## Rare Variants in the OTOG Gene Are a Frequent Cause of Familial

2 Meniere's Disease

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**Abstract** 

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**Objectives:** Meniere's disease (MD) is a rare inner ear disorder characterized by sensorineural hearing loss, episodic vertigo and tinnitus. Familial MD has been reported in 6-9% of sporadic cases, and few genes including FAM136A, DTNA, PRKCB, SEMA3D and DPT have been involved in single families, suggesting genetic heterogeneity. In this study, the authors recruited 46 families with MD to search for relevant candidate genes for hearing loss in familial MD. **Design:** Exome sequencing data from MD patients were analyzed to search for rare variants in hearing loss genes in a case-control study. A total of 109 patients with MD (73 familial cases and 36 early-onset sporadic patients) diagnosed according to the diagnostic criteria defined by the Barany Society were recruited in 11 hospitals. The allelic frequencies of rare variants in hearing loss genes were calculated in individuals with familial MD. A single rare variant analysis (SRVA) and a gene burden analysis (GBA) were conducted in the dataset selecting one patient from each family. Allelic frequencies from European and Spanish reference datasets were used as controls. **Results:** A total of 5136 single nucleotide variants in hearing loss genes were considered for SRVA in familial MD cases, but only one heterozygous variant in the OTOG gene (rs552304627) was found in two unrelated families. The GBA found an enrichment of rare missense variants in the OTOG gene in familial MD. So, 15/46 families (33%) showed at least one rare missense variant in the OTOG gene, suggesting a key role in familial MD. **Conclusions:** The authors found an enrichment of multiplex rare missense variants in the OTOG gene in familial MD. This finding supports OTOG as a relevant gene in familial MD and set the groundwork for genetic testing in MD.

## **INTRODUCTION**

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56 Meniere's disease [MD (OMIM 18600)] is a rare inner ear disorder with three major 57 symptoms: sensorineural hearing loss (SNHL), episodic vertigo and tinnitus (Lopez-Escamez et al. 2015; Espinosa-Sanchez & Lopez-Escamez 2016). Hearing loss always 58 59 involves low and medium frequencies in one or both ears (unilateral or bilateral MD) at 60 the onset of the disease. However, MD also affects high frequencies in early or 61 advanced stages of the disease (Belinchon et al. 2011). Epidemiological studies indicate 62 that MD is most common in European population, suggesting a genetic predisposition (Ohmen et al. 2013). Although the majority of MD patients are considered sporadic 63 64 (Frejo et al. 2016; Frejo et al. 2017), familial clustering has been reported in 8-9% of 65 sporadic cases in the European descendent (Requena et al. 2014), and in 6% of Korean 66 population (Lee et al. 2015), which also supports a genetic contribution to the disease 67 (Roman-Naranjo et al. 2017). MD shows a wide range of phenotypic variations among 68 patients, even within the same families (Lee et al. 2015b), and it is commonly 69 associated with migraine and systemic autoimmune disorders (Tyrrell et al. 2014; Cha 70 et al. 2008). Familial MD (FMD) shows an autosomal dominant (AD) pattern of 71 inheritance with incomplete penetrance and anticipation, showing an earlier onset 72 compared to sporadic cases (Morrison et al. 2009; Birgerson et al. 1987; Klar et al. 2006). Different whole exome sequencing (WES) based studies have identified several 73 74 genes related with FMD. Single nucleotide variants (SNV) in DTNA, FAM136A, 75 PRKCB, DPT and SEMA3D were identified in 4 different families AD inheritance with 76 incomplete penetrance (Requena et al. 2015; Martín-Sierra et al. 2016; Martín-Sierra et al. 2017). However, these findings have not been replicated neither in other MD 77 78 families nor sporadic MD (SMD) cases.

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least, one rare missense variant in this gene, suggesting a key role of otogelin in MD.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

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Patient assessment and selection A total of 73 MD patients from 46 different families with one or more affected firstdegree relatives, and 36 sporadic MD cases with an age of onset younger than 35 were recruited. Patients were diagnosed following the diagnostic criteria described by the International Classification Committee for Vestibular Disorders of the Barany Society (Lopez-Escamez et al. 2015). A complete hearing and vestibular assessment was carried out in all cases, including a brain magnetic resonance imaging to exclude other causes of neurological symptoms. Serial pure tone audiograms were retrieved from clinical records to assess hearing loss since the initial diagnosis. A summary of the clinical information of these patients is presented in the Supplemental Digital Content 1 (see Table 1 to Table 3, Supplemental Digital Content 1). This study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board for Clinical Research (MS/2014/02), and a written informed consent to donate biological samples was obtained from all subjects.

## DNA extraction and whole exome sequencing

Blood and saliva samples were taken from patients with MD to perform WES. DNA samples were extracted with prepIT-L2P (DNA Genotek, Ottawa, Canada) and QIAamp DNA Blood Mini Kit (Qiagen, Venlo, The Netherlands) using manufacturer's protocols and quality controls previously described (Szczepek et al. 2019). DNA libraries were prepared by using the SureSelect Human All Exon V6 kit (Agilent Technologies, Santa Clara, CA, USA) and were paired-end sequenced on the Illumina HiSeq 4000 platform at 100X coverage. Raw reads were stored in two FASTQ files for each individual.

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**Bioinformatic analysis Dataset generation and processing** Analysis-ready BAM files and VCF files were generated from raw unmapped reads using the GATK Best Practices pipeline. Reads were aligned to the GRCh37/hg19 human reference genome using the BWA-MEM algorithm. For obtaining the final dataset, SNV and small structural variants were filtered according to its Variant Quality Score Recalibration (VQSR) and depth of coverage (DP) values. Thus, variants were excluded if their VQSR value were under the VSQR threshold or their average DP < 10. Variants were functionally annotated using ANNOVAR version 2018Apr16. RefSeq was used for gene-based annotation and the Exome Aggregation Consortium (ExAC) database, the Combined Annotation Dependent Depletion (CADD) scores and the dbNSFP database (v3.0) were used for filter-based annotation. Sensorineural hearing loss gene set The SNHL gene set was generated by using three different databases: the Hereditary Hearing Loss Homepage (Van Camp G. 2018), the Deafness Variation Database (Azaiez et al. 2018) and Harmonizome (Rouillard et al. 2016), containing a total of 116 genes related with SNHL (see Table 4, Supplemental Digital Content 1). Data analysis and prioritization strategy Two pipelines and filtering/prioritization strategies were conducted to search for rare variants as we have previously described (Gallego-Martinez et al. 2019). The first was a single rare variant analysis (SRVA) for studying individual families; the second approach was a gene burden analysis (GBA) to obtain a gene-level mutational profile

(Figure 1). For these analyses only one patient from each family was selected.

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- of the hearing profile in FMD cases with candidate variants. Regression analysis was
- performed to estimate the outcome of hearing loss for each frequency.

174 **RESULTS** 

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Main genetic findings in familial MD Single rare variant analysis A total of 5136 variants located in SNHL genes were considered in FMD cases. After applying quality controls (QC), 4247 SNV remained. Only 75 nonsynonymous or splice site SNV fulfilled the MAF (<0.001) and CADD (>15) filtering criteria (Figure 1). From them, 40 SNV were already described in the NFE population or Spanish population, but only one SNV was found in more than one family (see Table 5, Supplemental Digital Content 1, which shows the rare variants found in the SRVA for FMD cases). This heterozygous variant located in OTOG gene was observed in cases from two unrelated families (F1 & F14). The variant chr11:17574758G>A (rs552304627; p.V141M), which is in the last nucleotide of the fourth exon in the OTOG canonical transcript (ENST00000399391), is likely pathogenic according to the ACMG and AMP guidelines. This multiplex variant is located in a Von Willebrand Factor D-type domain (vWD) with a MAF=.0008 in NFE population, and multiple in silico tools supported a likely pathogenic effect of this variant (SIFT score=.001; M-CAP=.153; CADD=28.2; GERP++ =5.36). The rest of the rare SNV were considered private familial variants because none of them were found in other FMD cases. None small structural variant (insertion or deletion) was found in any SNHL genes. Gene burden analysis Seventy-three genes with 214 SNV with a MAF<0.05 were retained after QC and

filtering steps. Most of the genes (74%) carried less than 3 variants, thus they were

discarded for further analysis. The most significant finding was an enrichment of rare 197 missense variants in OTOG gene in our FMD cases against either NFE population from 198 ExAC (OR= 4.3(2.6-7.0),  $p=4.1\times10^{-8}$ ) or Spanish population (OR= 3.6(2.1-5.9), p=199  $7.1 \times 10^{-6}$ ). Nine different rare missense variants were found in *OTOG* in 14/46 non-200 201 related families, existing 6 families with 2 or more shared variants (Table 1 & see 202 Figure 1, Supplemental Digital Content 2). The variants rs61978648 and rs61736002 203 were shared by individuals from 4 unrelated families (F2, F3, F4 & F5). Likewise, the 204 variants rs552304627 and rs117315845 were found in patients from other 2 unrelated 205 families (F1 & F14). 206 In addition, a novel variant in OTOG not included in the GBA was found in two cases from a 15th family (F34). This variant, located in exon 18 (chr11:17594747C>A), was 207 208 found in heterozygous state affecting the sequence of the C8 domain. The distribution 209 of the variants found in *OTOG* is scattered across the gene sequence (Figure 2). 210 Hearing profile in familial patients with rare variants in OTOG 211 The hearing profile for the 14 patients (3 males, 11 females) with rare variants in OTOG gene was studied (see Figure 2, Supplemental Digital Content 2, which shows the pure 212 213 tone audiograms for these patients). Ten of them showed bilateral hearing loss, 3 had 214 left-sided hearing loss and only 1 patient shown right-sided SNHL (see Table 1, Supplemental Digital Content 1, which summarizes the clinical information of the 215 familial MD cases carrying variants in OTOG gene). From these 14 patients, 16 ears 216 217 from 12 patients showed a flat shaped audiogram (57.1%), 5 ears from 5 patients showed a ski-slope shaped audiogram (17.8%), 3 ears from 3 patients showed a reverse-218 219 slope shaped (10.7%) and 4 ears had a normal pure-tone audiogram (14.2%).

220 A regression analysis was done to estimate the hearing loss at onset and the outcome for each frequency. We found a negative correlation at 1000 Hz ( $R^2$ =.143; p=.033) and 221 222 2000 Hz ( $R^2$ =.246; p=.004). There was no statistical correlation at 125 Hz, 250 Hz, 500 223 Hz, 4000 Hz nor 8000 Hz, suggesting no progression at these frequencies (Figure 3). 224 The age of onset of the symptoms was 41.93±8.66 and the estimated hearing loss at 225 onset was 62.14±12.83 for low frequencies (125-250-500 Hz) and 58.75±14.1 for high 226 frequencies (1000-2000-4000 Hz). Early onset sporadic MD 227 228 The same analytical pipeline was used in a series of patients with sporadic MD with an 229 age of onset younger than 35 (see Figure 3, Supplemental Digital Content 2). For the 230 SRVA, we found 60 nonsynonymous or splice site SNV with MAF < 0.001 and CADD 231 > 15 in SNHL genes. Among them, one variant was found in two sporadic cases and 232 another variant was also found in a familial case. The rest of the SNV were considered 233 simplex variants found in singletons and none of them were homozygous (see Table 6, 234 Supplemental Digital Content 1, which shows the rare variants found in the SRVA for 235 SMD cases). 236 A heterozygous nonsynonymous SNV in OTOG gene was found in two unrelated 237 sporadic MD cases (\$1 and \$23). The variant chr11:17632279C>T (rs779658224; 238 p.A1823V) is located in exon 35 of the canonical transcript of OTOG gene and it is a 239 variant of uncertain significance (VUS) according to the ACMG and AMP guidelines. 240 This variant has a MAF=.0005 in the NFE population from ExAC and it is not 241 described in the Spanish population from the CSVS. In addition, a heterozygous 242 nonsynonymous SNV in OTOGL gene was found in one sporadic case and in one 243 familial case (S27 and F31). The variant chr12:80752642T>G (rs145929269;

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2016).

Familial MD has an AD inheritance with incomplete penetrance (Morrison et al. 2009; Requena et al. 2014), and few genes have been involved in singular families (Requena et al. 2015; Martín-Sierra et al. 2016; Martín-Sierra et al. 2017). In this study, we have found an enrichment of rare missense variants in several unrelated patients with FMD in the OTOG gene. These variants were observed in 15 of 46 non-related families (33%) familial cases). Seven of the 15 families with rare variants in OTOG showed incomplete penetrance (47%) and partial syndromes (episodic vertigo or hearing loss) were found in relatives from 5 of 15 families (Morrison et al. 2009; Requena et al. 2015; Martín-Sierra et al. 2016; Martín-Sierra et al. 2017). Most of these rare variants were found in 2, 3 or 4 unrelated individuals from different families with MD and they were considered multiplex variants. However, the majority of the variants in OTOG found in nonfamilial patients with early onset were not observed in other sporadic cases (singletons variants). OTOG, which encodes otogelin, was described for first time by Cohen-Salmon et al (Cohen-Salmon et al. 1997). Otogelin is a 2925 amino acid protein (ENST00000399391) constituted by several vWD and C8 domains, and a cysteine knotlike domain in its C-terminal. It is mainly expressed in acellular structures which cover the sensory inner ear epithelia: the tectorial membrane, the otoconial membranes and the cupula over the cristae ampullaris of the semicircular canals. Because of its localization in the extracellular structures overlying the stereocilia of the hair cells involved in the mechanotransduction of sound and acceleration, this structural protein plays an important role in both auditory and vestibular functions (Schrauwen et al.

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The effects of variants in otogelin were first demonstrated in the orthologous gene in a mouse model. Three mouse models have been generated for evaluating the phenotypic changes resulting from OTOG variants. In the Otog<sup>tm1Prs</sup> model, authors inactivated Otog by deleting the first three exons. Vestibular dysfunction was detected at P4 in Otog<sup>-/-</sup>, observing anomalies in the saccule and utricule. The auditory function was evaluated by Pleyer reflex, showing profound hearing impairment. The Otog<sup>+/-</sup> mice did not present any anomalies (Simmler et al. 2000a). The second model is the twister (twt) mice, mice with a spontaneous recessive mutation entailing absence of Otog expression. Similarly to Otog<sup>tm1Prs</sup>, in Otog<sup>twt</sup> the vestibular dysfunction was detected at P4, and the hearing loss was progressive and moderate to severe/profound (Simmler et al. 2000b). The last mouse model published is the otogelin ENU-induced mouse model. In this model, a homozygous variant at the splice donor site of intron 29, Otog vbd/vbd, cause a frame-shift and a premature codon. Otog vbd/vbd mice shown abnormal hearing and vestibular functions (El Hakam Kamareddin et al. 2015). Four variants have been described in OTOG gene causing DFNB18B. Schraders et al. were the first to describe causative variants in OTOG. A homozygous 1bp deletion, c.5508delC (p.Ala1838Profs\*31) in four related patients, and two compoundheterozygous variants, c.6347C>T (p.Pro2116Leu) and c.6559C>T (p.Arg2187\*) in other two related patients, were described to cause hearing loss and vestibular dysfunction (Schraders et al. 2012). More recently, a homozygous nonsense variant c.330C>G (p.Tyr110\*) in a Korean patient has been identified, showing early-onset mild hearing loss without vestibular dysfunction (Yu et al. 2019). In contrast to studies mentioned above, OTOG variants found in this study were all in heterozygous state and, despite 6 FMD cases and 3 SMD cases studied had two or more variants, compound heterozygous variants could not be demonstrated because samples

301 from the parents were not available and OTOG variant segregation could not be fully 302 assessed in each family. However, the variants chr11:17574758G>A and 303 chr11:17663747G>A found in F14 were also identified in his mother, the variants 304 chr11:17578774G>A and chr11:17632921C>T found in F5 were also identified in her sister (II-7), and a novel variant chr11:17594747C>A not considered for the GBA were 305 306 found in F34 and her brother. Furthermore, variants located in untranslated regions 307 (UTRs) and promoter regions, which modulate gene expression and different protein 308 features (Chatterjee & Pal 2009; Buckland 2006), could not be evaluated because of the 309 study design. Altogether, the results obtained by GBA suggested a different genetic 310 architecture in FMD cases and SMD cases, since the enrichment of rare variants in 311 OTOG gene was only found in FMD cases and most of the variants found in sporadic 312 cases with early onset were singletons (not observed in multiple individuals). Each region of the cochlea is specifically stimulated by a specific frequency. Thus, the 313 314 base of the cochlea mainly responds to high-frequency sounds, whereas the apex 315 responds to low-frequency sounds, frequencies mostly affected in MD (Robles & 316 Ruggero 2017; Nakashima et al. 2016). Of note, otogelin shows a tonotopic gene 317 expression in mice (Yoshimura et al. 2014). OTOG gene showed a 2.43-fold change in 318 expression for apex vs base, making this gene a possible candidate for SNHL in MD. In 319 addition, an RNA-seq study of the inner ear from patients with normal hearing showed a 320 high expression of OTOG gene in the vestibule (Schrauwen et al. 2016), which could 321 explain the vestibular dysfunction in patients with pathogenic variants in this gene. 322 The audiograms of FMD patients who carried rare variants in OTOG gene showed a 323 moderate-to-severe flat hearing loss \*60 dB since the first years of onset involving all 324 frequencies. Low-frequency hearing had slight variations throughout the years, while a negative correlation was found at mid (1000Hz) and high-frequency (2000Hz) hearing. 325

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vestibular functions in MD.

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Figure legends

Figure 1: Flowchart summarizing the bioinformatic analysis on familial MD cases. On

the left, single rare variant analysis (SRVA) and prioritization pipeline. On the right, the

gene burden analysis (GBA) pipeline. SNV, single nucleotide variants; CADD,

Combined Annotation Dependent Depletion Score.

Figure 2: Variants distribution across OTOG gene domains. On the upper part, variants

which were found in familial Meniere disease (FMD) cases. On the bottom part,

variants which were found in sporadic Meniere disease (SMD) cases. Yellow-colored

variants indicate variants found in only one case, whereas red-colored variants represent

variants found in 2 or more cases in a cohort. vWD, von Willebrand factor type D

domain; T, Trypsin inhibitor-like domain; Abf, Alpha-L-arabinofuranosidase B domain;

CT, Cysteine knot domain.

Figure 3: Scattered plot showing air conduction hearing thresholds obtained and the

duration of the disease for each frequency in familial MD cases. Regression equations

and estimated hearing loss at the onset are displayed below the charts.

**Supplemental Digital Content** 

Supplemental Digital Content 1.docx

Supplemental Digital Content 2.docx

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Table 1. Rare Variants Found in the Gene Burden Analysis in OTOG Gene for Familial MD Cases.

Variant position	Exon	Families	Sporadic cases	MAF	MAF	MAF	MAF	CADD	Domain
				<b>FMD</b>	ALL MD	NFE	<b>CSVS</b>		
11:17574758G>A	4	F1; F14	_	0.041 (3/73)	0.028 (3/109)	0.00080	0.0033	24.8	vWD
11:17578774G>A	7	F2; F3; F4; F5	S24	0.068 (5/73)	0.055 (6/109)	0.0090	0.017	15.95	vWD
11:17594747C>A*	18	F34	-	0.027 (2/73)	0.018 (2/109)	_	_	22.2	C8
11:17621218C>T	30	F6; F7	_	0.027 (2/73)	0.018 (2/109)	0.0026	0.0033	34	C8
11:17627548G>A	32	F14	-	0.012 (1/73)	0.009 (1/109)	0.0056	0.0054	23.6	Abf
11:17631453C>T	35	F8	S11; S24	0.012 (1/73)	0.028 (3/109)	0.017	0.014	12.89	_
11:17632921C>T	35	F2; F3; F4; F5	-	0.068 (5/73)	0.046 (5/109)	0.0015	0.0054	7.71	_
11:17656672G>A	45	F10	<b>S</b> 9	0.013 (1/73)	0.018 (2/109)	0.0034	0.0039	31	_
11:17663747G>A	52	F1; F13; F14	S7	0.055 (4/73)	0.046 (5/109)	0.0058	0.0054	19.41	_
11:17667139G>C	54	F9; F11; F12	S12; S20	0.082 (6/73)	0.073 (8/109)	0.019	0.017	27.2	CT

<sup>\*</sup> This novel variant was not included in the gene burden analysis. Abbreviations: MAF FMD, minor allele frequency in familial MD; MAF ALL MD, minor allele frequency in all familial and non-familial MD cases; NFE, Minor allele frequency in non-Finnish European population; CSVS, Collaborative Spanish Variant Server; Abf, alpha-L-arabinofuranosidase B domain; CADD, Combined Annotation Dependent Depletion Score; CT: cysteine knot domain; vWD, von Willebrand factor type D domain.





