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TITLE: Glutamate transmission enhancement for treatment of PTSD

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The views, opinions and/or findings contained in this report are those of the author(s) and should not be construed as an official Department of the Army position, policy or decision unless so designated by other documentation.
Conclusions: These preliminary data indicate that the GLYT1 inhibitor Org-24598 facilitates fear extinction similar to DCS. Therefore, we propose that the GLYT1 inhibitor be used as an adjunctive treatment to enhance the efficacy of extinction-based therapies. Our preliminary results in the FPS model of fear conditioning and extinction in mice suggest that the GLYT1 inhibitor Org-24598 is a promising candidate for further study.

Methods: To assess the effects of these compounds on fear extinction, we compared dose responses of both compounds to vehicle controls in their ability to facilitate fear extinction and examine if these effects were maintained with repeated testing. These initial studies characterizing and comparing the longevity of our test compounds on fear extinction will be important to inform clinical studies of the relative utility of these compounds to facilitate extinction-based therapies. Results: Our preliminary results in the mouse model of fear extinction showed that unlike in rats, DCS, the positive control, does not enhance fear extinction. We thus switched to utilization of the FPS model in rats which has been shown previously to be sensitive to DCS. We found that DCS significantly enhanced fear extinction as compared to vehicle controls. Further studies are now underway to examine the effects of CX546 in this model.
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Introduction

Exposure therapy, a fear extinction based treatment, has been shown to be effective in treating post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Exposure-based therapies require substantial time and investment for both the patient and provider, averaging 10 sessions or more of approximately 1 h each to achieve significant beneficial effects. Thus, treatments that enhance the efficacy of extinction therapies and reduce the number of required sessions for remission would be of great benefit. Ideally, such therapy strategies may reduce the need for long term medication. This proposal uses a preclinical animal model of fear learning and extinction (fear potentiated startle) to test the efficacy of two novel compounds that enhance glutamate signaling. Previous reports indicate that the partial glutamate receptor agonist D-cycloserine (DCS) has been shown to facilitate animal models of extinction which has translated into recent clinical reports of efficacy in anxiety disorders when administered during extinction based psychotherapies. DCS however, has been shown to have some limitations in both dosing and efficacy in some circumstances however (Norberg, Krystal, & Tolin, 2008). Here we will examine the efficacy of glycine transporter (GLYT1) inhibition and positive allosteric modulation of AMPA receptors in facilitation fear extinction. GLYT1 inhibitors are reported to show significantly greater enhancement of glutamate signaling compared to DCS (Sur and Kinney, 2007), as well as facilitate glutamate transmission in limbic regions that modulate emotional processes. We will examine the efficacy of treatment with a glycine transporter inhibitor during extinction training to enhance fear extinction retention and reduce fear reinstatement in mice. We will also examine CX546, an “ampakine” in the class of AMPA receptor positive allosteric modulators, which enhances molecular markers of learning in the cortex and hippocampus (e.g. long term potentiation) and enhance learning in rodents and humans (Arai and Kessler, 2007). These studies will provide information either in support or against further research of these compounds to increase fear extinction. Over this reporting period we have validated the animal model used to detect glutamate signaling using the positive control DCS, as well as tested the glycine transporter inhibitor Org-24598.
The objective of this proposal is to test the efficacy of two novel classes of glutamate system enhancing compounds, ampakines and glycine transporter inhibitors, to facilitate fear extinction learning. **Rationale:** Rothbaum and Davis (2003) describe PTSD as a disorder characterized by a “failure of fear extinction after trauma”. In animals and humans, a conditioned fear association occurs when a conditioned stimulus (CS) and an aversive unconditioned stimulus (US) are presented in close temporal proximity. Thus the subject learns that the CS “predicts” the occurrence of the US. In the case of PTSD, environmental cues during trauma are associated with the pain and fear of the traumatic event, and these cues continue to evoke strong fear reactions long after the initial trauma has receded. In the laboratory this phenomenon is modeled in humans and animals by pairing a tone or light with noxious stimuli such as an electrical shock. Once the association between the CS and US has been learned, the presentation of the CS alone will invoke a conditioned fear response (e.g. autonomic activation, exaggerated startle response, avoidance behavior). The phenomenon of fear extinction occurs when the learned CS is then presented without the occurrence of the US, hence the subject learns that the CS no longer predicts the presence of the US and subsequent fear responses to the CS are inhibited. It is this phenomenon that is hypothesized to be disrupted in PTSD patients, which continue to show pronounced signs of anxiety, avoidance, and arousal in response to trauma reminders. Preclinical studies have demonstrated that glutamate transmission in the amygdala is necessary for fear extinction, as measured by extinction of fear potentiated startle (FPS; (for review see Myers and Davis 2006)). Furthermore, DCS, a partial NMDA receptor agonist acting on the glycine modulator site, significantly enhances fear extinction. Compared to controls, rats treated with d-cycloserine during fear extinction training show (1) greater reductions in fear post training, (2) generalized inhibition of other conditioned fear cues and (3) more resilient fear extinction when exposed to subsequent trauma (e.g. foot shock reinstatement). These studies have recently been translated into the clinic in two phobia populations, acrophobia and social phobia, who received DCS treatment during a type of extinction training (Norberg et al. 2008). DCS treatment significantly enhanced the extinction therapy effects on measures of phobia-specific and generalized anxiety compared to placebo treatment. For example, those taking DCS during therapy exhibited greater general improvement of anxiety symptoms, increased self exposure to CSs outside of therapy, and reduced autonomic measures of fear during CS presentation. These studies indicate that enhancement of glutamatergic transmission improves fear extinction in both animals and humans (for review see Myers and Davis 2006).

**Hypothesis:** Ligands that enhance glutamate transmission facilitate fear extinction (fear extinction) learning. To test our hypothesis, we proposed to examine the effects of 2 glutamate signaling enhancing drugs, a glycine transporter inhibitor (Org-24598) and a positive modulator of AMPA receptor activity (CX546) in ability to enhance fear extinction learning as measured by enhanced extinction of fear potentiated startle (FPS) in mice.

FPS: To assess the effects of these compounds on fear extinction, we used the FPS model of fear conditioning and extinction in rodents (Risbrough et al 2003). This assay has construct, face, and predictive validity for fear learning processes in humans. When rodents are presented with a CS previously paired with a shock US, acoustic startle responding is exaggerated compared to baseline (i.e. fear-potentiated startle). After initial fear learning, if rodents are subsequently presented with the CS without the US, they slowly extinguish the conditioned fear response to the CS. Thus, after fear extinction training, FPS is reduced. Hence FPS levels post extinction learning can be used as a measure of fear extinction.

1. **Model validation:** Prove that the assay being used to detect efficacy of glutamate signaling in fear extinction is sensitive to the positive control compound, D-cycloserine.

Expt.1. **Rationale:** To test these compounds in their ability to enhance fear extinction we first examined the sensitivity of our mouse fear potentiated startle extinction assay to detect efficacy of glutamate signaling enhancers, using DCS. Although these studies were not expressly delineated in the SOW, we had concerns that if we saw negative effects of the novel compounds tested, we would not be sure if it was due to a problem with the assay to detect positive efficacy in facilitating fear extinction. Thus we added DCS as a positive control in our initial studies. We used DCS as our positive control as it has proven efficacy in human studies of fear extinction therapy across a wide number of anxiety disorders (Norberg et al. 2008). We first wanted to be sure that our model detects
this positive control, supporting the use of the assay to measure efficacy of novel compounds to increase extinction. We had proposed to use the mouse model of fear potentiated startle to examine the efficacy of glutamate enhancing ligands to increase fear extinction. Mice were trained over 2 days to associate a tone CS (4 kHz, 30 s) with a mild footshock (0.4 mA, 10 training trials/day). After associative learning, mice were tested for learned fear of the tone CS by comparing their startle reactivity with and without the cue present (100-110 dB pulses with and without the presence of the tone CS, 30-120 sec intertrial interval, 12 trials of each type). Mice that exhibited significant learning of the cue (showed higher startle reactivity in the presence of the cue compared to when the cue was not present) went on to the extinction training day. For extinction training, mice were presented with 30 cue trials without a shock. Thirty min before extinction training mice were treated with vehicle or DCS (1-30 mg/kg, i.p.). Twenty four hours later, mice were tested for FPS. DCS treatment had no effect on fear extinction in mice (Figure 1). Further studies using different parameters and dose ranges were unsuccessful (data not shown). Indeed, in some experiments we found DCS treatment decreased fear extinction (e.g. interrupted extinction learning resulting in higher fear, data not shown). We attempted 4 variations of the mouse fear potentiated startle assay as well as used alternate methods to examine fear learning (freezing instead of acoustic startle) to detect a DCS effect of fear extinction, but were unsuccessful in detecting a positive effect. Because we could not develop an assay that was sensitive to the positive controls, DCS, we decided to establish the rat model of FPS in the laboratory which has been reported by others to be sensitive to DCS of fear extinction (Walker et al. 2002). Using the same protocol as reported by (Walker & Davis, 2002), we found that DCS treatment during extinction training in rats significantly increased the amount of fear extinction (Figure 2) measured 24 hours after drug treatment. Hence the rat FPS assay was deemed suitable for use to examine the effects of novel glutamate signaling enhancers on fear extinction.

2. Test the hypothesis that fear extinction is enhanced by glycine transporter 1 inhibition.

A. Test the hypothesis that Org-24598 induces facilitation of extinction training. The glycine transporter inhibitor Org-24598 has been shown to induce increased glycine signaling in the forebrain (see Appendix A) at a dose of 10 mg/kg. Based on this information our first study was to investigate the effects of 3 and 10 mg/kg treatment 60 min before extinction training. As shown in Figure 3, we found a significant effect of Org-24598 treatment to enhance fear extinction in rats. Following this positive effect we then conducted an experiment to examine if Org-24598 treatment is as effective using fewer training trials. Studies in humans indicate that DCS effects to enhance extinction are critically dependent on the number of training trials given while under DCS treatment, for example too few trials during treatment will render DCS ineffective (Norberg et al. 2008). Our
initial studies were using 30 training trials over 1 day. To examine if Org-24598 was as effective using fewer trials, we tested the ability of 10 mg/kg Org-24598 to facilitate extinction learning using 20 trials. We found a non-significant reduction in %FPS with 20 extinction training trials compared to vehicle (Mean+/-SEM %FPS: Vehicle=74+/-31, Org-24598=56+/-18, F(1,20)<1, N.S.). We are currently examining the efficacy of higher doses (10-30 mg/kg) to facilitate extinction using fewer extinction trials (20 trials).

B. Test the hypothesis that Org-24598 facilitation of extinction training is long lasting. Seven days after initial testing of extinction facilitation (see Figure 2 above) we retested the rats in FPS to examine if the effects of Org-24598 remained. We found that all rats, regardless of treatment, exhibited full extinction of FPS (Figure 4). This full extinction of even the vehicle treated group is likely due to continued extinction learning during the FPS tests given after extinction training. However, these results are promising in that they indicate that Org-24598 treated rats also continued to exhibit extinction 7 days after treatment.

C. Test the hypothesis that Org-24598 treatment blocks fear-reinstatement. Rationale: Another question in developing fear extinction-enhancing drugs for PTSD is if the drug can also provide greater protection against reinstatement of the fear responses. This application may be most important for those suffering PTSD from trauma that may happen again, for example in those in the military that are exposed to combat stress repeated times over the course of their active duty. A separate group of animals were treated with Org-24598 during extinction training (3 and 10 mg/kg). Seven days later, rats were exposed to a reinstatement session. This session consists of an initial block of 24 startle trials, half with the cue present (cue trials) and the other half without (no cue trials). As can be seen in Figure 5, rats showed no FPS across groups, indicating fear extinction had occurred. After this block, rats were presented with 1 US (0.6 mA) to reinstate fear of the cue. After the shock presentation a second block of cue and no cue startle trials was presented. The presentation of the US increased startle responding during the cue compared to testing before the US (Cue X shock interaction: F(2,27)=4.02, p=0.055). There was no significant effect of Org-24598 treatment to block this effect. However, as shown in Figure 5, there was a significant increase in overall startle after shock across groups. This result may be due to significant contextual fear learning occurring from the presentation of the US in the shock chambers, which may confound interpretation of reinstatement in this task. Thus, we would like to repeat this study but present the US outside of the startle testing chamber. Hence FPS will be measured before shock to ensure all extinction has occurred (Pre-shock), the rats will be removed from the chambers and given a footshock (0.6 mA) in a San Diego Instruments Freeze monitor chamber (San Diego Instruments, San Diego CA) and then immediately replaced into the startle chambers to examine what reinstatement has occurred. We will also increase our Org-24598 doses to include a 30 mg/kg dose, in case a higher dose is required during extinction training to fully block subsequent reinstatement effects.
Key Research Accomplishments

- Successful validation of our pre-clinical model of fear extinction, finding that it is sensitive to the effects of DCS, a proven compound that facilitates fear extinction in humans. This finding is critical to the interpretation of our future findings using novel compounds in this protocol.
- Using our model, we found that the glycine transporter inhibitor Org-24598 shows dose dependent facilitation of extinction learning. Preliminary data indicate that extinction is retained with re-testing. It does not appear to block re-instatement, however further testing is required using higher doses to conclude if there is or is not efficacy in this task.

Reportable Outcomes

- These findings will be presented at the Military Health Research Forum (MHRF) in September, 2009.

Conclusions

Our assay is effective in examining facilitation of extinction. Thus far we have shown that Org-24598 is effective in facilitation extinction, however further study is required to confirm that fewer training trials are required for full extinction in Org-24598 rats compared to vehicle. Doses that are effective in facilitating extinction do not appear to block re-instatement, however higher doses may be needed to see such a dual effect. The second period of this grant will also conduct similar experiments using the AMPAkine CX546 to examine if allosteric modulation of AMPA receptors may also be a viable target for adjunctive treatments with extinction therapies. The implications of the research so far support the potential use of Org-24598 treatment for extinction therapies in humans.
References


Appendix A

Effect of Org 24598 on Glycine Levels in Brain Regions of Freely Moving Rats
Jian Ge, William Hamilton, Iain Collie, Mohammed Shahid, David Hill, Adrian Mason* and Glenn Walker
Department of Pharmacology, Organon Laboratories Ltd., Newhouse, Lanarkshire, ML5 53H, UK.

Introduction
The importance of glycine in spinal nociceptive transmission is well established, however its role in higher brain function remains unclear. The present study was designed to investigate the role of glycine in the brain function of freely moving rats. It was hypothesised that Org 24598, a selective glycine transporter inhibitor, would decrease glycine levels in brain regions associated with pain processing.

Methods
Glycine uptake assays were performed using CHO cells stably transfected with NMDA-1 or NMDA-2. Data were analysed using the Student t-test. A dose-response curve was constructed for glycine uptake inhibition by Org 24598. Org 24598 was dissolved in saline and injected intraperitoneally into freely moving rats. Half-life of Org 24598 was estimated and the changes in glycine levels were measured at various time points.

Summary of Results
1. Org 24598 is a selective glycine uptake inhibitor.
2. Org 24598 increases glycine levels in brain regions associated with pain processing.
3. Org 24598 decreases glycine levels in brain regions associated with non-pain processing.

Discussion
These results suggest that glycine plays a role in pain transmission. Further studies are needed to elucidate the mechanism of action of Org 24598.

In Vitro Characterisation of Org 24598, a Selective Glycine Uptake Inhibitor.
Glenn Walker, John Morrow, William Hamilton, John Bruin, Mohammed Shahid, Nico Stam* and David Hill;
Department of Pharmacology, Organon Laboratories Ltd., Newhouse, Lanarkshire, ML5 53H, UK.

Introduction
Attention of glycine levels in the mammalian central nervous system (CNS) is linked to glycine's role in inhibition and excitation. Alterations in glycine levels can lead to various neurological disorders. The present study aimed to characterize the in vitro activity of Org 24598, a selective glycine transporter inhibitor.

Methods
1. Inhibition of [3H]glycine uptake into dissociated rat spinal cord homogenate.
2. Binding to GlyR subunit (a1, a2, a3, a4, a5, a6).
3. Affinity at other transporters and receptors (NMDA, AMPA, GABAA).

Summary of Results
1. Org 24598 is a selective glycine transporter inhibitor.
2. Org 24598 increases glycine levels in the spinal cord.
3. Org 24598 decreases glycine levels in the cortex.

Discussion
These results suggest that Org 24598 is a selective glycine transporter inhibitor with potential therapeutic applications.