

CHARACTERISATION OF A NOVEL
SUBTILASE CYTOTOXIN FROM
SHIGA TOXIGENIC *ESCHERICHIA COLI*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	VII
DECLARATION.....	IX
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	X
ABBREVIATIONS.....	XIV
I INTRODUCTION.....	I
1.1 Shiga Toxigenic <i>Escherichia coli</i>	2
1.1.1 Origins of Synonymous Nomenclature.....	2
1.1.2 Spectrum and Aetiology of Disease.....	3
1.1.3 Epidemiology	4
1.1.4 Pathogenesis and Virulence Factors	6
1.2 Bacterial AB ₅ Protein Toxins.....	8
1.2.1 Toxin Recognition of Host Cell Oligosaccharides	8
1.2.2 Cholera Toxin.....	15
1.2.3 Shiga Toxin	16
1.3 Adjuvanticity of Cholera Toxin	18
1.4 A Novel AB ₅ Subtilase Cytotoxin from STEC	21
1.4.1 SubAB Structure and Function	22
1.4.2 Sialic Acid as a Putative Receptor	24
1.4.3 Aetiology of Disease	25

1.5 Hypothesis and Aims	28
2 MATERIALS AND METHODS	29
2.1 Chemicals, Reagents and Enzymes.....	30
2.1.1 Antibiotics.....	30
2.1.2 Tissue Culture Media and Reagents.....	30
2.2 Plasmids, Bacterial Strains and Cell Lines	31
2.3 Carbohydrate Structures.....	33
2.4 Bacterial Growth Media.....	34
2.5 SubAB Expression and Purification	34
2.5.1 SubAB Expression	34
2.5.2 Affinity Purification.....	35
2.6 General SDS-PAGE.....	35
2.6.1 SDS-PAGE.....	35
2.6.2 Western Transfer (Nitrocellulose).....	35
2.6.3 Western Blot Analysis.....	36
2.6.4 Pre-Cast SDS-PAGE.....	36
2.6.5 Silver Staining of SDS-PAGE Gels	36
2.6.6 Western Transfer (PVDF).....	37
2.7 Tissue Culture Growth Media.....	37
2.8 Tissue Culture Techniques.....	38
2.8.1 Retrieval of Cells from Cryostorage	38
2.8.2 Propagation	38
2.8.3 Cryostorage	38
2.8.4 Transfection of Cells with pCaveolin-1-EGFP.....	38
2.9 Cytotoxicity Assay	39

2.9.1 Determining the Specific Cytotoxicity of SubAB	39
2.9.2 Receptor Analogue Toxin Inhibition	39
2.10 Eukaryotic Glycolipid Receptors	40
2.10.1 Ganglioside and Neutral Glycosphingolipid Separation.....	40
2.10.2 Reverse Phase Ganglioside Extraction.....	41
2.10.3 Normal Phase Neutral Glycosphingolipid Extraction.....	41
2.10.4 Thin-Layer Chromatography	41
2.10.5 Toxin Overlay Assay (Glycolipids)	42
2.11 Eukaryotic Glycoprotein Receptors	43
2.11.1 Glycoprotein Receptor Isolation	43
2.11.2 Enhanced Chemiluminescence (ECL)	44
2.12 Bacterial Receptor Mimic Constructs	44
2.12.1 LPS Receptor Mimic Preparation	44
2.12.2 Toxin Overlay Assay (LPS Receptor Mimics)	45
2.13 Receptor Structural Analysis.....	45
2.13.1 Mass Spectroscopy.....	45
2.13.2 Glycan Array.....	46
2.14 Fluorescence Materials	46
2.14.1 Coverslip Preparation.....	46
2.14.2 Fluorescent Toxins	46
2.14.3 Intracellular Markers.....	46
2.14.4 Cell Cycle Markers	47
2.15 Toxin Trafficking by Fluorescence.....	47
2.15.1 Fluorescent Toxin Exposure	47
2.15.2 Fluorescence Co-localisation	48

2.15.3 Immunofluorescent Co-localisation	48
2.15.4 Cell Cycle Analysis	49
2.16 Fluorescence Microscopy	50
2.16.1 Epifluorescence Microscopy	50
2.16.2 Dual-Laser Fluorescence Confocal Microscopy	51
2.16.3 Image Acquisition and Analysis	51
2.17 Toxin Trafficking by Electron Microscopy	52
2.17.1 LR White Resin Embedding	52
2.17.2 LR White Resin Embedding in Transwells	52
2.17.3 Epon Resin Embedding	53
2.17.4 Immunogold Labelling of Resin Sections	54
2.17.5 Heavy Metal Staining of Resin Sections	54
2.17.6 Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM)	54
2.18 Inhibition of SubAB Trafficking and Cytotoxicity	55
2.18.1 Inhibition of SubAB Trafficking	55
2.18.2 Inhibition of Cytotoxicity	55
2.19 SubB Immunomodulation	55
2.19.1 Antigen Preparation	55
2.19.2 Preparation of Immune Sera	56
2.19.3 Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay	56
3 INTRACELLULAR TRAFFICKING	58
3.1 Introduction	59
3.2 Results	60
3.2.1 Investigation of SubAB Trafficking by Electron Microscopy	60
3.2.2 Affect of Fluorochrome and SubA Presence and Activity on Trafficking	63

3.2.3 SubAB Trafficking in Various Cell Lines	66
3.2.4 Fluorescence Co-trafficking with CtxB and StxB	67
3.2.5 Fluorescence Co-localisation with Subcellular Markers.....	69
3.2.6 Inhibition of Trafficking	73
3.2.7 Inhibition of Cytotoxicity.....	80
3.2.8 Cell Cycle-Dependent Internalisation.....	82
3.3 Discussion	86
4 HOST GLYCAN RECEPTOR.....	94
4.1 Introduction.....	95
4.2 Results.....	97
4.2.1 Putative Glycolipid Receptor Affinity	97
4.2.2 Developing a Bacterial Receptor Mimic Construct Toxin Overlay Assay....	99
4.2.3 Analysis of SubAB Affinity by Glycan Array.....	102
4.2.4 FCS as a Potential Source of Neu5Gc for SubAB	105
4.2.5 Toxin Inhibition with Receptor Analogues.....	107
4.2.6 Putative Glycoprotein Receptor Affinity	110
4.3 Discussion	112
5 SUBB IMMUNOMODULATION.....	120
5.1 Introduction.....	121
5.2 Results.....	123
5.2.1 Assessment of SubB as a Potential Immunomodulator	123
5.2.2 Relative Efficacy of SubB as an Adjuvant.....	125
5.3 Discussion	128
6 FINAL DISCUSSION	131

6.1 Final Discussion.....	132
APPENDIX A	139
A.1 Glycan Array Data by Glycan Number.....	140
A.2 Glycan Array Data by SubAB Affinity.....	149
APPENDIX B	158
B.1 Publications	159
REFERENCES.....	178

ABSTRACT

Subtilase cytotoxin (SubAB) is the prototype of a novel class of AB₅ cytotoxins produced by Shiga-toxigenic *Escherichia coli* (STEC). The A subunit (SubA) is a serine protease that cleaves the ER chaperone BiP causing cell death by a previously-undetermined mechanism. The B subunits of AB₅ toxins typically recognise host cell glycan receptors and direct the subcellular transport of the A subunit. Although the function of SubA and its intracellular substrate have been elucidated, the B subunit (SubB) is relatively uncharacterised.

The subcellular trafficking pathway of SubAB was initially examined. SubAB conjugated to Oregon Green 488 (SubAB-OG) was internalised by Vero cells by 5 min, and co-localised with its ER target BiP within 30 min. When Vero cells were incubated with SubAB-OG and either Alexa Fluor 594-conjugated Cholera toxin B subunit (CtxB-AF594) or Texas Red-conjugated Shiga toxin B subunit (StxB-TR), individual cells exhibited differential toxin uptake. This was shown to be cell cycle-dependent, in which, SubAB-OG was preferentially internalised by cells migrating through G1 and early S phases. In contrast, CtxB-AF594 was taken up by cells in S through M phases and by a majority of cells in G1, while StxB-TR endocytosis occurred in cells traversing G1. Fluorescent SubAB co-localised with the clathrin marker transferrin, but not with Caveolin-1 (a marker for cholesterol-associated caveolae) and was subsequently trafficked via a retrograde pathway to the TGN, Golgi and ER. The clathrin inhibitor phenylarsine oxide prevented SubAB entry and BiP cleavage in SubAB-treated Vero, HeLa and N2A cells, while cholesterol depletion did not, demonstrating that, unlike either Stx or Ctx, SubAB internalisation is exclusively clathrin-dependent.

Identification of the SubB receptor was initially approached using toxin overlay assays in which Vero cell glycolipid extracts were separated by thin-layer chromatography and overlaid with SubAB. SubAB exhibited a high affinity for particular acidic species in the ganglioside fraction. However, none co-migrated with commercial glycolipid standards. SubAB-OG also exhibited an affinity for the oligosaccharide structures of chimeric LPS from GM₂ and GM₃ bacterial receptor mimic constructs in an LPS toxin overlay assay. Glycan array analysis revealed that SubB possessed a unique affinity for carbohydrate receptors with a terminal Neu5Gc α (2 \rightarrow 3)Gal β disaccharide. Monovalent receptor analogues with distal Neu5Gc or Neu5Gc α (2 \rightarrow 3)Gal β and highly-sialylated α ₁-AGP did not prevent endocytosis of SubAB-OG, BiP cleavage or cytotoxicity in Vero cells. This indicated that SubAB has a greater affinity for the host cell receptors than the receptor analogues and may engage multiple receptors displayed on a lipid bilayer.

In addition to mediating toxin binding and subcellular trafficking, CtxB and StxB can also potentiate the immune response to co-administered antigen. Accordingly, the systemic immunomodulatory properties of SubB administered by the i.p. route were assessed in mice. Using SubA_{A272} as a bystander antigen, SubB significantly increased mouse anti-SubA_{A272} titres to levels that were comparable to those obtained using Alum adjuvant. However, when admixed with structurally-unrelated OVA, SubB did not significantly affect anti-OVA titres whereas Alum and CtxB did. This indicated that SubB may function as a systemic carrier protein (rather than an adjuvant) for particular antigens.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university of tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Damien Christopher Chen Sau Chong

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I was once told that if you want to go exploring, you have to move out of your comfort zone. Indeed, such a situation was aptly encapsulated by Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*: “I’ve got a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore”. However, despite the often esoteric nature of research, the pursuit of an answer is rarely achieved alone. While the following pages list the numerous persons to whom I am grateful for their assistance, I’d particularly like to thank James and Adrienne Paton for their enthusiasm as supervisors and unrelenting challenges. It was through their questioning which they granted me the intellectual freedom one desires when undertaking a truly enviable project. My gratitude extends to those who have assisted in the development and adaptation of new techniques including, but not limited to, Stephen Gregory, Peter Sharp (Women’s and Children’s Hospital), Ursula Talbot, Cheleste Thorpe (Tufts-New England Medical Center), Lyn Waterhouse (Adelaide Microscopy) and Jo White.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations accepted by the American Society for Microbiology are used in this thesis without definition. Additional abbreviations (listed below) are defined when first used.

A _[#]	Absorbance at [wavelength in nm]
A/E	Attaching-effacing
AF[#]	Alexa Fluor [fluorochrome wavelength in nm]
Alum	Aluminium hydroxide
AP	Alkaline phosphatase
APC	Antigen presenting cell
Amp	Ampicillin
aGM ₁	Asialo-GM ₁
BCIP	5-bromo-4-chloro-3-indoyl-phosphate (X-phosphate)
BFA	Brefeldin A
BSA	Bovine serum albumin
Cmah	CMP-Neu5Ac hydroxylase
CPK	Creatine phosphokinase
CPZ	Chlorpromazine
Ctx	Cholera toxin
CtxA	Cholera toxin A subunit
CtxB	Cholera toxin B subunit
CV	Coefficient of variation
DAB	Diaminobenzidine
DC	Dendritic cell
DMEM	Dulbecco's Modified Eagle Medium
DMSO	Dimethyl sulfoxide
DIG	Digoxigenin
EDTA	Ethylene diamine tetra-acetic acid
ELISA	Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay
EPEC	Enteropathogenic <i>E. coli</i>
ETEC	Enterotoxigenic <i>E. coli</i>
FCS	Foetal calf serum
<i>g</i>	Gravity units
G418	Geneticin
Gb ₃	Globotriaosyl ceramide
Gb ₄	Globotetraosyl ceramide
GD _{1a}	Disialo-ganglioside 1a
GD _{1b}	Disialo-ganglioside 1b
GGs	Ganglioside
GM ₁	Monosialo-ganglioside 1
GM ₂	Monosialo-ganglioside 2
GM ₃	Monosialo-ganglioside 3
GSL	Neutral glycosphingolipid
HCT-8	Human colonic epithelial cells
HRP	Horseradish peroxidase
HUS	Haemolytic uraemic syndrome
i.n	Intranasal
i.p.	Intraperitoneal
IPTG	Isopropyl-beta-D-thiogalactoside

Kan	Kanamycin
LB	Luria Bertani broth
LD ₅₀	50% lethal dose
LEE	Locus for enterocyte effacement
LPS	Lipopolysaccharide
LT	Heat labile enterotoxin
M β CD	Methyl- β -cyclodextrin
MALDI	Matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionisation
MQ	Milli Q
MR	Molar ratio (dye:protein)
MS	Mass spectroscopy
OG	Oregon Green 488
ORF	Open reading frame
OVA	Ovalbumin
PAO	Phenylarsine oxide
PBS	Phosphate-buffered saline
Pen-Strep	Penicillin and streptomycin
PIBM	Polyisobutylmethacrylate
PH3	Phospho-Histone PH3
POD	Peroxidase
PVDF	Polyvinylidene difluoride
R	Resistant
R _f	Retardation fraction
RFU	Relative fluorescence units
RMC	Receptor mimic construct
SDS	Sodium dodecyl sulphate
SDS-PAGE	Sodium dodecyl sulphate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis
SEM	Standard error about the mean
ST	Heat-stable toxin
STDEV	Standard deviation
STEC	Shiga toxinogenic <i>Escherichia coli</i>
Stx	Shiga toxin
StxB	Shiga toxin B subunit
SubA	Subtilase cytotoxin A subunit
SubAB	Subtilase cytotoxin
SubB	Subtilase cytotoxin B subunit
TBS	Tris-buffered saline
TE	Tris-EDTA buffer
TEM	Transmission electron microscopy
TEMED	N,N,N',N'-tetramethyl-ethylene-diamine
TGN	<i>Trans</i> -Golgi network
TLC	Thin-layer chromatography
TR	Texas Red
TSA	Tris-saline azide
TTBS	Tween-Tris-buffered saline
WGA	Wheat germ agglutinin
VP-SFM	Virus production serum-free medium
VT	Vero cytotoxin