



# An iPSC model for POLR3A-associated spastic ataxia: Generation of three unrelated patient cell lines

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## ABSTRACT

Spastic Ataxias (SA) are a group of neurodegenerative disorders with combined pyramidal and cerebellar system affection, leading to an overlap phenotype between Hereditary Spastic Paraplegias (HSP) and Cerebellar Ataxias (CA). Here we describe the generation of iPSCs from three unrelated patients with an ultra-rare subtype of SA caused by compound heterozygous mutations in *POLR3A*, that encodes the largest subunit of RNA polymerase III. iPSCs were reprogrammed from normal human dermal fibroblasts (NHDFs) using episomal reprogramming with integration-free plasmid vectors: HIHRSi004-A, derived from a 44 year-old male carrying the mutations c.1909 + 22G > A/c.3944\_3945delTG, HIHRSi005-A obtained from a 66 year-old male carrying the mutations c.1909 + 22G > A/c.1531C > T, and HIHRSi006-A from a 27 year-old male carrying the mutations c.1909 + 22G > A/c.2472\_2472delC (ENST00000372371.8).

## Resource Table:

|                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unique stem cell lines identifier      | HIHRSi004-A<br>HIHRSi005-A<br>HIHRSi006-A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Alternative name(s) of stem cell lines | iPSC SP-184 4.1 (Unique cell line 1 name)<br>iPSC LD-12 5.3 (Unique cell line 2 name)<br>iPSC SP-76 1.3 (Unique cell line 3 name)                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Institution                            | Hertie Institute for Clinical Brain Research,<br>Tübingen, Germany; German Center for<br>Neurodegenerative Diseases (DZNE),<br>Tübingen, Germany;<br>Division of Neurodegenerative Diseases,<br>Department of Neurology, Heidelberg<br>University Hospital and Faculty of<br>Medicine, Heidelberg, Germany. |
| Contact information of distributor     | Rebecca Schüle<br><a href="mailto:rebecca.schuele@uni-heidelberg.de">rebecca.schuele@uni-heidelberg.de</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Type of cell lines                     | iPSC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Origin                                 | Human                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Additional origin info required        | Age: 49,74,36 44, 66, 27<br>Sex: Male, Male, Male                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

(continued on next column)

(continued)

|                                                       |                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unique stem cell lines identifier                     | HIHRSi004-A<br>HIHRSi005-A<br>HIHRSi006-A                                            |
| Cell Source                                           | Ethnicity if known: Western European,<br>Middle European, Western European           |
| Clonality                                             | Dermal fibroblasts                                                                   |
| Method of reprogramming                               | Clonal                                                                               |
| Genetic Modification                                  | Episomal reprogramming                                                               |
| Type of Genetic Modification                          | No                                                                                   |
| Evidence of the reprogramming                         | N/A                                                                                  |
| transgene loss (including genomic copy if applicable) | PCR for episomal vectors                                                             |
| Associated disease                                    | Spastic ataxia (ORPHA: 685), Hereditary<br>Spastic Paraplegia (ORPHA: 316240)        |
| Gene/locus                                            | POLR3A                                                                               |
| Date archived/stock date                              | Jan 2024                                                                             |
| Cell line repository/bank                             | TreatHSP Biobank ( <a href="https://www.treathsp.net">https://www.treathsp.net</a> ) |
| Ethical approval                                      | 199/2011BO1, 423/2019BO1, S-439/<br>2023                                             |

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## 1. Resource utility

*POLR3A* spastic ataxia is an ultra-rare neurodegenerative disorder with combined pyramidal and cerebellar system affection. Majority of cases are caused by a specific recurrent intronic variant in *POLR3A* (c.1909 + 22G > A) occurring *in trans* with a second, variable loss of function allele. The iPSC lines reported here can be differentiated into relevant cellular lineages to study the pathophysiology of *POLR3A*-associated spastic ataxia and the effects of its therapeutic interventions.

## 2. Resource details

Human dermal fibroblasts obtained from three unrelated individuals with spastic ataxia caused by mutations in *POLR3A* were reprogrammed using episomal reprogramming vectors that encodes for human *OCT4*, *KLF4*, *L-MYC*, *SOX2* and *LIN28* (Okita et al., 2011). All three lines share an intronic variant introducing a cryptic splice site in *POLR3A* (c.1909 + 22G > A), compound heterozygous with a second, variable *POLR3A* variant (Minnerop et al., 2017). Fibroblasts for the line iPSC SP-184 4.1 were obtained from a 44 year-old male of western European origin (c.1909 + 22G > A/c.3944,3945delTG, p.Y637Cfs\*14/p.V1315fs\*7). Fibroblasts for the line iPSC LD-12 5.3 were derived from a 66 year-old male of middle European origin (c.1909 + 22G > A/c.1531C > T, p.Y637Cfs\*14/p.Q511\*). Fibroblasts for the line iPSC SP-76 1.3 were acquired from a 27 year-old male of western European origin (c.1909 + 22G > A/c.2472,2472delC, p.Y637Cfs\*14/p.S825Qfs\*18). Details on the clinical phenotypes of all three patients have been published before (Minnerop et al., 2017).

8–10 days after nucleofection of the fibroblast lines, iPSC-like colonies became visible and were picked manually after 24–28 days, and further expanded for culturing and cryopreservation. The iPSC lines thus obtained exhibited an embryonic stem cell like morphology (Fig. 1E). By passage 8–10, the iPSC lines were transgene-free (Fig. 1F) as well as mycoplasma-free (Supplementary Fig. 1B). The cell lines were then subjected to SNP genotyping to confirm genomic integrity (Fig. 1A) and Sanger sequencing to confirm the presence of the patient mutations as in the fibroblast lines (Supplementary Fig. 1A).

The pluripotency of the three iPSC lines was confirmed at the protein expression level with immunocytochemistry for the markers TRA-1-81, and OCT4 (Fig. 1B), and with an alkaline phosphatase (ALP) staining which is a classical marker for iPSCs (Fig. 1D). On transcript level, expression of the markers *OCT4*, *SOX2*, *KLF4*, *C-MYC*, *NANOG*, *DNMT3B*, *TDGF1* were analysed with a RT-qPCR: Marker expression profiles in iPSC lines were clearly distinct from the source fibroblast lines but demonstrated similarities to the human embryonic stem cell line I3, thus confirming stemness of the cell lines (Fig. 1G). The differentiation potential of the three iPSC lines was assessed using an embryoid body based spontaneous differentiation method producing the three germ layers: ectodermal, mesodermal, and endodermal cell lineages which were probed for lineage-specific markers (Fig. 1B, scale bar 100 µm). The differentiation potential and the pluripotency tests together confirms the stem cell characteristics of the generated iPSC lines (see Table 1).

## 3. Materials and methods

### 3.1. Cell culture and reprogramming

Human skin fibroblasts were cultured in fibroblast culture medium: DMEM (Sigma-Aldrich) with 10 % FCS (Life Technologies) to around 80 % confluency. For reprogramming, fibroblasts ( $3 \times 10^5$  cells) were resuspended in 82 µl of fibroblast nucleofector solution (Lonza), 18 µl of

supplement solution (Lonza) and 3 µg of each episomal plasmid as described (Okita et al., 2011) (pCXLE-hUL, ID: #27080; pCXLE-hSK, ID: #27078 and pCXLE-hOCT3/4, ID: #27076 purchased from Addgene), and transferred to an electroporation cuvette and nucleofected by using the Amaxa 2b nucleofector program P-022 (Human Dermal Fibroblast Nucleofection Kit VPD-1001 [Lonza]). The reprogrammed cells were then seeded onto Matrigel® coated (1:60 in DMEM, Corning) 6-well plates in fibroblast culture medium. On the second day, medium was changed to fibroblast culture medium supplemented with 2 ng/ml FGF2 (Peprotech) and 1 % P/S (Gibco). Media was further switched to the in-house E8 medium as described previously (Nagel et al., 2019) along with 100 µM sodium butyrate (Sigma-Aldrich) and 0.1 % P/S, and subsequently changed every other day. After 3 to 4 weeks, the reprogrammed iPSC colonies were picked manually assisted with P26 gauge needles and placed separately onto Matrigel® coated (1:60) 24-well plates. At around 80 % confluency, iPSCs were passaged at a ratio of 1:12, using 0.2 % (w/v) EDTA (AppliChem) in PBS (Sigma-Aldrich), and plated onto Matrigel® coated (1:60) 6-well plates, using E8 medium, supplemented with Rock inhibitor Y-27632 (10 µM in DMSO, Abcam Biochemicals), which was also used at further passaging. iPSCs were frozen into cryostocks for maintenance using 50 % E8, 40 % KO-SR (Life Technologies), 10 % DMSO (Sigma-Aldrich) and 10 µM Y-27632. A PCR based mycoplasma testing (PanReac AppliChem kit) was performed for each generated line following the manufacturer's recommendations. All cells described were maintained at 37 °C and 5 % CO<sub>2</sub>.

### 3.2. Analysis of genomic integrity

To confirm that the iPSC lines were transgene-free after reprogramming, genomic DNA was extracted after the 10th passage by using the GeneJET Genomic DNA Purification Kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific) and were analysed via touchdown PCR with primers specific to the reprogramming factors (Table 2) in a Bio-Rad T100 Thermal Cycler (annealing temperature, TA: 65 °C, decreasing by 1 °C each cycle to 55 °C, repeat: 25 cycles at 55 °C, elongation time, TE: 30 s). Presence of the respective *POLR3A* variants were confirmed by conventional Sanger sequencing in the iPSCs along with their fibroblasts on a Genetic Analyzer 3130xl (Applied Biosystems) using BigDye® Terminator v3.1 chemistry and primers as listed (Table 2).

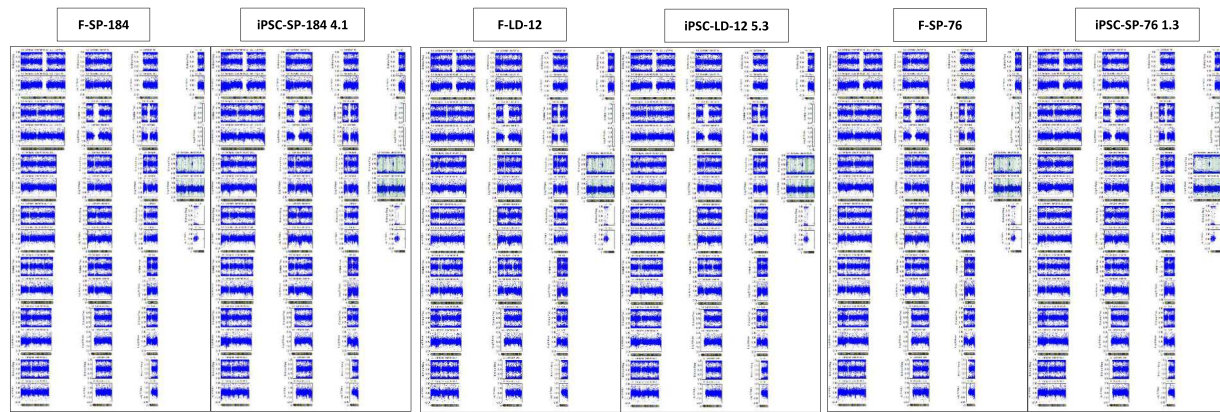
Genomic integrity was further analysed using a whole-genome SNP genotyping method using the HumanOmni2.5Exome-8 BeadChip v1.5 (Illumina) (Fig. 1A). To independently confirm the identity of the reprogrammed cells and to validate the parentage of the iPSC lines to their corresponding fibroblasts, an STR analysis was performed. For this, six short tandem repeats loci (D12S1648, D6S265, D12S345, D8S323, D12S1687, D12S85) were amplified via touchdown-PCR (16 cycles, TA 65 °C to 55 °C, TE 30 s, 19 cycles, TA 55 °C, TE 30 s, final TE 5 min) and the resulting fragments were analysed with a Genescan™ size standard (Applied Biosystems), using the Gene Mapper generic software (Applied Biosystems).

### 3.3. Analysis of stem cell characteristics

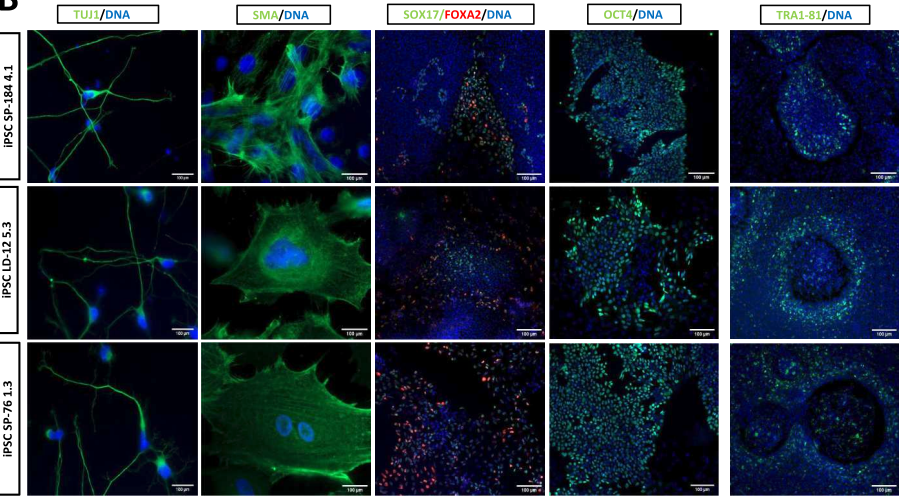
The stem cell characteristics of the three generated iPSC lines were investigated with the following experiments:

- 1) Pluripotency markers: To examine the expression of pluripotency markers through immunocytochemistry, iPSC cell lines were fixed with 4 % paraformaldehyde (PFA) (Merck) for 15 min at RT, followed by permeabilization with 0.1 % Triton-X (Carl Roth), and blocked with 5 % BSA/PBST (Thermo Fisher scientific) for 1 h at RT. They were further incubated with specific antibodies for pluripotency markers (Table 2) over night at 4 °C. These primary antibodies were detected via Alexa fluorophore conjugated secondary antibody staining for 1 h at RT (Table 2) and are counterstained with DAPI (1:10,000 in PBS, 5 min at RT, Invitrogen). The slides were further

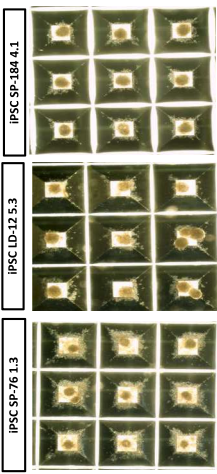
A



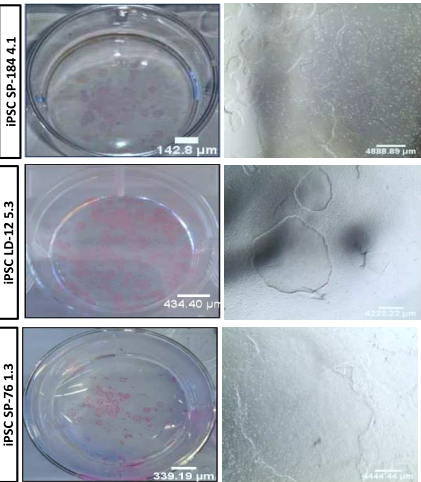
B



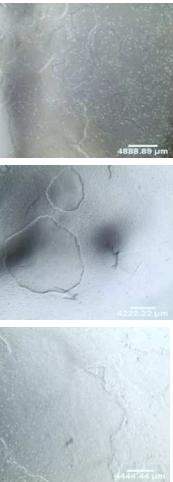
C



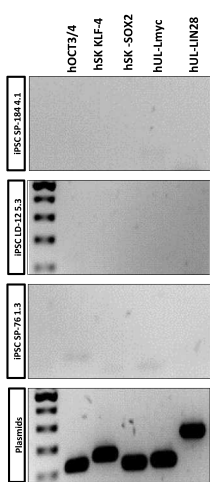
D



E



F



G

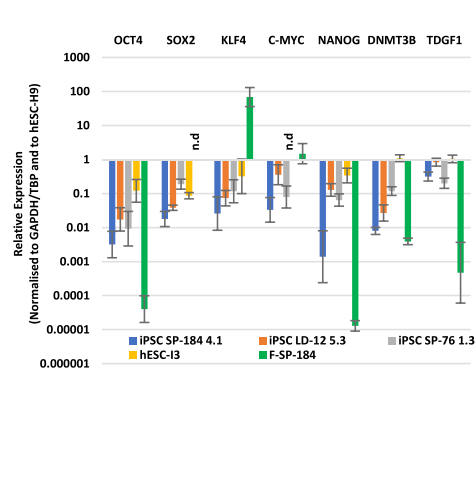


Fig. 1. Characterisation of iPSC lines HIIHRSi004-A, HIIHRSi005-A, HIIHRSi006-A.

**Table 1**  
Characterization and validation.

| Classification                                | Test                                                                                                                      | Result                                                                                                                                              | Data                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <b>Morphology Phenotype</b>                   | Photography Bright field                                                                                                  | Normal                                                                                                                                              | Fig. 1E                                  |
|                                               | Qualitative analysis                                                                                                      | i) Expression of pluripotency markers: OCT4, TRA 1–81 through immunocytochemistry.<br>ii) Expression of alkaline phosphatase (ALP) through staining | Fig. 1B and D                            |
| <b>Genotype</b>                               | Quantitative analysis                                                                                                     | RT-qPCR for expression of <i>OCT4</i> , <i>NANOG</i> , <i>KLF4</i> , <i>c-MYC</i> , <i>SOX2</i> , <i>DNMT3B</i> and <i>TDGF1</i>                    | Fig. 1G                                  |
|                                               | Whole genome SNP genotyping with Infinium OmniExpressExome-8 BeadChip (Illumina) Spacing (kb): Mean: 3,03; Median: 1,36   | No larger chromosomal aberrations or copy number variations were observed upon reprogramming                                                        | Fig. 1A                                  |
| <b>Identity</b>                               | Microsatellite PCR (mPCR)<br>STR analysis                                                                                 | Not performed<br>6 sites tested, all matched                                                                                                        | N/A<br>submitted in archive with journal |
| <b>Mutation analysis</b>                      | Sanger sequencing<br>Southern Blot OR WGS                                                                                 | Known <i>POLR3A</i> mutations confirmed<br>N/A                                                                                                      | Supplementary Fig. 1A<br>N/A             |
| <b>Microbiology and virology</b>              | Mycoplasma test                                                                                                           | Mycoplasma testing by PCR: Negative                                                                                                                 | Supplementary Fig. S1B                   |
| <b>Differentiation potential</b>              | Embryoid body formation                                                                                                   | Formation of embryoid bodies in aggrewell plates are demonstrated                                                                                   | Fig. 1C                                  |
| <b>List of recommended germ layer markers</b> | Expression of specific germ layer markers after spontaneous differentiation of the embryoid bodies by immunocytochemistry | Ectoderm: TUJ1<br>Endoderm: SOX17, FOXA2,<br>Mesoderm: SMA                                                                                          | Fig. 1B                                  |
| <b>Donor screening (OPTIONAL)</b>             | HIV 1 + 2 Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C                                                                                        | N/A                                                                                                                                                 | N/A                                      |
| <b>Genotype additional info (OPTIONAL)</b>    | Blood group genotyping<br>HLA tissue typing                                                                               | N/A<br>N/A                                                                                                                                          | N/A<br>N/A                               |

**Table 2**  
Reagents details.

|                                              | Antibodies used for immunocytochemistry/flow-cytometry |                     |                                                      |            |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------|
|                                              | Antibody                                               | Dilution            | Company                                              | Cat # RRID |
| <i>Pluripotency Markers</i>                  | mouse anti-OCT4                                        | 1:100               | SantaCruz                                            | AB_628051  |
|                                              | mouse anti-Tra-1–81                                    | 1:500               | Merck_Millipore                                      | AB_177638  |
| <i>Differentiation Markers</i>               | mouse anti-TUJ1                                        | 1:1000              | Sigma Aldrich                                        | AB_477590  |
|                                              | mouse anti-SMA                                         | 1:100               | Dako                                                 | AB_2223500 |
|                                              | goat anti-SOX17                                        | 1:250               | R&D Systems                                          | AB_355060  |
|                                              | rabbit anti-FOXA2                                      | 1:300               | Millipore                                            | AB_390153  |
|                                              | Alexa Fluor 568 donkey anti-goat IgG                   | 1:1000              | Invitrogen                                           |            |
| <i>Secondary antibodies</i>                  | Alexa Fluor 488 Goat anti-rabbit IgG                   | 1:1000              | Invitrogen                                           |            |
|                                              | Alexa Fluor 488 Goat Anti-mouse IgG                    | 1:1000              | Invitrogen                                           |            |
|                                              | <b>Primers</b>                                         |                     |                                                      |            |
| <i>Episomal Plasmids</i>                     | <b>Target</b>                                          | <b>Size of band</b> | <b>Forward/Reverse primer (5'–3')</b>                |            |
|                                              | OCT3/4_Plasmid                                         | 124 bp              | CATTCAAACTGAGGTAAGGG/TAGCGTAAAAGGAGCAACATAG          |            |
|                                              | SOX2_Plasmid                                           | 111 bp              | TTCACATGTCCCAGCACTACCAG/<br>TTTGTTTGACAGGAGCGACAAT   |            |
|                                              | KLF4_Plasmid                                           | 156 bp              | CCACCTCGCCTTACACATGAAG/<br>TAGCGTAAAAGGAGCAACATAG    |            |
|                                              | L-MYC_Plasmid                                          | 122 bp              | GGCTGAGAAGAGGATGGCTAC/TTTGTTTGACAGGAGCGACAAT         |            |
| <i>Pluripotency Markers (qPCR)</i>           | LIN28_Plasmid                                          | 251 bp              | AGCCATATGGTAGCCTCATGTCCGC/<br>TAGCGTAAAAGGAGCAACATAG |            |
|                                              | OCT4                                                   |                     | GGAAGGTAATTCAGCCAAACG/CTCCAGGTTGCCTCTCACTC           |            |
|                                              | SOX2                                                   |                     | AGCTCGCAGACCTACATGAA/CCGGGGAGATACATGCTGAT            |            |
|                                              | KLF4                                                   |                     | CCATCTTTCTCCACGTTTCGC/CGTTGAAGTCTCGGTCTCT            |            |
|                                              | C-MYC                                                  |                     | ATTCTCTGCTCTCCTCGACG/CTGTGAGGAGTTTGCTGTG             |            |
|                                              | NANOG                                                  |                     | CAAAGGCCAAACAACCCACTT/TGCGTCACACCATTTGCTATT          |            |
|                                              | DNMT3B                                                 |                     | ACGACACAGAGGACACACAT/AAGCCCTTGATCTTTCCCCA            |            |
|                                              | TDGF1                                                  |                     | GGTCTGTGCCCCATGACA/AGTTCTGGAGTCTCGGAAGC              |            |
| <i>House-Keeping Genes (qPCR)</i>            | GAPDH                                                  |                     | TCACCAGGGTGCTTTTAAC/GACAAGCTTCCCCTTCTCAG             |            |
|                                              | TBP                                                    |                     | CTTCGGAGAGTTCTGGAAATTG/CACGAAGTGCAATGGTCTTTAG        |            |
| <i>Genotyping</i>                            | N/A                                                    |                     |                                                      |            |
| <i>Targeted mutation analysis/sequencing</i> | Primer1: HIHRSi004-A                                   | 233 bp              | AGTAGGCAGCGTCAAAGAGA/CTTTACACCTGACGTTGGG             |            |
|                                              | Primer2: HIHRSi005-A                                   | 224 bp              | TGGCGTTGTTAGTTGTGTG/CCCACCGGACCTTCAGATTT             |            |
|                                              | Primer3: HIHRSi006-A                                   | 201 bp              | GAAATTGGCCAACGGTCTT/ACAGATGATTGCCTGTGTGG             |            |
|                                              | Primer4: HIHRSi004-A, HIHRSi005-A, HIHRSi006-A         | 158 bp              | TGAATTTGCTTGCTTCGCGA/GAACCAAGGGAAGCAGTAC             |            |

- embedded in mounting medium (DAKO) for detection with fluorescence microscopy.
- 2) Alkaline phosphatase staining: To assess the expression of alkaline phosphatase (ALP), a marker of iPSCs, iPSC lines were fixed with 4 % PFA for 1 min at RT, washed thrice with PBS, then incubated in the staining solution: 20 µl naphthol AS-MX phosphate alkaline solution (Sigma-Aldrich) with 500 µl Fast Red (1 mg/ml, Sigma-Aldrich), for 30 min at RT and imaged with a camera.
- 3) RT-qPCR: To confirm the expression of iPSC markers at transcript level, RT-qPCR was performed for all cell lines. RNA was extracted

from the generated iPSCs and fibroblasts using the RNAeasy mini-isolation Kit (Qiagen) and transcribed to cDNA with the Transcriptor First Strand cDNA Synthesis Kit (Roche). RT-qPCR was performed with the Light Cycler 480 SYBR Green I Master kit (Roche) for the pluripotency markers with primers as mentioned (Table 2). The pluripotency gene expression was compared to that of the embryonic stem cell line I3 and fibroblasts, and the expression values were normalized to housekeeping genes *GAPDH* and *TBP*, and the embryonic stem cell line H9, using the  $2^{-\Delta\Delta Ct}$  method in the Light Cycler 480 software.

- 4) Spontaneous differentiation to germ layers: To demonstrate the differentiation potential of the generated iPSC lines into cells of all 3 germ layers, an embryoid body (EB) based protocol was used as described (Nagel et al., 2019). For ectodermal differentiation, the EBs were plated in 3 N medium in house (50 % DMEM/F12 medium (Life Technologies), 50 % Neurobasal medium (Life Technologies), 1 % B27 (Life Technologies), 1 mM Glutamine (Gibco), 1 % NEAA (Sigma Aldrich), 50  $\mu$ M  $\beta$ -MeOH (Sigma Aldrich), 1 % Penicillin/Streptomycin (P/S) (Gibco), 160 mg/ml Glucose (Carl-roth)) and for mesodermal differentiation, EBs were plated in mesodermal differentiation medium (82 % DMEM high glucose (Sigma), 16 % FCS (Gibco), 1 % P/S (Gibco), 1 % NEAA (Sigma Aldrich), 55 mM  $\beta$ -MeOH (Sigma Aldrich), 0.0004 % Thioglycerol (Sigma-Aldrich)). Endodermal differentiation of the EBs was performed as described (Carpentier et al., 2014). Expression of differentiation markers at protein level was validated by immunofluorescence staining for specific markers of the three germ layers: endodermal markers - SOX17 and FOXA2, mesodermal marker - SMA and ectodermal marker - TUJ1 (Table 2). Images for both the immunostainings were acquired with Axio Imager Z1 (Zeiss) and were processed with Zen lite 2.0.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Kalaivani Manibarathi:** Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Tam Pham:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Holger Hengel:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Data curation. **Matthis Synofzik:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Data curation. **Maïke Nagel:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Methodology, Data curation. **Rebecca Schüle:** Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Resources.

#### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial

interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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#### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scr.2024.103363>.

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