Effect of Rosiglitazone on N-nitroso-N-methylurea-induced Mammary Tumors in Rat

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Abstract. The objective of this study was to evaluate the in vivo antitumor action of rosiglitazone (Rosi) alone or in combination with tamoxifen (Tam) on experimental mammary tumors induced by N-nitroso-N-methylurea (NMU) in Sprague-Dawley rats. Animals bearing mammary tumors were treated with 0.06 mg/kg/day or 0.12 mg/kg/day of Rosi orally, 1 mg/kg/day of Tam s.c., or with the combined treatment (Rosi+Tam). After 25 days of treatment, the following responses were observed: 45% of tumors were responsive to 0.06 mg/kg/day of Rosi treatment, while 55% of tumors under Tam treatment responded. The results of the combined Rosi+Tam treatment indicated that 75% of tumors were responsive. Similar results were obtained with 0.12 mg/kg/day of Rosi. Apoptosis, necrosis and glandular hypersecretion were observed in Rosi-treated tumors. In all cases, the combined Rosi+Tam treatment potentiated the antitumor effect of Tam alone. No side-effects were observed after treatment at any assayed dose.

Currently, it is believed that several hormones, such as estrogens, insulin and insulin-like growth factor systems (IGFs) participate in the development of normal and neoplastic mammary tissue (1-4). Thiazolidinediones (TZDs), such as rosiglitazone, are compounds that improve the insulin sensitivity in patients with non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM), as well as in rodent models of NIDDM, and are extensively used in the treatment of diabetes (5). It is known that these compounds act as high affinity ligands for a number of the nuclear hormone receptor super-family PPARs (peroxisome-proliferator activated receptors), which has been reported to play an important role in lipid and glucose metabolism as well as in adipocyte differentiation (6, 7). The PPARs are a group of three nuclear receptor isoforms encoded by different genes (7). Among them, PPARγ is of particular interest because, in addition to diabetes (8), it has been implicated in several other pathological conditions including cancer (9). Much evidence associates the PPARγ ligands with the differentiation and inhibition of tumor growth of established tumors, the chemopreventive effects in animal models and the inhibitory effect on cell growth in most cell types studied (10-14). Troglitazone, a class of TZDs, has also been reported as effective in the treatment of 7,12 dimethylbenz(a)anthracene (DMBA)-induced mammary tumors in rats (15).

We previously characterized an experimental mammary tumor induced in rats by three i.p. injections of the carcinogen N-nitroso-N-methylurea (NMU) at 50, 80 and 110 days of life (16). The objective of the present study was to evaluate the in vivo antitumor action of rosiglitazone (Rosi) alone or in combination with tamoxifen (Tam) on these experimental mammary tumors. Therefore, the effect of the treatments was determined by: a) glucose tolerance; b) mammary tumor growth; c) histopathological characteristics of the tumors; d) blood insulin and total IGF-I levels; e) other physiological parameters in rats during treatments.

Materials and Methods

Reagents. NMU was purchased from Sigma Chemical Co., (St. Louis, MO, USA). A blood glucose micromethod was used to determine glucose levels (Glucometer Gx, Ames S.A., Argentina). The kit for
IGF-I determination by radioimmunoassay (RIA) was purchased from Diagnostic Systems Laboratories Inc. (Texas, USA) and the kit for insulin detection (RIA) was from International CIS (France). Rosi was a gift from GlaxoSmithKlein Laboratories SA, (Buenos Aires, Argentina). Tam was kindly provided by Gador Laboratories SA (Buenos Aires, Argentina). Anti-PCNA (proliferating cell nuclear antigen) was a mouse monoclonal antibody from DakoCytomation (Clone PC10, Denmark). The second antibody was anti-mouse IgG peroxidase conjugate and for signal detection the 3,3’diaminobencidine tablets (DAB) were from Sigma Chemical Co. The synthetic balsam for microscopic observation was from Alwik (Poland). Other reagents were of analytical grade.

**Animals.** Female Sprague-Dawley rats (from the National University of La Plata, Animal Production Division, Argentina) were randomly separated into batches and housed in stainless steel cages with water and food *ad libitum* a temperature of 22-23°C, humidity around 56% and a 12-h light-dark cycle. In all cases the animals were kept under conditions recommended by the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, National Research Council, USA, 1996.

**Experiment 1. Glucose tolerance test (GTT) in rats under treatment.** The effects of 0.06 and 0.12 mg/kg/day of Rosi were analyzed. The employed doses were extrapolated from those utilized in human patients for the treatment of diabetic disease (17). In order to examine whether Rosi treatments affected the circulating levels of glucose, GTT was performed pre- and post-treatment in all treated rats. Six groups of 120-day-old animals were randomly separated (n=5 rats each) and treated as follows: i) rats received vehicle (control); ii) rats received 0.06 mg/kg/day of Rosi orally dissolved in 15% glycerine/water; iii) rats were treated with 1 mg/kg/day of Tam s.c. suspended in corn oil (Tam); iv) rats received combined 0.06 mg/kg/day of Rosi plus 1 mg/kg/day of Tam (Rosi 0.06+Tam); v) rats received 0.12 mg/kg/day of Rosi (Rosi 0.12); vi) rats received combined 0.12 mg/kg/day Rosi + 1 mg/kg/day Tam (Rosi 0.12+Tam). On days 120 and 145 of life and after basal glucose determination, 2 g/kg of glucose was injected i.p. into rats and the circulating glucose levels were determined at 30, 60 and 120 min post-glucose injection.

**Experiment 2. Effects of Rosi, Tam and Rosi+Tam treatments on tumor growth.** For malignant mammary tumor induction, rats were injected with three i.p. doses of NMU at 50, 80 and 110 days of age, as previously described (15). The developing tumors were measured with a caliper three days a week. Studies of the effects on tumor growth of 0.06 mg/kg/day and 0.12 mg/kg/day of Rosi, alone or combined with Tam, were performed. The results were compared to those obtained in rats receiving Tam alone and to controls receiving placebo (vehicle). Treatments began when at least one tumor per rat had a diameter of 0.6 cm. The treatment schedule of this experiment is summarized in Table I. The parameters recorded were: i) percentage of tumor responsive to treatments: each tumor was classified as responsive or growing according to its size in relation to the pre-treatment value; tumors were considered responsive when their diameters were similar to the initial value or when they were lower than its diameter at the beginning of the treatments (18, 19); ii) relative tumor size: calculated as the relationship between tumor size at different times versus the one at the beginning of each treatment. The tumor size was determined as the mean of the measurement of two perpendicular diameters three days a week (18, 19); iii) histopathology: the histopathological characteristics of all tumors were determined according to the classification of Russo et al. (20). Histological observations of all mammary tumors were performed. The specimens were fixed in 10% formaldehyde and embedded in paraffin. The slides were stained with hematoxylin-eosin (HE) for microscopic observation (AxioLab Carl Zeiss S.A., Zurich, Switzerland, microscope, carried out with Canon G5 digital camera and Nowell Canon remote capture 2.7, Image Browser 3.0, Photo Stich 3.1); iv) apoptosis determination: apoptotic cells in paraffin-embedded tissues were detected in situ by peroxidase staining using the Apoptag®PLUS Peroxidase In Situ Detection Kit S701 (Chemicon International, CA, USA). The basis of the employed technique was the examination of apoptosis via DNA fragmentation by the TUNEL assay; v) PCNA expression: samples from all tumors were fixed for 24 h in formaldehyde 10% (PBS 10 mM pH 7.4) and embedded in paraffin. Serial sections (5 µm) were cut with a microtome and mounted on glass xylanized slides. The PCNA expression was determined with the anti-PCNA antibody 1:50 overnight at 4°C. The slides were then incubated with rabbit anti-human HRP conjugate antibody 1:100. The immune complex was visualized with the chromogenic substrate DAB. All the experiments included positive and negative controls.

**Experiment 3. Effects of Rosi, Tam and Rosi+Tam treatments on insulin and total IGF-I circulating levels.** In order to determine whether the treatments produced changes in insulin or in total IGF-I circulating levels, both pre- and post-treatment values were determined in a new set of experiments. Blood samples (n=4 each group) were obtained from the tail of each rat pre- and post-
**Table II. Glucose tolerance test in control, Rosi-, Tam- and Rosi+Tam-treated rats.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Basal (mg/ml)</th>
<th>30 min (mg/ml)</th>
<th>60 min (mg/ml)</th>
<th>90 min (mg/ml)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Control</td>
<td>61-99</td>
<td>143-177</td>
<td>126-135</td>
<td>55-107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rosi 0.06</td>
<td>61-100</td>
<td>145-217</td>
<td>129-141</td>
<td>69-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tam</td>
<td>76-99</td>
<td>146-199</td>
<td>111-161</td>
<td>90-109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Rosi 0.06+Tam</td>
<td>83-101</td>
<td>138-181</td>
<td>121-166</td>
<td>95-107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Rosi 0.12</td>
<td>69-90</td>
<td>153-227</td>
<td>123-170</td>
<td>65-115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Rosi 0.12+Tam</td>
<td>69-86</td>
<td>123-198</td>
<td>107-166</td>
<td>87-106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Range of blood glucose levels (mg/dl) in rats pre- and post-1 g/kg glucose injection (n=5 each group). Rosi, rosiglitazone; Tam, tamoxifen. Results were obtained on day 25 of treatment. Initial values did not differ significantly. *p*NS, two-way ANOVA.

**Table III. Tumor growth evolution of NMU-induced mammary tumors in control, Rosi-, Tam- and Rosi+Tam-treated rats.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Growing No. (%)</th>
<th>Responsive No. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. NMU (n=40)</td>
<td>40 (100)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. NMU+Rosi 0.06 (n=32)</td>
<td>18 (55)</td>
<td>14 (45)a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. NMU+Tam (n=44)</td>
<td>20 (45)</td>
<td>24 (55)b,d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. NMU+Rosi 0.06+Tam (n=48)</td>
<td>10 (25)</td>
<td>30 (75)c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. NMU+Rosi 0.12 (n=14)</td>
<td>7 (50)</td>
<td>7 (50)d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. NMU+Rosi 0.12+Tam (n=10)</td>
<td>2 (20)</td>
<td>8 (80)e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observation period: 25 days. NMU, *N*-nitroso-*N*-methylurea; Tam, tamoxifen; Rosi, rosiglitazone; n, total number of tumors per group. aNMU+Rosi 0.06 vs. NMU, 0.0004; bNMU+Tam vs. NMU, p=0.0002; cNMU+Rosi 0.06+Tam vs. NMU, p<0.0001; dNMU+Rosi 0.12 vs. NMU+Rosi 0.06, p:NS; eNMU+Rosi 0.06 vs. NMU+Rosi 0.06+Tam, p:NS. Fisher test.

**Results**

**Experiment 1. Glucose tolerance test.** After glucose injection, rats treated with Rosi, Tam, or combined treatment showed a normal recovery of glucose levels (Table II). The results also indicated that NMU injections did not affect the GTT (data not shown).

**Experiment 2. Effects of treatments on tumor characteristics.**

i) **Tumor growth:** The evolution of tumor growth after 25 days of treatment is summarized in Table III. None of the tumors from the NMU control group spontaneously regressed. In the NMU+Rosi 0.06 group, 45% of the tumors were responsive, while 55% continued growing. With the Tam treatment (NMU+Tam group), 55% of the tumors showed regression and 45% continued growing, similar to our previous observations using the same experimental model (18, 19). In the combined treatment (NMU+Rosi 0.06+Tam), a higher proportion of tumors showed response (75%). In the NMU+Rosi 0.12 group, 50% of the tumors were sensitive, while 50% continued growing. When 0.12 mg/kg/day Rosi was combined with 1 mg/kg/day Tam, a greater proportion of tumors showed response (80%).

ii) **Relative tumor size:** After 25 days of 0.06 mg/kg/day Rosi treatment (Figure 1a), tumors that were sensitive to Rosi (Rosi 0.06(r)) displayed a significantly different evolution to those treated with placebo, and their growth either regressed or stabilized. When rats were treated with 0.12 mg/kg/day of Rosi, the final mean tumor sizes observed in responsive tumors (Rosi 0.12(r)) were similar to those responsive at 0.06 mg/kg/day Rosi (Figure 1b). Under the Tam treatment, the tumors regressed by approx. 50% at the end of the experiments (Figure 1c).

When rats bearing tumors were treated with 0.06 or 0.12 mg/kg/day of Rosi plus 1 mg/kg/day of Tam, the responsive tumors had similar sizes to those responsive to Rosi alone (Figures 1d and e). In summary, the combined Rosi-plus-Tam treatment produced a significant increase in the number of responsive tumors (Table III).

iii) **Histological results:** In Figure 2, mammary tumor histology and morphology, apoptosis and PCNA expression are presented. Tumors from NMU rats were always malignant adenocarcinomas, with a cribriform, comedo or papillary pattern, as previously described (18). A typical malignant pattern of a cribriform tumor is illustrated in Figure 2a. Tumors of rats treated with Rosi also showed a malignant pattern but with areas of glandular secretory differentiation, fibrous tissue reaction and inflammatory infiltrating cells (Figures 2b and c). Tumors from Tam-treated rats showed secretory gland differentiation (Figure 2d) and necrotic

**Experiment 3. Effect of treatments on body weight, water and food intake of rats.** During the treatments, the body weight (BW) and water and food consumption of the rats were monitored. Rats, 120 days old, were randomly separated into four groups (n=5 rats each): i) control, normal rats without any treatment; ii) rats received 0.06 mg/kg/day of Rosi; iii) rats received 1 mg/kg/day of Tam; and iv) rats received 0.06 mg/kg/day of Rosi plus 1 mg/kg/day of Tam. The animals were individually housed in stainless steel cages equipped with an individual feeder and a water bottle; water and food were provided ad libitum and their intake was monitored at daily intervals throughout the experiment. The body weight was determined every fifth day and expressed as g. The water and food consumption of each rat were expressed as ml/100 g BW and g/100 g BW, respectively.

**Statistical analyses.** In each figure and table, the respective statistical test used is indicated.
Figure 1. Time-course of tumor size in rats under Rosi, Tam or combined treatment. In all graphs (■) represents NMU-mammary tumors of non-treated rats. a: Results of 0.06 mg/kg/day Rosi treatment; (▼), regressing tumors; (▲) vs. (■), p<0.0001; (▲) vs. (■), p:NS. b: Results of 0.12 mg/kg/day Rosi treatment; (▼), regressing tumors; (▲) vs. (■), p<0.0001; (▲) vs. (■), p:NS. c: Results of 1 mg/kg/day Tam treatment; (▼), regressing tumors; (▲) vs. (■), p<0.0001; (△), growing tumors; (▲) vs. (■), p:NS. d: Results of 0.06 mg/kg/day Rosi+1 mg/kg/day Tam treatment; (▼), regressing tumors; (▲) vs. (■), p<0.0001; (▲) vs. (■), p:NS. e: Results of 0.12 mg/kg/day Rosi+1 mg/kg/day Tam treatment; (▼), regressing tumors; (▲) vs. (■), p<0.0001; (▲) vs. (■), p:NS. Each point represents the mean ± SD. Observation period: 25 days. Two-way ANOVA; r = responsive, g = growth.

Figure 2. Histopathology of mammary tumors. a: Cribriform adenocarcinoma usually found in NMU rats (H.E. 100X). b: Cribriform mammary adenocarcinoma following Rosi treatment showing secretory changes and important peripheral fibrous tissue reaction (H.E. 20X). c: Tumor edge with important fibrous tissue reaction and inflammatory infiltrating cells (H.E. 100X). d: Focal secretory changes in sectors of a cribriform adenocarcinoma of a Tam-treated rat (H.E. 100X). e: Extended necrotic sectors in rat mammary adenocarcinoma associated with important intraglandular secretion following Rosi+Tam treatment (H.E. 20X). f: Necrosis, intratumoral secretion, inflammatory and fibrotic reaction on tumor of Rosi+Tam-treated rat (H.E. 100X). g: Absence of apoptotic cells in a NMU tumor (100X). h: Very high number of apoptotic cells in a cribriform tumor following Rosi treatment (Apoptag and Hematoxylin, 100X). i: Apoptosis and secretory changes in a well-differentiated tumor adenocarcinoma following Rosi treatment (Apoptag and Hematoxylin, 1000X). j: Frequent apoptotic cells nearby a necrotic sector in a tumor of Tam-treated rat (Apoptag and Hematoxylin, 400X). Tumors from Tam-treated rats preponderantly showed necrosis, as previously reported (16, 18). k: Necrosis, apoptosis and intraglandular secretion in a rat cribriform adenocarcinoma following Rosi+Tam treatment (Apoptag and Hematoxylin 1000X). l: Very high number of apoptotic cells in an atypical gland of rat mammary adenocarcinoma associated with secretory activity, in Rosi+Tam-treated rat (Apoptag and Hematoxylin, 1000X). m: Very high proportion of PCNA-positive cells usually found in NMU tumors (PCNA and methyl green contracoloration, 1000X). n: Only occasional cells are PCNA-positive in tumors of Rosi-treated rats (PCNA and methyl green contracoloration, 1000X). o: Scarcely PCNA-positive cells in a tumor of a Tam-treated rat (PCNA and methyl green contracoloration, 1000X). p: Low proportion of positive cells to PCNA in a tumor of Rosi+Tam-treated rat (PCNA and methyl green contracoloration, 1000X). q: Percentage of PCNA-positive epithelial cells in tumors under different treatments. *** p<0.0001 vs. Control, one-way ANOVA.
Figure 2.
sectors (19), while the tumors from animals treated with Rosi+Tam also exhibited important intraglandular secretion, moderate fibrous development, inflammatory reaction and extended necrotic areas (Figures 2e and f).

iv) Apoptosis: The effects of Rosi, Tam and Rosi+Tam treatments on apoptosis, mitosis and necrosis in mammary tumors are summarized in Table IV. The immunohistochemical results indicated that the NMU-control tumors did not reveal apoptotic cells (Figure 2g). On the contrary, tumors from Rosi-treated animals showed areas with a large number of apoptotic cells per field and a low number of mitotic epithelial cells (Figures 2h and i). Tumors that regressed under Tam treatment showed extended apoptotic (Figure 2j) and necrotic areas, as previously reported (19). With the combined Rosi+Tam treatment, a significant increase in the number of apoptotic cells versus controls (placebo treatment) was observed and a lower number of mitosis per field was detected (Figures 2j and k).

v) PCNA expression: A large number of cells in the NMU tumors (80-90%) were stained (Figure 2l). In contrast, in the Rosi-treated tumors (Figure 2m), the proportion of PCNA-positive cells was significantly lower (15-25%). The low expression of the PCNA antigen was similar in the Tam or Rosi+Tam-treated tumors (Figures 2o and p), as shown in Figure 2q.

Experiment 3. Insulin and tIGF-I circulating levels. No significant differences either in insulin or in tIGF-I circulating values were seen between the Rosi-treated and the control rats (Table V). Neither the Tam nor the combined treatments changed the baseline values.

Experiment 4. Body weight, water and food intake. At the baseline, the control, Rosi, Tam and Rosi+Tam rats had similar body weights. At the end of the study, no significant differences were observed (Table VI). Also, no differences were observed either in water or in food consumption under the different treatments in comparison to the control rats. The data obtained with the doses of 0.12 mg/kg/day Rosi or Rosi 0.12+Tam did not differ significantly (data not shown).

Discussion

Breast cancer is highly prevalent in women all over the world (21). Most breast cancer is estrogen-dependent for its growth and, consequently, endocrine ablation either by removal of the ovary or by the administration of anti-estrogenic drugs has been one of the major therapy options (22). An important group of drugs has a selective effect on hormone responsive tissue and the most successful of these is Tam, which acts like an estrogen antagonist in the mammary epithelium (23). Once bound to the estrogen receptor (ER), Tam blocks transcriptional and post-transcriptional events. However, an important proportion of breast cancer is not responsive to Tam treatment, or develops resistance (23). Consequently, interest is focused on the development of new drugs for the management of this illness.

The thiazolidinediones, such as rosiglitazone are synthetic antihyperglycemic drugs that act as insulin sensitizers by binding to and activating a specific transcription factor in the cell nucleus (24); when activated, this factor binds to specific genes. Many of these genes regulate proteins involved in lipid metabolism, adipose tissue differentiation and the intracellular insulin signaling cascade (24). As mentioned above, it is known that PPARγ ligands not only exert an antidiabetic effect in type 2 diabetes, but also induce cell growth arrest, apoptosis and differentiation in many cancers and cell types (10, 12-14, 25-27), suggesting that PPARγ may be a potential therapeutic target for the treatment of certain human cancers.
The experiments presented here conformed to the in vivo mammary tumor model induced in rats by NMU (16). To test the hypothesis that rosiglitazone has a direct action on tumor growth, the doses administered to the rats were extrapolated from those employed in human type 2 diabetic patients (17). In the first set of experiments, it was determined that these treatments did not affect the glucose tolerance in rats (Table I). The same doses of Rosi were employed to assay the possible action of the drug on tumor growth. Twenty-five days of treatment produced interesting results on the treated rats: an important proportion of the tumors was sensitive to Rosi treatment, and growth regression or stabilization were observed. These results correlated with those reported by other researches. Pighetti et al., in their study of experimental mammary tumors induced by DMBA, showed that troglitazone induced the regression or stabilization of tumor growth (15). Ohta et al. showed a very significant decrease in tumor growth of BHP18-21 thyroid carcinoma cells injected into nude mice when the animals were treated with the PPARγ ligand (12). Our results clearly indicated that Rosi treatment reduced the growth rate in 40-50% of the tumors.

When the number of apoptotic cells was analyzed, Rosi was found to have provoked a higher number of apoptotic cells than the Tam or placebo treatments. The process of apoptosis is well recognized as playing an important role in the maintenance of normal tissue homeostasis and in tumorigenesis. It is known that the tumor growth rate is a balance between both proliferative activity and cell death. Increasing evidence indicates that the activation of PPARγ inhibits tumor growth by the induction of apoptosis. Yang et al. showed in renal cells that TZDs caused massive apoptosis with increasing bax and decreasing bcl-2 levels (27). Similar results were obtained by Liu et al. with K562 and HL-60 cells (28). In our experimental model, a significant proportion of the cells underwent apoptosis (Table III). To investigate the molecular mechanism of this process, the expressions of the apoptosis-regulatory genes bcl-2 and bax were assessed. Bax was up-regulated by Rosi treatment (data not shown), suggesting that the apoptosis course was via bax up-regulation. PPARγ activation was also found to induce apoptosis in human and rat glioma with a transient up-regulation of bax and bad protein levels (29). Conversely, Boggazi et al. did not show that Rosi affected bax expression in GH3 cells (30). Chen et al. reported that apoptosis induced by PPAR ligands was sequentially accompanied by reduced levels of bcl-2 (31). On the other hand, Shiau et al. reported that thiazolidinediones provoked apoptosis independently of PPARγ activation (32). Other investigations also supported the existence of PPARγ-independent pathways to mediate the anticancer effects of TZDs (33, 34).

In our experimental model, the Rosi treatment clearly diminished PCNA expression. The expression of PCNA, a nuclear protein related to the cell cycle and used as a marker of cell proliferation (35), was found significantly diminished in tumors from Rosi-treated rats in comparison to controls. It is known that the PCNA gene executes cellular responses to stress-repair or apoptosis. Absence or low levels of functional PCNA may drive cells into apoptosis (36). As mentioned above, many investigations indicated that PPARγ ligands promote cellular differentiation. Mueller et al. showed that the activation of PPARγ caused extensive lipid accumulation and changes associated with a more differentiated and less malignant state of the cells (37). Haydon et al., in their study on human osteosarcoma cell lines, showed that PPARγ agonists induced apoptosis and differentiation in human osteosarcoma (38). In pancreatic carcinoma cell lines, TZDs caused ductal differentiation, but not apoptosis (39). Animal model studies demonstrated that rosiglitazone redifferentiated thyroid cancers (40). In our experimental model, a clearly more differentiated pattern was observed in tumors after Rosi treatment, with important glandular hypersecretion and apoptotic sectors. The results presented in this paper showed a clear additive effect on tumor response, apoptosis and differentiation when the rats were treated with the combination of Rosi plus Tam.

Table VI. Body weight, water and food intake of control, Rosi-, Tam- and Rosi+Tam-treated rats.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Body weight (BW) (g)</th>
<th>Water intake (ml/100 g BW)</th>
<th>Food intake (g/100 g BW)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td>Initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Control</td>
<td>221-267</td>
<td>232-273</td>
<td>10.1-23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rosi 0.06</td>
<td>230-267</td>
<td>230-249</td>
<td>16.0-18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tam</td>
<td>220-256</td>
<td>223-264</td>
<td>17.6-22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Rosi 0.06+Tam</td>
<td>234-259</td>
<td>241-261</td>
<td>18.0-23.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data represent the range of the initial and the final values. Observation period: 25 days (n=5 rats per group).
Rosi, rosiglitazone; Tam, tamoxifen. p: NS. Two-way ANOVA.
One possible hypothesis to explain the action of rosiglitazone on the growth of a proportion of treated tumors may be the different expressions of estrogen receptors (ER). In this experimental model, ER were expressed in a wide range of well-differentiated cribriform tumors, while no expression was found in poorly-differentiated tumors (41). Wang and Kilgore suggested that a signal cross-talk exists bidirectionally between PPARγ and ER in breast cancer cells (42). Bonofgio et al. showed that the ERα and PPARγ pathways have an opposite effect on the regulation of the PI3K/AKT cascade (43). Recently, Papadaki et al. analyzed 170 human breast cancer biopsies, 51% of them PPARγ-positive (44), and found that PPARγ correlated with ERβ expression, associated with the inhibition of proliferation and invasiveness of breast cancer cells (45). The greater response observed with the Rosi-plus-Tam treatment could be due to the Tam treatment per se and to the effect of the PPAR ligand through ER. Currently, experiments are in progress in our laboratory to quantify PPARγ expression on Rosi-treated and non-treated NMU-induced mammary tumors.

Rosiglitazone is known to be orally effective in decreasing plasma glucose levels in non-insulin-dependent diabetic mellitus patients (24). The results of a recent investigation indicated that prolonged Rosi administration decreased insulin levels in human patients (46). In previous experiments, we had demonstrated that IGF-I played an important role in the development of the mammary model used in these experiments (3). In the experiments presented here, we demonstrated that Rosi did not increase IGF-I circulating levels, indicating that, under these conditions, the mechanism of action of Rosi is IGF-I-independent. When Rosi was combined with Tam, the inhibition of tumor growth may have been due to the Rosi per se action plus the multiple actions of Tam (22, 23). Macroscopic and microscopic observations of animals and organs did not evidence any change. Rosiglitazone did not show cytotoxicity or hepatic injury, in concordance with Yamamoto et al. (47). Stout et al. (48) reported that Rosi was well tolerated in a clinical trial in terms of liver toxicity. No effect on body weight, water or food intake in the rats under treatment was found, in agreement with the parameters reported by the Charles River Laboratories for Sprague-Dawley rats (http://www.criver.com).

Even though recent clinical trials using a PPARγ ligand failed to show clinical benefit in metastatic breast cancer (49,50), several studies reported the existence of links between certain metabolic disorders and cancer (51).

In conclusion, our experimental results signal the potential benefit of combined rosiglitazone plus tamoxifen treatment for breast cancer.

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