The GRN gene provides instructions for making a protein called progranulin. This protein is primarily found in the membrane of cellular structures called lysosomes, which are specialized compartments that digest and recycle materials. Within lysosomes, progranulin can be cut (cleaved) into smaller proteins, known as granulins, which are thought to function similar to progranulin.

Progranulin is found in tissues throughout the body, but it is most active in cells that are dividing rapidly, such as skin cells (fibroblasts), immune system cells, and certain brain cells. This protein helps regulate the growth, division, and survival of these cells. It also plays important roles in early embryonic development, wound healing, and the body's immune response to injury (inflammation). Progranulin is active in several types of brain cells. However, little is known about this protein's role in the brain. It appears to be critical for the survival of nerve cells (neurons).