

Genestat

Statistics for genomic research

Innovation area: Health

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Partners: UiO, NR, NTNU, OUS, PubGene

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Scope:

Produce statistical instruments to understand molecular mechanisms, on the basis of -omics data, contributing to biological discovery and thus combating diseases.

Results in 2012 and plans:

1. *The Genomic Hyperbrowser – statistical methods*

a) Statistical methods for genomic 3D data: In 2012 we started extending the statistical analysis to take the three-dimensional structure of DNA into account. Recently, genome-wide data on spatial co-localization of DNA is becoming available through the use of chromosome conformation capture together with high-throughput sequencing. The goal would be to create a web-based statistical system that allows generic analysis of genome annotation data in a three-dimensional setting, similar to the existing line-based statistical analysis of genomic data. The incorporation of three-dimensional localization allows extensions in several distinct directions: a) It can allow standard line-based analyses to be performed locally in bins corresponding to 3D co-localization; b) It can allow statistical analyses of questions that are directly related to three-dimensional structure, e.g. regarding unexpected 3D co-localization of related genomic features or unexpected correlation between values associated to co-localized genomic element; and c) It can allow comparative studies of the 3D organization of DNA across different tissue types and conditions. In 2012 we have submitted a first paper. The work on 3D co-localization will continue in 2013-2014. We hope that the extension, when implemented, will boost the external use of the Genomic Hyperbrowser (GH), which has not happened yet.

b) *Null models*: In the Genomic Hyperbrowser we use in most cases a preservation hierarchy in building the null hypothesis. The p-value depends critically on the choice of preservation and randomization of what is not preserved. There are similar situations in other applications outside genomics. In many tests, but not always, there is monotonicity between stochastic orderings of null hypothesis and p-values. This link between ordering of null models and p-values can be exploited to guide the use of the GH. We are writing a paper that gives sufficient condition for monotonicity. If we succeed to make a useful theory for the cases in the GH, we will be able to suggest how to guide the user in their investigations, for given computational time.

c) *Multitrack*: So far we have focused on hypothesis testing comparing two tracks. The number of possible relations explodes with more tracks. We started with the three track problem and the n-track problems for overlap between segment tracks. We have written a first draft paper on comparing several tracks. The extension to many tracks, and a way to perform in a more unsupervised fashion “discovery protocols”, can be useful in personalized medicine.

2. The Genomic Hyperbrowser – implementation and promotion

A key aspect is the need for a user-friendly implementation of all the novelties. In 2012, the data handling side and the user interface of the system have been improved. Also, algorithms and methods have been added or improved, including some of the statistical methods mentioned above. In 2013 and 2014, we will continue improvements of the system, including implementing new methods that have been / will be developed for analyses of genomic 3D data. We need to have a better strategy on how to promote the GH. We see that there are many papers that could use the GH but do not do it. We should contact each of these groups, and make them aware, offer assistance etc., so that their next paper will use the GH.

3. Predictive gene signature for response to post-mastectomy radiotherapy

Radiotherapy (RT) is known to improve loco-regional control, disease free survival and to have a long-term improvement on overall survival in high-risk patients suffering from breast cancer. We have found a gene signature consisting of 7 genes, whose transcription interacts with the effect of postmastectomy radiotherapy (PMRT) to modify the hazard of local recurrence of the cancer. These genes have been identified by whole genome microarray using RNA from fresh frozen human samples. The signature has been technically replicated and verified in corresponding formalin fixed, paraffin embedded tissue. We have filed a patent with Invent2, and they are now leading the commercialization project. We have applied for FORNY funding from NFR and Helse Sør-Øst. This funding will be used to validate the signature in a new cohort of 1000 women and to do a second statistical analysis with a new method to confirm/extend the seven genes. This is planned for 2013. In 2014 we hope that the patent can be sold to a major pharmaceutical industry, while further validated towards the creation of a clinical chip. Regression with $p \gg n$ is the key method used. This project is in collaboration with OUS and the University of Aarhus.

4. Statistical methodology for genomic data

a) *$p \gg n$ regression*: This is the most common situation in genomics, and calls for variable selection for prediction. We have developed a new method that allows to discard a very large proportion of variables, before running the Lasso method for variable selection and learning. The paper is submitted. In 2013 and 2014, we wish to investigate the use of this idea in several new directions: survival models; monotone non-linear regression; network estimation; interaction detection. In particular this last point should be one of the first genome-wide studies of full interactions. This might lead again to interesting discoveries.

b) Data integration: On each patient, we can measure multiple -omics data (DNA, CNV, RNA, methylation, exposures etc.) and we want to develop a new Bayesian method to use all these data sources contemporaneously, in order to increase the power of detection of new signatures and reduce uncertainty. We have started by a state-of-the-art review of existing approaches, and will continue with the development of alternatives. Focus will be in breast cancer and nutritional factors in cancer. This project will continue in 2013 and 2014.

c) Network estimation: This is a very important problem in all molecular biology. We wish to achieve state-of-the-art competence first, so that we can apply the methods to the many genomics data that require it. We want to investigate the possibility to develop new methods that allow exact calculations of posteriors for Wishart priors on precisions matrices. The way we have suggested to legalize a non-positive-definite matrix for DNB should be considered also in this context.

Besides what is mentioned above, we have for many years helped researchers in biology and medicine with experimental design and statistical analysis of their genomic data. This support will continue in 2013 and 2014. Particular attention will be given to mental disorders.

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