



Original Research

A bioinformatics approach for identification of miR-100 targets implicated in breast cancer

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Abstract: MicroRNAs (miRNAs) are small endogenous non-coding RNAs with principal roles in regulation of protein expression via translation repression and mRNA degradation. Based on these roles they are implicated in tumorigenesis processes as well. Among them is miR-100 which can exert both tumor suppressor and oncogenic functions in various cancer types. In breast cancer, it has been shown to affect apoptosis, epithelial-mesenchymal transition as well as tumor-related signaling pathways. In the present study, we introduce a novel approach for identification of miR-100 target genes which are possibly implicated in breast cancer pathogenesis. We applied 14 online tools for prediction of miR-100 target genes and used gene expression data produced by DNA microarray technology. By combining these two sets of data we proposed a list of miR-100 target genes with possible involvement in breast cancer. Considering the role of miR-100 as a context-dependent chief regulator of the cancer-related signaling pathways and a potential target for therapeutic modalities, identification of its targets would pave the way for designing new approaches for cancer treatment or sensitization of cancer cells to standard treatments.

Key words: miR-100, Target prediction; Bioinformatics; Microarray; Breast cancer.

Introduction

MicroRNAs (miRNAs) are small endogenous non-coding RNAs with fundamental roles in regulation of protein expression which is exerted via translation repression and mRNA degradation. The function of miRNAs in gene expression regulation has been documented in nearly all biological pathways. Consequently, aberrant expressions of miRNAs are implicated in many human disorders including cancer. Approximately half of miRNA genes are located in tumor-associated genomic regions which implies their participation in carcinogenesis (1). In addition, bioinformatics predictions of miRNA target genes have shown that nearly one third of all human protein-coding genes are supposed to be regulated by miRNAs. Multiple of these protein-coding genes participate in tumorigenesis (2). More specifically, abnormal miRNAs expression profile has been shown in every aspect of cancer development including cancer initiation and progression as well as tumor-microenvironment interactions (3). miRNAs can be classified according to their function in tumorigenesis process into two groups including onco-miRs which are up-regulated in cancers and act as oncogenes and tumor suppressor miRNAs (ts-miRs) which are down-regulated in tumors (4). Among miRNAs whose expression has been assessed in various tumors is microRNA-100 (miR-100). miR-100 is an evolutionary conserved member of miR-99 family (5). The ability of miR-100 to modulate expression of many important molecules in tumorigenesis process has potentiate it to function as both a tumor promoter and a tumor suppressor (6). In breast cancer

cell lines, miR-100 has been demonstrated as an epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT) inducer. Despite this function, it prevents the tumorigenicity, motility and invasiveness of mammary tumor cells. Its down-regulation has been detected in human breast cancer as a result of hypermethylation of its host gene *MIR100HG* (7). In addition, down-regulation of miR-100 in breast cancer cells results in over-expression of the proliferation- and survival-promoting oncogene insulin-like growth factor (IGF) 2 as well as other proteins of the IGF/mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) signaling cascade (8). However, a more recent study has shown the role of miR-100 in breast cancer tumorigenesis which is exerted through preventing the apoptotic activity of SK-BR-3 cells. Nevertheless, miR-100 has the opposite effect in regulating other types of breast cancer cells. The same study has assessed the effects of miR-100-mediated apoptosis regulation on breast cancer tumorigenesis *in vivo* and has shown significant decrease in tumor development in mice treated with anti-miRNA-100 oligonucleotide (AMO-miR-100). Consequently, miR-100 antagonism has been suggested as an inhibitory modality for the development of breast cancer (9). On the other hand, miR-100 has been shown to prevent maintenance and expansion of breast cancer stem cells in basal-like cancer via inhibition of Polo-like kinase1 (Plk1). Such action leads to differentiation of cancer stem cells changing a basal like phenotype into luminal phenotype which is responsive to hormonal therapy (10). Considering the distinctive role of miR-100 in breast cancer subtypes, in the present study we introduce a novel bioinformatics approach for identification

of miR-100 targets in each breast cancer subtype.

Materials and Methods

The bioinformatics pipeline employed in the current study is shown in Figure 1.

Bioinformatics analysis of miR-100 target genes

Fourteen online tools were applied for prediction of miR-100 target genes. TargetScan prediction is based on sequence complementarity to target sites with specific attention to perfect base-pairing in the seed region and sequence conservation (11). The miRBase tool considers sequence annotation such as genomic location, precursor sequences and literature citations (12). MiRmap combines thermodynamic, evolutionary, probabilistic and sequence-based characteristics of miRNAs to predict their targets (13). MiRWalk algorithm first examines perfect matches in the seed and then extends it till a mismatch is detected (14). DIANA-microT searches for 7-, 8- or 9-nucleotide long seed-complementaries, or 6-nt seeds with one G:U wobble and calculate the weighted quantity of conserved and non-conserved sites of a gene (14). PITA finds seed complementary of 6 to 8 nucleotides, permitting up to one G:U wobble in 7 and 8-mers and up to one mismatch in 8-mers (14). PACC-MIT-CDS identifies potential miRNA targets within coding sequences (CDS) by exploring conserved motifs that are complementary to the miRNA seed region and also overrepresented in comparison with a background model preserving both codon usage and amino acid sequence (15). Rna22 is another prediction tool which does not depend on cross-species conservation and first searches for putative miRNA binding sites in the sequence of interest, then detects the targeting miRNA (16). miRTarBase has gathered more than three hundred and sixty thousand miRNA-target interactions (MTIs) by manually searching relevant literature (17). The MIRZA-G uses evolutionary conservation in predicting canonical miRNA target sites and in addition, it predicts non-canonical miRNA target sites (18). MBSTAR uses a multiple instance learning approach for predicting specific functional binding sites in mRNA targets (19). miRDB is a miRNA target prediction and functional annotation tool in which miRNA functional annotations are demonstrated with a major emphasis on mature miRNAs, which are the functional carriers of miRNA-mediated gene expression regulation (20). The microRNA-NA.org predicts miRNA targets based on advancement of the miRanda algorithm and scores the targets for probability of mRNA down-regulation using mirSVR, a regression model that is trained on sequence and background characteristics of the predicted miRNA::mRNA duplex (21). Finally, the microRNA Data Integration Portal-mirDIP has been constructed through integration of prediction databases, comparison of predictions to in vitro data, and application of cross-database predictions to model the microRNA:transcript interactome (22). After application of all above mentioned tools we selected genes which have been predicted as miR-100 targets in at least two prediction tools.

Experimentally validated miR-100 target genes

Due to the pitfalls associated with the predictions

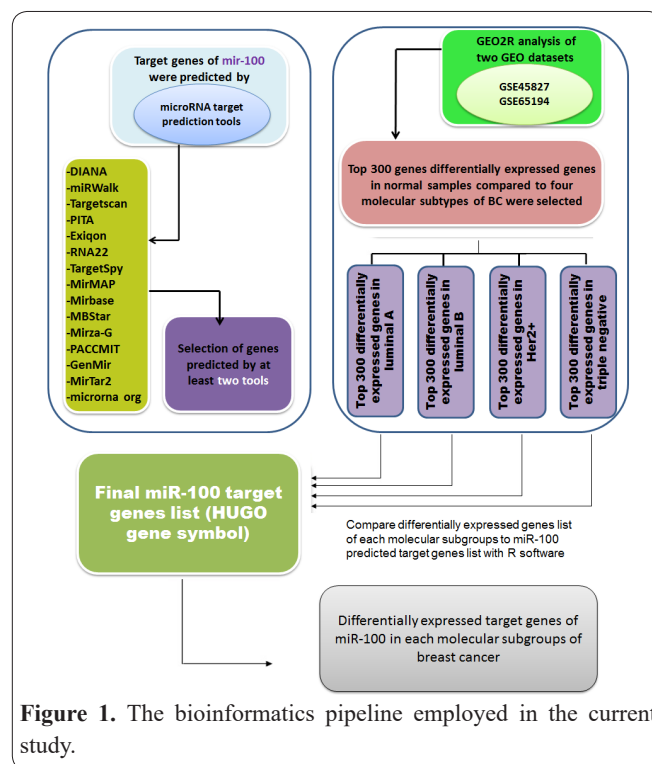


Figure 1. The bioinformatics pipeline employed in the current study.

of miRNA target sites with the computational algorithms (23), in order to find functionally relevant targets in breast cancer, we focused our search on researches which accomplished functional studies for identification of miR-100 targets.

Microarray data analysis

Using the Gene Expression Omnibus (GEO) repository at the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) archives (24), we got access to gene expression data produced by DNA microarray technology. By entering "breast cancer" and "transcriptome" key words and selection of "Expression profiling by array" as the filter and the minimum sample size of 100 for datasets, 10 datasets were retrieved. Two of them with similar array platforms (GPL570) and inclusion of four molecular subtypes of breast cancer (luminal A, luminal B, Her2+ and triple negative) have been selected for the current study (GSE45827, GSE65194). The pipeline used for selection of these datasets is shown in Figure 2.

Table 1 shows the summary of datasets used in the study.

Identification of differentially expressed genes in breast cancer subtypes

GEO2R web tool (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/info/geo2r.html>) was used for comparison of expression profile of each breast cancer subtype samples with normal samples in order to identify genes that are differentially expressed across samples. Based on Log₂-fold change between two experimental conditions (LogFC) and adjusted P values provided by the software, we selected 300 genes in each subtype with the most significant differential expression compared with normal samples.

Identification of miR-100 targets among differentially expressed genes in breast cancer subtypes

The R statistical program (25) was used for compa-

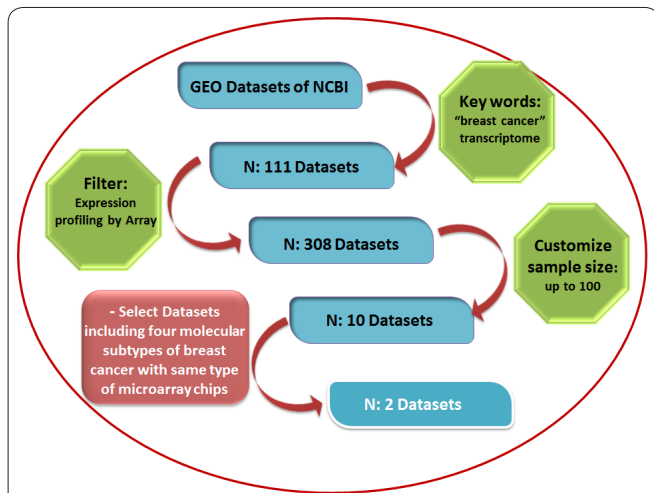


Figure 2. Flow chart of the protocol used for the search of breast cancer microarray datasets from the GEO database.

Table 1. Microarray datasets used in the current study.

GEO Number	Year	Samples	Chip type
GSE65194	2015	N:130	Affymetrix Human Genome U133 Plus 2.0 Array
		41 TNBC	
		30 Her2	
		30 Luminal B	
		29 Luminal A	
		11 normal breast tissue samples	
GSE45827	2016	N:155	Affymetrix Human Genome U133 Plus 2.0 Array
		11 normal	
		41 TN	
		30 Her2	
		29 Luminal A	
		30 Luminal B	

Table 2. Experimentally validated target genes of miR-100 in all cancers.

Target gene	Tools predicted the target gene	Disease	Reference
<i>PLK1</i>	Mirbase, EXIQONE Mirsearch	Lung adenocarcinoma	(27)
		Cervical cancer	
		Non-small cell lung cancer	
		Nasopharyngeal cancer	
<i>EGR2</i>	MBStar, EXIQONE Mirsearch	Oral squamous cell carcinoma	(28)
		<i>ID1</i>	Oral squamous cell carcinoma
<i>FGFR3</i>	>10 tools	Pancreatic cancer cells	(29)
<i>MMP13</i>	3 tools	Oral cancer cells	(28)
<i>ATM</i>	>10 tools	Glioma	(30)
<i>IGF1R</i>	>10 tools	Head and neck squamous cell carcinoma	(31, 32)
		Pancreatic cancer	
		Adrenocortical cancer	
<i>BMPR2</i>	5 tools	Adipose derived mesenchymal stem cells	(33)
<i>CTDSPL</i>	>10 tools	Acute myeloid leukemia	(34)
<i>HS3ST2</i>	>10 tools	Gastric cancer	(35)
<i>MTOR</i>	>10 tools	Bladder cancer,	(36)
		Acute myelocytic leukemia, ovarian cancer, endometrial	
<i>RPTOR</i>	3 tools	adrenocortical cancer	(28)
<i>FOXA1</i>	3 tools	Bladder cancer	(37)
<i>AGO2</i>	>10 tools	Prostate cancer	(38)
<i>NCOR2</i>	Microna.org, mirwalk	Glioblastoma	(39)
<i>Ciy61</i>	RNA22, Mirwalk	Osteosarcoma	(40)
<i>RAP1B</i>	5 tools	Colorectal cancer	(41)
<i>BAZ2A</i>	>10 tools	Prostate cancer	(42)
<i>THAP2</i>	>10 tools	Prostate cancer	(42)
<i>FKBP5</i>	6 tools	Acute lymphoblastic leukemia	(43)

risson and identification of miR-100 target genes which are differentially expressed in each cancer subtype compared with normal samples.

Enrichment annotation analysis and network construction

For the network construction and the enrichment annotation step, we used FunRich analysis tool version 3 (26) which provides a schematic clusterization of the gene list with demonstration of the related pathway.

Results

Experimentally validated miR-100 target genes

In order to assess the sensitivity of miRNA target prediction tools and validation of data provided by these tools we compared the list of experimentally validated miR-100 target genes to target genes predicted by the

Table 3. Experimentally validated target genes of miR-100 in breast cancer.

Target gene	Tools predicted the gene	Reference
<i>IGF2</i>	MirMAP, Mirwalk, PITA	(8)
<i>MTMR3</i>	>10 tools	(9)
<i>MTOR</i>	>10 tools	(44)
<i>SMARCA5</i>	>10 tools	(10)
<i>HOXA1</i>	>10 tools	(7)
<i>FZD8</i>	>10 tools	(45)

mentioned bioinformatics tools. Tables 2 and 3 show the experimentally validated miR-100 target genes in all cancer types and breast cancer as well as the number of bioinformatics tools predicted each gene respectively. All of genes demonstrated in Table 2 have been predicted by miRTarBase as a target of miR-100. However, among those demonstrated in Table 3, only *MTOR* has been strongly predicted by miRTarBase as a target of miR-100.

miR-100 target genes implicated in breast cancer

Based on the novel approach of combining microarray data analysis and bioinformatics prediction tools we identified miR-100 target genes which are differentially expressed in breast cancer tissues compared with normal tissues and are possibly implicated in breast cancer (Table 4).

Network construction

Both functional enrichment and interaction network analysis were performed using FunRich tool. The final datasets were analyzed against three different background databases namely FunRich, UniProt and Custom. Figure 3 shows the schematic interaction diagram. Interaction network provided by this tool demonstrates that miR-100 regulates numerous genes participating in apoptosis, DNA repair and cell cycle control in breast cancer. Bioinformatics tools have also shown similar expression pattern for these genes in breast cancer tissues which implies a similar regulatory process for them. In addition, several of these genes have important interactions with others which complicate the network of miR-100 targets. Consequently, miR-100 is anticipated to directly or indirectly control expression of numerous genes which highlights its role in the development of breast cancer.

Discussion

Breast cancer as the main cause of cancer death in women (46) has been accounted as an important area for identification of cancer biomarkers among both protein coding RNAs (47-49) and non-coding RNAs (50-53). miRNAs as a novel group of non-coding RNAs have also attained attention of researchers in the field of cancer biomarker discovery (6). miR-100 has been known as a significant player in the development of breast cancer. It has been shown to prevent the apoptotic activity of SK-BR-3 cells but induce apoptosis in other types of breast cancer cells (9). Another study has shown that the forced expression of this miRNA inhibits the replication capability of basal-like cancer stem cells (CSC) and alters an aggressive phenotype of cancer into a pheno-

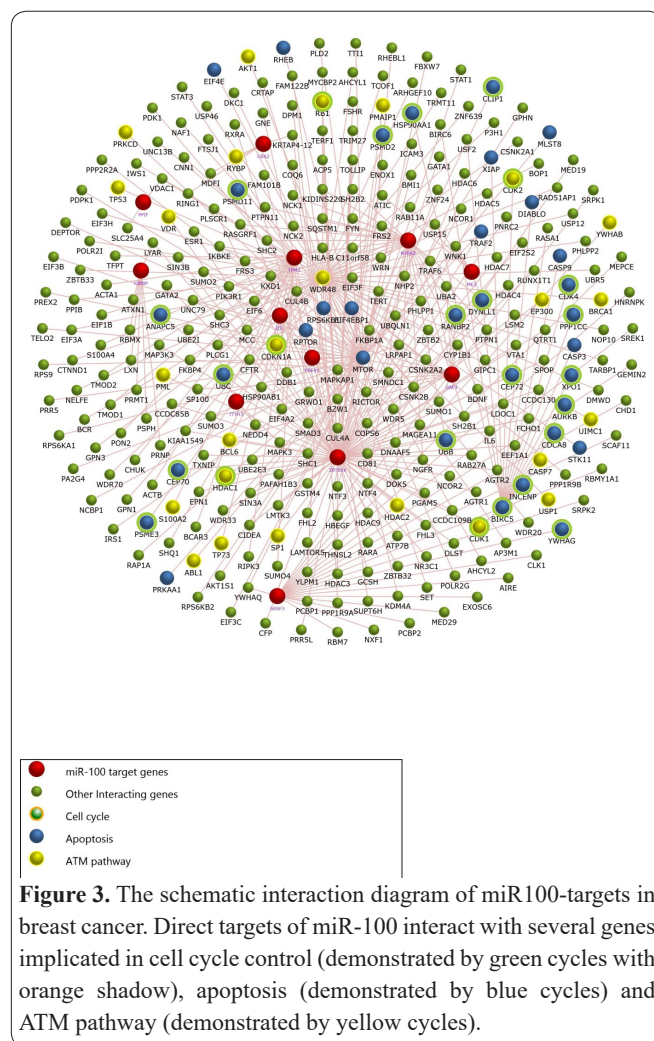


Figure 3. The schematic interaction diagram of miR100-targets in breast cancer. Direct targets of miR-100 interact with several genes implicated in cell cycle control (demonstrated by green circles with orange shadow), apoptosis (demonstrated by blue circles) and ATM pathway (demonstrated by yellow circles).

type with a better prognosis (10). The role of miR-100 in inhibition of CSC self-renewal and induction of their differentiation in breast cancer has been emphasized by others as well (54). In addition, miR-100 reduced expression has been detected in both human breast cancer primary tumors and cell lines while its forced expression has been shown to promote the effects of paclitaxel in MCF-7 cells (44).
 Considering the role of miRNAs in regulation of expression of multiple genes, different approaches have been evolved for prediction of their putative target. Experimental data provide valuable lines of evidence but they are time consuming. On the other hand, computational algorithms for the predictions of miRNA target sites have been associated with pitfalls (23). Consequently, in the present study we applied a novel approach for prediction of miR-100 targets in breast cancer based on both computational algorithms and experimental data available from previous microarray analyses. Although microarray studies are regarded inferior to RNA seq/ Western blot, the high throughput nature of this technique as well as availability of its results in public databases were the initiatives for selection of this technique in the current study. Furthermore, we constructed an interaction network demonstrating genes and signaling pathways controlled by miR-100 in breast cancer. Experimental techniques such as microarray are frequently used to measure gene expression following up-regulation or down-regulation of a certain miRNA. However, based on the regulatory effect of miRNA on both mRNA expression and protein expression, such approach

Table 4. miR-100 predicted target genes with differential expression in breast cancer subtypes based on the log₂-transformed fold change. The over- and under- expression are shown in green and red, respectively.

Genes	Luminal A	Luminal B	Her2+	TNBC	Function of the gene	Tools predicted the gene
<i>SAE1</i>	Green		Green		regulates protein structure and intracellular localization	>8 tools
<i>SRSF3</i>			Green		a member of the serine/arginine (SR)-rich family of pre-mRNA splicing factors	>5 tools
<i>HN1L</i>	Green				Jupiter microtubule associated homolog 2	>5 tools
<i>CYYR1</i>		Red			cysteine and tyrosine rich 1	>5 tools
<i>PPIF</i>				Green	part of the mitochondrial permeability transition pore	>5 tools
<i>DESI2</i>				Green	inhibits proliferation through S phase arrest and apoptosis	>5 tools
<i>TMEM30A</i>			Green		transmembrane protein 30A	>5 tools
<i>ME2</i>				Green	catalyzes the oxidative decarboxylation of malate to pyruvate	>5 tools
<i>NIPBL</i>	Green				role in developmental regulation	>3 tools
<i>SULF1</i>	Green	Green			an extracellular heparan sulfate endosulfatase	MBStar, MirMAP, PITA
<i>FOXA1</i>	Green				forkhead class of DNA-binding proteins	DIANA, MirMAP, PITA
<i>ARFGEF1</i>	Green		Green		intracellular vesicular trafficking	MBStar, MirMAP, PITA
<i>LARP4B</i>	Green				RNA metabolism and translation	Targetscan, MirMAP, PITA
<i>TPM3</i>	Green				actin-binding protein	Mirbase, PITA, MBStar
<i>GPRC5A</i>	Green				may play a role in epithelial cell differentiation	Targetscan, MirMAP
<i>FIGN</i>	Red		Red		microtubule severing factor	Targetscan, MirMAP
<i>PDE2A</i>	Red			Red	phosphodiesterase 2A	MirMAP, PITA
<i>MUC3A</i>	Red				epithelial glycoprotein	Targetscan, MirMAP
<i>NTRK2</i>		Red	Red		phosphorylates members of the MAPK pathway	MBStar, MirMAP, PITA
<i>DTL</i>			Green		E3 ubiquitin protein ligase homolog	microna org, MBStar, PACCMIT
<i>WDR48</i>	Green				interact with ubiquitin specific peptidase 1 (USP1)	microna org, DIANA, PACCMIT
<i>COG5</i>	Green				required for normal Golgi morphology and function	MBStar, MirMAP, PITA
<i>PREX1</i>	Green				activate RAC1 by exchanging bound GDP for free GTP	DIANA, MirMAP, PITA
<i>CELSR1</i>	Green				Positive Regulator of Endothelial Cell Migration and Angiogenesis.	MirMAP, PITA
<i>ZNF595</i>	Red				transcription factors that can regulate developmental and cellular processes	microna org, Mirbase, PITA
<i>GABRP</i>		Red			multisubunit receptor chloride channel that mediates the fastest inhibitory synaptic transmission	Mirbase, PITA, MBStar
<i>LGR6</i>		Red			glycoprotein hormone receptor that potentially functions as a tumor suppressor	MirMAP, PITA
<i>ATPIA2</i>		Red			responsible for maintaining the electrochemical gradients of Na and K ions across the plasma membrane	MirMAP, PITA
<i>BIRC5</i>				Green	inhibitor of apoptosis	Mirbase, PITA
<i>CBX2</i>				Green	initial evidence of an oncogenic role	Mirbase, PITA
<i>ZBTB16</i>				Red	involved in cell cycle progression	DIANA, PACCMIT
<i>CIRBP</i>				Red	inhibits DNA damage-induced apoptosis by regulating p53	Exiqone Mirsearch, Targetscan, MirMAP
<i>HSPA12B</i>				Red	involved in susceptibility to atherosclerosis	Targetscan, MirMAP, PITA
<i>TTYH3</i>			Green		function as chloride anion channels	MirMAP, PITA

would leave out targets which are regulated at the level of mRNA translation into protein (23). Multiple databases have been evolved with the purpose of deposition and sharing experimental data among them is the GEO DataSets which stores original submitter-supplied records (Series, Samples and Platforms) as well as curated DataSets. The latter produces the groundwork of GEO's advanced data presentation and analysis characteristics such as tools to detect differences in gene expression levels and cluster heatmaps. The second strategy for identification of miRNA targets has been provided by computational algorithms of miRNA target prediction. The most commonly applied algorithms are *ab initio* algorithms and machine learning approaches. In the former approach, the high number of false positives is the most important limitation while for the latter it is the reduced number of negative interactions with experimental support (23). In the present study, we combined bioinformatics prediction tools as well as GEO based differential expression analyses to find the most relevant miR-100 targets in breast cancer. The documentation of shared features for targets and specific sites with significant experimental validation is necessary to reveal the rules of miRNA–mRNA interactions (23). The result of the present study is of practical value in this regard. In addition, our dataset provides more miR-100 targets with possible implication in breast cancer compared with available experimentally validated targets in breast cancer. As the experimental validation of miRNA targets by available techniques such as western blotting or luciferase assay are relatively expensive and cumbersome, the proposed approach in the current study would be an effective way for suggestion of possible miRNA targets in distinctive contexts. In addition, due to complex miRNA–mRNA interactions, miRNA regulation should be considered as a complex network composed of genes targeted by many miRNAs and often having several sites for the same miRNA. The context-dependent manner of such network makes it challenging to rebuild reliable miRNA–mRNA interactions in experiments carried out *in vitro* (55). So, computational analyses are helpful in this regard. Considering the role of miR-100 as a context-dependent chief regulator of the cancer-related signaling pathways and a potential target for therapeutic modalities (8), identification of its targets would pave the way for designing new approaches for cancer treatment or sensitization of cancer cells to standard treatments.

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Conflict of interest

None

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