N-Leucinyl Benzenesulfonamides as Structurally Simplified Leucyl-tRNA Synthetase Inhibitors

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Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: N-Leucinyl benzenesulfonamides have been discovered as a novel class of potent inhibitors of *E. coli* leucyl-tRNA synthetase. The binding of inhibitors to the enzyme was measured by using isothermal titration calorimetry. This provided information on enthalpy and entropy contributions to binding, which, together with docking studies, were used for structure–activity relationship analysis. Enzymatic assays revealed that N-leucinyl benzenesulfonamides display remarkable selectivity for *E. coli* leucyl-tRNA synthetase compared to *S. aureus* and human orthologues. The simplest analogue of the series, N-leucinyl benzenesulfonamide (R = H), showed the highest affinity against *E. coli* leucyl-tRNA synthetase and also exhibited antibacterial activity against Gram-negative pathogens (the best MIC = 8 µg/mL, *E. coli* ATCC 25922), which renders it as a promising template for antibacterial drug discovery.

KEYWORDS: Leucyl-tRNA synthetase, inhibitors, antibacterial, sulfonamides, isothermal titration calorimetry

Aminoacyl-tRNA synthetase (aaRS) enzymes are conserved across bacteria and, at the same time, exhibit considerable evolutionary divergence with respect to the human enzymes. They have therefore attracted attention as therapeutic targets for the discovery of broad-spectrum antibacterials.^{1–4} The aaRS enzymes covalently link the cognate amino acid to its tRNA (tRNA) as part of protein biosynthesis. Aminoacylation of tRNA is a two-step process in which the enzymes initially form an aminoacyl adenylate intermediate from the amino acid and ATP. The amino acid is then transferred to the terminal adenosine residue of the tRNA. The enzymes are classified into two groups, depending upon whether the amino acid is transferred to the 2'- (Class I) or the 3'-hydroxyl group (Class II) of adenosine. Clinical validation of class I aaRS enzymes as druggable targets has been provided by the isoleucyl-tRNA synthetase (IleRS) inhibitor, mupirocin,^{5–7} also known as pseudomonic acid **1** (Figure 1), which is used to treat topical skin infections.⁸

A boron-containing molecule **2** (AN3365, GSK2251052, Figure 1)⁹ that inhibits leucyl-tRNA synthetase (LeuRS) by binding at the enzyme's editing site has also been evaluated clinically, although its development is encumbered due to the rapid emergence of resistance.^{10,11} Nevertheless, to date, no catalytic site LeuRS inhibitor has been advanced to clinical investigation.

Most of the precedent work to develop LeuRS catalytic site inhibitors has focused on nonhydrolyzable aminoacyl-AMP intermediate analogues such as LeuAMS **3** (Figure 1).^{12–14} Potent inhibitors have been discovered, but in general, these compounds lack selectivity for bacterial compared to human

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Figure 1. Representative class I aaRS inhibitors.

aaRSs and also lack antibacterial activity, the latter owing to poor intracellular accumulation.^{13,14}

Selectivity issues of bacterial LeuRS inhibition were overcome by researchers at Cubist who have developed acylsulfonamide-based LeuRS inhibitors **4** (Figure 1) in which the adenine ring is replaced with a substituted thiazole.¹⁵ Moreover, selective inhibitors of the homologous IleRS enzyme, with activity against Gram-positive organisms, have been achieved by replacing the adenine ring with substituted phenyltetrazoles linked to the sugar ring by a short alkyl group.¹⁶

A drawback of adenosine analogues is their relatively complex structures. This limits rapid chemical modifications to obtain crucial requirements such as selectivity and antibacterial activity. There are some examples in the recent literature showing that the adenylate can be substituted with a benzenesulfonamide motif. Teng et al. have developed selective nanomolar benzenesulfonamide based inhibitors **5** (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Known benzenesulfonamide-based aaRS inhibitors.

of bacterial ThrRS, including the enzyme from *E. coli*.¹⁷ In these inhibitors, the meta-substituent at the benzenesulfonamide (such as indazole) was designed to pick up the H-bond interactions seen in the adenine of the native substrate. Zhang et al. have developed low micromolar benzenesulfonamide **6** (Figure 2) based *T. brucei* LeuRS inhibitors.¹⁸ According to modeling studies, the acyl-thiourea group in these inhibitors provides additional H-bonding interactions with the enzyme. These findings motivated us to explore *N*-leucynyl benzenesulfonamides **7** as simplified bacterial LeuRS inhibitors (Table 1; see Supporting Information for the synthesis). The affinity of the inhibitors **7** for *Escherichia coli* LeuRS was determined using isothermal titration calorimetry (ITC). Enzymatic inhibition of compounds **7** against *E. coli*, *S. aureus*, and human LeuRS was also determined.¹⁹

Our initial hypothesis, guided by the known aaRS acylsulfonamide inhibitors and by analogy to inhibitor interactions at other ATP binding sites, for example, in kinases,

was that hydrogen bond interactions with Val569 and Met620, to mimic the interaction with adenine in the native substrate, would be beneficial. Inhibitor design was performed by docking of the benzenesulfonamide derivatives into a protein model based on an X-ray structure of *E. coli* LeuRS. These studies suggested that this could be achieved via amino pyridine or amino pyrimidine substituents at the meta position of the benzenesulfonamide (Figure 3, compound **7c** shown as an example). Based on these considerations, several analogues **7a–c** were prepared and were found to exhibit binding affinity at nanomolar concentrations against *E. coli* LeuRS in ITC experiments. Notably, potent inhibition of *E. coli* LeuRS with high selectivity versus *S. aureus* and human LeuRS were also observed (Table 1, entries 1–3). Interestingly, the installation of a methyl group in the pyrimidine ring (compound **7c**) led to an increased enthalpic contribution compared to analogues **7a,b**. However, this improvement is accompanied by a balancing decrease in entropic contribution to leave K_D practically unaltered. Replacement of the methyl with a phenyl group (compound **7d**, Table 1, entry 4) had a negative impact on binding due to reduced enthalpy compared to compound **7c**, which to some extent was counterbalanced with increased entropy. The net binding constant was unexpectedly strong given that compound **7d** does not fit into the crystallographically observed structures of *E. coli* LeuRS. This suggests further (as yet unobserved) conformational changes in the LeuRS structure on ligand binding, which will require crystallography studies in the future to understand.

Amino pyridine **7e** (Table 1, entry 5) showed similar ITC results to amino pyrimidine **7c**, which indicates no contribution of pyrimidine N1 to the binding. However, analogue **7f** (Table 1, entry 6) without amino group showed decreased enthalpy of binding compared to inhibitor **7c**, indicating that an amino group provides additional H-bonding. However, compound **7f** has comparable K_D , which is again due to counterbalancing with decreased binding entropy for this compound.

The favorable decrease of binding entropy for compound **7f** suggested the preparation and testing of more lipophilic compounds **7g–i** (Table 1, entries 7–9). Pyridine and phenyl substituted analogues **7g,h** showed K_D comparable to inhibitors **7a–c,e,f**. However, by increasing the aromatic ring size to naphthyl (compound **7i**), a considerable loss of binding enthalpy was observed, which indicated that this compound does not adopt the optimal conformation in the active site of the enzyme.

At this point, our interpretation of the data indicated a limited contribution to K_D from polar interactions and a variable contribution from more lipophilic compounds. Therefore, we decided to simplify the scaffold further. The simplest member of the *N*-leucynyl benzenesulfonamide class, inhibitor **7j**, was prepared, and it was found to exhibit the best binding affinity against *E. coli* LeuRS with a K_D of 1.4 nM. The ITC data imply that binding of compound **7j** with LeuRS is enthalpy driven and that entropy does not provide a favorable contribution to the Gibbs free energy of binding.

Antibacterial susceptibility testing against a standard laboratory strain of *E. coli* (BW25113) was performed for all inhibitors **7a–j**. Only inhibitor **7j** showed detectable activity (Table 2, entry 1) and was screened against a wider panel of strains. The best antibacterial activity was observed against *E. coli* (ATCC 25922) strains, while it was weaker for other Gram-negative pathogens such as *K. pneumoniae*, *P. aeruginosa*, and *E. cloacae*. No activity was detected against *S. aureus* as a

Table 1. ITC Binding Constants of *N*-Leucynyl Benzenesulfonamides 7 to *E. coli* LeuRS and the Enzymatic Potency against *E. coli*, *S. aureus*, and Human LeuRS

Entry	R, compound number	<i>E. coli</i> LeuRS ITC, K_D , nM	ITC, ΔH , kcal·mol ⁻¹	ITC, $\Delta T\Delta S$, kcal·mol ⁻¹	<i>E. coli</i> LeuRS IC ₅₀ , nM ^b	<i>S. aureus</i> LeuRS IC ₅₀ , nM ^b	Human LeuRS IC ₅₀ , nM ^b
1	 7a	14.5±0.3	-9.5±0.5	-1.2±0.5	54	9.2 x 10 ³	3.9 x 10 ³
2	 7b	12.8±1.2	-9.0±0.3	-1.7±0.3	14	650	490
3	 7c	10±3	-12.5±1.2	1.6±1.0	41	4.4 x 10 ³	160
4	 7d	56±17	-7.6±0.3	-2.3±0.4	224	3.6 x 10 ³	33
5	 7e	13.9±1.9	-9.10±0.11	-1.62±0.07	23	1.7 x 10 ³	850
6	 7f	22±4	-7.05±0.05	-3.40±0.13	47	2.7 x 10 ³	2.0 x 10 ³
7	 7g	10.9±1.5	-8.27±0.11	-2.6±0.18	13	920	1.2 x 10 ³
8	 7h	10.2±1.4	-8.1±0.5	-2.8±0.5	32	640	3.4 x 10 ³
9	 7i	64±18	-6.5±0.9	-3.3±0.8	65	1.0 x 10 ³	220
10	 7j	1.3±0.14	-13.1±0.3	1.1±0.2	35	5.4 x 10 ³	1.1 x 10 ³

^aITC data for binding to *E. coli* LeuRS enzyme. ^bIC₅₀ were within 10% of the error range.

representative Gram-positive pathogen. For comparison, compound **7c** was also tested against the strains listed in Table 2; however, it showed no detectable activity against any of the strains.

Antibacterial activity of compounds **7c** and **7j** was tested against derivatives of *E. coli* (BW25113) lacking key

components of multidrug efflux transporter components TolC and AcrAB.²⁰ Nevertheless, neither *tolC* deletion strain nor AcrA and AcrB deletion strains showed improved susceptibility to compounds **7c,j**. This indicates that the antibacterial activity of *N*-leucynyl benzenesulfonamides **7** is limited by additional mechanisms other than efflux.

Figure 3. Docked poses of 7c (purple), 7h (orange), and 7j (cyan) in active site of *E. coli* LeuRS (PDB 3gzg).

Table 2. Activity of Inhibitor 7j against a Panel of Selected Bacterial Strains

strains	name	7j MIC ($\mu\text{g/mL}$)
<i>E. coli</i>	BW25113	32
<i>E. coli</i>	ATCC 25922	8
<i>K. pneumoniae</i>	clinical isolate	64
<i>P. aeruginosa</i>	PA01	64
<i>Acinetobacter spp</i>	ATCC 19606	64
<i>E. cloacae</i>	clinical isolate	128
<i>S. aureus</i>	JE2	>256

In summary, we have identified *N*-leucinylnbenzenesulfonamides as a novel class of *E. coli* LeuRS inhibitors. The simplicity and potency of this class offers significant potential for the development of much needed novel antibacterial agents.

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website at DOI: 10.1021/acsmedchemlett.7b00374.

Synthesis and characterization of compound 7; description of molecular modeling; ITC titration curves; description of enzymatic assay and antimicrobial susceptibility (PDF)

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Author Contributions

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Notes

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■ ABBREVIATIONS

ITC, isothermal titration calorimetry; aaRS, aminoacyl-tRNA synthetase; LeuRS, leucyl-tRNA synthetase; IleRS, isoleucyl-tRNA synthetase; ThrRS, threonyl-tRNA synthetase; Tb, *Trypanosoma brucei*; MIC, minimum inhibitory concentration

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