

MiR-605-3p inhibits malignant progression of prostate cancer by up-regulating EZH2

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Abstract. – **OBJECTIVE:** This study aimed to investigate the effect of microRNA-605-3p (miR-605-3p) on cell proliferation, invasion and migration in prostate cancer cells, as well as its effects on the Enhancer Zeste Homolog 2 (EZH2) expression and the potential regulatory mechanisms.

PATIENTS AND METHODS: Quantitative Real Time-Polymerase Chain Reaction (qRT-PCR) was applied to detect the miR-605-3p expression in 52 pairs of Prostate Cancer (PCa) tissues and normal tissues, and to analyze the relationship between miR-605-3p expression and PCa biological parameters. MiR-605-3p mimics were transfected into PCa cell line PC-3 and DU145 to achieve miR-605-3p overexpression. Then, Cell Counting Kit-8 (CCK-8), cell colony formation assay and transwell invasion and migration assay were performed to analyze miR-605-3p's effect on the biological functions of prostate cancer cells. Finally, the potential mechanisms of downstream genes were explored through bioinformatics analysis and qRT-PCR.

RESULTS: We found that miR-605-3p expression in PCa was markedly higher than that in normal tissues. Patients with low miR-605-3p expression had advanced tumor stage, higher incidence of lymph node metastasis and distant metastasis. In vitro analysis showed that miR-605-3p overexpression leads to significant decrease in cell proliferation, invasion and migration ability. Subsequently, it was verified in cell line and tissues that EZH2 expression was remarkably increased in PCa, which was negatively correlated with miR-605-3p expression. In addition, the recovery experiment found that EZH2 can counteract the role of miR-605-3p in PCa, together they inhibited the malignant progression of PCa.

CONCLUSION: miR-605-3p was significantly associated with PCa stage, lymph node metastasis, distant metastasis and the poor prognosis. In addition, it can inhibit the malignant progression of PCa. In addition, the study showed that miR-605-3p may inhibit the proliferation, invasion and migration ability of PCa by regulating EZH2.

Key Words:

MiR-605-3p, EZH2, prostate cancer, Malignant progression.

Introduction

Prostate Cancer (PCa) is one of the most common malignant tumors in the world, which is also an important cause of cancer-related deaths in western countries. In recent years, the incidence of PCa in China has increased rapidly year by year. After the introduction of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) screening, the detection rate of prostate cancer peaked in the early 1990s^{4,5}. At present, approximately 85% of men with newly diagnosed prostate cancer are confined to early tumors⁶. Although the popularity of conventional PSA screening has increased the rate of early detection of prostate cancer, its benefits are still controversial, mainly because there is no consensus on whether PSA can effectively reduce prostate cancer mortality⁷⁻⁹. Due to the characteristics of tumor heterogeneity in prostate cancer, exploring new molecular markers for prostate cancer diagnosis and prognosis stratification, as well as new molecular therapeutic targets have become the main task for current researchers. Accelerating the diagnosis, prognosis and therapeutic effects of prostate cancer have important clinical implications for opening up a new direction in precision medicine^{9,10}. In addition to transcriptional factors that have shown clinical utility in a variety of clinical settings, researchers^{11,12} are increasingly interested in the potential effects of microRNAs (miRNAs) as biomarkers for prostate cancer and targeted therapies.

MicroRNAs (miRNAs) are non-coding single-stranded RNA molecules of approximately 18-22 nucleotides in length that serve primar-

ily as post-transcriptional gene regulators^{12,13}. MiRNAs could bind to the 3' untranslated region (UTR) of the target mRNA, or incomplete bind to the 5'-UTR or coding sequence, thereby altering their stability¹⁴. Thus, miRNAs can directly target mRNA degradation in a fully complementary manner, or induce translational inhibition by incomplete binding¹⁵. Some individual miRNAs have been shown to be tumor suppressor genes or oncogenes, depending on their regulated downstream targets, which make them more potentially useful¹⁶. MiR-605-3p is a non-coding short-stranded RNA expressed on human chromosome 10. It has been shown to be abnormally expressed in many tumor tissues, indicating that the interference of miR-605-3p is closely related to tumors. MiR-605-3p performs different functions for different tumors, and some scholars¹⁷ have reported that it can inhibit bladder cancer. Therefore, the focus and difficulty in the miRNA research work have been to discover and clarify the target genes regulated by miRNAs and the signaling pathways involved.

Enhancer of zeste homolog 2 (EZH2) is a member of the PeG (Polycomb group genes) and is closely related to embryonic development, cell differentiation, self-renewal of cancer stem cells and the pathogenesis of a variety of malignancies^{18,19}. It is worth noting that EZH2 is located on human chromosome 7q35. Comparative genomic hybridization (CGH) confirmed that there may be genes associated with prostate cancer metastasis in this chromosomal region²⁰. EZH2 is a catalytic subunit of PRC2 (Polycomb repressive complex 2), which encodes a protein with a highly conserved SET domain that can be modified by trimethylating protein lysine. EZH2 is associated with histone H3 acetylation 27 lysine (H3K27me3). A series of effector proteins, such as DNA methyltransferases, catalyze DNA methylation to prevent transcription factors from binding to the promoter region and ultimately achieve gene silencing^{21,22}. Researchers^{23,24} have shown that the expression of EZH2 is closely in association with the occurrence and development of a variety of tumors, and its high expression can promote the invasion and metastasis of cancer cells.

Based on the above series of results, we further explored the role of miR-605-3p and EZH2 in prostate cancer and described the possible role of miR-605-3p and EZH2 in the development of prostate cancer separately. Besides, we explained the molecular regulation mechanism of miR-605-3p on the action of EZH2, which may bring new

ideas for the diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer.

Patients and Methods

Patients and PCA Samples

Tumor tissues and precancerous tissues of 52 patients aged 40–88 years who received radical prostatectomy were collected. None of the patients underwent radiotherapy or chemotherapy before surgery. Histological typing and staging criteria for prostate cancer were performed in accordance with international cancer against cancer (AJCC) prostate cancer staging criteria. Patients and their families in this study have been fully informed and informed consent has been signed and approved by the Ethics Oversight Committee.

Cell Lines and Reagents

Four human-derived PCA cell lines (PC-3, 22Rv1, Lncap, DU-145) and one normal human prostate epithelial immortalized cell line (WPMY-1) were purchased from the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC; Manassas, VA, USA). F-12k medium (F12K; Gibco, Grand Island, NY, USA) used for cell culture were purchased from Life Technologies (Gaithersburg, MD, USA). Cells were cultured in a 37°C, 5% CO₂ incubator.

Cell Transfection

The negative control (NC) and the miR-605-3p overexpression sequence (miR-605-3p mimics) were constructed by the Jima Company (Shanghai, China). Cells were plated in 6-well plates and grown to a cell density of 70%, then transfection was performed using Lipofectamine 2000 (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA) according to the instructions. Cells were collected for quantitative Real Time-Polymerase Chain Reaction (qRT-PCR) analysis or other functional analysis after 48 hours.

Cell Proliferation Assays

The cells after 48 h of transfection were harvested and plated into 96-well plates at 2000 cells per well. After culturing for 24 h, 48 h, 72 h and 96 h, the cells were added with Cell Counting Kit-8 (CCK-8; Dojindo Laboratories, Kumamoto, Japan) reagent and incubated for 2 hours. Then, the optical density (OD) value of each well was measured using the microplate reader at 490 nm.

Colony Formation Assay

After the cell density reached 70-80%, a single cell suspension was prepared by digesting with 0.25% trypsin. Subsequently, the cell suspension was repeatedly blown with a pipette tip to more than 95% of the cells to form a single cell, and the number of viable cells was counted by the cell counting plate after trypan blue staining. 100 cells were plated in a 6-well plate with 2 ml of complete medium. Three parallel samples were set for each concentration, and the medium was changed every other day. Cells were cultured in a 37°C, 5% CO₂ incubator for 7 days to calculate the colony formation rate.

Transwell Cell Migration and Invasion Assays

After transfection for 48 hours, the cells were resuspended in a serum-free medium. After cell counting, the diluted cell density was adjusted to 2.0×10⁵/mL, and the transwell chamber containing Matrigel and no Matrigel was placed in a 24-well plate. 200 μL of the cell suspension was added to the upper chamber, and 500 μL of a medium was added to the lower chamber. After 48 hours, the chamber was removed, fixed with paraformaldehyde for 30 minutes, stained with the crystal violet for 15 minutes and then washed with Phosphate-Buffered Saline (PBS; Gibco, Grand Island, NY, USA). The inner surface of the basement membrane of the upper chamber was carefully cleaned to remove inner chamber cells. The perforated cells stained on the outer layer of the basement membrane of the lower chamber were observed under the microscope. Five fields of view were randomly selected for counting.

Quantitative Real-Time-Polymerase Chain Reaction

TRIzol (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA) was used to extract total RNA. Initially extracted RNA was treated with DNase I to remove genomic DNA and repurify the RNA. RNA reverse transcription was performed according to the Prime Script Reverse Transcription Kit (Takara, Otsu, Shiga, Japan) instructions. Real-time Polymerase Chain Reaction was performed according to the SYBR[®] Premix Ex Taq (TaKaRa, Otsu, Shiga, Japan) kit instructions using StepOne Plus Real Time-PCR System (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA). Primers were listed below. MiR-605-3p: f: 5'-AGGCACUAUGAGAUUUAGA-3'; U6: f: 5'-CGCAAGGATGACACGCAAATTC-3';

EZH2 : f:5'-TCCGCGCCCTTGCCCAGACC-3', r: 5'-GCCGCACGAACAGCCCCA-3'; β-actin: f: 5'-CCTGGCACCAGCAAT-3', r: 5'-GCTGATCCACATCTGCTGC-3'.

Each sample was subjected to a three-hole repeated experiment and the PCR repeated twice. Bio-Rad PCR instrument was used to analyze and process the data with software 2.0 (Hercules, CA, USA). The β-actin and U6 genes were used as internal parameter.

Western Blot

The transfected cells were lysed using cell lysis buffer and centrifuged at 12000 rpm for 20 minutes at 4°C. The protein concentration was calculated using Protein assay Kit (Pierce, Waltham, MA, USA). Primary antibody (Anti-EZH2) was purchased from Santa Cruz Biotechnology (Santa Cruz, CA, USA), while horseradish peroxidase-labeled secondary antibody was purchased from GenScript (Piscataway, NJ, USA). Sodium dodecyl sulphate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE) electrophoresis was used to separate proteins, then the proteins were transferred to polyvinylidene difluoride (PVDF) membrane (Millipore, Billerica, MA, USA). After blocking overnight in bovine serum albumin, the membranes were incubated with the primary antibodies and secondary antibodies separately. Proteins bands were detected by electrochemiluminescence (ECL; Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA), while the image was semi-quantitatively analyzed by alpha SP image analysis software.

Statistics Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) 22.0 software (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA). The χ^2 test and the exact probability Fisher test as well as COX regression analysis were performed respectively for the univariate analysis or the multivariate analysis. The Kaplan-Meier method was used for patient survival analysis. Data were expressed as mean ± standard deviation (\bar{x} ±s), and p <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

MiR-605-3p Was Lowly Expressed in PCa

MiR-605-3p expressions in PCa tissues as well as cell lines were verified by qRT-PCR, which revealed that miR-605-3p was markedly decreased

in PCa tissues than that of the adjacent tumor-free tissues (Figure 1A and 1B). In addition, miR-605-3p was significantly decreased in PCa cell lines, especially in PC-3 and DU145 cells, where the difference in expression levels was the most marked, so we chose these two strains for further analysis (Figure 1B).

MiR-605-3p Expression Was Associated with Clinical Stage, Lymph Node and Distance Metastasis in PCa Patients

According to the level of miR-605-3p in 52 pairs of PCa tissues and adjacent tissues, patients were divided into 2 different groups: the high miR-605-3p expression group and low miR-605-3p expression group. The relationship between miR-605-3p expression and the age, sex and

clinical stage, lymph node metastasis and distant metastasis of PCa patients were analyzed. Table I showed that low expression of miR-605-3p was positively correlated with PCa clinical stage, lymph node metastasis and distant metastasis, but not with age and gender. These results suggested that miR-605-3p may be a new biological indicator for predicting the malignant prognosis of PCa. In addition, to explore the relationship between miR-605-3p expression and the prognosis of PCa patients, we selected relevant follow-up data. Kaplan-Meier survival curves revealed that miR-605-3p low expression was strongly associated with the poor prognosis of PCa (Figure 1D), demonstrating that miR-605-3p expression was in correlation with clinical stage, lymph node and distance metastasis in PCa patients.

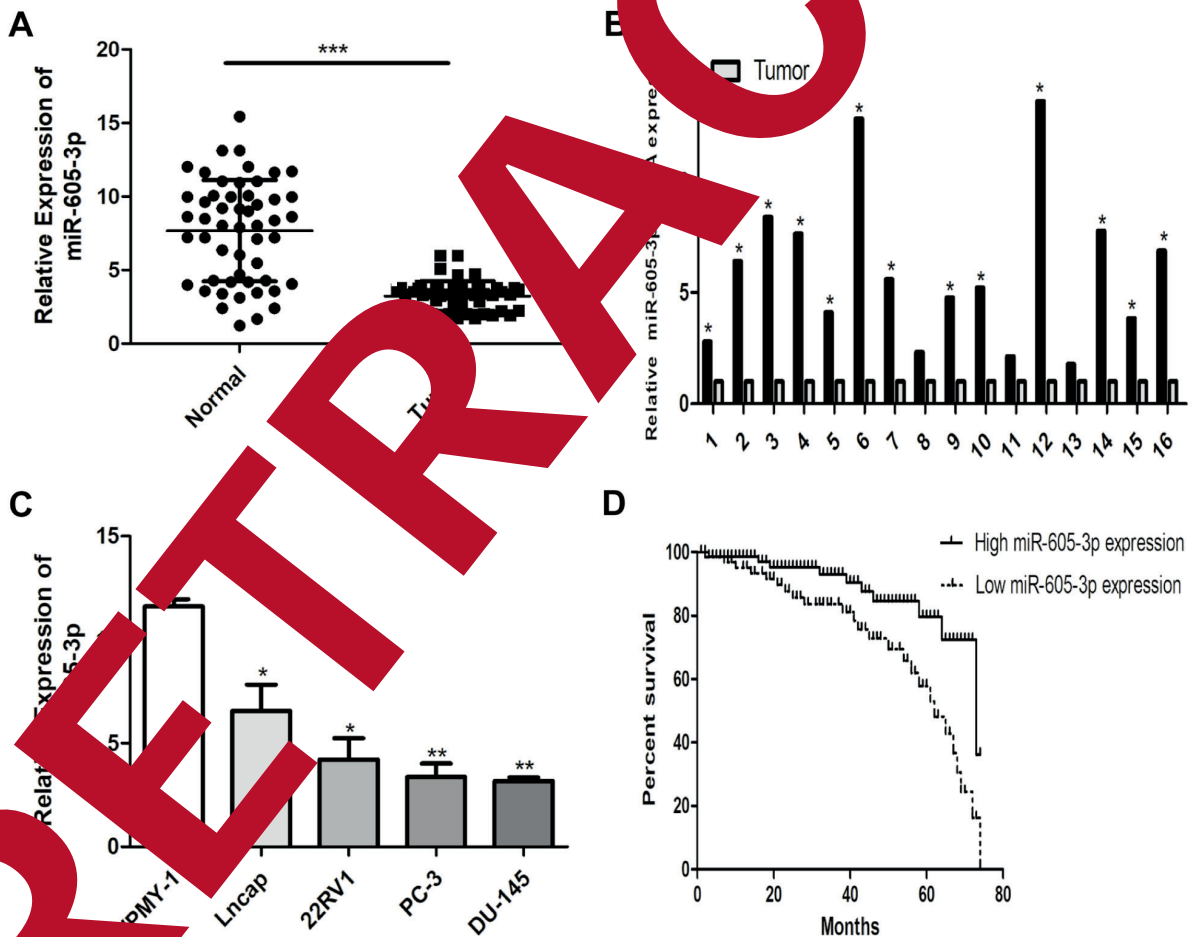


Figure 1. MiR-605-3p is under-expressed in prostate cancer tissues and cell lines. **A-B**, qRT-PCR detection of differential expression of miR-605-3p in prostate cancer tissues and adjacent non-tumor tissues. **C**, qRT-PCR detection of miR-605-3p expression levels in prostate cancer cell lines. **D**, Kaplan-Meier survival curve of lung cancer patients based on FOXC2-AS1 expression. Data are expressed as mean ± SD, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 1. Association of miR-605-3p expression with clinicopathologic characteristics of prostate cancer.

Parameters expression	Number of cases	miR-605-3p		p-value
		High (%)	Low (%)	
Age (years)				0.64
<60	20	12	8	
≥60	32	19	13	
Gender				0.23
Male	25	17	8	
Female	27	14	13	
T stage				0.04
T1-T2	31	22	9	
T3-T4	21	9	12	
Lymph node metastasis				0.02
No	33	25	8	
Yes	19	6	13	
Distance metastasis				0.033
No	38	26	12	
Yes	14	5	9	

miR-605-3p Overexpression Attenuated Cell Proliferation, Migration and Invasion

To better understand the role of miR-605-3p in PCa, we constructed the miR-605-3p miRNA expression model and verified miR-605-3p expression by qRT-PCR (Figure 2A). It was found that the proliferation rate of cells in the miR-605-3p overexpression group was markedly decreased than that in the NC group by CCK-8 proliferation assay and cell colony formation assay (Figure 2B and 2C). In addition, we applied the transwell migration assay to investigate the effect of miR-605-3p on PCa cell migration and invasion. The results showed that the number of membrane PCa cells in the transwell chamber for miR-605-3p overexpression was remarkably reduced, suggesting that the migration and invasive ability was inhibited (Figure 2D).

EZH2 is Highly Expressed in PCa

EZH2 expression in PCa tissue and cell line was verified by qRT-PCR. The results displayed that the expression level in PCa tissue was markedly increased compared with the adjacent tumor-free tissue (Figure 3A). In addition, EZH2 expression in PCa cells was significantly higher when compared with that in the WPMY-1 cell line (Figure 3B). We observed a negative correlation between miR-605-3p expression and EZH2 expression by qRT-PCR in prostate cancer tissues and cell lines (Figure 3C and 3D), indicating that miR-605-3p might target EZH2 in PCa.

EZH2 Modulated miR-605-3p Expression in PCa Cells

To further explore the way in which miR-605-3p inhibited the malignant progression of prostate cancer, we overexpressed both EZH2 and miR-605-3p in the cell lines of PCa to explore their role in PCa. The transfection efficiency of EZH2 was examined by qRT-PCR and Western blot (Figure 4A and 4B). Further experiments including cell colony formation assay and transwell migration and invasion assay showed that EZH2 can counteract the proliferation, invasion and metastasis of miR-605-3p in PCa cells (Figure 4C and 4D), suggesting that EZH2 modulated miR-605-3p expression in human PCa cells.

Discussion

Prostate cancer is one of the most common male malignancies, which has caused widespread concern in the world today, yet there is no clear evidence in the epidemiology of its exact predisposing factors¹⁻³. At present, the initial cell population of malignant tumors is called cancer stem cells (CSCs). In prostate cancer research, prostate cancer stem cells are still a hot spot in the world²⁵. Genetic polymorphism also plays a very important part. Although there have been a lot of researches on the mechanism of prostate cancer, the specific mechanism remains unclear. This may be because the malignant tumors are often accompa-

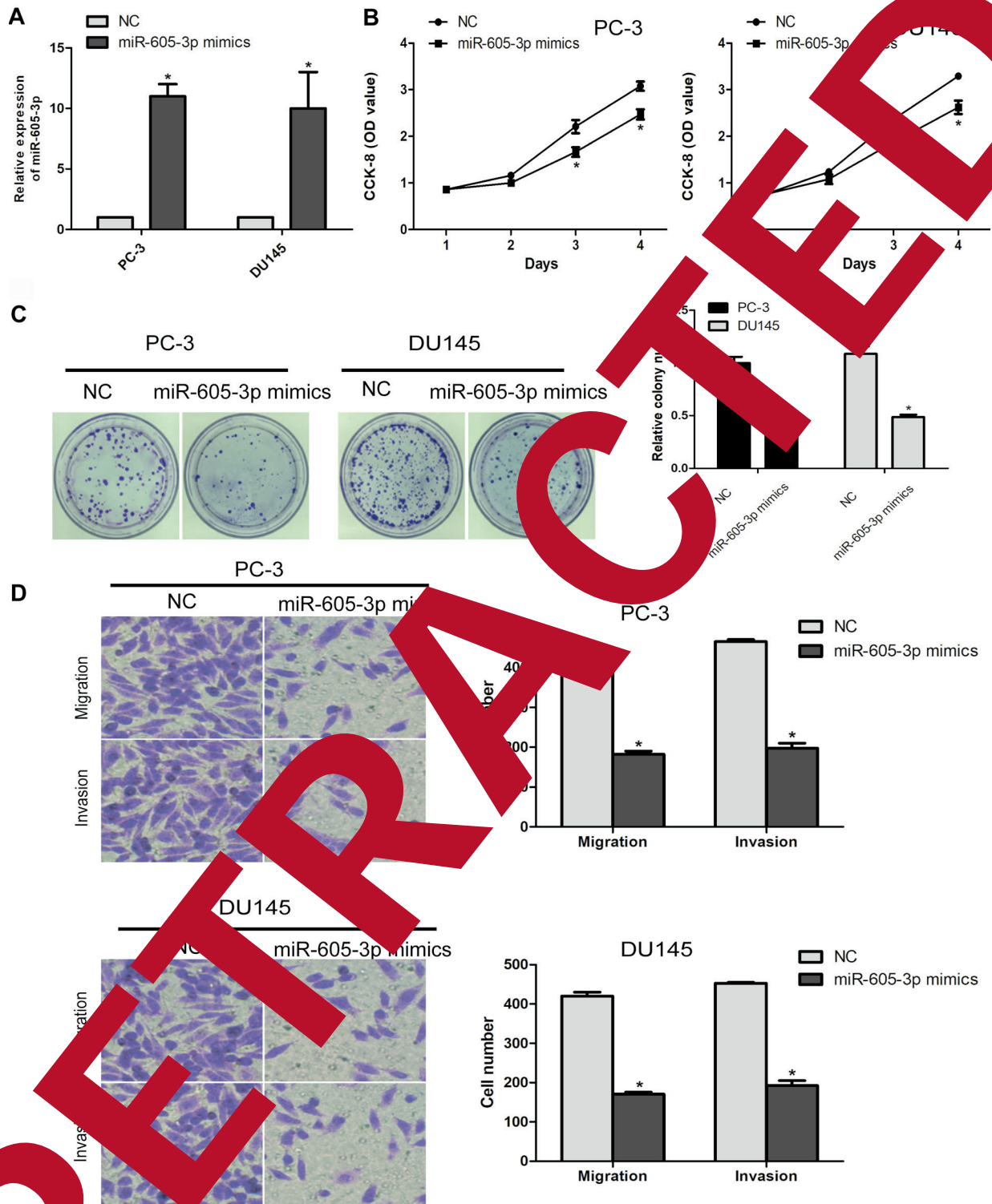


Fig 1. miR-605-3p affects prostate cancer cell proliferation, invasion and migration. **A**, qRT-PCR validates the transfection efficiency of miR-605-3p after transfection of NC and miR-605-3p mimics in PC-3 and DU145 cell lines. **B**, CCK-8 assay is performed to detect the effect of miR-605-3p on prostate cancer cell proliferation in PC-3 and DU145 cell line. **C**, Cell formation assay is performed to detect the effect of miR-605-3p on cell proliferation in PC-3 and DU145 cell lines. **D**, Transwell migration and invasion assay is performed to detect the effect of miR-605-3p on invasion and migration in prostate cancer cells in PC-3 and DU145 (magnification: 40 \times). Data are shown as mean \pm SD, * p <0.05.

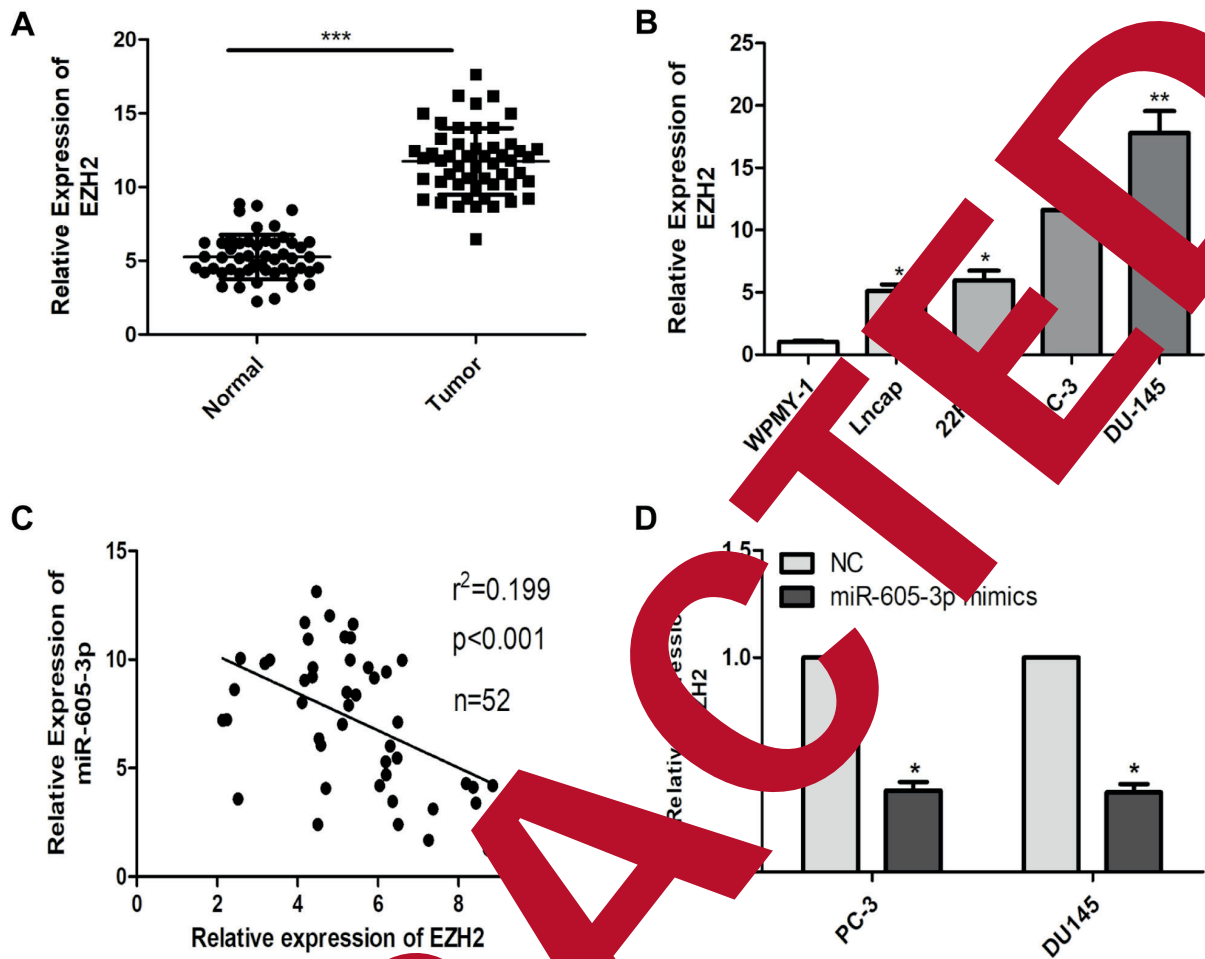


Figure 3. EZH2 is highly expressed in prostate cancer tissues and cell lines. **A**, qRT-PCR detection of differential expression of EZH2 in prostate cancer tissues and adjacent non-tumor tissues. **B**, qRT-PCR detection of EZH2 expression levels in prostate cancer cell lines. **C**, MiR-605-3p is significantly negatively correlated with the expression level of EZH2 in prostate cancer tissues. **D**, qRT-PCR confirmed the down-regulation of EZH2 expression after transfection of miR-605-3p mimics in PC-3 and DU145 cell lines. Data are shown as mean \pm SD. $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.001$.

nied by chromosomal copy number variation and rearrangement [17]. The metastasis and invasion of malignant tumors are generally caused by the destruction and invasion of the basement membrane by cancer cells, which is closely related to the dysfunction of fractional adhesion of normal epithelial cells [18]. Destruction and loss of the basement membrane cause the basal cell layer and lumen of adjacent tumor cells to lose the function of barrier to metastasis, which may cause tumor metastasis and dissemination [29]. Other studies have shown that the occurrence of prostate cancer is related to environmental and dietary changes. The important role of the environment in the occurrence and development of malignant tumors has been gradually recognized by people. With the improvement of living standards of residents,

the diet structure of older men has also changed, which has prolonged the life span. It is reported [29] that the incidence of human malignant tumors is closely related to the growth of life expectancy, while the incidence of prostate cancer is gradually increasing with age. Early diagnosis of prostate cancer still relies on molecular immunology and imaging examination, but clinically, prostate cancer has not been effectively treated, especially hormone-resistant prostate cancer (CRPC) is still an important factor threatening the life of prostate cancer patients [30,31]. Therefore, finding new molecular targets for prostate cancer is necessary to guide clinical practice.

MicroRNAs are a class of tiny molecules that function to regulate genes and do not encode proteins. They mainly bind to the 3'-UTR of their

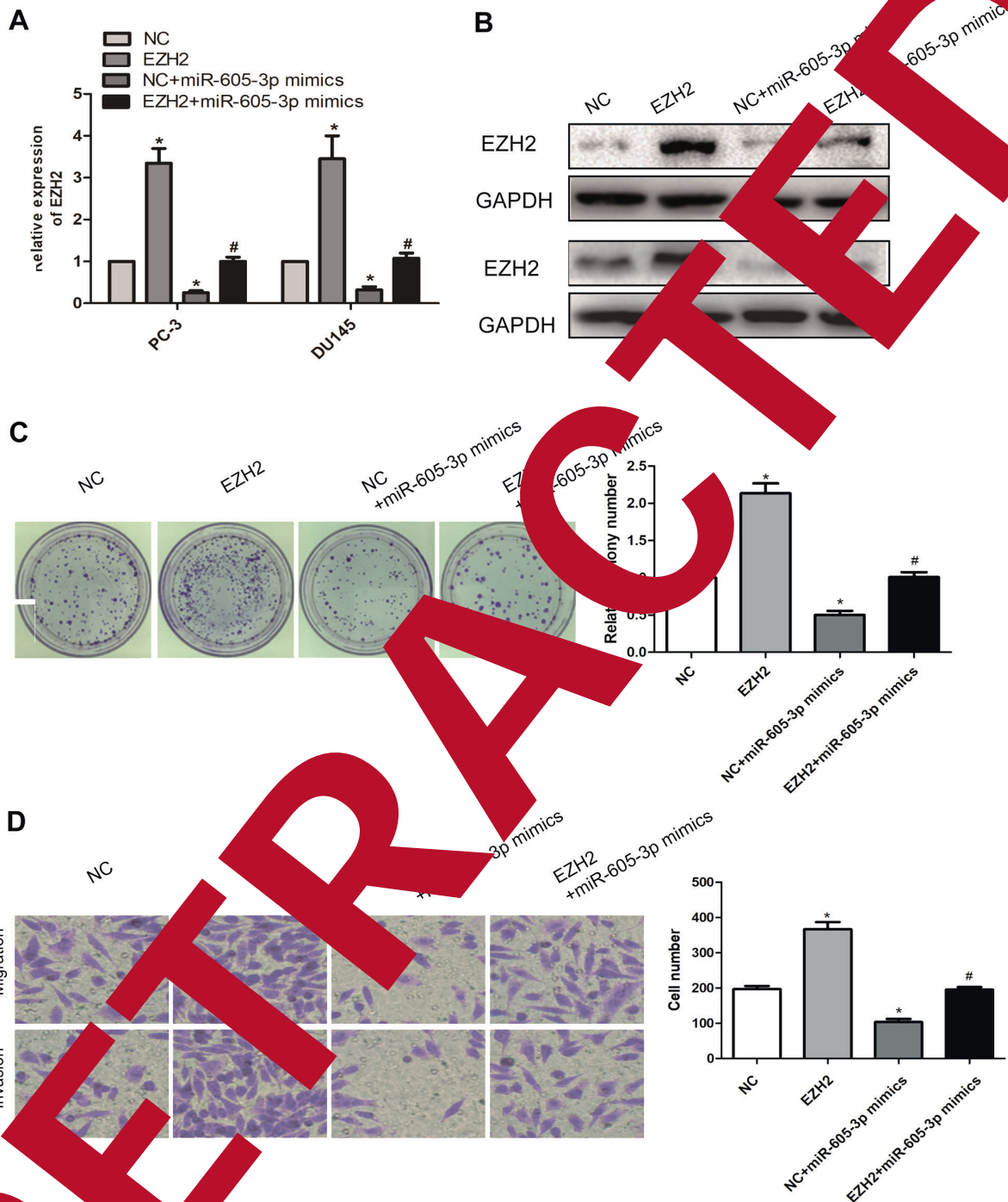


Figure 4. MiR-605-3p regulates the expression of EZH2 in prostate cancer tissues and cell lines. **A**, Detection of EZH2 expression levels in miR-605-3p and EZH2 co-transfected cell lines by qRT-PCR. **B**, Detection of EZH2 in miR-605-3p and EZH2 co-transfected cell lines by Western blot expression level. **C**, Cell colony formation assay is performed to detect the effect of miR-605-3p and EZH2 co-transfection on the proliferation of prostate cancer cells. **D**, The transwell migration assay is performed to detect the effect of miR-605-3p and EZH2 co-transfection in regulating the invasion and migration of prostate cancer cells (magnification: 40 \times). Data are shown as average \pm SD, *# p <0.05.

target genes through complementary pairing principles, leading to the degradation of genes or inhibition of their transcriptional expression¹²⁻¹⁴. Literature has shown that miRNAs are associated with the occurrence and development of various tumors. MiRNAs play a role as oncogenes or tumor suppressor genes¹⁴. A class of miRNAs is an oncogene in a certain tumor, and is often located in the deletion region or down-regulation of chromosome fragments in the genome, and plays an oncogene-like effect in such cells¹³⁻¹⁵. Deletion of this type of miRNA results in overexpression of its target tumor gene, producing the same effect as tumor gene amplification or activation¹⁵. The main target gene of another type of miRNA is a tumor suppressor gene, which is often located in the amplified region or expression of the chromosome fragment in the genome, and plays a tumor suppressor-like role¹⁴⁻¹⁶. Overexpression of this type of miRNA down-regulates the target gene, which is manifested by a decrease in the expression level of the oncogene protein, preventing the malignant transformation of the cell. There are multiple target genes for each miRNA in the cell, while each target gene may interact with multiple miRNAs to form a complex regulatory network, which regulates various genes after transcription and affects tumor development¹⁶. Although miR-605-3p has been discovered for a long time, its biological function has just begun to be studied. MiR-605-3p acts to inhibit tumor and participate in many physiological and pathological processes such as bladder cancer¹⁷. To better understand miR-605-3p function in the development and progression of PCa, we detected the expression of miR-605-3p in 52 PCa tissues and matched normal tissues. The expression of miR-605-3p was markedly decreased in prostate cancer tissue and was strongly associated with PCa stage, lymph node metastasis and distant metastasis. Therefore, we believe that miR-605-3p may play a role in tumor suppression in PCa. Besides, we found that the expression of EZH2 in tumor tissues was significantly up-regulated compared with the matched normal tissues, which was in negative correlation with the expression of miR-605-3p. The above results were also verified in PCa cell lines. To further investigate the role of miR-605-3p on the biological function of PCa, we constructed a miR-605-3p overexpression model and performed CCK-8, cell colony formation experiments, as well as invasion and migration experiments, which indicated that miR-605-3p can inhibit PCa proliferation as well as invasion and migration of PCa; however, its

specific molecular mechanism was still unclear. In the current study, we found that EZH2 was markedly down-regulated in prostate cancer, suggesting that miR-605-3p had a potential role in prostate cancer.

Next, we sought for the target genes for miR-605-3p. The eukaryotic genome produces thousands of different small RNAs (snRNAs) which regulate the expression of various genes under various conditions, which are responsible for the survival of biological organisms under environmental stresses¹²⁻¹⁶. Research evidence shows that RNA and RNA interference (RNAi) can participate in the regulation of alternative mRNA splicing and play a regulatory role in various cell biochemical processes. Its important and versatile regulatory mechanism is the RNA-protein complex cell biology³². Evidence from bioinformatics studies^{32,33} suggests that specific siRNAs have the potential to modulate the expression of target gene genes and are likely to play a role in target gene mRNA cleavage. To clarify the biological function of miRNA, we need to further search for its target gene. Bioinformatics analysis showed that miR-605-3p inhibited the effect on PCa by acting on the 3'-UTR region of EZH2; meanwhile, if there was a mutation in the 3'-UTR region, the inhibition effect would be greatly reduced. Therefore, the expression disorder of EZH2 is closely related to the occurrence and development of a variety of epithelial-derived and hematological tumors, and its high expression can promote the proliferation and metastasis of cancer cells. Therefore, we studied the relationship between EZH2 and prostate cancer²⁰⁻²². It was found that EZH2 can promote the malignant progression of tumor cells in prostate cancer cells.

To study the effect and interaction of miR-605-3p and EZH2 on the development of PCa, we further verified that miR-605-3p mimics significantly down-regulated the mRNA and protein expressions of EZH2. Subsequently, we used a recovery experiment to verify that EZH2 can counteract the ability of miR-605-3p to proliferate, invade and migrate in PCa cells. These above findings suggested that there may be a feedback regulation loop: EZH2 can reverse the biological effects of miR-605-3p in PCa cells, thereby jointly affecting the malignant progression of prostate cancer.

Conclusions

MiR-605-3p was significantly associated with PCa stage, lymph node metastasis and dis-

tant metastasis and poor prognosis, meanwhile it inhibited the malignant progression of PCa. In addition, miR-605-3p may inhibit PCa proliferation, invasion and migration by regulating EZH2.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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