

Roles of UDP-Glucuronosyltransferases in Chemical Carcinogenesis

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ABSTRACT: UDP-glucuronosyltransferases (UGT) play a major role in the elimination of nucleophilic metabolites of carcinogens, such as phenols and quinols of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. In this way they prevent their further oxidation to electrophiles, which may react with DNA, RNA, and protein. They also inactivate carcinogenic, N-oxidized metabolites of aromatic amines. Furthermore, glucuronides may be stable transport forms of proximate carcinogens excreted via the biliary or urinary tract, thereby liberating the ultimate carcinogen at the target of carcinogenicity. Isozymes of the UGT enzyme superfamily that control the glucuronidation of metabolites of aromatic hydrocarbons and of N-oxidized aromatic amines have been identified in rats and humans. Phenol UGT appears to be coinduced with other drug-metabolizing enzymes via the Ah or dioxin receptor. This isozyme probably controls various proximate carcinogens and contributes to the persistently altered enzyme pattern, leading to the "toxin-resistance phenotype" at cancer prestages. Knowledge about UGTs in different species, their regulation, and their tissue distribution will improve the risk assessment of carcinogens.

KEY WORDS: UDP-glucuronosyltransferases, carcinogenesis, aromatic amines, dioxin receptor, toxin-resistance phenotype

I. INTRODUCTION

The roles of UDP-glucuronosyltransferases (UGTs; EC 2.4.1.17) will be discussed in the context of other drug-metabolizing enzymes and of recent concepts of carcinogenesis. Two classes of carcinogens are used as examples, aromatic hydrocarbons and aromatic amines. Reviews are necessarily selective. Hence, a number of important contributions have not been included. The reader is referred to recent reviews on related drug-metabolizing enzymes (i.e., cytochromes P450 and glutathione *S*-transferases) and their role in carcinogenesis for further information.¹⁻⁴

A. Role of Glucuronidation in the Control of Nucleophilic Metabolites and Thereby in Preventing their Conversion to Reactive Metabolites

A large number of exogenous and endogenous lipophilic chemicals are converted by phase I enzymes of drug metabolism to a variety of nucleophilic and electrophilic metabolites (Figure 1). It has been demonstrated that the interaction of the chemically reactive, electrophilic metabolites with critical cellular macromolecules often initiates toxicity and plays an essential role in the multistage carcinogenic process.⁵ Electro-

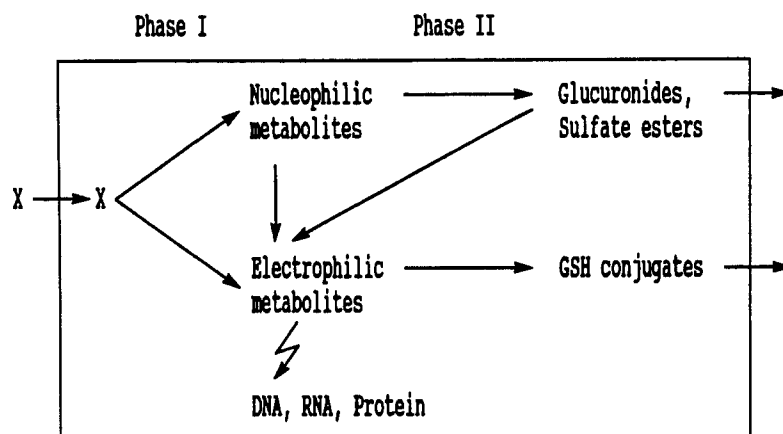


FIGURE 1. Scheme of cellular xenobiotic metabolism.

philic metabolites are largely controlled in phase II by a family of glutathione *S*-transferases (in the case of epoxides, together with epoxide hydrolases). However, the more stable and more abundant nucleophilic metabolites can also be converted to reactive metabolites. For example, phenols can be oxidized to radicals, polyphenols, semiquinones, and quinones. Quinones may undergo quinone/quinol redox cycles, with the generation of reactive oxygen species.⁶⁻⁸ Therefore the control of nucleophilic phenols, quinols, and *N*-oxidized aromatic amines by both UGTs and sulfotransferases (the latter together with acetyltransferases/deacetylases)⁹ may be as important as the control of electrophiles. It is the balance between phase I and phase II enzymes that is responsible for either detoxication or accumulation of toxic metabolites. In this context, it is to be noted that some conjugates, in particular sulfuric acid esters or acetic acid esters, are more reactive than the parent compound and represent ultimate carcinogens.¹⁰ For example, the sulfuric acid ester of *N*-hydroxy-2-aminofluorene has been shown to bind to DNA and to activate critical genes, such as the *c-Ha-ras* protooncogene.^{10,11}

B. Reactive Metabolites and Initiation of Carcinogenesis

Evidence is accumulating that in multistep carcinogenesis at least two stages can be distinguished, initiation and promotion. At the stage of initiation, protooncogenes such as *c-Ha-ras*

(critical for cellular growth control) are altered by genotoxic lesions.¹¹ These lesions may lead to heritable changes in the base sequence of cellular DNA.¹²⁻¹⁴ However, persistent alterations of at least two cooperating protooncogenes have been shown to be required for transformation.¹⁵ Inactivation of antioncogenes may also be involved, as shown in the heritable predisposition to cancer.^{16,17} Recently, it has been appreciated that, in addition to genotoxic lesions, cell proliferation markedly influences several steps in carcinogenesis (Figure 2).^{18,19} In this model, a normal cell (*N*), possibly a stem cell, is converted by genotoxic lesions into a preneoplastic initiated cell (*I*). The rate of conversion of *N* to *I* is influenced by both the mitotic rate of normal cells (α_1) and by terminal differentiation or death of normal cells (β_1). Similarly, the size of the population of initiated cells (*I*) is determined by its mitotic rate (α_2) and its death rate (β_2). The size of the population of initiated cells will be a major determinant of its conversion to transformed cells (*T*). Proliferation of initiated cells can be markedly influenced by nongenotoxic agents, frequently termed *tumor promoters*. Since proliferation of initiated cells represents a critical stage of carcinogenesis that is affected by nongenotoxic agents, it is often termed the stage of *tumor promotion*. Hence the process of tumor promotion is mostly determined by the term $\alpha_2\beta_2$. It has to be distinguished from transformation, which is often determined by a second genotoxic lesion.

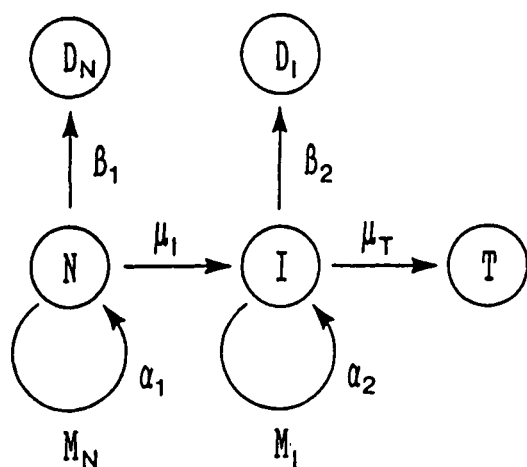


FIGURE 2. Two-stage model of carcinogenesis.^{18,19}

C. Reactive Metabolites and Tumor Promotion

Despite the complexity of multiple processes leading to neoplasia, carcinogens can be classified into genotoxic and nongenotoxic agents (Figure 3). Nongenotoxic agents can be subdivided into (a) those compounds reacting with receptors that may directly affect growth control and (b) reactive metabolites that indirectly affect growth control through cytotoxicity and subsequent regenerative growth. Hence, the formation of re-

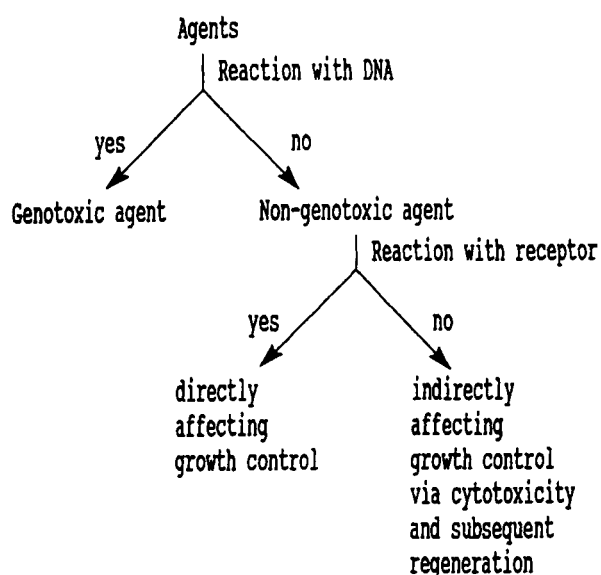


FIGURE 3. Classification of agents affecting carcinogenesis.

active metabolites in cells not only determines initiation through formation of genotoxic lesions, but also tumor promotion through generation of cytotoxic metabolites, leading to cell death and regenerative growth. In fact, in the case of “complete carcinogens”, the same ultimate toxins may be responsible for both genotoxicity and cytotoxicity. In the future, it may be advisable to characterize complete carcinogens on the basis of their relative genotoxic and cytotoxic activities.²⁰ This distinction may be important for low-dose extrapolation and risk assessment in toxicology.

Regenerative proliferation due to cytotoxicity may be important for both initiation and promotion. At the stage of initiation, cell proliferation predisposes the cell to genotoxic actions of carcinogens, since it has been demonstrated that the liver is particularly vulnerable to genotoxic agents in the early S phase of the cell cycle.²¹ At the stage of promotion, cytotoxicity may also be of importance. Initiated cells often show the “toxin-resistance phenotype”.²² Death of normal hepatocytes may lead to selective growth of toxin-resistant initiated hepatocytes, i.e., to their selective proliferation. In this context, it is interesting to note that carcinogens such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (in addition to being metabolized to genotoxic and cytotoxic reactive metabolites) directly stimulate a cellular receptor, the Ah receptor (see Section V).^{23,24} This receptor controls, in addition to the regulation of proteins involved in drug metabolism, processes involved in cell growth and differentiation. Hence, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons represent tumor promoters, affecting cellular growth control by both direct and indirect mechanisms (Figure 3). The discussion of recent concepts of carcinogenesis is intended to emphasize the multiple ways in which the balance between activating and inactivating drug-metabolizing enzymes (including UGTs) influence neoplastic transformation.

Two roles of glucuronidation in the control of carcinogenesis warrant discussion: (1) the role of glucuronidation of metabolites of aromatic amines and aromatic hydrocarbons as transport forms of proximate carcinogens determining the site of carcinogenicity and (2) its major role in the detoxication of aromatic hydrocarbons and aromatic amines. After a brief discussion of var-

ious factors affecting glucuronide formation in the cell, the role of particular isozymes of UGT in the metabolism of carcinogens will be discussed, in particular the regulation of phenol UGT by the Ah receptor and its persistent alterations at cancer prestages. The contribution of these persistent enzyme alterations to the toxin-resistance phenotype will be summarized.

II. GLUCURONIDES AS TRANSPORT FORMS OF CARCINOGENS DETERMINING THE TARGET OF CARCINOGENICITY

For more detailed information the reader is referred to previous reviews.^{5,25} Aromatic amines found widespread use in the dye industry in the mid-19th century. Accordingly, aromatic amines were among the first chemicals to be recognized as human carcinogens. As early as 1895, a German physician, Ludwig Rehn,²⁶ suggested that cancers of the urinary bladder found in dyestuff workers were due to chemical exposure to certain aniline dyes. In 1938, Hueper and co-workers demonstrated the urinary bladder carcinogenicity of 2-naphthylamine in dogs (Figure 4).²⁷ Aromatic amines, such as 2-naphthylamine and 4-

aminobiphenyl, are found in nanogram amounts in cigarette smoke.²⁸ These compounds, among others, may account for the positive correlation between cigarette smoking and the incidence of bladder cancer in humans.²⁹⁻³¹

During high-temperature cooking processes, certain amino acids, such as tryptophan and glutamic acid, along with creatinine and glucose, are pyrolyzed to extremely mutagenic heterocyclic amines (Figure 4), such as Trp-P-1 (3-amino-1,4-dimethyl-5H-pyrido[4,3-b]indole), Glu-P-1 (2-amino-3-methyldipyrido[1,2-a:3',2'-d]imidazole), and IQ (2-amino-3-methylimidazo[4,5-f]quinoline). These derivatives are carcinogenic at a number of sites in experimental animals and may contribute to the etiology of human cancer.³² Recently, a number of nitroaromatic hydrocarbons, found, for example, in diesel emission, were found to be converted to *N*-hydroxy arylamines and to mutagens and animal carcinogens.³³ They may also be involved in the etiology of human urinary bladder cancer.³⁴

In 1941, 2-acetylaminofluorene (2-AAF), a proposed insecticide, was shown to be carcinogenic to the liver, mammary gland, and urinary bladder of rats after dietary administration.³⁵ Subsequently, the *N*-hydroxy metabolite of 2-AAF was found to be more carcinogenic than the

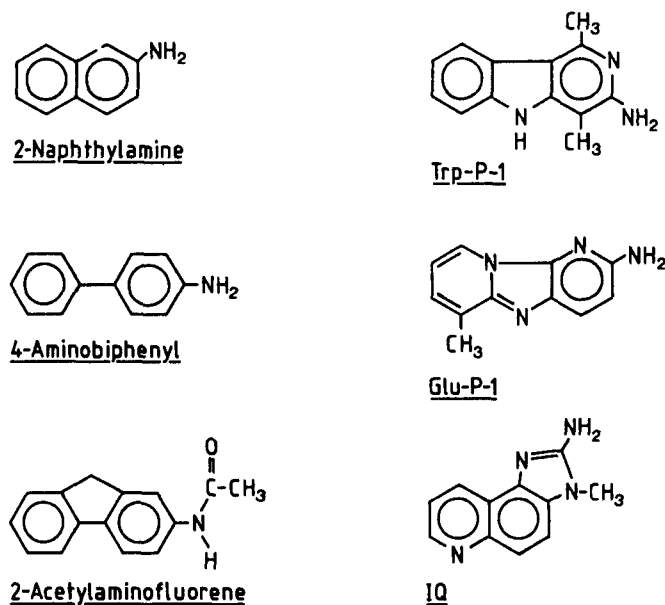


FIGURE 4. Structures of carcinogenic aromatic amines (for abbreviations see text).

parent compound.⁵ This provided the first evidence for the concept of metabolic activation and of the formation of a more "proximate carcinogen". It was later found that sulfation (and acetylation/deacetylation reactions) led to even more reactive intermediates, which formed covalent adducts with DNA (ultimate carcinogens). Glucuronidation led to the formation of the *N*-*O*-glucuronide of the corresponding *N*-hydroxy-2-AAF. Similarly, *N*-hydroxy-2-naphthylamine and *N*-hydroxy-4-aminobiphenyl have been shown to be converted to the corresponding *N*-glucuronides.³⁶⁻³⁸ These *N*-glucuronides represent stable transport forms that are excreted either by the biliary system into the intestine or via the blood into the urinary system (Figure 5). In the case of 2-naphthylamine, the corresponding *N*-hydroxy-*N*-glucuronide has been shown to decompose at the slightly acidic pH of urine to the hydroxylamine and to its protonated nitrenium ion, which readily reacts with DNA, and may initiate bladder cancer.^{5,39} In the case of *N*-hydroxy-4-aminobiphenyl, both the glucuronide and the unconjugated hydroxylamine enter the bladder.²⁵ The resulting DNA adducts have been identified in

exfoliated urothelial cells of the dog, a method that may be useful to monitor adduct levels in humans.⁴⁰

In addition to being *N*-oxidized in the liver and transported to the bladder as the *N*-hydroxy-*N*-glucuronide, 2-naphthylamine is converted to 1-hydroxy-2-naphthylamine in the liver and can be further oxidized in the bladder epithelium to the corresponding electrophilic iminoquinone by peroxidases, such as prostaglandin H synthase.²⁵ This may be an alternative way to form DNA adducts. 1-Naphthylamine, in contrast to 2-naphthylamine, has not been found to be a bladder carcinogen in experimental animals and humans.^{41,42} This is due to the lack of *N*-oxidation of 1-naphthylamine,²⁵ in addition to rapid glucuronidation to the *N*-glucuronide.⁴³

In the case of 3,2'-dimethyl-4-aminobiphenyl, the *N*-glucuronide of the corresponding hydroxylamine is secreted via the bile into the intestine, and the hydroxylamine is liberated in the colon by bacterial β -glucuronidase, initiating colon carcinogenicity.⁴⁴ Similarly, glucuronides of *N*-oxidized heterocyclic amines (formed during the cooking process) may be secreted via the

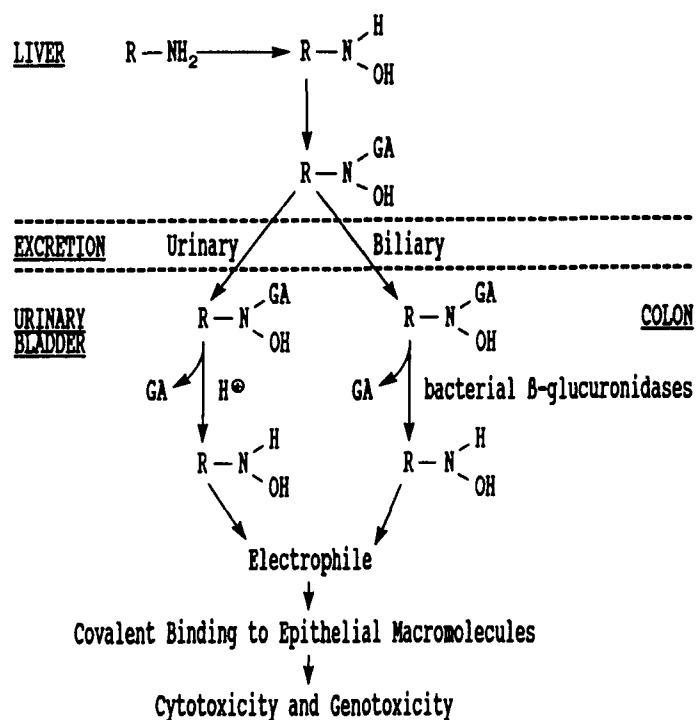


FIGURE 5. Hypothesis for arylamine-induced bladder and colon carcinogenesis. GA = glucuronic acid.

bile into the intestine, where the ultimate carcinogens may be liberated by β -glucuronidases.

Various glucuronides generated in the metabolism of heterocyclic amines have recently been identified.^{45,46} In these instances, the *N*-glucuronides act as transport forms of proximate carcinogens and determine the target of carcinogenicity.

Similar to aromatic amines, glucuronides of benzo(a)pyrene phenols and polyphenols, known to undergo enterohepatic circulation,⁴⁷ are split in the gut by bacterial β -glucuronidases and could conceivably contribute to the initiation of colon cancer.⁴⁸ Glucuronides are generally regarded as detoxication products. However, it is to be noted that enzymatic hydrolysis of 3-hydroxybenzo(a)pyrene glucuronide yields a DNA-binding product.⁴⁹

III. ROLE OF GLUCURONIDATION IN DETOXICATION OF CARCINOGENS

A. Aromatic Hydrocarbons

Since the discovery of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in chimney soot and coal tar, extensive studies have been conducted on the metabolic activation of these compounds to their ultimate carcinogens.^{50,51} In contrast to the previously discussed glucuronides acting as transport forms of proximal carcinogens, glucuronidation must be regarded mostly as a detoxication mechanism. Only selected aspects linking glucuronidation with detoxication of benzo(a)pyrene, benzene, and 2-hydroxybiphenyl will be discussed here.

1. Benzo(a)pyrene

The relationship between inhibition of glucuronidation (and sulfation) by salicylamide and increased covalent binding has been studied in isolated hepatocytes⁵² and in perfused liver.⁵³ Circumstantial evidence for the role of glucuronidation in the inactivation of genotoxic benzo(a)pyrene metabolites also stems from mutagenicity studies. Several laboratories have shown that the addition of UDP-glucuronic acid

to the Ames test reduces benzo(a)pyrene mutagenicity.⁵⁴⁻⁵⁷ In particular, the mutagenicity of benzo(a)pyrene-3,6-quinone was found to be reduced when liver homogenates of 3-methylcholanthrene-treated rats were used as the enzyme source.⁵⁸ The mechanism leading to mutagenicity is still unclear. In contrast, increased benzo(a)pyrene mutagenicity has been observed at high benzo(a)pyrene concentrations in the presence of UDP-glucuronic acid.⁵⁵⁻⁵⁷ The latter effect is probably due to the removal of quinones, which inhibit benzo(a)pyrene metabolism at high concentrations.⁵⁹ Removal of quinones by glucuronidation of quinols enhances benzo(a)pyrene monooxygenase activity⁶⁰ and DNA binding of metabolites.⁵⁹

Two selected pathways of benzo(a)pyrene metabolism are shown in Figure 6; at the top of the figure is the pathway leading to one of the ultimate carcinogens, the bay region dihydrodiol epoxide⁶⁰; at the bottom is the pathway leading to quinones and to quinone/quinol redox cycles. In contrast to dihydrodiols, phenols and quinols appear to be good substrates of 3-methylcholanthrene-inducible phenol UGT.⁶¹ Benzo(a)pyrene-3,6-quinol is efficiently conjugated to its mono- and diglucuronide.^{8,62} In this way, redox cycles with the generation of semiquinones and reactive oxygen species can be prevented. The quantitative contribution of various pathways to benzo(a)pyrene mutagenicity still remains to be elucidated.

2. Benzene

Earlier findings indicated that the addition of UDP-glucuronic acid to a benzene oxidizing system reduced covalent binding of metabolites to protein.⁶³ Studies of the influence of enzyme inducers on benzene-induced bone marrow toxicity demonstrated a temporary protective effect of treatment with 3,3',4,4'-tetrachlorobiphenyl (a 3-methylcholanthrene-type inducer), which was paralleled by an induction of hepatic UGT.⁶⁴ There is growing evidence that the liver is the primary site of bioactivation of benzene (Figure 7). Metabolites are generated in liver, which may be transported to the bone marrow. Partial hepatectomy or inhibition of hepatic benzene metabolism

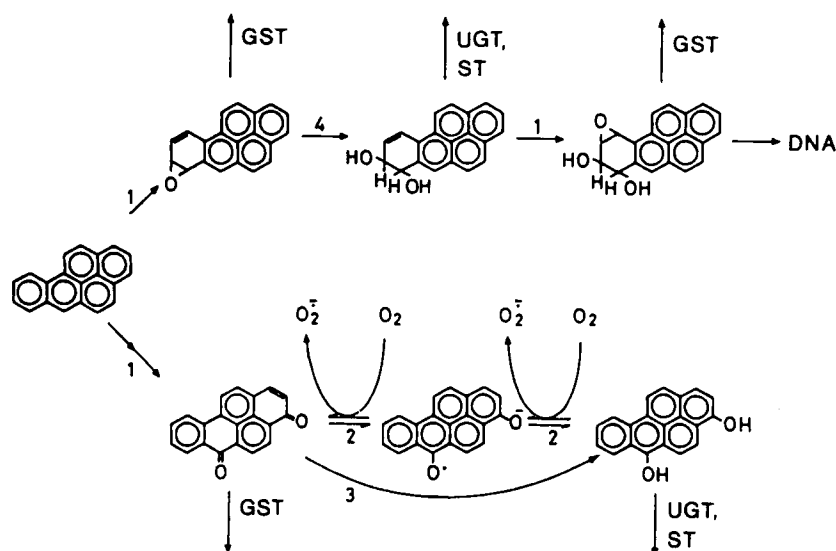


FIGURE 6. Selected pathways of benzo(a)pyrene metabolism. GST = glutathione *S*-transferases; ST = sulfotransferases. Numbers indicate phase I drug-metabolizing enzymes: (1) cytochrome P450-dependent monooxygenase; (2) NADPH-cytochrome P450 reductase; (3) NAD(P)H quinone reductase or DT diaphorase; (4) epoxide hydrolase.

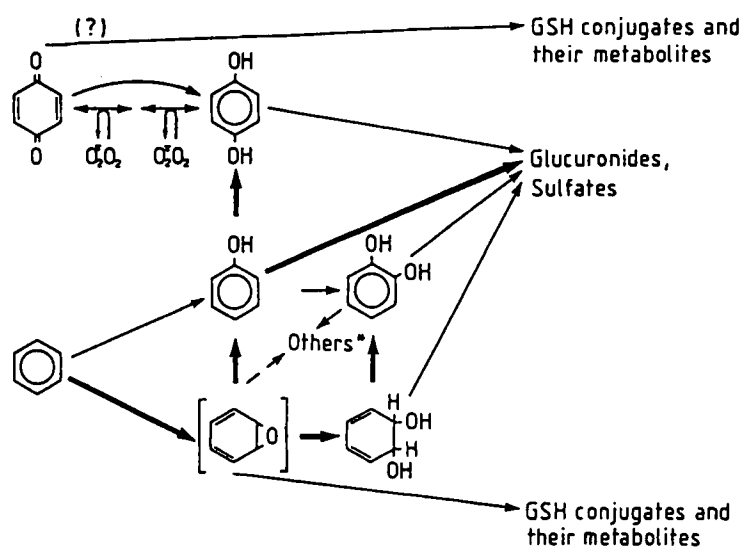


FIGURE 7. Selected pathways of benzene metabolism in hepatocytes.

resulted in a pronounced reduction of myelotoxicity.⁶⁵ In support of a role of glucuronidation in the inactivation of toxic intermediates, it has been shown that 3-methylcholanthrene treatment leads to a marked shift in the conjugation of phenol

sulfation to glucuronidation in isolated hepatocytes.⁶⁶ The shift was shown to be due to the induction of phenol UGT. Phenol sulfate and sulfuric acid esters of other phenolic benzene metabolites are known to be less stable than the

corresponding glucuronides, and may liberate the parent compound by chemical or enzymatic hydrolysis at the target of toxicity.

3. 2-Hydroxybiphenyl

2-Hydroxybiphenyl is widely used as an antimicrobial agent to protect edible crop and hence the human population may be exposed. It is assumed, however, that this human exposure does not lead to a significant health hazard. At low doses, 2-hydroxybiphenyl is mostly excreted as the glucuronide and sulfate ester, and no toxicity is observed. At high doses, conjugation pathways are saturated and the compound is further oxidized to the corresponding hydroquinone and semiquinone, metabolites that are probably responsible for covalent binding, genotoxicity, and the initiation of bladder cancer.⁶⁷ This example demonstrates that saturation of glucuronidation leads to the accumulation of phenols and to their further oxidation to reactive metabolites.

B. Aromatic Amines

2-Acetylaminofluorene (2-AAF) is one of the most extensively studied chemical carcinogens (Figure 4). As with other aromatic amines, *N*-oxidation (catalyzed mainly by P4501A1 and P4501A2) represents the initial activation step, followed in liver by sulfuric acid conjugation. This unstable conjugate decomposes and leads (in long-term feeding studies) to the only DNA adduct, *N*-(deoxyguanosine-8-yl)-2-aminofluorene, which may be responsible for initiation of hepatocarcinogenesis by 2-AAF.^{5,25} Glucuronidation competes with sulfuric acid conjugation. Conflicting results have been published about the reactivity of *N*-*O*-glucuronides of *N*-hydroxy-2-AAF. The *N*-*O*-glucuronide has been reported to react with DNA under *in vitro* conditions.^{68,69} However, whereas *N*-glucuronides of arylhydroxylamines induce repair synthesis of DNA in cultured urothelial cells of several species, the *N*-*O*-glucuronide of *N*-hydroxy-AAF does not induce DNA repair synthesis in the absence of β -glucuronidase,⁷⁰ suggesting that no reactive metabolites are formed under *in vivo* conditions.

These observations indicate that formation of *N*-*O*-glucuronides of arylhydroxylamines may represent a detoxication mechanism. Moreover, an inverse relationship was found between the carcinogenicity of 2-naphthylamine, 4-acetylnobiphenyl, and 2-AAF and the ease of glucuronidation of their hydroxamic acid derivatives, suggesting that glucuronidation may play an important role in determining the carcinogenicity of arylamines and arylacetamides in the rat.⁷¹ There are other examples that suggest a role of glucuronidation in detoxication. Enhanced glucuronidation of *N*-hydroxy-2-AAF in hepatocyte nodules may be involved in the "toxin-resistance phenotype" of these cells in the Solt-Farber model,⁷² discussed in Section V.B. Further support for the role of glucuronidation in detoxication of carcinogens stems from studies of the mutagenicity of 2-naphthylamine.⁷³ The addition of UDP-glucuronic acid to the Ames test led to a marked reduction of 2-naphthylamine mutagenicity.

Knowledge about glucuronidation of *N*-hydroxy-2-AAF is scarce in human tissues. Studies with primary cultures of human hepatocytes demonstrated that the cells conjugated 2 to 52% (up to 51% glucuronides and 12% sulfates) of 2-AAF over a thousandfold concentration range. The *C*-hydroxylated AAF metabolites were conjugated to glucuronides more efficiently than *N*-hydroxy-2-AAF and deacetylated aminofluorene metabolites.⁷⁴

The relationship between *N*-acetyltransferases and UGTs in determining the reactivity of *N*-oxidized arylamines is intriguing. Depending on the hepatic *N*-acetylation and *N*-deacetylation capacities, these metabolites appear mainly as the glucuronic acid conjugates of hydroxylamines or *N*-arylacetohydroxamic acids. The *N*-*O*-glucuronide of *N*-hydroxy-2-AAF is not carcinogenic when injected subcutaneously into the rat, and it does not induce DNA repair synthesis in cultured urothelial cells, unless in the presence of β -glucuronidase.⁷⁰ Depending on the species, the de-glucuronidated hydroxamic acids can be activated by urothelial cells through *N*-deacetylation or *N*,*O*-acetyltransfer, and can produce DNA repair synthesis in cultured urothelial cells secondary to the modification of DNA. Because of the low level of β -glucuronidase in the urine, *N*-*O*-

glucuronides are subject to little metabolic activation in the bladder and are, therefore, considered to be detoxified metabolites. However, since both the *N*-glucuronides and free hydroxylamines induce DNA repair synthesis in cultured urothelial cells, the *N*-glucuronides of hydroxylamines are considered to be responsible for the induction of bladder tumors. This has been demonstrated by the instillation of the *N*-glucuronide of *N*-hydroxy-2-aminofluorene in the heterotopic bladder of rats.⁷⁵

The formation of reactive glucuronides has been suggested in the case of *N*-hydroxyphenacetin, which has been proposed to be responsible for the kidney damage and carcinogenicity resulting from phenacetin.⁷⁶⁻⁷⁹ However, the ultimate toxin responsible for phenacetin-induced kidney damage still needs to be elucidated. The complexity of glucuronidation in the formation of water-soluble excretory products has been demonstrated in studies of benzidine metabolism.⁸⁰

IV. METABOLISM OF CARCINOGENS BY ISOZYMES OF THE UGT ENZYME SUPERFAMILY

A. Relationship between Patterns and Levels of UGT Isozymes and Glucuronide Formation in the Intact Cell

Comprehensive reviews on the various factors affecting glucuronide formation in cells have been published recently.^{81,82} In addition to the patterns and levels of UGT isozymes, these factors include the level of the cofactor UDP-glucuronic acid and the "latency" of UGT activity. Although influenced by various pretreatments, the cellular level of UDP-glucuronic acid is generally held constant in hepatocytes (0.3 $\mu\text{mol/g}$ tissue wet weight).^{83,84} This is mainly due to the fact that, despite the varying demands for glucuronidation, regeneration of UDP-glucuronic acid appears to be quite high in the liver of fed rats.

Evidence derived from the gene structure of UGTs suggests that the active site of UGT is located on the luminal site of the endoplasmic reticulum (Figure 8).^{85,86} This transmembrane to-

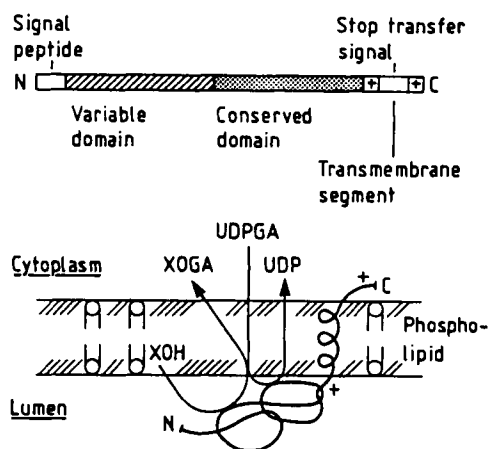


FIGURE 8. Common features deduced from UGT cDNA sequences and implication for the transmembrane topology of UGTs. GA = glucuronic acid; XOH = phenolic metabolite).

pology implies that UDP-glucuronic acid, synthesized in the cytoplasm, has to be transported through the membrane to the active site. There is circumstantial evidence for a carrier of UDP-glucuronic acid.^{87,88} Transport of UDP-glucuronic acid becomes rate limiting predominantly when high-turnover substrates are present at a high concentration. Maximal glucuronidation can be achieved, for example, by the addition of detergents to microsomes, leading to membrane perturbation. The ratio of UGT activities in disrupted vs. intact microsomes is called *latency*. Latency is less apparent at low substrate concentrations. For example, latency of UGT activity toward 1-naphthol is about 27-fold at 0.5 mM and only 3-fold at 0.002 mM (Lilienblum and Bock, unpublished results).

B. UGT Enzyme Superfamily

Many lines of evidence suggested multiplicity of UGTs in the past, for example, their differential inducibility by 3-methyl-cholanthrene or phenobarbital.⁸⁹⁻⁹² The existence of a supergene family of isozymes has been established recently by their purification to apparent homogeneity⁹³⁻⁹⁵ and by cloning, sequencing, and expression of the cDNAs in cultured cells (Table 1). The presently used interim nomenclature is based on agreed substrates, preferably endogenous substrates.¹¹⁴ This nomenclature is limited

TABLE 1
Hepatic UDP-Glucuronosyltransferases (UGTs)

Isozyme (substrates)	Overall similarity^a (%)	Ref.
Rat		
Phenol UGT = UGT-1 (benzo(a)pyrene-3,6-quinol, 4-methylumbelliferone, 1-naphthol)	100	85 ^b , 93—95
Bilirubin UGT	67	96 ^b , 97, 98
Digitoxigenin monodigitoxo- side UGT	—	99
Morphine UGT = UGT-2a	—	93, 100
4-Hydroxybiphenyl UGT = UGT-2b (4-methylumbelliferone, chloramphenicol, testosterone, estradiol)	40	101 ^b , 102 ^b
17 β -Hydroxysteroid UGT (testosterone, estradiol at C-17, 1-naphthol)	39	103 ^b
3 α -Hydroxysteroid UGT (androsterone, lithocholic acid, 4-aminobiphenyl)	35	94, 104 ^b , 105 ^b
Aromatic steroid UGT (esterone, estradiol at C-3)	—	98
Human		
Phenol UGT (4-methylumbelliferone, 1-naphthol, benzo(a)pyrene- 3,6-quinol)	100	106 ^b , 107
Bilirubin UGT	—	108
Morphine UGT	—	109
Tertiary amine UGT (tripelennamine)	—	109
4-Aminobiphenyl UGT (pI 6.2)	—	110
Estriol UGT (pI 7.4) (estriol at C-16, 4-methyl- umbelliferone, 1- naphthylamine)	42	110, 111 ^b
6-Hydroxysteroid UGT (hyodeoxycholic acid)	43	112 ^b
3,4-Catechol estrogen UGT (4-hydroxyestrone, 4- methyl-umbelliferone)	43	113 ^b

- ^a Sequence alignment was achieved using the program ALIGN, Scientific and Educational Software, Stateline, PA, U.S.A.
- ^b cDNA sequence.

because of the broad overlap of substrate specificity. A new nomenclature should be based upon the evolution of UGT amino acid sequences, similar to that adopted for the P450 enzyme family.¹¹⁵ In contrast to the large P450 family, only two UGT families may have evolved, the UGT-1 family (including phenol UGT, the classic 3-methylcholanthrene-inducible UGT-1), and the larger UGT-2 family (which shows 45% overall similarity to members of the UGT-1 family, including the classic phenobarbital-inducible UGT-2b).

Several problems have to be solved before a new nomenclature can be adopted. For example, two different isozymes (phenol UGT and bilirubin UGT) may be derived from the same gene by alternative splicing.⁹⁶ This hypothesis is based on recent studies of phenol UGT cDNA from Gunn rat liver, which revealed a -1 frameshift mutation in the gene sequence. This mutation introduces a premature stop codon, leading to a truncated protein lacking the C-terminal anchor in the endoplasmic reticulum membrane.¹¹⁶ Since at least two UGT isozymes appear to be lacking in Gunn rats, these isozymes may share the same C-terminal portion. Hence, the overall similarity of 67% between bilirubin UGT and phenol UGT should not obscure the fact that from residue 285 to the C-terminal there is 100% identity.

Only a few isozymes in a small number of species have been sequenced. This represents a major obstacle to the establishment of a new nomenclature. In addition to nine UGT sequences from rats and humans (Table 1), a mouse UGT has been sequenced with regulatory properties similar to bilirubin UGT.¹¹⁷ Moreover, a novel UGT has been sequenced from bovine olfactory epithelium.¹¹⁸

Knowledge about glucuronidation of carcinogens and their metabolites by particular UGT isozymes is limited. In particular, there is insufficient knowledge about the tissue distribution of UGT isozymes. In the rat, phenol UGT activities appear to be ubiquitously distributed, whereas other UGT activities appear to be restricted to the liver and intestine.^{61,119} Only UGT isozymes of rat and human liver will be discussed. Phenol UGT conjugates planar substrates, including carcinogenic aromatic hydrocarbons and aromatic amines and their metabolites. Although conju-

gated with higher affinity by phenol UGT, currently used standard phenols are overlapping substrates for several UGTs (Table 1). A more complete list of phenol UGT substrates is given in Table 2. Phenols of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons may be more selective substrates of phenol UGT. Induction factors for the latter substrates are higher than those obtained for standard phenols.¹²⁰ Interestingly, the enzyme conjugates benzo(a)pyrene-3,6-quinol to its mono- and diglucuronide.⁸ Due to the high induction factor for diglucuronide formation (40-fold), this reaction may serve as a selective probe for phenol UGT. The proximal carcinogens *N*-hydroxy-2-naphthylamine⁹³ and *N*-hydroxy-2-AAF⁷² are also conjugated efficiently by phenol UGT. Aromatic amines appear to be overlapping substrates for

TABLE 2
Substrate Specificity of Rat Liver Phenol UGT

Standard Phenols	Ref.
Phenol ^a	66
4-Nitrophenol	93, 94
1-Naphthol	94, 94
4-Methylumbelliferone	94
Metabolites of Aromatic Hydrocarbons	
3-Hydroxy-BP ^b	93, 120
7-Hydroxy-BP	120
5-Hydroxy-dibenz(a,h)anthracene	120
BP-3,6-quinol	8
BP-3,6-quinol monoglucuronide	8
Aromatic Amines and their Metabolites	
1-Naphthylamine	43, 121
2-Naphthylamine	43, 121
<i>N</i> -Hydroxy-2-naphthylamine	93
Drugs	
Mitoxanthrone ^a	122
(<i>R</i>)-Naproxen	123
Thyroxine ^a	124

^a Substrate specificity has been studied with the purified isozyme. When indicated assignment was carried out from induction studies.

^b BP, benzo(a)pyrene.

several UGTs. Interestingly, 4-aminobiphenyl appears to be a substrate for androsterone UGT^{94,121} and for a human liver isozyme eluting at pI 6.2 from chromatofocusing columns (Table 1).¹¹⁰

V. REGULATION OF UGTs

Similar to P450 isozymes, rat liver UGT isozymes are known to be differentially regulated by prototype inducers, such as phenobarbital and 3-methylcholanthrene,^{85,89-95,125} pregnenolone 16 α -carbonitril,^{99,125} and clofibrilic acid.^{92,97} It is interesting that similar prototype inducers are found in the UGT and the P450 enzyme families.¹¹⁵ Some UGT isozymes, such as phenol UGT, are also induced by antioxidants.¹²⁶⁻¹²⁸

Regulation by antioxidants is of particular interest due to the discovery of an antioxidant-responsive element (ARE) upstream of the structural gene of glutathione *S*-transferase Ya.¹²⁹ It is likely that a similar ARE is found upstream of the structural gene of phenol UGT. Induction of these conjugating enzymes [and of NAD(P)H quinone reductase] by antioxidants without a concomitant induction of P450 isozymes is noteworthy, since they are coordinately induced with P450 isozymes by the Ah receptor, discussed below.¹²⁶⁻¹²⁸ Two kinds of regulatory properties will be discussed in detail: (1) regulation of phenol UGT by the Ah receptor and (2) persistent increase of phenol UGT expression at cancer pre stages.

A. Regulation of Phenol UGT by the Ah Receptor

The Ah receptor is a soluble protein that binds planar aromatic compounds (particularly halogenated aromatic compounds) with high affinity (K_D -TCDD $\approx 6 \times 10^{-12}$ M).^{23,24,130} These ligands include polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, such as benzo(a)pyrene and 3-methylcholanthrene; polyhalogenated hydrocarbons, such as 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin; and a large number of plant constituents, such as β -naphthoflavone, rutaecarpine, and related quinazoline-carboline alkaloids present in the Rutaceae plant family.¹³¹ After ligand binding, the Ah receptor complexes with *cis*-acting xenobiotic responsive elements (XRE) upstream of the first exon of the gene for P4501A1.^{132,133} An identical element has been identified for glutathione *S*-transferase Ya.¹²⁹ Probably there is a similar XRE associated with phenol UGT. The Ah receptor is presumed to be

a member of the erb A superfamily, which includes the receptors for steroid hormones, vitamin D, retinoic acid, and thyroid hormone.¹³⁴

Earlier genetic evidence indicated that murine liver phenol UGT is regulated by the Ah receptor.¹³⁵ This result in the mouse model was supported in rat liver by induction studies using Ah receptor ligands differing in induction potencies by a factor of more than 100,000-fold (Figure 9).^{58,136} In these induction experiments, primary cultures of rat hepatocytes and cultures of rat hepatoma H4IIE cells were incubated for 48 h with various concentrations of polychlorinated dibenzo-*p*-dioxins (PCDDs) or the nonhalogenated benz(a)anthracene. PCDDs were designated by the position and number of chlorine atoms. For example, 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin is termed 2,3,7,8-*Cl*₄DD. Incubation for 48 h resulted in maximal induction of a P4501A1-de-

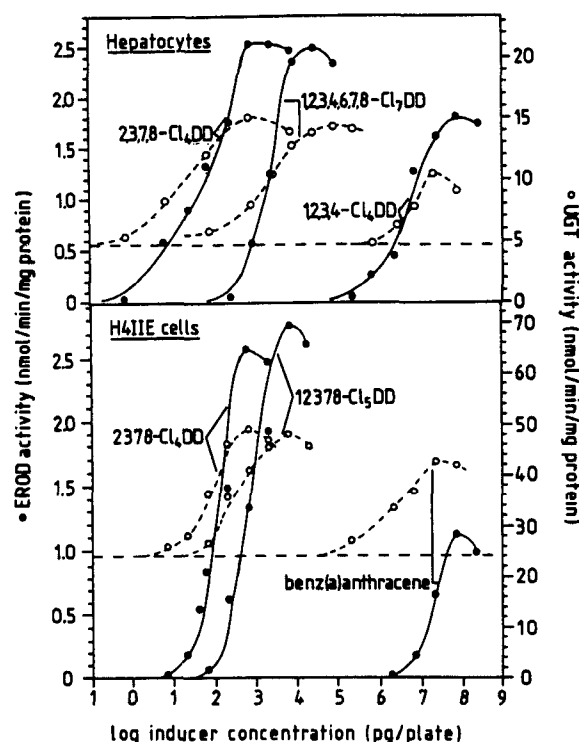


FIGURE 9. Dose-response curves of P4501A1-dependent 7-ethoxyresorufin *O*-deethylase (EROD) and of phenol UGT activity toward 4-methylumbelliferone. Cells were cultured as described.¹³⁶ Positions and numbers of chlorine substituents of the various polychlorinated dibenzo-*p*-dioxins are indicated by numbers.

pendent enzyme activity, 7-ethoxyresorufin *O*-deethylase (EROD) and of phenol UGT activity toward 4-methylumbelliferone. The data are shown as dose-response curves. Dashed lines indicate the levels of constitutive expression of phenol UGT in the two cell systems. More detailed data have been published.¹³⁶ As shown in Figure 9, both the P4501A1 and phenol UGT activities were induced at the same concentration of inducers, differing in potency by over 100,000-fold. Potencies of PCDDs have been calculated from the concentration of PCDD, leading to 50% of the induction maximum.

In humans, there is also some evidence for UGT isozymes responsive to 3-methylcholanthrene-type inducers. UGT activity toward paracetamol is increased in heavy smokers who are exposed to 3-methylcholanthrene-type inducers.^{137,138} Paracetamol has been shown to be a substrate of human liver phenol UGT,¹⁰⁷ suggesting a similar regulation of this isozyme in humans as in rats. However, paracetamol probably represents an overlapping substrate for several isozymes.

At least six drug-metabolizing enzymes have been shown to be regulated by the Ah receptor, including P4501A1, P4501A2, NAD(P)H quinone reductase or DT diaphorase, aldehyde dehydrogenase, glutathione *S*-transferase Ya, and phenol UGT.²⁴ The physiological function of the receptor and its endogenous ligands remain unknown. It is conceivable, however, that in evolution the receptor has adopted the function to detoxify planar aromatic compounds, in particular those of plant origin.^{24,58}

B. Persistent Increase of Phenol UGT at Cancer Prestages and Its Contribution to the Toxin-Resistance Phenotype

The multiple mechanisms leading to drug resistance have been reviewed recently.¹³⁹ Similar to persistent alterations of other drug-metabolizing enzymes,^{22,140} phenol UGT is increased at liver cancer prestages, such as hepatocyte foci^{141,142} and hepatocyte nodules.^{143,144} Alterations of UGT are heterogeneous, including both UGT-positive = UGT (+) and UGT-negative foci in mouse¹⁴⁵ and rat hepatocarcinogenesis

models (A.- B. Kobusch and K. W. Bock, unpublished results). The present discussion only deals with UGT (+) nodules, which are preponderant in the rat. Investigation of a number of hepatocyte nodules and differentiated hepatocellular carcinomas, produced by feeding 2-AAF, suggested that phenol UGT was increased selectively. Bilirubin UGT and 17 β -hydroxy-steroid UGT were not increased.¹⁴³ Northern blot analysis using a selective cDNA fragment of phenol UGT demonstrated increased expression of this isozyme under these conditions.¹⁴⁶ However, immunoblot analysis using antibodies to phenol UGT led to conflicting results. Whereas differentiated hepatocellular carcinomas showed increased expression of the *M_r* 55,000 phenol UGT polypeptide,⁹⁵ a new *M_r* 53,000 polypeptide was preponderant in hepatocyte nodules.¹⁴⁶ It has been demonstrated that phenol UGT represents a glycoprotein containing high mannose-type carbohydrate moieties of about *M_r* 2000.⁸⁵ In addition, it is known that glycoprotein synthesis is impaired in hepatocyte nodules produced by 2-AAF.¹⁴⁷ It is therefore conceivable that the phenol UGT polypeptide of *Mr* 53,000 found in hepatocyte nodules is produced by posttranscriptional modification, i.e., differential glycosylation, of phenol UGT (*M_r* 55,000).

Adaptive induction of phenol UGT by 3-methylcholanthrene-type inducers has to be clearly distinguished from the persistent alterations of this isozyme observed at cancer pre-stages. The persistent alterations of phenol UGT contribute to the "toxin-resistance phenotype" of preneoplastic cells (Table 3).²² This phenotype denotes an altered pattern of drug-metabolizing enzymes observed in different carcinogenesis models. It includes decreased P4501A1 and decreased sulfotransferase (such as sulfotransferase IV),¹⁴⁹ increased glutathione *S*-transferase P, and increased phenol UGT, as well as increased expression of the multidrug-resistance gene product P-glycoprotein.¹⁵⁰ The toxin-resistance phenotype may explain selective growth of preneoplastic cells under the conditions of the Solt-Farber model.⁷² In the evaluation of focal alterations, the progenitor cells of hepatocytes have to be considered. Mitoinhibitory agents such as 2-AAF are known to stimulate the growth of oval cells, which may be precursors of hepato-

TABLE 3
Permanent Alteration of Enzymes Involved in Drug Metabolism and Disposition in Rat Liver Nodules^a

Enzyme	Relative nodular activity ^a
Phase I	
Cytochromes P-450	0.2
Aryl hydrocarbon hydroxylase	0.05—0.3
NAD(P)H quinone reductase (cytosol)	13
Aldehyde dehydrogenase (cytosol)	40
Epoxide hydrolase (microsomal)	5
Phase II	
Phenol sulfotransferase	0.06
Phenol UGT	5—10
Glutathione S-transferases	5
Glutathione S-transferase P	34
Others	
Gamma-glutamyltranspeptidase	100—170
Glycoprotein P (<i>mdr</i> gene product)	Increased

^a Data are taken from references 143 and 148.

cytes.¹⁵¹⁻¹⁵⁴ Frequently studied rat liver epithelial cells show some characteristics of oval cells.¹⁵⁵ They also display a pattern of drug-metabolizing enzymes similar to the “toxin-resistance phenotype”.¹⁵⁶ Whereas P450 activities were found to be lower in rat liver epithelial cells, phenol UGT activities were comparable to those found in differentiated hepatocytes. A “toxin-resistance phenotype”, including increased UGT activity, is also found in tumor cells, in particular after treatment with chemotherapeutic agents,¹⁵⁷⁻¹⁵⁹ and may explain therapeutic failure after long-term treatment with these agents.

C. Size Distribution of Phenol UGT-Positive Hepatocyte Foci in Relation to Additional Phenotypic Alterations (Complexity Level and Growth Characteristics)

As expected from the findings of others,^{160,161} phenol UGT(+) foci were found to be phenotypically heterogeneous when four additional marker enzymes were analyzed comparatively in the foci (glutathione S-transferase P and gamma-glutamyltranspeptidase, which were increased,

as well as ATPase and glucose-6-phosphatase, which were decreased). Phenotypic diversity was sorted into different complexity levels as follows. When foci were found to be only UGT(+), they were arbitrarily assigned to complexity level 1. When the above-mentioned one to four additional markers were also altered, they were ascribed to complexity levels 2 to 5. The frequency of size class diameters of foci was studied in relation to their different complexity levels (Figure 10). In this study hepatocyte foci were produced in a stop model¹⁶² by the administration of *N*-nitrosomorpholine to male Wistar rats (180 g) in drinking water (80 mg/l) for 7 weeks. Stereologic analysis of foci was carried out at week 31 of the experiment. Focal intersections were sorted by different size classes according to their diameters. The size classes are defined by a log scale of maximum diameters according to Campbell et al.¹⁶³ It was found that the sizes of foci with higher complexity levels were larger than those with a lower complexity level. This finding suggests that foci with higher phenotypic complexity grow faster, extending the findings of others.^{160,161} It is conceivable that the phenotypic diversity results from pleiotropic effects of initiation events (including regulation of genes that are critical for growth control), rather than from a collection of random, primary initiation events.¹⁶⁰ To elucidate the molecular mechanisms underlying the persistent enzyme alterations at cancer prestages, markers such as phenol UGT may be particularly useful, since much is already known about its regulatory properties.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

(1) UDP-glucuronosyltransferases (UGTs) play a major role in the elimination of nucleophilic metabolites of carcinogens, such as phenols and quinols of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. In this way they prevent their further oxidation to electrophiles, which may react with DNA, RNA, and protein. They also inactivate carcinogenic, *N*-oxidized metabolites of aromatic amines. It has to be noted that electrophiles affect carcinogenesis in many ways, for example, by genotoxic alterations of protooncogenes, such as *c-Ha-ras* (initiation of carcinogenesis), or by cy-

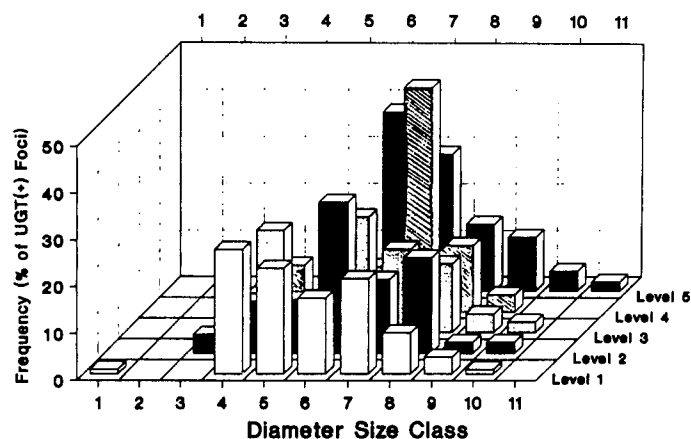


FIGURE 10. Size class distribution of phenol UGT-positive = UGT(+) foci in relation to additional phenotypic alterations (complexity level). Production of hepatocyte foci and assignment of complexity levels are described in the text. Diameter size classes and complexity levels of foci were calculated by stereologic analysis.¹⁶³

totoxic damage of cells, stimulating regenerative growth of toxin-resistant, initiated cells (tumor promotion).

(2) Two roles of glucuronides are emphasized: (1) their role as transport forms excreted via the biliary or urinary tract, thereby liberating the ultimate carcinogen at the target of carcinogenicity; (2) their role in sequestering proximate carcinogens, leading to their detoxication. For example, glucuronidation of quinols is important, since they are readily autoxidized to reactive semiquinones and quinones, and undergo toxic redox cycles, with the generation of reactive oxygen species. Arylacetohydroxamic acids, are inactivated by glucuronidation, instead of being activated by sulfation.

(3) Isozymes of the UGT enzyme superfamily have been identified that control the glucuronidation of phenols and quinols of aromatic hydrocarbons and of carcinogenic *N*-oxidized aromatic amines. In particular, a phenol isozyme is coinduced with other drug-metabolizing enzymes via the Ah- or dioxin receptor, and plays a major role in the control of various proximate carcinogens. This isozyme is persistently increased at cancer prestages in rat hepatocarcinogenesis models and contributes to the altered enzyme pattern, leading to the "toxin-resistance phenotype".

(4) Knowledge about the isozymes of this

enzyme superfamily in different species, and about their regulation and tissue distribution, will improve the extrapolation of drug and carcinogen metabolism data from experimental animals to humans, as well as risk assessment of carcinogens. In particular, regulatory properties of these isozymes, such as the control of phenol UGT by the Ah receptor and its persistent alterations at cancer prestages, will open a new avenue to understand higher order, pleiotropic regulatory programs.

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Added in proof: Resistance of guinea pigs (compared with rats) to bladder carcinogens has been attributed to a unique UGT in this species (Dawley R. M. et al., *Cancer Res.*, 51, 514, 1991).

Note added in proof: A new nomenclature system for UGT isozymes has been proposed by an international group of experts on the basis of divergent evolution of the genes, similar to that

proposed for the P450 enzyme family.¹¹⁵ For naming each gene it is proposed that the root symbol "UGT" for "UDP-glucuronosyltransferase" be followed by an Arabic number denoting the family, a letter designating the subfamily, and an Arabic numeral representing the individual gene. According to this nomenclature, UGT isozymes listed in Table 1 are named as follows: rat or human phenol UGT (which are believed to be orthologues) and rat bilirubin UGT are named UGT1A1 and UGT1A2, respectively. Phenobarbital-inducible 4-hydroxybiphenyl UGT, 3 α -hydroxysteroid UGT and 17 β -hydroxysteroid UGT will be UGT2B1, UGT2B2, and UGT2B3, respectively. Human 6-hydroxysteroid UGT, 3,4-catechol estrogen UGT, and estriol UGT are called UGT2B4, UGT2B7, and UGT2B8, respectively.

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