

Neglected Tropical Diseases

Methods and Principles in Medicinal Chemistry

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Contents

A Personal Foreword *xiii*

Preface *xvii*

- 1 Drug Discovery Strategies for Neglected Tropical Diseases: Repurposing Knowledge, Mechanisms and Therapeutics to Increase Discovery Efficiency** *1*
David C. Swinney and Michael P. Pollastri
- 1.1 Introduction *1*
- 1.2 First-line Therapies for NTDs and Mechanisms of Action *1*
- 1.3 Drug Discovery Efficiency *3*
- 1.3.1 Drug Discovery Process *3*
- 1.3.2 Drug Discovery Strategies *5*
- 1.3.3 PDD versus TDD for NTDs *6*
- 1.4 Critical Components for Successful Drug Discovery *7*
- 1.4.1 Finding a Starting Point *7*
- 1.4.2 Assays Robustness and Hit Selection Criteria *7*
- 1.4.3 Optimization Processes *8*
- 1.5 Repurposing Knowledge Mechanisms and Therapeutics *9*
- 1.6 Summary *10*
- References *10*

Part I Virus *15*

- 2 Toward Antiviral Therapies for the Treatment of Zika Virus Infection: Lessons Learned from Dengue Virus** *17*
Sarah K. Stevens, Paul C. Jordan, Andreas Jekle, and Jerome Deval
- 2.1 Zika Virus: History and Epidemiology *17*
- 2.2 Detection, Clinical Presentation, and Medical Need *20*
- 2.3 ZIKV Replication Cycle *21*
- 2.4 Lessons Learned from Dengue Antiviral Research *23*
- 2.4.1 Host Targeting Agents *24*
- 2.4.2 Direct Antiviral Agents *24*

2.5	<i>In Vitro</i> Tools for Anti-ZIKV Drug Discovery	25
2.5.1	Cell-Based Assays	25
2.5.2	Biochemical Assays and Tools for Structure-Based Drug Design	26
2.5.2.1	The NS5 MTase and Polymerase	26
2.5.2.2	The NS2B–NS3 Protease	27
2.5.2.3	The NS3 Helicase	27
2.6	Animal Models for Evaluating <i>In Vivo</i> Efficacy	28
2.7	ZIKV NS5 RdRp and MTase Inhibitors	30
2.7.1	Ribavirin and T-705 (Favipiravir)	30
2.7.2	2'-C-Methylated Nucleosides	32
2.7.3	NITD008	33
2.7.4	BCX4430	33
2.7.5	MTase Inhibitors	33
2.8	NS3 Protease and Helicase Inhibitors	34
2.9	Other Classes of Small Molecules against ZIKV	36
2.10	Conclusions and Future Directions on ZIKV Inhibition	37
	References	37
3	Developing Therapeutics for Ebola Virus Disease: A Multifaceted Approach	49
	<i>Michael K. Lo, Jessica R. Spengler, Bobbie Rae Erickson, and Christina F. Spiropoulou</i>	
3.1	Overview of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD)	49
3.2	Ebola Virus Diagnostics: Challenges and Innovations	50
3.3	Ebola Virus Genome Structure, Components, and Replication Cycle	52
3.4	<i>In vitro</i> Toolbox: Cell-Based Assays	54
3.5	<i>In Vivo</i> Toolbox: Animal Models for Efficacy Testing	54
3.6	Therapeutic Strategies	57
3.6.1	Host-Directed Antivirals	57
3.6.1.1	S-Adenosyl-Homocysteine Hydrolase Inhibitors	57
3.6.1.2	Kinases and Phosphatases	60
3.6.1.3	Protein Folding and Processing	60
3.6.1.4	Non-Proteolytic Endosomal Targets	63
3.6.1.5	Priming Host Immune Responses	65
3.6.1.6	Other Host Targets	67
3.6.2	Direct-Acting Antivirals	67
3.6.2.1	Antibody-Based Therapeutics	67
3.6.2.2	Inhibitors of Viral Protein Interactions	69
3.6.2.3	Nucleic Acid Inhibitors	70
3.6.2.4	Nucleoside Analogs/Polymerase Inhibitors	71
3.7	Conclusions	74
	Acknowledgments	74
	References	74

Part II Kinetoplastids 93

- 4 Designing Drugs to Target *Trypanosoma cruzi*, the Etiological Agent of Chagas Disease: When Chemistry needs Biology 95**
Martine Keenan and Eric Chatelain
- 4.1 Introduction 95
- 4.2 Chagas Disease Overview 95
- 4.3 Toward Sterile Cure in a Chagas Disease Mouse Model: Which Way Forward? 96
- 4.3.1 Feeding the Chagas Disease Pipeline: Compound Selection and Identification of Potential Hits/Starting Points 98
- 4.3.2 Choosing the “Right” Starting Points 98
- 4.3.3 Using *In Vitro* Assays to Guide Structural Optimization 101
- 4.3.4 Getting Compounds to the Site of Action 103
- 4.3.5 Mechanism of Action: Is There a Need for Target Deconvolution before Starting a Lead Optimization Program? 106
- 4.4 Conclusion 107
- Acknowledgments 108
- References 109
- 5 Drug Discovery and Development for Human African Trypanosomiasis 115**
Andrew Spaulding, Mitchell F. Gallerstein, and Lori Ferrins
- 5.1 Overview of Disease 115
- 5.2 Etiology and Epidemiology 115
- 5.3 Current Treatments 119
- 5.3.1 Stage 1 Treatments 119
- 5.3.2 Stage 2 Treatments 122
- 5.4 Diagnostics 123
- 5.5 Medicinal Chemistry 125
- 5.6 Future Drug Candidates 129
- 5.7 Conclusion 132
- References 132
- 6 Discovery of Drugs for Leishmaniases: A Progress Report 139**
Baljinder Singh, Frederick S. Buckner, and Michael P. Pollastri
- 6.1 Visceral Leishmaniasis (VL) 139
- 6.1.1 Current Treatment Regimens for VL 140
- 6.2 Cutaneous Leishmaniasis (CL) 141
- 6.2.1 Current Treatment Regimens for CL 142
- 6.3 Mucosal Leishmaniasis (ML) 143
- 6.3.1 Current Treatment Regimens for ML 143
- 6.4 Medicinal Chemistry 144
- 6.4.1 Phenotypic Screening Approach Versus Target-Based Approach 144

6.4.2	Phenotypic Screening Approaches	144
6.4.3	Target-Based Approaches	150
6.4.4	<i>In Silico</i> Computational Approaches	152
6.5	Conclusion	153
	References	154

Part III Helminths 161

7	Onchocerciasis Drug Discovery	163
	<i>Natalie A. Hawryluk and Ivan Scandale</i>	
7.1	Introduction	163
7.1.1	The Vector	163
7.1.2	Life Cycle of <i>O. volvulus</i>	164
7.2	Epidemiology	165
7.3	Clinical Manifestation	166
7.3.1	Skin Lesions	166
7.3.2	Nodules	166
7.3.3	Eye Lesions	166
7.3.4	Nodding Syndrome	167
7.4	Diagnostics	168
7.4.1	Clinical Diagnosis	168
7.4.2	Ultrasonography	168
7.4.3	Mazzotti Test	168
7.4.4	Parasitological Diagnosis	168
7.4.5	Immunological Tests and PCR	169
7.5	Current Therapies and Approaches	169
7.5.1	Direct-Acting Approach	169
7.5.1.1	Diethylcarbamazine	170
7.5.1.2	Ivermectin	170
7.5.1.3	Albendazole	171
7.5.1.4	Suramin	171
7.5.2	Antibacterial Approach	171
7.5.2.1	Tetracycline Derivatives	171
7.5.3	Nodulectomy	172
7.6	Discovery Models	172
7.6.1	Primary <i>In Vitro</i> Assays	172
7.6.2	<i>In Vivo</i> Efficacy Models	173
7.7	Medicinal Chemistry Approaches	173
7.7.1	Benzimidazoles	173
7.7.1.1	Flubendazole (FLBZ)	173
7.7.1.2	UMF-078	174
7.7.1.3	Boron-Derived Benzimidazoles	175
7.7.2	Macrocyclic Lactones	175
7.7.2.1	Milbemycins	175
7.7.2.2	Cyclooctadepsipeptides	176
7.7.2.3	Tylosins	177

7.7.3	Natural Products	178
7.7.3.1	Corallopyronin A	178
7.7.4	Small Molecules	180
7.7.4.1	Pyrazolopyridine	180
7.8	Conclusion	180
	References	180
8	Drug Discovery and Development for Schistosomiasis	187
	<i>Conor R. Caffrey, Nelly El-Sakkary, Patrick Mäder, Reimar Krieg, Katja Becker, Martin Schlitzer, David H. Drewry, Jonathan L. Vennerstrom, and Christoph G. Grevelding</i>	
8.1	Schistosomiasis: The Disease and the One Drug We Have for Treatment, Praziquantel	187
8.2	Drug Discovery for Schistosomiasis: Strategies, Tools, Targets, and a Note on the Target Product Profile	189
8.3	Drug Repurposing	190
8.4	Structure-Based Drug Design	195
8.5	Phenotypic Approaches	196
8.6	Organometallics	199
8.7	Natural Products	200
8.8	Perspective on Schistosome Kinases as Potential Drug Targets	202
8.9	Case Study 1: Biarylalkyl Carboxylic Acids (BACAs) as Antischistosomal	206
8.10	Case Study 2: Arylmethylamino Steroids (AASs) as Antischistosomal	212
8.11	Brief Summary of the Drug Development Pipeline	213
	Acknowledgments	215
	References	215
9	Soil-transmitted Helminthiasis – Challenges with Discovery of Novel Anthelmintics	227
	<i>Graham M. Kyne, Michael P. Curtis, Jennifer Keiser, and Debra J. Woods</i>	
9.1	Current Therapies and Unmet Needs for Soil-transmitted Helminthiasis (STHs)	227
9.2	Anthelmintic Research and Development in Animal Health: Value Drivers	229
9.3	Anthelmintic Discovery: State of the Art (2005–2017)	232
9.3.1	New Molecules from the Patent Literature	232
9.3.2	Medicinal Chemistry Approaches to New Molecules	235
9.3.2.1	Intervet Multicyclics	235
9.3.2.2	Vesicular Acetylcholine Transporter (VAChT) Inhibitors	238
9.3.2.3	Cyclooctadepsipeptides	242
9.4	Discussion	245
	Acknowledgment	245
	References	245

- 10 Drug Discovery and Development for the Treatment of Echinococcosis, Caused by the Tapeworms *Echinococcus granulosus* and *Echinococcus multilocularis* 253**
Andrew Hemphill, Reto Rufener, Dominic Ritler, Luca Dick, and Britta Lundström-Stadelmann
- 10.1 *Echinococcus* and Echinococcosis 253
- 10.2 The Biological Features of *E. granulosus* and *E. multilocularis*: Similar, but Different 254
- 10.3 Clinical Hallmarks, Diagnosis, and Prevention and Control of CE and AE 255
- 10.4 Currently Applied Benzimidazole Treatments for CE and AE 257
- 10.5 *In vitro* and *in vivo* Models to Study Drug Efficacy and Drug Targets in *Echinococcus* 261
- 10.6 Drug Repurposing as the Only Strategy for Discovering Novel Compounds to Treat Echinococcosis 264
- 10.6.1 Drug Repurposing for the Discovery of Novel Compounds to Treat AE 265
- 10.6.1.1 Anti-Infective Agents 265
- 10.6.1.2 Anticancer Drugs 269
- 10.6.2 Drug Repurposing for the Discovery of Novel Compounds to Treat CE 272
- 10.7 Where to Go from Here? 274
- Acknowledgments 276
- References 276
- 11 New Insights into the Treatment of Foodborne Trematode Infections 289**
Rafael Toledo, Alba Cortés, María Álvarez-Izquierdo, Carla Muñoz-Antoli, and J. Guillermo Esteban
- 11.1 Introduction 289
- 11.2 Morphology and Biology of Foodborne Trematodes 290
- 11.3 Epidemiology and Global Impact 292
- 11.4 Major Foodborne Trematodes 293
- 11.4.1 Liver Foodborne Trematode Infections 293
- 11.4.1.1 Clonorchiasis and Opisthorchiasis 293
- 11.4.1.2 Fascioliasis 294
- 11.4.2 Lung Foodborne Trematode Infections (Paragonimiasis) 294
- 11.4.3 Intestinal Foodborne Trematode Infections 295
- 11.4.3.1 Diplostomiasis 295
- 11.4.3.2 Echinostomiasis 295
- 11.4.3.3 Fasciolopsiasis 296
- 11.4.3.4 Gymnophalloidiasis 296
- 11.4.3.5 Heterophyiasis 296
- 11.5 Current Drugs Used Against Foodborne Intestinal Trematodes 296
- 11.5.1 Praziquantel 296
- 11.5.2 Triclabendazole 299
- 11.5.3 Tribendimidine 301

11.5.4	Other Drugs	303
11.6	Natural Products and Drug Discovery against Foodborne Trematodes	304
	Acknowledgments	312
	References	312
	Part IV Bacteria	325
12	Buruli Ulcer	327
	<i>Nicole Scherr and Gerd Pluschke</i>	
12.1	Etiology and Epidemiology	327
12.2	Current Treatments	328
12.3	Unmet Needs	329
12.4	Diagnostics	329
12.5	Discovery Models	330
12.5.1	<i>In Vitro</i> Test Formats	330
12.5.2	<i>In Vivo</i> Testing	331
12.6	Testing of Compounds for Activity Against <i>M. ulcerans</i>	332
12.6.1	Preclinical Profiling of Currently Recommended Antibiotic Treatment Regimens for BU	332
12.6.2	Repurposing of Tuberculosis Drug Candidates	332
12.6.3	Compound Screening	336
12.7	Clinical Studies	336
12.8	Future Directions and Opportunities	338
	References	339
13	Drug Discovery and Development for Leprosy	349
	<i>Carlos Franco-Paredes</i>	
13.1	Unmet Medical Needs in the Treatment of Leprosy	349
13.2	Current Therapies for Leprosy	350
13.2.1	Direct-Acting Antibacterial Therapy	350
13.3	Innovative Therapeutic Strategies	355
13.3.1	Host-Directed Therapy	355
13.4	Conclusions	358
	References	358
	Index	363

A Personal Foreword

There is a great need for new affordable, effective therapeutics for neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines NTDs as a diverse group of communicable diseases that prevail in tropical and subtropical conditions – affecting more than one billion people and costing developing economies billions of dollars every year. Populations living in poverty without adequate sanitation and in close contact with infectious vectors and domestic animals and livestock are those worst affected. The designation of “neglected” refers to the limited resources available for controlling and treating these diseases, including the discovery and development of new medicines.

With an eye toward providing a primer to the research community about the various NTDs and challenges in drug discovery for them, this book provides summaries of therapeutic discovery and development efforts for NTDs with a focus on the medicinal chemistry aspects of the programs. The authors for each chapter include experts in medicinal chemistry and biology. Each chapter describes the unmet medical needs, current therapies, available discovery tools including *in vitro* and *in vivo* assays and current medicinal chemistry approaches to address unmet medical needs. There are chapters on 10 NTDs as well as 2 emerging viral diseases, Zika and Ebola. The chapter on Zika virus discusses repurposing knowledge from the NTD dengue. We also included an introductory chapter on drug discovery strategies for NTDs.

The aim of drug discovery and development is to identify new medicines to satisfy the unmet medical need of patients. This is easier said than done. Drug discovery and development is very expensive due to the high failure rate of clinical candidates. It is well documented that most candidate medicines will fail, and the cost of failure contributes to the high cost of medicines. The poor efficiency of drug discovery is due in part to the inability to *a priori* predict if a drug will be efficacious (e.g. will it work or not?). Great advances have been made in reducing attrition due to pharmacokinetics (the ability of the drug to get to the site of action) and safety (toxicity), but not efficacy. The challenge to predicting efficacy is significant due to the complexity of pathophysiology; medicines must account for genetics, molecular mechanisms that translate to specific action as well as the dynamic heterogeneous physiological environment. The only way to confirm efficacy is to evaluate compounds in human proof-of-concept studies. These studies are costly in part because prior to the proof-of-concept studies, the compounds must be shown to be safe. Because of the high likelihood of failure

due to unanticipated toxicity or lack of efficacy, in order to reduce likelihood of project failure, it is necessary to take many (costly!) “shots on goal.”

Therein lies the challenge for drug discovery and development for neglected diseases. The funding is insufficient to support many “shots on goal.” It is important to recognize that there are no fundamental scientific or technological differences between discovery and development for neglected and non-neglected infectious diseases. What emerges from the chapters in this book is that validated discovery tools are available for the NTDs to support identification of active compounds. These include *in vitro* assays using the infectious organisms, as well as reliable animal models in most cases.

Not surprisingly, all the contributors identified funding as the most significant liability of their disease area, consistent with the neglected designation. One highly cost-effective approach to mitigate this is to repurpose knowledge and compounds from other diseases. Repurposing was highlighted in all the chapters as the most logical strategy.

Where funds should be spent is an important question to consider. Should the funds be spent on more knowledge of the fundamental biology hoping that translates to new candidate mechanisms and targets? Or better optimization of candidates to get more viable shots on goal? Or perhaps more repurposing of medicines previously approved for other indications? An apparent advantage of NTDs is the availability of phenotypic screening with models of infected diseases. At first glance, these models should provide good representation of the biology and identify appropriate new mechanisms of action. The limited success in follow-up on active compounds identified by phenotypic screens begs the questions: Why has there not been more success with actives from phenotypic screens? Do the screening assays not represent the relevant pathological state of the infected organism? Are the candidates not sufficiently optimized for drug-like properties due to limited medicinal chemistry resources? How much of the efforts are spent reevaluating flawed compounds and mechanisms in which the flaws were not reported? The answers to these questions will help ensure that funding is used more efficiently in the future.

What are the opportunities for medicinal chemistry in drug discovery and development for NTDs? Drug discovery and development requires acquisition of disease knowledge, creation or invention of new compounds, and optimization and development of the invention to product. The acquisition of knowledge is the domain of the biologist and funded by government organizations, such as the US National Institutes of Health, while product development involving clinical studies must be funded by pharmaceutical companies or public private partnerships and nonprofit organizations such as Medicines Development for Global Health and the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative. These organizations have been responsible for the recent successes with moxidectin for onchocerciasis and fexinidazole for sleeping sickness. The invention of the new molecule and optimization to a product is the domain of the medicinal chemist. The chapters in this book provide some excellent case studies of the optimization toward clinical candidates. Clearly there is much need and opportunities for medicinal chemists to invent new medicines for NTDs. The challenge is to identify quality starting points and funding sources for the medicinal chemistry optimization.

We acknowledge all the contributing authors for sharing their knowledge and perspectives on neglected tropical diseases. We thank the series editors Gerd Folkers, Hugo Kubinyi, and Raimund Mannhold for the opportunity to address this topic, and Frank Weinreich and Stefanie Volk at Wiley-VCH for the support and commitment.

May 2019

David C. Swinney, USA
Michael P. Pollastri, USA

Preface

The diverse group of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) prevails in a great many countries with tropical and subtropical conditions [1]. It is estimated that over 1 billion people are infected with NTDs, with a further 1 billion at risk. These diseases are the most common afflictions of the world's poorest people. However, some of the NTDs, such as tuberculosis, affect populations globally, including US populations. NTDs have a terrible impact on health, impede child growth and development, harm pregnant women, and often cause long-term debilitating illnesses. The fight against NTDs costs developing countries billions of dollars every year. Despite their significance, relatively little financial support has been provided to address NTDs, compared to the burden of ill health that they cause.

Twenty NTDs have been identified and classified by the World Health Organization (WHO). The majority of NTDs has particular characteristics in common [2]:

(i) they preferentially afflict poor people, who lack access to the safe water, sanitation, and basic health services required in order to protect themselves against infection by bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens; (ii) many are chronic; the damage they cause can be irreversible; (iii) NTDs can elicit severe pain and life-long disabilities; (iv) people with NTDs are often stigmatized and excluded from society, which in turn can affect their mental health.

The infectious agents responsible include the following:

Protozoa	Chagas disease, human African trypanosomiasis, leishmaniasis
Bacteria	Buruli ulcer, leprosy, trachoma, yaws
Helminth	Cysticercosis, dracunculiasis, echinococcosis, trematodiasis, lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis, and helminthiasis
Viruses	Dengue, chikungunya, rabies

The biological diversity of NTDs means that the control or elimination strategies also are very diverse. The availability of new safe and effective drugs for NTDs could provide public health benefit for overall global health; but because these diseases are found primarily in developing countries, existing incentives have been insufficient to encourage development of new drug therapies. While there are plenty of publications focusing on the large health and economic impact on

both the developing and developed world, scientific work dealing with medicinal chemistry aspects of NTDs is less comprehensive. Such work is needed to support the global development programs for discovery and development of new drugs for treatment and prevention or the use of old drugs applying repurposing strategies for tropical disease drug discovery [3]. The importance of supporting such research programs is indicated by the FDA Guidance for Industry, published in 2014 [4]. Thus, to fill this gap, two opinion leaders in this field, David Swinney and Michael Pollastri, accepted our invitation to organize such a volume.

The series editors thank David Swinney and Michael Pollastri for organizing this volume and for working with such excellent authors. Last, but not least, we thank Frank Weinreich and Stefanie Volk from Wiley-VCH for their valuable contributions to this project and to the entire book series.

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1

Drug Discovery Strategies for Neglected Tropical Diseases: Repurposing Knowledge, Mechanisms and Therapeutics to Increase Discovery Efficiency

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1.1 Introduction

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a diverse group of communicable diseases that prevail in tropical and subtropical conditions in 149 countries. These diseases include infections by bacteria, protozoans, helminths, and viruses. Analyses have estimated that NTDs affect more than one billion people and cost developing economies billions of dollars every year [1, 2]. Populations living in poverty, without adequate sanitation, and in close contact with infectious vectors and domestic animals and livestock are those worst affected. We refer readers to the websites of the WHO and CDC for more specifics on the individual diseases [3, 4].

Six of the infections caused by NTDs (dracunculiasis, lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis, soil-transmitted helminths, and trachoma) can be controlled or even eliminated through mass administration of safe and effective medicines (mass drug administration, MDA), or other, effective interventions. Along with therapeutic interventions, efforts to control the vectors (e.g. mosquitoes, black flies) that transmit these diseases and to improve basic water, sanitation, and hygiene are highly effective strategies against these NTDs [4].

There are still many NTDs that cannot be controlled, due to their mechanism of transmission, or their presence in zoonotic reservoirs, among other reasons. Thus, there is a need for new affordable, effective therapeutics in addition to the plans to control the disease vectors and improve basic water, sanitation, and hygiene.

1.2 First-line Therapies for NTDs and Mechanisms of Action

Most medicines currently used to treat NTDs were discovered many decades ago, despite having limitations (Table 1.1). For example, suramin used for the treatment of human African trypanosomiasis (HAT) was discovered almost 100 years

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Table 1.1 First-line therapies for NTDs and how they were discovered.

First-line	Diseases	Mechanism	Year
Albendazole	Ascariasis, hookworm, echinococcosis, lymphatic filariasis	Tubulin inhibitor	1987
Ivermectin	Lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis	Ion channel	1981
Praziquantel	Schistosomiasis, foodborne trematodiasis, Taeniasis/cysticercosis	Membrane disruption	1982
Benznidazole	Trichuriasis, chagas	Free radical toxicity	1966
Nifurtimox	Chagas, HAT	Oxidative stress	1970
Pentamidine	HAT	Cross-link DNA	1937
Suramin	HAT	Disrupt energy metabolism	1920
Melarsoprol	HAT	Trypanothione and pyruvate kinase inhibition	1949
Eflornithine	HAT	Ornithine decarboxylase inhibitor	1990
Amphotericin B	Leishmaniasis	Membrane disruption	1953
Miltefosine	Leishmaniasis	Membrane disruption	2002
Rifampicin	Buruli ulcer, leprosy	RNA polymerase	1971
Streptomycin	Buruli ulcer	Protein synthesis inhibition	1943
Dapsone	Leprosy	Dihydropteroate synthase inhibitor	1937
Clofazimine	Leprosy	DNA chelator	1969
Azithromycin	Trachoma, YAWS	Protein synthesis inhibition	1988
Triclabendazole	Foodborne trematodiasis, fascioliasis	Tubulin inhibitor	1989
Niclosamide	Taeniasis/cysticercosis	Disrupt energy metabolism	1960s

ago and is still used, albeit a number of newer medicines are now available [5, 6]. Strikingly, most NTD medicines were discovered prior to the 1990s, when molecular biology, molecular genetics, and associated technologies became central to medicine and drug discovery.

The mechanisms of action of these medicines involve disruption of processes essential to an organism's survival. These actions include disruption of microtubules (albendazole, triclabendazole) [7], ion flux (ivermectin) [8], oxidative stress (benznidazole, nifurtimox) [6, 9], disruption of energy production (suramin, niclosamide) [10], inhibition of protein synthesis (streptomycin and azithromycin) [11], inhibition of RNA synthesis (rifampicin) [12], disruption

of membrane integrity (praziquantel [13, 14], amphotericin B [15], miltefosine [16, 17], clofazimine [18]), and inhibition of production of essential metabolites (eflornithine, dapsone) [5, 19].

Most of these functions are not unique to the infectious agents. Selectivity over human homologs is required to achieve a useful safety profile. Differences in binding affinity between the microbe and human homologs provide the selectivity for some (albendazole, ivermectin), but not all, of the medicines. Perhaps, most interesting is that for some of the therapeutics, selectivity is thought to be achieved by the existence of compensatory mechanisms in humans. Greater free radical quenching in human cells versus parasite contribute the selectivity for benznidazole and nifurtimox [15]. Alternative uptake mechanisms for folic acid in hosts contribute to safety of dapsone [19]. Other exploitable differences include compound disposition (e.g. high-affinity uptake systems in trypanosomes by pentamidine) [6], and composition of membranes, which is a key selectivity feature for the function of amphotericin B [15].

1.3 Drug Discovery Efficiency

Drug discovery is an endeavor with very high attrition rates [20]. The high attrition rates are particularly detrimental for drug discovery for NTDs, owing to the disproportionately low research investment in this activity. As such, processes need to be employed to reduce the risk of attrition. Two important aspects relevant to medicinal chemistry are the strategies that provide therapeutic candidates and the critical components to identification and optimization of candidates with a greater chance of success. Drug discovery strategies are first addressed, followed by a discussion of the critical components of the drug discovery process and opportunities for repurposing.

1.3.1 Drug Discovery Process

The process of drug discovery and development is an iterative learn-and-confirm cycle addressing an unmet medical need (Figure 1.1) [21]. The process can be thought of as four stages that require different expertise and tools to define and test the therapeutic hypothesis.

1. Basic research creates new knowledge and **understanding of disease** that leads to tools created for discovery. This phase is most often accomplished in academia and government agencies. Some of the tools important to discovery that are created from basic research include models of disease, clinical relevant biomarkers, predictive phenotypic markers for use in screening assays, as well as potential mechanisms of intervention and drug targets.
2. The aim of the discovery/invention phase is to identify a potential therapeutic and its corresponding mechanism of action to be tested in patients. The strategies used for discovery, including assay formats and endpoints, are informed by the knowledge and tools created in basic research (discussed in Section 1.3.2). The invention phase has historically been the domain of the

R & D is an iterative process

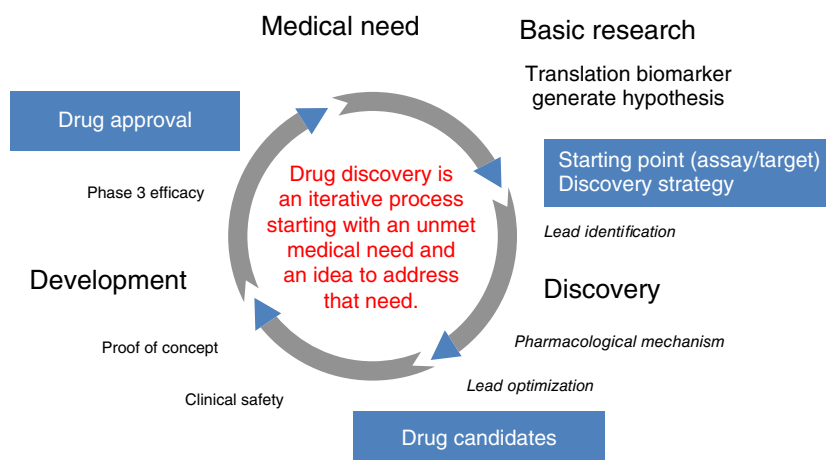


Figure 1.1 Drug discovery and development cycle. The process of drug discovery can be thought of as an iterative learn-and-confirm cycle with specific milestones. The process of discovery and development of a new medicine is initiated in response to an unmet medical need to treat a disease. Physiological, genetic, and chemical knowledge provides an understanding of the disease. This knowledge will lead to the identification of translation biomarkers and assays to enable discovery and invention of new medicines. These molecules will then be optimized for biopharmaceutical properties and safety to provide a drug candidate. At this point, the process of drug discovery is complete and the molecule should succeed or fail based on its own merit. Opportunities to improve efficiency in drug discovery will increase the probability that clinical candidates will make it to registration. The left-hand side of the circle (from 6 to 12 o'clock) is the development phase of drug discovery, which involves testing for safety and efficacy in humans leading to registration. Multiple iterations are generally required before a medicine with sufficient efficacy at a safe dose is discovered, tested in humans, and registered.

pharmaceutical and biotech industries, although academic institutions are now frequently inventing new medicines. The invention is typically identified by evaluation of potential drugs in biological assays that measure a response related to the clinical outcome. The modalities evaluated can be of organic chemical, biological, and genetic material prepared synthetically or isolated from natural substances (e.g. natural products). The modalities for NTDs are all chemical in nature. Part of the reason for this is that the cost and stabilities of biological and genetic therapeutics are prohibitive for NTDs.

The active modality and its corresponding mechanism of action provide the **therapeutic hypothesis** that will be tested in patients. For NTDs, the therapeutic hypothesis will be that the molecule will kill the infectious organism and reduce morbidity and/or mortality. The mechanism may not be known until long after the drug is approved, or it may be never known. For example, the mechanism of action of acetaminophen is still not known. The mechanisms of action of most drugs for NTDs were determined long after the drugs were invented.

3. In order to test the therapeutic hypothesis in the clinic, the active modality must be tolerable and have suitable drug-like properties including pharmacokinetics and pharmaceutical to provide sufficient drug concentrations to achieve the response. The **optimization** phase can be facilitated by knowledge of the mechanism of action, but this knowledge is not mandatory. The optimization phase is considered the “Valley of Death” due to the high attrition rate. It is resource-intensive and typically conducted in the pharmaceutical industry, although there are now academic and government centers conducting this work. The optimization phase produces a clinical candidate that can then be used to test the therapeutic hypothesis in the clinic.
4. The central feature of the therapeutic hypothesis is predicting a dose–response relationship between mechanism of action and efficacy (or toxicity) in humans [22]. Clinical studies are designed to test a specific molecule for its therapeutic usefulness.

Multiple iterations of learn-and-confirm hypothesis testing are usually required to identify first-in-class medicines. This long-term investment is not feasible for NTDs; drug discovery for these diseases must be more successful, with fewer iterations and fewer failures.

1.3.2 Drug Discovery Strategies

The knowledge available from basic research will inform the drug discovery strategy. Important aspects of the knowledge that impact the drug discovery strategies are knowledge of mechanisms of action and targets, availability of robust phenotypic assays, and structures of active compounds [23, 24].

Medicinal chemistry-dependent drug discovery strategies are commonly differentiated into empirical strategies now known as phenotypic drug discovery (PDD) and hypothesis-driven strategies now commonly described as target-based drug discovery (TDD) [25].

Phenotypic assays measure a phenotype in a physiological system. The term “phenotypic assay” includes all preclinical assay formats that use physiological systems, e.g. animals, cells, and biochemical pathways [24, 26]. Phenotypic assays make few assumptions as to the molecular details of how the system works, provide an empirical method to probe effects in physiological systems, and are mechanistic agnostic. Therapeutics are identified by the effect upon a phenotype and, subsequently, the therapeutics are used to identify the mechanism of action. The identification of active therapeutics is accomplished through empirical trial and error, verifiable by observation rather than by theory. The therapeutics are identified in which disease-relevant phenotypes provide a chain of translation between the observation and clinical response [27, 28]. The phenotype most relevant to NTD is reduction in proliferation and death of the organism.

Empirical, phenotypic assays have always played an important role in drug discovery for NTDs [29, 30]. In his Nobel lecture entitled “Selective inhibitors of dihydrofolate reductase,” George H Hitchings Jr. stated, “Those early, untargeted studies led to the development of useful drugs for a wide variety of diseases and has justified our belief that this approach to drug discovery is more fruitful than narrow targeting” [29].

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the emphasis of drug discovery changed to a more reductionist, target-based approach, and phenotypic assays were primarily used to confirm efficacy and evaluate safety. The drug target is a gene product that provides a mechanistic hypothesis to focus discovery research to identify a therapeutic that modulates the protein's activity [31]. A target can be validated with many technologies, including genetics [22]. Molecular technologies such as X-ray structure and computational chemistry are tools that help medicinal chemists in the rational design and optimization of molecules that bind to the target [32]. The central features of TDD are (i) identification and validation of a drug target, (ii) identification of a molecule that binds to that target, (iii) optimization of the selectivity over anti-targets, and (iv) optimization of the biopharmaceutical properties such that the drug concentrations in the body are sufficient to ensure that the drug is bound to the target throughout the dosing interval. This target-based paradigm has been envisioned to provide a more rational approach to drug discovery, analogous to a design and engineering approach [23, 32].

Most medicines for NTDs were discovered decades ago using empirical strategies (PDD) involving testing the ability of compounds to kill the infectious organisms (Table 1.1), essentially agnostic to the mechanism of action. Some of the key components of PDD success are the robustness of the assays and the composition of the screening libraries, both of which are addressed in more detail later [27].

Not all NTDs were discovered via phenotypic screening. Eflornithine was discovered on the basis of the hypothesis that an ornithine decarboxylase (ODC) inhibitor would be efficacious for HAT. Eflornithine is an irreversible inhibitor originally developed for cancer and repurposed for HAT. It was not efficacious for cancer due to the fast resynthesis of the ODC enzyme. Differential activity in the parasite was achieved due to much slower enzyme resynthesis in the trypanosome parasite [5].

1.3.3 PDD versus TDD for NTDs

As already noted, historically, PDD has provided most of the medicines for NTDs. A likely contributor to this success is the feasibility of assays measuring viability of parasites, worms, and bacteria, termed the chain of translatability [27]. The translatability of the microbe viability as a phenotypic measure of infectious disease pathology is very strong. This contrasts with the more uncertain translatability that modulation of a new target will provide selective cytotoxicity.

In general, the choice between a phenotypic (PDD) versus target-based strategy (TDD) for medicinal chemistry-dependent, first-in-class drug discovery is strongly influenced by the robustness, feasibility, and translatability that a phenotype will predict clinical efficacy (its chain of translatability) versus the predictability that a drug target and corresponding molecular mechanism will provide efficacy and selectivity. Molecular mechanisms of small molecules interacting with a target to provide sufficient efficacy and safety are more complex than simple binding. They involve conformational changes, kinetics, and are dependent on physiological context. This was the conclusion of an analysis of first-in-class medicines across all disease areas showing that the majority

of medicinal chemistry-driven medicines were discovered with phenotypic screening [25]. The molecular mechanisms are very difficult to predict and incorporate into reductionist assay formats [33, 34]. It was also noted that TDD was more successful for followers, presumably because the mechanism of action had already been validated [25].

An aspect of discovery strategies for NTDs that is rarely appreciated is that the selectivity of drugs was identified in many cases as a consequence of the empirical nature of the strategy. Differences in binding affinity between the microbe and human target determined the selectivity for some but not all of the medicines. As noted earlier, the selectivity is thought to be achieved by other mechanisms including compensatory mechanisms in humans (e.g. greater free radical quenching [6], alternative uptake mechanism for folic acid [19]), compound disposition (high-affinity uptake systems in parasites) [6], and composition of membranes (amphotericin B) [15].

1.4 Critical Components for Successful Drug Discovery

1.4.1 Finding a Starting Point

Identification of suitable chemical matter for optimization is paramount. In tropical medicine drug discovery, both phenotypic and target-based screens have been applied to a number of small-molecule chemical libraries, including FDA drug libraries [35] and natural products [36], as well as collections arising from industry [37] or product development partnerships such as the MMV, which has released the Malaria Box [38] and Pathogen Box [39], each of which contains 400 Lipinski-compliant chemistries with validated antiparasitic activities. In addition, repurposing of established drugs or preclinical chemotypes that inhibit homologous function in other eukaryotic systems can be a fruitful approach.

1.4.2 Assays Robustness and Hit Selection Criteria

As with drug discovery programs for any other indication, it is essential that screening assays are sufficiently robust and reproducible, and of reasonable throughput, to drive chemical optimization. Assays must have sufficient sensitivity to reproducibly identify modifications that affect a compound's activity, and it would be highly desirable to utilize orthogonal assays that measure the same biological endpoint as the primary assay but utilize a different readout. This can help avoid false-positive results that arise due to assay artefacts.

When selecting and defining a compound hit, different disease indications will have different requirements, overall. However, all programs share the same essential criteria: (i) sufficient potency against the target or pathogen, with some indication of a potential selectivity window. (ii) A hit compound is preferably a member of a series of structurally similar compounds that display differences in activity across 2–3 orders of magnitude. (iii) An assessment of compound ADME properties; while such properties are typically measured, computed

properties can also provide useful insights. (iv) A hit series would contain at least several compounds that meet at least some of the desired criteria measured or computed earlier. This will provide high confidence that the chemical series will be a tractable substrate for medicinal chemistry optimization.

It is essential that all hit compounds are assessed against other metrics of tractability. For example, the employment of a Pan-Assay Interfering compound (PAINS) assessment can identify potentially promiscuous chemotypes that, while appearing to be strong optimization starting points, are artefactual findings. Similarly, any active compounds identified in a screening campaign should be carefully assessed for features that are generally undesirable in a hit compound. These would include highly electrophilic moieties (alkyl halides, aldehydes), hydrolysable features (such as esters or acetals), or any other sort of chemically unstable moiety. Lastly, substructure searches using freely available databases such as PubChem or ChEMBL can often uncover potentially promiscuous or toxic moieties to help inform compound series selection.

It is highly desirable to pursue a chemotype that is readily pursued by organic synthesis (often described as “parallel-enabled”). In particular, the ability to easily and rapidly prepare analogs simultaneously is a major benefit to the speed of an optimization program, and it also allows exploration of a diverse chemical space. While many drugs do indeed trace their roots back to natural products [25], challenges in chemical synthesis of natural product analogs can frequently frustrate analog synthesis while searching for new compounds with appropriate properties.

1.4.3 Optimization Processes

Any successful chemical drug discovery program has, at its center, a well-informed medicinal chemistry effort. Noting that target product profiles for new drugs for many NTDs have been described [40–42], optimization programs must design and employ a series of assays that ensure direction toward the desired endpoint. Rather than an exclusive focus on antiparasitic potency and selectivity, it is critical to include considerations of absorption, distribution, metabolism, and excretion (ADME) properties, pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics, and selectivity against important anti-targets, such as hERG.

A project team should design an assay cascade that is fit-to-purpose, both in terms of measuring desired endpoints, as well as in maximizing efficient use of resource (which is frequently limited in NTD drug discovery). An example assay cascade is shown in Figure 1.2, which would lead to a compound that is <100 nM in potency, >100× selective over host cells, with adequate solubility and ADME properties and animal pharmacokinetic exposure, that can be tested in an *in vivo* efficacy experiment. Note that transition to each step of the cascade has defined property cutoffs, in terms of potency and properties. Depending on the goals on a given project, this diagram could be modified to include aspects such as screens in a panel of anti-targets (ion channels, G protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs), kinases, etc.), hERG, or other endpoints that are central to optimization.

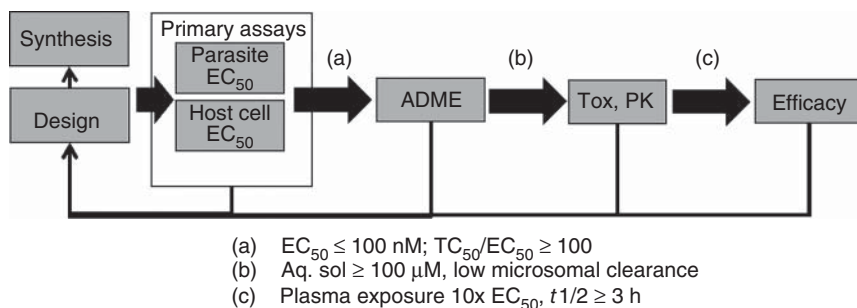


Figure 1.2 Example project optimization cascade.

1.5 Repurposing Knowledge Mechanisms and Therapeutics

The process of *de novo* drug discovery can be too resource expensive for NTDs. Opportunities to address this deficiency come from repurposing molecules and mechanisms. Repurposing is not a new concept for NTDs. Many of the currently used medicines were repurposed. For example, the benzimidazoles were originally developed as plant fungicides and later as veterinary anthelmintics [43]. The first benzimidazole to be developed and licensed for human use was thiabendazole in 1962. Although thiabendazole was very effective, it was also moderately toxic, which led to enormous efforts by animal health companies to find better and safer compounds. This led to the benzimidazole carbamates, such as mebendazole, flubendazole, oxfendazole, albendazole, and oxibendazole. Subsequently, several veterinary anthelmintics were developed and marketed, including parbendazole, fenbendazole, oxfendazole, and cambendazole. The first benzimidazole carbamate to make it into humans was mebendazole, followed by flubendazole (both Janssen products).

More recent examples of repurposing mechanisms include eflornithine. As noted earlier, eflornithine was discovered on the basis of the hypothesis that an ODC inhibitor would be efficacious for HAT [5]. Eflornithine is an irreversible inhibitor originally developed for cancer and repurposed for HAT and is one of the few therapeutics discovered with TDD.

There is growing optimism in the NTD community that more drugs will become available through repurposing. In 2018, moxidectin was approved by the U.S. FDA for onchocerciasis. Moxidectin, a macrocyclic lactone, was repurposed from animals and clinical studies showed superiority to ivermectin [44]. Fexinidazole, originally developed in the 1980s, was rediscovered in 2005 by DNDi researchers looking for possible antiparasitic compounds. In late 2018, an EMA scientific committee announced its “positive opinion” for fexinidazole, opening the way for individual countries to approve its use in HAT, with the first patients to receive the drug by mid-2019.

Repurposing, known as exaptation, has been an effective source of discovery and invention across many industries. The most obvious and exploited approach for NTDs is to identify molecules that have been developed for another disease