A novel bivalent morphine/heroin vaccine that prevents relapse to heroin addiction in rodents

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Received 9 August 2005; received in revised form 2 December 2005; accepted 12 January 2006

Available online 8 February 2006

Abstract

Both pre-clinical and clinical studies make feasible the use of vaccines as novel therapeutic medications to treat drug addiction. No reports to date have shown the development of structural models of opiate candidate vaccines for treating human addiction to such compounds. Here we report on the initial development of a novel structural formulation of a bi-valent vaccine against morphine/heroin. This vaccine was able to trigger and establish a high titer antibody response to haptenized drug with antibodies displaying equivalent specificities for both morphine and heroin. Such antibodies did not cross-recognize structurally dissimilar opiate medications. Furthermore, the evaluation of the potential therapeutic effectiveness of this vaccine was targeted to relapse prevention using a schedule of heroin delivery in the rat self-administration model. Antibodies against heroin blocked its reinforcing effects in rodents. The type of carrier protein used in this vaccine allows further evaluation of its potential therapeutic value for preventing relapse to heroin addiction in humans.

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Keywords: Vaccine; Morphine/heroin; Immunoprotection; Opiates; Active immunization; Prevention; Addiction

1. Introduction

Heroin addiction is a health problem and successful pharmacotherapies have been developed to treat the detoxification, withdrawal, craving and maintenance of the abstinent state of this addictive disorder [1–6]. Such treatments use long-acting oral opiate agents such as methadone, levo-acetylmethadol (LAAM) and the recently FDA-approved buprenorphine that mimic drug action at the opioid receptor [6–8]. Although the effectiveness of drug mimicry has been documented clinically, there remains significant concern and skepticism towards such treatments [2]. This relates to the fact that the heroin addict is still being exposed to opiates, and consequently may develop tolerance to and experience withdrawal from the treatment agent [2]. Another problem often seen in most out-patient treatments during the mainte-

nance of heroin abstinence is the high incidence of relapse to addictive drug consumption [1–6]. An alternative pharmacotherapy for both abstinence and prevention of relapse to heroin addiction is based on blocking heroin from reaching its opioid receptor target by using naltrexone and naloxone [7]. Indeed, despite the fact that these antagonists can be used to treat heroin addiction, their use has limitations as both drugs are not inactive in the absence of exogenous opiates and they block the binding of the body’s endogenous opioids (e.g., enkephalins and endorphins) causing negative emotional effects in the long-term treated patient [2].

As for other drugs of abuse such as cocaine, nicotine, methamphetamine and phencyclidine [9–11, and references therein], an alternative approach for heroin addiction might be an antibody-based antagonism of heroin’s brain entry. The feasibility of using an active vaccination approach for treating heroin addiction was explored 30 years ago by Bonese et al. [12]. They showed that responding maintained by this opiate was selectively abolished after active immunization with a morphine-6-hemisuccinyl-bovine serum albumin (BSA)
(M-6-H-BSA) conjugate in a single rhesus monkey trained to self-administer heroin. Surprisingly, no further progress was made in conducting more systematic studies focused on the generation of non-BSA-based carrier protein models of opiate vaccines appropriate for human use. Besides, we propose that once validated at the pre-clinical level, a novel structural model of a heroin vaccine designed for clinical use, could be subsequently considered as a candidate medication in clinical trials to test its potential therapeutic effectiveness as a co-adjutant and synergistic therapy for methadone or buprenorphine in preventing relapse to this opiate addiction. Furthermore, the use of such a vaccine in combination with existing therapies could also be useful to reduce the duration of substituted addiction and development of toxic side-effects often seen with the long-term use of these pharmacological agents, that ultimately contribute to the high incidence of treatment abandonment and heroin relapse [13].

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Preparation of the morphine-tetanus toxoid (M-TT) vaccine

The synthesis of the hapten for M-TT vaccine used the commercial formulation of morphine-sulfate H2O (m.w. 578.8) (Sigma–Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) as initial compound to produce morphine base according to a standard experimental procedure reported by Simon et al. [14]. After synthesis, morphine base was subjected to selective succinylation of its 6-hydroxy group in reflux (6 h at 70–80 °C) according to a standard protocol initially reported by Wainer et al. [15,16] with an excess of succinic anhydride (Sigma–Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) (2 g per 1 g of morphine sulfate) in dry benzene or pyridine (Sigma–Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA)/80% distilled H2O (Sigma–Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA)/20% DMSO (Sigma–Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) according to a standard procedure [17]. Generally, formation of the hapten was achieved by exhaustive dialysis against PBS, pH 7.2. to prepare the conjugate, the EDC-M-6-H derivative was coupled by its free imide group to the deprotected linker reagent with a latent amino group available on demand.

2.2. Active immunization and ELISA assays

The active immunization studies used male adult rats of 250–280 g (Harlan, Mexico). During all experimental conditions they were housed in individual hanging plastic cages within a temperature (21–24 °C) and light (08:00 h on; 20:00 h off) controlled vivarium. Principles of laboratory animal care, as outlined in the National Institutes of
Health (NIH) were followed. Although this protocol was not designed to specifically address toxicity, no detrimental effects of active vaccination were observed in boosted animals. For initial evaluation of the immunogenicity of the M-TT vaccine, 10 rats were immunized with the M-TT vaccine adsorbed to aluminum hydroxide gel adjuvant (alum, Imject-R-Alum, Pierce, Rockford, IL, USA) according to manufacturer’s protocol (Pierce, Rockford, IL, USA). Both adjuvant and TT alone were used as controls (n = 10 for each group) in the active immunization protocol. Each animal was injected subcutaneously (s.c.) at four sites over the shoulders bilaterally (two inoculation/side), with a total dose of M-TT vaccine/adjuvant of 250–300 μg/kg (0.25–0.3 ml alum (~0.12 μg/inoculation/animal/boost). Subsequently, 7–8 booster injections were administered using the same unit dose and coadjuvant and were given over a period of 14–16 weeks (once biweekly). This dosing regimen was adapted from standard vaccination protocols in rodents recommended for elicited antibody titer responses to small hapten linked to high molecular mass carrier proteins [18]. Fourteen days after each boost animals were invariably bled and sera were collected and frozen at −20 °C until use. A solid-phase antibody capture ELISA assay [19] was used for monitoring antibody titer response after each boost in vaccinated animals. Briefly, ELISA plates were coated with M-BSA conjugate to limit antibody detection to morphine and antiserum was added at a range of serial dilutions in triplicate. A biotin-labeled secondary anti-rat antibody (Jackson Immunoresearch, West Grove, PA, USA) coupled to a detection system of the VECTASTAIN Elite ABC Peroxidase Kit (Vector Lab, Burlingame, CA, USA) and OPD (Sigma–Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) was used to quantify the antibody concentration of the immune sera and values were expressed in mg/ml of sera. These data were used to estimate the heroin-binding capacity of the immune serum in mg/ml and the affinity of the antiserum for heroin binding. A pool of high-titer antiserum (n=1:100,000) contained high-affinity antibodies (2.5–4 × 10^8 M^-1) with a combined heroin binding capacity of up to 9–14 μM (0.6–0.8 mg/ml antigen-specific antibody). The specificity of the anti-morphine antibodies was determined by using the ELISA assay described above, where antiserum from rats immunized with the M-TT vaccine were incubated with varying concentrations of competitors (0.001–100 μM) represented by heroin and its metabolites (6-monoacetylmorphine and morphine 3- and 6-glucuronides, Sigma–Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA). Additional competitors used included compounds such as naloxone (Sigma–Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA), methadone (Sigma–Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) and buprenorphine (Sigma–Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) as well as Leu-enkephalin and β-endorphin (Tocris Cookson, Inc., Ellisville, MO, USA).

2.3. Study of active immunisation antagonism on heroin self-administration

Antibody antagonism studies used male adult rats of 250–280 g (Harlan, Mexico). During all experimental conditions they were housed in individual hanging plastic cages within a temperature (21–24 °C) and light (08.00 h on; 20.00 h off) controlled vivarium. Principles of laboratory animal care, as outlined in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) were followed. Heroin self-administration experiments were carried out in eight experimental operant chambers for rats (TSE Systems, Bad Homburg, Germany) fully equipped for self-administration of drugs. The chambers were connected to an OBS interface (TSE Systems, Bad Homburg, Germany), and a Pentium 4 PC was programmed with TSE software (TSE Systems, Bad Homburg, Germany) to control experimental events. Rats were divided into three groups (10 animals per group for a total of 30 animals) for the heroin self-administration paradigm, which used a unit dose of 0.06 mg/0.2 ml of sterile saline solution/kg body weight per infusion heroin (Sigma–Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA). Our heroin self-administration protocol in the rat was based on reported protocols [17,21] in which this dosing regimen produces opiate tolerance and dependence that parallels the behavior of chronic heroin use in humans. Cues (i.e., tone plus light) were presented to signal heroin availability during drug self-administration training and were absent along both extinction and reinstatement. Briefly, prior to surgery, rats (n = 30) were trained to press a lever for the delivery of food pellets. Jugular vein catheters were then implanted, and 1 week later the heroin self-administering protocol began. In daily 4 h sessions, animals were trained to self-administer intravenous infusions of 0.06 mg/kg heroin on a fixed-ratio 10 schedule of reinforcement (FR10). A minimum of 10 days of stable baseline response rates of ±10% variation in the number of infusions, at the FR10 in all animals was defined as baseline acquisition. After heroin intake had stabilized, substitution of normal saline was used for extinction of heroin self-administration behavior. Animals were normally subjected to an additional cycle of heroin intake acquisition/extinction before beginning immunization. Following heroin self-administration baseline training, sessions were discontinued for a 2-week period, and then rats were immunized with alum alone (n = 10), alum plus TT (n = 10) and alum plus M-TT vaccine using the immunization regimen described above. During the immunization period, heroin self-administration sessions were discontinued and sera were collected from immunized animals 14 days after each boost for monitoring the antibody titer using the ELISA assay described above. Boosted animals generally acquired sustained maximal antibody titers after the fourth to fifth
boosts. Reacquisition of heroin self-administration behavior was studied with the 0.06 mg/kg dose of heroin in all control and M-TT vaccine-treated rats. This dose was studied for 10–15 post-immunization sessions in all immunized groups. Analyses of antibody effects were calculated by averaging the total number of heroin infusions (drug intake) over the 10–15 post-immunization days in order to provide an overall evaluation of the entire post-immunization effects.

2.4. Statistical analyses

Statistical differences of antibody effects over the 10–15 post-immunization sessions in all immunized groups (control and M-TT vaccinated) were calculated from one dependent measure (e.g., infusions) for between-group treatment comparisons. Two-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed and the Newman–Keuls procedure was used for post-hoc comparisons. Significance was set as $P \leq 0.05$.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Vaccine design

We initially designed and synthesized a novel structural formulation of a morphine-tetanus toxoid (M-TT) vaccine able to generate a robust and sustained immunologic humoral response for heroin upon active vaccination. In the M-TT conjugate (patent pending #PCT/MX2005/000049), drug was covalently haptenized to the ε-amino free groups of the side chain of lysine residues of the highly immunogenic carrier protein tetanus toxoid (TT) using a long ($\approx 20.15 \, \text{Å}$) spacer linker arm (Fig. 1). Overall, the structural design of this morphine conjugate was based on exploiting practical structural rules derived from previous works, reporting successful preparations to make highly antigenic small hapten-based conjugates [19,22]. There has been demonstrated that the length of the spacer linker arm and its degrees of freedom, place the haptenized moieties of each conjugate, distant enough from structural domains of the carrier protein and in appropriate spatial orientation to be recognized by the immune system as antigen [23,24]. This in turn causes such haptens to become highly immunogenic [23]. With this rationale, we first hypothesized that our structural formulation of the M-TT vaccine should be efficient enough for triggering a robust response of antibodies of differing affinities and specificities to different structural determinants of morphine shared with related structural opiate analogs such as heroin and its neuroactive metabolites. Second, the M-TT vaccine not only uses a highly immunogenic carrier protein appropriate and authorized [22] for human use but also introduces a spacer linker arm that is twice the length of ones normally used in other morphine-6-hemisuccinyl-BSA conjugates to covalently haptenize morphine to its C-6 hydroxyl function through two stable amide bonds (Fig. 1). This spacer linker arm is formed by an aliphatic chain of carbon atoms of low structural complexity, which may reduce its potential role as immunopredominant determinant when haptenized morphine is exposed to immune cells.

3.2. Vaccine immunogenicity and characterization of humoral response

We further investigated the immunogenic capability of the M-TT vaccine to trigger a sustained and robust humoral immunologic response to the haptenized drug [12,23,25]. Although this protocol was not designed to specifically address animal toxicity testing, no major detrimental effects at general health level such as anaphylaxis, convulsions, loss of body weight and appetite, as well as in differences in ambulatory activity and mortality were observed between control versus vaccinated animals. Other safety parameters measured included injection site inspection and palpation. However, there were little local injection reactions such as erythema and subcutaneous nodules early (i.e., 1–7 days) after immunization, probably due to mechanical process of M-TT vaccine injection. Nonetheless, further standard
Fig. 2. Characterization of the immune humoral response to M-TT vaccine in actively vaccinated rats. (A) Time-course of the anti-morphine antibody titer response in boosted rats with the M-TT vaccine. The solid vertical arrows point for booster injections and 14 days after antibody titers were measured in the experimental group (empty circles on the graph) (mean ± S.E.M.; n = 10). (B) Individual variability of serum antibody levels from same group of animals showed in (A). Symbols (○, □, △, ▽, ◆, ▲, ▼, ♦, □/H17033, ■, ▲) are the serum levels (mg/ml) in individual animals. Time-course of the kinetics of decay (C) and recovery (D) of titers of the anti-morphine antibodies. A slow and progressive decay in serum antibody levels (C) was observed after the boost (solid vertical arrow) (mean ± S.E.M.; n = 10), reaching detectable levels ≥ 1:20,000 after 3–4 months and later rapidly recovering to maximal levels (≈ 1:80–100,000) within the first 5–14 days after reboost (solid vertical arrow) (D). Titers are expressed on the ordinate axis as the inverse of the sera dilution that gave 50% of the maximal response and points are the mean ± S.E.M. of serum antibody levels from ten vaccinated animals. (E) Analyses of the specificity of anti-morphine antibodies. Anti-morphine antibodies showed equivalent specificities for immunological recognition for heroin (♦), morphine (○), morphine-ovalbumine (△), the neuroactive metabolite, M-6-G (*) and inactive metabolite M-3-G (□), as well as 6-MAM (◆). No significant antibody cross-reactivity was observed for Leu-enkephalin (▼) and β-endorphin (□) including therapeutic opiate compounds such as methadone (□), naltrexone (□) and buprenorphine (♦). Values of antibody binding to the antigen adsorbed to the solid phase of the ELISAs are expressed as absorbance units at each point of varying concentration of indicated competitors from ten vaccinated animals.

rodent toxicity studies [9–11 and references therein] should be addressed to explore for potential systemic vaccine-induced adverse effects at the level of histopathological damage in organs and blood cells. Animals were immunized with the M-TT conjugate and bled at varying times. The anti-morphine antibodies were monitored by ELISA assays [19]. A progressive increase in the titer of specific antibodies was observed during the four initial boosts (Fig. 2A). Maximal sustained antibody titers (≥ 1:100,000, 0.8 ± 0.2 mg of specific immunoglobulin/ml of sera) were invariably reached after the fourth boost (Fig. 2A and B), and remained sustained over a period of a year with periodic administration of repeated booster. Additionally, a narrow variability of antibody serum levels (geometric
mean ± S.E.M. in mg/ml for boost 1 = 0.052 ± 0.013; boost 2 = 0.03 ± 0.105; boost 3 = 0.75 ± 0.046; boost 4 = 0.81 ± 0.02; boost 5 = 0.8 ± 0.31; boost 6 = 0.78 ± 0.25 and boost 7 = 0.79 ± 0.003) were observed in this group of vaccinated animals after each boost (Fig. 2B). This latter result suggests that individual variation in active antibody production would not impair the M-TT vaccine effectiveness in blunting relapse to opiate consumption (see below in Section 3.4), because based on other animal self-administration studies for cocaine and nicotine, vaccine treatment effectiveness may likely depend upon critical antibody threshold level [9,10]. Furthermore, a noteworthy finding was that the high-titer anti-morphine antibody responses observed in our study was several fold higher than those reported for other vaccines for drugs of abuse tested in rats, and nearly an order of magnitude higher than the best currently used vaccines in humans [9,10]. However, it is worth to mention that such comparisons do not necessarily reflect a superior immunogenic capability of the M-TT vaccine for heroin than other tested addictive vaccine conjugates.

For example, use of different vaccine dosing schedules and structurally dissimilar carrier hapten proteins (i.e., tetanus toxoid versus either BSA or B subunit polypeptide from cholera toxin) as well as haptenized drugs (i.e., cocaine and nicotine) may ultimately account for differential immune responses to addictive drugs either in rodent or humans. Furthermore, preliminary studies on synthesis of different morphine conjugates performed by our research group (data not shown) [26,27] were based on the structural model of the morphine-6-hemisuccinyl-BSA conjugate reported by Bonese et al. [12]. In these studies, we used KLH, ovalbumin, tyroglobulin and BSA as carrier proteins to haptenize morphine through aliphatic spacer linker arms of varying lengths (i.e., 2–6˚A). Overall, a common feature of these latter vaccine models was its low serum drug-specific antibody concentrations elicited (0.02–0.08 mg/ml) when compared to the M-TT vaccine [26,27]. Since morphine by itself is a very poorly immunogenic hapten [19], we could argue that the superior anti-morphine antibody response elicited by our M-TT vaccine could be due to the use of a highly immunogenic carrier protein (tetanus toxoid) [22] and both the nature and length of the spacer linker arm through which morphine is haptenized and acquires enough spatial freedom in the conjugate to become highly antigenic and immunogenic for the immune system.

Thereafter, we characterized the progressive decay of the titers of anti-morphine antibodies in non-boosted immunized animals. Antibody titers showed a significant decay in a time-dependent manner, reaching its lowest levels (≈1:20,000; 0.16 mg/ml) 120 d after re-booster (Fig. 2C). Following the significant antibody titer decay, a rapid recovery of maximal levels (≈1:80,000–1:100,000, 0.6–0.8 mg/ml) was observed within the first 5–14 days during a subsequent re-boost (Fig. 2D). These latter data confirm the effectiveness of the M-TT vaccine to induce immunologic humoral memory to this opiate.

### 3.3. Characterization of specificity of antibodies

As heroin is a synthetic morphine analogue produced by acetylation of the phenolic 3-hydroxyl and alcoholic 6-hydroxyl groups, blocking morphine through either its 3- or 6-hydroxyl functional groups could be useful for generating antisera unable to distinguish morphine from heroin [28–30]. Thus, the M-TT vaccine (Fig. 1) was synthesized by haptenizing morphine through its 6-hydroxy functional group for generating antibodies with equivalent specificity to heroin and the metabolites from both opiates. Heroin is rapidly metabolized in blood [31] by sequential deacetylation of two separate ester bonds to yield sequentially 6-monoacetylmorphine (6-MAM), morphine and two glucuronide metabolites named morphine-3-glucuronide (M-3-G) and morphine-6-glucuronide (M-6-G) [24]. Interestingly, 6-MAM and M-6-G have intrinsic efficacy to activate mu-type opioid receptors, thereby possibly contributing to the highly addictive properties of heroin [32–35].

A competition ELISA (Fig. 2E) was used to evaluate the specificity of the anti-morphine antibodies. There was no significant recognition for structurally dissimilar theraeutic opiate compounds such as buprenorphine, methadone and naltrexone. An absence of cross-recognition was also observed for a representative opioid peptide sequences such as leu-enkephalin and β-endorphin. Conversely, the antisera recognized with equivalent specificity 6-MAM, M-3-G and M-6-G. These data suggest the immunogenic capability of our M-TT vaccine to generate a humoral response of anti-morphine antibodies displaying equivalent specificities not only for heroin but also for its active metabolites. As antibodies cannot cross the blood-brain barrier, anti-morphine antibodies could represent efficacious pharmacological agents to retain heroin and its active metabolites in the plasma. The absence of cross-recognition of anti-morphine antibodies for endogenous opioid peptides, such as leu-enkephalin and β-endorphin, indicates a potential safe clinical use of the M-TT vaccine, because no cross-reactivity to endogenous opioid peptides would be generated in immunized subjects. Additionally, the lack of antibody cross-recognition to methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone makes possible to propose a potential combined use of the M-TT vaccine with these agents for treating heroin maintenance [1,3,6].

### 3.4. Therapeutic effects of the MTT vaccine

Heroin is known to have potent reinforcing effects that contribute to rapid addiction and high rates of relapse after long periods of abstinence [3,6]. Among the many factors that lead to heroin recidivism, re-exposure to the drug itself has been proven to be one of the most powerful in humans and animals [2,4–6]. Therefore, we next explored the efficacy of active immunization with the M-TT vaccine in preventing reacquisition of heroin self-administration in rats. A rat model of relapse was used where animals were trained to self-administer a moderate reinforcing dose of heroin (0.06 mg/kg
Significantly different (post-immunization sessions from M-TT and control vaccinated animals over 5 extinction sessions (striped bars). Vaccination effects were analyzed in animals vaccinated with alum alone and 22.5 ± 4.5 for animals vaccinated with alum plus the carrier protein. In contrast to vaccinated control, animals immunized with the M-TT vaccine did not reacquire heroin-taking behavior throughout the 15 days of testing with same heroin dose. The averaged (±S.E.M.) heroin infusions during 10–15 days of stable baseline response rates at the FR10 in all animals were averaged (±S.E.M.) and defined as pre-immunization baseline intake of drug (white bars). Pre-immunization saline infusions were averaged (±S.E.M.) over 5 extinction sessions (striped bars). Vaccination effects were analyzed by comparing the averaged (±S.E.M.) heroin infusions during 10–15 post-immunization sessions from M-TT and control vaccinated animals (solid bars). Significantly different (F(1,15) = 15, P < 0.005) from the post-immunization baseline values of control groups immunized with either alum alone (alum) or alum plus carrier protein (TT + alum). The M-TT vaccine introduces two novel structural advancements never presented by other morphine conjugates synthesized in the past, including the pioneer M-6-HBSA conjugate used by Bonese et al. [12]. Firstly, the use of a highly immunogenic hapten carrier protein (tetanus toxoid) appropriate and licensed for human vaccination. Secondly, the presence of a longer linker spacer arm of aliphatic residues of carbon atoms through which morphine is covalently linked to hapten carrier protein using two stable amide bonds. Whether the very high serum and sustained antibody concentrations over time attained in our study would be achievable in humans using the M-TT vaccine, who have shown to develop lesser and very variable anti-drug antibody titer response than experimental animals [9–11 and references therein], is an issue that remains to be explored in future Phases I–IIa clinical trials. Although the current studies suggest that the M-TT vaccine represents an attractive candidate medication to test safety and immunogenicity in Phase I clinical trials against heroin and/or morphine, additional detailed studies should be addressed to evaluate potential toxic side effects in other experimental animals (i.e., rabbits or primates). Furthermore, similar to the cocaine vaccine, TA-CD [11,36], a clinical trial program could be developed to further evaluate the safety, immunogenicity, and efficacy of M-TT in human volunteers. Given that the antibodies generated after immunization with M-TT cannot cross the blood-brain barrier, treatment effects are not expected to be psychoactive. Therefore, the M-TT vaccine may serve as a therapeutic adjunct to other pharmacotherapies aimed at heroin addiction treatments to maintain prolonged abstinence to this opiate with classical pharmacological agents [3,6,7]. Moreover, as illicit opiate use is
common among heroin addicts using these treatment modalities [13], having circulating anti-heroin antibodies is likely to reduce the use of such illicit substances, as their reinforcing effects would be blocked. Furthermore, the use of the M-TT vaccine in combination with existing therapies could also be useful to reduce the duration of substituted addiction and development of deleterious side-effects often seen with the long-term use of these pharmacological agents [13] that ultimately contribute to the high incidence of treatment aban-
don and heroin relapse [13]. For example, naltrexone is not inactive in the absence of exogenous addictive opiates and blocks the action of the body’s endogenous opioid peptides (i.e., enkephalins, dynorphins and endorphins), and this can cause negative emotional effects (such as depressed mood), which reduce patient compliance [1–3]. Additionally, clini-
documented long-term side effects such as constipation, weight gain, decreased libido and menstrual irregularities (resulting from hyperprolactinemia) have been reported in using methadone for heroin maintenance [37 and references therein]. Finally, the M-TT vaccine could be used as an alter-
native medication in heroin maintenance treatments in many countries where the medical prescription and authorization of use of pharmacological agents such as methadone and buprenorphine/naloxone are not yet available. Heroin addiction is a complex disease where one of the major problems to be improved is the high incidence of relapse during mainte-
nance to same or other addictive drugs (i.e., cocaine). Thus, in this world of multiple drug abuse/polydrug abuse, it is likely that such complex drug-intake patterns could only be successfully treated by using a combination of both current and novel therapeutic medications (i.e., simultaneous active vaccination against heroin/morphine/cocaine/amphetamines using polyvalent vaccine formulations).

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Dr. Ramón de la Fuente Muñiz and Dr. Gerardo Heinez for their encouragement in this study, to Dr. Rodrigo Arreola, Dr. Alberto Salazar and the Ass. Res. Juan Carlos-Calva for their input and help in the preparation of the manuscript. This work was supported by grants from the Fundación Gonzalo del Río Arronte and The National Institute of Psychiatry, Project INP-2040.

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