Synthesis and biological evaluation of tamoxifen fusion compounds for the optimization of MASPIT, a three-hybrid target deconvolution assay

Dries De Clercq¹, Martijn Risseeuw¹, Sam Lievens², Jan Tavernier² and Serge Van Calenbergh¹

¹Laboratory for Medicinal Chemistry (FFW), Ghent University, Harelbekestraat 72, B-9000 Ghent, Belgium
²Cytokine Receptor Lab, VIB & Ghent University, Albert Baertsoenkaai 3, B-9000 Ghent, Belgium

Methods that allow high throughput identification of cellular targets of bioactive small molecules are invaluable assets in pharmaceutical research. They are useful in mechanism of action studies of leads identified via phenotypic screening. Alternatively, they may uncover ‘off-target’ proteins of established drugs, that may contribute to their therapeutic efficacy or unwanted side effects. Finally, such methods also allow to identify potential novel therapeutic applications of existing drugs.

MAmmalian Small molecule-Protein Interaction Trap (MASPIT) is a three-hybrid approach that enables swift proteome-wide screening for intracellular targets of small molecules based on the JAK-STAT signaling pathway of the cytokine receptor (CR).¹² MASPIT employs eDHFR, fused to the CR to present a methotrexate (MTX) fusion compound (MFC) to the intracellular environment. This allows the screening of a small molecule bait against a collection of chimeric prey proteins. As a result of the interaction between the bait and a prey protein, the JAK-STAT pathway is activated, resulting in the expression of the luciferase reporter gene (cf. Fig.).

A conditio sine qua non for successful MASPIT analysis is the availability of appropriate synthetic probes.³ In this presentation we will discuss our efforts in optimizing the MASPIT system’s selectivity and sensitivity based on chemical dimerizers comprising tamoxifen (TAM) as model bait. To circumvent cellular toxicity associated with the known MTX anchor, we explored trimethoprim (TMP) as an alternative prokaryote-specific eDHFR ligand. Furthermore, in an effort to stabilize the ternary complex, the fusion compound was selectively and covalently immobilized to the CR using a SNAP-tag-based system (cf. Fig.).⁴

References
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