

ORIGINAL RESEARCH



iPSC-Based Modeling of Variable Clinical Presentation in Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy

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BACKGROUND: Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) is the most common inherited cardiac disease and a frequent cause of heart failure and sudden cardiac death. Our understanding of the genetic bases and pathogenic mechanisms underlying HCM has improved significantly in the recent past, but the combined effect of various pathogenic gene variants and the influence of genetic modifiers in disease manifestation are very poorly understood. Here, we set out to investigate genotype-phenotype relationships in 2 siblings with an extensive family history of HCM, both carrying a pathogenic truncating variant in the *MYBPC3* gene (p.Lys600Asnfs*2), but who exhibited highly divergent clinical manifestations.

METHODS: We used a combination of induced pluripotent stem cell (iPSC)-based disease modeling and CRISPR (clustered regularly interspersed short palindromic repeats)/Cas9 (CRISPR-associated protein 9)-mediated genome editing to generate patient-specific cardiomyocytes (iPSC-CMs) and isogenic controls lacking the pathogenic *MYBPC3* variant.

RESULTS: Mutant iPSC-CMs developed impaired mitochondrial bioenergetics, which was dependent on the presence of the mutation. Moreover, we could detect altered excitation-contraction coupling in iPSC-CMs from the severely affected individual. The pathogenic *MYBPC3* variant was found to be necessary, but not sufficient, to induce iPSC-CM hyperexcitability, suggesting the presence of additional genetic modifiers. Whole-exome sequencing of the mutant carriers identified a variant of unknown significance in the *MYH7* gene (p.Ile1927Phe) uniquely present in the individual with severe HCM. We finally assessed the pathogenicity of this variant of unknown significance by functionally evaluating iPSC-CMs after editing the variant.

CONCLUSIONS: Our results indicate that the p.Ile1927Phe variant of unknown significance in *MYH7* can be considered as a modifier of HCM expressivity when found in combination with truncating variants in *MYBPC3*. Overall, our studies show that iPSC-based modeling of clinically discordant subjects provides a unique platform to functionally assess the effect of genetic modifiers.

GRAPHIC ABSTRACT: A [graphic abstract](#) is available for this article.

Key Words: energy metabolism ■ mutation ■ phenotype ■ sibling ■ studies

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Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) is the most common inherited cardiac disease.¹ With an estimated prevalence of 1 in 500 people,² it is a frequent cause of heart failure and sudden cardiac death in the young population.^{3,4} HCM is a complex condition defined by heterogeneous clinical manifestations, ranging from severely affected to asymptomatic individuals.⁵ During the past 2 decades, genetic testing has identified a plethora of

pathogenic variants associated to HCM, mainly in genes encoding for sarcomere proteins.⁶ Among them, mutations in *MYBPC3*, encoding myosin-binding protein C, and in *MYH7*, encoding cardiac β -myosin heavy chain, are the most frequent.^{5,7,8} However, incomplete penetrance of pathogenic genetic variants and variable expressivity further underscore the strong influence of genetic and environmental modifiers of HCM progression.^{9–11}

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Novelty and Significance

What Is Known?

- Genetic testing has identified a plethora of gene mutations causing familial hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, but phenotype-genotype relationships are still poorly understood.
- Genetic association studies allow researchers and geneticists to assign pathogenic risk to genetic variants, but they are typically underpowered for variants of low prevalence.
- Induced pluripotent stem cell (iPSC)-based disease modeling, in combination with CRISPR/Cas9-mediated genome editing, emerge as powerful approaches to assess pathogenicity of disease-causing mutations.

What New Information Does This Article Contribute?

- We studied clinically discordant siblings sharing a pathogenic mutation in *MYBPC3* and generated isogenic pairs of iPSC-derived cardiomyocytes (iPSC-CMs).
- We identified disease-related phenotypes dependent on the *MYBPC3* mutation (mitochondrial dysfunction) and others for which the mutation was necessary, but not sufficient (CM hyperexcitability and hypercontractility).
- The search for additional genetic modifiers identified a variant of unknown significance in the *MYH7* gene, the pathogenicity which could be functionally evaluated after editing the variant in iPSC-CMs.

Our study aimed to investigate the relationship between genetic variations and the clinical presentation of HCM in 2 siblings who carried a pathogenic truncating variant in the *MYBPC3* gene but showed different clinical manifestations. We generated patient-specific iPSC-CMs from the siblings and used CRISPR/Cas9 genome editing to create isogenic control iPSC-CMs without the pathogenic variant. iPSC-CMs carrying the *MYBPC3* mutation exhibited impaired mitochondrial bioenergetics, and altered excitation-contraction coupling was observed in iPSC-CMs from the severely affected individual. However, the pathogenic *MYBPC3* mutation alone was not sufficient to induce hyperexcitability in iPSC-CMs, suggesting the presence of additional genetic modifiers. Whole-exome sequencing revealed a variant of unknown significance in the *MYH7* gene uniquely present in the severely affected individual. Functional evaluation of iPSC-CMs after editing the *MYH7* variant confirmed its pathogenicity and its role as a modifier of HCM expressivity when combined with truncating variants in *MYBPC3*. Our study illustrates the usefulness of iPSC-based modeling of clinically discordant subjects to identify and functionally assess the effect of genetic modifiers in cardiomyopathies.

Nonstandard Abbreviations and Acronyms

cTnI	cardiac troponin I
cTnT	cardiac troponin T
HCM	hypertrophic cardiomyopathy
iPSC	induced pluripotent stem cell
MHC	myosin heavy chain
VUS	variant of unknown significance

Advances in human induced pluripotent stem cell (iPSC) technology have aided disease modeling of several genetic cardiomyopathies, usually by investigating known pathogenic genetic variants in a patient-specific manner.^{12–15} The use of directed genome editing techniques to generate gene-corrected isogenic control iPSC lines has further improved researchers' ability to study genotype-phenotype correlations in HCM.¹⁶ However, dissecting the effect of genetic modifiers of cardiomyopathies is still limited by their complex genetic etiology.^{17,18} In the case of HCM associated to *MYBPC3* gene variants, several efforts at modeling the disease using iPSC-derived cardiomyocytes (iPSC-CMs) have

been reported, although their results have not always been consistent. Whereas some studies have found clear signs of HCM such as increased iPSC-CM cell area,^{19–21} and various degrees of alterations in calcium handling and/or contractility,^{15,20–24} others did not find any disease-relevant phenotype in iPSC-CMs carrying *MYBPC3* variants.²⁵ These seemingly conflicting results have been attributed to differences in the specific type of *MYBPC3* variant, the stage of differentiation/maturation of iPSC-CMs analyzed in the different studies, and the sensitivity of the analytical methodology employed, and underscore the importance of including isogenic iPSC control lines in the comparisons.²⁶

For the current studies, we took advantage of iPSC-based disease modeling to tease apart the contribution of genetic and environmental factors to disease onset/progression.²⁷ We generated iPSC from 2 siblings with a family history of HCM who shared a pathogenic variant in the *MYBPC3* gene, but exhibited highly divergent clinical manifestations (severe versus mild HCM). iPSC-CM representing these individuals also displayed disease-related phenotypes of divergent severity in vitro, which strongly suggested the presence of underlying genetic modifiers. Whole-exome sequencing identified a variant

of unknown significance (VUS) in the *MYH7* gene present exclusively in the patient with severe HCM. The use of CRISPR/Cas9-mediated directed genome editing and functional phenotyping of resulting iPSC-CM allowed ascribing pathogenicity to the *MYH7* variant, at least when combined with truncating *MYBPC3* mutations. Our study provides a valuable platform to functionally assess causality and ascribing pathogenicity to genetic variants in the context of familial cardiomyopathies.

METHODS

Data Availability

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article (and its [Supplemental Material](#)). The sequencing data generated in the study have been deposited in the European Variation Archive at EMBL-EBI under accession number PRJEB61786 (<https://www.ebi.ac.uk/eva/?eva-study=PRJEB61786>). The iPSC lines generated are being banked and will be available through the Spanish National Stem Cell Bank-Carlos III Spanish National Institute of Health, in compliance with the informed consent signed by the patients.

Detailed description of materials and methods can be found in the [Supplemental Material](#). Please see the Major Resources Table in the [Supplemental Material](#).

RESULTS

Modeling HCM Phenotypic Divergence

The index case in our studies (individual III.7 in Figure 1A) is a male patient diagnosed with obstructive HCM at 18 years of age. Cardiac magnetic resonance imaging

revealed a maximal left ventricular hypertrophy of 39 mm with moderate fibrosis in septal segments (Figure 1B; [Figure S1A](#)). A cardiac defibrillator was implanted during follow-up after a sudden death episode.

Genetic testing of known variants using the Sequenom MassArray platform detected a truncating variant in the *MYBPC3* gene (g12413delA, c.1800delA, p.Lys600Asnfs*2, *MYBPC3*^{K600fs}) in heterozygosity that was considered pathogenic according to the recommendations of the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics and the Association for Molecular Pathology. Clinical and genetic evaluation of family members unveiled that the father was a carrier of the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant and had nonobstructive HCM with left ventricular hypertrophy of 16 mm and fibrosis in the septal insertion points in cardiac magnetic resonance imaging (Figure 1C; [Figure S1B and S1C](#)). The sister of the proband also carried the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant but was asymptomatic at the time of the original study and she only developed a borderline phenotype with septal left ventricular hypertrophy of 12 mm and mild inducible obstructive gradient in echocardiogram (Figure 1D) at 42 years of age. The clinical description of the family is summarized in [Table S6](#).

Variable disease expressivity is not uncommon in familial HCM, even within members of the same family, and it is thought to arise from genetic, epigenetic, and/or environmental factors that modify disease progression and clinical outcome.⁵ To gain further insights into this phenomenon, we chose the proband (individual III.7 in Figure 1A, codenamed MYB1) and his sister (individual III.5 in Figure 1A, codenamed MYB2) as representative examples of severe and mild cases, respectively,

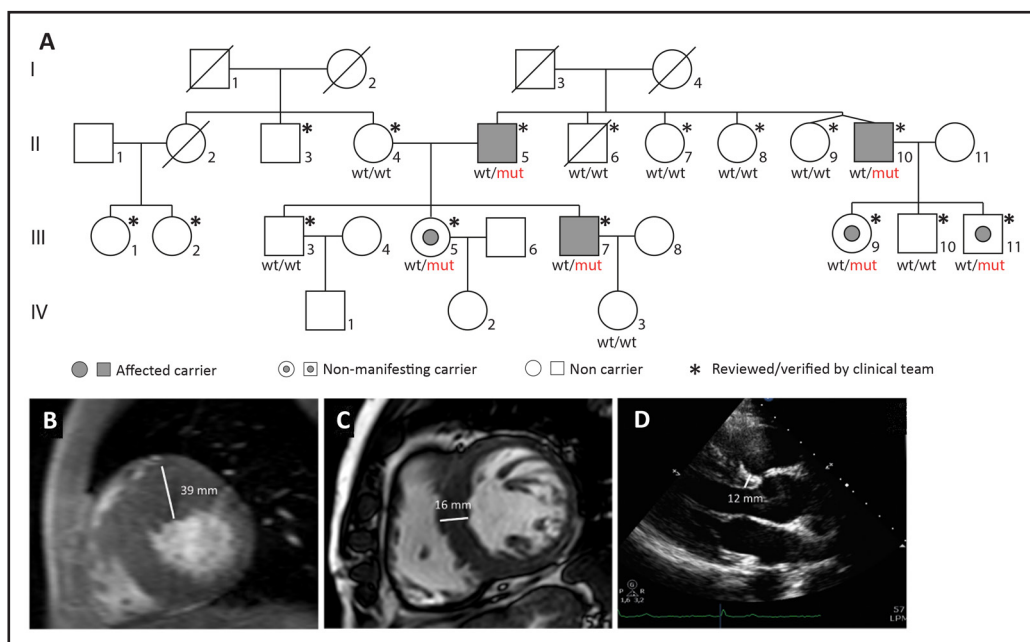


Figure 1. Description of a familial case of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM).

A, Pedigree of the HCM family. **B** and **C**, cardiac magnetic resonance imaging (CMRI) sections showing mid short-axis views from the proband III.7 (**B**) and his father II.5 (**C**), both carrying the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant. **D**, Echocardiogram parasternal long-axis of the proband's sister III.5.

of familial HCM associated to *MYBPC3* gene variants. After obtaining appropriate informed consent, primary cultures of dermal fibroblasts from skin biopsies were reprogrammed to iPSCs using nonintegrative Sendai virus vectors.²⁸ The derived iPSC lines MYB1#4 and MYB2#2 were thoroughly characterized for pluripotency and were confirmed to carry the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant in heterozygosity as expected (Figure S2A through S2L). We also included in our analyses an iPSC line previously generated from a healthy individual as an unrelated control. iPSCs were differentiated into cardiomyocytes (iPSC-CMs) following a robust monolayer protocol based on small molecule modulation of the WNT signaling

pathway.²⁹ Differentiation efficiency was similar for all iPSC lines and consistently yielded iPSC-CM cultures of purity >80%, as evaluated by coexpression of MHC (myosin heavy chain) and cTnI (cardiac troponin I) by flow cytometry (Figure 2A), and of cTnT (cardiac troponin T) and α -sarcomeric actin by immunostaining (Figure 2B).

Since myofibrillar disarray is a hallmark of HCM observed in CMs from patients and mouse models, albeit conflicting results having been reported in iPSC-CMs,^{16,24} we first explored whether the sarcomere organization was affected in iPSC-CM carrying the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant. Cardiomyocytes stained for the sarcomeric proteins cTnT and α -sarcomeric actin showed well aligned

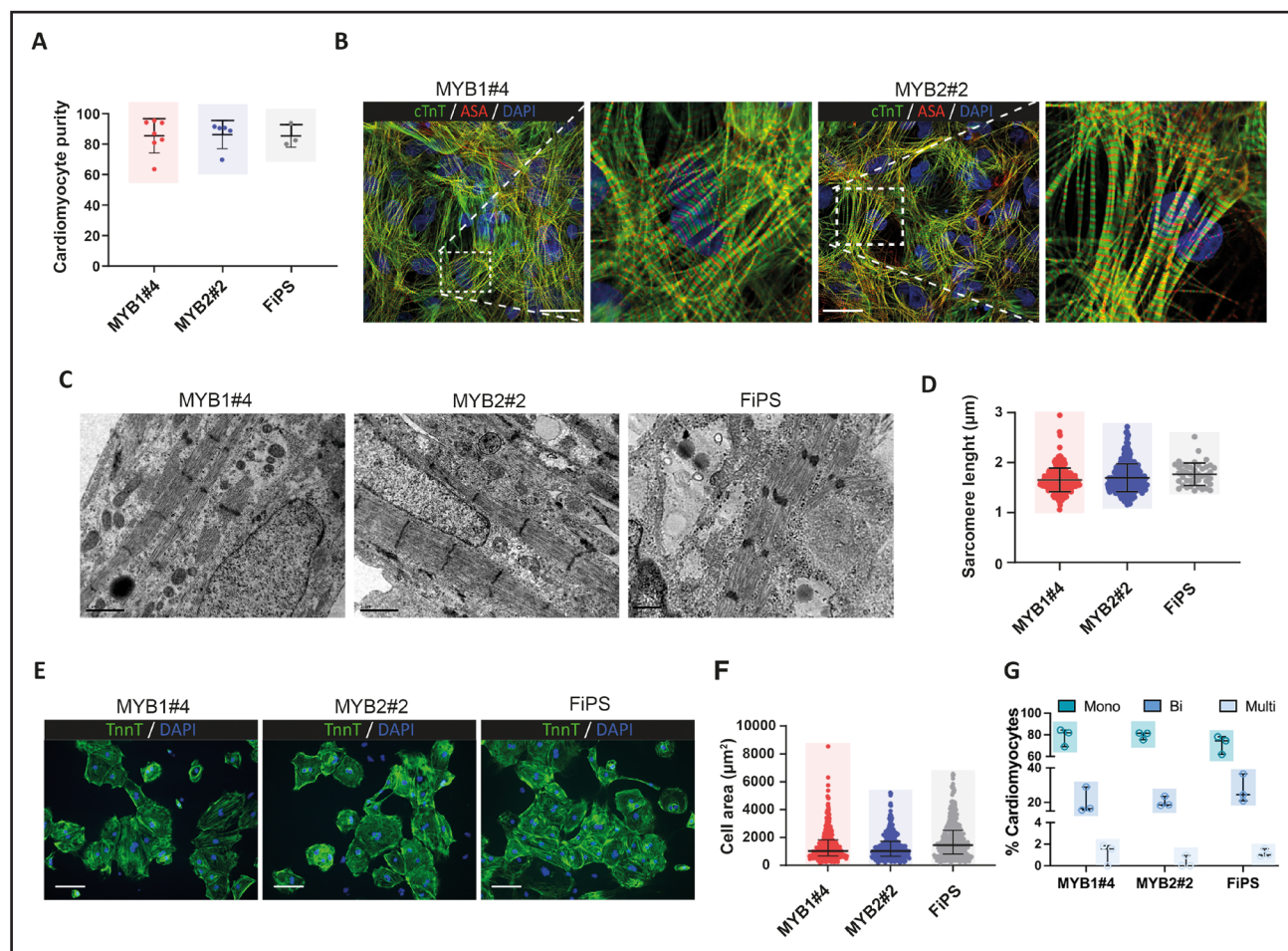


Figure 2. Generation and characterization of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) human-induced pluripotent stem cell-cardiomyocytes (hiPSC-CMs).

A, Cardiac differentiation cultures are composed of >80% cardiomyocytes. Data from MYB1#4 ($N=7$), MYB2#2 ($N=5$), and FiPS ($N=3$). Individual data plotted, along with mean \pm SD. Nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test followed by Dunn multiple comparison test. **B**, Representative immunostaining of mutant hiPSC-CMs staining positive for cTnT (cardiac troponin T) and α -sarcomeric actin (ASA), showing well aligned sarcomeres. Scale bar, 200 μ m. **C**, Ultrastructural analysis of HCM mutants and controls hiPSC-CMs. Representative TEM images of cardiomyocytes after 20 days in culture. Scale bar, 1 μ m. **D**, Quantification of sarcomere length. $n=266$ (MYB1#4), 324 (MYB2#2), and 43 (FiPS) sarcomeres studied. Individual data plotted, along with mean \pm SD. One-way ANOVA with Dunnett's correction for multiple comparison test. **E**, Representative immunofluorescence images stained for cTnT from mutants and controls hiPSC-CMs. Scale bar 100 μ m. **F**, Morphological analysis of single hiPSC-CMs showing quantification of cell area; $n=362$ (MYB1#4), 351 (MYB2#2) and 335 (FiPS) cells from $N=3$ independent differentiations. Individual data plotted, along with mean \pm SD. One-way ANOVA with Dunnett's correction for multiple comparison test. **G**, Percentage of mononucleated (mono), binucleated (bi), and multinucleated (multi) cardiomyocytes measured in $N=3$ independent differentiations. Individual data plotted, along with whisker plots. Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test for multiple comparisons with Dunn correction between each group.

sarcomeres with no apparent structural disarray for either of the HCM mutant lines (Figure 2B). Additionally, transmission electron microscopy showed that both mutant iPSC-CMs as well as control iPSC-CMs formed organized and regular myofibrils with defined Z bands (Figure 2C) and sarcomeres of comparable lengths (Figure 2D). Similarly, we could not observe significant differences in cell size and multinucleation levels between MYB1#4 and MYB2#2 when compared with control iPSC-CMs (Figure 2E through 2G). Our results so far show that iPSC-CMs carrying the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant do not recapitulate in vitro some hallmarks of HCM, such as cellular hypertrophy, increased multinucleation, and myofibrillar disarray. These results are consistent with several previous reports,^{22,23,25} and most likely reflect the relative immaturity of iPSC-CMs.³⁰

HCM-Related Phenotypes Caused by *MYBPC3* Gene Variant

To better ascertain genotype-phenotype relationships in our studies, we corrected the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant in both MYB1#4 and MYB2#2 iPSC lines using CRISPR/Cas9 technology, generating the isogenic control iPSC lines isoMYB1#4 and isoMYB2#2, respectively (Figure S3A through S3C). HCM-causing gene variants that affect myofilament proteins deregulate ATP utilization at the sarcomere level, increasing the energetic cost of contraction.^{31,32} Although whether mitochondrial energy depletion is cause or consequence of myocardial dysfunction is still a matter of debate, there is evidence in support of reduced cardiac bioenergetic performance in otherwise nonmanifesting carriers of sarcomeric mutations.³³ Moreover, mitochondrial dysfunction has more recently been shown to influence the severity of HCM-related phenotypes in iPSC-CM carrying pathogenic variants in sarcomeric genes.³⁴ For these reasons, we next analyzed mitochondrial metabolism in iPSC-CM carrying the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant and isogenic controls using the Seahorse extracellular flux analyzer, which determines oxygen consumption rate and extracellular acidification rate upon sequential addition of electron transport chain inhibitors (Figure 3A). We could not detect differences in mitochondrial content, baseline oxygen consumption rate and extracellular acidification rate, or mitochondrial ATP production rate among the iPSC-CM tested (Figure 3B through 3E). However, maximal respiration and spare capacity were reduced in iPSC-CMs carrying the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant compared with their isogenic controls and with unrelated control iPSC-CMs (Figure 3F and 3G). These results suggest that the *MYBPC3* variant forces mitochondria to function at an increased capacity to meet the elevated energetic demands of mutant CMs. It is interesting to note that a comparable degree of mitochondrial dysfunction was detected in iPSC-CMs from both *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant carriers, including

the asymptomatic individual MYB2#2, suggesting that impaired bioenergetics could be an early pathogenic event in HCM, lending support to the energy depletion model as a common mechanism that could potentially trigger disease progression.³¹

The *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} Variant Is Not Sufficient to Explain Altered CM Excitation/Contraction

Calcium plays a key role in regulating the excitation-contraction coupling in CMs.³⁵ Given that alterations in intracellular calcium levels are commonly associated with HCM and can contribute to early preclinical manifestations,^{15,36,37} we next sought to investigate whether iPSC-CMs from the severely affected patient and asymptomatic individual showed altered Ca²⁺ handling. For this purpose, we first recorded Ca²⁺ transients with the fluorescent Ca²⁺ indicator Fluo-4, using monolayers of iPSC-CM at 5 weeks of differentiation that were electrically paced at 0.5 Hz during imaging to avoid variation due to spontaneous beating (Figure 4A). We found that the amplitude of Ca²⁺ transients was reduced in MYB1#4-CMs when compared with MYB2#2-CMs or with isogenic controls (Figure 4B). Moreover, the kinetics of Ca²⁺ transients were significantly faster in MYB1#4-CMs compared with the other samples, exhibiting shorter times to both reaching maximum amplitude (Figure 4C) and to decaying to 50% peak (Figure 4D) and to 90% peak (Figure 4E). These findings demonstrate that iPSC-CMs from the severely affected individual show abnormal Ca²⁺ handling in vitro, for which the presence of the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant is necessary, inasmuch as isogenic gene-corrected iPSC-CMs showed normal Ca²⁺ transients. However, the fact that iPSC-CM from the asymptomatic individual, also carrying the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant, did not show abnormal Ca²⁺ handling, is a strong indication that this gene variant, while necessary, is not sufficient to cause the phenotype in our in vitro system.

We also analyzed the contraction kinetics of iPSC-CM monolayers using high-speed imaging and pixel-based motion analysis (Figure 4F and 4G). Examination of spontaneously contracting iPSC-CM monolayers at 30 days of differentiation did not reveal significant differences in beating rates or overall contraction or relaxation times among samples (Figure 4H, 4I, 4K, 4L). However, iPSC-CMs from the severely affected patient displayed a significantly shorter time to maximum contraction compared with their isogenic controls or with iPSC-CMs from the asymptomatic individual MYB2 (Figure 4J). These results are in line with our previous findings on Ca²⁺ handling and further support the notion that the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant is necessary, but not sufficient, to induce measurable alterations in excitation-contraction coupling in iPSC-CMs in vitro. Moreover, these findings suggest the possibility that genetic modifiers are

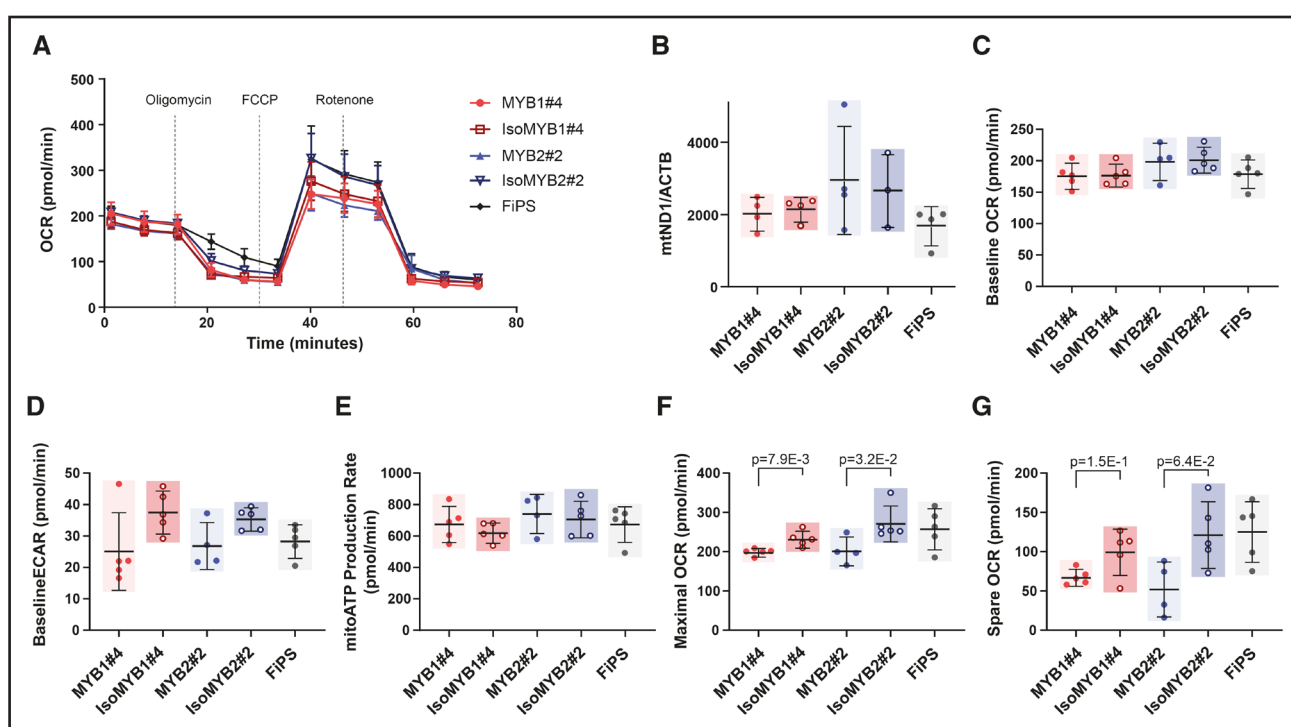


Figure 3. Bioenergetic analysis of human-induced pluripotent stem cell-cardiomyocytes (hiPSC-CMs) from MYBPC3 mutants and isogenic controls.

A, Mitochondrial respiration rates in cardiac monolayers after the sequential addition of modulators of the respiratory chain using the Seahorse Extracellular Flux Analyzer. Data represent mean±SD. **B**, qPCR analysis showing mitochondrial (ND1):nuclear (ACTB) DNA ratio (N=4 for MYB1#4, IsoMYB1#4, and Iso MYB2#2, and N=3 for MYB2#2). **C** through **G**, Bioenergetics profile quantified for baseline OCR (**C**), ECAR (**D**), mitochondrial ATP production rate (**E**), maximal (**F**), and spare (**G**) capacity. Data were generated from N=5 independent differentiation batches for MYB1#4, IsoMYB1#4, and IsoMYB2#2, and from N=4 independent differentiation batches for MYB2#2. Individual data plotted, along with mean±SD. Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare isogenic pairs.

present in the genome of the severely affected patient MYB1 that cooperate with the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant to bring about the hyperexcitability phenotype identified in iPSC-CMs.

The *MYH7* p.Ile192Phe Can Be Considered a Modifier in the Context of the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} Variant

To search for genetic modifiers that could potentiate the pathogenicity of the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant in the severely affected patient MYB1, we sequenced his exome, along with those of his sister and their father (Figure 5A). Among a panel of 405 genes associated with cardiovascular diseases, we identified 2 additional rare, nonsynonymous, exonic variants that were specific to the proband and not present in the other individuals and were categorized as variants of unknown significance (VUS; Figure 5B; Table S5). The first one resulted in a heterozygous serine-to-cysteine substitution (p.Ser1801Cys) in the Calcium Voltage-Gated Channel Subunit Alpha1 D (encoded by the *CACNA1D* gene), not previously described in the general or HCM population cohorts, suggesting that this variant may not be implicated in HCM. The second variant affected

MYH7 and consisted on a previously described heterozygous isoleucine-to-phenylalanine substitution at position 1927 (p.Ile1927Phe). This residue is localized at the C-terminal end within the light meromyosin (LMM) domain of the protein. Although not a highly conserved amino acid, some *in-silico* algorithms assigned a pathogenic score to this substitution (Figure 5C). Several variants affecting the LMM domain have been associated with HCM.³⁸ However, a significant proportion of individuals carrying variants in the LMM region do not develop HCM, suggesting incomplete penetrance.

The *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe is a very rare variant identified in gnomAD in 13 out of 282,718 alleles (MAF 0.005). This variant was classified as VUS in 1 patient in ClinVar and reported in the literature in a 36-year-old male with myopathy and no evidence of cardiac involvement.³⁹ In our laboratory, we have found it in 13 unrelated proband cases, 9 of them with HCM, but cosegregation studies in those families are still missing, thus complicating variant interpretation and resulting in the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant being currently classified as a VUS. Extending the genetic study confirmed the presence of the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant in the proband's mother (Figure 5A), who showed mild left ventricular hypertrophy with a septum of 14 mm

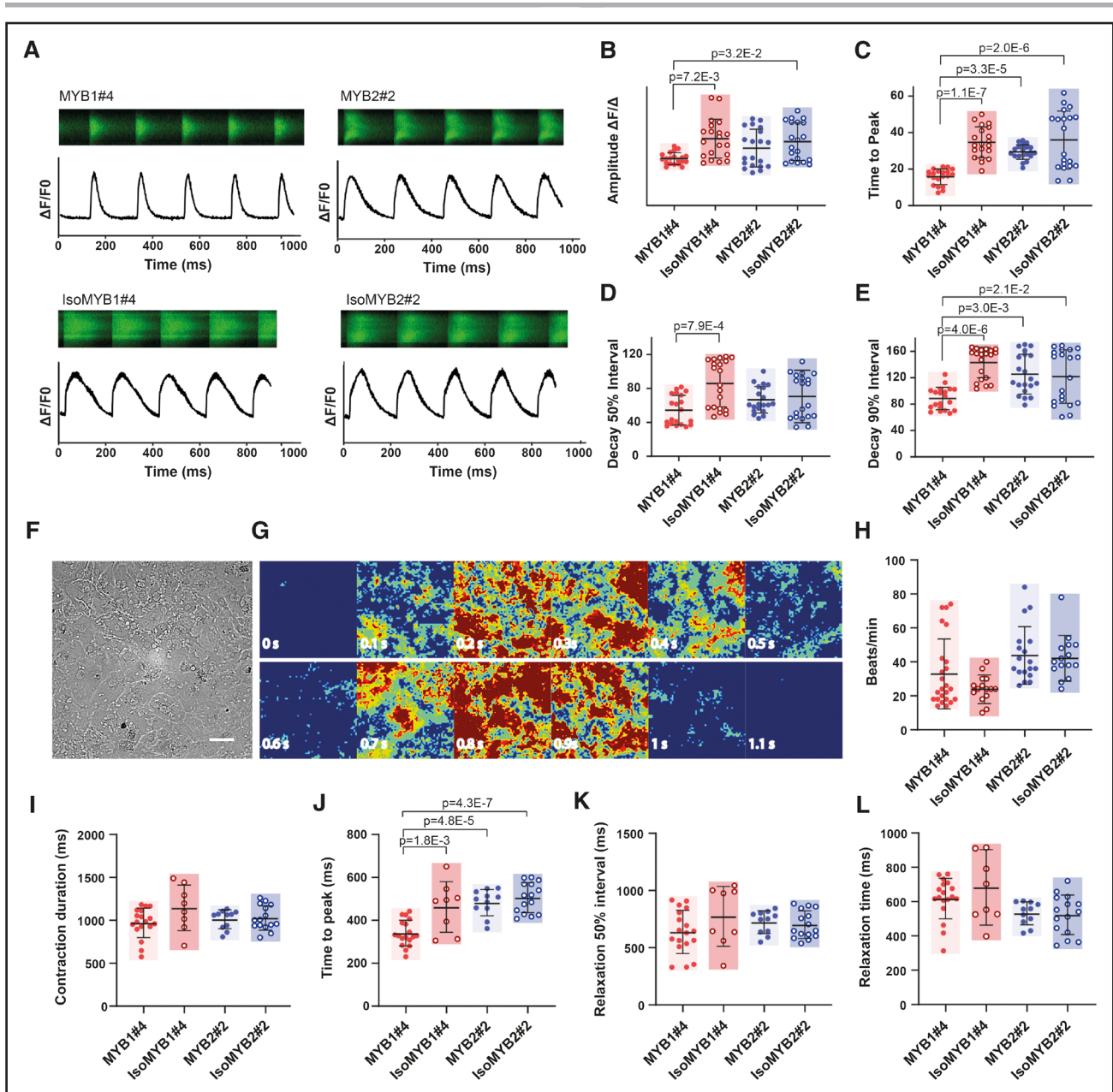


Figure 4. Calcium handling and contractile dynamics of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) mutants and isogenic controls in induced human-pluripotent stem cell (hiPSC)-derived cardiac monolayers.

A, Representative traces and line-scan images of Fluo-4 Ca²⁺ transients from electrically paced (0.5 Hz) hiPSC-derived cardiac monolayers. **B** through **E**, Quantification of calcium handling properties in HCM mutants and isogenic corrected hiPSC-CMs showing peak amplitudes (**B**), time to reach calcium peaks (**C**), calcium decay at 50% interval (**D**) and 90% interval (**E**). Individual data plotted, along with mean±SD. *n*=20 cells in all groups. For each group in **A** through **E**, data were generated from *N*=2 independent differentiation batches and analyzed using Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test for multiple comparisons with Dunn correction between each group. **F**, Representative bright-field image of a hiPSC-CM monolayer. Scale bar 100 μm. **G**, Vector-based contractile heatmap showing a homogeneous cardiac contraction and relaxation during a single beating event in a hiPSC-CM monolayer. **H**, Spontaneous beating rate at day 20 of cardiac differentiation. **I** through **L**, Analysis of contraction parameters from HCM mutants and isogenic edited hiPSC-CM monolayers at 5 weeks post-induction of cardiac differentiation showing quantification of contraction duration (**I**), time to maximum contraction (**J**), relaxation at 50% interval (**K**), and relaxation time (**L**). For each group in **H** through **L**, data were generated from *N*=5 independent differentiation batches for MYB1#4, *N*=4 independent differentiation batches for IsoMYB2#2, and *N*=3 independent differentiation batches for IsoMYB1#4 and MYB2#2. Individual data plotted, along with mean±SD. Data were analyzed with 1-way ANOVA with Tukey multiple comparison post hoc test.

and no fibrosis in cardiac magnetic resonance imaging (Figure 5D), all of which could be explained by arterial hypertension.

Evaluating rare and low-penetrance genetic variants by genome population studies or co-segregation analysis is frequently insufficient to produce robust evidence

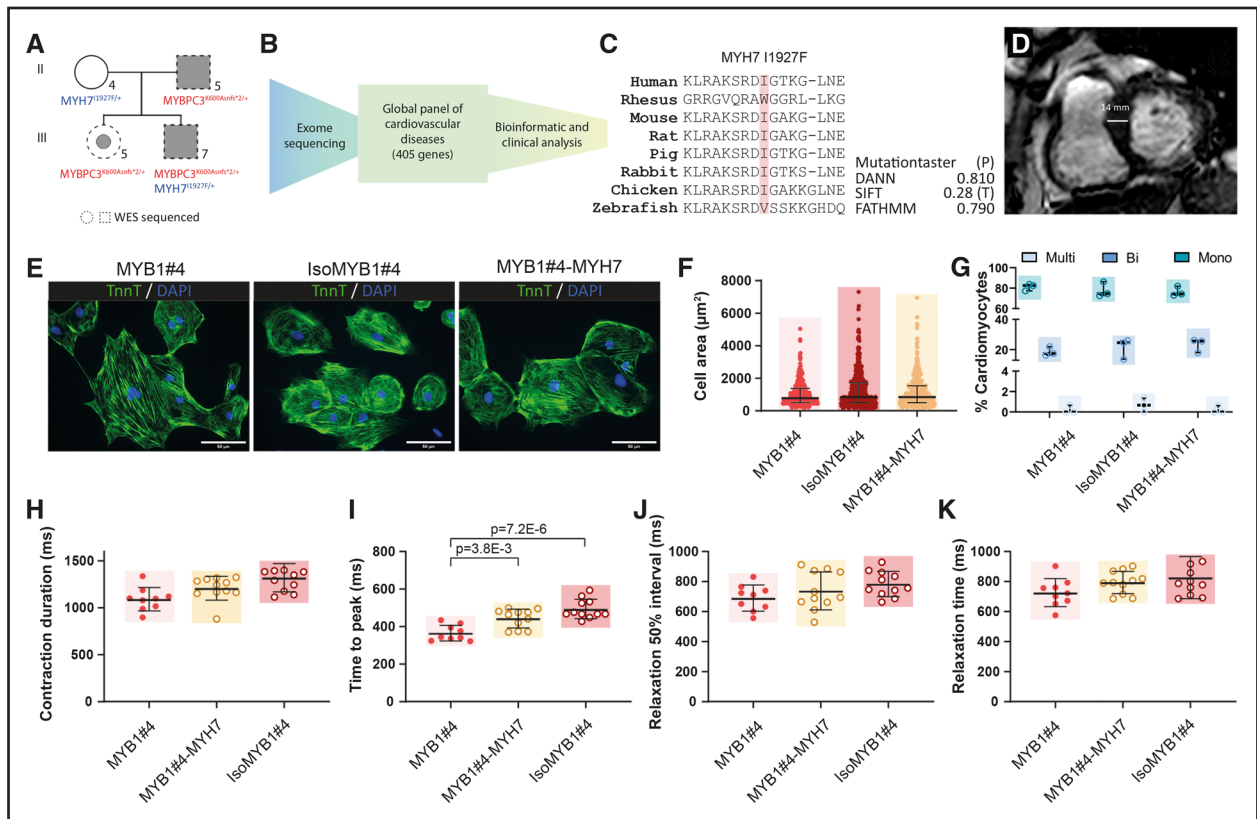


Figure 5. Identification and functional assessment of genetic modifiers of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) associated to *MYBPC3* variant.

A, Pedigree of a subset of the HCM family under study, showing individuals subjected to whole-exome sequencing. **B**, Workflow for the identification and analysis of genetic variants following a cardiac-enriched gene panel. **C**, *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe genetic variant identified in the symptomatic individual III.5 showing amino acid conservation across species. Variant of interest is highlighted in red. Prediction analysis of the effect of the amino acid change on protein function using Mutationtaster, DANN, SIFT and FATHMM damaging algorithms. P, pathogenic; T, tolerated. **D**, Cardiac magnetic resonance imaging (CMRI) section showing mid short-axis view from the proband's mother II.4, carrying the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe genetic variant. **E**, Representative immunofluorescence images stained for cTnT (cardiac troponin T) from double mutant MYB1#4 and isogenic single mutants human-induced pluripotent stem cell-cardiomyocytes (hiPSC-CMs). Scale bar 50 μ m. **F**, Morphological analysis of single hiPSC-CMs showing quantification of cell area; $n=428$ (MYB1#4), 457 (IsoMYB1#4), and 452 (MYB1#4-MYH7) cells from $N=3$ independent differentiations. Individual data plotted, along with mean \pm SD. One-way ANOVA with Dunnett's correction for multiple comparison test. **G**, Percentage of mononucleated (mono), binucleated (bi), and multinucleated (multi) cardiomyocytes measured in $N=3$ independent differentiations. Individual data plotted, along with whisker plots. Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test for multiple comparisons with Dunn's correction between each group. **H** through **K**, Analysis of contraction parameters from double mutant MYB1#4 and isogenic single mutants hiPSC-CMs monolayers at 5 weeks post-induction of cardiac differentiation showing quantification of contraction duration (**H**), time to maximum contraction (**I**), relaxation at 50% interval (**J**), and relaxation time (**K**). For each group in (**H**–**K**), data were generated from $N=3$ independent differentiation batches. Individual data plotted, along with mean \pm SD. Data were analyzed with 1-way ANOVA with Tukey multiple comparison post hoc test.

for variant interpretation. To directly assess pathogenicity of the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant, we used CRISPR/Cas9 technology to generate an additional isogenic control of MYB1#4 iPSC in which the *MYH7* variant was edited to the reference sequence, thus yielding the MYB1#4-MYH7 iPSC line (Figure S4A and S4B). As expected, MYB1#4-MYH7 iPSC-CMs were indistinguishable in terms of cell morphology, cell area, and percentage of multinucleation from the parental MYB1#4 iPSC-CMs or the isogenic isoMYB1#4 iPSC-CMs (Figure 5E through 5G). Also as expected, contractility analyses of cardiac monolayers did not reveal significant differences in the overall duration of the contraction or relaxation phases among samples (Figure 5H,

5J, 5K). Critically, however, the hypercontractility phenotype found in MYB1#4 iPSC-CMs as an abnormally short time to maximum contraction was rescued in both MYB1#4-MYH7 iPSC-CMs and isoMYB1#4 iPSC-CMs, which were in turn not different from one another (Figure 5I). Taken together, these results indicate that the presence of both the *MYBPC3* and the *MYH7* variants in the severely affected MYB1#4 individual account for the hypercontractility phenotype identified in MYB1#4 iPSC-CMs.

To investigate whether the presence of the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant modifies the risk of suffering HCM at the population level, we analyzed genomic data from 30,271 consecutive probands with different inherited

Table 1. Association Between MYH7 p.Ile1927Phe Variant and Clinical Diagnosis of HCM

Clinical diagnosis	Health in Code cohort		gnomAD cohort
	HCM	Control	Control
<i>MYH7</i> variant			
Reference	11 446	16 726	64 515
p.Ile1927Phe	9 (0.078%)	4 (0.023%)	8 (0.012%)
	Odds ratio	3.29	6.30
	95% CI	(1.01–10.68)	(2.50–15.90)
Significance level		$P=4.7\times 10^{-2}$	$P=3.1\times 10^{-4}$
Estimated penetrance		0.66%	1.3%
	95% CI	(0.13–3.2)	(0.34–4.8)

Number of alleles detected in the indicated cohorts. gnomAD cohort: European non-Finish population of the gnomAD v2.1.1 database. Statistical significance assessed by 2-sided Fisher exact test. Estimated penetrance calculated as described by Minikel et al.⁴⁰ HCM indicates hypertrophic cardiomyopathy.

cardiac conditions that were sequenced in Health in Code laboratory with a capture library including the *MYH7* gene (Table 1). The *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant was identified in 9 out of 11,446 probands with a diagnosis of HCM, being statistically significantly enriched in this phenotype compared to probands of the same cohort without evidence of cardiomyopathy (4 out of 16 726; 0.023%, $P=4.7\times 10^{-2}$), and also when compared with external controls of the gnomAD European non-Finish population (8/64 515 individuals; 0.012%, $P=3.1\times 10^{-4}$). Although the variant is associated with HCM, the estimated penetrance would be very low, ranging between 0.66% and 1.3% depending on the use of internal (Health in Code) or external (gnomAD) data, respectively (Table 1). Based on our cumulative evidence, we propose that the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant can be considered as a modifier of HCM expressivity when found in combination with truncating variants in *MYBPC3*, and possibly with pathogenic variants in other sarcomeric genes as well.

DISCUSSION

In the present work, we were able to study several related individuals with a strong family history of HCM. The clinical heterogeneity frequently observed in HCM patients was also present in this family, and genetic testing and clinical assessment identified 2 siblings carrying the pathogenic *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant inherited from their father, but who presented with highly discordant clinical phenotypes. From a clinical point of view, patients of HCM associated to mutations in *MYBPC3* have a later disease onset compared with individuals carrying mutations in other relevant sarcomeric genes, such as *MYH7* or genes coding for thin filament proteins, with a mean age at diagnosis around the fourth decade of life.⁷⁴¹ The sister of the proband in this work was initially described as a healthy carrier at the time of the familial study, when she was

27 years old. However, during subsequent clinical evaluations, she developed a borderline phenotype with septal left ventricular hypertrophy of 12 mm in echocardiogram, by 42 years of age. It is not uncommon that index cases present with a more severe phenotype, as was the case in our HCM family. Sources of such phenotypic differences can be attributed to several factors, including environmental, epigenetic, and genetic modifiers. Gender, in particular, has been shown to be critical in explaining some of the differences in clinical presentation seen among patients with HCM, although it is still unknown whether these findings reflect a lack of gender-specific criteria for HCM diagnosis, the influence of sex hormones or sex-specific differences in cardiac physiology.⁴² Here, we sought to use iPSC-based modeling to address whether and to what extent genetic modifiers could explain phenotypic diversity between these 2 siblings.

iPSC lines representing the severely affected HCM patient MYB1#4 and his asymptomatic sister MYB2#2 could be differentiated toward CMs with comparable efficiencies, which were also similar to those of control iPSC from a healthy individual. Moreover, we could not detect in those iPSC-CMs the morphological or structural abnormalities typically associated to HCM, such as increase in cell area or multinucleation index, or appearance of sarcomere disarray. These results are consistent with findings in mouse models of cardiac-specific *Mybpc3* mutation,^{43,44} as well as with most recent modeling efforts using iPSC-CMs,^{22,23,25,45} which have been explained by the fact that immature CMs are capable of maintaining normal levels of MyBP-C protein through compensatory reduction in MyBP-C degradation.^{20,23,25} Despite the absence of overt hypertrophy-related morphological alterations, iPSC-CMs from both MYB1#4 and MYB2#2 individuals carrying the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant developed mitochondrial bioenergetics alterations. The use of isogenic control iPSC-CMs in parallel allowed us to unambiguously ascribe such alterations to the presence of the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant. Several previous studies have described the appearance of energetic and metabolic imbalances in iPSC-CMs carrying sarcomeric gene variants,^{16,24,46,47} thus lending support to the energy depletion model that posits that energy depletion due to inefficient ATP utilization underlies HCM.³¹ However, since iPSC-CMs in those studies displayed overt structural abnormalities and sarcomere disarray, it is unclear whether energy depletion was cause or consequence of HCM phenotypes. Our findings in iPSC-CMs from *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant carriers uncover signs of mitochondrial dysfunction in the absence of HCM-associated phenotypes, indicating that impaired bioenergetics could be an early pathogenic event in HCM. These observations are well in line with results from clinical studies showing that asymptomatic carriers of sarcomeric mutations do present bioenergetics deficits.³³

Previous studies investigating the functionality of iPSC-CMs carrying heterozygous *MYBPC3* variants

have yielded conflicting results, some reporting abnormal calcium handling,²⁰ altered CM contractility,²² or both,^{15,21,48} but also alterations in calcium transients with normal contractility,²³ abnormal contractility with normal calcium handling,²⁴ and absence of alterations in either.²⁵ These discrepancies may be explained by patient-specific differences in genotype, protocol- or laboratory-specific differences in the phenotype of iPSC-CM, and differences in analytical methodology, and underscore the importance of including isogenic iPSC control lines and standardizing CM differentiation and functional testing in disease modeling efforts.²⁶ Our analysis of iPSC-CMs from the severely affected HCM patient MYB1#4 identified abnormally fast calcium transients and hypercontractility, both of which depended on the presence of the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant. However, iPSC-CMs from the asymptomatic sibling MYB2#2, also carrying this variant, showed normal calcium handling and contractility, strongly suggesting that the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant, while necessary, is not sufficient to induce functional abnormalities in iPSC-CMs *in vitro*.

These results prompted the search for potential genetic modifiers of HCM expressivity present in the severely affected individual. Whole-exome sequencing identified dozens of variants in probands MYB1#4 and MYB2#2 and their father, most of which shared among the 3 individuals and frequently found in the general population. We selected the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant for further characterization because it was specific to the severely affected HCM patient MYB1#4, and it implied the second-most commonly mutated gene in HCM after *MYBPC3*.⁵ This variant localizes to the C-terminal end within the repetitive heptad sequence in the LMM domain, essential for thick filament assembly. According to the ClinVar database, missense variants surrounding codon 1927 in *MYH7* are mostly interpreted as VUS with no assertion criteria provided, likely due to isolated reported cases and lack of segregation and functional studies.

To address the contribution of the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant to the phenotypes observed, we used CRISPR/Cas9-mediated genome editing to generate yet another isogenic control iPSC line. In this way, we could compare in parallel iPSC-CMs carrying both the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} and the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variants (parental MYB1#4 cells), only the *MYBPC3*^{K600fs} variant (MYB1#4-*MYH7* cells), and only the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant (isoMYB1#4). These analyses allowed us to investigate the effect of the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant when occurring in combination with truncating variants in *MYBPC3*. Since we did not experimentally test the effect of the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant in genomic contexts other than that of the study proband's, we cannot formally rule out that this variant alone could be pathogenic on its own in other genomic backgrounds. However, functional and case-controls data from this study suggest that this

is a variant of low penetrance, probably insufficient to be considered a classical monogenic disease-causing variant, but having a modifier effect when associated with pathogenic sarcomeric mutations. Moreover, the *MYH7* p.Ile1927Phe variant could even be considered a risk factor for developing HCM when using the concept of risk-allele put forward for other diseases such as long QT syndrome.⁴⁹ Advances in high-throughput DNA sequencing have revolutionized genetic screening and the ability to analyze genetic variation in healthy and diseased individuals.⁵⁰ Therefore, a host of novel genetic variants has been associated to HCM, often with insufficient evidence.^{51,52} This ever-increasing collection of sequence changes has raised important challenges in variant interpretation.⁵³ For numerous rare novel variants, there is not sufficient information to ascertain pathogenicity and they are thus classified as VUS, leading to uncertainty in patients and their relatives.^{9,54} Accurately determining the pathogenicity of genetic variants is a requirement for effective precision medicine of cardiomyopathies, especially when the presence of double or multiple variants can greatly modulate disease onset and clinical outcomes.^{8,55,56} The Wu laboratory pioneered the combination of iPSC-based modeling and CRISPR/Cas9-mediated genome editing for evaluating pathogenicity of HCM-related VUS.⁴⁸ Our work takes this notion 1 step further and show that the inclusion of clinically discordant relatives sharing a pathogenic variant in the study is a valuable strategy to identify genetic modifiers of HCM expressivity and, at the same time, causally assess their pathogenicity.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Disclosures

None.

Supplemental Material

Expanded Materials and Methods

Tables S1–S6

Figures S1–S4

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