No clinical utility of KRAS variant rs61764370 for ovarian or breast cancer

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No clinical utility of *KRAS* variant rs61764370 for ovarian or breast cancer

A full list of authors and affiliations appears at the end of the article.

Abstract

**Objective**—Clinical genetic testing is commercially available for rs61764370, an inherited variant residing in a *KRAS* 3′ UTR microRNA binding site, based on suggested associations with increased ovarian and breast cancer risk as well as with survival time. However, prior studies, emphasizing particular subgroups, were relatively small. Therefore, we comprehensively evaluated ovarian and breast cancer risks as well as clinical outcome associated with rs61764370.

**Methods**—Centralized genotyping and analysis were performed for 140,012 women enrolled in the Ovarian Cancer Association Consortium (15,357 ovarian cancer patients; 30,816 controls), the Breast Cancer Association Consortium (33,530 breast cancer patients; 37,640 controls), and the Consortium of Modifiers of *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* (14,765 *BRCA1* and 7904 *BRCA2* mutation carriers).

**Results**—We found no association with risk of ovarian cancer (OR= 0.99, 95% CI 0.94–1.04, p = 0.74) or breast cancer (OR = 0.98, 95% CI 0.94–1.01, p = 0.19) and results were consistent among mutation carriers (*BRCA1*, ovarian cancer HR = 1.09, 95% CI 0.97–1.23, p = 0.14, breast cancer HR = 1.04, 95% CI 0.97–1.12, p = 0.27; *BRCA2*, ovarian cancer HR = 0.89, 95% CI 0.71–1.13, p = 0.34, breast cancer HR = 1.06, 95% CI 0.94–1.19, p = 0.35). Null results were also obtained for associations with overall survival following ovarian cancer (HR = 0.94, 95% CI 0.83–1.07, p = 0.38), breast cancer (HR = 0.96, 95% CI 0.87–1.06, p = 0.38), and all other previously-reported associations.

**Conclusions**—rs61764370 is not associated with risk of ovarian or breast cancer nor with clinical outcome for patients with these cancers. Therefore, genotyping this variant has no clinical utility related to the prediction or management of these cancers.

Keywords

*KRAS* variant; Breast cancer; Ovarian cancer; Genetic association; Clinical outcome
1. Introduction

MicroRNAs (miRNAs) are a class of small non-coding RNA molecules that negatively regulate gene expression by binding partially complementary sites in the 3’ untranslated regions (UTRs) of their target mRNAs. In this way, miRNAs control many cancer-related biological pathways involved in cell proliferation, differentiation, and apoptosis [1]. To date, several inherited variants in microRNAs or miRNA target sites have been reported to confer increased cancer risks [2]. One such variant is located in the 3’ UTR of the KRAS gene (rs61764370 T > G) for which the rarer G allele has been reported to confer an increased risk of ovarian, breast, and lung cancer [3–7] as well as endometriosis [8], although not consistently [9–11].

For ovarian cancer, the rs61764370 G allele was also reported to be associated with increased risk (320 cases, 328 controls). Further increased risks were observed among 23 BRCA1 mutation carriers and 31 women with familial ovarian cancer, but without BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutations [3]. In contrast, no association with ovarian cancer risk was seen in another, much larger study, based on 8669 cases, 10,012 controls, and 2682 BRCA1 mutation carriers [9]. One criticism on the latter study was that some of the genotype data were for rs17388148, an imputed proxy for rs61764370; even though rs17388148 is highly correlated with rs61764370 ($r^2 = 0.97$) and was imputed with high accuracy ($r^2 = 0.977$) [12,13]. The minor allele of rs61764370 was also associated with shorter survival time in a study of 279 ovarian cancer patients diagnosed after age 52 years with platinum-resistant disease (28 resistant, 263 not resistant) and with sub-optimal debulking surgery after neoadjuvant chemotherapy (7 sub-optimal, 109 optimal) [14]. However, another study observed no association between rs61764370 and ovarian cancer outcome (329 cases) [15].

For breast cancer, a borderline significant increased frequency of the rs61764370 G allele was observed in 268 BRCA1 mutation carriers with breast cancer, but not in 127 estrogen receptor (ER)-negative familial non-BRCA1/BRCA2 breast cancer patients [5]. However, in a subsequent study, the variant was reported to be associated with increased risk of ER/PR negative disease (80 cases, 470 controls), as well as with triple negative breast cancer diagnosed before age 52 (111 cases, 250 controls), regardless of BRCA1 mutation status [6]. The validity of these findings has been questioned given the very small sample sizes and the number of subgroups tested [16,17]. Another report found no association with sporadic or familial breast cancer risk (695 combined cases, 270 controls), but found that the variant was associated with ERBB2-positive and high grade disease, based on 153 cases who used post-menopausal hormone replacement therapy [18].

It has also been reported, based on 232 women with both primary ovarian and breast cancer, that the frequency of the G allele at rs61764370 was increased for those who were screened negative for BRCA1 and BRCA2 (92 cases), particularly among those enrolled within two years of their ovarian cancer diagnosis (to minimize survival bias, 30 cases), those diagnosed with post-menopausal ovarian cancer (63 cases), those with a family history of ovarian or breast cancer (24 cases), and those with a third primary cancer (16 cases) [4].
This notable lack of consistency in findings between studies might be expected when appropriate levels of statistical significance are not used to declare positive findings from multiple small subgroup comparisons or post-hoc hypotheses [19]. In this respect, the dangers of subgroup analyses in the context of clinical trials are well-recognized [20]. These are important caveats, particularly since a genetic test for rs61764370 is currently marketed in the US for risk prediction testing to women who are at increased risk for developing ovarian and/or breast cancer or women who have been diagnosed with either ovarian or breast cancer themselves [21]. In general, much larger studies, with sufficient power to detect positive findings at much more stringent levels of statistical significance ought to be required to establish the clinical validity of a genetic test. Therefore, we conducted centralized genotyping of rs61764370 and other variants in the genomic region around the KRAS gene in 140,012 women to examine associations with risk and clinical outcome of ovarian and breast cancer.

2. Methods

2.1. Study participants

The following three consortia contributed to these analyses: the Ovarian Cancer Association Consortium (OCAC: 41 studies, Supplementary Table S1) [22], the Breast Cancer Association Consortium (BCAC: 37 studies, Supplementary Table S2) [23], and the Consortium of Modifiers of BRCA1 and BRCA2 (CIMBA: 55 studies, Supplementary Table S3) [24,25]. OCAC and BCAC consisted of case–control studies of unrelated women, and CIMBA consisted of studies of women with germline deleterious BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutations primarily identified through clinical genetics centers. For the purpose of the current analyses, only participants of European ancestry were included. Following genotyping, quality control exclusions (described below), and analysis-specific exclusions, data from the following women were available for analysis: 46,173 OCAC participants (15,357 patients with invasive epithelial ovarian cancer and 30,816 controls), 71,170 BCAC participants (33,530 patients with invasive breast cancer and 37,640 controls), and 22,669 CIMBA participants (for ovarian cancer analyses: 2332 affected and 12,433 unaffected BRCA1 carriers, 599 affected and 7305 unaffected BRCA2 carriers; for breast cancer analyses: 7543 affected and 7222 unaffected BRCA1 carriers, 4138 affected and 3766 unaffected BRCA2 carriers). For OCAC, overall and progression-free survival data were available for 3096 patients from 13 studies. Overall survival data were available for 28,471 patients from 26 BCAC studies and for 2623 mutation carriers with breast cancer from 11 CIMBA studies (excluding studies with less than ten deaths) as described previously [26,27]. Each study was approved by its relevant governing research ethics committee, and all study participants provided written informed consent.

2.2. Genotyping and imputation

Genotyping for rs61764370 was performed using the custom iCOGS Illumina Infinium iSelect BeadChip, as previously described [22–25]. In total, DNA from 185,443 women of varying ethnic background was genotyped (47,630 OCAC participants, 114,255 BCAC participants, 23,558 CIMBA participants), along with HapMap2 DNAs for European, African, and Asian populations. Genotype data were also available for three OCAC genome-
wide association studies (UK GWAS, US GWAS, Mayo GWAS) that had been genotyped using either the Illumina Human610-Quad Beadchip (12,607 participants) [28] or the Illumina HumanOmni2.5–8 Beadchip (883 participants). Raw intensity data files underwent centralized genotype calling and quality control [22–25]. HapMap2 samples were used to identify women with predicted European intercontinental ancestry; among these women, a set of over 37,000 unlinked markers was used to perform principal component (PC) analysis [29]. The first five and seven European PCs were found to control adequately for residual population stratification in OCAC and BCAC data, respectively. Samples with low conversion rate, extreme heterozygosity, non-female sex, or one of a first-degree relative pair (the latter for OCAC and BCAC only) were excluded. Variants were excluded if they were monomorphic or had a call rate <95% (minor allele frequency (MAF) >0.05) or <99% (MAF <0.05), deviation from Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium (p< \(10^{-7}\)), or >2% duplicate discordance.

In addition to rs61764370, 54 variants within 100 kb on either side of KRAS on chromosome 12 (25,258,179 to 25,503,854 bp in GRCh37.p12) were genotyped. Moreover, to provide a common set of variants across the region for analysis in all the data sets, we also used imputation to infer genotypes for another 1056 variants and for variants that failed genotyping. We performed imputation separately for OCAC samples, BCAC samples, BRCA1 mutation carriers, BRCA2 mutation carriers, and for each of the OCAC GWAS. We imputed variants from the 1000 Genomes Project data using the v3 April 2012 release as the reference panel [30]. To improve computation efficiency we initially used a two-step procedure, which involved pre-phasing using the SHAPEIT software [31] in the first step and imputation of the phased data in the second. We used the IMPUTE version 2 software [32] for the imputation for all studies with the exception of the US GWAS for which we used the MACH algorithm implemented in the minimac software version 2012.8.15 and MACH version 1.0.18 [33]. We excluded variants from association analyses if their imputation accuracy was \(r^2 < 0.30\) or their MAF was <0.005, resulting in 974 variants genotyped and imputed for OCAC, 989 variants genotyped and imputed for BCAC, and 1001 variants genotyped and imputed for CIMBA, including rs61764370 (Supplementary Tables S5, S6, and S7).

2.3. Analysis

Genotypes were coded for genotype dosage as 0, 1, or 2, based on the number of copies of the minor allele. For ovarian cancer case–control analysis (i.e., OCAC studies), logistic regression provided estimated risks of invasive epithelial ovarian cancer with odds ratios (ORs) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) adjusting for study, age, and the five European PCs. Subgroup analyses were conducted by histology, family ovarian and breast cancer history, menopausal status, time between ovarian cancer diagnosis and recruitment, and history of multiple primary cancers. For breast cancer case–control analysis (i.e., BCAC studies), the association between genotype and invasive breast cancer risk was evaluated by logistic regression, adjusting for study, age, and the seven European PCs, providing ORs and 95% CIs. Additional subgroup analyses were based on receptor status, first-degree family ovarian and breast cancer history, BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutation status, enrollment within two years of diagnosis, menopausal status (i.e. last menstruation longer than twelve months.
ago), age at diagnosis less than 52 years, and history of hormone replacement therapy use (i.e. longer than twelve months use). Risk analysis for BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutation carriers (i.e. CIMBA studies) was done using a Cox proportional hazard model to estimate hazard ratios (HRs) per copy of the minor allele, with age as follow-up time and stratified by country of residence; US and Canadian strata were further subdivided by self-reported Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry [24,25]. A weighted cohort approach was applied to correct for potential testing bias due to overrepresentation of cases in the study population [34]. We used robust variance estimation to allow for the non-independence of carriers within the same family [35]. To assess associations with ovarian cancer risk, mutation carriers were followed from birth until ovarian cancer diagnosis (event), a risk-reducing salpingo-oophorectomy (RRSO) or the age at enrollment, whichever occurred first. We also performed analyses restricted to women diagnosed or censored within two years before their enrollment. To assess associations with breast cancer risk, mutation carriers were followed from birth until a breast cancer diagnosis (i.e. either ductal carcinoma in situ or invasive breast cancer), ovarian cancer diagnosis, a risk-reducing bilateral prophylactic mastectomy or the age at enrollment, whichever occurred first.

Survival analysis of OCAC patients used Cox proportional hazards models estimating HRs and 95% CIs considering overall survival as well as progression-free survival following ovarian cancer diagnosis. Overall survival was adjusted for age at diagnosis, the five European PCs, histology, grade, FIGO stage, and residual disease after debulking surgery, and stratified by study, left truncating at the date of study entry and right censoring at five years to minimize events due to other causes. Progression-free survival was analyzed as for overall survival, but without adjustment for age and right censoring, and was defined as the time between the date of histologic diagnosis and the first confirmed sign of disease recurrence or progression, based on GCIG (Gynecological Cancer InterGroup) criteria [36]. We also performed subgroup analysis of patients suboptimally debulked after cytoreductive surgery (residual disease >1 cm) and of post-menopausal patients (age at diagnosis >52 years). Survival analysis of BCAC patients used Cox proportional hazard models estimating HRs and 95% CIs considering overall and breast cancer-specific survival following breast cancer diagnosis. Models were adjusted for age at diagnosis, tumor size, nodal status, grade, adjuvant hormonal and/or chemotherapy, and stratified by study, left-truncating at the date of study entry and right censoring at ten years. In addition, we performed subgroup analysis on ER-positive and ER-negative patients. For CIMBA breast cancer patients associations between genotype and overall survival were evaluated using Cox proportional hazard models estimating HRs and 95% CIs. Models were adjusted for age at diagnosis, tumor size, nodal status, grade, adjuvant hormonal and/or chemotherapy, and preventive bilateral oophorectomy and stratified by study, left-truncating at the date of study entry and right censoring at twenty years. Analyses were performed using STATA version 12.0 (StataCorp, Texas, USA).

3. Results

The results of the overall analysis as well as the subgroup analyses investigating the association between the minor allele at rs61764370 and ovarian cancer risk, breast cancer risk, and ovarian and breast cancer risks in BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutation carriers are shown...
in Table 1. Associations with clinical outcomes in and ovarian and breast cancer patients including \textit{BRCA1} and \textit{BRCA2} mutation carriers are shown in Table 2 and Supplementary Table S4.

We found no evidence for association between the rs61764370 G allele and ovarian or breast cancer risk. The most statistically significant association was observed for risk of low-grade serous ovarian cancer (n = 485; OR 0.76, 95% CI 0.59–0.97, p = 0.031), but this finding was not significant after Bonferroni correction for multiple testing. We also evaluated the association for additional specific subgroups in which an association with rs61764370 had been reported previously [3–6]. Ovarian cancer subgroups considered \textit{BRCA1} mutation carriers as well as \textit{BRCA1} and \textit{BRCA2} screened-negative patients with first degree family histories of breast or ovarian cancer and patients who had been diagnosed with breast cancer before their ovarian cancer diagnoses. For breast cancer these included, among others, \textit{BRCA1} mutation carriers, patients diagnosed with ER- and PR-negative tumors, and patients diagnosed with triple negative tumors before age 52 years. Importantly, we observed no evidence for association of rs61764370 with any of these subgroups (detailed in Table 1), with all ORs close to unity and very narrow CIs including unity.

Similarly, case-only analyses did not reveal any associations between rs61764370 genotype and ovarian and breast cancer clinical features or outcome (Table 2 and Supplementary Table S4). For example, the previously reported association between rs61764370 and risk of ERBB2-positive and high grade breast cancer in hormone replacement therapy users [18] was not replicated (Supplementary Table S4), and in ovarian cancer analyses we found no evidence of reduced survival among patients diagnosed after age 52 years or patients with suboptimal debulking after cytoreductive surgery (Table 2) [14]. The G allele of rs61764370 was also not associated with survival of breast cancer patients (Table 2).

Finally, we evaluated the association between the primary phenotypes of interest and common genetic variation (MAF > 0.02) in the genomic region of \textit{KRAS} (i.e., within 100 kb on either side of the gene), using imputed and genotyped data on 974 variants for OCAC, 989 variants for BCAC, and 1001 variants genotyped and imputed for CIMBA (Supplementary Tables S5, S6, and S7). We found no evidence of association for any of these variants, including rs61764370 and rs17388148, with these phenotypes that would withstand Bonferroni correction for multiple testing, as detailed in Supplementary Tables S5, S6, and S7 and shown in regional association plots (Fig. 1).

4. Discussion

Our analysis of 140,012 women genotyped for inherited variants in the \textit{KRAS} region provides definitive clarification of the role of these variants in ovarian and breast cancer susceptibility and outcome. We have found no evidence to support an association between rs61764370 and ovarian or breast cancer risk, or clinical outcomes in patients with ovarian or breast cancer. In the absence of any association and with ORs close to unity we would not typically consider sub-group analyses, particularly sub-groups for which differential associations would not be expected to occur. However, given the previous positive associations reported for a myriad of different subgroups, we tested for association among
each of these subgroups and found no evidence to support the previously reported associations.

Our study has notable strengths. The vast majority (i.e. >95%) of the samples were genotyped using the same genotyping platform and employing a common approach to genotype calling and quality control; additional samples used denser arrays and nearly identical procedures. The very large sample sizes for all the major phenotypes of interest provide substantial statistical power to exclude any clinically relevant associated risks for the major phenotypes of interest (Fig. 2). The null results found here are thus not due to lack of statistical power, and this analysis also had greater than 80% power to detect association for most of the subgroups, although for some subgroups it was not possible to exclude modest risks. In contrast to the current findings, other genetic association analyses using the same genotyping platform and the same studies as included here have identified more than 90 common germline variants associated with ovarian or breast cancer risk at $p < 5 \times 10^{-8}$ [22,23,37]. While critiques on a previous null KRAS report have suggested that inclusion of male controls, use of “prevalent” cases, and reliance on a surrogate genetic variant may have led to falsely negative conclusions, these are not issues in the present data set. Rather, we demonstrate the importance of international collaboration to identify true associations as well as to refute false associations, an equally important objective.

The rise of individualized medicine including the use of panels of common variants to predict cancer risk more accurately than using family history alone holds great promise [38]. For example, the 31 prostate cancer susceptibility alleles confirmed as of 2011 (at $p < 5 \times 10^{-8}$) can be combined to identify men in the top one percent of the risk distribution having a 3.2-fold increased risk [39]. Prediction has since then improved with now over 70 prostate cancer susceptibility alleles [40] and the utility of these genetic tests is currently under clinical evaluation. A similar clinical examination in ovarian and breast cancer is not far behind, with now over 18 and 77 confirmed susceptibility alleles, respectively, for these cancers [22,23]. The genotype at rs61764370, however, does not predict ovarian or breast cancer risk, even among particular subgroups of women or for particular subtypes of disease, nor is it a marker of differential outcome following diagnosis with these cancers. Therefore, genetic test results for rs61764370 should not be used to counsel women about their ovarian or breast cancer risks or outcome. Our results highlight the dangers of developing clinical tests without appropriate data from carefully conducted, large-scale studies to establish clinical validity.

**Supplementary Material**

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

**Authors**

Ovarian Cancer Association Consortium, Breast Cancer Association Consortium, and Consortium of Modifiers of BRCA1 and BRCA2, Antoinette Hollestellea,1, Frederieke H. van der Bannb,1, Andrew Berchuckc,*,1, Sharon E. Johnattyd, Katja K. Abene,f, Bjarni A. Aagnarssong,i,x, Kristiina Aittomäkih, Elisa Alducci, Irene L.
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Argyrios Ziogas\textsuperscript{iv}, Georgia Chenevix-Trench\textsuperscript{d}, Paul D.P. Pharoah\textsuperscript{ci,1}, Matti A. Rookus\textsuperscript{bw,1}, Maartje J. Hooning\textsuperscript{a,1}, and Ellen L. Goode\textsuperscript{bw,1}

**Affiliations**

\textsuperscript{a}Department of Medical Oncology, Erasmus MC Cancer Institute, Rotterdam, The Netherlands  
\textsuperscript{b}Department of Epidemiology, Netherlands Cancer Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
\textsuperscript{c}Duke Cancer Institute, Duke University Medical Center, Durham, NC, USA  
\textsuperscript{d}Department of Genetics, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Brisbane, Australia  
\textsuperscript{e}Comprehensive Cancer Center The Netherlands, Utrecht, The Netherlands  
\textsuperscript{f}Department for Health Evidence, Radboud University Medical Centre, University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands  
\textsuperscript{g}Landspitali University Hospital, Reykjavik, Iceland  
\textsuperscript{h}Department of Clinical Genetics, Helsinki University Central Hospital, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland  
\textsuperscript{i}Immunology and Molecular Oncology Unit, Veneto Institute of Oncology IOV-IRCCS, Padua, Italy  
\textsuperscript{j}Department of Molecular Genetics, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada  
\textsuperscript{k}Ontario Cancer Genetics Network, Fred A. Litwin Center for Cancer Genetics, Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum Research Institute, Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto, ON, Canada  
\textsuperscript{l}Department of Epidemiology, University of California Irvine, Irvine, CA, USA  
\textsuperscript{m}N.N. Alexandrov Research Institute of Oncology and Medical Radiology, Minsk, Belarus  
\textsuperscript{n}Centre for Cancer Genetic Epidemiology, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK  
\textsuperscript{o}Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics, School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
\textsuperscript{p}Division of Clinical Epidemiology and Aging Research, German Cancer Research Center, Heidelberg, Germany  
\textsuperscript{q}Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics, University Hospital of Schleswig-Holstein, University Kiel, Kiel, Germany  
\textsuperscript{r}Department of Breast Medical Oncology, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, USA  
\textsuperscript{s}Clinical Cancer Genetics, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, USA  
\textsuperscript{t}Department of Oncology, Karolinska University Hospital, Stockholm, Sweden  
\textsuperscript{u}Breakthrough Breast Cancer Research Centre, Division of Breast Cancer Research, The Institute of Cancer Research, London, UK  
\textsuperscript{v}Cancer Division, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Herston, QLD, Australia  
\textsuperscript{w}Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
\textsuperscript{x}Center for Cancer Research, University of Sydney at Westmead Millennium Institute, Sydney, Australia  
\textsuperscript{y}Cancer Epidemiology Centre, Cancer Council Victoria, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
\textsuperscript{z}Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia  
\textsuperscript{aa}Western Sydney and Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health Districts, Westmead Millennium Institute for Medical Research, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia  
\textsuperscript{ab}Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, New Brunswick, NJ, USA  
\textsuperscript{ac}Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Oregon Health and Science University, Portland, OR, USA  
\textsuperscript{ad}Knight Cancer Institute, Oregon Health and Science University, Portland, OR, USA  
\textsuperscript{ae}Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG), Cologne, Germany  
\textsuperscript{af}University Breast Center Franconia, Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics, University Hospital Erlangen, Erlangen, Germany  

\textsuperscript{et al.} Page 10
Genotipación, Human Cancer Genetics Program, Spanish National Cancer Research Centre (CNIO), Madrid, Spain \(^{ah}\) Human Genetics Group, Spanish National Cancer Research Centre (CNIO), Madrid, Spain \(^{ab}\) Biomedical Network on Rare Diseases (CIBERER), Madrid, Spain \(^{ac}\) Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Comprehensive Cancer Center, Medical University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria \(^{ad}\) Sheba Medical Center, Tel Aviv, Israel \(^{ae}\) Multidisciplinary Breast Center, University Hospital Leuven, University of Leuven, Belgium \(^{af}\) Gynecology Service, Department of Surgery, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York, NY, USA \(^{ag}\) Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics, Haukeland University Hospital, Bergen, Norway \(^{ah}\) Department of Clinical Science, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway \(^{ai}\) Department of Oncology, University of Helsinki, Helsinki University Central Hospital, Helsinki, Finland \(^{aj}\) Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Hannover Medical School, Hannover, Germany \(^{ak}\) Department of Radiation Oncology, Hannover Medical School, Hannover, Germany \(^{al}\) Department of Clinical Genetics, Vejle Hospital, Vejle, Denmark \(^{am}\) Copenhagen General Population Study, Herlev Hospital, Copenhagen University Hospital, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark \(^{an}\) Department of Clinical Biochemistry, Herlev Hospital, Copenhagen University Hospital, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark \(^{ao}\) Division of Cancer Prevention and Genetics, Istituto Europeo di Oncologia (IEO), Milan, Italy \(^{ap}\) Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden \(^{aq}\) Dr. Margarete Fischer-Bosch-Institute of Clinical Pharmacology, Stuttgart, Germany \(^{ar}\) University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany \(^{as}\) German Cancer Consortium (DKTK), Heidelberg, Germany \(^{at}\) Department of Epidemiology, Cancer Prevention Institute of California, Fremont, CA, USA \(^{au}\) Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD, USA \(^{av}\) Genome Sciences Centre, BC Cancer Agency, Vancouver, BC, Canada \(^{aw}\) Department of Biomedical Physiology and Kinesiology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada \(^{ax}\) Genetic Counseling Unit, Hereditary Cancer Program, IDIBGI-Catalan Institute of Oncology, Girona, Spain \(^{ay}\) Institute for Prevention and Occupational Medicine of the German Social Accident Insurance, Institute of the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (IPA), Bochum, Germany \(^{az}\) Department of Pathology and Laboratory Diagnostics, The Maria Sklodowska-Curie Memorial Cancer Center and Institute of Oncology, Warsaw, Poland \(^{ba}\) Department of Epidemiology, University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, Pittsburgh, PA, USA \(^{bb}\) Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany \(^{bc}\) Molecular Epidemiology Group, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany \(^{bd}\) Department of Pathology, Helsinki University Central Hospital, Helsinki, Finland \(^{be}\) Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Helsinki University Central Hospital, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland \(^{bf}\) Department of Oncological Sciences, Huntsman Cancer Institute, University of Utah School of Medicine, Salt Lake City, UT, USA \(^{bg}\) Section of Genetic Oncology, Department of Laboratory Medicine, University Hospital of Pisa, University of Pisa, Pisa, Italy \(^{bh}\) Cancer Genetics Laboratory, Research Division, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Melbourne, Australia \(^{bi}\) Sir Peter MacCallum
Department of Oncology, The University of Melbourne, Australia
Department of Pathology, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia
Gynaecological Oncology, The Chris O'Brien Lifehouse and The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
Division of Cancer Epidemiology, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany
Center for Medical Genetics, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium
Department of Clinical Genetics, Erasmus University Medical Center, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, USA
Department of Health Sciences Research, Division of Epidemiology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, USA
Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology, Division of Experimental Pathology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, USA
Sheffield Cancer Research Centre, Department of Oncology, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
Obstetrics and Gynecology Epidemiology Center, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, MA, USA
Department of Epidemiology, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, MA, USA
Academic Unit of Pathology, Department of Neuroscience, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
International Hereditary Cancer Center, Department of Genetics and Pathology, Pomeranian Medical Academy, Szczecin, Poland
INSERM U1052, CNRS UMR5286, Université Lyon 1, Centre de Recherche en Cancérologie de Lyon, Lyon, France
Molecular Oncology Laboratory, Hospital Clínico San Carlos, Madrid, Spain
Department of Gynaecological Oncology, Westmead Hospital, Sydney, Australia
Department of Human Genetics, Leiden University Medical Center, Leiden, The Netherlands
Department of Pathology, Leiden University Medical Center, Leiden, The Netherlands
Centre for Cancer Genetic Epidemiology, Department of Oncology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
Oncogenetics Laboratory, University Hospital Vall d'Hebron, Vall d'Hebron Institute of Oncology (VHIO), Barcelona, Spain
Section of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, The Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth, Lebanon, NH, USA
Department of Medicine, Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA
Basser Research Centre, Abramson Cancer Center, The University of Pennsylvania, Perelman School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, USA
Department of Genetics, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa
Non-Communicable Disease Epidemiology Department, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK
Department of Gynecology and Gynecologic Oncology, Dr. Horst Schmidt Klinik Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden, Germany
Department of Gynecology and Gynecologic Oncology, Kliniken Essen-Mitte, Essen, Germany
Centre Hospitalier de Québec Research Center, Laval University, Quebec, Canada
Institute of Biology and Molecular Genetics, Universidad de Valladolid (IBGM-UVA), Valladolid, Spain
Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, University Hospital Southampton, Southampton, UK
Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences, Division of Gynecologic Oncology, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Pittsburgh, PA, USA
Department of Clinical Genetics, Lund University, Lund, Sweden
Department of Oncology, Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen University Hospital, Copenhagen, Denmark
Institute of Human Genetics, Friedrich Alexander University Munich, Germany

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University Erlangen-Nuremberg, Erlangen, Germany
Institute for Medical Informatics, Statistics and Epidemiology, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany
David Geffen School of Medicine, Department of Medicine, Division of Hematology and Oncology, University of California at Los Angeles, CA, USA
Molecular Diagnostic Unit, Hereditary Cancer Program, IDIBELL-Catalan Institute of Oncology, Barcelona, Spain
Department of Cancer Epidemiology/Clinical Cancer Registry, Institute for Medical Biometrics and Epidemiology, University Clinic Hamburg-Eppendorf, Hamburg, Germany
Clinical Cancer Genetics, City of Hope, Duarte, CA, USA
New Mexico Cancer Center, Albuquerque, NM, USA
Fondazione Istituto di Oncologia Molecolare (IFOM), Milan, Italy
Cogentech Cancer Genetic Test Laboratory, Milan, Italy
Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory, Institute of Nuclear & Radiological Sciences & Technology, Energy & Safety, National Centre for Scientific Research Demokritos, Aghia Paraskevi Attikis, Athens, Greece
Kansas IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence Bioinformatics Core, The University of Kansas Cancer Center, Kansas City, KS, USA
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA
The Susanne Levy Gertner Oncogenetics Unit, Sheba Medical Center, Tel-Hashomer, Israel
Institute of Oncology, Sheba Medical Center, Tel-Hashomer, Israel
Department of Cancer Prevention and Control, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Buffalo, NY, USA
Center for Cancer Genetics and Prevention, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, MA, USA
Department of Preventive Medicine, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA
GEMO Study: National Cancer Genetics Network, UNICANCER Genetic Group, France
Department of Internal Medicine, Evangelische Kliniken Bonn gGmbH, Johanniter Krankenhaus, Bonn, Germany
Institute of Pathology, Medical Faculty of the University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany
Institute of Occupational Medicine and Maritime Medicine, University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Hamburg, Germany
Molecular Genetics of Breast Cancer, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany
Gynaecological Cancer Research Centre, Department of Women's Cancer, Institute for Women's Health, UCL, London, UK
Department of Clinical Genetics, Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen University Hospital, Copenhagen, Denmark
Cancer Research UK Clinical Trials Unit, The Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre, Glasgow, UK
Ontario Cancer Genetics Network, Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum Research Institute, Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto, ON, Canada
Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City, KS, USA
Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute, Cedars Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Gynecological Oncology Unit, The Royal Marsden Hospital, London, UK
Clinical Genetics Branch, Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health, Rockville, MD, USA
Department of Surgery, Oulu University Hospital, University of Oulu, Oulu, Finland
Department of Genetics and Pathology, Pomeranian Medical University, Szczecin, Poland
INSERM U1018, CESP (Center for Research in Epidemiology and Population Health), Environmental Epidemiology of Cancer, Villejuif, France
University Paris-Sud, UMRS 1018, Villejuif, France
Division of Epidemiology,
Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University Hospitals Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

Leuven Cancer Institute, University Hospitals Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

Department of Health Sciences Research, Division of Biomedical Statistics and Informatics, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, USA

Genetic and Molecular Epidemiology Group, Human Cancer Genetics Program, Spanish National Cancer Research Centre (CNIO), Madrid, Spain

Université Paris Sorbonne Cité, UMR-S775 Inserm, Paris, France

Cancer Control Research, BC Cancer Agency, Vancouver, BC, Canada

College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Texas Southern University, Houston, TX, USA

Department of Molecular Medicine and Surgery, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

Center for Individualized Medicine, Mayo Clinic, Scottsdale, AZ, USA

Department of Cancer Epidemiology and Prevention, M. Sklodowska-Curie Memorial Cancer Center & Institute of Oncology, Warsaw, Poland

Department of Gynecologic Oncology, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, USA

Department of Oncology and Pathology, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

National Center for Tumor Diseases, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany

Department of Gynecology, Radboud University Medical Centre, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Laboratoire de Diagnostic Génétique et Service d’Onco-hématologie, Hopitaux Universitaires de Strasbourg, CHRU Nouvel Hôpital Civil, Strasbourg, France

Department of Health Research and Policy, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA, USA

Anatomical Pathology, The Alfred Hospital, Melbourne, Australia

Institute of Cancer Sciences, University of Glasgow, Wolfson Wohl Cancer Research Centre, Beatson Institute for Cancer Research, Glasgow, UK

Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics, Division of Tumor Genetics, Klinikum rechts der Isar, Technical University Munich, Munich, Germany

Servicio de Anatomía Patológica, Hospital Monte Naranco, Oviedo, Spain

Department of Surgical Gynecology and Gynecological Oncology of Adults and Adolescents, Pomeranian Medical University, Szczecin, Poland

Department of Human Genetics, Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Centre, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Women’s Cancer Research Program, Magee-Women’s Research Institute and University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

Laboratory Medicine Program, University Health Network, Toronto, ON, Canada

Women’s College Research Institute, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

The University of Texas School of Public Health, Houston, TX, USA

Department of Population Sciences, Beckman Research Institute of City of Hope, Duarte, CA, USA

Department of Medicine and Institute for Human Genetics, University of California, San Francisco, CA, USA

Clinical Genetics Service, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York, NY, USA

Department of Molecular Genetics, National Institute of Oncology, Budapest, Hungary

Center for Clinical Cancer Genetics and Global Health, University of Chicago Medical Center, Chicago, IL, USA

Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York, NY, USA

University of Groningen, University Medical
Center, Department of Genetics, Groningen, The Netherlands
Department of Molecular Medicine, Sapienza University, Rome, Italy
Section of Molecular Diagnostics, Department of Clinical Biochemistry, Aalborg University Hospital, Aalborg, Denmark
Unit of Medical Genetics, Department of Preventive and Predictive Medicine, Fondazione Istituto di Ricovero e Cura a Carattere Scientifico Istituto Nazionale Tumori (INT), Milan, Italy
Department of Cancer Epidemiology, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute, Tampa, FL, USA
Division of Cancer Medicine, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Melbourne, Australia
Department of Medicine, St Vincent's Hospital, The University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
NRG Oncology Statistics and Data Management Center, Buffalo, NY, USA
Channing Division of Network Medicine, Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, MA, USA
Laboratory of Cancer Genetics and Tumor Biology, Department of Clinical Genetics, University of Oulu, Oulu University Hospital, Oulu, Finland
Biocenter Oulu, University of Oulu, Oulu, Finland
Unit of Molecular Bases of Genetic Risk and Genetic Testing, Department of Preventive and Predictive Medicine, Fondazione Istituto di Ricovero e Cura a Carattere Scientifico, Istituto Nazionale Tumori (INT), Milan, Italy
Center for Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, The University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA, USA
Clalit National Israeli Cancer Control Center, Haifa, Israel
Department of Community Medicine and Epidemiology, Carmel Medical Center and B. Rappaport Faculty of Medicine, Technion, Haifa, Israel
Department of Chronic Disease Epidemiology, Yale School of Public Health, New Haven, CT, USA
NorthShore University Health System, University of Chicago, Evanston, IL, USA
Department of Epidemiology, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA
Program in Epidemiology, Division of Public Health Sciences, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Seattle, WA, USA
Department of Gynecology, Jena University Hospital, Jena, Germany
Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA
Division of Cancer Studies, NIHR Comprehensive Biomedical Research Centre, Guy's & St. Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust in partnership with King's College London, London, UK
Department of Community and Family Medicine, Duke University Medical Center, Durham, NC, USA
Cancer Prevention, Detection and Control Research Program, Duke Cancer Institute, Durham, NC, USA
Centre of Familial Breast and Ovarian Cancer, Department of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, University Hospital of Cologne, Cologne, Germany
Centre for Molecular Medicine Cologne (CMMC), University Hospital of Cologne, Cologne, Germany
Division of Genetics and Epidemiology, The Institute of Cancer Research, Sutton, Surrey, UK
Institut für Humangenetik Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden, Germany
Department of Gynecological Oncology, Glasgow Royal Infirmary, Glasgow, UK
Unité Mixte de Génétique Constitutionnelle des Cancers Fréquents, Hospices Civils de Lyon, Centre Léon Bérard, Lyon, France
Department of Clinical Genetics, University and Regional Laboratories, Lund University Hospital, Lund, Sweden
Genetic Epidemiology Laboratory, Department of Pathology, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia
Saarland Cancer Registry, Saarbrücken, Germany
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References


Fig. 1.
Regional association plots for variants within the genomic region 100 kb either side of KRAS and risk of ovarian and breast cancer. X-axis position is referent to position (bp) on chromosome 12, build GRCh37.p12; yellow line indicates position of KRAS; red triangle indicates rs61764370. Y-axis is $- \log_{10}(p$-values) from association tests for risk of A) ER-negative breast cancer, B) ER-positive breast cancer, C) breast cancer in BRCA1 mutation carriers, D) breast cancer in BRCA2 mutation carriers, E) epithelial ovarian cancer, F) epithelial ovarian cancer in BRCA1 mutation carriers, and G) epithelial ovarian cancer in
BRCA2 mutation carriers. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)
Fig. 2.
Power curve for modest risk variants according to the total sample size. X-axis is total sample size for which case–control ratio is 1:1. Y-axis is the statistical power (range 0.5–1.0) for variants given a range of risks, assuming alpha = 0.01 and minor allele frequency 0.09.
Table 1
Associations between KRAS rs61764370 and risk of ovarian and breast cancer

For BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutation carrier analyses, cases are affected BRCA1/BRCA2 mutation carriers and controls are unaffected BRCA1/BRCA2 mutation carriers, and relative risks are estimated by hazard ratios; for other analyses, relative risks are estimated by odds ratios; ovarian cancer analyses used OCAC data adjusted for study, age, and the five European principal components; breast cancer analyses used BCAC data adjusted for study, age, and the seven European principal components; BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutation carrier analyses used CIMBA data with age as follow-up time and stratified for country; 95% CI, 95% confidence interval.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number Cases</th>
<th>Minor allele frequency</th>
<th>Relative risk (95% CI)</th>
<th>p-Value</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Controls</td>
<td>Cases</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>All invasive</td>
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<td>30,816</td>
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</table>
Table 2
Associations between KRAS rs61764370 and outcome in ovarian and breast cancer

Ovarian cancer analyses used OCAC data adjusted for age at diagnosis (overall survival only), the five European principal components, histology (serous, mucinous, endometrioid, clear cell, and other epithelial), grade (low versus high), FIGO stage (I–IV), residual disease after debulking surgery (nil versus any), and stratified by study; breast cancer analyses used BCAC data adjusted for age at diagnosis, tumor size, nodal status, grade, adjuvant hormonal and/or chemotherapy and was stratified by study; analyses for BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutation carriers used CIMBA data adjusted for age at diagnosis, tumor size, nodal status, grade, adjuvant hormonal and/or chemotherapy, and preventive bilateral oophorectomy and was stratified by study; 95% CI, 95% confidence interval.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of patients</th>
<th>No. of events</th>
<th>Hazard ratio (95% CI)</th>
<th>p-Value</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Overall survival</td>
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<tr>
<td>All patients</td>
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<td>1421</td>
<td>0.94 (0.83–1.07)</td>
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<td>Patients who were suboptimally debulked after cytoreductive surgery</td>
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<td>784</td>
<td>0.94 (0.78–1.13)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2226</td>
<td>1276</td>
<td>0.97 (0.84–1.12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progression-free survival</td>
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<td>All patients</td>
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<td>1.01 (0.90–1.13)</td>
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<td>1.02 (0.90–1.16)</td>
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<td><strong>Breast cancer</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall survival</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All patients</td>
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<td>0.96 (0.87–1.06)</td>
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<td>771</td>
<td>0.97 (0.81–1.18)</td>
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<td>Breast cancer-specific survival</td>
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<td>1693</td>
<td>0.95 (0.83–1.08)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overall survival</strong></td>
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