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Novel *N*-(4-Piperidiny)benzamide Antimalarials with Mammalian Protein Farnesyltransferase Inhibitory Activity

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Protein farnesyltransferase of *Plasmodium falciparum* is a potential target in the treatment of malaria for which increased drug resistance is observed. The design, synthesis and evaluation of a series of *N*-(4-piperidiny)benzamides is reported. The most potent compounds showed *in vitro* activity against the parasite at submicromolar concentrations.

Key words farnesyltransferase; malaria; *Plasmodium falciparum*; *N*-(4-piperidiny)benzamide derivative; inhibitor

Antimalarial drugs saved millions of lives during the 20th century. However, owing to the onset of drug resistance, there is now an urgent need to identify new drug targets in *Plasmodium falciparum* and to develop effective new antimalarial agents.^{1,2} Prenylated proteins have been shown to function in important cellular processes including signal transductions. Among them, protein farnesyl transferase (PFT) has been a major target in the conception of new anticancer drugs.³

In an effort to identify a new and more effective drug target, Chakrabarti^{4,5} found that the peptidomimetic L-745,631 (Chart 1) was the best inhibitor of *P. falciparum* PFT and also a good inhibitor of parasite growth.

This finding suggests the real potential of designing or identifying inhibitors of *P. falciparum* prenyl transferase as an approach to malaria therapy. In addition, several works have reported mammalian PFT inhibitors displaying potent antimalarial activities *in vitro* and more recently *in vivo*.⁶ Small inhibitors of mammalian FTase developed as anticancer drugs like BMS-214662^{7–11} are also effective inhibitors of *P. falciparum* growth.^{12,13}

Results and Discussion

Our work has focused on peptidomimetic inhibitors based on the CA₁A₂X tetrapeptide, known to be responsible for interaction with the mammalian FTase, where the A₁A₂ peptide is replaced by the structurally restricted *N*-(4-piperidiny)benzamide scaffold. Initial studies¹⁴ led us to compound **1** which possessed an IC₅₀ (isolated enzyme FTase) as low as 22.8 nM, but did not inhibit the proliferation of tumor cells in culture (Chart 2). More recently,¹⁵ we synthesized a series of derivatives of compound **1**, of general structure **2** which was the outcome of three structural modifi-

cations: (i) replacement of methioninate by phenylalaninate or isoleucinate (R₁) with the aim of increasing selectivity versus geranylgeranyl transferase, based on our previous results¹⁴ (ii) replacement of the cysteinyl moiety by a known metal chelator, *i.e.* (1-benzylimidazol-5-yl)methyl substituted in *para* position (R₂) of benzyl in order to increase cellular uptake (iii) reduction of the benzoyl group into benzyl (R₃) in order to introduce flexibility into this region of the molecule. Target compounds **15a–c**, **16c**, **17c**, **18** were obtained by reductive amination between adequate imidazolylcarbaldehydes **8a–c** and 4-aminopiperidines **12–14**. The synthesis of 5-formylimidazoles **8a–c** was completed (Chart 3) in 5 steps according to a strategy^{16,17} described for the preparation of regiochemically substituted imidazoleacetic esters: tritylation of N₁-imidazole (**4**), protection of primary alcohol as ester (**5**), benzylation of N₃ and detritylation of N₁ (**6a–c**). The aldehyde function was finally created by chemical oxidation of the hydroxymethyl group (**7a–c**) resulting from hydrolysis of the ester (**6a–c**). Piperidines **9–11** were also prepared (Chart 4) from reductive amination of *N*-Boc-piperidone with adequate α -amino esters. Benzoylation and deprotection of piperidine (compounds **12–14**, **18**), possibly followed by reduction of benzoyl into benzyl for **12**, was the last step before aminative reduction which yielded final compounds **15–17** and **19**.

Antimalarial activities (Table 1) of piperidines **1**, **15a–c**, **16c**, **17c**, and **19** range from 4.4 to 0.85 μ M with submicromolar activity for the most potent compound, **15b**. Introduction of a trifluoromethyl substituent into the *para* of the benzyl group increases potency about 3-fold when compared to the non substituted compound **15a**. The nature of the benzyl

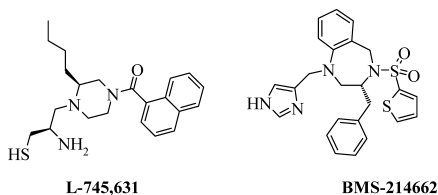


Chart 1

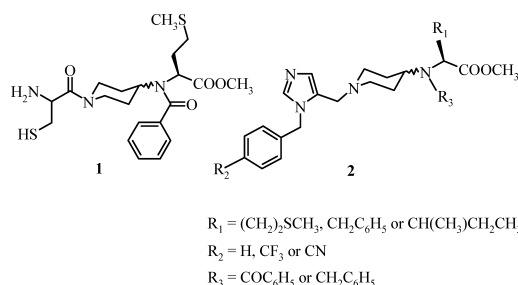


Chart 2

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Table 2. Antiproliferative Effects of 4-Aminopiperidine FTIs on L-1210 and DLD-1 Cell Lines

Compd.	IC ₅₀ ^{a)} (μM)	
	L-1210	DLD-1
1	>10 (>6.2) ^{b)}	18.1±2.3 (11)
15a	>10 (3.5)	27.1±6.6 (9.3)
15b	>10 (>12)	63.1±18.6 (74)
15c	0.020±0.006 (0.007)	9.20±2.47 (3.0)
16c	4.95±0.29 (0.7)	7.74±3.62 (1.6)
17c	6.62±0.32 (4.7)	26.5±6.3 (19.0)
19	3.95±0.22 (0.9)	12.9±3.8 (2.9)

a) See ref. 27. b) The ratio IC₅₀ compound/IC₅₀ *P. falciparum* is given in parentheses.

porphyrin IX (FP) reported for potent *in vitro* imidazole anti-malarials,²⁶⁾ which could also help to explain the differences noted.

Cytotoxicities on mammalian cells (Table 2) were evaluated on two selected cell lines (murine leukemia cell line L-1210 and human colon cell line DLD-1 which expresses K-Ras isoform in wild type) in order to determine the ratio between antiproliferative effects of compounds and *in vitro* activity against *P. falciparum*. The compounds have IC₅₀ values against L-1210 and DLD-1 in the micromolar range, except for **15c** (on L-1210). As seen with the direct comparison of the IC₅₀ values, there is no significant relationship. For example, **15b** has better activity for *P. falciparum* than for L-1210 and DLD-1 cell lines, which was not observed for **15c**. This shows that it is possible to develop antimalarial drugs without cytotoxic side effects.

In conclusion, new *N*-(4-piperidinyl)benzamide derivatives have been designed as FTase mammalian inhibitors displaying significant antimalarial micromolar and submicromolar activities. The results obtained demonstrate that requirements for FTase inhibition and antimalarial activity on the *N*-(4-piperidinyl)benzamide core are not exactly similar, suggesting that selective inhibition of parasitic growth over mammalian FTase inhibition should be possible. This study enables us to highlight a new antimalarial lead compound, **15b**. Further modulations to this compound are ongoing in order to optimize its antiparasitic activity. The first goal consists in combining the presence of diverse hydrophobic and bulky R₁ substituents with the replacement of methionine by isoleucine or other lipophilic groups. This work, together with other previous studies, shows that despite the absence of recombinant *P. falciparum* enzyme, the screening of FTase mammalian inhibitors on parasite growth can provide a number of new antimalarial leads.

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- In vitro P. falciparum* culture and drug assay. *P. falciparum* strains were maintained continuously in culture on human erythrocytes.²³⁾ *In vitro* antiplasmodial activity was determined using a modification of the semi-automated micro-dilution technique.²⁴⁾ *Plasmodium falciparum* chloroquine-resistant (FcB1R/Colombia) strains were used in sensitivity testing. Stock solutions of chloroquine diphosphate and test compounds were prepared in sterile distilled water and DMSO, respectively. Drug solutions were serially diluted with culture medium and introduced to asynchronous parasite cultures (0.5% parasitemia and 1% final hematocrite) on plates comprising 96-well plates for 24 h at 37 °C prior to the addition of 0.5 μCi of [³H]hypoxanthine (1 to 5 Ci/mmol; Amersham, Les Ulis, France) per well, for 24 h. The growth inhibition of each drug concentration was determined by comparison of the radioactivity incorporated into the treated culture with that in the control culture (without drug) maintained on the same plate. IC₅₀ was obtained from the drug concentration—response curve and the results were expressed as mean±standard deviations, determined from several independent experiments. The DMSO concentration never exceeded 0.1% and did not inhibit parasite growth.
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