Aberrant immune regulation and enrichment of stem-like CD8[+] T cells in the pancreatic lymph node
during type 1 diabetes development

Running title: Stem-like CD8[+] T cell phenotypes enriched in T1D

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Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare no relevant conflicts of interest related to the

work presented in this manuscript.

Word Count: 10286, Tables: 5, Figures: 5, Supplementary Tables: 4, Supplementary Figures: 8

Summary

Effector CD8$^+$ T cells are key cellular drivers of type 1 diabetes (T1D) pathogenesis, yet questions remain

regarding the molecular defects leading to altered cytotoxicity, their signature in peripheral tissues, and

their receptor specificity. Thus, we analyzed human pancreatic lymph nodes (pLN) using mass cytometry

and single cell RNA sequencing (scRNAseq) with combined proteomic and T cell receptor (TCR) profiling.

Cytometric analysis revealed an enriched population of T stem-cell memory (Tscm)-like cells

(CD8$^+$CD45RA$^+$CD27$^+$CD28$^+$CCR7$^+$CXCR3$^+$ T cells) in T1D pLNs. scRNAseq profiling indicated an elevated

inflammatory cytokine gene signature (*IFITM3*, *LTB*) along with regulators of terminal differentiation

(*BCL6*, *BCL3*) in naïve CD8$^+$ T cells in T1D pLN, while effector CD8$^+$ T cells expressed features of

progenitor exhausted cells (*BCL2*). Immune Response Enrichment Analysis (IREA) indicated IL-15

signaling as a significant driver of these phenotypes. Integrated TCR and transcriptomic analysis revealed

a cluster of diverse naïve-like CD8$^+$ T cell clones in T1D pLN. When comparing pLN and pancreatic cellular

slice extracts, we observed sharing of effector CD8$^+$ T cells, with upregulation of terminal effector

signatures detected within the pancreas relative to paired pLN samples. Thus, we provide multimodal

cellular profiles enriched in T1D tissues for consideration in therapeutic targeting.

Keywords: type 1 diabetes, human, pancreas, lymph node, CD8 T cell, single cell RNA sequencing

Introduction

Genetic fine mapping studies have identified that type 1 diabetes (T1D)-associated risk variants preferentially localize to enhancer regions within immune cells, namely T and B cells[1]. However, inaccessibility of the pancreas from living individuals mandates that studies examining immune cell function in T1D largely be derived from peripheral blood, which may not accurately reflect phenotypes within the target organ during disease pathogenesis. Identifying the molecular basis for T1D-associated immune dysregulation within the pancreas and pancreatic draining lymph nodes (pLN) is highly valuable in the process of developing targeted therapies.

The role of the pLN in promoting T1D progression is incompletely characterized, but murine and human studies have implicated the pLN as an important priming site for immune activation[2-4]. In the non-obese diabetic (NOD) mouse model of T1D, pLN self-renewing autoreactive T cells were found to be an important source of islet antigen-specific cytotoxic lymphocytes[5]. Human studies indicate that patients with T1D possess skewed T cell subset distributions within the pLN, with reduced T follicular regulatory (TFR) cell frequency reported in one study[6] and increased Th17 cells noted in another[7]. Although there are conflicting reports as to whether deficits in circulating regulatory T cell (Treg) number and function are present in T1D patients[8, 9], multiple studies have demonstrated deficits in suppressive capacity[7] and migration toward the pancreas[10] in Tregs derived from T1D pLN.

Though peripheral blood signatures do not always correlate with those from tissues[11], there have been many important knowledge gains linking peripheral immunological signatures to clinical outcomes. Interestingly, many of the signatures associated with immunotherapeutic response have converged around CD8$^+$ T cell subsets. For example, an exhausted-like CD8$^+$ population expressing negative regulatory molecules, including TIGIT and PD-1, together with exhaustion markers KLRG1 and CD57, was associated with C-peptide preservation post-treatment with alefacept (LFA3-Ig)[12]. Similarly, expansion of TIGIT$^+$KLRG1$^+$CD8$^+$ T cells was found preferentially in those who responded to teplizumab

(α-CD3)[13]. Moreover, studies in mice[5] and humans[14, 15] have implicated CD4[+] and CD8[+] stem cell memory

T cells (Tscm) as a potentially important reservoir for promoting pathogenic antigen-specific responses

in T1D. Although clinical studies have shown that exhausted-like populations are clonally related to a

different CD8[+] memory population expressing more activation markers relative to exhaustion markers[12],

there is a paucity of information in T1D regarding the distribution of these subsets in secondary

lymphatic organs and pancreas, their receptor profiles, or the pathways driving these phenotypes.

Our lab has previously generated sorted T cell receptor (TCR) profiles from donor-matched pLN,

spleen, and peripheral blood samples, revealing cell type-dependent repertoire sharing across tissues,

with CD8[+] T cells demonstrating the greatest degree of sharing[16]. The advent of single cell profiling

technologies enables the examination of sharing between lymph node and pancreas T cell populations

with greater resolution. To understand the phenotypic and transcriptomic profile of immune cell

populations in disease-relevant tissues, we performed single cell multi-omic analysis of the pLN as well

as pancreatic T cells from donors with and without T1D. In this study, we show that circulating

phenotypic signatures previously identified to correlate with T1D status or immunotherapeutic response

are shared across tissue immune phenotypes. Moreover, we offer evidence that human CD8[+] T cells

possess less differentiated phenotypes in the pLN in T1D and that effector populations differentiate

further upon trafficking to the pancreas.

Methods

Human Organ Donors

Tissues were recovered from T1D donors, donors possessing islet autoantibody positive (AAB+) as well

as donors without diabetes, and negative for islet autoantibodies (ND) according to the Network for

Pancreatic Organ donors with Diabetes (nPOD) inclusion criteria[17]. Demographic information used to

stratify subjects for analyses was obtained from the nPOD datashare (https://npoddatashare.coh.org/)

and nPOD data portal (https://portal.jdrfnpod.org) websites.

Organ Processing

Tissues were processed as previously described[16]. Briefly, pLN were dissociated in HBSS + 10% human

(male, type AB) serum (Atlanta Biologicals) using a gentleMACS tissue processor (Miltenyi), followed by

subsequent homogenization and filtering steps using a tissue douncer (40 mL; loose pestle; Wheaton)

and 100-μm, 70-μm, and 30-μm filters (Miltenyi) to obtain a single cell suspension. Cells were freshly

analyzed by flow cytometry as described below, and remaining cells were cryopreserved using CryoStor

CS10 (Stemcell). Live pancreatic slices were prepared from nPOD organ donors as previously described[18]

and freshly digested with 1X collagenase IV (Stemcell) diluted in DMEM for 30 minutes at $37^{o}C$ and 5%

CO_2. Remaining tissue was gently mechanically dissociated with frosted slides and filtered using 70-μm

filters (Miltenyi) to obtain a single cell suspension. Cells were enriched for CD45$^+$ cells using CD45

Microbeads (Milltenyi) and processed for scRNAseq (10X Genomics) as below.

Flow Cytometry

Fresh tissues were dissociated as above and stained with Live/Dead yellow viability dye (Invitrogen) and

incubated with TruStain FcX (Biolegend) according to manufacturer's instructions prior to staining with a

panel of antibodies broadly examining memory, effector, and naïve immune cell phenotypes (**Table 1**)

consistent with previously published methods[19]. Data were acquired on an LSRFortessa (BD) and

analyzed using FlowJo V10.8.2 software.

Mass Cytometry

Cryopreserved cells from pLN of ND (n=12) and T1D donors (n=10) were stained with a 35-marker panel

(**Table 2**) of MAXPAR metal-chelating polymers and run on a CyTOF mass cytometer by the Human

Immune Monitoring Center at Stanford University, as reported previously[20].

Mass Cytometry Analysis Pipeline

Data were normalized between batches using premessa[21] in R based on internal bead controls. After

this, FCS files were loaded into FlowJo (BD Biosciences), beads were excluded, and live single CD45$^+$ cells

were used for downstream analysis. Data analysis involved importing FCS files into R and creating a

flowset using the flowCore package[22]. Data were arcsinh transformed with a cofactor of 5 prior to using

the expression data and cell metadata to create a Seurat object. PCA was run using all panel markers,

after which K nearest neighbors (KNN) were calculated using FindNeighbors(), and initial clustering using

the lovain algorithm was performed (resolution=0.2). PCA was re-run on subsetted data with markers

not associated with the lineage of interest removed. Nearest neighbors were calculated as above and

subclustering was performed as above for each subset using the Louvain algorithm (resolution=0.5). Cell

counts per cluster per individual were determined and normalized by the total number of cells to allow

for comparison of cluster proportions. Differential abundance analysis was performed using propeller[23]

with age and batch as covariates in a linear model designed with model.matrix(~0 + group + age +

Batch). Design matrix and contrasts (T1D-ND) were incorporated into the propeller.ttest function with

arguments robust=T, trend=F, sort=T. Differential expression analysis was performed using the mean

expression values of each marker per cluster as input into a linear model using limma. Briefly, the design

matrix as defined with model.matrix(~condition + batch) was input alongside mean marker expression

into the lmFit function, the output of which was fed into the eBayes function. Significantly altered

cluster proportions or expression values were defined as Bonferroni adjusted p-value <0.05.

Single Cell RNA Sequencing

Cryopreserved single cell suspensions were thawed and stained with a cocktail of 7 oligo-barcoded

TotalSeq antibodies (Biolegend, **Table S1**) to aid in clustering naïve and memory $CD8^+$ and $CD4^+$ T cell

phenotypes. Prior to use, Totalseq antibodies were centrifuged at 14000xg for 10 minutes at 4^oC to

avoid antibody aggregates, as recommended by the manufacturer. Cell viability was assessed using

acridine orange and propidium iodide (AO/PI) staining on a Nexcelom Cellometer or CellDrop. For six

samples with viability <70%, the Dead Cell Removal Kit (Stemcell) was used. $1x10^6$ cells per sample

(viability >70%) were resuspended in 100μL volume of PBS + 1% BSA and stained with TruStain FcX

(5μL/test) to block Fc receptors for 10 minutes at 4^oC prior to incubation with the antibody master mix

(0.5μL of each antibody/test) for 30 minutes at 4^oC. Cells were washed four times with 3mL of chilled

PBS + 1% BSA, after which live cells were counted using AO/PI on a Nexcelom Cellometer or CellDrop

and volumes adjusted to obtain a targeted recovery of 10,000 cells. Single cell suspensions were loaded

into the Chromium Controller (10X Genomics) and libraries prepared according to the 5' v1.1, 5' v2, and

5' HT v2 kit protocols (10x Genomics). Libraries were sequenced on an Illumina Novaseq or Novaseq X

instrument with a target of 50,000 paired reads for gene expression, 10,000 paired reads for surface

protein, and 5,000 paired reads for TCR libraries. Median gene expression library sequencing saturation

was 80.9%.

147   **Single Cell Read Processing**

148   BCL files were processed to fastq files using the cellranger mkfastq pipeline (10X genomics). Fastq files

149   from gene expression, surface protein, and TCR libraries were processed to matrices using the cellranger

150   multi (10X genomics) count pipeline in order to maximize counting of cells with all three modalities.

151   **Single Cell RNAseq Normalization and Analysis Pipeline**

152   scRNAseq data were subject to quality control (QC) by removing doublets using the doubletfinder

153   package[24], and cells were removed based on cutoffs of reads/cell ≤2000 and percent mitochondrial

154   reads ≤10%, then normalized using the DSB package[25] to remove background noise and ambient signal.

155   After this initial filtering, data were log normalized with NormalizeData() and scaled with ScaleData(),

156   then variable features were calculated and dimensionality reduction was performed in Seurat[26]. For the

157   antibody-derived tag data, variable features were set to all antibodies included, data were scaled[26], and

158   principal component analysis (PCA) was run. Data were integrated in Seurat using IntegrateLayers() with

159   RPCA as the integration method. Integration of TCR with gene expression data was performed using

160   scRepertoire[27] in R. Clones were defined as sequences sharing an identical complementarity determining

161   region 3 (CDR3) for both TCRα and TCRβ. Differentially expressed genes (DEGs) were calculated using

162   MAST[28] with sex as a latent variable with a minimum expression threshold of 0.10 and reported when

163   false discovery rate (FDR) corrected $p<0.05$ and log2 fold change (FC)≥0.26. Pathway enrichment

164   analyses were performed using the top 100 most differentially expressed genes between T1D and ND

165   donors with FDR $p<0.05$ per cluster ranked by log2FC as input into the ReactomePA[29] package for pLN,

166   and the R package escape[30] was used to perform single-sample Gene Set Enrichment Analysis (ssGSEA)

167   using the integrated pancreas and pLN dataset. Results were reported when Benjamini-Hochberg

168   corrected $p<0.1$ as noted in figure legends.

Clonotype Neighbor Graph Analysis (CoNGA)

The RNA assay from the integrated pLN Seurat object was exported in h5ad format for python. Filtered

contig annotation data from each sample was merged using make_10x_clones_file_batch from the

conga package in python. The resulting merged TCR data were used along with the gene expression data

as input for run_conga.py[31] with the –all flag and batch keys set to status and nPOD identification

number (ID) in order to compare the composition of clusters by clinical status and across all donors.

Gene expression data were also batch corrected using the argument batch_integration_method

harmony with batch_integration_key batch. Clone information was added to the Seurat object metadata

in order to allow visualization of TCR clusters on the existing gene expression Uniform Manifold

Approximation and Projection (UMAP). Clones that possessed a conga score<1, indicative of significant

overlap between gene expression and TCR neighborhoods beyond what would be expected by chance[31],

were used as input to evaluate enrichment in cluster composition by clinical status using two-sided

Fisher's exact test as reported in the figure legend.

Sex as a biological variable

Male and female organ donors were accepted in this study, without biological sex considered as a major

covariate in T1D and ND donors.

Statistics

Data were analyzed using R v4.2.3, python v3.9 and GraphPad Prism v9. Statistical tests and p-values are

reported in the figure legends.

Study approval

The study was conducted in accordance with federal guidelines and the University of Florida (UF)

Institutional Review Board approved protocol IRB201600029, as previously described[32].

Data availability

Mass cytometry and flow cytometry data are available at ImmPort (https://www.immport.org, accession

number: SDY3066. Supporting Data Values associated with this manuscript are provided in the

supplement. Gene expression and TCR data are available on GEO with accession: In Progress

Results

Mass cytometry reveals a population of CD8⁺CXCR3⁺ T cells enriched in T1D pLN

The diverse nature of immune cell phenotypes mandates the use of high-parameter technologies, such

as cytometry time of flight (CyTOF)[33, 34, 12], to deep-phenotype multiple immune subsets. We applied

high-parameter CyTOF (35 markers, **Table S2**) to pLN derived from 10 T1D and 12 ND nPOD organ

donors (**Table 2; Figure 1A**). Clustering total CD45⁺ immune cells revealed 11 unique populations

spanning B cells, CD4⁺ T cells, CD8⁺ T cells, myeloid, and natural killer (NK) cells (**Figure 1B**). We observed

no significant differences in cluster abundance globally between T1D and ND donors (**Figure S1A-B**);

however, differential expression analysis revealed significantly enhanced CXCR3 expression in cluster 4,

a naïve CD8⁺ T cell cluster (p=0.04, fold change [FC]= 2.43), in T1D pLN as compared to ND donors

(**Figure 1C-D**). We confirmed these findings in an independent cohort of 24 nPOD pLN donors comprised

of ND, autoantibody positive (AAB+) and T1D donors (**Table 3**) using flow cytometry (**Figure S2**).

We then performed subclustering to obtain a finer resolution of immune cell subsets from the

CyTOF data. As one batch demonstrated slight, non-significant differences in age (**Figure S3**), we chose

to examine differences in cluster proportions using a linear model with age and batch incorporated as

covariates. Subsetting and reclustering of B cells and CD4 T cells yielded no significant changes in cluster

abundance or marker expression by clinical status (**Figure S4**). However, CD8⁺ T cell subclustering

yielded eight proteomic clusters (**Figure 2A-B**), with a T1D-associated increase in the proportion of CD8⁺

T cell cluster 0, expressing the naïve T cell markers CD45RA and CCR7, costimulatory molecules CD27

and CD28, as well as low levels of the chemokine receptor CXCR3, which confers migratory capacity

towards CXCL10[35] (**Figure 2C**). This finding was also confirmed in the aforementioned independent flow

cytometry cohort (**Figure 2D, Table 3**), where T1D donors possessed a significantly increased proportion

of CXCR3⁺ cells within the naïve (CD45RA⁺CCR7⁺) CD8⁺ T cell compartment as compared to both ND

(p=0.0053, FC=2.70) and islet autoantibody positive (AAB) donors (p=0.0062, FC=5.08). We next

compared the differentiation status of these cells, as CXCR3 expression may indicate a Tscm

phenotype[36], while CXCR5 expression is associated with precursor exhausted and differentiated effector

memory cells[37, 38]. When comparing CXCR3 and CXCR5 expressing CD8 T cell populations, $CXCR3^+CXCR5^+$

memory $CD8^+$ T cells expressed increased PD-1 as compared to their $CXCR3^+CXCR5^-$ counterparts,

supporting a less terminal phenotype for single $CXCR3^+$ cells (**Figure S5A-B**). Importantly, these

phenotypic signatures are clinically relevant in peripheral blood studies: we recently reported a T1D-

associated increase in $CXCR3^{lo}$ naïve $CD8^+$ T cells[19], and circulating $CD8^+$ T cells with a more terminally

differentiated/exhausted profile have been previously correlated with preservation of C-peptide and

response to teplizumab[12, 13]. Collectively, these data and our prior peripheral blood findings[39] suggest

Tc1 skewing as an immunological feature of T1D shared across tissues.

IL-15 drives memory maintenance and averts the exhaustion program in T1D $CD8^+$ T cells

To explore the transcriptomic profile of the cell populations previously identified by both CyTOF and

fluorochrome-based flow cytometry, we performed single cell RNA sequencing (scRNAseq) analysis with

TCR-seq on donor pLN (**Figure 3A**). After QC, we obtained 122,300 cells across 16 individuals (9 T1D, 7

ND) (**Table 4**) that comprised 25 clusters spanning $CD4^+$ T cells, $CD8^+$ T cells, B cells, NK cells, innate

lymphoid cells (ILCs), monocyte/macrophages and dendritic cells (DCs) (**Figure 3B**, **Figure S6A-B**). No

significant differences in global cluster abundance across clinical status were detected (**Figure S6C-D**).

We performed subclustering to more deeply examine alterations in T cell phenotype, yielding 15

subclusters spanning naïve, memory, and exhausted T cells, as well as Tregs (**Figure 3C**). Differential

expression analysis of T1D compared to controls identified conserved signatures across multiple CD4 T

cell clusters, such as a reduction in genes responsible for negative regulation of cytokine signaling (e.g.,

TNFAIP3[40] within naïve CD4, T follicular helper [TFH], Th17, thymic Treg [tTreg] clusters) and

activation/proliferation (e.g., *JUND*[41] within TFH, tTreg, Th1/17, Th17 clusters), as well as a broad

increase in interferon signaling genes (e.g., *IFITM3*[42] within Th17, naïve CD4, exhausted CD4, activated

naïve CD4, cycling CD4, TFH, Th1/17) (**Table S3**).

We next focused more deeply on CD8$^+$ T cell subsets as these phenotypes were significantly

altered in our CyTOF and flow cytometry data. When comparing differentially expressed genes (DEGs;

defined as false discovery rate (FDR) corrected p$_<$0.05 and Log2FC≥0.26) between T1D and ND pLN, we

observed within the naïve CD8$^+$ T cell cluster (**Figure 3D**) an upregulation of genes involved in

inflammatory cytokine signaling (*IFNAR2*[43], *IFNGR2*[44], *IFITM3*, *LTB*[45], *SOCS3*[46], *IL32*[47], *IL27RA*[48]) as well as

regulators of terminal differentiation (*BCL3*[49], *BCL6*[50], *BATF*[51]). Moreover, naïve CD8$^+$ T cells from T1D

donors also downregulated genes involved in negative regulation of cytokine signaling (*TNFAIP3*[40],

SOCS1[52]) and genes associated with T cell exhaustion (*DUSP2*[53], *NR4A2*[54], *TSC22D3*[55]) as compared with

ND. In the CD8 effector T cell (Teff) cluster (**Figure 3D**), we observed an upregulation of genes involved

in effector function (*SLC3A2*[56], *NKG7*[57], *HOPX*[58]), as well as migratory genes (*VIM*[59], *ITGA1*[60]) in T1D

relative to ND donors. We also noted upregulation of the anti-apoptotic factor *BCL2*, which is important

for the maintenance of long-lived memory subsets[61, 62], within CD8 Teff in T1D. Moreover, within this

cluster, we observed downregulation of genes associated with terminal differentiation and exhaustion

(*CXCR4*[63], *DUSP2*[53], *NR4A1*[54]), indicative of restraining of terminal differentiation in T1D as compared to

controls. Similarly, in the exhausted CD8 T cell cluster (CD8 Texh) (**Figure 3D**), we observed upregulation

of genes involved in chemotaxis (*XCL2*[64]), calcium signaling (*S100A6*, *S100A11*[65]), and inflammatory

cytokine response (*IL21R*[66], *IFITM1*, *IFITM3*, *IFITM2*[42, 67]), while genes associated with terminal

differentiation and exhaustion (*TSC22D3*, *DUSP2*, *HLA-DQB1*[68]) were downregulated in T1D.

Accordingly, pathway analysis using the Reactome database revealed that naïve CD8 T cells

(**Figure 3E**) in T1D were enriched for interleukin signaling and interferon signaling, while CD8 Teff (**Figure**

3F) were enriched for interleukin signaling and smooth muscle contraction, the latter likely reflective of

increased calcium signaling (*ANXA1, ANXA2*)[69]. Lastly, CD8 Texh (**Figure 3G**) were enriched for interferon

signaling, IL-21 signaling, and apoptotic processes, though the latter is likely reflective of negative

regulation of apoptosis, as upregulated genes *S100A11*[70], *ANXA2*[70, 71], and *VIM*[72] are involved in

inhibition of apoptosis, while *LMNA* is involved both in inhibiting apoptosis[73] and enhancing T cell

activation[74]. We then performed Immune Response Enrichment Analysis (IREA), which uses an extensive

database of specific gene sets induced by cytokine treatment[75], to infer the cytokine milieu driving these

CD8 phenotypes. Across the trajectory of CD8$^+$ T cell differentiation, signatures were significantly

enriched for IL-15 signaling in T1D (**Figure 3H-J**), which is known to promote stemness and restrain

exhaustion-like phenotypes[76] and can synergize with other inflammatory cytokines to promote effector

function[77].

CD8$^+$ T cell clones possessing a naïve-like phenotype are more prevalent in T1D pLN

Individual analyses of receptor or transcriptomic data may preclude insights into the relationships

between repertoire characteristics and phenotype. Thus, recent methods have been developed to

enable joint analysis of these modalities, namely Clonotype Neighbor Graph Analysis (CoNGA)[31], which

has shown utility in revealing transcripts associated with specific TCR genes and features. We applied

CoNGA (**Figure 4A**) to our pLN dataset, which identified 35 groups with significant (CoNGA score <1)

overlap in TCR and gene expression neighborhoods in pLN as indicated by CoNGA score and a minimum

of 4 cells per group (**Figure S7**). We overlaid CoNGA scores on the previously computed gene expression

data and observed that the most significant hits were localized to naïve CD8$^+$, mucosal-associated

invariant T (MAIT)/tissue resident memory T (TRM), and CD8$^+$ Teff cell clusters (**Figure 4B**). Clustering

using the gene expression data only using CoNGA yielded 16 unique clusters (**Figure 4C**), while clustering

using the TCR data only yielded 20 unique clusters (**Figure 4D-E**). We observed that CoNGA clone hits

belonging to CoNGA gene expression (GEX) cluster 10 and TCR cluster 3 were found in several T1D

donors, the highest frequency being found in new-onset donor 6550, while 32/33 clones detected in ND

donors (96%) were found in a single ND donor (**Table S4**). Thus, clones belonging to these clusters were

more often found in T1D (p=0.0033, OR=1.878) (**Figure 4F**). Among the clusters with >21 clones (0.1% of

unique clones from the dataset), we obtained 11 joint gene expression and TCR clusters. In accordance

with the original publication[31], we found a stronger relationship between receptor and phenotypes in

CD8[+] T cells and invariant T cells, with all of our CoNGA hit clusters being comprised of CD8[+] T cells,

including naïve, effector, T resident memory (TRM) and MAIT cell clusters (**Figure 4G**). The enriched GEX

cluster 10/TCR cluster 3 is comprised of CD8[+] T cells with high TCR diversity and with high expression of

CCR7, *SELL*, and *IL7R*. The TCRs within this cluster possessed a diverse TCR beta chain (*TRB*) repertoire,

while alpha chain gene usage was restricted to TRAV14/DV4, TRAV38-2/DV8, and TRAV38-1 (**Figure 4G**).

Additionally, this cluster also possessed a low Atchley factor 4 score (blue af4 logo, TCRseq features

panel, **Figure 4G**), which has previously been associated with larger, more hydrophobic residues[31].

Interestingly, we also noted an increase (p=0.0180, OR=1.792) in a group of expanded TCRs (CoNGA

gene expression cluster 15 paired with TCR cluster 14) comprised of MAIT and semi-invariant T cells

(TRAV1-2 gene usage paired with a more diverse set of TRB chains) in T1D pLN (**Figure S8**).

Shared memory T cell populations demonstrate enhanced effector phenotype in pancreatic slices

To investigate receptor sharing and gene expression across tissues, we performed scRNAseq on isolated

immune cells from fresh pancreatic slices[78, 79] and paired pLN (**Figure 5A**) from 2 recent-onset T1D

donors (nPOD 6551, duration 0.58 years; nPOD 6536, duration 4 years) with independently confirmed

insulitis[80]. Data integration yielded 17 clusters, which included naïve, memory, and effector CD4[+] and

CD8[+] T cell populations, Tregs, B cells, and resident macrophage populations (**Figure 5B**). We first

interrogated the TCR repertoire to examine sharing of T cell clones across these tissues, and while both

donors possessed insulitis, the newer onset donor 6551 possessed more extensive insulitis than donor

6536 (**Figure 5C**). We found that expanded clones localized mostly to clusters 0 (CD8 Teff) and 2 (CD8

CTL), respectively corresponding to CD8$^+$ T cell populations with lower and higher expression of

cytotoxicity-related molecules (*GZMK, CST7, LTB*) (**Figure 5D-E**). Clone sharing across pancreas and pLN

was minimal, with morisita horn (MH) values of 0.007 and 0.002 for cross-tissue overlap for donors 6536

and 6551, respectively (**Figure 5F**). However, even with our limited sample size, we were able to detect 6

unique clonotypes shared across tissues and clusters (**Figure 5G, Table 5**). While an expanded CD4$^+$ T cell

clone in donor 6536 was shared between tissues (cluster 9, ICOS^{hi} TCM), the majority of sharing was

detected between the effector CD8 clusters 0 and 2, especially within donor 6551 as compared to donor

6536, perhaps due to reduced infiltration as a result of increased disease duration.

We next investigated tissue-specific phenotypic differences in these clusters. We noted that

CD8$^+$ Teff clusters 0 and 2, defined by expression of NK cell receptors (*KLRK1*[81]*, KLRB1*[82]*)*, Th1 related

chemokine receptors and ligands (*CXCR3, CXCR6, CCL5*[83]) and markers of terminally differentiated

memory subsets (*LAG3, KLRD1, EOMES*[84]), were the most commonly shared clusters across tissues, while

less differentiated subsets, such as naïve T cells, were expectedly more prevalent in pLN and

inflammatory macrophages more prevalent in pancreas (**Figure 5H**). Examining DEGs of total CD8 T cells

between tissues revealed increased expression of genes involved in promoting naïve/stem-like

phenotypes, *LEF1* (Log2FC=4.8, p_{adj}=1.6e^{-7}) and *SELL* (Log2FC=4.0, p_{adj}=1.4e^{-}7), in pLN relative to

pancreatic slice (**Figure 5I**). As this could partially be explained by the increased proportion of naïve cells

in pLN relative to pancreatic slice, we sought to compare gene expression of shared populations across

tissues. We found that cells from cluster 0 (CD8 Teff) derived from pancreatic slices expressed enhanced

markers of cytotoxicity such as *GZMB* (Log2FC=5.46, p_{adj}=1.4e^{-46}) as well as exhaustion marker *DUSP4*[85]

(Log2FC=6.6, p_{adj}=1.3e^{-57}) alongside reduced expression of common gamma chain cytokine receptors

*IL7R (*Log2FC=-1.9, p_{adj}=2.5e^{-10}) and *IL2RG* (Log2FC=-2.0, p_{adj}=4.1e^{-5}) (**Figure 5J**). Cluster 2, which

possessed a similar transcriptomic profile to cluster 0 but with enhanced expression of cytotoxicity and

memory markers (CD8 CTL), demonstrated similar transcriptomic expression differences as cluster 0

across tissues (**Figure 5K**). GSEA of cluster 0 revealed upregulation of inflammatory signaling pathways,

namely IL-6-JAK-STAT3 (Log2FC=2.3, p_{adj}=1.5e^{-19}) and TNFα signaling (Log2FC=0.34, p_{adj}=1.7e^{-7}), as well

as downregulation of Wnt-Beta catenin signaling (Log2FC=-0.6, p_{adj}=2.3e^{-3}) (**Figure 5L**), altogether

suggesting that this cluster acquired a more differentiated transcriptomic program in pancreas relative

to pLN. We observed similar upregulation of inflammatory pathways in cluster 2 (**Figure 5M**). Notably,

while Wnt-Beta catenin signaling was not significantly enhanced in pLN for this cluster, we did observe

upregulation of *GIMAP5*[86] (Log2FC=-3.3, p_{adj}=1.5e^{-8}) in pLN, which is an important negative regulator of

GSK3β and thus, potentially enhances Wnt-signaling. Akin to recent reports in NOD mice that precursor

diabetogenic T cells are primed and maintained as a self-renewing pool in the pLN, seeding terminally

differentiated cells that expand in the islets[5], our data are indicative of distinct tissue programs allowing

for maintenance of CD8$^+$ T cell populations and prevention of exhaustion in the pLN, as well as

acquisition of further effector function in the pancreas during human T1D.

Discussion

Despite tremendous progress in characterizing circulating immune cells in T1D, a critical gap in

knowledge remains as to alterations in tissue immune phenotypes. Large datasets derived from the

pancreas have given insight into disease-related changes in endocrine[87, 88] composition and

function, as well as potential changes in immune:islet cell communication[87, 89], but have limited

power to examine immune cell phenotype. Datasets derived from secondary lymphoid organs in

T1D are lacking due to the limited availability of samples and, to date, lack receptor information[90].

This study begins to address these gaps using complementary methods (i.e., CyTOF,

scRNAseq/TCRseq/CITEseq) to assess differences in T cell phenotypes and their potential molecular

underpinnings within the pLN and pancreas.

CD8[+] T cells are classically thought to be a major mediator of islet destruction in T1D, given

their abundance in the insulitic lesion[91] and cytolytic function. Moreover, recent studies indicated

that CD8[+] T cells with a self-renewing phenotype may be important for T1D pathogenesis, as they

are elevated in peripheral blood, and autoreactive cells may be biased towards this phenotype[5, 14,

92]. Our study shows that CD8[+] T cells expressing markers of a Tscm population (CD45RA, CCR7,

CXCR3, CD27, CD28) are increased in T1D pLN (**Figures 1-2**). Tscm cells play an important role in

memory maintenance and in generating rapidly responding effector cells[93]. It has been previously

shown that serum concentrations of cytokines that promote Tscm development, notably IL-15, are

enhanced in T1D patients[94, 95]. Moreover, circulating islet antigen-reactive T cells from T1D donors

have been shown to possess stem-like features[14]. Enhanced capacity for self-renewal could be

clinically detrimental, as multiple therapeutic avenues (e.g., teplizumab, anti-thymocyte globulin

[ATG]) have converged on a signature of exhaustion in therapeutic responders[13, 96]. Our study has

provided further support for the relevance of this pathway, as IREA analysis revealed an enrichment

of IL-15-induced genes across the trajectory of CD8[+] T cell differentiation (**Figure 3**). We also

observed an increase in cytokine signaling and upregulation of the anti-apoptotic factor *BCL2,*

which, coupled with the downregulation of multiple exhaustion-associated genes in this cluster in

T1D, could suggest that CD8 T cells favor a progenitor exhausted phenotype rather than a terminal

exhaustion phenotype in T1D[61]. Further studies are needed to connect IL-15 signaling in T1D to

autoreactive T cell stemness and progenitor exhausted phenotypes and to investigate if inhibiting

this pathway may aid in establishing durable tolerance. Notably, baricitinib, an inhibitor of Janus

Kinase (JAK) 1/2 signaling and thus, common gamma chain cytokine signaling (including IL-15), has

recently demonstrated efficacy in preserving β-cell function in recent-onset T1D donors[97].

Interestingly, we observed reduced expression of *IL7R* and *IL2RG* in effector cells derived from the

recent-onset T1D pancreas relative to those from paired pLN, indicating that in the pancreas

microenvironment, these cells may be more reliant on IL-15 in combination with other effector

cytokines, such as IL-21, than IL-2 or IL-7. Whether baricitinib alone could aid in targeting the

autoreactive T cell reservoir or if combinatorial therapy will be necessary with T cell exhaustion-

inducing therapeutics, such as teplizumab, remains to be seen.

Limitations of the study include donor heterogeneity and limited sample size due to the

rarity of study tissues. Notably, we were unable to obtain sufficient immune cell numbers from

control pancreatic slices to compare immune phenotypes between T1D and ND donors. Our lab is

currently utilizing spatial transcriptomic and proteomic technologies to assess this without the need

for immune cell isolation. Moreover, T1D is a heterogeneous disease, and it is possible that immune

phenotypes identified through our studies may differ across different ancestry groups, which we

were not powered to assess. Indeed, though great strides are being made in investigating the

genetic drivers of T1D in populations with diverse genetic ancestry[98-100], there are still many

knowledge gaps regarding the importance of known genetic risk loci across groups traditionally

underrepresented in biomedical research. Despite this, we believe that the information that we

have provided using paired phenotype and receptor information for these subsets can be used by

the field to identify CDR3 motifs of further interest. As it stands, known TCR sequences that

correspond to autoreactive T cell specificity are rare[101]. Moreover, matching sequences to those in

curated databases such as the manually curated database of pathology associated sequences

(McPAS)[102] and immune epitope database (IEDB)[103] introduces a bias toward known specificities

and epitopes of interest. Thus, there is a need to apply new analytical strategies to identify

similarities in TCR sequence and transcriptomic features that may indicate a common antigen

specificity[104]. We utilized one such tool, CoNGA[31], to examine joint gene expression and receptor

features in T1D. This analysis revealed an enrichment of a TCR cluster comprised of diverse naive

CD8[+] T cells, further supporting our gene expression and proteomic data (**Figure 4**). The feature of

low AF4 within this cluster supports previous data wherein autoreactive T cells were found to

possess more hydrophobic residues[105], including within autoreactive receptors detected in the

pancreas[106].

We utilized paired pLN and pancreas T cell data to investigate phenotypes of shared

populations and to interrogate whether local expansion of T cells occurred in fresh pancreatic slices.

We identified the most abundant shared populations to be effector CD8[+] T cells, which were the

most clonally expanded populations. Moreover, we noted CD8[+] T cells, as a whole, had reduced

expression of genes involved in promoting stem-like/naïve phenotypes (*LEF1, SELL*) in pancreas

compared to pLN (**Figure 5**). This could be, in part, driven by the local inflammatory milieu. Indeed,

we observed enrichment of multiple inflammatory cytokine signaling pathways, namely IL-6 and

TNFα, in pancreas relative to pLN T cells, while we observed upregulation of Myc, mTORC1, and

Wnt signaling pathways in pLN relative to pancreas T cells. While sharing of TCR clones was limited

between donors and difficult to detect due to the sparsity of single cell data, we were able to detect

intra-donor sharing of clones across tissues and between clusters. Donor 6551, a 20-year-old donor

with 0.58 years disease duration, particularly notable for insulitis severity, possessed expanded

CD8$^+$ Teff clones that were shared between tissues and between clusters, whereas in the longer

duration (4 years) donor with less insulitis (6536), we were able to detect sharing of only one

effector CD8$^+$ clone across clusters and one CD4$^+$ clone across tissues (**Figure 5**). In accordance with

murine studies[5], these data support that T cell clones are supplied from the pLN and adopt a more

effector and terminally differentiated phenotype in the pancreas during human T1D development.

Previously, our lab reported increased circulating CXCR3^{lo}CD8$^+$ T cells in T1D[39] following

phenotyping of a cohort of over 824 cross-sectional peripheral blood samples. The present study

supports a role for these cells in the draining lymph node, while related terminal effector CXCR3

expressing subsets could be found in the target organ. Identifying subsets of interest that are

relevant in both peripheral blood and the target organ could aid in efforts to selectively inhibit

autoreactivity and monitor outcomes. Importantly, combination CXCR3 antagonism with ACT-777991

and α-CD3 treatment leads to disease remission in the NOD mouse[107], and first-in-human trials in

healthy adults have shown this compound to be tolerable[108]. Thus, combinatorial strategies to induce

tolerogenic phenotypes while targeting pathways relevant to tissue immune phenotypes may represent

an avenue to achieve durable tolerance. Taken together, our studies indicate that memory and

effector T cell programs in T1D are maintained in the pLN and enhanced locally in the pancreas,

likely driven by aberrant regulation of cytokine signaling and impacted by genotype at T1D risk loci.

Future directions validating the functionality of clones identified herein and investigating the

cellular interactions of CXCR3$^+$CD8$^+$ T cells across the differentiation trajectory will inform the

development of therapeutics to modulate them, providing novel avenues to delay or prevent T1D

progression.

Author Contributions

Author Contributions

LDP: Designing research studies, conducting experiments, acquiring data, analyzing data, writing the

manuscript (original draft), funding acquisition

MAB: Designing research studies, interpreting data, writing the manuscript (reviewing and editing)

HRS: Conducting experiments, acquiring data, writing the manuscript (reviewing and editing)

ALP: Writing the manuscript (reviewing and editing)

EP: Acquiring data, writing the manuscript (reviewing and editing)

CHW: Writing the manuscript (reviewing and editing)

MAA: Writing the manuscript (reviewing and editing), funding acquisition

RB: Analyzing data, writing the manuscript (reviewing and editing), interpreting data

TMB: Designing research studies, interpreting data, writing the manuscript (reviewing and editing),

funding acquisition, project oversight

Acknowledgments

We thank the nPOD donors and their families for their important contributions to this research. We

also thank the nPOD core team, namely Irina Kusmartseva, Helmut Hiller, and Maria Beery, for their

efforts in case acquisition, processing, and distribution.

Funding

This research was conducted with grant support from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) P01

AI042288 to TMB, F31 DK129004 to LDP, as well as from the American Diabetes Association (ADA)

11-23-PDF-78 to LDP, The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust (Grant # 2301-06562).

This research was also performed with the support of the Network for Pancreatic Organ donors

with Diabetes (nPOD; RRID:SCR_014641), a collaborative type 1 diabetes research project

supported by Breakthrough T1D and The Leona M. & Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust (Grant#3-

SRA-2023-1417-S-B). The content and views expressed are the responsibility of the authors and do

not necessarily reflect the official view of nPOD. Organ Procurement Organizations (OPO)

partnering with nPOD to provide research resources are listed at **https://npod.org/for-**

partners/npod-partners/.

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Tables

Table 1. Flow cytometry panel.   704

Antigen	Fluorophore	Clone	Manufacturer
CD197	BV421	G043H7	Biolegend
CD4	FITC	RPA-T4	BioLegend
CD45RA	PerCP-Cy5.5	HI100	BioLegend
CD185	PE	J252D4	BioLegend
CD183	PE-Cy7	G025H7	BioLegend
CD279	APC	eBioJ105	eBioscience
CD3	APC-H7	SK7	BD
Live/Dead	Live Dead Yellow	NA	Invitrogen

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707 Table 2. Demographic information for mass cytometry (CyTOF) cohort.

Clinical Status	n	% Male	Age (yr)	% AAB+	Disease Duration (yr)	% Insulitis +	% High Risk HLA
T1D	10	80	19±6.5	90	6.5±7.4	90	100
ND	12	66.7	16.9±5.6	0	NA	0	66.7

708 *High Risk HLA was defined by possession of risk associated alleles:
709   DRB1*0401,0402,0403,0404;DRB1*0301
710
711

712 Table 3. Demographic information for flow cytometry validation cohort.

Clinical Status	n	% Male	Age (yr)	# AAB	Disease Duration (yr)	% Insulitis +	% High Risk HLA
T1D	5	60	19.2±5.0	20% negative, 20% single, 20% double, 40% triple	10.5±9.8	80	100
AAB+	4	75	21.5±3.1	50% single, 50% double	NA	25	75
ND	15	66	17.1±7.1		NA	0	60

713 *High Risk HLA was defined by possession of risk associated alleles:
714   DRB1*0401,0402,0403,0404;DRB1*0301
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716

717 Table 4. Demographic information for scRNAseq cohort.

Clinical Status	n	% Male	Age (yr)	% AAB+	Disease Duration (yr)	% Insulitis+	% High Risk HLA
T1D	9	55	17.0±6.5	100	1.80±3.4	100	100
ND	7	71.4	17.1±3.1	0	NA	0	80

718 *High Risk HLA was defined by possession of risk associated alleles:
719   DRB1*0401,0402,0403,0404;DRB1*0301
720

721   Table 5. Amino acid sequences of shared clones across pLN and pancreas slices.

Tissue(s)	Donor	Cluster(s)	Sequence	n
pLN, slice	6536	5,9	CAASIGFGNVLHC_CSSKKGLDEQFF	4
pLN	6551	0,2	CAVDSGGGADGLTF_CASSPAGAGYEQYF	4
pLN	6551	0,2	CAMRGPFRAGANNLFF_CSARGGPVSNEQFF	3
pLN, slice	6551	0,2	CASKTGANNLFF_CASAPGQGSEQLFF	3
pLN	6551	0,2	CAVKDNARLMF_CASSSGEAGTNSPLHF	3
pLN	6536	0,2	CAVRSPSLMDSNYQLIW_CASCRTGNYEQYF	3

Figure Legends

Figure 1. Differential expression analysis of mass cytometry (CyTOF) data reveals enhanced CD8$^+$

CXCR3 expression in T1D pLN. A) Experimental workflow involving processing of pancreatic lymph

node (pLN), staining for lineage, phenotypic, and quality control (QC) markers, and data collection

on a mass cytometer. After data acquisition, normalization of channels to internal bead controls

was performed using the premessa[21] package, and any confounding effects of batch or donor age

on cluster composition were accounted for in analysis through incorporation as covariates in a

linear model. B) UMAP of CD45$^+$ cells clustered at resolution 0.2 using Seurat. C) Heatmap

displaying Z-scored mean expression of markers for the clusters represented in (B), with dot size

representing percent of cells in the cluster expressing the marker, separated by ND (blue) and T1D

(orange) donor type. Cluster of interest is highlighted with the orange box. Asterisks mark

populations with significantly different expression by condition as determined by linear model with

batch as a covariate. D) Significantly increased cluster 4 (corresponding to naïve CD8$^+$ T cells) CXCR3

expression in T1D donors. P value refers to the FDR-corrected p value from the linear modeling.

Figure 2. Differential abundance of CXCR3^{lo} naïve CD8 T cells in T1D pLN. A) UMAP of subclustered

CD8$^+$ T cells. B) Z-scored DotPlot of marker expression for each CD8$^+$ T cell subcluster. C)

Significantly increased proportion of subcluster 0 (CXCR3^{lo} naïve like) in T1D pLN as determined by

linear modeling with donor age and CyTOF batch as covariates. D) Significantly increased

percentage of naïve CD8$^+$ T cells expressing CXCR3 found in an independent cohort of pLN donors

by flow cytometry. P value for (D) is the result of an ordinary one-way ANOVA with Tukey's multiple

test correction.

Figure 3. IL-15 is predicted to drive signatures of memory maintenance and effector function in

T1D. A) Experimental workflow for scRNAseq of pLN. B) UMAP projection of total pLN cells, which

were subsetted to T cells, reintegrated with rpca, and reclustered, resulting in 15 T cell clusters (C).

D) Heatmap of Z-scored gene expression data showing a selection of DEGs between T1D donors and

ND donors across naïve, Teff, and Texh CD8$^+$ T cells. E) Network plot using DEGs in naïve CD8 T cells

showing enrichment of reactome pathways in T1D. F) Network plot using DEGs in CD8 Teff cells

showing enrichment of reactome pathways in T1D. G) Network plot using DEGs in CD8 Texh cells

showing enrichment of reactome pathways in T1D. H) Compass plot of IREA results using the top

genes upregulated in T1D in naïve CD8$^+$ T cells (p<0.05, log2FC>0.26) as input. I) Compass plot of

IREA results using the top genes upregulated in T1D in CD8$^+$ Teff cells (p<0.05, log2FC>0.26) as

input. J) Compass plot of IREA results using the top genes upregulated in T1D in CD8$^+$ Texh cells

(p<0.05, log2FC>0.26) as input. H-J) Bar height is indicative of enrichment score, while color

corresponds to FDR-adjusted P⬚value (two-sided Wilcoxon rank-sum test). Genes highlighted on

heatmap (D) met log2FC cutoffs of 0.26 and adjusted p-value cutoffs of 0.05. Pathway analysis was

performed with the reactomePA package and visualized if adjusted p<0.1 with the clusterprofiler

package.

Figure 4. Integrative receptor and gene expression analysis highlights an enriched naïve CD8$^+$ T

cell TCR cluster in T1D pLN. A) schematic of CoNGA. B) UMAP of subsetted T cells colored by CoNGA

score (indicative of overlap in TCR and gene expression neighborhoods) and C) CoNGA gene

expression cluster, alongside D) CoNGA scores overlaid on the CoNGA TCR UMAP and E) TCR

clusters overlaid on the TCR UMAP. F) Increase in CoNGA GEX cluster 10 and TCR cluster 3 in T1D. G)

Gene expression and TCR Graph vs Graph results for CoNGA clusters with score <1. Left half of

semicircle indicates gene expression cluster, right half of semicircle indicates TCR cluster

assignment. Bar plots indicate the relative proportion of T1D (orange) and ND (blue) cells for the

given cluster (left) and for the entire dataset (right), followed by the same for nPOD ID, where each

color represents a different donor. Top 9 differentially expressed genes are shown per cluster, as

well as TCR genes, CDR3 motif logos, and TCR sequence features[31] (TCRseq features panel, with red

indicating higher and blue indicating lower scores relative to the rest of the dataset). A panel of

marker genes shown is shown on the far right with red dots colored by mean expression and sized

by percent of cells expressing the gene. Difference in cluster proportion assessed with two-way

Fisher's exact test.

Figure 5. Tissue-dependent gene expression programs of memory CD8$^+$ T cell populations. A)

Processing workflow of pancreatic slices where pancreas was embedded in agarose and sliced using

a vibratome to yield 150μm slices[78, 79], after which cells were processed to single cell suspension,

selected for CD45$^+$ cells, and run on the 10X Chromium controller as described in methods. B)

UMAP of integrated gene expression data (n=2 donors, pLN and pancreatic slices) illustrating

prevalence of clusters across tissues. C) Histological staining (obtained from nPOD Aperio e-slide

manager) of insulin (pink), glucagon (blue), and CD3 (brown) across pancreas tail of the two donors

with paired pancreatic slice and pLN data shows increased insulitis in new-onset donor 6551. Scale

bars are included in the upper left corner of each image and correspond to 10x magnification and

101um for donor 6551, and 20x magnification and 50um for donor 6536. D) Dotplot showing Z-

scored gene expression per cluster in (B), with dot size corresponding to percent of cells in the

cluster expressing the marker. E) Barplot illustrating distribution of expanded clones across clusters,

with the majority of expanded clones localizing to memory CD8$^+$ T cell clusters 0 (CD8 Teff) and 2

(CD8 cytotoxic T lymphocytes [CTL]). F) Assessment of repertoire overlap across tissues with the

Morisita-Horn metric shows limited sharing across tissues. G) Alluvial plot subsetted to only shared

clones showing clonal sharing between clusters 5 (eTreg) and 9 (ICOS[hi] TCM), and 0 (CD8 Teff) and 2

(CD8 CTL) across both clusters and tissues. H) Barplot of percent of each cluster per tissue illustrates

differential subset abundance of innate and adaptive immune cells. I) Violin plots illustrating

differential expression of *LEF1* and *SELL* in CD8 T cells between tissues. J) Volcano plot of

differentially expressed genes in cluster 0 (CD8 Teff) between pancreatic slices and pLN. K) Volcano

plot of differentially expressed genes in cluster 2 (CD8 CTL) between pancreatic slices and pLN.

DEGs were defined as log2FC>0.26 and corrected p value<0.05. L) GSEA analysis of cluster 0 using

Hallmark genesets. M) GSEA analysis of cluster 2 using Hallmark genesets. GSEA analysis was

performed using escape, and DE genesets were identified with a Wilcoxon test. The top 20 gene

sets with adjusted p <0.05 were plotted with positive fold change indicating upregulation in

pancreatic slice (orange) and negative fold change indicating upregulation in pLN (blue).

A Subclustered pLN CD8⁺ T cells

B

C

D