

New gene functions in megakaryopoiesis and platelet formation

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

Platelets are the second most abundant cell type in blood and are essential for maintaining haemostasis. Their count and volume are tightly controlled within narrow physiological ranges, but there is only limited understanding of the molecular processes controlling both traits. Here we carried out a high-powered meta-analysis of genome-wide association studies (GWAS) in up to 66,867 individuals of European ancestry, followed by extensive biological and functional assessment. We identified 68 genomic loci reliably associated with platelet count and volume mapping to established and putative novel regulators of megakaryopoiesis and platelet formation. These genes show megakaryocyte-specific gene expression patterns and extensive network connectivity. Using gene silencing in *Danio rerio* and *Drosophila melanogaster*, we identified 11 of the genes as novel regulators of blood cell formation. Taken together, our findings advance understanding of novel gene functions controlling fate-determining events during megakaryopoiesis and platelet formation, providing a new example of successful translation of GWAS to function.

To discover novel genetic determinants of megakaryopoiesis and platelet formation, we performed meta-analyses of GWAS for mean platelet volume (MPV) and platelet count (PLT). Our analyses included 18,600 (13 studies, MPV) and 48,666 (23 studies, PLT) individuals of European descent, respectively, and up to ~2.5 million genotyped or imputed single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs)¹. Briefly, we tested within each study (Supplementary Table 1) the associations of MPV and PLT with each SNP using an additive model; we then combined these study-specific test statistics in a fixed-effects meta-analysis. To reduce the risk of spurious associations, we applied common stringent quality control filters and the genomic control method² to the meta-analysis, which shows no evidence for residual inflation of summary statistics (Supplementary Fig. 1).

A total of 52 genomic loci reaching statistical significance at the genome-wide adjusted threshold of $P \leq 5 \times 10^{-8}$ were discovered in this stage 1 analysis; 55 additional loci reached suggestive association ($5 \times 10^{-8} < P \leq 5 \times 10^{-6}$). We tested one SNP per locus in a stage 2 analysis that included *in silico* and *de novo* replication data in up to 18,838 individuals from 12 additional studies, confirming 15 additional loci (Supplementary Table 2). One further independent locus (*TRIM58*) associated with PLT was identified through detection of secondary association signals. Overall, 68 independent genomic regions were associated with PLT and MPV with $P \leq 5 \times 10^{-8}$, of which 52 are new and 16 were described previously in Europeans³⁻⁶ (Table 1). Of the 68 loci, 43 and 25 loci were associated significantly with PLT and MPV, respectively; 16 of them reached genome-wide significance with both traits (Supplementary Fig. 2). This partial overlap reflects the negative correlation of both traits (gender-adjusted $r = -0.49$, Fig. 1a) that results from the tight control of platelet mass (PLT \times MPV)⁷. The association of some loci with both PLT and MPV may reflect this negative correlation between the two traits or independent pleiotropic effects of a locus on megakaryopoiesis and platelet formation. The different statistical power at the two traits and small effect sizes at many loci reduce our power to discriminate among loci controlling MPV and PLT through analysis of platelet mass. Their testing will require the collection and analysis of PLT and MPV in large independent homogeneous cohorts. Some loci, however, have a clear-cut effect. For instance, *BAK1* affects PLT specifically, compatible with its role in apoptosis and platelet lifespan.

We further tested the association of the 68 loci in 7,949 (MPV) and 8,295 (PLT) samples of south Asian and 14,697 (PLT) samples of Japanese⁸ origin. We detected substantial overlap of association signals, with effect size and direction highly concordant with findings in Europeans (Supplementary Fig. 3 and Supplementary Table 3). In the south Asian sample, 15 of the 68 (22.1%) loci were significant after adjustment for multiple testing ($P \leq 7 \times 10^{-4}$). In the Japanese sample, 13 of 55 (23.6%) PLT loci showed significance. Moreover, 73 of 84 (87%, South Asians) and 45 of 55 (82%, Japanese) SNPs showed associations with effect estimates directionally consistent with Europeans. Such concordance is highly unlikely to be due to chance ($P = 2.3 \times 10^{-12}$ and $P = 2.1 \times 10^{-6}$), and provides independent validation of the locus discovery in Europeans.

The 68 loci cumulatively explain 4.8% of the phenotypic variance in PLT and 9.9% in MPV, accounting respectively for average increases of $2.57 \times 10^9 \text{ l}^{-1}$ PLT and 0.10 fl MPV per copy of allele. These levels of explained variance are in accordance with other GWAS of complex quantitative traits⁹. Our results indicate that many other common variants of similar or lower effect size, rare variants as well as structural variants may also contribute to the variation of both platelet traits. We used the method of ref. 10 to estimate the number of additional PLT- and MPV-associated loci having effect sizes comparable to those observed in our analysis. The method (with caveats discussed in the Supplementary Information) predicted that 137 and 81 such loci exist for PLT and MPV respectively, accounting for 9.7% and 18.3% of the total phenotypic variance.

Gene-prioritization strategies

Evidence from recent, highly powered meta-analyses suggests that the association peaks are enriched for genes controlling key underlying biological pathways^{11,12}. In our case, a large proportion of the association signals (46 out of 68) had the most significant SNP in stage 1 ('sentinel SNP') mapping to within a gene-coding region, including several key regulators of haemostasis (*ITGA2B*, *F2R*, *GP1BA*), megakaryopoiesis (*THPO*, *MEF2C*) and platelet lifespan (*BAK1*). Through an unbiased analysis of our GWAS results, we estimated that PLT-associated SNPs are significantly more likely to map to gene regions than expected by chance ($P < 0.05$, Supplementary Fig. 4), suggesting that we may prioritize the search of additional yet unknown genes

Table 1 | Summary of loci associated with platelet count and mean platelet volume in Europeans

GWAS locus	Trait	Sentinel SNP	Chr (build 36)	Position (build 36)	Cytoband	Locus	Effect/other allele*	n	Effect (s.e.)†	P value‡	Het. P value	Rep.¶	Refs#
1	MPV	rs17396340	1	10,208,762	1p36.22	<i>KIF1B</i>	A/G	21,612	0.008 (0.002)	2.83×10^{-8}	0.83	-	-
2	PLT	rs2336384	1	11,968,649	1p36.22	<i>MFN2</i>	G/T	57,366	2.172 (0.382)	1.25×10^{-8}	0.31	-	-
3	MPV	rs10914144	1	170,216,372	1q24.3	<i>DNM3</i>	C/T	18,589	0.014 (0.001)	1.11×10^{-24}	0.46	Yes	6
	PLT	rs10914144	1	170,216,372			T/C	54,978	3.417 (0.487)	2.22×10^{-12}	0.79	Yes	
4	MPV	rs1172130	1	203,511,575	1q32.1	<i>TMCC2</i>	G/A	21,141	0.011 (0.001)	3.82×10^{-27}	0.17	Yes	6
	PLT	rs1668871	1	203,503,759			C/T	58,108	2.804 (0.368)	2.59×10^{-14}	0.45	-	-
5	PLT	rs7550918	1	245,742,181	1q44	<i>LOC148824</i>	T/C	54,171	3.133 (0.471)	2.91×10^{-11}	0.85	-	-
6	PLT	rs3811444	1	246,106,073	1q44	<i>TRIM58</i>	C/T	27,955	3.346 (0.574)	5.60×10^{-9}	0.66	-	-
7	PLT	rs1260326	2	27,584,443	2p23	<i>GCKR</i>	T/C	54,396	2.334 (0.381)	9.12×10^{-10}	0.11	Yes	-
8	MPV	rs649729	2	31,317,888	2p23.1	<i>EHD3</i>	T/A	20,850	0.008 (0.001)	1.17×10^{-12}	0.61	Yes	6
	PLT	rs625132	2	31,335,803			G/A	45,217	4.236 (0.568)	9.15×10^{-14}	0.98	-	-
9	PLT	rs17030845	2	43,541,382	2p21	<i>THADA</i>	C/T	65,738	3.577 (0.556)	1.27×10^{-10}	0.40	-	-
10	MPV	rs4305276	2	241,143,685	2q37.3	<i>ANKMY1</i>	G/C	20,618	0.008 (0.001)	1.71×10^{-11}	0.71	-	-
11	PLT	rs7616006	3	12,242,647	3p25	<i>SYN2</i>	A/G	58,564	1.997 (0.366)	4.86×10^{-8}	0.20	-	-
12	PLT	rs7641175	3	18,286,415	3p23	<i>SATB1</i>	A/G	58,366	2.757 (0.416)	3.37×10^{-11}	0.34	-	-
13	MPV	rs1354034	3	56,824,788	3p14.3	<i>ARHGEF3</i>	T/C	18,286	0.023 (0.001)	3.31×10^{-69}	0.00	Yes	4,6
	PLT	rs1354034	3	56,824,788			C/T	49,135	6.848 (0.442)	2.86×10^{-54}	0.50	Yes	
14	PLT	rs3792366	3	124,322,565	3q21.1	<i>PDIA5</i>	G/A	58,335	2.153 (0.365)	3.60×10^{-9}	0.07	-	-
15	MPV	rs10512627	3	125,822,911	3q21.1	<i>KALRN</i>	C/G	21,108	0.006 (0.001)	5.10×10^{-10}	0.41	-	-
16	MPV	rs11734132	4	6,942,419	4p16.1	<i>KIAA0232</i>	G/C	17,444	0.011 (0.002)	1.11×10^{-11}	0.20	-	-
17	PLT	rs7694379	4	88,405,532	4q22.1	<i>HSD17B13</i>	A/G	56,430	2.129 (0.37)	8.70×10^{-9}	0.44	Yes	-
18	MPV	rs2227831	5	76,059,249	5q13.3	<i>F2R</i>	G/A	21,654	0.021 (0.003)	9.65×10^{-16}	0.11	-	-
	PLT	rs17568628	5	76,082,694			T/C	44,759	6.074 (0.993)	9.61×10^{-10}	0.77	-	-
19	PLT	rs700585	5	88,187,872	5q14.3	<i>MEF2C</i>	C/T	55,469	2.703 (0.442)	9.86×10^{-10}	0.06	-	-
	MPV	rs4521516	5	88,135,706			G/C	28,157	0.008 (0.001)	1.89×10^{-9}	0.39	-	-
20	PLT	rs2070729	5	131,847,819	5q31.1	<i>IRF1</i>	A/C	56,469	2.394 (0.371)	1.13×10^{-10}	0.73	-	-
21	MPV	rs10076782	5	158,537,540	5q33.3	<i>RNF145</i>	A/G	18,025	0.007 (0.001)	4.48×10^{-8}	0.52	-	-
22	PLT	rs441460	6	25,656,266	6p22.2	<i>LRRRC16</i>	G/A	58,064	3.08 (0.359)	8.70×10^{-18}	0.61	-	-
23	PLT	rs3819299	6	31,430,345	6p21.33	<i>HLA-B</i>	G/T	48,687	5.048 (0.824)	8.80×10^{-10}	0.90	-	-
24	PLT	rs399604	6	33,082,991	6p21.32	<i>HLA-DOA</i>	C/T	57,674	2.346 (0.365)	1.30×10^{-10}	0.23	-	-
25	PLT	rs210134	6	33,648,186	6p21.31	<i>BAK1</i>	G/A	58,554	4.957 (0.396)	7.11×10^{-36}	0.67	Yes	6,8
26	PLT	rs9399137	6	135,460,710	6q23.3	<i>HBS1L-MYB</i>	C/T	57,857	5.901 (0.41)	5.04×10^{-47}	0.74	Yes	8
27	MPV	rs342293	7	106,159,454	7q22.3	<i>FLJ36031-</i>	G/C	20,193	0.017 (0.001)	7.03×10^{-57}	0.19	Yes	5,6
	PLT	rs342275	7	106,146,451		<i>PIK3CG</i>	C/T	58,571	3.742 (0.363)	5.57×10^{-25}	0.17	-	-
28	PLT	rs4731120	7	123,198,458	7q31.3	<i>WASL</i>	C/A	66,147	4.14 (0.592)	2.77×10^{-12}	0.46	-	-
29	PLT	rs6993770	8	106,650,703	8q23.1	<i>ZFPM2</i>	A/T	54,960	3.668 (0.437)	4.30×10^{-17}	0.14	-	-
30	PLT	rs6995402	8	145,077,548	8q24.3	<i>PLEC1</i>	C/T	57,593	2.304 (0.371)	5.09×10^{-10}	0.10	-	-
31	MPV	rs10813766	9	321,489	9p24.3	<i>DOCK8</i>	T/G	21,104	0.007 (0.001)	3.68×10^{-12}	0.45	-	-
32	PLT	rs409801	9	4,734,742	9p24.1	<i>AK3</i>	C/T	56,063	5.585 (0.378)	2.59×10^{-49}	0.47	-	6
33	PLT	rs13300663	9	4,804,947	9p24.1	<i>RCL1</i>	C/G	48,092	5.585 (0.483)	9.83×10^{-30}	0.64	Yes	8
34	PLT	rs3731211	9	21,976,846	9p21.3	<i>CDKN2A</i>	A/T	54,529	3.281 (0.438)	6.43×10^{-14}	0.86	Yes	-
35	PLT	rs11789898	9	135,915,483	9q34.2	<i>BRD3</i>	T/G	57,391	3.014 (0.476)	2.39×10^{-10}	0.70	-	-
36	MPV	rs7075195	10	64,720,664	10q21.2	<i>JMJD1C</i>	A/G	21,226	0.014 (0.001)	2.39×10^{-44}	0.89	Yes	6
	PLT	rs10761731	10	64,697,615			T/A	54,344	3.849 (0.378)	2.02×10^{-24}	0.56	Yes	-
37	PLT	rs505404	11	233,267	11p15.5	<i>PSMD13-</i>	G/T	54,642	4.662 (0.453)	7.44×10^{-25}	0.86	-	6
	MPV	rs17655730	11	260,714		<i>NLRP6</i>	T/C	20,875	0.01 (0.001)	2.29×10^{-15}	0.29	-	-
38	PLT	rs4246215	11	61,320,874	11q12.2	<i>FEN1</i>	T/G	56,299	2.451 (0.39)	3.31×10^{-10}	0.41	Yes	-
39	PLT	rs4938642	11	118,605,115	11q23.3	<i>CBL</i>	C/G	56,605	4.73 (0.727)	7.66×10^{-11}	0.98	Yes	-
40	MPV	rs1558324	12	6,159,479	12p13.31	<i>CD9-VWF</i>	A/G	20,387	0.01 (0.001)	1.55×10^{-21}	0.48	Yes	-
	PLT	rs7342306	12	6,161,353			G/A	55,636	2.532 (0.384)	4.29×10^{-11}	0.14	-	-
41	MPV	rs2015599	12	29,326,746	12p11.22	<i>MLSTD1</i>	A/G	21,102	0.008 (0.001)	5.55×10^{-16}	0.76	-	-
42	MPV	rs10876550	12	52,998,574	12q13.13	<i>COPZ1-</i>	G/A	21,214	0.008 (0.001)	1.86×10^{-14}	0.38	Yes	-
						<i>NFE2-CBX5</i>							
43	MPV	rs2950390	12	55,341,557	12q13.3	<i>PTGES3-</i>	C/T	21,238	0.008 (0.001)	7.45×10^{-14}	0.75	-	-
	PLT	rs941207	12	55,309,550		<i>BAZ2A</i>	G/C	55,653	2.751 (0.431)	1.74×10^{-10}	0.33	-	-
44	PLT	rs3184504	12	110,368,990	12q24.12	<i>SH2B3</i>	T/C	56,354	3.99 (0.374)	1.22×10^{-26}	0.07	-	6,8
45	PLT	rs17824620	12	111,585,376	12q24.13	<i>RPH3A-</i>	C/A	51,530	2.457 (0.428)	9.67×10^{-9}	0.26	-	-
						<i>PTPN11</i>							
46	MPV	rs7961894	12	120,849,965	12q24.31	<i>WDR66</i>	T/C	29,755	0.03 (0.001)	1.42×10^{-103}	0.48	Yes	4,6
	PLT	rs7961894	12	120,849,965			C/T	51,897	3.923 (0.609)	1.22×10^{-10}	0.05	Yes	-
47	PLT	rs4148441	13	94,696,207	13q32	<i>ABCC4</i>	G/A	64,120	4.117 (0.6)	6.76×10^{-12}	0.38	Yes	-
48	MPV	rs7317038	13	113,060,898	13q34	<i>GRTP1</i>	C/T	27,646	0.006 (0.001)	8.27×10^{-12}	0.09	-	-
49	PLT	rs8022206	14	67,590,658	14q24.1	<i>RAD51L1</i>	G/A	52,251	3.197 (0.5)	1.55×10^{-10}	0.59	-	-
50	PLT	rs8006385	14	92,570,778	14q31	<i>ITPK1</i>	G/A	64,929	3.587 (0.558)	1.24×10^{-10}	0.28	-	-
51	PLT	rs7149242	14	100,229,168	14q32.2	<i>C14orf70-</i>	G/T	61,247	2.142 (0.385)	2.68×10^{-8}	0.07	-	-
						<i>DLK1</i>							
52	PLT	rs11628318	14	102,109,839	14q32.31	<i>RCOR1</i>	A/T	62,438	2.572 (0.405)	2.04×10^{-10}	0.84	-	-
53	PLT	rs2297067	14	102,636,537	14q32.32	<i>C14orf73</i>	T/C	41,687	3.538 (0.553)	1.58×10^{-10}	0.79	-	-
	MPV	rs944002	14	102,642,567			A/G	22,910	0.008 (0.001)	4.76×10^{-11}	0.66	Yes	-
54	MPV	rs3000073	14	104,800,836	14q32.33	<i>BRF1</i>	G/A	21,229	0.007 (0.001)	3.27×10^{-11}	0.28	-	-
55	PLT	rs3809566	15	61,120,776	15q22.2	<i>TPM1</i>	G/A	57,113	2.443 (0.39)	3.65×10^{-10}	0.33	-	6
56	PLT	rs1719271	15	62,970,853	15q22.31	<i>ANKDD1A</i>	G/A	56,782	3.414 (0.502)	1.05×10^{-11}	0.00	-	-
57	PLT	rs6065	17	4,777,160	17pter-p12	<i>GP1BA</i>	T/C	64,987	4.191 (0.63)	2.92×10^{-11}	0.00	Yes	8
58	PLT	rs397969	17	19,744,838	17p11.1	<i>AKAP10</i>	C/T	60,944	2.131 (0.357)	2.32×10^{-9}	0.92	-	-
59	MPV	rs8076739	17	24,738,712	17q11.2	<i>TAOK1</i>	T/C	21,652	0.013 (0.001)	4.59×10^{-38}	0.12	-	4,6
	PLT	rs559972	17	24,838,621			T/C	53,460	3.264 (0.375)	3.30×10^{-18}	0.25	-	-

Table 1 | Continued

GWAS locus	Trait	Sentinel SNP	Chr (build 36)	Position (build 36)	Cytoband	Locus	Effect/other allele*	n	Effect (s.e.)†	P value‡	Het. P value	Rep.§	Refs#
60	PLT	rs10512472	17	30,908,916	17q12	<i>SNORD7-</i>	C/T	58,692	3.636 (0.477)	2.40×10^{-14}	0.08	Yes	–
	MPV	rs16971217	17	30,968,167		<i>AP2B1</i>	C/G	21,089	0.009 (0.001)	3.77×10^{-12}	0.01	–	–
61	PLT	rs708382	17	39,797,869	17q21.31	<i>FAM171A2-</i> <i>ITGA2B</i>	T/C	50,036	2.439 (0.431)	1.51×10^{-8}	0.46	–	–
62	PLT	rs11082304	18	18,974,970	18q11.2	<i>CABLES1</i>	G/T	58,215	2.48 (0.378)	5.27×10^{-11}	0.73	Yes	–
63	MPV	rs12969657	18	65,687,475	18q22.2	<i>CD226</i>	T/C	19,285	0.007 (0.001)	3.36×10^{-11}	0.38	Yes	6
64	MPV	rs8109288	19	16,046,558	19p13.12	<i>TPM4</i>	A/G	13,964	0.029 (0.004)	1.15×10^{-11}	0.14	–	3
	PLT	rs8109288	19	16,046,558			G/A	29,014	11.945 (1.892)	2.75×10^{-10}	0.04	–	–
65	PLT	rs17356664	19	50,432,610	19q13.32	<i>EXOC3L2</i>	C/T	55,487	2.599 (0.415)	3.60×10^{-10}	0.07	–	–
66	MPV	rs13042885	20	1,872,706	20p13	<i>SIRPA</i>	C/T	21,186	0.008 (0.001)	5.56×10^{-14}	0.56	–	6
67	MPV	rs4812048	20	57,021,165	20q13.32	<i>CTSZ-</i> <i>TUBB1</i>	C/T	20,811	0.008 (0.001)	1.30×10^{-9}	0.06	–	–
68	PLT	rs1034566	22	18,364,276	22q11.21	<i>ARVCF</i>	T/C	61,469	2.128 (0.384)	3.06×10^{-8}	0.43	–	–
69	PLT	rs6141	3	185,572,959	3q27	<i>THPO</i>	T/C	39,366	2.467 (0.456)	6.18×10^{-8}	0.59	Yes	24, 8

Results are provided for the 68 loci and 84 sentinel SNPs reaching genome-wide significant ($P \leq 5 \times 10^{-8}$) association with PLT or MPV. Results for stages 1 and 2 of the analysis in Europeans are provided in Supplementary Table 2. MPV, mean platelet volume; PLT, platelet count.

* Alleles are indexed to the forward strand of NCBI build 36.

† Effect sizes in ln(f) for MPV and $10^9 l^{-1}$ for PLT.

‡ All P values are based on the inverse-variance weighted meta-analysis model (fixed effects).

§ *TRIM58* identifies the only secondary signal identified in this study, derived from a genome-wide secondary signal discovery effort carried out by conditioning the discovery GWAS on all SNPs reaching significance in the stage 1 meta-analysis. The effects (s.e.) and P values reported are obtained in the secondary analysis. The corresponding values in the stage 1 analysis are effect (s.e.) = 2.721 (0.542) and $P = 4.06 \times 10^{-7}$. Further details of this analysis are given in the Supplementary Information.

|| *THPO* narrowly misses the level required for nominal significance ($P < 5 \times 10^{-8}$) in Europeans, but shows genome-wide significance in Japanese.

*Rep. indicates replication of European stage 1 + 2 results in non-Europeans (Supplementary Table 3): yes, if association P value is at least in one non-European population < 0.0007 (to account for multiple testing of 68 loci).

#Relevant references are indicated.

controlling these processes in the associated regions. To define a univocal rule to study the enrichment of functional relationships in associated genes, we made the choice to focus on a set of 54 ‘core’ genes selected as either containing the sentinel SNP or mapping to within 10 kb from an intergenic sentinel SNP (Table 2). This selection strategy is designed to obtain unbiased hypotheses producing interpretable

biological inference for genes near the association signals, but has reduced sensitivity for genes that map further from the sentinel SNP. For instance *VWF*, a key regulator of haemostasis, maps to 55 kb from the sentinel SNP (Supplementary Fig. 3 and Supplementary Table 4) and is therefore not considered as a core gene. We further note that this selection strategy does not imply knowledge of the location of causative

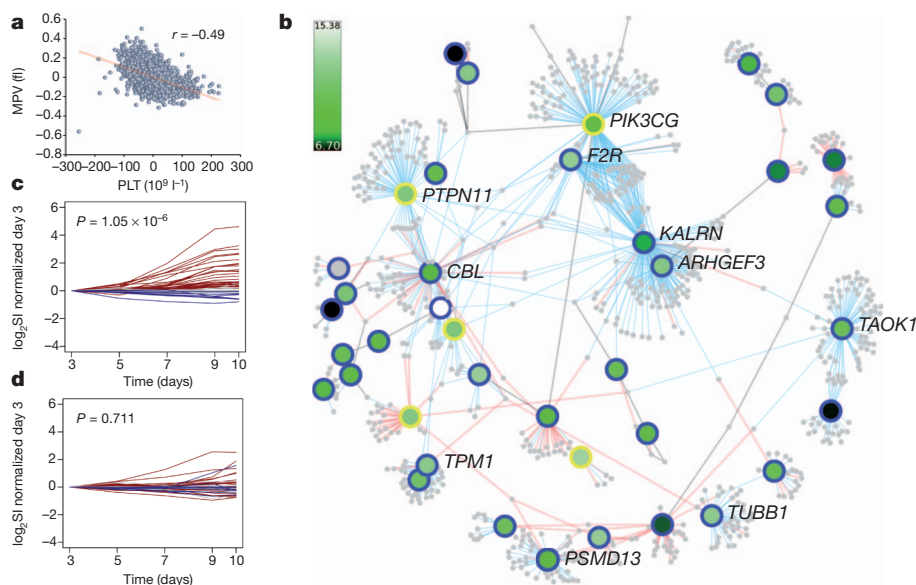


Figure 1 | Protein–protein interaction network and gene transcription patterns. **a**, Negative correlation between PLT and MPV in a UK sample. The gender-adjusted correlation coefficient r and trend line are shown. **b**, Protein–protein interaction network of platelet loci. For the nodes, genes are represented by round symbols, where node colour reflects gene transcript level in megakaryocytes on a continuous scale from low (dark green) to high (white). Grey-coloured round symbols identify first-order interactors identified in Reactome and IntAct. Core genes not connected to the main network are omitted. The 34 core genes are identified by a blue perimeter. Yellow perimeters identify five additional genes (*VWF*, *PTPN11*, *PIK3CG*, *NFE2* and *MYB*) with known roles in haemostasis and megakaryopoiesis and mapping to within the association signals at distances greater than 10 kb from the sentinel SNPs. These genes, which do not conform to the rule for inclusion into the core gene list, are not considered in further analyses presented in Fig. 2c, d and Supplementary

Fig. 5 and are shown here for illustration purposes only. Network edges were obtained from the Reactome (blue) and IntAct-like (red) databases and through manual literature curation (black). The network including the 34 core genes alone contains 633 nodes and 827 edges; after inclusion of the 5 additional genes, the network (shown here) includes 785 nodes and 1,085 edges. The full network, containing gene expression levels and other annotation features, is available in Cytoscape²⁵ format for download (Supplementary Data 1). **c**, **d**, Time course experiments of gene expression in megakaryocytes and erythroblasts. Expression of core genes in \log_2 transformed signal intensities (\log_2 SI) during differentiation of the haematopoietic stem cells into megakaryocytes (**c**) or erythroblasts (**d**), segregated by their trends of statistically significant increasing (red), decreasing (blue) or unchanged (grey) gene expression. The corresponding gene list for the three classes is given in Supplementary Data 1.

Table 2 | Summary of functional evidence for core genes

Sentinel SNP (trait)	Core gene (distance in kb)*	Phenotype†
rs17396340 (MPV) rs2336384 (PLT) rs10914144 (MPV, PLT)	<i>KIF1B</i> kinesin family member 1B (0) <i>MFN2</i> mitofusin 2 (0) <i>DNM3</i> dynamin 3 (0)	Variant annotation: sentinel SNP in $r^2 = 1$ with eQTL for <i>KIF1B</i> Variant annotation: sentinel SNP is eQTL for <i>MFN2</i> <i>shibire</i> (<i>DNM-like</i>): overproliferation of plasmatocytes in <i>Drosophila</i> (this study)
rs1172130, rs1668871 (MPV, PLT) rs1260326 (PLT)	<i>TMCC2</i> transmembrane and coiled-coil domain family 2 (2,481; 0) <i>GCKR</i> glucokinase (hexokinase 4) regulator (0)	Variant annotation: sentinel SNP in $r^2 = 0.928$ with eQTL for <i>RIPK5</i> <i>Xab1</i> (non-core gene): pronounced increase in plasmatocyte and crystal cell counts in <i>Drosophila</i> (this study)
rs649729, rs625132 (MPV, PLT) rs17030845 (PLT) rs1354034 (MPV, PLT)	<i>EHD3</i> EH-domain-containing 3 (0) <i>THADA</i> thyroid adenoma associated (0) <i>ARHGEF3</i> Rho guanine nucleotide exchange factor (GEF) 3 (0)	<i>ehd3</i> morpholino-injected embryos had no haematopoietic phenotype in <i>D. rerio</i> (this study) <i>Zfp3612</i> (non-core gene): decreased platelet cell number in mouse <i>arhgef3</i> : profound effect on thrombopoiesis and erythropoiesis in <i>D. rerio</i> (this study)
rs2227831, rs17568628 (MPV, PLT) rs700585, rs4521516 (PLT, MPV) rs2070729 (PLT) rs10076782 (MPV) rs210134 (PLT)	<i>F2R</i> coagulation factor II (thrombin) receptor (0; 15,343) <i>MEF2C</i> myocyte enhancer factor 2C (0) <i>IRF1</i> interferon regulatory factor 1 (0) <i>RNF145</i> ring finger protein 145 (0) <i>BAK1</i> BCL2-antagonist/killer 1 (116)	<i>Par1</i> (<i>F2R</i>): thrombin activation of platelets attenuated in mouse <i>Mef2</i> : severely impaired megakaryopoiesis with reduced platelet count and increased platelet volume in mouse <i>Irf1</i> : decreased number of NK lymphocytes in mouse <i>rnf145</i> : ablation of thrombopoiesis and erythropoiesis in <i>D. rerio</i> (this study) <i>Bak1</i> : genetic ablation of <i>Bcl-xl</i> in mouse leads to thrombocytopenia by reducing platelet lifespan and this is corrected by ablation of <i>Bak1</i> <i>Zfpm2</i> : peripheral haemorrhage in mouse; <i>ush</i> (<i>ZFPM2</i>): reduction in plasmatocytes and crystal cells in <i>Drosophila</i> (this study)
rs6993770 (PLT)	<i>ZFPM2</i> zinc finger protein, multitype 2 (0)	<i>Plec1</i> : impaired leukocyte recruitment to wounds in mouse <i>Dock8</i> : decrease in number of B cells and T cells in mouse; autosomal recessive hyper-IgE recurrent infection syndrome (OMIM: 243700)
rs6995402 (PLT) rs10813766 (MPV)	<i>PLEC1</i> plectin (0) <i>DOCK8</i> dedicator of cytokinesis 8 (0)	<i>ak3</i> : ablation of thrombopoiesis and erythropoiesis in <i>D. rerio</i> (this study) <i>jmjd1c</i> : ablation of thrombopoiesis and erythropoiesis in <i>D. rerio</i> (this study)
rs409801 (PLT) rs7075195, rs10761731 (MPV, PLT) rs505404, rs17655730 (PLT, MPV)	<i>AK3</i> adenylate kinase 3 (2,699) <i>JMJD1C</i> jumonji domain containing 1C (0) <i>PSMD13</i> proteasome (prosome, macropain) 26S subunit, non-ATPase, 13 (0); <i>NLRP6</i> NLR family, pyrin domain containing 6 (7,856)	<i>rpn9</i> (<i>PSMD13</i>): reduction in plasmatocyte numbers in <i>Drosophila</i> (this study)
rs4246215 (PLT)	<i>FEN1</i> flap structure-specific endonuclease 1 (0)	Variant annotation: sentinel SNP is eQTL for <i>CPSF7</i> ; <i>Fads2</i> (non-core gene): abnormal platelet physiology and decreased platelet aggregation in mouse
rs4938642 (PLT)	<i>CBL</i> Cas-Br-M (murine) ecotropic retroviral transforming sequence (0)	Acute myeloid leukaemia (OMIM: 165360); <i>Cbl</i> : increased platelet numbers, increased thymic CD3 and CD4 expression on T cells in mouse; haematopoietic stem/progenitor cells showed enhanced sensitivity to cytokines in <i>Cbl</i> -null mice
rs10876550 (MPV)	<i>COPZ1</i> coatomer protein complex, subunit zeta 1 (6,604)	Variant annotation: sentinel SNP is eQTL for <i>GPR84</i> ; <i>Copz1</i> : iron deficiency in mouse; <i>Nfe2</i> (non-core): thrombocytopenia in mouse; <i>Znf385a</i> (non-core): abnormal platelet morphology in mouse; <i>Su(var)205</i> (non-core <i>CBX5</i>): reduction in plasmatocyte number and overproliferation of crystal cells in <i>Drosophila</i> (this study)
rs3184504 (PLT)	<i>SH2B3</i> SH2B adaptor protein 3 (0)	<i>Lnk</i> (<i>SH2B3</i>): increased megakaryopoiesis and platelet count in mouse; increased white blood cell counts and decreased platelet count in mouse; <i>rpl6</i> (non-core): reduced plasmatocyte and crystal cell number in <i>Drosophila</i> (this study)
rs4148441 (PLT) rs7317038 (MPV)	<i>ABCC4</i> ATP-binding cassette, sub-family C (CFTR/MRP), member 4 (0) <i>GRTP1</i> growth hormone regulated TBC protein 1 (0)	<i>ABCC4</i> is an active constituent of mediator-storing granules in human platelets Variant annotation: sentinel SNP is eQTL for <i>GRTP1</i> ; sentinel SNP in $r^2 = 0.93$ with eQTL for <i>RASA3</i>
rs3000073 (MPV) rs3809566 (PLT)	<i>BRF1</i> BRF1 homologue, subunit of RNA polymerase III transcription initiation factor IIIB (<i>S. cerevisiae</i>) (0) <i>TPM1</i> tropomyosin 1 (alpha) (1,115)	<i>brf</i> : reduction in plasmatocyte cell number in <i>Drosophila</i> (this study)
rs6065 (PLT)	<i>GP1BA</i> glycoprotein Ib (platelet), alpha polypeptide (0)	Variant annotation: sentinel SNP in $r^2 = 1$ with eQTL for <i>TPM1</i> ; <i>tpma</i> (<i>TPM1</i>): total abrogation of thrombopoiesis, but normal erythropoiesis in <i>D. rerio</i> (this study) Bernard–Soulier syndrome (OMIM: 231200), benign Mediterranean macrothrombocytopenia (OMIM: 153670), pseudo-von Willebrand disease (OMIM: 177820); <i>Gp1ba</i> : giant platelets, a low platelet count and increased bleeding in mouse; <i>Gp1ba</i> ^{+/-} mice show complete inhibition of arterial thrombus formation and intermediate platelet numbers
rs708382 (PLT)	<i>FAM171A2</i> family with sequence similarity 171, member A2 (1,108); <i>ITGA2B</i> integrin, alpha 2b (7,207)	Glanzmann thrombasthenia (OMIM: 607759); decreased platelet count, abnormal platelet morphology and decreased platelet aggregation in mouse; <i>itga2b</i> : severely reduced thrombocyte function in <i>D. rerio</i>
rs12969657 (MPV)	<i>CD226</i> CD226 molecule (0)	Variant annotation: sentinel SNP is eQTL for <i>CD226</i> ; leukocyte adhesion deficiency (OMIM: 116920); <i>CD226</i> mediates adhesion of megakaryocytic cells to endothelial cells and inhibition of this diminishes megakaryocytic cell maturation; <i>Dnam1</i> (<i>CD226</i>): cytotoxic T cells and NK cells less able to lyse tumours in mouse
rs13042885 (MPV) rs4812048 (MPV)	<i>SIRPA</i> signal-regulatory protein alpha (4,163) <i>CTSZ</i> cathepsin Z (5,468); <i>TUBB1</i> tubulin, beta 1 (6,539)	<i>Sirpa</i> : mild thrombocytopenia in mouse, decreased proportion of single positive T cells, enhanced peritoneal macrophage phagocytosis Autosomal dominant macrothrombocytopenia (OMIM: 613112); <i>Tubb1</i> : thrombocytopenia resulting from a defect in generating proplatelets in mouse; prolonged bleeding time and attenuated response of platelets to thrombin in mouse; <i>sun</i> (non-core ATP5E): reduction of crystal cell numbers in <i>Drosophila</i> (this study)

Table 2 | Continued

Sentinel SNP (trait)	Core gene (distance in kb)*	Phenotype†
rs1034566 (PLT)	<i>ARVCF</i> armadillo repeat gene deleted in velocardiocardial syndrome (O)	Variant annotation: sentinel SNP in $r^2 = 1$ with eQTL for <i>UFD1L</i>
rs6141 (PLT)	<i>THPO</i> thrombopoietin (O)	Essential thrombocythemia (OMIM: 187950); <i>Thpo</i> : decrease in platelet number and increase in platelet volume in mouse

Information is given only for genes with a haematopoietic phenotype. A more extensive annotation of genes within associated intervals is presented in Supplementary Table 4. Information on variants associated with gene expression is presented in Supplementary Table 6. No evidence for a haematopoietic effect was associated with the following core genes: rs3811444 (PLT) (*TRIM58* tripartite motif-containing 58 (O)); rs4305276 (MPV) (*ANKMY1* ankyrin repeat and *MYND* domain containing 1 (O)); rs3792366 (PLT) (*PDI5* protein disulphide isomerase family A, member 5 (O)); rs10512627 (MPV) (*KALRN* kalirin, RhoGEF kinase (O)); rs11734132 (MPV) (*KIAA0232* (5,628)); rs441460 (PLT) (*LRRC16A* leucine-rich-repeat containing 16A (O)); rs13300663 (PLT) (*RCL1* RNA terminal phosphate cyclase-like 1 (O)); rs3731211 (PLT) (*CDKN2A* cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor 2A (O)); rs2950390, rs941207 (MPV, PLT) (*PTGES3* prostaglandin E synthase 3 (cytosolic) (1,871); *BAZ2A* bromodomain adjacent to zinc finger domain, 2A (O)); rs7961894 (MPV, PLT) (*WDR66* WD repeat domain 66 (O)); rs8022206 (PLT) (*RAD51L1* RAD51-like 1 (*S. cerevisiae*) (O)); rs8006385 (PLT) (*ITPK1* inositol-tetrakisphosphate 1-kinase (O)); rs2297067, rs944002 (PLT, MPV) (*C14orf73* exocyst complex component 3-like 4 (O)); rs8076739, rs559972 (MPV, PLT) (*TAOK1* TAO kinase 1 (3,357, 0)); rs1697127 (MPV) (*AP2B1* adaptor-related protein complex 2, beta 1 subunit (O)); rs11082304 (PLT) (*CABLES1* Cdk5 and Abl enzyme substrate 1 (O)); rs8109288 (MPV, PLT) (*TPM4* tropomyosin 4 (O)); rs17356664 (PLT) (*EXOC3L2* exocyst complex component 3-like 2 (3,301)); rs2015599 (MPV) (*FAR2* fatty acyl CoA reductase 2 (O)); rs397969 (PLT) (*AKAP10* A kinase (PRKA) anchor protein 10 (4,506)); rs11789898 (PLT) (*BRD3* bromodomain containing 3 (O)).

*Core genes are defined as either containing a sentinel SNP or as mapping at less than 10 kb from an intergenic SNP. Distance from nearest gene is calculated as the absolute distance between SNP and transcription start site of the gene or 3' end of last exon.

†Phenotypes are defined from exhaustive search of the OMIM (Online Mendelian Inheritance in Man) database, published *in vitro* studies for humans and knockout and knockdown experiments for model organisms for both core and non-core genes. r^2 values are calculated from the HapMap phase 2 CEU panel. *Drosophila* indicates *Drosophila melanogaster*.

variants, which is currently incomplete. A detailed SNP survey showed that at 15 loci the sentinel SNPs either encoded, or were in high linkage disequilibrium (LD, $r^2 \geq 0.8$) with, a non-synonymous variant (Supplementary Table 5); another 11 either matched or were in high linkage disequilibrium with SNPs associated with expression levels of core genes (or cis-eQTLs, Supplementary Table 6), indicating that other loci may exert their effect through regulation of gene expression¹³. The validation of suggestive causative effects, as well as the identification of more complex interactions involving other genomic loci (trans eQTLs), will require a more comprehensive discovery in appropriately powered genomic data sets.

As a first effort to characterize biological connectivity among the core genes, we applied canonical pathway analyses (see <http://www.ingenuity.com>), detecting a highly significant over-representation of core genes in relevant biological functions such as haematological disease, cancer and cell cycle (Supplementary Table 7). Encouraged by these results, we extended this effort to construct a comprehensive network of protein–protein interactions incorporating the core genes. This effort integrated information from public databases (principally Reactome and IntAct) with careful manual revision of published evidence and high-throughput gene expression data. The resulting network, which includes 633 nodes and 827 edges, showed extensive connectivity between the proteins encoded by the core genes with an established functional role in megakaryopoiesis and platelet formation and those encoded by genes hitherto unknown to be implicated in these processes (Fig. 1b).

Transcriptional patterns of core genes

We next considered whether this connectivity was also reflected in the regulation of core gene transcription, and whether expression patterns were unique to megakaryocytes. Despite high levels of correlation in gene expression between different blood cell types (median = 0.8; median absolute deviation = 0.1)¹⁴, we found that core genes tend to have significantly greater expression in megakaryocytes than in the other blood cells ($P = 7.5 \times 10^{-5}$, Supplementary Fig. 5a). This observation is compatible with the notion that ultimate steps in blood cell lineage specification are accompanied, or driven, by the emergence of increasing numbers of lineage-specific transcripts. To explore this assumption, we used genome-wide expression arrays to determine changes in global transcript levels during *in vitro* differentiation of umbilical-cord blood-derived haematopoietic stem cells to precursors of blood cells. We considered five different time points and two cell types, erythroblasts (the precursors of red blood cells) and megakaryocytes. Notwithstanding high levels of correlation of gene expression between erythroblasts and megakaryocytes¹⁴, core gene transcripts showed a significant increase over time in megakaryocytes ($P = 1.5 \times 10^{-6}$) but not in erythroblasts ($P = 0.77$, Fig. 1c, d; see also Supplementary Fig. 5b). Taken together, these patterns of core gene expression are consistent with a different regulation of their transcription in

megakaryocytes versus erythroblasts, and with their centrality in megakaryopoiesis and platelet formation. This hypothesis is also consistent with the observation that only 5 of the 68 sentinel SNPs exert a significant effect on erythrocyte parameters (*HBS1L-MYB*, *RCL1*, *SH2B3*, *TRIM58* and *TMCC2*, Supplementary Table 8).

Gene silencing in model organisms

To assess whether core genes are indeed implicated in haematopoiesis, we interrogated the function of 15 genes using gene silencing in *D. rerio* and *D. melanogaster*, and supported empirical data with published evidence on knockout models in *M. musculus* (Table 2 and Supplementary Table 4). In *D. rerio*, we applied morpholino constructs to silence the expression of six genes (Fig. 2 and Supplementary Fig. 6) selected to have >50% homology with the human counterpart and no previous evidence of involvement in haematopoiesis. Silencing of four genes in *D. rerio* (*arhgef3*, *ak3*, *rnf145*, *jmjd1c*) resulted in the ablation of both primitive erythropoiesis and thrombocyte formation. Silencing of *tpma*, the orthologue of *TPM1* that is transcribed in megakaryocytes but not in other blood cells, abolished the formation of thrombocytes but not of erythrocytes. Silencing of *ehd3* did not yield a haematopoietic phenotype. We also screened *D. melanogaster* RNA interference (RNAi) knockdown lines for quantitative alterations in the two most prevalent classes of blood elements: plasmatocytes and crystal cells. The repertoire of blood cells in *D. melanogaster*, consisting of about 95% plasmatocytes and 5% crystal cells, is less varied than in vertebrates. Transcription factors and signalling pathways regulating haematopoiesis have, however, been conserved throughout evolution¹⁵, making the RNAi knockdown studies a relevant first step towards a better understanding of the putative role of these GWAS genes in haematopoiesis. Four core-gene *D. melanogaster* lines (*shibire* (*DNM*), *ush* (*ZFPF2*), *rpn9* (*PSMD13*), *Brf* (*BRF1*)), as well as five others (*sun* (*ATP5E*), *CG3704* (*XAB1*), *Su(var)205* (*CBX5*), *dve* (*SATB1*) and *RpL6* (*RPL6*)), displayed highly reproducible differences in the numbers of these two cell types (Table 2 and Supplementary Table 4). Despite widespread differences between mammalian and insect haematopoietic lineages¹⁶, our findings from *D. melanogaster* provide new and supporting examples of functional conservation in the control of blood cell formation in invertebrates and vertebrates^{17–19}.

New gene and functional discoveries

The data from studies in *D. rerio* by us and in *M. musculus* by others (see Supplementary Table 4) provided proof-of-concept evidence that our prioritization strategy is appropriate for selecting novel genes controlling thrombopoiesis and megakaryopoiesis, respectively. More detailed insights and additional implicated genes will be revealed through the systematic silencing of all genes in the associated regions. For instance, RNAi knockdown of *dve* in *D. melanogaster* reduces plasmatocyte numbers and increases the number of crystal cells, thus providing supporting evidence that its non-core gene

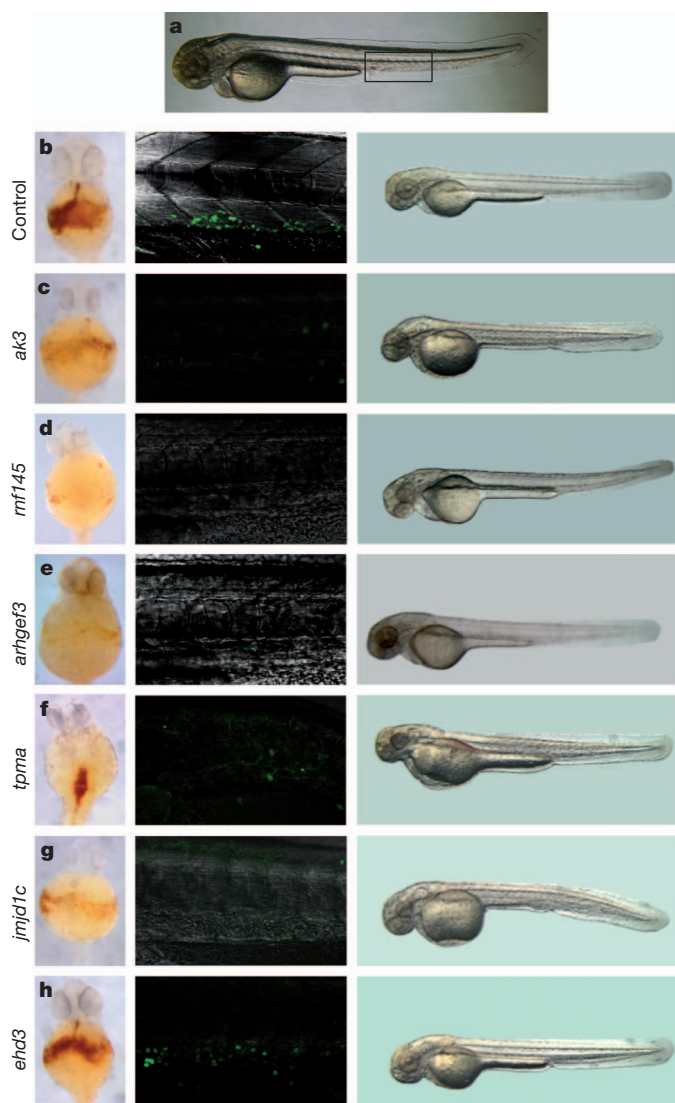


Figure 2 | Functional assessment of novel loci in *D. rerio*. Gene-specific morpholinos were injected into wild-type and *Tg(cd41:EGFP)* embryos at the one cell stage (Supplementary Fig. 6) to assess alterations in erythropoiesis and thrombopoiesis. **a**, Control *D. rerio* embryo at 72 h post fertilization (h.p.f.); the boxed region corresponds to images in the middle panels of **b–h**. **b–h**, Left: o-dianisidine staining was used to assess the number of mature erythrocytes at 48 h.p.f.: *ehd3* (**h**) morpholino-injected embryos showed normal haemoglobin staining, whereas embryos injected with *ak3* (**c**), *rnf145* (**d**), *arhgef3* (**e**) or *jmj1c* (**g**) morpholinos showed a decrease in the number of haemoglobin-positive cells compared to control embryos (**b**). Embryos injected with *tpma* morpholinos (**f**) showed normal numbers of erythrocytes but unusual accumulation dorsally in the blood vessels (compatible with cardiomyopathy). Middle: haematopoietic stem-cell and thrombocyte development was assessed using the transgenic *Tg(cd41:EGFP)* line at 72 h.p.f. Embryos injected with the *ehd3* (**h**) morpholino had a normal number of GFP⁺ cells in the caudal haematopoietic tissue and circulation, when compared to control embryos (**b**). However, GFP⁺ cells were absent in *ak3* (**c**), *rnf145* (**d**), *arhgef3* (**e**), *tpma* (**f**) and *jmj1c* (**g**) morpholino-injected embryos. Right: One-cell-stage embryos were injected with the standard control morpholino (**b**) or gene-specific morpholino (**c–h**) and monitored during development. No gross lethality or developmental abnormalities were observed at 72 h.p.f. in gene-specific morpholino-injected embryos (**c–h**) compared with the control (**b**). **a** and middle and right panels of **b–h**, lateral view, anterior left; left panels of **b–e**, **g**, **h**, ventral view, anterior up; left panel of **f**, dorsal view, anterior up. The genes appear to be nonspecifically expressed during embryogenesis as shown by patterns deposited in the ZFIN resource (<http://zfin.org>).

human homologue *SATB1* should be prioritized in functional studies. However, the results of the knockdown study in *D. rerio* do not clarify at which hierarchical positions in thrombopoiesis and erythropoiesis the genes exert their effect, requiring further assessment in conditional knockout models in *M. musculus* with lineage-specific regulation of gene transcription. Nevertheless, our results have already allowed novel insights into the genetic control of these processes. Signalling cascades initiated by thrombopoietin (THPO) and its receptor cMPL via the JAK2/STAT3/5A signalling pathway are key regulatory steps initiating changes in gene expression responsible for driving forward megakaryocyte differentiation²⁰. Our study highlights several additional signalling proteins implicating potentially important novel regulatory routes. For instance, two genes encoding guanine nucleotide exchange factors (*DOCK8* and *ARHGEF3*) were identified. Mendelian mutations of the former are causative of the hyper-IgE syndrome, but its effect on platelets had not yet been identified. The silencing of the latter gene in *D. rerio* resulted in a profound haematopoietic phenotype characterized by a complete ablation of both primitive erythropoiesis and thrombocyte formation, demonstrating its novel regulatory role in myeloid differentiation. In a parallel and in-depth study we demonstrated its novel role in the regulation of iron uptake and erythroid cell maturation²¹. A second class of genes also known to critically control early and late events of megakaryopoiesis are transcription factors. For instance, *MYB* silencing by microRNA 150 determines the definitive commitment of the megakaryocyte–erythroblast precursor to the megakaryocytic lineage¹⁵. A further 10 core genes identified in this study are implicated in the regulation of transcription. Among these, we have demonstrated here that silencing of *rnf145* and *jmj1c* in *D. rerio* severely affects both lineages.

In conclusion, this highly powered study describes a catalogue of known and novel genes associated with key haematopoietic processes in humans, providing an additional example of GWAS leading to biological discoveries. We further showed that for a large proportion of these known and new genes, functional support is achieved from model organisms and by overlap with genes implicated in inherited Mendelian disorders and in human cancers because of acquired mutations. In-depth functional studies and comparative analyses will be necessary to characterize the precise mechanisms by which these new genes and variants affect haematopoiesis, megakaryopoiesis and platelet formation. Furthermore, we provide extensive new resources, most notably a freely accessible knowledge base embedded in the novel protein–protein interaction network, with information about the identified platelet genes being implicated in Mendelian disorders and results from gene-silencing studies in model organisms. We anticipate that these resources will help to advance megakaryopoiesis research, to address key questions in blood stem-cell biology and to propose new targets for the treatment of haematological disorders. Finally, MPV has been associated with the risk of myocardial infarction^{22,23}. The contribution of the new loci to the aetiology of acute myocardial infarction events will require assessment in a prospective setting.

METHODS SUMMARY

A summary of the methods can be found in Supplementary Information and includes detailed information on: study populations; blood biochemistry measurements; genotyping methods and quality control filters; genome-wide association and meta-analysis methods; gene prioritization strategies for functional assessment and network construction; protein–protein interaction network; *in vitro* differentiation of blood cells; experimental data sets and analytical methods for gene expression analysis; zebrafish morpholino knockdown generation; assessment of other model organism resources.

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Supplementary Information is linked to the online version of the paper at www.nature.com/nature.

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Author Information Reprints and permissions information is available at www.nature.com/reprints. The authors declare no competing financial interests. Readers are welcome to comment on the online version of this article at www.nature.com/nature. Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to C.G. (christian.gieger@helmholtz-muenchen.de), W.H.O. (who1000@cam.ac.uk) or N.S. (ns6@sanger.ac.uk).

Author Contributions Study design group: C.G., S. Sanna, A.A.H., A. Rendon, M.A.F., W.H.O., N.S.; manuscript writing group: C.G., A. Radhakrishnan, S. Sanna, A.A.H., A. Rendon, M.A.F., W.H.O., N.S.; data preparation, meta-analysis and secondary analysis group: A. Radhakrishnan, B.K., W.T., E.P., G.P., R.M., M.A.F., C.G., N.S.; bioinformatics analyses, pathway analyses and protein–protein interaction network group: S.M.,

J.-W.N.A., S.J., J.K., Y.M., L.B., A. Rendon, W.H.O.; transcript profiling methods and data group: K.V., A. Rendon, L.W., A.H.G., T.-P.Y., F. Cambien, J.E., C. Hengstenberg, N.J.S., H. Schunkert, P.D., W.H.O.; *M. musculus* models: R.R.-S.; *D. rerio* knockdown models: A.C., J.S.-C., D. Stemple, W.H.O.; *D. melanogaster* knockdown models: U.E., J. Penninger and A.A.H. All other author contributions and roles are listed in Supplementary Information.

Christian Gieger^{1*}, Aparna Radhakrishnan^{2,3*}, Ana Cvejic^{2,3*}, Weihong Tang^{4*}, Eleonora Porcu^{5*}, Giorgio Pistis^{6*}, Jovana Serbanovic-Canic^{2,3*}, Ulrich Elling⁷, Alison H. Goodall^{8,9}, Yann Labrune¹⁰, Lorna M. Lopez^{11,12}, Reedik Mägi^{13,28}, Stuart Meacham^{2,3}, Yukinori Okada^{14,15}, Nicola Pirastu^{16,102}, Rossella Sorice¹⁷, Alexander Teumer¹⁸, Katrin Voss², Weihua Zhang¹⁹, Ramiro Ramirez-Solis³, Joshua C. Bis²⁰, David Ellinghaus²¹, Martin Gögele²², Jouke-Jan Hottenga²³, Claudia Langenberg²⁴, Peter Kovacs²⁵, Paul F. O'Reilly²⁶, So-Youn Shin^{3,27}, Tõnu Esko^{28,29,30}, Jaana Hartiala^{31,32}, Stavroula Kanoni^{33,33}, Federico Murgia³⁴, Afshin Parsa³⁵, Jonathan Stephens², Pim van der Harst³⁶, C. Ellen van der Schoot³⁷, Hooman Alayee^{31,32}, Antony Attwood^{2,3}, Beverley Balkau^{38,39}, François Bastardot⁴⁰, Saonli Basu⁴¹, Sebastian E. Baumeister⁴², Ginevra Biino^{34,43,44}, Lorenzo Bomba⁴⁵, Amélie Bonnefond¹⁰, François Cambien⁴⁶, John C. Chambers¹⁹, Francesco Cucca³, Pio D'Adamo^{16,102}, Gail Davies¹², Rudolf A. de Boer³⁶, Eco J. C. de Geus²³, Angela Döring^{47,48}, Paul Elliott^{19,49}, Jeanette Erdmann^{50,101}, David M. Evans⁵¹, Mario Falchi⁵², Wei Feng⁵¹, Aaron R. Folsom⁴, Ian H. Frazer⁵³, Quince D. Gibson⁵⁵, Nicole L. Glazer⁵⁴, Chris Hammond²⁷, Anna-Liisa Hartikainen⁵⁵, Susan R. Heckber^{56,57}, Christian Hengstenberg⁵⁸, Micha Hersch⁵⁹, Thomas Illig⁶⁰, Ruth J. F. Loos²⁴, Jennifer Jolley², Kay Tee Khaw^{61,62}, Brigitte Kühnel¹, Marie-Christine Kyrtson⁶³, Vasiliki Lagou⁶⁴, Heather Lloyd-Jones², Thomas Lumley⁶⁵, Massimo Mangino²⁷, Andrea Maschio⁵, Irene Mateo Leach³⁶, Barbara McKnight⁶⁵, Yasin Memari^{3,27}, Braxton D. Mitchell³⁵, Grant W. Montgomery⁶⁶, Yusuke Nakamura⁶⁷, Matthias Nauck⁶⁸, Gerjan Navis⁶⁹, Ute Nöthlings^{70,71}, Ilja M. Nolte⁷², David J. Porteous^{11,73}, Anneli Pouta^{55,74}, Peter P. Pramstaller⁷², Janne Pullat²⁸, Susan M. Ring⁵¹, Jerome I. Rotter⁷⁵, Daniela Ruggiero¹⁷, Aimo Ruukonen⁷⁶, Cinzia Sala⁶, Nilesch J. Samani^{8,9}, Jennifer Sambrook⁷⁷, David Schlessinger⁷⁸, Stefan Schreiber²¹, Heribert Schunkert^{50,101}, James Scott⁷⁹, Nicholas L. Smith^{56,57,80}, Harold Snieder⁷², John M. Starr^{11,81}, Michael Stumvoll⁸², Atsushi Takahashi¹⁴, W. H. Wilson Tang^{83,84}, Kent Taylor⁷⁵, Albert Tenesa^{85,86}, Sree Lay Thein⁸⁷, Anke Tönjes⁸², Manuela Uda⁵, Sheila Ulivi¹⁶, Dirk J. van Veldhuisen³⁶, Peter M. Visscher^{11,66}, Uwe Völker¹⁸, H.-Erich Wichmann^{47,88}, Kerri L. Wiggins²⁰, Gonnoke Willemsen²³, Tsun-Po Yang³, Jing Hua Zhao²⁴, Paavo Zitting⁸⁹, John R. Bradley⁷⁷, George V. Dedoussis³³, Paolo Gasparini^{16,102}, Stanley L. Hazen⁸³, Andres Mestralpala^{28,29,30}, Mario Pirastu^{34,43}, Alan R. Shuldiner^{35,90}, L. Joost van Pelt⁹¹, Jaap-Jan Zwaginga⁹², Dorret I. Boomsma²³, Ian J. Deary^{11,12}, Andre Franke²¹, Philippe Froguel^{10,52}, Santhi K. Ganesh⁹³, Marjo-Riitta Jarvelin^{16,102}, Nicholas G. Martin⁶⁶, Christa Meisinger⁴⁸, Bruce M. Psaty^{57,96}, Timothy D. Spector²⁷, Nicholas J. Wareham²⁴, Jan-Willem N. Akkerman⁹⁷, Marina Ciullo¹⁷, Panos Deloukas³, Andreas Greinacher⁹⁸, Steve Jupe⁹⁹, Naoyuki Kamatani¹⁴, Jyoti Khadake⁹⁹, Jaspal S. Kooner⁷⁹, Josef Penninger⁷, Daniela Prokopenko⁶⁴, Derek Stemple³, Daniela Toniolo^{64,44}, Lorenz Wernisch¹⁰⁰, Serena Sanna^{5*}, Andrew A. Hicks^{22*}, Augusto Rendon^{2,100*}, Manuel A. Ferreira^{6*}, Willem H. Ouwehand^{2,3,77*} & Nicole Soranzo^{3*}

¹Institute of Genetic Epidemiology, Helmholtz Zentrum München, German Research Center for Environmental Health, Ingolstädter Landstr. 1, 85764 Neuherberg, Germany. ²Department of Haematology, University of Cambridge & NHS Blood and Transplant, Cambridge CB2 0PT, UK. ³Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Hinxton, Cambridge, CB10 1HH/1SA, UK. ⁴Division of Epidemiology and Community Health, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455-0354, USA. ⁵Istituto di Ricerca Genetica e Biomedica, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, c/o Cittadella Universitaria di Monserrato, Monserrato, Cagliari 09042, Italy. ⁶San Raffaele Scientific Institute, Via Olgettina 58, 20132 Milano, Italy. ⁷IMBA, Institute of Molecular Biotechnology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, 1030 Vienna, Austria. ⁸Department of Cardiovascular Sciences, University of Leicester, Glenfield Hospital, Groby Road, Leicester LE3 9QP, UK. ⁹Leicester NIHR Biomedical Research Unit in Cardiovascular Disease, Glenfield Hospital, Leicester LE3 9QP, UK. ¹⁰CNRS-UMR-8199, Institut de Biologie de Lille, 1 Rue du Professor Calmette, BP245, 59019 Lille Cedex, France. ¹¹Centre for Cognitive Ageing and Cognitive Epidemiology, 7 George Square, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH8 9JZ, UK. ¹²Department of Psychology, The University of Edinburgh, 7 George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9JZ, UK. ¹³Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics, University of Oxford, Oxford OX3 7BN, UK. ¹⁴Laboratory for Statistical Analysis, RIKEN Center for Genomic Medicine, Institute of Physical and Chemical Research, 1-7-22 Tsukuba-cho, Tsukuba, Ibaraki, Kanagawa 230-0045, Japan. ¹⁵Department of Allergy and Rheumatology, Graduate School of Medicine, University of Tokyo, 7-3-1, Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, 113-8654, Japan. ¹⁶Institute for Maternal and Child Health — IRCCS 'Burlo Garofolo' — via dell'Istria 65/1, 34137 Trieste, Italy. ¹⁷Institute of Genetics and Biophysics A. Buzzati-Traverso, CNR, Via P. Castellino 111, 8031 Naples, Italy. ¹⁸Interfaculty Institute for Genetics and Functional Genomics, Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-University Greifswald, 17487 Greifswald, Germany. ¹⁹Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, School of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, St Mary's Campus, London W2 1PG, UK. ²⁰Department of Medicine, University of Washington, 1959 Northeast Pacific Street, Seattle, Washington 98195-0001, USA. ²¹Institute of Clinical Molecular Biology, Christian-Albrechts-University, 24105 Kiel, Germany. ²²Centre for Biomedicine, European Academy Bozen/Bolzano, Viale Druso 1, 39100 Bolzano, Italy. ²³Department of Biological Psychology, VU University Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1105, Van der Boechorststraat 1, 1081 BT, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. ²⁴MRC Epidemiology Unit, Institute of Metabolic Science, Addenbrooke's Hospital, Box 285, Cambridge CB2 0QQ, UK. ²⁵Interdisciplinary Centre for Clinical Research, University of Leipzig, Inselstr. 22, 04103 Leipzig, Germany. ²⁶Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Imperial College London, London W2 1PG, UK. ²⁷Department of Twin Research and Genetic

Epidemiology, King's College London, London SE1 7EH, UK. ²⁸Estonian Genome Center, University of Tartu, Tiigi 61b, 50410 Tartu, Estonia. ²⁹Estonian Biocenter, Riia 23b, 51010, Tartu, Estonia. ³⁰Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia. ³¹Department of Preventive Medicine, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California 90089-9075, USA. ³²Institute for Genetic Medicine, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California 90089-9075, USA. ³³Department of Nutrition-Dietetics, Harokopio University, Athens 17671, Greece. ³⁴Institute of Population Genetics, National Council of Research, 07100 Sassari, Italy. ³⁵University of Maryland School of Medicine, 655 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201-1559, USA. ³⁶Department of Cardiology, University Medical Center Groningen, University of Groningen, Hanzplein 1, 9713 GZ Groningen, The Netherlands. ³⁷Department of Experimental Immunohaematology, Sanquin Research, Plesmanlaan 125, 1066 CX Amsterdam, The Netherlands and Landsteiner Laboratory, Academic Medical Centre, University of Amsterdam, Meibergdreef 9, 1105 AZ Amsterdam, The Netherlands. ³⁸Inserm, CESP Centre for research in Epidemiology and Population Health, U1018 Villejuif, 94807 France. ³⁹University Paris Sud 11, UMRS 1018, Villejuif, 94807 France. ⁴⁰Service de Médecine Interne, CHUV, 1011 Lausanne, Switzerland. ⁴¹Division of Biostatistics, School of Public Health, University of Minnesota, A460 Mayo Building, mmc 303, 420 Delaware St SE, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455, USA. ⁴²Institute for Community Medicine, Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-University Greifswald, 17475 Greifswald, Germany. ⁴³Shardna Life Sciences, Loc. Piscinamanna 09010 Pula (CA), Italy. ⁴⁴Institute of Molecular Genetics-CNR Via Abbiategrasso 207, 27100 Pavia, Italy. ⁴⁵Istituto di Zootecnica, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore sede Piacenza, via Emilia Parmense 84, 29122 Piacenza, Italy. ⁴⁶INSERM UMRS 937, Pierre and Marie Curie University (UPMC, Paris 6) and Medical School, 91 Bd de l'Hôpital, 75013 Paris, France. ⁴⁷Institute of Epidemiology I, Helmholtz Zentrum München, German Research Center for Environmental Health, Ingolstädter Landstr.1, 85764 Neuherberg, Germany. ⁴⁸Institute of Epidemiology II, Helmholtz Zentrum München, German Research Center for Environmental Health, Ingolstädter Landstr.1, 85764 Neuherberg, Germany. ⁴⁹MRC-HPA Centre for Environment and Health, Imperial College London, St Mary's Campus, Norfolk Place, London W2 1PG, UK. ⁵⁰Universität zu Lübeck, Medizinische Klinik 2, Lübeck, Germany. ⁵¹MRC Centre for Causal Analyses in Translational Epidemiology, School of Social and Community Medicine, University of Bristol, Oakfield House, Oakfield Grove, Bristol BS8 2BN, UK. ⁵²Department of Genomics of Common Disease, School of Public Health, Imperial College London, The Commonwealth Building, The Hammersmith Hospital, Du Care Road, London W12 0NN, UK. ⁵³The University of Queensland Diamantina Institute, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane, Queensland 4102, Australia. ⁵⁴Department of Medicine, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts 02118, USA. ⁵⁵Department of Clinical Sciences/Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Oulu, Aapistie 7, Oulu, 90220 Finland. ⁵⁶Department of Epidemiology, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195-7236, USA. ⁵⁷Group Health Research Institute, Group Health Cooperative, Seattle, Washington 98101-1448, USA. ⁵⁸Klinik und Poliklinik für Innere Medizin II, Universitätsklinikum Regensburg, 93053 Regensburg, Germany. ⁵⁹Department of Medical Genetics, University of Lausanne, and Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics, Lausanne, Switzerland. ⁶⁰Unit for Molecular Epidemiology, Helmholtz Zentrum München, German Research Center for Environmental Health, Ingolstädter Landstr.1, 85764 Neuherberg, Germany. ⁶¹Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Strangeways Research Laboratory, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB1 8RN, UK. ⁶²Clinical Gerontology Unit, Addenbrooke's Hospital, Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 2QQ, UK. ⁶³First Department of Propedeutic Internal Medicine and Hematology Department, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Medical School, Laikon General Hospital, Athens 11727, Greece. ⁶⁴Oxford Centre for Diabetes, Endocrinology and Metabolism, University of Oxford, Oxford OX3 7LJ, UK. ⁶⁵Department of Biostatistics, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195-7232, USA. ⁶⁶Genetic Epidemiology, Queensland Institute of Medical Research, The Bancroft Centre, 300 Herston Road, Herston 4006, Queensland, Australia. ⁶⁷Laboratory of Molecular Medicine, Human Genome Center, Institute of Medical Science, University of Tokyo, Tokyo 108-8639, Japan. ⁶⁸Institute of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine, Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-University Greifswald, 17475 Greifswald, Germany. ⁶⁹Department of Internal Medicine, University Medical Center Groningen, University of Groningen, 9713 GZ Groningen, The Netherlands. ⁷⁰Section for Epidemiology, Institute for Experimental Medicine, Christian-Albrechts-University Kiel, 24105 Kiel, Germany. ⁷¹Popgen Biobank, University Clinic Schleswig-Holstein, 24105 Kiel, Germany. ⁷²Unit of Genetic Epidemiology and Bioinformatics, Department of Epidemiology, University Medical Center Groningen, University of Groningen, 9713 GZ Groningen, The Netherlands. ⁷³Medical Genetics Section, University of Edinburgh, Molecular Medicine Centre, Western General Hospital, Crewe Road South, Edinburgh EH4 2XU, UK. ⁷⁴National Institute for Health and Welfare, Aapistie 1, Oulu 90220, Finland. ⁷⁵Medical Genetics Institute, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, California 90048, USA. ⁷⁶Institute of Diagnostics, Clinical Chemistry, University of Oulu, Box 5000Y, University of Oulu, Oulu 90014, Finland. ⁷⁷NIHR Cambridge Biomedical Research Centre, Cambridge CB2 0QQ, UK. ⁷⁸Laboratory of Genetics, National Institute on Aging, Baltimore, Maryland 21224-6825, USA. ⁷⁹Faculty of Medicine, National Heart and Lung Institute, Cardiovascular Science, Hammersmith Campus, Hammersmith Hospital, Imperial College London, London W12 0HS, UK. ⁸⁰Seattle Epidemiologic Research and Information Center of the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Research and Development, Seattle, Washington 98108, USA. ⁸¹Geriatric Medicine Unit, The University of Edinburgh, Royal Victoria, Craigleith Road, Edinburgh EH4 2DN, UK. ⁸²Department of Medicine, University of Leipzig, Liebigstr. 18, 04103 Leipzig, Germany. ⁸³Center for Cardiovascular Diagnostics and Prevention, Department of Cell Biology and Cardiovascular Medicine, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio 44195, USA. ⁸⁴Heart and Vascular Institute, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio 44195, USA. ⁸⁵Institute of Genetics and Molecular Medicine, MRC Human Genetics Unit, Edinburgh EH4 2XU, UK. ⁸⁶The Roslin Institute, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh, Roslin Midlothian EH25 9RG, UK. ⁸⁷Department of Molecular Haematology, King's College London, 125 Coldharbour Lane, London SE5 9NU, UK. ⁸⁸Institute of Medical Informatics, Biometry and Epidemiology, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität und Klinikum Grosshadern, Marchioninstr. 15, 81377 Munich, Germany. ⁸⁹Department of Physiatrics, Lapland Central Hospital, Rovaniemi, 96101, Finland. ⁹⁰Geriatric Research and Education Clinical Center, Veterans Administration Medical Center, Baltimore, Maryland 21208, USA. ⁹¹Department of Laboratory Medicine, University Medical Center Groningen, University of Groningen, 9713 GZ Groningen, The Netherlands. ⁹²Sanquin Research Leiden, Jon J. van Rood Center for Clinical Transfusion research, and the Department of Immuno-hematology and Blood Transfusion, Leiden University Medical Center, 2333 Leiden, The Netherlands. ⁹³Division of Cardiovascular Medicine, University of Michigan Health System, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. ⁹⁴Institute of Health Sciences, University of Oulu, Aapistie 7, Oulu, 90220 Finland. ⁹⁵National Institute for Health and Welfare, Biocenter Oulu, University of Oulu, Aapistie 7, Oulu, 90220 Finland. ⁹⁶Department of Medicine, Epidemiology, and Health Services, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98101-1448, USA. ⁹⁷Department of Clinical Chemistry and Haematology, University Medical Center Utrecht, 3584 CX Utrecht, Netherlands. ⁹⁸Institute for Immunology and Transfusion Medicine, Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-University Greifswald, 17475 Greifswald, Germany. ⁹⁹Proteomics Services, EMBL-European Bioinformatics Institute, Wellcome Trust Genome Campus, Hinxton, Cambridge CB10 1SD, UK. ¹⁰⁰MRC Biostatistics Unit, Institute of Public Health, University Forvie Site, Robinson Way, Cambridge CB2 0SR, UK. ¹⁰¹Nordic Center of Cardiovascular Research, Lubeck, Germany. ¹⁰²University of Trieste, Piazzale Europa 1, 34127 Trieste, Italy.

*These authors contributed equally to this work.