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(54) Title: *GNAT1* MUTATIONS IN MELANOMA

(57) Abstract: The present invention provides methods of detecting mutations in a *GNAT1* gene in a melanocytic neoplasm for diagnostic and prognostic purposes. The invention further provides methods of treating such melanocytic neoplasm by modulating the activity of the mutated *GNAT1* gene.



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***GNA11* MUTATIONS IN MELANOMA**

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims benefit of U.S. provisional application no. 61/256,885, filed
5 October 30, 2009, which application is herein incorporated by reference.

STATEMENT AS TO RIGHTS TO INVENTIONS MADE UNDER FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0002] This invention was made with Government support under grant no. R01 CA131524-
01A1 awarded by the National Institutes of Health. The Government has certain rights in this
10 invention.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The current model of melanoma formation is that melanocytes progress from a
normal to malignant state by accumulating mutations in key melanoma genes. *See*, Meier, F.,
et al. (1998) *Frontiers in Bioscience* 3:D1005-1010. Melanoma can arise spontaneously, or
15 within a pre-existing nevus or mole. Nevi possess mutations in known melanoma genes and
are therefore a risk factor for developing melanoma. *See, e.g.*, Pollock, P.M., *et al.*, (2003)
Nat. Genet. 33(1):19-20; Kumar, R. *et al.*, (2004) *J. Invest. Dermatol.* 122(2):342-348; Chin,
L., (2003) *Nat. Rev. Cancer* 3(8):559-570.

[0004] The majority of human melanomas and melanocytic nevi have been shown to have
20 activating mutations in the BRAF, NRAS, C-KIT, or HRAS genes. Furthermore, recent
studies have demonstrated that melanomas fall into genetically distinct groups having marked
differences in the frequency of MAP-kinase pathway activation. *See*, Curtin, J.A., *et al.*,
(2005) *N Engl J Med.* 353(20):2135-47. One category, uveal melanoma, arises from
melanocytes within the choroidal plexus of the eye and is biologically distinct from
25 cutaneous melanoma by characteristic cytogenetic alterations. *See*, Horsman *et al.* (1993)
Cancer 71(3):811. The other category are intradermal melanocytic proliferations, which can
be congenital or acquired, and present in diverse ways ranging from discrete bluish moles
(blue nevi) to large blue-gray patches affecting the conjunctiva and periorbital skin (nevus of
Ota), shoulders (nevus of Ito), and the lower back (Mongolian spot). *See*, Zembowicz, *et al.*

(2004) *Histopathology* 45(5):433. These intradermal melanocytic proliferations do not contain either BRAF or NRAS mutations, and thus have a unique etiology when compared with other nevi and melanoma. See, Ariyanayagam-Baksh SM, *et al.*, (2003) *Am J Dermatopathol.* 25(1): p. 21-7.

- 5 **[0005]** Uveal melanoma is a melanocytic neoplasm that arises from melanocytes in the choroidal plexus, ciliary body or iris epithelium of the eye (*e.g.*, Singh, *et al.*, *Ophthalmol Clin North Am* 18:75-84, viii, 2005). In more aggressive subtypes there are further genetic alterations such as monosomy 3, trisomy 8 and a strong tendency to metastasize to the liver (Singh, *et al.*, *Ophthalmol Clin North Am* 18:75-84, viii, 2005, Horsman & White, *Cancer* 71:811-9, 1993). Uveal melanoma is highly aggressive, with a 5-year disease-specific survival rate of approximately 70% (*e.g.*, Chang *et al.*, *Cancer* 83:1664-78, 1998). One risk factor for uveal melanoma is the presence of bluish-grey hyper-pigmentation in the conjunctiva and periorbital dermis, called the naevus of Ota (Singh *et al.*, *Ophthalmology* 105:195-8, 1998). (1998) *Am J Dermatopathol.* 20:109-110).
- 10
- 15 **[0006]** Recently, a large-scale mutagenesis screen in mice identified several dark skin (Dsk) mutants. See, Van Raamsdonk CD, *et al.*, (2004) *Nat Genet.* 36: 961-968. Some of these mutants had a melanocytic phenotype with a sparse cellular proliferation of intradermal melanocytes resembling blue nevi. The mutations were shown to be the result of mutations in G-protein α -subunits.
- 20 **[0007]** G proteins represent a large family of heterotrimeric proteins found in mammals composed of alpha (α), beta (β) and gamma (γ) subunits. See, Wettschureck, N. A. O. S., (2005) *Physiol. Rev.* 85(4):1159-1204. G- α_q , is one of a variety of G-alpha subunits that mediates the stimulation of phospholipase C β through the binding and hydrolysis of GTP. See, Markby, D.W., *et al.*, (1993) *Science* 262(1541):1895-1901. It has been hypothesized
- 25 that activation of G- α_q promotes the survival of melanocytes in the dermis. See, Van Raamsdonk, C. D., *et al.*, (2004). This is consistent with the observation in mice that hyperactivity of G- α_q increases the number of melanoblasts, immature melanocytes, migrating in the dermis without increasing their mitotic rate. See, Van Raamsdonk, C. D., *et al.*, (2004).
- 30 **[0008]** Somatic oncogenic mutations of *GNAQ*, a heterotrimeric G protein alpha subunit, have been identified in various melanocytic neoplasms, including blue nevi and uveal melanomas (WO 2008/098208), among others.

[0009] *GNAIL* is 90% identical to *GNAQ* at the amino acid level and shares overlapping functions with *GNAQ* on pigmentation in mice. This invention is based, in part, on the discovery of the occurrence of mutations in *GNAIL* in melanocytic neoplasms, including in uveal melanoma.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] The current invention provides methods of detecting a melanoma or nevus cell in a biological sample. The methods comprise detecting an activating sequence mutation in a *GNAIL* gene in a biological sample comprising the suspected melanoma cell or nevus cell, or a biological sample comprising a cell known to be a melanoma or nevus cell, from a patient.

For example, the invention provides methods of detecting melanoma, *e.g.*, either primary or metastatic uveal melanoma; or detecting a nevus, *e.g.* a blue nevus such as malignant blue nevus, cellular blue nevus, common blue nevus, nevus of Ito, or nevus of Ota; by detecting the presence of a mutation in a *GNAIL* gene or product encoded by the gene; or by detecting overexpression of *GNAIL*. The methods can be used for diagnostic and prognostic

indications and for identifying melanoma patients that are responsive, or likely to be responsive, to various treatment therapies that target the *GNAIL* pathway, such as G-alpha antagonists, or therapies that target downstream signaling components, such as protein kinase C inhibitors. The invention also provides methods of treating a melanoma or nevus comprising administering a *GNAIL* inhibitor, *e.g.*, a small molecule, an antibody, or a nucleic acid inhibitor such as a siRNA, to a patient having the melanoma, *e.g.*, uveal melanoma or malignant blue nevus; or nevus, *e.g.*, a blue nevus, arising from a mutation in a *GNAIL* gene.

[0011] Thus, the invention provides a method of detecting a melanocytic neoplasm in a biological sample, *e.g.*, a skin or eye sample, comprising melanoma cells from a patient, *e.g.*, a patient that has, or is suspected of having, melanoma, the method comprising detecting an activating mutation of *GNAIL* in melanoma or nevi cells present in the biological sample, wherein the presence of an activating mutation of *GNAIL* is indicative of the presence of a melanocytic neoplasm. In some embodiments, the melanocytic neoplasm is a uveal melanoma. In other embodiments, the *GNAIL* mutation is indicative of a nevus, such as a blue nevus, or a melanoma arising in blue nevus, also known as malignant blue nevus. In some embodiments, the detecting step comprises detecting the presence or absence of a *GNAIL* mutation in a nucleic acid, *e.g.*, mRNA or genomic DNA. In typical embodiments, such detection steps comprise an amplification reaction that specifically amplifies *GNAIL*, such as PCR or RT-PCR and detection of a mutation using a probe that hybridizes to a

target *GNA11* sequence or by sequencing the amplified *GNA11*. In other embodiments, the detecting step comprises detecting the mutation in a *GNA11* protein, *e.g.*, measuring the level of GNA11 activity and/or expression. In typical embodiments, such detecting step comprises the use of antibodies (immunocytochemistry) and/or electrophoretic protein separation (*e.g.*, western blot). In some embodiments the *GNA11* mutation is Gln209 to Leu (CAA to CTA or CAA to CTG), while in other embodiments, the *GNA11* mutation is Gln209 to Pro (CAA to CCA).

[0012] Typically, the detecting step comprises detecting the presence or absence of an activating sequence mutation in a *GNA11*. This is often achieved, *e.g.*, by analyzing a nucleic acid sample from the biological sample. The nucleic acid can be a DNA or RNA sample. The DNA sample can be obtained from reverse transcription of RNA, or can be genomic DNA. Often, the detection step for detecting the mutation comprises an amplification reaction. The presence or absence of the mutations can be identified, *e.g.*, by sequence analysis of the amplified nucleic acid; or by methods that employ allele-specific oligonucleotide primers or probes.

[0013] In some embodiments, the methods of the invention may comprise an additional step of detecting the presence or absence of an activating mutation in *GNAQ*, *e.g.*, a mutation at the codon encoding Gln 209 of *GNAQ* in a nucleic acid from the biological sample. In some embodiments, the biological sample is from a patient that has uveal melanoma or a malignant blue nevus. In some embodiments, the patient has a melanocytic neoplasm where the melanocytic neoplasm is a blue nevus.

[0014] In some embodiments, the biological sample is from a patient that has, or is suspected of having a melanoma, *e.g.*, uveal melanoma or malignant blue nevus, or metastasis. In other embodiments, the biological sample is from a patient that has, or is suspected of having, a nevus, *e.g.*, a blue nevus such as common blue nevus, cellular blue nevus, nevus of Ito, or nevus of Ota. In some embodiments, the sample is from skin, eye, or from a metastatic site.

[0015] The invention also provides a method of monitoring progression of melanoma in a patient subjected to a therapy for treatment of the melanoma arising from a mutation in *GNA11*. The method comprises detecting a change in the number of cells having a mutation in *GNA11* in a biological sample from a patient, where the change in the number of cells having a mutation is indicative of the patient's response to the therapy. In some

embodiments, the melanoma is uveal melanoma. In some embodiments, the melanoma is a malignant blue nevus. In some embodiments, the sample is from a metastatic site.

[0016] In some embodiments, monitoring progression of melanoma in a patient where the melanoma arose from an activating mutation in a *GNAT1* gene is performed by detecting the mutation in a nucleic acid from the biological sample. In other embodiments, the progression of the melanoma arising from a mutation in *GNAT1* is detected in by evaluating a GNA11 protein present in the biological sample. In some embodiments of the invention, the biological sample is from eye or skin. In other embodiments, the biological sample is from a metastatic site, *e.g.*, liver, lung, blood, lymph node, adrenal gland, or bone.

[0017] Typically, in monitoring melanoma progression in accordance with the invention, the presence of a reduced number of cells having a *GNAT1* mutation in the biological sample taken from a patient after treatment with an agent as compared to the number of cells having a *GNAT1* mutation in a biological sample taken from the patient before being exposure to the treatment agent is indicative of a positive therapeutic response to the treatment agent.

[0018] In all of the detection methods of the invention the biological sample can be from any source in the body that is suspected of containing primary or metastatic melanoma cells. Thus, the biological sample can be from skin, *e.g.*, eye, *e.g.*, uvea, conjunctiva, or mucosal membranes. In other embodiments, the sample can be from blood, serum, tissue from lymph nodes, or tissue from visceral organs such as adrenal gland, liver or lung; or bone tissue. In some embodiments, for example in monitoring progression of melanoma, the sample is from a readily accessible tissue such as blood.

[0019] In another aspect, the invention provides a method of determining whether a melanoma patient is a candidate for receiving a therapy that inhibits the activity of a $G\alpha$ subunit, either directly or by inhibiting a protein that is activated by $G\alpha$. The method comprises determining whether the melanoma cells have an activating mutation in *GNAT1*. In some embodiments, patients treated with such inhibitors do not have a melanoma or nevus that has an activating mutation in *GNAT1*. This determination is performed in accordance with the detection methods described herein. Accordingly, the detecting step can comprise detecting the mutation in mRNA, DNA, or protein. In some embodiments, the detecting step can comprise detecting the presence of a *GNAT1* mutation in a nucleic acid sample from the melanoma or nevus, whereas in other embodiments, the detecting step is from a protein sample from a melanocytic neoplasm. The nucleic acid sample can be RNA or DNA, *e.g.*,

genomic DNA or cDNA made from RNA from the melanocytic neoplasm sample. Often, the detecting step comprises an amplification reaction, such as PCR or RT-PCR.

[0020] In some embodiments, the melanoma is a uveal melanoma.

[0021] In another aspect, the invention provides a method of inhibiting growth and/or proliferation of nevus or melanoma cells arising from a somatic mutation in *GNAT1*, the method comprising administering a *GNAT1* antagonist. The *GNAT1* antagonist can be *e.g.*, a small molecule, such as edelfosine, a protein kinase C inhibitor, or the staurosporine analogue CPG41251; an antibody; a peptide; or a nucleic acid. In some embodiments, the inhibitor is siRNA. In some embodiments the siRNA targets both *GNAT1* and *GNAT2* nucleic acid sequences. Typically, the nevi or melanoma cells are from *e.g.*, uveal melanoma or a blue nevus. In typical embodiments, the patient undergoing treatment does not have a melanoma or nevus that has a mutation in *GNAT2*.

[0022] The invention also provides a method of determining the risk of progression of a nevus to a melanoma, the method comprising detecting the presence or absence of a sequence mutation in a *GNAT1* gene in a biological sample from the nevus, wherein the presence of the mutation is indicative of increased risk of progression of the nevus to melanoma. In some embodiments, the sequence mutation is a codon encoding Gln 209 of *GNAT1*. In some embodiments, the nevus is a blue nevus. In some embodiments, the mutation is detected by evaluating the protein that is encoded by the gene.

[0023] The invention also provides a method of determining the risk of metastasis of a melanoma, the method comprising detecting the presence or absence of a sequence mutation in a *GNAT1* gene in a biological sample from the patient where the biological sample comprises primary melanoma cells and wherein the presence of the mutation is indicative of increased risk of metastasis of the melanoma. In some embodiments the melanoma is uveal melanoma. In some embodiments, the sequence mutation is a codon encoding Gln 209 of *GNAT1*.

[0024] In some embodiments, a *GNAT1* mutation, *e.g.*, an activating mutation at codon 209, is detected in a melanocytic neoplasm such as acral melanoma, acral lentiginous melanoma, chronic sun-induced damaged (CSD) melanoma, non-chronic sun-induced damage (NCSD) melanoma, lentigo maligna melanoma, mucosal melanoma, nodular melanoma, superficial spreading melanoma, desmoplastic melanoma, conjunctival melanoma, recurrent cellular blue nevi, melanoma arising in a congenital nevus, malignant

blue nevus, and metastasis. In some embodiments, the *GNAI1* mutation is detected in melanocytic neoplasms that are nevi. For example, a *GNAI1* mutation may be detected in a congenital nevus, congenital nevus with nodules, congenital nevus with desmoplastic reaction, giant congenital nevus with atypia, giant congenital nevus with nodules, congenital nevus without specific diagnosis, atypical blue nevus, atypical cellular blue nevus, blue nevus with neurocristic hamartoma, blue nevus without specific diagnosis and deep penetrating nevus without specific diagnosis.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0025] Figure 1: Mutation spectrum of *GNAI1* at codon 209. The top panel shows the wild type sequence of codon 209 coding for glutamine (between dashed lines). The most common mutation was a adenine to thymine transversion resulting in a substitution to leucine (*GNAI1*^{Q209L}), followed by a adenine to cytosine transversion resulting in a proline substitution (*GNAI1*^{Q209P}) and a mutation affecting the second and third base of codon 209, also resulting in a leucine substitution.

[0026] Figure 2. Anatomic location and histopathological features and mutation status. A) *GNAI1* mutations were more common in primary uveal melanomas of ciliochoroidal location. (p=0.048, Fisher's Exact test). Bars: Upper segment, *GNAI1*; middle segment, *GNAQ*; lower segment, neither

[0027] Figure 3: *GNAI1*^{Q209L} induces tumors with spontaneous metastasis in immunocompromised mice. Immortalized mouse melanocytes (melan-a cells) were transduced with *GNAI1*^{Q209L} and injected bilaterally into the flank of NOD/SCID/interleukin 2 receptor [IL2r] γ^{null} mice (n=3). All six injection sites developed tumors (upper right) that were heavily melanized (lower left), all mice developed multiple lung metastases (lower middle) and one mouse developed liver metastases (lower right).

[0028] Figure 4: Mutant *GNAI1* results in MAP-kinase activation. Melan-a cells were transduced with *GNAI1*^{Q209L}, *GNAQ*^{Q209L}, or vector control, incubated for 48 hours, serum-starved for 16 hours, stimulated for 20 minutes with 2% serum, and lysed.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Introduction

[0029] The present invention provides methods, reagents and kits, for detecting melanoma and nevus cells for diagnostic and prognostic uses, and for treating melanomas and nevi. The

invention is based, in part, upon the discovery that melanoma and nevi have activating somatic mutations in *GNA11*, *i.e.*, mutations that result in a loss or decrease of GTP hydrolyzing activity of a G- α subunit.

[0030] G- α is the alpha subunit of one of the heterotrimeric GTP-binding proteins that form two subgroups in vertebrates, the widely expressed G α -q family comprising Gnaq and Gna11, and the Gna14 and Gna15 family, which show more restricted expression. The G α -q family mediates stimulation of phospholipase C β resulting in the hydrolysis of bisphosphoinositide (PIP₂) into inositide triphosphate (IP₃) and diacylglycerol (DAG). IP₃ can stimulate the release of calcium from intracellular storage in the endoplasmic reticulum (ER) leading to downstream calcium-dependent signaling. In parallel, DAG can activate protein kinase C (PKC) and both pathways can then feed into the mitogen activated protein kinase (MAPK) cascade. *See, Corbit, K.C., et al., (2000) Mol. Cell Biol. 20:5392-5403; Sato, M. et al., (2006) Ann. Rev. Pharm. Toxicol. 46:151-187.*

[0031] In one aspect of the invention, the present inventors have discovered that activating mutations in *GNA11*, *e.g.*, heterozygous, somatic substitution mutations of Q209 of *GNA11*, are present in several types of melanocytic neoplasms, including nevi such as blue nevi and melanoma, such as uveal melanoma.

[0032] In some embodiments, a GNA11 activating mutation is a mutation that leads to overexpression of GNA11 nucleic acid and polypeptide sequences. Thus, in addition to methods of detecting activating mutations, methods that detect levels of GNA11 nucleic acid and/or polypeptide sequences can also be used to detect nevi, *e.g.*, blue nevi and melanoma cells, such as primary or metastatic uveal melanoma cells, as described herein in which GNA11 is overexpressed.

[0033] In one aspect of the invention, the ability to detect nevi and/or melanoma cells by virtue of detecting a somatic mutation in *GNA11* that activates *GNA11*, is useful for any of a large number of applications. For example, it can be used, alone or in combination with other diagnostic methods, to diagnose melanoma, or a certain type of melanoma, in the patient. It can also be used to identify particular melanomas that are sensitive to therapeutics, such as therapeutics that target G-proteins or phospholipase C β or other downstream components of pathways regulated by GNA11. In some embodiments, detection of an activating *GNA11* mutations can be employed as a prognostic indicator of more aggressive melanomas that are more likely to lead to metastasis than melanomas that do not have a mutation in *GNA11*.

[0034] The detection of somatic activating mutations in *GNAT1* can also be used to monitor the efficacy of a melanoma treatment. For example, the level of GNA11 activity, *e.g.*, G α activity, or an activity such as phospholipase C β that is dependent on G α activity, or the numbers of melanocytic cells that have a sequence mutation in *GNAT1*, after an anti-melanoma treatment can be compared to the level before the treatment. A decrease in the level of GNA11 activity, *e.g.*, phospholipase C β activity, or a reduction in the number of melanoma cells that have mutated *GNAT1* after the treatment, indicates efficacious treatment.

[0035] The level of GNA11 activity and/or a change in the number of cells having a somatic mutation in *GNAT1* can also be statistically correlated with the efficacy of particular anti-melanoma therapy or with an observed prognostic outcome, thereby allowing the development of a database on which statistically-based prognosis, or a selection of the most efficacious treatment, can be made in view of a particular level activity or diagnostic presence of a *GNAT1* mutation.

[0036] Detection of cells having an activating mutation in *GNAT1* can be useful to monitor the number or location of melanoma cells in a patient, for example, to monitor the progression of the cancer over time.

[0037] The presence of an activating mutation in *GNAT1* can also indicate melanomas that are likely to be responsive to therapeutic agents that target mutant GNA11. Accordingly, the invention also provides methods of treating a melanocytic neoplasm, *e.g.*, uveal melanoma or a blue nevus, that has an activating mutation in *GNAT1* by administering a G α antagonist, *e.g.*, antibodies, peptides, small molecule inhibitors, such as L-threo-dihydrosphingosine (a PKC specific inhibitor) or other small molecule inhibitors, and nucleic acid inhibitors of GNA11, *e.g.*, *GNAT1* or *GNAT1/GNAQ* siRNA inhibitors, or inhibitors of phospholipase C β , or downstream pathways regulated by GNA11. Such melanocytic neoplasms can be identified by analyzing for the presence of an activating mutation in GNA11 using the methods described herein.

[0038] The presence of an activating mutation in *GNAT1* in nevi often indicates nevi, *e.g.*, conventional types of blue nevi and nevi of Ota, that are at risk for progression to melanoma. Accordingly, a nevus from a patient can be evaluated for the presence of an activating mutation using the methods described herein.

Definitions

[0039] The term "GNA11" or "Gna11" refers to the alpha subunit of a guanine nucleotide binding protein (G-protein). The term encompasses nucleic acid and polypeptide polymorphic variants, alleles, mutants, and fragments of *GN11*. Human *GN11* is localized to chromosome region 19p13.3. *GN11* sequences are well known in the art. An example of a nucleic acid sequence encoding *GN11* is provided as SEQ ID NO:1. An example of a polypeptide sequence is shown in SEQ ID NO:2. A human *GN11* gene variant is localized to chromosome region 19p13.3 and encodes a polypeptide that has at least 97%, 98%, or 99%, or greater, identity to SEQ ID NO:2.

[0040] A "*GN11*-dependent melanoma" as used in the context of this application refers to a melanocytic neoplasm comprising melanoma cells that have a defect (also referred to as a "mutation") in *GN11* that activates GNA11, *i.e.*, has an "activating" mutation, in comparison to melanocytes that do not have the mutation, and leads to a loss or decrease of GTP hydrolyzing activity of the mutant G- α subunit. The defect in *GN11* can involve a mutation, *e.g.*, a substitution mutation, that results in constitutive activity of the protein. The "*GN11*-dependent melanoma cells" may have one or more of such mutations, *e.g.*, the cells may have somatic substitution mutation involving Q209. A "*GN11*-dependent melanoma" of the present invention can arise, *e.g.*, from a nevus (*e.g.*, a blue nevus) or the eye (*e.g.*, the uvea). A "GNA11-dependent melanoma" may also have mutations in genes other than GNA11.

[0041] The term "mucosal melanoma" refers to tumors arising on mucosal membranes; "ocular melanoma" as used herein is melanoma that arises from the eye. "Ocular melanoma" includes uveal and conjunctival melanoma. "Conjunctival melanoma" refers to a melanoma that arises on the conjunctiva, while "uveal melanoma" refers to a melanoma of the pigmented tract of the eye.

[0042] "CSD melanoma" as used herein refers to melanoma arising from skin with chronic sun-induced damage; and "NCSD melanoma" as used herein refers to melanoma arising from skin without chronic sun-induced damage. The distinction between the "CSD" and "NCSD" groups in the instant application is based on a microscopic determination of the presence or absence of marked solar elastosis of the dermis surrounding the melanomas. In all but a few cases, melanomas associated with chronic sun-induced damage (CSD) occur on the face and distal extremities such as the forearms, dorsal hands, shins and calfs. These melanomas

typically occur in individuals older than 50 years of age, and microscopically, have an intraepidermal component in which melanocytes are arranged as solitary units rather than nests. In addition, these melanomas tend to have an atrophic epidermis with the effacement of the rete ridges. A subset of the CSD melanomas is lentigo maligna melanomas. By contrast melanomas that were not associated with chronic sun-induced damage (NCSD) occur on the trunk and proximal extremities such as thighs and upper arms. The NCSD melanomas typically show an intraepidermal component in which melanocytes are arranged as nests rather than solitary units and display considerable upward scatter (pagetoid spread). Many of the NCSD melanomas are superficial spreading melanomas.

[0043] Chronic sun-induced damage is defined as having a CSD score greater than CSD 2. The scores are obtained by determining the degree of solar elastosis on hematoxylin-and-eosin (H&E) stained sections of normal skin surrounding the melanomas at 100-200x magnification using the following system (Landi *et al.*, *Science* 313: 521 – 522, 2006), examples of which are provide in Landi.

CSD 0: absence of elastotic fibers; *CSD 0+*: rare elastotic fibers discernible only at 200x magnification;

CSD 1: scattered elastotic fibers lying as individual units, not as bushels, between collagen bundles; “-” or “+” classifiers were used to indicate whether the elastotic fibers were scarcely or densely scattered.

CSD 2: densely scattered elastotic fibers distributed predominantly as bushels rather than individual units; The “-” classifier was used to indicate that bushels were present, but elastotic fibers distributed as individual units predominated; The “+” classifier was used when larger aggregates of bushels formed, but preserving the outline of individual bushels instead of forming amorphous deposits;

CSD 3: amorphous deposits of blue–gray material with lost fiber texture; “-” only focal formation of amorphous deposits; “+” very large agglomerates of diffuse basophilic material.

[0044] As used herein, the term "determining that the melanoma arose from" a site, *e.g.*, uvea, mucosa, conjunctiva, acral skin, skin having chronic sun-induced damage, or skin that does not have chronic sun-induced damage, refers to identifying the site of origin of a melanoma. Such a determination can be performed by visual inspection of a patient or by a pathology evaluation of the melanoma.

[0045] The terms “tumor” or “cancer” in an animal refers to the presence of cells possessing characteristics such as atypical growth or morphology, including uncontrolled proliferation, immortality, metastatic potential, rapid growth and proliferation rate, and certain characteristic morphological features. Often, cancer cells will be in the form of a tumor, but such cells may exist alone within an animal. “Tumor” includes both benign and malignant neoplasms. The term “neoplastic” refers to both benign and malignant atypical growth.

[0046] The term “melanocytic neoplasm” as used herein refers to an area of hyperpigmentation relative to the surrounding tissue. Melanocytic neoplasms include both nevi and primary melanoma as well as melanoma that has metastasized to anywhere in the body. Thus, “melanocytic neoplasm” as used here include benign neoplasms. Similarly, the term “melanocyte” refers to both neoplastic and normal melanocytes. Typically, melanocytic neoplasms occur on skin, mucosal membranes, and the eye. Non-limiting melanocytic neoplasms include melanoma, e.g., acral lentiginous melanoma, CSD melanoma, NCSD melanoma, lentigo maligna melanoma, muscosal melanoma, nodular melanoma, superficial spreading melanoma, desmoplastic melanoma, uveal melanoma, conjunctival melanoma, recurrent cellular blue nevi, melanoma arising in a congenital nevus, malignant blue nevus, and metastasis. Melanocytic neoplasms as used herein also include nevi. For example, non-limiting examples of melanocytic neoplasms also include congenital nevus, congenital nevus with nodules, congenital nevus with desmoplastic reaction, giant congenital nevus with atypia, giant congenital nevus with nodules, congenital nevus without specific diagnosis, blue nevus, atypical blue nevus, atypical cellular blue nevus, blue nevus with neurocristic hamartoma, blue nevus without specific diagnosis and deep penetrating nevus without specific diagnosis.

[0047] The term “blue nevus” or “blue nevi” as used herein refers to an intradermal, *i.e.*, within the dermal layer of the skin, melanocytic proliferation that exhibits increased pigmentation such that the nevus typically has a bluish color. A blue nevus, which can be congenital or acquired, may present in diverse ways ranging from discrete bluish moles (blue nevi) to large blue-gray patches affecting the conjunctiva and periorbital skin (nevus of Ota), shoulders (nevus of Ito), and the lower back (Mongolian spot). In some embodiments a “blue nevus” may be a “malignant blue nevus”, *i.e.*, a melanoma that arose within a blue nevus or of which certain portions resemble a blue nevus histopathologically.

[0048] “Biological sample” as used herein refers to a sample obtained from a patient suspected of having, or having a melanoma. In some embodiments, the sample may be a tissue biopsy, which refers to any type of biopsy, such as needle biopsy, fine needle biopsy, surgical biopsy, etc. The sample typically comprises a tissue sample, *e.g.*, a skin tissue sample or eye sample, that harbors the melanocytic neoplasm, although the biological sample may also be derived from another, site, *e.g.*, a site to which a melanoma may metastasize, or from the blood. In some cases, the biological sample may also be from a region adjacent to the melanocytic neoplasm.

[0049] “Providing a biological sample” means to obtain a biological sample for use in methods described in this invention. Most often, this will be done by removing a sample of cells from a patient, but can also be accomplished by using previously isolated cells (*e.g.*, isolated by another person, at another time, and/or for another purpose), or by performing the methods of the invention *in vivo*. Archival tissues, having treatment or outcome history, can also be used.

[0050] An indication that two nucleic acid sequences or polypeptides are substantially identical is that the polypeptide encoded by the first nucleic acid is immunologically cross reactive with the antibodies raised against the polypeptide encoded by the second nucleic acid, as described below. Thus, a polypeptide is typically substantially identical to a second polypeptide, *e.g.*, where the two peptides differ only by conservative substitutions. Another indication that two nucleic acid sequences are substantially identical is that the two molecules or their complements hybridize to each other under stringent conditions, as described below. Yet another indication that two nucleic acid sequences are substantially identical is that the same primers can be used to amplify the sequences.

[0051] The terms “isolated,” “purified,” or “biologically pure” refer to material that is substantially or essentially free from components that normally accompany it as found in its native state. Purity and homogeneity are typically determined using analytical chemistry techniques such as polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis or high performance liquid chromatography. A protein or nucleic acid that is the predominant species present in a preparation is substantially purified. In particular, an isolated nucleic acid is separated from some open reading frames that naturally flank the gene and encode proteins other than protein encoded by the gene. The term “purified” in some embodiments denotes that a nucleic acid or protein gives rise to essentially one band in an electrophoretic gel. Preferably, it means

that the nucleic acid or protein is at least 85% pure, more preferably at least 95% pure, and most preferably at least 99% pure. "Purify" or "purification" in other embodiments means removing at least one contaminant from the composition to be purified. In this sense, purification does not require that the purified compound be homogenous, e.g., 100% pure.

5 [0052] The terms "polypeptide," "peptide" and "protein" are used interchangeably herein to refer to a polymer of amino acid residues. The terms apply to amino acid polymers in which one or more amino acid residue is an artificial chemical mimetic of a corresponding naturally occurring amino acid, as well as to naturally occurring amino acid polymers, those containing modified residues, and non-naturally occurring amino acid polymer.

10 [0053] The term "amino acid" refers to naturally occurring and synthetic amino acids, as well as amino acid analogs and amino acid mimetics that function similarly to the naturally occurring amino acids. Naturally occurring amino acids are those encoded by the genetic code, as well as those amino acids that are later modified, e.g., hydroxyproline, γ -carboxyglutamate, and O-phosphoserine. Amino acid analogs refers to compounds that have
15 the same basic chemical structure as a naturally occurring amino acid, e.g., an α carbon that is bound to a hydrogen, a carboxyl group, an amino group, and an R group, e.g., homoserine, norleucine, methionine sulfoxide, methionine methyl sulfonium. Such analogs may have modified R groups (e.g., norleucine) or modified peptide backbones, but retain the same basic chemical structure as a naturally occurring amino acid. Amino acid mimetics refers to
20 chemical compounds that have a structure that is different from the general chemical structure of an amino acid, but that functions similarly to a naturally occurring amino acid.

[0054] Amino acids may be referred to herein by either their commonly known three letter symbols or by the one-letter symbols recommended by the IUPAC-IUB Biochemical Nomenclature Commission. Nucleotides, likewise, may be referred to by their commonly
25 accepted single-letter codes.

[0055] "Conservatively modified variants" applies to both amino acid and nucleic acid sequences. With respect to particular nucleic acid sequences, conservatively modified variants refers to those nucleic acids which encode identical or essentially identical amino acid sequences, or where the nucleic acid does not encode an amino acid sequence, to
30 essentially identical or associated, e.g., naturally contiguous, sequences. Because of the degeneracy of the genetic code, a large number of functionally identical nucleic acids encode most proteins. For instance, the codons GCA, GCC, GCG and GCU all encode the amino

acid alanine. Thus, at every position where an alanine is specified by a codon, the codon can be altered to another of the corresponding codons described without altering the encoded polypeptide. Such nucleic acid variations are “silent variations,” which are one species of conservatively modified variations. Every nucleic acid sequence herein which encodes a polypeptide also describes silent variations of the nucleic acid. One of skill will recognize that in certain contexts each codon in a nucleic acid (except AUG, which is ordinarily the only codon for methionine, and TGG, which is ordinarily the only codon for tryptophan) can be modified to yield a functionally identical molecule. Accordingly, often silent variations of a nucleic acid which encodes a polypeptide is implicit in a described sequence with respect to the expression product, but not with respect to actual probe sequences.

[0056] As to amino acid sequences, one of skill will recognize that individual substitutions, deletions or additions to a nucleic acid, peptide, polypeptide, or protein sequence which alters, adds or deletes a single amino acid or a small percentage of amino acids in the encoded sequence is a “conservatively modified variant” where the alteration results in the substitution of an amino acid with a chemically similar amino acid. Conservative substitution tables providing functionally similar amino acids are well known in the art. Such conservatively modified variants are in addition to and do not exclude polymorphic variants, interspecies homologs, and alleles of the invention. typically conservative substitutions for one another: 1) Alanine (A), Glycine (G); 2) Aspartic acid (D), Glutamic acid (E); 3) Asparagine (N), Glutamine (Q); 4) Arginine (R), Lysine (K); 5) Isoleucine (I), Leucine (L), Methionine (M), Valine (V); 6) Phenylalanine (F), Tyrosine (Y), Tryptophan (W); 7) Serine (S), Threonine (T); and 8) Cysteine (C), Methionine (M) (*see, e.g.,* Creighton, *Proteins* (1984)).

[0057] “Nucleic acid” or “oligonucleotide” or “polynucleotide” or grammatical equivalents used herein means at least two nucleotides covalently linked together. Oligonucleotides are typically from about 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 25, 30, 40, 50 or more nucleotides in length, up to about 100 nucleotides in length. Nucleic acids and polynucleotides are a polymers of any length, including longer lengths, e.g., 200, 300, 500, 1000, 2000, 3000, 5000, 7000, 10,000, etc. A nucleic acid of the present invention will generally contain phosphodiester bonds, although in some cases, nucleic acid analogs are included that may have alternate backbones, comprising, e.g., phosphoramidate, phosphorothioate, phosphorodithioate, or O-methylphosphoroamidite linkages (see Eckstein, *Oligonucleotides and Analogues: A Practical Approach*, Oxford University Press); and peptide nucleic acid backbones and linkages. Other analog nucleic acids include those with positive backbones; non-ionic backbones, and non-

ribose backbones, including those described in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,235,033 and 5,034,506, and Chapters 6 and 7, ASC Symposium Series 580, *Carbohydrate Modifications in Antisense Research*, Sanghui & Cook, eds.. Nucleic acids containing one or more carbocyclic sugars are also included within one definition of nucleic acids. Modifications of the ribose-

phosphate backbone may be done for a variety of reasons, *e.g.*, to increase the stability and half-life of such molecules in physiological environments or as probes on a biochip.

Mixtures of naturally occurring nucleic acids and analogs can be made; alternatively, mixtures of different nucleic acid analogs, and mixtures of naturally occurring nucleic acids and analogs may be made.

[0058] A variety of references disclose such nucleic acid analogs, including, for example, phosphoramidate (Beaucage et al., *Tetrahedron* 49(10):1925 (1993) and references therein; Letsinger, *J. Org. Chem.* 35:3800 (1970); Sprinzl et al., *Eur. J. Biochem.* 81:579 (1977); Letsinger et al., *Nucl. Acids Res.* 14:3487 (1986); Sawai et al., *Chem. Lett.* 805 (1984), Letsinger et al., *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* 110:4470 (1988); and Pauwels et al., *Chemica Scripta* 26:141 (1986)), phosphorothioate (Mag et al., *Nucleic Acids Res.* 19:1437 (1991); and U.S. Patent No. 5,644,048), phosphorodithioate (Briu et al., *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* 111:2321 (1989), O-methylphosphoroamidite linkages (see Eckstein, *Oligonucleotides and Analogues: A Practical Approach*, Oxford University Press), and peptide nucleic acid backbones and linkages (see Egholm, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* 114:1895 (1992); Meier et al., *Chem. Int. Ed. Engl.* 31:1008 (1992); Nielsen, *Nature*, 365:566 (1993); Carlsson et al., *Nature* 380:207 (1996), all of which are incorporated by reference). Other analog nucleic acids include those with positive backbones (Denpcy et al., *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 92:6097 (1995); non-ionic backbones (U.S. Patent Nos. 5,386,023, 5,637,684, 5,602,240, 5,216,141 and 4,469,863; Kiedrowshi et al., *Angew. Chem. Intl. Ed. English* 30:423 (1991); Letsinger et al., *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* 110:4470 (1988); Letsinger et al., *Nucleoside & Nucleotide* 13:1597 (1994); Chapters 2 and 3, ASC Symposium Series 580, "Carbohydrate Modifications in Antisense Research", Ed. Y.S. Sanghui and P. Dan Cook; Mesmacker et al., *Bioorganic & Medicinal Chem. Lett.* 4:395 (1994); Jeffs et al., *J. Biomolecular NMR* 34:17 (1994); *Tetrahedron Lett.* 37:743 (1996)) and non-ribose backbones, including those described in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,235,033 and 5,034,506, and Chapters 6 and 7, ASC Symposium Series 580, "Carbohydrate Modifications in Antisense Research", Ed. Y.S. Sanghui and P. Dan Cook. Nucleic acids containing one or more carbocyclic sugars are also included within one definition of nucleic acids (see Jenkins et al., *Chem. Soc. Rev.* (1995) pp 169-176). Several nucleic acid analogs

are described in Rawls, C & E News June 2, 1997 page 35. All of these references are hereby expressly incorporated by reference.

[0059] Other analogs include peptide nucleic acids (PNA) which are peptide nucleic acid analogs. These backbones are substantially non-ionic under neutral conditions, in contrast to the highly charged phosphodiester backbone of naturally occurring nucleic acids. This results in two advantages. First, the PNA backbone exhibits improved hybridization kinetics. PNAs have larger changes in the melting temperature (T_m) for mismatched versus perfectly matched basepairs. DNA and RNA typically exhibit a 2-4°C drop in T_m for an internal mismatch. With the non-ionic PNA backbone, the drop is closer to 7-9°C. Similarly, due to their non-ionic nature, hybridization of the bases attached to these backbones is relatively insensitive to salt concentration. In addition, PNAs are not degraded by cellular enzymes, and thus can be more stable.

[0060] The nucleic acids may be single stranded or double stranded, as specified, or contain portions of both double stranded or single stranded sequence. As will be appreciated by those in the art, the depiction of a single strand also defines the sequence of the complementary strand; thus the sequences described herein also provide the complement of the sequence. Unless otherwise indicated, a particular nucleic acid sequence also implicitly encompasses conservatively modified variants thereof (*e.g.*, degenerate codon substitutions) and complementary sequences, as well as the sequence explicitly indicated. The nucleic acid may be DNA, both genomic and cDNA, RNA or a hybrid, where the nucleic acid may contain combinations of deoxyribo- and ribo-nucleotides, and combinations of bases, including uracil, adenine, thymine, cytosine, guanine, inosine, xanthine hypoxanthine, isocytosine, isoguanine, etc. "Transcript" typically refers to a naturally occurring RNA, *e.g.*, a pre-mRNA, hnRNA, or mRNA. As used herein, the term "nucleoside" includes nucleotides and nucleoside and nucleotide analogs, and modified nucleosides such as amino modified nucleosides. In addition, "nucleoside" includes non-naturally occurring analog structures. Thus, *e.g.* the individual units of a peptide nucleic acid, each containing a base, are referred to herein as a nucleoside.

[0061] A "label" or a "detectable moiety" is a composition detectable by spectroscopic, photochemical, biochemical, immunochemical, chemical, or other physical means. For example, useful labels include ^{32}P , fluorescent dyes, electron-dense reagents, enzymes (*e.g.*, as commonly used in an ELISA), biotin, digoxigenin, or haptens and proteins or other entities

which can be made detectable, *e.g.*, by incorporating a radiolabel into the peptide or used to detect antibodies specifically reactive with the peptide. The labels may be incorporated into the KIT nucleic acids, proteins and antibodies at any position. Any method known in the art for conjugating the antibody to the label may be employed, *e.g.*, using methods described in Hermanson, Bioconjugate Techniques 1996, Academic Press, Inc., San Diego.

[0062] A “labeled nucleic acid probe or oligonucleotide” is one that is bound, either covalently, through a linker or a chemical bond, or noncovalently, through ionic, van der Waals, electrostatic, or hydrogen bonds to a label such that the presence of the probe may be detected by detecting the presence of the label bound to the probe. Alternatively, method using high affinity interactions may achieve the same results where one of a pair of binding partners binds to the other, *e.g.*, biotin, streptavidin.

[0063] As used herein a “nucleic acid probe or oligonucleotide” is defined as a nucleic acid capable of binding to a target nucleic acid of complementary sequence through one or more types of chemical bonds, usually through complementary base pairing, usually through hydrogen bond formation. As used herein, a probe may include natural (*i.e.*, A, G, C, or T) or modified bases (7-deazaguanosine, inosine, etc.). In addition, the bases in a probe may be joined by a linkage other than a phosphodiester bond, so long as it does not functionally interfere with hybridization. Thus, *e.g.*, probes may be peptide nucleic acids in which the constituent bases are joined by peptide bonds rather than phosphodiester linkages. It will be understood by one of skill in the art that probes may bind target sequences lacking complete complementarity with the probe sequence depending upon the stringency of the hybridization conditions. The probes are preferably directly labeled as with isotopes, chromophores, lumiphores, chromogens, or indirectly labeled such as with biotin to which a streptavidin complex may later bind. By assaying for the presence or absence of the probe, one can detect the presence or absence of the select sequence or subsequence. Diagnosis or prognosis may be based at the genomic level, or at the level of RNA or protein expression.

[0064] The term “recombinant” when used with reference, *e.g.*, to a cell, or nucleic acid, protein, or vector, indicates that the cell, nucleic acid, protein or vector, has been modified by the introduction of a heterologous nucleic acid or protein or the alteration of a native nucleic acid or protein, or that the cell is derived from a cell so modified. Thus, *e.g.*, recombinant cells express genes that are not found within the native (non-recombinant) form of the cell or express native genes that are otherwise abnormally expressed, under expressed or not

expressed at all. By the term “recombinant nucleic acid” herein is meant nucleic acid, originally formed *in vitro*, in general, by the manipulation of nucleic acid, *e.g.*, using polymerases and endonucleases, in a form not normally found in nature. Similarly, a “recombinant protein” is a protein made using recombinant techniques, *i.e.*, through the expression of a recombinant nucleic acid as depicted above.

[0065] The phrase “selectively (or specifically) hybridizes to” refers to the binding, duplexing, or hybridizing of a molecule to a particular nucleotide sequence under stringent hybridization conditions when that sequence is present in a mixture (*e.g.*, total cellular or library DNA or RNA, an amplification reaction), such that the binding of the molecule to the particular nucleotide sequence is determinative of the presence of the nucleotide sequence in the mixture.

[0066] The phrase “stringent hybridization conditions” refers to conditions under which a probe will hybridize to its target subsequence, typically in a complex mixture of nucleic acids, but to no other sequences. Stringent conditions are sequence-dependent and will be different in different circumstances. Longer sequences hybridize specifically at higher temperatures. An extensive guide to the hybridization of nucleic acids is found in Tijssen, *Techniques in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology--Hybridization with Nucleic Probes*, “Overview of principles of hybridization and the strategy of nucleic acid assays” (1993). Generally, stringent conditions are selected to be about 5-10°C lower than the thermal melting point (T_m) for the specific sequence at a defined ionic strength pH. The T_m is the temperature (under defined ionic strength, pH, and nucleic concentration) at which 50% of the probes complementary to the target hybridize to the target sequence at equilibrium (as the target sequences are present in excess, at T_m , 50% of the probes are occupied at equilibrium). Stringent conditions will be those in which the salt concentration is less than about 1.0 M sodium ion, typically about 0.01 to 1.0 M sodium ion concentration (or other salts) at pH 7.0 to 8.3 and the temperature is at least about 30°C for short probes (*e.g.*, 10 to 50 nucleotides) and at least about 60°C for long probes (*e.g.*, greater than 50 nucleotides). Stringent conditions may also be achieved with the addition of destabilizing agents such as formamide. For selective or specific hybridization, a positive signal is at least two times background, preferably 10 times background hybridization. An example of stringent hybridization conditions can be as following: 50% formamide, 5x SSC, and 1% SDS, incubating at 42°C, or, 5x SSC, 1% SDS, incubating at 65°C, with wash in 0.2x SSC, and 0.1% SDS at 65°C. For PCR, a temperature of about 36°C is typical for low stringency amplification, although

annealing temperatures may vary between about 32°C and 48°C depending on primer length. For high stringency PCR amplification, a temperature of about 62°C is typical, although high stringency annealing temperatures can range from about 50°C to about 65°C, depending on the primer length and specificity. Typical cycle conditions for both high and low stringency amplifications include a denaturation phase of 90°C - 95°C for 30 sec - 2 min., an annealing phase lasting 30 sec. - 2 min., and an extension phase of about 72°C for 1 - 2 min. Protocols and guidelines for low and high stringency amplification reactions are provided, e.g., in Innis *et al.* (1990) *PCR Protocols, A Guide to Methods and Applications*, Academic Press, Inc. N.Y.).

[0067] Nucleic acids that do not hybridize to each other under stringent conditions are still substantially identical if the polypeptides which they encode are substantially identical. This occurs, e.g., when a copy of a nucleic acid is created using the maximum codon degeneracy permitted by the genetic code. In such cases, the nucleic acids typically hybridize under moderately stringent hybridization conditions. Illustrative “moderately stringent hybridization conditions” include a hybridization in a buffer of 40% formamide, 1 M NaCl, 1% SDS at 37°C, and a wash in 1X SSC at 45°C. A positive hybridization is at least twice background. Those of ordinary skill will readily recognize that alternative hybridization and wash conditions can be utilized to provide conditions of similar stringency. Additional guidelines for determining hybridization parameters are provided in numerous reference, e.g., and Current Protocols in Molecular Biology, ed. Ausubel, *et al.*

[0068] The phrase “functional effects” in the context of assays for testing compounds that inhibit activity of a GNA11 protein includes the determination of a parameter that is indirectly or directly under the influence of the GNA11 protein or nucleic acid, e.g., a functional, physical, or chemical effect, such as the ability to decrease tumorigenesis, or alter GTP hydrolase activity. Activities or functional effect of GNA11 can include protein-protein interaction activity, e.g., the ability of GNA11 to bind an antibody or other protein with which it interacts; GTP hydrolase activity, the ability of GNA11 to bind GTP and/or GDP; contact inhibition and density limitation of growth; cellular proliferation; cellular transformation; changes in pigmentation; growth factor or serum dependence; tumor specific marker levels; invasiveness into Matrigel; tumor growth and metastasis *in vivo*, including measurement of tumor growth and tumor “take” in a model system; mRNA and protein

expression in cells, including those undergoing metastasis, and other characteristics of cancer cells. "Functional effects" include *in vitro*, *in vivo*, and *ex vivo* activities.

[0069] As used herein, "inhibitors" or "antagonists" of GNA11 (*e.g.* "GNA11 antagonists") refer to modulatory molecules or compounds that, *e.g.*, bind to, partially or totally block activity, decrease, prevent, delay activation, inactivate, desensitize, or down regulate the activity or expression of GNA11 protein, phospholipase C β , or downstream molecules regulated by GNA11, *e.g.*, protein kinase C (PKC). Inhibitors can include siRNA or antisense RNA, genetically modified versions of GNA11 protein, *e.g.*, versions with altered activity, as well as naturally occurring and synthetic GNA11 antagonists, antibodies, small chemical molecules and the like. GNA11 inhibitors for use in the invention are known in the art. For example, non-limiting examples of inhibitors suitable for use with the present invention can include inhibitors of PKC, for example, the relatively nonspecific PKC inhibitor staurosporine, the staurosporine analogue CPG41251, bryostatin-1, KAI-9803, 7-hydroxystaurosporine, L-threo-dihydrosphingosine (safingol), AHT956 and AEB071, the non-selective PKC inhibitor (PKC412), ilmofosine (BM 41 440), indolcarbazole Gö6796 which is a more specific inhibitor of the classical PKC isoforms including PKC μ , the PKC-alpha antisense inhibitor LY900003, and the PKC-beta inhibitors LY333531, LY317615 (Enzastaurin). An example of an antisense molecule suitable for use in depleting PKC-alpha mRNA is 5'-GTTCTCGCTGGTGAGTTTCA-3'. Non-limiting illustrative inhibitors of phospholipase C β can include edelfosine and fluvirsin B[2]. Assays for identifying other inhibitors can be performed *in vitro* or *in vivo*, *e.g.*, in cells, or cell membranes, by applying test inhibitor compounds, and then determining the functional effects on activity.

[0070] In some embodiments, samples or assays comprising GNA11 proteins that are treated with a potential inhibitor are compared to control samples without the inhibitor, to examine the effect on activity. Typically, control samples, *e.g.*, melanoma cells, that have a GNA11 mutation and that are untreated with inhibitors are assigned a relative protein activity value of 100%. Inhibition of GNA11 is achieved when the activity value relative to the control is changed at least 20%, preferably 50%, more preferably 75-100%, or more. In some embodiments, an inhibitor will activate a particular activity, such as GTP hydrolysis, however, the net effect will be a decrease in the activity of GNA11q, *e.g.*, in comparison to controls that have activated GNA11.

[0071] The phrase “changes in cell growth” refers to any change in cell growth and proliferation characteristics *in vitro* or *in vivo*, such as formation of foci, anchorage independence, semi-solid or soft agar growth, changes in contact inhibition and density limitation of growth, loss of growth factor or serum requirements, changes in cell morphology, gaining or losing immortalization, gaining or losing tumor specific markers, ability to form or suppress tumors when injected into suitable animal hosts, and/or immortalization of the cell. *See, e.g., Freshney, Culture of Animal Cells a Manual of Basic Technique* pp. 231-241 (3rd ed. 1994).

[0072] As used herein, "antibody" includes reference to an immunoglobulin molecule immunologically reactive with a particular antigen, and includes both polyclonal and monoclonal antibodies. The term also includes genetically engineered forms such as chimeric antibodies (*e.g.,* humanized murine antibodies) and heteroconjugate antibodies (*e.g.,* bispecific antibodies). The term "antibody" also includes antigen binding forms of antibodies, including fragments with antigen-binding capability (*e.g.,* Fab', F(ab')₂, Fab, Fv and rIgG. *See also, Pierce Catalog and Handbook, 1994-1995 (Pierce Chemical Co., Rockford, IL). See also, e.g., Kuby, J., Immunology, 3rd Ed., W.H. Freeman & Co., New York (1998). The term also refers to recombinant single chain Fv fragments (scFv). The term antibody also includes bivalent or bispecific molecules, diabodies, triabodies, and tetrabodies. Bivalent and bispecific molecules are described in, e.g., Kostelny *et al.* (1992) *J Immunol* 148:1547, Pack and Pluckthun (1992) *Biochemistry* 31:1579, Hollinger *et al.*, 1993, *supra*, Gruber *et al.* (1994) *J Immunol* :5368, Zhu *et al.* (1997) *Protein Sci* 6:781, Hu *et al.* (1996) *Cancer Res.* 56:3055, Adams *et al.* (1993) *Cancer Res.* 53:4026, and McCartney, *et al.* (1995) *Protein Eng.* 8:301.*

[0073] An antibody immunologically reactive with a particular antigen can be generated by recombinant methods such as selection of libraries of recombinant antibodies in phage or similar vectors, *see, e.g., Huse et al., Science* 246:1275-1281 (1989); Ward *et al., Nature* 341:544-546 (1989); and Vaughan *et al., Nature Biotech.* 14:309-314 (1996), or by immunizing an animal with the antigen or with DNA encoding the antigen.

[0074] Typically, an immunoglobulin has a heavy and light chain. Each heavy and light chain contains a constant region and a variable region, (the regions are also known as “domains”). Light and heavy chain variable regions contain four framework" regions

interrupted by three hypervariable regions, also called complementarity-determining regions (CDRs).

[0075] References to “V_H” or a “VH” refer to the variable region of an immunoglobulin heavy chain of an antibody, including the heavy chain of an Fv, scFv, or Fab. References to “V_L” or a “VL” refer to the variable region of an immunoglobulin light chain, including the light chain of an Fv, scFv, dsFv or Fab.

[0076] A “chimeric antibody” is an immunoglobulin molecule in which (a) the constant region, or a portion thereof, is altered, replaced or exchanged so that the antigen binding site (variable region) is linked to a constant region of a different or altered class, effector function and/or species, or an entirely different molecule which confers new properties to the chimeric antibody, e.g., an enzyme, toxin, hormone, growth factor, drug, etc.; or (b) the variable region, or a portion thereof, is altered, replaced or exchanged with a variable region having a different or altered antigen specificity.

[0077] A “humanized antibody” is an immunoglobulin molecule which contains minimal sequence derived from non-human immunoglobulin. Humanized antibodies include human immunoglobulins (recipient antibody) in which residues from a complementary determining region (CDR) of the recipient are replaced by residues from a CDR of a non-human species (donor antibody) such as mouse, rat or rabbit having the desired specificity, affinity and capacity. In some instances, Fv framework residues of the human immunoglobulin are replaced by corresponding non-human residues. Humanized antibodies may also comprise residues which are found neither in the recipient antibody nor in the imported CDR or framework sequences. In general, a humanized antibody will comprise substantially all of at least one, and typically two, variable domains, in which all or substantially all of the CDR regions correspond to those of a non-human immunoglobulin and all or substantially all of the framework (FR) regions are those of a human immunoglobulin consensus sequence. The humanized antibody optimally also will comprise at least a portion of an immunoglobulin constant region (Fc), typically that of a human immunoglobulin (Jones *et al.*, *Nature* 321:522-525 (1986); Riechmann *et al.*, *Nature* 332:323-329 (1988); and Presta, *Curr. Op. Struct. Biol.* 2:593-596 (1992)). Humanization can be essentially performed following the method of Winter and co-workers (Jones *et al.*, *Nature* 321:522-525 (1986); Riechmann *et al.*, *Nature* 332:323-327 (1988); Verhoeven *et al.*, *Science* 239:1534-1536 (1988)), by substituting rodent CDRs or CDR sequences for the corresponding sequences of a human

antibody. Accordingly, such humanized antibodies are chimeric antibodies (U.S. Patent No. 4,816,567), wherein substantially less than an intact human variable domain has been substituted by the corresponding sequence from a non-human species.

[0078] The term "fully human antibody" refers to an immunoglobulin comprising human hypervariable regions in addition to human framework and constant regions. Such antibodies can be produced using various techniques known in the art. For example *in vitro* methods involve use of recombinant libraries of human antibody fragments displayed on bacteriophage (e.g., McCafferty *et al.*, 1990, *Nature* 348:552-554; Hoogenboom & Winter, J. Mol. Biol. 227:381 (1991); and Marks *et al.*, *J. Mol. Biol.* 222:581 (1991)), yeast cells (Boder and Wittrup, 1997, *Nat Biotechnol* 15:553-557), or ribosomes (Hanes and Pluckthun, 1997, *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A* 94:4937-4942). Similarly, human antibodies can be made by introducing of human immunoglobulin loci into transgenic animals, e.g., mice in which the endogenous immunoglobulin genes have been partially or completely inactivated. Upon challenge, human antibody production is observed, which closely resembles that seen in humans in all respects, including gene rearrangement, assembly, and antibody repertoire. This approach is described, e.g., in U.S. Patent Nos. 6,150,584, 5,545,807; 5,545,806; 5,569,825; 5,625,126; 5,633,425; 5,661,016, and in the following scientific publications: (e.g., Jakobavits, *Adv Drug Deliv Rev.* 31:33-42 (1998), Marks *et al.*, *Bio/Technology* 10:779-783 (1992); Lonberg *et al.*, *Nature* 368:856-859 (1994); Morrison, *Nature* 368:812-13 (1994); Fishwild *et al.*, *Nature Biotechnology* 14:845-51 (1996); Neuberger, *Nature Biotechnology* 14:826 (1996); Lonberg & Huszar, *Intern. Rev. Immunol.* 13:65-93 (1995).

General recombinant methods

[0079] This invention relies in part on routine techniques in the field of recombinant genetics, e.g., for methods used in detecting GNA11 or for the preparation of GNA11 polypeptides and nucleic acids. Basic texts disclosing the general methods of use in this invention include Sambrook & Russell, *Molecular Cloning, A Laboratory Manual* (3rd Ed, 2001); Kriegler, *Gene Transfer and Expression: A Laboratory Manual* (1990); and *Current Protocols in Molecular Biology* (Ausubel *et al.*, eds., 1994-1999).

Identification of a GNA11 sequence in a sample from a patient

[0080] In one aspect of the invention, the presence of an activating mutation in a GNA11 polynucleotide, e.g., mRNA or genomic DNA, or increased activity of a GNA11 protein and/or the presence of a sequence mutation in a GNA11 protein, is determined in biological

samples suspected of comprising nevus, such as blue nevus, and/or melanoma, *e.g.*, uvea melanoma or malignant blue nevus, cells.

[0081] In some embodiments activating mutations in GNA11 nucleic acids are determined. As noted, human *GNA11* sequences are well known. Accordingly, the presence of mutations
5 can be readily determined.

[0082] "Sequence mutation" as used in this application refers to changes in a polynucleotide sequence that result in changes to protein activity. Mutations can be nucleotide substitutions, such as single nucleotide substitutions, insertions, or deletions. GNA11 mutations in melanocytic neoplasms of the present invention are typically activating
10 mutations that lead to constitutive activation of GNA11 activity. A GNA11 gene that is "mutated" in the context of this invention includes a GNA11 gene that is overexpressed such that the GNA11 pathway activity is upregulated and leads to abnormal growth of a nevus or melanoma cell.

[0083] An activating mutation detected in accordance with the invention is typically a
15 sequence mutation. A mutation may be in any part of the *GNA11* gene where the mutation leads to activation of GNA11. A common sequence mutation site is present at Q209. Mutations in GNA11 at Q209 include those shown in Figure 1. As is understood in the art, the particular mutation is commonly referred to by the change in amino acid sequence that results from the mutation in the nucleic acid sequence.

[0084] In the present invention an altered level of GNA11 activity and/or a sequence
20 mutation in GNA11 is detected for the diagnosis (or for prognostic indications) of melanocytic neoplasms, *e.g.*, for the diagnosis of subtypes of melanoma such as uveal melanoma and nevi such as blue nevi. Thus, biological samples obtained from patients that have or are suspected of having a melanocytic neoplasm can be analyzed for mutations in the
25 sequence of GNA11 mRNA or protein. The presence of a mutation is conveniently analyzed using samples of RNA, DNA, or protein.

[0085] In some embodiments, the methods of the invention may further comprise evaluating a biological sample from a patient for the presence or absence of an activating mutation in GNAQ, *e.g.*, a mutation at the codon encoding Gln 209 of GNAQ in a nucleic
30 acid from the biological sample. In some embodiments, the biological sample is from a patient that has uveal melanoma or a malignant blue nevus. In some embodiments, the

patient has a melanocytic neoplasm where the melanocytic neoplasm is a blue nevus.
Methods of detecting activating mutations in GNAQ are known (see WO 2008/098208).

Detection of Sequence Mutations in GNA11

5 **[0086]** In one embodiment, diagnostic and prognostic detection of a sequence mutation in *GNA11* is performed by determining the presence of cells in a biological sample having a sequence mutation in *GNA11*. Methods of evaluating the sequence of a particular gene are well known to those of skill in the art, and include, *inter alia*, hybridization and amplification based assays. A sequence mutation in *GNA11* in the instant invention can be determined
10 using a probe that selectively hybridizes to the mutant sequence.

[0087] In some embodiments, the presence of a mutant GNA11 allele can be conveniently determined using DNA sequencing, such as pyrosequencing, or other known sequencing techniques. Other detection methods include single-stranded conformational polymorphism or restriction fragment length polymorphism detection methods and denaturing gradient gel
15 electrophoresis analysis.

[0088] In some embodiments, a GNA11 sequence mutation in a biological sample is determined by hybridization of sample DNA or RNA to a probe that specifically hybridizes to a GNA11 sequence. The probes used in such applications specifically hybridize to the region of the GNA11 sequence harboring the mutation. Preferred probes are sufficiently long, *e.g.*,
20 from about 10, 15, or 20 nucleotides to about 50 or more nucleotides, so as to specifically hybridize with the target nucleic acid(s) under stringent conditions.

[0089] In some embodiments, a probe may be used to hybridize to the regions of *GNA11* that encodes position 209 of GNA11. In some embodiments, a probe used to detect a mutations may selectively hybridize to a mutant codon 209 that has a mutations CAG>CTG,
25 CAG>CCG, CAG>CTA, or CAG>CTT.

[0090] Any of a number hybridization-based assays can be used to detect a sequence mutation in GNA11 in the cells of a biological sample. For example, dot blots, array-based assays and the like can be used to determine GNA11 sequence mutations.

[0091] In some embodiments, amplification-based assays are used to detect sequence
30 mutations in GNA11 or to measure the levels of GNA11 transcript. In such an assay, the

target GNA11 nucleic acid sequence is specifically amplified in an amplification reaction (e.g., Polymerase Chain Reaction, or PCR). Examples of amplification-based assays can include RT-PCR methods well known to the skilled artisan (*see, e.g., Ausubel et al., supra*).

Detailed protocols for PCR of DNA and RNA, including quantitative amplification

5 methods, are known (*see, e.g., Innis et al. (1990) PCR Protocols, A Guide to Methods and Applications, Academic Press, Inc. N.Y.; and Ausubel and Russell & Sambrook, both supra*).

The known nucleic acid sequences for GNA11 (*see, e.g., SEQ ID NO:1*) are sufficient to enable one of skill to routinely select primers to specifically amplify any portion of the gene

so that GNA11 is targeted. Suitable primers for amplification of specific sequences can be

10 designed using principles well known in the art (*see, e.g., Dieffenbach & Dveksler, PCR Primer: A Laboratory Manual (1995)*).

[0092] Other suitable amplification methods include, but are not limited to, ligase chain reaction (LCR) (*see, Wu and Wallace (1989) Genomics 4: 560, Landegren et al. (1988)*

Science 241:1077, and Barringer et al. (1990) *Gene* 89: 117), transcription amplification

15 (Kwoh et al. (1989) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 86: 1173), self-sustained sequence replication

(Guatelli et al. (1990) *Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci. USA* 87: 1874), dot PCR, and linker adapter PCR, etc.

[0093] The presence of mutations in GNA11 DNA or RNA can also be determined using known techniques such as allele-specific oligonucleotide hybridization, which relies on

20 distinguishing a mutant from a normal nucleic acid sequence using an oligonucleotide that

specifically hybridizes to the mutant or normal nucleic acid sequence. This method typically employs short oligonucleotides, e.g., 15-20 nucleotides, in length, that are designed to

differentially hybridize to the normal or mutant allele. Guidance for designing such probes is available in the art. The presence of a mutant allele is determined by measuring the amount

25 of allele-specific oligonucleotide that hybridizes to the sample

[0094] In other embodiments, the presence (or amount) of a normal or mutant GNA11

nucleic acid can be detected using allele-specific amplification or primer extension methods.

These reactions typically involve use of primers that are designed to specifically target a

normal or mutant allele via a mismatch at the 3' end of a primer. The presence of a mismatch

30 effects the ability of a polymerase to extend a primer when the polymerase lacks error-

correcting activity. The amount of amplified product can be determined using a probe or by

directly measuring the amount of DNA present in the reaction.

[0095] Detection of levels of GNA11 nucleic acids, *e.g.*, levels of normal and/or mutant GNA11 polynucleotides, or the presence of a GNA11 mutation can also be performed using a quantitative assay such as a 5'-nuclease activity (also referred to as a "TaqMan®" assay), *e.g.*, as described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,210,015; 5,487,972; and 5,804,375; and Holland et al., 1988, Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 88:7276-7280. In such an assay, labeled detection probes that hybridize within the amplified region are added during the amplification reaction. In some embodiments, the hybridization probe can be an allele-specific probe that discriminates a normal or mutant allele. Alternatively, the method can be performed using an allele-specific primer and a labeled probe that binds to amplified product. In other embodiments, the probe may not discriminate between a mutant and normal allele.

[0096] As indicated above, in some embodiments, levels of GNA11 RNA are detected. Methods of detecting and/or quantifying the level of GNA11 gene transcripts (mRNA or cDNA made therefrom) using nucleic acid hybridization techniques are known to those of skill in the art. For example, expression levels of GNA11 can also be analyzed by techniques such as RT-PCR, *e.g.*, using real-time RT-PCR using allele-specific primers or probes, dot blotting, in situ hybridization, RNase protection, probing DNA microchip arrays, and the like.

[0097] Overexpression of GNA11, either mutated sequences or normal nucleic acid and/or polypeptide sequences, can be detected, *e.g.*, using quantitative sequences known in the art such as those described hereinabove. Overexpression is determined with reference to a control, *e.g.*, a normal tissue or normal melanocytes.

Detection of GNA11 polypeptide sequences

[0098] Altered GNA11 expression and/or activity can also be detected by detecting GNA11 protein or activity. For example, detection of GNA11 protein activity or the presence of GNA11 proteins that have a mutation, can be used for diagnostic purposes or in screening assays. In some embodiments, the level of GNA11 or the presence of a normal or mutant GNA11 polypeptide in a sample is conveniently determined using immunological assays. In other embodiments, GNA11 activity can be used to determine the presence of activating mutation of GNA11 in a biological sample. The following section discusses immunological detection of GNA11. The section also relates to generation and engineering of antibodies that can be used, *e.g.*, in therapeutic applications.

Immunological detection GNA11

[0099] Antibodies can be used to detect GNA11 or can be assessed in the methods of the invention for the ability to inhibit GNA11. The detection and/or quantification of GNA11 can be accomplished using any of a number of well recognized immunological binding assays. A general overview of the applicable technology can be found in Harlow & Lane, *Antibodies: A Laboratory Manual* (1988) and Harlow & Lane, *Using Antibodies* (1999). Other resources include see also *Methods in Cell Biology: Antibodies in Cell Biology*, volume 37 (Asai, ed. 1993); *Basic and Clinical Immunology* (Stites & Terr, eds., 7th ed. 1991, and *Current Protocols in Immunology* (Coligan, et al. Eds, John C. Wiley, 1999-present). Immunological binding assays can use either polyclonal or monoclonal antibodies. In some embodiments, antibodies that specifically detect mutant GNA11 molecules may be employed.

[0100] Commonly used assays include noncompetitive assays (e.g., sandwich assays) and competitive assays. In competitive assays, the amount of GNA11 present in the sample is measured indirectly by measuring the amount of a known, added (exogenous) GNA11 displaced (competed away) from an anti- GNA11 antibody by the unknown GNA11 present in a sample. Commonly used assay formats include immunoblots, which are used to detect and quantify the presence of protein in a sample. Other assay formats include liposome immunoassays (LIA), which use liposomes designed to bind specific molecules (e.g., antibodies) and release encapsulated reagents or markers, which are then detected according to standard techniques (see Monroe et al., *Amer. Clin. Prod. Rev.* 5:34-41 (1986)).

[0101] Antibodies to GNA11 are commercially available. In some embodiments, mutations to GNA11 can be detected using antibodies that specifically bind a mutant form, thus immunoassays can also be used to detect mutant GNA11 proteins.

[0102] GNA11 or a fragment thereof, e.g., the portion of the peptide frequently containing a sequence mutation, may be used to produce antibodies specifically reactive with GNA11 using techniques known in the art (see, e.g., Coligan; Harlow & Lane, both *supra*). Such techniques include antibody preparation by selection of antibodies from libraries of recombinant antibodies in phage or similar vectors, as well as preparation of polyclonal and monoclonal antibodies by immunizing rabbits or mice (see, e.g., Huse et al., *Science* 246:1275-1281 (1989); Ward et al., *Nature* 341:544-546 (1989)). Such antibodies can be used for diagnostic or prognostic applications, e.g., in the detection of melanomas or for other

cancers that exhibit increased expression or activity of GNA11.

[0103] Typically, polyclonal antisera with a titer of 10^4 or greater are selected and tested for cross reactivity against non-GNA11 proteins or even other related proteins from other organisms, using a competitive binding immunoassay. Specific polyclonal antisera and monoclonal antibodies will usually bind with a K_d of at least about 0.1 mM, more usually at least about 1 μ M, optionally at least about 0.1 μ M or better, and optionally 0.01 μ M or better.

[0104] In some embodiments, a GNA11 antibody may be used for therapeutic applications. For example, in some embodiments, such an antibody may be used to reduce or eliminate a biological function of GNA11 as is described below. That is, the addition of anti-GNA11 antibodies (either polyclonal or preferably monoclonal) to a melanocytic neoplasm (or a cell population containing cancerous cells) may reduce or eliminate the neoplasm. Generally, at least a 25% decrease in activity, growth, size or the like is preferred, with at least about 50% being particularly preferred and about a 95-100% decrease being especially preferred.

[0105] Often, the antibodies to the GNA11 proteins for therapeutic applications are humanized antibodies (e.g., Xenerex Biosciences, Mederex, Inc., Abgenix, Inc., Protein Design Labs, Inc.). Human antibodies can also be produced using various techniques known in the art, including phage display libraries (Hoogenboom & Winter, *J. Mol. Biol.* 227:381 (1991); Marks *et al.*, *J. Mol. Biol.* 222:581 (1991)). The techniques of Cole *et al.* and Boerner *et al.* are also available for the preparation of human monoclonal antibodies (Cole *et al.*, *Monoclonal Antibodies and Cancer Therapy*, p. 77 (1985) and Boerner *et al.*, *J. Immunol.* 147(1):86-95 (1991)). Similarly, human antibodies can be made by introducing of human immunoglobulin loci into transgenic animals, e.g., mice in which the endogenous immunoglobulin genes have been partially or completely inactivated. Upon challenge, human antibody production is observed, which closely resembles that seen in humans in all respects, including gene rearrangement, assembly, and antibody repertoire. This approach is described, e.g., in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,545,807; 5,545,806; 5,569,825; 5,625,126; 5,633,425; 5,661,016, and in the following scientific publications: Marks *et al.*, *Bio/Technology* 10:779-783 (1992); Lonberg *et al.*, *Nature* 368:856-859 (1994); Morrison, *Nature* 368:812-13 (1994); Fishwild *et al.*, *Nature Biotechnology* 14:845-51 (1996); Neuberger, *Nature Biotechnology* 14:826 (1996); Lonberg & Huszar, *Intern. Rev. Immunol.* 13:65-93 (1995).

Detection of activity

[0106] As appreciated by one of skill in the art, GNA11 activity can be detected to evaluate expression levels or for identifying inhibitors of activity. The activity can be assessed using a variety of *in vitro* and *in vivo* assays, including GTP and GDP binding activity, GTP-

5 hydrolase activity, or measurement of phospholipase C β . In some embodiments GNA11 activity can be evaluated using additional endpoints, such as those associated with transformation or pigmentation. Such assays are described in greater detail in the examples and section detailing methods of identifying additional GNA11 inhibitors. Typically GNA11 activity is determined by measuring the ability to bind a protein to which it interacts, *e.g.*, an
10 antibody, ligand, or other protein, such as signaling molecules.

Disease diagnosis/prognosis

[0107] GNA11 nucleic acid and polypeptide sequences can be used for diagnosis or prognosis of a melanocytic neoplasm, *e.g.*, a blue nevus, uveal melanoma, or malignant blue nevus, in a patient. For example, as described above, the sequence, level, or activity of

15 GNA11 in a melanocytic neoplasm sample from a patient can be determined, wherein an alteration, *e.g.*, an increase in the level of expression or activity of GNA11 or an activating sequence mutation in GNA11, indicates the presence or the likelihood of a melanocytic neoplasm.

[0108] The methods of the present invention can be used to determine the optimal course of
20 treatment in a patient with cancer. For example, the presence of an activating mutation in *GNA11*, *e.g.*, an activating sequence mutation, can indicate that certain therapeutics, such as those that target GNA11, phospholipase C β , or downstream pathways regulated by GNA11 will be beneficial to those patients. In addition, a correlation can be readily established between the number of melanocytic neoplasm cells having the mutation in GNA11, and the
25 relative efficacy of one or another anti-melanoma agent. Such analyses can be performed, *e.g.*, retrospectively, *i.e.*, by analyzing for an activating mutation in samples taken previously from patients that have subsequently undergone one or more types of anti-cancer therapy, *e.g.*, therapies that target G-proteins or phospholipase C β , or other downstream pathways regulated by GNA11, and correlating the number of melanocytic neoplasm cells having the
30 mutation with the known efficacy of the treatment.

[0109] Often, such methods will be used in conjunction with additional diagnostic methods, *e.g.*, detection of other melanoma indicators, *e.g.*, cell morphology, and the like. In other

embodiments, a tissue sample known to contain melanoma cells, *e.g.*, from a tumor, will be analyzed for GNA11 activating mutations to determine information about the cancer, *e.g.*, the efficacy of certain treatments, such as therapeutics that target GNA11, or downstream pathways regulated by GNA11

- 5 [0110] In some embodiments, analysis of melanoma cells for the presence of GNA11 activating mutations can be used to determine the prognosis of a patient with melanoma, *e.g.*, uveal melanoma or malignant blue nevus, or for determining progression of the disease. A "diagnostic presence" can be increased levels of GNA11 mRNA or protein and/or activity, and/or the presence of activating sequence mutations in GNA11.
- 10 [0111] Any biological sample suspected of containing melanoma cells can be evaluated to determine progression. For example, tissues from visceral organs, such as liver or lung, blood, lymph nodes, bone and the like can be analyzed for the presence of GNA11 sequence mutations and or increased levels of GNA11 activity.

Inhibitors or modulators of GNA11

- 15 [0112] In another aspect, this invention includes methods of treating melanoma that overexpress and/or have a mutation in *GNA11* where the method comprises administering an inhibitor or GNA11 antagonist. Inhibitors and GNA11 antagonists are known. For example, non-limiting inhibitors suitable for use with the present invention can include specific and nonspecific inhibitors of PKC and various PKC isoforms including PKC μ and PKC ϵ . Non-
- 20 limiting inhibitors suitable for use with the present invention also include staurosporine, the staurosporine analogue CPG41251, bryostatin-1, KAI-9803, 7-hydroxystaurosporine, L-threo-dihydrosphingosine (safingol), the non-selective PKC inhibitor (PKC412), ilmofofosine (BM 41 440), Gö6976, which is an indolcarbazole that more specifically inhibits the classical isoforms of PKC, including PKC μ , the PKC-alpha antisense inhibitor LY900003, and the
- 25 PKC-beta inhibitors LY333531, LY317615 (Enzastaurin). Non-limiting inhibitors of phospholipase C β can include edelfosine and fluvirubin B[2], which are also suitable for use in the present invention.

- [0113] Other inhibitors include inhibitors such as antibodies, peptide, nucleic acids, *e.g.*, siRNA, and the like. As used herein, a GNA11 inhibitor can be a molecule that modulates
- 30 GNA11 nucleic acid expression and/or GNA11 protein activity, or in some embodiments, downstream pathways regulated by GNA11. In some embodiments, a GNA11 inhibitor is an

inhibitory RNA molecule that targets *GNA11* nucleic acid sequences. In some embodiments, an inhibitory RNA molecule that targets *GNA11* nucleic acid sequences may also target *GNAQ* nucleic acid sequences.

[0114] Method of identifying suitable siRNA that target *GNA11* are well known in the art.

- 5 [0115] The ability to inhibit GNA11 can be evaluated using appropriate assays, *e.g.*, by assaying GNA11 activity, *e.g.*, GTP binding or GTP hydrolase activity and comparing the amount of activity to controls that are not treated with the inhibitor.

[0116] In another embodiment, mRNA and/or protein expression levels can be measured to assess the effects of a test compound on GNA11 expression levels. A host cell expressing
10 GNA11 is contacted with a test compound for a sufficient time to effect any interactions, and then the level of mRNA or protein is measured. The amount of time to effect such interactions may be empirically determined, such as by running a time course and measuring the level of expression as a function of time. The amount of expression may be measured by using any method known to those of skill in the art to be suitable.

- 15 [0117] The amount of expression is then compared to the amount of expression in the absence of the test compound. A substantially identical cell may be derived from the same cells from which the recombinant cell was prepared but which had not been modified by introduction of heterologous DNA. A difference in the amount of expression indicates that the test compound has in some manner altered GNA11 levels.

- 20 [0118] In some assays to identify GNA11 inhibitors, samples that are treated with a potential inhibitor are compared to control samples to determine the extent of modulation. Control samples without the mutation and untreated with candidate inhibitors are assigned a relative activity value of 100. Inhibition of GNA11 is achieved when the activity value relative to the control is about 80%, optionally 50%, optionally 25-0%.

- 25 [0119] GNA11 inhibitors can be any small chemical compound, or a biological entity, *e.g.*, a macromolecule such as a protein, sugar, nucleic acid or lipid.

[0120] In some embodiments, GNA11 inhibitors are small molecules that have a molecular weight of less than 1,500 daltons, and in some cases less than 1,000, 800, 600, 500, or 400 daltons. The relatively small size of the agents can be desirable because smaller molecules
30 have a higher likelihood of having physiochemical properties compatible with good pharmacokinetic characteristics, including oral absorption than agents with higher molecular

weight. For example, agents less likely to be successful as drugs based on permeability and solubility were described by Lipinski *et al.* as follows: having more than 5 H-bond donors (expressed as the sum of OHs and NHs); having a molecular weight over 500; having a LogP over 5 (or MLogP over 4.15); and/or having more than 10 H-bond acceptors (expressed as the sum of Ns and Os). *See, e.g., Lipinski et al. Adv Drug Delivery Res 23:3-25 (1997).*

Compound classes that are substrates for biological transporters are typically exceptions to the rule.

Inhibition of expression

[0121] As noted above, nucleic acid inhibitors may also be used to decrease expression of GNA11. Therefore, a nucleotide sequence that specifically interferes with expression of *GNA11* at the transcriptional or translational level can be used to treat a melanoma or nevus. In some embodiments, such a nucleic acid inhibitor may also target *GNA11* nucleotide sequences that are sufficiently identical to *GNAQ* nucleic acid sequences so as to interfere with expression of *GNAQ*. An inhibitory nucleic acid approach may utilize, for example, siRNA and/or antisense oligonucleotides to block transcription or translation of *GNA11* mRNA, either by inducing degradation of the mRNA with a siRNA or by masking the mRNA with an antisense nucleic acid.

[0122] An “siRNA” or “RNAi” refers to a nucleic acid that forms a double stranded RNA, which double stranded RNA has the ability to reduce or inhibit expression of a gene or target gene when the siRNA expressed in the same cell as the gene or target gene. “siRNA” thus refers to the double stranded RNA formed by the complementary strands. The complementary portions of the siRNA that hybridize to form the double stranded molecule typically have substantial or complete identity. In one embodiment, an siRNA refers to a nucleic acid that has substantial or complete identity to a target gene and forms a double stranded siRNA. The sequence of the siRNA can correspond to the full length target gene, or a subsequence thereof. Typically, the siRNA is at least about 15-50 nucleotides in length (*e.g.*, each complementary sequence of the double stranded siRNA is 15-50 nucleotides in length, and the double stranded siRNA is about 15-50 base pairs in length, preferably about preferably about 20-30 base nucleotides, preferably about 20-25 nucleotides in length, *e.g.*, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, or 30 nucleotides in length.

[0123] “Silencing” or “downregulation” refers to a detectable decrease of transcription and/or translation of a target sequence, *i.e.*, the sequence targeted by the siRNA, or a decrease

in the amount or activity of the target sequence or protein in comparison to the normal level that is detected in the absence of the interfering RNA or other nucleic acid sequence. A detectable decrease can be as small as 5 % or 10 %, or as great as 80 %, 90 % or 100 %. More typically, a detectable decrease ranges from 20 %, 30 %, 40 %, 50 %, 60 %, or 70 %.

5 [0124] A DNA molecule that transcribes dsRNA or siRNA (for instance, as a hairpin duplex) also provides RNAi. For example, dsRNA oligonucleotides that specifically hybridize to a *GNA11* nucleic acid sequence such as SEQ ID NO:1 can be used in the methods of the present invention.

[0125] Antisense oligonucleotides that specifically hybridize to *GNA11* nucleic acid
10 sequences can also be used to silence the transcription and/or translation of *GNA11*, and thus treat melanoma, *e.g.*, uveal melanoma, or a nevus such as a blue nevus. Methods of designing antisense nucleic acids (either DNA or RNA molecules) are well known in the art. Antisense nucleic acids may comprise naturally occurring nucleotides or modified nucleotides such as, *e.g.*, phosphorothioate, methylphosphonate, and -anomeric sugar-phosphate, backbone-
15 modified nucleotides.

[0126] The ability of an inhibitor to modulate the expression of *GNA11* can be evaluated using known methods. Such methods generally involve conducting cell-based assays in which test compounds are contacted with one or more cells expressing *GNA11* and then detecting a decrease in expression (either transcript or translation product).

20 **Melanoma treatment and administration of pharmaceutical compositions**

[0127] Inhibitors of *GNA11* can be administered to a patient for the treatment of a melanocytic neoplasm having a sequence mutation in *GNA11*. As described in detail below, the inhibitors are administered in any suitable manner, optionally with pharmaceutically acceptable carriers. In some embodiments, inhibitors of PKC or phospholipase C β are
25 administered. Protocols for the administration of inhibitors are known and can be further optimized for melanoma patients based on principles known in the pharmacological arts (see, *e.g.*, Remington: The Science and Practice of Pharmacy, 21st Edition, Philadelphia, PA. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2005).

[0128] The inhibitors can be administered to a patient at therapeutically effective doses to
30 prevent, treat, or control a melanocytic neoplasm. The compounds are administered to a patient in an amount sufficient to elicit an effective protective or therapeutic response in the patient. An effective therapeutic response is a response that at least partially arrests or slows

the symptoms or complications of the disease. An amount adequate to accomplish this is defined as “therapeutically effective dose.” The dose will be determined by the efficacy of the particular GNA11 inhibitor employed and the condition of the subject, as well as the body weight or surface area of the area to be treated. The size of the dose also will be determined by the existence, nature, and extent of any adverse effects that accompany the administration of a particular compound in a particular subject.

[0129] Toxicity and therapeutic efficacy of such compounds can be determined by standard pharmaceutical procedures in cell cultures or experimental animals, for example, by determining the LD₅₀ (the dose lethal to 50% of the population) and the ED₅₀ (the dose therapeutically effective in 50% of the population). The dose ratio between toxic and therapeutic effects is the therapeutic index and can be expressed as the ratio, LD₅₀/ED₅₀. Compounds that exhibit large therapeutic indices are preferred. While compounds that exhibit toxic side effects can be used, care should be taken to design a delivery system that targets such compounds to the site of affected tissue to minimize potential damage to normal cells and, thereby, reduce side effects.

[0130] The data obtained from cell culture assays and animal studies can be used to formulate a dosage range for use in humans. The dosage of such compounds lies preferably within a range of circulating concentrations that include the ED₅₀ with little or no toxicity. The dosage can vary within this range depending upon the dosage form employed and the route of administration. For any compound used in the methods of the invention, the therapeutically effective dose can be estimated initially from cell culture assays. A dose can be formulated in animal models to achieve a circulating plasma concentration range that includes the IC₅₀ (the concentration of the test compound that achieves a half-maximal inhibition of symptoms) as determined in cell culture. Such information can be used to more accurately determine useful doses in humans. Levels in plasma can be measured, for example, by high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC). In general, the dose equivalent of a modulator is from about 1 ng/kg to 10 mg/kg for a typical subject.

[0131] siRNA can be delivered to the subject using any means known in the art, including by injection, inhalation, or oral ingestion of the siRNA. Another suitable delivery system for siRNA is a colloidal dispersion system such as, for example, macromolecule complexes, nanocapsules, microspheres, beads, and lipid-based systems including oil-in-water emulsions, micelles, mixed micelles, and liposomes. The preferred colloidal system of this invention is a

liposome. Liposomes are artificial membrane vesicles which are useful as delivery vehicles in vitro and in vivo. Nucleic acids, including RNA and DNA within liposomes and be delivered to cells in a biologically active form (Fraley, *et al.*, *Trends Biochem. Sci.*, 6:77, 1981). Liposomes can be targeted to specific cell types or tissues using any means known in the art.

[0132] Delivery of antisense polynucleotides specific for GNA11 can be achieved using any means known in the art including, *e.g.*, direct injection, inhalation, or ingestion of the polynucleotides. In addition, antisense polynucleotides can be delivered using a recombinant expression vector (*e.g.*, a viral vector based on an adenovirus, a herpes virus, a vaccinia virus, or a retrovirus) or a colloidal dispersion system (*e.g.*, liposomes).

[0133] A treatment that targets GNA11 can be administered with other melanoma therapeutics, either concurrently or before or after treatment with another melanoma therapeutic agent.

[0134] Pharmaceutical compositions for use in the present invention can be formulated by standard techniques using one or more physiologically acceptable carriers or excipients. The compounds and their physiologically acceptable salts and solvates can be formulated for administration by any suitable route, including via inhalation, topically, nasally, orally, parenterally (*e.g.*, intravenously, intraperitoneally, intravesically or intrathecally) or rectally.

[0135] For oral administration, the pharmaceutical compositions can take the form of, for example, tablets or capsules prepared by conventional means with pharmaceutically acceptable excipients, including binding agents, for example, pregelatinised maize starch, polyvinylpyrrolidone, or hydroxypropyl methylcellulose; fillers, for example, lactose, microcrystalline cellulose, or calcium hydrogen phosphate; lubricants, for example, magnesium stearate, talc, or silica; disintegrants, for example, potato starch or sodium starch glycolate; or wetting agents, for example, sodium lauryl sulphate. Tablets can be coated by methods well known in the art. Liquid preparations for oral administration can take the form of, for example, solutions, syrups, or suspensions, or they can be presented as a dry product for constitution with water or other suitable vehicle before use. Such liquid preparations can be prepared by conventional means with pharmaceutically acceptable additives, for example, suspending agents, for example, sorbitol syrup, cellulose derivatives, or hydrogenated edible fats; emulsifying agents, for example, lecithin or acacia; non-aqueous vehicles, for example, almond oil, oily esters, ethyl alcohol, or fractionated vegetable oils; and preservatives, for

example, methyl or propyl-p-hydroxybenzoates or sorbic acid. The preparations can also contain buffer salts, flavoring, coloring, and/or sweetening agents as appropriate. If desired, preparations for oral administration can be suitably formulated to give controlled release of the active compound.

- 5 **[0136]** For administration by inhalation, the compounds may be conveniently delivered in the form of an aerosol spray presentation from pressurized packs or a nebulizer, with the use of a suitable propellant, for example, dichlorodifluoromethane, trichlorofluoromethane, dichlorotetrafluoroethane, carbon dioxide, or other suitable gas. In the case of a pressurized aerosol, the dosage unit can be determined by providing a valve to deliver a metered amount.
- 10 Capsules and cartridges of, for example, gelatin for use in an inhaler or insufflator can be formulated containing a powder mix of the compound and a suitable powder base, for example, lactose or starch.

- [0137]** The compounds can be formulated for parenteral administration by injection, for example, by bolus injection or continuous infusion. Formulations for injection can be
- 15 presented in unit dosage form, for example, in ampoules or in multi-dose containers, with an added preservative. The compositions can take such forms as suspensions, solutions, or emulsions in oily or aqueous vehicles, and can contain formulatory agents, for example, suspending, stabilizing, and/or dispersing agents. Alternatively, the active ingredient can be in powder form for constitution with a suitable vehicle, for example, sterile pyrogen-free
- 20 water, before use.

[0138] The compounds can also be formulated in rectal compositions, for example, suppositories or retention enemas, for example, containing conventional suppository bases, for example, cocoa butter or other glycerides.

- [0139]** Furthermore, the compounds can be formulated as a depot preparation. Such long-
- 25 acting formulations can be administered by implantation (for example, subcutaneously or intramuscularly) or by intramuscular injection. Thus, for example, the compounds can be formulated with suitable polymeric or hydrophobic materials (for example as an emulsion in an acceptable oil) or ion exchange resins, or as sparingly soluble derivatives, for example, as a sparingly soluble salt.

- 30 **[0140]** The compositions can, if desired, be presented in a pack or dispenser device that can contain one or more unit dosage forms containing the active ingredient. The pack can, for

example, comprise metal or plastic foil, for example, a blister pack. The pack or dispenser device can be accompanied by instructions for administration.

Kits for Use in Diagnostic and/or Prognostic Applications

[0141] The invention also provides kits for diagnostic or therapeutic applications. For diagnostic/prognostic applications, such kits may include any or all of the following: assay reagents, buffers, GNA11 probes, primers, antibodies, or the like. In some embodiments a kit that comprises GNA11 diagnostic reagents may further comprise GNAQ diagnostic reagents. Such a kit may, for example, comprise a primer set to specifically amplify GNA11 and a primer set to specifically amplify GNAQ. Further, a kit may comprise a probe that detects a mutation, such as a mutation at the codon encoding position 209 of GNA11 and/or GNAQ. In some embodiments, the kit may comprise a probe specific for GNA11 and a probe specific for GNAQ, as well as probes that discriminate between mutant and wildtype alleles. Optionally, the kit may further comprises amplification primers for GNA11 and GNAQ.

[0142] In addition, the kits may include instructional materials containing directions (i.e., protocols) for the practice of the methods of this invention. While the instructional materials typically comprise written or printed materials they are not limited to such. Any medium capable of storing such instructions and communicating them to an end user is contemplated by this invention. Such media include, but are not limited to electronic storage media (e.g., magnetic discs, tapes, cartridges, chips), optical media (e.g., CD ROM), and the like. Such media may include addresses to internet sites that provide such instructional materials.

EXAMPLES

Examination of melanoma and nevus samples for presence of GNA11 sequence mutation.

[0143] To determine whether *GNA11* plays a role in human melanocytic neoplasia, the coding regions of *GNA11* were sequenced in uveal melanomas and blue nevi. The *GNA11* coding region was also sequenced in normal surrounding tissue from selected biopsies.

Methodology

Tissues

[0144] Archival, paraffin-embedded biopsies were retrieved from the archives of the Department of Ophthalmology, and the Dermatopathology Section of the Departments of

Dermatology and Pathology of the University of California, San Francisco, the Department of Pathology of the University of British Columbia, Canada, the Department of Pathology of the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, and the University of Graz, Austria. For each sample, DNA was extracted from sections of 5-20 μ m thickness from which tumor-bearing tissue had been manually microdissected.

Sequencing

[0145] Sample DNA was amplified using PCR. The reaction conditions were 0.25 mM each dNTPs, 0.4X BSA (New England Biolabs), 1 U Hotstar Taq (Qiagen), 1X Hotstar Taq buffer (Qiagen), and 0.5 μ M each primer: 5'-cgctgtgtccttcaggatg-3' and 5'-

ccacctcgtgtgtccgact-3' to examine *GNAIL* Q209. PCR consisted of 35 cycles of 95 °C (30 seconds), 58 °C (1 minute), and 72 °C (1 minute) after initial denaturation of 94°C for 15 minutes. PCR reactions were purified using columns and then used as templates for sequencing reactions using Big Dye (ABI). Sequencing was performed in both directions. Samples identified with mutations in both sequencing directions were replicated at least twice. For samples with mutations, DNA was sequenced from the adjacent normal tissue, to determine whether the mutations were somatically acquired.

Plasmids

[0146] A plasmid with the entire *GNAIL* coding region containing the Q209L variant was obtained from UMR cDNA Resource Center. The wild-type counterpart was generated by site-specific mutagenesis of codon 209. The coding regions of both constructs were epitope-tagged with an N-terminal Myc-tag and cloned into Wzl retroviral expression vectors. The *GNALQ* and *GNAIL* constructs used in Western blots were obtained from the Missouri S&T cDNA resource center. They are internally Glu-Glu tagged, with altered residues at position 171-176 from AYLPTQ (G α q) or GYLPTQ (G α 11) to EYMPTE6, and were cloned into Wzl-retrovirus vectors. All constructs were sequenced for confirmation. All constructs were sequenced for confirmation.

Transduction

[0147] Viral supernatants were generated using appropriate packaging cell lines and transfected with 10 μ g plasmid and lipofectamine 2000. Media were changed 16 hr after transfection and the virus was harvested 40 to 56 hr later. Melan-a cells were transduced and positively selected with blasticidin.

Western blot analysis

[0148] Cells were washed twice with ice-cold PBS and lysed in 50mM Tris-HCl pH7.8, 1% NP-40, 10% glycerol, 150mM NaCl, 1% sodium deoxycholate, 1% sodium dodecyl sulphate, supplemented with protease inhibitor, phosphatase inhibitor and EDTA (Pierce Biotechnologies). The protein content of the lysates was determined by the BCA Protein Assay Reagent (Pierce Biotechnologies). 15µg of protein were separated by SDS-PAGE and transferred to Immobilon-P membrane (Millipore). Primary antibodies were pERK (E-4, Santa Cruz Biotechnology) and β-actin (Sigma). Secondary antibodies were labeled with horseradish peroxidase.

10 *Cell culture*

[0149] Melan-a cells were cultured in glutamine-containing RPMI media supplemented with 10% FCS and 200 nM TPA.

Tumorigenicity evaluation

[0150] Melan-a cells were transduced with *GN11* expressoin constructs or a β-galactosidase control vector, and selected with 5µg/ml blasticidin over two weeks. These cells were then cultured, trypsinized, washed in PBS, and re-suspended in DMEM at ten million cells per milliliter. Four month old female NOD/SCID/interleukin 2 receptor [IL2r] γ^{null} mice were injected with one million cells subcutaneously in both flanks. Mice were palpated weekly for the development of tumors and tumor sizes were determined using calipers.

Results

[0151] We obtained sequencing data from exons 5 of *GN11* and *GNAQ* for 713 cases (Table 1). Mutations were identified in *GN11* exon 5, all at glutamine 209, which would result in a substitution to leucine in most (97.3%) of the cases (*GNA11*^{Q209L}) with 2.7% of the cases with a mutation resulting in a proline substitution (*GNA11*^{Q209P}). Mutations affecting codon 209 in *GN11* were CAG>CTG (94.5%), CAG>CCG (2.7%), CAG>CTA (1.4%), and CAG>CTT (1.4%). In all cases, those samples that had a *GN11* mutation did not have a *GNAQ* mutation. The mutation frequency of *GN11* increased progressively from blue nevi (7%), to primary uveal melanomas (32%), to uveal melanoma metastases (57%), a pattern inverse to the distribution of *GNAQ* mutations, which were most common in blue nevi and least common in metastases (p=<0.001). *GN11* mutations were restricted to neoplastic

tissue and not found in DNA extracted from surrounding non-lesional tissue, indicating that the mutations are somatic.

[0152] Because the segmental melanocytoses, Nevus of Ito and the Nevus of Ota, are sparsely cellular, it is possible that mutations were missed in some samples.

- 5 [0153] For the 118 cases of uveal melanoma in which it was possible to determine the location of the primary tumor, lesions arising in the ciliochoroidal regions had a higher frequency of *GNAI1* mutations (Figure 2). Mutations of *GNAQ* and *GNAI1* were found more commonly in primary tumors with epithelioid cells or a mixture of epithelioid and spindled cells when compared to samples comprises of only spindled cells, but this was not statistically significant. Using Comparative Genomic Hybridization (CGH), we attempted to determine whether prognostically relevant chromosomal aberrations (*e.g.*, White *et al.*, *Cancer* 83:354-359, 1998) were present in 36 primary uveal melanoms and observed no association between their presence and mutation status of *GNAQ* and *GNAI1*. However, this analysis was very limited, as none of the 35 samples was without a mutation for comparison.
- 10
- 15 [0154] Examination of overall survival and disease-free survival for the 81 cases for which we had the requisite data did not reveal a significant difference between those with tumors bearing a *GNAQ* mutation and those with tumors bearing a *GNAI1* mutations. A trend towards longer survival in those tumor carrying a *GNAI1* mutation, when compared with those tumors carrying a *GNAQ* mutation, or no *GNAQ* or *GNAI1* mutations, was observed, however.
- 20

Functional validation of *GNAI1*

- [0155] To validate *GNAI1*^{Q209L} as an oncogene *in vivo*, immortalized mouse melanocytes (melan-a cells) were transduced with *GNAI1*^{Q209L} and monitored their ability to form tumors in immunocompromised mice compared with similar melanocytes transduced with β -galactosidase as negative controls). Each of six injection sites for *GNAI1*^{Q209L} melanocytes developed rapidly growing tumors. No tumors were observed at the injection sites of control melanocytes (n=6). In contrast to a comparable tumorigenicity experiment performed with *GNAQ*^{Q209L}-transduced melanocytes (Van Raamsdonk *et al.*, *Nature* 457:599-602, 2009), all three mice injected with *GNAI1*^{Q209L} transduced melan-a cells developed metastases, three in the lung and one in the liver.
- 25
- 30

[0156] Western blot analyses of *GNAI1*^{Q209L}-transduced melanocytes showed MAP-kinase activation, as measured by increased levels of phosphorylated ERK. In prior studies (e.g., Van Raamsdonk *et al.*, *Nature* 457:599-602, 2009), *GNAQ*^{Q209L} mutant cell lines were highly sensitive to MEK-inhibitors. Of the 13 uveal melanoma cell lines available in our laboratory, none carried a *GNAI1* mutation, and so we were unable to test whether the *GNAI1*^{Q209L} mutant cells are similarly sensitive to MEK-inhibitors. However, the close functional relationship between Gα_q and Gα₁₁ together with the data that we describe here, indicates that the MAP-kinase activation is effected by *GNAI1*^{Q209} mutations in uveal melanoma cells and can be countered with MEK-inhibitors. Five of these thirteen cell lines carried the *GNAQ*^{Q209} mutation, suggesting that *GNAI1* mutations compromise, to a greater extent than *GNAQ*^{Q209} mutations, growth in culture.

Discussion

[0157] These data identified *GNAI1* as an oncogene frequently mutated in uveal melanoma. In our sample set, about 83% of uveal melanomas have a mutation in either *GNAQ* or *GNAI1*, suggesting that activation of the Gα_{q/11} pathway is the predominant route to the development of uveal melanoma. *GNAQ* and *GNAI1* share overlapping functions in melanocytes (Van Raamsdonk, et al., *Nat Genet* 36:961-8, 2004) and both activate the MAP kinase pathway when constitutively active. While Gα_q and Gα₁₁ have amino acid sequences that are 90% homologous, there appear to be differences in their role in melanocytic neoplasia.

[0158] *GNAI1* mutations may have a more potent effect on melanocytes than mutations in *GNAQ*. In the studies described in this example, *GNAI1* mutations were rare in blue nevi, which are benign neoplasms. There were significantly more *GNAI1*^{Q209} mutations than *GNAQ*^{Q209} mutations in uveal melanoma metastases. Furthermore, *GNAI1* mutations were more common in locally advanced primary tumors and primaries originating from the ciliochoroidal regions, a prognostically adverse feature (Abramson *et al.*, In Kufe *et al.*, eds, *Cancer Medicine, Neoplasms of the Eye, Adult Ophthalmic Oncology: Ocular Diseases*: BC Decker, 2003). Finally, the mouse *Gnai1*^{Dsk7} mutation is more potent than *Gnaq*^{Dsk1} at rescuing melanocyte proliferation/survival impaired by heterozygous mutations in *Kit*, *Pax3* and *endothelin B* (Van Raamsdonk *et al.*, *Nat Genet* 2004;36:961-968, 2004). However, as the mutations found in mice occur at different residues in *GNAI1* and *GNAQ* (I63V and

V179M, respectively), it is possible that the difference is a functional consequence of the mutations, themselves, rather than a difference in function between *GNAI1* and *GNAQ*.

[0159] While patient survival did not differ significantly between *GNAQ* and *GNAI1*-mutant cases in the study described in this example, the number of patients available at the time of the analysis may have been too small to detect such a difference. In addition, the analysis herein used enucleation specimens, which could have introduced a bias; tissue for mutation analysis is not routinely available from samples that do not undergo enucleation surgery. The samples that we analyzed in this example were also typically from larger tumors, which may have obscured association between *GNAQ* or *GNAI1* mutations and prognosis in the analysis in the present example.

[0160] In a recent study of *GNAQ* and *GNAI1* in 922 human neoplasms of various histopathologies, the only mutations found were in *GNAQ* in blue nevi (Lamba *et al.*, *PLoS One* 4:e6833, 2009). Uveal melanoma was not included, however. While not exhaustive, these results and the data in the present study indicate that *GNAQ* and *GNAI1* mutations are enriched in the melanocytic lineage. Another study showed that *GNAQ* mutations were present in 37% of melanocytic neoplasms of the central nervous system (Kusters-Vandeveld, *et al. Acta Neuropathol* 2009). *GNAI1* mutations are also expected to be found in this category of melanocytic tumors.

[0161] Not to be bound by theory, the peculiar association of mutations in melanocytic neoplasms of the dermis, uvea and CNS may indicate different cells of origin. A developmental pathway has been described (Adameyko, *et al.*, *Cell* 139:366-79, 2009) in which a subset of melanocytes derives from a precursor shared with Schwann cells. It is possible that $G\alpha_{q/11}$ signaling may have an important role in melanocytes arising through this developmental mechanism. If so, the timing when mutations arise may determine the localization and extent of the neoplasm. Lesions confined to the CNS would arise from $G\alpha_{q/11}$ mutations in precursors before onset of migration, segmental lesions such as Nevus of Ota would result from mutations in a precursor early during migration, while mutations arising later along the migratory pathway would result in solitary lesions involving the skin or choroid.

[0162] In summary, the results presented in this example indicated that a large majority of uveal melanomas and blue nevi harbor mutations in either *GNAQ* or *GNAI1*. The functional similarities between $G\alpha_q$ and $G\alpha_{11}$ thus form a basis to develop mechanism-based therapies

for melanomas with these specific mutations. Such an intervention could benefit up to 83% of metastatic uveal melanoma cases, a particularly devastating form of melanoma for which no effective treatment is currently available.

- 5 **[0163]** All publications, patents, accession numbers, and patent applications cited in this specification are herein incorporated by reference as if each individual publication or patent application were specifically and individually indicated to be incorporated by reference.

- 10 **[0164]** Although the foregoing invention has been described in some detail by way of illustration and example for purposes of clarity of understanding, it will be readily apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art in light of the teachings of this invention that certain changes and modifications may be made thereto without departing from the spirit or scope of the appended claims.

Table 1. Mutation frequency of Q209 in exons 5 of *GNAQ* and *GNAI1* in melanocytic neoplasms. CSD, melanoma located on chronically sun damaged skin; NonCSD, melanomas on skin without microscopic signs of chronic sun-induced damage .

Categories	Subtypes	GNA11		GNAQ		Neither		Grand Total
Blue nevi	Amelanotic blue nevus	0	0.0%	7	70.0%	3	30.0%	10
	Cellular blue nevus	3	8.3%	26	72.2%	7	19.4%	36
	Common blue nevus	4	6.7%	39	65.0%	17	28.3%	60
	Nevus of Ito	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	7	100.0%	7
	Nevus of Ota	1	5.0%	2	10.0%	17	85.0%	20
	Malignant blue nevus	1	16.7%	2	33.3%	3	50.0%	6
Total		9	6.5%	76	54.7%	54	38.8%	139
Ocular melanocytic tumors	Conjunctival melanoma	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	9	100.0%	9
	Uveal melanoma, primary	52	31.9%	73	44.8%	38	23.3%	163
	Uveal melanoma, metastasis	13	56.5%	5	21.7%	5	21.7%	23
	Uveal nevus	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1
Total		65	33.2%	79	40.3%	52	26.5%	196
Other nevi	Common nevus	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	22	100.0%	22
	Congenital nevus	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	17	100.0%	17
	Deep penetrating nevus	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	27	100.0%	27
	Spitz nevus	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	19	100.0%	19
	Atypical Spitz tumor	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	20	100.0%	20
Total		0	0.0%	0	0.0%	105	100.0%	105
Extra-ocular melanomas	Acral	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	47	100.0%	47
	CSD	0	0.0%	1	1.4%	73	98.6%	74
	Mucosal	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	62	100.0%	62
	NonCSD	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	90	100.0%	90
Total		0	0.0%	1	0.4%	272	99.6%	273
Grand Total								713

Illustrative *GNA11* cDNA and protein sequences:**SEQ ID NO:1 Accession Number NM_002067 GNA11, mRNA, CDS243..1322**

1 gctgcggcgg cggcgcgggc tgagtgcggc cgcgcgggag tccgcggctg gcgcggcccc
 61 agcggggacc cggcgggctc ccaggcggcg gccgaggcgg ggcgggcccg cccggggccg
 5 121 agggccgggtg gccgaggccg gagggcccg cgcggcggcg gccgaggcgg ctccggccag
 181 ggccggggccg ggggcccggg ggcggcggcg ggcaggcggc cgcgtcggcc ggggcccggg
 241 cgatgactct ggagtccatg atggcgtgtt gcctgagcga tgaggtgaag gagtccaagc
 301 ggatcaacgc cgagatcgag aagcagctgc ggcgggacaa gcgcgacgcc cggcgcgagc
 361 tcaagctgct gctgctcggc acgggcgaga gcgggaagag cacgttcac cagcagatgc
 10 421 gcatcatcca cggcgccggc tactcggagg aggacaagcg cggcttcacc aagctcgtct
 481 accagaacat cttcaccgcc atgcaggcca tgatccgggc catggagacg ctcaagatcc
 541 tctacaagta cgagcagaac aaggccaatg cgctcctgat ccgggagggtg gacgtggaga
 601 aggtgaccac cttcgagcat cagtacgtca gtgccatcaa gaccctgtgg gaggaccgg
 661 gcatccagga atgctacgac cgcaggcgcg agtaccagct ctccgactct gccaagtact
 15 721 aacctgaccga cgttgaccgc atcgccacct tgggctacct gccacccag caggacgtgc
 781 tgcgggtccg cgtgcccacc accggcatca tcgagtacct ttccgacctg gagaacatca
 841 tcttcgggat ggtggatgtg gggggccagc ggtcggagcg gaggaagtgg atccactgct
 901 ttgagaacgt gacatccatc atgtttctcg tcgccctcag cgaatacgac caagtccctg
 961 tggagtcgga caacgagaac cggatggagg agagcaaagc cctgttccgg accatcatca
 20 1021 cctacccctg gttccagaac tcctccgtca tcctcttcct caacaagaag gacctgctgg
 1081 aggacaagat cctgtactcg cacctgggtg actacttccc cgagttcgat ggtccccagc
 1141 gggacgcccga ggcggcgcgg gagttcatcc tgaagatgtt cgtggacctg aaccccgaca
 1201 gcgacaagat catctactca cacttcacgt gtgccaccga cacggagaac atccgcttcg
 1261 tgttcgcggc cgtgaaggac accatcctgc agctcaacct caaggagtac aacctggtct
 25 1321 gagcgcgccg gcccgaggag acgggatgga gacacggggc aggaccttcc ttccacggag
 1381 cctgcggctg ccgggcgggt ggcgctgccg agtccgggcc ggggcctctg cccgcgggag
 1441 gagatTTTTT tttttcatat ttttaacaaa tggTTTTT ttcacagtta tcaggggatg
 1501 tacatctctc cctccgtaca cttcgcgcac cttctcacct tttgtcaacg gcaaaggcag
 1561 cctTTTTTctg gccttgactt atggctcgct tttttctaaa aaaaaaaaaa aaaaa
 30

SEQ ID NO:2 GNA11 Protein Sequence**Accession Numbers: UniProtKB P29992-1; NP_002058**

1 MTLESMMACC LSDEVKESKR INAEIEKQLR RDKRDARREL KLLLLGTGES GKSTFIKQMR
 35 61 IIHGAGYSEE DKRGFTKL VY QNIFTAMQAM IRAMETLKIL YKYEQNKANA LLIREVDVEK
 121 VTTFEHQYVS AIKTLWEDPG IQECYDRRRE YQLSDSAKY LTDDVDRIATL GYLPTQQDVL
 181 RVRVPTTGII EYPFDLENII FRMVDVGGQR SERRKWIHCF ENVTSIMFLV ALSEYDQVLV
 241 ESDNENRMEE SKALFRITIIT YPWFQNSSVI LFLNKKDLLE DKILYSHLVD YFPEFDGPQR
 301 DAQAAREFIL KMFVDLNPDS DKIIYSHFTC ATDTENIRFV FAAVKDTILQ LNLKEYNLV

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1 1. A method of detecting a melanocytic neoplasm cell in a biological
2 sample from a patient, wherein the sample comprises melanocytic cells, the method
3 comprising:
4 detecting the presence or absence of an activating mutation in a *GNAT1* gene
5 in the biological sample, thereby detecting the presence of the melanocytic neoplasm cell in
6 the biological sample if the activation mutation is present.
- 1 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the melanocytic neoplasm cell is a
2 uveal melanoma cell.
- 1 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the melanocytic neoplasm cell is a
2 blue nevus cell.
- 1 4. The method of any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the sequence
2 mutation is at a codon encoding Gln 209 of *GNAT1*.
- 1 5. The method of claim 4, wherein the mutation is a Q209L or Q209P
2 substitution.
- 1 6. The method any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the detecting step
2 comprises detecting the presence or absence of the mutation in a nucleic acid sample from the
3 biological sample.
- 1 7. The method of claim 6, wherein the detecting step comprises an
2 amplification reaction.
- 1 8. The method of claim 6 or claim 7, comprising determining the
2 sequence of the mutated region of the *GNAT1* gene.
- 1 9. The method of claim 6 or claim 7, wherein the detecting step
2 comprises contacting the nucleic acid sample with a probe that selectively hybridizes to the
3 *GNAT1* gene, and detecting the presence of hybridized probe, thereby detecting the sequence
4 mutation.
- 1 10. The method any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the detecting step
2 comprises detecting the mutation in a protein encoded by the gene.

- 1 11. The method of any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein the biological
2 sample is an eye sample or a skin sample.
- 1 12 The method of any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein the biological
2 sample is from lymph node, lung, liver, adrenal gland, soft tissue, or bone.
- 1 13. The method of any one of claims 1 to 12, wherein biological sample is
2 from a patient that has been diagnosed with melanoma.
- 1 14. The method of claim 13, wherein the melanoma arose from the uvea.
- 1 15. The method of claim 13, wherein the melanoma arose from a blue
2 nevus.
- 1 16. The method of any one of the preceding claims, further comprising
2 detecting the presence or absence of an activating mutation in a *GNAQ* gene.
- 1 17. A method of monitoring progression of a melanoma in a patient
2 subject to a therapy, the method comprising detecting a change in the number of melanoma
3 cells having an activating mutation in a *GNAT1* gene in a biological sample from the patient,
4 wherein a change in the number of cells having the *GNAT1* mutation is indicative of the
5 response of the patient to the therapy.
- 1 18. The method of claim 17, wherein the biological sample is from eye or
2 skin.
- 1 19. The method of claim 17, wherein the biological sample is from blood,
2 lymph node, liver, lung, adrenal gland, or bone.
- 1 20. The method of any one of claims 17 to 19, wherein the melanoma is
2 uveal melanoma.
- 1 21. The method of any one of claims 17 to 19, wherein the melanoma is a
2 malignant blue nevus.
- 1 22. A method of inhibiting proliferation of melanoma cells that have an
2 activating mutation in *GNAT1*, the method comprising contacting a GNA11 antagonist with
3 melanoma cells that have an activating mutation in *GNAT1*.

- 1 23. The method of claim 22, wherein the GNA11 antagonist is a small
2 molecule.
- 1 24. The method of claim 22, wherein the GNA11 antagonist is a protein
2 kinase C inhibitor.
- 1 25. The method of claim 22, wherein the GNA11 antagonist is an inhibitor
2 of phospholipase C β .
- 1 26. The method of claim 22, wherein the GNA11 antagonist is an
2 antibody.
- 1 27. The method of claim 22, wherein the GNA11 antagonist is an siRNA.
- 1 28. The method of any one of claims 22 to 27, wherein the melanoma cells
2 are from a uveal melanoma.
- 1 29. The method of any one of claims 22 to 27, wherein the melanoma cells
2 arose from a blue nevus.
- 1 30. The method of any one of claims 22 to 27, wherein the activating
2 mutation is in a codon encoding Gln 209 of *GNAI1*.
- 1 31. A method of identifying a melanoma patient who is a candidate for
2 treatment with a *GNAI1* inhibitor, the method comprising detecting the presence or absence
3 of an activating mutation in a *GNAI1* gene in a biological sample from a melanoma present
4 in the patient,
5 wherein the presence of the mutation is indicative of a melanoma
6 patient who is a candidate for treatment with a *GNAI1* inhibitor,
- 1 32. The method of claim 31, wherein the mutation is in a codon encoding
2 Gln 209 of GNA11.
- 1 33. The method of claim 31 or 32, wherein the melanoma is uveal
2 melanoma.
- 1 34. The method of claim 31 or 32, wherein the melanoma is a malignant
2 blue nevus.

1 35. The method of any one of claims 31 to 34, wherein the detecting step
2 comprises detecting the mutation in a protein encoded by the gene.

1 36. The method of any one of claims 31 to 34, wherein the detecting step
2 comprises detecting the mutation in a *GNAT1* nucleic acid.

1 37. The method of any one of claims 31 to 36, further comprising
2 administering a *GNAT1* inhibitor to the patient.

1 38. A method of determining the risk of progression of a nevus to a
2 melanoma, the method comprising detecting the presence or absence of an activating
3 mutation in a *GNAT1* gene in a biological sample from the nevus,
4 wherein the presence of the mutation is indicative of increased risk of
5 progression of the nevus to melanoma.

1 39. The method of claim 38, wherein the mutation is a codon encoding Gln
2 209 of *GNAT1*.

1 40. The method of claim 38 or 39, wherein the nevus is a blue nevus.

1 41. The method of claim 38 or 39, wherein the nevus is a nevus of Ota.

1 42. The method of any one of claims 38 to 41, wherein the detecting step
2 comprises detecting the mutation in a protein encoded by the gene.

1 43. The method of any one of claims 38 to 41, wherein the detecting step
2 comprises detecting the mutation in a *GNAT1* nucleic acid.

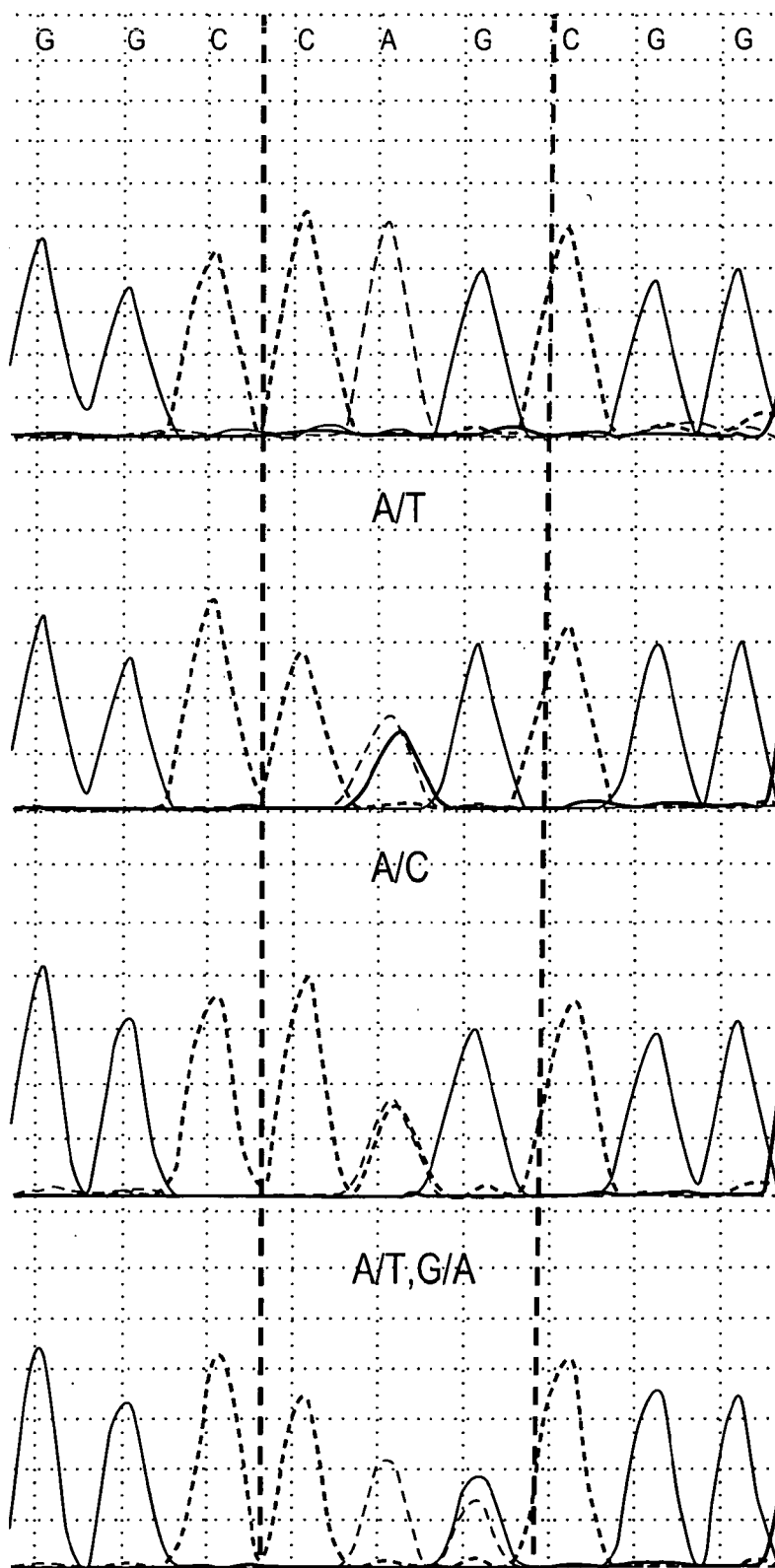
1 44. A method of determining the risk of metastasis of a melanoma, the
2 method comprising detecting the presence or absence of an activating mutation in a *GNAT1*
3 gene in a biological sample from a patient that has melanoma,
4 wherein the presence of the mutation is indicative of increased risk of
5 metastasis of the melanoma.

1 45. The method of claim 44, wherein the melanoma is uveal melanoma.

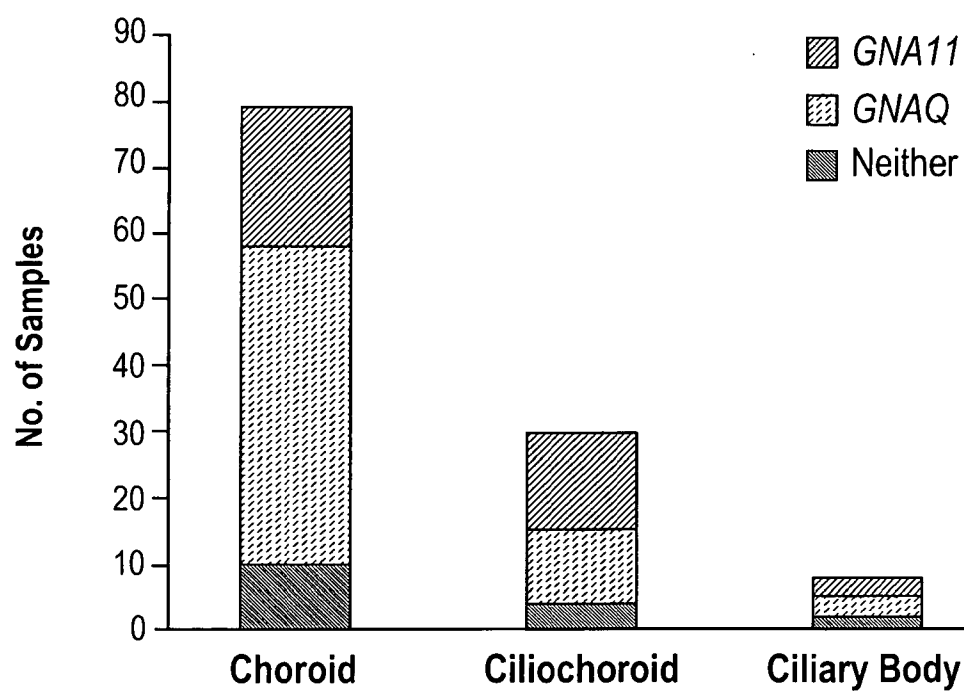
1 46. The method of claim 44, wherein the melanoma is a malignant blue
2 nevi.

- 1 47. The method of any one of claims 44 to 46, wherein the mutation is in a
2 codon encoding Gln 209 of GNA11.

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**FIG. 1**

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**FIG. 2**

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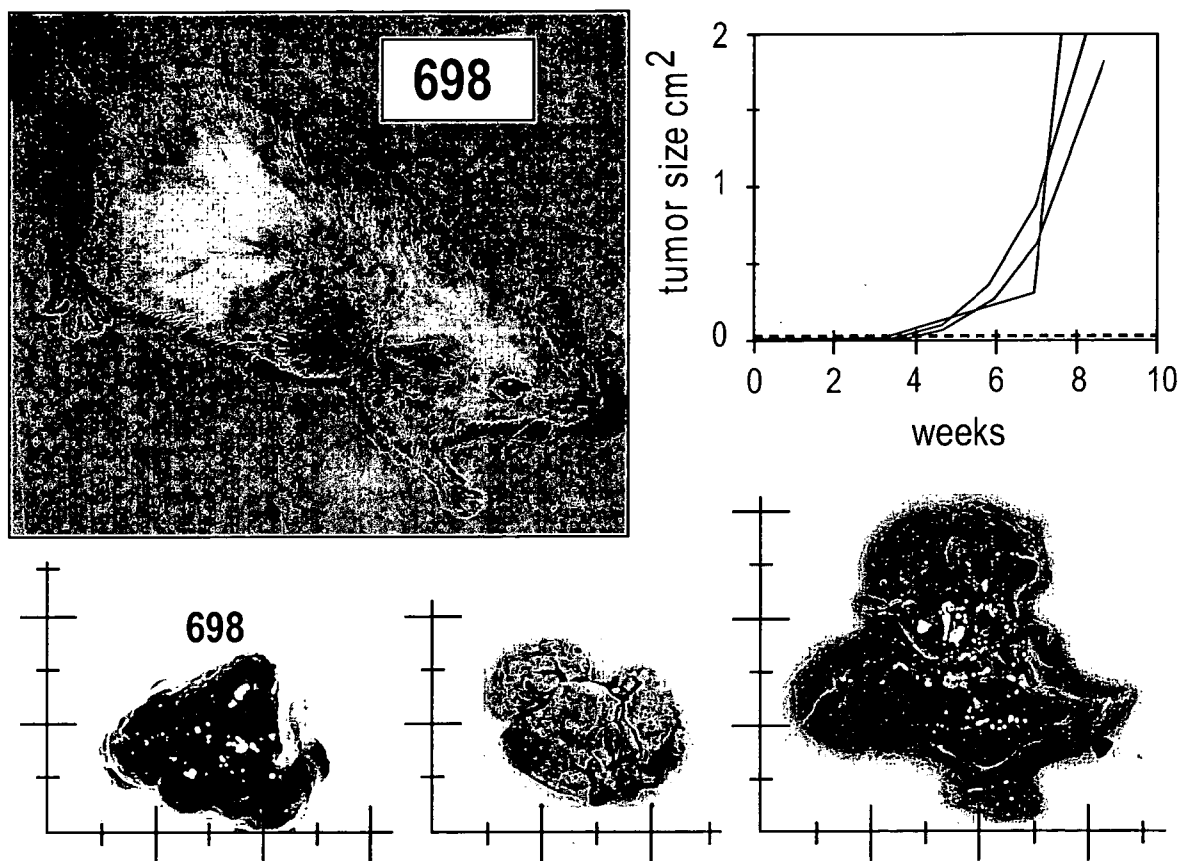
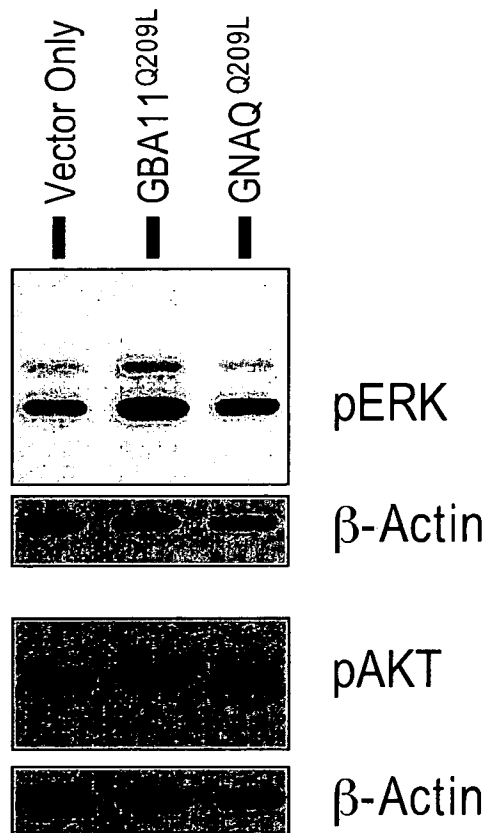


FIG. 3

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**FIG. 4**

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/US2010/054843

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. C12Q1/68

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

C12Q

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data, MEDLINE, BIOSIS

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



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Date of the actual completion of the international search

18 March 2011

Date of mailing of the international search report

29/03/2011

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2010/054843

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Information on patent family members

International application No

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