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Amido acids of bicyclo[2.2.1]-hept-2-en-endo, endo-5,6-dicarboxylic acid anhydride as new β-glucuronidase inhibitors	30
Oksana Kryshchuk	
Cubane stability under palladium and nickel catalyzed Suzuki-Miyaura reaction conditions.....	31
Marharyta Kryvokhina, Oleksandr Gaidai	
Validation of the method of standardization of concomitant impurities in "Carbatryl" tablets	32
Liudmyla Kucherenko, Hanna Nimenko, Olga Khromylova	
Synthesis and antioxidant activity of 2-(2,4-dioxothiazolidin-5-ylidene)-N- (1,3,4-thiadiazol-2-yl)acetamides.....	33
Maryan Lelyukh, Ihor Chaban, Vadym Flud, Volodymyr Ogurtsov, Taras Chaban	
Novel eco-friendly spectrophotometric determination of lercanidipine hydrochloride in tablets using methyl red	34
Liliya Logoyda, Liubomyr Kryskiw, Mariana Horyn, Tetyana Kucher, Nadiya Zarivna, Olha Poliak	
<i>Hypochaeris</i> L. genus: bioactive compounds and pharmacological perspectives.....	35
Olha Mykhailenko, Christian Zidorn	
Optimisation of the extraction of phenolic compounds from greater Celandine (<i>Chelidonium majus</i> L.) herb using response surface methodology	36
Elona Naseckaitė, Mindaugas Liaudanskas, Kristina Zymonė	
Reaction of Chloracylation products of aromatic amines with 5-fluorouracil ...	37
Ochilov Shohzod, Yusufov Mukhriddin, Abdushukurov Anvar, Matchanov Alimjon	
Synthesis and Analysis of Copper(II) Complexes for G-Quadruplex Targeting	38
Lidiia Petrushova, Riccardo Bonsignore, Giampaolo Barone	
Qualitative and quantitative composition of <i>Camellia sinensis</i> (L.) Kuntze extract.....	39
A. Pocevičiūtė, A. Mazurkevičiūtė	
Insights on the anti-allergic constituents of <i>Bischofia javanica</i>: network pharmacology and bioactivity-guided fractionation	40
Thiyagarajan Raviraj, Ujala Upadhyaya, Sedin Renadi, Ashutosh Kumar Shukla, Harshita Tiwari, Mohamed El-Shazly, Bing-Hung Chen, Olha Mykhailenko, Michal Korinek	
Synthesis of pharmacologically active substances based on coordination compounds of Cu(II) and Ni(II) with glutaric acid and nicotinamide.....	41
Safokulov B., Pulatova G.U., Fathullaeva M.	



Synthesis and Analysis of Copper(II) Complexes for G-Quadruplex Targeting

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Introduction. Guanine quadruplexes (G4s) are non-canonical four-stranded DNA structures that are predominantly found in oncogenes such as c-MYC, VEGF and BCL-2. These structures play a key role in gene regulation and are a promising therapeutic target for cancer treatment. Selective stabilisation of G4s can inhibit the transcription of oncogenes, offering a unique mechanism for cancer treatment. Metal-based G4-binding compounds, especially those containing copper(II) ions, are of interest due to their redox activity and ability to induce reactive oxygen species (ROS), which may enhance their cytotoxicity towards cancer cells.

Materials and methods. The present study concerns the synthesis of copper(II) Schiff base complexes, using ethanol and water as solvents, with the use of copper(II) perchlorate and copper(II) acetate as the metal source. The products were purified and characterised using mass spectrometry, elemental analysis, whilst FRET (Fluorescence Resonance Energy Transfer) DNA melting assay was used to assess their G4-binding capabilities. Double-helical DNA, as well as hTelo, c-MYC, VEGF, cKIT1, cKIT2 and BCL-2 G-quadruplexes, were tested. The influence of substance concentration on the melting point of G4-DNA solutions was also studied.

Results and discussion. The synthesised copper(II) complexes exhibited interesting binding affinity for G4 structures, although their capacity to stabilise these complexes exhibited variability. The FRET analysis indicated that RB303 demonstrated the most promising stabilizing effect of genes as cKIT1 and BCL-2 with ΔT values $9.0 \pm 0.62^\circ\text{C}$ and $4.71 \pm 0.20^\circ\text{C}$ respectively. It is noteworthy that no substantial stabilization was observed for the VEGF and c-MYC quadruplexes. This implies that the introduction of specific ligand modifications may potentially enhance the selective G4-binding properties and cytotoxicity in cancer cells.

Conclusions. This study underscores the potential of copper(II)-based complexes as selective G4 stabilisers in oncogenes, with encouraging outcomes observed for RB303. Further optimisation of the ligand structures and biological testing are required to enhance the specificity and cytotoxicity of these compounds towards cancer cells. The findings lend support to the proposition that G4-targeting compounds represent a promising avenue for the development of novel cancer therapies.

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