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Universidad del País Vasco
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The role of protein NEDDylation in the pathogenesis of cholangiocarcinoma: new potential therapeutic target

Tesis presentada por

PAULA OLAIZOLA REBÉ

Donostia – San Sebastián

2020

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Para la obtención del título de doctora en

Investigación Biomédica **por la**

Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

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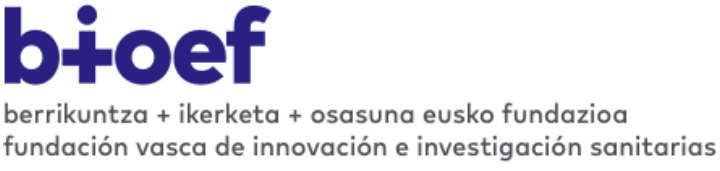
The project exposed in this thesis was performed at Biodonostia Health Research Institute under the supervision of Dr. Jesús Mª Bañales Asurmendi and Dr. María J. Perugorria Montiel. Likewise, Dr. María Begoña Ruiz Larrea, on behalf of the Faculty of Medicine and Nursing of the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), absolutely supported this dissertation.

Paula Olaizola Rebé was the recipient of a Ph.D. fellowship (*PRE_2016_1_0269*) from Gobierno Vasco (Basque Country, Spain) and a Short-Term fellowship (Padova, Italy: *Reference number: 8448*) from the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO; Heidelberg, Germany). This work was funded by BIOEF (Basque Foundation for Innovation and Health Research: EiTB Maratoia BIO15/CA/016/BD and by the AECC (Spanish Association Against Cancer).



Acknowledgments (Agradecimientos)

Me gustaría comenzar dando las gracias a mis directores, los Drs. Jesús Bañales y María Jesús Perugorria, por haberme dado la oportunidad de realizar esta tesis doctoral en su grupo, así como por haberme ayudado a crecer profesional y personalmente gracias a su experiencia y dedicación. A Txus quiero agradecerle su confianza, su apoyo, así como su capacidad resolutiva y determinación para llevar a cabo este proyecto. Agradezco a Matxus sus palabras de ánimo y su confianza. También me gustaría agradecer al Dr. Luis Bujanda su predisposición a ayudar en cualquier situación.

También quisiera agradecer al Gobierno Vasco por la beca concedida para la realización de este proyecto, así como a la Universidad del País Vasco (UPV/EHU) y al Instituto de Investigación Sanitaria Biodonostia (IISB) por permitirme llevarlo a cabo.

Por supuesto, a mis amigos y compañeros de “Hepato”, por su constate apoyo, incondicional ayuda y buen humor, gracias a los que este trabajo ha sido posible. Quisiera agradecer a todos, los que habéis pasado y los que habéis llegado hace poco, el tiempo que hemos compartido y todos los buenos momentos que hemos vivido. A Oihane, por ser un ejemplo de esfuerzo y trabajo, por enseñarme a “ponerme las cosas fáciles” y por los buenos consejos. A Ander, por tus ganas de compartir conocimiento, por tus tranquilizadoras palabras y tu capacidad para relativizar problemas en momentos difíciles. A Aitor, por poner cordura y sensatez en momentos de tensión, por tu tranquilidad, paciencia y buen humor, que alegraban el laboratorio. Puyi, thank you for bringing out the bright side out the most frustrating moments, and also for your unconditional love for chocolate (and cheese), which would always cheer us up and make desperate days a bit easier to cope with. A Álvaro, por tu alegría que nos animaba cada día, y por tu paciencia y ayuda siempre que la he necesitado. A Pedro, por tu apoyo, por tus ganas e ilusión y por estar siempre dispuesto a ayudar. A Javi, por animarme a reflexionar y discutir, por tu ayuda y por tu ingenioso humor que nos hace pasar tan buenos momentos. A Nuno, por tu curiosidad, tu sarcástico humor y desconcertante locura. A Aloña, por tu apoyo, tus buenas palabras y por ser mi compañera de series, siempre al día y dispuesta a comentar. A Anne, por tu confianza desde el primer día.

Quisiera agradecer especialmente a las Bikinis, por compartir pensamientos, problemas y alegrías (a ser posible en la terraza del Teorema y con cañas de por medio) para hacer que los momentos complicados dejen de serlo por unas horas. A Ibone, por estar siempre pendiente y dispuesta a ayudar, por tu generosidad y por tu inagotable energía. A Ainhoa, por tu tiempo, tu predisposición, por tu alegría y tus

ganas de aprender. Gracias por tu cariño, por animarme en los momentos más complicados, por tus intentos de macarronizarme y por tus palabras de aliento. A Laura, con la que después de tantos años no tengo ni que hablar para que me entienda, gracias por tus siempre sabias y acertadas palabras. Gracias por saber escuchar, por tu sinceridad, tu apoyo, y tus ganas de hacer bien las cosas, que nos hacen la vida un poco más fácil a los demás.

Me gustaría dar las gracias a Nerea que, a pesar de estar solo unos meses en el laboratorio, se convirtió en un gran apoyo y es ahora una buena amiga. Gracias por darme ánimos y confiar en mí más que yo misma. También a Francesca, por tu afán por aprender y tu entusiasmo, así como por compartir tu pasión por Italia. Grazie mille!

Además de a los miembros del grupo de Enfermedades Hepáticas, quisiera dar las gracias a Carla, Esther, Jaione A., Ana Aiastui, Alba, Neia, Martxel, Miren, Garazi, Sonia, Jon y Sandra por su ayuda, por las palabras de ánimo y por las muestras de apoyo y cariño recibidas. Especialmente, me gustaría agradecer a Claudia, por escucharme (incluso cuando hablo sola), por entenderme y por ayudarme en todo momento. A Ander, por tu confianza, tus constantes ánimos y por tu incondicional amistad. A Jaione, por las vivencias compartidas, incluso en la distancia, por escucharme y aconsejarme y porque no me cansaré de decir “afortunada yo por tener tu amistad”.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my friends in Padua, Valeria, Massi and Luca. Thank you for your warm welcoming, you help and support in this project, as well as for the delicious dinners and spritzs. Grazie per avermi fatto sentire a casa.

I am also very grateful to all the collaborators that have contributed to this work, thank you for your effort, experience and advice.

A mis amigas del Enjambre, por su interés, por su apoyo y confianza, así como por los constantes debates y divertidas distracciones que me hacen olvidar el trabajo y disfrutar de momentos únicos. Gracias por estar siempre ahí, a pesar del tiempo y la distancia.

Por último, sin duda, agradecer a mi familia, por estar siempre a mi lado. A mis padres por su paciencia e incondicional apoyo, por entender que el concepto de horario es difuso, por su esfuerzo y su ayuda (desde los tupper hasta telecélula). Gracias por todo, porque si estoy aquí ahora es por vosotros. A mi abuelo, a mi yaya y a mi amoña, por querer saber un poco más lo que hago y estar siempre orgullosos de su nieta, a pesar de no entenderlo completamente. A mi hermana Irene, por

conocerme y entenderme como nadie. Porque a pesar de que me costó aceptar que ibas a formar parte del laboratorio, me alegro muchísimo de poder trabajar contigo y aprender nuevas cosas juntas. Gracias por ser mi confidente, por soportarme y apoyarme tanto, por confiar en mí y animarme siempre con tus tonterías. Gracias por estar siempre a mi lado.

Abbreviations

3D	Three dimensional
5-FU	5-fluoroacil
α-SMA	α-smooth muscle actin
ABC	ATP-binding cassette
ACTB	β-actin
AGRN	Agrin
AKR1C1	Aldo-keto reductase family 1 member C1
AKR1C3	Aldo-keto reductase family 1 member C3
AMP	Adenosine 5'-monophosphate
ANXA2	Annexin A2
ATM	Ataxia telangiectasia mutated
ATP	Adenosine triphosphate
ATR	Ataxia telangiectasia and rad3-related protein
BAK	BCL2 agonist/killer
BAX	BCL2 associated X
BIM	BCL2 like 11
BS^3	Bis(sulfosuccinimidyl)suberate
BSA	Bovine serum albumin
CA19-9	Carbohydrate antigen 19-9
CAF	Cancer-associated fibroblasts
CCA	Cholangiocarcinoma
CCT3	T-complex protein 1 subunit gamma
CDK1	Cyclin-dependent kinase 1 (Cdc2)
CDC25A	Cell division cycle 25 homolog A
cDNA	Complementary DNA
CDT1	Chromatin licensing and DNA replication factor 1
CEA	Carcinoembryonic antigen
CFSE	Carboxyfluorescein succinimidyl ester
CHK1	Checkpoint kinase 1
CHK2	Checkpoint kinase 2
Cis	Cisplastin
CK19	Cytokeratin 19
COL6A1	Collagen alpha-1(VI) chain
COPB1	Coatomer subunit beta
COX-2	Cyclooxygenase-2
CRISPR	Clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats
CRL	Cullin-RING ligase
CSN	COP9 signalosome
CT	Computed tomography
DAB	3,3-diaminobenzidine
dCCA	Distal CCA
DDB2	DNA damage binding protein 2
DDR	DNA damage response
DLST	Dihydrolipoyllysine-residue succinyltransferase component of 2-oxoglutarate dehydrogenase complex, mitochondrial
DMC1	Meiotic recombination protein DMC1/LIM15 homolog
Doxo	Doxorubicin
DSB	Double-strand break

eCCA	Extrahepatic CCA
ECM	Extracellular matrix
EGF	Epidermal growth factor
EGFR	Epidermal growth factor receptor
EIF3E	Eukaryotic translation initiation factor 3 subunit E
EIF3F	Eukaryotic translation initiation factor 3 subunit F
EMT	Epithelial-mesenchymal transition
EpCAM	Epithelial cell adhesion molecule
ERBB2	Erb-b2 receptor tyrosine kinase 2
ERCP	Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography
FAP1	Fibroblast activated protein 1
FBS	Fetal bovine serum
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
FGFR	Fibroblast growth factor receptor
FITC	Fluorescein isothiocyanate
GAPDH	Glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase
Gem	Gemcitabine
GemCis	Gemcitabine and cisplatin combination
GO	Gene ontology
gRNA	RNA guide
H&E	Hematoxylin and eosin
HBV	Hepatitis B virus
HCC	Hepatocellular carcinoma
HCV	Hepatitis C virus
Hh	Hedgehog
HIFα	Hypoxia inducible factor α
HMGA	High mobility group A
HMGB1	High mobility group B protein 1
HRP	Horseradish peroxidase
HSC	Hepatic stellate cell
HSP90AA1	Heat shock protein HSP 90-alpha
HSPA1A	Heat shock 70 kDa protein 1A
IBDU	Intrahepatic bile duct unit
iCCA	Intrahepatic CCA
IDH	Isocitrate dehydrogenase
i.e.	Latin: *id est* (it is)
IF	Immunofluorescence
IG-iCCA	Intraductal-growing iCCA
IgG	Immunoglobulin G
IHC	Immunohistochemistry
IL-6	Interleukin 6
IL-12	Interleukin 12
iNOS	Inducible nitric oxide synthase
IP	Immunoprecipitation
IRE1	Serine/threonine-protein kinase/endoribonuclease IRE1
KIF1C	Kinesin-like protein KIF1C
KPNA2	Importin subunit alpha-1

MCM1	DNA replication licensing factor MCM1
MDM2	Murine double minute 2
MDR1	Multidrug resistant protein 1 or P-glycoprotein
MF-iCCA	Mass-forming iCCA
MMP	Matrix metalloprotease
MOC	Mechanism of chemoresistance
MRI	Magnetic resonance imaging
mRNA	Messenger RNA
MRP	Multidrug resistance-associated protein
NAE	NEDD8 activating enzyme E1
NAE1	NEDD8 activating enzyme E1, regulatory subunit
NAFLD	Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease
NFκB	Nuclear factor kappa-light-chain-enhancer of activated B cells
NBD	Normal bile duct
ncRNA	Non-coding RNA
NDUFA8	NADH dehydrogenase [ubiquinone] 1 alpha subcomplex subunit 8
NEDD8	Neural precursor cell expressed developmentally down-regulated protein 8
NEDP1	NEDD8-specific protease
NEM	N-ethylmaleimide
NER	Nucleotide excision repair
NHC	Normal human cholangiocytes
NHEJ	Non-homologous end joining
NICD1	Notch intracellular domain 1
NK	Natural killer
NOXA	Phorbol-12-myristate-13-acetate-induced protein 1
OCT4	POU class 5 homeobox 1
ORC1	Origin recognition complex 1
P/S	Penicillin-streptomycin
p-H2AX	Phosphorylated histone H2A histone family member X
PAM	Protospacer adjacent motif
PBC	Primary biliary cholangitis
pCCA	Perihilar CCA
PCNA	Proliferating cell nuclear antigen
PD	Padua
PDGF	Platelet-derived growth factor
PEBP1	Phosphatidylethanolamine-binding protein 1
PHB	Prohibitin-1
PI-iCCA	Periductal-infiltrating iCCA
PLD	Polycystic liver disease
POLD3	DNA polymerase delta subunit 3
PRDX1	Peroxiredoxin-1
PRDX2	Peroxiredoxin-1
PRKDC	DNA-dependent protein kinase catalytic subunit
PSC	Primary sclerosing cholangitis
PTMs	Post-translational modifications
qPCR	Quantitative polymerase chain reaction

RAN	GTP-binding nuclear protein Ran
RBX	RING-box protein
RIPA	Radio-immunoprecipitation assay
ROS	Reactive oxygen species
RTK	Receptor tyrosine kinase
SEC22B	Vesicle-trafficking protein SEC22b
SOX2	(Sex-determining region Y)-box transcription factor 2
SOX17	(Sex-determining region Y)-box transcription factor 2
SDS	Sodium dodecyl sulfate
SDS-PAGE	Sodium dodecyl sulfate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis
SLC	Solute carrier
SMURF1	SMAD-specific E3 ubiquitin-protein ligase 1
SN	Surrounding normal
SS	San Sebastian
SUCLA2	Succinate-CoA ligase [ADP-forming] subunit beta, mitochondrial
T_0	Time zero
TACE	Transarterial chemoembolization
TAMs	Tumor-associated macrophages
TARE	Transarterial radioembolization
TBS-T	Tris-buffered saline with 0.1% Tween® 20
TCA	Tricarboxylic cycle
TCGA	The Cancer Genome Atlas
TGF-β	Transforming growth factor β
TGF-βR	Transforming growth factor β receptor
TIGER	The Thailand Initiative in Genomics and Expression Research
TILs	Tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes
TLDA	TaqMan Low-Density Array
TME	Tumor microenvironment
Tregs	Regulatory T cells
TXN	Thioredoxin
UBA3	Ubiquitin-activating enzyme or NEDD8 activating enzyme E1, catalytic subunit
UBE2F	Ubiquitin-conjugating enzyme E2F
UBE2M	Ubiquitin-conjugating enzyme E2M
UBL	Ubiquitin-like protein
UQCRC1	Cytochrome b-c1 complex subunit 1, mitochondrial
VAMP3	Vesicle-associated membrane protein 3
VCP	Transitional endoplasmic reticulum ATPase
VEGF	Vascular endothelial growth factor
WB	Western blot
WEE1	WEE1 G_2 checkpoint kinase
WNT	Wingless
WT	Wild type
XRCC5	X-ray repair cross complementing 5 (Ku80)
XRCC6	X-ray repair cross complementing 6 (Ku70)
ZO-1	Zona occludens 1

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Introduction

I.1. The liver

I.1.1. Physiology

The liver is the largest internal organ of the human body and one of the most important for the maintenance of physiological homeostasis.[1] The liver performs several and complex metabolic functions including carbohydrate, lipid and amino acid metabolism.[2] Additionally, this organ serves as nutrient storage for glucose, lipids, iron and vitamins.[2] The broad spectrum of functions accomplished by the liver also includes the synthesis and secretion of albumin, transferrin, fibrinogen, apolipoproteins, and other plasma proteins into blood.[2] Bile production and secretion is a major function of the liver and is crucial for nutrient absorption and biliary clearance of organic and inorganic solutes.[3] Furthermore, the liver receives a dual blood supply (i.e., the hepatic portal vein and the hepatic artery), becoming exposed to a variety of toxic compounds. In this regard, the liver has the ability to metabolize and secrete potentially harmful biochemical products that are produced by the body (i.e., bilirubin or ammonia), to detoxify and eliminate pathogenic and xenobiotic agents, as well as to regulate the immune response.[2,4] Of note, hepatic functions are maintained even after massive liver damage or partial resection, due to its unique regenerative capacity.[5]

I.1.2. Macroscopic and microscopic anatomy

Anatomically, the liver is divided into two large lobes (i.e., right and left) and two small central ones (i.e., quadrate and caudate), which are mostly covered by a fibrous layer, known as the Glisson's capsule.[2,6] The liver parenchyma is arranged in thousands of hexagonal units named hepatic lobules (**Figure I.1**).[2] Each hepatic lobule represents the functional and structural entity of the liver, consisting of a central vein from which hepatocytes radiate forming linear cords towards a portal triad, formed by connective tissue enclosing branches of the hepatic artery, portal vein and bile duct (**Figure I.1**).[6] Oxygen, nutrients, bile acids and hormones delivered by venous and arterial blood are drained from the terminal branches of the portal vein and hepatic artery to the lobule's central vein through the hepatic sinusoids (**Figure I.1**).[2] Similarly, hepatocyte-secreted bile reaches the bile duct branches at the portal triad through a network of canaliculi.[2] The sinusoidal capillaries lie in between the cords of hepatocytes separated by a narrow perisinusoidal space (also known as the space of Disse), which comprises reticular fibers and nutrient-rich blood plasma. The direct contact between sinusoidal capillaries and hepatocytes improves metabolic exchange.[2]

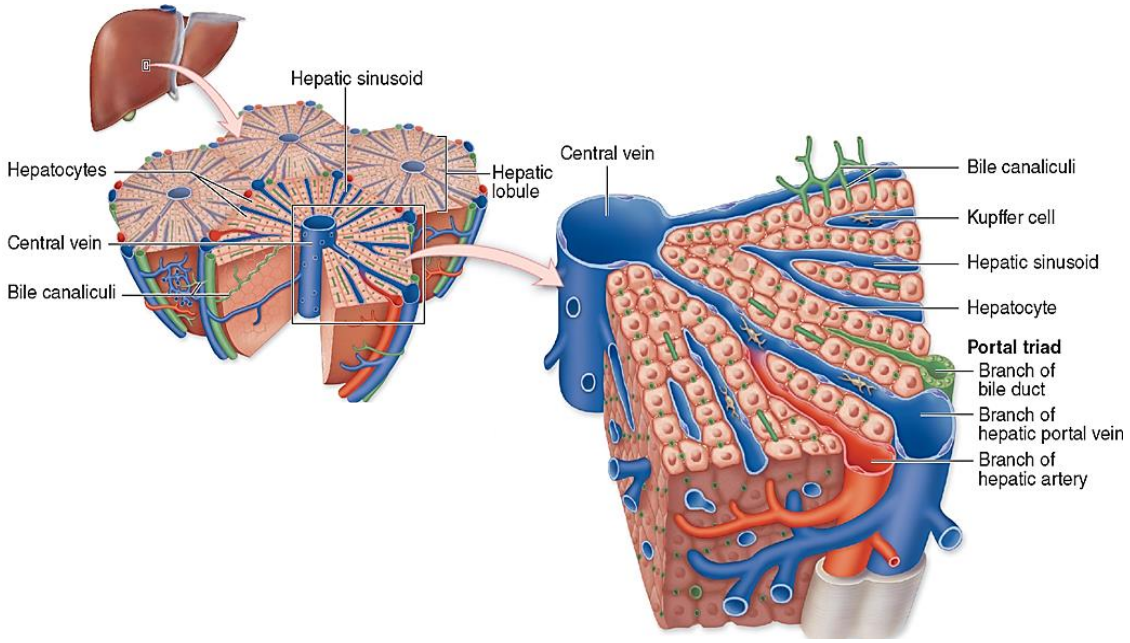

Figure I.1. Microscopic structure of the liver. The liver is structured in hexagonal hepatic lobules composed of cords of hepatocytes radiating from the central vein outwards to the portal triads. (Adapted from Mescher AL, 2013)[7]

Multiple cell populations (i.e., parenchymal and non-parenchymal) coexist within the liver and coordinately govern the hepatic function at multiple levels.[1,2] Hepatocytes and cholangiocytes are the two main epithelial cell types of this organ. Roughly, 70-80% of the liver volume consists of parenchymal hepatocytes, which are responsible for the majority of the metabolic functions in the liver, whereas cholangiocytes, the epithelial cells lining the bile ducts, only represent 3-5% of the total liver cells, even though they carry out crucial functions in the modification and transport of the bile.[1,2] Other non-parenchymal cells of the liver include the liver resident macrophages or Kupffer cells, hepatic stellate cells and sinusoidal endothelial cells that are involved in immunological, fibrogenic and substance exchange processes, respectively.[1,2]

I.2. The biliary tract

I.2.1. Anatomy

The biliary tract is comprised of several ducts lined by cholangiocytes that regulate the production, composition and transport of the bile from the liver to the duodenum. As aforementioned, primary bile is secreted from the hepatocytes into the canaliculi (i.e. a narrow tubular space between the apical membranes of two adjacent hepatocytes) and is subsequently collected by the canals of Hering, leading to the ductule-canalicular junction.[8] These specialized channels serve as the anatomical and physiological transition from the hepatocyte-lined canaliculi to cholangiocyte-lined ductules (<15 µm), which ultimately form the biliary tree (**Figure I.2**).[8,9] These small structures serially converge at the portal space to form the interlobular ducts (15-100 µm), which progressively enlarge to form septal ducts (100-300 µm), area ducts (300-400 µm) and segmental ducts (400-800 µm) (**Figure I.2**).[8,9] The bile collected from the right and left lobes is then drained to the corresponding hepatic ducts (>800 µm), which are considered the limit of the intrahepatic biliary tree (**Figure I.2**).[8,9] Finally, the bile flows through the extrahepatic biliary tree (i.e., common hepatic duct, cystic duct, gallbladder, and common bile duct) ultimately reaching the duodenum (**Figure I.2**), where it enables lipid digestion and absorption.[8,9]

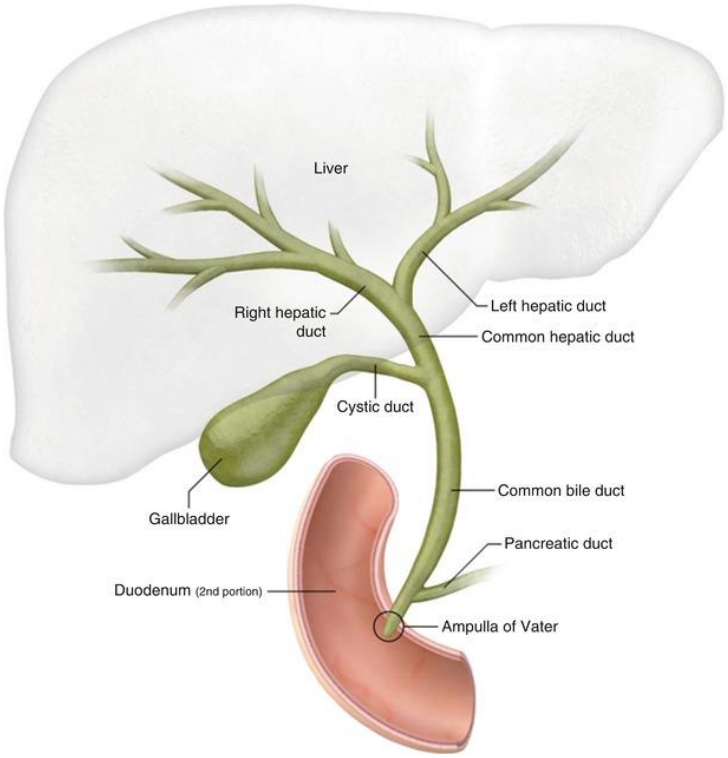

Figure I.2. Biliary tree architecture. The biliary tree consists of a network of intrahepatic and extrahepatic tubular ducts where the hepatocyte-secreted bile is modified and transported to the duodenum.[10]

I.2.2. Cholangiocytes

Cholangiocytes constitute a small proportion of all liver cells but are very important in health and disease. Biologically, these epithelial cells play essential roles for normal liver function and are key in the regulation of hepatocyte-derived bile composition, facilitating biliary salt reabsorption and contributing to its fluidization and alkalinization. Cholangiocytes express primary cilia that arise from their apical membrane.[11–13] This microtubule-based organelle possesses mechano-, chemo- and osmo-sensor properties that allow the detection of changes in bile flow and composition, and is able to transduce such stimuli into intracellular signaling ultimately modulating bile formation.[14,15] Furthermore, cholangiocytes display multiple transmembrane carriers (i.e., aquaporins, transporters and exchangers) at the apical and/or basolateral sides that are involved in bile composition regulation and biliary bicarbonate secretion,[3,16–18] protecting cholangiocytes from damaging or toxic agents.[19,20]

I.2.3. Cholangiopathies

Biliary diseases, also termed as cholangiopathies, refer to a large group of chronic liver diseases that share cholangiocytes as their central target.[16] Cholestasis, chronic inflammation, ductular reaction and fibrosis seem to be common events among biliary disorders. However, cholangiopathies are generally classified in different categories attending to their etiology in: a) immune-mediated [such as primary biliary cholangitis (PBC)[16] or primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC)],[21] b) infectious (caused by opportunistic infections with *Cryptosporidium parvum*),[22] c) genetic [e.g., polycystic liver disease (PLD),[23] cystic fibrosis[24] or Alagille's syndrome],[25] d) vascular (post-ischemic cholangiopathies),[26] e) neoplastic [e.g., biliary tract cancer or cholangiocarcinoma (CCA)], f) drug-induced [e.g., amoxicillin/clavulanic acid, carbamazepine, 5- fluorouracil (5-FU), among others],[27,28] or g) idiopathic (e.g., biliary atresia, idiopathic childhood/adulthood ductopenia).[16] Although being considered rare diseases, cholangiopathies account for substantial morbidity and mortality, being a major indication for liver transplantation as curative therapy.[29–31] Therefore, elucidating the molecular mechanisms underlying the development and progression of these diseases is of utmost importance to find potential targets for therapy.

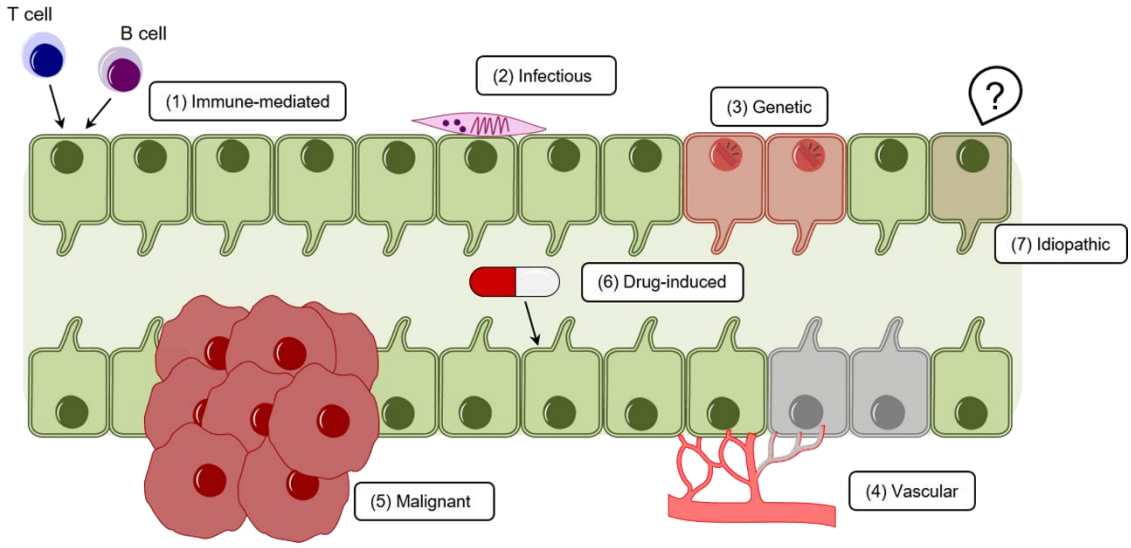

Figure I.3. Classification of cholangiopathies according to their etiology. Cholangiopathies are chronic liver diseases that affect cholangiocytes and are categorized as (1) Immune-mediated, (2) Infectious, (3) Genetic, (4) Ischemic, (5) Malignant, (6) Drug-induced and (7) Idiopathic.

I.3. Cholangiocarcinoma

I.3.1. General features

CCA comprises a heterogeneous group of malignancies arising along the biliary tree. These tumors emerge from the malignant transformation of the epithelial cells lining the bile ducts (i.e. cholangiocytes), although it can derive from peribiliary glands, hepatic stem cells or even hepatocytes under transdifferentiation.[32] CCA is the second most frequent primary liver tumor (~15%), after hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), and represents ~3% of all gastrointestinal cancers. The global trend of CCA over the past decades indicates an increase in both incidence (0.3-6 per 100,000 inhabitants per year)[33–35] and mortality (1-6 per 100,000 inhabitants per year).[36–39] Despite being a rare tumor in most Western countries (<6 cases per 100,000 people), the global geographical distribution of CCA is asymmetrical and Southeast Asian countries, such as China, South Korea, Thailand and Japan, present significantly higher incidence.[37,39,40] Such discrepancy is likely due to differences in exposure to specific risk factors, particularly to endemic liver fluke parasites, and because of a high hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) prevalence in Asia.[35,41–43]

I.3.2. Classification

Considering the heterogeneity and diversity of CCAs, several classifications have been proposed.[38,44,45] The most widely used CCA classification is based on the anatomical location of the tumor. However, other parameters, such as tumor growth pattern or the cell of origin may be better predictors of CCA behavior.[32,46,47]

Anatomically, CCAs are classified into intrahepatic (iCCA), perihilar (pCCA) and distal (dCCA). iCCAs can emerge from any portion of the intrahepatic biliary tree, from segmental bile ducts to smaller branches (**Figure I.4**). pCCAs arise in the right and/or left hepatic duct and/or surrounding their junction, while dCCAs affect the common bile duct. iCCAs can be further divided attending to their growth pattern into mass-forming (MF-iCCA), periductal infiltrating (PI-iCCA) and intraductal growing (IG-iCCA), although mixed growth patterns have been described (**Figure I.4**).[48] MF-iCCA encompasses a mass of tumor cells affecting the biliary duct and the liver parenchyma.[49] In contrast, PI-iCCAs grow longitudinally along the wall of large bile ducts leading to progressive wall thickening and stricture development,[37,50,51] whereas IG-iCCAs present a papillary growth pattern towards the duct lumen.[51,52] On the other hand, pCCAs and dCCAs generally present as poorly defined sclerosing tumors and, less frequently, as papillary tumors, and exhibit similar growth patterns to PI- and IG-type of iCCAs.[53–55]

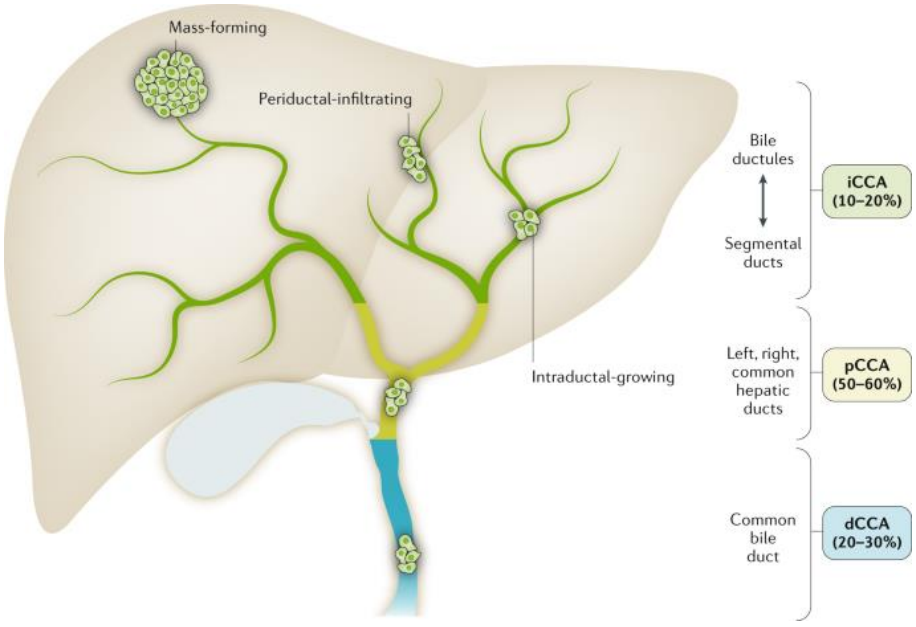

Figure I.4. CCA classification. Depending on their anatomical site of origin, CCAs are classified as intrahepatic (iCCA), perihilar (pCCA) or distal (dCCA). iCCAs are also classified into mass-forming, periductal infiltrating or intraductal growing according to their growth pattern.[37]

Histologically, pCCA and dCCA are predominantly mucinous adenocarcinomas or papillary tumors,[50,56] while iCCAs are more heterogeneous and show several histological variants. In this regard, two main histological subtypes of iCCA are usually distinguished according to the level or size of the affected bile duct. Thus, small bile duct (mixed) type iCCA arises as a small-sized tubular or acinar adenocarcinoma with nodular growth invading the liver parenchyma, and with minimal or no mucin production.[57–61] Alternatively, large bile duct (mucinous) type iCCA affects large intrahepatic bile ducts and is constituted by mucin-producing columnar tumor cells arranged in a large-duct or papillary architecture.[61–64] The distinction between small and large bile duct types does not only have histopathological implications but also distinguishes iCCA subtypes with different clinicopathological and molecular features.[58,61]

I.3.3. Risk factors

The etiologies of most CCAs are unknown; however, several risk factors with different degree of predisposition to CCA development have been established.[39,65] The presence of certain biliary pathologies such as choledochal cysts, stones within the bile ducts, cirrhosis, chronic biliary diseases (such as Caroli Disease or PSC) are strongly associated with CCA. In fact, among PSC patients (global incidence ~1/100,000) there is a 10-15% risk of developing CCA,[66–68] while in the case of Caroli Disease the risk reaches 6-30%.[69,70] Moreover, viral infections due to HBV and HCV, as well as liver fluke parasites, such as *Opisthorchis viverrini* and *Clonorchis sinensis*, have been reported to augment the risk of CCA development. Exposure to certain toxins (asbestos, dioxins or nitrosamines) has also been associated with CCA. On the other hand, alcoholic liver disease, cirrhosis, diabetes, tobacco and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is a less strong but highly prevalent risk factor.[37]

I.3.4. Molecular mechanisms of pathogenesis

The process of biliary tumorigenesis involves multiple complex mechanisms to drive the malignant transformation of cholangiocytes. Among them, sustained proliferation, death evasion, neo-angiogenesis as well as the development of invasive and colonizing capacities are some of the main hallmarks of CCA cells.[71] Underlying these hallmarks are genetic, epigenetic and molecular alterations affecting the target cells.[37]

I.3.4.1 Genetic and epigenetic alterations

Several studies, using whole and targeted DNA sequencing approaches, have emphasized the genomic complexity of CCA tumors, identifying the most prevalent gene mutations affecting crucial genes in cell growth promotion (*KRAS*, *BRAF*, *SMAD4*, *FGFR1-3*, *EGFR*, *NOTCH*, *WNT*), DNA rearrangements and genomic instability (*TP53*, *CDK1NA*, *CCND1*, *ATM*, *ROBO2*, *BRCA1* and *BRCA2*), de-ubiquitination (*BAP1*) and chromatin remodeling (*ARID1A*, *ARID1B*, *ARID2A*, *SMARCA4*, *PBRM1*, *MLL2*, *MLL3*, *KMT2C*).[37] Furthermore, mutations deregulating Wnt/β-catenin, Notch or PI3K signaling networks have been described. Of note, the discovery of hotspot *IDH1* and *IDH2* mutations, as well as the constitutive *FGFR2* fusions are driving mutational profile-based clinical trials testing specific compounds targeting these alterations.[37,39]

Despite displaying shared mutations, CCA subtypes present different genomic profiles. Thus, *FGFR*-fusions together with *TP53*, *KRAS*, *IDH1/2* and *BAP1* mutations are the most common events in iCCA, whereas *PRKACA* and *PRKACB* fusions, as well as mutations in *ELF3* preferentially occur in p/dCCA.[72,73] Integrative genomic

studies have aimed to stratify CCA patients based on prognosis.[74,75] In this regard, mutations in *TP53* or *KRAS* have been associated with higher tumor recurrence and lower overall survival in CCA patients after surgical resection,[72] compared to patients with *IDH* mutations or patients without mutations in any of those 3 genes. Although most CCA tumor mutations are somatic, a proportion of patients (5-10%) harbor germline mutations in *BRCA1/2*, *ATM* or *BAP1*, which may predispose to CCA development.[76,77]

Deregulated DNA methylation, histone modifications and aberrant non-coding RNA (ncRNA) expression can also trigger unbalanced transcription of a plethora of target genes that sustain malignant cell transformation without modifying the DNA sequence.[78,79] In this regard, CpG hypermethylation has been reported in CCA, supporting the relevance of epigenetic modifications in these tumors. However, the epigenetic modifications in CCAs are still poorly studied and a better understanding of these processes may hold promising translational potential, serving as diagnostic and prognostic tools, but also as targets for new therapeutic strategies.

I.3.4.2 Signaling and molecular networks

CCAs often arise in the context of prolonged biliary inflammation and cholestasis, which provide a rich milieu of pro-inflammatory cytokines, growth factors and toxic bile acids that might contribute to cholangiocarcinogenesis.[37,80,81] This setting presumably triggers aberrant signaling leading to uncontrolled cellular proliferation, survival, angiogenesis and invasion, overall promoting CCA development and sustaining tumor progression (**Figure I.5**). Transcriptomic profiling identified the presence of two subclasses of iCCA: the “inflammation” (38%) and “proliferative” (62%) subtypes, characterized by the activation of immune-mediated and oncogenic pathways, respectively.[75] Among the pro-inflammatory cytokines sustaining CCA growth and progression, interleukin 6 (IL-6) is a major player, being involved in the activation of the JAK/STAT3, ERK1/2 or the mitogenic p38 signaling pathways promoting tumor proliferation and growth.[82–85] On the other hand, multiple signals [e.g., inducible nitric oxide synthase (iNOS) activation, bile acids, oxysterol, among others) can induce the expression of the inflammatory mediator cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2), triggering proliferation and preventing apoptosis through prostaglandin E2-mediated AKT or epidermal growth factor (EGF) pathway activation.[86,87]

Multiple signaling networks involved in biliary development, including Notch, Wnt/β-catenin, Hedgehog (Hh) or Hippo/YAP, are re-activated during liver repair or in an inflammatory setting.[88] Regarding CCA, a prominent activation of Notch, Wnt/β-catenin and transforming growth factor-β (TGF-β) was observed in comparison to

HCC.[89] The Notch pathway mediates biliary repair, growth and hepatocyte transdifferentiation into cholangiocytes during carcinogenesis.[90] Indeed, iCCA development in mouse models has been observed after experimental overexpression of Notch intracellular domain 1 (NICD1) in hepatocytes.[91,92] Moreover, the majority of CCAs present augmented Wnt/β-catenin signaling, in part as a consequence of the activated macrophage-mediated release of Wnt ligands[93,94] but also as a result of mutations[95] or DNA methylation alterations affecting components of this pathway,[96] altogether regulating cell growth and survival.[95] Likewise, most CCAs display activated Hh signaling,[97,98] which could be induced by myofibroblasts[99] or hepatic stellate cells (HSC)-secreted platelet-derived growth factor BB (PDGF-BB),[100] enhancing cell proliferation, migration and invasion. On the other hand, the Hippo/YAP signaling pathway is known to modulate organ size, cell proliferation and apoptosis.[101] In CCA, upregulation of YAP has been reported and correlates with worse prognosis.[102–104] Despite genetic alterations of the YAP pathway being infrequent,[105] up to 14% of CCAs present mutations in *ARID1A*, which encodes for a subunit of the chromatin remodeling complex SWI/SNF that reduces YAP transcriptional activity.[106]

Receptor tyrosine kinase (RTK) signaling activation is a common event in all CCA subtypes. Overactivation of *EGFR1*, *ERBB2* and *MET* RTK signaling has been reported in CCA and is associated with worse prognosis.[74,75] RAS-MAPK and PI3K-AKT-mTOR pathways are triggered by RTK signaling, resulting in augmented proliferation, apoptosis evasion and enhanced tumor growth.[74,75,107–109] In addition, chromosomal fusion rearrangements in *FGFR2* occur in CCA. Noteworthy, molecular alterations in RTK signaling pathways constitute amenable targets for therapy.

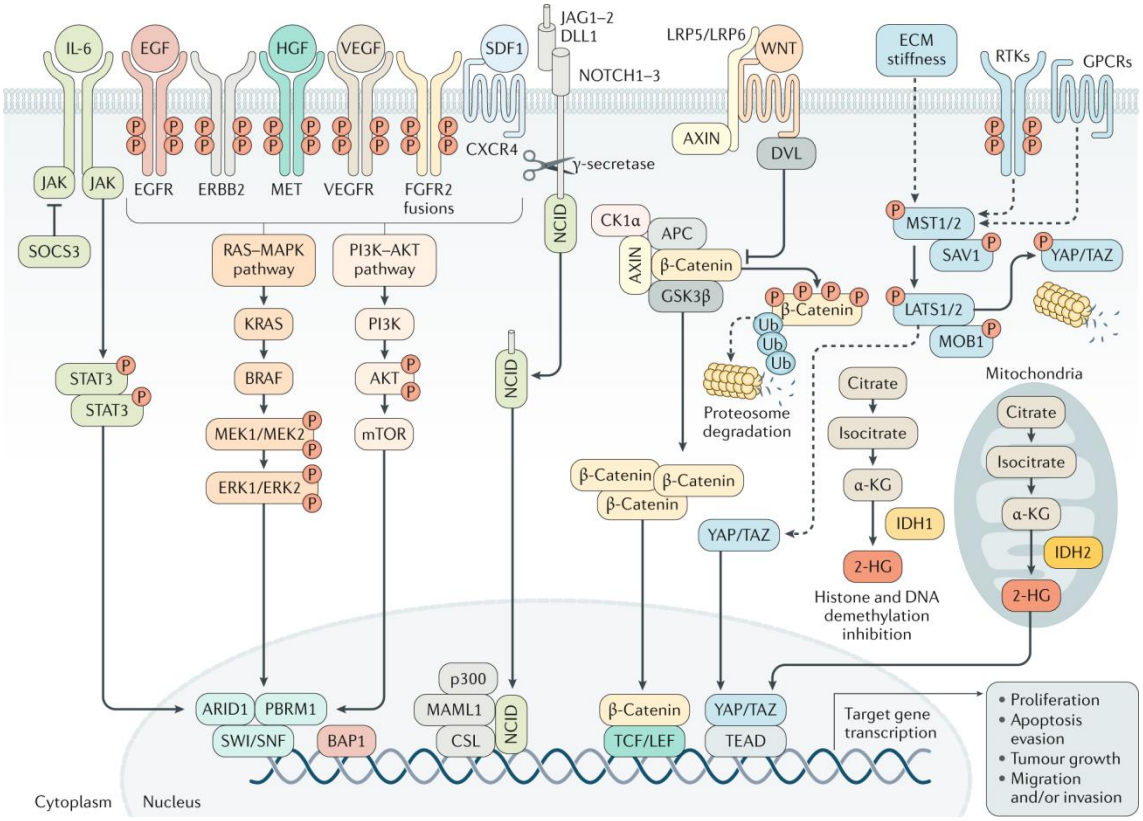

Figure I.5. Signaling pathways driving cholangiocarcinogenesis. CCA development, growth and progression involve complex molecular processes that include the interplay between extracellular ligands and the increased expression of aberrant activation of cell surface receptors that lead to deregulation of signaling pathways, ultimately enhancing cell proliferation, survival, migration or invasion. The most commonly mutated genes that might result in the overactivation of some of these pathways are *KRAS*, *BRAF*, *ARID1*, *PBRM1*, *BAP1*, *IDH1* and *IDH2*. Abbreviations: 2-HG, 2-hydroxyglutarate; ECM, extracellular matrix; RTK, receptor tyrosine kinase.[37]

I.3.5. Tumor microenvironment

CCAs present an extensive desmoplastic tumor microenvironment (TME) and, even though epithelial cells are generally considered as the coordinators of tumor growth, the crosstalk between the tumor and its stroma cannot be understated. In fact, TME can drive the neoplastic transformation of epithelial cells and regulate numerous cancer hallmarks.[110–115] The CCA stroma consists of a complex network of extracellular matrix proteins[116,117] and diverse cell types, including infiltrating immune cells (e.g., macrophages, neutrophils, natural killer or T cells), endothelial cells and cancer-associated fibroblasts (CAFs),[118] that interact with the tumor epithelium to support and sustain cancer progression (**Figure I.6**).

CAFs are a heterogeneous spindle-shaped cell population with mesenchymal origin that contributes to tumor progression.[119] In CCA, tumor growth and reduced survival positively correlate with the abundance of CAFs.[120] Although their origin remains uncertain, CAFs most likely derive from quiescent HSCs, tissue-resident portal fibroblasts, pericytes, bone marrow-derived mesenchymal stem cells and monocyte precursor-derived fibrocytes through transdifferentiation and activation.[121–123] CAFs can stimulate CCA growth through the release of short-ranged and direct morphogenetic signals such as Notch[124] or Hh[98]. Additionally, CAFs can express several matrix metalloproteases (MMPs) themselves[125,126] or communicate with other TME cells to release them, promoting a malignant CCA phenotype.[127] In turn, CCA cells can secrete PDGF-D and TGF-β that stimulate the recruitment and activation of fibroblasts.[128,129] Moreover, malignant cholangiocyte-derived PDGF-D induces CAFs secretion of vascular growth factors (e.g., VEGF-A, VEGF-C) which attract lymphatic endothelial cells, favoring CCA cell intravasation and metastasis.[130]

Among the immune cells residing within the TME, tumor-associated macrophages (TAMs) are the most relevant population.[113] These are mainly alternatively activated M2 macrophages, with anti-inflammatory and immunosuppressive characteristics that contribute to cancer progression.[131] As aforementioned, activated macrophages can secrete Wnt ligands activating the Wnt/β-catenin signaling in CCA cells, promoting their proliferation.[93,94] Tumor-infiltrating neutrophils (TINs) and lymphocytes (TILs) are also present in CCA TME. TINs seem to inversely correlate with $CD8^+$ T cells and positively correlate with regulatory T cells (Tregs).[132] In this regard, the abundance of TINs and Tregs together with reduced $CD8^+$ T cell infiltrates are associated with poor prognosis in patients with CCA.[132] In contrast, improved prognosis was described in CCA patients with enhanced $CD4^+$ and $CD8^+$ T cell infiltrates.[133–135] For this reason, a decrease in adaptive immune response

components and an increase of immunosuppressive Tregs has been suggested to permit immune scape of the tumor and has been related to CCA progression.[133,136]

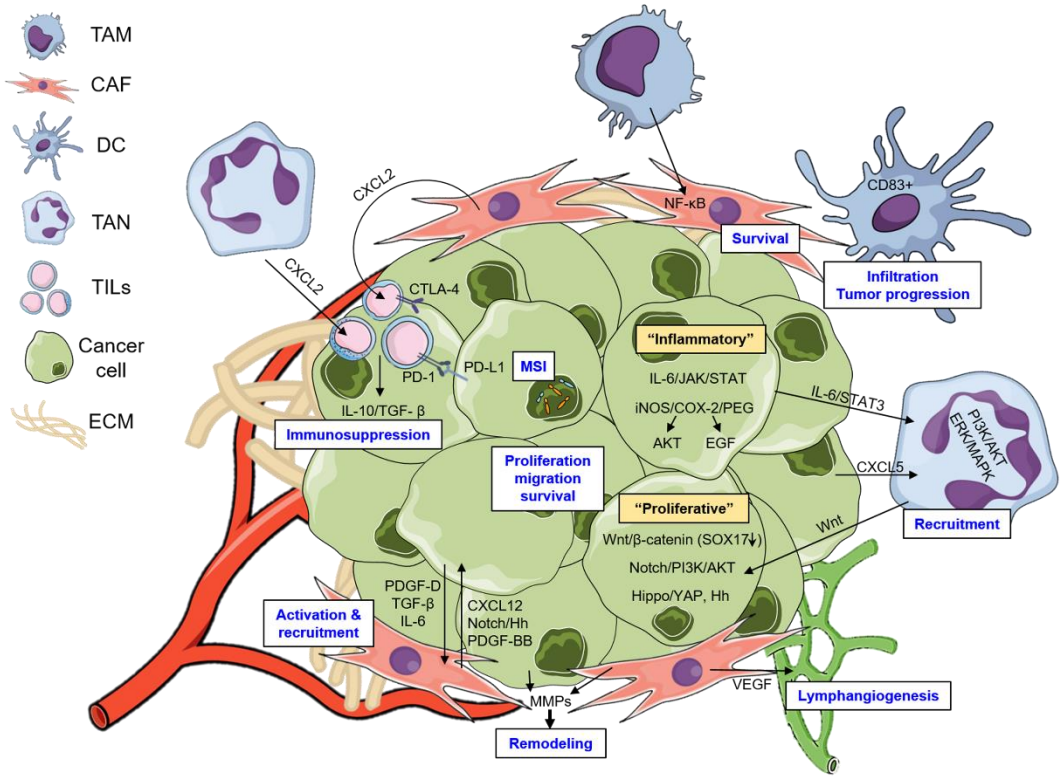

Figure I.6. Tumor microenvironment and the pathogenesis of cholangiocarcinoma. The crosstalk between cancer cells and their stroma triggers the activation of several signaling pathways in tumor tissue that results in cancer cell survival, proliferation and migration, immune cell recruitment and infiltration, immunosuppression, microsatellite instability, extracellular matrix remodeling and lymphangiogenesis, thus supporting tumor growth and progression. Abbreviations: CAF, cancer-associated fibroblast; COX-2, cyclooxygenase; CTLA-4, cytotoxic T lymphocyte antigen 4; DC, dendritic cell; ECM, extracellular matrix; iNOS, inducible nitrogen oxide synthase; MSI, microsatellite instability; PDGF, platelet-derived growth factor; PD-1, programmed death protein 1; PD-L1, programmed death ligand 1; PGE, prostaglandin E; TAM, tumor-associated macrophage, TAN, tumor-associated neutrophil; TILs, tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes. (Adapted from Rodrigues PM *et al*., 2020)[137]

I.3.6. Diagnosis

CCAs are generally asymptomatic in early stages thus, most patients are diagnosed at advanced phases (~70%) when the disease is already widespread. Late diagnosis, together with the highly chemoresistant nature of these tumors, compromise the possible therapeutic options and contribute to their dismal prognosis. Although there are no specific symptoms, abdominal pain, malaise, fatigue, pruritus, weight loss and/or jaundice, among others, might appear during tumor progression.

Diagnosis is usually conducted by combining imaging methods [i.e., computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP)], analysis of non-specific serum tumor markers [i.e., carcinoembryonic antigen (CEA) and carbohydrate antigen 19-9 (CA19-9)] and histological analysis of tumor biopsies.[37,39,138,139] Nonetheless, the current non-invasive diagnostic tools (i.e., imaging methods and tumor markers in serum) display low sensibility and specificity, and always require histological confirmation. The lack of accurate non-invasive markers and prognosis predictors in CCA claims for an urgent need to combine efforts and search for precise and valid diagnostic biomarkers to improve patient welfare and outcome.

I.3.7. Therapeutic strategies

Currently, surgical resection of the tumor or liver transplantation are the only potentially curative options for CCA. The eligibility of CCA patients for surgical resection is conditioned to their clinical status, tumor extension as well as the presence or absence of metastasis or locally-advanced disease.[140] However, most CCA patients present with advanced unresectable tumors, and thus, less than one third undergo complete resection.[140] Besides, relapse after surgical resection is frequent and patients present a short 5-year survival (22-44% for iCCA, 11-41% for pCCA and 27-37% for dCCA),[141] prompting studies aiming to identify patients at risk of recurrence and focused on adjuvant therapy research. In this regard, the BILCAP study, a chemotherapy-based phase III clinical trial, reported benefits in terms of overall survival and relapse-free survival when employing capecitabine as adjuvant therapy in biliary tract cancers.[142] Based on the favorable results obtained, international guidelines recommend capecitabine as adjuvant therapy after curative resection of CCA.[142] Liver transplantation for CCA is controversial, and even though different multicenter studies have accomplished promising results in terms of disease-free or overall survival rates,[143–146] liver allograft supply and life-long immunosuppression are important limitations of this strategy.

In unresectable cases, palliative treatment remains the only possible option. Robust data derived from the phase III ABC-02 and the phase II BT22 trials support the use of first-line gemcitabine and cisplatin combination (GemCis) chemotherapy in patients with advanced CCA.[147,148] Once resistance to first-line therapy is developed, FOLFOX (folinic acid, 5-FU and oxaliplatin) has shown potential benefit as second-line therapy for CCA.[149] Additionally, more intensive approaches using triple chemotherapy are currently being assessed as first-line chemotherapeutic strategies.[150,151] Locoregional therapies such as transarterial chemoembolization (TACE), transarterial radioembolization (TARE) and liver chemosaturation constitute promising therapeutic options[152–154] but evidence supporting their efficacy is modest and further studies confirming their value are needed.[154]

Aiming to set the basis for precision medicine, the currently explored treatment options are based on the mutational signatures driving CCA. Several ongoing clinical trials are evaluating multiple molecules targeting specific genetic alterations such as *IDH1/2* mutations, *FGFR* alterations, RTK fusions or *EGFR*, *MET* and *ERBB2* mutations. Based on their promising achievements, molecular profiling in cancer, identifying mutations/amplifications/fusions amenable for targeted therapy, could represent a significant improvement in patient management.[137] Finally, in spite of emerging as an attractive anti-cancer therapeutic option, clinical data on immunotherapy for CCA is limited.

I.4. Posttranslational modifications

I.4.1. General concepts

Posttranslational modifications (PTMs) refer to the covalent attachment or proteolytic cleavage of functional groups or proteins to or from substrate proteins. These chemical changes alter the structure and properties of individual proteins, affecting their stability, activity, turnover, localization and/or interaction with other molecules. To date, more than 450 PTMs have been identified and such wide variety includes phosphorylation, methylation, acetylation, ubiquitination, SUMOylation, NEDDylation, glycosylation and lipidation, among others. These proteome modifications constitute a pivotal mechanism that regulates protein levels and function, allowing cells to rapidly respond to diverse stimuli.[155,156] Indeed PTMs can activate or inhibits multiple signaling networks, being determinant in numerous biological processes such as gene expression, signal transduction, proliferation, survival, protein-protein and cell-cell interactions, as well as in mediating communication between cells and their environment. [155,156] Given their relevance in physiological processes, perturbation of PTMs commonly lead to cell

disturbances.[156] Moreover, altered cellular states including differentiation or malignant transformation of cells could be accompanied by the acquisition of unique PTM hallmarks.[156]

I.4.2. The NEDDylation pathway

Protein NEDDylation results from the covalent and reversible binding of *neural precursor cell expressed developmentally down-regulated protein 8* (NEDD8) to a lysine residue in the substrate protein.[157] NEDD8 attachment to proteins is catalyzed by a three-step enzymatic cascade that involves the heterodimer NEDD8-activating enzyme E1 (NAE), NEDD8-conjugating E2 enzymes [ubiquitin-conjugating enzyme E2F (UBE2F) and ubiquitin-conjugating enzyme E2M (UBE2M)] and substrate-specific E3 ligases (**Figure I.7**). Briefly, NEDD8-specific protease (NEDP1) first processes the Gly76 residue at the C-terminal tail of the NEDD8 precursor form. The next step in NEDD8 activation requires the binding of Mg^{2+}, ATP and NEDD8 to NAE [constituted by the heterodimer of NEDD8 activating enzyme E1 regulatory subunit (NAE1) and the NEDD8 activating enzyme E1 catalytic subunit also known as ubiquitin-activating enzyme 3 (UBA3)] that leads to the formation of an acyl adenylate intermediate, NEDD8-AMP, and the release of inorganic pyrophosphate.[158,159] The NEDD8-AMP subsequently reacts with an active thiol site of the NAE E1 enzyme leading to the formation of NEDD8-NAE thioester and the release of AMP.[159–161] The binding of a second NEDD8-AMP, resulting from a second round of NEDD8, ATP and Mg^{2+} reaction, yields an open conformation of the NEDD8-charged NAE structure allowing the transfer of NEDD8 to one of the E2 NEDD8-conjugating enzymes (UBE2F and UBE2M) through a transthiolation reaction.[160–164] Finally, a substrate-specific E3 ligase transfers NEDD8 to a lysine residue in its target protein.[165–167] Most NEDD8 E3 ligases reported to date belong to the RING family of E3s [e.g., cullin-associated RING-box proteins 1 and 2 (RBX1/2), murine double minute 2 (MDM2), Von Hippel–Lindau (VHL), among others]. Other NEDD8 E3 ligases include Parkin or SMAD-specific E3 ubiquitin-protein ligase 1 (SMURF1).[161] Protein NEDDylation is a reversible process in which deNEDDylases [e.g., NEDP1 or COP9 signalosome (CSN)] are able to cleave the peptide bond between the substrate and NEDD8, freeing NEDD8 and facilitating the restart of the NEDDylation conjugation cycle.[168] Curiously, while NEDP1 is able to process the precursor form of NEDD8, CSN complexes do not present a high affinity for free NEDD8 and are very inefficient in processing its precursor form.[161] In contrast, NEDP1 exhibits an insignificant activity when it comes to removing a single NEDD8 from cullins. Nevertheless, NEDP1 mediates deNEDDylation of hyperNEDDylated cullins, resulting in mono-NEDDylated substrates.[161] Moreover, NEDP1 can deconjugate NEDD8 from multiple non-cullin substrates.[161]

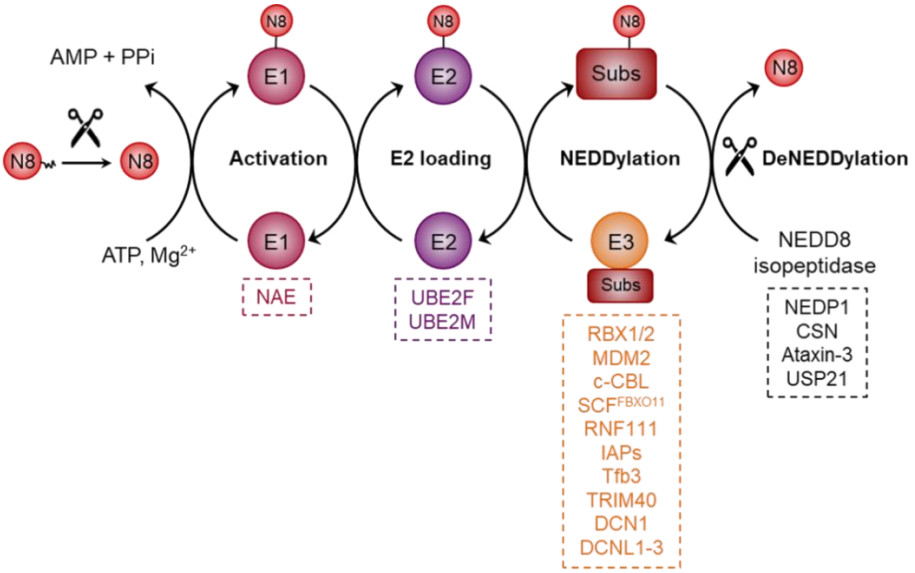

Figure I.7. The NEDDylation pathway. Schematic representation of each step of the NEDD8 conjugation pathway, including NEDD8 precursor processing, NEDD8 activation by NAE, E2 loading, conjugation to a substrate by an E3 and recycling of NEDD8 by a deNEDDylating isopeptidase. The involving enzymes in each step are listed. Abbreviations: c-CBL, casitas B-lineage lymphoma; CSN, COP9 signalosome; DCN1, defective in cullin neddylation protein 1; DCNL 1-3, DCN1-like protein 1-3; IAP, inhibitor of apoptosis; MDM2, murine double minute 2; N8, NEDD8; NAE, NEDD8-activating enzyme; NEDP1, NEDD specific protease 1; RBX1/2, RING-box protein 1/2; RNF111, ring finger protein 111; SCF^{FBXO11}, Skp1-Cul1-F-box; subs, substrate; Tfb3; RNA polymerase II transcription factor B subunit 3; TRIM40, tripartite motif-containing protein 40; UBE2F, ubiquitin-conjugating enzyme 2F; UBE2M, ubiquitin-conjugating enzyme 2M; USP21, ubiquitin carboxyl-terminal hydrolase 21. (Adapted from Zhao Y *et al*., 2014)[169]

NEDD8 is a ubiquitin-like protein (UBL), and these, including ubiquitin and SUMO1, are able to form chains of consecutive SUMO or ubiquitin residues on their substrates. Nevertheless, NEDD8 substrates are thought to be mainly mono-NEDDylated on a single or several conserved lysine residues, and NEDD8 chains have only been reported *in vitro*.[170]

Even though NEDD8 is a UBL that shares 59% amino acid identity and 80% homology with ubiquitin;[171] protein NEDDylation is specific. In this regard, NEDP1 is specific for the NEDD8 precursor form and does not process other UBL precursors.[161] Additionally, a single amino acid difference in the C-terminal of the two UBLs, Ala72 in NEDD8 and Arg72 in ubiquitin, which is recognized by their respective E1 enzymes, represents an important specificity mark.[162] Furthermore, the binding of NEDD8 to the E2 enzymes occurs in a UBA3-specific site that is not present in other E1s, preventing cross-reactivity with other UBL pathways such as ubiquitination or SUMOylation.[162] Finally, NAE can recognize and distinguish both NEDD8 E2 conjugating enzymes, incorporating additional specificity when it comes to cullin modification since UBE2M and UBE2F specifically NEDDylate different cullins (cullin 1-4 and cullin 5, respectively).[161]

I.4.3. NEDDylation substrates

The best characterized substrate of NEDD8 is the cullin family of proteins.[172] In humans, 8 cullin family members have been identified and these include cullins 1-3, 4A, 4B, 5, 7 and 9.[172] Cullins act as a molecular scaffold together with an adaptor protein, a substrate receptor and a RING protein to form the cullin-RING ligases (CRLs), well-known E3 ubiquitin ligases. NEDDylation of cullins activates CRLs, and therefore, promotes ubiquitination and proteasomal degradation of multiple CRL substrates modulating important biological processes such as cell cycle progression, survival, DNA repair and signal transduction, among others (**Figure I.8**).[159,173] The plethora of proteins that can be targeted by CRLs include DNA licensing proteins (e.g., CDT1, ORC1), cell cycle mediators (e.g., p21, p27) or kinases (e.g., WEE1, RhoA).

In addition to CRLs, several non-cullin proteins have been identified to become NEDDylated (**Figure I.8**). These include transcription factors (e.g., p53, p73, E2F, IκBα, HIF1α), receptors (e.g., EGFR, TGF-βR2), kinases (e.g., PINK1, CK1α), E3 ligases (e.g., MDM2, Parkin) and others such as Histone 4 or ribosomal proteins.[161,174–180] NEDDylation of transcription factors, generally suppresses their activity by altering their stability, subcellular localization or interaction with DNA. For instance, MDM2-mediated p53 NEDDylation, unlike MDM2-mediated ubiquitination, does not lead to proteasomal degradation but inhibits its transcriptional activity.[174] The p53 family member, p73 can also become NEDDylated by MDM2, impeding its nuclear translocation and therefore, downregulating its transcriptional activity.[181] Similarly, the transcriptional activity of E2F transcription factors is reduced upon E2F NEDDylation.[182] Protein NEDDylation can potentially regulate RTK signaling. EGFR is a RTK that is activated by binding to extracellular growth factors, which in turn trigger several signaling networks. However, hyper-activation of the downstream signaling cascades can be detrimental, thus EGFR is rapidly phosphorylated or ubiquitinated to mediate its internalization through endocytosis and degradation.[161] Moreover, the E3 ligase c-CBL has been reported to NEDDylate EGFR, resulting in increased ubiquitination and degradation.[161]

On the other hand, protein NEDDylation can result in protein stabilization. In this regard, MDM2 mediates its auto-NEDDylation to enhance its stability and promotes NEDDylation of ribosomal proteins (i.e., L11 and S4) modulating their stability and subcellular location.[161] Likewise, NEDDylation of the oncoprotein HuR leads to its stabilization and nuclear localization, protecting this protein from degradation and hence stimulating cell proliferation and survival.[175] Taken together, these data highlight the relevance of protein NEDDylation, and its fine-tuning, in numerous physiological processes (**Figure I.8**).

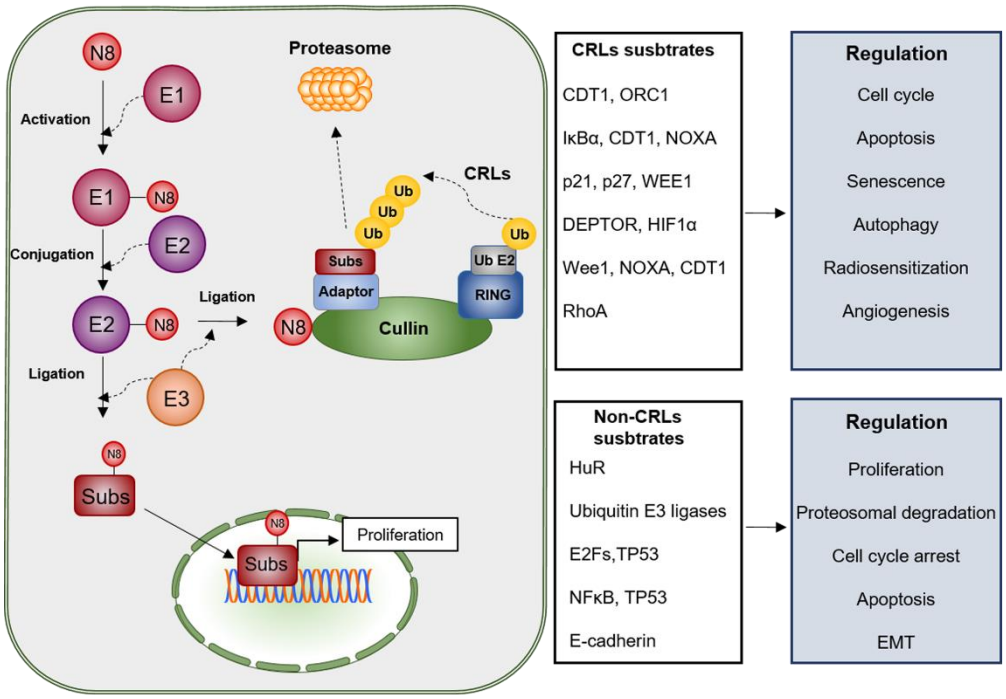

Figure I.8. Molecular mechanisms modulated by the NEDDylation pathway. The NEDD8 conjugation pathway is involved in several physiological processes including cell cycle progression, proliferation, survival, migration, invasion, angiogenesis, among others. Abbreviations: CRL, cullin RING ligase; EMT, epithelial-mesenchymal transition; N8, NEDD8; subs, substrate; Ub, ubiquitin.

I.4.4. NEDDylation and disease

Deregulation in NEDDylation conjugation has been reported in several human diseases such as different types of cancers,[183–187] inflammatory and autoimmune disorders[188,189] as well as neurodegenerative[190,191] and cardiac conditions.[192] Regarding cancer, aberrant protein NEDDylation has been found in distinct types of tumors and multiple NEDD8 target proteins have been identified. As aforementioned, these include cell cycle regulators, tumor suppressors and oncoproteins. Therefore, disruption of normal NEDDylation adversely affects normal cell cycle progression, cell proliferation and survival, ultimately promoting tumor growth.

Considering hepatic disorders, liver fibrosis, early stages of NAFLD (i.e., hepatic steatosis), HCC and iCCA have been shown to exhibit aberrant protein NEDDylation.[193–197] In fact, upregulated protein NEDDylation was observed in patients with liver fibrosis as well as in two animal models mimicking liver fibrosis progression.[193] Similarly, *NEDD8* mRNA levels were increased in patients with hepatic steatosis compared to healthy controls,[195] and both *NEDD8* and *NAE1* mRNA levels were found augmented in a large cohort of HCC patients.[198] Furthermore, the expression of the NEDDylation pathway components (i.e., *NAE1*, *UBA3*, *UBE2M*), as well as NEDD8-conjugation, were determined by immunohistochemistry (IHC) in a cohort of iCCA patients, of which two-thirds displayed upregulation of the NEDDylation pathway.[197] Besides, global levels of NEDDylation and NAE1 protein expression significantly correlated with poor disease outcome in HCC[194] and *NAE1* expression was shown to be an independent prognostic factor for postoperative recurrence in iCCA.[197] Furthermore, knockdown of *UBE2M* reduced cell proliferation and survival in iCCA cells.[199] Overall, these findings indicate that upregulated NEDDylation pathway is involved in liver disease and interference in this pathway could be a promising therapeutic target.

I.4.5. Pevonedistat – A first-in-class NEDDylation inhibitor

Pevonedistat (Takeda Oncology) was developed as a result of perseverant medicinal chemical efforts on N6-benzyl adenosine, which had been previously identified as an inhibitor of NAE through high throughput screening methods.[173] Pevonedistat is an adenosine sulfamate analog and a small highly selective first-in-class inhibitor of NAE and, therefore, of the NEDDylation pathway (**Figure I.9**).[173] Since Pevonedistat is structurally related to AMP, a tight binding product of the first step of the NEDDylation cascade, Pevonedistat is able to form a covalent adduct with NEDD8, impeding further steps in the NEDDylation cascade by a novel mechanism termed substrate-assisted inhibition. This Pevonedistat-NEDD8 adduct resembles the NEDD8-AMP intermediate, but cannot be further transferred to E2s, stopping the subsequent reactions and blocking NEDD8 conjugation.[200] By doing so, Pevonedistat effectively inhibits cullin NEDDylation, inactivating CRLs, which leads to the accumulation of CRL substrates and, thus, triggers cell cycle arrest, apoptosis, senescence and multiple other cellular responses. Likewise, inhibition of NEDD8 conjugation to certain oncoproteins also halts disturbed cell growth. Preclinical studies have proven its potent antitumor activity and well-tolerated toxicity.[159,173] In addition, phase I trials have ensured the safety of Pevonedistat and demonstrated promising clinical effects in terms of disease stabilization and partial or complete responses to treatment.[200,201] Thus, Pevonedistat is currently being investigated in several clinical trials for the treatment of patients suffering from solid and hematological tumors, alone or in combination with other chemotherapeutic compounds.

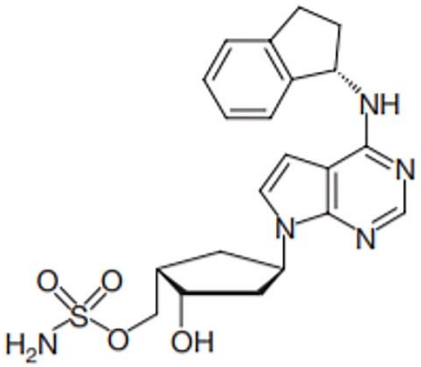

Figure I.9. Chemical structure of Pevonedistat. Pevonedistat (((1S,2S,4R)-4-{4-[(S)-2,3-Dihydro-1H-inden-1-ylamino]-7H-pyrrolo[2,3-d]pyrimidin-7-yl}-2-hydroxycyclopentyl)methyl sulfamate hydrochloride) is an adenosine sulfamate analog that forms with NEDD8 and adduct, which impedes NEDD8 conjugation and blocks the NEDDylation pathway.[173]

Furthermore, increasing evidence is highlighting the role of NEDDylation in the regulation of TME.[202] Importantly, CAFs derived from Pevonedistat-treated HCC tissues presented downregulation of genes involved in cell cycle and DNA replication pathways, suggesting that Pevonedistat could inhibit CAFs proliferation.[203] Moreover, Pevonedistat was found to reduce endothelial cell migration and capillary tube formation, overall suppressing angiogenesis.[202,204] By contrast, T cell and dendritic cell activation, which contributes to antitumor immune response, seems to be impaired upon NEDDylation inhibition.[205,206] It is, therefore, important to determine the relevance of protein NEDDylation in tumor-promoting TME and to assess the effect of NEDDylation inhibition on the different populations of TME *in vivo*, providing further foundation for the use of Pevonedistat as an anticancer therapeutic strategy.

Hypothesis and Objectives

PTMs are essential mechanisms to modulate cellular responses to diverse stimuli. The relevance of protein NEDDylation, in particular, has been demonstrated in different diseases including cancer. Upregulation of the NEDDylation pathway in CCA pointed out the relevance of this PTM in cholangiocarcinogenesis. Therefore, this dissertation aims to further depict the potential role of NEDDylation in the pathogenesis of CCA as well as its regulatory value using Pevonedistat.

Hence, the following objectives were proposed to be assessed:

I. Analysis of the expression levels of the NEDDylation activation components in human CCA tissue compared to controls.

II. Analysis of the expression levels of the NEDDylation activation components in CCA cell lines compared to normal controls.

III. Evaluation of the impact of pharmacological or genetic NEDDylation inhibition in the pathogenesis of CCA *in vitro*.

IV. Evaluation of the impact of pharmacological or genetic NEDDylation inhibition in the pathogenesis of CCA *in vivo*.

V. Identification of the NEDDylation targets involved in cholangiocarcinogenesis.

VI. Ascertain of the role of NEDDylation in the crosstalk between CCA cells and the TME.

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Appendix

Publications during the PhD

1. Lee-Law, P.Y., **Olaizola, P.**, Caballero-Camino, F.J., Izquierdo-Sánchez, L., Rodrigues, P.M., Santos-Laso, A., Azkargorta, M., Elortza, F., Martinez-Chantar, M.L., Perugorria, M.J., Aspichueta, P., Marzioni, M., LaRusso, N.F., Bujanda, L., Drenth, J.P.H., Banales, J.M., 2020. Targeting UBC9-mediated protein hyper-SUMOylation in cystic cholangiocytes halts polycystic liver disease in experimental models. J. Hepatol. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhep.2020.09.010

2. Rodrigues, P.M., **Olaizola, P.**, Paiva, N.A., Olaizola, I., Agirre-Lizaso, A., Landa, A., Bujanda, L., Perugorria, M.J., Banales., J.M., 2020. Pathogenesis of Cholangiocarcinoma. Annu. Rev. Pathol. Mech. Dis. 2021;16:annurev-pathol-030220-020455.

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