Original Article

A 7-IncRNA assessment model predicts glioblastoma multiforme patients' prognoses and survival

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Abstract: Glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) is the most common type of central nervous system tumor and the type with the highest rates of malignancy and mortality. Due to its complex molecular mechanism and pathogenesis, the treatments are often ineffective, and there are significant individual treatment and prognostic differences. Long non-coding RNAs (IncRNAs) may play an important role in the pathogenesis of GBM. Through The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA) database, we used a univariate COX regression, a LASSO regression, a Kaplan-Meier (K-M) survival analysis, and multivariate COX to screen and construct an integrated IncRNA model to predict GBM patients' survival times. Using a co-expression analysis, Gene Ontology (GO), and a Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes (KEGG) enrichment analysis, we can indirectly explain the function of LncRNAs in the model. We constructed predictive models of 7-IncRNAs, including ACO10327.4, ACO80038.3, AL132822.1, BNC2-AS1, HOXC-AS3, NALT1, and SNHG18. The specificity and sensitivity of the model were verified using the ROC. The AUC (area under the curve) values of 3 years and 5 years were 0.842 and 0.88 respectively, indicating that the model predicted the patients' survival performance well. Through a coexpression analysis, the 7-IncRNA model may act as potential prognostic biomarkers and play an important role in the pathogenesis of GBM. We have constructed a clinical survival prediction model based on the 7-IncRNA expression profile. It can be used to predict the overall three- and five-year survival times, and the model has been shown to be accurate and reliable.

Keywords: TCGA database, glioblastoma multiforme, IncRNA, bioinformatics, survival, prognostic model

Introduction

Gliomas are the most common tumors in the central nervous system, accounting for about 30% [1]. They are characterized by infiltrative growth, a high degree of malignancy and recurrence, and a poor prognosis, among which GBM is the most common type and the type with the worst prognosis [2, 3]. The 5-year survival rate is less than 1%, and the median survival period is only 14-17 months [4]. In 2016, biomolecule markers were added to the glioma classification basis as the WHO central nervous system classification guide, to classify glioma more accurately [5]. Studies on mRNA, miRNA, and DNA methylation, and copy number variation have been widely reported in gliomas. These markers are helpful to distinguish the glioma subtypes [4].

LncRNAs are a non-coding RNA molecules larger than 200 nt that lack a continuous open

reading frame, so they cannot encode proteins [6, 7]. Previously, IncRNAs were considered to be the "noise" of genome transcription, a byproduct of RNA polymerase II transcription, devoid of any biological function. Recent studies have shown that IncRNAs have a large number and different lengths, and they carry more information, so it is easier to form a variety of functional advanced structures, involving various cellular physiological processes, including chromatin structure, epigenetics, RNA transcription, splicing, editing, and translation [8], overall playing an extensive regulatory role in various levels of gene expression [9]. These IncRNAs may become markers for the early diagnosis of gliomas, they can effectively predict patient prognosis, and we can even develop new treatments using these IncRNAs [10-12]. IncRNAs are of great significance for the efficient diagnosis and treatment of gliomas [13]. To make more effective use of the existing information and data resources, our re-

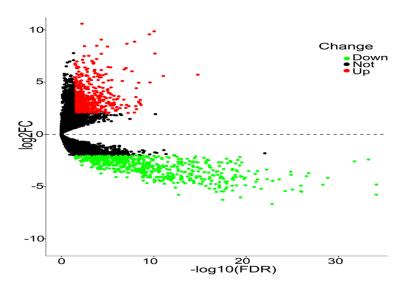


Figure 1. A volcano map of the differential IncRNAs. The edgeR package was used to do a differential analysis of the IncRNA expression in the normal tissues and tumor tissues. In the figure, red indicates that the genes were highly expressed in the tumor samples, while greenindicates a low expression in the samples, and black indicates no difference between the tumor samples and the normal samples.

Table 1. 16 IncRNAs with significant univariate Cox regressions

LncRNA	HR	<i>P</i> -Value				
HOXC-AS2	1.187910129	0.000249224				
NALT1	1.327634215	0.000933215				
HOXC-AS3	1.223405126	0.000965228				
AC005632.5	1.468289091	0.001697464				
HCG21	1.235258873	0.002584322				
AC011603.2	1.259766024	0.003142749				
HOTAIR	1.112044234	0.00388437				
AL356019.2	0.692030194	0.004520976				
AP002807.1	1.259107699	0.005158091				
AL132822.1	1.276899805	0.005868751				
AC080112.2	1.249236677	0.00612997				
AC080038.3	1.329389665	0.006190354				
BNC2-AS1	1.168771953	0.006804842				
HOTAIRM1	1.179011188	0.007957243				
AC010327.4	1.227320491	0.008661644				
SNHG18	1.188548315	0.00879218				

search used the TCGA database to find valuable differential IncRNAs, establish survival-related clinical prognostic models, and predict patients' three- and five-year survival times. Moreover, to understand the potential functions and mechanisms of these IncRNAs, a co-expression analysis can predict the corresponding protein-coding target genes and indi-

rectly explain their mechanism of action in tumorigenesis and tumor development.

Materials and methods

Data

The gene expression and corresponding clinical information of GBM patients came from the Cancer Genome Atlas (TC-GA). The website is https:// www.cancer.gov/about-nci/organization/ccg/research/structural-genomics/tcga. The database access date was August 1, 2020, and our searches were limited to human species. Among our search results, five were normal tissues and 169 were glioblastoma. The samples were sequenced on the Illumina HiSeq RNA-Seq platform. The patient expression

profile data and the clinical information are public and freely available. Therefore, this study does not require an ethics committee approval.

IncRNA differential expression profile

First, we downloaded the GBM gene expression profile data from the TCGA database, we downloaded the human gene name conversion annotation file in the GENCODE database (https://www.gencodegenes.org/), and then we annotated the relevant genes in the expression profile with gene symbols.

Then we selected all the IncRNAs, using the above steps, and a total of 14,082 IncRNAs expression profiles were retrieved. Next, we grouped normal samples and the tumor samples, and we used the edgeR package to estimate the different IncRNAs. When |log2FC| >2 and P<0.05, this was considered differentially expressed IncRNA in our subsequent analysis.

Model establishment and verification

We sorted out the clinical data downloaded the TCGA, we then extracted the patient sample numbers, the survival status, and the overall survival times. We deleted the normal samples because there is a possibility of duplicate records in the clinical samples, so we deleted

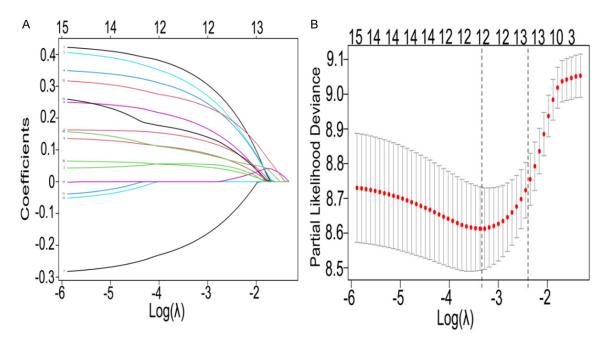


Figure 2. A LASSO regression screening for the IncRNAs. A. LASSO coefficient profiles of the 16 texture features. B. Selection of the tuning parameter (λ) in the LASSO model via a 10-fold cross-validation based on the minimum criteria. Optimal resulted in 12 IncRNAs.

the duplicate sample data, and then integrated the samples with the expression data, and then we performed a univariate cox model analysis to calculate the relationship between the expression level of each IncRNA and the overall patient survival. The IncRNAs with P< 0.01 were selected, and these IncRNAs were statistically significant in our univariate cox analysis. Next, we used lasso regression to select the IncRNAs, and this step served to screen out the IncRNAs based on the minimum lambda method (R package "glmnet").

We performed a KM survival analysis on the above lncRNAs to obtain the lncRNAs that have an impact on survival. Then, a multivariate cox analysis and a stepwise regression were used to select the best model to obtain the lncRNAs for the final clinical prediction model, and the 'survminer package' was used to visualize the multivariate cox results. The prognostic index can be calculated according to the lncRNA expressions obtained using the regression coefficient β of the model and the multivariate cox regression, and the prognostic performance can be evaluated using the 3-year and 5-year time-dependent receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve. Based on the median

prognostic index, the GBM patients were divided into high-risk and low-risk groups, and a Kaplan-Meier survival analysis of the high-risk and low-risk cases was performed.

The co-expression method predicts the IncRNA protein coding genes (PCG) and functions

Through the Pearson correlation coefficient, the target gene prediction of IncRNAs in the prognostic model indirectly clarifies its potential function and mechanism. The protein coding genes (PCG) with a Pearson correlation coefficient >0.40 and P<0.01 are considered to be protein-coding genes related to IncRNAs, so we selected the 'clusterProfiler package' for the target genes predicted by IncRNA to do the GO and KEGG enrichment pathway analyses [14]. The above biometric analysis was performed using R (R-4.0.0).

Results

Differentially expressed IncRNAs in GBM patients

Using 174 GBM samples (5 normal samples, 169 tumor samples) in the TCGA database,

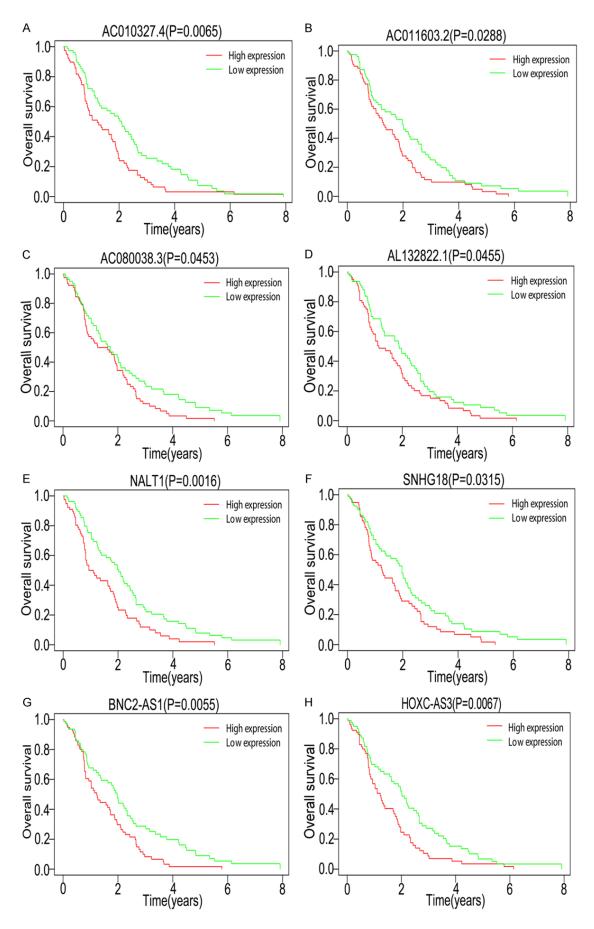


Figure 3. The Kaplan-Meier survival curves of 8 IncRNAs. (A) AC010327.4 (B) AC011603.2 (C) AC080038.3 (D) AL132822.1 (E) NALT1 (F) SNHG18 (G) BNC-AS1 and (H) HOXC-AS3. These genes with high expressions were significantly shorter than those with low expressions.

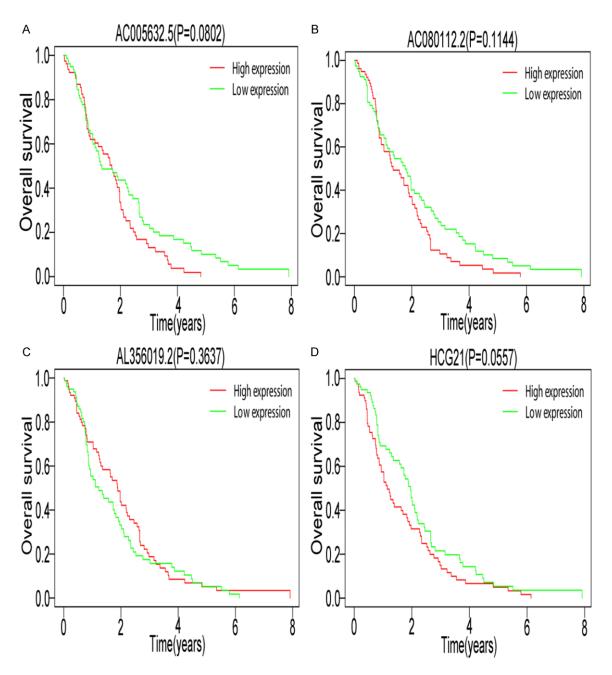


Figure 4. (A) AC005632.5 (B) AC080112.2 (C) AL356019.2 and (D) HCG21 had no significant effect on patient survival.

we used the 'edgeR package' to select the IncRNAs with different expressions for these patients, set |logFC| >2 and P<0.05, and finally screened the 1,226 IncRNAs with differential expressions. 610 were up-regulated, and 616 were down-regulated (Figure 1).

Construction of the IncRNA prognostic model

We kept the sample numbers, the survival statuses, and the overall survival times from the clinical information of the GBM patients downloaded using TCGA. The tumor samples were

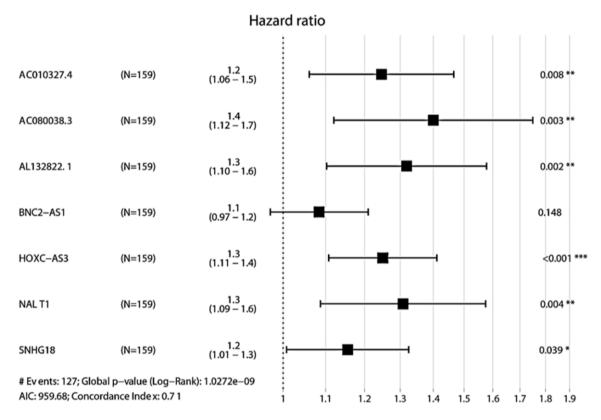


Figure 5. 7 A IncRNA forest map in the multivariate Cox regression model. HR>0 indicates that the expression of the 7 IncRNAs was positively correlated with the survival risk of the patients. The Concordance Index 0.71 indicated that the model has moderate predictive power.

selected to establish a prognostic model, so the IncRNA expression data from the 5 normal samples were deleted. In R, the clinical information and expression profile data were integrated using the sample numbers. We got rid of the missing data in the survival status and the data with duplicate sample numbers. Because of the follow-up lasso regression, the samples with a survival time of 0 were excluded. Finally, 159 GBM patients were left for the follow-up univariate cox regression analysis, and the IncRNAs with P<0.01 were selected for further analysis. These IncRNAs: (HOXC-AS2, NALT1, HOXC-AS3, AC005632.5, HCG21, ACO11603.2, HOTAIR, AL356019.2, AP002-807.1, AL132822.1, AC080112.2, AC0800-38.3, BNC2-AS1, HOTAIRM1, AC010327.4, and SNHG18) met the conditions (Table 1).

Furthermore, the "glmnet" package was selected, and 12 IncRNAs were screened from 16 genes selected using a univariate Cox regression using lasso regression based on the minimum λ method (**Figure 2**). They were AC005-

632.5, AC010327.4, AC011603.2, AC0800-38.3, AC080112.2, AL132822.1, AL3560-19.2, BNC2-AS1, HCG21, HOXC-AS3, NALT1, and SNHG18.

Then the survival analysis of the 12 genes showed that 8 IncRNAs (ACO10327.4, AC-011603.2, AC080038.3, AL132822.1, NALT1, SNHG18, BNC2-AS1, and HOXC-AS3) had significant effects on survival, P<0.05 (Figure 3). The other four IncRNAs (ACO05632.5, AC-080112.2, AL356019.2, and HCG21) (Figure 4) had no significant effect on survival. Through a multivariate cox stepwise analysis, the results showed that 7-IncRNAs (ACO10327.4, AC080038.3, AL132822.1, BNC2-AS1, HOXC-AS3, NALT1, and SNHG18) make up the optimal prediction model (Figure 5). Based on the expression level multiplicative regression model (β) and the linear combination of the following expression, a prognostic index (PI) based on IncRNAs was established. In our model, PI = (0.22056 * AC010327.4 expression) + (0.33664 * AC080038.3 expression)

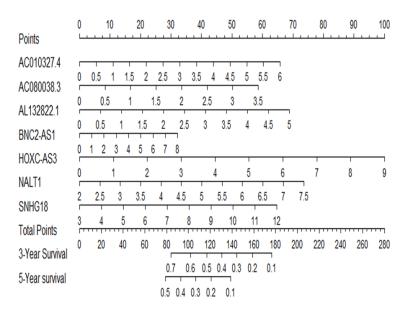


Figure 6. Prediction of the patient survival times by drawing a nomogram of the 7 IncRNAs in the model.

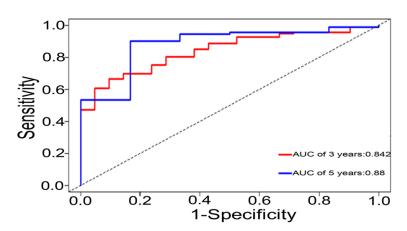


Figure 7. The 3-year and 5-year ROC curves. The predicted 3-year survival AUC value was 0.842, and the predicted 5-year survival AUC value was 0.88.

+ (0.27674 * AL132822.1 expression) + (0.08086 * BNC2-AS1 expression) + (0.22342 * HOXC-AS3 expression) + (0.26874 * NALT1 expression) + (0.14461 * SNHG18 expression). Prediction of patient survival times using a nomogram (**Figure 6**).

We evaluated the prognostic performance using 3-year and 5-year ROC curves, and the results showed that the 3-year survival AUC area was 0.842 and the 5-year survival area under the curve (AUC) was 0.88 (Figure 7), indicating that the model has good accuracy.

The IncRNA model predicted the score, and the patients were divided into a high-risk group

(score > median) and a lowrisk group (score < median) according to the median score, and then risk score charts were drawn (**Figure 8**).

We analyzed the patient survival in the high-risk and low-risk groups and confirmed that the overall survival times of the patients in the high-risk group were significantly shorter than the survival times in the low-risk group, P=3.193e-11, and the difference was statistically significant (Figure 9).

IncRNAs coexpression analysis predicts the target genes and functional enrichment

According to the Pearson correlation coefficient, we predicted the protein-coding target genes of 7 IncRNAs in the model, selected the expression values of the IncRNAs and mRNAs related to GBM in the TCGA database, and analyzed the co-expressions of the Pearson correlation. There was a significant correlation between |cor| >0.40, and P<0.05. AC010327.4 had 206 related protein-coding genes, AC080038.3 had 692 related protein-coding genes, BNC2-AS1 had 90 related proteincoding genes, HOXC-AS3 had

89 related protein-coding genes, NALT1 had 2829 related protein-coding genes, and SN-HG18 had 143 related protein-coding genes. Only one protein-coding gene was obtained through the AL132822.1 coexpression analysis. Except for the co-expressed protein-coding genes of the positive and negative correlations in BNC2-AS1, the other 6 IncRNAs only had positively related genes. Here we listed the eight IncRNAs with the highest positive and negative correlation coefficients (CCNA1, HYPK, PABPC1L2A, BCAN, BNC2, HOXC10, MST1, and AL162231.1) (Figure 10).

The "clusterProfiler" package was selected in R, and the target genes predicted using In-

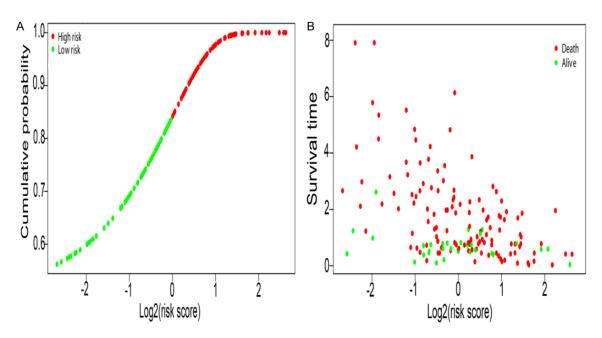


Figure 8. A risk score distribution chart. A. For this cumulative function distribution chart, we calculated the score of each patient, chose the median, and then sorted from low to high. B. The survival status of each patient corresponding to the scatter plot.

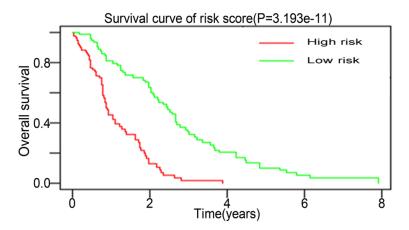


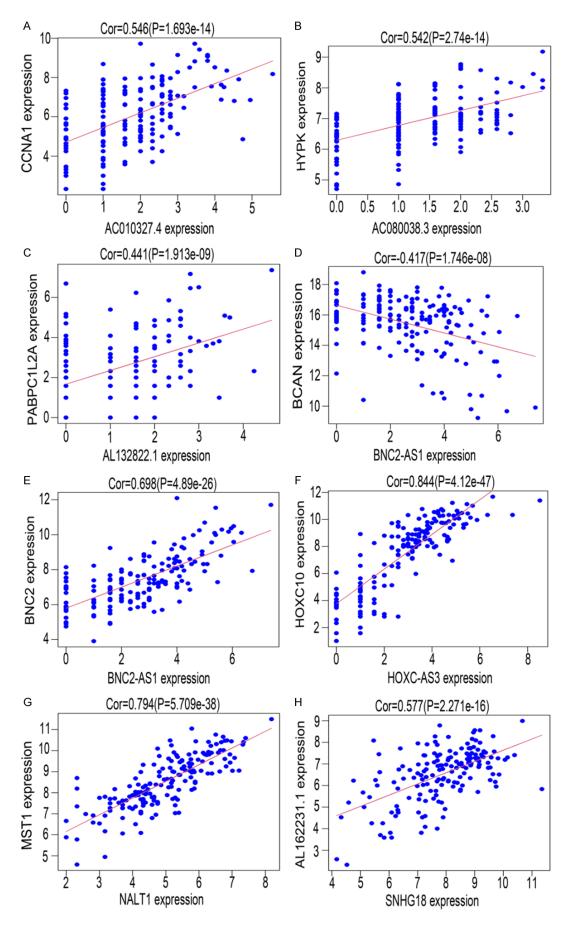
Figure 9. Survival curves of the patients in the high and low-risk groups. The survival times of the patients in the high-risk score group were significantly shortened, P<0.01, with a significant difference.

cRNAs related to the prognosis were analyzed using the GO functional annotation and the KEGG pathway enrichment analysis, and a possible mechanism was speculated. The results of the GO analysis mainly include biological process (BP), molecular function (MF), and cellular component (CC). Our results include RNA methyltransferase activity, DNA-dependent ATPase activity, ATPase activity, tRNA methyltransferase activity, protein serine/threonine kinase activity, activating transcription factor binding, and

so on. The results of the GO enrichment analysis of the target genes predicted by AC080038.3, HOXC-AS3, and NALT1 are shown in (Figures 11-13). The other 6 IncRNAs are shown in (Figures 14-17). The predicted target genes were analyzed using the KEGG pathway, and a total of 12 paths were obtained (Table 2). We could see that the pathways were enriching the tumorrelated genes, including transcriptional misregulation in cancer, choline metabolism in cancer, and the mRNA surveillance pathway, etc.

Discussion

Glioma is the most common intracranial tumor, among which GBM is the most common and has the worst prognosis, with related gene heterogeneity and tumor susceptibility, high mortality and easy recurrence after treatment, and a short survival time [4]. We intended to construct a clinical risk prediction model for GBM patients through data mining. Clinicians can use the prediction model to develop individual diagnoses and treatment strategies for pati-



7-IncRNAs predict the survival of glioblastoma patients

Figure 10. Pearson correlation analysis (|Pearson correlation coefficient| >0.40 and P<0.01) we selected the 7 IncRNA-related mRNAs. The most significantly positive and negative correlated mRNAs are shown. A. ACO10327. 4's most positive relevant protein coding genes was CCNA1 (Cor=0.546, P=1.693e-14). B. ACO80038.3's most positive relevant protein coding genes was HYPK (Cor=0.542, P=2.74e-14). C. AL132822.1's most positive relevant protein coding genes was PABPC1L2A (Cor=0.441, P=1.913e-09). D, E. The most negatively and positively related protein coding genes of BNC2-AS1 were BCAN (Cor=-0.417, P=1.746e-08) and BNC2 (Cor=0.698, P=4.89e-26), respectively. F. The most positively relevant protein coding gene of HOXC-AS3 was HOXC10 (Cor=0.844, P=4.12e-47). G. While NALT1's protein coding gene was MST1 (Cor=0.794, P=5.709e-38). H. And SNHG18's protein coding gene was AL162231.1 (Cor=0.577, P=2.271e-16).

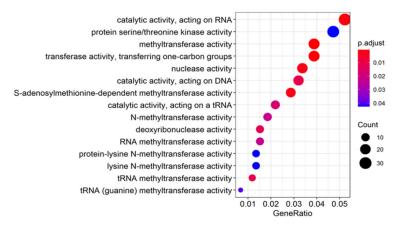


Figure 11. Dotplot of the target gene GO enrichment predicted by ACO80038.3.

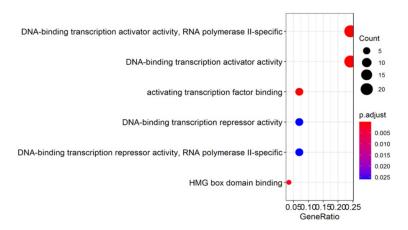


Figure 12. Dotplot of the target gene GO enrichment predicted by HOXC-AS3.

ents and effectively evaluate their prognoses. Compared with a single biomarker, multiple sets of biomarkers can improve the accuracy of the model prediction.

Gene chip technology and high-throughput sequencing technology are the most effective ways to detect and discover IncRNA at present [15]. The limitation of gene chip technology is that specific probes must be designed in the

experiment, and these must be helped by the existing IncRNA database. High-throughput sequencing is needed for some unknown IncRNAs. Many large-scale multidimensional gene databases have been established, especially the tumor Genome Map (The Cancer Genome Atlas, TCGA), which includes a variety of gene data, including expression profiles, copy numbers, methylation, and other information, as well as relatively complete clinical data, which further shows that abnormal gene expression is closely related to the occurrence and development of tumors. At the same time, these differential genes can be associated with patients' clinical information to find out the genes that have a significant impact on survival, which is helpful to mine and find valuable cancer survival prediction models. This greatly reduces the scope of the vast research but also improves the efficiency of the research. In addition, the effective information in the database can guide the laboratory research, and the experimental resear-

ch can verify the database information. In our study, according to the TCGA database, we found the GBM data, and we obtained the gene expression data and the sample clinical data. Then we extracted the expression profiles of the IncRNAs, analyzed the differences between the normal samples and the GBM samples using R, and found the related differentially expressed genes. Then a univariate cox analysis, lasso regression, and a multivariate

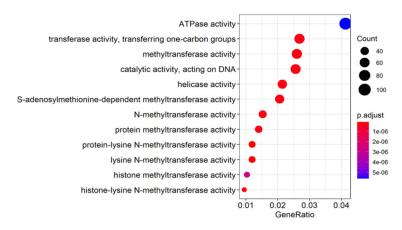


Figure 13. Dotplot of the target gene GO enrichment predicted by NALT1.

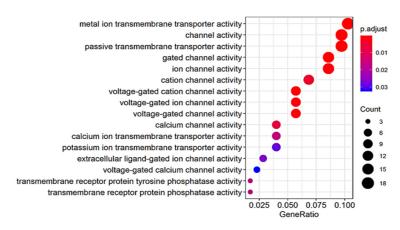


Figure 14. Dotplot of the target gene GO enrichment predicted by ACO10327.4.

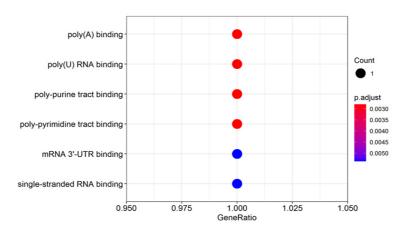


Figure 15. Dotplot of the target gene GO enrichment predicted by AL132822.1.

cox analysis were carried out to establish a GBM clinical prognostic risk model. Finally, new 7-IncRNA prediction models were constructed

to predict the overall survival of patients with GBM. A timedependent ROC analysis showed that our model had a good survival prediction. Since IncRNA does not encode proteins, to understand the function of the 7-IncRNAs, we analyzed the Pearson correlation between the IncRNA and protein-coding genes. Through the IncRNA-related mRNAs, we could indirectly explain the potential mechanism of the IncRNAs. We found that there are tumor-related pathways in the analysis of the functional enrichment of the GO and KE-GG pathways, suggesting that the IncRNAs in this model are related to the tumors.

Among the 7-IncRNAs in the model, BNC2-AS1, HOXC-AS3, NALT1, SNHG18 have been described in the literature. Liu [16] found that BNC2-AS1 can promote the proliferation and growth of gastric cancer cells, and the BNC2-AS1 gene knockout can significantly inhibit the proliferation, migration, and invasion of gastric cancer cells. Yang [17] found that HOXC-AS3 is highly expressed in invasive mucinous adenocarcinoma of the lung. This team also found that the significant down-regulation of the HOXC-AS3 gene hinders the proliferation and migration of IMA cells. Shi [18] found that HOXC-AS3 is abnormally overexpressed in breast cancer, especially HER2. HOXC-AS3 upregulates the expression of the PPP1R1A protein, thus promoting the metastasis of breast cancer. Wang [19] indicated that HOXB13 is highly expressed in GBM cells U87

and U251, and HOXC-AS3 is involved in the HOXB13-induced proliferation, migration, and invasion of GBM cells.

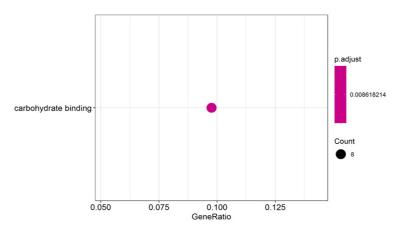


Figure 16. Dotplot of the target gene GO enrichment predicted by BNC2-AS1.

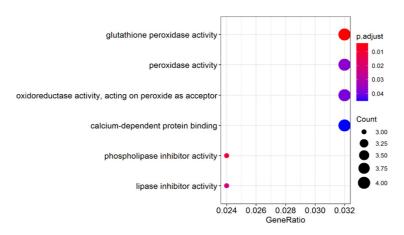


Figure 17. Dotplot of the target gene GO enrichment predicted by SNHG18.

Li [20] found that HOXC-AS3 is related to the occurrence and development of multiple myeloma. Zhang [21] found that HOXC-AS3 is significantly increased in gastric cancer and is related to the clinical prognosis of gastric cancer. Moreover, HOXC-AS3 regulates cell proliferation and migration both in vitro and in vivo. Piao [22] pointed out that the overexpression of NALT1 promotes the invasion and metastasis of gastric cancer, and the mechanism may be related to the regulation of NOTCH1 by NALT1 and its effect on the expression of the NOTCH signal pathway. Zheng [23] found that the expression of SNHG18 in clinical glioma tissues is significantly higher than it is in normal brain tissues. The expression of SNHG18 is correlated with the clinical tumor grade and negatively correlated with the mutation of isocitrate dehydrogenase 1. The knockout of SNHG18 can inhibit the radiation resistance of glioma cells, while the overexpression of SNHG18 has the opposite effect, as it can increase the tumor's resistance to radiotherapy.

So far, there are few studies covering AC010327.4, AC080-038.3, or AL132822.1. However, in our study of the IncRNAs and mRNAs in the TCGA database, we found that the expressions of ACO10-327.4 and CCNA1 had the greatest correlation. Yang's meta-analysis indicates that there is a significant relationship between CCNA1 methylation and the slow progression of human malignant tumors [24]. Some studies have also shown the mechanism of CC-NA1 in cervical cancer, nasopharyngeal carcinoma, breast cancer, and squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck [25-29]. It has been reported that the most significant protein-coding gene, MAN2C1 of AC080038.3, promotes the formation of prostate cancer xenografts by activating AKT [30]. Jiang found that the MAN2C1 gene can

promote the growth, invasion, and metastasis of transplanted tumors in mice [31]. Interestingly, AL132822.1 and its most significant protein-coding gene PABPC1L2A have not been reported in PubMed, so it is impossible to have an in-depth discussion on them.

However, our research also has some limitations. We tried to verify the prediction performance of the 7-IncRNA model in other large GBM datasets. Unfortunately, it was difficult to find datasets with complete GBM expression profile information and prognosis information such as TCGA, that is to say, there is no suitable dataset for us to verify in the next step.

Conclusion

In summary, we have constructed a clinical survival prediction model based on a 7-lncRNA expression profile. According to this model, any

Table 2. 7 IncRNAs co-expressed in the 12 pathways of the target gene KEGG enrichment

ID	Description	GeneRatio	Bg Ratio	p.adjust	Count
hsa05202	Transcriptional misregulation in cancer	4/19	192/8047	0.04411713	4
hsa05231	Choline metabolism in cancer	22/885	98/8047	0.03368915	22
hsa03015	mRNA surveillance pathway	25/885	91/8047	0.0004953	25
hsa00480	Glutathione metabolism	4/43	57/7104	0.02877192	4
hsa00514	Other types of O-glycan biosynthesis	4/38	47/8047	0.00658516	4
hsa00512	Mucin type O-glycan biosynthesis	3/38	32/8047	0.01912408	3
hsa04662	B cell receptor signaling pathway	4/38	82/8047	0.01912408	4
hsa05168	Herpes simplex virus 1 infection	110/885	491/8047	1.30E-11	110
hsa00310	Lysine degradation	22/885	61/8047	3.12E-05	22
hsa03460	Fanconi anemia pathway	20/885	54/8047	3.80E-05	20
hsa03440	Homologous recombination	17/885	41/8047	3.80E-05	17
hsa03040	Spliceosome	37/885	149/8047	7.25E-05	37

GBM patient can be scored and divided into a high prognostic risk group or a low prognostic risk group. It is used to predict the overall survival time of 3 years or 5 years, and the model is proved to be accurate and reliable. And we also made an indirect preliminary analysis of its potential mechanism and found that these IncRNAs may be related to the occurrence and development of tumors.

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

None.

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