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Fluorinated Δ F508-CFTR Correctors and Potentiators for PET Imaging

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Abstract

¹⁹F-modified bithiazole correctors and phenylglycine potentiators of the Δ F508-CFTR chloride channels were synthesized and their function assayed in cells expressing human Δ F508-CFTR and a halide-sensitive fluorescent protein. Fluorine was incorporated into each scaffold using prosthetic groups for future biodistribution imaging studies using positron emission tomography (PET). The Δ F508-CFTR corrector and potentiator potencies of the fluorinated analogs were comparable to or better than those of the original compounds.

Keywords

Cystic fibrosis; PET; Corrector; Potentiator; Δ F508-CFTR

Cystic fibrosis (CF) is the most prevalent lethal hereditary disease among Caucasians, affecting approximately one in 2,500 individuals.¹ The average life expectancy in CF is about 40 years. The principal cause of mortality in CF is deterioration of lung function caused by chronic lung infection.^{2,3} Cystic fibrosis is caused by mutations in the cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator (CFTR) protein, the most common being a deletion of phenylalanine at position 508 (Δ F508).^{4,5} This mutation causes CFTR protein misfolding, resulting in retention and rapid degradation in the endoplasmic reticulum.^{6–9}

Compounds have been synthesized that rescue defective Δ F508-CFTR protein processing (correctors) and defective chloride channel gating (potentiators).^{10–12} Bithiazole **1** (corr-**4a**) and indolylacetamidophenylacetamide **2** (PG-**01**) are the benchmark corrector and potentiator studied here, respectively (Figure 1). Structure-activity relationship studies based on corr-**4a** revealed that substitution of a 2-chloro-5-(*N,N*-dimethyl-amino)phenyl moiety for the 5-chloro-2-methoxyphenyl group improved water solubility (**3**; Figure 1)¹³ and that

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Supplementary Information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:#####.

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locking the bithiazole system into an *s-cis* conformation with a 7-membered ring (**3**; Figure 1) improved corrector efficacy.¹¹

We recently reported the synthesis of a fluorescently-labeled bithiazole corrector **4** (Figure 1), which enabled the evaluation of its biodistribution in mice by fluorescence imaging.¹⁴ Though this approach produced information about the *in vivo* handling of a functional CF corrector, the inclusion of a fluorophore label resulted in poor compound metabolic stability, limiting the time over which the non-modified compounds could be studied. Also, the limited penetration of light into tissues precluded non-invasive whole-body imaging.

To address these issues, we report here a first step to apply positron emission tomography (PET) imaging to non-invasively visualize the biodistribution of a bithiazole corrector and a phenylglycine potentiator.^{15–17} Analogs suitable for PET imaging have the advantage of minimally modifying the original compound structure (replacing a H with an ¹⁸F),¹⁸ which increases the likelihood of maintaining activity while enabling *in vivo* monitoring of uptake and biodistribution. Indeed, imaging modalities can be relevant at all stages of CF drug development, with potential applications in animal models, tissue preparations, and human *in vivo* studies. Relevant imaging could enlighten at the basic mechanistic level leading to a better understanding CF pathophysiology, at the level of assessing the potential of new correctors or potentiators, at the effectiveness of treatment level, and/or at the level of measuring function to better drug delivery.¹⁹

PET produces images through the detection of positron emitting radioisotopes. The most commonly used radionucleotide is fluorine-18 due to its relatively long half-life ($t_{1/2} = 110$ min). Other elements, such as carbon (¹¹C $t_{1/2} = 20.4$ min), nitrogen (¹³N $t_{1/2} = 9.97$ min), and oxygen (¹⁵O $t_{1/2} = 2.04$ min), have much shorter half-lives. To address the need for new disease-specific probes, prosthetic groups¹⁸ have been developed for the rapid incorporation of radioisotopes into the specific tracers. A variety of amine-reactive prosthetic groups have been developed, the most commonly being [¹⁸F]*N*-succinimidyl-4-fluorobenzoate (**5**; Figure 2).²⁰ Other ¹⁸F-acylating agents include the carboxylate reactive [¹⁸F]4-fluoroaniline prosthetic group (**6**; Figure 2).²¹ A strategy that has received considerable attention is the use of click chemistry to incorporate small molecular weight ¹⁸F-labeled alkynes such as [¹⁸F]5-fluoroalkyne (**7**; Figure 2) into azide substituted peptides.²² Copper(I)-catalyzed 1,2,3-triazole formation is fast, chemoselective, and performed under mild conditions.²²

As a first step in enabling CF-relevant PET studies, we report here the design, synthesis, and $\Delta F508$ -CFTR activity of two ¹⁹F-labeled correctors (**8** and **9**; Figure 3) and two ¹⁹F-labeled potentiators (**10** and **11**; Figure 3). Since ¹⁸F has a 110 min half-life, late-stage introduction of the fluorinated moiety is essential and, consequently, targets **8–11** were designed with the aforementioned ¹⁸F-prosthetic groups in mind.

Targeting fluorobenzoyl analogs ¹⁹F-**8** and ¹⁹F-**9** (Scheme 1), the first synthetic step was the condensation of 3-chloropentane-2,4-dione with thiourea in refluxing ethanol over 12 h to afford aminothiazole **12** in 95% yield.¹¹ The acetyl group of **12** was subsequently α -brominated with bromine in acetic acid to produce **13** in 86% yield. Aminothiazole building block **15** was obtained in 79% yield by the condensation of **13** with 1-(2-chloro-5-dimethylaminophenyl)thiourea (**14**) in refluxing ethanol. The final step in the synthesis of ¹⁹F-bithiazole **8** proved to be more challenging than expected as numerous attempts to couple it with fluorobenzoic acid by amide-coupling condensation with HATU, EDC, or CDI proved unsuccessful. Eventually, bithiazole **15** was acylated with 4-fluorobenzoyl chloride (prepared by treatment of 4-fluorobenzoic acid with oxalyl chloride) in the presence of triethylamine at room temperature (10 min) to afford ¹⁹F-**8**.

Given these difficulties, a new strategy was developed for the synthesis of fluorinated bithiazole **9**. Work began here with the CDI-mediated coupling of aminothiazole **12** with 4-fluorobenzoic acid. Thiazole **17** was markedly easier to purify than **8**. Bromination of **17** proved significantly more difficult than **12**, requiring the use of a stronger acidic medium (HBr vs. AcOH) with pyridinium tribromide to afford **18** (91% yield). The final reaction involved condensation of **18** with 1-(5-chloro-2-methoxyphenyl)thiourea (**19**), delivering ^{19}F -**9** in 76% yield.

Yield and purification difficulties were due to the poor solubility of aminobithiazole intermediate **15** as well as the corresponding fluorinated bithazoles **8** and **9**. Because [^{18}F]*N*-succinimidyl-4-fluorobenzoate (^{18}F -SFB) would be used in picomolar quantities for the final coupling to aminobithiazole intermediates, the reaction solution would be quite dilute and solubility is not expected to be a significant issue.

The ΔF508 -CFTR corrector activity of ^{19}F -**8** and ^{19}F -**9** was assayed using a cell-based fluorescence assay in Fischer rat thyroid (FRT) cells co-expressing human ΔF508 -CFTR and the halide-sensitive fluorescent protein YFP-H148Q/I152L.¹¹ The concentration-dependence data show slightly greater potency of ^{19}F -**8** and ^{19}F -**9**, compared to benchmark corrector corr-**4a**, as shown in Figure 4. EC_{50} values (in μM) were: **8** = 1.4; **9** = 1.4; corr-**4a** = 2.3].

Synthesis of fluoroaniline potentiator ^{19}F -**10** (Scheme 2) began with an EDC-mediated coupling of 4-fluoroaniline to Boc-*N*-methyl-L-phenylglycine (Scheme 2).^{10,23} Boc-protected **21**, obtained in 61% yield, was then deprotected by treatment with TFA and subsequent EDC-activated coupling with 3-indole acetic acid and DMAP gave ^{19}F -**10** in 72% yield over two steps.

Synthesis of 4-(3-fluoropropyl)-1*H*-1,2,3-triazole analog **11** began with the synthesis of 4-azidoaniline via a CuI-catalyzed, proline-promoted coupling reaction²⁴ followed by an EDC-mediated condensation of **20** (Scheme 2) with Boc-*N*-methyl-L-phenylglycine to afford **22** (**20**, 74%; and **22**, 97%, respectively). Subsequent Boc removal (TFA) followed by treatment with EDC-activated 3-indole acetic acid and DMAP afforded azido phenylglycine intermediate **23** (90% yield).

The synthesis of 5-fluoroalkyne for the triazole-forming cycloaddition with azido-phenylglycine intermediate **23** proved to be unsuccessful. Initially, we focused on utilizing diethylaminosulfur trifluoride (DAST) for the conversion of the alcohol moiety of 4-pentyne-1-ol into an alkyl fluoride.²⁵ Unfortunately, no fluorinated alkyne was isolated. Das *et al.* reported that ionic liquids can be used in an improved purification procedure of the dehydroxy-fluorination reaction with DAST; again, no desired product was isolated.²⁶ Likewise, a modified procedure employing tosylate **24** (synthesized by the treatment of 4-pentyn-1-ol with *p*-toluenesulfonyl chloride and triethylamine²⁷) and nucleophilic fluoride [KF plus 18-Crown-6 or $\text{Bu}_4\text{N}^+\text{F}^-(t\text{BuOH})_4$ ²⁸] was unsuccessful.

With this as a backdrop, tosylate **24** was clicked to azido intermediate **23** in a Huisgen copper-catalyzed 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition to afford **25** in 85% yield (Scheme 3). Finally, potentiator analog ^{19}F -**11** was obtained by treatment of **25** with $\text{Bu}_4\text{N}^+\text{F}^-(t\text{BuOH})_4$ (**26**) in 31% yield.

The ΔF508 -CFTR potentiator activity of ^{19}F -**10** and ^{19}F -**11** was assayed in FRT cells co-expressing ΔF508 -CFTR and YFP-H148Q/I152L after rescue of ΔF508 -CFTR by 24 h culture at 27 °C.^{11,12} Fluorinated phenylglycine analogs had EC_{50} of 0.09 μM (^{19}F -**10**) and

1.1 μM (^{19}F -**11**), comparable to that of 0.3 μM reported previously for PG-01,¹⁰ and much better than that of 7.0 μM for benchmark potentiator genistein (Figure 5).

The retained corrector activity of ^{19}F -**8** and ^{19}F -**9** and potentiator activity of ^{19}F -**10** is likely the consequence of the enhanced binding interactions of fluorine.²⁹ Indeed, fluorine is found in approximately 5–15% of drugs that have come to market over the past 50 years.²⁹ Fluorine has also been shown to improve metabolic stability and generally enhance physicochemical properties,²⁹ features which would be useful in future *in vivo* studies.

In conclusion, two active fluorinated corrector analogs and two active fluorinated potentiator analogs were synthesized and the introduction of a fluorine atom was found to improved potency. Both fluorinated correctors (^{19}F -**8** and ^{19}F -**9**) and a fluorinated potentiator (^{19}F -**10**) showed improved or comparable activity to the original compounds. These active, fluorinated analogs are potentially useful for non-invasive PET imaging of *in vivo* compound uptake and biodistribution. Given the short half-life of ^{19}F ($t_{1/2} = 110$ min), the next step en route to PET studies with these compounds will be to develop synthetic routes to ^{19}F -**8**, ^{19}F -**9**, and ^{19}F -**10** where the ^{19}F moiety is introduced in the last synthetic step. Current efforts are focused on developing viable and high-yielding routes to ^{19}F -**8** from *N*-(2-chloro-5-(dimethylamino)phenyl)-4'-methyl-[4,5'-bithiazole]-2,2'-diamine (**15**) + **7** and ^{19}F -**10** from (*S*)-2-(2-(1H-indol-3-yl)-*N*-methylacet-amido)-2-phenylacetic acid + **6**.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

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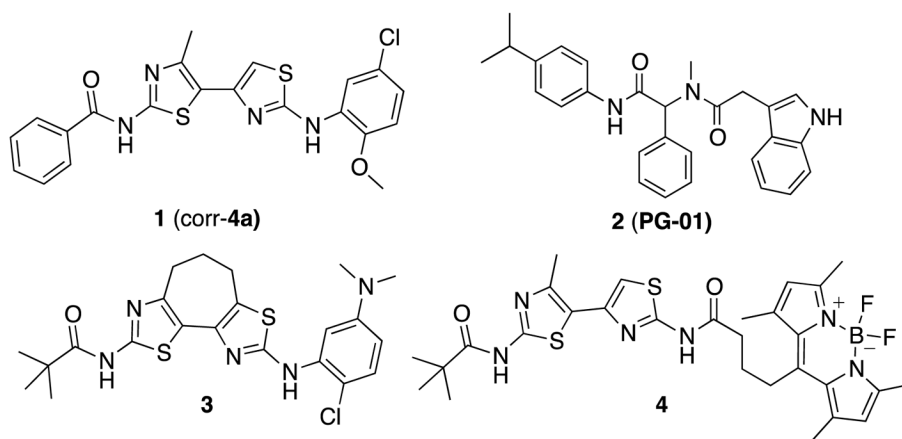


Figure 1.
 $\Delta F508$ -CFTR correctors (**1/3/4**) and potentiator (**2**).

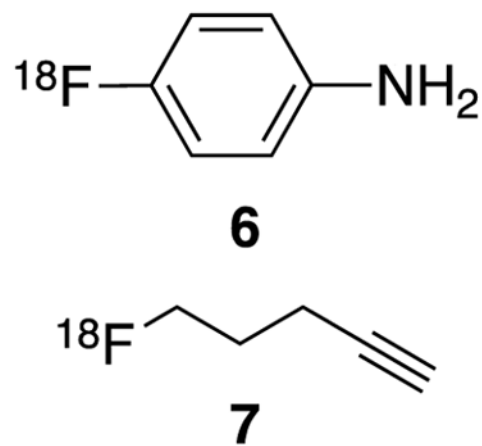
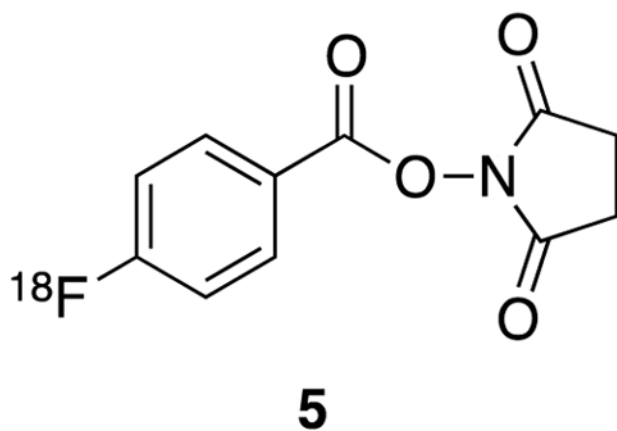


Figure 2.
Potential ^{18}F -prosthetics.

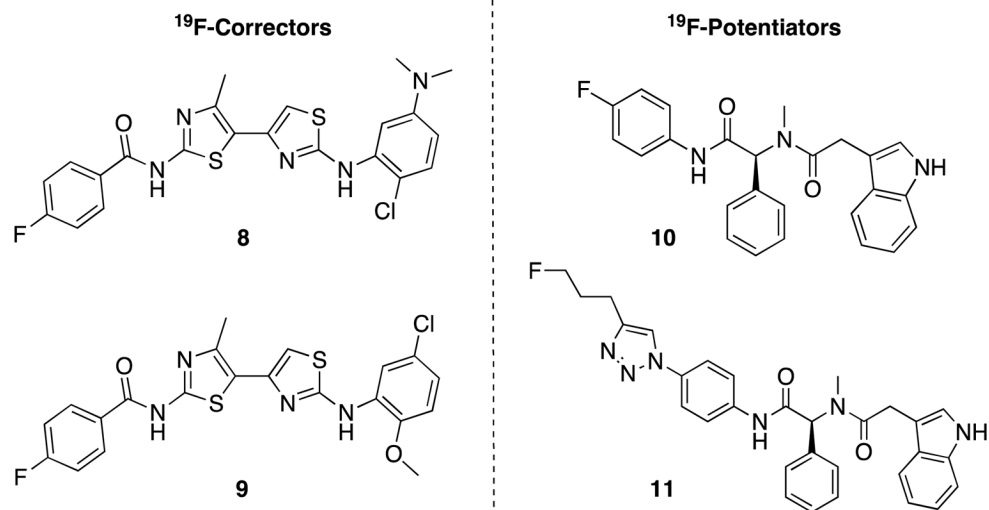


Figure 3.
Fluorine-containing corrector and potentiator analogs.

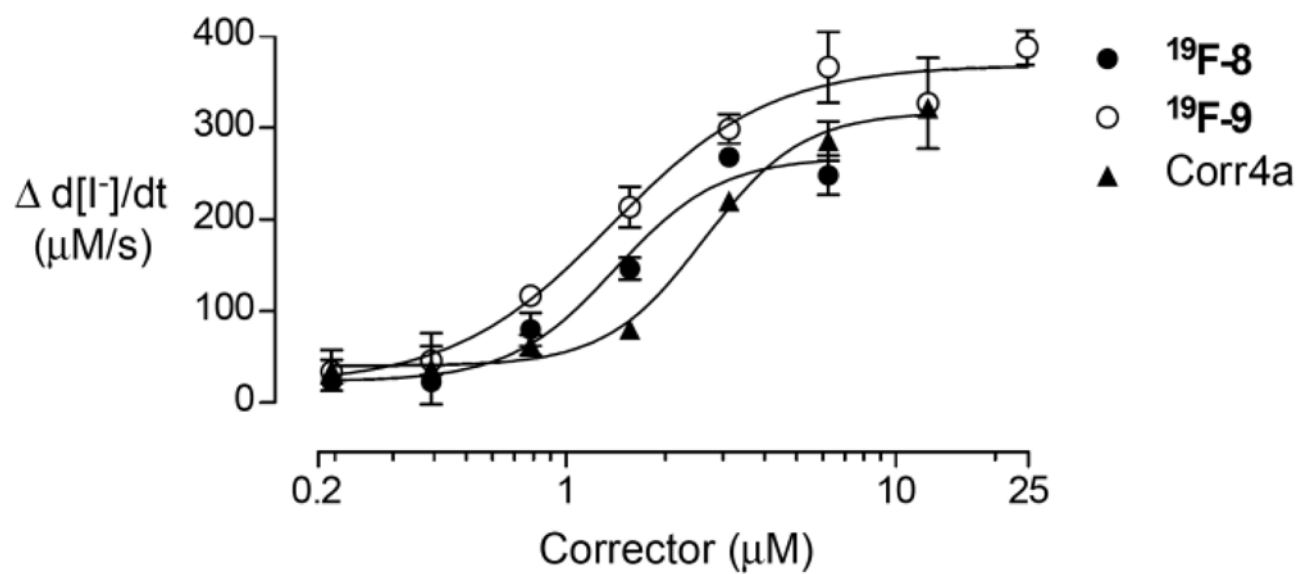


Figure 4. Concentration-dependence of $\Delta F508$ -CFTR corrector activity of $^{19}\text{F-8}$ and $^{19}\text{F-9}$ compared to corr-4a.

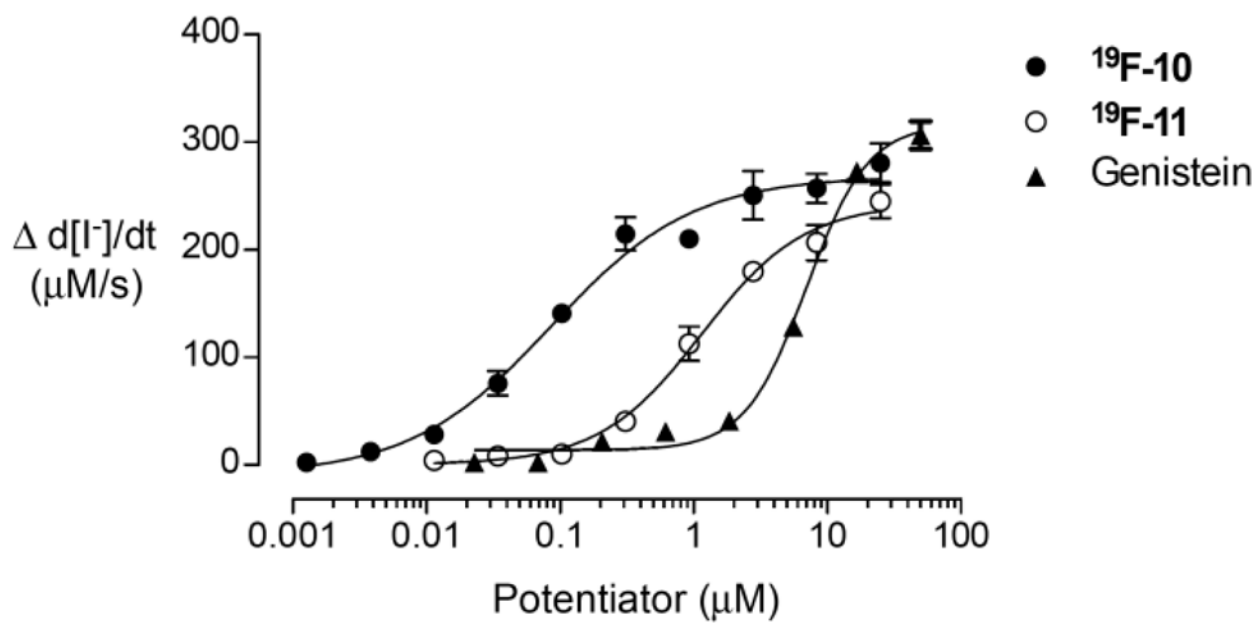
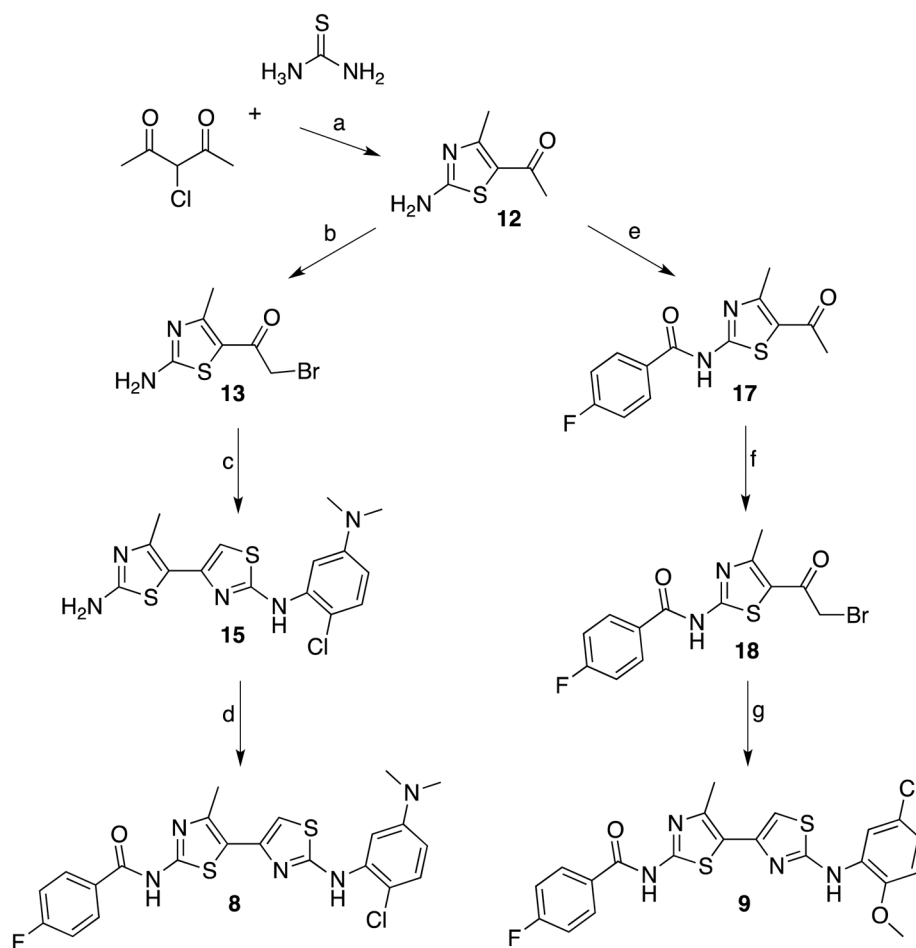
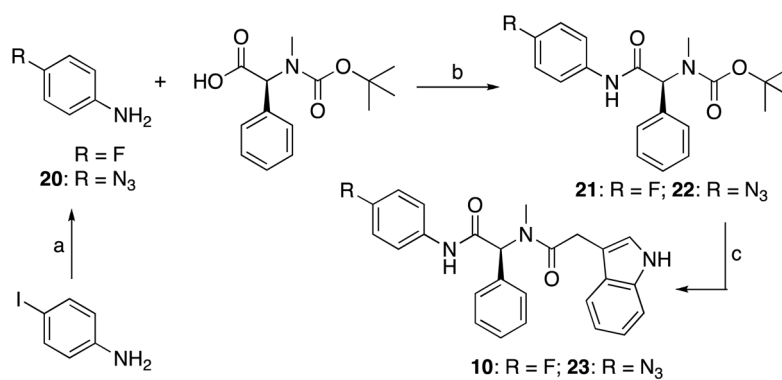


Figure 5. Concentration-dependence of $\Delta F508$ -CFTR potentiator activity of ^{19}F -10 and ^{19}F -11 compared to genistein.

**Scheme 1.**

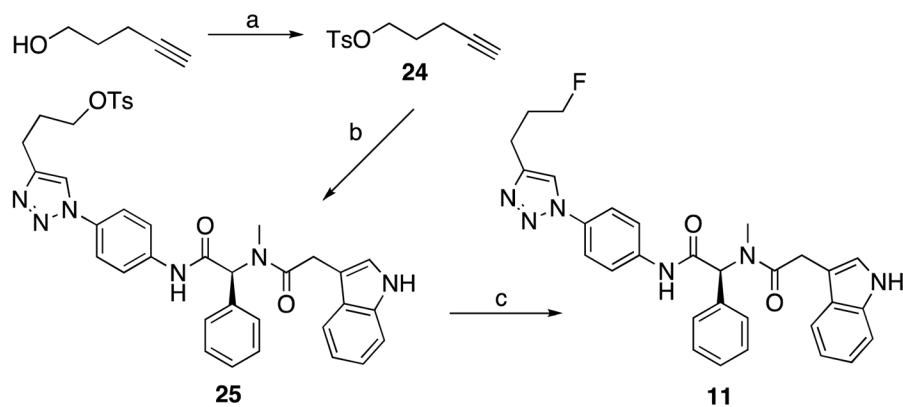
Synthesis of fluorinated corrector analogs.^a

^aReagents: (a) EtOH, reflux; (b) Br₂, AcOH; (c) 1-(2-chloro-5-dimethylaminophenyl)thiourea (**14**), EtOH, reflux; (d) i. 4-fluorobenzoic acid, CH₂Cl₂, oxalyl chloride, ii. 4-fluorobenzoyl chloride (**16**), CH₂Cl₂, TEA; (e) 4-fluorobenzoic acid, CDI, DMF, 100 °C; (f) PyrH⁺Br₃⁻, 33% HBr in AcOH; (g) 1-(5-chloro-2-methoxyphenyl)thiourea (**19**), EtOH, reflux.

**Scheme 2.**

Synthesis of fluorinated potentiator ¹⁹F-**10** and azido intermediate **23**.^a

^aReagents: (a) CuI, NaN₃, L-proline, NaOH, DMSO, 60 °C; (b) EDC, HOBT, DMF, DCM, 0 °C to rt; (c) i. TFA, DCM, ii. EDC, DMAP, DCM, DMF, 0 °C to rt.



Scheme 3.

Synthesis of fluorinated potentiator ¹⁹F-11.

^aReagents: (a) TsCl, TEA, DCM, 0 °C to rt; (b) Na ascorbate, CuSO₄, **23**, DCM, *t*BuOH, H₂O; (c) i. Bu₄N⁺F⁻ H₂O, *t*BuOH, hexane, 90 °C, 30 min forms Bu₄N⁺F⁻ (*t*BuOH)₄ (**26**), ii. **25**, **26**, ACN, 70 °C, 1 h.