Bioorganic & Medicinal Chemistry Letters 25 (2015) 1100–1103

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Bioorganic & Medicinal Chemistry Letters

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/bmcl

Synthesis and in vitro evaluation of novel 8-aminoquinoline–pyrazolopyrimidine hybrids as potent antimalarial agents

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 13 August 2014
Revised 1 January 2015
Accepted 5 January 2015
Available online 9 January 2015

Keywords:
8-Aminoquinoline
Pyrazolopyrimidine
Plasmodium falciparum
Structure activity relationship
Hybridization

ABSTRACT

In the search of novel chemotherapeutic agents for emerging drug resistant parasites, the hybridization approaches have successfully emerged as an efficient tool in malarial chemotherapy. Herein, a rational design and synthesis of novel 8-aminoquinoline and pyrazolopyrimidine hybrids and their antimalarial activity against wild type *Plasmodium falciparum* (*Pf*_NF54) and resistant strain (*Pf*_K1) is reported. The medicinal chemistry approach to expand the scope of this series resulted in an identification of potent compounds with nanomolar potency (best IC_{50} 5–10 nM). Systematic structure activity relationship (SAR) studies revealed that pyrazolopyrimidine and 8-aminoquinoline ring are essential for achieving good *P. falciparum* potency. The docking study revealed that the compound **6** can retain some of the critical interactions within pfDHODH drug target.

The last decade has witnessed the world's need of novel drugs to fight malaria. According to the World Health Organization, there were an estimated 207 million cases of malaria resulting in 627,000 deaths and 482,000 children under five years of age in 2012.[1] The vast majority of deaths are caused by *Plasmodium falciparum* and *Plasmodium vivax* infections. Artemisinin-based combination therapy is the most effective in treating patients with *P. falciparum* infection.[2] The rapid emergence of malarial parasite resistance to currently available antimalarial drugs, including artemisinin derivatives, pose a threat to derail the global efforts to cure malaria.[3] With the onset of drug-resistant *Plasmodium* parasites, new approaches are being developed to combat the widespread disease.[4] The hybridization strategy involves an incorporation of key pharmacophoric features from existing drugs to design a novel molecule with a different efficacy and resistance profile. This approach has seen some success in recent times in delivering novel chemical entities against protozoan parasites.[5]

Primaquine, an 8-aminoquinoline moiety is the only drug available to eliminate exoerythrocytic infection, and provide a radical cure for vivax malaria (Fig. 1).[6] A primaquine analog, tafenoquine with a long half-life (2–3 weeks) is currently in clinical trials for the prophylactic treatment of malaria.[7] A recent literature report revealed that modifications of 8-aminoquinoline moiety have been attempted to improve tissue and blood schizonticidal activity.[8] The triazolopyrimidine core (DSM1) has been reported as a potent inhibitor of pfDHODH and is active against *P. falciparum*.[9] Lead optimization identified a metabolically stable inhibitor of pfDHODH (DSM265) that successfully translated into efficacy against *P. falciparum* both in vitro and in vivo.[10] Recognizing the importance of these two bioactive cores, we were interested in hybridization of the pharmacophoric features of them into a single molecule to explore potential synergies. Herein, we report a rational design, synthesis and SAR relationship of aminoquinoline with ring bioisosteres of triazolopyrimidine.

The target compounds, **1**–**9** have been achieved as outlined in Schemes 1 and 2. The aromatic nucleophilic substitution, S_NAr of chloro-containing heterocycles with 8-aminoquinoline in the presence of NaH, DMF yielded the desired aminoquinolines, **1**, **4** and **6** as depicted in Scheme 1.[10b,11] To synthesize the aminoquinolines **2**, **5** and **7**, initially a S_NAr reaction was carried out to afford the intermediates **2a**, **5a** and **7a** which undergo further hydrogenation–dechlorination reaction in the presence of Pd/C in triethylamine under ambient hydrogen pressure resulting in desired products in good yields.[12]

Synthesis of aminoquinolines **3**, **8** and **9** is achieved as outlined in scheme 2. Commercially available amino pyrazoles treated with *N*,*N*-dimethylformamide dimethyl acetal, followed by cyclization with malononitrile in pyridine under microwave conditions afforded the corresponding intermediates, **19**, **20**. Subsequently, they were converted to the desired aminoquinolines, **8**, **9** under

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bmcl.2015.01.003
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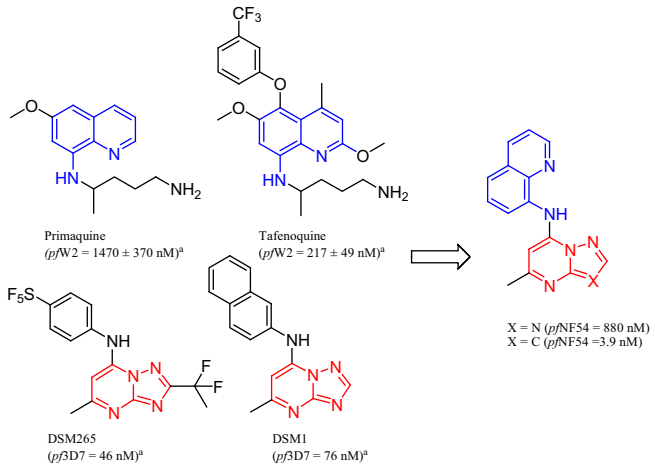
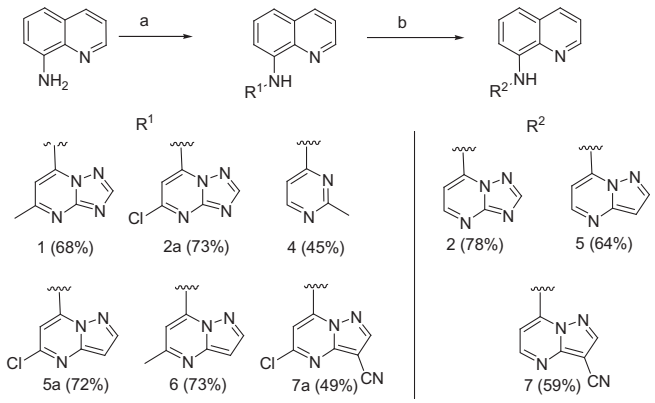
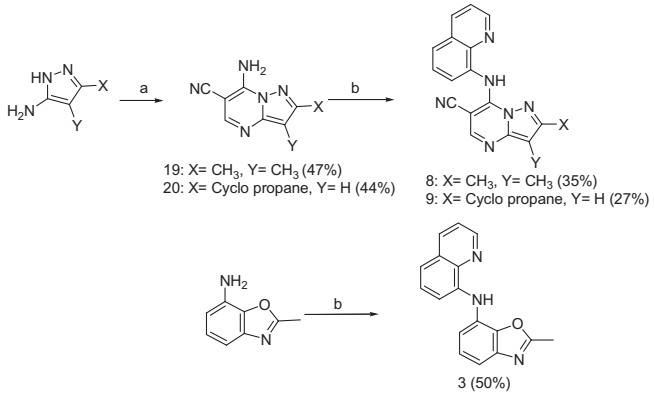


Figure 1. Potential antimalarial agents. [a]Literature reported IC50 value.



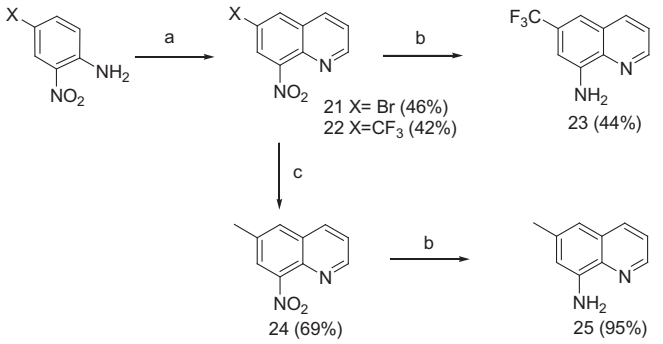
Scheme 1. Reagents and conditions: (a) Het-Cl, NaH, DMF, 0 °C to 60 °C, 5–12 h; (b) Pd/C, TEA, H_2 gas, DCM/MeOH (1:2), rt, 6–12 h.



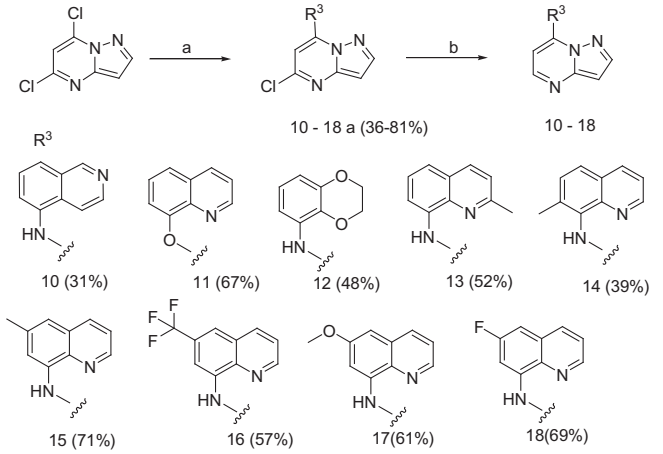
Scheme 2. Reagents and conditions: (a) (i) *N*,*N*-dimethylformamide dimethyl acetal, xylene, 3 h, 150 °C; (ii) malononitrile, pyridine, 85 °C, 20 min, MW; (b) 8-bromoquinoline, $Pd_2(dba)_3$, xantphos, *t*-BuONa, toluene, 110 °C, 12 h.

Buchwald conditions. Similar conditions were used to synthesize compound **3**.

The synthesis of aminoquinolines, **23**, **25** is outlined in Scheme 3. Condensation of glycerol with substituted 2-nitroaniline under acidic conditions afforded intermediates, **21**, **22**. Hydrogenation of the nitro group of quinoline, **22** in the presence of Pd/C led to compound **23**. Bromo substituted nitroquinoline, **21** when subjected to Suzuki reaction, followed by reduction afforded compound **25**.



Scheme 3. Reagents and conditions: (a) glycerol, NaI, H_2SO_4, 150 °C; (b) Pd/C, H_2 gas, MeOH, 16 h; (c) trimethylboroxine, $Pd(PPh_3)_4$, K_2CO_3, DMF, 110 °C, 16 h.



Scheme 4. Reagents and conditions: (a) R-NH_2 or R-OH, NaH, DMF, 0 °C to 60 °C, 5–12 h; (b) Pd/C, TEA, DCM/MeOH (1:2), rt, 6–12 h.

Syntheses of compounds (**10**–**18**) are outlined in Scheme 4. The analogs were synthesized by following the same procedure as illustrated in Scheme 1.

All of the synthesised compounds (**1**–**18**) were tested for their antimalarial activity against a sensitive (NF54) and a multidrug-resistant (K1) strain of *Pf* using a SYBR Green-based readout.[13,14] Chloroquine, pyrimethamine, and artesunate were used as reference drugs in all of the experiments.

Our initial focus to explore antiplasmodial activity for the triazolopyrimidine core (TP) hybridized with 8-aminoquinoline resulted in a hit, **1** with an IC50 of 0.88 μM (Table 1). Removal of methyl group at the C-5 in TP ring, **2** was tolerated for *P. falciparum* potency. Our medicinal chemistry efforts were focused on finding structurally similar rings for replacing the TP core and to expand the chemical scope of the series. We used bicyclic 5,6 and monocyclic 6 member ring systems. The replacement of TP ring with benzoxazole ring, **3** was found to be moderately active. However, the pyrimidine ring substitution, **4** was inactive against *P. falciparum*. On the other hand, converting TP ring into pyrazolopyrimidine ring by removing one nitrogen atom in compound, **5** showed >100 fold improvement in potency with single digit nanomolar compared to compound **2**. Encouraged by these results, we explored further SAR modifications on pyrazolopyrimidine ring as a core. Incorporation of a methyl at the C-5 position of pyrazolopyrimidine ring, **6** also retained the potency. Introduction of an electron withdrawing groups like nitrile at C-3 position, **7** showed moderate potency. The pyrazolopyrimidine, **8** with dimethyl substitution was 5 fold less active as compared to pyrazolopyrimidine, **5** and **6**. The replacement of dimethyl substitution with cyclopropyl group, **9**