CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A peptide comprising the amino acid sequence Ala^{1} –Arg^{2} –Val^{3} –Ser^{4} –Ile^{5} –His^{6}–Cys^{7} (SEQ ID NO: 18), wherein the peptide is between 7 and 25 amino acids, inclusive.

2. The peptide of claim 1, wherein the peptide comprises one or more chemical modifications to increase protease resistance, serum stability, and/or bioavailability.

3. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a peptide according to claim 1 and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

4. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 3, wherein the pharmaceutical composition is formulated for oral, intramuscular, intravenous, subcutaneous, topical, transdermal, rectal, vaginal, pulmonary, intranasal, intrabuccal, or sublingual administration.

5. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 3, wherein the pharmaceutical composition further comprises one or more pharmacologically acceptable excipients selected from a polymer carrier, a disintegration agent, a lubricant, a solvent, or a swelling agent.

6. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 3, wherein the pharmaceutical composition is formulated as a tablet, pill, capsule, granules, a syrup, a spray, an aerosol, a liposomal composition, an ointment, a suppository, an implant, a plaster, or a slow release formulation.