

Biology of human melanocyte development, Piebaldism, and Waardenburg syndrome

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Abstract

Melanocyte development is orchestrated by a complex interconnecting regulatory network of genes and synergistic interactions. Piebaldism and Waardenburg syndrome are neurocristopathies that arise from mutations in genes involved in this complex network. Our understanding of melanocyte development, Piebaldism, and Waardenburg syndrome has improved dramatically over the past decade. The diagnosis and classification of Waardenburg syndrome, first proposed in 1992 and based on phenotype, have expanded over the past three decades to include genotype. This review focuses on the current understanding of human melanocyte development and the evaluation and management of Piebaldism and Waardenburg syndrome. Management is often challenging and requires a multidisciplinary approach.

KEYWORDS

depigmentation, hypomelanosis, leukoderma, melanocyte development, piebald trait, piebaldism, Waardenburg syndrome

1 | INTRODUCTION

Melanocyte development is coordinated by a network of genes that function in a temporal, spatial, and dose-dependent manner. Germline mutations in genes that regulate melanocyte development occur in patients with Piebaldism and Waardenburg syndrome (WS). Over the last three decades, our understanding of Piebaldism and WS has improved and continues to evolve with advancing molecular techniques. The identification of multiple novel genes has enhanced our ability to detect these disorders and prevent associated complications. The purpose of this article was to provide a comprehensive review of our current understanding of melanocyte development in humans and their related genodermatoses. We begin with a review of melanocyte development and subsequently describe a clinical approach to evaluating and managing patients with Piebaldism or Waardenburg syndrome.

2 | SEARCH STRATEGY AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Articles referenced in this manuscript were identified by MEDLINE using the Medical Subject Headings search tool for Piebaldism and

Waardenburg syndrome. Additional search queries were performed and included the following key words: "piebald," "white forelock," "KIT," "c-KIT," "CD117," "PAX3," "SNAI2," "SLUG," "MITF," "SOX10," "EDNRB," "KITLG," "EDNRB," "EDN3," "Endothelin," "Kallmann syndrome," "PCWH," "Peripheral demyelinating neuropathy, central demyelination, Waardenburg syndrome and Hirschsprung disease," and "cochlear development." The search was limited to English articles indexed between May 1, 1995, and May 1, 2017. The bibliography of high-impact articles was reviewed to identify additional relevant studies and was included in our references when appropriate.

3 | MELANOCYTE DEVELOPMENT

The melanocyte is derived from the neural crest, a transient layer of multipotent embryonic cell population that gives rise to an array of cells and structures, including melanocytes, neurons, glial cells, and the enteric nervous system and facial skeleton.¹ Initially, melanocyte-derived neural crest cells were shown to migrate along a dorso-lateral pathway, between the dermamyotome and ectoderm, before diving ventrally (through the dermis) to populate the basal layer of the epidermis and hair follicles.² In 2009, Adameyko et al,³ provided

evidence to show a substantial number of cutaneous melanocytes are derived from the Schwann cell precursors of nerves that innervate the skin. Phenotypic analysis of congenital birthmarks has now led to a new theory that proposes the existence of a novel population of melanocyte-derived precursor cells arising within the mesoderm that follow a centrifugal migration pattern.³ The origin of melanocytes is complex and the differences in origin may account for the variable phenotype exhibited by various disease processes.⁴

In humans, melanocytes can be found in the skin, eyes, and cochlea. In the epidermis and iris, melanocytes are responsible for the variation

in skin and eye color, respectively.^{2,5,6} In the stria vascularis of the inner ear, they exist as intermediate cells that help maintain an electrochemical potential necessary for normal hearing.⁷⁻⁹ The development, survival, and migration of melanocyte precursors during embryogenesis are orchestrated by a complex regulatory network of genes that include *MITF*, *PAX3*, *SOX10*, *EDNRB*, *EDN*, *KIT*, and *SNAI2* (Figure 1).

Microphthalmia transcription factor (*MITF*) protein is termed the “master transcription regulator” because it is essential for melanocyte survival, migration, proliferation, and differentiation.^{10,11} In the melanocyte lineage, various transcription factors (eg, *PAX3*, *SOX10*) and

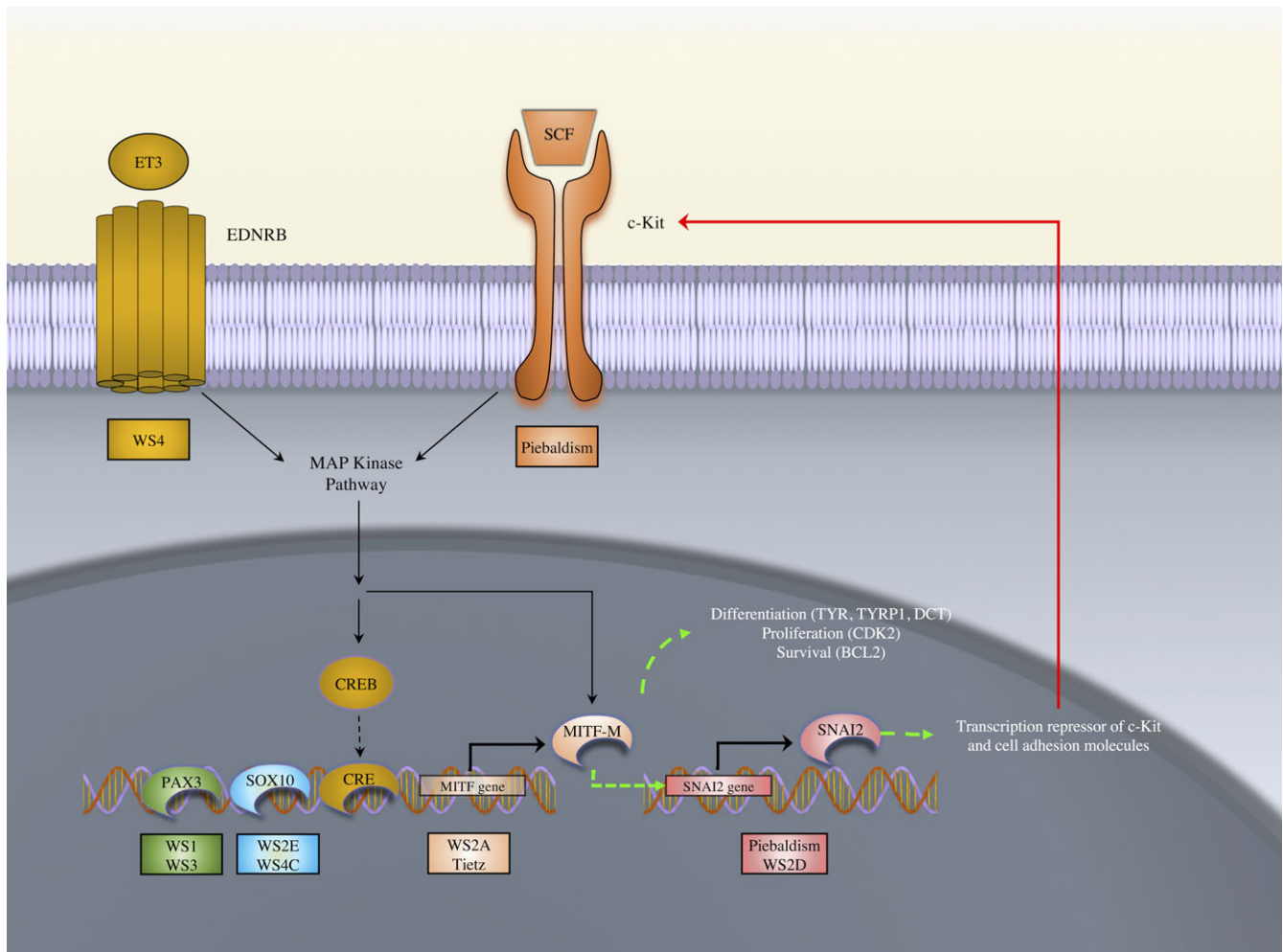


FIGURE 1 Melanocyte development. The *MITF* gene encodes a basic helix-loop-helix leucine zipper (b-HLH-Zip) dimeric nuclear transcription factor essential for the survival, migration, proliferation, and differentiation of multiple cell lines.^{100,101} Nine unique promoter-exon units have been identified and are important in synthesizing several isoforms with distinct 5' exons. The M-isoform is expressed exclusively in the melanocytes lineage. *MITF-M* transcription is regulated by multiple transcription factors including, *PAX3*, *SOX10*, *LEF*, *CREB*, and *MITF*. Wnt signaling (not show) is critical for melanocyte development by promoting the interaction between β -catenin with *LEF1/TCF*, which induces the *MITF-M* promoter.^{10,101} Furthermore, the b-HLH-Zip domain of *MITF* interacts with *LEF-1*, functioning as a nuclear mediator to attenuate *MITF* expression and regulating gene dosage (not shown).¹⁰³ *PAX3* and *SOX10* trans-activate the *MITF* promoter, synergistically upregulating expression.^{2,113} *MITF* effector genes, including *SNAI2*, *Bcl2*, *p16*, and proteins of melanogenesis.^{100,114} *SNAI2* is a transcription repressor of *c-Kit* and *E-cadherin* gene, which are important for normal migration of melanoblasts and maintaining homeostasis.¹¹⁵⁻¹²³ The negative feedback loop between *c-Kit* and *SNAI2* is essential for maintaining homeostasis; overexpression of either impairs self-renewal ability of these cells.^{120,121} The loss or reduction in the expression of *Bcl2* and *p16* tumor suppressor genes would explain the rapid depletion of melanocyte stem cells in the follicles and subsequent hair graying.¹²⁴⁻¹²⁷ *SOX10*, *EDN3*, and *EDNRB*, in addition to the melanocyte neural crest-derived cells, are critical genes for enteric neural crest-derived cell proliferation, migration, and survival. Mutations in any of these three genes can result in the absence of melanocytes and neurons in the skin and gut, respectively¹²⁸⁻¹³⁰

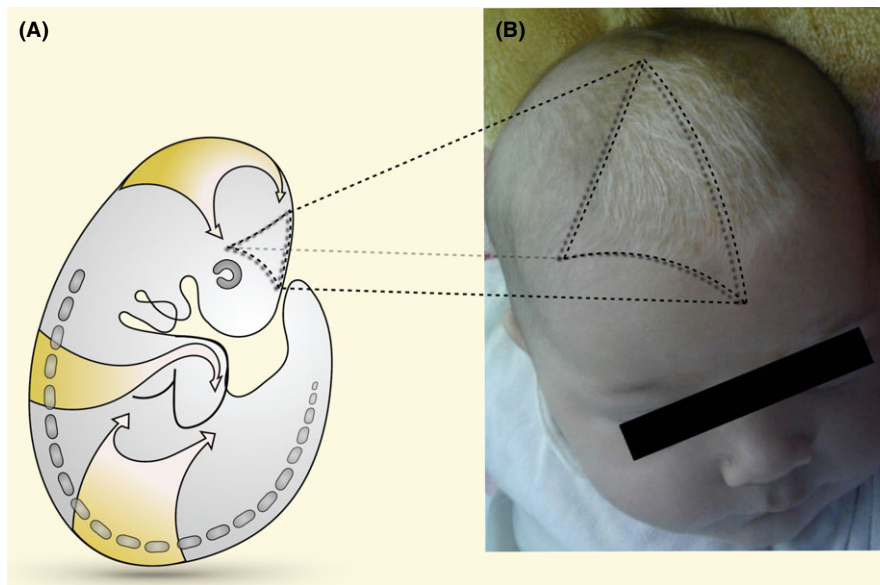


FIGURE 2 White forelock. Melanocytes arise from neural crest cells that reside at the top or “crest” of the neural tube. From this point, the melanocyte-derived neural crest cells migrate, proliferate, and differentiate along a dorso-lateral pathway, before diving ventrally to reach its most distant site.² As a result, gene defects in melanocyte development result in abnormal pigment patterns that are prominent at midline, the point farthest from the site of embryologic origin. The clinical photo of the child with the white forelock (Figure 2B) was adapted from Kerkeni et al¹³¹.

extracellular signaling pathways (eg, KIT, EDNRB-EDN) regulate the expression of *MITF*.¹⁰ In addition to melanocyte precursors, *PAX3*, *SOX10*, *EDNRB*, and *EDN* are broadly expressed in several other lineages of neural crest cells. Early expression of *PAX3* is critical for the development of melanocytes, craniofacial tissue, and formation of the upper limbs.^{12,13} *SOX10*, *EDNRB*, and *EDN* are necessary for the normal migration of melanocyte-derived and enteric-derived neural crest cells to the skin and gut, respectively.¹⁴ Loss-of-function mutations in *MITF* or its regulatory genes can cause a striking pattern of depigmentation characteristic of Piebaldism and Waardenburg syndrome.

4 | PIEBALDISM AND WAARDENBURG SYNDROME

Piebaldism and Waardenburg syndrome (WS) are neurocristopathies characterized by incomplete penetrance and high levels of variable expressivity.¹⁵⁻¹⁸ A white forelock is the most common cutaneous manifestation of both conditions and can be the sole integumentary finding.^{17,19} Depigmented patches, when present, are frequently apparent at birth, lack convex borders, and classically involve the forehead, ventral trunk, and midextremities (Figure 2). Hyperpigmented macules adjacent to and/or within depigmented patches are a classic characteristic finding that can aid in the diagnosis of Piebaldism.¹⁹⁻²² Axillary freckling and café-au-lait spots are occasional features of Piebaldism and should not be confused with neurofibromatosis-1.²³⁻²⁷ Piebaldism is best viewed as a variant of Waardenburg syndrome without the extra-cutaneous manifestations.

Waardenburg syndrome (WS) is an auditory-pigmentary disorder that accounts for 2%-3% of congenital deafness. The estimated worldwide incidence is 2 to 3 cases per 100 000 population and equally affecting both genders and all races.^{28,29} There are four subtypes of WS that are defined phenotypically. The diagnosis of WS1 can be

TABLE 1 Waardenburg syndrome type I diagnostic criteria proposed by Waardenburg consortium³⁰

Waardenburg syndrome type I diagnostic criteria ^a	
Major criteria	Minor criteria
Congenital sensorineural hearing loss	Cutaneous hypopigmentation
White forelock	Synophrys or medial eyebrow flare
Abnormal iris pigment ^b	Broad/high nasal root or low columella
Dystopia canthorum (W index > 1.95) ^c	Hypoplastic nasal alae
Affected first-degree relative	Premature gray hair (< 30 y of age) ^d

^aRequires 2 major criteria or 1 major plus 2 minor criteria.

^bComplete heterochromia iridum, partial heterochromia, or hypoplastic blue irides (brilliant blue irides).

^cW index = $X + Y + (a \div b)$; where $X = (2a - 0.2119c + 3.909) \div c$ and $Y = (2a - 0.2479b + 3.909) \div b$. a, b, and c are the dimensions, measured in millimeters, of the inner canthal, interpupillary, and outer canthal.

^dDefined by graying before 30 years of age.

established clinically using the Waardenburg Consortium criteria (Table 1).³⁰ WS2, WS3, and WS4 are defined by the absence of dystopia canthorum (ie, lateral displacement of the inner canthi), presence of musculoskeletal abnormalities, and aganglionic megacolon, respectively.³¹ The advancements in molecular techniques and the identification of multiple pathogenic genes have allowed the traditional classification to be further subdivided by genotype (Table 2).

5 | EVALUATION

Piebaldism and WS should be considered in infants or young children with stable, midline, depigmented patches (Figure 2). Phenotypic severity ranges from a few depigmented strands of hair to diffuse depigmentation.^{15,32-34} The use of hair dye should be specifically inquired about, otherwise the leukotrichia can go unrecognized.

TABLE 2 Genodermatoses associated with defects in melanocyte development

Type	Gene	Location	MIM	Inheritance	Comment ^a
Piebaldism	<i>KIT</i> <i>SNAI2</i>	4q12 8q11.21	172 800	AD	Café-au-lait spots and axillary freckling may be present. Mild cases are associated with haploinsufficiency; in contrast, a dominant-negative mutation of the tyrosine kinase domain, manifests with a severe phenotype. Homozygous mutations in <i>Kit</i> or <i>SNAI</i> can result in WS2.
WS1	<i>PAX3</i>	2q36.1	193 500	AD	52% hearing loss. Vestibular dysfunction (> 50%); even when hearing is normal ¹³² . Craniofacial abnormalities and other ^b neural crest-related defects are rare.
WS3 ^c	<i>PAX3</i>	2q36.1	148 820	AD, AR	57% hearing loss. WS1 ^d plus musculoskeletal abnormalities of the upper limbs (Flexion contractures, musculoskeletal hypoplasia, and/or syndactyly) ^{133,134}
WS2	<i>MITF</i>	3p13	193 510	AD	90% hearing loss. High frequency of early hair graying and excessive freckling ^{135,136}
	<i>SNAI2</i>	8q11.21	608 890	AR	Only 2 cases reported that resulted from homozygous <i>SNAI2</i> deletions. Both had sensorineural hearing loss and heterochromia, without any cutaneous or dysmorphic manifestations. ¹¹⁵ Since the initial publication in 2002, no additional confirmatory cases have been reported.
	<i>SOX10</i>	22q13.1	611 584	AD	100% hearing loss. Often arise de-novo ^{60,110,135,137} . Chronic constipation ^{49,66,96} . Hyponosmia/Anosmia ^{56,66} . Inner ^f ear malformations and temporal bone abnormalities ^{56,65,138,139}
	<i>EDNRB</i>	13q22.3	Ref. 140 (Issa 2017)	AD	70% hearing loss ¹⁴⁰ . Predicted to account for 5%-6% of WS2 cases. Reported from 6 families in France. None had cutaneous depigmentation; but a white lock and early graying were present in 1/11 and 2/11 cases, respectively. Segmental heterochromia was found at a high proportion.
	<i>KIT</i>	4q12	Ref. 141	AR	Complete depigmentation of the skin and hair. Hearing loss, brilliant blue irides, hypotonia, and motor and language delay. The proband parents both had classical features of piebaldism.
	<i>KITLG^e</i>	12q21.32	Ref. 142,143	Unknown	Only two publications identified with potential confounders. They presented similar to other subjects with WS2; however, café-au-lait spots were also present.

(Continues)

The pattern of depigmentation and/or presence of a white forelock helps to differentiate them from vitiligo and other hypopigmented conditions of the newborn (Table 3). Chromosome 4q12q21 deletions can be mistaken for Waardenburg syndrome because of the identical pattern of skin depigmentation, a white forelock, and craniofacial abnormalities (A functional loss in the *KIT* gene, which lies within this chromosomal region, explains the phenotypic resemblance.)³⁹⁻⁴² However, hypotonia, intellectual disability, and growth abnormalities are evident in nearly all patients, but are rarely features of WS.^{43,44} A skin biopsy is not necessary or adequate in confirming the diagnosis of WS.^{45,46}

5.1 | Assessment

A suspected diagnosis of Piebaldism or WS should be accompanied by a thorough history and physical examination (Figure 3). A family history is important in identifying familial cases and should focus on

pigment abnormalities, premature graying of the hair, hearing loss, and gastrointestinal complications. A proband with WS4 may have a sibling with chronic constipation, recurrent enterocolitis, or early death from intestinal complications.^{47,48} Newborns suspected of having WS should not be released from the hospital until they have passed stool. During the neonatal period, the presence of abdominal distension, bilious emesis, and poor feeding are red flags suggestive of Hirschsprung disease (HD). Mild cases of HD typically manifest in older children with severe chronic constipation.^{48,49} As such, a low threshold for referral for a rectal suction biopsy is warranted.⁵⁰

A detailed physical examination should be performed with particular attention to the craniofacial structures, genitalia, and potential neurological symptoms, including any delay in the developmental milestones. Anosmia, eunuchoidal proportions, cryptorchidism, or a micropenis should prompt a formal evaluation for Kallmann's syndrome, a form of congenital hypogonadotropic hypogonadism (CHH) that can result from *SOX10* mutations (Table 4).^{51,52} In an infant male with a micropenis or

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Type	Gene	Location	MIM	Inheritance	Comment ^a
WS4	EDNRB	13q22.3	277 580	AD, AR	54% hearing loss Severe ^b variant (ABCD syndrome) with black forelock
	EDN3	20q13.32	613 265	AR	AD mutations result in HSCR only 75% hearing loss
	SOX10	22q13.1	600 423	AD	93% hearing loss Skin depigmentation might be most frequent and severe with WS4. ^{45,144-146}
PCWH ^h	SOX10	22q13.1	609 136	AD	WS2 or WS4 plus leukodystrophy and/or peripheral neuropathy ^{147,148}
Tietz ⁱ syndrome	MITF	3p13	103 500	AD	Congenital sensorineural hearing loss and global ^f hypopigmentation Premature graying of the hair and diffuse freckling in sun-exposed regions occur in a majority of cases.

The traditional classification of Waardenburg syndrome is based on phenotype. WS1 and WS3 are caused by pathogenic variants in the *PAX3* gene. WS2 and WS4 can be further subdivided by genotype. The majority of WS2 cases do not have an identifiable pathogenic gene.⁹⁷ While *MITF* and *SOX10* mutations account for approximately 30% of cases, *SNAI2*, *EDNRB*, and *KITLG* are rare and account for less than 5% of cases.^{98,99} Pathogenic variants of *SOX10* and *EDNRB-EDN3* account for approximately 50% and 30% of WS4 cases, respectively.

EDN, Endothelin; EDNRB, Endothelin-B Receptor; HSCR, Hirschsprung disease; PCWH syndrome, Peripheral demyelinating neuropathy, central dysmyelination, Waardenburg syndrome, and Hirschsprung disease; WS, Waardenburg syndrome.

^aHearing loss percentages based on a systematic review Song 2016.¹⁴⁹

^bFew human reports of Spina bifida^{150,151}; Synophrys, cleft lip and cryptochidism¹⁵²; Anal Atresia¹⁵³; Choroidal Melanoma¹⁵⁴; Unilateral renal agenesis¹⁵⁵; congenital cataracts¹⁵⁶. In mice, *PAX3* mutations induce pigment defects, spina bifida, and heart defects (Truncus arteriosus).^{157,158}

^cMultiple reports demonstrate WS3 phenotype resulting from parents with heterozygous mutations in *PAX3* (with WS1) producing a proposita that is homozygous with WS3 phenotype. The phenotype in the AR cases was extremely severe, with nearly complete depigmentation (with only small areas of normal skin) and severe contractures of the upper limbs with muscle atrophy.^{134,159}

^dRecently, *IHH* and *EPHA4* haploinsufficiency have been suggested as the genes responsible for syndactyly and short stature associated with WS3, both lie in close proximity to *PAX3* gene.^{160,161}

^eReport was from a single family. *KITLG* encodes a soluble and transmembrane isoform. The mutation was in exon 4, a section of the gene sequence shared by both soluble and transmembrane *KITL* after alternative splicing. It is plausible that we have never seen it as a cause before because of the rare nature of affecting both isoforms.¹⁴² Interestingly, familial progressive hyper- and hypopigmentation (FPHH) is another genetic pigmentary disease associated with *KITLG* mutations (OMIM 145 260).

^fRadiologically, enlarged vestibule and cochlear deformity associated with bilateral agenesis or hypoplasia of semicircular canals is highly suggestive of WS with *SOX10* mutations.⁶⁵

^gAlbinism, Black Lock, Cell Migration Disorder (ABCD) syndrome, described in a Turkish family, see Ref. 162,163.

^hPCWH, WS4, and WS2 resulting from *SOX10* mutation might best be viewed as a spectrum. Many subjects classified as WS2 with *SOX10* mutations have severe constipation or neurological symptoms.^{49,164,165} Hypopigmented macules might be a feature suggestive of WS associated with *SOX10* mutations, rather than the classical midline depigmentation; however, a white forelock is still often reported.¹⁶⁶

ⁱTietz syndrome is caused by a heterozygous mutation in exon 7 of *MITF*. Unlike Waardenburg syndrome, skin melanocyte density is normal (suggesting that the migration of melanocyte precursors during embryogenesis is normal). In contrast to albinism, visual acuity is normal in all the reported cases. Premature graying and development of freckles on sun-exposed skin appear to be characteristic features.^{104,105,167,168}

undescended testes, a magnetic resonance image (MRI) can be used as a primary diagnostic method.^{53,54} MRI in subjects with WS and *SOX10* pathogenic variants frequently reveals hypoplasia or aplasia of the olfactory bulbs; in addition, inner ear or temporal bone abnormalities are often present.⁵⁵⁻⁶⁷ In older children, an MRI is often unnecessary and formal testing for anosmia or hyposomia can establish the diagnosis of Kallmann's syndrome.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, CHH is a challenging diagnosis that is often made late in adolescence or adulthood. A careful evaluation, early diagnosis, and prompt referral can reduce numerous complications that occur later in life.⁵¹

6 | MANAGEMENT

6.1 | General

The management of Piebaldism and Waardenburg syndrome involves a multidisciplinary team approach, patient education, and early

intervention in selected patients. All patients with WS, and their families, should be offered genetic counseling and testing. The pathogenic *PAX3* alleles may increase the risk of severe neural tube defects in the probands offspring; whether this risk is folate-response is unknown.⁶⁹ Regardless, daily folic acid supplementation (0.4-0.8 mg) is recommended to all women of childbearing age.⁷⁰

6.2 | Integumentary system

Skin depigmentation associated with Piebaldism and WS is stable, but lacks melanocytes and inflammation; as a result, light therapy and corticosteroids have no role in therapy. Optimal skin photo-protection should be recommended. Management with cosmetic camouflage and hair dye can improve quality of life and provide significant emotional benefit.⁷¹⁻⁷³ Tissue grafting and cell transplantation have high success rates for the depigmented patches of Piebaldism.⁷⁴⁻⁸⁴ The literature for depigmented patches associated with WS is

TABLE 3 Major differential diagnoses for Piebaldism and Waardenburg syndrome

Condition	Features
Vitiligo ^{169,170}	Segmental: Rapid onset then stabilizes; asymmetrical, trigeminal, and thoracic are frequent sites; involved segments do not cross midline Nonsegmental: Progressive with flares; symmetrical
Nevus anemicus	Irregular borders, interspersed normal; pallor becomes less pronounced under Woods lamp; ¹⁷¹ diascopy ^a can be diagnostic
Nevus ^{b,c} depigmentosus	Isolated, multiple, or segmental, ¹⁷² most common differential encountered in vitiligo clinics, ¹⁷³ poor response to surgical grafts ¹⁷⁴⁻¹⁷⁶ Woods light demonstrates off-white accentuation; in contrast to chalk white seen with depigmentation conditions (eg, Piebaldism)
Tuberous ^d sclerosis complex (TSC) ¹⁷⁷	Hypopigmented macules of tuberous sclerosis can be round, oval, segmental, or ash-leaf shaped; additional cutaneous (eg, shagreen patches, angiofibromas) or neurological (eg, seizures) features are often present
Hypomelanosis of Ito (Pigmentary Mosaicism) ¹⁷⁸	Linear distribution, streaks, or whorls; majority of cases occur sporadically Biopsy typically reveals a normal number of melanocytes Approximately 73% have extra-cutaneous manifestations (eg, developmental delay, skeletal deformities, epilepsy, intellectual disability)
Chr 4q12q21 deletions	Midline depigmentation, intellectual disability, hypotonia, and/or growth abnormalities

^aDiascopy can be performed by applying pressure to the patch and surrounding skin with a glass slide. It differentiates vascular abnormalities from other conditions. Visualizing an erythematous change in only normal skin when pressure is applied to the patch is characteristic of nevus anemicus.^{179,180}

^bNevus depigmentosus might be considered a mild state of mosaicism, and it can be difficult to differentiate from hypopigmented macules associated with TSC.^{181,182}

^cThe diagnosis of indeterminate or borderline leprosy should be considered in the differential of nevus depigmentosus in high-risk children; its prevalence is similar to that of ND in some areas and can present with similar findings.¹⁸³

^dThe prevalence of hypopigmented macules in the healthy population is approximately 5%; however, they can also be the initial manifestation of TSC. In the absence of a positive family history for TSC or additional symptoms, further workup is unnecessary.¹⁸⁴

anecdotal, but theoretically should be similar to Piebaldism. Of note, the dermatologist should be aware that monopolar diathermy should not be used in the head and neck region of patients with cochlear implants (which these patients often have). Bipolar diathermy can be used at distances greater than 2 cm away from the implant.⁸⁵ Electrical current can result in damage to the implant, further surgery, additional expenses, and possible complications.

6.3 | Auditory system

Waardenburg syndrome is a high-risk indicator for hearing loss; as such, even if the newborn screening is passed, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a referral for at least one diagnostic auditory assessment.⁸⁶ The comprehensive audiological evaluation should be performed no later than 3 months of age. Confirmed hearing loss requires appropriate referral (otolaryngology, speech-language pathology, audiology, genetics) and intervention by no later than 6 months of age.⁸⁷ Congenital sensorineural hearing loss treated with cochlear implants improves language, communication, and cognitive skills.⁸⁸⁻⁹³ At least 2 weeks prior to cochlear implant placement, in addition to routine age-specific vaccinations, the child should receive pneumococcal vaccines (PCV13 and/or PPSV23) because of the heightened risk for bacterial meningitis.^{94,95}

6.4 | Gastrointestinal system

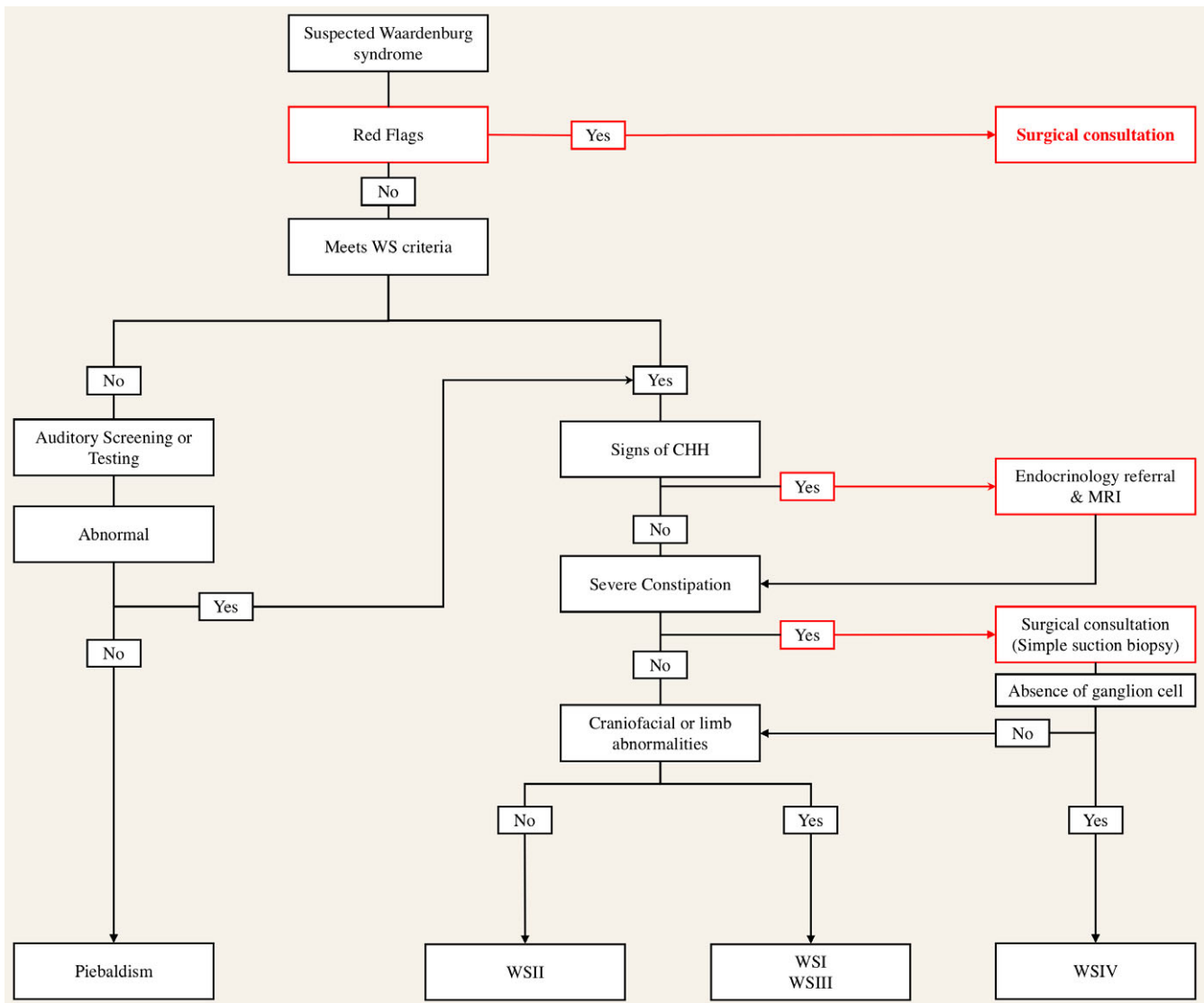
During follow-up visits, the patient should be asked about constipation because HD may not be apparent early in life. Chronic constipation

should prompt a referral for an evaluation of HD. A diagnostic biopsy suggestive of HD is treated with surgical anastomosis of functional gut.¹⁴ Chronic constipation and negative diagnostic tests for HD have been described with SOX10 mutations.^{49,96} Even within the same family, rectal biopsy can be positive in one offspring, but negative in another with chronic constipation and an identical SOX10 mutations.⁶⁶

7 | PERSPECTIVES, AREAS OF UNCERTAINTY, AND CONCLUSIONS

Our understanding of the development of melanocytes in humans has drastically improved over the last three decades. Greater than 90% of WS1 cases can be identified by single-gene testing (*PAX3* sequence analysis). The heterogeneous variations in genotype and phenotype associated with WS1 can be explained by haploinsufficiency that results from a loss-of-function mutation in *PAX3*, a dose-sensitive gene. A dominant-negative *PAX3* pathogenic variant or homozygous loss-of-function mutations produce a severe phenotype characteristic of WS3.

The majority (> 60%) of WS2 cases are unexplained at the molecular level.⁹⁷ Heterozygous *MITF* and *SOX10* mutations each account for 15% of cases; *SNAI2*, *EDNRB*, and *KITLG* are rare and account for less than 5%.^{98,99} Proteins that activate or repress the expression of MITF-M are potential gene candidates. For instance, *FOXD3*, *POU3F2*, *ALX3*, *TNF- α* , and *TGF- β* can reduce MITF-M levels; in contrast, genes involved in cAMP-CREB, Wnt, or MAPK signaling pathways can increase MITF expression.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, post-translational modifications (eg, ubiquitination, phosphorylation)



Red Flags	
Evaluation	Findings
History	Bilious emesis, poor feeding, failure to pass meconium within 48 hours or severe constipation since birth
Physical examination	Abdominal distension Absence of stool in the rectal vault
Plain Radiograph	Dilated bowels and absence of rectal air
Contrast enema	Transition zone between normal and pathologic bowel

FIGURE 3 Evaluation of Piebaldism and Waardenburg syndrome (WS)

and chromatin complexes that mediate epigenetic remodeling (eg, DNA methylation, histone modifications) contribute to *MITF* regulation.^{101,102} The increasing use of whole-genome sequencing will hopefully identify novel genes that are responsible for the unexplained cases of WS.

The primary mechanism of WS2 associated with *MITF* and *SOX10* pathogenic variants appears to be related to haploinsufficiency, and

the degree of phenotype severity may also be related to Wnt signaling. *MITF* pathogenic variants that do not effect LEF-1 mediated activation of the M-promotor appear to be associated with a mild phenotype.¹⁰³ The most severe auditory-pigmentary phenotype, represented by Tietz syndrome, are associated with dominant-negative mutations in *MITF* or pathogenic variants that prevent LEF-1 site activation (eg, *MITF* p.R217I).¹⁰³⁻¹⁰⁵ Homozygous mutations in *MITF* also

result in a severe phenotype characterized by coloboma, osteopetrosis, microphthalmia, macrocephaly, global hypopigmentation, and deafness (COMMAD).¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the most severe phenotype associated with pathogenic variants of SOX10, characterized by the presence of neuropathy, result from truncated mutations neighboring or involving the last exon.¹⁰⁷ The mechanism is thought to be related to the escape from nonsense-mediated mRNA decay and the production of a

mutant protein that competes and impairs the function of the wild-type SOX10 protein.^{60,96,108,109}

Lastly, the relationship between genotype and phenotype in humans continues to be a large area of uncertainty and primarily anecdotal. Many of the findings, especially in relation to PAX3 and SOX10 pathogenic variants, can be logically extrapolated from understanding their function during embryogenesis (Table 5). For instance, anosmia, chronic constipation, and inner ear malformations are likely specific phenotypic markers of SOX10 pathogenic variants. A common limitation in many studies involving patients with WS is the absence of long-term follow-up and lack of awareness. In one series, 15 subjects with WS and SOX10 mutations were studied retrospective in order to better define its relationship to “temporal bone abnormalities.” Bilateral agenesis of the olfactory bulbs was “incidentally” found in 7 of 8 subjects with adequate MR imaging sequences.⁶⁵ However, the subjects were prepubertal and formal testing for anosmia was not reported. Interestingly, SOX10 mutations, unlike PAX3 mutations, most commonly arise de-novo, which may be related to infertility.¹¹⁰⁻¹¹² Future studies focusing on genotype should include a comprehensive phenotype profile and, if appropriate, long-term follow-up. Currently, no nationally recognized guidelines specific for Piebaldism or Waardenburg syndrome exist.

TABLE 4 Signs of congenital hypogonadotropic hypogonadism (CHH)

Period assessed	Signs of congenital hypogonadotropic hypogonadism ^{a,b}
Mini-puberty ^c	M: Cryptorchidism, micropenis F: No specific signs
Adolescent	M/F: Eunuchoidal proportions, low libido, sexual function is lacking, hypo- or anosmia M: Prepubertal testes, undervirilization, absent growth spurt F: Absent breast development, primary amenorrhea
Adulthood	Infertility, osteoporotic fractures

CHH: Congenital hypogonadotropic hypogonadism; M: Male; F: Female.

^aCHH is a challenging diagnosis that is very often diagnosed late in adolescence or adulthood. A careful evaluation by the dermatologist can be very rewarding. Timely diagnosis and treatment accompany a long list of benefits. See Ref. 51 for further recommendations on diagnosis and treatment.

^bAll neonates born to parents with CHH should be formally evaluated by an endocrinologist. Referral should not be delayed because the window for hormone profiling is narrow.

^cMini-puberty: A phenomenon that refers to the period the HPG axis is active in utero and for the short period after birth. During this short period, hormone profiling at 4-8 wks can establish the diagnosis. Afterward, the diagnosis can be very difficult to establish prior to adolescence.

8 | OTHER RESOURCES

U.S. National Library of Medicine: <https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/waardenburg-syndrome#synonyms>.

American Society for Deaf Children: <http://deafchildren.org>.

The Leiden Open Variation Database includes the mutations that characterize Waardenburg syndrome and clinical variants: http://grenada.lumc.nl/LOVD2/WS/home.php?action=switch_db.

TABLE 5 Selective role of PAX3¹⁸⁵ and SOX10^{66,186-188} in extra-cutaneous tissues during embryogenesis

Type	Extra-cutaneous function during embryogenesis	Phenotype
PAX3	Expressed in neural crest cells that contribute to the craniofacial structures	Lateral displacement of the medial canthi Cleft palate
	Expressed in myogenic precursors and important in their migration and survival to the limbs	Hypoplasia of the limb musculature of the upper extremities due to premature apoptosis
	Expressed in dark cell precursors that migrate to the vestibule and function in fluid homeostasis ¹⁸⁹	Vestibular symptoms ¹³² (eg, vertigo)
SOX10	Expressed in glial-derived neural crest cells and important in their survival and differentiation	Neuropathy and leukodystrophy due to hypo- or demyelination
	Expressed in the enteric-derived neural crest cells and important in the development of the enteric ganglia	Enteric hypo- or aganglionosis Chronic constipation
	Expressed in neural crest cells that are important in the development of the inner ear and temporal bone	Bilateral hypo- or aplasia of the semicircular canals Temporal bone abnormalities
	Important in the differentiation of neural crest-derived olfactory ensheathing cells and migration of GnRH neurons to the forebrain ^{188,190}	Olfactory bulb hypoplasia or aplasia (anosmia) Congenital hypogonadotropic hypogonadism

The Human Gene Mutation Database can be used to identify gene lesions associated with inherited conditions in humans: <http://www.hgmd.cf.ac.uk/ac/index.php>.

An extensive list of melanogenic genes in mice can be found at <http://www.espcr.org/micemut/>.

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