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A Bioinformatics Approach to Synthetic Lethal Interactions in Breast Cancer with Gene Expression Data

S. Thomas Kelly

a thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

15 June 2017

Abstract

Background

Synthetic lethal genetic interactions are re-emerging in the post-genomics era due to their potential for precision medicine against cancers. Synthetic lethal drug design exploits the functional redundancy of genes disrupted in cancers (including tumour suppressors) to develop specific treatments against them. *CDH1*, which encodes E-cadherin, is a tumour supressor gene with loss of function in breast and btomach cancers. Experimental screens have identified candidate synthetic lethal interactions for drug target triage, which can be further supported with bioinformatics analysis. Furthermore, gene expression data enables investigation of synthetic lethal pathways and graph structure of synthetic lethal genes within them.

Approach

A computational methodology, the Synthetic Lethal Prediction Tool (SLIPT) has been developed to detect synthetic lethal interactions in gene expression data. This methodology was demonstrated on interactions with *CDH1* in breast and stomach cancer data from The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA) project. Synthetic lethal genes and pathways were further investigated with unsupervised clustering, gene set over-representation analysis, metagenes, and permutation resampling. In particular, analyses focused on comparing SLIPT gene candidates to an experimental siRNA screen Telford *et al.* (2015). Network analysis methods were applied to the most supported pathways to test for pathway structure among between synthetic lethal candidates. Simulation and modelling was used to assess the statistical performance of SLIPT, including simulated data with correlation structures derived from graph stuctures.

Findings

Many candidate synthetic lethal partners of CDH1 were detected in both TCGA breast cancer. These genes clustered into several distinct groups, with distinct biological functions and elevated expression in different clinical subtypes. While the number of genes detected by both approaches was not significant, these contained significantly enriched pathways. In particular, $G_{\alpha i}$ signalling, cytoplasmic microfibres, and extracellular fibrin clotting were robustly supported by both approaches, which is consistent with the known cytoskeletal and cell signalling roles of E-cadherin and validation of GPCR pathways performed by Telford $et\ al.\ (2015)$. Many of these pathways were replicated in stomach cancer data. The pathways supported only by SLIPT included regulation of immune signalling and translational elongation which were not expected to be detected in an isogenic cell line model but are still candidates for further investigation.

Synthetic lethal candidates detected by SLIPT and siRNA were compared within graph structures of the candidate synthetic lethal pathways. These genes did not differ with respect to network metrics of importance or connectivity in the pathway. There was little support, across pathways, that SLIPT gene candidates were consistently upstream or downstream of siRNA gene candidates with pathways.

A model of synthetic lethality was used to simulate gene expression data with synthetic lethal partners of a gene. The SLIPT methodology had high statistical performance, detecting few synthetic lethal partners, which diminished with more synthetic lethal partners or lower sample size. The SLIPT methodology performed better than Pearson correlation or the χ^2 -test. In particular, it performed well with high specificity for datasets containing thousands of genes or genes positively correlated with the query gene (as expected to occur in expression data). SLIPT was robust across correlation structures, including those derived from complex pathway structures and often distinguished synthetic lethal genes from those positively or negatively correlated with them. Therefore SLIPT is appropriate to identify synthetic lethal genes within pathways and use candidate synthetic lethal genes (and their correlates) to identify synthetic lethal pathways.

Summary

Thus my thesis has developed, evaluated, and refined a bioinformatics approach to discovery of synthetic lethal genes solely from gene expression data. This approach has been demonstrated to detect biologically informative and clinically relevant candidate partners for *CDH1* in breast and stomach cancers. These investigations have also involved the development of network analysis and simulation procedures which may be more widely applicable.

Research Contributions During Candidature

Publications

Kelly, S. T. and Spencer, H. G. (2017) Population-Genetics Models of Sex-Limited Genomic Imprinting. *Theoretical Population Biology* **115**:35-44 doi:10.1016/j.tpb.2017.03.004

Manuscripts Submitted

Kelly, S. T., Single, A. B., Telford, B. J., Beetham, H. G, Godwin, T. D., Chen, A., Black, M., A., and Guilford, P. J. (2017) Towards HDGC chemoprevention: vulnerabilities in E-cadherin-negative cells identified by genomic interrogation of isogenic cell lines and whole tumors. Submitted to *Cancer Prevention Research*.

Kelly, S. T., Chen, A., Guilford, P. J., and Black, M. A. (2017) Synthetic lethal interaction prediction of target pathways in E-cadherin deficient breast cancers. Submitted to *BMC Genomics*.

Conference Presentations

Consortium of Biological Sciences 2017 (Kobe) December TBC

eResearch 2017 (Queenstown) February 20th-22nd

Research Bazaar 2016 (Dunedin) February 2nd-4th

eResearch 2016 (Queenstown) February 9th-11th

Genetics Otago Symposium 2016 (Dunedin) March 7th-8th

DunDead: Zombie Science and Culture Festival 2014 (Dunedin) August 16th-17th eResearch 2014 (Hamilton) June 30th-July 2nd (Supported by Google)

Poster Presentations

Next Generation Sequencing Asia 2016 (Singapore) October 11th-12th (Supported by the University of Otago Division of Health Sciences; Maurice and Phyllis Paykel Trust)

Research Bazaar 2015 (Melbourne) February $16^{\rm th}$ - $18^{\rm th}$ (Supported by the New Zealand eScience Infrastructure)

Otago School of Medical Sciences Postgraduate Symposium 2015 (Dunedin) April $28^{\rm th}\text{-}29^{\rm th}$

QMB Cancer Drugs Satellite 2014 (Queenstown) August 24th-25th

Seminar Presentations

University of Otago Department of Biochemistry 2017 (Dunedin) November TBC

Tōhoku University 2016 (Sendai) November 11th

Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology 2016 (Onna) November 1st

Sōkendai Graduate University 2016 (Hayama) October 25th

Tōkyō University Institute of Medical Science 2016 (Shirokanedai) October 24th

National Institute of Genetics 2016 (Mishima) October 21^{st}

RIKEN Division of Genomic Technologies 2016 (Yokohama) October 20th

Software Packages

Software packages in the R language have been released. Please refer to the appropriate GitHub repository for more information (including documentation, vignettes, and installation instructions), on the following account: https://github.com/TomKellyGenetics

- slipt to accompany the synthetic lethal publication above and release SLIPT (Synthetic Lethal Interaction Prediction Tool)
- vioplotx to provide enhanced violin plots
- heatmap.2x to provide annotated heatmaps
- igraph.extensions metapackage for the packages for iGraph objects:
 - plot.igraph to provide plotting for directed graphs
 - info.centrality to compute network analysis metrics
 - pathway.structure.permutation for resampling within pathways
 - graphsim to simulate expression (mvtnorm) from pathway structures

The slipt-app GitHub repository also hosts an application for Synthetic Lethal Interaction Prediction Tool (SLIPT) developed in the R shiny environment as part of a related project. There is a digital copy of this thesis, including high resolution full-colour figures, hosted at:

https://github.com/TomKellyGenetics/thesis/blob/master/thesis.pdf

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- REANNZ, NZGL, and NeSI (eResearch 2016, Queenstown)
- Otago Division of Health Sciences, Oxford Global, and Maurice and Phyllis Paykel Trust (NGS Asia 2016, Singapore)
- RIKEN Division of Genomic Technologies and the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology (seminar visits in Japan)

Thanks most of all to my fianceé, Dr Yui Kawagishi, you've been an inspiration. Thank you for your support and encouragement, every day, even from afar: it has always made a difference. It's been incredible to see you flourish in your career and I look forward to joining you again soon. May the next chapter of our adventures involve a bit less Skype across timezones.

どうもありがとう由ちゃん。また来月。頑張った!行きます!

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Glossary

allele A gene variant with a specific sequence and

phenotype.

bioinformatics Statistical or computational approaches to bi-

ological data or research tools.

Bisulfite-Seq Methylome data from sequencing bisulfite

treated DNA.

CAGE-Seq Transcriptome data from cap analysis of gene

expression.

cancer A class of diseases, formally "malignant neo-

plasm", of abnormal cellular growth and

spread to other organs.

cancer gene A gene which is involved in the malignancy

of some cancers, encompassing oncogenes and tumour suppressors, which have molecular aberrations in cancer and variants which pre-

dispose individuals to cancer.

centrality A network metric which identifies the most im-

portant vertices in a network.

chemoprevention The use of cytotoxic drugs to prevent cancers

from forming, generally applied to high-risk

mutation carriers.

chemotherapy The use of cytotoxic drugs to treat cancers, in

combinations, generally applied to advanced

stage cancers.

ChIP-Seq Epigenome data from chromatin immunopre-

ciptation sequencing.

compound screen A high-throughput screen performed using a

library of chemical compounds.

computational biology Applying computational or mathematical

modelling to understanding biological systems

and relationships.

conditional essentiality A gene becoming essential to viability un-

der certain environmental conditions, including presence of compounds which inactivate

other genes.

copy number The number of copies of DNA, typically two

copies for diploid organisms but subject to

variation.

de novo A bioinformatics sequence assembly con-

ducted entirely from raw genomics data with-

out a reference sequence.

diagnosis The identification of disease by clinical, cellu-

lar, and molecular characteristics.

driver mutation A mutation which promotes cancer growth.

E-cadherin Epithelial cadherin (calcium-dependent adhe-

sion), a cell-adhesion protein encoded by the

tumour suppressor gene, CDH1.

edge or link A relationship connecting a pair of elements of

a graph structure or network, may weighted or

directional.

epigenome An analysis of epigenetic modifications of all

genes in the genome.

epistasis (biological) The effects of a gene modifying or masking the

phenotype of another gene.

epistasis (statistical) A divergence of the observed double mutant

phenotype from that expected based on the respective phenotypes of single mutant (Fisher,

1919).

essential A gene which is required to be functional or

expressed for a cell or organism to be viable,

grow or develop.

exome A sequencing approach designed to generate

data enriched for coding genes within the

genome.

familial A trait recurrently occurring in families, not

necessarily with a genetic cause.

functional redundancy Genes which perform a common function, also

known as genetic redundancy.

gene expression A measure of the relative expression of each

gene from the mRNA extracted from (pooled)

cells.

genetic robustness A system of biological pathways which (has

evolved to) continue to function as a whole under various conditions, including the inacti-

vation of various individual genes.

genome An analysis of all of the DNA sequence in the

genome.

genomic An approach or technology designed to gener-

ate or use data from all genes in the genome.

genomic medicine The use of genomic information to tailor

medicine treatment to the genetics of an in-

dividual.

germline mutation A mutation that occurred in germline cells and

is passed between generation.

graph or network A mathematical structure modelling or depict-

ing the relationships between elements.

hallmark of cancer An underlying characteristic of cancer as part

of a rational approach devised by (Hanahan

and Weinberg, 2000).

hereditary A trait or disease which has a genetic cause

and is inherited from family members.

high-throughput screen An experimental procedure to perform a large

scale series of chemical, genetic, or pharmaco-

logical tests.

hub A central or highly connected component of a

network.

in silico An investigation conducted using computa-

tions, typically simulations or analyses.

in vitro An investigation conducted using a controlled

experimental system to examine biomolecules.

in vivo An investigation conducted using in the con-

text of a biological cell or organism, including

pre-clincal models and clinical trials.

induced essentiality A gene becoming essential to viability under

certain conditions, including inactivation of a

synthetic lethal partner.

information centrality A network centrality metric which uses the im-

pact of removing a vertex or node on connec-

tions in the network.

intrinsic subtype Distinguishing cancer by molecular and ge-

netic features.

MCF10A cell line A non-tumorigenic epithelial cell line derived

from breast tissue.

metabolome An analysis of all the metabolites and enzymes

in the cell.

metagene A consistent signal of expression for a collec-

tion of genes such as a biological pathway, derived from singular value decomposition.

metagenome An analysis of all of the genes and genomes in

a community.

metastasis A secondary growth of a tumour or spread of

cancer to other organs.

microarray A high-throughput technique to measure pres-

ence or abundance of nucleic acid sequences

from binding to probes.

microRNA Short RNA molecules generally regarded to

regulate gene expression by binding to mRNA.

molecular profile A combination of genetic and biochemical

measures which identifies characteristic traits

of a tumour.

molecular subtype A classification of cancers based on an identi-

fication using molecular properties.

mutant A variant or dysfunctional phenotype arising

from a mutation in a gene.

mutation A change in DNA sequence that disrupts gene

function.

network biology The application mathematical and computa-

tional approaches to networks in understand-

ing biological relationships.

network medicine The use of network biology to understand, pre-

vent, or treat diseases.

non-oncogene addiction The dependence of a cancer cell on functioning

non-mutant genes.

'omics A combination of approaches to generating

biological data with high-throughput procedures such as genomics, proteomics or

metabolomics.

oncogene A gene that potentially causes cancer, typi-

cally by over-expression or mutant gene vari-

ants.

oncogene addiction The dependence of a cancer cell on a specific

oncogenic pathway.

PageRank centrality A network centrality metric which uses eigen-

vectors with a scaling factor (Brin and Page,

1998).

pan cancer A focus on the molecular and genetic features

across cancers in different tissues.

passenger mutation A mutation that occurs in cancers but does

not affect the growth of cancers.

pathway A series of biomolecules that produces a par-

ticular product or biological function.

pleiotropy A gene which has multiple biological func-

tions.

polypharmacology The design of drugs to target multiple molec-

ular targets or biological pathways.

precision medicine The application of prevention and treatment

measures to target diseases by molecular and

genetic features.

prognosis The estimation of disease progression and pa-

tient outcome.

proteome An analysis of all the proteins expressed from

the genome.

proto-oncogene The non-mutant variant or precursor to a mu-

tant oncogene.

recurrent mutation The repeated occurrence of mutations in a

particular gene across cancers.

RNAi screen A high-throughput screen performed using a

RNA interference (RNAi).

RNA-Seq Transcriptome data from sequencing RNA.

Sanger sequencing A dideoxy chain termination method for DNA

sequencing (named after Fred Sanger).

scale-free A property of a network which has a power

law vertex degree distribution, that is several highly connected hub genes and many with

very few connections.

shortest path A path with the fewest possible edges which

connects two particular vertices.

small world A property of a network which is highly

connected and has a low characteristic path length, derived from the mean shortest path

length across all pairs of nodes.

somatic mutation A mutation that occurs in somatic cells, dur-

ing a patient's lifespan.

sporadic cancer Cancers which do occur in patients with a fam-

ily history or carry a high-risk genetic variant. When multiple drugs have more effect than

expected from the effect of each separately.

synthetic dosage lethal A synthetic genetic interaction (SGI) analo-

gous to synthetic lethality where genes are disrupted by a change in dosage, typically where one gene is inactivated and the other over-

expressed.

synergy

synthetic lethal Genetic interactions where inactivation of

multiple genes is inviable (or deleterious) which are viable if inactivated separately.

synthetic lethal screen A high-throughput screen performed on iso-

genic cell lines to detect genes for which inhibition specifically deleterious to the null mu-

tant genotype.

synthetic rescue A synthetic genetic interaction when the com-

bined mutations restores the wild-type the

phenotype of one of the mutations.

synthetic sick Genetic interactions where inactivation of

multiple genes is deleterious which are viable

if inactivated separately.

synthetic suppression A synthetic genetic interaction when the com-

bined mutations (partially) suppresses the mutant phenotype of one of the mutations.

targeted therapy Cancer treatment that specifically acts against

a molecular target, in contrast to standard

chemotherapy.

transcriptome An analysis of all of the genes expressed in the

genome.

treatment Medical procedures for a disease to improve

patient outcomes.

tumour An abnormal lump of tissue or growth of cells,

may be cancerous.

tumour suppressor A gene potentially causes cancer, typically by

disruption of functions which protect the cell

from cancer.

vertex degree A network metric of connectivity of vertices

which uses the number of edges connected to

each vertex or node.

vertex or node An element of a graph structure or network.

wild-type A natural phenotype of a trait or the normally

functional allele which encodes it.

Acronyms

1KGP 1000 genomes project.

ADP Adenosine Diphosphate.

AMP Adenosine Monophosphate.

AMPK AMP-activated Protein Kinase.

ANOVA Analysis of Variance. ATP Adenosine Triphosphate.

AUROC Area Under the Receiver Operating Charac-

teristic (curve).

BioPAX Biological Pathway Exchange.BiSEp Bimodal Subsetting Expression.BMP Bone Morphogenic Protein.

cAMP Cylic AMP.

CCLE Cancer Cell Line Encyclopaedia.

cDNA Complementary Deoxyribonucleic Acid (from

mRNA).

CGP Cancer Genome Project.

ChIP Chromatin Immunoprecipitation.

ChIP-Seq Chromatin Immunopreciptation Sequencing.

CNV Copy Number Variation.

COSMIC Catalogue Of Somatic Mutations In Cancer.

CpG 5'-C-phosphate-G-3'.

CRAN comprehensive R archive network.

CXCR Chemokine Receptor.

DAISY Data Mining Synthetic Lethal Identification

Pipeline.

DDBJ DNA Data Bank of Japan.
DNA Deoxyribonucleic Acid.

EMBL European Molecular Biology Laboratory.

EMT Epithelial-Mesenchymal Transition. ENA The European Nucleotide Archive. ENCODE Encyclopaedia of DNA Elements.

ER Estrogen Receptor.

exprSL Synthetic Lethality (expression).

FANTOM Functional Annotation Of Mammalian

genome.

FDR False Discovery Rate.

GEO Gene Expression Omnibus.

GO Gene Ontology.

GPCR G Crotein Coupled Receptor.

HDAC Histone Deacetylase.

HDGC Hereditary Diffuse Gastric Cancer.

HLRCC Hereditary Leiomyomatosis and Renal Cell

Carcinoma.

HPC High Performance Computing.

ICGC International Cancer Genome Consortium.

InDel Insertion or Deletion (in DNA sequence).

JAK Janus Kinase.

lncRNA Long Non-Coding Ribonucleic Acid.

METABRIC Molecular Taxonomy of Breast Cancer Inter-

national Consortium.

microRNA Micro RNA.

mRNA Messenger Ribonucleic Acid.
MSI Microsatellite Instability.
mtSL synthetic Lethality (mutation).

mtSLIPT Synthetic Lethal Interaction Prediction Tool

(against mutation).

NCBI National Center for Biotechnology Informa-

tion (in the USA).

NCI National Cancer Institute (in the USA).
NeSI New Zealand eScience Infrastructure.

NGS Next-Generation Sequencing.

NHGRI National Human Genome Research Institute

(in the USA).

NIG National Institute of Genetics (in Japan).
NIH National Institutes of Health (in the USA).

NMD Nonsense-Mediated Decay.

PAM50 Prediction Analysis of Microarray 50.

PARP Poly-ADP-Ribose Polymerase.

PCR Polymerase Chain Reaction.

PDE Phosphodiesterase.

PI3K Phosphoinositide 3-kinase.

PIP₂ Phosphatidylinositol-(4,5)-bisphosphate. PIP₃ Phosphatidylinositol-(3,4,5)-trisphosphate.

PPI Protein-Protein Interaction.

PR Progesterone Receptor.

qPCR Quantitative (real-time) Polymerase Chain Reaction.

RFLP Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism.

RGS G-protein Signalling. RHO Ras Homolog Family.

RMA Robust Multiarray Averaging (normalisation.

RNA Ribonucleic Acid.

RNAi Ribonucleic Acid Interference.

ROC Reciever Operating Characteristic (curve).

RPPA Reverse Phase Protein Arrays.

RRBS Reduced Representation Bisulfite Sequencing.

rRNA Ribonucleic acid.

RSEM RNA-Seq by Expectation Maximization (nor-

malisation.

SGA Synthetic Gene Array (technique).

SGI Synthetic Genetic Interaction.

shRNA Short Hairpin Ribonucleic Acid.

siRNA Short Interfering Ribonucleic Acid.

SL Synthetic Lethal.

 ${\bf SLIPT} \quad {\bf Synthetic\ Lethal\ Interaction\ Prediction\ Tool}.$

Slurm Simple Linux Utility for Resource Manage-

ment.

SNP Single Nucleotide Polymorphism. SR Synthetic Rescue (or viability).

SS Synthetic Suppression.

SSL Synthetic Sick.

TCGA The Cancer Genome Atlas (genomics project).

TGF α Transforming Growth Factor α .

tRNA Transfer Ribonucleic Acid.

 ${\tt UCSC \quad University \ of \ California, \ Santa \ Cruz.}$

UTR Untranslated Region (of mRNA).

WNT Wingless-Related Integration Site.

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