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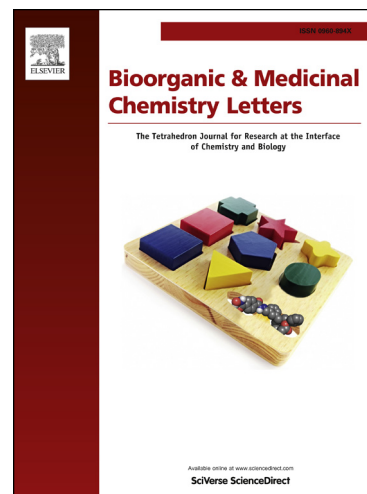
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## Novel bivalent inhibitors with sub-nanomolar affinities towards human glyoxalase I

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### ABSTRACT

The zinc metalloenzyme glyoxalase I (GlxI) catalyzes the glutathione-dependent inactivation of cytotoxic methylglyoxal. Two competitive bivalent GlxI inhibitors, polyBHG2-62 ( $K_i = 1.0$  nM) and polyBHG2-54 ( $K_i = 0.3$  nM), were synthesized based on the transition-state analog *S*-(*N*-bromophenyl-*N*-hydroxycarbamoyl) glutathione (BHG). The most effective inhibitor, polyBHG2-54, is the first subnanomolar inhibitor of GlxI, and is over 50-fold more potent than BHG itself.

Human glyoxalase I (GlxI) is a 42 kDa<sup>1</sup> dimeric Zn<sup>2+</sup> metalloenzyme that detoxifies methylglyoxal *in vivo* by converting it into *S*-D-lactoylglutathione, which is then converted to D-lactate by glyoxalase II.<sup>2,3</sup> Since high activities of GlxI are present in tumor tissues, inhibitors of GlxI increase the accumulation of cytotoxic methylglyoxal, which results in significant anti-tumor activity both *in vitro* and *in vivo*.<sup>4</sup> A potent and selective GlxI inhibitor could therefore potentially result in an adjuvant to restore chemotherapy sensitivity in tumor cells.<sup>5,6</sup>

Linking two identical binding groups by a spacer unit has been proposed<sup>7</sup> to improve both the selectivity and the activity of inhibitors compared with the corresponding univalent ligands, and this approach has been verified experimentally.<sup>8-10</sup> However, optimization of the spacer unit between the binding groups remains a challenge, and is crucial in fragment-based drug design.<sup>11</sup> In this paper, we extend our previous work on bivalent transition-state analog inhibitors of human glyoxalase I (hGlxI)<sup>10</sup> to include two new competitive bivalent GlxI inhibitors in which symmetric ligands are linked by linkers that differ in flexibility, length, and water solubility.

We previously developed a new class of competitive inhibitors of homodimeric human glyoxalase I by cross-linking two

molecules of the transition state analog *S*-(*N*-chlorophenyl-*N*-hydroxycarbamoyl)glutathione (CHG) through their  $\gamma$ -glutamyl-NH<sub>2</sub> groups with poly- $\beta$ -alanyl tethers of different length: [CHG( $\beta$ -ala)<sub>*n*</sub>] suberate diamide (*n* = 1–7). The strongest inhibitors of this antitumor target enzyme likely bind simultaneously to the active site on each subunit, and give  $K_i$  values as low as 0.96 nM (*n* = 6), a 50-fold tighter binding than the monomer inhibitor CHG ( $K_i = 46$  nM).<sup>5,12</sup> Cross-linking not only improves the binding affinity, but also improves the selectivity by almost 100-fold for human GlxI (hGlxI) relative to yeast GlxI (yGlxI). In the X-ray crystal structure of the hGlxI complex with CHG, the  $\gamma$ -glutamyl-NH<sub>2</sub> groups are exposed to solvent, and are about 30 Å apart. However, a 70–80 Å tether length was found to give the best inhibition.

Nevertheless, these inhibitors have two drawbacks that need to be addressed: amidation of the  $\gamma$ -glutamyl-NH<sub>2</sub> groups decreases the binding affinity by 7 to 13-fold, and the bivalent inhibitors have low solubility, making them unable to cross the cell membrane. In this work, we modify the linker by replacing the amide groups with ethylcarbonyl groups, which do not affect the binding affinity of CHG. Two new inhibitors based on *S*-(*N*-bromophenyl-*N*-hydroxycarbamoyl) glutathione (BHG)<sup>5,12</sup> exhibit inhibition constants of 1 nM or less, and one of these

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