Combined computational and cellular screening identifies synergistic inhibition of SARS-CoV-2 by lenvatinib and remdesivir

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ABSTRACT

Rapid repurposing of existing drugs as new therapeutics for COVID-19 has been an

important strategy in the management of disease severity during the ongoing SARS-CoV-

2 pandemic. Here, we screened by high-throughput docking 6,000 compounds within the

DrugBank library for their potential to bind and inhibit the SARS-CoV-2 3CL main

protease, a chymotrypsin-like enzyme that is essential for viral replication. For 19

candidate hits, parallel *in vitro* fluorescence-based protease-inhibition assays and Vero-

CCL81 cell-based SARS-CoV-2 replication-inhibition assays were performed. One hit,

diclazuril (an investigational anti-protozoal compound), was validated as a SARS-CoV-2

3CL main protease inhibitor *in vitro* (IC50 value of 29 μM) and modestly inhibited SARS-

CoV-2 replication in Vero-CCL81 cells. Another hit, lenvatinib (approved for use in humans

as an anti-cancer treatment), could not be validated as a SARS-CoV-2 3CL main protease

inhibitor *in vitro*, but serendipitously exhibited a striking functional synergy with the

approved nucleoside analogue remdesivir to inhibit SARS-CoV-2 replication in Vero-

CCL81 cells. Lenvatinib is a broadly-acting host receptor tyrosine kinase (RTK) inhibitor,

but the synergistic effect with remdesivir was not observed with other approved RTK

inhibitors (such as pazopanib or sunitinib), suggesting that the mechanism-of-action is

independent of host RTKs. Furthermore, time-of-addition studies revealed that

lenvatinib/remdesivir synergy probably targets SARS-CoV-2 replication subsequent to

host-cell entry. Our study shows that combining computational and cellular screening is

an efficient means to identify existing drugs with repurposing potential as antiviral

compounds. Future studies should aim at understanding and optimizing the

lenvatinib/remdesivir synergistic mechanism as a therapeutic option.

IMPORTANCE

Successful repurposing of existing drugs as COVID-19 therapeutics would be a rapid and

important means to limit disease severity during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. In this study,

we used a computational screening approach to identify existing drugs that might inhibit

the function of a critical enzyme (the 3CL main protease) encoded by the causative agent

of COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2. While we found that diclazuril (an investigational human drug

already approved for use in animals) inhibited this viral enzyme *in vitro*, it only showed

modest ability to inhibit SARS-CoV-2 replication in cells. However, our approach

serendipitously identified lenvatinib (an anti-cancer drug approved for use in humans) as

a potent inhibitor of SARS-CoV-2 replication when combined with the existing approved

antiviral drug, remdesivir. Our findings raise the possibility that future studies to

understand the molecular mechanisms underlying the lenvatinib/remdesivir synergy could

uncover new therapeutic principles for treatment of COVID-19 or similar viral diseases.

INTRODUCTION

Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) entered the human population in late 2019 and rapidly spread around the globe causing a devastating pandemic with significant impacts on human health and the worldwide economy (1, 2). Infection with SARS-CoV-2 results in a respiratory disease, COVID-19, that is mild in most individuals or even asymptomatic. However, in vulnerable patients, in particular in individuals with compromised immune systems, such as the elderly or immunosuppressed, the virus can cause a severe life-threatening pneumonia (2-4). Thus, large efforts have been undertaken to develop vaccines and antiviral drugs for the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. While several vaccines have been developed and licensed at unprecedented speeds, the development of antiviral drugs has not yet been successful (5-8). Remdesivir is the only antiviral drug that is currently approved and used to treat COVID-19 patients in many countries, but its efficacy has been questioned by recent results from a large-scale clinical trial (9, 10). Thus, additional efforts are urgently needed to fill this gap.

Early on in the pandemic, drug development approaches focused on the repurposing of drugs approved for other conditions as a means to accelerate the process of bringing drug candidates to market (11, 12). One of the viral drug targets that has gained particular interest is the SARS-CoV-2 protease, 3CL M^{pro}, a chymotrypsin-like protease that cleaves the two polyproteins, pp1a and pp1ab, and is essential for viral replication (13, 14). 3CL M^{pro} is considered a promising target for drug development as its structure has been solved and there is no homologous human protease (15, 16). Moreover, protease inhibitors have been developed successfully to treat HIV-1 and hepatitis C virus infections

(17, 18). While several inhibitors of 3CL M^{pro} have already been identified, no drug

targeting 3CL M^{pro} has been approved yet (15, 19-22). Here, we computationally screened

a library of approved drugs for novel 3CL M^{pro} inhibitors. The identified drug candidates

were then tested for their antiviral potential in an *in vitro* 3CL M^{pro} protease-inhibition

assay, and in a Vero cell-based virus replication assay using authentic SARS-CoV-2.

While two potential inhibitors (diclazuril and ramelteon) identified *in silico* possessed

modest antiviral activity, we found that lenvatinib, an inhibitor of receptor tyrosine kinases

such as vascular endothelial growth factor receptors, displayed strong synergistic

inhibition of SARS-CoV-2 with the approved drug remdesivir.

91   **RESULTS**

To identify novel inhibitors of the SARS-CoV-2 3CL M^{pro}, we performed an *in silico*

screening campaign of the Drugbank library which contains approximately 6000 approved

drugs (23). The docking was carried out by the computer program SEED (details in

Methods section) using two holo structures of 3CL M^{pro} (PDB codes 5r82 and 5re9). The

binding pocket was considered rigid during docking. The calculation of the binding energy

makes use of a force field-based methodology. Upon filtering and ranking, the top 19

compounds were purchased for experimental validation (Fig. 1A, B).

An *in vitro* fluorescence-based protease-inhibition assay with recombinant 3CL M^{pro}

protease was employed to measure the potential inhibition of enzymatic activity by each

compound. The positive control, GC376, was used as reference compound (22). An IC$_{50}$

(inhibitor concentration that results in 50% reduction of activity with respect to buffer-only

solution) value of 316 nM was measured for GC376, which is consistent with a reported

value of 190 nM (22). First, single-dose measurements were carried out at 100 µM for

each compound (Fig. 1C). For only two compounds a substantial reduction (> 40% with

respect to DMSO-only) of 3CL M^{pro} activity was measured. In follow-up dose-response

experiments with these two compounds, diclazuril showed an IC_{50} of 29 µM, and

oprea1_409650 showed an IC_{50} of 100 µM (Fig. 1D, E). The binding mode of diclazuril as

predicted by docking is shown in Figure 1F.

In parallel, we tested the 19 predicted 3CL M^{pro} protease inhibitors for their potential to

inhibit SARS-CoV-2 replication in Vero CCL81 cells. Following pretreatment with the

different inhibitors for 2 h, Vero CCL81 cells were infected with SARS-CoV-2 isolate

SARS-CoV-2/human/Switzerland/ZH-395-UZH-IMV5/2020 at a multiplicity of infection

(MOI) of 0.01 PFU/cell and viral titers were determined at 24 h post-infection. Remdesivir,

a known inhibitor of SARS-CoV-2 (24), was included as a positive control. In parallel,

inhibitor-treated cells were left uninfected and cell viability was determined. With the

exception of compounds 9-aminocampthecin and 1-deazaadenosine, cell viability was

only minimally affected by treatment with the inhibitors (Fig. 2A). In line with previous

reports, SARS-CoV-2 replication was inhibited by remdesivir in a dose-dependent

manner, thus validating our screening assay (Fig. 2B). We also observed significant

inhibition of virus replication with three of the predicted protease inhibitors, lenvatinib,

ramelteon and diclazuril (Fig. 2B). Of note, diclazuril, which was the most potent protease

inhibitor in the *in vitro* protease assay, was also the strongest hit in the screen for inhibition

of SARS-CoV-2 replication. Oprea1, which also displayed inhibition in the protease assay

did not reduce viral replication significantly. While the inhibitory effects of the three hit

compounds were robust and reproducible across the replicates of the SARS-CoV-2

screening assay, the degree of inhibition was only around 50-60% and thus modest (Fig.

2C). In order to test whether the inhibitors would show greater antiviral potential when

combined with an established inhibitor of SARS-CoV-2, we tested them in combination

with low concentrations of remdesivir. While ramelteon and diclazuril did not increase virus

inhibition by remdesivir, the combination of remdesivir and lenvatinib showed a very strong

synergistic effect: the low concentration of remdesivir used reduced viral titers

approximately 3-fold, but in combination with lenvatinib, SARS-CoV-2 titers were reduced

>1000-fold (Fig. 2D), which was not due to cytotoxic effects (Supp. Fig. 1A). When the

three hit compounds were tested in human Calu-3 cells for their impact on SARS-CoV-2

replication, we did not detect any effect on cell viability (Supp. Fig. 1B) but also no

inhibition of virus growth, either by the inhibitors alone or in combination with low doses of

remdesivir (Supp. Fig. 1C). Thus, the striking synergistic effect of lenvatinib in combination

with remdesivir appears to be specific to Vero CCL81 cells.

As lenvatinib did not inhibit SARS-CoV-2 3CL M^{pro} in the *in vitro* protease-inhibitor assay

at the concentration used in cell culture-based assays (Fig. 1C), we speculated that its

function as an inhibitor of receptor tyrosine kinases (RTKs) might contribute to the

observed synergy with remdesivir. We therefore selected pazopanib and sunitinib as

additional RTK inhibitors to test for synergy with remdesivir, as they exhibit a similar

inhibition profile to lenvatinib, with all three shown to inhibit vascular endothelial growth

factor receptors (VEGFR1, VEGFR2 and VEGFR3), platelet-derived growth factor

receptor (PDGFR-a/-b), and c-Kit with comparable specificity and potency (25, 26). When

taking cell viability into consideration, only lenvatinib displayed a clear synergistic effect

with remdesivir (Fig. 2E, Supp. Fig. 1D) suggesting that the observed synergistic inhibitory

effect is not linked to inhibition of VEGFR-, PDGFR- or c-Kit induced signaling. Next, we

performed a time-of-addition experiment, in which we treated cells with remdesivir,

lenvatinib, or the combination of both inhibitors, at 1 h prior to infection, 1 h post infection,

or 4 h post infection. At 24 h post infection, supernatants were harvested and infectious

virus titers determined by plaque assay. As expected from an RNA polymerase inhibitor,

remdesivir retained its antiviral potential if given post viral entry: treatment with remdesivir

1 h post infection resulted in a similar inhibition of virus replication as treatment of cells

prior to infection (Fig. 2F). In addition, treatment with remdesivir at 4 h post infection still

led to a substantial decrease in viral replication. The synergistic effect of lenvatinib and

remdesivir was highly similar for pretreatment and 1 h post-treatment conditions, both

resulting in potent inhibition of virus replication. Furthermore, the 4 h post infection

treatment condition resulted in a less potent, but still substantial, decrease in viral titers

by more than 10-fold (Fig. 2F). Thus, our data suggest that the synergistic effect of

lenvatinib and remdesivir could be due to more potent inhibition of the viral transcription

and/or replication processes rather than any effects on earlier stages of the viral

replication cycle.

167   **DISCUSSION**

Our approach of combining *in silico* and *in vitro* screenings of an approved drug library for

inhibitors of the SARS-CoV-2 3CL M^{pro} protease identified diclazuril as a low micromolar

inhibitor of the 3CL M^{pro} protease, and three drugs (diclazuril, ramelteon, and lenvatinib)

that reduced viral replication in Vero CCL81 cells. Moreover, lenvatinib showed an

unexpectedly strong synergy with remdesivir. This shows that the approach used here

can identify compounds with antiviral potential.

There are several caveats to the approach adopted in this study. Of note, we only tested

the compounds at a single 10 µM concentration, and thus an immediate option to see

stronger inhibition of virus replication would be to test higher concentrations of the

inhibitors. However, this might result in the identification of additional compounds with

antiviral potential but only in a non-physiologically achievable range of concentrations.

Thus, extensive compound modification and optimization for increased antiviral potential

would be required in subsequent studies and would slow immediate roll-out of a

repurposed drug. Given that our goal was to rapidly identify approved drugs as treatment

options for COVID-19 and circumvent the lengthy process of progressing inhibitors to

approval, we set the threshold at 10 µM and did not consider higher drug concentrations.

Options to improve the yield of our screening approach could be to use an alternative

structure of 3CL M^{pro} that was subsequently solved by room temperature X-ray

crystallography (27).　It reveals the ligand-free structure of the active site and the

conformation at near-physiological temperature, and was suggested to be a better target

for *in silico* screening for inhibitors of 3CL M^{pro} (27). Moreover, additional libraries of

approved　drugs　could　be　included,　for　example　IUPHAR/BPS

(https://www.guidetopharmacology.org/) and ChEMBL (https://www.ebi.ac.uk/chembl/),

although they overlap substantially with DrugBank.

A second caveat is the apparent cell-type specificity of synergy observed between

lenvatinib and remdesivir: this effect was clear in Vero CCL81cells, but not in human Calu-

3 cells. One possible explanation could be that lenvatinib inhibits a Vero cell-specific target

that is not inhibited in Calu-3 cells. This could either be due to differential expression levels

of the respective target or could be related to differences in target sequence and structure

between the human and the African green monkey version of the target. As the conversion

of remdesivir to its active metabolite (remdesivir triphosphate) is less efficient in Vero

CCL81 cells as compared to Calu-3 cells (24), the synergistic effect of lenvatinib with

remdesivir could be linked to the metabolic conversion of remdesivir. If lenvatinib

treatment led to a higher conversion rate, and thus to higher levels of the active metabolite

of remdesivir it could be hypothesized that in Calu-3 cells, where the conversion of

remdesivir to remdesivir triphosphate is already efficient, an increase in conversion

efficiency would not result in a boost of the antiviral potential of remdesivir. However, it is

thus far unclear how lenvatinib would affect the metabolic conversion of remdesivir. Given

that lenvatinib did not significantly inhibit the SARS-CoV-2 3CL M^{pro} protease in the *in vitro*

protease assay, the known targets of lenvatinib (i.e. receptor tyrosine kinases (RTKs),

such as VEGFR, PDGFR or c-Kit), could be the relevant drug targets for inhibition of virus

replication and synergy with remdesivir. We did not observe synergy for two other RTK

inhibitors with comparable RTK specificity and potency, and thus the observed synergy is

probably not mediated by inhibition of VEGFRs, PDGFRs or c-Kit, which are targeted by

all three inhibitors. Thus, future work should aim to reveal the mechanism behind the

synergistic action of remdesivir and lenvatinib. Such studies on the Vero cell-specific

synergy could reveal broader insights into the metabolism and antiviral mechanism of

nucleoside analogs and thus aid the development of antiviral drugs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

***In silico* screen for 3CL M^{pro} inhibitors.** The evaluation of the binding energy by the

program SEED makes use of a force field-based energy function. Protein and ligand

electrostatic desolvation penalties are approximated by a continuum dielectric treatment

and the generalized Born model (28-30). The partial charges and vdW parameters for the

atoms in the protein and in the ligands were taken from the CHARMM36 all-atom force

field and the CHARMM general force field (CGenFF), respectively (31-33). Importantly,

CHARMM36 and CGenFF employ a consistent paradigm for the determination of partial

charges and vdW parameters. The dielectric discontinuity surface was approximated by

the molecular surface. The dielectric constant was assigned a value of 2.0 and 78.5 for

the volume occupied by the solute and solvent, respectively. Default SEED parameters

were used. The nearly 6000 approved and experimental drugs in DrugBank with more

than 17 non-hydrogen atoms were docked by SEED. This filter on molecular sizes was

employed to avoid the selection of very small molecules which cannot provide sufficient

affinity. SEED offers three methods for the actual placement of the fragments: (1) polar

docking in which fragments are positioned and oriented such that at least one favorable

hydrogen bond with a residue in the binding site is formed, (2) apolar docking in which

fragments are placed in the hydrophobic regions of the binding site, and (3) a combination

of (1) and (2). The latter placement procedure was used. The docking was carried out on

two holo structures of 3CL M^{pro} (PDB codes 5r82 and 5re9) with high resolution. The

residue Glu166 was selected for the definition of the binding pocket. For PDB 5r82 no

water molecules were retained, while for PDB 5re9 one buried water molecule was

retained. Two energy filters were used: total binding energy < -10 kcal/mol and van der

Waals efficiency < -1.0 kcal/mol per non-hydrogen atom. Hydrogen bonding penalty was

calculated for each compound, according to the method described by Zhao and Huang

(34). If newly formed hydrogen bonds between the ligand and the protein are not in good

geometry or desolvated donors/acceptors are not involved into new hydrogen bonds, an

enthalpic loss arises due to uncompensated breakage of hydrogen bonds with waters.

The hydrogen bonding penalty index is calculated by checking both the solvation and

hydrogen bonding state of donors/acceptors at the protein-ligand interface. A value of 1

in penalty corresponds to about 1.5 kcal/mol in binding free energy. This penalty can then

be integrated into total binding energy values according to the formula SEED total energy

+ hydrogen bonding penalty*1.5kcal/mol. Compounds were then ranked by recalculated

total energy and heavy atom count. Up to top five compounds for each heavy atom count

tier were selected and experimental phase drugs were removed, focusing on approved

drugs. The resulting compounds were visually inspected, favoring compounds that

established H-bonds, and 19 compounds in total were selected.

***In vitro* protease inhibition assay.** The in vitro inhibition assay was based on

fluorescence and was carried out according to the specifications of the vendor (Reaction

Biology, Catalogue #: Mpro). The assay measures the inhibitory activity of compounds

that compete with a known peptide substrate for purified 3CL Mpro. The peptide contains

a quencher and a donor group, thus fluorescence is quenched in an intact peptide. Upon

cleavage of the peptide by 3CL Mpro the donor fragment generates fluorescence which

is quantified by a luminometer. The fluorogenic substrate used is [NH2-

C(EDANS)VNSTQSGLRK(DABCYL)M-COOH]. The positive control is GC376 which was

employed as reference compound. Single-dose screenings were performed at 100 µM.

Compound screening for inhibitors of SARS-CoV-2. To test the selected compounds

from the docking analysis for antiviral activity against SARS-CoV-2, 1.2×10^4 Vero CCL81

cells were seeded in DMEM supplemented with 10% fetal calf serum (FCS), 100 U/ml of

penicillin, and 100 µg/ml of streptomycin in 96-well plates and incubated overnight at 37°C

and 5% CO_2. For the infection and cell viability experiments, compound dilutions of 10 µM

and a final DMSO concentration of 0.1% were used. As negative control, 0.1% DMSO

was used while 10, 5 and 2.5 µM remdesivir (at a final DMSO concentration of 0.1%)

served as positive controls. The day after seeding, cells were washed with PBS followed

by incubation with the individual compounds at a concentration of 10 µM diluted in Opti-

MEM (Gibco) for 2 h at 37°C and 5% CO_2. Next, medium was removed and cells were

infected with SARS-CoV-2 (SARS-CoV-2/human/Switzerland/ZH-395-UZH-IMV5/2020)

at a multiplicity of infection (MOI) of 0.01 PFU/cell diluted in PBS supplemented with 0.3%

BSA, 1 mM Ca^{2+}/Mg^{2+}, 100 U/ml penicillin, and 100 µg/ml streptomycin (35). Cells were

then incubated for 1 h at 37°C and 5% CO_2. Following infection, the inoculum was

removed and DMEM supplemented with 10 µM of the respective compound (or the

positive or negative control), 100 U/ml penicillin, 100 µg/ml streptomycin, 0.3% BSA,

20 mM HEPES, 0.1% FCS, and 0.5 µg/ml TPCK-treated trypsin was added to the cells.

After incubation for 24 h at 37°C and 5% CO_2, cell supernatants were harvested and virus

titer was determined by plaque assay.

In parallel to the infection experiments, cell viability following incubation of Vero CCL81

cells with the respective compounds was assessed using the same experimental set-up

as for the infection experiments but instead of infection with SARS-CoV-2, cells were

mock-infected with PBS supplemented with 0.3% BSA, 1 mM Ca^{2+}/Mg^{2+}, 100 U/ml

penicillin, and 100 µg/ml streptomycin for 1 h at 37°C and 5% CO_2. Cell viability was

determined 24 h after the addition of compound-containing DMEM using the CellTiterGlo

kit (Promega) and a luminescence plate reader (Perkin Elmer). The infection and cell

viability experiments for the compound screen were performed in duplicates in three

independent experiments.

For the analysis of the compound screen, all titers were normalized to the negative control

(0.1% DMSO) and log2-transformed. Next, the z-score was calculated by dividing the

difference of the normalized and transformed titer of a given sample and the average

normalized and transformed titer of the negative control by the standard deviation of the

normalized and transformed negative control (36). The average z-score of the three

independent replicates for a given sample was used for hit selection. Compounds

associated with a z-score of smaller than -2 were considered as hits for further analysis.

Compounds associated with an average reduction in cell viability of more than 20%

relative to the negative control were not considered as hits.

Testing for synergistic inhibition of SARS-CoV-2. Vero CCL81 cells were seeded in

96 well plates at a density of 1.2×10^4 cells/well and incubated overnight. Cells were

washed once with PBS and incubated for 2 h at 37°C and 5% CO_2 with Opti-MEM (Gibco)

containing 5 or 2.5 µM remdesivir alone or in combination with 10 µM ramelteon

(PubChem ID 208902), lenvatinib (PubChem ID 9823820), diclazuril (PubChem ID

25273624), pazopanib (LC laboratories, P-6706) or sunitinib (Selleckchem, S1042) at a

final concentration of 0.1 % DMSO. DMSO 0.1 % was used as negative control. Cells

were infected with SARS-CoV-2 (SARS-CoV-2/human/Switzerland/ZH-395-UZH-

IMV5/2020) at a MOI of 0.01 in PBS supplemented with 0.3% BSA, 1 mM Ca^{2+}/Mg^{2+}, 100

U/ml penicillin, 100 µg/ml streptomycin. After 1 h at 37°C and 5% CO_2, cells were washed

once in PBS and the indicated compounds were added in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's

medium (DMEM; Gibco) supplemented with 100 U/ml penicillin, 100 µg/ml streptomycin,

0.3% BSA, 20 mM HEPES, 0.1 % FCS and 0.5 µg/ml TPCK-treated trypsin. Samples

were taken at 48 h post infection and supernatants were stored at -80°C prior to titer

determination by plaque assay. In parallel to the infection experiments, cell viability was

assessed as indicated in the compound screen section above. All experiments were

performed in duplicates in three independent experiments.

Time of addition experiments. Vero CCL81 cells were seeded in 96 well plates at a

density of 1.2×10^4 cells/well. After incubation overnight, cells were washed once with

PBS and incubated for 1 h at 37°C and 5% CO_2 with Opti-MEM (Gibco) containing the

indicated inhibitors. DMSO 0.1 % was used as negative control. Cells were infected with

SARS-CoV-2 (SARS-CoV-2/human/Switzerland/ZH-395-UZH-IMV5/2020) at a MOI of

0.01 PFU/cell in PBS supplemented with 0.3% BSA, 1 mM Ca^{2+}/Mg^{2+}, 100 U/ml penicillin,

100 µg/ml streptomycin. Following infection, the inoculum was removed and DMEM

supplemented with 100 U/ml penicillin, 100 µg/ml streptomycin, 0.3% BSA, 20 mM

HEPES, 0.1% FCS, and 0.5 µg/ml TPCK-treated trypsin was added to the cells. To test

for time of addition effect, the indicated compounds were added either 1 or 4 h post

infection instead of 1 h before infection in parallel samples. After incubation for 24 h at

37°C and 5% CO_2, cell supernatants were harvested, and virus titer was determined by

plaque assay. In parallel to the infection experiments, cell viability was assessed as

indicated above. All experiments were performed in duplicates in three independent

experiments.

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339   **FIGURE LEGENDS**

Fig. 1 *In silico* screen reveals novel inhibitors of the SARS-CoV-2 3CL M^{pro} protease.

A) Schematic overview of the *in silico* screen by high-throughput docking for repurposing

known drugs. **B)** List of 19 compounds identified as potential inhibitors of 3CL M^{pro}. **C)**

The 19 compounds were tested in an *in vitro* fluorescence-based assay at a concentration

of 100 μM for their potential to inhibit 3CL M^{pro}. Mean values from three independent

results are shown with error bars representing standard deviations. GC376 is the positive

control. **D-E)** The two compounds that showed a reduction of enzymatic activity of more

than 40% (relative to DMSO solution) in the *in vitro* protease assay, oprea1_409650 (D)

and diclazuril (E), were tested at varying concentrations to obtain a dose-response curve.

Average values from three independent experiments are plotted with error bars

representing standard deviations. **F)** Predicted binding mode of diclazuril (carbon atoms

in magenta) to 3CL M^{pro} (ribbon model in cyan with the side chains of the catalytic dyad

in yellow). The hydrogen bonds between diclazuril and the backbone polar groups of

Glu166 are shown (dotted lines).

Fig. 2. Lenvatinib acts synergistically with remdesivir to inhibit SARS-CoV-2. A)

Effect of inhibitor-treatment on cell viability. Vero CCL81 cells were pre-treated for 2

h with 10 μM of a putative 3CL M^{pro} inhibitor or with DMSO 0.1% or RDV (10, 5, and 2.5

μM) as negative and positive control, respectively. Then, cells were mock-infected for 1 h

followed by incubation in the presence of the respective inhibitors or controls. 24 h after

mock-infection cell viability was assessed. Shown are means and standard deviation of

cell viability normalized to the DMSO control (depicted as a square) of three independent

experiments each performed in duplicates. RDV-treated cells are depicted as triangles.

Compounds reducing cell viability more than 20% compared to the DMSO control (marked

in red) were excluded from the selection. **B) Effect of inhibitor-treatment on SARS-**

CoV-2 growth. Experimental set-up as in A) but cells were infected with SARS-CoV2

(MOI=0.01) for 1 h followed by incubation in the presence of the respective inhibitors or

controls. After 24 h of incubation, cell supernatants were harvested and viral growth was

assessed by plaque assay. Virus titers of three independent experiments, each performed

in duplicate, were normalized to the DMSO control, log2-transformed and converted into

z-scores. Z-score of DMSO and RDV-treated cells are depicted as square and triangle,

respectively. Excluded inhibitors are marked in red. A z-score of smaller than -2 was used

for the selection of inhibitors for follow-up. **C) Normalized virus titers for selected**

inhibitors. Experimental set-up as in B). Shown are virus titers normalized to DMSO

control of the selected inhibitors from B). Depicted are means and standard deviation of

three independent experiments, each performed in duplicates. **D) Effect of combination**

of selected inhibitors with RDV on SARS-CoV-2 growth. Vero CCL81 cells were pre-

treated for 2 h with 10 µM of ramelteon, lenvatinib, or diclazuril combined with either 5 or

2.5 µM RDV. DMSO 0.1% or RDV (5 and 2.5µM) were used as negative and positive

control, respectively. Following infection with SARS-CoV-2 (MOI=0.01) for 1 h, cells were

incubated in the presence of the respective inhibitors or controls. After 48 h of incubation,

cell supernatants were harvested and viral growth was assessed by plaque assay. Shown

are mean virus titers and standard deviation of three independent experiments, each

performed in duplicate. **E) Effect of VEGFR inhibitors and RDV on SARS-CoV-2**

growth. Vero CCL81 cells were pre-treated for 2 h with lenvatinib (10 µM), pazopanib (10

µM), or sunitinib (1 µM) in combination with RDV (5 µM). DMSO 0.1% or RDV (5 µM) were

used as negative and positive controls, respectively. Following infection with SARS-CoV2

(MOI=0.01) for 1 h, cells were incubated in the presence of the respective inhibitors or

controls. After 48 h of incubation, cell supernatants were harvested and viral growth was

assessed by plaque assay. Shown are mean virus titers and standard deviation of three

independent experiments, each performed in duplicate. **F) Effect of time of addition on**

the synergistic reduction of SARS-CoV-2 growth by lenvatinib and RDV. Vero CCL81

cells were treated either 1 h before (-1h), 1 h after (+1h) or 4 h after (+4h) infection with

SARS-CoV-2 (MOI=0.01) with 10 µM of lenvatinib combined with either 5 or 2.5 µM RDV.

DMSO 0.1% or RDV (10, 5 and 2.5µM) were used as negative and positive control,

respectively. 24 h post infection, cell supernatants were harvested and viral growth was

assessed by plaque assay. Shown are mean virus titers and standard deviation of three

independent experiments, each performed in duplicates. LoD, limit of detection.

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Figure 1

Internal name	Pubchem ID	Name
LWI_3CL_001	5323	Sulfadimethoxine
LWI_3CL_002	5215	Sulfadiazine
FMA_3CL_001	10127622	Selumetinib
LWI_3CL_003	5328	Sulfamethizole
LWI_3CL_004	71157	Nefiracetam
LWI_3CL_005	5336	Sulfapyridine
FMA_3CL_002	6918485	Isavuconazole
FMA_3CL_003	208902	Ramelteon
FMA_3CL_004	10090485	Galunisertib
FMA_3CL_005	9823820	Lenvatinib
FMA_3CL_006	82148	Agomelatine
FMA_3CL_007	72402	9-Aminocamptothecin
FMA_3CL_008	447980	Oprea1_409650
FMA_3CL_009	213053	Cimicoxib
LWI_3CL_006	5326	Sulfameter
FMA_3CL_010	25273624	Diclazuril
FMA_3CL_011	159738	1-Deazaadenosine
FMA_3CL_012	115348	2-Iodomelatonin
LWI_3CL_007	5503	Tolazamide

Figure 2