

# Expression Characteristics and Significant Diagnostic and Prognostic Values of ANLN in Human Cancers

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**Introduction:** In light of the increased demand for reliable cancer-associated biomarkers and ANLN oncogenic potential, the present study aimed to investigate ANLN's role in 24 human cancers.

**Methods:** The UALCAN, Kaplan–Meier (KM) plotter, TNM Plot, GENT2, GEPIA, HPA, cBioPortal, STRING, Enrichr, TIMER, Cytoscape, DAVID, MuTarget, and CTD online databases and bioinformatic tools were used in this study.

**Results:** In three of the cancers analyzed, ANLN expression was downregulated in tumor tissue, while it was overexpressed in the 21 other types of tumor tissue relative to controls. In CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients, ANLN overexpression was correlated with shorter overall survival, relapse-free survival, and metastasis. This suggests that ANLN is significantly involved in the development and progression of these four cancers. Further expression analysis revealed upregulation of ANLN in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients with different clinical characteristics, regardless of the heterogeneity barrier. Gene Ontology and Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes enrichment analysis revealed that ANLN-associated genes were coexpressed with ANLN and were included in diverse BP, MF, and KEGG terms. Moreover, some interesting correlations were also documented between ANLN expression and its promoter-methylation level, genetic alterations, other mutant genes, and CD8<sup>+</sup> T- and CD4<sup>+</sup> T-cell infiltration. Moreover, we also identified ANLN-associated transcription factors, miRNAs, and chemotherapeutic drugs.

**Conclusion:** This pan-cancer study revealed the novel diagnostic and prognostic role of ANLN across four cancers, regardless of heterogeneity.

**Keywords:** cancer, ANLN, diagnostic, prognostic, biomarker

## Introduction

Cancer is a multifactorial disease with various potential causes.<sup>1</sup> In 2020, around 8.7 million cancer deaths were reported worldwide and the disease declared the second-leading cause of death after cardiovascular disorders.<sup>2</sup> Although these massive figures show that the battle against cancer has not been won yet, recent advances in personalized medicine and

treatment strategies like immunotherapy have significantly improved the survival of cancer patients.<sup>3</sup> However, cancer is still rising significantly and results in tremendous social and economic burdens around the world. As such, exploring the underlying biological mechanisms of carcinogenesis and investigating the possible potential diagnostic and prognostic biomarkers of cancer is urgent.

Anillin (*ANLN*) is an actin-binding protein that was originally discovered in *Drosophila* and is primarily involved in cytokinesis.<sup>4</sup> The *ANLN* gene is located at the 7p14.2 position in the human genome and is involved in the recruitment of numerous key cell division-associated genes, such as F-actin, myosin II, and septins, and is thus regarded as the major organizer of the cytokinetic machinery.<sup>5</sup> It has been reported that mutations and expression variations in *ANLN* contribute significantly to the development and progression of human cancers.<sup>6</sup> So far, *ANLN* dysregulation has been reported in different human cancers, ie, in breast, colorectal, liver, lung, endometrial, kidney, ovarian, brain, and pancreatic cancers.<sup>7</sup> A bioinformatics-based study revealed that the *ANLN* gene can be an ideal prognostic biomarker for evaluating the survival of cervical cancer patients.<sup>8,9</sup> In addition, *ANLN* was found to cause chemotherapy resistance in breast cancer cells by directly reducing the effectiveness of doxorubicin during a clinical trial.<sup>10</sup> As *ANLN* upregulates in tumor tissue and its expression increases as the disease progresses, this gene holds great promise as a potential biomarker of cancer development and progression.<sup>7,11,12</sup> Due to the increasing prevalence of cancer cases worldwide, elucidation of underlying molecular mechanisms and the discovery of more sensitive diagnostic and prognostic biomarkers of cancer is critical to managing the disease.

In this study, we carried out a systematic expression analysis and evaluated the diagnostic and prognostic values of *ANLN*. Additionally, we also analyzed the correlation of *ANLN* expression with its promoter-methylation level, other mutant genes, and CD4<sup>+</sup> and CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells. Finally, using online databases, we identified transcription factors (TFs), miRNAs, and important chemotherapeutic drugs targeting *ANLN*. Our results revealed the unique role of *ANLN* in cervical squamous-cell carcinoma (CESC), esophageal carcinoma (ESCA), head-and-neck squamous-cell carcinoma (HNSC), and kidney renal clear-cell carcinoma (KIRC), as well as suggesting this gene as a reliable diagnostic and prognostic biomarker in these cancers.

## Methods

### Ethics

This study was reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Bahawalpur, Pakistan.

### UALCAN Analysis

The UALCAN web tool facilitates multiomic analysis with respect to both MET500 and TCGA cancer genomic data.<sup>13</sup> In this work, we performed pan-cancer differential expression and promoter-methylation analysis of *ANLN* across multiple human cancer types using UALCAN. mRNA-expression level were normalized as transcripts per million reads, while promoter-methylation level were normalized as  $\beta$  values. As with all statistical analyses herein, Student's *t*-test was employed and  $P < 0.05$  taken as significant.

### KM Plotter–Based Analysis

Kaplan–Meier (KM) plotter (<https://kmplot.com/analysis>) is a user-friendly online tool designed for survival analysis of the gene of interest in 21 different cancer patients. This tool contains mRNA-expression data and survival information of cancer patients obtained from the Gene Expression Omnibus (GEO).<sup>14</sup> Briefly, *ANLN* was searched to obtain KM overall survival (OS) and relapse-free (RFS) plots of the available 21 cancer subtypes. *P*-values, 95% CIs, and HRs) were determined.

### TNM Plot

This database (<https://www.tnmplot.com>) is designed to analyze the relative expression of any gene of interest in normal, cancerous, and metastatic tissue.<sup>15</sup> It contains data on 3,691 normal, 29,376 tumor, and 453 metastatic samples from the

GEO and 730 normal, 9,886 tumor, and 394 metastatic samples from TCGA. We used TNM Plot to analyze *ANLN* expression in normal and metastatic tissue from different cancers.

## TIMER-, GENT2-, GEPIA-, and HPA-Based Expression-Validation Analysis

TIMER (<http://timer.cistrome.org>), GENT2 (<http://gent2.appex.kr>), GEPIA (<http://gepia.cancer-pku.cn>), and the Human Protein Atlas (HPA) database (<https://www.proteinatlas.org>) are cancer transcriptomic data-analysis websites.<sup>16–19</sup> In the current study, we used TIMER, GENT2, and GEPIA for mRNA- and protein-expression validation of *ANLN* using new independent cohorts of cancer patients. In TIMER, GENT2, and GEPIA, mRNA expression was normalized as transcripts per million reads, while in the HPA protein expression was graded as not detected, low, medium, or high based on the intensity of staining and fraction of the stained cells.

## MExpress

MExpress (<https://mexpress.be>) helps to analyze correlations between promoter-methylation levels and expression.<sup>20</sup> In this study, correlations between *ANLN* expression and promoter-methylation levels in cancer patients were computed using this tool with the help of Pearson correlation analysis.

## cBioPortal

cBioPortal is a web tool that facilitates the multiomic analysis using TCGA cancer-genome data.<sup>21</sup> This tool provides comprehensive detail regarding copy-number variation (CNV) and genetic mutations in the gene of interest. Additionally, this tool also evaluates the association between gene mutation and the prognosis of cancer patients. We used cBioPortal to evaluate and analyze the *ANLN* genetic alterations and CNVs in TCGA's data set of cancers.

## PPI-Network Construction, Visualization, Gene Ontology (GO), and Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes (KEGG) Pathway-Enrichment Analysis

The STRING database (<http://string-db.org>) is an online source for constructing PPI networks of genes of interest.<sup>22</sup> We utilized this user-friendly tool to construct a PPI network of *ANLN*-enriched genes. This was further visualized with Cytoscape software.<sup>23</sup> Then, GO and KEGG analysis of the *ANLN*-enriched genes were performed using DAVID (<http://david.ncifcrf.gov/summary.jsp>).<sup>24</sup>

## Correlation of *ANLN* with Related Genes

GEPIA (<http://gepia.cancer-pku.cn>) was utilized to compute correlations between *ANLN* and related genes with the help of the “Correlation Analysis” module.

## *ANLN* and CD4<sup>+</sup> and CD8<sup>+</sup> T Cells

TIMER (<http://timer.cistrome.org>) helps in the evaluation of immune-cell infiltration and clinical/therapeutic effects.<sup>25</sup> This resource helped us to compute Spearman correlations between *ANLN* expression and CD4<sup>+</sup> T- and CD8<sup>+</sup> T-cell infiltration in cancer patients.

## Enrichr Database Analysis

Enrichr (<https://maayanlab.cloud/Enrichr>)<sup>26</sup> facilitates analysis of gene(s) of interest using enrichment terms, eg, functional, targeted miRNAs, and pathway-enrichment terms. In this study, we identified *ANLN*-targeted miRNAs and TFs using this web source. The top-ten significantly enriched terms are given in the Results section.

## MuTarget Analysis

The MuTarget (<https://www.mutarget.com/result>) platform is principally designed to associate gene expression with mutational status in cancer samples.<sup>27</sup> We identified mutant genes responsible for expression alterations in *ANLN* using

this tool. Based on Mann–Whitney *P*-values and mean FC, significant genes were selected for testing, where we used default thresholds of  $P \leq 0.05$  and  $0.714 > FC > 1.4$ .

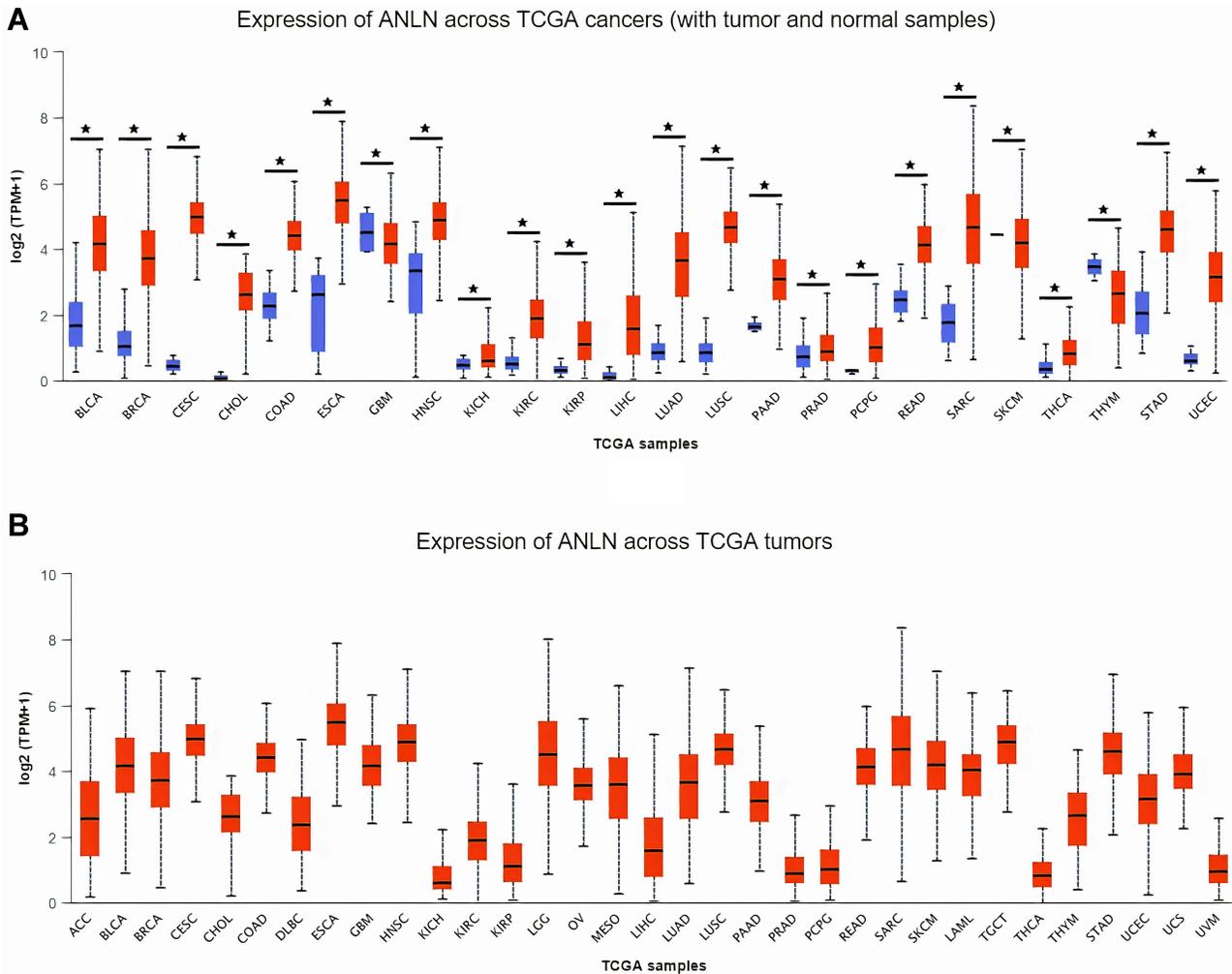
### ANLN Gene–Drug Interaction-Network Analysis

The Comparative Toxicogenomics Database (CTD; <http://ctdbase.org>) is used to retrieve information on chemotherapeutic drugs that can change the expression of genes of interest.<sup>28</sup> ANLN was queried in CTD and a gene–drug interaction network visualized with Cytoscape to recognize ANLN-interacting drugs that may help in the treatment of distinct human cancers by regulating ANLN expression.

## Results

### Expression-Level Analysis of ANLN in Distinct Types of Human Cancer

To find differences in ANLN expression in tumors and normal tissue, TCGA expression profiles across 24 types of tumor samples and paired normal tissue were utilized through the UALCAN platform. Results demonstrated that ANLN was down-regulated in glioblastoma, skin cutaneous melanoma, and thymoma, while it was overexpressed in all the remaining 21 types of cancer samples compared to normal controls, including CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** ANLN expression across cancers and normal tissue visualized by UALCAN. **(A)** ANLN expression in cancer subtypes paired with normal controls; **(B)** ANLN expression in cancer subtypes only. \**P*<0.05.

## ANLN Prognostic Potential in Different Types of Cancer

KM Plotter was used to investigate the prognostic potential of *ANLN* in different types of cancer. Overexpression of *ANLN* was significantly associated with decreased OS and RFS duration of CESC (HR 1.77, 95% CI 1.1–2.83,  $P=0.016$ ; HR 2.14, 95% CI 0.98–4.68,  $P=0.05$ ), ESCA (HR 2.64, 95% CI 1.36–5.15,  $P=0.003$ , HR 271493743.64, 95% CI<sub>0-Inf</sub>,  $P=0.028$ ), HNSC (HR 1.36, 95% CI 1.2–1.81,  $P=0.034$ ; HR 2.08, 95% CI 0.88–4.09,  $P=0.0087$ ), and KIRC (HR 2.25, 95% CI 1.68–3.04,  $P=8.2 \times 10^{-8}$ , HR 1.83, 95% CI 0.65–5.16,  $P=0.024$ ) patients (Figure 2A and B). *ANLN* overexpression was also positively correlated with metastasis of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC (Figure 2C). Taken together, these data suggest that *ANLN* might contribute significantly to the development and progression of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC, and thus the next part of our study mainly focused on the unique role of *ANLN* in these four cancer types.

## Transcription and Translational Expression–Level Validation of ANLN Using New Independent Cohorts

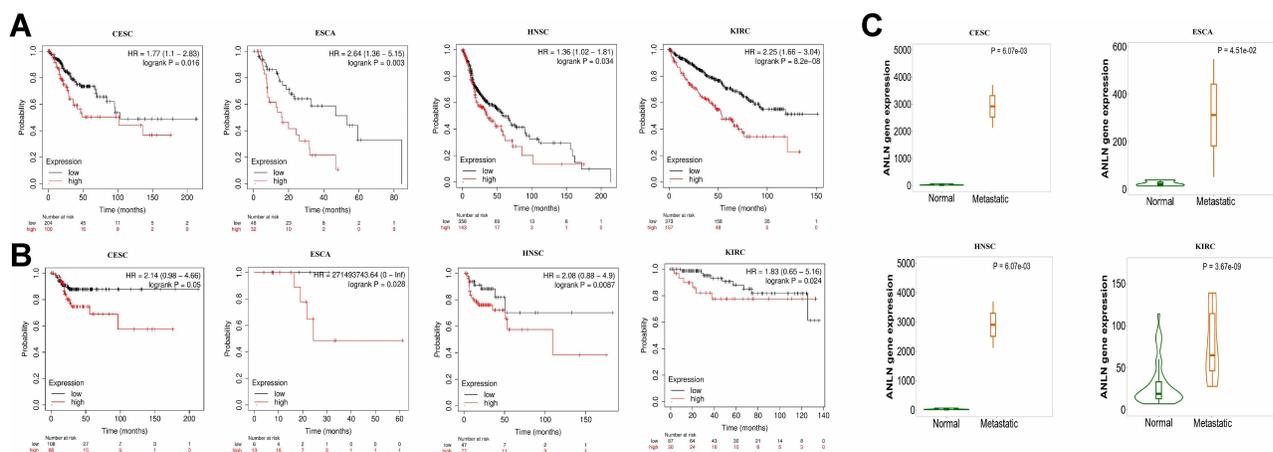
To further validate *ANLN* expression at transcription and translational levels, we reanalyzed its expression using new independent cohorts of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC via TIMER, GENT2, GEPIA, and the HPA. Reanalysis also revealed significant overexpression of *ANLN* at both transcription and translational level in the new cohorts of patients relative to normal controls (Figure 3).

## ANLN Overexpressed in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC Patients with Different Clinicopathological Features

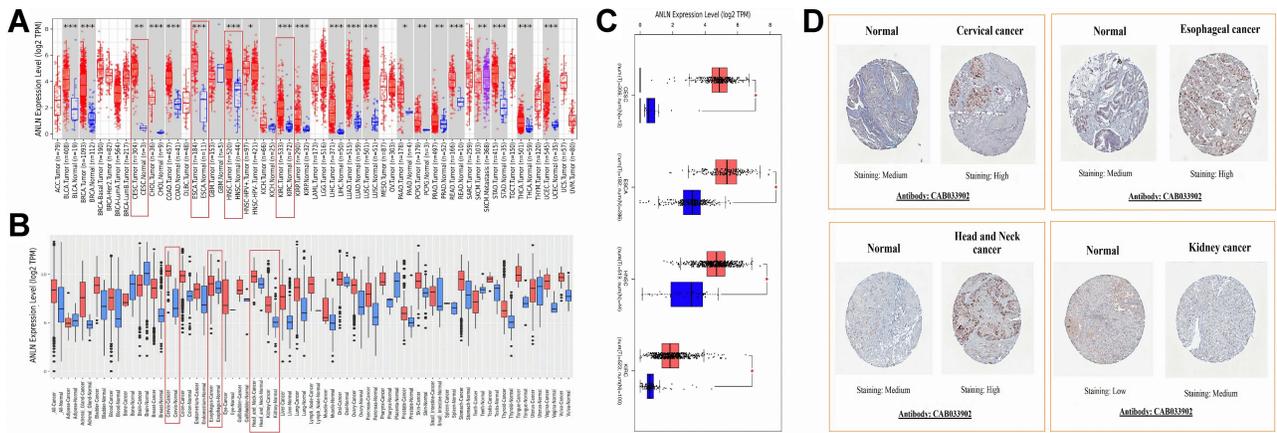
The distinct cancer types (CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC) in which *ANLN* showed significant negative correlations with OS and RFS duration were reanalyzed to verify the significance of *ANLN* expression in normal and cancerous samples with clinicopathological parameters: cancer stage, patient age, patient ethnicity, and nodal metastasis. *ANLN* was significantly overexpressed in all CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients with different clinicopathological parameters compared to the normal controls (Figure 4). Taken together, this implies that *ANLN* is overexpressed in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients, regardless of the heterogeneity barrier.

## Promoter-Methylation Analysis of ANLN

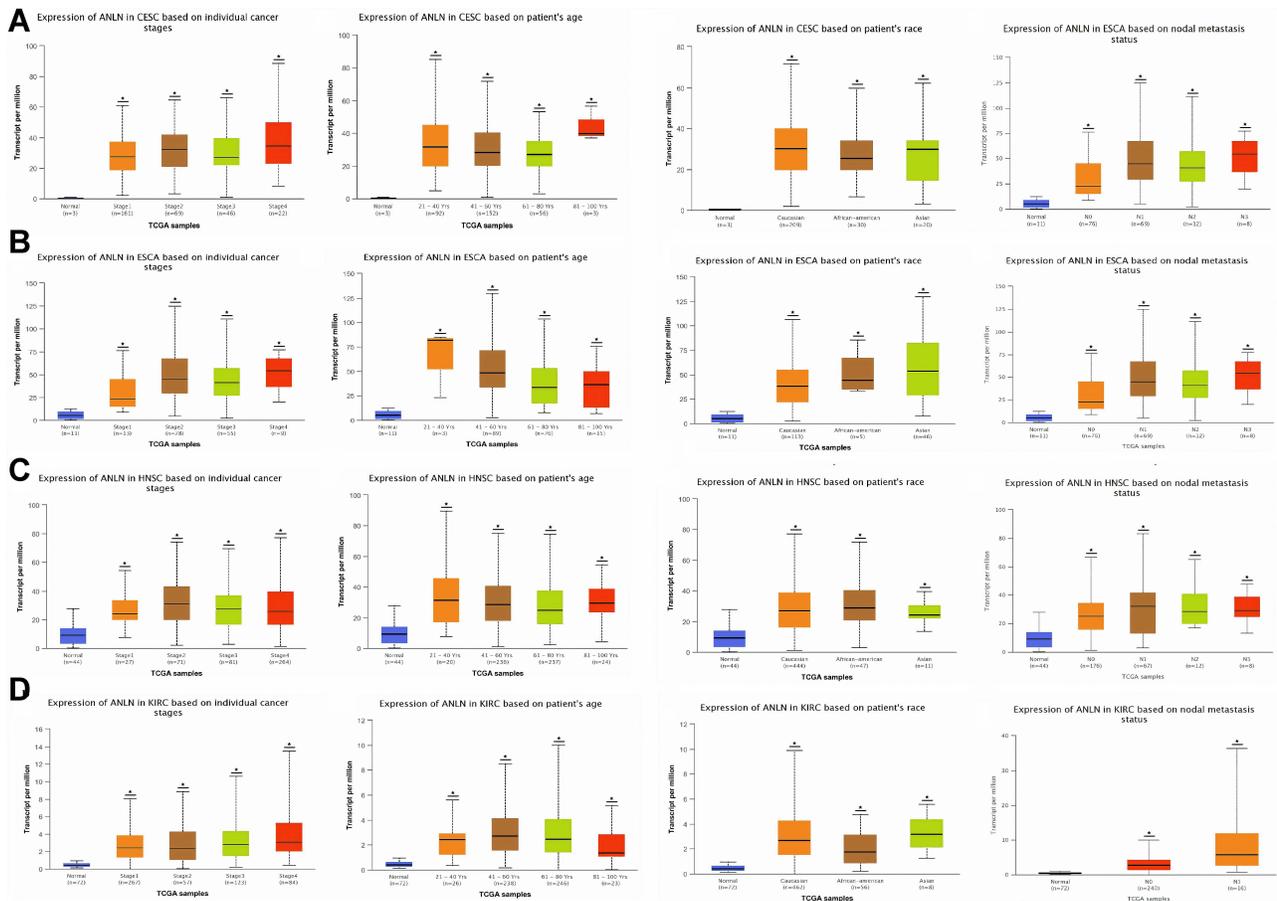
It is known that inactivation of tumor-suppressor genes due to hypermethylation of the promoter region leads to cancer.<sup>29</sup> To assess *ANLN* promoter methylation in defined cancer types, we utilized the UALCAN database. The results suggested



**Figure 2** Prognostic values and correlation analysis of *ANLN* with tumor metastasis in cancers. (A) OS in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC; (B) RFS in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC; (C) correlation analysis of *ANLN* with metastasis in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC tissue.

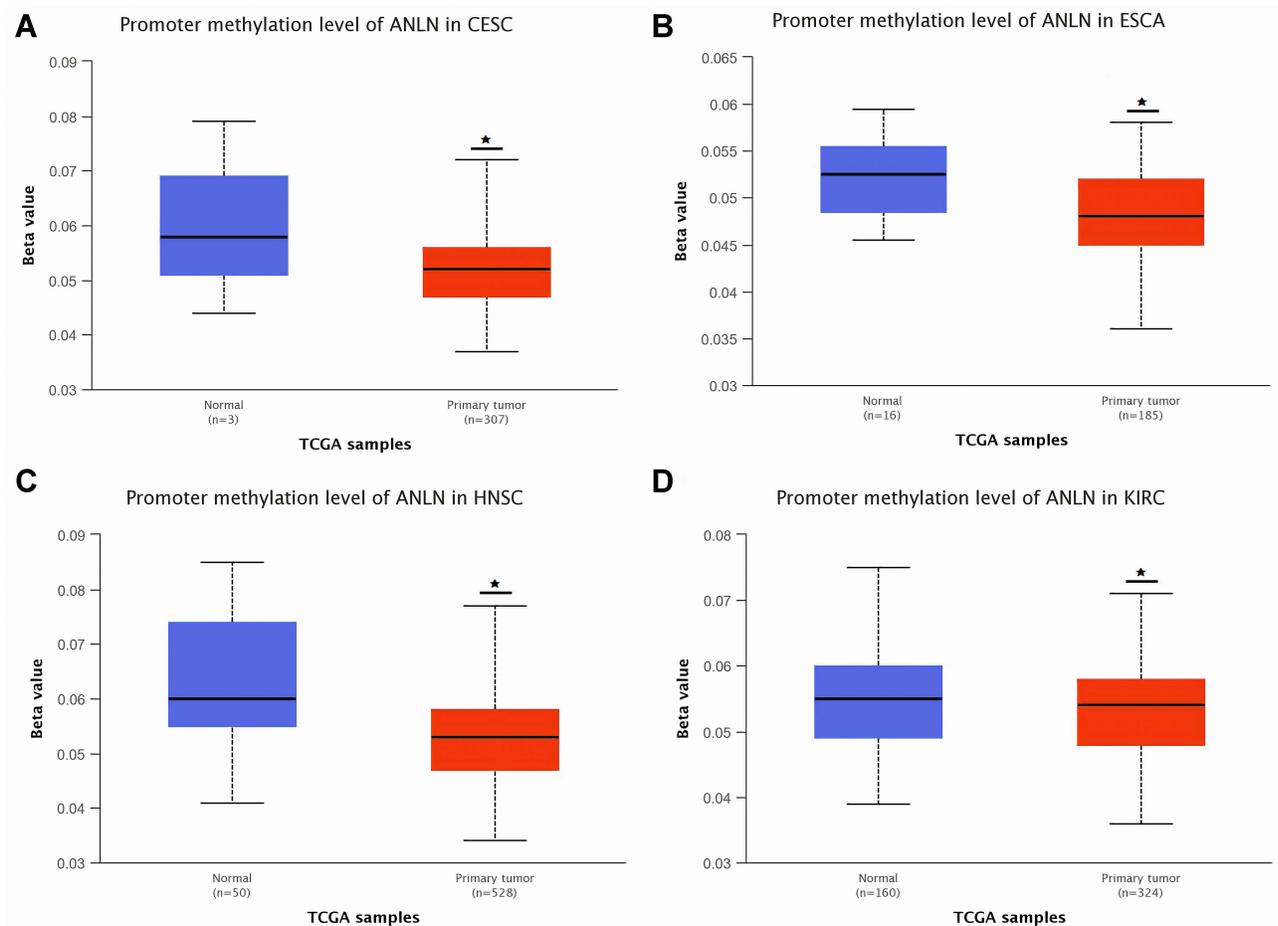


**Figure 3** Transcription and translational expression-level validation of *ANLN* in new independent cohorts of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC via TIMER, GENT2, GEPIA, and HPA databases. **(A)** Transcription level-expression validation of *ANLN* via TIMER; **(B)** transcription level-expression validation of *ANLN* via GENT2; **(C)** transcription level-expression validation of *ANLN* via GEPIA; **(D)** translational level expression validation of *ANLN* via HPA. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.001$ , \*\*\* $P < 0.0001$ .



**Figure 4** Clinicopathological feature-specific expression profiling of *ANLN* in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC via UALCAN. **(A)** Individual cancer stage-specific expression profiling of *ANLN*; **(B)** patient age-specific expression profiling of *ANLN*; **(C)** patient ethnicity-specific expression profiling of *ANLN*; and **(D)** nodal metastasis-specific expression profiling of *ANLN*. \* $P < 0.05$ .

that the promoter level of *ANLN* was significantly lower in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC samples (Figure 5). Therefore, the overall data suggested a negative correlation between *ANLN* expression and promoter methylation in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC samples compared to the normal controls.



**Figure 5** Promoter-methylation analysis of *ANLN* in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC via UALCAN. (A) CESC; (B) ESCA; (C) HNSC; (D) KIRC. \* $P < 0.05$ .

## Promoter Methylation–Level Validation of *ANLN* Using New Independent Cohorts

To validate *ANLN* promoter methylation in the new independent cohorts of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC, we used MExpress. It was observed that promoter methylation values obtained from the different methylation probes in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC were also significantly negatively correlated with *ANLN* expression levels (Figure 6).

## Copy-Number Variations and Mutational Analysis of *ANLN*

Information related to *ANLN* genetic alterations — deep amplification, deep deletion, genetic mutation, and fusion — in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC was obtained from TCGA CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC (TCGA, PanCancer Atlas) data sets consisting of 297, 182, 523, and 512 cancerous samples, respectively. Results revealed that *ANLN* harbored genetic alterations in only 0.8% cases of CESC, 5% cases of ESCA, 2.8% cases of HNSC, and 0.6% cases of KIRC, with maximum missense mutations in CESC, HNSC, and KIRC and maximum deep amplification in ESCA (Figure 7).

## PPI Network of *ANLN*, GO, and KEGG Analysis

We constructed a PPI of *ANLN*-associated genes via STRING and visualized it through. In total, ten *ANLN* interacting genes were identified through this network. We then performed GO and KEGG enrichment analysis of *ANLN*-associated genes. *ANLN*-associated genes were significantly involved in mitotic cytokinesis, positive regulation of cytokinesis, mitotic nuclear division, microtubule-based movement, and regulation of small GTPase–mediated signal-transduction biological process (BP) terms, protein-kinase binding, microtubule binding, ATP binding, and microtubule motor-activity

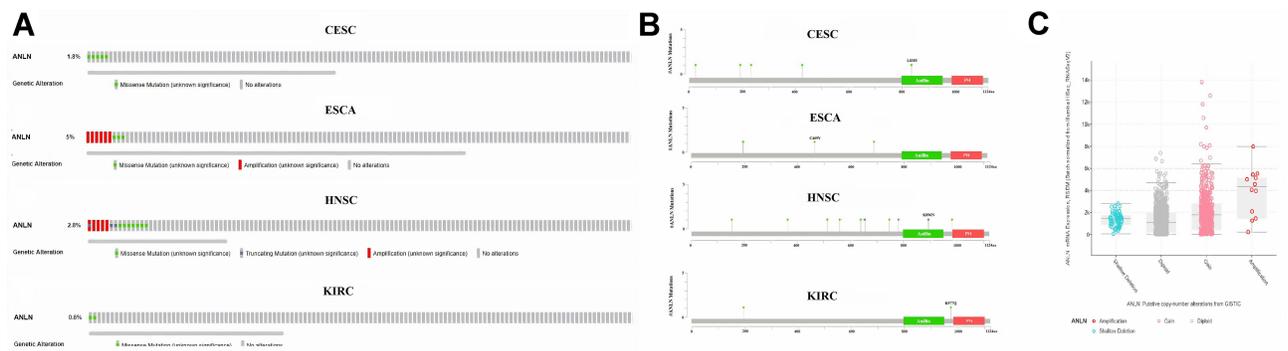


**Figure 6** Promoter methylation-level validation of ANLN in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC via MEXPRESS. (A) CESC; (B) ESCA; (C) HNSC; (D) KIRC. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.001$ , \*\*\* $P < 0.0001$ .

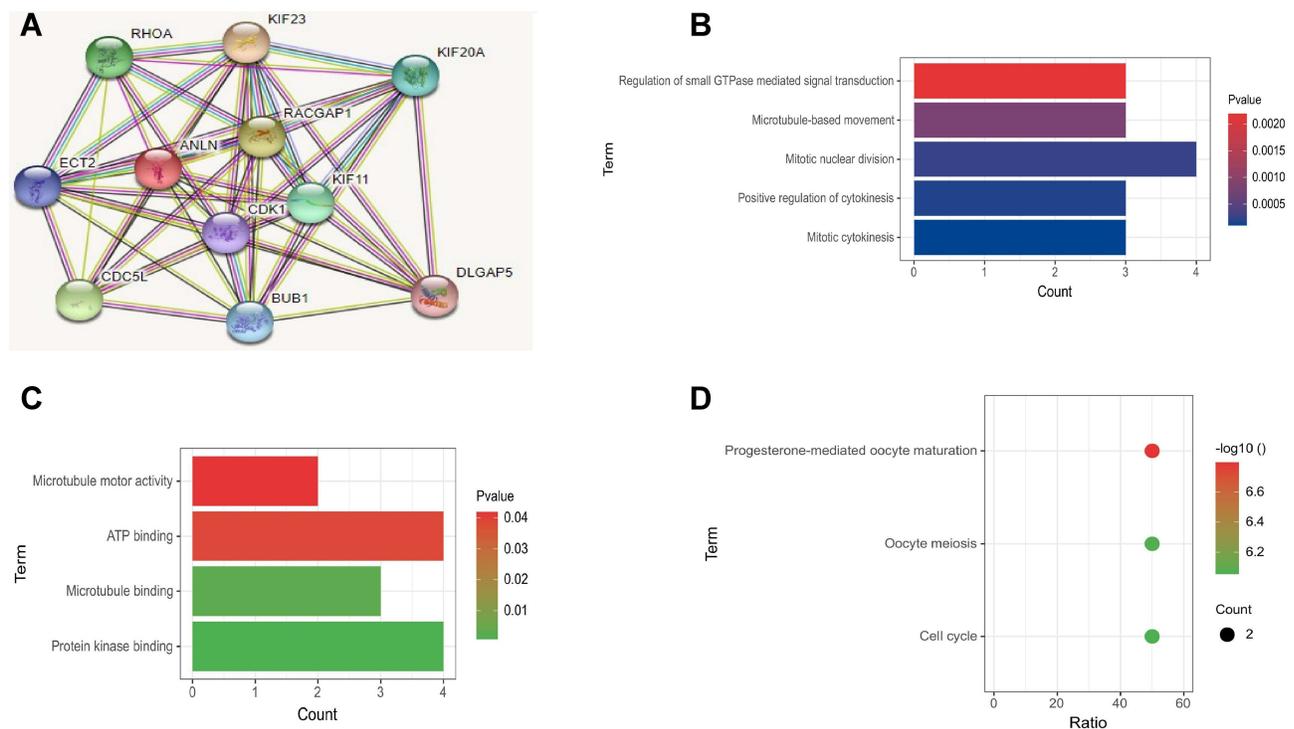
molecular function (MF) terms, and KEGG terms: progesterone-mediated oocyte maturation, oocyte meiosis, and the cell cycle (Figure 8 and Table 1).

### Correlation Analysis Between ANLN and Associated Gene Expression

We used GEPIA to analyze correlations between ANLN and associated gene (explored via STRING) expression in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC. ANLN expression was strongly positively correlated with expression levels of PHOA, RACGAP1, KIF23, KIF20A, KIF11, ECT2, DLGAP5, CDK1, CDC5L, and BUB1 (Figure 9). Based on these results, we speculated that along with ANLN, dysregulation of its other associated genes may also play a tumor-promoting role in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC.



**Figure 7** Copy-number variations (CNVs) and genetic alteration analysis of *ANLN* in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC data sets. **(A)** Overview of CNVs and genetic alterations of *ANLN* in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC samples; **(B)** types of genetic mutation observed in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC samples, altering the amino acids of the encoded proteins; **(C)** types of CNV observed in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC samples.



**Figure 8** PPI network, GO, and KEGG enrichment analysis of *ANLN*-enriched genes via STRING and DAVID. **(A)** PPI network of *ANLN*-enriched genes; **(B)** BP GO terms of *ANLN*-enriched genes; **(C)** MF GO terms of *ANLN*-enriched genes; **(D)** KEGG terms of *ANLN*-enriched genes.

## ANLN and Infiltrating Levels of CD8<sup>+</sup> and CD4<sup>+</sup> T Cells

Functions of and interactions between the innate and adaptive immune systems are vital for anticancer immunity. Cytotoxic T cells expressing cell-surface CD8<sup>+</sup> and CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells are the most powerful effectors in anticancer immune response and form the backbone of current successful cancer immunotherapies.<sup>30</sup> In the current study, Spearman correlations between expression of *ANLN* and CD8<sup>+</sup> and CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells was calculated using TIMER. Results revealed a significant negative correlation between the mRNA expression of *ANLN* and CD8<sup>+</sup> T-cell levels in CESC, ESCA, and HNSC and significant positive correlation in KIRC (Figure 10). On the other hand, a significant positive correlation between mRNA expression of *ANLN* and CD4<sup>+</sup> T-cell levels was also found in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC (Figure 10).

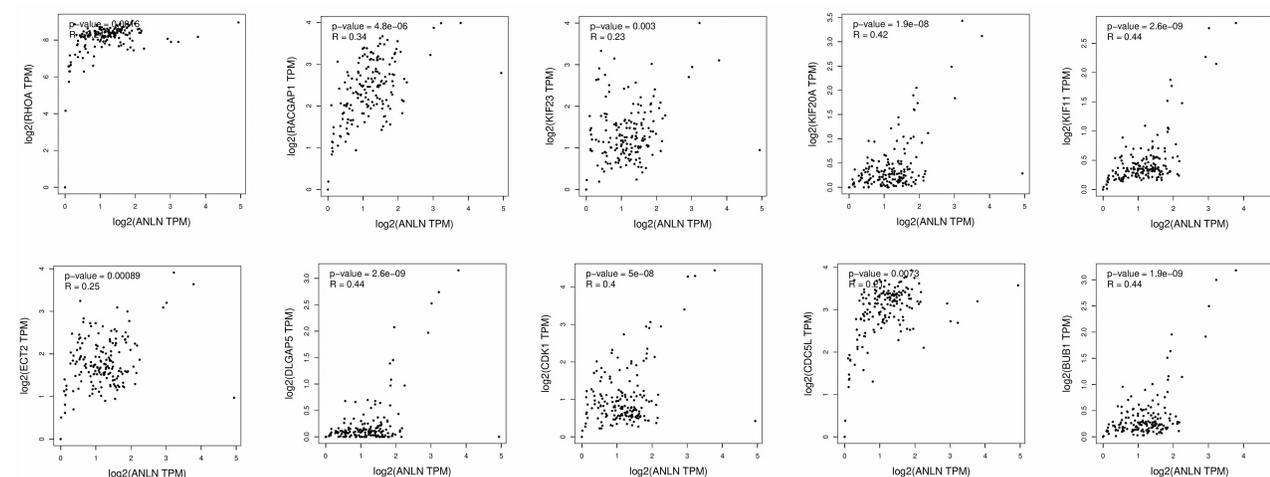
**Table 1** GO and KEGG enrichment analysis of ANLN-enriched genes

	Name	Genes	P	Gene symbols
<b>GO BP terms</b>				
GO:0000281	Mitotic cytokinesis	3	1.0290098284689253 <sup>-4</sup>	ANLN, RACGAP1, KIF20A
GO:0032467	Positive regulation of cytokinesis	3	1.6842308606935264 <sup>-4</sup>	RACGAP1, ECT2, RHOA
GO:0007067	Mitotic nuclear division	4	2.5032649977440837 <sup>-4</sup>	ANLN, CDK1, KIF11, BUB1
GO:0007018	Microtubule-based movement	3	8.093894290048242 <sup>-4</sup>	RACGAP1, KIF20A, KIF11
GO:0051056	Regulation of small GTPase-mediated signal transduction	3	0.0021934816623356197	RACGAP1, ECT2, RHOA
<b>GO MF terms</b>				
GO:0019901	Protein-kinase binding	4	8.333346238382384 <sup>-4</sup>	RACGAP1, CDC5L, KIF20A, KIF11
GO:0008017	Microtubule binding	3	0.003138105842022134	RACGAP1, KIF20A, KIF11
GO:0005524	ATP binding	4	0.03878566879527679	CDK1, KIF20A, KIF11, BUB1
GO:0003777	Microtubule motor activity	2	0.04186160016871645	KIF20A, KIF11
<b>KEGG terms</b>				
hsa04914	Progesterone-mediated oocyte maturation	2	1.6012127104389768 <sup>-7</sup>	CDK1, BUB1
hsa04114	Oocyte meiosis	2	8.572436716581579 <sup>-7</sup>	CDK1, BUB1
hsa04110	Cell cycle	2	8.841944543185589 <sup>-7</sup>	CDK1, BUB1

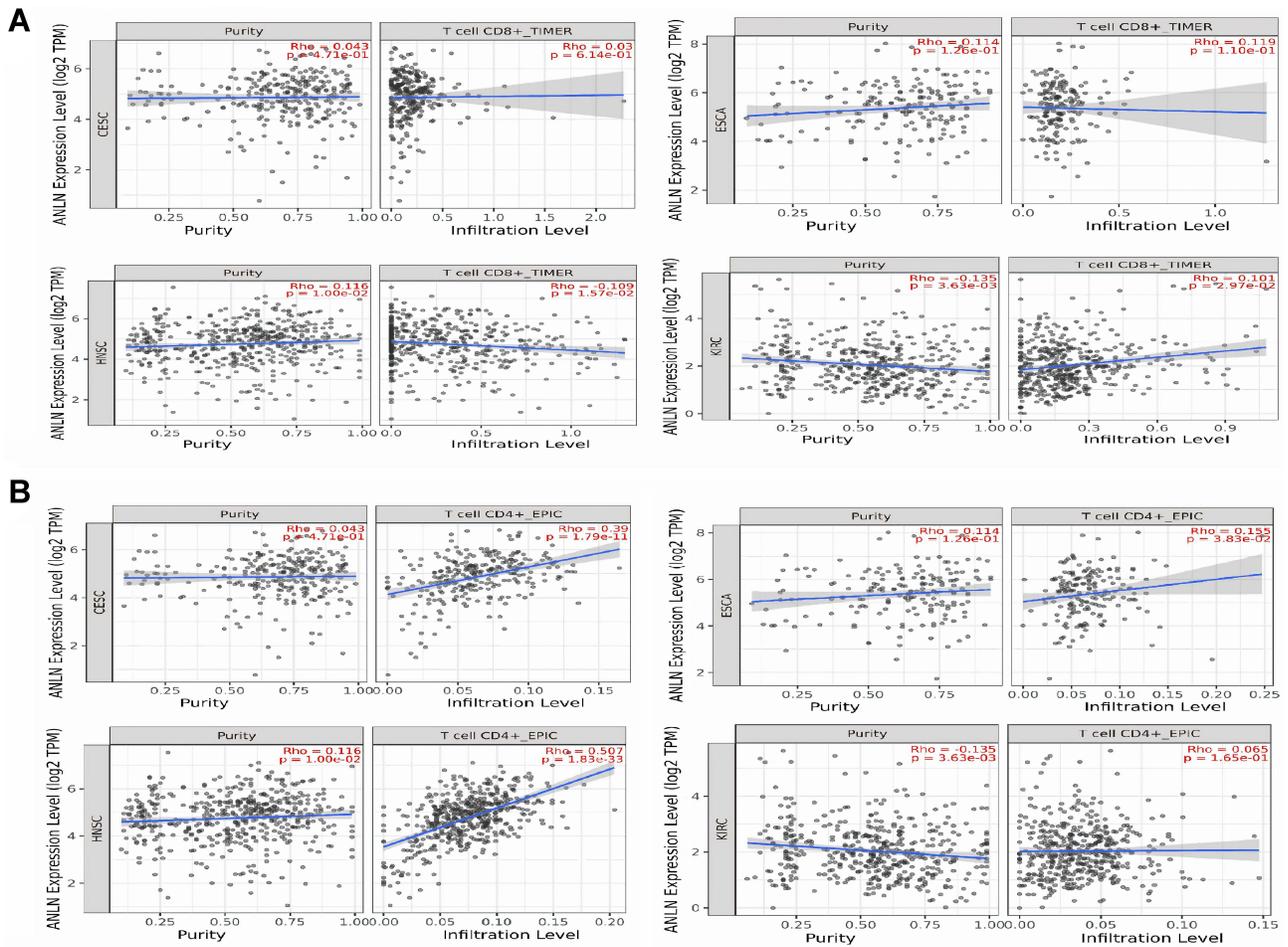
**Abbreviations:** GO, Gene Ontology; KEGG, Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes; BP, biological process; MF, molecular function.

## Identification of miRNAs and TFs That Potentially Regulate ANLN

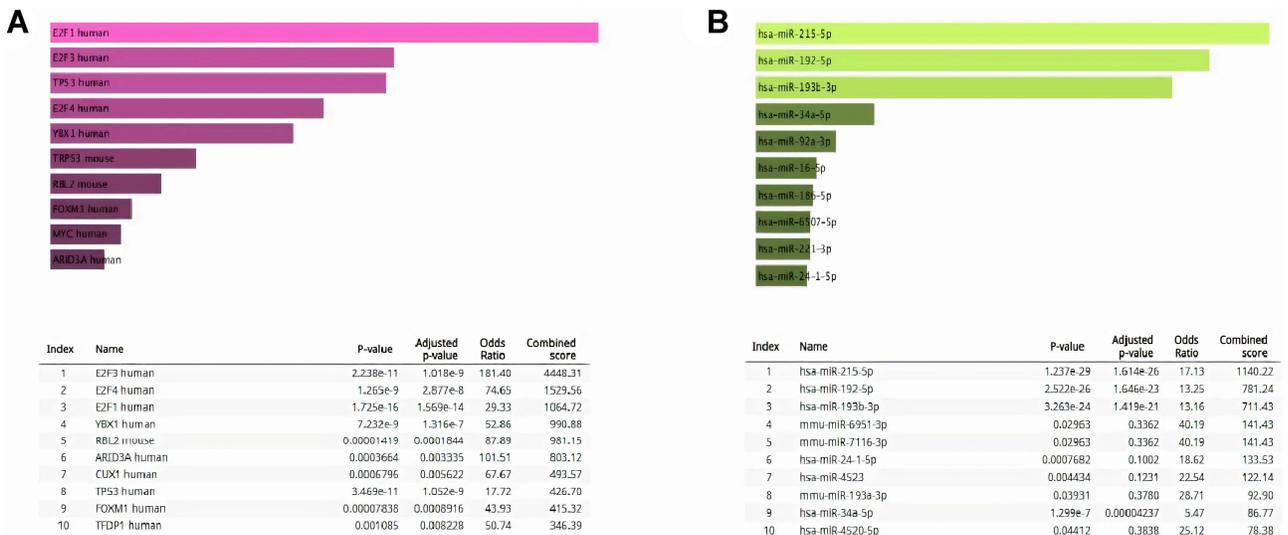
Enrichr was utilized to predict the *ANLN* targeted TFs, and miRNAs. In total, the ten most significant TFs (E2F1, E2F3, TP53, E2F4, YBX1, TRP53 [mouse], RBL2 [mouse], FOXM1, MYC, and ARID3A) and ten miRNAs (hsa-miR215-5p, hsa-miR192-5p, hsa-miR193b-3p, hsa-miR34a-5p, hsa-miR92a-3p, hsa-miR16-5p, hsa-miR18b-5p, hsa-miR6507-5p, hsa-miR221-3p, and hsa-miR24-1-5p) were identified that potentially regulate *ANLN* expression (Figure 11). Taken together, these clues highlight that *ANLN* expression can be regulated by a variety of factors.



**Figure 9** Correlation analysis of *ANLN* and associated gene expression in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC samples.



**Figure 10** TIMER-based Spearman correlation analyses of ANLN expression and CD4<sup>+</sup> T- and CD8<sup>+</sup> T- cell levels in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC. (A) ANLN expression and CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells; (B) ANLN expression and CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells.



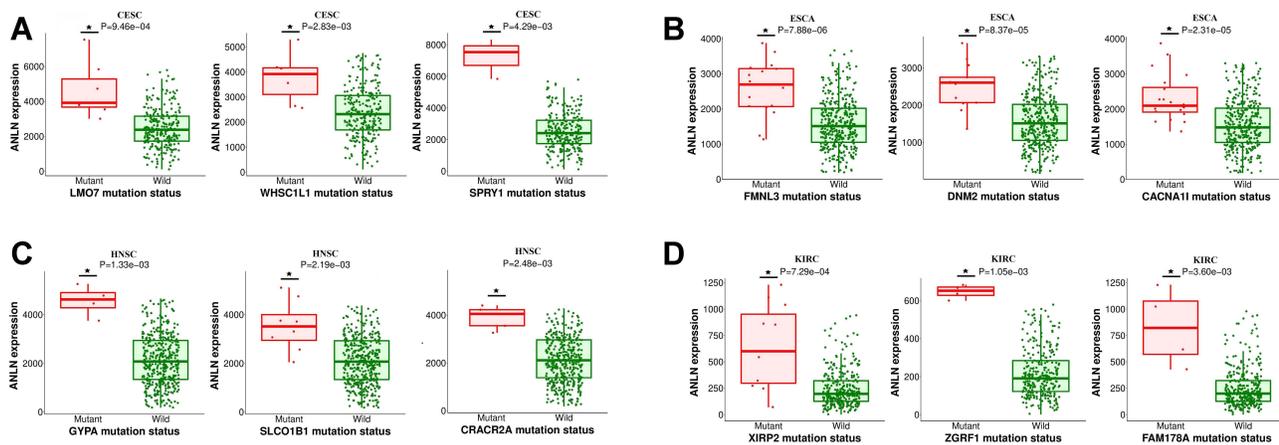
**Figure 11** ANLN-targeted TFS and miRNAs in human cancers. (A) ANLN-targeted TFS; (B) ANLN-targeted miRNAs.

## Correlations Between ANLN and Other Mutant Genes

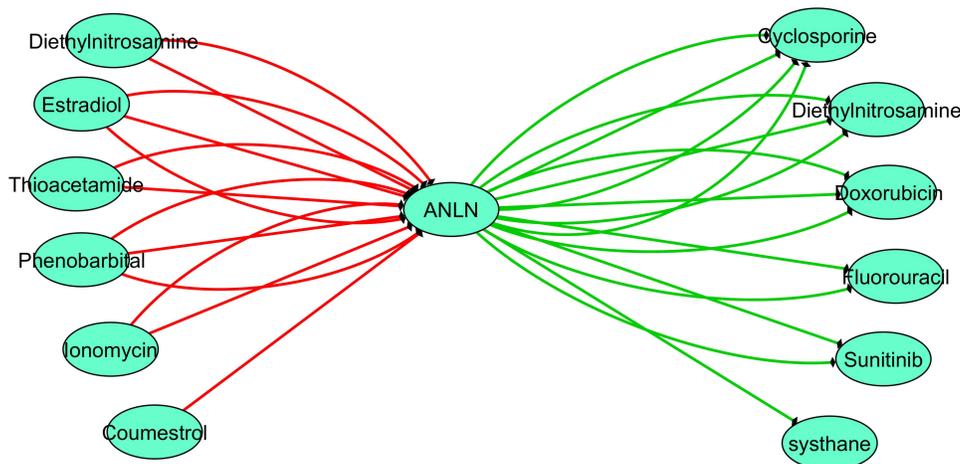
To identify mutant genes responsible for *ANLN* overexpression, we used MuTarget and selected the top three mutant genes for CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patient. As shown in Figure 12, the top three mutant genes positively correlated with the expression of *ANLN* were *LMO1*, *WHSC1L1*, and *SPRY1* in CESC, *FMNL2*, *DNM2*, and *CACNA11* in ESCA, *GYP A*, *SLCO1B1*, and *CRACR2A* in HNSC, and *XIRP2*, *ZGRF1*, and *FAM178A* in KIRC. Collectively, these results suggest that *ANLN* expression has strong correlations with different mutant genes in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC.

## Gene–Drug Interaction-Network Analysis of ANLN

In order to explore the relationship between *ANLN* and available cancer therapeutic drugs, a gene–drug interaction network was developed using CTD. *ANLN* expression can be influenced by a variety of drugs. For example, estradiol and ionomycin can elevate the expression level of *ANLN*, while sunitinib and cyclosporine can reduce *ANLN* expression (Figure 13).



**Figure 12** Mutant genes positively correlated with *ANLN* in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC from MuTarget. (A) Top three genes correlated with *ANLN* in CESC; (B) top three genes correlated with *ANLN* in ESCA; (C) top three correlated genes with *ANLN* in HNSC; (D) top three genes correlated with *ANLN* in KIRC. \* $P < 0.05$ .



**Figure 13** Gene–drug interaction network of *ANLN* and chemotherapeutic drugs. Red arrows, chemotherapeutic drugs that increase the expression of *ANLN*; green arrows: chemotherapeutic drugs that decrease the expression of *ANLN*; arrow counts, number of supported studies in the literature.

## Discussion

Although *ANLN* has been explored in few cancers,<sup>7,11,12</sup> its role in other subtypes of human cancer has yet to be uncovered. In the current study, we identified significant associations between *ANLN* expression and CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC. We found that *ANLN* was downregulated in three types of cancer tissue and overexpressed in another 21 types relative to controls and its overexpression was significantly correlated with the decreased OS and RFS duration, and advanced metastasis of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC. Altogether, these results support that *ANLN* may play a key role in the initiation and development of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC. Therefore, in the present study, our main focus was these four cancers. Due to heterogeneity, CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC may remain a serious therapeutic issue for clinicians and doctors. Therefore, we further evaluated the clinicopathological feature-specific expression of *ANLN* in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients. *ANLN* was also significantly overexpressed in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients with clinicopathological features of different cancer stage, age, ethnicity, and nodal metastasis. Therefore, since *ANLN* expression was higher in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC samples relative to controls, we believe that it is more important to reduce the expression of *ANLN* using different chemotherapeutic drugs to treat CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients.

Next, we tried to explore the possible causes of *ANLN* overexpression, so we carried out correlation analyses between *ANLN* overexpression and promoter-methylation level, CNV, and genetic mutations in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC. *ANLN* harbored genetic alterations in very small proportions of the cancer patients (0.8% of CESC, 5% of ESCA, 2.8% of HNSC, and 0.6% of KIRC), with maximum missense mutations in CESC, HNSC, and KIRC and maximum deep amplification in ESCA. Therefore, we speculate that these genetic changes might participate in *ANLN* overexpression at a low level. Moreover, *ANLN* promoter-methylation analysis revealed that promoter-methylation level of *ANLN* was significantly (lower in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC samples. Therefore, we speculate that *ANLN* overexpression can be the result of significant hypomethylation in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to correlate *ANLN* expression with genetic alterations and promoter-methylation levels in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC.

Gynecological cancer, including CESC, is a leading cause of cancer-related deaths in women. Various studies have been conducted worldwide to identify CESC-specific diagnostic and prognostic biomarkers, eg, Berger et al<sup>31</sup> identified various mutated genes and CNV abnormalities in CESC by analyzing GEO datasets. Song et al<sup>32</sup> developed a long noncoding RNA-miRNA-mRNA network in CESC using GEO data sets and provided novel insights into CESC biology. However, none of the biomarkers has been generalized so far in CESC patients with various clinicopathological features for diagnosis and predicting the prognosis of CESC. We showed significant upregulation of *ANLN* expression in CESC patients with various clinicopathological features, ie, different cancer stage, age, ethnicity, and nodal metastasis compared to the normal controls.

Recently, various ESCA-related molecular biomarkers have been investigated, including *ASPM*, *AURKA*, *BUB1*, *CDC20*, *CENPF*, *DLGAP5*, *NEK2*, *TOP2A*, *TPX2*, and *UBE2C*.<sup>33</sup> However, none of these biomarker has been generalized in ESCA patients with various clinicopathological features for diagnosis and predicting the prognosis of ESCA. In the present study, we revealed significant upregulation of *ANLN* expression in ESCA patients with the aforementioned clinicopathological features.

At present, different molecular biomarkers, including *LAMC1*, *LAMC2*, *LAMC3*, and *HOX*, used for diagnosis and predicting the prognosis of HNSC, have certain limitations.<sup>34</sup> None of the biomarkers has been generalized in HNSC patients with various clinicopathological features for diagnosis and predicting the prognosis of HNSC. However, In the present study, we showed a significant upregulation of *ANLN* expression in HNSC patients with the aforementioned clinicopathological features.

For differentiating KIRC patients from normal individuals, expression profiling of *TIMP3* and *HMGCS1* genes and hsa-miR21-5p and hsa-miR365a-3p miRNAs were suggested to be reliable by Huang et al.<sup>35</sup> However, none of these or any other biomarker has been generalized so far in KIRC patients of various clinicopathological features for diagnosis and predicting the prognosis. We found significant upregulation of *ANLN* expression in KIRC patients with the aforementioned clinicopathological features compared to the normal controls. In sum, overexpression, promoter-

methylation levels, OS, and RFS suggest *ANLN* to be a novel diagnostic and prognostic potential biomarker of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients with different clinical variables.

TFs and miRNAs are important regulators of gene expression, and abnormalities in their expression are known to cause cancer.<sup>36,37</sup> To discover possible roles of TFs and miRNAs in the dysregulation of *ANLN*, we predicted potential TFs and miRNAs of *ANLN* using Enrichr. Our results revealed the ten most significant TFs to be E2F1, E2F3, TP53, E2F4, YBX1, TRP53 [mouse], RBL2 [mouse], FOXM1, MYC, and ARID3A and the ten most significant miRNAs to be hsa-miR215-5p, hsa-miR192-5p, hsa-miR193b-3p, hsa-miR34a-5p, hsa-miR92a-3p, hsa-miR16-5p, hsa-miR18b-5p, hsa-miR6507-5p, hsa-miR221-3p, and hsa-miR24-1-5p as potential regulator of *ANLN* expression. This important information might also help in understanding *ANLN*'s oncogenic role in more detail.

Immunotherapy is one of the most reliable treatment options for cancer patients.<sup>38</sup> However, only a small proportion of cancer patients actually benefit from immunotherapy. CD8<sup>+</sup> and CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells are important components of the immunotherapy; therefore, based on these immune cells, the discovery of novel biomarkers is a clinical priority. In our study, we analyzed whether *ANLN* correlated with CD8<sup>+</sup> and CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells or not. We found interesting positive and negative correlations between *ANLN* expression and CD8<sup>+</sup> and CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells, which may open up new avenues for the treatment of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients, especially those who are not getting benefits from the existing immunocheckpoint inhibitors/regulators. However, an *ANLN* and immune cell infiltration-based study is needed on a large scale for further confirmation of these results.

Despite the use of single-gene indicators, multigene diagnostic and prognostic approaches have recently gained traction.<sup>39</sup> CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients with different types of mutation still lack any sensitive, accurate therapy. Therefore, using MuTarget, we identified mutant genes responsible for altering *ANLN* expression. The top three mutant genes in each of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC were *LMO1*, *WHSC1L1*, and *SPRY1* in CESC, *FMNL2*, *DNM2*, and *CACNA1I* in ESCA, *GYP A*, *SLCO1B1*, and *CRACR2A* in HNSC, and *XIRP2*, *ZGRF1*, and *FAM178A* in KIRC. By linking these mutant genes with *ANLN* expression, it is easier to identify potential multigene-based therapies in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC.

A PPI network of *ANLN*-associated genes via STRING revealed a set of ten *ANLN*-associated genes. GO and KEGG analysis of these highlighted their involvement in mitotic cytokinesis, positive regulation of cytokinesis, mitotic nuclear division, microtubule-based movement, and regulation of small GTPase-mediated signal-transduction BP terms, while protein-kinase binding, microtubule binding, ATP binding, and microtubule motor-activity MF terms, and KEGG terms for progesterone-mediated oocyte maturation, oocyte meiosis, and the cell cycle. Moreover, a correlation analysis between *ANLN* and *ANLN*-associated gene expression revealed a strong positive correlation further validating our findings regarding GO and KEGG analysis and paved the way for further exploration of *ANLN* molecular function. We also identified drugs that could be useful in the treatment of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC by targeting *ANLN* for expression regulation.

## Conclusion

*ANLN* is an actin-binding protein that participates in cytokinesis. Here, we systematically utilized several gene-expression databases and bioinformatic tools to verify the diagnostic and prognostic roles of *ANLN* in CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients with different clinical variables for the first time. Our findings suggested that *ANLN* is a diagnostic and prognostic biomarker of CESC, ESCA, HNSC, and KIRC patients. However, further studies are required to confirm these findings.

## Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this work.

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