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2 **A novel truncating variant of GLI2 associated with Culler-Jones syndrome impairs Hedgehog**  
3 **signalling**

4 **Authors**

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26 **Abstract:**

27 Background: GLI2 encodes for a transcription factor that controls the expression of several genes in

28 the Hedgehog pathway. Mutations in GLI2 have been described as causative of a spectrum of

29 clinical phenotypes, notably holoprosencephaly, hypopituitarism and postaxial polydactyl.

30 Methods: In order to identify causative genetic variant, we performed exome sequencing of a trio

31 from an Italian family with multiple affected individuals presenting clinical phenotypes in the

32 Culler-Jones syndrome spectrum. We performed a series of assays, both in vitro and in ovo

33 (Chicken model) to test the functional properties of GLI2 mutation.

34 Results: Here we report a novel deletion c.3493delC (p.P1167LfsX52) in the C-terminal activation

35 domain of GLI2, and cell-based functional assays confirmed the pathogenicity of the identified

36 variant and revealed a dominant-negative effect of mutant GLI2 on Hedgehog signalling.

37 Conclusion: Our results highlight the variable clinical manifestation of GLI2 mutations and

38 emphasize the value of functional characterisation of novel gene variants to assist genetic

39 counselling and diagnosis.

40 **Introduction**

41 The Hedgehog (Hh) family of secreted morphogens control cell proliferation, differentiation and

42 patterning during embryo development (Ingham, Nakano, & Seger, 2011). In humans, gene

43 mutations in molecular components of the Hh pathway are associated with a number of congenital

44 malformations or syndromes, characterized by abnormal development of brain structures, limbs and

45 midline face, such as Holoprosencephaly (HPE), Greig cephalopolysyndactyly syndrome, Pallister-

46 Hall Syndrome, Culler-Jones syndrome, and non-syndromic polydactylies (Bale, 2002). Besides its

47 key roles in embryogenesis, Hh signaling remains active in some adult tissues, contributing to organ

48 homeostasis and regeneration (Petrova & Joyner, 2014), whereas aberrant activation of the pathway

49 occurs in several human cancers, including basal cell carcinoma and medulloblastoma (di Magliano

50 & Hebrok, 2003).

51 All three vertebrate Hh ligands, Sonic hedgehog (*SHH*), Indian hedgehog and Desert hedgehog  
52 activate the same signal transduction pathway but operate in different tissues and organs. In the  
53 embryo, a concentration gradient of SHH, the most potent and best studied member of the family,  
54 specifies the identity of ventral neuron types along the entire rostral-caudal length of the central  
55 nervous system. SHH functions in the limb bud to define number, position and character of the  
56 digits (Tickle, 2006), and contributes to the development of the pituitary gland (Treier et al., 2001),  
57 cerebellum (Dahmane & Ruiz-i-Altaba, 1999; Wechsler-Reya & Scott, 1999), midbrain (Agarwala,  
58 Sanders, & Ragsdale, 2001), eye (Heavner & Pevny, 2012) and face (Xavier et al., 2016).

59 The effects of “canonical” Hh pathway are mediated by the GLI family of transcription factors  
60 (GLI1, GLI2 and GLI3), which control the expression of a number of target genes (Riobo &  
61 Manning, 2007). The three GLI proteins share a conserved C2H2-type zinc finger DNA-binding  
62 domain (Kinzler, Ruppert, Bigner, & Vogelstein, 1988). In addition, GLI2 and GLI3 possess an N-  
63 terminal repressor domain and a C-terminal activator domain, whereas GLI1 functions solely as an  
64 activator (Dai et al., 1999; Sasaki, Nishizaki, Hui, Nakafuku, & Kondoh, 1999). In the absence of  
65 Hh ligand, the membrane receptor Patched1 (*PTCH1*) inhibits the seven-transmembrane protein  
66 Smoothed (SMO) by preventing its access to the primary cilium. In this “off” state, GLI2 and  
67 GLI3 are retained in the cytoplasm by SUFU, a main negative regulator of the pathway, and  
68 undergo partial proteolytic processing that removes the C-terminal activation domain generating  
69 transcriptional repressor forms GLI3R and, to a lesser extent, GLI2R. Upon SHH binding, *PTCH1*  
70 inhibition of SMO is relieved. As a result, GLI2 and GLI3 are converted into transcriptional  
71 activators (GLIA) that translocate into the nucleus to drive expression of target genes, including  
72 *GLI1* and *PTCH1*. Generally, GLI2A is the predominant activator of the pathway whereas GLI3R is  
73 the major transcriptional repressor, and their relative levels shape the SHH response (Briscoe &  
74 Théron, 2013; Eggenchwiler & Anderson, 2007; Hui & Angers, 2011).

75 *GLI2* is a large and highly polymorphic gene, with a number of rare/family-specific heterozygous  
76 missense, non-sense, and frameshift mutations detected in individuals presenting with a spectrum of

77 clinical phenotypes that include HPE, craniofacial abnormalities, polydactyly, panhypopituitarism,  
78 secondary hypogonadism or isolated growth hormone deficiency (Bear et al., 2014; França et al.,  
79 2010; Paulo et al., 2015; Roessler et al., 2003; 2005). The broad and variable range of clinical  
80 manifestations may have its origin in the bifunctional transcriptional activity of *GLI2* and the  
81 complex regulatory feedbacks operating in the Hh signaling pathway, and points to possible  
82 modifying effects of additional genetic and environmental factors. Because it may be challenging to  
83 interpret the significance and impact of *GLI2* mutations, gene variants need to be functionally  
84 characterized to assess their pathogenicity and support genotype-phenotype correlation.  
85 Here, we identify and functionally validate a novel truncating variant in the activation domain of  
86 *GLI2* linked to a Culler-Jones syndrome phenotype characterized by hypopituitarism, polydactyly  
87 and facial dysmorphism in an Italian family.

## 88 **Material and Methods**

### 89 *DNA Extraction and Sequencing*

90 Genomic DNA (gDNA) was extracted from 800 µl of peripheral blood using the automated  
91 extractor Maxwell® 16 Research System (Promega, Madison, WI, USA); the concentration and  
92 high quality of gDNA (A260/280 1.8 to 2.0) was determined using a Nanodrop™  
93 Spectrophotometer 1000 (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Wilmington, DE, USA). Library preparation  
94 was performed using Illumina Nextera Expanded Rapid Caputer Enrichment Exome. Exome  
95 sequencing was carried out on Illumina HiSeq 2500 platform (Illumina, Inc. San Diego, CA, USA)  
96 using SBS chemistry. Libraries were sequenced in paired end mode, 101 nucleotides long each.

97

### 98 *Data Analysis*

99 Reads were aligned to reference genome hg19 using bwa aln (Li & Durbin, 2010) (v 0.6.2). Variant  
100 calling was performed using GATK Unified Genotyper (Mckenna et al., 2010)(v.2.4.9) after Indel  
101 Realignment and VQSR according to GATK best practices (DePristo et al., 2011).

102 Variant effect prediction was performed using SnpEff v3.6 (Cingolani, Platts, Wang, Coon, &  
103 Nguyen, 2012) using GRCh37.34 genome version, subsequently variants were annotated to dbSNP  
104 v146 and to dbNSFP v2.4 (Liu, Jian, & Boerwinkle, 2013) using same suite.

105 The following chain of filters was applied to the variant set: GATK VQSLOD > 0, predicted  
106 change in coding sequence, segregation according to a dominant model, rarity in the population  
107 (COMMON = 0 in dbSNP build 137), predicted to be damaging according to SIFT (Kumar,  
108 Henikoff, & Ng, 2009) and Polyphen (Adzhubei et al., 2010). Genes were prioritized using the  
109 Phenolyzer platform (Yang, Robinson, & Wang, 2015).

110

### 111 *Expression Plasmids*

112 The Human GLI2 cDNA clone was obtained from Addgene (pCS2-hGli2 #17648 (Roessler et al.,  
113 2005)) For N-terminal GFP tagging of GLI2, hGLI2 cDNA was inserted at the 3'-end of EGFP in  
114 the CMV expression vector pN1-EGFP (Clontech) using standard PCR-cloning. GeneArt  
115 Mutagenesis kit (Thermo) was used to introduce the deletion c.3493delC (p.P1167LfsX52) into  
116 GFP-tagged wild-type GLI2 expression construct using the following primers:

117 Forward 5'- CCAGCCAGGTGAAGCCTCCACCTTTCCTCAGGGCAACCTG-3'

118 Reverse 5'- CAGGTTGCCCTGAGGAAAGGTGGAGGCTTCACCTGGCTGG-3'

119

### 120 *Western Blotting*

121 HEK293T cells (AD-293 cell line) were maintained in DMEM supplemented with 10% FBS, 1% L-  
122 Glutamine, 1% Penicillin/Streptomycin. Cells transfected with the GFP-tagged constructs or pN1-  
123 EGFP control for 36 hrs using Lipofectamine 2000 (Thermo) were lysed on a nutator for 30 min at  
124 4°C in lysis buffer (NaCl 150mM, EDTA 2mM, Tris-HCl pH7.5 50mM, Triton 1%) supplemented  
125 with protease and phosphatase inhibitor cocktails. After clarification by centrifugation at 13,000 g  
126 for 10 min at 4°C, 20µg of total protein lysate were analyzed by SDS-PAGE followed by  
127 immunoblot with rabbit anti-GFP antibody (1:1000; Thermo) and rabbit anti-GAPDH (1:5000; Cell

128 Signaling). Detection was performed by standard chemiluminescence with ECL Plus Western  
129 Blotting Substrate (Pierce/Thermo).

130

### 131 *Immunofluorescence Assays*

132 NIH-3T3 mouse fibroblasts were seeded on glass coverslips in DMEM supplemented with 10%  
133 FBS, 1% L-Glutamine, 1% Penicillin/Streptomycin for 24hrs, prior to treatment with 16nM SHH  
134 (Recombinant mouse SHH C25II N-Terminus, R&D Systems) in DMEM containing 0.5% FBS for  
135 5 hrs. Cells were fixed for 20 min at RT with 4% PFA diluted in PBS and containing 4% sucrose,  
136 washed in PBS, stained with DAPI for 5 min and imaged with a 63x objective on a Leica TCS SP8  
137 confocal microscope.

138

### 139 *Quantitative Real-Time PCR*

140 NIH-3T3 cells were transfected in 12-well plate format with the indicated plasmids using  
141 Lipofectamine 2000 [1µg DNA:1.5µl Lipofectamine per well]. After 24 hrs, cells were treated with  
142 SHH (16nM) in DMEM containing 0.5% FBS for 40 hrs. 1 µg of total RNA extracted with Trizol  
143 (Thermo) was reverse transcribed into cDNA with M-MLV Reverse Transcriptase using random  
144 primers, and analyzed by SYBR green-based real-time quantitative PCR (SYBR Select Master Mix,  
145 Thermo) with the following primer sets:

146 *GAPDH* (F 5' - AATGTGTCCGTCGTGGATCTGA-3'; R 5' -

147 AGAAGGTGGTGAAGCAGGCATC-3'),

148 *GLII* (F 5' -TTATGGAGCAGCCAGAGAGA-3'; R 5' - ATTAACAAAGAAGCGGGCTC-3')

149 *Ptch1* (F 5' - TGACAAAGCCGACTACATGC-3'; R 5' - AGAGCCCATCGAGTACGCT-3')

150

### 151 *Luciferase Assays*

152 NIH-3T3 were transfected in 24-well plate format using Lipofectamine 2000 with GFP-tagged  
153 wild-type GLI2, GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> or GFP control plasmids along with a 8x-GLI-BS-Luc Firefly luciferase

154 reporter construct containing eight repeats of the GLI binding sequence (Sasaki et al., 1999) and a  
155 plasmid expressing Renilla luciferase under the CMV promoter for normalization (Promega) in a  
156 3:2:1 ratio (GLI2/mock GFP plasmids:8x-GLI-BS-Luc:Renilla Luc). [600ng total plasmid DNA:1µl  
157 Lipofectamine per well]. 24 hrs after transfection, cells were treated with SHH (16nM) in DMEM  
158 containing 0.5% FBS for 30 hrs and processed with Dual Luciferase Assay Kit (Promega) for  
159 measurement of Firefly and Renilla luciferase activities.

160 The same plasmids mixed at 2:1:1 ratio (GLI2/mock GFP plasmids:8x-GLI-BS-Luc:Renilla Luc)  
161 were electroporated “in-ovo” into neural progenitor cells in the neural tube of HH stage 13-14 chick  
162 embryos (Hamburger & Hamilton, 1992) using a square wave electroporator (BTX). After 24 hrs,  
163 the electroporated spinal cords were dissociated with trypsin supplemented with DNase (100U,  
164 Sigma) and cells were cultured for 1-2 hrs on PDL (100µg/ml)/laminin (1µg/ml)-coated 24-well  
165 plate in Neurobasal media containing B27 supplement (Gibco/Thermo Scientific), 2mM L-  
166 Glutamine (Gibco/Thermo Scientific), 1% Penicillin/Streptomycin (Gibco/Thermo Scientific),  
167 50µM Glutamic Acid (Sigma-Aldrich) (Bonanomi et al., 2012). Cells were then stimulated with  
168 SHH at the indicated concentrations for 24 hrs prior to harvesting and processing with Dual  
169 Luciferase Assay Kit (Promega).

170

## 171 **Results**

### 172 *Clinical phenotype of the patients*

173 Proband is a 6 year old female with neonatal panhypopituitarism (HP:0000871), prominent  
174 forehead (HP:0011220), thin upper lip vermilion (HP:0000219), downslanted palpebral fissures  
175 (HP:0000494), 2-3 finger syndactyly (HP:0001233), low-set ears (HP:0000369), single median  
176 maxillary incisor (HP:0006315), long philtrum (HP:0000343), bilateral postaxial hexadactyly  
177 (HP:0006136), choanal atresia (HP:0000453) and anterior pituitary agenesis (HP:0010626). Her  
178 father was diagnosed with hypopituitarism (HP:0040075) [hypothyroidism (HP:0000821), growth

179 hormone deficiency (GHD) (HP:0000824)], unilateral hexadactyly (HP:0001162), and ectopic  
180 pituitary posterior lobe (HP:0011755). After further investigation, hexadactyly (HP:0001162) was  
181 described in the paternal grandfather, while GHD (HP:0000824) and hypopituitarism (HP:0040075)  
182 were identified in the paternal uncle who did not exhibit hand anomalies (Figure 1A).  
183 The proband was previously tested negative for mutations in candidate disease-linked genes  
184 *POU1F1*, *PROP1*, *HESX1*, *LHX3* and *GLI3*.

185

#### 186 *Exome Sequencing identifies GLI2 as candidate disease gene*

187 Exome sequencing was performed on the trio (Figure 1A) at average target coverage of 30x for  
188 each sample (Table S1). After variant calling, 130 rare or novel variants in 125 genes were found  
189 segregating according to a dominant model and affecting coding sequences. Once filtered for  
190 putative pathogenicity, 40 variants in 40 genes were retained (Table S2). Candidate genes were  
191 prioritized based on their association with the clinical phenotypes of the patients using Phenolyzer  
192 software. This analysis unambiguously identified *GLI2* as the top-scoring gene, while other  
193 candidates (*WDR34*, *DPAGT1*, *ASXLI*) already known to be associated with query phenotypes were  
194 ranked significantly lower (Figure 1B). Both the proband and her father were found to carry a novel  
195 heterozygous mutation caused by the deletion c.3493delC in the *GLI2* gene, leading to a frameshift  
196 and premature stop of translation at residue 1218 (p.P1167LfsX52).

197

#### 198 *The mutation p.P1167LfsX52 converts GLI2 into a dominant-negative transcriptional repressor*

199 The frameshift mutation c.3493delC in *GLI2* truncates the C-terminal portion of the transactivation  
200 domain required for transcriptional activity (p.P1167LfsX52, Figure 2A). To determine whether  
201 this truncation alters *GLI2* function, we generated GFP-tagged constructs of either wild-type *GLI2*  
202 or the p.P1167LfsX52 mutant (hereafter *GLI2*<sup>MUT</sup>) and examined their functional properties using  
203 cell-based assays. As predicted, *GLI2*<sup>MUT</sup> revealed by western blotting in transfected HEK293 cells  
204 was smaller than the wild-type protein (~129kDa vs. 167kDa; ~156kDa vs. 194 kDa after GFP



205 fusion) (Figure 2B). However, the subcellular distribution of GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> expressed in NIH-3T3  
206 mouse fibroblasts, which respond to SHH, was similar to that of wild-type GLI2: both proteins were  
207 found in the cytoplasm as well as the nucleus in untreated cells and accumulated within the nucleus  
208 following stimulation with SHH (Figure 2C-F'). Nevertheless, despite normal nuclear targeting,  
209 GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> was unable to induce expression of the transcriptional targets of SHH signaling *GLI1* and  
210 *Ptch1*, whose mRNA levels were instead substantially higher in SHH-treated cells overexpressing  
211 wild-type GLI2 relative to mock-transfected controls (Figure 2G and H).

212 To directly investigate the effects of the p.P1167LfsX52 mutation on GLI2 transcriptional activity,  
213 we assessed the ability of GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> to stimulate a GLI-dependent reporter construct (8xGliBS-Luc)  
214 in which a promoter containing tandem GLI responsive elements drives expression of firefly  
215 luciferase upon activation of the Hedgehog pathway (Sasaki et al., 1999). In NIH-3T3 cells,  
216 overexpression of wild-type GLI2 increased reporter activity in a ligand-independent manner to an  
217 extent comparable to control cells treated with SHH. Conversely, the basal levels of reporter  
218 activity were significantly lower in cells transfected with GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> and did not show the expected  
219 increase after SHH stimulation (Figure 2I).

220 A complementary set of experiments was conducted in primary cultures of neural progenitor cells  
221 derived from the chick embryo neural tube electroporated with either wild-type or mutant GLI2  
222 together with the 8xGliBS-Luc reporter. Spinal cord progenitors depend on graded SHH signaling  
223 to acquire class-specific molecular identities during embryo development (Briscoe, Pierani, Jessell,  
224 & Ericson, 2000) and exhibit reliable dose-dependent responsiveness to SHH in culture (Figure 2J,  
225 control). Electroporation of wild-type GLI2 led to robust induction of reporter activity independent  
226 of SHH stimulation, whereas GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> caused a considerable reduction in luciferase levels  
227 compared to control cells at all ligand concentrations tested, indicating that the mutant protein  
228 suppresses transcription mediated by endogenous GLI factors (Figure 2J).

229 In conclusion, the truncated mutant p.P1167LfsX52 functions as a transcriptional repressor that  
230 exerts dominant-negative effects on GLI-dependent gene expression.

231

232 *Discussion and Conclusions*

233 This study expands the spectrum of *GLI2* mutations reporting a novel heterozygous pathogenic  
234 variant (p.P1167LfsX52) that results in autosomal-dominant developmental abnormalities including  
235 polydactyly, hypopituitarism, GHD and hypothyroidism.

236 Functional studies based on cellular assays demonstrated that the frameshift mutation  
237 p.P1167LfsX52 truncates the C-terminal transactivation domain of *GLI2* generating a  
238 transcriptional-repressor form that retains the ability to translocate into the nucleus in response to  
239 *SHH* but exhibits dominant-negative activity. As a result, we observed a significant inhibition of  
240 *GLI* reporter levels in cells expressing *GLI2* p.P1167LfsX52, indicating that the activity of wild-  
241 type *GLI* proteins is suppressed by the mutant variant. Dominant-negative activity was reported for  
242 other pathogenic variants of *GLI2* with deletions in the activation domain (Roessler et al., 2005).

243 The inhibitory effect was found to require integrity of the DNA-binding and amino-terminal  
244 transcriptional repressor domains (Flemming et al., 2013; Roessler et al., 2005), which are intact in  
245 *GLI2* p.P1167LfsX52. To inhibit positive *GLI* function, C-terminally truncated variants may  
246 compete with and displace wild-type *GLI2* from target sites and/or form inactive complexes with  
247 the activating forms.

248 While *GLI2* mutations were originally identified in patients with HPE and midline abnormalities,  
249 (Roessler et al., 2003; 2005), more recently it became clear that *GLI2* variants are often associated  
250 with polydactyly, pituitary deficiency and subtle midfacial facial phenotypes rather than patent HPE  
251 (Bear et al., 2014; França et al., 2010; Rahimov, Ribeiro, de Miranda, Richieri-Costa, & Murray,  
252 2006) (Kordaß, Schröder, Elbracht, Soellner, & Eggermann, 2015). The fact that frank HPE is rare  
253 in patients with *GLI2* mutations, in contrast to those with *SHH* variants, has suggested that other  
254 *GLI* proteins (*GLI1*, *GLI3*) might function redundantly to compensate in part for *GLI2* deficiency,  
255 in line with studies in compound mutant mice (Arnhold, França, Carvalho, Mendonca, & Jorge,

256 2015; Park et al., 2000; Sasaki et al., 1999). Likewise, *GLI2*-null mice display normal limb  
257 patterning unless *GLI1* is also ablated, and *GLI2/GLI3* double heterozygous mice have a more  
258 severe polydactyly than *GLI3* mutants (Park et al., 2000). Interestingly, polydactyly is generally  
259 present in patients with more severe *GLI2* variants, including those that disrupt the zinc-finger and  
260 transactivation domains (Arnhold et al., 2015). Specifically, individuals with mutations predicted to  
261 result in protein truncation are significantly more likely to present both polydactyly and pituitary  
262 insufficiency compared to those with non-truncating variants (Bear et al., 2014)

263 There is striking variability in the phenotypic outcomes of *GLI2* mutations even within the same  
264 family tree (França et al., 2010; Paulo et al., 2015; Rahimov et al., 2006; Roessler et al., 2003;  
265 2005), ranging from unaffected carriers to patients with craniofacial abnormalities, pituitary  
266 phenotypes and polydactyly, either isolated or in combination. In the pedigree examined in this  
267 study, hormone deficiencies, but not hand and facial anomalies, were present in all individuals  
268 carrying mutant *GLI2*, in support of the recommendation to consider this gene as a primary  
269 candidate to screen after endocrinology testing has revealed pituitary insufficiency even in the  
270 absence of polydactyly (Bear & Solomon, 2015). Incomplete penetrance and variable phenotypes,  
271 as also reported in patients with autosomal dominant mutations in other loci linked to HPE or  
272 pituitary deficiencies (e.g., *SHH*, *SIX3*, *OTX2*, *HESX1*), suggest the contribution of additional  
273 genetic variants, epigenetic changes and environmental factors. Despite the pathogenetic role of  
274 *GLI2* mutations has already been described, a small number of rare and damaging variants in the  
275 same gene can be found in public data from non-dysmorphic individuals such as the Exome  
276 Aggregation Consortium (Lek et al., 2016) or Exome Variant Server (Fu et al., 2012). Therefore,  
277 systematic functional validation of putative pathogenic variants would be valuable for genetic  
278 counseling and patient screening.

279

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## 410 **Figure Legends**

411 **Figure 1 – Exome Sequencing identifies *GLI2* as candidate disease gene:** (A) Pedigree of the  
412 reported family. Main known phenotypes are mapped to individuals. Samples marked by a red star  
413 were available for Exome Sequencing. Proband is indicated with an arrow. (B) Bar plot  
414 representing prioritization scores obtained with Phenolyzer for genes identified from Exome  
415 Sequencing. *GLI2* can be effectively associated with the clinical phenotype.

416

417 **Figure 2 – *GLI2* mutant p.P1167LfsX52 lacks transcriptional activity and inhibits Hedgehog-**  
418 **GLI signaling:** (A) Schematic of *GLI2* wild-type and p.P1167LfsX52 mutant lacking the C-  
419 terminal region of the activation domain. Other functional motifs are intact, including the N-  
420 terminal repressor sequence, the zinc finger DNA-binding domain and nuclear localization signal.  
421 (B) Western blotting of total protein lysates of HEK293 cells transfected with plasmids expressing  
422 GFP-tagged wild-type human *GLI2* (*GLI2*<sup>WT</sup>), p.P1167LfsX52 (*GLI2*<sup>MUT</sup>) or GFP (mock control)  
423 revealed with anti-GFP antibody. GAPDH is a loading control. (C-F') GFP-tagged *GLI2*<sup>WT</sup> or  
424 *GLI2*<sup>MUT</sup> visualized in transfected NIH-3T3 cells before or after stimulation with SHH (16nM) for  
425 5 hrs. The GFP signal extracted from the corresponding merged images is show in C'-F'. Both  
426 proteins are found in the cytoplasm (arrowhead) and nucleus (arrow) in untreated cells and become  
427 primarily localized to the nucleus after stimulation. Scale bar, 10µm. (G, H) Levels of *GLII* (G)  
428 and *PTCHI* (H) transcripts detected by quantitative-PCR in NIH-3T3 cells expressing GFP-tagged

429 GLI2<sup>WT</sup>, GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> or GFP control, before and after treatment with SHH (16nM) for 40 hrs. All  
430 conditions are normalized to untreated control cells (mean  $\pm$  SEM, n=2). Unpaired *t*-test, (\*\*)  
431  $p < 0.01$  GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> vs. GLI2<sup>WT</sup> either untreated or SHH-treated matching conditions. (I) Luciferase-  
432 based reporter assay with GLI-responsive construct 8x-Gli-BS-Luc in NIH-3T3 cells transfected  
433 with GFP-tagged GLI2<sup>WT</sup>, GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> or GFP control, before and after treatment with SHH (16nM)  
434 for 30 hrs. The expression levels of the reporter gene are measured by luciferase activity. All  
435 conditions are normalized to untreated control (mean  $\pm$  SEM, n=2). Unpaired *t*-test (\*\*\*),  $p < 0.001$   
436 GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> vs. control either untreated or SHH-treated matching conditions. (NS, non-significant)  
437  $p = 0.1264$  GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> untreated vs. treated. (J) Luciferase-based assay with 8x-Gli-BS-Luc reporter in  
438 chick spinal cord progenitor cells expressing GFP-tagged GLI2<sup>WT</sup>, GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> or GFP control, treated  
439 with increasing doses of SHH for 24 hrs. All conditions are normalized to untreated control (mean  $\pm$   
440 SEM, n=2-4). Unpaired *t*-test, (\*)  $p = 0.0137$  GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> vs. control, untreated; (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.001$   
441 GLI2<sup>MUT</sup> vs. control at corresponding SHH concentrations.

442

443

#### 444 **Conflict of interest**

445 The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

#### 446 **Patient consent**

447 Obtained.

#### 448 **Ethical approval**

449 This study was approved by the Institutional Ethical Review Committee, San Raffaele Hospital,  
450 Milan, Italy (prot. RARE-DISEASE)

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