Bioorganic & Medicinal Chemistry Letters 24 (2014) 224–227

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Bioorganic & Medicinal Chemistry Letters

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

Discovery of hybrid Hsp90 inhibitors and their anti-neoplastic effects against gefitinib-resistant non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC)

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 11 July 2013
Revised 29 October 2013
Accepted 15 November 2013
Available online 22 November 2013

Keywords:
Hsp90
Lung cancer
Gefitinib resistance
Inhibitor
Rational design

ABSTRACT

Heat shock protein 90 (Hsp90) represents an attractive cancer therapeutic target due to its role in the stabilization and maturation of many oncogenic proteins. We have designed a series of hybrid Hsp90 inhibitors by connecting the resorcinol ring of VER-49009 (**2**) and the trimethoxyphenyl ring of PU3 (**3**) using structure-based approach. Subsequent testing established that compound **1f** inhibited gefitinib-resistant H1975 cell proliferation, brought about the degradation of Hsp90 client proteins including EGFR, Met, Her2 and Akt and induced the expression of Hsp70. The design, synthesis, and evaluation of **1f** are described herein.

Conventional drug design embraces the 'one gene, one drug, one disease' philosophy. Over the past two decades, several targeted cancer drugs, including Gleevec, Iressa and Herceptin have been discovered to eradicate tumors in more specific ways and reduce the harmful nonspecific side effects of chemotherapeutics. However, this notion is being challenged by the occurrence of drug resistance. The tumor cells outsmart single-targeted drugs to escape from their destiny by mutating targeted proteins, down-regulating death signals, or up-regulating survival pathways. In this regard, it is being recognized that single-target drugs can be problematic and multi-target drugs have emerged as a new paradigm to overcome the resistance in drug discovery.[1,2] Alternatively, to elucidate a single protein, so called 'nodal' protein that integrates multiple signaling pathways and discover an inhibitor against nodal proteins may be best suited to overcome the genetic and molecular heterogeneity of progressive disease through simultaneously interrupting multiple mechanisms of tumor maintenance.

Heat shock protein 90 (Hsp90) is a cancer nodal protein and has become an attractive therapeutic target in cancer research. Hsp90 is ATP dependent molecular chaperone that is responsible for the stabilization and maturation of their substrate proteins, referred to as 'client' proteins. Disruption of Hsp90 chaperone activity induces client proteins degradation via the ubiquitin–proteasome pathway, which can ultimately lead to cell death. Many Hsp90 client proteins, including Her2, Met, Cdk4, Akt, HIF-1α and MMP2 play significant roles in six essential hallmarks of a cancer cell.[3–5] More interestingly, Hsp90 is constitutively expressed at 2–10 fold higher levels in tumor cells compared to their normal counterparts and Hsp90 inhibitors demonstrate selective anti-proliferative effects toward cancer cells as compared to normal cells, due to the greater dependence of tumor cells on Hsp90's chaperoning function against oncogenic stressors in the hostile hypoxic, acidotic and nutrient-deprived microenvironment.[6,7]

The natural product geldanamycin was first identified as an Hsp90 inhibitor in 1994.[8] Since then, a number of natural products and synthetic small molecules that target Hsp90 have been discovered for the treatment of cancerous diseases, which include radicicol[9], VER-49009,[10] and PU3[11] (Fig. 1). Despite of these advances, none of Hsp90 inhibitors are clinically approved as an anti-cancer chemotherapy until now, and there still remains a need for the discovery of a novel class of small molecule inhibitors against Hsp90. Here, we report the design, synthesis, and anti-cancer effects of a new class of Hsp90 inhibitors.

Structural analysis of Hsp90 revealed that ATP-binding pocket of Hsp90 consisted of a hydrophilic region and a hydrophobic region (Fig. 2). Co-crystal structure of VER-49009[10] (**2**) bound to the N-terminal ATP-binding region of Hsp90 demonstrated that the resorcinol ring of **2** positioned in the hydrophilic region of the pocket. The hydrophilic region of the pocket consisted of Asp93 and Asp54 residues, which typically interact with the adenine ring. The crystal structure of PU3[11] (**3**) indicated that the 3,4,5-trimethoxyphenyl ring of PU3 (**3**) was located in the opposite orientation of the resorcinol ring of VER-49009 (**2**). The π-rich

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bmcl.2013.11.034

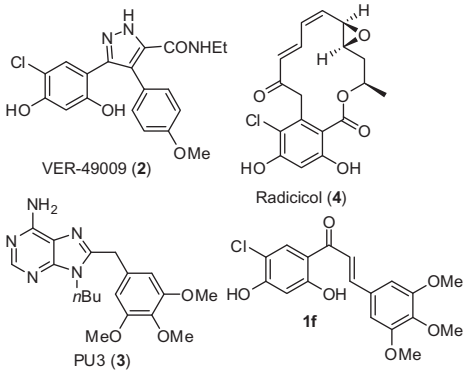


Figure 1. Structures of known Hsp90 inhibitors and **1f**.

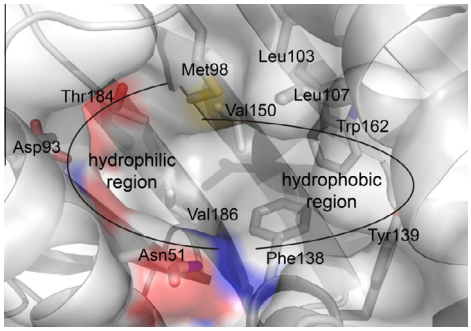
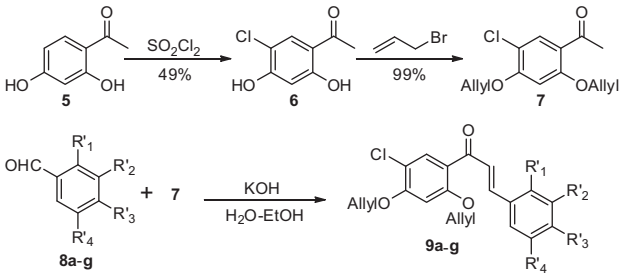


Figure 2. X-ray crystal structure of apo-Hsp90 (PDB code: 1UYM).

amino acids of Phe138, Trp162, and Tyr139 formed the hydrophobic region of the pocket and the trimethoxyphenyl ring of PU3 (**3**) had π–π interaction with those residues. With the aim of maximizing interactions in the ATP binding pocket of Hsp90, we intended to design a molecule by hybridizing the resorcinol ring of VER-49009 (**2**) and the 3,4,5-trimethoxyphenyl ring of PU3 (**3**). To connect the 3,4,5-trimethoxyphenyl ring to the resorcinol ring, we decided to use a chalcone scaffold as a core template. Chalcones are abundant natural products in edible plants such as green tea and exhibit a wide spectrum of biological activities including anti-tumor activities.[12,13] Accordingly, chalcones are an important class of molecules and speculated as promising candidates as anticancer agents. Besides, our recent study has also demonstrated that a natural product, licochalcone A disrupts Hsp90 chaperoning function.[14] With a hybrid inhibitor embedded in the chalcone scaffold, we envision that the resorcinol ring of the inhibitor would make a hydrogen bond with Asp93 involved in ATP binding pocket and the hydrophobic trimethoxyphenyl group of the inhibitor would project into the π-rich lipophilic cavity of the pocket.[15,16]

The synthesis of compounds (**1a**–**g**) began with the preparation of 6-chloro-2,4-dihydroxyacetophenone (**6**) (Scheme 1). Treatment of 2,4-dihydroxyacetophenone (**5**) with sulfuryl chloride provided a chlorinated product **6** as well as its undesired regio-isomer of 3-chloro-2,4-dihydroxyacetophenone in 1:1 molar ratio. After carefully being resolved by silica gel chromatography, the protection reaction of 2,4-dihydroxyl groups of compound (**6**) was carried out. Initial studies to protect 2,4-dihydroxyl groups of **6** with TBSCl or MOMCl using combinations of various bases (TEA, K_2CO_3, and DBU) and solvents (CH_2Cl_2 and DMF) were not fruitful but only to produce a single protected adduct. Consequently, compound **6** was protected with allyl bromide in the presence of K_2CO_3 to furnish the allyl-protected ketone **7** in 99% yield. With ketone **7** in

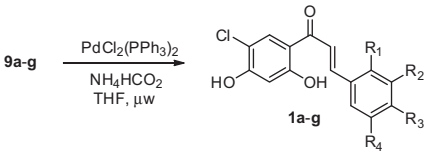


entry	R'_1	R'_2	R'_3	R'_4	aldehyde
1	H	H	OMe	H	**9a**
2	H	H	OAllyl	H	**9b**
3	H	OAllyl	OAllyl	H	**9c**
4	OAllyl	H	OAllyl	H	**9d**
5	OMe	H	OMe	H	**9e**
6	H	OMe	OMe	OMe	**9f**
7	H	OCH_2O		H	**9g**

Scheme 1. Claisen–Schmidt aldol condensation of acetophenone **7** with aldehyde **8a**–**g**.

hand, Claisen–Schmidt aldol condensation of ketone **7** with the corresponding aromatic aldehydes **8a**–**g** was carried out in the presence of KOH in MeOH–H_2O. The condensation reaction successfully provided enones **9a**–**g** in 42–80% yield. Finally, removal of allyl-protecting groups, using $PdCl_2(PPh_3)_2$ and ammonium formate under microwave irradiation produced the resulting 3-chloro-2,4-dihydroxychalcones (**1a**–**g**) (Scheme 2).[20]

To investigate the effects of newly synthesized compounds (**1a**–**g**) for Hsp90 inhibition, we first screened the efficacy of these compounds by measuring anti-proliferative effects against H1975 cell line. H1975 is a gefitinib-resistant non-small cell lung cancer cell line and its resistance is mediated by 'gatekeeper' the mutation T790M-EGFR in combination with L858R,[15–17] The resistance is also related to Met amplification, compensating for the loss of EGFR signals.[18] To test anti-proliferative activities of compounds (**1a**–**g**) against gefitinib-resistant H1975, we treated H1975 cells with various concentrations of compounds (**1a**–**g**) and measured



entry	R_1	R_2	R_3	R_4	product
1	H	H	OMe	H	**1a**
2	H	H	OH	H	**1b**
3	H	OH	OH	H	**1c**
4	OH	H	OH	H	**1d**
5	OMe	H	OMe	H	**1e**
6	H	OMe	OMe	OMe	**1f**
7	H	OCH_2O		H	**1g**

Scheme 2. Removal of allyl protecting groups.