



Discovery of novel non-peptidic β -alanine piperazine amide derivatives and their optimization to achiral, easily accessible, potent and selective somatostatin ss_{t1} receptor antagonists

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ABSTRACT

Structural simplification of the core moieties of obeline and ergoline somatostatin ss_{t1} receptor antagonists, followed by systematic optimization, led to the identification of novel, highly potent and selective ss_{t1} receptor antagonists. These achiral, non-peptidic compounds are easily prepared and show promising PK properties in rodents.

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The somatostatin ss_{t1} receptor is one of five somatostatin receptor subtypes (ss_{t1} to ss_{t5}) that have been cloned and characterized so far.^{1–3} It belongs to the G-protein-coupled receptor superfamily and is present in human brain⁴, human retina⁵, neuroendocrine cells⁶, endothelial cells⁷ and various human tumors.^{8–13} Sst_1 receptors are involved in the intra-hypothalamic regulation of growth hormone (GH) secretion^{6,14–17} and modulate somatostatin release in basal ganglia.¹⁸ There is increasing evidence that ss_{t1} receptors act as inhibitory auto-receptors located on somatostatin neurons in hypothalamus, basal ganglia, retina and possibly hippocampus.¹⁹ Thus, compounds that selectively interact with ss_{t1} receptors may play a role in various diseases, such as retinal and endocrine dysfunctions, cancer and neuropsychiatric disorders.^{5,18–20} For instance, ss_{t1} -selective agonists have been shown to mimic the inhibitory effect of SRIF on GH secreting pituitary tumors,²¹ whereas in medullary thyroid carcinoma, they inhibit calcitonin secretion and gene expression.^{22,23} Furthermore, ss_{t1} -selective agonists inhibit endothelial activities, suggesting their utility in angiogenesis.⁷ Finally, we have reported that ss_{t1} antagonists promote social interactions, reduce aggressive behavior and stimulate learning in rodents.^{24,25} In order to further evaluate the potential of somatostatin ss_{t1} receptor ligands for the treatment

of various disorders, we are interested in developing non-peptidic, orally available, brain penetrating, potent and subtype-selective ss_{t1} receptor antagonists.

Recently, we have described antagonists of the ss_{t1} receptor subtype based on the octahydrobenzo[g]quinoline (obeline, e.g., **1**)^{26,27} as well as the octahydro-indolo[4,3-fg]quinoline (ergoline, e.g., **2**)²⁸ scaffolds (Fig. 1).

Both chemical classes provide ligands with very high affinity and selectivity for the ss_{t1} receptor subtype, however, the chemical structure of both cores is relatively complex. Obelines as well as ergolines contain three chiral centers, which requires a long and low-yielding total synthesis including the resolution of a racemate in the case of the obelines,^{29,30} or the use of expensive natural products as starting materials in the case of ergolines.³¹ In addition to these accessibility issues, both structural classes show considerable affinity to some monoamine receptors. Obeline derivative **1** for instance binds to the dopamine D_4 receptor with a pK_D of 8.30, whereas the ergoline derivative **2** is a ligand of the dopamine

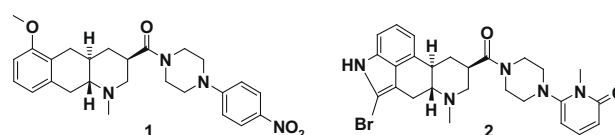


Figure 1. Typical representatives of obeline (**1**) and ergoline (**2**) ss_{t1} antagonists.

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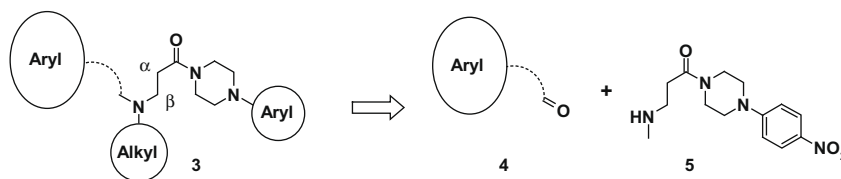


Figure 2. General pharmacophore **3** for ss_{t1} antagonists, and outline of synthetic strategy towards first derivatives.

D_2 and the $5HT_{1A}$ receptors (pK_D s of 7.25 and 7.30, respectively). Due to these potential shortcomings, we set out to identify alternative ss_{t1} receptor ligands with retained ss_{t1} affinity and selectivity versus ss_{t2} – ss_{t5} , but a simpler chemical structure and reduced affinity to monoamine receptors.

Comparison of structures for ss_{t1} antagonists from the obeline and ergoline classes reveals that these non-peptidic ligands share a common pharmacophore, schematically represented by **3** (Fig. 2, left). In this model, a central tertiary amine is substituted by (i) a small alkyl group, (ii) an aryl piperazine amide moiety separated from the amine by a two carbon linker (β -substitution), and (iii) a functionalized aromatic moiety connected by an aliphatic spacer.

In order to assess the utility of this simple pharmacophore model for the identification of structurally less complex ss_{t1} ligands, we decided to retain the first two structural features (i) and (ii) in the simplest possible way, namely as the achiral *N*-methyl- β -alanine piperazine amide **5** (Fig. 2, right), and experimentally probe the less defined third amine substituent. To this end, a collection of aldehydes of the general structure **4** was assembled. These building blocks were selected based on approximate match with the requirements outlined in **3**, structural simplicity, attractiveness as potential drug substructures, and availability of the corresponding acid, ester or alcohol precursors. In total, 17 aldehydes of type **4** were prepared by oxidation of the corresponding primary alcohol precursors (data not shown), reacted with secondary amine **5** under reductive amination conditions, and the resulting tertiary amines tested for their affinity to rat ss_{t1} and ss_{t2} receptors.³² Gratifyingly, this small collection of amines revealed as best example the achiral dibenzosuberane derivative **6** (prepared from aldehyde **4a**, Scheme 1), which retained surprisingly high ss_{t1} affinity (pK_D 7.74) and selectivity versus ss_{t2} (>100-fold) despite its apparently flexible structure. **6** was therefore chosen for further optimization.

In a first round of derivation, the tricyclic dibenzosuberane moiety was further probed. The central 7-membered ring of the dibenzosuberane system was replaced by an unsaturated 7-membered ring (**7**, Table 1), carbo- and hetero-cyclic 6-membered (**8**–**10**) as well as 5-membered rings (**11** and **12**), always by retaining the symmetry of the polycyclic system in order to avoid introduction of a chiral center. In addition, the number of annelated rings was reduced (**13**–**15**). Derivatives **7**–**15** were prepared in analogy to the synthesis of **6** (Scheme 1), and tested in the ss_{t1} and ss_{t2} receptor binding assays.

All these modifications were well tolerated by the ss_{t1} receptor, with the exception of carbazole derivative **12** and naphthalenes **13** and **14**. Introduction of xanthenyl and fluorenyl moieties (derivatives **10** and **11**, respectively) improved the ss_{t1} affinity by more

than 20-fold to the subnanomolar range while at the same time further enhancing the selectivity over ss_{t2} to >1000-fold. For further optimization, the most potent and selective compound (fluorene derivative **11**) was chosen.

Increasing the size of the alkyl substituent of **11** from methyl to ethyl, isopropyl, allyl and cyclopropylmethyl (**16**–**19**, Table 2) successively decreased ss_{t1} affinity and ss_{t2} selectivity. Therefore, the methyl group was retained as the preferred substituent in this position.

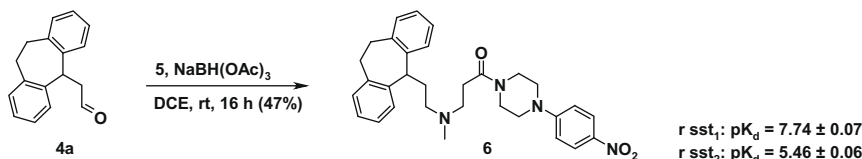
In order to optimize the aryl piperazine part of fluorene derivative **11**, a collection of 18 aryl- and heteroaryl piperazines²⁷ **21a**–**r** (Scheme 2 and Fig. 3) were coupled with acid chloride **20** applying a Schotten-Baumann-type reaction protocol in a multi-parallel fashion (Scheme 2).

Each aryl piperazine was shaken with a slight excess of **20** in a biphasic mixture of aq. $NaHCO_3$ and DCM for 5 h. After separation of the phases and drying of the organic phase, the crude mixtures were loaded on pre-packed SiO_2 cartridges and eluted with DCM/MeOH 9:1. Fractions collected based on tlc analysis were treated with HCl, evaporated and analyzed by HPLC. Purities of crude products **22a**–**r** ranged from 22% to 95% (Table 3) and were deemed good enough to provide a first assessment of binding affinities. Therefore, the crude hydrochlorides were directly submitted for rat ss_{t1} receptor binding studies. Based on these preliminary binding results (Table 3), the 3,4-difluorophenyl piperazine moiety of **22g**, the benzoxadiazole piperazine of **22p**, and to a lesser extent the imidazo[1,2-*b*]pyridazine piperazine of **22q**, offered themselves as interesting options to replace the nitrophenyl piperazine group of **11**.

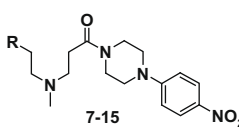
Combination of the most promising structural moieties identified in the course of this optimization process led to the fluorenyl and xanthenyl derivatives **22g**, **22p**, **23** and **24** (Table 4). All four derivatives were prepared and characterized in binding studies with rat and human somatostatin receptor subtypes.

Compounds **22g**, **22p**, **23** and **24** bind to rat ss_{t1} receptors with subnanomolar affinities (pK_D s 9.11–9.55) and show excellent selectivity versus rat ss_{t2} receptors ($\geq 10,000$ -fold). These attractive binding features were confirmed in cell lines expressing the five human receptor subtypes.²⁵ All four compounds exhibit single-digit nanomolar affinities to h ss_{t1} receptors, and bind to h ss_{t2} –h ss_{t5} with affinities >1 μM (Table 4).

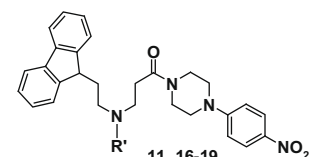
Since there were no major differences in the binding profile for these four derivatives, the two difluorophenyl piperazine derivatives **22g** and **23** were selected for further profiling, mainly based on the easier accessibility of the piperazine building block.



Scheme 1. Synthesis of tertiary amine **6**, and somatostatin receptor binding affinities.

Table 1Binding affinities of β -alanine piperazine amide derivatives to rat sst_1 and sst_2 receptors: modifications at the polycyclic moiety


Compound	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
pK_d r sst_1 ^a	7.74 \pm 0.07	7.94 \pm 0.02	7.53 \pm 0.02	7.90 \pm 0.01	9.05 \pm 0.06	9.15 \pm 0.10	6.48 \pm 0.03	7.11 \pm 0.03	6.56 \pm 0.03	7.86 \pm 0.04
pK_d r sst_2 ^a	5.46 \pm 0.06	5.29 \pm 0.04	4.73 \pm 0.07	5.22 \pm 0.01	5.17 \pm 0.03	5.16 \pm 0.03	4.84 \pm 0.05	5.06 \pm 0.02	4.78 \pm 0.04	5.08 \pm 0.05

^a Mean \pm SEM. Number of experiments: $n = 3$ –6.**Table 2**Binding affinities of fluorene derivatives to rat sst_1 and sst_2 receptors: modifications at the alkyl moiety


R' Compound	Me 11	Et 16	iPr 17	Allyl 18	–CH ₂ cPr 19
pK_d r sst_1 ^a	9.15 \pm 0.10	9.02 \pm 0.02	8.33 \pm 0.06	8.15 \pm 0.04	7.34 \pm 0.01
pK_d r sst_2 ^a	5.16 \pm 0.03	5.74 \pm 0.01	6.04 \pm 0.02	5.39 \pm 0.03	5.16 \pm 0.22

^a Mean \pm SEM. Number of experiments: $n = 3$ –6.

In a cAMP-based functional assay, **23** and **22g** behaved as antagonists, devoid of agonist activity, with a pK_b of 7.93 and 8.55, respectively. Both **23** and **22g** act as antagonists at the human recombinant sst_1 receptor driven luciferase activity with pK_b -values of 8.13 and 8.46, respectively, and are devoid of intrinsic activity.²⁵

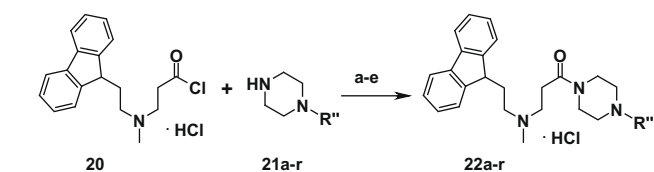
Radioligand binding affinities of **23** and **22g** were tested for a panel of 40 monoamine or peptide receptors, ion channels and transporters.²⁵ Highest affinities were found for the $\alpha 1$ receptor (pK_D s of 6.55 and 6.53), the D2 receptor (pK_D s of 6.31 and 6.11) and the D4 receptor (pK_D s of 6.31 and 6.90), indicating that these new β -alanine piperazine amide derivatives have an improved selectivity profile as compared to obelines and ergolines.

The pharmacokinetics and brain levels of **23** and **22g** were studied in mice after dosing of 10 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ i.v. and 30 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ p.o. Both compounds were well absorbed after oral administration, with an estimated bioavailability of 7% for **22g** and 19% for **23**. They penetrated readily and significantly into the brain with a brain/plasma ratio >1 after oral and i.v. dosing. Maximum concentrations of **23** and **22g** in plasma and brain were reached at about 1 h. Apparent terminal half-lives in plasma of 11 and 6 hours could be estimated for intravenously and orally administered **23** and **22g**, respectively.

Compounds **23** and **22g** were tested for inhibition of four human cytochrome P450 isoenzymes using a microplate-based, direct fluorometric assay. Estimated IC_{50} s for CYP450 1A2, 2C19 and 3A4 were in the μM range or higher than 10 μM for both compounds, and $<1/1.3$ μM for CYP 2D6, respectively, indicating a low to moderate potential for drug–drug interactions.

An initial genotoxicity assessments revealed that both **23** and **22g** were negative in the Ames test as well as the micronucleus test in V79 Chinese hamster cells.

Since good synthetic accessibility has been a main requirement for potential alternatives to obeline and ergoline sst_1 antagonists,



Scheme 2. Parallel synthesis of fluorene derivatives with modified arylpiperazine moieties. Reaction conditions: (a) Arylpiperazine **21a–r** (0.1 mmol), acid chloride **20** (0.13 mmol), 1 M aq. NaHCO_3 (1 ml), DCM (2 ml), shake for 5 h. (b) Pipette off aqueous phase, add 100 mg Na_2SO_4 , shake for 30 min. (c) Load on cartridge containing 500 mg SiO_2 , wash with DCM (1 ml). (d) Elute with 3×1 ml DCM/MeOH 9/1 (tlc control). (e) Add 0.5 N HCl/EtOH (0.5 ml), evaporate, HPLC analysis.

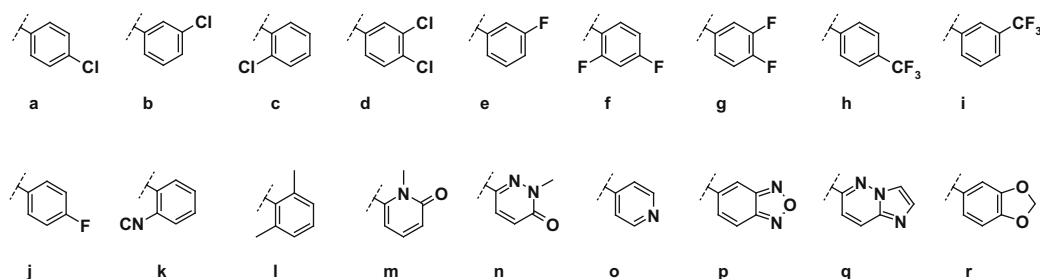
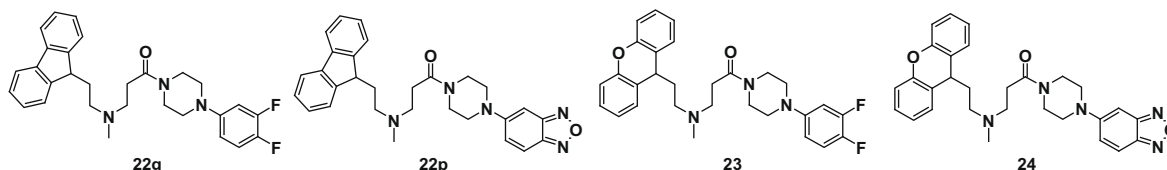
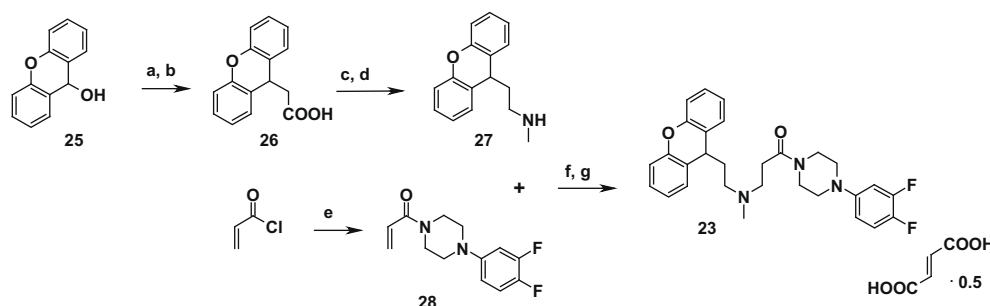
**Figure 3.** Structures of residues R'' for piperazines **21a–r** and products **22a–r**.

Table 3HPLC purities and rat sst₁ binding affinities of crude parallel synthesis products **22a–r**

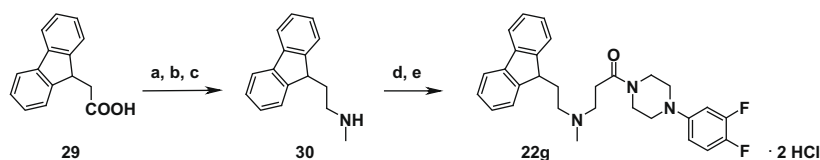
Compound	22a	22b	22c	22d	22e	22f	22g	22h	22i
HPLC purity [%]	77	74	84	55	79	78	81	90	89
pK _d r sst ₁ ^a	8.77 ± 0.05	7.75 ± 0.11	7.62 ± 0.11	8.72 ± 0.08	8.44 ± 0.10	8.48 ± 0.07	9.24 ± 0.03	7.50 ± 0.06	7.21 ± 0.14
Compound	22j	22k	22l	22m	22n	22o	22p	22q	22r
HPLC purity [%]	81	95	91	52	68	23	33	22	58
pK _d r sst ₁ ^a	8.71 ± 0.08	8.34 ± 0.06	< 6	8.67 ± 0.02	8.18 ± 0.10	7.67 ± 0.07	9.13 ± 0.02	8.96 ± 0.09	8.34 ± 0.05

^a Mean ± SEM. Number of experiments: *n* = 3.**Table 4**Compounds **22g**, **22p**, **23**, **24**: affinities for different somatostatin receptor subtypes

Compound	pK _d ^a						
	r sst ₁	r sst ₂	h sst ₁	h sst ₂	h sst ₃	h sst ₄	h sst ₅
22g	9.29 ± 0.02	4.71 ± 0.10	8.27 ± 0.06	4.91 ± 0.07	5.57 ± 0.06	5.62 ± 0.01	n.d.
22p	9.55 ± 0.02	5.38 ± 0.05	8.58 ± 0.05	5.38 ± 0.07	5.92 ± 0.01	5.94 ± 0.02	n.d.
23	9.11 ± 0.11	5.19 ± 0.16	8.79 ± 0.06	5.16 ± 0.09	5.55 ± 0.04	5.47 ± 0.06	4.84 ± 0.10
24	9.49 ± 0.10	5.09 ± 0.05	8.67 ± 0.05	n.d.	5.79 ± 0.02	5.84 ± 0.02	n.d.

^a Mean ± SEM. Number of experiments: *n* = 3–6.

Scheme 3. Synthesis of achiral xanthenyl sst₁ antagonist **23**. Reaction conditions: (a) malonic acid (1.5 equiv), HOAc, rt, 1 h (quant). (b) NMP, 1 h, 100° (88%). (c) ClCOO*i*Bu, Me₂NBn, EtOAc, –15°, then H₂NMe, rt, 1 h (91%). (d) Red-Al (3.5 equiv, 65% in toluene), toluene, –5° to rt, 3 h (86%). (e) **21g**, EtOAc, aq. NaHCO₃, 5° to rt, 1 h (88%). (f) EtOAc, 70°, 20 h (86%). (g) fumaric acid (0.5 equiv), ethanol/heptane, crystallization (85%).



Scheme 4. Synthesis of achiral fluorenyl sst₁ antagonist **22g**. Reaction conditions: (a) ClCOO*i*Bu, Me₂NBn, EtOAc, –15°, then H₂NMe, rt, 1 h (80%). (b) LiAlH₄/CHCl₃, THF, 65°, 4 h. (c) H₂O, 4 N NaOH, then filter; HCl gas (50%). (d) NaOH; **28**, EtOAc, 65°, 20 h. (e) HCl, EtOAc/EtOH, crystallization (64%).

large scale syntheses have been worked out for both **22g** and **23**. Starting from commercial xanthene-9-ol **25**, 0.68 kg of **23** hemifumarate was prepared in a straightforward, chromatography-free, 7-step synthesis in an overall yield of 50% (Scheme 3). A similar chromatography-free 6-step process starting from commercially available fluorene-9-yl acetic acid **29** afforded 1 kg of **22g** di-hydrochloride salt in an overall yield of 26% (Scheme 4).

In summary, we have identified a novel class of achiral, highly potent and selective somatostatin sst₁ receptor antagonists that

show promising PK properties in mice, are not genotoxic in vitro, and are easily prepared on large scale. Further details and results of in-vivo studies with these compounds will be published elsewhere in due course.

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