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Antitumoral activity of a polyisoprenylated benzophenone (CLU-502) isolated from Clusia sp

D. Diaz-Carballo, D. Strumberg, S. Seeber, R.A. Hilger. *University of Essen, Medical School, West German C, Experimental Therapeutics, Essen, Germany*

We have characterized a polyisoprenylated benzophenone isolated from *Clusia rosea*, collected in Florida, USA. This novel substance, called CLU-502, was isolated from methanolic extracts of the plant using RP-HPLC coupled to a PDA-detector. In the SRB proliferation assay, CLU-502 demonstrated a potent cytotoxic activity in a panel of human tumor cell lines such as neuroblastoma and leukemia. Both, wild-type cell lines and sub-lines resistant to doxorubicin, cis-platin, etoposide, SN38, raltitrexel or 5-fluorouracil were highly sensitive to CLU-502. Interestingly, normal fibroblasts were more resistant to this compound than cancer cells. CLU-502 inhibits the unwinding activity of topoisomerase I in a relaxation of pBR322 plasmid, as well as the decatenation of kinetoplasmids by human topoisomerase II. In addition, CLU-502 induce a dose-dependent inhibition of telomerase activity in vitro. A dose-dependent effect on the phosphorylation of ERK1/2, the cytosolic downstream enzymes of the MAP-kinase pathway, was also detected in Western blot analyses. The interaction of CLU-502 with PD98059, a specific inhibitor of ERK1/2 phosphorylation, resulted in a synergistic cytotoxic effect when both drugs were administered to tumor cells simultaneously. As the result of the exposure of cell cultures to CLU-502, a cell cycle arrest of the G_1 phase through the induction of $p21^{CIP}$ was detected. CLU-502 induces a down-regulation of N-myc proto-oncogen in LAN-1 wild type and etoposide resistant, Pgp positive neuroblastoma cell line. Apoptosis/DNA-damage in tumor cells was observed in agarose gels after the exposure of CLU-502 at different concentrations. Initial toxicological studies in a nude mouse model revealed that treatment with CLU-502 was well tolerated up to 100 mg/kg. Finally, preliminary studies had shown that CLU-502 is active in vivo in a neuroblastoma and colon carcinoma nude-mice models.

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Novel mTOR Inhibitors with improved pharmacological properties over rapamycin

M.A. Gregory[1], S. Gaisser[1], R.E. Lill[1], H. Hong[2], B. Wilkinson[1], H. Petkovic[1], R. Sheridan[1], J. Staunton[2], P.F. Leadlay[3], M. Zhang[1]. *[1]Biotica Technology Ltd., Essex, UK; [2]University of Cambridge, University Chemical Laboratory, Cambridge, UK; [3]University of Cambridge, Department of Biochemistry, Cambridge, UK*

The mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR), a downstream protein kinase of the phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3K)/Akt (protein kinase B) signaling pathway that mediates cell survival and proliferation, is a prime strategic target for anticancer drug development. Rapamycin is a highly specific inhibitor of mTOR and its analogues are the only agents in clinical development that target the PI3K/Akt pathway.

In spite of various semi-synthetic modifications of rapamycin, the structural changes produced have been limited to only a few positions around the macrolactone ring, for example, the hydroxyls at C40 and C28 as well as those at C16 and C27 after dealkylation. More limited chemistry has been applied at other functionalities such as the ketone at C9 and the conjugated triene moiety. These limitations inherent to synthetic modification of rapamycin are further exemplified by the fact that most rapamycin analogues under clinical development, CCI-779, RAD001 and ABT-579 are all modified at the C40 hydroxyl group outside FKBP and mTOR binding domains. As a consequence they are likely to share similar profiles with rapamycin. For example, CCI-779 shares the same tumor inhibition profile with rapamycin and the Pearson correlation coefficient of the in vitro antiproliferative activities and potencies of the two agents across the 60-cell-line screen is 0.86.

We report here the use of engineered biosynthesis approach to explore wider structural space of rapamycin and the discovery of novel rapamycin analogues with improved pharmacological properties over rapamycin. The challenges of using biosynthetic engineering for the modification of rapamycin include the size and complexity of the rapamycin biosynthetic gene cluster (which has made heterologous expression approaches difficult) and the genetic intractability of the rapamycin producing organism, *Streptomyces hygroscopicus* NRRL5491. Examples of the genetic modification of this organism are extremely limited.

Deletion of a portion of the rapamycin biosynthetic gene cluster, using conjugative methods for DNA transfer to *S. hygroscopics* followed by targeted recombination, provided a rapamycin non-producing mutant, MG2−10. The deleted genes included those responsible for all of the oxidative (at C9, C16 and C27) and methylation (at the C16, C27 and C39 hydroxyl groups) modifications of the first enzyme free intermediate of rapamycin biosynthesis. In addition, it was discovered that one of these genes, *rapK*, is essential for the production of the first enzyme free biosynthetic intermediate, as it is required for the production of (or regulation of the production of) the starter unit of the rapamycin polyketide synthase. Another of the genes, *rapL*, is required for the production of the pipecolic acid unit incorporated into rapamycin; we have shown previously that deletion of this gene and exogenous feeding of related amino acids provided access to novel rapalogues.

Complementation of *S. hygroscopics* MG2−10 with gene cassettes carrying combinations of the deleted genes provided access to a library of rapalogues bearing altered oxidation and alkylation patterns (24 possible combinations). The feeding of exogenous carboxylic acids (starter unit analogues) or amino acids (pipecolic acid analogues) to specific mutants provided an orthogonal approach for increasing diversity through mutasynthesis of the engineered strains. The presentation will provide further details of the experiments described herein and of the novel rapalogues generated by these methods.

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Parthenolide sensitizes ultraviolet (UV) B-induced apoptosis via PKC but independent of AKT

Y.K. Won, C.N. Ong, H.M. Shen. *National University of Singapore, Community, Occupational, and Family Medicine, Singapore, Singapore*

Parthenolide is the principal sesquiterpene lactone in feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*) with proven anti-inflammatory property. We have previously reported that parthenolide possesses strong anti-cancer activity in UVB-induced skin cancer using SKH-1 hairless mice. In order to further understand the mechanism(s) involved in the anti-cancer activity of parthenolide, we investigated the role of protein kinase B (AKT) and protein kinase C (PKCs) in the sensitization activity of parthenolide on UVB-induced apoptosis. Parthenolide pre-treatment vastly sensitizes JB6 cells to UVB-induced apoptosis. Although parthenolide inhibits the UVB-induced phosphorylation of AKT at Thr308 site (but not at Ser473 site), transient transfection of a constitutively active AKT plasmid does not affect this sensitization, indicating that AKT activation is not directly involved in cell death induced by parthenolide-UVB. On the other hand, several subtypes of PKCs have been reported to be involved in UVB-induced signaling cascade with both pro- and anti-apoptotic activities. Here we focused on 2 novel PKCs (the pro-apoptotic PKCδ and the anti-apoptotic PKCη) and the anti-apoptotic atypical PKCζ. UVB induces the translocations of these PKCs from the cytosol to membrane, an indication of their activations. Parthenolide pre-treatment enhances the translocation of PKCδ, and in contrary, inhibits the translocations of PKCη and ζ. Similar results were also detected when the kinase activities of these PKCs were tested. Moreover, pre-treatment with a specific PKCδ inhibitor Rotterlin completely diminishes the sensitization effect of parthenolide on UVB-induced apoptosis. In conclusion, we demonstrated that parthenolide sensitizes UVB-induced apoptosis via a PKC-dependent pathway but independent of AKT.

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Real time imaging of cancer therapeutic effects of a natural product turmeric in cell culture and animal models

T. Chaudhuri[1], Z. Cao[2], K. Zinn[2]. *[1]University of Alabama at Birmingham, Radiology, Birmingham, AL, USA; [2]University of Alabama at Birmingham, Medicine, Birmingham, AL, USA*

Introduction: The goal was to visualize the anti-cancer effect of a natural product, curcumin, a major component of turmeric normally eaten by humans. We report that curcumin has a fluorescence characteristic that can be detected under visible light using appropriate filters. To accomplish the goal we utilized our powerful light-based imaging system where incorporation of curcumin into the cancer cells and apoptosis were visualized in cell culture and in animal experiments.

Materials and method: Curcumin (diferuloylmrthane) was purified from fresh turmeric roots. Human origin ovarian cancer cells (Skov3 and Ovcar-3) cervical cancer cells (HeLa) were cultured in DMEM medium containing non-essential amino acids, and 2mM L-glutamine with 10% FBS. The cells were incubated at 37C in a humidified atmosphere containing 95% air and 5%CO2. Cancer cells were harvested by trypsin/ EDTA 24 hrs followed by plating in triplicates wells in 24 well plates. Cells were allowed to grow for 24h in DMEM supplemented with 2mM L-glutamine with 10% FBS. Curcumin (50 ug/well) was added to each cell line in triplicate wells. In additional triplicate wells, no curcumin was added for controls. At defined times (2h, 5h, 8h and 24 h for HeLa and SKOV3 and 24h, 48h, 72h, and 96h for Ovcar3), cells were washed twice with PBS. Wells were imaged with a Leica DMIRE 2 fluorescent microscope and Spot RT color camera. Cell viability was determined by trypan blue exclusion and plates were imaged again. For in vivo studies, each type of cancer cells (1×106 cells/mouse)