



Apocrine Lesions of the Breast

Wentao Yang

Fudan University Shanghai Cancer Center

Basic features of apocrine cells

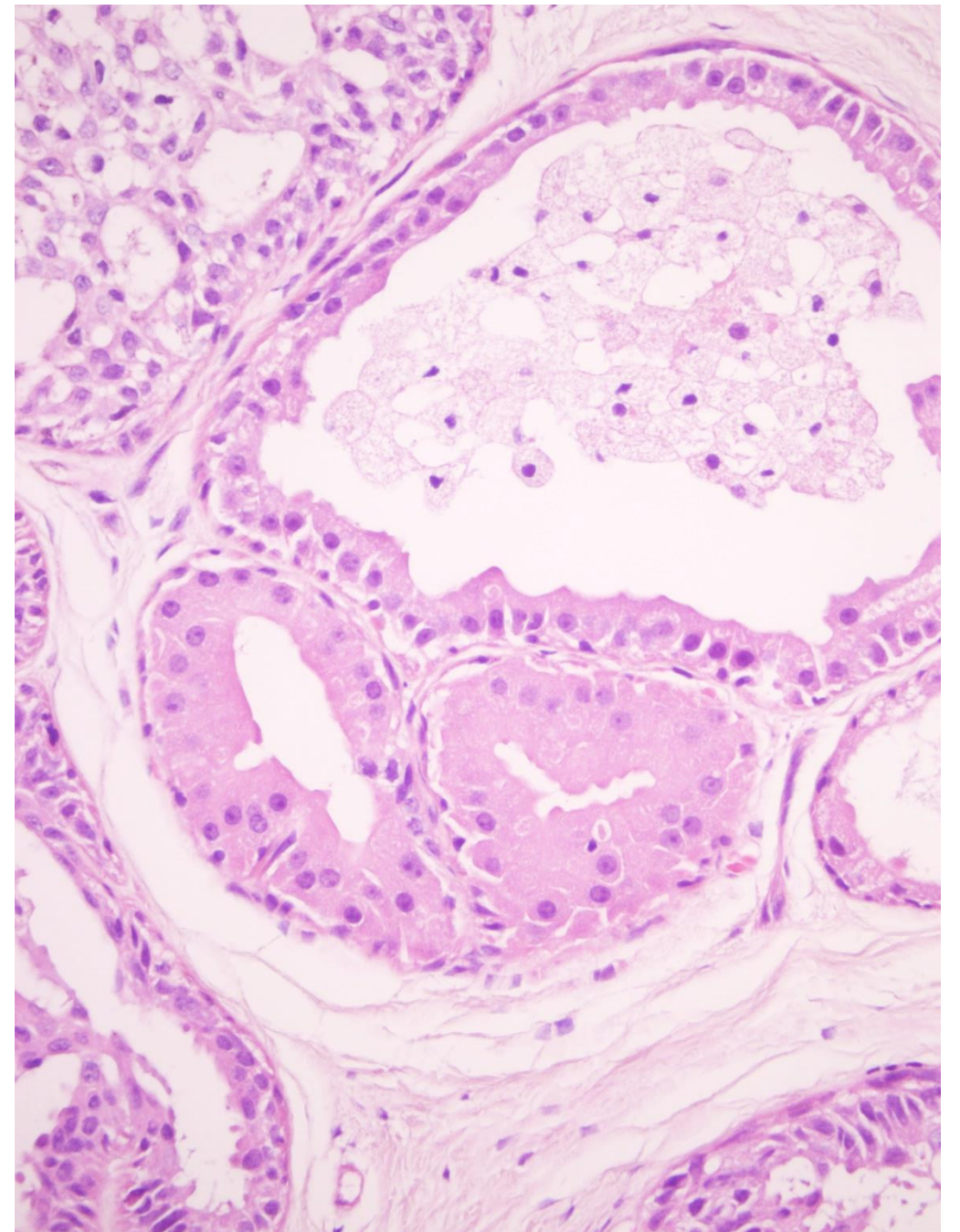
- Tall columnar, cuboidal, or flattened
- **Type A:**
 - **Cytoplasm:** Abundant eosinophilic granular cytoplasm; supranuclear vacuoles (may contain pigment)
 - **Nucleus:** Round to oval, basally located; 1–2 prominent nucleoli
 - **Cystic spaces:** Hyperchromatic, flattened to cuboidal nuclei

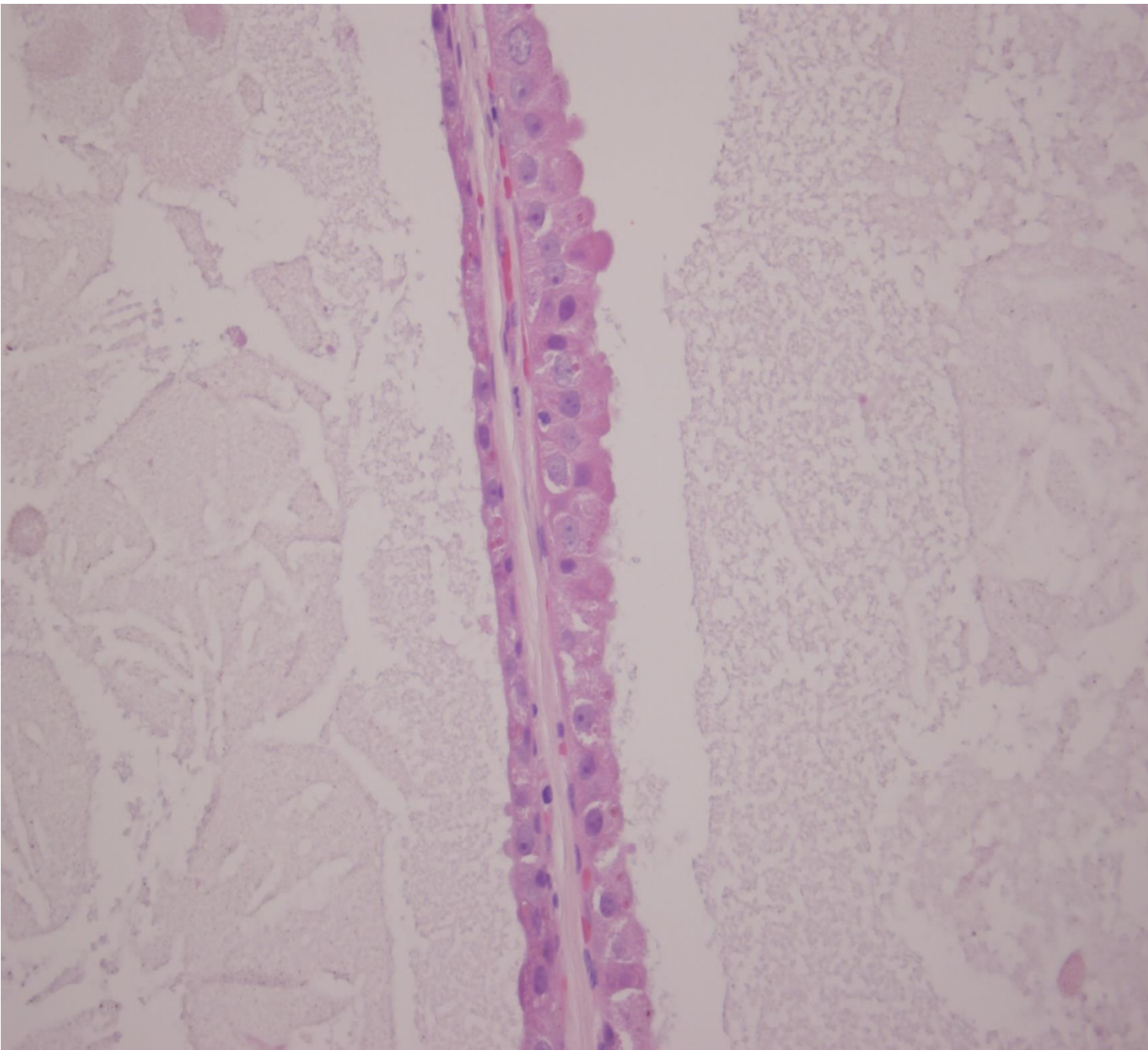
Ultrastructure:

- Electron-dense granules near luminal surface
- Short, scattered microvilli

In apocrine metaplasia:

- Mitotic figures rare
- No atypical mitoses



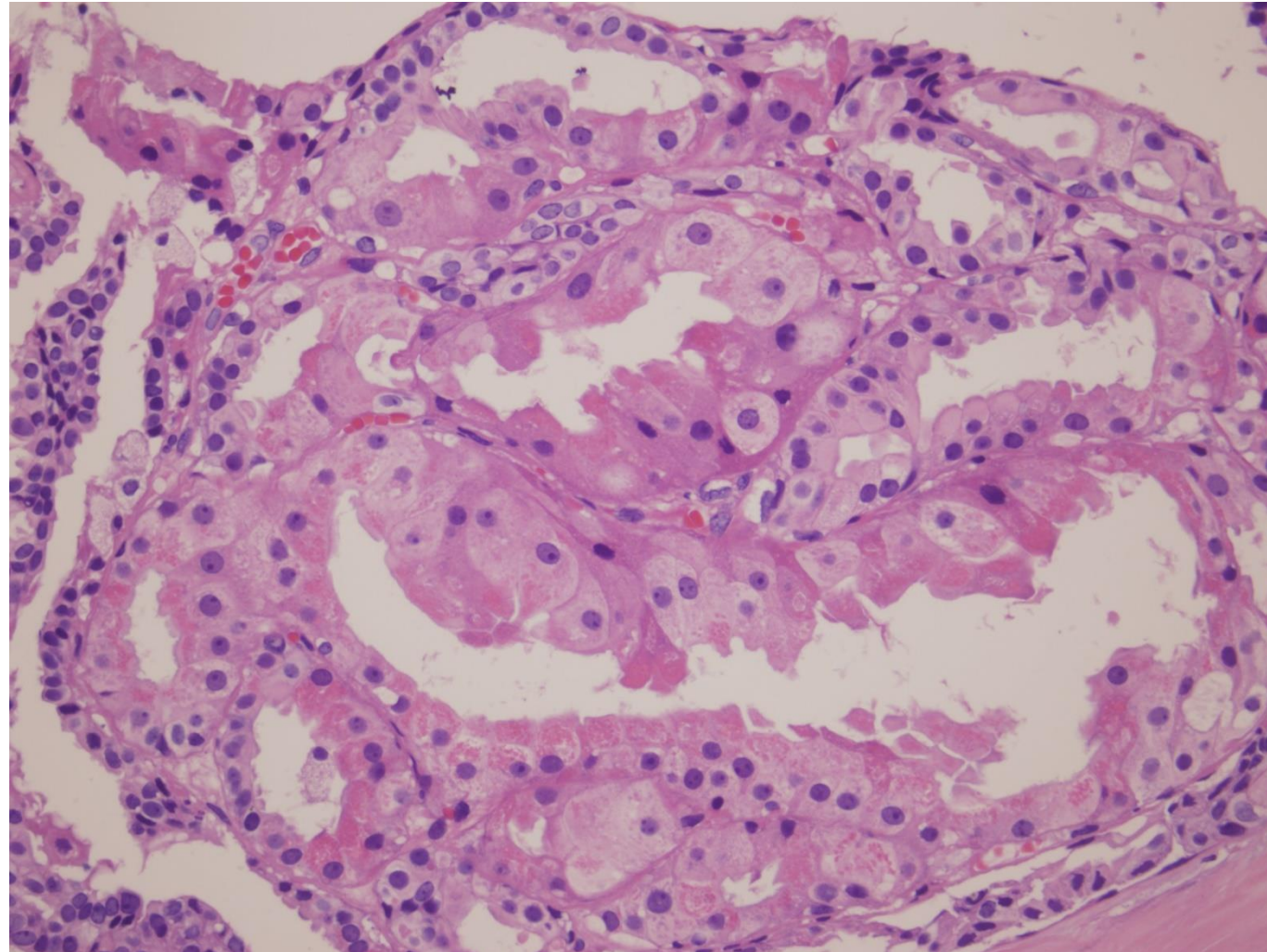


- **Uniform cuboidal to columnar cells in a single cohesive layer**
- **Basal nuclei with luminal cytoplasmic accumulation (apical blebs or snouts)**
- **Eosinophilic homogeneous cytoplasm and supranuclear vacuoles**
- **No significant necrosis or mitotic activity**

- **Type B:**

- Cytoplasm: Pale, clear, foamy, with small vacuoles (lipofuscin pigment).
- Nuclei: Identical to those of Type A cells.

Ultrastructure: the small vacuoles correspond to empty vesicles



Immunohistochemical characteristics of apocrine cells

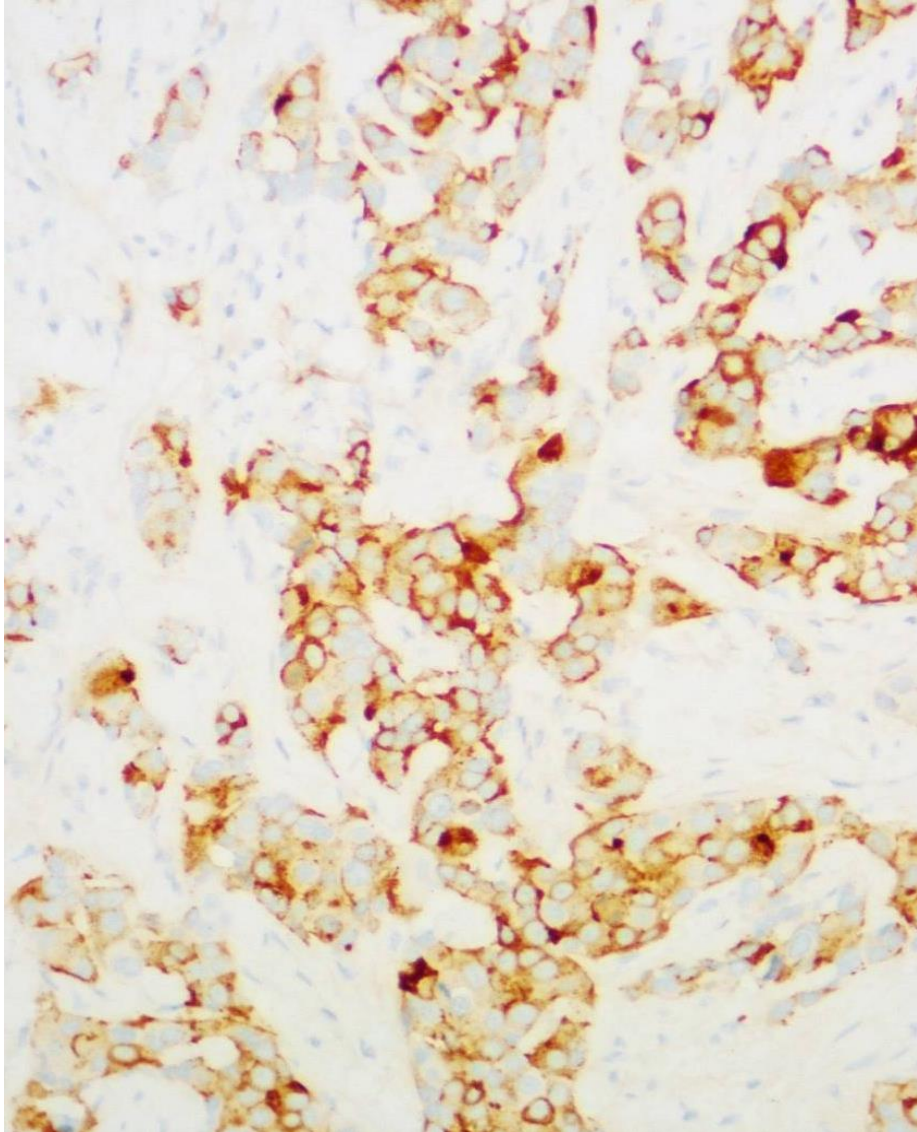
- Diastase-digested PAS (+)
- IHC:
 - ER (-)** , **PR (-)** , **AR (+)**
 - EMA (+)** , **CK8/18 (+)**
 - GCDFP15 (+)**
 - CK5/6(-), CK14(-)**

ADH vs. Low-grade DCIS:
differentiation using ER and HMWCK



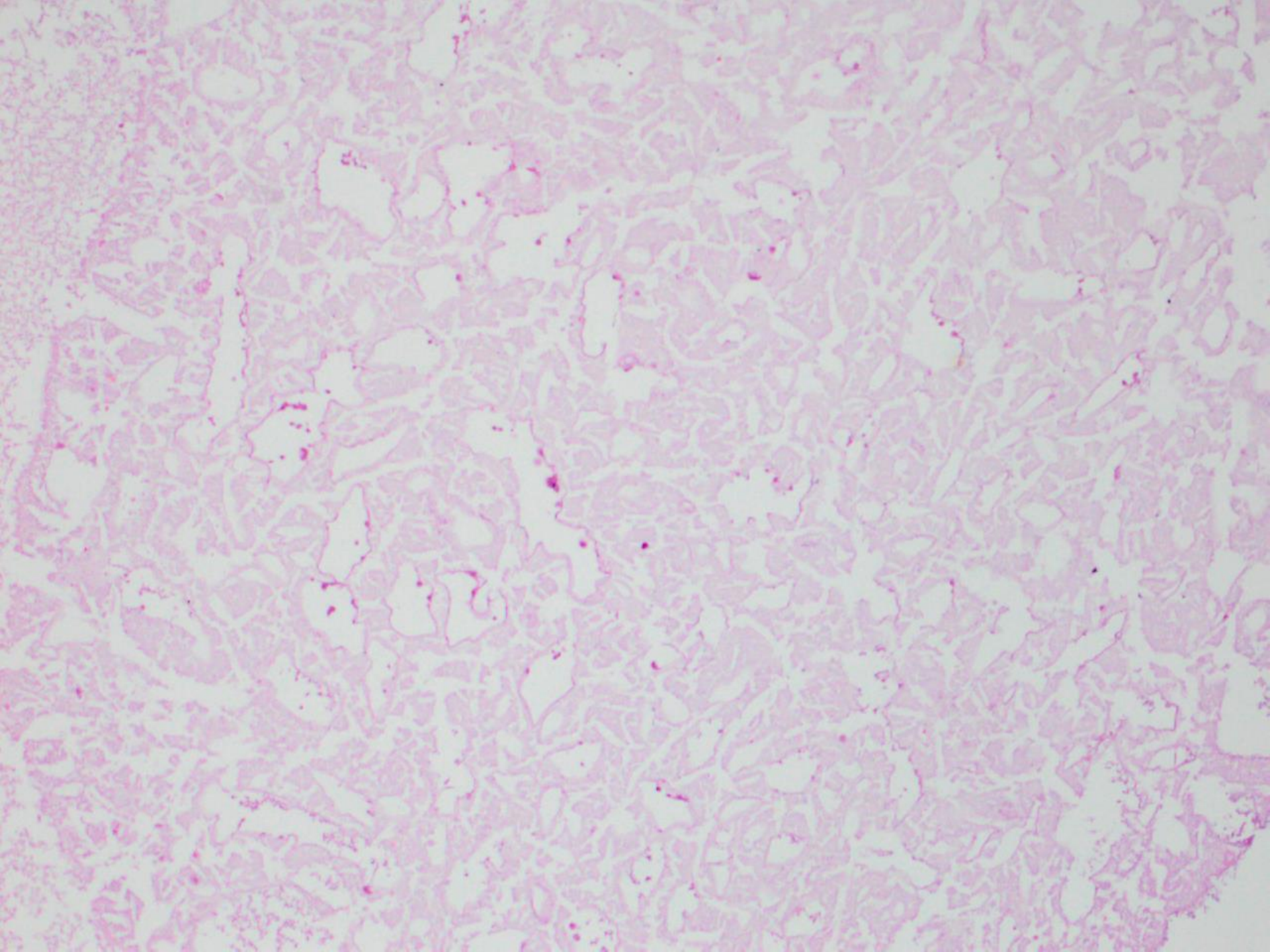
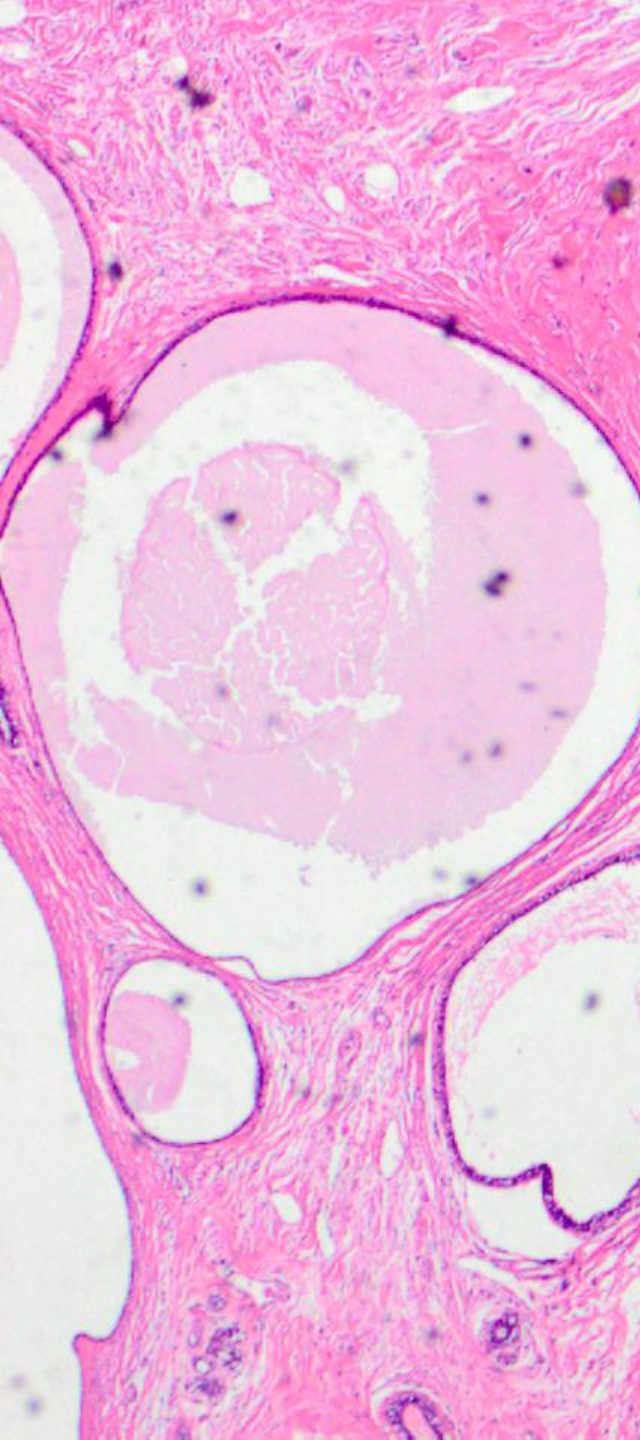
Not applicable to apocrine lesions

GCDFP15 (Gross Cystic Disease Fluid Protein-15)



- Cytoplasmic staining localization.
- Positive expression is not restricted to breast apocrine glands.
- Apocrine cells from various sites (e.g., axilla, vulva, eyelid, external auditory canal).
- Non-apocrine glands (e.g., salivary glands, bronchial submucosal glands).
- Other sites: ovary, endometrium, pancreas, ampulla of Vater, prostate.

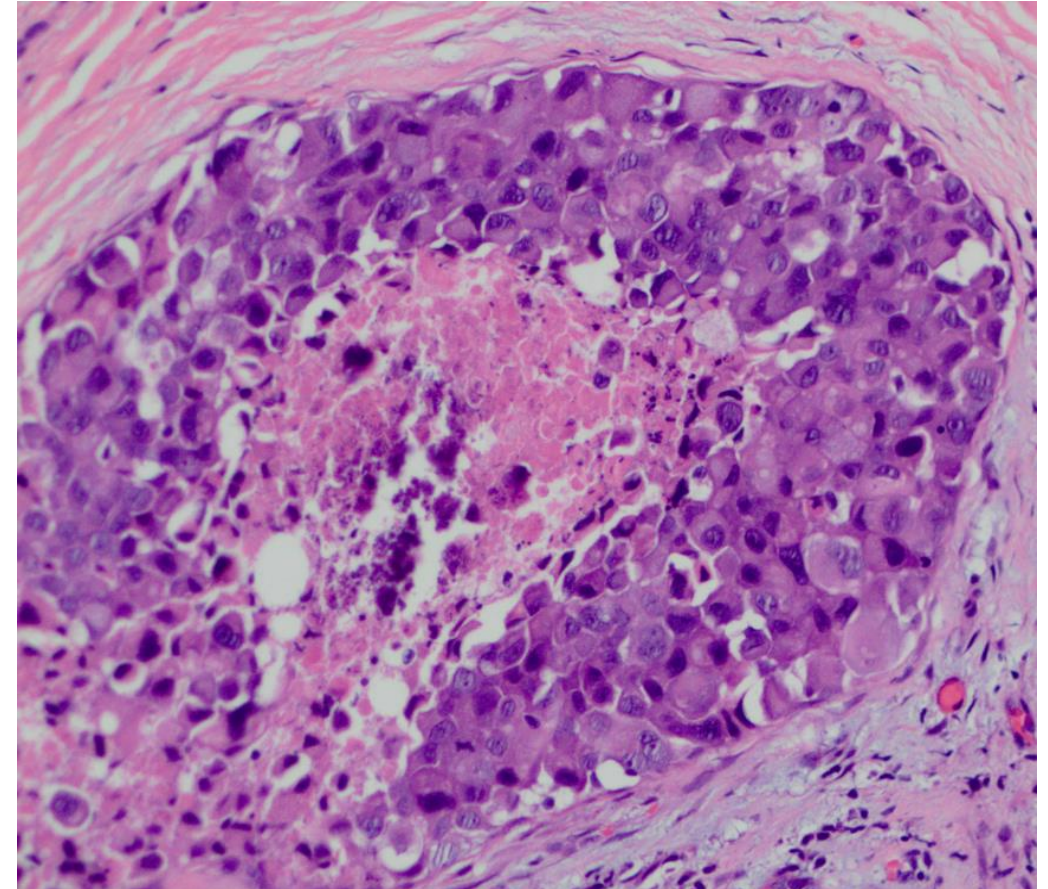
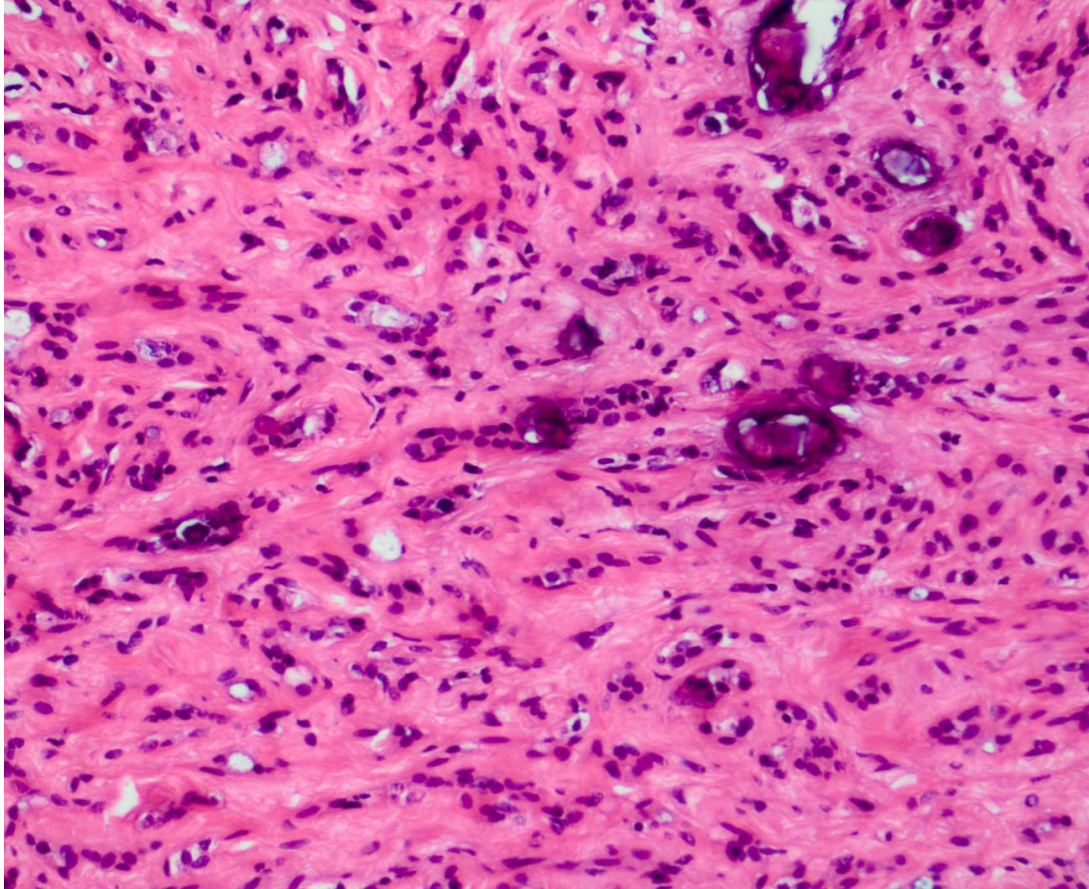
Not only positive in invasive breast cancer with apocrine differentiation, other invasive breast carcinomas can also be positive (50-74%).



Breast calcifications are divided into two primary categories defined by their biochemical composition.

Calcium Phosphate Microcalcifications

- Common
- Non-refractile and non-birefringent
- Stain blue-purple with hematoxylin
- Typically originate from cellular degeneration or necrosis
- Can be present in both benign and malignant lesions

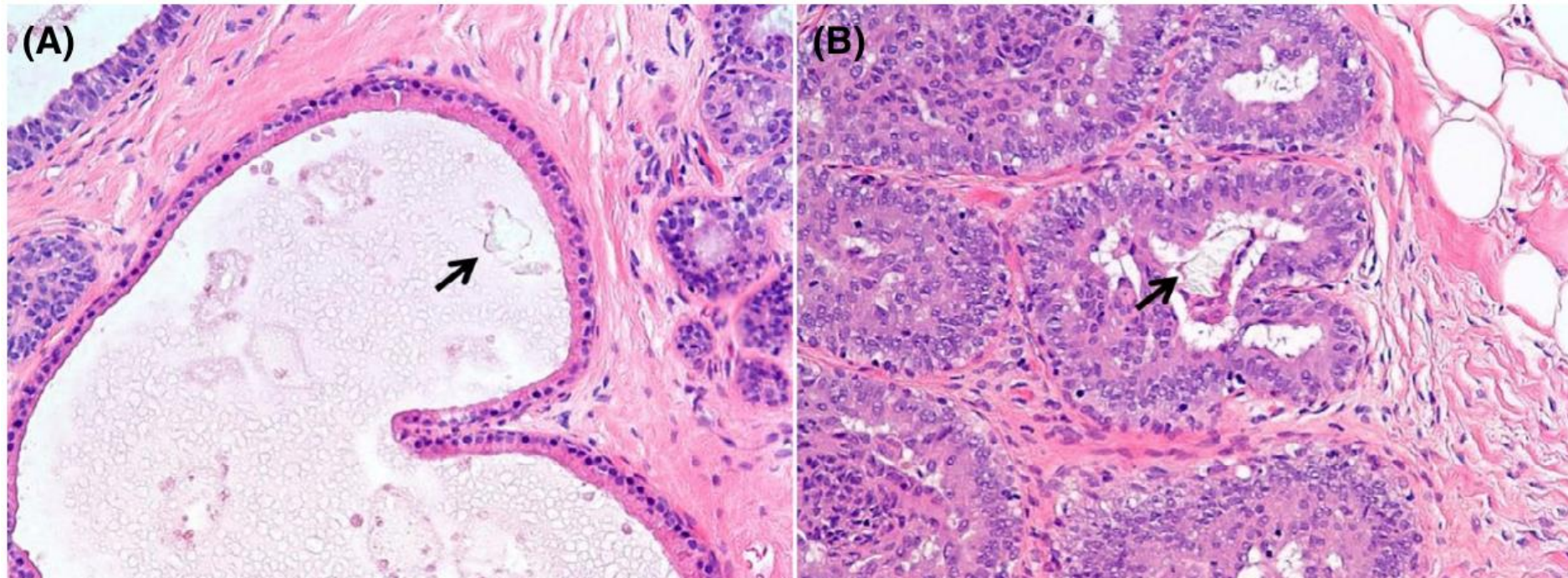


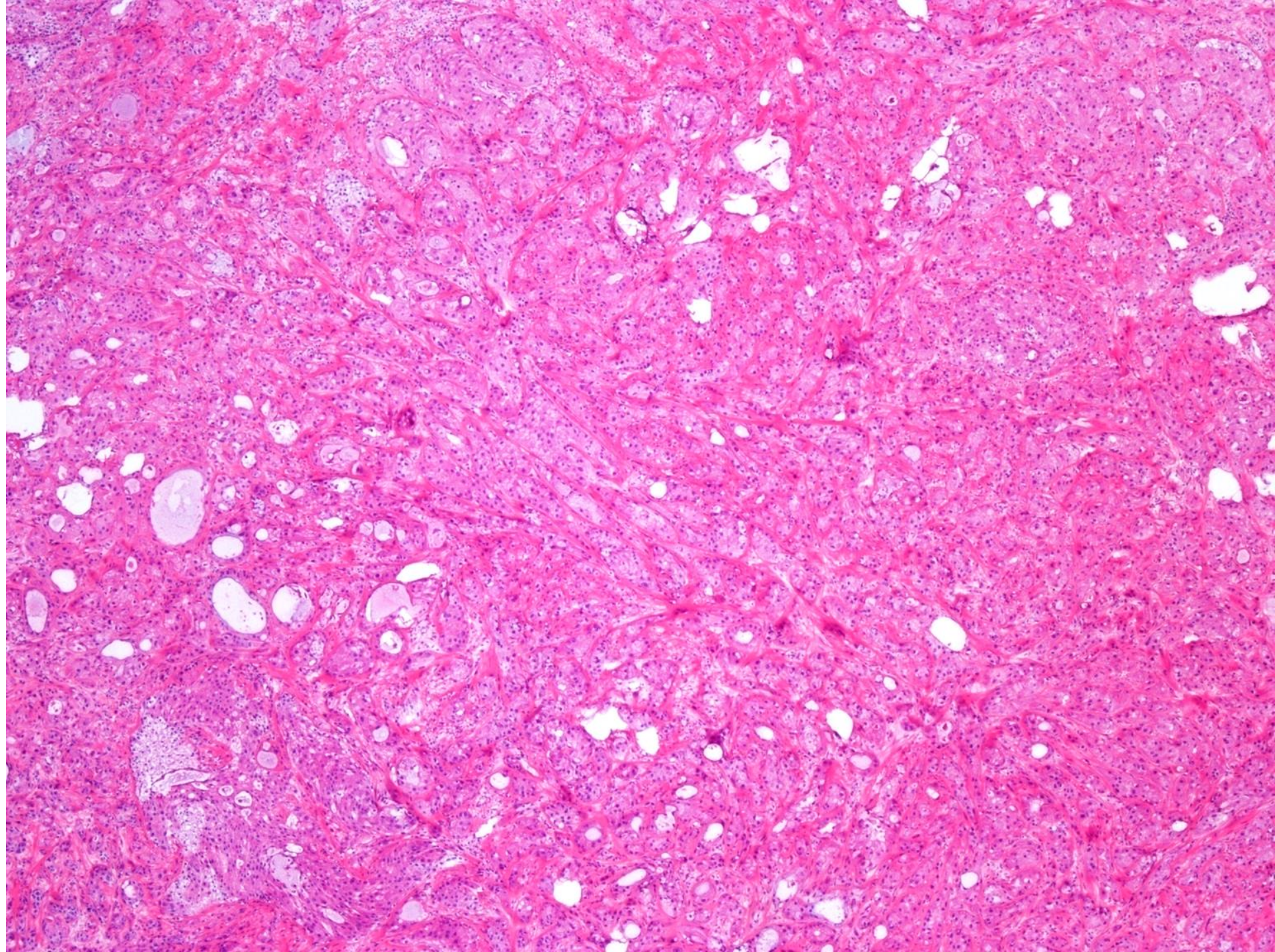
Calcium Oxalate Microcalcifications

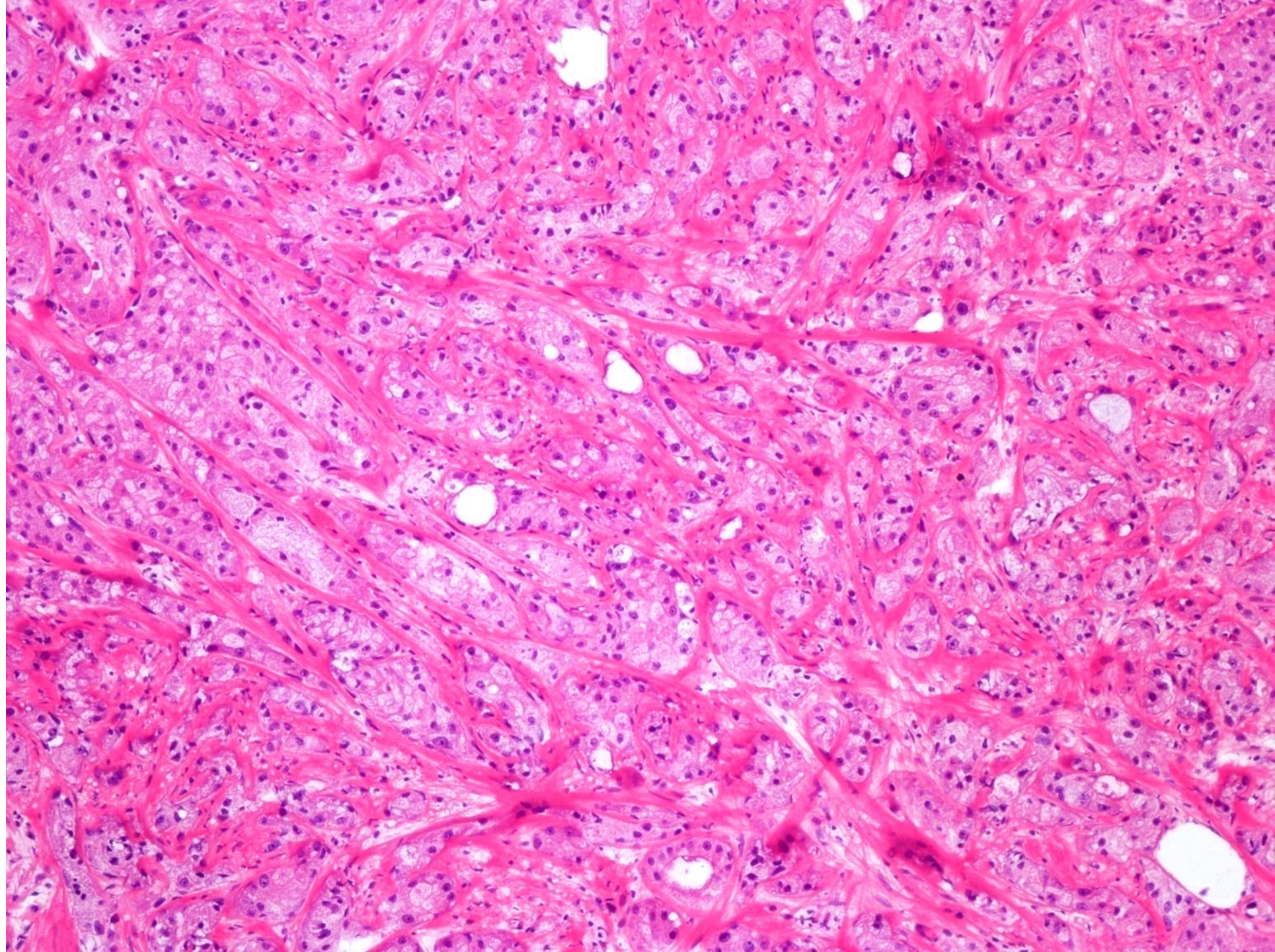
- Refractile and birefringent.
- Difficult to identify under non-polarized light microscopy.
- Associated with apocrine cysts.
- May originate from secretory products.

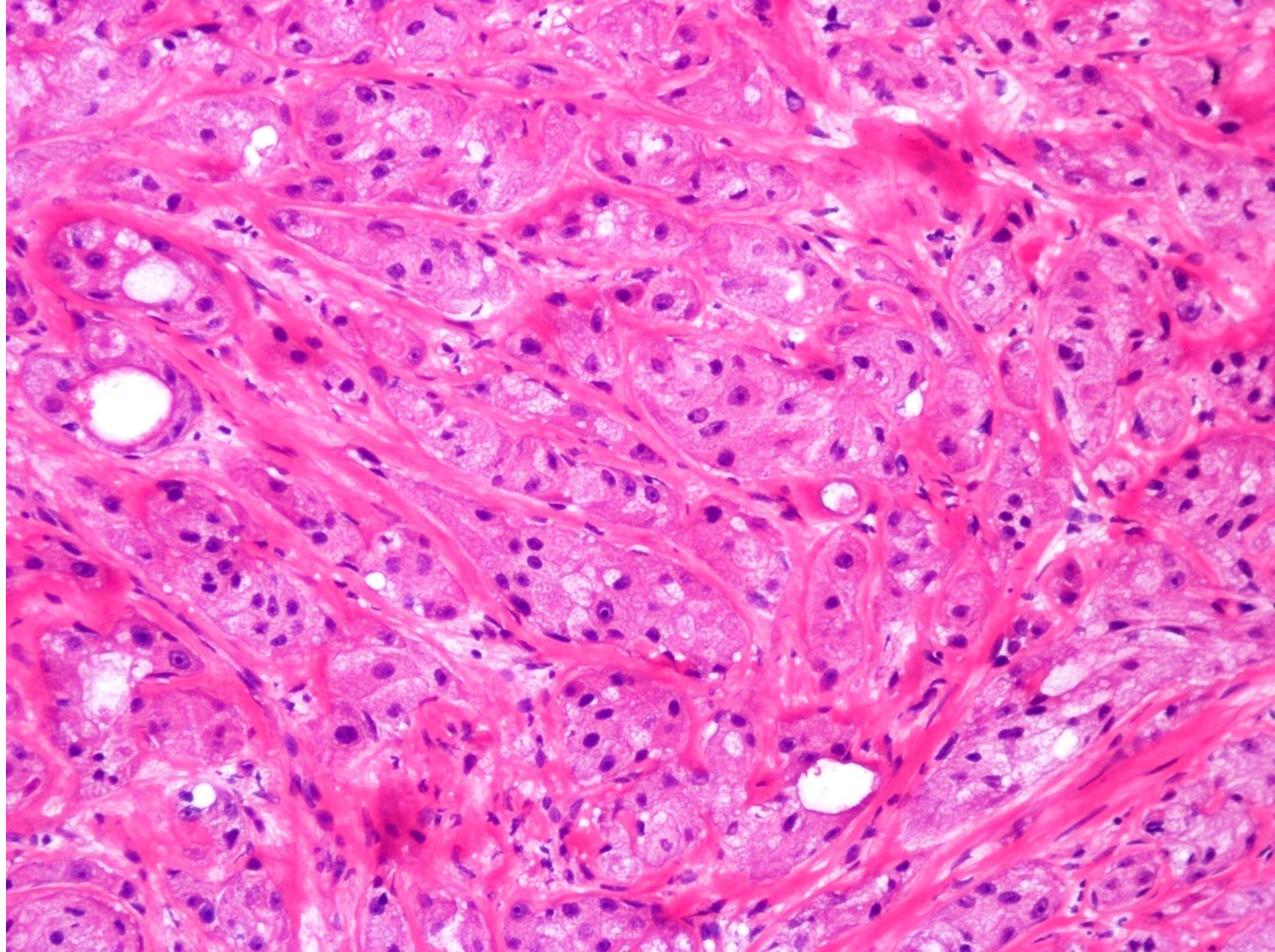
Occurrence

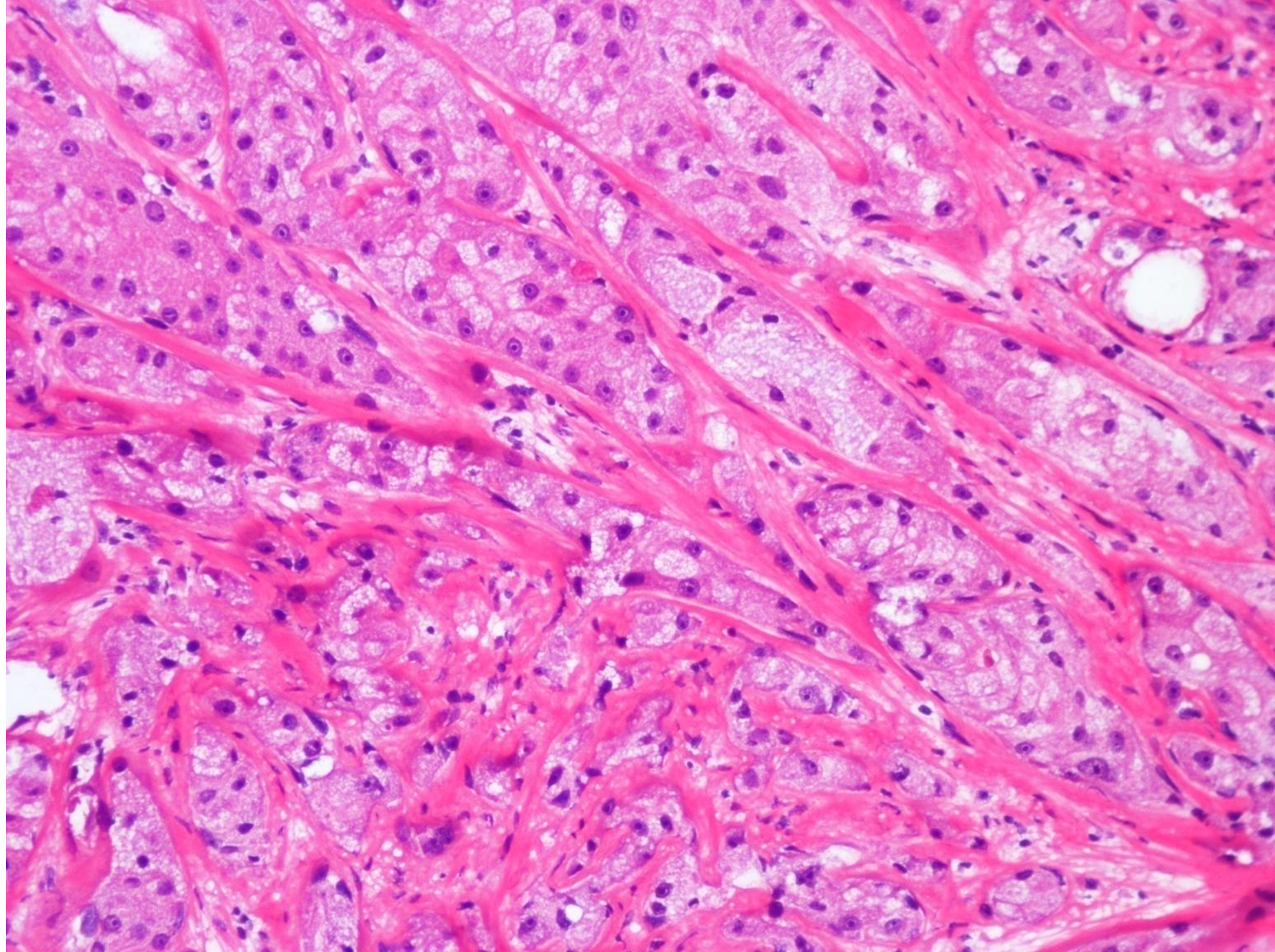
- Typically in non-proliferative lesions: cysts, apocrine lesions, benign ducts
- Among proliferative lesions: only in usual ductal hyperplasia (UDH)
- Rare: chronic granulomatous inflammation, intraductal papilloma, columnar cell change, stromal tissue

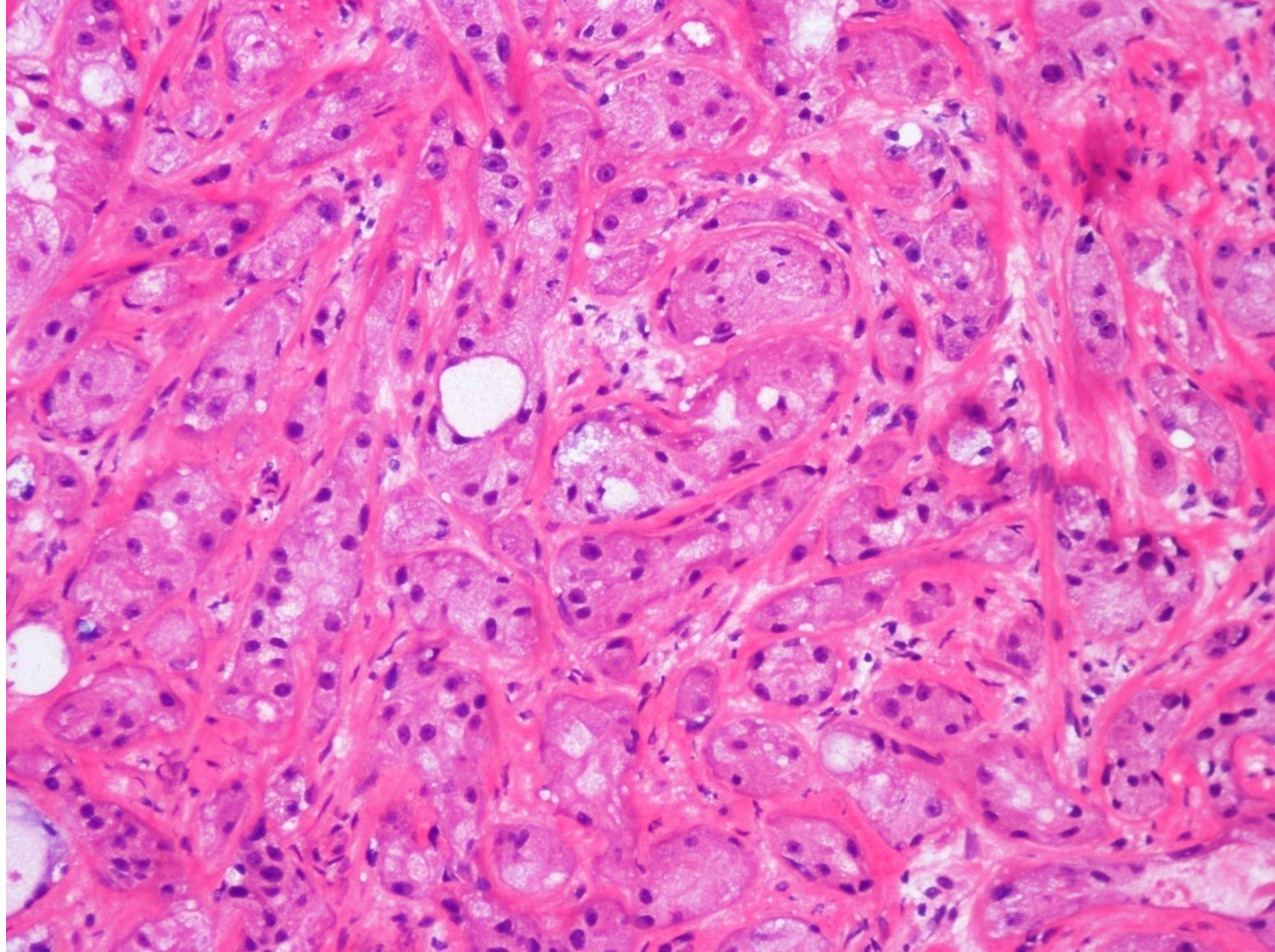




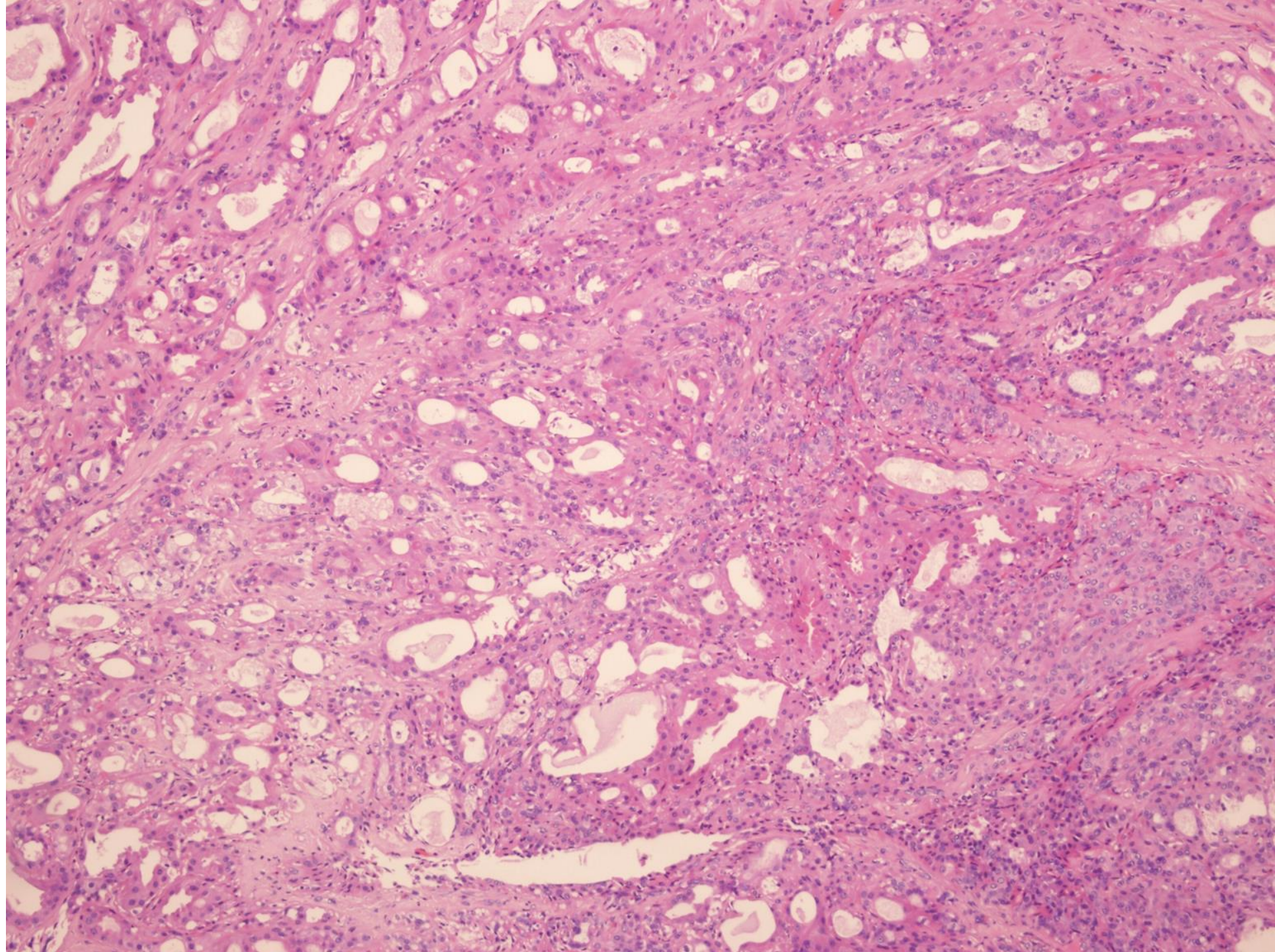


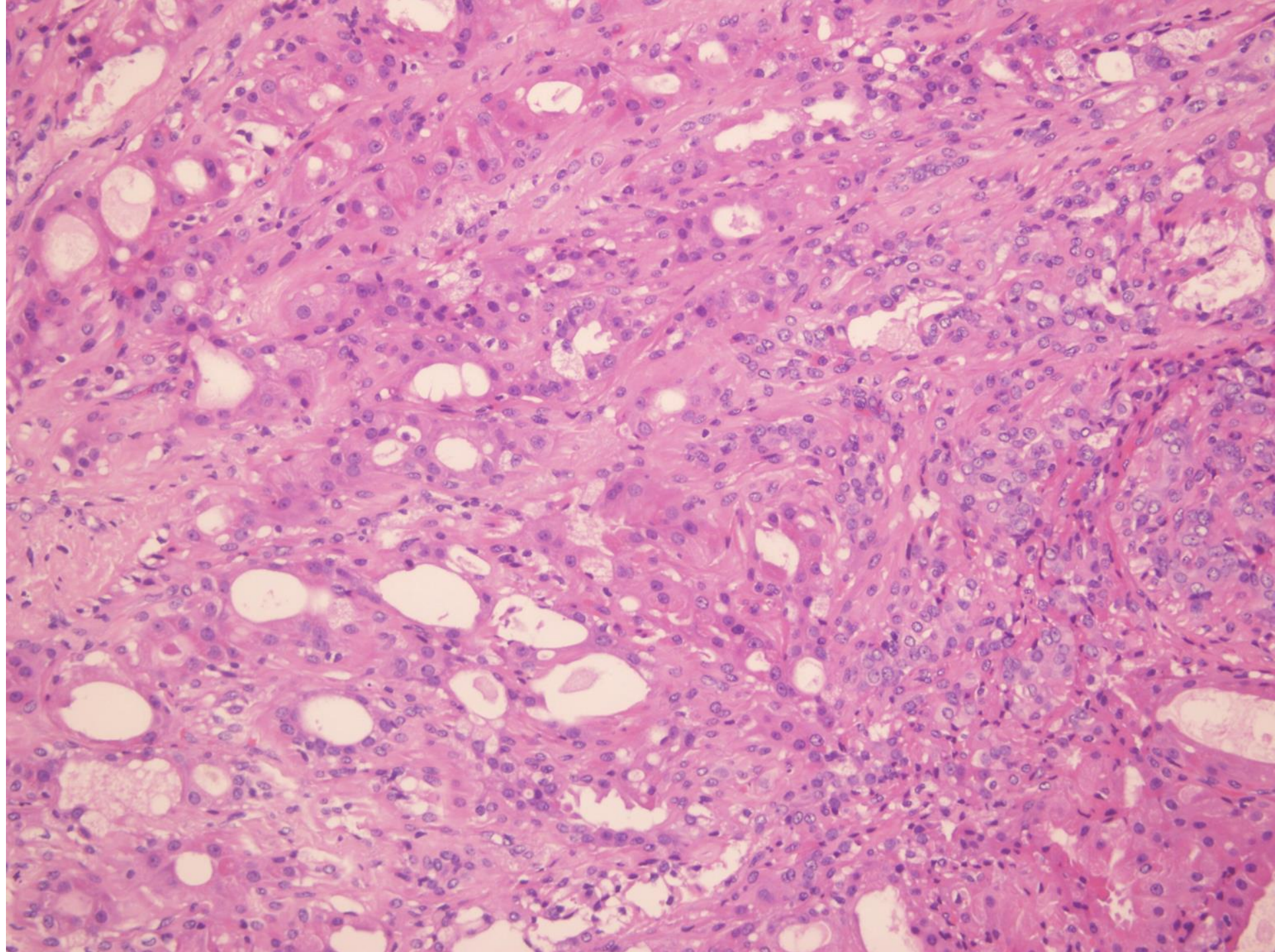


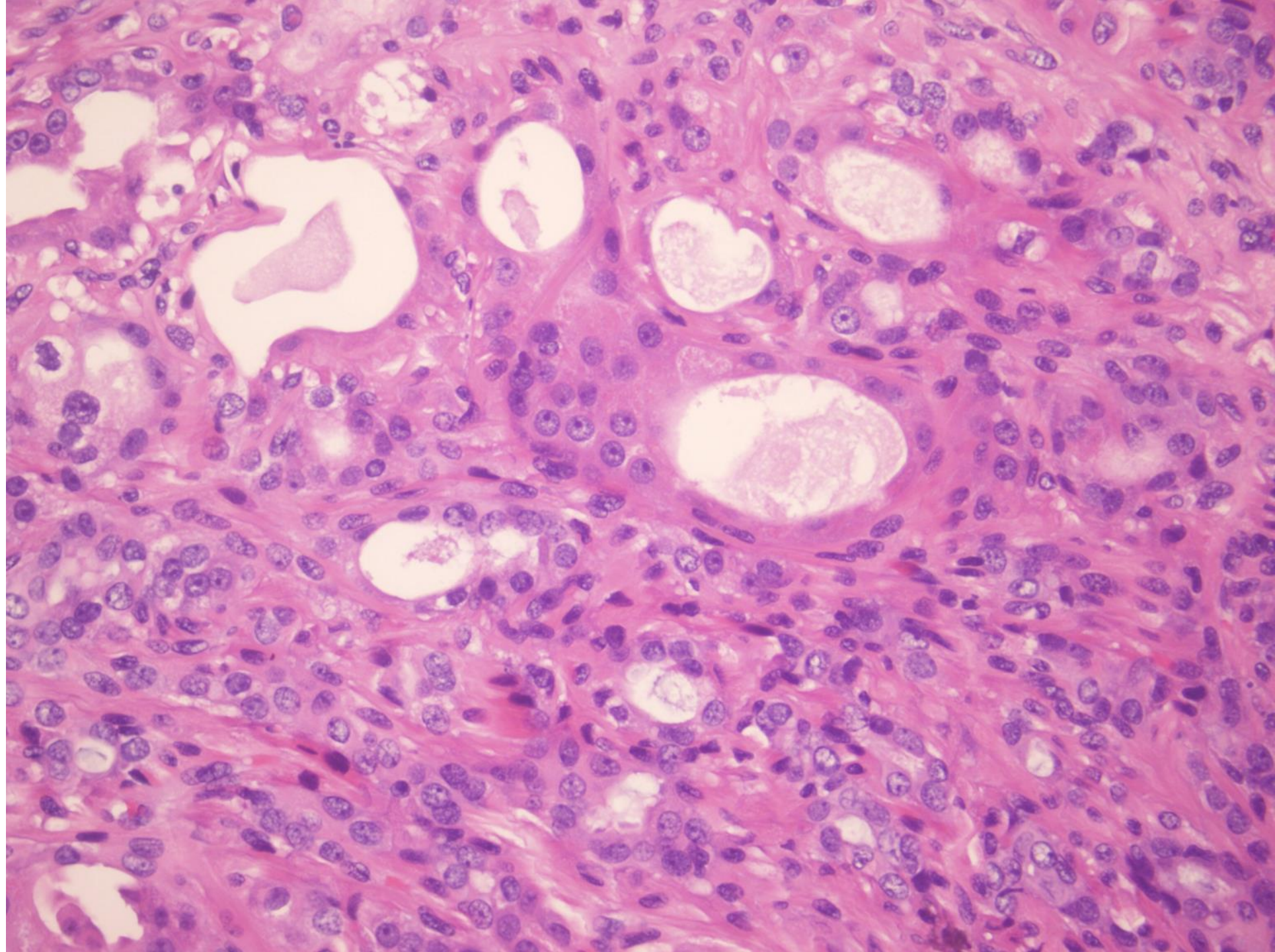


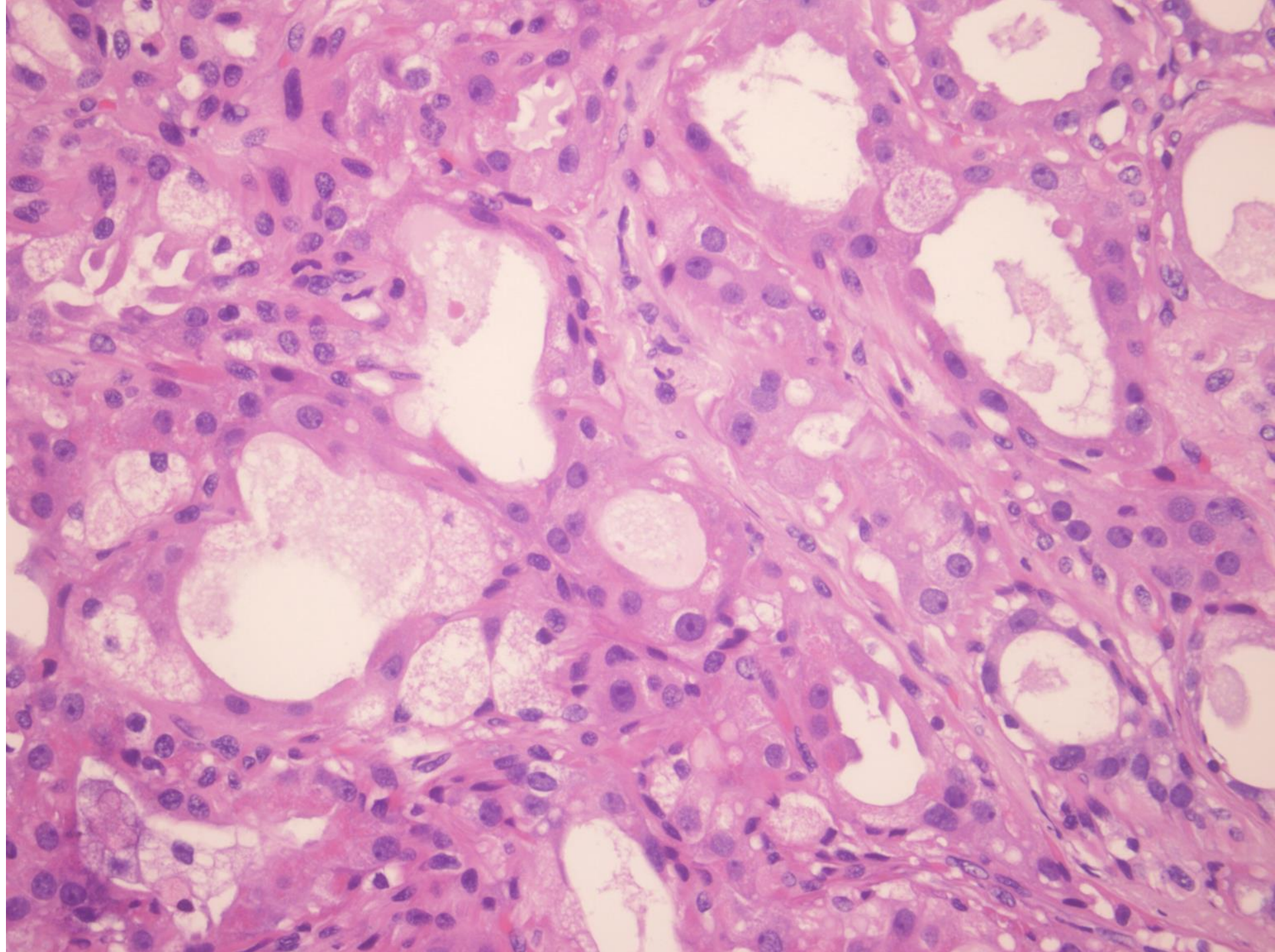


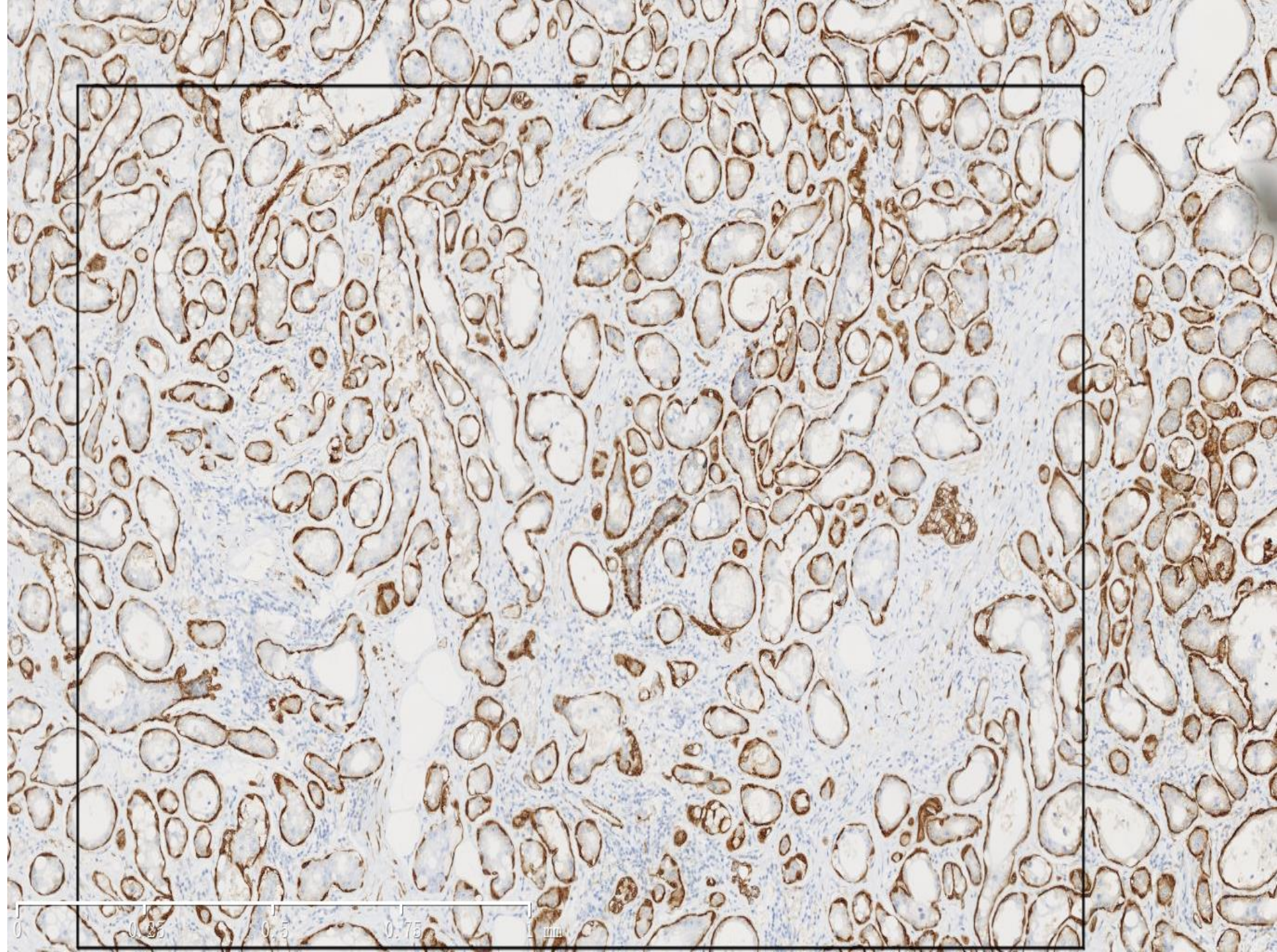
Paraffin Slides

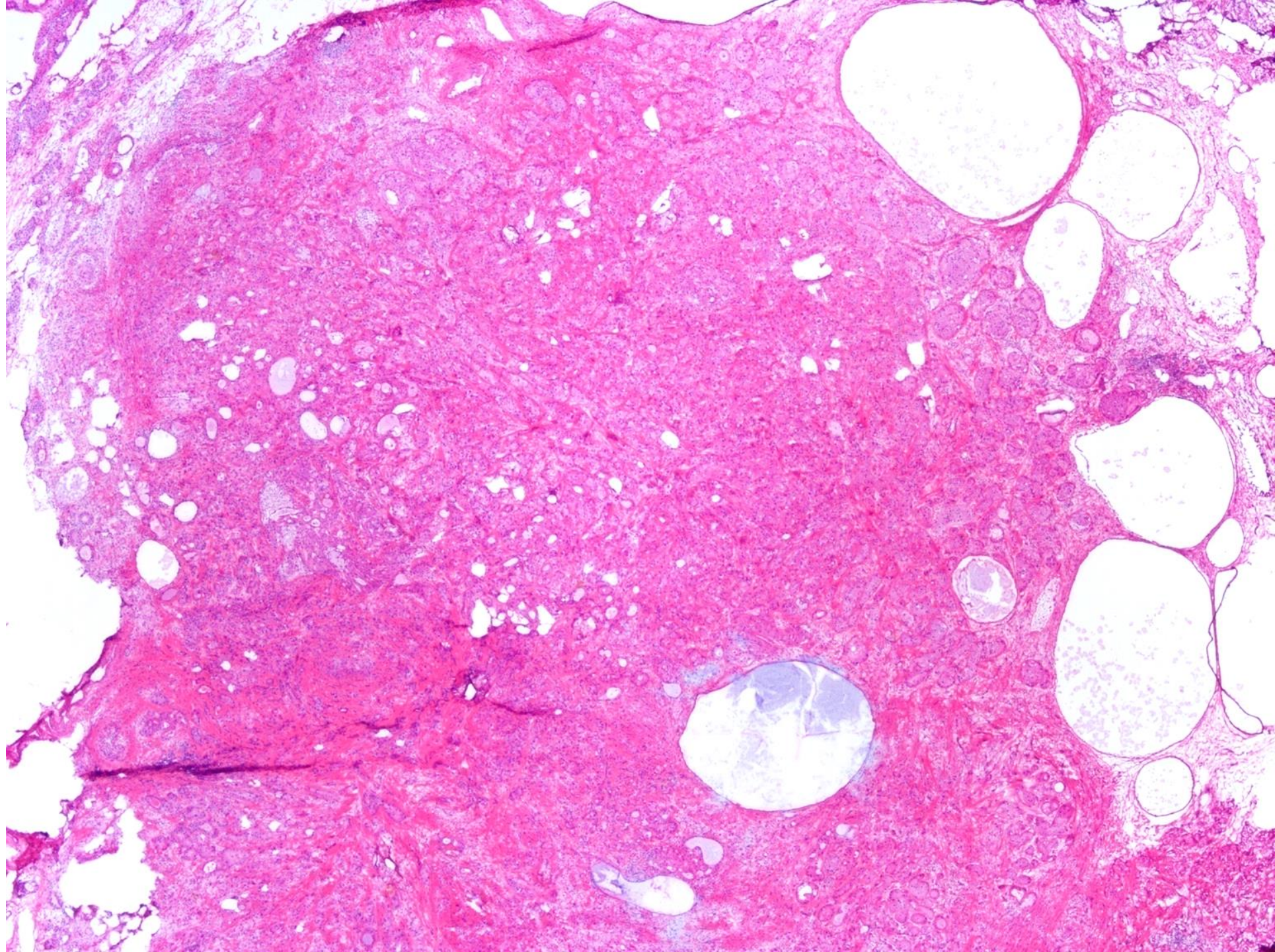




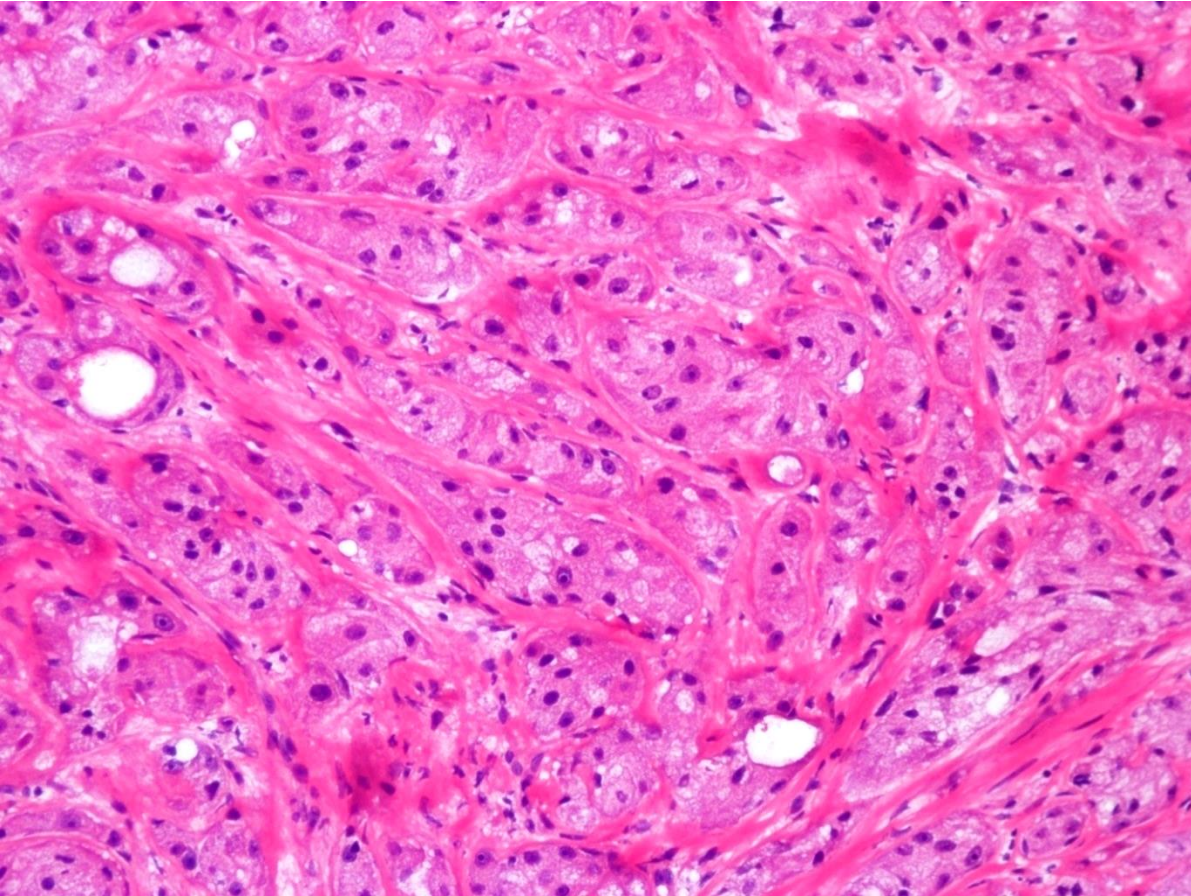




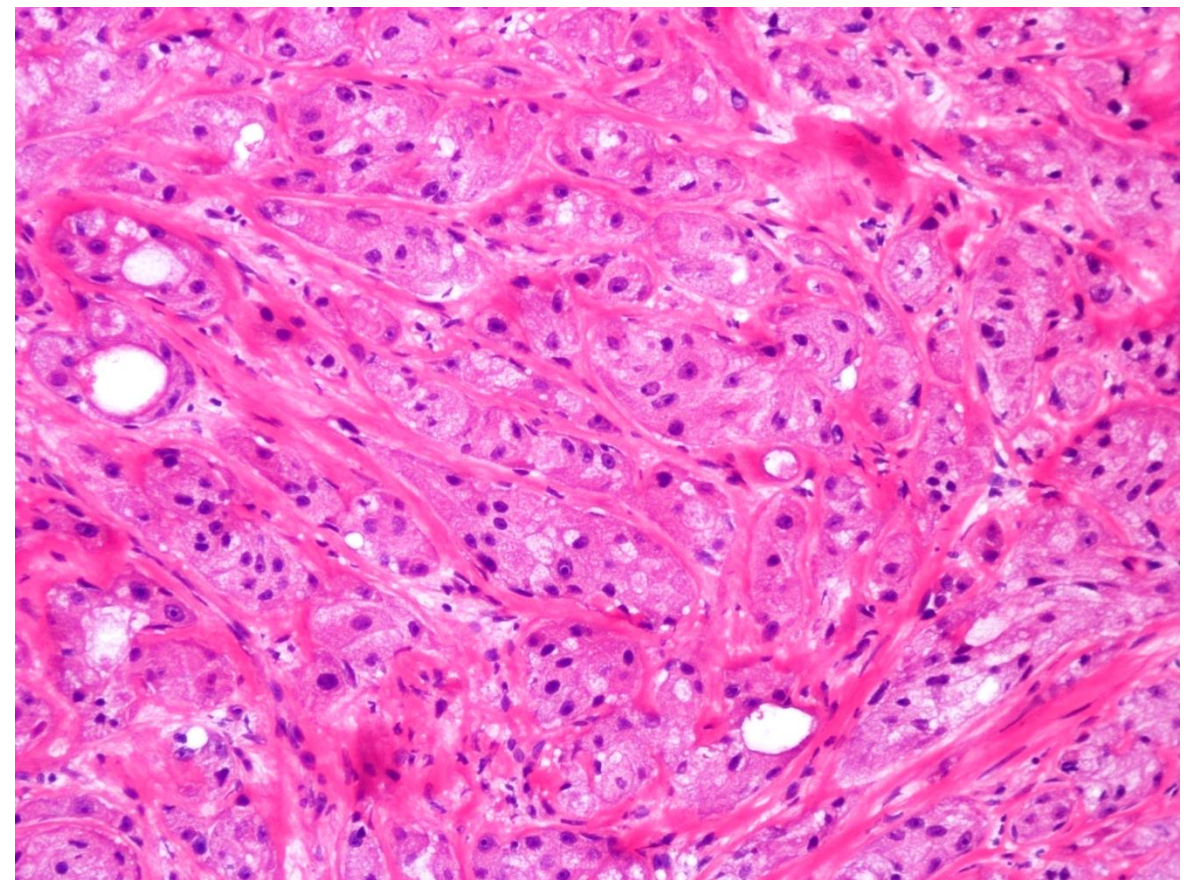
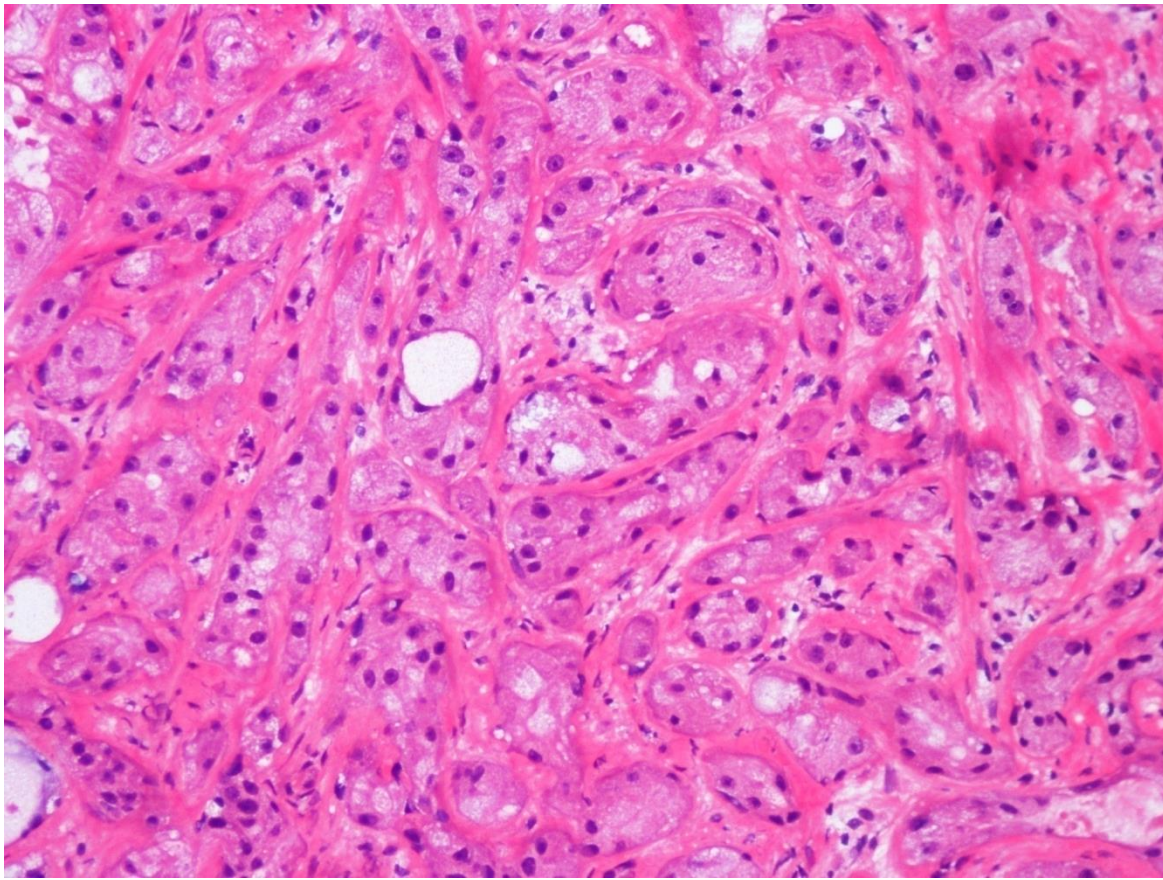




Apocrine adenosis



- sclerosing adenosis, radial scar or complex sclerosing lesion, with prominent apocrine metaplasia
 - may present as a distinct mass
 - Nuclear/nucleolar features may mimic atypia
 - Compressed, distorted and architecturally disordered
 - The myoepithelial cell layer may be attenuated and difficult to visualize
- misdiagnosed as invasive carcinoma



- Low power: lobulo-centric configuration, background of sclerosing adenosis
- Lesion with apocrine metaplasia, architectural disorder
- Lack significant cytologic atypia and mitotic activity
- Epithelial-myoepithelial bilayer (basement membrane-like material)

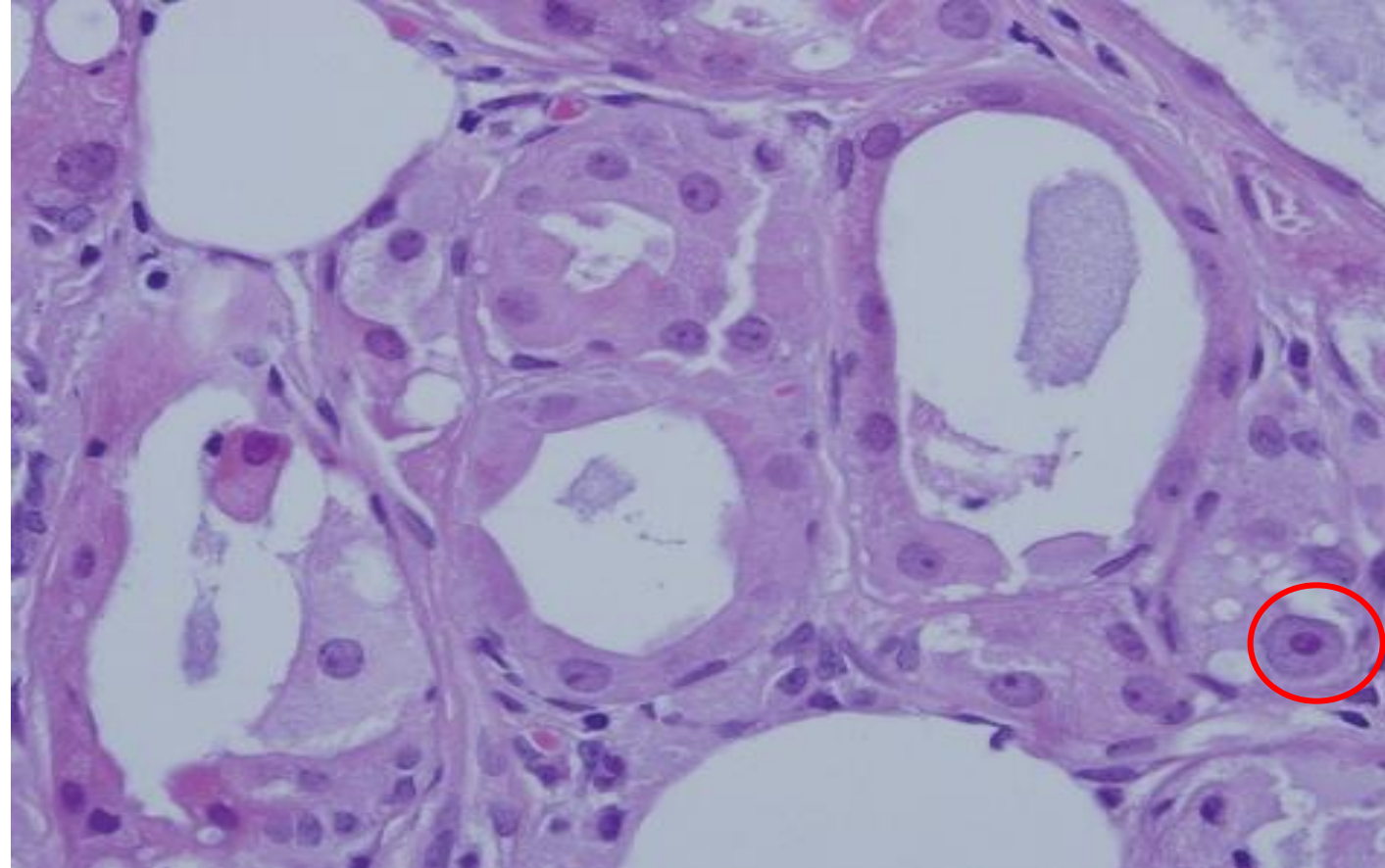
**high caution on frozen
section and await
paraffin sections**

Atypical Apocrine Adenosis

- sclerosing adenosis with apocrine change(apocrine adenosis) with superimposed atypia
 - Crowded ducts without epithelial hyperplasia/stratification, lacking cribriform or micropapillary patterns (architectural atypia and necrosis are not features of this entity)
 - Marked nuclear size variation (≥ 3 -fold variation)
- Distinction from apocrine ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) can be extremely difficult.
 - In cases of diagnostic uncertainty, a diagnosis of atypical apocrine adenosis should be rendered.

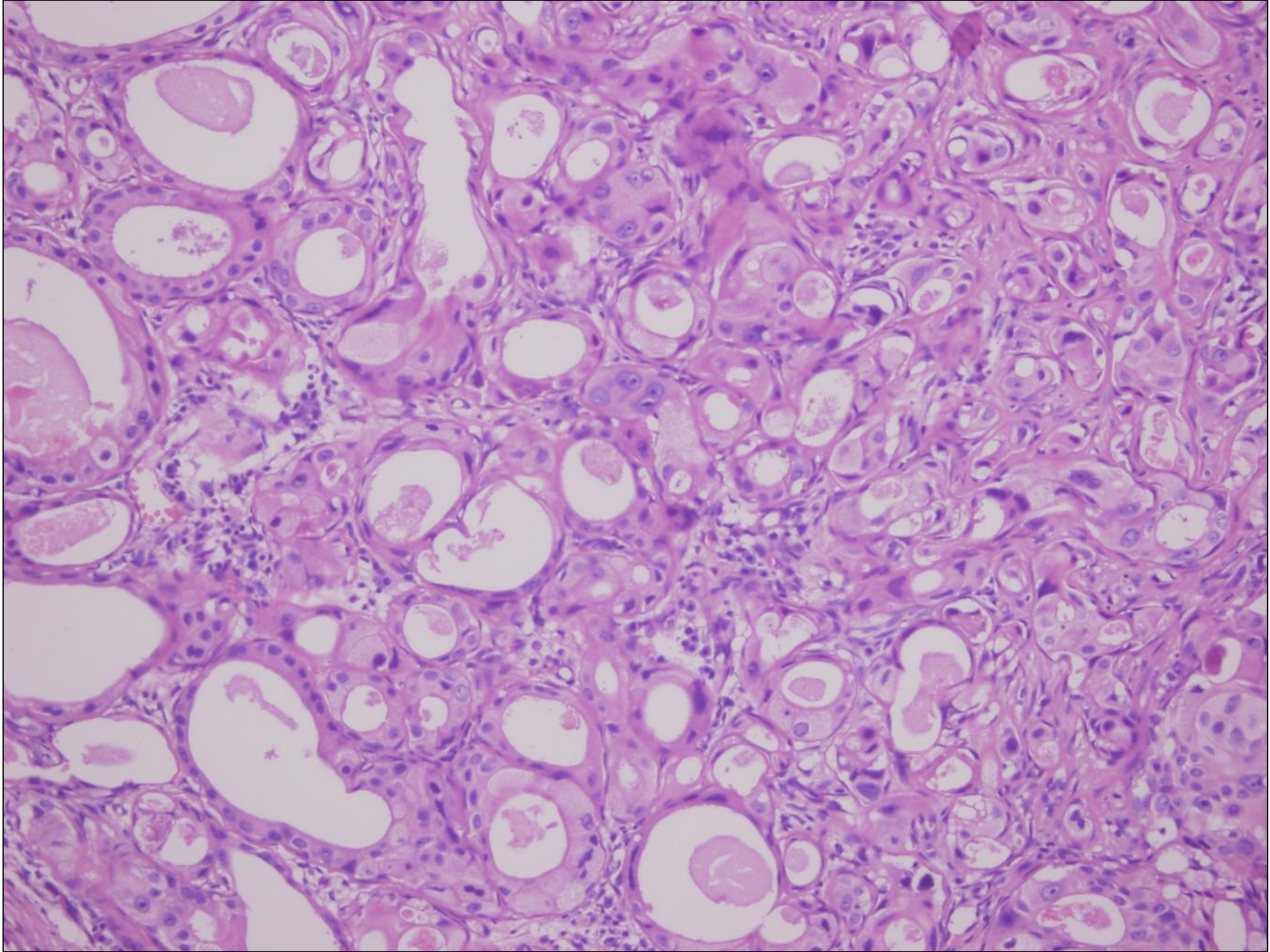
Variation in Nuclear Size

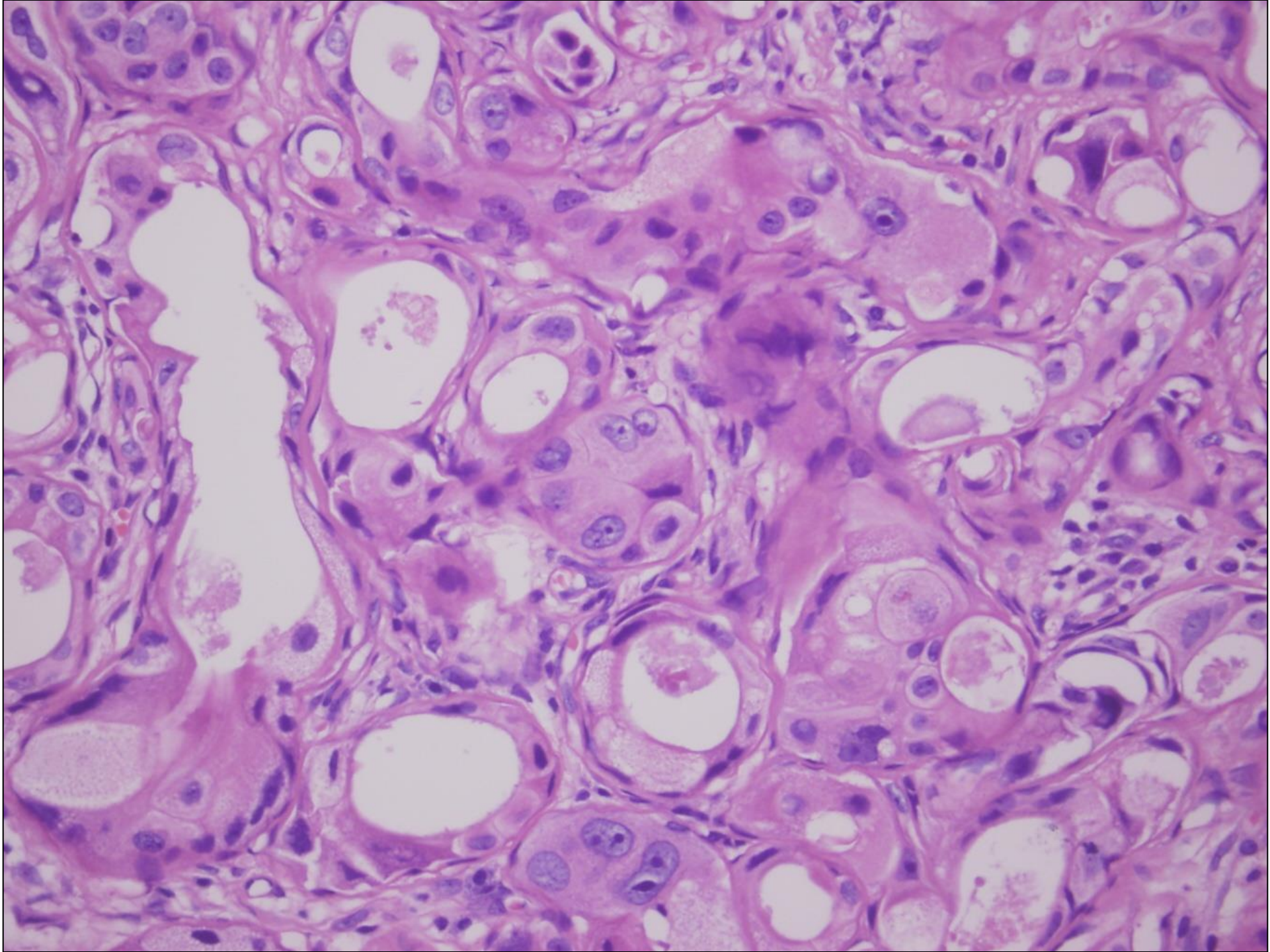
- Refers to the two-dimensional nuclear area.
- **The "3-fold variation rule"**: A 3-fold difference in nuclear size (vs normal apocrine cells) ---- a 1.73-fold difference in diameter.



Prominent nucleoli

- Apocrine metaplasia: typically features small, well-defined nucleoli.
- This finding is common and lacks diagnostic significance.
- **Nuclear enlargement** is a more relevant feature.





Apocrine DCIS vs. **Atypical apocrine adenosis**

- Limited experience.
- Marked nuclear pleomorphism, prominent/multiple nucleoli, and necrosis

---- diagnosis is not difficult.
- Architectural features have limited value in the differential diagnosis.
- In difficult cases, favor a diagnosis of atypical apocrine adenosis.

However, the distinction from apocrine DCIS involving sclerosing adenosis is not clear-cut; this is especially problematic in cases in which there is apocrine DCIS elsewhere in the specimen.

In equivocal cases, a diagnosis of “atypical apocrine adenosis” or “atypical apocrine proliferation involving sclerosing adenosis” is preferable.

Atypical apocrine hyperplasia (AAH)

a proliferation of apocrine cells within a duct space or terminal duct lobular unit with atypical cytological features and/or architectural atypia but insufficient for a diagnosis of DCIS

- **Architectural Atypia:**

Roman bridges, cribriform patterns, micropapillae.

- **Cytologic Atypia:**

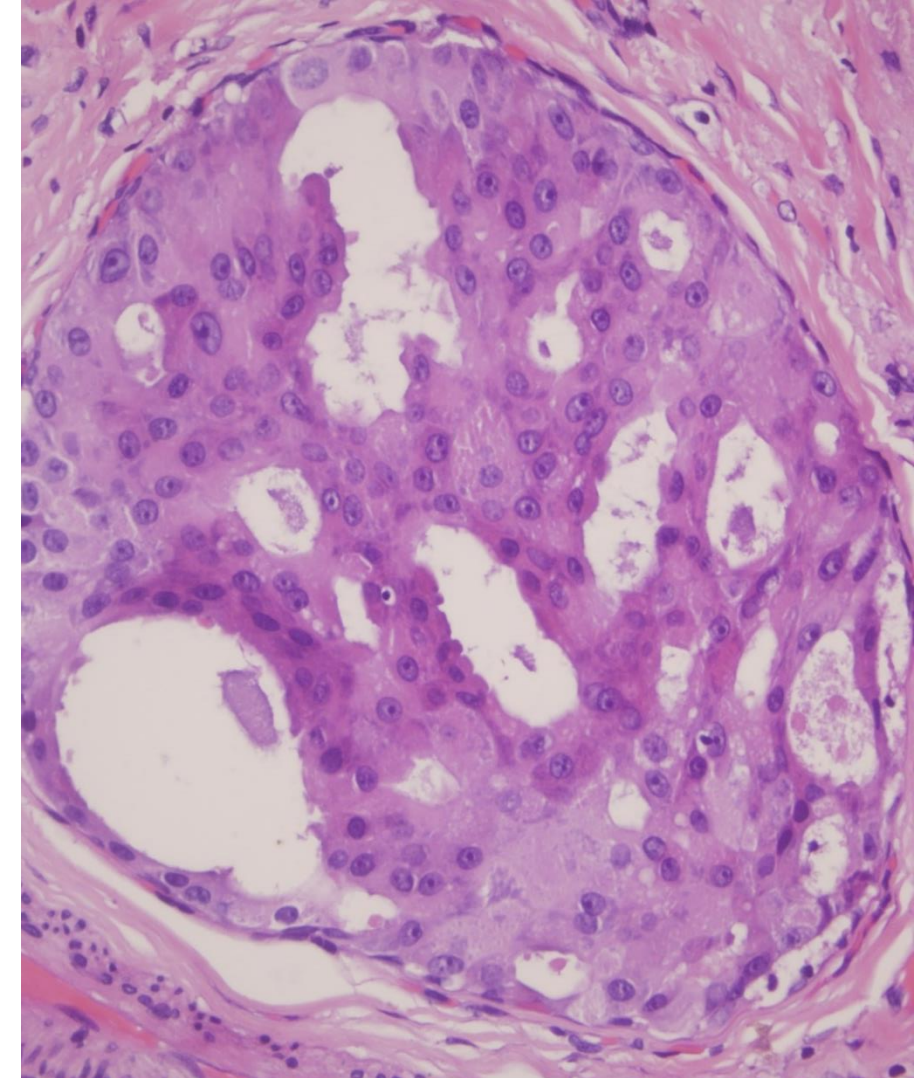
≥3-fold nuclear size variation; prominent/enlarged nucleoli.

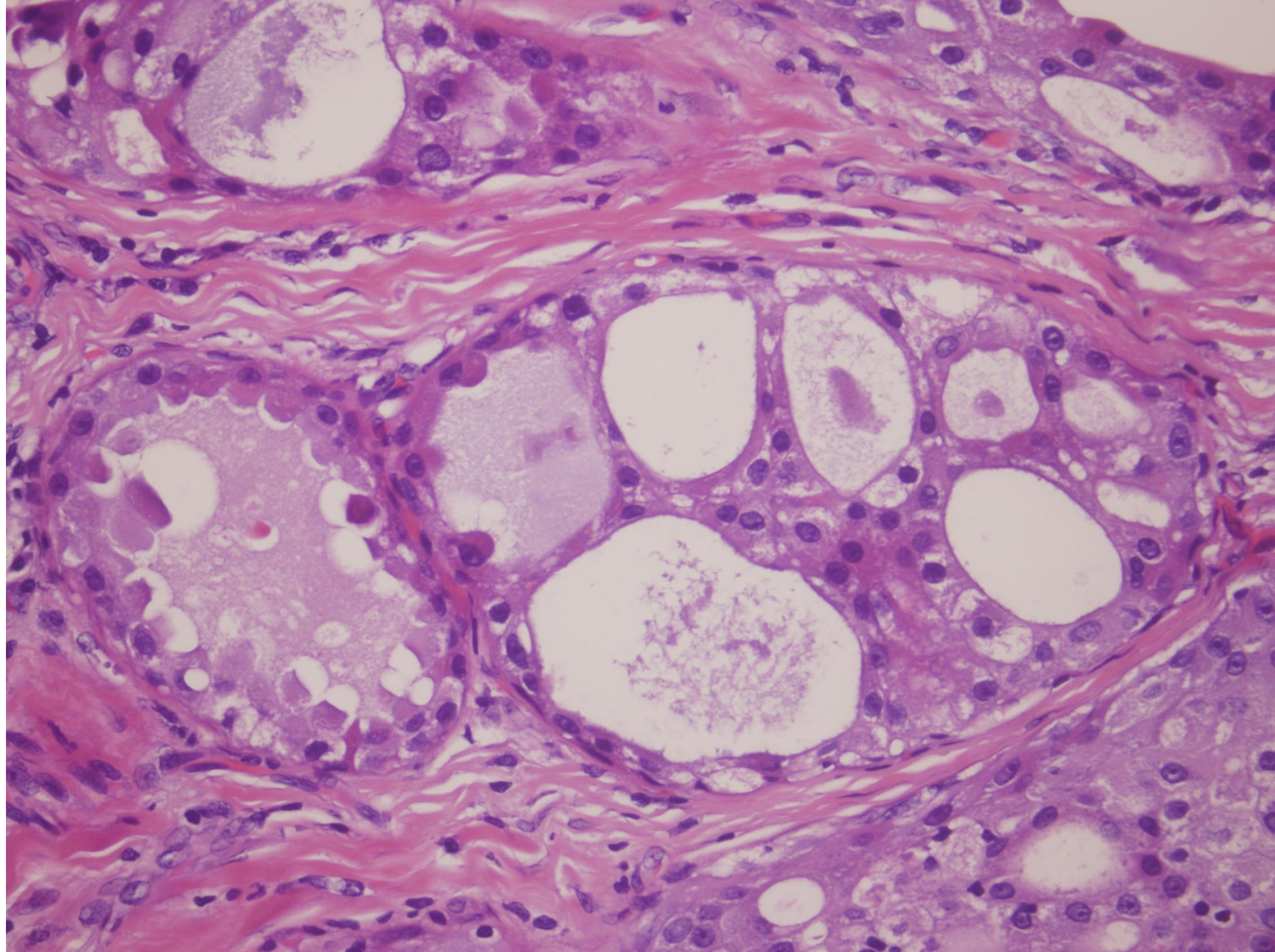
Nuclear rounding, monotony, and uniformity (may not meet the 3-fold rule).

Presence of mitotic figures. **HER2 staining might be helpful**

Tavassoli & Norris defined AAH by the following criteria:

- **Cytologic changes:** ≥3-fold nuclear size variation, prominent nucleoli, increased nuclear stratification
- **Architectural changes:** cribriform patterns or bridging; nuclear pleomorphism may be absent
- **Typically absent:** necrosis, atypical mitoses, periductal inflammation, fibrosis
- **Size criterion:** <2 mm focus





Low-grade Apocrine DCIS

- **Tavassoli and Norris**

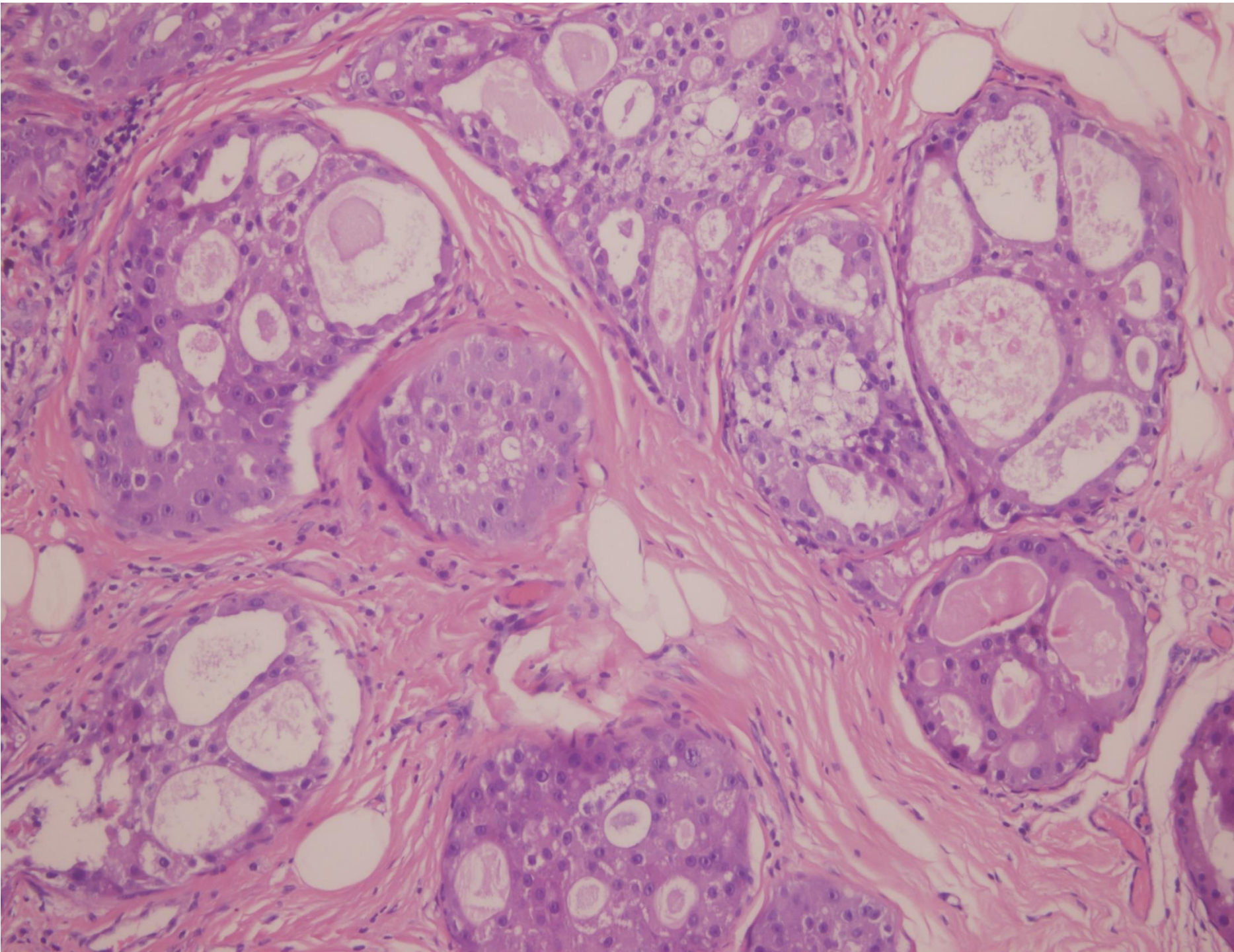
Architecture (**solid, cribriform, micropapillary**)

Nuclear features (**Note: cells may not meet the 3-fold rule; can be monomorphic and uniform**)

2 mm criterion (**involvement of the entire duct cross-section**)

- **O'Malley**

Relies primarily on extent of disease and nuclear features, not architectural pattern.



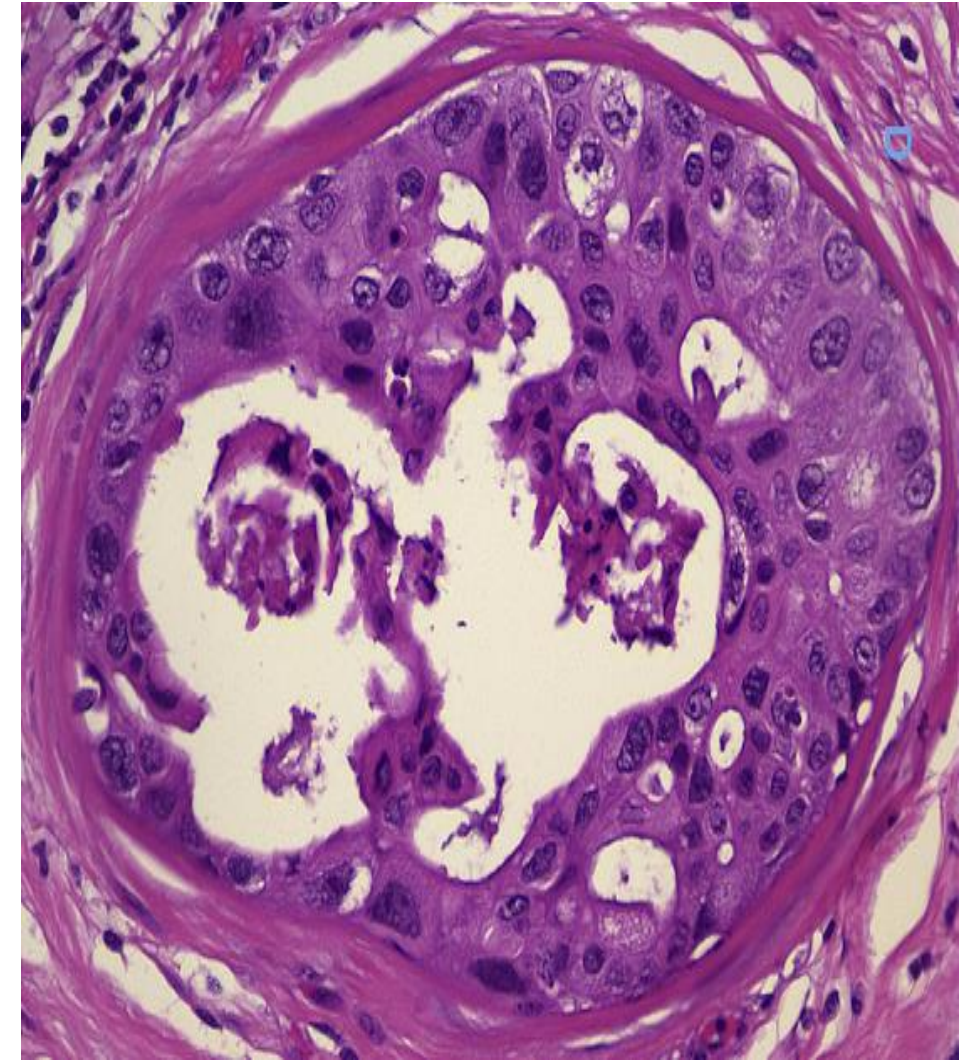
High-grade apocrine DCIS

- Cells exhibit marked atypia

Nuclei show >3-fold variation, distinct nuclear membranes, and coarse chromatin.

Prominently enlarged nucleoli.

- Mitotic figures
- Comedo necrosis
- Periductal fibrosis and inflammation may be present



Diagnosis of high-grade lesions is generally straightforward and does not require a size criterion.

Apocrine Ductal Carcinoma In Situ of the Breast: Histologic Classification and Expression of Biologic Markers

Apocrine DCIS requires a distinct grading system from conventional DCIS, due to its unique cytologic features.

Nuclear Grading

	Nuclear size	Pleomorphism	Nucleoli
Grade 1	Small to moderate	Inconspicuous	Single, prominent
Grade 2	Small to moderate	Moderate	Multiple, prominent
Grade 3	Moderate to large	Marked	Multiple, prominent

- Nuclear size (vs. benign apocrine cells): Small: 1x-2x; Moderate: 3x-4x; Large: $\geq 5x$
- With overall mild-moderate pleomorphism, the grade is 2, regardless of occasional large/multinucleated cells.

- **Low-grade Apocrine DCIS:** nuclear grade 1-2; no necrosis (In practice: mild-moderate cytologic atypia without necrosis.)
- **High-grade Apocrine DCIS:** nuclear grade 3; necrosis present
- **Intermediate-grade Apocrine DCIS:** intermediate between low and high-grade (Examples: moderate nuclear pleomorphism WITH necrosis, OR grade 3 nuclei WITHOUT necrosis)

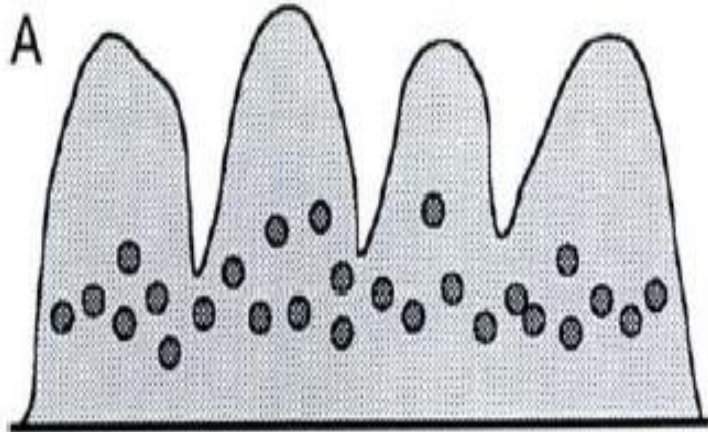
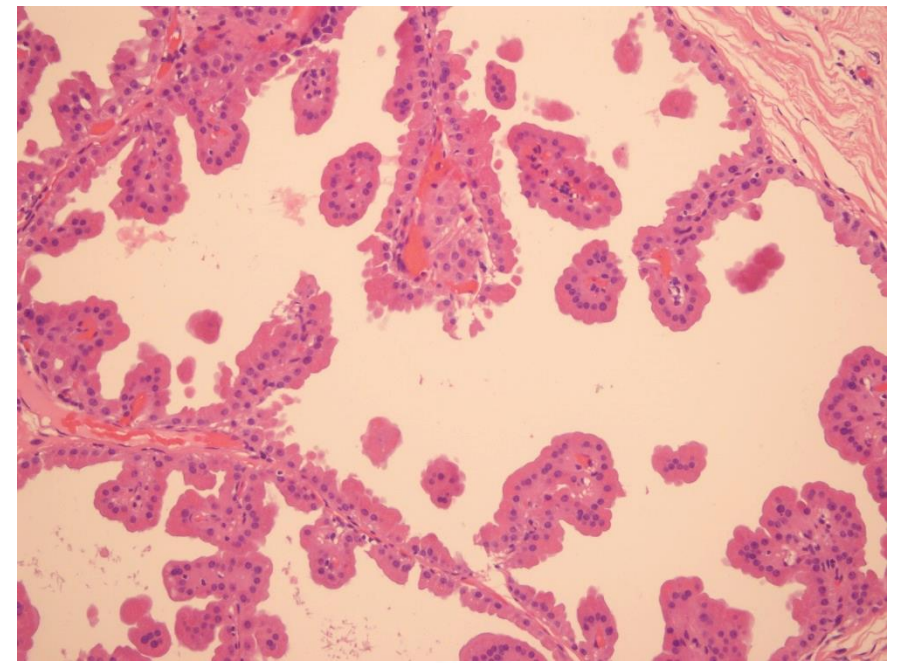
● **Grade apocrine DCIS when possible**

● **Assess nuclear pleomorphism in most prominent atypical area**

● **Necrosis not required for diagnosis**

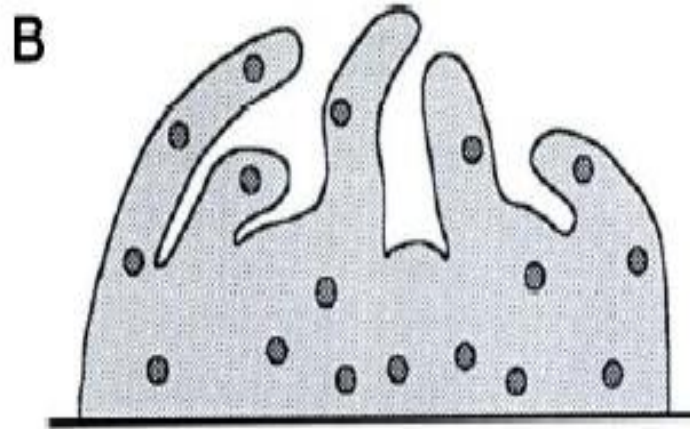
Papillary apocrine change

- Apocrine epithelium lining cysts may show varying degrees of micropapilla and papilla formation
- In a large series with extensive follow-up, Page et al. classified papillary apocrine change as simple, complex, highly complex



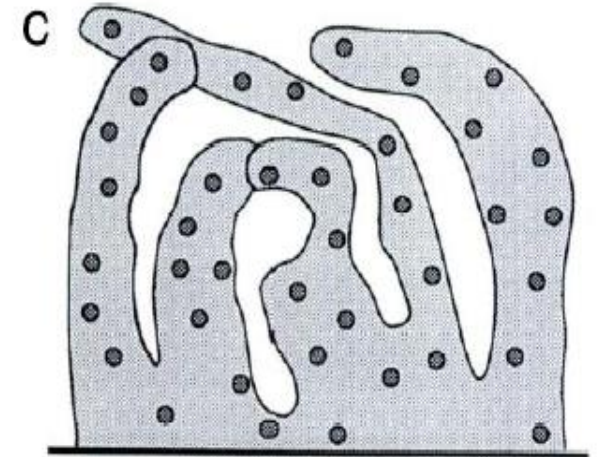
SIMPLE

The projections show no tendency to fuse.



COMPLEX

Taller, slender projections with a tendency to fuse



HIGHLY COMPLEX

Projections extending to the lumen center (2-3 cells wide) with focal anastomosis (≥ 2 contact points)

Table 1 Prevalence of PAC and associated biopsies	
	All biopsies with
Simple	20.3% (n = 2,102)
Complex	6.5% (n = 673)
Highly complex	1.0% (n = 101)
All biopsies	100% (n = 10,357)

^a Atypical hyperplasia, lobular, or ductal pat

Highly complex lesions frequently hyperplasia, requiring thorough sa

Table 2 Relative breast cancer risk of PAC ^a		
	All patients with PAC (95% CI)	All patients with PAC but without AH [95% CI]
Simple	1.39 ^b (1.1–1.8) (n = 1,169)	1.29 (0.96–1.7) (n = 1,111)
Complex	1.30 (0.77–2.24) (n = 384)	0.90 (0.47–1.7) (n = 355)
Highly complex	3.14 ^c (1.3–7.6) (n = 60)	2.0 (0.77–7.4) (n = 45)

^a Compared to analogous women from the Third National Cancer Survey.

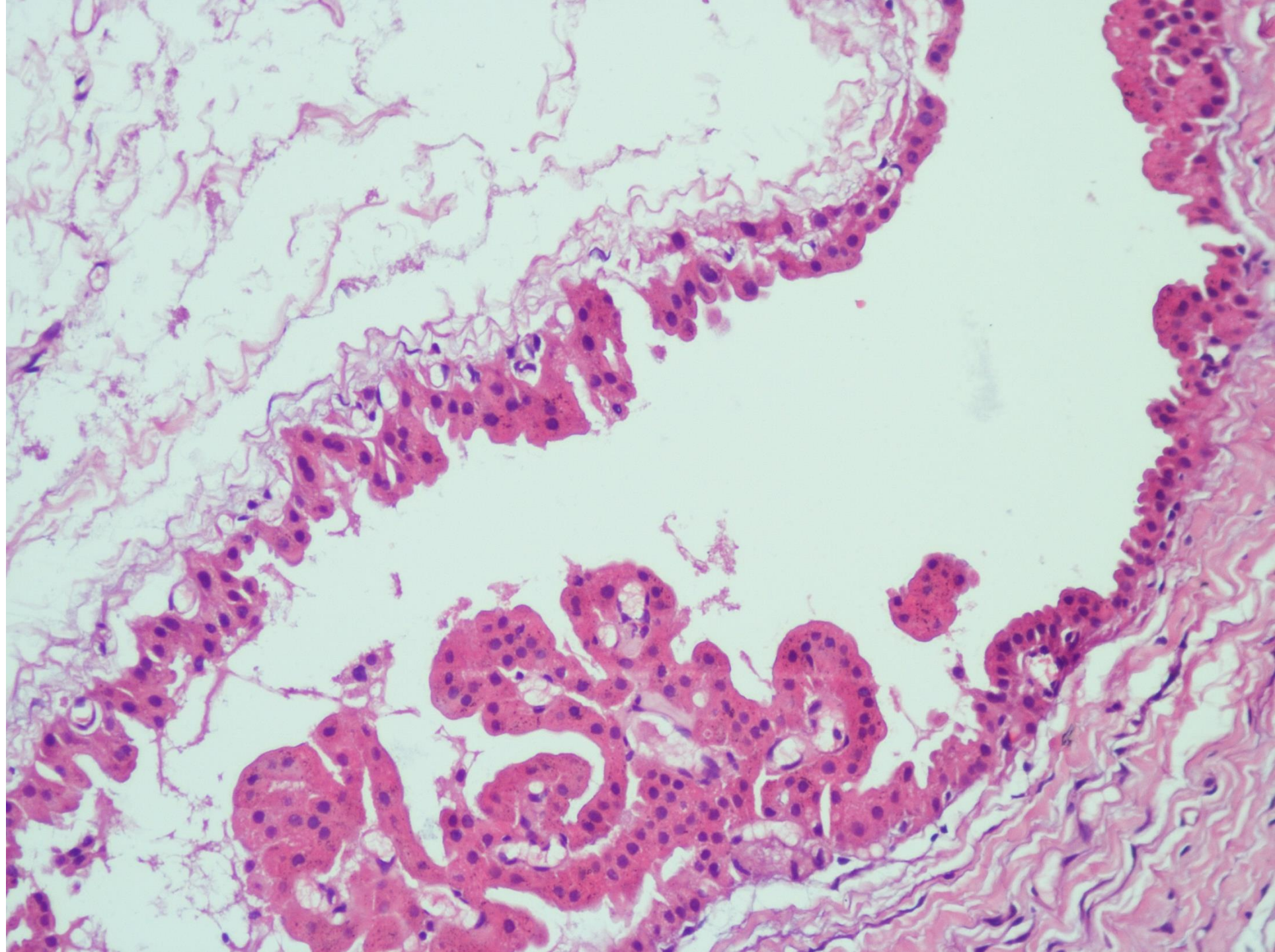
^b P = 0.02.

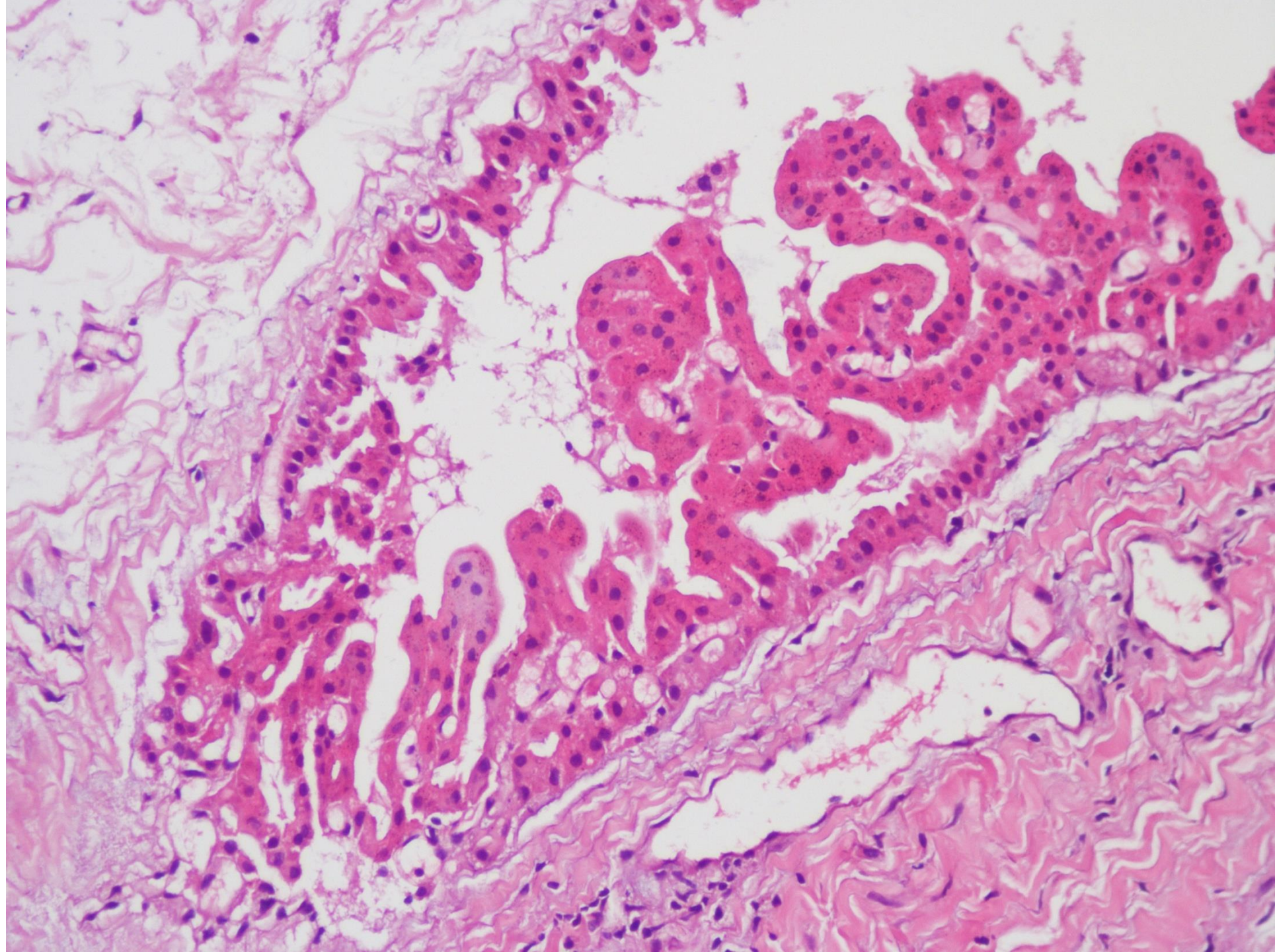
^c P = 0.007.

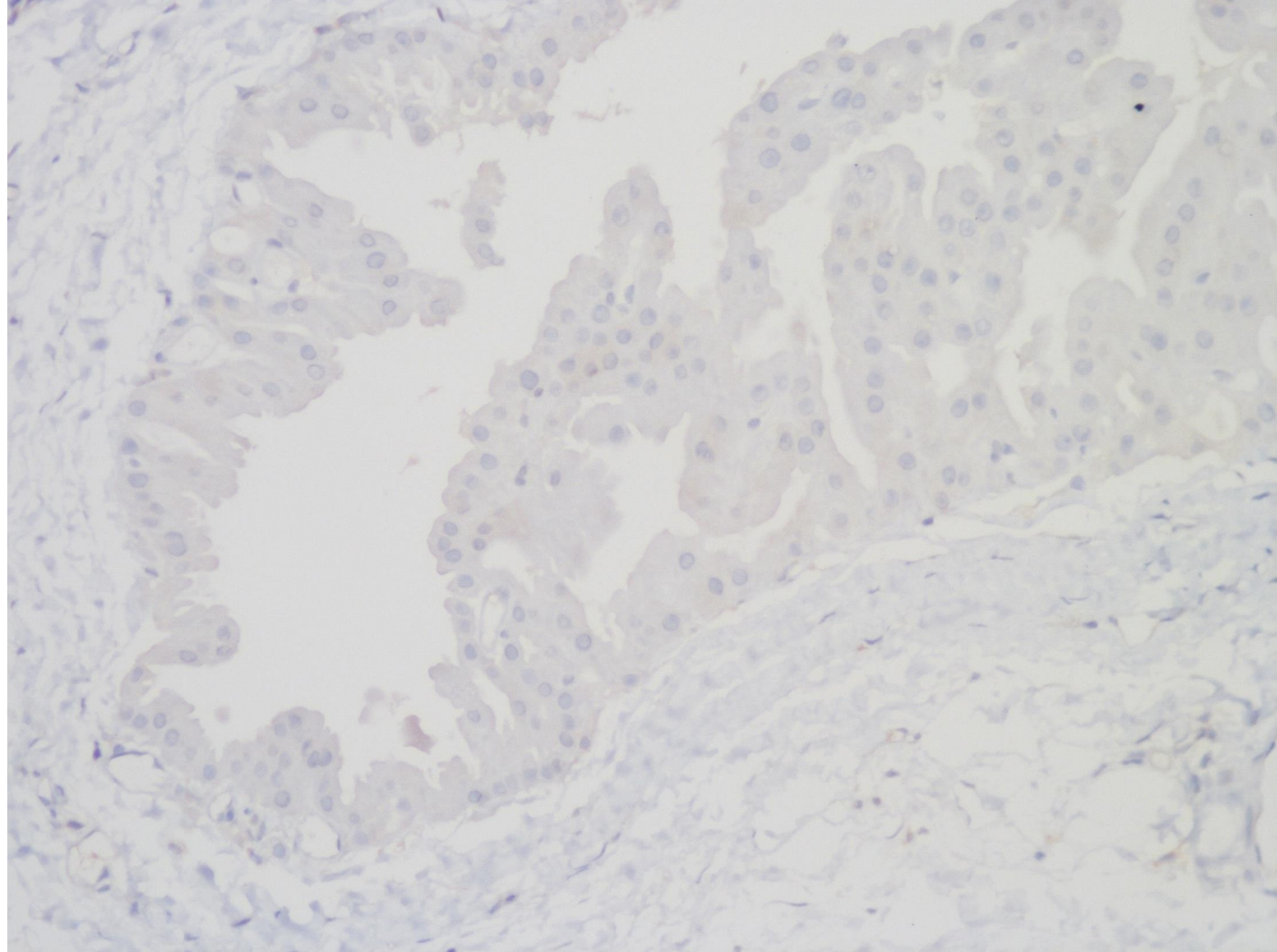
PAC does not increase the relative risk of breast cancer

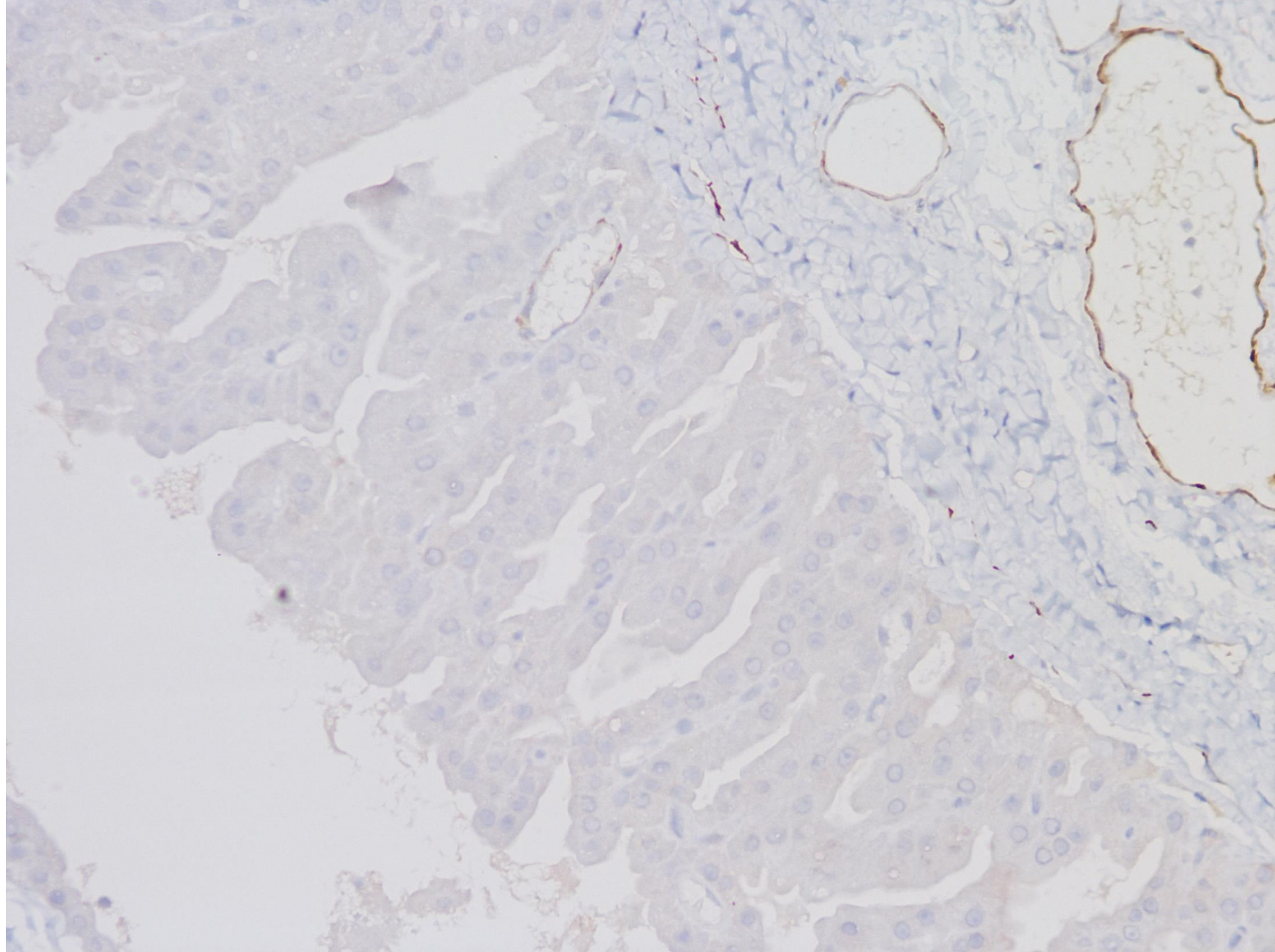
- no biological basis for distinguishing these variants of papillary change
- recognition of the highly complex variant is important to avoid misinterpretation as atypical or in situ change.

- **Received gray-red and gray-yellow tissue measuring $4 \times 3 \times 2$ cm. Sectioning reveals a 1.5 cm cyst containing milky fluid.**



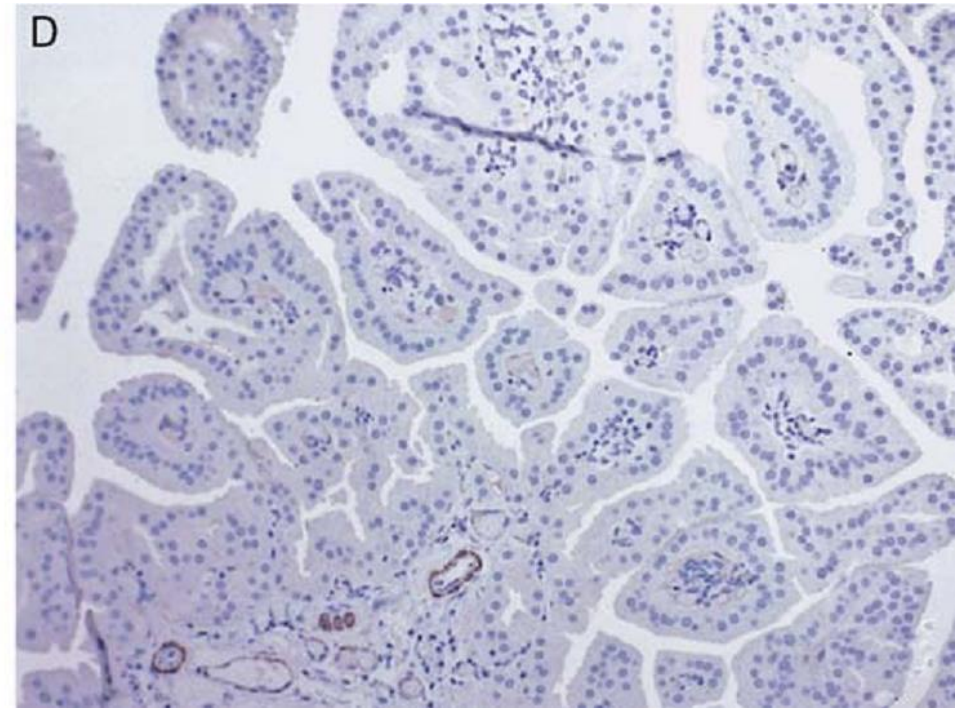
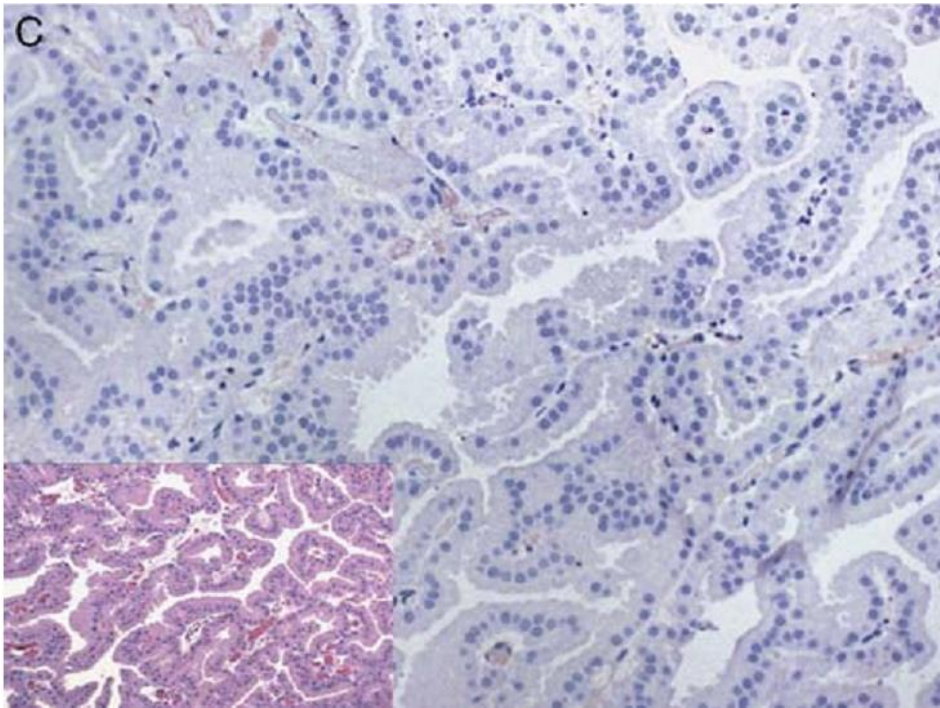




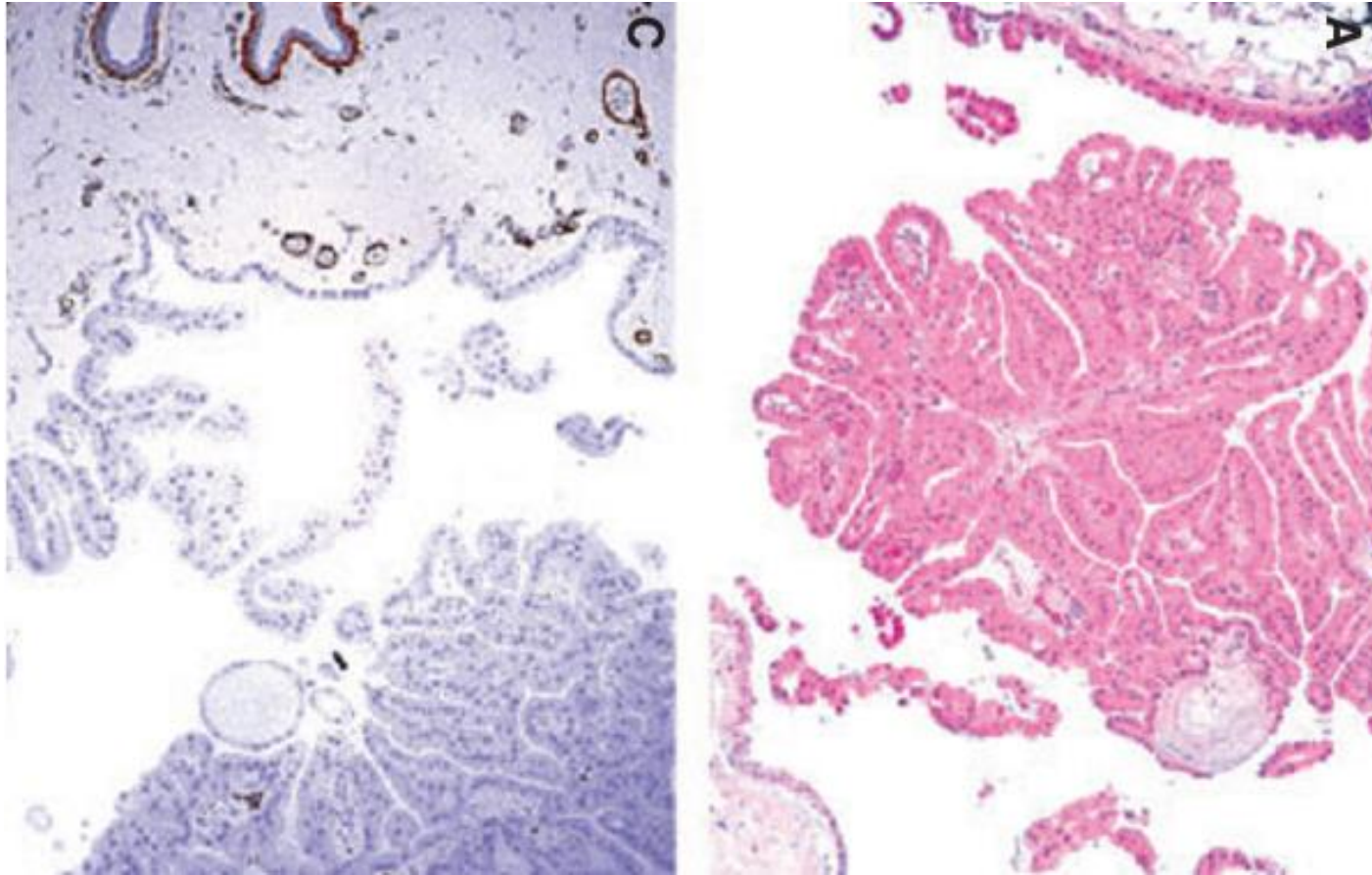


Diminished Number or Complete Loss of Myoepithelial Cells Associated With Metaplastic and Neoplastic Apocrine Lesions of the Breast

Trine Tramm, MD, Jee-Yeon Kim, MD,† and Fattaneh A. Tavassoli, MD‡*

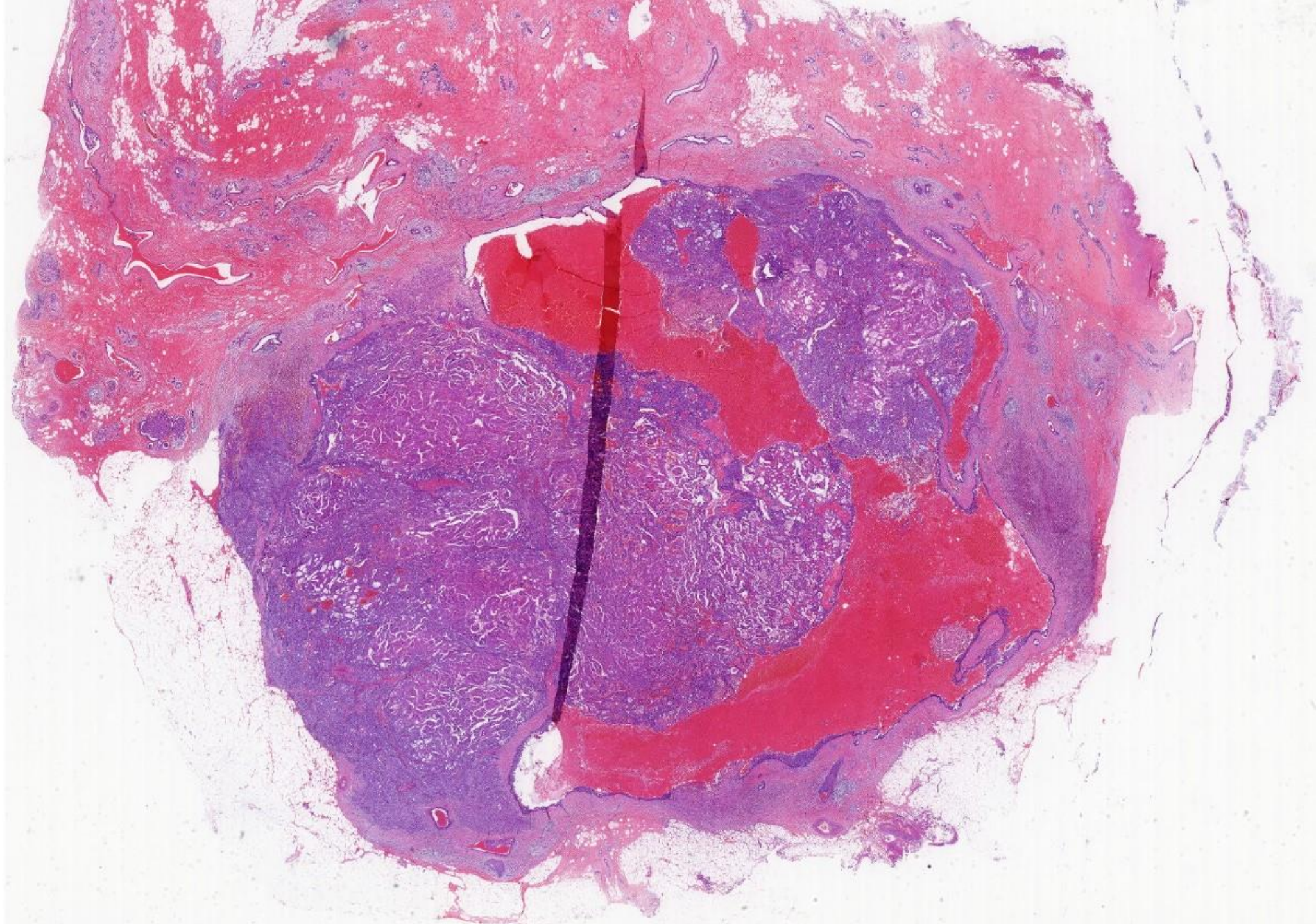


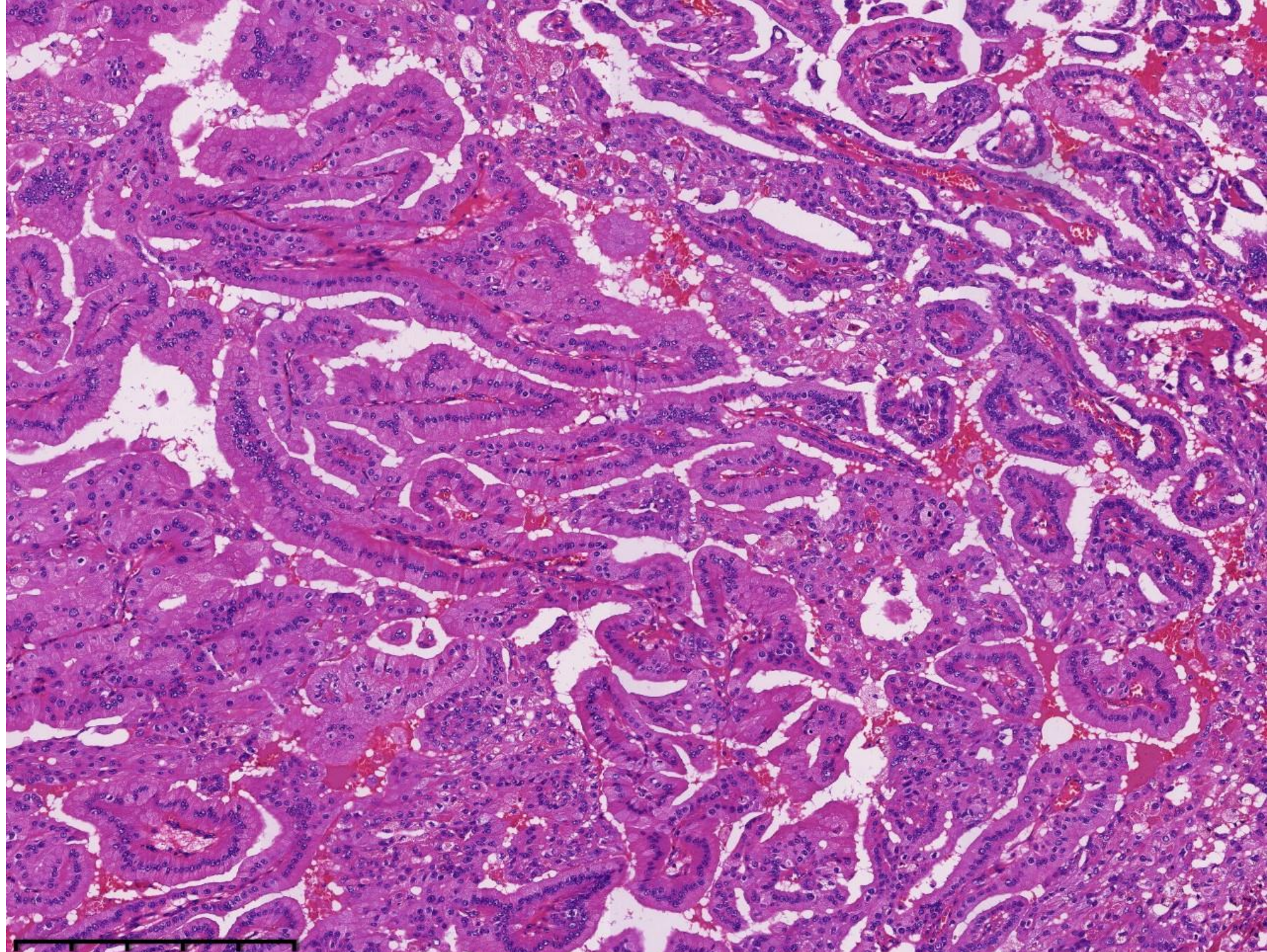
Benign apocrine papillary lesions of the breast lacking or virtually lacking myoepithelial cells—potential pitfalls in diagnosing malignancy

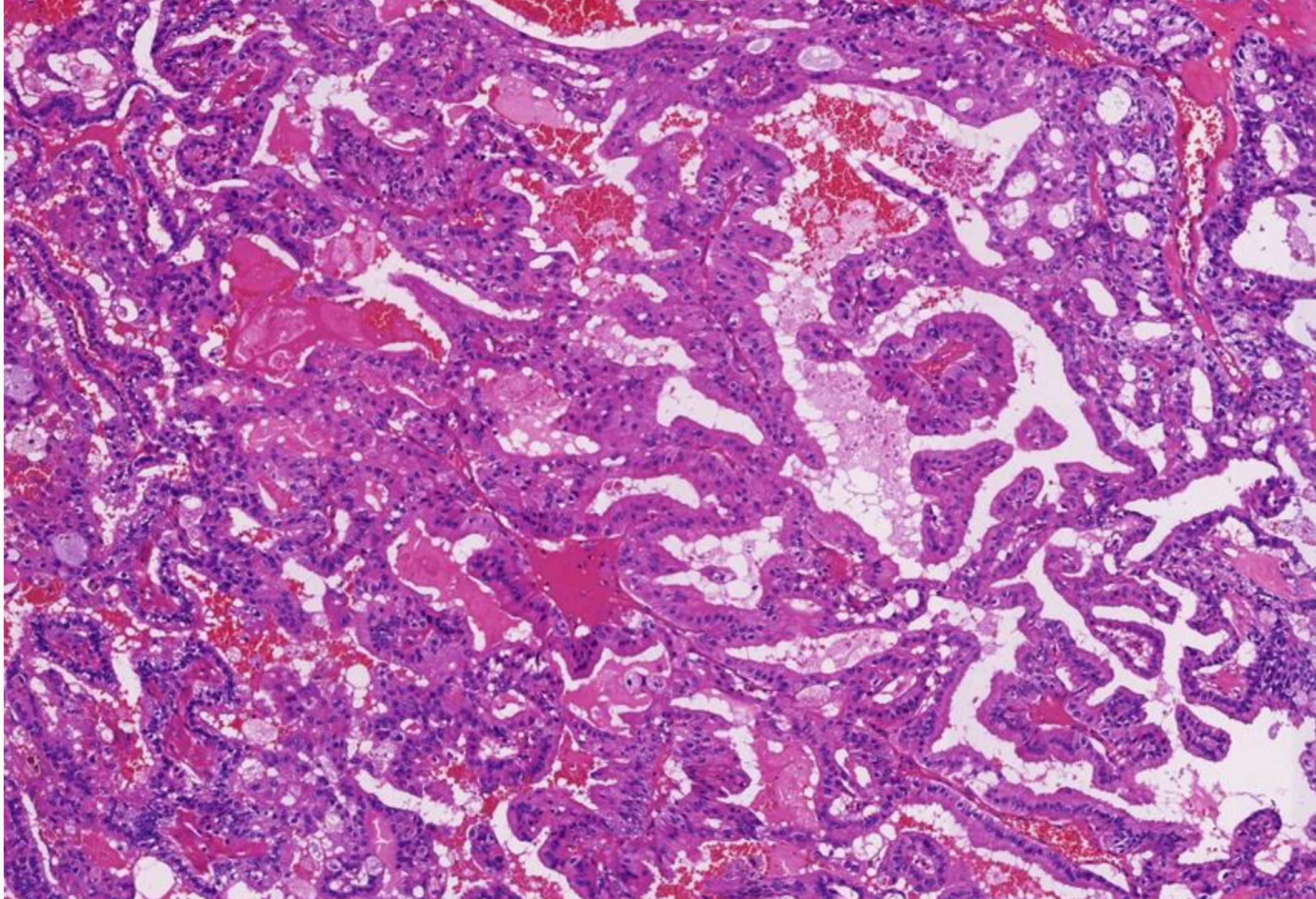


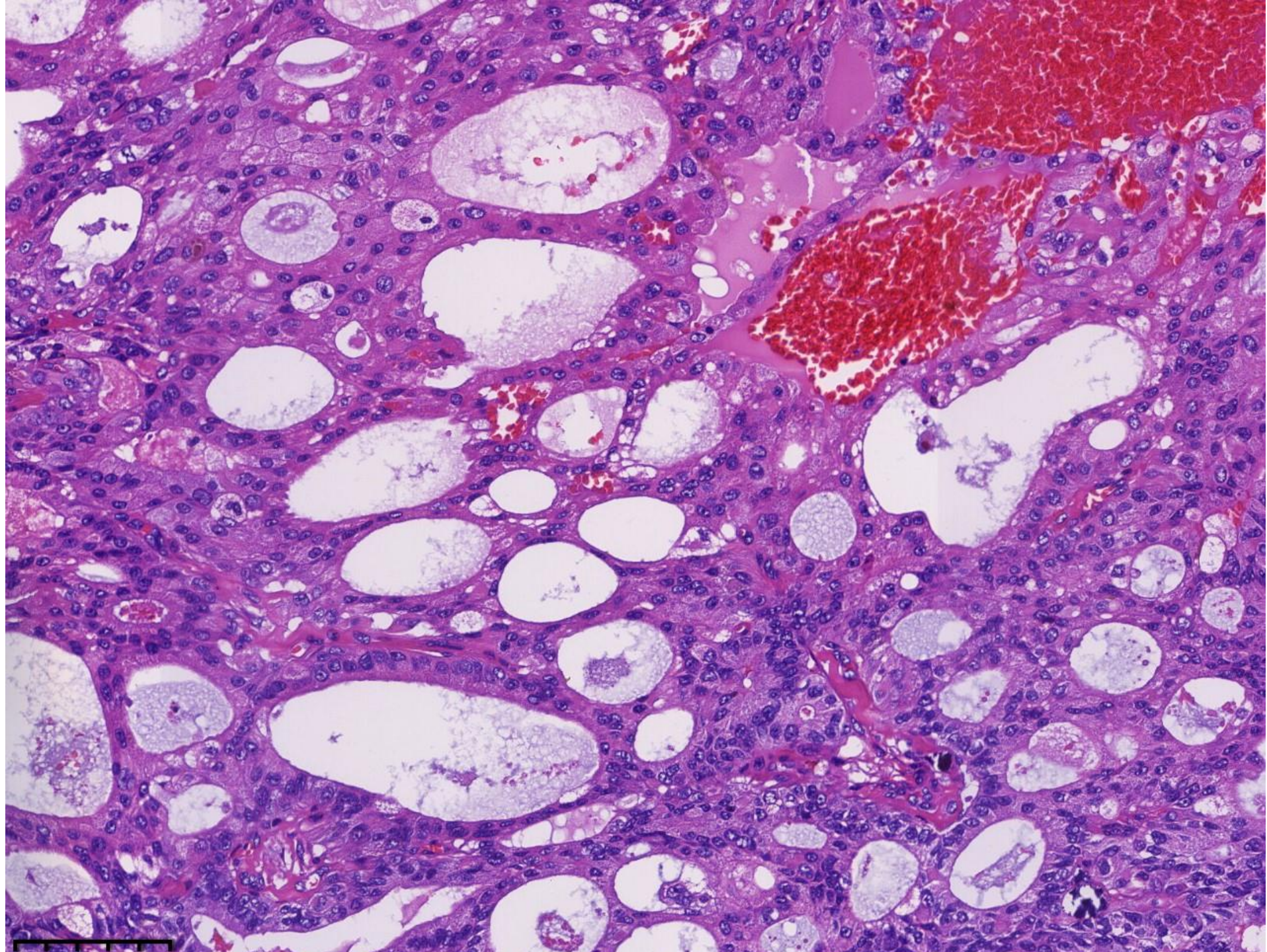
- Benign apocrine papillary lesions may show partial or complete loss of myoepithelial cells (within and around papillae)
- **Prerequisite: Benign cytologic and architectural features.**

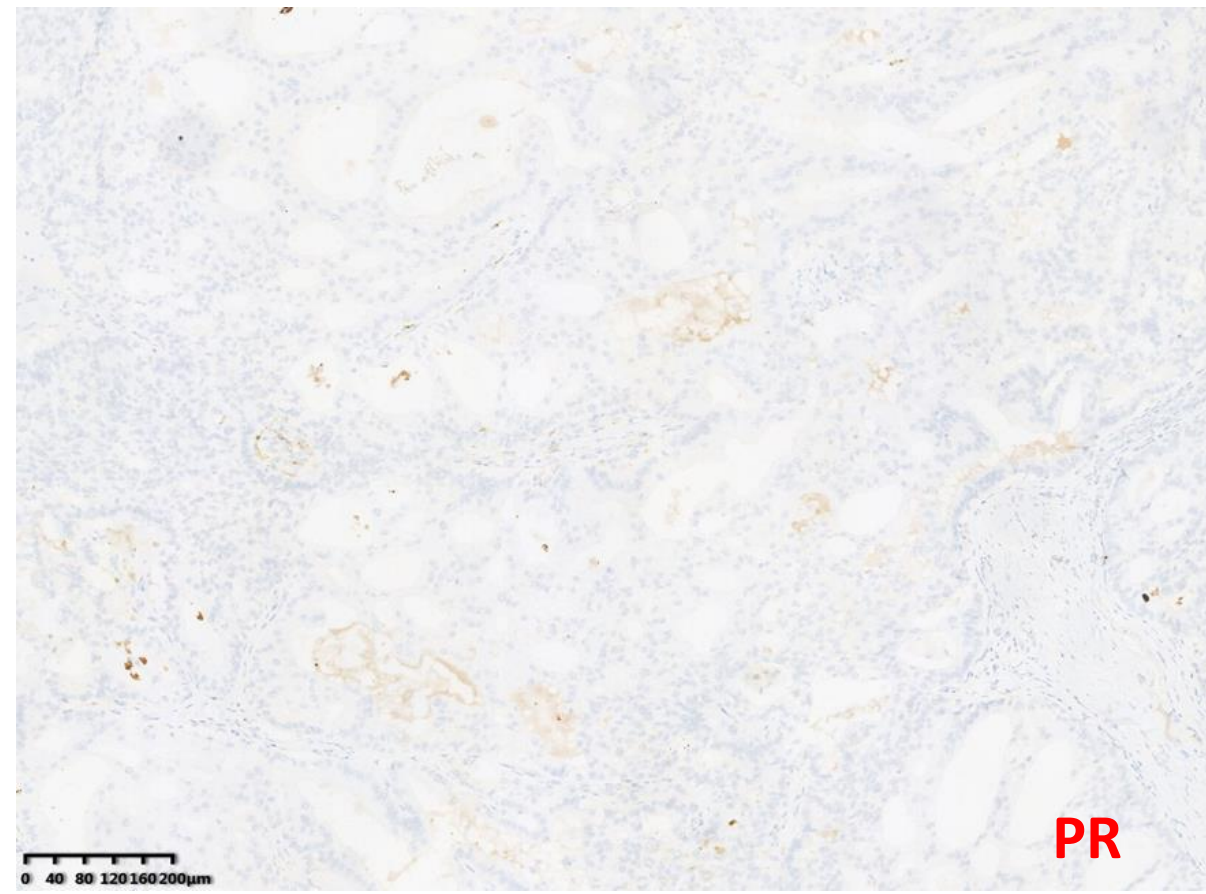
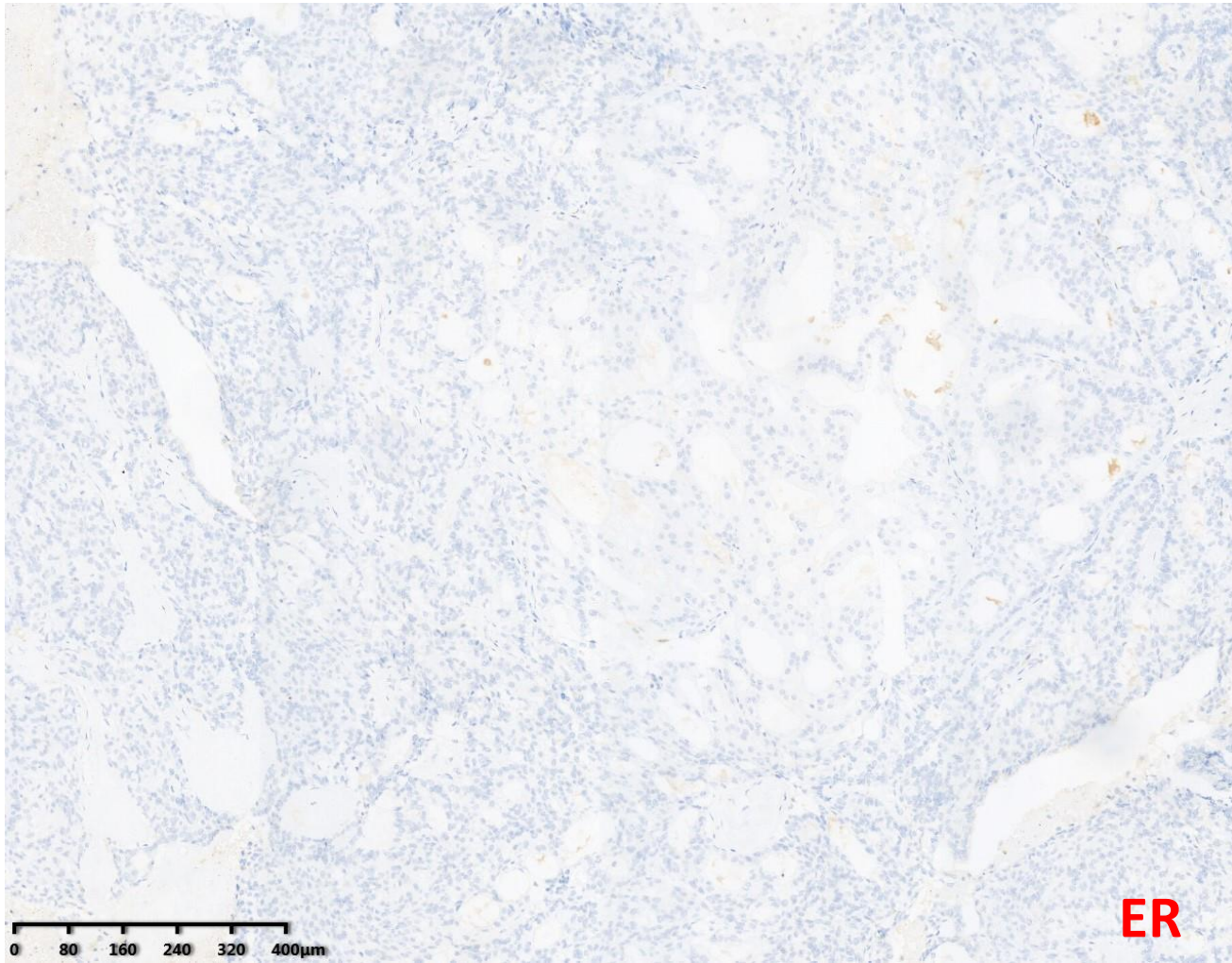
**F/63, 4×3 cm mass in upper
outer quadrant of left breast**

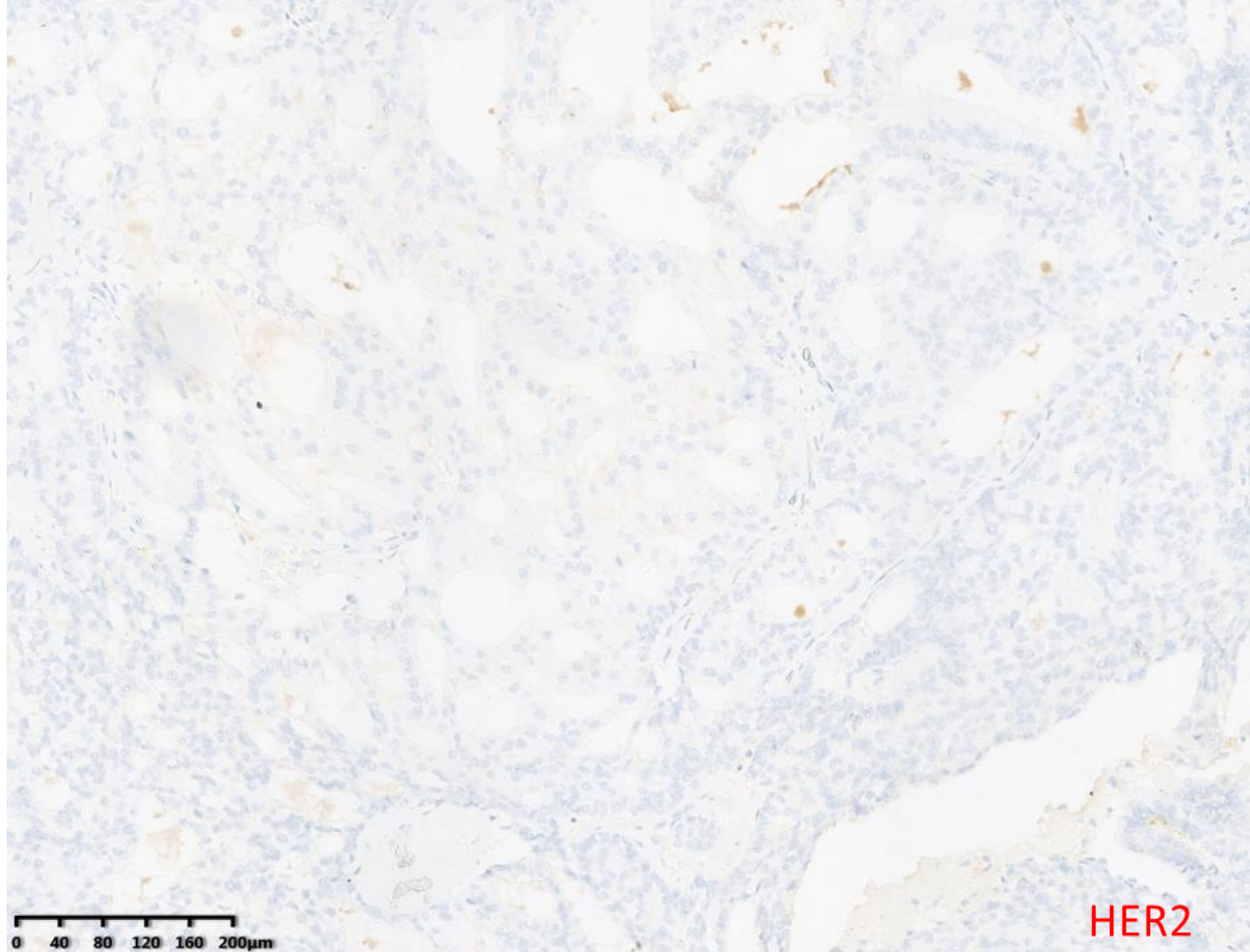


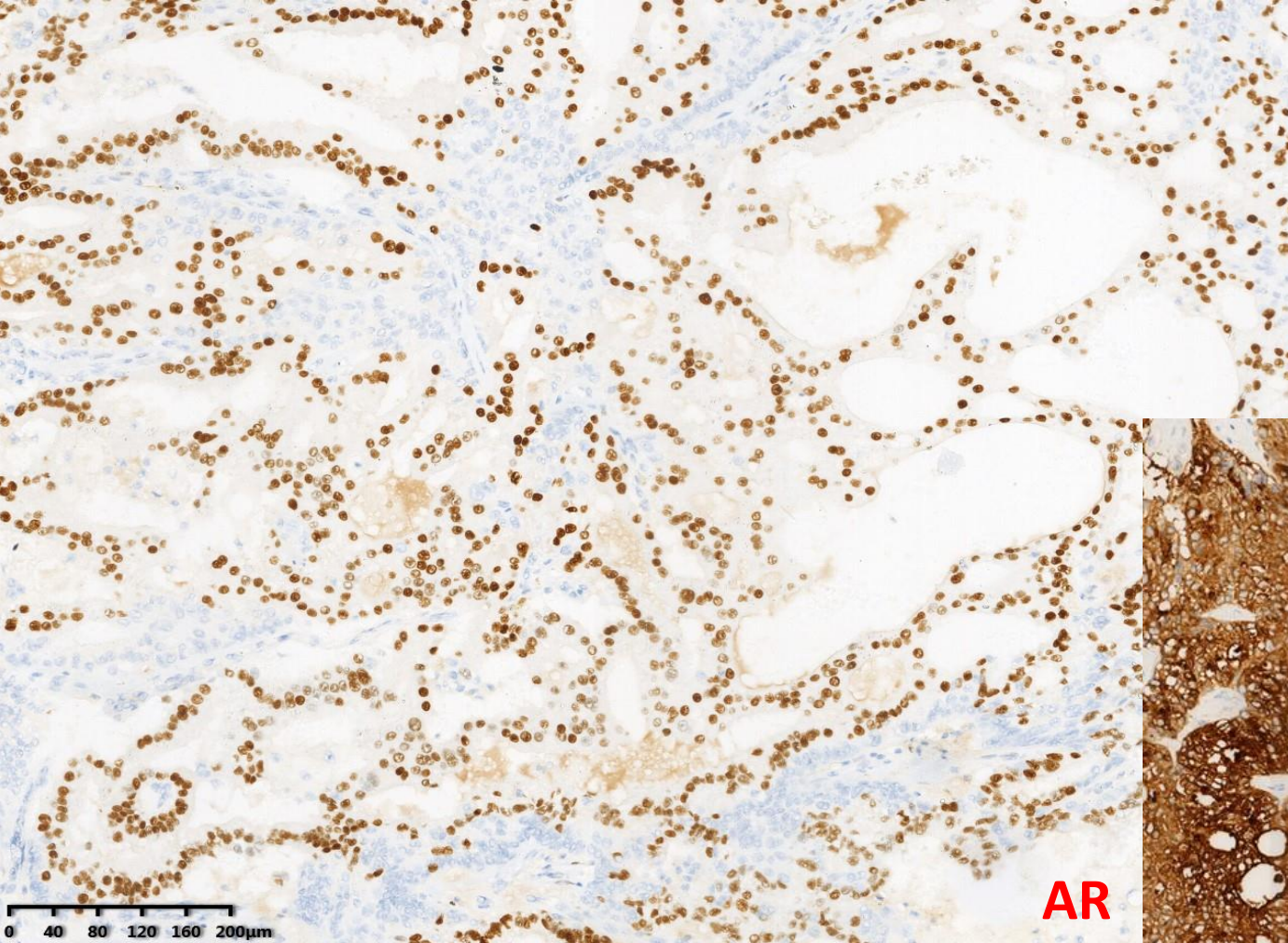




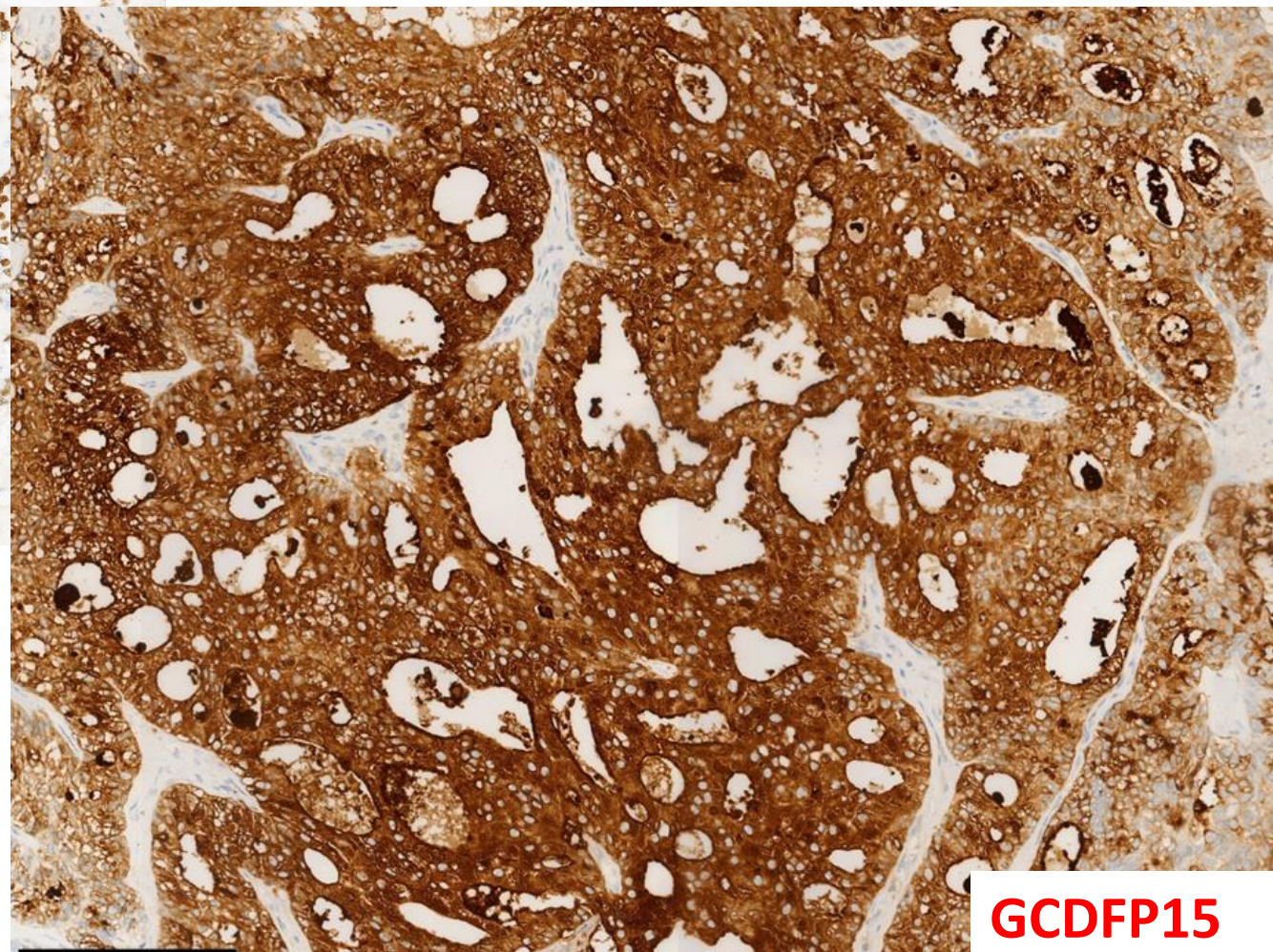




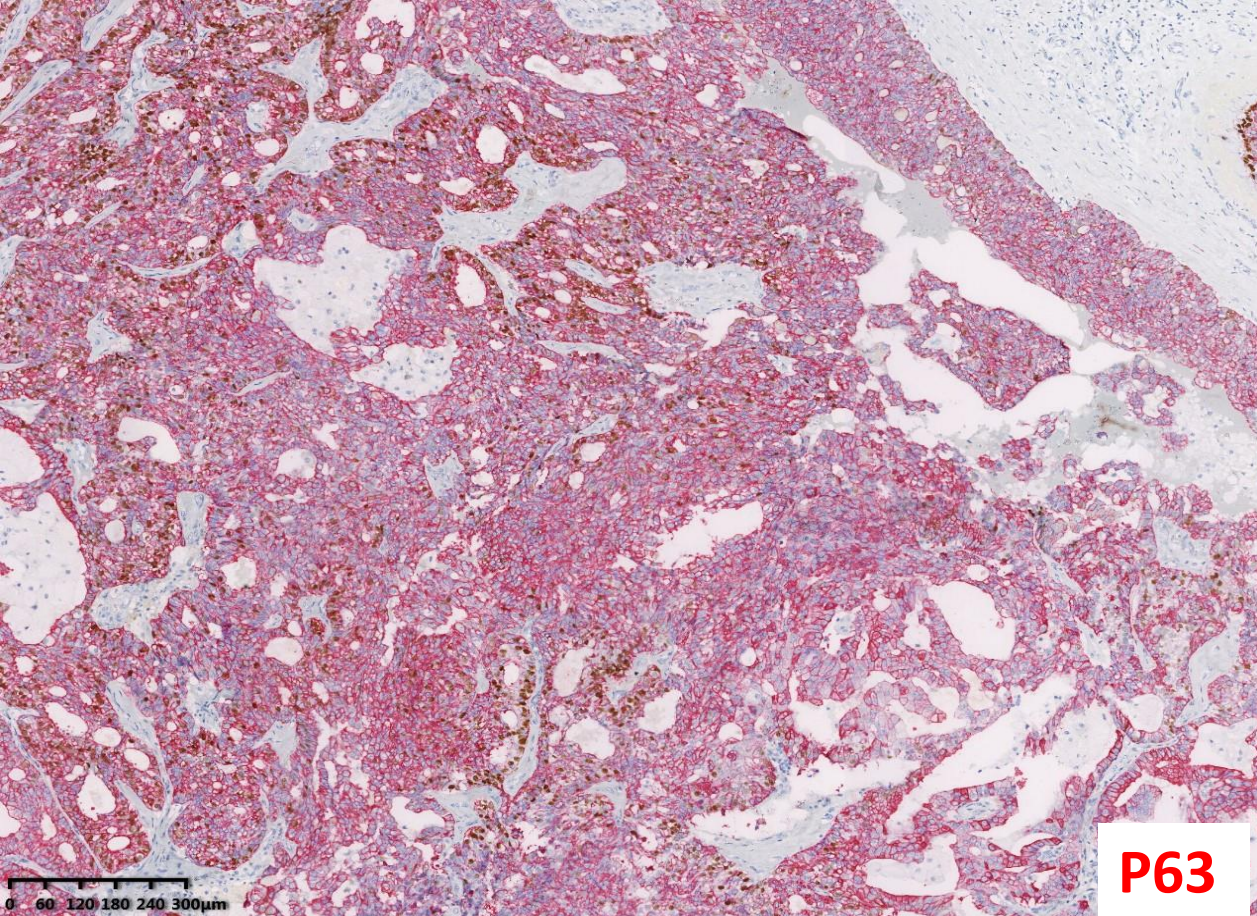




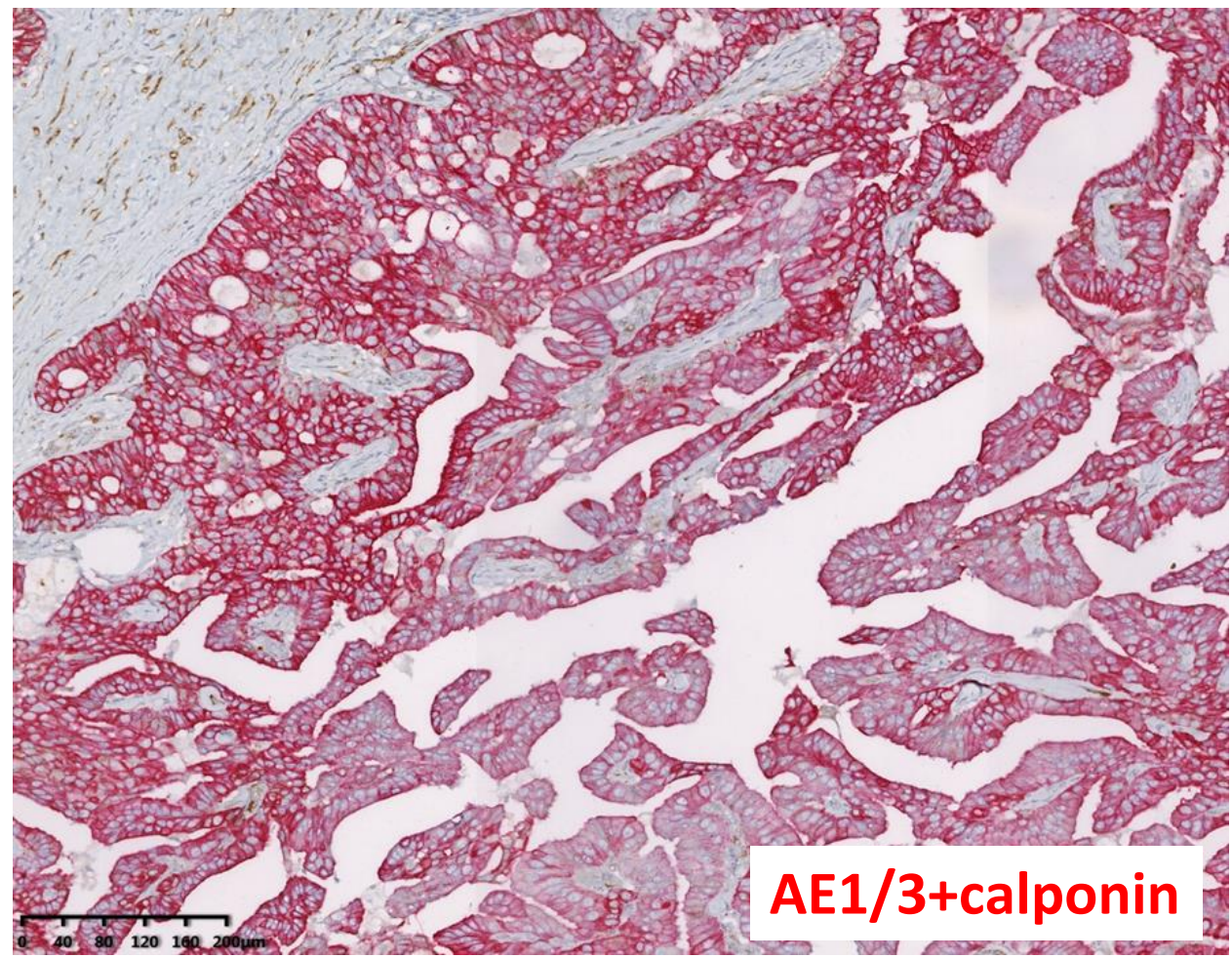
AR



GCDFP15

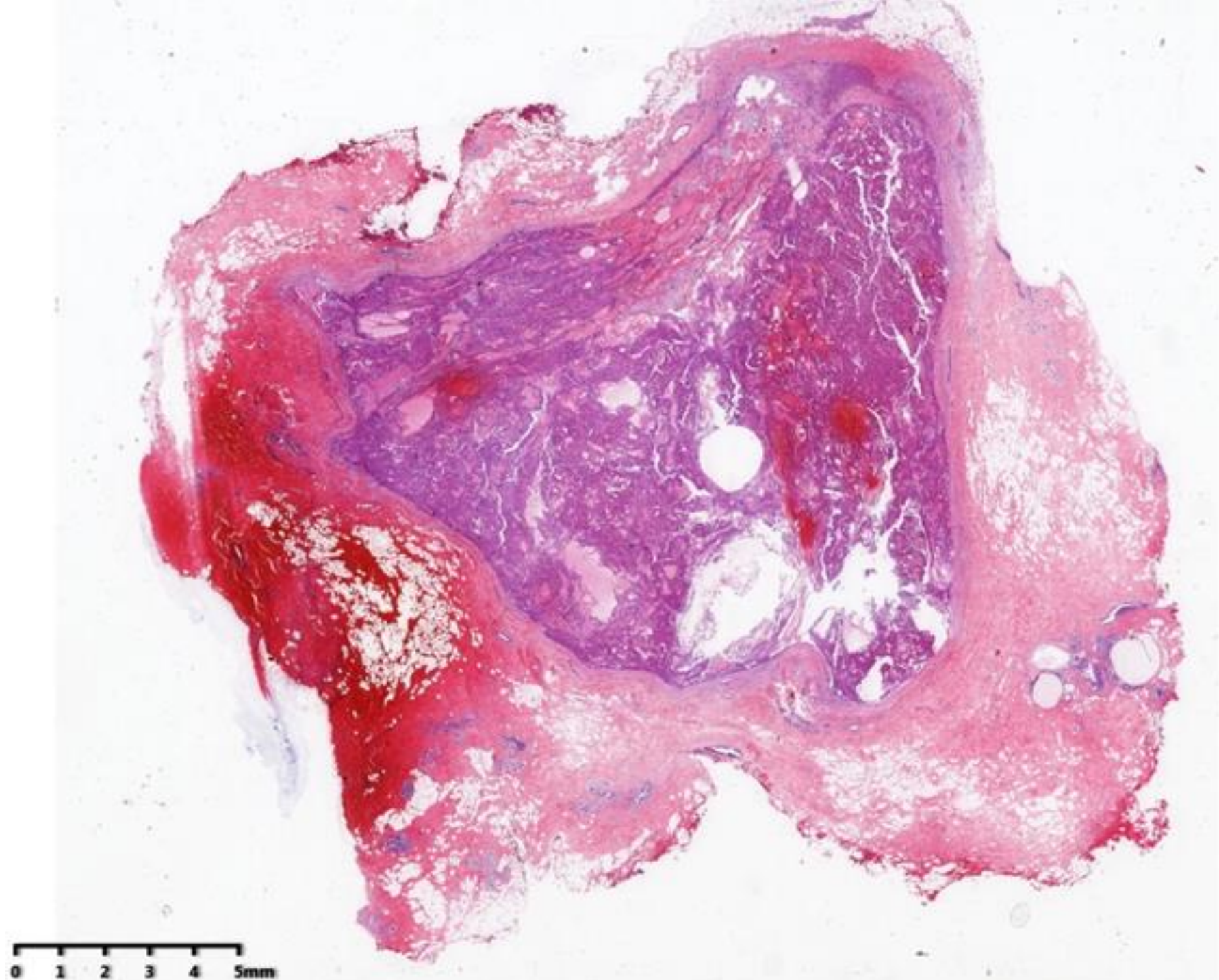


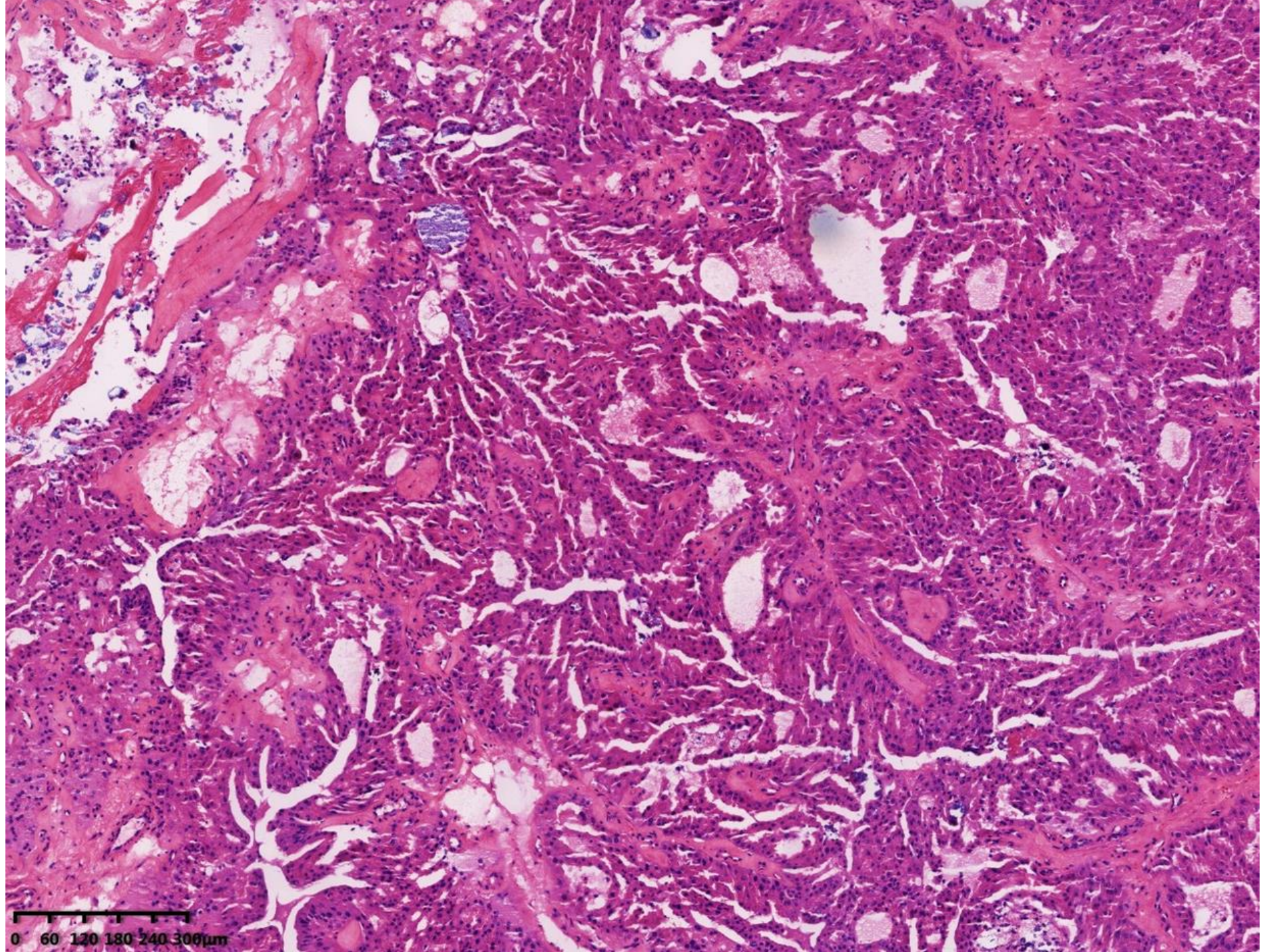
P63

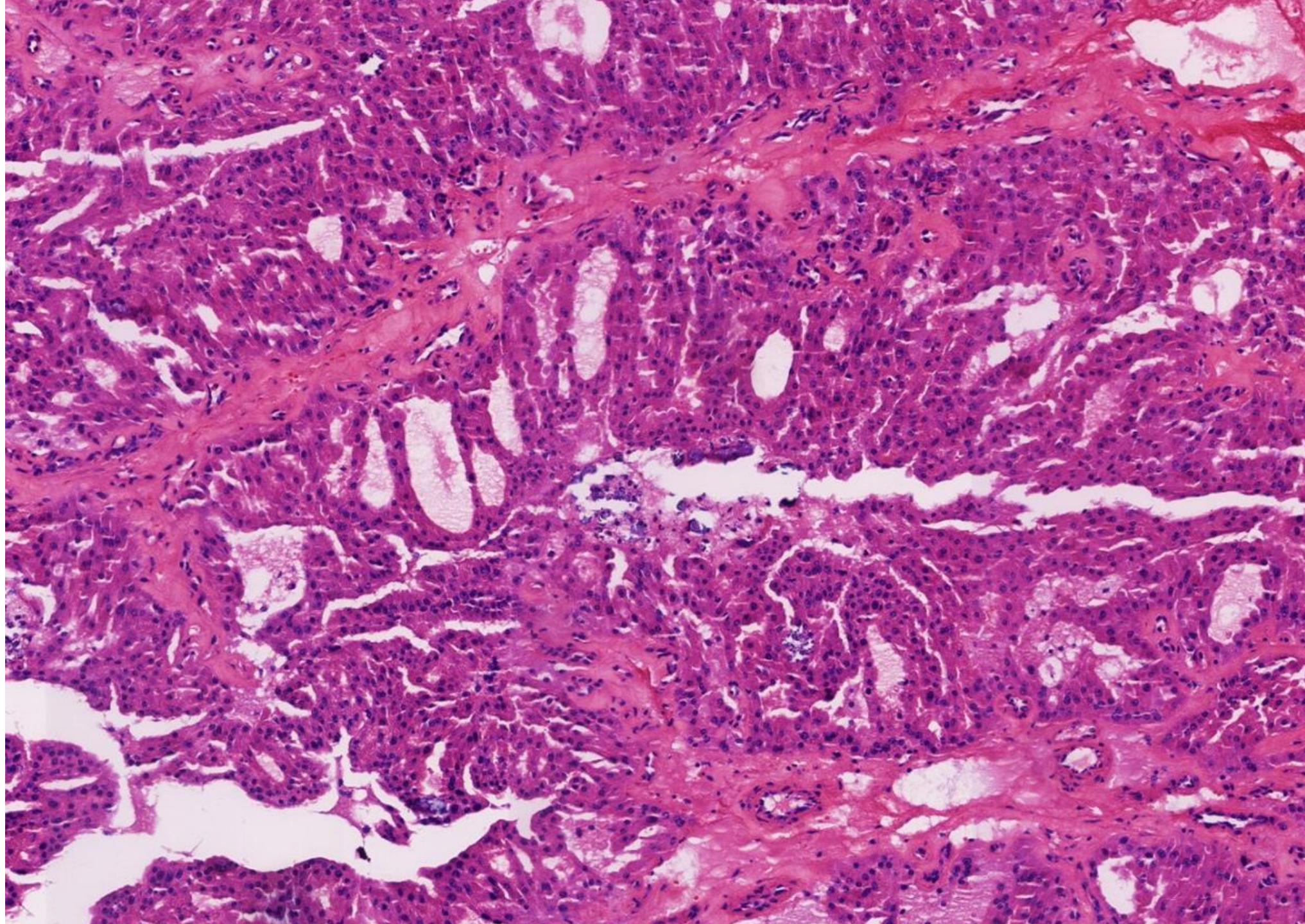


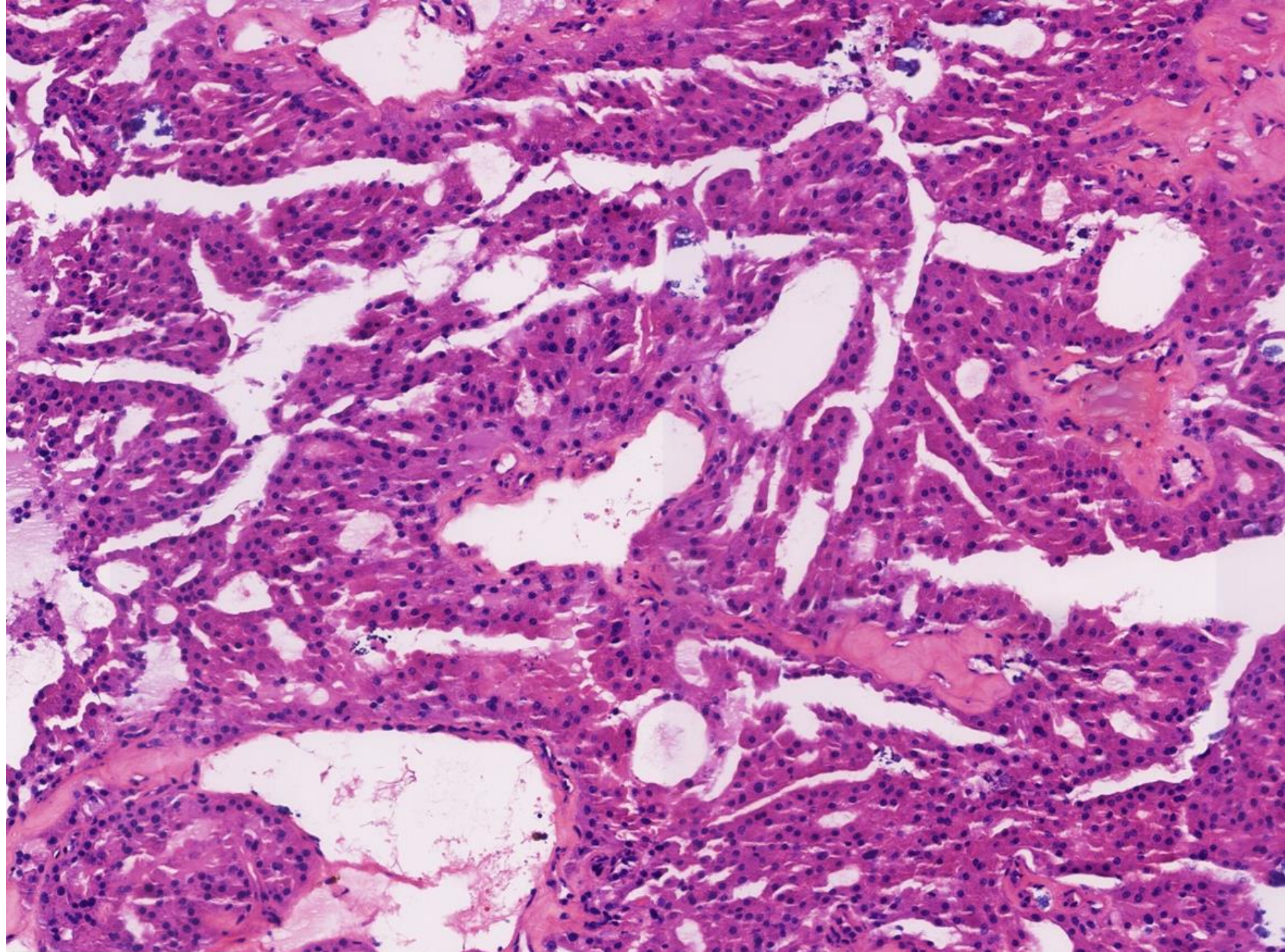
AE1/3+calponin

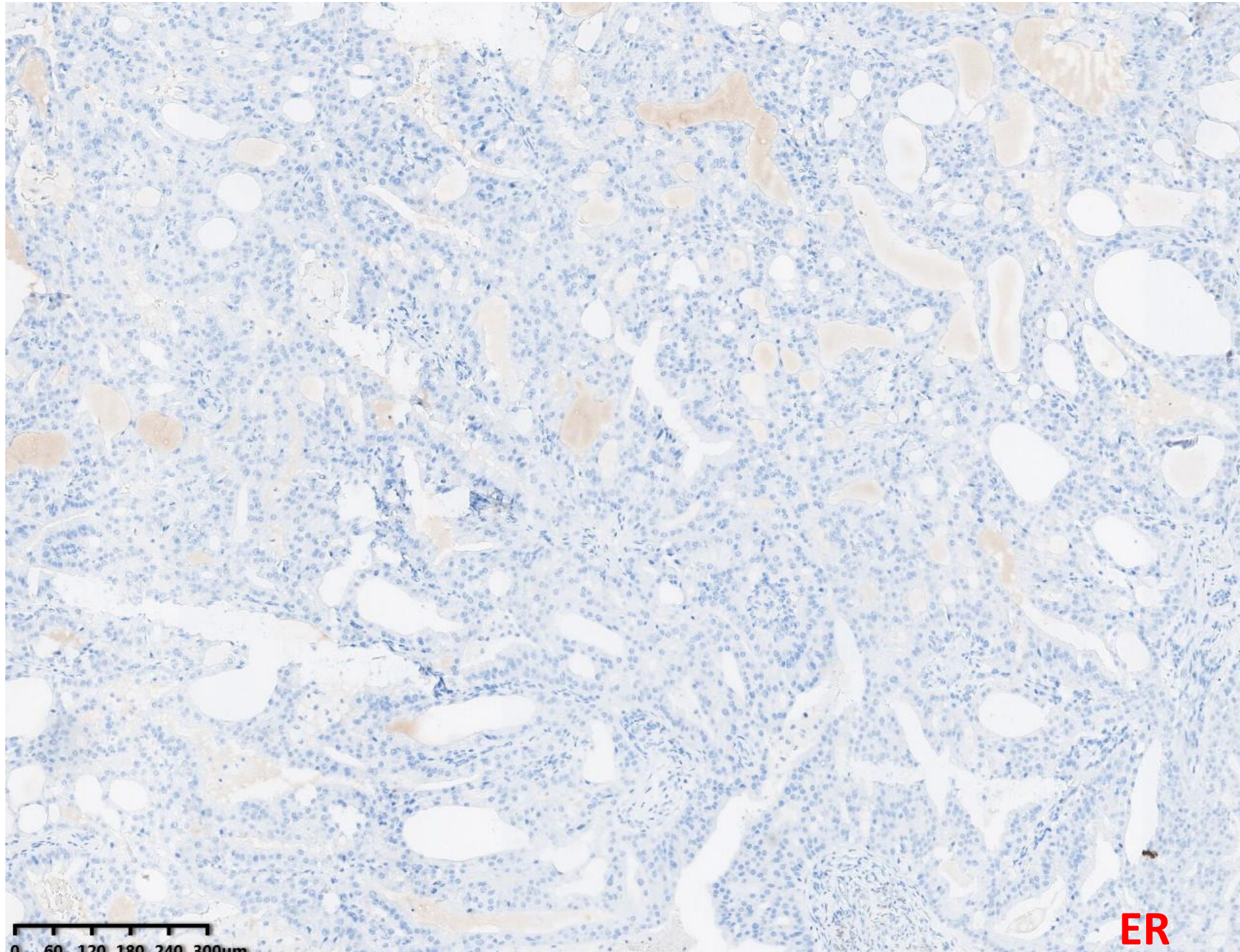
F/44, 3×3 cm left breast mass.





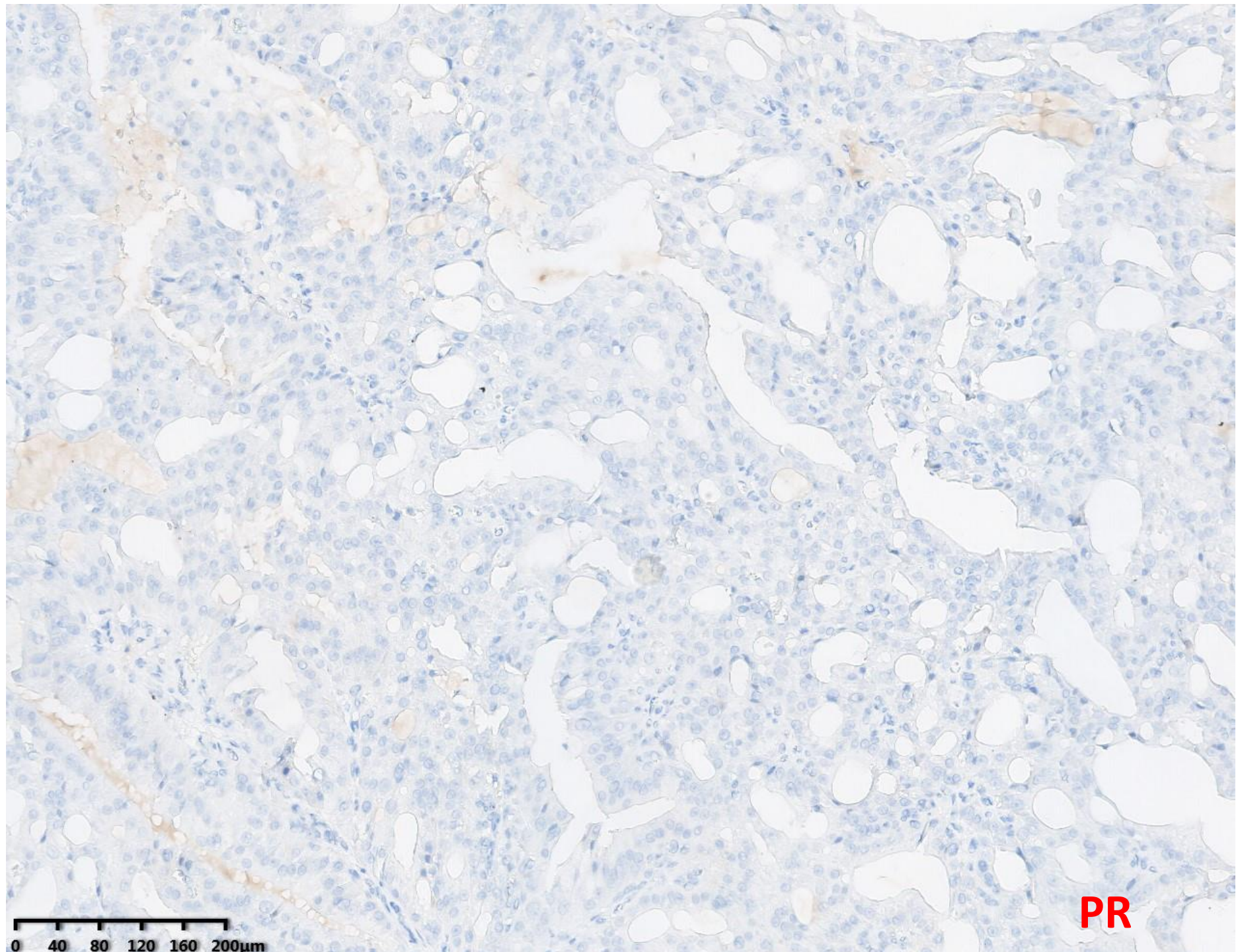




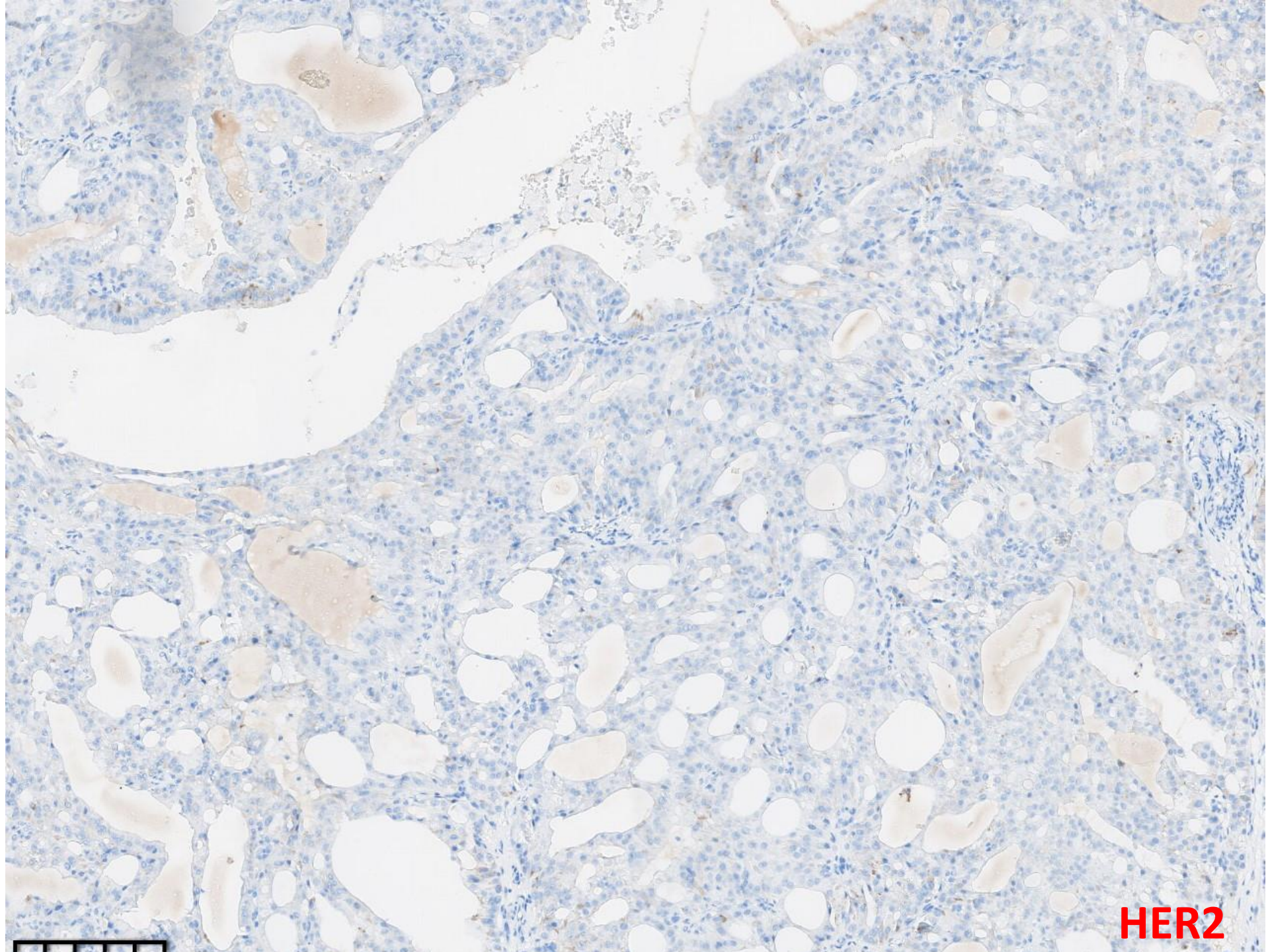


0 60 120 180 240 300µm

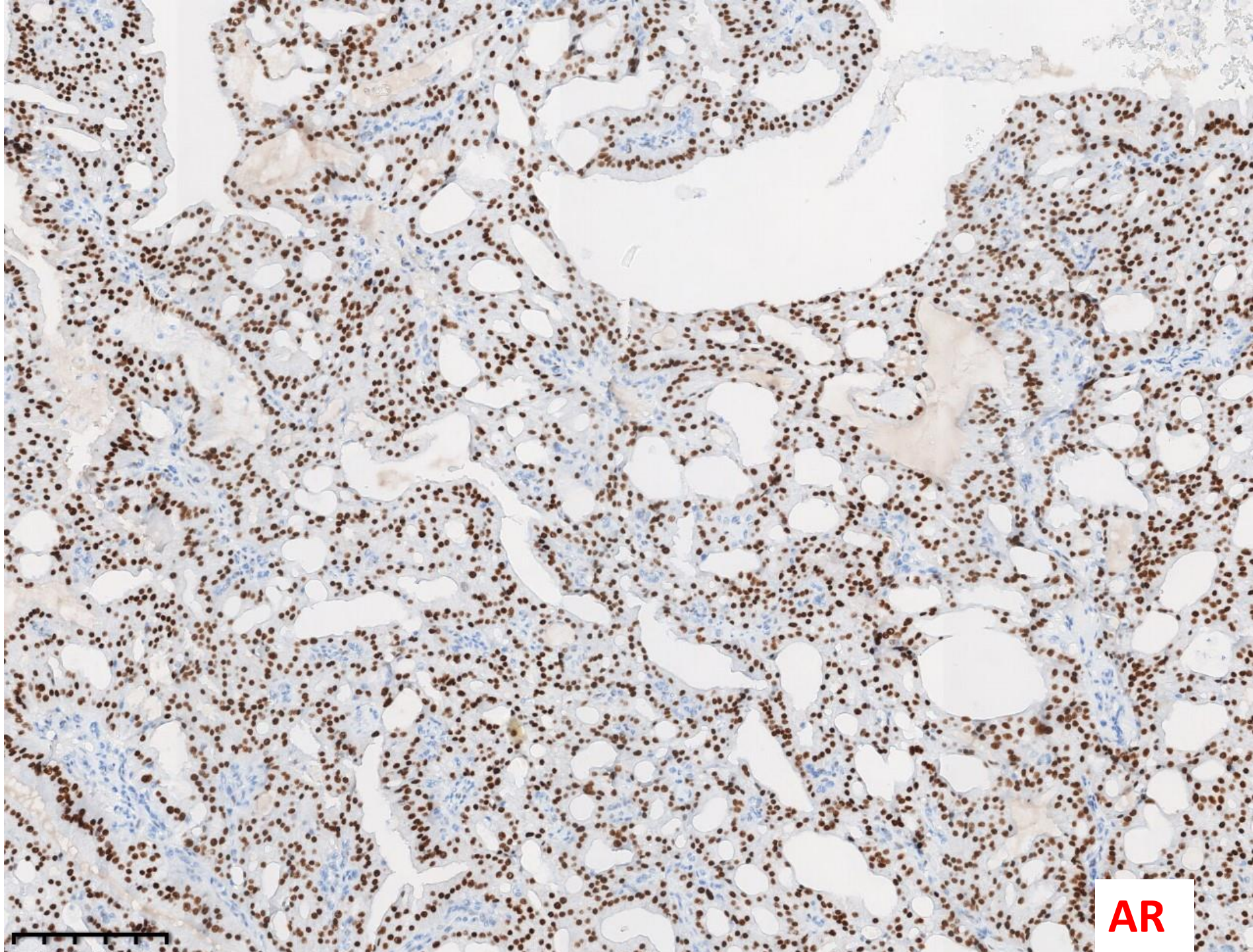
ER



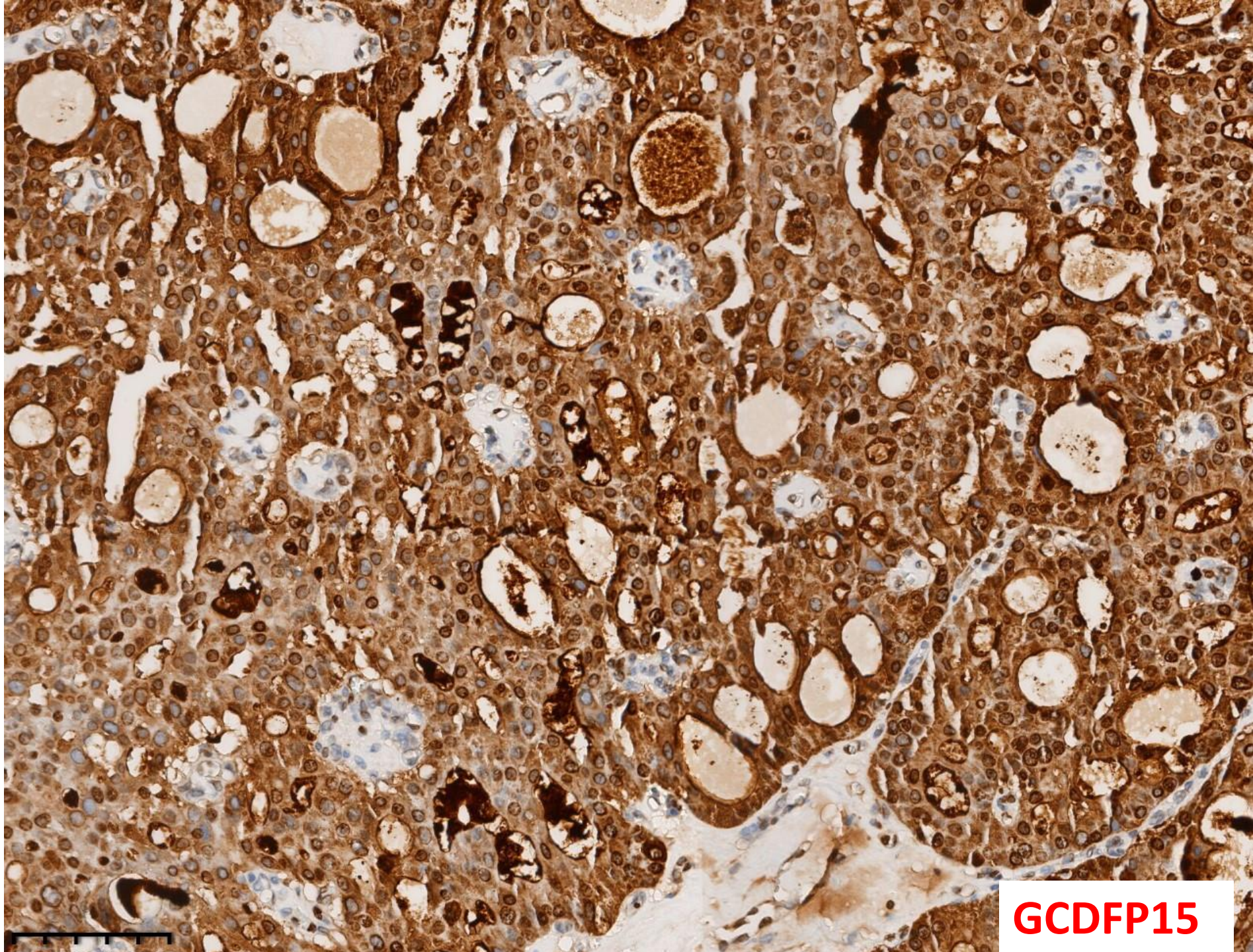
PR



HER2



AR



GCDFP15

Encapsulated papillary carcinoma



- Encapsulated papillary carcinoma: fibrovascular stalks **with low/intermediate grade neoplastic cells**
- Immunophenotype: ER+, usually PR+, HER2-, low/moderate Ki-67 (**Apocrine variant is an exception**)
- Lesions with similar growth pattern but **nuclear pleomorphism, high mitotic activity, or triple-negative/HER2+ phenotype: grade and stage as invasive carcinoma**

Encapsulated papillary carcinoma (apocrine variant)

- In 2009, Seal et al reported 5 cases of encapsulated papillary carcinoma with classic morphology but apocrine cytology (GCDFP-15+, AR+), establishing **the apocrine variant**, with subsequent case reports published.
- Myoepithelial cell loss (within and around papillae)
- Triple-negative phenotype reported
- Sentinel lymph node biopsies: negative
- No recurrences in followed cases; biology appears similar to classic EPC

**Triple-negative phenotype does not exclude encapsulated papillary carcinoma.
Assess nuclear grade and apocrine features.**

261 Clinicopathological Characteristics of 22 Cases of Apocrine Encapsulated Papillary Carcinoma

Ke Zuo¹, Xiaoli Xu¹, Rui Bi², Ruohong Shui¹, Wentao Yang¹

¹Fudan University Shanghai Cancer Center, Shanghai, China, ²Fudan University Shanghai Cancer Center, Shanghai Medical College, Fudan University, Shanghai, China

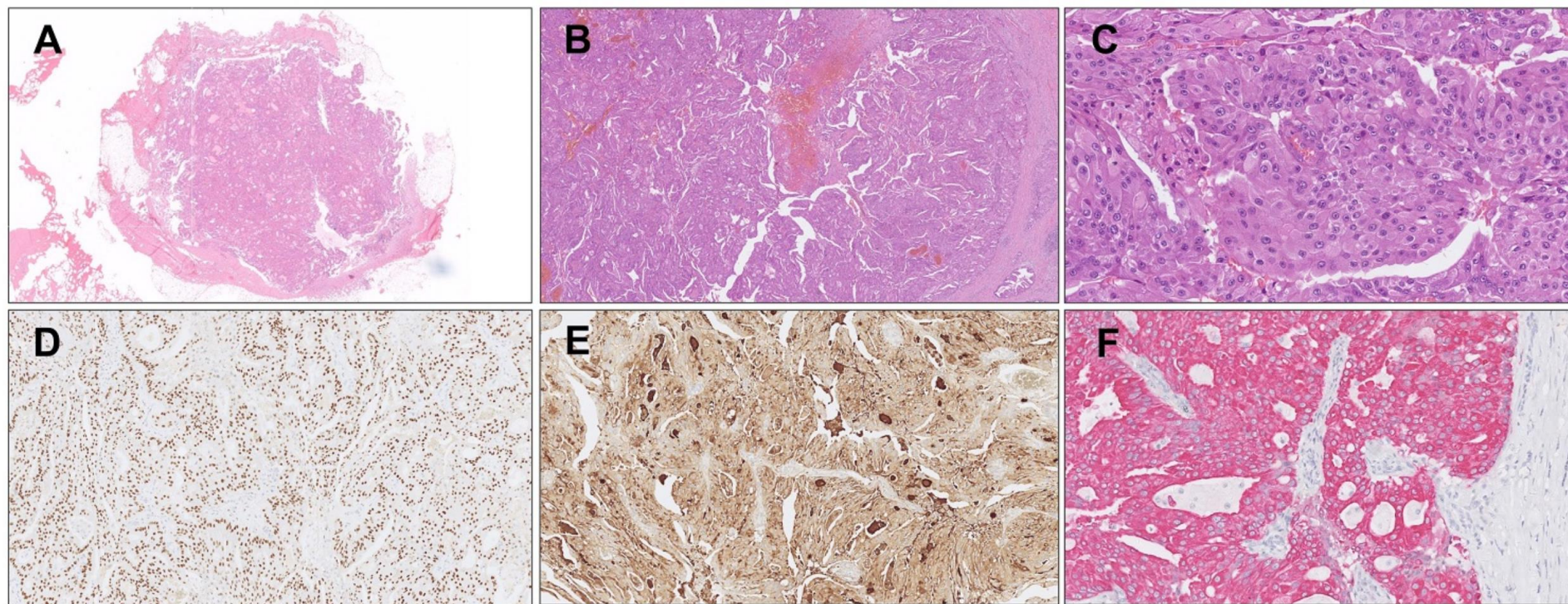
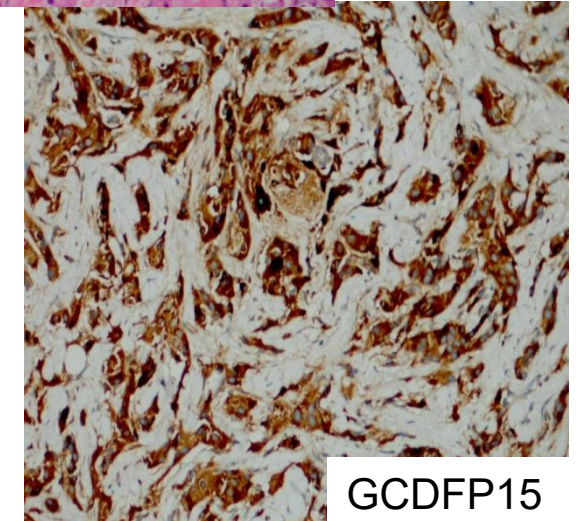
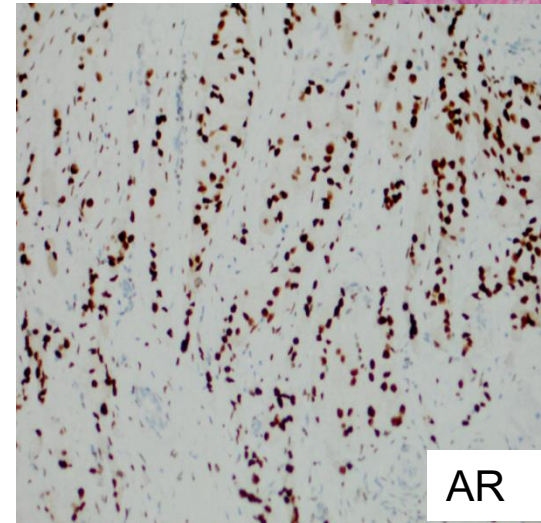
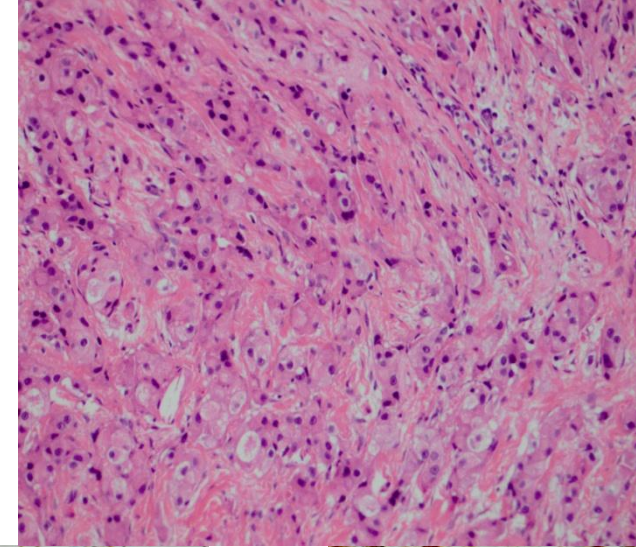


Figure 1. **A.** Typical AEPC presented with intracystic papillary component surrounded by a thick fibrous capsule at low power. **B.** Papillary structure of AEPC. **C.** Apocrine cytomorphology of AEPC. **D.** AEPC positive for AR. **E.** AEPC positive for GCDFP15. **F.** AEPC positive for AE1/AE3 (red) but negative for myoepithelial marker p63

breast cancer (TNBC) of no special type. Therefore, the indolent biological behavior of AEPC is different from that of TNBC of no special type, but much closer to classical EPC. It might be more appropriate to treat patients with the same strategies for classical EPC.

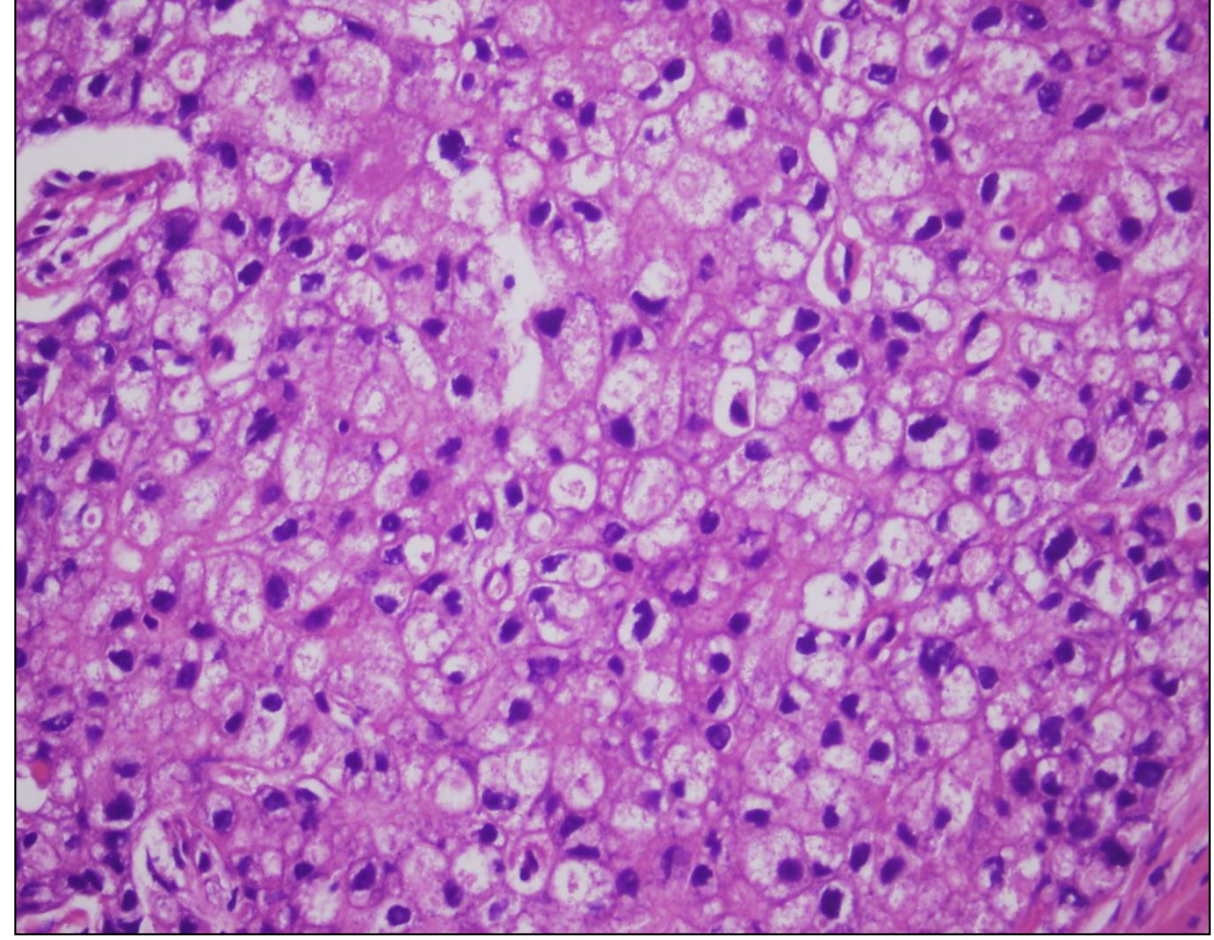
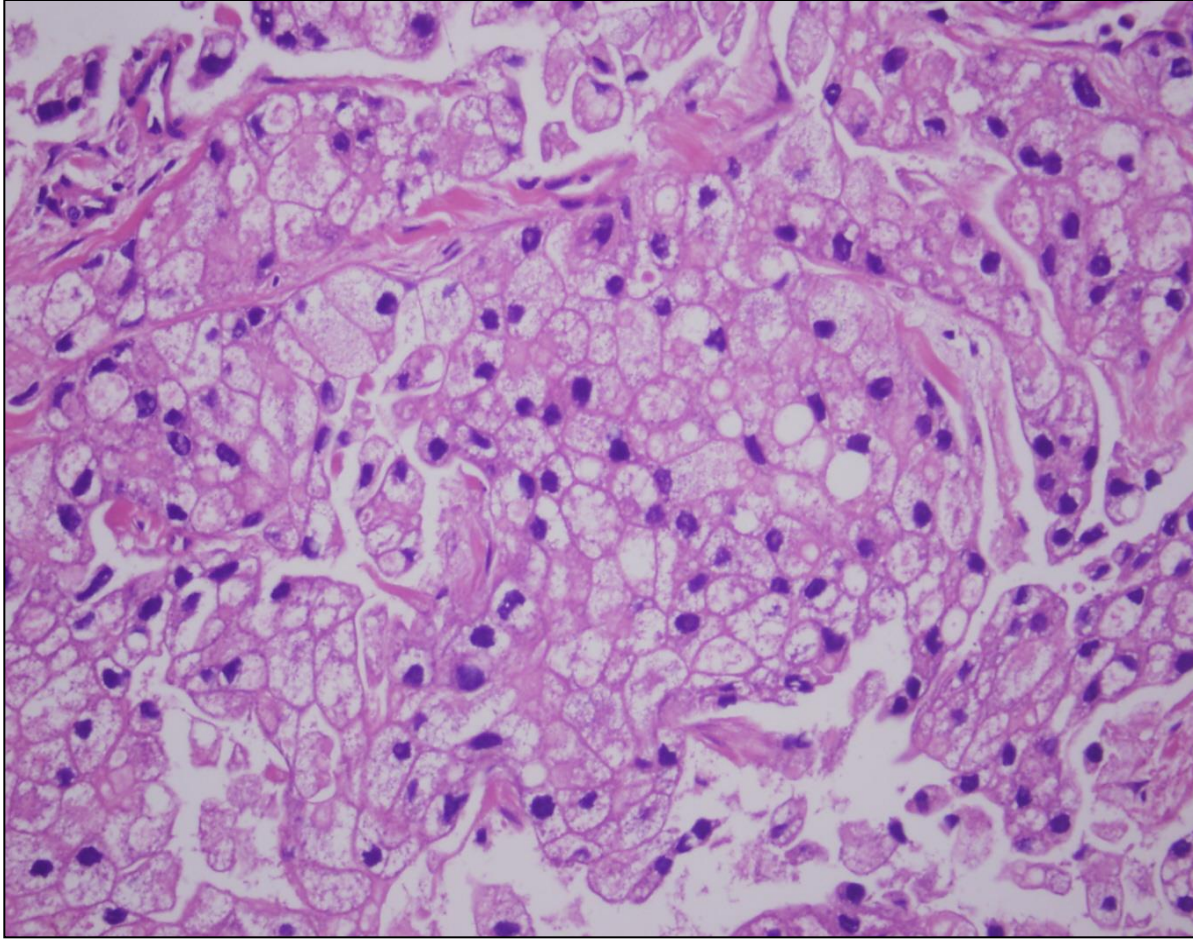
Invasive carcinoma with apocrine differentiation

- **2012 WHO:** Included subtype, no diagnostic criteria
- **Current WHO:** >90% tumor cells with apocrine features (large cells, eosinophilic granular cytoplasm, nuclear enlargement, prominent nucleoli)
- **Ideal Standard:** Morphology PLUS immunophenotype: ER(-), PR(-), AR(+)
- **Important:** Morphology not specific; also common in HER2+ cancers. Cytoplasmic granularity may be subtle.



Recommended Diagnostic Approach:

1. Classic apocrine morphology
2. Immunophenotype: ER(-), PR(-), AR(+), GCDFP-15(+)
3. >90% of tumor cells meet above criteria

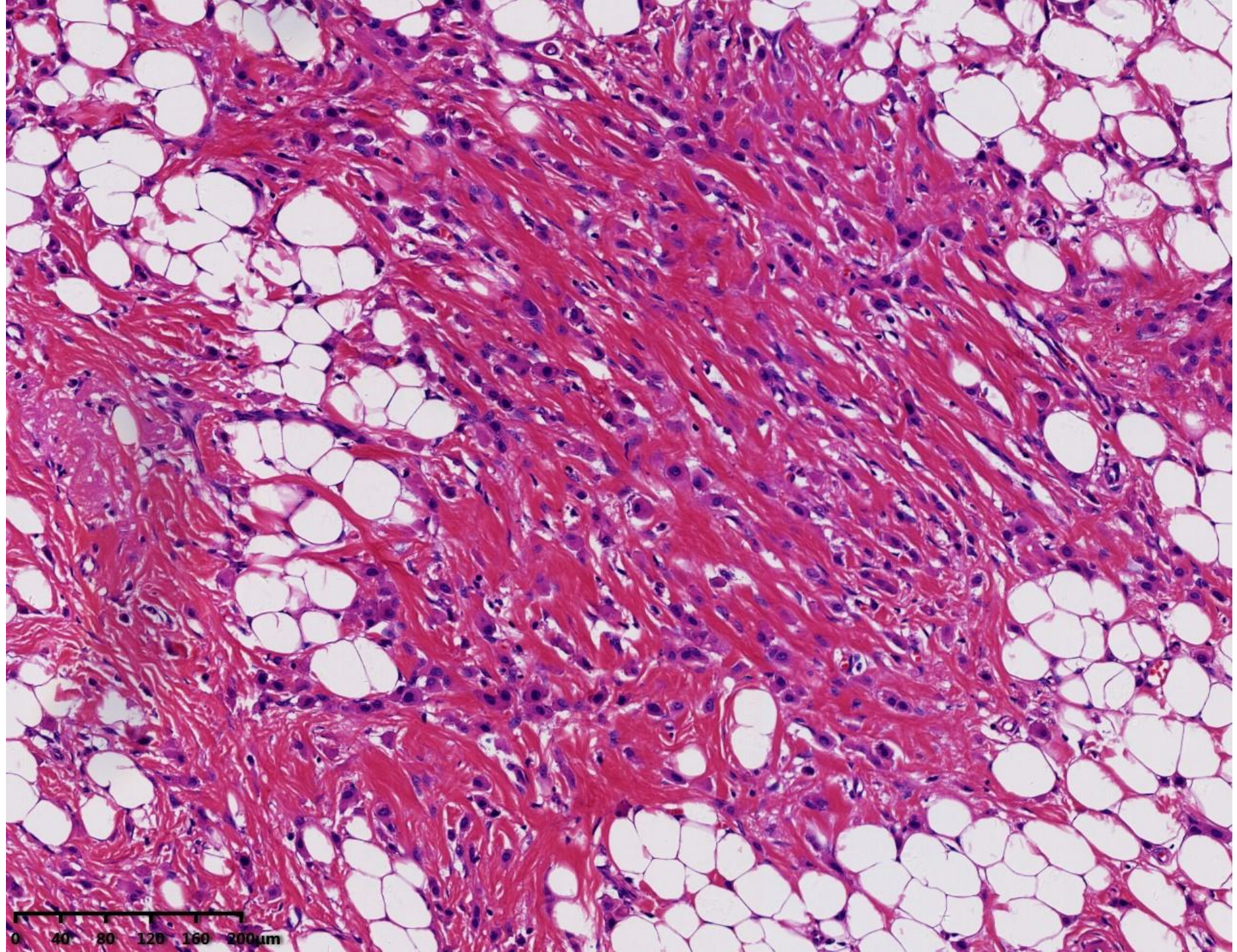


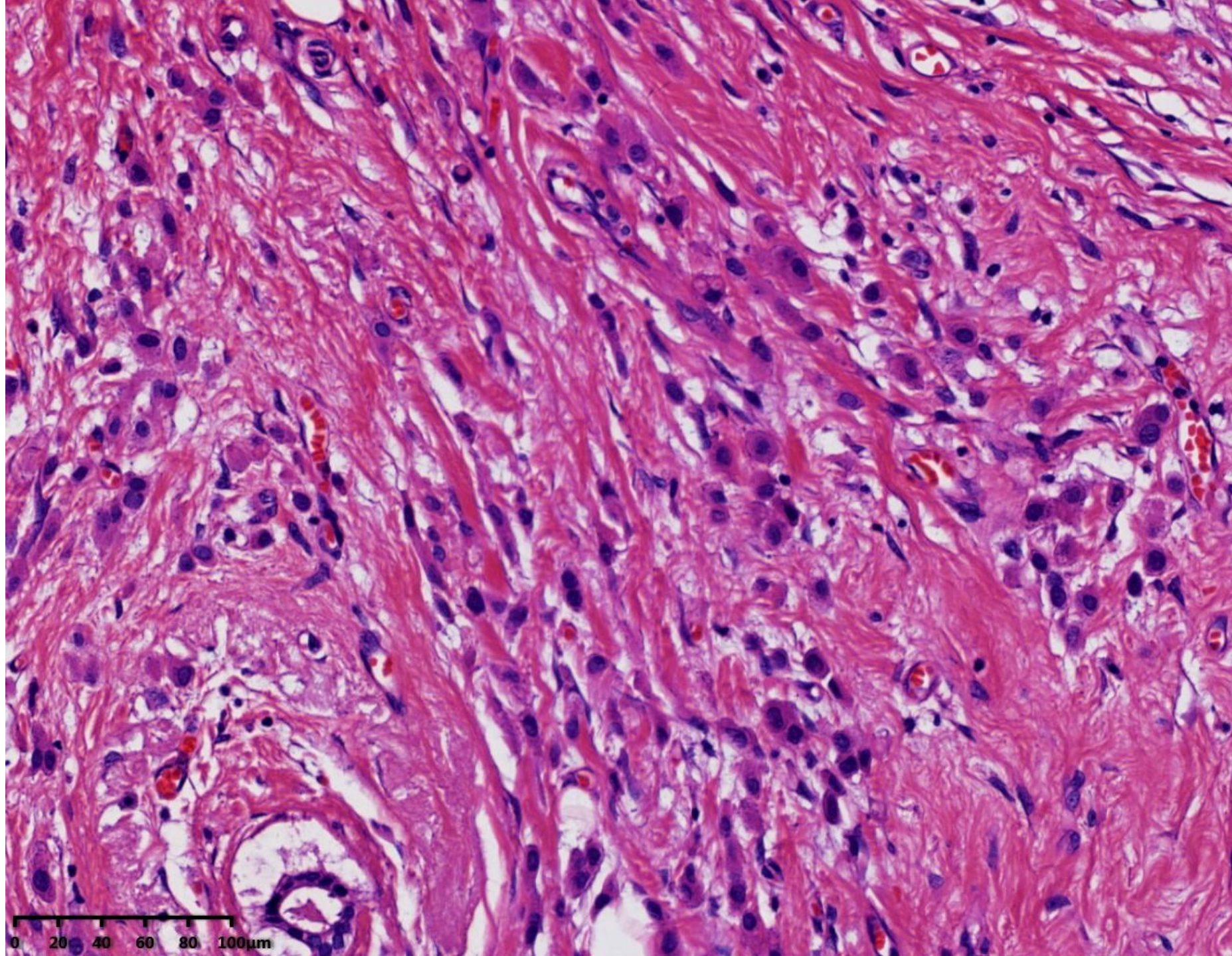
Differential diagnosis

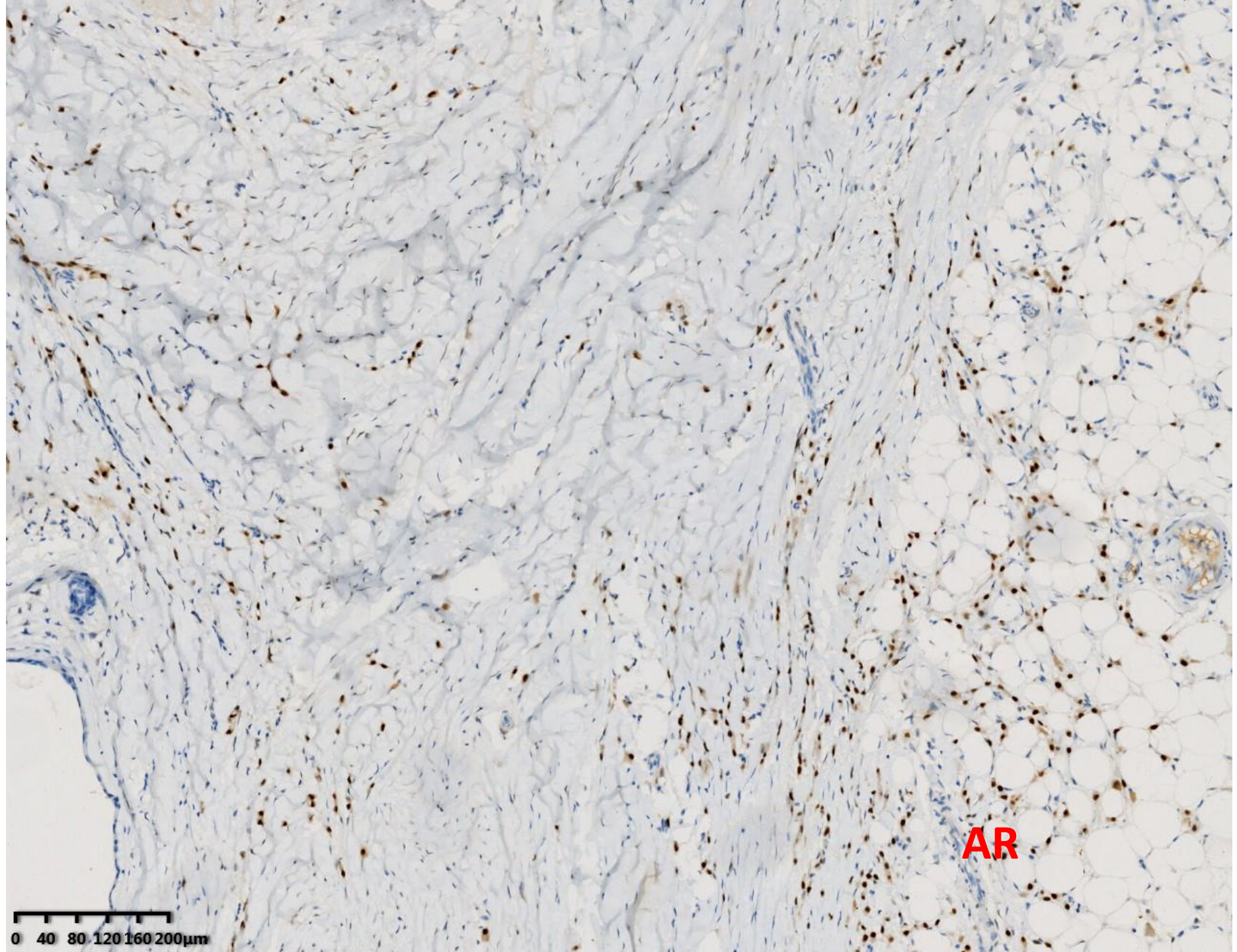
- Histiocytoid carcinoma
- Oncocytic carcinoma
- Invasive lobular carcinoma
- Secretory carcinoma

Lipid-rich carcinoma
Granular cell tumor
Malignant melanoma
Histiocytic reaction

F/60, 2.8×2.3 cm mass, lower outer quadrant of right breast





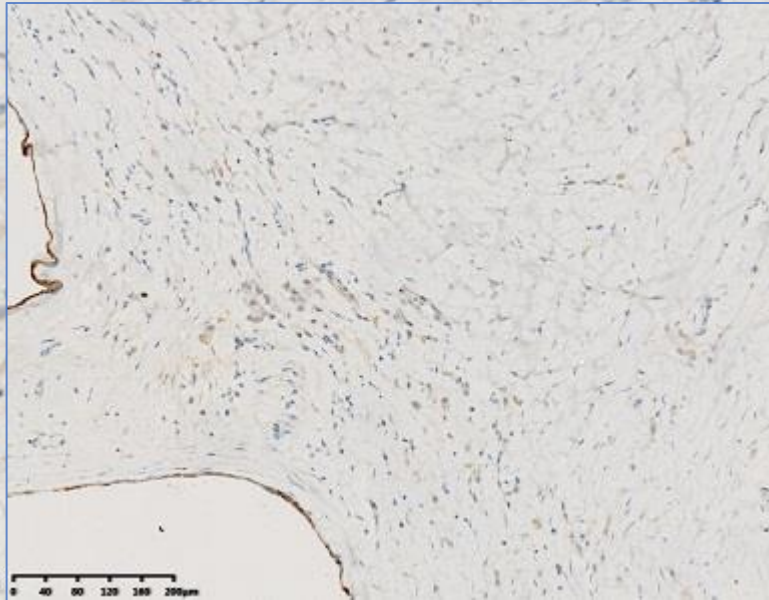


AR

0 40 80 120 160 200µm

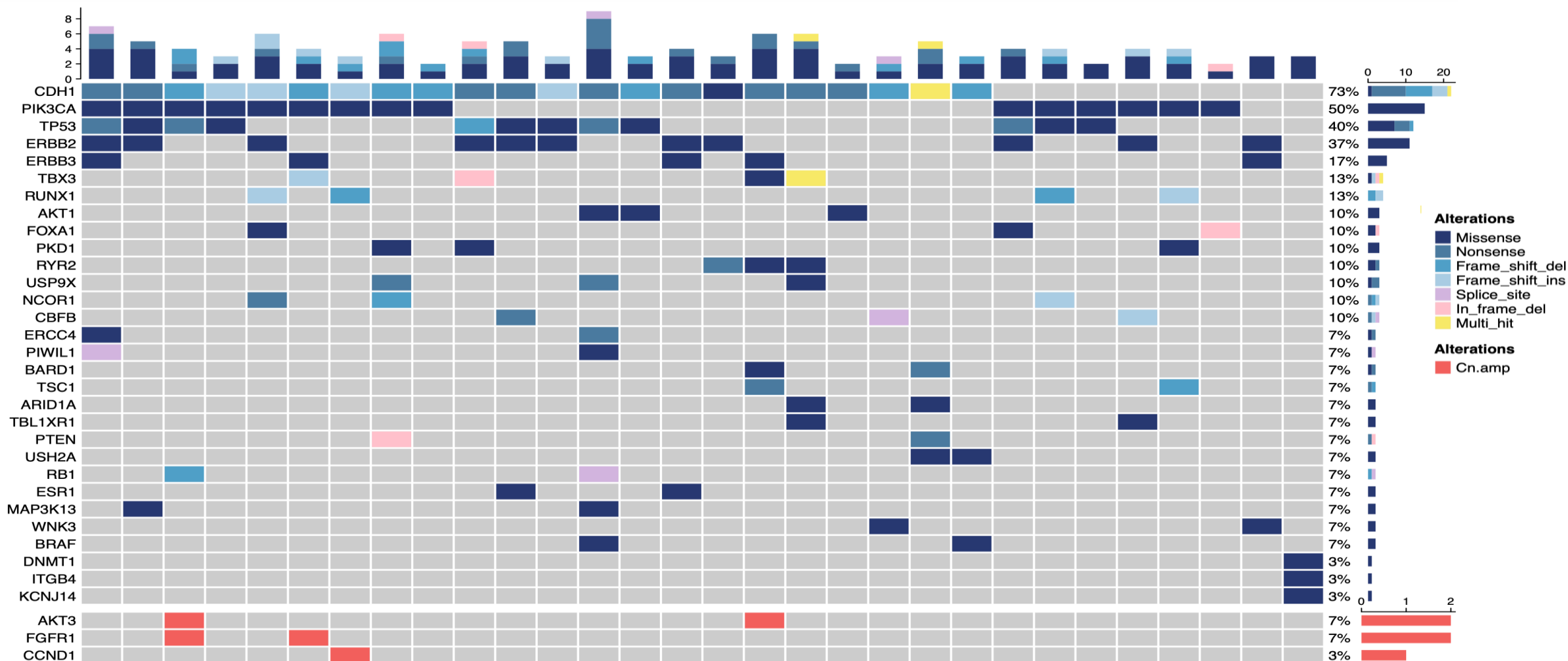


Invasive lobular carcinoma with apocrine differentiation



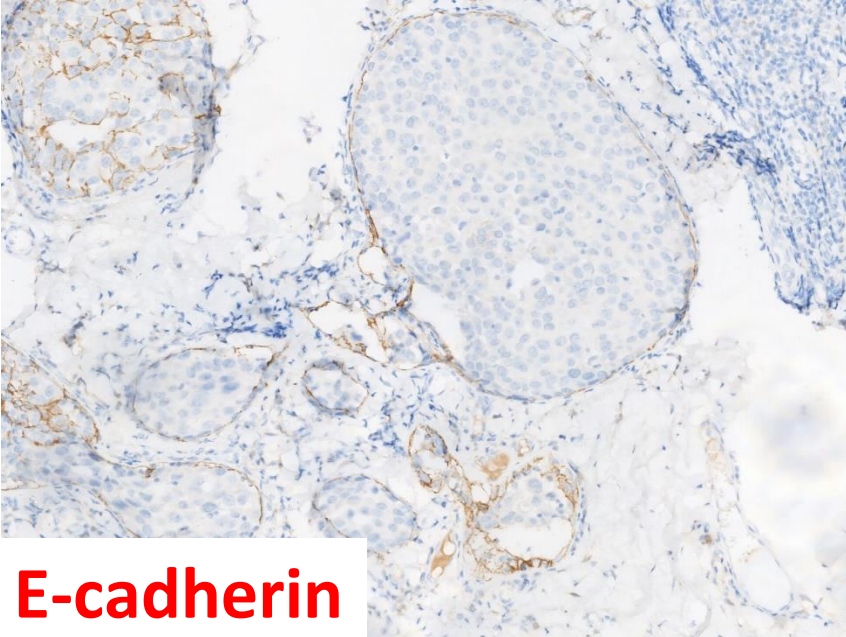
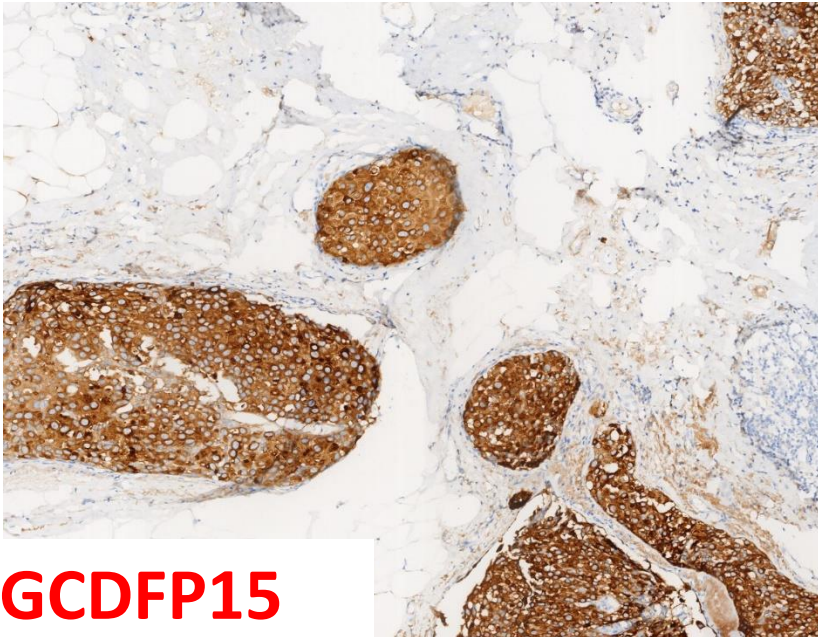
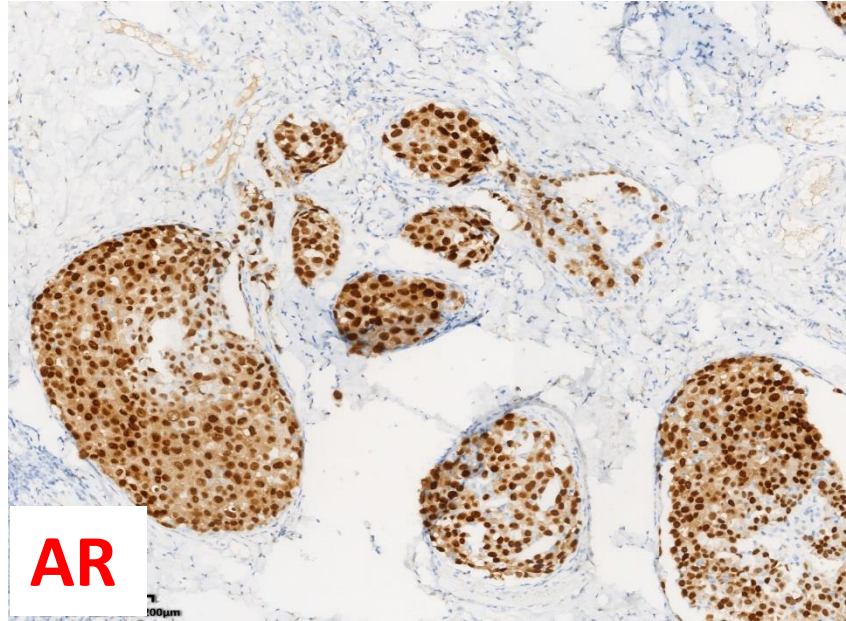
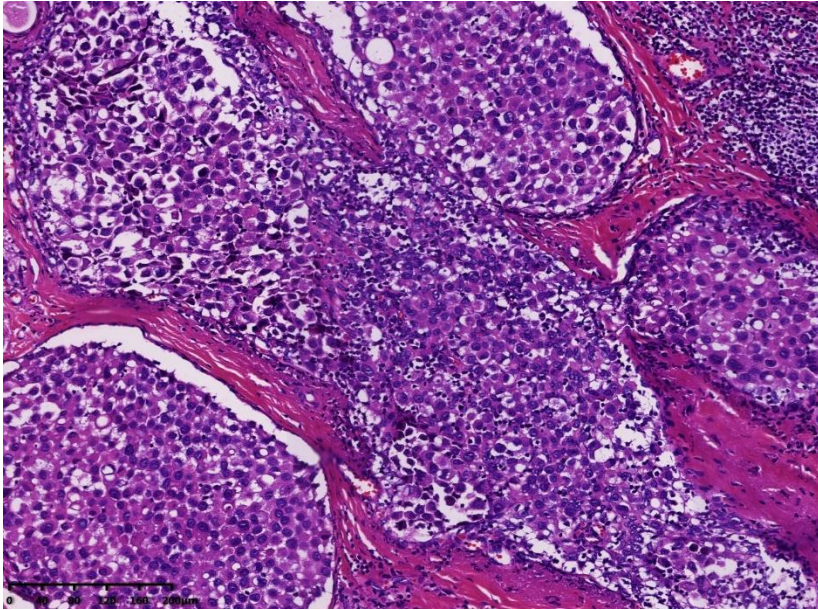
E-Cadherin

AR+TNBC invasive lobular carcinoma



- HER2/ERBB2 mutation: 36.67% (11/30) , all were activating mutation, including p.L755S, p.S310F/Y, p.V842I, p.V777L, p.D769N, p.D769Y, p.T862A, p.H787Y

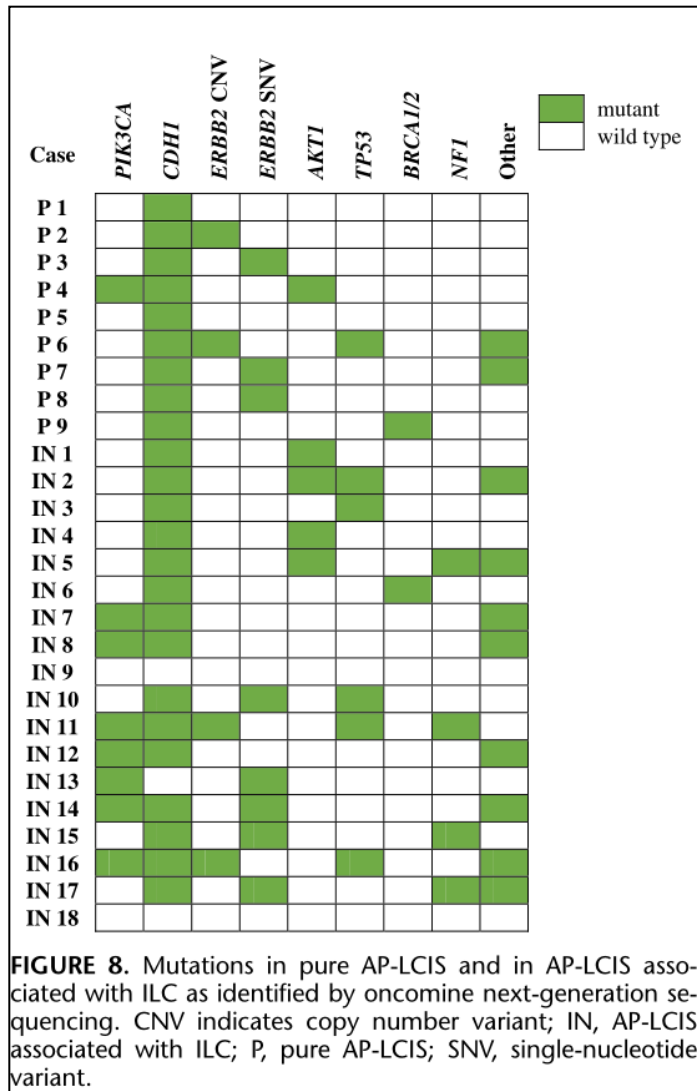
Pleomorphic lobular carcinoma in situ



- Diagnosis relies on cytology features
- Marked nuclear pleomorphism (**>4x lymphocyte**)
- $\pm$ Comedo necrosis
- $\pm$ Apocrine differentiation
- Differential: High-grade DCIS
- High Ki-67, often ER-, HER2+

Apocrine Variant of Pleomorphic Lobular Carcinoma In Situ

Further Clinical, Histopathologic, Immunohistochemical, and Molecular Characterization of an Emerging Entity



AP-LCIS Profile:

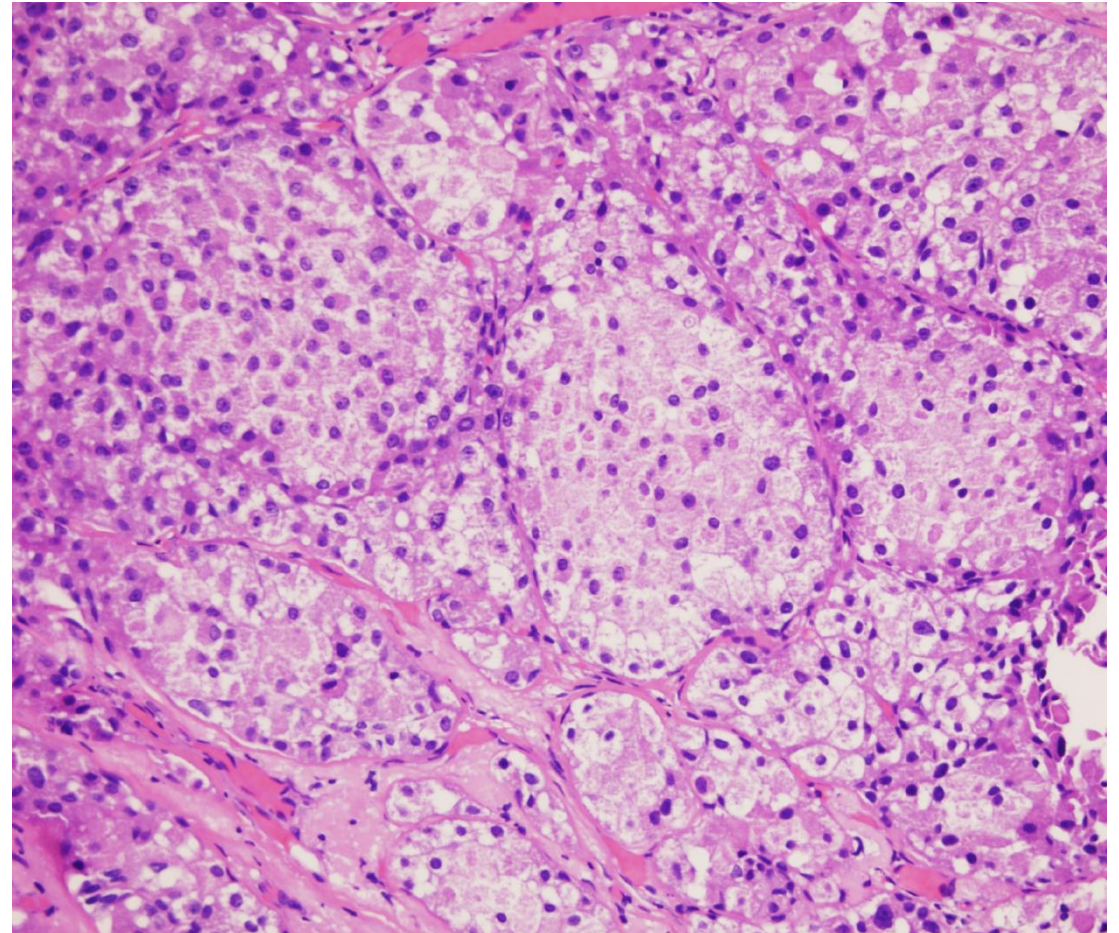
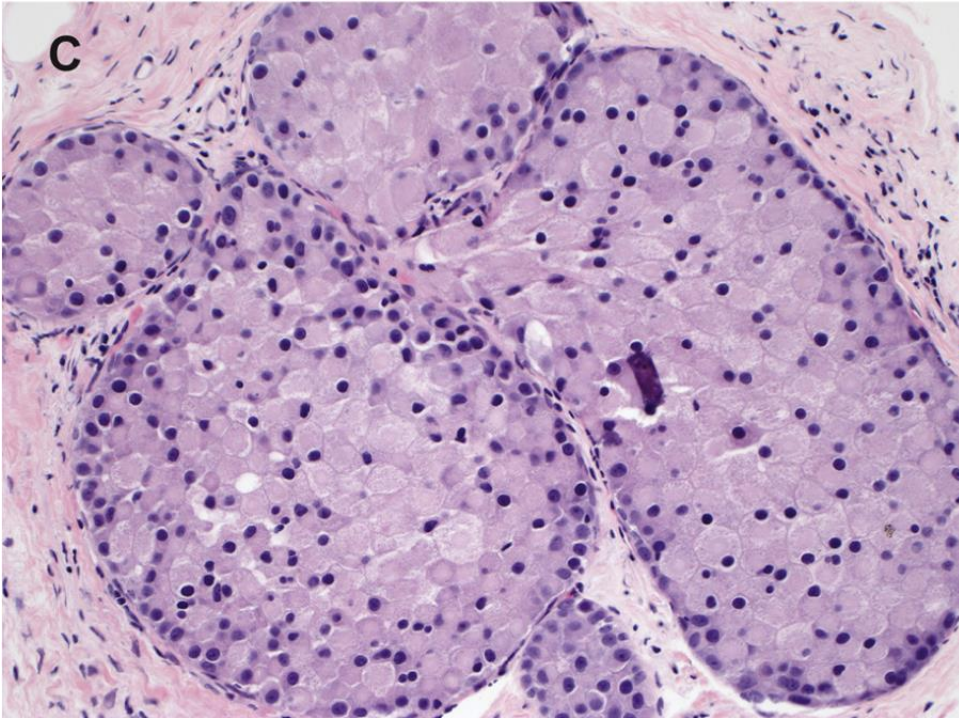
- Ki-67 >15%, AR+ 90%
- Aurora A+ (38%), no significant association with recurrence, invasion, or lymph node metastasis
- Clinicopathologically identical to P-LCIS
- No unique markers by NGS
- 2/13 recurrences (57mo F/U), zero metastases
- AP-LCIS = high-grade LCIS variant with P-LCIS-like features

Practical diagnostic challenges

Apocrine cytology present but insufficient for pleomorphic subtype diagnosis

LCIS with apocrine features:

- ER/PR(-), unlike classic ER/PR(+) LCIS
- Current classification remains undefined
- Clinical significance uncertain



Immunohistochemistry of apocrine lesions

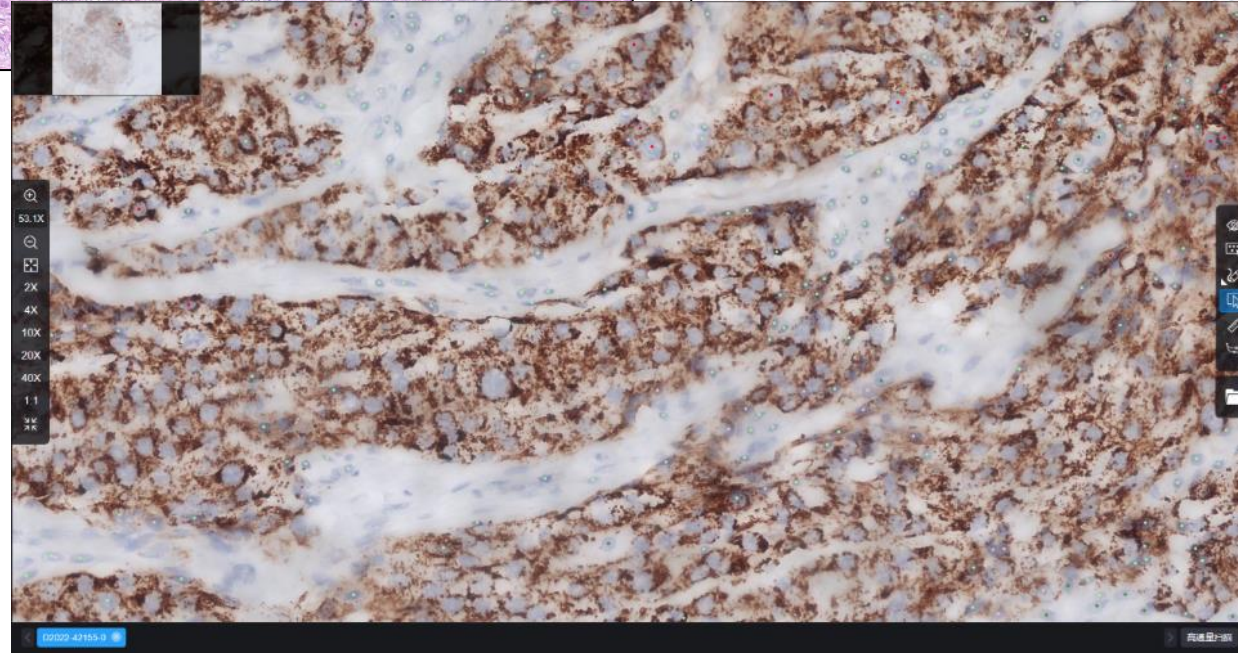
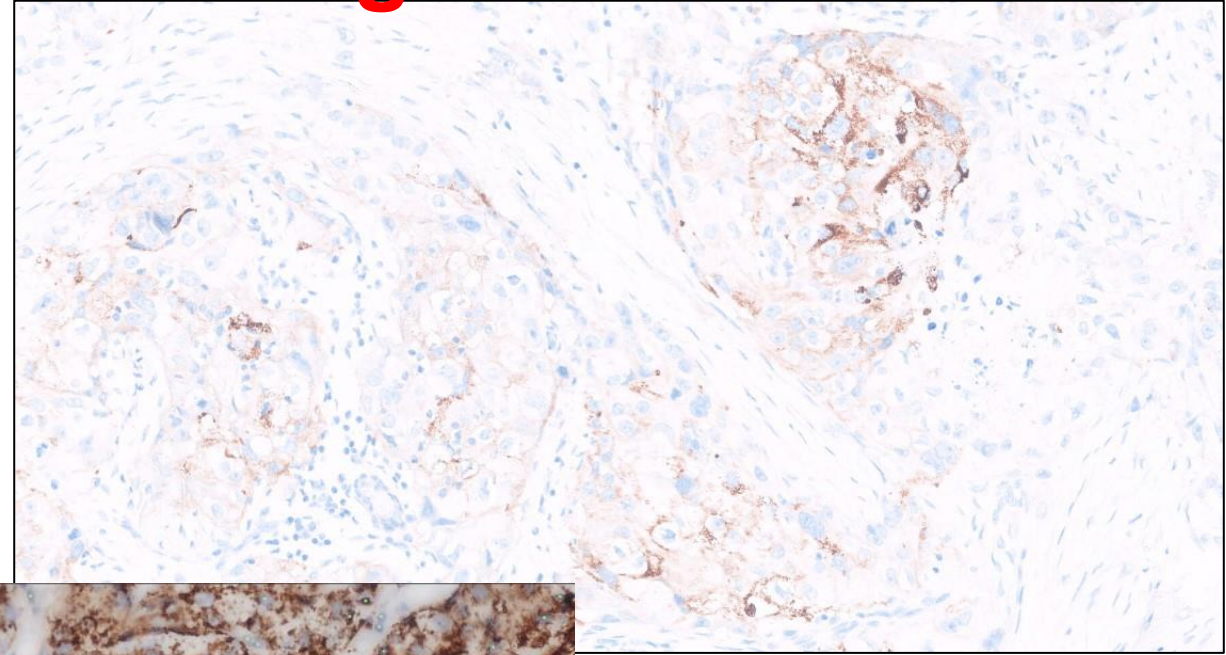
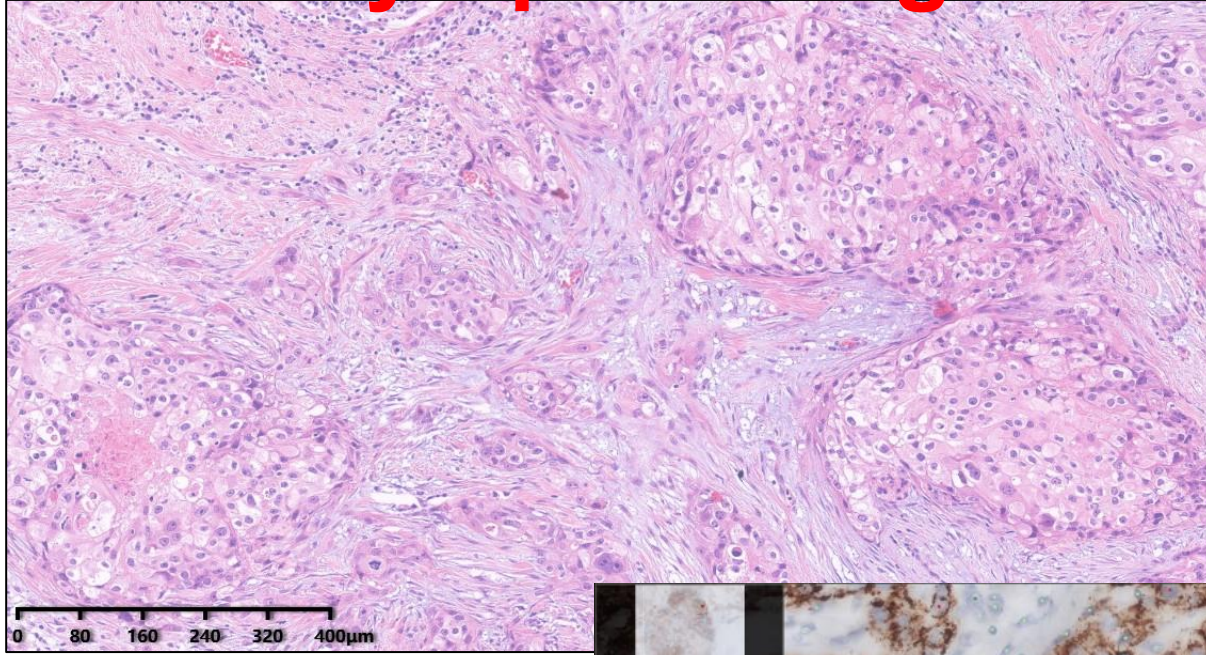
	Benign apocrine proliferations	Apocrine DCIS	Invasive apocrine carcinoma
Oestrogen receptor	0% positive ^{17,39}	0–6% positive ^{25,39}	3.8–60% positive ^{39,41}
Progesterone receptor	0% positive ^{17,39}	0–3% positive ^{25,39}	5.8–40% positive ^{39,41}
Proliferation index (Ki67)	0–14.5 ^{16,46} Mean 2.7% ¹⁸	0.4–28.7 ²⁵ Mean 14.7% ¹⁸	6.9–23.7 ¹⁸ Mean 15.3% ¹⁸
Androgen receptor	100% positive ^{17,39}	97% positive ²⁵	56–100% positive ^{39,41,42}
BCL2	0% positive ^{39,46}	0–3% positive ^{25,39}	50% positive ³⁹
p53	0–30% positive ^{16,39,46}	62–67% positive ^{25,39}	46–50% positive ^{18,39}
c-myc	100% positive ^{46–48}	Not known	Not known
HER2 protein overexpression	10–57% positive* ^{16,46}	47% positive ²⁵	50% positive ⁴²

DCIS, Ductal carcinoma *in situ*.

*These cases did not show *HER2* gene amplification.

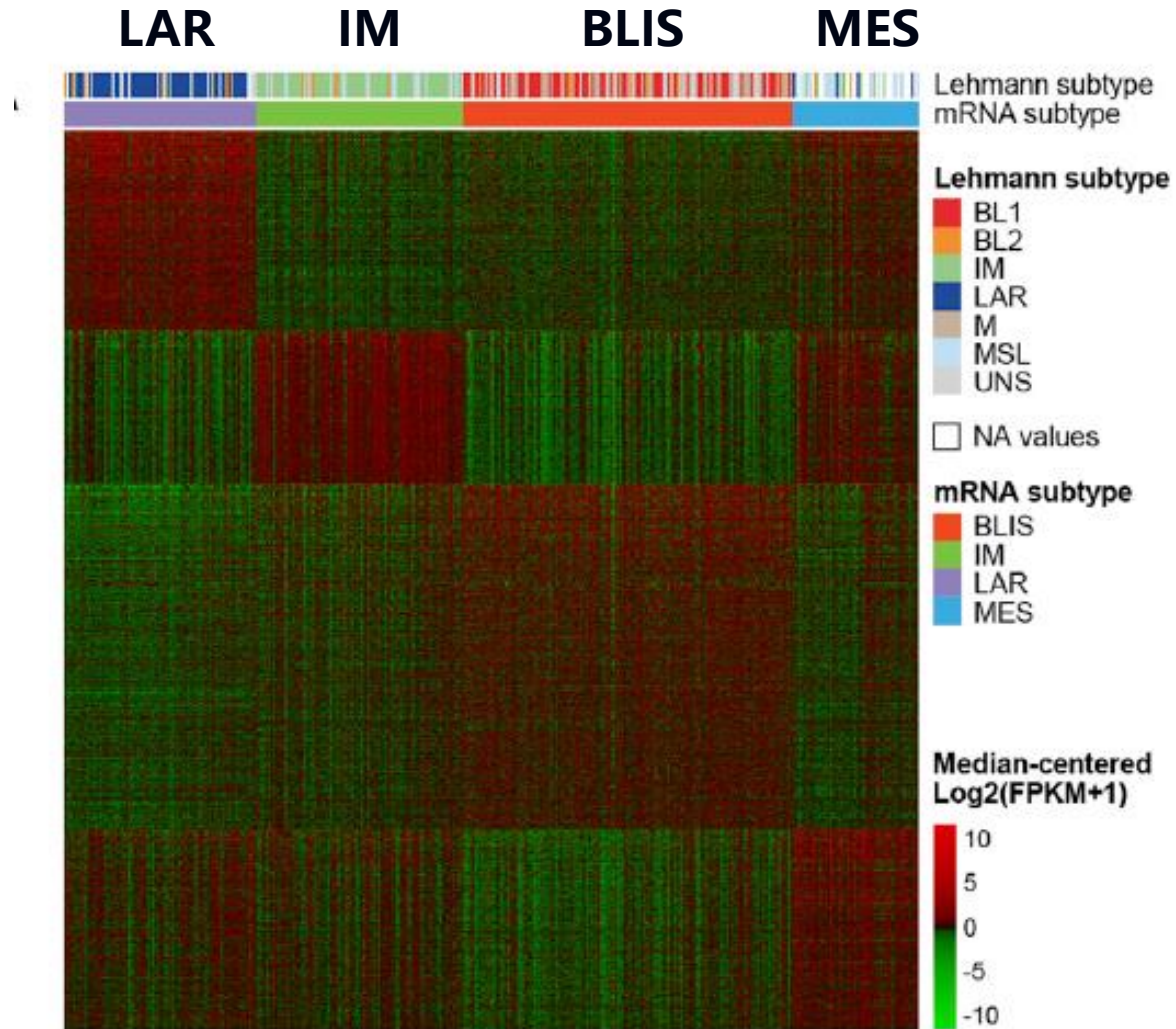
For TNBC with low Ki-67, consider special subtypes including apocrine carcinoma.

HER2 expression in apocrine carcinoma may show cytoplasmic granular staining



TNBC is a heterogeneous group

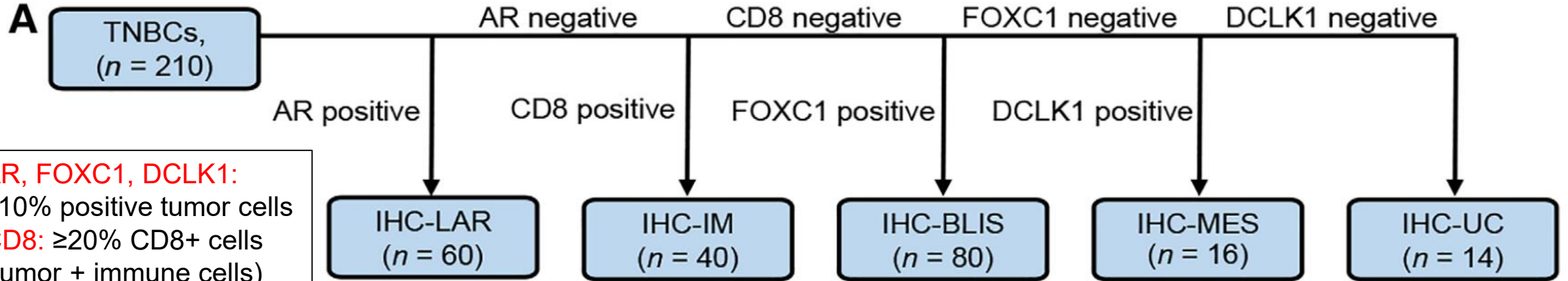
— FUSCC Molecular Classification of TNBC



Multi-omics analysis of 465 TNBC cases identified 4 molecular subtypes.

- **LAR:** Luminal androgen receptor subtype (23%)
- **IM:** Immunomodulatory subtype (24%)
- **BLIS:** Basal-like and immune-suppressed subtype (39%)
- **MES:** Mesenchymal-like subtype (15%)

IHC-Based Subtyping Strategy



IHC-LAR	AR (+)
IHC-IM	AR (–) and CD8(+)
IHC-BLIS	AR(–), CD8(–), and FOXC1(+)
IHC-MES	AR(–), CD8(–), FOXC1(–) and DCLK1(+)
IHC-UC	AR(–), CD8(–), FOXC1(–) and DCLK1(–)

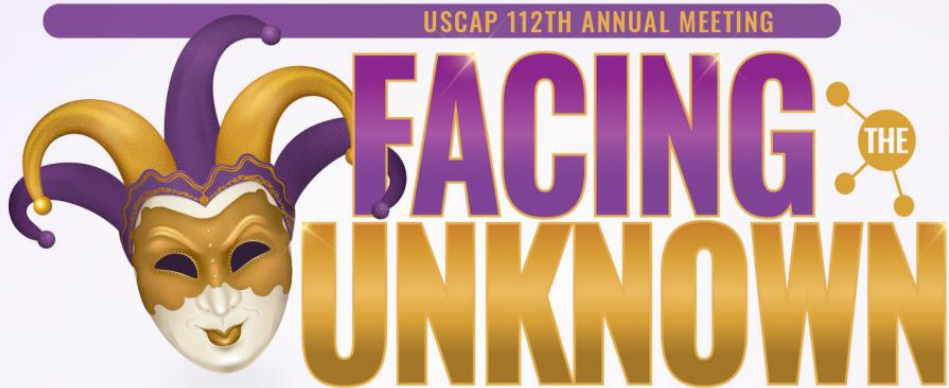
Molecular classification and treatment strategies for TNBC ----FUSCC

Subtype	BLIS	IM	LAR	MES
Clinical	poor prognosis (5-year RFS, 84%)	good prognosis (5-year RFS, 94%)	high prevalence in Asians; poor prognosis (5-year RFS, 88%); elderly patients; related to apocrine differentiation; androgen receptor-positive	poor prognosis (5-year RFS, 79%)
Mutation	<i>TP53</i> (77%); no other frequent mutation; enrichment of the HRD mutation signature	<i>TP53</i> (81%) no other frequent mutation; enrichment of the HRD mutation signature	<i>TP53</i> (61%) PI3K-AKT pathway (~70%) <i>ERBB2</i> (9%)	mutation profile between LAR and the other two groups
Copy number	high chromosomal instability; frequent 9p23 and 12p13 amplification	relatively high chromosomal instability	low chromosomal instability; <i>CDKN2A/B</i> loss (<i>RB1</i> neutral)	copy-number profile between LAR and the other two groups
Treatment	low HRD score: escalated chemotherapy, intensive monitoring; high HRD score: platinum drugs	immune checkpoint inhibitors	endocrine therapy; targeting <i>ERBB2</i> and CDK4/6 inhibitors	targeting CSCs; STAT3 inhibitor

Neoadjuvant chemotherapy for luminal androgen receptor (LAR) breast cancer: potential predictive biomarkers and genetic alterations

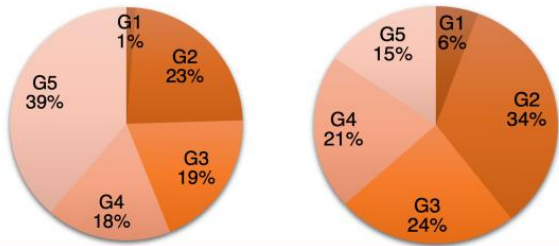
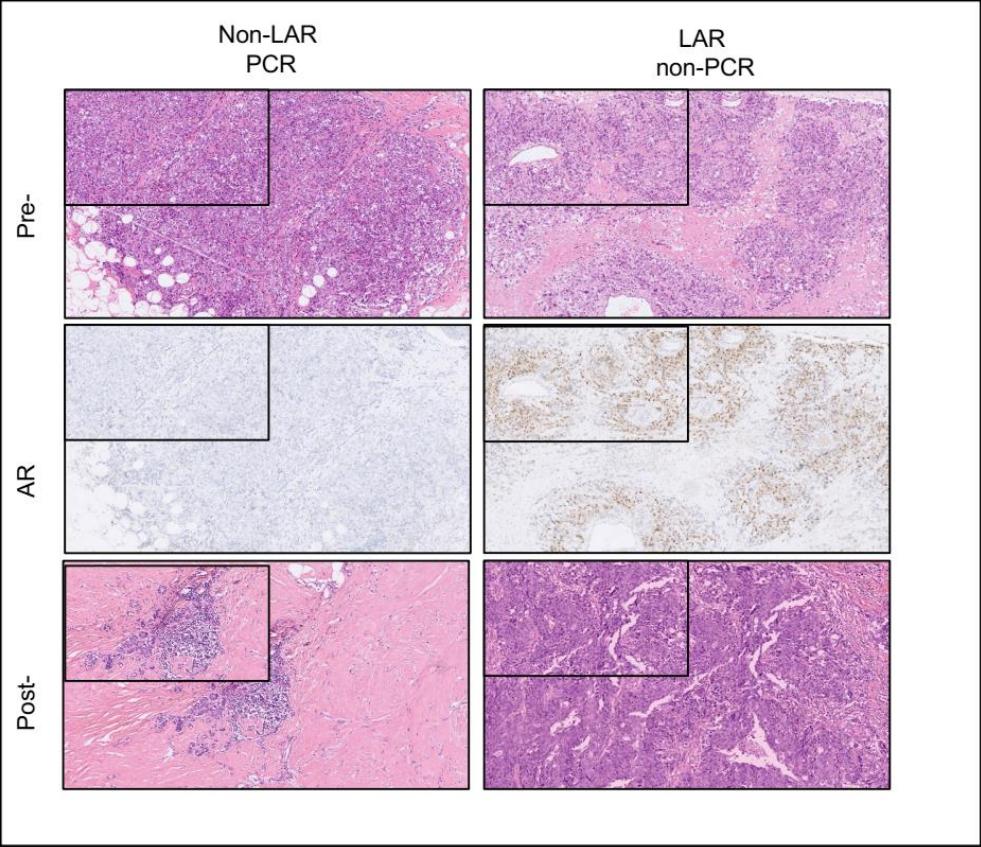
Ming Li (I Weng Lao)

Fudan University Shanghai Cancer Center, Shanghai, China



LAR subtype presented a lower pCR rate(12.68%) and lower MP grade compared to non-LAR subtype

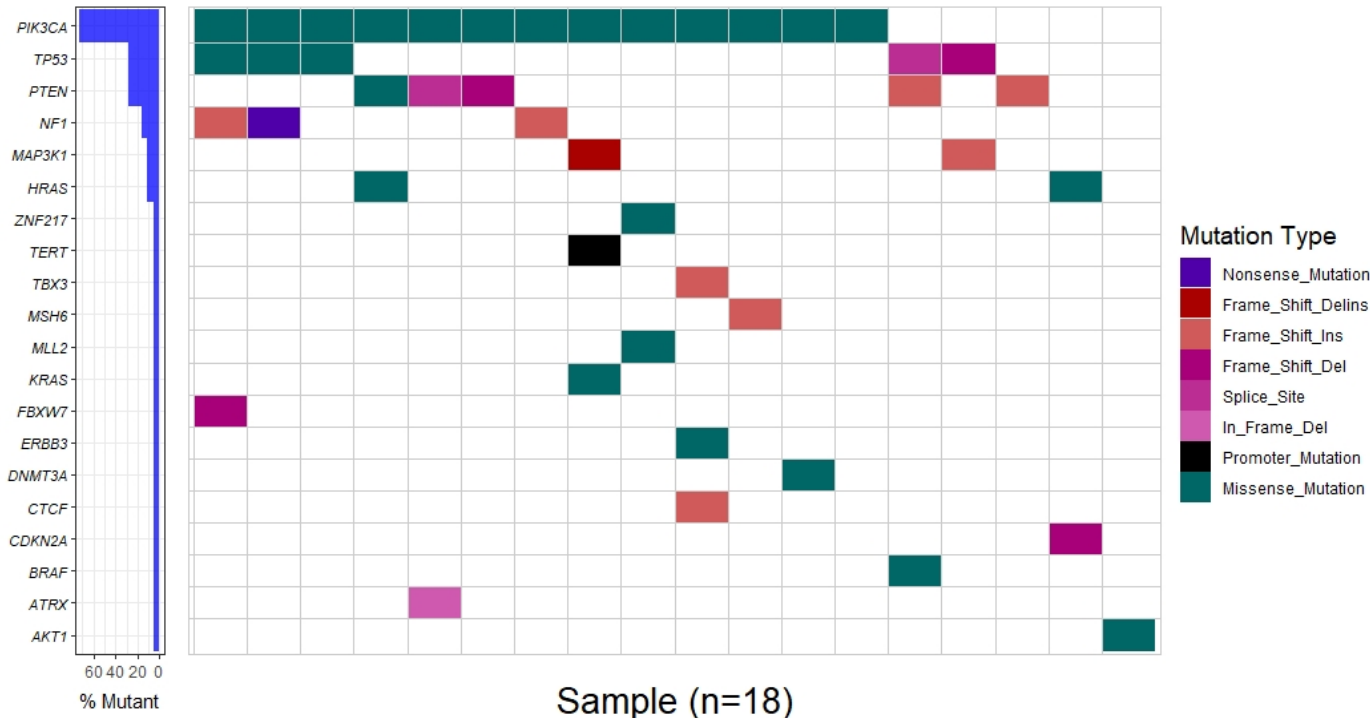
		Non-LAR		LAR		
		n	%	n	%	
		226		71		
Pathological response						< 0.001
pCR	62	27.43	53	34.19	9	12.68
Non-pCR	164	72.57	102	65.81	62	87.32
Miller-Payne grade						0.003
G1	6	2.65	2	1.29	4	5.63
G2	60	26.55	36	23.23	24	33.8
G3	47	20.8	30	19.35	17	23.94
G4	42	18.58	27	17.42	15	21.13
G5	71	31.42	60	38.71	11	15.49
Miller-Payne grade						0.016
≥90%	113	50	87	56.13	26	36.62
< 90%	113	50	68	43.87	45	63.38





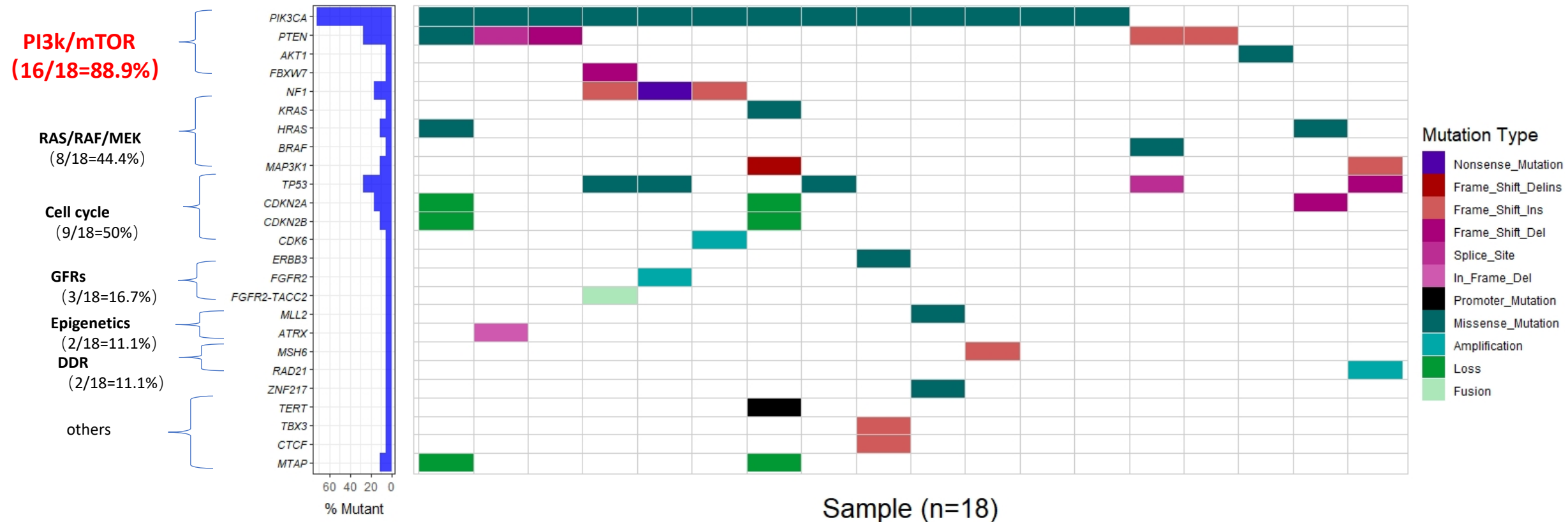
Invasive apocrine carcinoma of the breast: clinicopathologic features and comprehensive genomic profiling of 18 pure triple-negative apocrine carcinomas

Xiangjie Sun^{1,2} · Ke Zuo^{1,2} · Qianlan Yao^{1,2} · Shuling Zhou^{1,2} · Ruohong Shui^{1,2} · Xiaoli Xu^{1,2} · Rui Bi^{1,2} · Baohua Yu^{1,2} · Yufan Cheng^{1,2} · Xiaoyu Tu^{1,2} · Hongfen Lu^{1,2} · Wentao Yang^{1,2}



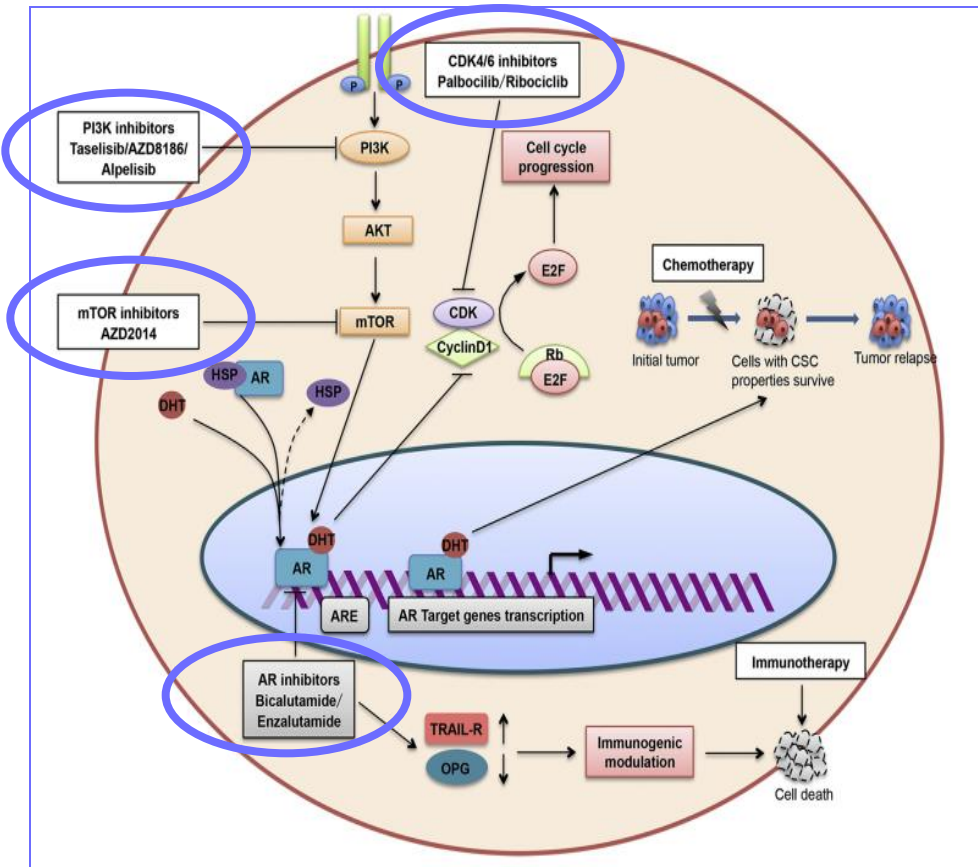
Gene	SNV	CNV_	Rearrangement_count	Sum	Percent
PIK3CA	13	0	0	13	0.72
PTEN	5	1	0	6	0.33
TP53	5	0	0	5	0.28
CDKN2A	1	2	0	3	0.17
NF1	3	0	0	3	0.17
HRAS	2	0	0	2	0.11
MAP3K1	2	0	0	2	0.11
CDKN2B	0	2	0	2	0.11
MTAP	0	2	0	2	0.11
FGFR2	0	1	1	2	0.11
BRAF	1	0	0	1	0.06
MLL2	1	0	0	1	0.06
ZNF217	1	0	0	1	0.06
DNMT3A	1	0	0	1	0.06
ERBB3	1	0	0	1	0.06
TERT	1	0	0	1	0.06
KRAS	1	0	0	1	0.06
AKT1	1	0	0	1	0.06
FBXW7	1	0	0	1	0.06
TBX3	1	0	0	1	0.06
CTCF	1	0	0	1	0.06
MSH6	1	0	0	1	0.06
ATRX	1	0	0	1	0.06
RAD21	0	1	0	1	0.06
CDK6	0	1	0	1	0.06

NGS Study of Invasive Apocrine Carcinoma ---- FUSCC

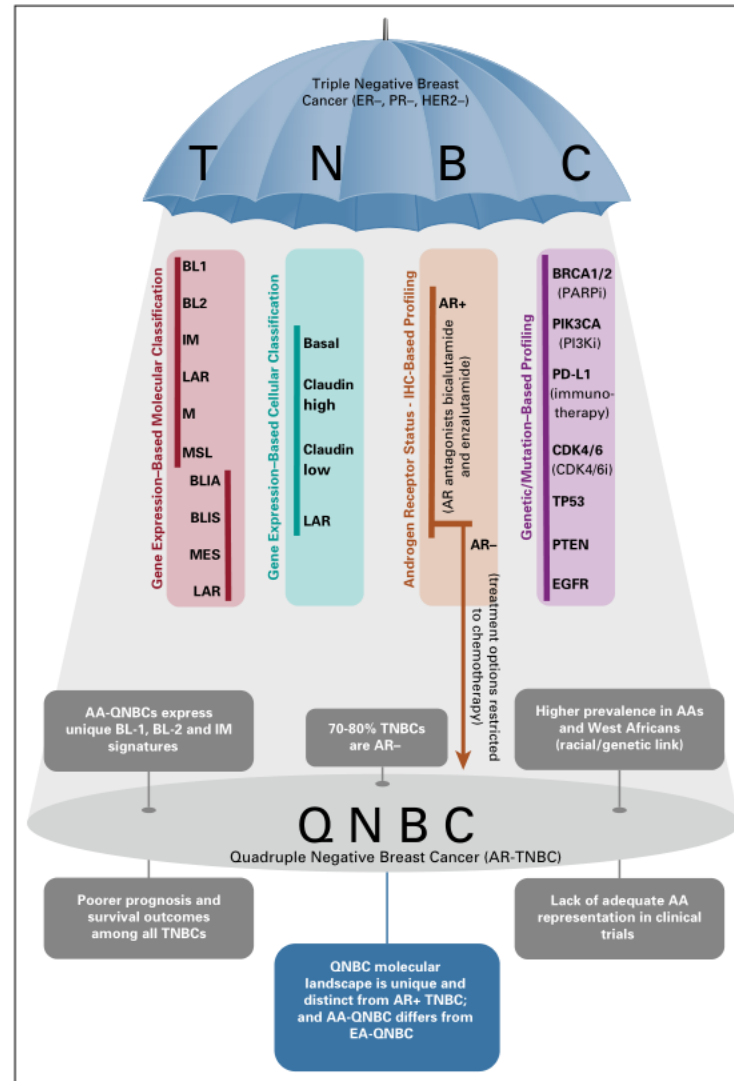


Three patients had concurrent PIK3CA and PTEN mutations

QNBC (Quadruple Negative Breast Cancer)



- CDK4/6 inhibitors
- PI3K inhibitors
- mTOR inhibitors
- AR antagonists



- **AR-Negative TNBC**
- **70-80% of all TNBC cases**
- **Distinct genomic alterations from AR+ TNBC**



Thank you