



ARTICLE

Epidemiology

*CYP3A7*1C* allele: linking premenopausal oestrone and progesterone levels with risk of hormone receptor-positive breast cancers

Nichola Johnson *et al.*

BACKGROUND: Epidemiological studies provide strong evidence for a role of endogenous sex hormones in the aetiology of breast cancer. The aim of this analysis was to identify genetic variants that are associated with urinary sex-hormone levels and breast cancer risk.

METHODS: We carried out a genome-wide association study of urinary oestrone-3-glucuronide and pregnanediol-3-glucuronide levels in 560 premenopausal women, with additional analysis of progesterone levels in 298 premenopausal women. To test for the association with breast cancer risk, we carried out follow-up genotyping in 90,916 cases and 89,893 controls from the Breast Cancer Association Consortium. All women were of European ancestry.

RESULTS: For pregnanediol-3-glucuronide, there were no genome-wide significant associations; for oestrone-3-glucuronide, we identified a single peak mapping to the *CYP3A* locus, annotated by rs45446698. The minor rs45446698-C allele was associated with lower oestrone-3-glucuronide (−49.2%, 95% CI −56.1% to −41.1%, $P = 3.1 \times 10^{-18}$); in follow-up analyses, rs45446698-C was also associated with lower progesterone (−26.7%, 95% CI −39.4% to −11.6%, $P = 0.001$) and reduced risk of oestrogen and progesterone receptor-positive breast cancer (OR = 0.86, 95% CI 0.82–0.91, $P = 6.9 \times 10^{-8}$).

CONCLUSIONS: The *CYP3A7*1C* allele is associated with reduced risk of hormone receptor-positive breast cancer possibly mediated via an effect on the metabolism of endogenous sex hormones in premenopausal women.

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BACKGROUND

Epidemiological studies provide strong evidence for a role of endogenous hormones in the aetiology of breast cancer.^{1,2} Pooled analyses of data from prospective studies estimated that a doubling of circulating oestradiol or oestrone was associated with a 30–50% increase in breast cancer risk in postmenopausal women and a 20–30% increase in breast cancer risk in premenopausal women; there was no evidence that premenopausal progesterone levels were associated with breast cancer risk.^{2,3} We have previously screened 642 SNPs tagging 42 genes involved in sex steroid synthesis or metabolism, and tested for the association with premenopausal urinary oestrone glucuronide and pregnanediol-3-glucuronide levels, measured in urine samples collected at pre-specified days of the woman’s menstrual cycle.⁴ Oestrone-3-glucuronide and pregnanediol-3-glucuronide are urinary metabolites of oestrogen and progesterone, respectively,^{5,6} that are used in the context of reproductive medicine to monitor ovarian activity.⁷ None of the variants that we tested was associated with urinary pregnanediol-3-glucuronide, but a rare haplotype, defined by two SNPs spanning the cytochrome P450

family 3 subfamily A (*CYP3A*) gene cluster, was associated with a highly significant 32% difference in urinary oestrone-3-glucuronide.⁴ Fine-scale mapping analyses identified the SNP rs45446698 as a putative causal variant at this locus; rs45446698 is one of seven highly correlated SNPs that cluster within the *CYP3A7* promoter and comprise the *CYP3A7*1C* allele.⁸ A genome-wide association study (GWAS) of postmenopausal plasma oestradiol levels found no association at this locus.⁹ A subsequent GWAS of pre- and postmenopausal hormone levels similarly found no association with plasma oestradiol at this locus; they did however find associations at this locus with DHEAS and progesterone.¹⁰

The *CYP3A* genes (*CYP3A5*, *CYP3A7* and *CYP3A4*) encode enzymes that metabolise a diverse range of substrates;¹¹ in addition to a role in the oxidative metabolism of hormones, *CYP3A* enzymes metabolise ~50% of all clinically used drugs, including many of the agents used in treating cancer.¹² *CYP3A4*, the major isoform in adults, is predominantly expressed in the liver, where it is the most abundant P450, accounting for 30% of total *CYP450* protein. *CYP3A7*, the major isoform in the foetus, is generally silenced shortly after birth.¹³ In *CYP3A7*1C* carriers, a region within

Correspondence: Nichola Johnson (nichola.johnson@icr.ac.uk)

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Members of the NBCS Collaborators, AOCs Group, ABCTB Investigators and kConFab Investigators are listed above Acknowledgements.

A full list of authors and their affiliations appear at the end of the paper

These authors contributed equally: Nichola Johnson, Sarah Maguire, Anna Morra, Pooja Middha Kapoor

These authors jointly supervised this work: Jenny Chang-Claude, Marjanka K. Schmidt, Nick Orr, Olivia Fletcher

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the foetal *CYP3A7* promoter has been replaced with the equivalent region from the adult *CYP3A4* gene;¹⁴ this results in adult expression of *CYP3A7* in *CYP3A7*1C* carriers and may influence metabolism of endogenous hormones, exogenous hormones used in menopausal hormone treatment and clinically prescribed drugs, including agents used in treating cancer, in these individuals.^{12,15} In order to identify additional variants that are associated with premenopausal urinary hormone levels and to further characterise the associations at the *CYP3A* locus, we carried out a GWAS of urinary oestrone-3-glucuronide and pregnanediol-3-glucuronide levels, using mid-luteal-phase urine samples from women of European ancestry and followed up by testing for an association with breast cancer risk in cases and controls from the Breast Cancer Association Consortium (BCAC). To determine whether the *CYP3A7*1C* allele influences metabolism of exogenous hormones, we evaluated gene-environment interactions with menopausal hormone treatment for breast cancer risk, and to investigate whether adult expression of *CYP3A7* impacts on agents used in treating cancer, we analysed associations with breast cancer-specific survival.

METHODS

GWAS subjects

Generations Study. Full details of the Generations Study have been published previously.¹⁶ Briefly, the Generations Study is a cohort study of more than 110,000 women from the UK general population, who were recruited beginning in 2003 and from whom detailed questionnaires and blood samples have been collected to investigate risk factors for breast cancer.

British Breast Cancer Study. Full details of the British Breast Cancer Study have been published previously.¹⁷ Briefly, the British Breast Cancer Study is a national case-control study of breast cancer, in which cases of breast cancer were ascertained through the cancer registries of England and Scotland and through the National Cancer Research Network. Cases were asked to invite a healthy female first-degree relative with no history of cancer and a female friend or non-blood relative to participate in the study.

Mammography Oestrogens and Growth Factors study. Full details of the Mammography Oestrogens and Growth Factors study have been published previously.¹⁸ Briefly, this is an observational study nested within a trial of annual mammography screening in young women that was conducted in Britain.¹⁹ Approximately 54,000 women aged 39–41 years were randomly assigned to the intervention arm from 1991 to 1997 and offered annual mammograms until age 48 years. From 2000 to 2003, women in the intervention arm who were still participating in this trial were invited to participate in the Mammography Oestrogens and Growth Factors study; they were asked to provide a blood sample and complete a questionnaire detailing demographic, lifestyle and reproductive factors. More than 8000 women were enrolled in the study.

GWAS subjects were drawn from the Generations Study ($N=184$), the British Breast Cancer Study ($N=284$) and the Mammography Oestrogens and Growth Factors study ($N=109$). To be eligible for the GWAS analysis of oestrone-3-glucuronide and pregnanediol-3-glucuronide levels, women had to be having regular menstrual cycles (i.e., their usual cycle length had to be between 21 and 35 days) and not using menopausal hormone therapy or oral contraceptives. All of the women included in this analysis reported being of European ancestry, and none had been diagnosed with breast cancer at the time of study recruitment.

Measurement of hormone levels

The protocol for collecting timed urine samples has been published previously.¹⁸ Briefly, a woman's predicted date of

ovulation was estimated from the date of the first day of her last menstrual period and her usual cycle length; ovulation was predicted to occur 14 days before the date of her next menstrual period. On this basis, women were asked to provide a series of early morning urine samples on pre-specified days of their cycle. For this analysis, the mid-luteal-phase sample, taken at 7 days after the predicted day of ovulation, was used. To confirm that ovulation had occurred, consistent with the predicted date of ovulation, pregnanediol-3-glucuronide was measured; to take account of the differences in volume in early morning urine samples from different women, we measured creatinine, a waste product of normal muscle and protein metabolism that is released at a constant rate by the body. Samples in which pregnanediol-3-glucuronide, adjusted for creatinine levels, was $>0.3 \mu\text{mol/mol}$, were taken forward for measurement of creatinine-adjusted oestrone-3-glucuronide. Pregnanediol-3-glucuronide and oestrone-3-glucuronide were analysed by commercial competitive ELISA Kits (Arbor Assays, Ann Arbor, USA) according to the manufacturer's instructions. For pregnanediol-3-glucuronide, the lower limit of detection was determined as 0.64 nmol/l ; intra- and inter-assay coefficients of variation were 3.7% and 5.2%, respectively. For oestrone-3-glucuronide, the lower limit of detection was determined as 19.6 pmol/l ; intra- and inter-assay coefficients of variation were 3.5% and 5.9%, respectively. Creatinine was determined using the creatininase/creatinase-specific enzymatic method²⁰ using a commercial kit (Alpha Laboratories Ltd, Eastleigh, UK) adapted for use on a Cobas Fara centrifugal analyser (Roche Diagnostics Ltd, Welwyn Garden City, UK). For within-run precision, the coefficient of variation was $<3\%$, while for intra-batch precision, the coefficient of variation was $<5\%$.

For 303 premenopausal women participating in the Generations Study (184 as above and an additional 119 for whom timed urine samples were accrued more recently), urinary progesterone levels were also measured using an "in house" ELISA. In all, 96-well plates (Greiner Bio-One GmbH, Frickenhausen, Germany) were coated with $100 \mu\text{l}$ of $5 \mu\text{g/ml}$ GAM (Arbor Assays, Ann Arbor, USA) in ELISA coating buffer (100 mM Na Bicarbonate, pH 9.6) covered and incubated in a fridge at 4°C overnight. Before use, the plates were washed three times with wash buffer 0.05 M Tris/HCl and 0.05% Tween 20, pH 7.4 (Tween[®] 20, Sigma-Aldrich, Inc., St. Louis, MO, USA). Standards, samples and controls ($20 \mu\text{l}$ per well) were added to each well, followed by $80 \mu\text{l}$ of progesterone 3-HRP conjugate (Astra Biotech GmbH, Berlin, Germany) at 1:10,000 in assay buffer (PBS pH 7.4 containing 0.1% BSA and 250 ng/ml Cortisol), followed by $50 \mu\text{l}$ of monoclonal progesterone Ab (Astra Biotech GmbH, Berlin, Germany) 1:50,000 in assay buffer. Plates were incubated at room temperature for 2 h on a microtitre plate shaker (IKA[®], Schuttler MTS4, IKA Labortechnik, Staufen, Germany), then washed five times with assay wash buffer and $120 \mu\text{l}$ of substrate solution (3,3',5,5'-tetramethylbenzidine, Millipore Corporation, Temecula, CA, USA) was added to each well. Plates were incubated at room temperature without shaking in the dark. After 20 min, the reaction was stopped by adding $80 \mu\text{l}$ of 2 N H_2SO_4 solution (Sigma-Aldrich Company Ltd., Dorset, UK). Finally, the plates were read on a plate reader at 450 nm . Standard curves were prepared with a total of eight different concentrations (16, 8, 4, 2, 1, 0.5, 0.25 and 0 ng/ml). Samples, standards and controls were included in duplicate. Inter- and intra-assay coefficients of variation were calculated from two controls of low and high progesterone in duplicate in each of eight assays. The inter-assay coefficients of variation for low and high pools, respectively, were 11.4 and 9.1%; the intra-assay coefficients of variation were 8.9 and 5.6%. The lower limit of detection was calculated at 0.1 ng/ml . Cross-reaction with other steroids was oestrone: 0.17%, oestradiol: 0.28%, oestriol: 0.18%, dehydroepiandrosterone: 0.02%, testosterone: 0.36%, dihydrotestosterone: 0.15%, 17α -hydroxyprogesterone: 2.9%, androstenedione: 0.14%, 11-deoxycortisol: 0.46%, corticosterone: 0.18%, cortisone: 0.04% and cortisol: 0.04%.

GWAS genotyping and quality control

DNA from 577 women was genotyped using Illumina Infinium OncoArray 500 K BeadChips. We excluded samples for which <95% of SNPs were successfully genotyped. Identity-by-descent analysis was used to identify closely related individuals enabling exclusion of first-degree relatives. We applied SmartPCA²¹ to our data and used phase II HapMap samples to identify individuals with non-Caucasian ancestry. The first two principal components for each individual were plotted, and k-means clustering was used to identify samples separated from the main Caucasian cluster. SNPs with call rates <95% were excluded, as were SNPs with minor allele frequency (MAF) <2% and those whose genotype frequencies deviated from Hardy–Weinberg proportions at $P < 1 \times 10^{-05}$. Following QC, 487,659 SNPs were successfully genotyped in 560 samples (Generations Study: $N = 179$, British Breast Cancer Study: $N = 278$ and Mammography Oestrogens and Growth Factors study: $N = 103$). Genome-wide imputation was performed using 1KGP Phase 3 reference data. Haplotypes were pre-phased using SHAPEIT2.²² Imputation was performed using IMPUTE2.²³ Imputed SNPs with INFO scores <0.8 and MAFs <2% were excluded from subsequent analyses. After QC, a set of 7,792,694 successfully imputed SNPs were available for association analysis.

Genotyping rs45446698 and sequencing of the CYP3A7*1C allele For the 119 Generations Study women who were not included in the GWAS but for whom progesterone was subsequently measured, rs45446698 was genotyped by TaqMan (Thermo Fisher Scientific Ltd, UK). The call rate was 100% with 100% concordance between 12 duplicates. To confirm that rs45446698 tags the CYP3A7*1C allele, we sequenced this region in 31 women selected on the basis of their rs45446698 genotype (9 common homozygotes and 22 carriers). A 370-bp DNA region (chr7: 99 332 745-99 333 114; GRCh37/hg19) was amplified using Phusion High-Fidelity DNA Polymerase (New England Biolabs, UK) and primers CCATAGAGACAAGAGGAGA (forward) and CTGAGTCTTTTTTCAGCAGC (reverse). The PCR product was purified using QIAquick Gel Extraction Kit (Qiagen) and Sanger sequenced using a commercially available service (Eurofins Genomics, Germany).

Statistical analysis of GWAS data

Tests of association between SNP genotypes and log-transformed creatinine-adjusted oestrone-3-glucuronide and pregnanediol-3-glucuronide adjusted for study were performed using linear regression in SNPTTEST v2.5.²⁴ Test statistic inflation was assessed visually using a QQ Plot (Supplementary Fig. S1) and formally by calculating the inflation factor, λ . There was no evidence of systematic test statistic inflation ($\lambda = 1.01$ for both oestrone-3-glucuronide and pregnanediol-3-glucuronide). For the single significant association (rs45446698), we used multivariate linear regression to adjust for potential confounders: age at menarche (<12, 12, 13, 14 and >14 years), age at collection of urine samples (<35, 35–40 and ≥ 40 years), body mass index (BMI: <18.5, 18.5–<20.0, 20.0–<25.0, 25.0–<30.0 and ≥ 30.0 kg/m²) and parity (0, 1, 2 and ≥ 3 live births).

Follow-up genotyping of rs45446698

Genotype data for rs45446698 were generated as part of iCOGS²⁵ and OncoArray.²⁶ Full details of SNP selection, array design, genotyping and post-genotyping QC have been published.^{25,26} Participants genotyped in both collaborations were excluded from the iCOGS data sets with the exception of the GxE interaction analysis of menopausal hormone treatment, for which five studies (CPS-II, PBCS, UKBGS, MCCS and pKARMA) were excluded from OncoArray, rather than iCOGS, in order to maximise the number of studies with sufficient cases and controls for analysis. We excluded cases with breast tumours of unknown invasiveness, or in situ disease, and those for whom age at diagnosis was not known.

After QC exclusions,²⁶ the call rate for rs45446698 in OncoArray data was 99.66% and there was no evidence of deviation from Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium in controls (Supplementary Table S1). In iCOGS data, rs45446698 was imputed using 1KGP Phase 3 reference data (info score = 0.94); we used gene dosages ($\leq 0.2 = 0$, >0.8 and $\leq 1.2 = 1$, $>1.8 = 2$) to call genotypes for 99.22% of samples.

Statistical analysis of rs45446698 and breast cancer risk

Due to the low MAF of rs45446698 (3.7%, 0.03% and 0.4% in individuals of European, Asian and African ancestry, respectively), we restricted our analyses to individuals of European ancestry and excluded studies with <50 cases or controls; there were 35 (iCOGS) and 56 (OncoArray) studies for the current case–control analysis (Supplementary Tables S1 and S2).

We combined heterozygote and rare homozygote genotypes and estimated carrier ORs using logistic regression, adjusted for 15 principal components^{25,26} and study. Stratum-specific carrier ORs were estimated for a set of pre-specified prognostic variables (oestrogen receptor (ER), progesterone receptor (PR), HER2, grade and stage). We excluded studies with <50 cases or controls in any individual stratum from stratified analyses. Interactions were assessed based on case-only models (ER, PR, Her2, stage and grade). In the subset of studies for which covariate data were available, we used multivariable logistic regression to adjust for reference age (defined as age at diagnosis for cases and age at interview for controls), age at menarche, BMI and parity (as above). Finally, we stratified our analyses on menopausal status at reference age. When menopausal status was missing, the reference age was used as a surrogate (<54 premenopausal and ≥ 54 postmenopausal). To select the reference age that most accurately captured menopausal status in this group of studies, we generated AUC curves based on women who had reported natural menopause with different reference age cut-offs (50–56 years); on this basis, a reference age of 54 was selected. P values were estimated using likelihood ratio tests with one degree of freedom. All P values reported, for all analyses, are two-sided. Statistical analyses were performed using STATA version 11.0 (StataCorp, College Station, TX, USA).

Statistical analysis of gene–environment interaction (GxE) with menopausal hormone treatment

Postmenopausal women from 13 (iCOGS) and 27 (OncoArray) studies provided the data on menopausal hormone treatment. Menopausal status and postmenopausal hormone use were derived as of the reference date (defined as date of diagnosis for cases and interview for controls); women with unknown age at reference date were excluded from this analysis. All analyses were conducted only in postmenopausal women. Carrier ORs for breast cancer risk were estimated using logistic regression stratified by current use of menopausal hormone treatment, oestrogen–progesterone therapy and oestrogen-only therapy, respectively. Analyses were adjusted for study, ten principal components, reference age, age at menarche, parity, BMI, former use of menopausal hormone treatment and use of any menopausal hormone treatment preparation other than the one of interest in analyses of current use of menopausal hormone treatment by type. To account for potential heterogeneity of the main effects of menopausal hormone treatment/oestrogen–progesterone therapy/oestrogen-only therapy by study design, we included an interaction term between the risk factor of interest and an indicator variable for study design (prospective cohorts/population-based case–control studies, non-population-based studies). Interactions between rs45446698 and current use of menopausal hormone treatment, oestrogen–progesterone therapy and oestrogen-only therapy were assessed using likelihood ratio tests, based on logistic regression models with and without interaction between rs45446698 and current use of menopausal hormone

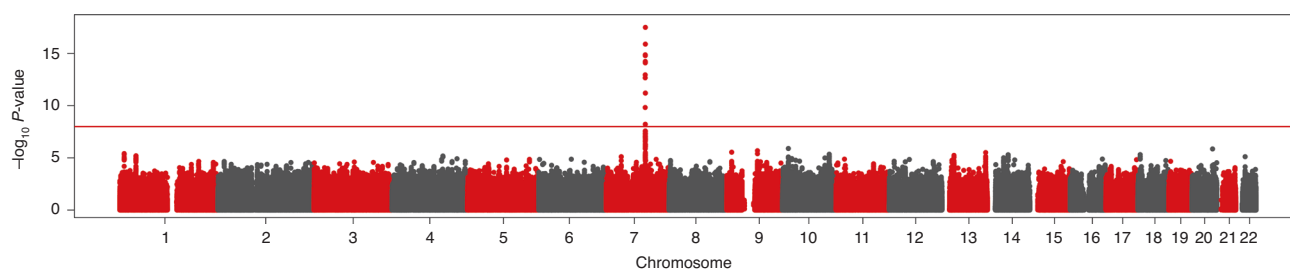


Fig. 1 Manhattan plot of single-nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) associations with luteal-phase urinary oestrone-3-glucuronide levels in 560 premenopausal women. $-\log_{10} P$ values for SNP associations are plotted against the genomic coordinates (hg19). The red line indicates the conventionally accepted threshold for genome-wide significance ($P = 1 \times 10^{-8}$).

treatment, oestrogen–progesterone therapy and oestrogen-only therapy, respectively. Statistical analyses were performed using SAS 9.4 and R (version 3.4.4).

Statistical analysis of breast cancer-specific survival in cases
In total, 38 (iCOGS) and 63 (OncoArray) studies provided follow-up data for analysis of breast cancer-specific survival. Analysis of outcome was restricted to patients who were at least 18 years old at diagnosis and for whom vital status at, and date of the last follow-up were known. Patients ascertained for a second tumour were excluded. Time-to-event was calculated from the date of diagnosis. For prevalent cases with study entry after diagnosis, left truncation was applied, i.e., follow-up started at the date of study entry.²⁷ Follow-up was right-censored at the date of death (death known to be due to breast cancer considered an event), the date the patient was last known to be alive if death did not occur or at 10 years after diagnosis, whichever came first. Follow-up was censored at 10 years due to limited data availability after this time. Hazard ratios (HR) for association of rs45446698 genotype with breast cancer-specific survival were estimated using Cox proportional hazards regression implemented in the R package survival (v. 2.43–3) stratified by country. iCOGS and OncoArray estimates were combined using an inverse-variance-weighted meta-analysis.

RESULTS

We tested 8,280,353 autosomal SNPs for association with luteal-phase creatinine-adjusted oestrone-3-glucuronide and pregnanediol-3-glucuronide in 560 premenopausal women. For oestrone-3-glucuronide, we identified a single peak mapping to the *CYP3A* locus at chromosome 7q22.1 (Fig. 1 and Supplementary Table S3); conditioning on any of the top SNPs, there were no additional independent signals. Four of the SNPs that were significant at $P < 1 \times 10^{-8}$ comprise part of the seven-SNP *CYP3A7*1C* allele,^{8,15} including the top, directly genotyped SNP, rs45446698 (Supplementary Table S3). The rare rs45446698-C allele (MAF = 0.035) was associated with a 49.2% reduction in luteal-phase oestrone-3-glucuronide (95% CI -56.1% to -41.1% , $P = 3.1 \times 10^{-18}$, Table 1) and explained 11.5% of the variation in oestrone-3-glucuronide in these premenopausal women. Since hormone levels may be influenced by both demographic and reproductive factors, we adjusted for age at urine collection, age at menarche, body mass index and parity; these adjustments did not alter the association (fully adjusted model: 44.8% reduction, 95% CI -53.3% to -34.8% , $P = 2.1 \times 10^{-12}$, Table 1).

For pregnanediol-3-glucuronide, there were no associations that were significant at a threshold of $P < 1 \times 10^{-8}$ (Supplementary Fig. S2). An association between the *CYP3A* locus and progesterone levels has been reported previously;¹⁰ accordingly, we measured progesterone in addition to pregnanediol-3-glucuronide in premenopausal women from the Generations Study. Progesterone was moderately correlated with pregnanediol-3-glucuronide ($r = 0.37$, $P = 7.4 \times 10^{-12}$), but while

there was no association between the rs45446698-C allele and urinary pregnanediol-3-glucuronide levels (5.5% reduction, 95% CI -24.2% to $+17.7\%$, $P = 0.61$) in this group of women, the rs45446698-C allele was associated with significantly lower luteal-phase urinary progesterone levels (26.7% reduction, 95% CI -39.4% to -11.6% , $P = 0.001$, Table 1). Adjusting these analyses for covariates, as above, did not alter the results (Table 1).

To test for the association between rs45446698 and breast cancer risk, we combined genotype data from 56 studies (OncoArray; Supplementary Table S1) with imputed data from 35 studies (iCOGS; Supplementary Table S2) in a total of 90,916 cases and 89,893 controls of European Ancestry. The rs45446698-C allele was associated with a reduction in breast cancer risk (OR = 0.94, 95% CI 0.91–0.98, $P = 0.002$, Table 2) with no evidence of heterogeneity between data sets ($P_{\text{het}} = 0.58$). There was no evidence that the reduction in breast cancer risk associated with being a rs45446698-C carrier differed according to Her2 status, tumour grade or stage (Supplementary Table S4). Stratifying by ER status, the association was limited to ER-positive (ER+) breast cancers (OR = 0.91, 95% CI 0.87–0.96, $P = 0.0002$ and OR = 1.03, 95% CI 0.95–1.11, $P = 0.50$ for ER+ and ER– cancers, respectively; $P_{\text{int}} = 0.03$, Table 2). Stratifying by ER and PR status, the association was limited to ER+/PR+ cancers (ER+/PR+: OR = 0.86, 95% CI 0.82–0.91, $P = 6.9 \times 10^{-8}$; ER+/PR–: OR = 1.06, 95% CI 0.96–1.16, $P = 0.25$; $P_{\text{int}} = 0.0001$, Table 2). Adjusting for demographic and reproductive factors in the subset of studies for which these additional covariates were available did not alter this association (Supplementary Table S5). Defining reference age as age at diagnosis for cases and age at interview for controls and using this as a proxy for menopausal status (<54 or ≥ 54 years), we further stratified our analysis on menopausal status; there was little evidence that the association with ER+/PR+ breast cancer differed by menopausal status (premenopausal OR = 0.94, 95% CI 0.84–1.06, $P = 0.31$, postmenopausal OR = 0.86, 95% CI 0.80–0.93, $P = 0.0001$, $P_{\text{het}} = 0.28$).

On the assumption that genetic variants that influence metabolism of endogenous hormones⁵ may also impact on metabolism of exogenous hormones, we investigated whether menopausal hormone treatment modified the association between rs45446698 genotype and ER+/PR+ breast cancer risk in 17,831 postmenopausal breast cancer cases and 40,437 postmenopausal controls. The rs45446698-C carrier OR was lower (i.e., more protective) in current users of any menopausal hormone treatment but particularly in those who used combined oestrogen–progesterone therapy (current users: OR = 0.68, 95% CI 0.52–0.90, $P = 0.007$; never users: OR = 0.85, 95% CI 0.76–0.95, $P = 0.005$, Table 3). This difference was not, however, statistically significant ($P_{\text{int}} = 0.15$, Table 3).

Finally, to determine whether rs45446698 genotype could affect patient outcome by influencing metabolism of cytotoxic agents that are *CYP3A* substrates,¹⁵ we tested for the association between rs45446698 genotype and 10-year breast cancer-specific survival in 91,539 breast cancer cases from 71 studies

Table 1. Association of rs45446698 with levels of oestrone-3-glucuronide, pregnanediol-3-glucuronide and progesterone in premenopausal women of European ancestry.

Hormone	Geometric mean by rs45446698 genotype (µmol/mol)		Unadjusted analysis		Adjusted analysis ^a	
	AA	AC/CC	% change	P	% change	P
GWAS (N = 560)						
Oestrone-3-glucuronide	9.74	4.95	-49.2 (-56.1 to -41.1)	3.1×10^{-18}	-44.8 (-53.3 to -34.8)	2.1×10^{-12}
Pregnanediol-3-glucuronide	0.78	0.70	-10.1 (-22.5 to 4.3)	0.16	-9.3 (-22.9 to 6.8)	0.24
Follow-up progesterone analysis (N = 298)						
Oestrone-3-glucuronide	9.77	4.39	-55.0 (-63.1 to -45.1)	2.6×10^{-15}	-55.1 (-63.6 to -44.7)	4.0×10^{-14}
Pregnanediol-3-glucuronide	0.79	0.75	-5.5 (-24.2 to 17.7)	0.61	-9.6 (-27.9 to 13.3)	0.38
Progesterone	29.37	21.51	-26.7 (-39.4 to -11.6)	0.001	-24.3 (-37.6 to -8.2)	0.005

^aAnalysis was adjusted for age at menarche (<12, 12, 13, 14 and >14 years), age at collection of urine samples (<35, 35-40 and ≥40 years), body mass index (<18.5, 18.5-20.0, 20.0-25.0, 25.0-30.0 and ≥30.0 kg/m²) and parity (0, 1, 2 and ≥3 live births).

Table 2. Association of rs45446698 among women of European ancestry overall and stratified by hormone receptor status.

	iCOGS				OncoArray				Combined			
	Cases	Controls	OR (95% CI)	P ₁	Cases	Controls	OR (95% CI)	P ₁	Cases	Controls	OR (95% CI)	P ₁
All subjects	36,859	37,320	0.93 (0.87-0.98)	0.01	54,057	52,573	0.95 (0.91-1.00)	0.05	90,916	89,893	0.94 (0.91-0.98)	0.002
ER +	19,950	28,820	0.90 (0.84-0.97)	0.007	28,478	40,223	0.92 (0.87-0.98)	0.01	48,428	69,043	0.91 (0.87-0.96)	0.0002
ER-	4298	28,820	1.04 (0.92-1.18)	0.56	6592	40,223	1.03 (0.92-1.14)	0.64	10,890	69,043	1.03 (0.95-1.11)	0.50
NK	5087				8380							
Total	29,335	28,820		P _{int} = 0.06	4450	40,223		P _{int} = 0.19				P _{int} = 0.03
PR +	13,995	28,820	0.85 (0.78-0.93)	0.0002	21,500	40,223	0.87 (0.81-0.93)	0.0001	35,495	69,043	0.86 (0.82-0.91)	5.8×10^{-8}
PR-	6154	28,820	1.06 (0.95-1.18)	0.33	10,058	40,223	1.05 (0.96-1.15)	0.26	16,212	69,043	1.05 (0.98-1.12)	0.18
NK	9186				11,892							
Total	29,335	28,820		P _{int} = 0.001	43,450	40,223		P _{int} = 0.0004				P _{int} = 1.3×10^{-6}
ER +, PR +	13,508	28,820	0.85 (0.78-0.93)	0.0003	20,624	40,223	0.87 (0.81-0.93)	0.0001	34,132	69,043	0.86 (0.82-0.91)	6.9×10^{-8}
ER +, PR-	2890	28,820	1.03 (0.89-1.20)	0.66	4597	40,223	1.07 (0.96-1.21)	0.21	7487	69,043	1.06 (0.96-1.16)	0.25
NK	12,937				18,229							
Total	29,335	28,820		P _{int} = 0.02	43,450	40,223		P _{int} = 0.001				P _{int} = 0.0001

P₁ test of H₀ no association between rs45446698 and breast cancer risk, P_{int} test of H₀ no difference between stratum-specific estimates, P_{het} test of H₀ no difference between iCOGS and OncoArray data, NK not known.

Studies with less than 50 cases in any stratum were excluded from the stratified analyses leaving 16 studies for analysis in iCOGS data and 32 studies for analysis in OncoArray data.

for whom follow-up data were available. There was neither overall association between rs45446698 genotype and breast cancer-specific survival (HR = 0.99, 95% CI 0.91-1.09, P = 0.90, Table 4) nor was there any evidence of an association in analyses stratified by tumour characteristics (Supplementary Table S6). Stratifying by treatment regimen, we found no evidence that rs45446698 genotype influenced outcome in cases who were treated with a hormonal agent (i.e., tamoxifen or an aromatase inhibitor, Table 4). There was, however, some evidence that in cases who were treated with a taxane, carriers of the rs45446698-C allele had reduced breast cancer-specific survival compared with non-carriers (HR = 1.46, 95% CI 1.08-1.97, P = 0.01, Table 4).

DISCUSSION

This present GWAS identified a single, highly significant association between the CYP3A7*1C allele (tagged by rs4546698) and premenopausal urinary oestrone-3-glucuronide. This finding alone is not novel; we have previously reported an association between the CYP3A7*1C allele, parent oestrogens and several oestrogen metabolites.⁵ What we have demonstrated for the first time is the extent to which this signal dominates the genetic architecture of

hormone levels in premenopausal women of Northern European ancestry (Fig. 1; rs45446698 P = 3.1×10^{-18} , all other signals P > 1×10^{-6}) and we estimate that 11.5% of the variance in urinary oestrone-3-glucuronide levels is explained by this one allele.

Two previous GWAS of circulating oestrogen levels have been published, neither reported an association with the CYP3A locus.^{9,10} This lack of replication may be explained by our choice of study population. The first GWAS⁹ was conducted in postmenopausal women (N = 1623) participating in the Nurses' Health Study and the Sisters in Breast Screening Study. The second was conducted within the Twins UK study (N = 2913) and included men as well as pre-, peri- and postmenopausal women. A strength of our GWAS is that all of the women were premenopausal and had regular menstrual cycles; circulating levels of oestrogens in premenopausal women are much higher compared with those in postmenopausal women.^{4,28} For each woman, we assayed a single urine sample taken in the mid-luteal phase of her cycle at exactly 7 days after her predicted day of ovulation. Thus, although our study is relatively small (N = 560), we may have had greater power to detect an association at the CYP3A locus than previous studies due to the very homogeneous premenopausal study population that we selected.

Table 3. Association of rs45446698 genotype with ER + /PR + breast cancer risk among women of European ancestry stratified by current use of postmenopausal hormone treatment.

	iCOGS				OncoArray				Combined			
	Cases	Controls	OR (95% CI)	P_1	Cases	Controls	OR (95% CI)	P_1	Cases	Controls	OR (95% CI)	P_1
MHT–	3742	8902	0.73 (0.62–0.86)	0.0002	5961	15,128	0.95 (0.83–1.08)	0.45	9703	24,030	0.86 (0.78–0.95)	0.003
MHT +	1593	2859	0.77 (0.59–0.99)	0.04	2823	5529	0.87 (0.71–1.06)	0.16	4416	8388	0.83 (0.70–0.97)	0.02
NK	622	1793			3090	6226			3712	8019		
Total	5957	13,554		$P_{int} = 0.81$	11,874	26,883		$P_{int} = 0.26$	17,831	40,437		$P_{int} = 0.47$
EPT–	3736	7826	0.77 (0.65–0.91)	0.002	4173	8566	0.93 (0.80–1.09)	0.38	7909	16,392	0.85 (0.76–0.95)	0.005
EPT +	727	944	0.71 (0.48–1.05)	0.09	878	1170	0.66 (0.45–0.97)	0.03	1605	2114	0.68 (0.52–0.90)	0.007
NK	1494	4784			6823	17,147			8317	21,931		
Total	5957	13,554		$P_{int} = 0.72$	11,874	26,883		$P_{int} = 0.09$	17,831	40,437		$P_{int} = 0.15$
ET–	3840	7710	0.75 (0.63–0.88)	0.0005	4343	8136	0.92 (0.79–1.07)	0.29	8183	15,846	0.88 (0.79–0.97)	0.01
ET +	589	1172	0.69 (0.45–1.06)	0.09	640	1484	0.94 (0.62–1.42)	0.76	1229	2656	0.84 (0.64–1.10)	0.21
NK	1528	4672			6891	17,263			8419	21,935		
Total	5957	13,554		$P_{int} = 0.83$	11,874	26,883		$P_{int} = 0.85$	17,831	40,437		$P_{int} = 0.78$

MHT menopausal hormone treatment, EPT oestrogen–progesterone therapy, ET oestrogen-only therapy, P_1 test of H_0 no association between rs45446698 and ER + /PR + breast cancer risk, P_{int} test of H_0 no difference between stratum-specific estimates, NK not known. Studies with less than 50 cases in any stratum were excluded from the stratified analyses leaving 13 studies for analysis in iCOGS data and 27 studies for analysis in OncoArray data. All models are adjusted for reference age, study, ten principal components and former use of MHT. Additionally, when stratified by EPT or ET, models are adjusted for use of any other type of MHT other than the one of interest. Further adjusting for age at menarche (<12, 12, 13, 14, >14), parity (0, 1, 2 and ≥ 3 live births) and BMI (<18.5, 18.5–<20.0, 20.0–<25.0, 25.0–<30.0 and ≥ 30.0 kg/m²) did not alter these results.

Table 4. Association of rs45446698 with breast cancer-specific survival in breast cancer cases of European Ancestry stratified by treatment regimen.

Group	iCOGS				OncoArray				Combined			
	Cases	Events	HR (95% CI)	P_1	Cases	Events	HR (95% CI)	P_1	HR (95% CI)	P_1	P_{het}	
All breast cancer patients	32,743	2580	0.93 (0.80–1.08)	0.35	58,796	3799	1.04 (0.92–1.17)	0.57	0.99 (0.91–1.09)	0.90	0.28	
Only patients that												
Received tamoxifen	9766	825	1.22 (0.95–1.57)	0.13	7803	746	0.95 (0.73–1.23)	0.68	1.08 (0.90–1.30)	0.41	0.18	
Received aromatase inhibitor	3794	246	0.94 (0.58–1.54)	0.82	5460	247	1.03 (0.64–1.65)	0.91	0.99 (0.70–1.39)	0.94	0.81	
Received CMF-like CT	919	99	0.30 (0.09–1.01)	0.05	1692	229	0.88 (0.55–1.41)	0.60	0.77 (0.50–1.19)	0.24	0.11	
Received taxanes*	1806	160	1.69 (0.96–2.99)	0.07	3836	299	1.37 (0.96–1.96)	0.08	1.46 (1.08–1.97)	0.01	0.54	
Received anthracycline therapy	4625	418	1.21 (0.83–1.75)	0.32	6740	771	1.07 (0.82–1.38)	0.63	1.11 (0.90–1.37)	0.33	0.58	

CMF cyclophosphamide methotrexate fluorouracil, CT chemotherapy, P_1 test of H_0 no association between rs45446698 and breast cancer-specific survival, P_{het} test of H_0 no difference across genotyping platforms.

In total, 38 studies from iCOGS and 63 studies from OncoArray provided follow-up data for analysis of breast cancer-specific survival. The results were censored at 10 years after diagnosis. HR for association of rs45446698 genotype with breast cancer-specific survival was estimated using Cox proportional hazards regression stratified by country.

*To test for statistical interaction between rs45446698 genotype and treatment with a taxane, we additionally compared the association in cases who received chemotherapy including a taxane to that in cases who received chemotherapy that did not include a taxane ($P_{int} = 0.02$; the association in the latter group was in the opposite direction and not significant: HR = 0.88, 95% CI 0.67–1.15, $P = 0.34$).

Our findings also demonstrate the potential significance of the choice of hormone or hormone metabolite; both of the previous GWAS assayed plasma oestradiol. In a targeted analysis of urinary oestrogen metabolites, we have previously shown that the association between the CYP3A7*1C allele and oestrone (45.3% lower levels in carriers, $P = 0.0005$) is more pronounced than the association with oestradiol (26.7% lower levels, $P = 0.07$) with the implication that measuring urinary oestrone-3-glucuronide (rather than plasma oestradiol) may have contributed to our positive findings. Similarly, by measuring pregnanediol-3-glucuronide and progesterone in premenopausal women from the Generations Study, we were able to demonstrate a significant association of rs45446698 with progesterone (27% reduction, $P = 0.001$) in the absence of an association with pregnanediol-3-glucuronide (6% reduction, $P = 0.61$).

The fact that we measured a urinary oestrogen metabolite (oestrone-3-glucuronide) rather than serum or plasma oestrogens (oestradiol or oestrone) limits the interpretation of our results in terms of a causal association. Estimates of the association between

circulating oestrogens and breast cancer risk are based on measurements of hormone levels in plasma or serum,³ and in a recent study that measured luteal-phase serum oestrogens and urinary oestrogen metabolites in 249 premenopausal women,²⁹ serum oestradiol and oestrone were only moderately correlated with urinary oestrone (serum oestradiol: $r = 0.39$, serum oestrone: $r = 0.48$). Our analysis of rs45446698 genotypes in 90,916 cases and 89,893 controls from BCAC, however, provides robust evidence of an association of the CYP3A7*1C allele with breast cancer risk overall (OR = 0.94, $P = 0.002$) and a more pronounced protective effect on ER + /PR + breast cancers (OR = 0.86, $P = 6.9 \times 10^{-8}$). The specificity of this association (comparing ER + /PR– with ER + /PR + cancers, $P_{het} = 0.001$) and our replication of Ruth and colleagues report of a signal at the CYP3A locus in their analysis of circulating progesterone levels¹⁰ raise the possibility that premenopausal progesterone levels might influence risk of ER + /PR + breast cancers. This would be in contrast to the findings from Key et al. who reported no evidence of an association between premenopausal progesterone levels and

breast cancer risk overall and no heterogeneity in estimates stratified by PR status.³ However, the number of cases of PR+ ($N=158$) and PR- ($N=61$) breast cancer was small, and this analysis may have lacked power to detect modest associations in subgroups of cancers. Alternatively, the association of rs45446698 genotype with ER+/PR+ breast cancer risk, specifically, may be due to the fact that PR is a marker for an intact oestrogen signalling pathway³⁰ confirming a direct link between the levels of oestrogen (or oestrogen signalling) and proliferation in this subgroup of cancers.

Our analysis of the *CYP3A7*1C* allele, menopausal hormone treatment and breast cancer risk was inconclusive; while the carrier ORs were consistent with a greater protective effect of this allele in women taking exogenous hormones, particularly oestrogen-progesterone therapy, none of the interactions was statistically significant. Overall, there were 14,119 ER+/PR+ breast cancer cases and 32,418 controls for this subgroup analysis, but for what was, arguably, the most pertinent subgroup (i.e., current oestrogen-progesterone therapy use), the number of cases who were current users was relatively small (*CYP3A7*1C* carriers $N=107$, non-carriers $N=1498$) and power was limited to detect modest interactions. There are limitations to this analysis; we focussed on current menopausal hormone treatment use (adjusted for past use) as it is for current use that the association with breast cancer risk is the strongest,³¹ but we did not have information on dose, duration or the formulation that was used.

Finally, we found no association between *CYP3A7*1C* carrier status and survival in patients treated with tamoxifen, a known CYP3A substrate. This may reflect the fact that compared to CYP3A4, CYP3A7 is a poor metaboliser of tamoxifen,³² or that standard doses of tamoxifen achieve high levels of oestrogen receptor saturation.³³ There was some evidence that breast cancer-specific survival was reduced in *CYP3A7*1C* carriers who were treated with a taxane, compared with non-carriers ($P=0.01$); this may, however, be a chance finding given the number of comparisons that were tested.

In conclusion, we present strong evidence that the *CYP3A7*1C* allele impacts on the metabolism of endogenous hormones, which in turn, reduces the risk of hormone receptor-positive breast cancer in carriers. Optimal strategies for breast cancer prevention in women at high risk of breast cancer and in the general population are an area of active research. In this context, *CYP3A7*1C* carriers represent a naturally occurring cohort in which the effects of reduced exposure to endogenous oestrogens and progesterones throughout a woman's premenopausal years can be further investigated. Our results regarding the impact of *CYP3A7*1C* carrier status on exogenous hormones and chemotherapeutic agents are preliminary but warrant further investigation, preferably in the setting of randomised trials.

NBCS COLLABORATORS

Anne-Lise Børresen-Dale^{86,129}, Grethe I. Grenaker Alnæs¹²⁹, Kristine K. Sahlberg^{129,130}, Lars Ottestad¹²⁹, Rolf Kåresen^{86,131}, Ellen Schlichting¹³¹, Marit Muri Holmen¹³², Toril Sauer^{86,133}, Vilde Haakensen¹²⁹, Olav Engebråten^{86,134,135}, Bjørn Naume^{86,134}, Alexander Fosså^{134,136}, Cecilie E. Kiserud^{134,136}, Kristin V. Reinertsen^{134,136}, Åslaug Helland^{129,134}, Margit Riis¹³¹, Jürgen Geisler^{86,137}, Osbreac¹³⁸

AOCS GROUP

David D. L. Bowtell^{139,140,141}, Anna deFazio^{142,143,144}, Penelope M Webb¹⁴⁵, Georgia Chenevix-Trench¹⁴⁵

ABCTB INVESTIGATORS

Christine Clarke¹⁴⁶, Deborah Marsh¹⁴⁷, Rodney Scott^{148,149}, Robert Baxter¹⁵⁰, Desmond Yip^{151,152}, Jane Carpenter¹⁵³, Alison Davis^{154,155}, Nirmala Pathmanathan^{156,157}, Peter Simpson¹⁵⁸, Dinny Graham¹⁴⁶, Mythily Sachchithanathan¹⁴⁶

KCONFAB INVESTIGATORS

David Amor¹⁵⁹, Lesley Andrews¹⁶⁰, Yoland Antill¹⁶¹, Rosemary Balleine¹⁶², Jonathan Beesley¹⁶³, Ian Bennett¹⁶⁴, Michael Bogwitz¹⁶⁵, Leon Botes¹⁶⁶, Meagan Brennan¹⁶⁷, Melissa Brown¹⁶⁸, Michael Buckley¹⁶⁹, Jo Burke¹⁷⁰, Phyllis Butow¹⁷¹, Liz Caldon¹⁷², Ian Campbell¹⁷³, Deepa Chauhan¹⁷⁴, Manisha Chauhan¹⁷⁵, Georgia Chenevix-Trench¹⁷⁶, Alice Christian¹⁷⁷, Paul Cohen¹⁷⁸, Alison Colley¹⁷⁹, Ashley Crook¹⁸⁰, James Cui¹⁸¹, Margaret Cummings¹⁸², Sarah-Jane Dawson¹⁸³, Anna DeFazio¹⁸⁴, Martin Delatycki¹⁸⁵, Rebecca Dickson¹⁸⁶, Joanne Dixon¹⁸⁷, Ted Edkins¹⁸⁸, Stacey Edwards¹⁸⁹, Gelareh Farshid¹⁹⁰, Andrew Fellows¹⁹¹, Georgina Fenton¹⁹², Michael Field¹⁹³, James Flanagan¹⁹⁴, Peter Fong¹⁹⁵, Laura Forrest¹⁹⁶, Stephen Fox¹⁹⁷, Juliet French¹⁹⁸, Michael Friedlander¹⁹⁹, Clara Gaff²⁰⁰, Mike Gattas²⁰¹, Peter George²⁰², Sian Greening²⁰³, Marion Harris²⁰⁴, Stewart Hart²⁰⁵, Nick Hayward²⁰⁶, John Hopper²⁰⁷, Cass Hoskins²⁰⁸, Clare Hunt²⁰⁹, Paul James²¹⁰, Mark Jenkins²¹¹, Alexa Kidd²¹², Judy Kirk²¹³, Jessica Koehler¹⁶⁰, James Kollias²¹⁴, Sunil Lakhani²¹⁵, Mitchell Lawrence²¹⁶, Geoff Lindeman²¹⁷, Lara Lipton²¹⁸, Liz Lobb²¹⁹, Graham Mann²²⁰, Deborah Marsh²²¹, Sue Anne McLachlan²²², Bettina Meiser¹⁶⁰, Roger Milne²²³, Sophie Nightingale²²⁴, Shona O'Connell²²⁵, Sarah O'Sullivan²²⁶, David Gallego Ortega²²⁷, Nick Pachter²²⁸, Briony Patterson²²⁹, Amy Pearn²³⁰, Kelly Phillips²³¹, Ellen Pieper²³², Edwina Rickard²³³, Bridget Robinson²³⁴, Mona Saleh²³⁵, Elizabeth Salisbury²³⁶, Christobel Saunders²³⁷, Jodi Saunus²³⁸, Rodney Scott²³⁹, Clare Scott²⁴⁰, Adrienne Sexton²⁴¹, Andrew Shelling²⁴², Peter Simpson²⁴³, Melissa Southey²⁴⁴, Amanda Spurdle²⁴⁵, Jessica Taylor²⁴⁶, Renea Taylor²⁴⁷, Heather Thorne²⁴⁸, Alison Trainer²⁴⁹, Kathy Tucker²⁵⁰, Jane Visvader²⁵¹, Logan Walker²⁵², Rachael Williams²⁵³, Ingrid Winship²⁵⁴, Mary Ann Young²⁵⁵

¹²⁹Department of Cancer Genetics, Institute for Cancer Research, Oslo University Hospital-Radiumhospitalet, Oslo, Norway; ¹³⁰Department of Research, Vestre Viken Hospital, Drammen, Norway; ¹³¹Section for Breast- and Endocrine Surgery, Department of Cancer, Division of Surgery, Cancer and Transplantation Medicine, Oslo University Hospital-Ullevål, Oslo, Norway; ¹³²Department of Radiology and Nuclear Medicine, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway; ¹³³Department of Pathology at Akerhus University hospital, Lørenskog, Norway; ¹³⁴Department of Oncology, Division of Surgery and Cancer and Transplantation Medicine, Oslo University Hospital-Radiumhospitalet, Oslo, Norway; ¹³⁵Department of Tumor Biology, Institute for Cancer Research, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway; ¹³⁶National Advisory Unit on Late Effects after Cancer Treatment, Department of Oncology, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway; ¹³⁷Department of Oncology, Akerhus University Hospital, Lørenskog, Norway; ¹³⁸Breast Cancer Research Consortium, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway; ¹³⁹Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Melbourne 3000 VIC, Australia; ¹⁴⁰Sir Peter MacCallum Department of Oncology, The University of Melbourne, Parkville 3010 VIC, Australia; ¹⁴¹Kinghorn Cancer Centre, Garvan Institute for Medical Research, Darlinghurst 2010 NSW, Australia; ¹⁴²Centre for Cancer Research, The Westmead Institute for Medical Research, Westmead 2145 NSW, Australia; ¹⁴³Department of Gynaecological Oncology, Westmead Hospital, Westmead 2145 NSW, Australia; ¹⁴⁴The University of Sydney, Sydney 2052 NSW, Australia; ¹⁴⁵QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Locked Bag 2000 Royal Brisbane Hospital, Brisbane, Queensland 4029, Australia; ¹⁴⁶Centre for Cancer Research, The Westmead Institute for Medical Research, The University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia; ¹⁴⁷University of Technology Sydney, Translational Oncology Group, School of Life Sciences, Faculty of Science, Ultimo, NSW, Australia; ¹⁴⁸School of Biomedical Sciences, University of Newcastle, Newcastle, Australia; ¹⁴⁹Hunter Medical Research Institute and NSW Health Pathology North, Newcastle, Australia; ¹⁵⁰Kolling Institute of Medical Research, University of Sydney, St Leonards, NSW, Australia; ¹⁵¹Epigenetics & Transcription Laboratory Melanie Swan Memorial Translational Centre, Sci-Tech, University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT, Australia; ¹⁵²Department of Medical Oncology, The Canberra Hospital, Garran, ACT, Australia; ¹⁵³Scientific Platforms, The Westmead Institute for Medical Research, The University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia; ¹⁵⁴The Canberra Hospital, Garran, ACT, Australia; ¹⁵⁵The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, Australia; ¹⁵⁶Westmead Breast Cancer Institute, Western Sydney Local Health District, Westmead, New South Wales, Australia; ¹⁵⁷University of Sydney, Western Clinical School, Westmead, New South Wales, Australia; ¹⁵⁸UQ Centre for Clinical Research, Faculty of Medicine, The University of Queensland, Herston, QLD, Australia; ¹⁵⁹Genetic Health Services, Victoria Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, VIC 3050, Australia; ¹⁶⁰Hereditary Cancer Clinic, Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick, NSW 2031, Australia; ¹⁶¹Dept. Haem and Medical Oncology, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, St Andrews Place, East Melbourne, VIC 3002, Australia; ¹⁶²Department of Translational Oncology, c/o Department of Medical Oncology, Westmead Hospital, Westmead, NSW 2145, Australia; ¹⁶³Queensland Institute of Medical Research, Herston Road, Herston, Qld 4002, Australia; ¹⁶⁴Silverton Place, 101 Wickham Terrace, Brisbane, QLD 4000, Australia; ¹⁶⁵Familial Cancer Centre, The Royal Melbourne Hospital, Grattan Street, Parkville, Victoria 3050, Australia; ¹⁶⁶Hereditary Cancer Centre, Prince of Wales Hospital, Barker St, Randwick, NSW 2031, Australia; ¹⁶⁷NSW Breast Cancer Institute, PO Box 143, Westmead, NSW 2145, Australia; ¹⁶⁸Department of Biochemistry, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, QLD 4072, Australia; ¹⁶⁹Molecular and Cytogenetics Unit, Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick,

NSW 2031, Australia; ¹⁷⁰Royal Hobart Hospital, GPO Box 1061L, Hobart, TAS 7001, Australia; ¹⁷¹Medical Psychology Unit, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Camperdown, NSW 2204, Australia; ¹⁷²Replication and Genome Stability, Cancer Division, Garvan Institute of Medical Research, 370 Victoria Street, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010, Australia; ¹⁷³Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre St Andrew's Place, East Melbourne, VIC 3002, Australia; ¹⁷⁴School of Psychology, Brennan MacCallum (Building A18), University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia; ¹⁷⁵St Vincents Hospital, Cancer Genetics Clinic, The Kinghorn Cancer Centre, Sydney, NSW 2010, Australia; ¹⁷⁶Queensland Institute of Medical Research, Royal Brisbane Hospital, Herston, QLD 4029, Australia; ¹⁷⁷Genetics Department, Central Region Genetics Service, Wellington Hospital, Wellington, New Zealand; ¹⁷⁸Gynaecological Cancer Research, St John of God Subiaco Hospital, 12 Salvado Road, Subiaco, WA 6008, Australia; ¹⁷⁹Department of Clinical Genetics, Liverpool Health Service, PO Box 103, Liverpool, NSW 2170, Australia; ¹⁸⁰Department of Clinical Genetics, Level 3E, Royal North Shore Hospital, St Leonards, NSW 2065, Australia; ¹⁸¹Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, Prahan, Vic 3004, Australia; ¹⁸²Department of Pathology, University of Queensland Medical School, Herston, NSW 4006, Australia; ¹⁸³Molecular Genetics Department, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England; ¹⁸⁴Dept. Gynaecological Oncology, Westmead Institute for Cancer Research, Westmead Hospital, Westmead, NSW 2145, Australia; ¹⁸⁵Clinical Genetics, Austin Health, Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, PO Box 5444, Heidelberg West, Vic 3081, Australia; ¹⁸⁶Level 2, Block 51, Royal North Shore Hospital, North Shore, NSW 2408, Australia; ¹⁸⁷Central Regional Genetic Services, Wellington Hospital, Private Bag, 7902 Wellington, New Zealand; ¹⁸⁸Clinical Chemistry, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, Box D184, Perth, WA 6001, Australia; ¹⁸⁹Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, University of Queensland, St Lucia, Qld 4072, Australia; ¹⁹⁰Tissue Pathology, IMVS, Adelaide, SA 5000, Australia; ¹⁹¹Molecular Diagnostic Development, Pathology Department, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Melbourne East, Melbourne, Vic 3002, Australia; ¹⁹²South West Family Cancer Clinic, Liverpool Hospital, Liverpool BC, NSW 1871, Australia; ¹⁹³Royal North Shore Hospital, Level 2, Vindin House, St Leonards, NSW 2065, Australia; ¹⁹⁴Epigenetics Unit, Department of Surgery and Oncology, Imperial College London, London W12 0NN, UK; ¹⁹⁵Medical Oncology Department, Regional Cancer and Blood Services, Level 1 Building 7, Auckland City Hospital, 2 Park Rd., Grafton, Auckland 1023, New Zealand; ¹⁹⁶Psychosocial Cancer Genetics Research Group, Parkville Familial Cancer Centre, 305 Grattan Street, Melbourne, Vic 3000, Australia; ¹⁹⁷Pathology Department, Level 1, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, St Andrew's Place, East Melbourne, Vic 3002, Australia; ¹⁹⁸School of Molecular and Microbial Sciences, University of Queensland, St Lucia, Qld 4072, Australia; ¹⁹⁹Department of Medical Oncology, Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick, NSW 2031, Australia; ²⁰⁰Victorian Clinical Genetics Service, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Parkville, VIC 3052, Australia; ²⁰¹Queensland Clinical Genetic Service, Royal Children's Hospital, Bramston Terrace, Herston, QLD 4020, Australia; ²⁰²Clinical Biochemistry Unit, Canterbury Health Labs, PO Box 151, Christchurch, New Zealand; ²⁰³Illawarra Cancer Centre, Wollongong Hospital, Private Mail Bag 8808, South Coast Mail Centre, Wollongong, NSW 2521, Australia; ²⁰⁴Familial Cancer Clinic, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, St Andrews Place, East Melbourne, VIC 3002, Australia; ²⁰⁵Breast and Ovarian Cancer Genetics, Monash Medical Centre, 871 Centre Road, Bentleigh East, VIC 3165, Australia; ²⁰⁶Queensland Institute for Medical Research, Royal Brisbane Hospital, Post Office, Herston, QLD 4029, Australia; ²⁰⁷Centre for M.E.G.A. Epidemiology, University of Melbourne, Level 1, 723 Swanston Street, Carlton, VIC 3010, Australia; ²⁰⁸Parkville Familial Cancer Centre, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre & The Royal Melbourne Hospital, Melbourne, VIC 3000, Australia; ²⁰⁹Southern Health Familial Cancer Centre, Monash Medical Centre, Special Medicine Building, 246 Clayton Rd, Clayton, Victoria 3168, Australia; ²¹⁰Genetic Health Services, Monash Medical Centre, Clayton, Vic 3168, Australia; ²¹¹Centre for M.E.G.A. Epidemiology, The University of Melbourne, 723 Swanston Street, Carlton, VIC 3053, Australia; ²¹²Clinical Genetics Departments, Central Regional Genetics Service, Wellington Hospital, Wellington, New Zealand; ²¹³Familial Cancer Service, Department of Medicine, Westmead Hospital, Westmead, NSW 2145, Australia; ²¹⁴Breast Endocrine and Surgical Unit, Royal Adelaide Hospital, North Terrace, SA 5000, Australia; ²¹⁵UQ Centre for Clinical Research, Level 6, Building 71/918, University of Queensland, The Royal Brisbane & Women's Hospital, Herston, QLD 4029, Australia; ²¹⁶Prostate Cancer Research Program, 19 Innovation Walk, Level 3, Monash University, Clayton, VIC 3800, Australia; ²¹⁷Breast Cancer Laboratory, Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, PO Royal Melbourne Hospital, Parkville, VIC 3050, Australia; ²¹⁸Medical Oncology and Clinical Haematology Unit, Western Hospital, Footscray, VIC 3011, Australia; ²¹⁹Medical Psychology Research Unit, Room 332, Brennan MacCallum Building (A18), The University of Sydney, Camperdown, NSW 2006, Australia; ²²⁰Westmead Institute for Cancer Research, Westmead Millennium Institute, Westmead, NSW 2145, Australia; ²²¹Kolling Institute of Medical Research, Royal North Shore Hospital, St Leonards, NSW 2065, Australia; ²²²Department of Oncology, St Vincent's Hospital, 41 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy, VIC 3065, Australia; ²²³Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Oncológicas, C/ Melchor Fernández Almagro, 3E-28029 Madrid, Spain; ²²⁴Western Health and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, St Andrew's Place, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002, Australia; ²²⁵Southern Health Familial Cancer Centre, Special Medicine Building, 246 Clayton Road, Clayton, Vic 3168, Australia;

²²⁶Genetic Services of Western, Level 3 Agnes Walsh House, 374 Bagot Road, Subiaco, WA 6008, Australia; ²²⁷Tumour Development Group, Garvan Institute of Medical Research, The Kinghorn Cancer Centre, 370 Victoria St, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010, Australia; ²²⁸Familial Cancer and Clinical Genetics, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Grattan Street, Parkville, VIC 3050, Australia; ²²⁹Tas Clinical Genetics Service, Royal Hobart Hospital, GPO Box 1061, Hobart, Tasmania 7001, Australia; ²³⁰The Gene Council, Perth, Australia, PO Box 510, North Perth, WA 6906, Australia; ²³¹Department of Medical Oncology, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, St Andrew's Place, East Melbourne, VIC 3002, Australia; ²³²Parkville Familial Cancer Centre and Genomic Medicine, VCCC Grattan Street, Melbourne, Vic 3000, Australia; ²³³Familial Cancer centre, Westmead Hospital, Westmead, NSW 2145, Australia; ²³⁴Oncology Service, Christchurch Hospital, Private Bag, 4710 Christchurch, New Zealand; ²³⁵Centre for Genetic Education, Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick, NSW 2031, Australia; ²³⁶Anatomical Pathology, UNSW, Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick 2031 NSW, Australia; ²³⁷School of Surgery and Pathology, QE11 Medical Centre, M block, 2nd Floor, Nedlands, WA 6907, Australia; ²³⁸Breast Pathology, University of Queensland, Centre for Clinical Research, Building 71/918, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Herston, Qld 4029, Australia; ²³⁹Hunter Area Pathology Service, John Hunter Hospital, Locked Bag 1 Regional Mail Centre, New Lambton Heights, NSW 2310, Australia; ²⁴⁰Research Department, WEHI c/o Royal Melbourne Hospital, Parkville, VIC 3050, Australia; ²⁴¹Familial Cancer Centre, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Grattan Street, Parkville, Vic 3050, Australia; ²⁴²Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand; ²⁴³The University of Queensland, Building 71/918, RBWH Campus, Herston, Qld 4029, Australia; ²⁴⁴Genetic Epidemiology Laboratory, Departemnt of Pathology, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC 3010, Australia; ²⁴⁵Cancer Unit, Queensland Institute of Medical Research, Herston, QLD 4029, Australia; ²⁴⁶Familial Cancer and Genetics Medicine, Royal Melbourne Hospital, 2nd Floor, Grattan Street, Parkville, Vic 3050, Australia; ²⁴⁷Cancer Program, Monash University, Rm 349, Level 3, Building 7619, Innovation Walk, Clayton, VIC 3800, Australia; ²⁴⁸Research Department, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, St Andrew's Place, East Melbourne, VIC 3002, Australia; ²⁴⁹University of NSW, Prince of Wales Hospital, Barker Street, Randwick, NSW 2031, Australia; ²⁵⁰Heredity Cancer Clinic, Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick, NSW 2031, Australia; ²⁵¹The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, Post Office Royal Melbourne Hospital, Parkville, VIC 3050, Australia; ²⁵²Molecular Cancer Epidemiology Laboratory, Queensland Institute of Medical Research, P.O. Royal Brisbane Hospital, Herston, Qld 4027, Australia; ²⁵³Family Cancer Clinic, St Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010, Australia; ²⁵⁴Department of Genetics, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Parkville, VIC 3050, Australia and ²⁵⁵Genome.One, 370 Victoria St, Darlinghurst 2010 NSW, Australia

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ethics approval and consent to participate Collection of blood samples, urine samples and questionnaire information was undertaken with written informed consent and relevant ethical review board approval in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki (Supplementary Table S7).

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Data availability GWAS data and the complete dataset for follow-up genotyping will not be made publicly available due to restraints imposed by the ethics committees of individual studies; requests for data can be made to the corresponding author (GWAS data) or the Data Access Coordination Committee (follow-up genotyping data) of BCAC (<http://bcac.ccg.medschl.cam.ac.uk/>). Summary results for all variants genotyped by BCAC (including rs45446698) are available at <http://bcac.ccg.medschl.cam.ac.uk/>.

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Nichola Johnson¹, Sarah Maguire², Anna Morra³, Pooja Middha Kapoor^{4,5}, Katarzyna Tomczyk¹, Michael E. Jones⁶, Minouk J. Schoemaker⁶, Clare Gilham⁷, Manjeet K. Bolla⁸, Qin Wang⁸, Joe Dennis⁸, Thomas U. Ahearn⁹, Irene L. Andrusis^{10,11}, Hoda Anton-Culver¹², Natalia N. Antonenkova¹³, Volker Arndt¹⁴, Kristan J. Aronson¹⁵, Annelie Augustinsson¹⁶, Caroline Baynes¹⁷, Laura E. Beane Freeman⁹, Matthias W. Beckmann¹⁸, Javier Benitez^{19,20}, Marina Bermisheva²¹, Carl Blomqvist^{22,23}, Bram Boeckx^{24,25}, Natalia V. Bogdanova^{13,26,27}, Stig E. Bojesen^{28,29,30}, Hiltrud Brauch^{31,32,33}, Hermann Brenner^{14,33,34}, Barbara Burwinkel^{35,36}, Daniele Campa^{4,37}, Federico Canzian³⁸, Jose E. Castelao³⁹, Stephen J. Chanock⁹, Georgia Chenevix-Trench⁴⁰, Christine L. Clarke⁴¹, NBCS Collaborators, Don M. Conroy¹⁷, Fergus J. Couch⁴², Angela Cox⁴³, Simon S. Cross⁴⁴, Kamila Czene⁴⁵, Thilo Dörk²⁷, A. Heather Eliassen^{46,47}, Christoph Engel^{48,49}, D. Gareth Evans^{50,51}, Peter A. Fasching^{18,52}, Jonine Figueroa^{9,53,54}, Giuseppe Floris⁵⁵, Henrik Flyger⁵⁶, Manuela Gago-Dominguez^{57,58}, Susan M. Gapstur⁵⁹, Montserrat Garcia-Closas⁹, Mia M. Gaudet⁵⁹, Graham G. Giles^{60,61,62}, Mark S. Goldberg^{63,64}, Anna González-Neira²⁰, AOCs Group, Pascal Guènel⁶⁵, Eric Hahnen^{66,67}, Christopher A. Haiman⁶⁸, Niclas Häkansson⁶⁹, Per Hall^{45,70}, Ute Hamann⁷¹, Patricia A. Harrington¹⁷, Steven N. Hart⁷², Maartje J. Hooning⁷³, John L. Hopper⁶¹, Anthony Howell⁷⁴, David J. Hunter^{47,75}, ABCTB Investigators, kConFab Investigators, Agnes Jager⁷³, Anna Jakubowska^{76,77}, Esther M. John^{78,79}, Rudolf Kaaks⁴, Renske Keeman³, Elza Khusnutdinova^{21,80}, Cari M. Kitahara⁸¹, Veli-Matti Kosma^{82,83,84}, Stella Koutros⁹, Peter Kraft^{47,85}, Vessela N. Kristensen^{86,87}, Allison W. Kurian^{78,79}, Diether Lambrechts^{24,25}, Loic Le Marchand⁸⁸, Martha Linet⁸¹, Jan Lubiński⁷⁶, Arto Mannermaa^{82,83,84}, Siranoush Manoukian⁸⁹, Sara Margolin^{70,90}, John W. M. Martens⁷³, Dimitrios Mavroudis⁹¹, Rebecca Mayes¹⁷, Alfons Meindl⁹², Roger L. Milne^{60,61,62}, Susan L. Neuhausen⁹³, Heli Nevanlinna⁹⁴, William G. Newman^{50,51}, Sune F. Nielsen^{28,29}, Børge G. Nordestgaard^{28,29,30}, Nadia Obi⁹⁵, Andrew F. Olshan⁹⁶, Janet E. Olson⁷², Håkan Olsson¹⁶, Ester Orban⁹⁷, Tjongwon Park-Simon²⁷, Paolo Peterlongo⁹⁸, Dijana Plaseska-Karanfilska⁹⁹, Katri Pylkäs^{100,101}, Gad Rennert¹⁰², Hedy S. Rennert¹⁰², Kathryn J. Ruddy¹⁰³, Emmanouil Saloustros¹⁰⁴, Dale P. Sandler¹⁰⁵, Elinor J. Sawyer¹⁰⁶, Rita K. Schmutzler^{66,67,107}, Christopher Scott⁷², Xiao-Ou Shu¹⁰⁸, Jacques Simard¹⁰⁹, Snezhana Smichkoska¹¹⁰, Christof Sohn¹¹¹, Melissa C. Southey^{60,62,112}, John J. Spinelli^{113,114}, Jennifer Stone^{61,115}, Rulla M. Tamimi^{47,116}, Jack A. Taylor^{105,117}, Rob A. E. M. Tollenaar¹¹⁸, Ian Tomlinson^{119,120}, Melissa A. Troester⁹⁶, Thérèse Truong¹²¹, Celine M. Vachon¹²¹, Elke M. van Veen^{50,51}, Sophia S. Wang^{122,123}, Clarice R. Weinberg¹²⁴, Camilla Wendt⁹⁰, Hans Wildiers⁵⁵, Robert Winqvist^{100,101}, Alicja Wolk^{69,125}, Wei Zheng¹⁰⁸, Argyrios Ziogas¹², Alison M. Dunning¹⁷, Paul D. P. Pharoah^{8,17}, Douglas F. Easton^{8,17}, A. Forbes Howie¹²⁶, Julian Peto¹²⁷, Isabel dos-Santos-Silva⁷, Anthony J. Swerdlow^{6,127}, Jenny Chang-Claude^{4,97}, Marjanka K. Schmidt^{3,128}, Nick Orr² and Olivia Fletcher¹

¹The Breast Cancer Now Toby Robins Research Centre, The Institute of Cancer Research, London, UK; ²Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, Ireland, UK; ³Division of Molecular Pathology, The Netherlands Cancer Institute - Antoni van Leeuwenhoek Hospital, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; ⁴Division of Cancer Epidemiology, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany; ⁵Faculty of Medicine, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany; ⁶Division of Genetics and Epidemiology, The Institute of Cancer Research, London, UK; ⁷Department of Non-Communicable Disease Epidemiology, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK; ⁸Centre for Cancer Genetic Epidemiology, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK; ⁹Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, Bethesda, MD, USA; ¹⁰Fred A. Litwin Center for Cancer Genetics, Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum Research Institute of Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto, ON, Canada; ¹¹Department of Molecular Genetics, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada; ¹²Department of Epidemiology, Genetic Epidemiology Research Institute, University of California Irvine, Irvine, CA, USA; ¹³N.N. Alexandrov Research Institute of Oncology and Medical Radiology, Minsk, Belarus; ¹⁴Division of Clinical Epidemiology and Aging Research, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany; ¹⁵Department of Public Health Sciences, and Cancer Research Institute, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada; ¹⁶Department of Cancer Epidemiology, Clinical Sciences, Lund University, Lund, Sweden; ¹⁷Centre for Cancer Genetic Epidemiology, Department of Oncology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK; ¹⁸Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics,

Comprehensive Cancer Center ER-EMN, University Hospital Erlangen, Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg, Erlangen, Germany; ¹⁹Centro de Investigación en Red de Enfermedades Raras (CIBERER), Madrid, Spain; ²⁰Human Cancer Genetics Programme, Spanish National Cancer Research Centre (CNIO), Madrid, Spain; ²¹Institute of Biochemistry and Genetics, Ufa Federal Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ufa, Russia; ²²Department of Oncology, Helsinki University Hospital, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland; ²³Department of Oncology, Örebro University Hospital, Örebro, Sweden; ²⁴VIB Center for Cancer Biology, Leuven, Belgium; ²⁵Laboratory for Translational Genetics, Department of Human Genetics, University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium; ²⁶Department of Radiation Oncology, Hannover Medical School, Hannover, Germany; ²⁷Gynaecology Research Unit, Hannover Medical School, Hannover, Germany; ²⁸Copenhagen General Population Study, Herlev and Gentofte Hospital, Copenhagen University Hospital, Herlev, Denmark; ²⁹Department of Clinical Biochemistry, Herlev and Gentofte Hospital, Copenhagen University Hospital, Herlev, Denmark; ³⁰Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark; ³¹Dr. Margarete Fischer-Bosch-Institute of Clinical Pharmacology, Stuttgart, Germany; ³²FIT-Cluster of Excellence, University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany; ³³German Cancer Consortium (DKTK), German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany; ³⁴Division of Preventive Oncology, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) and National Center for Tumor Diseases (NCT), Heidelberg, Germany; ³⁵Molecular Epidemiology Group, C080, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany; ³⁶Molecular Biology of Breast Cancer, University Womens Clinic Heidelberg, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany; ³⁷Department of Biology, University of Pisa, Pisa, Italy; ³⁸Genomic Epidemiology Group, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany; ³⁹Oncology and Genetics Unit, Instituto de Investigación Sanitaria Galicia Sur (IISGS), Xerencia de Xestión Integrada de Vigo-SERGAS, Vigo, Spain; ⁴⁰Department of Genetics and Computational Biology, QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia; ⁴¹Westmead Institute for Medical Research, University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia; ⁴²Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, USA; ⁴³Sheffield Institute for Nucleic Acids (SinFoNiA), Department of Oncology and Metabolism, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK; ⁴⁴Academic Unit of Pathology, Department of Neuroscience, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK; ⁴⁵Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden; ⁴⁶Channing Division of Network Medicine, Department of Medicine, Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA; ⁴⁷Department of Epidemiology, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, MA, USA; ⁴⁸Institute for Medical Informatics, Statistics and Epidemiology, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany; ⁴⁹LIFE - Leipzig Research Centre for Civilization Diseases, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany; ⁵⁰Division of Evolution and Genomic Sciences, School of Biological Sciences, Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, University of Manchester, Manchester Academic Health Science Centre, Manchester, UK; ⁵¹North West Genomics Laboratory Hub, Manchester Centre for Genomic Medicine, St Mary's Hospital, Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, Manchester Academic Health Science Centre, Manchester, UK; ⁵²David Geffen School of Medicine, Department of Medicine Division of Hematology and Oncology, University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, USA; ⁵³Usher Institute of Population Health Sciences and Informatics, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK; ⁵⁴Cancer Research UK Edinburgh Centre, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK; ⁵⁵Leuven Multidisciplinary Breast Center, Department of Oncology, Leuven Cancer Institute, University Hospitals Leuven, Leuven, Belgium; ⁵⁶Department of Breast Surgery, Herlev and Gentofte Hospital, Copenhagen University Hospital, Herlev, Denmark; ⁵⁷Fundación Pública Galega de Medicina Xenómica, Instituto de Investigación Sanitaria de Santiago de Compostela (IDIS), Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Santiago, SERGAS, Santiago de Compostela, Spain; ⁵⁸Moore's Cancer Center, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, CA, USA; ⁵⁹Behavioral and Epidemiology Research Group, American Cancer Society, Atlanta, GA, USA; ⁶⁰Cancer Epidemiology Division, Cancer Council Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia; ⁶¹Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia; ⁶²Precision Medicine, School of Clinical Sciences at Monash Health, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia; ⁶³Department of Medicine, McGill University, Montréal, QC, Canada; ⁶⁴Division of Clinical Epidemiology, Royal Victoria Hospital, McGill University, Montréal, QC, Canada; ⁶⁵Center for Research in Epidemiology and Population Health (CESP), Team Exposé and Heredity, INSERM, University Paris-Saclay, Villejuif, France; ⁶⁶Center for Familial Breast and Ovarian Cancer, Faculty of Medicine and University Hospital Cologne, University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany; ⁶⁷Center for Integrated Oncology (CIO), Faculty of Medicine and University Hospital Cologne, University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany; ⁶⁸Department of Preventive Medicine, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA; ⁶⁹Institute of Environmental Medicine, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden; ⁷⁰Department of Oncology, Södersjukhuset, Stockholm, Sweden; ⁷¹Molecular Genetics of Breast Cancer, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany; ⁷²Department of Health Sciences Research, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, USA; ⁷³Department of Medical Oncology, Erasmus MC Cancer Institute, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; ⁷⁴Division of Cancer Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK; ⁷⁵Nuffield Department of Population Health, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK; ⁷⁶Department of Genetics and Pathology, Pomeranian Medical University, Szczecin, Poland; ⁷⁷Independent Laboratory of Molecular Biology and Genetic Diagnostics, Pomeranian Medical University, Szczecin, Poland; ⁷⁸Department of Epidemiology & Population Health, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA, USA; ⁷⁹Department of Medicine, Division of Oncology, Stanford Cancer Institute, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA, USA; ⁸⁰Department of Genetics and Fundamental Medicine, Bashkir State University, Ufa, Russia; ⁸¹Radiation Epidemiology Branch, Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD, USA; ⁸²Translational Cancer Research Area, University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland; ⁸³Institute of Clinical Medicine, Pathology and Forensic Medicine, University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland; ⁸⁴Biobank of Eastern Finland, Kuopio University Hospital, Kuopio, Finland; ⁸⁵Program in Genetic Epidemiology and Statistical Genetics, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, MA, USA; ⁸⁶Institute of Clinical Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway; ⁸⁷Department of Medical Genetics, Oslo University Hospital and University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway; ⁸⁸Epidemiology Program, University of Hawaii Cancer Center, Honolulu, HI, USA; ⁸⁹Unit of Medical Genetics, Department of Medical Oncology and Hematology, Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Nazionale dei Tumori di Milano, Milan, Italy; ⁹⁰Department of Clinical Science and Education, Södersjukhuset, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden; ⁹¹Department of Medical Oncology, University Hospital of Heraklion, Heraklion, Greece; ⁹²Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics, University of Munich, Campus Großhadern, Munich, Germany; ⁹³Department of Population Sciences, Beckman Research Institute of City of Hope, Duarte, CA, USA; ⁹⁴Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Helsinki University Hospital, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland; ⁹⁵Institute of Medical Biometry and Epidemiology, University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Hamburg, Germany; ⁹⁶Department of Epidemiology, Gillings School of Global Public Health and UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA; ⁹⁷Cancer Epidemiology Group, University Cancer Center Hamburg (UCC), University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Hamburg, Germany; ⁹⁸Genome Diagnostics Program, IFOM - the FIRC Institute of Molecular Oncology, Milan, Italy; ⁹⁹Research Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology 'Georgi D. Efremov', MASA, Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia; ¹⁰⁰Laboratory of Cancer Genetics and Tumor Biology, Cancer and Translational Medicine Research Unit, Biocenter Oulu, University of Oulu, Oulu, Finland; ¹⁰¹Laboratory of Cancer Genetics and Tumor Biology, Northern Finland Laboratory Centre Oulu, Oulu, Finland; ¹⁰²Clalit National Cancer Control Center, Carmel Medical Center and Technion Faculty of Medicine, Haifa, Israel; ¹⁰³Department of Oncology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, USA; ¹⁰⁴Department of Oncology, University Hospital of Larissa, Larissa, Greece; ¹⁰⁵Epidemiology Branch, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, NIH, Research Triangle Park, NC, USA; ¹⁰⁶School of Cancer & Pharmaceutical Sciences, Comprehensive Cancer Centre, Guy's Campus, King's College London, London, UK; ¹⁰⁷Center for Molecular Medicine Cologne (CMMC), Faculty of Medicine and University Hospital Cologne, University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany; ¹⁰⁸Division of Epidemiology, Department of Medicine, Vanderbilt Epidemiology Center, Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, TN, USA; ¹⁰⁹Genomics Center, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Québec - Université Laval Research Center, Québec City, QC, Canada; ¹¹⁰Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Medical Faculty, University Clinic of Radiotherapy and Oncology, Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia; ¹¹¹National Center for Tumor Diseases, University Hospital and German Cancer Research Center, Heidelberg, Germany; ¹¹²Department of Clinical Pathology, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia; ¹¹³Population Oncology, BC Cancer, Vancouver, BC, Canada; ¹¹⁴School of Population and Public Health, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada; ¹¹⁵The Curtin UWA Centre for Genetic Origins of Health and Disease, Curtin University and University of Western Australia, Perth, Western Australia, Australia; ¹¹⁶Department of Population Health Sciences, Weill Cornell Medicine, New York, NY, USA; ¹¹⁷Epigenetic and Stem Cell Biology Laboratory, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, NIH, Research Triangle Park, NC, USA; ¹¹⁸Department of Surgery, Leiden University Medical Center, Leiden, The Netherlands; ¹¹⁹Institute of Cancer and Genomic Sciences, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK; ¹²⁰Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics and Oxford NIHR Biomedical Research Centre, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK; ¹²¹Department of Health Science Research, Division of Epidemiology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, USA; ¹²²Department of Computational and Quantitative Medicine, City of Hope, Duarte, CA, USA; ¹²³City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center, City of Hope, Duarte, CA, USA; ¹²⁴Biostatistics and Computational Biology Branch, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, NIH, Research Triangle Park, NC, USA; ¹²⁵Department of Surgical Sciences, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden; ¹²⁶MRC Centre for Reproductive Health, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK; ¹²⁷Division of Breast Cancer Research, The Institute of Cancer Research, London, UK; ¹²⁸Division of Psychosocial Research and Epidemiology, The Netherlands Cancer Institute - Antoni van Leeuwenhoek hospital, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.