

Online Research @ Cardiff

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/103200/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Wonnacott, Alexa, Bowen, Timothy and Fraser, Donald 2017. MicroRNAs as biomarkers in chronic kidney disease. *Current Opinion in Nephrology and Hypertension* 26 (6) , pp. 460-466.
10.1097/MNH.0000000000000356 file

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/MNH.0000000000000356>
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/MNH.0000000000000356>>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies. See <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



Title

MicroRNAs as biomarkers in Chronic Kidney Disease

Wonnacott A¹, Bowen T¹, Fraser D¹.

¹University Hospital Wales, Cardiff University

Corresponding Author details

Professor Donald Fraser

Wales Kidney Research Unit,

School of Medicine

Cardiff University

Heath Park Campus

CF14 4XN

Tel: +442920 748446

Email: fraserdj@cardiff.ac.uk

Disclosure of funding: A Wonnacott is funded by a Wellcome Clinical Research Training Fellowship.

Abstract

Purpose of review: This review summarises recent data supporting the concept that urinary microRNAs are a useful new class of biomarker. They may improve capacity to stratify patients with CKD according to risk of progression, and may also inform about response to therapy.

Recent findings: MicroRNAs are present, stable and readily quantifiable in tissues and body fluids, including urine, and have widespread importance as regulators in the kidney. Urinary microRNAs are typically released from the nephron or downstream structures, and their abundance may reflect altered microRNA expression in the kidney, or release into the lumen by the cells comprising the different regions of the nephron. As a consequence, abundance of specific microRNAs in the urine may change in various pathological states. Large-scale studies are now needed, to test the capacity of specific microRNAs to inform about risk and response to therapy.

Summary: Urinary microRNAs appear useful sentinels for pathological processes occurring in the kidney and may enable a “personalised medicine” approach to the management and stratification of renal disease.

Keywords: microRNA, biomarker, urinary, kidney

Introduction

Biological markers of disease have been studied for millennia. Hippocrates, credited with conceiving that diseases had natural rather than supernatural causes, reflected in his writing on indirect measurements of health such as evaluation of the patient's breath or urine [1]. "Biomarker" is a more contemporary term, defined by a National Institutes of Health Working Group in 1998 as, "a characteristic that is objectively measured and evaluated as an indicator of normal biological processes, pathogenic processes, or pharmacologic responses to a therapeutic intervention". The requirement for objective measurement is key, since it allows comparison of values from different individuals or time points. Some commonly utilized clinical parameters can also be considered as biomarkers, for example blood pressure. Other biomarkers in routine use in the care of patients with Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) include measurements of excretory kidney function, most commonly in the form of serum creatinine concentration and extrapolated estimates of glomerular filtration rate (eGFR), and measurements of urinary protein excretion. Figure 1 depicts potential uses of biomarkers in the nephrology setting.

There are two key goals for existing and future biomarkers: firstly, to stratify patients according to risk of disease progression or complications (e.g. likely rate of decline in kidney function or risk of major adverse cardiovascular event) and, secondly, to identify surrogates that can be used to measure response to treatment (e.g. reduction in urinary protein excretion following pharmacological blockade of the renin-angiotensin system). In these terms, existing biomarkers

are useful but limited. Existing measures of excretory kidney function have well-documented inaccuracies and, by measuring loss of function retrospectively, do not provide data on the current activity of pathological processes in the kidney. Urinary protein excretion is a valuable marker of glomerular damage and informs about risk of progressive decline in excretory function, but is not specific for these.

Therefore, new biomarkers are needed. Biomarkers are most valuable when they correlate to a specific modifiable outcome, and are not simply a means of labeling patients with a disease. The discovery of the M-type phospholipase A2 receptor as a target antigen in idiopathic membranous GN is an excellent example [2]. In this case, advancement of molecular understanding in this disease has not only improved diagnostic distinction from secondary membranous GN, but also provides serological evidence of disease severity. This helps identify those with greatest potential to benefit from immunosuppression –people who would previously have first undergone a period of potentially deleterious “watchful waiting.”[3].

MicroRNAs also show promise as a new class of biomarker in CKD. MicroRNAs were first discovered as a mechanism of post-transcriptional regulation of gene expression in the nematode *C. elegans*, and have since been found to have widespread expression and importance. They are present in all human cells and are now linked to many physiological and pathological processes. A recent excellent review summarises our current knowledge about the role of microRNAs in renal diseases [4**].

MicroRNAs are stable in tissues, and resist degradation in pathological specimens. They can be measured by sensitive molecular techniques that employ nucleic acid amplification approaches, including Quantitative Reverse Transcription-quantitative Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-qPCR) and Next Generation Sequencing. More recently, these observations have been extended to body fluids, including urine. Figure 2 depicts the biogenesis of urinary miRs, which are stabilized either by association with extracellular vesicles (EVs) or specialised proteins [5, 6]. The significance of certain miRs being located in EVs versus protein-bound in urine is not yet known. The origin of urinary miRs is predominantly the nephron and downstream urinary tract [7], with limited reports of freely filtered miRs from the systemic circulation [8]. Crucially, urinary microRNA concentrations have been found to associate with important clinical characteristics, including histopathological diagnosis. Therefore, there is considerable interest in utilising these accessible, non-invasive and informative biomarkers in the context of renal disease.

Next, we consider microRNAs as biomarkers in specific types of kidney disease. To this end, we highlight selected examples of recent studies that have progressed our understanding of miRs in kidney disease and their future use as biomarkers, and we apologise to the many workers in this field whose research we have not been able to highlight due to lack of space.

Diabetic Nephropathy

Diabetic Nephropathy (DN) is the leading cause of end-stage renal failure worldwide. There is an unmet clinical need to improve the molecular understanding of this multifactorial disease, in order to establish new biomarkers and therapeutic targets alike. The consequent focus on DN has led to significant progress in elucidating the roles of miRs in molecular-cellular pathways that result in the histological hallmarks of DN. The complexity of their crosstalk is demonstrated, for example, by the apparently conflicting roles of miR-192 as both anti- and pro-fibrotic mediator in TGF β -induced fibrosis [9*]. Such detailed mechanistic miR analyses in models of renal pathology provide prime data for biomarker development, as discussed below.

Proteinuria is one of the most widely used biomarkers in CKD, with urinary albuminuria excretion widely adopted in the diagnosis and monitoring of DN. Albuminuria serves a useful purpose in assessing the integrity of the glomerular filtration barrier (GFB) and is easily detectable in urine using inexpensive bedside tests. However, albuminuria has shortcomings, including that it is detectable only once renal damage has ensued, and that it is not specific to DN [10]. Albuminuria is also a weak prognosticating tool in DN- the idiosyncrasies in its relationship to clinical progression are summarised in a recent article by Alicic et al. [11].

Urinary miRs represent biomarkers with potential not only to augment the utility of albuminuria as a surrogate marker of GFB integrity, but may also

predict the progression of DN *before* the onset of GFB breakdown. In a recent report, Mohan et al showed that urinary miR-451-5p was increased in the urinary exosomes of diabetic rats three weeks prior to significant albuminuria and three weeks before histological changes of glomerulosclerosis and tubulointerstitial fibrosis were noted. Interestingly, kidney tissue expression of miR-451-5p fell during the development of DN [12**]. Thus miRs secreted into the urine by the injured nephron in the early stages of DN may be used not simply to denote the current state of damage, but to differentiate those patients likely to progress to DN who would warrant specialist nephrology surveillance. This represents a novel means of stratifying an ever-growing population of diabetic patients.

There is currently an increase in studies utilising urinary miR “biomarker panels”- multiple miRs measured in combination, to optimize diagnostic sensitivity and specificity [13] as well as being more widely informative of disease processes [14]. In recent work, Kato et al describe a megacluster of nearly 40 microRNAs coordinately increased in the glomeruli of mouse models of DN and renal cells treated with diabetogenic stimuli. Using synthetic antisense oligonucleotides, these researchers were able to inhibit the host transcript and decrease expression of this entire cluster of miRNAs, resulting in attenuation of early DN features *in vitro* and in mice [15**]. These data emphasise the coordinate regulation of miR expression and downstream actions, and support the idea that use of multiple miR panels may be an effective means of monitoring a multifactorial condition like DN. However, for use as DN biomarkers, additional barriers to implementation in care pathways that might arise from the

development of more complex diagnostic assays and methods of data analysis for multiple miRs should be borne in mind.

Acute Kidney Injury (AKI)

Given the high prevalence of AKI in at-risk populations and its strong association with mortality, biomarkers capable of stratifying AKI risk in specific patient cohorts are highly desirable. Animal models representing a wide range of AKI aetiologies have recently been used to identify candidate biomarkers.

In a rat model of contrast-induced AKI (CI-AKI), increased miR-188, miR-30a and miR-30e were detected in plasma. Subsequent analysis replicated these findings in 71 patients who developed CI-AKI following coronary angiography or percutaneous coronary intervention. These miRNAs may therefore have potential utility as early CI-AKI biomarkers [17*].

AKI is a frequent complication of major cardiac surgery, and is associated with increased mortality and morbidity. In an analysis of 115 cardiac surgery patients, baseline miR-21 abundance was reduced in the 42 patients that suffered post-operative AKI. Furthermore, those with AKI stage 2/3 had significantly increased mortality over the 2.9 year follow up period. Therefore, Gaede et al propose serum miR-21 as a biomarker to stratify high-risk patients in this context [18*].

Another recent focus has been the use of mesenchymal stem cells in the repair of renal injury. Zhu and co-workers showed that bone marrow mesenchymal stem cell treatment alleviated renal injury in a cisplatin-induced rat model of AKI. Upregulated expression of miR-146b was seen in kidney tissues from AKI rats in comparison with control animals, and elevated serum miR-146b was detected in early disease. Cisplatin treatment upregulated miR-146b expression in rat kidney epithelial cell line NRK-52E. These cells were protected from drug-induced apoptosis by knockdown of this miR and consequent derepression of ErbB4 [18*]. MiR-146b may therefore have utility as an early AKI biomarker, and decreasing the abundance of this miR has possible therapeutic potential.

Glomerulonephritis

It has been suggested that the use of urinary miRs or other biomarkers as a “liquid biopsy” could remove the requirement for renal biopsy in patients with various forms of acute glomerulonephritis (GN). However, it will be hard for a biomarker or biomarker panel to replace the rich histopathological data derived from a tissue biopsy, and we instead envisage the role of miR biomarkers in this context as augmenting the use of invasive biopsy by a) identifying whom to biopsy and b) allowing regular surveillance of disease activity, including response to treatment. In these terms, miRs have recently been proposed as biomarkers in the diagnosis and monitoring of patients with Focal Segmental Glomerulosclerosis [19, 20], with miR-193a particularly well characterized as having a direct role in a mouse model of this disease [21].

In IgA Nephropathy (IgAN), Serino et al recently conducted a retrospective, international multicenter study to determine the sensitivity of miR biomarkers. Combined serum levels of miR-148b and let-7b (regulators of IgA1 O-glycosylation) differentiated between healthy blood donors and patients with IgAN. Moreover, the miR signature was specific for IgAN when tested against other glomerular diseases, and remained an independent predictor of IgAN irrespective of renal function or corticosteroid treatment [22*].

Renal Cell Carcinoma and other malignancies

The first definitive link between miRs and pathology was made by Calin et al in their work on Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia [23]. Since then, there has been a strong trajectory in oncology of discoveries about fundamental mechanisms feeding through into greater capacity to stratify patients using the associated biomarkers, including miRs. In Renal Cell Cancer (RCC) specific miRs have been found to function as oncogenes [24*] and tumour suppressor genes [25], and recent studies have linked miR expression and patient outcomes, including prediction of metastatic disease [26, 27], treatment response to sunitinib [28-30] and post-operative recurrence [31*].

In oncology patients, recent reports show that changes in miR expression can help define response to immunosuppressant treatment [32, 33]. Similar studies have not, to our knowledge, been done yet in patients with GN and other non-malignant renal diseases. We predict that such studies might demonstrate potential for miR quantification to predict response to immunosuppressant treatment, thus potentially minimising ineffective exposure of patients to classes

of drugs with a high inherent burden of treatment. Such tools may ultimately assist clinicians in assessing the risk-benefit ratio of immunosuppressant treatment in complex cases of, for example, lupus nephritis or vasculitis.

In patients with RCC, tissue expression of miR-193b at the time of nephrectomy has been found to predict eGFR at 12 months [34]. Most studies in this area have focused exclusively on tissue miR expression, but a recent study by Butz et al demonstrates the potential of urinary miRs in distinguishing between patients with clear cell renal carcinoma (ccRCC) and healthy participants, and a return of aberrant urinary miR expression to normal following successful surgical intervention [35].

Whilst providing promising leads in individualising the management of RCC, these small studies, with a predominant profiling/sequencing focus, lack the large-scale patient recruitment and longitudinal data to derive adequate power to validate these miRs as robust RCC biomarkers.

MicroRNAs as therapeutic targets

MicroRNAs have rapidly progressed to the point of being tested as therapeutic targets, with a number of phase I clinical trials underway, predominantly in oncology. The most well established miR-based therapeutic agent in non-malignant disease is miravirsen, a miR-122 antagonist that blocks the viral replication of the hepatitis C virus, currently in phase II clinical trials [36, 37]. In Nephrology, anti-miR-21 treatment is currently undergoing Phase II testing in patients with Alport syndrome (ClinicalTrials.gov identifier NCT02855268)

[38*], based upon the antifibrotic effects of anti-miR-21 seen in alpha3-chain Type IV collagen knockout mice [39]. MiR-21 has a well-characterised association with organ fibrosis via repression of PPAR α -regulated signaling pathways in Fatty Acid oxidation, mitochondrial biogenesis, and anti-inflammatory signaling [39]. It is noteworthy that the antifibrotic action of anti-miR-21 is not specific to Alport syndrome, but may be applicable to many CKD aetiologies. This emphasises the importance of understanding the processes that change as a consequence of altered miR expression, and not just seeing miRs as markers of disease. In this review, we have presented the advances in miR biomarkers by clinical diagnosis, but it may be equally appropriate to describe the role of miRs in precise pathophysiological pathways, many of which are common across several renal diagnoses that come under the umbrella of “CKD”-diseases dominated by proteinuria, immune complex deposition, tubular dysfunction etc.

Common to the above examples of clinical trials of anti-miRs is the prior elucidation of precisely what the miR is doing, through thorough molecular profiling of the affected pathway, known miR targets and the downstream effects of target repression. We propose that the same approach will be useful in investigating miRs as biomarkers. The rapid advancement of sequencing technology means that it is now possible to generate vast amounts of data from profiling even single cells- but taking this approach to selecting potential miR biomarkers in isolation, without also understanding their role in disease mechanisms, will be challenging to translate into a validated test suitable for use in clinical practice. Characterization of miR actions at the molecular-cellular

level, including identification of targets and downstream effects of target repression, is also important.

Conclusion

MicroRNAs have significant potential as biomarkers in renal disease. The challenge is to translate this to clinical use. In figure 3, we outline the steps required in the development of clinically usable miR biomarkers. Momentum is building in technological development [40, 41*], spurred on by the growing body of evidence that suggests miR biomarkers can play a part in the era of personalised medicine.

Key points

- miRs are released from the nephron/urinary tract and may be detected in patient urine at a time-point before significant renal damage has occurred
- We predict miR biomarkers will enable stratification of renal diseases in a purposeful way that is amenable to treatment modification (“personalised medicine” approach)
- Translation of miR biomarkers into clinical use is currently limited by miR detection methods and the need for large-scale validation studies
- Understanding the role of miRs in renal pathophysiology is a key component of their development as biomarkers, which in turn evolves into new therapeutic target opportunities

Acknowledgements: None

Financial support and sponsorship: A Wonnacott is funded by a Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Training Fellowship.

Conflicts of Interest: TB and DJF are co-applicants on patent application PCT/GB2017/050195: Kidney disease diagnostic.

References

1. Hippocrates. Hippocratic Writings (Classics) Edited by G. Lloyd. Penguin Classics; 1983.
2. Beck LH, Jr., Bonegio RG, Lambeau G, *et al.* M-type phospholipase A2 receptor as target antigen in idiopathic membranous nephropathy. *The New England journal of medicine.* 2009;361(1):11-21.
3. De Vriese AS, Glassock RJ, Nath KA, *et al.* A Proposal for a Serology-Based Approach to Membranous Nephropathy. *Journal of the American Society of Nephrology : JASN.* 2017;28(2):421-30.
4. **Bhatt K, Kato M, Natarajan R. Mini-review: emerging roles of microRNAs in the pathophysiology of renal diseases. *American journal of physiology Renal physiology.* 2016;310(2):F109-18. This review provides a comprehensive description of how microRNAs are processed and their mechanism of action, as well as their mechanistic roles in pathogenesis of DN, AKI and Polycystic Kidney Disease.
5. Hutvagner G, Simard MJ. Argonaute proteins: key players in RNA silencing. *Nature reviews Molecular cell biology.* 2008;9(1):22-32.

6. Vickers KC, Palmisano BT, Shoucri BM, *et al.* MicroRNAs are transported in plasma and delivered to recipient cells by high-density lipoproteins. *Nature cell biology.* 2011;13(4):423-33.
7. Miranda KC, Bond DT, McKee M, *et al.* Nucleic acids within urinary exosomes/microvesicles are potential biomarkers for renal disease. *Kidney International.* 2010;78(2):191-9.
8. Cheng Y, Wang X, Yang J, *et al.* A translational study of urine miRNAs in acute myocardial infarction. *Journal of molecular and cellular cardiology.* 2012;53(5):668-76.
9. *Simpson K, Wonnacott A, Fraser DJ, Bowen T. MicroRNAs in Diabetic Nephropathy: From Biomarkers to Therapy. *Current diabetes reports.* 2016;16(3):35. Our previous review provides greater detail into miRs involved in fibrogenesis; a common final pathway in many renal diseases (including DN) that may provide useful disease biomarkers as well as new therapeutic targets.
10. Al-Rubeaan K, Siddiqui K, Al-Ghonaim MA, *et al.* Assessment of the diagnostic value of different biomarkers in relation to various stages of diabetic nephropathy in type 2 diabetic patients. *Scientific Reports.* 2017;7(1):2684.
11. Alicic RZ, Rooney MT, Tuttle KR. Diabetic Kidney Disease: Challenges, Progress, and Possibilities. *Clinical journal of the American Society of Nephrology : CJASN.* 2017.

12. **Mohan A, Singh RS, Kumari M, *et al.* Urinary Exosomal microRNA-451-5p Is a Potential Early Biomarker of Diabetic Nephropathy in Rats. *PLoS ONE*. 2016;11(4). This study used a streptomycin-induced DN rat model to demonstrate an increase in urinary miR-451-5p that predates the development of albuminuria and tubulointerstitial fibrosis. In kidney tissue, miR-451-5p went down and the predicted miR targets (IL-6 and MMP-9) went up, suggesting a loss of repression in these fibrosis-inducing genes in DN.

13. Eissa S, Matboli M, Aboushahba R, *et al.* Urinary exosomal microRNA panel unravels novel biomarkers for diagnosis of type 2 diabetic kidney disease. *Journal of diabetes and its complications*. 2016;30(8):1585-92.

14. Keller T, Boeckel JN, Gross S, *et al.* Improved risk stratification in prevention by use of a panel of selected circulating microRNAs. *Scientific Reports*. 2017;7(1):4511. This study demonstrates how the use of multiple miRs in a "biomarker panel" may improve diagnostic/risk stratification accuracy when compared to component miRs in isolation.

15. **Kato M, Wang M, Chen Z, *et al.* An endoplasmic reticulum stress-regulated lncRNA hosting a microRNA megacluster induces early features of diabetic nephropathy. *Nature communications*. 2016;7:12864. This paper is the first to show that a single oligonucleotide (GapmeR) can target the host transcript of a miR megacluster of 40 miRs that are increased in diabetic kidney disease and ameliorate early histological hallmarks of DN in mice, and attenuates

response to fibrotic stimuli in human mesangial cells. This may be used as a biomarker signature of DN, and present a new therapeutic target.

16. *Sun SQ, Zhang T, Ding D, *et al.* Circulating MicroRNA-188, -30a, and -30e as Early Biomarkers for Contrast-Induced Acute Kidney Injury. *Journal of the American Heart Association.* 2016;5(8). 3 overexpressed miRs in a rat model of CI-AKI were validated in 71 patients with CI-AKI. Changes in the candidate miRs were detectable in patient serum at 4-6 hours post-contrast exposure, and may therefore be useful biomarkers of CI-AKI in clinical settings, such as outpatient radiological procedures.

17. *Gaede L, Liebetrau C, Blumenstein J, *et al.* Plasma microRNA-21 for the early prediction of acute kidney injury in patients undergoing major cardiac surgery. *Nephrology, dialysis, transplantation : official publication of the European Dialysis and Transplant Association - European Renal Association.* 2016;31(5):760-6. This paper provides an example of how miR biomarkers may be utilised as a predictive tool in assessing AKI risk, allowing optimisation of pre- and post-procedural management in high-risk cases.

18. *Zhu Y, Yu J, Yin L, *et al.* MicroRNA-146b, a Sensitive Indicator of Mesenchymal Stem Cell Repair of Acute Renal Injury. *Stem cells translational medicine.* 2016;5(10):1406-15. This animal study identifies miR-146b as a novel biomarker in identifying AKI, but also demonstrates a mechanism for its involvement in MSC-mediated AKI repair, thus demonstrating how detailed

knowledge of how a miR acts can allow the extrapolation of miR biomarker usage to potential therapeutic intervention.

19. Zhang W, Zhang C, Chen H, *et al.* Evaluation of microRNAs miR-196a, miR-30a-5P, and miR-490 as biomarkers of disease activity among patients with FSGS. *Clinical journal of the American Society of Nephrology : CJASN.* 2014;9(9):1545-52.

20. Leierer J, Mayer G, Kronbichler A. Primary focal segmental glomerulosclerosis: miRNAs and targeted therapies. *European journal of clinical investigation.* 2016;46(11):954-64.

21. Gebeshuber CA, Kornauth C, Dong L, *et al.* Focal segmental glomerulosclerosis is induced by microRNA-193a and its downregulation of WT1. *Nature medicine.* 2013;19(4):481-7.

22. *Serino G, Pesce F, Sallustio F, *et al.* In a retrospective international study, circulating miR-148b and let-7b were found to be serum markers for detecting primary IgA nephropathy. *Kidney International.* 2016;89(3):683-92.

This is an example of an international multi-centre study to achieve the necessary patient numbers required to assess diagnostic accuracy of miR biomarkers (using area under receiver operating characteristic curve) in rare GNs such as IgAN.

23. Calin GA, Dumitru CD, Shimizu M, *et al.* Frequent deletions and down-regulation of micro- RNA genes miR15 and miR16 at 13q14 in chronic lymphocytic leukemia. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America. 2002;99(24):15524-9.
24. *Li Y, Chen D, Jin LU, *et al.* Oncogenic microRNA-142-3p is associated with cellular migration, proliferation and apoptosis in renal cell carcinoma. Oncology letters. 2016;11(2):1235-41. This paper provides an example of how a single miR may have multiple oncogenic effects (shown in vitro here) and may therefore be useful as both a biomarker and therapeutic target in renal cell carcinoma.
25. Li Y, Li J, Sun X, *et al.* MicroRNA-27a functions as a tumor suppressor in renal cell carcinoma by targeting epidermal growth factor receptor. Oncology letters. 2016;11(6):4217-23.
26. Wotschovsky Z, Gummlich L, Liep J, *et al.* Integrated microRNA and mRNA Signature Associated with the Transition from the Locally Confined to the Metastasized Clear Cell Renal Cell Carcinoma Exemplified by miR-146-5p. PLoS ONE. 2016;11(2):e0148746.
27. Mlcochova H, Machackova T, Rabien A, *et al.* Epithelial-mesenchymal transition-associated microRNA/mRNA signature is linked to metastasis and prognosis in clear-cell renal cell carcinoma. Scientific Reports. 2016;6.

28. *Garcia-Donas J, Beuselinck B, Inglada-Perez L, *et al.* Deep sequencing reveals microRNAs predictive of antiangiogenic drug response. *JCI insight.* 2016;1(10):e86051. The first paper demonstrating the predictive value of miRs in determining drug response (Tyrosine Kinase inhibitors) in renal cell carcinoma, thus highlighting how miR biomarkers may be used to personalise patient management.
29. Yamaguchi N, Osaki M, Onuma K, Yumioka T, *et al.* Identification of MicroRNAs Involved in Resistance to Sunitinib in Renal Cell Carcinoma Cells. *Anticancer research.* 2017;37(6):2985-92.
30. Puente J, Laínez N, Dueñas M, *et al.* Novel potential predictive markers of sunitinib outcomes in long-term responders versus primary refractory patients with metastatic clear-cell renal cell carcinoma. *Oncotarget.* 2017;8(18):30410-21.
31. *Shu X, Hildebrandt MA, Gu J, *et al.* MicroRNA profiling in clear cell renal cell carcinoma tissues potentially links tumorigenesis and recurrence with obesity. *British journal of cancer.* 2017;116(1):77-84. This multi-phase study identified miRs associated with 3-fold greater risk of tumour recurrence, but also provides new insights into the mechanisms involved in the link between recurrence and obesity, therefore highlighting the importance of unraveling the role of miRs in pathological systems.

32. Liu Z, Yao L, Tan B, *et al.* Detection of microRNA-200b may predict the inhibitory effect of gefitinib on non-small cell lung cancer and its potential mechanism. *Oncology letters*. 2016;12(6):5349-55.
33. Kijima T, Hazama S, Tsunedomi R, *et al.* MicroRNA-6826 and -6875 in plasma are valuable noninvasive biomarkers that predict the efficacy of vaccine treatment against metastatic colorectal cancer. *Oncology reports*. 2017;37(1):23-
34. Trevisani F, Ghidini M, Larcher A, *et al.* MicroRNA 193b-3p as a predictive biomarker of chronic kidney disease in patients undergoing radical nephrectomy for renal cell carcinoma. *British journal of cancer*. 2016;115(11):1343-50.
35. Henriett Butz RN-M, Qiang Ding *et al.* Exosomal MicroRNAs Are Diagnostic Biomarkers and Can Mediate Cell-Cell Communication in Renal Cell Carcinoma. *European Urology Focus*. 2016;2(2):210-8.
36. Lanford RE, Hildebrandt-Eriksen ES, Petri A, *et al.* Therapeutic silencing of microRNA-122 in primates with chronic hepatitis C virus infection. *Science (New York, NY)*. 2010;327(5962):198-201.
37. van der Ree MH, van der Meer AJ, de Bruijne J, *et al.* Long-term safety and efficacy of microRNA-targeted therapy in chronic hepatitis C patients. *Antiviral research*. 2014;111:53-9.

38. *ClinicalTrials.gov (Internet). Regulus Therapeutics Inc. Identifier NCT02855268, A Phase 2, Randomized, Double-Blind, Placebo controlled Study to Evaluate the Safety, Pharmacodynamics, Pharmacokinetics, Dose Selection, and Preliminary Efficacy of Weekly RG 012 Injections in Patients with Alport Syndrome: 2016. (Cited 29th June 2017). Available from: clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT02855268. This is the first phase II clinical trial to examine the use of an injectable miR antagonist in the treatment of a renal condition.
39. Gomez IG, MacKenna DA, Johnson BG, *et al.* Anti-microRNA-21 oligonucleotides prevent Alport nephropathy progression by stimulating metabolic pathways. *The Journal of clinical investigation*. 2015;125(1):141-56.
40. Liu Q, Shin Y, Kee JS, Kim KW, Rafei SR, Perera AP, *et al.* Mach-Zehnder interferometer (MZI) point-of-care system for rapid multiplexed detection of microRNAs in human urine specimens. *Biosensors & bioelectronics*. 2015;71:365-72.
41. *Daniel A. Smith LJM, Guido Drago, *et al.* Electrochemical detection of urinary microRNAs via sulfonamide-bound antisense hybridisation. *Sensors and Actuators B: Chemical*. June 2017 ARTICLE IN PRESS DOI: [10.1016/j.snb.2017.06.069](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.snb.2017.06.069) This report details a pilot system of a carbon electrochemical sensor that can detect urinary miR-21 and has potential as a non-invasive, point-of-care test, which is a crucial step in the clinical implementation of a miR biomarker.

Figure Legends

Figure 1. Potential Uses of miR Biomarkers in Nephrology. MiR biomarkers may augment our current ability to diagnose and serially monitor renal conditions. Their most useful application may be in stratifying patients according to modifiable outcomes (e.g. risk of developing AKI or CVD) or providing a personalised signature of disease that may inform treatment decisions (such as risk of renal allograft failure or likelihood of response to chemotherapy agents in renal cancers). Additionally, miRs may be critical determinants of specific mechanistic pathways in the kidney. CVD=cardiovascular disease RRT=renal replacement therapy RAAS= renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system.

Figure 2. The biogenesis of urinary microRNAs. MiRs are released by cells of the nephron and downstream in the urinary tract. They may be associated with membrane-bound extracellular vesicles such as microvesicles, formed by outward budding of the plasma membrane, and exosomes, secreted from multivesicular endosomes formed in the endocytic tract. MiRs can also exist bound to Argonaute proteins [5] and other proteins including high-density lipoproteins (HDL) [6].

Figure 3. Phases of miR Biomarker Development. Initial discovery experiments often utilise profiling/sequencing techniques to establish differentially expressed microRNAs in samples of interest. Clinical validation involves large retrospective and prospective cohort analysis from heterogeneous

populations, often achieved using (costly) international multicentre studies. MiR detection assays and analysis platforms must be analytically validated to confirm reliability and reproducibility of test results across hospital settings. Clinical utility is confirmed using pre-defined patient/treatment outcomes, but for complete integration into clinical practice, the test must also be user-friendly and cost-effective. This complex development pathway requires collaboration between academia, industry and health care services; the predominant partner at each stage is indicated above.

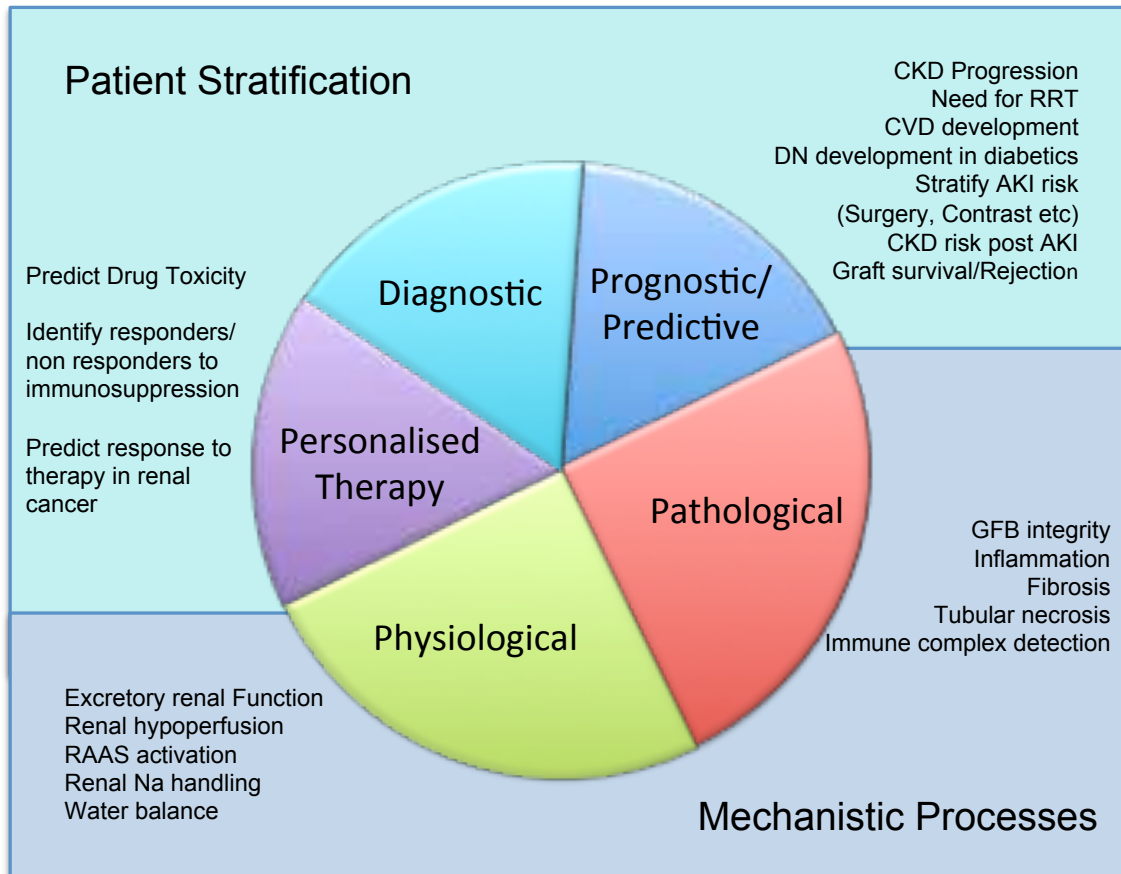


Figure 1. Potential Uses of miR Biomarkers in Nephrology. MiR biomarkers may augment our current ability to diagnose and serially monitor renal conditions, and may potentially obviate the need for invasive renal biopsy, However, their most useful application may be in stratifying patients according to modifiable outcomes (such as risk of developing AKI or CVD) or providing a personalised signature of disease that may inform treatment decisions (such as risk of renal allograft failure or likelihood of response to chemotherapy agents in renal cancers). Additionally, miRs may be critical determinants of specific mechanistic pathways that result in changes to renal architecture and physiological function, and can be used as biomarkers in this context.

CVD=cardiovascular disease RRT=renal replacement therapy RAAS= renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system.

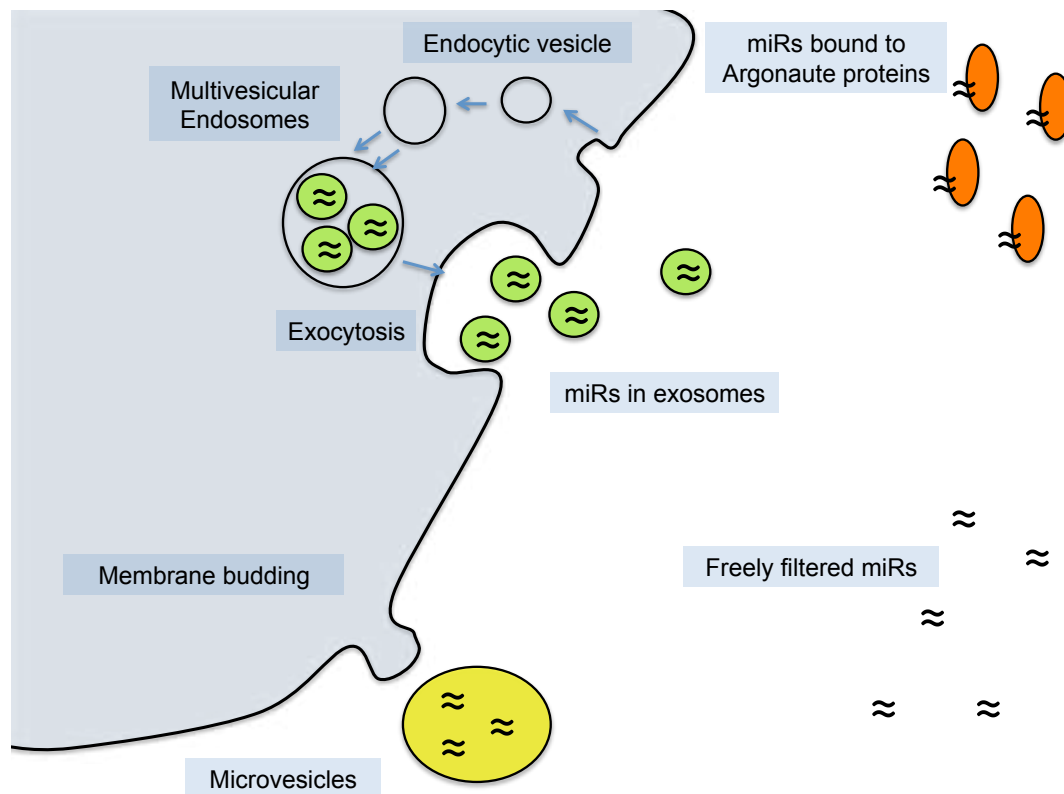


Figure 2. The biogenesis of urinary microRNAs. MiRs are released by cells of the nephron and downstream in the urinary tract. They exist inside membrane-bound vesicles such as microvesicles, formed by outward budding of the plasma membrane, and exosomes, secreted from multivesicular endosomes formed in the endocytic tract. MiRs can also exist bound to Argonaute proteins (1), but also bind to other non-specialised proteins such as high-density lipoproteins (HDL) (2).

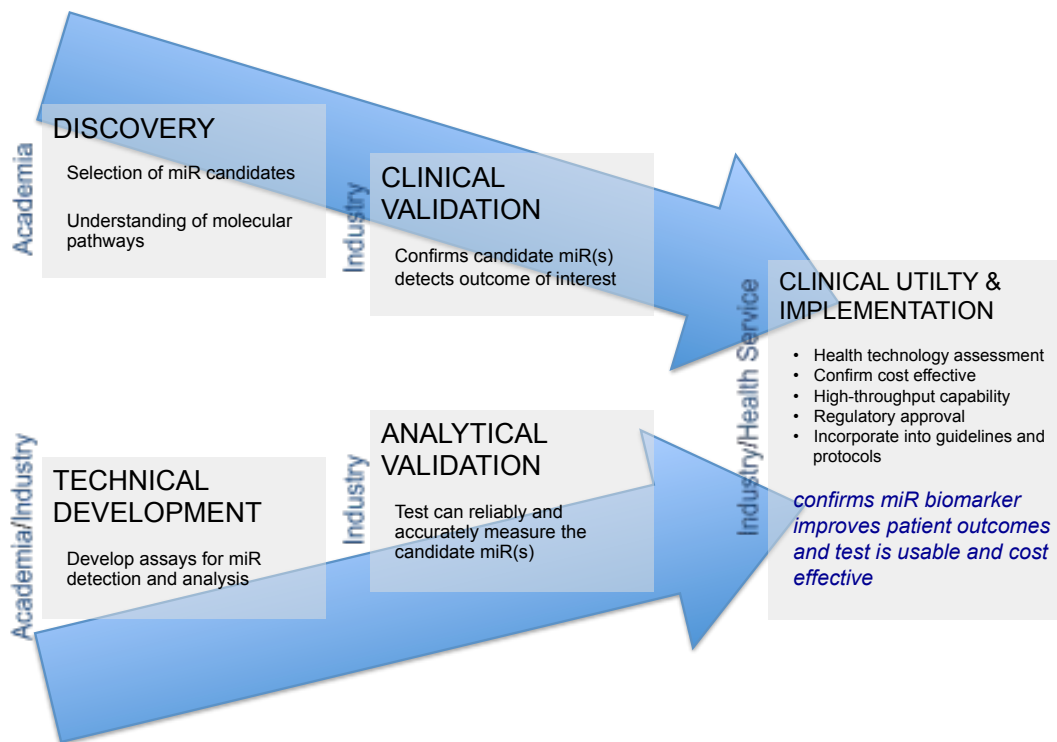


Figure 3. Phases of miR Biomarker Development. Initial discovery experiments often utilise profiling/sequencing techniques to establish differentially expressed microRNAs in samples of interest. Biobanks are a useful source in obtaining a validation cohort at this stage. Clinical validation involves large retrospective and prospective cohort analysis from heterogeneous populations, often achieved using (costly) international multicentre studies. MiR detection assays and analysis platforms must be analytically validated to confirm reliability and reproducibility of test results. Clinical utility is confirmed using pre-defined patient/treatment outcomes, but for complete integration into clinical practice, the test must also be user-friendly and cost-effective. This complex development pathway requires collaboration between academia, industry and health care services; the predominant partner at each stage is indicated above.

1. Hutvagner G, Simard MJ. Argonaute proteins: key players in RNA silencing. *Nature reviews Molecular cell biology*. 2008;9(1):22-32.
2. Vickers KC, Palmisano BT, Shoucri BM, Shamburek RD, Remaley AT. MicroRNAs are transported in plasma and delivered to recipient cells by high-density lipoproteins. *Nature cell biology*. 2011;13(4):423-33.

Please use either Arial or Helvetica font size 7 for any text or labels within figures.

- Clearly marked as "original" or "previously published" upon submission
- must be provided for all figures and should be included in the main body of the text following the references.
- Figures and tables should not be embedded within the text but should be submitted as separate files.
- Figures should be in JPEG, TIFF, EPS, PPT or WORD formats and should have a resolution of at least 300 dpi to be suitable for printing