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Synthesis and evaluation of a bifunctional chelate for development of Bi(III)-labeled radioimmunoconjugates

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Abstract

A new bifunctional ligand *C*-DEPA was designed and synthesized as a component for antibody-targeted radiation therapy (radioimmunotherapy, RIT) of cancer. *C*-DEPA was conjugated to a tumor targeting antibody, trastuzumab, and the corresponding *C*-DEPA-trastuzumab conjugate was evaluated for radiolabeling kinetics with ²⁰⁵Bi. *C*-DEPA-trastuzumab conjugate rapidly bound ²⁰⁵Bi, and ²⁰⁵Bi-*C*-DEPA-trastuzumab conjugate was stable in human serum for 72 h. The *in vitro* radiolabeling kinetics and serum stability data suggest that *C*-DEPA is a potential chelate for preclinical RIT applications using ²¹²Bi and ²¹³Bi.

Radioimmunotherapy (RIT) using α -particle emitting radionuclides has been proven to be effective in treatment of leukemia, lymphoma, and micrometastatic cancers.^{1–3} Among those radionuclides for α -RIT, ²¹²Bi ($t_{1/2}$ = 60.6 m) and ²¹³Bi ($t_{1/2}$ = 45 m) with high α energy (5–8 MeV) and a short emission range (50–80 μ m) were proposed to selectively and effectively kill tumor cells with a minimum damage to normal cells.³ Preclinical and clinical studies have demonstrated therapeutic efficacy of α -particle emitting radionuclides in treatment of the blood-born cancers.^{4–7} In particular, RIT using monoclonal antibody (mAb) labeled with ²¹³Bi was found to be effective in the treatment of chemo- and external radiation-resistant leukemia cells.⁸ An effective bifunctional chelator of ²¹²Bi or ²¹³Bi possessing a functional group for conjugation to a tumor targeting antibody is an essential component for α -RIT.¹ Several less optimal bifunctional ligands including *C*-DOTA (2-(4-nitrobenzyl)-1,4,7,10-tetraazacyclotetradecane-1,4,7,10-tetra-acetic acid) and *C*-DTPA ((2-(4-nitrobenzyl)-diethylenetriamine pentaacetic acid) have been explored for RIT of ²¹³Bi and ²¹²Bi.^{1,9–11} *C*-DTPA displays rapid and high yield radiolabeling with Bi(III), while the chelator produces an unstable complex both *in vitro* and *in vivo*.¹ The excellent *in vitro* or *in vivo* stability of Bi(III) complex of DOTA is reported.¹ However, slow kinetics of DOTA in binding Bi(III) under mild conditions limits RIT application of the ligand.¹ Development of a superior bifunctional ligand that can tightly and rapidly bind the short-lived radioisotopes is required for safe and potent α -RIT application.

We previously reported that decadentate DEPA (7-[2-(bis-carboxymethyl-amino)-ethyl]-4,10-bis-carboxymethyl-1,4,7,10-tetraazacyclododec-1-yl-acetic acid) is a promising chelator for the radioisotopes of Bi(III).¹² DEPA was designed to possess a donor system

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integrating both macrocyclic DOTA (1,4,7,10-tetraazacyclododecane-1,4,7,10-tetracarboxylic acid) and acyclic DTPA (diethylenetriamine pentaacetic acid) and expected to rapidly form a stable complex with a metal having relatively large ionic radii such as Bi(III), and Ac(III) based on cooperative binding of both the macrocyclic and acyclic moieties. $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ -DEPA was stable in human serum without any loss of the radioactivity for two weeks and displayed excellent *in vivo* stability in mice.¹² We herein report synthesis and evaluation of the bifunctional analog, C-DEPA, as a potential chelator of the Bi(III) radionuclides.

The synthetic route to the new bifunctional ligand C-DEPA is outlined in Schemes 1 and 2. We wanted to prepare the macrocyclic backbone compound **5** via nucleophilic ring opening reaction of *N*-BOC protected aziridine **2** by cyclen (1,4,7,10-tetraazacyclododecane) **1** followed by removal of the BOC group in **4** (Scheme 1). Alkylation of **5** was expected to provide the key precursor molecule **10** for the synthesis of C-DEPA (Scheme 2). As expected, selective mono-substitution of **1** with aziridine derivative **2** produced **4** by the opening of the aziridine ring in **2** at the less hindered methylene carbon. However, the isolated yield of **4** was low as the reaction also formed polysubstitution byproducts and elimination product **3**, and purification of the polar intermediate compound **4** was challenging. Different reaction conditions at varying temperature, time, or solvent were examined to optimize the isolated yield of **4**. The reaction of **1** (1 equiv), **2** (1 equiv), and DIPEA (3 equiv) in DMF (45 °C, 25 h) provided elimination product **3** as the exclusive product. The reaction of **1** with **2** in CH₃CN for 10–24 h provided **4** in poor yield (12–21%). When the reaction was refluxed in CH₃OH for 48 h, a mixture of **3** and **4** in a 1:1 mole ratio was obtained as evidenced by analytical HPLC. The best isolated yield of **4** (56%) was achieved from the reaction of **1** (1 equiv) and **2** (2 equiv) in MeOH under reflux for 21 h. The BOC group in **4** was removed by the treatment of **4** with 4M HCl in 1,4-dioxane to provide **5**. Regiochemistry in the ring opening of aziridine analogue **2** was confirmed by independently preparing compound **5** starting from **6** (Scheme 1). Swern oxidation of **6** provided **7** in good isolated yield (78%), and BOC-protected macrocyclic compound **9** was obtained from reductive amination of **7** with **8**¹³ using sodium triacetoxyborohydride provided in excellent isolated yield (85%). Removal of the BOC groups in **9** using 4M HCl in 1,4-dioxane provided **5**. Preparation of **5** via this alternative route was found to be more reproducible and practical as compared to the original synthetic route via selective substitution of **1** which we initially accomplished. The ¹H and ¹³C NMR spectral data of **5** obtained from two different synthetic routes were essentially identical and confirms the regiochemistry observed in the ring opening of the aziridine compound **2**. Synthesis of the desired bifunctional ligands C-DEPA and C-DEPA-NCS is shown in Scheme 2. Reaction of **5** with *tert*-butyl bromoacetate in acetonitrile produced compound **10**. This substitution reaction turned out to be very challenging, and **10** was isolated in poor yield (10%) using semi-prep HPLC purification, and the isolated yield of the reaction is yet to be improved. Subsequent removal of the *tert*-butyl groups in **10** using HCl(g) in 1,4-dioxane provided C-DEPA (**11**). The nitro group in **11** was transformed into the amino group to provide **12**. Reaction of **12** with thiophosgene provided the bifunctional ligand C-DEPA-NCS (**13**) containing the isothiocyanate group for conjugation to an antibody.

C-DEPA-NCS was conjugated to a tumor targeting antibody, trastuzumab which was approved by the FDA for the treatment of metastatic breast cancer and is known to selectively target the HER2 protein over-expressed in various tumors including colon and breast cancers.^{14–15} Protein concentration in the C-DEPA-trastuzumab conjugate was quantified using the UV spectroscopic method as described in the experimental.¹⁶ The Pb(II)-AAIII based UV-Vis spectrophotometric assay as previously reported^{16,17} was used for the determination of the number of C-DEPA ligand linked to trastuzumab (L/P ratio).

The spectroscopic assay data indicate that *C*-DEPA was conjugated to trastuzumab with a L/P ratio of 0.84:1 (Supporting Information).

The purified *C*-DEPA-trastuzumab conjugate was further evaluated for radiolabeling reaction kinetics with $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ ($t_{1/2} = 15.3$ d for ^{205}Bi ; $t_{1/2} = 6.24$ d for ^{206}Bi), a surrogate of ^{212}Bi and ^{213}Bi at room temperature for 1 h. For comparison, *C*-DTPA-trastuzumab conjugate was prepared and radiolabeled with $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$. During the incubation time (1 h), the radiolabeling reaction kinetics was determined by taking aliquots of the reaction solutions at six different time points (1 min, 5 min, 10 min, 20 min, 30 min, and 60 min). The components were analyzed using SE-HPLC after challenging the reaction mixture with 10mM DTPA, and the radiolabeling efficiency (%) at each time point was determined (Table 1 and Supporting Information). The data in Table 1 indicate that *C*-DEPA-trastuzumab conjugate was rapid in binding $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ (1 min, 89%; 60 min, 93%) at room temperature which was comparable to labeling of *C*-DTPA-trastuzumab with $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ (1 min, 94%; 60 min, 96%). However, *C*-DOTA-trastuzumab conjugate displayed slow complex formation kinetics with $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ (60 min, 60%) as previously reported.¹⁶ The result confirms that *C*-DOTA is not qualified for use in RIT applications using the short-lived radioisotopes ^{212}Bi and ^{213}Bi .

In vitro serum stability of the radiolabeled complexes was performed to determine if $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ -*C*-DEPA-trastuzumab conjugate remained stable without loss of $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ in human serum (Table 2 and Supporting Information). $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ -*C*-DTPA-trastuzumab conjugate was evaluated for comparison. The $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ -*C*-DEPA-trastuzumab conjugate was prepared at 37 °C and pH 5.5, purified on a PD-10 column, and incubated in human serum (37 °C). At each time point (0 h, 24 h, 48 h, 72 h), aliquots of the reaction mixture were analyzed using SE-HPLC (PBS, pH 7.4). $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ -*C*-DEPA-Trastuzumab was stable without release of the radioactivity into serum, and no transchelation of $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ from the complex to the serum protein was observed over the course of 3 days. However, ~23% of the radioactivity was released from $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ -*C*-DTPA-trastuzumab conjugate in 72 h.

In summary, the new bifunctional ligand *C*-DEPA was prepared and characterized and conjugated to a tumor-targeting antibody, trastuzumab. The corresponding *C*-DEPA-trastuzumab conjugate was evaluated for complexation kinetics with $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$. *C*-DEPA-trastuzumab conjugate rapidly formed a complex with $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ with an excellent radiolabeling efficiency, and $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ -*C*-DEPA-trastuzumab conjugate was stable in human serum for 3 days. Based on the promising result of the *in vitro* evaluations, *C*-DEPA will be further evaluated for RIT with ^{212}Bi and ^{213}Bi using tumor bearing mice.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

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Scheme 1.
Synthesis of key intermediate compound 5

Scheme 2.
Synthesis of C-DEPA (11) and C-DEPA-NCS (13)

Table 1

Radiolabeling efficiency (%) of *C*-DEPA-trastuzumab, *C*-DTPA-trastuzumab, and *C*-DOTA-trastuzumab conjugates with $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ (pH 5.5, RT).^[a]

Time (min)	<i>C</i> -DEPA-trastuzumab	<i>C</i> -DTPA-trastuzumab	<i>C</i> -DOTA-trastuzumab ^[b]
1	88.7 ± 1.4	93.6 ± 0.5	8.4 ± 1.9
5	90.4 ± 1.0	95.1 ± 0.3	17.2 ± 4.3
10	91.2 ± 1.2	95.3 ± 0.6	28.7 ± 4.5
20	91.1 ± 1.4	96.0 ± 0.3	38.0 ± 4.9
30	92.6 ± 0.8	95.9 ± 0.3	49.7 ± 9.0
60	92.7 ± 0.8	95.8 ± 0.1	60.2 ± 8.0

^[a]SE-HPLC (mobile phase: PBS, pH 7.4). Radiolabeling efficiency (mean ± standard deviation %) was measured in triplicate.

^[b]The data was cited for comparison (ref. 16)

Table 2

In vitro serum stability (SE-HPLC) of $^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ -radiolabeled trastuzumab-ligand conjugates (pH 7 and 37 °C).

Radioimmunoconjugate	Time (h)	$^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ -bound conjugate complex (%)
$^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ -C-DEPA-trastuzumab	0	100.0
	24	100.0
	48	100.0
	72	100.0
$^{205/6}\text{Bi}$ -C-DTPA-trastuzumab	0	100.0
	24	73.4
	48	76.7
	72	77.0