European Journal of Medicinal Chemistry 109 (2016) 199–205

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

European Journal of Medicinal Chemistry

journal homepage: http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ejmech

Research paper

Design, synthesis, and biological evaluation of crenatoside analogues as novel influenza neuraminidase inhibitors

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 6 July 2015
Received in revised form
15 December 2015
Accepted 15 December 2015
Available online 4 January 2016

Keywords:
Design
Synthesis
Neuraminidases inhibitors
Crenatoside derivatives
Influenza virus

ABSTRACT

Natural products, especially derived from TCMH, have been found to exert antiviral effects against influenza virus. Crenatoside, a phenylethanoid glycoside from *Pogostemon cablin* Benth, which has been shown as a novel effective NA inhibitor previously, is considered as the leading compound for our further SARs studies. This work presented design, synthesis of novel crenatoside analogues from readily available D-Glucose and L-rhamnose in a convergent manner. Furthermore, their biological activities and SARs were also investigated. Especially, compound **2 h** showed impressive IC_{50} = 27.77 μg/mL against NAs, which is 3 folds more potent than the leading compound crenatoside (IC_{50} = 89.81 μg/mL). These results would promise their therapeutic potential for influenza disease.

1. Introduction

Influenza virus causes worldwide outbreaks in humans and animals every year with high morbidity and mortality. In the past century, severe influenza outbreaks took place, including the catastrophic H1N1 Spanish influenza in 1918 (caused more than 50 million deaths globally), the H2N2 Asian flu in 1957 (caused more than 1 million deaths globally), and the H3N2 Hong Kong flu in 1968 (caused ~0.5 million deaths globally) [1]. The battle between human and influenza has begun since ancient time, and will last for a long time.

The enveloped, negative-stranded influenza virus belongs to the family *Orthomyxoviridae*, which can be classified by the antigenic properties of glycopro-teins located at the surface of the virus, haemagglutinin (H) and neuraminidase (N). Sixteen subtypes have currently been defined with the haemagglutinin protein (H1–H16) and nine with the neuraminidase protein (N1–N9) accordingly [2]. Both haemagglutinin and neuraminidase are crucial for the replication and infectivity of influenza virus [3]. Many compounds against NP and HA targets were found [4,5]. For example, a new class of compounds featuring a camphor moiety has been discovered by Sokolova, which exhibits potent inhibitory activity against influenza A viruses [6]. Especially, neuraminidase (NA) cleaves the specific linkage of the sialic acid receptor, resulting in the release of the newly formed virions from the infected cells. Additionally, the neuraminidase may facilitate the early stage of influenza virus infection towards lung epithelial cells [7]. Hence, neuraminidase has been an attractive target for the development of novel anti-influenza drugs.

At present, the first-line drugs (oseltamivir and zanamivir) recommended for flu treatment are NA inhibitors. Both of them are sialic acid (Neu5Ac) analogues (Fig. 1). Though with tremendous success, the treatment doesn't seem to be optimistic due to the spontaneously arising and spreading of oseltamivir resistance among influenza virus [8]. Therefore, developing novel NA inhibitors to combat influenza virus is desirable.

Natural products, especially those derived from traditional Chinese medicine herbs (TCMH), are still the major source of innovative therapeutic agents for infectious diseases, cancer, lipid disorders and immunomodulation [9]. However, the structural complexity, small content and unfavourable pharmacokinetic properties of bioactive natural products limited their use in therapeutic field [10]. Thus it is desirable to initiate a SARs study to identify the drug candidate for further investigations.

Pogostemon cablin Benth, also known as “Guang-Huo-Xiang” in China, is an important TCMH that has been widely used for

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ejmech.2015.12.031
0223-5234/

treatment on common cold, nausea, diarrhoea, headaches and fever [11]. In previous study, we have identified crenatoside as a novel selective NA inhibitor from a collection of phenylethanoid glycosides isolated from *P. cablin* Benth. The study partially revealed a molecular basis for the anti-influenza activity of this TCMH. It also suggested that caffeoyl and 1, 4-dioxanyl moieties are critical for their inhibition and selectivity of NA from influenza A virus (H1N1) (Fig. 2). However, several defects of crenatoside, including its poor pharmacokinetic properties and small content in plants, limited its use as a drug candidate. In this paper, we presented the design, synthesis and biological evaluation of crenatoside analogues as novel NA inhibitors, which not only reveal the structure-activity relationships in crenatoside, but also provide drug candidate for further investigations.

2. Design of crenatoside analogues

Generally, the design of crenatoside analogues is based on the bioisosteric replacement and functionality "knock-out" strategy. In medicinal chemistry, bioisosteric replacement is a frequently used strategy in optimization to obtain the desired biological or physical properties of a compound. And functionality "knock out" is also a common protocol to clearly state the contributions of the structural motif to the biological activities. Specifically, we would like to replace the caffeoyl group with privileged drug scaffold and eliminate the rhamnose moiety to investigate the impact of these functional groups on the biological activities. Furthermore, MOE simulation showed that the bulky glucose 3′- rhamnose moiety impedes its binding with the NA (Fig. 3). Additionally, the substitution effect of C-3′ on the biological activity is still unexplored. Therefore, we would like to incorporate privileged drug scaffold, amino acid, onto the C-3′ position.

3. Chemistry

With considerations mentioned above, we initiated our synthesis of the crenatoside analogues. The compound **7** can be served as the versatile intermediate for the synthesis of crenatoside analogues. The retrosynthestic analysis of compound **7** is shown in Scheme 1. Compound **7** can be synthesized by intermediate **8** through C-3′ functionalization and reductive debenzylation. The intermediate **8** can be prepared by base-mediated intramolecular alkylation of compound **9**, which is routinely synthesized by glycosidation of compound **10** and phenylethanol. The activated precursor can be prepared by protection of C-5′, C6′ hydroxyl groups with benzyl acetide and activation of the anomeric carbon with phenyl sulfide of readily available D-glucose.

With the retrosynthetic analysis in mind, we then started the synthetic endeavours. Starting from commercially available D-glucose, we obtained compound **12** by fully acetylation of hydroxyl group with Ac_2O in the presence of sodium acetate in good yield. Sequential BF3·Et2O catalysed theo glycosylation, and Zemplen deacetylation, led to the glucosinolate **13**, of which the C-4′, C6′ hydroxyl groups were selectively protected with O-benzylidene group [12] and C2′, C3′ hydroxyl groups were protected as diacetate

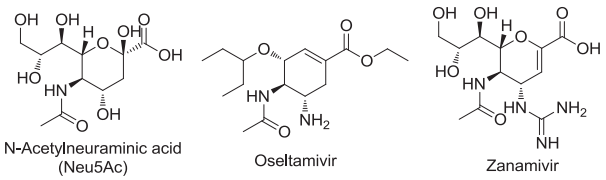

Fig. 1. The structure of Neu5Ac, oseltamivir and zanamivir.

to reach intermediate **15**. Subsequently, we focused on the challenging glycosidation. After multiple attempts, we found that C-2′ acetylate promoted stereoselective glycosidation of compound **15** with phenylethanol **16** under AgOTf/NIS/-40 °C conditions. This gave our target compound **17** as diastereoisomers in moderate yield [13]. In this protocol, phenylethanol **16** was prepared by reaction of styrene oxide with hydrobromide as racemic isomers, which would help our investigation of C-7 configuration on the biological activities. Finally, deacetylation with NaOMe followed by intramolecular O-alkylation in the presence of NaH yields compound **7** as diastereoisomers (Scheme 2).

We then performed synthesis of analogues. On one hand, debenzylidenation of compound **7** in the presence of 80%HOAc afforded isomers **1a** and **1b**, which was then separated by HPLC. The stereochemistry of **1a** and **1b** was elucidated by the difference of the coupling constant for H-7/H-8 (J_7-8β = 3.6 Hz for α configuration) [14]. The stereochemistry of C-7 of analogues is also assigned in the same way. On the other hand, L-rhamnose conjugated analogues **1c** and **1d** were synthesized in a convergent manner. Compound **20** was prepared through a three-step protocol from L-rhamnose according to the routine procedure. Subsequent glycosylation of compound **20** with the compound **7** in the presence of TMSOTf at −30 °C gave compound **21** in good yield [15], which was then debenzylidenated and deacetylated to provide isomers **1c** and **1d** [16] (Scheme 3).

As mentioned above, a series of C-3′ substituted analogues were also synthesized. Specifically, we would like to attach cinnamoyl group and amino acid at C-3′ position. Compound **7** was esterified with different cinnamic acid derivatives, followed by debenzylidenation and deacetylation to provide compounds **2a**–**2 h** in moderate yield [17]. Similarly, compounds **3a**–**3d** synthesized by esterification and simultaneous removal of benzylidenation and Boc groups using TFA/CH_2Cl_2 (Scheme 4).

4. Experimental

4.1. General remarks

^1H and ^{13}C NMR spectra were recorded on a Brucker AV 400 spectrometer or 500 using tetramethylsilane (TMS) as an internal standard; J-values are in Hz. Mass spectra were recorded by ESI-HRMS analysis, which was provided by Agilent 6520 Q-TOF LC/MS spectrometer (Agilent, Germany). Solvent for anhydrous reaction should be processed before use. Commercially obtained reagents were used without further purification. All reactions were monitored by thin-layer chromatography (TLC) with Huang hai GF_{254} silica gel coated plates.

4.2. Procedure for the preparation of the unknown compounds

4.2.1. 2-β-bromo-Benzeneethanol, 4, 6-O-Benzylidene-2, 3-O-acetyl-β-D- glucopyranose (17)

A suspension of compound **15** (88.8 mg, 0.2 mmol) and compound **16** (60 mg, 0.3 mmol) in dry CH_2Cl_2 (5 mL) containing activated 4 Å molecular sieves (80 mg) was stirred under an atmosphere of argon at RT for 30 min. After cooling to −40 °C, NIS (54 mg, 0.24 mmol) and a solution of AgOTf in toluene (18 mg, 2 ml) was added and the resulting mixture was stirred from −40 °C to RT for 2.5 h. The reaction was quenched with 0.3 ml Et_3N and diluted with CH_2Cl_2 (10 mL). The solution was washed with brine and the organic layer was dried over Na_2SO_4 and filtered. The filtrate was concentrated in vacuo and the residue was purified by flash silica gel column chromatography to give compound **17** (58 mg, 55.0%) as a white powder.