

Background

Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) is becoming a major global health burden, with increasing prevalence and incidence worldwide. There is no approved therapy for the treatment of NASH. The farnesoid X receptor (FXR) has emerged as an important therapeutic target for the treatment of NASH¹. EDP-305, a novel FXR agonist, was designed to meet this unmet medical need.

Methods

EDP-305 was tested side-by-side with obeticholic acid (OCA) for potency (EC₅₀) and efficacy using both a chimeric FXR reporter assay in Chinese hamster ovary (CHO) cells and a full length FXR luciferase reporter assay in human embryonic kidney (HEK) cells^{2,3}. The ability of EDP-305 and OCA to regulate FXR downstream gene expression of small heterodimer partner (SHP), cholesterol 7 alpha-hydroxylase (CYP7A1) and bile salt export pump (BSEP) was tested in the human Huh7.5 hepatocyte cell line. The *in vivo* activity of EDP-305 and OCA was determined in C57BL/6 mice treated by oral gavage with EDP-305 or OCA at the indicated doses for five days.

Human primary hepatic stellate cells (HSC) were treated with 5 ng/ml transforming growth factor beta (TGFβ) alone or with a combination of 5 ng/ml of TGFβ with 500 nM of EDP-305 or OCA to assess the effects of EDP-305 on liver fibrosis. Key inflammatory and fibrotic genes were analyzed by RT-PCR.

Results

EDP-305 is a potent FXR agonist with an EC₅₀ value of 8 nM in a full-length FXR reporter assay using HEK cells, which is a 16-fold greater potency than OCA (EC₅₀: 130 nM). In addition, EDP-305 does not activate other nuclear receptors and is selective for FXR. Both EDP-305 and OCA showed dose-dependent increases in SHP and BSEP gene expression *in vitro*. At 12 nM, which is close to the EC₅₀ of EDP-305 in the HEK cell reporter assay, EDP-305 induced SHP and BSEP mRNA expression by 5-fold and 18-fold, respectively, compared to minimal induction by OCA. EDP-305 reduced CYP7A1 mRNA expression down to approximately 5%, while 40% CYP7A1 mRNA remained with OCA treatment at 12 nM.

Consistent with the *in vitro* activation of FXR signaling, EDP-305 had similar effects *in vivo*, such that it induced a dose-dependent increase in the expression of target genes: SHP and fibroblast growth factor 15 (FGF15), in the mouse ileum. Moreover, EDP-305 treatment exhibited a dose-dependent increase in SHP and BSEP mRNA, and a dose-dependent reduction in CYP7A1 mRNA in the mouse liver.

In comparison to OCA, EDP-305 significantly displayed more potent anti-fibrotic effects when compared to OCA. For example, when compared to OCA, EDP-305 significantly (p<0.05) decreased expression of α-smooth muscle actin (α-SMA) by 68%, collagen type 1 α2 (COL1A2) by 42%, and collagen type 3 α1 (COL3A1) by 57%. Moreover, when compared to OCA, EDP-305 even further decreased expression (p<0.01) of metalloproteinase inhibitor 1 (TIMP1) by 80% and metalloproteinase inhibitor 2 (TIMP2) by 65%, which are critical genes involved in the progression of liver fibrosis.

Table 1. Potency and efficacy of EDP-305 and its metabolites in a full length FXR activation assay in HEK cells

Compound	Full length FXR activation (HEK)		
	N	EC50 (µM)	Efficacy (%)
CDCA	10	8.358 ± 1.392	100% ± 2%
OCA	10	0.130 ± 0.039	150% ± 21%
EDP-305	10	0.008 ± 0.003	152% ± 19%
2571 (EDP-305 Metabolite 1)	4	0.011 ± 0.012	149% ± 14%
2572 (EDP-305 Metabolite 2)	4	0.016 ± 0.019	151% ± 19%

Table 2. EDP-305 is Highly Selective for FXR

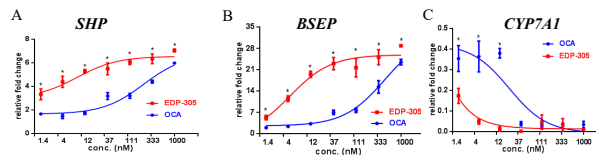
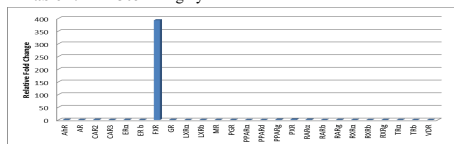


Figure 1. EDP-305 increases SHP, BSEP and CYP7A1 gene expression *in vitro*. Huh7.5 cells were seeded in tissue culture plates overnight in serum-reduced media (1% FBS). Cells were treated with EDP-305 or OCA for 10 hours (n=3). DMSO (0.2% v/v) served as a control. The highest treatment concentration for both EDP-305 and OCA were 1 µM with a series of 1:3 dilutions. (A) SHP; (B) BSEP; (C) CYP7A1. * p<0.05 between EDP-305 and OCA.

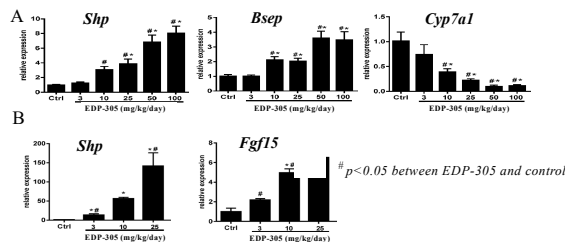


Figure 2. EDP-305 regulates gene expression *in vivo*. C57BL/6J mice, aged 8-10 weeks old, were treated with EDP-305. EDP-305 was administered via oral gavage. Gene expression analysis in liver (A) and intestine (B) were determined by real-time PCR. 18S ribosomal RNA (18S rRNA) was used as a house-keeping gene control.

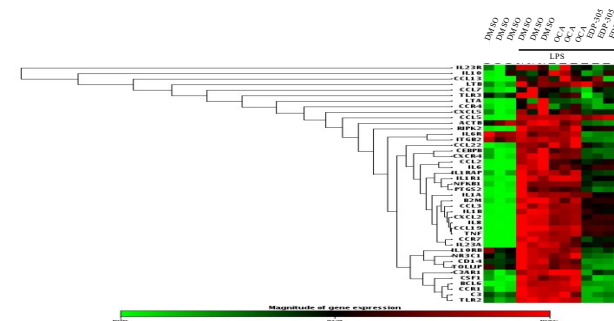


Figure 3. Heat map showing the effects of EDP-305 and OCA on expression of genes involved in inflammation. Relative expression of genes, normalized to control, was calculated from delta CT values. EDP-305 down-regulated inflammatory response genes.

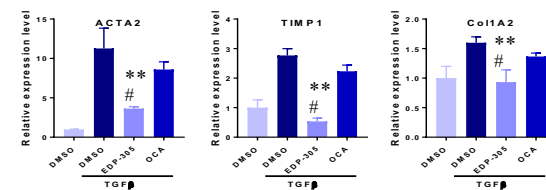


Figure 4. Activation of FXR signaling with EDP-305 significantly inhibited expression of key fibrosis genes *in vitro*. HSCs cells were treated with TGF (5 ng/ml) alone or in combination with OCA (0.5 µM) or EDP-305 (0.5 µM) for 18 hours (n=3 for each treatment). # P<0.05 compared to LPS; ** P<0.05 compared to OCA.

Conclusions

EDP-305 is a highly potent and selective FXR agonist, and demonstrated greater efficacy than OCA in the regulation of FXR target genes in bile acid metabolism both *in vitro* and *in vivo*. EDP-305 is more potent than OCA in reducing expression of key fibrotic genes *in vitro*, thus holding the potential to mitigate the fibrotic responses associated with NASH.

Acknowledgements

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References

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