Fall 2023 OVPR Seed Grant Program
Title: Structure-based design of anti-bacterial agents targeting LpxC
PI: Robert C. Rizzo
Co-PI: Peter J. Tonge

OVERVIEW / ABSTRACT
New drugs are needed to treat Multi Drug Resistant Pseudomonas aeruginosa (MDR-PA) which is a serious threat to human health. The zinc deacetylase paLpxC catalyzes the first committed step in Lipid A biosynthesis and is an unexploited MDR-PA drug target. Initial efforts to develop antibiotics that target LpxC were hindered by safety concerns. Several studies now indicate that the alkyne group in many LpxC inhibitors is a metabolic liability, and Pfizer developed a series of pyridone sulfones such as PF5081090 (1) (Figure 1) which lack the alkyne and are thought to be safer. Compound 1 has a residence time of 30 min on paLpxC, causes a PAE of 1.26 h on the growth of P. aeruginosa PAO1, and has efficacy in an animal model of infection. In order to further improve safety, our goal is to develop analogs of 1 that result in an increase in PAE, which we hypothesize will enable dosing frequency to be reduced thereby widening the therapeutic window and improving safety. A strong positive correlation exists between inhibitor residence time and PAE, and consequently we performed a structure kinetic relationship (SKR) study to identify analogs of 1 with increased residence time on paLpxC. This resulted in the discovery of inhibitors such as PT913 that has a residence time of 2 h and causes a PAE of 4 h (Figure 1). However, PT913 has an MIC of only 12.5 µM compared to 1 (0.625 µM) likely due to the increase in cLogP of PT913 compared to 1 (0.44 vs -0.57). Consequently, our goal is to develop analogs of 1 with increased residence time and PAE, on paLpxC and with physicochemical and microbiological properties suitable for in vivo analysis. We will accomplish this goal by modifying the sulfone headgroup of 1 which is oriented toward a pocket adjacent to the active site zinc, and our approach is to modify a primary inhibitor scaffold which has a chemically tractable head group. The rationale is that by computationally screening for modifications to the head group we can prioritize a more optimal subset for experimental validation. The expected outcomes are: (1) computational assembly and screening of reaction-compatible head groups conjoined to a core inhibitor scaffold, (2) prioritization and purchase of precursors for the most favorable head groups, (3) chemical synthesis to attach head groups to the primary scaffolds, (4) experimental testing to identify inhibitors with the most favorable antibacterial activity and drug-like properties.

Aim #1: Identify molecules that mimic native interactions of the endogenous substrate. Computationally identify head group precursors which recreate biologically relevant interactions. Create docking libraries by attaching headgroups to scaffolds using amine alkylation, amide condensation, or triazole-based click reactions which mimic experimental protocols. Dock libraries to a high-resolution paLpxC structure. Prioritize compounds for synthesis and evaluation using protein-ligand energy, molecular similarity, and cheminformatic descriptors derived from Gram-negative antibiotics. Develop analogs around experimentally-verified hits.

Aim #2: Synthesize and characterize compounds for paLpxC inhibition and microbiological activity. Top scoring compounds will be synthesized and characterized. Ki (inhibition) and tR (residence times) will be determined using fluorescence competition assays with paLpxC. The microbiological activity of the inhibitors will be evaluated using a wild-type strain (PAO1) and efflux-pump mutant (MexABCDXY) of P. aeruginosa to determine the minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) and post-antibiotic effect (PAE).