

# Small-molecule targeting of GPCR-independent non-canonical G protein signaling inhibits cancer progression

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## Abstract

Activation of heterotrimeric G-proteins (G $\alpha\beta\gamma$ ) by G-protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs) is a quintessential mechanism of cell signaling widely targeted by clinically-approved drugs. However, it has become evident that heterotrimeric G-proteins can also be activated via GPCR-independent mechanisms that remain untapped as pharmacological targets. GIV/Girdin has emerged as a prototypical non-GPCR activator of G proteins that promotes cancer metastasis. Here, we introduce IGGi-11, a first-in-class small-molecule inhibitor of non-canonical activation of heterotrimeric G-protein signaling. IGGi-11 binding to G-protein  $\alpha$ -subunits (G $\alpha_i$ ) specifically disrupted their engagement with GIV/Girdin, thereby blocking non-canonical G-protein signaling in tumor cells, and inhibiting pro-invasive traits of metastatic cancer cells *in vitro* and in mice. In contrast, IGGi-11 did not interfere with canonical G-protein signaling mechanisms triggered by GPCRs. By revealing that small molecules can selectively disable non-canonical mechanisms of G-protein activation dysregulated in disease, these findings warrant the exploration of therapeutic modalities in G-protein signaling that go beyond targeting GPCRs.

## 36 Introduction

37 G protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs) mediate a large fraction of all transmembrane signaling in the  
38 human body, including responses triggered by every major neurotransmitter and by two-thirds of hormones  
39 (1). They are also the largest family of druggable proteins in the human genome, representing the target for  
40 over one-third of clinically approved drugs (2). To relay signals, GPCRs activate heterotrimeric G-proteins  
41 ( $G\alpha\beta\gamma$ ) in the cytoplasm by promoting the exchange of GDP for GTP on  $G\alpha$  subunits, which results in a  
42 concomitant dissociation of  $G\beta\gamma$  dimers (3). In turn,  $G\alpha$ -GTP and “free”  $G\beta\gamma$  act on downstream effectors to  
43 propagate signaling. Signaling is turned off by the intrinsic GTPase activity of  $G\alpha$ , which leads to the re-  
44 association of  $G\alpha$  with  $G\beta\gamma$ . There is also a growing number of cytoplasmic proteins that modulate nucleotide  
45 handling by G-proteins, thereby exerting profound effects on the duration and amplitude of signaling (4-11).

46 In stark contrast to GPCRs, there are no clinically approved drugs for heterotrimeric G-proteins, despite  
47 their well-documented potential as pharmacological targets (12). Small molecule inhibitors of  $G\beta\gamma$  have been  
48 validated in some preclinical models (12, 13), but no drug-like small molecule that targets  $G\alpha$  subunits has  
49 been validated. There are, however, some natural cyclic depsipeptides that block  $\alpha$ -subunits of the  $G_{q/11}$  family  
50 with high specificity and potency (14). Unfortunately, because they inhibit G-protein activation *en toto*, these  
51 compounds could cause undesired side effects due to indiscriminate blockade of ubiquitous, physiologically-  
52 relevant functions of their target G-proteins.

53 Perhaps a more nuanced targeting approach that exploits disease-specific mechanisms of G-protein  
54 regulation could pave the way for new pharmacology. This idea is thwarted by the realization that the  
55 mechanisms of G-protein regulation beyond ubiquitous GPCR-mediated activation remain poorly understood  
56 in the absence of adequate tools to interrogate them. GIV (also known as Girdin) is a cytoplasmic protein  
57 that binds to  $G\alpha_i$  subunits to promote G-protein signaling in a GPCR-independent manner (8, 15-17) and its  
58 expression in human primary solid tumors correlates with progression towards more invasive, metastatic  
59 stages in various types of cancer (18-20). Tumor cells depleted of GIV also fail to migrate *in vitro* or  
60 metastasize in mice (21). Here, we report the identification of a small molecule that binds to  $G\alpha_i$  to selectively  
61 prevent GIV binding without disturbing other mechanisms by which the G-protein is regulated, including  
62 canonical GPCR-mediated signaling. We leverage this compound to establish that GIV-mediated activation  
63 of G-protein signaling favors cancer progression by operating downstream of receptor tyrosine kinases (RTKs)  
64 instead of downstream of GPCRs.

65

## 66 Results

### 67 High-throughput screen for inhibitors of the GIV- $G\alpha_i$ interaction

68 Previous work indicates that expression of GIV at high levels in cancer cells might facilitate its association  
69 with  $G\alpha_i$ , which in turn favors tumor cell migration and other pro-metastatic traits (8, 15-17, 22-25) (**Fig. 1A**).

70 Moreover, characterization of the molecular basis for the GIV-Gai interaction (**Fig. 1A**) revealed that this  
71 protein-protein interaction might be suitable for specific pharmacological disruption (26-28). These previous  
72 findings motivated us to pursue a small molecule screen for inhibitors of the GIV-Gai interaction. Using a  
73 fluorescence polarization (FP) assay that directly monitors GIV binding to Gai3 (27), we obtained 580 hits  
74 from screening a collection of 200,000 compounds (**Fig. 1B, C**). Of these, 155 tested positive for inhibition in  
75 both the primary FP assay and an orthogonal secondary assay (AlphaScreen®, AS) (27) (**Fig. 1C, D**). After  
76 triage, 68 compounds were discarded based on unfavorable chemical properties, and only 69 of the  
77 remaining 87 compounds could be repurchased as fresh powder stocks (**Fig. 1D, Table S1**). We named this  
78 set of compounds “IGGi”, for “Inhibitors of the GIV-Gai interaction”. We next evaluated the performance of  
79 these 69 IGGi compounds in cell-based assays. In cancer cell lines that express high levels of GIV (e.g., the  
80 triple-negative metastatic breast cancer cell line, MDA-MB-231), loss of GIV or disruption of its ability to bind  
81 Gai through mutagenesis impairs cell migration, but does not affect cell viability under standard *in vitro* culture  
82 conditions on plastic dishes (17, 21). We found that approximately one-third of the IGGi compounds impaired  
83 MDA-MB-231 cell migration without affecting viability (**Fig. 1E**), lending confidence on the ability of our  
84 biochemical screen to identify compounds with the desired biological activity. To further prioritize the 69 IGGi  
85 compounds, we excluded not only those with the undesired property of reducing MDA-MB-231 viability, but  
86 also those that reduced the viability of MCF-7 cells (a non-metastatic breast cancer cell line that expresses  
87 low levels of GIV) or of MCF-10A (a non-transformed epithelial breast cell line) to eliminate molecules with  
88 non-specific cytotoxicity (**Fig. 1F**). The remaining 44 compounds were tested in a tertiary GIV-Gai binding  
89 assay based on GST-fusion pull-downs (PD) (**Fig. 2A**). Only one compound, IGGi-11, was found to inhibit  
90 Gai3 binding to GIV in this assay. Despite the weak activity of this compound in MDA-MB-231 cell migration  
91 assays (**Fig. 1E**), experiments presented below indicated high specificity and suitability for cell-based  
92 systems upon analog development.

93

#### 94 **IGGi-11 binds to the GIV interacting region of Gai**

95 We reasoned that inhibitors of the GIV-Gai interaction should bind to the G-protein because our primary  
96 screening assay used a small peptide fragment of GIV unlikely to harbor enough structural features to  
97 accommodate a small molecule. Using nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy, we found that  
98 IGGi-11 caused dose-dependent chemical shift perturbations (CSP) in the amide bond signals of discrete  
99 amino acids of isotopically labeled (<sup>2</sup>H-<sup>13</sup>C-<sup>15</sup>N) Gai3 (**Fig. 2B, Fig. S1**), indicating compound binding. In  
100 contrast, another IGGi compound, IGGi-41, that was a potent inhibitor of MDA-MB-231 cell migration (**Fig.**  
101 **1E**) but did not disrupt GIV-Gai binding (**Fig. 2A**), did not cause NMR signal perturbations (**Fig. S2**). These  
102 results suggested that IGGi-11 binds specifically to Gai3. When IGGi-11-induced NMR perturbations were  
103 overlaid on a structural model of IGGi-11-bound Gai3 and compared to a structural model of the GIV-Gai3

104 complex, several of the amino acids with the largest perturbations (S252, W258, F259, F215, E216, G217,  
105 and K35) clustered around the predicted docking site for IGGi-11 and overlapped with the binding area for  
106 GIV (**Fig. 2C**). To directly test if IGGi-11 binds on this predicted site located in the groove between the  $\alpha 3$   
107 helix and the conformationally dynamic Switch II (SwII) region, we carried out isothermal titration calorimetry  
108 (ITC) experiments with wild-type Gai3 (WT) or mutants. We found that three different mutations in the  
109 predicted binding site for IGGi-11 on Gai3 (F215A, N256E, and W258A) lead to large decreases in compound  
110 binding affinity (>10-30 fold), whereas another mutation in an amino acid adjacent to the predicted binding  
111 site (G42R) did not (**Fig. 2D**). All mutant proteins fold properly and remain functional based on multiple assays  
112 (26). The estimated equilibrium dissociation constant ( $K_D$ ) for the Gai3/IGGi-11 interaction based on ITC was  
113  $\sim 4 \mu\text{M}$  (**Fig. 2D**), which was in good agreement with estimates based on curve fits of CSPs observed in NMR  
114 experiments (0.9-4.6  $\mu\text{M}$ , **Fig. S1**). IGGi-11 also blocked GIV binding to Gai3 in FP assays with an inhibition  
115 constant ( $K_i$ ) of  $\sim 14 \mu\text{M}$ , and similar results were obtained for the other two  $G\alpha$  proteins of Gi family: Gai1  
116 and Gai2 (**Fig. S3A**). Consistently, IGGi-11 also inhibited the ability of GIV to promote the steady-state  
117 GTPase activity of Gai3, which reports increased nucleotide exchange *in vitro* (25) (**Fig. S3B**). Together,  
118 these results indicate that IGGi-11 binds to the GIV interacting site of Gai proteins with low micromolar affinity,  
119 thereby precluding the formation of the GIV-Gai complex *in vitro*.

120

### 121 **IGGi-11 does not affect GIV-independent aspects of G-protein regulation and function**

122 A concern with targeting Gai is the potential on-target but nonetheless undesired effects that may result  
123 due to the many functions of G-proteins. The activity of  $G\alpha$  subunits depends on the ability to handle  
124 nucleotides (GDP/GTP exchange, GTP hydrolysis), on proteins that regulate their activity ( $G\beta\gamma$ , GPCRs,  
125 Guanine nucleotide Dissociation Inhibitors (GDIs), and GTPase Accelerating Proteins (GAPs)), or on how  
126 they regulate other proteins that propagate signaling (effectors) (**Fig. 3A**). With this in mind, we set out to  
127 thoroughly address the potential effect of IGGi-11 on G-protein functions other than those mediated via GIV  
128 binding by using isolated cell membranes or purified proteins. First, we tested the effect of IGGi-11 on the  
129 association of  $G\beta\gamma$  with  $G\alpha$  using a bioluminescence resonance energy transfer (BRET) assay (29, 30). We  
130 found that concentrations of IGGi-11 up to 100  $\mu\text{M}$  did not cause the dissociation of  $G\beta\gamma$  from Gai3 (**Fig. 3B**),  
131 whereas incubation with a positive control peptide (R12 GL, 25  $\mu\text{M}$ ) or a non-hydrolyzable GTP analog  
132 (GTP $\gamma$ S, 300  $\mu\text{M}$ ) did. Similar observations were made with three other  $G\alpha$  subunits that belong to the same  
133 family as Gai (i.e., Gao), or to different ones (i.e., Gaq and G $\alpha 13$ ) (**Fig. S4A**), indicating that IGGi-11 does  
134 not disrupt  $G\alpha\beta\gamma$  heterotrimers. Using the same assay, we assessed the effect of IGGi-11 on GPCR-mediated  
135 activation of G-proteins, which results in the dissociation of  $G\beta\gamma$  from  $G\alpha$ . We found that concentrations of  
136 IGGi-11 up to 100  $\mu\text{M}$  did not interfere with the ability of agonist-stimulated GPCRs to activate Gi3, Go, Gq,  
137 or G13 heterotrimers (**Fig. 3C**, **Fig. S4B**). Rapid kinetic assays further confirmed that IGGi-11 did not alter  
138 the rate of  $G\beta\gamma$  dissociation upon GPCR activation (**Fig. 3D**) or the rate of  $G\beta\gamma$ -Gai3 reassociation upon



139 GPCR signal termination (**Fig. S4C**). As an alternative to assess GPCR-mediated activation of G-proteins,  
140 we used another BRET-based biosensor (31) that directly monitors the formation of GTP-bound Gai3 (**Fig.**  
141 **3E**). We found that neither amplitude nor kinetics of Gai3-GTP formation upon GPCR stimulation were  
142 affected by IGGi-11 (**Fig. 3E, F**). We also found that IGGi-11 did not interfere with the spontaneous exchange  
143 of GDP for GTP on Gai3 using three independent assays: BRET-based GTP $\gamma$ S binding to Gai in isolated  
144 membranes (**Fig. S5A**), binding of fluorescently labeled GTP $\gamma$ S to purified Gai (**Fig. S5B**), or steady-state  
145 GTPase activity of purified Gai with radiolabeled GTP (**Fig. S5C**). We also found that IGGi-11 did not affect  
146 the hydrolysis of GTP to GDP by purified Gai (**Fig. S5D**).

147 Next, we evaluated the potential impact of IGGi-11 on the ability of active, GTP-bound Gai proteins to  
148 engage and modulate effectors. First, we observed that IGGi-11 did not cause NMR signal perturbations in  
149 the  $\alpha$ 3/Swll region of GTP $\gamma$ S-loaded Gai3 (**Fig. S6A**), which contrasts with the observations obtained for  
150 GDP-loaded Gai3 (**Fig. 2B, Fig. S1**) and suggests lack of compound binding to active G-proteins. Consistent  
151 with this, we also found that IGGi-11 did not inhibit the interaction between purified Gai3 and KB-1753, an  
152 effector-like peptide that binds to the  $\alpha$ 3/Swll region of Gai-GTP (32) (**Fig. S6B**). We then tested whether  
153 IGGi-11 affected the regulation of a *bona fide* effector of Gai, i.e., adenylyl cyclase (**Fig. 3G**). In membranes  
154 from cells expressing adenylyl cyclase 5, IGGi-11 did not affect either activation mediated by purified Gas or  
155 inhibition mediated by purified Gai (**Fig. 3G**). The compound did not affect adenylyl cyclase activity either  
156 under basal conditions or upon direct, G-protein-independent activation with forskolin (**Fig. 3G**).

157 Finally, we assessed whether IGGi-11 would preclude the binding of Gai to other G-protein regulators  
158 like Guanine nucleotide Dissociation Inhibitors (GDIs) that contain a GoLoco motif (4, 5), or GTPase-  
159 Accelerating Proteins (GAPs) of the Regulators of G protein Signaling (RGS) family (6, 7). We found that  
160 IGGi-11 did not inhibit the interaction of Gai3 with the GoLoco motif responsible for the GDI activity of RGS12  
161 (R12 GL, **Fig. S6B**) or with the GAP RGS4 (**Fig. S6C**).

162 Taken together, our results indicate that IGGi-11 specifically inhibits GIV binding to Gai without interfering  
163 with any other major function of Gai, including nucleotide binding and hydrolysis, association with G $\beta$  $\gamma$   
164 subunits and other cytoplasmic regulators, activation by GPCRs, or modulation of effectors.

165

### 166 **Validation of an IGGi-11 analog with increased activity in cells**

167 After establishing the specificity of IGGi-11 for the target GIV-Gai complex *in vitro*, we sought to determine  
168 its biological activity in cells. We found that preincubation of MDA-MB-231 cells with IGGi-11 inhibited their  
169 ability to migrate only marginally (**Fig. S7A**). We reasoned that this could be due to low membrane  
170 permeability because IGGi-11 contains two negatively charged carboxylate groups (**Fig. S7A**). To overcome  
171 this, we generated IGGi-11me, an analog in which the carboxylates were esterified with methyl groups. We  
172 hypothesized that esterification would increase membrane permeability by eliminating the charges of the  
173 carboxylates, and that cytoplasmic esterases would revert the modification to produce IGGi-11, thereby

174 enabling enhanced inhibitory activity in cells (**Fig. S7A**). Indeed, preincubation of MDA-MD-231 cells with  
175 IGGi-11me efficiently reduced their ability to migrate (**Fig. S7A**). As desired, IGGi-11me (or IGGi-11) did not  
176 affect the viability of MDA-MB-231 or MCF-10A cells (**Fig. S7B**). We confirmed that IGGi-11me had higher  
177 permeability than IGGi-11 by using a parallel artificial membrane permeability assay (**Fig. S7C**). We also  
178 confirmed that IGGi-11me was converted to IGGi-11 by esterases present in the cytosol of MDA-MB-231  
179 cells (**Fig. S7D**), which is a critical step because IGGi-11me inhibits GIV-Gai3 binding with lower potency  
180 than IGGi-11 (**Fig. S7E**). These results indicate that IGGi-11me serves as pro-drug that allows the action of  
181 the active GIV-Gai inhibitor compound, IGGi-11, in cells.

182

### 183 **IGGi-11me inhibits GIV-dependent cancer cell signaling**

184 Previous work has shown that GIV mediates the activation of Akt downstream of various receptor tyrosine  
185 kinases (RTKs), including the Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor (EGFR), and other surface receptors via  
186 G-protein (i.e., G $\beta\gamma$ ) dependent activation of PI3K (8, 15, 17, 23, 25, 33-35). We found that IGGi-11me  
187 reduced the phosphorylation of Akt at S473 (pAkt) upon EGF stimulation in two cell lines, MDA-MB-231 and  
188 HeLa, indicating reduced Akt activity (**Fig. 4A**). The lack of complete Akt inhibition is consistent with the  
189 known existence of GIV-independent mechanisms utilized by EGFR to activate PI3K-Akt signaling (36). In  
190 fact, the extent of IGGi-11me mediated inhibition of Akt was similar to that observed upon depletion of GIV in  
191 these cell lines (**Fig. 4B**). Moreover, IGGi-11me failed to further reduce Akt activation in GIV-depleted cells,  
192 indicating that it does not affect GIV-independent mechanisms of Akt activation downstream of EGFR (**Fig.**  
193 **4B**). Also, IGGi-11me did not change the total amount of GIV or Gai (**Fig. 4A, B**), supporting that its  
194 mechanism of action is the disruption of the interaction of the two proteins, rather than indirectly altering their  
195 abundance. These results show that IGGi-11me specifically inhibits GIV-dependent G-protein signaling in  
196 cancer cells.

197

### 198 **IGGi-11me does not affect GIV-independent G-protein cell signaling**

199 Although IGGi-11 does not interfere with GIV-independent mechanisms of G-protein regulation *in vitro*  
200 (**Fig. 3, Fig. S4-6**), confirmation that the same holds for IGGi-11me in cells was warranted. First, we compared  
201 side by side the effect of IGGi-11me on GIV-dependent and GIV-independent G-protein signaling in the same  
202 cell line (MDA-MB-231) with the same readout (Akt activation). For GIV-dependent G-protein signaling, we  
203 stimulated cells with EGF as in **Fig. 4A-B**, whereas for GIV-independent G-protein signaling we stimulated  
204 cells with SDF-1 $\alpha$ , an agonist for the endogenously expressed GPCR CXCR4 (**Fig. 4C**). We found that IGGi-  
205 11me inhibited Akt activation in response to EGF but not in response to SDF-1 $\alpha$  (**Fig. 4C**), indicating that it  
206 does not interfere with GPCR-mediated G-protein signaling. In contrast, pertussis toxin (PTX), which  
207 precludes Gai activation by GPCRs but not by GIV (37), efficiently blocked activation of Akt in response to  
208 SDF-1 $\alpha$  but not to EGF (**Fig. 4C**). These results indicate that IGGi-11me specifically targets GIV-dependent

209 G-protein signaling mechanisms in cells without interfering with canonical GPCR-mediated G-protein  
210 signaling. To further substantiate this point, we assessed the effect of IGGi-11me on GPCR signaling by using  
211 BRET-based biosensors that directly monitor the activation of endogenous G-proteins (31). More specifically,  
212 HeLa cells expressing biosensors for either Gai-GTP or free G $\beta\gamma$  were treated with IGGi-11me exactly under  
213 the same conditions that led to decreased GIV-dependent Akt activation after EGF stimulation (**Fig. 4A-B**).  
214 We found that G-protein responses elicited by stimulation of endogenous  $\alpha_2$  adrenergic receptors with  
215 maximal ( $>EC_{100}$ ) or submaximal ( $<EC_{100}$ ) concentrations of a cognate agonist were unaltered by IGGi-11me  
216 (**Fig. 4D**). Not only were the amplitudes and rates of the activation responses unchanged, but the rates of  
217 deactivation upon GPCR blockade with an antagonist also remained the same (**Fig. 4D**). These results show  
218 that IGGi-11me does not interfere with GIV-independent G-protein signaling like that elicited by GPCRs.

219

### 220 **IGGi-11me specifically inhibits GIV-dependent tumor cell migration**

221 Previous evidence indicates that GIV is expressed at high levels in metastatic cancers, and that formation  
222 of the GIV-Gai complex favors cell migration (15, 18-20). Consistent with some of these observations, we  
223 found that invasive breast cancer (BRCA) cell lines prone to metastasis expressed higher levels of GIV  
224 ( $GIV^{High}$ ) than non-invasive breast cancer cell lines ( $GIV^{Low}$ ) (**Fig. 5A**). IGGi-11me was approximately four  
225 times more potent inhibiting the migration of MDA-MB-231 cells ( $GIV^{High}$ ) than of MCF-7 cells ( $GIV^{Low}$ ) (**Fig.**  
226 **5B**). This difference in IGGi-11me sensitivity could not be attributed to differences in Gai protein abundance  
227 because they were present in similar amounts in both cell lines (**Fig. 5B**). While we could not test the effect  
228 of IGGi-11me on the  $GIV^{Low}$  cell lines T47D and MDA-MB-453 because they lacked measurable migration,  
229 we found that IGGi-11me inhibited cell migration in the  $GIV^{High}$  cell lines BT-549 and Hs578T with a potency  
230 similar to that seen for MDA-MB-231 cells (**Fig. S8A**). These results established a correlation between GIV  
231 expression (and presumably the formation of a GIV-Gai complex) and sensitivity to IGGi-11me. To further  
232 substantiate that IGGi-11me specifically inhibits GIV-dependent tumor cell migration, we tested its effect on  
233 GIV-depleted MDA-MB-231 cells. We found that, compared to control cells, IGGi-11me had no effect on MDA-  
234 MB-231 cell migration upon GIV depletion (**Fig. 5C**). Similar observations were made with HeLa cells (**Fig.**  
235 **5D**). GIV-depleted cells contained amounts of Gai proteins similar to those in their corresponding control cells  
236 (**Fig. 5C, D**), further supporting that the inhibition of cell migration exerted by IGGi-11me is GIV-dependent.  
237 Furthermore, the inhibition of cell migration by IGGi-11me was not a consequence of reduced cell viability,  
238 as the latter was not affected by the compound in any of cell lines investigated (**Fig. 5E, Fig. S8B**). These  
239 findings indicate that IGGi-11me specifically blocks GIV-dependent tumor cell migration, implying that the  
240 disruption of the GIV-Gai complex hinders the pro-invasive features of  $GIV^{High}$  cancer cells.

241

### 242 **IGGi-11me inhibits tumor growth and metastatic invasion in mice**

243 Although loss of GIV does not affect the growth of tumor cells on plastic dishes, it hinders growth in three-

244 dimensional Matrigel cultures (17), which account for tumor cell interactions with the extracellular matrix and  
245 recapitulate many of the behavioral features of cancer cells in tumors *in situ* (38). We found that IGGi-11me  
246 mimicked previous observations (17) upon loss of GIV in Matrigel cultures— i.e., MDA-MB-231 became  
247 smaller and more organized acinar structures than control cells, resulting in an overall reduction of cell growth  
248 (**Fig. 6A, B**). In contrast, IGGi-11me did not affect the growth of non-transformed MCF-10A breast cells in  
249 Matrigel cultures (**Fig. 6B**). Consistent with these observations *in vitro*, IGGi-11me also reduced the ability of  
250 MDA-MB-231 cells to form tumors when implanted subcutaneously as xenografts in mice (**Fig. 6C**). Because  
251 we could not observe metastatic invasion of the lungs upon subcutaneous tumor implantation, we assessed  
252 the effect of IGGi-11me on MDA-MB-231 cell injection through the tail vein, an established experimental  
253 paradigm of metastatic colonization of the lungs (39). We found that IGGi-11me reduced the ability of MDA-  
254 MB-231 cells to appear in the lungs weeks after tail vein injection (**Fig. 6D**). Together, these results indicate  
255 that disruption of the GIV-Gai interaction by IGGi-11me prevents tumor cell traits associated with cancer  
256 progression.

257

## 258 Discussion

259 In this work we identify and characterize a chemical probe of broad utility for dissecting atypical  
260 mechanisms of cellular communication mediated by G-proteins with important biomedical implications not  
261 only for cancer, but also for fibrosis, and male fertility, among other maladies (8, 9, 17, 18, 20, 40, 41).  
262 Because its chemical scaffold is synthetically tractable, IGGi-11 may further serve as a lead compound to  
263 develop analogs with improved potency and pharmacokinetic properties that could have therapeutic value.  
264 From a broader perspective, this work provides the proof of principle for a modality of pharmacological  
265 targeting in heterotrimeric G-protein signaling that deviates from the widespread focus on GPCRs or the  
266 direct ablation of G-protein activity *en toto*. This modality consists of targeting G-proteins to selectively disrupt  
267 specific mechanisms by which they are regulated. IGGi-11 disrupts Gai binding to GIV but not to many of its  
268 other binding partners, despite them physically engaging the same region of Gai as GIV. This region includes  
269 the SwII, which is dynamic and adopts different conformations depending on the protein partner bound to  
270 Gai. Although it is tempting to speculate that the selectivity of IGGi-11 may arise from its relative ability to  
271 interact with these different conformations, the structural basis for the action of IGGi-11 remains to be fully  
272 elucidated. The targeting modality described here follows the path opened by recent advances on small  
273 molecule inhibitors for another GTPase, KRas, in reshaping the traditional definition of what constitutes a  
274 druggable target (42, 43).

275

276

277

278 **MATERIALS and METHODS**

279 Chemical compounds of interest were purchased from reliable vendors or synthesized in-house, and tested  
280 in *in vitro* assays, including nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR), bioluminescence resonance energy transfer  
281 (BRET) assays or different protein-protein binding experiments following previously established procedures  
282 that are described in details in Supplementary Information. Cell-based experiments to assess the efficacy  
283 and specificity of compounds were also carried out using previously established procedures and/or cell lines,  
284 including cell migration assays using modified Boyden chambers, immunoblotting and signaling assays, all  
285 of which are described in detail in Supplementary Information along with the animal experiments measuring  
286 xenograft tumor growth by luminescence bioimaging.

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419 **Author Contributions:** J.Z., V.D., M.F.G, S.D., J.-C.P., A.L., and Q.C. conducted experiments. J.Z., V.D.,  
420 A.B., F.J.B., and M.G.-M. designed experiments. J.Z., V.D., M.F.G, S.D., J.-C.P., A.L., A.I.dO, and F.J.B.  
421 analyzed data. M.G.-M. wrote the manuscript with input from all authors. M.G.-M. conceived and supervised  
422 the project.

423 **Competing interests:** M.G.-M. is listed as an inventor in a provisional patent filed by Boston University  
424 related to the content of this manuscript. The rest of the authors declare no competing interests.

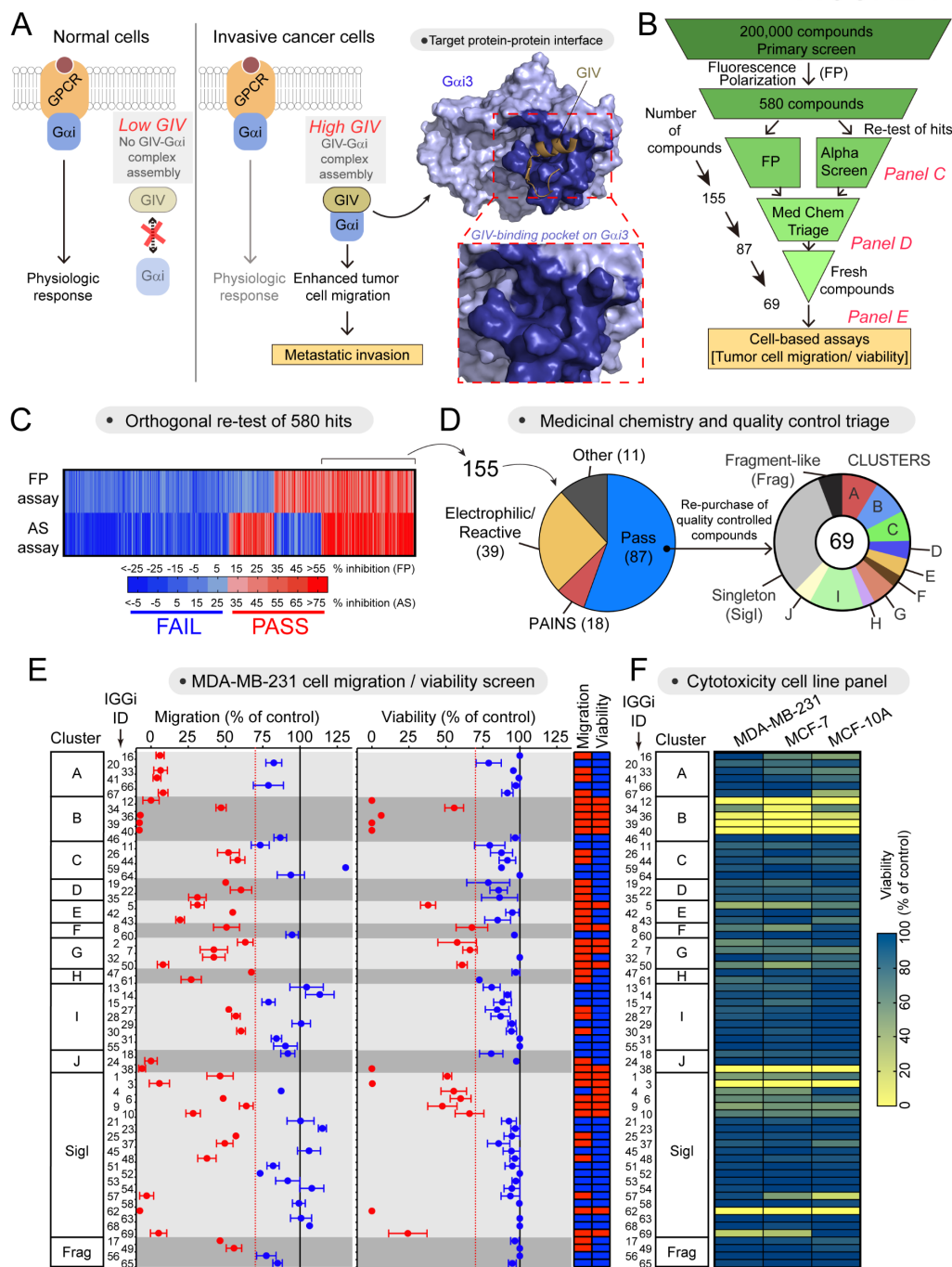
425 **Data and materials availability:** All data are available in the main text or the supplementary materials.

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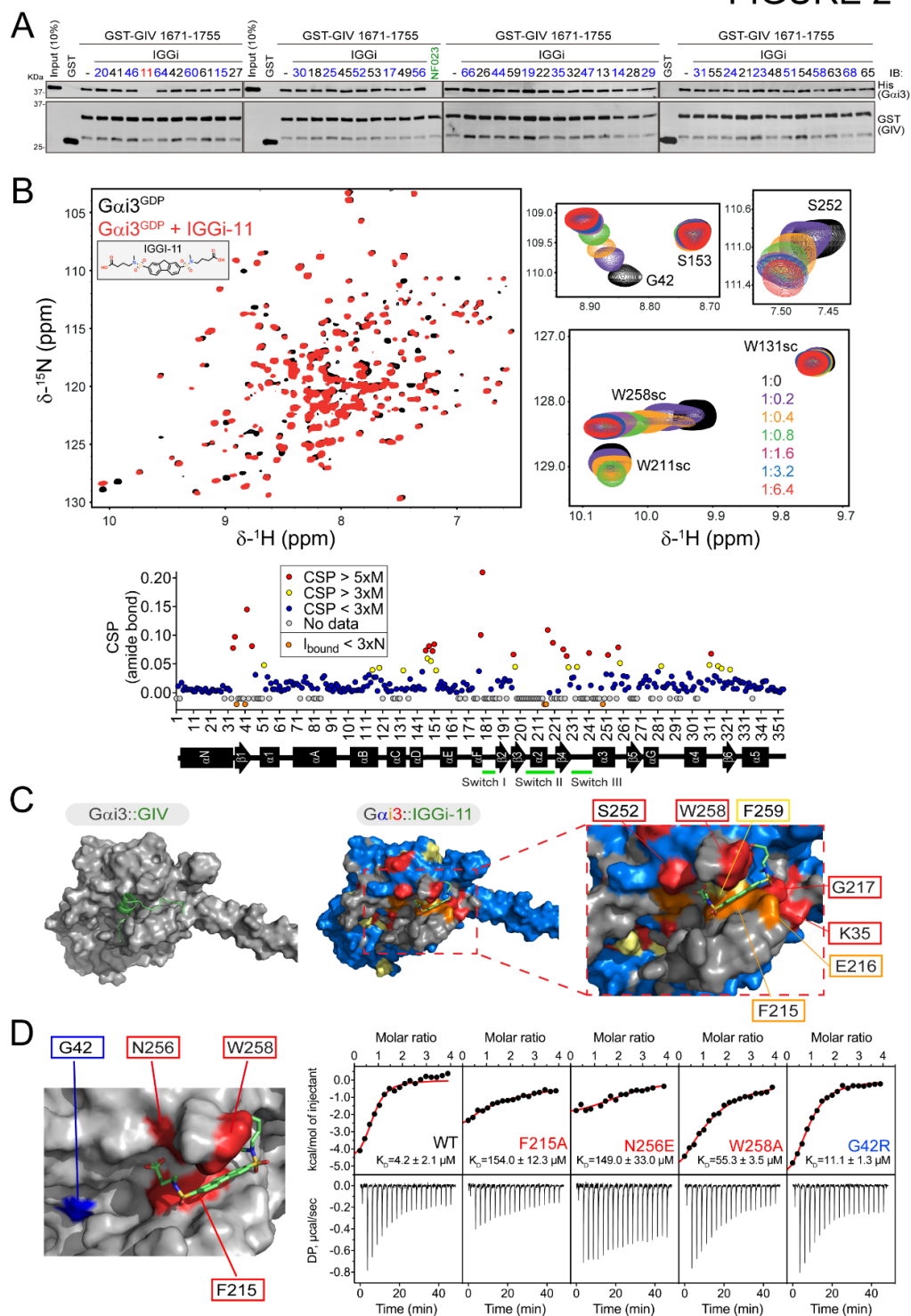
FIGURE 1



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**Figure 1. Small molecule screening to identify inhibitors of the GIV-Gai interaction. (A)** Diagram depicting the rationale for targeting the GIV-Gai interaction with small molecules. **(B)** Scheme of the full screening campaign. **(C)** Confirmation of hit compounds that inhibit the GIV-Gai interaction in two orthogonal biochemical assays, fluorescence polarization (FP) and AlphaScreen (AS). **(D)** Triage of compounds based on unfavorable chemical properties and availability of molecules with quality control. **(E)** Test of 69 IGGi compounds (100  $\mu$ M) on MDA-MB-231 cell migration and viability. Red, <30% reduction; blue, >30% reduction. Mean  $\pm$  SEM ( $N = 4$ ). **(F)** Comparison of the effect of IGGi compounds (100  $\mu$ M) on the viability of three breast cell lines, MDA-MB-231, MCF-7, and MCF-10A (mean of  $N = 3$ ).

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493 **Figure 2. IGGi-11 binding to the GIV interacting region of Gai.** (A) IGGi-11 disrupts GIV-Gai binding in  
 494 pull-down assays. His-Gai3 was incubated with glutathione agarose-bound GST-GIV (aa 1671-1755) in the  
 495 presence of the indicated compounds or the positive control NF023 at a concentration of 100  $\mu\text{M}$ . After  
 496 incubation and washes, bead-bound proteins were separated by SDS-PAGE and immunoblotted (IB) as  
 497 indicated. Representative of 3 independent experiments. (B) Overlay of  $^1\text{H}$ - $^{15}\text{N}$  TROSY spectra of  $^2\text{H}$ ,  $^{13}\text{C}$ ,  $^{15}\text{N}$ -  
 498 Gai3-GDP in the absence or presence of IGGi-11. Selected regions from the overlaid spectra depicting

499 representative perturbations in Gai3 signals induced by increasing amounts of IGGI-11 are shown at the right.  
500 The dot plot (bottom) corresponds to the quantification of IGGI-11 induced chemical shift perturbations  
501 (CSPs). Red, CSP > 5 times the median (M); yellow, CSP >3xM; blue, CSP <3xM; grey, no data. Reductions  
502 in signal intensity ( $I_{\text{bound}}$ ) below 3 times the noise (N) are indicated in orange. **(C)** Comparison of models of  
503 IGGI-11 docked onto Gai3 (*middle and right*, color coded according to NMR perturbations quantified in panel  
504 A) and GIV-bound Gai3 (*left*). **(D)** Quantification of IGGI-11 binding affinity ( $K_D$ ) for Gai3 wild-type (WT) or the  
505 indicated mutants using isothermal titration calorimetry (ITC). Data are representative of at least two  
506 independent experiments.

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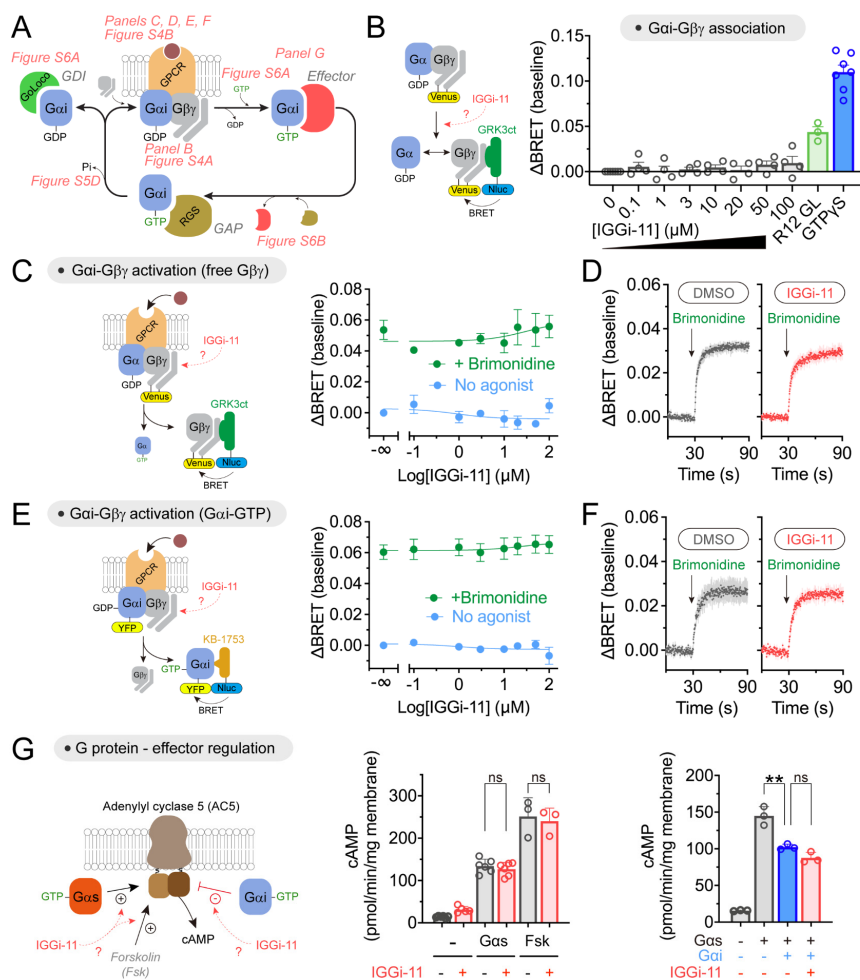
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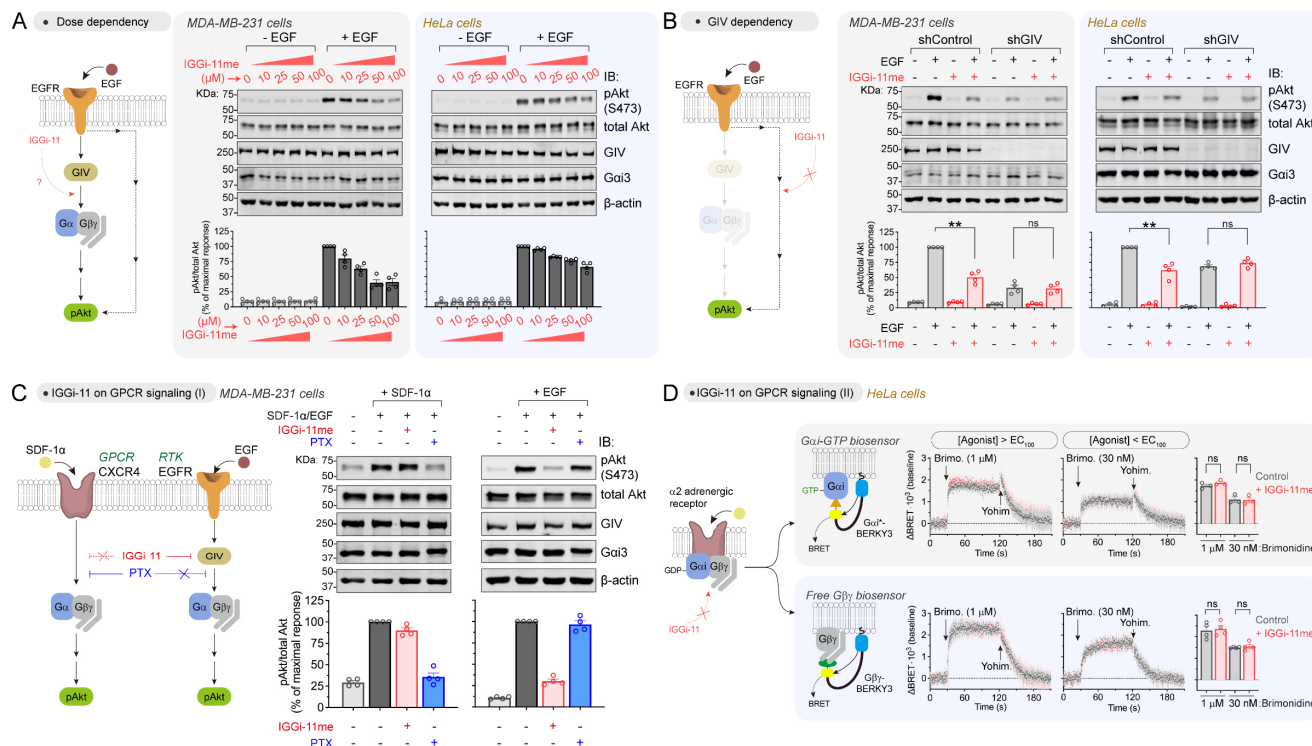
FIGURE 3



**Figure 3. Lack of effect of IGGi-11 on G-protein coupling to GPCRs and effectors. (A)** Diagram of key steps and protein interactions involved in Gai-subunit functions. **(B)** IGGi-11 does not dissociate Gβγ from Gai3 in membranes isolated from HEK293T cells expressing a BRET-based biosensor for free Gβγ, whereas two positive controls do (a GoLoco peptide derived from RGS12, R12 GL, 25 μM; and GTPγS 300 μM). **(C-F)** IGGi-11 does not affect GPCR-mediated activation of Gi3 as determined by the dissociation of Gai3-Gβγ heterotrimers (C, D) or the formation of Gai3-GTP (E, F) using BRET-based biosensors. In C and E, membranes isolated from HEK293T cells expressing the α<sub>2A</sub> adrenergic receptor were treated with the indicated concentrations of IGGi-11 with (green) or without (blue) stimulation with a receptor agonist (brimonidine, 1 μM) for 2 minutes before BRET measurements. In D and F, BRET was continuously measured in real time in the presence of 100 μM IGGi-11 or vehicle (1% DMSO, v:v). **(G)** IGGi-11 does not interfere with G-protein-mediated regulation of adenylyl cyclase. Membranes isolated from HEK293T cells expressing adenylyl cyclase 5 were treated with IGGi-11 (100 μM), purified Gas (0.5 μM), purified myristoylated Gai1 (Gai, 1 μM), and forskolin (Fsk, 10 μM) in the combinations indicated in the graphs. Mean ± SEM (N ≥ 3). \*\*P < 0.01, ANOVA.

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FIGURE 4

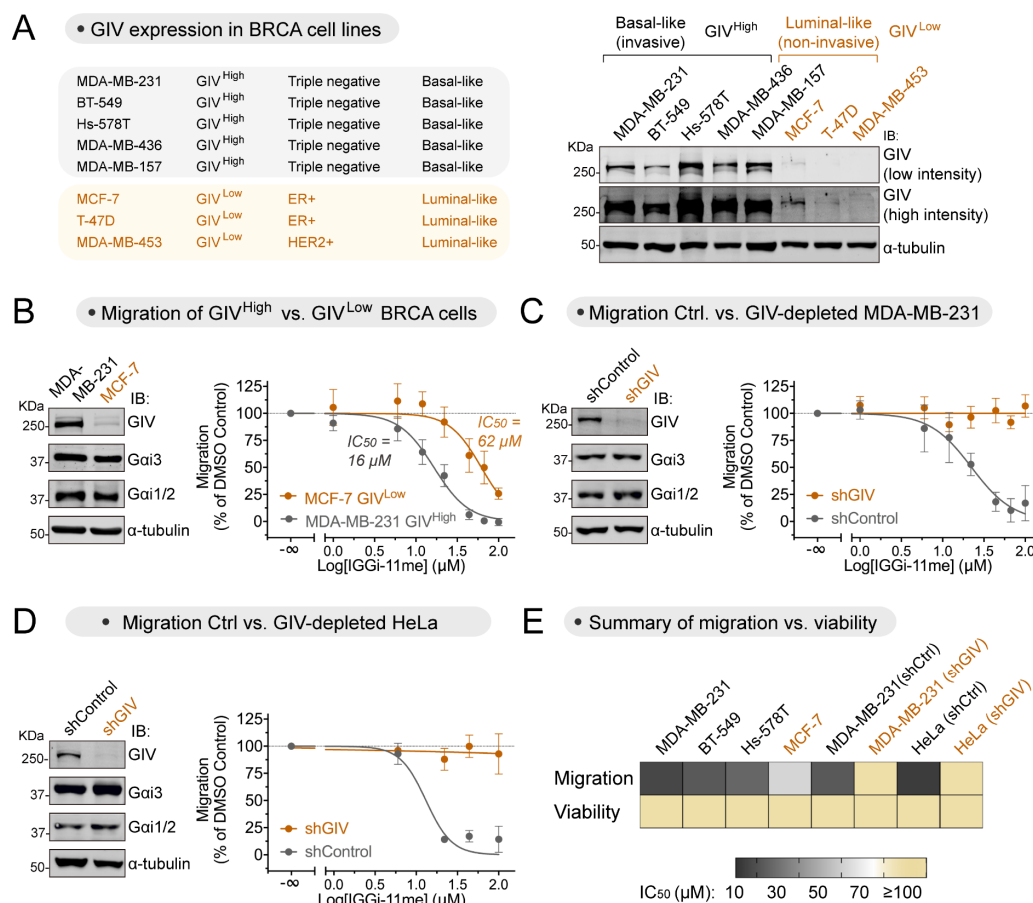


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**Figure 4. IGGi-11me specifically inhibits GIV-dependent G-protein cell signaling. (A)** IGGi-11me inhibits EGF-stimulated Akt activation (phospho-serine 473, pAkt S473) in MDA-MB-231 and HeLa cells. Cells were preincubated with the indicated concentrations of IGGi-11me and stimulated with EGF (1.6 nM for MDA-MB-231 or 50 nM for HeLa) for 5 minutes before lysis and immunoblotting. **(B)** IGGi-11me (100 μM) does not inhibit EGF-stimulated Akt activation in GIV-depleted cells. GIV-depleted cells (shGIV) or control cells (shControl) were treated as in A. **(C)** IGGi-11me does not block Akt activation upon stimulation of the GPCR CXCR4. MDA-MB-231 cells were preincubated with IGGi-11me (100 μM) or pertussis toxin (PTX, 100 ng/ml) and stimulated with SDF-1α (100 ng/ml for 10 min) or EGF (1.6 nM for 5 min) before processing as in A. **(D)** IGGi-11me does not affect GPCR-mediated modulation of G-protein activity. HeLa cells expressing BRET biosensors for Gai-GTP (Gai\*-BERKY3) or free Gβγ (Gβγ-BERKY3) were preincubated with IGGi-11me (100 μM) and sequentially treated with the α2 adrenergic agonist brimonidine and the antagonist yohimbine (25 μM) during real-time BRET measurements as indicated in the figure. All results are mean ± SEM (N ≥ 3). \*\*P < 0.01; ns, P > 0.05, ANOVA.

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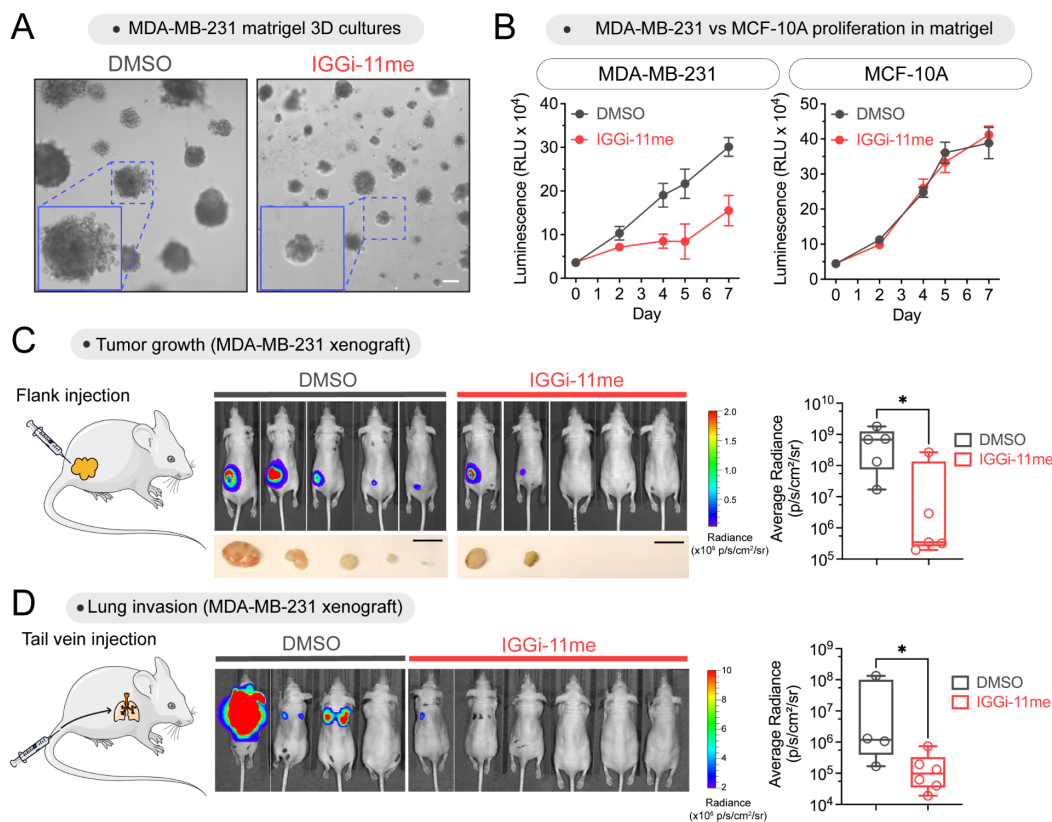
FIGURE 5



**Figure 5. IGGi-11me blocks GIV-dependent tumor cell migration.** (A) Basal-like invasive breast cancer (BRCA) cell lines express higher amounts of GIV (GIV<sup>High</sup>) than luminal-like non-invasive BRCA cell lines (GIV<sup>Low</sup>) as determined by immunoblotting. (B) IGGi-11me inhibits cell migration more potently in MDA-MB-231 cells (GIV<sup>High</sup>) than in MCF-7 cells (GIV<sup>Low</sup>). Chemotactic cell migration towards fetal bovine serum was determined in the presence of the indicated concentrations of IGGi-11me using a Boyden-chamber assay. (C, D) IGGi-11me mediated inhibition of tumor cell migration is lost upon depletion of GIV from MDA-MB-231 (C) or HeLa (D) cells. GIV-depleted cells (shGIV) or control cells (shControl) were processed as described in B. (E) IGGi-11me impairs tumor cell migration without affecting cell viability. Heatmap comparing the half-maximal inhibitory concentration (IC<sub>50</sub>) of IGGi-11me on cell migration or viability of the indicated cell lines. IC<sub>50</sub> values were determined from results shown in this figure or in Fig. S8. Cell viability was determined upon incubation with IGGi-11me for 24 hours, which is longer than the times cells were exposed to the compound in cell migration assays. All results are mean ± SEM (N ≥ 3).

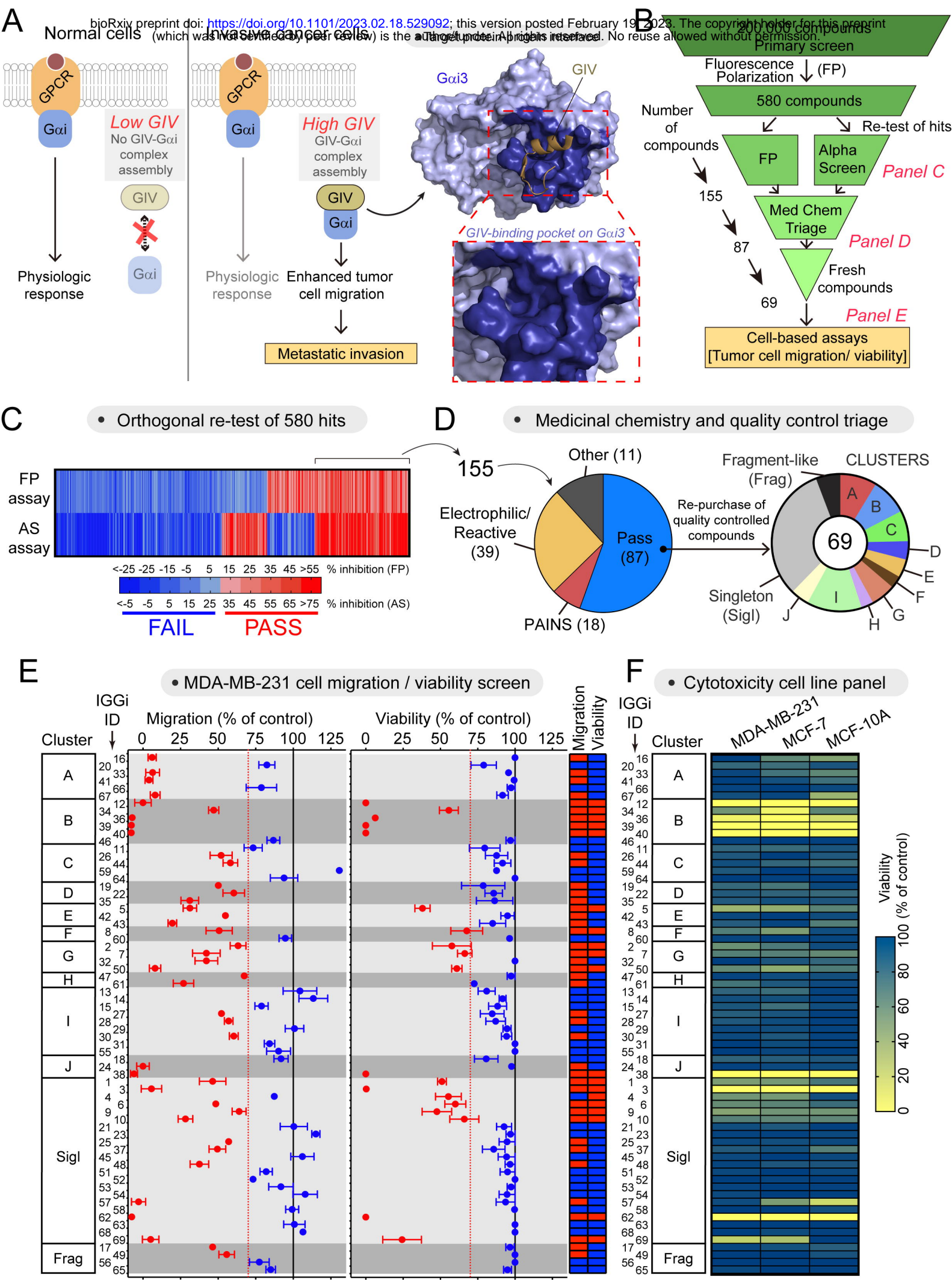
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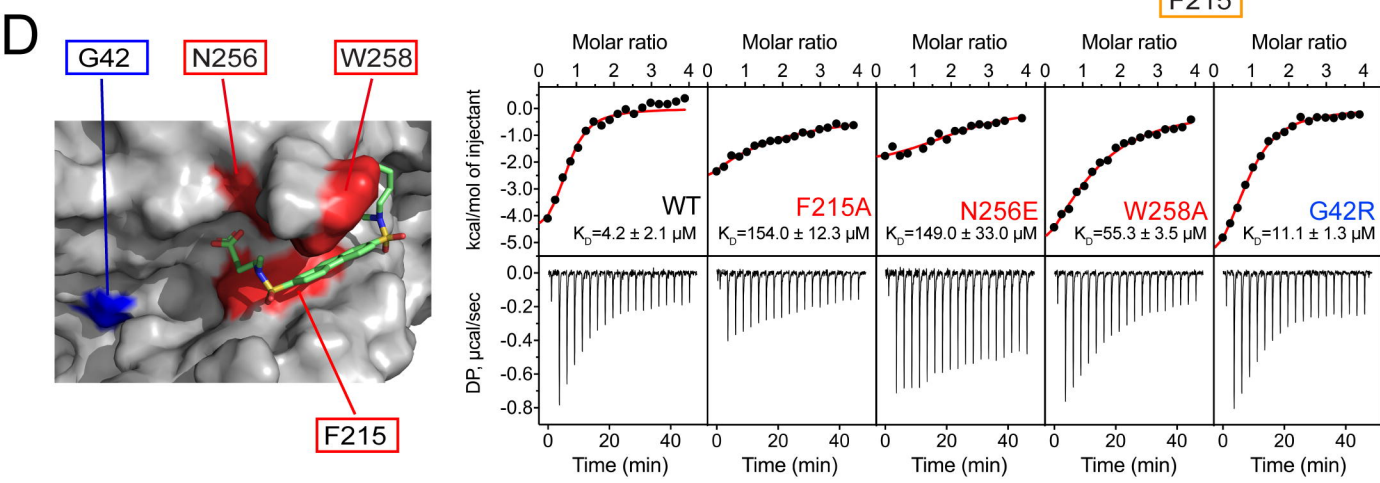
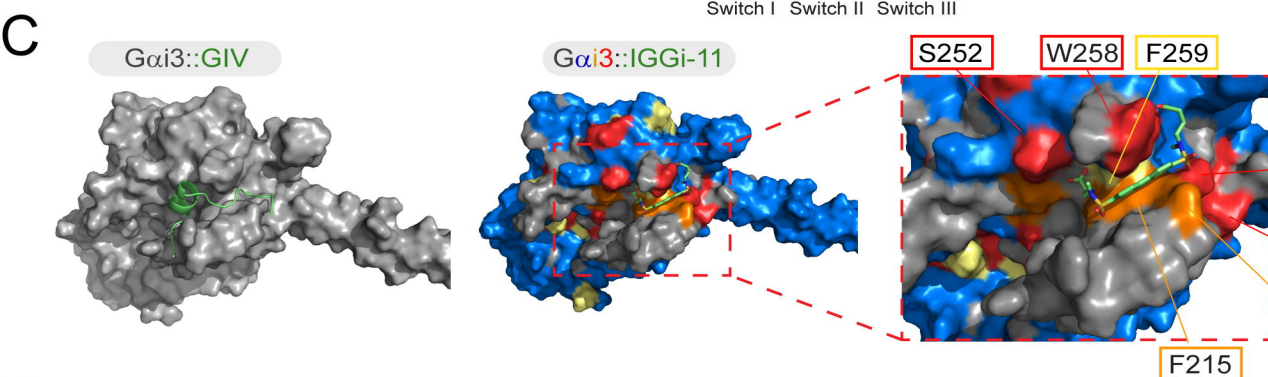
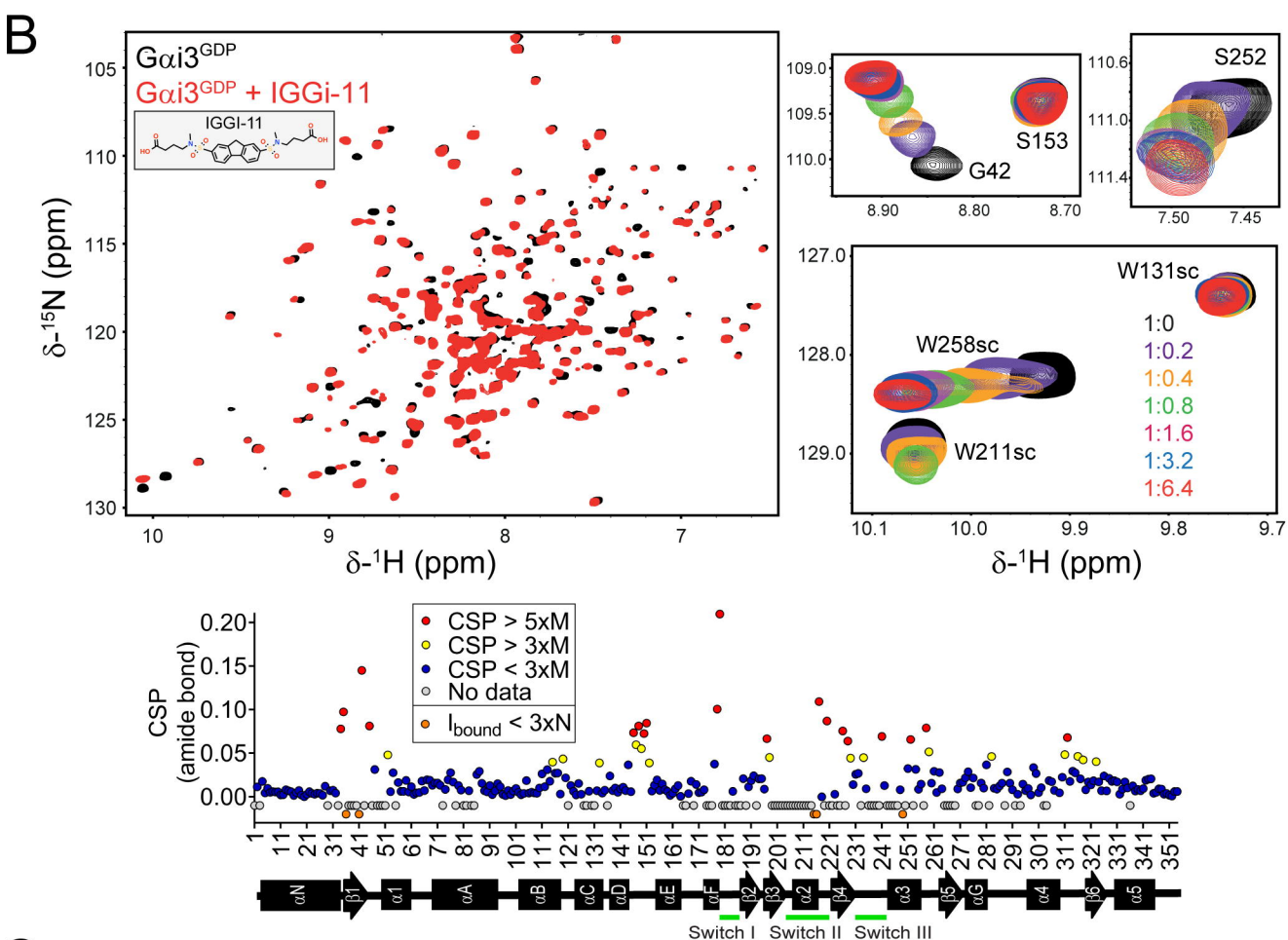
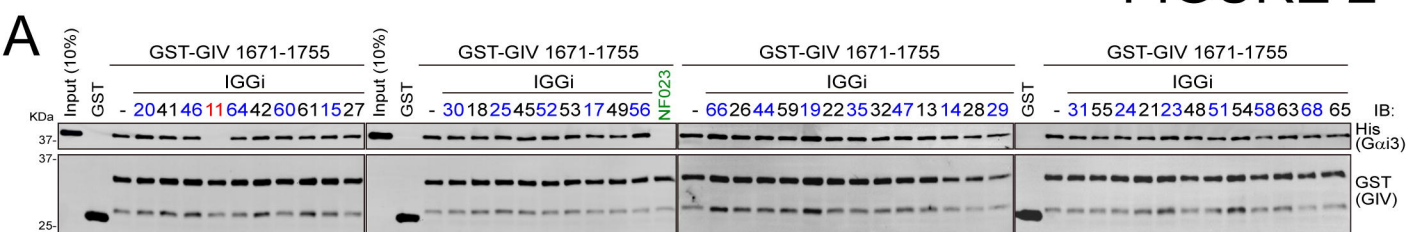
FIGURE 6



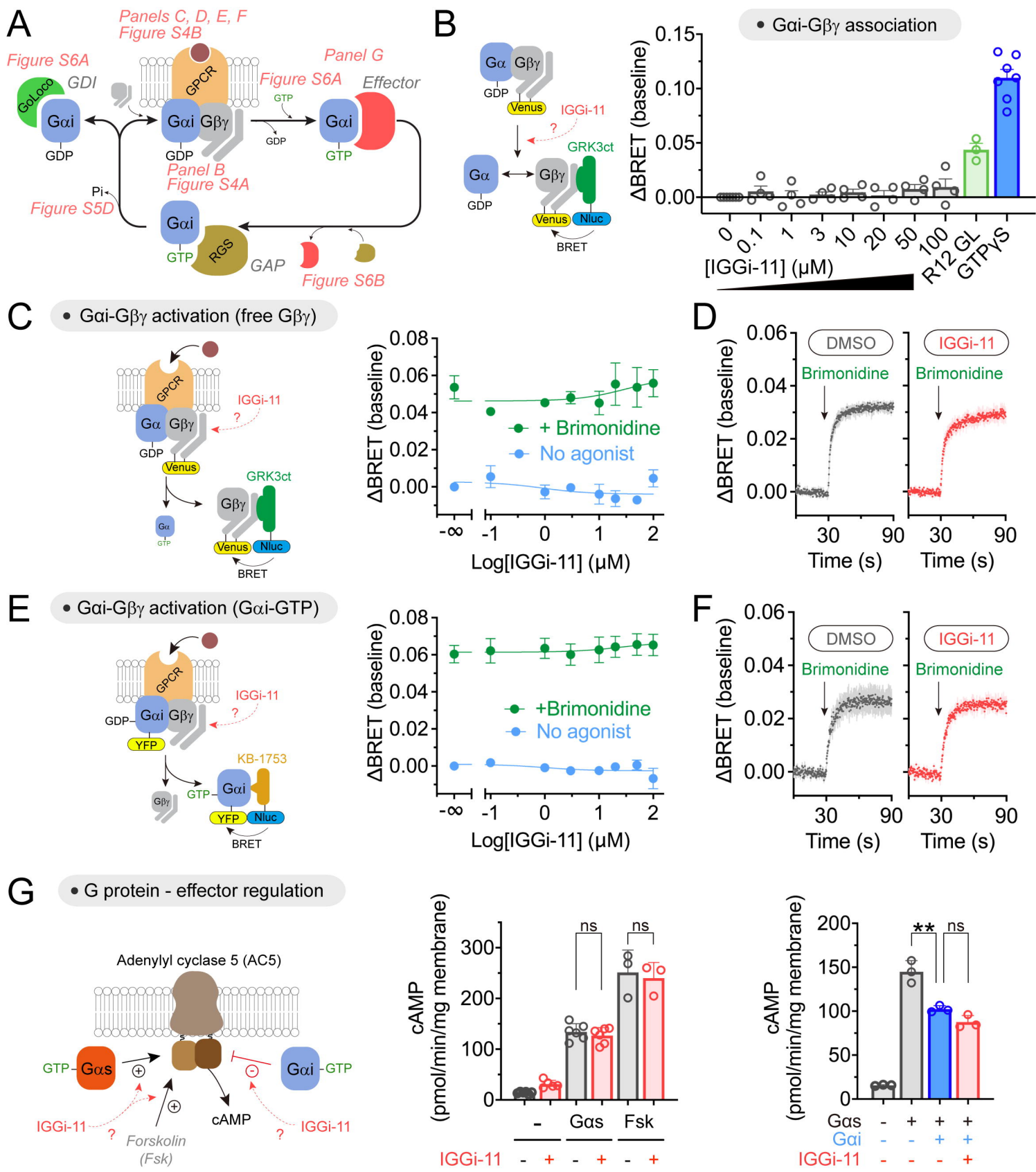
**Figure 6. Inhibition of tumor growth and metastatic invasion in mice upon IGGi-11me treatment. (A, B)** IGGi-11me inhibits growth of MDA-MB-231 breast cancer invasive cells, but not of non-transformed MCF-10A cells, on Matrigel. IGGi-11me (100  $\mu$ M) or DMSO was used to treat cells at the onset of the culture period for 2 days and then removed for the remaining duration of the experiment. (A) displays representative images of acini at 7 days (scale bar = 100  $\mu$ m), and viability in (B) is expressed as mean  $\pm$  SEM ( $N \geq 3$ ). (C, D) IGGi-11me impairs MDA-MB-231 cell tumor growth (C) or lung invasion (D) in NCr nu/nu athymic nude mice. Female nude mice were injected subcutaneously (C) or through the tail vein (D) with luciferase-expressing MDA-MB-231 cells treated with IGGi-11me or DMSO, and imaged 8 weeks later upon luciferin administration ( $N = 4-6$  per group). Box plots on the left display the quantification of luminescence (median, min/max). \* $P < 0.05$ , Mann-Whitney U test. In (C), tumors were photographed post-mortem (scale bar = 1 cm).



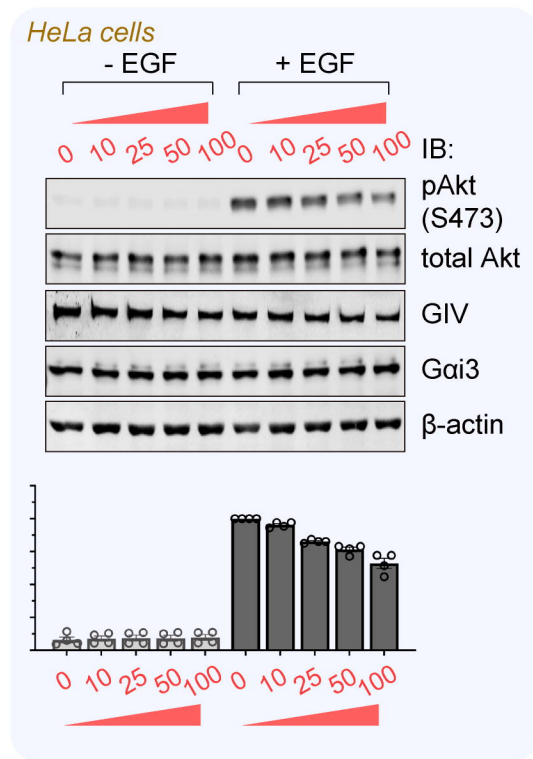
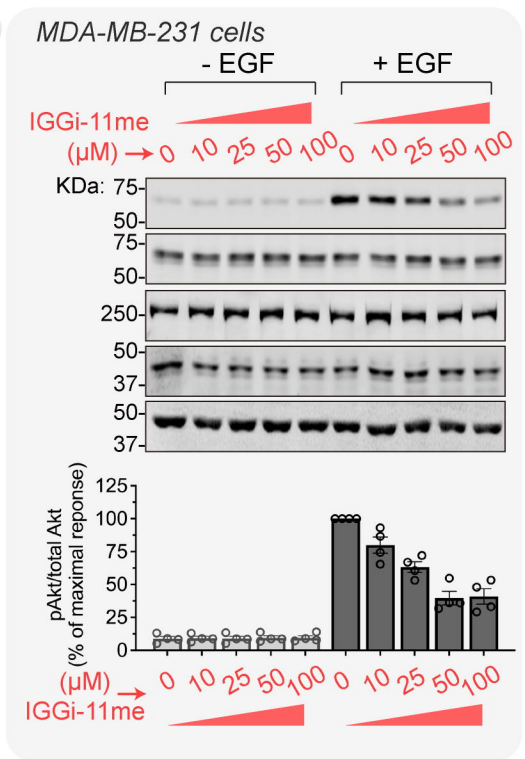
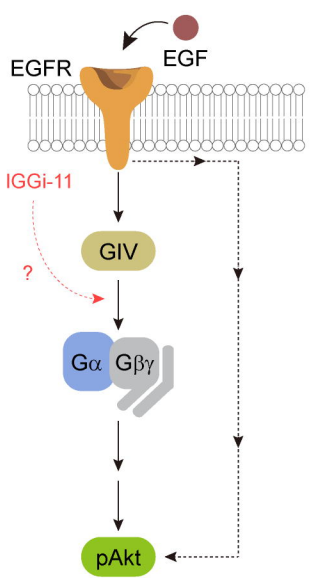




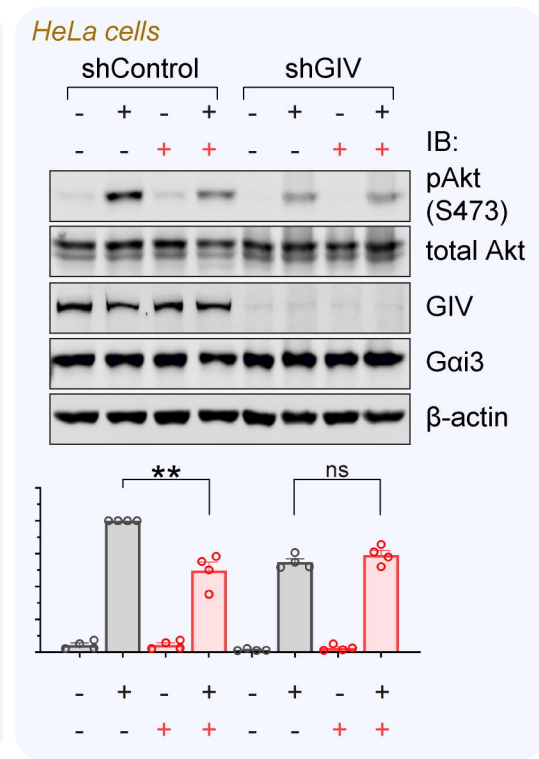
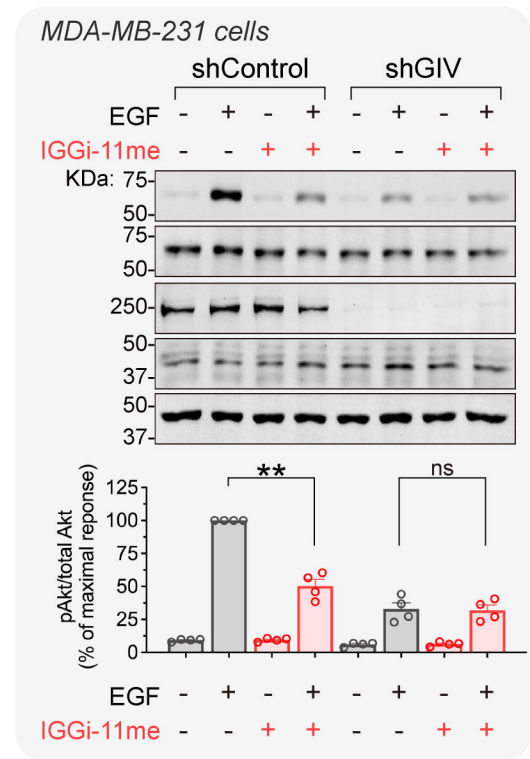
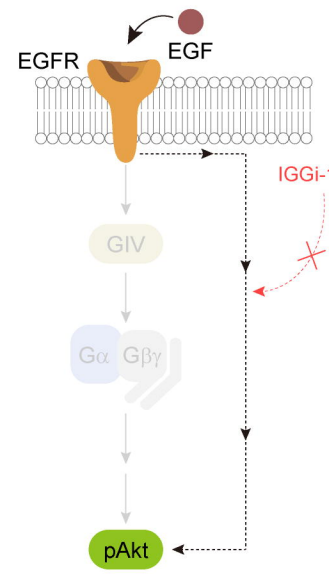




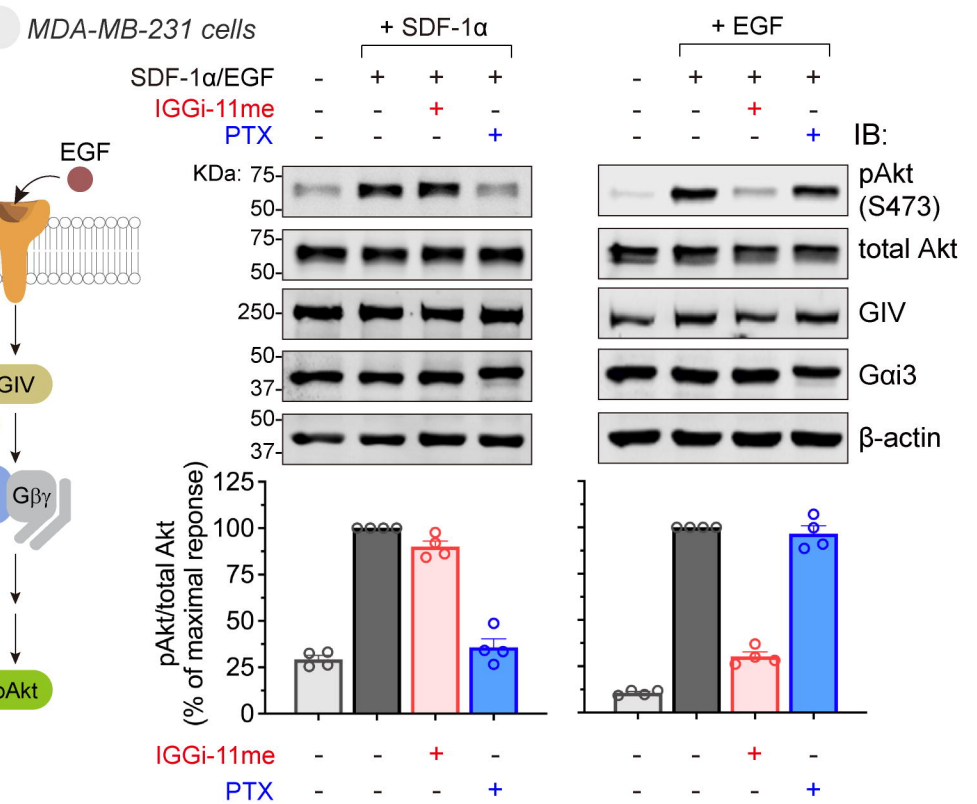
**A** • Dose dependency



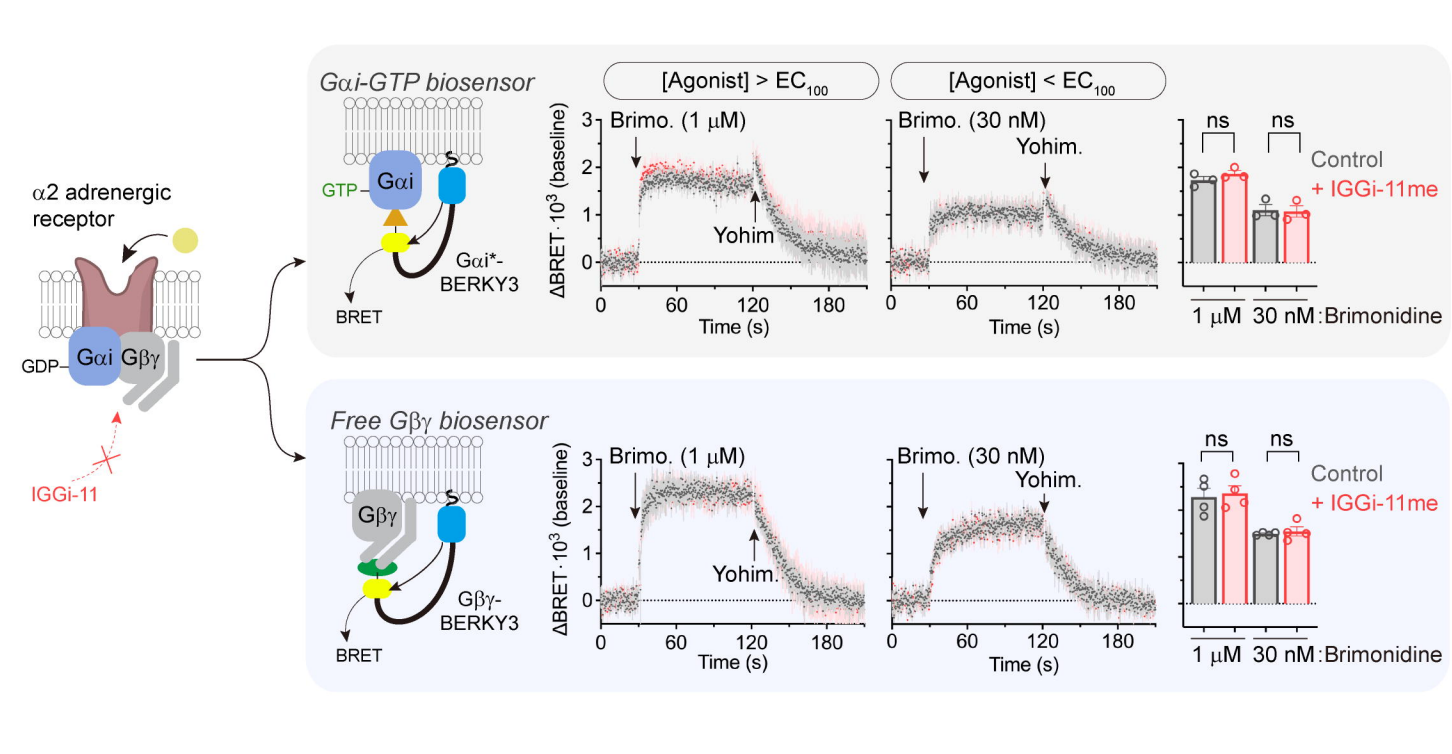
**B** • GIV dependency



**C** • IGGi-11 on GPCR signaling (I)



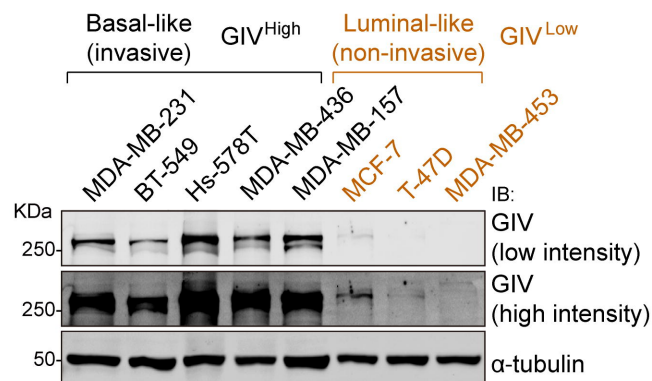
**D** • IGGi-11 on GPCR signaling (II)



## A

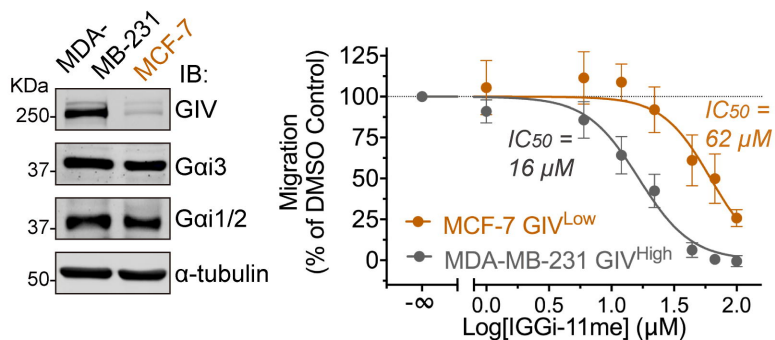
### GIV expression in BRCA cell lines

MDA-MB-231	GIV <sup>High</sup>	Triple negative	Basal-like
BT-549	GIV <sup>High</sup>	Triple negative	Basal-like
Hs-578T	GIV <sup>High</sup>	Triple negative	Basal-like
MDA-MB-436	GIV <sup>High</sup>	Triple negative	Basal-like
MDA-MB-157	GIV <sup>High</sup>	Triple negative	Basal-like
MCF-7	GIV <sup>Low</sup>	ER+	Luminal-like
T-47D	GIV <sup>Low</sup>	ER+	Luminal-like
MDA-MB-453	GIV <sup>Low</sup>	HER2+	Luminal-like



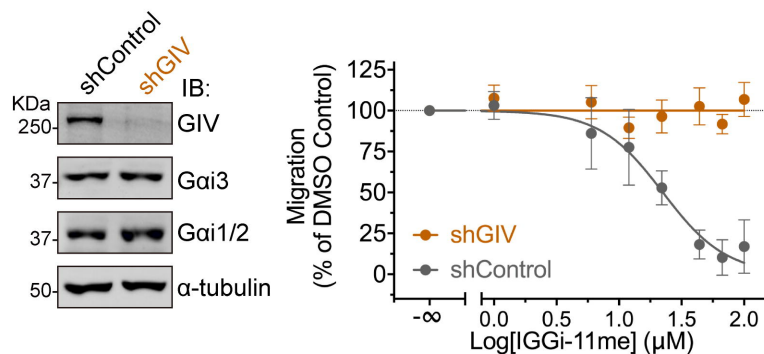
## B

### Migration of GIV<sup>High</sup> vs. GIV<sup>Low</sup> BRCA cells



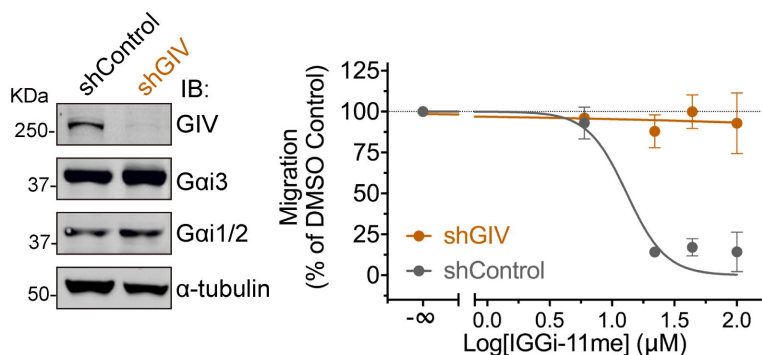
## C

### Migration Ctrl. vs. GIV-depleted MDA-MB-231



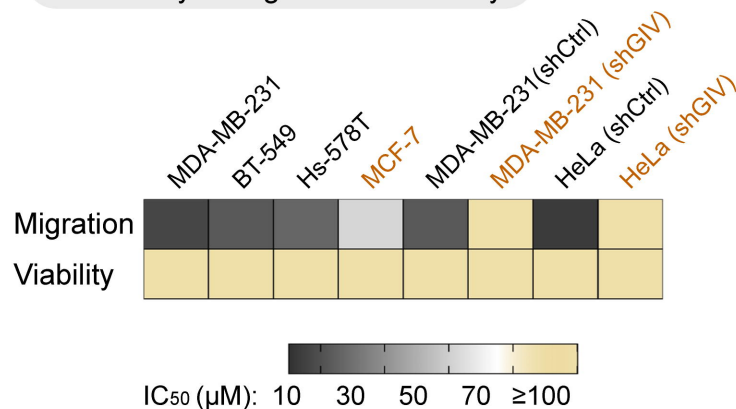
## D

### Migration Ctrl vs. GIV-depleted HeLa



## E

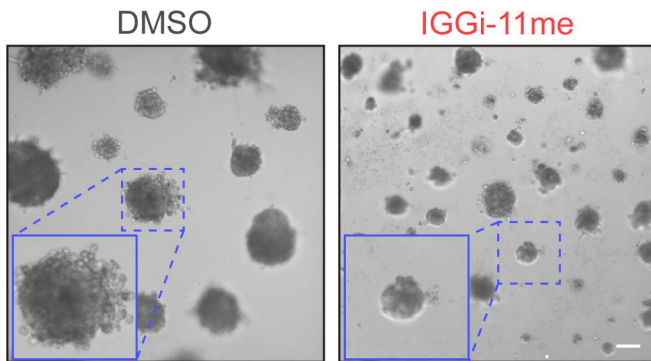
### Summary of migration vs. viability





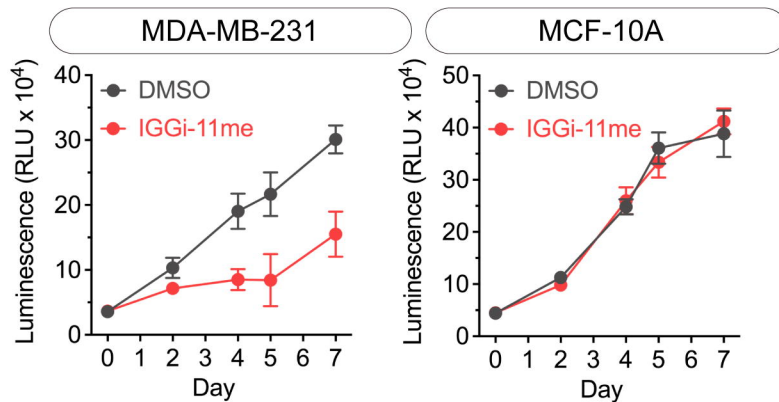
## A

- MDA-MB-231 matrigel 3D cultures



## B

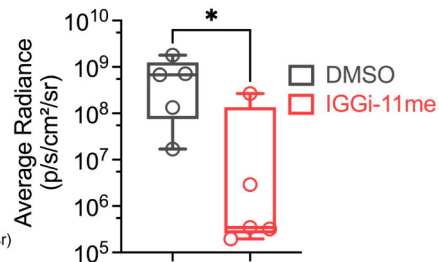
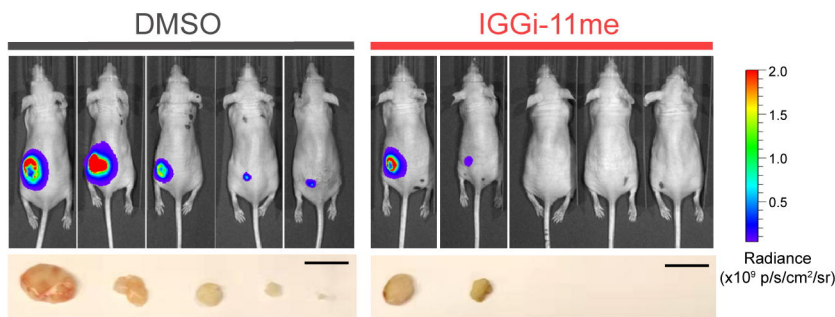
- MDA-MB-231 vs MCF-10A proliferation in matrigel



## C

- Tumor growth (MDA-MB-231 xenograft)

Flank injection



## D

- Lung invasion (MDA-MB-231 xenograft)

Tail vein injection

