

TARGETED PROTEINS FOR RECENT AND EMERGING DIABETES MELLITUS RESEARCH

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Article Received on
31 Oct. 2019,

Revised on 21 Nov. 2019,
Accepted on 11 Dec. 2019

DOI: 10.20959/wjpr20201-16464

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ABSTRACT

Diabetes mellitus (DM) is a major degenerative disease in the world today. Several epidemiological and clinical studies indicate a direct relationship between hyperglycemia and long-term complications such as retinopathy, nephropathy, neuropathy and angiopathy, etc. India has today become the diabetic capital of the world with over 20 million diabetics and this number is set to increase to 57 million by 2025. It is ranked seventh among the leading causes of death and is considered third when its fatal complications are taken into account. DM is a multifactorial disease which is characterized by hyperglycemia, lipoprotein abnormalities, raised basal metabolic rate, defect in reactive

oxygen species scavenging enzymes and high oxidative stress-induced damage to pancreatic beta cells. Several drugs are presently available to reduce hyperglycemia in diabetes mellitus. These drugs have side effects and thus searching for a new class of compounds is essential to overcome this problems. Nevertheless, there is continuous search for alternative drugs; management of diabetes without any side effects is still a challenge to the medicinal chemist. Therefore, it is prudent to look for options in novel drugs for diabetes. In this review article, we will review the role of future new chemicals entities able to target the metabolic disorder. Some of these new anti-diabetic treatment strategies may in the future not only control symptoms and modify the natural course of diabetes, but also potentially prevent or cure the disease.

KEYWORDS: Diabetes Mellitus, Metabolic Disorder, Antidiabetics, DPP-IV Inhibitors.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 180 million people worldwide have diabetes. This number is likely to more than double by 2030. Both type 1 and type 2 DM are increasing in frequency. The reason for the increase of type 1 DM is not known. The genetic basis for type 2 DM cannot change in such a short time; thus other contributing factors, including increasing age, obesity, sedentary lifestyle, and low birth weight, must account for this dramatic increase. In addition, type 2 DM is being diagnosed with remarkable frequency in preadolescents and adolescents. Up to 45% of newly diagnosed children and adolescents have type 2 Diabetes Mellitus. The incidence of each type of diabetes varies widely throughout the world. In the United States, about 5% to 10% of all diabetic patients have type 1 DM, with an incidence of 18 per 100,000 inhabitants per year. A similar incidence is found in the United Kingdom. The incidence of type 1 DM in Europe varies with latitude. The highest rates occur in northern Europe (Finland, 43 per 100,000) and the lowest in the south (France and Italy, 8 per 100,000). The one exception to this rule is the small island of Sardinia, close to Italy, which has an incidence of 30 per 100,000. However, even the relatively low incidence rates of type 1 DM in southern Europe are far higher than the rates in Japan.

NEWER APPROACHES

Current Pharmacotherapy

Once a diagnosis of diabetes or metabolic syndrome has been established, then efforts to relieve the symptoms of this disease begin. The initial steps include various life style changes to provide weight control such as dietary modification to include caloric budgeting and reduced intake of high fat and high glycemic index foods, exercise to include aerobic and resistance training to increase metabolic rate and muscle mass (i.e., elevated glucose disposition from blood stream). Failing correction of the signs of metabolic syndrome or diabetes with lifestyle modifications, the patient is placed on oral anti-diabetic pharmacotherapy. Typically monotherapy is the first step, however the trend is to monitor disease progression carefully, provide clear goal-oriented endpoints such as HbA1c below 7.0%, and advance to combination therapy earlier if goals not achieved. Historically injected insulin is reserved for patients who fail to adequately respond to combination therapy or those with safety concerns such as pregnancy, or severe renal, or liver impairment. There is some

movement toward earlier insulin use and insulin in combination with oral agents to try to slow disease progression. Although insulin is the workhorse in late stage disease and a variety of insulin products are available and in development. Oral agents can be classified occurring to their mode of action. Currently there are five mechanistic classes of anti-diabetic agents to include:

1. Carbohydrate modulators which delay intestinal absorption of monosaccharides (i.e., α -glucosidase inhibitors).
2. Insulin secretagogues which increase the exocytosis of insulin from β -cells (sulfonylureas and other Potassium channel stimulators such as repaglinide, nateglinide, etc.).
3. Agents which have direct insulin sensitizing effects on peripheral insulin responsive tissues (biguanides such as metformin; peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma (PPAR γ) full agonists such as rosiglitazone and pioglitazone).
4. Incretin potentiators (exenatide is an incretin analog and sitagliptin is an inhibitor of incretin degradation).
5. Amylin analog (pramlintide).

As physicians assess their patients with regard to their glycemic control, they attempt to match their needs to the unique pharmacodynamic and side effect profiles of the agents mentioned above and described briefly below. How the known drugs work (cellular targets and observed effects) and their appropriate use (indication, contraindication, side effects) is outlined below.^[27]

A. Carbohydrate Modulators (α -Glucosidase Inhibitors)

Alpha-Glucosidase inhibitors such as acarbose competitively inhibit the activity of α -glucosidase enzymes in the brush border of enterocytes lining the intestinal villi. This inhibits the cleaving of di and oligosaccharides to monosaccharides such as glucose prior to absorption. This delays the absorption of glucose and alters the release of glucose-dependent intestinal hormones. These agents are indicated as monotherapy in patients inadequately controlled on non-pharmacological measures. They can be particularly useful in patients who experience marked post-prandial hyperglycemia but otherwise have well controlled basal glucose concentrations.

The typical decrease in HbA1c levels is 0.5–1.0%, however to have this effect the diet must be rich in complex carbohydrates and high doses of drug must be tolerated. The most common side effects are gastrointestinal in nature and include abdominal discomfort and

diarrhoea. α -Glucosidase inhibitors were first used in the early 1990s and owing to high cost and limited efficacy, the use of this class remains low.

B. Insulin Secretagogues (Sulfonylureas and Other K Directed Agents Such as Repaglinide, Nateglinide, etc.)

Sulfonylureas are a class of agents used since the 1960s that bind the sulfonylurea receptor (SUR-1) in β -cells. SUR-1 binding closes K_{ATP} channels lowering the depolarization threshold of the membrane. Depolarization opens Ca^{++} channels increasing intracellular Ca^{++} levels and facilitates insulin release. A second generation of more potent sulfonylureas has been available since the 1990s. These agents are popularly used as first-line therapy in patients that have not achieved adequate glycemic control using non-pharmacological measures. Typically sulfonylureas decrease HbA1c by 1–2%; however responses are variable and are dependent on functional β -cells. Secondary sulfonylurea urea failure (i.e., deterioration of glycemic control over time) along with the most common adverse effect, frequent hypoglycaemia some times requires that they be used in combination therapy with metformin or PPAR γ agonists. The inexpensive cost, the potent glycemic control, and utility in combination therapy make sulfonylureas use very common despite the observation of weight gain in some patients.

Another class that is highly related in terms of mechanism of action is the rapid-acting prandial insulin releasers. Examples include meglitinide, repaglinide, and nateglinide, which bind to an alternative binding site on SUR-1 and have similar effects. These, like the sulfonylureas are very effective at suppressing post-prandial hepatic glucose production and are used appropriately in patients with poor post-prandial glucose control.

C. Insulin Sensitizers (Biguanides and Thiazolidinediones)

Insulin sensitizers have direct pleiotropic effects on insulin responsive tissues, generally enhancing insulin sensitivity in these tissues. Insulin sensitizers improve insulin action at the target tissue level so the requirement for functional β -cells is not as stringent. Nonetheless, these agents can be helpful in early metabolic syndrome patients or insulin dependent diabetics. Biguanides as a class were derived from traditional European herbal therapies of the 1920s involving *Galega officinalis* which was rich in glucose-lowering guanidine derivatives.

Several biguanides were reported in the 1950s to include metformin, phenformin, and buformin. The only remaining biguanide in the US is metformin (approved in 1995). Although the molecular mechanisms of metformin are not completely understood, evidence suggests that AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK; an emerging target reviewed *infra*) is an indirect target for metformin. Unlike sulfonylureas, metformin does not stimulate insulin release and lowers blood glucose without causing overt hypoglycaemia (i.e., anti-hyperglycaemic vs. hypoglycaemic). Metformin exerts insulin sensitizing influences on multiple tissues to include liver (decreased HGP via suppressed GNG and glycogenolysis), fat (decreased FFA production via increased glucose uptake and oxidation), muscle (increased insulin mediated glucose disposal via increased uptake and glycogenesis, decreased fatty acid oxidation), and intestine (increased anaerobic glucose metabolism). Through these pleiotropic effects, metformin counters IR and reduces gluco- and lipotoxicity. Metformin is first-line therapy of choice for overweight and obese patients and is commonly used as monotherapy or in combination.

However, there are some contraindications to its use to include impaired renal function (annual serum creatinine testing is advised), liver disease, or history of metabolic acidosis.

Typically, metformin decreases HbA1c by 1–2% however, this is somewhat dependent upon some degree of endogenous β -cell function (less so than sulfonylureas). Clinical benefits also include lack of hypoglycaemic liability, reduced basal insulin secretion, stabilized to decreased body weight, and improvements in low- and high density lipoproteins (LDL; HDL) levels. Lastly certain vasoprotective properties are alleged based on increased fibrinolysis and reduced anti-thrombotic factor plasminogen activator inhibitor-1 (PAI-1).

The most common adverse effects are abdominal discomfort and diarrhoea in approximately 10%. Due to potent anti-hyperglycaemic effects, other ancillary clinical benefits, utility in combination therapy, and inexpensive cost, metformin is among the most commonly prescribed oral agents.

D. Peroxisome Proliferator-Activated Receptor Gamma (PPAR γ) Agonists (Thiazolidinediones)

TZD improve whole body insulin sensitivity via the activation of PPAR γ in a variety of different tissues. The nuclear receptor PPAR γ is activated by endogenous lipids and prostaglandins, and modulates the transcription of a broad program of genes. The first TZD,

troglitazone was approved in 1997 but was pulled from the market due to hepatotoxicity. Currently rosiglitazone and pioglitazone are the only TZD available in the US. TZD have a variety of metabolic effects in adipose tissue (increased glucose uptake, FA uptake, lipogenesis, and pre-adipocyte differentiation), muscle (increased glucose uptake, glycolysis, and glycogenesis), and liver (decreased GNG, glycogenolysis; increased lipogenesis and glucose uptake). TZD, like metformin, are anti-hyperglycaemic agents which additionally reduce insulin concentrations and lower TG in the blood. However unlike metformin, TZD tend to promote fat synthesis and increased body weight. TZD are available for non-obese and obese patients failing non-pharmacological therapy and can be used as mono- or combination therapy. Side effects of TZD therapy have garnered significant attention in the lay press and include fluid retention which worsens cardiac failure and predisposes to myocardial infarction, and weight gain of 1–4 kg. TZD also induced anaemia, and are contraindicated in active liver disease, heart failure, insulin-dependence (in Europe; rationale is edema is worse), and pregnancy. The anti-hyperglycaemic effects require 2–3 months to reach maximum efficacy which can reduce HbA1c by 0.5–1.5%, particularly if some β -cell function is intact. Also TZD might reduce the risk of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease due to low-grade reductions in inflammation and reduced PAI-1 expression. Despite widely publicized adverse effects and moderate cost, TZD is still widely used. Alternative agents targeting different PPAR isoforms remain active areas of research in pharmaceutical company pipelines.

E. Incretin Potentiators (Exenatide and Sitagliptin)

Incretins are gut-derived peptide hormones that are rapidly secreted in response to meal initiation. The two main incretins in humans, glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide (GIP) and glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) stimulate pancreatic β -cells within 10 min of a meal to secrete insulin. This effect accounts for 50–60% of the total post-prandial insulin response in healthy individuals. The incretin effect is specific to oral ingestion (i.e., not observed with glucose given intravenously) and can be defined as an enhanced insulin response to oral glucose loads when compared to intravenous glucose loads. Incretins are also believed to stimulate β -cell growth and prevent β -cell apoptosis, suggesting that therapeutic agents based on this target may have the ability to alter the natural history of diabetes (i.e., progressive β -cell functional decline). Unfortunately, the response to GIP is blunted in DM-II making the GIP-directed agent's poor pharmacotherapy. However, FDA has approved a couple of incretin directed agents that potentiate GLP-1 receptor (GLP-1R).

F. DPP-IV Inhibitors (Sitagliptin)

The incretin effect is limited by the action of the serine protease DPP-IV which rapidly cleaves GLP-1 and GIP. This hypothesis was supported by the observation in DPP-IV knockout mice in which GIP and GLP-1 levels were increased and demonstrated enhanced insulin secretion after oral glucose challenge. A theoretical advantage of DPP-IV inhibitors is that they would also potentiate the effects of GIP and other incretins. Sitagliptin was the first DPP-IV inhibitor approved in 2006. Sitagliptin significantly lowers blood glucose and HbA_{1c} when used as monotherapy but these effects were not as potent as metformin. However, addition of sitagliptin to metformin or TZD produced significant improvements in HbA_{1c} and resulted in a greater portion of patients reaching HbA_{1c} < 7%. The most common side effects of sitagliptin are gastrointestinal complaints and nasopharyngitis. Sitagliptin is indicated as an adjunct to diet and exercise to improve glycemic control in patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus as monotherapy, or in combination with TZD or metformin.

G. GLP-1 Receptor (GLP-1R) Agonist (Exenatide)

Exenatide is a polypeptide that was originally isolated from the venom of gila monsters and exhibits 53% identity with GLP-1. However it is 10 to 100 fold more potent than endogenous GLP-1 owing to its resistance to degradation by dipeptidyl peptidase-IV (DPP-IV) which typically completely degrades incretins within a few minutes of their secretion. Exenatide is administered via subcutaneous injection twice a day and produces significant reduction in HbA_{1c}, FPG, and post-prandial glucose levels. Exenatide achieved HbA_{1c} levels < 7% (average decline of 0.8%) in 46% of patients that failed metformin with a mean weight loss of 2.8kg. The most common side effect is nausea and occasional hypoglycemia. Exenatide is indicated as adjunctive therapy to improve glycemic control in DM-II patients who are taking metformin, a sulfonylurea, a TZD, or a combination thereof, but have not achieved adequate glycemic control.

An advantage of exenatide or sitagliptin is reduction in HbA_{1c} without weight gain commonly seen with insulin, sulfonylureas, and TZD. Also the prospect of preservation of β -cells function suggests that they may alter the natural history of diabetes, however this long-term effect has not yet been observed clinically. Moreover, these agents provide another option for clinicians to improve glycemic control (including for patients failing combination therapy) and thus forestall progression to insulin dependency.

H. Amylin Analog (Pramlintide)

Amylin, discovered in 1987, is a peptide hormone co-secreted with insulin from the pancreatic β -cells in response to glucose absorption. Amylin binds to a G-protein coupled receptor (GPCR) that suppresses glucagon secretion, slows gastric emptying time, and reduces food intake (i.e., satiating effect). Post-prandial blood glucose is significantly lowered by the cumulative effects of these three activities of amylin. Despite the diversity of effects, amylin acts as a neuroendocrine hormone exerting its metabolic effects centrally. Pramlintide is an equipotent analog (amino acids A25, S28, and S29 are changed to avoid aggregation problems with amylin) that was approved in 2005 for type 1 and 2 diabetics who have not achieved glucose control as an adjunctive to meal time insulin (with or without sulfonylurea and/or metformin). It is administered subcutaneously before each meal of > 250 calories (skip dose if meal skipped) at a location >2 inches from the insulin injection site. The most common side effects are hypoglycemia, nausea and vomiting (particularly with over eating, and anorexia), and the only contraindications are allergy and confirmed diagnosis of gastroparesis. In DM-II patients, pramlintide was associated with 0.5% HbA1c reduction and 0.5– 1.4 Kg body weight reduction. Because pramlintide is an injectable that must be given with each meal, its use is limited to patients who tolerate multiple injections in addition to insulin, and may be suggested for patients whose HbA1c are < 8% but still need further reduction in post-prandial glucose levels and/or have a body mass index of >35 kg/m (i.e., morbidly obese). Also self-monitoring of blood glucose (SMBG) within 1–4 hr after eating is imperative for determining the appropriate preprandial insulin bolus doses and adjusting their timing.

I. Inadequacy of Current Pharmacotherapy

Despite the large number of agents and the mechanistic diversity that they embody, 63% of DM-II patients fail to reach goal HbA1c levels of < 7% as advised by the American Diabetes Association, and are thus at high risk of developing complications. Moreover, almost invariably patients progress through the stages of declining pancreatic function. Consequently there is still an urgent need for novel anti-diabetic agents that affect diverse biological targets.

Current Concepts of Ppar γ Signaling in Diabetes Mellitus

The peroxisome is a sub cellular organelle whose functions extend well beyond the removal of molecular oxygen and later breakdown of hydrogen peroxide, to include glycerolipid synthesis, cholesterol biosynthesis and breakdown, and fatty-acid oxidation. The fact that

proliferation of peroxisomes induced in rodents is associated with a multitude of biochemical changes has been for a long time contrasted with the uncertainty about the underlying mechanisms of peroxisome proliferation. Essentially, the discovery of the first peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor (PPAR) by Issemann and Green was the key to the present understanding of peroxisome proliferation and its growing medical significance.

PPAR γ and Insulin Resistance/Type 2 diabetes

A more pleiotropic role has been recently assigned to PPAR γ as it influences multiple fundamental pathways in the cell with wide-ranging biomedical implications. In particular, studies looking into the molecular basis of insulin resistance have focused on the PPAR γ , as they increase our understanding of the pathophysiology of Type 2 diabetes and also lead to the development of newer anti-diabetic agents. Type 2 diabetes is a major medical problem, the incidence of which is escalating rapidly in developing countries; with India harbouring the largest ever number of diabetics in the world. Insulin resistance is one of the principal defects underlying the development of Type 2 diabetes and Indians are considered to be more insulin-resistant. Additionally, the prevalence of micro and macrovascular complications associated with diabetes is also increasing in epidemic proportions. There is a general consensus that targeting insulin resistance early in the course of the disease may help achieve optimal glycemic control, halt disease progression, and probably even prevent the diabetic complications. This view has been strengthened by the recent trials of thiazolidinedione group of drugs that treat diabetes by increasing the sensitivity of insulin's action, primarily acting through PPAR γ signalling.

Cellular abundance of PPAR γ

Although PPAR γ expression is detected in the nucleus of many cells, only adipose tissue, large intestine and haematopoietic cells express the highest levels of PPAR γ mRNA and protein. Human muscle tissue expresses only trace amounts of PPAR γ under basal conditions. However, PPAR γ mRNA has been identified in skeletal muscle and is found to be increased in obese subjects with insulin resistance. The expression of PPAR γ mRNA or protein or both in adipose tissue changes under the influence of a number of metabolic and hormonal variables. While short-term changes in food intake do not affect the expression of human PPAR γ , hypocaloric diets for a longer period result in its down regulation. In rodents, PPAR γ is down regulated by fasting and insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus whereas its expression is induced by a high-fat diet. Interestingly, PPAR γ expression is highly enriched in

subcutaneous fat in normal weight subjects and its higher expression culminates in visceral adipose tissue in obese subjects. Additional experiments also point out its regulation by insulin, tumour necrosis factor α (TNF α) and glucocorticoids. Moreover, the tissue specific expression of PPAR γ in endothelial and vascular smooth muscle cells suggests their causal and additional influence on vascular tone and elevated blood pressure.

While PPAR γ seems to have its primary effects on adipose tissue, it is a paradox how PPAR γ agonists improve insulin sensitivity in muscle, where glucose uptake maximally occurs. It is important to note that on a whole-body level, adipose tissue is indispensable for glucose homeostasis, as demonstrated by the link between lipoatrophy and insulin resistance, suggesting that the adipogenic activity of PPAR γ contributes to insulin sensitization. In a nutshell, short-term storage of excess energy, secondary to PPAR γ activity, ameliorates insulin sensitivity. Nevertheless, the low abundance of PPAR γ mRNA and protein in muscle tissue poses a question. Is PPAR γ essential for the normal action of insulin and uptake of glucose? According to Auwerx, minute quantities of PPAR γ in muscle might, however, be sufficient or alternatively might be induced during treatment with thiazolidinedione, leading to an eventual direct PPAR γ mediated response of the muscle to these insulin sensitizers.

CONCLUSION

Newer approaches mentioned in this article have been directed at improving currently available anti-diabetic drugs and finding the new compounds. The role of future new chemical entities will be to target the metabolic disorder through multi-facet mechanisms. Some of these new anti-diabetic treatment strategies may in the future not only control symptoms and modify the natural course of diabetes, but also potentially prevent or cure the disease.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors are thankful and acknowledge the support given by D. Subodh Singh, Chairman NRI Institute of Research & Technology Bhopal, M.P India for providing Facilities of this study.

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