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Biological activities from extracts of endophytic fungi isolated from *Viguiera arenaria* and *Tithonia diversifolia*

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**Keywords**

endophytic fungi; *Viguiera arenaria*; *Tithonia diversifolia*; *Glomerella cingulata*; cytotoxic activity; nectriapyrone.

**Abstract**

A total of 39 endophytic fungi have been isolated from *Viguiera arenaria* and *Tithonia diversifolia*, both collected in São Paulo State, Brazil. The isolates were identified based on their ribosomal DNA sequences. The ethyl acetate (EtOAc) extracts of all endophytic fungi were evaluated for their antimicrobial, antiparasitic and antitumoral activity. Antimicrobial screening was conducted using an agar diffusion assay against three pathogenic microorganisms: *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Escherichia coli* and *Candida albicans*. Antiparasitic activity was determined by enzymatic inhibition of gGAPDH of *Trypanosoma cruzi* and adenine phosphor-ybosiltransferase (APRT) of *Leishmania tarentolae*. Antitumoral activity was tested against human T leukemia cells by the Mosmann colorimetric method. All extracts showed activity in at least one assay: 79.5% of the extracts were cytotoxic against leukemia cells, 5.1% of the extracts were active against *S. aureus*, 25.6% against *E. coli* and 64.1% against *Candida albicans*. Only one extract showed promising results in the inhibition of parasitic enzymes gGAPDH (95.0%) and three were found to inhibit APRT activity. The cytotoxic extract produced by the strain VA1 (*Glomerella cingulata*) was fractionated and yielded nectriapyrone and tyrosol. Nectriapyrone showed relevant cytotoxic activity against both human T leukemia and melanoma tumor cell lines.

**Introduction**

The significance of natural products in the drug discovery and development processes has been reported extensively (Koehn & Carter, 2005). The importance of natural products as sources of innovative therapeutic agents can be illustrated by the drugs used in the control of infectious diseases, cancer, lipid disorders, immunomodulation and hypertensive diseases (Clardy & Walsh, 2004). However, one crucial aspect to be considered for a successful natural product-based drug discovery program is the selection of the natural source to be studied. It is important to take into account that unexplored and/or underexplored sources of biological diversity are often related to novel chemical diversity. Endophytic fungi have been considered to be untapped sources of natural products and should be included in the search for new and innovative biologically active compounds (Clardy & Walsh, 2004).

The term endophytic fungus has been used to describe those fungi that can be detected at a particular moment within the tissues of an apparently healthy plant host. The colonization can be inter- or intracellular, localized or systemic (Schulz & Boyle, 2005), and their metabolic interactions with the environment increase the possibilities of the production of bioactive compounds. In fact, endophytic fungi have been shown to be a promising source of new natural bioactive agents (Pupo et al., 2006). Moreover, several crude extracts from different culture broths have shown antimicrobial activity against pathogenic fungi, bacteria and yeasts, cytotoxic activity on human cell line, anti-Herpes simplex virus type 1 activity (anti-HSV) and antimalarial activity against the protozoan *Plasmodium falciparum* (Rodrigues et al., 2000; Huang et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2001; Corrado & Rodrigues, 2004; Wiyakrutta et al., 2004). Therefore, the investigation of endophytic fungi can lead to useful and new natural products.

The aim of this study was to isolate, identify and cultivate endophytic fungi from two *Asteraceae* species: *Viguiera arenaria* and *Tithonia diversifolia*. *Tithonia diversifolia*, also known as Mexican sunflower, was selected because its...
extracts have been used traditionally in the treatment of malaria, diarrhea, fever, hepatitis and wounds (Cos et al., 2002; Goffin et al., 2002; Gu et al., 2002). Anti-inflammatory, amebicidal, antispasmodic, antifungal, antibacterial and antiviral activities have also been described for Tithonia diversifolia extracts (Cos et al., 2002; Goffin et al., 2002). Bioactive diterpenes have been isolated from V. arenaria (Ambrosio et al., 2006). Moreover, there are no previous reports on the isolation and cultivation of endophytes from Tithonia diversifolia and V. arenaria.

The organic extracts were evaluated in antimicrobial assays against Staphylococcus aureus, Escherichia coli and Candida albicans, in cytotoxic assays using leukemia cells and inhibition of parasitic enzymes glycosomal glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase (gGAPDH) from Trypanosoma cruzi and adenine phosphoribosyltransferase (APRT) from Leishmania tarentolae. The assays were selected on the basis of the need for new antibiotics and anticancer agents, due to the development of resistance by infectious microorganisms and the high worldwide mortality caused by cancer (Pisani et al., 1999). In addition, there is an urgent need for efficient drugs for the treatment of protozoan and nematodal infectious such as malaria, leishmaniasis, trypanomiasis and filariasis (Strobel & Daisy, 2003). Glomerella cingulata was found to be the most common endophytic fungus associated with V. arenaria. For this reason, the cytotoxic extract VA1 was selected for chemical studies, leading to the isolation and identification of the bioactive compound nectriapyrone (1) and also of tyrosol (2).

Materials and methods

Isolation

The leaves and roots of V. arenaria were collected in São Carlos city, SP, and the leaves of Tithonia diversifolia were collected in Ribeirão Preto city, SP.

The general procedures adopted for isolation of the microorganisms followed the methodology described by Weber et al. (2004). After collection, the plant material was washed with water and surface sterilized by immersion in 70% aqueous ethanol (3 min), followed by 5% aqueous sodium hypochlorite (60', 90' and 5') and finally with 70% aqueous ethanol (1 min). After these procedures, the leaves and roots were rinsed with sterilized water. This latter water was incubated in Petri dishes to ensure the elimination of all epiphytic microorganisms. Small pieces of the leaves and roots were excised and placed on agar in Petri dishes containing potato dextrose agar (PDA) medium at 30 °C. Individual hyphal tips of the emerging fungi were removed and placed on PDA slants. Endophytic fungi isolated from the leaves Tithonia diversifolia have been codified as TD1–TD5. Endophytic fungi isolated from the leaves V. arenaria have been codified as VA1–VA19, VA25, VA26 and VA29–VA37, and those isolated from the roots of V. arenaria have been codified as VA20, VA21, VA27 and VA28.

All the isolated endophytic fungi strains have been deposited at ‘Laboratório de Enzimologia Industrial’, FCFRP, USP. The strains are maintained by periodic transfers onto PDA (Nam et al., 2000) at 4 °C, and also in silica gel (six to 12 mesh, grade 40, desiccant activated) at 10 °C.

Identification of the endophytic fungi

The isolates were identified based on their ribosomal DNA (rRNA gene) sequences. The fungi were grown on YPD medium [1% (w/v) yeast extract, 2% (w/v) peptone, 2% (w/v) dextrose] for 72 h at 30 °C on a shaking platform at 120 r.p.m., harvested by vacuum filtration, frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at −70 °C. Genomic DNA was isolated using the phenol–chloroform extraction technique, and the pellets were allowed to dry. DNAs were then dissolved in 100 μL sterile water and 1 μL of DNA solution was used for the amplification procedure. The DNAs were quantified with a fluorometer. Amplification of products of the correct size was verified on 1% agarose gels. The ITS1–ITS2 and ITS3–ITS4 primer pairs were used to amplify a large portion of the ITS1 region, 5.8S rRNA gene and the adjacent ITS2 region. PCR amplification was performed with a volume of 50 μL: 1 μL of genomic DNA (500 ng), 2.5 μL of 4 mM dNTP, 0.5 μL of 5 U of Amplitaq platinum Taq polymerase μL−1, 5 μL of 10X buffer [100 mM Tris-HCl (pH 8.3), 2 μL of 50 mM MgCl2], 1 μL of universal primers ITS1, ITS2, ITS3 and ITS4 (21 pM) and 37 μL distilled water. Amplification was completed in a thermocycle under cycling conditions: 94 °C for 2 min, followed by 35 cycles of 94 °C for 1 min, 54 °C for 1 min and 72 °C for 1 min, and a final step of 72 °C for 10 min. PCR products were purified in Qiagen columns. Full DNA sequence analysis of the PCR products obtained with universal fungal primers ITS3–ITS4 specific for rRNA gene was used to confirm the species identification. Automated DNA sequencing was performed in both directions using the initial amplifications primers, and the resulting DNA sequences were aligned and analyzed with sequences software. Comparison of sequences from isolates and GenBank sequences was performed using an advanced blast search (Henry et al., 2000) and Clustal W (Thompson et al., 1994). Identities higher than 98% were taken into account for the classification.

Fermentation and extraction

The fermentation procedure was carried out in a two-step process in which the suspensions of spores or fungal mycelia were inoculated into 1-L flasks containing 200 mL of seed medium (Jackson et al., 1993). After inoculation, the flasks
were incubated with agitation (120 r.p.m.) at 30 °C for 2 days (preculture). The resulting mycelia were harvested, rinsed and transferred into 2-L flasks containing 400 mL of Czapek medium (Alviano et al., 1992) for an additional fermentation period of 6 days at 30 °C, with shaking at 120 r.p.m.

After the fermentation processes, the culture broths were separated from the mycelia by filtration under vacuum, and submitted to liquid-liquid partition with EtOAc (3 × 150 mL). After this procedure, the organic solvent was evaporated under reduced pressure to dryness to yield an EtOAc extract.

Isolation of compounds

The EtOAc crude extract (88.0 mg) obtained from G. cingulata (VA1) was fractionated in a silica gel column (0.063–0.200 nm) with hexane:EtOAc (9 : 1); hexane: EtOAc (1 : 1); EtOAc; and MeOH. The subfraction 19 (7.6 mg), obtained with Hexane:EtOAc (1 : 1), was submitted to preparative TLC in silica gel PF254 eluted with hexane:EtOAc (7 : 3), yielding nectriapyrone (1) (rf: 0.41, C13) spray ionization). Mass spectra were carried out in a mass spectrometer ESI-MS (Micromass Quattro LC – electrospray ionization).

Structure elucidation

Nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectra were acquired in Bruker spectrometers (DRX-400 and DRX-500), working at 400 and 500 MHz for 1H and at 100 and 125 MHz for 13C. The spectra were recorded in CDCl3, and the solvent signals at δ 7.26 for proton, and δ 77.0 for carbon, were used as references. Mass spectra were carried out in a mass spectrometer ESI-MS (Micromass Quattro LC – electrospray ionization).

Tumor cell line culture and cytotoxicity assay

The human acute T-cell leukemia tumor cell line (JURKAT) was obtained from the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC, Rockville, MD). The tumor cell line was maintained on Sabouraud at 37 °C in an atmosphere of 5% CO2 and 95% air with more than 95% humidity.

The cytotoxic activity was determined against Jurkat cells and assessed by a 3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyl tetrazolium bromide (MTT) assay as described by Mosmann (1983). Briefly, the tumor cells line was cultured in appropriate flasks and maintained in continuous exponential growth. Tumor cells were removed from de flasks, washed and were placed in 96-well plates at a density of 1 × 105 cells well−1. EtOAc extracts and isolated compounds were dissolved in dimethyl sulfoxide (1000 × concentrated solution). Tumor cells were cultured with or without different concentrations of relevant compound methotrexate (Whitehall Co., São Paulo) (1000–0.1 µg mL−1), and incubated for 24 h. At the end of the treatment period, 20 µL of MTT (5 mg mL−1) was added to the wells, and cells were incubated for a further 4 h. Finally, 50 µL of 20% sodium dodecyl sulfate solution was supplied to each well. Formazan crystals were dissolved at 37 °C, overnight. The absorbance of each well was read on a micro plate reader (μQUANT, Biotek Instruments Inc.) at a wavelength of 570 nm. Cytotoxicity rate was calculated as follow: % of cytotoxicity of compounds = 1 – absorbance drug treated/absorbance control × 100.

Antimicrobial assays

The agar plate diffusion assay was used to evaluate the antimicrobial activity (Rios et al., 1988; Freitas et al., 2002). The EtOAc extracts of all endophytic fungi and isolated compounds were screened for antimicrobial activity against S. aureus (ATCC 25923), E. coli (ATCC 25922) and Candida albicans (ATCC 1023). All bacteria were maintained in tryptic soy agar at 37 °C and Candida albicans was maintained on Sabouraud at 37 °C. The microorganisms were grown onto antibiotic medium no. 1 for 24 h at 30 °C, and aliquots were placed in 0.9% NaCl until they reached a turbidity value of 0.5 on the McFarland scale (about 107 CFU mL−1). Each microorganism suspension (0.5% in antibiotic medium no. 1) was used for the agar-well diffusion method. In this procedure, 1 mg of each extract was dissolved in 1 mL of dimethylsulfoxide (50%) and the penicillin G (1 µg mL−1 for S. aureus), miconazole (4 mg mL−1 for Candida albicans) and streptomycin sulfate (0.2 mg mL−1 for E. coli) were used as positive controls. All samples (organic extracts, isolated compounds and positive controls) were placed (50 µL) in templates on plates containing antibiotic medium no. 1 with the test

![Fig. 1. Chemical structures of nectriapyrone (1) and tyrosol (2) produced by Glomerella cingulata (VA1).](image-url)
microorganisms. Dimethylsulfoxide (50%, 50 μL) was used as a negative control. After 3 h of preincubation at room temperature to allow diffusion of the substances into the agar, the plates were incubated for 24 h at 37 °C and overlaid with 5 mL of 1% agar solution containing 2,3,5-triphenyl tetrazolium chloride (2 mg mL⁻¹). After 15 min, the plates were examined for the detection of clear zones of inhibition around the fungal extract. This experiment was performed in triplicate. For data analysis, the clear zones of inhibition around the fungal extracts were measured in millimeter with a ruler and compared with the positive controls. Extracts were considered to be active when the clear zones were equal to or superior to 12 mm.

**gGAPDH activity assay**

The gGAPDH used in the assays is a recombinant enzyme obtained in an E. coli expression system. The preparation and purification of the gGAPDH followed the procedure described previously (Souza et al., 1998). The assays were performed as described (Vieira et al., 2001). Reduced NADH was measured spectrophotometrically at 340 nm at a 30-s interval. The reaction medium contained 50 mmol L⁻¹ Tris-HCL, pH 8.6, buffer with 1 mmol L⁻¹ EDTA, 1 mmol L⁻¹ β-mercapto-ethanol, 30 mmol L⁻¹ Na₂HAsO₄, 2.5 mmol L⁻¹ NAD⁺, 0.3 mmol L⁻¹ glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate and 1.5 μg protein, in a total volume of 1000 μL. The reaction was initiated by addition of enzyme. All extracts and isolated compounds were evaluated at a concentration of 100 μg mL⁻¹. All the measurements were run in triplicate. A negative control with 10% dimethylsulfoxide was used.

**The APRT activity assay**

The APRT used in the assays is a recombinant enzyme obtained in an E. coli expression system. APRT activity was determined by spectrophotometric measurements of formation of AMP at 259 nm after 60 s (Tuttle & Krenitsky, 1980). The reaction medium contained 100 mmol L⁻¹ Tris-HCL, pH 7.4, 5 mmol L⁻¹ MgCl₂, 100 mmol L⁻¹ adenine, 560 mmol L⁻¹ PRPP and 7.5 μg APRT, in a total volume of 1000 μL. All extracts and isolated compounds were evaluated at a concentration of 50 μg mL⁻¹. All the measurements were run in triplicate. A negative control with 10% dimethylsulfoxide was used.

**Results and discussion**

A total of 39 endophytic strains were isolated from V. arenaria, 30 from the leaves and four from the roots, while five endophytes were isolated from the leaves of Tithonia diversifolia. The molecular identification of the strains showed that 13 isolates obtained from V. arenaria were classified as Glomerella cingulata and two were classi-

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<th>Table 1. Endophytic fungi strains isolated from Tithonia diversifolia (TD) and Viguiera arenaria (VA)</th>
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fied as Colletotrichum gloeosporioides (Table 1). In fact, G. cingulata is the teleomorph (sexual) stage of Colletotrichum gloeosporioides. These strains were kept separately because they showed morphological differences, and they also produced extracts with different chemical profiles analyzed by HPLC and 1H NMR (data not shown). The alignment of the G. cingulata isolates ITS1-2 and ITS3-4 regions showed very high identity, above 95% (supplementary Fig. S1a, b). The alignment of ITS3-4 regions from G. cingulata with Colletotrichum gloeosporioides displayed about 93% identity (supplementary Fig. S1c). Additional studies are being currently performed to understand the chemistry and biological properties of these two groups of isolates.

Colletotrichum species are implicated in plant diseases, usually referred to as anthracnose, and include some of the most destructive postharvest pathogens of cereals, legumes, fruits and vegetables (Garcia-Pajon & Collado, 2003). Five
Diaporthe species were also identified from V. arenaria (three strains of Diaporthe phaseolorum and two of Diaporthe helianthi). Another strain of D. helianthi was also isolated from Tithonia diversifolia (Table 1). One strain from Tithonia diversifolia and five from V. arenaria have not been identified.

The EtOAc extracts from the endophytic fungi were evaluated against three pathogenic microorganisms: S. aureus, E. coli and Candida albicans. Antiparasitic activity was determined by enzymatic inhibition of gGAPDH of Trypanosoma cruzi and APRT of L. tarentolae. Antitumoral activity was determined against human T leukemia cells. The extract obtained from the culture medium (blank) was tested in all the assays and did not present significant activity, showing that positive results were due to the secondary metabolites produced by the endophytic fungi.

Antimicrobial activity

The antimicrobial activities of the fungal extracts are presented in Table 2. Two extracts (5.1%) presented significant antimicrobial activity against S. aureus, while ten extracts (25.6%) were active against E. coli and 25 (64.1%) showed activity against Candida albicans. Some extracts were found to be ineffective against microorganisms at the concentration used (1 mg mL⁻¹). The relative high proportion of active extracts against Candida albicans indicates that these endophytic fungi might produce potent antifungal compounds.

Endophytes have already been reported as being prolific producers of antimicrobial compounds. Wiyakrutta et al. (2004) screened extracts from 360 endophytic fungi in six different assays, resulting in c. 25% active extracts against Mycobacterium tuberculosis.

A total of 187 strains of endophytic fungi belonging to 136 species have also been tested in antimicrobial assays (Pelaez et al., 1998). The production of antimicrobial substances was detected in 45 strains. In this study, differences were observed among isolates from the same species, with respect to their ability to produce antimicrobial metabolites (Pelaez et al., 1998). Species of Phomopsis isolated from Aspidosperma tomentosum and Spondias momin were screened for their antibacterial activity using the bioautographic TLC agar-overlay technique. Three of the 13 extracts effectively inhibited the growth of all test organisms (Corrado & Rodrigues, 2004).

Compounds isolated previously from endophytic fungi also displayed antimicrobial activities. The altersetin, a natural product isolated from two endophytic Alternaria species, showed potent minimum inhibitory concentration against several pathogenic Gram-positive bacteria (Hellwig et al., 2002). A series of 15 structurally diverse families of diterpene natural products, the guanacastepenes A–O, produced by an unidentified endophyte isolated from a Costa Rican plant also presented antimicrobial activity (Brady et al., 2001). Guanacastepene A showed antibacterial activity against meticillin-resistant S. aureus and vancomycin-resistant Enterococcus faecium (Singh et al., 2000), while guanacastepene I showed pronounced activity against S. aureus (Brady et al., 2001). Phomoxanthone A and phomoxanthone B were isolated from the endophytic fungus Phomopsis sp. from Thailand and exhibited significant activity against M. tuberculosis (Isaka et al., 2001). Antibacterial dicerandrols A–C were isolated from Phomopsis longicolla, an endophyte of Dicerandra frutescens (Wagenaar & Clardy, 2001).

The continued development of new antimicrobial agents is important to overcome the difficulties related to the treatment of infections caused by resistant pathogens (Petersen et al., 2004), and endophytic fungi have emerged as an alternative source for the production of new antimicrobial compounds.

Enzymatic activity for gGAPDH from Trypanosoma cruzi and APRT from L. tarentolae

gGAPDH is a homo-tetramer protein that catalyzes the oxidation of glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate with a concomitant reduction of β-nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD+). It represents a target to find trypanocidal compounds, because the bloodstream form of Trypanosoma cruzi is highly dependent on the glycolysis for ATP production (Souza et al., 1998). The screening of the 39 extracts showed that only one extract (VA14A) exhibited a good level of gGAPDH activity inhibition (95%), and another one (VA17A) was found to have a moderate inhibitory activity (40%). In a previous screening using 32 plant extracts, four active extracts (12.5%) were found (Vieira et al., 2001).

The phosphoribosyltransferases family is involved in the mechanism of purine formation (Thiemann et al., 1998). The adenine phosphoribosyltransferase (APRT) enzyme from L. tarentolae has been proposed as a target for the rational search of new leishmanicidal drugs. It has been found that three extracts were able to decrease the APRT catalytic activity (inhibitory activity ≥ 50%): VA14A (60.7%), VA16A (57.4%) and VA35A (61.4%). These extracts might be considered for further fractionating in order to yield inhibitors of the purine biosynthetic pathway of L. tarentolae.

Crude extracts from Meliaceae and Rutaceae plants have already shown promising APRT activity (Ambrozin et al., 2005), but endophytic fungi extracts had not been exploited in this assay.

The present results suggest that endophytic fungi can also produce antiparasitic compounds. The smaller number of active extracts in the enzymatic inhibition might be due to the higher selectivity of these assays, compared with the whole cell-based antimicrobial and antitumoral assays.
The results obtained in this screening showed that endophytic fungi are a promising source of bioactive natural products. The most active extracts have been selected for fractioning in order to isolate the active compounds.
Antitumoral activity

Table 2 shows the results of the antitumoral assay. These tests were carried out using human T leukemia cells and methotrexate as a positive control. A high number of EtOAc extracts were found to be active (79.5%). Several cytotoxic compounds have been isolated from endophytic fungi, showing the potential of these fungi in the search of antitumoral agents. Some anticancer drugs have been identified in endophytic fungi cultures. Taxol has been isolated from Glomerella cingulata, an endophytic fungus associated with V. arenaria (Stierle et al., 1993). Camptothecin has been produced by an endophytic fungus associated with Nothapodytes foetida (Puri et al., 2005). In addition, vincristine has been isolated from Myelia sterilia, an endophyte from Catharanthus roseus (Yang et al., 2004), and podophyllotoxin was found to be produced by a novel endophyte, Trametes hirsute, associated with Podophyllum hexandrum (Puri et al., 2006). Therefore, endophytic fungi play an important role in the search for antitumoral compounds and might also represent an alternative source for the production of therapeutic agents that are not easily obtained by chemical synthesis.

Glomerella cingulata was found to be the most common endophytic fungus associated with V. arenaria. In addition, all the G. cingulata strains produced cytotoxic extracts (Table 2). The EtOAc extract from the VA1 showed a remarkable cytotoxic activity against the JURKAT tumor cell line (IC$_{50}$ = 0.24 mg mL$^{-1}$), and this activity was found to be higher than the control drug methotrexate (IC$_{50}$ = 3.99 mg mL$^{-1}$) (Table 2). Importantly, the control EtOAc extract obtained from culture medium alone did not show a significant cytotoxicity, indicating that the VA1 cytotoxic activity was mediated by fungal-derived compounds. The EtOAc extract from G. cingulata (VA1) culture supernatant was submitted to chromatographic procedures, yielding two major compounds, and also a mixture of nonidentified fatty acids. The structures of the major compounds were established on the basis of their spectroscopic data, mainly 1D and 2D NMR and ESI-MS, and are in agreement with the structures reported previously for nectriapyrone (Avent et al., 1992) and tyrosol (Chen et al., 2004). Both compounds have been tested against tumor cell lines. Tyrosol was inactive, but nectriapyrone was found to have relevant cytotoxic activity against both JURKAT T leukemia cells and B16F10 melanoma cells. Also, the results showed that nectriapyrone is more active on JURKAT cells (IC$_{50}$ = 476.4 µg mL$^{-1}$) than B16F10 cells (IC$_{50}$ = 1463 µg mL$^{-1}$) (Fig. 2). It is noteworthy that nectriapyrone showed higher activity compared with methotrexate on both tumor cell lines. Nectriapyrone also showed certain selectivity to the tumor cells, because it did not show remarkable cytotoxic effect towards normal cells as peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) (IC$_{50}$ = 2667 µg mL$^{-1}$) (Fig. 3). Finally, nectriapyrone presented an IC$_{50}$ value against PBMC normal cells between the positive controls methotrexate (IC$_{50}$ = 3709 µg mL$^{-1}$) and gemcitabine (IC$_{50}$ = 1381 µg mL$^{-1}$). The higher activity of the crude extract VA1A (IC$_{50}$ = 249 µg mL$^{-1}$) compared with that observed for nectriapyrone (476.4 µg mL$^{-1}$) towards JURKAT cells could be related to a synergistic activity between fatty acid derivatives present in the extract and nectriapyrone. Cytotoxic synergism has already been reported between fatty acids and anticancer drugs such as taxanes (Menendez et al., 2005), vinorelbine (Menendez et al., 2002), gemcitabine and 5-fluorouracil (Whitehouse et al., 2003). In addition, it has been demonstrated that unsaturated fatty acids can be used as modulators of tumor cell chemosensitivity (Menendez et al., 2002). Some α-pyrone have been reported to be produced by fungi belonging to several genera, including Alternaria,
The 2-pyrone subunit of nectriapyrone is found in a number of natural products possessing broad-spectrum biological activity and has inspired organic chemists to synthesize novel derivatives (Fairlamb et al., 2004). Several 2-pyrone natural and synthetic compounds have shown cytotoxic activity (Fairlamb et al., 2004; McGlacken & Fairlamb, 2005) against tumor cells, such as human ovarian carcinoma (A27080), human colorectal adenocarcinoma (SW480) (Suzuki et al., 1997), human cervix carcinoma cell line (HeLa), human ovarian carcinoma cell line (A27080), Kirsten murine sarcoma virus-transformed rat kidney cell line (K-NRK), mouse macrophage tumor cells in vivo (P-388D1) (Kondoh et al., 1998) and human chronic myelogenous leukemia cells (K562) (Marrison et al., 2002), suggesting the potential use of these class of compounds as hits for the development of new anticancer drugs.

The present results have been shown that nectriapyrone was produced by the endophytic fungus G. cingulata (VA1) and also provide evidence that this compound presented a relevant cytotoxic activity towards tumor cells. The 2-pyrone sub-unit could be used as a good model for studies on the mechanism(s) of action and structure–activity relationships of this class of compounds. In addition, the data reinforce that endophytes are an outstanding source of bioactive small molecules.

Nectriapyrone and tyrosol did not present significant activity in the other bioassays.

The high incidence of antimicrobial and cytotoxic activity detected in the assays suggests that the bioactive secondary metabolites might be produced as an adaptation for specific functions in nature. Endophytic fungi live in a complex web of interactions with the plant host, other endophytes and also phytopathogens, and hence they are expected to produce bioactive compounds that can improve their ability to survive in such complex environment.

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References


Endophytes from Viguiera arenaria and Tithonia diversifolia


Supplementary material

The following supplementary material is available for this article online:

Fig. S1a. Alignment of the Glomerella cingulata ITS-1 and -2 regions.

Fig. S1b. Alignment of the G. cingulata ITS-3 and -4 regions.

Fig. S1c. Alignment of the ITS-3 and -4 regions Colletotrichum gloeosporioides with G. cingulata.

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