

## Structure-Based Design and Synthesis of New Estrane-Pyridine Derivatives as Cytochrome P450 (CYP) 1B1 Inhibitors

Raphaël Dutour, Francisco Cortés-Benítez, Jenny Roy, and Donald Poirier

ACS Med. Chem. Lett., **Just Accepted Manuscript** • DOI: 10.1021/acsmedchemlett.7b00265 • Publication Date (Web): 11 Oct 2017

Downloaded from <http://pubs.acs.org> on October 12, 2017

### Just Accepted

"Just Accepted" manuscripts have been peer-reviewed and accepted for publication. They are posted online prior to technical editing, formatting for publication and author proofing. The American Chemical Society provides "Just Accepted" as a free service to the research community to expedite the dissemination of scientific material as soon as possible after acceptance. "Just Accepted" manuscripts appear in full in PDF format accompanied by an HTML abstract. "Just Accepted" manuscripts have been fully peer reviewed, but should not be considered the official version of record. They are accessible to all readers and citable by the Digital Object Identifier (DOI®). "Just Accepted" is an optional service offered to authors. Therefore, the "Just Accepted" Web site may not include all articles that will be published in the journal. After a manuscript is technically edited and formatted, it will be removed from the "Just Accepted" Web site and published as an ASAP article. Note that technical editing may introduce minor changes to the manuscript text and/or graphics which could affect content, and all legal disclaimers and ethical guidelines that apply to the journal pertain. ACS cannot be held responsible for errors or consequences arising from the use of information contained in these "Just Accepted" manuscripts.



# Structure-Based Design and Synthesis of New Estrane-Pyridine Derivatives as Cytochrome P<sub>450</sub> (CYP) 1B<sub>1</sub> Inhibitors

Raphaël Dutour,<sup>†,‡</sup> Francisco Cortés-Benítez,<sup>†,#</sup> Jenny Roy,<sup>†</sup> and Donald Poirier<sup>\*,†,‡</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Laboratory of Medicinal Chemistry, Endocrinology-Nephrology Unit, CHU de Québec – Research Center, Québec, Qc, Canada

<sup>‡</sup> Department of Molecular Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Université Laval, Québec, Qc, Canada

<sup>#</sup> Department of Pharmacy, Faculty of Chemistry, National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico

**KEYWORD:** *Steroid, estrane, enzyme inhibitor, cytochrome P<sub>450</sub>, CYP1B<sub>1</sub>, molecular modelling*

**ABSTRACT:** Inhibition of cytochrome P<sub>450</sub> (CYP) 1B<sub>1</sub> is a promising therapeutic strategy, as such an inhibitor could modulate the bioactivation of procarcinogens while reducing drug resistance. Based on docking studies, the synthesis of 12 estra-1,3,5(10)-triene derivatives containing a pyridin-3-/4-yl moiety at position C<sub>2</sub>, 3 or 4 was performed and we measured their inhibitory activity on CYP1B<sub>1</sub> using the ethoxyresorufin-O-deethylase (EROD) assay. The position of the nitrogen atom in the aromatic ring has little influence on their inhibition potency, but compounds with a pyridinyl at C<sub>2</sub> of the steroid nucleus are more potent CYP1B<sub>1</sub> inhibitors than those with a pyridinyl at C<sub>3</sub> or 4. Estradiol derivatives (OH at C<sub>17β</sub>) are also 10-fold more potent inhibitors than estrone derivatives (carbonyl at C<sub>17</sub>). Thus, 2-(pyridin-3-yl)-estradiol (**4a**) is the best CYP1B<sub>1</sub> inhibitor (IC<sub>50</sub> = 0.011 μM) from this series of compounds, and the best steroid inhibitor reported until now. It is also 7.5-fold more potent than the well-known non-steroidal CYP1B<sub>1</sub> inhibitor α-naphthoflavone (IC<sub>50</sub> = 0.083 μM).

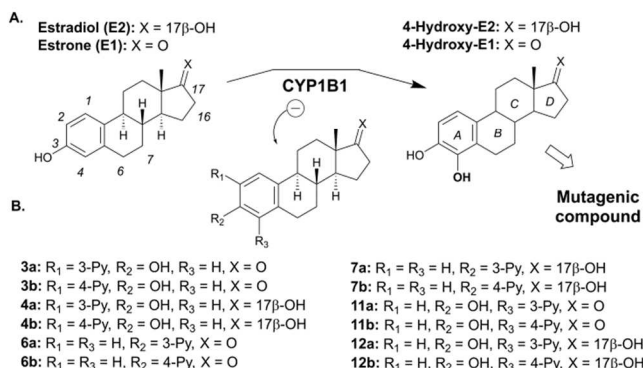
## Introduction

Cytochromes P<sub>450</sub> (CYPs) form a large family of hemo-proteins involved in many reduction and oxidation reactions on both endogenous and xenobiotic compounds of different sizes. Eighteen (18) CYP gene families, including over 50 enzymes, are found in humans.<sup>1,2</sup> The CYP1 family is comprised of 3 members: CYP1A<sub>1</sub>, CYP1A<sub>2</sub>, and CYP1B<sub>1</sub>. The latter is mainly expressed in extrahepatic mesodermal cells, including steroidogenic tissues (ovaries, testes and adrenal glands) and in steroid-responsive tissues (breast, uterus and prostate).<sup>3</sup> CYP1 enzymes have been extensively studied because they are involved in the conversion of many polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), such as benzo[α]pyrene, into carcinogens.<sup>4,5</sup> Moreover, it should be noted that CYP1 enzymes are involved in the modulation of pro-inflammatory and inflammatory pathways through the metabolism of leukotrienes and eicosanoids.<sup>6</sup> These enzymes can also act as tumor suppressors via the metabolism of some flavonoid- and stilbene-type compounds.<sup>7-9</sup>

Among these 3 CYP1 enzymes, CYP1B<sub>1</sub> represents an interesting therapeutic target, notably because it is involved in the 4-hydroxylation of 17β-estradiol (E<sub>2</sub>) (**Figure 1A**), whereas CYP1A<sub>1</sub> and CYP1A<sub>2</sub> mainly catalyse the 2-hydroxylation of E<sub>2</sub>.<sup>10,11</sup> Unlike 2-hydroxy-E<sub>2</sub> and its oxidation product E<sub>2</sub>-2,3-quinone, 4-hydroxy-E<sub>2</sub> can be oxidized into E<sub>2</sub>-3,4-quinone, a mutagenic compound which can bind DNA covalently, leading to the formation of

depurinating adducts.<sup>12</sup> In addition, it has been observed that CYP1B<sub>1</sub> is overexpressed in a wide variety of human cancers (breast, lung, colon, esophagus, skin, testis, lymph node and brain), but not in healthy tissue.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, CYP1B<sub>1</sub> can also be a good marker for the prevention of certain cancers. Finally, it should also be emphasized that CYP1B<sub>1</sub> is involved in the metabolism of certain anticancer agents, such as docetaxel, leading to drug-resistance associated with the overexpression of CYP1B<sub>1</sub>.<sup>14-16</sup> Thus, a CYP1B<sub>1</sub> inhibitor could be useful within a multi-therapy context. Based on these observations, the inhibition of CYP1B<sub>1</sub> constitutes a promising therapeutic strategy, because it would enable a biological action at 3 distinct levels: 1) by inhibiting the formation of 4-hydroxy-E<sub>2</sub>, 2) by inhibiting the bioactivation of procarcinogens, and 3) by reducing drug-resistance.<sup>15</sup>

Over the past years, several CYP1 inhibitors have been identified within different families, including flavonoids, *trans*-stilbenes, coumarins, alkaloids and anthraquinone derivatives,<sup>1,17-19</sup> but in the steroid family, only 16α-fluoro-5-androsten-17-one and three methoxyestradiol derivatives were reported as weak CYP1B<sub>1</sub> inhibitors.<sup>20,21</sup> This is surprising, considering that C<sub>18</sub>-steroid E<sub>2</sub> and its oxidized form at position 17, estrone (E<sub>1</sub>), are both substrates of several CYPs, including CYP1B<sub>1</sub>.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 1.** The conversion of estrogen C18-steroid hormones by CYP1B1 (A) and the structures of the newly synthesized CYP1B1 inhibitors (B). Partial numbering of carbons (left structure) and steroid (A-D) ring identification (right structure) are reported.

Our research group has expertise in the development of enzyme inhibitors of steroidogenesis having a steroid nucleus (C18-, C19- or C21-steroids).<sup>22-25</sup> In our previous study, we reported the results obtained from the screening of 90 steroids and steroid derivatives on the CYP1B1 using the ethoxyresorufin-O-deethylase (EROD) assay.<sup>26</sup> Among the molecules tested, we identified thioestrone (IC<sub>50</sub> = 3.4  $\mu$ M) as an inhibitor of CYP1B1.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, molecular modeling studies have shown that the 3-SH group of this steroid is closer (3.36 Å) to the iron atom of the heme system of CYP1B1 than the 3-OH of E1 and E2.

Based on these observations, we considered introducing a chemical group on the A-ring of a C18-steroid (estra-1,3,5(10)-triene) which could be able to interact with the heme of CYP1B1. Pyridine, an aromatic ring containing a nitrogen atom, is known to generate interactions with the iron of heme systems.<sup>27</sup> We therefore synthesized 12 steroid derivatives containing a pyridin-3-/4-yl moiety at position C2, 3 or 4 of E1 and E2 (Figure 1B). Their inhibitory activity against CYP1B1 and docking simulations have also been reported.

## Results and discussion

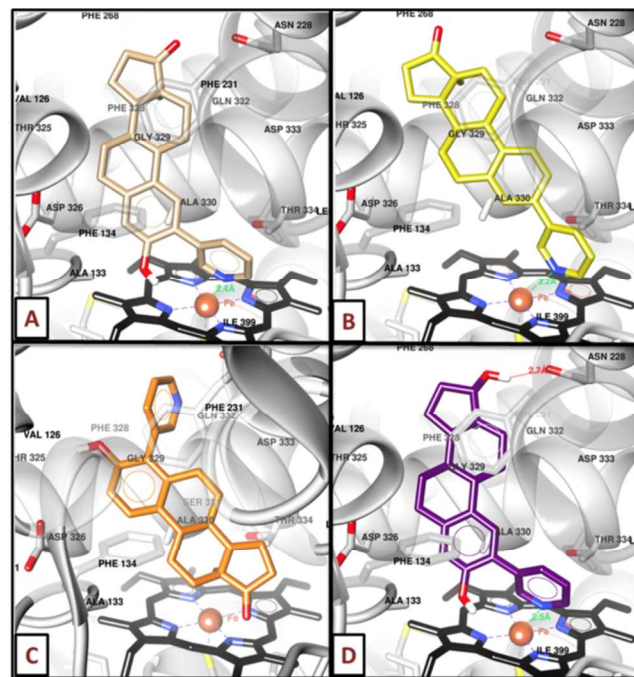
### Docking simulations and rational inhibitor design

The  $\alpha$ -naphthoflavone (ANF) is one of the best CYP1B1 inhibitors reported in literature, and this flavonoid binds the CYP1B1 catalytic site.<sup>28</sup> The crystal structure of CYP1B1 (PDB ID: 3PMo) is also known, and it was used in our design of new steroidal CYP1B1 inhibitors. We first divided the fused tricyclic core of ANF as three mimetic parts for the A/B/C-rings of the steroidal scaffold. Furthermore, in the co-crystallized structure of ANF, we observed that the phenyl moiety at C2 was oriented towards the porphyrin and ferrous ion of the heme group. Thus, we believe that replacing this phenyl ring by a pyridine moiety could generate a favorable interaction with the heme group by means of a nitrogen-iron bond. Additionally, in our previous docking studies using E1 and E2 (Supp. Info., Figure A), we observed that the A-ring was oriented towards the heme group. However, it was less close when compared to the phenyl moiety at C2 of ANF. From these observations, we hypothesized that a desired interaction

between a pyridine ring and the heme of CYP1B1 could be achieved by adding a pyridine to the A-ring of E1 or E2.

To address this idea, we performed docking simulations using GOLD-5.4 software<sup>29,30</sup> and the 3D structure of CYP1B1 (PDB ID: 3PMo). The molecules screened in this study were ANF for comparison purposes, and those represented in Figure 1B.

This screening provided a GOLD score (GS) of 69.8 and a ChemPLP fitness score (CFS) of 95.5 for the best docked conformation of ANF (Table 1). The 2-substituted compounds, such as 3a (GS = 60.6 and CFS = 81.2), fit better into the binding site of CYP1B1 than the corresponding 3-substituted compound 6a (GS = 58.8 and CFS = 49.9) and 4-substituted compound 11a (GS = 45.6 and CFS = 76.0). In fact, the pyridine ring of 3a interacts with the heme group (Figure 2A) through a nitrogen-iron bond. Moreover, the nitrogen atom of 3a is closer to the iron than the nitrogen atom of 6a (2.4 Å and 3.2 Å, respectively, Figures 2A and 2B). In addition, we found that the pyridinyl moiety promotes an ideal orientation to perform *pi*-stacking interactions between the A-ring of the steroid and the side chain of Phe134. On the contrary, the structure of 11a is inverted when compared to 3a and 6a (Figure 2C). Thus, this orientation, suggesting an interaction of the carbonyl at C17 with iron, significantly decreases the interactions into the binding site. On the other hand, 4a (Figure 2D), which is an E2 derivative having a pyridin-3-yl at C2, presented the best GS and CFS for this series (62.6 and 86.0, respectively).



**Figure 2.** Binding mode of 3a (A), 6a (B), 11a (C), and 4a (D) docked in CYP1B1. Black sticks represent the heme group, whereas the iron atom is highlighted as a red sphere. Images were produced using the UCSF Chimera package.<sup>30</sup>

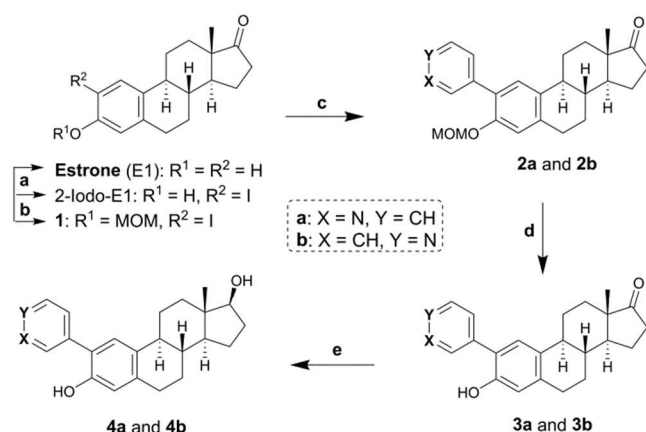
The binding mode for this compound showed the same orientation and interactions as 3a. These include a nitrogen-iron bond with the heme as well as *pi*-stacking inter-

action between the A-ring and Phe134. Additionally, the steroidal core of **3a** and **4a** interacts by means of hydrophobic contacts with Phe268, Ala133, and Phe134. Nevertheless, **4a** produced an H-bond between the 17 $\beta$ -OH group and the carbonyl group from the side chain of Asn228. This extra interaction is also performed by the E2 derivatives **4b**, **7a** as well as **7b** (data not shown) and is the main reason why we found better GS and CFS values than **3b**, **6a**, and **6b**. Hence, the E2 derivatives with a pyridine ring linked to C2 could induce a significant inhibitory effect on CYP1B1.

### Chemistry

To confirm our docking results, we performed the synthesis of 12 E1 and E2 derivatives bearing a pyridin-3-/4-yl moiety in C2, 3 or 4 of the estr-1,3,5(10)-triene (**Figure 1B**). A different synthesis pathway was used to introduce the pyridine ring at each steroid position, and the final step is the reduction of the C17 ketone into a secondary alcohol. Compounds **3a**, **3b**, **4a**, and **4b** bearing a pyridinyl moiety at C2 were obtained in two or three steps from **1** (**Scheme 1**). Compound **1** was previously obtained from E1 in two steps: 1) 2-iodo-E1 was prepared via a selective halogenation of E1 with mercuric acetate and iodine in acetic acid<sup>31</sup> and 2) the 3-OH was protected by a reaction with the methoxymethyl (MOM) chloride in the presence of Cs<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>. Compounds **2a** and **2b** were obtained by a Suzuki coupling between **1** and 3- or 4-pyridine boronic acid in the presence of K<sub>3</sub>PO<sub>4</sub> and the catalyst Pd(dppf)Cl<sub>2</sub>. This reaction was performed in DMF under microwaves (MW). Then, the MOM ether was hydrolysed with HCl to form **3a** and **3b**. Finally, **4a** and **4b** were synthesized from **3a** and **3b** through a reduction of the ketone with sodium NaBH<sub>4</sub>.

### Scheme 1<sup>a</sup>

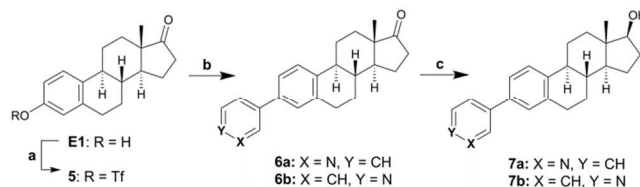


<sup>a</sup>Reagents and conditions: (a) Hg(OAc)<sub>2</sub>, I<sub>2</sub>, AcOH, THF, rt, 2 h; (b) MOM-Cl, Cs<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>, ACN, reflux, 2-3 h; (c) 3- or 4-pyridine boronic acid, Pd(dppf)Cl<sub>2</sub>, K<sub>3</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, DMF, MW, 120°C, 2-3 h; (d) 10% HCl aq. in MeOH (1:9), 50°C, overnight; (e) NaBH<sub>4</sub>, MeOH/DCM (9:1), 0°C, 2-3 h.

Steroid derivatives with a pyridinyl at C3 were obtained from **5** in a single step for the oxidized forms **6a** and **6b** or in two steps for the reduced forms **7a** and **7b** (**Scheme 2**). A classical reaction between E1 and triflic anhydride with DMAP as base gave **5** in a high yield of 90%.<sup>32</sup> Compounds

**6a** and **6b** were obtained by a Suzuki coupling of **5** with 3- or 4-pyridine boronic acid under the same reaction conditions used for **2a** and **2b**. Compounds **6a** and **6b** were then reduced with NaBH<sub>4</sub> to give compounds **7a** and **7b**.

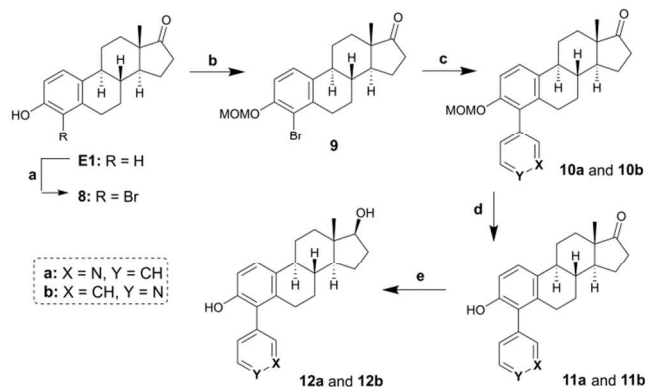
### Scheme 2<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup>Reagents and conditions: (a) Tf<sub>2</sub>O, 2,6-lutidine, DMAP, DCM, 0°C to rt; (b) 3- or 4-pyridine boronic acid, Pd(dppf)Cl<sub>2</sub>, K<sub>3</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, DMF, MW, 120°C, 2-3 h; (c) NaBH<sub>4</sub>, MeOH/DCM (9:1), 0°C, 2-3 h.

Steroid derivatives with a pyridinyl at C4 were synthesized from 4-bromo-E1 (**8**) in three steps for the oxidized forms **11a** and **11b** or in four steps for the reduced forms **12a** and **12b** (**Scheme 3**). Compound **8** was obtained from E1 by a bromination with Br<sub>2</sub> in the presence of powdered iron, acetic acid, and water, as previously reported by Slaunwhite and Neely.<sup>33</sup> The MOM derivative **9** was formed by the protection of the 3-OH of **8** with MOM-Cl and Ce<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> in refluxing ACN. Thereafter, **10a** and **10b** were obtained by a Suzuki coupling of **9** with 3- or 4-pyridine boronic acid under different conditions than those previously reported for C2 and 3. Indeed, due to the lower reactivity of the bromine atom compared to the iodine, the methodology used for the synthesis of compounds with the pyridinyl at C2 or 3 was not efficient for the coupling at C4. After investigation, we found alternative conditions for the Suzuki coupling of boronic acids with aromatic compounds bearing a bromine atom. In this methodology, Pd(PPh<sub>3</sub>)<sub>4</sub> was used as the catalyst, aqueous K<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> (2M) as the base, and the reaction was carried out in a mixture of toluene and ethanol. Subsequent deprotection of the MOM ether with HCl led to the formation of **11a** and **11b**. Compounds **12a** and **12b** were next synthesized through a reduction of **11a** and **11b** with NaBH<sub>4</sub>.

### Scheme 3<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup>Reagents and conditions: (a) Br<sub>2</sub>, 80% aq. acetic acid, Fe, 20°C; (b) MOM-Cl, Cs<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>, ACN, reflux, 2-3 h; (c) 3- or 4-pyridine boronic acid, Pd(PPh<sub>3</sub>)<sub>4</sub>, toluene, EtOH, K<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> aq. (2M), reflux, overnight; (d) 10% HCl aq. in MeOH (1:9), 50°C, overnight; (e) NaBH<sub>4</sub>, MeOH/DCM (9:1), 0°C, 2-3 h.

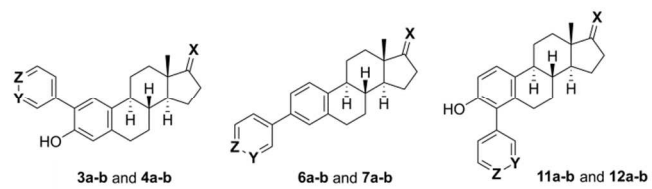
(d) 10% HCl aq. in MeOH (1:9), 50°C, overnight; (e) NaBH<sub>4</sub>, MeOH/DCM (9:1), 0°C, 2–3 h.

The chemical reactions described above were generally complete, but it is important to mention that a protection of the 3-OH with a MOM group is necessary to subsequently perform the Suzuki coupling. In fact, this protecting group promotes the formation of palladium complexes during this reaction, thus optimizing the coupling of steroid derivatives **1** and **9** with pyridine boronic acid. In this context, it should be noted that Ivanov et al. worked on the optimization of the Suzuki-Miyaura reaction conditions for the synthesis of 2-aryl-E<sub>1</sub> and 2,4-diaryl-E<sub>1</sub> by using different ligands, and notably sterically encumbered biaryl ligands.<sup>34</sup> We were able to obtain E<sub>1</sub> derivatives with a pyridinyl at C<sub>2</sub> in good yields (approximately 70–80%) under conventional Suzuki coupling reaction conditions through the introduction of the MOM group at C<sub>3</sub>.

### Structure-activity relationships against CYP1B1

The inhibitory activity of synthesized compounds **3a-b**, **4a-b**, **6a-b**, **7a-b**, **11a-b**, and **12a-b** against recombinant human CYP1B1 enzyme was evaluated using the standard EROD assay, which is widely used to assess CYP1 activity (Table 1). In this assay performed in the presence of NADPH as cofactor, the transformation of resorufin ethyl ether, used as an enzyme substrate, into resorufin, was measured by recording the fluorescence. ANF, a potent CYP1B1 inhibitor,<sup>1</sup> was used as the reference for this assay. As the best steroidal CYP1B1 inhibitor,<sup>26</sup> thioestrone was included in the protocol to compare its activity with those of our new steroid derivatives. The activity of E<sub>1</sub> and E<sub>2</sub>, two steroidal substrates of CYP1B1, was also evaluated.

**Table 1. Docking Scores and Inhibition of CYP1B1 Activity by a Series of E<sub>1</sub> and E<sub>2</sub> Derivatives**



Cpd <sup>a</sup>	X	Y	Z	GS <sup>b</sup>	CFS <sup>b</sup>	Inhibition (%) at 0.3 μM <sup>c</sup>	Inhibition IC <sub>50</sub> (μM) <sup>c</sup>
<b>3a</b>	=O	N	CH	60.6	81.2	37.8 ± 1.5	0.063
<b>3b</b>	=O	CH	N	52.5	74.8	21.3 ± 3.1	0.120
<b>4a</b>	17βOH	N	CH	62.6	86.0	85.4 ± 0.3	0.011
<b>4b</b>	17βOH	CH	N	54.2	81.8	87.4 ± 0.9	0.032
<b>6a</b>	=O	N	CH	58.8	49.9	28.2 ± 2.5	-
<b>6b</b>	=O	CH	N	56.2	49.7	6.1 ± 2.2	-
<b>7a</b>	17βOH	N	CH	45.7	85.7	19.6 ± 1.7	-
<b>7b</b>	17βOH	CH	N	49.0	84.4	19.5 ± 0.7	-
<b>11a</b>	=O	N	CH	45.6	76.0	14.0 ± 1.8	-
<b>11b</b>	=O	CH	N	43.2	74.8	16.9 ± 2.3	-
<b>12a</b>	17βOH	N	CH	44.1	71.2	28.9 ± 1.1	-
<b>12b</b>	17βOH	CH	N	42.8	71.9	20.9 ± 4.5	-
E <sub>1</sub>	-	-	-	58.6	49.7	16.0 ± 4.0	-
E <sub>2</sub>	-	-	-	48.5	53.6	12.4 ± 3.0	-
T-E <sub>1</sub>	-	-	-	69.8	-	13.3 ± 3.3	-
ANF	-	-	-	69.8	95.5	94.0 ± 3.2	0.083

<sup>a</sup> E<sub>1</sub>: estrone; E<sub>2</sub>: 17β-estradiol; T-E<sub>1</sub>: thioestrone; ANF: α-naphthoflavone. <sup>b</sup> CFS: ChemPLP fitness score; GS: Gold score. <sup>c</sup> Inhibition (%) and IC<sub>50</sub> of the transformation of resorufin ethyl ether into resorufin by human CYP1B1 in presence of NADPH in triplicate (±SD). See Supp. Info. (Figure B) for the inhibition curves of **3a**, **3b**, **4a**, **4b**, and ANF.

The results of the EROD assay clearly highlight **4a** and **4b**, which have shown a very close inhibitory activity against CYP1B1 (85.4 ± 0.3 and 87.4 ± 0.9%, respectively) to that of ANF (94.0 ± 3.2%) at 0.3 μM. Compounds **4a** and **4b** bear a pyridin-3-/4-yl, respectively, at C<sub>2</sub> of the steroid backbone. We also note that **3a** and **3b**, which are distinguished from **4a** and **4b** only by the presence of a ketone instead of an alcohol at C<sub>17</sub>, have a lower inhibitory activity than their reduced forms. E<sub>2</sub> derivatives appear to be better inhibitors than their oxidized forms in most cases, but the difference is particularly pronounced for **3a-b** and **4a-b**. Compounds **6a-b** and **7a-b**, with a pyridinyl at C<sub>3</sub> show a weaker activity than their counterparts with the pyridinyl in C<sub>2</sub>. Except **6b**, which have the lowest activity among the 12 synthesized compounds, these derivatives at C<sub>3</sub> present a similar inhibitory potency (~20%). Finally, the C<sub>4</sub>-steroid derivatives **11a-b** and **12a-b** have an inhibitory activity similar to that of **6a** and **7a-b**, with the pyridinyl at C<sub>3</sub>. Compounds **12a-b** have a slightly higher inhibitory activity than those of the oxidized homologues **11a-b**. Thioestrone is clearly a lower inhibitor in comparison with these pyridine derivatives. Otherwise, both substrates E<sub>1</sub> and E<sub>2</sub> showed a very weak inhibitory potency towards CYP1B1 (~15% inhibition), thus demonstrating the role of the pyridine ring.

From screening study results, we selected four steroid derivatives with a pyridine ring at C<sub>2</sub> as the best CYP1B1 inhibitors. From their inhibition curves, we determined their IC<sub>50</sub> values (Table 1), which allow a better comparison between each inhibitor.

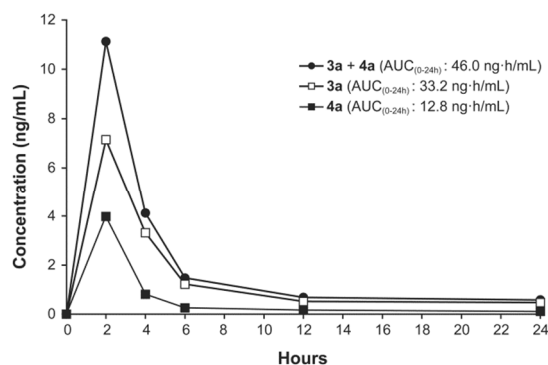
Considering these results, the most important point is that steroid derivatives with a pyridinyl at C<sub>2</sub> (**3a-b** and **4a-b**) are the best inhibitors of CYP1B1 activity among the 12 steroids bearing a pyridine moiety. This is quite interesting, and confirms the docking results showing the best CFS and GS when the pyridine ring was located at C<sub>2</sub>, while the introduction of the pyridinyl in C<sub>3</sub> or C<sub>4</sub> seemed to lessen the affinity of these compounds for the enzyme. Also note that E<sub>2</sub> derivatives **4a-b** are better CYP1B1 inhibitors than their oxidized E<sub>1</sub> homologues **3a-b** confirming our docking results. Given that E<sub>1</sub> and E<sub>2</sub> have shown the same inhibitory activity against CYP1B1, this result suggests that the hydroxy function in C<sub>17</sub> is involved in the formation of a H-bond, probably with the Asn228 residue into the catalytic site of CYP1B1 as suggested by our docking simulations. Moreover, it should be stressed that **4a-b** appear to be very potent inhibitors of CYP1B1. Indeed, they have shown better inhibitory activities than ANF, a potent and well-known CYP1B1 inhibitor.

### Plasmatic concentration of **4a** in rats

A preliminary assessment of the stability of these new CYP1B1 inhibitors was performed by determination of the



plasmatic concentration of **4a** as a function of time after a subcutaneous (sc) injection in rats (Figure 3). The concentration of the corresponding oxidized compound **3a** was also measured, because the secondary alcohol of an E2 derivative is known to be metabolized by the Phase-I metabolism enzymes. Surprisingly, the ketonic form of **4a**, compound **3a**, was more concentrated in plasma than the alcohol **4a**, but the shape of their concentration curves was the same. In fact, following a sc injection of 0.66 mg of **4a** in propylene glycol (PG):DMSO (92:8), the plasmatic concentrations of **4a** and **3a** rapidly increased to 4.0 and 7.0 ng/mL (at 2 h), respectively, and gradually decreased thereafter. Although the plasmatic concentrations measured and AUC values calculated (12.8, 33.2 and 46.0 ng.h/mL for **4a**, **3a**, and **4a** + **3a**, respectively) are relatively acceptable for E2-derivatives, these preliminary results highlight that both 17 $\beta$ -OH and 3-OH of **4a** could be protected towards Phase-I and phase-II metabolism, in order to increase their metabolic stability and, consequently, to increase their plasmatic concentrations.



**Figure 3.** Plasmatic concentrations of 2-(pyridin-3-yl)-E2 (**4a**) and 2-(pyridin-3-yl)-E1 (**3a**) after a sc injection of **4a** (0.66 mg in 500  $\mu$ L PG:DMSO (92:8); 2.0 mg/kg) in rats. AUC: area under curve.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we have successfully synthesized a series of estra-1,3,5(10)-triene derivatives bearing a pyridinyl linked to the steroid A-ring (position C2, 3 or 4) and a carbonyl or a hydroxyl group on D-ring (C17). This study constitutes an important advance in the field of CYP1B1 inhibitors, as we have identified the most potent CYP1B1 inhibitors with a steroid scaffold. Indeed, **4a** and **4b** have shown a better (7.5 and 2.5-fold) inhibitory activity when compared to ANF, a potent non-steroidal CYP1B1 inhibitor.

A major point of consideration is that the position of the pyridine ring plays a key role for the inhibitory activity of the synthesized steroid derivatives and the best inhibitors appear to be those with the pyridinyl at C2. Notably, **4a** and **4b** ( $IC_{50}$  = 0.011 and 0.032  $\mu$ M, respectively) are 6- and 4-fold more active inhibitors against CYP1B1 activity than their oxidized homologues in C17 (**3a** and **3b**), thus reflecting that 17 $\beta$ -OH contributes to improve the affinity of these compounds for the catalytic site of CYP1B1. However, the difference of inhibitory activity between the reduced form and the oxidized form is not so

important for the other derivatives with a pyridinyl in C3 or C4, but they are poor CYP1B1 inhibitors.

The position of the nitrogen atom into the pyridine ring doesn't strongly alter the inhibitory potency. Indeed, compounds with a pyridin-3-yl moiety (series **a**) almost have the same inhibitory profile as their analogues with a pyridin-4-yl moiety (series **b**). However, the measurement of  $IC_{50}$  values of **3a-b** and **4a-b** showed that **3a** and **4a**, with a pyridin-3-yl at C2, were 2- and 3-fold more potent CYP1B1 inhibitors than their counterparts **3b** and **4b**, with a pyridin-4-yl at C2.

The interesting results we obtained open the door to the development of a new generation of steroidal CYP1B1 inhibitors. In fact, based on these SAR results and additional docking studies, the synthesis of a large series of new and diversified estrane derivatives is planned to reveal their inhibitory activity against CYP1B1. Modification at C17 will also be tested to avoid the formation of a less potent ketone derivative, which is the major metabolite observed when the corresponding alcohol was injected in rats.

## ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### Supporting Information

1) Docking methodology, 2) experimental procedures for the synthesis, characterization, and NMR spectra of all compounds, 3) enzymatic EROD assay, 4) plasmatic concentration assay, 5) Figure A, 6) Figure B, and 7) references for Supporting Information.

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website.

## AUTHOR INFORMATION

### Corresponding Author

\* Tel: 1-418-654-2296. E-mail: [donald.poirier@crchul.ulaval.ca](mailto:donald.poirier@crchul.ulaval.ca)

### Author Contributions

All authors contributed to writing the manuscript and have given approval to the final version of the manuscript.

### Funding Sources

Fonds de recherche du Québec – Santé (FRQS) for their financial support from the Strategic Program.

### Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Francisco Cortés Benítez thanks the National Autonomous University of Mexico and the National Council for Sciences and Technology (CONACyT) for the fellowship awarded. Careful reading of this manuscript by Mrs. Michelle Harvey is also greatly acknowledged.

## REFERENCES

- Chun, Y. J.; Kim, S. Discovery of cytochrome P450 1B1 inhibitors as new promising anti-cancer agents. *Med. Res. Rev.*, **2003**, 23, 657-668.

- (2) Nebert, D. W.; Wikvall, K.; Miller, W. L. Human cytochromes P450 in health and disease. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B.*, **2013**, 368, 20120431.
- (3) Sutter, T. R.; Tang, Y. M.; Hayes, C. L.; Wo, Y. Y.; Jabs, E. W.; Li, X.; Yin, H.; Cody, C. W.; Greenlee, W. F. Complete cDNA sequence of a human dioxin-inducible mRNA identifies a new gene subfamily of cytochrome P450 that maps to chromosome 2. *J. Biol. Chem.*, **1994**, 269, 13092-13099.
- (4) Shen Z, Liu J.; Wells, R. L.; Elkind, M. M. cDNAcloning, sequence analysis, and induction by aryl hydrocarbons of a murine cytochrome P450 gene, CYP1B1. *DNA Cell. Biol.*, **1994**, 13, 763-769.
- (5) Androutsopoulos, V. P.; Tsatsakis, A. M.; Spandidos, D. A. Cytochrome P450 CYP1A1: wider roles in cancer progression and prevention. *BMC Cancer*, **2009**, 9, 187.
- (6) Divanovic, S.; Dalli, J.; Jorge-Nebert, L. F.; Flick, L. M.; Gálvez-Peralta, M.; Boespflug, N. D.; Stankiewicz, T. E.; Fitzgerald, J. M.; Somarathna, M.; Karp, C. L.; Serhan, C. N.; Nebert, D. W. Contributions of the three CYP1 monooxygenases to pro-inflammatory and inflammation-resolution lipid mediator pathways. *J. Immunol.*, **2013**, 191, 3347-3357.
- (7) Androutsopoulos, V. P.; Papakyriakou, A.; Vourloumis, D.; Tsatsakis, A. M.; Spandidos, D. A. Dietary flavonoids in cancer therapy and prevention: Substrates and inhibitors of cytochrome P450 CYP1 enzymes. *Pharmacol. Therapeut.*, **2010**, 126, 9-20.
- (8) Androutsopoulos, V. P.; Papakyriakou, A.; Vourloumis, D.; Spandidos, D. E. Comparative CYP1A1 and CYP1B1 substrate and inhibitor profile of dietary flavonoids. *Bioorg. Med. Chem.*, **2011**, 19, 2842-2849.
- (9) Androutsopoulos, V. P.; Li, N.; Aroo, R. R. J. The Methoxylated Flavones Eupatorin and Cirsiliol Induce CYP1 Enzyme Expression in MCF7 Cells. *J. Nat. Prod.*, **2009**, 72, 1390-1394.
- (10) Hayes, C. L.; Spink, D. C.; Spink, B. C.; Cao, J. Q.; Walker, N. J.; Sutter, T. R. 17 $\beta$ -Estradiol hydroxylation catalyzed by human cytochrome P450 1B1. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA*, **1996**, 93, 9776-9781.
- (11) Lee, A. J.; Cai, M. X.; Thomas, P. E.; Conney, A. H.; Zhu, B. T. Characterization of the oxidative metabolites of 17 $\beta$ -estradiol and estrone formed by 15 selectively expressed human cytochrome p450 isoforms. *Endocrinology*, **2003**, 144, 3382-3398.
- (12) Cavalieri, E. L.; Stack, D. E.; Devanesan, P. D.; Todorovic, R.; Dwivedy, I.; Higginbotham, S.; Johansson, S. L.; Patil, K. D.; Gross, M. L.; Gooden, J. K.; Ramanathan, R.; Cerny, R. L.; Rogan, E. G. Molecular origin of cancer: Catechol estrogen-3,4-quinones as endogenous tumor initiators. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA*, **1997**, 94, 10937-10942.
- (13) Murray, G. I.; Taylor, M. C.; McFadyen, M. C.; McKay, J. A.; Greenlee, W. F.; Burke, M. D.; Melvin, W. T. Tumor-specific expression of cytochrome P450 CYP1B1. *Cancer Res.*, **1997**, 57, 3026-3031.
- (14) McFadyen, M. C. E.; McLeod, H. L.; Jackson, F. C.; Melvin, W. T.; Doehmer, J.; Murray, G. I. Cytochrome P450 CYP1B1 protein expression : A novel mechanism of anticancer drug resistance. *Biochem. Pharmacol.*, **2001**, 62, 207-212.
- (15) Cui, J.; Meng, Q.; Zhang, X.; Cui, Q.; Zhou, W.; Li, S. Design and synthesis of new  $\alpha$ -naphthoflavones as cytochrome P450 (CYP) 1B1 inhibitors to overcome docetaxel-resistance associated with CYP1B1 overexpression. *J. Med. Chem.*, **2015**, 58, 3534-3547.
- (16) Rochat, B.; Morsman, J. M.; Murray, G. I.; Figg, W. D.; McLeod, H. L. Human CYP1B1 and anticancer agent metabolism: mechanism for tumor-specific drug inactivation? *J. Pharmacol. Exp. Ther.*, **2001**, 296, 537-541.
- (17) Cui, J.; Li, S. Inhibitors and prodrugs targeting CYP1: a novel approach in cancer prevention and therapy. *Curr. Med. Chem.*, **2014**, 21, 519-552.
- (18) Dong, J.; Zhang, Q.; Cui, Q.; Huang, G.; Pan, X.; Li, S. Flavonoids and naphthoflavonoids: wider roles in the modulation of cytochrome P450 family 1 enzymes. *ChemMedChem* **2016**, 11, 2102-2118.
- (19) Dutour, R.; Poirier, D. Inhibitors of cytochrome P450 (CYP) 1B1. *Eur. J. Med. Chem.* **2017**, 135, 296-306.
- (20) Dawling, S.; Roodi, N.; Parl, F. F. Methoxyestrogens exert feedback inhibition on cytochrome P450 1A1 and 1B1. *Cancer Res.*, **2003**, 63, 3127-3132.
- (21) Ciolino, H. P.; MacDonald, C. J.; Yeh, G. C. Inhibition of carcinogen-activating enzymes by 16 $\alpha$ -fluoro-5-androsten-17-one. *Cancer Res.*, **2002**, 62, 3685-3690.
- (22) Poirier, D. Contribution to the development of inhibitors of 17 $\beta$ -hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase types 1 and 7: key tools for studying and treating estrogen-dependent diseases. *J. Steroid Biochem. Mol. Biol.*, **2011**, 125, 83-94.
- (23) Maltais, R.; Ayan, D.; Trottier, A.; Barbeau, X.; Lagüe, P.; Bouchard, J. E.; Poirier, D. Discovery of a non-estrogenic irreversible inhibitor of 17 $\beta$ -hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase type 1 from 3-substituted-16 $\beta$ -(*m*-carbamoylbenzyl)-estradiol derivatives. *J. Med. Chem.*, **2014**, 57, 204-222.
- (24) Maltais, R.; Trottier, A.; Delhomme, A.; Barbeau, X.; Lagüe, P.; Poirier, D. Identification of fused 16 $\beta$ ,17 $\beta$ -oxazinone-estradiol derivatives as a new family of non-estrogenic 17 $\beta$ -hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase type 1 inhibitors. *Eur. J. Med. Chem.*, **2015**, 93, 470-480.
- (25) Ciobanu, L. C.; Boivin, R. P.; Luu-The, V.; Poirier, D. 3 $\beta$ -Sulfamate derivatives of C19 and C21 steroids bearing a *t*-butylbenzyl or a benzyl group: synthesis and evaluation as non-estrogenic and non-androgenic steroid sulfatase inhibitors. *J. Enzyme Inhib. Med. Chem.*, **2003**, 18, 15-26.
- (26) Poirier, D.; Roy, J.; Cortés-Benítez, F.; Dutour, R. Targeting cytochrome P450 (CYP) 1B1 with steroid derivatives. *Bioorg. Med. Chem. Lett.*, **2016**, 26, 5272-5276.
- (27) DeVore, N. M.; Scott, E. E. Structures of cytochrome P450 17A1 with prostate cancer drugs abiraterone and TOK-001. *Nature*, **2012**, 482, 116-119.
- (28) Wang, A.; Savas, U.; Stout, C. D.; Johnson, E. F. Structural Characterization of the complex between  $\alpha$ -naphthoflavone and human cytochrome P450 1B1. *J. Biol. Chem.*, **2011**, 286, 5736-5743.
- (29) Pettersen, E. F.; Goddard, T. D.; Huang, C. C.; Couch, G. S.; Greenblatt, D. M.; Meng, E. C.; Ferrin, T. E. UCSF Chimera - A visualization system for exploratory research and analysis. *J. Comp. Chem.*, **2004**, 25, 1605-1612.
- (30) Jones, G.; Willett, P.; Glen, R. C.; Leach, A. R.; Taylor, R. Development and validation of a generic algorithm for flexible docking. *J. Mol. Biol.*, **1997**, 267, 727-748.
- (31) Potter, B. V. L.; Reed, M. J.; Woo, L. W. L. Steroidal compounds for inhibiting steroid sulphatase. Patents, **2003**. WO2003033518A1.
- (32) Radu, I. I.; Poirier, D.; Provencher, L. New efficient pathway for the synthesis of 3-aminoestrone. *Tetrahedron Lett.*, **2002**, 43, 7617-7619.
- (33) Slaunwhite, W. R., Neely, L. Bromination of phenolic steroids. I. Substitution of estrone and 17 $\beta$ -estradiol in ring A. *J. Org. Chem.*, **1962**, 27, 1749-1752.
- (34) Ivanov, A.; Ejaz, S. A.; Shah, S. J. A.; Ehlers, P.; Villinger, A.; Frank, E.; Schneider, G.; Wölfling, J.; Rahman, Q.; Iqbal, J.; Langer, P. Synthesis, functionalization and biological activity of arylated derivatives of (+)-estrone. *Bioorg. Med. Chem.*, **2017**, 25, 949-962.

Insert Table of Contents artwork here

