Title: Every CFTR variant counts – Target-capture based Next-Generation-Sequencing for Molecular Diagnosis in the German CF Registry

Lay Title: Unlocking the Secrets of Cystic Fibrosis: A Genetic Study of people with CF in Germany

Authors: Simone Ahting\textsuperscript{a}, Lutz Nährlich\textsuperscript{b}, Inka Held\textsuperscript{c}, Constance Henn\textsuperscript{d}, Angelika Krill\textsuperscript{e}, Kerstin Landwehr\textsuperscript{f}, Jochen Meister\textsuperscript{g}, Susanne Nährig\textsuperscript{h}, Anna Nolde\textsuperscript{i}, Katharina Remkel, Renate Ruppel\textsuperscript{k}, Annette Sauer-Heilborn\textsuperscript{l}, Martin Schebek\textsuperscript{m}, Gudrun Schopper\textsuperscript{n}, Bernhard Schulte-Hubbert\textsuperscript{o}, Carsten Schwarz\textsuperscript{p}, Christina Smaczny\textsuperscript{q}, Sabine Wege\textsuperscript{r}, Registry working group of the German CF Registry, Julia Hentschel\textsuperscript{a}

Affiliations: 
\textsuperscript{a} Institute of Human Genetics, University Medical Center Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany 
\textsuperscript{b} Department of Pediatrics, Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Giessen, Germany 
\textsuperscript{c} Pediatric Practice Friesenweg, Cystic Fibrosis Center Altona, Hamburg, Germany 
\textsuperscript{d} Division of pediatric Pulmonology and Allergology, Hospital for children and adolescents, University Medical Center Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany 
\textsuperscript{e} Division of Pneumology, University Medical Center Homburg, Homburg/Saar, Germany 
\textsuperscript{f} Division of Allergology and Pediatric Pneumology, University Children's Hospital Bethel, University Medical Center Ostwestfalen-Lippe, Bielefeld, Germany 
\textsuperscript{g} Division of Pneumology, Allergology and Psychotherapy, Children’s Hospital, Helios Hospital Aue, Aue, Germany 
\textsuperscript{h} Cystic Fibrosis Center for Adults, Med. Klinik V, University Hospital LMU, Munich, Germany 
\textsuperscript{i} Division of Pneumology, II. Department of Medicine and University Transplant Center, University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Hamburg, Germany 
\textsuperscript{j} Department for General Paediatrics, Neonatology and Paediatric Cardiology, University Hospital Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany 
\textsuperscript{k} University Children’s Hospital, University Medical Center Erlangen, Erlangen, Germany 
\textsuperscript{l} Department of Respiratory Medicine, Hannover Medical School, Hannover, Germany 
\textsuperscript{m} Division of Pediatric Pneumology, Center for Pediatric and Women’s Medicine Kassel, Kassel, Germany 
\textsuperscript{n} University Children’s Hospital Schwabing, Technical University of Munich, Munich, Germany
What was your research question?
We aimed to better understand cystic fibrosis (CF) by improving the methods we are using to identify the gene mutations that cause CF (within a gene called CFTR). Knowing the exact mutations can help doctors pick the best treatments.

Why is this important?
CF is a serious genetic disorder, and treatment plans can differ based on the exact gene mutations a person with CF has. Understanding these genetic details can help doctors make the best treatment choices and consequently improve quality of life for people with CF. Currently, we focus our analysis on only a portion of the gene that causes CF, but mutations can occur within the whole gene. So in order to identify the gene mutations for all people with CF it is important to also explore the regions that are not studied in traditional genetic analyses.

What did you do?
We used advanced DNA testing methods, called Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS), to look at the entire CFTR gene. We studied 655 people with CF who gave consent for the German CF Registry. We identified not only common mutations but also some that had never been seen before. We also corrected errors in the Registry data to ensure that the information is accurate and up-to-date.

What did you find?
Our in-depth exploration of the CFTR gene of hundreds of people with CF revealed several important findings. First, many people had mutations that are not typically tested for, underlining the need for comprehensive genetic testing. Second, we found 43 new mutations never described before. This could potentially change how we understand and treat people with CF.
with CF. Third, a significant number of mutations were uncertain, requiring further studies to understand their impact on a person’s health.

What does this mean and reasons for caution?
Our study provides a more complete picture of CF gene mutations in Germany. This can help in personalized treatment plans, inform family members who might be at risk, and help in developing new therapies. However, our methodology has its limitations and not all mutations we found are fully understood yet.

What’s next?
Next, we recommend a two-step genetic testing strategy: an initial basic test followed by a comprehensive one if needed. This could speed up finding the right treatments for people with CF, especially those with rare mutations.

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