Activation of the Anticancer Prodrugs Cyclophosphamide and Ifosfamide: Identification of Cytochrome P450 2B Enzymes and Site-Specific Mutants with Improved Enzyme Kinetics

Chong-Sheng Chen, Jack T. Lin, Kendrick A. Goss, You-ai He, James R. Halpert, and David J. Waxman

Division of Cell and Molecular Biology, Department of Biology, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts (C.-S.C., J.T.L., K.A.G., D.J.W.); and Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, Texas (Y.H., J.R.H.)

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ABSTRACT

Cyclophosphamide (CPA) and ifosfamide (IFA) are oxazaphosphorine anticancer prodrugs metabolized by two alternative cytochrome P450 (P450) pathways, drug activation by 4-hydroxylation and drug inactivation by N-dechloroethylation, which generates the neurotoxic and nephrotoxic byproduct chloroacetaldehyde. CPA and IFA metabolism catalyzed by P450s 2B1, 2B4, 2B5, and seven site-specific 2B1 mutants was studied in a reconstituted Escherichia coli expression system to identify residues that contribute to the unique activities and substrate specificities of these enzymes. The catalytic efficiency of CPA 4-hydroxylation by rat P450 2B1 was 10- to 35-fold higher than that of rabbit P450 2B4 or 2B5. With IFA, 50% of metabolism proceeded via N-dechloroethylation for 2B1 and 2B4, whereas CPA N-dechloroethylation corresponded to only 3% of total metabolism (2B1) or was absent (2B4, 2B5). Improved catalytic efficiency of CPA and IFA 4-hydroxylation was obtained upon substitution of 2B1 Ile-114 by Val, and replacement of Val-363 by Leu or Ile selectively suppressed CPA N-dechloroethylation by 90%. P450 2B1-V367A, containing the Ala replacement found in 2B5, exhibited only 10% of wild-type 2B1 activity for both substrates. Canine P450 2B11, which has Val-114, Leu-363, and Val-367, was therefore predicted to be a regioselective CPA 4-hydroxylase with high catalytic efficiency. Indeed, P450 2B11 was 7- to 8-fold more active as a CPA and IFA 4-hydroxylase than 2B1, exhibited a highly desirable low K_m (80–160 M), and catalyzed no CPA N-dechloroethylation. These findings provide insight into the role of specific P450 2B residues in oxazaphosphorine metabolism and pave the way for gene therapeutic applications using P450 enzymes with improved catalytic activity toward these anticancer prodrug substrates.

The oxazaphosphorine cyclophosphamide (CPA) and its structural isomer ifosfamide (IFA) are DNA-alkylating agents commonly used in cancer chemotherapy (Sladek, 1994). These anticancer agents are administered as prodrugs that are activated by a liver cytochrome P450-catalyzed 4-hydroxylation reaction that yields active, cytotoxic metabolites. Several liver-expressed P450 enzymes catalyze this activation reaction; the phenobarbital-inducible rat P450 enzyme 2B1 (Clarke and Waxman, 1989) and its human counterpart 2B6 (Chang et al., 1993; Huang et al., 2000) show particularly high CPA 4-hydroxylase activity compared with other P450 forms. The primary metabolite, 4-OH-CPA or 4-OH-IFA, equilibrates with the ring-open aldophosphamide and undergoes β-elimination to yield the therapeutically active, DNA cross-linking phosphoramide mustard and the byproduct acrolein (4-hydroxylation pathway). CPA and IFA are also subject to an alternative, P450-catalyzed side chain oxidation that generates therapeutically inactive N-dechloroethylated metabolites and the neurotoxic and nephrotoxic byproduct chloroacetaldehyde (CAA; N-dechloroethylation pathway) (Furlanut and Franceschi, 2003).

In patients with cancer, CPA and IFA are primarily activated in the liver, a tissue rich in P450 activity, followed by transport of the activated metabolites to the tumor via blood flow. However, these activated metabolites also gain entry to normal body tissues, where they may induce host toxicity. These and related issues may be circumvented using a P450-
based gene therapy strategy whereby tumor cells are sensitized to CPA and IFA by introduction of cDNA coding for P450 2B1 or 2B6 using a suitable viral or nonviral vector (Chen and Waxman, 2002). This gene therapy has the potential to improve therapeutic efficacy by increasing tumor cell kill at lower systemic drug doses and with reduced host tissue toxicity. To take full advantage of this potential, it will be important to optimize the system through the discovery or design of P450 enzymes with increased activity at pharmacologically relevant drug levels. Desirable enzymes would display increased catalytic efficiency ($V_{\text{max}}/K_m$) for 4-hydroxylation of CPA and IFA. P450 2B variants with a lower $K_m$ would be especially desirable, in view of the high $K_m$ values (~0.5–2 mM) of P450s 2B1 and 2B6 with CPA and IFA as substrates (Weber and Waxman, 1993; Huang et al., 2000) and the comparatively low peak plasma drug concentrations (~100–200 μM) found in treated patients (Sladek, 1994; Furlanut and Franceschi, 2003). Decreasing metabolic flux through the N-dechloerythyl pathway would also be desirable, because the metabolic products of this pathway are neurotoxic and nephrotoxic and are generally believed to be devoid of antitumor activity (however, see Borner et al., 2000).

In recent years, there have been numerous examples of rational redesign of the substrate specificity of bacterial P450s through substitution of individual, or combinations of, active site residues identified by X-ray crystallography (Walsh et al., 2000; Li et al., 2001). In parallel with these advances, structure-function studies of mammalian P450 enzymes have revealed how substitutions of residues that map to the active sites of bacterial P450s and the mammalian enzyme P450 2C5 can enhance existing activities or confer new specificities (Domanski and Halpert, 2001). Many of these residues belong to five of the six substrate-recognition sites (SRSs) for P450 family 2 enzymes that were proposed on the basis of multiple sequence alignments and analogy with P450 101 (Gotoh, 1992). In the case of the P450 2B enzymes, residues 114, 363, and 367 account for many of the functional differences between rat 2B1 and 2B2 (Strobel and Halpert, 1997), rabbit 2B4 and 2B5 (He et al., 1996; Szklarz et al., 1996), rat 2B1 and human 2B6 (Domanski et al., 1999), and rat 2B1 and canine 2B11 (Hasler et al., 1994). These functional alterations can frequently be explained using three-dimensional homology models based on the structures of bacterial P450s (Szklarz and Halpert, 1997) or P450 2C5 (Wester et al., 2003). Most recently, the progesterone hydroxylation specificity of P450 2B1 was converted to that of P450 2C5 by simultaneous substitution of seven active site residues with the corresponding residues of 2C5, as predicted by a 2B1 homology model based on the structure of 2C5 (Kumar et al., 2003).

In the present study, rat 2B1, rabbit 2B4 and 2B5, and seven site-specific mutants of P450 2B1 at positions 114 (SRS-1), 363, and 367 (SRS-5) were characterized with respect to their steady-state kinetic properties using the anticancer prodrug substrates CPA and IFA. The data obtained identify these three SRS residues as important determinants of the catalytic activity and regioselectivity of oxazaphosphorine metabolism and led to the discovery of P450 2B11 as a highly efficient and regioselective catalyst of CPA 4-hydroxylation.

### Materials and Methods

**Materials.** MOPS, δ-aminolevulinic acid, CHAPS, dilauroylphosphatidylcholine, EDTA, DTT, CPA, NADPH, adenosine, and 1-α,6-ethenoadenosine hydrochloride were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO). CAA [50% (w/v) solution in water], 3-aminophenol, and hydroxylamine HCl were purchased from Aldrich Chemical Co. (Milwaukee, WI). HPLC-grade methanol was purchased from J. T. Baker (Phillipsburg, NJ). 4-Hydroperoxy-IFA and 4-hydroperoxy-CPA were provided by ASTA Pharma (Bielefeld, Germany). CPA was obtained from the Drug Synthesis and Chemistry Branch of the National Cancer Institute (Bethesda, MD).

**Construction of P450 2B1 Mutants and Expression in Escherichia coli.** Construction of P450 2B1 mutants I114V, V363L, V367A, and V367A was described previously (He et al., 1995). P450 2B1–V363I was produced using a one-step PCR method. A mutagenic primer (GAAGATCTTATCCCTATTGGAG) containing a BglII site (underlined) was used with a pKK233-2 vector-specific 3′-primer in a PCR amplification reaction. The P450 2B1 mutant was then constructed in pKK233-2 (Amersham Biosciences Inc., Piscataway, NJ) by replacing a 380-base pair BglII fragment from wild-type P450 2B1 with the corresponding mutated PCR fragment. To construct the P450 2B1 double mutants, I114V/363L and I114V/363L, a BglII fragment of pKK-2B1–I114V was replaced with the corresponding fragment from pKK-2B1–V363L or pKK-2B1–V363I. All mutants generated in this study were verified by DNA sequencing to ensure the presence of the desired changes and the absence of extraneous mutations (Protein Chemistry Laboratory, University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, TX). P450 2B1 mutants and wild-type P450 2B1 enzymes 2B1, 2B4, 2B5, and 2B11 cloned into pKK233-2 (John et al., 1994; Szklarz et al., 1996) were expressed in E. coli strain Top3α as described previously (He et al., 1995). Briefly, Top3α cells were grown at 37°C with 250-rpm shaking in 250 ml of liquid Terrific Broth media to midlog phase before adding isopropyl 1-thio-β-D-galactopyranoside (final concentration of 1 mM) and δ-aminolevulinic acid (final concentration of 80 μg/ml). Cells were harvested after an additional 72-h incubation at 37°C with 190-rpm shaking. CHAPS-solubilized membranes were prepared as described previously (John et al., 1994).

**Rat NADPH-Cytochrome P450 Reductase Expression and Purification.** cDNA encoding rat NADPH-P450 reductase was kindly provided by Dr. Todd Porter (College of Pharmacy, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY). P450 reductase was expressed from a T7 expression plasmid [pET29α(+)Novagen, Madison, WI] and purified as described previously (Harlow and Halpert, 1997).

**Reconstitution of E. coli-Expressed P450s.** E. coli-derived P450 membrane fractions (10 pmol of P450 at 1–5 nmol of P450/mL) were mixed with 3 μl of freshly sonicated dilauroylphosphatidylcholine solution (1 μg/μl) and purified rat liver P450 reductase (~20 pmol) in 100 mM MOPS buffer, pH 7.3, containing 0.2 mM DTT, 1 mM EDTA, 0.5% CHAPS detergent, and 20 μl of 100 mM KPi buffer, pH 7.4, to give a final volume of 45 μl (20–40 mM MOPS, 44 mM KPi, pH 7.4, 0.25–0.5 mM EDTA, 40–80 μM DTT, and 0.1–0.2% CHAPS). The reconstituted mixture was then incubated at room temperature for 10 min and kept on ice before enzymatic analysis (Shimada and Yamazaki, 1998).

**Metabolism of CPA and IFA.** Reconstituted P450 samples (45 μl) prepared as described above were added to 30 μl of 100 mM KPi, pH 7.4, containing various concentrations of CPA or IFA (final assay concentrations of CPA and IFA were 0.3, 0.5, 0.8, 1.5, 3, 5, and 7 mM). Samples were preincubated for 4 min at 37°C. Reactions were then initiated with 25 μl of 4 mM NADPH to give a final volume of 100 μl. Samples were incubated for a further 15 min at 37°C, at which time the reactions were stopped by the sequential addition of 40 μl of 5.5% ZnSO$_4$, 40 μl of saturated barium hydroxide, and 20 μl of 0.01 M HCl on ice. Samples were vortexed and then centrifuged at 14,000 rpm for 15 min. Two 50-μl aliquots were removed from the supernatant of each sample and placed in separate screw-cap Ep-
TABLE 1
Steady-state kinetics analysis: CPA metabolism catalyzed by P450s 2B1, 2B4, and 2B5

| P450 | 4-Hydroxylation | | N-Dechloroethylation | | % N-deCl
<table>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K&lt;sub&gt;m&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>V&lt;sub&gt;max&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>V&lt;sub&gt;max&lt;/sub&gt;/K&lt;sub&gt;m&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<td>K&lt;sub&gt;m&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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<td>mM</td>
<td>mol/min/mol</td>
<td>mol/min/mol</td>
<td></td>
<td>mM</td>
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<tr>
<td>2B&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.45 ± 0.24</td>
<td>35.9 ± 6.2</td>
<td>29.4 ± 3.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.65 ± 0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;&lt;sub&gt;4&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.28 ± 0.37</td>
<td>13.5 ± 2.9</td>
<td>2.6 ± 0.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>N.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;&lt;sub&gt;5&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.17 ± 1.82</td>
<td>2.8 ± 0.7</td>
<td>0.7 ± 0.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>N.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.D., not determined; catalytic activity at or below limit of detection.

<sup>a</sup> N-dechloroethylation as a percentage of total metabolism at V<sub>max</sub>.

<sup>b</sup> Data are based on n = 4 independent experiments (4-hydroxylation) or n = 3 (N-dechloroethylation).

<sup>c</sup> Data are based on n = 2 independent experiments.

Results

Profiles of CPA and IFA Metabolism by P450 2B1, 2B4, and 2B5. Previous studies of panels of rat and human P450 enzymes have established that rat P450 2B1 (Clarke and Waxman, 1989) and human P450 2B6 (Chang et al., 1993; Huang et al., 2000) are the most active catalysts of CPA 4-hydroxylation in each species. We therefore investigated whether P450 2B4 and 2B5, which are well studied rabbit P450 2B enzymes, also display high activity with CPA as substrate. Steady-state kinetic analysis showed that 4-hydroxylation was the predominant pathway of CPA metabolism catalyzed by all three mammalian P450 2B enzymes (Table 1). The alternative, N-dechloroethylation pathway corresponded to only ∼3% of total CPA metabolism in the case of...
2B1 and was undetectable with 2B4 and 2B5 (Table 1). 2B1 displayed a $V_{\text{max}}$ value (36 mol/min/mol of P450) that was 2.7-fold higher than 2B4 and 13-fold higher than 2B5. In contrast to CPA, IFA was metabolized by 2B1 and 2B4 by both pathways, with 4-hydroxylation/N-dechloroethylation product ratios of $\sim 1:1$ at $V_{\text{max}}$ (Table 2). P450s 2B4 and 2B5 exhibited 10- to 20-fold lower catalytic efficiencies ($V_{\text{max}}/K_m$) than 2B1 for IFA 4-hydroxylation, and 2B5 was unable to catalyze IFA N-dechloroethylation (Table 2).

Impact of Site-Specific P450 2B1 Mutations on CPA and IFA Metabolic Activities. We next investigated whether site-directed mutagenesis could be applied to improve the catalytic properties of P450 2B1 toward CPA and IFA, either by increasing 4-hydroxylation or by decreasing metabolism by N-dechloroethylation. We focused our efforts on three 2B1 active site residues, Ile-114 in SRS-1 and Val-363 and Val-367 in SRS-5, based on a large body of earlier studies showing the critical importance of the residues at these positions in dictating substrate specificity differences among P450 2B subfamily members (Hasler et al., 1994; He et al., 1996; Szklarz et al., 1996; Strobel and Halpert, 1997; Domanski et al., 1999). Seven site-specific mutants were prepared and expressed in E. coli. Kinetic analysis of P450 2B1-I114V, chosen on the basis of a 4-fold increase in progesterone hydroxylation activity and an altered androstenedione metabolite profile (He et al., 1995), revealed a $\sim 3$-fold lower $K_m$ than wild-type P450 2B1 using CPA as substrate (Fig. 1A). Decreases in $K_m$ were also seen with the double mutants I114V/V363L and I114V/V363I, where Val-363 was additionally replaced by either Leu (found in P450 2B6) or Ile (found in P450 2B4) (also see below). Decreases in $K_m$ of up to 4-fold were also seen for IFA with all three I114V-containing mutants in both metabolic pathways (Figs. 1D and 2D). However, these changes in $K_m$ were accompanied by decreases in $V_{\text{max}}$ for CPA and IFA 4-hydroxylation in all three proteins that contained the I114V substitution (up to a 60–75% decrease seen with I114V/V363L). Consequently, the overall improvement in catalytic efficiency was modest (a $\sim 2$-fold increase for CPA with I114V and 2.5-fold increase for IFA with I114V/V363I) (Fig. 1, C and F).

We next investigated the impact of mutating the P450 2B1 SRS-5 residue Val-363 to Leu, Ile, or Ala. The V363L and...
V363I mutants showed modest differences in $V_{\text{max}}$ for CPA 4-hydroxylation compared with wild-type enzyme [≈2-fold increase (V363I) or decrease (V363L); Fig. 1B]. Interestingly, however, both mutant 2B1 proteins totally lacked CPA N-dechloroethylation activity (Fig. 2B; Table 3). This loss of CPA N-dechloroethylation was also seen with the I114V/V363L double mutant. In contrast, with IFA as substrate, the V363L and V363I mutants showed no decrease in IFA N-dechloroethylation at $V_{\text{max}}$ (Fig. 2D). Moreover, because of the decrease in $K_m$ (Fig. 2D), the overall catalytic efficiency of IFA N-dechloroethylation increased significantly in the case of I114V/V363L, I114V/V363I, and V363I (Fig. 2F). V363L showed a markedly reduced $V_{\text{max}}$ for IFA 4-hydroxylation, corresponding to ~10% of wild-type 2B1 (Fig. 1E) with no change in IFA N-dechloroethylation, such that overall metabolic flux via N-dechloroethylation increased from 52 to 90% of total metabolism (Table 3). A similar trend in IFA 4-hydroxylation was seen with the I114V/V363L double mutant.

Interestingly, although the replacement of V363 with Leu or Ile abolished CPA N-dechloroethylation, in the case of the V363A mutant, the $V_{\text{max}}$ for this reaction increased 4-fold and the $K_m$ for CPA decreased ~2-fold, resulting in an 8-fold overall increase in catalytic efficiency (Fig. 2, A–C). Correspondingly, metabolism of CPA via the N-dechloroethylation pathway increased from 3 to ~20% of total metabolism (Table 3).

Finally, substitution of a second P450 2B1 SRS-5 residue, Val-367, with the Ala found in 2B5 markedly decreased metabolism of CPA and IFA by both metabolic pathways. The $V_{\text{max}}$ for CPA 4-hydroxylation was decreased to 8% of wild-type P450 2B1, and CPA N-dechloroethylation was undetectable (Figs. 1B and 2B). Similarly, the $V_{\text{max}}$ values for IFA 4-hydroxylation and N-dechloroethylation were decreased to 11 and 2.2% of wild-type 2B1, respectively (Figs. 1E and 2E).

**P450 2B11 Is a High-Efficiency, Low $K_m$ Catalyst of CPA and IFA Activation.** The mutagenesis studies described above indicate that the Ile-114-to-Val substitution is beneficial, insofar as it decreases the $K_m$ of P450 2B1 for CPA and IFA. The Val-363-to-Leu and Val-363-to-Ile substitutions are also beneficial, insofar as they suppress N-dechlo-
directed mutagenesis targeting three active site residues was carried out with P450 2B1. Striking differences among the enzymes were found in terms of $V_{\text{max}}$ and/or $K_m$ for the 4-hydroxylation pathway, which generates active, cancer chemotherapeutic metabolites. Substantial differences were also seen in the N-dechloroethylation pathway, which inactivates these drugs and generates metabolites with neurotoxic and nephrotoxic activity. Incorporation of a Val residue at position 114 in 2B1 was found to lower the $K_m$ for both pathways of CPA and IFA oxidation, and introduction of a Leu or Ile at position 363, or Ala at position 367, resulted in 100% regioselectivity for CPA 4-hydroxylation. The metabolite profiles of P450 2B1-V363L with CPA and IFA were very similar to those of human P450 2B6 (Huang et al., 2000). This human enzyme shares Ile-114 and Val-367 with 2B1 but has Leu at position 363. Based on these observations, it was predicted that canine P450 2B11, which incorporates two of the desired “mutations”, Val-114 and Leu-363, would be a highly efficient and regioselective catalyst of the therapeutically beneficial 4-hydroxylation pathway.

Indeed, P450 2B11 exhibited a 9-fold lower $K_m$ for CPA 4-hydroxylation than 2B1 with similar $V_{\text{max}}$, such that the catalytic efficiency ($V_{\text{max}}/K_m$) was 7-fold higher than 2B1. In addition, as predicted, 2B11 did not metabolize CPA by the undesirable N-dechloroethylation pathway. In the case of IFA, the decrease in $K_m$ was 20-fold compared with 2B1 and the increase in $V_{\text{max}}$/$K_m$ for 4-hydroxylation 8.5-fold. To our knowledge, this represents the first example where a species difference in P450 metabolic profile was correctly predicted based on the identification of active site residues. Interestingly, although improved, the catalytic efficiency for CPA 4-hydroxylation exhibited by P450 2B11-I114V/V363L was still 5-fold lower than that of P450 2B11, suggesting the importance of yet additional residues. One attractive possibility is amino acid 290, which is Ile in 2B1 and Asp in 2B11. This residue contributes to the unique ability of 2B11 to hydroxylate certain polychlorinated biphenyls (Hasler et al., 1994) and to the distinct steroid metabolite profiles that are characteristic of P450s 2B1 and 2B11 (Harlow et al., 1997).

In terms of in vitro/in vivo correlations, the high catalytic efficiency of P450 2B11 for CPA 4-hydroxylation coupled with the high constitutive expression of this enzyme in canine liver (Duignan et al., 1987) may also explain why the dose of the high constitutive expression of this enzyme in canine liver (Duignan et al., 1987) may also explain why the dose of CPA used in treating lymphomas and carcinomas in dogs is generally lower than the standard treatment dose in humans (Dorr and Von Hoff, 1994) versus 500-1500 mg CPA/m$^2$ per treatment course in humans (Dorr and Von Hoff, 1994).

Undesirable changes seen with some of the 2B1 mutants

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**TABLE 3**

N-dechloroethylation of CPA and IFA catalyzed by P450 2B1 and its site-specific mutants

Data for P450 2B1 are based on Tables 1 and 2 ($n$ = 3 independent experiments, except as noted in Fig. 1). Other data are based on Figs. 1 and 2 ($n$ = 3 independent experiments).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enzyme</th>
<th>$V_{\text{max}}$</th>
<th>$V_{\text{max}}/K_m$</th>
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<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>3.2 ± 1.6</td>
<td>52.7 ± 2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1114V</td>
<td>4.8 ± 0.4</td>
<td>46.0 ± 14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1114V/V363L</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>76.8 ± 4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1114V/V363I</td>
<td>1.6 ± 1.0</td>
<td>52.1 ± 5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V363L</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>90.3 ± 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V363I</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>74.0 ± 1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V363A</td>
<td>20.6 ± 7.8</td>
<td>57.0 ± 15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V367A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27.1 ± 9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ N-dechloroethylation as a percentage of total metabolism at $V_{\text{max}}$.

$^b$ Wild-type and site-specific mutants of P450 2B1, as indicated.

**TABLE 4**

P450 2B11: steady-state kinetics analysis of CPA and IFA metabolism

Data are based on $n$ = 2 independent experiments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substrate</th>
<th>$K_m$ (mM)</th>
<th>$V_{\text{max}}$ (mol/min/mol P450)</th>
<th>$V_{\text{max}}/K_m$ (mol/min/mol P450)</th>
<th>$V_{\text{max}}$ (mol/min/mol P450/mM)</th>
<th>$V_{\text{max}}/K_m$ (mol/min/mol P450/mM)</th>
<th>$% \text{N-deCl}^a$</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>0.16 ± 0.01</td>
<td>28.2 ± 0.2</td>
<td>174.7 ± 8.4</td>
<td>7.8 ± 0.2</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>N.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFA</td>
<td>0.08 ± 0.02</td>
<td>5.3 ± 0.5</td>
<td>66.8 ± 9.1</td>
<td>5.4 ± 0.2</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>N.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.D., not determined; catalytic activity at or below limit of detection.

$^a$ N-dechloroethylation as a percentage of total metabolism at $V_{\text{max}}$. 

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**Discussion**

This study was undertaken in an effort to identify or design P450 2B enzymes that exhibit improved catalytic activity or substrate specificity with respect to activation of the anticancer prodrugs CPA and IFA. Initially, three naturally occurring P450 2B proteins were characterized, and site-specific mutants occurring P450 2B proteins were characterized, and site-directed mutagenesis targeting three active site residues was carried out with P450 2B1. Striking differences among the enzymes were found in terms of $V_{\text{max}}$ and/or $K_m$ for the 4-hydroxylation pathway, which generates active, cancer chemotherapeutic metabolites. Substantial differences were also seen in the N-dechloroethylation pathway, which inactivates these drugs and generates metabolites with neurotoxic and nephrotoxic activity. Incorporation of a Val residue at position 114 in 2B1 was found to lower the $K_m$ for both pathways of CPA and IFA oxidation, and introduction of a Leu or Ile at position 363, or Ala at position 367, resulted in 100% regioselectivity for CPA 4-hydroxylation. The metabolite profiles of P450 2B1-V363L with CPA and IFA were very similar to those of human P450 2B6 (Huang et al., 2000). This human enzyme shares Ile-114 and Val-367 with 2B1 but has Leu at position 363. Based on these observations, it was predicted that canine P450 2B11, which incorporates two of the desired “mutations”, Val-114 and Leu-363, would be a highly efficient and regioselective catalyst of the therapeutically beneficial 4-hydroxylation pathway.

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Undesirable changes seen with some of the 2B1 mutants
investigated here included an increase in CPA N-dechloroethyl- 
ylation (V363A) and a substantial decrease in overall CPA 
and IFA metabolic activity (V367A). Thus, introduction into 
P450 2B1 of the Val-367-to-Ala substitution found in rabbit 
2B5 recapitulated the low CPA and IFA 4-hydroxylase activ-
ity of that enzyme. P450 2B1-V367A is not inactive, however, 
as shown by the high steroid hydroxylase activity that it 
displays, albeit with altered stereo- and regiospecificity com-
pared with wild-type 2B1 (Szklarz et al., 1996). Moreover, 
with IFA, none of the P450 2B1 mutants displayed increased 
partitioning in favor of 4-hydroxylation. Indeed, in the case 
of the V363L, V363I, and I114V/V363L mutants, IFA N-dechlo-
roethylation was further increased, from ~50% (wild-type 
2B1) to 74 to 90% of total metabolism. In the case of V363L, 
the alteration in overall metabolic profile largely reflects a 
90% decrease in \( V_{\text{max}} \) for IFA 4-hydroxylation. P450 2B1- 
V367A exhibited the lowest percent of IFA N-dechloroethy-
lation (27%), consistent with the absence of this pathway in 
the case of P450 2B5. Thus, in addition to providing new 
insights into the structural basis for species differences in 
CPA and IFA metabolism, the site-specific 2B1 mutants 
characterized here yielded intriguing findings as to how the 
two isomeric prodrug substrates orient themselves in P450 
2B active sites.

With IFA as substrate, the large chloroethyl side chain at 
position N-3 of the oxazaphosphorine may inhibit substrate 
binding in an orientation that leads to hydroxylation at the 
adjacent C-4 carbon (4-hydroxylation). With CPA as sub-
strate, however, both N-chloroethyl side chains are linked to 
the same exocyclic nitrogen atom. This may, in part, explain 
why CPA is preferentially metabolized by 4-hydroxylation by 
many liver P450s, whereas IFA is actively metabolized by 
both pathways. Previous efforts to examine CPA binding to 
P450 2B1 using a homology model based on a P450 102 
template suggested that 2B1 residues 114 and 363 play a key 
role in orienting the substrate (Lewis and Lake, 1997), in 
agreement with our experimental results. However, it was 
not feasible to apply molecular modeling based on estab-
lished mammalian P450 structures (Wester et al., 2003; 
Williams et al., 2003) to obtain a more detailed understanding 
of the changes in CPA and IFA metabolite profiles seen with 
the various P450 2B1 mutants (data not shown). CPA and 
IFA are both chiral compounds, such that when the race-
mates are used, as in the present study and in the clinic, each 
enantior may undergo both 4-hydroxylation and N-dechlo-
roethylation. Moreover, in the case of the racemic IFA sub-
strate, the CAA measured as a monitor of N-dechloroethyl-
lation can be derived by four different enzymatic pathways, 
\((R)\)- and \((S)\)-IFA 2-dechloroethylase, and \((R)\)- and \((S)\)-IFA 
3-dechloroethylase (Granvil et al., 1999; Roy et al., 1999).

The recent elucidation of a high-resolution X-ray crystal 
structure of ligand-free P450 2B4 (Scott et al., 2003) 
with ongoing work on a ligand-bound structure bodes well for 
structure-based approaches to the design of even more efficient and 
selective catalysts of oxazaphosphorine 
activation than P450 2B1.

The present identification of P450 enzymes with enhanced 
efficiency for activation of CPA and IFA, such as P450 2B1 
and some of the P450 2B1 mutants studied here, may lead to 
improvements in P450-based gene therapies for cancer treat-
ment. P450 prodrug activation-based gene therapies use vi-
ral or nonviral vectors to deliver a prodrug-activating P450 
cDNA to tumor cells in vivo, which thereby acquire the ca-
pability to activate prodrugs, such as CPA and IFA, locally 
within the tumor. This circumvents the need for liver P450-
catalyzed prodrug activation and enhances the killing of tu-
mor cells in a selective manner (Chen and Waxman, 2002).

This concept has been validated using P450s 2B1 and 2B6 in 
a variety of in vivo tumor models (Ichikawa et al., 2001; Kan 
et al., 2001; Jounaidi and Waxman, 2004) and has shown 
promise in early stage clinical trials (Lohr et al., 2001). P450 
2C enzymes characterized by low \( K_m \) values for CPA and IFA 
(Chang et al., 1997) have also been evaluated, but their use is 
limited by low \( V_{\text{max}} \) values and hence low overall activity 
compared with P450 2B enzymes at expression levels that 
can be achieved in tumor cells (Jounaidi et al., 1998; Jounaidi 
and Waxman, 2004). Low \( K_m \) enzymes with high \( V_{\text{max}} \) values, 
such as P450 2B1 and the I114V-containing site-specific 
variants of P450 2B1 described here, may facilitate the in-
trduction of P450 2B-based gene therapy applications using 
low prodrug doses, such as low-dose, metronomic CPA treat-
ment (Man et al., 2002). In this way, liver P450-catalyzed 
prodrug activation, and its associated systemic toxicity, 
may be reduced while preserving intratumoral prodrug activation 
and its anticancer effect. Further studies will be required to 
determine the ultimate clinical effectiveness of this ap-
proach.

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