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Genetic modifiers of CHEK2*1100delC associated breast cancer risk

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1 **ABSTRACT**

2 **Purpose**

3 *CHEK2**1100delC is a founder variant in European populations conferring a 2-3 fold increased risk of
4 breast cancer (BC). Epidemiologic and family studies have suggested that the risk associated with
5 *CHEK2**1100delC is modified by other genetic factors in a multiplicative fashion. We have
6 investigated this empirically using data from the Breast Cancer Association Consortium (BCAC).

7 **Methods**

8 With genotype data of 39,139 (624 1100delC carriers) BC patients and 40,063 (224) healthy controls
9 from 32 BCAC studies, we analyzed the combined risk effects of *CHEK2**1100delC and 77 common
10 variants in terms of a polygenic risk score (PRS) and pairwise interaction.

11 **Results**

12 The PRS conferred an odds ratio (OR) of 1.59 [95% CI 1.21-2.09] per standard deviation for BC for
13 *CHEK2**1100delC carriers and 1.58 [1.55-1.62] for non-carriers. No evidence for deviation from the
14 multiplicative model was found. The OR for the highest quintile of the PRS was 2.03 [0.86-4.78] and
15 for the lowest quintile 0.52 [0.16-1.74] for *CHEK2**1100delC carriers, corresponding to over 34.0%
16 and less than 15.0% life-time risk, respectively.

17 **Conclusion**

18 Our results confirm the multiplicative nature of risk effects conferred by *CHEK2**1100delC and the
19 common susceptibility variants. Furthermore, the PRS could identify the carriers at a high life-time
20 risk for clinical actions.

21 **Keywords:** Breast cancer; *CHEK2**1100delC; Polygenic risk score (PRS); common variants; Breast
22 Cancer Association Consortium (BCAC)

23

1 INTRODUCTION

2 The protein truncating mutation *CHEK2**1100delC (checkpoint kinase 2) is a moderate penetrance
3 breast cancer risk variant with relative risk estimate of 2-3 fold.^{1,2} However, several studies have
4 shown that the absolute risk of breast cancer in *CHEK2**1100delC carriers is markedly higher in
5 women with a family history than without,³⁻⁵ and that *CHEK2**1100delC carriers have a higher
6 probability of developing bilateral breast cancer.⁶ These observations are quantitatively consistent
7 with a simple polygenic model suggesting that *CHEK2**1100delC combines multiplicatively with other
8 genetic loci. However, this has not yet been established empirically.

9 Genome wide association studies have identified common genetic variants that are associated with
10 increased risk of breast cancer. A polygenic risk score (PRS), based on 77 low penetrance variants has
11 been estimated to explain approximately 12-14% of the excess familial risk and shown to identify
12 individuals at highest genetic risk at the population level.^{7,8} Some of these variants predominantly
13 predispose to either estrogen receptor positive (ER+) or estrogen receptor negative (ER-) disease,
14 which represent the two main etiological subclasses of breast cancer.⁹ *CHEK2**1100delC carriers are
15 more strongly predisposed to ER+ disease: about 90% of carrier tumors are ER+ in comparison to 77-
16 78% of non-carrier tumours.¹⁰

17 Here, we investigate the synergistic risk effects attributable to *CHEK2**1100delC and the common
18 breast cancer susceptibility variants both individually and summarized in terms of the PRS.^{7,8}

19 PATIENTS AND METHODS

20 Study participants

21 Female invasive breast cancer patients and healthy controls of European ancestry were included
22 from studies participating in the Breast Cancer Association Consortium (BCAC)(Table S1). Data from
23 a study were included if the study provided genotype data of the common variants from at least one
24 breast cancer patient carrying the 1100delC variant. This selection yielded data from 32 studies and

1 a total of 79 202 study subjects, including 848 *CHEK2**1100delC carriers (Table S2) for pairwise
2 interaction analyses. Complete quality controlled^{7, 10} genotype data for all 77 common variants and
3 *CHEK2**1100delC were available from 33 624 study subjects (369 *CHEK2**1100delC carriers, Table S2).
4 This data were used in the analyses involving the PRS.

5 All participating studies were approved by their institutional review committees. Each study
6 followed national guidelines for participant inclusion and for informed consent procedures.

7 **Genotyping**

8 All variants except *CHEK2**1100delC were genotyped centrally using a custom Illumina iSelect
9 genotyping array (iCOGS, Illumina, Inc. San Diego, CA, USA) as part of the COGS consortium studies
10 as described earlier.^{7, 8} *CHEK2**1100delC was primarily genotyped using a custom made TaqMan
11 assay (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA), with a small minority being genotyped using
12 iPLEX.¹⁰ In addition to the 38,549 study subjects genotyped using the iCOGS array, 40,653 BCAC
13 study subjects were genotyped for up to 25 of the common risk variants and these data were used in
14 the pairwise interaction analysis (Table S2, Table S3). These samples were genotyped by
15 independent studies following BCAC genotyping standards as described previously.^{11, 12}

16 **Statistical analyses**

17 Statistical analyses were performed using Stata SE 10 (StataCorp, Texas, USA) and R version 2.15.2.¹³
18 For the common variants a log-additive model was assumed; i.e. the risk was analyzed in terms of
19 the number of disease-associated alleles [0, 1, 2] carried. For practical reasons, *CHEK2**1100delC was
20 assumed to follow a dominant inheritance model (i.e. rare homozygotes (n=19) were combined with
21 heterozygotes). All analyses were adjusted for study and seven principal components defined on the
22 basis of the genome-wide data from the iCOGS project as described earlier.⁷

23 **Polygenic risk score**

1 In order to investigate the combined effects of the 77 common variants and *CHEK2**1100delC, a
2 polygenic risk score (PRS) based on the main effects of the common variants was calculated using

3 the formula:
$$\sum_{i=1}^n a_i \log_2 OR_i$$

4 where n is the number of loci included in the model, a is the number of susceptibility alleles in locus i
5 and OR is the per allele odds ratio for breast cancer, estimated separately for each variant in the
6 whole data set (Table S4, column "All"). The PRS was standardized by mean and standard deviation
7 of the PRS distribution among the healthy individuals.⁸ Noteworthy, of pairs of linked variants with
8 $r^2 > 0.75$, we included in the PRS only the lead variant (rs2981579, not rs2981582; rs12662670, not
9 rs3757318; rs554219, not rs614367). Furthermore, we did not include in the analyses any imputed
10 data, nor rs17879961, the *CHEK2* missense variant I157T, because the number of study subjects
11 carrying both 1100delC and I157T was very low (n=5). The interaction between PRS and
12 *CHEK2**1100delC was assessed by comparing nested logistic regression models: a model including
13 the PRS and 1100delC genotype and a model supplemented with an interaction term, coded as the
14 product of the PRS and 1100delC. In analyses of the PRS and positive family history of breast cancer,
15 positive family history was defined as at least one first degree relative with breast cancer.

16 The cumulative life-time breast cancer risk of *CHEK2**1100delC carriers in different PRS-percentiles
17 was derived assuming an average life-time risk of 23%¹⁴ and previously published relative risk
18 estimates associated with the PRS.⁸

19 **Pairwise interaction analyses**

20 We tested for pairwise interaction between each common variant and *CHEK2**1100delC as
21 described above for the interaction between the PRS and 1100delC. P-values were corrected for 77
22 parallel tests using the Benjamini-Hochberg method.¹⁵ Furthermore, the OR for breast cancer was
23 estimated separately for each of the common variants for the whole dataset and for the subgroup of
24 1100delC carriers. These analyses were also performed separately on the subgroup of breast cancer

1 patients with ER+ disease, because 1100delC is associated with ER+ breast cancer.¹⁰ Statistical power
2 was estimated as previously suggested for risk interaction analyses.¹⁶

3 **RESULTS**

4 We analyzed the combined effects of *CHEK2**1100delC and 77 common low penetrance breast
5 cancer risk variants using data from the international Breast Cancer Association Consortium (Table
6 S2). The PRS summarizing the individual effects of the common variants was strongly associated with
7 breast cancer risk among *CHEK2**1100delC carriers (OR per unit standard deviation 1.59 [1.21 - 2.09],
8 $P=0.0008$) and the OR was similar to that in non-carriers (1.58 [1.55 - 1.62], $P_{\text{interaction}}=0.93$). ORs for
9 the highest and lowest quintiles of the PRS distribution were 2.03 [0.86 - 4.78] and 0.52 [0.16 - 1.74]
10 for *CHEK2**1100delC carriers, respectively, when compared to the middle quintile (Table 1). Both
11 estimates were well in line with those made among non-carriers.

12 The OR associated with *CHEK2**1100delC in the analysis data set 2.99 [2.32 – 3.85] was attenuated,
13 when the model was adjusted for positive family history of breast cancer. Also, the OR associated
14 with the PRS was slightly attenuated (Table 2). Any significant interaction between risk effects
15 associated with 1100delC, PRS and positive family history was not found. However, in a case-only
16 analysis there was a significant association between the PRS and family history of breast cancer,
17 among both *CHEK2**1100delC carriers (OR 1.29 [1.01 - 1.65], $P=0.04$) and non-carriers (OR 1.17 [1.12
18 - 1.21], $P=4E-16$) (Figure S1).

19 When the common variants were considered individually, we found nominally significant
20 interactions between five variants and *CHEK2**1100delC for overall breast cancer (rs11249433,
21 rs11780156, rs204247, rs2981582 and rs704010; Table S4a). Two of these represented synergistic
22 (more than multiplicative) and three antagonistic interactions (the estimated effect in 1100delC
23 carriers being in the opposite direction to that in non-carriers). However, none of the interactions
24 were significant after correction for multiple testing. Nine variants showed a nominally significant
25 interaction for ER-positive breast cancer (Table S4b).

1 DISCUSSION

2 Our analyses on the synergistic effects of *CHEK2**1100delC and 77 common low penetrance variants
3 on breast cancer risk give strong support to the predicted multiplicative polygenic model.^{8, 17, 18}

4 While this has previously been shown for combinations of low penetrance variants,⁸ and for variants
5 in combination with BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations,¹⁹ this is the first direct demonstration for a
6 “moderate” risk gene and has important implications for risk prediction. The PRS was a significant
7 risk factor for *CHEK2**1100delC carriers, and the estimated OR per unit standard deviation was very
8 similar in *CHEK2**1100delC carriers and in non-carriers, consistent with the hypothesis that the
9 common susceptibility variants combine with the rare *CHEK2**1100delC variant in an approximately
10 multiplicative fashion. Similarly, the PRS risk estimates for the highest and lowest quintiles did not
11 differ between the *CHEK2**1100delC carriers and non-carriers. These two estimates made for the
12 *CHEK2**1100delC carriers alone did not reach statistical significance (Table 1), possibly reflecting
13 limited statistical power due to the relatively low number of healthy variant carriers (Table S2).

14 However, this is the largest cohort genotyped for *CHEK2**1100delC and these common variants, and
15 even though some of the point estimates are not significant as such, they are consistent with the
16 previous reports. Most importantly, we did not find evidence for deviation from the multiplicative
17 model, suggesting that the PRS could be used in risk stratification of 1100delC carriers as it can be
18 used for non-carriers.

19 The unadjusted OR for the *CHEK2**110delC variants (Table 2) was higher in our analysis data set than
20 in previous reports.^{2, 14} Adjusting for positive family history markedly attenuated the
21 *CHEK2**1100delC associated, suggestive of some oversampling of familial cases. The PRS was also
22 slightly attenuated after the adjustment. However, *CHEK2**1100delC, PRS and family history
23 remained significant risk factors in the combined model (Table 2) suggesting that the common
24 variants together explain part of the excess familial risk as previously suggested,¹⁷ but that the PRS
25 has predictive value also in breast cancer families segregating *CHEK2**1100delC.

1 Recently, a large study estimating the risk associated with *CHEK2**1100delC in relation to age, tumor
2 subtype and family history reported the cumulative life-time risk for 1100delC carriers to be about
3 23%.¹⁴ Assuming that the genetic risk attributable to the common variants (the PRS) would vary
4 around this estimate similarly as published previously for non-carriers (OR higher than 1.48 [1.39 -
5 1.57] or lower than 0.65 [0.60 – 0.70] for percentiles above 80% or lower than 20%, respectively),⁸
6 20% of the 1100delC carriers with highest PRS would have life-time risk higher than 34.0% [32.0% -
7 36.1%] exceeding the threshold for the high-risk category (>30%) according to the UK NICE
8 guidelines for familial breast cancer.²⁰ Similarly, for the 20% of 1100delC carriers with lowest PRS,
9 the life-time risk would be lower than 15.0% [13.8% - 16.1%], i.e. close to population risk (<17%).
10 These observations imply that, if *CHEK2**1100delC is to be used in risk prediction, it can be made
11 more effectively by including in the prediction also the PRS representing the risk modifying effects of
12 the common variants.

13 *CHEK2**1100delC carrier cancers do not represent a phenotypically distinct subgroup of breast
14 carcinomas. Instead, the phenotypic diversity of *CHEK2**1100delC associated cancers resembles that
15 of breast tumors in general.¹⁰ Thus, it was not surprising that the relative risks conferred by the
16 common variants were similar for the *CHEK2**1100delC carriers and for non-carriers, and no
17 significant pairwise interaction was found. We estimated that we had sufficient statistical power
18 (80%) to exclude the possibility of such pairwise interaction between *CHEK2**1100delC and any of
19 the common variants that would have an effect size of 2.5 (OR for interaction term higher than 2.5)
20 but not enough power to investigate interactions comparable in magnitude to the risk effects
21 associated with the low penetrance variants (OR 1.1-1.5). Thus, it remains possible that more
22 modest departures from a multiplicative model may exist. If so, however, much larger case-control
23 studies, perhaps combined with pedigree analyses, will be required to detect them.

24 In conclusion, our analyses confirm the predicted multiplicative relationship between
25 *CHEK2**1100delC and the common low penetrance variants. Hence, the PRS could be similarly
26 applied for risk prediction for the variant carriers as for the general population. Most importantly,

1 the PRS could help identifying the high risk group of the *CHEK2**1100delC carriers, who would best
2 benefit from clinical intervention.

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1 **LEGENDS TO FIGURES AND TABLES**

2 **Table 1.** Breast cancer risk associated with the polygenic risk score (PRS) for non-carriers and the
3 carriers of *CHEK2**1100delC.

4 **Table 2.** Relative breast cancer risk associated with *CHEK2**1100delC, PRS and positive family history
5 of breast cancer in the analysis data set.

6 **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**

7 **Figure S1.** Relationship between the polygenic risk score (PRS) and positive family history of breast
8 cancer.

9 **Table S1.** Description of study design and genotype data availability of 32 studies participating in the
10 Breast Cancer Association Consortium (BCAC).

11 **Table S2.** *CHEK2**1100delC genotype data availability for breast cancer (BC) cases and controls.

12 **Table S3.** Description of genotype data coverage and genotyping methods for each low penetrance
13 variant.

14 **Table S4.** Odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) estimated for the whole dataset and for
15 the carriers of *CHEK2**1100delC, as well as for pairwise interaction between each variant and
16 *CHEK2**1100delC for (a) breast cancer (b) estrogen receptor positive (ER+) breast cancer.

17 **Supplementary data.** Detailed acknowledgements.