

Supplementary Appendix for

Mendelian randomization analysis of red cell distribution width in pulmonary arterial hypertension

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Supplementary Methods

RDW and PAH association

RDW values were natural log-transformed and for ease of interpretation z-score normalized to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. The association between RDW levels and PAH was tested in a logistic regression framework adjusted for age and sex (Supplementary Table [S1](#)). For PAH cases we used closest to diagnosis RDW measurements. For controls we retrieved the first available RDW measurement.

We excluded individuals from non-white ethnic backgrounds to avoid potential bias from ethnicity effects. Since RDW is known to be elevated in a number of diseases, we excluded all individuals with either of the following in their medical history: polycystic kidney disease, chronic kidney disease, liver disease and transfusion therapy received. Furthermore, children and adolescents under the age of 18 as well as individuals with extreme RDW values (below 10%, N=20 or above 30%, N=15) were not included in the analysis. Out of the 35 excluded for extreme RDW, 14 were cases from VUMC in the range of 43-55 and 20 were all below 10 from one of the NIHRBR centers. Both centers confirmed reporting errors for these samples (*Supplementary Figure [S1](#)*).

Mendelian randomization; causal effect estimation using MR

Alleles were aligned to correspond to an increase in RDW followed by the harmonization of the effects. The causal effect was estimated with the inverse variance weighted (IVW) and weighted median estimator (WM) methods as implemented in the MR-Base software (1).

Inverse-variance weighted method

We used the conventional inverse variance weighted (IVW) method for estimating the causal effect. The IVW method is efficient when all variants in the genetic instrument are valid instruments. Briefly, each variant in the genetic instrument provided a causal estimate calculated by simply dividing the variant's effect on PAH by the variant's effect on RDW (ratio of coefficients or Wald ratio). These individual causal estimates were then meta-analyzed in a fixed-effects model weighted by the reciprocal of the standard error of the variant association with PAH.

This is equivalent to regressing the variant-RDW estimates on the variant-PAH estimates with the above-mentioned weighting whilst forcing the regression line to pass through the origin.

The causal estimate from the IVW method (β_{IVW}) is:

$$\beta_{IVW} = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^K X_k Y_k \sigma_{Yk}^{-2}}{\sum_{k=1}^K X_k^2 \sigma_{Yk}^{-2}}$$

Where:

k is an index for each of the variants used in the two-sample MR analysis

X is the effect estimate on the exposure (RDW) as reported in the RDW GWAS summary statistics

Y is the effect estimate on the outcome (PAH) as reported in the PAH GWAS summary statistics

The standard error of the causal estimate is:

$$se(\beta_{IVW}) = \sqrt{\frac{1}{\sum_{k=1}^K X_k^2 \sigma_{Yk}^{-2}}}$$

Weighted median estimator

We used the WM estimator to allow for up to (but not including 50%) of the variants in our genetic instrument to be invalid instruments.

Analogously to the IVW method, a Wald ratio (see above) is calculated for each variant. These Wald ratios are then ordered and weighted by the same weights used in the IVW method (see above). Let w_j be the weight of the j th ordered Wald ratio estimate.

$$S_j = \sum_{k=1}^j w_k$$

Where:

k is an index for each of the variants used in the two-sample MR analysis

w is the weight of the variant

s_j is the sum of weights up to and including the j^{th} Wald ratio estimate

The weights are standardized, so that the sum of weights is 1. The WM estimator is the median of the empirical distribution of weighted Wald ratios. Each Wald ratio is the $100(s_j - \frac{w_j}{2})^{\text{th}}$ percentile of this distribution.

Quality control and imputation procedures of VUMC genotype data

VUMC participants were genotyped in 6 batches (30,886 in total) using the Infinium Expanded Multi-Ethnic Global Array-8 (MEGA-ex) array (Illumina, San Diego, California, US).

Variant QC (pre-imputation): Variants were excluded if they had a low call rate ($< 95\%$), deviated from the Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium ($P \leq 0.00005$), were rare (minor allele frequency $\leq 1\%$) or had more than two alleles.

Sample QC: Individuals with high proportions ($> 5\%$) of missing genotype data, unresolved sex discrepancies (discordant phenotype-genotype sex information), heterozygosity outliers, self-reported and/or principal component-based ethnic outliers, intentional duplicates and related individuals (PI-HAT > 0.2) were excluded.

Imputation of non-genotyped variants: The filtered genotype array data was imputed to the Haplotype Reference Consortium panel using the free Sanger Imputation Service provided by the Wellcome Sanger Institute (2).

Imputed variants were further filtered for deviations from the Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium ($P \leq 0.00005$), rare variants (minor allele frequency $\leq 1\%$) which are often poorly imputed and other low-quality variants with an INFO score lower than 0.9.

Genetic risk score (GRS) derivation and calculation of variance explained (R^2) from individual-level data

Weighted genetic risk scores (GRS) comprising the single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) from the RDW genetic instrument were regressed onto the first RDW values which provided the coefficient of determination (R^2) as an estimate for the correlation between RDW and the RDW GRS in our population. The GRSs can be derived by summing the effect alleles multiplied by the effect size at each of the variants (3).

GRS were calculated using the software PRSice-2 (3). Genotypes for the 179 SNPs in the RDW GRS were extracted from the imputed VUMC controls dataset. The same inclusion criteria as for our observational study were applied. Out of the 15,889 VUMC controls included in the observational study, 14,964 had genetic data that passed standard variant and sample quality control.

The GRS for an individual is the summation of the effect (trait-increasing) alleles (0, 1 or 2) weighted by the effect size of the variant taken from the genome-wide significant summary statistics of the RDW GWAS (4). We used an additive model meaning that homozygotes for the effect allele had twice the increase in RDW levels as the heterozygotes. This was in line with the model used in the RDW GWAS.

The following models were used to assess the validity of the RDW GRS as a proxy for RDW levels:

Full model: $RDW \sim GRS + sex + age + principal\ components\ (1st\ and\ 2nd) + batch\ (study\ specific)$

Null model: $sex + age + principal\ components\ (1st\ and\ 2nd) + batch\ (study\ specific)$

The R^2 for the GRS alone is calculated by subtracting the R^2 of the model not containing the GRS (null model) from the R^2 of the full model.

The confidence intervals for the GRS R^2 were computed using the adjusted bootstrap percentile method as implemented in the R software package 'boot' (5) (number of replicates = 20,000).

R² calculation from GWAS summary-level data

R² was calculated for each independent variant based from the publicly available summary statistics of the RDW GWAS in the discovery and replication populations (4). These individual estimates were then summed to give the overall variance explained by the RDW instrument.

$$R^2 = \sum_{k=1}^K \frac{Nsample_k + 1}{Nsample_k} \times \frac{Z_k^2}{Z_k^2 + Nsample_k} - \frac{1}{Nsample_k}$$

Where:

k is an index for each of the variants used in the two-sample MR analysis

Z is the Z-statistic as reported in the RDW GWAS summary statistics

$Nsample$ is the sample size as reported in the RDW GWAS summary statistics

The standard error for the R² estimate was calculated as shown below:

$$SE_{R^2} = \sum_{k=1}^K \sqrt{\left(\frac{2}{Nsample_k}\right) \times \left(2 \times R_k^2 + \frac{1}{Nsample_k}\right)}$$

Supplementary Table and Figure Legends

Supplementary Table [S1](#) Characteristics of the study population used for estimating/assessing the association between RDW and PAH, stratified by sex. PAH – Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension, VUMC - Vanderbilt Institute for Clinical and Translational Research, NIHRBR - UK National Institute for Health Research BioResource, RDW – red cell distribution width.

Supplementary Table [S2](#) Logistic regression model predicting PAH disease status. We report the results of the adjusted model in the paper.

Supplementary Table [S3](#) Five variants selected from the RDW GWAS based on their effects on systemic iron status. This table presents the effect estimates of these variants on RDW as reported by Astle et al. on RDW (Effect estimate per RDW SD; Effect estimate p-value). *The effects of these variants for the same allele go in the opposite direction on serum iron as reported by the Genetics of Iron Status GWAS (6). Elevated RDW can reflect iron deficiency which presents with decreased serum iron levels. In the Genetics of Iron Status GWAS, the two HFE variants reached genome-wide significance ($P < 5 \times 10^{-8}$) for all four (serum iron, transferrin, transferrin saturation, ferritin) iron status biomarkers, TMPRSS6 reached it for all but transferrin, TFRC reached it for transferrin and transferrin saturation, while TFR2 reached it for iron and transferrin saturation.

Supplementary Table [S4](#) Summary of the RDW GRS models. The null model corresponds to the linear regression model specified above without the GRS. The R^2 of the null models are identical since the sample and the covariates are the same. P.value is the significance value of the model fit (F-test). Empirical p-values that account for multiple testing and overfitting were obtained through permutation tests ($n=20,000$).

Supplementary Figure [S1](#) Flow diagram of the exclusion steps in the UK centers and the Vanderbilt University Medical Centre (VUMC) of the two cohorts (UK PAH Cohort and VUMC) participating in the RDW and PAH association analysis as described in the Supplementary methods.

Supplementary Figure [S2](#) Mendelian Randomization (MR) analyses of red cell distribution width (RDW) and pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH). A two-sample design was used where effect estimates for the instrumental genetic variants were taken from two non-overlapping populations. RDW QTL and their effect estimates were taken from the largest-to-date population based RDW genetic association study (GWAS) (4). Effect estimates for the RDW QTL on PAH susceptibility were obtained from the largest-to-date PAH GWAS (6). The primary MR analysis included all 179 RDW QTL while the secondary MR analysis was restricted to five out of the 179 RDW QTL acting via iron status (Supplementary Table [S3](#)).

Supplementary Figure [S3](#) Individual MR causal estimates (IVW) for the main MR analysis of association between RDW and development of PAH - using all available RDW SNPs - from the four contributing studies in PAH GWAS. PAH ORs per one standard unit increase in RDW (dot) with the corresponding lower and upper 95% confidence intervals (horizontal line). The result of the BHFAH (IVW causal OR = 1.54, 95% CI = 1.06 – 2.23) did not survive the correction for multiple testing and was driven by the causal estimate of one variant (rs6883412). PHAAR: Pulmonary Hypertension Allele-Associated Risk (269 PAH cases, 1068 controls). PAHB: US National Biological Sample and Data Repository for Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension (694 PAH cases, 1560 controls). NIHRBR: UK National Institute for Health Research BioResource (847 PAH cases, 5048 controls). BHFAH: British Heart Foundation Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension (275 PAH cases, 1983 controls). Meta-analyzed: overall results of PAH GWAS including all four studies.

Supplementary Figure S4 Individual MR causal estimates (IVW) for the secondary MR analysis of association of RDW to development of PAH – using 5 SNPs related to systemic iron status - from the four contributing studies in PAH GWAS. PAH ORs per one standard unit increase in RDW (dot) with the corresponding lower and upper 95% CIs (horizontal line). PHAAR: Pulmonary Hypertension Allele-Associated Risk (269 PAH cases, 1068 controls). PAHB: US National Biological Archive and Data Repository for Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension (694 PAH cases, 1560 controls). NIHRBR: UK National Institute for Health Research BioResource (847 PAH cases, 5048 controls). BHFP AH: British Heart Foundation Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension (275 PAH cases, 1983 controls). Meta-analyzed: overall results of PAH GWAS including all four studies.

Supplementary Tables and Figures

	PAH (118 VUMC; 524 NIHRBR)		Controls (15,889 VUMC)	
	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)
N	445 (69)	197 (31)	8,539 (54)	7,350 (46)
RDW (mean/SD)	15.1/2.20	15.5/2.33	13.6/1.41	13.6/1.39
Age (mean/SD)	52.4/17.6	58.2/16.2	54.3/16.1	58.1/14.7

Supplementary Table [S24](#) Characteristics of the study population used for estimating/assessing the association between RDW and PAH, stratified by sex. PAH – Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension, VUMC - Vanderbilt University Medical Centre, NIHRBR - UK National Institute for Health Research BioResource, RDW – red cell distribution width.

Variable	Unadjusted		Adjusted	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
RDW (SD)	1.85	1.75 – 1.94	1.90	1.80 – 2.01
Age	-	-	0.98	0.98 – 0.99
Sex (base=female)	-	-	0.54	0.45 – 0.64

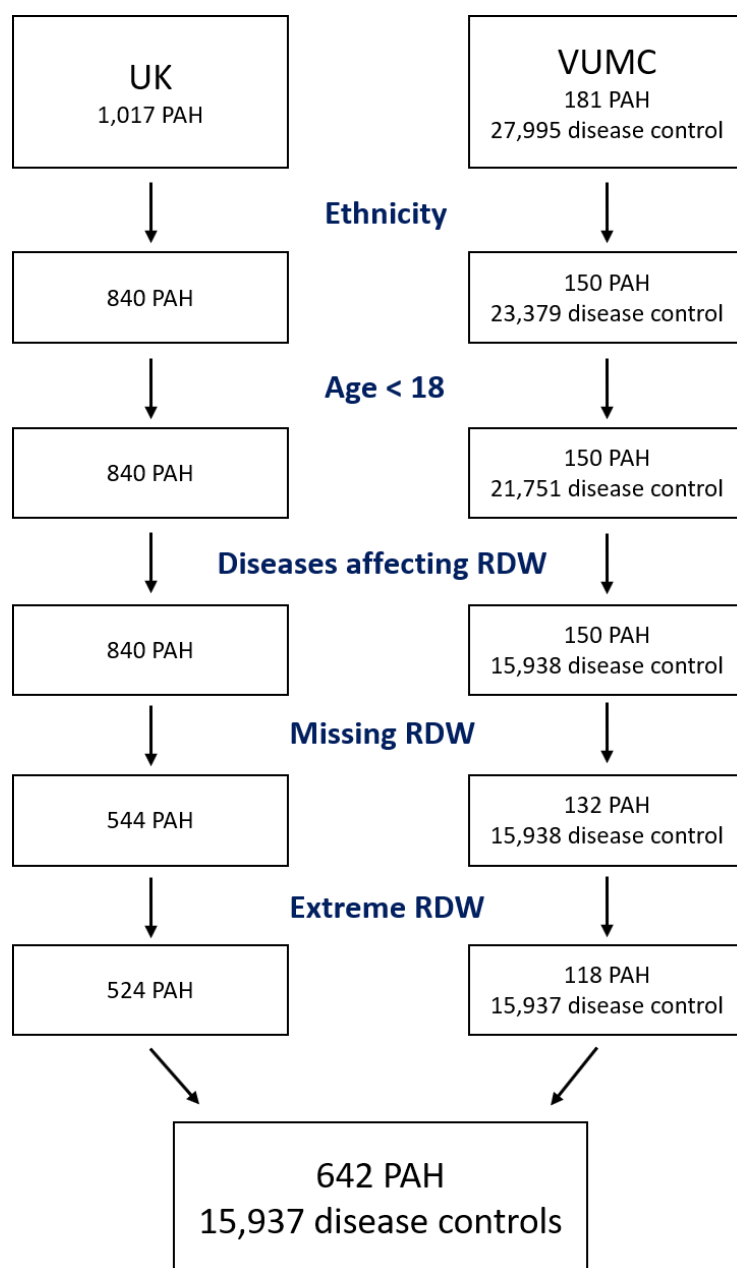
Supplementary Table [S2](#) Logistic regression model predicting PAH disease status. We report the results of the adjusted model in the paper.

Variant information				RDW GWAS		Genetics of Iron Status GWAS								
				Astle et al.		Benyamin et al.								
Gene	Lead variant ID	Effect Allele	Allele Frequency in UKB and INTERVAL	beta RDW	P - value	Proxy variant ID*	beta iron	P – value iron	beta ferritin	P – value ferritin	beta TSAT	P – value TSAT	beta TF	P – value TF
HFE	rs144861591	C	0.92	0.21	6.50×10^{-216}	rs1800562	-0.37	4.0×10^{-77}	-0.21	1.4×10^{-29}	-0.58	1.5×10^{-178}	0.55	1.3×10^{-153}
TMPRSS6	rs855791	A	0.44	0.13	9.79×10^{-271}	-	-0.19	4.3×10^{-77}	-0.05	5.8×10^{-8}	-0.19	3.5×10^{-80}	0.04	1.3×10^{-4}
HFE	rs198851	G	0.85	0.13	2.55×10^{-161}	-	-0.19	1.6×10^{-40}	-0.06	3.6×10^{-6}	-0.23	4.7×10^{-59}	0.12	3.0×10^{-17}
TFRC	rs7619708	C	0.24	0.07	4.35×10^{-64}	rs6583288	0.03	1.2×10^{-2}	0.004	7.3×10^{-1}	0.05	3.8×10^{-6}	-0.06	3.8×10^{-8}
TFR2	rs9801017	G	0.37	0.05	9.40×10^{-37}	rs7385804	-0.06	7.2×10^{-8}	-0.02	2.5×10^{-2}	-0.05	1.8×10^{-7}	0.01	4.0×10^{-1}

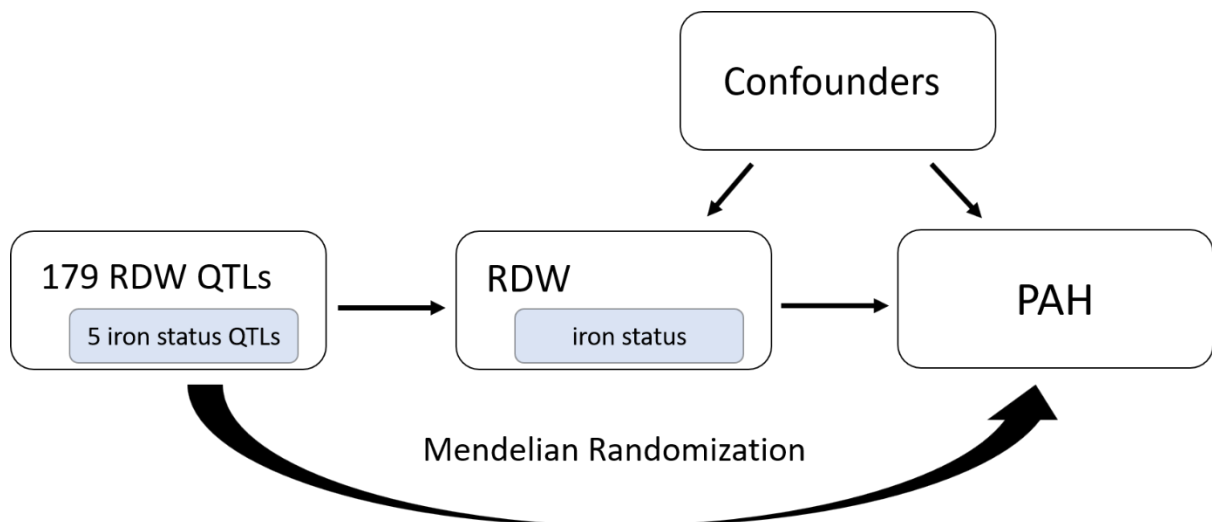
Supplementary Table S3 Five variants selected from the RDW GWAS based on their effects on systemic iron status. This table presents the effect estimates of these variants on RDW as reported by Astle et al. on RDW (Effect estimate per RDW SD; Effect estimate p-value). Elevated RDW can reflect iron deficiency which presents with decreased serum iron levels. In the Genetics of Iron Status GWAS, the two HFE variants reached genome-wide significance ($P < 5 \times 10^{-8}$) for all four (serum iron, transferrin, transferrin saturation, ferritin) iron status biomarkers, TMPRSS6 reached it for all but transferrin, TFRC reached it for transferrin and transferrin saturation, while TFR2 reached it for iron and transferrin saturation. The betas for RDW and the iron biomarkers from Benyamin et al. are reported in standard units. RDW = red cell distribution width; TSAT = transferrin saturation; TF = transferrin. *Where the lead RDW variant for the locus was not available in the Genetics of Iron Status GWAS we listed the results of a suitable proxy variant in strong linkage disequilibrium ($r^2 \geq 0.8$) with the RDW lead variant.

RDW GRS	GRS R^2	Null R^2	P value	Empirical P value
179 RDW QTLs	0.0264	0.054	2.4×10^{-94}	5.0×10^{-5}
5 RDW QTLs	0.0065	0.054	3.3×10^{-24}	5.0×10^{-5}

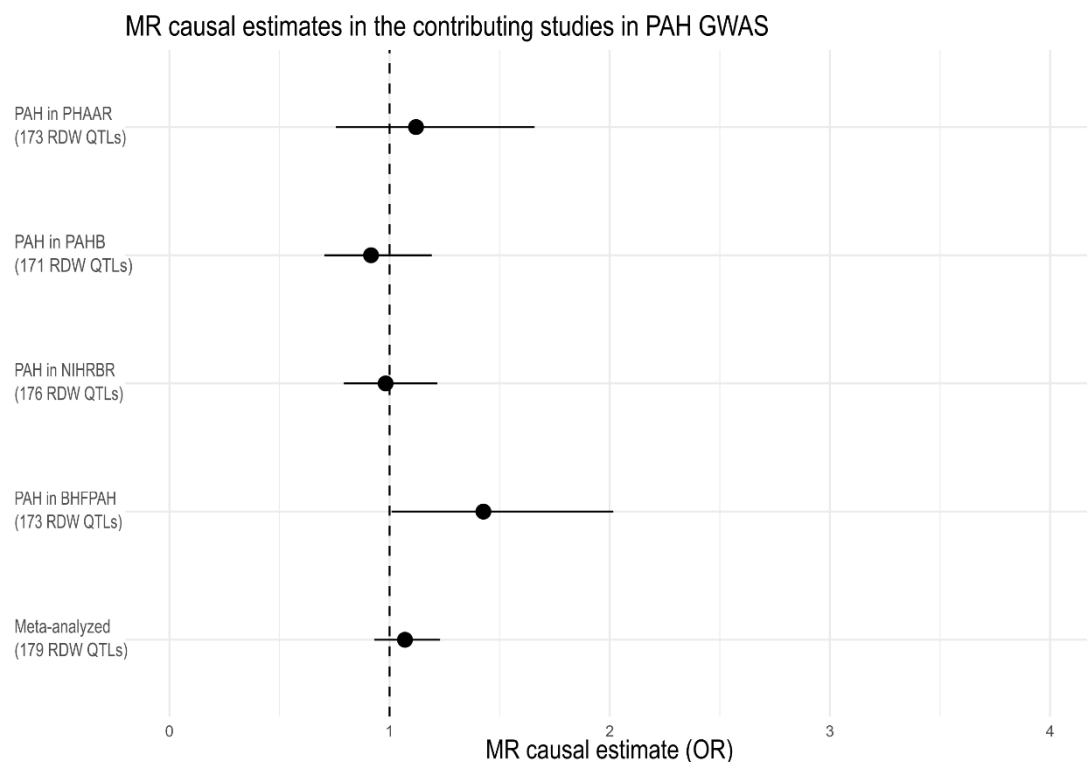
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Supplementary Figure [S1](#) Flow diagram of the exclusion steps in the UK centers and the Vanderbilt University Medical Centre (VUMC) participating in the RDW and PAH association analysis as described in the Supplementary methods.

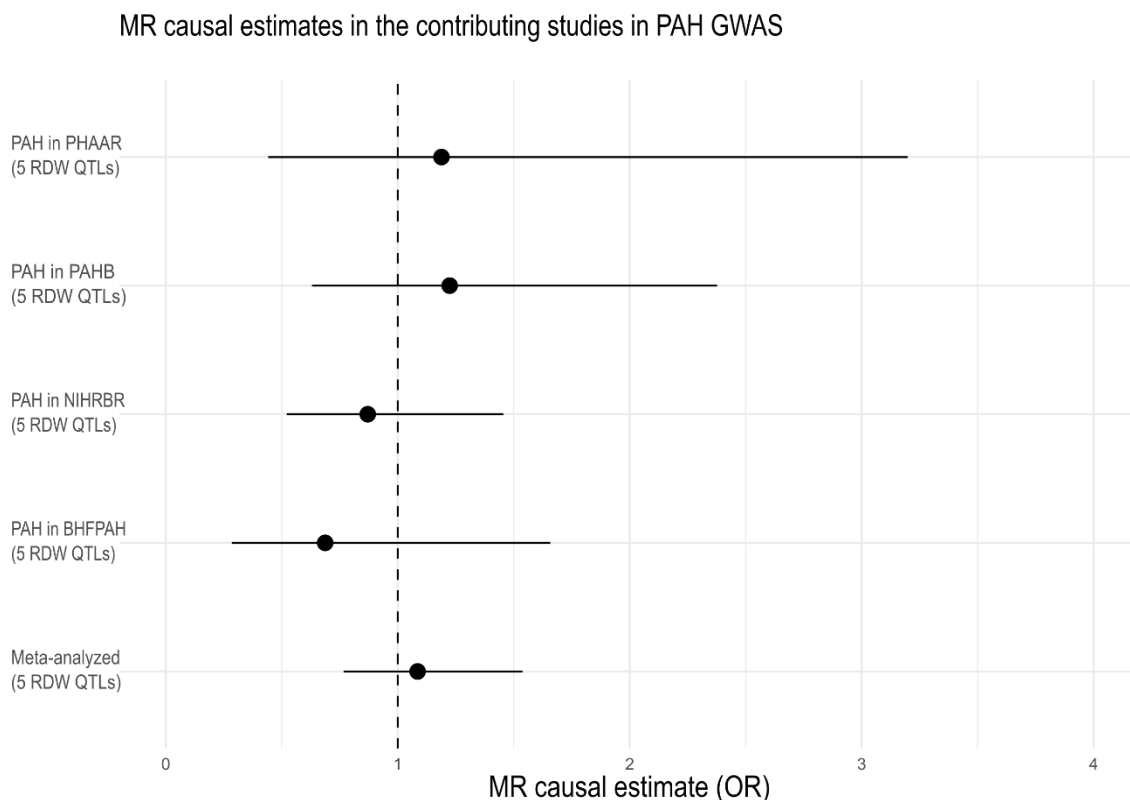


Supplementary Figure [S2](#) Mendelian Randomization (MR) analyses of red cell distribution width (RDW) and pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH). A two-sample design was used where effect estimates for the instrumental genetic variants were taken from two non-overlapping populations. RDW QTL and their effect estimates were taken from the largest-to-date population based RDW genetic association study (GWAS) (4). Effect estimates for the RDW QTL on PAH susceptibility were obtained from the largest-to-date PAH GWAS (7). The primary MR analysis included all 179 RDW QTL while the secondary MR analysis was restricted to five out of the 179 RDW QTL acting via iron status (Supplementary Table [S3](#)).



Supplementary Figure [S3](#) Individual inverse variance weighted MR causal estimates for the main MR analysis of association between RDW and development of PAH - using all available RDW QTLs including suitable proxy variants with a minimum r^2 of 0.8 in each study - from the four contributing

studies in PAH GWAS. PAH ORs per one standard unit increase in RDW (dot) with the corresponding lower and upper 95% confidence intervals (horizontal line). The result of the BHFPAH (OR causal = 1.43, 95% CI = 1.01 – 2.02) did not survive the correction for multiple testing and was driven by the causal estimate of one variant (rs6883412). PHAAR: Pulmonary Hypertension Allele-Associated Risk (269 PAH cases, 1068 controls). PAHB: US National Biological Sample and Data Repository for Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension (694 PAH cases, 1560 controls). NIHRBR: UK National Institute for Health Research BioResource (847 PAH cases, 5048 controls). BHFPAH: British Heart Foundation Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension (275 PAH cases, 1983 controls). Meta-analyzed: overall results of PAH GWAS including all four studies.



Supplementary Figure S4 Individual MR causal estimates (IVW) for the secondary MR analysis of association of RDW to development of PAH – using 5 RDW QTLs related to systemic iron status - from the four contributing studies in PAH GWAS. PAH ORs per one standard unit increase in RDW (dot) with the corresponding lower and upper 95% confidence intervals (horizontal line). PHAAR: Pulmonary Hypertension Allele-Associated Risk (269 PAH cases, 1068 controls). PAHB: US National Biological Sample and Data Repository for Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension (694 PAH cases, 1560 controls). NIHRBR: UK National Institute for Health Research BioResource (847 PAH cases, 5048 controls). BHFPAH: British Heart Foundation Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension (275 PAH cases, 1983 controls). Meta-analyzed: overall results of PAH GWAS including all four studies.

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