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Commentary

The Role of Hepatic Drug Metabolism in Drug-Drug Interactions and Polypharmacy

Levin Chen*

Department of Toxicology, Sichuan University, Sichuan, China

ABOUT TO STUDY

The liver, as a central organ in drug metabolism, plays a crucial role in determining the pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of therapeutic agents. Hepatic drug metabolism is integral to the clearance of drugs from the body and influences their efficacy and toxicity. In an era where polypharmacy is increasingly common, understanding the role of hepatic metabolism in Drug-Drug Interactions (DDIs) is essential for optimizing therapeutic outcomes and minimizing adverse events.

Overview of hepatic drug metabolism

Hepatic drug metabolism occurs primarily in hepatocytes, where enzymes transform lipophilic drugs into hydrophilic metabolites for excretion. This process is typically categorized into two phases:

Phase I reactions: Involves oxidation, reduction, and hydrolysis reactions. Mediated predominantly by the Cytochrome P450 (CYP) enzyme family. Converts drugs into more polar metabolites, which may be active or inactive.

Phase II reactions: Involves conjugation reactions, such as glucuronidation, sulfation, and acetylation. Facilitated by enzymes like UDP-glucuronosyltransferases (UGTs) and Sulfotransferases (SULTs). Produces highly water-soluble compounds for renal or biliary excretion.

Both phases are interconnected, and the interplay between them determines the metabolic fate of drugs. Variations in enzyme activity due to genetic polymorphisms, environmental factors, or concomitant drug use significantly impact hepatic metabolism.

Drug-drug interactions in hepatic metabolism

DDIs occur when one drug alters the metabolism of another, leading to changes in therapeutic efficacy or toxicity. A drug inhibits the activity of a hepatic enzyme, reducing the metabolism of co-administered drugs. Ketoconazole inhibits CYP3A4, increasing plasma levels of drugs like midazolam and simvastatin. A drug induces the expression of metabolic enzymes, accelerating the metabolism of co-administered drugs. Rifampin induces CYP3A4, reducing the efficacy of oral contraceptives. Two drugs metabolized by the same enzyme compete for binding, altering their clearance. Omeprazole and clopidogrel, both metabolized by CYP2C19, may lead to reduced activation of clopidogrel. These interactions underscore the importance of understanding hepatic enzyme activity in clinical practice, particularly in populations with polypharmacy.

Strategies to manage hepatic DDIs in polypharmacy

Polypharmacy, defined as the use of multiple medications concurrently, is prevalent among elderly populations and patients with chronic diseases. While polypharmacy is often necessary for managing complex conditions, it increases the risk of DDIs and Adverse Drug Reactions (ADRs). Hepatic metabolism is central to these interactions due to its role in drug clearance. Reduced hepatic enzyme activity in elderly individuals can prolong drug half-life and increase toxicity. Liver diseases, such as cirrhosis, impair metabolic enzyme function, altering drug metabolism. Drugs with narrow therapeutic indices (e.g., warfarin, digoxin) are particularly susceptible to metabolism-related DDIs. Regular review of patient medication lists to identify and mitigate potential DDIs. Tailoring drug doses based on hepatic function tests, such as liver enzyme levels and bilirubin. Identifying genetic polymorphisms in CYP enzymes (e.g., CYP2D6, CYP2C9) to predict metabolic variability. Tools like Lexicomp and Micromedex provide evidence-based information on DDIs. Measuring plasma drug concentrations to ensure therapeutic levels while avoiding toxicity.

Emerging trends and research

Advances in pharmacogenomics and personalized medicine are revolutionizing the understanding of hepatic metabolism. For instance, researchers are exploring endogenous compounds, such as 4β-hydroxycholesterol (a CYP3A4 activity marker), to predict DDIs. Using liver microsomes and organoids to model hepatic metabolism and predict clinical outcomes. Designing drugs with minimal CYP450 interaction potential to reduce DDI risks.

Correspondence to: Levin Chen, Department of Toxicology, Sichuan University, Sichuan, China; E-mail: levinchen@wchscu.cn

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Leveraging AI to identify potential DDIs during preclinical stages. Grapefruit juice inhibits intestinal CYP3A4, increasing the bioavailability of statins like atorvastatin, leading to muscle toxicity. Amiodarone inhibits CYP2C9, increasing warfarin levels and the risk of bleeding. Close monitoring of INR is essential. Enzyme-inducing antiepileptics (e.g., carbamazepine) reduce the efficacy of co-administered drugs, such as oral contraceptives, necessitating alternative contraceptive methods. Hepatic drug metabolism is a cornerstone of pharmacotherapy, particularly in the context of DDIs and polypharmacy. A thorough understanding of metabolic pathways, enzyme activity, and patient-specific factors is essential for minimizing risks and optimizing therapeutic outcomes. As healthcare evolves, integrating pharmacogenomic insights and advanced predictive tools will further enhance the management of DDIs, ensuring safer and more effective treatments for patients across diverse populations.