

Review

WR2721 as a modulator of cisplatin- and carboplatin-induced side effects in comparison with other chemoprotective agents: a molecular approach

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Abstract. Cisplatin is an active cytostatic that became successful in the treatment of several types of solid tumours after its nephrotoxic potential was controlled by hydration and diuresis. Thiol compounds were tested to reduce further cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity. Thiosulphate is rapidly excreted by the kidneys and protects against cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity by inactivating reactive platinum species in the kidney. Due to inactivation of cisplatin in the circulation, thiosulphate also interferes with its antitumour activity. Therefore, it is mainly used in two-route schedules, whereby cisplatin is delivered locally to the tumour (i.p. or i.a.) while systemic (i.v.) thiosulphate protects the kidneys. Diethyldithiocarbamate was shown to protect against cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity in several animal models by reversing cellular damage. However, in the clinic it has been less successful, partly due to its central nervous system toxicity. The endogenous thiol compounds glutathione and metallothionein have been shown to reduce cisplatin-induced toxicity both in animal models and in clinical trials. However, the results are rather preliminary and a reduction in therapeutic efficacy may be expected, for both glutathione and metallothionein have been reported to be involved in platinum resistance. The thioether methionine has been shown to reduce cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity in animal models but it has not yet been tested in the clinic. Cisplatin-induced acute emesis can be sufficiently controlled with a new class of 5-hydroxytryptamine-3 (5HT₃)-receptor blockers, but delayed emesis remains a problem. High-dose cisplatin regimens with protection of the kidneys induces ototoxicity, peripheral neuropathy and myelotoxicity, which become dose-limiting. Neurotoxicity was partly reversed by the neuro-generative agent ORG2766, but this agent does not reduce other cisplatin-induced toxicities. Therefore, an agent capable of protecting multiple non-tumour tissues is needed. Carboplatin is a second-generation analogue of cisplatin

with less nephro-, neuro- and ototoxicity. Carboplatin is at least as active as cisplatin at its maximum tolerated dose, which is defined by its myelotoxicity. Protection from carboplatin-induced myelotoxicity may be controlled by autologous bone marrow transplantation and/or hematopoietic growth factor infusions. High-dose carboplatin schedules may cause nephrotoxicity, neurotoxicity and ototoxicity. Again, the protection of multiple non-tumour tissues is needed. WR2721 appears to be such a modulating agent capable of protecting multiple non-tumour tissues. It was shown to be preferentially metabolized and taken up as the thiol metabolite WR1065 by non-tumour tissues as compared with (hypoxic) solid tumours. It was shown to protect mice from cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity and from cisplatin- and carboplatin-induced myelotoxicity without interfering with the antitumour activity. The first clinical studies suggest the same selective protection of multiple non-tumour tissues from cisplatin-induced toxicity. This could be explained by a strong prevention (not reversal) of cisplatin-induced cellular damage by WR1065, whereas WR2721 or its main metabolites will hardly inactivate the intact platinum-based drug in the circulation.

Introduction

The treatment of cancer plays an important role in modern medical science. Non-operable and/or metastasized tumours may be fought with DNA-damaging agents (radiation and/or cytostatic drugs) to prevent tumour cell proliferation. An important group of cytostatic drugs in the chemotherapeutic treatment of several types of solid tumour are the platinum-based antitumour drugs.

After the somewhat serendipitous discovery of the cytostatic properties of cisplatin [*cis*-diamminedichloroplatinum(II), Fig. 1] by Rosenberg et al. [137], it was almost discarded as an antitumour agent because of its nephrotoxicity [185]. Following the reduction of this toxicity by

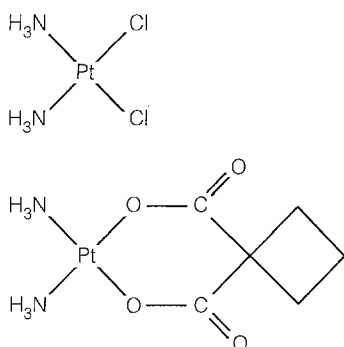


Fig. 1. Structural formulae of cisplatin (top) and carboplatin (bottom)

forced hydration, cisplatin became one of the most successful agents in cancer chemotherapy, showing activity against several solid tumours [111].

Over 2,000 analogues of cisplatin have been synthesized and tested as second-generation antitumour drugs to obtain Pt complexes with reduced toxicities and similar or improved antitumour activity. At the moment, carboplatin [diammine(1,1-cyclobutane-dicarboxylato)platinum(II); Fig. 1] is one of the few successful analogues with clinical application. Its dose-limiting toxicity is bone marrow suppression [186].

Mechanisms of antitumour activity

It is generally accepted that the antitumour activity of the platinum compounds is the result of their binding to DNA [133, 154]. This binding is preceded by the hydrolysis of the labile anionic ligand(s). The hydrolysis of the monofunctional chloro ligand in cisplatin is 100 times faster than that of the dicarboxylato ligand in carboplatin [89]. However, because carboplatin is given at a higher dose and because it is less rapidly cleared from the plasma than cisplatin [181], the tumour is exposed for a longer time and to higher levels of drug after carboplatin administration than after treatment with cisplatin. Ultimately, carboplatin and cisplatin form the same adducts with DNA; only the reaction kinetics differ [89]. The binding of the *cis*-diammine platinum(II) moiety with two adjacent guanines on the same DNA strand (PtGG) is the most abundant lesion (ca. 62%), followed by the *cis*-diammine platinum(II) moiety bound to a guanine and an adjacent adenine on the 5' side of the same strand (PtAG, ca. 18%), the *cis*-diammine platinum(II) moiety bound to two guanines on the same strand separated by one base or bound to two guanines on opposite DNA strands (GPtG, ca. 8%) and the *cis*-diammine platinum(II) moiety monofunctionally bound to a guanine at the moment the reaction is stopped with ammonium bicarbonate (PtG, ca. 8%). Surprisingly, binding of the *cis*-diammine platinum(II) moiety to guanine and an adenosine on the 3' side on the same strand (PtGA) has not been observed. From alkaline elution studies (to quantitate interstrand cross-links) it has been concluded that the GPtG mainly originated from *cis*-diammine platinum(II) bound to two non-adjacent guanines on the same strand [51].

Which Pt-DNA adduct is to be held responsible for the antitumour activity of cisplatin and carboplatin remains a matter of debate. The observation that the *trans*-analogue of cisplatin, which is incapable of forming intrastrand cross-links with neighbouring nucleotides on the DNA, is hardly antitumour-active suggests that one or more of these intrastrand cross-links should be responsible for the antitumour effect [26, 133, 154]. Elegant analytical methods using liquid chromatography and off-line flameless atomic absorption spectroscopy (FAAS) or a competitive enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay have enabled the identification and quantification of the various Pt-DNA adducts at the femtomolar level [47, 51, 52, 53, 131]. Immunohistochemical techniques have allowed the quantification of Pt-DNA adduct levels in cultured cancer cells and in (tumour) tissue samples from animals and patients treated with cisplatin or carboplatin [38, 53, 166–169]. At present, most authors suggest a relationship between the antitumour activity and the intrastrand cross-links of cisplatin (and carboplatin) to the N7 position of two adjacent guanines. This Pt-GG adduct is the most abundant lesion and is thought to introduce a distortion in the DNA that is large enough to stop the division of the cells without being rapidly recognized and, thus, efficiently removed by repair enzymes [26]. Recent results obtained in preclinical studies demonstrated a relationship between the Pt-DNA adduct levels in cultured tumour cells and the cytostatic effect [125, 168]. However, a cisplatin-resistant IgM immunocytoma did not differ in the formation and/or repair of Pt-DNA adducts from the cisplatin-sensitive parental tumour [52]. This finding may be explained by the recent discovery that contrary to the data on total Pt-DNA levels, low levels of Pt-DNA adducts in actively transcribed regions of specific genes correlate with resistance [194]. However, a tentative relationship has been demonstrated between Pt-DNA adduct levels and antitumour response in cultured cells [168, 169] and in white blood cells of platinum-treated patients [126, 132].

Recently, new possible cellular targets involved in signal transduction pathways have been reported to be involved in the cytostatic actions of platinum antitumour agents [11]. Nevertheless, at present DNA is considered to be the major cellular target involved in the cytotoxic actions of platinum-based antitumour agents. Therefore, the study of these adducts remains important in the elucidation of the clinical effects of cytostatic platinum compounds.

Cisplatin- and carboplatin-induced toxicities and their modulation

Platinum antitumour agents show a steep dose-response curve for their antitumour activity in several tumour types. This means that a decrease in the dose-limiting toxicity allows for the safe administration of a higher dose, thus improving the therapeutic efficacy [122]. The reduction of platinum-induced toxicities by modulating agents may therefore be a realistic approach to improve the therapeutic effect.

Cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity

The use of cisplatin in the clinic was originally hampered by its nephrotoxicity [185]. Methods of overcoming this toxicity have included a variety of techniques, among which were the development of second-generation platinum compounds with reduced nephrotoxic potential and the use of modulating agents that could selectively reduce the cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity. Therefore, the mechanisms underlying this toxicity have also become the subject of extensive research. An excellent review on cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity has been published elsewhere [35].

It has been shown that Pt is accumulated in the kidney and that tubular damage is the main cause of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity. Apart from glomerular filtration, active transport of low-molecular weight metabolites takes place to and from the lumen of the kidney tubules [140]. Low-molecular-weight metabolites of cisplatin may be reactive and, thus, involved in the effects (toxicities) of cisplatin. Because of the many analytical chemical difficulties encountered in the selective and sensitive detection of these metabolites, our knowledge about their identity and effects is very limited [33, 107]. Cisplatin bound to plasma proteins has lost most of its antitumour and toxic activity [161]. Cisplatin-methionine interaction products have been identified and do not appear to play a role in cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity, in contrast to the reactive hydrolysis species for which it is clear that they play a role in cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity [33].

The precise cellular target of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity remains a matter of debate. As possible causes of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity, the following have been reported: depletion of cellular thiols [190]; inhibition of the synthetic ability of the cell by damage to the DNA [164]; inhibition of post-transcriptional protein synthesis [108]; interference with Ca^{2+} homeostasis [40]; inhibition of adenosine triphosphatases (ATPases) [117], which has been contradicted by other investigators [177]; and damage to mitochondria [27, 56, 63]. Increased lipid peroxidation has also been reported as a cause of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity by some authors [20, 22, 152], but not by others [8]. The involvement of radicals may be secondary to cisplatin-induced damage to defence systems of the cell such as the glutathione-mediated detoxification of radicals [22].

Modulation of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity

Apart from the development of cisplatin analogues, the development of modulating agents to reduce selectively the nephrotoxic potential of cisplatin has received much attention. The reduction of high peak plasma levels of cisplatin by prolonged infusion, the reduction of the residence time of reactive Pt species in the kidney by diuresis and the inhibition of hydrolysis by (hypertonic) saline infusion have dramatically decreased cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity [23, 54]. Agents modulating renal blood flow [39, 70, 150] and agents modulating the cellular uptake of

Pt species [16, 32, 34, 45, 80, 81, 127, 150] have produced contradictory results.

Radical scavengers [29, 43, 195] have been shown to reduce cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity, although the role of radicals in cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity remains a matter of debate [8, 20]. Several other modulating agents with unknown mechanisms of protection have also been reported to modulate cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity [44, 93, 121, 156].

Besides diuresis and hydration, the use of nucleophilic thiols or thioethers with a high affinity for the electrophilic Pt(II) species appears to be a successful approach to modulate cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity [23]. The following modulators have been used or are presently under (clinical) investigation.

Thiosulphate has been shown to be reactive towards Pt(II) [36, 48] and to concentrate in the kidneys [148]. Therefore, thiosulphate reduces cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity by inactivating toxic Pt species in the kidney, and this allows the use of an increased dose of cisplatin [96]. Because thiosulphate has also been shown to inactivate cisplatin in the blood [3, 79, 88], exposure of the tumour to active Pt species is also reduced [60, 61]. Indeed, thiosulphate has been shown to reduce the antitumour activity of cisplatin in tumour cell cultures [31, 179]. Concomitant i.v. administration of thiosulphate with high-dose cisplatin has failed to increase the therapeutic index (the antitumour efficacy at a certain level of toxicity) in rodent models [1, 72, 76]. However, an increased plasma level of dethyldithiocarbamate (DDTC)-reactive platinum has been observed in patients treated with a higher, equitoxic dose (the amount of cisplatin given together with a protective agent that establishes a level of toxicity similar to that produced by cisplatin alone) of cisplatin plus thiosulfate as compared with cisplatin alone [61]. This finding corresponds to the reduced nephrotoxicity observed by other investigators in the clinic [71, 102] without an apparent loss of antitumour effect. However, this regimen was associated with high neurotoxicity.

Thiosulphate may be particularly useful in two-route regimens, i.e. the tumour is locally exposed to cisplatin (i.p. or i.a.) while systemic (i.v.) thiosulphate is preferentially delivered to the kidney. Cisplatin given i.p. in combination with i.v. thiosulphate has resulted in an increased therapeutic index in a mouse tumour model [78]. In the clinic, i.p. cisplatin plus i.v. thiosulphate has been shown to be associated with reduced toxicity [4, 73, 74, 95, 100, 162]. The use of high-dose cisplatin plus etoposide (i.p.) with i.v. thiosulphate protection has produced high response rates in ovarian cancer patients, but it is too early for this regimen to be reliably compared with other platinum-based therapies with regard to antitumour activity [75]. An increased exposure to reactive Pt has been observed for the peritoneal cavity [4, 73, 74]. Local (i.a.) cisplatin with systemic (i.v.) thiosulphate has been shown to be very active in several rodent tumours of the limb, liver and uterus, especially when i.a. cisplatin is combined with angiotensin II [68, 69, 90, 91, 94, 178]. When this approach is used for the treatment of liver tumours in the clinic, the higher equitoxic dose of cisplatin results in elevated Pt levels in plasma, although the nephrotoxicity is

reduced [2, 160, 163]. An evaluation of the antitumour activity has not yet been possible.

An interesting, recent finding is the reduction of cisplatin-induced chromosomal damage (sister-chromatid exchanges) by thiosulphate given concomitantly with or 3 h after cisplatin [118]. The administration of thiosulphate 3 h after cisplatin might thus reduce genotoxic effects that may result in the occurrence of secondary tumours [85] without decreasing the antitumour efficacy. However, thiosulphate given on this schedule will have lost its potency as a modulator of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity. It can be concluded that despite extensive research, a clear increase in the therapeutic index has not yet been achieved for cisplatin given in combination with thiosulphate, and this regimen is therefore not generally used in the treatment of cancer.

DDTC is very reactive towards Pt(II) complexes [36]. When given 1–4 h after cisplatin, it has been shown to rescue kidneys from cisplatin-induced damage without producing a reduction in the antitumour activity [18, 24, 25]. This protection has also been observed in vitro with cultured porcine kidney tubule cells [108]. It was hypothesized that *DDTC* could reverse the formation of cisplatin-protein complexes, which are responsible for (part of the) cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity, but not that of cisplatin-DNA complexes. This hypothesis was supported by the in vitro restoration of protein function by *DDTC* after inactivation with cisplatin, whereby *DDTC* failed to reverse cisplatin-DNA binding [17, 62]. *DDTC* was shown to reverse Pt-methionine binding quickly, but not Pt-cysteine binding, thus suggesting that the rescue of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity by *DDTC* results from reversal of the formation of Pt-methionine and not Pt-cysteine complexes [97]. Surprisingly, thiosulphate could also rapidly reverse the Pt-methionine bond, but in contrast to *DDTC*, it was not capable of reactivating cisplatin-inactivated fumarase. This effect might have been due to the negative charge and hydrophilicity of thiosulphate, preventing its access to the platinated methionine residue in the active centre of the enzyme [19].

When applied after cisplatin in several rodent models, *DDTC* and various other dithiocarbamates have resulted in an increase in the excretion of Pt in bile and urine [12, 87, 92] and a decrease in Pt levels in normal tissues [12, 87, 135], which might explain the observed reduction in nephrotoxicity. Rescue from cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity by dithiocarbamates was increased when *DDTC* was given both 24 h prior to cisplatin to induce metallothionein expression and daily $\times 6$ after cisplatin to reverse cisplatin-induced damage [82]. However, the induction of metallothionein in the tumour might result in a reduced sensitivity to cisplatin, as metallothionein has been shown to be involved in cisplatin resistance [7, 129, 139, 142]. Cisplatin and local hyperthermia used in combination with various dithiocarbamates has been very effective in several rodent tumour models [113, 187]. In clinical trials, *DDTC* given 45 min after cisplatin did not change (filterable) Pt pharmacokinetics [37, 124]. Protection against cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity has been observed by some investigators [15, 130] but not by others [124]. The use of *DDTC* in the clinic is hampered by a severe but reversible toxicity

to the central nervous system, requiring heavy sedation of the patient [15, 130, 138]. *Disulfiram*, the orally available dimer of *DDTC*, did not reduce cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity in a phase II trial [182].

Mercaptoethanesulphonate (mesna) has also been tested for its protective potential against cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity. Early animal studies showed some protection [86], but later studies failed to demonstrate any protection [105]. The low reactivity of mesna with toxic Pt species as compared with thiosulphate may be an explanation for this lack of protection [96].

Methionine, a sulphur-containing amino acid, has been shown to react with cisplatin [33]. Although Pt-methionine complexes can be reversed by strong nucleophiles, the interaction products of cisplatin with methionine are expected to be less reactive and, thus, less (nephro)toxic. This effect has been confirmed in two separate studies in rodents [33, 120]. Although there is one report of methionine enhancing cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity in rats [191], recent and detailed animal studies have again shown a protective effect for methionine and other related thioethers [13, 14, 83].

Glutathione (GSH), a cysteine-containing tripeptide, is present in cells in the millimolar range and plays a major role in detoxification processes [106]. Because of its nucleophilic thiol moiety [36], it is expected to play a role in the intracellular inactivation of cytotoxic Pt species. There is one report on the reduction of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity by depletion of GSH in rats [103], which is contradicted by other studies demonstrating increased nephrotoxicity upon GSH depletion [77, 109]. Furthermore, GSH has been demonstrated to decrease cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity in animals [6, 155, 196] and in patients [42]. Although there are several reports on the involvement of GSH in the resistance of tumour cells to cisplatin [7, 129, 139, 142], an apparent reduction in the antitumour activity of cisplatin by GSH has not been observed [42, 196].

Conflicting results have been reported on the induction of renal *metallothioneins* (MT), cysteine-rich low-molecular-weight peptides, by cisplatin [50, 109, 134, 155]. Protection against cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity has been demonstrated by the induction of MT with metals such as Bi and Zn [20, 66, 115, 116]. Other investigators have observed a slightly protective effect [151, 155] or no protection at all [109, 134]. An increased binding of Pt was not observed in the MT fractions of kidney and liver cells [20, 145, 155]. Radical scavenging by MT has been proposed as a possible mechanism of its protection against cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity [20]. Although MT appears to play a role in the resistance of some tumour cell lines to cisplatin [7, 129, 139, 142], no reduction in the antitumour activity has thus far been observed [116].

Selenite and ebselen are compounds containing *selenium*, which is a heavier member of the same group as sulphur in the periodic table of the elements. These compounds have protected mice and rats from cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity without producing a reduction in the antitumour activity [9, 10, 114, 119, 141, 153, 188]. It is suggested that selenium compounds may protect the kidneys from damage by free radicals [153]. However, the involvement of radicals in cisplatin-induced nephrotoxic-

ity is very uncertain [8, 20]. In analogy to sulphur compounds, it can be postulated that selenium compounds act simply by inactivating reactive Pt species via ligand exchange. This possibility has not yet been studied, and more research on the molecular basis of the protective action of selenium compounds has to be performed.

In conclusion, thiosulphate can reduce cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity but has a major drawback in that it inactivates cisplatin in the blood. Even in two-route chemotherapy regimens, its applicability has not yet been proven. DDTC is capable of reversing cisplatin-induced damage in the kidney. However, its severe neurotoxicity makes DDTC very unsuitable for clinical application. Methionine and related compounds such as GSH and the induction of metallothioneins can reduce cisplatin-induced toxicity. However, these remain in an early stage of development and problems involving a reduction in the antitumour efficacy may be expected.

Cisplatin- and carboplatin-induced bone marrow suppression

With cisplatin, bone marrow suppression occurs only in high-dose regimens [122]. For carboplatin, myelotoxicity is the dose-limiting toxicity [186]. The molecular mechanism behind the myelotoxic action of cisplatin and carboplatin has not been studied. It is very likely that the division of the rapidly proliferating myeloid progenitors is inhibited by Pt-DNA adduct formation. This implies that the selective modulation of bone marrow suppression is probably not possible on a pharmacodynamic basis as the tumour and the bone marrow share the same mechanism (cellular target) of cytotoxicity.

Modulation of cisplatin- and carboplatin-induced bone marrow suppression

The modulator of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity, DDTC, also protects mice from cisplatin-induced bone marrow suppression when given after cisplatin [18, 41, 49, 65, 123]. Myelosuppression caused by carboplatin has also been reduced by this modulator [41, 65, 143]. However, the dependence of timing was less obvious for this effect than for modulation of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity, and there was no clear dose-response relationship [65, 123]. Dible et al. [41] observed maximal protection when DDTC was administered concomitantly with cisplatin, which also resulted in a reduction in the antitumour activity. In a recent report, it was demonstrated that a DDTC-mediated release of growth factors by stromal cells occurred instead of a direct reversal of damage to the colony-forming units (CFUs, early myeloid progenitors) [144]. This means that the Pt-induced damage was somewhat compensated and not reversed. In clinical trials of cisplatin with dithiocarbamate rescue, an inhibition of myelotoxicity has not yet been demonstrated. In a clinical trial of carboplatin with DDTC, severe myelotoxicity was encountered that might have been related to previous treatments. Even when this was the case, the protection provided by DDTC could

not have been impressive [138]. Mesna did not reduce bone marrow suppression in cisplatin-treated mice [98].

Thus, DDTC and mesna do not hold a lot of promise for protection against platinum-induced myelotoxicity. To date, laborious autologous bone marrow transplantation and/or the use of peripheral stem cell infusions and haemopoietic growth factors have been the only possibilities of circumventing the myelotoxic effects of platinum cytostatics [110, 149, 165]. However, recombinant erythropoietin did not protect murine erythroid stem cells from cisplatin-induced cytotoxicity in vitro [55]. Thus, bone marrow remains one of the non-tumour tissues that are affected by platinum toxicity and may limit the dose that can be applied safely.

Cisplatin- and carboplatin-induced neurotoxicity and ototoxicity

Cisplatin causes a loss of mainly sensory nerve function that appears to be related to the cumulative dose [21, 136, 170]. Thus far, no study has been performed on the molecular mechanisms of this side effect. The cellular target is not known. Morphology studies have revealed changes in DNA, the nucleolus and the number of lysosomes [112]. High-dose cisplatin is associated with ototoxicity, which appears to be reduced when infusion rates are reduced [184]. Carboplatin is less ototoxic than cisplatin. However, high-dose carboplatin with autologous bone marrow support has been associated with substantial ototoxicity [149].

Modulation of cisplatin-induced neurotoxicity and ototoxicity

Neurotoxicity has been studied in clinical trials with modulating agents that were initially developed for the reduction of nephrotoxicity. Thiosulphate has offered protection against cisplatin-induced neurotoxicity [101]. However, a recent phase I trial with high-dose cisplatin and thiosulphate (i.v.) demonstrated a dose-limiting neurotoxicity [102]. For DDTC, no protection against cisplatin-induced neurotoxicity has yet been demonstrated and no protection against cisplatin-induced ototoxicity has been observed [15, 124]. Quite to the contrary, the orally available dimer of DDTC, disulfiram, has been shown to reduce cisplatin-induced ototoxicity (but not nephrotoxicity) [182]. The neurotropic peptide and adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH₄₋₉) analogue ORG.2766, involved in nerve regeneration, has ameliorated cisplatin-induced neurotoxicity both in animal studies and in the clinic [57, 58, 112].

In conclusion, cisplatin-induced neurotoxicity (and ototoxicity) is the main problem associated with high-dose cisplatin treatment regimens. Although some success has been obtained with the nerve regeneration-stimulating agent ORG.2766, true protection (prevention of damage) has not yet been established.

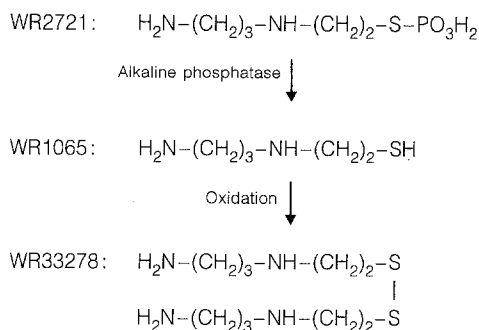


Fig. 2. Structural formula of WR2721 and its conversion into the main metabolites WR1065 and WR33278

Gastro-intestinal toxicity

Cisplatin and, to a lesser extent, carboplatin cause severe but reversible gastro-intestinal toxicity, resulting in nausea and vomiting and diarrhoea. Especially the nausea and vomiting caused by platinum compounds is very severe and lays a heavy burden upon the patient [183].

Modulation of gastro-intestinal toxicity

Conventional antiemetics reduce cisplatin-induced nausea and vomiting, although severe, to an acceptable level [183]. With the development of a new class of antiemetic agents [serotonin (5-hydroxytryptamine-3, 5HT₃)-receptor antagonists], the occurrence and severity of acute nausea and vomiting has been dramatically reduced [128]. This effect is very important in preventing treatment refusal.

Cisplatin-induced toxicity to the intestine, resulting in diarrhoea, is transient and does not produce problems in the clinic [183]. Therefore, the mechanism and modulation of this toxicity has not received much attention. Dithiocarbamates have been shown to reduce histopathological damage to the small intestines of cisplatin-treated rats [92] and to be antiemetic in dogs [18]. Disulfiram, the dimer of DDTC, has reduced nausea and vomiting in a phase II trial [182]. The uroprotector mesna protects cisplatin-treated mice from gastro-intestinal toxicity and lethality [5]. Bi³⁺-induced metallothioneins have reduced gastro-intestinal toxicity in cisplatin-treated mice [116].

In conclusion, cisplatin-induced nausea and vomiting are, although not life-threatening, major problems from a patient's point of view. At present, acute nausea and vomiting can be satisfactorily controlled, but delayed vomiting remains a problem [128]. Intestinal toxicity causing diarrhoea has not been a major problem and its modulation has not been studied much.

We can conclude that the reduction of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity by (saline) hydration and diuresis has enabled the safe use of cisplatin at a dose at which especially ototoxicity and neurotoxicity become a problem. A new generation of antiemetics (5HT₃-receptor blockers) has considerably improved the tolerance of patients to platinum chemotherapy. Carboplatin is an active cisplatin analogue with low nephrotoxic potential; the dose-limiting

toxicity of this compound is myelotoxicity. However, when given with bone marrow protection, high-dose carboplatin may also cause nephrotoxicity and ototoxicity [67, 149]. Therefore, a modulator that protects selectively against the multiple side effects (nephro-, myelo-, neuro- and ototoxicity) of platinum antitumour drugs is needed. At present, the most promising compound for the achievement of this goal is WR2721.

WR2721

WR2721 [S-2-(3-aminopropylamino)ethyl]phosphorothioic acid; ethiophos; Fig. 2] was developed by the Walter Reed Army Institute Hospital to protect soldiers from radiation on the battle field. WR2721 is the less toxic pro-drug of the aminothioli compound WR1065. WR1065 is rapidly formed in vivo by dephosphorylation of WR2721 [28, 147]. Aminothioli compounds are well known for their radioprotective potential. The mechanisms underlying this protection are the depletion of oxygen, reducing the formation of reactive oxygen radicals, the inactivation of radicals by a direct interaction and proton donation to DNA damaged by radicals [28]. It was an obvious step to the use of the pro-drug WR2721 as a protector in radiotherapy.

WR2721 has been shown to protect selectively non-tumour tissues against radiation-induced damage [28]. This selectivity could be explained by the preferential accumulation of WR1065 in non-tumour tissues as observed in several species [147]. The preferential accumulation of WR1065 in non-tumour tissues might be explained as follows. WR2721 is dephosphorylated into the protecting thiol metabolite WR1065 by alkaline phosphatase, abundantly present at the cellular membrane of endothelial cells of small blood vessels. Subsequently WR1065 is capable of passively crossing the cellular membrane [30]. Because solid tumours eligible for radiotherapy are poorly vascularized, their alkaline phosphatase activity is low. Furthermore, because of the hypoxic state of the tumour, the tissue pH is decreased. This results in a reduced formation and uptake of WR1065 in the tumour as compared with other tissues via (a) a decreased activity of the alkaline phosphatase present and (b) an increased amount of protonated amino groups in WR1065, decreasing the fraction of neutral molecules that can enter the cell [28, 30, 147]. Thus, selectivity is achieved by the preferential formation and uptake of WR1065 in non-tumour tissues.

Pharmacokinetics of WR2721 and its metabolites

The (tissue) kinetics of WR2721 and its main metabolites have been studied in several species. In all species investigated (including humans), the half-life of WR2721 in the plasma was short (<5 min) [147, 157]. During a 15-min continuous infusion of 740 mg/m², the steady-state plasma level of WR2721 was 0.1 mM [147]. WR1065 plasma levels were not determined in this study. When 750 mg/m² WR2721 was given to a patient in five repeated (150 mg/m²) bolus injections over 15 min, a steady-state plasma

Table 1. The direct interaction of cisplatin and carboplatin, the prevention and reversal of cisplatin-DNA interactions and the reversal of cisplatin-protein interactions with WR2721 and its main metabolites WR1065 and WR33278 in comparison with DDTC and TS

Modulating agent	$k_2, \text{CDDP} \times 10^4$ ($M^{-1} s^{-1}$) ^a	$k_2, \text{CBDCA} \times 10^4$ ($M^{-1} s^{-1}$) ^b	CDDP-DNA Prevention (%) ^c	CDDP-DNA Reversal (%) ^d	Pt(dien)SMe Reversal ($t_{1/2}$, min) ^e	Fumarase Reactivation (%) ^f
WR2721	25.3	6.07	51	14	2187	7.7
WR1065	49.1	12.4	74	28	81.1	16
WR33278	8.60	0.39	64	13	>>	0
DDTC	—	—	97	43	3.15	61
TS	577	82.4	89	13	1.15	—

^{a, b} Second-order rate constant for cisplatin (CDDP) and carboplatin (CBDCA) in 10 mM phosphate buffer (pH 7.4) at 37°C (after [171])

^c Prevention of DNA platination by 25 µg cisplatin/ml in the presence of a 50-fold molar excess of modulating agent; incubated for 1 h at pH 7.0 and 37°C (after [172])

^d Reversal of DNA platination by a 50-fold molar excess of modulating

agent; incubated for 2 h at pH 7.0 and 37°C (after [172])

^e Reversal of the platinum-methionine type binding in Pt(dien) bound to S-methyl-glutathione in 10 mM phosphate (pH 7.4) at 37°C (after [173])

^f Restoration of fumarase activity by 20 mM of WR compound or 2 mM DDTC after inactivation of the enzyme with cisplatin; incubations were performed in 0.1 M phosphate (pH 7.4) at 37°C (after [173])

level of 1 mM WR2721 was achieved. The concentration of WR1065 in the plasma of this patient was initially 100 µM and declined slowly to 35 µM after 1 h [146]. WR1065 given i.v. to dogs and monkeys was rapidly distributed from the plasma to the tissues. The terminal half-life was long, probably due to its release from a pool of mixed disulphides [99, 104, 158, 159]. In mice injected with WR2721, WR1065 is rapidly and preferentially taken up into various tissues such as the kidney and lung. These non-tumour tissues accumulate high levels of WR1065 as compared with the tumour, with a subsequent rapid decrease being observed ($t_{1/2}$ <10 min) [147, 180]. The tissue kinetics of WR1065 in bone marrow have not yet been established, but radioprotection studies indicate that WR1065 rapidly enters the bone marrow [28].

It can be concluded that after the i.v. administration of WR2721, its thiol metabolite WR1065 is rapidly and preferentially accumulated by non-tumour tissues. This pharmacokinetic selectivity provides a basis for the selective modulation of platinum-induced toxicities.

WR2721 as a modulator of toxic side effects of platinum antitumour agents

The above-mentioned characteristics of WR2721 make it a promising candidate for the selective modulation of platinum-induced toxicities. Indeed, a decrease in cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity has been obtained using 100–200 mg/kg WR2721 (dose-modification factors of about 1.5) without producing a reduction of the antitumour activity in mice and rats [84, 192, 193]. In mice, bone marrow suppression by cisplatin has also been decreased by the administration of 600 mg/kg WR2721 (dose modification factor of 3) without resulting in a reduction of the antitumour activity [189]. A very recent study demonstrated the protection of colony-forming bone marrow cells by WR2721 after an in vitro exposure to carboplatin, whereas three human glioblastoma cell lines were not protected [46]. Preliminary results obtained with the combination of

carboplatin and WR2721 in tumour-bearing mice have also suggested a selective protection against myelotoxicity [64].

Because of prior investigations of WR2721 as a radio-protector in humans, it was readily available for safe use in clinical trials. WR2721 administration is limited by emesis and reversible hypotension, the latter becoming more severe with increasing infusion time. A maximum tolerated dose (MTD) of 740–910 mg/m² has been reached in clinical trials [59]. Clinical trials of cisplatin in combination with WR2721 have shown a decrease not only in myelotoxicity and nephrotoxicity but also in neurotoxicity and ototoxicity without an apparent reduction of the antitumour effect [59].

Recently, mechanistic in vitro studies have been performed to obtain a better understanding of the molecular mechanisms behind the protective action of WR2721 in platinum-based chemotherapy. Cisplatin and its second-generation analogue carboplatin did not react rapidly with the modulating agent WR2721, its thiol metabolite WR1065 or the symmetrical disulphide WR33278 [171] (Table 1). Therefore, it has been postulated that cisplatin or carboplatin will not be significantly inactivated in the circulation by WR2721 or its metabolites, even when they are given at the same time. A dramatic reduction of the formation of cisplatin-DNA adducts was observed in the presence of the WR compounds [172] (Table 1).

WR1065 was the most active compound, its activity being almost comparable with that of the strong nucleophiles DDTC and thiosulphate (TS). This effect has been explained by the ability of WR1065, in contrast to TS and DDTC, to concentrate near DNA by counter-ion condensation, thus inactivating cisplatin and hydrolysed species before they can bind to DNA. Reversal of the formation of cisplatin-DNA adducts also occurred with WR1065 and, to a lesser extent, WR33278 and WR2721. WR1065 was even more active than TS and almost as active as DDTC. However, adduct reversal was slow as compared with the prevention of their formation [172] (Table 1). The reversal of platinum-DNA interactions by thiol compounds contrasts with earlier findings [17, 62]. This effect is prob-

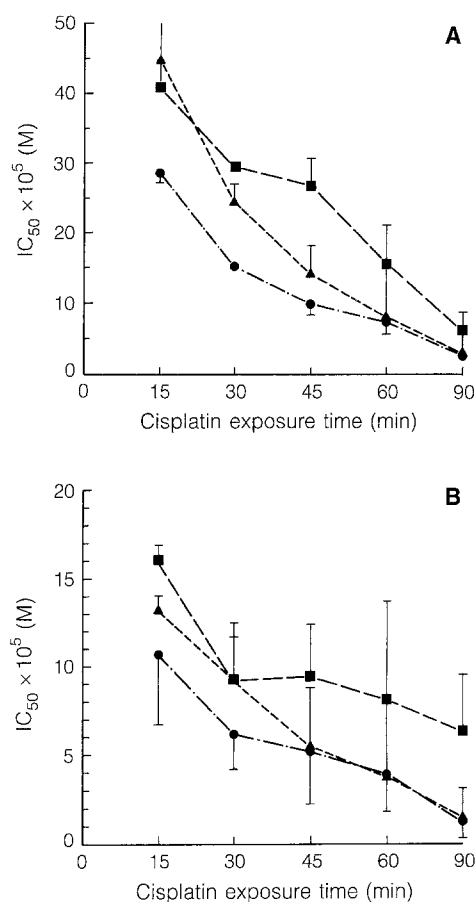


Fig. 3 A, B. IC_{50} values of cisplatin (mean \pm SD) for OVCAR-3 cells after various periods of incubation with cisplatin alone (●), with cisplatin after a 15-min incubation with 5 mM WR1065 (▲) and after concomitant incubation with cisplatin and 5 mM WR1065 (■). Two separate experiments (A, B) were performed in triplicate (after [174])

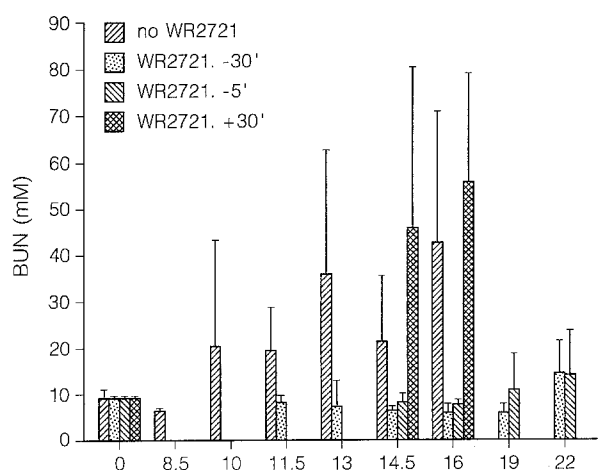


Fig. 4. Modulation of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity in BALB/c mice ($n = 8$) by WR2721 (200 mg/kg, i.p.) at 30 min before, 5 min before or 30 min after cisplatin administration as measured by plasma urea levels (mM) at day 4 (after [175])

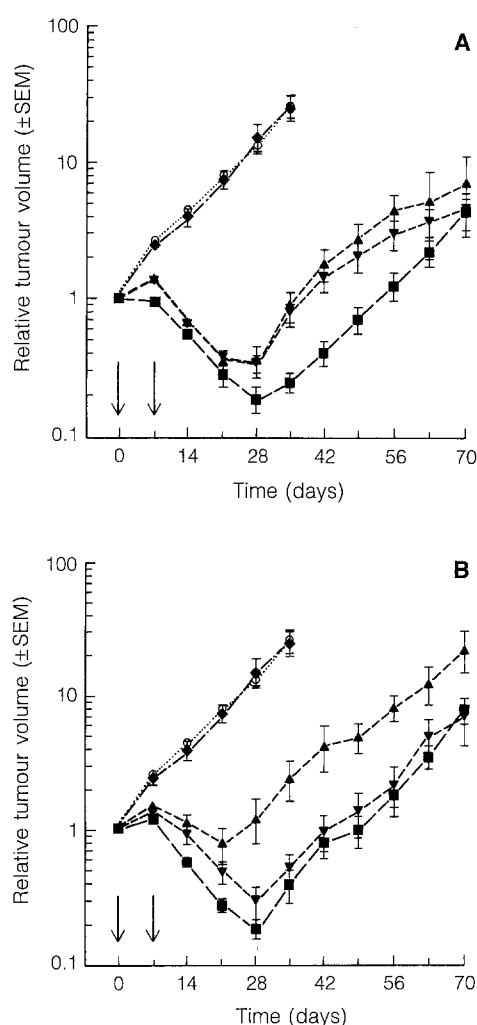


Fig. 5 A, B. Relative volumes of well-established s.c. OVCAR-3 xenografts grown in female nude mice after a conventional dose of platinum-containing drug (weekly \times 2) injected alone (▲) and in combination with 200 mg/kg WR2721 given 5 min previously (▼) or with 200 mg/kg WR2721 given 5 min prior to a higher, equitoxic dose of platinum-containing drug (weekly \times 2; ■) in comparison with those in untreated (○) and WR2721-treated (+) mice. **A** Cisplatin given at a 5-mg/kg (conventional) and an 8-mg/kg (high) dose (after [175]). **B** Carboplatin given at a 60-mg/kg (conventional) and a 90-mg/kg (high) dose (after [176])

ably due to the longer period of incubation of cisplatin and DNA used in the earlier studies [17, 62]. Platinum-protein interactions were hardly reversed by WR2721 or its main metabolites [173] (Table 1). Platinum-cysteine interactions could not be reversed by any of the WR compounds or by TS or DDTC. However, cisplatin-methionine interactions were rapidly reversed by DDTC and TS, whereas WR1065 was much slower in reversing this type of platinum-protein interaction and WR2721 and WR33278 hardly reversed this type of binding. This was confirmed by their capacity to restore the enzyme activity of fumarase after its inactivation by platination of the methionine residue in the active centre.

On the basis of these *in vitro* results, the prevention of cisplatin-induced damage by the thiol metabolite WR1065 is considered to be the most probable mechanism of protection. Because of the dramatic effect on cisplatin-DNA ad-

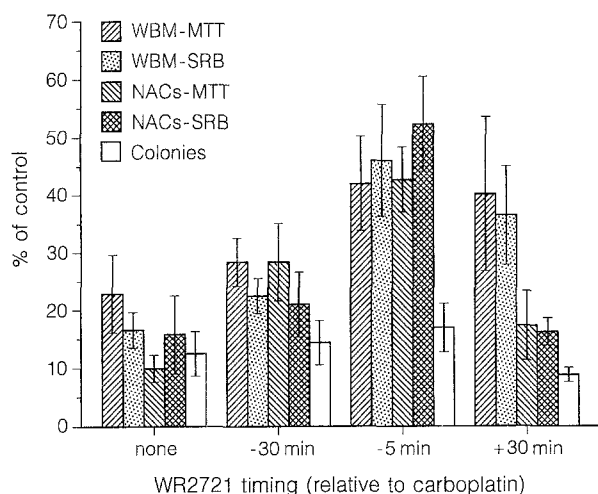


Fig. 6. Bone marrow function (% of control values \pm SEM) of female BALB/c mice treated i.p. with 90 mg/kg carboplatin in the presence or absence of 200 mg/kg i.p. WR2721 at various administration times relative to carboplatin. In vitro proliferation of whole bone marrow (WBM) and non-adherent cells (NACs) was determined by both MTT and SRB staining. The clonogenic capacity of the bone marrow was determined by a bilayered soft-agar assay (after [176]). * Significantly different from the group treated with carboplatin alone according to Wilcoxon's rank-sum test (double-sided, $2\alpha \leq$)

duct formation, interference with antitumour activity might be expected when the tumour is capable of efficiently dephosphorylating WR2721 and of taking up large amounts of the thiol metabolite WR1065. Thus, the preferential formation and uptake of WR1065 by non-tumour tissues appears to be crucial for the successful use of WR2721 in platinum-based chemotherapy. This was confirmed by the reduced cytostatic activity of cisplatin in the presence of WR1065 (in contrast to WR2721), in human ovarian cancer cells [174] (Fig. 3). Protection was better when WR1065 was incubated with the cancer cells concomitantly with cisplatin (co-incubation) as compared with incubation of the cells with WR1065 prior to a cisplatin exposure (pre-incubation). The protective effect of pre-incubation with WR1065 declined when the period of exposure to cisplatin was increased. Neither WR1065 nor WR2721 could protect cells from the cytostatic effect of cisplatin when the WR compounds were incubated with the cells 1 h after the cisplatin exposure. This effect confirms the hypothesis that the reversal of platinum-induced damage is not an important mechanism of protection.

Considering the fast uptake of WR1065 in (preferentially non-tumour) tissues and its subsequent rapid clearance from these tissues, an optimal administration scheme was suggested by the administration of WR2721 5 min prior to treatment with the platinum drug [171]. However, the reduction of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity in mice was the same (not improved) when WR2721 was given 5 min prior to cisplatin as compared with 30 min prior to cisplatin [175] (Fig. 4). WR2721 given 30 min after cisplatin did not protect mice at all from nephrotoxicity. This finding is in agreement with the hypothesis that the prevention of damage is the main mechanism of protection. In immuno-deficient (nude) mice bearing human ovarian car-

cinoma xenografts, WR2721 given 5 min prior to cisplatin did not interfere with the antitumour efficacy of cisplatin [175] (Fig. 5A). This effect is in agreement with the hypothesis that WR2721 or its metabolites are not expected to inactivate a significant amount of the intact platinum drug in the circulation. The increased MTD of cisplatin given in combination with WR2721 resulted in an increased therapeutic efficacy.

Modulation of carboplatin-induced bone marrow toxicity by WR2721 was less obvious than its modulation of cisplatin-induced nephrotoxicity [176] (Fig. 6). Especially the late haemopoietic progenitor cells appeared to be partly protected by WR2721. The effect was more obvious when WR2721 was given 5 min prior to carboplatin than when it was used 30 min before or 30 min after the platinum drug. WR2721 given 5 min prior to carboplatin did not interfere with the tumour growth reduction in nude mice bearing human ovarian carcinoma xenografts [176] (Fig. 5B). Again, this finding is in accordance with the hypothesis that WR2721 or its metabolites are not expected to inactivate a significant amount of the intact platinum drug in the circulation. On the contrary and quite surprisingly, WR2721 was shown to potentiate the tumour growth reduction induced by carboplatin. At the higher MTD of carboplatin, the increase in therapeutic efficacy appeared to be a little higher than that obtained with the conventional carboplatin dose plus WR2721.

In conclusion, WR2721 is a promising chemoprotective agent in reducing multiple side effects without interfering with antitumour efficacy. Various molecular aspects behind the selective modulation of cisplatin- and carboplatin-induced toxicities have been studied and the results extrapolated to the cellular and the in vivo level. This has generated new insights for a more rational and improved use of WR2721 in platinum-based chemotherapy. Clinical trials for the use of platinum antitumour drugs in combination with WR2721 in the treatment of head and neck cancer have recently been started, using these new insights together with previous experiences in clinical trials of cisplatin and WR2721.

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