

BICIFADINE: A NOVEL NON-OPIOID ANALGESIC

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Pain, either acute or chronic, is defined as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience that is associated with the potential for real acute or ongoing tissue damage. It is an extremely complex process that involves interrelated neurotransmitter and neuromodulator systems in ascending and descending spinal pathways and supraspinal sites.

The primary goal of the treatment of pain is analgesia to improve the quality of life of the individual. Opioid analgesics, or opiates, have been used for thousands of years to treat pain. This class of agents produces potent analgesic effects by activating mu, delta or kappa opioid receptors. These receptors normally regulate nociception, mood and responses to stress by interacting with endogenous endorphins. However, these agents are not effective in the treatment of all types of chronic pain and there are many disadvantages associated with long-term opioid therapy, including adverse events, tolerance and dependency. Thus, the development of nonopioid therapeutics remains a priority for researchers in the search for effective long-term therapy of chronic pain states¹⁻⁴

Numerous nonopioid analgesics with various mechanisms of action have been discovered and have been marketed or are under development. These agents include nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), cyclooxygenase type 2 (COX-2) inhibitors, nitric oxide synthase (NOS) inhibitors, superoxide dismutase mimetics, GABA receptor agonists, phospholipase A2 (PLA2) inhibitors, ion channel modulators, cannabinoids, nociception receptor antagonists, antidepressants and histamine antagonists, among others¹. Bicifadine (DOV- 220075) is a particularly attractive nonopioid analgesic. It is an inhibitor of both the norepinephrine and serotonin transporters and an NMDA antagonist with a non-narcotic profile. Bicifadine was shown to have potent analgesic activity in vivo and was chosen for further development for the treatment of pain^{5, 6}

Pharmacological Actions

An in vitro study examining the interaction between the [³H]-imipramine binding site and the 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT, serotonin) transporter complex in human platelets showed that bicifadine was a preferential blocker of [³H]-5-HT uptake⁷. Bicifadine was shown to reverse abnormal (3-legged) gait in rats with inflamed

paws more potently than aspirin and codeine, and it exhibited marked analgesic activity in the inflamed rat paw pressure threshold test and the mouse writhing assay. Comparison of the oral therapeutic indices in rats of bicifadine with other compounds revealed that bicifadine compared favorably to aspirin and was significantly better than codeine, pentazocine and propoxyphene^{5,8}. Bicifadine was generally inactive in the high-intensity rat tail-flick and mouse hot-plate models. It showed no physical dependence liability when administered as an s.c. pellet or using an incremental i.p. dosing schedule. No morphine-like physical dependence was observed and little tolerance developed in studies in rhesus monkeys administered the agent over 40 days. Bicifadine did not exhibit any anti-inflammatory activity and it did not inhibit prostaglandin synthetase in vitro^{6, 8-10}

Clinical Studies

The analgesic efficacy of bicifadine (75 and 150 mg p.o.) against postoperative pain was demonstrated in a single-dose, double-blind, placebo- and aspirin (650 mg p.o.) controlled, parallel-group study conducted in 100 patients with moderate to severe postoperative abdominal or orthopedic pain. Bicifadine was well tolerated. Adverse events reported were minor and included diaphoresis, drowsiness, dizziness and a "high" feeling. The majority of these adverse events were seen in patients on the higher dose of bicifadine. Significant analgesia was observed in patients administered 150 mg bicifadine or aspirin compared to placebo and 75 mg bicifadine. No significant difference was observed between the 75-mg bicifadine dose and placebo¹¹.

A double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled, single-dose phase II trial in 752 patients compared the analgesic efficacy and safety of bicifadine (200, 400 or 600 mg p.o.) with placebo and codeine (60 mg p.o.) in the treatment of moderate to severe postoperative dental pain (i.e., surgical removal of impacted third molars). Both active agents were well tolerated, with no serious adverse events, nausea and emesis being the most common. A significant, dose-dependent increase in summary measures of efficacy (Sum of Pain Relief and Intensity Difference [SPRID], Sum of Pain Intensity Difference [SPID], Total Pain Relief [TOTPAR]) was observed in patients receiving bicifadine compared to placebo. In addition, a significant, time-related increase in pain relief was observed in patients administered 400 and 600 mg of bicifadine. Maximum effects were observed within 2-3 h of dosing and were sustained for the 6-h examination period. Maximal effect scores for the doses of 200 and 400 mg were similar to those observed for codeine, while the effects observed with the dose of 600 mg were significantly greater¹².

A double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled, single-dose phase III trial in 540 patients compared the analgesic efficacy and safety of bicifadine (200, 400 or 600 mg p.o.) with placebo and tramadol (100 mg p.o.) in the treatment of moderate to severe postoperative dental pain. Both bicifadine and tramadol were well tolerated, with no serious adverse events observed. Nausea and emesis were the most common adverse events reported, with the highest frequency in the 600-mg bicifadine group. Overall, however, bicifadine was associated with a lower frequency of adverse events. A significant overall effect on SPRID, SPID and TOTPAR scores was noted in patients receiving bicifadine as compared to placebo and significant time-related pain relief was observed at all doses of bicifadine. Maximum effects were seen within 1 h of dosing and were sustained for the 12-h examination period. Maximal effect scores for the 400- and 600-mg doses of bicifadine were comparable to those obtained for tramadol¹³.

A pivotal, multicenter, double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled phase III trial in about 480 outpatients with moderate to severe acute pain following bunionectomy has been initiated to determine the safety and efficacy of 3 doses of bicifadine over a 5-day period. This trial is using tramadol as an active control and the primary efficacy endpoint is the SPRID score. Secondary endpoints include time to use of rescue medication, clinical global evaluations and other measures of analgesia¹⁴.

Two pivotal, multicenter, double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled phase III trials have been initiated in patients with chronic lower back pain to determine the safety and efficacy of bicifadine for up to 1 year. Primary efficacy endpoints include changes in pain severity ratings by the patient, measures of functional disability and patients' global impression of change. Secondary endpoints are changes in these measures at several time points prior to the end of treatment, the rate of discontinuation due to lack of efficacy, time to use of rescue medication and other analgesia-related rating scales. One study will assess the effects of 3 doses of bicifadine over 3 months, and patients who complete this study will be eligible to enter a follow-up study with up to 1 year of additional treatment¹⁵. Bicifadine continues to undergo phase III development with a total of 7 trials planned to evaluate its safety and efficacy as a treatment for acute pain and chronic lower back pain^{15, 16}.

Conclusions:

The novel nonopioid analgesic bicifadine has a favorable pharmacological action and dynamic profile. The clinical efficacy of bicifadine can be used for the treatment of postoperative dental pain,

postbunionectomy pain and chronic lower back pain with least adverse effects.

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