

Meeting abstract

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## Modification of actin fibers changes the electrical phenotype of cardiac myofibroblasts

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from 15th Scientific Symposium of the Austrian Pharmacological Society (APHAR) Joint meeting with the Hungarian Society of Experimental and Clinical Pharmacology (MFT) and the Slovenian Pharmacological Society (SDF) Graz, Austria. 19-21 November 2009

Published: 12 November 2009

BMC Pharmacology 2009, 9(Suppl 2):A15 doi:10.1186/1471-2210-9-S2-A15

This abstract is available from: <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2210/9/S2/A15>

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### Background

Slow conduction and ectopic activity are major determinants of cardiac arrhythmogenesis. Both of these conditions can be elicited by myofibroblasts (MFBs) following establishment of heterocellular gap junctional coupling with cardiomyocytes. MFBs appear during structural remodeling of the heart and are characterized by the expression of  $\alpha$ -smooth muscle actin ( $\alpha$ -SMA) containing stress fibers. In this study, we investigated whether pharmacological interference with the actin cytoskeleton affects myofibroblast arrhythmogenicity.

### Methods

Experiments were performed with patterned growth strands of neonatal rat ventricular cardiomyocytes coated with cardiac MFBs. Impulse conduction velocity ( $\theta$ ) and maximal upstroke velocities of propagated action potentials ( $dV/dt_{max}$ ), expressed as % action potential amplitude change (%APA) per ms, were measured optically using voltage sensitive dyes. Actin was destabilized by latrunculin B (LtB) and cytochalasin D and stabilized with jasplakinolide. Data are given as mean  $\pm$  S.D. ( $n = 5-22$ ). Single cell electrophysiology was assessed using standard patch-clamp techniques.

### Results

As revealed by immunocytochemistry, exposure of MFBs to LtB (0.01-10  $\mu$ mol/L) profoundly disrupted stress fibers which led to drastic changes in cell morphology with MFBs assuming an astrocyte-like shape. In control cardio-

myocyte strands (no MFB coat), LtB had negligible effects on  $\theta$  and  $dV/dt_{max}$ . In contrast, LtB applied to MFB-coated strands increased  $\theta$  dose-dependently from  $197 \pm 35$  mm/s to  $344 \pm 26$  mm/s and  $dV/dt_{max}$  from  $38 \pm 5$  to  $78 \pm 3\%$  APA/ms, i.e., to values virtually identical to those of cardiomyocyte control strands ( $339 \pm 24$  mm/s;  $77 \pm 3\%$  APA/ms). Highly similar results were obtained when exposing the preparations to cytochalasin D. In contrast, stabilization of actin with increasing concentrations of jasplakinolide exerted no significant effects on impulse conduction characteristics in MFB-coated strands. Whole-cell patch-clamp experiments showed that LtB hyperpolarized MFBs from -25 mV to -50 mV, thus limiting their depolarizing effect on cardiomyocytes which was shown before to cause arrhythmogenic slow conduction and ectopic activity.

### Conclusion

Pharmacological interference with the actin cytoskeleton of cardiac MFBs affects their electrophysiological phenotype to such an extent that they lose their detrimental effects on cardiomyocyte electrophysiology. This result might form a basis for the development of therapeutic strategies aimed at limiting the arrhythmogenic potential of MFBs.