

1 **Gene networks and expression quantitative trait loci associated with platinum-based**
2 **chemotherapy response in high-grade serous ovarian cancer**

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8 **Abstract**

9 **Introduction:** A major impediment in the treatment of ovarian cancer is the relapse of
10 platinum-resistant tumors, which occurs in approximately 25% of patients. A better
11 understanding of the genetic mechanisms underlying response to platinum-based
12 chemotherapy will improve treatment efficacy.

13 **Objectives:** We used a systems biology approach to identify novel gene networks and
14 regulatory sequence variants associated with platinum-based chemotherapy response.

15 **Methods:** From the Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA), we classified high-grade serous ovarian
16 carcinoma (HGSOC) patients who remained cancer-free 12 months following completion of
17 platinum-based chemotherapy as “chemo-sensitive” (N=160) and those who had cancer
18 recurrence within six months of chemotherapy as “chemo-resistant” (N=110). Both univariate
19 and multivariate analysis of gene expression microarrays identified differentially expressed
20 genes and co-expression networks associated with chemotherapy response. Moreover, we
21 integrated genomics data to determine expression quantitative trait loci (eQTL).

22 **Results:** One differentially expressed gene encoding Valosin-containing protein (VCP) and
23 five co-expression network modules were associated with chemotherapy response in HGSOC
24 patients. These genes contribute to protein processing in the endoplasmic reticulum, which
25 has been previously implicated in variable chemotherapy response. In addition, 192 eQTLs
26 were associated with co-expressed gene modules as well as genes regulating cholesterol
27 levels, also previously described to affect chemotherapy response.

28 **Conclusion:** This study implicates known and novel gene networks underlying response to
29 platinum-based chemotherapy among HGSOC patients. A better understanding of the genetic

30 determinants of chemotherapy response will facilitate genetic testing for predicting drug
31 response, which will increase treatment efficacy and identify patients for alternative therapies.
32

33 **Introduction**

34 Ovarian cancer is the most lethal gynecological malignancy and the 8th leading cause of
35 cancer death in women around the world.¹ According to the Global Cancer Observatory
36 report in 2012, ovarian cancer accounts for 3.6% of all cancer cases and 4.3% of all cancer
37 related deaths worldwide.² High-grade serous ovarian carcinoma (HGSOC) is the most
38 malignant form of ovarian cancer that accounts for up to 70% of all cases.³ Routine diagnosis
39 is often difficult due to the lack of mass screening methods and heterogenous manifestations
40 of the cancer symptoms, which result in approximately 75% of patients diagnosed with
41 advanced stages.⁴ The average 5-year survival rates are 39% for Stage 3 and 17% for Stage 4
42 cancers.¹

43 The current standard of care for ovarian cancer is aggressive cytoreductive surgery
44 followed by platinum-based chemotherapy.⁴ However, this standard of care is not effective
45 for all patients, with approximately 25% experiencing relapse within six months following
46 platinum-based therapy, likely due to the development of antineoplastic resistance.⁵ The
47 median survival time for recurrent ovarian cancers range from 12-24 months.^{6,7} Treatment
48 options for patients with recurrent ovarian cancer include non-platinum-based chemotherapy
49 regimens, immunotherapy, and molecular targeted therapy.^{7,8}

50 Ovarian cancer has a multifactorial etiology that includes genetic and non-genetic
51 risk factors. An estimated 23% of cases are hereditary, but the majority are sporadic with
52 multiple reported risk factors such as history of gravidity, infertility, and late age
53 menopause.^{9,10} A better understanding of the etiology of ovarian cancer, as well as the genetic
54 mechanisms underlying variable response to platinum-based chemotherapy is needed for
55 improved diagnosis and treatment. For example, previous studies reported that *BRCA1* and

56 *BRCA2* genes, associated with increased risk of ovarian cancer, harbor mutations associated
57 with platinum drug sensitivity and survival time.¹¹ Similarly, tumor suppressor genes such as
58 *RBI*, *NFI*, *RAD51B*, *PTEN* have been associated with acquired chemotherapy resistance.¹²
59 Earlier studies have also highlighted the importance of the immune system in the treatment of
60 ovarian cancer. For example, loss of chemokines and disruptions to the IFN- γ pathway have
61 been associated with poor treatment outcomes in HGSOE patients¹³ whereas the NF κ B
62 signaling pathway and elevated expression of *STAT1* were associated with increased response
63 to platinum therapy.^{14,15,16} However, these known genetic variations do not account for all of
64 the variability in chemotherapy response among HGSOE patients and there is currently no
65 screening method to accurately predict prognosis prior to start of chemotherapy. Thus, further
66 studies are necessary to determine additional modulators of chemotherapy response, which
67 can be used as biomarkers for genetic testing.

68 In this study, we classified HGSOE patients as sensitive to platinum-based
69 chemotherapy if they did not experience a recurrence one year after completing
70 chemotherapy. Our definition differs from previous studies which classified patients as
71 sensitive if they did not relapse after a platinum-free interval of six months or greater (The
72 Cancer Genome Atlas Research Network, 2011). In addition, we classified patients as
73 resistant if they experienced tumor progression during chemotherapy or had a recurrence
74 within the six months following the end of therapy. Our classification of sensitive and
75 resistant patients are in accordance with the standard Gynecologic Oncology Group (GOG)
76 criteria.⁵ Consequently, we excluded patients who had a recurrence between six to 12 months
77 after platinum therapy. Our strategy for dichotomizing chemotherapy response using these
78 “extremes” of response instead of a single threshold aims to enrich for genetic differences
79 between resistant and sensitive patients.

80 In addition to our novel classification of chemotherapy response in ovarian cancer
81 patients, we applied a multivariate, systems biology analysis approach to identify and
82 characterize the gene networks associated with this variable therapeutic outcome. Earlier
83 studies largely focused on univariate analysis of gene expression data known as differential
84 gene expression (DGE) analysis^{17,18}. This analysis assumes that each gene functions in
85 isolation within the genome and is limited in statistical power due to multiple testing
86 corrections to reduce likelihood of false positives. The multivariate approach used in this
87 study identifies novel connections among genes, which represent potential interactions of
88 genes within biological pathways or networks. Specifically, we applied Weighted Gene Co-
89 expression Network Analysis¹⁹ (WGCNA), which uses an unsupervised machine-learning
90 algorithm to identify clusters of highly correlated or co-expressed genes. Moreover, we
91 correlated sequence variations with co-expressed gene networks known as expression
92 Quantitative trait loci (eQTLs). A better understanding of the biological mechanisms
93 regulating chemotherapy response will enable more effective treatments either by improving
94 the accuracy of genetic testing or through the identification of novel therapies for cancer
95 patients.

96

97 **Methods**

98 ***Patient Classification:***

99 Using a cohort of 608 high-grade grade serous ovarian carcinoma (HGSOC) patients from
100 The Cancer Genome Atlas Project (TCGA), we retrieved clinical data from the Genomic Data
101 Commons Portal via the TCGAAbiolinks R/Bioconductor package²⁰. Among the HGSOC
102 cases, 587 had available clinical data; these were filtered and subsequently classified into two
103 distinct groups based on their response to platinum-based chemotherapy. Specifically, we
104 focused on the time interval between a patients' last primary platinum treatment and the onset
105 of a recurrent tumor, or progression of an existing one for those patients whose initial tumor
106 did not undergo complete remission¹⁷. We excluded patients with insufficient clinical
107 information, were administered non-platinum drugs, and those who had died for any reason
108 within a year of initial diagnosis, as they cannot be defined conclusively as sensitive or
109 resistant to their adjuvant chemotherapy. Of those remaining, a total of 270 patients were
110 classified as either resistant or sensitive to platinum-based chemotherapy. Patients who
111 developed a new tumor in less than six months following their last platinum treatment were
112 defined as resistant (N=110). In contrast, those who did not have a recurrent tumor event
113 more than a year after their last primary platinum treatment were defined as sensitive
114 (N=160). Those who had a recurrent tumour event between six months to one year following
115 therapy were excluded from the study. This strategy was used to enrich for the genetic
116 differences between the two drug response groups.

117 ***Transcriptomics Data Processing and Analysis:***

118 *Expression Microarrays:* Expression data from the Affymetrix ht_hg_u133a microarray chip
119 was used for univariate and multivariate (co-expression) analysis. Of the 270 subjects

120 classified as sensitive or resistant to chemotherapy, 238 had expression array data (N=138
121 sensitive, 100 resistant). Array measures were adjusted with robust multi-array average
122 (RMA)²¹, followed by quantile normalization, and log-transformation using the *affy* package
123 from Bioconductor²². Two potential outliers and two duplicated samples were removed from
124 the study using the *arrayQualityMetrics* package for quality control (see **Supplemental Data**
125 **1** for normalization, transformation and quality control assessments), resulting in 135
126 sensitive and 99 resistant subjects remaining. Probe sets were sorted by median absolute
127 deviation (MAD), and the top 50% of the probes with highest variation (n=11,107) were
128 included for analysis. This non-specific filtering step was used to remove non-variable probes,
129 therefore, reducing multiple testing and likelihood of false positives.

130 Differential Gene Expression Analysis: The *Limma*²³ package in Bioconductor²⁴ was used to
131 identify differentially expressed genes between chemo-sensitive and resistant groups, using
132 linear models. We applied the false discovery rate (FDR) method for multiple testing
133 correction to reduce the likelihood of false-positive results. Age at diagnosis and stage of
134 tumor were included as covariates in this analysis (**Supplemental Data 2**).

135 Weighed Gene Co-expression Network Analysis (WGCNA): We performed hierarchical
136 clustering of genes with the R package *WGCNA*¹⁹, grouping genes based on their similarity in
137 expression. This was achieved by first creating a similarity matrix using Pearson correlations
138 of expression among all genes. The resulting matrix was raised to a soft-thresholding power
139 of 9, as suggested by the soft-thresholding power estimation plot (**Supplemental Figure 1**).
140 This process amplifies the connection strength between genes and reduces noise in the
141 adjacency matrix. To account for topological similarity of genes, the number of shared
142 neighbors among genes was used to give weight to gene-gene connectivity. To avoid
143 excessive splitting of genes into smaller modules, minimum module size was set to 30, split

144 sensitivity (deep split) to 4, and modules with similar expression profiles were merged at a
145 height of 0.5 (**Supplemental Figure 2**). Using principal component analysis, we calculated
146 module eigengene for each co-expression cluster to summarize module expression into a
147 single measure. Each module eigengene was tested for association with platinum
148 chemotherapy response using generalized linear models, while adjusting for age at diagnosis
149 and stage of cancer as covariates. Finally, we used *Cytoscape*²⁵, an open source
150 bioinformatics platform, to visualize gene co-expression networks.

151 *Gene function and pathway annotations:* We used the Database for Annotation, Visualization
152 and Integrated Discovery (DAVID)²⁶ to identify biological pathways and functions that were
153 enriched in each significant gene co-expression module. We also screened significant genes
154 in the GeneMANIA²⁷ database to identify for functional connections reported in published
155 literature. Next, we searched the UCSC TFBS conservation sites track with DAVID to
156 identify enriched motifs of transcription factors that may co-regulate genes within the
157 associated clusters. Finally, we used the drug–gene interaction database (DGIdb)²⁸, a public
158 database with curation of data describing relationships between genes, chemicals, drugs, and
159 pathological phenotype, to identify genes with prior reported associations with
160 chemotherapeutic agents.

161 ***Genomics Data Processing and Analysis:***

162 *Genomics Data:* Single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) data from the germline tissues
163 (blood derived normal or solid tissue normal, based on availability) were obtained from the
164 TCGA legacy database. The Affymetrix Genome-Wide Human SNP Array 6.0 was used to
165 capture genetic variations, which detected 906,600 SNPs. Of the 270 subjects classified as
166 resistant or sensitive to platinum-based chemotherapy, 266 (157 sensitive and 109 resistant)

167 had genotype data available.

168 Imputations: The imputation of autosomal chromosomes was performed using the Michigan
169 imputation server pipeline²⁹. We used the 1000 Genome Project phase 3 sequencing data
170 (version 5)³⁰ reference panel for the imputation of missing genotypes. We then used Eagle
171 v.2.3³¹ for phasing of the genotypes to their respective chromosomes. For the imputation of
172 variants on the X chromosome, SHAPEIT³² was used for phasing in combination with the
173 1000 genomes project phase 3 (version 5) reference panel (**Supplemental Data 3**).

174 Quality control:

175 *Subject level:* Two pairs of individuals had a relatedness coefficient (π -hat) > 0.9, which are
176 likely duplicated samples. One subject from each pair was randomly removed from the
177 dataset. Next, inbreeding coefficients (F) were computed for each subject using PLINK³³. A
178 total of 18 subjects with high homozygosity (F>0.05) or heterozygosity (F<-0.05) rates were
179 excluded. Moreover, sex was computed based on heterozygosity rates (F) of the X
180 chromosome. Four subjects whose predicted gender was undefined (F>0.2) were removed
181 from the study.

182 *SNP level:* SNPs with minor allele frequencies (MAF) less than 1% or with genotyping call
183 rate less than 90% were removed. This step removed 38,430,595 SNPs with MAF < 0.01,
184 resulting in 9,528,963 SNPs to be used for further analysis.

185 Genome-wide Association Study: After imputations and quality control filtering, 240 subjects
186 (N= 142 sensitive, 98 resistant) and a total of 9,528,963 SNPs (MAF > 0.1) remained for
187 analysis (**Supplemental Data 4**). Plink (v.1.90) was applied with association analysis of
188 platinum-based chemotherapy response using a logistic regression method. Age at diagnosis
189 and tumor stages were included as covariates.

190 ***Expression Quantitative Trait Loci (eQTL) Analysis:***

191 Common SNPs (MAF > 0.01) were tested for association with gene expression of individual
192 genes and module eigengenes using the *matrixeQTL* R package³⁴. Correlated loci indicated
193 potential regulatory function of the SNPs on the expression of the nearby corresponding gene,
194 known as cis-expression Quantitative Trait Loci (cis-eQTL). Cis-eQTL were defined as
195 correlated SNPs within 1 Mb from the gene transcriptional start site (TSS).

196

197 **Results**

198 Differential gene expression (DGE) analysis returned one significant probe mapping to
199 Valosin Containing Protein (*VCP*) with FDR adjusted p-value < 0.05 (**Figure 1**) as well as
200 606 probes mapping to 521 unique genes with nominal significance (unadjusted p-value <
201 0.05; **Supplemental Table 1**). Functional annotation analysis showed that the 521 genes were
202 enriched for many oncogenic processes, such as cellular response to DNA damage stimulus
203 (GO:0006974), DNA repair (GO:0006281), positive regulation of cell growth (GO:0030307),
204 and positive regulation of apoptotic process (GO:0043065). Pathway analysis identified many
205 immune related pathways, such as mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK) pathway and B-
206 Cell antigen receptor (BCR) signaling pathway. A detailed list of functional annotations and
207 identified pathways of differentially expressed genes can be found in **Supplemental Data 5**.

208 The hierarchical clustering of genes using *WGCNA* resulted in 86 unique modules of
209 co-expressed genes (**Supplemental Table 2**). Each module was assessed for association with
210 chemotherapy response (**Supplemental Figure 3**). Five gene clusters (*honeydew1*, *lightcyan1*,
211 *lightpink3*, *orangered4*, and *skyblue3*) were identified to be correlated with sensitivity to
212 chemotherapy (p < 0.05); one gene cluster remained significant after Bonferroni correction

213 (*honeydew1*, $p\text{-value}=7e-05$) (**Figure 2**). The significant modules were annotated using
214 DAVID, which identified gene enrichment for biological pathways including apoptosis,
215 negative regulation of the Wnt signaling pathway, transcription, immune responses, and DNA
216 double-strand break processing involved in repair via single-strand annealing. GeneMANIA
217 analysis showed that genes in these modules were previously reported in 49 publications,
218 some of which documented associations with oncogenic pathways and chemotherapeutic
219 outcomes. We searched in these genes in the gene-drug interaction database (DGIdb) and
220 found that 35 were associated with chemotherapeutic agents such as carboplatin and
221 paclitaxel. Finally, we identified over-represented conserved transcription factor binding sites
222 located in genes from each module. A detailed list of functional annotations, transcription
223 factors and pathways related to gene modules can be found in **Supplemental Data 6**.

224 Our genome-wide association study (GWAS) of SNPs did not identify significantly
225 correlated variants for platinum chemotherapy response. The Manhattan plot (**Figure 3**),
226 shows that all SNPs fell below the genome-wide significance threshold ($p < 5 \times 10^{-8}$), as
227 indicated by the red horizontal line. As this may be due to insufficient statistical power, we
228 performed a targeted association analysis on two well-known genes associated with
229 chemotherapeutic outcomes in ovarian cancer: *BRCA1* and *BRCA2*. Of the 237 SNPs in
230 *BRCA1* and 256 in *BRCA2*, we identified 34 SNPs in *BRCA2* and 1 SNP in *BRCA1* that were
231 significantly associated with chemotherapy response (**Supplemental Table 3**).

232 Next, SNPs were tested for correlation with expression of the 606 differentially
233 expressed probes and 5 co-expression modules. This identified 5,242 cis-eQTL associated
234 with the expression of differentially expressed probes, and 192 cis-eQTL associated with co-
235 expression networks (**Supplemental Data 7**).

236

237 **Discussion**

238 In this manuscript, we identified novel genes and gene networks correlated with variable
239 response to platinum-based chemotherapy in HGSOC patients. Using a univariate analysis
240 approach, we identified a differentially expressed locus encoding the valosin-containing
241 protein (*VCP*) associated with sensitivity to platinum-based chemotherapy. In addition, we
242 applied a multivariate, co-expression analysis method for identifying groups of
243 interconnected genes that could contribute to common biological pathways. This method
244 identified 5 clusters of co-expressed genes nominally correlated with chemo-response, one of
245 which remained significant after correction of multiple testing. Genes in these modules have
246 been annotated to be associated with biological pathways such as apoptosis, transcription,
247 immune response, negative regulation of the Wnt signaling pathway and DNA double-strand
248 break processing involved in repair via single-strand annealing.

249 The most significantly associated probe identified in the DGE analysis was for a
250 gene encoding Valosin-containing protein (*VCP*, $p = 3.91E-06$). *VCP* plays a critical role in
251 disintegrating large polypeptide cellular structures for further degradation by proteolytic
252 enzymes. It functions to regulate important pathways of DNA repair, replication and cell
253 cycle progression by removing faulty polypeptide structures from chromatin material,
254 ribosomes, endoplasmic reticulum and mitochondria. This gene has been previously
255 identified as a potential biomarker for predicting the success of platinum-based chemotherapy
256 in lung cancer patients.³⁵ Drugs that inhibit *VCP*, such as the novel inhibitor CB-5083³⁶, are
257 currently being evaluated for their prospective anticancer properties.

258 Many of the nominally correlated genes from our DGE analysis are enriched for

259 pathways known to be critical for oncogenesis and chemotherapeutic drug resistance. For
260 example, probe 213532_at mapping to the A Disintegrin and Metalloproteinase-17 (*ADAM17*)
261 gene was upregulated in the chemo-resistant group ($p = 0.017$). This is consistent with prior
262 studies, which reported that overexpression of *ADAM17* results in reduced cisplatin-induced
263 apoptosis in hepatocellular carcinoma cells and may contribute to cisplatin resistance via the
264 EGFR pathway³⁷. Moreover, we identified another up-regulated probe 205239_at ($p = 0.003$)
265 for the gene encoding Amphiregulin (AREG), a protein found in the EGFR signaling pathway,
266 which has been reported to promote ovarian cancer stemness and drug resistance to anti-
267 cancer therapy.³⁸ Taken together, our findings support a potential role of the AREG-EGFR
268 signaling pathway in the development of platinum-resistance in ovarian carcinoma.

269 It is also important to note that one of the most enriched pathways from our DGE
270 analysis was the protein processing in endoplasmic reticulum (hsa04141) pathway. Using
271 DAVID, we have identified 18 differentially expressed probes mapping to 15 unique genes
272 within this pathway. Prior studies have highlighted that endoplasmic reticulum (ER) stress
273 may cause cisplatin resistance in ovarian carcinoma by inducing autophagy in cancer cells,
274 allowing them to escape apoptosis.^{39,40} Findings from this pathway analysis suggest that
275 future studies of the contribution of ER stress in cisplatin sensitivity is needed to improve our
276 understanding of platinum-resistance in ovarian cancer.

277 In our co-expression network analysis, the gene module “*honeydew1*” showed the
278 most significant correlation with chemotherapy response ($p = 6.53e-05$). This module
279 includes two probes that map to *VCP*, a gene that was associated with platinum-based
280 chemotherapy response in our DGE analysis. Additional genes in this module were associated
281 with positive regulation of mitochondrial membrane potential, protein ubiquitination, mitosis,
282 alternative splicing, and apoptotic processes. Pathway analysis showed that this module is

283 involved in protein processing in the endoplasmic reticulum. A prior study has found that
284 *VCP* is critical for extraction and degradation of unfolded proteins in endoplasmic reticulum
285 is crucial for cancer cell survival and lower expression of *VCP* is associated with poor
286 response to platinum-based chemotherapy.⁴¹ In alignment with this finding, genes co-
287 expressed in the *honeydew1* module were co-downregulated in chemo-resistant patients.

288 The *honeydew1* module is composed of 76 probes mapping to 54 unique genes, and
289 of these, 44 genes are found to be in chromosome 9, demonstrating the importance of
290 chromosome 9 in the regulation of chemo-resistance in ovarian cancer. These findings
291 support previous studies, where genetic imbalance and alterations in chromosome 9 have
292 been associated with progression of ovarian cancer and increased cisplatin resistance.⁴²
293 Analysis of overrepresented transcription factor binding sites demonstrated that genes in this
294 module may be co-regulated by a common transcription factor known as organic cation
295 transporter 1 (OCT1). We found that over 96% of genes in this module (49/54 genes) contain
296 a nucleotide motif bound by OCT1. Prior studies have reported that silencing OCT1 impaired
297 cisplatin-induced apoptosis in esophageal cancer cells, and that cisplatin-resistant cells were
298 already expressing significantly reduced levels of OCT1.⁴³ Taken together, these findings
299 characterize a network of co-expressed genes that is associated with platinum-resistance in
300 ovarian cancer. Genes within this module may be co-regulated by the OCT1 transcription
301 factor, which may be used as a novel potential target for ovarian cancer therapies

302 The other four co-expression modules associated with platinum-based response also
303 include genes known to be involved in oncogenic process and drug response outcomes. For
304 example, the *orangered4* module is composed of genes that are critical for regulation of
305 immune response, which have been shown to play a role in chemotherapy response in
306 HGSOC.¹⁴¹⁵ Genes in this module are associated with functional annotation terms including
15

307 immunoglobulin receptor binding, antigen binding, B cell receptor signaling pathway, and
308 phagocytosis (DAVID). In addition, 10 of the 58 genes in this module are enriched for a
309 common transcription factor binding site: acute myeloid leukemia 1 protein (AML1). This
310 transcription factor is involved in haematopoiesis process and immune functions such as
311 thymic T-cell development. Studies have reported that the AML1 transcription factor is
312 overexpressed in ovarian cancer patients, and may contribute to cancer cell proliferation,
313 migration and invasion.⁴⁴ In addition, we found that the *lightpink3* module is strongly
314 associated with transcription regulation process, which plays a pivotal role in cancer
315 progression. Finally, genes in modules *lightcyan1* and *skyblue3* are target regions of
316 chemotherapeutic agents such as tyrosine kinase inhibitors (**Supplemental data 6**).

317 The analysis of *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* SNPs demonstrated that 28 out of 35 variants
318 associated with chemotherapy response were also cis-acting eQTLs, correlated with the
319 expression of *BRCA2* as well as neighboring genes *N4BP2L1*, *N4BP2L2*, *FRY*, and *STARD13*
320 (nominal p-value <0.05). Both *BRCA2* and *STARD13* are well known tumor-suppressors, and
321 upregulation of *N4BP2L1* and *N4BP2L2* is associated with positive prognosis in ovarian
322 cancer cases.⁴⁵ This finding shows the potential regulatory effect of the variants in *BRCA2*.

323 In addition, our results show that 47% of variants identified in *BRCA2* are associated
324 with LDL/HDL cholesterol levels (**Supplemental Table 3**). Prior studies of lung and ovarian
325 cancers consistently reported that cholesterol levels may affect the efficacy of platinum-based
326 chemotherapeutic agents.^{46,47} Our findings indicate a new link between genetic variants in
327 *BRCA2* and platinum-based chemotherapy response through cholesterol level regulation.

328 **Conclusion**

329 In this study, we identified genes and gene networks correlated with platinum-based

330 chemotherapy response in high-grade serous ovarian cancer patients, which implicate known
331 and novel biological mechanisms. Specifically, we identified that reduced expression of *VCP*
332 is associated with platinum-resistance. This gene is critical for removing unfolded proteins
333 from the endoplasmic reticulum and previously correlated with cancer cell survival and
334 platinum-based chemotherapy response. In addition, we report potentially regulatory variants
335 in the *BRCA2* gene correlated with chemotherapy response and the expression of genes that
336 determine cholesterol levels. Moreover, we identified a novel group of potentially co-
337 regulated genes on chromosome 9 that are correlated with platinum resistance using a
338 machine-learning algorithm. In addition, genes from this module including *VCP* are also
339 involved in protein processing in the endoplasmic reticulum. This manuscript supports earlier
340 studies which implicated *VCP* and *BRCA2* genes in chemotherapy response. We also
341 identified regulatory variants in *BRCA2* and additional genes co-regulated with *VCP* on
342 chromosome 9 that also contribute to protein removal in the ER. Findings from our study
343 could facilitate genetic testing through the identification of gene signatures that may predict
344 chemotherapy response as well as lead to novel drug targets, given a better understanding of
345 the biological mechanisms underlying chemotherapy response.

346

347 **Figure Legends**

348 **Figure 1. Gene co-expression modules correlated with platinum-based chemotherapy**
349 **response.** Network plot showing the five significant gene co-expression modules from
350 *WGCNA*: honeydew1 - centre, lightcyan1 - left, lightpink3 - top, orangered4 - bottom, and
351 skyblue3 - right. Nodes represent probes and edges are connections among the probes. Co-
352 expressed probes (i.e. belonging to a single module) are indicated in the same colour.

353 **Figure 2. Differential expression analysis of platinum-based chemotherapy response in**
354 **HGSOC patients.** Volcano plot showing univariate analysis results. One probe, 208648_at,
355 which maps to the Valosin-Containing Protein (*VCP*) gene is significantly correlated with
356 chemotherapy outcome as indicated by the red line (FDR-corrected p value < 0.05). A total of
357 606 probes mapping to 521 unique genes with nominal correlate as indicated by the green
358 line (p = 0.05).

359 **Figure 3. GWAS of chemotherapy response.** Manhattan plot shows no SNPs are
360 significantly associated (i.e. surpasses the Red line indicating a p-value threshold of 5×10^{-8}).

361

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369 **Conflict of interest**

370 The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

371 **Author contribution**

372 J.C. performed the data analyses and drafted the manuscript. D.G.T., S.N. and A.T. assisted in
373 the data analyses. Q.L.D. designed the research project, supervised data analyses and assisted
374 in the writing of the manuscript. M.K. assisted in the study design and editing of the

375 manuscript.

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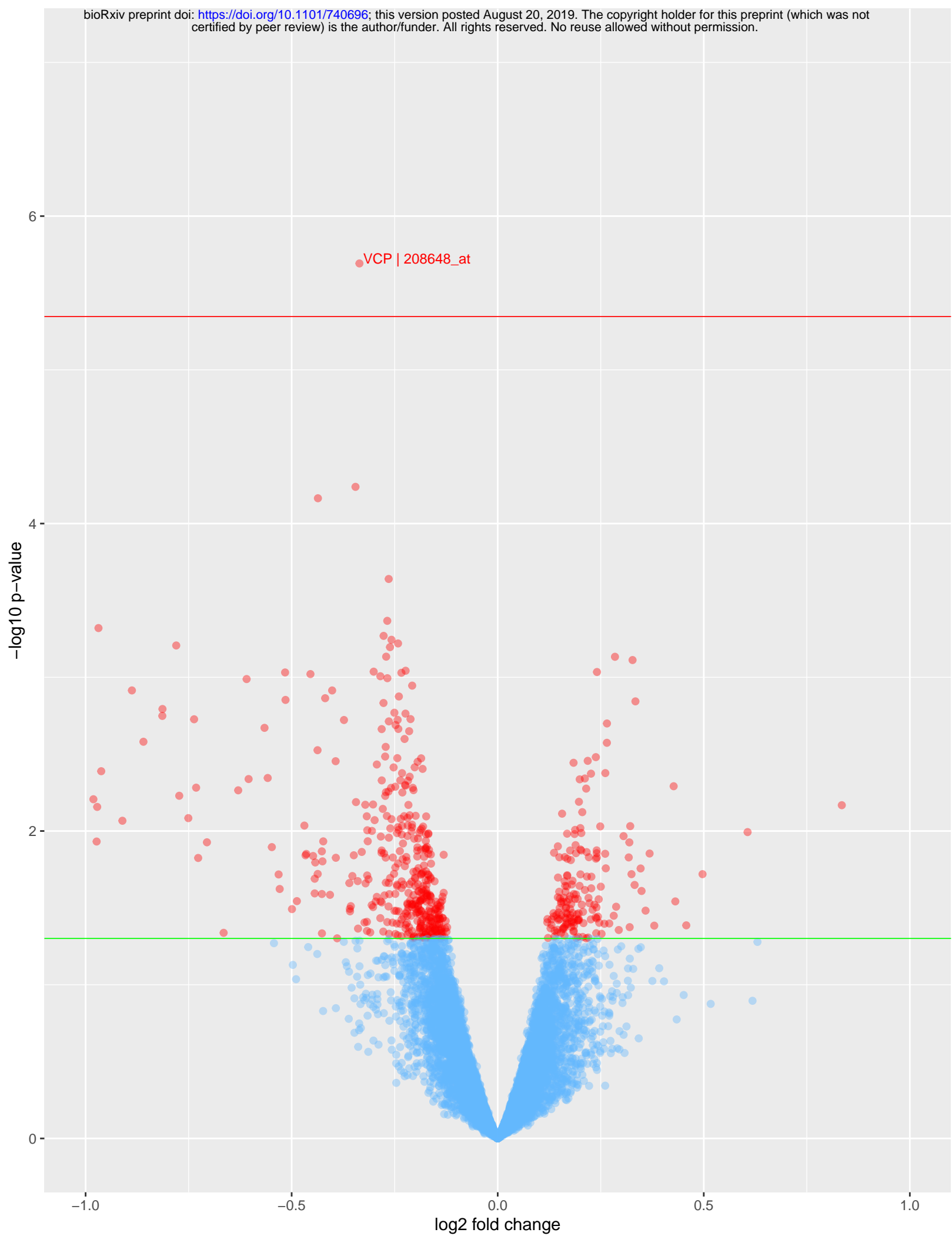
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