The Hippo pathway terminal effector TAZ/WWTR1 mediates oxaliplatin sensitivity in colon cancer cells

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23 Oxaliplatin, colon cancer, Hippo signaling, TAZ, P53

24

25   **SUMMARY**

26   YAP and TAZ, the Hippo pathway terminal transcriptional activators, are frequently

27   upregulated in cancers. In tumor cells, they have been mainly associated with increased

28   tumorigenesis controlling different aspects from cell cycle regulation, stemness, or resistance

29   to chemotherapies. In fewer cases, they have also been shown to oppose cancer progression,

30   including by promoting cell death through the action of the P73/YAP transcriptional complex,

31   in particular after chemotherapeutic drug exposure. Using several colorectal cancer cell lines,

32   we show here that oxaliplatin treatment led to a dramatic core Hippo pathway down-regulation

33   and nuclear accumulation of TAZ. We further show that TAZ was required for the increased

34   sensitivity of HCT116 cells to oxaliplatin, an effect that appeared independent of P73, but

35   which required the nuclear relocalization of TAZ. Accordingly, Verteporfin and CA3, two

36   drugs affecting the activity of YAP and TAZ, showed an antagonistic with oxaliplatin in co-

37   treatments. Our results support thus an early action of TAZ to sensitize cells to oxaliplatin,

38   consistent with a model in which nuclear TAZ in the context of DNA damage and P53 activity

39   pushes cells towards apoptosis.

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INTRODUCTION

Colorectal cancer (CRC) is the third leading cause of cancer-related death worldwide (Rawla et al., 2019). 30% of patients present synchronous metastases and 50-60% will develop metastases that will require chemotherapy. The current management of advanced or metastatic CRC is based on fluoropyrimidine (5-FU), oxaliplatin and irinotecan as single agents or more often in combination (e.g. FOLFOX, FOLFIRI, or FOLFIRINOX; Xie et al., 2020). Chemotherapy is combined with targeted therapy including monoclonal antibodies against EGFR (e.g. cetuximab and panitumumab) or VEGF (bevacizumab), tyrosine kinase inhibitors (e.g. regorafenib), and immune checkpoint blockade agents for patients with MSI-High tumors (e.g. pembrolizumab; Xie et al., 2020).

Oxaliplatin is a third-generation platinum antitumor compound with a 1,2-diaminocyclohexane (DACH) ligand (Chaney, 1995; Raymond et al., 1998). It induces mainly intra-strand crosslinks, but also inter-strand crosslinks and DNA-protein crosslinks that stop DNA replication and transcription, leading to apoptotic cell death (Perego and Robert, 2016; Woynarowski et al., 2000, 1998). Oxaliplatin exerts its anti-tumor effect also by inducing immunogenic cell death (Tesniere et al., 2010). Resistance to oxaliplatin can be either intrinsic (primary resistance) or acquired (secondary resistance), and is usually tackled by combining drugs to expose tumoral cells weaknesses or inhibit alternative survival pathways (Vasan et al., 2019). Despite intense research efforts in this field, more information on the molecular mechanisms underlying oxaliplatin mechanism of action are needed to develop new treatment strategies and improve the therapeutic response rate.

The Hippo signaling pathway represents an evolutionarily highly conserved growth control pathway. First discovered through genetic screens in *Drosophila*, it consists of a central cascade of core kinases: MST1/2 and LATS1/2 (homologues of *Drosophila* Hippo and Warts; Heng et al., 2021; Pocaterra et al., 2020; Zheng and Pan, 2019). When activated, LATS1/2 phosphorylate YAP and WWTR1/TAZ (homologues of *Drosophila* Yki), two partly redundant transcriptional co-activators which represent the terminal effector of the Hippo pathway (Reggiani et al., 2021). Phosphorylated YAP and TAZ are retained in the cytoplasm through binding to 14-3-3 proteins, and sent for proteasomal degradation. When the Hippo pathway is not activated, hypo-phosphorylated YAP/TAZ enter the nucleus and bind to specific transcription factors (TFs) to turn on the transcription of target genes. The best characterized TF partners for YAP and TAZ are the TEADs (TEAD1-4, homologues of *Drosophila* Scalloped; Heng et al., 2021; Pocaterra et al., 2020; Zheng and Pan, 2019). While depending

77   on cell type, the classic target genes include genes involved in proliferation, resistance to
78   apoptosis, cytoskeletal remodeling, or stemness (Rosenbluh et al., 2012; Tapon et al., 2002;
79   Totaro et al., 2018). But YAP/TAZ nucleo-cytoplasmic localization (and activity) is also
80   controlled by mechanical cues relayed by the actin cytoskeleton, or by cytoplasmic trapping
81   proteins such as AMOTs (Heng et al., 2021; Pocaterra et al., 2020; Zheng and Pan, 2019).
82   Importantly, the nuclear retention of YAP and TAZ is favored by tyrosine phosphorylation by
83   different kinases, and in particular SRC and YES (Byun et al., 2017; Ege et al., 2018; Li et al.,
84   2016).

85   The Hippo pathway has been primarily described as a tumor suppressive pathway in a wide
86   variety of solid tumors (Kim and Kim, 2017; Li and Guan, 2022; Nguyen and Yi, 2019;
87   Thompson, 2020; Zheng and Pan, 2019) preventing the pro-tumoral effect of YAP/TAZ.
88   However, in CRCs the role of the Hippo pathway and of YAP and TAZ appears more complex.
89   Several studies point towards a classic pro-tumoral role for YAP and TAZ. In CRC patients
90   tumor samples, high expression and nuclear localizations of YAP correlated strongly with
91   disease evolution and bad prognosis (Ling et al., 2017; Steinhardt et al., 2008), or with
92   resistance to treatments such as 5FU or cetuximab (Kim and Kim, 2017; Lee et al., 2015; Touil
93   et al., 2014). Furthermore, invalidating YAP could blunt tumorigenic behaviors both in mice
94   CRC models (Shao et al., 2014) or in the metastatic HCT116 CRC cell line (Konsavage et al.,
95   2012). However, YAP could exhibit a tumor suppressive role in CRCs. Studies in genetic
96   mouse models have shown that YAP/TAZ restricts canonical Wnt/β-Catenin signaling thus
97   preventing intestinal stem cells amplification, and could act as tumor suppressors in CRCs
98   (Azzolin et al., 2014, 2012; Barry et al., 2013). Similarly, the loss of core Hippo kinases
99   (LATS/MST) was recently shown to inhibit tumor progression in Apc mutant mouse models
100   and in patients-derived xenografts models (Cheung et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020).

101   The tumor suppressive role of YAP in CRC is further supported by its reported role in response
102   to DNA damage inducer drugs. Studies have shown that, in different cell lines including CRC
103   lines, cell death in response to cisplatin, doxorubicin, or etoposide, is mediated by P73, a
104   protein related to the tumor-suppressor P53. Following treatments, a YAP/P73 complex
105   accumulates in the nucleus, and triggers the transcription of P73 target genes involved in cell
106   death (Lapi et al., 2008; Strano et al., 2005, 2001). The direct interaction between YAP and
107   P73 is proposed to prevent P73 destabilization by the E3-Ubiquitin Ligase ITCH (Levy et al.,
108   2007; Strano et al., 2005). This pro-apoptotic role of YAP is reminiscent to a similar role of
109   Yki in *Drosophila* (a Yki/p53 complex; Di Cara et al., 2015). Importantly, this appears specific

110   to YAP, since TAZ cannot bind to P73, further suggesting that YAP and TAZ, while

111   performing redundant roles, also possess specific activities (Reggiani et al., 2021).

112   Given that oxaliplatin constitute one of the most used drugs in the treatment of CRCs, it is

113   important to evaluate its effects with respect to the Hippo pathway and to YAP/TAZ which can

114   elicit conflicting roles to oppose or promote CRC tumorigenesis. We show here that upon

115   treatment with oxaliplatin, TAZ accumulated in the nucleus of CRC cell lines. We further show

116   that TAZ was required for early sensitivity of HCT116 to oxaliplatin. Interestingly, the nuclear

117   localisation of TAZ was important, and drugs preventing this such as Dasatinib antagonized

118   the effect of oxaliplatin. These results support an early anti-tumoral role of YAP and TAZ in

119   response to oxaliplatin suggesting particular attention to sequence of treatments and drug

120   combinations should be paid when considering potential future drugging of YAP/TAZ

121   signaling in the treatment of CRCs.

122

123 **RESULTS and DISCUSSION**

124 *Oxaliplatin treatment triggers an early cell death program*

125   Oxaliplatin is a third generation platinum compound widely used as part of the first line of

126 treatment for colon cancer patients in the FOLFOX regimen (Chaney, 1995; Raymond et al.,

127 1998; Xie et al., 2020). Inside cells, oxaliplatin binds DNA, generating adducts which

128 ultimately lead to DNA breaks and replicative stress in proliferating cells. When used on

129 proliferating cancer cells, oxaliplatin treatment resulted in concentration-dependent cell death.

130 We measured the IC50 of oxaliplatin on HCT116 colon cancer cells at 0.5μM (Supplemental

131 Figure S1A). This dose reduced the amount of cells by 50% after 4 days of treatment. This

132 dose was about 10 fold lower than the oxaliplatin concentration reported in the blood of treated

133 patients (between 3.7 and 7μM; Graham et al., 2000). The oxaliplatin dose used in this study

134 was thus compatible with the dose that could be ultimately found at the level of tumors in a

135 clinical setting, and did not represent an acute high concentration treatment, highlighting its

136 relevance for studying cellular responses to oxaliplatin.

137 When treated with oxaliplatin at IC50, HCT116 cells exhibited clear signs of DNA damage

138 such as accumulation of γH2AX, and 53BP1 puncta in the nuclei (Figure 1A&B). Consistently,

139 P53, which has been shown to control a specific cell death program in response to severe DNA

140 damage (for recent reviews Abuetabh et al., 2022; Panatta et al., 2021), accumulated strongly

141 24h after treatment (Figure 1C). Intriguingly, the P53 related protein P73, previously reported

142 to accumulate and to mediate cell death in response to DNA-damage inducing drugs such as

143 cisplatin, doxorubicin or etoposide, including in HCT116 cells (Lapi et al., 2008; Strano et al.,

144 2005), was destabilized upon oxaliplatin treatment. P63, the third member of the P53 protein

145 family, was not expressed in HCT116, even upon treatment (Figure 1C).

146 To better understand the cellular responses to oxaliplatin we profiled the changes in gene

147 expression after 24h of exposure at IC 50. This analysis revealed that the expression of only a

148 limited number of genes were affected (fold change >1.5, adjusted p-value < 0.05): 253 up-

149 regulated and 111 down-regulated (Figure 1D; Supplemental Table 1). Gene ontology

150 enrichment approaches using the g:profiler online tool (Supplemental Table 2; Raudvere et al.,

151 2019) highlighted that amongst the main cellular processes controlled by the upregulated genes

152 were DNA damage response (GO:0044819 mitotic G1/S transition checkpoint signaling;

153 GO:0000077 DNA damage checkpoint signaling…), apoptosis and cell death (GO:0045569

154 TRAIL binding; GO:0008219 cell death; GO:0012501 programmed cell death; GO:0006915

155 apoptotic process …), and p53 response (GO:0072331 signal transduction by p53 class

156 mediator), consistent with the known role of oxaliplatin generating adducts on the DNA.
157 Indeed, many genes up-regulated have previously been associated with p53 signaling, and
158 represent p53 canonical target genes such as CDKN1A/P21, P53I3, BAX, or TIGAR
159 (REAC:R-HSA-3700989 Transcriptional Regulation by P53; WP:WP4963 p53 transcriptional
160 gene network). While up-regulated genes controlled mainly cell death programs, the down-
161 regulated genes were involved in DNA replication (GO:0006260) and cell cycle (GO:0007049)
162 consistent with the well documented effect of DNA damage on blocking cell cycle and
163 proliferation (Abuetabh et al., 2022).

164 Amongst the genes mis-regulated were also genes related to inflammation and immune cell
165 recruitment (e.g. the upregulated genes CXCR2, EBI3/IL-27, or NLRP1, and the
166 downregulated gene IL17RB) consistent with the previously reported role of oxaliplatin during
167 immune cell death (Tesniere et al., 2010).

168 Finally, these analyses also highlighted several genes involved in cell architecture, namely
169 cytoskeleton and junctional complexes. Amongst the most striking features were changes in
170 the expression of integrin and extracellular matrix proteins engaging Integrins and Focal
171 Adhesions: collagens COL5A1 and COL12A1, as well as laminins LAMA3, LAMB3, and
172 LAMC1 and integrin ITGA3. These observations suggest that treated cells might remodel their
173 extracellular matrix, their Focal Adhesions, and the signaling pathways associated. The RNA-
174 Seq analyses revealed also many changes to the cytoskeleton, including an upregulation of
175 several keratin-based intermediate filaments (KRT15/19/32) and associated factors (KRTAP2-
176 3 and SFN). Several genes controlling the actin cytoskeleton were also affected such as the
177 branched actin regulators WDR63, CYFIP2, or WASF3, or different genes predicted to control
178 RHO activity (up: RHOD, EZR, and RAP2; down: ARHGAP18).

179

180 Taken together, these results suggest that upon oxaliplatin treatment, HCT116 cells implement
181 an early cell death program, which is likely mediated by the elevated P53 levels, and many
182 "bona-fide" P53 direct target genes involved in cell death are upregulated. Unlike other
183 treatments such as cisplatin, doxorubicin, and etoposide (Lapi et al., 2008; Strano et al., 2005),
184 oxaliplatin is unlikely to mobilize the p73 anti-tumoral response since P73 levels are decreased
185 upon oxaliplatin treatment. The difference is striking when considering closely related
186 platinum compounds such as cisplatin and oxaliplatin. This difference is unlikely due to timing
187 as we could not observe any P73 up-regulation after oxaliplatin treatment even after shorter or
188 longer exposures. Even though dose comparisons between different compounds is tricky, we
189 note that the cisplatin dose was 50 times higher than that of oxaliplatin. Alternatively, while

190   both are thought to act primarily as generators of lethal amounts of DNA breaks, their

191   difference in mobilizing either P73 (cisplatin) or P53 (oxaliplatin) might arise from different

192   alternative cellular effects independent of DNA damage.

193

194   ***Oxaliplatin treatment triggers YAP and TAZ nuclear accumulation***

195   Having established a regimen for treating HCT116 cells with oxaliplatin, and given the

196   complex reported roles of YAP/TAZ in CRCs (see Introduction), we investigated whether

197   YAP/TAZ could be affected, and thus monitored TEAD, YAP, and TAZ expressions and

198   localizations following oxaliplatin treatment.

199   After 24h (or 48h) of oxaliplatin treatment at the IC50, we did not observe any change in the

200   total levels or in the nuclear localization of TEAD4, the main TEAD paralogue in colon cells

201   (Figure 2A). However, TAZ and YAP nuclear localizations increased following oxaliplatin

202   treatment in our culture conditions: the TAZ and YAP nuclear staining increased by 60% and

203   55% respectively when compared to untreated cells (Figure 2A). TAZ nuclear accumulation

204   was also observed in two other CRC cell lines: LoVo and Caco-2 (Supplemental Figure S2).

205   TAZ nuclear accumulation was further confirmed by fractionation experiments (Figure 2C; see

206   Materials and Methods). This increase in TAZ nuclear localization was reflected by an increase

207   in total TAZ levels by western blot analysis (Figure 2B). However, YAP total levels, and more

208   importantly the levels of YAP phosphorylation on Serine 127 (S127) were unchanged (Figure

209   2B).

210   The YAP S127 phosphorylation is deposited by the LATS1/2 Hippo pathway terminal kinases

211   and mediate the cytoplasmic retention of YAP by the 14-3-3 proteins and later targeting for

212   proteasomal degradation (Heng et al., 2021; Pocaterra et al., 2020; Zheng and Pan, 2019).

213   Western-blot analyses on total protein extracts showed that several key proteins in the core

214   Hippo pathway were hypo-phosphorylated (p-MST1/2, p-MOB1) indicating a general lower

215   activity of the core Hippo pathway (Figure 2B). Total protein levels were also lower after

216   treatment, further suggesting a lower Hippo pathway activity in response to oxaliplatin,

217   consistent with the increased TAZ levels and increased nuclear TAZ localization (Figure

218   2A&C). However, given that levels of phospho-YAP and total YAP remained unchanged, how

219   the Hippo pathway down-regulation could have differing effects on YAP and TAZ remains to

220   be explored. YAP and TAZ appear only partly redundant, and YAP and TAZ specific

221   regulations have been reported (Reggiani et al., 2021). It is noteworthy that an additional

222   phospho-degron is present in TAZ, making it more sensitive to degradation than YAP. This

223   increased sensitivity might magnify TAZ level changes when the Hippo pathway is inhibited

224   by oxaliplatin (Azzolin et al., 2012). The decreased protein levels of different Hippo pathway

225   components in response to oxaliplatin were unlikely due to reduced mRNA abundance, since

226   we did not observe any change in our RNA-Seq, suggesting that it might be a consequence of

227   reduced translation and/or increased protein degradation. Indeed, previous studies have shown

228   that core Hippo pathway components can be regulated by ubiquitination such as LATS1 or

229   MOB1 (Ho et al., 2011; Lignitto et al., 2013; Salah et al., 2011). Whether oxaliplatin treatment

230   triggers a specific ubiquitin-mediated destabilization of the core Hippo pathway remains

231   however to be studied.

232

233   ***YAP is dispensable for Oxaliplatin-mediated cell death***

234   Performing pathway analyses on the mis-regulated genes highlighted a strong activation of

235   p53 signaling (Supplemental Table S2). Motif enrichment analyses suggested that the p53

236   family of transcription factors were the main controllers of the up-regulated genes. With the

237   exception of Axl, none of the "classic" YAP/TAZ target genes such as CTGF, CYR61/CCN1,

238   or BIRC2 (or genes involved in cell cycle progression, cytoskeleton regulation, or drug

239   resistance; (Pocaterra et al., 2020; Totaro et al., 2018) were up-regulated after oxaliplatin

240   treatment. We thus wondered what would be the role of YAP and TAZ in the response to

241   oxaliplatin treatment. Indeed, other anti-cancer drugs such as cisplatin have been shown to

242   promote cell death in part through the implementation of a P73/YAP-dependent cell death

243   program. Mechanistically, it has been proposed that DNA damage induced by cisplatin

244   stabilizes YAP which then binds and protects P73 from ITCH-mediated degradation (Levy et

245   al., 2007); the P73/YAP complex accumulates in the nucleus to turn on the expression of P73

246   target genes involved in cell death (Lapi et al., 2008; Strano et al., 2005, 2001). We thus

247   wondered whether the accumulation of TAZ (and the moderate accumulation of YAP) in the

248   nucleus could also participate in the cell death induced by oxaliplatin.

249   To test the requirement of YAP and TAZ, we invalidated YAP and TAZ by RNA interference.

250   The sole invalidation of YAP by shRNA led to a very modest reduction in oxaliplatin

251   sensitivity (IC50 in *shYAP* was determined at 0.62 compared to 0.52 in *shLuc* controls) (Figure

252   3A&C). It is noteworthy that, under the culture conditions used, YAP appeared dispensable for

253   HCT116 cells since the shRNA led to a knock-down efficiency >90%. These results suggest

254   that the cell death in response to oxaliplatin might not be dependent (or only marginally) on

255   the YAP/P73 complex as previously reported for other DNA-damage inducing compounds

256   (Lapi et al., 2008; Levy et al., 2007; Strano et al., 2005), but depends on alternative

257   mechanisms.

258

TAZ promotes cell death in response to oxaliplatin, independently of P73

260   We then investigated the role of TAZ. Strikingly, while the depletion of YAP had hardly

261   any effect, the combined knock-down of both YAP (*shYAP*) and TAZ (*siTAZ*), resulted in a

262   clear increase in resistance to oxaliplatin, where the IC50 reached 0.91µM in *shYAP/siTAZ*

263   HCT116 cells compared to 0.58µM in *shLuc/siScrambled* HCT116 control cells (Figure

264   3B&C), highlighting that TAZ participates to cell death in response to oxaliplatin. The effects

265   observed were specific to the *siTAZ*, since we observed a re-sensitization of treated cells when

266   complementing them with an expression vector for a murine version of *Taz* insensitive to the

267   *siTAZ* designed against human *TAZ* (Supplemental Figure S3A&B). We then wondered

268   whether the increased sensitivity promoted by TAZ could be dependent on P73, in a similar

269   mechanism as proposed for cisplatin. However, while P53 accumulated in response to

270   oxaliplatin in HCT116, P73 levels were decreased, undermining the role of P73 in response to

271   this drug (Figure 1C). This absence of P73 stabilization, is consistent with the absence of

272   increased YAP levels after oxaliplatin treatment (Figure 2B). These results highlight that,

273   although overexpressed YAP could bind and stabilize endogenous P73 (Supplemental Figure

274   S4; Levy et al., 2007; Strano et al., 2005, 2001), oxaliplatin treatments at the clinically relevant

275   doses used, do not lead to YAP and P73 stabilization. We then confirmed that TAZ cannot bind

276   P73 (Supplemental Figure S4), ruling out that the elevated nuclear TAZ following oxaliplatin

277   could act through a transcriptional complex with P73 to enhance cell death. A recent study

278   reported a direct interaction between TAZ and P53 in MCF7 and HCT116 cells, which resulted

279   in the inhibition of P53 activity towards senescence (Miyajima et al., 2020). However, when

280   we performed co-immunoprecipitation experiments, we were unable to document any

281   interaction between over-expressed YAP or overexpressed TAZ with endogenous P53 in

282   normal or oxaliplatin treated HCT116 cells (Supplemental Figure S4). Furthermore, the

283   increased oxaliplatin resistance of cells upon *YAP/TAZ* knockdown supports strongly that TAZ

284   acts to promote cell death and thus cooperates with P53 rather than antagonizes its activity as

285   suggested before (Miyajima et al., 2020). Taken together, these results suggest that the

286   sensitivity of HCT116 cells to oxaliplatin mediated by YAP and TAZ is not mediated by the

287   direct interaction of YAP or TAZ to P53 or P73.

288

Increased resistance to oxaliplatin upon YAP/TAZ activity blockade

290   The sh/siRNA interference results suggested that TAZ was required for sensitivity to

291   oxaliplatin. To validate independently the knock-down experiments, we used a

292   pharmacological approach with drugs targeting YAP/TAZ activity and monitored their action
293   in combination with oxaliplatin. We performed 2D matrices co-treatment analyses in which
294   cells were treated with increasing amounts of oxaliplatin and of the YAP/TAZ inhibitors
295   verteporfin or CA3 (Figure 3D and Supplemental Figure S1B &C; Liu-Chittenden et al., 2012;
296   Song et al., 2018). In both cases, the co-treatments led to a marked increase in the HCT116
297   resistance to oxaliplatin. Similar results were obtained on two other CRC cell lines: LoVo, and
298   Caco-2 (Supplemental Figure S3C&D). The mode of action of verteporfin remains unclear and
299   might involve increased retention in the cytoplasm of YAP and TAZ, or their degradation,
300   preventing them from complexing in the nucleus with their transcription factor partners (Wang
301   et al., 2016). A recent study showed that CA3 reduced the transcriptional activity mediated by
302   YAP/TAZ-TEAD (reduction in target genes expression), with only minor effects on YAP
303   protein levels (Morice et al., 2020). Even though the exact mode of action of verteporfin and
304   CA3 remain unclear, the increased resistance to oxaliplatin observed by co-treating cells with
305   YAP/TAZ pharmacological inhibitors, confirms the results obtained with the genetic knock-
306   down, and supports a model where increased TAZ activity participate in the sensitivity of CRC
307   cells to oxaliplatin.

308

Src inhibition by Dasatinib reduces HCT116 cells sensitivity to oxaliplatin

310   The results suggest thus that preventing TAZ signaling in the early phases of oxaliplatin
311   treatment would represent a counter-productive approach, leading to reduced efficacy of
312   oxaliplatin to induce cell death. Besides the canonical Hippo signaling pathway, the nucleo-
313   cytoplasmic shuttling of YAP and TAZ is under the control of many other inputs. In particular,
314   YAP and TAZ retention in the nucleus is promoted by the action of different tyrosine kinases,
315   such as ABL or SFKs (Src Family Kinases) which phosphorylate the C-termini of YAP and
316   TAZ (Y357 or Y316 respectively; Byun et al., 2017; Ege et al., 2018; Guégan et al., 2022;
317   Kedan et al., 2018; Lamar et al., 2019; Li et al., 2016). Due to its high relevance for colon
318   cancer, we focused our analysis on SRC, frequently activated in colon carcinoma (Sirvent et
319   al., 2020). An earlier study showed that depending on the colon cancer cell line considered,
320   SRC could be activated, inhibited, or not affected following oxaliplatin treatment (Kopetz et
321   al., 2009). We could replicate that SRC was not activated after 24h of oxaliplatin treatment in
322   HCT116 cells (as measured by phosphorylation on Y416; Figure 4A). Working with HCT116,
323   we are thus in a position to test the contribution of SRC to YAP/TAZ shuttling during
324   oxaliplatin treatment without the complications arising from treatment-induced acute SRC
325   activation. Previous reports suggested that the classic SRC kinase inhibitor Dasatinib could be

326   used as a drug to prevent YAP/TAZ signaling (Rosenbluh et al., 2012). Indeed, combining

327   Dasatinib with oxaliplatin treatment, prevented the nuclear accumulation of TAZ (Figure 4B).

328   The addition of Dasatinib to oxaliplatin treated cells led to a dramatic reduction of the TAZ

329   nuclear staining when compared to oxaliplatin alone (95% reduction; see Materials and

330   Methods). It should be noted however, that Dasatinib treatment at 50nM reduced slightly the

331   elevated global TAZ levels observed in response to oxaliplatin (Figure 4A). Nevertheless, even

332   though TAZ appeared a bit more unstable in presence of Dasatinib, its nucleo-cytoplasmic ratio

333   was still profoundly affected by Dasatinib, preventing nuclear accumulation (Figure 4B).

334   We thus asked what would be the combined effect of Dasatinib treatment and oxaliplatin in

335   HCT116 cells. We thus performed 2D matrices co-treatment analyses in which cells were

336   treated with increasing amounts of oxaliplatin and of Dasatinib using drug ranges

337   encompassing their respective IC50 (0.5µM for oxaliplatin and 8µM for Dasatinib;

338   Supplemental Figure S1A&D). Strikingly combining both drugs showed clear regions of

339   antagonism, suggesting that Dasatinib treatment reduced HCT116 cells sensitivity to

340   oxaliplatin (Figure 4C). These results further support a model in which the nuclear

341   relocalization of TAZ in response to oxaliplatin treatment sensitizes cells, and caution the use

342   of Dasatinib in combination to oxaliplatin.

343

344   ***YAP/TAZ promote cell death in the early response to chemotherapeutic agents***

345   Taken together the results presented here show that oxaliplatin promotes the fast nuclear

346   relocalization of TAZ which then participates to the cells sensitivity to oxaliplatin. Given that

347   we could not find any interaction between TAZ and P53 family members, but that the nuclear

348   localization of TAZ is required for its effect, we could envision several models:

349   i) either the TAZ/TEAD transcription complex, in the context of DNA damage and P53

350   activation, promotes the transcription of specific early response genes promoting cell death;

351   ii) or the slight increase at the transcriptional level of "classic" YAP/TAZ/TEAD targets

352   involved in proliferation sensitizes cells to DNA damage and replicative stress;

353   iii) or alternatively, TAZ acts through a new complex involved in cell death, independently of

354   TEAD.

355   More studies should help to distinguish between these potential models.

356

357   YAP and TAZ, have been implicated in the resistance to various chemotherapies or targeted

358   therapies in different cancers (Kim and Kim, 2017; Nguyen and Yi, 2019; Zeng and Dong,

359   2021). It should be noted that the current study focuses on the immediate effects of oxaliplatin

360   within the first hours after exposure. Whether YAP and TAZ are later important for the

361   maintenance of the resistance acquired by the surviving clones is not addressed in this study.

362   Hints towards this later role of YAP/TAZ, are suggested by the elevated YAP levels reported

363   in many cancer cells following resistant clone selection (our own unpublished results, and (Kim

364   and Kim, 2017; Nguyen and Yi, 2019; Zeng and Dong, 2021). Functional studies impairing

365   YAP demonstrated that YAP is indeed required for the tumorigenicity of resistant cells

366   (Yoshikawa et al., 2015). Furthermore, elevated YAP and TAZ nuclear staining is frequently

367   observed in patients tumor samples, including in CRCs (Li and Guan, 2022; Ling et al., 2017;

368   Steinhardt et al., 2008; Thompson, 2020). In advanced cancers, almost all patients undergo one

369   or more rounds of treatment before surgery, if surgery is possible. It is thus unclear whether

370   the increased YAP/TAZ nuclear levels observed in tumor samples reflect primary response to

371   treatment (as suggested by the current study), or whether they represent a secondary state that

372   might have been selected in the cells resistant to treatment.

373   The current study investigates the early response to oxaliplatin, supporting an early tumor

374   suppressive role of YAP/TAZ in response to treatment, in which, in the context of detrimental

375   DNA damage, YAP/TAZ activity promotes cell death. Is this role general or is it specific to

376   CRCs and oxaliplatin? Independently of the mechanism involved (YAP/P73 complex as

377   previously reported or alternative TAZ-mediated mechanisms as shown here), different breast

378   and colon cancer cell lines mobilize YAP or TAZ to promote cell death in response to many

379   different DNA damaging agents (Basu et al., 2003; Lapi et al., 2008; Levy et al., 2007; Strano

380   et al., 2005, 2001). This anti-tumoral role appears evolutionarily conserved and in *Drosophila*

381   the YAP/TAZ homologue Yki promotes cell death in response to different stress inducing

382   agents (Di Cara et al., 2015), further suggesting that YAP/TAZ might promote cell death in

383   response to chemotherapeutic agents in other cancers beside CRCs and breast cancers. When

384   considering drugging YAP/TAZ signaling in the treatment of CRCs and other cancers, special

385   attention should thus be given to drug combinations, and importantly the sequence in which

386   they will be used.

387

MATERIALS AND METHODS

shRNA construction

shRNA directed against human *YAP*, *TAZ*, or the non-relevant *Luciferase* gene were designed by adding to the selected targeted sequences, overhangs corresponding to BamHI and EcoRI cloning sites at the 5'end of forward and reverse strand, respectively. Resulting oligos were then annealed together and cloned into the pSIREN-RetroQ vector (TaKaRa) according to the manufacturer's protocol between BamHI and EcoRI cloning sites.

Targeted sequences:

shRNA-YAP(3619): CAATCACTGTGTTGTATAT

shRNA-TAZ(1417): CCCTTTCTAACCTGGCTGT

shRNA-Luciferase: CGTACGCGGAATACTTCGA

Cell culture and cell transfections

Certified Human HCT 116 and LoVo colorectal cancer cell lines (RRID:CVCL_0291, RRID:CVCL_0399) were obtained from LGC Standards (ATCC-CCL-247, ATCC-CCL-229). Caco-2 cells (RRID:CVCL_0025) were certified independently. Cells were cultured in RPMI1640 supplemented with 10% FBS at 37°C in a humidified atmosphere with 5% CO_2. Cultures were regularly checked to be mycoplasma-free. No antibiotics were used to avoid any cross-reaction with the Oxaliplatin treatment.

HCT116 cells expressing shRNA against *YAP*, *TAZ* , or *Luciferase* (Luc; control) were obtained by retroviral gene transduction of the corresponding pSIREN vectors. Retroviral particles were produced in HEK293 cells and subsequently used to infect HCT116 cells. Positive clones were selected with 1 μg/mL puromycin and pooled together.

HCT116-*shYAP/siTAZ* cells were created by transfecting 100nM of *TAZ siRNA* (Dharmacon siGENOME SMARTpool #M-016083-00-0005) into HCT116-*shYAP* cells using Lipofectamine 2000 (Invitrogen) according to manufacturer's protocol. As a negative control, 100nM of *siScrambled* (D-001206-13) was transfected into HCT116-*shLuc* cells.

Murine Taz was expressed by transfecting cells with pEF-TAZ-N-Flag from Michael Yaffe (Addgene #19025; RRID:Addgene_19025; Kanai et al., 2000).

RNA-Seq

HCT 116 cells were plated to reach 60 to 70% of confluence and treated with 0.5 μM Oxaliplatin (IC_{50}) for 24 hours. RNA was extracted using RNeasy plus mini kit (Qiagen),

421   quantified and analyzed for its integrity number (RIN) using a Bioanalyzer (Agilent 2100 at

422   the IRMB: https://irmb-montpellier.fr/single-service/transcriptome-ngs/). RNA (1 µg) with

423   RIN between 8 and 10 were sent for RNA-Sequencing analysis to Fasteris biotechnology

424   company (http://www.fasteris.com). After library preparation, sequencing was performed on

425   the Illumina NovaSeq 6000 platform (S1 2x100 full FC). Mapping on the human genome

426   GRCh38 was performed using the protocol STAR 2.7.5b leading to 80-100 Millions reads per

427   condition. Normalization and pairwise differential expression analyses were performed using

428   the R package DESeq2 (2.13) (Anders and Huber, 2010).

429   RNA-Seq data has been deposited in NCBI's Gene Expression Omnibus under accession

430   number GSE227315.

431

432   ***Western blotting***

433   Proteins issued from transfected untreated and treated HCT 116 cells were extracted, analyzed

434   by SDS-PAGE. Dilutions and antibodies' references are listed below.

435   Flag M2 (1/2000; Sigma-Aldrich #F1804)

436   GAPDH (1/3000; Proteintech #60004)

437   Histone H3 (1/1000; Cell Signaling Technology CST #4499)

438   LATS1 (1/1000; CST #3477)

439   MOB1 (1/1000; CST #13730)

440   p-MOB1 (1/1000; CST #8699)

441   MST1 (1/1000; CST #3682)

442   p-MST1/2 (1/1000; CST #49332)

443   NF2 antibody (Proteintech #26686-1-AP)

444   P53 (1/5000; Proteintech #10442-1-AP)

445   P63 (1/250; Santa Cruz #sc25268)

446   P73 (1/1000; CST #14620)

447   p-SRC Y416(1/1000; CST #2105)

448   TAZ (1/1000; CST #4883)

449   TEAD4 (1/250; Santa Cruz #sc101184)

450   Tubulin (1/10000; Sigma-Aldrich #T6074)

451   YAP (1/1000; CST #14074)

452   p-YAP S127 (1/1000; CST #13008)

453

454   ***Immunoprecipitation and co-immunoprecipitation***

455   Protein extracts were prepared in lysis buffer (NaCl 150 mM, Tris pH 7.4 10 mM, EDTA 1
456   mM, Triton X-100 1%, NP-40 0.5%, cOmplete, EDTA-free protease inhibitors (Roche
457   #11873580001) for 30 min on ice before centrifugation. Immunoprecipitations were performed
458   overnight at 4°C on a rocking wheel using mouse EZview Red anti-Flag M2 affinity gel
459   (Sigma-Aldrich #F1804) after transfections of either p2xFlag CMV2 (empty vector), p2xFlag
460   CMV2-YAP2 (YAP1; Addgene #19045) or p2xFlag CMV2-WWTR1 (TAZ). After Flag
461   immunoprecipitation, washes in lysis buffer were performed, followed by protein elution by
462   competition with 3XFLAG peptide (150 ng/µL final concentration) during 1 hour at 4°C. The
463   different immunoprecipitates were then subjected to Western blotting for detection of protein
464   complexes.

465

466   *Immunofluorescence*

467   Cells seeded on glass coverslips were fixed 10 min in paraformaldehyde (4 %), before being
468   permeabilized in PBS / 0.1% TritonX-100 for 10 min. After blocking in PBS / 0.5% BSA, cells
469   were incubated with primary antibodies overnight at 4C. Primary antibodies used are listed
470   below. Secondary Alexa Fluor Antibodies (1/600; Invitrogen) were used as described
471   previously (Kantar et al., 2021) for 1 hour at room temperature before mounting the coverslips
472   with Vectashield (Vector Laboratories #H-1200) and imaging on Zeiss Apotome or Leica
473   Thunder microscopes.
474   Antibodies used were rabbit anti-53BP1 (1/100; CST #4937), mouse anti-phospho-Histone
475   H2AX clone JBW301 (1/200; Millipore #05-636), anti-TAZ (1/100; CST #4883), mouse anti-
476   TEAD4 (1/50; Santa Cruz #sc101184), and rabbit anti-YAP (1/100; CST #14074).

477

478   *Nuclear staining quantifications in HCT116 cells*

479   Quantification was performed using ImageJ. Binary mask corresponding to the cell nuclei was
480   based on DAPI staining. Two nuclei touching each other (and therefore recognized as one on
481   binary mask) were manually separated by drawing a 2-pixel line between them. All incomplete
482   nuclei on the edge of the image as well as those that were in mitosis or mechanically damaged
483   were excluded from the analysis. The total signal was calculated as "corrected total cell
484   fluorescence" (CTCF) according to the following formula:
485   *CTCF = Integrated Density – (Area of selected cell * Mean fluorescence of the background)*
486   Background fluorescence was measured on three different spots (roughly the size of cell
487   nucleus) outside of the cell. In case of 53BP1 and g-H2AX staining, the whole area covered by
488   the nuclear mask was quantified as one. For YAP and TAZ nuclear staining, each cell was

489   quantified separately using particle analysis tool. Cytoplasmic levels of YAP and TAZ were

490   not quantified due to the small size of the cytoplasm in HCT116 cells.

491

492   ***IC50 calculation and cytotoxicity***

493   Cell growth inhibition and cell viability after incubation with Oxaliplatin (Sigma Aldrich

494   #O9512), Verteporfin (Sigma Aldrich #SML0534), CA3 (CIL56, Selleckchem, #S8661) or

495   Dasatinib (Selleckchem #S1021) were assessed using the sulforhodamine B (SRB) assay.

496   Exponentially growing cells (750 cells/well) were seeded in 96-well plates in RPMI-1640

497   medium supplemented with 10% FCS. After 24 hours, serial dilutions of the tested drugs were

498   added and each concentration was tested in triplicate. After 96 hours, cells were fixed with

499   10% trichloroacetic acid and stained with 0.4% SRB in 1% acetic acid. SRB-fixed cells were

500   dissolved in 10 mmol/L Tris–HCl and absorbance at 540 nm was read using an MRX plate

501   reader (Dynex, Inc., Vienna, VA, USA). IC50 was determined graphically from the

502   cytotoxicity curves.

503   For HCT116-*shYAP/siTAZ*, cells were transfected in 6 well plates 24h before starting the cell

504   growth and cytotoxicity assays.

505

506   ***Quantification of the interaction effect***

507   The interaction between the drugs tested *in vitro* was investigated with a concentration matrix

508   test, in which increasing concentration of each single drug were assessed with all possible

509   combinations of the other drugs. For each combination, the percentage of expected growing

510   cells in the case of effect independence was calculated according to the Bliss equation (Greco

511   et al., 1995):

512 $$fu_c = fu_A fu_B$$

513   where fu_c is the expected fraction of cells unaffected by the drug combination in the case of

514   effect independence, and fu_A and fu_B are the fractions of cells unaffected by treatment *A* and *B,*

515   respectively. The difference between the fu_c value and the fraction of living cells in the

516   cytotoxicity test was considered as an estimation of the interaction effect, with positive values

517   indicating synergism and negative values antagonism.

518

519

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

VS, LHM, LJ, and DK performed experiments. CG and AD designed the experiments. VS, LHM, MR, DK, CG and AD analyzed the data. VS, LHM, DT, LB, CG, and AD interpreted the data. CG and AD wrote the manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

All authors declare no competing interest

732 **FIGURE LEGENDS**

733 **Figure 1. Oxaliplatin treatment induces DNA damage**

734 **A**. Immunofluorescence experiments performed on HCT116 cells treated, or not, with
735 oxaliplatin (0.5 µM) monitoring γ-H2AX (yellow). DAPI (blue) was used to stain DNA and
736 the nuclei. Quantification of the staining is shown on the right side and is represented as the
737 corrected nuclear fluorescence. Data are represented as the mean ± SEM. (n=3). Unpaired two-
738 tailed Student's t-test; ** p<0.01.

739 **B**. Immunofluorescence experiments performed on HCT116 cells treated, or not, with
740 oxaliplatin (0.5 µM) monitoring 53BP1 (grey). DAPI (blue) was used to stain DNA and the
741 nuclei. Quantification of the staining is shown on the right side and is represented as the
742 corrected nuclear fluorescence. Data are represented as the mean ± SEM. (n=3). Unpaired two-
743 tailed Student's t-test; *** p<0.001.

744 **C**. Western blot analysis showing protein expression of TEAD4 and p53 family of proteins in
745 HCT116 treated (Oxa), or not (NT) with oxaliplatin (0.5 µM). GAPDH was used as a loading
746 control (n=3).

747 **D.** Heat map corresponding to the genes differentially expressed in HCT116 cells after 24h of
748 oxaliplatin treatment at IC50 (see Supplemental Table 1). The three replicates for the non-
749 treated (NT) and treated (Oxa) are shown.

750

751 **Figure 2. Oxaliplatin treatment triggers YAP and TAZ nuclear accumulation**

752 **A**. Immunofluorescence experiments performed on HCT116 cells treated, or not, with
753 oxaliplatin (0.5 µM) monitoring TEAD4 (top panels), YAP (middle panels), and TAZ (bottom
754 panels) nuclear localization (red). DAPI (blue) was used to stain DNA and the nuclei.
755 Quantification of both stainings are shown on the right side of the figures and are represented
756 as the corrected nuclear fluorescence. Data are represented as the mean ± SEM (n=3). Unpaired
757 two-tailed Student's t-test; **** p < 0.0001.

758 **B**. Western blot analysis showing protein expression and/or activation of Hippo pathway
759 components in HCT116 cells treated (Oxa), or not (NT) with oxaliplatin (0.5 µM). GAPDH
760 was used as a loading control (n=3).

761 **C**. Western blot analysis after subcellular fractionation showing the relative amount of YAP
762 and TAZ protein in the nuclear fraction of HCT116 cells treated (Oxa), or not (NT) with
763 oxaliplatin (0.5 µM). Histone H3 was used as a nuclear loading control for the fractionation
764 (n=3).

765

Figure 3. YAP and TAZ are required for oxaliplatin-mediated cell death

A. HCT116-*shYAP* and HCT116-*shLuc* cell lines were treated with increasing doses of oxaliplatin for 96h. Cell viability analysis was then assessed using SRB assay and the IC50 of oxaliplatin was calculated as the concentration needed to kill 50% of the cells (shown in the inset). Paired two-tailed Student's t-test ,* p<0.05.

B. HCT116-*shYAP-siTAZ* and HCT116-*shLuc-siCtl* (control) cell lines were treated with increasing doses of oxaliplatin for 96h. Cell viability analysis was then assessed using SRB assay and the IC50 of oxaliplatin was calculated as the concentration needed to kill 50% of the cells (shown in the inset). Paired two-tailed Student's t-test, ** p<0.01.

C. Western blot analysis showing protein expression of TAZ and YAP in HCT116-*shLuc*, -*siTAZ*, -*shYAP* and both -*shYAP-siTAZ* used in panel A and B. Tubulin was used as a loading control (n=3).

D. HCT116 cells were incubated with increasing concentrations of oxaliplatin and either Verteporfin or CA3. Cell viability was assessed with the SRB assay in 2D to obtain the viability matrix. Drug concentrations were as follows: Verteporfin (from 0.437 to 7 µM), CA3 (from 0.004 to 0.75 µM) and Oxaliplatin (from 0.0185 to 1.2 µM). The synergy matrices were calculated as described in Materials and Methods.

Figure 4. Src inhibition by Dasatinib reduces HCT116 cells sensitivity to oxaliplatin

A. Western blot analysis showing protein expression of YAP and TAZ in HCT116 treated, or not, with oxaliplatin (0.5 µM) and/or Dasatinib (50 nM and 100 nM). Phopsho-SRC blotting was used to evaluate the inhibition of SRC activity using Dasatinib. GAPDH was used as a loading control (n=3). Quantification of the blots (performed using Image J software) is shown on the right side of the figure.

B. Immunofluorescence experiments performed in HCT116 cells treated, or not, with oxaliplatin (0.5 µM) and/or Dasatinib (50 nM) monitoring YAP (top panels) and TAZ (bottom panels) nuclear localization (red). DAPI (blue) was used to stain DNA and the nuclei. Quantification of both stainings are shown on the right side of the figures and are represented as the corrected nuclear fluorescence. Data are represented as the mean ± SEM (n=3). Unpaired two-tailed Student's t-test; ****p < 0.0001.

C. HCT116 colorectal cancer cell lines were incubated with increasing concentrations of oxaliplatin and Dasatinib. Cell viability was assessed with the SRB assay in 2D to obtain the viability matrix. Drug concentrations were as follows: Dasatinib (from 1 to 16 µM) and

799 oxaliplatin (from 0.0185 to 1.2 μM). The synergy matrix was calculated as described in

800 Materials and Methods.

801

802

803

804 **SUPPLEMENTAL FIGURE LEGENDS**

805

806 **Supplemental Figure S1. Cell viability in response to drugs**

807 Cells were treated with increasing doses of oxaliplatin (**A**), Verteporfin (**B**), CA3 (**C**) and

808 Dasatinib (**D**) for 96h. Cell viability analysis was then assessed using SRB assay and the IC50

809 of each drug could be calculated as the concentration that reduced cell numbers by 50% (shown

810 in the insets).

811

812 **Supplemental Figure S2. TAZ nuclear accumulation in LoVo and Caco-2 CRC cell lines**

813 **A-B**. Immunofluorescence experiments performed on LoVo (A) and Caco-2 (B) cells treated

814 or not, with oxaliplatin at IC50 (0.6 μM and 0.3 μM respectively) monitoring TAZ nuclear

815 localization (green). DAPI (blue) was used to stain DNA and the nuclei. Quantifications are

816 shown on the right side of the figure and are represented as the corrected nuclear fluorescence.

817 Data are represented as the mean ± SEM. Unpaired two-tailed Student's t-test; **** $p < 0.0001$.

818

819 **Supplemental Figure S3. TAZ mediates sensitivity to oxaliplatin in CRC cell lines**

820 **A**. HCT116-*shYAP-siScramb* (control), HCT116-*shYAP-siTAZ,* and HCT116-*shYAP-siTAZ*

821 transfected with a Flag tagged murine Taz *(pEFmTaz)* cell lines were treated with increasing

822 doses of oxaliplatin for 96h. Cell viability analysis was then assessed using SRB assay and the

823 IC50 of oxaliplatin was calculated as the concentration needed to kill 50% of the cells. Paired

824 two-tailed Student's t-test, ** $p<0.01$, ns non-significant.

825 **B**. Western blot analysis showing protein expression of TAZ and Flag in the different cell lines

826 used in panel A. GAPDH was used as a loading control.

827 **C-D**. LoVo (C) and Caco-2 (D) cells were incubated with increasing concentrations of

828 oxaliplatin and either Verteporfin or CA3. Cell viability was assessed with the SRB assay in

829 2D to obtain the viability matrix. Drug concentrations were as follows: Verteporfin (from 0.875

830 to 14 μM), CA3 (from 0.15 to 2.4 μM) and Oxaliplatin (from 0.075 to 4.8 μM). The synergy

831 matrices were calculated as described in Materials and Methods.

832

833   **Supplemental Figure S4. Interaction between YAP/TAZ and P53 protein family members**

834   **in HCT116 cells**

835   Western blot analysis of Flag (YAP or TAZ) immunoprecipitates on protein extracts from

836   HCT116 treated (Oxa), or not (NT) showing an interaction between YAP and p73 (n=3).

837

838

839   **Supplemental Table 1. Differentially expressed genes in HCT116 cells after oxaliplatin**

840   **treatment for 24h at IC50**

841   Only differentially expressed genes with an adjusted p-value< 0.05 are shown. Columns are:

842   test_id: position and description of the feature tested

843   ENSG_ID: Ensemble gene ID

844   symbol: gene symbol

845   sample_1: first group in the comparison; untreated cells

846   sample_2: second group in the comparison; cells treated with oxaliplatin

847   mean_1: mean of normalized count for the first group in the comparison

848   mean_2: mean of normalized count for the second group in the comparison

849   log2FoldChange: log2 fold change estimates

850   pvalue: pvalue

851   padj: pvalue adjusted for multiple testing with the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure, which

852   controls false discovery rate (FDR)

853

854   **Supplemental Table 2. g:profiler functional enrichment analyses**

855   Columns are :

856   GO_ID: Gene Ontology

857   KEGG_ID: KEGG pathways

858   REAC_ID: Reactome pathways

859   WP_ID: WikiPathways

860   TF_ID: regulatory motif matches from TRANSFAC

861   MIRNA_ID: miRNA targets from miRTarBase

862   CORUM_ID: protein complexes from CORUM

863   HPA_ID: tissue specificity from Human Protein Atlas

864   HP_ID: human disease phenotypes from Human Phenotype Ontology

865

866   Description: description of the functional group

867   p.Val: p-value

868   FDR: false discovery rate

869   Genes: genes found in the intersection

870

871   **Supplemental Table 3. RNA-Seq statistics**

872