The Hippo pathway terminal effector TAZ/WWTR1 mediates oxaliplatin sensitivity in colon cancer cells

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KEY WORDS:

Oxaliplatin, colon cancer, Hippo signaling, TAZ, P53

SUMMARY

YAP and TAZ, the Hippo pathway terminal transcriptional activators, are frequently

upregulated in cancers. In tumor cells, they have been mainly associated with increased

tumorigenesis controlling different aspects from cell cycle regulation, stemness, or resistance

to chemotherapies. In fewer cases, they have also been shown to oppose cancer progression,

including by promoting cell death through the action of the P73/YAP transcriptional complex,

in particular after chemotherapeutic drug exposure. Using several colorectal cancer cell lines,

we show here that oxaliplatin treatment led to a dramatic core Hippo pathway down-regulation

and nuclear accumulation of TAZ. We further show that TAZ was required for the increased

sensitivity of HCT116 cells to oxaliplatin, an effect that appeared independent of P73, but

which required the nuclear relocalization of TAZ. Accordingly, Verteporfin and CA3, two

drugs affecting the activity of YAP and TAZ, showed an antagonistic with oxaliplatin in co-

treatments. Our results support thus an early action of TAZ to sensitize cells to oxaliplatin,

consistent with a model in which nuclear TAZ in the context of DNA damage and P53 activity

pushes cells towards apoptosis.

INTRODUCTION

Colorectal cancer (CRC) is the third leading cause of cancer-related death worldwide (Rawla et al., 2019). 30% of patients present synchronous metastases and 50-60% will develop metastases that will require chemotherapy. The current management of advanced or metastatic CRC is based on fluoropyrimidine (5-FU), oxaliplatin and irinotecan as single agents or more often in combination (e.g. FOLFOX, FOLFIRI, or FOLFIRINOX; Xie et al., 2020). Chemotherapy is combined with targeted therapy including monoclonal antibodies against EGFR (e.g. cetuximab and panitumumab) or VEGF (bevacizumab), tyrosine kinase inhibitors (e.g. regorafenib), and immune checkpoint blockade agents for patients with MSI-High tumors (e.g. pembrolizumab; Xie et al., 2020).

Oxaliplatin is a third-generation platinum antitumor compound with a 1,2-diaminocyclohexane (DACH) ligand (Chaney, 1995; Raymond et al., 1998). It induces mainly intra-strand crosslinks, but also inter-strand crosslinks and DNA-protein crosslinks that stop DNA replication and transcription, leading to apoptotic cell death (Perego and Robert, 2016; Woynarowski et al., 2000, 1998). Oxaliplatin exerts its anti-tumor effect also by inducing immunogenic cell death (Tesniere et al., 2010). Resistance to oxaliplatin can be either intrinsic (primary resistance) or acquired (secondary resistance), and is usually tackled by combining drugs to expose tumoral cells weaknesses or inhibit alternative survival pathways (Vasan et al., 2019). Despite intense research efforts in this field, more information on the molecular mechanisms underlying oxaliplatin mechanism of action are needed to develop new treatment strategies and improve the therapeutic response rate.

The Hippo signaling pathway represents an evolutionarily highly conserved growth control pathway. First discovered through genetic screens in *Drosophila*, it consists of a central cascade of core kinases: MST1/2 and LATS1/2 (homologues of *Drosophila* Hippo and Warts; Heng et al., 2021; Pocaterra et al., 2020; Zheng and Pan, 2019). When activated, LATS1/2 phosphorylate YAP and WWTR1/TAZ (homologues of *Drosophila* Yki), two partly redundant transcriptional co-activators which represent the terminal effector of the Hippo pathway (Reggiani et al., 2021). Phosphorylated YAP and TAZ are retained in the cytoplasm through binding to 14-3-3 proteins, and sent for proteasomal degradation. When the Hippo pathway is not activated, hypo-phosphorylated YAP/TAZ enter the nucleus and bind to specific transcription factors (TFs) to turn on the transcription of target genes. The best characterized TF partners for YAP and TAZ are the TEADs (TEAD1-4, homologues of *Drosophila* Scalloped; Heng et al., 2021; Pocaterra et al., 2020; Zheng and Pan, 2019). While depending

on cell type, the classic target genes include genes involved in proliferation, resistance to
apoptosis, cytoskeletal remodeling, or stemness (Rosenbluh et al., 2012; Tapon et al., 2002;
Totaro et al., 2018). But YAP/TAZ nucleo-cytoplasmic localization (and activity) is also
controlled by mechanical cues relayed by the actin cytoskeleton, or by cytoplasmic trapping
proteins such as AMOTs (Heng et al., 2021; Pocaterra et al., 2020; Zheng and Pan, 2019).
Importantly, the nuclear retention of YAP and TAZ is favored by tyrosine phosphorylation by
different kinases, and in particular SRC and YES (Byun et al., 2017; Ege et al., 2018; Li et al.,
2016).

The Hippo pathway has been primarily described as a tumor suppressive pathway in a wide
variety of solid tumors (Kim and Kim, 2017; Li and Guan, 2022; Nguyen and Yi, 2019;
Thompson, 2020; Zheng and Pan, 2019) preventing the pro-tumoral effect of YAP/TAZ.
However, in CRCs the role of the Hippo pathway and of YAP and TAZ appears more complex.
Several studies point towards a classic pro-tumoral role for YAP and TAZ. In CRC patients
tumor samples, high expression and nuclear localizations of YAP correlated strongly with
disease evolution and bad prognosis (Ling et al., 2017; Steinhardt et al., 2008), or with
resistance to treatments such as 5FU or cetuximab (Kim and Kim, 2017; Lee et al., 2015; Touil
et al., 2014). Furthermore, invalidating YAP could blunt tumorigenic behaviors both in mice
CRC models (Shao et al., 2014) or in the metastatic HCT116 CRC cell line (Konsavage et al.,
2012). However, YAP could exhibit a tumor suppressive role in CRCs. Studies in genetic
mouse models have shown that YAP/TAZ restricts canonical Wnt/β-Catenin signaling thus
preventing intestinal stem cells amplification, and could act as tumor suppressors in CRCs
(Azzolin et al., 2014, 2012; Barry et al., 2013). Similarly, the loss of core Hippo kinases
(LATS/MST) was recently shown to inhibit tumor progression in Apc mutant mouse models
and in patients-derived xenografts models (Cheung et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020).

The tumor suppressive role of YAP in CRC is further supported by its reported role in response
to DNA damage inducer drugs. Studies have shown that, in different cell lines including CRC
lines, cell death in response to cisplatin, doxorubicin, or etoposide, is mediated by P73, a
protein related to the tumor-suppressor P53. Following treatments, a YAP/P73 complex
accumulates in the nucleus, and triggers the transcription of P73 target genes involved in cell
death (Lapi et al., 2008; Strano et al., 2005, 2001). The direct interaction between YAP and
P73 is proposed to prevent P73 destabilization by the E3-Ubiquitin Ligase ITCH (Levy et al.,
2007; Strano et al., 2005). This pro-apoptotic role of YAP is reminiscent to a similar role of
Yki in *Drosophila* (a Yki/p53 complex; Di Cara et al., 2015). Importantly, this appears specific

to YAP, since TAZ cannot bind to P73, further suggesting that YAP and TAZ, while

performing redundant roles, also possess specific activities (Reggiani et al., 2021).

Given that oxaliplatin constitute one of the most used drugs in the treatment of CRCs, it is

important to evaluate its effects with respect to the Hippo pathway and to YAP/TAZ which can

elicit conflicting roles to oppose or promote CRC tumorigenesis. We show here that upon

treatment with oxaliplatin, TAZ accumulated in the nucleus of CRC cell lines. We further show

that TAZ was required for early sensitivity of HCT116 to oxaliplatin. Interestingly, the nuclear

localisation of TAZ was important, and drugs preventing this such as Dasatinib antagonized

the effect of oxaliplatin. These results support an early anti-tumoral role of YAP and TAZ in

response to oxaliplatin suggesting particular attention to sequence of treatments and drug

combinations should be paid when considering potential future drugging of YAP/TAZ

signaling in the treatment of CRCs.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Oxaliplatin treatment triggers an early cell death program

Oxaliplatin is a third generation platinum compound widely used as part of the first line of treatment for colon cancer patients in the FOLFOX regimen (Chaney, 1995; Raymond et al., 1998; Xie et al., 2020). Inside cells, oxaliplatin binds DNA, generating adducts which ultimately lead to DNA breaks and replicative stress in proliferating cells. When used on proliferating cancer cells, oxaliplatin treatment resulted in concentration-dependent cell death. We measured the IC50 of oxaliplatin on HCT116 colon cancer cells at 0.5μM (Supplemental Figure S1A). This dose reduced the amount of cells by 50% after 4 days of treatment. This dose was about 10 fold lower than the oxaliplatin concentration reported in the blood of treated patients (between 3.7 and 7μM; Graham et al., 2000). The oxaliplatin dose used in this study was thus compatible with the dose that could be ultimately found at the level of tumors in a clinical setting, and did not represent an acute high concentration treatment, highlighting its relevance for studying cellular responses to oxaliplatin.

When treated with oxaliplatin at IC50, HCT116 cells exhibited clear signs of DNA damage such as accumulation of γH2AX, and 53BP1 puncta in the nuclei (Figure 1A&B). Consistently, P53, which has been shown to control a specific cell death program in response to severe DNA damage (for recent reviews Abuetabh et al., 2022; Panatta et al., 2021), accumulated strongly 24h after treatment (Figure 1C). Intriguingly, the P53 related protein P73, previously reported to accumulate and to mediate cell death in response to DNA-damage inducing drugs such as cisplatin, doxorubicin or etoposide, including in HCT116 cells (Lapi et al., 2008; Strano et al., 2005), was destabilized upon oxaliplatin treatment. P63, the third member of the P53 protein family, was not expressed in HCT116, even upon treatment (Figure 1C).

To better understand the cellular responses to oxaliplatin we profiled the changes in gene expression after 24h of exposure at IC 50. This analysis revealed that the expression of only a limited number of genes were affected (fold change >1.5, adjusted p-value < 0.05): 253 up-regulated and 111 down-regulated (Figure 1D; Supplemental Table 1). Gene ontology enrichment approaches using the g:profiler online tool (Supplemental Table 2; Raudvere et al., 2019) highlighted that amongst the main cellular processes controlled by the upregulated genes were DNA damage response (GO:0044819 mitotic G1/S transition checkpoint signaling; GO:0000077 DNA damage checkpoint signaling…), apoptosis and cell death (GO:0045569 TRAIL binding; GO:0008219 cell death; GO:0012501 programmed cell death; GO:0006915 apoptotic process …), and p53 response (GO:0072331 signal transduction by p53 class

mediator), consistent with the known role of oxaliplatin generating adducts on the DNA.
Indeed, many genes up-regulated have previously been associated with p53 signaling, and
represent p53 canonical target genes such as CDKN1A/P21, P53I3, BAX, or TIGAR
(REAC:R-HSA-3700989 Transcriptional Regulation by P53; WP:WP4963 p53 transcriptional
gene network). While up-regulated genes controlled mainly cell death programs, the down-
regulated genes were involved in DNA replication (GO:0006260) and cell cycle (GO:0007049)
consistent with the well documented effect of DNA damage on blocking cell cycle and
proliferation (Abuetabh et al., 2022).

Amongst the genes mis-regulated were also genes related to inflammation and immune cell
recruitment (e.g. the upregulated genes CXCR2, EBI3/IL-27, or NLRP1, and the
downregulated gene IL17RB) consistent with the previously reported role of oxaliplatin during
immune cell death (Tesniere et al., 2010).

Finally, these analyses also highlighted several genes involved in cell architecture, namely
cytoskeleton and junctional complexes. Amongst the most striking features were changes in
the expression of integrin and extracellular matrix proteins engaging Integrins and Focal
Adhesions: collagens COL5A1 and COL12A1, as well as laminins LAMA3, LAMB3, and
LAMC1 and integrin ITGA3. These observations suggest that treated cells might remodel their
extracellular matrix, their Focal Adhesions, and the signaling pathways associated. The RNA-
Seq analyses revealed also many changes to the cytoskeleton, including an upregulation of
several keratin-based intermediate filaments (KRT15/19/32) and associated factors (KRTAP2-
3 and SFN). Several genes controlling the actin cytoskeleton were also affected such as the
branched actin regulators WDR63, CYFIP2, or WASF3, or different genes predicted to control
RHO activity (up: RHOD, EZR, and RAP2; down: ARHGAP18).

Taken together, these results suggest that upon oxaliplatin treatment, HCT116 cells implement
an early cell death program, which is likely mediated by the elevated P53 levels, and many
"bona-fide" P53 direct target genes involved in cell death are upregulated. Unlike other
treatments such as cisplatin, doxorubicin, and etoposide (Lapi et al., 2008; Strano et al., 2005),
oxaliplatin is unlikely to mobilize the p73 anti-tumoral response since P73 levels are decreased
upon oxaliplatin treatment. The difference is striking when considering closely related
platinum compounds such as cisplatin and oxaliplatin. This difference is unlikely due to timing
as we could not observe any P73 up-regulation after oxaliplatin treatment even after shorter or
longer exposures. Even though dose comparisons between different compounds is tricky, we
note that the cisplatin dose was 50 times higher than that of oxaliplatin. Alternatively, while

both are thought to act primarily as generators of lethal amounts of DNA breaks, their

difference in mobilizing either P73 (cisplatin) or P53 (oxaliplatin) might arise from different

alternative cellular effects independent of DNA damage.

Oxaliplatin treatment triggers YAP and TAZ nuclear accumulation

Having established a regimen for treating HCT116 cells with oxaliplatin, and given the

complex reported roles of YAP/TAZ in CRCs (see Introduction), we investigated whether

YAP/TAZ could be affected, and thus monitored TEAD, YAP, and TAZ expressions and

localizations following oxaliplatin treatment.

After 24h (or 48h) of oxaliplatin treatment at the IC50, we did not observe any change in the

total levels or in the nuclear localization of TEAD4, the main TEAD paralogue in colon cells

(Figure 2A). However, TAZ and YAP nuclear localizations increased following oxaliplatin

treatment in our culture conditions: the TAZ and YAP nuclear staining increased by 60% and

55% respectively when compared to untreated cells (Figure 2A). TAZ nuclear accumulation

was also observed in two other CRC cell lines: LoVo and Caco-2 (Supplemental Figure S2).

TAZ nuclear accumulation was further confirmed by fractionation experiments (Figure 2C; see

Materials and Methods). This increase in TAZ nuclear localization was reflected by an increase

in total TAZ levels by western blot analysis (Figure 2B). However, YAP total levels, and more

importantly the levels of YAP phosphorylation on Serine 127 (S127) were unchanged (Figure

2B).

The YAP S127 phosphorylation is deposited by the LATS1/2 Hippo pathway terminal kinases

and mediate the cytoplasmic retention of YAP by the 14-3-3 proteins and later targeting for

proteasomal degradation (Heng et al., 2021; Pocaterra et al., 2020; Zheng and Pan, 2019).

Western-blot analyses on total protein extracts showed that several key proteins in the core

Hippo pathway were hypo-phosphorylated (p-MST1/2, p-MOB1) indicating a general lower

activity of the core Hippo pathway (Figure 2B). Total protein levels were also lower after

treatment, further suggesting a lower Hippo pathway activity in response to oxaliplatin,

consistent with the increased TAZ levels and increased nuclear TAZ localization (Figure

2A&C). However, given that levels of phospho-YAP and total YAP remained unchanged, how

the Hippo pathway down-regulation could have differing effects on YAP and TAZ remains to

be explored. YAP and TAZ appear only partly redundant, and YAP and TAZ specific

regulations have been reported (Reggiani et al., 2021). It is noteworthy that an additional

phospho-degron is present in TAZ, making it more sensitive to degradation than YAP. This

increased sensitivity might magnify TAZ level changes when the Hippo pathway is inhibited

by oxaliplatin (Azzolin et al., 2012). The decreased protein levels of different Hippo pathway

components in response to oxaliplatin were unlikely due to reduced mRNA abundance, since

we did not observe any change in our RNA-Seq, suggesting that it might be a consequence of

reduced translation and/or increased protein degradation. Indeed, previous studies have shown

that core Hippo pathway components can be regulated by ubiquitination such as LATS1 or

MOB1 (Ho et al., 2011; Lignitto et al., 2013; Salah et al., 2011). Whether oxaliplatin treatment

triggers a specific ubiquitin-mediated destabilization of the core Hippo pathway remains

however to be studied.

YAP is dispensable for Oxaliplatin-mediated cell death

Performing pathway analyses on the mis-regulated genes highlighted a strong activation of

p53 signaling (Supplemental Table S2). Motif enrichment analyses suggested that the p53

family of transcription factors were the main controllers of the up-regulated genes. With the

exception of Axl, none of the "classic" YAP/TAZ target genes such as CTGF, CYR61/CCN1,

or BIRC2 (or genes involved in cell cycle progression, cytoskeleton regulation, or drug

resistance; (Pocaterra et al., 2020; Totaro et al., 2018) were up-regulated after oxaliplatin

treatment. We thus wondered what would be the role of YAP and TAZ in the response to

oxaliplatin treatment. Indeed, other anti-cancer drugs such as cisplatin have been shown to

promote cell death in part through the implementation of a P73/YAP-dependent cell death

program. Mechanistically, it has been proposed that DNA damage induced by cisplatin

stabilizes YAP which then binds and protects P73 from ITCH-mediated degradation (Levy et

al., 2007); the P73/YAP complex accumulates in the nucleus to turn on the expression of P73

target genes involved in cell death (Lapi et al., 2008; Strano et al., 2005, 2001). We thus

wondered whether the accumulation of TAZ (and the moderate accumulation of YAP) in the

nucleus could also participate in the cell death induced by oxaliplatin.

To test the requirement of YAP and TAZ, we invalidated YAP and TAZ by RNA interference.

The sole invalidation of YAP by shRNA led to a very modest reduction in oxaliplatin

sensitivity (IC50 in *shYAP* was determined at 0.62 compared to 0.52 in *shLuc* controls) (Figure

3A&C). It is noteworthy that, under the culture conditions used, YAP appeared dispensable for

HCT116 cells since the shRNA led to a knock-down efficiency >90%. These results suggest

that the cell death in response to oxaliplatin might not be dependent (or only marginally) on

the YAP/P73 complex as previously reported for other DNA-damage inducing compounds

(Lapi et al., 2008; Levy et al., 2007; Strano et al., 2005), but depends on alternative

mechanisms.

TAZ promotes cell death in response to oxaliplatin, independently of P73

We then investigated the role of TAZ. Strikingly, while the depletion of YAP had hardly
any effect, the combined knock-down of both YAP (*shYAP*) and TAZ (*siTAZ*), resulted in a
clear increase in resistance to oxaliplatin, where the IC50 reached 0.91µM in *shYAP/siTAZ*
HCT116 cells compared to 0.58µM in *shLuc/siScrambled* HCT116 control cells (Figure
3B&C), highlighting that TAZ participates to cell death in response to oxaliplatin. The effects
observed were specific to the *siTAZ*, since we observed a re-sensitization of treated cells when
complementing them with an expression vector for a murine version of *Taz* insensitive to the
siTAZ designed against human *TAZ* (Supplemental Figure S3A&B). We then wondered
whether the increased sensitivity promoted by TAZ could be dependent on P73, in a similar
mechanism as proposed for cisplatin. However, while P53 accumulated in response to
oxaliplatin in HCT116, P73 levels were decreased, undermining the role of P73 in response to
this drug (Figure 1C). This absence of P73 stabilization, is consistent with the absence of
increased YAP levels after oxaliplatin treatment (Figure 2B). These results highlight that,
although overexpressed YAP could bind and stabilize endogenous P73 (Supplemental Figure
S4; Levy et al., 2007; Strano et al., 2005, 2001), oxaliplatin treatments at the clinically relevant
doses used, do not lead to YAP and P73 stabilization. We then confirmed that TAZ cannot bind
P73 (Supplemental Figure S4), ruling out that the elevated nuclear TAZ following oxaliplatin
could act through a transcriptional complex with P73 to enhance cell death. A recent study
reported a direct interaction between TAZ and P53 in MCF7 and HCT116 cells, which resulted
in the inhibition of P53 activity towards senescence (Miyajima et al., 2020). However, when
we performed co-immunoprecipitation experiments, we were unable to document any
interaction between over-expressed YAP or overexpressed TAZ with endogenous P53 in
normal or oxaliplatin treated HCT116 cells (Supplemental Figure S4). Furthermore, the
increased oxaliplatin resistance of cells upon *YAP/TAZ* knockdown supports strongly that TAZ
acts to promote cell death and thus cooperates with P53 rather than antagonizes its activity as
suggested before (Miyajima et al., 2020). Taken together, these results suggest that the
sensitivity of HCT116 cells to oxaliplatin mediated by YAP and TAZ is not mediated by the
direct interaction of YAP or TAZ to P53 or P73.

Increased resistance to oxaliplatin upon YAP/TAZ activity blockade

The sh/siRNA interference results suggested that TAZ was required for sensitivity to
oxaliplatin. To validate independently the knock-down experiments, we used a

pharmacological approach with drugs targeting YAP/TAZ activity and monitored their action
in combination with oxaliplatin. We performed 2D matrices co-treatment analyses in which
cells were treated with increasing amounts of oxaliplatin and of the YAP/TAZ inhibitors
verteporfin or CA3 (Figure 3D and Supplemental Figure S1B &C; Liu-Chittenden et al., 2012;
Song et al., 2018). In both cases, the co-treatments led to a marked increase in the HCT116
resistance to oxaliplatin. Similar results were obtained on two other CRC cell lines: LoVo, and
Caco-2 (Supplemental Figure S3C&D). The mode of action of verteporfin remains unclear and
might involve increased retention in the cytoplasm of YAP and TAZ, or their degradation,
preventing them from complexing in the nucleus with their transcription factor partners (Wang
et al., 2016). A recent study showed that CA3 reduced the transcriptional activity mediated by
YAP/TAZ-TEAD (reduction in target genes expression), with only minor effects on YAP
protein levels (Morice et al., 2020). Even though the exact mode of action of verteporfin and
CA3 remain unclear, the increased resistance to oxaliplatin observed by co-treating cells with
YAP/TAZ pharmacological inhibitors, confirms the results obtained with the genetic knock-
down, and supports a model where increased TAZ activity participate in the sensitivity of CRC
cells to oxaliplatin.
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Src inhibition by Dasatinib reduces HCT116 cells sensitivity to oxaliplatin
The results suggest thus that preventing TAZ signaling in the early phases of oxaliplatin
treatment would represent a counter-productive approach, leading to reduced efficacy of
oxaliplatin to induce cell death. Besides the canonical Hippo signaling pathway, the nucleo-
cytoplasmic shuttling of YAP and TAZ is under the control of many other inputs. In particular,
YAP and TAZ retention in the nucleus is promoted by the action of different tyrosine kinases,
such as ABL or SFKs (Src Family Kinases) which phosphorylate the C-termini of YAP and
TAZ (Y357 or Y316 respectively; Byun et al., 2017; Ege et al., 2018; Guégan et al., 2022;
Kedan et al., 2018; Lamar et al., 2019; Li et al., 2016). Due to its high relevance for colon
cancer, we focused our analysis on SRC, frequently activated in colon carcinoma (Sirvent et
al., 2020). An earlier study showed that depending on the colon cancer cell line considered,
SRC could be activated, inhibited, or not affected following oxaliplatin treatment (Kopetz et
al., 2009). We could replicate that SRC was not activated after 24h of oxaliplatin treatment in
HCT116 cells (as measured by phosphorylation on Y416; Figure 4A). Working with HCT116,
we are thus in a position to test the contribution of SRC to YAP/TAZ shuttling during
oxaliplatin treatment without the complications arising from treatment-induced acute SRC
activation. Previous reports suggested that the classic SRC kinase inhibitor Dasatinib could be

used as a drug to prevent YAP/TAZ signaling (Rosenbluh et al., 2012). Indeed, combining

Dasatinib with oxaliplatin treatment, prevented the nuclear accumulation of TAZ (Figure 4B).

The addition of Dasatinib to oxaliplatin treated cells led to a dramatic reduction of the TAZ

nuclear staining when compared to oxaliplatin alone (95% reduction; see Materials and

Methods). It should be noted however, that Dasatinib treatment at 50nM reduced slightly the

elevated global TAZ levels observed in response to oxaliplatin (Figure 4A). Nevertheless, even

though TAZ appeared a bit more unstable in presence of Dasatinib, its nucleo-cytoplasmic ratio

was still profoundly affected by Dasatinib, preventing nuclear accumulation (Figure 4B).

We thus asked what would be the combined effect of Dasatinib treatment and oxaliplatin in

HCT116 cells. We thus performed 2D matrices co-treatment analyses in which cells were

treated with increasing amounts of oxaliplatin and of Dasatinib using drug ranges

encompassing their respective IC50 (0.5µM for oxaliplatin and 8µM for Dasatinib;

Supplemental Figure S1A&D). Strikingly combining both drugs showed clear regions of

antagonism, suggesting that Dasatinib treatment reduced HCT116 cells sensitivity to

oxaliplatin (Figure 4C). These results further support a model in which the nuclear

relocalization of TAZ in response to oxaliplatin treatment sensitizes cells, and caution the use

of Dasatinib in combination to oxaliplatin.

YAP/TAZ promote cell death in the early response to chemotherapeutic agents

Taken together the results presented here show that oxaliplatin promotes the fast nuclear

relocalization of TAZ which then participates to the cells sensitivity to oxaliplatin. Given that

we could not find any interaction between TAZ and P53 family members, but that the nuclear

localization of TAZ is required for its effect, we could envision several models:

i) either the TAZ/TEAD transcription complex, in the context of DNA damage and P53

activation, promotes the transcription of specific early response genes promoting cell death;

ii) or the slight increase at the transcriptional level of "classic" YAP/TAZ/TEAD targets

involved in proliferation sensitizes cells to DNA damage and replicative stress;

iii) or alternatively, TAZ acts through a new complex involved in cell death, independently of

TEAD.

More studies should help to distinguish between these potential models.

YAP and TAZ, have been implicated in the resistance to various chemotherapies or targeted

therapies in different cancers (Kim and Kim, 2017; Nguyen and Yi, 2019; Zeng and Dong,

2021). It should be noted that the current study focuses on the immediate effects of oxaliplatin

within the first hours after exposure. Whether YAP and TAZ are later important for the
maintenance of the resistance acquired by the surviving clones is not addressed in this study.
Hints towards this later role of YAP/TAZ, are suggested by the elevated YAP levels reported
in many cancer cells following resistant clone selection (our own unpublished results, and (Kim
and Kim, 2017; Nguyen and Yi, 2019; Zeng and Dong, 2021). Functional studies impairing
YAP demonstrated that YAP is indeed required for the tumorigenicity of resistant cells
(Yoshikawa et al., 2015). Furthermore, elevated YAP and TAZ nuclear staining is frequently
observed in patients tumor samples, including in CRCs (Li and Guan, 2022; Ling et al., 2017;
Steinhardt et al., 2008; Thompson, 2020). In advanced cancers, almost all patients undergo one
or more rounds of treatment before surgery, if surgery is possible. It is thus unclear whether
the increased YAP/TAZ nuclear levels observed in tumor samples reflect primary response to
treatment (as suggested by the current study), or whether they represent a secondary state that
might have been selected in the cells resistant to treatment.
The current study investigates the early response to oxaliplatin, supporting an early tumor
suppressive role of YAP/TAZ in response to treatment, in which, in the context of detrimental
DNA damage, YAP/TAZ activity promotes cell death. Is this role general or is it specific to
CRCs and oxaliplatin? Independently of the mechanism involved (YAP/P73 complex as
previously reported or alternative TAZ-mediated mechanisms as shown here), different breast
and colon cancer cell lines mobilize YAP or TAZ to promote cell death in response to many
different DNA damaging agents (Basu et al., 2003; Lapi et al., 2008; Levy et al., 2007; Strano
et al., 2005, 2001). This anti-tumoral role appears evolutionarily conserved and in *Drosophila*
the YAP/TAZ homologue Yki promotes cell death in response to different stress inducing
agents (Di Cara et al., 2015), further suggesting that YAP/TAZ might promote cell death in
response to chemotherapeutic agents in other cancers beside CRCs and breast cancers. When
considering drugging YAP/TAZ signaling in the treatment of CRCs and other cancers, special
attention should thus be given to drug combinations, and importantly the sequence in which
they will be used.
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MATERIALS AND METHODS

shRNA construction

shRNA directed against human *YAP*, *TAZ*, or the non-relevant *Luciferase* gene were designed by adding to the selected targeted sequences, overhangs corresponding to BamHI and EcoRI cloning sites at the 5'end of forward and reverse strand, respectively. Resulting oligos were then annealed together and cloned into the pSIREN-RetroQ vector (TaKaRa) according to the manufacturer's protocol between BamHI and EcoRI cloning sites.

Targeted sequences:

shRNA-YAP(3619): CAATCACTGTGTTGTATAT

shRNA-TAZ(1417): CCCTTTCTAACCTGGCTGT

shRNA-Luciferase: CGTACGCGGAATACTTCGA

Cell culture and cell transfections

Certified Human HCT 116 and LoVo colorectal cancer cell lines (RRID:CVCL_0291, RRID:CVCL_0399) were obtained from LGC Standards (ATCC-CCL-247, ATCC-CCL-229). Caco-2 cells (RRID:CVCL_0025) were certified independently. Cells were cultured in RPMI1640 supplemented with 10% FBS at 37°C in a humidified atmosphere with 5% CO_2. Cultures were regularly checked to be mycoplasma-free. No antibiotics were used to avoid any cross-reaction with the Oxaliplatin treatment.

HCT116 cells expressing shRNA against *YAP*, *TAZ* , or *Luciferase* (Luc; control) were obtained by retroviral gene transduction of the corresponding pSIREN vectors. Retroviral particles were produced in HEK293 cells and subsequently used to infect HCT116 cells. Positive clones were selected with 1 μg/mL puromycin and pooled together.

HCT116-*shYAP/siTAZ* cells were created by transfecting 100nM of *TAZ siRNA* (Dharmacon siGENOME SMARTpool #M-016083-00-0005) into HCT116-*shYAP* cells using Lipofectamine 2000 (Invitrogen) according to manufacturer's protocol. As a negative control, 100nM of *siScrambled* (D-001206-13) was transfected into HCT116-*shLuc* cells.

Murine Taz was expressed by transfecting cells with pEF-TAZ-N-Flag from Michael Yaffe (Addgene #19025; RRID:Addgene_19025; Kanai et al., 2000).

RNA-Seq

HCT 116 cells were plated to reach 60 to 70% of confluence and treated with 0.5 μM Oxaliplatin (IC_{50}) for 24 hours. RNA was extracted using RNeasy plus mini kit (Qiagen),

quantified and analyzed for its integrity number (RIN) using a Bioanalyzer (Agilent 2100 at

the IRMB: https://irmb-montpellier.fr/single-service/transcriptome-ngs/). RNA (1 µg) with

RIN between 8 and 10 were sent for RNA-Sequencing analysis to Fasteris biotechnology

company (http://www.fasteris.com). After library preparation, sequencing was performed on

the Illumina NovaSeq 6000 platform (S1 2x100 full FC). Mapping on the human genome

GRCh38 was performed using the protocol STAR 2.7.5b leading to 80-100 Millions reads per

condition. Normalization and pairwise differential expression analyses were performed using

the R package DESeq2 (2.13) (Anders and Huber, 2010).

RNA-Seq data has been deposited in NCBI's Gene Expression Omnibus under accession

number GSE227315.

Western blotting

Proteins issued from transfected untreated and treated HCT 116 cells were extracted, analyzed

by SDS-PAGE. Dilutions and antibodies' references are listed below.

Flag M2 (1/2000; Sigma-Aldrich #F1804)

GAPDH (1/3000; Proteintech #60004)

Histone H3 (1/1000; Cell Signaling Technology CST #4499)

LATS1 (1/1000; CST #3477)

MOB1 (1/1000; CST #13730)

p-MOB1 (1/1000; CST #8699)

MST1 (1/1000; CST #3682)

p-MST1/2 (1/1000; CST #49332)

NF2 antibody (Proteintech #26686-1-AP)

P53 (1/5000; Proteintech #10442-1-AP)

P63 (1/250; Santa Cruz #sc25268)

P73 (1/1000; CST #14620)

p-SRC Y416(1/1000; CST #2105)

TAZ (1/1000; CST #4883)

TEAD4 (1/250; Santa Cruz #sc101184)

Tubulin (1/10000; Sigma-Aldrich #T6074)

YAP (1/1000; CST #14074)

p-YAP S127 (1/1000; CST #13008)

Immunoprecipitation and co-immunoprecipitation

Protein extracts were prepared in lysis buffer (NaCl 150 mM, Tris pH 7.4 10 mM, EDTA 1

mM, Triton X-100 1%, NP-40 0.5%, cOmplete, EDTA-free protease inhibitors (Roche

#11873580001) for 30 min on ice before centrifugation. Immunoprecipitations were performed

overnight at 4°C on a rocking wheel using mouse EZview Red anti-Flag M2 affinity gel

(Sigma-Aldrich #F1804) after transfections of either p2xFlag CMV2 (empty vector), p2xFlag

CMV2-YAP2 (YAP1; Addgene #19045) or p2xFlag CMV2-WWTR1 (TAZ). After Flag

immunoprecipitation, washes in lysis buffer were performed, followed by protein elution by

competition with 3XFLAG peptide (150 ng/µL final concentration) during 1 hour at 4°C. The

different immunoprecipitates were then subjected to Western blotting for detection of protein

complexes.

Immunofluorescence

Cells seeded on glass coverslips were fixed 10 min in paraformaldehyde (4 %), before being

permeabilized in PBS / 0.1% TritonX-100 for 10 min. After blocking in PBS / 0.5% BSA, cells

were incubated with primary antibodies overnight at 4C. Primary antibodies used are listed

below. Secondary Alexa Fluor Antibodies (1/600; Invitrogen) were used as described

previously (Kantar et al., 2021) for 1 hour at room temperature before mounting the coverslips

with Vectashield (Vector Laboratories #H-1200) and imaging on Zeiss Apotome or Leica

Thunder microscopes.

Antibodies used were rabbit anti-53BP1 (1/100; CST #4937), mouse anti-phospho-Histone

H2AX clone JBW301 (1/200; Millipore #05-636), anti-TAZ (1/100; CST #4883), mouse anti-

TEAD4 (1/50; Santa Cruz #sc101184), and rabbit anti-YAP (1/100; CST #14074).

Nuclear staining quantifications in HCT116 cells

Quantification was performed using ImageJ. Binary mask corresponding to the cell nuclei was

based on DAPI staining. Two nuclei touching each other (and therefore recognized as one on

binary mask) were manually separated by drawing a 2-pixel line between them. All incomplete

nuclei on the edge of the image as well as those that were in mitosis or mechanically damaged

were excluded from the analysis. The total signal was calculated as "corrected total cell

fluorescence" (CTCF) according to the following formula:

CTCF = Integrated Density – (Area of selected cell * Mean fluorescence of the background)

Background fluorescence was measured on three different spots (roughly the size of cell

nucleus) outside of the cell. In case of 53BP1 and g-H2AX staining, the whole area covered by

the nuclear mask was quantified as one. For YAP and TAZ nuclear staining, each cell was

quantified separately using particle analysis tool. Cytoplasmic levels of YAP and TAZ were
not quantified due to the small size of the cytoplasm in HCT116 cells.
491

IC50 calculation and cytotoxicity
Cell growth inhibition and cell viability after incubation with Oxaliplatin (Sigma Aldrich
#O9512), Verteporfin (Sigma Aldrich #SML0534), CA3 (CIL56, Selleckchem, #S8661) or
Dasatinib (Selleckchem #S1021) were assessed using the sulforhodamine B (SRB) assay.
Exponentially growing cells (750 cells/well) were seeded in 96-well plates in RPMI-1640
medium supplemented with 10% FCS. After 24 hours, serial dilutions of the tested drugs were
added and each concentration was tested in triplicate. After 96 hours, cells were fixed with
10% trichloroacetic acid and stained with 0.4% SRB in 1% acetic acid. SRB-fixed cells were
dissolved in 10 mmol/L Tris–HCl and absorbance at 540 nm was read using an MRX plate
reader (Dynex, Inc., Vienna, VA, USA). IC50 was determined graphically from the
cytotoxicity curves.
For HCT116-*shYAP/siTAZ*, cells were transfected in 6 well plates 24h before starting the cell
growth and cytotoxicity assays.
505

Quantification of the interaction effect
The interaction between the drugs tested *in vitro* was investigated with a concentration matrix
test, in which increasing concentration of each single drug were assessed with all possible
combinations of the other drugs. For each combination, the percentage of expected growing
cells in the case of effect independence was calculated according to the Bliss equation (Greco
et al., 1995):

$$fu_c = fu_A fu_B$$

513 where fu_c is the expected fraction of cells unaffected by the drug combination in the case of
514 effect independence, and fu_A and fu_B are the fractions of cells unaffected by treatment *A* and *B,*
515 respectively. The difference between the fu_c value and the fraction of living cells in the
516 cytotoxicity test was considered as an estimation of the interaction effect, with positive values
517 indicating synergism and negative values antagonism.
518
519

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank the different lab members of the Djiane and Gongora teams for helpful

discussions. VS was supported by Fondation de France. MR was supported by LabEx

NUMEV. DK was supported by Ligue Contre le Cancer. This work was supported by grants

from Fondation ARC (#PJA 20141201630) and Ligue Nationale Contre le Cancer (Région

Languedoc-Roussillon) to LHM and AD. Work in the lab of CG was also supported by grants

and funds from INSERM, the Institut du cancer de Montpellier (ICM), SIRIC (SIRIC

Montpellier Cancer Grant «INCa-DGOS-Inserm 6045»), Cancéropole GSO, and the program

«investissement d'avenir» (grant agreement: Labex MabImprove, ANR-10-LABX-53-01).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

VS, LHM, LJ, and DK performed experiments. CG and AD designed the experiments. VS,

LHM, MR, DK, CG and AD analyzed the data. VS, LHM, DT, LB, CG, and AD interpreted

the data. CG and AD wrote the manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

All authors declare no competing interest

 FIGURE LEGENDS

Figure 1. Oxaliplatin treatment induces DNA damage

A. Immunofluorescence experiments performed on HCT116 cells treated, or not, with

oxaliplatin (0.5 µM) monitoring γ-H2AX (yellow). DAPI (blue) was used to stain DNA and

the nuclei. Quantification of the staining is shown on the right side and is represented as the

corrected nuclear fluorescence. Data are represented as the mean ± SEM. (n=3). Unpaired two-

tailed Student's t-test; ** $p<0.01$.

B. Immunofluorescence experiments performed on HCT116 cells treated, or not, with

oxaliplatin (0.5 µM) monitoring 53BP1 (grey). DAPI (blue) was used to stain DNA and the

nuclei. Quantification of the staining is shown on the right side and is represented as the

corrected nuclear fluorescence. Data are represented as the mean ± SEM. (n=3). Unpaired two-

tailed Student's t-test; *** $p<0.001$.

C. Western blot analysis showing protein expression of TEAD4 and p53 family of proteins in

HCT116 treated (Oxa), or not (NT) with oxaliplatin (0.5 µM). GAPDH was used as a loading

control (n=3).

D. Heat map corresponding to the genes differentially expressed in HCT116 cells after 24h of

oxaliplatin treatment at IC50 (see Supplemental Table 1). The three replicates for the non-

treated (NT) and treated (Oxa) are shown.

Figure 2. Oxaliplatin treatment triggers YAP and TAZ nuclear accumulation

A. Immunofluorescence experiments performed on HCT116 cells treated, or not, with

oxaliplatin (0.5 µM) monitoring TEAD4 (top panels), YAP (middle panels), and TAZ (bottom

panels) nuclear localization (red). DAPI (blue) was used to stain DNA and the nuclei.

Quantification of both stainings are shown on the right side of the figures and are represented

as the corrected nuclear fluorescence. Data are represented as the mean ± SEM (n=3). Unpaired

two-tailed Student's t-test; **** $p < 0.0001$.

B. Western blot analysis showing protein expression and/or activation of Hippo pathway

components in HCT116 cells treated (Oxa), or not (NT) with oxaliplatin (0.5 µM). GAPDH

was used as a loading control (n=3).

C. Western blot analysis after subcellular fractionation showing the relative amount of YAP

and TAZ protein in the nuclear fraction of HCT116 cells treated (Oxa), or not (NT) with

oxaliplatin (0.5 µM). Histone H3 was used as a nuclear loading control for the fractionation

(n=3).

Figure 3. YAP and TAZ are required for oxaliplatin-mediated cell death

A. HCT116-*shYAP* and HCT116-*shLuc* cell lines were treated with increasing doses of oxaliplatin for 96h. Cell viability analysis was then assessed using SRB assay and the IC50 of oxaliplatin was calculated as the concentration needed to kill 50% of the cells (shown in the inset). Paired two-tailed Student's t-test ,* p<0.05.

B. HCT116-*shYAP-siTAZ* and HCT116-*shLuc-siCtl* (control) cell lines were treated with increasing doses of oxaliplatin for 96h. Cell viability analysis was then assessed using SRB assay and the IC50 of oxaliplatin was calculated as the concentration needed to kill 50% of the cells (shown in the inset). Paired two-tailed Student's t-test, ** p<0.01.

C. Western blot analysis showing protein expression of TAZ and YAP in HCT116-*shLuc*, -*siTAZ*, -*shYAP* and both -*shYAP-siTAZ* used in panel A and B. Tubulin was used as a loading control (n=3).

D. HCT116 cells were incubated with increasing concentrations of oxaliplatin and either Verteporfin or CA3. Cell viability was assessed with the SRB assay in 2D to obtain the viability matrix. Drug concentrations were as follows: Verteporfin (from 0.437 to 7 µM), CA3 (from 0.004 to 0.75 µM) and Oxaliplatin (from 0.0185 to 1.2 µM). The synergy matrices were calculated as described in Materials and Methods.

Figure 4. Src inhibition by Dasatinib reduces HCT116 cells sensitivity to oxaliplatin

A. Western blot analysis showing protein expression of YAP and TAZ in HCT116 treated, or not, with oxaliplatin (0.5 µM) and/or Dasatinib (50 nM and 100 nM). Phopsho-SRC blotting was used to evaluate the inhibition of SRC activity using Dasatinib. GAPDH was used as a loading control (n=3). Quantification of the blots (performed using Image J software) is shown on the right side of the figure.

B. Immunofluorescence experiments performed in HCT116 cells treated, or not, with oxaliplatin (0.5 µM) and/or Dasatinib (50 nM) monitoring YAP (top panels) and TAZ (bottom panels) nuclear localization (red). DAPI (blue) was used to stain DNA and the nuclei. Quantification of both stainings are shown on the right side of the figures and are represented as the corrected nuclear fluorescence. Data are represented as the mean ± SEM (n=3). Unpaired two-tailed Student's t-test; ****p < 0.0001.

C. HCT116 colorectal cancer cell lines were incubated with increasing concentrations of oxaliplatin and Dasatinib. Cell viability was assessed with the SRB assay in 2D to obtain the viability matrix. Drug concentrations were as follows: Dasatinib (from 1 to 16 µM) and

oxaliplatin (from 0.0185 to 1.2 μM). The synergy matrix was calculated as described in
Materials and Methods.

SUPPLEMENTAL FIGURE LEGENDS

Supplemental Figure S1. Cell viability in response to drugs
Cells were treated with increasing doses of oxaliplatin (**A**), Verteporfin (**B**), CA3 (**C**) and
Dasatinib (**D**) for 96h. Cell viability analysis was then assessed using SRB assay and the IC50
of each drug could be calculated as the concentration that reduced cell numbers by 50% (shown
in the insets).

Supplemental Figure S2. TAZ nuclear accumulation in LoVo and Caco-2 CRC cell lines
A-B. Immunofluorescence experiments performed on LoVo (A) and Caco-2 (B) cells treated
or not, with oxaliplatin at IC50 (0.6 μM and 0.3 μM respectively) monitoring TAZ nuclear
localization (green). DAPI (blue) was used to stain DNA and the nuclei. Quantifications are
shown on the right side of the figure and are represented as the corrected nuclear fluorescence.
Data are represented as the mean ± SEM. Unpaired two-tailed Student's t-test; **** $p < 0.0001$.

Supplemental Figure S3. TAZ mediates sensitivity to oxaliplatin in CRC cell lines
A. HCT116-*shYAP-siScramb* (control), HCT116-*shYAP-siTAZ,* and HCT116-*shYAP-siTAZ*
transfected with a Flag tagged murine Taz *(pEFmTaz)* cell lines were treated with increasing
doses of oxaliplatin for 96h. Cell viability analysis was then assessed using SRB assay and the
IC50 of oxaliplatin was calculated as the concentration needed to kill 50% of the cells. Paired
two-tailed Student's t-test, ** $p<0.01$, ns non-significant.
B. Western blot analysis showing protein expression of TAZ and Flag in the different cell lines
used in panel A. GAPDH was used as a loading control.
C-D. LoVo (C) and Caco-2 (D) cells were incubated with increasing concentrations of
oxaliplatin and either Verteporfin or CA3. Cell viability was assessed with the SRB assay in
2D to obtain the viability matrix. Drug concentrations were as follows: Verteporfin (from 0.875
to 14 μM), CA3 (from 0.15 to 2.4 μM) and Oxaliplatin (from 0.075 to 4.8 μM). The synergy
matrices were calculated as described in Materials and Methods.

Supplemental Figure S4. Interaction between YAP/TAZ and P53 protein family members

in HCT116 cells

Western blot analysis of Flag (YAP or TAZ) immunoprecipitates on protein extracts from

HCT116 treated (Oxa), or not (NT) showing an interaction between YAP and p73 (n=3).

Supplemental Table 1. Differentially expressed genes in HCT116 cells after oxaliplatin

treatment for 24h at IC50

Only differentially expressed genes with an adjusted p-value< 0.05 are shown. Columns are:

test_id: position and description of the feature tested

ENSG_ID: Ensemble gene ID

symbol: gene symbol

sample_1: first group in the comparison; untreated cells

sample_2: second group in the comparison; cells treated with oxaliplatin

mean_1: mean of normalized count for the first group in the comparison

mean_2: mean of normalized count for the second group in the comparison

log2FoldChange: log2 fold change estimates

pvalue: pvalue

padj: pvalue adjusted for multiple testing with the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure, which

controls false discovery rate (FDR)

Supplemental Table 2. g:profiler functional enrichment analyses

Columns are :

GO_ID: Gene Ontology

KEGG_ID: KEGG pathways

REAC_ID: Reactome pathways

WP_ID: WikiPathways

TF_ID: regulatory motif matches from TRANSFAC

MIRNA_ID: miRNA targets from miRTarBase

CORUM_ID: protein complexes from CORUM

HPA_ID: tissue specificity from Human Protein Atlas

HP_ID: human disease phenotypes from Human Phenotype Ontology

Description: description of the functional group

p.Val: p-value

FDR: false discovery rate

Genes: genes found in the intersection

Supplemental Table 3. RNA-Seq statistics