

Surfactant protein-B polymorphisms, pulmonary function and COPD in 10,231 individuals

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Abstract

The *surfactant protein-B (SP-B)* gene may influence COPD and thus personalised medicine. We tested whether functional polymorphisms in *SP-B* (rs1130866=1580T>C, rs2077079=-18A>C and rs3024791=-384G>A) associate with reduced lung function and risk of COPD in the general population.

We genotyped 10,231 individuals from the adult Danish general population, and recorded spirometry and hospital admissions due to COPD. Because we previously found an association between the rare *SP-B* 121ins2 mutation and COPD among smokers, we stratified the analyses for smoking status.

None of the individual *SP-B* genotypes or genotype combinations were associated with reduced FEV₁%predicted, FVC%predicted and FEV₁/FVC overall, or among smokers separately (p=0.25-0.99). The odds ratio for spirometry defined COPD did not differ from 1.0 for any of the *SP-B* genotypes or genotype combinations overall, or among smokers separately (p=0.17 to 0.78). Similar results were obtained for hospitalisation due to COPD (p=0.07 to 0.93); we could exclude overall hazard ratios for heterozygotes of 1.18 to 1.21 and for homozygotes of 1.25 to 1.57 or larger for all three polymorphisms.

In conclusion, functional polymorphisms in the *SP-B* gene are not associated with reduced lung function or risk of COPD, making it unlikely that these variants will be useful in personalised medicine.

Introduction

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is one of the leading causes of death worldwide and the number of deaths due to COPD is expected to rise in the future [1]. Smoking is the main risk factor for development of COPD, however not all smokers develop the disease. This suggests that other factors such as genetic background may play a role in susceptibility to COPD, and thus be useful in personalised medicine. A variety of genes have been linked with risk of COPD; among these the surfactant protein genes [2-4].

Surfactant proteins are essential components of the lung surfactant layer which covers the terminal airways. The lung surfactant consists of phospholipids, cholesterol, and proteins and is primarily produced by alveolar type II cells [5,6]. It forms a thin lipid layer on the surface of alveoli, which reduces surface tension and prevents alveoli from collapse during expiration. Upon exocytosis from alveolar type II cells, surfactant initially exists as multilayered vesicular structures in the epithelial lining fluid. From these structures it spreads to the surface as alveoli are extended and compressed during breathing.

Surfactant protein-B (SP-B) is one of the four known surfactant proteins in humans. It is important for the formation of lamellar bodies and correct assembly of the surfactant layer [7]. Lack of SP-B cause fatal respiratory distress syndrome in newborns [8], and genetic markers in and around the *SP-B* gene have been associated with a spectrum of pulmonary diseases including COPD [2-4,9-13]. Three functional polymorphisms in *SP-B*, rs1130866, rs2077079 and rs3024791, have been associated with risk and/or severity of COPD. Rs1130866 abolishes an N-linked glycosylation site in *SP-B*, while the two promoter polymorphisms, rs2077079 and rs3024791 alter *SP-B* transcription levels [3,14-18].

We hypothesised, that the three common functional polymorphisms (rs1130866, rs2077079 and rs3024791) in the *SP-B* gene are associated with reduced lung function and risk of

COPD in the general population. To test this hypothesis, we genotyped 10,231 individuals from the adult Danish general population, and recorded spirometry and hospital admissions due to COPD. We calculated odds and hazard ratios to assess risk of COPD according to SP-B genotype, and we used power calculation to illustrate the maximal risk of COPD we potentially could have overlooked.

Materials and methods

Subjects

We genotyped 10,231 individuals from the Copenhagen City Heart Study, a prospective general population study of individuals selected based on the Central Population Register Code to reflect the adult Danish population aged 20 to 80+ years [19]. The Copenhagen City Heart Study was initiated in 1976-1978 with follow-up examinations in 1981-1983, 1991-1994 and in 2001-2003. DNA for genotyping was isolated from participants attending the 1991-1994 and/or 2001-2003 examinations. The study was approved by the local ethical committee: Nos. 100.2039/91 and 01-421/94, Copenhagen and Frederiksberg committee. All participants gave written informed consent. All participants were Whites of Danish descent

Pulmonary function testing and COPD diagnoses

FEV₁ and FVC were determined with a dry wedge spirometer (Vitalograph; Maids Moreton, Buckinghamshire, UK). Each spirometry was performed in triplicate and results accepted only if variation between the two best performing of these were less than 5%. The best results were used for calculation of FEV₁ % predicted and FVC % predicted by using multiple regressions with age and height as covariates on never smokers for men and women separately [19,20]. Spirometry defined COPD was FEV₁/FVC<0.7 and FEV₁ <80% of predicted [4]. If individuals with asthma were excluded from this definition and/or individuals with GOLD stage I (FEV₁/FVC<0.7 and FEV₁ >80% of predicted) were included, the results were similar to those presented. Information on hospitalisation due to COPD (ICD8:491-492, ICD10:J41-J44) was collected in the national Danish Patient Registry, which covers all hospitals in Denmark from 1976 through 2009.

Other pulmonary diseases

Asthma was defined as an affirmative response to the question “do you have asthma?” Chronic bronchitis was defined as an affirmative response to the question “Do you bring up phlegm at least

3 months continuously every year?” Information on pneumonia, interstitial lung disease and lung cancer was collected in the national Danish Patient Registry and the Danish Cancer Registry.

Pneumonia (ICD 8:480-486, ICD10:J12-J18), Interstitial lung disease (ICD10:J84) and lung cancer (ICD7:162.0-2, 162.4-7, 163.0, 164.0, 199.2, 462.1-4, 464.4, 962.1-2, 962.4-6, 963.0, 964.0, ICD10: C33-C34, C37-C38, D02.1-2).

Genotyping

Genomic DNA was isolated from frozen whole blood (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany). The genotype analysis was performed in 2007 by use of the ABI PRISM[®] 7900HT Sequence Detection System (Applied Biosystems Inc., Foster City, CA, USA). Primers and probes for the TaqMan assays are listed in supplementary Table 1. The TaqMan analysis was validated by sequencing of a subsample of the participants.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analyses were performed with STATA/S.E version 10.0 (StataCorp LP, College Station, Texas, USA). A two-sided $P < 0.05$ was considered significant. From the three polymorphisms, we generated all possible genotype combinations. We used Kruskal-Wallis test and Pearson's χ^2 test for differences in characteristics between *SP-B* genotypes (Table 1). Main effects of *SP-B* genotypes in predicting FEV₁ % predicted, FVC % predicted and FEV₁/FVC were examined using the test for trends, while associations of *SP-B* genotype combinations with lung function were tested in ANOVA models. Odds ratios for COPD on spirometry by *SP-B* genotype/genotype combination were by logistic regression models including age, sex, packyears, passive smoking, occupational dust/fumes, education, and occupation. Hazard ratios for COPD hospitalisation during up to 33 years of follow-up by *SP-B* genotype/genotype combination were determined by Cox regression models with age as time scale, adjusted for age, sex, packyears passive smoking, occupational dust/fumes, education, and occupation. We used NCSS-PASS to calculate the low and high

odds/hazard ratios, which we have 90% power to exclude at 2-sided probability values <0.05 .

Linkage disequilibrium between polymorphisms was estimated by Lewontins D' using STATA's `pwld` function.

Results

Characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1. There were no differences in sex, age, smoking status or packyears of tobacco smoked for any of the *SP-B* genotypes. The distributions of *SP-B* genotypes for the three polymorphisms were in Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium (rs1130866: $p=0.26$, rs2077079: $p=0.96$, rs3024791: $p=0.32$). Pair wise linkage disequilibrium for the three polymorphisms was determined by D' . Rs2077079 and rs3024791 were in tight linkage disequilibrium ($D'=0.97$), whereas there was low linkage disequilibrium between rs1130866 and either of rs2077079 or rs3024791 ($D'=0.21$ and 0.18 respectively). The relationship between spirometry defined COPD and COPD hospitalisation according to gender and age is presented in Table 2. The proportion of men tended to be higher among those with spirometry defined COPD and age greater than 66 years, while the proportion of women tended to be higher among those with COPD hospitalisation and age less than 67. The proportions of women and men were similar among individuals with spirometry defined COPD or COPD hospitalisation.

Lung function

None of the individual *SP-B* genotypes or genotype combinations were associated with reduced FEV₁ % predicted, FVC % predicted and FEV₁/FVC ($p=0.34$ to 0.94) (Figure 1). When stratifying for smoking status, the p -value for *SP-B* genotype combinations reached significance for FEV₁ % predicted and FVC % predicted among never smokers (Figure 2). On post-hoc analysis the *SP-B* TCAAGG and TCCCGG vs TCACGG genotypes were associated with increased FEV₁ % predicted ($p=0.02$ and $p=0.01$, respectively) and FVC % predicted ($p=0.02$ and $p=0.003$) among never smokers. Conversely the *SP-B* CCCCCGA vs TCACGG genotype was associated with reduced FEV₁ % predicted ($p=0.007$), FVC % predicted ($p=0.04$), and FEV₁/FVC ($p=0.01$) among never smokers. These results are not biologically plausible and they could not be confirmed when testing spirometry defined COPD or COPD hospitalisation. Among ever smokers, none of the individual

SP-B genotypes or genotype combinations were associated with reduced FEV₁ % predicted, FVC % predicted and FEV₁/FVC ($p = 0.25$ to 0.99) (Supplementary Figure 1).

Risk of COPD

The odds ratio for spirometry defined COPD did not differ from 1.0 for any *SP-B* genotype or genotype combination (Figure 3). The risk for COPD hospitalisation did neither differ from 1.0 for any of the *SP-B* genotypes or genotype combinations (Figure 3). We had 90% statistical power to exclude odds ratios for spirometry defined COPD for heterozygotes of 1.22 to 1.24 and for rare homozygotes of 1.30 to 1.96 or larger for all three polymorphisms (Figure 3). Likewise, we had 90% statistical power to exclude hazard ratios for COPD hospitalisation for heterozygotes of 1.18 to 1.21 and for rare homozygotes of 1.25 to 1.57 or larger for all three polymorphisms.

When stratifying for smoking status, the p -value for the rs1130866 polymorphism reached significance for COPD hospitalisation among never smokers (Figure 4); however, none of the individual rs1130866 CC and TC genotypes differed significantly from 1.0, and the result could not be confirmed when analysing spirometry-defined COPD. The odds ratio for spirometry defined COPD was increased in *SP-B* TTACGG and TCAAGA vs TCACGG among never smokers (odds ratios and 95%CI: 2.5 (1.2-5.5) and 2.7 (1.1-6.7), respectively), and for COPD hospitalisation in *SP-B* CCAAAA vs TCACGG among never smokers (hazard ratio 8.6 (1.7-42.6)). None of these results could be confirmed when analysing the other COPD outcome of the study or when analysing the lung function. We therefore interpret these findings as likely spurious results.

Because the rs1130866 and the rs2077079 polymorphisms have been associated with severity of COPD and COPD exacerbations [3,16], we examined the prevalence of COPD GOLD stages by *SP-B* genotype. The prevalence of COPD GOLD stage II and COPD GOLD stage III/IV did not differ by any of the *SP-B* genotypes ($p = 0.16$ to 0.86).

Risk of other lung diseases

We also tested whether the three *SP-B* polymorphisms were associated with asthma, interstitial lung disease, pneumonia, chronic bronchitis or lung cancer (Supplementary Table 2). None of the *SP-B* genotypes associated with any of the abovementioned lung diseases; except that the rs3024791 AA vs. GG genotype did show an association with 1.8-fold increased risk of asthma.

Discussion

Genetic variation in *SP-B* has been linked to COPD in several association studies [3,9,16,18] and thus could have importance for the development of COPD in the general population. We determined whether three functional polymorphisms in *SP-B* were associated with poor lung function and COPD in a large homogenous Danish population sample. We found with significant power that these polymorphisms were not associated with lung function or risk of COPD overall, or among smokers. This makes it unlikely that the genetic variants can be used clinically to assess risk of COPD or to identify COPD subgroups for tailored therapy.

The C allele of the rs113086 polymorphism has previously, in studies with <1,000 participants, been associated with increased risk of COPD, severity of airway obstruction and disease exacerbation in COPD patients [3,14,16,18]. In contrast, our population based study with > 10,000 participants indicate that the rs113086 polymorphism does not affect risk of COPD, severity of COPD, or risk of any other additional pulmonary disorder overall or among smokers. We did find a trend towards lower risk of COPD hospitalisation among never smokers. However, this result could not be confirmed when analysing spirometry defined COPD or lung function. We therefore interpret this as a likely spurious finding. Our data on lung function are in accordance with a previous study on healthy males, which showed no association between rs113086 and FEV₁ % predicted or FVC % predicted [21].

The *SP-B* promoter variations rs2077079 and rs3024791 have previously, in studies with <400 participants, been associated with severity of airway obstruction and exacerbations in COPD patients, but not to risk of developing COPD [3,16]. Both polymorphisms alter transcription of the *SP-B* gene and may be associated with altered levels of SP-B in the airways. We did not find any overall association of the two promoter variants with lung function, risk of COPD, or COPD hospitalisation. We have previously shown, that partial SP-B deficiency due to the rare 121ins2

mutation is associated to reduced pulmonary function and increased risk of COPD among smokers [4]. However, when stratifying our data for smoking status, none of the two promoter polymorphisms were associated with reduced pulmonary function or risk of COPD among smokers.

It has been suggested that the rs1130866 polymorphism may require other interacting factors to alter the pulmonary phenotype. Guo et al suggested that gene-gene and gene-environment interaction may be of importance [3] and Hersh et al. found rs113086 to be associated with COPD only in a statistical model with the presence of a gene-smoking interaction term [18]. To mimic gene-gene interactions and gene-environment interactions, we assessed lung function and calculated COPD risk estimates for combinations of rs1130866, rs2077079 and rs3024791 stratified by smoking status. When stratifying our analyses by smoking status, we were unable to show association of *SP-B* genotype combinations with lung function and risk of COPD among smokers. Among never smokers we did find association between certain genotype combinations and lung function or COPD. However, these results may not be biologically plausible and they could not be confirmed using lung function or the other COPD endpoint of the study. If correction for 60 and 30 multiple comparisons was performed for the analyses of *SP-B* combinations and lung function (Figure 2) and *SP-B* combinations and COPD (Figure 4) respectively, none of the results observed among never smokers would be of statistical significance. We therefore interpret these findings as likely spurious results. The lack of overall association of *SP-B* polymorphisms with pulmonary function and disease in our study is supported by recent genome-wide association studies and by a novel Dutch population/case-control study [22-24].

As variations in *SP-B* have been associated to other respiratory diseases than COPD [9,10,25], we also tested for association between the three polymorphisms and risk of common pulmonary diseases such as asthma, pneumonia and lung cancer. We found no consistent association between *SP-B* genotypes and any of the lung diseases we examined except for asthma.

As did previous reports on surfactant protein-C [26,27], a family relative to surfactant protein-B, we did find an association between *SP-B* rs3024791 rare vs. common homozygosity and asthma. We could not confirm this result when analysing other *SP-B* genotypes, and further studies will be needed to conclusively determine whether the *SP-B* rs3024791 AA genotype is associated with increased asthma risk.

Some misclassification of spirometry defined COPD is possible, and this could limit the subgroup analysis according to GOLD classification. The pulmonary function tests used to define COPD were not performed post bronchodilator due to the large number of subjects included in the study and our limited funds. However, excluding individuals with asthma from this definition did not substantially alter our results. Furthermore, in the 1991-1994 survey those individuals who had FEV1/FVC less than 0.7 had post bronchodilator spirometry performed. If analyses on pulmonary function and COPD were confined to this subgroup, we found no difference in FEV1 % predicted or FEV1/FVC, or in COPD prevalences according to *SP-B* genotype or genotype combination. Lack of association between any of the *SP-B* polymorphisms with pulmonary function or disease as opposed to previous findings could be due to different genotype frequencies among the studied populations. Hersh et al reported a carrier frequency for the rs1130866 T allele of 0.44 for controls and 0.46 for cases [18]. We found the overall frequency of the T allele to be 0.54. Foreman et al reported carrier frequencies for rs3024791 GG/AG/AA genotypes of 0.73/0.25/0.02 [16]. Our results were very similar (0.75/0.23/0.02). Gou et al reported a carrier frequency for the rs1130866 C allele of 0.67 for controls and 0.82 for cases [3]. We found an overall carrier frequency for the rs1130866 C allele of 0.71. Bias caused by investigator knowledge of disease or risk factor status seems unlikely, because our sample was selected from the general population and because genotyping of our sample was performed without investigator knowledge of disease status or lung function test results.

In conclusion, we find with significant power that common functional polymorphisms in the *SP-B* gene are not associated with reduced lung function or risk of COPD in the Danish general population overall or among smokers. This makes it unlikely that these genetic variants will have a role in personalised medicine. Though our results are based on individuals of Danish/European descent, these polymorphisms are prevalent in many populations and our results may apply to other parts of the World.

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Legends to figures

Figure 1 - Lung function according to *SP-B* genotypes and genotype combinations. Values are means and standard errors. P-values for *SP-B* genotypes and genotype combinations were by test for trends and ANOVA, respectively. Numbers are slightly less than all individuals genotyped as not all participants had spirometry performed.

Figure 2 - Lung function according to *SP-B* genotypes and genotype combinations among never smokers. Values are means and standard errors. P-values for *SP-B* genotypes and genotype combinations were by test for trends and ANOVA, respectively. Numbers are slightly less than all individuals genotyped as not all participants had spirometry performed.

Figure 3 - Risk of COPD according to *SP-B* genotypes and genotype combinations. COPD spirometry = $FEV_1/FVC < 0.7$ and $FEV_1 < 80\%$ of predicted. COPD hospitalisation = ICD8:491-492 or ICD10:J41-J44. Odds ratios for spirometry defined COPD are by logistic regression. Hazard ratios for COPD hospitalisation are by Cox regression. Multivariate adjusted models allowed for age, sex, packyears, passive smoking, occupational dust/fumes, education, and occupation. P-values for *SP-B* genotypes and genotype combinations were by test for trends and ANOVA, respectively. The 90% power indicates the odds ratios that can be detected in this study at two-sided $p < 0.05$. Numbers for the analysis of spirometry defined COPD are slightly less than for COPD hospitalisation, because not all individuals had spirometry performed.

Figure 4- Risk of COPD according to *SP-B* genotypes and genotype combinations, stratified by smoking status. Ever smoker was current and former smokers. COPD spirometry = $FEV_1/FVC < 0.7$ and $FEV_1 < 80\%$ of predicted. COPD hospitalisation = ICD8:491-492 or ICD10:J41-J44. Odds ratios

for spirometry defined COPD are by logistic regression. Hazard ratios for COPD hospitalisation are by Cox regression. The models allowed for age, sex, packyears, passive smoking, occupational dust/fumes, education, and occupation. P-values for *SP-B* genotypes and genotype combinations were by test for trends and ANOVA, respectively. Numbers for the analysis of spirometry defined COPD are slightly less than for COPD hospitalisation, because not all individuals had spirometry performed.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants by *SP-B* genotype

Characteristics	rs1130866, 1580T>C				rs2077079, -18A>C				rs3024791, -384G>A				
	All	TT	TC	CC	p value	AA	AC	CC	p value	GG	GA	AA	p value
Number (%)	10231	2963 (29)	5138 (50)	2130 (21)		3815 (37)	4860 (48)	1556 (15)		7724 (75)	2319 (23)	188 (2)	
Women (%)	56	45	45	43	0.49	45	44	44	0.86	44	44	48	0.50
Age (years)	59(45-69)	58 (44-69)	59 (45-69)	58 (45-69)	0.49	59 (45-69)	58 (45-69)	59 (45-69)	0.76	58 (45-69)	59 (45-69)	59 (41-68)	0.38
Smoking (%)													
Never	24	25	23	24	0.15	25	24	23	0.18	24	24	24	0.97
Ever	76	75	77	76		75	76	77		76	76	76	
Packyears	24(10-40)	23 (10-39)	24 (10-40)	24 (10-40)	0.48	24 (10-40)	24 (10-40)	23 (10-40)	0.49	24 (10-40)	23 (10-38)	25 (11-38)	0.59
Passive smoking (%)	79	79	79	79	0.71	79	79	80	0.86	79	79	82	0.83
Occupational exposure to dust/fumes (%)	17	17	17	17	0.84	18	17	17	0.12	18	17	15	0.46
Education													
None (%)	23	23	23	23	0.86	23	24	21	0.39	24	21	24	0.09
<3 years (%)	52	52	52	51		52	52	53		52	52	50	
>3 years (%)	25	24	25	25		25	25	25		24	27	26	
Occupation													
No paid job (%)	9	9	9	9	0.97	9	10	8	0.46	9	9	12	0.23
Employed (%)	80	81	81	80		81	80	82		80	82	81	
Self-employed (%)	10	9	10	10		10	10	9		10	9	7	
Asthma (%)	6	6	6	7	0.39	6	6	5	0.35	6	6	10	0.08
GOLD II (%)	9	9	9	9	0.53	9	10	9	0.26	9	9	6	0.23
GOLD III/IV (%)	4	5	4	4	0.21	4	4	4	0.86	4	4	7	0.16

Values are median (interquartile range) for continuous variables and frequencies for categorical variables. The p-value was calculated by Kruskal-

Wallis test for continuous variables and Pearson's χ^2 test for categorical variables. Packyears of tobacco smoked were based on ever smokers.

Passive smoking = affirmative response to the questions "does anyone in your household smoke?" or "how many hours per day are you subjected to passive smoke?" Occupational exposure to dust or smoke = affirmative response to the question "Have you been exposed to occupational dust or fumes?" Asthma = affirmative response to the question "Do you have asthma?"

Table 2. Patients with COPD according to gender and age.

	Women			Men	
	All	67< years	67≥ years	66< years	66≥ years
COPD spirometry, No (%)	1327 (100)	296(22)	309 (23)	340 (26)	382 (29)
COPD hospitalisation, No (%)	1186 (100)	347(29)	297 (25)	278 (23)	264 (22)
COPD any, No (%)	1936 (100)	501(26)	462 (24)	492 (25)	481 (25)

Values are number of individuals (%). COPD spirometry = $FEV_1/FVC < 0.7$ and $FEV_1 < 80\%$ of predicted. COPD hospitalisation = ICD8:491-492 or ICD10:J41-J44. Median ages used for stratification were determined among individuals who had spirometry defined COPD or COPD hospitalisation (=COPD any) for women and men separately.

Figure 1

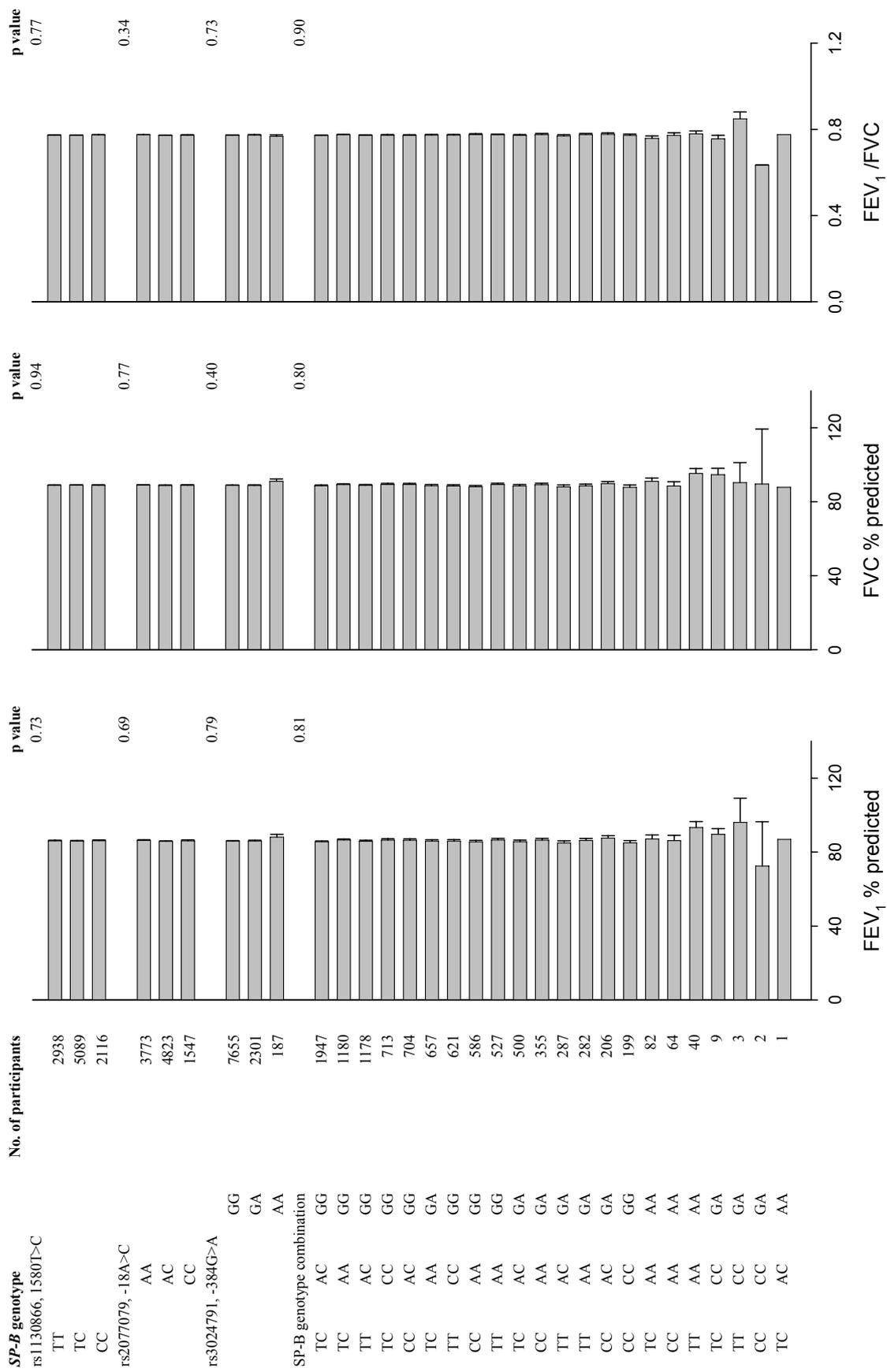


Figure 2

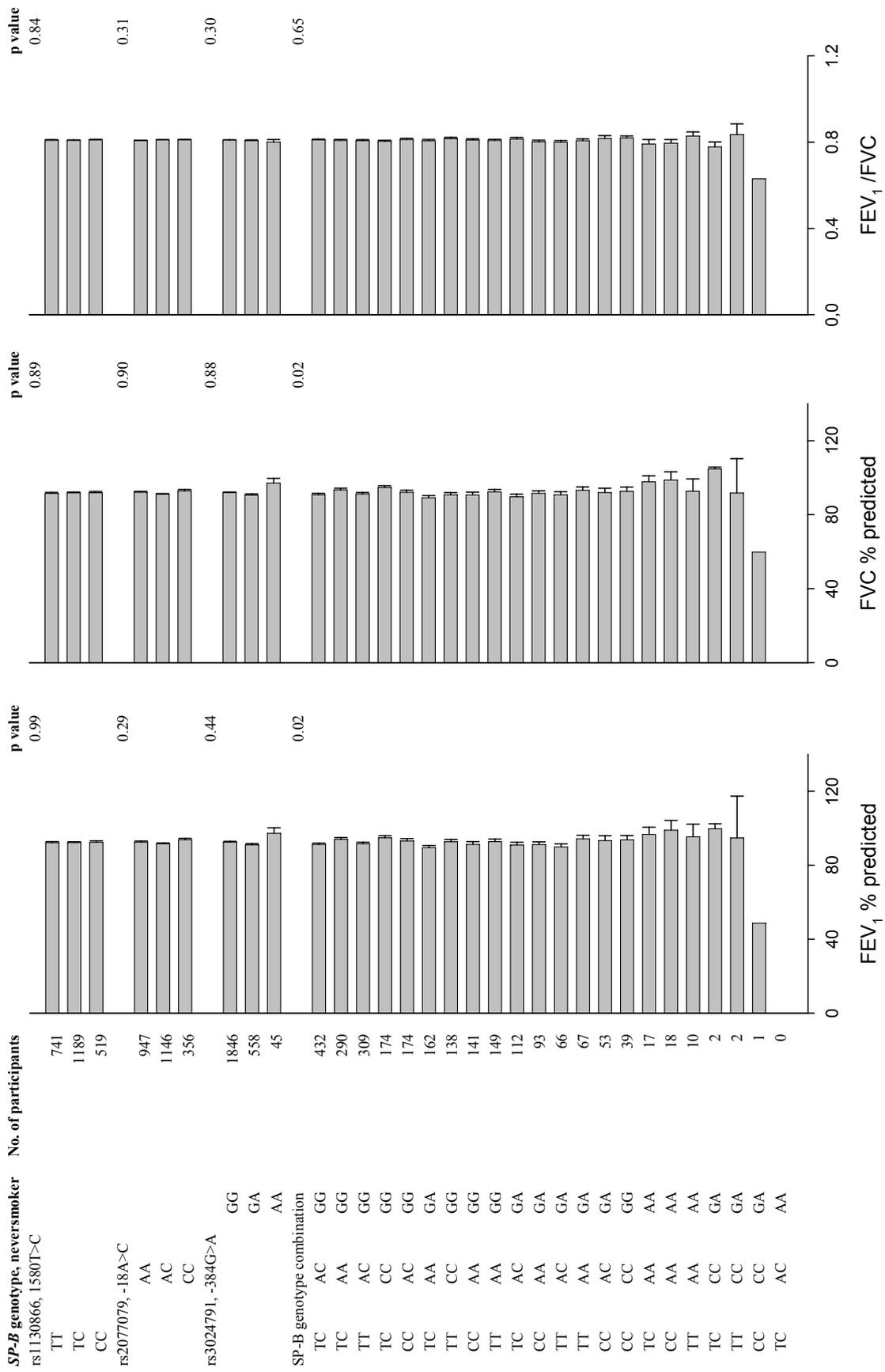


Figure 3

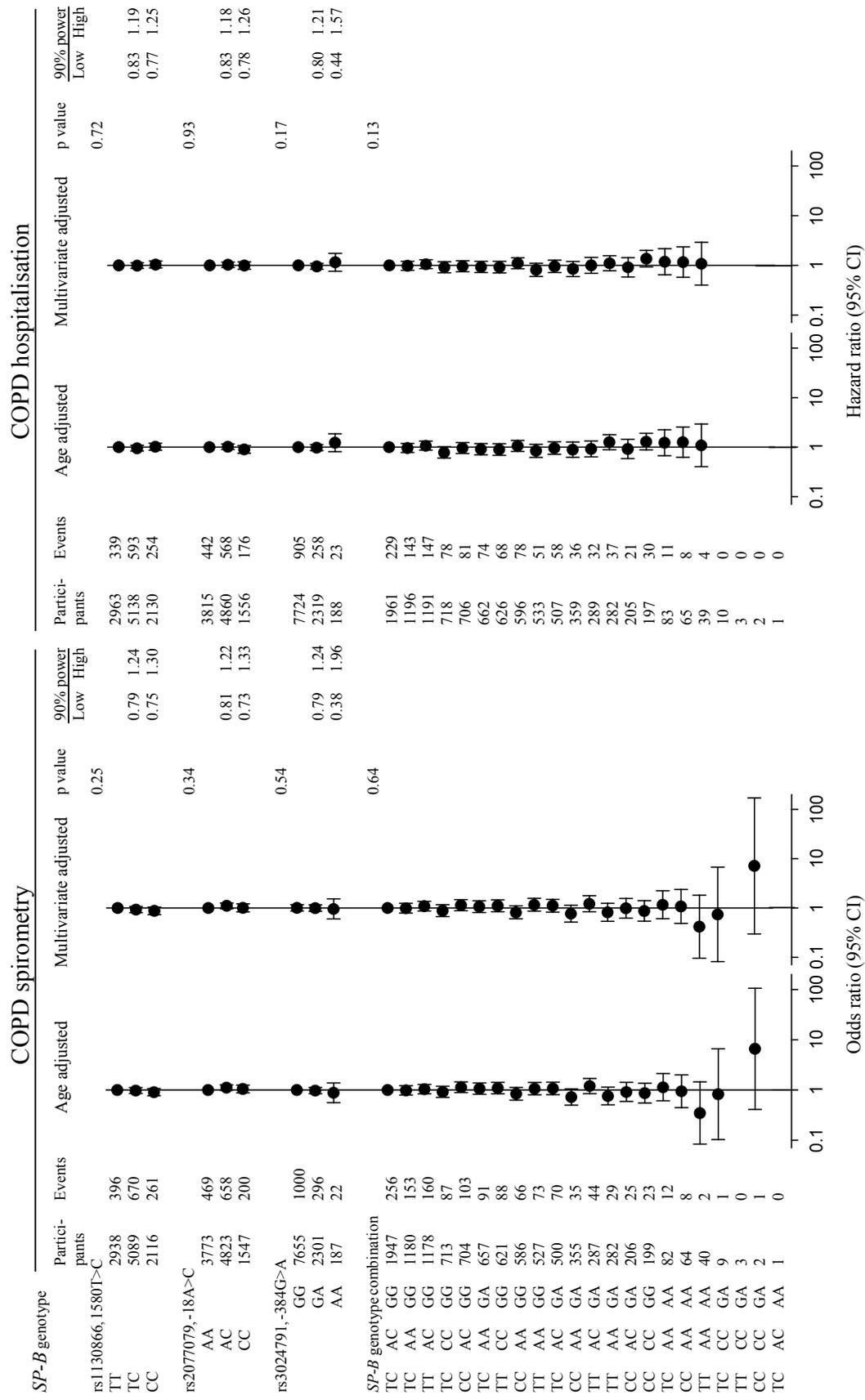


Figure 4

