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Tumour-initiating cells: challenges and opportunities for anticancer drug discovery.

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The hypothesis that cancer is driven by tumour-initiating cells (popularly known as cancer stem cells) has recently attracted a great deal of attention, owing to the promise of a novel cellular target for the treatment of haematopoietic and solid malignancies. Furthermore, it seems that tumour-initiating cells might be resistant to many conventional cancer therapies, which might explain the limitations of these agents in curing human malignancies. Although much work is still needed to identify and characterize tumour-initiating cells, efforts are now being directed towards identifying therapeutic strategies that could target these cells. This Review considers recent advances in the cancer stem cell field, focusing on the challenges and opportunities for anticancer drug discovery.

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