


**REVIEW**

# Role of YES1 signaling in tumor therapy resistance

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**Funding information**

Special Funding for Qilu Sanitation and Health Leading Talents Cultivation Project; Key Research and Development Project of Shandong Province, Grant/Award Number: 2017GSF18147

**Abstract**

YES proto-oncogene 1 (YES1) is an SRC family kinase (SFK) that plays a key role in cancer cell proliferation, adhesion, invasion, survival, and angiogenesis during tumorigenesis and tumor development. Reports suggest that *YES1* amplification is associated with resistance to chemotherapeutic drugs and tyrosine kinase inhibitors (TKIs) in human malignancies. However, the mechanisms of drug resistance have not been fully elucidated. In this article, we review the literature on YES1 and discuss the implications of YES1 signaling for targeted therapy and chemotherapy resistance in malignancies. Moreover, recent advances in targeted therapy for *YES1*-amplified malignancies are summarized. Finally, we conclude that targeting YES1 may reverse drug resistance and serve as a valuable tumor treatment strategy.

**KEYWORDS**

*YES1*-amplified malignancies, chemotherapy resistance, molecular mechanisms, EGFR-TKIs

## 1 | BACKGROUND

Studies of driver mutations in malignancy, such as those in epidermal growth factor receptor (*EGFR*), anaplastic lymphoma kinase (*ALK*), and human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 (*HER2*), have provided more treatment options for patients with advanced malignancies [1–3].

However, some patients still do not benefit from targeted therapy because they either have acquired or primary resistance or lack targetable driver mutations. Drug resistance remains a serious problem in the course of treatment, which limits the application of targeted therapy and is one of the most important challenges in the treatment of malignancies today [4]. Therefore, there

**Abbreviations:** ALK, anaplastic lymphoma kinase; ANXA2, annexin A2; EGFR, epidermal growth factor receptor; EPHA2, erythropoietin-producing hepatocellular receptor A2; HER2, human epidermal growth factor receptor-2; MAPK, mitogen-activated protein kinase; mTOR, mammalian target of rapamycin; NSCLC, non-small cell lung cancer; SFK, Src family kinase; TKI, tyrosine kinase inhibitor; YAP1, YES1-associated protein 1; YES1, YES proto-oncogene 1.

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is an urgent need to improve anticancer treatment strategies, including developing new drugs and addressing drug resistance.

YES proto-oncogene 1 (YES1) is one of the nine members of SRC family kinases (SFKs), and the other members are SRC, FYN, LYN, BLK, LCK, HCK, FGR, and YRK. YES1, SRC, and FYN are widely expressed in mammalian tissues, while LYN, LCK, FGR, BLK, and HCK are more expressed in the hematopoietic system [5]. SFK is an important nonreceptor tyrosine kinase (RTK) that can regulate the cellular function of normal cells. SFK signaling has been shown to be related to the growth, survival, invasion, adhesion, and migration of cancer cells, and plays a role in resistance to targeted therapy, endocrine therapy, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy [6, 7]. Recently, YES1 has received increasing attention for its potential oncogenic properties and its use as a biomarker in various tumors. Upon stimulation by RTKs, including EGRF, PDGFR, CSF1R, and FGFR, YES1 is recruited to activate and phosphorylate these membrane receptors that regulate downstream substrates and exert partial biological effects. YES1 is the only member of the SFK family to show gene amplification in primary tumors of untreated patients [8]. Previous laboratory studies supported that YES1 amplification mediates resistance to anti-HER2 drugs and EGFR-tyrosine kinase inhibitors (TKIs) among others [9, 10].

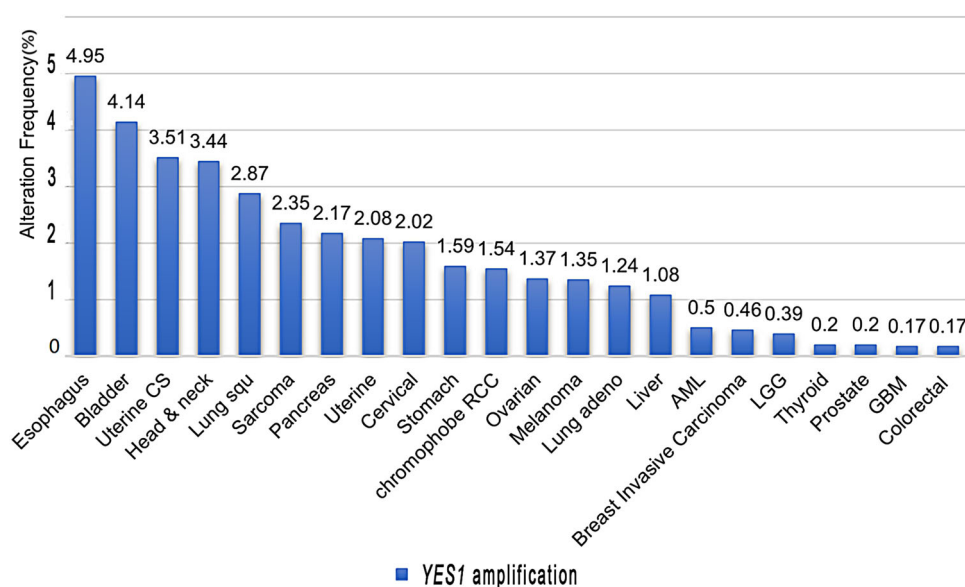
In this review, we describe the role of YES1 and its signaling in tumors, focusing on the role of YES1 amplification in TKI and chemotherapy resistance. Recent advances in targeted therapy for YES1-amplified malignancies are analyzed. Targeting YES1 may reverse

drug resistance and serve as a valuable therapeutic strategy in tumor treatment.

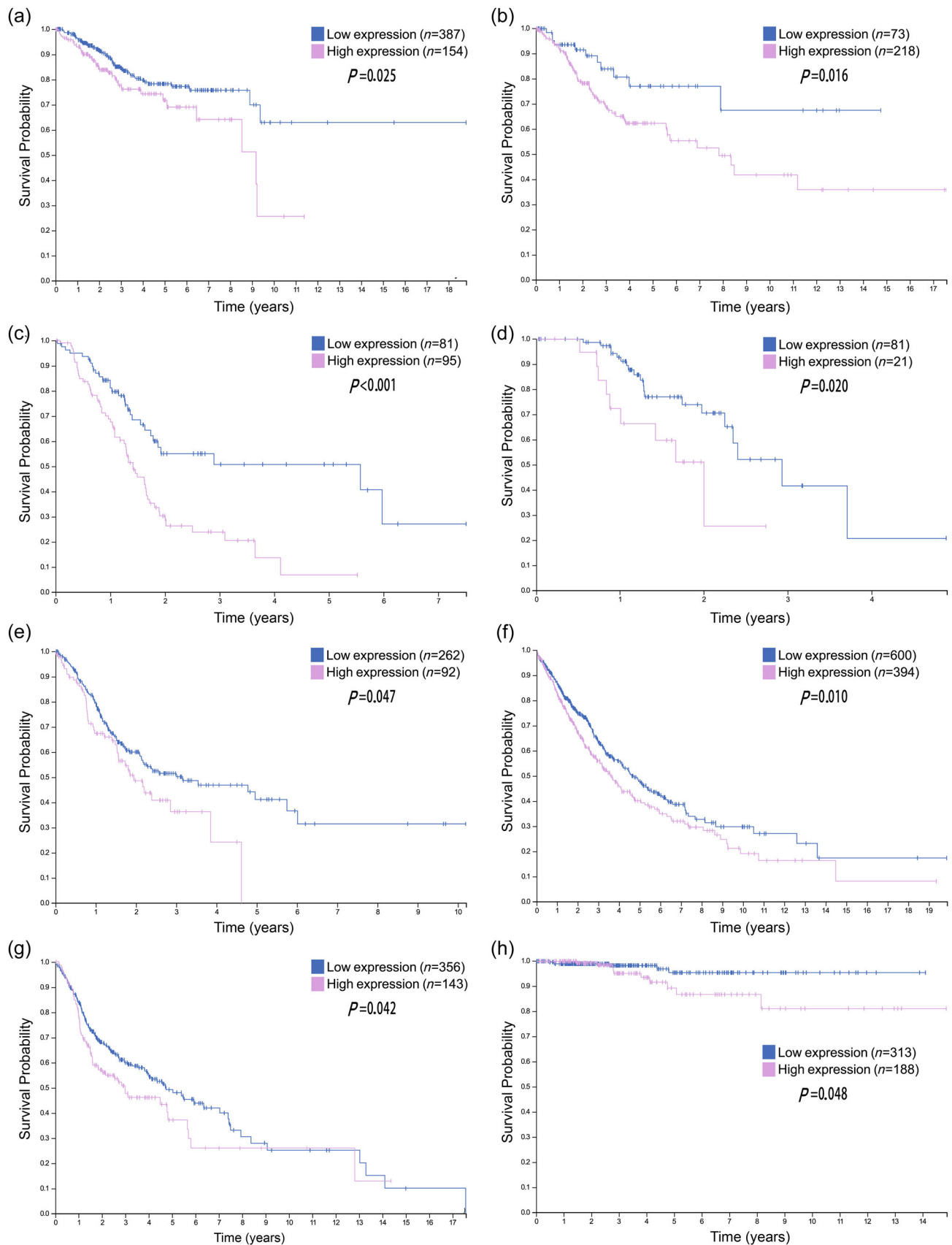
## 2 | FUNCTION AND SIGNALING OF YES1 IN TUMORS

It has been observed that YES1 plays a vital role in the occurrence and development of various malignant tumors such as non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC), breast cancer, colorectal cancer, prostate cancer, esophageal cancer, gastric cancer, liver cancer, thyroid cancer, glioblastoma, pancreatic cancer, and melanoma [11–21]. We investigated genomic data from patients with somatic YES1 amplification in various malignancies, including NSCLC, breast, colorectal, bladder, and prostate cancers, from the cBioPortal for Cancer Genomics databases. The prevalence of YES1 amplification in various malignancies is shown in Figure 1. In addition, the correlation between YES1 expression from the Human Protein Atlas database and the prognosis of various tumors is shown in Figure 2. The results showed that high expression of YES1 was associated with shorter progression-free survival (PFS). Recent studies have shown that YES1 overexpression can promote the level of tumor-infiltrating regulatory T cells, thereby forming an immunosuppressive tumor micro-environment [22]. This might explain the poorer survival outcome of patients with high YES1 expression. Therefore, YES1 may be a predictor of decreased tumor PFS.

YES1 is associated with cell proliferation, migration, and metastasis. Overexpression of the nontyrosine protein kinase YES1 is associated with activation of the focal adhesion



**FIGURE 1** Prevalence of YES1 amplification in tumors from the cBioPortal database. AML, acute myeloid leukemia; GBM, glioblastoma; LGG, low-grade glioma; RCC, renal cell carcinoma. YES1, YES proto-oncogene 1.



**FIGURE 2** Expression of YES1 and its relationship to the prognosis of multiple tumors from the Human Protein Atlas database. (a) Endometrial cancer; (b) cervical cancer; (c) pancreatic cancer; (d) melanoma; (e) stomach cancer; (f) NSCLC; (g) head and neck cancer; (h) thyroid cancer. Y-axis: survival probability. X-axis: time (years). NSCLC, non-small cell lung cancer; YES1, YES proto-oncogene 1.

kinase [14], YES1-associated protein 1 (YAP1) [23], and mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) [24] pathways. Garmendia et al. [11] reported that amplification of *YES1* leading to YES1 overexpression is an altered oncogenic driver in NSCLC that induces tumor growth and metastatic spread. The underlying mechanism may be that YES1 promotes S6K and protein kinase B (AKT) phosphorylation and affects phosphatidylinositol-3-kinase (PI3K)/AKT/mTOR pathway. YES1 overexpression can also modulate the microenvironment to promote tumor growth. Several studies have shown that the circFUT8/miR-944/YES1 axis affects proliferation, migration, and invasion of NSCLC cells [25]. Several YES1-related signaling axes have also been reported in other cancers, and in malignant mesothelioma. YES silencing leads to cell growth inhibition, which is dependent on G1 cell cycle arrest and induction of apoptosis, and knockdown of YES decreases levels of cyclin D by inactivation of  $\beta$ -catenin signaling. RBM15-mediated m6A modification may promote hepatocellular carcinoma progression through the IGF2BP1-YES1-MAPK axis [26]. In gastric cancer, the EPHA2-YES1-Annexin A2 (ANXA2) axis has been confirmed to be a new invasion and metastasis pathway. Among them, YES1 activated by EPHA2 phosphorylates ANXA2 at Tyr24, leading to ANXA2 activation and increased ANXA2 nuclear distribution, which contributes to invasion and metastasis [27]. Furthermore, some microRNAs regulate tumor progression by interacting with YES1. For example, circ-ZNF124-regulated mir-498 directly binds to *YES1* messenger RNA and inhibits NSCLC progression by inactivating the Wnt/ $\beta$ -catenin signaling pathway. Moreover, a study showed that overexpression of mir-133a inhibits the proliferation of NSCLC cells. In gastric cancer, miR-140-5p affects phenotype by regulating *YES1* [16, 28–30]. Wang et al. [31] found that the levels of phosphorylated SFK, EGFR, AKT, and extracellular signal-regulated kinase 1 and 2 (ERK1/2) were significantly increased in *YES1*-amplified cells, and they confirmed that YES1 overexpression is upstream of abnormal activation of SFK, EGFR, AKT, and ERK1/2 signaling pathways. One study showed that YES1 is required for EGFR nuclear translocation [32]. In addition to the classic cytoplasmic EGFR signaling pathway, there is also a signaling pathway affected by nuclear EGFR [33–35], and the nuclear translocation of EGFR leads to resistance to multiple treatments such as targeted therapy, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy [36–40].

YAP1, originally identified as YES1-associated protein 1, is a key effector of the HIPPO signaling pathway and plays a vital role in anticancer drug resistance [41–43]. Literature data suggest that YES1 regulates YAP1 activity indirectly through serine phosphorylation and directly through nuclear localization, and the mechanism by which YES1 regulates YAP1 may also depend on the cellular environment [15, 44]. However, the molecular and functional relationship between

YES1 and YAP1 is complex and has not been thoroughly elucidated.

### 3 | ROLE OF YES1 IN ANTICANCER THERAPY RESISTANCE

#### 3.1 | YES1 resistance to EGFR-TKIs

To date, third-generation small-molecule TKIs targeting EGFR have been developed for the treatment of EGFR-mutant cancers. Despite high response rates to these EGFR-TKIs, resistance remains inevitable for most patients with malignancies. Studies have shown that *YES1* amplification is associated with acquired resistance to first-generation EGFR-TKIs [45, 46]. Yu et al. [45] first identified a patient who acquired *YES1* amplification after erlotinib treatment. Wei et al. [46] reported that YES1 expression was upregulated 1.5-fold in a stable gefitinib-resistant cell line, and these resistant cells responded to SFK-targeting dasatinib. However, none of the studies further elucidated how *YES1* amplification plays a role in acquired resistance to erlotinib and gefitinib. Garmendia et al. [11] reported that YES1 is one of the drivers of NSCLC tumor growth and progression, and YES1 overexpression was associated with *YES1* amplification. These investigators demonstrated that knockdown of YES1 expression by specific small interfering RNAs decreased the levels of phosphorylated S6K, a downstream effector of mTOR, and that YES1 overexpression resulted in increased levels of phosphorylated S6K, whereby YES1 maintained mTOR pathway activity. There is evidence that activation of mTOR confers resistance to erlotinib and gefitinib [47, 48]. Thus, although not directly validated, *YES1* amplification may be involved in resistance to EGFR-TKIs through activation of the mTOR pathway. Fan et al. [9] demonstrated that acquired amplification of *YES1* is a mechanism of resistance to EGFR inhibition and that activation of YES1 expression resulted in resistance to all three generations of EGFR-TKIs, including erlotinib, afatinib, and osimertinib. Ichihara et al. [49] demonstrated that amplification of *YES1* mediates acquired resistance to osimertinib. In their study, treatment of *YES1*-amplified cells with osimertinib alone inhibited phosphorylation of EGFR but not other downstream effectors (e.g., ERK, AKT, or S6). Therefore, *YES1* amplification may lead to osimertinib resistance by activating corresponding signaling pathways, such as AKT and MAPK pathways. Pharmacological or genetic inhibition of YES1 expression restored sensitization to osimertinib in cells with *YES1* amplification. Moreover, combined treatment with

osimertinib and SFK inhibitors inhibited both EGFR and downstream effector signaling, thereby increasing apoptosis in vitro. The relationship between *YES1* amplification and primary resistance to EGFR-TKIs remains unclear. We reported for the first time a case of primary afatinib-resistant lung adenocarcinoma patient carrying EGFR exon 21 L858R missense mutation and *YES1* amplification [50]. The potential role of *YES1* in primary EGFR-TKI resistance needs further exploration.

### 3.2 | *YES1* signaling mediates resistance to HER2-targeted drugs

HER2 is an RTK and a member of the ERBB protein family. To date, HER2-targeted therapy has made significant progress, and a variety of HER2-targeted drugs have come out one after another, including anti-HER2 antibodies (trastuzumab and pertuzumab), pan-HER inhibitors (afatinib and neratinib), and trastuzumab emtansine (T-DM1). Amplification of *YES1* has been reported as a mechanism of HER2-targeted drug resistance in various cancers, including gastric cancer, NSCLC, and breast cancer [10, 31, 51, 52]. Wang et al. [31] found that *YES1* was overexpressed in T-DM1-resistant cells with *YES1* amplification. *YES1* activates different proliferation-related signaling pathways, including EGFR, PI3K, and MAPK pathways, resulting in cross-resistance to all types of HER2-targeting drugs such as antibodies, antibody-drug conjugates, and small-molecule inhibitors. The interaction between *YES1* and HER2 was elucidated by Takeda et al. [52], who believed that *YES1* directly binds and activates HER2, and *YES1* amplification is the mechanism of neratinib resistance in HER2-driven breast and lung cancers. Multiple studies confirmed that the SRC family inhibitor dasatinib overcomes HER2-targeted drug resistance mediated by *YES1* amplification [10, 31, 51, 52]. As precision medicine continues to advance in cancer treatment, new therapeutic strategies need to be identified to overcome HER2-targeted drug resistance caused by *YES1* amplification.

### 3.3 | Role of *YES1* in resistance to other TKIs

Iida et al. [32] found that *YES1* overexpression leads to nuclear EGFR translocation and mediates cetuximab resistance in a NSCLC cell line. Fan et al. [9] reported that *YES1* amplification may lead to resistance to ALK-TKIs in NSCLC patients. In their study, among 17 patients with ALK fusion-driven, two patients with *YES1* amplification developed resistance to ALK-TKIs.

However, these researchers did not further explore the specific mechanism of *YES1* amplification leading to ALK-TKI resistance. Lun et al. [53] demonstrated that overexpression of *YES1* activates ERK1/2 in an MEK-independent manner in melanoma cells. In their study, *YES1* expression activated ERK, which induced resistance to combination therapy with vemurafenib (BRAF<sup>V600E</sup> inhibitor) and CI1040 (MEK inhibitor). Therefore, this research group suggested that the overexpression of *YES1* is one of the key mechanisms of drug resistance in melanoma cells carrying BRAF<sup>V600E</sup> mutation, and *YES1* is one of the kinases that can induce BRAF-MEK combined inhibitory drug resistance. Kim et al. [54] revealed that *YES1* expression was upregulated in a dose-dependent manner in nilotinib- and imatinib-resistant cell line models. The researchers believed that when the endogenous BCR-ABL oncoprotein is inactivated by TKI inhibitors, the activated *YES1* kinase may provide another means to engage in survival pathways. However, *YES1* expression in imatinib-resistant chronic myelogenous leukemia patients did not differ significantly between strong and poor responders. One explanation for this finding is the relatively small clinical sample size in this study. Therefore, further studies with larger clinical sample sizes are needed [54].

### 3.4 | *YES1* regulates tumor cell sensitivity to chemotherapy

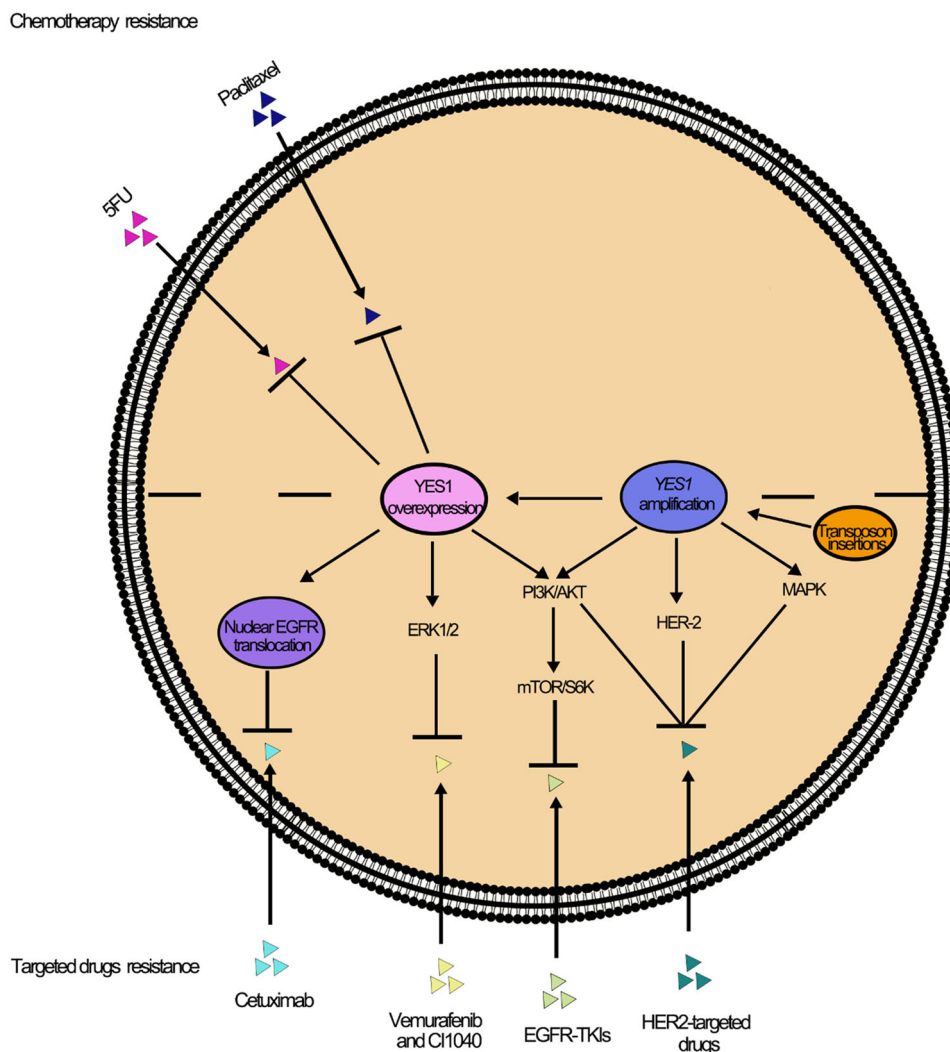
Paclitaxel, a tubulin-binding agent, is an antitubulin chemotherapy drug. Studies have shown that overexpression of SFKs mediates paclitaxel resistance in various cancer types, and inhibition of SFKs increases paclitaxel sensitivity [55]. Arima et al. [56] demonstrated that *YES1* and its mitotic phosphorylation confer paclitaxel resistance. These researchers demonstrated that cyclin-dependent kinase 1-mediated phosphorylation of *YES1* was associated with mitotic arrest and apoptosis in antitubulin chemotherapy. MiR-199a is a negative regulator of various cancers [57]. Chen et al. [58] confirmed that *YES1* expression was directly regulated by miR-199a and found that miR-199a was negatively correlated with *YES1* expression. Ectopic expression of miR-199a decreased the expression of *YES1*, whereas overexpression of *YES1* downregulated the expression of miR-199a. Low miR-199a expression leads to overexpression of *YES1*, which mediates paclitaxel resistance in prostate cancer. Touil et al. [59] found that *YES1* expression levels were increased by 5-fluorouracil (5-FU) chemotherapy that patients expressing high *YES1* levels had a poorer prognosis. The *YES1*/YAP axis plays an important role in 5-FU

chemoresistance through the joint acquisition of stem cell-like phenotype and cell quiescence. Altogether, YES1 regulates sensitivity to chemotherapy, and high expression of YES1 may be one of the mechanisms of chemotherapy resistance. The role of YES1 in targeted therapy and chemotherapy resistance is shown in Figure 3.

### 3.5 | Novel therapies for *YES1*-amplified and *YES1*-overexpressing malignancies

Studies have shown that patients with *YES1* amplification may benefit from SFK inhibitors, such as dasatinib. Dasatinib restored the sensitivity of *YES1*-amplified lung cancer cells to EGFR-TKIs, such as

osimertinib and gefitinib [46, 49]. Yoshioka et al. [51] showed that dasatinib monotherapy or combination therapy with afatinib overcame the acquired resistance to afatinib in *YES1*- and *HER2*-amplified gastric cancer cells. Other studies have shown that combination therapy with dasatinib can overcome acquired resistance to neratinib in *YES1*- and *HER2*-amplified breast and lung cancers, and acquired resistance to trastuzumab, lapatinib, and T-DM1 in *YES1*-amplified and *HER2*-positive breast cancers [10, 31, 52]. Recently, Hamanaka et al. [15] generated the *YES1* inhibitor CH6953755. They demonstrated that *YES1* amplification is a potential driver in several tumor types. In their study, CH6953755 had selective antitumor activity against cancers with *YES1* amplification, both in vitro and in vivo.



**FIGURE 3** Role of YES1 signaling in resistance to targeted therapy and chemotherapy. AKT, protein kinase B; EGFR, epidermal growth factor receptor; ERK1/2, extracellular signal-regulated kinase 1 and 2; 5-FU, 5-fluorouracil; HER2, human epidermal growth factor receptor-2; mTOR, mammalian target of rapamycin; PI3K, phosphatidylinositol-3-kinase; TKI, tyrosine kinase inhibitor; YES1, YES proto-oncogene 1.

## 4 | CONCLUSION

YES1 is critical for resistance to cancer therapy, including multiple TKIs and chemotherapeutics. Targeting YES1 may reverse drug resistance and serve as a valuable therapeutic strategy in cancer treatment. Therefore, further studies are warranted to reveal the roles of YES1 overexpression and *YES1* amplification in resistance to anticancer therapy. In conclusion, YES1 and regulatory molecules of the YES1 signaling pathway have the potential to be used as novel, reliable and rational molecular targets for antimalignant tumor therapy.

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**Hai Zhou:** Conceptualization (lead); writing—original draft (lead). **Dantong Sun:** Data curation (equal); writing—original draft (equal). **Junyan Tao:** Conceptualization (equal); writing—original draft (equal). **Mingjin Xu:** Data curation (supporting); writing—original draft (supporting). **Xiaochun Zhang:** Writing—review and editing (equal). **Helei Hou:** Funding acquisition (lead); project administration (lead); supervision (lead).

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no data sets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

### ETHICS STATEMENT

Not applicable.

### INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable.

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**How to cite this article:** Zhou H, Sun D, Tao J, Xu M, Zhang X, Hou H. Role of YES1 signaling in tumor therapy resistance. *Cancer Innovation.* 2023;2:210–218. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cai2.51>