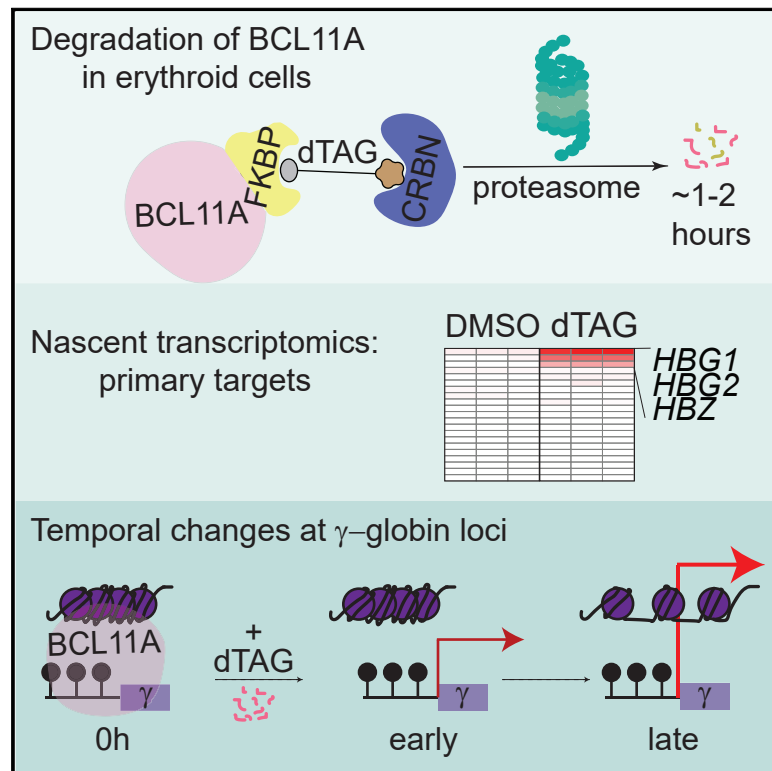


Cell Chemical Biology

Temporal resolution of gene derepression and proteome changes upon PROTAC-mediated degradation of BCL11A protein in erythroid cells

Graphical abstract



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In brief

Reactivation of γ -globin by the downregulation of BCL11A expression is a promising strategy for the treatment of sickle cell disease. In this issue of *Cell Chemical Biology*, Mehta et al. use PROTAC-mediated depletion of BCL11A to identify a small set of target genes and chart the kinetics of γ -globin induction.

Highlights

- PROTAC-mediated degradation of BCL11A reactivates high-level γ -globin expression
- BCL11A represses <31 primary target genes; *HBG*, *HBZ* most induced upon BCL11A loss
- Presence of BCL11A is the major barrier to γ -globin promoter activation
- Upon BCL11A loss, increased chromatin accessibility closely follows transcription



Article

Temporal resolution of gene derepression and proteome changes upon PROTAC-mediated degradation of BCL11A protein in erythroid cells

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SUMMARY

Reactivation of fetal hemoglobin expression by the downregulation of BCL11A is a promising treatment for β -hemoglobinopathies. A detailed understanding of BCL11A-mediated repression of γ -globin gene (*HBG1/2*) transcription is lacking, as studies to date used perturbations by shRNA or CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing. We leveraged the dTAG PROTAC degradation platform to acutely deplete BCL11A protein in erythroid cells and examined consequences by nascent transcriptomics, proteomics, chromatin accessibility, and histone profiling. Among 31 genes repressed by BCL11A, *HBG1/2* and *HBZ* show the most abundant and progressive changes in transcription and chromatin accessibility upon BCL11A loss. Transcriptional changes at *HBG1/2* were detected in <2 h. Robust *HBG1/2* reactivation upon acute BCL11A depletion occurred without the loss of promoter 5-methylcytosine (5mC). Using targeted protein degradation, we establish a hierarchy of gene reactivation at BCL11A targets, in which nascent transcription is followed by increased chromatin accessibility, and both are uncoupled from promoter DNA methylation at the *HBG1/2* loci.

INTRODUCTION

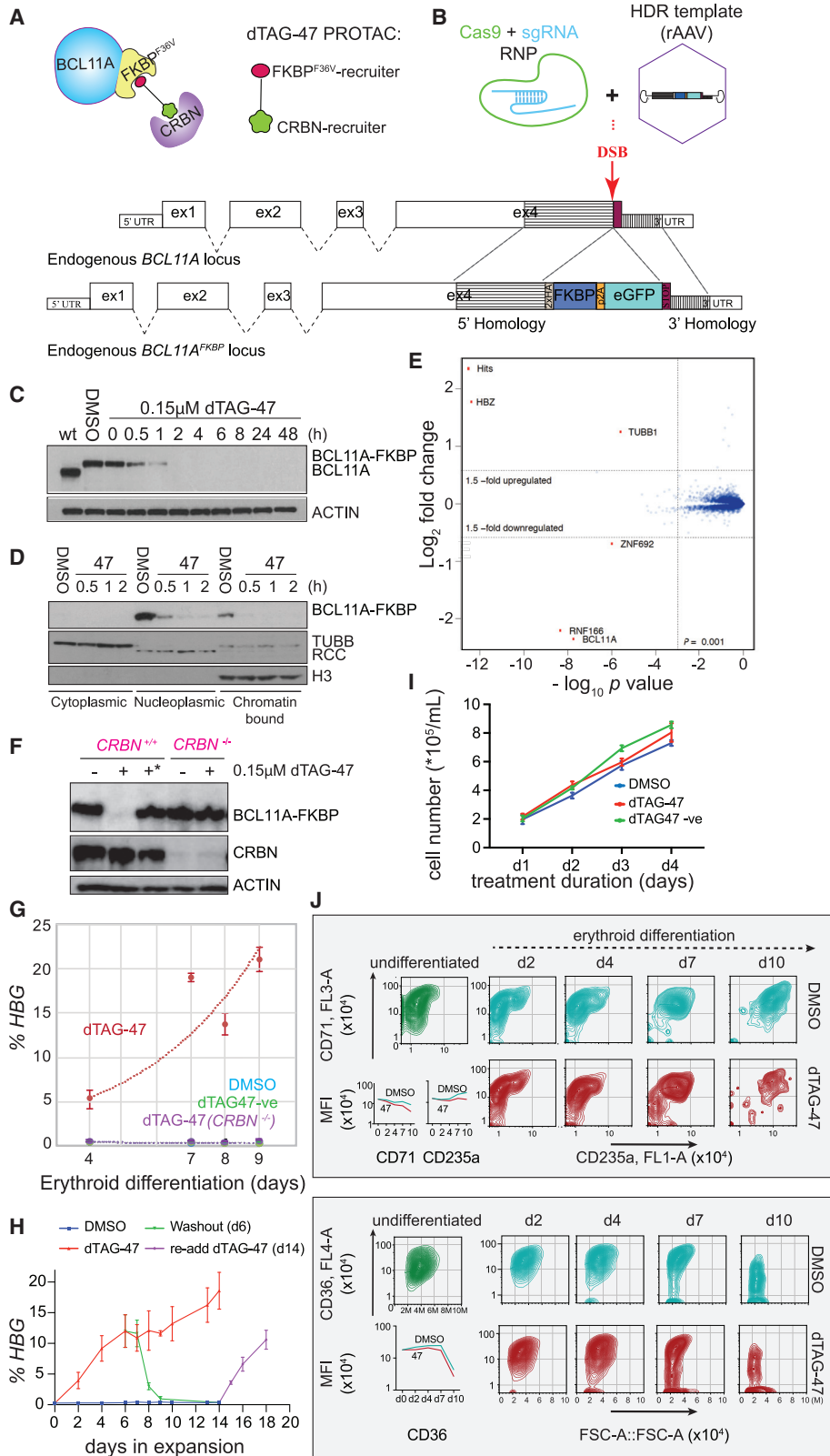
Red cells of newborns contain fetal hemoglobin (HbF, $\alpha_2\gamma_2$) and are replaced during infancy by cells with adult hemoglobin (HbA, $\alpha_2\beta_2$). The “switch” from HbF to HbA is initiated transcriptionally in developing erythroid cells by silencing of the γ -globin (*HBG1/2*) genes and reciprocal activation of the β -globin gene. In adult blood, HbF accounts for ~1% of total hemoglobin. Increased expression of HbF lessens the severity of the β -hemoglobin disorders, sickle cell disease (SCD), and β -thalassemia. Reversing HbF silencing in adult cells has been at the forefront of efforts to treat β -hemoglobinopathies (Orkin, 2021).

The transcription factor BCL11A is a critical effector of the γ/β -globin switch, wherein it directly binds to and represses the promoters of the γ -globin genes (Liu et al., 2018, 2021; Martyn et al., 2018; Sankaran et al., 2008). Downregulation of BCL11A expression by small hairpin RNA (shRNA) or CRISPR-

Cas9 gene editing induces therapeutic levels of γ -globin in SCD and β -thalassemia patients (Esrick et al., 2021; Frangoul et al., 2021). Despite progress in translating findings to the clinic, an understanding of the kinetics of BCL11A's action is lacking. BCL11A loss-of-function studies have been limited to end-state analyses following genetic manipulations (Guda et al., 2015; Sankaran et al., 2008; Xu et al., 2011). The time lag inherent in examining transcriptional and proteomic consequences allows for compensatory and secondary changes that confound the interpretation of primary mechanisms.

Targeted protein degradation offers the opportunity to interrogate the sequence of events that ensue following the loss of a protein of interest (POI). Proteolysis targeting chimeras (PROTACs), which are hetero-bifunctional molecules that recruit a POI to endogenous E3 ligases for ubiquitylation and proteasomal degradation, provide an experimental strategy to achieve this goal (Toure and Crews, 2016). To target POIs lacking known





(legend on next page)

ligands, tag-based approaches have been developed (Chung et al., 2015; Nabet et al., 2018; Nishimura et al., 2009). Here, we have used the dTAG system, in which modified FKBP12 (FKBP12^{F36V}) is expressed in fusion with the POI. The bifunctional dTAG-47 PROTAC, consisting of ligands specific for FKBP12^{F36V} and the E3 ubiquitin (Ub) ligase CUL4-DDB1-RBX1-CRBN (CRL4^{CRBN}) substrate cereblon (CRBN) targets the fusion POI for CRBN-mediated proteolytic degradation (Huang et al., 2017; Nabet et al., 2018). We used the dTAG system to acutely degrade BCL11A protein in immortalized, HbA-expressing erythroid human umbilical cord blood-derived erythroid progenitor-2 (HUDEP-2) cells (Kurita et al., 2013) undergoing erythroid differentiation, and interrogated consequences on nascent transcription, chromatin accessibility, proteomics, histone modifications, and promoter DNA methylation. Our findings reveal the kinetics of transcriptional reactivation and repression upon protein degradation of BCL11A or re-expression upon PROTAC washout.

RESULTS

Conditional degradation of BCL11A protein reactivates HBG1/2 transcription

We tested the dTAG and SMASH (small molecule-assisted shutoff of protein) systems (Chung et al., 2015; Nabet et al., 2018) to deplete BCL11A protein in HUDEP-2 cells. In the dTAG platform, CRBN is recruited by a PROTAC to FKBP12^{F36V} fused to BCL11A (Figure 1A). In contrast, SMASH relies on the fusion of a drug-sensitive viral protease and a protein destabilization element to the POI. FKBP12^{F36V} or SMASH sequences linked to p2a-eGFP were introduced in-frame at the C terminus of the *BCL11A* locus by nucleofection of a ribonucleosomal protein (RNP) mix of CRISPR-Cas9: single-guide RNA (sgRNA) followed by the delivery of ~1- to 1.6-kb HDR templates by the transduction of crude rAAV6/2 preparations (Mehta et al., 2022) (Figure 1B). The knockin design generates protein fusions of full-length BCL11A-XL, the isoform implicated in γ -globin silencing (Liu et al., 2018). Levels of BCL11A and *HGB1/2* in knockin cells were comparable to those in wild-type cells (Figures 1C, S1A, and S1B), indicating that the BCL11A protein fusions were unperturbed in expression and retained repressor function.

Treatment of *BCL11A*^{FKBPF36V/FKBF36V} (abbreviated as *BCL11A*^{FKBP}) cells with 0.15 μ M dTAG-47 resulted in the marked degradation of BCL11A within 2 h (Figure 1C). Cellular fractionation and western blotting revealed that BCL11A is found in the nucleoplasm and chromatin, and degraded by 2 h with drug (Figure 1D). Treatment over a range of dTAG-47 concentrations elicited the hook effect, which is characteristic of PROTAC molecules (Moreau et al., 2020) (Figure S1C). To assess the specificity of dTAG-47 and initial consequences of BCL11A-FKBP12^{F36V} degradation, we performed multiplexed quantitative mass spectrometry (MS)-based proteomics of cells treated for 6 h with dTAG-47 or DMSO. A total of 8,164 proteins were quantified. Two peptides unique to BCL11A-FKBP12^{F36V} (K.ASNPV EVGIQVTPEDDDCLSTSSR.G and R.FSTPPGELDGGISGR.S) were used for the quantification of BCL11A-FKBP12^{F36V}. Of all of the proteins analyzed, BCL11A exhibited the largest reduction in relative abundance, followed by two off-targets of pomalidomide, RNF166 and ZNF692, with no known roles in globin regulation (Figure 1E) (Donovan et al., 2018). We also observed the relative upregulation of human T-cell lymphotropic virus-1 bZIP factor (HBZ) and TUBB1, direct targets of BCL11A, as determined from chromatin occupancy (Liu et al., 2018) and data presented here. Thus, treatment with dTAG-47 induces highly significant and selective depletion of BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V} in HUDEP-2 cells.

In contrast, we observed that depletion of BCL11A with the SMASH system following the addition of asunaprevir (ASV) occurred after more prolonged treatment and led to a modest reduction in protein abundance (Figures S1D and S1E). These findings are consistent with the observation that only newly synthesized SMASH-fusion protein is degraded (Chung et al., 2015). Given the acute and profound depletion of BCL11A protein with the dTAG platform compared with SMASH, further studies were limited to the dTAG system.

We confirmed that the degradation of BCL11A-FKBP12^{F36V} was mediated through recruitment to CRBN. In CRISPR-Cas9-generated CRBN knockout clones of parental *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells, BCL11A was not degraded upon the addition of dTAG-47 (Figure 1F). Likewise, the treatment of *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells with dTAG-47-NEG, a molecule unable to recruit CRBN (Nabet et al., 2020), failed to elicit degradation (Figure 1F). Whereas

Figure 1. Acute and specific degradation of BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V}, potent induction of HBG1/2, and limited effects on cell proliferation and erythroid differentiation upon dTAG-47 treatment

- (A) The dTAG-47 PROTAC recruits the CRBN E3 ligase complex to BCL11A-FKBP12^{F36V}.
 (B) Strategy to knockin FKBP12^{F36V} at the 3' end of *BCL11A*.
 (C) Western blot of BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V} in *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells.
 (D) Western blot of BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V} in cytoplasmic, nuclear, and chromatin-bound protein fractions treated with 0.15 μ M dTAG-47 or DMSO, for indicated durations.
 (E) Volcano plot of differentially expressed proteins (moderated t test, $p < 0.001$) in *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells treated with 0.1 μ M dTAG-47 versus DMSO for 6 h.
 (F) Western blot of BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V} in *BCL11A*^{FKBP}; *CRBN*^{-/-} cells treated with 0.15 μ M dTAG-47 or DMSO, and in *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells treated with 0.15 μ M dTAG-47 or dTAG-47-NEG(*) for 6 h.
 (G) qRT-PCR quantification of *HBG1/2* from *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells treated with 0.15 μ M dTAG-47, dTAG-47-NEG(*), or DMSO for 6 h, and from *BCL11A*^{FKBP}; *CRBN*^{-/-} cells treated with 0.15 μ M dTAG-47 or DMSO at days 4–9 of erythroid differentiation. A total of 2–3 clones per genotype; error bars, SD; %HBG = 100* [*HBG*/(*HBG* + *HBB*)]. *HPRT* is endogenous control.
 (H) qRT-PCR quantification of *HBG1/2* over the course of treatment of *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells with DMSO, or 0.15 μ M dTAG-47, and washout of dTAG-47 after 6 days of treatment, followed by the re-addition of 0.15 μ M dTAG-47 in expansion conditions; error bars, SD.
 (I) The proliferation of *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells treated with 0.15 μ M dTAG-47 or DMSO over 4 days in expansion phase.
 (J) Flow cytometry of cell surface CD71, CD235a, and CD36 in differentiating *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells treated with 0.15 μ M dTAG-47 or DMSO. Inset, MFI quantification. DSB, double-strand break; rAAV = recombinant adeno-associated virus; sgRNA = single-guide RNA; MFI, mean fluorescence intensity.
 See also Figure S1.

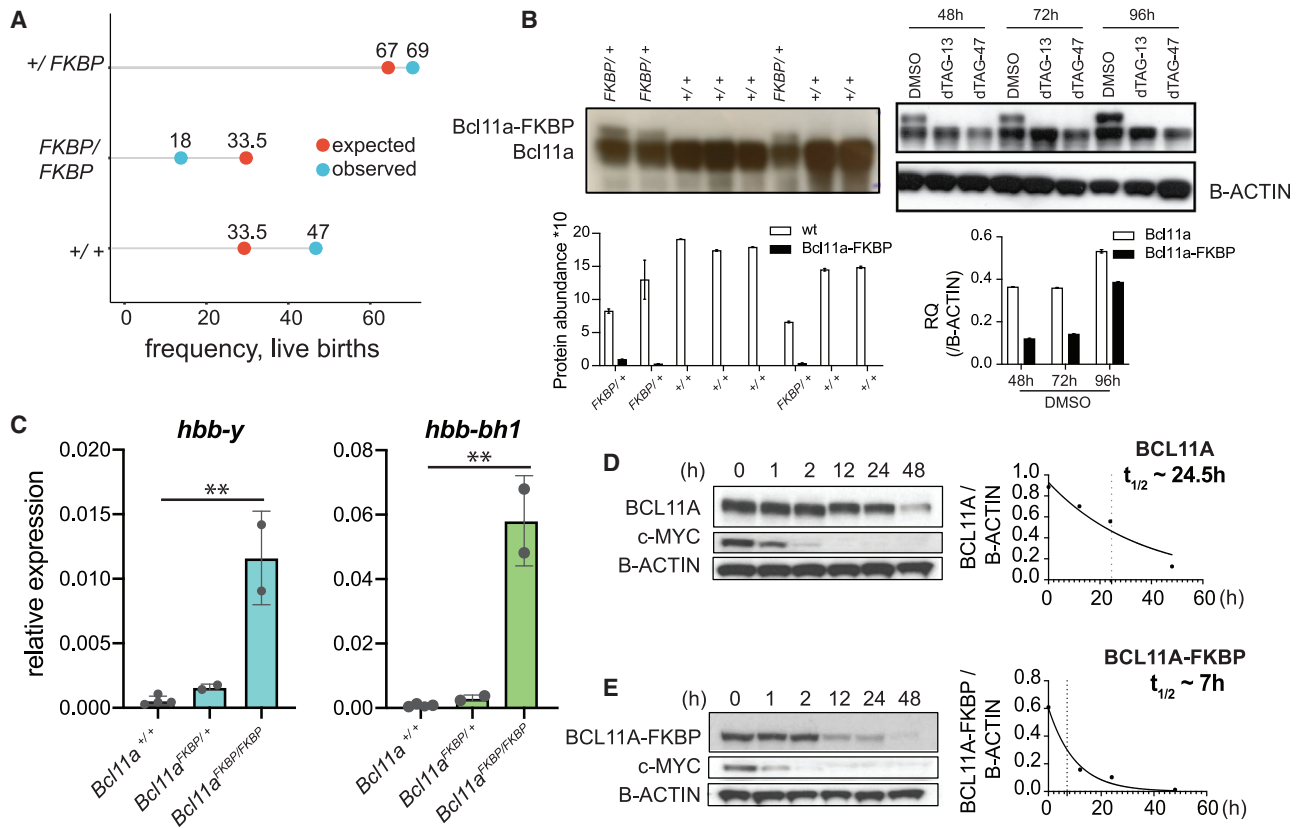


Figure 2. *Bcl11a*^{FKBP/FKBP} mice show postnatal lethality due to reduced abundance of Bcl11a-FKBP^{F36V}

(A) Expected versus observed ratio of progeny with genotypes *Bcl11a*^{+/+}, *Bcl11a*^{FKBP/+}, and *Bcl11a*^{FKBP/FKBP} from a *Bcl11a*^{FKBP/+} × *Bcl11a*^{FKBP/+} cross. (B) Left: Western blot of Bcl11a-FKBP^{F36V} in *Bcl11a*^{FKBP/+} and *Bcl11a*^{+/+} 11.5 dpc embryos. Right: Western blot of Bcl11a-FKBP^{F36V} in *Bcl11a*^{FKBP/+} and *Bcl11a*^{+/+} MEL cells treated with dTAG-13, dTAG-47, or DMSO for indicated durations. (C) Relative quantification of *hbb-y* and *hbb-bh1* transcripts in 14.5 dpc fetal livers of *Bcl11a*^{FKBP/+} and *Bcl11a*^{+/+} embryos by qRT-PCR. *Gapdh* is endogenous control. Error bars, SD. (D and E) Western blot of (D) BCL11A and (E) BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V} in *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells treated with 5 μM cycloheximide for indicated times (n = 2). Right, quantified BCL11A and BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V} abundance in the cycloheximide chase assay to determine protein half-life (t_{1/2}). See also Figure S1.

BCL11A^{FKBP} cells treated with dTAG-47 showed a progressive increase in the expression of target *HBG1/2* transcripts upon differentiation (Figure 1G), *BCL11A*^{FKBP/CRBN}^{-/-} cells treated with dTAG-47, as well as *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells treated with dTAG-47-NEG, failed to derepress *HBG1/2* (Figure 1G). Moreover, the addition of dTAG-47 to *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells, followed by washout of the drug, acted as a toggle switch for de-repression and re-repression of *HBG1/2* (Figure 1H). Thus, BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V} was acutely and specifically degraded by the recruitment of CRBN and led to the anticipated de-repression of *HBG1/2*.

We next assessed the effects of BCL11A loss on the growth and differentiation of HUDEP-2 cells. Cell proliferation was minimally perturbed following the depletion of BCL11A (Figure 1I). The differentiation of BCL11A-depleted HUDEP-2 cells, as assessed by flow cytometric analyses of surface markers (CD71, CD235a, and CD36), was comparable to that of parental cells (Figure 1J).

Bcl11a^{FKBP/FKBP} mice phenocopy knockout mice

With the aim of examining BCL11A loss in the tissues of an animal, we knocked in FKBP12^{F36V} at the C terminus of *Bcl11a*.

Bcl11a^{FKBP/FKBP} mice were born at lower frequencies compared to expected Mendelian ratios [$\chi^2(2, N = 134) = 12.672, p = 0.002$], and all live-born homozygous pups died soon after birth (Figures 2A and S1F). This phenotype is reminiscent of *Bcl11a* knockout mice, and unexpected if Bcl11a-FKBP^{F36V} protein exhibited a normal half-life. We observed that Bcl11a-FKBP^{F36V} protein was detected at substantially lower levels compared to unmodified Bcl11a protein in 11.5 days post-coitum (dpc) embryos (Figure 2B). By comparison, wild-type and Bcl11a-FKBP^{F36V} bands were less skewed in *Bcl11a*^{FKBP/+} mouse erythroleukemia (MEL) cells, validating the detection of both forms of Bcl11a by western blot (Figure 2B). Consistent with the reduced level of Bcl11a-FKBP^{F36V}, fetal liver cells of 14.5 dpc *Bcl11a*^{FKBP/FKBP} mice revealed the impaired repression of embryonic globins, unlike *Bcl11a*^{FKBP/+} and wild-type littermates (Figure 2C).

To investigate how the modification of BCL11A protein with FKBP^{F36V} influenced protein stability, we performed cycloheximide chase experiments in HUDEP-2 cells to measure protein half-lives. Whereas BCL11A is a stable protein (t_{1/2} ~24.5 h),

we observed that BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V} exhibited a $t_{1/2} \sim 7$ h ($n = 2$; Figures 2D, 2E, and S1F). We surmise that a reduced half-life accounts for the accelerated loss of the fusion protein in *Bcl11a*^{FKBP} mice, phenocopying the knockout (Liu, 2003).

Chromatin accessibility closely follows transcription of *HBG1/2* upon BCL11A degradation

To interrogate the kinetics of de-repression of *HBG1/2*, we used precision nuclear run-on sequencing (PRO-seq) and assayed nascent transcription following the acute depletion of BCL11A (Mahat et al., 2016). PRO-seq maps the position of RNA polymerase II (RNA PolII) at base pair resolution across the genome, providing quantifiable snapshots of nascent transcription at target loci. We performed PRO-seq in two independent *BCL11A*^{FKBP} clones at successive times (3 h–5 days) following the addition of dTAG-47 or DMSO. Nascent transcription was induced at the *HBG1/2* loci by 3 h, progressively increasing thereafter (Figures 3A and 3C). Chromatin accessibility, as assessed by assay for transposase-accessible chromatin with high-throughput sequencing (ATAC-seq), was unchanged at 4 or 24 h of dTAG-47 treatment, but increased at day 2 and later (Figures 3B and 3C). Thus, while nascent transcription rapidly initiated at the *HBG1/2* locus upon BCL11A depletion, an increase in chromatin accessibility was detected after a brief lag.

We performed drug washout experiments to determine the kinetics of repression of the active *HBG1/2* locus by BCL11A (Figure 3D). At 4 days of treatment, cells were switched to media lacking dTAG-47 to restore BCL11A levels. BCL11A protein was detected within 2 h and reached the control level within 24 h (Figure 3E). By 12 h, we observed fewer nascent *HBG1/2* transcripts compared to dTAG-47-treated samples, progressively decreasing as the level of BCL11A protein returned to normal (Figures 3F–3H). Chromatin accessibility was reduced at 24 h and was comparable to the control level within 48 h of washout (Figures 3G–3I). Taken together, these data reveal that a progressive transcriptional response is elicited at the *HBG1/2* locus rapidly following BCL11A modulation. Changes in chromatin accessibility are detected afterward.

BCL11A functions as a repressor at a small set of primary target genes in erythroid cells

PROTAC-mediated protein depletion affords the opportunity to investigate the effects of BCL11A loss on a global scale. Thus, primary targets of transcriptional repression by BCL11A may be more accurately determined than through steady-state analyses. BCL11A is undetectable within 2 h post-dTAG-47 addition. At 3 h, significant changes in nascent transcription were detected in 58 genes (false discovery rate [FDR] <5%; Figures 4A, 4B, and S2A) with 56/58 genes showing increased expression (Figure 4A). A fold change cutoff was not applied to this analysis since a small but sustained increase in nascent transcription could lead to a substantial accumulation of mature RNA (and/or protein). A majority of the genes upregulated at 3 h continued to be de-repressed at later times, and nearly 80% (i.e., 44/56 upregulated genes) contained the BCL11A recognition motif (TGA/TCCA/T) in their promoter (TSS \pm 2 kb) as compared to a background discovery of 35% ($p = 7.4e-11$, Fisher exact test, two-sided; Figure 4C). Of the 44 genes, 22 (50%) had the preferred motif, TGACCA. Neither of the two downregulated

genes contained a BCL11A motif. Thus, BCL11A functions solely as a repressor in erythroid cells.

We next charted relative nascent transcription at these 44 upregulated genes that contain the BCL11A motif (\log_2 fold change [\log_2 FC] DMSO versus dTAG) in two sets of experiments in two independent *BCL11A*^{FKBP} clones: 3 h to 5 days after dTAG-47 addition and 12–96 h after washout of drug following 4 days of dTAG-47 treatment, all under differentiation conditions (Figures 4D and S2B). The 44 genes clustered in 4 distinct groups (based on the \log_2 FC). The expression of genes in clusters II and IV exhibited modest upregulation upon BCL11A loss and re-repression upon drug washout compared to genes in cluster I. Genes in cluster I, limited to *HBG1/2* and *HBZ*, were the most potently induced, or repressed, upon BCL11A loss and reinstatement, respectively. Cluster IV comprised genes with modest upregulation only at a few time points and were inconsistently re-repressed upon the restoration of BCL11A, suggesting that cluster IV genes are not primary targets.

Next, we analyzed chromatin accessibility at the 44 loci by ATAC-seq after adding or removing dTAG-47. Chromatin accessibility trends largely mirrored nascent transcription. Cluster I genes showed the most extensive changes in chromatin accessibility between DMSO and dTAG-47 treated samples, whereas cluster IV genes exhibited no pattern (Figure 4E). Based on these nascent transcriptomic and ATAC-seq data, we conclude that the 31 genes in clusters I, II, and III represent primary targets of BCL11A.

We next enumerated the number and position of BCL11A motifs within promoter regions for all 31 primary targets. Cluster I genes exhibited a greater number of BCL11A motifs compared to clusters II, III, and IV, or to a random selection of genes per kilobase of gene length (Figure 4F). Chromatin-binding data for BCL11A (Liu et al., 2018) revealed that cluster I genes were the most enriched for BCL11A at their promoter regions (Figure 4G). Of all of the primary targets, cluster I genes showed a distinct pattern of progressively increasing transcription induction upon BCL11A depletion (Figure 4H).

We then performed an agnostic differential promoter region accessibility analysis of dTAG-47- versus DMSO-treated samples. None of the genes showed differential changes at 4 or 24 h post-degradation at FDR <5%. Hence, we applied a more lenient cutoff of p value <5% and identified 10 gene promoters showing increased accessibility at 4 h, progressively increasing thereafter. Only \sim 22% (7/31) of the primary targets showed significantly increased chromatin accessibility in dTAG-47 samples at any time across differentiation, with variation seen between each cluster; all cluster I genes, <60% of cluster II, and only \sim 25% of cluster III genes showed increased chromatin accessibility upon BCL11A-depletion (Figure 4I). Moreover, it was only at 48 h and later that the majority of the primary target gene promoters became differentially accessible (Figures 4I, gray zone, and S2C). These results echo observations at *HBG1/2* (Figure 3C), where changes in nascent transcription preceded a discernible increase in accessibility at promoter regions.

We also assessed changes in histone modifications upon BCL11A depletion by chromatin immunoprecipitation sequencing (ChIP-seq) during differentiation (Figure 4J). Three modifications that correlate with active chromatin, H3K4me3,

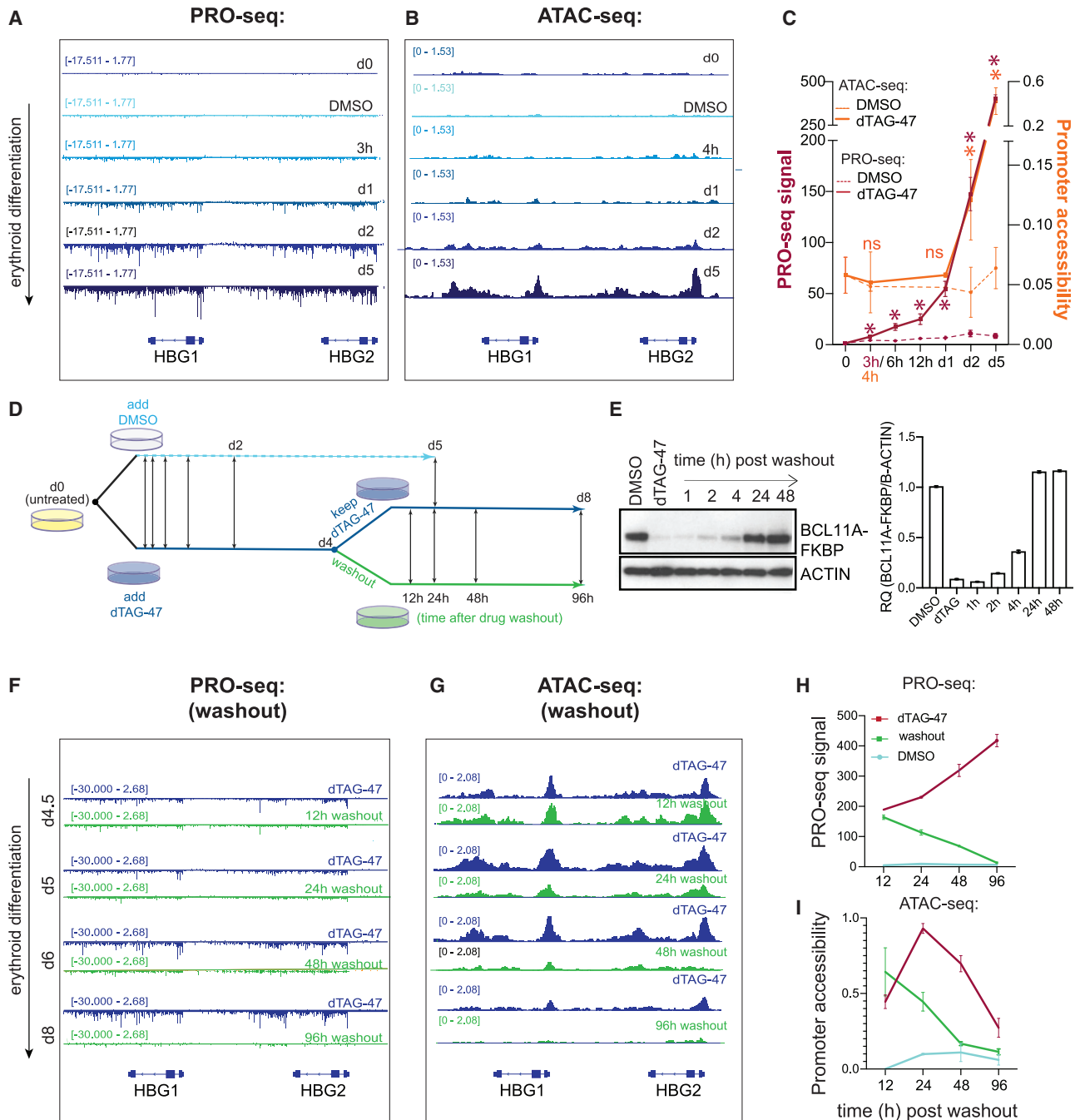


Figure 3. Rapid changes in nascent transcription followed by a delayed change in promoter accessibility at *HBG1/2* locus upon acute depletion and restoration of *BCL11A*

(A) PRO-seq tracks of nascent transcription at the *HBG1/2* loci in untreated (day 0), or 3 h, day 1, day 2, and day 5 DMSO- or dTAG-47-treated *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells. (B) ATAC-seq tracks of chromatin accessibility at the *HBG1/2* loci at the same times as (A).

(C) Quantification of PRO-seq signals at *HBG1/2* genes (top), and ATAC-seq signals at *HBG1/2* promoters (TSS+/- 500 bp) at indicated times. *p < 0.05, DESeq2. Error bars, SD.

(D) Schematic of the course of drug treatment and washout. Double-sided arrows indicate sampling for PRO/ATAC-seq at given times.

(E) Left: Western blot of BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V} upon DMSO or dTAG-47 treatment for 4 days, followed by washout of dTAG-47 at various times in differentiating *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells. Right: Relative quantification (RQ) of BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V} with respect to β-actin control, means ± SEMs.

(F) PRO-seq tracks of nascent transcription at the *HBG1/2* loci in *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells treated with dTAG-47 for 4 days, and washed off the drug at various times.

(G) ATAC-seq tracks of chromatin accessibility at the *HBG1/2* loci in dTAG-47-treated *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells washed of the drug at the same times as (F).

(H and I) Quantification of (H) PRO-seq signals at *HBG1/2* genes (top), and (I) ATAC-seq signals at *HBG1/2* promoter regions (TSS+/- 500 bp, bottom) at various times. n = 2, error bars, SD.

See also Figure S2.

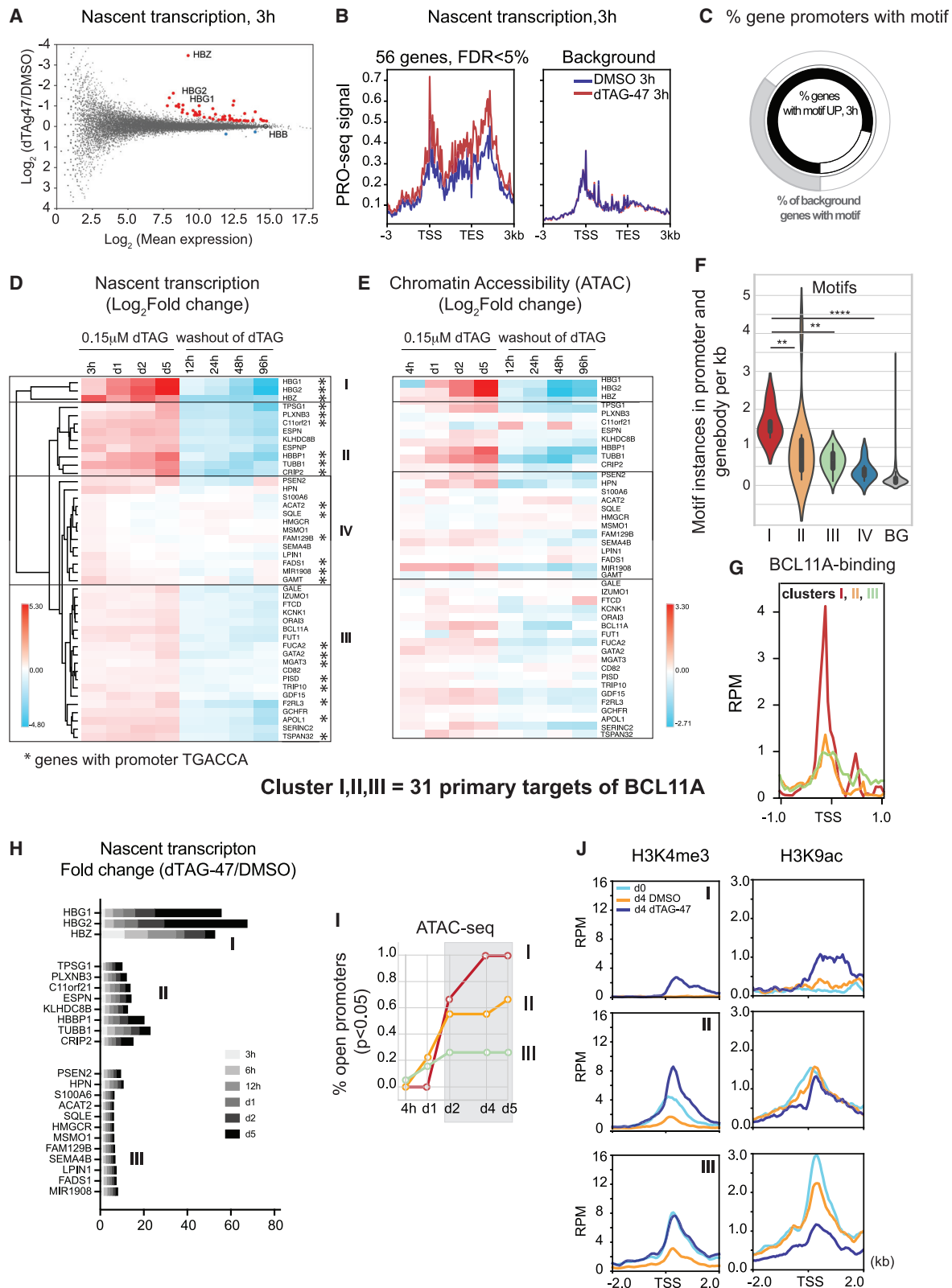


Figure 4. BCL11A represses a small set of 31 genes in erythroid cells

(A) Scatterplot of differential nascent transcription (DE) in *BCL11A*^{FkBP} cells upon 3 h of treatment with dTAG-47 versus DMSO. Red/blue dots represent genes with significant up-/downregulation, respectively, in the dTAG-47-treated samples at FDR < 5%.

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H3K9Ac, and H3Ac, showed differential enrichment at the primary BCL11A targets. Whereas promoters of all three clusters of genes were enriched for the active-H3Ac mark in dTAG-treated samples compared to DMSO (Figure S2D), both H3K4me3 and H3K9Ac showed a cluster-specific pattern of enrichment during differentiation: cluster I gene promoters were not enriched for H3K4me3/H3K9Ac in undifferentiated cells (day 0) and remained devoid of H3K4me3/H3K9Ac through differentiation (day 4, DMSO). Upon dTAG treatment, cluster I genes acquired promoter-specific H3K4me3/H3K9Ac (Figure 4J). In contrast, gene promoters in clusters II and III were enriched with active histone modifications at day 0, which were lost by day 4 of differentiation (day 4, DMSO). In cells treated with dTAG-47, active marks at these genes were largely retained. From these results, we postulate that BCL11A-mediated repression of cluster I versus cluster II and III genes takes place in a temporally staggered manner in erythroid differentiation.

Globins are the most abundant differentially expressed targets of BCL11A in the proteome

To map changes in nascent transcription to the proteome, we performed MS-based proteomic analysis of undifferentiated and differentiated *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells, treated with dTAG-47 or DMSO (Figure 5A). Proteomes were acquired by measuring each sample with a single 100-min gradient data-independent acquisition (DIA) method (Aebersold and Mann, 2016; Gillet et al., 2012; Karayel et al., 2020; Ludwig et al., 2018). An average of 6,070 proteins were quantified in each sample. We focused on two unique BCL11A-XL isoform peptides quantified across all of the samples (DPFLSFGDSR and GAVVGVGDESR; Figure S3A), which confirmed the degradation of BCL11A (Figure 5B). We performed differential protein expression analysis of dTAG-47- and DMSO-treated samples during differentiation. Among the differentially expressed proteins, most were present in greater abundance in dTAG-47 samples, further confirming the role of BCL11A as a repressor. Moreover, we observed high positive correlation in protein abundance between dTAG47 and DMSO treated cells throughout erythroid differentiation (Figures 5A and 5C; Pearson r^2 0.88 at day 2, r^2 0.85 at day 4, r^2 0.91 at day 7), indicating limited differences in the proteome of BCL11A-depleted cells compared to DMSO. As expected following extended treatment with dTAG-47, samples at day 7 showed the largest number of differentially abundant proteins (FDR <1% and S_0 0.1; Figures 5C, S3B, and S3C).

By applying an FDR <5% at S_0 <0.1, we found 3 proteins at day 2, 6 proteins at day 4, and 382 proteins at day 7 of differentiation to be differentially expressed between DMSO and dTAG-47 treatments. HBG1/2 and HBZ were upregulated earliest and increased throughout differentiation (Figures 5D and S3C). While all differential protein expression at day 2 could be correlated with a change in nascent transcription of primary BCL11A targets, this fraction decreased at later times of dTAG-47 treatment to 66.6% at day 4. By day 7, only less than 10% of differentially expressed proteins were primary targets of BCL11A (Figure 5E). Thus, a remarkably small set of primary transcriptional targets of BCL11A, including fetal and embryonic globins, culminates in measurable differential protein abundance (day 2). The proteins differentially expressed at day 7 may reflect the secondary effects of prolonged BCL11A loss or dTAG-47 exposure itself.

To gauge the relative abundance of all differentially expressed proteins, we next used the proteomic ruler method to estimate proteome-wide copy numbers of proteins per cell (Wiśniewski et al., 2014). Using this approach, we compared the estimated copy numbers of all of the differentially expressed proteins (FDR <5% and S_0 <0.1) at each time. HBG1/2 and HBZ were present at substantially higher copy numbers compared to all of the other differentially expressed proteins both early (day 2) and later (day 4) in differentiation (Figure 5F). By day 7 of treatment and differentiation, the globins, corresponding to genes of cluster I, far outweighed the abundance of the other ~382 differentially expressed proteins in the differentiating erythroid cells (Figure 5F). We corroborated the findings of increased abundance of HbF and HBZ by HPLC and western blot, respectively (Figure S4), and detected increased abundance of these proteins as early as 12–24h after the addition of dTAG-47 to differentiating cells.

BCL11A-mediated repression of HBG1/2 is independent of promoter CpG methylation

DNA methylation at promoter CpG dinucleotides has often been associated with transcriptional silencing (Goren et al., 2006). A correlation of *HBG1/2* promoter methylation with HbF silencing has provided a rationale for inhibitors of DNA methylation as therapy for hemoglobinopathies. A total of 8 CpG in the *HBG1/2* promoters are heavily methylated in adult stage HBB-expressing cells. Acute degradation of BCL11A provides an opportunity to address directly the relationship between *HBG1/2* transcription and promoter DNA methylation. We assayed 5-methyl cytosine

(B) Metagene of nascent transcription at the 56 upregulated genes (FDR <5%) upon 3 h of dTAG-47 (red) or DMSO (blue) treatment. For comparison, a background of 370 random non-primary genes.

(C) Circular bar graph of enrichment of BCL11A motifs in 3 h DE genes over the whole genome background ($p = 7.4e-11$, Fisher exact test, 2-sided).

(D) Heatmap of \log_2 fold change (FC) in nascent transcription of 3-h DE genes at various time points following dTAG-47 treatment (versus DMSO left panels) and after washout of dTAG-47 (versus dTAG-47 treatment, right panels). Hierarchical clustering of genes with average Euclidean distance is shown.

(E) Heatmap of \log_2 FC in promoter chromatin accessibility (ATAC-seq) (TSS \pm 500 bp) of 3 h DE genes in dTAG-47 versus DMSO (left panels) and upon washout of dTAG-47 (washout versus dTAG-47, right panels), at various times.

(F) Violin plots of number of BCL11A motif instances per kilobase of gene length. Mann-Whitney U , 2-sided test. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

(G) Metagene of BCL11A enrichment at promoter regions of the 31 primary targets of BCL11A.

(H) FC induction in nascent transcription (dTAG-47 versus DMSO) of genes in all 4 clusters.

(I) Cumulative plot of percentage of genes with significantly increased promoter accessibility after dTAG-47 treatment across erythroid differentiation ($p < 0.05$). Clustering as determined in (D).

(J) Metagene of H3K4me3 and H3K9Ac enrichment (ChIP-seq) at TSS (\pm 2 kb) in undifferentiated (day 0) and dTAG-47 or DMSO-treated cells at day 4 of differentiation in the 4 gene clusters. ns, not statistically significant. Two clones were analyzed.

See also Figure S2.

(5mC) levels at the *HBG1/2* promoter by bisulfite modification and methylation-independent PCR followed by next-generation sequencing (NGS) of PCR amplicons. We ruled out PCR bias in amplifying methylated versus unmethylated targets by assessing methylation at the *HBG1/2* promoters of HUDEP-1 and HUDEP-2 cells and in a 1:1 mixture of HUDEP-1:HUDEP-2 genomic DNA as PCR template. HUDEP-1 and HUDEP-2 cells represent fetal- and adult-type cells with unmethylated and methylated *HBG1/2* promoters, respectively (Kurita et al., 2013). Our analysis showed that unmethylated and methylated templates were detected comparably in the 1:1 template sample (Figure S5C).

We then quantified CpG methylation at the eight promoter CpG sites at days 4–9 following BCL11A degradation. To ensure high-level globin expression, HUDEP-2 cells were cultured in differentiation media. Robust HbF reactivation was achieved without the reduction of DNA methylation at any promoter CpG (Figures 6A–6C, S5A, and S5B). At 9 days of dTAG-47 treatment, HBG transcripts represented 35% of the total β -like transcripts, despite no appreciable loss of promoter methylation. Thus, promoter CpG methylation is not the primary mode of *HBG1/2* repression.

To assess the impact of DNA methylation loss in conjunction with loss of BCL11A, we treated cells with azacytidine (AZA), an inhibitor of the maintenance DNA methyltransferase DNMT1. To compare relative contributions of promoter CpG methylation and BCL11A-mediated promoter repression to *HBG1/2* silencing, we treated *BCL11A^{FKBP}* clones with either dTAG-47 or DMSO and added 0, 0.1, or 0.3 μ M AZA to the culture media. As expected, promoter 5mC was progressively lost with increasing duration and concentration of AZA treatment (Figure 6D, bottom rows of DMSO treatment). This loss was more pronounced in BCL11A-depleted cells, indicating that removal of the repressor facilitated AZA-mediated loss of promoter CpG methylation (Figures 6D, top rows of dTAG-47 treatment, and 6E). Simultaneous treatment of AZA and dTAG-47 led to the synergistic induction of *HBG1/2*, where the contribution of BCL11A loss to de-repression was greater than that of CpG demethylation at all AZA concentrations, especially at 0.1 μ M, where AZA treatment had a limited effect on cell viability (Figures 6F and S5D). Therefore, the removal of promoter 5mC led to a modest effect on *HBG1/2* induction and is not the primary barrier to active and abundant *HBG1/2* transcription.

DISCUSSION

Here, we show that PROTAC-mediated rapid depletion of BCL11A induces *HBG1/2* reactivation comparable to genetic

loss-of-function in HUDEP-2 and in erythroid-differentiated CD34⁺ primary cells. While not unexpected, the correspondence provides proof-of-principle for BCL11A-targeted PROTACS as a potential therapeutic strategy.

Nascent transcription immediately following BCL11A depletion identified an exceedingly small set of 31 genes directly repressed by BCL11A, the globin genes (*HBG1/2* and *HBZ*) showing substantially greater responses to BCL11A depletion in transcription, chromatin accessibility, and protein abundance. While BCL11A plays a pivotal role in silencing *HBG1/2* during the globin switch, it also participates in the shutoff of expression of *HBZ*, the embryonic α -like globin gene, which is partially reactivated in *BCL11A^{-/-}* cells and mouse models (King et al., 2021). The large FC induction of *HBZ* seen here is manifested by exceedingly low basal (DMSO) levels of *HBZ* in the presence of BCL11A; *HBZ* RNA is induced to \sim 1.5% of total α -like globins (Figure S3D).

Through the quantitative analysis of the proteome of BCL11A-depleted cells, we showed that the effects of BCL11A depletion are remarkably specific and likely account for the near-normal differentiation of erythroid progenitors in the face of reduced levels of BCL11A (this study), knockout mice (Xu et al., 2011), and in clinical trials for SCD and β -thalassemia (Esrick et al., 2021; Frangoul et al., 2021). The transcription factor ZNF410 exerts dedicated control on *HBG1/2* expression via control of an upstream regulator CHD4 (Lan et al., 2021; Vinjamur et al., 2021). Of the already narrow set of primary targets, BCL11A directly and disproportionately controls a niche set of two embryonic/fetal globins in the erythroid cell.

Chromatin accessibility, as assayed in ATAC-seq, reflects the physical access of Tn5 to chromatinized DNA. Access may be occluded by the presence of nucleosomes, chromatin-binding factors, or higher-order chromatin. Transcriptionally active regions are accessible to transcription factors and RNA PolII, but the temporal relationship between nascent transcription and chromatin accessibility remains unresolved (Klemm et al., 2019). The staggering of transcriptional induction and chromatin opening in our system is reminiscent of embryonic stem cells, where the re-establishment of accessible chromatin following DNA replication was secondary to and dependent on nascent transcription of prospectively “open” loci (Stewart-Morgan et al., 2019). Acute oncoprotein depletion has also revealed the staggering of nascent transcription and chromatin accessibility (Olsen et al., 2022; Stengel et al., 2021). Chromatin remodeling is a dynamic process that requires the constant engagement of ATP-dependent chromatin remodeling complexes that exhibit

Figure 5. Quantitative proteomics analysis reveals modest changes to protein abundance in BCL11A-depleted cells undergoing erythroid differentiation

- (A) Principal-component analysis (PCA) of *BCL11A^{FKBP}* cells, dTAG-47 or DMSO treated, at various times in differentiation.
 (B) Log₂ MS intensities of 2 distinct *BCL11A*-FKBP^{F36V} peptides in undifferentiated HUDEP-2, *BCL11A^{-/-}*, and *BCL11A^{FKBP}* cells, and in differentiating *BCL11A^{FKBP}* cells treated with DMSO or dTAG-47.
 (C) Log₂ FC in protein abundance between dTAG-47 or DMSO treatments at days 2, 4, and 7 erythroid differentiation. Proteins that change significantly in abundance (FDR <1%) between dTAG-47 and DMSO treatments are in blue.
 (D) Overlap between proteins significantly changing in abundance (FDR <5%, s0 = 0.1) between dTAG-47 and DMSO treatments at days 3, 4, and 7 of differentiation.
 (E) Percentage of DE proteins at each time point that are primary targets of BCL11A, as determined by PRO-seq. Percentage of primary targets are represented in gray.
 (F) Heatmaps of log₁₀ (estimated copy numbers) of proteins differentially abundant at days 2, 4, and 7 with dTAG-47 versus DMSO treatment (FDR <5%, s0 = 0.1). Three replicates are shown.
 See also Figures S3 and S4.

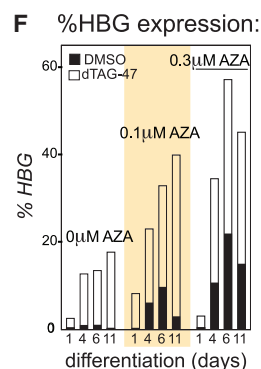
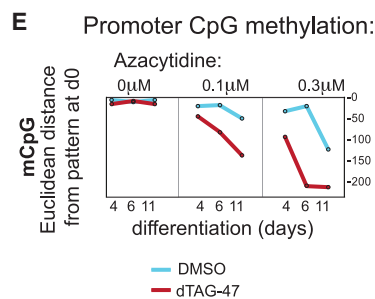
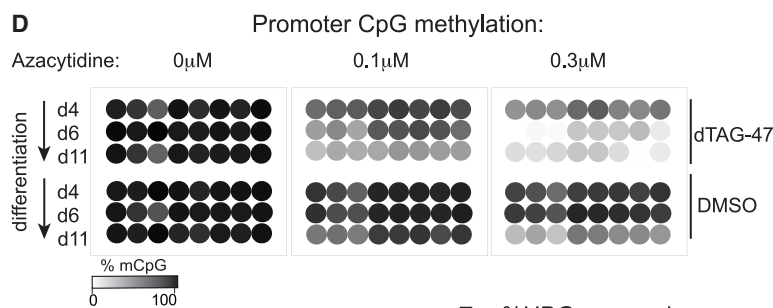
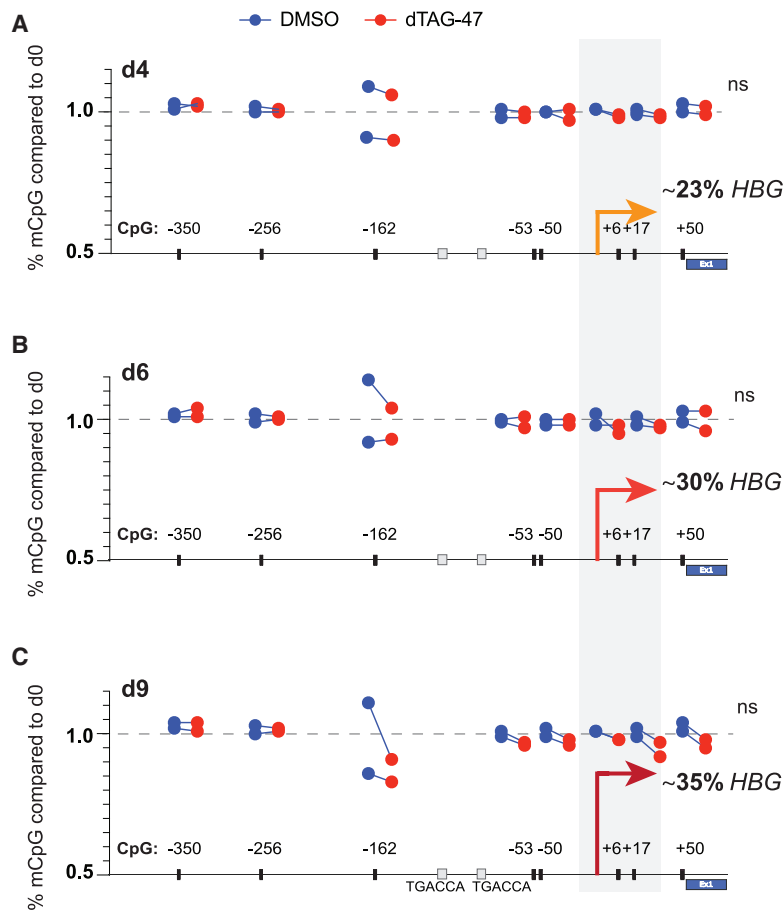


Figure 6. BCL11A represses HBG1/2 genes independently of promoter CpG methylation

(A–C) Percentage of CpG methylation at 8 CpG sites in *HBG1/2* promoters at days 4 (A), 6 (B), and 9 (C) of differentiation in DMSO- (blue dots) and dTAG-47 (red dots)-treated *BCL11A^{FKBP}* cells, as compared to day 0. Extent of *HBG* upregulation is shown in orange, red, maroon arrows. $n = 2$. (D) *HBG1/2* promoter CpG methylation in differentiating *BCL11A^{FKBP}* cells treated with azacytidine (0, 0.1, and 0.3 μM) and DMSO or dTAG-47. Dots are CpGs, and color intensity indicates percentage of methylation. (E) Total promoter CpG methylation represented as the euclidean distance of CpG methylation values from the methylation pattern at day 0 for DMSO or dTAG-47 treatments in conjunction with azacytidine (0, 0.1, and 0.3 μM). (F) qRT-PCR quantification of *HBG1/2* as a percentage of total globin RNA in differentiating *BCL11A^{FKBP}* cells treated with azacytidine (0, 0.1, and 0.3 μM) in combination with DMSO (black bars) or dTAG-47 (open bars). *HPRT* is endogenous control, %*HBG* = 100* [*HBG*/(*HBG* + *HBB*)]. See also Figure S5.

differential affinity toward specific modifications of nucleosome substrates (Schick et al., 2021, Dann et al., 2017). BCL11A recruits the nucleosome remodeling and deacetylase (NuRD) chromatin remodeling complex at the *HBG1/2* promoters, which is essential for γ -globin silencing (Sher et al., 2019). While dTAG-47 rapidly depleted BCL11A from chromatin (Figure 1C), we speculate that NuRD complexes, which maintain chromatin compaction, may be removed more slowly or passively upon DNA replication or cell-cycle-dependent dilution of associated modified histones (e.g., NuRD-interacting unmethylated H3K4) (Kraushaar et al., 2018). In addition, loss of NuRD complexes at the γ -globin promoters may be forestalled by independent recruitment by ZBTB7A/LRF (Masuda et al., 2016).

A correlation of promoter DNA methylation with gene repression has served as a rationale for inhibitors of DNA methylation as therapeutics for HbF reactivation (Lavelle, 2004). Our data argue that BCL11A represses *HBG1/2* largely independent of promoter DNA methylation. Removal of BCL11A facilitated the AZA-mediated loss of CpG methylation and led to the synergistic induction of γ -globin, with the contribution of BCL11A depletion to reactivation considerably greater than that of CpG demethylation alone. PROTAC-mediated degradation of BCL11A temporally uncoupled transcription, chromatin accessibility, and DNA methylation at the *HBG1/2* locus and suggests that the loss of DNA methylation seen in previous genetic studies occurs secondary to the reactivation of transcription. Such temporal uncoupling may be widespread, as recently reported in differentiating monocytes, where changes in DNA methylation lagged behind transcription and chromatin accessibility by several days (Barnett et al., 2020). As promoter CpG methylation is not the dominant contributor to *HBG1/2* repression, we propose that removal of a direct transcriptional repressor, such as BCL11A or ZBTB7A/LRF, is necessary for robust γ -globin reactivation. The rapidity with which γ -globin transcription is reactivated following BCL11A degradation suggests that repression is an active process, and refutes a simple “hit-and-run” model in which a repressor initiates a cascade of events and is dispensable thereafter (Martyn et al., 2018; Varala et al., 2015). The critical role of BCL11A as an active, direct, and dominant repressor of γ -globin transcription raises questions regarding the use of epigenetic modifiers for effective reactivation of HbF, unless these modalities also downregulate BCL11A expression or function.

Within HUDEP-2 cells, BCL11A appears to be an exceedingly long-lived transcription factor ($t_{1/2} \sim 24.5$ h, Figure 2D). While still relatively stable for a transcription factor, BCL11A-FKBP^{F36V} exhibited a shorter half-life ($t_{1/2} \sim 7$ h). Given that the steady-state abundances of *BCL11A-FKBP* mRNA and protein are comparable to those in parental cells, a reduced half-life of the tagged protein is unlikely to confound the effects of acute loss of BCL11A on downstream transcription or proteomics (Figure S1A). A reduced half-life would predictably lead to slower recovery of the fusion protein to steady-state levels compared to the wild-type protein, which may alter the kinetics of re-repression. Of note, the level of HbF in *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells was equivalent to that of parental HUDEP-2 cells, which is indicative of full γ -globin repression. However, the failure of mice homozygous for *Bcl11a*^{FKBP} alleles to survive suggests that primary cells *in vivo* are less tolerant to alterations in half-lives of critical pro-

teins. We report our findings to caution investigators who may seek to apply the dTAG or other protein degradation platforms in whole animals.

Recent gene therapy and CRISPR-Cas9 editing trials for SCD and β -thalassemia have validated BCL11A as a therapeutic target. As currently practiced, genetic therapies that rely on *ex vivo* modification of hematopoietic stem cells and reinfusion following myeloablative chemotherapy cannot address the global burden of these disorders. Small molecules directed to BCL11A offer the prospect of a widely applicable therapeutic option. While many challenges remain, the scarcity of primary targets of BCL11A and dominance of globins in the BCL11A-depleted proteome provide requisite proof of principle for further pursuit of this goal.

Limitations of the study

The apparent staggering of transcription and chromatin accessibility may reflect an S phase-dependent mechanism. In this scenario, BCL11A-depleted cells undergoing DNA replication may be the first to exhibit a failure of silencing. Increased chromatin accessibility may require dilution of underlying histone marks with each cell division cycle and be concurrent, but not observable, in an asynchronously dividing cell population because of a lack of sensitivity of existing technology. These questions call for a direct assessment by single-cell RNA-seq and ATAC-seq analyses, as well as nascent transcription analysis of G1/S/G2M-separated *BCL11A*^{FKBP} cells.

SIGNIFICANCE

Reactivation of fetal hemoglobin (HbF, $\alpha_2\gamma_2$) by gene therapy or editing-mediated downregulation of BCL11A expression is a tractable and promising strategy for the treatment of sickle cell disease (SCD) and β -thalassemia. To date, studies of BCL11A function have been limited to steady-state observations, which fail to capture kinetic insights into the repression or reactivation of γ -globin. Here, we used the “dTAG” PROTAC system to acutely degrade BCL11A protein in erythroid cells. Nascent transcription and quantitative proteomic analysis show that BCL11A represses a very small set of primary gene targets. Among these, the two fetal/embryonic globins HBG and HBZ are the most strongly induced upon BCL11A loss. Moreover, following the removal of BCL11A, γ -globin transcription is briskly induced, followed closely by increased chromatin accessibility. By concurrent BCL11A depletion and exposure to the DNMT1-inhibitor azacytidine, we assess the relative contributions of the presence of BCL11A and promoter CpG methylation in the γ -globin promoter to repression at the locus. The data reveal that the presence of BCL11A is the primary barrier to γ -globin transcription. In summary, our data temporally uncouple transcriptional induction, chromatin accessibility, and DNA methylation at the γ -globin locus in erythroid cells. The paucity of primary targets of BCL11A and dominance of globins in the BCL11A-depleted proteome provides a proof-of-principle for small molecule-mediated degradation of BCL11A as a therapeutic option.

STAR★METHODS

Detailed methods are provided in the online version of this paper and include the following:

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SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Supplemental information can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chembiol.2022.06.007>.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

S.M. and S.H.O. designed the study. S.M. performed the experiments and analyzed and interpreted the data. A.B. performed the experiments. Y.K. analyzed PRO-seq, ATAC-seq, and ChIP-seq. O.K. and M.M. performed/analyzed the DIA proteomics. S.R.G. and K.A. performed/advised on PRO-seq. K.A.D. and E.S.F. performed/analyzed the multiplexed proteomics. D.S., K.Z., and Y.F. generated/studied the mice. Q.Z. analyzed amplification-seq. B.N. and N.S.G. provided drugs and advice. S.H.O. supervised the work. S.M. and S.H.O. wrote the manuscript, with input from all of the authors.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

E.S.F. is a founder, scientific advisory board (SAB) member, and equity holder in Civetta Therapeutics, Jengu Therapeutics (board member), Neomorph, and Proximity Therapeutics; SAB member and equity holder in Avilar Therapeutics and Phytos Therapeutics; and a consultant to Novartis, Sanofi, Deerfield, and EcoR1. The Fischer lab receives or has received research funding from Novartis, Astellas, Ajax, Voronoi, Interline, and Deerfield. B.N. is an inventor on patent applications related to the dTAG system (WO/2017/024318, WO/2017/024319, WO/2018/148440, WO/2018/148443, and WO/2020/146250). K.A.D. is a consultant to Kronos Bio and Neomorph. S.H.O. is a consultant for Syros Pharmaceuticals, serves on the SAB of PeterBio, and is the inventor on issued patents related to BCL11A, which are licensed by Boston Children's Hospital. The other authors declare no competing interests.

INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

One or more of the authors of this paper self-identifies as living with a disability.

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STAR★METHODS

KEY RESOURCES TABLE

REAGENT or RESOURCE	SOURCE	IDENTIFIER
Antibodies		
Rabbit Monoclonal α -BCL11A	Abcam	Cat# ab191401; RRID: AB_2921236
Mouse monoclonal α - β -ACTIN	Santa Cruz Biotechnology	Cat# Sc-4778; RRID: AB_626632
Mouse monoclonal α -Gapdh	Abcam	Cat# ab8245; RRID: AB_2107448
Human polyclonal α -TUBB	Abexxa	Cat# abx026439; RRID: AB_2921238
Mouse monoclonal α -RCC	Santa Cruz Biotechnology	Cat# sc-55559; RRID: AB_831160
Rabbit polyclonal α -CRBN	Novusbio	Cat# NBP1-91810; RRID: AB_11037820
Rabbit polyclonal α -c-MYC	Cell Signaling	Cat# 9402; RRID: AB_2151827
Rabbit polyclonal α -HBZ	Abcam	Cat# 228651; RRID: AB_2921242
Mouse monoclonal α -HBG	Santa Cruz Biotechnology	Cat# Sc-21756; RRID: AB_2295004
α -human CD71 PE-cy7	eBioscience	Cat# 25-0719-42; RRID: AB_2573366
α -human CD235a FITC	BD Pharmingen	Cat# 559943; RRID: AB_397386
α -human CD36 APC	Biologend	Cat# 336203; RRID: AB_1575029
Rabbit polyclonal α -H4K4me3	Actie Motif	Cat# 39915; RRID: AB_2687512
Rabbit Monoclonal α -H3K9Ac	Actie Motif	Cat# 39917; RRID: AB_2616593
Rabbit polyclonal α -H3Ac	Actie Motif	Cat# 39040; RRID: AB_2687871
Normal Rabbit IgG	Cell Signaling	Cat# 2729S; RRID: AB_1031062
Goat Anti-Rabbit IgG (H + L)-HRP Conjugate	Bio-Rad Laboratories	Cat# 1706515; RRID: AB_2617112
Goat Anti-Mouse IgG (H + L)-HRP Conjugate	Bio-Rad Laboratories	Cat# 1706516; RRID: AB_2921252
Rabbit polyclonal α -H3	Abcam	Cat# 1791; RRID: AB_302613
Hemoglobin alpha Antibody - BSA Free	Novusbio	Cat# NB110-41083; RRID: AB_790106
α -Hemoglobin β Antibody (37-8)	SantaCruz	Cat# sc-21757; RRID: AB_627713
Biological samples		
pAAV-IRES-hrGFP-mWnt3a	Rodriguez et al., 2014	Addgene: 89771
Chemicals, peptides, and recombinant proteins		
dTAG47 and dTAG47-ve	Nabet et al. (2018)	N/A
Cycloheximide	MilliporeSigma	Cat# C4859
Azacytidine	Cayman chemical	Cat# 11164
Asunaprevir	Cayman chemical	Cat# 20835
Alt-R® S.p. Cas9 Nuclease V3	IDT	Cat# 1081059
Critical commercial assays		
Subcellular Protein Fractionation Kit for Cultured Cells	ThermoFisher	Cat# 78840
D-10 Hemoglobin A1c Program	BioRad laboratories	Cat# 12000949
Deposited data		
ChIP-seq, ATAC-seq, PRO-seq	This paper, GEO database	GSE194348
Multiplexed global proteome analysis with TMT quantitation	This paper, PRISM database	PXD030307
LC-MS/MS global proteome data (DIA)	This paper, ProteomeXchange database	PXD030307
Mouse: MEL cells	Stuart Orkin	N/A
Experimental models: Cell lines		
HUDEP-2	Kurita et al. (2013)	N/A

(Continued on next page)

Continued

REAGENT or RESOURCE	SOURCE	IDENTIFIER
Experimental models: Organisms/strains		
C57BL/6J mice	Jackson labs	RRID:IMSR_JAX:000664
Software and algorithms		
ImageJ	ImageJ	https://imagej.nih.gov/ij/
GraphPad Prism Software	Prism	https://www.graphpad.com

RESOURCE AVAILABILITY

Lead contact

Further information and requests for reagents should be directed to and will be fulfilled by the Lead contact, Stuart H Orkin (stuart_orkin@dfci.harvard.edu).

Materials availability

This study did not generate new unique reagents.

Data and code availability

NGS and proteomics data have been deposited in GEO and ProteomeXchange/PRIDE databases respectively, and are publicly available as of the date of publication. Accession numbers are listed in the [key resources table](#).

This paper does not report original code.

Any additional information required to reanalyze the data reported in this paper is available from the [lead contact](#) upon request.

EXPERIMENTAL MODEL AND SUBJECT DETAILS

HUDEP cell culture and drug treatment

HUDEP-1 and HUDEP-2 (human umbilical cord blood-derived erythroid progenitor, male) lines were provided by Dr. Yukio Nakamura, and cultured as described previously ([Vinjamur and Bauer, 2018](#)). Cells were maintained at a density of $<0.5 \times 10^6$ in expansion medium: StemSpan™ SFEM (STEMCELL Technologies, 09650) with SCF (50 ng/mL), EPO (3 IU/mL), Dexamethasone (0.4 μg/mL), Doxycycline (1 μg/mL), and passaged every other day. Erythroid differentiation was carried out by replacing the medium to EDM2 (Erythroid Differentiation Media: IMDM (Corning, 15-016-CV) supplemented with 330 μg/mL HoloHuman Transferrin, 10 μg/mL Recombinant Human Insulin, 2 IU/mL Heparin, 5% Inactivated Plasma, 3 IU/mL Erythropoietin, 2 mM L-Glutamine, 100 ng/mL SCF, 1 μg/mL doxycycline). Cells were resuspended in medium containing 0.15 μM dTAG-47. Every other day, cells were centrifuged at 500g for 5 min at 4C and resuspended in fresh media containing the drug.

Mouse work and generation of KI mouse

Animal experiments were performed under protocols approved by the Boston Children's Hospital Animal Care and Use Committee (15-18). Endogenous tagging of *Bcl11a* in the mouse was achieved by zygote AAV infection/and RNP electroporation ([Chen et al., 2019](#)). sgRNA targeting the C-terminus of Bcl11a was synthesized in-house ([Sher et al., 2019](#)) and complexed with recombinant Cas9 protein (PNAbio) in OptiMEM (Gibco). A serotype-1 AAV carrying the FKBP^{F36V} sequence flanked by 200bp homology arms was used as a donor template and added to the solution at $\sim 5 \times 10^{12}$ gc/mL, prior to electroporation. Batches of 30 one-cell-stage C57BL/6/N/Crl mouse embryos were electroporated using a square-wave electroporator (7x pulses, 30V, 100 ms intervals), washed in OptiMEM, and transferred into CD1 foster mothers. Founder mice were screened by PCR, and knock-ins confirmed by Sanger sequencing. Mendelian distribution of genotypes was compared using Mendel ([Montoliu, 2012](#)). Expression of tagged Bcl11a-dTAG-HA was confirmed by western blotting using anti-Bcl11a (Abcam ab191401) and anti-HA (Cell Signaling #2367) antibodies. *In vitro* transcription of the sgRNA (ATGATATAAAAAGTGAATAG) was performed with the following oligos (5' → 3'): DS_mBclSTOP_IVTfw (GAAATTAATACGACTCACTATAGGATGATATAAAAAGTGAATAGGTTTTAGAGCTAGAAATAGCAAGTTAAAATAAGGCTAGTCCG) and DS_IVTrv (AAAAAAGCACCGACTCGGTGCCACTTTTTCAAGTTGATAACGGACTAGCCTTATTTAACTTGC). E14.5 embryos were not sexed since no sex-based effects on globin expression were expected.

METHOD DETAILS

Generation of indel and knock-in HUDEP-2 clones

Cas9/sgRNA RNP was generated by mixing 120 pM guide RNA (2'-O-methyl analog and 3' phosphorothioate internucleotide modified-sgRNA, custom ordered from Synthego Corp., 5' to 3' sequence: augauuaaaaacugauag) with 61 pM Cas9-Alt-R protein (IDT)

and incubated at room temperature for 10 min. Meanwhile, 5×10^4 HUDEP-2 cells were collected by centrifugation at 500xg for 5 min, washed in 1X room temperature PBS, and resuspended in 20 μ L NF-solution (P3 Primary Cell 4D-Nucleofector™ X Kit, Lonza). Thereafter, RNP was mixed with the cells, and nucleofection was carried out in a 4D-nucleofector X Unit with program EO-100. Immediately after nucleofection, cells were supplemented with 80 μ L warm expansion medium. After 10 min, cells were collected by centrifugation at 500xg for 5 min and resuspended in 100 μ L expansion medium in one well of a flat-bottom 96-well plate. For generation of knockins, 20 μ L crude rAAV viral prep (see below) was added to the cells at this point, and the cells returned to the 37°C incubator for 3 days.

For the generation of *CRBN*^{-/-} clones, two guides at the 5' of the *CRBN* gene were used (5' to 3' sequences: aaccaccugccgcuc-cugcc and UCCUGCUGAUCUCCUUCGC), with RNP electroporation performed as described as above.

The triple-transfection method was used to generate crude rAAV lysates (Robert et al., 2017). HEK293T cells were plated in a 10 cm dish in 1X Penicillin-streptomycin-Glutamine and 10% FBS in DMEM. At 80% confluence, the medium was replaced with fresh medium. Then, cells were triple-transfected using polyethylenimine Max (PEI Max, Polysciences 24,765-1) with 12 μ g of pAAV-helper, 7.5 μ g of pRep2Cap6, and 7.5 μ g of transfer plasmid (containing the HDR template with FBBP^{F36V} flanked by a 1.1kb proximal and a 186bp distal arm) (PEI:DNA = 3:1), in DMEM without phenol red (Life Technologies 31053036). 3 days after transfection, cells were scraped and collected by spinning at 1300 RPM for 5 min. The cell pellet was re-suspended in 1–2 mL DPBS without calcium or magnesium and lysed by three rounds of freeze-thaw. This was accomplished by placing them alternately in a dry ice/ethanol bath until completely frozen and in a water bath of 37°C until completely thawed. After the final thaw, cell lysate was spun at 1300 RPM for 5 min, and the supernatant was filtered through a 0.22 μ m syringe filter to yield a crude viral lysate. Viral lysates were stored in 25 μ L aliquots at 4°C for up to 4 weeks and at –80°C after that.

One week after electroporation/AAV transduction, single-cell colonies were generated. To isolate single-cell clones, ~30 cells were seeded per 96 well plate. Media was refreshed every 3–4 days over 10–14 days. Wells with >1 colony were excluded. Single clones were expanded and genotyped for the desired knock-in by PCR on genomic DNA extracted with Quickextract solution (Lucigen). Clones showing biallelic knock-ins were expanded and frozen in LN2 at early passages.

PRO-seq

PRO-seq cell permeabilization

PRO-seq was performed as described (Liu et al., 2021). Five million HUDEP-2 were harvested on ice, and washed with cold PBS. Cells were resuspended in 2 mL cold Buffer W (10 mM Tris-Cl, pH 8.0, 10 mM KCl, 250 mM sucrose, 5 mM MgCl₂, 0.5 mM DTT, 10% glycerol, 0.5% BSA) using wide-bore P1000 tip and transferred to a 2 mL low binding tube and strained through a 35 micron nylon mesh cell strainer. Immediately add 18 mL Chilled Buffer P (Buffer W supplemented with 0.05% Igepal CA630) to cell suspension and mixed gently for 2 min. Cells were centrifuged at 700 × g for 8 min and resuspended in 1 mL Buffer F (50 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.3, 40% glycerol, 5 mM MgCl₂, 0.5 mM DTT, 0.5% BSA), and centrifuged again at 700 × g for 8 min. The pellets were resuspended in 400 μ L Buffer F and counted using a hemocytometer to ensure that >95% cells were permeabilized. The cell density was adjusted to $1 \times 10^6/100 \mu$ L, and the suspension was snap-frozen and stored at –80°C.

PRO-seq run-on and library construction

Aliquots of frozen (–80°C) permeabilized cells were thawed on ice and pipetted gently to fully resuspend. An aliquot was removed and diluted 1:10 in 1xPBS for cell counting using an automatic counter (Biorad TC-20) with counts spot-checked by manual recount using a hemocytometer as needed. An aliquot of each dilution was also stained with Trypan Blue, and counting repeated to determine permeabilization efficiency. For each sample, 1 million permeabilized cells were used for nuclear run-on. For normalization, 50,000 permeabilized *Drosophila* S2 cells were spiked-in to each sample of 1 million mammalian cells. Nuclear run-on assays and library preparation were performed essentially as described (Elrod et al., 2019) with modifications noted below.

The nuclear run-on buffer was prepared as 4X stock (20mM Tris pH 8, 20mM MgCl₂, 2mM DTT, 600mM KCl, 40 μ M/ea biotin-11-NTPs (Perkin Elmer), 20U SuperaseIN (Thermo). The 4X stock was mixed 1:1 with 2% sarkosyl (Sigma) to yield 2X complete run-on mix. The 3' adapter (RNA oligo: 5'-GAUCGUCGGACUGUAGAACUCUGAAC-3'InvdT) was pre-adenylated prior to use (5' DNA adenylation kit, NEB, according to the manufacturer's instructions). Adenylated oligo was purified by ethanol precipitation, resuspended in water and quality of modification was confirmed by electrophoresis on a 15% TBE-Urea gel (Novex) next to appropriate controls. The adapter concentration was adjusted to 10 μ M, and 1 μ L was used for each ligation which contained T4 RNA ligase 2, truncated KQ (NEB) with 15% PEG-8000 in the reaction mix. Reactions were incubated at 16°C overnight. Each ligation reaction was then diluted with 180 μ L of betaine binding buffer (1.42g of betaine brought to 10mL with binding buffer and sterile filtered) containing 1 μ L of 100 μ M blocking oligo (TCCGACGATCCCACGTTCCCGTGG/3InvdT). The blocking oligo is complementary to and overhangs the 3' end of the 3' adapter and reduces 5'/3' adapter dimer formation during the 5' adapter ligation step. The blocking oligo was modified at its 3' end to prevent extension by reverse transcriptase. Blocking oligo was also included in final wash solution prior to the 5' adapter ligation and in the ligation reaction itself, both at 3-fold molar excess over the initial amount of 3' adapter (i.e. 1 μ L of 30 μ M per reaction). The 5' adapter ligation was performed as as described (Elrod et al., 2019) except that PEG-8000 was increased to 15%.

After reverse transcription, cDNA was immediately amplified for 5-cycles ("preCR" step). A PCR cocktail consisting of NEBNext Ultra II Q5 master mix (NEB) and Illumina TruSeq PCR primers (RP-1, common; and RPI-X, indexing) was added to each cDNA and amplification carried out according to manufacturer's suggested 2-step cycling conditions for NGS applications. To determine optimal library amplification, the preCRs were thawed on ice and an aliquot serially diluted. Each dilution was mixed with a PCR

cocktail (Q5 DNA polymerase with optional high GC enhancer) containing 10 μM /ea of Illumina universal P5 and P7 primers and amplified 15-cycles. The reactions were electrophoresed on a 2.2% agarose gel (SeaKem) cast with SYBR gold (Thermo) and analyzed to determine the optimal number of cycles for final amplification. preCRs were transferred from ice to a pre-heated thermal cycler block and amplified for the appropriate number of additional cycles to reach the total determined in the test amplification. Pooled libraries were sequenced using an Illumina NovaSeq S1 (PE 50), Novaseq S4 (200 cycle kit), NextSeq in high output mode (PE 75), NovaSeq S1 with 100 cycle kit (PE50).

PRO-seq data analysis

Preprocessing: Raw paired-end sequences in FASTQ format were trimmed using cutadapt (Martin, 2011) (version 1.18) to remove adapter sequences and low-quality 3' bases (-match-read-wildcards -m 20 -q 10). The 3' adapter sequences of R1 reads ("TGGAATTCTCGGGTGCCAAGGAAGTCCAGTCAC") and the 3' adapter of R2 reads ("GATCGTCCGACTGTAGAACTCTGAAC") were removed from all read pairs. The resulting read pairs were mapped to the spike-in Drosophila genome (dm6) using Bowtie2 (Langmead and Salzberg, 2012) (version 2.2.9), with those reads not mapped to the spike genome as input to the primary genome (hg19) using Bowtie2. Reads mapped to the hg19 reference genome were then sorted and indexed using samtools (Danecek et al., 2021) (version 1.9), and subsequently converted to BED format using the bamtoBED command from the bedtools suite (Quinlan and Hall, 2010) (version 2.30.0). The 3' end positions of the R1 end, which correspond to the 3' end of nascent RNAs, were extracted from the BED files and used as input to generate bedGraph files at single-nucleotide resolution for visualization using the genomecov command from bedtools, with a genome-wide normalization factor being 30 million divided by total read numbers. Thus the signals in the bedGraph files represent the number of nascent transcripts per 30 million transcripts. Because the R1 end in PRO-seq reveals the position of the RNA 3' end, the "+" and "-" strands were swapped to generate bedGraphs representing 3' end position at single-nucleotide resolution.

Differential expression analysis. DESeq2 (Love et al., 2014) (version 1.32.0) was used to identify the statistically differential genes between the DMSO and drug-treated samples. DESeq2 takes the raw counts of nascent transcripts per gene as input and estimates the fold change and significance based on the negative binomial distribution. The raw count matrices of nascent transcripts were generated by mapping the 3' end of R1 ends to the TSS and TES+3kb region for each gene. We used the 3kb extension for transcription quantification because it is observed that for many highly transcribed genes there is an enrichment of nascent transcripts at the post-TES region. Notably, biological clones were assigned as a confounding factor and were subsequently removed by DESeq2, thus enabling the differential analysis more centered on the effects of the dTAG-47 drug. Genes with adjusted p value lower than 0.05 were deemed as significant.

Meta-gene plots. Average metagene plots of PRO-seq read density from TSS to TES of indicated gene groups were generated using computeMatrix and plotProfile commands from deeptools (Ramírez et al., 2016) (version 3.5.1). Each gene was divided from TSS to TES positions into 60 bins, and read density was calculated in each bin and normalized by the bin length. Read density flanking each gene was also calculated (3kb upstream of TSS and 3kb downstream of TES). Average values for each gene group are shown.

BCL11A motif analysis. BCL11A recognizes the sequence TGA(G)CCA(T) (Liu et al., 2018). To prepare the gene set with the BCL11A motif in the promoter region, the genome was scanned to identify occurrences of the four motif variants (TGACCA, TGGCCA, TGACCT, TGGCCT) by using bowtie (Langmead et al., 2009) (version 1.2.2) with no mismatches allowed. Then all the motif occurrences were overlapped with a merged set of BCL11A binding sites (Liu et al., 2018) using the "intersect" command from bedtools. Only those motif occurrences showing BCL11A binding were considered functional and kept for further analysis. BCL11A binding sites were merged from available BCL11A CUT&RUN data in HUDEP2 cells at various times (Liu et al., 2018).

LC-MS/MS

Sample preparation for LC-MS/MS analysis

Cell pellets were lysed in SDC buffer (1% sodium deoxycholate in 100 mM Tris pH 8.5) and immediately boiled for 5 min at 95°C. After cooling the lysates on ice for 5 min, we sonicated them for 15 min at 4°C using the Bioruptor® Plus sonication device. Protein concentration was determined by Tryptophan assay as described in (Kulak et al., 2014) to equalize protein amounts before reduction and alkylation by 10 mM TCEP and 40 mM 2-Chloroacetamide, respectively, for 5 min at 45°C. Proteins were subsequently digested by the addition of 1:100 LysC and Trypsin overnight at 37°C with agitation (1,500 rpm). 24 h later, ~20 μg of peptide was desalted using an in-StageTip (iST) protocol (Kulak, 2014). Briefly, samples were at least 4-fold diluted with 1% trifluoro-acetic acid (TFA) in isopropanol and loaded onto StageTips prepared in-house using SDB-RPS material (Empore). StageTips were then washed with 200 μL of 1% TFA in isopropanol twice and 200 μL 0.2% TFA/2% ACN (acetonitrile) once. Peptide elution is performed with 80 μL of 1.25% Ammonium hydroxide (NH_4OH)/80% ACN and eluates were dried using a SpeedVac centrifuge (Concentrator Plus; Eppendorf). MS loading buffer (0.2% TFA/2%ACN (v/v)) was added to the dried samples to resuspend prior to LC-MS/MS analysis. Peptide concentrations were measured optically at 280 nm (Nanodrop 2000; Thermo Scientific) and subsequently equalized using the same MS loading buffer. Approximately, 200 ng of peptides from each sample was analyzed using a 100 min DIA method.

LC-MS/MS analysis and data processing

Nanoflow liquid chromatography (LC)-tandem mass spectrometry (MS/MS) measurements were carried out on an EASY-nLC 1200 ultrahigh-pressure system (Thermo Fisher Scientific) coupled to an Orbitrap instrument, namely Orbitrap Exploris 480 and a nano-electrospray ion source (Thermo Fisher Scientific). In-house packed columns (50 cm, 75 μm inner diameter, ReproSil-Pur C18-AQ1.9 μm resin (Dr. Maisch GmbH)) were used and column temperature was kept at 60°C with an in-house developed oven. Peptides

were loaded in buffer A (0.1% formic acid (FA) (v/v)) and eluted with a linear 80 min gradient of 5–30% of buffer B (80% acetonitrile (ACN) and 0.1% FA (v/v)), followed by a 4 min increase to 60% of buffer B and a 4 min increase to 95% of buffer B, and a 4 min wash of 95% buffer B at a flow rate of 300 nL/min. At the end, buffer B concentration was decreased to 4% in 4 min and stayed at 4% for another 4 min.

MS data for each sample/biological replicate were recorded in singlicates in DIA mode. Full MS scans were acquired in the range of m/z 300–1,650 at a resolution of 120,000 at m/z 200 and the automatic gain control (AGC) set to $3e6$. Full MS events were followed by 33 MS/MS windows per cycle at a resolution of 30,000 at m/z 200 and ions were accumulated to reach an AGC target value of $1e5$ or an Xcalibur-automated maximum injection time. The spectra were recorded in profile mode. The HCD collision energies (%) was stepped (25.5, 27, and 30).

Subsequently, data were processed in Spectronaut version 15.2.210819.50606 (Biognosys AG) using the human SwissProt reference proteome of canonical and isoform sequences with 42,431 entries downloaded in July 2019 for final protein identification and quantification. We set carbamidomethylation as fixed modification and acetylation of the protein N-terminus and oxidation of methionine as variable modifications. Trypsin/P proteolytic cleavage rule was used with a maximum of two missed cleavages permitted and a peptide length of 7–52 amino acids. A protein and precursor FDR of 1% were used for filtering and subsequent reporting in samples (q-value mode with no imputation).

Bioinformatic analysis of LC-MS/MS data

In preparation for the analysis, protein intensities were log₂-transformed and data were filtered to ensure that identified proteins showed expression in all biological triplicates of at least one experimental group. Subsequently, missing values were replaced by random numbers that were drawn from a normal distribution (width = 0.3 and downshift = 1.8). Principal component analysis (PCA) of samples/biological replicates was performed using Perseus (1.6.1.3) (Tyanova et al., 2016). For the pairwise comparisons between groups, a statistical t-test was performed and permutation-based FDR which was set to 0.01 or 0.05 in conjunction with an S0-parameter of 0.1 was applied. For hierarchical clustering of proteins, protein abundances were z-scored and clustered using Euclidean as a distance measure for row and/or column clustering. Mean log₂ ratios of biological triplicates and the corresponding p-values were visualized with volcano plots and significance was based on an FDR <0.05 or 0.01.

ChIP-seq

Chromatin immunoprecipitation and sequencing

About $5\text{--}30 \times 10^6$ HUDEP-2 cells were cross-linked with fresh 1% formaldehyde (Fisher Scientific) with/without dTAG-47 for 6 min at room temperature (RT) and quenched with 1.25 M glycine for 5 min at RT. Cells were washed three times in cold phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) containing protease inhibitors and cell pellets flash-frozen in LN₂. Nuclei were isolated using the truChIP kit (Covaris Inc.), and chromatin was sheared at 4°C, 140 W, and 200 cycles per burst with 10% duty factor for 8 min (Covaris). Input fraction was saved (1%), and the remaining sheared chromatin was used for ChIP with antibodies specific for an epitope or an immunoglobulin G isotype control (Millipore) in immunoprecipitation buffer [0.1% Triton X-100, 0.1 M tris-HCl (pH 8), 0.5 mM EDTA, and 0.15 M NaCl in 1× Covaris D3 buffer] at 4°C, rotating overnight, followed by incubation with Dynabeads Protein G (10003D, Life Technologies) for 4 h. The chromatin-bead-antibody complexes were sequentially washed with three buffers of increasing salt concentrations and TE buffer. Chromatin was then eluted using 1% SDS in Tris-EDTA. Cross-linking was reversed by incubation with ribonuclease A (Roche) for 1 h at 37°C, and with Proteinase K (Roche) at 65°C overnight. DNA was purified with the QIAquick PCR Purification Kit (28104, Qiagen). ChIPseq libraries were prepared using Swift S2 Acel reagents on a Beckman Coulter Biomek i7 liquid handling platform from approximately 1 ng of DNA according to manufacturer's protocol and 14 cycles of PCR amplification. Finished sequencing libraries were quantified by Qubit fluorometer and Agilent TapeStation 2200. Library pooling and indexing was evaluated with shallow sequencing on an Illumina MiSeq. Subsequently, libraries were sequenced on an Illumina NovaSeq6000 targeting 40 million 150bp read pairs by the DFCI Molecular Biology Core.

ChIP-seq data analysis

Raw sequences in FASTQ format were mapped to the spike-in Drosophila genome (dm6) using Bowtie2 (version 2.2.9), with those reads not mapped to the spike genome as input to the primary genome (hg19) using Bowtie2 (version 2.2.9). Mapped reads were then sorted and indexed using samtools (version 1.9). Duplicate reads, as well as reads mapped to the human blacklisted regions (Amemiya et al., 2019), were filtered out. The resulting reads were then used to generate the bigwig files for visualization in genome browser using the bamCoverage command with the CPM (Count Per Million) normalization method. Metagenes plots in this study were generated from the bigwig files using computeMatrix and plotProfile commands from deepTools.

ATAC-seq

Assay for transposase-accessible chromatin (Omni-ATAC-seq)

Omni-ATAC was performed as before (Liu et al., 2021) with 70,000 HUDEP-2 cells frozen in 10% DMSO/FBS. On the day of the experiment, cells were thawed on ice and permeabilized with 50 μL RSB buffer (10 mM Tris-HCl pH 7.4, 10 mM NaCl, 3 mM MgCl₂) with 0.1% NP40, 0.1% Tween-20 and 0.01% Digitonin for 3 min on ice. 1 mL of cold RSB containing 0.1% Tween-20 was added before cells were pelleted again. Pellets were resuspended with 50 μL transposition mixture (25 μL 2×TD buffer, 2.5 μL transposase from ATAC-seq kit (Illumina), 16.5 μL PBS, 0.5 μL 1% digitonin, and 0.5 μL 10% Tween 20), and the reaction was carried out at 37°C for 45 min. Genomic DNA was extracted with a Qiagen MinElute PCR purification kit according to the manufacturer's recommended

protocol. Total DNA was used as template for amplification, mixed with 15 μ L of 2x Ultra II Q5 mix, 1 μ L of 10 μ M i7 primer (AATGATACGGCGACCACCGAGATCTACACTCGTCGGCAGCGTCAGATGTG), and 1 μ L of 10 μ M i5 primer (CAAGCAGAAGACGGCATACGAGATN>NNNNNNNGTCTCGTGGGCTCGGAGATGT) where the Ns represent barcodes. PCR amplification was performed as follows: 65°C 5 min, 98°C 30 s, 98°C 10 s, 63°C 30 s, repeat step 3-4 for 5–9x, and 63°C 5min. PCR products were purified with AMPure beads and quantified using Qubit and Tapestation before pooling and sequencing. The libraries were sequenced on the NextSeq 500 platform with NextSeq 500/550 High Output Kit v2 (75 cycles). Paired-end sequencing was performed (2 \times 42 bp, 6 bp index).

ATAC-seq data analysis

Raw sequences in FASTQ format were mapped to the spike-in *Drosophila* genome (dm6) using Bowtie2 (version 2.2.9), with those reads not mapped to the spike genome as input to the primary genome (hg19) using Bowtie2 (version 2.2.9). Mapped reads were then sorted and indexed using samtools (version 1.9). Since Tn5 transposase binds as a dimer and inserts two adaptors separated by 9 bp, all reads mapped to the forward strand need to be offset by +4 bp and those mapped to the reverse strand need to be offset by –5 bp. We used the alignmentSieve command (“–ATACshift”) from deeptools (version 3.5.1) to accomplish the shifting step. Duplicate reads, as well as reads mapped to the human blacklisted regions (Amemiya et al., 2019), were filtered out. The resulting reads were then used to generate the bigwig files for visualization in genome browser using the bamCoverage command with the CPM (Count Per Million) normalization method.

For each sample, peaks were identified using MACSs (Zhang et al., 2008) (version 2.1.1), with the narrow peak mode and q value 0.05 as the statistical cutoff. Peak summits from all samples were pooled, creating a non-redundant peak set for further analysis. Next, the peak summits pooled from all samples were sorted in descending order by the fifth column (i.e. $-\log_{10}$ p-value). Peak summits from the top of the list were picked and any remaining peaks within 300 bp of the top peak summit were removed. Then, the next peak summit in the list was picked and the process was repeated until the entire list was traversed. In total, 156,282 non-redundant peak summits were identified. Each peak summit was then extended by 300bp in both directions and the resulting region was used as the peak region.

Similar to the differential analysis of PRO-seq data, we used DESeq2 for differential chromatin accessibility analysis at gene promoters. Specifically, the featureCounts tool from the subread (Liao et al., 2014) package (version 2.0.0) was used to generate a raw read count matrix of promoter accessibility (TSS \pm 500bp). Then the raw read count matrix was used as input for DESeq2. Genes with a p-value lower than 0.05 were deemed as significant.

Multiplexed proteomics

Sample preparation, multiplexed TMT LC-MS3 mass spectrometry and LC-MS data analysis

Clonal HUDEP-2 cells were treated with DMSO or 0.1 μ M dTAG-47 in biological triplicate for 6 h and cells were harvested by centrifugation. Cells were lysed by addition of lysis buffer (8 M Urea, 50 mM NaCl, 50 mM 4-(2-hydroxyethyl)-1-piperazineethanesulfonic acid (EPPS) pH 8.5, Protease and Phosphatase inhibitors) and manual homogenization by 20 passes through a 21-gauge (1.25 in. long). Bradford assay was used to determine the final protein concentration in the clarified cell lysate. 100 μ g of protein for each sample was reduced, alkylated and precipitated using methanol/chloroform as previously described (Donovan et al., 2018) and the resulting washed precipitated protein was allowed to air dry. Precipitated protein was resuspended in 4 M Urea, 50 mM HEPES pH 7.4, followed by dilution to 1 M urea with the addition of 200 mM EPPS, pH 8. Proteins were first digested with LysC (1:50; enzyme:protein) for 12 h at RT. The LysC digestion was diluted to 0.5 M Urea with 200 mM EPPS pH 8 followed by digestion with trypsin (1:50; enzyme:protein) for 6 h at 37°C. Tandem mass tag (TMT) reagents (Thermo Fisher Scientific) were dissolved in anhydrous acetonitrile (ACN) according to manufacturer’s instructions. Anhydrous ACN was added to each peptide sample to a final concentration of 30% v/v, and labeling was induced with the addition of TMT 11-plex reagent to each sample at a ratio of 1:4 peptide:TMT label. The 11-plex labeling reactions were performed for 1.5 h at RT and the reaction quenched by the addition of hydroxylamine to a final concentration of 0.3% for 15 min at RT. Each of the sample channels were combined in a 1:1 ratio, desalted using C18 solid phase extraction cartridges (Waters) and analyzed by LC-MS for quality control checks and channel ratio comparison. Samples were combined using the adjusted volumes determined in the channel ratio analysis and dried down in a speed vacuum. The combined sample was resuspended in 1% formic acid and acidified (pH 2–3) before being subjected to desalting with C18 SPE (Sep-Pak, Waters). Sample was then offline fractionated into 96 fractions by high pH reverse-phase HPLC (Agilent LC1260) through an aeris peptide xb-c18 column (phenomenex) with mobile phase A containing 5% acetonitrile and 10 mM NH_4HCO_3 in LC-MS grade H_2O , and mobile phase B containing 90% acetonitrile and 10 mM NH_4HCO_3 in LC-MS grade H_2O (both pH 8.0). The 96 resulting fractions were then pooled in a non-contiguous manner into 24 fractions and desalted using C18 solid phase extraction plates (SOLA, Thermo Fisher Scientific) followed by subsequent mass spectrometry analysis.

Data were collected using an Orbitrap Fusion Lumos mass spectrometer (Thermo Fisher Scientific, San Jose, CA, USA) coupled with a Proxeon EASY-nLC 1200 LC pump (Thermo Fisher Scientific). Peptides were separated on a 100 μ m inner diameter microcapillary column packed with ~50 cm of Accucore C18 resin (2.6 μ M, 100 Å, Thermo Fisher Scientific). Peptides were separated using a 190 min gradient of 6–27% acetonitrile in 1.0% formic acid with a flow rate of 350 nL/min.

Each analysis used an MS3-based TMT method as described previously (R Development Core Team, 2015). The data were acquired using a mass range of m/z 340–1350, resolution 120,000, AGC target 5×10^5 , maximum injection time 100 ms, dynamic exclusion of 120 s for the peptide measurements in the Orbitrap. Data dependent MS2 spectra were acquired in the ion trap with a normalized collision energy (NCE) set at 35%, AGC target set to 1.8×10^4 and a maximum injection time of 120 ms MS3 scans

were acquired in the Orbitrap with HCD collision energy set to 55%, AGC target set to 2×10^5 , maximum injection time of 150 ms, resolution at 50,000 and with a maximum synchronous precursor selection (SPS) precursors set to 10.

Proteome Discoverer 2.4 (Thermo Fisher Scientific) was used for .RAW file processing and controlling peptide and protein level false discovery rates, assembling proteins from peptides, and protein quantification from peptides. MS/MS spectra were searched against a Swissprot human database (December 2019) with both the forward and reverse sequences. Database search criteria are as follows: tryptic with two missed cleavages, a precursor mass tolerance of 20 ppm, fragment ion mass tolerance of 0.6 Da, static alkylation of cysteine (57.02146 Da), static TMT labeling of lysine residues and N-termini of peptides (229.16293 Da), and variable oxidation of methionine (15.99491 Da). TMT reporter ion intensities were measured using a 0.003 Da window around the theoretical m/z for each reporter ion in the MS3 scan. Peptide spectral matches with poor quality MS3 spectra were excluded from quantitation (summed signal-to-noise across channels <100 and precursor isolation specificity <0.5). Reporter ion intensities were normalized and scaled using in-house scripts in the R framework (R Development Core Team, 2015). Statistical analysis was carried out using the limma package within the R framework (Ritchie et al., 2015).

Subcellular protein fractionation

Subcellular protein fractionation of nucleoplasmic, cytoplasmic, and chromatin-bound fractions was performed with the Subcellular Protein Fractionation Kit for Cultured Cells (Thermo fisher, 78,840) with the following modifications. Fresh 5×10^6 HUDEP-2 cells were used per sample/timepoint and collected by centrifugation at 800g for 5min. Micrococcal nuclease was added to the chromatin-bound fraction at 5x the concentration recommended and incubated at 37°C overnight while shaking at 1000rpm on a thermomixer. An equivalent of 1×10^6 cells for each fraction was loaded on an SDS-PAGE gel for analysis by western blot.

Western blot

Western blot samples were boiled in 1 × SDS loading buffer to denature all proteins and separated with 4–15% gradient SDS-PAGE gels. Proteins were then transferred to PVDF membrane with a semi-dry Trans-Blot Turbo System (Biorad) at 2.5 mA/cm² 25V for 10 min. Membranes were blocked with 5% nonfat milk for 1 h and then incubated with primary antibodies for 1 h at room temperature or overnight in the cold room with shaking. Excess antibodies were washed with TBS-T (50 mM Tris pH 8.0, 150 mM NaCl, 0.1% Tween 20) 3 times, and HRP-conjugated secondary antibodies were incubated for 30 min at room temperature. After 3 washes with TBS-T, the membranes were developed with Enhanced Chemiluminescent HRP Substrate (PerkinElmer, NEL104001EA). The following antibodies were used: BCL11A (ab19487, Abcam), and B-ACTIN (Santa Cruz, sc-47778 HRP, CRBN (Novus Biologicals, NBP1-91810), TUBB (Invitrogen, MA5-31940, H3 (Abcam, ab24834), RCC (Santa Cruz Biotechnology, sc-55559). All antibodies were used at 1:1,000 dilutions in TBS-T, except α -B-ACTIN at 1:5000 and α -H3 at (1:7000).

Cycloheximide chase experiments

Cycloheximide was added to HUDEP-2 cells at a non-toxic concentration of 10 μ M in expansion media. Fifty thousand cells were collected, and cell pellets frozen down immediately, at various times following the addition of the compound. Western blot was performed as described above. c-MYC was used as a positive control for cessation of cytosolic translation, whereas B-ACTIN was used as an indicator of a highly stable protein.

Azacytidine treatment, bisulfite conversion of DNA, and analysis of CpG methylation status

HUDEP-2 cells were cultured in differentiating media containing DMSO or 0.15 μ M dTAG-47 in addition to 0 μ M, 0.1 μ M, or 0.3 μ M Azacytidine. Cells were spun down and resuspended in fresh media containing the drugs owing to the short half-life of AZA in cell culture. $0.5\text{--}1 \times 10^6$ cells were collected, flash-frozen in LN₂, and stored at -80°C . On the day of the experiment, DNA was extracted from frozen pellets with an Allprep DNA/RNA Mini Kit (Qiagen). Bisulfite conversion was performed on 1 μ g DNA with an Epiect kit (Qiagen), and a 457bp region of the *HBG1/2* promoter region was amplified by nested PCR as described previously (Mehta et al., 2015). Primer sequences are given in Table S1. PCR amplicons were sent for Illumina Amplicon next-generation sequencing (Genewiz), yielding 2×250 bp reads.

Fastq files were aligned to each of two custom-made human genomes covering the β -globin locus only: one genome in which all the cytosines (C) are converted to uracil (U), read as thymine (T) by the Illumina sequencer, and another genome which is the wild-type human genome. The wild-type genome signifies the unconverted state as the methylated C's are resistant to the bisulfite conversion. DNA sequences are expected to align to one of the two custom-made genomes, depending on the extent of bisulfite conversion. Because perfect alignment is not expected due to differing methylation levels across the CpGs, we scanned for partially aligned sequences and subjected them to the second step of counting. For this second step, a computer program was written to locally align each sequence to the entire amplicon again, but this time counted the number of converted cytosines at each of 8 CpG loci, which is seen as a mismatched base T compared to the wildtype genome in the local alignment. Methylation frequencies were computed at each of the CpG loci as the number of aligned sequences containing the converted cytosine at the locus, normalized by the total number of aligned sequences covering the locus (the sum of converted cytosines and unconverted cytosines).

Reverse transcription and quantitative PCR

RNA was prepared and cDNA was amplified with the Cells-to-ct kit (ThermoFisher, 4402954). 10–30k cells were used per sample. The cDNA was diluted 1.5 times with water and 2 μ L used for each qPCR reaction in a 384-well format with iQ SYBR Green Supermix (Bio-rad) on a Bio-rad CFX Real-Time PCR Detection system. *HPRT1* was used as an endogenous control. All the RT-qPCR primers are listed in Table S1. The data were analyzed using $2^{-\Delta\text{CT}}$ method and visualized using GraphPad. Three technical replicates were performed, on at least two biological replicates.

QUANTIFICATION AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Statistical analyses of data appropriate to each technique was performed and details included in the relevant method description. Details of statistical tests used, values of n , as well as definition of center, dispersion and precision measures are as shown in figure legends. For all experiments including NGS analyses, n represents independent $BCL11A^{FKBP}$ clones. For proteomics experiments, a single $BCL11A^{FKBP}$ clone was processed at the n number shown. No methods were used to determine whether the data met assumptions of statistical approaches.