



Current Developments of C3-Substituted Coumarin Hybrids as Anti-Cancer Agents

Anees A. Pangal*, Javed A. Shaikh, Ejazuddin M. Khan

Dept. of Chemistry & Post Graduate Research Centre, Abeda Inamdar Sr. College of Arts, Science & Commerce, Camp, Pune, Affiliated to Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, India.

*Corresponding author's E-mail: aagpan@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Coumarin (benzopyran-2-one or chromen-2-one) is a fused benzene and pyrone ring system which prompt biological investigation to assess their potential therapeutic significance. It possesses immeasurable anticancer potential with minimum side effects depending on the substitutions on the basic nucleus. These analogs are the small molecules that act as anticancer agents by targeting abundant mechanisms that appear to be involved in a variety of cancers. Conjugation of coumarin with varied pharmacophores responsible for different biological activities has yielded many novel hybrid molecules, which have improved pharmacokinetics. Researchers have explored for their inhibitory activity towards kinases, cell cycle arrest, angiogenesis, heat shock protein (HSP90), telomerase, mitosis, carbonic anhydrase, monocarboxylate transporters, aromatase and sulfatase, blocking cell cycle, inducing cell apoptosis, modulating estrogen receptor (ER), or inhibiting the DNA-associated enzymes such as topoisomerase. Many of these agents are hybrid molecules designed through concept of molecular hybridization and have shown multiple pharmacological activities. The present review compiles research reports on development of different C3-coumarin hybrids. It covers the current developments of C3- substituted Coumarin-based anticancer agents and will provide a wide outlook for medicinal chemists on the research and developments of more active and less toxic anticancer drugs possessing coumarin hybrids.

Keywords: Coumarin; benzopyran-2-one; chromen-2-one; C3-coumarin hybrids; anticancer.

INTRODUCTION

Coumarins have been established as a well known naturally occurring heterocyclic compounds isolated from various plants. Coumarins comprise a very large class of compounds found throughout the plant kingdom. They are found at high levels in some essential oils, particularly *cinnamon* bark oil (7,000 ppm), *cassia* leaf oil (up to 87,300 ppm) and *lavender* oil. Coumarin is also found in fruits (e.g. *bilberry*, *cloudberry*), green tea and other foods such as *chicory*. Most of the coumarins occur in higher plants, with the richest sources being *Rutaceae* and *Umbelliferone*¹. They belong to the family of lactones having 1-benzopyran-2-one system that can be isolated from plants as well as can be carried out in the laboratory². Coumarins occupy a special role in nature. They belongs to the flavonoid class of plant secondary metabolite, which exhibit a variety of biological activities, associated with low toxicity and have achieved considerable interest due to their beneficial potential effects on human health³. It possesses immeasurable anticancer potential with minimum side effects depending on the substitutions on the basic nucleus. Coumarins have a tremendous ability to regulate diverse range of cellular pathways that can be explored for selective anticancer activity⁴. Cancer being the second leading cause of death worldwide⁵, a number of experiments is going on to develop compounds with minor or no side effects and coumarins were reported to exhibit negligible or mild side effects⁶. Naturally occurring coumarins, having wide spectrum of activities such as

antioxidant⁷, anti-inflammatory⁸, anticancer⁹, MAO-B inhibitory¹⁰, antinociceptive¹¹, hepatoprotective¹², antithrombotic¹³, antiviral¹⁴, antimicrobial¹⁵, antituberculosis¹⁶, anti-carcinogenic¹⁷, antidepressant¹⁸, antihyperlipidemic¹⁹ and anticholinesterase²⁰⁻²³ activities are frequently used by the researchers to develop novel synthetic and semi synthetic coumarin based therapeutic agents. Many of these agents are hybrid molecules designed through concept of molecular hybridization with multiple pharmacological activities²⁴. This multifunctional attribute of these hybrid compounds makes them potential drug candidates for the treatment of multi factorial diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's disease, metabolic syndromes, AIDS, malaria and cardiovascular diseases²⁵.

In recent years, molecular hybridization strategy has emerged as a novel approach that involves conglomeration of two or more pharmacophores in one molecular scaffold to develop hybrid multifunctional molecules²⁶. The latter have multiple biological activities, modified selectivity profile, different or dual modes of action with reduced undesired side effects due to mixing of pharmacophores in one molecule. Such molecules may be further modified to exhibit favorable pharmacokinetics and oral bioavailability²⁷⁻²⁸. Using this approach, several research groups have designed and synthesized many hybrid molecules. Some prominent examples of such molecules include ziprasidone, duloxetine and ladostigil for multi factorial CNS diseases, and sunitinib and lapatinib for treatment of cancers²⁹. Many more hybrid



molecules for treatment of other multi factorial diseases that are highly variable and heterogeneous involving multiple organ systems and targets such as metabolic disorders, malaria, inflammation, organophosphorous poisoning and ischaemia have been reported³⁰.

Hybridization or coupling of different coumarin derivatives with varied bioactive molecules such as resveratrol, maleimide sulfonamides, pyrazoline, chalcone, triazoles and a lipoic acid has produced novel hybrid molecules, which are endowed with vasorelaxant³¹, platelet anti-aggregating³², anticancer³³, mono amineoxidase-B (MAO-B) inhibitory³⁴, antimicrobial, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties³⁵. Therefore, molecular hybridization approach is playing an important role in development of novel molecules for treatment of numerous multi factorial diseases.

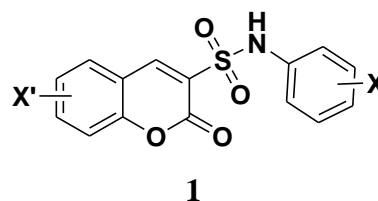
Anti-cancer drugs are cytotoxic and exhibit severe side effects particularly on normal proliferating tissues such as hematopoietic system³⁶. Often combination therapies, wherein several cytotoxic agents are combined in anticancer treatment regime, offer better results with fewer side effects³⁷. Currently, combination of chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery offers the best outcomes for cancer patients. Such combinations have been successfully used in treatment of particular cancer types, for example, Hodgkin's lymphoma, testicular cancer and various leukemias³⁸. Researchers are now exploiting natural products having anticancer profile to develop drugs with fewer side effects. Among various phytochemicals, coumarins have attracted considerable interest in the past few years³⁹. Coumarins have the potential not only to treat cancer but also to counter the side effects associated with radiotherapy. Hybridizing the coumarin nucleus with other moieties leads to new molecules with improved anticancer activity profile⁴⁰.

In the present study, we have made an attempt to elaborate C3 substituted coumarin-based anticancer agents. This review will provide a wide outlook for medicinal chemists on the research and developments of more active and less toxic anticancer drugs possessing coumarin hybrids.

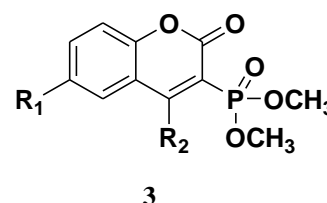
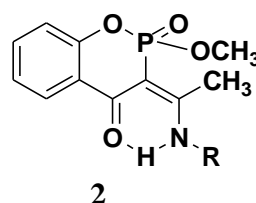
Anticancer Activity of C3-Substitued Coumarins

Reddy NS et al. synthesized coumarin 3-(N-aryl) sulphonamides **1**. The effect of all the compounds on the growth of human tumor cells in culture was evaluated using androgen receptor negative prostate (DU145), colorectal (DLD-1), non-small cell lung carcinoma (H157), estrogen receptor negative breast (BT20), and chronic myeloid leukemia (K562) cell lines. The dose response of each cell line was established by determining the number of viable cells after 96 hours of continuous treatment against five different concentrations (1-100 μ M range) of each compound. The activation of JNK1 by these compounds as shown in immune complex kinase assay clearly showed that they activate JNK pathway either by

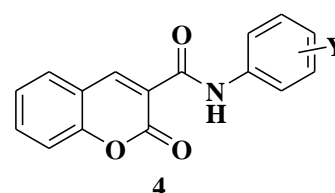
interacting with JNK1 or with one of the upstream kinases in this pathway⁴¹.



Budzisz E et al. determined the cytotoxic effects and alkylating activity of a series of 3-[1-(alkylamino)-ethylidene]-chroman-2,4-dione,2-methoxy-3-[1-(alkylamino)-ethylidene-2,3-dihydro-2,4-dioxo-2 λ 5-benzo [e] [1,2] oxa phosphinane **2** and [2-oxo-4- phenyl(alkyl)-2H-chromen-3-yl]-phosphonic acids dimethyl ester **3** on the two leukemia cell lines HL-60 and NALM-6. These compounds were highly toxic to NALM-6 cells than to HL-60 cells. IC50 data are about nine times lower for the NALM-6 than for the HL-60 cell lines. Their cytotoxic effect increased with an increase of the hydrophobic parameters in the region of the substituents at the 2-, 3- and 4-positions of the benzopyrone skeleton of these compounds⁴².

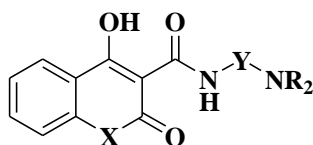


A series of coumarin-3-(N-aryl) carboxamides **4** were prepared and evaluated as cytotoxic agents against SKBr3 and BT474 breast cancer cell lines as well as normal HFLs (human lung fibroblasts). Among the synthesized compounds, 6-chlorocoumarin derivative (X = 6-Cl and Y = 3-NO₂-4-Cl) showed the highest inhibitory activity against ErbB-2 kinase (IC50 = 0.166 mM). Some derivatives including the latter compound were found to have respectable cytotoxic activity against SKBr3 and BT474 cells (IC50 values = 16.3-94 mM). The SAR study showed that the substitutions on the coumarin ring and also on the N-phenyl moiety can strongly affect the cytotoxic profile of the compounds⁴³.



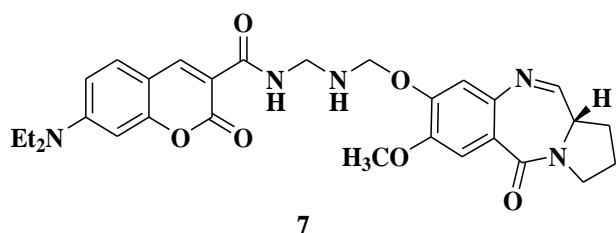
Matiadis et al. studied a series of coumarin and quinolinone-3-carboxamide derivatives **5** and **6** were synthesized and examined for their anticancer activities against several cancer cell lines including prostate cancer cells DU145 and PC3, colon cancer HCT15, breast cancer MCF7, ovarian cancer IGROV1, liver cancer SKHep1, and leukemia cancer HL60 (TB). Cell viability assay by the trypan blue dye exclusion method demonstrated that

coumarin derivative containing N-(8-aminooctyl) side chain [X= O, Y= (CH₂)₈, and R= H] had the highest inhibitory effects against DU145 prostate cancer cells (GI₅₀ < 10 mM)⁴⁴.



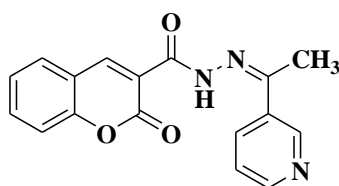
5 : X = O
6 : X = N

The C-3 position of coumarin ring is an attractive position for preparing conjugate analogs via amidic linker. The pyrrolo [2, 1-c] [1,4] benzodiazepines (PBD) are a class of the sequence selective DNA-targeting agents that interact covalently with guanine bases at the DNA minor groove, preferably at purine-guanine-purine sites. DNA interaction, cytotoxicity and differential cellular localization of a series of fluorescent 7-diethylamino coumarinepyrrolo benzodiazepine conjugates **7** is investigated by Wells et al. The cytotoxicity assay showed that the synthetic intermediate ethyl 7-(diethyl amino)-2-oxo-2H-chromene-3-carboxylate was inactive against both tested cell lines (OVCAR5 ovarian carcinoma and LOX IMVI melanoma). In contrast, the Coumarin-PBD conjugate bearing a propylene linker (X= CH₂) was the most potent compound (IC₅₀ values ≤ 3.2 mM). The biological assessments revealed that the linker structure within these Coumarin-PBD conjugates had significant influence on the extent and time course of DNA binding, in vitro cytotoxic potency and cellular distribution⁴⁵.



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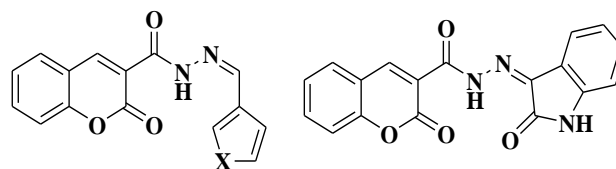
Mohareb et al. have synthesized a series of hydrazide-hydrazone derivatives including coumarin **8**. The effect of compound **8** on the in vitro growth of three human tumor cell lines namely breast adenocarcinoma (MCF7), non-small cell lung cancer (NCIH460) and CNS cancer (SF268) indicated that the best inhibitory activity was against NCIH460 with IC₅₀ value of 10 mM⁴⁶.



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Naser et al. have reported the synthesis and antitumor activity of coumarin-3-hydrazide-hydrazone hybrids **9-12**. The compounds were assessed against human drug-resistant pancreatic carcinoma (PANC1) cells and drug-

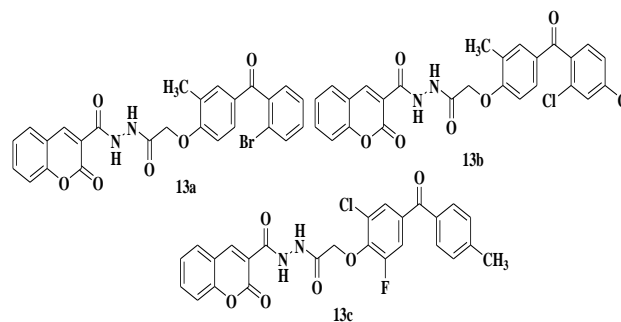
sensitive (hepatic carcinoma; HepG2 and leukemia; CCRF) cell lines. The 6-bromocoumarins (R = 6-Br) containing furan, thiophene and isatin moieties were more potent than doxorubicin against resistant PANC1 cells. Furthermore, 6-bromo analog of **9** showed promising cytotoxicity against all cell lines. The obtained biological data revealed that these compounds can induce apoptosis in drug resistant PANC1 and sensitive HepG2 cell lines⁴⁷.



9 : X = S
10 : X = O
11 : X = NH

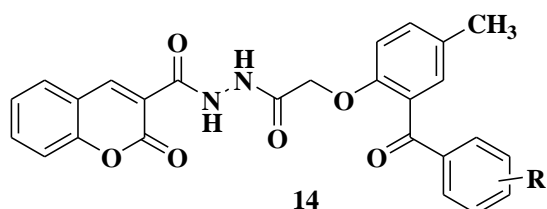
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The investigations on the generation and development of cancer cells have demonstrated that promotion of angiogenesis and resistant to apoptosis are the two important hallmarks of cancer⁴⁸. Thus, the development of multi-target therapy is an interest approach to overcome cancer. Hence, many efforts have been carried out to designing compounds with potential of anti angiogenesis and apoptosis inducing activities. Benzophenones are noteworthy scaffold for versatile biological profiles such as antitumor effect. In order to development of novel antiangiogenic as well as anticancer agents, Khanum et al. designed and evaluated the inhibitory effects of synthesized benzophenone-conjugated coumarin-3-carbohydrazides **13** series on cell proliferation of MCF7, Trypan blue and MTT assays were performed. Among the tested derivatives, compounds **13a-c** exhibited potent anticancer properties (IC₅₀ values < 10 mM). The inhibition of neo vessel formation in choriocarcinoma membrane (CAM) model, which is angiogenesis dependent, was observed following the treatment with compounds **13a-c**. The effects of compounds **13a-c** on homogeneous caspase and PI3-kinase in MCF-7 cells indicate that the homogeneous caspase activity was increased in MCF-7 cells by these compounds. Also, these compounds showed significant inhibition against PI3K and apoptosis induction⁴⁹.

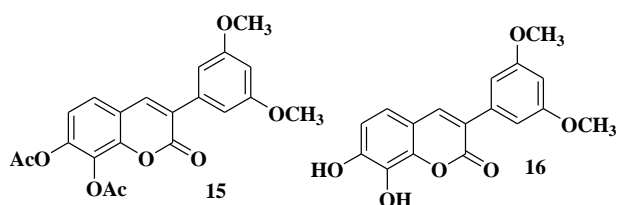


Khanum and co-workers synthesized new series of coumarin-conjugated benzophenone **14** with anti angiogenic and proapoptotic properties as regional isomers of compounds **13**. For screening these

compounds against Ehrlich ascites carcinoma (EAC) and Daltons lymphoma ascites (DLA) cell lines, Trypan blue, MTT and LDH release assays were carried out. The obtained results from Trypan blue and MTT assays showed that 2-bromobenzophenone derivative (R = 2-Br) exhibited potent IC₅₀ values of less than 10 mM against cancer. Effect of 2-bromobenzophenone derivative on cellular integrity as verified by LDH release assay indicated a concentration dependent increase in the LDH release with the IC₅₀ values less than 10.6 mM in EAC and DLA cell lines. The latter compound was considered as a lead compound with potent cytotoxic and antitumor efficacy by inhibiting the neovascularization and promoting apoptosis⁵⁰.

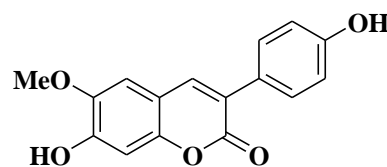


Trans-Stilbenes are attractive for broad-range of biological activities such as, protection properties against cancer, heart diseases, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, inflammations and infections. Resveratrol, pterostilbene and piceatannol are examples of compounds containing trans-stilbene backbone⁵¹⁻⁵³. Based on trans-stilbene structure, some Coumarin-stilbenes hybrids called 3-arylcoumarins were designed, prepared and screened for antitumor properties against nasopharyngeal (KB), KV, MCF7, MCF7/ADR cancer cell lines by Céline Rivière et al. Among them, compounds **15**, and **16** showed significant anticancer properties. Especially, compound **15** with IC₅₀ value of 5.18 mM exhibited the highest activity against KB cell line. The obtained results showed that 7,8-dihydroxy or 7,8-diacetoxy substituent on 3-arylcoumarin had positive effects on cytotoxic potency⁵⁴.

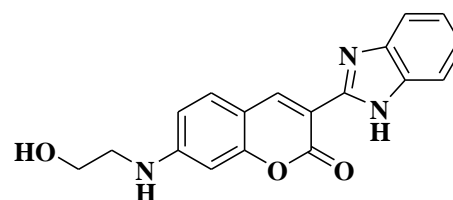


In another experiment, Yang et al. reported the synthesis of some hydroxylated analogs of 3-phenylcoumarins. The antioxidant activity against 2,20-azobis(2-amidinopropane) hydrochloride. (AAPH)-induced pBR322 DNA strand breakage, and anti proliferative effects of compounds on human promyelocytic leukemia HL-60 and human lung adenocarcinoma epithelial A549 cells were evaluated in vitro. The obtained results from MTT assay demonstrated that compound **17** bearing 6-methoxy-7-hydroxy substituent on the coumarin ring and 4-hydroxy on phenyl group was the most potent compound (IC₅₀ values ≤ 7.5 mM). Although compound **17** exhibited poor antioxidant activity but appeared to be the most potent

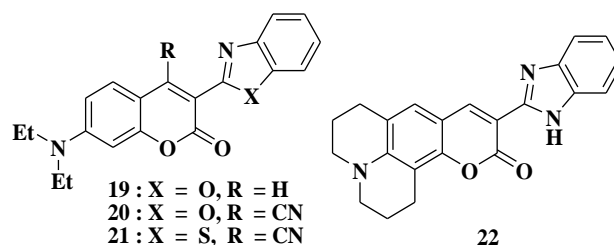
compound, and this activity was mediated by deregulation in cell cycle and induction of apoptosis⁵⁵.



The benzimidazole moiety is a well-known motif for clinical values toward tumor cells and in particular, 2-arylbenzimidazoles possess potent anticancer activities⁵⁶. A family of Coumarin-benzimidazole hybrids were synthesized and assessed for in vitro anticancer activity against preliminary 60 tumor cell lines. Among them, Coumarin-benzimidazole hybrid **18** with a 7-(2-hydroxyethyl amino) moiety demonstrated stronger growth inhibitory effect against most of the cancer cell lines and higher selectivity on leukemia cancer cells (CCRF-CEM, HL60(TB), K562, RPMI8226), HCT116, HCT15, melanoma cancer cells (LOX IMVI, UACC257) and breast cancer cells (MCF7, T47D)⁵⁷.

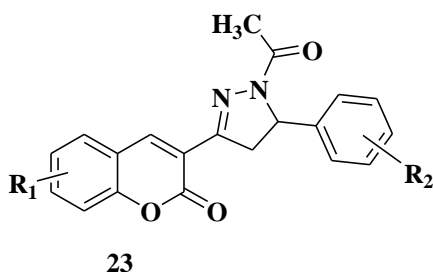


A series of 7-aminocoumarins **19-21** bearing heteroaryl moiety at C-3 position were synthesized and screened for cytotoxic activity against human umbilical vein endothelial cell (HUVEC) and several cancer cells by Paul et al. Benzoxazole derivatives **19** and **20** showed significant inhibitory effect on various cancer cell lines and **21** and **22** exhibited high selectivity for HUVEC. It was found that the introduction of benzothiazolyl group at C-3 position of Coumarin ring had positive effect on inhibitory profile and presence of a cyano group at the fourth position offered the selectivity towards HUVEC⁵⁸.

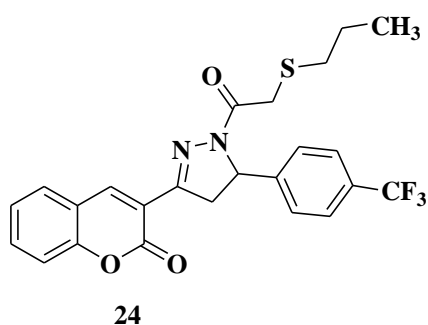


Pyrazole and pyrazoline are prominent structural motifs found in numerous antitumor agents⁵⁹. Liu et al. have reported the design and synthesis of coumarin derivatives possessing pyrazoline moiety as potential telomerase inhibitors with enhanced anticancer activities. Telomerase plays a critical role in cancer makes it an important target for the development of cancer

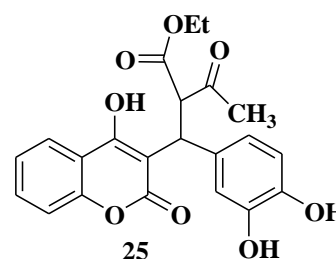
chemotherapy. In particular, telomerase is closely related to the occurrence and development of human gastric cancer⁶⁰. The biological evaluation of compounds **23** for their cytotoxic activity against human gastric cancer (SGC7901), human prostate cancer (PC3), and human epidermoid carcinoma (A431) cell lines revealed that unsubstituted derivative (R1 = R2 = H) with IC50 value of 2.69 mg/mL was the most potent compound against SGC7901, being superior to 5-fluorouracil. Furthermore, modified TRAP assay for telomerase inhibition showed that the latter compound can strongly inhibit telomerase (IC50 value = 2.0 ± 0.07 mM)⁶¹.



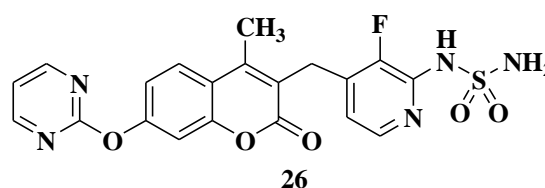
In a study by Liu et al., a series of Coumarin-pyrazoline derivatives bearing a thio acetyl moiety were designed and synthesized to find out affective lead compound with anti proliferative activity. The in vitro anticancer activity of compounds were assessed in comparison to 5-fluorouracil against SGC7901, MGC803, Bcap37 and HepG2 cell lines. Some compounds showed significant antiproliferative activity superior to standard drug 5-fluorouracil. In particular, the n-butylthio derivative **24** showed the most potent inhibitory activity (IC50 value = 0.92 ± 0.09 mM) against telomerase in TRAP assay. The biological assays indicated that compound **38** could suppress cell proliferation through inducing cell cycle arrest in G0/G1 phase⁶².



Stanchev et al synthesized some 3-benzyl-4-hydroxycoumarin derivatives and tested them for cytotoxic activity against two tumor cell lines, urinary bladder carcinoma cells (EJ-60) and leukemia-derived HL-60 cells in comparison to melphalan as reference drug. The best cytotoxic activity was obtained with 3,4-dihydroxy derivative **25**⁶³.

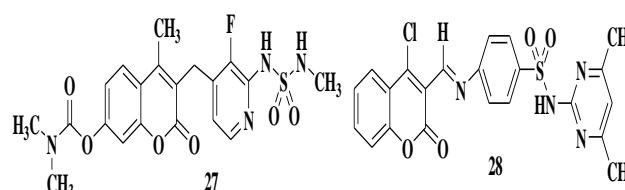


In a study by Aoki et al. synthesized some 3-benzylcoumarins bearing sulfamide moiety with strong Raf/MEK inhibitory activity and acceptable pharmacokinetics profile. Among the title compounds, 6-fluorocoumarin sulfamide derivative **26** exhibited potent in vitro cytotoxic activity against HCT116 cells (IC50 = 8 nM) and high in vivo antitumor efficacy against HCT116 xenograft (ED50 = 4.8 mg/kg). Compound **26** had potent Raf/MEK inhibitory activity, good pharmacokinetics profile and relatively weak CYP inhibitory or CYP induction activities⁶⁴.



Several coumarins containing imine bond at C-3 have been reported as anti-cancer agents, possessing diverse mechanisms of actions. Carbonic anhydrases, specifically isozyme IX (CA IX) are highly over expressed gene in response to hypoxia in cancer cells⁶⁵. Thus, CA IX inhibition may be a new approach for the management of hypoxic tumors⁶⁶. Coumarin derivatives were recently shown to be inhibitors of the CA enzymes⁶⁷. For example, Maresca et al. reported a series of CA inhibitors with coumarin and thio coumarin structures⁶⁸.

Wang and coworkers designed and synthesized some imine-linked sulfonamide-coumarin analogs with high affinity and selectivity on tumor-associated CA IX and assessed their potential to inhibit mouse melanoma B16eF10 and MCF7 cells and hCAs II (cytosolic, off target isoform) and hCAs IX (trans membrane, tumor-associated enzyme). Among them, compounds **27** and **28** more strongly inhibited the hCA II (IC50 = 23 nM) and hCA IX (IC50 = 24 nM), respectively. The IC50 values of the latter compounds against B16eF10 and MCF7 cells were ≤ 0.19 mM⁶⁹.



CONCLUSION

Coumarins are the small molecules that act as anticancer agents by targeting abundant mechanisms that appear to be involved in a variety of cancers. Conjugation of

coumarin with varied pharmacophores responsible for different biological activities has yielded many novel hybrid molecules, which have improved pharmacokinetics. Researchers have explored for their inhibitory activity towards kinases, cell cycle arrest, angiogenesis, heat shock protein (HSP90), telomerase, mitosis, carbonic anhydrase, monocarboxylate transporters, aromatase and sulfatase, blocking cell cycle, inducing cell apoptosis, modulating estrogen receptor (ER), or inhibiting the DNA-associated enzymes, such as topoisomerase. There is still a lot to explore about the coumarin analogs.

Currently existing data shows that all coumarins derivatives covered in this manuscript are reported to exhibit a tremendous anticancer potential. Despite numerous effects of coumarins in the search for bioactive compounds, they still remain as one of the most versatile class of compounds for anticancer drug design and discovery. Molecular hybridization is an attractive strategy, through which coumarin pharmacophores can be coupled or fused with other pharmacophores to develop novel therapeutic drugs that can be used for treatment of even complex multi factorial diseases.

In the present study, we have made an attempt to elaborate C3 substituted coumarin-based anticancer agents as main pharmacophoric substituent on the coumarin core structure. Lots of efforts have focused on the modifications of positions 3. The most attractive compounds were coumarins containing amide, hydrazide or (hetero)aryl moieties at C-3, 3,4-fused coumarins and coumarin hybrids. It is believed that, this review will provide a wide outlook for medicinal chemists on the research and developments of more active and less toxic anticancer drugs possessing coumarin hybrids. Thus, such similar derivatives can be explored which may lead to the development of a potent anticancer pharmacophore.

Recently, new derivatives of coumarins possessing a broad spectrum of pharmacological activities have been synthesized, however to discuss these in detail will lead to finalization of a new review on this topic by itself.

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