

Analogue-based Drug Discovery

Edited by

János Fischer and C. Robin Ganellin



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Contents

Preface XVII

Introduction XIX

List of Contributors XXV

Abbreviations XXIX

Part I General Aspects of Analogue-Based Drug Discovery 1

1 Analogues as a Means of Discovering New Drugs 3

Camille G. Wermuth

- 1.1 Designing of Analogues 3
 - 1.1.1 Analogues Produced by Homologous Variations 3
 - 1.1.1.1 Homology Through Monoalkylation 3
 - 1.1.1.2 Polymethylenic Bis-Ammonium Compounds: Hexa- and Decamethonium 3
 - 1.1.1.3 Homology in Cyclic Compounds 4
 - 1.1.2 Analogues Produced by Vinylogy 4
 - 1.1.2.1 Zaprinas Benzologues 5
 - 1.1.3 Analogues Produced by Isosteric Variations 5
 - 1.1.3.1 The Dominant Parameter is Structural 5
 - 1.1.3.2 The Dominant Parameter is Electronic 6
 - 1.1.3.3 The Dominant Parameter is Lipophilicity 7
 - 1.1.4 Positional Isomers Produced as Analogues 7
 - 1.1.5 Optical Isomers Produced as Analogues 8
 - 1.1.5.1 Racemic Switches 8
 - 1.1.5.2 Specific Profile for Each Enantiomer 8
 - 1.1.6 Analogues Produced by Ring Transformations 9
 - 1.1.7 Twin Drugs 9
- 1.2 The Pros and Cons of Analogue Design 10
 - 1.2.1 The Success is Almost Warranted 10

1.2.2	The Information is Available	11
1.2.3	Financial Considerations	11
1.2.4	Emergence of New Properties	12
1.3	Analogue Design as a Means of Discovering New Drugs	12
1.3.1	New Uses for Old Drugs	12
1.3.2	The PASS Program	14
1.3.3	New Leads from Old Drugs: The SOSA Approach	14
1.3.3.1	Definition	14
1.3.3.2	Rationale	15
1.3.3.3	Availability	15
1.3.3.4	Examples	15
1.3.3.4	Discussion	18
1.4	Conclusion	20

2 Drug Likeness and Analogue-Based Drug Discovery 25

John R. Proudfoot

3 Privileged Structures and Analogue-Based Drug Discovery 53

Hugo Kubinyi

3.1	Introduction	53
3.2	Drugs from Side Effects	54
3.3	Agonists and Antagonists	55
3.4	Privileged Structures	57
3.5	Drug Action on Target Classes	58
3.5.1	GPCR Ligands	59
3.5.2	Nuclear Receptor Ligands	61
3.5.3	Integrin Ligands	61
3.5.4	Kinase Inhibitors	63
3.5.5	Phosphodiesterase Inhibitors	64
3.5.6	Neurotransmitter Uptake Inhibitors	65
3.6	Summary and Conclusions	65

Part II Selected Examples of Analogue-Based Drug Discoveries 69

1 Development of Anti-Ulcer H₂-Receptor Histamine Antagonists 71

C. Robin Ganellin

1.1	Introduction	71
1.2	The Prototype Drug, Burimamide, Defined Histamine H ₂ -Receptors	71
1.3	The Pioneer Drug, Cimetidine: A Breakthrough for Treating Peptic Ulcer Disease	72
1.4	Ranitidine: The First Successful Analogue of H ₂ Antagonists	73
1.5	The Discovery of Tiotidine and Famotidine	76

1.6	Other Compounds	77
1.7	The Use of H ₂ -Receptor Histamine Antagonists as Medicines	78
2	Esomeprazole in the Framework of Proton-Pump Inhibitor Development	81
	<i>Per Lindberg and Enar Carlsson</i>	
2.1	Towards Omeprazole: The First Proton-Pump Inhibitor	81
2.2	The Treatment of Acid-Related Disorders Before Losec®	81
2.3	Pioneer Research at Hässle during the 1960s and 1970s	83
2.3.1	Toxicological Challenges	86
2.3.2	Discovery of H ⁺ , K ⁺ -ATPase: The Gastric Proton Pump	87
2.3.3	Analogue Optimization	87
2.4	The Development of Omeprazole	89
2.4.1	Further Toxicological Challenges and the Halt of the Clinical Program	89
2.4.2	Resumption of Clinical Studies	90
2.4.3	Omeprazole Reaches the Market and Supersedes H ₂ -Receptor Antagonists	90
2.5	The Unique Action of Omeprazole	91
2.5.1	Inhibition of the Final Step	91
2.5.2	Omeprazole Binds Strongly to the H ⁺ , K ⁺ -ATPase	91
2.5.3	Inhibition of Acid Secretion and H ⁺ , K ⁺ -ATPase Activity	92
2.5.4	Omeprazole Concentrates and Transforms in Acid	93
2.5.5	Disulfide Enzyme–Inhibitor Complex on the Luminal Side	93
2.5.6	Short Half-Life in Plasma and Long Half-Life for Enzyme–Inhibitor Complex	93
2.5.7	Mechanism at the Molecular Level	94
2.5.8	The “Targeted Prodrug” Omeprazole means a Highly Specific Action	96
2.6	pH-Stability Profile	97
2.7	Omeprazole Analogues Synthesized by Other Companies	98
2.8	Omeprazole: A Need for Improvement?	103
2.8.1	The Omeprazole Follow-Up Program	103
2.8.2	No Good Alternative to the Omeprazole Structural Template	103
2.8.3	Chemical Approach	104
2.8.4	Synthesis and Screening	105
2.8.5	Isomers Seemed Unattractive	106
2.8.6	Isomer Pharmacokinetics and Pharmacodynamics in Animals	106
2.8.7	The Key Experiment in Man	107
2.8.8	Production of Esomeprazole (Mg Salt)	109
2.8.9	Omeprazole Isomers: Differences in Clearance and Metabolic Pattern	109
2.9	Summary	111

3 The Development of a New Proton-Pump Inhibitor: The Case History of Pantoprazole 115

Jörg Senn-Bilfinger and Ernst Sturm

- 3.1 Introduction 115
- 3.2 History of Gastrointestinal Research at Byk Gulden 117
 - 3.2.1 The Antacids and Cytoprotectives Projects and the Set-Up of In-Vivo Ulcer Models 117
 - 3.2.2 Decision to Concentrate on Anti-Secretory Treatments and the Study of Compounds with an Unknown Mechanism of Action 118
- 3.3 Identification of the First PPI Project Candidates 121
 - 3.3.1 Optimizing the Benzimidazole Moiety 121
 - 3.3.2 Impact of the First PPI Project Compounds 123
- 3.4 Elucidation of the Mechanism of Action of PPIs 125
 - 3.4.1 A Surprising Interrelationship Between Stability and Activity 125
 - 3.4.2 Isolation and Identification of the Active Principle of the PPIs 125
- 3.5 Identification of Pantoprazole as a Candidate for Development 128
 - 3.5.1 Optimizing the Pyridine Moiety and the First Synthesis of Pantoprazole 128
 - 3.5.2 Selection Criteria 129
 - 3.5.3 The Selection of Pantoprazole and Internal Competition with SK&F95601 130
 - 3.5.4 Toxicological Problems: Project Development at Risk 131
 - 3.5.5 Benefits of Pantoprazole for the Patient 132
 - 3.5.6 Summary 132
- 3.6 Outlook on Further Developments 133

4 Optimizing the Clinical Pharmacologic Properties of the HMG-CoA Reductase Inhibitors 137

Sándor Kerpel-Fronius and János Fischer

- 4.1 Introduction 137
- 4.2 Medicinal chemistry of the Statins 138
- 4.3 Clinical and Pharmacologic Properties of the Statin Analogues 142
 - 4.3.1 Fibrate Coadministration 148
- 4.4 Clinical Efficacy of the Statins 149

5 Optimizing Antihypertensive Therapy by Angiotensin Receptor Blockers 157

Csaba Farsang and János Fischer

- 5.1 Medicinal Chemistry 157
- 5.2 Clinical Results with Angiotensin II Antagonists 160
 - 5.2.1 Mechanisms of Action 160
 - 5.2.1.1 Other Effects of ARBs 161
 - 5.2.2 Target Organ Protection 162

5.2.2.1	Left Ventricular Hypertrophy	162
5.2.2.2	Diabetic and Nondiabetic Nephropathy	162
5.2.2.3	Diabetes Prevention	162
5.2.2.4	Coronary Heart Disease (CHD)	162
5.2.2.5	Congestive Heart Failure	162
5.2.2.6	Stroke Prevention and Other CNS Effects	163
5.3	Differences Among Angiotensin AT ₁ Receptor Blockers	163
5.3.1	Structural Differences	163
5.3.2	AT ₁ Receptor Antagonism	164
5.3.3	Pharmacokinetics/Dosing Considerations	164
5.3.4	Drug Interactions/Adverse Effects	165
5.3.5	Efficacy in Hypertension	165
5.4	Summary	166
6	Optimizing Antihypertensive Therapy by Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme Inhibitors	169
	<i>Sándor Alföldi and János Fischer</i>	
6.1	Medicinal Chemistry of ACE-inhibitors	169
6.2	Clinical Results with ACE-Inhibitors	173
6.2.1	Hemodynamic Effects	173
6.2.2	Effects of ACE-Inhibitors	174
6.2.2.1	Hypotension	174
6.2.2.2	Dry Cough	174
6.2.2.3	Hyperkalemia	174
6.2.2.4	Acute Renal Failure	175
6.2.2.5	Proteinuria	175
6.2.2.6	Angioedema	175
6.2.2.7	Teratogenic Effects	175
6.2.2.8	Other Side Effects	175
6.2.3	Contraindications	176
6.2.4	Drug Interactions	176
6.3	Differences Among ACE-Inhibitors	177
6.4	Summary and Outlook	179
7	Case Study of Lacidipine in the Research of New Calcium Antagonists	181
	<i>Giovanni Gaviraghi</i>	
7.1	Introduction	181
7.2	Dihydropyridine Calcium Channel-Blocking Agents	182
7.2.1	Nifedipine	182
7.2.2	Felodipine	183
7.2.3	Isradipine	183
7.2.4	Nimodipine	184
7.2.5	Nisoldipine	184

7.2.6	Amlodipine	185
7.2.7	Lacidipine	185
7.2.8	Lercanidipine	185
7.2.9	Manidipine	186
7.3	Lacidipine: A Long-Lasting Calcium Channel-Blocking Drug: Case Study	187
7.3.1	The Lacidipine Project	188
7.3.2	Synthesis	190
7.3.3	The Pharmacological Profile of Lacidipine	190
7.4	Conclusion	191

8 Selective Beta-Adrenergic Receptor-Blocking Agents 193

Paul W. Erhardt and Lajos Matos

8.1	Introduction	193
8.2	Beta-1 Selective Blockers	201
8.2.1	Atenolol	201
8.2.1.1	Discovery	201
8.2.1.2	Synthesis	203
8.2.1.3	Clinical Pharmacology	203
8.2.2	Betaxolol	206
8.2.2.1	Discovery	206
8.2.2.2	Synthesis	209
8.2.2.3	Clinical Pharmacology	210
8.2.3	Celiprolol	211
8.2.3.1	Discovery	211
8.2.3.2	Synthesis	214
8.2.3.3	Clinical Pharmacology	215
8.2.4	Nebivolol	217
8.2.4.1	Discovery	217
8.2.4.2	Synthesis	218
8.2.4.3	Clinical Pharmacology	220
8.3	Accumulated Structure–Activity Relationships	222
8.4	Summary	226

9 Case Study: “Esmolol Stat” 233

Paul W. Erhardt

9.1	Introduction	233
9.2	Pharmacological Target	234
9.3	Chemical Target	234
9.3.1	Internal Esters	234
9.3.2	External Esters	236
9.3.3	Structure–Activity Relationships	237
9.4	Chemical Synthesis	240
9.5	Pharmacology and Clinical Profile	241

9.6	Summary and Some Lessons for Today	243
9.6.1	Compound Libraries	243
9.6.2	Biological Testing	244
9.6.3	SAR	244
10	Development of Organic Nitrates for Coronary Heart Disease	247
	<i>László Dézsi</i>	
10.1	Introduction	247
10.2	Empirical Observations Leading to the Therapeutic Use of Classic Nitrovasodilators	247
10.3	Isoamyl Nitrite: The Pioneer Drug	248
10.4	Nitroglycerin (Glyceryl Trinitrate): The Most Successful Analogue	248
10.5	Isosorbide Dinitrate: A Viable Analogue with Prolonged Action	249
10.6	Isosorbide Mononitrate: The Metabolite of Isosorbide Dinitrate	250
10.7	Nicorandil: The Potassium Channel Opener Analogue with a Broad Cardiovascular Spectrum	251
10.8	Cardiovascular Efficacy of Organic Nitrates	252
10.9	Mechanism of Action of Organic Nitrates	253
10.10	Tolerance to Organic Nitrates	255
10.11	Concluding Remarks	256
11	Development of Opioid Receptor Ligands	259
	<i>Christopher R. McCurdy</i>	
11.1	Introduction	259
11.2	Pharmacology Related to the Classic Opioid Receptors.	261
11.3	Alkaloids from the Latex of <i>Papaver somniferum</i> Initiate Research	261
11.4	Morphine: The Prototype Opioid Ligand	262
11.4.1	Initial Studies of Morphine Analogues	263
11.5	Structure–Activity Relationships of Morphine Derivatives	265
11.6	Synthetic Analogues of Thebaine Further Define Morphinan SAR	266
11.7	Compounds of the Morphinan Skeleton Produce New Agents	269
11.8	Further Reduction of the Morphinan Skeleton Produced the Benzomorphans	270
11.9	Another Simplified Version of Morphine Creates a New Class of Opioid Ligand	271
11.10	A Breakthrough in the Structural Design of Opioid Ligands	271
11.11	Discovery of the 4-Anilidopiperidines	273
11.12	Phenylpropylamines: The Most Stripped-Down Opioids Still Related to Morphine	273
11.13	The Use of Opioid Analgesics in Clinical Practice: Hope of the Future	274

12	Stigmines	277
	<i>Zeev Tashma</i>	
12.1	Historical Background	277
12.2	Pharmacological Activities of Physostigmine	278
12.3	Chemistry and Biochemistry of Physostigmine	279
12.4	Interaction of Acetylcholinesterase with Carbamates	280
12.5	SAR of the Eseroline Moiety, and the Development of Miotine	282
12.6	The Development of Quaternary Carbamates for Myasthenia Gravis	283
12.7	Carbamates as Pre-Exposure Treatment against Organophosphate Intoxication	284
12.8	Carbamates as Insecticides	286
12.8.1	Structural Features	287
12.9	Carbamates in the Treatment of Alzheimer's Disease	287
12.9.2	Close Derivatives of Physostigmine	288
12.9.3	Rivastigmine	289
13	Structural Analogues of Clozapine	297
	<i>Béla Kiss and István Bitter</i>	
13.1	Introduction	297
13.2	Clozapine: The Prototype "Atypical" Antipsychotic; Some Chemical Aspects	299
13.3	Preclinical Aspects	300
13.3.1	Multireceptor Profile: <i>In-Vitro</i> , <i>In-Vivo</i> Similarities and Differences	300
13.3.2	The Availability of Data	304
13.3.3	Dopamine D ₂ versus Serotonin 5-HT _{2A} Affinity	304
13.3.4	Affinity to other Receptors	306
13.3.5	Inverse Agonism	306
13.3.6	Receptor Affinity of Metabolites and Clinical Action	307
13.4	Clinical Aspects	307
13.4.1	Terminology	307
13.4.2	Indications	308
13.4.3	Dosage	308
13.4.4	Clinical Efficacy in Schizophrenia	308
13.4.5	Clinical Efficacy in Bipolar Disorder (Especially in Mania)	309
13.4.6	Adverse Events	310
13.5	Summary and Conclusions	310
14	Quinolone Antibiotics: The Development of Moxifloxacin	315
	<i>Uwe Petersen</i>	
14.1	Introduction	315
14.2	Aims	320
14.3	The Chemical Evolution of Moxifloxacin	321

14.4	Synthetic Routes	338
14.4.1	<i>S,S</i> -2,8-Diazabicyclo[4.3.0]nonane	338
14.4.2	Preparation of BAY X 8843 36 and its Analogues	339
14.4.3	Preparation of Moxifloxacin Hydrochloride 47	339
14.5	The Physicochemical Properties of Moxifloxacin	342
14.6	The Microbiological and Clinical Properties of Moxifloxacin	344
14.6.1	<i>Mycobacterium tuberculosis</i>	347
14.6.2	Skin Infections	347
14.6.3	Ophthalmology	348
14.6.4	Dental Medicine	348
14.7	Pharmacokinetics/Pharmacodynamics of Moxifloxacin	348
14.8	Development of Resistance to Moxifloxacin	350
14.9	Safety and Tolerability of Moxifloxacin	352
14.10	Metabolism, Excretion and Biodegradability of Moxifloxacin	353
14.11	Future Prospects for Quinolones	355
14.12	Summary and Conclusions	356
15	The Development of Bisphosphonates as Drugs	371
	<i>Eli Breuer</i>	
15.1	Historical Background	371
15.2	Discovery of the Biological Activity of Pyrophosphate and of Bisphosphonates	372
15.3	Bone-Related Activity of Bisphosphonates	372
15.3.1	Overview	372
15.3.2	Osteolytic Bone Diseases	373
15.3.2.1	Osteoporosis	373
15.3.2.2	Osteolytic Tumors	373
15.3.2.3	Paget's Disease	375
15.3.3	Structure–Activity Relationships	375
15.3.3.1	The Molecular Skeletons of Bisphosphonates	375
15.3.3.2	Phosphonic Acid Groups	375
15.3.3.3	The Geminal Hydroxy Group	375
15.3.3.4	Nitrogen-Containing Side Chain	375
15.3.3.5	Structure–Activity Relationships of BPs: A Summary	376
15.3.4	Inhibition of Bone Resorption: The Mechanisms of Action	377
15.3.5	Clinical Pharmacology of Bisphosphonates	378
15.3.6	Bisphosphonates in Clinical Use	379
15.4	Miscellaneous Biological Aspects of Bisphosphonates	379
15.4.1	Bisphosphonates as Vehicles for Delivering Drugs to Bone	379
15.4.2	Bisphosphonates as Potential Drugs for other Indications	379
15.4.2.1	Antiviral Drugs	381
15.4.2.2	Bisphosphonate Inositol-Monophosphatase Inhibitor: A Potential Drug for Bipolar Disorders	381

- 15.4.2.3 Hypocholesterolemic Bisphosphonates (Squalene Synthase Inhibitors) 381
- 15.4.2.4 Antiparasitic Drugs 381
- 15.4.2.5 Anti-Inflammatory and Anti-Arthritic Bisphosphonates 382
- 15.4.2.6 Cardiovascular Applications of Bisphosphonates 382
- 15.5 Conclusions 382

16 Cisplatin and its Analogues for Cancer Chemotherapy 385

Sándor Kerpel-Fronius

- 16.1 Introduction 385
- 16.2 Cisplatin 385
 - 16.2.1 Discovery 385
 - 16.2.2 Structure 386
 - 16.2.3 Mechanism of Action 386
 - 16.2.4 Pharmacokinetics 387
 - 16.2.5 Clinical Efficacy 387
 - 16.2.6 Adverse Effects 388
- 16.3 Carboplatin 389
 - 16.3.1 Development 389
 - 16.3.2 Administration and Pharmacokinetics 389
 - 16.3.4 Adverse Effects 390
 - 16.3.5 Clinical Efficacy 390
- 16.4 Oxaliplatin 390
 - 16.4.1 Development 390
 - 16.4.2 Cellular Resistance to Various Pt Analogues 391
 - 16.4.3 Metabolism and Pharmacokinetics 392
 - 16.4.4 Adverse Effects 392
 - 16.4.5 Clinical Efficacy 392
- 16.5 Summary 393

17 The History of Drospirenone 395

Rudolf Wiechert

- 17.1 General Development 395
- 17.2 Syntheses 397

18 Histamine H₁ Blockers: From Relative Failures to Blockbusters Within Series of Analogues 401

Henk Timmerman

- 18.1 Introduction 401
- 18.2 The First Antihistamines 402
- 18.3 Diphenhydramine as a Skeleton for Antihistamines 403
 - 18.3.1 The Diaryl Group 404
 - 18.3.2 The Linker 406

- 18.3.3 The Basic Group 406
- 18.3.4 The Analogue Principle 407
- 18.3.5 The Analogue Principle in Perspective 409
- 18.4 The New Antihistamines 411
- 18.5 Antihistamines for Which the Analogue Principle Does not Seem to Work 415
- 18.6 Inverse Agonism 415
- 18.7 A Further Generation of Antihistamines? 416
- 18.8 Conclusions 417

19 Corticosteroids: From Natural Products to Useful Analogues 419

Zoltán Tuba, Sándor Mahó, and Csaba Sánta

- 19.1 Introduction 419
- 19.2 Corticosteroid Analogues 420
 - 19.2.1 Cortisone 422
 - 19.2.2 Hydrocortisone 423
 - 19.2.3 Prednisone and Prednisolone 424
 - 19.2.4 Fludrocortisone 424
 - 19.2.5 Triamcinolone and Triamcinolone Acetonide 425
 - 19.2.6 Dexamethasone 426
 - 19.2.7 Betamethasone 427
 - 19.2.8 Beclomethasone Dipropionate 428
 - 19.2.9 Methylprednisolone 429
 - 19.2.10 Fluocinolone Acetonide, Flunisolide, Fluocortin-21-Butylate and Flumetasone 429
 - 19.2.11 Budesonide 431
 - 19.2.12 Halobetasol Propionate 432
 - 19.2.13 Mometasone Furoate 433
 - 19.2.14 Fluticasone Propionate 434
 - 19.2.15 Loteprednol Etabonate 435
 - 19.2.16 Ciclesonide 436
- 19.3 Summary 437

Part III Table of Selected Analogue Classes 441

Erika M. Alapi and János Fischer

Index 553

Preface

The International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) is the global civil organization of chemists. The Union is organized into Divisions, with Division VII being devoted to Chemistry and Human Health. The latter incorporates the Subcommittee for Medicinal Chemistry and Drug Development which has projects in various stages of completion. One of these projects, which is devoted to “Analogue-Based Drug Discovery”, was initiated in 2003.

The goal of the project is to study the role of analogue drugs for medicinal chemistry, and in this respect two interesting points have come to light:

1. Statistically, every second drug is an analogue.
2. The market value of analogue drugs amounts to approximately two-thirds of that for all small-molecule drugs.

Clearly, in order to have reached this level of importance, analogue drugs must have special value.

Today, it is not too difficult to identify analogues among the most frequently prescribed drugs, on the basis of their similarities in structure and biological properties. In the present book, analogue drugs have, for the first time, been collected systematically on the basis of two sources:

- by using actual data from the Anatomical-Therapeutic Chemical (ATC) System of the World Health Organization (WHO); and
- by using the most recently available data of IMS (the former Intercontinental Marketing Services) Health.

In this way, among the Top 500 most frequently used drugs, 67 analogue classes and 306 analogue drugs have been identified.

This book focuses on both structural and pharmacological analogues – that is, those analogues which have similar chemical and biological properties – although some examples are also included where the analogue is derived purely on a similar chemical or a similar biological basis (but not both).

Within the book, it is shown how analogues play an important role in medicinal chemistry and, more importantly, how they optimize drug therapies. Hence, it was for this reason that we sought to select diverse fields of drug research and medicinal chemistry.

The aim of the book was not to provide a comprehensive review, but rather to describe selected analogue classes in a more detailed manner. In support of this aim, we should point out that nine of the authors have played key roles as co-inventors in the discovery of some of the very important drugs detailed in the book.

This book should serve as a useful reference for experts in medicinal chemistry and also for students of this field. Moreover, it will also be of interest to a wide range of scientists, including organic chemists, biochemists, pharmacologists and clinicians, who are interested in drug research.

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We hope that this book will be a useful reading for all experts participating in drug discovery, both in the industry and in academia.

And last – but not least – we welcome comments from readers, and assure them that these will be taken on board if we are fortunate enough to run to a second edition!

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Budapest and London
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Introduction

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The discovery and development of new drugs to provide medicines for treating diseases is the main role of the pharmaceutical industry. The impact of this process on the well-being of society is considerable, but it is a difficult and costly procedure to conduct. Biological organisms – and especially human beings – are extraordinarily complex, and our understanding of how they function at the molecular level remains rudimentary, although considerable advances in knowledge have been made in recent decades. Whilst an advanced industrial society was able to plan and deliver a man to the moon following a 10-year program, almost 40 years on we are still only able to treat about 60% of cancer patients effectively, and do not understand how to correct most mental diseases.

In order to treat a disease, an attempt must be made to put right something that has gone wrong. However, because of our limited understanding of normal state functions at the molecular level, we must work empirically and in doing so resort to much trial and error. In general, the same situation applies to new drug discovery, with the sources of new drugs falling into three main categories:

- Existing drugs
- Screening against a physiological target
- Structure-based drug design

Existing Drugs

The most fruitful basis to discover a new drug is to start with an old drug, and this has been the most common and reliable route to new products. Thus, existing drugs may need to be improved, for example to develop a better dosage form, to improve drug absorption or duration, to increase potency and reduce the daily dose, or to avoid certain side effects. On occasion, the existing drug is a natural product, but more often than not it is a synthetic compound, and many such examples are provided later in this book.

Natural Products

Historically, natural products have formed the oldest basis for new medicines, and natural selection during evolution and competition between the species has produced powerful, biologically active natural products. These can serve as chemical leads, to be refined by the chemist by creating analogues that will provide a more specifically acting drug, or perhaps avoid a delivery problem or an unwanted adverse side effect.

For example, molds and bacteria produce substances that prevent other organisms from growing in their vicinity. The famous *Penicillium* mold led, via the pharmaceutical industry, to penicillin. However, penicillin was not stable in the acidic environment of the stomach, and so compounds were synthesized by chemists to produce a range of useful semisynthetic penicillin analogues. An example of the use of analogues to develop new antibacterial antibiotics is provided in Chapter II-14, on the development of moxifloxacin.

Another fruitful means of identifying pharmacologically active natural products has been that of folk law remedies, many of which are plant products. Typical examples include alkaloids, such as atropine (from plants of the Solanaceae family, known to the ancient Greeks) and reserpine (from *Rauwolfia serpentina*, the snakeroot), which is popular in India as a herbal remedy for use as a tranquilizer or antihypertensive. Other chapters in the book relate to stigmines (based on physostigmine, an anticholinesterase alkaloid from the Calabar bean in West Africa) that are used to treat Alzheimer's disease (Chapter II-12), and opioid receptor ligands (based on morphine, the most important alkaloid of the opium poppy) for pain relief and as antitussives (Chapter II-11).

Synthetic Drugs

A very important type of synthetic drug is one that opens up a new therapeutic treatment, and this is referred to as a *pioneer drug* because it is used to pioneer a new type of therapy, or to make a marked improvement over what was previously possible. Such a drug is often referred to as "First in class", and might arise through the observation of a side effect of a drug that is already in use but can then be exploited by making an analogue. The side effect may be the result of an astute observation made during pharmacological studies in animals, or from clinical investigations in patients. An example is the discovery of sulfonamide diuretics during the 1950s following the observation that the antibacterial drug sulfanilamide made the urine alkaline by inhibiting the enzyme, carbonic anhydrase. This rendered the then-used toxic organomercurials obsolete, and so constituted a considerable improvement in therapy.

Another example is the discovery made during the use of the antihistamine promethazine to treat surgical shock. In order to improve potency, a chlorine atom was incorporated into the drug molecule. Subsequently, when the patients seemed to be unconcerned about undergoing surgery, chlorpromazine – the first

phenothiazine antipsychotic drug – was born, thereby opening up a new era in the treatment of mental disease.

A more recent example is that of sildenafil which, as a result of observations made during Phase I studies in male volunteers, is now used to treat erectile dysfunction. Sildenafil had originally been designed as an analogue of zaprinast, and a more selective phosphodiesterase inhibitor (PDE5) for use as a cardiovascular agent (see Chapter I-1).

Although such drugs have not been “designed” for their newly observed action, they usually trigger the start of an analogue program to improve upon their activity.

Physiological Targets

Pioneer drugs may also arise more deliberately as a result of ligand design, for example, to block an enzyme, or to block a biogenic amine receptor. Examples are the first inhibitor of the angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE), captopril, the first H_1 -receptor antihistamine, phenbenzamine, the first β -blocker, pronethalol, and the first histamine H_2 -receptor antagonist, cimetidine. These have all given rise to analogue programs described later in the book (Chapters II-6, II-18, II-8 and II-1 respectively).

More recently, as a result of the considerable explosion in scientific knowledge of cellular biochemistry and cell biology, a large number of physiological targets have been considered for drug action. A major problem however in this regard is to relate the isolated target to the physiology of the whole animal. Furthermore, it is never clear at the outset of a research program that the particular target will determine the outcome of a disease, as Nature rarely issues monopolies to the putative transmitters. Another problem is that physiological targets may not have a known specific messenger substance, and so there may not be a chemically based lead. Hence, attempts must be made to identify a lead through the high-throughput screen (HTS) of a chemical library.

Structure-Based Drug Design

On occasion – although still rather rarely – sufficient molecular information is known about the physiological target (e.g., it may be the crystal structure of an enzyme showing the precise geometry of the active site) that an attempt can be made to design directly a drug molecule to fit. Although this situation is rather rare, it is clearly intellectually satisfying if success is achieved. In reality, this situation should perhaps be termed “structure-assisted drug design”, and examples to date have occurred in the anti-HIV field of drug research and recently in discovery of a promising renin inhibitor (aliskerin).

The foregoing discussion should have provided the reader with the impression that new drug discovery is a very difficult and risky business, and indeed, there are very few industries prepared to invest in research programs where the likeli-

hood of success is so low, especially if the intended outcome is a pioneer drug. Typically, the time scale is likely to be 10–20 years, and there is no guarantee that the product will have an adequate impact on the disease process, or be sufficiently safe and free of unwanted side effects.

Analogue-Based Drug Design

The development of a pioneer drug is extraordinarily uncertain because its therapeutic use has not yet been validated clinically. On the other hand, preparing an analogue of an established drug has the considerable advantage that the predicted therapeutic use of the analogue has already been proved. This removes a major uncertainty from the overall risk of success. Nonetheless, there are still many hurdles to overcome, notably with regard to pharmacokinetic behavior and safety. It is important, however, to identify at the outset of the research program the expected clinical advantage of the analogue over the established drug which is being used as a lead. The aim must be to provide an improvement in the use as a medicine.

Very often, a pioneer drug which demonstrates its success will stimulate many companies to seek an improved analogue. Since the identification of success will be a clinical publication or annual report of sales, companies tend to start their research programs at about the same time. Many different new potential analogue drugs may therefore appear within a year or two of each other, and all must undergo extensive preclinical laboratory studies for safety, as well as clinical trials to prove their advantage over the lead medicine. Eventually, the potential new drug must be marketed in order to gain access to a sufficiently wide patient population and to reveal its advantages and confirm its safety and lack of adverse side effects.

Thus, companies have exchanged the uncertainty of having to determine the clinical use of a pioneer product for the uncertainty which arises through competition with other companies to demonstrate a clinical advantage for their analogue product. The latter is usually a lesser uncertainty and, indeed, there is always the likelihood that a competitive product may run into difficulties – for example, unexpected side effects, a poorer clinical performance than initially predicted, or inadequate marketing. Thus, there are powerful reasons for continuing to develop new analogue compounds, and this leads to an apparent proliferation of new products which, for some time, may lead to confusion about which is the most suitable drug treatment.

From an outsider's view of the pharmaceutical industry, this proliferation of products may be seen as an example of rampant commercialization. The analogue products are often regarded as “me-too” compounds – a term used pejoratively, notably by those who indulge in attacking the pharmaceutical industry, to suggest that because a pioneer medicine has proved to be commercially valuable, other companies want to share in the commercial success. Of course, companies must be commercially successful to stay in existence, as with any other business enterprise, but this cannot be the only basis for a new drug. As has been explained

above, the new drug must demonstrate an advantage if it is to succeed. In effect, the application of new analogue products is the historical means by which a particular drug therapy becomes optimized, and this is clearly demonstrated by the many examples provided in the present book.

Defining Analogues

The term “analogue” is used in its chemical sense and is defined in the IUPAC medicinal chemistry glossary as “... a drug whose structure is related to that of another drug but whose chemical and biological properties may be quite different.”

It is useful for present purposes to have a broader definition of analogues, where not only the chemical relationships, but also the pharmacological properties are considered.

In the present context, we consider an analogue drug to be one that has a chemical and/or pharmacological relationship to another drug. We have used a classification of analogue drugs according to three categories in which we have defined chemistry in terms of chemical structure.

Structural and Pharmacological Analogues

Structural and pharmacological analogues are drugs which have similar chemical structures, and a similar main pharmacological activity. One special class of these is considered to be *direct analogues* if they have identical pharmacophores – that is, they can be described by a general structure which includes most of the chemical skeleton. Many analogues, however, share only a small part of the skeleton, and in this case they are not direct analogues.

It is sometimes difficult to discern any true chemical similarity, but the development of an analogue may have started with the lead structure and passed through a series of iterative structure–activity relationships (SARs). Where there is such a historical development, the analogues are still considered to have a structural and pharmacological relationship.

The histamine H₂ antagonist anti-ulcer drugs (see Chapter II-1) illustrate the difference between the definitions. Thus, burimamide provided proof of principle, while metiamide, a *direct analogue*, went into clinic trials and validated the target by demonstrating the therapeutic use. However, metiamide had an unacceptable side effect (granulocytopenia), and so another *direct analogue*, cimetidine, became the *pioneer drug*. With ranitidine came a change in the ring structure (imidazole replaced by dimethylaminomethyl-furan); this does not have the same SAR pattern and so must be considered to be a *structural and pharmacological analogue* (i.e., not a *direct analogue*). Nizatidine appears as a *direct analogue* of ranitidine (thiazole replaces furan). Famotidine has several major changes in structure, but still retains the CH₂SCH₂CH₂ chain and the heterocycle and polar “end group”; thus, it is also a *structural and pharmacological analogue*. Roxatidine has many dif-

ferences in its structure and might be considered as a *pharmacological analogue*; however, its SAR development can be directly traced to other analogues with a general structure that fits all of the above compounds, so it must be considered to be a *structural and pharmacological analogue*.

Structural Analogues

Structural analogues are drugs which have a similar chemical structure but have quite different pharmacological properties. These drugs are usually prepared with the intention of being a structural and pharmacological analogue but then, unexpectedly, another pharmacological activity appears. An example is in the case of opiate agonists and antagonists (see Chapter II-11) where morphine, as a prototype opiate agonist, has an N-methyl substituent. The N-allyl-normorphine, nalorphine, is used as a morphine antagonist.

In some cases, the simple modification of a drug structure can essentially modify the biological activity profile, whilst preserving some part of the original activity. Drospirenone (see Chapter II-17), an orally active progestin contraceptive with antimineralcorticoid properties, is an example of an analogue-based drug discovery process that started from the diuretic spironolactone.

Pharmacological Analogues

Pharmacological analogues are drugs which have a similar pharmacological activity without having any discernible chemical or structural relationship. This means that different pharmacophores exist to explain the same pharmacological activity of structurally different drugs. Leads for such compounds can arise through screening and/or computer modeling. These analogues are beyond the scope of this book. An example is provided by the three compounds nifedipine, verapamil, and diltiazem, all of which are L-class voltage-gated calcium-channel blockers (see Chapter II-7).

The Content of the Book

This book presents the role of analogues in medicinal chemistry and their contribution to new drug discovery. In Part I, the various chemical approaches to making analogues are reviewed and the general aspects of analogue-based drug discovery (ABDD) are summarized, whilst in Part II are described 19 examples of analogue classes, together with relevant case studies. A table of structural and pharmacological analogues of the most frequently used drugs is provided in Part III.

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