

Review

An Introduction to Spiral Steroids

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Abstract: In addition to the classical steroids, which have cholesterol as a precursor, there are steroids with 7-dehydrocholesterol as a precursor. This review describes the identification of these steroids, their biosynthesis and some aspects of their function. There are three classes of these compounds, distinguished by the number of their carbon atoms, 23, 24 and 25. Each class has a spiral steroid and is a phosphodiester. Up until these investigations, no spiral steroids or steroid phosphodiesters were known. There are at least 13 compounds of which six have been purified to near homogeneity. Each one has been characterized by its mass and proposed composition. They function by regulating the NaK-ATPase. Based on the tissues in which they have been detected, each class of compound seems to regulate a different isoform of the NaK-ATPase. This is an important site of endocrine regulation.

Keywords: Spiral steroids; Ionotropin; digoxin-like materials; NaK-ATPase; potassium sparing diuretics

1. Introduction

Intracellular fluids have K⁺ levels of 100 mM. Extracellular fluids, including plasma, have K⁺ levels of 4-6 mM. Thus, there must be a mechanism to 'pump' K⁺ into the cells against that gradient. In the 1950's, Szent-Gyorgyi proposed that there was an endogenous equivalent to digoxin [1]. His speculation unleashed a 60-year search for the material which, he proposed, might function similar to digoxin. There have been several false candidates, primarily digoxin, itself, ouabain, and more recently, marinobufagenin [2, 3, 4]. However, in vertebrates, no precursors or metabolites were identified for any of the candidates. Within the last few years, we have identified 13 steroid phosphocholine diesters. These can be divided into three classes, based on the number of carbon atoms in the steroid fragment, and all can be derived from a common precursor. Some, but not all of them, bind to digoxin specific antibodies. Altogether, the discovery points to a new path of investigation to understand K⁺ regulation. This has consequences for many diseases, especially diseases of pregnancy.

1.1 What is a spiral steroid?

A carbon atom can have 4 substituents. If each pair is part of a ring, it would be a spiral steroid. The spiral carbon atom would be a bridge between the rings, but no bond would be part of both rings. What distinguishes a spiral steroid from other bridge carbons is that the planes formed by the two rings are perpendicular. All four of the substituents need not be carbon atoms. To date, carbon atom 17 is the only natural, spiral carbon atom known to be present in steroid molecules. Some synthetic potassium sparing diuretics, including spironolactone and eplerenone, are also spiral steroids. Figure 1 illustrates these features.

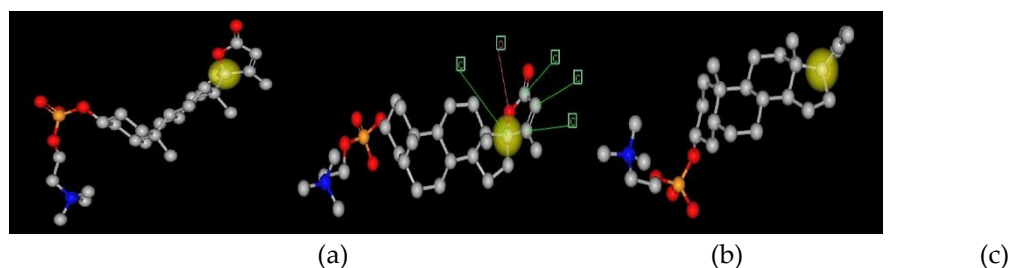


Figure 1. Three representations of a spiral steroid - C341.

This figure shows three representations of C341. The yellow ball is on carbon 17, the spiral carbon atom. The view in Panel A is face on to the E-ring and edge on to the B-C-D gonane rings; Panel C is face on to the B-C-D gonane rings and edge on to the E-ring; Panel B is intermediate in orientation. Panel B also has arrows pointing to the five atoms that form the E-ring.

1.1 Naming, Symbols and Abbreviations:

Other than the apparent precursor, 17 α -hydroxy-pregna-5,7-dienolone, none of these compounds had been described [5, 6]. Thus, there are no widely recognized, common names. Chasalow selected *IONOTROPIN* for the name of the first spiral steroid isolated because it seemed to be needed for regulation of ion transport [7]. In retrospect, kaleotropin might have been a better selection. All of the papers published from our laboratory have included Ionotropin as a keyword. This practice has made it possible for interested investigators to find all of the original papers.

There are no common names for steroids with 23, 24, or 25 carbon atoms. Rather than using cross reaction with an antibody specific to a particular cardiotonic glycoside, we established the practice of using the molecular mass of the steroid fragment, as observed in the positive ion mass spectrum, as the basis for the symbol [8]. Note that the apparent mass of a fragment might not be the same as the true formula mass.

Finally, all of the compounds are phosphodiester. For phosphocholine compounds we preface the observed mass with C; for phosphethanolamine compounds, the preface is E; if the phosphodiester was not identified, the letter is an X [9].

1.3 Mass spectra of steroid phosphocholine diesters:

There must be two breaks in the gonane portion of a steroid in order to generate fragments. As a consequence, steroids usually generate simple mass spectra. In contrast to the classical steroid hormones, the phosphodiester usually have more than one molecular ion present, depending on the counter cation associated with the phosphate [7]. For the phosphocholine diester, the biggest ion peak is the fragment derived from phosphocholine at $m/z=184$ Da.

Each phosphocholine steroid diester can generate 5 different m/z cations, which were designated S, A, B, C, & D [10]. Figure 2 has an example. Table 1 shows the positive ions that derive from each of the phosphocholine diesters. The relative amounts of S, A, B, C, and D are dependent on [i] the source of the sample, [ii] the electrolytes present and [iii] how the sample has been extracted or purified. This pattern has also been useful in identifying steroid phosphodiester in crude extracts [10]. A further complication occurs because the phosphoethanolamine compounds don't fragment the same way as the phosphocholine compounds.

1.4 Steroid Ethanolamine Phosphodiester (SEP)

SEP were detected in adrenal and ovarian extracts but not in serum [7]. On the basis of this localization, SEPs seem to be precursors, rather than metabolites, of the phosphocholine steroids. Apparently, the SEP are storage forms and are converted to the phosphocholine diesters by N-methylation. N-methylase is an ACTH-dependent

enzyme and also converts norepinephrine to epinephrine. Thus, in response to ACTH, [a] norepinephrine could be converted to epinephrine – leading to increased glycolysis and [b] SEP could be converted to a phosphocholine steroid – leading to increased potassium in the heart – increased calcium – and increased blood flow. The combination of events would be important in both the stress response and also during parturition [9].

1.41 Mass spectral analysis of Steroid Ethanolamine Phosphodiester (SEP)

SEP have a different fragment pattern on mass spectrum analysis than that observed with phosphocholine steroids. Because there is no trimethylamine, SEP can't fragment with loss of trimethylamine fragment – the Type A cations. Instead, the S fragment ions for SEP are formed in higher relative intensity. Whereas the phosphocholine fragment at $m/z=184$ Da is a major ion in spectra from phosphocholine steroids, SEP do not generate the corresponding fragment at $m/z=142$ Da.

2. Biochemistry of spiral steroids

In the 1950's, cardiotonic glycosides were proposed as a substitute for an endogenous potassium sparing hormone [1] and a synthetic potassium sparing diuretic, spironolactone, was discovered [11]. However, no one was successful in preparing a tissue extract that had the same function as spironolactone. In the 1970's, to assist physicians in monitoring possible toxicity of digoxin, an RIA for digoxin was developed [12]. From time to time, prior to initiation of therapy, patients were identified that had unknown materials that were detected by the assay [13]. The material was given a trivial name, digoxin-like-material, which was abbreviated as DLM.

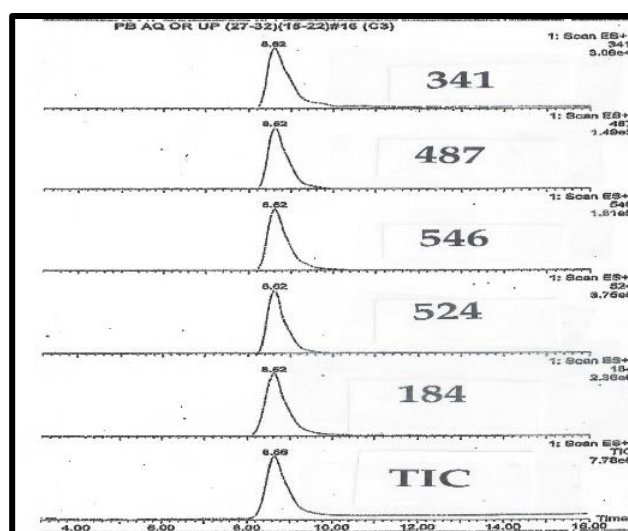
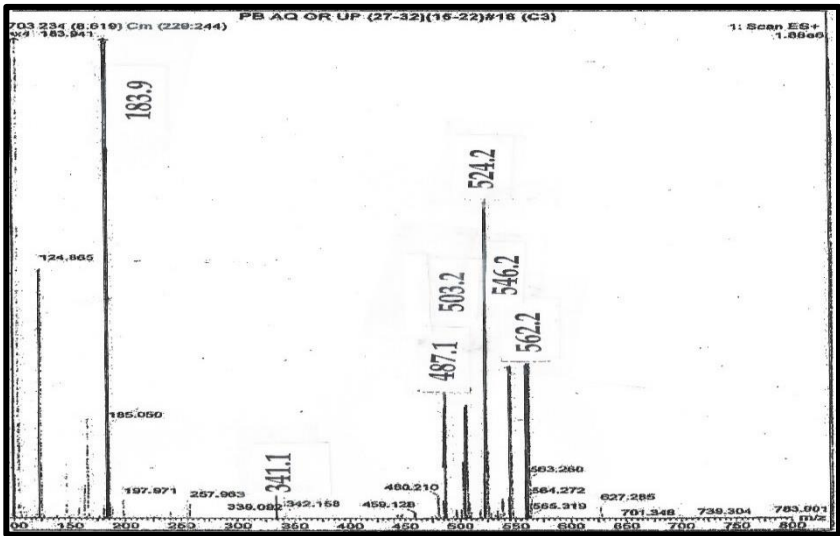


Figure 2. LC-MS chromatography of purified C341 isolated from pig blood.

HPLC chromatograms monitored by the mass ions characteristic of C341. The takeaway lesson from Figures 2 and 3 is all of the expected ions characteristic of C341 co-eluted and there were no significant unexplained ions. In total, the two figures suggest a high degree of purity for C341.

Figures 2 & 3 from Chasalow, F.; Pierce-Cohen, L. *Steroids* **2018**, 136: 63-75 [7].



Chasalow,F.; Pierce-Cohen,L. *Steroids*, **2018**, 138: 63-75. [7]

Figure 3. Mass Spectrum of purified C341 from Pig Blood

This is the mass spectrum of C341 as shown on line 5 of Table 1. [i] S is the ion at 341 Da; [ii] A is the ion at 487 Da – generated by loss of trimethylamine from C; [iii] B is the ion at 524 Da as the H+ ion; [iv] C is the ion at 546 as the Na+ ion Da; [v] D is the ion at 562 Da as the K+ ion; The Ion at 503 Da is the loss of trimethylamine from D.

2.10 Initial candidates for the DLM

Table 1. Mass spectrometry of phosphocholine diesters							
Line		M (Da)	S (Da)	A (Da)	B (Da)	C (Da)	D (Da)
Phosphodiester precursor with 21 carbon atoms							
1	&	330	313	459	496	518	534
2		346	329	475	512	534	560
Phosphodiesters with 23 carbon atoms							
3	@	&	354	337	483	520	542
4	@	&	356	339	485	522	544
5	@	&	358	341	487	524	546
6	#	&	376	361	507!	544	566
7	#	&	378	363	509!	546	568
Phosphodiesters with 24 carbon atoms							
8	@		370	353	!	536	558
9	@		386	369	!	552	574
10	#		374	389	!	572	594
Phosphodiesters with 25 carbon atoms							
11	@		398	381	!	564	580
12	#		416	401	!	!	!
13	@		430	413	!	!	!
Symbols							
	M	Molecular mass of the steroid					
	S	Steroid fragment – formed by loss of PC (183 Da) from B					
	A	Loss of trimethylamine (59 Da) from C					
	B	H+ free acid					
	C	Na+ sodium salt					
	D	K+ potassium salt					
Notes:							
@	These compounds are spiral steroids with 23 carbon atoms						
#	The carboxylic acids must be protonated to be detected						
&	Based on the absence of other ions in the mass spectrum, these six were judged to have been purified to near homogeneity.						
!	Ions that fit this pattern were not observed in the positive ion spectrum.						

Although the levels of DLM are undetectable (less than 0.05 ng/ml) in sera from normal individuals, there are more than 200 papers describing DLM levels in various diseases [14]. Several teams attempted to isolate the DLM. First 'to market' were claims for digoxin [2]. Second, Hamlyn isolated 13 µg of 'ouabain' from 80 liters of plasma [3]. There is now a long list of papers describing Endogenous Ouabain [15, 16] and a shorter list describing EO as fantasy [17]. A third candidate is marinobufagenin [18]. There is an RIA for marinobufagenin that detects an unidentified substance in human serum from pregnant women [19]. Note that these three cardiotonic steroids are poisons and, in serum samples, have only been detected by RIA. No precursors are known and there are no logical biosynthetic pathways proposed in mammals.

2.11 How did we find the spiral steroids:

Our discovery path began with two investigations in the 1980s. First, Chasalow laboratory observed that patients with Smith-Lemli-Opitz Syndrome (SLO) [a] had a steroid disorder, [b] were potassium wasting and [c] benefited from digoxin therapy [20]. Second, Bradlow laboratory observed that some human breast cyst fluids had high potassium levels [21]. Together, we speculated that the cyst fluids had a steroid hormone that the infants needed, but didn't make. Chasalow measured 'digoxin' in both types of samples [22]. Whatever the material detected with the RIA for digoxin was, a DLM was present both in breast cyst fluids and in serum from healthy newborn infants, but it was not present in the serum from newborn infants with SLO syndrome [20].

2.12 Why weren't the spiral steroids found prior to these investigations:

The DLM levels in many breast cyst fluids were over 0.6 ng/ml [22]. As part of normal patient care, the fluids were aspirated. This was the initial source of the efforts to isolate DLM. First, we confirmed that the DLM was not digoxin (or ouabain) by difference in solubility. Second, we learned to isolate and concentrate the DLM. This could not be done before because methods to isolate either digoxin or classical steroids cannot be used to concentrate DLM. After several false starts, suitable isolation methods were developed. As the properties of DLM are different from that of all other steroids, new methods were needed for purification. [7]

2.13 How did we isolate the phosphocholine steroid diesters

Breast cyst fluids with high potassium levels were the first source we used to isolate the DLM. Separation was achieved by HPLC with a gradient of increasing polarity. Repeated chromatography led to two compounds –(a) compound with a UV absorption at 240 nm that was not a DLM and (b) a DLM with little UV absorbance over 210 nm. However, as the average volume of fluid in a human breast cyst is less than 2 ml, it was difficult to use as a source for isolation of an unknown steroid-like material.

In the second stage, we obtained outdated blood plasma from the local blood collection center and, with the methods developed for the cyst fluid extract, we were able to distinguish 4 steroid phosphodiester. In the third stage, we obtained 10 liters of porcine blood. In total, with that starting material, we obtained about 10 mg each of 4 pure phosphocholine steroids diesters – C313, C337, C339, and C341. MS ion peaks for the four compounds are listed in Table 1 [7].

2.2 Determining the chemical formula of the steroid

Chasalow applied a trial-and-error (T&E) method to determine the molecular formula of the steroid. There is no *a priori* reason why only one formula would satisfy the basic rules of chemistry. Once there was a logical composition and with the knowledge of steroid biochemistry, it was possible to propose a structure. The Appendix shows the T&E analysis of each phosphodiester, its proposed composition and the structure most consistent with steroid enzyme biochemistry. Table 2 summarizes the various features. The proposed structures do not eliminate isomers and stereoisomers. If Occam's Razor does not apply, then there would have to be more unknown

intermediates, enzymes and pathways. For example, C313 and C329 differ by 16 Da, as would be expected for an extra hydroxy group. This was confirmed by the fragmentation showing loss of 18 Da for C329. It doesn't identify the site of the hydroxy group, but carbon atoms 18, 19, and 21 are eliminated because a hydroxy group on those carbons wouldn't fragment by loss of a molecule of water (18 Da), as was actually observed for C329 and C369.

2.3 Biosynthesis of steroid ethanolamine phosphate diester – Part 1- the phosphate

Both choline and ethanolamine are required nutrients in mammals [23]. The first step is the condensation of 17 α -hydroxy-pregna-5,7-dienolone with a phosphate donor.

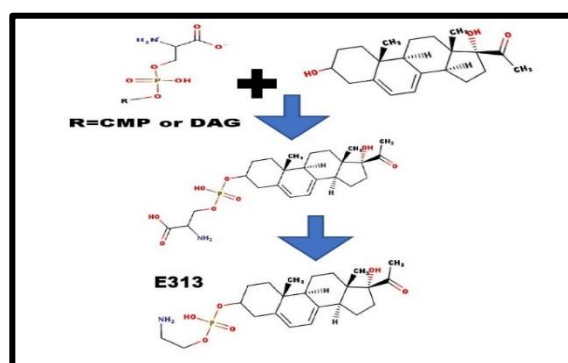
Table 2											Structural components of newly discovered steroids										
	Symbol	Alkenes			-OH	-COOH	Spiral	Composition													
		5	7	23				C	H	O	Delta										
21 Carbon atom compounds																					
	C313, E313	X	X					21	30	3	7										
	C329, E329	X	X		X			21	30	4	7										
23 Carbon atom compounds																					
	C337, E337	X	X	X			X	23	30	3	9										
	C339, E339	X		X			X	23	32	3	8										
	C341, E341			X			X	23	34	3	7										
	C361, E361	X				X		23	36	4	6										
	C363, E363					X		23	38	4	5										
24 Carbon atom compounds																					
	X353	X		X			X	24	34	3	8										
	X369	X	X	X			X	24	34	4	8										
	C389, E389	X		X	X	X		24	36	5	7										
25 Carbon atom compounds																					
	X381	X		X			X	25	34	4	9										
	X401	X		X		X		25	36	5	8										
	X413	X		X	X	X	X	25	34	6	9										

Basically, there are two alternatives: [a] a transfer from either a phosphocholine lipid or a phosphoethanolamine lipid and [b] *de novo, in situ* synthesis, perhaps from CDP-serine or phosphatidyl-serine. The serine-steroid phosphodiester would be an anion and would not be detected in the cation mass spectrum. Decarboxylation would form E313 [9] and N-methylation would convert E313 to form C313 [24]. As we detected many Exxx compounds in adrenal extracts, methylation might not occur until after the addition of the extra carbons. This would fit with the hypothesis of steroid phosphoethanolamine diesters as the precursor-storage form for the phosphocholine diesters (Figure 3) [7].

Figure 4. Formation of steroid phosphoethanolamine diesters.

2.4 Biosynthesis of phosphosteroid diesters – Part 2 – the steroid

In 1940, Thomas Wolfe wrote: "You can never go home again." That same principle applies in steroid biochemistry. You can't form a Δ^7 -8 sterol once it has been reduced by



the Δ^7 -sterol reductase. UV spectra of both of the steroid phosphocholine diesters with 21 carbon atoms (C313 and C329) are consistent with Δ^5 - Δ^7 -dienes. Thus, the patients

with SLO syndrome (7-dehydrosterol reductase deficiency) provide the ‘tell’ that the precursor for the phosphodiester must be a Δ^7 -sterol.

After almost a century of steroid investigation, no unconjugated steroids with more than 21 carbon atoms have been described in vertebrates. One could visualize two basic paths to synthesize steroids with more than 21 carbon atoms. One could form them with a [a] different side chain cleavage enzyme from cholesterol and [b] one could add carbons to a precursor with 21-carbon atoms. Burstein, with side chain labeled cholesterol, found only a 6-carbon fragment (25). This confirmed these steroids had to be derived from a 21-carbon precursor. When only phosphocholine steroids with 23 carbon atoms had been identified, the extra carbons could have been added by malonyl coenzyme A (and subsequent decarboxylation).

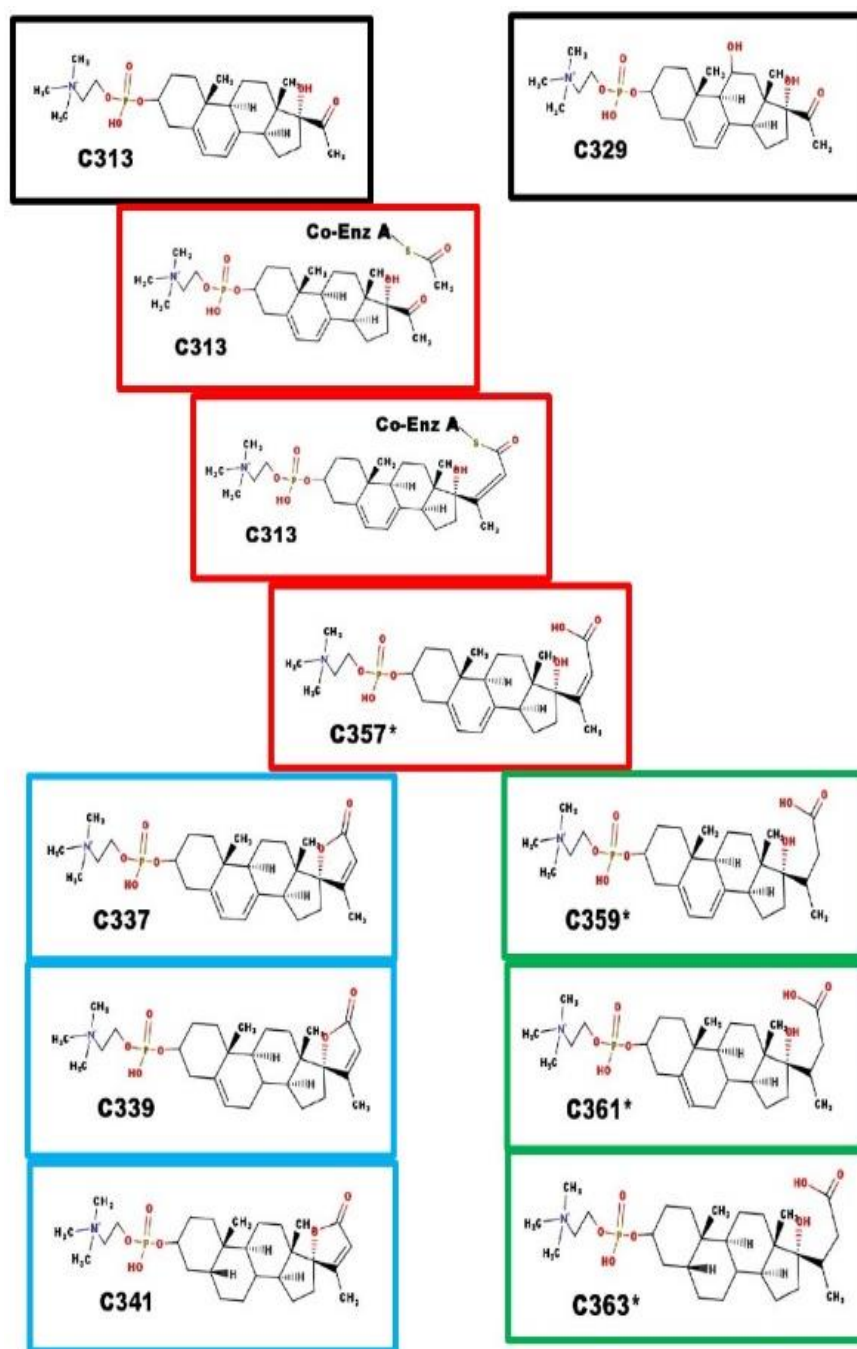
Fatty acid synthase lengthens carboxylic acids two carbons at a time. Acetyl coenzyme A is the donor. After condensation, it is dehydrated and the resulting alkene is reduced. Scheme 1 shows how 23 carbon atom phosphosteroids could be synthesized by a fatty acid synthetase-like enzyme. However, that doesn’t account for the 24 and 25 carbon atom phosphosteroids.

The three most common acyl coenzyme A derivatives and the corresponding phosphocholine steroids are listed in Table 3. It is possible that other acyl coenzyme A derivatives could also be coupled to C313 or C329. This would depend on the substrate specificity of the fatty acid synthase-like enzyme complex.

Table 3 Origin of the extra carbon atoms in spiral steroids

# of carbon atoms in steroid	Acyl- Co-A	Chemical Formula	Identifying Position in steroid
23	Acetyl-	-CO-CH ₃	22, 23
24	Propyl-	-CO-CH ₂ -CH ₃	22, 23, 24
25	Acetoacetyl-	-CO-CH ₂ -CO-CH ₃	22, 23, 24, 25

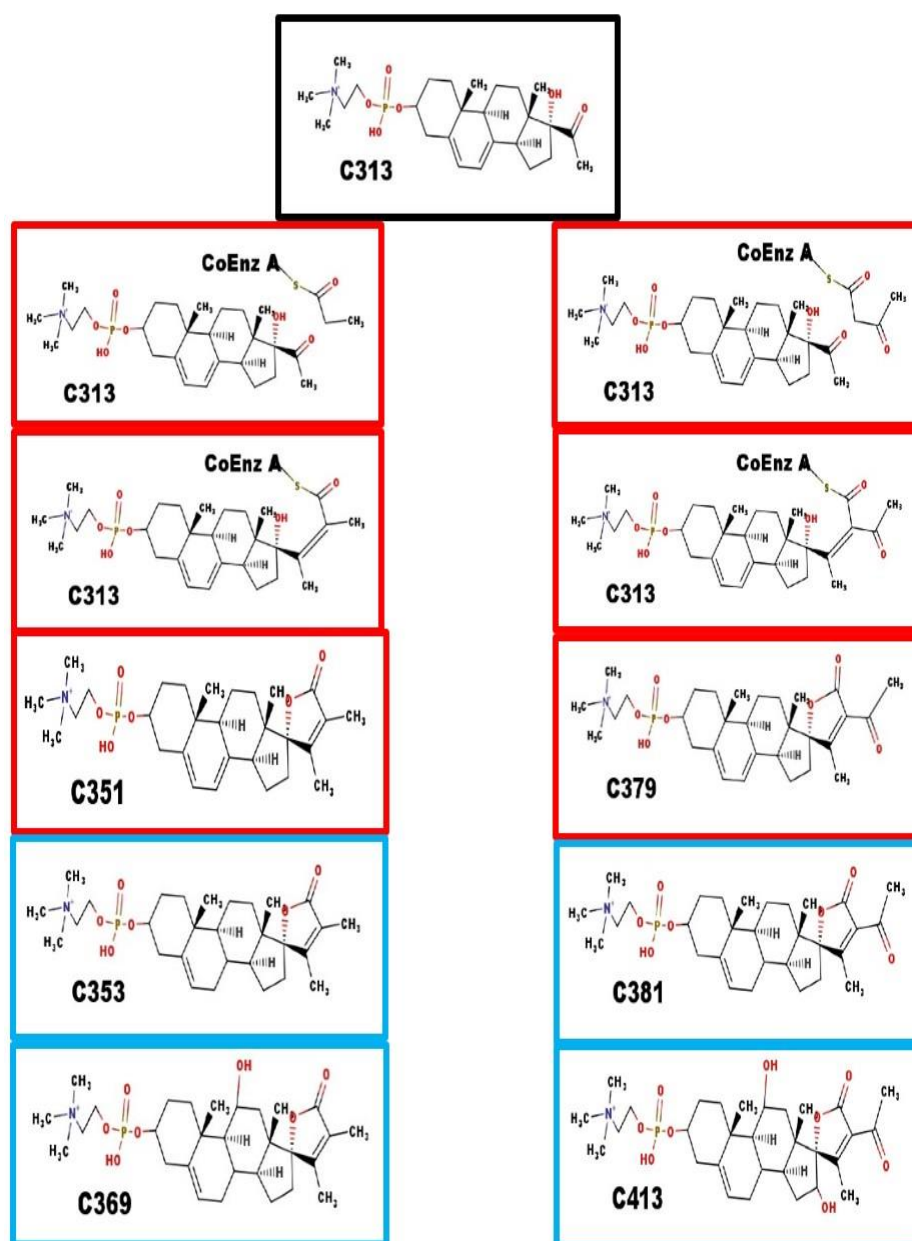
Note: using this numbering scheme simplifies an understanding of the biosynthesis of all of the spiral steroids.



Scheme 1: Enzymes and Biosynthesis of Steroids with 23 carbon atoms

Black boxes – precursor steroids with 21 Carbon atoms; Red boxes – proposed intermediates; Blue boxes – spiral steroids; Green boxes – carboxylic acids. C357* is the branch point. The intermediate steps are similar to the steps leading to lengthening of fatty acids. Ring closure leads to Ionotropin (C341) and DLM. Reduction of the C20-C23 alkene prevents ring closure. The function of C361* and C363* are unknown at this time.

The extra carbons are added by the action of an unknown enzyme catalyzing a process similar to that of fatty acid synthase – leading to C357*. C357* is a substrate for two different enzymes: [i] Ring E closure enzyme – leading to the spiral steroids and [ii] C20-C23 reductase leading to the carboxylic acid compounds. The dialkenes of both compounds can be sequentially reduced- first at the Δ^7 -8 alkene and then at the Δ^5 -6 alkene. The final product is a 5β -steroid. The Δ^5 -6 intermediate also may have a function.



Scheme 2: Enzymes and Biosynthesis of Steroids with 24 and 25 carbon atoms

The fatty acid synthase enzyme complex also seems to accept propyl Coenzyme A (which leads to a steroid with 24 carbon atoms) and acetoacetyl-Coenzyme A (which leads to a steroid with 25 carbon atoms) as a co-substrate with X313.

Black boxes – precursor steroid with 21 carbon atoms; Red boxes – proposed intermediates; Blue boxes – spiral steroids. The intermediate steps are similar to the steps leading to lengthening of fatty acids. C369 fragments with loss of 18 Da which is consistent with the presence of a hydroxyl group. For C369 and C413, we have no evidence at which steps the hydroxyl groups are added nor the carbon atoms to which they are attached. They are shown at carbon 11 and carbon 16 because enzymes with that specificity are known.

3.0 Proposed Function of Steroid Phosphocholine Diesters

Regulation of potassium recovery must occur in every tissue. However, there must be a source of specificity that causes accumulation in only one target tissue. The primary function of the steroid type of potassium sparing diuretics is regulation of the NaK-ATPase of which there are multiple isoforms. I propose that these match with different classes of steroid phosphodiesterases.

Four of the steroid phosphodiesterases are likely to have unique functions. Each class has a spiral steroid. Some of the classes also have members with a hydroxy group. The 23-carbon atom class also has a carboxyl derivative that doesn't seem to be a precursor and was present in the adrenal extracts. The following sections correlate each class with their proposed endocrine function.

3.1 Function of the 23-carbon atom class of steroid phosphocholine diesters

Ionotropin (C341) is the major 23-carbon atom steroid phosphocholine diester. It was isolated on the basis of cross-reaction with digoxin-specific antibodies. The pharmaceutical equivalent, spironolactone, improves renal and heart function in patients with congestive heart failure. 'Endogenous ouabain,' (which was also isolated on the basis of cross-reaction with ouabain-specific antibodies) was elevated in patients with essential hypertension [26, 27]. The actual compound measured is probably C341. Whether C341 is the cause of the essential hypertension or part of the attempt to compensate for the hypertension, remains to be determined.

3.2 Function of the 24-carbon atom class of steroid phosphocholine diesters

The 24 carbon compounds are C353, C369 and E389*. Steroids of this class were not detected in serum from prepubertal children. E389* was present in bovine adrenal extracts. C369 was present in bovine ovaries. C353 was present in serum from pregnant women. Based on where we found them, this class probably binds to the specific NaK-ATPase isoforms that are present in gonads and in the fetal-placental unit. Elevated levels of C313 and/or of C329 in serum seem to be a common feature of women with pre-eclampsia [28]. Thus, when fetal potassium is inadequate the placenta secretes both precursors into the maternal circulation, leading to potassium accumulation and maternal hypertension [29]. C369 was present in the serum of obligate heterozygotes for 7-dehydrosterol reductase deficiency [30]. This suggests that C369 (11-hydroxy, 23-methyl-C339) does not cause hypertension. Thus, the theory is the hypertension is caused by the C341 made from the high levels of C313 present in the maternal serum. Elevated C329 could lead to synthesis of C369 and lead to restoration of fetal potassium levels [31].

3.3 Function of the 25-carbon atom class of steroid phosphocholine diesters

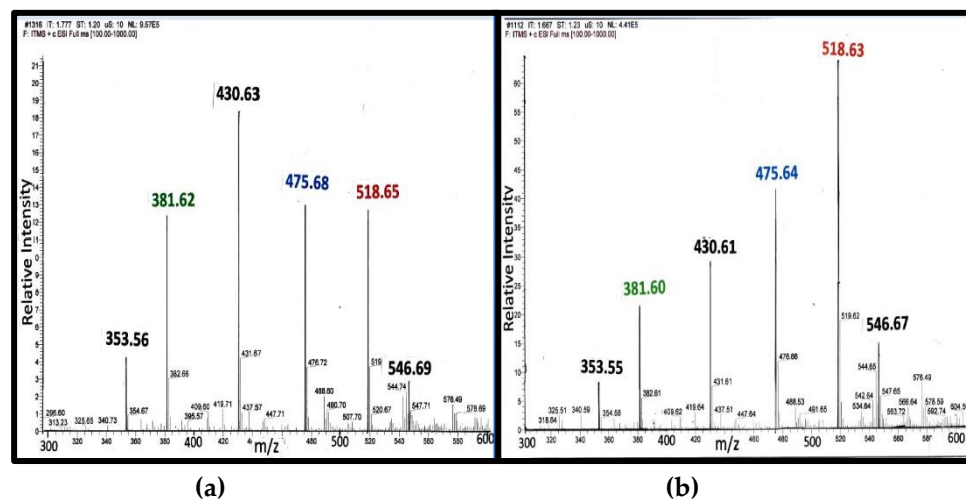
Scheme 2 also describes the proposed biosynthetic path for the synthesis of steroids with 25 carbon atoms. C381 is the most common member of the 25-carbon atom class. It was found in milk from cattle, goats and sheep. Milk from all three species have high levels of potassium. It was also present in pregnant women, whether or not they had pre-eclampsia [28]. C413 was detected in fetal calf serum. In addition to binding to NaK-ATPase, it is possible there is a specific nuclear receptor in mammary glands for a steroid of this class. C381 was also detected in serum from adult males. Its function in males is less obvious.

3.4 Spiral steroids during pregnancy

Figure 4 shows representative mass spectra obtained on serum extracts from pregnant women [28]. The study included 40 samples, 20 samples from women with normal blood pressure and 20 samples from women with pre-eclampsia. Miltefosine (sodium hexadecyl phosphocholine) generates an ion at $m/z=430$ Da. As an internal control, 10 μ l of 0.2 mg/ml of miltefosine was added to 0.2 ml of serum. For analysis, the ion intensity of each steroid phosphodiester was compared to the intensity of the internal control. If the peak ion intensity of the phosphodiester was the same as that of miltefosine, then the

concentration of the phosphodiester would be about 10 mg/L (~20 μ M) of serum. In fact, when C341 was isolated, 10 mg was isolated from 10 liters of porcine blood [7]. Note that in the spectrum from the normotensive woman, the ion intensity of C341 was about 1/5 the intensity of the miltefosine ion.

During pregnancy, all four classes of steroid phosphodiesters are present in serum: (a) 21 carbon class – C313 and C329; (b) 23 carbon class – C341; (c) 24 carbon class – C353; (d) 25 carbon class – X381. There are three different spiral steroids present in maternal serum. Hence, it is not surprising that a single measurement with an immunoassay specific for a cardiotonic glycoside, such ouabain or dixogin, does not adequately reflect fetal-maternal health status.



Chasalow, F.; John, C.; Bochner, R. *Steroids*. 2019. 151: 108466 [28].

Figure 4: MS from serum steroid phosphodiesters during pregnancy

Panel a: Serum from a normotensive woman at 22 weeks of gestation

Panel b: Serum a woman with pre-eclampsia at 22 weeks of gestation

Peak assignments: (i) 353 Da- C353, (ii) 381 Da- X-381, (iii) 430 Da-Internal control, miltefosine, (iv) 475 Da- Type A ion from C329, (v) 518 Da- type C ion from C313, (vi) 546 Da- Type C ion from C341.

3.5 Is there a role for replacement hormone therapy for spiral steroids?

Patients who benefit from spironolactone and/or eplerenone would be expected to benefit from one of the spiral steroids. The synthetic compounds probably bind to all of the isoforms of NaK-ATPase. Potentially, the natural spiral steroids may be tissue specific and have fewer side effects.

4. Materials and methods

This review tries to summarize the discovery of these novel steroids. The details of methods for extraction are in Chasalow [7]. The basic methods for the mass spectroscopy of individual serum samples are in Chasalow, Bochner and John [28].

5. Conclusions

Aldosterone was discovered in 1955. Investigators continue to learn more about the role of mineralocorticoides even 70 years after their discovery. The clock has now started on the the biochemical endocrinology of the spiral steroids. The problem is complicated by the fact that, whereas aldosterone functions in a similar fashion in all of its targets, the same is not true for the spiral steroids. C341 (Iontropin) functions in renal and cardiac tissues, C369 works in gonads and placenta and C381 accumulates potassium in milk in mammary glands. These three compounds are spiral steroid phosphodiesters and bind to different forms of NaK-ATPase. It's as if we considered estrogens,

androgens and progestogens as all functioning in the same way because they all bind to nuclear receptors even though the receptors are all different.

Appendix

The appendix contains [i] the Trial and Error table (T&E) for each of the steroid phosphoesters, [ii] the proposed structures, [iii] specific comments about the proposed structure, and [iv] some information about the tissue in which it was detected.

In the T&E table, each line illustrates a different possible composition :

- The first column identifies a particular trial.
- Second column selects the number of carbon atoms in the particular trial. The third column has the number of oxygen atoms in the trial.
- To get the m/z of the steroid 17 Da must be added to the m/z observed of the steroid fragment observed in the mass spectrum. When phosphoesters fragment, the oxygen between the phosphorus and the carbon atom remains attached to the phosphorus atom. Carboxylic acids must be protonated to be detected in the positive ion spectrum. Thus, only 15 Da needs to be added to get the correct m/z value if the proposed structure contains a carboxylic acid.
- H-Max is the maximum number of hydrogens that could form a molecule. It is twice the number of carbon atoms plus two. H-Max must be larger than H-Req.
- H-Req in each trial (Hydrogen atoms required to make a molecule) is calculated by subtracting the contributions to the m/z from the carbon and oxygen atoms.
- Delta is half the difference between H-Max and H-Req. Delta is the number of double bonds or rings in the proposed structure. Each Delta reduces the number of hydrogens required by two atoms. Alkenes, ketones and carboxylic acids each contribute a Delta. Steroids must have Delta greater than 4 because of the four rings in the gonane. Delta must be between 4 and 12 to be consistent with a steroid molecule.
- The next line in the table increases the number of oxygen atoms and repeats the calculation. After the range of possible Delta is exceeded, the next lines increase the number of carbon atoms and the process is repeated.
- Knowledge of steroid enzyme biochemistry is used to restrict choices. For example, Occam's razor suggests C337, C339, and C341 represent step wise reduction of double bonds or ketones. Similarly, MS-MS fragmentation with loss of 18 Da suggests the presence of a hydroxy group. The hydroxy group could not be at carbons 18, 19, or 21 because the adjacent carbon is a tertiary carbon.
- Finally, the bold print identifies the composition that best fits the steroid fragment.
- The proposed composition does not eliminate stereoisomers.

Beneath each T&E table is the proposed structure.

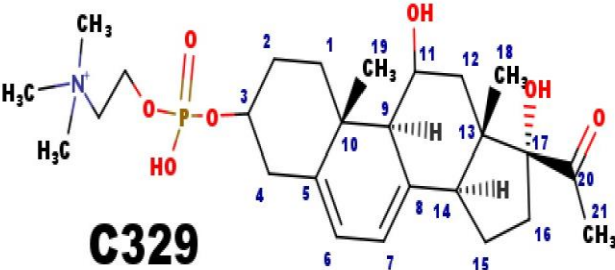
21-carbon compounds	C313, C329
23-carbon compounds	C337, C339, C341, C361*, C363*
24-carbon compounds	C353, C369, C389*
25-carbon compounds	X381, X401*, X413

* Carboxylic acid

C313					
Carbon:	Oxygen	H-max	H-Req	m/z	Delta
19	4	40	38	330	1
19	5	40	22	330	9
20	4	42	26	330	8
21	3	44	30	330	7
21	4	44	14	330	15
22	2	46	34	330	6
22	3	46	18	330	14

C313 was one of the two phosphosteroids in serum from newborn infants with 7-dehydrosterol reductase deficiency (Smith-Lemli-Opitz syndrome). E313 and C313 are the precursors of all of the phosphodiester steroids.

C329						
Carbor	Oxygen	H-max	H-Req	m/z	Delta	
19	5	40	38	346	1	
20	5	42	26	346	8	
21	3	44	46	346	-1	
21	4	44	30	346	7	
21	5	44	14	346	15	
22	3	46	34	346	6	
22	4	46	18	346	14	



C329

In bovine ovarian extracts, an m/z fragment ion was observed at 311 Da. There is no logical Delta that could be added to the structure of C313 to get to C311. However, loss of 18 Da would be consistent with C329. The Na+ ion of the intact molecule would have an m/z=534 Da and the Na+ salt fragment with loss of 59 Da (trimethylamine) to produce an ion at 475 Da. Both were observed in serum extracts from pregnant women but not from extracts of plasma from children prior to puberty.

C337						
Line	Carbon	Oxygen	H-max	H-Req	m/z	Delta
1	21	5	44	22	354	11
2	21	6	44	6	354	19
3	22	4	46	26	354	10
4	22	5	46	10	354	18
5	23	3	48	30	354	9
6	23	4	48	14	354	17
7	24	2	50	34	354	8
8	24	3	50	18	354	16
9	25	1	52	38	354	7
10	25	2	52	22	354	15

C337

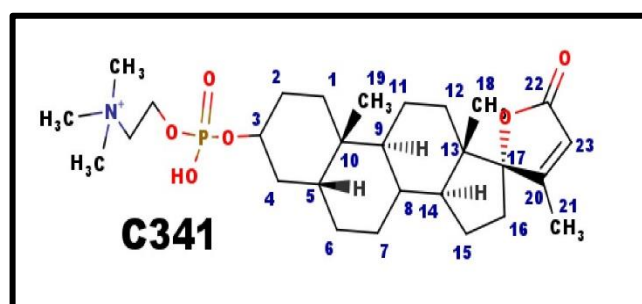
This is the first spiral steroid phosphodiester formed in the proposed biosynthetic scheme.

C339						
Line	Carbons	Oxygen	H-max	H-Req	m/z	Delta
1	21	5	44	24	356	10
2	21	6	44	8	356	18
3	22	4	46	28	356	9
4	22	5	46	12	356	17
5	23	3	48	32	356	8
6	23	4	48	16	356	16
7	24	2	50	36	356	7
8	24	3	50	20	356	15
9	25	1	52	40	356	6
10	25	2	52	24	356	14

C339 was one of the first group of steroid phosphodiester that we isolated from mammalian and avian serum. Although C341 is the primary 23-carbon spiral steroid in mammals, the primary 23-carbon spiral steroid in both chickens and turkeys is C339.

After adrenarche, the human weak androgen is DHEA-S, which is a Δ^5 -6 androgen just like the proposed structure of C339. Thus, human NaK-ATPase needs to be able to discriminate the spiral steroid from the weak androgen. Both chickens and turkeys have much lower levels of their weak androgen, which is not DHEA=S, and it doesn't compete with the spiral steroid for the usual NaK-ATPase isoform.

C341						
Line	Carbon	Oxygen	H-max	H-Req	m/z	Delta
1	21	5	44	26	358	9
2	21	6	44	10	358	17
3	22	4	46	30	358	8
4	22	5	46	14	358	16
5	23	3	48	34	358	7
6	23	4	48	18	358	15
7	24	2	50	38	358	6
8	24	3	50	22	358	14
9	25	1	52	42	358	5
10	25	2	52	26	358	13



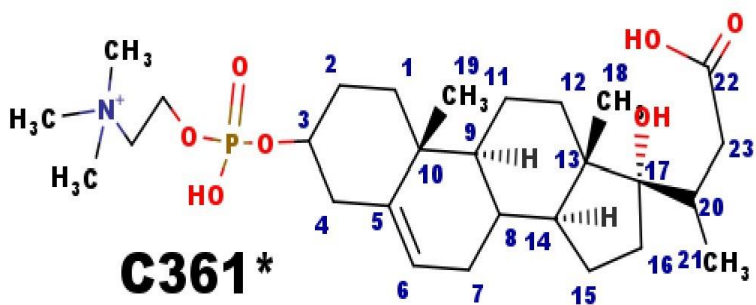
The proposed structure has Delta=7, five for the rings, one for Δ^{20-23} alkene and one for the carboxyl group. C341 was isolated on the basis of DLM assays. It wasn't present in serum from infants with Smith-Lemli-Opitz syndrome. The plane of the E-ring is almost perpendicular to the plane of the gonane ring. Note that the AB ring juncture is shown in the β configuration. Although testosterone is reduced to the 5α -configuration, the substrate for its reduction is the Δ^4 -3 ketone. The phosphosteroids would not be substrates for that enzyme. The only enzyme, that reduces the Δ^5 -6, forms the 5β -configuration, similar to the cholic acids. C341, as a 5β -steroid would not be expected to interact with the androgen receptor. In contrast, spironolactone has a Δ^4 -3 ketone and interacts with both the DLM receptor and the androgen receptor.

When C341 was isolated, the starting material was 10 liters of fresh porcine blood. We obtained 10 mg of C341. As an estimate, ignoring all losses during isolation, this would be a serum concentration of 100 $\mu\text{g/dL}$. Normal 17-hydroxyprogesterone levels are < 200 ng/dL. Peak cortisol levels are < 25 $\mu\text{g/dL}$ and corticosterone levels are < 3 $\mu\text{g/dL}$. Normal young adult DHEA-S levels at 300-500 $\mu\text{g/dL}$. Thus, except for DHEA-S, C341, even allowing for losses in isolation, the serum concentration of C341 is the highest of all the steroids. C341 is the primary spiral steroid with 23-carbon atoms in mammals.

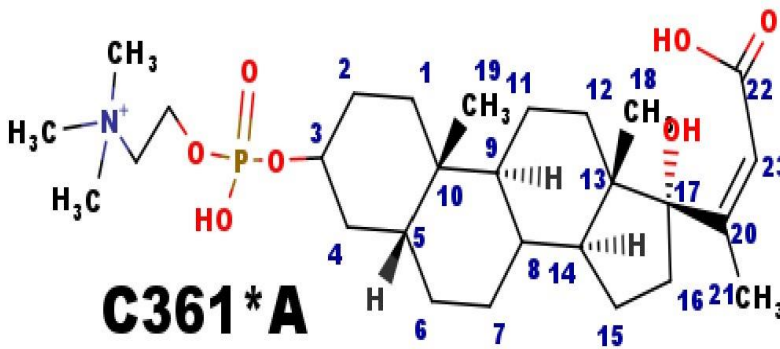
We assigned Ionotropin as the trivial name for C341. The name was selected because patients who were deficient had an electrolyte defect, suggesting that it would function to stimulate ion transport.

The asterisk in the name indicates that the proposed structure is a carboxylic acid

C361							
Line	Carbons	Oxygen	H-max	H-Req	m/z	Delta	
1	21	5	44	44	376	0	
2	21	6	44	28	376	8	
3	22	4	46	48	376	-1	
4	22	5	46	32	376	7	
5	23	3	48	52	376	-2	
6	23	4	48	36	376	6	
7	24	3	50	40	376	5	
8	24	4	50	24	376	13	
9	25	2	52	44	376	4	
10	25	3	52	28	376	12	



C361*



C361*A

and the apparent mass is actually 2 Da higher than the molecular formula suggests.

There are two isomers that might generate C361 – [1] Δ5-6 with C20-C23 reduced and [2] Δ20-23 with C5-C6 reduced. In fact, the mass spectrum that obtained from the sample of C361 that we had isolated seems to show a double peak. Perhaps both isomers were present. In C361*A, the five atoms that form the E-ring are more or less coplanar. Thus, the atoms for E-ring have juxtaposition to form the ring. The same is not true for C361. The reduction of the side chain alkene is similar to the enzyme step in the fatty acid synthase pathway. C361A could be an intermediate in the formation of C341. The same is not true for C361A, which may have another biological function.

C363						
Line	Carbons	Oxygen	H-max	H-Req	m/z	Delta
1	21	5	44	46	378	-1
2	21	6	44	30	378	7
3	22	4	46	50	378	-2
4	22	5	46	34	378	6
5	23	3	48	54	378	-3
6	23	4	48	38	378	5
7	24	3	50	42	378	4
8	24	4	50	26	378	12
9	25	2	52	46	378	3
10	25	3	52	30	378	11

C363* must have a Delta of 5. Four for the rings and one for the carboxyl group. It is the only phosphosteroid we found without a 20-23 alkene. This seems to be an important synthetic branch point. The 3D structure suggests that once the bond is reduced, the lactone E-ring can't form because the 5 atoms are not co-planar. The H-NMR was indistinguishable from the NMR from C341, indicating most of the hydrogen atoms were in the same environment. The localization of this compound in bovine adrenal extracts, rather than in serum, suggests it is not a non-functional metabolite. Small amounts of C363 were also present in extracts from blood obtained from the blood bank.

A comparison of C341 and C363 indicates a difference of 22 Da. The 22 Da is composed of three components, [i] 18 Da for the water, [ii] 2 Da to protonate the carboxylate anion and [iii] 2 Da to reduce the C20-C-23 alkene. Thus, C363 is not on the obvious path to synthesize C341.

C369							
Line	Carbons	Oxygen	H-max	H-Req	m/z	Delta	
1	23	4	48	46	386	1	
2	23	5	48	30	386	9	
3	23	6	48	14	386	17	
4	24	4	50	34	386	8	
5	24	5	50	18	386	16	
6	25	3	52	38	386	7	
7	25	4	52	22	386	15	
8	26	2	54	42	386	6	
9	26	3	54	26	386	14	

Both C369 ($m/z=552$ Da) and E369 ($m/z=510$ Da) were present in bovine ovarian extracts. C369 and E369 both fragment with loss of a fragment of 18 Da. This would be consistent with a hydroxy group. The precursor for both compounds would be X329, which also fragments with loss of 18 Da. If there was a hydroxy on carbon 18, 19, 21, or 24, it would not fragment with loss of water (18 Da) because the adjacent carbon atom can't form an alkene.

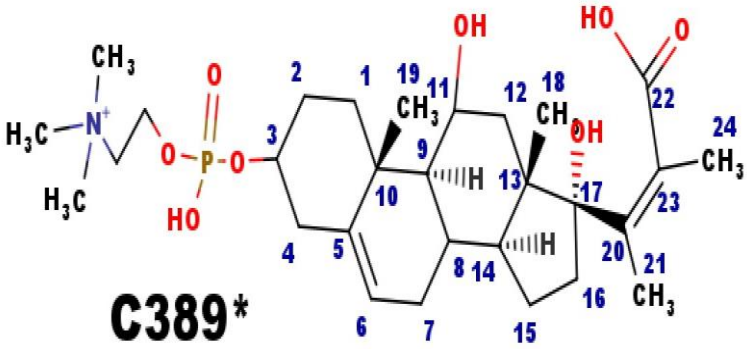
10 out of 10 obligate heterozygotes for 7-dehydrosterol reductase deficiency had high levels of C369 in their serum [30]. In contrast, at 22-24 weeks of gestational age, only 3 of 40 pregnant women had high levels of C369 in their serum [28]. The estimated incidence of the heterozygotes for this disorder is 5-10%. Perhaps, the high levels of C369 may play a part in the preservation of the gene in the population, despite the consequence to the individuals who are homozygous for a mutation at the gene.

C381						
Line	Carbons	Oxygen	H-max	H-Req	m/z	Delta
1	23	4	48	58	398	-5
2	23	5	48	42	398	3
3	23	6	48	26	398	11
4	24	4	50	46	398	2
5	24	5	50	30	398	10
6	25	4	52	34	398	9
7	25	3	52	50	398	1
8	26	4	54	22	398	16
9	26	2	54	54	398	0
10	27	2	56	42	398	7

C381

C381 was found in extracts from milk from three species – cows, sheep and goats. No other steroid phosphodiester was present in the extracts. C381 was also present in serum from pregnant women but not in prepubertal children. Note that milk is high in potassium ions.

C389						
Line	Carbons	Oxygen	H-max	H-Req	m/z	Delta
1	23	5	48	48	404	0
2	23	6	48	32	404	8
3	24	4	50	52	404	-1
4	24	5	50	36	404	7
5	25	3	52	56	404	-2
6	25	4	52	40	404	6
7	26	2	54	60	404	-3
8	26	3	54	44	404	5



C389*

C389 and E389 were both present in extracts from bovine adrenals. Note that C389 and C369 differ by 20 Da even the only difference is loss of molecule of water with 18 Da. We attribute the extra 2 Da as necessary to convert the carboxylate anion to a cation in order for it to be detected in the positive ion spectrum.

C413						
Line	Carbons	Oxygen	H-max	H-Req	m/z	Delta
1	23	7	48	42	430	3
2	23	8	48	26	430	11
3	24	6	50	46	430	2
4	24	7	50	30	430	10
5	25	5	52	50	430	1
6	25	6	52	34	430	9
7	26	5	54	38	430	8
8	26	6	54	22	430	16

C413 was detected in extracts from fetal calf serum. The T&E table suggests that there are two extra hydroxy groups compared to C381. However, the site for the hydroxy groups is not defined. The C ion for C413 would have m/z= 596 Da. A cation with that was observed, however, the ion concentration wasn't sufficient for MS-MS confirmation.

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Marvin Applets were used for drawing, displaying and characterizing chemical structures and reactions, Product Version 21.1 ChemAxon (<https://www.chemaxon.com>).

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Sample Availability: No samples of the spiral steroids are available at this time.

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