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Protection Against Genital HSV-2 in Guinea Pigs with Subunit Vaccines Containing gD2, gB2, and gH/gL Glycoprotein Antigens Complexed with CLDC Adjuvant

R.D. Cardin^{1,*}, F.J. Bravo¹, J.D. Earwood¹, J.R. Clark¹, R.J. Eisenberg², G.H. Cohen², J. Fairman³, D.I. Bernstein¹

¹ Cincinnati Children's Hosp., Cincinnati, USA; ² University of Penn, Philadelphia, USA; ³ Juvaris BioTherapeutics, Inc., Pleasanton, USA

An effective vaccine for genital herpes simplex type 2 (HSV-2) remains a priority. We previously showed that the CLDC adjuvant enhanced protection against genital HSV-2 in guinea pigs when combined with 5 µg gD2 antigen. To further evaluate other HSV-2 candidate subunit vaccines, we compared the following groups: no vaccine, gD2-FL (full length, 1–306aa)+CLDC, gD2-T (truncated, 1–285aa)+CLDC, gD2-T+gB2 (31–726aa)+gH2/gL2 (21–802aa)+CLDC, and gB2+gH2/gL2+CLDC. Guinea pigs were immunized SC twice at 3 week intervals, and challenged intravaginally 3 weeks later with 1×10^6 pfu HSV-2 (MS strain). All of the vaccinated groups had significantly reduced acute lesions and virus titers at 2 and 5 dpi compared to the no vaccine group ($p \leq 0.002$) whereas no significant differences were observed between the vaccinated groups. Vaccination with any of the vaccines significantly reduced recurrent HSV-2 disease ($p \leq 0.002$) compared to the no vaccine group. For all of the vaccination groups, recurrent mean lesion scores (<1.0 vs. 7.5) and recurrent mean lesion days (<1 day vs. 9 days) were significantly reduced compared to the no vaccine group. PCR analysis of latent viral DNA in the DRG after 63 dpi demonstrated a significant difference ($p < 0.01$) in the number of animals with detectable HSV-2 DNA following first round PCR for groups gD2-T+CLDC, gD2-T+gB2+gH2/gL2+CLDC, and gB2+gH2/gL2+CLDC compared to the no vaccine group while the gD2-F+CLDC group was not significantly different. Following nested PCR, all groups had >80% of the DRGs positive for HSV-2 DNA, suggesting subtle differences between latent viral load between the vaccination groups. Analysis of recurrent vaginal shedding and antigen-specific antibody is currently underway. Taken together, these results indicate that all the vaccines were effective but that study design alterations, such as reducing the antigen dose or increased time between vaccinations, will be necessary to distinguish between the vaccine candidates [Supported by Contract NO1-AI-15438 from the Virology Branch, NIAID, NIH].

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In Vitro and In Vivo Activities of the Novel Anti-cytomegalovirus Compound AIC246

Peter Lischka^{1,*}, Guy Hewlett², Tobias Wunberg³, Judith Baumeister⁴, Daniela Paulsen¹, Thomas Goldner¹, Helga Ruebsamen-Schaeff¹, Holger Zimmermann¹

¹ AiCuris GmbH&Co.KG, Wuppertal, Germany; ² HBSC, Wuppertal, Germany; ³ Boehringer Ingelheim RCV GmbH&Co.KG, Vienna, Austria; ⁴ Ablynx N.V., Zwijnaarde-Gent, Belgium

Background: CMV remains an important pathogen for immunocompromised individuals including transplant recipients, AIDS patients, and newborns. To date, all drugs licensed for the treatment of CMV infection and disease target the viral DNA-polymerase. Although effective, there are several disadvantages associated with the use of these drugs including toxicity and emergence of drug

resistance. Hence, safe and improved antivirals with novel molecular targets are urgently needed. Here we report on the antiviral properties of AIC246, a novel small molecular weight compound that is currently undergoing clinical phase II trials.

Methods: The anti-CMV activity of AIC246 was evaluated in vitro and in vivo using different cell culture assays and in an engineered mouse xenograft model. In addition, antiviral properties of the drug in comparison to Ganciclovir were characterized by the use of different virus strains, different cell types, increasing MOIs and “time of addition” experiments.

Results: AIC246 exhibited excellent in vitro inhibitory activity against HCMV ($EC_{50} \sim 4$ nM) and potent in vivo efficacy in a xenograft mouse model ($ED_{50} \sim 3.4$ mg/kg/day). The efficacy of the drug was not significantly affected by cell culture variations or MOI. Time of addition experiments revealed that the drug acts “late” in the virus replication cycle.

Conclusion: AIC246 represents a novel HCMV inhibitor with potent antiviral activity in vitro and in vivo and acts via a mode of action that is different to Ganciclovir.

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A Chimeric Guinea Pig Cytomegalovirus (GPCMV) Encoding Wild Type or Mutant HCMV UL97 Renders GPCMV Susceptible or Resistant to Ganciclovir while Retaining an Ability to Disseminate in the Animal Host

Alistair McGregor*, Jared Leibelt, Catherine Bouska, Mark Schleiss

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, USA

The species specific constraints of human cytomegalovirus (HCMV) precludes direct study of this virus in animal models. GPCMV is uniquely useful for studies related to congenital CMV infection but is not sensitive to HCMV antivirals ganciclovir (GCV) and maribavir (MBV). Although the modes of action of these antivirals are different they act via the HCMV viral protein pUL97. Strains of HCMV can emerge with resistance to GCV or MBV. These resistant strains are due to specific pUL97 codon changes which modify the susceptibility of the virus to the GCV or MBV. We previously demonstrated the ability to improve the susceptibility of GPCMV to antivirals MBV and GCV by the generation of a chimeric GPCMV encoding UL97 in place of GP97, the homolog gene (McGregor et al., 2008). Not only did this chimeric virus have GCV sensitivity similar to HCMV clinical isolates but it retained an ability to be pathogenic in vivo, where animals treated with GCV therapy had reduced mortality and viral dissemination. We hypothesized that the generation of chimeric GPCMV containing specific UL97 mutations found in resistant strains of HCMV would result in the generation of chimeric GPCMV capable of normal viral replication but resistant to MBV or GCV, dependent on their specific mutations. Five chimeric mutant UL97 GPCMV were generated that carried individual mutations found in HCMV resistant strains. The pUL97 codon modifications were M460I, H520Q, A594V, L595S or a deletion (591–594). Additionally, two MBV UL97 mutant chimeric GPCMV were generated that carried pUL97 codon changes V353A or T409M. These chimeric mutant UL97 GPCMV exhibited growth kinetics similar to wild type GPCMV. A sixth GCV mutant UL97 chimeric GPCMV was generated that incorporated 3 specific mutations (M460I, H520Q and 591–594 deletion), designated v3xUL97. This chimera exhibited growth kinetics similar to wild type GPCMV as well as increased resistance to GCV in comparison to the wild type UL97 chimeric GPCMV. The highest level of resistance to GCV was exhibited by