



## Evaluation of genotoxic biomarkers in extracts of marine sponges from Argentinean South Sea

S.A. Bartolotta<sup>a</sup>, M.A. Scuteri<sup>a,b</sup>, A.S. Hick<sup>a</sup>, J. Palermo<sup>c</sup>, M.F. Rodriguez Brasco<sup>c</sup>, E. Hajdu<sup>d</sup>, B. Mothes<sup>e</sup>, C. Lerner<sup>e</sup>, M. Campos<sup>e</sup>, M.A. Carballo<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> GIGETOX- Citogenética Humana y Genética Toxicológica, INFIBIOC, Facultad de Farmacia y Bioquímica, UBA, Junín 956 (1113), Buenos Aires, Argentina

<sup>b</sup> Departamento de Tecnología, Universidad Nacional de Luján, Ruta 5 y 7. (6700), Luján, Buenos Aires, Argentina

<sup>c</sup> UMYMFOR - Departamento de Química Orgánica, Facultad de Ciencias Exactas y Naturales, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Ciudad Universitaria, Pabellón II, 1428, Buenos Aires, Argentina

<sup>d</sup> Museu Nacional/UFRJ, Quinta da Boa Vista, s/n 20940-040, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

<sup>e</sup> Laboratório de Poríferos Marinhos, Museu de Ciências Naturais Fundação Zoobotânica do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Rua Salvador França 1427, 90690-000, Porto Alegre – RS, Brazil

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### ABSTRACT

Marine sponges are a rich source of structurally and biologically active metabolites of biomedical importance. We screened polar and non-polar samples of crude extracts obtained from marine sponges collected in different locations of Argentinean south sea coast, as a novel approach for their characterization.

The evaluation was performed using cytotoxic and genotoxic biomarkers such as mitotic index (MI), cell proliferation kinetics (CPK) and sister chromatid exchanges (SCE), monitored *in vitro* using peripheral blood lymphocytes. Statistical analysis was performed using two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The extracts evaluated belonged to: *Callyspongia flabellata* (BURTON, 1932) (*Callyspongiidae*); *Plicatellopsis sp.* (*Suberitidae*); *Callyspongia fortis* (RIDLEY, 1881) (*Callyspongiidae*); *Clathria (Microciona) antarctica* (TOPSENT, 1917) (*Microcionidae*); *Spongia (Spongia) magellanica* (THIELE, 1905) (*Spongiidae*); *Halicnemia papillosa* (THIELE, 1905) (*Axinellidae*); *Cliona chilensis* (THIELE, 1905) (*Clionidae*); *Haliclona sp. 1*; *Haliclona sp. 2* (*Chalinidae*).

Genotoxicity studies revealed that the evaluated sponge extracts did not exhibit cytotoxic activity measured from mitotic index MI and cell proliferation kinetics (CPK). In contrast, sister chromatid exchanges (SCE) showed that the non-polar extract of *Callyspongia fortis* and the polar extract of *Cliona chilensis* presented significant differences in SCE frequency ( $p < 0.001$ ), when compared with control cultures. These results emphasize the need to set up a standard battery of “in vitro” genotoxicity testing for new chemicals, pharmaceutical and drugs.

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### 1. Introduction

Marine natural products provide a source of valuable chemical diversity that can be used to design and develop new and potentially useful therapeutic agents. Pharmaceutical interest in sponges was aroused in the early 1950's by the discovery of nucleosides in the marine sponge *Cryptotethya crypta* (Bergmann and Feeny, 1950, 1951). The unknown nucleosides spongothymidine and spongouridine were the basis for the synthesis of 1- $\beta$ -D-arabinofuranosyl cytosine (ara-C) as anticancer agent currently used in the routine treatment of patients with leukaemia and lymphoma and the antiviral drug 1- $\beta$ -D-arabinofuranosyl adenine (ara-A) used for herpes simplex virus infection (Proksch et al., 2002).

Most bioactive compounds in advanced pre-clinical testing can be classified as anti-inflammatory, antitumor, immunosuppressive or neurosuppressive, antiviral, antimycotic, haemolytic, hemagglutinating, ichthyotoxic, analgesic, antiprotozoan, antimalarial, nematocidal, anti-angiogenic, antiacetylcholinesterase, antibiotic, antifouling, anti-asthmatic and others. However, some of them may cause side effects due to their low selectivity (Bjarnason et al., 1993; Borchard, 1998; Rahden-Staron, 2002; De Rosa, 2002; Rifai et al., 2005).

The marine environment displays an enormous biodiversity, and sponges show a circumpolar distribution and inhabit all seas. South America's Brazilian coast sponges, were studied by screening extracts for novel pharmaceuticals (Rangel et al., 2001; Monks et al., 2002) and cytotoxicity studies through “in vitro” assays were developed (Scuteri, 2002; Prado, 2002; Torres et al., 2002; Aiub et al., 2002).

In Argentina, especially in the South Atlantic, Porifera biodiversity knowledge is fragmentary, particularly the continental shelf of Rio Negro and Chubut Provinces (López Gappa and Landoni, 2005) and remains chemically unexplored. Novel alkaloids were found from

\* Corresponding author. GIGETOX- Citogenética y Genética Toxicológica, Departamento de Bioquímica Clínica, Facultad de Farmacia y Bioquímica, UBA, Junín 956 (1113), Buenos Aires, Argentina. Tel.: +54 11 59508707; fax: +54 11 59508691.

E-mail address: [macarballo2003@yahoo.com.ar](mailto:macarballo2003@yahoo.com.ar) (M.A. Carballo).

*Cliona* sp (Palermo et al., 1996), *Cliona chilensis* (Palermo et al., 1998) and *Clathria* sp extracts (Zuleta et al., 2002).

It is well a known fact that physical, chemical and biological agents can act, directly or indirectly, over individual genetic information, generating shifts in cellular function, which are in turn responsible for medium or long term effects on health. Since bioactive compounds of marine sponge extracts have been evaluated only through cytotoxicity assays (usually cell death), it is from this perspective that the analysis of these extracts and their influence in genome constitution becomes relevant, and genetic and cytotoxic biomarkers are excellent tools to aid in this analysis (Grandjean, 1995).

The aim of this work is the evaluation of organic and aqueous extracts from nine sponge species from Argentinean south sea coast in order to know their potential genotoxic effect using a non-cytotoxic concentration on peripheral blood lymphocytes against biological endpoints such as mitotic index (MI), cell proliferation kinetics (CPK) and sister chromatid exchange (SCE).

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Collection and extraction procedures

Nine specimens of marine sponge were collected during the 2006 campaign by wading at low tide and scuba diving at a depth of between 0 and 10 m in Rio Gallegos, Puerto Deseado and Playa Ciega, Santa Cruz Province and Punta Pardelas, Península de Valdez, Chubut Province, Argentina. The samples were stored in ethanol 70% until processed. The sponges were ground up and extracted with EtOH (500 ml). The extracts were filtered and the residue extracted once again at room temperature with EtOH (500 ml) and EtOAc (500 ml). The combined extracts were evaporated and the resulting aqueous suspension was exhaustively extracted with EtOAc. The organic extract was partitioned between cyclohexane and MeOH/H<sub>2</sub>O (9:1) yielding lipophilic (cyclohexane layer) and polar (aqueous MeOH layer) extracts. Voucher specimens were deposited at MNRJ - Porifera collection of Museu Nacional of Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro and at MCN-POR - Porifera collection of Museu de Ciências Naturais, Fundação Zoobotânica do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil.

### 2.2. Lymphocyte Cultures from Human Peripheral Blood

Heparinized blood samples were obtained from two healthy donors with no recent history of exposure to mutagens. Briefly, 0.8 ml of each of the blood samples were placed in a sterile flask containing 7.5 ml RPMI culture medium supplemented with 1.5 ml foetal bovine serum (Gibco), 0.1 ml phytohemagglutinin (PHA) (Gibco) and 0.1 ml bromodeoxyuridine (BrdU) (Sigma). Then, 0.1 ml sponge extracts were added at the beginning of the cultures, which were then incubated for 72 h at 37 °C. The chosen concentration was performed considering a cytotoxicity screening that we developed in peripheral blood lymphocytes through mitotic index evaluation. The experimental design included from 1 to 48 µg/ml and we found that 6 µg/ml culture was the first assayed dose where we can analyze the chosen biomarkers (sister chromatid exchanges, cell proliferation kinetics and mitotic index) with good response and resolution.

Negative control was developed by adding distilled water (100 µl) to each donor's culture. Two hours before harvesting eliminate, 0.2 ml of Colcemid (10 µg/ml; Sigma) was added to each culture flask. For harvesting, cells were centrifuged at approximately 800–1000 rpm for 10 min. The supernatant was removed and 5 ml of a pre-warmed (37 °C) 0.075 M KCl hypotonic solution were added. Cells were re-suspended and incubated at 37 °C for 45 min. The supernatant was removed by centrifugation, and 5 ml of a fixative (methanol:glacial acetic acid, 3:1) were added. The fixative was removed and the

procedure was repeated twice. To prepare the slides, five drops of the fixed cell suspension were dropped on clean glass slides and air-dried. Cells were stained following a modified Fluorescence plus Giemsa (FPG) technique (Perry and Wolff, 1974). Slides were stained for 20 min in a 0.05% (w/v) Hoechst 33258 solution, rinsed with tap water and placed under a near-UV lamp for 90 min, covered with Sorensen's buffer, pH 6.8, and stained with a 3% Giemsa solution in phosphate buffer (pH 6.8) for 15 min.

### 2.3. Microscopic Evaluation

#### 2.3.1. Sister Chromatid Exchanges (SCE)

The frequency of Sister Chromatid Exchanges (SCE) was counted in 50 metaphases, all with 46 centromeres per sponge polar and non polar extract. The results were expressed as the frequency of SCE per metaphase.

#### 2.3.2. Mitotic Index (MI)

The mitotic index was estimated as the proportion of mitotic cells in 2000 cells counted for each preparation sponge polar and non polar extract and donor in Giemsa stained slides (Miller and Adler, 1989).

#### 2.3.3. Cell Proliferation Kinetics (CPK)

The proportion of first (M<sub>1</sub>), second (M<sub>2</sub>) and third (M<sub>3</sub>) division cells was scored in 100 consecutive metaphases from each duplicate 72 hr culture for each experimental point. Replication index (RI) was calculated as:  $RI = (M_1 \times 1) + (M_2 \times 2) + (M_3 \times 3) / 100$  (Rojas et al., 1993).

#### 2.3.4. Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) randomised block design for each biomarker (Graphpad Instat) and Mann Whitney U-test for not paired samples with two tails. A statistically significant difference was set at  $P < 0.05$ .

## 3. Results

Most screenings of secondary metabolites of biomedical importance from marine sponge extracts reported an inhibitory effect that turned out to be strongly cytotoxic in our system. Taking into account these findings, we developed our screening with several dose extracts and selected 6 µg/ml as chosen dose in our experimental design because it showed no cytotoxic effect in peripheral blood lymphocytes.

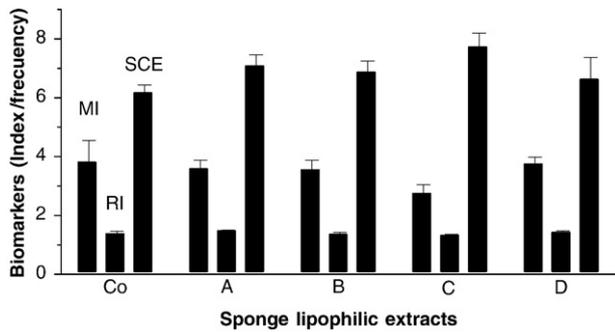
When potential cytotoxicity was analyzed through mitotic index and cell proliferation kinetics in the non polar extracts of *C. flabellata*, *Plicatellopsis* sp., *C. fortis* and *Clathria antarctica*, we could not find significant modifications after treatment on lymphocytes cultures. However, SCE frequency analysis showed that *C. fortis* extract presented a statistically significant increase when compared with control values ( $p < 0.04$ ) (Fig. 1).

Non polar extracts of *Spongia magellanica*, *Halicnemia papillosa*, *Cliona chilensis*, *C. fortis*, *Haliclona* sp 1 and 2, did not induce modifications either in mitotic index or in cell proliferation kinetics or SCE, when compared with control cultures (Fig. 2).

When we developed the same protocol for polar extracts (Fig. 3), we could observe no cytotoxic effect as well as no modifications in cell proliferation kinetics; however, *Cliona chilensis* extract was considerably more active since a significant increase ( $p < 0.0005$ ) in SCE frequency was observed when chromosomal instability was measured.

## 4. Discussion

The progress in molecular and cell biology in the last decades has enabled a rational exploitation of the natural resources of the secondary metabolites and biomaterials from sponges and their associated micro-organisms.



**Fig. 1.** Mitotic index, Replication index and Sister chromatid exchange evaluation in LSP from *Callyspongia flabellata* (A), *Plicatellopsis sp* (B), *Callyspongia fortis* (C), *Clathria (Microciona) antarctica* (D) sponge extracts compared with control (Co). Each point is the mean value of quadruplicate determinations.

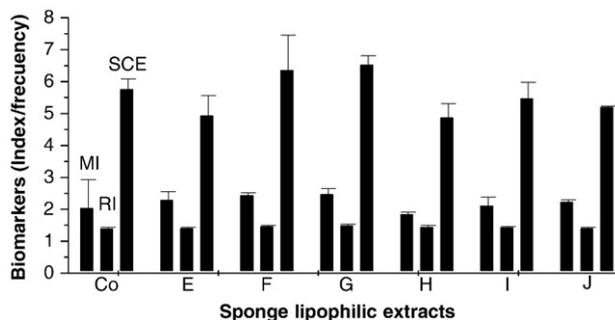
Screening the extracts from marine sponge is a common approach for the identification of compounds with biological activities as potential drugs candidates (Faulkner, 2000). The chemical diversity of sponge products is the largest among marine phyla, but, in many cases, the exact mode of action and the biosynthetic origin of the compounds (sponge or symbiont) are still unclear (Sipkema, 2004).

In order to establish a standard battery of genotoxicity testing for different chemicals, pharmaceutical and drugs *in vitro*, cytogenetic methodologies are known to be very useful and human peripheral blood lymphocytes are considered acceptable for these experimental designs (OECD, 1997). From a historical perspective, stimulated human peripheral blood lymphocyte cultures have proved to be a sensitive indicator of *in vitro* induced chromosome structural changes (Muehlbauer and Schuler, 2003).

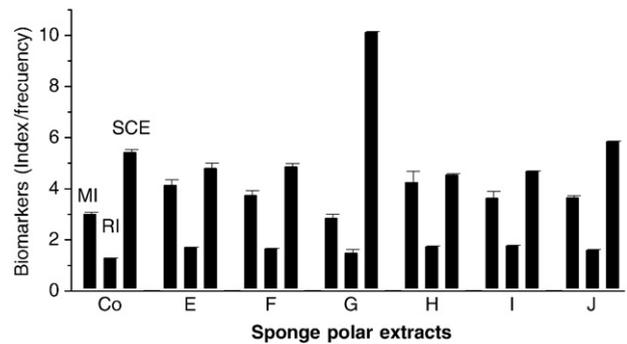
Mitotic and replication indexes are used as indicators of adequate cell proliferation biomarkers. MI measures the proportion of cells in the M-phase of the cell cycle and its inhibition could be considered as cellular death or a delay in the cell proliferation kinetics (Rojas et al., 1993).

Within standardized biomarkers, Sister Chromatid Exchanges (SCEs) are well known and used as genotoxicity indicators. Their use as a biomarker is based on the fact that even low doses of genotoxic materials can trigger a statistically significant increase in SCE per cell. So, their analysis offers a useful, sensitive and quantitative possibility of measuring genetic damage in individuals exposed to potentially genotoxic substances (Tennant et al., 1987; Tucker and Preston, 1996; Natarajan, 2002).

When the potential cytotoxicity of ten sponge extracts (6 µg/ml culture considering non-cytotoxic activity on human peripheral blood) was analyzed through mitotic index evaluation, no significant decrease was found for both lipophilic and polar sponge extracts.



**Fig. 2.** Mitotic index, Replication index and Sister chromatid exchange evaluation in LSP from *Spongia magellanica* (E), *Halicnemisia papillosa* (F), *Cliona chilensis* (G), *Callyspongia fortis* (H), *Haliclona sp.1* (I), *Haliclona sp.2* (J) sponge extracts compared with control (Co). Each point is the mean value of quadruplicate determinations.



**Fig. 3.** Mitotic index, Replication index and Sister chromatid exchange evaluation in LSP from *Spongia magellanica* (E), *Halicnemisia papillosa* (F), *Cliona chilensis* (G), *Callyspongia fortis* (H), *Haliclona sp.1* (I), *Haliclona sp.2* (J) sponge extracts compared with control (Co). Each point is the mean value of quadruplicate determinations.

When cell proliferation kinetics was studied no significant modifications could be detected for any of the evaluated sponge extracts.

SCE frequency analysis showed that the lipophilic extract of *C. fortis* presents a statistically significant increase when compared with control values ( $p < 0.04$ ) (Fig. 1). However, we could not find significant modifications in SCE frequency with *C. flabellata* lipophilic extract.

*C. fortis* collected in Santa Cruz Province showed a significant SCE increase when lymphocytes were exposed to sponge lipophilic extracts. However, no modifications could be detected with specimens collected in Pta Pardelas, Chubut Province. It is possible that the observed SCE difference between both specimens was influenced by different secondary metabolite production in response to diverse environmental conditions. Punta Pardelas is a key zone with organisms of sub-Antarctic origin (Magallanic biogeographic province) and Brazilian origin (Argentine bio-geographic province) in a coastal zone that triggered interest in assessing the effects of ecotones on biodiversity. Ecotones, can greatly affect faunal movement, population dynamics, species interactions, and community structure (Olivier, 1971).

Therefore, the chemical composition and production of secondary metabolites by specimens from different geographic locations needs to be studied in future investigations.

*Cliona chilensis* polar extracts were considerably more active when chromosomal instability was measured against SCE, since a significant increase ( $p < 0.0005$ ) was induced (Fig. 3). As *Cliona chilensis* lipophilic extracts did not induce any change in the SCE frequency, bioactive compounds from the polar extract could be involved in the observed effect.

## 5. Conclusions

Marine organisms have proved to be a rich source of bioactive secondary metabolites with potential anticancer properties. Nevertheless, the relationship between the chemical structures of the compounds and their bioactivity is usually not obvious. The frequent occurrence of biologically active natural products in morphologically undefended sessile organisms such as the sponges, reflects an ecological adaptation (Proksch et al., 2003). Secondary metabolites production can vary dramatically among geographic regions, habitats and individuals in a local habitat, and even within a single individual (Harvell et al., 1993; Hay and Fenical, 1996; Becerro et al., 1998, 2003).

In our study of ten marine sponge extracts the results obtained using biomarkers analysis indicate the presence of biologically active compounds in *Callyspongia fortis* lipophilic extract and *Cliona chilensis* polar extract. The sponge extracts induced chromosomal instability in stimulated human peripheral blood cultures indicating cellular damage as the individual response to potentially genotoxic drugs.

We can conclude that the evaluation of bioactive compounds of marine sponges against biological endpoints such as mitotic index

(MI), cell proliferation kinetics (CPK) and sister chromatid exchange (SCE) is a fundamental tool as initial step prior to other *in vitro* assays, if we consider that the extracts could be potential DNA damaging agents.

It is imperative to determine the possible DNA damaging effect of these drugs on normal cells because a molecule becomes a candidate for testing in humans if it displays toxicity against cancer cells and is tolerated by healthy cells. To date only few drugs have been commercially developed and several of the known marine compounds have also been prematurely withdrawn from clinical trials because of their extreme toxicity or undesirable side effects.

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