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Discovery of 3-aminopicolinamides as metabotropic glutamate receptor subtype 4 (mGlu4) positive allosteric modulator warheads engendering CNS exposure and in vivo efficacy

Rocco D. Gogliotti^a, Darren W. Engers^{a,b}, Pedro M. Garcia-Barrantes^a, Joseph D. Panarese^a, Patrick R. Gentry^a, Anna L. Blobaum^{a,b}, Ryan D. Morrison^a, J. Scott Daniels^{a,b}, Analisa D. Thompson^a, Carrie K. Jones^{a,b,d}, P. Jeffrey Conn^{a,b,d}, Colleen M. Niswender^{a,b,d}, Craig W. Lindsley^{a,b,c,*}, and Corey R. Hopkins^{a,b,c,*}

^aVanderbilt Center for Neuroscience Drug Discovery, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, TN 37232, USA

^bDepartment of Pharmacology, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, TN 37232, USA

^cDepartment of Chemistry, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37232, USA

^dVanderbilt Kennedy Center, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, TN 37232, USA

Abstract

This letter describes the further chemical optimization of the picolinamide-derived family of mGlu₄ PAMs wherein we identified a 3-amino substituent to the picolinamide warhead that engendered potency, CNS penetration and in vivo efficacy. From this optimization campaign, VU0477886 emerged as a potent ($EC_{50} = 95$ nM, 89% Glu Max) mGlu₄ PAM with an attractive DMPK profile (brain:plasma $K_p = 1.3$), rat $CL_p = 4.0$ mL/min/kg, $t_{1/2} = 3.7$ h) and robust efficacy in our standard preclinical Parkinson's disease model, haloperidol-induced catalepsy (HIC).

Keywords

mGlu₄; Metabotropic glutamate receptor; Positive allosteric modulator (PAM); Parkinson's disease; Structure–activity relationship (SAR)

Metabotropic glutamate receptor subtype 4 (mGlu₄) has garnered a great deal of interest as a novel, non-dopaminergic target for the potential treatment of Parkinson's disease (PD) by virtue of selective activation via positive allosteric modulators (PAMs)^{1–6} and normalization of the overactive indirect pathway within the basal ganglia circuitry.^{7,8} Beyond symptomatic treatment of motor disturbances, emerging data suggests mGlu₄ PAMs may also be neuroprotective, and hence disease-modifying.^{1–6} As discussed in the field, SAR can be steep for certain allosteric chemotypes, and adequate CNS penetration, as well as overall DMPK properties, have been an ongoing challenge in the development of mGlu₄ PAMs.^{6,9,10} An optimization program in our lab based on an HTS hit has afforded a diverse

*Corresponding authors. craig.lindsley@vanderbilt.edu (C.W. Lindsley), corey.hopkins@vanderbilt.edu (C.R. Hopkins).

array of picolinamide-based mGlu₄ PAMs **1–5** (Fig. 1),^{11–15} and by surveying bioisosteres, the identification of our first preclinical candidate, VU0418506 (**6**).¹⁶ Our back-up program sought to distance from the pyrazolo[4,3-*b*]pyridine head group of **6**, and one aspect focused on functionalized picolinamides, leveraged en route to **7**.¹⁶ In this Letter, we will detail the discovery, SAR, DMPK profiles and in vivo efficacy of the newly identified 3-aminopicolinamide mGlu₄ PAM warheads.

In route to the pyrazolo[4,3-*b*]pyridine head group of **6** ($EC_{50} = 67$ nM, $pEC_{50} = 7.17 \pm 0.07$, $109.3 \pm 3.8\%$ Glu Max), we had synthesized and evaluated a single 3-aminopicolinamide, **7** ($EC_{50} = 587$ nM, $pEC_{50} = 6.24 \pm 0.03$, $88.1 \pm 2.0\%$ Glu Max) analog (Fig. 2).¹⁶ While ~7-fold less potent than **6**, **7** represented a structurally distinct and unexplored chemotype. Thus, we quickly prepared a diverse set of either 3- or 4-functionalized picolinamides **8–15**; however, all proved to be inactive as mGlu₄ PAMs, suggesting that the 3-amino moiety, and the presence of a hydrogen bond donor, in **7** was a required pharmacophore.

We then elected to survey the 3-aminopicolinamide warhead in the context of a broader array of Eastern moieties (e.g., imides, aryl/heteroaryl, sulfonamides, ethers) previously shown to engender mGlu₄ PAM activity, maintaining a key *meta*-chloro moiety. The chemistry to assemble analogs **17** was straight forward, as the Eastern moieties (R = phthalimides, imides, lactams and ethers) have all previously been described^{11–15} and were available as functionalized anilines **16a–d** (Scheme 1).

The SAR for analogs **17** (Table 1) represented a departure from simple picolinamides **1–5** or the pyrazolo[4,3-*b*]pyridine head group of **6**, displaying a steep phenotype. Phthalimides, such as **17a** and **17d**, displayed good PAM activity, as did certain isoindolinones, such as **17e** and **17h**. However, electronics played a key role in activity, as an electron-rich isoindolinone, **17h**, possessed an EC_{50} of 319 nM, whereas an electron-deficient congener, **17g**, was devoid of PAM activity ($EC_{50} > 10$ μ M). This proved to be a general trend (F and CN also devoid of PAM activity). Lactams **17j–s** also displayed a range of mGlu₄ PAM activity, from inactive to 758 nM, driven mainly by lipophilicity and steric bulk. Here, only two analogs, **17a**, a phthalimide congener, and **17t**, an ether derivative, displayed potency (EC_{50} s below 100 nM) comparable to the clinical candidate, **6**. The unsubstituted phthalimide **17a** was potent at both human and rat mGlu₄ (EC_{50} s of 94.5 nM and 128 nM, respectively), and possessed attractive physicochemical properties (MW = 392, $cLogP = 2.52$ and $TPSA = 105$ Å²). Similarly, the chemically distinct, pyrimidinyl ether **17t** was even more potent (human and rat mGlu₄ EC_{50} s of 64.6 nM and 46.6 nM, respectively) and also possessed favorable physicochemical properties (MW = 396, $cLogP = 2.27$ and $TPSA = 103$). However, before locking into these two novel mGlu₄ PAMs for more detailed characterization, we wanted to fully evaluate other SAR within this series of mGlu₄ PAMs.

As the 3-aminopicolinamide moiety afforded potent mGlu₄ PAMs, we then surveyed the activity of the corresponding 3-hydroxypicolinamide analog of **17a**, **18** (Fig. 3). Compound **18** (mGlu₄ $EC_{50} = 125$ nM, 115.4% Glu Max) proved to be of comparable potency to **17a**, but offered no advantage in terms of physicochemical properties. Then, in the context of **17t**, we surveyed alternative heteroaromatic amino amides, and found that the isonicotinamide

derivative, **19**, was devoid of mGlu₄ PAM activity ($EC_{50} > 10 \mu M$), while a pyrazine analog, **20**, was active ($EC_{50} = 296 \text{ nM}$, 103.9% Glu Max), but lost ~5-fold relative to **17t**. Therefore, we advanced both **17a** and **17t** in a battery of in vitro and in vivo DMPK assays.¹¹⁻¹⁶

For in vivo tool compounds, the in vitro and in vivo DMPK profiles of both **17a** (VU0477886) and **17t** (VU0483872) were attractive. PAM **17a** displayed moderate intrinsic clearance in both rat and human microsomes (CL_{HEP} 51 mL/min/kg and 5.8 mL/min/kg, respectively), limited free fraction ($F_u(h, r)$ of 0.007 and 0.003) and a mixed cytochrome P₄₅₀ profile (3A4, 2D6 and 1A2 IC_{50} s $> 30 \mu M$, 2C9 $IC_{50} = 7.2 \mu M$). In Sprague Dawley (SD) rats, **17a** was a low clearance compound ($CL_P = 3.98 \text{ mL/min/kg}$) with a low volume ($V_{ss} = 0.85 \text{ L/kg}$) and a 3.7 h half-life. In a rat plasma:brain level (PBL) cassette study (0.25 mg/kg, 0.25 h, IV), **17a** effectively partitioned into the CNS ($K_p = 1.31$) and was not a human P-gp substrate (efflux ratio = 1.2). Similarly, PAM **17t** displayed moderate to high intrinsic clearance in both rat and human microsomes (CL_{HEP} 46.1 mL/min/kg and 17.71 mL/min/kg, respectively), limited free fraction ($F_u(h, r)$ of 0.004 and 0.004) and a mixed cytochrome P₄₅₀ profile (2C9 2D6 IC_{50} s $> 30 \mu M$, 1A2 $IC_{50} = 2.6 \mu M$ and 3A4 $IC_{50} = 21.1 \mu M$). In SD rats, **17t** was a low clearance compound ($CL_P = 13.7 \text{ mL/min/kg}$) with a uniform volume ($V_{ss} = 0.86 \text{ L/kg}$) and a 1.5 h half-life. In a rat PBL cassette study (0.25 mg/kg, 0.25 h, IV) **17t** displayed moderate partitioning into the CNS ($K_p = 0.36$) and was not a human P-gp substrate (efflux ratio = 1.9). Both **17a** and **17t** displayed excellent selectivity versus the other mGlu receptors. Thus, both new PAMs possessed acceptable profiles to advance into our standard rodent pharmacodynamic model for Parkinson's disease (PD), reversal of haloperidol-induced catalepsy (HIC).¹¹⁻¹⁶

PAM **17a** (VU0477886) was evaluated first via an oral route of administration in the HIC model (Fig. 4), and compared side-by-side with the preclinical candidate, **6** (VU0418506). In this study, a 1 mg/kg p.o. dose of **17a**, proved to be as efficacious as **6** in reversing a robust 1.5 mg/kg dose of haloperidol. As our previous PBL study was IV, we also collected plasma and brain samples from the oral HIC study to assess PK/PD. In this case, total brain levels reached 334 nM ($K_p = 0.3$), a value greater than 2-fold above the rat mGlu₄ PAM EC_{50} (128 nM).

PAM **17t** (VU0483872), in the same paradigm, proved to be more efficacious than **6** (Fig. 5), displaying a minimum effective dose (MED) of 1 mg/kg p.o. and robust reversal at 3 mg/kg p.o. comparable to candidate **6** at 10 mg/kg p.o. Once again, as our previous PBL study was IV, we also collected plasma and brain samples from the oral HIC study to assess PK/PD. In this case, total brain levels reached 172 nM ($K_p = 0.2$), a value greater than 3.5-fold above the rat mGlu₄ PAM EC_{50} (46.6 nM). Thus, both 3-aminopicolinamide derivatives proved to be potent mGlu₄ PAMs in vitro and in vivo.

In summary, we report the first detailed SAR of a novel series of mGlu₄ PAMs based on a 3-aminopicolinamide warhead. New mGlu₄ PAMs **17a** (VU0477886) and **17t** (VU0483872) proved to be potent PAMs, possessed favorable physicochemical properties and DMPK properties, displayed excellent CNS penetration and demonstrated robust in vivo efficacy in the HIC preclinical model of PD. Moreover, **17t** performed as well, if not better than our

first mGlu₄ PAM preclinical candidate **6** (VU0418506). While attractive in many aspects, neither **17a** nor **17t** advanced as back-ups to **6** due to low F_{up} , suboptimal multispecies PK and poor projected human PK. However, both represent new in vivo tool compounds to study mGlu₄ potentiation, and demonstrate solid PK/PD relationships in HIC. Efforts towards suitable back-up compounds continue and will be reported in due course.

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17. Representative synthesis of **17a** (VU0477886). *N*-(3-chloro-4-(1,3-dioxoisindolin-2-yl)phenyl)-3-aminopicolinamide. In a vial, 300 mg (0.993 mmol, 1.0 equiv) of 2-(2-chloro-4-nitrophenyl)isindoline-1,3-dione were resuspended in dioxane. The suspension was cold in an ice bath and purged with argon. A previously prepared solution of tin(II) chloride (4.5 equiv) in concentrated hydrochloric acid (5 M concentration of SnCl₂) was added dropwise to the suspension. After 2 h of stirring at room temperature, the reaction was neutralized carefully with aqueous potassium carbonate 20%, filtered and extracted with diethyl ether. The organic phase was dried with magnesium sulphate, filtered and the volatiles eliminated in vacuo to yield a yellow

solid (196 mg, 72%). ^1H NMR (400.1 MHz, $\text{DMSO}-d_6$) δ (ppm): 7.97 (2H, m), 7.90 (2H, m), 7.14 (1H, d, $J = 8.5$ Hz), 6.76 (1H, d, $J = 2.4$ Hz), 6.60 (1H, dd, $J = 8.6$ Hz, $J = 2.4$ Hz), 5.74 (2H, s, $-\text{NH}_2$). ^{13}C NMR (100.6 MHz, $\text{DMSO}-d_6$) δ (ppm): 167.5, 151.5, 135.3, 132.7, 131.78, 131.76, 123.9, 116.5, 113.6, 113.0. In a vial, 0.088 mmol (1.2 equiv) of the 3-aminopicolinic acid were added and dissolved in 0.5 mL mixture of DCM:DIEA (9:1), then 41 mg (0.110 mmol, 1.5 equiv) of HATU were added. The mixture was stirred for 10 min, and 20 mg (0.073 mmol, 1.0 equiv) *N*-(4-aminophenyl)phthalimide dissolved in 0.5 mL of DCM:DIEA (9:1), followed by 3 drops of DMF. The reaction was stirred for 24 h at room temperature. After this time, the reaction was quenched with the addition of water, and was worked up by extraction with DCM (2 mL, thrice). The organic phased was filtered through a phase separator, volatiles were evaporated, the crude was dissolved in DMSO and purified by preparative HPLC. Cream powder. ^1H NMR (400.1 MHz, CDCl_3) δ (ppm): 10.33 (1H, s), 8.16 (1H, d, $J = 2.3$ Hz), 8.01 (2H, m), 7.95 (1H, dd, $J = 4.2$ Hz, $J = 1.1$ Hz), 7.83 (2H, m), 7.74 (1H, dd, $J = 8.6$ Hz, $J = 2.3$ Hz), 7.35 (1H, d, $J = 8.6$ Hz), 7.25 (1H, dd, $J = 8.4$ Hz, $J = 4.3$ Hz), 7.09 (1H, dd, $J = 8.4$ Hz, $J = 1.2$ Hz). ^{13}C NMR (100.6 MHz, CDCl_3) δ (ppm): 166.8, 165.6, 146.3, 139.9, 136.6, 134.4, 133.6, 131.9, 130.7, 128.6, 127.9, 125.4, 124.4, 120.6, 118.3. HRMS (TOF, ES+) $\text{C}_{20}\text{H}_{14}\text{ClN}_4\text{O}_3$ $[\text{M}+\text{H}]^+$ calcd mass 393.0754, found 394.0753.

Figure 1. Structures of picolinamide-based mGlu₄ PAMs (1–5), and the first preclinical candidate, VU0418506 (6).

Figure 2.

Structures of the lone 3-aminopicolinamide mGlu₄ PAM (**7**), and a diverse array of inactive functionalized picolinamide head groups **8–15** (inset).

Figure 3.

Structures and mGlu₄ PAM activities of close analogs of **17a** and **17t**, highlighting the unique pharmacology of the 3-aminopicolinamide.

Figure 4.

Reversal of haloperidol-induced catalepsy (HIC) with either **17a** (VU0477886) or preclinical candidate **6** (VU0418506). Dosed orally as a microsuspension in 0.1% Tween80/0.5% methylcellulose bead-milled 30 min after haloperidol (1.5 mg/kg). $n = 9-10$ rats/group, * $p < 0.05$ in comparison to vehicle.

Figure 5.

Reversal of haloperidol-induced catalepsy (HIC) with either **17t** (VU0483872) or preclinical candidate **6** (VU0418506). Dosed orally as a microsuspension in 0.1% Tween80/0.5% methylcellulose bead-milled 30 min after haloperidol (1.5 mg/kg). $n = 9-10$ rats/group, * $p < 0.05$ in comparison to vehicle.

Scheme 1.

Preparation of analogs **17**. *Reagents and conditions:* (a) 3-aminopicolinic acid or 3-hydroxypicolinic acid, HATU, DIEA, DCM:DMF, rt, 24 h, 65–90%.¹⁷

Table 1Structures and mGlu₄ PAM activity of analogs **17**

Compd	R	mGlu ₄ EC ₅₀ (μM) ^a	pEC ₅₀ ± SEM ^a	% Glu Max ^b
17a		0.095	7.02 ± 0.50	89.1 ± 3.9
17b		2.19	5.66 ± 0.07	63.2 ± 1.8
17c		0.921	6.04 ± 0.09	60.7 ± 2.2
17d		0.689	6.16 ± 0.14	122.5 ± 6.2
17e		0.236	6.63 ± 0.21	43.9 ± 6.2
17f		3.96	5.40 ± 0.01	76.8 ± 0.6

Compd	R	mGlu ₄ EC ₅₀ (μ M) ^a	pEC ₅₀ $\pm$ SEM ^a	% Glu Max ^b
17g		>10	>5	42.3 $\pm$ 2.6
17h		0.319	6.50 $\pm$ 0.07	71.7 $\pm$ 11.1
17i		1.25	5.90 $\pm$ 0.05	68.9 $\pm$ 0.8
17j		>10	>5	39.6 $\pm$ 4.7
17k		>10	>5	12.7 $\pm$ 3.0
17l		2.80	5.55 $\pm$ 0.07	66.2 $\pm$ 1.4
17m		1.86	5.73 $\pm$ 0.05	75.9 $\pm$ 0.9
17n		2.52	5.60 $\pm$ 0.13	92.8 $\pm$ 2.4

Compd	R	mGlu ₄ EC ₅₀ (μ M) ^a	pEC ₅₀ $\pm$ SEM ^a	% Glu Max ^b
17o		0.758	6.12 $\pm$ 0.05	45.3 $\pm$ 4.1
17p		1.61	5.79 $\pm$ 0.04	74.5 $\pm$ 2.7
17q		>10	>5	13.8 $\pm$ 3.3
17r		1.28	5.89 $\pm$ 0.08	52.0 $\pm$ 3.5
17s		>10	>5	47.7 $\pm$ 2.7
17t		0.065	7.19 $\pm$ 0.11	97.9 $\pm$ 4.0
17u		1.35	5.87 $\pm$ 0.15	89.8 $\pm$ 2.0

^aCalcium mobilization mGlu₄ assay; values are average of $n = 3$.

^bAmplitude of response in the presence of 30 μ M test compound, normalized to a standard compound, PHCCC (100% Glu Max).^{11_16}