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E-mail :
editor.ijpast@gmail.com
editor@ijpast.in

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Drug target selection and bioinformatics for the prevention of malaria

S.Kiran [1],Dr.Smithamadhuri [2],G.Suresh [3],Kunusoth Nagaraju [4,]

A key element of malaria control programs is the use of antimalarial medications. These medications fall into the following categories: antibiotics, atovaquone/proguanil, antifolates, quinolines, and artemisinins. Drug resistance is progressively compromising their efficacy. Therefore, lowering the rising illness burden and financial loss from malaria depends on the creation of novel antimalarials and the enhancement of those that already exist. The most virulent human malaria parasite, Plasmodium falciparum, and a rodent parasite, P. yoelii yoelii, have released their genome sequences. This has created new avenues for intensive research aimed at identifying critical parasite determinants encoded in the genomes that may be targets for drugs or candidates for drug discovery programs. The capacity to assess the effectiveness of medications in reliable model systems before conducting clinical trials may become possible with the release of genome sequences of additional human and rodent malaria parasites as well as those of primates in the future. Integration of diverse data from high-throughput technologies, including genome and cDNA sequencing, microarrays, proteomics, structural genomics, and metabolic networks, will be necessary to address the difficulty of finding appropriate therapeutic targets. For this integration to work, bioinformatics techniques must be used to mine databases in order to find patterns that distinguish parasite determinants as promising targets for drug research. Yuthavong1 lists the following qualities of a good malaria drug target: (i) a crucial aspect of the parasite life cycle that must differ significantly from any similar process in the host; (ii) the absence of alternative pathways that avoid the target; (iii) the parasite's preferred accessibility or lead compound accumulation within it; (iv) low potential for drug resistance development; (v) involvement in a rate-limiting biochemical process; and (vi) the ability to easily test the effects of inhibitors on the target (to validate the target). (vii) the availability of a simple test method for high-throughput screening; (viii) the presence of known specific inhibitors and varying selectivity for inhibition from the host enzyme/receptor.

Thorough examination of the roles and interactions of candidates within the framework of a host-parasite relationship is essential prior to including them in the whole discovery process. Several bioinformatics techniques that use biological data include gene expression analysis, acquisition of foreign genetic material search, and positive selection gene scanning. Understanding the regulation of malaria parasite genes is essential for taking advantage of them as targets. This includes understanding the variations in expression levels, timing, and tissue, as well as how they vary from host genes. Compared to species like yeast or its apicomplexan cousin Toxoplasma gondii, less is known about the processes of transcription and translation in malaria parasites. For instance, further research is required to fully understand the function of alternative splicing. Multiple protein isoforms may be a way for P. falciparum to redirect the host immune response away from the predominant functional isoform, according to early research on alternative transcripts in the species. Inhibitors tailored to the main isoform may be designed using temporal and geographical data on protein diversity.

Assistant professor [1,2,3,4],
Department of Pharmacy,
Samskruti College of Pharmacy,
Kondapur (V), Ghatkesar (M) Medchal Dist, Telangana, India.

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The apicoplast, an essential organelle found in malaria parasites, is believed to have secondary end symbiotic origins in bacteria and algae. Approximately 500 nuclear-encoded genes that are exclusive to the apicoplast have been found by genome analysis. Bioinformatics can now be used to thoroughly investigate the horizontal transfer of genetic material from this organelle to the nuclear genome, revealing biological processes that are specific to the parasite and occur in the apicoplast and/or cytoplasm of the parasite. Antibiotics and herbicides may be directed at these processes.

High-throughput positive selection scanning of inter- and interspecies orthologous DNA sequences using bioinformatics methods may produce significant changes that provide malaria parasites a selective advantage. Selective inhibitor design may be enhanced by combining information from protein structure, such as substrate binding and cleavage sites, with sequence alignment data, such as mutation kind, position, and impact. The host specificity of blood-feeding parasites has been explained by this kind of integrative perspective. Reiterating the need of building bioinformatics capabilities in nations where illness is widespread is crucial2. An enhanced comprehension of parasite biology and a proficient use of bioinformatics techniques can expedite the management of malaria.

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