Genotype-Specific Abnormalities in Mitochondrial Function Associate with Distinct Profiles of Energy Metabolism and Catecholamine Content in Pheochromocytoma and Paraganglioma

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Abstract

Purpose: Pheochromocytomas and paragangliomas (PGL) are neuroendocrine tumors of sympathetic and parasympathetic paraganglia. This study investigated the relationships between genotype-specific differences in mitochondrial function and catecholamine content in PGL tumors.

Experimental Design: Respiratory chain enzyme assays and 1H-nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy at 500 MHz were conducted on homogenates of 35 sporadic PGLs and 59 PGLs from patients with hereditary mutations in succinate dehydrogenase subunits B and D (SDHB, SDHD), succinate dehydrogenase assembly factor 2, von Hippel-Lindau (VHL), rearranged during transfection (RET), neurofibromatosis type 1 (NF1), and myc-associated factor X.

Results: In SDHx-related PGLs, a significant decrease in complex II activity (P < 0.0001) and a significant increase in complex I, III, and IV enzyme activities were observed when compared to sporadic, RET, and NF1 tumors. Also, a significant increase in citrate synthase (P < 0.0001) enzyme activity was observed in SDHx-related PGLs when compared to sporadic-, VHL-, RET-, and NF1-related tumors. An increase in succinate accumulation (P < 0.001) and decrease in ATP/ADP/AMP accumulation (P < 0.001) was observed when compared to sporadic PGLs and PGLs of other genotypes. Positive correlations (P < 0.01) were observed between respiratory chain complex II activity and total catecholamine content and ATP/ADP/AMP and total catecholamine contents in tumor tissues.

Conclusions: This study for the first time establishes a relationship between determinants of energy metabolism, like activity of respiratory chain enzyme complex II, ATP/ADP/AMP content, and catecholamine content in PGL tumors. Also, this study for the first time successfully uses NMR spectroscopy to detect catecholamines in PGL tumors and provides ex vivo evidence for the accumulation of succinate in PGL tumors with an SDHx mutation.

Introduction

Pheochromocytomas and paragangliomas (PGL) are neuroendocrine tumors of sympathetic and parasympathetic paraganglia. PGLs of sympathetic origin (adrenal medulla and extra adrenal sympathetic tissue of abdomen, pelvis, and chest) usually produce catecholamines, whereas the tumors of parasympathetic origin (head and neck PGLs) usually do not produce significant amounts of catecholamines (1). At least 30% to 35% of the PGLs are caused by germline mutations of 10 identified tumor susceptibility genes (2). These include VHL (von Hippel-Lindau), RET (rearranged during transfection), NF1 (neurofibromatosis type 1), SDHA/B/C/D (succinate dehydrogenase subunits A, B, C, and D), SDHAF2 (succinate dehydrogenase assembly factor 2), and the more recently reported TMEM127 (transmembrane protein 127) and MAX (myc-associated factor X;
Succinate dehydrogenase (SDH) plays a key role in energy metabolism, which is deregulated upon loss of SDH function. Nearly 30% of pheochromocytomas and paragangliomas (PGL) are caused by germline mutations of which succinate dehydrogenase subunit B (SDHB) mutations have been associated with large-sized aggressive tumors and increased risk of malignancy. Thus, studies on energy metabolism in relation to endocrine activity are needed to improve diagnosis, localization, and treatment of these tumors. In such an attempt, we report a strong positive correlation between determinants of energy metabolism and catecholamine content in PGLs, suggesting a metabolic deviation in SDHB-related tumors that supports growth, contributing to larger sizes and implicating the need for targeting cellular energetics in therapy. Furthermore, we report increased succinate accumulation in these tumors, which could serve as a biomarker. Finally, genotype-specific differences in tumor metabolic contents reported in the study highlight the importance of metabolic imaging in tumor localization and patient follow-up.

**Translational Relevance**

Succinate dehydrogenase (SDH) plays a key role in energy metabolism, which is deregulated upon loss of SDH function. Nearly 30% of pheochromocytomas and paragangliomas (PGL) are caused by germline mutations of which succinate dehydrogenase subunit B (SDHB) mutations have been associated with large-sized aggressive tumors and increased risk of malignancy. Thus, studies on energy metabolism in relation to endocrine activity are needed to improve diagnosis, localization, and treatment of these tumors. In such an attempt, we report a strong positive correlation between determinants of energy metabolism and catecholamine content in PGLs, suggesting a metabolic deviation in SDHB-related tumors that supports growth, contributing to larger sizes and implicating the need for targeting cellular energetics in therapy. Furthermore, we report increased succinate accumulation in these tumors, which could serve as a biomarker. Finally, genotype-specific differences in tumor metabolic contents reported in the study highlight the importance of metabolic imaging in tumor localization and patient follow-up.

In 17% of sporadic tumors, somatic mutations in RET, VHL, MAX, and more recently, HIF-2α and NF1 have been reported (3–5).

Based on transcriptional profiling studies, PGLs can be classified into 2 clusters: cluster 1 and cluster 2 (6, 7). Cluster 1 tumors (VHL, SDHA/B/C/D/AF2) are characterized by increased expression of genes involved in (pseudo) hypoxia, cell proliferation, angiogenesis, electron transport chain and the Krebs cycle, and abnormal function of oxidoreductases. Cluster 2 tumors (RET, NF1) show an increased expression of genes involved in protein synthesis, kinase signaling, endocytosis, and maintenance of a differentiated chromaffin cell catecholamine biosynthetic and secretory phenotype. Sporadic PGLs are distributed between the 2 major clusters based on their gene expression pattern and catecholamine phenotype (6).

SDH is an important component of the mitochondrial electron transport chain. In tumors with SDHx mutations, the ability of cells for oxidative phosphorylation is compromised (7–10). Also, it has been showed in vitro that accumulation of succinate in cells silenced for SDH causes inhibition of prolyl hydroxylase activity resulting in stabilization of hypoxia-inducible factor-1α (HIF-1α) and HIF-2α (11 and 12). HIF-1α and -2α then translocate to the nucleus where, together with aryl hydrocarbon receptor nuclear translocator, they form an active HIF complex that induces the expression of genes with hypoxia response elements that support tumor progression via different signaling pathways. Thus, in cluster 1 tumors, the pseudohypoxic drive is hypothesized to mediate an increase in aerobic glycolysis, also known as Warburg effect. This is supported by increased HIF-α protein level combined with lower SDH activity and increased glycolysis as indicated by lactate dehydrogenase activity (7).

The differences between cluster 1 and cluster 2 tumors are also characterized by differences in catecholamine biosynthetic and secretory profiles (13). PGLs with mutations in RET and NF1 produce both epinephrine and norepinephrine and have low rate constants for catecholamine secretion, whereas SDHx- and VHL-related tumors mainly produce norepinephrine and have high rate constants for catecholamine secretion. Tumor catecholamine content is lower in cluster 1 tumors, compared to cluster 2 tumors. Also, it is well known that sequestration of catecholamines into chromaffin granules through vesicular monoamine transporters (VMAT) and re-uptake of catecholamines via norepinephrine transporter (NET) are active energy-dependent processes. Differences in catecholamine phenotypes may thus in part be explained by mutation-dependent changes in energy metabolism.

In this study, we therefore investigated relationships between genotype-specific differences in mitochondrial function and catecholamine content in PGL tumors. A total of 90 PGL tissues of various genotypes were included. Besides functional assays for respiratory complexes I to IV and citrate synthase, 1H-nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy was conducted to provide an overview of the intracellular metabolome with specific focus on catecholamines, ATP/ADP/AMP and intermediates of glycolysis and Krebs cycle.

**Materials and Methods**

**Patients**

Patients with histologically proven PGLs evaluated at the Department of Medicine, Division of Endocrinology of the Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Centre (RUNMC, Nijmegen, the Netherlands) and at Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), National Institute of Health (NIH) (Bethesda, MD) were considered for the study. Tumor tissue samples of consecutive patients from RUNMC who underwent surgical resection between 1988 and 2012 were included in the study. NIH patients underwent surgery between 2003 and 2010. Frozen primary tumor tissues from 64 patients at RUNMC and 26 patients at NICHD were included. The presence of germline mutations and large deletions in SDHB/C/D, RET, VHL and—which since 2011—in SDHA, SDHAF2, TMEM127, and MAX were investigated using standard procedures. Data were collected under conditions of regular clinical care, with ethical committee approval obtained for the use of those data for scientific purposes at RUNMC. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of NICHD, and all patients gave written informed consent before testing. The details of the patients’ clinical characteristics and genotype are listed in Table 1.

**Tumor tissue processing**

Tumor tissues resected from the patients described earlier were procured as early as possible, the dimensions of the
tumor were recorded by the pathologist and a small piece of the tumor tissue was weighed and snap frozen and stored in liquid nitrogen and later used for experimental purposes. For histologic confirmation, additional slices were stained with hematoxylin and eosin and re-evaluated by an independent pathologist (B. Kusters).

Respiratory chain enzyme assays

Frozen tumor specimens (~40 mg) were homogenized on melting ice in sucrose–EDTA–phosphate buffer [0.25 M sucrose, 2 mmol/L EDTA, 10 mmol/L K2PO4, pH 7.4, 8% (w/v)] using a hand-held glass/glass homogenizer. Homogenates were subsequently centrifuged at 600 g for 10 minutes and supernatants used for the determination of the activities of respiratory chain enzyme complexes I to IV and the mitochondrial matrix enzyme, citrate synthase. These assays measured the formation of a spectrophoto metrically detectable end-product at regular time intervals and were conducted on Konelab 20XT clinical chemistry analyzer (Thermo Scientific) as described elsewhere (14). The protein concentrations in the supernatants were also measured in parallel using pyrogallol red–molybdate complex method as described earlier (15). The enzyme activities were normalized to mg protein. Five samples were excluded from analysis (2 Sporadic; 1 each SDHB, VHL, and NF1) as the tumor tissue homogenate contained blood which could affect determinations and interpretations of respiratory chain enzyme activities and protein concentrations.

1H-NMR spectroscopy

1H-NMR spectroscopy was conducted in frozen tumor tissues to determine concentrations of intermediates of energy metabolism (Krebs cycle and glycolysis), catecholamines, and their metabolites. One sporadic, 2 SDHB, 1 VHL, and 2 MAX tumors were excluded from the experiment as the amount of starting material was low. The tumor tissues were homogenized on ice in 10% (w/v) of distilled water using a hand-held Teflon/glass homogenizer. The samples were then centrifuged at 16,000 × g for 10 minutes at 4°C and the supernatants were subjected to ultrafiltration with Vivaspain Turbo 15, 10 kDa filters (Sartorius). The ultrafiltrates were diluted with water to 700 μL pH was adjusted to 2.5 and 20 μL of 20.2 mmol/L sodium 3-trimethylsilyl-2,2,3,3-tetradeteropropionate in D2O was added to the samples. The samples were then placed in 5 mm NMR tubes and 1H-NMR spectra were obtained using a Bruker 500 MHz spectrometer (pulse angle 90°, 7 microseconds pulses with a delay time of 4 seconds, number of scans 256). The water resonance was suppressed by gated irradiation centered on water frequency (16, 17).

Concentrations of succinate in the tumor tissues were estimated by integrating the area under the peak at 2.66 ppm. Differences in peak heights were clearly observed for tumors with high, absent, and low levels of succinate (Supplementary Fig. S1). Tumor tissue ATP/ADP/AMP content was estimated by integrating the area under peaks in the region 6.18 to 6.21 ppm. Because each of the 3 compounds differs by the presence of one phosphate group, spectral peaks for these metabolites cannot be distinguished using 1H-NMR spectroscopy. Epinephrine content was estimated by integrating area under the peaks for the triplet at 2.73 ppm and the total catecholamine content was estimated by integrating the area under the peaks for multiplets in the region 6.86 to 6.98 ppm. Because each of the 3 compounds differs by the presence of one phosphate group, spectral peaks for these metabolites cannot be distinguished using 1H-NMR spectroscopy. Norepinephrine content was estimated by calculating the difference between total catecholamine and epinephrine contents. Other amines, which could contribute to peaks in the region 6.86 to 6.98 ppm are dopamine and 3-methoxytyramine. However, the concentration of these compounds as measured by high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) is in the nanomolar range (18), much lower than the detection limit of 1H-NMR spectroscopy, which is in micromolar range. The catecholamine content of the tumor tissue as estimated by 1H-NMR spectroscopy was validated in a small subset of 22 samples using HPLC. For this purpose, the frozen tumor tissues (~5 mg) were weighed accurately, transferred to a processing tube and 5 volumes of 0.4 M perchloric acid containing 0.5 mmol/L EDTA is added and homogenized on ice using a homogenizer (Polytron). The tubes are then spun for 15 minutes at 3,000 rpm in a refrigerated centrifuge to separate the precipitated proteins and cell debris. The perchloric acid extract is separated from the pellet, frozen on dry ice, and stored at ~80°C until assayed for catecholamines. Furthermore, the

Table 1. Patient characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>N (patients)</th>
<th>Age, y (mean ± SD)</th>
<th>Gender (M/F)</th>
<th>N (tumors)</th>
<th>Tumor location (A/E/HN)</th>
<th>Tumor volume (cm³)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sporadic</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>47.5 ± 14.8</td>
<td>18/17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32/3/0</td>
<td>218.6 ± 452.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDHB</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32 ± 11.9</td>
<td>10/3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1/1/4/0</td>
<td>273.1 ± 316.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDHD</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44 ± 10.4</td>
<td>6/2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1/1/6</td>
<td>27.9 ± 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDHAF2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0/0/1</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VHL</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30.7 ± 13</td>
<td>6/3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7/2/0</td>
<td>61.5 ± 84.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN-2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37.9 ± 12.8</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15/0/0</td>
<td>93.4 ± 171.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NF1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>43.2 ± 17.4</td>
<td>5/3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8/0/0</td>
<td>107.6 ± 80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAX</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>48 ± 14</td>
<td>2/1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3/0/0</td>
<td>63.2 ± 71.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: A, adrenal; E, extraadrenal; F, female; HN, head and neck; M, male; N, no. of patients; y, years.
perchloric acid extract is prepared using alumina extraction method as described previously (19). A significant correlation and linear relationship was observed between the 2 methods (Supplementary Fig. S2).

**Statistical methods**

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS (SPSS Inc., v.18) and GraphPad Prism 6 software (GraphPad). The data were analyzed using independent samples Kruskal–Wallis test and Dunn post test was used to compare the different genotypes and adjusted P values were reported. Correlation between respiratory chain enzyme activities and tumor tissue catecholamine content was examined using Spearman correlation test. Statistical significance was accepted at P value < 0.05. Furthermore, estimation of catecholamine content by 1H-NMR spectroscopy and HPLC and comparison of respiratory chain enzyme activities with total catecholamine content was carried out using Passing–Bablok regression analysis (20).

**Results**

**Respiratory chain enzyme activities**

The activity of the respiratory chain complex II was deficient in all SDHx tumors as expected (Fig. 1B; P < 0.0001). The activity of the complexes I, III, and IV was significantly higher in SDHx tumors than in VHL, RET, NF1, and sporadic tumors (Fig. 1A, C, and D; P < 0.05). This was even more clearly so for citrate synthase activity (Fig. 1E; P < 0.0001). The VHL tumors showed a lower activity for complex I when compared to sporadic tumors (Fig. 1A and Table 2; P < 0.05) and complex III when compared to sporadic (Fig. 1C and Table 2, p < 0.01) and cluster II tumors (Fig. 1C and Table 2; P < 0.05). In contrast, the MAX tumor group had a tendency of higher activity for the complexes II, III, and IV when compared to the other genotypes (Fig. 1B–D). Furthermore, for the various SDH mutations no mutation specific differences could observed in the activities of respiratory chain enzyme complexes I to IV. Although a low complex II activity was observed in SDHB-related tumors when compared to SDHD-related ones, the sensitivity of the assay at such low enzyme activity levels precludes such an analysis and interpretation of the results (Supplementary Fig. S3).

**Detection of energy metabolism intermediates and tumor tissue catecholamines using 1H-NMR spectroscopy**

The NMR spectra of the tumor homogenates showed very high succinate (P < 0.001) levels in all SDHx cases as

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**Figure 1.** Respiratory chain enzyme activity in PGL tumor tissues of different genotypes. A–E, dot plots depicting the respiratory chain enzyme activities of respiratory chain enzyme complexes I to IV and citrate synthase (CS) across different genotypes in mU normalized to mg protein concentrations. Horizontal line represents the mean. Datasets having different alphabets above them are significantly different (P < 0.05).
expected (Fig. 2A). Mutation specific differences in the levels of succinate could not be observed for the tumors with various SDH mutations (Supplementary Fig. S3). Succinate was not NMR detectable or very low in all other tumor samples except for 1 tumor in the sporadic group. Citrate was present in high concentration in 4 sporadic tumors. Low concentrations of pyruvate, without genotype-specific differences, were observed in all PGL tissues (data not shown).

The differences in high-energy phosphate content between the tumors were striking. Proton NMR spectroscopy cannot discriminate between ATP, ADP, and AMP and therefore Fig. 2B shows the sum of the 3 high-energy phosphates. The concentration of ATP/ADP/AMP was consistently very low \( (P < 0.0001) \) in all SDHx tumors. A very low content also occurred in the other tumor groups but the ATP/ADP/AMP concentration was rather variable in these groups. RET tumors had high ATP/ADP/AMP when compared to sporadic \( (P < 0.01) \) and SDHx tumors \( (P < 0.0001) \).

Epinephrine was proton NMR—undetectable in all SDHx and VHL tumors. The RET tumors showed high epinephrine concentrations when compared to sporadic \( (P < 0.05) \),

<p>| Table 2. Comparison of respiratory chain complex activities between different genotypes |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>SDHx vs. Sporadic</th>
<th>MEN-2 and NF1</th>
<th>VHL vs. Sporadic</th>
<th>MEN-2 and NF1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complex I</td>
<td>0.3164</td>
<td>0.0278</td>
<td>0.0478</td>
<td>0.4221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex II</td>
<td>-0.0001</td>
<td>-0.0001</td>
<td>0.1150</td>
<td>0.1703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex III</td>
<td>0.0050</td>
<td>0.0165</td>
<td>0.0082</td>
<td>0.0137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex IV</td>
<td>0.0397</td>
<td>0.0439</td>
<td>0.0600</td>
<td>0.0733</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Listed in the table are \( P \) values (adjusted) for the various comparisons. Highlighted in bold letters are comparisons that attained statistical significance.

Figure 2. Accumulation of intermediates of energy metabolism and catecholamine metabolism in PGL tumor tissues of different genotypes as determined by \(^1^H\)-NMR spectroscopy. A, dot plot depicting the tumor tissue succinate concentrations expressed as nmol per mg tumor tissue across different genotypes. B, dot plot depicting the tumor tissue ATP/ADP/AMP concentrations expressed as mmol per mg tumor tissue across different genotypes. C, dot plot representing the tumor tissue epinephrine concentrations expressed as µmol per mg tumor tissue across different genotypes. D, dot plot representing the tumor tissue norepinephrine concentrations expressed as µmol per mg tumor tissue across different genotypes. Horizontal line represents the mean. Datasets having different alphabets above them are significantly different \( (P < 0.05) \). In 13 tumor samples succinate and ATP/ADP/AMP and in 33 tumor samples total catecholamine peaks were below detection limit. They have been represented as half the lowest detectable value.
SDHx \( (P < 0.0001) \), and VHL \( (P < 0.001) \) tumors (Fig. 3C). In SDHx tumors, norepinephrine was also very low when compared to sporadic \( (P < 0.01) \), RET \( (P < 0.0001) \), and NF1 tumors \( (P < 0.05) \), whereas 50% of the VHL tumors produced significant amounts of norepinephrine (Fig. 3D). Total catecholamine peaks were below detection limit in 33 tumor samples. Seven of these samples were subjected to HPLC, which detected the presence of catecholamines in these tissues.

**Correlation of energy metabolism with tumor tissue catecholamine content**

Positive correlations \( (P < 0.001) \) were observed between activities of respiratory chain complex II and concentrations of epinephrine, norepinephrine, and total catecholamine content in tumor tissues. ATP/ADP/AMP content of PGL tumors also showed a positive correlation with tumor tissue epinephrine, norepinephrine, and total catecholamine levels (Table 3). Parasympathetic PGLs were excluded from this analysis as they do not produce catecholamines.

Furthermore, Passing–Bablok regression statistics for comparison between complex II activity, tumor ATP/ADP/AMP content, and total catecholamine content showed a linear relationship (Fig. 4).

**Discussion**

This study establishes differences in mitochondrial energy pathways in metabolic processes in PGLs and provides novel insight into how deregulation of energy metabolism might impact catecholamine phenotypic features of cluster 1 and cluster 2 tumors. Furthermore, the study also provides *ex vivo* evidence for the accumulation of succinate in SDH-related tumors and successfully uses \(^1\text{H}-\text{NMR} \) spectroscopy for detection of catecholamines in PGL tumor tissues.

In accordance with previous reports (7–10), we observed that the activity of SDH or respiratory chain enzyme complex II is low in SDH-related tumors. Interestingly, reduction of complex II activity in SDH-related tumors was associated with increased activities of other respiratory chain complexes I, III, and IV and citrate synthase.

**Table 3. Correlation of respiratory chain enzyme activity with tumor tissue catecholamine content**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catecholamines</th>
<th>CI (µmol/mg protein)</th>
<th>CII (µmol/mg protein)</th>
<th>CIII (µmol/mg protein)</th>
<th>CIV (µmol/mg protein)</th>
<th>ATP/ADP/AMP (mmol/mg tissue)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E (nmol/mg tissue)</td>
<td>Correlation coefficient</td>
<td>0.226</td>
<td>0.423</td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE (nmol/mg tissue)</td>
<td>Correlation coefficient</td>
<td>0.160</td>
<td>0.479</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (two-tailed)</td>
<td>0.163</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.495</td>
<td>0.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total catecholamines</td>
<td>Correlation coefficient</td>
<td>0.208</td>
<td>0.517</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (two-tailed)</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.196</td>
<td>0.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
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<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Highlighted in bold letters are comparisons that attained statistical significance.

Abbreviations: CI, II, III and IV, respiratory chain enzyme complexes I to IV; E, epinephrine.
support the hypothesis that there is an accumulation of in vivo we for the first time provide strong germline SDH mutation, however, it was described in a lization of HIF-1 observed that the accumulation of succinate leads to stabi- PET to SDH tumors (24–26).

In this study, we established that tumor tissue concentrations of ATP/ADP/AMP, as determined by low peak heights at relevant resonance positions in $^1$H-NMR spectra, are lower in SDHx-related tumors than in other tumors. Furthermore, our findings of positive relationships between respiratory enzyme complex II function, tumor ATP/ADP/AMP content, and tumor catecholamine contents suggest the possibility that differences in energy metabolism might also contribute to the lower tumor tissue catecholamine contents in cluster 1 than in cluster 2 tumors. To this end, it is well known that the sequestration of catecholamines into secretory vesicles and re-uptake of catecholamines into chromaffin cells are active energy dependent processes. Sequestration of catecholamines is facilitated by VMATs. The $H^+$ gradient necessary to maintain the activity of VMATs is generated by ATP-dependent vesicular membrane proton pump (30). Chromaffin granules also contain strikingly high concentrations of ATP due to the activity of vesicular nucleotide transporter (31). This contributes to the stability and ability of chromaffin granules to maintain stores of catecholamines (32, 33). Furthermore, NET responsible for the sodium chloride ($Na^+/Cl^-$)–dependent reuptake of extracellular norepinephrine and dopamine is also indirectly dependent on cellular store of ATP. NET functions by coupling the transport of norepinephrine and dopamine with the influx of sodium and chloride ($Na^+/Cl^-$). The ion gradients of $Na^+$ and $Cl^-$ generated by the $Na^+/K^+$-ATPase make this reuptake energetically favorable (34, 35). Clearly therefore, energy metabolism has an important role in maintaining the stability of chromaffin granules and thus catecholamine storage. It thereby seems possible that genotype-specific differences in the energy metabolism, along with associated differences in expression of various genes.

In in vitro experiments with cells silenced for SDH, it was observed that the accumulation of succinate leads to stabilization of HIF-1α (11). Later, Pollard and colleagues (27) described succinate accumulation in tumor tissues with germline SDH mutation, however, it was described in a single patient with pathogenic SDH mutation. In this study, we for the first time provide strong in vitro evidence to support the hypothesis that there is an accumulation of succinate in SDH-related PGL tumor tissues. This supports
encoding components of secretory pathway and exocytotic machinery (36), could in conjunction contribute to genotype-specific differences in tumor catecholamine phenotypic features.

In this study we included 35 sporadic tumors, 60% of which were not tested for SDHA and SDHAF-2. Two of the 3 sporadic tissues which had low respiratory chain complex II activities comparable to SDHx tumors also belong to the group that were not tested for SDHA and SDHAF-2. Thus, mutations in SDHA and SDHAF-2 cannot be ruled out in these tumors. Also, the low activity may indicate that these tumors may have an as yet unidentified intronic or promotor mutations in SDH subunit genes or unidentified mutations in assembly factors genes.

We used 1H-NMR spectroscopy to determine the tumor tissue metabolite concentrations as it provides a holistic view on the tumor metabolome. This technique can very well identify various metabolites and quantify differences in the metabolite concentrations among different samples, but it is limited by its sensitivity. It can quantify metabolites only in micromolar range because of which many intermediates of energy and catecholamine metabolism could not be determined in this study. This is clearly visible in the Fassing–Bablok regression analysis of total catecholamines versus complex II activity and ATP/ADP/AMP levels, where reduced sensitivity of NMR spectroscopy separates out a group of samples which if analyzed with a more sensitive method could have reflected the linear relationship better. Nevertheless, the study was successful in identifying the relationship between catecholamine content of PGLs and energy metabolism.

Catecholamine contents are particularly low in tumors due to SDHB mutations and it has been suggested that this along with diversion of energy from maintaining catecholamine phenotypic features to growth might contribute to the larger sizes and more aggressive features of these tumors (18). This study, establishing relationships between tumor energetics and catecholamine phenotypic features, provides new insight into how such diversions of energy might occur with implications for novel therapeutic strategies targeting energy pathways.

Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest
No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed.

Authors’ Contributions
Development of methodology: U. Engelke, R. Rodenburg, R. Wevers, G. Eisenhofer, B. Kusters
Administrative, technical, or material support (i.e., reporting or organizing data, constructing databases): K. Pacak, D. Kunst
Study supervision: R. Wevers

Acknowledgments
The authors thank Ms. A.M. Leenders and Mr. N.I. Grebencichkov for their help with respiratory chain enzyme assays and statistics, respectively.

Grant Support
The work leading to these results has received funding from the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013) under grant agreement no. 259735 (ENSAH CANCER). The costs of publication of this article were defrayed in part by the payment of page charges. This article must therefore be hereby marked advertisement in accordance with 18 U.S.C. Section 1734 solely to indicate this fact.

Received December 27, 2012; revised May 1, 2013; accepted May 13, 2013; published OnlineFirst May 30, 2013.

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