

DESCRIPTION

Title of Invention:

METHOD FOR SCREENING FOR COMPOUND CAPABLE OF
5 ENHANCING OR INHIBITING OATP1B1 TRANSPORT ACTIVITY,
AND METHOD FOR DETERMINING EXPRESSION LEVEL OF
OATP1B1

Technical Field

[0001] The present invention relates to a method, using a fluorescent
10 compound dichlorofluorescein, for screening for a compound that enhances or
inhibits the transport activity of OATP1B1 and relates to a method for
measuring the expression level of OATP1B1.

Background Art

[0002] In recent years, it has been increasingly recognized that hepatocytes
15 play important roles in drug discovery. Hepatocytes are indispensable tools
for pharmacokinetic studies of drugs, such as prediction of in vivo clearance of
drugs or investigation of drug interaction. The molecular mechanisms of
various metabolic enzymes and transporters that are expressed in hepatocytes
and playing dominant roles in pharmacokinetics (absorption, distribution,
20 metabolism, and excretion) of drugs have been being revealed. Among
them, much attention has been paid to the roles of organic anion-transporting
polypeptides (OATPs) in the pharmacokinetics of anionic drugs (Non Patent
Literature 1).

[0003] The OATP family transporters are expressed in various tissues and
25 organs in the body, such as small intestine, kidney, and liver, and among them,
OATP1B1 (alias: OATP-C, OATP2, or LST-1), OATP1B3 (alias: OATP-8),
and OATP2B1 (alias: OATP-B) are known to be highly expressed in human
hepatocytes (Non Patent Literatures 2 and 3). Clinically important drugs
such as statins and angiotensin II receptor blockers are known to be taken up
30 by human hepatocytes mainly via OATP1B1, and cyclosporine and rifampicin
are known as typical inhibitors of OATP1B1 (Non Patent Literature 2).

[0004] It is known that a concomitant use of an OATP1B1 substrate drug
with an OATP1B1 inhibitor reduces uptake of the substrate drug into the liver,

resulting in increase in the blood level of the substrate drug in clinical settings. Accordingly, evaluation of the drug interaction potential of a test compound via OATP1B1 is very important from the view point of clinical safety. Conventionally, in order to quantitatively evaluate transporter-mediated drug interaction potential of a test compound, an evaluation method (RI method) using a known substrate labeled with a radioisotope is known (Patent Literature 1).

[0005] The RI method gives high sensitivity, but is expensive, and also needs caution when handling the samples. Instead, a detection method (fluorescence method), not using any radioisotope, but using a fluorescent compound, is also known. For example, an evaluation method using 6-carboxyfluorescein (6-CFL), which is a good substrate for organic anion transporter 1 (OAT1), has been reported (Non Patent Literature 4).

[0006] It can be said that the fluorescence method is easy to operate, is less expensive than the RI method, and has excellent throughput. However, in general, it is difficult to predict whether a compound can or cannot serve as a substrate of a transporter, and, therefore, not many fluorescent compounds that can function as substrates of anion transporters are known. In addition, some conventional fluorescent substrates have disadvantages such as that the detection sensitivity is not necessarily high due to a low fluorescence intensity emitted by the substrate itself, autofluorescence of a test compound, and photobleaching of the fluorescent substrate.

Citation List

Patent Literature

[0007] Patent Literature 1: Japanese Patent Application Laid-Open No. 2006-340610

Non Patent Literature

[0008] Non Patent Literature 1: Matthew G. Soars, et al., Chemico-Biological Interactions, 168, (2007) pp. 2-15

Non Patent Literature 2: Kathleen M. Giacomini, et al., Nature Reviews Drug Discovery, Vol. 9, pp. 215-236, 2010

Non Patent Literature 3: Bonnie Hsiang, et al., J. Biol. Chem., Vol. 274, pp. 37161-37168, 1999

Non Patent Literature 4: Tomas Cihlar, et al., Analytical Biochemistry, 283, pp. 49-55, 2000

Summary of Invention

Technical Problem

5 [0009] Accordingly, in view of the problems associated with the conventional RI method, it is an object of the present invention to provide a method using a fluorescent compound for screening for a compound that enhances or inhibits the transport activity of OATP1B1, being safe, inexpensive, and easy to operate and allowing detection with sensitivity comparable to that of the RI
10 method, and also to provide a method for measuring the expression level of OATP1B1.

Solution to Problem

15 [0010] In order to solve the above problems, the present inventors have investigated a plurality of fluorescent compounds for their adaptability as substrates of OATPs. As a result, it was revealed that dichlorofluorescein (DCF) is an excellent substrate of OATP1B1, and it was also surprisingly found that the results of evaluation using DCF as a substrate of OATP1B1 are equivalent to those by the conventional RI method, and the present invention was accomplished.

20 [0011] That is, the present invention provides a method of screening for a compound that enhances or inhibits the transport activity of OATP1B1, using dichlorofluorescein.

25 [0012] The method preferably includes a step of preparing cells expressing OATP1B1; a step of bringing dichlorofluorescein and a test compound into contact with the cells; a step of measuring the fluorescence intensity of dichlorofluorescein taken up by the cells; and a step of determining the test compound as a compound that enhances the transport activity of OATP1B1 in a case that the measured fluorescence intensity is higher than that when the test compound is not present and determining the test compound as a compound
30 that inhibits the transport activity of OATP1B1 in a case that the measured fluorescence intensity is lower than that when the test compound is not present.

[0013] It is preferable that the cells expressing OATP1B1 in the screening

method of the present invention be selected from the group consisting of OATP1B1 forced-expression cells, immortalized human hepatocytes, primary cultured human hepatocytes, freshly isolated human hepatocytes, cryopreserved human hepatocytes, and sandwich-cultured human hepatocytes or be cells overexpressing a protein consisting of the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1 in the cell membrane or cells transformed with a DNA consisting of the nucleotide sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

[0014] The present invention also provides a use of dichlorofluorescein in measurement of the expression level of OATP1B1.

[0015] The present invention also provides a method for measuring the expression level of OATP1B1 in test cells, and the method includes a step of bringing dichlorofluorescein into contact with test cells; a step of measuring the fluorescence intensity of dichlorofluorescein taken up by the test cells; and a step of evaluating the expression level of OATP1B1 in the test cells based on the measured fluorescence intensity.

[0016] In the measurement method of the present invention, it is preferable to relatively evaluate the expression level of OATP1B1 in test cells using positive cells expressing OATP1B1 as a control. It is preferable that the positive cells expressing OATP1B1 be selected from the group consisting of OATP1B1 forced-expression cells, immortalized human hepatocytes, primary cultured human hepatocytes, freshly isolated human hepatocytes, cryopreserved human hepatocytes, and sandwich-cultured human hepatocytes or be cells overexpressing a protein consisting of the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1 in the cell membrane or cells transformed with a DNA consisting of the nucleotide sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

[0017] The present invention further provides a use of a kit including dichlorofluorescein and positive cells expressing OATP1B1 in measurement of the expression level of OATP1B1 in test cells. It is preferable that the positive cells expressing OATP1B1 in the kit be selected from the group consisting of OATP1B1 forced-expression cells, immortalized human hepatocytes, primary cultured human hepatocytes, freshly isolated human hepatocytes, cryopreserved human hepatocytes, and sandwich-cultured human hepatocytes or be cells overexpressing a protein consisting of the amino acid

sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1 in the cell membrane or cells transformed with a DNA consisting of the nucleotide sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

Advantageous Effects of Invention

5 [0018] A compound that enhances or inhibits the transport activity of OATP1B1 can be detected safely, inexpensively, and easily to operate with sensitivity comparable to that of an RI method by using dichlorofluorescein, which has been proved as an excellent substrate of OATP1B1. The compound selected by the screening method of the present invention is expected to be capable of controlling the in vivo pharmacokinetics, such as
10 blood level, of a drug serving as a substrate of OATP1B1. It is also possible to predict OATP1B1-mediated drug interaction potential of a test compound by the screening method of the present invention.

[0019] The present invention can also provide a method for measuring the expression level of OATP1B1 safely, inexpensively, and easily to operate with
15 sensitivity comparable to that of an RI method. It is believed that the measurement of the expression level of OATP1B1 is useful for, for example, evaluation of an activity of cells, such as hepatocytes, expressing OATP1B1 and comparison of activities of hepatocytes of different lots.

Brief Description of Drawings

20 [0020] [Figure 1] Figure 1 includes graphs showing substrate specificities of various fluorescein derivatives.

[Figure 2] Figure 2 is a graph showing time profiles of the uptake of dichlorofluorescein (DCF) by OATP1B1.

25 [Figure 3] Figure 3 is a graph showing a kinetic analysis of DCF uptake by OATP1B1.

[Figure 4] Figure 4 is a graph showing effect of known OATP inhibitors on OATP1B1-mediated uptake of DCF.

[Figure 5] Figure 5 is a graph showing comparison of K_i values between a DCF method and a known RI method.

30 [Figure 6] Figure 6 is a graph showing time/temperature-dependent uptake of DCF by human hepatocytes.

[Figure 7] Figure 7 includes graphs showing a kinetic analysis of DCF uptake by human hepatocytes.

[Figure 8] Figure 8 is a graph showing effect of OATP inhibitors on DCF uptake by human hepatocytes.

Description of Embodiments

5 [0021] OATP1B1 in the present invention is mainly expressed in the cell membrane of human hepatocytes and is one of organic anion transporter proteins (organic anion-transporting polypeptide: OATP) having an activity of uptake of anionic compounds into cells (transport activity) and is also called OATP-C, OATP2, or LST-1. Examples of the OATP1B1 protein include that consisting of the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1, and
10 proteins including amino acid sequences having substitution, deletion, or addition of one or two to nine amino acid residues in the above amino acid sequence and having the function of OATP1B1 are also encompassed in the present invention. Examples of DNA encoding the OATP1B1 protein include that consisting of the nucleic acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2,
15 and DNAs including nucleic acid sequences having substitution, deletion, or addition of one or 2 to 50 nucleotides in the above nucleic acid sequence and encoding proteins having the function of OATP1B1 are also encompassed in the present invention.

20 [0022] The dichlorofluorescein (DCF) in the present invention is a derivative of a fluorescent compound, fluorescein, and can be commercially available. It has not been known until now that DCF can be a substrate of an organic anion-transporting polypeptide.

25 [0023] The screening method of the present invention is a method of screening for a compound that enhances or inhibits the transport activity of OATP1B1, using dichlorofluorescein and preferably includes the following steps.

30 [0024] The first step of the screening method of the present invention is a step of preparing cells expressing OATP1B1. The cells expressing OATP1B1 are cells functionally expressing OATP1B1 in the cell membrane. The functionally expressing means that OATP1B1 is expressed in the cell membrane in a state having a transport activity of an anionic compound. The OATP1B1-expressing cells are not specifically limited, and examples thereof include immortalized cell lines expressing OATP1B1, artificially modified cell

lines expressing OATP1B1, and cell lines immortalized with viruses and expressing OATP1B1. In addition, a human-derived cell line expressing OATP1B1 and a transgenic cell line highly expressing OATP1B1 are preferably used.

5 [0025] In particular, the OATP1B1-expressing cells used in the screening method of the present invention are preferably primary cultured cells or an established or unestablished cell line expressing OATP1B1, such as OATP1B1 forced-expression cells, immortalized human hepatocytes, primary
10 cultured human hepatocytes, freshly isolated human hepatocytes, cryopreserved human hepatocytes, and sandwich-cultured human hepatocytes. Herein, the OATP1B1 forced-expression cell is a cell introduced with a gene or nucleotide encoding an OATP1B1 protein or peptide by a gene engineering technique and functionally expressing the OATP1B1 protein or peptide. Such a forced-expression cell is, for example, preferably a cell overexpressing
15 a protein consisting of the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1 in the cell membrane or a cell transformed with a DNA consisting of the nucleotide sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2. The overexpression of OATP1B1 may be either a transient expression or stable expression, and cells stably expressing OATP1B1 are more preferably used in view of
20 reproducibility. Similarly, the transformed cell may be either a transiently or stably transformed cell, and stably transformed cells are more preferably used in view of reproducibility.

[0026] The host cell for forced expression is not specifically limited, and mammal cells, such as HEK-293 cells, or *Xenopus* oocytes are preferably
25 used from the simplicity of handling. The technique of gene transfer is generally known. For example, an objective DNA is amplified by, for example, PCR using a human liver cDNA as a template and appropriate primers so as to clone the full length of the nucleotide sequence shown in SEC ID NO: 2; the DNA is inserted into a vector having an appropriate expression
30 promoter; and the vector is introduced into cells by a method such as calcium phosphate transfection, lipofection, or microinjection. The transformed cells can be selected with an appropriate selective medium.

[0027] The second step of the screening method of the present invention is a

step of bringing dichlorofluorescein and a test compound into contact with the cells. The bringing dichlorofluorescein and a test compound into contact with cells refers to adding the both simultaneously or sequentially to a culture medium or buffer for the cells to contact the both with the cells. A concentration of dichlorofluorescein of 0.1 μM or more gives sufficient detection sensitivity, and the concentration may be appropriately adjusted within a range of 0.1 to 1000 μM for example. Meanwhile, the concentration of the test compound varies depending on the compound and, in general, may be appropriately adjusted within a range of 1 nM to 1 mM. The time for contacting with the cells may be 1 to 30 minutes and is preferably in the time range in which the uptake of dichlorofluorescein linearly increases.

[0028] After the contact of the dichlorofluorescein and the test compound with the cells, the cells are preferably washed for removing the fluorescent compound not taken up by the cells. The washing may be generally performed with a buffer such as PBS or Krebs-Henseleit (KH) buffer at a temperature of 1 to 10°C one to three times.

[0029] The third step of the screening method of the present invention is a step of measuring the fluorescence intensity of dichlorofluorescein taken up by the cells. The dichlorofluorescein taken up by the cells can be collected in a solution by solubilizing the cells. Examples of the solubilization of cells include treatment with an aqueous NaOH solution. The fluorescence intensity of the solution containing collected dichlorofluorescein is measured with a fluorophotometer at an excitation wavelength of 450 to 550 nm and a fluorescence wavelength of 500 to 600 nm. In order to convert the measured fluorescence intensity into the amount (such as molar number) of the fluorescent compound, it is preferable to form a calibration curve in advance. In addition, in order to standardize the incorporated fluorescent compound, it is preferable to convert the amount of the fluorescent compound into the amount per cell or per unit protein.

[0030] The fourth step of the screening method of the present invention is a step of determining the test compound as a compound that enhances the transport activity of OATP1B1 in a case that the measured fluorescence intensity is higher than that when the test compound is not present and

determining the test compound as a compound that inhibits the transport activity of OATP1B1 in a case that the measured fluorescence intensity is lower than that when the test compound is not present. The case that the measured fluorescence intensity is higher than that when the test compound is not present means that the uptake of dichlorofluorescein into the cells is increased by the presence of the test compound, and it is therefore believed that the test compound enhances the transport activity of OATP1B1. On the other hand, the case that the measured fluorescence intensity is lower than that when the test compound is not present means that the uptake of dichlorofluorescein into the cells is decreased by the presence of the test compound, and it is therefore believed that the test compound inhibits the transport activity of OATP1B1.

[0031] A compound that enhances the transport activity of OATP1B1 can be used for normalization of genetic polymorphism accompanied by decrease in function of OATP1B1. In addition, it is possible to enhance the excretion of xenobiotics that are transported by OATP1B1. On the other hand, a compound that inhibits the transport activity of OATP1B1 causes drug interaction with a selective substrate of OATP1B1, and, therefore, selection of a compound that does not inhibit the transport activity of OATP1B1 leads to creation of a pharmaceutical agent that is low in risk of drug interaction.

[0032] The present invention also provides a use of dichlorofluorescein in measurement of the expression level of OATP1B1. It is preferable to specify the dichlorofluorescein to be used for measuring the expression level of OATP1B1, that is, it is preferable, for example, that dichlorofluorescein be packaged together with a manual describing, for example, a method for measuring the expression level of OATP1B1.

[0033] The method of the present invention of measuring the expression level of OATP1B1 in test cells includes a step of bringing dichlorofluorescein into contact with test cells; a step of measuring the fluorescence intensity of dichlorofluorescein taken up by the test cells; and a step of evaluating the expression level of OATP1B1 in the test cells based on the measured fluorescence intensity. These steps are equivalent to the above-described steps. It is preferable that the measured fluorescence intensity be first

converted into the amount of the fluorescent compound based on a calibration curve and then standardized into the compound amount per cell or per unit protein. The prepared standardized data can be compared to those in other cells and can be used in selection of cells that express a relatively large or small amount of OATP1B1.

[0034] In the measurement method of the present invention, it is preferable to relatively evaluate the expression level of OATP1B1 in test cells, using positive cells expressing OATP1B1 as a control. It is preferable that the positive cells expressing OATP1B1 be selected from the group consisting of OATP1B1 forced-expression cells, immortalized human hepatocytes, primary cultured human hepatocytes, freshly isolated human hepatocytes, cryopreserved human hepatocytes, and sandwich-cultured human hepatocytes or be cells overexpressing a protein consisting of the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1 in the cell membrane or cells transformed with a DNA consisting of the nucleotide sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

[0035] The present invention also provides a use of a kit including dichlorofluorescein and positive cells expressing OATP1B1 in measurement of the expression level of OATP1B1 in test cells. It is preferable that the positive cells expressing OATP1B1 in the kit be selected from the group consisting of OATP1B1 forced-expression cells, immortalized human hepatocytes, primary cultured human hepatocytes, freshly isolated human hepatocytes, cryopreserved human hepatocytes, and sandwich-cultured human hepatocytes or be cells overexpressing a protein consisting of the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1 in the cell membrane or cells transformed with a DNA consisting of the nucleotide sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

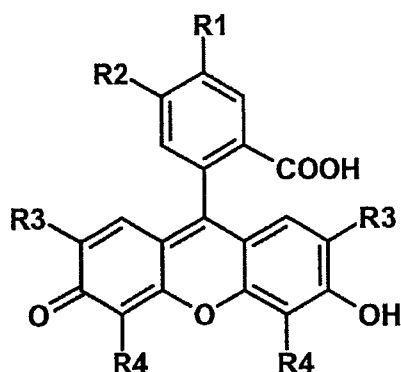
[0036] The kit optionally includes a medium for culturing cells, a buffer for being added to cells or washing cells, a reagent for measuring the amount of a protein, and other components.

Examples

[0037] (Example 1: Investigation of substrate specificities of various fluorescein derivatives)

Various fluorescent dyes, i.e., the following fluorescein derivatives, were each investigated for adaptability as a substrate of OATPs.

[0038] [Chemical Formula 1]



[Table 1]

Fluorescein derivative	R ₁	R ₂	R ₃	R ₄
Fluorescein (FL)	H	H	H	H
Dichlorofluorescein (DCF)	H	H	Cl	H
Carboxydichlorofluorescein (CDCF)	R ₁ = COOH, R ₂ = H or R ₁ = H, R ₂ = COOH		Cl	H
Oregon Green (Oregon Green)	H	H	F	H
5-Carboxyfluorescein (5-CFL)	COOH	H	H	H
6-Carboxyfluorescein (6-CFL)	H	COOH	H	H
Calcein (Calcein)	H	H	H	CH ₂ N(CH ₂ COOH) ₂
Biscarboxyethyl carboxyfluorescein (BCECF)	R ₁ = COOH, R ₂ = H or R ₁ = H, R ₂ = COOH		(CH ₂) ₂ COOH	H

5 [0039] Complementary DNAs of OATP1B1, OATP1B3, and OATP2B1 (respectively shown by SEQ ID NOs: 2, 3, and 4) were cloned by RT-PCR using human liver total RNA (Invitrogen Corporation) as a template and the following primers:

Primers for OATP1B1

10 sense primer: CGTCCGACTTGTTGCAGTTG (SEQ ID NO: 5)
antisense primer: AACACAGAAGCAGAAGTGGC (SEQ ID NO:

6)

Primers for OATP1B3

15 sense primer: TAACATCAGAAAAAGGATGGACTTG (SEQ ID NO: 7)

antisense primer: TGCAATGTTAGTTGGCAGCA (SEQ ID NO: 8)

Primers for OATP2B1

sense primer: CTGAGAAGATTGCTTCCTC (SEQ ID NO: 9)

antisense primer: ACTGCTGTGGCTGCTACTCT (SEQ ID NO: 10)

5 [0040] Expression vectors, pcDNA3.1 vectors (Invitrogen Corporation), carrying the resulting genes were respectively introduced into HEK-293 cells by lipofection using Lipofectamin 2000 (Invitrogen Corporation). The cells were cultured in Hygromycin-containing selective media to produce HEK-293 cells forcedly expressing OATP1B1, OATP1B3, and OATP2B1, respectively.

10 [0041] The above cells were seeded in a poly-D-lysine-coated dish at 4×10^5 cells/well. The medium was replaced with a KH buffer, and various fluorescent dyes dissolved in DMSO were added to the respective HEK-293 cells such that the final concentration in the KH buffer was 1 μ M, followed by incubation at 37°C for 5 minutes. Subsequently, the cells were washed with an ice-cold KH buffer three times and were then solubilized with an aqueous 0.1 N NaOH solution, and the fluorescence intensity of the fluorescent dye taken up by the cells was measured (excitation wavelength: 490 nm, fluorescence wavelength: 515 nm).

20 [0042] In order to quantitatively measure the amount of fluorescent compound taken up by the cells, a calibration curve showing the fluorescence intensity per unit fluorescent compound was prepared in advance. Based on this calibration curve, the measured fluorescence intensity was converted into the fluorescent compound per well (pmol/well or μ L/well), which was divided by the total protein amount (mg protein/well) of the solubilized cells (standardization) to convert into the fluorescent compound amount per unit protein (pmol/mg protein or μ L/mg protein).

25 [0043] The results are shown in Figure 1(a). As obvious from Figure 1(a), a combination of dichlorofluorescein (DCF) and OATP1B1 showed the highest uptake among the combinations of fluorescent dye and transporters tested. The results suggest that DCF is an excellent substrate for OATP1B1. For reference, the substrate specificities of various fluorescein derivatives on OAT1 and OAT3 were also investigated by the same method. The results are

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shown in Figure 1(b). It was proved by Figure 1(b) that as described in Non Patent Literature 4, 6-CFL is a satisfactory substrate for OAT1 and also that DCF is not a satisfactory substrate for both OAT1 and OAT3. These results also proved that the combination of DCF and OATP1B1 has specificity.

5 [0044] (Example 2: Time profiles of the uptake of DCF by OATP1B1)

As in Example 1, HEK-293 cells forcedly expressing OATP1B1 were prepared and were seeded in a poly-D-lysine-coated dish at 4×10^5 cells/well. The medium was replaced with a KH buffer, and DCF dissolved in DMSO was added to the cells such that the final concentrations in the KH buffer were 10 0.1 μM , 1 μM , and 10 μM , followed by incubation at 37°C for 0 to 30 minutes. The cells were sampled at the incubation times of 1 min, 5 min, 10 min, and 30 min, washed with an ice-cold KH buffer three times, and then solubilized with an aqueous 0.1 N NaOH solution, and the fluorescence intensity of the fluorescent dye taken up by the cells was measured as in 15 Example 1 (excitation wavelength: 490 nm, fluorescence wavelength: 515 nm).

[0045] The results are shown in Figure 2. It was revealed from Figure 2 that the uptake amount of DCF by the HEK-293 cells forcedly expressing OATP1B1 into the cells increases over time and depends on the concentration of added DCF. 20

[0046] (Example 3: Kinetic analysis of DCF uptake by OATP1B1)

As in Example 1, HEK-293 cells forcedly expressing OATP1B1 were prepared and were seeded in a poly-D-lysine-coated dish at 4×10^5 cells/well. The medium was replaced with a KH buffer, and DCF dissolved in DMSO 25 was added to the cells such that the final concentrations in the KH buffer were 0.1 to 100 μM , followed by incubation at 37°C for 5 minutes. The uptake velocities at 0.1 μM , 0.3 μM , 1 μM , 3 μM , 10 μM , 30 μM , and 100 μM concentrations of DCF were plotted, and analyzed by Michaelis-Menten Plot.

[0047] The results are shown in Figure 3. The K_m and V_{max} were calculated 30 by the following Michaelis-Menten equation. As a result, V_{max} was 131.6 (pmol/min/mg protein), and K_m was 7.22 (μM). Each parameter represents the mean value of four independent experiments. It was revealed that DCF is a satisfactory substrate for OATP1B1.

$$v = V_{\max} \cdot S / (K_m + S)$$

[0048] (Example 4: Effect of known OATP inhibitors on OATP1B1-mediated uptake of DCF)

As in Example 1, HEK-293 cells forcedly expressing OATP1B1 were prepared and were seeded in a poly-D-lysine-coated dish at 4×10^5 cells/well. DCF (in 0.1% DMSO, final concentration: 3 μ M) and a predetermined concentration of a known OATP1B1 inhibitor were added to the cells, followed by incubation at 37°C for 5 minutes. As the known OATP1B1 inhibitors, rifampicin (Rif: 10 μ M), bromosulfophthalein (BSP: 10 μ M), cyclosporine A (Cys A: 10 μ M), estradiol-17 β -D-glucuronide (EG: 10 and 30 μ M), and estrone-3-sulfate (ES: 10 and 30 μ M) were used. After incubation, the cells were washed with an ice-cold KH buffer three times, and then solubilized with an aqueous 0.1 N NaOH solution, and the fluorescence intensity of DCF taken up by the cells was measured as in Example 1 (excitation wavelength: 490 nm, fluorescence wavelength: 515 nm).

[0049] The results are shown in Figure 4. It was revealed from Figure 4 that the OATP1B1-mediated uptake of DCF was reduced in cells added with the known OATP1B1 inhibitors, compared to a control not added with any inhibitor. That is, the DCF uptake by HEK-293 cells was inhibited by the known OATP1B1 inhibitor. It was also revealed that this inhibition depends on the concentrations of inhibitors, estradiol-17 β -D-glucuronide and estrone-3-sulfate. It was proved that the DCF uptake is mediated by OATP1B1 forcedly expressed in HEK-293 cells.

[0050] (Example 5: Comparison of K_i values between DCF method and conventional RI method)

As in Example 1, HEK-293 cells forcedly expressing OATP1B1 were prepared and were seeded in a poly-D-lysine-coated dish at 4×10^5 cells/well. In the DCF method, as in Example 4, DCF (in 0.1% DMSO, final concentration: 3 μ M) and a predetermined concentration of a known OATP inhibitor were added to the cells, the cells were incubated at 37°C for 5 minutes, and the fluorescence intensity of DCF taken up by the cells was measured (excitation wavelength: 490 nm, fluorescence wavelength: 515 nm). In the conventional RI method, radiolabeled estradiol-17 β -D-glucuronide

(EG) was used. As in DCF, radiolabeled EG (in 0.1% DMSO, final concentration: 0.01 μ M) and a predetermined concentration of a known OATP inhibitor were added to the cells, and the cells were incubated at 37°C for 5 minutes. Subsequently, the cells were washed with an ice-cold KH buffer three times and then solubilized with an aqueous 0.1 N NaOH solution, and after neutralization with an aqueous 1 N HCl solution, the radioactivity taken up by the cells was measured. As the inhibitor, the compounds shown in the following table were used. The K_i values in the DCF method and the conventional RI method were calculated, and a correlation therebetween was investigated.

[0051] [Table 2]

	Compound	K_i (μ M)	
		DCF	EG
1	ES	0.079	0.078
2	BSP	0.092	0.073
3	Cyclosporin A	0.18	0.13
4	Rifampicin	0.26	0.29
5	Ritonavir	0.62	0.55
6	Tacrolimus	1.27	0.89
7	Erythromycin	6.99	4.14
8	Taurocholic acid	8.68	17.5
9	Ketoconazole	15.6	12.2
10	Verapamil	21.8	23.9
11	Probenecid	41.9	73.4
12	Cimetidine	> 300	> 300
13	Methotrexate	> 300	> 300

[0052] The results are shown in Figure 5. As obvious from Figure 5, there is a very high correlation between the K_i value from the DCF method and the K_i value from the conventional RI method ($R^2 = 0.9797$). It was proved from the results that inhibitory effect on OATP1B1 can be evaluated using DCF as the substrate and that DCF method can provide inhibition constants equivalent to those from the conventional RI method.

[0053] (Example 6: Time/temperature-dependent uptake of DCF by human hepatocytes)

Cryopreserved human hepatocytes and cryopreserved hepatocytes recovery medium (CHRM) were purchased from Invitrogen Corporation. The cryopreserved human hepatocytes were thawed in a water bath at 37°C and were added to the CHRM prewarmed at 37°C. After centrifugation at room temperature, the supernatant was discarded, and a hepatocyte suspension at 1×10^6 cells/mL was prepared in ice-cold KH buffer and stored on ice. A DCF solution was prepared by dissolving DCF in a KH buffer at a final concentration 20 μ M. The hepatocyte suspension was preincubated in a water bath at 37°C for 2 minutes before the start of uptake reaction, and the DCF solution prewarmed at 37°C was added thereto in the same volume as that of the hepatocyte suspension to start the reaction. Similarly, also at 4°C, the DCF solution stored on ice in advance was added to the hepatocyte suspension stored on ice in the same volume as that of the hepatocyte suspension to start the reaction. The hepatocytes were incubated at 37°C and 4°C, respectively, for 0 to 5 minutes. The cells were sampled at the incubation times of 0.5 min, 2 min, and 5 min, and the hepatocytes were separated from the DCF solution by an oil spin method (e.g., Yoshihisa SHITARA, et al., JOURNAL OF PHARMACOLOGY AND EXPERIMENTAL THERAPEUTICS, 304: 610-616, 2003). Specifically, 80 μ L of the hepatocyte suspension was collected and added to a centrifugal tube containing 50 μ L of oil (specific gravity: 1.015, Sigma-Aldrich Co.) and 100 μ L of an aqueous 2 N NaOH solution under the oil layer, and centrifugation was performed at 10,000 g for 20 seconds. By the centrifugation, the hepatocytes passed through the oil layer and were solubilized with an aqueous 2 N NaOH solution. Subsequently, the fluorescence intensity of DCF taken up by the cells was measured as in Example 1 (excitation wavelength: 490 nm, fluorescence wavelength: 515 nm).

[0054] The results are shown in Figure 6. Since transporters expressed on the cell surface membrane of hepatocytes do not function at 4°C, the measured uptake of fluorescent compound, DCF, at 4°C is believed to be

transporter-independent uptake (nonspecific binding to membrane surface or passive diffusion). Since the transporter functions at 37°C, the difference between the DCF uptake at 37°C and 4°C is believed to be uptake mediated by transporters (OATP1B1 and other transporters expressed in the hepatocytes). It was revealed from Figure 6 that the transporter-mediated uptake of DCF by human hepatocytes at 37°C increases over time.

[0055] (Example 7: Kinetic analysis of DCF uptake by human hepatocytes)

Human hepatocytes were prepared as in Example 6, and a hepatocyte suspension was prepared at 1×10^6 cells/mL. DCF was dissolved in a KH buffer at final concentrations of 2 μ M, 6 μ M, 20 μ M, 60 μ M, 200 μ M, 600 μ M, and 2000 μ M. The hepatocyte suspension was incubated in a water bath at 37°C for 2 minutes before the start of uptake reaction, and a DCF solution prewarmed at 37°C was added thereto in the same volume as that of the hepatocyte suspension to start the reaction. The hepatocytes were incubated at 37°C for 0 to 5 minutes and were sampled at the incubation times of 0.5 min, 2 min, and 5 min, and the hepatocytes were separated from the DCF solution by an oil spin method. The hepatocytes were solubilized with an aqueous 2 N NaOH solution, and the fluorescence intensity of DCF taken up by the cells was measured as in Example 1 (excitation wavelength: 490 nm, fluorescence wavelength: 515 nm). The uptake velocity at each concentration was plotted, the data were analyzed by Michaelis-Menten equation including the term of passive diffusion, and the relationship between the uptake velocity and the uptake clearance of DCF was further analyzed by Eadie-Hofstee plot.

[0056] The results are shown in (a) and (b) of Figure 7. In (b) of Figure 7, saturation of the uptake of DCF was observed at the higher concentration range corresponding to higher uptake velocity. This result suggests that the uptake of DCF by human hepatocytes is mediated by transporters. Furthermore, in the kinetic analysis, K_m , V_{max} , and P_{dif} were calculated by the following Michaelis-Menten equation including the term of passive diffusion. As a result, K_m was 38.55 μ M, V_{max} was 117.52 pmol/min/ 10^6 cells, and P_{dif} was 2.20 μ L/min/ 10^6 cells. It is predicted that the DCF uptake by human hepatocytes is mainly mediated by OATP1B1, from that the K_m value is close

to that obtained from the cells forcedly expressing OATP1B1 in Example 3 ($K_m = 7.22 \mu\text{M}$) and that as shown in Example 1, among the OATP transporters expressed in human hepatocytes, OATP1B1 showed the highest transport activity on DCF.

$$v = V_{\max} \cdot S / (K_m + S) + P_{\text{diff}} S$$

[0057] (Example 8: Effect of OATP inhibitor on DCF uptake by human hepatocytes)

Human hepatocytes were prepared as in Example 6, and a hepatocyte suspension was prepared at 1×10^6 cells/mL. DCF was dissolved in a KH buffer at final concentrations of $20 \mu\text{M}$ and $2000 \mu\text{M}$. A DMSO solution containing a predetermined concentration of a known OATP1B1 inhibitor was added to the KH buffer containing $20 \mu\text{M}$ of DCF to give an inhibitor solution. As the known OATP1B1 inhibitors, bromosulphophthalein (BSP, final concentration: $10 \mu\text{M}$), rifampicin (Rif, final concentration: $10 \mu\text{M}$), and cyclosporine A (Cys A, final concentration: $10 \mu\text{M}$) were used. In addition, a positive control not containing any inhibitor, a negative control (4°C) not containing any OATP1B1 inhibitor and being investigated at 4°C , and a control (DCF (1000)) containing a high concentration (final concentration: $1000 \mu\text{M}$) of DCF instead of inhibitors were each prepared by adding DMSO to a KH buffer containing a predetermined concentration of DCF. The hepatocyte suspension was incubated in a water bath at 37°C for 2 minutes before the start of uptake reaction, and a solution containing DCF prewarmed at 37°C was added thereto in the same volume as that of the hepatocyte suspension to start the reaction. The hepatocytes were incubated at 37°C for 0 to 5 minutes and were sampled at the incubation times of 0.5 min, 2 min, and 5 min, and the hepatocytes were separated from the DCF solution by an oil spin method. The hepatocytes were solubilized with an aqueous 2 N NaOH solution, and the fluorescence intensity of DCF taken up by the cells was measured as in Example 1 (excitation wavelength: 490 nm, fluorescence wavelength: 515 nm).

[0058] The results are shown in Figure 8. In Figure 8, it is believed that the difference between uptake of the positive control and 4°C , both not containing any inhibitor, is the uptake quantity of DCF mediated by transporters. On the

other hand, the control containing 1000 μ M of DCF showed a fluorescence intensity level comparable to the uptake at 4°C, and no transporter-mediated uptake was observed. This result is believed to result from saturation of the transporters by 1000 μ M of DCF. In addition, it was revealed that the DCF uptake was reduced by each of OATP1B1 inhibitors: BSP, Rif, and Cys A to the level comparable to the uptake at 4°C. That is, the DCF uptake by human hepatocytes was inhibited by the known OATP1B1 inhibitors. It was confirmed by this result that the DCF uptake into human hepatocytes is mainly mediated by OATP1B1.

Industrial Applicability

[0059] A compound that enhances or inhibits the transport activity of OATP1B1 can be detected safely, inexpensively, and easily to operate with sensitivity comparable to that of an RI method by using dichlorofluorescein, which has been proved as an excellent substrate of OATP1B1. The compound selected by the screening method of the present invention is expected to be capable of controlling the in vivo pharmacokinetics, such as blood level, of a drug serving as a substrate of OATP1B1. It is also possible to predict OATP1B1-mediated drug interaction potential of a test compound by the screening method of the present invention.

[0060] The present invention can also provide a method for measuring the expression level of OATP1B1 safely, inexpensively, and easily to operate with sensitivity comparable to that of an RI method. It is believed that the measurement of the expression level of OATP1B1 is useful for, for example, evaluation of an activity of cells, such as hepatocytes, expressing OATP1B1 and comparison of activities of hepatocytes of different lots.

Sequence Listing

CLAIMS

[Claim 1] A method of screening for a compound that enhances or inhibits a transport activity of OATP1B1, using dichlorofluorescein.

[Claim 2] The method according to Claim 1, comprising:

5 a step of preparing a cell expressing OATP1B1;
a step of bringing dichlorofluorescein and a test compound into contact with the cell;

a step of measuring a fluorescence intensity of dichlorofluorescein taken up by the cell; and

10 a step of determining the test compound as a compound that enhances the transport activity of OATP1B1 in a case that the measured fluorescence intensity is higher than that when the test compound is not present and determining the test compound as a compound that inhibits the transport activity of OATP1B1 in a case that the measured fluorescence intensity is
15 lower than that when the test compound is not present.

[Claim 3] The method according to Claim 1 or 2, wherein the cell expressing OATP1B1 is selected from the group consisting of OATP1B1 forced-expression cells, immortalized human hepatocytes, primary cultured human hepatocytes, freshly isolated human hepatocytes, cryopreserved human
20 hepatocytes, and sandwich-cultured human hepatocytes.

[Claim 4] The method according to Claim 1 or 2, wherein the cell expressing OATP1B1 is a cell overexpressing a protein consisting of the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1 in a cell membrane.

[Claim 5] The method according to Claim 1 or 2, wherein the cell
25 expressing OATP1B1 is a cell transformed with a DNA consisting of the nucleotide sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

[Claim 6] A use of dichlorofluorescein in measurement of an expression level of OATP1B1.

[Claim 7] A method for measuring an expression level of OATP1B1 in
30 a test cell, comprising:

a step of bringing dichlorofluorescein into contact with the test cell;
a step of measuring a fluorescence intensity of dichlorofluorescein taken up by the test cell; and

a step of evaluating an expression level of OATP1B1 in the test cell based on the measured fluorescence intensity.

[Claim 8] The method according to Claim 7, wherein the expression level of OATP1B1 in the test cell is relatively evaluated using a positive cell expressing OATP1B1 as a control.

[Claim 9] The method according to Claim 8, wherein the positive cell is selected from the group consisting of OATP1B1 forced-expression cells, immortalized human hepatocytes, primary cultured human hepatocytes, freshly isolated human hepatocytes, cryopreserved human hepatocytes, and sandwich-cultured human hepatocytes.

[Claim 10] The method according to Claim 8, wherein the positive cell is a cell overexpressing a protein consisting of the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1 in a cell membrane.

[Claim 11] The method according to Claim 8, wherein the positive cell is a cell transformed with a DNA consisting of the nucleotide sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

[Claim 12] A use of a kit comprising dichlorofluorescein and a positive cell expressing OATP1B1 in measurement of an expression level of OATP1B1 in a test cell.

[Claim 13] The use according to Claim 12, wherein the positive cell is selected from the group consisting of OATP1B1 forced-expression cells, immortalized human hepatocytes, primary cultured human hepatocytes, freshly isolated human hepatocytes, cryopreserved human hepatocytes, and sandwich-cultured human hepatocytes.

[Claim 14] The use according to Claim 12, wherein the positive cell is a cell overexpressing a protein consisting of the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1 in a cell membrane.

[Claim 15] The use according to Claim 12, wherein the positive cell is a cell transformed with a DNA consisting of the nucleotide sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.