ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Common and Rare Coding Genetic Variation Underlying the Electrocardiographic PR Interval

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Honghuang Lin, PhD
et al

BACKGROUND: Electrical conduction from the cardiac sinoatrial node to the ventricles is critical for normal heart function. Genome-wide association studies have identified more than a dozen common genetic loci that are associated with PR interval. However, it is unclear whether rare and low-frequency variants also contribute to PR interval heritability.

METHODS: We performed large-scale meta-analyses of the PR interval that included 83 367 participants of European ancestry and 9436 of African ancestry. We examined both common and rare variants associated with the PR interval.

RESULTS: We identified 31 genetic loci that were significantly associated with PR interval after Bonferroni correction ($P<1.2×10^{-6}$), including 11 novel loci that have not been reported previously. Many of these loci are involved in heart morphogenesis. In gene-based analysis, we found that multiple rare variants at *MYH6* ($P=5.9×10^{-11}$) and *SCN5A* ($P=1.1×10^{-7}$) were associated with PR interval. *SCN5A* locus also was implicated in the common variant analysis, whereas *MYH6* was a novel locus.

CONCLUSIONS: We identified common variants at 11 novel loci and rare variants within 2 gene regions that were significantly associated with PR interval. Our findings provide novel insights to the current understanding of atrioventricular conduction, which is critical for cardiac activity and an important determinant of health.

CLINICAL PERSPECTIVE

The duration of PR interval is an important biomarker of the cardiac conduction system. Increasing evidence suggests that cardiac conduction measurements including PR interval are heritable. It is thus interesting to understand the biological and potential clinical implications of genetic variation underlying cardiac conduction. We performed a large-scale meta-analysis of PR interval that included 83 367 participants of European ancestry and 9436 of African ancestry using the Illumina exome chip. Thirty-one genetic loci were significantly associated with PR interval after Bonferroni correction, including 11 loci that have not been previously reported. Our findings provide new insights to the current understanding of atrioventricular conduction, which is critical for cardiac activity and an important determinant of health.

Electrical conduction from the cardiac sinoatrial node to the ventricles is critical for normal heart function. Abnormalities of atrioventricular conduction can cause significant morbidity, and have been associated with atrial fibrillation (AF),[1,2] cardiac malformations, and sudden death.[3,4] Conduction from the sinus node through the atria, atrioventricular node, and His-Purkinje fibers is readily evaluated from surface ECG, by measurement of the duration of PR interval. Despite the critical role that the cardiac conduction system plays in cardiac physiology and disease, the formation and regulation of the conduction system remains incompletely understood.

Recent data indicate that cardiac conduction measurements are heritable[5–7] and have a genetic basis.[8–11] To date, genetic studies of PR interval have been relatively modest-sized largely European-ancestry samples and have implicated cardiac-expressed ion channels, cardiac developmental transcription factors, signaling molecules, and novel pathways not previously known to be involved in cardiac conduction processes. Nevertheless, existing studies have focused on the role of common and predominantly noncoding genetic variants, which account for only a modest proportion of trait heritability.[6]

To better understand the biological and potential clinical implications of genetic variation underlying cardiac conduction, there is a need to examine both common and rare variations underlying atrioventricular conduction in large, well-powered, multiethnic studies. Moreover, assessment of genetic variation that alters protein coding has the potential to more directly implicate genes involved in processes critical to cardiac conduction. We

therefore sought to examine PR interval duration in relation to predominantly coding genetic variants, in large, multi-ethnic analyses using the exome chip.

METHODS

The data, analytic methods, and study materials will be made available to other researchers for purposes of reproducing the results, subject to Data Use/Sharing Agreements adopted by individual participating cohorts. The summary results from the current article are available at the Broad Cardiovascular Disease Knowledge Portal (www.broadcvdi.org).

Study Participants

The current project included participants of European ancestry from 22 studies: AGES (Age, Gene/Environment Susceptibility Study); ARIC study (Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities); BRIGHT (British Genetics of Hypertension); Massachusetts General Hospital CAMP (Cardiology and Metabolic Patient) cohort; CHS (Cardiovascular Health Study); ERF (Erasmus Rucphen Family Study); FHS (Framingham Heart Study); GOCHA (Genes for Cerebral Hemorrhage on Anticoagulation); GRAPHIC (Genetic Regulation of Arterial Pressure in Humans in the Community); INTER99 (The Inter99 Study); KORA (Cooperative Health Research in the Region Augsburg); KORCULA (CROATIA-Korcula); LifeLines (LifeLines Cohort Study); MESA (Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis); NEO (The Netherlands Epidemiology of Obesity); RS (Rotterdam Study); GS:SFHS (Generation Scotland: Scottish Family Health Study); SHIP (Study of Health in Pomerania); TwinsUK; UHP (Utrecht Health Project); WHI (Women's Health Initiative); and YFS (Young Finns Study).

In addition, we included participants of African ancestry from 5 studies. These studies included ARIC, CHS, JHS (Jackson Heart Study), MESA, and WHI.

Institutional Review Boards or Ethics Committees approved study procedures at each contributing site. All participants provided written informed consent to participate in genetic research.

Measurement of PR Interval

PR interval duration, in milliseconds, was measured from the onset of the P wave to the onset of the QRS interval for each cohort. The following exclusions were applied: extreme PR values (≤80 or ≥320 ms); second- or third-degree heart block; AF on baseline ECG; history of myocardial infarction, heart failure, or Wolff–Parkinson–White syndrome; pacemaker placement; use of class I or III blocking medications (ATC code prefix C01B); digoxin use (ATC code C01AA05); or pregnancy.

Genotyping

Genotyping was performed independently in each study using the Illumina Human Exome BeadChip (v1.0, 1.1, or 1.2). Data were called and cleaned according to Cohorts for Heart and Aging Research in Genomic Epidemiology Exome Chip best practices.[12] Detailed information for each study on genotyping platforms, variant calling, and quality control metrics is shown in Table I in the Data Supplement. All studies used the same set of reference alleles to recode variants to ensure consistency.

Statistical Analyses

Before association analysis, PR interval was first adjusted for covariates by taking residuals from a linear regression of PR on age, sex, height, body mass index, and RR interval. Each cohort additionally adjusted as necessary for cohort-specific variables, such as clinic sites, family structure, and population structure. To reduce sensitivity to extreme PR values, the residuals were inverse normal transformed and used as the outcome for association testing.

Because single-marker–based analyses typically have low power to identify associations between rare variants and traits, we separated the analysis for common and rare variants based on minor allele frequency (MAF). Common variants were defined as those with MAF ≥1%, and the remaining variants were defined as rare variants (MAF<1%). For each of the common variants, we evaluated its association with the transformed PR interval and accounted for multiple testing by Bonferroni correction ($P<0.05/42\,075=1.2\times10^{-6}$). For the rare variants, we restricted analyses to nonsynonymous or splicing variants with MAF <1% because such variants are more likely to be functional than synonymous or more common variants. As we expect some rare variants may act in the same or opposite directions even in the same gene region,[13] we used a modified version of the Sequence Kernel Association Test,[14] which avoids problems of signals canceling out each other in burden test results. Many gene regions had few or no rare nonsynonymous or splicing variants. Monomorphic variants from each study also were reported in the cohort-level results as they were used for the cumulative MAF computations in gene-based tests. Gene regions with a cumulative MAF of rare variants <1% were excluded, resulting in 5761 gene regions that were tested (Results). Therefore, Bonferroni-corrected significance threshold for our gene-based tests was $P<0.05/5761=8.7\times10^{-6}$. In secondary analyses, we limited the analysis to damaging variants, defined as nonsense variants or variants predicted to be damaging by PolyPhen-2[15] or SIFT.[16]

Analyses were performed using the prepScores function of the seqMeta R package. Family-based studies implemented the kins option in prepScores to specify kinship matrices. Each study provided single-variant Z statistics from score tests, as well as genotype covariance matrices, which were then combined by fixed-effects meta-analysis. The heterogeneity across studies was assessed by the Cochran Q, which is a nonparametric statistical test defined as the weighted sum of squared differences between individual study effects and the pooled effect. We performed both race-stratified and race-combined meta-analyses, and the race-combined results were used for the remaining sections unless stated otherwise.

Comparison With Genetic Loci Associated With AF and P-Wave Indices

We also compared genetic loci associated with PR interval with those associated with AF and P-wave indices (PWI) to see whether there are any shared genetic mechanisms. AF loci were identified by a recent exome chip analysis that included 22 806 AF cases and 132 612 referents.[17] PWI loci were identified from a meta-analysis of P-wave duration and P-wave terminal force that included 44 456 participants.[18] In addition, for each of the top variants associated with PR, we also examined its association with AF and PWI.

Examine Potential Function of PR-Related Variants for Gene Expression, Regulation, and Biological Pathways

Pathway analysis was performed by MAGENTA[19] with default settings. The summary result for the common variants was used as the input, and significant pathways were defined as those with a false discovery rate[20] <0.05. The implication of genetic variants on cardiac gene expression (expression quantitative trait loci analysis) was performed by querying the GTEx database.[21] At each PR-related locus, we identified the top variant and its neighboring variants that were within 500 kb and in linkage disequilibrium with the top variant ($r^2 \geq 0.5$). Four heart and vascular tissues were queried, including artery aorta, artery coronary, atrial appendage, and heart left ventricle. Significant expression quantitative trait locis were defined as those with false discovery rate <0.05. Regulatory regions were downloaded from the ENCODE Project[22] and the NIH Roadmap Epigenomics Program.[23] Four tracks were created: (1) included all 98 cell types from Roadmap epigenomics H3K27ac sites; (2) included only 4 heart tissues (aorta, right atrium, left ventricle, and right ventricle) from Roadmap epigenomics H3K27ac sites; (3) included all 125 cell lines from ENCODE Dnase HS sites; and (4) included only 3 heart-derived cell lines (cardiac fibroblasts, atrial fibroblasts, and cardiac myocytes). The enrichment of PR-related loci in regulatory regions was examined by the VSE R package.[24] For comparison, we randomly created 1000 variant sets with MAF values and linkage disequilibrium structures similar to those seen for PR-related loci.

RESULTS

The current analyses included a total of 92 803 individuals from 27 cohorts, with 83 367 individuals from 22 studies of European ancestry and 9436 individuals from 5 studies of African ancestry. Clinical characteristics of the study participants are in Table 1.

Identification of 31 Loci Associated With PR Interval

A total of 42 075 common variants were analyzed (MAF ≥1%). As shown in Figure 1 and Table 2, 31 loci were significantly associated with PR interval after Bonferroni correction ($P<1.2\times10^{-6}$), including 22 loci that reached the conventional genome-wide significance threshold ($P<5\times10^{-8}$). The results of the random effects meta-analysis were similar to those of the fixed-effects analysis (Table II in the Data Supplement). The most significant locus was tagged by rs6795970 ($P=4.0\times10^{-240}$), a missense variant in *SCN10A*, which encodes a sodium channel that has been associated previously with the PR interval ($r^2=0.97$ with the top SNP rs6599250 reported previously).[8] Highly associated variants clustered in the linker region between the second and third domains of *SCN10A* (Figure 2). The top variants at 12 loci are missense

Table 1. Clinical Characteristics of the Participating Studies

Ancestry	Study	Total N	Men, N (%)	Age, y, Mean	PR Interval, ms, Mean±SD	RR Interval, ms, Mean±SD	BMI, kg/m², Mean±SD	Height, cm, Mean±SD	SBP, mm Hg, mean±SD	β-Blockers (%)	Diuretics (%)	Calcium Antagonists* (%)
European ancestry	AGES	2052	742 (36.2)	75.9±5.4	170.5±26.8	895±129	27.0±4.4	166±9	143±20	635 (31.0)	ND	108 (5.3)
	ARIC	9828	4528 (46.1)	54.1±5.7	160.3±23.3	928±136	26.9±4.7	169±9	118±17	789 (8.0)	1085 (11.0)	176 (1.8)
	BRIGHT	841	324 (38.9)	57.6±10.7	161.1±19.9	960±169	27.5±3.8	166±9	153±24	248 (29.5)	260 (30.9)	18 (2.1)
	CAMP	2493	1394 (55.9)	60.7±11.6	163.0±26.8	926±166	28.5±5.8	171±10	ND	Excluded	ND	Excluded
	CHS	3247	1313 (40.4)	72.4±5.4	167.8±28.2	956±151	26.4±4.4	165±9	136±21	366 (11.3)	750 (23.1)	206 (6.3)
	ERF	982	447 (45.5)	48.2±14.3	152.9±23.2	982±159	26.9±4.6	168±10	140±20	3 (0.3)	133 (13.5)	25 (2.5)
	FHS	7580	3428 (45.2)	39.3±9.8	152.0±22.1	910±175	26.0±5.0	169±10	119±15	Excluded	ND	Excluded
	GOCHA	355	161 (45.4)	73.2±8.2	167.6±27.7	913±173	26.1±4.6	169±10	N/A	Excluded	ND	ND
	GRAPHIC	1755	893 (50.9)	39.1±14.5	153.0±24.0	934±145	26.1±4.6	171±9	128±19	39 (2.2)	ND	ND
	INTER99	5836	2843 (48.7)	46.1±7.9	158.2±22.4	921±150	26.3±4.6	172±9	130±18	ND	ND	ND
	KORA	2617	1247 (47.6)	48.3±13.0	162.1±22.2	944±149	26.9±4.4	168±9	127±19	199 (7.6)	152 (5.8)	13 (0.5)
	KORCULA	293	106 (36.2)	55.0±13.4	159.8±24.0	929±127	28.0±4.3	168±9	139±14	8 (2.7)	3 (1.0)	6 (2.0)
	LifeLines	1934	781 (40.3)	45.2±13.1	156.7±24.7	896±145	25.9±4.5	175±9	122±16	64 (3.3)	39 (2.0)	23 (1.2)
	MESA	2455	1171 (47.7)	62.8±10.2	164.7±25.2	1047±158	27.8±5.1	169±10	123±21	Excluded	ND	Excluded
	NEO	5782	2717 (47.0)	55.9±5.9	164.5±23.4	940±151	30.0±4.8	174±10	133±17	Excluded	ND	ND
	RS	2358	1086 (46.1)	68.6±8.1	168.2±24.7	871±144	26.3±3.6	168±9	ND	293 (12.4)	ND	ND
	GS:SFHS	9168	3786 (41.3)	52.0±13.6	164.1±24.9	886±146	26.9±5.1	168±10	134±18	192 (2.1)	ND	ND
	SHIP	6493	2608 (40.2)	49.2±15.3	158.5±23.3	897±146	27.5±5.0	170±9	131±20	ND	ND	ND
	TwinsUK	465	32 (6.9)	52.3±11.7	159.6±22.6	923±148	26.8±5.4	163±7	119±16	ND	ND	ND
	UHP	1735	779 (44.9)	39.1±13.0	155.9±22.5	950±151	24.9±3.9	175±10	125±17	69 (4.6)	32 (1.8)	18 (1.0)
	WHI	13252	0 (0)	66.0±6.5	161.4±24.0	921±138	28.7±5.6	162±6	130±18	735 (5.5)	1715 (13.3)	1230 (9.3)
	YFS	1846	824 (44.6)	41.9±5.0	156.2±22.6	1028±165	26.4±4.9	172±9	119±14	38 (2.1)	24 (1.3)	1 (0.1)
African ancestry	ARIC	3366	1291 (38.4)	53.3±5.8	171.2±26.8	929±151	29.4±6.1	168±9	128±22	315 (9.4)	717 (21.3)	222 (6.6)
	CHS	627	232 (37.0)	72.4±5.5	170.2±28.1	918±161	28.4±5.5	165±9	142±22	54 (8.6)	217 (34.6)	60 (9.6)
	JHS	2220	833 (37.5)	52.7±12.5	172.7±27.3	956±150	31.4±6.4	169±9	126±18	Excluded	ND	Excluded
	MESA	1565	718 (45.9)	62.3±10.0	170.9±26.3	1050±172	30.2±5.9	168±10	132±21	Excluded	ND	Excluded
	WHI	1658	0 (0)	64.6±6.4	167.1±24.8	921±148	31.1±5.8	162±7	134±17	87 (5.2)	393 (23.7)	341 (20.6)

Exclusion criteria are given in Table I in the Data Supplement. AGES indicates Age, Gene/Environment Susceptibility Study; ARIC study, Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities; BMI, body mass index; BRIGHT, British Genetics of Hypertension; CAMP, Cardiology and Metabolic Patient; CHS, Cardiovascular Health Study; ERF, Erasmus Rucphen Family Study; FHS, Framingham Heart Study; GOCHA, Genes for Cerebral Hemorrhage on Anticoagulation; GRAPHIC, Genetic Regulation of Arterial Pressure in Humans in the Community; GS:SFHS, Generation Scotland: Scottish Family Health Study; JHS, Jackson Heart Study; KORA, Cooperative Health Research in the Region Augsburg; KORCULA, CROATIA-Korcula; LifeLines, LifeLines Cohort Study; MESA, Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis; N/A, not available; ND, not determined; NEO, The Netherlands Epidemiology of Obesity; RS, Rotterdam Study; SBP, systolic blood pressure; SHIP, Study of Health in Pomerania; UHP, Utrecht Health Project; WHI, Women's Health Initiative; and YFS, Young Finns Study.
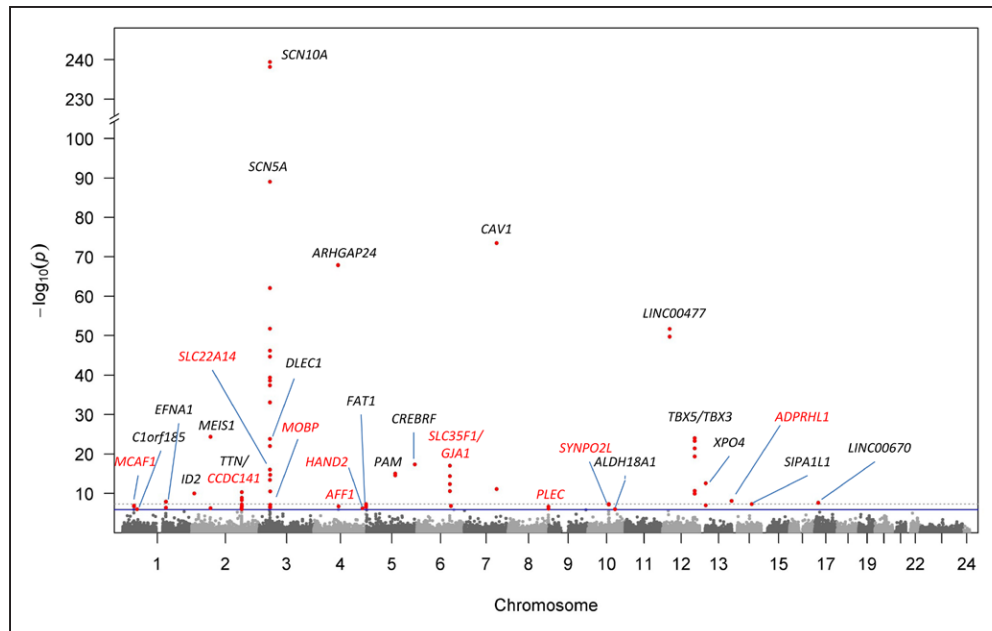*Nondihydropyridine calcium antagonists.

Figure 1. Manhattan plot showing the association between common variants and PR interval from combined ancestry analysis.
The x axis represents the chromosomal position for each SNP, and the y axis represents the $-\log_{10}(P$ value) of the association with PR interval. The dashed line represents the genome-wide significance cutoff of 5×10^{-8}, and the blue line represents the Bonferroni P value cutoff of 1.3×10^{-6}. Black color represents known loci, whereas red color represents novel loci.

variants. In addition, the top variants at 4 loci (including 3 novel loci) are low-frequency variants (1%<MAF<5%), illustrating the power of exome chip analyses to identify low-frequency coding associations. Detailed information of the nearest gene to each genome-wide significant locus is given in Table III in the Data Supplement.

We then examined the associations between these top PR variants with AF and electrocardiographic PWI. Eight out of 31 PR loci identified in our analysis were associated with AF after Bonferroni correction ($P<0.05/31=1.6\times10^{-3}$), consistent with some shared mechanisms between the regulation of PR interval and AF. Variants in *SCN10A* most significantly associated with PR interval were also significantly associated with AF (Table IV in the Data Supplement). Among PR-related SNPs, rs60632610 at the *SYNPO2L* locus was most significantly associated with AF (odds ratio, 1.90 [0.87–0.93]; $P=1.5\times10^{-10}$). Figure I in the Data Supplement shows the overlap among loci associated with PR interval, AF, and PWI.

We also performed a sensitivity analysis that separated samples of European and African ancestry. As shown in Table V in the Data Supplement and Figure II in the Data Supplement, all of the 31 loci except rs17391905 at the 1p32.3 locus ($P=2.6\times10^{-6}$) were also significant in the analysis of European-only samples. Table VI in the Data Supplement and Figure III in the Data Supplement show the result for the analysis of African ancestry-only samples. Three loci were significant: *SCN5A* (rs3922844), *SCN10A* (rs6795970), and *TBX5* (rs883079) after Bonferroni correction; $P<1.3\times10^{-6}$. All 3 loci were also significant in the analysis of European-

only samples. The result from each individual study is shown in Table VII in the Data Supplement.

Rare Variations in *MYH6* and *SCN5A* Are Associated With PR Interval

We next examined the association between PR interval and rare variants (MAF<1%) in gene regions. Variation in 2 gene regions, *MYH6* ($P=5.9\times10^{-11}$) and *SCN5A* ($P=1.1\times10^{-7}$), was associated with PR interval (Table 3). Tables VIII and IX in the Data Supplement show the association of each rare variant within *MYH6* and *SCN5A* with PR interval, respectively. *MYH6* encodes a cardiac myosin heavy chain subunit, and *SCN5A* encodes the major cardiac sodium channel and was previously found to be associated with PR interval.[8] *MYH6* was also recently found to associate with PWI.[18] We also performed an ancestry-stratified analysis in the same way as the combined analysis. The same 2 gene regions were significant using data from European samples alone ($P=4.1\times10^{-12}$ and 8.3×10^{-7} for *MYH6* and *SCN5A*, respectively). These 2 genes did not reach the significance cutoff in African samples ($P=0.03$ and 0.01 for *MYH6* and *SCN5A*, respectively). Two other genes, *HEATR2* ($P=2.2\times10^{-6}$) and *THRAP3* ($P=4.2\times10^{-6}$), were significantly associated in African samples alone. However, in the combined analysis, these 2 genes were not significant ($P=0.02$ and 0.06 for *HEATR2* and *THRAP3*, respectively), probably because of a low cumulative allele frequency.

In our secondary analysis of pooled samples, we analyzed only damaging variants, defined as nonsense mutations or alternations predicted to be damaging

Table 2. Common Variants Significantly Associated With PR Interval From Meta-Analysis of All Studies

SNP	Locus	Closest Gene	Function	Coding Allele	CAF*	β	SE	P Value	No. of Studies†	Prolong or Shorten PR Interval	Novel Locus
rs6795970	3p22.2	SCN10A	Missense	A	0.37	0.1705	0.0052	4.0×10^{-240}	27	Prolong	
rs3922844	3p22.2	SCN5A	Intronic	A	0.34	−0.1069	0.0053	9.3×10^{-90}	26	Shorten	
rs3807989	7q31.2	CAV1	Intronic	A	0.43	0.0908	0.0050	3.0×10^{-74}	27	Prolong	
rs7660702	4q21.23	ARHGAP24	Intronic	C	0.33	−0.0921	0.0053	1.2×10^{-68}	27	Shorten	
rs17287293	12p12.1	LINC00477	Intergenic	G	0.14	−0.1084	0.0071	1.9×10^{-52}	27	Shorten	
rs11897119	2p14	MEIS1	Intronic	C	0.39	0.0566	0.0055	4.2×10^{-25}	25	Prolong	
rs1896312	12q24.21	TBX3	Intergenic	G	0.28	0.0564	0.0055	8.7×10^{-25}	26	Prolong	
rs883079	12q24.21	TBX5	3′UTR	G	0.29	0.0550	0.0054	4.5×10^{-24}	26	Prolong	
rs116202356	3p22.2	DLEC1	Missense	A	0.02	−0.1953	0.0199	1.0×10^{-22}	27	Shorten	
rs251253	5q35.1	CREBRF	Intergenic	G	0.42	−0.0439	0.0051	4.7×10^{-18}	26	Shorten	
rs11153730	6q22.31	SLC35F1	Intergenic	C	0.47	−0.0420	0.0049	9.5×10^{-18}	27	Shorten	Novel
rs35658696	5q21.1	PAM	Missense	G	0.04	0.0956	0.0119	8.5×10^{-16}	27	Prolong	
rs2070492	3p22.2	SLC22A14	Missense	T	0.10	0.0624	0.0083	4.0×10^{-14}	27	Prolong	Novel
rs2585897	13q12.11	XPO4	Intronic	A	0.17	0.0471	0.0064	2.8×10^{-13}	27	Prolong	
rs2042995	2q31.2	TTN	Missense	C	0.26	0.0375	0.0057	4.3×10^{-11}	27	Prolong	
rs4399693	2p25.1	ID2	Intergenic	A	0.34	0.0374	0.0058	9.1×10^{-11}	25	Prolong	
rs41306688	13q34	ADPRHL1	Missense	C	0.03	0.1002	0.0173	7.4×10^{-9}	22	Prolong	Novel
rs4745	1q22	EFNA1	Missense	T	0.49	0.0299	0.0053	1.2×10^{-8}	26	Prolong	
rs11078078	17p12	LINC00670	Intronic	A	0.40	0.0281	0.0050	2.2×10^{-8}	27	Prolong	
rs60632610	10q22.2	SYNPO2L	Missense	T	0.15	−0.0371	0.0068	4.5×10^{-8}	27	Shorten	Novel
rs11848785	14q24.2	SIPA1L1	Intronic	G	0.24	0.0317	0.0058	4.6×10^{-8}	27	Prolong	
rs3733414	4q35.2	FAT1	Missense	A	0.38	0.0280	0.0051	4.8×10^{-8}	27	Prolong	
rs17362588	2q31.2	CCDC141	Missense	A	0.08	−0.0491	0.0090	5.5×10^{-8}	27	Shorten	Novel
rs2296172	1p34.3	MACF1	Missense	G	0.20	0.0326	0.0061	1.1×10^{-7}	27	Prolong	Novel
rs9398652	6q22.31	GJA1	Intergenic	A	0.14	0.0390	0.0074	1.3×10^{-7}	26	Prolong	Novel
rs442177	4q22.1	AFF1	Intronic	C	0.42	−0.0262	0.0050	1.8×10^{-7}	26	Shorten	Novel
rs7002002	8q24.3	PLEC	Missense	A	0.38	−0.0272	0.0052	2.1×10^{-7}	25	Shorten	Novel
rs1768208	3p22.1	MOBP	Intron	T	0.25	0.0288	0.0057	3.6×10^{-7}	27	Prolong	Novel
rs2119788	4q34.1	HAND2	Intergenic	C	0.52	−0.0246	0.0049	5.6×10^{-7}	27	Shorten	Novel
rs17391905‡	1p32.3	C1orf185	Intergenic	G	0.03	−0.0694	0.0142	9.6×10^{-7}	27	Shorten	
rs524295	10q24.1	ALDH18A1	Intergenic	A	0.40	−0.0261	0.0053	9.7×10^{-7}	26	Shorten	

CAF indicates coding allele frequency; and UTR, Untranslated region.

†Some variants did not reach pass the quality filtering in respective studies and thus were excluded.

‡SNP was not significant if African participants were excluded.

by PolyPhen-2[15] or SIFT.[16] Three genes reached the significance cutoff ($P<0.05/2030=2.5 \times 10^{-5}$), including *GORASP1* ($P=1.1 \times 10^{-5}$), *NEBL* ($P=1.9 \times 10^{-5}$), and *SCN5A* ($P=2.2 \times 10^{-5}$; Table X in the Data Supplement).

Expression Quantitative Trait Loci Analysis

We also performed expression quantitative trait loci analysis to determine whether any of the novel PR-related variants were associated with cardiac gene expression using data from GTEx.[21] Eight loci were associated with expression of at least 1 gene in the atrial appendage, left ventricle, coronary artery, or aorta, suggesting the importance of these loci in the regulation of gene expression in heart or vascular tissues (Table XI in the Data Supplement).

Enrichment of PR-Related Variants in Regulatory Regions

We examined involvement of PR-related variants in regulatory function. As shown in Figure IV in the Data Supplement, PR-related variants were significantly enriched in regulatory regions in both primary heart tissues ($P_{adj}=3.7 \times 10^{-9}$) and heart-derived cell lines ($P_{adj}=0.002$), but not in all tissues ($P_{adj}>0.05$). The
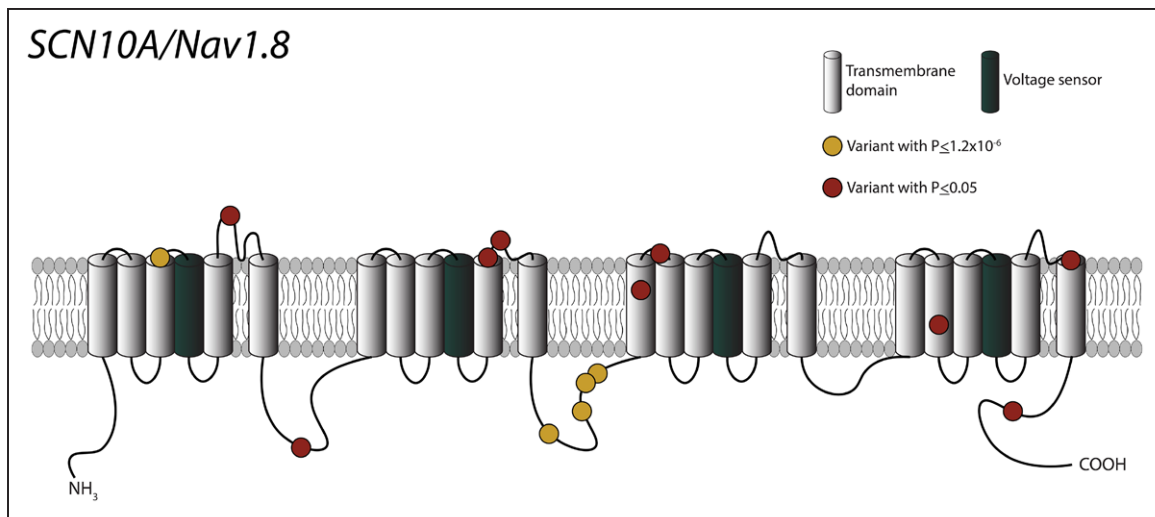
Figure 2. Diagram of sodium voltage-gated channel α subunit 10 (SCN10A).
Each yellow circle represents a genetic variant with a P value less than the significance cutoff (1.2×10^{-6}). Each red circle represents a genetic variant with a P value greater than the significance cutoff, but <0.05.

observed enrichment suggested involvement of these loci in tissue-specific regulatory functions. In addition, the variants also tended to locate within evolutionarily conserved regions ($P_{adj}=2.8\times10^{-5}$ for primates and 6.4×10^{-5} for mammals).

Enrichment of PR-Related Variants in Biological Pathways

We examined the enrichment of PR-related variants in biological pathways by MAGENTA.[19] Table XII in the Data Supplement shows the top pathways identified. The most significant pathway was heart morphogenesis ($P=3.6\times10^{-5}$; false discovery rate=0.049), suggesting that many PR-related genes might be involved in cardiac development. The pathway was the only significant pathway after correction for multiple testing (false discovery rate<0.05).

DISCUSSION

We conducted large-scale analyses of the genetic determinants of atrioventricular conduction in 92 803 individuals by studying the electrocardiographic PR interval. In total, we observed 31 genetic loci that were associated with atrioventricular conduction, 11 of which are novel. In aggregate, the results implicate loci containing genes encoding ion channels in the heart, sarcomeric proteins, cardiac transcription factors, and other proteins with unknown cardiac function. Our findings provide new insights to the current understanding of atrioventricular conduction, which is critical for cardiac function.

Table 3. Top 10 Gene Regions Associated With PR Interval by the SKAT Test*

Gene	P Value	Qmeta†	CMAF	No. of Variants	No. of Studies With At Least 1 Rare Variant	Average Number of Variants in Each Study
MYH6‡	5.9×10^{-11}‡	23 537 340	0.0215	32	27	12
SCN5A	1.1×10^{-7}‡	16 604 843	0.0289	35	27	13
GORASP1	1.3×10^{-5}	14 361 252	0.0308	16	27	6
NEBL	1.9×10^{-5}	11 787 699	0.0309	36	27	11
TRIML2	1.2×10^{-4}	10 173 978	0.0223	23	27	10
SLC22A11	1.5×10^{-4}	6 539 656	0.0136	11	27	6
MTRF1	2.8×10^{-4}	9 073 098	0.0235	10	26	3
CD36	3.5×10^{-4}	8 001 777	0.0156	28	27	9
CAPRIN2	3.7×10^{-4}	6 886 375	0.0169	15	27	7
PIK3R6	6.0×10^{-4}	9 763 336	0.0316	23	26	8

CMAF indicates cumulative minor allele frequency; and SKAT, Sequence Kernel Association Test.

*The analysis included only nonsynonymous and splice site rare variants (minor allele frequency<1%) within the gene regions.

†Qmeta: the SKAT Q statistic, defined as $\sum_{j=1}^{n} w_j S_j$, where w_j is the weight, and S_j is the squared score.

‡The significance level for gene-based tests after Bonferroni correction was $P<0.05/5759=8.7\times10^{-6}$; the 2 genes reached this significant cutoff.

Interestingly, rare variants in *SCN5A* and *MYH6* were associated with PR interval. A missense mutation (D1275N) in *SCN5A* has previously been reported in a large family with multiple members affected by dilated cardiomyopathy, conduction disorder, and arrhythmia.[25] The mutation, together with several other mutations within the same gene, has also been associated with dilated cardiomyopathy,[26] AF,[27] and long-QT syndrome.[28–31] Rare mutations within *MYH6* were associated with sick sinus syndrome,[28] congenital heart defects,[32] and atrial septal defects.[33]

Our observations support and extend prior analyses of cardiac conduction. Most previous genome-wide association studies involved the study of common genetic variation in smaller samples of up to 28 517 individuals.[8,10,11] In keeping with those prior studies, we again observed that *SCN10A* is the most prominent gene involved in atrioventricular conduction. A recent genome-wide association study was based on 105K samples corroborates many of our current findings.[34] However, our current study had greater power than earlier analyses for assessment of rare coding variation.

Our study has 2 major implications. First, our results underscore the utility of assessing coding variation as an efficient way to identify functional molecular domains. In particular, our findings provide insights into the functional topology of *SCN10A*. The *SCN10A* sodium channel gene is widely expressed in the nervous system and heart,[21] but it has only recently been implicated in cardiac conduction[8,34–36] and arrhythmias such as AF[35] and Brugada syndrome.[37] *SCN10A* encodes an α-subunit (with 6 transmembrane-spanning regions), which forms tetrameric, voltage-gated sodium channels responsible for the Nav 1.8 late sodium channel current.[38,39] We found a collection of amino acid substitutions in the linker region between the second and third domains of *SCN10A* that were associated with PR duration (Figure 2). Variants in this linker region that were associated with the PR interval also were associated with AF, suggesting that function of this domain may have important clinical implications.

Prior work on the homologous *SCN5A* cardiac sodium channel gene—which is also a cardiac conduction locus—indicates that this linker region is critical for sodium channel inactivation. Sodium influx is predominantly responsible for cardiomyocyte depolarization. Moreover, channel inactivation is essential for restoration of the hyperpolarized state needed for cyclic cardiomyocyte depolarization and contraction. Therefore, variations in this linker region might be involved in Nav 1.8 inactivation. Other data are necessary to identify relationships among variation in the linker region, the late sodium channel current, and channel inactivation in both healthy and diseased states.

Together with previously discovered susceptibility genes, our findings implicate genes in different functional classes that regulate atrioventricular conduction such as ion channels and cardiac transcription factors. In many cases, anomalies in these genes have been found to cause human cardiac diseases, such as congenital heart defects, primary cardiac conduction abnormalities, and syndromes predisposing to sudden cardiac death (Table III in the Data Supplement). Interestingly, some of the genes are not expressed (in high abundance) in the right atrial appendage or the left ventricle, according to existing data sets—although most are active in the heart (Table XIII in the Data Supplement). Atrioventricular nodal conduction also can be influenced by external tone from the autonomic nervous system. Therefore, further work is necessary to determine the mechanisms by which identified genes that are not expressed in the heart influence the PR interval.

We acknowledge several limitations of our study. Since the PR interval was measured across many cohorts, it is possible that there is some heterogeneity that would diminish our power to detect modest associations. We excluded individuals with extreme values of PR interval, which might have been gleaned from large variations in cardiac conduction. We also performed inverse normal transformation on the raw PR interval to reduce the heterogeneity, which on the other hand might reduce the interpretability. Although we performed single-variant and gene-based tests, we did not examine the association of haplotype patterns with PR interval, so it is unclear whether there are any haplotypes that might be associated with PR interval. Most of the genetic variants analyzed were in exons. Therefore, the effects of variants within regulatory regions were not investigated. We note that the variants identified may not be causally related to the studied phenotypes (PR interval, AF, and PWI) but may be in linkage disequilibrium with causal variants. We anticipate that future increases in sample size with additional replications and more comprehensive genotyping platforms, such as denser SNP arrays or genome sequencing, will help address these limitations.

In conclusion, we studied genetic variants associated with PR-interval duration and identified 31 common loci—including 11 that were novel—and 2 rare variant regions. Our findings greatly expand our knowledge of the genes that underlie atrioventricular conduction in the heart.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Authors

Honghuang Lin, PhD; Jessica van Setten, PhD; Albert V. Smith, PhD; Nathan A. Bihlmeyer, BS; Helen R. Warren, PhD; Jennifer A. Brody, BA; Farid Radmanesh, MD, MPH; Leanne Hall, MSc; Niels Grarup, MD, PhD; Martina Müller-Nurasyid,

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Correspondence

Honghuang Lin, PhD, Section of Computational Biomedicine, Department of Medicine, Boston University School of Medicine, 72 E Concord St, B-616, Boston, MA 02118, E-mail hhlin@bu.edu or Steven A. Lubitz, MD, MPH, Cardiac Arrhythmia Service & Cardiovascular Research Center, Massachusetts General Hospital, 55 Fruit St, GRB 109, Boston, MA 02114, E-mail slubitz@mgh.harvard.edu

Affiliations

Section of Computational Biomedicine (H.L.) and Section of Cardiovascular Medicine (E.J.B.), Department of Medicine, Boston University School of Medicine, MA. National Heart Lung and Blood Institute's and Boston University's Framingham Heart Study, MA (H.L., E.J.B.). Department of Cardiology, Division Heart & Lungs, University Medical Center Utrecht, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands (J.v.S., F.W.A.). Icelandic Heart Association, Kopavogur (A.V.S., V.G.). Faculty of Medicine, University of Iceland, Reykjavik (A.V.S., V.G.). Predoctoral Training Program in Human Genetics, McKusick-Nathans Institute of Genetic Medicine (N.A.B.) and McKusick-Nathans Institute of Genetic Medicine (D.E.A.), Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD. William Harvey Research Institute (H.R.W., P.B.M.) and NIHR Barts Cardiovascular Research Unit (H.R.W., P.B.M.), Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary University of London, United Kingdom. Cardiovascular Health Research Unit, Department of Medicine (J.A.B., J.C.B., C.M.S.), Department of Biostatistics (K.M.R.), Cardiovascular Health Research Unit, Division of Cardiology, Departments of Medicine and Epidemiology (N.S.), Cardiovascular Health Research Unit, Departments of Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Services (B.M.P.), and Cardiovascular Health Research Unit, Department of Epidemiology (S.R.H.), University of Washington, Seattle. Center for Human Genetic Research (F. Radmanesh, J.R.) and Cardiovascular Research Center (P.L.H., L.-C.W., H.S.J., W.H., A.H., N.R.T., P.T.E., S.A.L.), Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston. Program in Medical and Population Genetics, Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT, Cambridge, MA (L.-C.W., P.T.E., S.A.L.). Department of Cardiovascular Sciences, University of Leicester, United Kingdom (L.H., C.P.N., N.J.S.). NIHR Leicester Cardiovascular Biomedical Research Unit, Glenfield Hospital, United Kingdom (L.H., C.P.N., N.J.S.). The Novo Nordisk Foundation Center for Basic Metabolic Research, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences (N.G., J.B.-J., O. Pedersen, T.H.), Laboratory of Experimental Cardiology (J.K.K.), and Department of Clinical Medicine, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences (A.L.), University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Department of Medicine I, University Hospital Munich, Ludwig Maximilian's University Munich, Germany (M.M.-N., M.F.S., S.K.). Chair of Genetic Epidemiology, IBE, Faculty of Medicine, LMU Munich, Germany (K.S.). DZHK (German Cardiovascular Research Centre), Partner Site: Munich Heart Alliance, Germany (M.M.-N., M.F.S., A.P., T.M., S.K.). Institute of Genetic Epidemiology (M.M.-N., K.S.), Institute of Epidemiology II (A.P., M.W.), Research Unit of Molecular Epidemiology (M.W.), and Institute of Human Genetics (T.M.), Helmholtz Zentrum München-German Research Center for Environmental Health, Neuherberg, Germany. Medical Research Council Human Genetics Unit, Institute of Genetics and Molecular Medicine (T.B., J.M., C.H.) and Usher Institute of Population Health Sciences and Informatics (I.R.), University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom. University of Groningen, University Medical Center Groningen, Department of Cardiology, The Netherlands (N.V., R.A.d.B., P.v.d.M., P.v.d.H.). Institute for Translational Genomics and Population Sciences and Department of Pediatrics, Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, Torrance, CA (H.J.L., Y.-D.I.C., J.Y., X.G., K.D.T., J.I.R.). Department of Clinical Epidemiology (R.L.-G., D.O.M.-K.) and Department of Cardiology (S.T., J.W.J.), Leiden University Medical Center, The Netherlands. Department of Medical Informatics (M.E.v.d.B.), Human Genomics Facility (F. Rivadeneira), Human Genotyping Facility (A.U.), and Department of Epidemiology (M.E., B.H. Stricker), Erasmus MC, University Medical Center Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Interfaculty Institute for Genetics and Functional Genomics, University Medicine and Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-University Greifswald, Germany (S.W., G.H., U.V.). DZHK (German Cardiovascular Research Centre), Partner Site Greifswald, Germany (S.W., H.V., S.B.F., U.V., M.D.). Division of Public Health Sciences, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Seattle, WA (J.H., C.K.). Department of Clinical Chemistry, Fimlab Laboratories and Faculty of Medicine and Life Sciences (L.-P.L., T.L.) and Department of Clinical Physiology, Tampere University Hospital and Faculty of Medicine and Life Sciences (M.K.), University of Tampere, Finland. Department of Data Science (H.M.) and Physiology and Biophysics (J.G.W.), University of Mississippi Medical Center, Jackson. Laboratory of Epidemiology and Population Sciences, National Institute on Aging, Intramural Research Program, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD (T.B.H., L.J.L). Division of Nephrology and Hypertension, Internal Medicine, School of Medicine, University of Utah, Salt Lake City (M.L.). Department of Epidemiology, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University, Atlanta, GA (A.A.). Epidemiological Cardiology Research Center (EPICARE), Wake Forest School of Medicine, Winston Salem, NC (E.Z.S.). Medical Research Institute (J.M.C.) and Division of Population Health Sciences (B.H. Smith), Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, University of Dundee, United Kingdom. Department of Medical Informatics (J.A.K.) and Genetic Epidemiology Unit, Department of Epidemiology (C.M.v.D.), Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. TCM Clinical Basis Institute, Zhejiang Chinese Medicine University, Hangzhou, China (Z.X., C.W.). Division of Cardiology, Department of Medicine, UPMC Heart and Vascular Institute, University of Pittsburgh, PA (J.W.M.). German Center for Diabetes Research, Neuherberg, Germany (A.P.). Institute of Human Genetics, Technische Universität München, Germany (T.M.). Research Centre for Prevention and Health, Capital Region of Denmark, Copenhagen (A.L.). Department of Clinical Experimental Research, Rigshospitalet, Denmark (A.L.). British Heart Foundation Glasgow Cardiovascular Research Centre, Institute of Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences, College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences, University of Glasgow, Scotland (S.P.). Institute for Community Medicine (H.V.) and Department of Internal Medicine B (S.B.F., M.D.), University Medicine Greifswald, Germany. Department of Twin Research and Genetic Epidemiology, King's College London, United Kingdom (M.M., T.D.S.). Julius Center for Health Sciences and Primary Care, University Medical Center, Utrecht, The Netherlands (M.L.B.). Division of Cardiovascular Medicine, Department of Medicine, Stanford University School of Medicine, CA (M.P.). Department of Clinical Physiology and Nuclear Medicine, Turku University Hospital, and Research Centre of Applied and Preventive Cardiovascular Medicine, University of Turku, Finland (O.T.R.). Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute, Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Washington, Seattle (B.M.P., S.R.H.). Faculty of Medicine, University of Split, Croatia (O. Polasek). Cardiogenetics Lab, Genetics and Molecular Cell Sciences Research Centre, Cardiovascular and Cell Sciences Institute, St George's, University of London, Cranmer Terrace, United Kingdom (B.P.P., Y.J.). Durrer Center for Cardiovascular Research, Netherlands Heart Institute, Utrecht, The Netherlands (F.W.A.). Institute of Cardiovascular Science, Faculty of Population Health Sciences, University College London, London, United Kingdom (F.W.A.). Farr Institute of Health Informatics Research and Institute of Health Informatics, University College London, London, United Kingdom; CARIM School for Cardiovascular Diseases, Maastricht Centre for Systems Biology (MaCSBio) and Department of Biochemistry, Maastricht University, The Netherlands (A.I.).

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