

Regulatory heterogeneity of neuroendocrine tumors

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Treating patients with lung neuroendocrine tumors is challenging. The two main challenges are the lack of effective drug treatments and the lack of reliable biomarkers to guide management, since patients with the same tumor grade/stage often have different clinical courses. The genetic, epigenetic and developmental programs that drive lung neuroendocrine tumors remain obscure, limiting our abilities to suggest new biomarkers and drug targets. We are working to systematically characterize the regulatory programs of lung neuroendocrine tumors to address this gap. We will share our current progress on the project and plans for the future.

We are characterizing putative enhancers (by H3K27ac ChIP-seq) and transcriptomes (by RNA-seq) of neuroendocrine tumors, to identify the regulatory networks the underlies these tumors. Using these methods, we have recently successfully identified regulatory and developmental subtypes of pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors [1], and matching biomarkers that demonstrated clear clinical prognostic value. We are currently characterizing and analyzing lung neuroendocrine tumors, and comparing them amongst themselves as well as to existing profiles of other neuroendocrine tumors.

We have characterized putative enhancers and transcriptomes of 12 primary typical lung neuroendocrine tumors. Clustering of the enhancer profiles revealed two or three novel subtypes. Analysis of the regulatory and transcriptional programs of the different subtypes revealed they rely on different signaling pathway, suggesting they may respond to different tyrosine kinase inhibitors.

We are now in the process of validating the newly identified subtypes across larger cohorts, and setting up experimental models to test the response to different tyrosine kinase inhibitors. In addition, we are aiming to characterize atypical lung neuroendocrine tumors, and compare them to the typical tumors we profiled.

References

[1] Enhancer signatures stratify and predict outcomes of non-functional pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors. Cejas P*, Drier Y*#, Dreijerink KMA, Brosens LAA, Deshpande V, Epstein CB, Conemans EB, Morsink FHM, Graham MK, Valk GD, Vriens MR, Castillo CF, Ferrone CR, Adar T, Bowden M, Whitton HJ, Da Silva A, Font-Tello A, Long HW, Gaskell E, Shores N, Heaphy CM, Sicinska E, Kulke MH, Chung DC, Bernstein BE#, Shivdasani RA#. *Nature Medicine*, 25, 1260–1265 (2019).

Enhancer signatures stratify and predict outcomes of non-functional pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors

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Most pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors (PNETs) do not produce excess hormones and are therefore considered 'non-functional'¹⁻³. As clinical behaviors vary widely and distant metastases are eventually lethal^{2,4}, biological classifications might guide treatment. Using enhancer maps to infer gene regulatory programs, we find that non-functional PNETs fall into two major subtypes, with epigenomes and transcriptomes that partially resemble islet α - and β -cells. Transcription factors ARX and PDX1 specify these normal cells, respectively^{5,6}, and 84% of 142 non-functional PNETs expressed one or the other factor, occasionally both. Among 103 cases, distant relapses occurred almost exclusively in patients with ARX⁺PDX1⁻ tumors and, within this subtype, in cases with alternative lengthening of telomeres. These markedly different outcomes belied similar clinical presentations and histology and, in one cohort, occurred irrespective of MEN1 mutation. This robust molecular stratification provides insight into cell lineage correlates of non-functional PNETs, accurately predicts disease course and can inform postoperative clinical decisions.

Surgery is recommended for solitary PNETs larger than 2 cm and the World Health Organization (WHO) grade is the best current tool to predict metastasis^{7,8}. Insulinomas resemble normal pancreatic β -cells and carry a good prognosis^{1,2}, but the lineage of most non-functional PNETs is obscure and about half the cases progress to lethal metastasis months to years after surgery^{1,2,9}. Although 70% of PNETs carry MEN1, ATRX or DAXX gene mutations, and 15% activate mammalian target of rapamycin signaling^{10,11}, no mutation

or biological feature is sufficiently correlated with clinical outcomes to guide prognosis or therapy^{3,8}. Alternative lengthening of telomeres (ALT) is associated with ATRX or DAXX loss and elevated risk of recurrence¹²⁻¹⁴, but is not a routine clinical test.

Cellular identities are encoded in chromatin states defined by the complement of active *cis*-elements, where nucleosomes bear H3K4me1/2, H3K27ac and other covalent marks^{15,16}. 'Super' or 'stretch' enhancers, which control lineage-specifying genes^{17,18}, especially delineate cell-specific chromatin signatures¹⁹ and help nominate tumor cell origins²⁰. Chromatin immunoprecipitation sequencing (ChIP-seq)-derived profiles of H3K27ac-marked candidate enhancers in 8 frozen, primary non-functional, pancreatic and 22 intestinal neuroendocrine (NE; carcinoid) tumors (see Supplementary Table 1) differed substantially from those of gastrointestinal carcinomas and less so from each other (Fig. 1a). Loci expressed in the two NE tumor types, such as *SYP*, were similarly marked in both, whereas organ-restricted loci, such as *CDX2*, were marked selectively (Fig. 1b). Super-enhancer profiles, distinct from those of normal islets (Fig. 1c), revealed three PNET subtypes. Considering A and B types as separate groups, 288 enhancers showed more than twofold higher H3K27ac in type A (false discovery rate (FDR) < 0.05—see Supplementary Table 2), with sites in α -cell-specific loci ARX and *IRX2* showing especially large differences (Fig. 1d). Conversely, 104 regions showed notably more H3K27ac in B-type tumors, including enhancers over genes such as *PDX1* and *SLC17A6*, which are not expressed in α -cells^{21,22}.

Across the eight PNETs, A- and B-type tumors gave strong H3K27ac signals at ARX and *IRX2* or at *PDX1*, respectively, whereas

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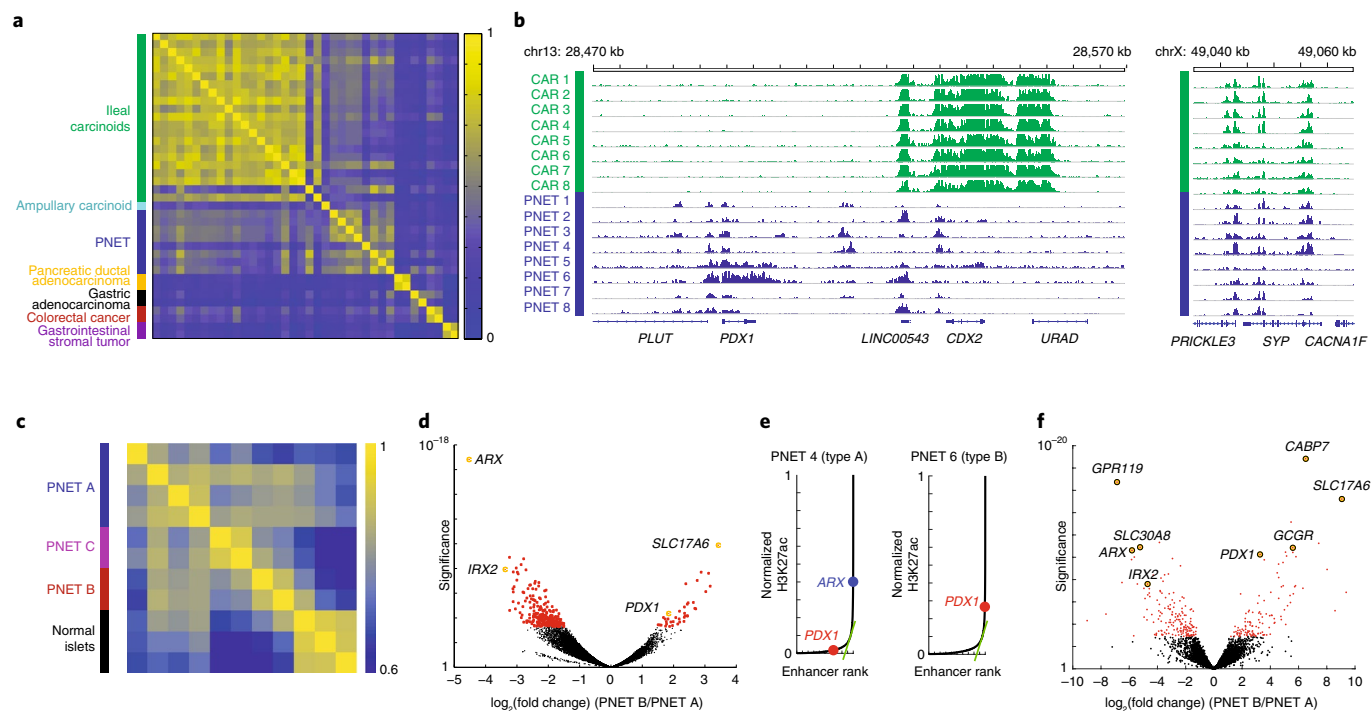


Fig. 1 | Distinctive PNET enhancer profiles. **a**, Pairwise Pearson's correlations of H3K27ac signals at distal regulatory elements in diverse gastrointestinal cancers. PNETs and carcinoid (small intestinal NE) tumors differ from others, reflecting distinct cell origins. Whereas intestinal NE enhancer landscapes are highly concordant, PNETs appear heterogeneous. **b**, Representative H3K27ac ChIP-seq tracks (16 of 30 samples), showing differential acetylation at the *CDX2* and *PDX1* loci; intronic *SYP* enhancers are marked in both intestinal (green) and pancreatic (blue) NETs. ChIP-seq read counts were scaled by DESeq2 normalization based on promoter signals (see Methods). **c**, Pearson's correlations of super-enhancer H3K27ac signals in PNETs and normal pancreatic islets suggest three possible disease subtypes. **d**, Significance (\log_{10} scale, Wald's test) and \log_2 fold differences in H3K27ac ChIP-seq signals in A- and B-type PNETs, calculated by DESeq2 comparison of six biologically independent tumors. Each dot represents an individual site (red: FDR < 0.05). Selected H3K27ac sites are colored yellow and annotated by the nearest gene. **e**, Normalized H3K27ac signals across all sites (super-enhancers lie to the right of the inflection) in single representative type A and type B tumors from six samples. **f**, Significance (\log_{10} scale, Wald's test) and \log_2 fold differences of normalized mRNA read counts in A- and B-type PNETs ($n=8$ biologically independent tumors) considered as two groups. Each dot represents an individual gene (red: FDR < 0.05). Left and right: transcripts enriched in types A and B, respectively. Transcripts associated with selected super-enhancers, including those highlighted in **d**, are indicated (yellow).

C-type tumors were variably marked at these loci and expressed low levels of *ARX* and *PDX1* messenger RNAs (mRNAs) (see Extended Data Fig. 1a). In individual A- and B-type tumors, *ARX* and *PDX1* met objective super-enhancer criteria¹⁹, respectively (Fig. 1e). At these and other loci, ChIP-seq for H3K4me2 (ref.²³) on the original eight and four additional PNETs (see Supplementary Table 1) revealed similar patterns to H3K27ac (see Extended Data Fig. 1a—H3K4me2 marks the *PDX1* promoter in all PNETs, but only B-type tumors carry locus-wide H3K4me2). Aggregate (Fig. 1f) and individual (see Extended Data Fig. 1b) comparisons of A- and B-type PNET transcriptomes (see Supplementary Table 3) showed differential *ARX* and *PDX1* expression.

Knowledge of pancreatic endocrine ontogeny derives largely from studies of mouse development²⁴. *NEUROG3* initiates the endocrine lineage and *ARX* specifies α -cell fate⁵, whereas *PAX4* drives β -cell differentiation²⁵; absence of both factors favors the δ lineage²⁶. *ARX* is necessary for α -cell differentiation²⁷, but other transcription factors (TFs, for example *NKX2.2*, *PAX6*, *PDX1*) sustain β -cells^{6,28–31}. In embryos, early α -cell specification leads to *Insulin* and *Glucagon* co-expressing bipotential precursors, followed by β -cell differentiation³²; forced transdifferentiation between α - and β -cells also occurs through intermediate *Insulin*⁺ *Glucagon*⁺ cells²⁹. In this light, we compared A- and B-type PNET-restricted enhancers (Fig. 1d) with areas of chromatin selectively open in normal α - or β -cells³³. Type A regions were highly enriched

for α -cell-specific sites (62 shared, $P < 1.1 \times 10^{-18}$), whereas type B-specific enhancers were enriched for β -cell-restricted sites (15 shared, $P < 1.7 \times 10^{-5}$; see Supplementary Table 4). Comparison with RNA profiles of fractionated normal human islets³⁴ also revealed enrichment of α - and β -cell-specific transcripts in A- ($P < 1.6 \times 10^{-9}$) and B-type ($P < 6.2 \times 10^{-16}$) PNETs, respectively. Differential TF expression distinguished PNETs better than *Glucagon* and *Insulin* mRNA levels, which were generally low and similar in the two subtypes (see Extended Data Fig. 1b).

From H3K27ac ChIP-seq on 13 additional frozen PNETs (validation cohort), tumors were designated as: type A if signals were high (>500 reads per kb per million sequence tags (RPKM)) at *ARX* and *IRX2* but absent or low (<250 RPKM) at *PDX1*; type B if the *ARX* locus was largely unmarked (<250 RPKM); and type C if read counts at *ARX* and *PDX1* were comparable. Although A or C typing was ambiguous in two PNETs, the B type was easily identified by lack of H3K27ac at *ARX*. Similar to the discovery set, the validation cohort readily distinguished type B from other PNETs by H3K27ac signals at α -cell/type A- and β -cell/type B-specific enhancers (Fig. 2 and see Extended Data Fig. 1c). Moreover, *ARX* and *PDX1* immunostains gave the expected signals in normal human islets (see Extended Data Fig. 2a,b) and, importantly, 15 independent, additional, non-functional PNETs showed mutually exclusive, nucleus-dominant, *ARX* or *PDX1* expression in 10 tumors (67%); 5 cases lacked or co-expressed both TFs (Fig. 3a).

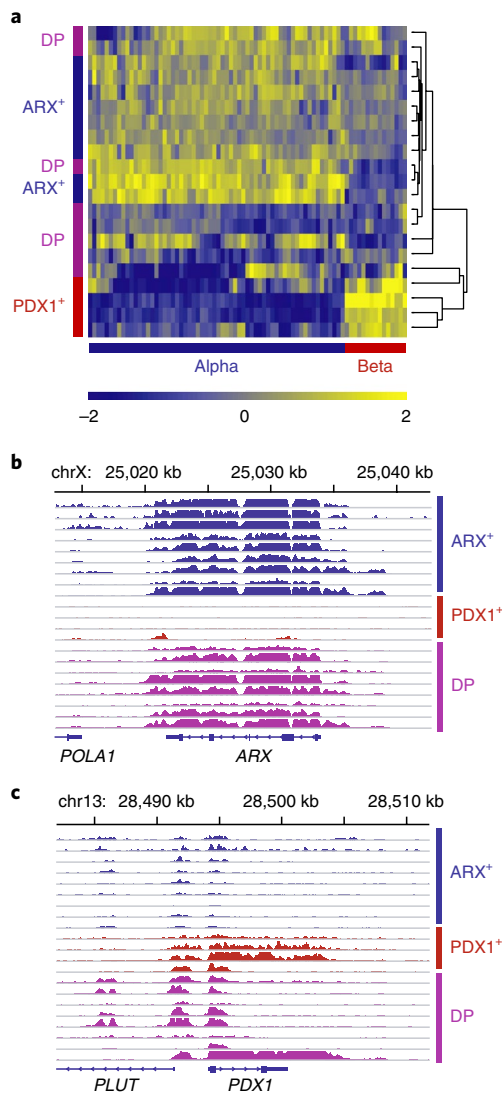


Fig. 2 | PNET subtypes represent distinct endocrine lineages. **a**, Relative H3K27ac ChIP-seq signals in all 21 PNETs (8 from the discovery set + 13 additional) of types A (ARX⁺), B (PDX1⁺) and C (DP) at enhancers that are specific to A versus B PNETs (Fig. 1d) and α - versus β -cells³³. **b,c**, Genomic views of the ARX (**b**) and PDX1 (**c**) loci, showing H3K27ac signals for all 21 PNETs. chr, chromosome. ChIP-seq signals are scaled by promoter-based DESeq2 normalization (see Methods).

Next tissue microarrays were examined that represented 77 Dutch PNETs³⁵, 61 of which (79%) had germline *MEN1* mutations, including 13 insulinomas associated with hyperinsulinemia (see Supplementary Table 5). Overall, 34 of the 77 cases showed nuclear expression of ARX only (31% type A), 31 expressed only PDX1 (37% type B) and 12 cases were either double-positive (DP) or double-negative (DN—8% each; Fig. 3b and see Extended Data Fig. 2b). When present, the immunohistochemistry (IHC) signals for PDX1 were uniformly strong and every insulinoma, scored blindly, expressed only PDX1. Although equally unambiguous, ARX signals varied in strength across type A tumors (see Extended Data Fig. 2c), so some DN tumors may represent technical failure of IHC, whereas others may represent type A PNETs with low ARX expression. DP tumor cells largely co-express ARX and PDX1 (Fig. 3c and see Extended Data Fig. 3a), possibly representing a dual lineage. *MEN1* mutations did not skew the proportions of A and B tumors (Fig. 3b).

H3K4me2 and mRNAs were profiled in selected tumors from the Dutch cohort using fixed-tissue chromatin immunoprecipitation sequencing (FiT-seq)³⁶ and RNA sequencing (RNA-seq). PNETs, identified by IHC as ARX⁺ or PDX1⁺, expressed exclusively those mRNAs and showed abundant H3K4me2 only at the corresponding super-enhancers; DP tumors (type C) expressed both ARX and *PDX1* mRNAs, with less pronounced enhancer marks at both loci (Fig. 3d). Of note, no PNETs in this group expressed somatostatin (*SST*) (see Extended Data Fig. 3b). FiT-seq for H3K27ac and immunostaining on representative formalin-fixed, paraffin-embedded (FFPE) samples from the discovery cohort also revealed concordance (see Extended Data Fig. 3c). Thus, IHC classifies PNETs robustly, reflecting lineage-specific gene and enhancer signatures that are henceforth called ARX⁺, PDX1⁺ and DP.

PNETs uniformly lacked H3K27ac and mRNA expression at early acting *NEUROG3* and *PAX4* loci (see Extended Data Fig. 4a), similar to isolated human islets, and IHC failed to detect *NEUROG3* in any tumor (see Extended Data Fig. 4b). In contrast, enhancer marking and mRNA levels were high at other canonical endocrine loci (*ISL1* and *NEUROD1*—data not shown), but not at terminal differentiation genes (for example, *MAFA* and *FFAR1*; see Extended Data Fig. 4c). H3K4me2, but not H3K27ac, appeared at many such loci and, because PNETs may represent arrested differentiation, we compared tumor mRNA profiles with those of normal mature and progenitor islet cells³⁷ (see Supplementary Table 6). In all PNETs with mRNA data, the mature cell signature was stronger than that of progenitors (see Extended Data Fig. 5), suggesting that ARX⁺ and PDX1⁺ non-functional PNETs partially resemble mature α - and β -cells, respectively.

Detailed clinical follow-up was documented on the 61 Dutch *MEN1*-mutant cases³⁸ (see Supplementary Table 5). ARX⁺ and PDX1⁺ non-functional PNETs ($n=47$) did not differ by tumor size or grade (Fig. 4a), and the range of sizes was similar to that of insulinomas (see Extended Data Fig. 6a). With 24 months of median follow-up (longest 8 years), all relapses occurred in the liver and only in ARX⁺ or DN cases; no PDX1⁺ or DP PNETs recurred (Fig. 4b and see Extended Data Fig. 6b). A study was then made of 67 unselected cases from Massachusetts (see Supplementary Table 5), where IHC revealed roughly equal fractions of ARX⁺ and PDX1⁺ PNETs, but a larger proportion of DN tumors than the previous cohorts (Fig. 4c). Tumor size was known for 61 cases and clinical outcomes for 56 of the 60 non-functional PNETs. ARX⁺ and PDX1⁺ tumors were similar in size (see Extended Data Fig. 6c). All relapses over 66 months of median follow-up (longest >15 years) occurred at distant sites, mostly in patients with ARX⁺ or DN tumors (Fig. 4d and see Extended Data Fig. 6d; $P=0.02$); only one PDX1⁺ and two DP tumors relapsed. Thus, PDX1 expression correlated with favorable prognosis in two distinct PNET cohorts.

Telomere-specific FISH was used to determine ALT status, which is associated with *ATRX* and *DAXX* mutations^{12–14}, in 50 Dutch *MEN1*-related and 62 American sporadic PNETs (see Extended Data Fig. 6e). Of 27 sporadic ARX⁺ and DN tumors, 13 tumors (48.1%) showed ALT compared with 14.3% of 35 PDX1⁺ and DP tumors ($P<0.005$, Fisher's exact test); similar relationships appeared in *MEN1*-mutant cases (see Extended Data Fig. 6f). ALT was associated with disease relapse, as expected^{12–14} (see Extended Data Fig. 6g), but was more informative when combined with PNET subtype: relapses occurred in every ARX⁺ALT⁺ tumor, only 9% of ARX⁺ALT⁻ cases and just one PDX1⁺ALT⁻ case (Fig. 4e).

Among the 103 total cases with clinical follow-up, 83 had data on subtype, size, ALT and WHO grade. The odds ratio (OR) for relapse of ARX⁺ or DN cases was higher (14.45, 95% confidence interval (CI) 1.79–116.61) than ORs for 2-cm size (1.14, CI 0.12–11.07) and even 3 cm (8.47, CI 2.11–34.02). Even excluding DN and DP cases (remaining $n=64$), the OR for relapse of ARX⁺ PNETs (10.31, CI 1.25–84.73), was higher than for tumors > 2 cm (8.13, CI 0.99–66.97)

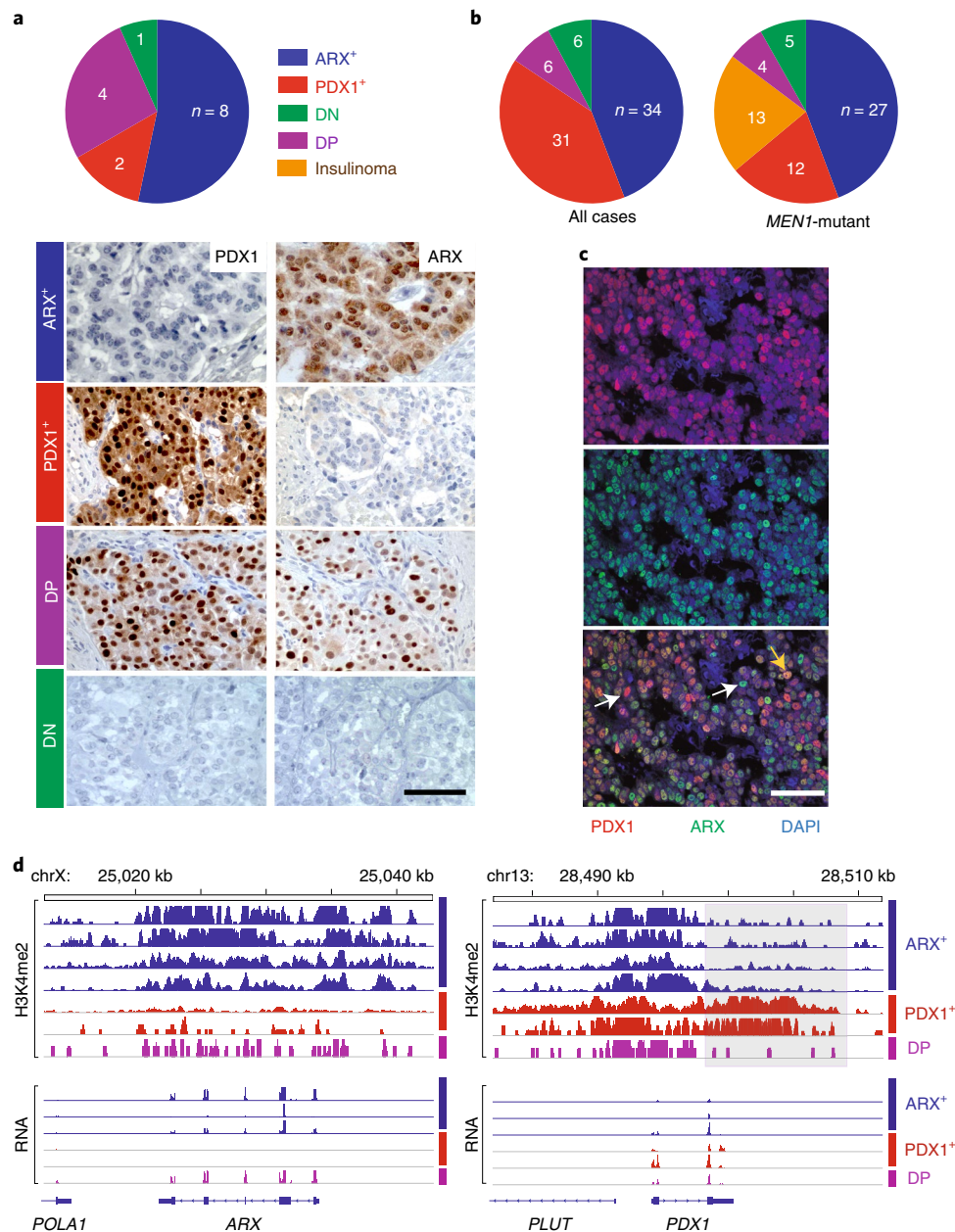


Fig. 3 | ARX and PDX1 immunostains distinguish PNET subtypes. **a**, Assignment of PNETs in a small independent cohort to subtypes based on immunostaining for ARX (type A), PDX1 (type B), both TFs (DP) or neither (DN). Numbers in each slice indicate independent biological samples, and representative data from each subtype illustrate specificity, which allowed unambiguous assignment. **b**, PNET subtype distribution in a large ($n=77$) cohort, dominated by 61 *MEN1*-mutant cases. Numbers in each slice indicate independent biological samples. **c**, Double immunofluorescence for PDX1 (red) and ARX (green) in a DP tumor, showing TF co-expression in most cells (yellow arrow), with solitary ARX or PDX1 staining in the minority. Scale 50 μm . Similar results were evident in all four examples tested. **d**, H3K4me2 and mRNA levels in PNETs sub-typed by immunostaining, showing that differential histone modifications and transcript levels match the assignments. Every evaluated case is shown. ChIP-seq signals are scaled by promoter-based DESeq2 normalization. RNA-seq signal is scaled to 0–2 RPKM. chr, chromosome.

or $>3\text{cm}$ (9.6, CI 1.94–47.44). Relapses occurred in patients with WHO grade 1 PNETs, and considering all variables by multiple logistic regression, tumor grade was a poor independent risk factor (Fig. 4f). Only ALT and especially absence of PDX1 correlated independently with relapse (Fig. 4f); PDX1⁺ PNETs rarely relapsed.

In summary, enhancer profiles in overtly similar non-functional PNETs revealed superficial similarities with islet α - or β -cells, reflected in IHC delineation of ARX⁺, PDX1⁺ and fewer ARX⁺PDX1⁺ (DP) tumors. Among 103 cases followed at length after surgery, distant relapses predominated in patients with ARX⁺

tumors, occurring in only three PDX1⁺ or DP cases. This favorable association with PDX1 expression can be applied rapidly in the clinic. Specifically, patients with small PDX1⁺ tumors may be reassured and followed conservatively, whereas vigilant monitoring in patients with PDX1⁻ tumors may detect early metastases amenable to surgical or medical treatment. Consideration of ALT⁺ status, which correlates with ARX expression, adds prognostic information, but is less practical than IHC in clinical laboratories. The superior prognosis of PDX1⁺ over ARX⁺ PNETs matches the indolent and aggressive disease courses, respectively, of

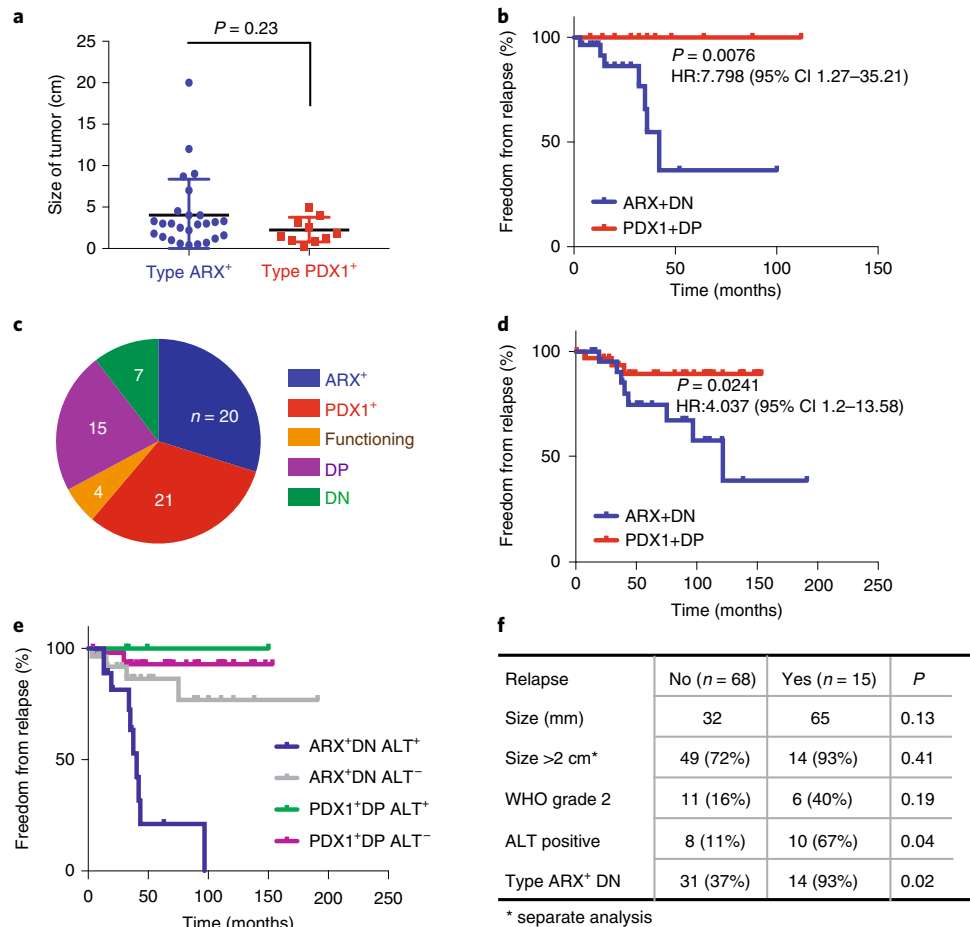


Fig. 4 | Different prognosis of PNET subtypes. **a**, Size of all 36 primary tumors with data available for size and PNET type in the Dutch cohort ($P=0.23$, two-tailed Mann-Whitney U -test). Bars represent mean \pm s.d. **b**, Kaplan-Meier analysis of disease-free survival in all 47 Dutch cases with available data, showing significant recurrence of ARX⁺ and DN tumors considered together ($P=0.0076$, two-sided log-rank test; hazard ratio (HR) = 7.8, Mantel-Haenszel test; CI is indicated). No PDX1⁺ tumor recurred, and outcomes of ARX⁺ tumors (ungrouped from DN) are shown in Extended Data Fig. 6b. **c**, Distribution of PNET subtypes in the MGH cohort ($n=67$; numbers in each slice indicate independent biological samples). **d**, Kaplan-Meier analysis of disease-free survival in all 55 MGH cases with available data, confirming the worse prognosis associated with ARX⁺ and DN tumors considered together ($P=0.0241$, two-sided log-rank test; HR = 4.04, CI 1.2–13.58). Data for ARX⁺ and PDX1⁺ tumors, separated from DP and DN, are in Extended Data Fig. 6d. **e**, Kaplan-Meier analysis of disease-free survival in both cohorts, with cases sub-typed for both TF expression and ALT. All ARX⁺ and DN tumors with ALT recurred. Although PDX1⁺ tumors gave excellent outcomes irrespective of ALT status (the only recurrence lacked ALT), ARX⁺ and DN tumors without ALT had an intermediate prognosis. **f**, Multiple logistic regression analysis of the MGH and Dutch cohorts combined ($n=83$ —all cases with relevant data, including 15 relapses). ARX⁺ and DN status are strong prognostic indicators.

metastatic insulinomas and glucagonomas^{1,3}; thus, PNETs that resemble β -cells have better clinical outcomes irrespective of hormonal activity and disease extent. RNA analyses in mouse and human PNETs previously found a group with high *Insulin* expression³⁹, but did not identify tumor subtypes or different clinical outcomes. Conversely, Chan et al. found enriched α -cell RNA signatures and worse prognosis in *ATRX*-, *DAXX*- or *MEN1*-mutant PNETs⁴⁰. The new, clinically actionable differences reported among PNET types illustrate a general strategy to stratify cancers by epigenetic landscapes and cell lineage, with prognostic implications.

Online content

Any methods, additional references, Nature Research reporting summaries, source data, statements of code and data availability and associated accession codes are available at <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-019-0493-4>.

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Author contributions

P.C., Y.D., C.B.E., E.S., D.C.C., B.E.B. and R.A.S. designed the study. P.C. performed the experiments. Y.D. performed the computational analyses. P.C., L.A.A.B. and V.D. analyzed immunohistochemistry data. C.B.E., M.B., E.G., H.J.W., N.S., A.F.-T. and H.W.L. coordinated ChIP- and RNA-seq efforts. K.M.A.D., E.B.C., L.A.A.B., F.H.M.M., G.D.V., M.R.V., C.F.-d.C., C.F., T.A., A.D.S., E.S., M.H.K. and D.C.C. obtained and curated tissue collections and clinical data. P.C. and K.M.A.D. analyzed clinical data. M.K.G. and C.M.H. performed and scored telomere-specific FISH for ALT. B.E.B. and R.A.S. supervised the study. Y.D., P.C. and R.A.S. wrote the first manuscript draft. K.M.A.D., V.D., M.H.K., D.C.C., B.E.B. and R.A.S. revised the paper.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Additional information

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Methods

Clinical materials. Fresh-frozen pancreatic and intestinal NE tumor specimens were obtained from tissue banks at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH). FiT-seq and RNA-seq occurred on seven and eight additional FFPE PNET specimens, respectively, in the Dutch cohort, and four FFPE specimens from the discovery set. The epigenome classification was validated by ChIP-seq on 13 additional fresh frozen PNETs and by immunophenotyping 15 FFPE samples from BWH, tissue microarrays (TMAs) representing 77 cases (61 with clinical information) from a Dutch national registry and 67 PNETs (54 with clinical information) from MGH. The TMAs included replicate sections and surrounding normal pancreas. All patients gave informed consent for use of primary tumor tissues and, where shown, clinical outcomes. Institutional Review Boards at Dana-Farber/Harvard Cancer Center and University Medical Center Utrecht approved the studies. Pathologists reviewed H&E-stained tissue sections to confirm diagnoses. See Supplementary Tables 1 and 5.

ChIP-seq and FiT-seq. Sections (30 μ m) from frozen samples with >90% tumor enrichment were collected in microtubes, washed in phosphate-buffered saline (PBS), cross-linked with 1% formaldehyde for 5 min, and quenched with 0.125 M glycine for 5 min at room temperature. Cross-linked material was resuspended in 0.1% sodium dodecylsulfate (50 mM Tris-HCl pH 8, 10 mM ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid) and sonicated for 40 min in a Covaris E210 instrument (duty cycle 20%; intensity 8; cycles per burst 200). For FiT-seq, FFPE sections were macrodissected to obtain >80% tumor cell enrichment and 10 sections were used, each 10- μ m thick. Sections were washed three times with xylenes to remove paraffin, rehydrated in an ethanol/water series and prepared as described³⁶, with modified buffer and sonication conditions (Covaris E220 instrument, 20 min, 5% duty cycle, 105 peak incident power, 200 cycles per burst, 1 ml AFA Fiber milliTUBES). Soluble chromatin (5 μ g) was immunoprecipitated with 10 μ g H3K27ac (Active Motif 39133) antibody for ChIP-seq and H3K4me2 (Millipore 07-030) or H3K27ac (Diagenode C15410196) antibody for FiT-seq. ChIP-seq libraries were constructed by end repair (Epicentre ER0720) of precipitated DNA, base extension with Klenow fragment (New England Biolabs M0212L) and ligation (New England Biolabs M220S) of Y-form-sequencing adapters (Illumina), followed by 14 cycles of PCR. Between enzymatic steps, fragments of the desired size were enriched using AMPure XP beads (Beckman Coulter). FiT-seq libraries were prepared using ThruPLEX-FD kits (Rubicon Genomics) following the manufacturer's protocols. Then, 36-base-pair (bp) paired-end reads were sequenced on a HiSeq 2500 instrument (Illumina).

RNA-seq. A small piece of each snap-frozen primary tumor was pulverized using the T-prep method (Covaris, catalog no. 520097) on dry ice, followed by implementation of Agencourt RNAadvance (Beckman Coulter, catalog no. A32645) on a Biomek FXP automation workstation (Beckman Coulter) to isolate RNA. We used 150 ng RNA to prepare libraries with TruSeq Stranded Total RNA kits (Illumina, catalog no. RS-122-2301). From FFPE tissues, four 10- μ m sections were deparaffinized, rehydrated in an ethanol/water series, and RNA extracted using AllPrep DNA/RNA FFPE kits (Qiagen). Concentrations were measured using the Quant-iT RiboGreen RNA assay (Thermo Fisher) and the quality assessed on an Agilent 2100 Bioanalyzer using the Agilent RNA 6000 Nano kit. Ribosomal (rRNA) and mitochondrial RNAs were removed using biotinylated, target-specific oligonucleotides combined with Ribo-Zero rRNA removal beads and the TruSeq Stranded Total RNA kit (Illumina). The 75-bp single-end reads were sequenced on a NextSeq 500 Instrument (Illumina).

Immunostaining. Tissue sections were deparaffinized in xylenes and hydrated through an ethanol and water series. Antigens were retrieved in 10 mM sodium citrate (pH 6) and 0.05% Tween-20 in a pressure cooker for 3 min. After cooling and rinsing with PBS, slides were treated with 3% H₂O₂ in PBS for 10 min to quench endogenous peroxidases, washed and incubated in blocking solution (PBS containing 1% BSA and 1% Tween-20) for 1 h at ambient temperature. Slides were incubated with ARX (Thermo Fisher AF7068SP, dilution 1:300), PDX1 (Abcam ab134150, 1:300), NEUROG3 (Fisher Scientific AB5684, 1:50) or SST (Agilent A056601-2, 1:10,000) antibody diluted in blocking solution for 1 h. Slides stained for PDX1, SST or NEUROG3 were washed in PBS and incubated with the peroxidase-based EnVision Kit (Dako). Slides stained for ARX were incubated with horse radish peroxidase-conjugated anti-sheep antibody (Santa Cruz sc-2473, 1:500 in blocking solution) for 30 min, followed by VectaStain Elite ABC kit (Vector) for 30 min, washed, developed using 3,3'-diaminobenzidine (Dako) and counterstained with Mayer's hematoxylin. For double immunostaining, slides were blocked with 5% FBS in PBS for 1 h at room temperature and incubated overnight at 4 °C with ARX (1:100 in PBS, 1% BSA, 0.3% Triton X-100) and PDX1 (1:500) antibody. Slides were then incubated with a biotinylated anti-sheep antibody (Life Technologies A16045, 1:250), followed by a mix of Alexa Fluor 488-conjugated streptavidin (Life Technologies S11223) and Alexa Fluor 546-conjugated anti-rabbit serum antibody (Life Technologies A11035, 1:250) for 1 h, washed in PBS and mounted in DAPI+ Vectashield medium (Vector). Associations of TF expression with clinical variables were calculated using the statistical package SPSS v.19.0.0.

Telomere-specific FISH and assessment of ALT. Deparaffinized TMA slides were hydrated, steamed for 25 min in citrate buffer (Vector Laboratories), dehydrated, and hybridized with a Cy3-labeled peptide nucleic acid probe complementary to the mammalian telomere repeat sequence. An Alexa Fluor 488-labeled peptide nucleic acid probe specific to human centromeric DNA was included as a positive control. After post-hybridization washes, slides were counterstained with DAPI. ALT⁺ tumors were identified by telomere length heterogeneity and the presence of large, ultra-bright foci of nuclear FISH signals in \geq 1% of tumor cells^{12,14}. Necrotic areas were excluded from consideration and two individuals blinded to the PNET subtype scored the slides, with 100% concordance.

Computational and statistical analyses. ChIP-seq reads were aligned to the reference genome (hg19) using BWA 0.7.10 (ref. 41). Reads with mapping scores <10 were discarded, and those aligned to the same position and strand were counted only once. Density signals were calculated using igvtools and visualized on the Integrated Genome Viewer⁴². H3K27ac and H3K4me2 peaks (style 'histone' for variable length, local filtering disabled) were called using HOMER⁴³. A union set of H3K27ac⁺ peaks was generated by taking the top 50,000 from each sample and merging those peaks using bedtools merge⁴⁴. Reads were acetylation signals at enhancers, estimated from ChIP-seq reads that fell within this union set and counted using featureCounts⁴⁵.

H3K27ac profiles were compared using DESeq2 (ref. 46). Promoter signals (<2 kb downstream and <2.5 kb upstream of transcription start sites) vary less than those at enhancers; therefore, only promoter signals were used to estimate normalization (size) factors for each library by DESeq2. When comparing libraries normalized by these size factors, only enhancers with average normalized read counts \geq 100 were considered. *P* values were calculated using Wald's test and FDRs using the Benjamini-Hochberg method⁴⁷. Super-enhancers were called by ROSE¹⁹ from H3K27ac peaks using default parameters. Public H3K27ac ChIP-seq data, obtained from the following sources, were re-analyzed using the above methods:

Pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma⁴⁸: Gene Expression Omnibus (GEO) accessions [GSM2131266](#) and [GSM2131280](#)

Gastric adenocarcinoma⁴⁹: GEO accessions [GSM1969645](#) and [GSM1969657](#)

Colorectal cancer⁵⁰: GEO accessions [GSM2058055](#) and [GSM2058056](#)

Normal islets⁵¹: ArrayExpress accession [E-MTAB-1919](#)

α -Cell- and β -cell-specific enhancers were obtained from Supplementary Table 4 in Arda et al.³³. Enhancers shared with PNET types A (ARX⁺) and B (PDX1⁺) were determined by bedtools intersect⁴⁴, and enrichment *P* values were calculated using Fisher's exact test. To cluster PNETs by enhancer signatures (see Fig. 2a and Extended Data Fig. 1c), hierarchical clustering of Pearson's correlations of H3K27ac profiles (quantified by log₂ read counts) was performed, using the shortest distance linkage.

RNA-seq reads were mapped to the hg19 reference genome using STAR 2.5.2 (ref. 52) and GENCODE v.19 annotations; reads with mapping scores <10 were discarded. To compare RNA profiles, reads were counted with featureCounts⁴⁵ and compared using DESeq2. *P* values were calculated using Wald's test and FDRs using the Benjamini-Hochberg method, considering only genes with an average normalized read count \geq 100 and using a Cook's cutoff of 20. RNA-seq data on normal pancreatic islets⁵³ were obtained from GEO accessions [GSM1303932](#) and [GSM1303934](#). α -Cell- and β -cell-specific genes were obtained from Supplementary Table 2 in Wang et al.³⁴. Enrichment *P* values of α - and β -beta cell-specific genes were calculated by Fisher's exact test (two-sided). Pancreatic endocrine cell mRNA signatures were obtained from Supplementary Table 1 in Ramond et al.³⁷, considering populations A and B as mature, and populations C and D as progenitors (see Extended Data Fig. 5). Correlations of tumors to these Mature and Progenitor signatures were based on Spearman's correlation of log₂(transcript count per million (TPM) + 1) values of the tumor and the average log₂(TPM + 1) values of Mature and Progenitor islet cell populations.

ALT status and PNET immunohistochemistry were compared using two-sided Fisher's exact test. Tumor sizes between groups were compared using the two-tailed Mann-Whitney *U*-test. Disease-free survival was analyzed using the log-rank test and Kaplan-Meier plots were generated using GraphPad Prism v.7. To assess the prognostic value of different variables, we applied SPSS Statistics for multiple logistic regression analysis.

Reporting Summary. Further information on research design is available in the Nature Research Reporting Summary linked to this article.

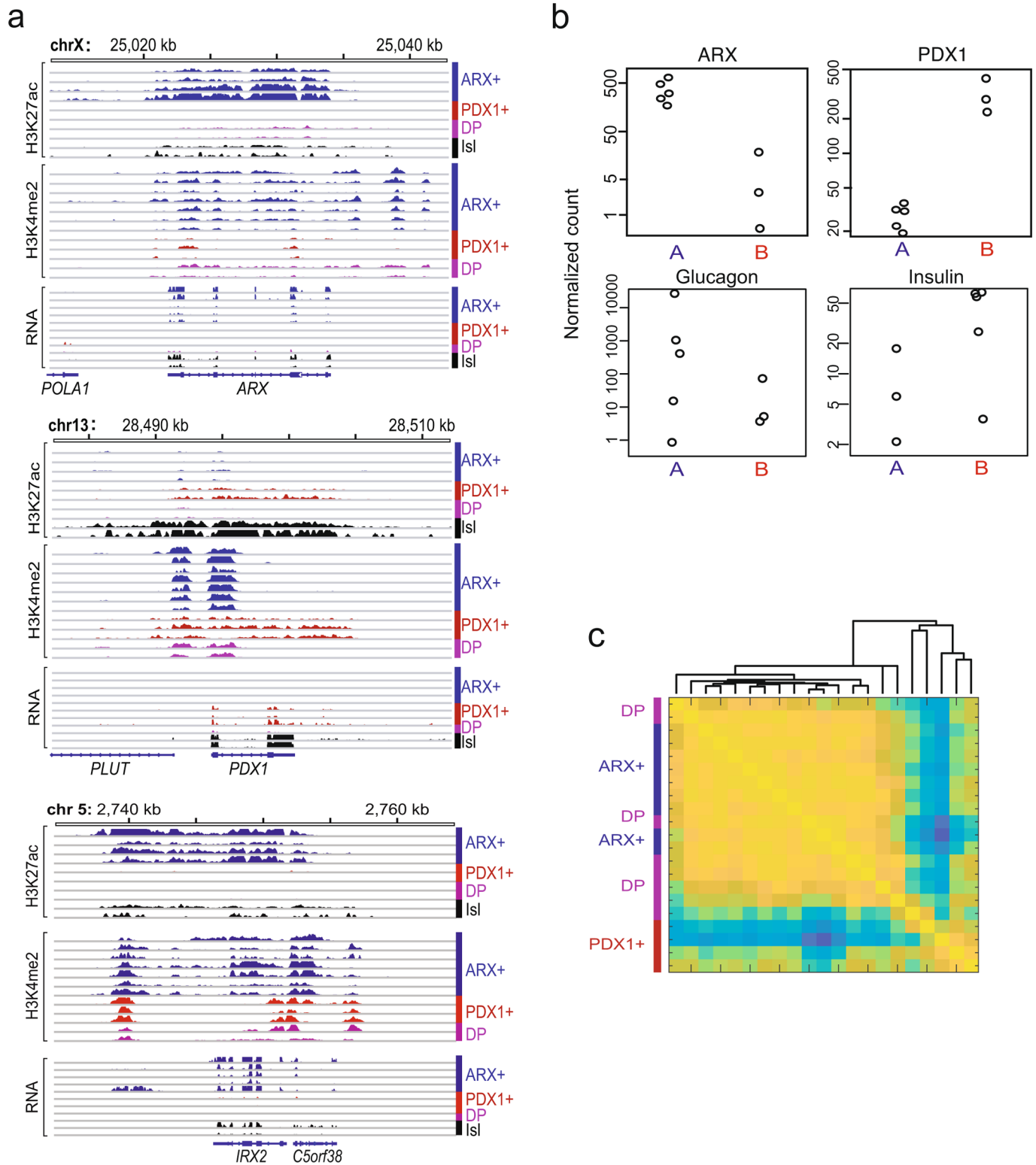
Data availability

All relevant data are included in the manuscript and/or in its supplementary information files. ChIP-seq and RNA-seq data have been deposited in the National Center Biotechnology Information's GEO under [GSE116356](#). Other original data that support the findings of this study have been uploaded as Source Data.

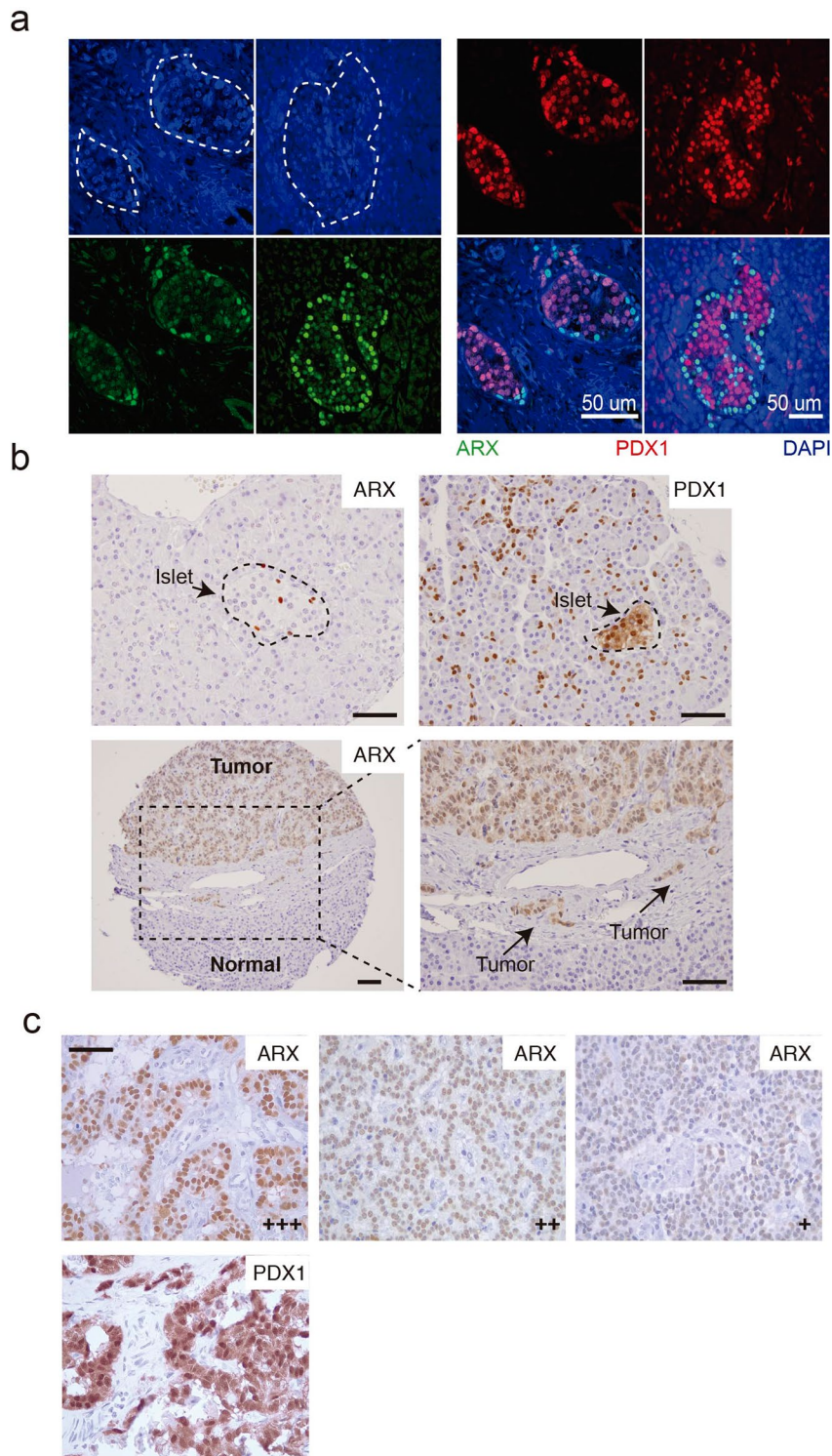
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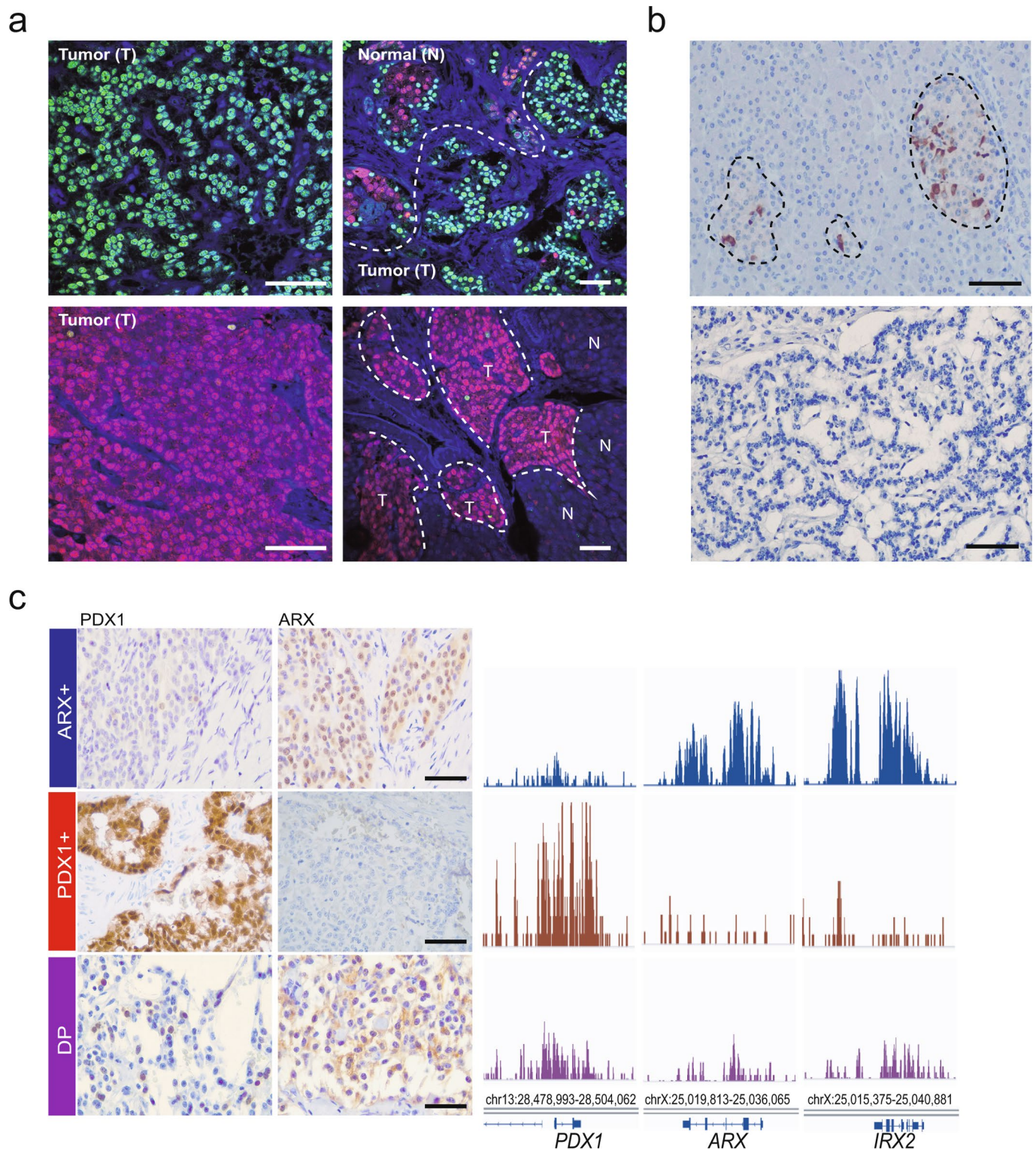
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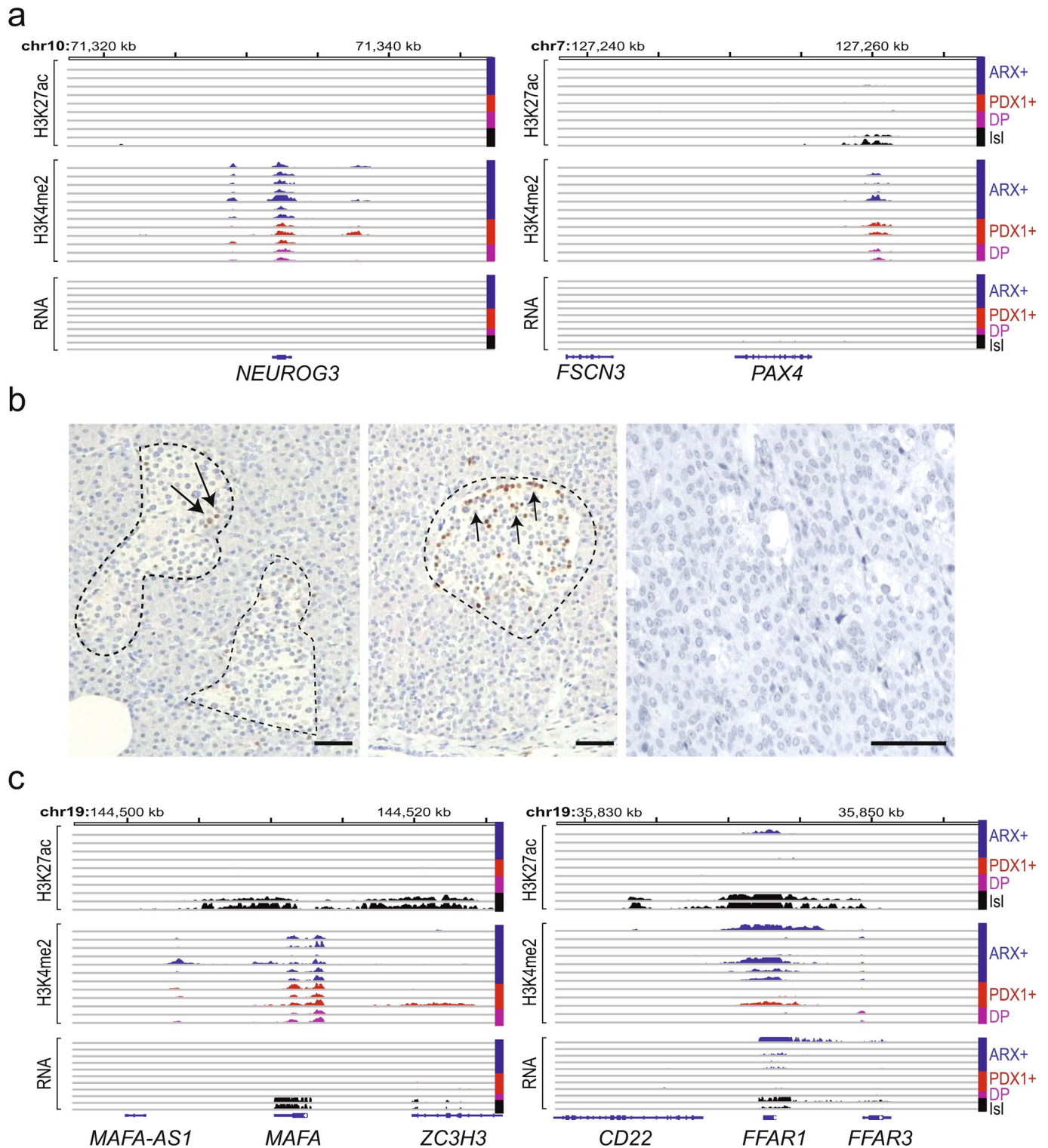
Extended Data Fig. 1 | PNET subtypes are associated with distinct enhancers of lineage-restricted TFs. a, H3K27ac, H3K4me2 and mRNA data tracks at ARX and PDX1 in all eight PNETs from the discovery set and from two samples of normal islets of Langerhans (Isl). ChIP-seq signals are scaled by promoter-based DESeq2 normalization (see Methods) and mRNA read counts are normalized by total read numbers (y axis represents 0–2 fragments per million reads). **b**, Distributions of ARX and PDX1 mRNA levels in A- and B-type PNETs. **c**, Pearson's correlations of H3K27ac signals at PNET type A/ α -cell and type B/ β -cell enhancers in all 21 tumors from the discovery and validation cohorts ($n=8$ and $n=13$ biologically independent samples, respectively).



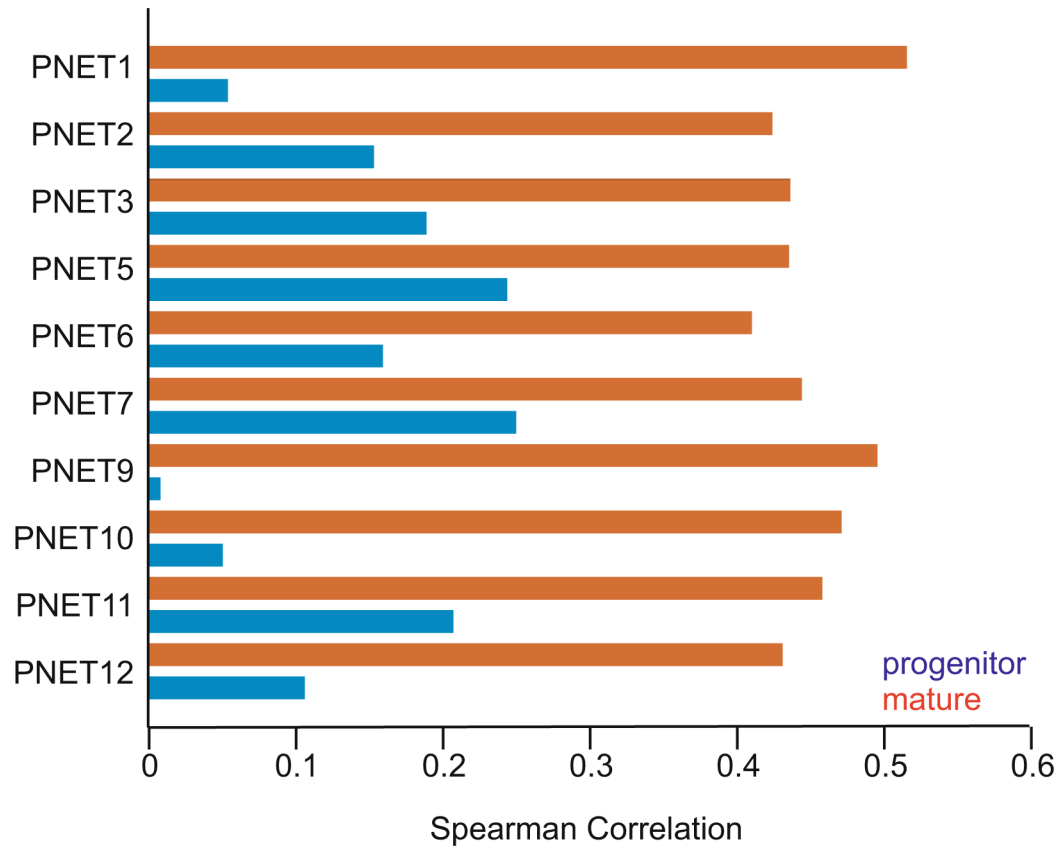
Extended Data Fig. 2 | ARX and PDX1 immunostain in human normal islets and PNETs. **a**, Double immunofluorescence for PDX1 (red) and ARX (green) in normal islets (marked by dashed white outlines). Scale bar, 50 μ m. The results, representing hundreds of islets, verify antibody specificity, lineage-restricted expression and cell distributions: abundant PDX1⁺ β -cells scattered across islets and fewer ARX⁺ α -cells enriched in the islet periphery. **b**, Top: ARX and PDX1 IHC selectively mark endocrine α - and β -cells, respectively, in normal human islets. Many exocrine and ductal cells also express PDX1, as is well known²⁴. The results represent hundreds of normal islets from multiple individuals, which revealed no ARX⁺ PDX1⁺ DP cells. Thus, although described in rodent embryos²⁴, such cells are absent or extremely rare in the adult human pancreas. Bottom: IHC for ARX in a representative PNET and surrounding normal cells on TMAs from the Dutch cohort. The area boxed in the left image is magnified on the right. ARX⁺ cells dominate in the tumor and mark invasive foci (arrows). **c**, Range of IHC signal strength in ARX⁺ PNETs (+weak, ++ moderate, +++ strong), contrasted with uniformly robust PDX1 staining. Images are examples selected from 34 ARX⁺ and 31 PDX1⁺ cases (Fig. 3b). Scale bars, 50 μ m.



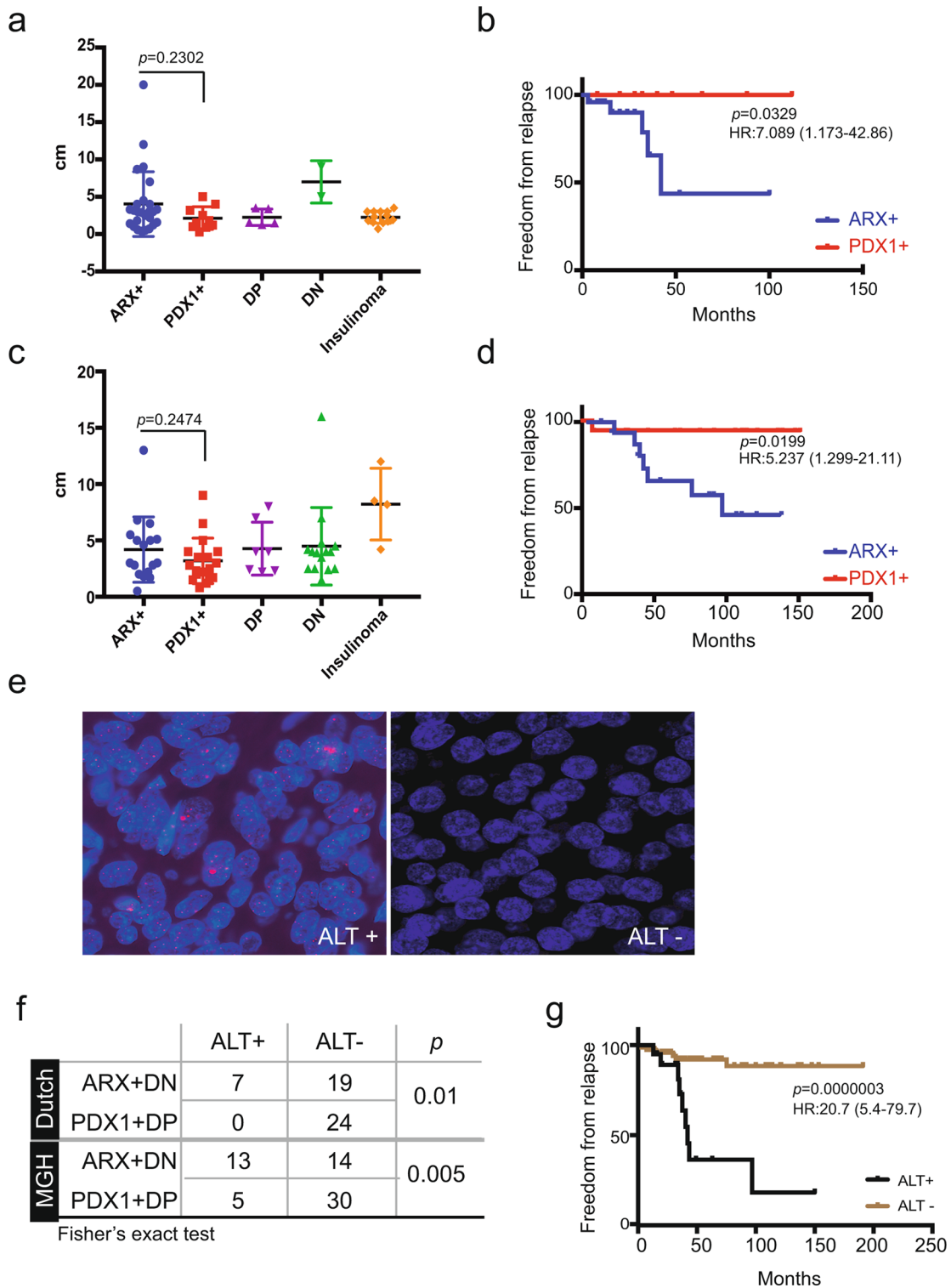
Extended Data Fig. 3 | Additional IHC and enhancer characterization of PNETs. **a**, Double immunofluorescence of representative ARX⁺ (type A, $n=34$ biologically independent samples) and PDX1⁺ (type B, $n=31$ biologically independent samples) tumors (T) adjacent to normal islets (N), showing selective detection of ARX (green) and PDX1 (red), respectively. Lack of antibody cross-reactivity controls for ARX and PDX1 co-staining (Fig. 3c) in DP tumors. **b**, SST expression in normal islets (δ -cells) and absence in all 77 Dutch PNETs, including the representative DN tumor ($n=6$ biologically independent samples) shown here. **c**, IHC results for ARX and PDX1 shown alongside H3K27ac FiT-seq data from the same samples in three of the four cases (one of each subtype) from the discovery cohort where both FFPE and frozen samples were available.



Extended Data Fig. 4 | Other endocrine-specific loci in PNETs. a, H3K27ac, H3K4me2 and mRNA data tracks from all eight PNETs in the discovery set and from two normal islet samples at loci that control early pancreas ontogeny: *NEUROG3* and *PAX4*. Histone marks and RNA-seq data are scaled as in Extended Data Fig. 1a. **b**, IHC for *NEUROG3* in rare normal islets (dashed outlines), showing scarce *NEUROG3*⁺ endocrine cells (arrows). Hundreds of normal islets and all 19 biologically independent PNETs represented on one TMA (one example is shown) lacked expression. **c**, H3K27ac, H3K4me2 and mRNA data tracks from all eight PNETs in the discovery set and from two normal islet samples at loci that control terminal endocrine cell maturation, *MAFA* and *FFAR1*. Histone marks and RNA-seq data are scaled as in Extended Data Fig. 1a. A single outlier showed strong H3K27ac and mRNA at *FFAR1*.



Extended Data Fig 5 | Differentiation status of PNETs. a. Correlations of mRNA profiles in individual PNETs with those of pancreatic endocrine progenitor and mature cells³⁷. x axis: Spearman's correlations between $\log_2(\text{TPM}+1)$ values of each tumor and the average $\log_2(\text{TPM}+1)$ values of mature and progenitor populations.



Extended Data Fig 6 | Association of PNET subtypes with ALT status. a,c, Tumor size in all PNET subtypes in the Dutch (**a**) ($n=56$ independent tumors) and the MGH (**c**) ($n=61$ independent tumors) cohorts. Bars represent mean \pm s.d. *P* values for differences in size of primary ARX+ and PDX1+ tumors determined by the two-sided Mann-Whitney *U*-test. **b,d,** Analyses of recurrence-free survival in the Dutch (**b**) ($n=30$ cases) and MGH (**d**) ($n=35$ cases) cohorts when ARX+ and PDX1+ tumors were considered separately, ungrouped from DP and DN tumors. *P* values and HRs were determined using two-sided log-rank and Mantel-Haenszel tests, respectively. **e,f,** Representative (**e**) (1 example each from 25 independent ALT+ and 87 independent ALT- cases) and aggregate (**f**) ($n=112$ biologically independent cases) results of telomere-specific FISH in cases classified as positive or negative for ALT. The statistical test was two-sided. **g,** Kaplan-Meier analysis of disease-free survival in all 112 cases with ALT data from both cohorts, without consideration of PNET subtype.

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ChIP-seq and RNA-seq data have been deposited in in NCBI's Gene Expression Omnibus and are accessible through GEO Series accession number GSE116356 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE116356>).

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Life sciences study design

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Sample size	We did not perform sample size calculation. Rather, we used the largest combined tumor sample and clinical datasets that were available to us.
Data exclusions	Failed chip-seq tracks were excluded (IP efficiency less than 5%, as estimated by ratio of reads within peaks) and ovarian metastatic samples were excluded.
Replication	All attempts of replication are described in the manuscript.
Randomization	The study described does not include any intervention. Therefore randomization of patients does not apply to this study.
Blinding	Immunohistochemical scoring was done blinded to the clinical information

Reporting for specific materials, systems and methods

Materials & experimental systems

n/a	Involvement in the study
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unique biological materials
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Antibodies
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Eukaryotic cell lines
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Palaeontology
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Animals and other organisms
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Methods

n/a	Involvement in the study
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ChIP-seq
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Flow cytometry
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> MRI-based neuroimaging

Unique biological materials

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Obtaining unique materials

Antibodies

Antibodies used	H3K27ac (Active Motif 39133; lot #01613007), H3K27ac (Diagenode C15410196; lot#A1723-0041D), H3K4me2 (Millipore 07-030; lot #2477948), ARX (R&D, AF7068; lot #CFOM0217021), PDX1 (Abcam ab134150; lot #GR97323-11), NEUROG3 (EMD Millipore AB5684; lot # 2519231), SST (Agilent A056601-2). All antibodies with human reactivity.
Validation	H3K27ac (Active Motif 39133), H3K27ac (Diagenode C15410196) and H3K4me2 (Millipore 07-030) are validated for ChIP-seq application as stated on Manufacturer's website. In addition, H3K4me2 (Millipore 07-030) is validated for FIT-seq (Nat. Med 2016, PMID:27111282). ARX (R&D, AF7068), PDX1 (Abcam ab134150), NEUROG3 (EMD Millipore AB5684), SST (Agilent A056601-2) are all validated for immunohistochemistry as stated on the corresponding Manufacturer's websites. We further validated the performance by analysis of the expression in normal pancreatic islets (described in the manuscript).

Human research participants

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Population characteristics

Population characteristics

tumor grade/ mitotic index, time between surgery and relapse/ follow-up and whether the patient had a hormone producing tumor or not. We did also report age and sex of the patients, although these parameters were not assessed as variables in the study.

Recruitment

All patients that underwent surgery of a primary pNET in the hospitals involved in the study during the sample correction period and gave informed consent were included in the study.

ChIP-seq

Data deposition

- Confirm that both raw and final processed data have been deposited in a public database such as [GEO](#).
- Confirm that you have deposited or provided access to graph files (e.g. BED files) for the called peaks.

Data access links

May remain private before publication.

GEO accession GSE116356, token sdcjkgmenputxkp

Files in database submission

CAR_10_h3k27ac_13811.bw
 CAR_11_h3k27ac_8691.bw
 CAR_12_h3k27ac_8701.bw
 CAR_13_h3k27ac_13810.bw
 CAR_14_h3k27ac_13809.bw
 CAR_15_h3k27ac_13832.bw
 CAR_16_h3k27ac_13807.bw
 CAR_17_h3k27ac_13833.bw
 CAR_18_h3k27ac_7487.bw
 CAR_19_h3k27ac_7478.bw
 CAR_1_h3k27ac_8688.bw
 CAR_20_h3k27ac_13836.bw
 CAR_21_h3k27ac_8485.bw
 CAR_2_h3k27ac_13835.bw
 CAR_3_h3k27ac_13838.bw
 CAR_4_h3k27ac_13834.bw
 CAR_5_h3k27ac_8702.bw
 CAR_6_h3k27ac_7479.bw
 CAR_7_h3k27ac_8704.bw
 CAR_8_h3k27ac_8699.bw
 CAR_9_h3k27ac_13839.bw
 CAR_A_22_h3k27ac_8679.bw
 PNET_10_h3k4me2_16537.bw
 PNET_11_h3k4me2_16544.bw
 PNET_12_h3k4me2_16549.bw
 PNET_1_h3k27ac_14046.bw
 PNET_1_h3k4me2_16548.bw
 PNET_2_h3k27ac_8649.bw
 PNET_2_h3k4me2_16520.bw
 PNET_3_h3k27ac_8656.bw
 PNET_3_h3k4me2_16530.bw
 PNET_4_h3k27ac_8482.bw
 PNET_4_h3k4me2_16512.bw
 PNET_5_h3k27ac_14048.bw
 PNET_5_h3k4me2_16524.bw
 PNET_6_h3k27ac_8644.bw
 PNET_6_h3k4me2_16536.bw
 PNET_7_h3k27ac_8658.bw
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pnet_61_h3k27ac_20220.bw
pnet_61_h3k27ac_20220_fp-stylehistone-L0.bed

pnet_70_h3k27ac_20229.bed
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 pnet_75_h3k27ac_20221.bed
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 pnet_77_h3k27ac_20225.bed
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 pnet_81_h3k27ac_20231.bed
 pnet_81_h3k27ac_20231_fp-stylehistone-L0.bed

Genome browser session
 (e.g. [UCSC](#))

Carcinoid data: https://genome.ucsc.edu/cgi-bin/hgTracks?hgS_doOtherUser=submit&hgS_otherUserName=yotamd&hgS_otherUserSessionName=carcinoid_h3k27ac
 PNET data: https://genome-euro.ucsc.edu/cgi-bin/hgTracks?hgS_doOtherUser=submit&hgS_otherUserName=yotamd&hgS_otherUserSessionName=pnet

Methodology

Replicates

N/A

Sequencing depth

All ChIP-seq data are paired-end. Library information is included in Suppl. Table 1.

Antibodies

For ChIP: H3K27ac (Active Motif 39133; lot #01613007), H3K27ac (Diagenode C15410196; lot#A1723-0041D), H3K4me2 (Millipore 07-030; lot #2477948). All antibodies have human reactivity and are validated for ChIP.
 For immunohistochemistry and immunofluorescence: ARX R&D Systems AF7068), PDX1 (Abcam ab134150), NEUROG3 (Millipore AB5684), and Somatostatin (Agilent A056601-2) antibodies were used to stain tissue sections after appropriate blocking of specimens to reduce non-specific background signals.

Peak calling parameters

Peaks were called using homer 4.6 with the command findPeaks using parameters -style histone -L 0.
 Super enhancers were called using ROSE (Whyte et al, Cell 2013; 153:307-319)

Data quality

We required IP efficiency of at least 5%, with at least 20,000 peaks detected at FDR of 0.001

Software

BWA 0.7.10, igvtools 2.3, featureCounts 1.6.2, bedtools 2.26, DESeq 2, HOMER 4.6, ROSE