Effects of EDP-420 on penicillin-resistant and quinolone- and penicillin-resistant pneumococci in the rabbit meningitis model

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Objectives: To test the efficacy of EDP-420, a new ketolide, in experimental pneumococcal meningitis and to determine its penetration into the CSF.

Methods: The experimental rabbit model was used in this study and EDP-420 was tested against a penicillin-resistant and a penicillin- and quinolone-resistant mutant. EDP-420 was also tested against both strains in time-killing assays over 8 h in vitro.

Results: In experimental meningitis, EDP-420 produced a bactericidal activity comparable to the standard regimen based on a combination of vancomycin with ceftriaxone against a penicillin-resistant Streptococcus pneumoniae and a penicillin- and quinolone-resistant S. pneumoniae isolate. The penetration of EDP-420 into inflamed meninges was 38% after an iv injection of 10 mg/kg. The bactericidal activity of EDP-420 was also confirmed in in vitro time-killing assays.

Conclusions: EDP-420 is an efficacious alternative treatment in pneumococcal meningitis, especially when resistant strains are suspected.

Keywords: pneumococcal meningitis, ketolide, resistance

Introduction

The continuous spread of penicillin-resistant pneumococci has significantly complicated the treatment of pneumococcal infections.1 The epidemiological situation is clearly deteriorating worldwide. Based on a recent surveillance study (PROTEKT) including 69 centres in 25 countries, the overall penicillin resistance ranged from 25% to 53%. The highest resistance rates were reported in Asia (53.4%), followed by France (46.2%) and Spain (42.1%), whereas in the Netherlands all strains were susceptible to penicillin.2 In addition, resistance to erythromycin A was even higher (from 31.1% to 79.6%) with the highest rates observed in Asia. In that study, all strains were susceptible to telithromycin. These data emphasize the need for alternative regimens for pneumococcal infections. In a more recent study in the USA, telithromycin retained activity against erythromycin-resistant [mainly mef(A)-positive] strains.3

Based on actual guidelines, the empirical treatment of pneumococcal meningitis consists of a combination of a third-generation cephalosporin with vancomycin, especially when resistant strains are suspected.4 However, the constantly increasing number of pneumococcal isolates resistant to cephalosporins (cefuroxime, cefixime and cefpodoxime with resistance rates ranging from 62% to 68% in Asia) might jeopardize the use of cephalosporins in the empirical treatment of pneumococcal meningitis.2 Furthermore, the unreliable penetration of vancomycin in case of adjunctive steroid therapy might compromise the efficacy of the empirical treatment.5

Little is known about the role of macrolides or ketolides in the treatment of meningitis. To our knowledge, no data are available about the role of telithromycin in pneumococcal meningitis.

The aim of this study was to test EDP-420, a new class of bicyclolide (a bridged bicyclic macrolide) with excellent activity against pneumococci, in an experimental meningitis model using a penicillin-resistant and a penicillin- and quinolone-resistant Streptococcus pneumoniae isolate.
Materials and methods

**Pneumococcal strain**

The pneumococcal strain WB4 (MIC of penicillin is 4 mg/L, serogroup 6) was isolated from the blood of a patient at the Inselspital in Bern and was provided by the Institute for Infectious Diseases at the University of Bern. This strain was grown in Mueller–Hinton broth until an approximate density of $10^8$ cfu/mL and was then diluted to $\sim 10^7$ cfu/mL for in vivo experiments. MICs were determined in liquid culture and growth was controlled after 6, 12 and 24 h because of the spontaneous autolysis of pneumococci. The MICs of ceftriaxone, vancomycin and EDP-420 were 0.5, 0.12 and 0.06 mg/L, respectively. The quinolone-resistant strain was obtained by sequential exposure of the strain WB4 to trovafloxacin. The MICs after this exposure were 4 mg/L for penicillin, 0.5 mg/L for ceftriaxone, 0.12–0.25 mg/L for vancomycin, 4 mg/L for trovafloxacin, 32 mg/L for ciprofloxacin and 0.06 mg/L for EDP-420.

**Experimental meningitis model**

The experimental rabbit meningitis model described by Dacey and Sande⁶ was used in this project. The experimental protocols were approved by the federal veterinary office of the county of Bern. Pathogen-free New Zealand rabbits weighing 2.5–3 kg were provided by the Zentraltierstelle der Medizinischen Fakultät der Universität Bern, where all the experiments were performed.

One day before an experiment, rabbits were anaesthetized by intramuscular injection of a combination of ketamine and xylazine to fit prostheses on their calvarium to facilitate subsequent placement within a stereotactic frame. On the day of the experiment, rabbits received 1.75 g/kg ethylcarbamate (urethane) subcutaneously and then 10 mg/kg pentobarbital iv to induce deep anaesthesia. The animals were fixed in stereotactic frames and a 3.5 inch (25 G) spinal needle was introduced into the cisterna magna. Following the withdrawal of 0.2 mL of CSF, pneumococci (1 × 10^8 cfu in 0.2 mL of saline solution) were injected into the subarachnoid space. After inoculation, the animals were brought back to the cages for the night. The next day, the rabbits were fitted again in the frames using the techniques and anaesthesia described above. A catheter was fixed in the femoral artery for serum sampling. A spinal needle was fixed again in the subarachnoid space. Antibiotics were injected intravenously in standard doses described in the literature⁷,⁸ (100 mg/kg ceftriaxone, 20 mg/kg vancomycin).

EDP-420 initially was administered at a lower dose (10 mg/kg) to determine the penetration into inflamed meninges in order to estimate a proper dose for the larger efficacy study. A higher dose of 30 mg/kg was selected as the estimated dose for efficacy based on EDP-420 pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics described by Maglio⁷ in mice. Vancomycin was given at 0 and 4 h and ceftriaxone at 0 h according to their pharmacokinetic properties. CSF (0.2 mL) was sampled at 0, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 8 h after initiation of therapy. Blood samples were collected at 0.25, 0.5, 1, 2, 3, 4, 4.25, 4.5, 5, 6, 7 and 8 h after initiation of therapy. Each group included untreated controls which received comparable volumes of saline.

**Determination of antibiotic levels and cfu titres**

EDP-420 concentration in serum and CSF was determined by LC/MS/MS (performed by Enanta Pharmaceuticals, Inc.). cfu were measured by serial dilution of CSF, plating on agar plates with 5% sheep blood and incubation overnight at 37°C in 5% CO₂.

**Statistical analysis**

The Student t-test and one-way analysis of variance (Newman–Keuls’s multiple comparisons test) were used for parametric data. Comparison of positive and negative cultures was analysed by the two-tailed Fisher exact test. A $P$ value of <0.05 was considered significant.

**Results**

The serum and CSF kinetics of EDP-420 in infected rabbits at 10 mg/kg is presented in Figure 1 and Table 1. After an iv injection to infected rabbits, EDP-420 serum level peaked at 2.59 mg/L at 0.25 h and decreased rapidly to 0.928 mg/L 2 h after an injection. During the following 6 h, EDP-420 levels decreased more slowly with levels of 0.453 mg/L at the end of the treatment period at 8 h. In the corresponding CSF, EDP-420 concentration increased during the first 2 h and then remained stable until the end of the 8 h treatment period with an average $C_{\text{max}}$ of 0.676 mg/L and an average concentration of 0.479 mg/L at 8 h. The AUC_0–8 values in serum and CSF were 2.48 and 6.53 mg.h/L, respectively. The CSF/serum ratios were 0.28 ± 27 and 0.38 ± 38 for $C_{\text{max}}$ and AUC_0–8, respectively.

When 10 mg/kg was given intravenously to non-infected rabbits, there was almost no penetration (only 1%) across the non-inflamed meninges whereas the serum concentration remained relatively similar to the infected rabbits at the same dose (Table 1). However, at the same dose in infected animals, the concentrations were ~25% and 35% higher for $C_{\text{max}}$ and AUC than in non-infected animals.

An EDP-420 dose of 30 mg/kg given intravenously to infected rabbits resulted in a proportional increase in the serum level from 10 to 30 mg/kg (Figure 2). However, the CSF penetration did not increase at this dose with a $C_{\text{max}}$ of 0.607 mg/L and an AUC_0–8 of 2.75 mg.h/L which are at a similar level to the 10 mg/kg dose (Figure 3 and Table 2).

As known from a previous study,⁷ vancomycin, used in standard doses (20 mg/kg every 4 h, 2 doses) in rabbits, produced CSF levels between 1.74 and 4.0 mg/L and ceftriaxone (100 mg/kg) led to CSF levels between 3.5 and 5.5 mg/L.⁸ During the entire treatment period, EDP-420 CSF levels remained above the MIC leading to CSF/MIC ratios between 5 and 8.

![Figure 1. Serum and CSF concentration of EDP-420 at a dose of 10 mg/kg in rabbits infected with penicillin-resistant S. pneumoniae WB4. Filled squares represent serum levels and filled diamonds represent CSF levels.](image-url)
The antibacterial efficacy of EDP-420 against the two pneumococcal strains is presented in Table 3. In the untreated controls, the growth of bacteria was negligible, $< 1 \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$ over 8 h. Before the initiation of treatment, the bacterial titre was significantly higher in the EDP-420 group ($6.91 \pm 0.41$ EDP-420 versus $5.88 \pm 0.70$ for the standard regimen, $P < 0.004$). Against the penicillin-resistant strain, EDP-420 was bactericidal ($-0.61 \pm 0.10 \Delta \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL-h}$) with a decrease of the viable cell count of $4.80 \log_{10}$ at the end of the treatment period, managing to sterilize the CSF of 3 out of 10 rabbits. The standard regimen based on a combination of vancomycin with ceftriaxone produced a similar antibacterial activity ($-2.45 \log_{10}$ cfu/mL after 8 h). At the end of the experimental period, the CSF in 5 out of 10 rabbits was sterile in the comparator regimen. Using the penicillin- and quinolone-resistant strain, the initial titre was similar in all groups, ranging from $5.41$ to $6.20 \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$. In the untreated controls, the bacterial growth was slightly more pronounced after 8 h ($+1.36 \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$ compared with $+0.55 \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$ for the penicillin-resistant strain). Both treatment groups produced similar antibacterial activity (Table 3) and sterilized the CSF of 5 out of 10 rabbits.

In the \textit{in vitro} time-killing assays, EDP-420 was tested only against the penicillin-resistant strain. With concentrations 5 and $10 \times$ above the MIC, EDP-420 showed bactericidal activity, reducing the bacterial titre by $4.5$ and $5.5 \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$, respectively after 8 h (Figure 4).

**Discussion**

\textit{S. pneumoniae} is one of the leading causes of severe infections, and is responsible for 500 000 cases of pneumonia, 55 000 cases of bacteremia and 6000 cases of meningitis each year in the USA.\textsuperscript{1} However, the introduction of the protein–polysaccharide conjugate vaccine in 2000 in the USA led to a significant decrease of invasive pneumococcal infections, especially in children under 2 years of age.\textsuperscript{10} Since the first report of penicillin-resistant pneumococcal isolates in Papua New Guinea and Australia, increasing resistance rates have been reported worldwide, especially in several countries in Asia.\textsuperscript{11} In some tissues
The good tissue pen-binding to the 50S subunit of bacterial ribosomes and prevention of EDP-420 is based on inhibition of protein synthesis by direct As with all macrolides and ketolides, the mechanism of action of EDP-420 is expected to be effective.14 The very low MIC (0.06 mg/L) against penicillin-resistant pneumococci and the bactericidal activity of EDP-420, demonstrated in time-killing assays in vitro (Figure 4), are two prerequisites qualifying EDP-420 as a new efficacious agent for pneumococcal infections. In our experimental meningitis model, EDP-420 at 1× 30 mg/kg had similar efficacy to the standard regimen of a combination of ceftriaxone (1× 100 mg/kg) with vancomycin (2× 20 mg/kg) used in this animal model of meningitis. Even against erythromycin-resistant strains with MICs between 0.003 and 0.006 mg/L based on a recent study, EDP-420 is expected to be effective.14

In summary, its excellent efficacy in vivo and its good penetration into the CSF warrant further studies of EDP-420 as a potential candidate for the treatment of CNS pneumococcal infections, especially against resistant strains. We are aware that the penicillin-resistant pneumococcal strain used in this study is not ideal and a macrolide-resistant strain would have been more appropriate. On the other hand, this penicillin-resistant strain has been used in multiple studies allowing a precise comparison of the efficacies of the different regimens.

Further efficacy and pharmacokinetics–pharmacodynamics studies are needed. To our knowledge, this preliminary study shows, for the first time, the efficacy of a bicyclolide class antibiotic in experimental meningitis.

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Transparency declarations

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