

## The Role of Drug Transporters on Psychotropic Penetration of the Blood–Brain Barrier

Yumiko Akamine, B.S., Kayoko China, M.S., and Tsukasa Uno, Ph.D.

*Department of Hospital Pharmacy, Faculty of Medicine,  
University of the Ryukyus, Okinawa, Japan*

### ABSTRACT

At the blood–brain barrier (BBB), the superfamily of ATP-binding cassette (ABC) transporters includes the ABCB1 subfamily corresponding to P-glycoprotein (P-gp), the ABCC subfamilies of multidrug resistance-associated proteins (MRPs), and the ABCG2 subfamily corresponding to breast cancer resistance protein (BCRP). These efflux transporters are located mainly in the endothelial cells forming the BBB and prevent the entry of xenobiotics into the brain. Since psychotropics act on target sites of the central nervous system (CNS) in the brain, it is very important to know these transporters' roles at the BBB and to determine the brain drug concentrations at the targeted sites of the CNS. However, there is little information on human brain concentrations of psychotropics. Recent studies have demonstrated that brain concentrations of many psychotropics are significantly higher in P-gp-knockout mice than in wild-type mice. This result implies that P-gp may be a key player in the regulation of brain psychotropic pharmacokinetics and possibly causes the P-gp-mediated drug interaction at the BBB. In this review, we discuss the current findings concerning the role of drug transporters on the concentrations of psychotropics in the brain and summarize the available *in vivo* studies related to psychotropics.

**Keywords:** *psychotropic drugs, drug transporters, P-glycoprotein, blood–brain barrier*

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### INTRODUCTION

Since the central nervous system (CNS) is separated from peripheral blood circulation by physiological barriers, e.g., the blood–brain barrier (BBB), the CNS is not directly exposed to drugs in systemic circulation [1-4]. Although many psychotropic medications reach specific sites within the CNS via the circulatory system (Figure 1), the precise concentrations of the psychotropic drugs in the CNS cannot be determined in each patient [5]. Therefore, ensuring drug delivery to the CNS and achieving appropriate drug concentrations in the CNS are the final targets of rational psychiatric pharmacotherapy. The BBB is composed of the tight junctions of capillary endothelial cells attached to the brain. It protects the CNS from

potentially toxic substances by limiting the paracellular movement of endogenous and exogenous compounds [6,7]. The endothelial cells of the BBB contain numerous membrane transporters related to the influx or efflux of various important therapeutic drugs [6-8]. Previous reports suggest that the expression and activity of drug transporters at the BBB limit the entry of psychotropics and regulate their effects and toxicity [9].

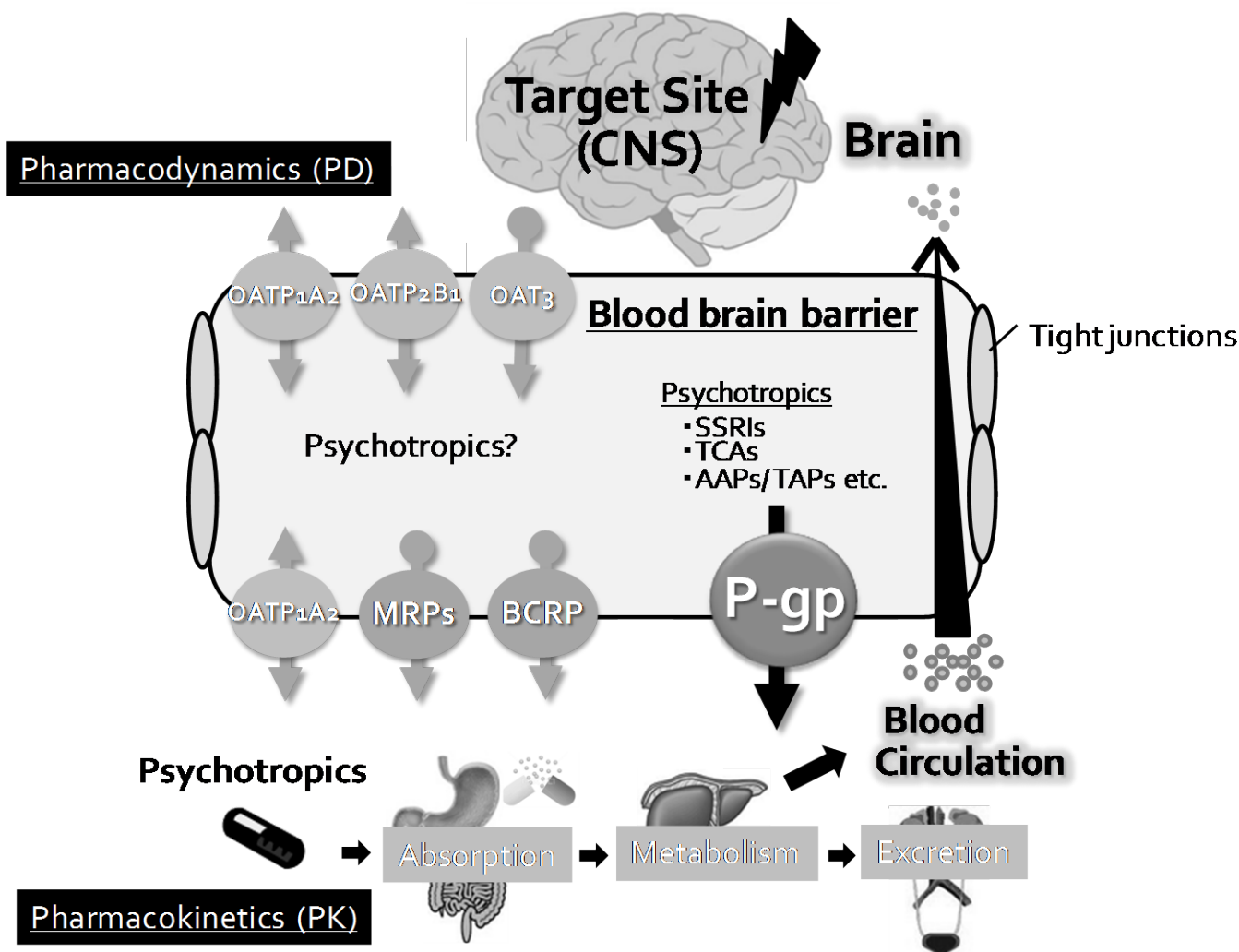
In recent years, although many drug transporters, including the ATP-binding cassette (ABC) protein family and the solute carrier (SLC) family, have been identified at the BBB [8-11], one focus of study has been the role of the superfamily of ABC transporters in drug penetration into the brain [12]. The subfamilies at the BBB include the ABCB1 subfamily

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Corresponding Author: Tsukasa Uno, Ph.D., Department of Hospital Pharmacy, Faculty of Medicine, University of the Ryukyus, 207 Uehara, Nishihara, Okinawa 903-0215, Japan  
Tel.: +81-98-895-1346 Fax: +81-98-895-1487 Email: u370409@med.u-ryukyu.ac.jp

corresponding to P-glycoprotein (P-gp), the ABC subfamilies of multidrug resistance-associated proteins (MRPs), and the ABCG2 subfamily corresponding to breast cancer resistance protein (BCRP) [12]. These transporters are responsible for an efflux pump to prevent toxic substrates and many therapeutic medications from entering the brain [12]. Of these efflux transporters, P-gp has been established as a key factor at the BBB [13]. Multiple studies have reported the

presence of P-gp at the BBB [14,15], which is associated with the clinical response of many CNS-acting drugs as psychotropics [8,9,16-18]. In addition, several studies of drug interactions in humans have found that P-gp-mediated transport activity is modulated by its own inhibition and induction under polypharmacy, which can affect drug pharmacokinetics [19,20].



**Fig. 1.** Drug Delivery of Psychotropics

However, in the case of clinically significant drug interactions at the BBB, it is difficult to tell if these interactions are based on pharmacokinetic or pharmacodynamic changes. For example, although the interaction between quinidine and loperamide is known to induce respiratory depression as a severe side effect, it has been reported that there was no change in the loperamide plasma concentrations [21]. The mechanism of this interaction may be an elevation in the brain concentrations of loperamide caused by quinidine coadministration. It has also been

reported that, in P-gp knock-out mice models, the CNS concentrations of loperamide were increased by 10- to 100-fold [14]. Since many psychotropics are known as P-gp substrates, a greater understanding of the functional changes in P-gp activity at the BBB is needed in clinical practice, as this will enable more accurate prediction of the actual therapeutic response to psychotropics. In this review, we describe the role of drug transporters, mainly P-gp, on psychotropic penetration of the BBB.

## INFLUENCE OF P-GP IN ANIMAL STUDIES

The role of P-gp at the BBB has frequently been studied using the *mdr1a* (encoding P-gp)-knockout mouse (*mdr1a*<sup>-/-</sup> mouse) [22]. This mouse model is a unique and valuable pharmacologic tool in examining the *in vivo* P-gp function at the BBB. Two types of *mdr1a* and *mdr1b* (encoding P-gp) were detected in this mouse study, each of which showed different tissue distribution [23]. Recent studies have established that only P-gp-based *mdr1a* is expressed at the BBB, not *mdr1b* [9,24,25]. Accordingly, a model study using the *mdr1a*<sup>-/-</sup> mouse has clearly demonstrated a lack of P-gp at the BBB. Many psychotropics have been investigated using this knockout mouse model, and dramatic differences in the brain concentrations of psychotropics between knockout and wild-type mice have been consistently confirmed [9,16,26,27]. For example, the brain concentrations of risperidone and its active metabolite 9-hydroxyrisperidone (paliperidone) were reported to be at least 10 times greater in knockout mice than in wild-type mice [28]. These findings suggest that P-gp is a key determinant of the brain pharmacokinetics of various psychotropics.

Interestingly, in this study, no significant differences in the plasma concentrations of risperidone and paliperidone were found between wild-type and knockout mice (1.4-fold for risperidone, 1.1-fold for paliperidone, respectively) [28]. This indicates that increased brain concentrations of P-gp-associated psychotropics independently occur irrespective of changes in the blood concentrations of the drugs, which may potentially cause CNS-related side effects. Furthermore, despite the fact that P-gp is expressed in the liver, intestine and kidney as well as the BBB [11], the discrepancy in brain and blood concentrations of the drugs implies that these P-gp psychotropics have different tissue distributions and organ transitions in relation to whole body drug pharmacokinetics. Therefore, these studies demonstrate the significant influence of P-gp on CNS pharmacotherapy, and it would be useful to know to what extent P-gp activity is pathophysiologically modulated under polypharmacy with possibly interacting drugs.

## P-GP AND POSITION EMISSION TOMOGRAPHY (PET) STUDY

In recent clinical studies, positron emission tomography (PET) was used to study the human activity of P-gp at the BBB. Since a radioligand [11C]-verapamil

has been shown to be effectively transported by P-gp at the BBB in humans, this substrate is a suitable probe for clinical PET study to evaluate P-gp function [29]. Langer O *et al.* [30] reported that the enhanced P-gp activity in PET studies using R-[11C]-verapamil might contribute to drug resistance in some patients with treatment-refractory epilepsy. In addition, de Klerk OL *et al.* [31] showed that patients with chronic schizophrenia had significantly decreased [11C]-verapamil uptake in the brain compared with healthy volunteers, and the decrease of [11C]-verapamil uptake correlated with increased P-gp activity. These results suggest that overexpression of P-gp in brain tissue may limit the penetration of CNS drugs to their sites of action and may cause pharmacoresistance. Another human study using PET [32] showed that the P-gp inhibitor cyclosporine A significantly increased the brain concentrations of [11C]-verapamil in healthy subjects. Therefore, PET studies using [11C]-verapamil may provide a clinical indicator of the P-gp activity of psychotropics and drug–drug interactions associated with P-gp at the BBB.

## INFLUENCE OF ABCB1 POLYMORPHISM ON PSYCHOTROPICS

Polymorphisms in genes encoding transport proteins may play an important role in the interindividual variability of drug pharmacokinetics and therapeutic response. Many researchers have studied single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) or haplotypes to determine their frequency and to establish their impact on transport functions [33].

P-gp is encoded by the *ABCB1* genes. To date, more than 50 SNPs have been identified [34]. One of these, C3435T, has been associated with the expression and function of P-gp in humans. Carriers homozygous for this polymorphism (TT) showed more than a 2-fold lower *ABCB1* expression than the CC group, which resulted in high plasma concentrations of substrate drugs [35]. Many studies have reported associations between functional SNPs in *ABCB1* and the therapeutic response to psychotropics. Tricyclic antidepressants (nortriptyline, amitriptyline, and imipramine) are P-gp substrates [36,37]. In patients with a mutated P-gp gene C3435T (TT group), P-gp activity was reduced, and the incidence of orthostatic hypotension was significantly increased as a result [38]. Furthermore, such selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors as fluvoxamine and paroxetine are both inhibitors and substrates of P-gp [39,40], and therapeutic response to these drugs can be affected by P-gp gene polymorphism. In fact, recent pharmaco-

genetic research has demonstrated that responses to fluvoxamine and paroxetine were significantly affected by *ABCB1* polymorphisms, including C3435T genotypes [34,41]. The fluvoxamine plasma concentrations were significantly higher in the 3435TT group compared to the 3435CC group [41]. In the case of paroxetine treatment, patients with the haplotype combination 3435C-2677G-1236T of the *ABCB1* gene showed minimal improvement in their Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression scores [34]. In addition, patients with the 3435CC genotype had significantly lower dose-normalized clozapine concentrations than CT or TT patients [42]. This study suggests that 3435CC patients require higher clozapine doses to achieve the same plasma concentrations as CT or TT patients, and *ABCB1* genotyping should be considered as a novel strategy that could improve drug use. However, since there is little information on the relationship between *ABCB1* polymorphism and clinical efficacy, prospective clinical trials will be needed to clarify this relationship.

#### OTHER ABC TRANSPORTERS AND SOLUTE CARRIER (SLC) TRANSPORTERS

In recent years, the other ABC efflux transporters (MRPs and BCRP) have been thought to affect drug penetration into the brain (Figure 1), although there is yet little information on whether these transporters affect the pharmacokinetics of psychotropics. MRPs expressed at the BBB play some role in xenobiotic elimination at the BBB and the brain-cerebrospinal fluid barrier [43-45]. The MRP subtypes at the BBB consist of MRP1, MRP4 and MRP5 (MRP2?). It has been reported that citalopram is a substrate of MRP1, and that MRP1 polymorphism affected citalopram clinical response [46]. Because 4002G>A MRP1 genotype was associated with greater expression and function of MRP1, patients with the AG or AA genotype receiving citalopram were 5.8 times more likely to experience remission at 8 weeks than patients with the GG genotype [46].

A recent study also found that BCRP plays an important role in xenobiotic elimination at the BBB and that the brain concentrations of BCRP substrates were higher in BCRP-knockout mice [47]. So far, an *in vitro* study has suggested that risperidone and clozapine are BCRP inhibitors [48]. However, in the case of commonly prescribed drugs, except for psychotropics, there is often overlap in substrates of ABC transporters among P-gp, BCRP and MRPs [49,50]. Thus, further evidence is needed to evaluate

the extents of their effects on the pharmacokinetics of these drugs.

Additionally, several solute carrier (SLC) drug transporters are expressed at the BBB, including organic anion-transporting polypeptide (OATP) 1A2, OATP2B1, and organic anion transporter 3 (OAT3) (Figure 1) [51]. These transporters are localized at the luminal and abluminal membranes of brain capillary endothelial cells and regulate the delivery of CNS drugs to systemic circulation [8,51]. Methotrexate (MTX), a folate antimetabolite, is known as an OATP1A2 substrate [52], and methotrexate chemotherapy has been reported to cause severe CNS toxicity [53]. *SLCO1A2* (encoding OATP1A2) polymorphism may account for interindividual differences in MTX treatment response and MTX-induced toxicities [52]. Therefore, OATP1A2 may be another important factor in determining the response to drugs that act on the CNS, including psychotropics. However, we may need to wait for the results of future studies, because the substrate specificity of OATPs with regard to psychotropics is still being investigated.

#### CONCLUSIONS

We have shown that P-gp affects the efficacy and side effects of psychotropics. P-gp plays a key role not only in the gastrointestinal tract but also at the BBB. As previously described, it appears to be very important to estimate the effects of P-gp, especially with regard to drug transport to the CNS, which is closely tied to drug efficacy. Understanding the competitive action among and direct inhibitory effects of P-gp substrates and modulators will enable us to more correctly predict potential drug–drug interactions and establish safer and more effective dosage schedules.

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