



## Novel BACE1 inhibitors possessing a 5-nitroisophthalic scaffold at the P<sub>2</sub> position

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### ABSTRACT

Recently, we reported substrate-based pentapeptidic BACE1 inhibitors possessing a hydroxymethylcarbonyl isostere as a substrate transition-state mimic. These inhibitors showed potent inhibitory activities in enzymatic and cell assays. We also designed and synthesized non-peptidic and small-sized inhibitors possessing a heterocyclic scaffold at the P<sub>2</sub> position. By studying the structure–activity relationship of these inhibitors, we found that the σ–π interaction of an inhibitor with the BACE1–Arg235 side chain played a key role in the inhibition mechanism. Hence, we optimized the inhibitors with a focus on their P<sub>2</sub> regions. In this Letter, a series of novel BACE1 inhibitors possessing a 5-nitroisophthalic scaffold at the P<sub>2</sub> position are described along with the results of the related structure–activity relationship study. These small-sized inhibitors are expected improved membrane permeability and bioavailability.

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Amyloid β (Aβ) peptide is a main component of senile plaques in the brains of Alzheimer's disease (AD) patients. According to the amyloid hypothesis,<sup>1</sup> β-secretase [BACE1: β-site APP (amyloid precursor protein) cleaving enzyme 1] appears promising as a molecular target for therapeutic intervention in AD,<sup>2–6</sup> as BACE1 triggers Aβ peptide formation by cleaving APP at the Aβ domain N-terminus.<sup>7–12</sup> Potent peptidic BACE1 inhibitors<sup>13–19</sup> (IC<sub>50</sub> ~1.2 nM) with a hydroxymethylcarbonyl (HMC) isostere as a substrate transition-state mimic have been reported.<sup>20,21</sup> Of these inhibitors, KMI-429 exhibited effective inhibition of BACE1 activity in cultured cells and significant reduction of Aβ production in vivo (via direct administration into the hippocampi of APP transgenic and wild-type mice).<sup>14b</sup> Some natural amino acids in these inhibitors seem to be required to improve both enzymatic stability in vivo and permeability across the blood–brain barrier. Recently, with the goal of developing a practical anti-AD drug, non-peptidic and small-sized BACE1 inhibitors possessing a 2,6-pyridinedicarboxylic or chelidonic scaffold at the P<sub>2</sub> position were designed based on the conformer structure of a virtual inhibitor docked on the enzyme (Fig. 1), so called 'in silico conformational structure-based design'.<sup>20</sup> As these non-peptidic inhibitors exhibited lower inhibitory activities than peptidic KMI-compounds, more potent forms were desired and, thus, inhibitors possessing a halogen atom

on the P<sub>2</sub>-pyridine ring were designed by focusing on their interaction with the guanidino π-orbital of BACE1–Arg235 (Fig. 2), and found to be more potent.<sup>23</sup> In this study, we designed and synthesized novel BACE1 inhibitors possessing a 5-nitroisophthalic scaffold at their P<sub>2</sub> position by focusing on the interaction with side

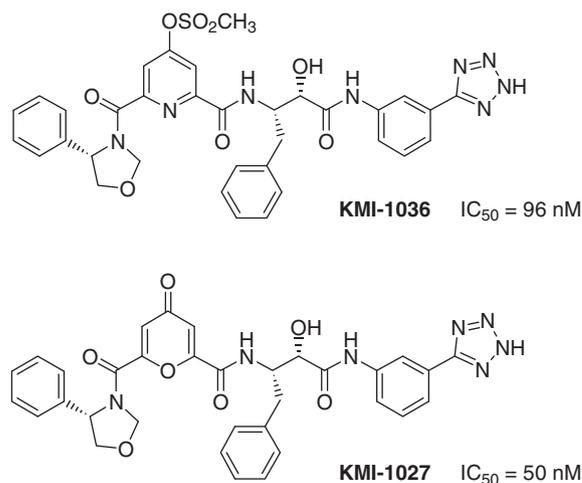
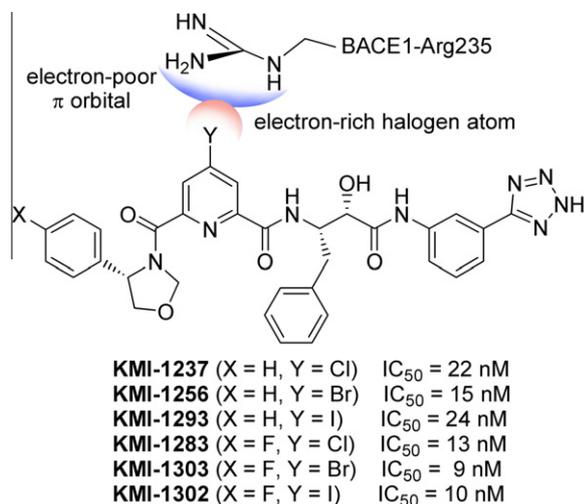


Figure 1. BACE1 inhibitors with a P<sub>2</sub> heterocyclic scaffold.

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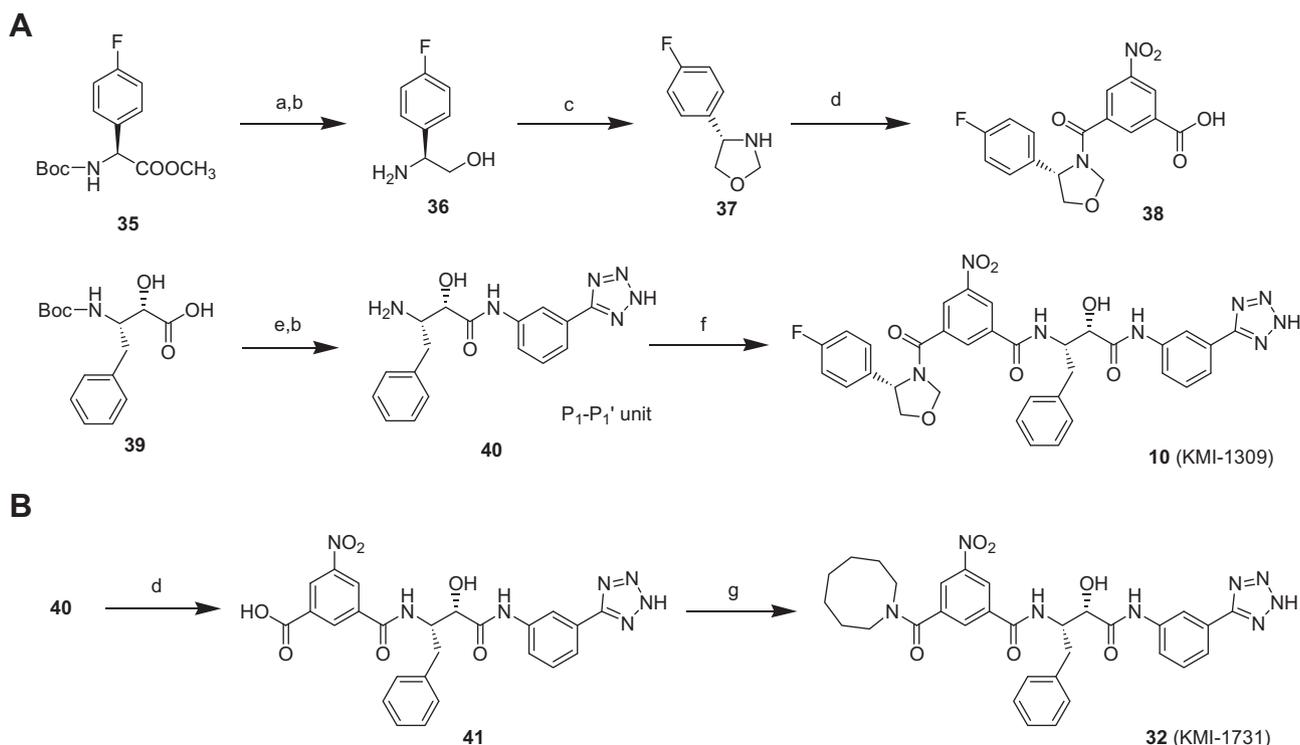
**Figure 2.** BACE1 inhibitors with a halogen atom on the  $P_2$  aromatic ring.

chain of BACE1-Arg235. In addition, the results of their structure–activity relationship are discussed.

When the publicly-available X-ray crystal structures of BACE1-inhibitor complexes are compared, surprisingly, the guanidino-planes of Arg235–BACE1 show similar features in terms of flopping over the  $P_2$  region of the inhibitors, and the nearest distances between the  $P_2$  region and guanidino-plane show similar values of about 3 Å in the X-ray crystal structures of most BACE1-inhibitor complexes.<sup>23</sup> It was hypothesized here that the guanidino-plane of Arg235 pushes down on the  $P_2$  region of the inhibitors, causing them to be affixed in the BACE1 active site, and that a slightly attractive force from a quantum effect, such as stacking or  $\sigma$ – $\pi$  interactions, plays a significant role for packing down the inhibitors effectively in the active site of BACE1. Hence, an inhibitors,

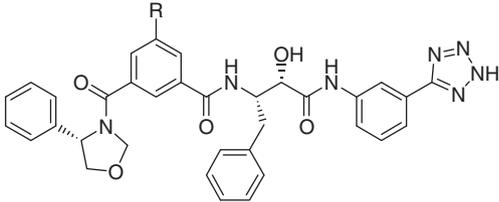
KMI-1303, was designed, which possessed a halogen atom on the  $P_2$ -pyridine scaffold, and proved to be quite potent (Fig. 2). The electron-rich halogen atom appeared able to interact with the electron-poor  $\pi$ -orbital of guanidino-plane by Coulomb's force. With the goal of identifying other forms of potent inhibitors by optimizing the inhibitor  $P_2$  regions, we investigated the effect of other  $P_2$  regions substituents which allowed to interact with the guanidino-plane of BACE1-Arg235. A 5-isophthalic scaffold was adopted as a  $P_2$  residue for the synthesis of a series of BACE1 inhibitors.

BACE1 inhibitors **1–34** were synthesized with the plan to connect in tandem the blocks corresponding to the  $P_3$ – $P_2$  residues and  $P_1$ – $P_1'$  residues (Scheme 1A) or to connect sequentially from the  $P_1'$  residues to  $P_3$  residues (Scheme 1B). Amide bonds were produced by common solution-phase synthesis methods using 1-ethyl-3-(3-dimethylaminopropyl)carbodiimide-HCl (EDC-HCl) in the presence of 1-hydroxybenzotriazole (HOBt) as a coupling agent. For examples, in the synthesis of inhibitors **10** and **32** (Scheme 1),  $P_3$  amine **37** and 5-nitroisophthalic acid were coupled to produce the  $P_3$ – $P_2$  residue **38**, with the former compound, possessing an oxazolidine ring, prepared from the corresponding amino alcohol, itself previously prepared from L-amino acid derivatives. Other amines were commercially available.  $P_1$ – $P_1'$  residue **40** was synthesized from Boc-Apns-OH **39** [Apns: (2S,3S)-3-amino-2-hydroxy-4-phenylbutyric acid] and 5-(3-aminophenyl)tetrazole. Eventually,  $P_3$ – $P_2$  residue **38** and  $P_1$ – $P_1'$  residue **40** were coupled to produce inhibitor **10**. Alternatively, some inhibitors, **32** for example, were synthesized from compound **40** by sequential connection with the  $P_2$  residue and  $P_3$  amine. BACE1 inhibitor **2** was synthesized from its methyl ester, by alkaline hydrolysis, which was prepared from monomethyl ester of benzene-1,3,5-tricarboxylic acid as a starting material. BACE1 inhibitor **4** was synthesized from compound **9** by catalytic hydrogenation using 5% Pd-C catalyst. All inhibitors were purified by preparative reversed phase-high performance liquid chromatography. BACE1 inhibitory activities of the synthesized inhibitors were determined



**Scheme 1.** Reagents and conditions: (a)  $LiBH_4$ /THF-MeOH; (b) 4N HCl/dioxane; (c) HCHO, water; (d) 5-nitroisophthalic acid, EDC-HCl, HOBt/DMF; (e) 5-(3-aminophenyl)tetrazole, EDC-HCl, HOBt/DMF; (f) **38**, EDC-HCl, HOBt/DMF; (g) azocane, EDC-HCl, HOBt/DMF.

**Table 1**  
BACE1 inhibitors possessing a chelidonic scaffold at the P<sub>3</sub> position

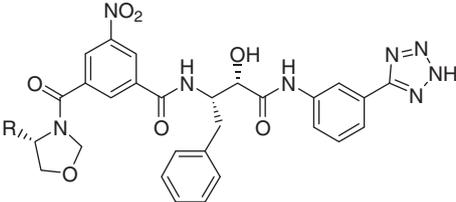


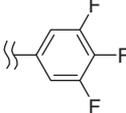
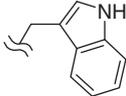
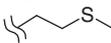
Compound (KMI-No.)	R	BACE1 inhibition %		IC <sub>50</sub> (nM)
		at 2 μM	at 0.2 μM	
1 (KMI-1662)	-H	85	46	192
2 (KMI-1767)	-COOH	91	60	122
3 (KMI-1298)	-OCOCH <sub>3</sub>	79	—	—
4 (KMI-1307)	-NH <sub>2</sub>	49	—	—
5 (KMI-1280)	-Br	98	84	25
6 (KMI-1287)	-I	98	78	34
7 (KMI-1325)	-CH <sub>3</sub>	95	65	67
8 (KMI-1277)	-C(CH <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>3</sub>	63	—	—
9 (KMI-1214)	-NO <sub>2</sub>	98	88	19

by an enzymatic assay using a recombinant human BACE1 and FRET (fluorescence resonance energy transfer) substrate as previously reported.<sup>5,13–19,22,23</sup>

First, BACE1 inhibitors **1–9** were synthesized possessing an isophthalic scaffold at the P<sub>2</sub> position and diverse groups on its aromatic ring (Table 1). Of these inhibitors, compound **9**, with a nitro group, exhibited the highest BACE1 inhibitory activity and

**Table 2**  
BACE1 inhibitors possessing a 2,6-pyridinedicarboxylic scaffold at the P<sub>3</sub> position

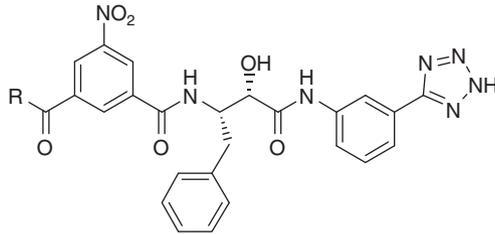


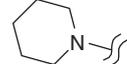
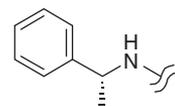
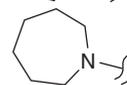
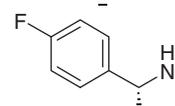
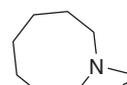
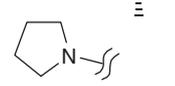
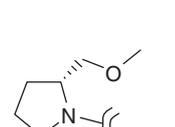
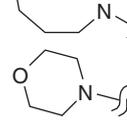
Compound (KMI-No.)	R	BACE1 inhibition %		IC <sub>50</sub> (nM)
		at 2 μM	at 0.2 μM	
10 (KMI-1309)		99	91	13
11		81	41	—
12	Benzyl	89	45	—
13	Cyclohexylmethyl	50	—	—
14		80	—	—
15		57	—	—
16	-CH <sub>3</sub>	33	—	—
17	-Et	92	54	—
18	- <i>n</i> -Pr	93	57	—
19	- <i>n</i> -Bu	92	59	—
20	Isopropyl	88	44	—
21		86	45	—
22	<i>sec</i> -Butyl	94	62	—
23	Isobutyl	85	42	—
24	<i>tert</i> -Butyl	71	—	—

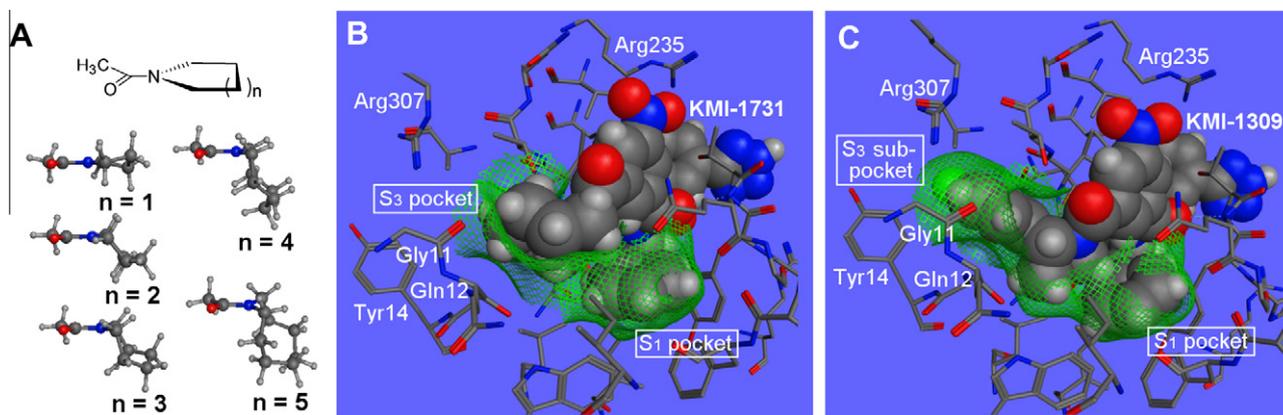
compound **5**, **6**, and **7**, possessing a halogen atom or methyl group on the P<sub>2</sub> aromatic ring, also exhibited high BACE1 inhibitory activities, suggesting that a small-sized and hydrophobic substituent on the P<sub>2</sub> aromatic ring was preferential for BACE1 inhibition. Having previously reported the nature of a series of BACE1 inhibitors possessing a halogen atom on the P<sub>2</sub>-heterocyclic scaffold, the focus here was on the nitro-group as a P<sub>2</sub>-substituent, resulting in the design of inhibitors **10–34**. Inhibitors **10–24** possessed a 5-membered oxazolidinone ring (Table 2) and, of these, compound **10** exhibited the highest BACE1 inhibitory activity, followed in activity by compounds **17–19** and **22**. The results also showed that compound **16**, with a small-sized group and compounds **13**, **15**, and **24**, with bulky oxazolidinone ring substituents, showed low inhibitory activities, suggesting that size—being the length of as phenyl group—and planarity for an inhibitor P<sub>2</sub>-substituent are important. In particular, a *p*-fluorophenyl group appeared to interact tightly with the BACE1 S<sub>3</sub> sub-pocket.

Next, inhibitors **25–34**, with no oxazolidinone ring at the P<sub>3</sub> position were synthesized (Table 3). Inhibitors **26** and **27**, with a P<sub>2</sub>-benzylamino type group, exhibited relatively high BACE1 inhibitory activities and, although compound **28** with a P<sub>3</sub>-pyrrolidine ring, showed low inhibitory activity, inhibitor **29**, possessing a substituent on the P<sub>3</sub>-pyrrolidine ring, showed superior inhibitory activity. This suggested that there was an empty space between the P<sub>3</sub>-pyrrolidine ring and S<sub>3</sub> pocket of BACE1. Hence, inhibitors **30–34** were produced with cyclic amines at the P<sub>3</sub> position and, of these, compound **32** (KMI-1731), with an 8-membered ring, showed the highest inhibitory activity. To understand these results, a docking simulation study was performed using MOE soft-

**Table 3**  
BACE1 inhibitors possessing 2,6-pyridinedicarboxylic scaffold at the P<sub>3</sub> position



Compound (KMI-No.)	R	BACE1 inhibition %		Compound (KMI-No.)	R	BACE1 inhibition %	
		at 2 μM	at 0.2 μM			at 2 μM	at 0.2 μM
25-(KMI-1211)	-N(n-Pr) <sub>2</sub>	79	—	30 (KMI-1729)		49	—
26 (KMI-1212)		83	44	31-(KMI-1730)		60	—
27 (KMI-1213)		87	50	32 (KMI-1731)		80	38
28 (KMI-1728)		24	—	33 (KMI-1769)		28	—
29 (KMI-1219)		89	57	34 (KMI-1732)		0	—

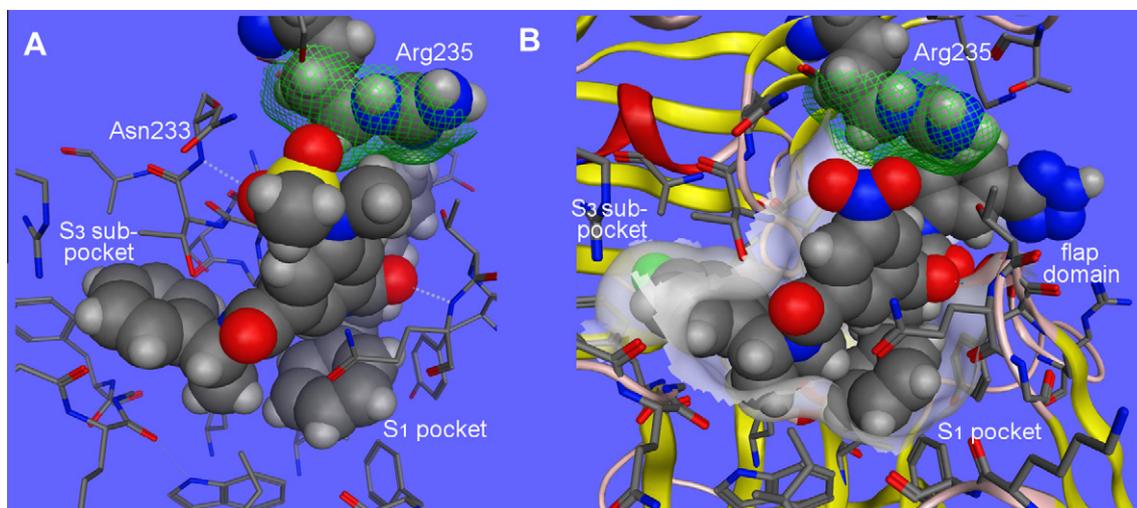


**Figure 3.** (A) Configurations of some cyclic amides. (B) Inhibitor **32** (KMI-1731) docked in BACE1. (C) Inhibitor **10** (KMI-1309) docked in BACE1 (PDB ID: 2B8L). Space-filling models and green lines indicate inhibitors and BACE1 hydrophobic pockets, respectively, and stick models indicate BACE1 amino acid residues around each inhibitor.

ware (Chemical Computing Group Inc., Canada, Figure 3). The configurations of cyclic acetyl amides from 5- to 9-membered rings after energy minimization under the MMFF94x force field are shown in Figure 3A. The molecular sizes of these cyclic acetyl amides appeared to be similar in the direction of the amide bonds regardless of their ring-sizes, because the larger rings present more greatly curved configurations. When inhibitor **32**, with an 8-membered ring, was docked in BACE1, this ring appeared to interact tightly with the S<sub>3</sub> pocket of BACE1 due to its very bent structure (Fig. 3B). However, compound **33**, with a 9-membered ring, showed surprisingly low inhibitory activity. In general, an odd-membered, medium-sized ring has higher strain energy and no symmetric properties, resulting in a bulky configuration (Figure 3A). Consequently, compound **33** might not have been able to bind

to the S<sub>3</sub> pocket of BACE1. On the other hand, compound **34**, with a P<sub>3</sub>-morpholine ring, exhibited no inhibitory activity, suggesting that a hydrophilic moiety, such as an oxygen atom, could not interact with the hydrophobic S<sub>3</sub> pocket of BACE1. For comparison, BACE1 docked inhibitor **10** is shown in Figure 3C. Inhibitor **32**'s P<sub>3</sub> moiety could have interacted with the S<sub>3</sub> pocket of BACE1, while inhibitor **10**'s P<sub>3</sub>-benzene ring appeared able to interact effectively with the S<sub>3</sub> sub-pocket lying behind the S<sub>3</sub> pocket.

As described above, inhibitors with a nitro group on the P<sub>2</sub>-isophthalic scaffold exhibited the highest inhibitory activities among the present inhibitors possessing an isophthalic scaffold. To better understand this finding, a docking simulation performed using MOE software. As inhibitor **5–7** exhibited potent BACE1 inhibitory activities, a halogen and methyl groups were speculated



**Figure 4.** Interaction between BACE1-Arg235 and inhibitors docked in BACE1 (PDB ID: 2B8L). (A) Merck's compound. (B) Compound **10** (KMI-1309). Inhibitors and Arg235 were depicted by space-filling models. Stick models indicate BACE1 amino acid residues around each inhibitor.

to be fixed on the P<sub>2</sub>-isophthalic ring by direct covalent bonding and effectively bound to the guanidino-plane of BACE1-Arg235 by  $\sigma$ - $\pi$  interactions. The X-ray crystal structure of Merck's inhibitor bound in BACE1 (PDB ID: 2B8L) is shown in Figure 4A. Because the sulfonyl-oxygen atom of P<sub>2</sub>-N-methyl-N-methanesulfonyl group of Merck's inhibitor appears to interact with the  $\alpha$ -amino group of BACE1-Asn233 by hydrogen bonding, the N-methyl group is fixed on the P<sub>2</sub>-isophthalic ring and might bind effectively to the BACE1-Arg235 by CH- $\pi$  interactions. Considering the nitro group on the P<sub>2</sub>-isophthalic ring of inhibitor **10** (Fig. 4B), the rotation of a nitro group on an aromatic ring is restricted by resonance effects and is thus fixed on its ring. For this reason, the oxygen atom of the nitro group is speculated here to be fixed on the P<sub>2</sub>-isophthalic ring and can thus effectively bind to BACE1-Arg235 by O- $\pi$  interactions.

In conclusion, we synthesized a series of BACE1 inhibitors possessing an isophthalic scaffold at the P<sub>2</sub> position, and found some potent BACE1 inhibitors with a nitro group on the P<sub>2</sub> ring. Notably, inhibitor **10** (KMI-1309) was shown to have potent BACE1 inhibitory activity (IC<sub>50</sub> = 13 nM). These small-sized and non-peptidic inhibitors are expected to provide improvement of clinical inhibitor bioavailability and membrane permeability across the blood-brain barrier.

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