

University of Groningen

A potential strategy to treat liver fibrosis

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*Bikes after snow in the garden at my house in Ubbo Emmiusingel,
Groningen, February 2004.*

Chapter I

Aim of the thesis



*“Rest satisfied with doing well,
and leave others to talk of you as they please.”*

Pythagoras (582 BC - 507 BC).

Liver fibrosis is the 9th leading cause of death in the world. This chronic disease cannot be treated successfully with conventional antifibrotic and anti-inflammatory drugs currently on the market, because they either lack efficacy or cause too many side-effects.

Targeting of antifibrotic agents to hepatic stellate cells is considered a promising strategy to increase their therapeutic potential. This thesis will present a novel strategy to synthesize drug targeting conjugates aimed at hepatic stellate cells. The core of our invention is a novel platinum based a linker system, the so-called Universal Linkage System (ULS), that allows us to couple a broad range of drugs.

Three different drugs have been employed in the present thesis. Pentoxifylline is an anti-inflammatory drug that has been suggested as a potential antifibrotic drug once delivered specifically to hepatic stellate cells (1). Losartan is an angiotensin II receptor antagonist that is widely used for the treatment of hypertension and renal disease. Its beneficial effects on the renin-angiotensin system can be applied to improve the liver function during fibrosis (2). The third drug we have employed is a PDGF-R tyrosine kinase inhibitor (PTKI), a gleevec-like compound. Due to the role of platelet derived growth factor (PDGF-B) as the most potent mitogen to the HSC during liver fibrosis (3), PTKI is regarded as a potential new drug to stop the fibrogenic process.

The aim of the present thesis is therefore to study the therapeutical approach of targeting antifibrotic drugs specifically to the hepatic stellate cells to improve the liver injury. Three different drug targeting conjugates are discussed in detailed, as well as the screening of its efficacy *in vitro* and *in vivo*.

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2. Bataller,R., Sancho-Bru,P., Gines,P., Lora,J.M., Al Garawi,A., Sole,M., Colmenero,J., Nicolas,J.M., Jimenez,W., Weich,N., Gutierrez-Ramos, J.C., Arroyo,V., and Rodes, J. 2003. Activated human hepatic stellate cells express the renin-angiotensin system and synthesize angiotensin II. *Gastroenterology* **125**:117-125.
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*Modesto, organizado amigo,
trabajador profundo,
déjame darte el ala de mi canto,
el golpe de aire, el salto de mi oda:
ella nace de tu invisible máquina,
ella vuela desde tu infatigable
y encerrado molino,
entraña delicada y poderosa,
siempre viva y oscura.
Mientras el corazón suena
y atrae la partitura de la mandolina,
allí adentro tú filtras y repartes,
separas y divides,
multiplicas y engrasas,
subes y recoges los hilos y los gramos de la vida,
los últimos licores, las íntimas esencias.*

*Viscera submarina, medidor de la sangre,
vives lleno de manos y de ojos,
midiendo y trasvasando
en tu escondida cámara de alquimista.
Amarillo es tu sistema de hidrografía roja,
buzo de la más peligrosa
profundidad del hombre,
allí escondido siempre, sempiterno,
en la usina, silencioso.
Y todo sentimiento o estímulo
creció en tu maquinaria,
recibió alguna gota
de tu elaboración infatigable,
al amor agregaste fuego o melancolía,
una pequeña célula equivocada
o una fibra gastada en tu trabajo
y el aviador se equivoca de cielo,
el tenor se derrumba en un silbido,
al astrónomo se le pierde un planeta.*

*Cómo brillan arriba
los hechiceros ojos de la rosa,
los labios del clavel matutino!
Cómo ríe en el río la doncella!
Y abajo el filtro y la balanza,
la delicada química del hígado,
la bodega de los cambios sutiles:
nadie lo ve o lo canta, pero,
cuando envejece
o desgasta su mortero,
los ojos de la rosa se acabaron,
el clavel marchitó su dentadura
y la doncella no cantó en el río.*

*Austera parte o todo de mí mismo,
abuelo del corazón,
molino de energía:
te canto y temo como si fueras juez,
metro, fiel implacable,
y si no puedo entregarme
amarrado a la pureza,
si el excesivo manjar
o el vino hereditario de mi patria
pretendieron
perturbar mi salud
o el equilibrio de mi poesía,
de ti, monarca oscuro,
distribuidor de mieles y venenos,
regulador de sales,
de ti espero justicia:
Amo la vida: Cúmpleme! Trabaja!
No detengas mi canto.*

*Oda al Hígado. Pablo Neruda,
Premio Nobel de Literatura 1971.*