



Synthesis of novel 1*H*-Pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine derivatives as DYRK 1A/1B inhibitors

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ABSTRACT

As DYRK1A and 1B inhibitors, 1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine derivatives were synthesized. Mostly, 3-aryl-5-arylamino compounds (**6**) and 3,5-diaryl compounds (**8** and **9**) were prepared and especially, 3,5-diaryl compound **8** and **9** showed excellent DYRK1B inhibitory enzymatic activities with IC₅₀ values of 3–287 nM. Among them, 3-(4-hydroxyphenyl)-5-(3,4-dihydroxyphenyl)-1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine (**8h**) exhibited the highest inhibitory enzymatic activity (IC₅₀ = 3 nM) and cell proliferation inhibitory activity (IC₅₀ = 1.6 μM) towards HCT116 colon cancer cells. Also compound **8h** has excellent inhibitory activities in patient-derived colon cancer organoids model as well as in 3D spheroid assay model of SW480 and SW620. The docking study supported that we confirmed that compound **8h** binds to DYRK1B through various hydrogen bonding interactions and hydrophobic interactions.

DYRK (Dual-specificity tyrosine phosphorylation-regulated kinases) belongs to CMGC group, which includes cyclin-dependent kinases (CDKs), mitogen-activated protein kinases (MAPKs), glycogen synthase kinases (GSKs) and CDC-like kinases (CLKs). DYRK family is constituted with DYRK1A, DYRK1B, DYRK2, DYRK3, and DYRK4.^{1,2} DYRK1A is one of the most studied DYRK family and upregulation of DYRK1A^{3–6} in brain is related with several neurodegenerative diseases including Down syndrome^{7,8} and Alzheimer's disease.^{9–11} The relevant diseases with DYRK1A were expanded to diverse cancers^{12–14} such as lung cancer, cervical cancer, colorectal cancer, melanoma, and acute myeloid leukemia. Recently, it was reported that DYRK1A is engaged in human pancreatic β-cell proliferation,^{15–19} which led it a potential therapeutic target for diabetes.^{20,21} The DYRK1B is associated with cancer biology and muscle differentiation, and overexpressed in many types of cancer cells such as glioblastoma,²² breast cancer,²³ pancreatic cancer,²⁴ and ovarian cancer.²⁵ Also DYRK1B contributes to progress cell cycle from G0/G1 to S phase, therefore, inhibition of DYRK1B reactivates cancer

cells from quiescent state.^{26,27} In this reason, the development of DYRK1B inhibitors are mostly concentrated on the treatment of oncolytic diseases (Fig. 1).²⁸ So far several DYRK1A and 1B inhibitors have entered clinical trials. As DYRK1A inhibitors, Lorecivint²⁹ is undergoing phase III trial as a treatment of osteoarthritis and epigallocatechin-gallate (EGCG) from green tea is in phase II/III clinical trial for cancer immunotherapy. Besides, many DYRK1A and 1B inhibitors are under investigation in the preclinical stage with diverse indications. AZ191²⁵ has been studied as oncolytic drugs and the GNF-4877³⁰ is under development as antidiabetic drug. Harmine^{31,32} and ProINDY³³ from natural products have been studied for various disease, and based on their structures, azaindole and benzothiazoylidene other novel DYRK1 inhibitors have been designed and synthesized. Leucettamine L41³⁴ from the marine sponge leucettamine is also under pre-clinical study for neurodegenerative disease. DANDY³⁵ is also an azaindole-based compounds, and recently it is reported that one of fluoro-DANDY derivatives has cognitive rescuing effect by *in vivo* study

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of standard mouse model of Down syndrome.³⁶

We are interested in 1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine core for developing novel DYRK inhibitors, which has additional nitrogen in azaindole core. We believed this core structure could provide improved activities against DYRK1A/1B and novel characteristics of compound properties. So we prepared diverse 1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine derivatives and examined the cytotoxicity of them against colorectal cancer cell lines.

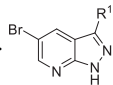
From the Commercially available 5-bromo-1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine **1**, mono-substituted DYRK 1A/1B inhibitors were firstly synthesized. For the modification on the C3 position of compound **1**, iodination at the C3 position of **1** with I₂ was performed. Then the resulting **2** was *N*-protected by a SEM group with trimethylsilylethoxymethyl chloride (SEMCL) and the following regioselective Suzuki-miyaura cross-coupling at C3 position with arylboronic acids afforded C3-substituted compound **3a-o** in 47–76% yields. Deprotection of SEM group from **3** resulted in mono-substituted **4a-o**.

With these compounds in hand, inhibitory enzymatic activities of **4a-o** against DYRK1B were examined (Table 1). Staurosporine was used as a reference compound. Most of phenyl-substituted derivatives (**4a-j**) exhibited moderate to excellent inhibitory activities with IC₅₀ values in the range of 54–2040 nM, except for 3-methoxyphenyl (**4b**), 3-nitrophenyl (**4c**), and 4-nitrophenyl (**4i**) substituents which had no inhibitory activity. Especially, 4-methoxyphenyl (**4f**) and 4-hydroxy (**4g**) compounds showed the highest inhibitory activities with IC₅₀ values in the range of 54 and 87 nM, respectively. When heteroaromatic substituents were introduced into 1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine, the IC₅₀ values of them (**4k-o**) against DYRK1B were ranged from 121 to 4,038 nM. We selected four compounds (**4e**, **4g**, **4j**, and **4m**) to test DYRK1A inhibitory activities and their IC₅₀ values appeared similar compared to those against DYRK1B.

Next, we synthesized di-substituted 1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine derivatives to increase the inhibitory activity against DYRK1B (Scheme 2). Based on compound **3** in Scheme 1, the C–N bond coupling of **3** with arylamines in the presence of Pd₂dba₃ and Xantphos and the following deprotection of SEM group from the corresponding products by TBAF afforded 3-aryl-5-arylamino-1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridines (**6a-g**). In another way, consecutive Suzuki-miyaura cross-coupling of **3** with arylboronic acids resulted in *N*-SEM-protected 3,5-diaryl-1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridines (**7a-j**) in 61–99% yields. Subsequent deprotection of **7** gave rise to diaryl compounds (**8a-j**). During the process, 4-aminophenyl compound **7k** was followed by the additional reaction with CH₃SO₂Cl,

Table 1

Inhibitory enzymatic activities of compounds **4**.



Compound	R ¹	DYRK1B IC ₅₀ (nM) ^{a,b}
4a		2040
4b		>5 μM
4c		>5 μM
4d		635
4e		257
4f		54
4g		87
4h		1050
4i		>5 μM
4j		568
4k		615
4l		4038
4m		141
4n		736
4o		121
Staurosporine		3

^a IC₅₀ values were determined from concentration-dependent inhibition curves of triplicate experiments by GraphPad Prism software.

^b DYRK1A enzymatic activities (IC₅₀) for the selected compounds : **4e** (638 nM), **4g** (56 nM), **4j** (1,107 nM), and **4m** (92 nM)

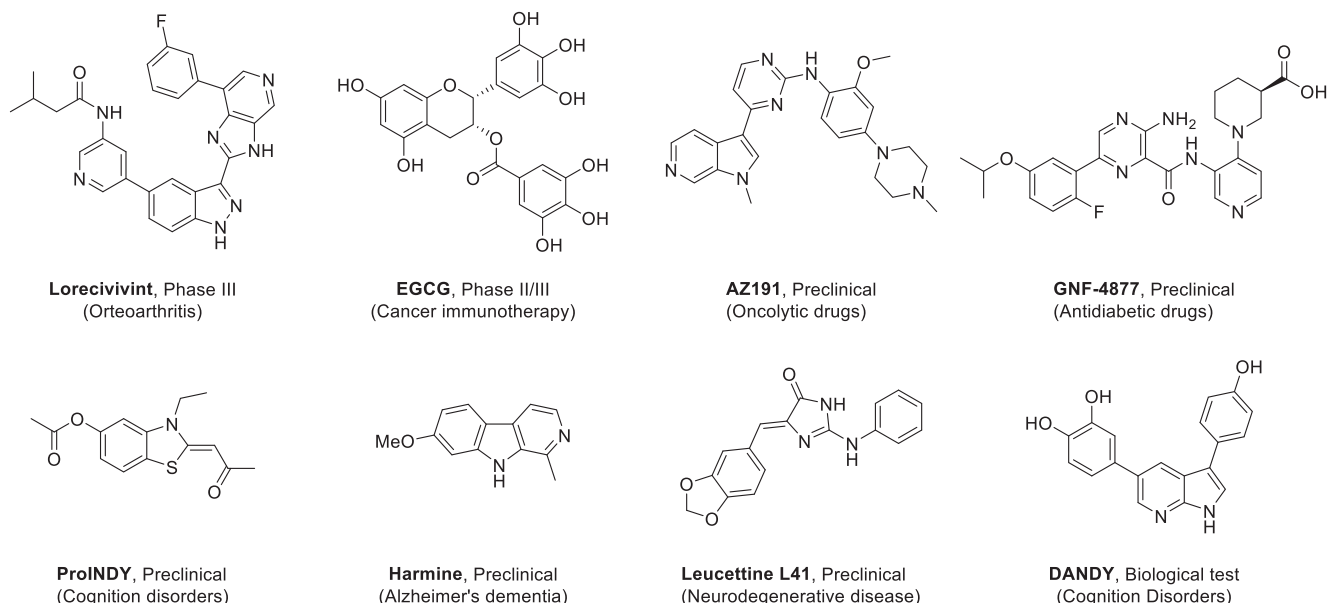
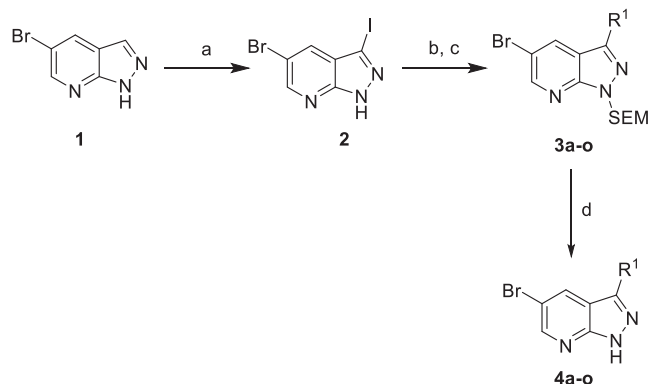
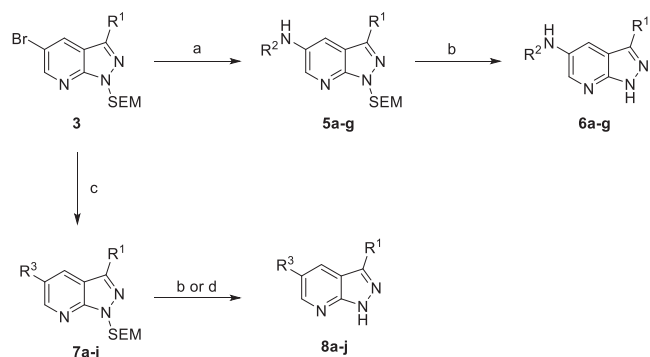


Fig. 1. DYRK inhibitors and their development status.



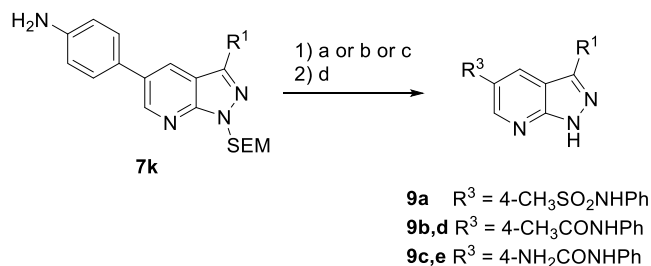
Scheme 1. Reagents and conditions (a) I_2 (1.1 equiv), KOH (2.1 equiv), DMF, rt, 2 h, 83%; (b) SEMCl (1.7 equiv), NaH (2.0 equiv), DMF, rt, 2 h, 95%; (c) R-B(OH)₂ (1.1 equiv), Pd(dppf)Cl₂·CH₂Cl₂ (5 mol%), 2 M K₂CO₃ (3.0 equiv), CH₃CN, 85 °C, 3 h, 47–76%; (d) TBAF (20.0 equiv), THF, reflux, 4 h, 29–99%.



Scheme 2. Reagents and conditions (a) Pd₂dba₃ (10 mol%), Xantphos (10 mol %), Cs₂CO₃ (2.0 equiv), 1,4-dioxane, 90 °C, 12 h, 44–76%; (b) TBAF (20.0 equiv), THF, reflux, 4 h, 31–62%; (c) R-B(OH)₂ (1.1 equiv), Pd(dppf)Cl₂·CH₂Cl₂ (5 mol%), 2 M K₂CO₃ (3.0 equiv), CH₃CN, 85 °C, 3 h, 61–99%; (d) BBr₃ (10.0 equiv), DCM, rt, 24 h, 24–74%.

Ac₂O, and potassium cyanate (NCOK) to obtain the corresponding products (9a–e) (Scheme 3).

When 3-aryl-5-arylamino-1H-pyrazolo[3,4-b]pyridines (6a–g) were tested for the inhibitory activities of DYRK1B, their IC₅₀ values slightly improved compared to mono-substituted 4 (Table 2). When compared to 4b with 4-methoxyphenyl substituent, additional phenylamino (6a), 3-hydroxyphenylamino (6b), and 3-benzyloxyphenylamino (6c) substituents enhanced DYRK 1B inhibitory activities with IC₅₀ values of 575 nM, 191 nM, and 3,683 nM, respectively. But, extra arylamino substituents (6d, 6f, and 6g) into 4f remained less effective against DYRK1B, and only 6e showed similar to 4f. The inhibitory activities of 6a–g against DYRK1A are also very similar to those against DYRK 1B.



Scheme 3. Reagents and conditions. (a) CH₃SO₂Cl (2.0 equiv), DCM, rt, 12 h, 90%; (b) Ac₂O (1.5 equiv), AcOH, 110 °C, 5 h, 65%; (c) NCOK (1.2 equiv), 2 N HCl, 0 °C to rt, 6 h, 80%; (d) TBAF (20.0 equiv), THF, reflux, 4 h, 37–67%.

Table 2

Inhibitory enzymatic activities of compounds **6**

Compound	R ²	R ¹	DYRK 1A IC ₅₀ (nM) ^a	DYRK 1B IC ₅₀ (nM) ^a
6a			2817	575
6b			950	191
6c			>5 μM	3683
6d			365	188
6e			33	31
6f			309	309
6g			3553	1273
Staurosporine			11	3

^a IC₅₀ values were determined from concentration-dependent inhibition curves of triplicate experiments by GraphPad Prism software.

Most of diaryl 1H-pyrazolo[3,4-b]pyridine derivatives **8** and **9** showed more improved inhibitory activities against DYRK 1B than compounds **6a–g**, except for **8a** with 3,4-diphenyl substituents (Table 3). With 3,4-dimethoxyphenyl substituent at C5 position, the derivatization of diverse aryl substituents at C3 position gave rise to the range of IC₅₀ values of 97–287 nM against DYRK 1B (Table 3, 8b–d). When 4-hydroxyphenyl substituent (8e–f) was introduced, the inhibitory activities were highly increased from IC₅₀ 6 to 56 nM. But, 3-hydroxyphenyl substituent (**8g**) was not effective as much as 4-hydroxyphenyl substituent. Most compounds with 3,4-hydroxyphenyl group (**8h–j**) exhibited the highest inhibitory activities with IC₅₀ values of 3–29 nM. Methylsulfonylamino, acylamino and ureido substituents also increased DYRK 1B inhibitory activities with IC₅₀ values of 2–13 nM (Table 3, 9a–e). In terms of DYRK 1A, most results of diaryl 1H-pyrazolo[3,4-b]pyridine derivatives were comparable to those of DYRK 1B.

With the enzymatic activities of DYRK1B inhibitors, the cytotoxic activities against colon cancer cells (HCT116) were investigated. Firstly, several compounds (**8h**, **9a**, **9b**, **9c**, and **9e**) were selected and tested. Among them, compounds **8h**, **9a**, and **9b** showed excellent cell proliferation inhibitory activities with IC₅₀ values of 3.4, 1.6, and 2.1 μM, respectively. Rest of compounds **9b** and **9c** remained with IC₅₀ values of 16.2 and 8.9 μM, respectively (see supplementary data Fig. S1). After considering their inhibitory enzymatic, cell proliferation inhibitory activities and other chemical properties including solubilities, we decided to further examine **8h**.

To figure out the effect of **8h** on cytotoxicity towards colon cancer cells, we measured cell proliferation inhibitory activity in 10 colon cancer cell lines (RKO, HCT116, DLD-1, SW620, SW480, COLO205, HT29, LOVO, HCT15, and LS174T). Compound **8h** showed remarkable cytotoxic efficacy against five colon cancer cells such as RKO, HCT116, DLD-1, SW480 and SW620 and exhibited divergent sensitivity (IC₅₀ values of 1–38 μM) (Fig. 2a). In addition, the morphology of cells treated with **8h** showed multi-vesicle formation compared to vehicle-treated cells (Fig. 2b). Therefore, we could predict the induction of autophagy by **8h** since they showed the morphologically specific form of autophagic cell death.

Next, we assessed cell growth inhibitory effect through 3D spheroid model that the microenvironment of cancer cell was more resembled that of a patient's tumor tissues (Fig. 3). At day 10 after the treatment of **8h**, the cell size of SW480 and SW620 was reduced. The number of

Table 3
Inhibitory enzymatic activities of diaryl 1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine derivatives.

Compound	R ³	R ¹	DYRK 1A IC ₅₀ (nM) ^{a,b}	DYRK 1B IC ₅₀ (nM) ^a
8a			>5 μM	>5 μM
8b			75	97
8c			632	287
8d			299	167
8e			44	56
8f			5	6
8g			213	39
8h			5	3
8i			24	29
8j			NT	15
9a			NT	5
9b			NT	13
9c			8	7
9d			NT	10
9e			NT	2
Staurosporine			11	3

^a IC₅₀ values were determined from concentration-dependent inhibition curves of triplicate experiments by GraphPad Prism software.

^b NT: Not tested.

viable cells stained with calcein AM decreased and the size of nuclei stained with Hoechst33342 became smaller. In addition, we found that the number of dead cells stained with ethidium homodimer-1 (EthD-1) increased (Fig. 3). Therefore, the cytotoxic activity of DYRK1 inhibitor **8h** towards SW480 and SW620 colon cancer cells continued to maintain in 3D spheroid models of them.

Finally, we verified the cytotoxic effect of **8h** in patient derived cancer organoid models. As shown in Fig. 4, the treatment of **8h** exhibited reduction of crypt size and disruption of intact organoid structure compared to that of vehicle-treated organoids. Altogether, DYRK1 inhibitor, **8h**, showed prominent cytotoxic effect in colon cancer cell lines through diverse models.

In order to predict the binding modes of compound **8h** for DYRK1B, we performed molecular docking studies with DYRK1B homology model. As shown in Fig. 5, the 1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine scaffold of compound **8h** forms two hydrogen bonds with Glu191 backbone CO and Leu193 backbone NH in the hinge region. Also the 1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine ring forms hydrophobic interactions with Ala138, Val174 and Leu246, as well as 1,2-dihydroxyphenyl ring is oriented towards solvent exposed area by forming hydrophobic interaction with Ile117 and hydrogen bonding with Ile117 backbone CO. Phenol ring makes electrostatic interaction with Lys140, and hydrophobic interaction with Val258.

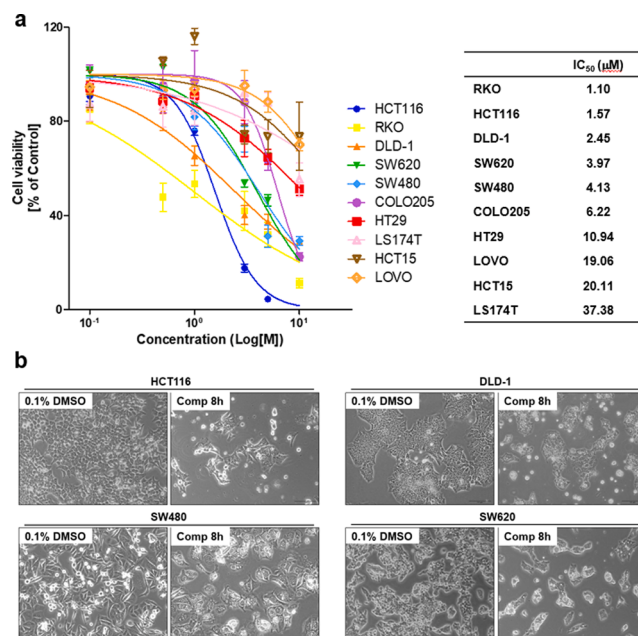


Fig. 2. Cytotoxicity and cells morphology treated with compound **8h**.

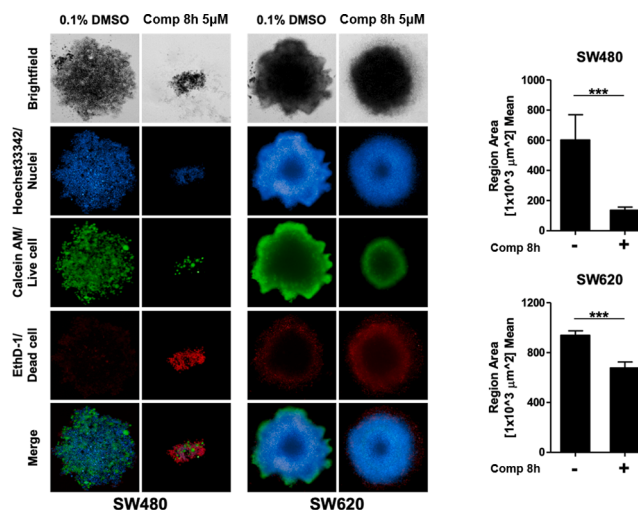


Fig. 3. 3D spheroid assay with compound **8h**. Cells (SW480: 1×10^2 per well and SW620: 1×10^3 per well) were seeded at 96 well U-bottom plate coated with poly-HEMA. At 3, 5, 7 days, cells were treated with compound **8h** (5 μM). Then, cells were stained with Hoechst33342 (Nuclei), Calcein AM (Live cell) and Ethidium Homodimer-1 (Dead cell). Representative images were taken on day 10 at 50X.

In conclusion, we successfully designed and synthesized 1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine derivatives. Mainly, 3,5-disubstituted 1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridines, 3-aryl-5-arylamino compounds (**6**) and 3,5-diaryl compounds (**8** and **9**), were prepared and especially, compound **8** and **9** showed excellent DYRK1B inhibitory enzymatic activities with IC₅₀ values of 3–287 nM. Among them, 3-(4-hydroxyphenyl), 5-(3,4-dihydroxyphenyl)-1*H*-pyrazolo[3,4-*b*]pyridine (**8h**) exhibited the highest enzymatic (IC₅₀ = 3 nM) and cell proliferation inhibitory activities (HCT116, IC₅₀ = 1.6 μM). Also compound **8h** has excellent inhibitory activities in patient-derived colon cancer organoids model as well as in 3D spheroid assay model of SW480 and SW620. The docking study supported that we confirmed that compound **8h** binds to DYRK1B through various hydrogen bonding interactions and hydrophobic interactions.

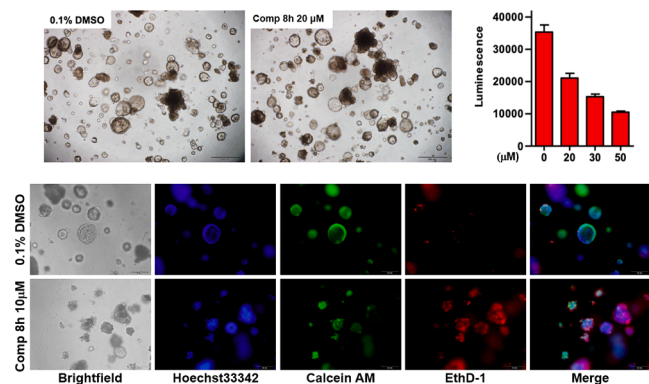


Fig. 4. Cytotoxic effect of compound **8h** in patient-derived organoid model. Colon cancer organoids were treated with **8h** for 5 days and were subjected to cytotoxicity assay using CellTiter Glo. Representative images were taken on day 5 at 50X. Then, organoids were stained with Hoechst33342 (nuclei), Calcein AM (live cell) and Ethidium Homodimer-1 (dead cell). Experiments were performed triplicate and quantified using Prism5.

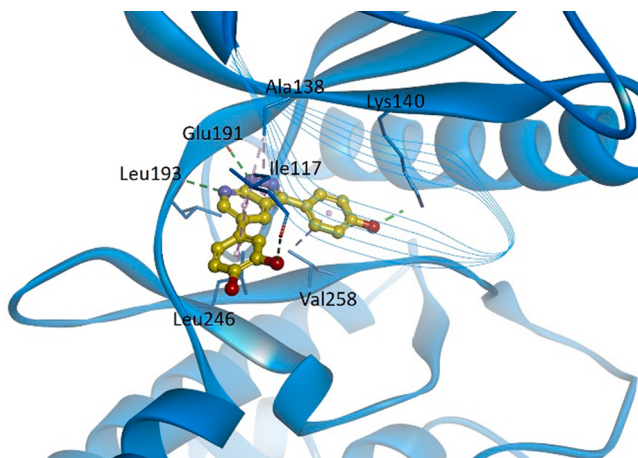


Fig. 5. Docking model of compound **8h** for DYRK1B. Compound **8h** (yellow colored ball and stick) to the DYRK1B (blue colored ribbon). For clarity, key binding site residues are shown in sticks and labeled using the 3-letter amino acid code. The hydrogen bonds are displayed as green dashed lines and hydrophobic interactions are shown as pink dashed lines. Also electrostatic interactions are indicated by orange dashed lines.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bmcl.2021.128226>.

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