

HEMIASTERLIN ANALOGSField of Invention

5 This invention relates to biologically active compounds and compositions, their use and derivation.

Background

10 As described in Talpir, R. et al. (1994) Tetrahedron Lett. 35:4453-6 and in international patent application PCT/GB96/00942 published October 24, 1996 under number WO96/33211, the compound hemiasterlin may be
15 obtained from marine sponges or synthesized. As set forth in PCT/GB96/00942, hemiasterlin and the synthetic analogs described therein are cytotoxic and anti-mitotic.

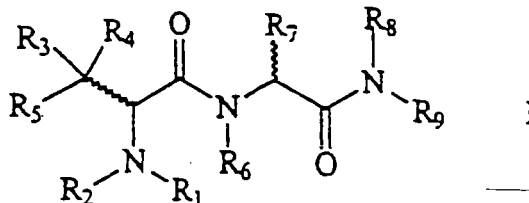
 Compounds that differ from hemiasterlin in the region of the indole moiety of hemiasterlin are novel. It has now
20 been found that analogs of hemiasterlin wherein the indole moiety of hemiasterlin has been deleted or replaced demonstrate potent anti-mitotic and cytotoxic activity.

Summary of Invention

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 This invention provides a compound or pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, having the formula

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wherein,



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R_1 and R_2 are independently selected from the group consisting of: H, R, and ArR-, and where at least one of R_1 and R_2 is R and neither are ArR-, R_1 and R_2 together may optionally be a three to seven membered ring;

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R_3 and R_4 are independently selected from the group consisting of: H, R, ArR-, and where at least one of R_3 and R_4 is R and neither are ArR- or Ar, R_3 and R_4 together may optionally be a three to seven membered ring;

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R_5 is selected from the group consisting of: H, R, ArR-, and Ar;

R_6 is selected from the group consisting of: H, R, and ArR-;

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R_7 and R_8 are independently selected from the group consisting of: H, R, and ArR-; and

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R_9 is: $Z-\overset{\text{O}}{\underset{\text{O}}{\text{C}}}-Y-$;

and wherein,

R is defined as a saturated or unsaturated moiety having a linear, branched, or cyclic skeleton containing one to ten carbon atoms, zero to four nitrogen atoms, zero to four oxygen atoms, and zero to four sulfur atoms, and the carbon atoms are optionally substituted with: =O, =S, OH, -OR₁₀, -O₂CR₁₀, -SH, -SR₁₀, -SOCR₁₀, -NH₂, -NHR₁₀, -N(R₁₀)₂, -NHCOR₁₀, -NR₁₀COR₁₀, -I, Br, -Cl, -F, -CN, -CO₂H, -CO₂R₁₀, -CHO, -COR₁₀, -CONH₂, -CONHR₁₀, -CON(R₁₀)₂, -COSH, -COSR₁₀, -NO₂, -SO₃H, -SOR₁₀, -SO₂R₁₀, wherein R₁₀ is a linear, branched or cyclic, one to ten carbon saturated or unsaturated alkyl group;

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X is defined as a moiety selected from the group consisting of: -OH, -OR, =O, =S, -O₂CR, -SH, -SR, -SOCR,

-NH₂, -NHR, -N(R)₂, -NHCOR, -NRCOR, -I, -Br, -Cl, -F, -CN, -CO₂H, -CO₂R, -CHO, -COR, -CONH₂, -CONHR, -CON(R)₂, -COSH, -COSR, -NO₂, -SO₃H, -SOR, and -SO₂R;

5 Ar is defined as an aromatic ring selected from the group consisting of: phenyl, naphthyl, anthracyl, phenanthryl, furyl, pyrrolyl, thiophenyl, benzofuryl, benzothiophenyl, quinolyl, isoquinolyl, imidazolyl, thiazolyl, oxazolyl, and pyridyl, optionally substituted
10 with R or X;

Y is defined as a moiety selected from the group consisting of: a linear, saturated or unsaturated, one to six carbon alkyl group, optionally substituted with R,
15 ArR-, or X; and,

Z is defined as a moiety selected from the group consisting of: -OH, -OR; -SH; -SR; -NH₂; -NHR; -N(R)₂; -NHCH(R₁₁)COOH; and -NRCH(R₁₁)COOH, wherein R₁₁ is a moiety
20 having the formula: R, or -(CH₂)_nNR₁₂R₁₃, wherein n=1-4 and R₁₂ and R₁₃ are independently selected from the group consisting of: H; R; and -C(NH)(NH₂).

This invention also provide methods of preparing the
25 aforementioned compound of formula I, and precursors thereof, as described herein.

This invention also provides the use of the
aforementioned compound of formula I, or a pharmaceutically
30 acceptable salt thereof, for:

(a) manufacture of a medicament;

35 (b) in a method whereby cells, including tumor cells which are susceptible to the cytotoxic effects of the compound are treated with the compound or pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof; and

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(c) in a method whereby cells are treated with the compound or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, to bring about mitotic arrest in the cells, or the production of abnormal mitotic spindles in the cells.

Description of Figures

Figure 1 is a schematic showing a preferred scheme for synthesis of a compound of this invention.

Figure 2 is a schematic showing a preferred scheme for synthesis of the amino acid used in the coupling reaction shown in Figure 1.

Figure 3 is a schematic showing steps in the synthesis of a compound of this invention as described in the examples herein.

Figure 4 is a schematic showing steps in the synthesis of the dipeptide shown in Figure 3, as described in the examples herein.

Figure 5A and 5B are graphs comparing the cytotoxicity of hemiasterlin to SPA-110, as described in the examples herein.

Figure 6 is a graph comparing the anti-mitotic activity of SPA-110 (♦) to hemiasterlin (□), as described in the examples herein.

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Detailed Description of the Invention

Except where otherwise stated, the recitation of a compound herein covers all possible salts of the compound, and denotes all possible isomers possible within the structural formula given for such compound, including geometrical and optical isomers. Unless otherwise stated, materials described herein comprising a compound for which isomers exist, are to be regarded as covering individual isomers, and, mixtures of isomers including racemic mixtures.

In the compound of formula I set out above, bonds drawn in wavy line are from carbon atoms which may be optical centers. Preferably, the following absolute configurations predominate:



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Except where otherwise stated, any moiety referred to herein which is described as "alkyl" will preferably be straight chain or, branched when possible, and will preferably have up to eight, more preferably up to six and even more preferably up to four carbon atoms. Except where

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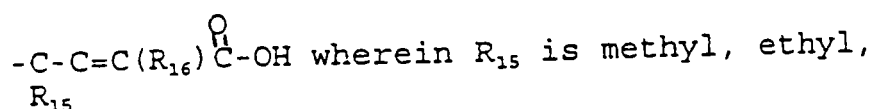
preferably unsubstituted. Methyl is the most preferred alkyl group.

5 In this specification, reference is made to alkyl moieties being saturated or unsaturated, thereby including within the definition of the moiety, alkene and alkyne groups (whether internal, terminal or part of a ring).

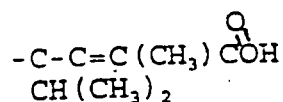
10 In a compound of formula I, the following substituents alone, or in combination, are preferred:

- (a) R_1 and R_2 independently: H, methyl, ethyl, propyl, n-butyl, acetyl; or, where R_1 and R_2 are joined: cyclopropyl, cyclobutyl, cyclopentyl or cyclohexyl; more preferably R_1 and R_2 are independently: H or CH_3 ; most preferably R_1 is H and R_2 is CH_3 ;
- 15
- (b) preferably no more than one of R_3 and R_4 is H; more preferably, R_3 and R_4 are independently: methyl, ethyl, n-propyl or n-butyl, or, where R_3 and R_4 are joined: β -cyclopropyl, β -cyclobutyl, β -cyclopentyl or β -cyclohexyl; most preferably R_3 and R_4 are each methyl;
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- (c) R_5 : Ar in the definition of R_5 is preferably phenyl, naphthyl, anthracyl or pyrrolyl; preferably R_5 is phenyl, methyl or H; most preferably R^5 is phenyl or methyl;
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- (d) R_6 and R_8 independently: H or methyl, more preferably R_6 is H and R_8 is methyl;
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- (e) R_7 : a three to six carbon, branched alkyl group; more preferably R_7 is $-\text{C}(\text{CH}_3)_3$; and
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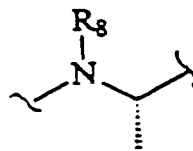
(f) in R_9 , Z is preferably OH, $-OR_{14}$ (wherein R_{14} is a linear or branched one to six carbon alkyl group, $-NHCH(R_{11})COOH$ or $-NCH_3CH(R_{11})COOH$ wherein R_{11} is R, or $-(CH_2)_nNHC(NH)(NH_2)$; or R_9 is preferably



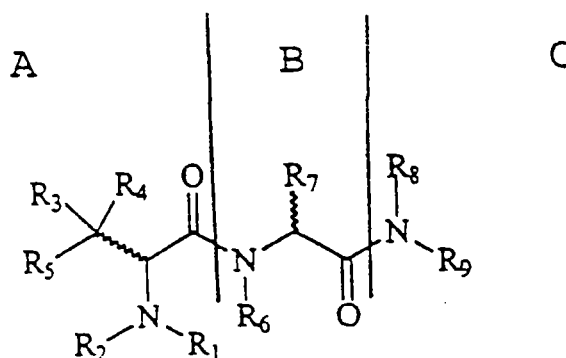
n-propyl, isopropyl, tert-butyl, iso-butyl, or sec-butyl and R_{16} is H, methyl, ethyl, propyl, iso-propyl, n-butyl, iso-butyl or sec-butyl; more preferably Z is OH and R_9 as a whole is:



Where R_9 has a chiral center in moiety Y, the following absolute configuration is preferred, with reference to an example where the chiral center has a methyl substituent:



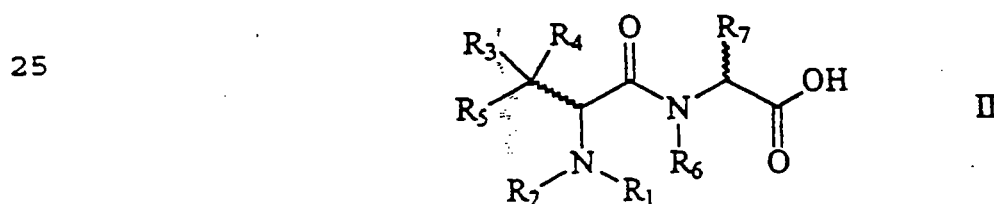
Compounds of formula I may be prepared by coupling moieties A, B and C as represented below using standard procedures, including procedures for coupling amino acids through a peptide bond.



A coupling agent, for example PyBroP, is suitably used in the reaction. The reaction suitably comprises connecting amino acid moieties in the presence of the coupling agent, a base such as 4-dimethylaminopyridine and an organic solvent such as methylene chloride. Standard reaction quenching and purification procedures known in the art produce the coupled compound.

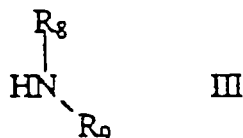
Preparation of moieties B and C as described above may be carried out using procedures and starting materials known in the art, for example by following the methods described in the aforementioned PCT/GB96/00942. The methods as set out in the examples herein may be employed, with suitable modification to materials and reagents, according to particular substituents of moieties A, B and C.

One aspect of this invention is a method for preparing a compound of formula I in which a compound of the formula:



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is coupled with a compound of the formula:



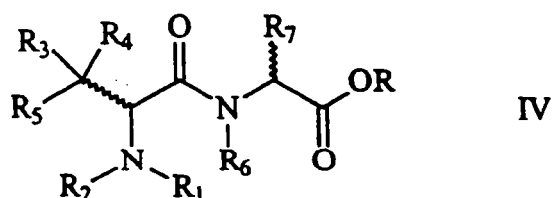
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A compound of formula III may be prepared by known methods (such as described in PCT/GB96/00942) and by the method described in the examples herein.

A further aspect of this invention is a method for preparing a compound of the formula II described above in which a compound of the formula:

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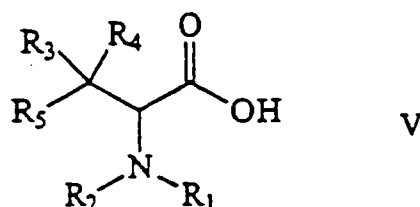


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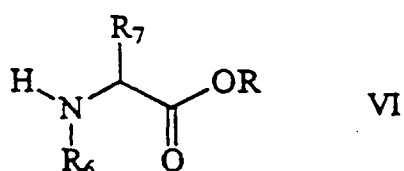
is treated with a base such as dilute sodium hydroxide in a solvent such as methanol for enough time to allow removal of OR; followed by acidification to about pH 3. Preferably R in formula IV is a simple alkyl chain, such as CH₃, and a protecting agent such as tert-butoxycarbonyl (Boc) may be used to protect the amine group; i.e. R₁ or R₂ is replaced by Boc. The Boc group is suitably removed by a reaction such as TFA/CH₂Cl₂ for about 1 hour at ambient temperatures. An appropriate isolation protocol produces the TFA salt. Subsequently another group (eg. R₁ or R₂) could be introduced on the nitrogen by standard techniques known to any person in the art, which produces compound of formula IV.

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A further aspect of this invention is a method for preparing a compound of formula IV described above in which a compound of the formula:

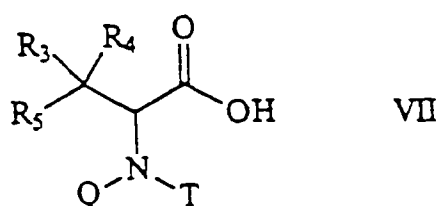


10 is coupled with a compound of the formula:

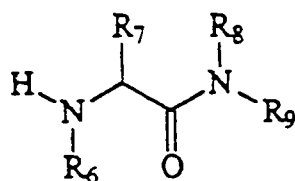


20 Preparation of compound V can be accomplished by many procedures known to person skilled in the art. One such example is described below in Figure 2. Compounds of formula VI may be prepared by methods known to persons of skill in the art.

25 A preferred method according to this invention for preparing a compound of formula I, is to prepare a dipeptide comprising moieties B and C and couple the dipeptide to moiety A. In this method, a compound of the following formula, wherein Q and T together are a combination of any two of the substituents: R₁, R₂ and a
30 protecting group:



is coupled with a compound of the formula:

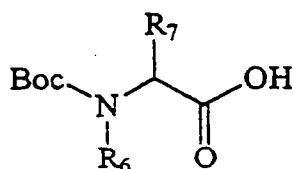


VIII

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A compound of formula VIII may be prepared by coupling a compound of formula III as described above, with a compound of the formula:

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IX

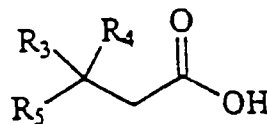
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Compounds of formula IX may be prepared by methods known to persons of skill in the art.

A further aspect of this invention is a method to prepare a compound of formula VII as described above in which a compound of the formula:

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X

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is treated with a base followed by an azide compound. The azide derivative so produced is reduced to form an amine which is then treated with groups selected from: R_1 , R_2 and Boc in the presence of a base such as sodium hydride.

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Figure 1 sets out a preferred scheme for preparation of a compound of formula I involving the coupling of amino acid moiety A with a dipeptide comprising moieties B and C. In the embodiment shown in the figure, the substituents of the dipeptide are those of hemiasterlin. The Boc protected dipeptide portrayed in the figure may be obtained by the methods set out in the examples herein. On the A moiety, Boc may replace R_1 rather than R_2 or both R_1 and R_2 may be present on the A moiety prior to coupling.

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Figure 2 sets out a preferred scheme for preparation of moiety A as used in the scheme shown in Figure 1. R_2 may be added in place of Boc and Boc may replace R_1 .

Compounds of formula I are biologically active. The invention includes the use of a compound of formula I. Compounds of formula I may have pesticidal, for example insecticidal activity. Preferably, however, the use is in the pharmaceutical field for medical or veterinarial applications.

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The compounds described herein have utility as cytotoxic agents, particularly against tumor cells and may have utility as anti-bacterial or anti-viral agents. Therefore, this invention includes a pharmaceutical composition comprising an effective amount of a compound of formula I, in association with a carrier.

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This invention further provides the use of a compound of formula I for the manufacture of a medicament for use in the treatment of cancer or a tumor in a mammal.

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In using a compound of formula I for medical or
veterinarian applications, the compound is preferably
administered in a pharmaceutical composition comprising
also a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier, and optionally,
5 one or more other biologically active ingredients. Such
compositions may be in any form used for administering
pharmaceuticals, for example any form suitable for oral,
topical, vaginal, intravenous, subcutaneous, parenteral,
rectal and inhalatory application. The compositions may be
10 provided in discrete dose units. The carriers may be
particulate, with the compositions being, for example,
tablets or powders, or liquid, with the compositions being,
for example, oral syrups or injectable liquids, or aerosol,
for inhalatory application.

15 For oral administration an excipient and/or binder may
be present. Examples are sucrose, kaolin, glycerin, starch
dextrins, sodium alginate, carbosymethylcellulose and ethyl
cellulose. Colouring and/or flavouring agents may be
20 present. A coating shell may be employed. For rectal
administration oleaginous bases may be employed, for
example lanolin or cocoa butter. For an injectable
formulation buffers, stabilizers and isotonic agents may be
included.

25 The dosage of a compound of formula I may depend upon
the weight and physical condition of the patient; on the
severity and longevity of the illness; and on the
particular form of the active ingredient, the manner of
30 administration and the composition employed. A daily dose
of about 0.0001 to about 100 mg/kg of body weight taken
singly or in separate doses of up to 6 times a day, or by
a continuous infusion, embraces the effective amounts most
typically required. A preferred range is about 0.001 to
35 about 50 mg/kg of body weight, per day, most preferably
about 0.01 to about 30 mg/kg of body weight, per day.

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It is to be understood that use of a compound of formula I in chemotherapy can involve such a compound being bound to an agent, for example a monoclonal or polyclonal antibody, a protein or a liposome, which assists the delivery of the said compound to tumor cells.

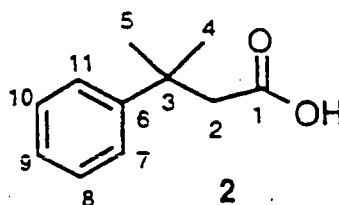
This invention also includes the use of a compound of formula I as an antimitotic agent. Such use may be in procedures that require blocking cells in mitosis, such as the preparation of mitotic spreads for karyotype analysis. The compounds of this invention can also be used to probe microtubule function in mitotic cells.

Examples

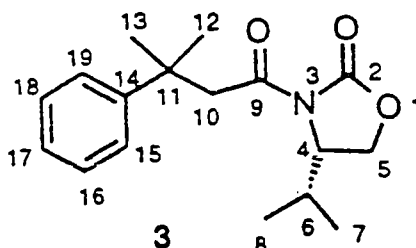
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The following examples provide a detailed description of preferred methods of synthesis of a preferred compound of this invention, SPA-110. Also described are precursor compounds and characterization of various compounds of this invention. Figures 3 and 4 schematically portray the synthesis of the a SPA-110 salt according to the examples. Reference numerals in the examples correspond to labelling of compounds in Figures 3 and 4 and labelling of compounds depicted in the examples.

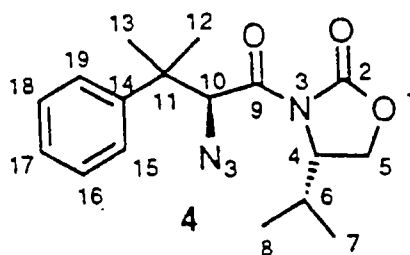
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3-methyl-3-phenylbutanoic acid (2)

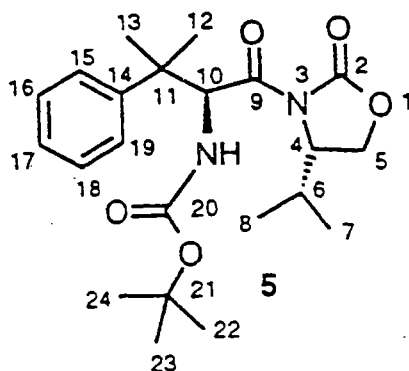
3-Methyl-2-butenic acid (1, 5.10 g, 50.9 mmol) and AlCl_3 (20.4 g, 153 mmol) were placed in a one-neck round-bottomed flask. Benzene (50 mL) was added, which produced vigorous bubbling. Upon completion of the bubbling, a capped condenser (*i.e.* closed system) was attached, the reaction mixture was stirred and placed in an oil bath at 65°C . The pressure in the system was occasionally released. The progress of the reaction was followed by following the loss of starting material by GC. If the reaction was not complete within 1 h, a small quantity of AlCl_3 was added and stirring was continued. To the solution was added diethyl ether and the mixture was cooled to 0°C . Slowly conc. HCl and some water were added until all the solid dissolved and the pH was less than 2. The aqueous layer was extracted with diethyl ether three times. The organic layer was concentrated to 150 mL and then was extracted with a saturated sodium hydrogen carbonate solution six times. The combined aqueous layer were acidified with conc. HCl until the pH was less than 2. The acidic aqueous layer was extracted with diethyl ether three times and the accumulated organic layer was dried with magnesium sulfate. The solution was filtered and the diethyl ether was removed *in vacuo* producing a white solid (8.51 g, 47.7 mmol) in 94% yield, which did not need further purification. mp $55 - 56^\circ\text{C}$. $^1\text{H-NMR}$ (400 MHz, CDCl_3) 10.45 (bs, 1H, CO_2H), 7.38 (d, 2H, $J = 7.2$ Hz, H-11 and H-7), 7.32 (t, 2H, $J = 7.2$ Hz, H-10 and H-8), 7.21 (t, 2H, $J = 7.2$ Hz, H-9), 2.65 (s, 2H, H-2), 1.47 (s, 6H, H-5 and H-4); Mass spectrum (EI) 178 (23, M^+), 119 (100, $[\text{C}_9\text{H}_{11}]^+$). For pioneering work to form 2 see: F.J. Eijkman (1908) Chem. Kentr. II, p. 110; or A. Hoffman (1929) J. Am. Chem. Soc. 51:2542.

(4S)-3-(3-methyl-3-phenyl-1-oxobutyl)-4-isopropyl-2-oxazolidinone (3)

3-Methyl-3-phenylbutanoic acid (2, 1.00 g, 5.61 mmol) was dissolved in 70 mL of THF and cooled to -78°C . Triethylamine (1.17 mL, 8.42 mmol) and trimethylacetyl chloride (0.760 mL, 6.17 mmol) were added to the reaction flask producing a white solid. The resulting mixture was warmed to 0°C for 1 h and then cooled back down to -78°C . In a second flask butyllithium (6.84 mL, 1.6 M in hexanes, 10.9 mmol) was added dropwise with vigorous stirring to a solution of (4S)-(-)-4-isopropyl-2-oxazolidinone (1.45 g, 11.2 mmol) at -78°C in THF (60 mL) producing a white precipitate. The resulting suspension of the lithiated oxazolidinone was added *via* cannula to the reaction flask. Stirring was continued for 2 h, water was added and the reaction mixture was warmed to room temperature, whereupon it was extracted three times with diethyl ether. The combined organic extracts were dried over magnesium sulfate, and concentrated *in vacuo*. The product was purified by radial chromatography (4 mm plate, 3 : 7 diethyl ether - pet. ether) affording compound 3 as a clear, colourless oil in 84% yield (1.37 g, 4.74 mmol). $^1\text{H-NMR}$ (400 MHz, CDCl_3) 7.38 (d, 2H, $J = 7.3$ Hz, H-19 and H-15) 7.28 (t, 2H, $J = 7.3$ Hz, H-18 and H-16), 7.16 (t, 1H, $J = 7.3$ Hz, H-17), 4.22 - 4.18 (m, 1H, H-4), 4.05 (dd, 1H, $J = 9.0$ and 2.8 Hz, 1H-5), 4.00 (t, 1H, $J = 9.0$ Hz, 1H-5), 3.38 - 3.30 (m, 2H, H-10), 2.16 - 2.12 (m, 1H, H-6), 1.48 (s, 3H, H-13 or H-12), 1.47 (s, 3H, H-13 or H-12), 0.79 (d, 3H, $J = 7.1$ Hz, H-8 or H-7), 0.71 (d, 3H, $J = 6.9$ Hz, H-8 or H-7); Mass spectrum (EI) 289 (8, M^+), 119 (100, $[\text{C}_9\text{H}_{11}]^+$). Optical rotation obtained was $[\alpha]_D^{25} +69.5$ (c 1.16, CHCl_3). Compound 3 was prepared according to D.A. Evans *et al.* (1988) Tetrahedron 44:5525.

Preparation of the 4-isopropyl-2-oxazolidinone 4

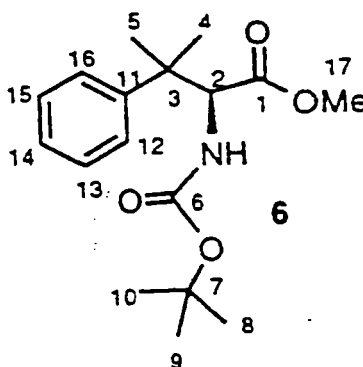
Preparation of the 4-isopropyl-2-oxazolidinone 5



Azide 4 (418 mg, 1.26 mmol), 10% palladium on charcoal (280 mg), and di-*tert*-butyl dicarbonate (608 mg, 2.78 mmol) were placed in a 100 mL flask. Ethyl acetate (37 mL) was added and the resulting black suspension was stirred at room temperature. The mixture was

flushed with argon, then with hydrogen and was stirred under a hydrogen balloon overnight (~14 h). The reaction mixture was filtered through silica gel and the collected material was washed with ethyl acetate. The combined filtrate was concentrated *in vacuo* and the crude mixture was purified by flash column chromatography (3 : 7 diethyl ether - pet. ether) to afford compound 5, a viscous colourless oil, in 78% yield (400 mg, 0.989 mmol). ¹H-NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) 7.40 (d, 2H, *J* = 7.4 Hz, H-19 and H-15), 7.29 (t, 2H, *J* = 7.4 Hz, H-18 and H-16), 7.21 (t, 1H, *J* = 7.4 Hz, H-17), 6.12 (d, 1H, *J* = 9.9 Hz, H-10), 5.11 (bs, 1H, N-H), 3.89 (d, 1H, *J* = 8.4 and 1.9 Hz, H-5), 3.82 - 3.79 (m, 1H, H-4), 3.45 (t, 1H, *J* = 8.4 Hz, H-5), 2.26 - 2.22 (m, 1H, H-6), 1.41 (s, 9H, H-24, H-23 and H-22), 0.80 (d, 3H, *J* = 7.0 Hz, H-8 or H-7), 0.76 (d, 3H, *J* = 6.9 Hz, H-8 or H-7); Mass spectrum (DCI, CH₄/NH₃ mix) 405 (1, [M+H]⁺), 349 (7, [M-C₄H₉]⁺), 230 (100, [C₉H₁₄N₂O₅]⁺). Optical rotation obtained was $[\alpha]_D^{24} +118.4$ (c 0.935, CHCl₃). Compound 5 was prepared according to the methodology developed by D.A. Evans *et al.* (1990) [supra].

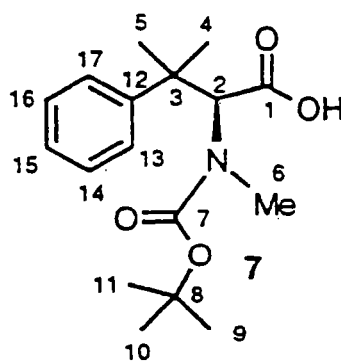
Methyl (2*S*)-2-(*tert*-butoxycarbonyl)amino-3-methyl-3-phenylbutanoate (6)



Oxazolidinone 5 (245 mg, 0.605 mmol) was dissolved in a mixture of 7.1 mL THF and 1.8 mL water. This solution was cooled to 0°C and hydrogen peroxide (0.618 mL, 30% aqueous, 5.45 mmol) and lithium hydroxide (1.82 mL, 1.0 M, 1.82 mmol) were added. The resulting mixture was stirred at room temperature overnight (~15 h). The excess peroxide was quenched by addition of sodium hydrogen sulfite (7.1 mL, 1.5 M, 10.7 mmol) and stirring was continued for 1 h. The aqueous phase was acidified with 1.0 M citric acid and the mixture was extracted three times with ethyl acetate. The combined ethyl acetate extracts were dried over magnesium sulfate and concentrated *in vacuo*. To the remaining crude material was added a solution of diazomethane in diethyl ether until the solution stayed yellow. After bubbling argon through the solution for 15 min., the remaining volatile components were removed *in vacuo* to afford crude compound 6. Purification of ester 6 was accomplished by radial chromatography (2 mm plate, 3 : 7 diethyl ether - pet. ether, sample was loaded with CHCl₃), producing a clear colourless oil (171 mg, 0.555) in

92% yield. $^1\text{H-NMR}$ (400 MHz, CDCl_3) 7.33 - 7.27 (m, 4H, H-16, H-15, H-13, H-12), 7.20 (t, 1H, $J = 6.7$ Hz, H-14), 4.99 (bd, 1H, $J = 8.8$ Hz, H-2), 4.50 (bd, 1H, $J = 8.8$ Hz, N-H), 3.48 (s, 3H, H-17), 1.41, 1.38 (s, 3H, H-5 and H-4), 1.37 (s, 9H, H-10, H-9, and H-8); Mass spectrum (EI) 307 (0.1, M^+), 234 (2, $[\text{M}-\text{O}-\text{t-Bu}]^+$), 119 (100, $[\text{C}_9\text{H}_{11}]^+$). Optical rotation obtained was $[\alpha]_D^{25} +35.2$ (c 2.98, CHCl_3). Compound 5 was prepared according to the methodology developed by D.A. Evans *et al.* (1990) [*supra*].

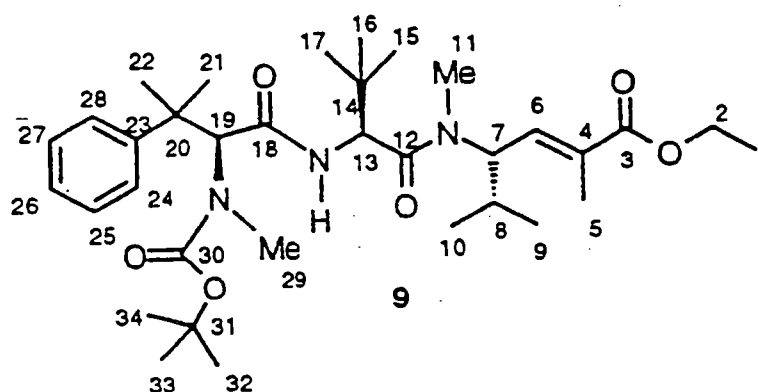
(2S)-N-tert-butoxycarbonyl-N-methyl-3-methyl-3-phenylbutanoic acid (7)



To a vigorously stirred solution of ester 6 (43.4 mg, 0.141 mmol) in 2 mL dry DMF were added sodium hydride (10.2 mg, 4.24 mmol) followed by methyl iodide (0.088 mL, 1.41 mmol) and the resulting grey suspension was stirred overnight (~20 h) at room temperature. The excess sodium hydride was quenched by cautious addition of water and the mixture was acidified by dropwise addition of 1.0 M citric acid. The acidic mixture was extracted three times with ethyl acetate, the combined organic layer extracted three times with brine, dried over magnesium sulfate and concentrated *in vacuo*. The resulting light orange oil was dissolved in 4 mL methanol in a 25 mL flask. To the solution was added 1.0 mL of water, followed by 1.13 mL of 1.0 M lithium hydroxide. The reaction mixture was heated at 60°C overnight (~14 h), producing a white precipitate. To the resultant mixture was added saturated sodium hydrogen carbonate solution and water; the mixture was then extracted with ethyl acetate. The aqueous layer was acidified with 1.0 M citric acid until the pH was ~4. The mixture was extracted three times with ethyl acetate. The combined organic layers were dried with magnesium sulfate and concentrated *in vacuo*. Compound 7 was also found in the first ethyl acetate extraction so it was also added to the crude product. Purification of acid 7 was performed by silica gel column chromatography (1 : 2 diethyl ether - pet. ether with 1% acetic acid) resulting in a 49% yield (21.2 mg, 0.0670 mmol) of a clear colourless oil. $^1\text{H-NMR}$ (400 MHz, CDCl_3) 7.41 (d, 1.3H, $J = 7.6$ Hz, H -17 and H -13), 7.37 (d, 1.3H, $J = 7.6$ Hz, H -17 and H -13), 7.28 (t, 2H, $J = 7.6$ Hz, H-16 and H-14), 7.18 (t, 1H, J

= 7.2 Hz, H-15), 5.17 (bs, 0.66H, H-2), 4.93 (bs, 0.33H, H-2), 2.75 (s, 1.05H, H-6), 2.62 (s, 1.95H, H-6), 1.55 (s, 3H, H-5 or H-4), 1.49 - 1.39 (m, 12H, H-5 or H-4 and H-11, H-10 and H-9); Mass spectrum (EI) 307 (0.1, M^+), 234 (3, $[M-Ot-Bu]^+$), 119 (100, $[C_9H_{11}]^+$), 57 (78, $[C_4H_9]^+$); Exact mass calc d for $C_{17}H_{25}NO_4$: 307.1783. Found (EI): 307.1793.

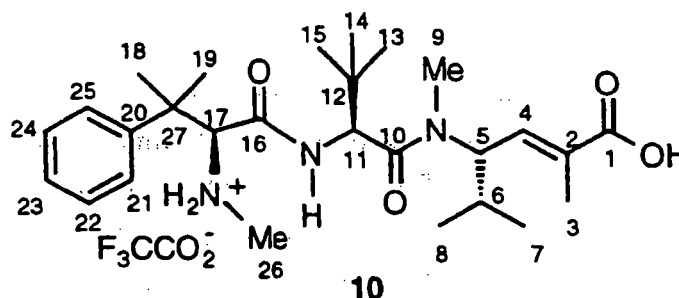
Preparation of Compound 9



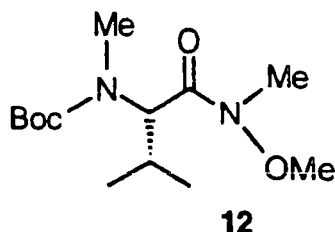
The *N*-Boc-amino ester 8 (71.6 mg, 0.174 mmol) was dissolved in 1 mL CH_2Cl_2 and 1 mL of TFA was added. The reaction mixture was stirred at room temperature for 0.5 h. Removal of the solvent *in vacuo*, followed by repeated rinsing of the remaining material with CH_2Cl_2 (3 x 5 mL) and evaporation of the residual solvent afforded the TFA salt of the amino acid ester 8. In a separate flask, to a solution (or suspension) of the *N*-Boc protected amino acid 7 (51.5 mg, 0.167 mmol) in 0.5 mL CH_2Cl_2 , was added DIEA (0.0875 mL, 0.503 mmol), DMAP (0.031 mg, 0.10 mmol) and PyBroP (0.0781 mg, 0.167 mmol). The solution was stirred for a few minutes and then a solution of the TFA salt of 8 was added in 1 mL of CH_2Cl_2 *via* cannula addition. The reaction mixture was stirred at room temperature for 18 h. To the mixture was added water, CH_2Cl_2 and ten drops of 10% aqueous HCl. The resulting biphasic solution was extracted with CH_2Cl_2 (three times with 20 mL). The organic layer was extracted with saturated aqueous sodium hydrogen carbonate (10 mL), dried with magnesium sulfate and the solvent was removed *in vacuo*. The product was purified by flash chromatography (silica gel, 1 : 1 diethyl ether - pet. ether) affording the protected tripeptide 9 as a clear colourless oil in 27% yield (0.0272 g, 0.0454 mmol). 1H -NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$) 7.84 (bd, 1H, $J = 9.5$ Hz, N-H), 7.4- 7.30 (m, 5H, H-28, H-27, H-25, H-24), 7.21 (bt, 1H, $J = 7.2$ Hz, H-26), 6.63 (bd, 1H, $J = 9.6$ Hz, H-6), 5.08 (t, 1H, $J = 9.6$ Hz, H-7), 4.83 (d, 1H, $J = 9.5$ Hz, H-13), 4.17 (q, 2H, $J = 7.1$ Hz, H-2), 3.02 (s, 3H, H-11), 2.15 (s, 0.66H, H-29), 2.02 (s, 2.37H, H-29), 1.94 - 1.81 (m, 1H, H-8), 1.88 (s, 3H, H-5), 1.39 - 1.38 (m, 9H, H-34, H-33 and H-32), 1.28 (t, 3H, $J = 7.1$ Hz, H-1), 0.98 (s, 9H, H-

17, H-16 and H-15), 0.83, 0.77 (d, 3H, $J = 6.6$ Hz, H-10 and H-9); PyBroP is described in E. Frérot *et al.* (1991) *Tetrahedron* 47:259.

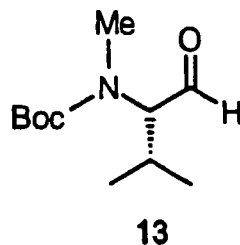
SPA110 - trifluoroacetate salt (10)



To a solution of the ethyl ester 9 (23.0 mg, 0.0382 mmol) in 1.1 mL MeOH was added 0.30 mL water and 0.31 mL of a 1.0 M aqueous solution of lithium hydroxide (0.31 mmol). The reaction mixture was stirred at room temperature overnight (~20 h) whereupon it was acidified by dropwise addition of 1.0 M citric acid and then extracted three times with ethyl acetate. The combined organic extracts were dried with magnesium sulfate and concentrated *in vacuo*. Under an argon atmosphere, the crude oil was dissolved in 1 mL CH₂Cl₂ and the solution was treated with TFA (1 mL) and then was stirred at room temperature for 0.5 h. Removal of the excess solvents *in vacuo*, followed by rinsing of the remaining material three times with CH₂Cl₂ (5 mL) and evaporation of the residual solvent, produced the TFA salt. HPLC purification of the crude product using a Magnum reverse phase C-18 column (H₂O(45) : MeOH(55) with 0.05% TFA) afforded the tripeptide 10 as a white powder. ¹H-NMR (400 MHz, CD₃OD) 7.53 (d, 2H, $J = 7.6$, H-25 and H-21), 7.44 (t, 2H, $J = 7.6$ Hz, H-24 and H-22), 7.34 (t, 1H, $J = 7.6$ Hz, H-23), 6.76 (d, 1H, $J = 9.1$ Hz, H-4), 5.04 (t, 1H, $J = 10.1$ Hz, H-5), 4.91, 4.34 (s, 1H, H-17 and H-11), 3.13 (s, 3H, H-9), 2.49 (H-26), 2.08 - 1.99 (m, 1H, H-6), 1.90 (s, 3H, H-3), 1.46, 1.37 (s, 3H, H-19 and H-18), 1.05 (s, 9H, H-15, H-14 and H-13), 0.89 (d, 3H, $J = 6.1$ Hz, H-8 or H-7), 0.88 (d, 3H, $J = 6.5$ Hz, H-8 or H-7); Mass spectrum (EI) 474 (0.1, [M-CF₃CO₂]⁺), 458 (0.1, [M-16-CF₃CO₂]⁺), 382 (2), 162 (62), 69 (74), 45(100).

*N*α-Boc-*N*α-methyl-*L*-valine *N*-methoxy-*N*-methanamide (12)

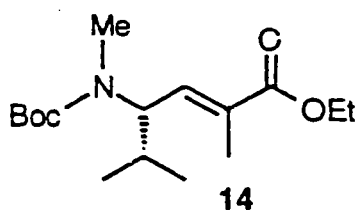
To a cold (0°C) solution of *N*-Boc-*N*-methylvaline (11) (5.0 g, 21.6 mmol), *N*,*O*-dimethylhydroxylamine hydrochloride (2.8 g, 28 mmol), and PyBOP® (11.2 g, 22 mmol) in CH₂Cl₂ (22 mL) was added DIEA (8.4 mL, 75 mmol). After 1 min., the reaction mixture was warmed to room temperature and stirring was continued for 1 h. If the pH value of the mixture was less than 7, the mixture could be treated with a few drops DIEA to allow the reaction to go to completion. The mixture was poured into 200 mL of diethyl ether and the resultant mixture was washed successively with 3 N hydrochloric acid (3 x 30 mL), saturated aqueous sodium hydrogen carbonate solution (3 x 30 mL), and saturated aqueous sodium chloride (3 x 30 mL). The organic layer was dried with magnesium sulfate and the solvent was evaporated, followed by chromatography of the crude product (silica gel, 1 : 3 diethyl ether - pet. ether), afforded 12 (4.46 g, 75% yield) as a colourless oil. ¹H-NMR (200 MHz, CDCl₃): 0.84 (d, *J* = 6.6 Hz, 4H, (CH₃)₂), 0.85 (d, *J* = 6.6 Hz, 2H, (CH₃)₂), 1.41 (s, 6H, Boc-(CH₃)₃), 1.44 (s, 3H, Boc-(CH₃)₃), 2.15 - 2.30 (m, 1H, CH), 2.75 (s, 1H, NCH₃), 2.78 (s, 2H, NCH₃), 3.10 (bs, 3H, NCH₃), 3.64 (s, 1H, OCH₃), 3.68 (s, 2H, OCH₃), 4.66 (d, *J* = 10 Hz, 0.4H, CH), 4.95 (d, *J* = 10 Hz, 0.6H, CH); Exact mass calc'd for C₁₃H₂₇N₂O₄ (M+H)⁺: 275.19708. Found (DCI): 275.19710. Optical rotation obtained was [α]_D²⁵ +128.3 (c 2.9, CHCl₃).

N-Boc-*N*-methyl-*L*-valinal (13)

Lithium aluminum hydride (875 mg, 23 mmol) was added to a solution of *N*α-Boc-*N*α-methyl-*L*-valine *N*-methoxy-*N*-methanamide (12) (2.0 g, 7.7 mmol) in dry THF (8 mL) and the reaction mixture was stirred for 20 min. The mixture was poured into a stirring solution of potassium hydrogen sulfate (3.14 g, 23 mmol) in water (100 mL). Diethyl ether (75 mL) was

added, the layers separated and the aqueous layer extracted with diethyl ether (3 x 50 mL). The organic layers were combined, and washed sequentially with 3 N hydrochloric acid (3 x 30 mL), saturated aqueous sodium hydrogen carbonate (3 x 30 mL), and saturated aqueous sodium chloride (3 x 30 mL). The organic layer was dried with magnesium sulfate and the solvent was evaporated to yield the crude aldehyde 13 (1.52 g, 92% yield). Aldehyde 13 was used without further purification. Note: 13 can be stored under argon for ~ 2 weeks, but when stored in organic solvents at room temperature, undergoes slow decomposition. $^1\text{H-NMR}$ (200 MHz, CDCl_3) 0.73 (d, $J = 6.9$ Hz, 3H, CH_3), 0.91 (d, $J = 6.9$ Hz, 3H, CH_3), 1.27 (s, 9H, $\text{Boc}-(\text{CH}_3)_3$), 2.02 - 2.15 (m, 1H, CH), 2.63 (s, 2H, NCH_3), 2.72 (s, 1H, NCH_3), 3.44 (d, $J = 9.5$ Hz, 0.5H, CH), 3.86 (d, $J = 9$ Hz, 0.5H, CH), 9.45 (s, 1H, CH); Exact mass calc'd for $\text{C}_{11}\text{H}_{22}\text{NO}_3$ ($\text{M}+\text{H}$) $^+$: 216.15997; Found (DCI): 216.15996; Optical rotation obtained was $[\alpha]_D^{25} -104.2$ (c 5.5, CHCl_3).

Ethyl (2*E*,4*S*)-*N*-Boc-*N*-methyl-4-amino-2,5-dimethylhex-2-enoate (14)



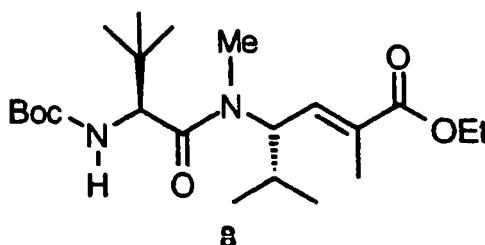
To a solution of aldehyde 13 (1.75 g, 8.7 mmol) in dry CH_2Cl_2 (9.0 mL) under an argon atmosphere at room temperature was added (carbethoxyethylidene)triphenylphosphorane (4.19 g, 11.3 mmol) and stirring was continued for a 4 h. The reaction mixture was diluted with water (100 mL) and extracted with diethyl ether (3 x 100 mL). The combined organic extracts were washed with saturated aqueous sodium chloride (100 mL), dried with magnesium sulfate and concentrated *in vacuo*. The crude oil was purified by flash chromatography (silica gel, 2 : 23 diethyl ether - pet. ether) to afford the required *E*-2-alkenoate 14 as a colourless oil (2.13 g, 82% yield). $^1\text{H-NMR}$ (200 MHz, CDCl_3) 0.74 (d, $J = 6$ Hz, 3H, CH_3), 0.79 (d, $J = 6$ Hz, 3H, CH_3), 1.17 (t, $J = 7$ Hz, 3H, CH_3), 1.34 (s, 9H, $\text{Boc}-(\text{CH}_3)_3$), 1.72 (m, 1H, CH), 1.78 (s, 3H, CH_3), 2.60 (bs, 3H, NCH_3), 4.08 (q, $J = 7$ Hz, 2H, CH_2), 4.15 - 4.20 (m, 0.5H, CH), 4.21 - 4.32 (m, 0.5H, CH), 6.54 (d, $J = 8$ Hz, 1H, CH); Exact mass calc'd for $\text{C}_{16}\text{H}_{30}\text{NO}_4$ ($\text{M}+\text{H}$) $^+$: 300.21750; Found (DCI): 300.21754. Optical rotation obtained was $[\alpha]_D^{25} +61.1$ (c 9.1, CHCl_3).

General procedure 1: Trifluoroacetic acid mediated cleavage of *N*-Boc groups

N-Boc-amino acid ester (1.0 equiv.) was treated with TFA /CH₂Cl₂ (0.1 mmol / 1 mL) at room temperature for 0.5 h. Removal of the solvent *in vacuo*, followed by repeated rinsing of the residual material with CH₂Cl₂ (3 x 5 mL) and evaporation of the remaining traces of solvent afforded the TFA salt of the amino acid ester in quantitative yield. TFA salts were used without further purification.

General procedure 2: Trimethylacetyl chloride mediated peptide coupling

To a cold (-78 C) stirred solution of acid (1.1 equiv.) in dry THF (1 mL /mmol) under an argon atmosphere was added DIEA (1.5 equiv.) and trimethylacetyl chloride (1.2 equiv.). The resulting mixture was warmed to 0°C for 1 h and then re-cooled to -78 C. DIEA (2.2 equiv.) was added *via* cannula to the reaction flask followed by the addition *via* cannula of the TFA salt of the amino acid ester (1.0 equiv., prepared by general procedure 1) in dry THF (0.5 mL/mmol) at -78 C. Stirring was continued for 1 h and water (40 mL) was added. The mixture was allowed to warm to room temperature, and extracted with diethyl ether (3 x 50 mL). The combined organic extracts were washed with saturated aqueous sodium chloride (50 mL), dried over magnesium sulfate, and concentrated *in vacuo*. The crude oil was purified by flash chromatography (silica gel, diethyl ether - pet. ether) to afford the desired dipeptide as a colourless oil.

Dipeptide 8

Following general procedure 2, dipeptide 8 was prepared with the following quantities of reagents and solvents: *N*-Boc-*tert*-leucine (15), 156 mg (0.52 mmol); trimethylacetyl chloride, 64 mL (0.52 mmol); DIEA, 99 mL (0.57 mmol); *N*-Boc-MHVV-OEt (14), 110 mg (0.47 mmol); DIEA, 198 mL (1.14 mmol); THF, 7 mL. Purification of the crude product by flash chromatography (silica gel, 1 : 5 diethyl ether - pet. ether) afforded 121 mg of 8 (62% yield). ¹H-NMR (200 MHz, CDCl₃) 0.76 (d, *J* = 6 Hz, 3H, CH₃), 0.80 (d, *J* = 6 Hz, 3H, CH₃), 0.88 (s,

9H, (CH₃)₃), 1.22 (t, $J = 7$ Hz, 3H, CH₃), 1.33 (s, 9H, Boc-(CH₃)₃), 1.79 - 1.89 (m, 1H, CH), 1.83 (s, 3H, CH₃), 2.91 (s, 3H, NCH₃), 4.12 (q, $J = 7$ Hz, 2H, CH₂), 4.35 (d, $J = 10$ Hz, 1H, CH), 5.03 (t, $J = 10$ Hz, 1H, CH), 5.14 (d, $J = 10$ Hz, 1H, NH), 6.57 (d, $J = 8$ Hz, 1H, CH); Exact mass calc'd for C₂₂H₄₁N₂O₅ (M+H)⁺: 413.30154; Found (DCI): 413.30119. Optical rotation obtained was $[\alpha]_D^{25}$ -76.9 (c 2.43, CHCl₃).

Assay for Cytotoxicity

Cytotoxicity of SPA-110 compared to hemiasterlin as against p53+ and p53- variants of human breast cancer MCF-7 cells and A549 tumor cells was determined according to the methods described in J. Immunol. Methods 65:55-63 (1983). Results shown in Figures 5A and 5B show that SPA-110 is more cytotoxic in some instances than the naturally occurring compound.

10

Assay for Antimitotic Activity

Antimitotic activity is detected by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay using a mitosis-specific antibody, TG-3 (from Albert Einstein College of Yeshiva University, Bronx, N.Y.; and see: PCT application published July 4, 1996 under WO96/20218).

MCF-7 mp53⁻ cells (expressing a dominant-negative p53 mutation as described in S. Fan, et al. (1955) Cancer Research 55:1649-1654) were cultured as monolayers in DMEM supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum, 2 mM L-glutamine, 50 units /ml penicillin, 50 µg/ml streptomycin, 1 mM sodium pyruvate, MEM non-essential amino acids, 1 µg/ml bovine insulin, 1 µg/ml hydrocortisone, 1 ng/ml human epidermal growth factor, and 1 ng/ml β-estradiol at 37°C in humidified 5% CO₂. The cells were seeded at 10,000 cells per well of 96-well polystyrene tissue culture plates (Falcon) in a volume of 200 µl cell culture medium. The cells were allowed to grow for 24 hours and compounds were added at about 1 µg/ml or 10 µg/ml (from 1000-fold stocks in dimethylsulfoxide) and the cells were incubated for 20 hours. Nocodazole (Sigma) served as a positive control. After treatment with the agent to be tested, the cell culture medium was removed completely and the 96-well tissue culture plates were frozen at -70°C for up to 2 hours. The frozen cells were thawed by addition of 100 µl

of ice-cold lysis buffer (0.5 mM phenylmethanesulfonylfluoride, 1 mM ethylene glycol-bis(β -aminoethyl ether) N,N,N,N'-tetraacetic acid, pH 7.4,) and lysed by pipeting up-and-down 10 times. The cell lysates were transferred to 96-well PolySorp ELISA plates (Nunc) and dried completely by blowing warm air at about 37°C with a hair drier positioned about 3 feet above the plates. Protein binding sites were blocked by adding 200 μ l per well of 10 mM Tris HCl pH 7.4, 150 mM NaCl, 0.1 mM PMSF, 3% (w/v) dried non-fat milk (Carnation) for 1 hour at room temperature. This was removed and replaced with 100 μ l of the same solution containing 0.1-0.15 μ g/ml TG-3 mitosis-specific monoclonal antibody and horseradish peroxidase-labelled goat anti-mouse IgM (1021-05, Southern Biotechnology Associates) at a dilution of 1/500. After overnight incubation at 4°C, the antibody solution was removed and the wells were rinsed 3 times with 200 μ l rinse buffer (10 mM Tris HCl pH 7.4, 0.02% Tween 20). 100 μ l of 120 mM Na_2HPO_4 , 100 mM citric acid, pH 4.0 containing 0.5 mg/ml 2,2'-azino-bis(3-ethylbenzthiazoline-6-sulfonic acid) and 0.01% hydrogen peroxide was added for 1 hour at room temperature and the plates were read at 405 nm using a BioTek plate reader.

Results comparing antimitotic activity of hemiasterlin to SPA-110 are shown in Figure 6. SPA-110 exhibited considerably greater antimitotic activity than the naturally occurring compound.

In Vivo Activity of SPA-110

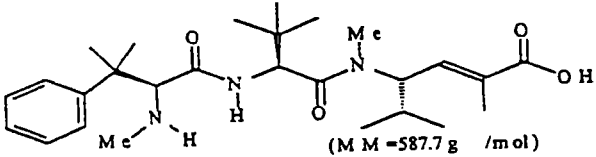
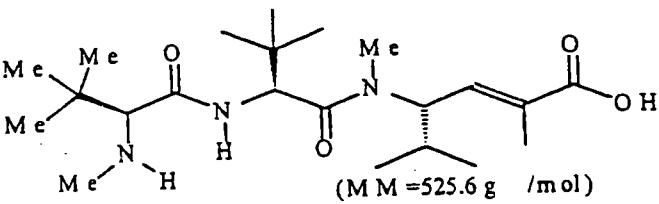
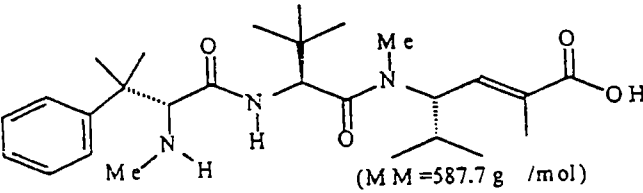
The compound SPA-110 was evaluated in vivo using standard pharmacological test procedures which measure its ability to inhibit the growth of human tumor xenografts. The human colon carcinoma LOVO (American Type Culture Collection, Rockville, Maryland #CCL-229) was grown in tissue culture in RPMI supplemented with 10% FBS. Athymic

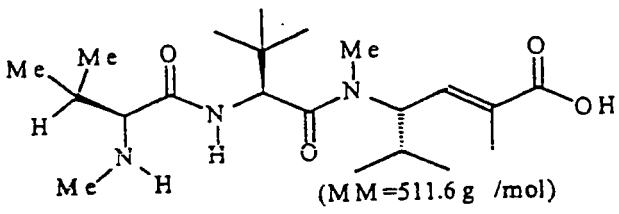
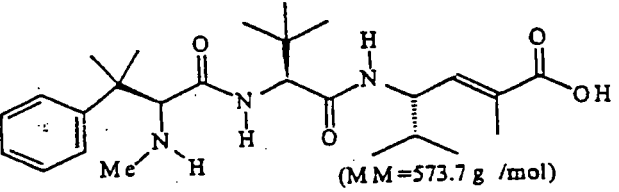
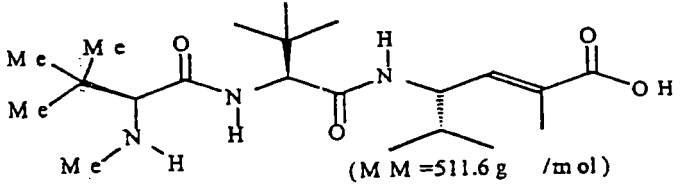
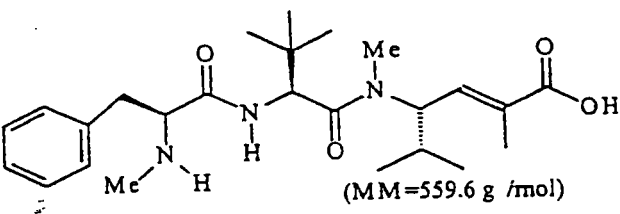
nu/nu female mice (Charles River, Wilmington, MA) were injected sub-cutaneously in the flank area with 7.0×10^6 LOVO cells. When tumors attained a mass of between 80 and 120 mg, the mice were randomized into treatment groups (day zero). Animals were treated intravenously once a day on days 1, 5, and 9 post staging (day zero) with 1 mg/kg/dose of SPA-110 prepared in 2.5% ethanol in saline or with saline as the vehicle control. Some animals were treated intraperitoneally once a day on days 1, 5 and 9 post staging with 1 mg/kg/dose Vincristine as a positive control. Tumor mass was determined every 7 days [$(\text{length} \times \text{width}^2)/2$] for 28 days post staging. RTG or relative tumor growth (Mean tumor mass on days 7, 14, 21 and 28 divided by the mean tumor mass on day zero) was determined for each treatment group. % T/C was calculated as $\text{RTC (treated group)} / \text{RTC (vehicle control group)} \times 100$. Statistical analysis (Student-t-test) of log relative tumor growth was used to compare treated verses control group in each experiment. A p-value ($p \leq 0.05$), which indicates a statistically significant reduction in relative tumor growth, was obtained in each case. 5 of 5 animals treated at day 28 with SPA-110 survived. 9 of 10 animals treated at day 28 with vincristine survived. The results are shown in the following table.

Treatment	% T/C day 7	% T/C day 14	% T/C day 21	% T/C day 28
Vincristine	34	37	44	47
SPA-110 1 mg/kg	16	18	30	47

Relative Activity of Compounds of this Invention

Various analogs of SPA-110 have been synthesized and characterized for their cytotoxic and anti-mitotic activities. The high degree of correlation between cytotoxicity and anti-mitotic capacity indicates that the cytotoxicity of the compounds of this invention is due to the compounds' anti-mitotic activity. The following structures are analogs falling within the scope of this invention depicted in approximately descending order of cytotoxic/anti-mitotic activity.

Compound Name	Compound structure (TFA salt) Me = CH ₃
SPA 110	 (M M = 587.7 g /mol)
SPA115	 (M M = 525.6 g /mol)
SPA123	 (M M = 587.7 g /mol)

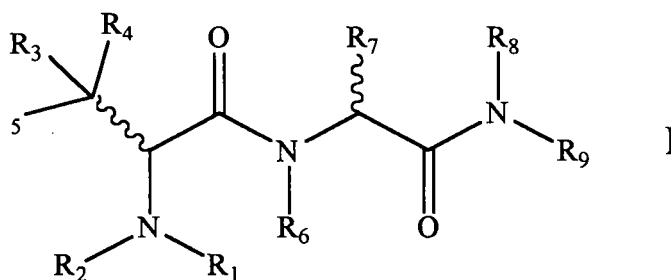
5	SPA116	 (MM=511.6 g/mol)
10	SPA121	 (MM=573.7 g/mol)
15	SPA122	 (MM=511.6 g/mol)
20	SPA114	 (MM=559.6 g/mol)

25

30 As will be apparent to those skilled in the art in the
 light of the foregoing disclosure, many alterations and
 modifications are possible in the practice of this
 invention without departing from the spirit or scope
 thereof. Accordingly, the scope of the invention is to be
 construed in accordance with the substance defined by the
 35 claims herein, which substance includes obvious chemical
 equivalents of the compounds and methods set out in the
 claims.

WE CLAIM:

1. Use of a compound or pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, having the formula



for preparation of an antimitotic agent, wherein:

R_1 and R_2 are independently selected from the group consisting of: H, R, and ArR-,
or R_1 and R_2 are joined to form Ring;

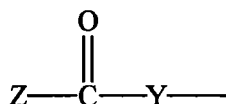
R_3 and R_4 are independently selected from the group consisting of: H, R, and ArR-,
or R_3 and R_4 are joined to form Ring;

R_5 is selected from the group consisting of: H, R, ArR-, and Ar;

R_6 is selected from the group consisting of: H, R, and ArR-;

R_7 and R_8 are independently selected from the group consisting of: H, R, and ArR-;
and

R_9 is:



in which:

R is defined as a saturated or unsaturated moiety having a linear, branched, or non-aromatic cyclic skeleton containing one to ten carbon atoms, zero to four nitrogen atoms, zero to four oxygen atoms, and zero to four sulfur atoms, and the carbon atoms are optionally substituted with: =O, =S, -OH, -OR₁₀, -O₂CR₁₀, -SH, -SR₁₀, -SOCR₁₀, -NH₂, -NHR₁₀, -N(R₁₀)₂, -NHCOR₁₀, -NR₁₀COR₁₀, -I, Br, -Cl, -F, -CN, -CO₂H, -CO₂R₁₀, -CHO, -COR₁₀, -CONH₂, -CONHR₁₀, -CON(R₁₀)₂, -COSH, -COSR₁₀, -NO₂, -SO₃H, -SOR₁₀,

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-SO₂R₁₀, wherein R₁₀ is a linear, branched or cyclic, one to ten carbon saturated or unsaturated alkyl group;

Ring formed by joining R₁ and R₂ or by joining R₃ and R₄ is a three to seven member non-aromatic cyclic skeleton within the definition of R,

X is defined as a moiety selected from the group consisting of: -OH, -OR, =O, =S, -O₂CR, -SH, -SR, -SOCR, -NH₂, -NHR, -N(R)₂, -NHCOR, -NRCOR, -I, -Br, -Cl, -F, -CN, -CO₂H, -CO₂R, -CHO, -COR, -CONH₂, -CONHR, -CON(R)₂, -COSH, -COSR, -NO₂, -SO₃H, -SOR, and -SO₂R;

Ar is defined as an aromatic ring selected from the group consisting of: phenyl, naphthyl, anthracyl, phenanthryl, furyl, pyrrolyl, thiophenyl, benzofuryl, benzothiophenyl, quinolinyl, isoquinolinyl, imidazolyl, thiazolyl, oxazolyl, and pyridinyl, optionally substituted with R or X;

Y is defined as a moiety selected from the group consisting of: a linear, saturated or unsaturated, one to six carbon alkyl group, optionally substituted with R, ArR-, or X; and,

Z is defined as a moiety selected from the group consisting of: -OH, -OR, -SH, -SR, -NH₂, -NHR, -N(R)₂, -NHCH(R₁₁)COOH; and -NRCH(R₁₁)COOH, wherein R₁₁ is a moiety having the formula: R, or -(CH₂)_nNR₁₂R₁₃, wherein n=1-4 and R₁₂ and R₁₃ are independently selected from the group consisting of: H; R; and -C(NH) (NH₂).

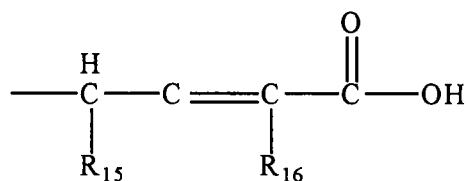
2. The use of claim 1, wherein Ar is phenyl, naphthyl, anthracyl, or pyrrolyl.
3. The use of claim 1 or 2, where R₅ is naphthyl, anthracyl, or pyrrolyl.
4. The use of claim 1 or 2, wherein R₅ is H.
5. The use of claim 1 or 2, wherein R₅ is methyl.
6. The use of claim 1 or 2, wherein R₅ is phenyl.

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7. The use of any one of claims 1-6, wherein one of R_3 and R_4 is H and the other of R_3 and R_4 is $ArR-$.
8. The use of any one of claims 1-6, wherein R_3 and R_4 are each R.
9. The use of claim 8, wherein R_3 and R_4 are independently selected from the group consisting of: methyl, ethyl, n-propyl and n-butyl.
10. The use of claim 8, wherein R_3 and R_4 are each $-CH_3$.
11. The use of any one of claims 1-6, wherein R_3 and R_4 are joined and form a moiety selected from the group consisting of: β -cyclopropyl, β -cyclobutyl, β -cyclopentyl and β -cyclohexyl.
12. The use of any one of claims 1-11, wherein R_1 and R_2 are independently selected from the group consisting of: H, methyl, ethyl, propyl, n-butyl, and, acetyl.
13. The use of any one of claims 1-11, wherein R_1 and R_2 are joined and form a moiety selected from the group consisting of cyclopropyl, cyclobutyl, cyclopentyl, and cyclohexyl.
14. The use of any one of claims 1-11, wherein R_1 and R_2 are independently: H, CH_3 or acetyl.
15. The use of any one of claims 1-11, wherein R_1 and R_2 are independently: H or CH_3 .
16. The use of claim 15, wherein R_1 is H, and R_2 is $-CH_3$.
17. The use of any one of claims 1-16, wherein R_6 is H or CH_3 .
18. The use of any one of claims 1-17, wherein R_8 is H or CH_3 .

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19. The use of any one of claims 1-16, wherein R_6 is H and R_8 is CH_3 .
20. The use of any one of claims 1-19, wherein R_7 is a three to six carbon, branched alkyl group.
21. The use of any one of claims 1-19, wherein R_7 is $-\text{C}(\text{CH}_3)_3$.
22. The use of any one of claims 1-16, wherein R_6 is H, R_7 is: $-\text{C}(\text{CH}_3)_3$, and R_8 is $-\text{CH}_3$.
23. The use of any one of claims 1-22, wherein Z is: $-\text{NHCH}(\text{R}_{11})\text{COOH}$ or $-\text{NCH}_3\text{CH}(\text{R}_{11})\text{COOH}$, wherein R_{11} is R; or, $-(\text{CH}_2)_n\text{NHC}(\text{NH})(\text{NH}_2)$.
24. The use of any one of claims 1-22, wherein Z is $-\text{OR}_{14}$ in which R_{14} is a linear or branched one to six carbon alkyl group.
25. The use of any one of claims 1-22, wherein Z is OH.
26. The use of any one of claims 1-22, wherein Z is $-\text{OCH}_3$.
27. The use of any one of claims 1-22, wherein R_9 has the formula:

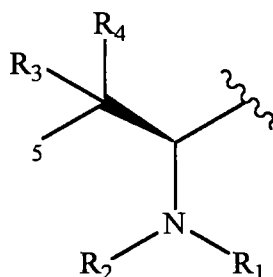


wherein R_{15} is selected from the group consisting of: methyl, ethyl, n-propyl, isopropyl, tert-butyl, iso-butyl, and sec-butyl; and R_{16} is selected from the group consisting of: H, methyl, ethyl, propyl, iso-propyl, n-butyl, iso-butyl and sec-butyl.

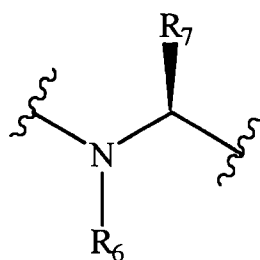
28. The use of claim 27, wherein R_{15} is isopropyl and R_{16} is methyl.

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29. The use of any one of claims 1-28, wherein the compound has the configuration:

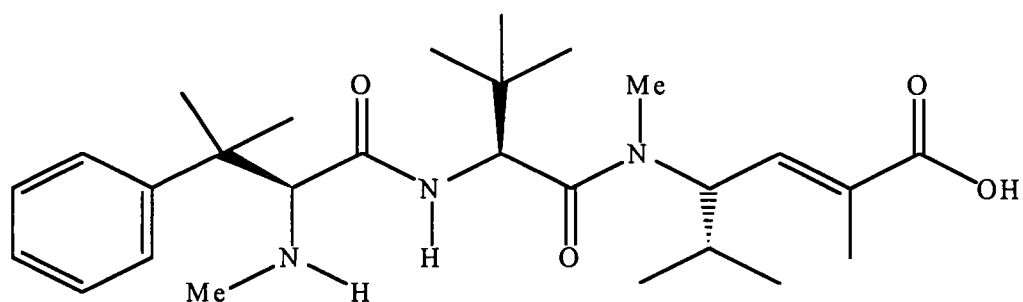


30. The use of any one of claims 1-29, wherein the compound has the configuration:



31. The use of any one of claims 1-30, wherein Y comprises a chiral centre having an *s*-configuration.

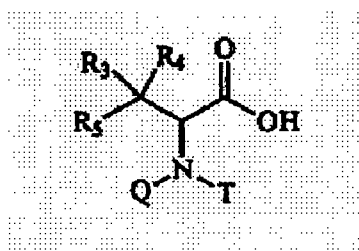
32. The use of claim 1, wherein the compound has the structure:



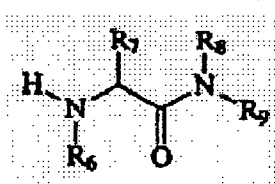
33. The use of any one of claims 1-32, wherein the antimitotic agent is a medicament for the treatment of cancer.

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34. A method of preparing a compound as described in claim 1 comprising the step of:
coupling an amino acid having the formula:

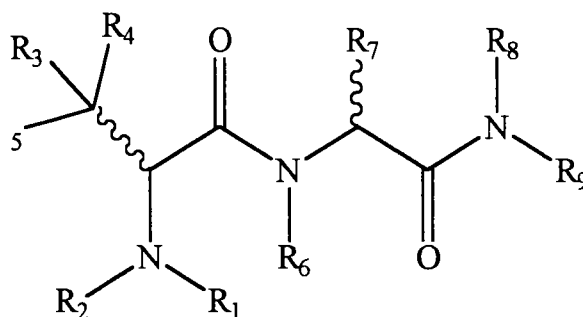


in which $R_3 - R_5$ are as defined in claim 1 and Q and T are selected from the group consisting of: R_1 and R_2 as defined in claim 1, and a protecting group;
with a dipeptide having the formula:



in which $R_6 - R_9$ are as defined in claim 1;
and, where Q or T is a protecting group, the additional step of replacing the protecting group with R_1 or R_2 to form compound I.

35. A compound or pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, having the formula:



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wherein:

R_1 and R_2 are independently selected from the group consisting of: H, R, and ArR-, or R_1 and R_2 are joined to form Ring;

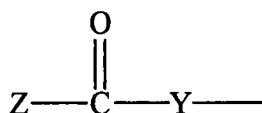
R_3 and R_4 are independently selected from the group consisting of: H, R, and ArR-, or R_3 and R_4 are joined to form Ring;

R_5 is selected from the group consisting of: H, R, ArR-, and Ar;

R_6 is selected from the group consisting of: H, R, and ArR-;

R_7 and R_8 are independently selected from the group consisting of: H, R, and ArR-;
and

R_9 is:



in which:

R is defined as a saturated or unsaturated moiety having a linear, branched, or non-aromatic cyclic skeleton containing one to ten carbon atoms, zero to four nitrogen atoms, zero to four oxygen atoms, and zero to four sulfur atoms, and the carbon atoms are optionally substituted with: =O, =S, -OH, -OR₁₀, -O₂CR₁₀, -SH, -SR₁₀, -SOCR₁₀, -NH₂, -NHR₁₀, -N(R₁₀)₂, -NHCOR₁₀, -NR₁₀COR₁₀, -I, Br, -Cl, -F, -CN, -CO₂H, -CO₂R₁₀, -CHO, -COR₁₀, -CONH₂, -CONHR₁₀, -CON(R₁₀)₂, -COSH, -COSR₁₀, -NO₂, -SO₃H, -SOR₁₀, -SO₂R₁₀, wherein R₁₀ is a linear, branched or cyclic, one to ten carbon saturated or unsaturated alkyl group;

Ring formed by joining R_1 and R_2 or by joining R_3 and R_4 is a three to seven member non-aromatic cyclic skeleton within the definition of R,

X is defined as a moiety selected from the group consisting of: -OH, -OR, =O, =S, -O₂CR, -SH, -SR, -SOCR, -NH₂, -NHR, -N(R)₂, -NHCOR, -NRCOR, -I, -Br, -Cl, -F, -CN, -CO₂H, -CO₂R, -CHO, -COR, -CONH₂, -CONHR, -CON(R)₂, -COSH,

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-COSR, -NO₂, -SO₃H, -SOR, and -SO₂R;

Ar is defined as an aromatic ring selected from the group consisting of: phenyl, naphthyl, anthracyl, phenanthryl, furyl, pyrrolyl, thiophenyl, benzofuryl, benzothiophenyl, quinoliny, isoquinolyl, imidazolyl, thiazolyl, oxazolyl, and pyridinyl, optionally substituted with R or X;

Y is defined as a moiety selected from the group consisting of: a linear, saturated or unsaturated, one to six carbon alkyl group, optionally substituted with R, ArR-, or X; and,

Z is defined as a moiety selected from the group consisting of: -OH, -OR, -SH, -SR, -NH₂, -NHR, -N(R)₂, -NHCH(R₁₁)COOH; and -NRCH(R₁₁)COOH, wherein R₁₁ is a moiety having the formula: R, or -(CH₂)_nNR₁₂R₁₃, wherein n=1-4 and R₁₂ and R₁₃ are independently selected from the group consisting of: H; R; and -C(NH)(NH₂);

and wherein:

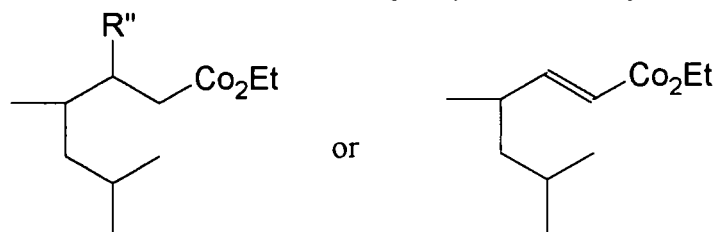
if R₈ is H and Y is an optionally substituted one carbon alkyl group, R₁ and R₂ are not joined to form imidazolidine,

if R₈ is H, Y may only be substituted with R' or Ar'R', in which:

R' is a saturated linear, branched, or cyclic skeleton containing one to ten carbon atoms, and

Ar' is an aromatic ring selected from the group consisting of phenyl, naphthyl, anthracyl and phenanthryl, optionally substituted with R', and

if R₃, R₄, R₆ and R₈ are H, R₅ is phenyl, R₇ is methyl and R₉ is



wherein R'' is methyl or t-butyl, then neither R₁ nor R₂ may be butyloxycarbonyl.

36. The compound of claim 35, wherein Ar is phenyl, naphthyl, anthracyl, or pyrrolyl.

37. The compound of claim 35 or 36, where R₅ is naphthyl, anthracyl, or pyrrolyl.

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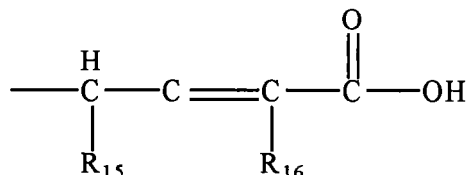
38. The compound of claim 35 or 36, wherein R_5 is H.
39. The compound of claim 35 or 36, wherein R_5 is methyl.
40. The compound of claim 35 or 36, wherein R_5 is phenyl.
41. The compound of any one of claims 35-40, wherein one of R_3 and R_4 is H and the other of R_3 and R_4 is $ArR-$.
42. The compound of any one of claims 35-40, wherein R_3 and R_4 are each R.
43. The compound of claim 42, wherein R_3 and R_4 are independently selected from the group consisting of: methyl, ethyl, n-propyl and n-butyl.
44. The compound of claim 42, wherein R_3 and R_4 are each $-CH_3$.
45. The compound of any one of claims 35-40, wherein R_3 and R_4 are joined and form a moiety selected from the group consisting of: β -cyclopropyl, β -cyclobutyl, β -cyclopentyl and β -cyclohexyl.
46. The compound of any one of claims 35-45, wherein R_1 and R_2 are independently selected from the group consisting of: H, methyl, ethyl, propyl, n-butyl and acetyl.
47. The compound of any one of claims 35-45, wherein R_1 and R_2 are joined and form a moiety selected from the group consisting of cyclopropyl, cyclobutyl, cyclopentyl and cyclohexyl.
48. The compound of any one of claims 35-45, wherein R_1 and R_2 are independently: H, CH_3 or acetyl.

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49. The compound of any one of claims 35-45, wherein R_1 and R_2 are independently: H or CH_3 .
50. The compound of claim 49, wherein R_1 is H, and R_2 is $-\text{CH}_3$.
51. The compound of any one of claims 35-50, wherein R_6 is H or CH_3 .
52. The compound of any one of claims 35-51, wherein R_8 is H or CH_3 .
53. The compound of any one of claims 35-50, wherein R_6 is H and R_8 is CH_3 .
54. The compound of any one of claims 35-53, wherein R_7 is a three to six carbon, branched alkyl group.
55. The compound of any one of claims 35-53, wherein R_7 is $-\text{C}(\text{CH}_3)_3$.
56. The compound of any one of claims 35-50, wherein R_6 is H, R_7 is: $-\text{C}(\text{CH}_3)_3$, and R_8 is $-\text{CH}_3$.
57. The compound of any one of claims 35-56, wherein Z is: $-\text{NHCH}(\text{R}_{11})\text{COOH}$ or $-\text{NCH}_3\text{CH}(\text{R}_{11})\text{COOH}$, wherein R_{11} is R; or, $-(\text{CH}_2)_n\text{NHC}(\text{NH})(\text{NH}_2)$.
58. The compound of any one of claims 35-56, wherein Z is $-\text{OR}_{14}$ in which R_{14} is a linear or branched one to six carbon alkyl group.
59. The compound of any one of claims 35-56, wherein Z is OH.
60. The compound of any one of claims 35-56, wherein Z is $-\text{OCH}_3$.

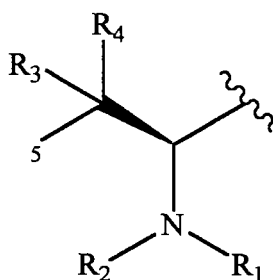
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61. The compound of any one of claims 35-56, wherein R_9 has the formula:

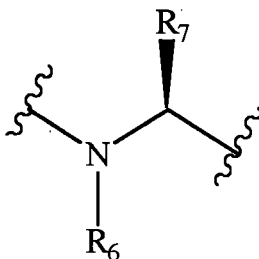


wherein R_{15} is selected from the group consisting of: methyl, ethyl, n-propyl, isopropyl, tert-butyl, iso-butyl, and sec-butyl; and R_{16} is selected from the group consisting of: H, methyl, ethyl, propyl, iso-propyl, n-butyl, iso-butyl and sec-butyl.

62. The compound of claim 61, wherein R_{15} is isopropyl and R_{16} is methyl.
63. The compound of any one of claims 35-62, having the configuration:



64. The compound of any one of claims 35-63, having the configuration:



65. The compound of any one of claims 35-64, wherein Y comprises a chiral centre having an *s*-configuration.

66. The compound of claim 35, wherein the compound has the structure:

