



# Academic Drug Discovery and Chemical Biology: A Tale of Two Targets

*Stephen V. Frye, Ph.D.  
Professor & Director  
Center for Integrative  
Chemical Biology  
& Drug Discovery*

*University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill*



**SGC**

[www.pharmacy.unc.edu/cicbdd](http://www.pharmacy.unc.edu/cicbdd)

# Outline

- **Why Academic Drug Discovery?**
- **Mer Kinase Discovery Project**
- **Chemical Probes for Methyl-Lysine Readers**

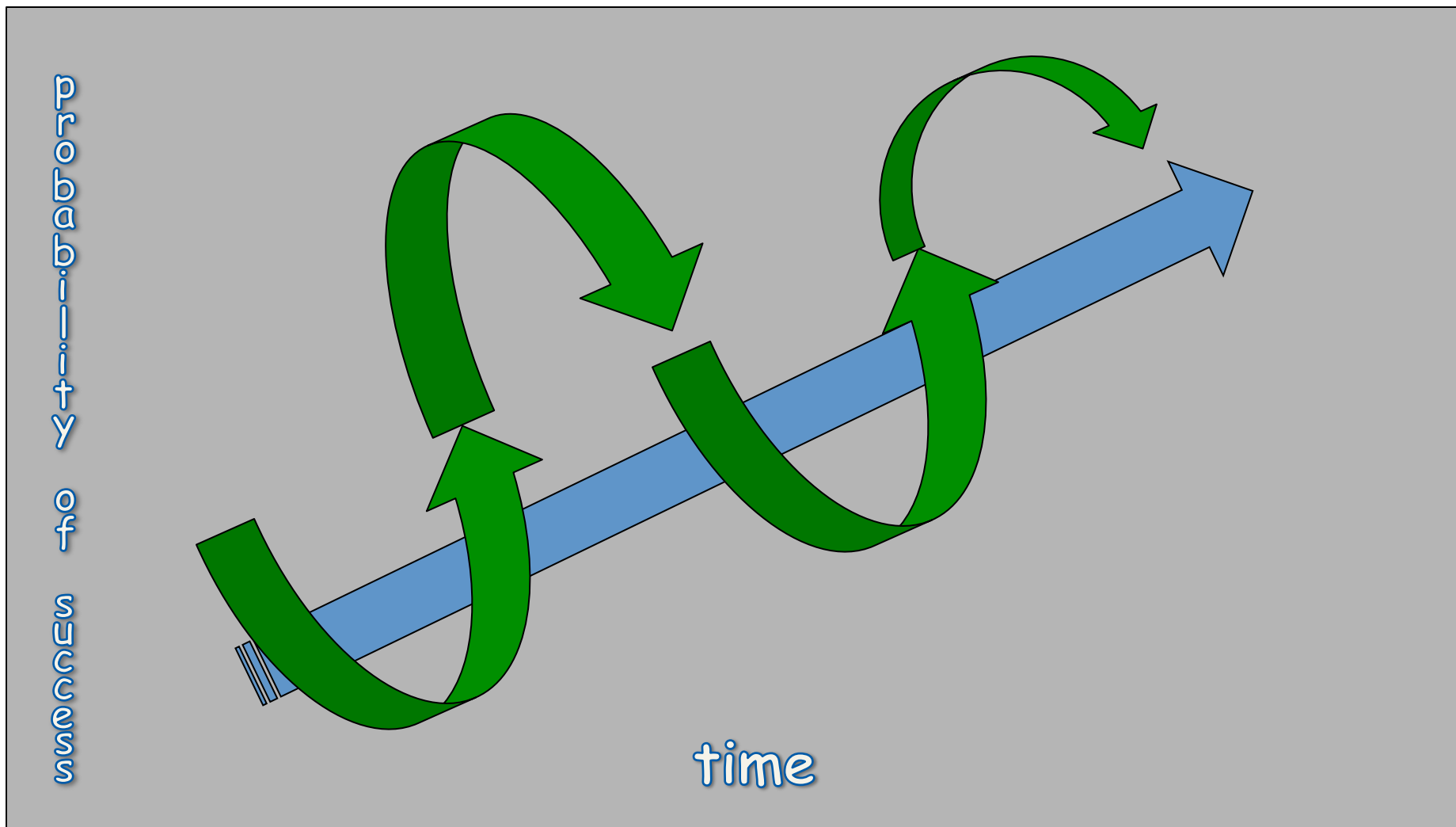


# Conflict of Interest Statement

- A company (Meryx Inc.) to progress the mer kinase inhibitor discovery work has been formed to advance a candidate toward the clinic.
- Shelley Earp, Doug Graham and I are founders of this company.

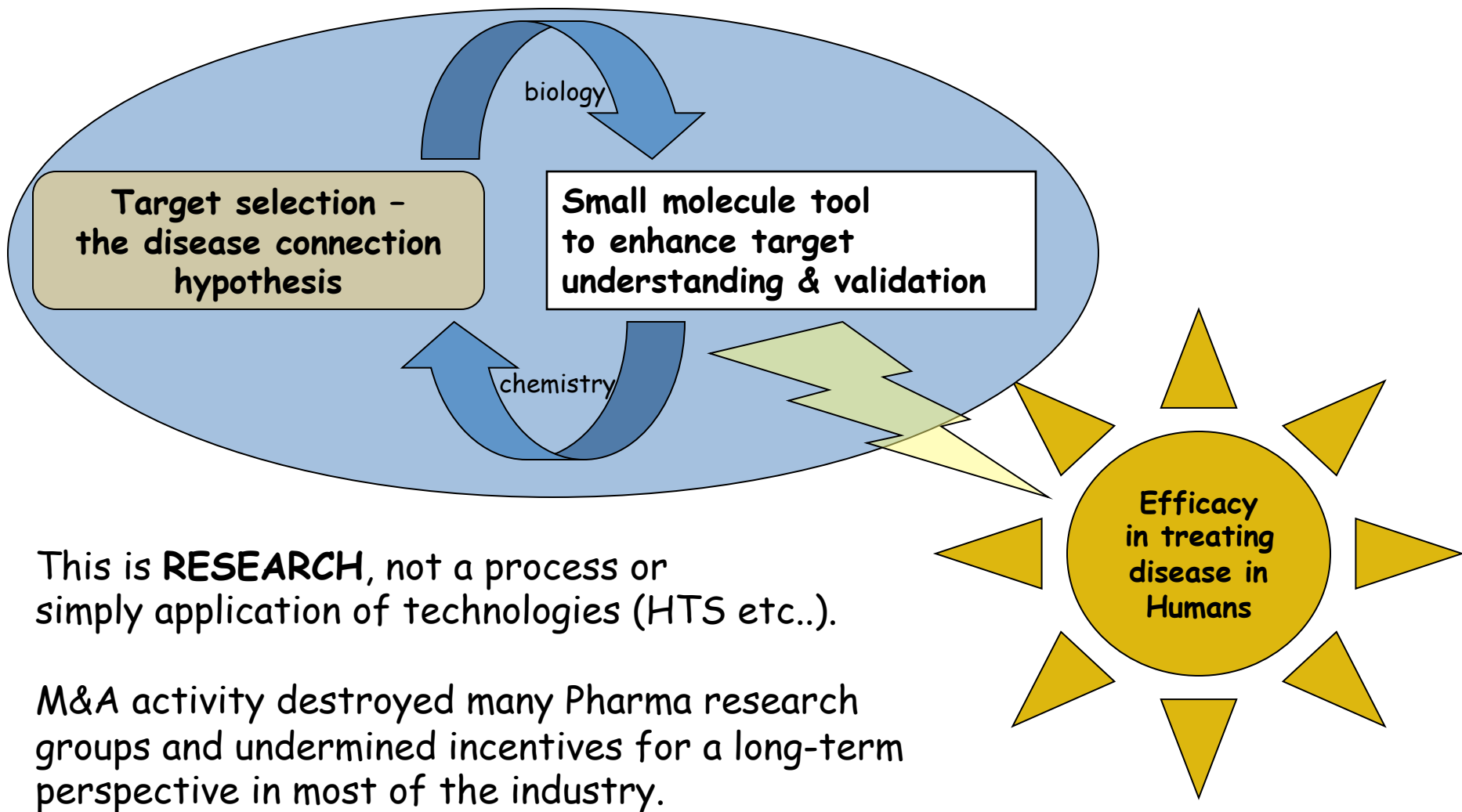


# Drug Discovery – what can be done better in academia?





# Drug Discovery – what can be done better in academia?



This is **RESEARCH**, not a process or simply application of technologies (HTS etc..).

M&A activity destroyed many Pharma research groups and undermined incentives for a long-term perspective in most of the industry.

# DISCOVERY of Mer TK Inhibitors

>1100 Compounds, >4 Years of Work



Shelley Earp



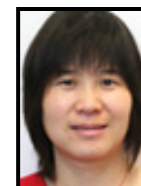
Doug Graham



Bill Janzen



Dmitri Kireev



Xiaodong Wang



## A great collaboration

Chemistry & In vitro assays: CICBDD,  
Biology: Earp and Graham labs  
Funding: NCI Next Program



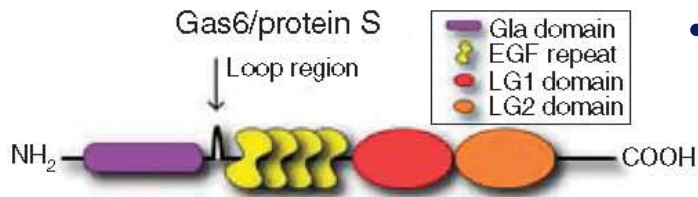
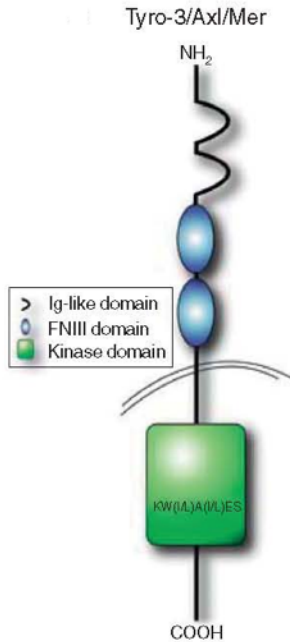
University of Colorado  
Anschutz Medical Campus



UNC  
LINEBERGER

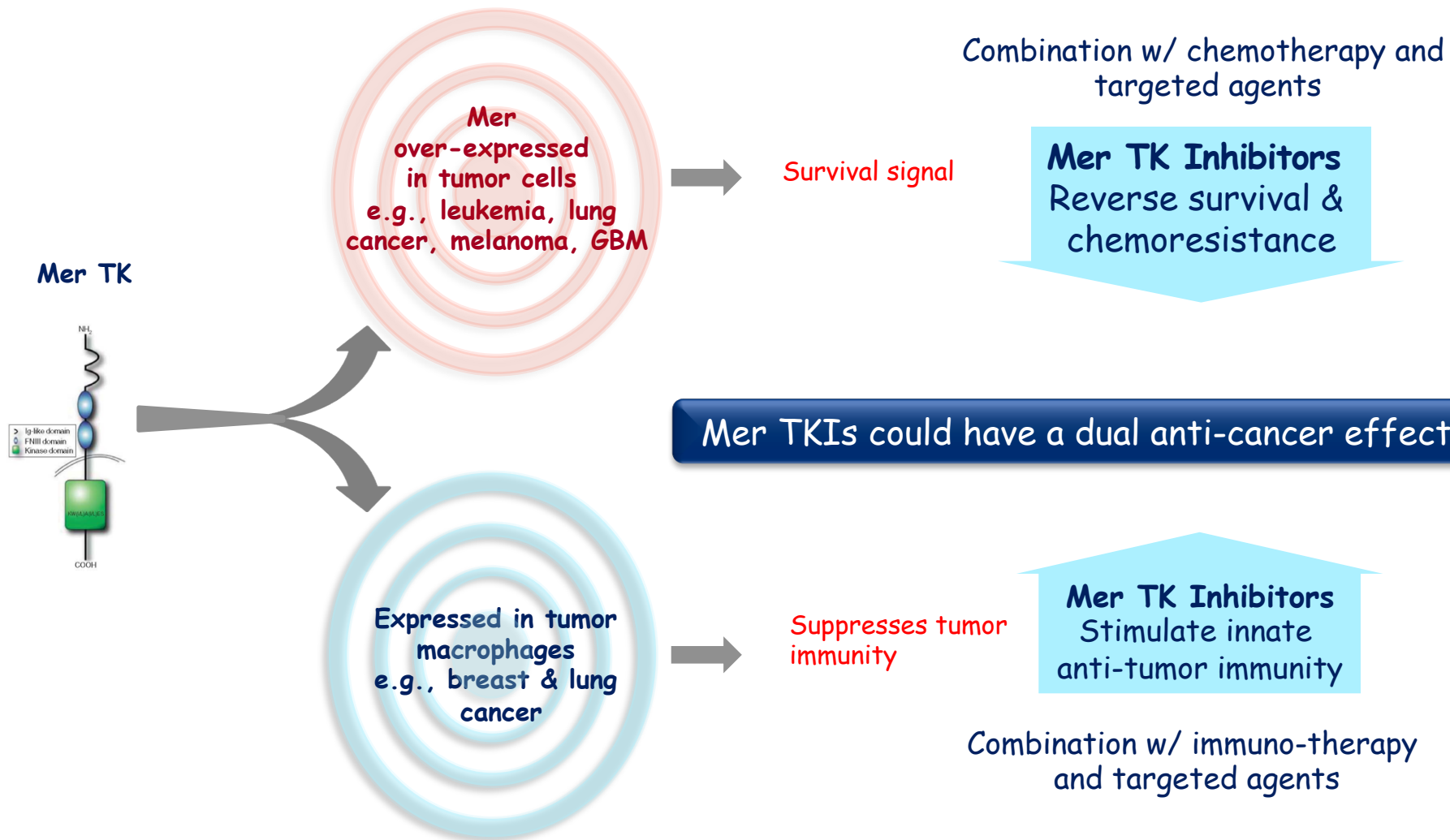
# Mer Receptor Tyrosine Kinase

Member of TAM family of RTKs



- Normal expression in:
  - Macrophages – NK, dendritic cells
  - Epithelial tissues
  - Reproductive tissues
- Physiologic function:
  - Phosphatidyl serine responsive
  - Protein ligands bind apoptotic cells
  - Binding triggers ingestion and suppresses inflammatory cytokines
- Aberrantly expressed in cancer:
  - Acute Leukemia – ALL & AML
  - Solid tumors – melanoma, NSCLC, GBM, etc.
- Oncogenic function:
  - Survival signaling – anti-apoptosis
  - Chemoresistance
  - Motility and invasion
  - Immune suppression in the tumor microenvironment

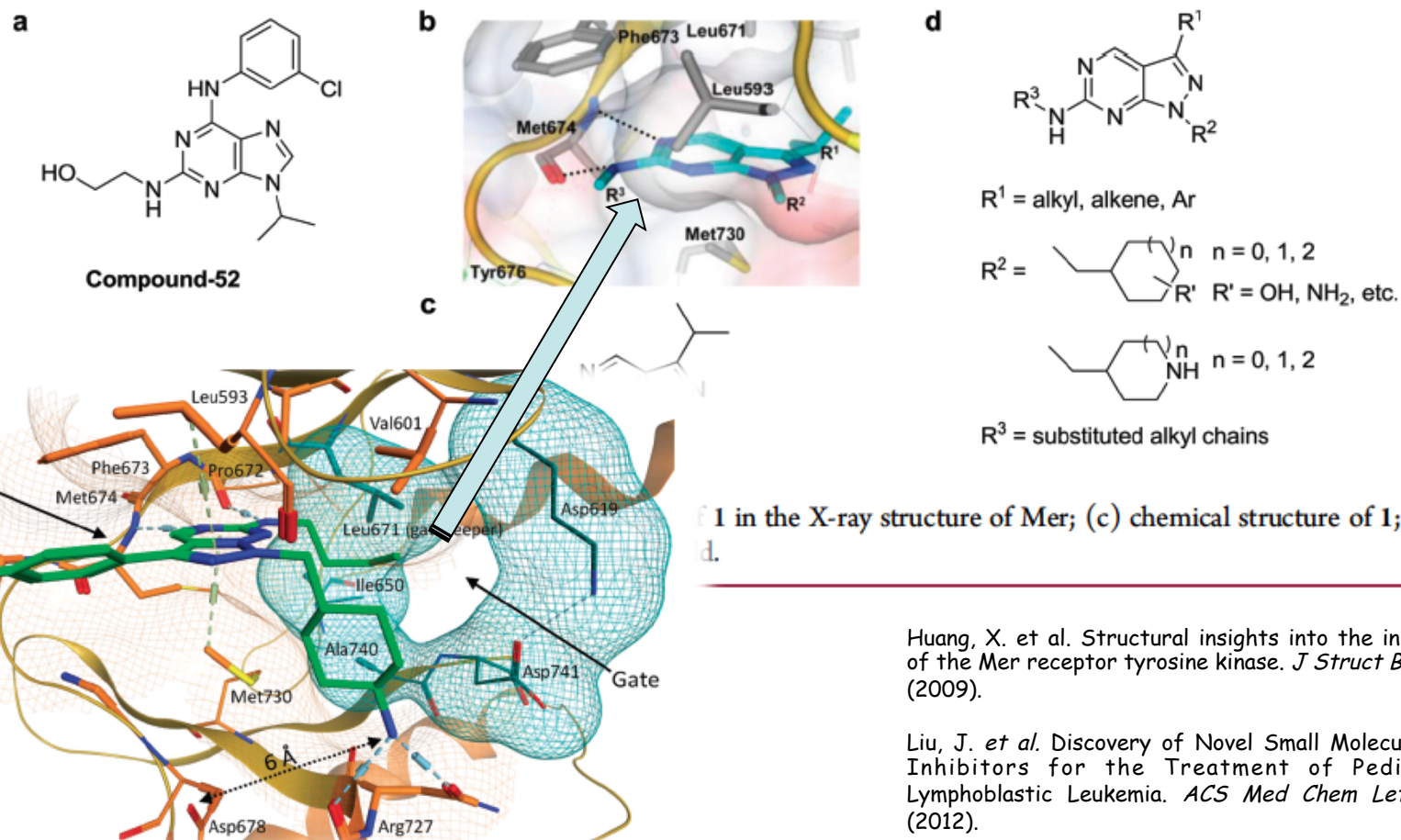
# Mer TK: A Dual Target in Cancer



# MerTKI Leads: Structure based hit design

ACS Medicinal Chemistry Letters

Letter



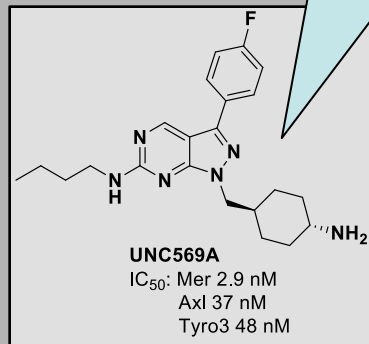
UNC  
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UNC  
LINEBERGER



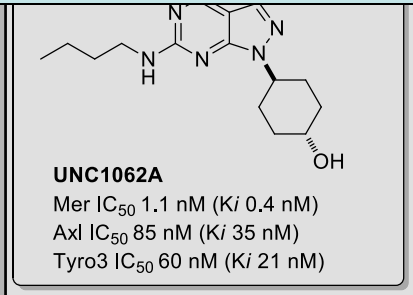
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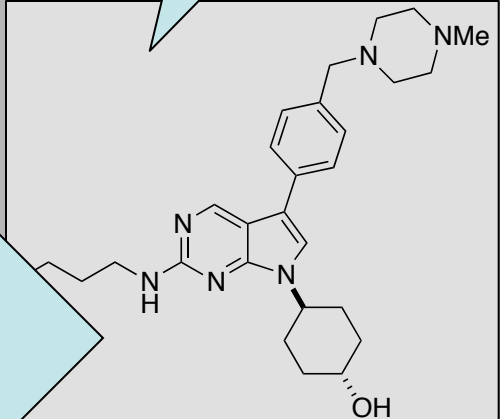
good mouse PK, Herg activity, moderate cell activity, good solubility, no survival advantage (1.5 years to first in vivo tool)



moderate mouse PK, great cell activity, poor solubility, no Herg activity



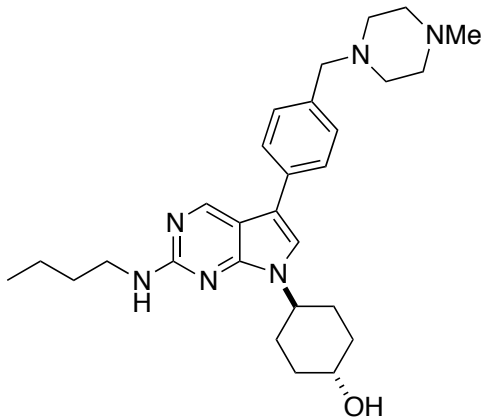
kinases are highly precedented target-class, many issues understood but this took 2.5 years (3-5 chemists), hundreds of compounds



time

# UNC2025: Potent Mer TK Inhibitor

Carna Biosciences tested  
@100nM against 305 kinases, IC50's for >50% I



MW 446  
tPSA 66.7  
cLogP 4.78  
LE 0.36  
SEI 14  
LipE 4.4  
freely soluble in saline

TAM Family Activity  
Mer 0.74 nM (Ki 0.16 nM)  
FLT3 0.84 nM (Ki 0.71 nM)  
Axl 17 nM (Ki 15 nM)  
Tyro3 25 nM (Ki 5.1 nM)

hERG >20  $\mu$ M

Can Axl be a sentinel for "off-target" kinase activity?



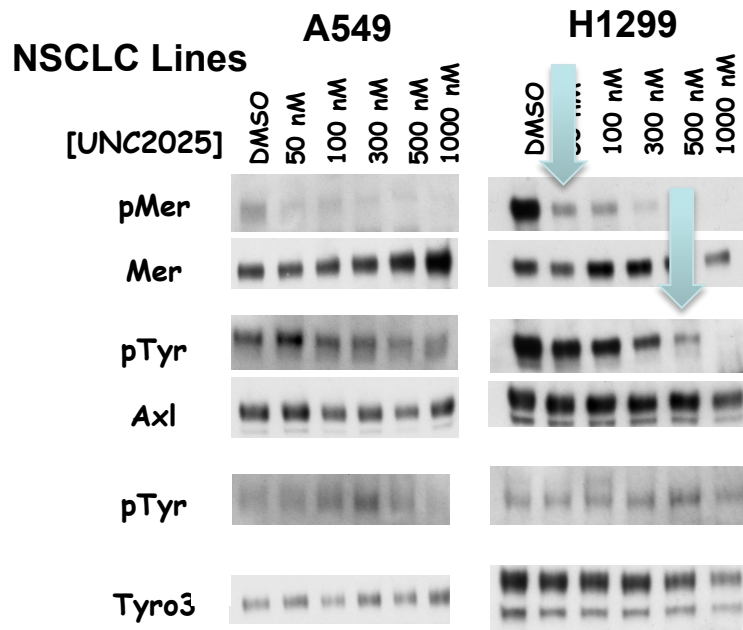
# Selectivity Concerns

- What hypothesis are you testing?
  - most important issue
- Will off-target activity compromise safety & developability?
  - we rarely know what the ‘anti-targets’ are
    - Herg
    - 5HT2b agonism
    - p450’s
  - Some ‘multikinase’ inhibitors are quite toxic

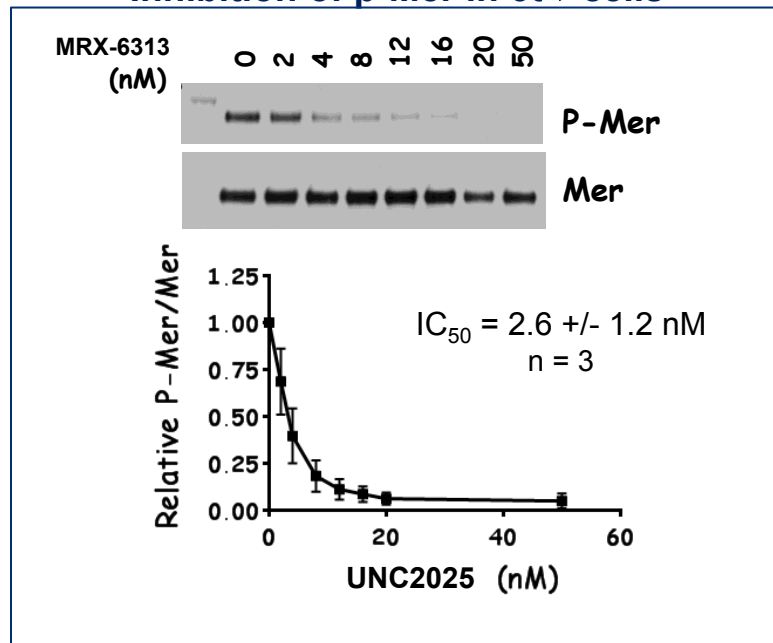




# UNC2025: Potent Cellular Mer TK Inhibitor



## Inhibition of p-Mer in 697 cells

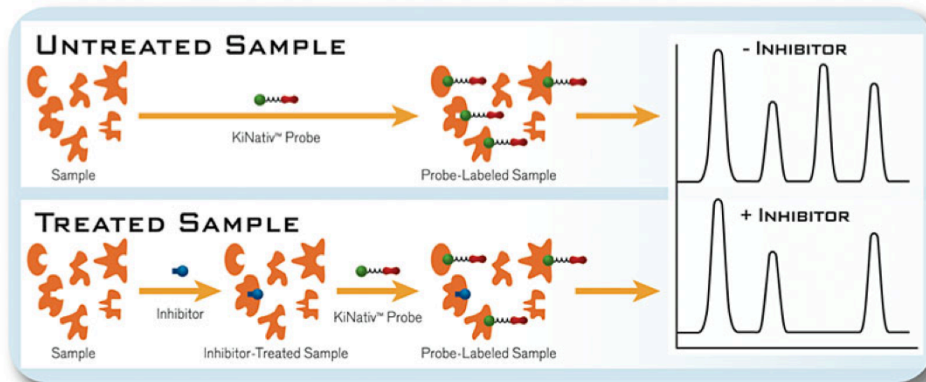
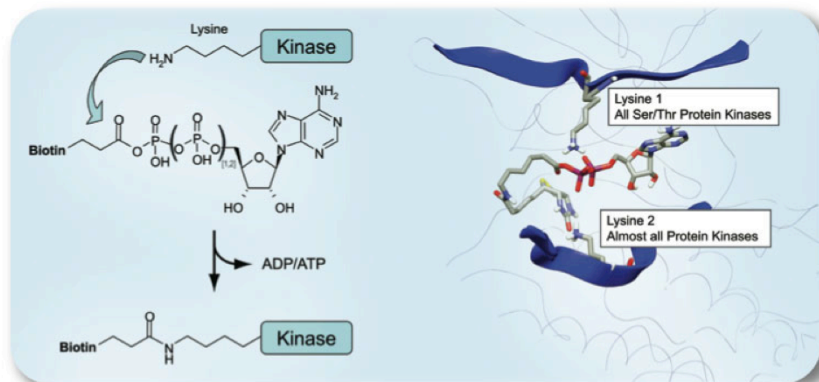


### TAM Family Activity

|       |         |              |
|-------|---------|--------------|
| Mer   | 0.74 nM | (Ki 0.16 nM) |
| FLT3  | 0.84 nM | (Ki 0.71 nM) |
| Axl   | 17 nM   | (Ki 15 nM)   |
| Tyro3 | 25 nM   | (Ki 5.1 nM)  |

- cellular IC<sub>50</sub>'s right shifted by 10-20 fold
- 50 nM Mer = 500 nM Axl ≥ 1 μM Tyro3
- If this relationship holds for other kinases, in vivo effects will be dominated by Mer and Flt3

Can Axl be a sentinel for "off-target" kinase activity?



- **697 cellular lysate** [500uL of a 5mg/mL stock]
- +/- MRX-6313 for 15 minutes [0, 0.1, 1.0, 10, 100, 1000nM]
- Add reactive ADP or ATP probes [5uM-10 min]
- Denature protein to stop reaction
- Digest with Trypsin
- Enrich probe labeled peptides with streptavidin
- Purified elute was analyzed by LC MS/MS [quadruplicate]

### Preliminary conclusions:

- Mer is the kinase most potently protected from labeling by UNC2025 with ADP and ATP reagent (700 pM and 50 pM  $IC_{50}$ , respectively)
- Axl not observed (Tyro3 peptides are redundant with Mer, so not distinguishable). Flt3 was not significantly protected – we do not understand this result.
- ADP detected kinase  $IC_{50}$ 's correlate better with Carna data than ATP
  - more analysis underway
- NCI: **“work confirms the team’s finding that UNC2025 preferentially inhibits MERTK”**

Trevor Glaros  
Dianne Newton

**SAIC**®

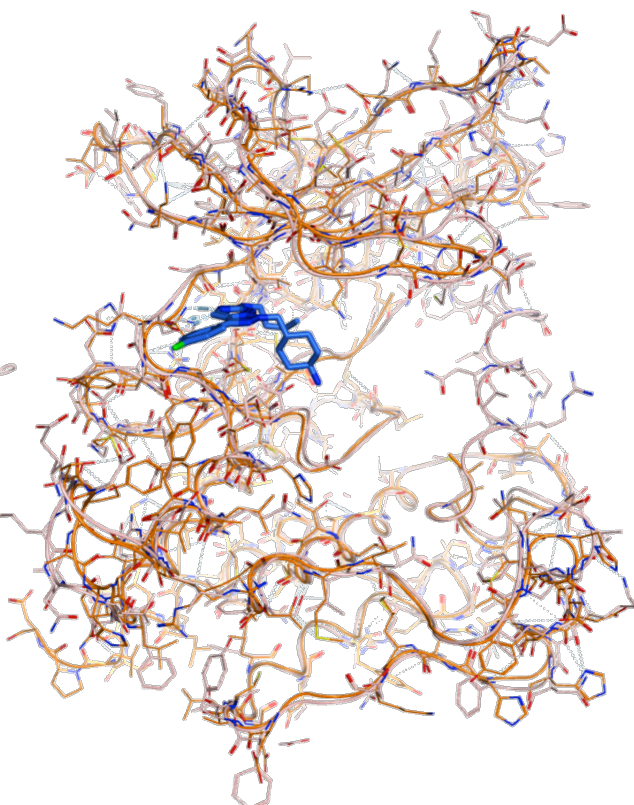
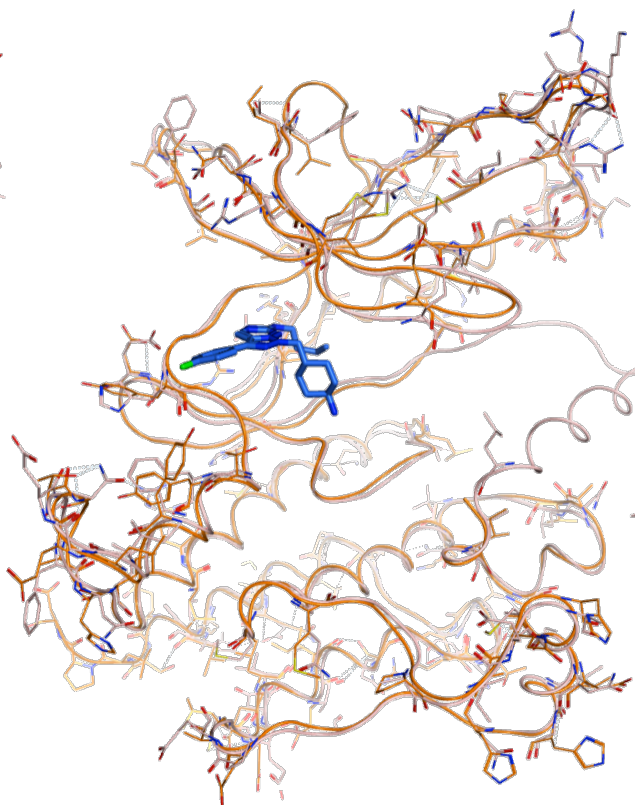
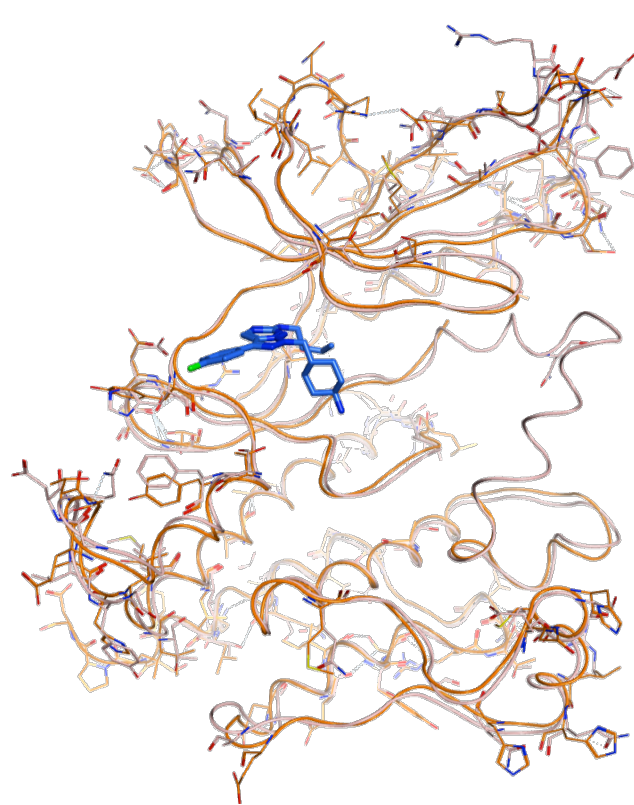
Frederick Patricelli, Matthew P. *et al.* In Situ Kinase Profiling Reveals Functionally Relevant Properties of Native Kinases. *Chemistry & Biology* **18**, 699-710, (2011).

# Selectivity: Identity and Divergent Side-chains

Axl (~60%)

Tyro3 (~52%)

FLT3 (~26%)

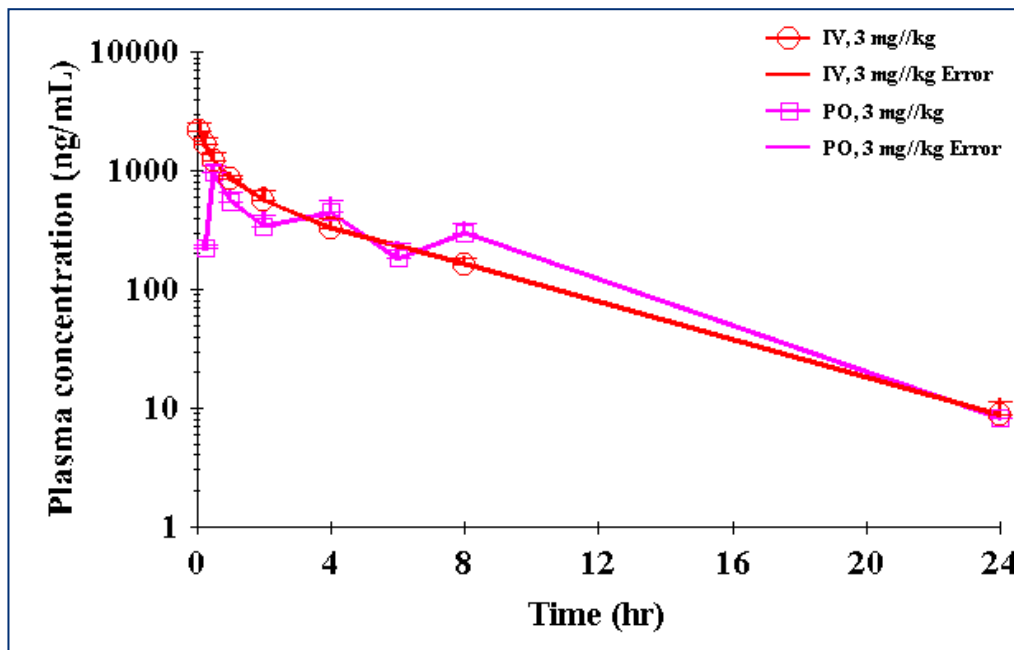


IC<sub>50</sub> Mer 1.5 nM  
Axl 94 nM  
Tyro3 86 nM  
FLT3 270 nM

IC<sub>50</sub> Mer 1.1 nM  
Axl 2.4 nM  
Tyro3 6.3 nM  
Flt3 95 nM



## UNC2025: Mouse Pharmacokinetics

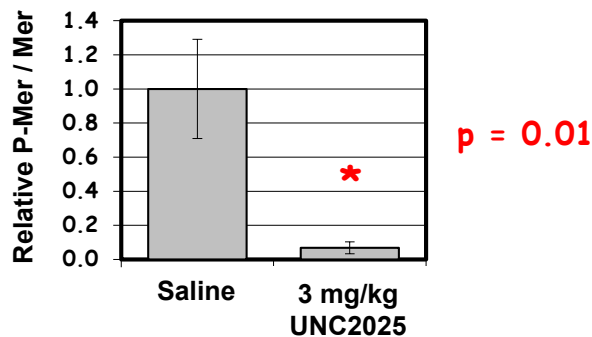
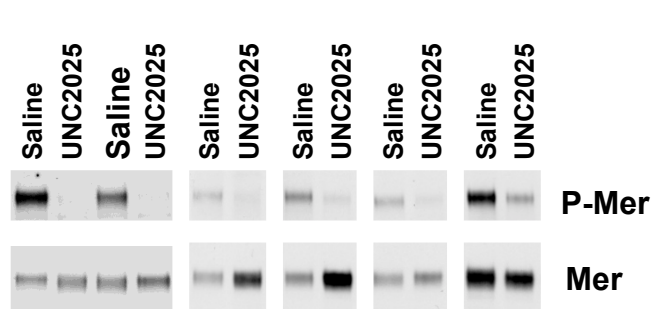


**PO Cmax**      1.75  $\mu$ M  
**T1/2**          3.8 h  
**%F**            100

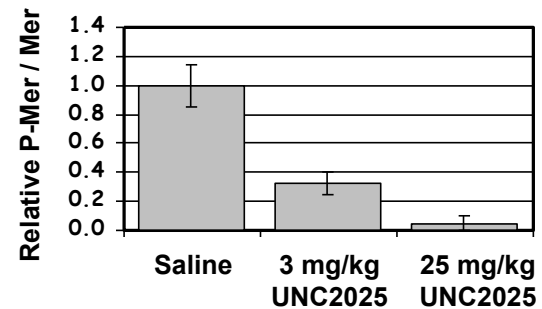
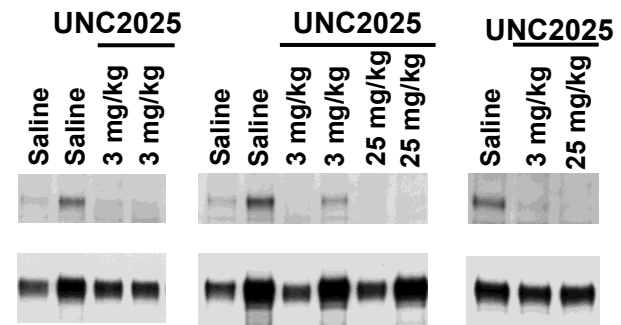
| Dose (mg/kg) | Route | T1/2 (h) | Tmax (h) | Cmax ( $\mu$ M) | AUC <sub>last</sub> (h* $\mu$ M) | Vss (L/Kg) | CL (mL/min/kg) | % F |
|--------------|-------|----------|----------|-----------------|----------------------------------|------------|----------------|-----|
| 3.0          | IV    | 3.8      | -        | 4.36            | 9.78                             | 2.33       | 9.22           |     |
| 3.0          | PO    | -        | 0.50     | 1.75            | 9.79                             | -          | -              | 100 |



# UNC2025 Pharmacodynamics: Potent Inhibition of p-Mer in Bone Marrow Leukemia Cells

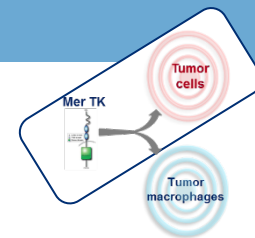


**x0.5 hours Post-Treatment**



**x12 hours Post-Treatment**



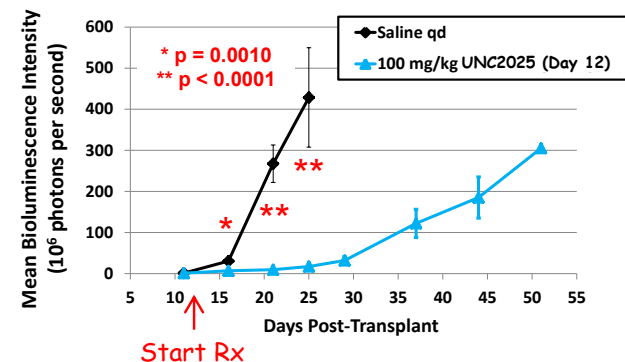
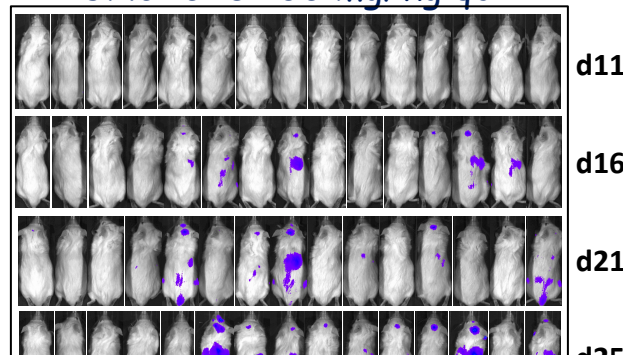
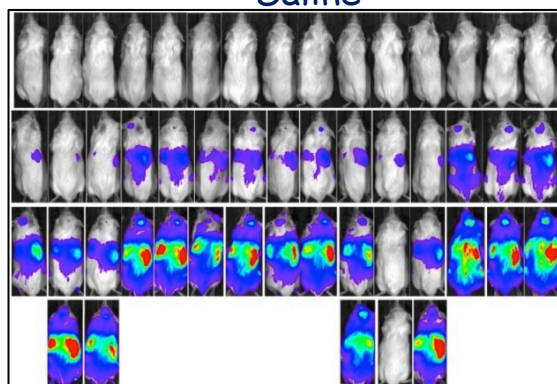


# UNC2025: Active in Established Leukemia

Mer TK over-expressed in B ALL 697 cells

Saline

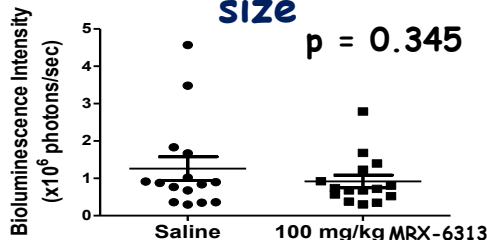
UNC2025 100 mg/kg qd



shRNA knock-down of Mer inhibits growth of:

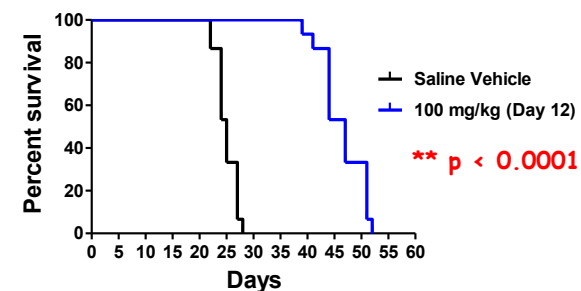
- ALL – similar effects to TKI
- AML
- melanoma
- lung cancer

Pre-treatment tumor size



Rx started on day 12 post-transplant  
n=15

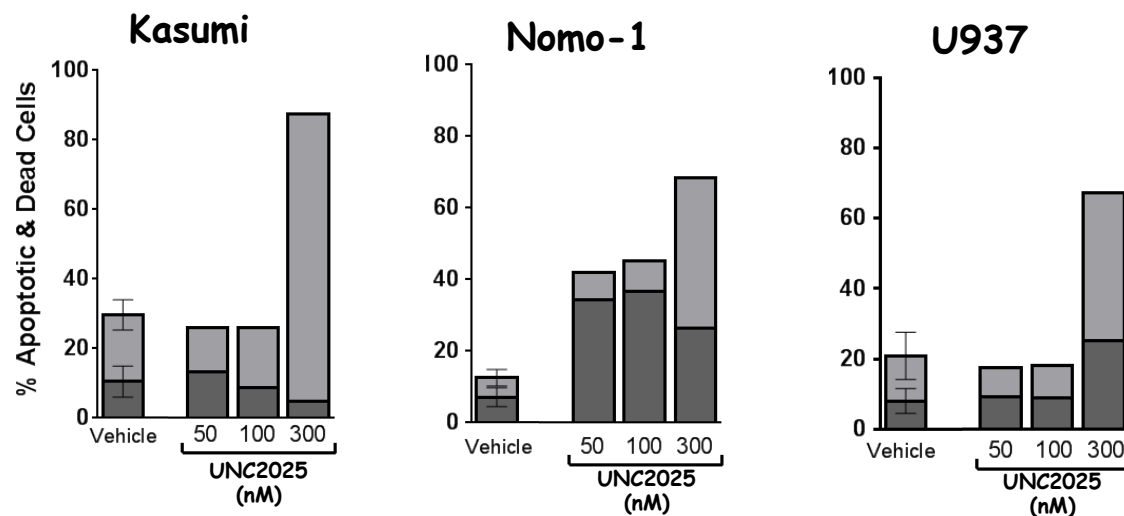
Graham Lab



|         | Median Survival |
|---------|-----------------|
| Saline  | 25 days         |
| UNC2025 | 47 days         |



## UNC2025 Induces Apoptosis in Mer-Expressing AML Cell Lines

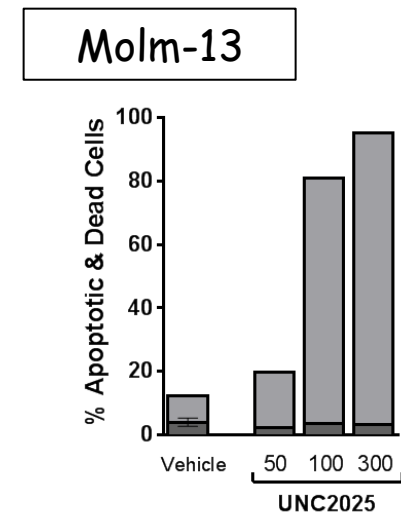
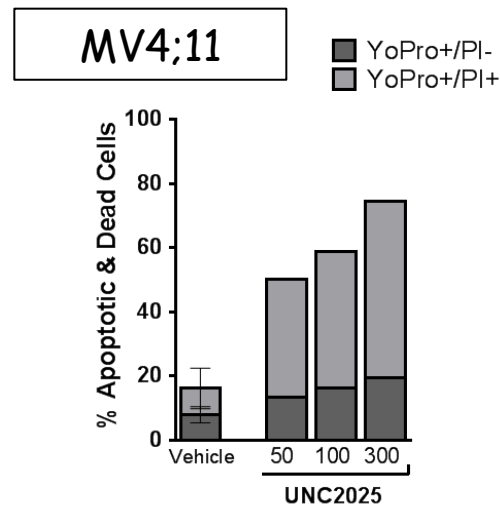
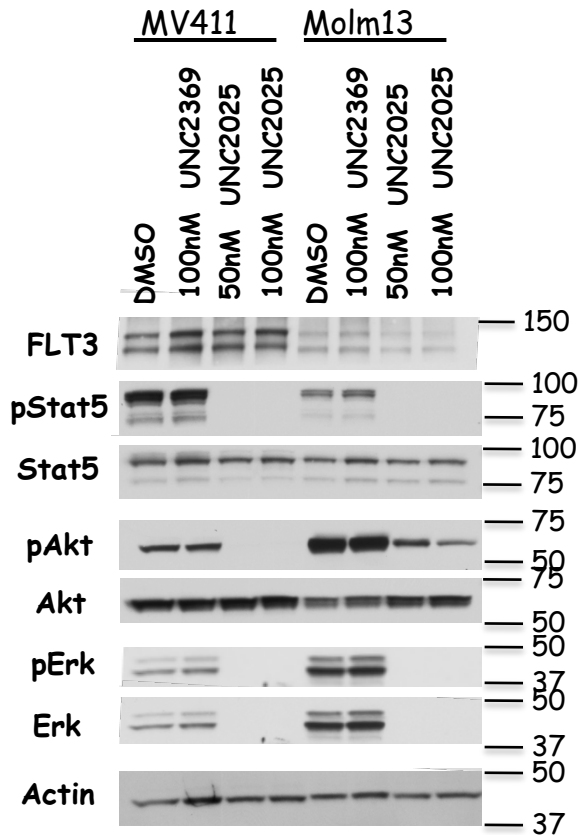


Cell cultures were treated with UNC2025 or vehicle for 72 hrs.

Apoptotic & dead cells were detected by flow cytometry after staining with YoPro®-1-iodide & propidium iodide.

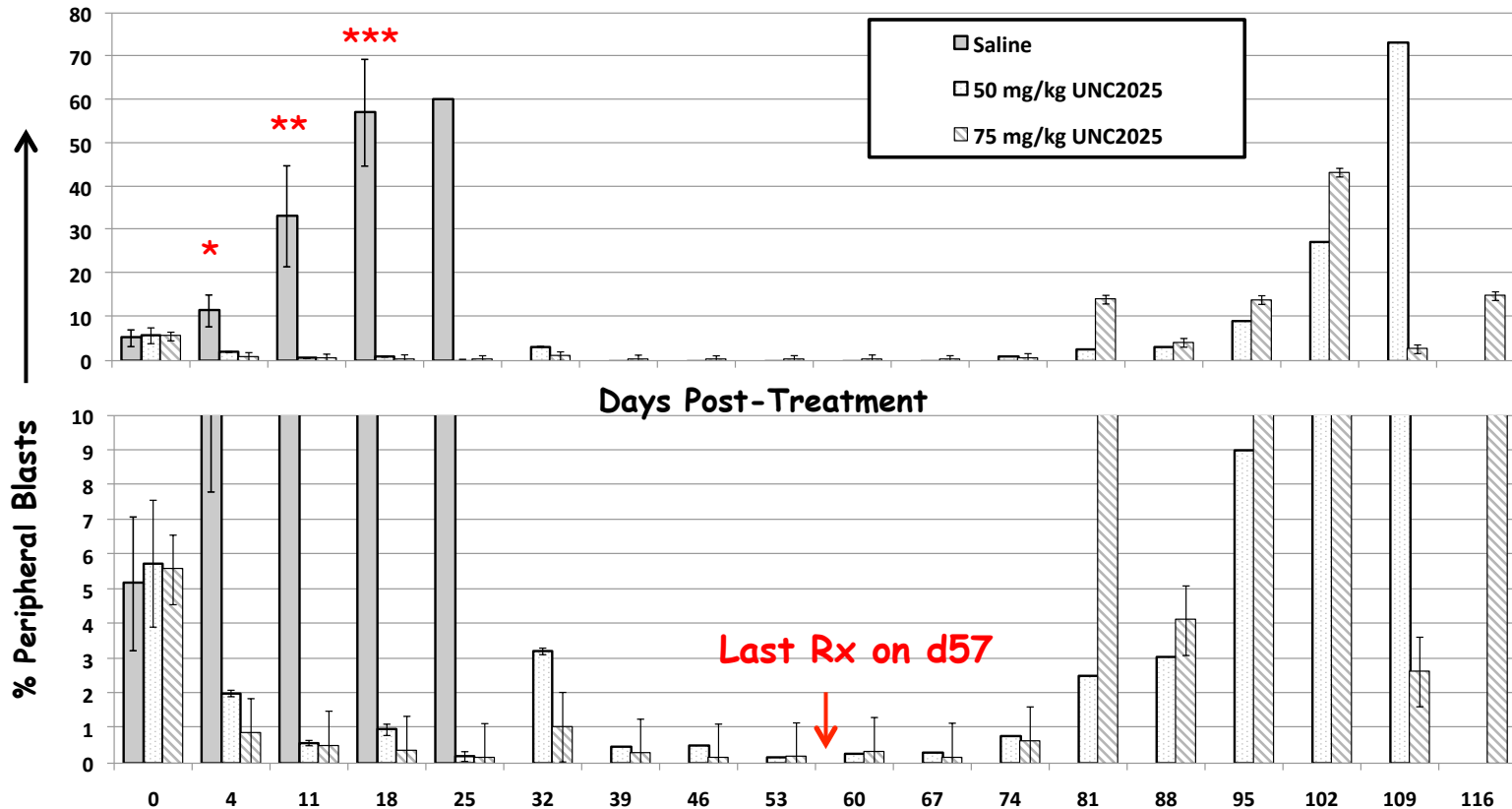


# UNC2025 Inhibits FLT3-dependent Downstream Signaling & Induces Apoptosis in Mer-Negative FLT3-ITD AML Cells





# Treatment with UNC2025 decreases leukemia burden in a Mer+, FLT3-ITD+ AML patient sample xenograft model



TKI vs Saline

- \* p < 0.05
- \*\* p < 0.025
- \*\*\* p < 0.003

n = 5

D. DeRyckere, A. Hill, & K. Minson

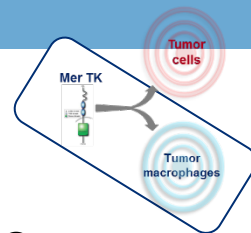


# Studies Underway Using Immunocompetent Mice: Testing Mer TKIs with Immune Checkpoint Agents

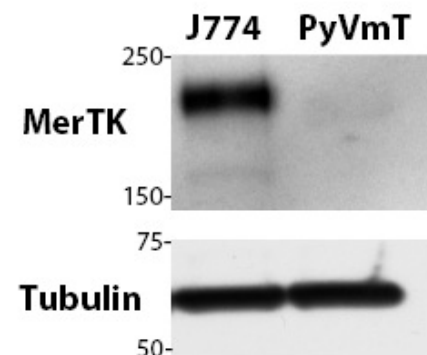
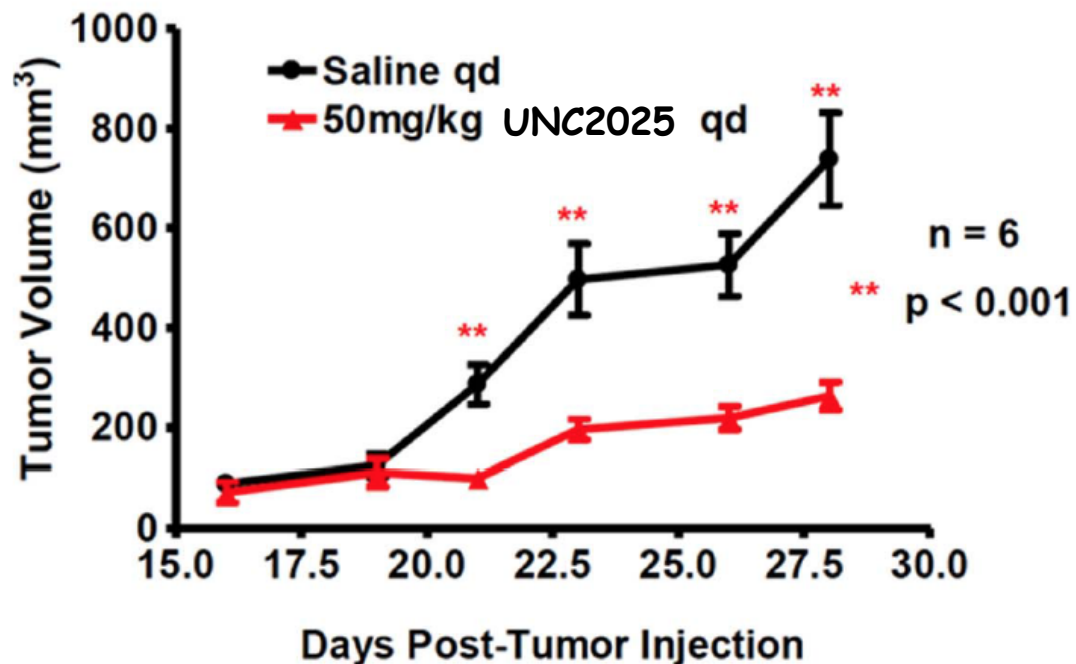
- **Breast Cancer Syngeneic Models**
  - PyVmT - Mer neg – C57/Bl6 - +/- anti-PD1-L and anti-CTLA4
  - NT2 HER2/Neu FVB mice +/- anti-PD1-L and anti-CTLA4
- **Melanoma**
  - B16 in C57/Bl6 Mer TKIs +/- anti-PD1-L/anti-CTLA4
  - Tria5 GEMM (Mer – tumor) Mer TKIs and anti PD1L
  - Combination with B-raf inhibition (synergistic in cells)
- **GEMMs – NSCLC**
  - Mer + and Mer – GEMMs
  - Mer TKIs +/- anti-PD1

Schlegel, J. *et al.* MERTK receptor tyrosine kinase is a therapeutic target in melanoma.  
*J Clin Invest* **123**, 2257-2267, doi:10.1172/JCI67816 (2013).





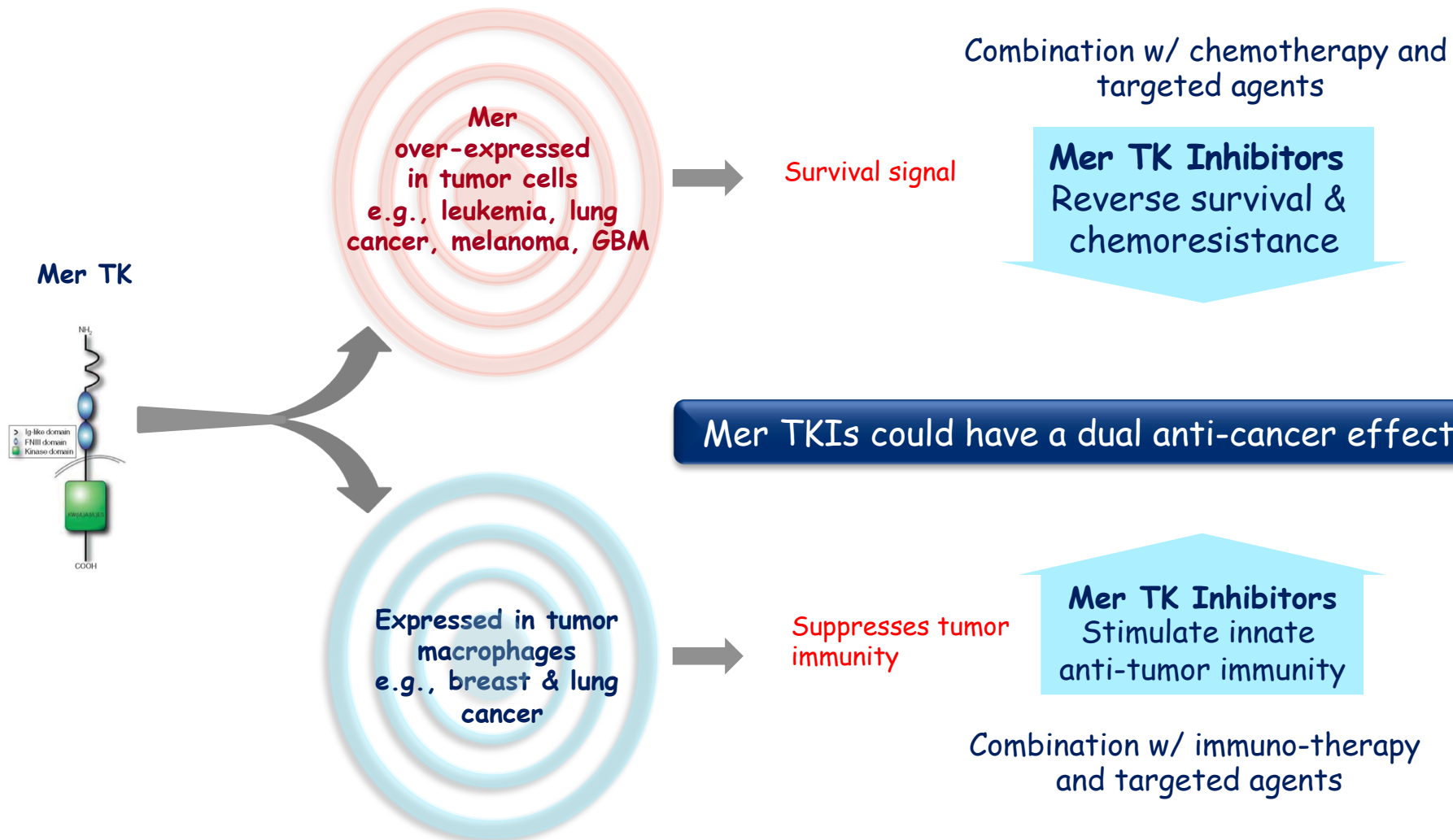
## UNC2025: Active in Mer TK-Negative Breast Cancer Activity via immune modulation of tumor microenvironment?



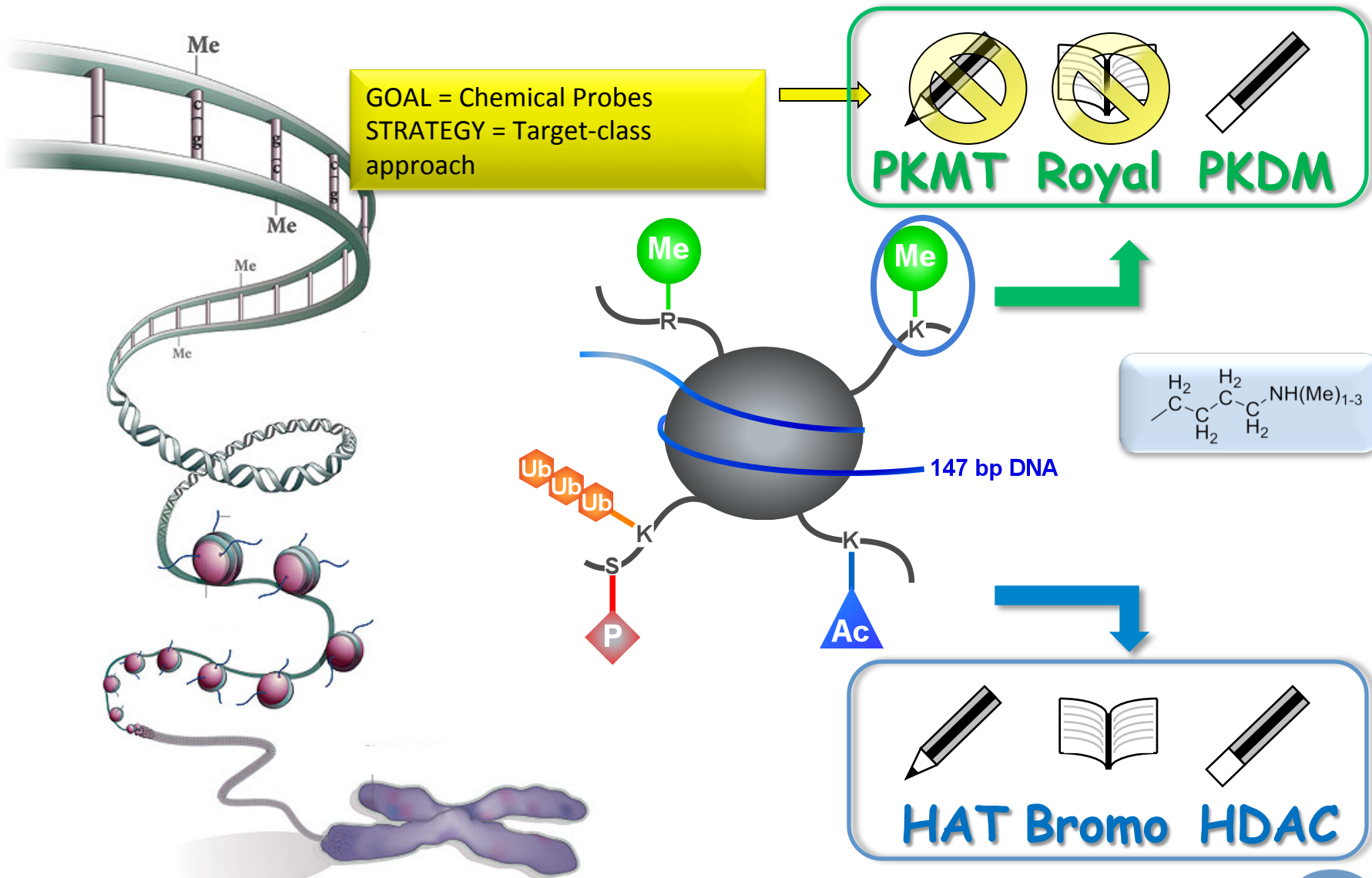
Graham lab

- Immune-Competent Orthotopic Model of Mer-Negative Breast Cancer
- Treatment from Day -2 to day 28; 50 mg/kg bid UNC2025 or vehicle

# Mer TK: A Dual Target in Cancer



# Chemical Biology of Chromatin Regulation



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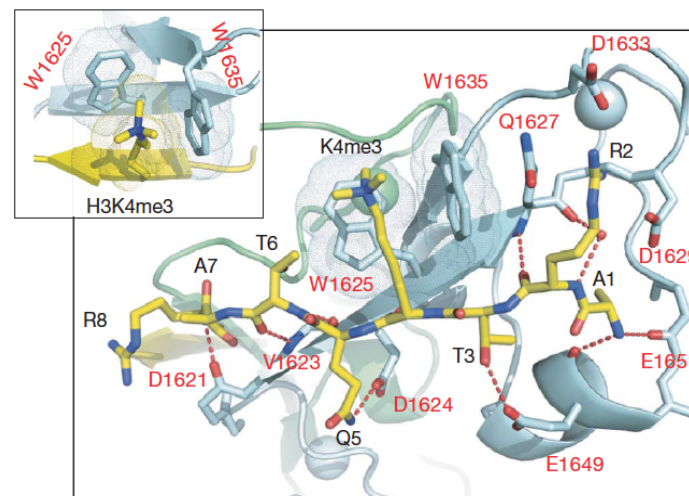
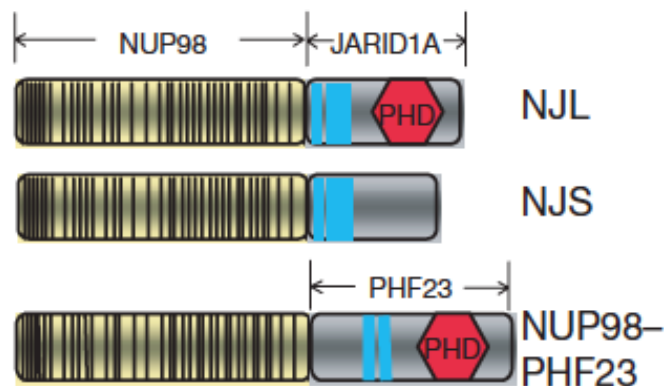


*"Mutations in PHD fingers that abrogated H3K4me3 binding also abolished leukaemic transformation."*

LETTERS

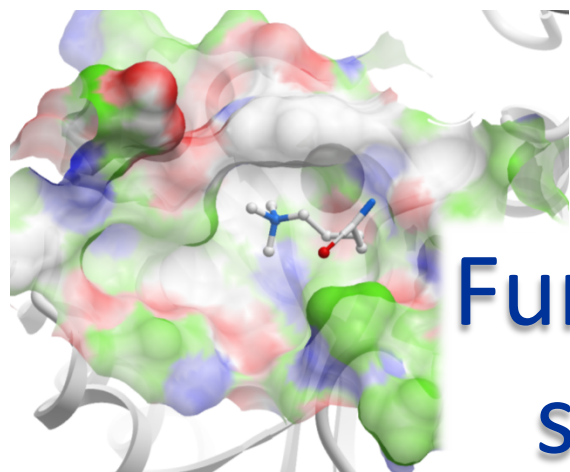
## Haematopoietic malignancies caused by dysregulation of a chromatin-binding PHD finger

Gang G. Wang<sup>1</sup>, Jikui Song<sup>2</sup>, Zhanxin Wang<sup>2</sup>, Holger L. Dormann<sup>1</sup>, Fabio Casadio<sup>1</sup>, Haitao Li<sup>2</sup>, Jun-Li Luo<sup>3</sup>, Dinshaw J. Patel<sup>2</sup> & C. David Allis<sup>1</sup>

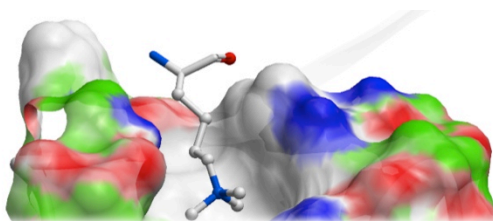




# Methyl-lysine Reader Families

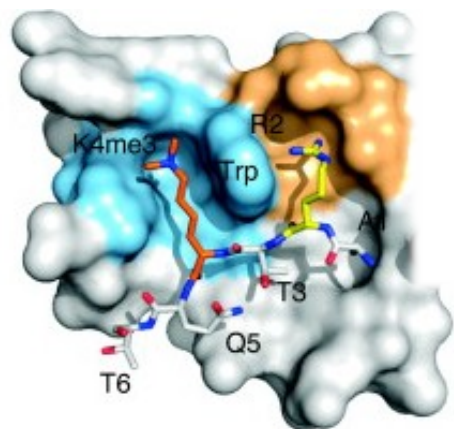


34 Chromo Domains (Kme3)



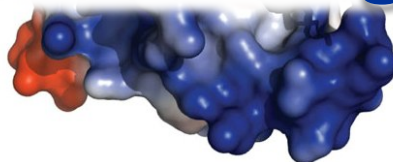
Domains (Kme1 & 2)

Functionally conserved,  
structurally diverse:

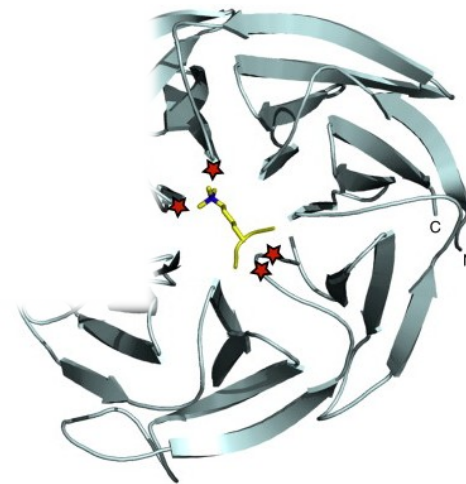


102 PHD Domains (Kme0-3)

No potent small  
molecule ligands



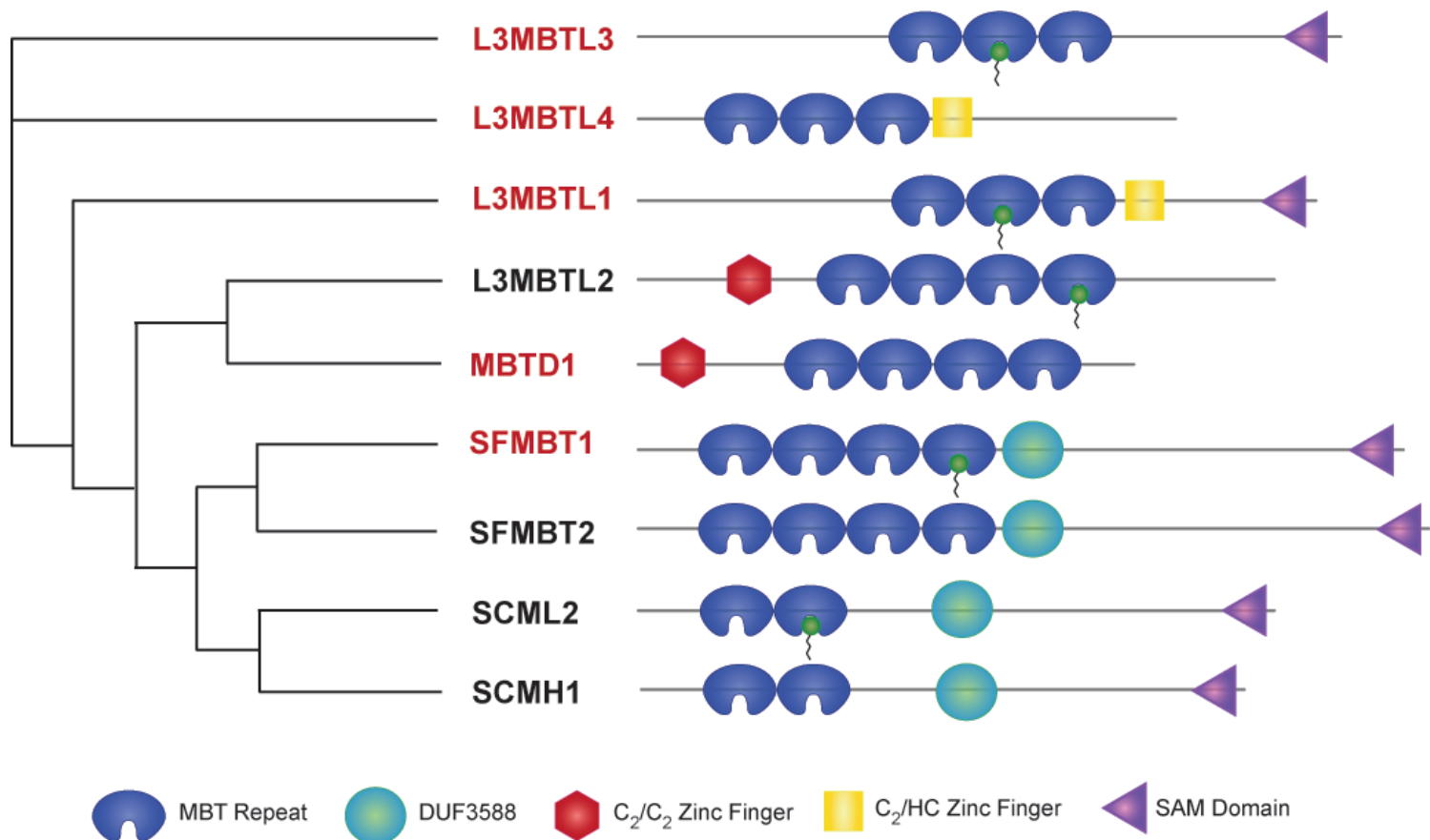
22 PWWP Domains (Kme3)



2 WD40 Domains (Kme2 & 3)



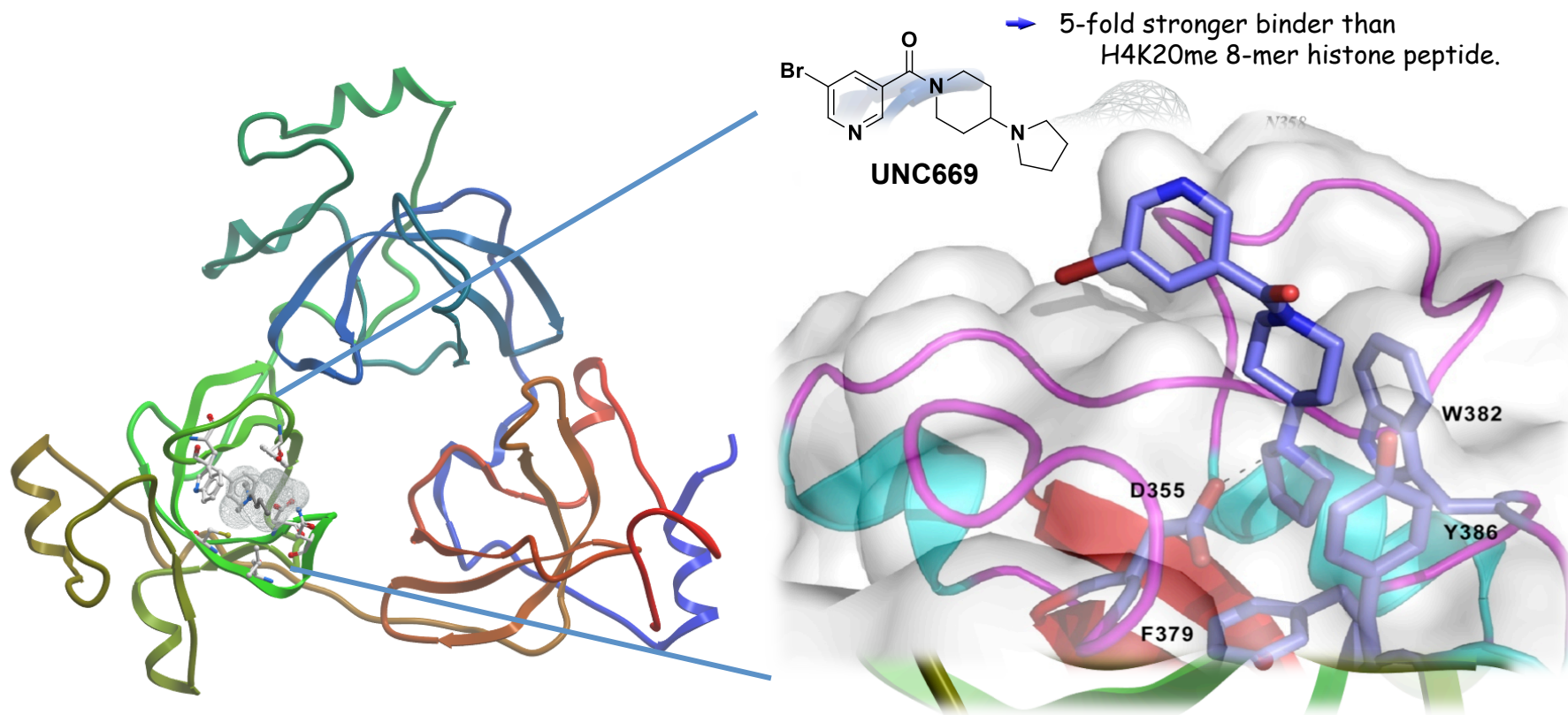
# Phylogenetic Tree of Human MBT Proteins





# Structural Biology of MBT Domains

- MBT domains recognize  $KMe_1$  and  $KMe_2$  in a sequence independent fashion
- Binding cavity is lined with aromatic residues, and the resulting cation- $\pi$  interactions are major contributors to the binding along with an ion pair to an acidic residue

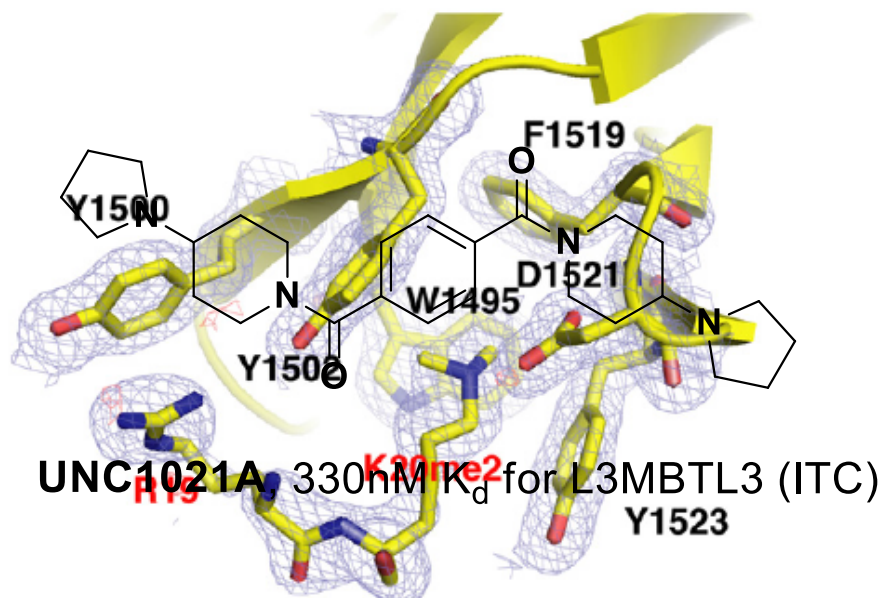


Wang, W.K. et al. Malignant Brain Tumor Repeats: A Three-Leaved Propeller Architecture with Ligand/Peptide Binding Pockets. *Structure* 11, 775-89 (2003)

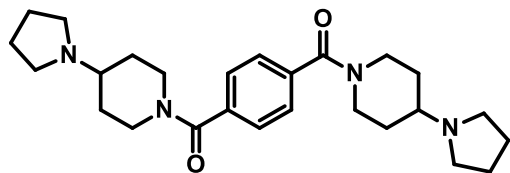
*J. Med. Chem.* 2011, 54, 2504.  
*MedChemComm* 2012, 3, 45.

# How to increase affinity?

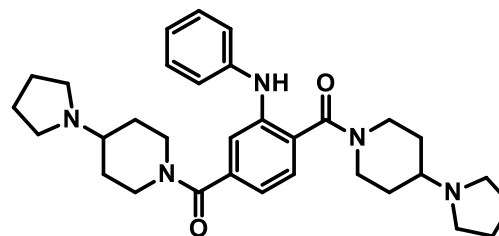
- Change the target – tandem tudor domains (e.g. 53BP1, ca. 1 mM binder to H4K20me2 ) have two binding sites, maybe higher affinity is possible



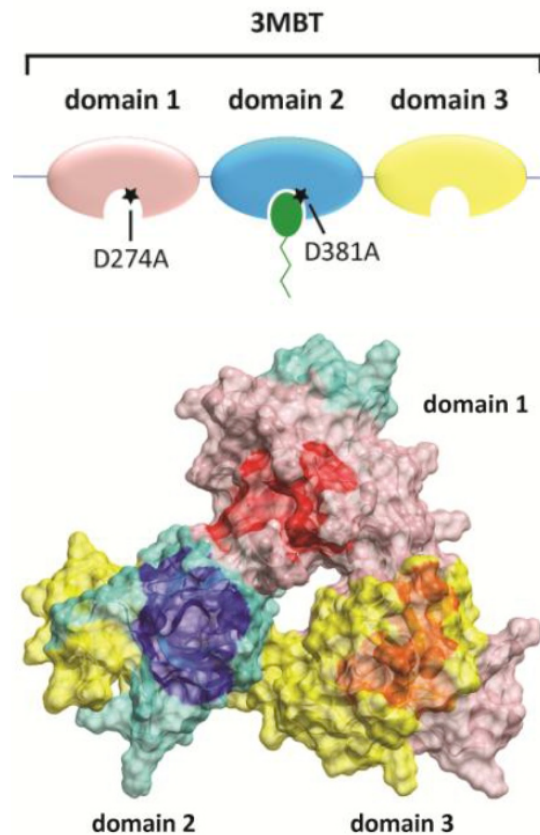
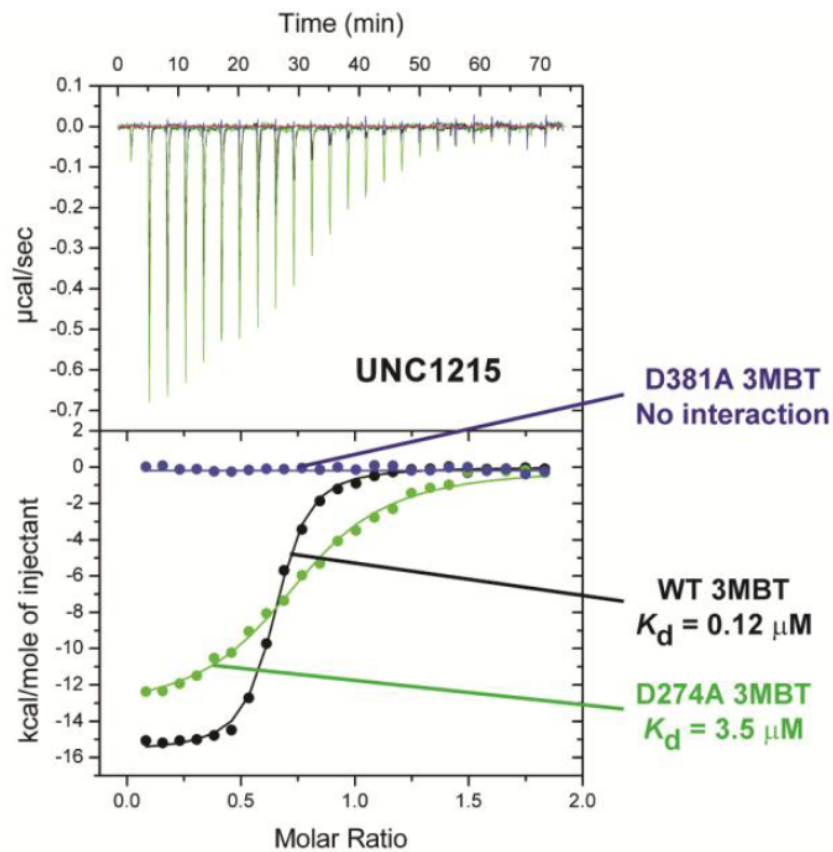
# L3MBTL3 Small Molecule Inhibitors



UNC1021



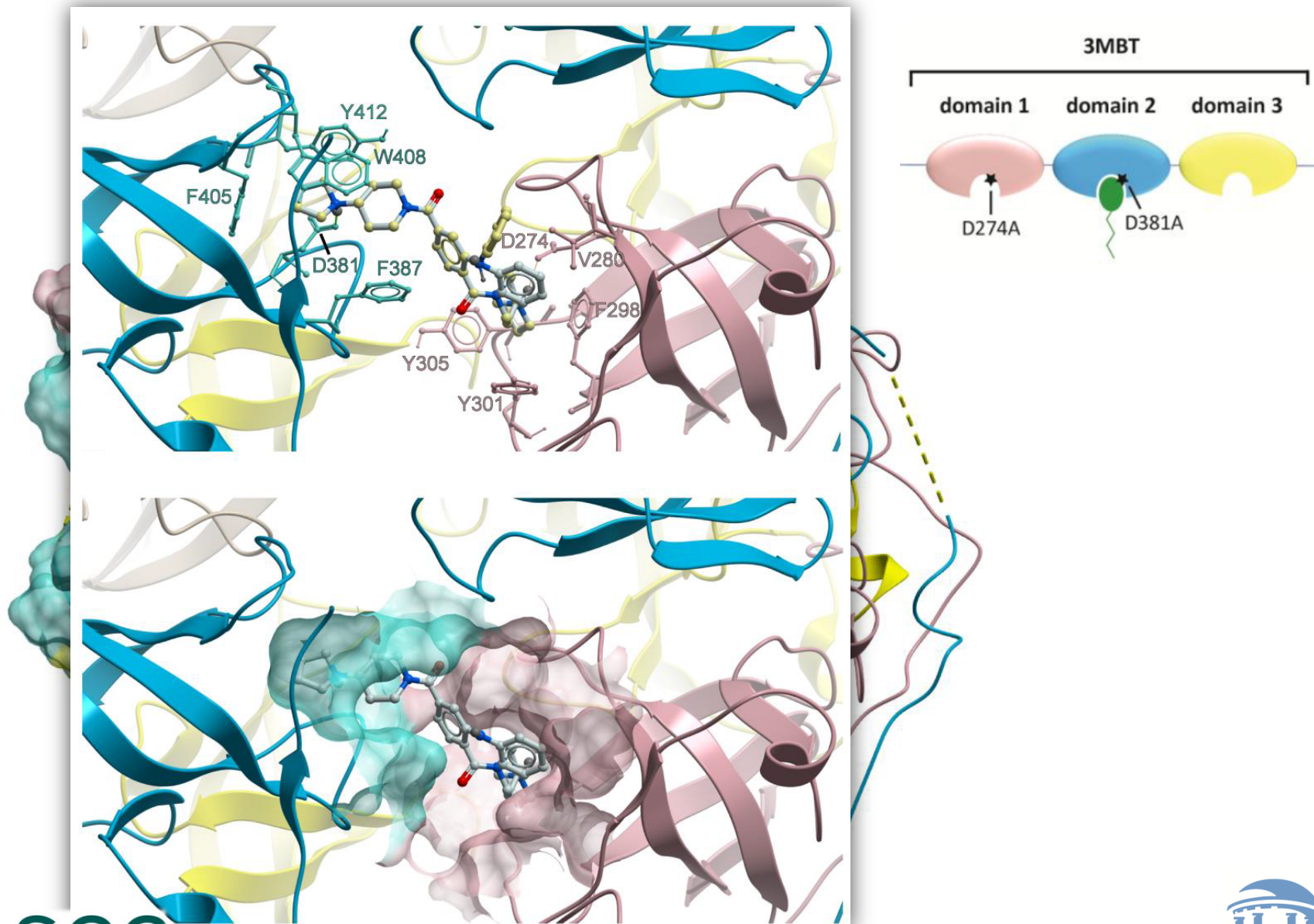
UNC1215



James, L. I. et al. *Nat. Chem. Biol.* **2013**, *3*, 184.



# L3MBTL3-UNC1215 Co-Crystal Structure



SGC

James, L. I. et al. *Nat. Chem. Biol.* **2013**, 3, 184.

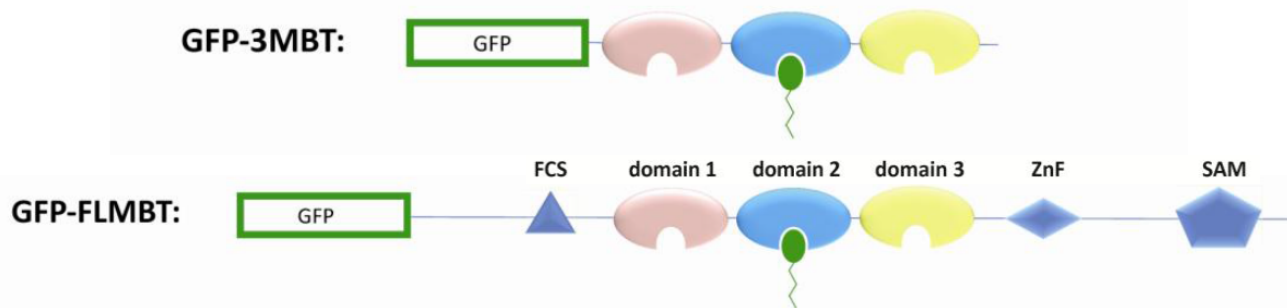
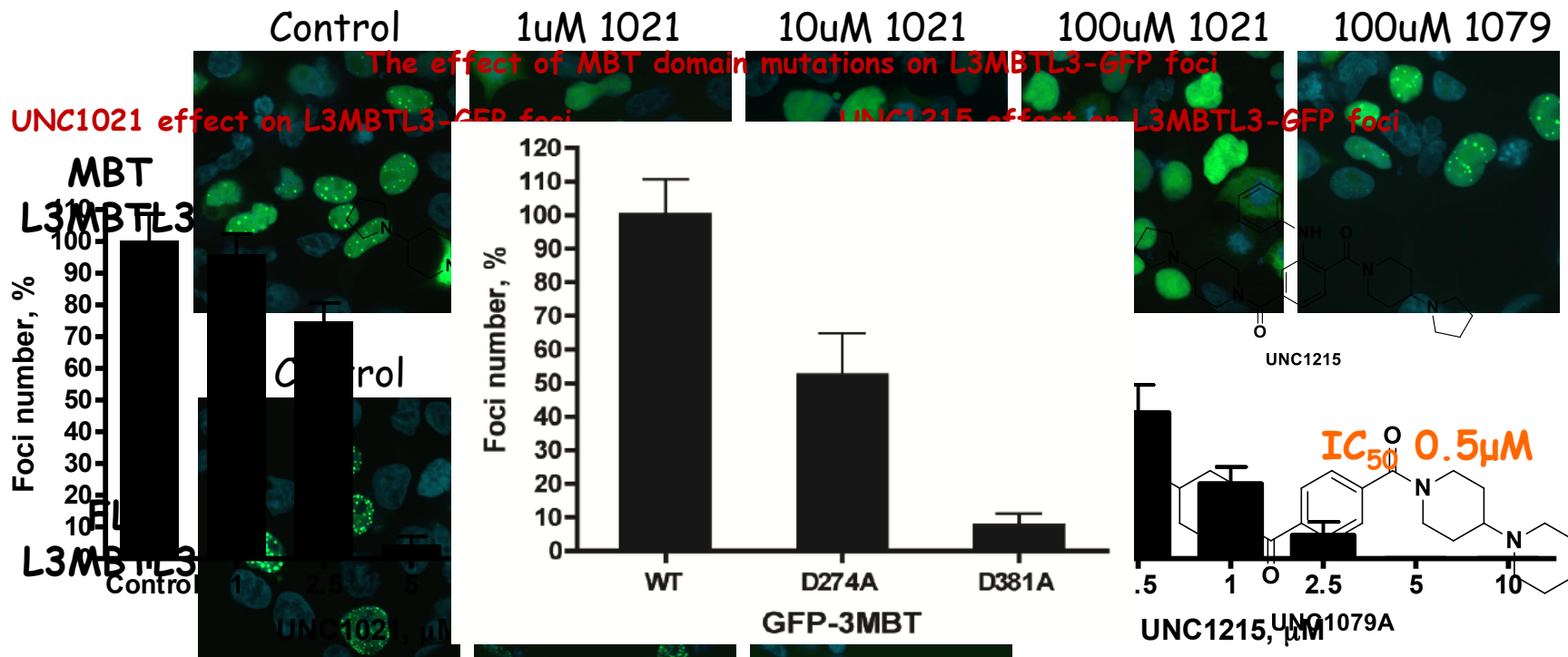
CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE CHEMICAL BIOLOGY & DRUG DISCOVERY





# GFP-L3MBTL3 Localization

L3MBTL3 inhibitors are effective at reducing MBT foci

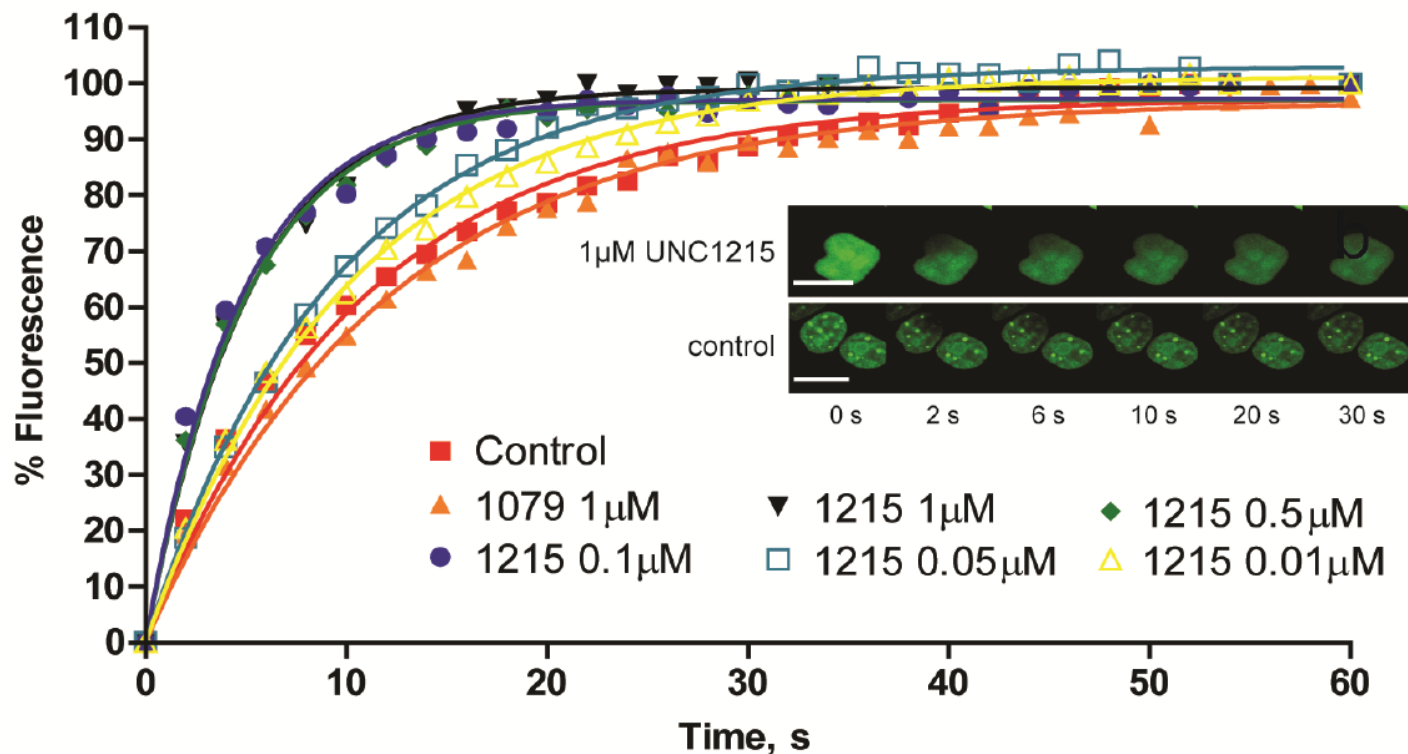


James, L. I. et al. *Nat. Chem. Biol.* **2013**, *3*, 184.



# GFP-L3MBTL3 FRAP

UNC1215 increases L3MBTL3 (MBT only) mobility in a dose response manner

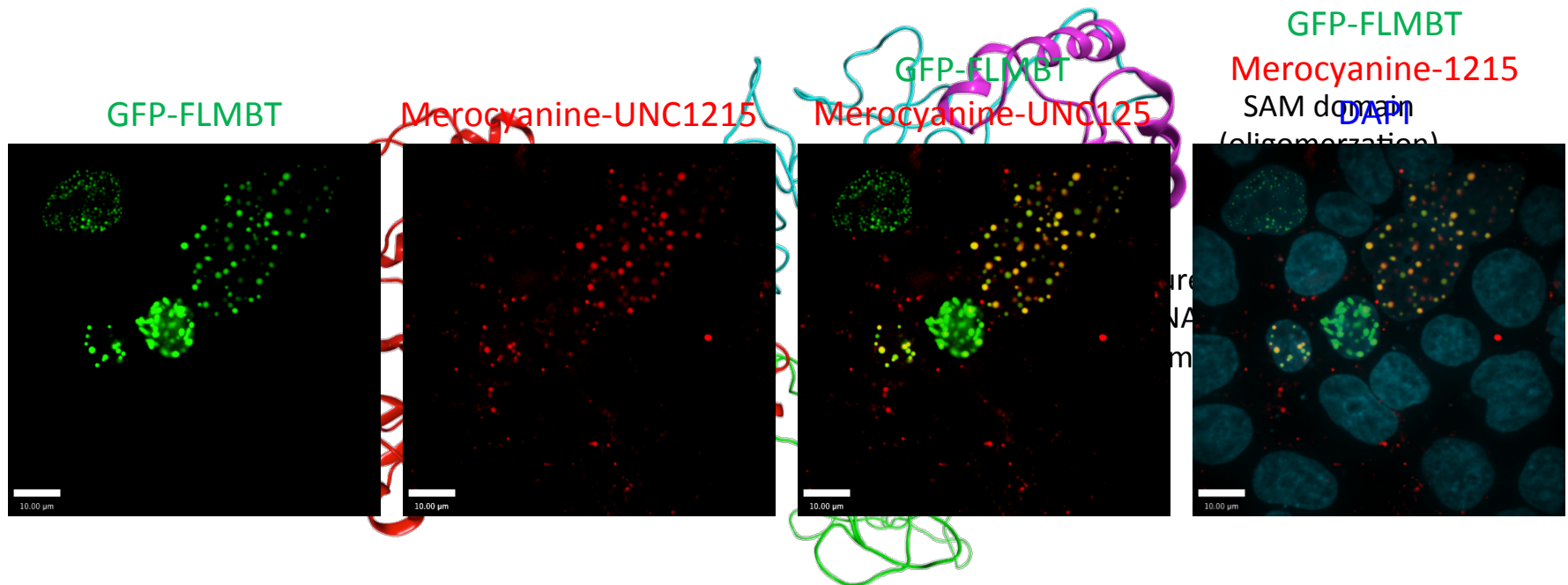
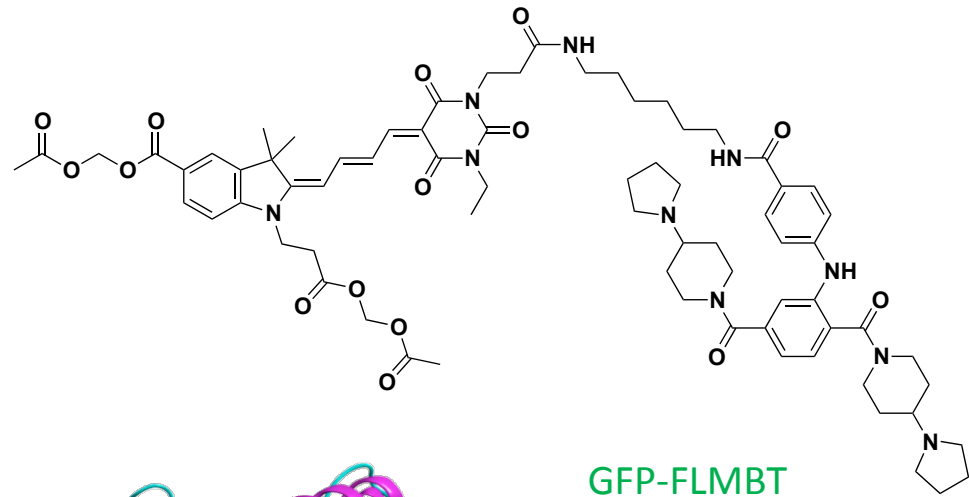


• L3MBTL3 D274A (domain 1) and D381A (domain 2) mutants have higher mobility than WT in FRAP assay in the context of both full length and MBT domain only proteins



# Fluorescent UNC1215

Does UNC1215 bind the full length L3MBTL3 protein?

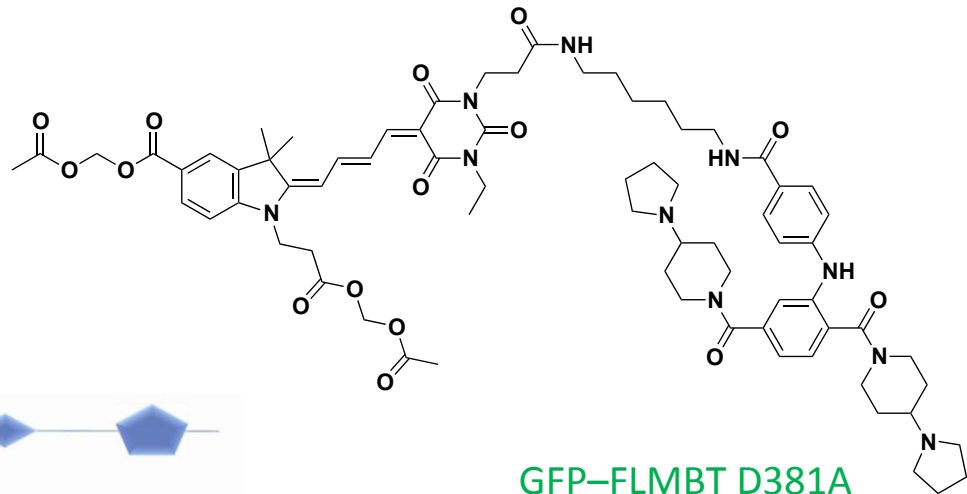


Full-length GFP-L3MBTL3 co-localizes with merocyanine-UNC1215 in the nucleus, but not with the merocyanine dye alone

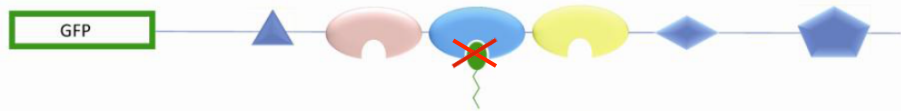


# Fluorescent UNC1215

Does UNC1215 bind the full length L3MBTL3 protein?



GFP-FLMBT:

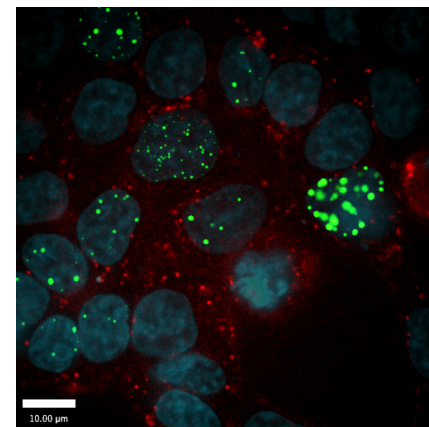
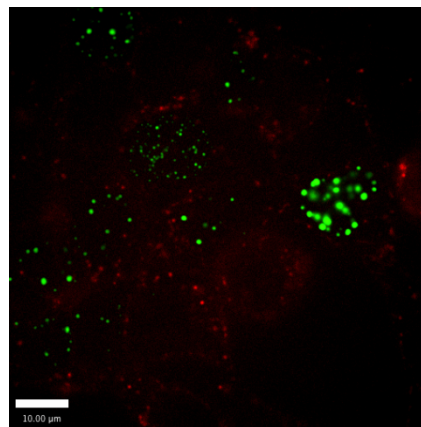
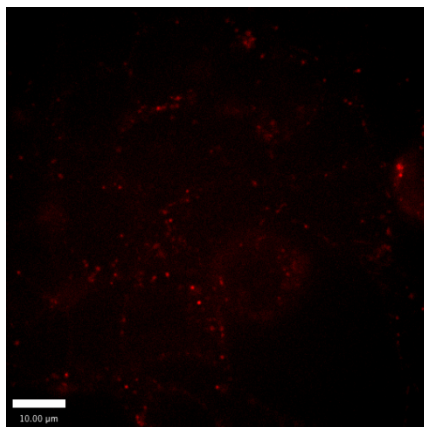
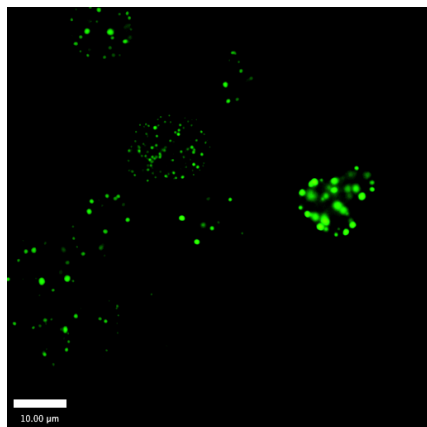


GFP-FLMBT D381A

Merocyanine-UNC1215

GFP-FLMBT D381A  
Merocyanine-UNC125

GFP-FLMBT D381A  
Merocyanine-1215  
DAPI

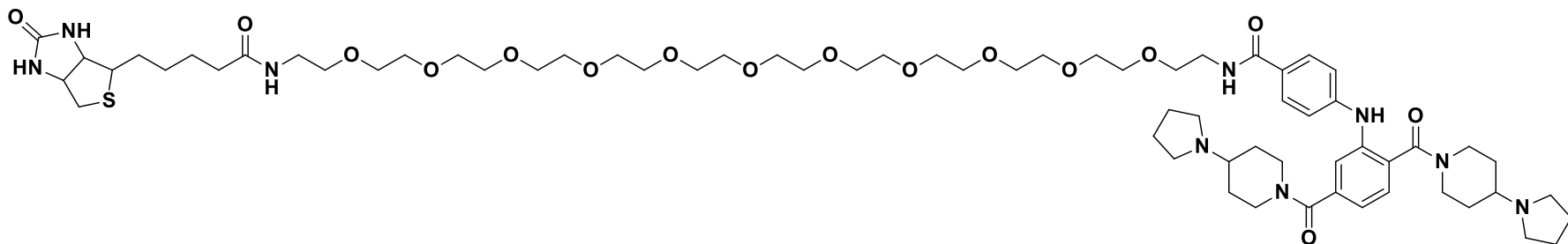


Full-length GFP-L3MBTL3 domain 2 mutant does not co-localize with merocyanine-UNC1215





# UNC1215 Selectivity Profiling



| Alphascreen<br>IC <sub>50</sub> [μM] | L3MBTL1  | L3MBTL3   | L3MBTL4   | SFMBT                      | MBTD1   | CBX7                       | 53BP1   | UHRF1                     | PHF23                     | JARID1A                   |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
|                                      | MBT domains                                    |   |   |                            |   | Chromo Domain              | Tudor Domains                                   |                           | PHD Fingers               |                           |
| <b>UNC1021</b>                       | <b>3</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.93,<br>n = 44) | <b>0.04</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.94,<br>n = 44) | <b>16</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.72,<br>n = 35) | <b>&gt; 30</b><br>(n = 33) | <b>11</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.85,<br>n = 29) | <b>&gt; 30</b><br>(n = 31) | <b>17</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.76,<br>n = 45) | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 33) | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 6)  | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 6)  |
| <b>UNC1215</b>                       | <b>2</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.93,<br>n = 17) | <b>0.04</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.93,<br>n = 17) | <b>11</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.63,<br>n = 21) | <b>&gt; 30</b><br>(n = 18) | <b>6</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.71,<br>n = 11)  | <b>&gt; 30</b><br>(n = 19) | <b>4</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.90,<br>n = 12)  | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 18) | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 15) | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 15) |
| <b>UNC1079</b>                       | <b>&gt; 30</b><br>(n = 6)                      | <b>21</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.72,<br>n = 6)    | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 6)                        | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 5)   | <b>3</b><br>(R <sup>2</sup> = 0.91,<br>n = 5)   | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 5)   | <b>&gt; 30</b><br>(n = 8)                       | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 5)  | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 6)  | <b>&gt;30</b><br>(n = 6)  |

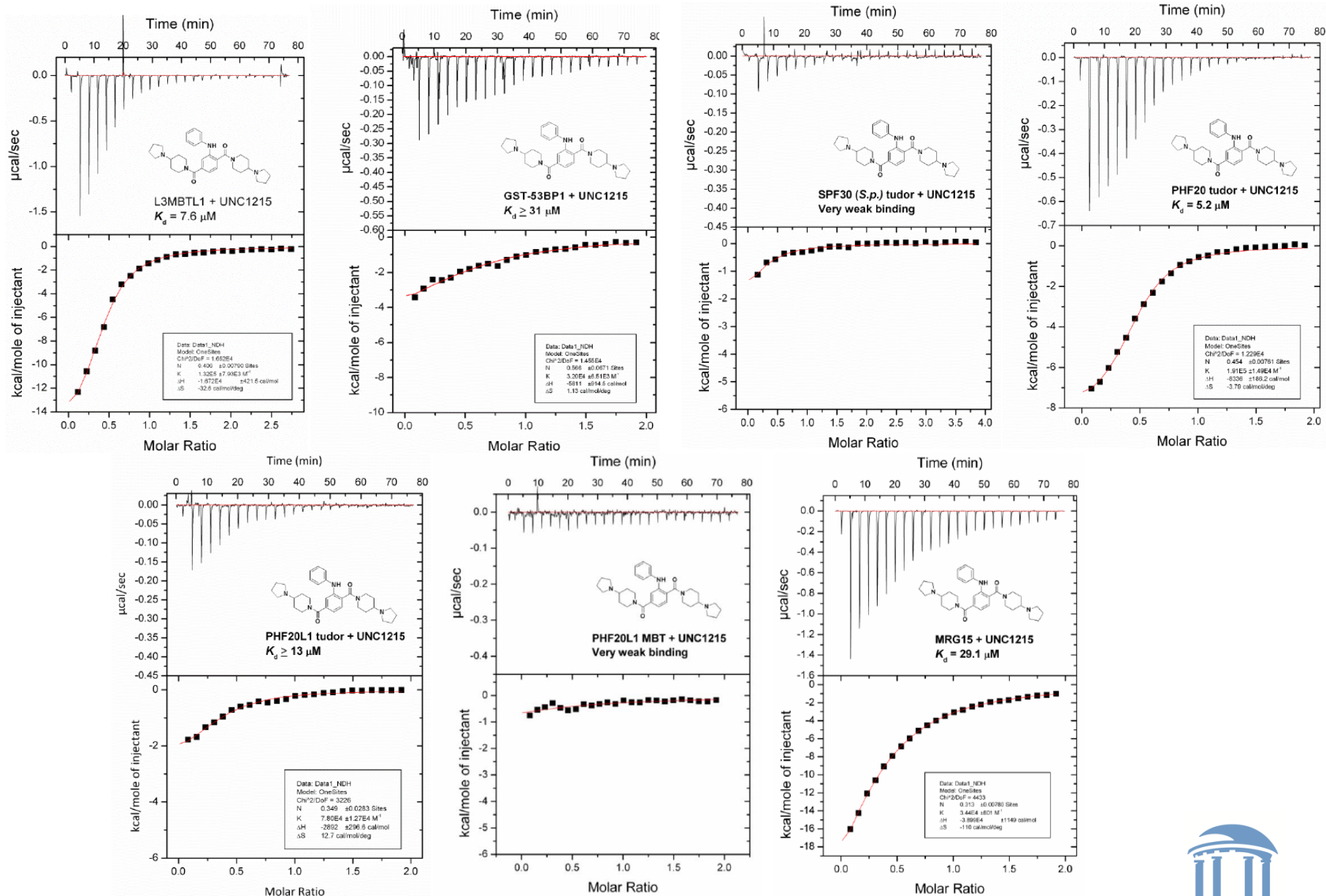
- All proteins (except MRG15) are binders of the H4K20me1-2 mark

Bedford Lab, MD Anderson

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# UNC1215 Selectivity Profiling



| Target Category                           | Target Activity |                                    |                                  |
|---|-----------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
|   | Target          | IC <sub>50</sub> (μM) <sup>a</sup> | K <sub>d</sub> (μM) <sup>b</sup> |
| Within methyl-lysine reader target family | L3MBTL3         | 0.04                               | 0.12                             |
|   | L3MBTL1         | 2                                  | 9.4                              |
|   | 53BP1           | 4                                  | > 31                             |
|   | PHF20 Tudor     | NT                                 | 5.6                              |
|   |                 |                                    |                                  |

Non-toxic in cell titer glow assay in HEK293 cells up to 100 μM

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Histone methyltransferases | < 50% inhibition at 250 μM versus 10 targets <sup>c</sup>             |
| Bromodomains               | T <sub>m</sub> shift < 0.5 °C at 10 μM versus 12 targets <sup>d</sup> |

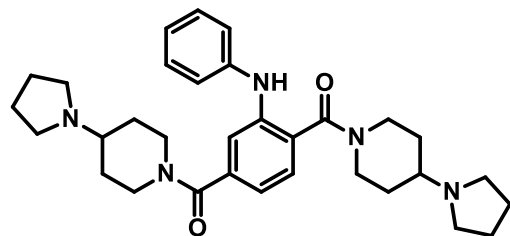
*"When one admits that nothing is certain one must, I think, also admit that some things are much more nearly certain than others."*

*Bertrand Russell*

|                          |   |                       |                           |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------|---------------------------|
|                          | M2  | 0.072                 | 30% at 30 μM <sup>e</sup> |
|                          | M3  | 0.89                  | NT                        |
|                          | M4  | 0.40                  | NT                        |
|                          | M5  | 4.3                   | NT                        |
| Kinase Selectivity Panel | < 15% inhibition at 10 μM versus 49 kinases |                       |                           |
|                          | Target                                      | % Inhibition at 10 μM |                           |
|                          | FLT3  | 64%                   |                           |

<sup>a</sup>Alphascreen assays results. <sup>b</sup>ITC results. <sup>c</sup>Radioactive SAM methyl transfer assay results. <sup>d</sup>Differential scanning fluorimetry results. <sup>e</sup>Radioligand binding assay results. <sup>f</sup>Ca<sup>2+</sup> mobilization assay results. <sup>e</sup>cAMP biosensor assay results.

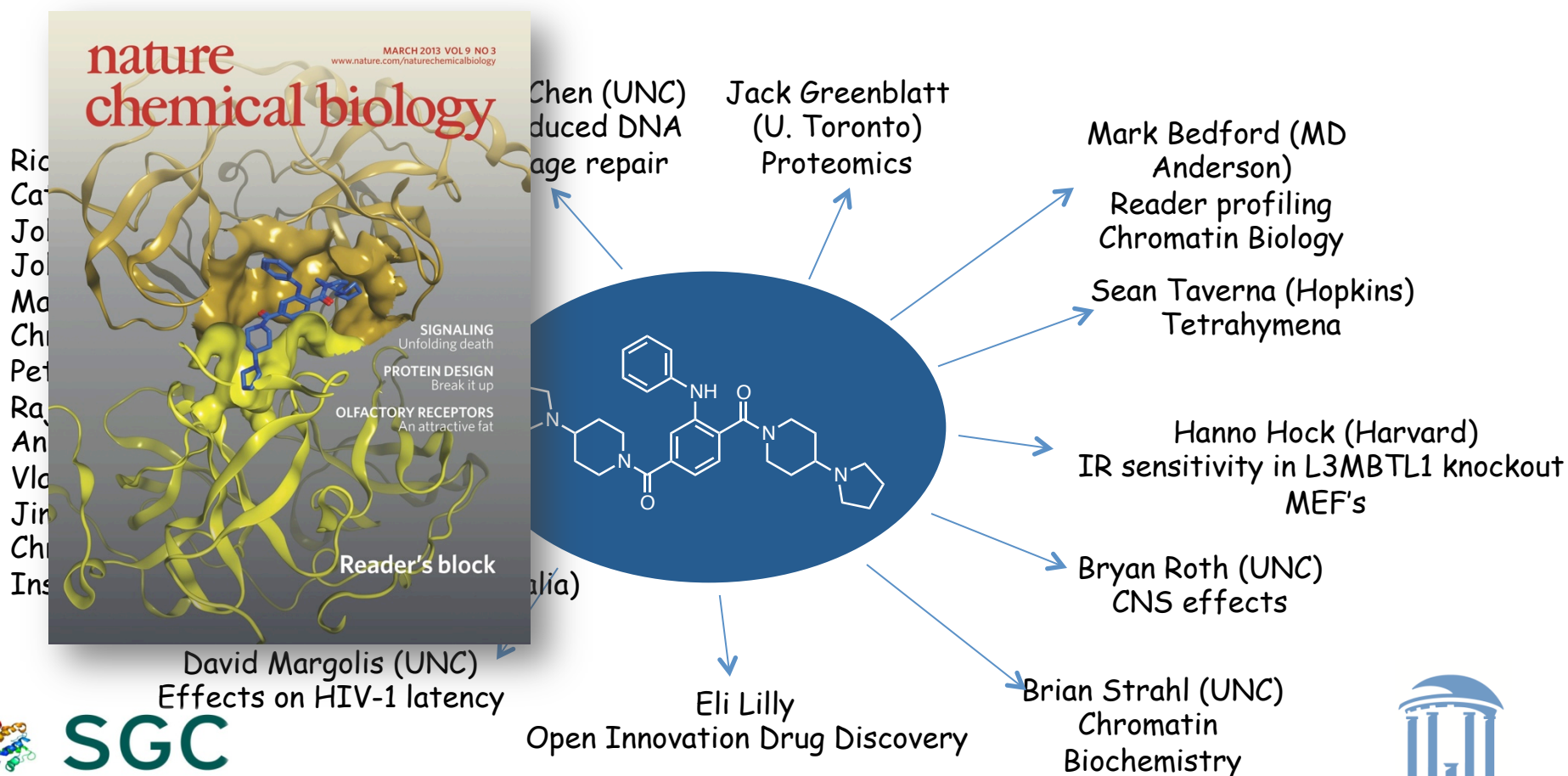
# UNC1215's path to probedom



UNC1215

## Quality Chemical Probes:

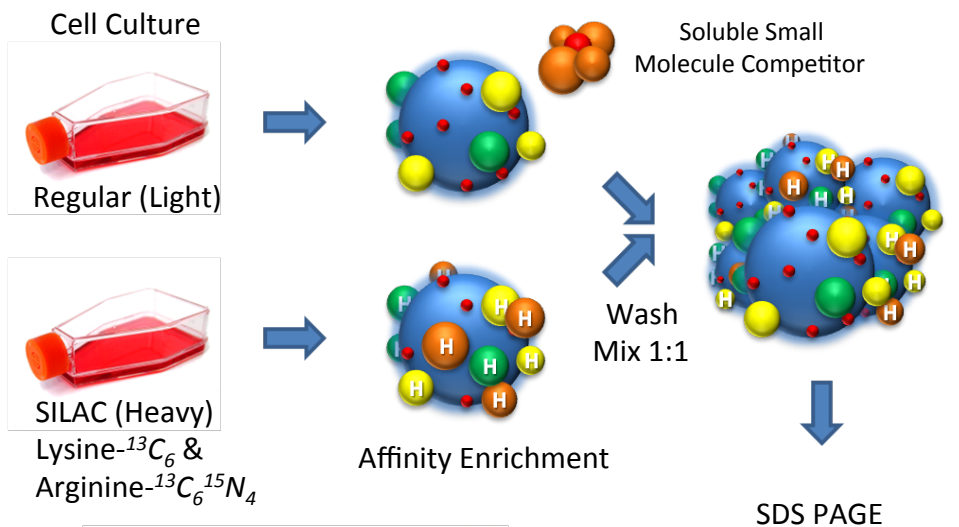
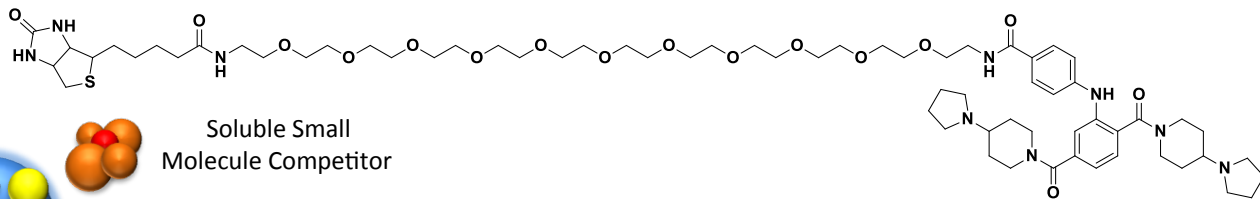
- Molecular profiling
- Mechanism of action
- Identity of the active species
- Proven utility as a probe
- Availability



SGC



# Understanding L3MBTL3 Function



*measuring differences in the ratio of SILAC (heavy):regular (light) proteins.*

H:L ratio > 2:1 (target)

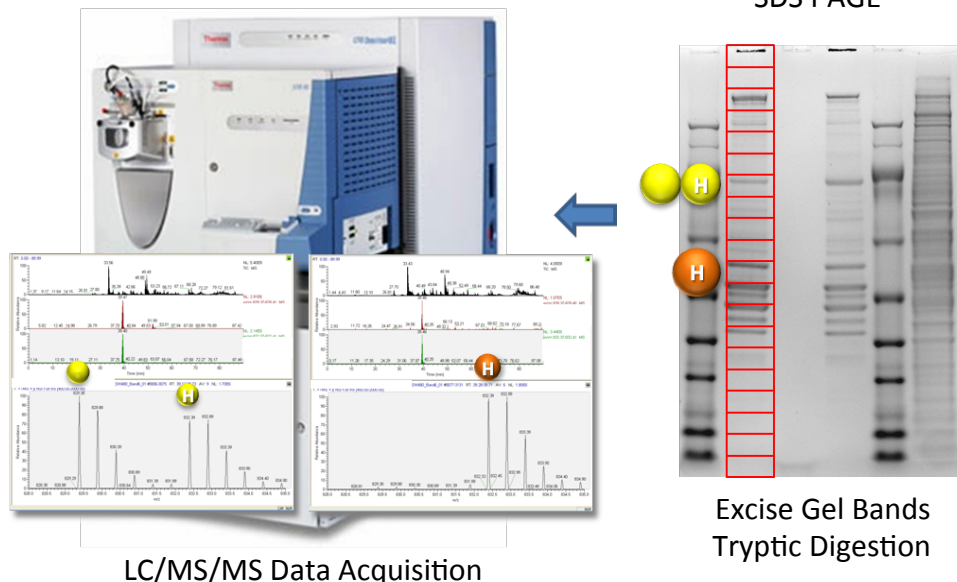
Experimental variations:

1. Active competitor
2. "Flip"
3. Inactive analog as competitor



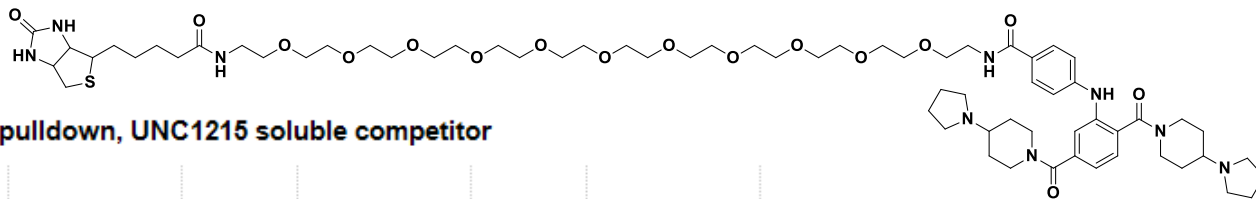
Candidate Proteins

1. Target / off-targets
2. Binding partners

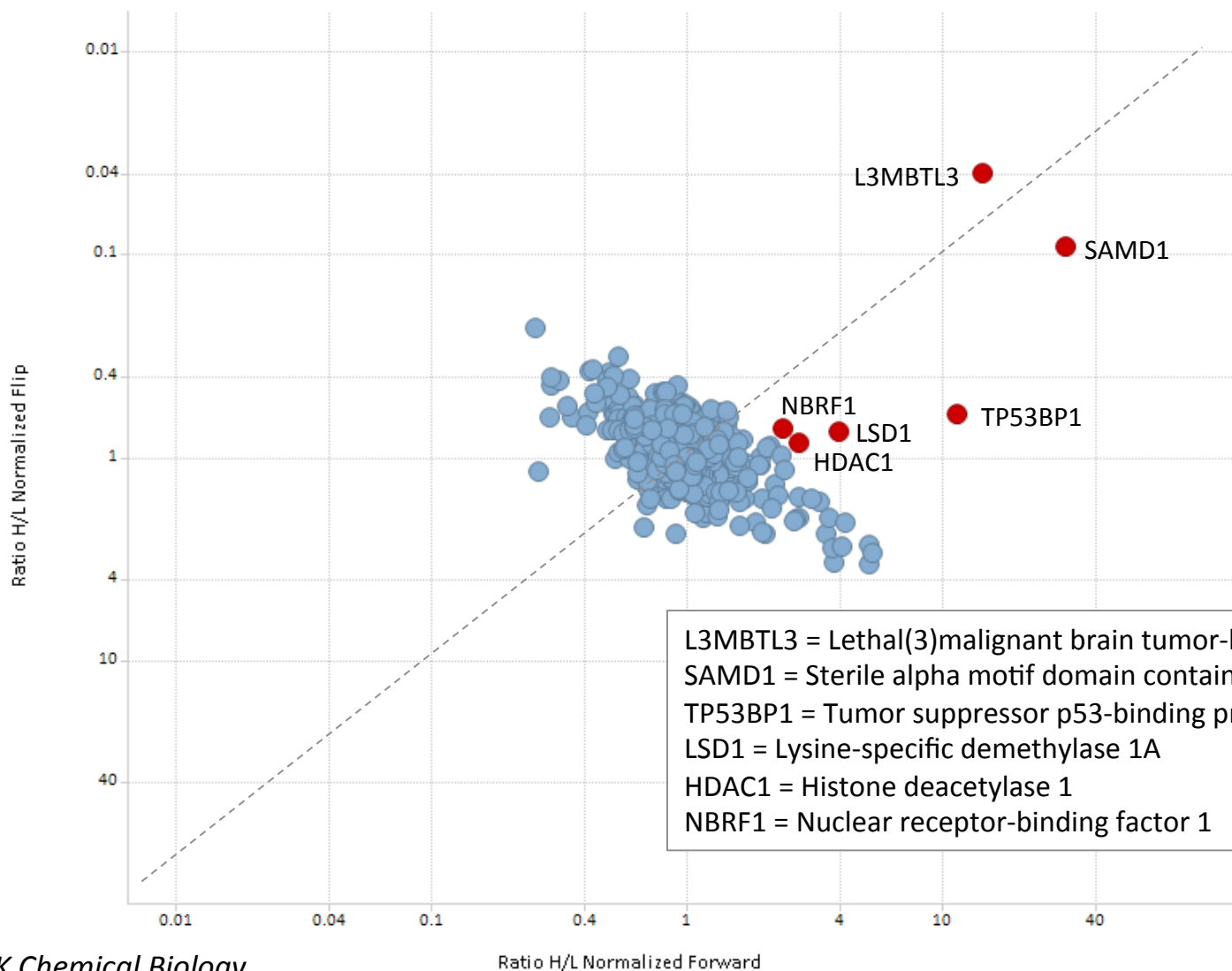




# Understanding L3MBTL3 Function



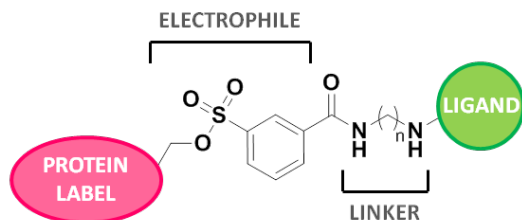
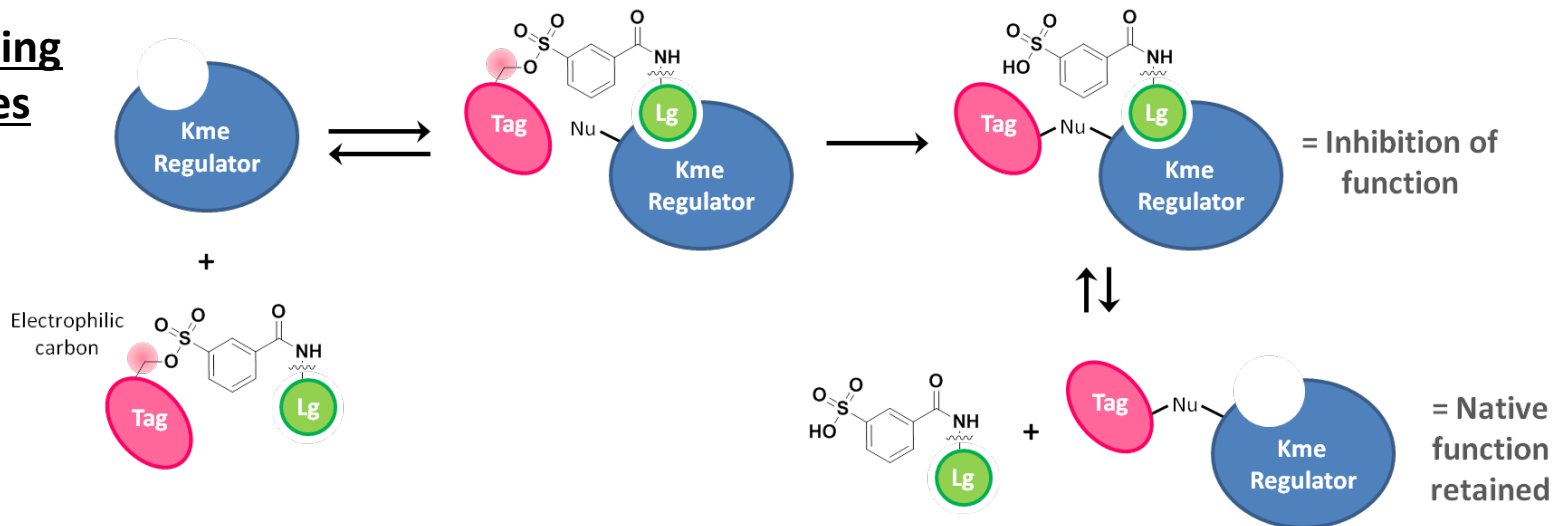
SILAC (G401 cells): Biotin-UNC1215 pulldown, UNC1215 soluble competitor





# Understanding L3MBTL3 Function

## Affinity labeling technologies



| PROTEIN LABEL  | ELECTROPHILE           | LINKER | LIGAND  |
|--|------------------------|--------|---|
| Biotin, Deuterated biotin                                  | Tosylate (shown above) |        | Known compounds for Kme readers (L3MBTL3, L3MBTL1)                        |
| Fluorescent Dyes (coumarin, Mero76)                        | Acyl imidazole         |        | Kme reader compounds in the pipeline (53BP1, UHRF1, CBX7, PHF23, JARID1A) |
| Photo-cross-linkers (diazirine), Dual biotin/cross-linkers |                        |        | Known compounds for Kme writers (G9a, EZH2, DOT1L, SMYD2)                 |
| Azide  |                        |        | Kme writer compounds in the pipeline (SETD8)                              |

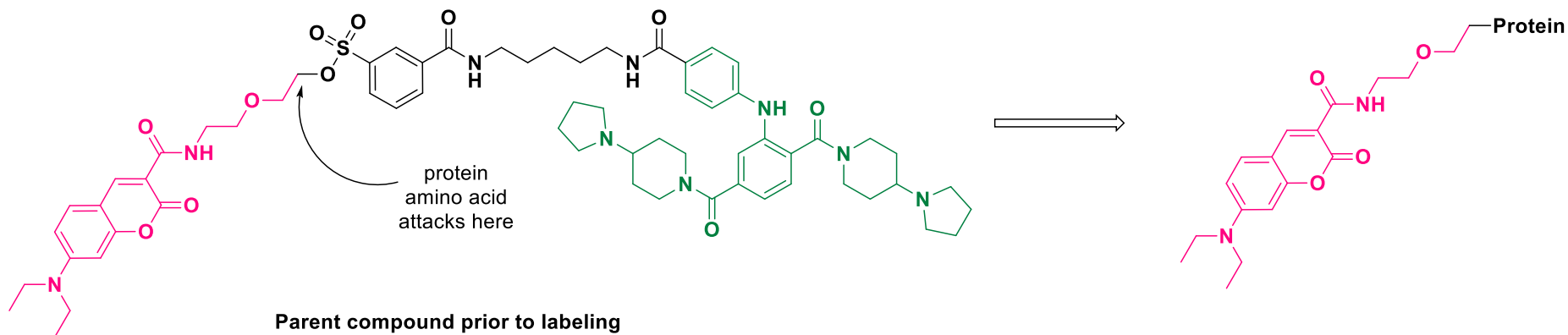
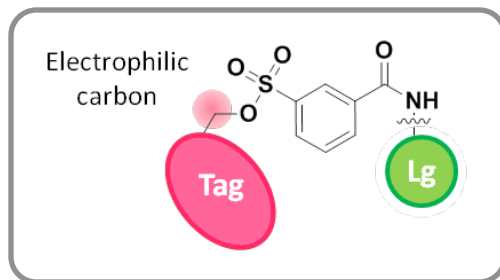
**Goal:** to covalently modify endogenous L3MBTL3 without genetic manipulation in a cellular context

- 1) Photo-cross-linking & MS experiments to identify protein-protein interactions
- 2) Confocal microscopy experiments to visualize protein localization
- 3) ChIP-seq experiments to analyze protein interactions with DNA without the need for protein specific antibodies



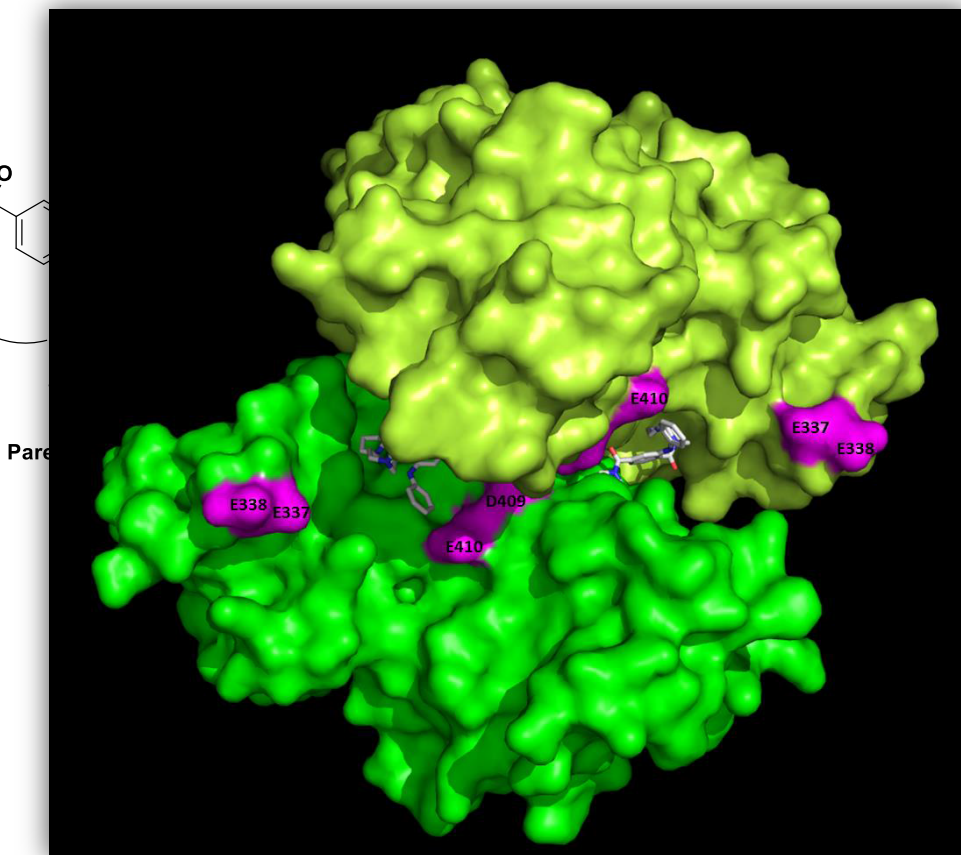
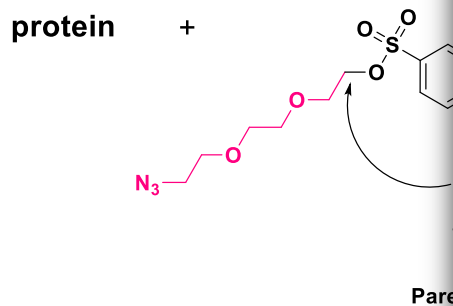
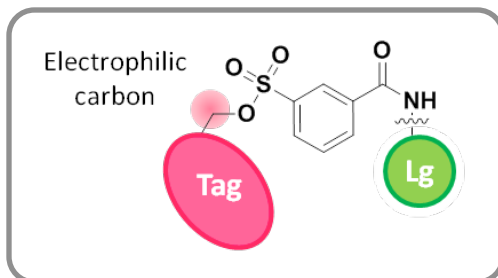
# Understanding L3MBTL3 Function

## Affinity labeling technologies

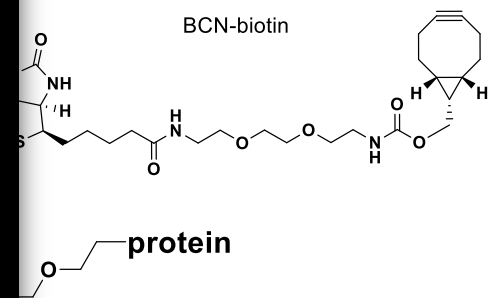


# Understanding L3MBTL3 Function

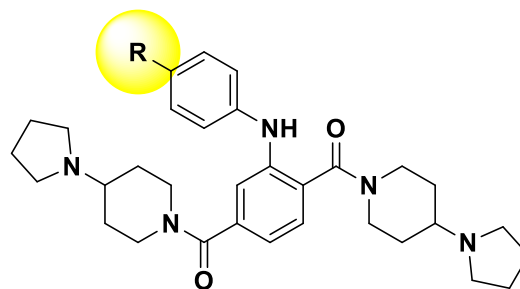
## Affinity labeling technologies



protein



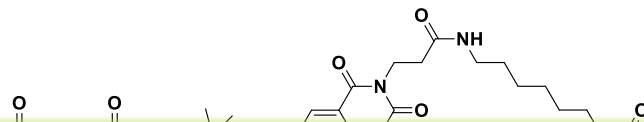
# Turning chemical probes into useful tools



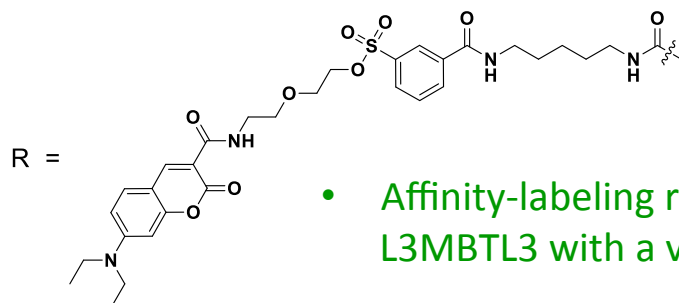
**UNC1215:**  
Potent L3MBTL3 inhibitor



- Tagged reagent used to purify reader proteins



Reagent used to visualize L3MBTL3 in cells



- Affinity-labeling reagent used to covalently modify L3MBTL3 with a variety of chemical tags



# MBT Acknowledgements

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