

1 **CDK12/CDK13 inhibition disrupts a transcriptional program critical for glioblastoma  
2 survival**

3 Silje Lier, Solveig Osnes Lund, Anuja Lipsa, Katrin B. M. Frauenknecht, Idun Dale Rein, Preeti  
4 Jain, Anna Ulrika Lång, Emma Helena Lång, Niklas Meyer, Aparajita Dutta, Santosh Anand,  
5 Gaute Johan Nesse, Rune Forstrøm Johansen, Arne Klungland, Johanne Egge Rinholt, Stig  
6 Ove Bøe, Ashish Anand, Steven Michael Pollard, Simone P. Niclou, Mads Lerdrup#, Deo  
7 Prakash Pandey#

8 **#) Correspondence:**

9 Deo Prakash Pandey, Department of Microbiology, Rikshospitalet, Oslo University Hospital,  
10 P. O. Box 4950 Nydalen, N-0424 Oslo, Sognsvannsveien 20, 0372 Oslo, Norway, Phone: +47  
11 23 01 39 10, Fax: +47 23074061, Deo.Prakash.Pandey@rr-research.no

12 Mads Lerdrup, Center for Chromosome Stability, Department of Cellular and Molecular  
13 Medicine, University of Copenhagen, Blegdamsvej 3C, 2200 Copenhagen N, Denmark, +45  
14 2363 6776, mlerdrup@sund.ku.dk

15 **Affiliations:**

16 Department of Microbiology, Rikshospitalet, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway (S.L.,  
17 S.O.L., A.U.L., E.L., P.J., N.M., G.J.N., R.F.J., A.K., J.E.R., S.O.B., D.P.P.); Institute of Basic  
18 Medical Sciences, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway (S.L., N.M., J.E.R.); National Center of  
19 Pathology, Laboratoire national de santé, Dudelange, Luxembourg (K.B.M.F.); Integrated  
20 BioBank of Luxembourg, Luxembourg Institute of Health, Dudelange, Luxembourg (K.B.M.F.);  
21 Department of Radiation Biology, Institute for Cancer Research, Radium Høspitalet, Oslo,  
22 Norway (I.D.R.); Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Indian Institute of  
23 Technology, Guwahati, Assam, India (A. D., A. A.); Department of Informatics, Systems, and

24 Communications, University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy (S.A.); MRC Centre for  
25 Regenerative Medicine, SCRM Building, University of Edinburgh (S. M. P.); NORLUX Neuro-  
26 Oncology Laboratory, Department of Cancer Research, Luxembourg Institute of Health,  
27 Luxembourg (A.L., S.P.N.); Department of Life Sciences and Medicine, University of  
28 Luxembourg, Belval, Luxembourg (S.P.N.); Center for Chromosome Stability, Department of  
29 Cellular and Molecular Medicine, University of Copenhagen, Denmark (M.L.).  
  
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## 32 Abstract

33 Glioblastoma is the most prevalent and aggressive malignant tumor of the central nervous  
34 system. With a median overall survival of only one year, glioblastoma patients have a  
35 particularly poor prognosis, highlighting a clear need for novel therapeutic strategies to target  
36 this disease. Transcriptional cyclin-dependent kinases (tCDK), which phosphorylate key  
37 residues of RNA polymerase II (RNAPII) c-terminal domain (CTD), play a major role in sustaining  
38 aberrant transcriptional programs that are key to development and maintenance of cancer  
39 cells. Here, we show that either pharmacological inhibition or genetic ablation of the tCDKs,  
40 CDK12 and CDK13, markedly reduces both the proliferation and migratory capacity of glioma  
41 cells and patient-derived organoids. Using a xenograft mouse model, we demonstrate that  
42 CDK12/13 inhibition not only reduces glioma growth *in vivo*. Mechanistically, inhibition of  
43 CDK12/CDK13 leads to a genome-wide abrogation of RNAPII CTD phosphorylation, which in  
44 turn disrupts transcription and cell cycle progression in glioma cells. In summary, the results  
45 provide proof-of-concept for the potential of CDK12 and CDK13 as therapeutic targets for  
46 glioblastoma.

## 47 Significance statement

48 Glioblastoma is a common, aggressive, and invasive type of brain tumor that is usually fatal.  
49 The standard treatment for glioblastoma patients is surgical resection, radiotherapy, and  
50 chemotherapy with DNA-alkylating agents, and unfortunately current treatments only extend  
51 overall survival by a few months. It is therefore critical to identify and target additional  
52 biological processes in this disease. Here, we reveal that targeting a specific transcriptional  
53 addiction for glioma cells by inhibition of CDK12/CDK13 disrupts glioma-specific transcription  
54 and cell cycle progression and has potential to provide a new therapeutic strategy for  
55 glioblastoma.

## 56 Introduction

57 With a median overall survival of 13.9 months and a 5-year survival rate of only 5.3%, IDH-  
58 wildtype Glioblastoma is the most prevalent and aggressive tumor of the central nervous  
59 system (1, 2). The standard of care for glioblastoma patients is surgical resection followed by  
60 radiotherapy and chemotherapy with temozolomide (TMZ), which only increases overall  
61 survival by a few months (3, 4). It is therefore critical to identify new specific vulnerabilities of  
62 glioblastomas that can be targeted pharmacologically.

63 Aberrant transcriptional programs are key to development and maintenance of cancer cells,  
64 and consequently cancer cells are often hypersensitive to the targeting of the transcriptional  
65 machinery (5). Glioblastoma propagation and resistance to existing therapies are driven by a  
66 subset of stem-like cells, which depend on neurodevelopmental transcription factors (TF) to  
67 maintain a specific transcriptional program and sustain proliferation (6, 7). As TFs can be  
68 functionally redundant or difficult to inhibit by small molecules, inhibition of the core  
69 transcriptional machinery offers an attractive alternative way to disrupt the transcriptional  
70 addictions of cancer cells.

71 RNAPII-dependent transcription is generally required for the transcriptional programs that  
72 sustain specific cell lineages and identities, including that of glioblastomas. The transcription  
73 cycle of RNAPII is regulated by a set of tCDKs, including CDK7-CDK13, that phosphorylate the  
74 RNAPII CTD and facilitate key steps of transcriptional initiation and elongation(8). CDK7 is  
75 involved in regulating transcriptional initiation by phosphorylating serine-5 (pSer5) of the  
76 RNAPII CTD (9). CDK9, CDK12, and CDK13 phosphorylate serine-2 (pSer2) of RNAPII CTD  
77 regulating transcriptional elongation (10, 11). tCDKs are attractive therapeutic targets (8), and  
78 several highly specific inhibitors were recently reported (12), including the CDK9-inhibitor

79 NVP-2, the allosteric CDK7-inhibitor THZ1, and the allosteric CDK12/13-inhibitor THZ531.  
80 These inhibitors target a cysteine residue outside the kinase domain, thereby resulting in  
81 much higher specificity (11, 13). THZ1-mediated CDK7 inhibition leads to loss of RNAPII  
82 phosphorylation mainly at Ser5 and has anti-cancer properties in adult and pediatric glioma  
83 cells (14-16). THZ531 treatment reduces RNAPII phosphorylation mainly at Ser2, and can  
84 reduce neuroblastoma, osteosarcoma, and Ewing sarcoma proliferation (17, 18).  
85 Furthermore, the specific CDK12/CDK13 inhibitor SR-4835 reduces proliferation of triple  
86 negative breast cancer cells (19).

87 Here we explore whether tCDK inhibitors can inhibit glioma cell proliferation. Using THZ531  
88 and SR-4835 that inhibit CDK12/CDK13 and RNAPII pSer2<sup>11,19</sup>, we demonstrate that glioma  
89 cell proliferation is specifically and strongly reduced due to loss of RNAPII phosphorylation,  
90 transcriptional shutdown, and disruption of a glioblastoma-specific transcriptional program.  
91 Finally, we demonstrate that the cell cycle progression and DNA replication are substantially  
92 affected in gliomas by CDK12/CDK13 inhibition. Altogether, our results illustrate that  
93 CDK12/CDK13 inhibition can provide a promising therapeutic alternative for the treatment of  
94 glioblastoma.

## 95 Results

### 96 **Inhibition of CDK12/CDK13 arrests glioblastoma cell proliferation and migration**

97 To identify tCDKs affecting glioblastomas proliferation, we first performed survival analysis  
98 using GlioVis (20), revealing that glioblastoma patients with higher CDK13 expression have  
99 significantly poorer overall survival (HR = 0.66; p = 0.0058). In contrast, no significant  
100 correlation was observed for other tCDKs (Supplementary Figure 1A), although all tCDKs were  
101 expressed in GSCs (Supplementary Figure 1B). We therefore examined the effect of selected

102 tCDK inhibitors on the survival of a panel of glioma-patient derived stems cells (GSCs) and  
103 control cells using dose response analyses (Supplementary Figure 1, D-F). We found GSCs to  
104 be particularly vulnerable to two small molecule CDK12/CDK13 inhibitors THZ531 and SR-4835  
105 (11, 19) (Figure 1, A and B, Supplementary Figure 1, F and G). Furthermore, the effect was  
106 independent on the presence of serum in the cell culture media (Supplementary Figure 1C).  
107 Importantly, all GSCs tested were sensitive to THZ531 and SR-4835 treatment, and their IC<sub>50</sub>  
108 values ranging from 20 to 200 nM were substantially lower than those of cells from other  
109 cancer sub-types (Figure 1B, Supplementary Figure 1F). In agreement with a recent study  
110 reporting that THZ531 inhibited proliferation of liver cancer cells (21), human hepatoma  
111 HepG2 cells were also sensitive to THZ531. Moreover, 100 nM and 500 nM THZ531 led to a  
112 strong reduction in proliferation and colony formation for the GSCs, but not for Hela cells  
113 (Figure 1C and D, Supplementary Figure 1G). To further validate the results obtained using  
114 inhibitors, we investigated the effect of genetic ablation of CDK12/CDK13 on the proliferation  
115 of GSCs using a CRISPR/Cas9-based competition assay. Positive control single guide RNAs  
116 (sgRNA) against MCM2, RPS19, and CDK9 inhibited glioma cells, whereas a negative control  
117 had no effect. Importantly, each of three independent sgRNAs targeting CDK12, or CDK13,  
118 revealed that genetic ablation of these targets significantly inhibited the glioma cell  
119 proliferation (Figure 1E).

120 Cell migration is central for the invasive capacity of malignant gliomas (22), and we next  
121 assessed the effect of THZ531 on GSC migration compared to the positive control Gefitinib  
122 (23). High-content live-cell microscopy revealed that THZ531 significantly reduced migration  
123 of G7, G144, G14 and G166 GSCs and even exceeded the ability of Gefitinib to inhibit GSC

124 migration (Figure 1F, Supplementary Figure 1H, Supplementary movies 1 and 2). These  
125 findings demonstrate that THZ531 strongly inhibits proliferation and migration of glioma cells.

126 **CDK12 is expressed in human glioblastoma tissue and inhibition of CDK12/CDK13  
127 compromises *ex vivo* glioblastoma proliferation**

128 Immunohistochemistry for CDK12 was performed on glioblastoma tissue (n = 5 patients) and  
129 on CNS tissues without glioblastoma (n = 2 patients), see Supplemental Table 1 for details on  
130 patient material. In control CNS tissue, no unequivocal nuclear CDK12 expression was  
131 detected, while a heterogeneous distribution of nuclear CDK12 expression was visible in  
132 glioblastoma tissue, ranging from weak, to moderate, to strong expression (representative  
133 pictures are provided in Figure 2A, bottom panel).

134 We next assessed the effect of CDK12/CDK13 inhibitors on *ex vivo* 3D glioblastoma  
135 patient-derived organoids (GBOs) that were reformed from isolated single tumor cells as  
136 previously described (24, 25). Four glioblastoma patient-derived tumor cells were selected,  
137 exhibiting a typical range of key glioblastoma genetic alterations including deletion of  
138 CDKN2A/B, amplification of CDK4/6 and EGFR, mutations of TP53, PTEN, PIK3CA and EGFR  
139 (Supplementary Figure 2B). Furthermore, in addition to the CDK12/CDK13 inhibitors, THZ531  
140 and SR-4835, we included Abemaciclib, a CDK4/6 inhibitor and Lomustine, both inhibitors of  
141 clinical significations for glioblastoma treatment to benchmark the effect of CDK12/CDK13  
142 inhibition. THZ531 and SR-4835 treatment strongly affected the morphology and structure of  
143 GBOs (Figure 2B) and inhibited the proliferation of GBOs (Figure 2, C and D). The effect of  
144 THZ531 treatment on inhibition of GBO was comparable to Abemaciclib and Lomustine where  
145 SR-4835 was a more potent inhibitor of GBO proliferation compared to Abemaciclib and

146 Lomustine (Figure 2, C and D), a consistent finding observed in GSCs (Supplementary Figure 2,  
147 C and D).

148

149 **Inhibition of CDK12/CDK13 reduces *in vivo* tumor growth**

150 To investigate the effect of CDK12/CDK13 inhibitors can reduced tumor burden *in vivo*, we  
151 used CDK12/13 inhibitor SR-4835 because it has been tested against triple-negative breast  
152 tumor xenografts in mice (19), while THZ531 has not yet been used for *in vivo*. We determined  
153 that in mice, the maximum tolerated dose of SR-4835 was 20 mg/kg. In addition, we  
154 discovered that SR-4835 was undetectable in mouse brains when sampled 24 h post-dose,  
155 suggesting that it cannot cross the blood-brain barrier (BBB). Therefore, we used a mouse  
156 subcutaneous xenograft model based on U87-MG cells to test the efficacy of the CDK12/13  
157 inhibitor SR-4835, and compared it to TMZ treatment. SR-4835 reduced *in vitro* U87-MG  
158 proliferation with similar IC<sub>50</sub> as we have observed for GSCs (Figure 3, A and B). Nine days  
159 after injection with U87-MG cells, mice were dosed with SR-4835 or TMZ for two weeks (Figure  
160 3C). Growth of subcutaneous tumors was strongly inhibited by 20 mg/kg SR-4835, 5 mg/kg or  
161 2 mg/kg TMZ (Figure 3C). Importantly, the constant body weight of the mice indicated that all  
162 treatments were well tolerated. Finally, we tested the effect of SR-4835 on a large panel of  
163 cancer cell lines encompassing pancreatic, ovarian, uterine and prostate cancer, and found  
164 that GSCs were most sensitive to CDK12/CDK13 inhibition (Figure 3D). Altogether, we found  
165 that inhibition of CDK12/13 has a strong and specific effect on glioma growth, which compares  
166 favorably with the existing treatment.

167 **Inhibition of CDK12/CDK13 leads to global loss of RNAPII CTD phosphorylation and nascent  
168 mRNA synthesis in GSCs**

169 We next analyzed the phosphorylation level of key residues in the RNAPII CTD following  
170 THZ531 treatment. Using 500 nM THZ531 as in previous studies of other cell types (11, 18, 26,  
171 27), we found that 6 h of treatment almost completely abolished Ser2 phosphorylation and  
172 strongly affected pThr4 in GSCs G7 cells, while the total RNAPII levels remained unchanged up  
173 to 24 h (Figure 4A). In contrast, no substantial changes were observed in the levels of  
174 phosphorylated species of RNAPII within 48 h of treatment for HeLa cells (Figure 4A).

175 To investigate the effect of CDK12/CDK13 inhibition on genome-wide chromatin occupancy of  
176 total RNAPII, pSer2 and pSer5 in glioma cells, we employed the recently developed CUT&RUN  
177 technology (28). Total RNAPII occupancy transiently increased at genes with preexisting  
178 RNAPII at transcription start sites (TSSes) after 1 h of THZ531 treatment and were similar to  
179 those of control treated cells after 6 h of treatment (Figure 4B). pSer5 levels were considerably  
180 reduced post 6 h treatment, whereas genome-wide chromatin occupancy of pSer2 was  
181 strongly reduced following 6 h of treatment. Control markers H3K27ac and H3K27me3 were  
182 enriched at TSSes of actively transcribed and silent genes, respectively (Supplementary Figure  
183 3A). In summary, these data show that THZ531 treatment strongly reduced genome-wide  
184 levels of phosphorylated RNAPII species.

185 To examine nascent and steady state transcription in THZ531-treated cells, we used SLAM-seq  
186 (29). In brief, uridines of nascent transcripts were labeled using a short pulse of 4-thiouridine  
187 (4sU) and isolated RNA was then exposed to iodoacetate, which converts incorporated uridine  
188 to cytosine. T->C conversion was used to identify nascent transcripts and compare the  
189 patterns of nascent and steady state transcription in THZ531-treated and control G7 cells. This  
190 established that THZ531 strongly suppressed nascent mRNA synthesis (Figure 4C). Indeed,  
191 exposure to THZ531 for 6 h caused a near total loss of newly-transcribed mRNAs and also had

192 a strong impact on the composition of the steady state transcriptome, with thousands of  
193 mRNAs being significantly up- and down-regulated (Figure 4, D and E).

194 As expected, the expression of mRNAs showed a very high level of concordance with total  
195 RNAPII occupancy as well as RNAPII phosphorylation (Figure 4, F and G). In line with the  
196 observation that THZ531 nearly completely blocked nascent transcription, the most highly  
197 expressed transcripts with the highest levels of TSS-associated RNAPII, were also most strongly  
198 down-regulated by THZ531 (Figure 4, F and G). Gene Ontology analysis revealed profound  
199 consequences of THZ531-mediated inhibition of CDK12/CDK13, and the most strongly  
200 enriched functional categories of down-regulated nascent and steady state transcripts in  
201 THZ531-treated GSCs, G7 and G144, included transcription, cell cycle, and RNA metabolism  
202 (Figure 4H, Supplementary Figure 3C). Up-regulated steady-state transcripts were enriched in  
203 biological processes, such as translation and metabolism (Supplementary Figure 3C) in  
204 accordance with previous observations (17, 18). We also investigated selected sets of  
205 transcripts, including ribosomal, histones, cell cycle, house-keeping, DNA damage response  
206 (DDR), BRCA-ness factors, which are known to be dependent on CDK12 for their expression  
207 (18, 26), as well as the TFs that sustain the proliferation of glioma cells and their targets (Figure  
208 4I). Nascent transcripts encoding cell cycle, DDR, BRCA or core glioma TFs and their target  
209 genes were significantly enriched among the down-regulated genes (Figure 4, I-J,  
210 Supplementary Figure 3D and 4A). In contrast, we found that nascent transcripts expressed  
211 from housekeeping genes were not significantly enriched or depleted among up-regulated,  
212 down-regulated, or unchanged genes.

213 Transcripts encoding key neurodevelopmental TFs, including OLIG2, POU3F2 and SOX2 are  
214 required for proliferation of glioma cells, were among the most strongly down-regulated

215 transcripts (Figure 4J). The down-regulation or ablation of these TFs has been shown to  
216 strongly suppress proliferation of glioma cells (6). We therefore investigated change in their  
217 expression and occupancy of total, pSer2, and pSer5 forms of RNAPII following THZ531  
218 treatment. All three genes were highly expressed in G7 cells and were marked by the presence  
219 of super-enhancer sites containing broad H3K27ac domains, as reported earlier (6, 7)  
220 (Supplementary Figure 5A). While pSer2 was nearly abolished at these genes and pSer5  
221 strongly reduced, total RNAPII was also reduced following 6 h of CDK12/CDK13 inhibition. We  
222 observed a strong down-regulation in the nascent transcripts for these genes, which was  
223 validated using RT-qPCR. We found that the expression of key DDR genes was strongly down-  
224 regulated following THZ531 treatment as reported earlier (Supplementary Figure 5B). In  
225 addition, the expression of many glioblastoma-specific neurodevelopmental TFs including  
226 OLIG2, POU3F2 and SOX2 target genes was profoundly down-regulated (Supplementary  
227 Figure 5C), with Olig2 target genes being most strongly affected whereas expression of many,  
228 but not all house-keeping genes remained unaffected (Supplementary Figure 5D). In concert,  
229 these results demonstrate that THZ531-mediated inhibition of CDK12/CDK13 strongly  
230 suppresses expression of TFs (and their target genes) required for the glioblastoma  
231 transcriptional program.

### 232 **THZ531 treatment disrupts GSC cell cycle progression**

233 G7 and G144 GSCs responded similarly to THZ531 and overlapping sets of differentially  
234 expressed transcripts were readily identified (Supplementary Figure 6A). Several functional  
235 categories related to the cell cycle were enriched among the most down-regulated nascent  
236 transcripts in THZ531-treated G7 cells and in the steady-state transcripts down-regulated in  
237 both G7 and G144 cells (Figure 4H, Supplementary Figure 3C). Publicly available data on cell

238 cycle dependence of gene expression in HeLa and U2OS cells (30) were used to assess cell  
239 cycle-dependence of transcriptional changes following THZ531 treatment in GSCs. The results  
240 showed the strongest down-regulation of nascent transcripts in THZ531-treated G7 cells after  
241 S-phase (Supplementary Figure 6, B and C). Interestingly, prior to S phase, the steady state  
242 transcripts were both up- and down-regulated whereas after S-phase, the majority of the  
243 steady state transcripts were down-regulated (Supplementary Figure 6, B and C).

244 To further explore the effect of CDK12/CDK13 inhibition on the cell cycle of glioma cells, we  
245 used EdU incorporation to mark the cells in S-phase. Following 6 h THZ531 treatment, there  
246 was no EdU incorporation in both the G7 and G144 cells, indicating a lack of DNA synthesis  
247 (Figure 5, A and B) and this effect was stable up to 24 h. At the same time, we did not observe  
248 any change in EdU incorporation in Hela cells following THZ531 treatment (Supplementary  
249 Figure 6D). Furthermore, we noticed an increase of cells in both G1- and G2-phases following  
250 the pronounced loss of cells in active S-phase. We arrested cells in mitosis using nocodazole  
251 in combination with THZ531 treatment and found that GSCs were not entering mitosis,  
252 indicating blocked cell cycle progression (Figure 5, C and D). Furthermore, neither the  
253 frequency of apoptosis nor the amount of DNA damage changed after 6 h exposure to THZ531.  
254 However, after exposure to THZ531 for 24 h, apoptotic cells, DNA damage,  $\gamma$ -H2AX and cleaved  
255 PARP did increase (Figure 5, E-G). Expression of key cyclin genes, which are required for  
256 different phases of cell cycle was found to be severely down-regulated following THZ531  
257 treatment (Figure 5H), explaining the arrested cell cycle progression. These data indicate that  
258 THZ531 impacts DNA synthesis and cell cycle progression of glioma cells, in addition to  
259 blocking nascent transcription and phosphorylation of RNAPII CTD.

## 260 Discussion

261 In the present study, we identify an efficient and specific way to target and disrupt the  
262 transcriptional program required for glioma cell proliferation and migration. Specifically, we  
263 show how small molecule inhibitors targeting CDK12/CDK13, which phosphorylate RNAPII,  
264 strongly perturb the transcriptional landscape in GSCs. This leads to down-regulation of  
265 multiple glioblastoma-associated transcription factors and their targets, and subsequently a  
266 strong inhibition of GSC-proliferation, stalled cell cycle progression, and induction of cell  
267 death. The clear dependence of glioma cells on CDK12 and CDK13 for proliferation was  
268 validated using CRISPR/CAS9-mediated genetic ablation of CDK12 and CDK13. We also  
269 confirmed that CDK12 is well-expressed in human glioblastoma tissue ranging from weak to  
270 moderate to strong expression. Moreover, the CDK12/CDK13 inhibitors affected the  
271 morphology and reduced the survival of ex vivo GBOs, in a favorable manner compared to  
272 CDK4/6 inhibition and Lomustine, both of which are used to treat glioblastoma patients. While  
273 our results show that the CDK12/CDK13 inhibitor SR-4835 is well-tolerated in mice, it fails to  
274 cross the BBB. However, the observed reduced tumor burden in a subcutaneous xenograft  
275 mouse model, encourages further tests in more clinically relevant *in vivo* models as well as  
276 identification of novel CDK12/13 inhibitors that can pass the BBB.

277 The primary activity of CDK12 and CDK13 is to phosphorylate Ser2 of RNAPII CTD (8) and  
278 exposure to THZ531 rapidly and nearly completely blocks phosphorylation of RNAPII Ser2 and  
279 strongly reduces abundance of other RNAPII phospho-species in GSCs, with no similar effect  
280 in control cells. Furthermore, pSer2- and pSer5- RNAPII chromatin occupancy is strongly  
281 reduced in THZ531-treated glioma cells, while total RNAPII chromatin occupancy is not. In  
282 addition, exposure of glioma cells to THZ531 nearly abolishes nascent mRNA synthesis and

283 causes large-scale changes in steady state mRNA expression. In particular, THZ531 strongly  
284 down-regulates expression of TFs and transcriptional programs essential for glioma cell  
285 proliferation (6).

286 We find that CDK12/CDK13 inhibition has a profound impact on expression of genes involved  
287 in transcription and cell cycle regulation. Concordantly, THZ531 rapidly suppresses active DNA  
288 replication and increases the proportion of cells in G1 and G2 in GSCs. However, apoptosis and  
289 DNA damage are observed after 24 h exposure to THZ531, but not after 6 h. These  
290 observations suggest that THZ531 compromises DNA synthesis, and that this subsequently  
291 may lead to DNA damage and apoptosis. At the same time, we find that the expression of key  
292 cyclin genes together with core DDR genes is profoundly down-regulated within 6 h treatment  
293 of THZ531, explaining the remarkable arrest of cell cycle progression. Glioblastomas have  
294 constitutive activation of the DDR pathway and show high genomic instability (31-33), and  
295 several key regulators of the DDR pathways, including BRCA1, are required for glioblastoma  
296 survival <sup>41</sup>. We find that key DDR components are suppressed rapidly and strongly by  
297 CDK12/CDK13 inhibition, providing a potential explanation for the remarkable sensitivity of  
298 GSCs compared to other cancer cells (Figure 3F).

299 Since the initial identification of THZ531 in 2016, there has been great interest in  
300 understanding the requirement and roles of CDK12/CDK13 in cancer cells. Furthermore, loss  
301 or mutation of CDK12 is reported for several cancers, including ovarian, breast and prostate  
302 cancers (34-36). These studies correlate loss of CDK12 with altered expression of core DNA  
303 damage response genes. Recent studies associated expression changes after loss of  
304 CDK12/CDK13 with gene length, expression level, and intronic polyadenylation cleavage of  
305 affected mRNAs (17, 18, 26). In agreement with other studies focusing on breast cancer and

306 neuroblastomas (17-19, 26), we find that the inhibition of CDK12/CDK13 strongly down-  
307 regulated the expression of core DDR genes. Furthermore, our observations are in agreement  
308 with recent findings in K562 chronic myeloid leukemia cells, where inhibition of CDK12/13  
309 result in a global loss of RNAPII CTD phosphorylation and extensive genome-wide  
310 transcriptional changes (27). Moreover, similar results are obtained when CDK12 is inhibited  
311 in HEK-293 cells (37). At higher concentrations, we observe that the proliferation of control  
312 cells is also affected by both CDK12/CDK13 inhibitors, THZ531 and SR-4835. Therefore, other  
313 cancer cells potentially require a higher dose of CDK12/CDK13 inhibitors to observe the global  
314 changes in RNAPII phosphorylation and subsequent shutdown of nascent transcription. It will  
315 be relevant for future work to understand the factors that govern the differences leading to  
316 sensitivity of CDK12/13 inhibition among different cancers.

317 Taken together, we report that inhibition of CDK12/CDK13 leads to a global down-regulation  
318 of transcription and limits cell cycle progression in glioma cells. We also demonstrate that  
319 pharmacological inhibition of CDK12/CDK13 profoundly reduces the *in vitro* and *ex vivo*  
320 proliferation of glioma cells and reduces tumor burden in a subcutaneous mouse xenograft  
321 model. CDK12/13 inhibition leads to a therapeutically attractive outcome by exploiting a  
322 transcriptional addition without directly targeting DNA replication machinery. Identification  
323 and further characterization of small molecule inhibitors targeting CDK12/CDK13 with  
324 improved pharmacological properties, in particular the ability to cross the BBB, therefore  
325 would have a large therapeutic potential for glioblastoma treatment. The potential of  
326 CDK12/13 inhibitors for glioblastoma treatment should be investigated further.

## 327 Materials and methods

### 328 Cell culture

329 All the GSCs used are IDH-wt. GSCs G7, G144, G166, G14, G25, G26 and G30 were a kind gift  
330 from S.M. Pollard. GSC cell lines U3013 and U3017 were acquired from HGCC, Uppsala (38).  
331 GSC cell lines P3, BG5 and BG7 were a kind gift from Rolf Bjerkvig (39). All GSC cells were  
332 cultured in neural stem cell (NSC) medium supplemented with EGF and FGFb as previously  
333 described(40). U87MG, Hela, U2OS and HEPG2 cell lines were cultured in DMEM with FBS.  
334 MCF10a and breast cancer cell lines, MCF-7, SKBR-3 and MDA-MB-231 were kind gifts from  
335 Prof. Ragnhild Eskeland, University of Oslo and Dr. Gunnhild Mælandsmo, Oslo University  
336 Hospital, Oslo.

337 **Cell viability assays**

338 **MTT assay;** 3K-10K cells were seeded in 96-well plates and treated with inhibitors. After 72  
339 hours (h), the MTT assay (Merck, 11465007001) was performed, according to manufacturer's  
340 instructions. **Proliferation assay;** 200,000 cells were seeded in duplicate in 6-well plates. Cells  
341 were counted with trypan blue and replated every 3-4 days. **Clonogenic survival assay;** 10,000  
342 cells were seeded in duplicate in 6-well plates. After 14 days, the medium was removed and  
343 cells were given a wash with PBS. Crystal violet staining (0.05% Crystal violet, 1% CH<sub>2</sub>O, 1%  
344 MeOH in PBS) was added for 20 minutes (min), after which the cells were rinsed with water  
345 and left to air dry. **Ex vivo assay** was performed on standardized 3D patient-derived organoids  
346 from glioblastoma IDH-wt patients that were reformed from isolated single tumor cells as  
347 previously described (24, 25). More information in supplemental methods. **Competition**  
348 **assays** were performed as described in supplemental methods.

349 **Cell migration experiment**

350 Migration patterns of GSCs were studied in 96-well glass bottom plates (Greiner Sensoplate  
351 (M4187-16EA, Merck)) after treatment with DMSO control, 500 nM THZ531 or 1.0  $\mu$ M  
352 Gefitinib overnight. More information is provided in the supplemental methods section.

353 **Immunohistochemistry for CDK12 expression in human glioblastoma tissue**

354 Immunohistochemistry (IHC) for CDK12 expression was performed with polyclonal rabbit-anti-  
355 human-CDK12 antibody (ab246887; Abcam; dilution 1:50) using the protocol described in  
356 supplementary methods section. To determine the expression of CDK12 in human patients,  
357 we assessed glioblastoma and control tissue for immunoreactivity to CDK12 (Figure 2A and  
358 Supplementary Figure 2A). A brief description of patient characteristics is included in  
359 supplemental Table 1.

360 **Mouse experiments**

361 SR-4835 (MedChemexpress) was dissolved in 10% DMSO / 90% (30%) Hydroxypropyl-b-  
362 Cyclodextrin (hp-BCD) and TMZ (Selleckchem), was dissolved in 10% DMSO in distilled water  
363 and administered per os (PO) using gavage. Weekly SR-4835 dosage was five days daily in the  
364 week with a two-day break whereas TMZ dosage was daily. For the combination treatment,  
365 compounds were dosed at the same time with TMZ dosed first, followed by SR-4835. More  
366 information is provided in the supplemental methods section.

367 **Ethics**

368 For glioma organoids, patient samples were collected from patients having given informed  
369 consent, and ethical approval has been obtained from the research ethics committee in  
370 Luxembourg (National Committee for Ethics in Research (CNER), as described (24). The use of  
371 fully anonymised human tissue (IHC) was also approved by CNER (reference number 1121-

372 278). Mice experiments were carried out by Crownbio, UK and animal welfare were complied  
373 with the UK Animals Scientific Procedures Act 1986 (ASPA) in line with Directive 2010/63/EU  
374 of the European Parliament and the Council of 22 September 2010 on the protection of  
375 animals used for scientific purposes.

376 **SR-4835 dose response** 3K-5K cells were seeded in 96-well plates and next day, were treated  
377 with 3.16-fold dilution in triplicate (31.6 $\mu$ M, 10 $\mu$ M, 3.16 $\mu$ M, 1 $\mu$ M, 316nM, 100nM, 31.6nM,  
378 10nM and 3.16nM). After 72h, CellTiter-Glo assay (Promega) was performed, according to  
379 manufacturer's instructions. The IC50 data used for Figure 3F is available on request.

380 **Immuno-blotting**

381 Cells were lysed directly in 1.25X Laemmli sample buffer, sonicated and denatured at 95°C for  
382 5 minutes. Samples were loaded and the protein separated in Novex tris-glycine 6% gels (Life  
383 Technologies, XP00062BOX) and transferred to nitrocellulose membranes, subsequently  
384 standard immuno-blotting procedures were followed with details provided in the  
385 supplemental methods section.

386 **SLAM-seq and CUT&RUN**

387 Cells were treated with THZ531 or vehicle control before they were harvested and were  
388 processed using the protocol described in (29)-(28), with details described in the supplemental  
389 methods section.

390 **Bioinformatics and data processing**

391 Please see the supplemental methods section for details on SLAM-seq data processing,  
392 CUT&RUN and visualization methods.

393 **Flow cytometry**

394 Cell cycle changes were analysed using the Click-iT EdU Alexa Fluor 647 Flow Cytometry Assay  
395 Kit (Invitrogen, CA, USA). Cells were labeled with EdU for 3 h after drug treatment with  
396 THZ531. Dead cells were marked using LIVE/DEAD Near-IR (Life Technologies, L10119), and  
397 Hoechst was used to mark DNA. Flow cytometry was performed using BD Fortessa (BD  
398 Biosciences, CA, USA). Analyses were made using the Flowjo software (FlowJo, LLC, OR, USA).

399 **Data Availability**

400 ----- FOR REVIEWERS (will be deleted from the manuscript upon acceptance): -----  
401 To review GEO accession GSE174035:  
402 Reviewer access to the unpublished Cut&Run and SLAM-seq data in this study can be  
403 obtained using the link <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE186311>  
404 and by entering the token **invokisndmtpqz** into the box.  
405 -----

406 All Cut&Run and SLAM-seq data are deposited at NCBI's Gene Expression Omnibus (41) under  
407 the accession number GSE186311.

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514

515 **Figure legends**

516 **Figure 1**

517 **Inhibition of CDK12 and CDK13 specifically affects proliferation of glioma cells. (A)** Dose-  
518 response curves from MTT assays eleven high-grade glioma and seven non-glioma cell lines  
519 treated with THZ531. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of three replicates. **(B)** Bar graph showing  
520 IC50 values from the MTT assays in (A). **(C)** *in vitro* cell proliferation assay of the GSCs G7 and  
521 G144, and HeLa cells treated as indicated. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of three replicates. **(D)**  
522 Clonogenic survival assay of G7, G144 and HeLa cells treated as indicated. **(E)** Competition  
523 assays of sgRNAs targeting CDK9, CDK12 and CDK13 as well as positive controls (essential  
524 genes, MCM2 and RPS19). Non-targeting sgRNA (NC) was used as negative control. **(F)** Boxplot  
525 representing average migration speed of four high-grade glioma cells treated as indicated. The  
526 EGFR inhibitor Gefitinib was used as positive control. Each data-point boxplots represents  
527 average migration speeds in 4-6 acquired time-lapse movies. The boxplot is representative of  
528 three independent experiments. \* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.001$ .

529

530 **Figure 2**

531 **CDK12 is expressed in resected glioblastoma tissue of human patients and inhibition of**  
532 **CDK12/CDK13 compromises ex vivo glioblastoma proliferation. (A)** Representative images of  
533 CDK12 immunohistochemistry in control and glioblastoma tissue. The top row shows control  
534 stainings whereas the bottom row left to right reflect CDK12 expression in three different

535 glioblastoma patients (for information on patients, see Supplementary Table 1). Scale bar 50  
536  $\mu\text{M}$ . **(B)** Representative image showing effect of different inhibitors with indicated doses on  
537 glioblastoma organoids. **(C)** Dose-response curve showing data from glioblastoma organoids  
538 treated with inhibitors as indicated and measured for cell viability 72 h post treatment. **(D)**  
539 Dot-plot showing IC50 values from the assays in **(C)**.

540 **Figure 3**

541 **Inhibition of CDK12/CDK13 reduces tumor burden *in vivo*.** **(A)** Dose-response curve for U87-  
542 MG glioma cells treated with SR-4835. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of three replicates. **(B)** *in*  
543 *vitro* cell proliferation assay U87-MG cells treated as indicated. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of  
544 three replicates. **(C)** Mean tumor volume and relative body weight of mice over time for the  
545 indicated treatments with the dosage shown in the bottom. Significance of the combination  
546 treatment is indicated with an asterisk. **(D)** Box-plot showing IC50 values for dose response of  
547 SR-4835 inhibition on a panel of cancer cell lines. p-values are from two-sided t-tests  
548 Benjamini-Hochberg corrected for multiple testing.

549 **Figure 4**

550 **CDK12/CDK13 inhibition profoundly affects RNAPII phosphorylation and transcription in**  
551 **glioma cells.** **(A)** Immuno-blot analyses from G7 and HeLa cells that were treated with vehicle,  
552 500 nM THZ531 for 6 h, 24 h and 48 h for the various RNAPII CTD species. **(B)** Heatmaps of  
553 Cut&Run signal from RNAPII, RNAPII phosphorylation states, and histone modifications at k-  
554 means clustered unique TSSes  $\pm$ 1 kbp. G7 cells were treated with DMSO and THZ531 for 1 h  
555 and 6 h. **(C)** Diagram showing T to C conversion in three replicates of SLAM-seq data from G7  
556 cells treated with THZ531 or DMSO for 6 h. **(D)-(E)** 'Volcano plots' showing the overall  
557 transcriptional differences in G7 cells treated with THZ531 for 6h compared to DMSO control  
558 for steady-state **(D)** and nascent transcripts **(E)**. X-axis shows the log2 fold differences. Y-axis

559 shows the -log10 Benjamini-Hochberg corrected p-values. Dashed rectangles: populations of  
560 interest. **(F)** Graphs of average Cut&Run signal from RNAPII, RNAPII phosphorylation states,  
561 and histone modifications at and around TSS and TTS of genes. Levels are FPKM normalized.  
562 **(G)** Heatmaps illustrating transcription in relationship to Cut&Run data of RNAPII, RNAPII  
563 phosphorylation states, and histone modifications at TSSes. Groups from Figure 4E **(H)** Bar  
564 diagrams of Benjamini-Hochberg corrected -log10 p-values from most enriched gene ontology  
565 terms in nascent or steady state transcripts down-regulated after 6h of THZ531-treatment in  
566 G7 cells. **(I)** Bubble diagram of enrichment of gene groups within up-regulated, down-  
567 regulated or unchanged categories. P-values are Benjamini-Hochberg corrected. **(J)** Volcano  
568 plots as in Figure 4E with the indicated gene populations colored.

569 **Figure 5**

570 **CDK12/CDK13 inhibition disrupts glioma cell cycle** **(A)** Cell cycle analysis in G7 and G144 cells  
571 after 6 and 24 h treatment with DMSO or 500 nM THZ531. 10  $\mu$ M EdU was added 1 h prior to  
572 harvest. Dot plots show intensity of EdU relative to DNA content (Hoechst) in interphase cells  
573 (one representative replicate shown). **(B, C)** Bar diagrams of cell cycle distributions of G7 and  
574 G144 cells treated as indicated. Doses used: THZ531 (500 nM) Nocodazole (1  $\mu$ g/ml). **(D)** Flow  
575 cytometry analysis of % of G7 cells in mitosis following 500 nM THZ531  $\pm$  1  $\mu$ g/ml Nocodazole  
576 treatment for 24h. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of two replicates for **(B)-(D)**. **(E, F)** Flow  
577 cytometric assays of apoptotic **(E)** of  $\gamma$ H2AX accumulation **(F)** cells in G7 cells treated with 500  
578 nM THZ531 for 6 h and 24 h. **(G)** Western blots of PARP and  $\gamma$ H2AX levels in G7, G144 and  
579 HeLa cells treated with 500 nM THZ531. **(H)** RT-qPCR analysis of cyclin mRNA levels in G7 cells  
580 treated with 500 nM THZ531 for 1 h and 6 h. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of two replicates.

Figure 1

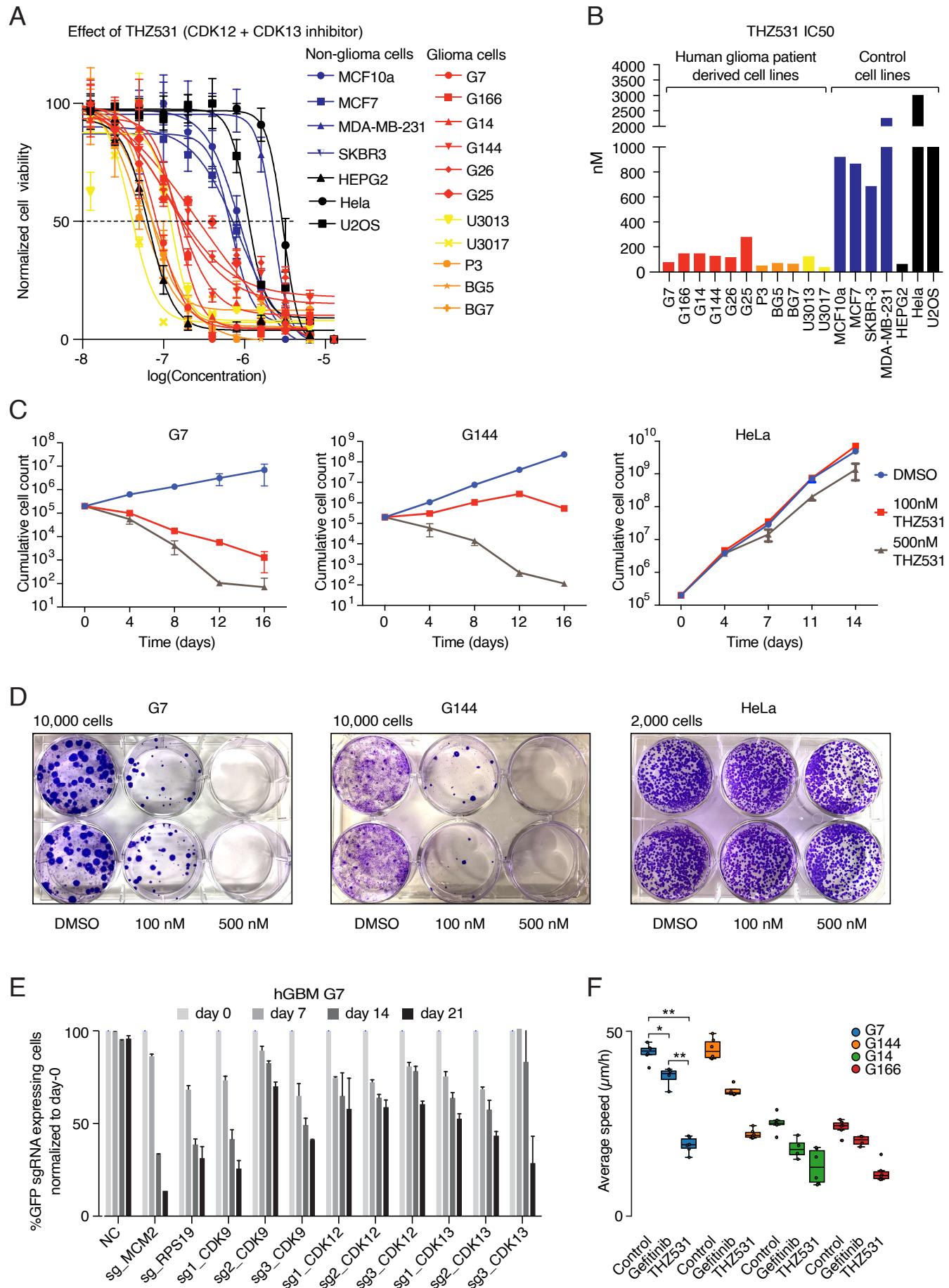
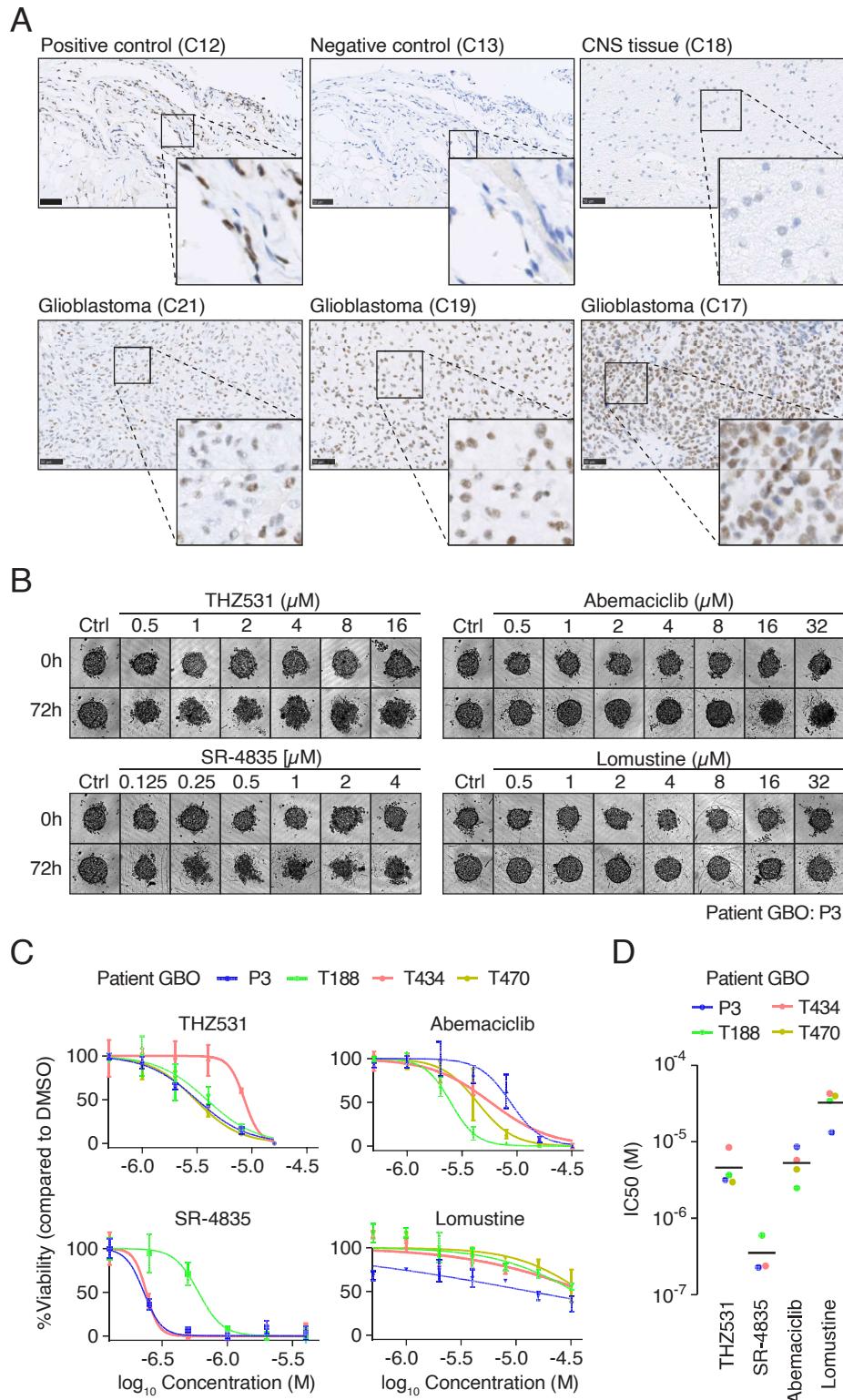


Figure 2



## Figures

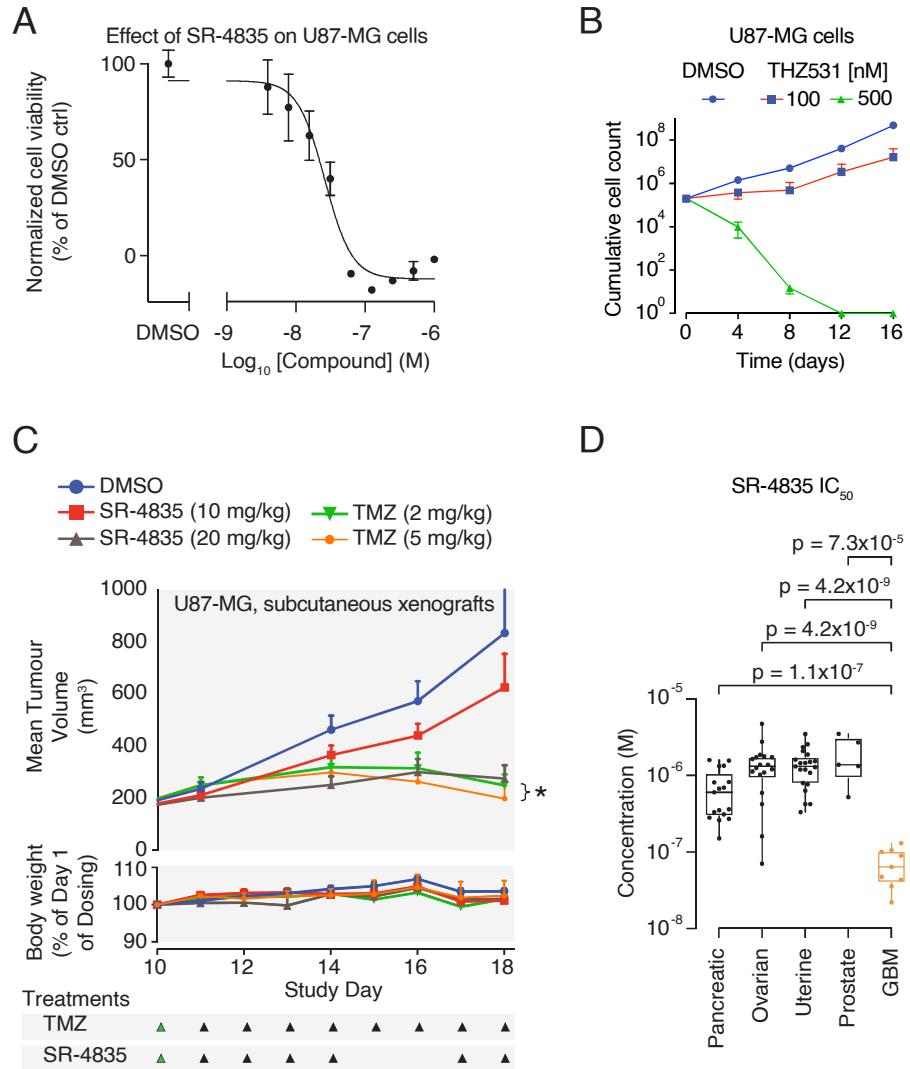


Figure 4

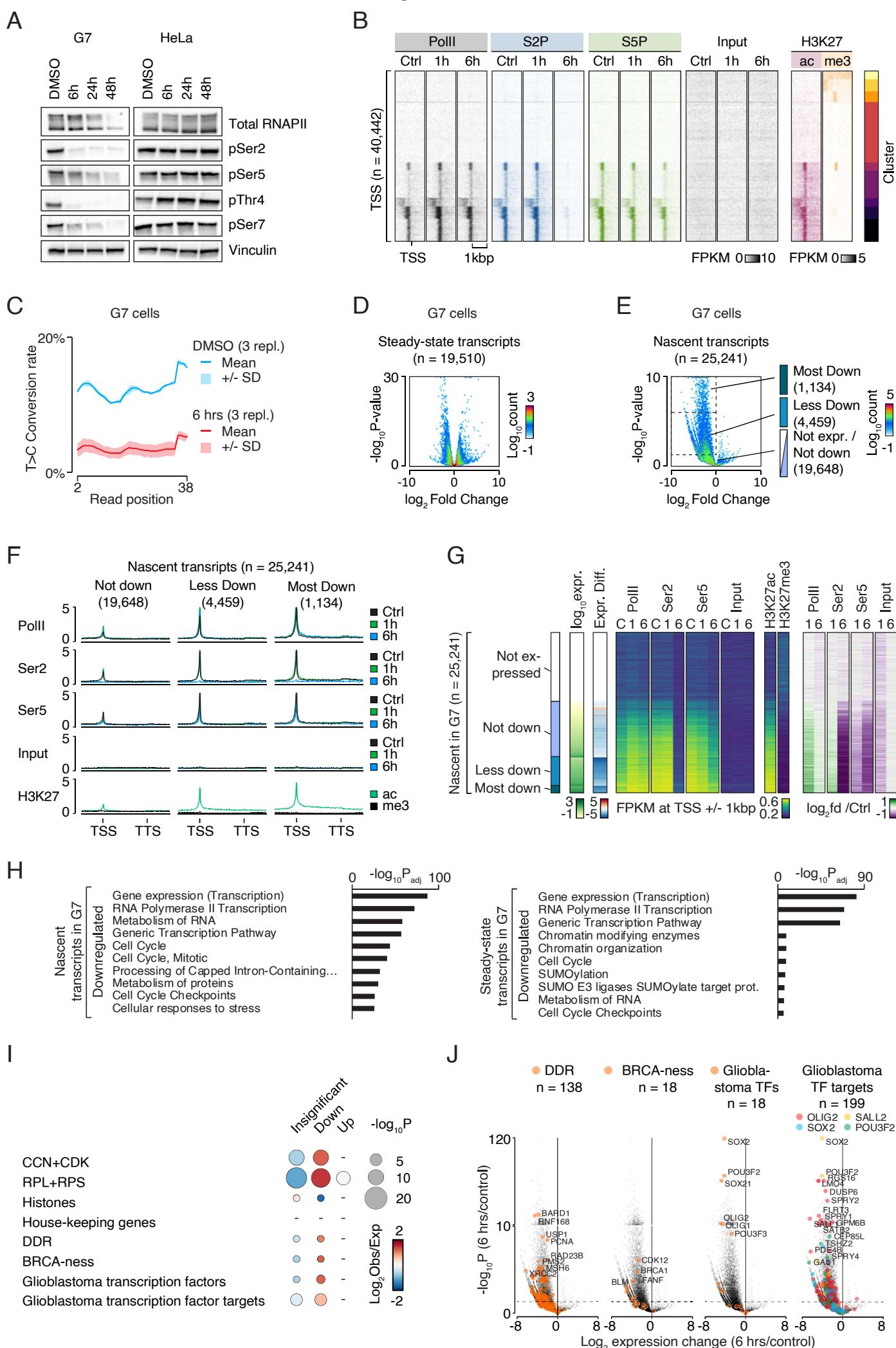
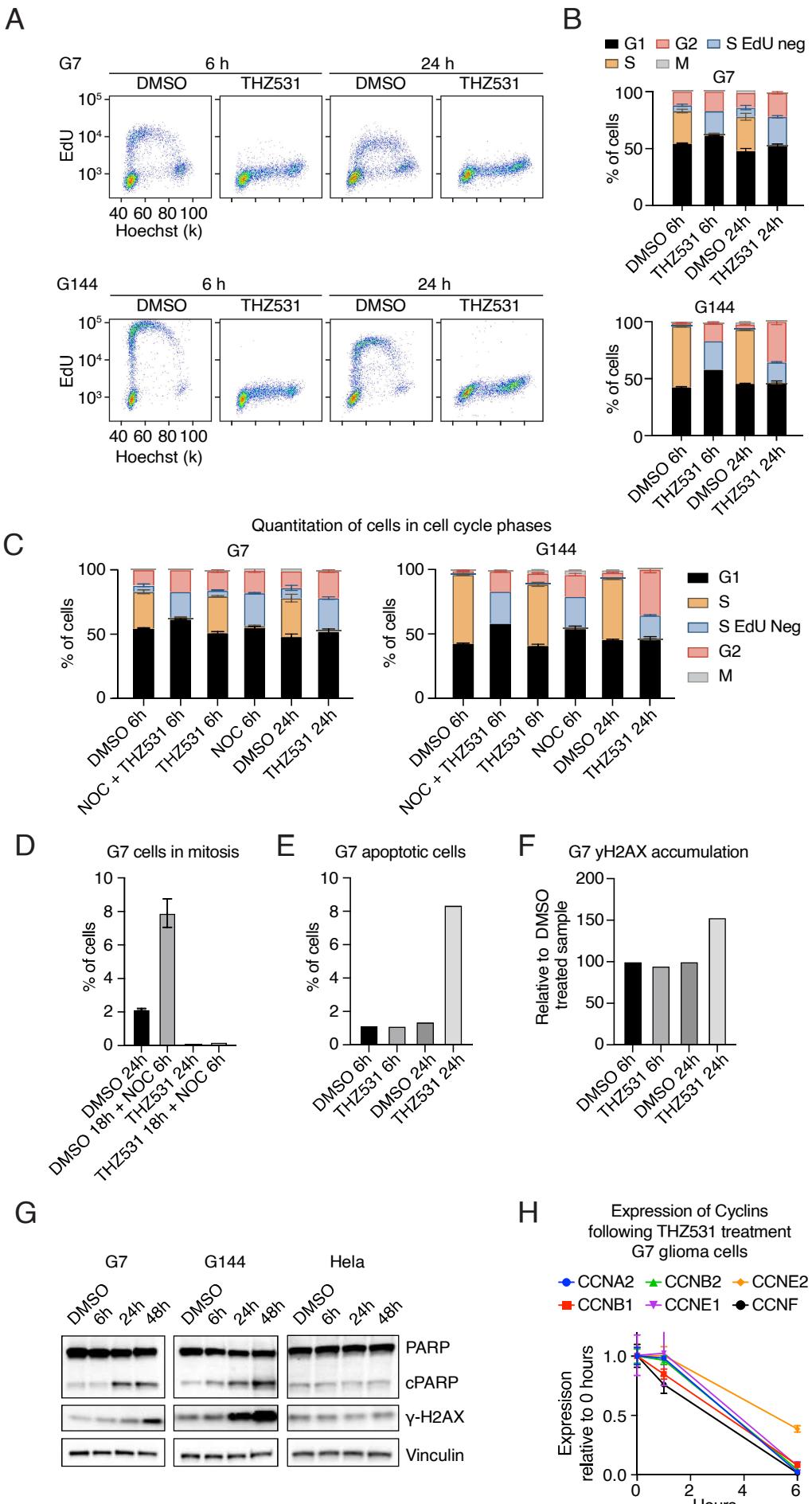


Figure 5



## **Supplemental methods**

### **Lentivirus production and transduction**

For lentivirus production, 293FT cells were transfected with VSV, Pax8 and expression constructs, using lipofectamine. After 8h, cells were washed and cultured in NSC medium. After 48h, the medium was collected and passed through a 0.45  $\mu$ m filter. For transduction, GSCs were cultured in NSC medium containing virus particles supplemented with 8  $\mu$ g/ml polybrene. After 48h of transduction, cells were passaged and cultured in selection medium for 2 days.

### **Competition assay**

Stably expressing Cas9 G7 cells are derived by transducing GSC G7 cells with lentivirus produced from lentiCas9-Blast (Addgene #52962). The sgRNAs were expressed from U6-sgRNA-SFFV-puro-P2A-EGFP, which is derived from (Addgene: #57827) and reported here<sup>25</sup>. The sgRNA sequences are available on request. The stably expressing Cas9 G7 cells were transduced with the sgRNAs expressing lentiviruses to achieve 40-60% GFP expressing cells. The transduced cells were subsequently cultured for a period of 21 days and population of sgRNA expressing GFP+ cells were analyzed at indicated days by flow cytometry.

### **Cell migration experiment**

Migration patterns of human GSCs were studied in 96-well glass bottom plates (Greiner Sensoplate (M4187-16EA, Merck)) after treatment with DMSO control, 500 nM THZ531 or 1.0  $\mu$ M Gefitinib overnight. Live cell imaging was performed using an ImageXpress Micro Confocal High-Content microscope equipped with an environmental control gasket, maintaining 37°C and 5% CO<sub>2</sub>, and controlled by the MetaXpress 6 software (Molecular Devices). Images were acquired in widefield mode using a 20x 0.45 NA Ph1 air objective, a phase contrast ring, and

transmitted light for visualizing the contour of cells. Cell migration was registered for a total time of 8 h (h). For each well 2 sites were imaged with a time interval of 4 minutes (min) between frames. Acquired time lapse movies were analyzed using the TrackMate<sup>25</sup> plugin in the Fiji ImageJ software<sup>26</sup> and *in-house* Python-based scripts (Python 3.7.6).

**Ex vivo assay** were performed on standardized 3D patient-derived organoids that were reformed from isolated single tumor cells as previously described {Golebiewska, 2020 #163; Oudin, 2021 #164}. For the CDK12/CDK13 inhibitors, four patient-derived GBM IDHwt tumor cells, exhibiting a typical range of key GBM genetic alterations including deletion of CDKN2A/B, amplification of CDK4/6 and EGFR, mutations IN TP53, PTEN, PIK3CA, EGFR were selected. Briefly, isolated tumor cells were seeded in a 384-well plate at a density of 1000 cells/well and were cultured on an orbital shaker for 72 hours to reform organoids prior to inhibitor treatment. 3D organoids were cultured in a volume of 25 µl DMEM medium/well supplemented with 10% FBS, 2mM L-Glutamine, 0.4mM NEAA, and 100U/ml Pen/Strep (all from Lonza) at 37°C under 5% CO<sub>2</sub> and atmospheric oxygen. Organoids were treated with the following inhibitors: THZ531 (CDK12/13), SR4835 (CDK12/13), Abemaciclib (CDK4/6) and Lomustine from MedChemExpress in a twofold and six-point serial dilution series ranging from 16 µM to 500 nM (THZ531), 4µM to 125nM (SR4835) and 32 µM to 500 nM (Abemaciclib and Lomustine) from a stock solution of 10 mM prepared in dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) (Sigma-Aldrich). A set of control wells with cells treated with DMSO was included on all the plates and the assay was performed with three technical replicates. After 3 days (72 hours) of incubation with the inhibitors, cell viability was measured using the commercially available CellTiter-Glo® 3D Cell Viability Assay (Promega) according to the manufacturer's instructions. Luminescence was measured with a ClarioStar plate reader (BMG Labtech). The relative cell viability for each

inhibitor was calculated by normalization to DMSO control per condition. Dose response curves (DRCs) were fitted by nonlinear regression analysis using GraphPad Prism software: best-fit lines and the resulting IC<sub>50</sub> values were calculated using log [inhibitor] versus normalized response—variable slope (four parameters).

### **Immunohistochemistry for CDK12 expression in GBM patients**

Anonymized formalin-fixed and paraffin-embedded (FFPE) tissue samples from routine diagnostics were subjected to CDK12 immunohistochemistry. Minimal clinical data such as age, sex and final pathological diagnoses were included (see **supplementary table-1**). In brief, immunohistochemistry was performed on 2-3 µm thick slices of glioblastoma tissue (n = 5 patients) and on CNS tissue without glioblastoma (n = 2 patients) using an automated IHC staining system Dako Omnis (Agilent, Santa Clara, California, USA). For further details, please see supplementary table-1. Tissue from a patient with fasciitis was used as control tissue. The staining procedure included heat and chemical treatment of the slides with EnVision FLEX TRS at low pH at 97°C (20 min), incubation (30 min) with polyclonal rabbit-anti-human-CDK12 antibody (ab246887; Abcam; 1:50) and 3 min endogenous enzyme block with EnV FLEX Peroxidase-Blocking solution. Signal enhancement was achieved by incubating slides with EnV Flex + Rabbit LINKER (10 min). EnV FLEX/HRP labeled polymer (20 min) was used as secondary antibody, followed by incubation with the EnVision FLEX DAB Chromogen for 5 minutes. Slides were counterstained with hematoxylin and mounted with coverslipping film Tissue-Tek (Sakura, Staufen, Germany). Slides were then scanned in the Hamamatsu NanoZoomer 2.0-HT (Hamamatsu Photonics), digitized, and transferred to a computer screen. Brightness, gain, and contrast were all kept constant during image acquisition. Glioblastoma and CNS tissue as well

as control tissue were then assessed for immunoreactivity (negative, weak, moderate or strong) to CDK12 (see also Figure 2A/Supplementary figure 2A).

**Supplementary Table 1 : Patients characteristics of the samples included**

Patient No.	Slide No.	Age (y)	Gender	Tissue	Diagnosis
1	C12	81	female	Fascia	fasciitis
1	C13	81	female	Fascia	fasciitis
2	C18	40	male	CNS	Cavernous hemangioma
3	C14	59	female	CNS	Glioblastoma, CNS WHO grade 4
4	C15	74	female	CNS	cerebral amyloid angiopathy (CAA)
5	C16	85	female	CNS	glioblastoma, CNS WHO grade 4
6	C17	69	female	CNS	glioblastoma, CNS WHO grade 4
7	C19	64	male	CNS	glioblastoma, CNS WHO grade 4
8	C21	55	male	CNS	rest/recurrent glioblastoma, CNS WHO grade 4

#### Mouse experiments

SR-4835, from MedChemexpress was dissolved in 10% DMSO / 90% (30%) Hydroxypropyl-b-Cyclodextrin (hp-BCD) and TMZ from Selleckchem, was dissolved in 10% DMSO in distilled water and administered per os (PO). Weekly SR-4835 dosage was five days daily in the week with a two days break whereas TMZ dosage was daily. For the combination treatment, compounds were dosed at the same time with TMZ dosed first, followed by SR-4835. For a more detailed A subcutaneous U87-MG-luc model was established by Crown Bioscience Inc. (Leicester, UK) using the parental U87-MG cell line from ECACC, transduced in house to express luciferase. Animals were housed in IVC housing with a 12 h light/dark cycle and access to Teklad 2919 and sterile water ad libitum. **Tolerability experiment** Athymic nude mice aged 7-8 weeks old from Envigo were dosed with 20 mg/kg and 30 mg/kg SR-4835 for 2 weeks with the weekly cycle five days on and two days off. **Efficacy experiments** The *in vivo* efficacy of the SR-4835, either as a monotherapy or in combination with Temozolamide, was further evaluated in the clinically relevant subcutaneous CDX U87-MG-luc xenograft model. These experiments were conducted at Crown Bioscience, Inc. (Leicester, UK) in 7-8 week old athymic

nude mice (Envigo, UK). Forty-eight mice were enrolled in the efficacy study, eight mice per cohort for six cohorts. Eight million U-87-MG-luc cells were injected subcutaneously injected into athymic nude mice acquired from Envigo. All animals were randomly allocated to the six different study. Randomization was performed on day nine post injection, prior to the treatment start. The treatments were undertaken for 2 weeks with the five day on, 2 day off cycle per week for SR-4835 and daily for TMZ. Tumors were measured 3 times a week and tumor volumes were estimated by measuring the tumor in two dimensions using electronic callipers. **Humane Endpoints** Any mouse with tumor volume/measurement at terminal size (e.g. mean diameter 15mm) was terminated. After one measurement of body weight loss (BWL) > 10% on the day of dosing, a treatment break was given and treatment resumed when the body weight recovered to BWL < 5% (compared to day 1 treatment). Any mouse with BWL > 15% for 3 consecutive measurements (compared to day 1 treatment) was euthanized and any mouse with body weight loss  $\geq$  20% was Schedule 1 culled.

### **Immuno-blotting**

Cells were lysed directly in 1.25X Laemmli sample buffer, sonicated and denatured at 95°C for 5 minutes. Samples were loaded and the protein separated in Novex tris-glycine 6% gels (Life Technologies, XP00062BOX) and transferred to nitrocellulose membranes. Membranes were incubated in blocking buffer (5% FBS in TBST (TBS with 0.2% Tween-20) for 1.5h at room temperature and incubated with primary antibody (dilutions are indicated in the table below) in the blocking buffer overnight at 4°C. Membranes were given three washes in TBST for 10 minutes, then incubated 35 minutes with appropriate secondary antibodies in blocking buffer and washed for another 3x10 minutes. Chemiluminescent detection was performed using Chemiluminescent substrate kit from Fisher Scientific, catalog 34580.

**Supplementary Table 2 : Antibody dilution**

Antibody	Manufacturer	Catalog number	Dilution for CUT&RUN	Dilution for WB
RNAPII total	Mbl	MABI0601	1:100	1:10 000
RNAPII pSer2	Mbl	MABI0602	1:100	1:10 000
RNAPII pSer5	Mbl	MABI0603	1:100	1:10 000
H3K27ac	CST	D5E4	1:100	1:1000
H3K27me3	CST	C36B11	1:100	1:1000
RNAPII pThr4	Active Motif	61461	NA	1:1000
RNAPII pSer7	Active Motif	61087	NA	1:1000
Vinculin	Sigma	V9131	NA	1:10 000
PARP	CST	9542	NA	1:1000
GAPDH	Santa Cruz Biotechnology	sc25778	NA	1:20 000
IgG	abcam	ab6721	1:100	NA

**qPCR primers** are available on request

### **SLAM-seq**

SLAM-seq was performed according to the previous described protocol <sup>26</sup>. Briefly, cells were seeded at approximately 70% confluence, and treated with THZ531 or vehicle control. 1 hour before harvest, 4sU was added to the medium at a final concentration of 500 µM. The samples were kept in the dark as RNA was extracted with Qiagen's RNeasy Plus Mini Kit. 3 µg RNA was alkylated with iodoacetamide (Sigma, 10 mM) for 15 minutes, and the RNA was repurified by ethanol precipitation. 250 ng RNA was used to make libraries with Lexogen's QuantSeq 3' mRNA-Seq Library Prep Kit FWD for Illumina and PCR Add-on Kit for Illumina. Deep sequencing was performed using the NovaSeq platform (Illumina).

### **CUT&RUN**

Cells were treated with THZ531 or vehicle control before they were harvested, washed and bound to Concanavalin A-coated magnetic beads. The cells were then permeabilized with

wash buffer (20 mM HEPES, pH7.5, 150 mM NaCl, 0.5 mM spermidine and a Roche complete tablet per 50 ml) containing 0.02% Digitonin. The cell-bead suspension was incubated with 0.5-1 µg of respective antibody in a total volume of 50 µL overnight at 4°C on a nutator. After 3 washes with 1 mL Digitonin buffer, cells were resuspended in 50 µL volume with pAG-MNase and nutated for 10 minutes at RT. Cells were given two washes with Digitonin buffer, chilled on ice, and ice-cold CaCl<sub>2</sub> was added, before nutating for 2 hours at 4°C. STOP buffer was added (340 mM NaCl, 20 mM EDTA, 4 mM EGTA, 0.02% Digitonin, 50 µg/mL RNase A, 50 µg/ml glycogen), and tubes were incubated at 37°C for 10 minutes in a ThermoMixer, to release fragments into solution. After centrifugation at 16,000 x g for 5 minutes at 4°C, tubes were placed on a magnet stand and the liquid transferred to new tubes. DNA was extracted using Qiagen's MinElute PCR Purification Kit, according to manufacturer's instructions. Quantification was done by Qubit analysis, and libraries were made with 2 ng DNA using the NEBNext® Ultra™ II DNA Library Prep Kit for Illumina" (New England Biolabs, E7645), according to manufacturer's instructions. Deep sequencing was performed using the NovaSeq platform (Illumina).

### **SLAM-seq data processing**

3' UTR annotations were obtained from <sup>29</sup>. All further processing was done on the Galaxy server, using the SlamDunk pipeline (<http://github.com/t-neumann/slamdunk>). Prior to mapping, the quality of the sequencing of the reads was inspected using FastQC (v.0.72+galaxy1) (<https://www.bioinformatics.babraham.ac.uk/projects/fastqc/>). Adapters were trimmed from raw reads using cutadapt through the trim\_galore (v.0.4.3.2) wrapper tool with adapter overlaps set to 3bp. The reads were then processed using SlamDunk (v.0.4.1+galaxy2). Settings were adjusted to alignment against the human genome (GRCh38),

12bp trimming from the 5' end, with multi-mapper retention strategy for 100 alignments, filtering for variants with a 0.2 variant fraction, filtering for base-quality cutoff of  $\geq 27$ , and filtering for  $\geq 1$  T>C conversions.

### **Cut&Run data processing**

Prior to mapping, the quality of sequenced reads were inspected using FastQC (v. 0.10.1) (<https://www.bioinformatics.babraham.ac.uk/projects/fastqc/>), fastqScreen (v. 0.11.4, <sup>41</sup>), and MultiQC (v. 1.7, <sup>42</sup>) and reads were mapped to hg38 using Bowtie2 (v. 2.2.9, <sup>43</sup>) and the settings "--local --very-sensitive-local --no-unal --no-mixed --no-discordant --phred33 -I 10 -X 700", and filtered for an insert size between 20 and 120 base pairs using samtools (v. 1.10, <sup>44</sup>) in accordance with instructions from the CUT&RUN protocol <sup>45</sup> in the following pipe: "samtools view -h -f 66 | awk -F'\t' 'function abs(x){return ((x < 0.0) ? -x : x)} {if ((abs(\$9) >= 20 && abs(\$9) <= 120) || \$1 ~ /^[^@]/) print \$0}' | samtools view -Sb - ". Filtered mapped reads were deduplicated and imported into EaSeq v. 1.2 <sup>46</sup> using default settings and unless specified subsequent analysis and visualisation was performed using the integrated tools in EaSeq.

### **Genome-wide data sources**

All Cut&Run and SLAM-seq data are deposited at NCBI's Gene Expression Omnibus <sup>47</sup> under the accession number GSE186311. Refseq gene annotations <sup>48</sup> were acquired from the UCSC table browser <sup>49</sup>. CDK and cyclin genes were identified based on matching the strings 'CDK' or 'CCN' to gene symbols. RPL/RPS gene symbols were obtained from <http://ribosome.med.miyazaki-u.ac.jp/rpg.cgi?mode=orglist&org=Homo%20sapiens>, Histone gene symbols were obtained from [http://www.informatics.jax.org/mgihome/nomen/gene\\_name\\_initiative.shtml](http://www.informatics.jax.org/mgihome/nomen/gene_name_initiative.shtml), house-

keeping gene symbols were obtained from <sup>50</sup>, DDR-gene symbols were obtained from <https://www.mdanderson.org/documents/Labs/Wood-Laboratory/human-dna-repair-genes.html>, BRCA-ness gene symbols were obtained from <sup>51</sup> and gene symbols for glioma transcription factors and targets were obtained from <sup>11</sup>.

#### **Cut&Run and SLAM-seq visualization and integration**

Graphs of average Cut&Run signal as well as heatmaps were generated in EaSeq using the 'Average' and 'HeatMap'-tools, respectively. K-means clustering was performed using the 'Cluster'-tool with the clustering methodology set to k-means, the offset set to +/-1kb and log-transformation disabled. Output from the SLAM-seq processing was analysed for differential expression using DeSeq2 <sup>52</sup> with default settings, and size factors estimated on the total mRNA reads for global normalization. Transcripts were subgrouped according to adjusted p-values from the differential expression analysis, with the group 'Most down' having adjusted p-values below  $10^{-5}$  and the group 'Less down' having adjusted p-values between  $10^{-5}$  and 0.05. Volcano plots were generated based on log2 fold differences and adjusted p-values from DeSeq2 and visualized using EaSeq and the 'Scatter'-tool or Microsoft Excel 2016. The number of selected gene subsets found within the significantly regulated genes was counted and compared to that expected by chance using Chi-square testing, and p-values for all shown comparisons were Bonferroni-adjusted before being plotted in bubble diagrams. Cut&Run values for 1D heatmaps of signal at TSSes were quantified using the 'Quantify'-tool and default settings except for using offsets of +/-1kb and visualized together with 'basemean' and log2 fold difference values from the DeSeq2 output of Nascent transcripts using the 'ParMap'-tool. The order of the TSSes was determined based on first the grouping as mentioned above, and then the average expression value in all conditions (Basemean). GO-term enrichment analysis of significantly regulated transcripts was done using g:Profiler (<https://biit.cs.ut.ee/gprofiler/>,

<sup>53</sup>). Bee-swarm plots were made using the using R (<https://www.R-project.org/>) and the beeswarm package (The Bee Swarm Plot, an Alternative to Stripchart, version 0.2.0, A Eklund (2016), CRAN). Integration of expression data with cell-cycle related transcriptional changes was done using published results <sup>30</sup>. The ‘polar coordinates’ from transcripts that were found to be significant in their work was used as the X-axis when visualizing the moving average log 2 fold difference in the expression of 100 transcripts (Y-axis).

1 **Supplementary legends**

2 **Supplementary Figure 1:**

3 (A) Survival analyses from GlioVis showing relation between survival of patients and  
4 expression of tCDK used in the study. (B) Heatmap showing the mRNA expression of tCDKs in  
5 the cell lines used in the study. (C) Three high-grade glioma cell lines were cultured in serum-  
6 free or serum-containing media and were treated with increasing doses of THZ531. After 72h,  
7 the cell viability was assessed using Cell-Titer-Glo. Graph displays a dose-response curve with  
8 percent cell viability relative to the DMSO control for each cell line. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD  
9 of three replicates. (D) Four high-grade glioma cell lines and two non-glioma cell lines were  
10 treated with increasing doses of THZ1. After 72h, cells were subjected to the MTT assay. Graph  
11 displays a dose-response curve with percent cell viability relative to the DMSO control for each  
12 cell line. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of three replicates. (E) Four high-grade glioma cell lines  
13 and two non-glioma cell lines were treated with increasing doses of NVP-2. After 72h, cells  
14 were subjected to the MTT assay. Graph displays a dose-response curve with percent cell  
15 viability relative to the DMSO control for each cell line. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of three  
16 replicates. (F) Eight high-grade glioma cell lines and two non-glioma cell lines were treated  
17 with increasing doses of SR-4835. After 72h, cells were subjected to the MTT assay. Graph  
18 displays a dose-response curve with percent cell viability relative to the DMSO control for each  
19 cell line. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of three replicates. (G) *in vitro* cell proliferation assay of  
20 GSCs treated as indicated. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of two replicates. (H) Effect of THZ531  
21 treatment on the migration of glioma cells. Average speed of migration is plotted over time.  
22 Gefitinib, an EGFR inhibitor is used a positive control.

23 **Supplementary Figure 2:**

24 (A) Representative images of CDK12 immunohistochemistry in cortex/infiltration zone/cell-  
25 rich tumor of glioblastoma patients. Nuclear CDK12 expression absent in cortex areas without  
26 obvious tumor cell infiltration (top) while the number of CDK12-positive cells increases with  
27 tumor cell density in the infiltration zone (CDK12-positive cells = black arrowhead; CDK12-  
28 negative cortical neurons = blue arrowhead). Multinucleated giant cells (asterisk, bottom) in  
29 highly cellular areas expressing CDK12. Scale bar 50  $\mu$ m. (B) Summary of the patient  
30 characteristics of the ex vivo GBM organoids. (C) Four high-grade glioma cell lines were treated  
31 with increasing doses of inhibitors as indicated. After 72h, the cell viability was assessed using  
32 Cell-Titer-Glo. Graph displays a dose-response curve with percent cell viability relative to the  
33 DMSO control for each cell line. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of three replicates. (D) Dot-plot  
34 showing IC50 values for dose response of inhibitors on a panel of GSCs shown in (C).

35 **Supplementary Figure 3:**

36 (A) Heatmaps of Cut&Run signal from RNAPII, RNAPII phosphorylation states, selected  
37 histone mark modifications, as well as input at gene bodies and immediate upstream and  
38 downstream regions (+/-25% of gene length) from G7 cells treated with either THZ531 for 1  
39 hr, or THZ531 for 6 hrs as well as DMSO controls. Genes were ordered vertically based on their  
40 total expression level. The horizontal extent of each gene and the upstream and downstream  
41 regions corresponding to quarter of the gene length is fitted within the same visual space in  
42 the heatmaps regardless of its absolute extent. TSS and TTS illustrate transcription start sites  
43 and termination sites, respectively. Cut&Run and input levels are FPKM normalized.  
44 (B) Graphs of average Cut&Run signal from RNAPII phosphorylation states normalized to  
45 RNAPII levels at all gene bodies and surrounding loci. RNAPII and RNAPII modification states  
46 were obtained as described in Figure 4A. The horizontal extent of each gene and the upstream  
47 and downstream regions corresponding to half a gene length is fitted within the same visual

48 space in the heatmaps regardless of its absolute extent. TSS and TTS illustrate transcription  
49 start sites and termination sites, respectively. Cut&Run levels are FPKM normalized. (C) Bar  
50 diagrams showing the most significantly enriched gene ontology (GO) terms from selected  
51 subsets of genes from steady-state and nascent RNA. X-axes represent -log10 p-values  
52 adjusted for multiple testing. (D) Volcano plots showing the overall transcriptional differences  
53 in nascent transcripts as in Figure 3E, but with certain gene populations highlighted. X-axes  
54 shows the log2 fold difference in transcription in G7 cells treated with THZ531 for six hours  
55 compared to DMSO controls. Y-axes shows the -log10 transformed p-values Benjamini-  
56 Hochberg corrected for multiple testing. Coloured dots illustrate the transcriptional changes  
57 of the listed gene populations.

58 **Supplementary Figure 4:**

59 (A) Volcano plots showing the overall transcriptional differences in steady-state transcripts as  
60 in Figure 3D, but with certain gene populations highlighted. X-axes shows the log2 fold  
61 difference in transcription in G7 cells treated with THZ531 for six hours compared to DMSO  
62 controls. Y-axes shows the -log10 transformed p-values Benjamini-Hochberg corrected for  
63 multiple testing. Coloured dots illustrate the transcriptional changes of the listed gene  
64 populations.

65 **Supplementary Figure 5:**

66 (A) Genome browser tracks of Cut&Run signal density and total transcript-levels (bottom) at  
67 the Olig2, Pou3f2 and Sox2 loci at indicated treatments. (B-D) RT-qPCR analyses of the mRNA  
68 levels of DDR genes (B), glioblastoma transcription factors (C) or housekeeping genes (D) in  
69 G7 cells treated with 500 nM THZ531 for 1 h and 6 h. Data represent mean  $\pm$  SD of two  
70 replicates.

71 **Supplementary Figure 6:**

72 (A) Venn-diagrams illustrating the overlap in the populations of genes being downregulated  
73 (left) as well as upregulated (right) in G7 cells compared to G144 cells. (B) Graphs illustrated  
74 the moving average of transcriptional changes in nascent (top) or steady-state (middle,  
75 bottom) transcripts from G7 (top, middle) or G144 (bottom) cells treated with THZ531 for 6  
76 hours compared to DMSO controls. Transcripts were ordered according to previously  
77 published classification of cell-cycle timing. Only transcripts, for which transcriptional timing  
78 could be assessed with an FDR-value of 0.001 or better, were included. (C) Beeswarm-plots of  
79 transcriptional changes as in (B) with transcripts grouped into six overall groups based on  
80 previously published transcriptional timing. P-values were obtained using Mann-Whitney U-  
81 tests and Bonferroni-corrected for multiple testing. (D) Cells were treated with 500 nM  
82 THZ531 at indicated times and EdU incorporation was performed in the last 1 hour by adding  
83 10  $\mu$ M EdU. Cell staining was done using Click-IT chemistry according to manufacturer's  
84 instructions.

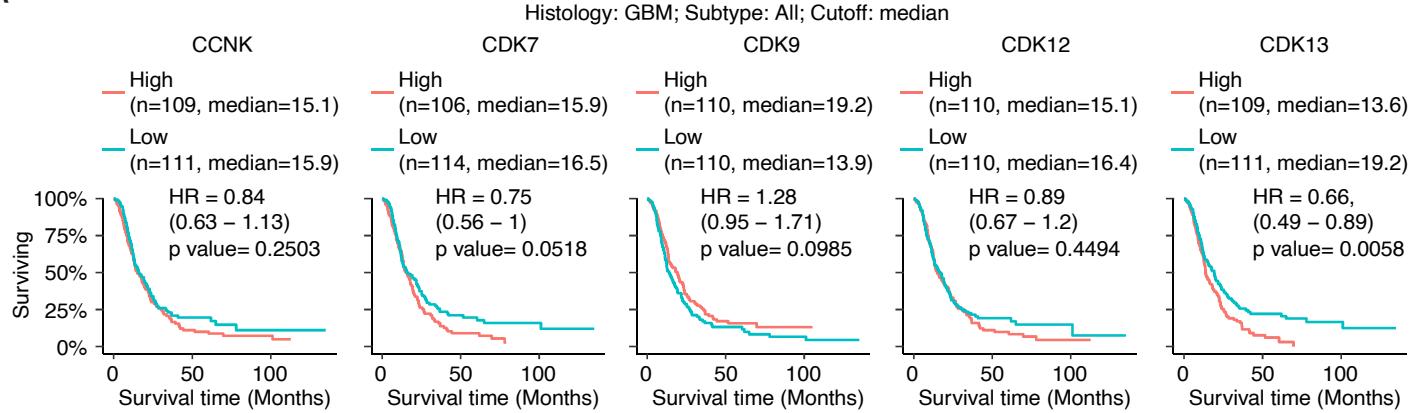
85 **Supplementary movie 1 and 2:**

86 The movies include raw data with TrackMate overlay to show particle tracking of migrating G7  
87 (Supplementary movie 1) and G144 cells (Supplementary movie 2). Prior to imaging, 6000  
88 cells were seeded in wells of a 96-well glass plate and cells exposed to either DMSO (left panel)  
89 or 500 nM THZ531 (right panel) overnight. Image acquisition was carried out using a 20x air  
90 objective, a time interval of 4 min and a total imaging period of 8 h. The movie has been  
91 reduced to show 50 frames. Scale bar is 10  $\mu$ m.

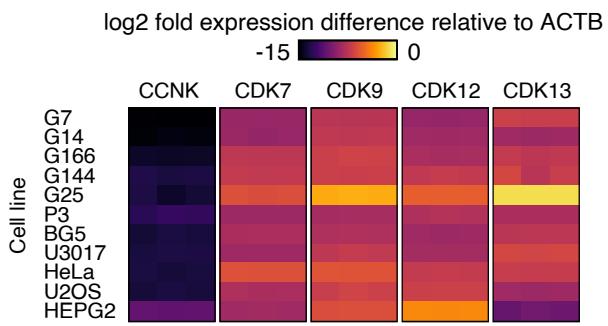
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Supplementary Figure

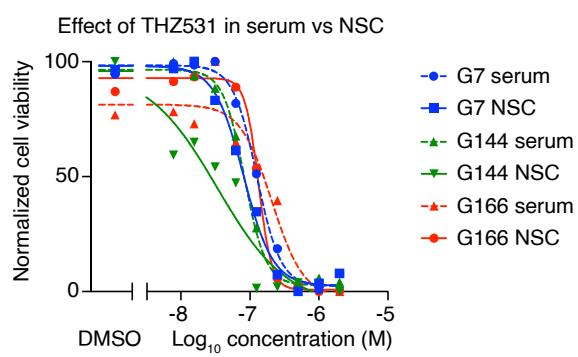
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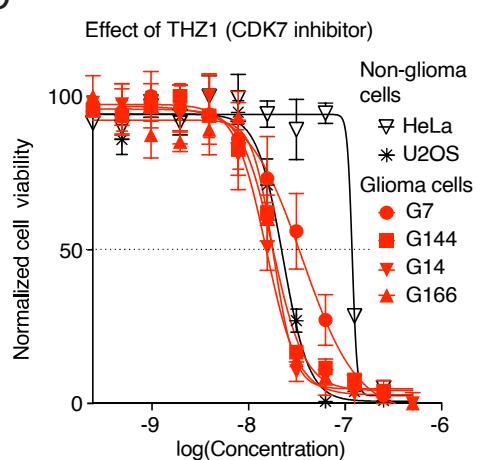
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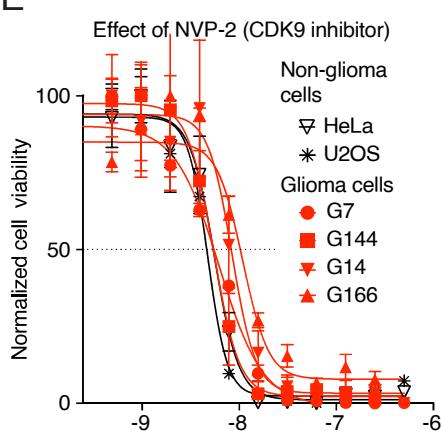
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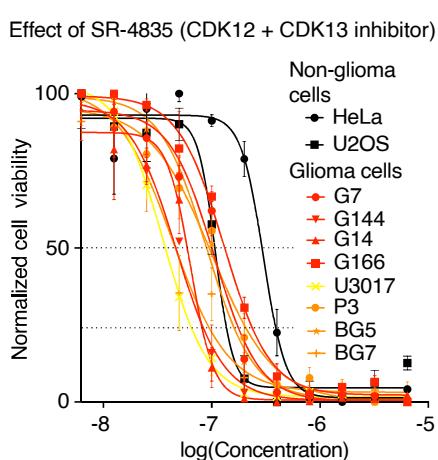
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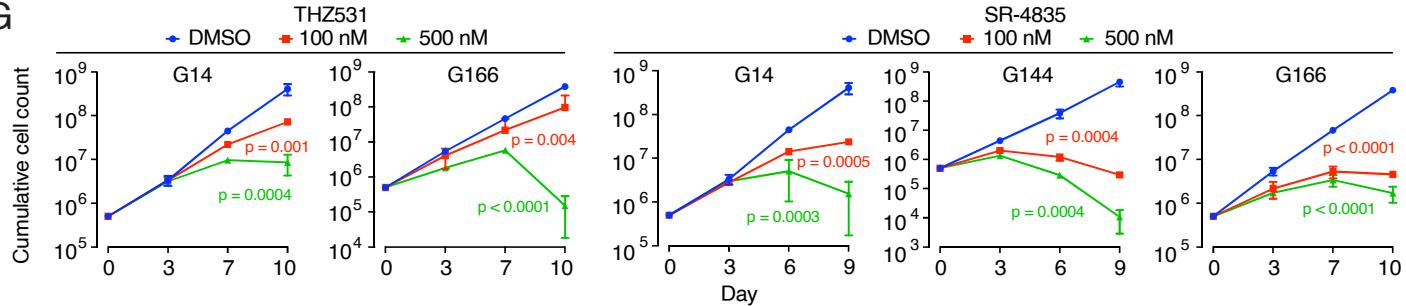
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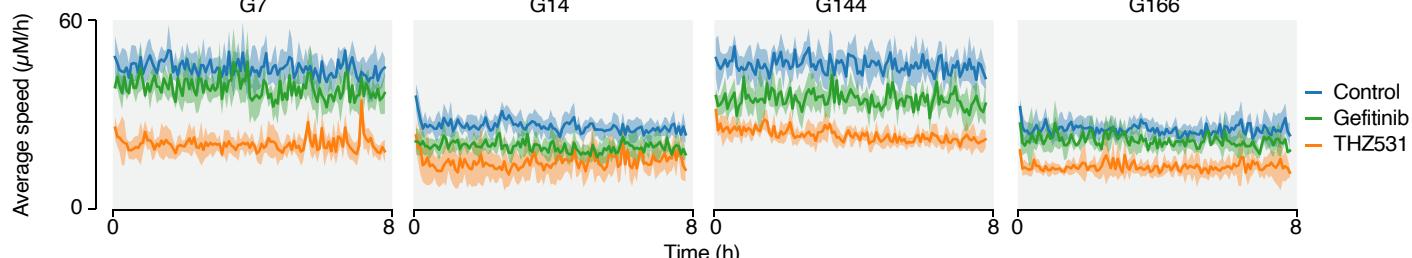
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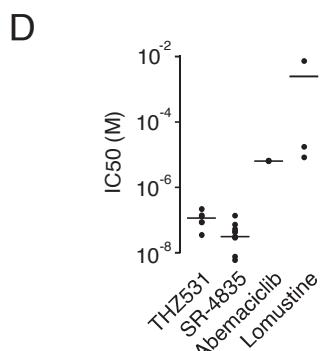
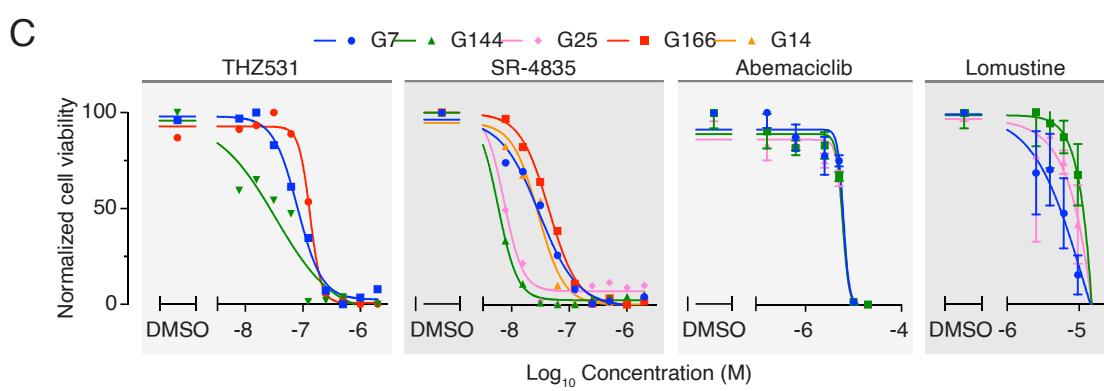
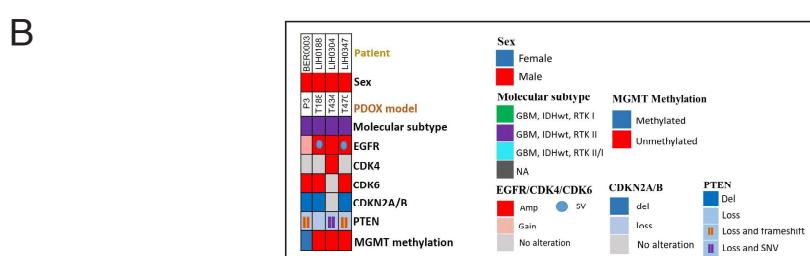
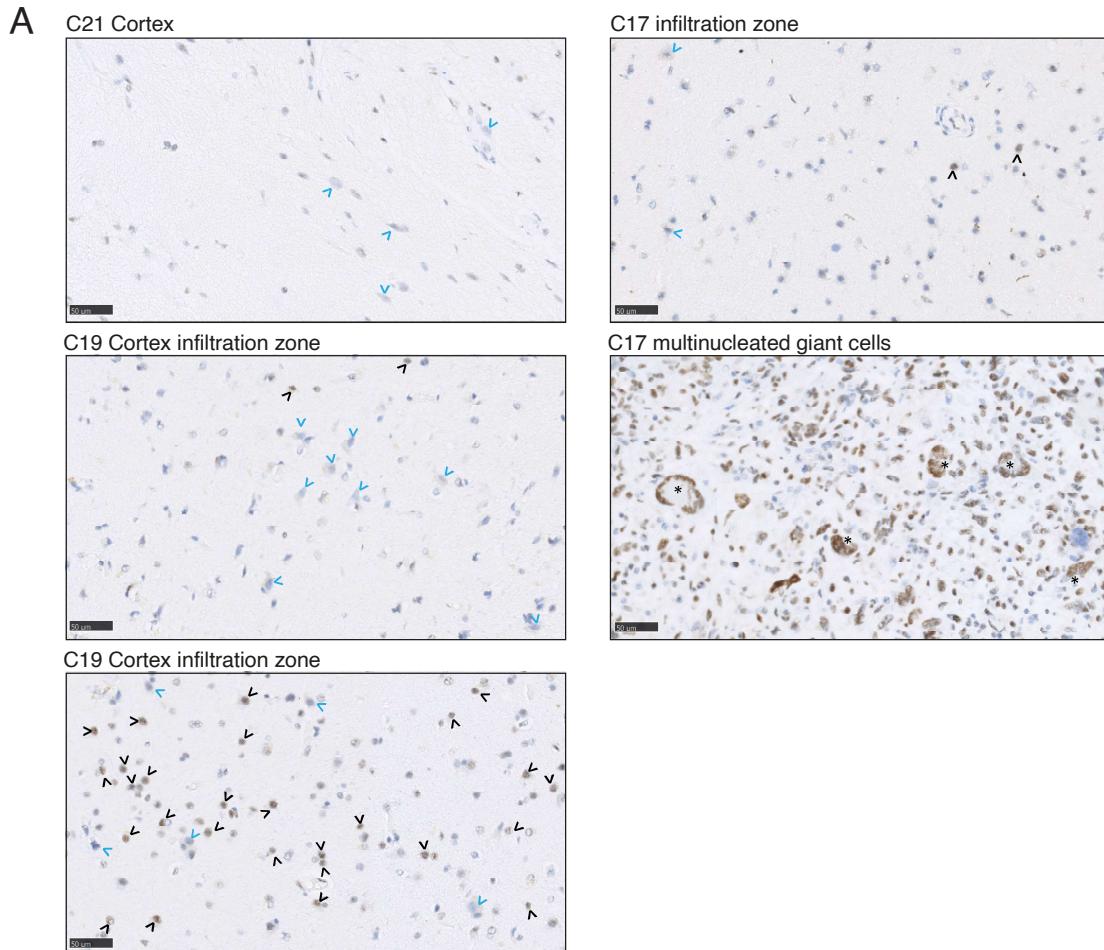
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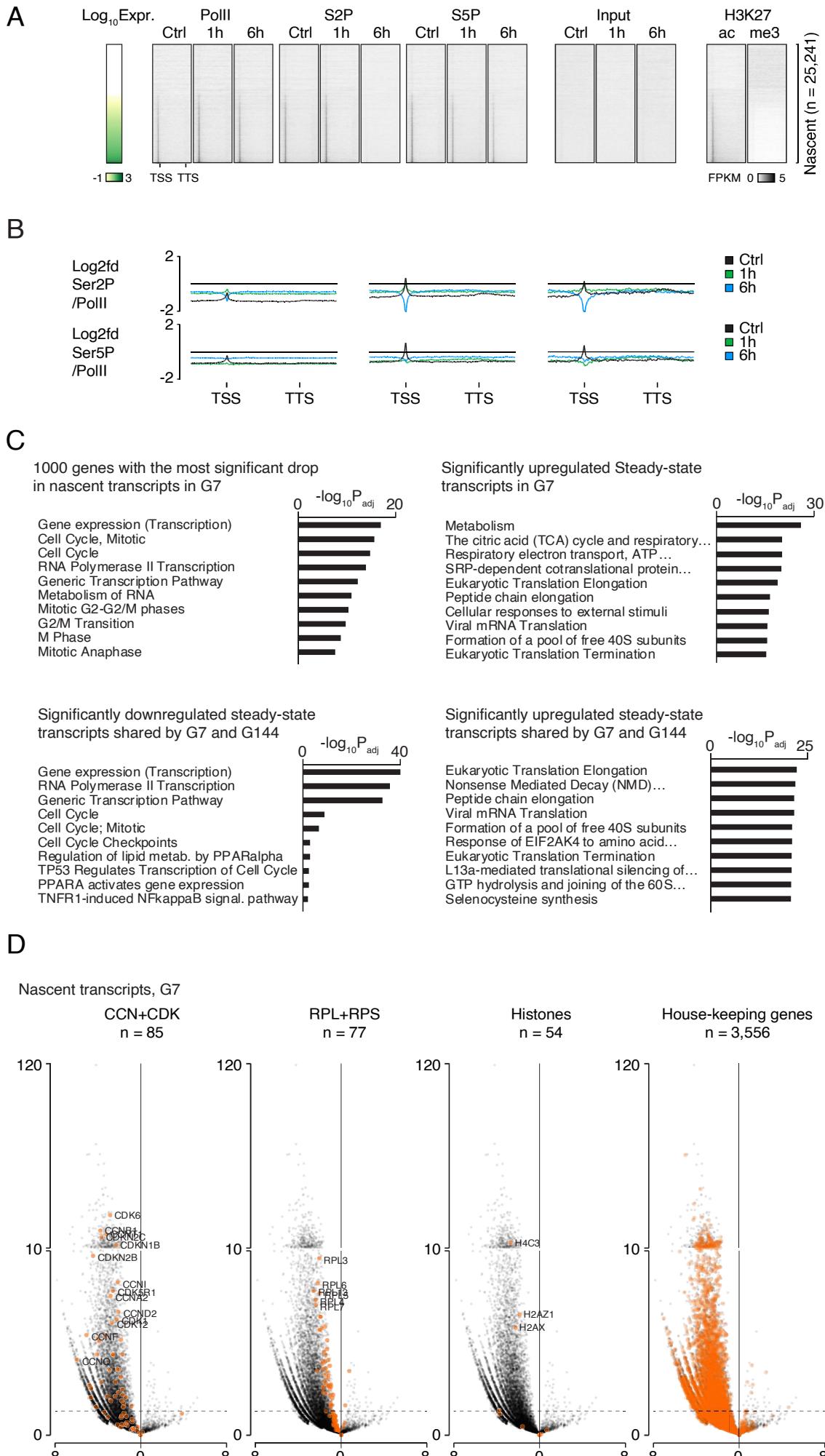
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Supplementary Figure 2



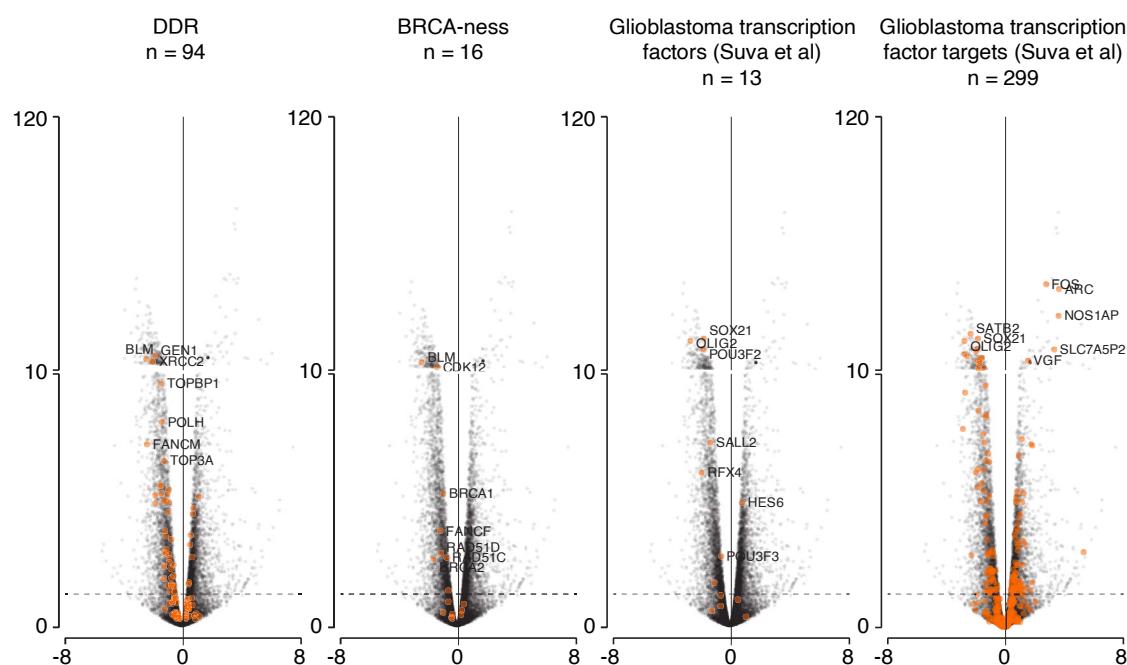
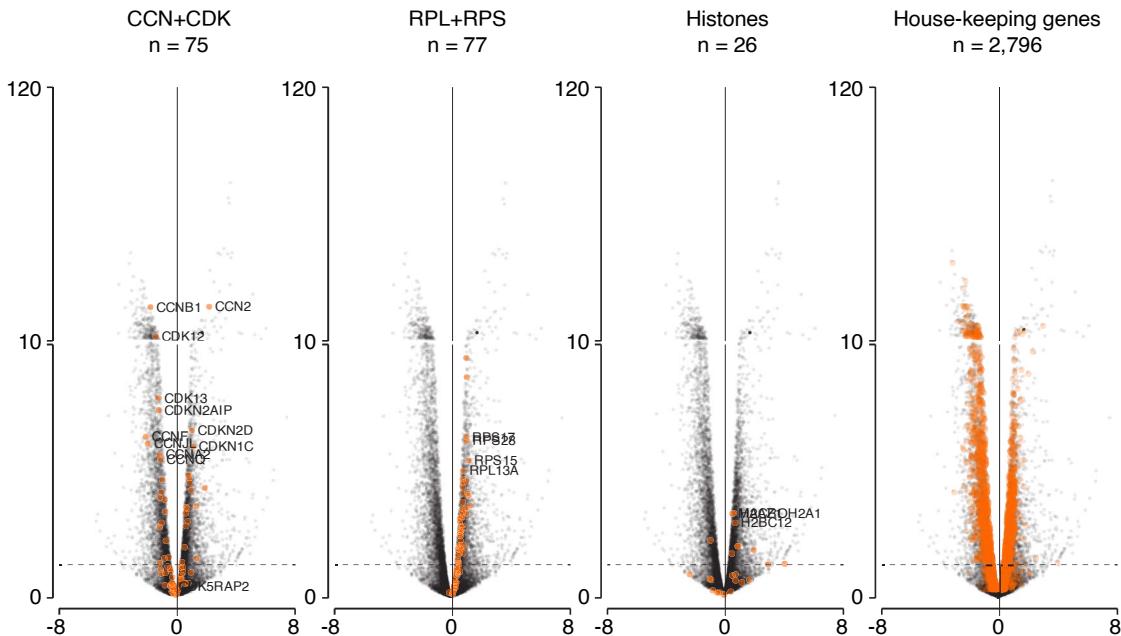
## Supplementary Figure 3



## Supplementary Figure 4

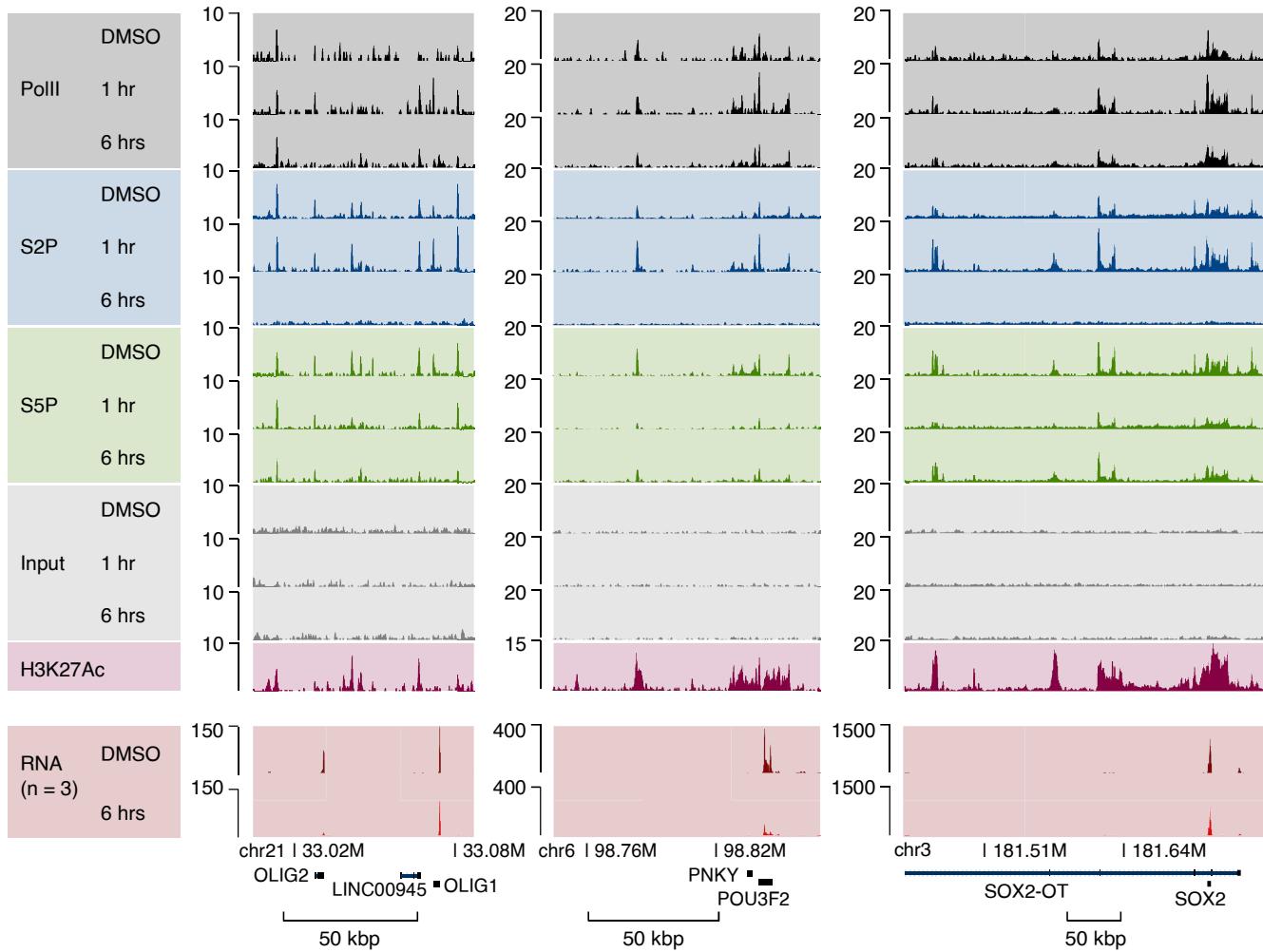
A

### Steady-state



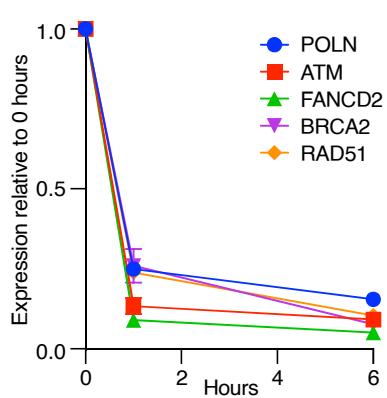
## Supplementary Figure 5

A



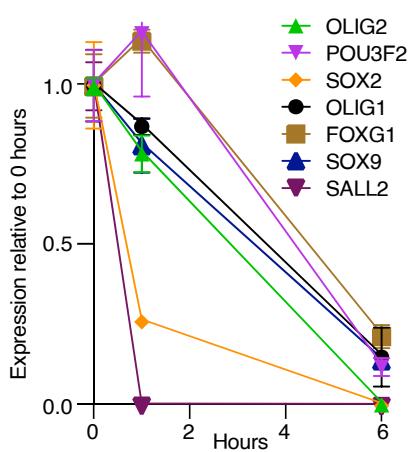
B

Expression of DDR genes following THZ531 treatment



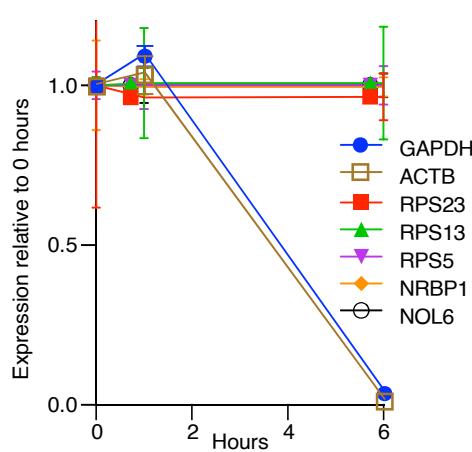
C

Expression of glioblastoma transcription factors following THZ531 treatment



D

Expression of housekeeping genes following THZ531 treatment



## Supplementary Figure 6

