

Epithelial-mesenchymal transition: a cancer researcher's conceptual friend and foe.

Michael Klymkowsky, Pierre Savagner

► **To cite this version:**

Michael Klymkowsky, Pierre Savagner. Epithelial-mesenchymal transition: a cancer researcher's conceptual friend and foe.. American Journal of Pathology, American Society for Investigative Pathology, 2009, 174 (5), pp.1588-93. 10.2353/ajpath.2009.080545 . inserm-00377343

HAL Id: inserm-00377343

<https://www.hal.inserm.fr/inserm-00377343>

Submitted on 21 Apr 2009

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

**Epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT):
a cancer researcher's conceptual friend and foe**

Michael W. Klymkowsky[^] & Pierre Savagner*

[^] Molecular, Cellular & Development Biology, University of Colorado, Boulder,

Boulder CO 80309 USA

* IRCM, Institut de Recherche en Cancérologie de Montpellier, INSERM U896, Montpellier, F-

34298, France

Corresponding author: Pierre Savagner
IRCM, INSERM U896,
Montpellier, F-34298, France
Tel: 33 (0)4 67 61 85 23
Fax: 33 (0)4 67 61 30 4
psavagner@valdorel.fnclcc.fr

Abbreviation: EMT: Epithelial-mesenchymal transition

Acknowledgements: MWK work is supported by NIH grant GM58004 and by an American Cancer Society Seed grant through the University of Colorado Cancer Center. PS work is supported by the Ligue Regionale contre le Cancer (Languedoc-Roussillon), and Groupement des Entreprises Francaises dans la Lutte contre le Cancer (Languedoc-Roussillon).

Abstract

Epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT) describes a series of rapid changes in cellular phenotype. Epithelial cells loosen cell-cell adhesion structures, change their polarity, modulate their cytoskeletal organization and typically become isolated, motile, and resistant to anoikis. EMT is often applied to distinct biological events as if it were a single conserved process, but in fact these processes can vary in intensity from transient depolarization to total cellular reprogramming as found by transcriptional analysis. Adjustments are therefore necessary when applying the term EMT to tumor progression. Based on clinical observations, it is more appropriate in most cases to describe the emergence of an "EMT-like" phenotype during tumor progression. This does not imply complete trans-differentiation but emphasizes the intermediary phenotype associated with tumor cell renewal and adaptation to specific microenvironments. Here, we categorize the various EMT-like phenotypes found in human carcinomas that, depending on the tumor type, may or not represent analogous stages in tumor progression. We based these categories on global tumor phenotype. Tumor microenvironment associated with stromal reactions, hypoxia, paucity of nutrients, impaired differentiation and that activation of various EMT-associated pathways, modulate overall tumor phenotype and lead to tumor heterogeneity.

The epithelial-mesenchymal transition concept: Epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT) describes a rapid and often reversible change of cell phenotype. EMT was originally defined in the context of cellular remodeling that occurs during heart morphogenesis ¹, and has been applied to a range of events, including mesoderm and neural crest formation ². The reverse process, mesenchymal-epithelial transition also occurs during development ³. During EMT, epithelial

cells loosen their characteristic cell-cell adhesion structures, change their polarity, modulate the organization of their cytoskeletal systems, switch expression from keratin- to vimentin-type intermediate filaments, and become isolated, motile, and resistant to anoikis^{4 5}.

EMT bears at least a superficial resemblance to the steps in the transition of normal to metastatic cells during epithelial tumor progression. That the concept of EMT was relevant to tumor progression was refined and explored *in vitro*, most notably by E.D. Hay, using epithelial cell models; these cells could be transformed into individualized motile cells through manipulations using growth factors or extracellular matrix components⁶. Original EMT models include the transformation of lens epithelial cells growing in collagen gels⁷, NBT-II carcinoma cells responding to fibroblast growth factor (FGF)⁸ and MDCK cells responding to hepatocyte growth factor/scatter factor (HGF/SF)⁹⁻¹¹. Over the years, many more models have been described, and a number of genes have been implicated in EMT-like behavior of tumor cell¹². As is often the case, genes active (and activated) during the course of carcinoma progression and metastasis are also active in other processes, specifically during early embryogenesis, tissue morphogenesis, wound healing^{2, 13-15}. This has led to the idea that EMT, as it occurs in the course of developmental events, is "reactivated" during tumor progression. The popularity of this idea is suggested by the fact that a recent search on "epithelial-mesenchymal transition" and "cancer" using PubMed (NCBI, NIH) yielded more than 463 references. On the other hand, the assumption that EMT is actually relevant to cancer progression has raised serious objections from pathologists who points out the lack of direct clinical evidence for EMT¹⁶. A re-evaluation of the literature suggests that there are good reasons to make a clear distinction between EMT *sensu stricto* and the EMT-like phenotype observed in carcinoma.

Relevance of EMT in the cancer environment: By definition, EMT can apply only to epithelial-derived cancers (carcinomas), which account for 90% of human tumors. To intravasate and metastasize, epithelial cells must at least transiently down-regulate their cell-cell adhesion structures¹⁴. The loss of cell-cell adhesion, however, does not make an EMT! Perhaps the major obstacle in identifying EMT-specific events is the lack of definitive markers for post-EMT cells. For example keratin expression is routinely used by pathologists to identify epithelial-derived carcinoma cells¹⁷, but cannot be used to identifying post-EMT cells since these cells should (if an actual EMT event were taking place) no longer express keratin. In fact, post-EMT epithelial cells will be phenotypically similar to (normal) vimentin-expressing stromal cells. Several groups have attempted to decipher the clonal origins of epithelial and mesenchymal components of tumors by comparative genotypic analysis using microsatellite markers²²⁻²⁵. In fact, some less common tumors such as phyllodes tumors of the prostate were found to combine stromal and epithelial components with distinct clonal origins¹⁸. However, this strategy has been problematic when applied to more prevalent mammary invasive ductal carcinomas: transformed stroma cells share chromosomal rearrangements with transformed epithelial cells, suggesting common origin, but also contain stroma specific rearrangements¹⁹⁻²¹. A clearer situation is found in carcinosarcoma, rare tumors mostly described in uterus and lung, that display a mix of epithelial and mesenchymal cell types. Most studies indicate that these tumors are derived from a common epithelial progenitor that gives rise to a mesenchymal subpopulation presumably through an EMT-like process.

"EMT-like" phenotypes in cancer: There is an important distinction to make based on the poorly differentiated state of many carcinoma cells. Their phenotype may reflect a dedifferentiation rather than a trans-differentiation process, such as occurs during EMT. From

this perspective, transformed epithelial progenitors/stem cells may simply fail to differentiate normally, rather than differentiate into mesenchymal cells. If this is the case, the use of the term EMT is inappropriate and confusing, since it is misleading about the origin of the cells (Fig. 1).

To address this issue, we suggest using the term "EMT-like" as a more descriptive and accurate term to describe the phenotypes of epithelial cancers, since it does not imply a specific mechanism or the origin of the cells described. We propose three functional criteria to define "EMT-like" phenotypes in human carcinomas: a) state of cell polarization, b) state of cell cohesiveness and c) intermediate filament protein expression. Based on these criteria we define the following four EMT-like phenotypes :

Phenotype 0: Differentiated tumor cells with preserved epithelial structure and cell polarity,

Phenotype 1: Most tumor cells display cellular depolarization¹⁵, but retain cohesive cell-cell contacts and keratin expression.

Phenotype 2: There is loss of cell-cell adhesion in most tumor cells, but the cells still express keratins.

Phenotype 3: There is loss of keratin expression and substantial expression of vimentin in most tumor cells.

Considering the phenotypic heterogeneity of most human tumors, this classification does not preclude that some tumor area may show distinct phenotypic features. That said, most tumors do display a dominant phenotype which is used by pathologist for typing. Applying this scheme to human carcinoma types we have evaluated all major human carcinoma types, based on reference works^{26,27}, original articles²⁸⁻³⁰, and our personal observations on breast and colon carcinomas typed and identified by the pathology department at CRLC Val d'Aurelle

(Montpellier, France)(Table 1). Some of the criteria we are suggesting here for "EMT-like" phenotyping are used in routine by pathologists. For example, expression of E-cadherin, a major player in epithelial cell-cell adhesion, is used to differentiate breast invasive ductal carcinoma which express E-cadherin protein and invasive lobular carcinoma that do not^{31,32}. In summary, there are limited but therapeutically significant numbers of carcinomas with phenotypes 2 and 3, involving poorly differentiated cells that may remain partially cohesive.

EMT-like behavior and tumor heterogeneity: Typically, most carcinomas display histological heterogeneity. We and others^{14, 33} have suggested that only a small percentage of tumor cells ever undergo a total (corresponding to Phenotype 3) and that it is these cells that are presumably, the source of actively metastatic cells. Perhaps the best-documented example of this is the invasive front in colorectal carcinomas. Cells in this region usually express a less differentiated "progenitor/stem cell" phenotype³⁴ together with nuclear β -catenin, indicative of active canonical Wnt signaling. They are thought to play a critical role in tumor invasive mechanism.

A link between progenitor/stem cells and EMT-like grade is expected based on the immature epithelial phenotype of precursor cells³⁴. Many genes involved in progenitor/stem cell maintenance also appear to be involved in the regulation of cell motility, EMT and EMT-like phenotypes. Among these genes CD24, CD44, CD49/Integrin α 6, CD29/Integrin β 1, and Slug (Snail2) constitute good examples³⁵⁻³⁹. Recently, work from R. Weinberg's laboratory has emphasized molecular links between EMT process and emergence of "stemness"⁴⁰. This is interesting because stemness is distinct from mesenchymal behavior.

Epithelial cells initiate migration by becoming "activated". Activation is considered a "metastable phenotype"⁴¹ that combines incomplete differentiation, cell motility and some cell-cell cohesiveness. It can be considered "EMT-like". For example, during wound healing,

immature basal keratinocytes are activated by changes in the local microenvironment and express such a metastable phenotype³⁸. Their migration involves cohort migration, in which cells migrate as groups, not isolated cells. Similarly, during mammary gland tubulogenesis, cells located at the tip of growing tubule terminal end buds (cap cells) migrate as a group entity and express specific cadherins (P-cadherin) and migrate as a group. Interfering with cell-cell adhesion disrupts rather than enhances the migratory pattern⁴². This type of behavior is similar to that displayed by carcinoma cells expressing a metastable phenotype; it explains the cellular chords and partially differentiated tubules found in mammary invasive ductal carcinoma. Total lack of cohesiveness between carcinoma cells, more representative of EMT, represents a distinct mode of invasion, present, for example, in infiltrating lobular carcinoma. This type of invasion is more insidious: while not inherently more invasive than invasive ductal carcinomas, it tends to be detected later during tumor progression, resulting in a poorer prognosis.

Old and new pathways: what happened to EMT master genes? In vitro and in vivo model systems have allowed the characterization of various pathways leading to EMT and EMT-like phenotypes. Such pathways are referred to as EMT pathways in this review, without assuming functional specificity. Five main pathways have been found to trigger EMT-associated process^{13, 14, 43}: Tyrosine kinase receptors (EGF, FGF, HGF, PDGF, IGF), integrins, Wnt, NF κ B and TGF β pathways. These pathways involve Akt, GSK3, Rho-GTPases and SMAD signaling pathways. A distinct EMT pathway has been recently described involving the protein tyrosine phosphatase Pez⁴⁴. In direct association with cancer progression, several molecules including ILEI^{12, 45}, RKIP⁴⁶, and CXCR4⁴⁷ appear to control EMT-like phenotypes and tumor metastasis in mouse models^{13, 14}. The on-set of both EMT and EMT-like events are associated with loss of cellular polarity, partial to total destabilization of cell-cell junctions, remodeling and replacement

of cytoskeletal components, the onset of cell motility and the suppression of apoptosis.

Transcriptional down regulation of junctional components accompanies the EMT process in several systems^{13,48} and may be the cause or an effect of EMT-like events.

Down-regulation of E-cadherin is linked to cell-cell dissociation and invasion in pancreas, prostate and mammary gland mouse cancer models^{49,50}. Specific transcription factors, in particular Snail (Snail1), Slug (Snail2), Twist, SIP1/Zeb and E47, negatively regulate E-cadherin expression^{51,52}, and presumably display overlapping functional redundancy, in part through their common recognition of E-box sequences. These factors appear to be involved in most physiological EMT situations. Their over-expression in epithelial cell lines usually induces an EMT^{48,51-53}. However, their specificity is clearly not restricted to E-cadherin regulation and EMT process. For example, members of the Snail family have been shown to be involved in cell motility, proliferation control, differentiation and apoptotic regulation in vivo and in cell models⁵⁴⁻⁵⁹. At the same time, detailed mechanism(s) of their effects remain unclear since cellular co-expression of Snail and E-cadherin has been described in breast and colon carcinomas by several groups^{33,60}.

Distinct pathways inducing EMT have been uncovered recently, emphasizing functional links between EMT-like phenotypes and inductive pathways specifically activated during tumor growth and progression (Fig. 2). Tumor cell growth requires an increase in local vasculature to provide metabolites and oxygen. Cells adjust to a nutritionally impoverished and hypoxic environment by activating specific pathways, associated with hypermetabolism⁶¹, glycolysis and resistance to acidosis-induced toxicity, and neoangiogenesis. Hypoxia genes have been found to be expressed locally within solid tumors, probably contributing to tumor heterogeneity⁶². The link between hypoxia and EMT has been recently strengthened by the observed activation of Snail and Twist expression by HIF-1, a key hypoxia effector⁶³⁻⁶⁵. Another hypoxia-related gene,

lysyl oxydase, was found to interact directly with Snail, but the functional significance of this interaction has been disputed^{66,67}.

Another specific feature of tumor microenvironment is the stromal reaction through which epithelial-mesenchymal interactions activate or regulate several pathways involving integrins, cytokines and growth factors that are critical for tumor growth and metastasis⁶⁸. Inflammatory cells play a major role in secreting activating factors, and NF- κ B, a key regulator of the inflammatory response has been found to regulate Slug, Snail, and Twist⁶⁹, unpublished observation). A putative role of macrophages in dragging individualized cells from mammary tumors into the bloodstream has recently been suggested in striking movies⁷⁰.

In conclusion, EMT has often been tacitly assumed to be a single conserved process, but this is by no means unambiguously established. What is clear is that EMT and EMT-like processes are influenced by the origin of the cells under consideration. Based on clinical observations, it appears more appropriate in most cases to describe the emergence of an "EMT-like" phenotype during tumor progression. This descriptive term does not necessarily imply an active dedifferentiation process but emphasizes an intermediary phenotype resulting from tumor cell renewal and adaptation to specific microenvironments. It clearly emphasizes the importance of better understanding cell population kinetics, survival and differentiation mechanisms during tumor growth and metastasis.

Figure legends

Fig 1. EMT, "EMT-like" phenotype and tumor progression in breast carcinoma. EMT-like phenotype can be interpreted in several ways. It can result from the transformation of

normally differentiated epithelial cells followed by an EMT process, generating tumor cells with poorly differentiated features (a). Conversely, "EMT-like" phenotype can result from a lack of differentiation by stem/progenitor cells, resulting in cells expressing a partially differentiated phenotype: P1 (Most tumor cells characterized by cellular depolarization but retaining cohesive cell-cell contacts and keratin expression), P2 (Loss of cell-cell adhesion in most tumor cells, still expressing keratins) or P3 (Loss of keratin and substantial expression of vimentin). These early progenitors express a metastable phenotype but do not reach an epithelial differentiated state (b). In both situations, tumor microenvironment controls cell phenotype through several tumor-specific pathways being investigated.

Fig. 2. Tumor-specific changes converge in inducing EMT phenotype. Most pathways controlling EMT-like behavior in cancer cells can be linked to specific environmental changes occurring during tumor growth and progression. Tumor cells adapt to an impoverished and hypoxic environment by activating alternative pathways to adjust to hypoxia (a) and adopting hypermetabolism (b). Tumor cells typically express a partially differentiated phenotype suggesting impairment in differentiation pathways (c). Finally, another specific feature of tumor microenvironment is the stromal reaction. Stromal and inflammatory cells play a major role in secreting activating factors and controlling tumor cells motility (d).

References

1. Bolender D, Markwald R: Epithelial-mesenchymal transformation in chick atrioventricular cushion morphogenesis., *Scan Electron Microsc* 1979, 3:313-321
2. Savagner P: Leaving the neighborhood: molecular mechanisms involved during epithelial-mesenchymal transition, *Bioessays* 2001, 23:912-923
3. Baum B, Settleman J, Quinlan M: Transitions between epithelial and mesenchymal states in development and disease., *Semin Cell Dev Biol* 2008, 19:294-308
4. Stockinger A, Eger A, Wolf J, Beug H, Foisner R: E-cadherin regulates cell growth by modulating proliferation-dependent beta-catenin transcriptional activity, *J Cell Biol* 2001, 154:1185-1196
5. Valdés F, Alvarez A, Locascio A, Vega S, Herrera B, Fernández M, Benito M, Nieto M, Fabregat I: The epithelial mesenchymal transition confers resistance to the apoptotic effects of transforming growth factor Beta in fetal rat hepatocytes., *Mol Cancer Res* 2002, 1:68-78
6. Greenburg G, Hay E: Cytodifferentiation and tissue phenotype change during transformation of embryonic lens epithelium to mesenchyme-like cells in vitro., *Dev Biol* 1986, 115:363-379
7. Greenburg G, Hay ED: Epithelia suspended in collagen gels can lose polarity and express characteristics of migrating mesenchymal cells, *J Cell Biol* 1982, 95:333-339
8. Boyer B, Tucker G, Valles A, Franke W, Thiery J: Rearrangements of desmosomal and cytoskeletal proteins during the transition from epithelial to fibroblastoid organization in cultured rat bladder carcinoma cells., *J Cell Biol* 1989, 109:1495-1509

9. Li Y, Joseph A, Bhargava M, Rosen E, Nakamura T, Goldberg I: Effect of scatter factor and hepatocyte growth factor on motility and morphology of MDCK cells., *In Vitro Cell Dev Biol.* 1992, 28:364-368
10. Uehara Y, Kitamura N: Expression of a human hepatocyte growth factor/scatter factor cDNA in MDCK epithelial cells influences cell morphology, motility, and anchorage-independent growth, *J Cell Biol* 1992, 17:889-894
11. Weidner K, Sachs M, Birchmeier W: The Met receptor tyrosine kinase transduces motility, proliferation, and morphogenic signals of scatter factor/hepatocyte growth factor in epithelial cells, *J Cell Biol* 1993, 121:145-154
12. Waerner T, Alacakaptan M, Tamir I, Oberauer R, Gal A, Brabletz T, Schreiber M, Jechlinger M, Beug H: ILEI: a cytokine essential for EMT, tumor formation, and late events in metastasis in epithelial cells, *Cancer Cell* 2006, 10:227-239
13. Thiery JP, Sleeman JP: Complex networks orchestrate epithelial-mesenchymal transitions, *Nat Rev Mol Cell Biol* 2006, 7:131-142
14. Bex G, Raspe E, Christofori G, Thiery JP, Sleeman JP: Pre-EMTing metastasis? Recapitulation of morphogenetic processes in cancer, *Clin Exp Metastasis* 2007, 24:587-597
15. Dow LE, Humbert PO: Polarity regulators and the control of epithelial architecture, cell migration, and tumorigenesis, *Int rev cytology* 2007, 262:253-302
16. Tarin D, Thompson EW, Newgreen DF: The fallacy of epithelial mesenchymal transition in neoplasia, *Cancer Res* 2005, 65:5996-6000; discussion 6000-5991
17. Barak V, Goike H, Panaretakis KW, Einarsson R: Clinical utility of cytokeratins as tumor markers, *Clin Biochem* 2004, 37:529-540

18. McCarthy R, Zhang S, Bostwick D, Qian J, Eble J, Wang M, Lin H, Cheng L: Molecular genetic evidence for different clonal origins of epithelial and stromal components of phyllodes tumor of the prostate., *Am J Pathol* 2004, 165:1395-1400
19. Fukino K, Shen L, Matsumoto S, Morrison C, Mutte rG, Eng C: Combined total genome loss of heterozygosity scan of breast cancer stroma and epithelium reveals multiplicity of stromal targets., *Cancer Res* 2004, 64:7231-7236
20. Moinfar F, Man YG, Arnould L, Bratthauer GL, Ratschek M, Tavassoli FA: Concurrent and independent genetic alterations in the stromal and epithelial cells of mammary carcinoma: implications for tumorigenesis, *Cancer Res* 2000, 60:2562-2566
21. Howe JR, Roth S, Ringold JC, Summers RW, Jarvinen HJ, Sistonen P, Tomlinson IP, Houlston RS, Bevan S, Mitros FA, Stone EM, Aaltonen LA: Mutations in the SMAD4/DPC4 gene in juvenile polyposis, *Science* 1998, 280:1086-1088
22. Halachmi S, DeMarzo A, Chow N, Halachmi N, Smith A, Linn J, Nativ O, Epstein J, Schoenberg M, Sidransky D: Genetic alterations in urinary bladder carcinosarcoma: evidence of a common clonal origin, *Eur Urol.* 2000, 37:350-357
23. Dacic S, Finkelstein S, Sasatomi E, Swalsky P, Yousem S: Molecular pathogenesis of pulmonary carcinosarcoma as determined by microdissection-based allelotyping., *Am J Surg Pathol.* 2002, 26:510-516
24. Fujii H, Yoshida M, Gong Z, Matsumoto T, Hamano Y, Fukunaga M, Hruban R, Gabrielson E, Shirai T: Frequent genetic heterogeneity in the clonal evolution of gynecological carcinosarcoma and its influence on phenotypic diversity, *Cancer Res* 2000, 60:114-120
25. Thompson L, Chang B, Barsky S: Monoclonal origins of malignant mixed tumors (carcinosarcomas). Evidence for a divergent histogenesis, *Am J Surg Pathol* 1996, 20:277-285

26. Rosai J, Ackerman L: Surgical Pathology, ninth edition. Edited by New York, Mosby, 2004.
27. Kufe DW, Pollock RE, Weichselbaum RR, Bast RC, Jr, Gansler TS, Holland JF, Frei III E: Cancer Medicine. Edited by Hamilton (Canada), BC Decker, 2003.
28. Hu L, Lau S, Tzang C, Wen J, Wang W, Xie D, Huang M, Wang Y, Wu M, Huang J, Zeng W, Sham J, Yang M, Guan X: Association of Vimentin overexpression and hepatocellular carcinoma metastasis, *Oncogene* 2004, 23:298-302
29. Ngan C, Yamamoto H, Seshimo I, Tsujino T, Mani M, Ikeda J, Konishi K, Takemasa I, Ikeda M, Sekimoto M, Matsuura N, Monden M: Quantitative evaluation of vimentin expression in tumour stroma of colorectal cancer, *Br J Cancer* 2007, 96:986-992
30. Biernat W, Kordek R, Liberski P, Woźniak L: Carcinosarcoma of the skin. Case report and literature review., *Am J Dermatopathol* 1996, 6:614-619
31. Derksen PWB, Liu X, Saridin F, van der Gulden H, Zevenhoven J, Evers B, van Beijnum JR, Griffioen AW, Vink J, Krimpenfort P, Peterse JL, Cardiff RD, Berns A, Jonkers J: Somatic inactivation of E-cadherin and p53 in mice leads to metastatic lobular mammary carcinoma through induction of anoikis resistance and angiogenesis, *Cancer cell* 2006, 10:437-449
32. Moll R, Mitze M, Frixen U, Birchmeier W: Differential loss of E-cadherin expression in infiltrating ductal and lobular breast carcinomas, *Am J Pathol* 1993, 143:1731-1742
33. Come C, Magnino F, Bibeau F, De Santa Barbara P, Becker KF, Theillet C, Savagner P: Snail and slug play distinct roles during breast carcinoma progression, *Clin cancer res* 2006, 12:5395-5402
34. Brabletz T, Jung A, Spaderna S, Hlubek F, Kirchner T: Opinion: migrating cancer stem cells - an integrated concept of malignant tumour progression, *Nat Rev Cancer* 2005, 5:744-749

35. Brakebusch C, Fassler R: beta 1 integrin function in vivo: adhesion, migration and more, *Cancer met rev* 2005, 24:403-411
36. Baumann P, Cremers N, Kroese F, Orend G, Chiquet-Ehrismann R, Uede T, Yagita H, Sleeman JP: CD24 expression causes the acquisition of multiple cellular properties associated with tumor growth and metastasis, *Cancer res* 2005, 65:10783-10793
37. Hamilton SR, Fard SF, Paiwand FF, Tolg C, Veiseh M, Wang C, McCarthy JB, Bissell MJ, Koropatnick J, Turley EA: The hyaluronan receptors CD44 and Rhamm (CD168) form complexes with ERK1,2 that sustain high basal motility in breast cancer cells, *J biol chem* 2007, 282:16667-16680
38. Savagner P, Kusewitt DF, Carver EA, Magnino F, Choi C, Gridley T, Hudson LG: Developmental transcription factor slug is required for effective re-epithelialization by adult keratinocytes, *J Cell Physiol* 2005, 202:858-866
39. Storci G, Sansone P, Trere D, Tavolari S, Ta^oÄurelli M, Ceccarelli C, Guarnieri T, Paterini P, Pariali M, Montanaro L, Santini D, Chieco P, Bonafe M: The basal-like breast carcinoma phenotype is regulated by SLUG gene expression, *J Pathol* 2008, 214:25-37
40. Mani S, Guo W, Liao M, Eaton E, Ayyanan A, Zhou A, Brooks M, Reinhard F, Zhang C, Shipitsin M, Campbel IL, Polyak K, Brisken C, Yang J, Weinberg R: The epithelial-mesenchymal transition generates cells with properties of stem cells., *Cell* 2008, 133:704-715
41. Lee JM, Dedhar S, Kalluri R, Thompson EW: The epithelial-mesenchymal transition: new insights in signaling, development, and disease, *J Cell Biol* 2006, 172:973-981
42. Daniel CW, Strickland P, Friedmann Y: Expression and functional role of E- and P-cadherins in mouse mammary ductal morphogenesis and growth, *Dev Biol* 1995, 169:511-519
43. Moustakas A, Heldin C-H: Signaling networks guiding epithelial-mesenchymal transitions during embryogenesis and cancer progression, *Cancer science* 2007, 98:1512-1520

44. Wyatt L, Wadham C, Crocker LA, Lardelli M, Khew-Goodall Y: The protein tyrosine phosphatase Pez regulates TGFbeta, epithelial-mesenchymal transition, and organ development, *J Cell Biol* 2007, 178:1223-1235
45. Mackenzie NC, Raz E: Found in translation: A new player in EMT, *Dev Cell* 2006, 11:434-436
46. Beach S, Tang H, Park S, Dhillon AS, Keller ET, Kolch W, Yeung KC: Snail is a repressor of RKIP transcription in metastatic prostate cancer cells, *Oncogene* 2007,
47. Yoon Y, Liang Z, Zhang X, Choe M, Zhu A, Cho HT, Shin DM, Goodman MM, Chen ZG, Shim H: CXC chemokine receptor-4 antagonist blocks both growth of primary tumor and metastasis of head and neck cancer in xenograft mouse models, *Cancer Res* 2007, 67:7518-7524
48. Savagner P, Yamada KM, Thiery JP: The zinc-finger protein slug causes desmosome dissociation, an initial and necessary step for growth factor-induced epithelial-mesenchymal transition, *J Cell Biol* 1997, 137:1403-1419
49. Perl AK, Wilgenbus P, Dahl U, Semb H, Christofori G: A causal role for E-cadherin in the transition from adenoma to carcinoma, *Nature* 1998, 392:190-193
50. Derksen PW, Liu X, Saridin F, van der Gulden H, Zevenhoven J, Evers B, van Beijnum JR, Griffioen AW, Vink J, Krimpenfort P, Peterse JL, Cardiff RD, Berns A, Jonkers J: Somatic inactivation of E-cadherin and p53 in mice leads to metastatic lobular mammary carcinoma through induction of anoikis resistance and angiogenesis, *Cancer Cell* 2006, 10:437-449
51. Batlle E, Sancho E, Franci C, Dominguez D, Monfar M, Baulida J, Garcia De Herreros A: The transcription factor snail is a repressor of E-cadherin gene expression in epithelial tumour cells, *Nat Cell Biol* 2000, 2:84-89

52. Bolos V, Peinado H, Perez-Moreno MA, Fraga MF, Esteller M, Cano A: The transcription factor Slug represses E-cadherin expression and induces epithelial to mesenchymal transitions: a comparison with Snail and E47 repressors, *J Cell Sci* 2003, 116:499-511
53. Yang J, Mani S, Donaher J, Ramaswamy S, Itzykson R, Come C, Savagner P, Gitelman I, Richardson A, Weinberg R: Twist, a master regulator of morphogenesis, plays an essential role in tumor metastasis., *Cell* 2004, 17:927-939
54. Barrallo-Gimeno A, Nieto MA: The Snail genes as inducers of cell movement and survival: implications in development and cancer, *Development* 2005, 132:3151-3161
55. Castro Alves C, Rosivatz E, Schott C, Hollweck R, Becker I, Sarbia M, Carneiro F, Becker KF: Slug is overexpressed in gastric carcinomas and may act synergistically with SIP1 and Snail in the down-regulation of E-cadherin, *J Pathology* 2007, 211:507-515
56. Kajita M, McClinic KN, Wade PA: Aberrant expression of the transcription factors snail and slug alters the response to genotoxic stress, *Mol cell biol* 2004, 24:7559-7566
57. Perez-Mancera PA, Gonzelez-Herrero I, Perez-Caro M, Gutierrez-Cianca N, Flores T, Gutierrez-Adan A, Pintado B, Sanchez-Martin M, Sanchez-Garcia I: SLUG in cancer development, *Oncogene* 2005, 24:3073-3082
58. Wu WS, Heinrichs S, Xu D, Garrison SP, Zambetti GP, Adams JM, Look AT: Slug antagonizes p53-mediated apoptosis of hematopoietic progenitors by repressing puma, *Cell* 2005, 123:641-653
59. Zhang C, Carl TF, Trudeau ED, Simmet T, Klymkowsky MW: An NF-kappaB and slug regulatory loop active in early vertebrate mesoderm, *PLoS ONE* 2006, 1:e106
60. Becker KF, Rosivatz E, Blechschmidt K, Kremmer E, Sarbia M, Hofler H: Analysis of the E-cadherin repressor Snail in primary human cancers, *Cells tissues, organs* 2007, 185:204-212

61. Arias JI, Aller MA, Arias J: Cancer cell: using inflammation to invade the host, *Mol Cancer* 2007, 6:29
62. Harris AL: Hypoxia--a key regulatory factor in tumour growth, *Nat Rev Cancer* 2002, 2:38-47
63. Imai T, Horiuchi A, Wang C, Oka K, Ohira S, Nikaido T, Konishi I: Hypoxia attenuates the expression of E-cadherin via up-regulation of SNAIL in ovarian carcinoma cells, *Am J Pathol* 2003, 163:1437-1447
64. Evans AJ, Russell RC, Roche O, Burry TN, Fish JE, Chow VW, Kim WY, Saravanan A, Maynard MA, Gervais ML, Sufan RI, Roberts AM, Wilson LA, Betten M, Vandewalle C, Berx G, Marsden PA, Irwin MS, Teh BT, Jewett MA, Ohh M: VHL promotes E2 box-dependent E-cadherin transcription by HIF-mediated regulation of SIP1 and snail, *Mol Cell Biol* 2007, 27:157-169
65. Yang M, Wu K: TWIST activation by hypoxia inducible factor-1 (HIF-1): implications in metastasis and development., *Cell Cycle* 2008, 15:2090-2096
66. Peinado H, Del Carmen Iglesias-de la Cruz M, Olmeda D, Csiszar K, Fong KS, Vega S, Nieto MA, Cano A, Portillo F: A molecular role for lysyl oxidase-like 2 enzyme in snail regulation and tumor progression, *Embo J* 2005, 24:3446-3458
67. Min C, Kirsch KH, Zhao Y, Jeay S, Palamakumbura AH, Trackman PC, Sonenshein GE: The tumor suppressor activity of the lysyl oxidase propeptide reverses the invasive phenotype of Her-2/neu-driven breast cancer, *Cancer Res* 2007, 67:1105-1112
68. Tlsty TD, Coussens LM: Tumor stroma and regulation of cancer development, *Annu Rev Pathol* 2006, 1:119-150
69. Zhang C, Carl T, Trudeau E, Simmet T, Klymkowsky M: An NF-kappaB and slug regulatory loop active in early vertebrate mesoderm., *PLoS ONE* 2006, 1:e106

70. Wyckoff JB, Wang Y, Lin EY, Li JF, Goswami S, Stanley ER, Segall JE, Pollard JW, Condeelis J: Direct visualization of macrophage-assisted tumor cell intravasation in mammary tumors, *Cancer Res* 2007, 67:2649-2656

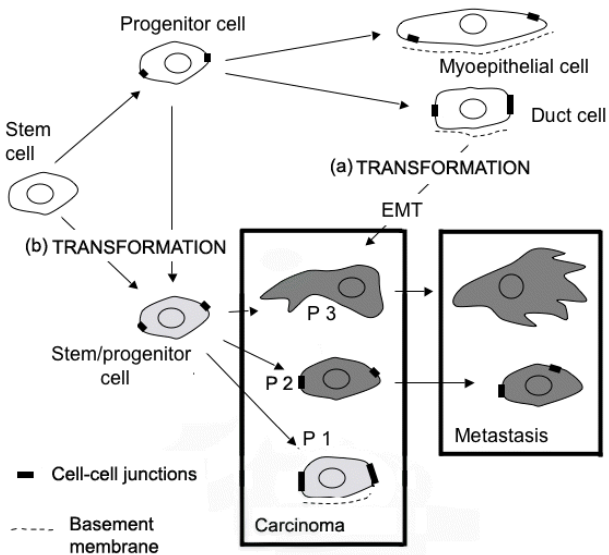


Fig. 1

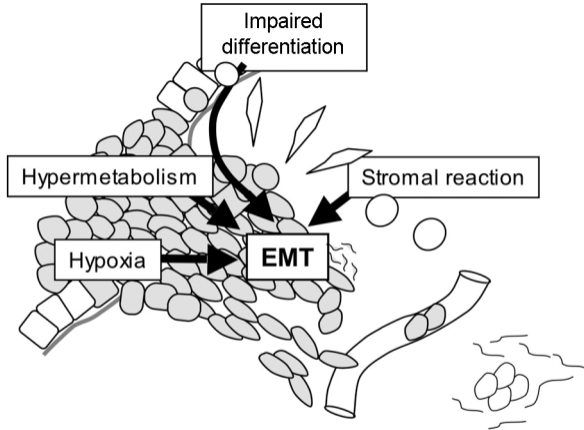


Fig 2

Bladder Cancer	Transitional cell carcinoma	Papillary	3
		Solid	3
	Carcinosarcoma		1
Breast Cancer	Invasive ductal carcinoma		3
	Infiltrating Lobular carcinoma		2
	Carcinosarcoma		1
Colon and Rectal Cancer	Adenocarcinomas		3a
	Carcinosarcoma		1
Anal Cancer	Epidermoid carcinoma		3
Endometrial Cancer	Adenocarcinomas		3
	Carcinosarcoma		1
Ovarian cancer	Serous and Mucinous carcinoma		3
Testicular cancer	Embryonal carcinoma, teratocarcinoma		1
Gastric cancer	Diffuse gastric cancer		2
	Intestinal gastric cancer		3
Head and neck cancer	carcinoma (squamous cell carcinoma)		3
Kidney (Renal Cell) Cancer	Wilms		2
	Renal cell carcinoma		3
Liver cancer	Hepatocellular carcinoma		3
Lung Cancer	Squamous cell carcinomas		3
	Adenocarcinoma		3
	small cell lung carcinoma		3b
	Spindle-cell carcinoma		2
	Carcinosarcoma		1
Pancreatic Cancer	Adenocarcinomas		3
Prostate Cancer	Adenocarcinomas		3
	Carcinosarcoma		1
Skin Cancer	Basal cell cancer		3
	Squamous cell cancer		3
	spindle cell squamous cell		1
	Melanoma		3
Thyroid Cancer	Adenocarcinoma		3
	Anaplastic carcinomas		2
Malignant mesothelioma		1	

Table 1. EMT-like phenotypes in human carcinomas. we selected three functional criteria to define "EMT-like" phenotypes in human carcinomas, ranging from partial to total EMT-like phenotype: a) state of cell polarization, b) state of cell cohesiveness and c) intermediate filament expression. Combination of these criteria helped us define the following four EMT-like phenotypes: Phenotype 0: Differentiated tumor cells with preserved epithelial structure and cell polarity, Phenotype 1: Most tumor cells characterized by cellular depolarization. However, they retain cohesive cell-cell contacts and the expression of keratins. Phenotype 2: Loss of cell-cell adhesion in most tumor cells, still expressing keratins. Phenotype 3: Loss of keratin and substantial expression of vimentin