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BRIEF REPORT



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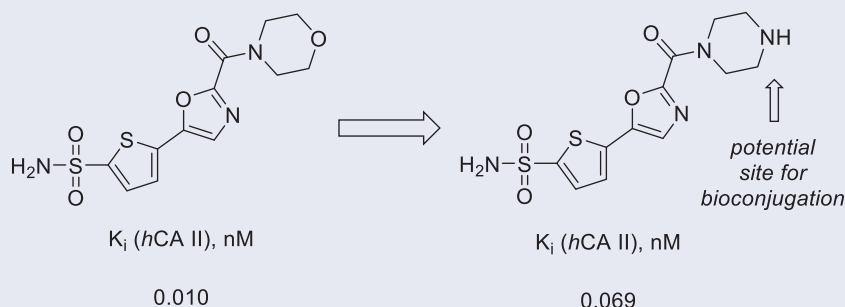
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ABSTRACT

Hydrophilic derivatives of an earlier described series of carbonic anhydrase inhibitors have been designed, prepared and profiled against a panel of carbonic anhydrase isoforms, including the glaucoma-related *hCA II*. For all hydrophilic derivatives, computational prediction of intraocular permeability routes showed the predominance of conjunctival rather than corneal absorption. The potentially reactive primary or secondary amine periphery of these compounds makes them suitable candidates for bioconjugation to polymeric drug carriers. As was shown previously, the most active *hCA II* inhibitor is efficacious in alleviating intraocular pressure in normotensive rabbits with efficacy matching that of dorzolamide.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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Introduction

Glaucoma-related high intraocular pressure can be alleviated by the use of eye drops of prostaglandin analogues, beta blocking agents and carbonic anhydrase inhibitors (CAIs)¹. The recent approval of rho kinase inhibitors and NO donors significantly expands the range of treatment options^{2,3}. The clinically used topical CAIs for glaucoma treatment include dorzolamide (**1**) and brinzolamide (**2**), compounds that are (a) relatively lipophilic and (b) non-selective as inhibitors of a particular carbonic anhydrase isoform⁴. Acetazolamide (**3**) and methazolamide (**4**) are also used as anti-glaucoma agents (Figure 1), but they are oral medications which frequently cause adverse drug reactions⁵. Potent and selective inhibition of carbonic anhydrase II isoform (*hCA II*) is an important mechanism of action due to the critical importance of this enzyme in reduction of glaucoma-related intraocular pressure⁶.

Topical ocular drugs are typically designed as rather lipophilic, because they absorb to the eye across the cornea⁷. Lipophilicity leads to decreased water solubility and, thus, lowers the achievable drug concentration in the tear fluid. On the contrary, higher concentration in the tear fluid can be achieved with hydrophilic compounds. Such compounds may absorb into their ocular targets via conjunctiva and sclera that allow permeation of relatively hydrophilic compounds⁸. Specifically designing hydrophilic compounds that can utilise this route will lower the loss of hydrophilic compounds to the blood stream across conjunctiva⁸. Anti-glaucoma CAIs exert their action in the ciliary body located next to sclera, thereby making non-corneal absorption of highly potent, hydrophilic derivatives an interesting approach. Moreover, in comparison to the cornea, the conjunctiva has wider inter-cellular space for permeation of hydrophilic compounds⁹.

Previously, we described a series of 5-(sulfamoyl)thien-2-yl 1,3-oxazoles **5a–c** which displayed a remarkably potent inhibition

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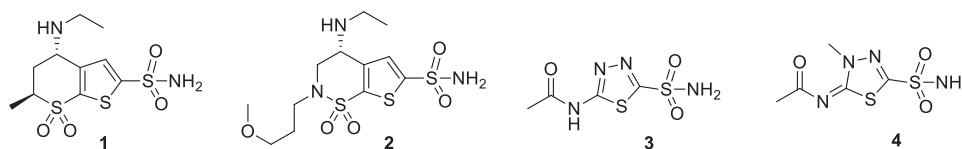


Figure 1. Clinically used antiglaucoma carbonic anhydrase inhibitors.

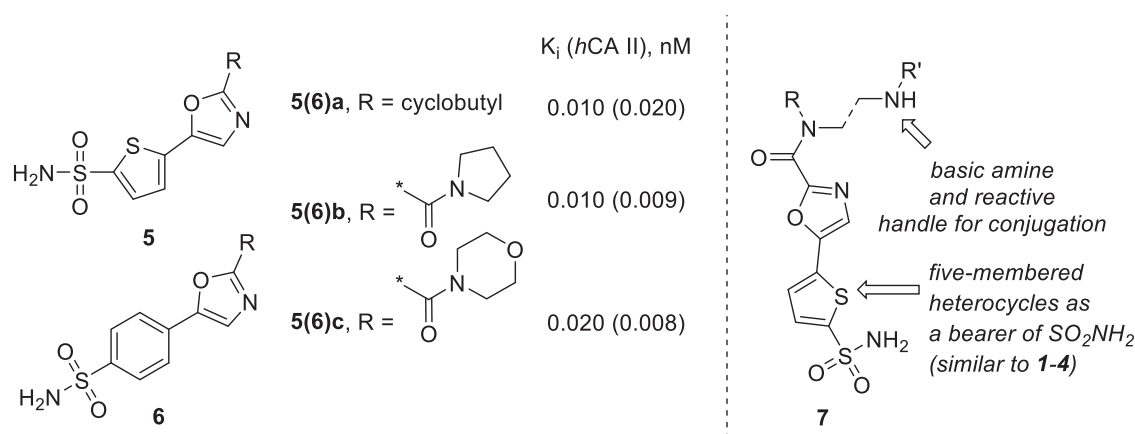


Figure 2. Earlier reported potent hCAII inhibitors 5(6)a-c and their modified hydrophilic thiophene analogues 7 designed and investigated in this work.

profile towards human carbonic anhydrase (CA, EC 4.2.1.1) and, in particular, its hCA II isoform¹⁰ which is the primary target for intraocular pressure-reducing antiglaucoma drugs.⁶ Later on, a related – and similarly potent against hCA II – benzenesulfonamide series (6a-c) showed high efficacy *in vivo* lowering ocular hypertension in rabbits. Furthermore, the high potency and the pronounced selectivity towards the CA isoform of this series was rationalised by X-ray crystallographic structure of complex of 6c with the protein¹¹. Considering that compounds 5a-c contain the primary sulphonamide group linked to a thiophene moiety, it makes them structurally closer to the clinically used drugs 1-4 all of which have a five-membered heterocyclic core as a primary sulphonamide-bearing scaffold. Thus, we selected carboxamides 5b-c as the prototype scaffold for the introduction of peripheral functional groups which would increase the resulting compounds' hydrophilicity and also a reactive 'handle' for subsequent chemical conjugation to polymer nanoparticles. These notions resulted in the design of series 7 (Figure 2).

Eye drop treatment for glaucoma is notoriously hampered by the poor patient compliance and the progression of the disease and loss of vision¹². Longer-acting intraocular drug delivery with polymeric systems could potentially solve this issue¹³. New compounds 7 were designed with this downstream goal in mind, since their structure could allow conjugation to the polymeric carriers *via* amide and other potentially biodegradable linkages. On the other hand, the inherent hydrophilicity of these compounds was seen as potentially beneficial as hydrophilic compounds, even when liberated from a polymer carrier, display slower clearance from the intraocular spaces¹⁴. Thus, even with similar on-target potencies, more hydrophilic drugs, once delivered to the intraocular space, are expected to have a lower clearance and would require smaller dose per day to exert their actions. Even taken alone, more hydrophilic hCA II inhibitors will have potential as traditional eye drop medications if they could be potentially delivered across the conjunctiva-sclera route to the ciliary body.

As cautioned earlier¹⁵, 'decorating' a more lipophilic potent hCA II inhibitor with outright hydrophilic moieties (i.e. moving from 5 to 7) carries a potential risk of losing the desired hCA II potency. As one must bear in mind, the active site of carbonic

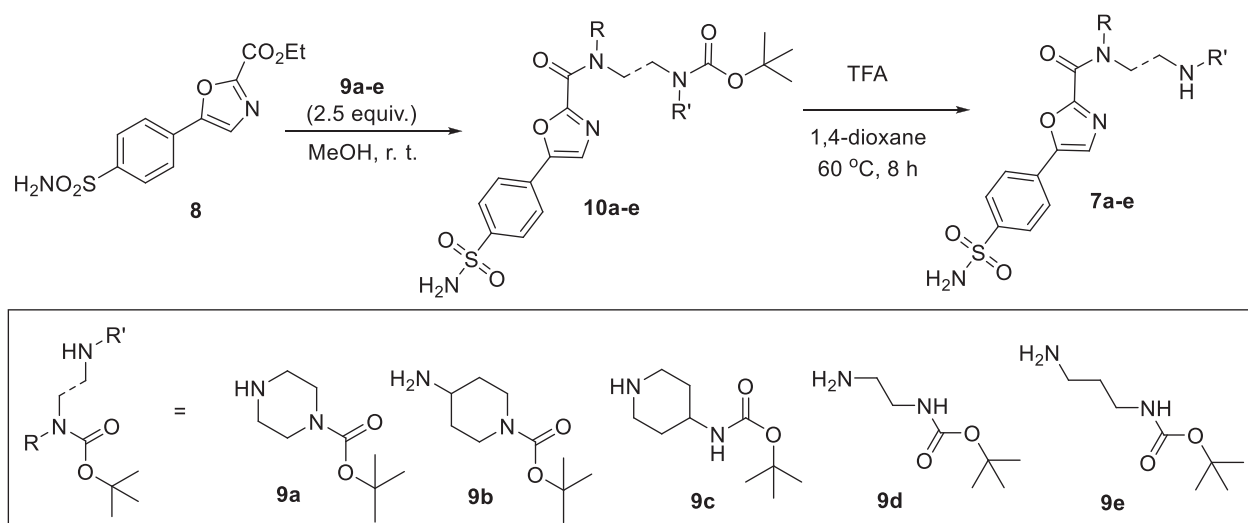
anhydrase has a very characteristic topology where a hydrophobic half of the protein surface is clearly delineated from the hydrophilic one¹⁶. Thus, replacing a relatively hydrophobic groups in 5a-c with a large hydrophilic carboxamide groups could, in principle, deprive 7 of desired affinity to hCA II. Despite these potential risks we set off to synthesise a set of compounds 7 for investigation of their carbonic anhydrase inhibitory potency *in vitro* and subsequent efficacy study of the best inhibitor intraocular pressure-lowering agents *in vivo*. Herein, we report the results of these studies.

Results and discussion

The key building block – ethyl 5-(4-sulfamoylphenyl)oxazole-2-carboxylate (8) – was synthesised in several straightforward steps from α -aminoacetophenone hydrochloride as described previously^{10,15}. The electron-withdrawing influence of the sulphonamide group on the electrophilicity of the ester functionality in 8 turned out to be of advantage in subsequent synthesis of the target compounds 7a-e. Indeed, on reaction requiring no additional activation, with 2.5-fold excess of mono-Boc-protected dibasic amines 9a-e at r.t. in MeOH, respective amides 10a-e were obtained and deprotected with TFA in 1,4-dioxane at 60 °C and purified chromatographically to give the target compounds 7a-e (Scheme 1).

The inhibitory profile obtained for sulphonamides 7a-e in a stopped-flow kinetics assay against human CA I, II, IV and XII is shown in Table 1. In addition to hCA II, the other three isoforms were selected to preliminarily gauge the off-target profile of the compounds intended to inhibit the target isoform. Moreover, inhibition profile against hCA IV and XII was thought to be of significance as these isoforms are also involved in the secretion of the intraocular liquor¹⁷.

To our delight, all four inhibitors 6a-d preserved the potent inhibition profile against the target hCA II isoform (although their hCA II potency deteriorated somewhat compared to the less hydrophilic initial leads 5a-c) and a clearly better hCA II selectivity profile compared to acetazolamide (4) employed as a



Scheme 1. Synthesis of hydrophilic sulphonamides **7a-e** investigated in this work.

Table 1. Inhibitory activity of compounds **7a-e** against the target (*hCA* II) as well as selected off-target (*hCA* I, IV and XII) isoforms.

Compound	Structure	K_i (nM) ^a			
		<i>hCA</i> I	<i>hCA</i> II	<i>hCA</i> IV	<i>hCA</i> XII
7a		4.0	0.069	21.6	3.9
7b		56.8	0.92	23.7	8.9
7c		31.3	0.41	30.6	5.7
7d		72.9	3.9	5.2	9.3
7e		58.3	3.1	4.6	8.8
3 ^b		250	12	75	5.7

^aMean from three different assays by stopped flow technique (errors were in the range of ± 5 –10% of the reported values).

^bSulfonamide inhibitor acetazolamide (AAZ) used as a reference pan-CA inhibitor in stopped flow CO₂ hydrase assay.

reference inhibitor. Interestingly, the replacement of the morpholine oxygen atom in **5c** with hydrogen bond donating/accepting piperazine NH in compound **7a** (a rather drastic change from the standpoint of potential molecular interactions which resulted in the change of the binding mode, *vide infra*) led to only a

three-fold drop in *hCA* II potency. This clearly makes compound **7a** stand out as the hydrophilic (and potentially 'bioconjugatable') follow-on to compound **5c**. Of course, the ultimate efficacy profile of this inhibitor reducing the glaucoma-related intraocular pressure (IOP) would depend on a multitude

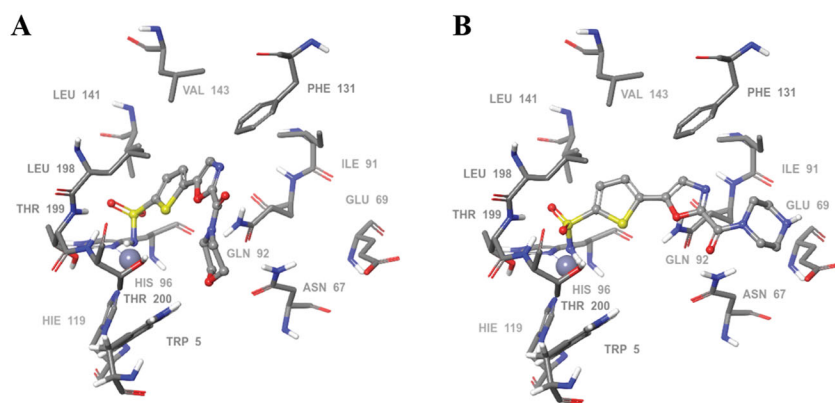


Figure 3. Binding poses of **5c** (A) and **7a** (B) in the *hCAII* active site.

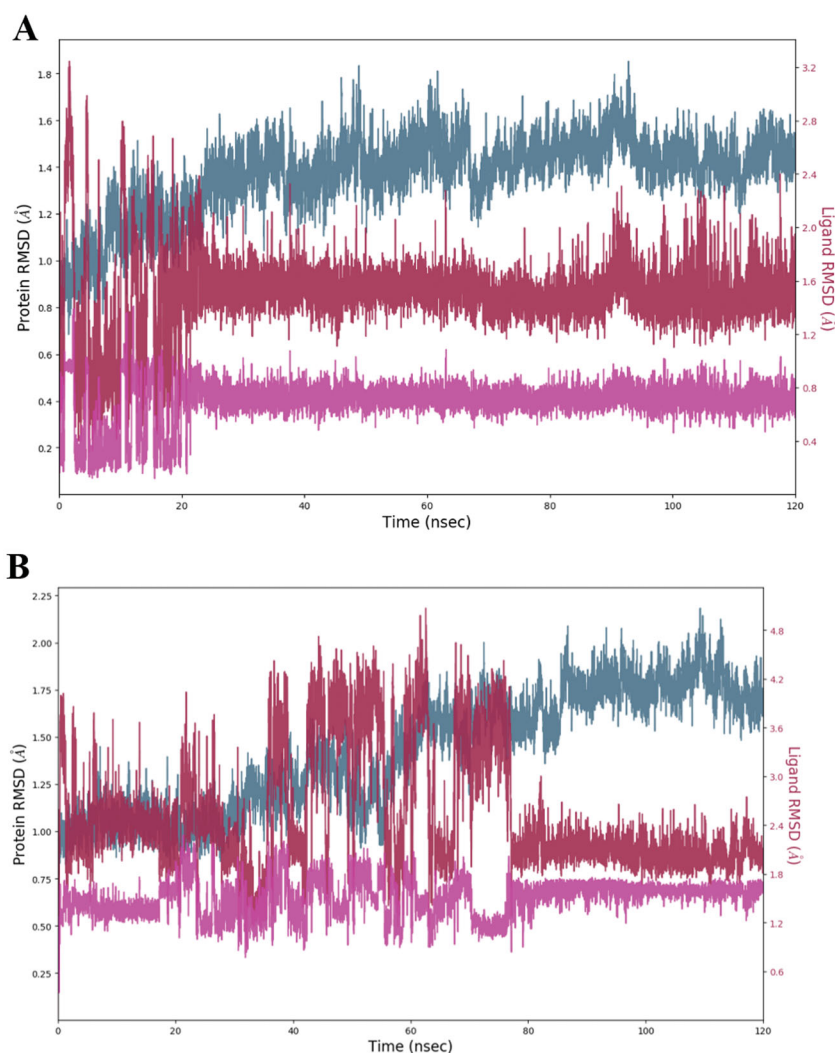


Figure 4. RMSD changes observed for the complexes 'acetazolamide – *hCA II*' (A) and 'compound **7a** – *hCA II*' (B) during a 120 ns molecular dynamics simulation.

of factors among which permeability characteristics (intrinsically linked to a favourable set of molecular parameters) will be of significance.

In order to visualise the binding of the prototype compound **5c** in comparison to the hydrophilic lead derivative **7a** and to possibly understand the origins of the essentially preserved *hCA II* potency in case of the latter, we performed the docking of both ligands into the active site *hCA II*. In the case of both prototype molecule **5c** and the advanced hydrophilic lead compound **7a** the

thiophene sulphonamide moiety, predictably, acted as a zinc binding group displaying typical orientation which is well known from a wide range of crystallographic studies¹⁸. Specifically, the sulphonamide moiety interacted with the catalytic Zn^{2+} ion as well as with Thr199. At the same time, the thiophene ring was oriented towards the hydrophobic pocket lined up with the residues Leu141, Val143, and Phe131. Furthermore, the 1,3-oxazole ring of the ligands was involved in interactions with Phe131 and formed a hydrogen bond with Gln92. Interestingly, we found the

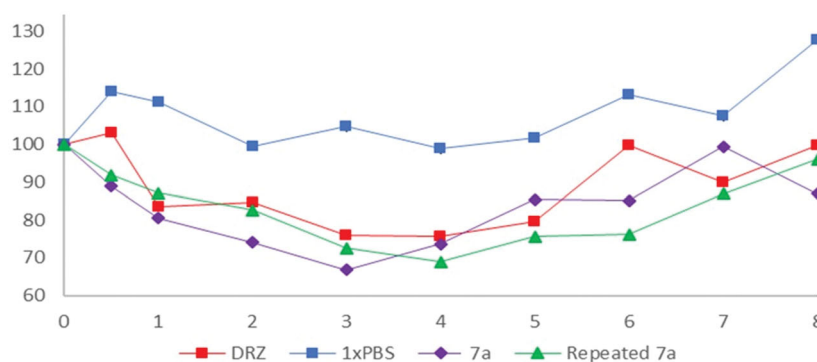


Figure 5. Percentage change in IOP (y axis) over time (x axis) after administration of compound **7a** (two independent experiments), negative control phosphate buffered saline (PBS) and positive control dorzolamide (DRZ) in albino rabbits ($n = 6$).

Table 2. Chemical descriptors of carbonic anhydrase inhibitors **7a–e** (calculated using ACDLabs 12.0).^a

Compound	HBa	HBd	HBtot	LogP	MW	LogD _{8.0}	PSA	logPSA
7a	3	11	−0.42	0.000861	342.39	0.38	155.15	2.191
7b	4	12	−1.46	−0.93	356.42	0.84	163.94	2.215
7c	4	12	−1.24	−0.68	356.42	0.42	169.14	2.228
7d	5	13	−1.11	−0.60	316.36	0.10	177.93	2.250
7e	5	13	−1.84	−1.30	330.38	0.36	177.93	2.250

^aMW: molecular weight; HBa: hydrogen bond acceptors; HBd: hydrogen bond donors; HBtot: total amount of hydrogen bond formers; LogP: logarithmic value of partition coefficient; LogD_{7.4}/LogD_{8.0}: logarithmic value of distribution coefficient at pH 7.4/8.0; PSA: polar surface area; LogPSA: logarithmic value of polar surface area.

Table 3. Calculated permeability (P_{app}) values of dorzolamide (**1**) and compounds **7a–e**.

Compound	Cornea (rabbit)		Cornea (porcine)		Conjunctiva (porcine)	
	P_{app} (cm/s)	% of 1	P_{app} (cm/s)	% of 1	P_{app} (cm/s)	% of 1
1	7.79E−06	100	1.75E−07	100	1.86E−06	100
7a	9.68E−07	12	1.71E−07	98	1.83E−06	98
7b	3.27E−07	4	1.20E−07	69	1.47E−06	79
7c	3.76E−07	5	1.18E−07	67	1.45E−06	78
7d	2.68E−07	3	8.29E−08	48	1.17E−06	63
7e	1.68E−07	2	8.29E−08	48	1.17E−06	63

Table 4. Formulas for estimating permeability properties of carbonic anhydrase inhibitors.

	Formula	References
Corneal permeability of rabbit (cm/s)	$\text{LogPapp} = -3.885 - 0.183(\text{HBtot}) + 0.277(\text{logD7.4})$	19
Corneal permeability of porcine (cm/s)	$\text{LogPapp} = -4.6823 - 0.7670(\text{logPSA}) - 0.1346(\text{HBd}) + 3.0024(\text{Halogen ratio})$	20
Conjunctival permeability of porcine (cm/s)	$\text{LogPapp} = -4.1594 - 0.6121(\text{logPSA}) - 0.0792(\text{HBd}) + 3.2914(\text{Halogen ratio})$	21

LogPapp: logarithmic value of apparent permeability; HBtot: total amount of hydrogen bond formers; LogD7.4: logarithmic value of distribution coefficient at pH 7.4; LogPSA: logarithmic value of polar surface area; HBd: hydrogen bond donors; Halogen ratio: sum of all halogens divided by the sum of all heavy atoms excluding hydrogen.

morpholineamide moiety in the compound **5c** was oriented towards the NH-groups of the Trp5 and Asn67. In contrast, the piperazine ring in compound **7a** formed a salt bridge with Glu69. As it follows from this analysis, presumably, the ligand–protein interactions displayed by both morpholineamide moiety in **5a** and piperazine amide substituent in **7a** resulted in the favourable energy for the molecules' binding within the active site of hCA II and thus leading the potent inhibitory action of the compounds against the CA isoform (Figure 3).

In order to test the robustness of the docking poses identified, we performed 120 ns molecular dynamics simulation of ligand **7a** docked in the active site of hCA II in comparison with the clinically used (non-selective) hCA II inhibitor acetazolamide (**3**). The RMSD values of the protein backbone (blue), the ligand relative to hCA II (red) and the ligand relative to its original, pre-simulation docking pose (purple) were found to stabilise to fit the range of 1–3 Å (robust fit) within 23.36 ns for acetazolamide and within

77 ns for ligand **7a** (Figure 4). The longer relaxation time observed for **7a** has likely to do with the greater conformational flexibility of the piperazine carboxamide side chain which took longer to restore the network of critical hydrogen-bonding contacts. Overall, the molecular dynamics simulation demonstrated the robustness of the docking pose presented in Figure 3(B).

The intraocular pressure (IOP) lowering effect of newly developed hydrophilic hCAII inhibitor **7a** was tested in normotensive New Zealand White rabbits¹⁹. The results are shown as percentage changes in Figure 5. Compound **7a** (1% eye drop) (tested twice consecutively) showed a clear IOP lowering effect which was comparable to the effect produced by **1** (dorzolamide, administered as 2% eye drops).

For compounds **7a–e**, we have calculated a series of chemical descriptors (Table 2) from which critical ocular permeability parameters can be deduced. It is apparent, that all five compounds are distinctly hydrophilic.

The chemical descriptors presented in Table 2 allowed us to calculate the predicted corneal and conjunctival permeability values for compounds **7a–e** in comparison with dorzolamide (**1**) (Table 3). These calculations are based on the earlier formulas by Kidron et al.²⁰ and Ramsay et al.^{21,22}. It is apparent that the conjunctival permeation route becomes a principal one for hydrophilic compounds **7a–e** in comparison with more lipophilic dorzolamide (**1**) (Table 4).

In summary, we have described next-generation 5-(sulfamoyl)thien-2-yl 1,3-oxazole carbonic anhydrase inhibitors endowed with a primary or secondary amine periphery. The compounds were designed with a dual goal of increasing compounds' hydrophilicity and provide a reactive 'handle' for potential conjugation to sustained-release nanoparticles. Increased hydrophilicity, while desirable for increased drug residence in the intraocular space could be generally viewed as an obstacle for corneal drug absorption. However, hydrophilic compounds may be efficiently absorbed *via* conjunctiva and thus have greater efficacy which may be expected if corneal absorption alone is considered. Out of the compounds described herein, the lead compound (**7a**) displayed a potent and selective inhibition of hCA II isoform, a glaucoma target and showed comparable efficacy as 1% eye drops in reducing the intraocular pressure in normotensive rabbit to that of clinically used 2% dorzolamide eye drops. This is despite the fact that the corneal permeability of these hydrophilic compounds was predicted to be significantly lower than that of dorzolamide. The data additionally support the concept of hydrophilic compounds permeating across the conjunctiva and sclera into the ciliary body.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by all author(s) except CTS. C. T. Supuran is Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Enzyme Inhibition and Medicinal Chemistry. He was not involved in the assessment, peer review, or decision-making process of this paper. The authors have no relevant affiliations of financial involvement with any organisation or entity with a financial interest in or financial conflict with the subject matter or materials discussed in the manuscript. This includes employment, consultancies, honoraria, stock ownership or options, expert testimony, grants or patents received or pending, or royalties.

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