

1 **Cerpegin-derived furo[3,4-*c*]pyridine-3,4(1*H*,5*H*)-diones enhance cellular**  
2 **response to interferons by de novo pyrimidine biosynthesis inhibition**

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33 **Keywords:** Interferon, pyrimidine biosynthesis, cerpegin, DHODH, DNA damage response

1 **ABSTRACT**

2 There is an increasing interest in the field of cancer therapy for small compounds targeting  
3 pyrimidine biosynthesis, and in particular dihydroorotate dehydrogenase (DHODH), the fourth  
4 enzyme of this metabolic pathway. Three available DHODH structures, featuring three  
5 different known inhibitors, were used as templates to screen *in silico* an original chemical  
6 library from Erevan University. This process led to the identification of P1788, a compound  
7 chemically related to the alkaloid cerpegin, as a new class of pyrimidine biosynthesis inhibitors.  
8 In line with previous reports, we investigated the effect of P1788 on the cellular innate immune  
9 response. Here we show that pyrimidine depletion by P1788 amplifies cellular response to both  
10 type-I and type II interferons, but also induces DNA damage as assessed by  $\gamma$ H2AX staining.  
11 Moreover, the addition of inhibitors of the DNA damage response led to the suppression of the  
12 P1788 stimulatory effects on the interferon pathway. This demonstrates that components of the  
13 DNA damage response are bridging the inhibition of pyrimidine biosynthesis by P1788 to the  
14 interferon signaling pathway. Altogether, these results provide new insights on the mode of  
15 action of novel pyrimidine biosynthesis inhibitors and their development for cancer therapies.  
16

## 1 INTRODUCTION

2 DNA and RNA syntheses require large amounts of purine and pyrimidine nucleosides  
3 as precursors. This makes quickly dividing cells highly dependent on *de novo* nucleoside  
4 biosynthesis, whereas quiescent and slowly growing cells essentially rely on intracellular  
5 recycling of nucleosides or their uptake from extracellular fluids. Consequently, cancer cells  
6 are particularly sensitive to nucleoside biosynthesis inhibitors such as 5-fluorouracil,  
7 methotrexate, or 6-mercaptopurine, which are extensively used in clinical practice. Among  
8 antimetabolites that are currently investigated for their antitumoral properties, molecules  
9 targeting dihydroorotate dehydrogenase (DHODH), the fourth enzyme of *de novo* pyrimidine  
10 biosynthesis, are the subject of intense research [1-3]. In this metabolic pathway, three  
11 enzymatic steps are required to convert glutamine, aspartate, and bicarbonate into  
12 dihydroorotate (DHO), which is the substrate for DHODH [3]. Its oxidation by DHODH leads  
13 to orotate, which is converted into uridine monophosphate (UMP) that serves as a precursor for  
14 cytidine and thymidine biosynthesis. This makes DHODH a rate-limiting enzyme in the  
15 biosynthesis of pyrimidine nucleosides, and a potential target for antimetabolite development.

16 In the 90s, brequinar, a potent DHODH inhibitor passed pre-clinical studies, and was  
17 evaluated for its antitumor properties in multiple phase-I and phase-II trials [1-3]. However,  
18 severe adverse effects and a lack of efficacy in patients with different types of solid tumors  
19 stopped its development. This setback also led to the disregard of DHODH inhibition as a  
20 valuable strategy for anticancer therapies. Concomitantly, teriflunomide, another DHODH  
21 inhibitor, and its related prodrug (leflunomide), were evaluated successfully and approved for  
22 the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis and later on for multiple sclerosis despite significant side  
23 effects [1-3]. This drug was shown to impair the proliferation of immune cells by inhibiting  
24 pyrimidine biosynthesis. It also interferes through tyrosine kinase inhibition and Aryl  
25 Hydrocarbon Receptor (AhR) activation, which altogether contribute to its immunosuppressive

1 properties [4]. Despite the failure of brequinar in past clinical studies, recent publications  
2 renewed interest in DHODH as a target in cancer therapy and both old and recent series of  
3 DHODH inhibitors were shown to have promising antitumor properties. This was demonstrated  
4 in various *in vivo* models when administered alone or in combination with other drugs, in  
5 particular in acute myeloid leukemia (AML), neuroblastoma, PTEN (Phosphatase and TENsin  
6 homolog) mutant triple negative breast cancer cells, and KRAS (V-Ki-ras2 Kirsten rat sarcoma  
7 viral oncogene homolog) mutant pancreatic cancer cells [5-14]. Several DHODH inhibitors,  
8 including brequinar, leflunomide and new molecules such as BAY2402234 or PTC299, are  
9 currently being evaluated in clinical trials for cancer therapy [15,16]. Some pyrimidine  
10 biosynthesis inhibitors also exhibit broad-spectrum antiviral activity *in vitro* [1-3,17-19] and *in*  
11 *vivo* [20-22], opening new fields of application for this class of antimetabolites. In this context,  
12 the identification of novel DHODH inhibitors with original chemical and pharmacological  
13 properties has become a priority to overcome the limitations of existing molecules [23-27].

14 Beyond its cytostatic effects, DHODH inhibition is known to have a strong impact on  
15 gene expression, cell metabolism, and differentiation [5,12,14,15,28]. Our team is interested in  
16 the existing relationships between pyrimidine biosynthesis and the activation of innate  
17 immunity, with a specific focus on the interferon (IFN) response. IFN- $\alpha/\beta$  (or type I IFNs) are  
18 key antiviral and antitumoral cytokines that are produced by both immune and non-immune  
19 cells. They are released upon stimulation by viral PAMPs (Pathogen-Associated Molecular  
20 Patterns) such as double-stranded RNA molecules, or cellular DAMPs (Damage-Associated  
21 Molecular Patterns) including DNA breaks. Once bound to their target receptors, IFN- $\alpha/\beta$   
22 mobilize the JAK (Janus Kinase) and STAT (Signal Transducers and Activators of  
23 Transcription) signaling cascade to induce a large panel of target genes, the ISGs (Interferon-  
24 Stimulated Genes), which encode numerous antiviral and antitumoral factors. IFNs and ISGs  
25 are therefore essential for the innate immune response against viruses and for the control of

1 carcinogenesis [29,30]. Most interestingly, it is now well documented that pyrimidine  
2 biosynthesis inhibitors (i) induce some ISGs by a non-canonical and IFN-independent pathway,  
3 and (ii) enhance the expression of IFNs and ISGs when induced by viruses or viral PAMPs  
4 such as double-stranded RNA molecules [22,31-41]. Data from the literature suggest that  
5 DHODH inhibitors amplify the cellular response to type I IFNs, but this was only shown using  
6 a reporter gene containing Interferon-Stimulated Response Elements (ISRE) driving  
7 transcription of luciferase and never explored in detail [32,34]. The mechanism by which the  
8 inhibition of pyrimidine biosynthesis promotes the expression of IFNs and ISGs remains poorly  
9 understood and thus needs to be further documented [22,32,36,40,41]. The positive interaction  
10 between the inhibition of pyrimidine biosynthesis and the innate immune response likely  
11 contributes to the antiviral activity of DHODH inhibitors and it is tempting to speculate that it  
12 could also participate to the antitumor effect of these molecules as well.

13 DHODH, anchored by its N-terminal extremity to the internal mitochondrial membrane,  
14 uses flavin mononucleotide (FMN) and ubiquinone (or coenzyme Q<sub>10</sub>) as cofactors in a two-  
15 step redox reaction. Ubiquinone is usually located in the mitochondrial membrane. Close  
16 contact between DHODH and the membrane allows ubiquinone to shuttle into a hydrophobic  
17 channel of this enzyme in order to contact FMN as recently modelled [42]. A majority of  
18 DHODH inhibitors that have been described in the literature compete with ubiquinone for  
19 binding to this channel, and interact with a limited number of well-characterized residues [1-  
20 3]. Here, we took advantage of three high-definition structures available in the Protein Data  
21 Bank (PDB) for human DHODH bound to unrelated inhibitors to develop and benchmark a  
22 pipeline for *in silico* screening (4OQV, 3KVJ, 4RR4). This led to the identification of P1788,  
23 a compound featuring structural components of the plant alkaloid cerpegin [43,44], as a new  
24 class of pyrimidine biosynthesis inhibitors. We then used this compound to establish that  
25 cellular response to both type-I and II IFNs is amplified in cell cultures where pyrimidine

1 biosynthesis is blocked. We provide evidence that pyrimidine biosynthesis inhibition by P1788  
2 activates the DNA damage response to amplify the interferon response. Altogether, our results  
3 reinforce the link between this metabolic pathway and the innate immune response and its  
4 therapeutic potential in various acute and chronic diseases.

5

## 6 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### 7 **Chemical syntheses**

8 All solvents and chemicals were purchased from the Armenian Institute of Applied  
9 Chemistry (ARIAC). Dimethylformamide (DMF), dimethylacetal (DMA) and xylene were  
10 dried using standard. <sup>1</sup>H NMR and <sup>13</sup>C NMR spectra were recorded in deuterated dimethyl  
11 sulfoxide (DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) at ambient temperature using a 500 MHz nuclear magnetic resonance  
12 (NMR) spectrometer equipped with a 5 mm cryogenically cooled probe <sup>1</sup>H/<sup>13</sup>C/<sup>2</sup>D optimized  
13 for carbon-13 detection with z-gradients. The chemical shifts were reported in ppm downfield  
14 from tetramethylsilane (TMS). For compounds P2702, P2703, P2705 and P2706, <sup>1</sup>H NMR and  
15 <sup>13</sup>C NMR spectra were recorded with a Varian Mercury 300 spectrometer operating at 300 MHz  
16 and 75MHz with TMS as internal standard in DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>/CCl<sub>4</sub> solution at 303 K. Electrospray  
17 ionization (ESI) and high resolution mass spectrometry (HRMS) analyses were conducted  
18 using a Thermo Scientific High Resolution Exactive Orbitrap Mass spectrometer. The  
19 measurements were performed on the NMR platform and Mass spectrometry platform of  
20 UMR8601 CNRS laboratory. Elemental analyses were carried out by the CNRS microanalysis  
21 service at Gif-sur-Yvette. Melting points were determined on a Kofler hot-stage microscope  
22 and are uncorrected.

#### 23 ***1. Procedure for the Synthesis of Cerpegin N-Substituted Derivatives.***

24 The general procedure used for the synthesis of substituted cerpegin analogs was  
25 described in our previous reports [43,45]. Initial (E)-ethyl 4-(2-(dimethylamino)vinyl)-5,5-  
26 disubstituted-2-oxo-2,5-dihydrofuran-3-carboxylates (**II**) were synthesized according to

1 previously described methods [43-46]. Briefly, condensation of 2-oxo-2,5-dihydrofurans (**I**; 10  
2 mmol) and DMF/DMA (1.44 ml; 12 mmol) was achieved in 3 h in boiling anhydrous xylene  
3 (10 ml) to give the corresponding compounds (**II**) in yields of up to 80-90% (**Scheme 1**). In a  
4 flask fitted with a reflux, compound (**II**) (10 mmol) and the corresponding amine (40 mmol)  
5 were mixed in anhydrous xylene (7 mL). In the case of amines with low boiling points (bp  
6 <100°C) the reaction was undertaken without xylene using an excess of amine. The mixture  
7 was boiled for 15 h (extra 2 h after cessation of dimethylamine evolution), cooled to room  
8 temperature, and 5 mL of light petroleum was added. The resulting precipitates were filtered,  
9 washed with ether and dried. Yields and physical data of the resulting compounds are provided  
10 in Supplementary Materials and Methods.

## 11 **2. Synthesis of *N*-cyclopropyl-4-methyl-2-oxo-1-oxaspiro[4.5]dec-3-ene-3-carboxamide** 12 **(P2708).**

13 A mixture of ethyl 4-methyl-2-oxo-1-oxaspiro[4.5]dec-3-ene-3-carboxylate (2.38 g; 10  
14 mmol) and cyclopropylamine (0.9 mL; 13 mmol) in ethanol (1 mL) was left at room  
15 temperature 20 h. The resulting precipitate was filtered, washed with cold ether and  
16 recrystallized from ethanol. Yields and physical data of the resulting compound are provided  
17 in Supplementary Materials and Methods.

18

## 19 ***In silico* screening**

20 The *in silico* docking was performed with Discovery Studio (Discovery Studio  
21 Modeling Environment, release 4.5; Dassault Systemes BIOVIA: San Diego, 2015) as an  
22 interface to LibDock, a docking algorithm developed by Diller and Merz [47]. LibDock uses  
23 protein site features called HotSpots which are tagged as polar or apolar. Prior to the docking  
24 procedure, the receptor HotSpot file was calculated. In parallel, ligands were prepared (*i.e.*  
25 tautomer generation, protonation depending of pKa, or stereoisomer generation), then random

1 ligand conformations were generated for each ligand structure by high-temperature molecular  
2 dynamics using the BEST algorithm. The different conformations of ligands were placed into  
3 the active site and HotSpots were matched as triplets. After a manual optimization and curation  
4 step, the ligand poses were scored. Because ligand hydrogens were removed during the docking  
5 process, they were added back to the ligand poses and optimized by minimization. The ligand  
6 poses with the highest LibDock scores were retained and clustered according to their binding  
7 mode.

8

### 9 *Cells and culture conditions*

10 Cells were cultured at 37°C and 5% CO<sub>2</sub> in Dulbecco's Modified Eagle's Medium  
11 (DMEM; Sigma-Aldrich; D6429) containing 10% fetal calf serum (FCS; Sigma-Aldrich;  
12 F0804), penicillin and streptomycin. Experiments were performed on HEK-293 cells stably  
13 transfected with the ISRE-Luciferase reporter gene (ISRE-Luc), with or without NanoLuc as  
14 an additional reporter gene [32,48]. ISRE-Luc and ISG expression levels were unaffected by  
15 the presence of this additional reporter gene, and data from cells with or without NanoLuc were  
16 treated indifferently. Human peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) from one healthy  
17 donor were isolated by density centrifugation with Lymphoprep medium (StemCell  
18 Technologies) from leucocytes concentrates obtained when plateletpheresis was performed  
19 (Etablissement Français du Sang; Paris; France). To activate PBMCs, cells were treated for 24  
20 h with the TLR7/8 ligand R848 at 5 µg/ml (Sigma Aldrich) and supernatants were harvested.  
21 Cytokine expression levels were assessed using the LEGENDplex Human Anti-Virus Response  
22 Panel (BioLegend). Results are presented in Supplementary Table I.

23

### 24 *Reagents, cytokines and small compounds*



1 Firefly luciferase expression in culture wells was measured using the Bright-Glo  
2 (Promega) or Britelite plus reagents (PerkinElmer), according to the manufacturer's  
3 recommendations. Cellular viability was determined by quantification of adenosine  
4 triphosphate (ATP) in culture wells using the CellTiter-Glo assay (Promega). Bioluminescence  
5 was measured for 0.1 s with a luminometer (EnSpire; PerkinElmer). Recombinant IFN- $\alpha$  was  
6 from Sigma-Aldrich or PBL Assay Science. Recombinant IFN- $\gamma$  was from Roussel Uclaf (a  
7 kind gift of Dr. Mounira Chelbi-Alix) or Miltenyi Biotech. Uridine, orotate, dihydroorotate,  
8 PF477736 (Checkpoint Kinase 1 inhibitor), mirin (MRE11 inhibitor), C646 (P300/CREB-  
9 Binding Protein inhibitor), teriflunomide, brequinar, and mitoxantrone were all from Sigma  
10 Aldrich. Vidofludimus was from Selleckchem. AZD6738 (Ataxia telangiectasia and Rad3-  
11 related kinase inhibitor) was from Euromedex.

12

### 13 ***Metabolite analysis***

14 Nucleoside/nucleotide quantification in HEK-293 cells was performed by high-  
15 performance liquid chromatography (HPLC)-coupled spectrophotometry as previously  
16 described in [38]. Experimental details are provided in the "Supplementary Materials and  
17 Methods".

18

### 19 ***Gene expression analysis by RT-qPCR.***

20 ISG expression levels were determined by Reverse Transcription and quantitative  
21 Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-qPCR) as follows. Total RNAs were extracted from  $2 \times 10^5$   
22 cells using the RNeasy Micro kit including DNase (Qiagen). Reverse transcription of cellular  
23 RNA into cDNA was achieved using the RevertAid H Minus first-strand cDNA synthesis kit  
24 (Thermo Scientific). Real-time PCRs were performed in duplicate using the Takyon ROX  
25 SYBR MasterMix dTTP blue kit (Eurogentec) and a 7900HT Fast RT-PCR system (Applied

1 Biosystems). Transcripts were quantified using the following program: 3 min at 95°C, followed  
2 by 35 cycles of 15 s at 95°C, 25 s at 60°C, and 25 s at 72°C. For each transcript, CT values  
3 were normalized both to the expression levels of RPL13A (60S ribosomal protein L13a) and  
4 unstimulated control samples using the  $2^{-\Delta\Delta CT}$  method. The primers used for the quantification  
5 of transcripts are presented in Supplementary Table II.

6

### 7 ***$\gamma$ H2AX immunostaining***

8 Cells were harvested after 24 h of culture, washed with PBS, trypsinized and fixed for  
9 30 min in paraformaldehyde (PFA 4%). Cells were washed and permeabilized with Perm Buffer  
10 III (BD Biosciences) for 5 min. After one washing step, cells were stained with a mouse  
11 monoclonal anti- $\gamma$ H2AX antibody (1/400 dilution, 3F2 Clone, ThermoFisher) or a matching  
12 isotopic control in phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) + 2% bovine serum albumin (BSA). After  
13 45 min at 4°C, cells were washed again and incubated with a secondary Alexa Fluor 488-  
14 conjugated goat anti-mouse antibody (1/500, A21121, ThermoFisher). Cells were washed after  
15 45 min at 4°C of incubation, and analyzed by flow cytometry using a FACSCanto II (BD  
16 Biosciences).

17

## 18 **RESULTS**

### 19 ***In silico identification of DHODH inhibitors.***

20 Ubiquinone is a rather large cofactor made of a 1,4-benzoquinone and a tail of 10  
21 isoprenyl chemical subunits (Fig. 1A). The structure of human DHODH bound to ubiquinone,  
22 or its reduced form ubiquinol, has not been resolved yet. However, more than 50 co-structures  
23 of human DHODH featuring chemical inhibitors are available in the PDB. The vast majority of  
24 these inhibitors were found to bind a hydrophobic funnel localized at the contact interface of  
25 DHODH with the mitochondrial membrane. This lipophilic pocket was considered as the

1 binding site for ubiquinone allowing a direct contact with FMN at its extremity as recently  
2 modeled by Costeira-Paulo J. et al [42]. As shown in Fig. 1A, our molecular docking protocol  
3 confirmed that ubiquinone perfectly fits within this binding pocket. We also validated that  
4 Arg136, which is essential for DHODH activity and mutated in patients with Miller syndrome,  
5 interacts with one of the keto groups of ubiquinone as reported in [42]. To perform the  
6 molecular docking-based screening, we selected in PDB three available high-resolution  
7 structures of DHODH binding chemically-unrelated inhibitors: 4OQV, 3KVJ and 4RR4  
8 [49,50]. These structures were not selected on the basis of the activity of the compounds, but  
9 because the compounds display different binding modes to human DHODH. Indeed, all three  
10 compounds are interacting with Arg136 and FMN in the hydrophobic funnel but the rest of the  
11 interactions with DHODH are highly diverse (Fig. 1B). This provided three slightly different  
12 DHODH structures to undertake an *in silico* screening. To benchmark our screening protocol,  
13 we showed that algorithm-based docking of each inhibitor perfectly matched the corresponding  
14 X-ray derived DHODH structure as assessed by a low Root-Mean-Square Deviation (RMSD)  
15 comparison (Fig. 1B).

16 The virtual high-throughput screening (vHTS) was performed on a set of 1,587  
17 compounds from Yerevan State University, a chemical library that encompasses a large  
18 diversity of original structures. To ensure a time/precision ratio compatible with vHTS, we used  
19 a protocol in which amino acid side chains of the protein are left flexible only around the  
20 binding site, and we tested 10 random conformers for each ligand. The resulting ligand poses  
21 were further filtered to select compounds expected to bind Arg136 and FMN, and then ranked  
22 according to their docking scores as described in the Material and Methods section. The entire  
23 library was screened against the three selected DHODH structures. Finally, a total of 26, 49,  
24 and 55 compounds respectively fulfilled our criteria when using the 4OQV, 3KVJ and 4RR4  
25 structures (Fig. 1C). To further increase the stringency of our screening, we selected the 11

1 compounds identified with at least two of the three abovementioned structures. Interestingly,  
2 this subset included two molecules, P2703 and P1788 (Fig. 1D), which featured a 1,1,5-  
3 trimethylfuro[3,4-*c*]pyridine-3,4(1*H*,5*H*)-dione component similar to one seen in the alkaloid  
4 cerpegin. To our knowledge, such double-ringed structure with two adjacent keto groups  
5 contacting Arg136 was new for DHODH inhibitors and thus deserved further investigations.

6

### 7 ***Functional validation of selected hits.***

8         Since our main interest in DHODH inhibitors is their capacity to boost the cellular innate  
9 immune response, we used a reporter cell line expressing luciferase under the control of five  
10 interferon-stimulated response elements (ISRE-Luc) to assess the biological activity of the  
11 selected compounds. We and other groups have previously shown that in such a reporter  
12 system, cellular response to IFN- $\alpha/\beta$  is amplified by DHODH inhibitors [32,34]. Cells were  
13 incubated with increasing concentrations of selected compounds in the presence of recombinant  
14 IFN- $\alpha$ , and luciferase activity was quantified 24 h later. Of the 11 compounds tested, 9 were  
15 inactive but the two related compounds P2703 and P1788 efficiently increased cellular response  
16 to IFN- $\alpha$  (Fig. 2A). To further confirm the inhibition properties of this chemical series, we  
17 tested the capacity of P1788 to block cellular proliferation, a phenotype that is also associated  
18 with DHODH inhibition. P1788 efficiently inhibited the proliferation of HEK-293 cells when  
19 monitored over three days (Fig. 2B).

20

### 21 ***Structure activity relationships***

22         To determine some structure activity relationship for this chemical series, and confront  
23 them with the docking model determined for P2703 and P1788 (Fig. 1D), we prepared the array  
24 of chemical analogs of cerpegin depicted in Fig. 3. Each compound was tested for its ability to  
25 boost cellular response to IFN- $\alpha$  using ISRE-Luc reporter cells as shown in Fig. 2A. A dose-

1 response ranging from 0.8 to 150  $\mu\text{M}$  was obtained for each molecule, and the corresponding  
2 pEC50s were calculated to compare their biological effect (Fig. 3). Norcerpegin (1,1-  
3 dimethylfuro[3,4-*c*]pyridine-3,4(1*H*,5*H*)-dione), the original scaffold of this chemical series,  
4 was inactive. The difference of effect seen between P1788 and compounds P2512, P1781 or  
5 P2705 demonstrated that a cyclopropyl substituent on the nitrogen was essential. Furthermore,  
6 compounds with the larger N-cyclobutyl (P2707), N-cyclopentyl (P1792), or N-cyclohexyl  
7 (P1793) groups were also inactive. Similarly, P2706 exhibiting an extended cyclopropylmethyl  
8 group showed no activity at tested concentrations. Altogether, these results support our docking  
9 model in which this cyclopropyl group fully occupies the DHODH hydrophobic pocket made  
10 of FMN, Val134 and Val143 (Fig. 1D). We also found that a double hydrophobic substitution  
11 on position 1 of the furopyridine scaffold was essential as seen for compounds featuring a  
12 spirocyclopentane (P2717), a spirocyclohexane (P1788) or a phenyl and a methyl group  
13 (P2703). This is consistent with our docking model where such substituents interact with Ala59  
14 or Ala55 at the entry side of the hydrophobic pocket (Fig. 1D). Finally, opening the pyridine  
15 group as in P2708 also impaired the biological activity of the molecule. This last result is in  
16 line with a structuring role for the furopyridine scaffold. Altogether, these results validate our  
17 docking model for P2703 and P1788 in the ubiquinone binding pocket of DHODH.

18 To compare the activity of P2703 and P1788 with well-characterized inhibitors of  
19 DHODH, teriflunomide, vidofludimus and brequinar were evaluated in the same cellular assay  
20 (Fig. 3). Teriflunomide and vidofludimus were significantly more active than P2703 and P1788  
21 ( $\text{EC}_{50} = 8.9$  and  $2.8 \mu\text{M}$  vs  $27$  and  $44 \mu\text{M}$ , respectively), but all four molecules showed EC50s  
22 within the micromolar range. Only brequinar was much more active with an EC50 equal to 56  
23 nM. Because P2703 and P1788 were within a range of activity close to fully optimized  
24 molecules like teriflunomide or vidofludimus, we decided to further investigate the properties  
25 of these molecules. Although P2703 was slightly more active, P1788 was selected as the

1 prototype of this chemical series because a larger batch had been produced and was readily  
2 available.

3

#### 4 ***P1788 targets the pyrimidine biosynthesis pathway***

5 To demonstrate that P1788 is indeed targeting the pyrimidine metabolism, we treated  
6 cells with this molecule and quantified nucleoside levels by liquid chromatography coupled  
7 with spectrophotometry. As shown in Fig. 4A, pyrimidine levels collapsed in P1788-treated  
8 cells (U and C), whereas purine levels were unaffected (G and A). This shows that P1788  
9 interferes with pyrimidine homeostasis as expected. We then determined if the amplification of  
10 IFN- $\alpha/\beta$  signaling by P1788 is a consequence of pyrimidine depletion in treated cells. To  
11 address this question, cells with the ISRE-Luc reporter gene were treated with recombinant  
12 IFN- $\alpha$  and P1788 in the absence or presence of uridine. The addition of uridine completely  
13 reverted the effect of P1788, thus demonstrating that pyrimidine depletion is indeed responsible  
14 for the amplified response to IFN- $\alpha$  as shown in Fig. 4B. In order to determine more precisely  
15 which step of pyrimidine biosynthesis is inhibited by P1788, the same experiment was  
16 performed using a culture medium supplemented with either DHO or orotate (Fig. 4C). While  
17 DHO showed no effect on cellular response to IFN- $\alpha$ , orotate completely reverted the effect of  
18 P1788. As DHO and orotate are respectively the substrate and product of DHODH, these results  
19 confirmed that P1788 is inhibiting this critical step of the pyrimidine biosynthesis pathway.

20

#### 21 ***P1788 amplifies cellular response to both type I and type II IFNs***

22 As stated above, it has previously been shown that DHODH inhibition amplifies cellular  
23 response to IFN- $\alpha/\beta$  [32,34]. However, this was only documented using an ISRE-Luc reported  
24 gene and never validated by the actual monitoring of cellular ISGs. We took advantage of  
25 P1788 as a novel inhibitor to address this question. Cells were treated with increasing

1 concentrations of IFN- $\alpha$  in the absence or presence of P1788, and expression levels of 12 ISGs  
2 were determined by RT-qPCR. ISGs were induced by IFN- $\alpha$  alone, but P1788 further enhanced  
3 their expression (Fig. 5A). For example, a 4 to 5-fold increase in Mx2 expression level was  
4 observed when cells stimulated with IFN- $\alpha$  were co-treated with P1788 (Fig. 5B). Altogether,  
5 this confirmed that P1788 can boost the cellular response to IFN- $\alpha$

6 To our knowledge, it is still unknown if pyrimidine biosynthesis inhibitors are also able  
7 to amplify the cellular response to IFN- $\gamma$ . This is particularly interesting because this cytokine,  
8 which is massively produced by Natural Killer (NK) cells and CD8+ T lymphocytes, plays a  
9 key role in antitumoral immune responses and adaptive immunity in general. We thus  
10 investigated the effects of P1788 on this pathway. Cells with the ISRE-Luc reporter gene were  
11 stimulated with recombinant IFN- $\gamma$  in the absence or presence of P1788. As shown in Fig. 6A,  
12 the reporter gene was induced by IFN- $\gamma$ , and P1788 further increased its expression. To further  
13 validate this observation, we collected supernatants of human PBMCs stimulated with R848, a  
14 synthetic ligand for TLR7. Such conditioned supernatants contain IFN- $\gamma$  as shown in  
15 Supplementary Table I and were used to stimulate cells with the ISRE-Luc reporter gene. P1788  
16 strongly increased the cellular response to conditioned supernatants from PBMCs (Fig. 6B).  
17 Our results demonstrate that P1788 is able to amplify cellular response to both type I and type  
18 II interferons.

19

### 20 ***Key factors of the DNA damage response link P1788 to the IFN signaling pathway***

21 Pyrimidine depletion by DHODH inhibitors has been shown to block DNA replication,  
22 leading to S phase accumulation and the activation of DNA damage response [9] (Fig. 7A). It  
23 is also well known that DNA damage are able to prime or induce the IFN response to prevent  
24 infections or tumor formation, depending on the cellular system [29,51]. The DNA damage  
25 response could therefore functionally link the inhibition of DHODH to the innate immunity as

1 recently documented by Luthra P. et al [40]. To address this question in our cellular system, we  
2 first determined if P1788 treatment induced the DNA damage response by measuring  $\gamma$ H2AX,  
3 the phosphorylated form of H2AX (H2A histone family member X) on serine 139. As shown  
4 in Fig. 7B, P1788 induced a significant increase in  $\gamma$ H2AX staining as determined by flow  
5 cytometry. Similar  $\gamma$ H2AX levels were achieved with the reference DHODH inhibitor  
6 teriflunomide but the signal was much higher with mitoxantrone, a potent topoisomerase II  
7 inhibitor that induces massive DNA damage. Furthermore, P1788 effect was neutralized by the  
8 addition of uridine, thus implicating pyrimidine depletion in this effect. The inhibition of *de*  
9 *novo* pyrimidine biosynthesis by P1788 is therefore associated to the induction of a mild DNA  
10 damage response which probably reflects the accumulation of stalled DNA forks in S phase.

11 The exonuclease activity of the double-strand break repair protein MRE11, which is  
12 part of the MRE11/RAD50/NBS1 (MRN) complex, plays an important role in the stabilization,  
13 resection, and restart of stalled DNA forks (Fig. 7A). MRE11 also exhibits some endonuclease  
14 activity involved in the cleavage and release of single-stranded DNA from the resection site  
15 which contributes to IFN activation [52]. We tested the effect of mirin, an inhibitor of the  
16 MRE11 nuclease activity, on the cellular response to IFN- $\alpha$  in the absence or presence of  
17 P1788. As shown in Fig. 7C, mirin completely abolished the booster effect of P1788 on ISRE-  
18 Luc induction by IFN- $\alpha$ . Cellular viability was not affected by this treatment as shown in Supp.  
19 Fig. 1A. The Ataxia telangiectasia and Rad3-related kinase (ATR) are co-activated with the  
20 MRN complex by single-stranded DNA breaks and then phosphorylate CHK1 (Checkpoint  
21 Kinase 1) to block cell cycle progression upon DNA damage [53]. We tested potent inhibitors  
22 of either ATR (AZD6738) or CHK1 (PF477736) in our system. ATR or CHK1 inhibitors  
23 abolished the effects of P1788 on the IFN- $\alpha$  response, further supporting a role of the DNA  
24 damage response as shown in Fig. 7D and E. Interestingly, ATR or CHK1 inhibition also  
25 showed significant effects on the cellular response to IFN- $\alpha$  in the absence of P1788. This



1 suggests that a steady-state activation of ATR and CHK1 in these cells somehow contributes to  
2 the IFN response. As stated, these treatments showed limited (AZD6738) or no effect  
3 (PF477736) on cellular viability (Supp. Fig. 1B). Finally, we evaluated the contribution of P300  
4 and CBP (CREB-Binding protein), two related histone acetyltransferases that are activated  
5 downstream of the DNA damage response but also regulate the expression of ISGs. We thus  
6 treated cells with C636, a small compound inhibiting both P300 and CBP, and induced the  
7 ISRE-Luc reporter gene with IFN- $\alpha$  with or without P1788. As shown in Fig. 7F, the inhibition  
8 of P300/CBP slightly decreased cellular response to IFN- $\alpha$ , but most importantly abolished the  
9 effect of P1788. These results confirm the functional link between the DNA damage response  
10 and the IFN-potentiating effect of P1788.

11

## 12 **DISCUSSION**

13 *De novo* pyrimidine biosynthesis is essential to fulfill the metabolic needs of quickly  
14 proliferating cells. As such, there is an increased interest in the field of cancer for molecules  
15 blocking critical steps of this enzymatic pathway. Here, we detailed the identification of P1788  
16 and related molecules as a new series of pyrimidine biosynthesis inhibitors. These compounds  
17 were selected by virtual screening using three structures of DHODH co-crystallized with  
18 chemically distinct inhibitors bound to the ubiquinone/ubiquinol pocket. This approach was  
19 previously used by other teams and our results confirm its efficacy [54,57]. We then established  
20 the inhibition of pyrimidine biosynthesis pathway in P1788-treated cells by measuring  
21 nucleoside levels and using cellular response to IFN- $\alpha$  as a functional readout. The fact that  
22 orotate but not DHO nullified the effects of P1788 in this test supports the inhibition of DHODH  
23 by this molecule. It is of interest that P1788 and related molecules of this chemical series feature  
24 the unique chemical scaffold found in the alkaloid cerpegin (Fig. 3)[43,44]. Cerpegin is found  
25 in the Indian plant *Ceropegia juncea*, which has been used for centuries in folk medicine as a

1 tranquilizer, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, and anti-ulcer therapy. Modern studies showed that  
2 compounds with the cerpegin scaffold inhibit the 20S subunit of the proteasome [43,45]. The  
3 results described here show that compounds also based on the cerpegin scaffold but with  
4 different additional chemical groups inhibit pyrimidine biosynthesis. The two-edged fused  
5 polycyclic moieties of this chemical series are actually reminiscent of known DHODH  
6 inhibitors, including brequinar, dicoumarol, and DD778 that we recently described [38].  
7 Brequinar interacts with Arg136 of DHODH through its carboxylic acid group whereas in  
8 dicoumarol, the lactone oxygen atom was suggested to play this role [58]. According to our *in*  
9 *silico* model, the interaction of P1788 with Arg136 is mediated by the diketone motif. To our  
10 knowledge, this mode of interaction was not previously reported for DHODH inhibitors and  
11 clearly distinguishes the P1788 series from known DHODH inhibitors.

12         We took advantage of our lead molecule P1788 to characterize in details the impact of  
13 pyrimidine biosynthesis inhibition on cellular response to IFNs. It is well known that DHODH  
14 inhibition can (i) induce ISGs independently of IFN production or JAK/STAT signaling and  
15 (ii) amplify the expression of both ISGs and IFN genes in response to double-stranded RNA  
16 molecules, a viral PAMP that binds and activates RIG-like receptors (RLRs). Literature also  
17 suggested that cellular response to type I IFNs is amplified when DHODH is inhibited as  
18 assessed with an ISRE-Luc reporter gene [32,34]. Here, we have analyzed a dozen of ISGs by  
19 RT-qPCR, and found that their induction by recombinant IFN- $\alpha$  is, as expected, enhanced in  
20 the presence of P1788. This illustrates that the cellular stress associated to pyrimidine  
21 deprivation is acting at multiple steps of the innate immune response. Most interestingly, we  
22 also found that P1788 amplifies cellular response to IFN- $\gamma$ . This was shown using purified  
23 recombinant IFN- $\gamma$  or conditioned supernatants from activated PBMCs. IFN- $\gamma$  activates a  
24 signaling cascade that significantly differs from IFN- $\alpha/\beta$  as it binds a specific receptor  
25 (IFNGR1/2) and mobilizes Jak1/Jak2 kinases — as opposed to Jak1/Tyk2 for IFN- $\alpha/\beta$  — to

1 phosphorylate STAT1. STAT2 is not involved in the signaling cascade induced by IFN- $\gamma$ . Our  
2 results and the literature suggest that a common mechanism triggered by pyrimidine deprivation  
3 amplifies cellular response to both IFN- $\alpha/\beta$ , IFN- $\gamma$ , and RLR ligands. IFNs rely on STAT1/2  
4 for gene transcription, whereas RLRs activate Interferon Regulatory Factors 3 (IRF3). It is  
5 therefore tempting to speculate that a common costimulatory factor associates to these  
6 transcription factors when pyrimidine biosynthesis is impaired. Discovering this mechanism  
7 remains a major challenge in our understanding of the mechanisms linking pyrimidine  
8 metabolism to innate immunity.

9         Here, we showed that P1788 treatment was associated to the induction of a DNA  
10 damage response as assessed by  $\gamma$ H2AX staining. Furthermore, the enhanced response to IFN-  
11  $\alpha$  was dependent on MRE11, ATR, CHK1, and P300/CBP. MRE11, ATR, and CHK1 are all  
12 activated by single-stranded genomic DNA, in particular at stalled DNA replication forks which  
13 likely accumulate when intracellular pyrimidine concentration drops below a certain threshold  
14 [52]. This further supports the idea that the DNA damage response represents the functional  
15 link between the inhibition of pyrimidine biosynthesis and the innate immune response. Most  
16 interestingly, we and others have previously shown that Interferon Regulatory Factor 1 (IRF1)  
17 is essential to ISG induction in cells treated with pyrimidine biosynthesis inhibitors alone,  
18 double-stranded RNA, or both [32,40]. IRF1 is a transcription factor that is upregulated by the  
19 DNA damage response and promotes the expression of ISGs, either alone or in association with  
20 STATs and IRFs [59,60]. In addition, it was shown that IRF1-mediated transcription relies on  
21 P300/CBP, two related histone acetyltransferases that we implicated in the signaling cascade  
22 downstream of P1788 [61]. In a recent report by Luthra et al, it has been shown that DNA  
23 damage associated with the inhibition of pyrimidine biosynthesis activate ATM (Ataxia  
24 Telangiectasia Mutated), a kinase activated by double-stranded DNA breaks, which was  
25 essential to the induction of ISGs by pyrimidine biosynthesis inhibitors [40]. In line with this

1 work, we conclude from our observations that the DNA damage response links pyrimidine  
2 deprivation to the innate immune response and to IRF1, and show that P300/CBP is also  
3 involved in this phenomenon.

4 In conclusion, we have identified and characterized a new series of compounds  
5 inhibiting pyrimidine biosynthesis. Future work will aim at improving these compounds to  
6 obtain more potent inhibitors with optimized pharmacological properties. These molecules  
7 enhance cellular response to IFN- $\alpha/\beta$ , and DNA damage response plays a key role in this  
8 mechanism. Most importantly, we showed that cellular response to IFN- $\gamma$  is also enhanced in  
9 the presence of P1788. This latter finding is opening exciting perspectives in cancer therapy as  
10 IFN- $\gamma$  contributes to the antitumoral activity of both NK cells and CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes [62].  
11 This suggests that the benefit of DHODH inhibitors relies not only on their cytostatic effects  
12 but also on their capacity to boost an antitumoral response. If confirmed *in vivo* this would  
13 represent a significant step toward the development of this new category of antitumoral drugs.

#### 15 **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

16 We acknowledge the technical support of Stéphanie Dupuy from the Flow Cytometry Platform  
17 at Université Paris Descartes. We thank the chemical library UMR8601 of Paris Descartes  
18 University for preparing and providing access to Yerevan's complete database for virtual and  
19 physical screening. We thank Dr. Farah Hodeib and Dr. Yves Janin for proofreading the  
20 manuscript. This work was supported by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ChemInnate  
21 program to POV and SN), Campus France (Programme CEDRE), SantImmune from the  
22 Fondation Paris Descartes, the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS;  
23 [www.cnrs.fr](http://www.cnrs.fr)), and the Institut National de la Santé Et de la Recherche Médicale (INSERM).  
24 SH was supported by the National Council for Scientific Research (Lebanon) and the Université  
25 Saint-Esprit de Kaslik (USEK).

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## DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Structures and DHODH-inhibitory activities of the original compounds described in this manuscript have been patented.

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37

## 1 **Figure Legends**

### 2 **Figure 1. *In silico* screening procedure for the identification of novel DHODH inhibitors.**

3 (A) DHODH structure was retrieved from PDB (3KVJ), showing orotate (red), FMN (green),  
4 and Arg136 (blue). The DHODH inhibitor present in the ubiquinone-binding site of the  
5 structure was removed and replaced by a ubiquinone analog without the hydrophobic tail to  
6 facilitate the *in silico* docking (yellow). Ubiquinone structure is shown in the upper left panel  
7 as a reference. (B) Schematic 2-D diagrams of small molecule inhibitors as bound to DHODH  
8 in PDB structures 4OQV, 3KVJ and 4RR4. For each inhibitor, the RMSD value estimates the  
9 position overlap between structural data and results of the *in silico* docking. (C) Venn diagram  
10 showing the results of the screenings performed on DHODH structures from 4OQV, 3KVJ, and  
11 4RR4. We selected the 11 hit compounds identified in more than one screen for further  
12 evaluation. (D-E) Schematic 2-D diagrams of P2703 and P1788 bound to DHODH as  
13 determined by *in silico* docking.

14

### 15 **Figure 2. Cellular response to IFN- $\alpha$ is amplified by P1788 and P2703.**

16 (A) HEK-293 cells with the ISRE-Luc reporter gene were treated with P1788, P2703 or DMSO alone in the  
17 absence or presence of IFN- $\alpha$  (150 IU/ml). Expression of the ISRE-Luc reporter gene was  
18 determined 24 h later, and results were normalized using cells treated with IFN- $\alpha$  alone as  
19 reference. (B) Cells were treated with DMSO or P1788 at different concentrations, and the  
20 number of viable cells was determined using the CellTiter-Glo reagent after 24, 48 and 72 h of  
21 culture. Results were expressed as a percentage relative to untreated cells at t = 0 h. Data  
22 represent means +/- SD of three (A) or two (B) independent experiments. \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01;  
23 \*\*\*p<0.001 as calculated by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Bonferroni's post  
24 hoc test.

25

### 26 **Figure 3. Structure/activity relationships.**

27 Chemical analogs of P1788 and P2703 were tested  
28 for their ability to boost cellular response to IFN- $\alpha$  in HEK-293 cells with the ISRE-Luc  
29 reporter gene. Teriflunomide, vidofludimus and brequinar were tested as reference DHODH  
30 inhibitors in the same cellular assay. pEC50s, corresponding to  $-\log_{10}$  of the half maximal  
31 effective molar concentrations, were computed from a four-parameter fitting curve using Prism  
32 software (GraphPad). Binding energies were also computed by *in silico* docking for comparison  
33 with pEC50s. FTD ("failed to determine") is indicated when binding energies could not be  
computed. The chemical structure of cerpegin is shown as a reference.

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**Figure 4. P1788 is inhibiting pyrimidine biosynthesis.** (A) Cells were treated with DMSO or increasing concentrations of P1788. 24 h later, cells were harvested and intracellular levels of purine (G/A) and pyrimidine (C/U) were determined by HPLC-coupled spectrophotometry. Results were normalized using DMSO-treated cells as a reference. (B) Cells were treated with increasing concentrations of IFN- $\alpha$  with DMSO, P1788 (80  $\mu$ M) or P1788 (80  $\mu$ M) and uridine (125  $\mu$ M). 24 h later, expression of the ISRE-Luc reporter gene was determined. Results were normalized using cells treated with DMSO + IFN- $\alpha$  at 250 IU/ml as a reference. (C) Same experiment as in (A), but culture medium was supplemented with 3 mM of orotate or DHO instead of uridine. Data represent means +/- SD of three independent experiments. \*\*\*p<0.001 as calculated by two-way ANOVA.

**Figure 5. ISG induction by IFN- $\alpha$  is enhanced in the presence of P1788.** (A) HEK cells with the ISRE-Luc reporter gene were cultured with increasing concentrations of IFN- $\alpha$  and co-treated with DMSO or P1788 (80  $\mu$ M). 16 h later, induction levels of indicated ISGs were determined by RT-qPCR, and expressed as fold changes relative to control cells (DMSO alone). Results highlighted in bold correspond to statistically significant values when comparing untreated to P1788-treated cells from three independent experiments (p<0.05 determined by two-way ANOVA with Bonferroni's post hoc test). (B) Corresponding data for Mx2 mRNA expression were displayed as a bar chart showing mean values +/- SD.

**Figure 6. Cellular response to IFN- $\gamma$  is amplified by P1788.** (A) HEK-293 cells with the ISRE-Luc reporter gene were treated with DMSO or P1788 (80  $\mu$ M) in the absence or presence of recombinant IFN- $\gamma$  (150 IU/ml). Luciferase activity in culture wells was determined 24 h later. Results were normalized using cells treated with DMSO + IFN- $\gamma$  as reference. \*\*p<0.01 as calculated by two-tailed t-test. (B) Same experiment as in (A), but cells were stimulated with different dilutions ranging from 1/8 to 1/64 of conditioned supernatants from activated PBMCs. Results were normalized using cells treated with 1/8 diluted supernatants as reference. Data represent means +/- SD of three independent experiments. \*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.001 determined by two-way ANOVA with Bonferroni's post hoc test.

**Figure 7. Immunostimulatory properties of P1788 is linked to DNA damage response.** (A) Simplified model of the DNA damage response induced by pyrimidine deprivation at

1 **stalled DNA replication forks. (B)** Cells were treated with DMSO, P1788 (80  $\mu$ M), P1788 +  
2 uridine (Uri.; 125  $\mu$ M), teriflunomide (Ter.; 50  $\mu$ M) or mitoxantrone (Mit.; 50 nM). 24 h later,  
3 cells were harvested and  $\gamma$ H2AX level was determined by immunostaining and flow cytometry  
4 analysis. Data represent means  $\pm$  SD of three independent experiments. \*\* $p < 0.01$ ;  
5 \*\*\* $p < 0.001$  as calculated by two-tailed t-test. **(C-F)** HEK-293 cells with the ISRE-Luc reporter  
6 gene were treated with DMSO, IFN- $\alpha$  (150 IU/ml) or IFN- $\alpha$  + P1788 (80  $\mu$ M), in the absence  
7 or presence of mirin (C), AZD6738 (D), PF477736 (E) or C636 (F) to inhibit MRE11, ATR,  
8 CHK1 and P300/CBP, respectively. Luciferase activity in culture wells was determined 24 h  
9 later, and results were normalized using cells treated with IFN- $\alpha$  alone as reference. Data  
10 represent means  $\pm$  SD of at least three independent experiments (B-F). \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ;  
11 \*\*\* $p < 0.001$  as calculated by standard Student's t-test (B) or one-way ANOVA with  
12 Bonferroni's post hoc test (C-F).

13

14 **Supplementary Figure 1. Cell counts in cultures treated with mirin, AZD6738, PF477736**  
15 **or C636.** The number of viable cells was determined in culture conditions from Fig. 7C, D, E  
16 and D using the CellTiter-Glo reagent. Results were expressed as a percentage relative to cells  
17 treated with IFN- $\alpha$  alone. Data represent means  $\pm$  SD of three (A/C/D) or two independent  
18 (B) experiments.



Figure 1

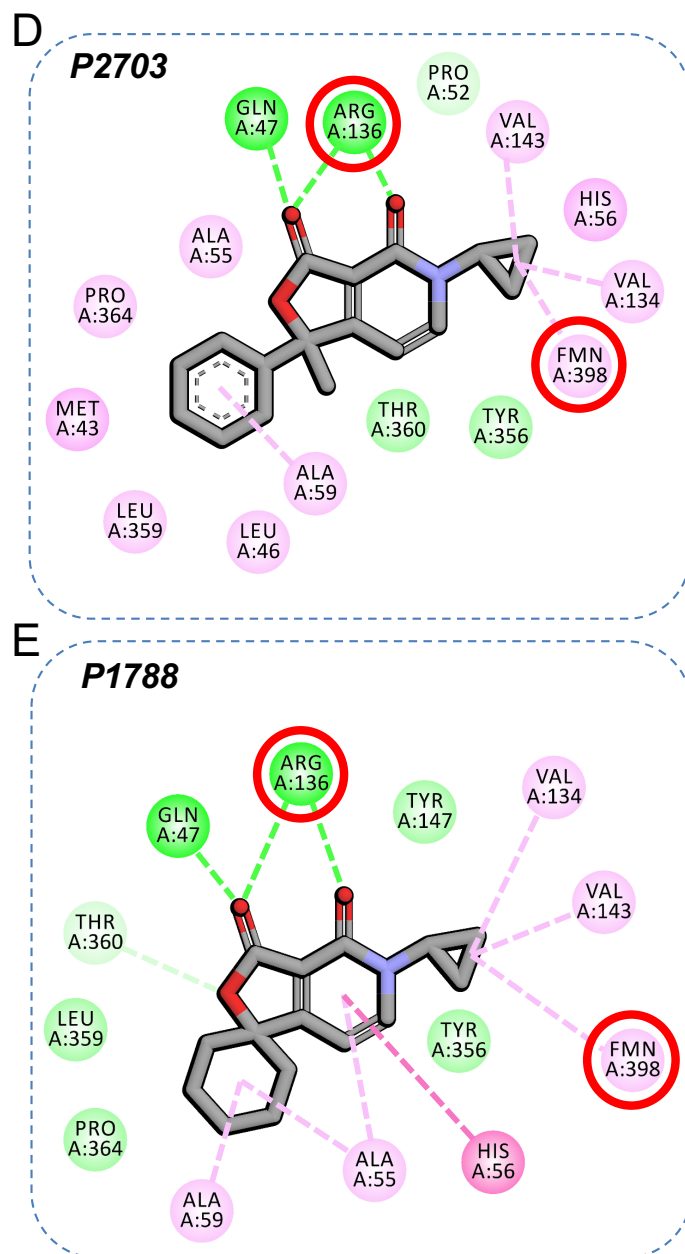
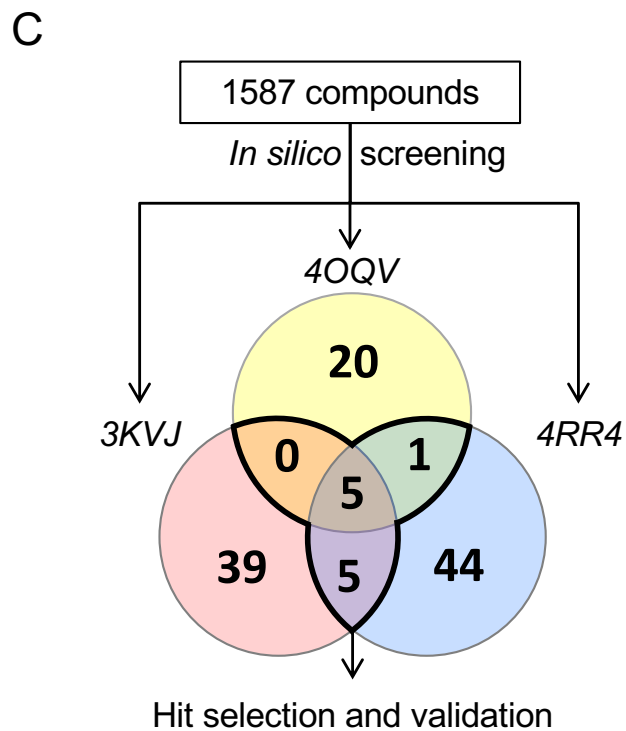
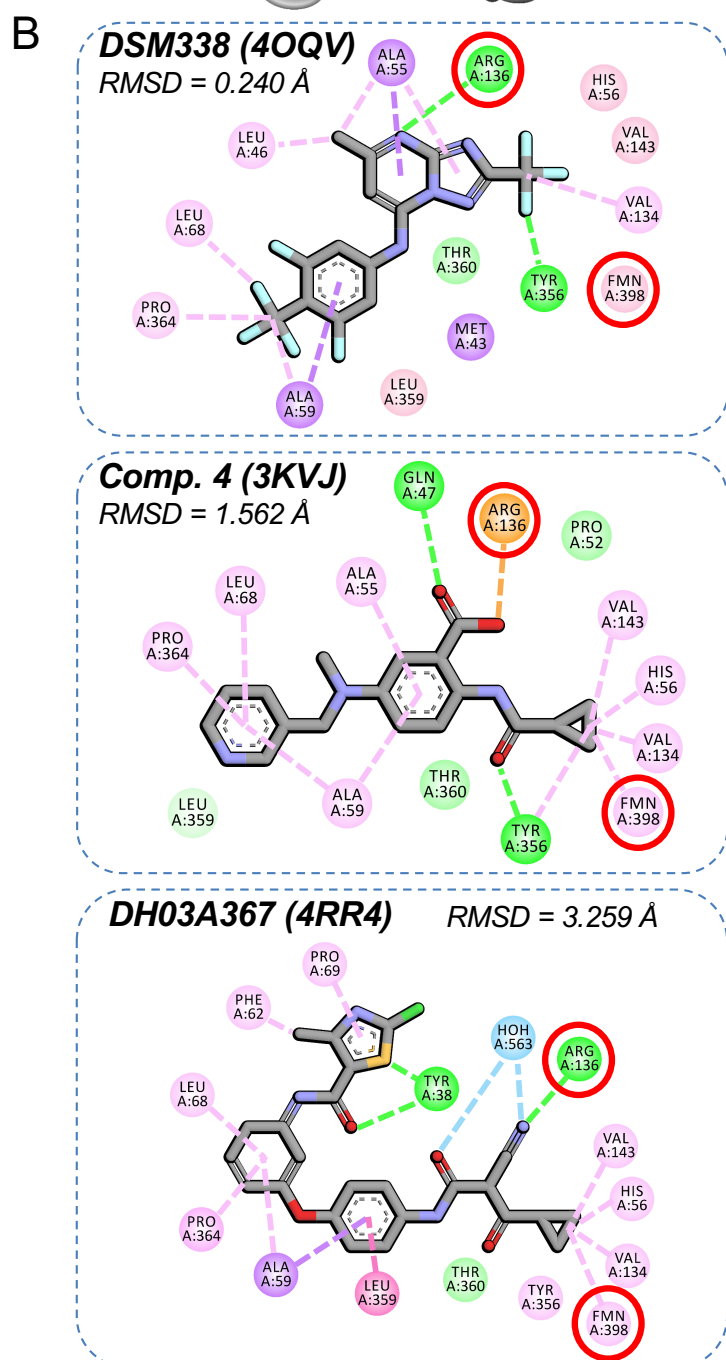
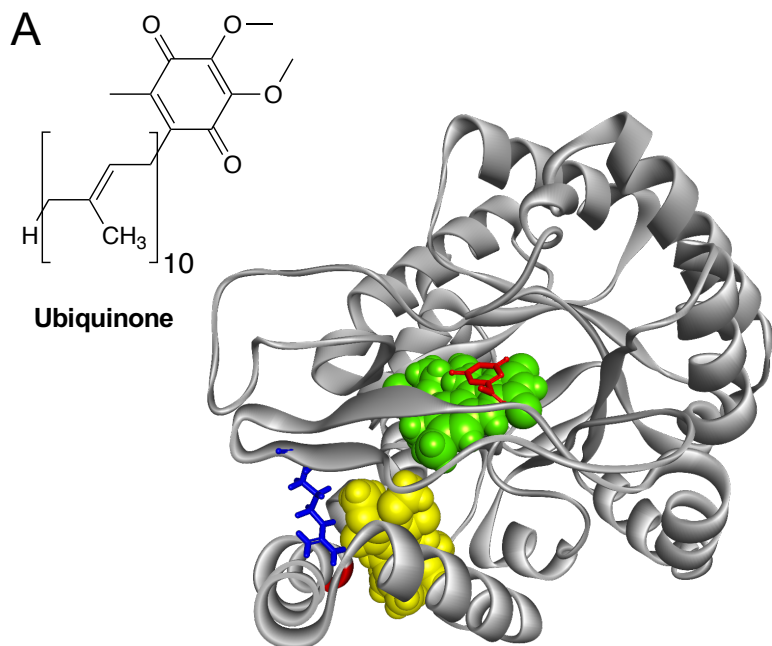
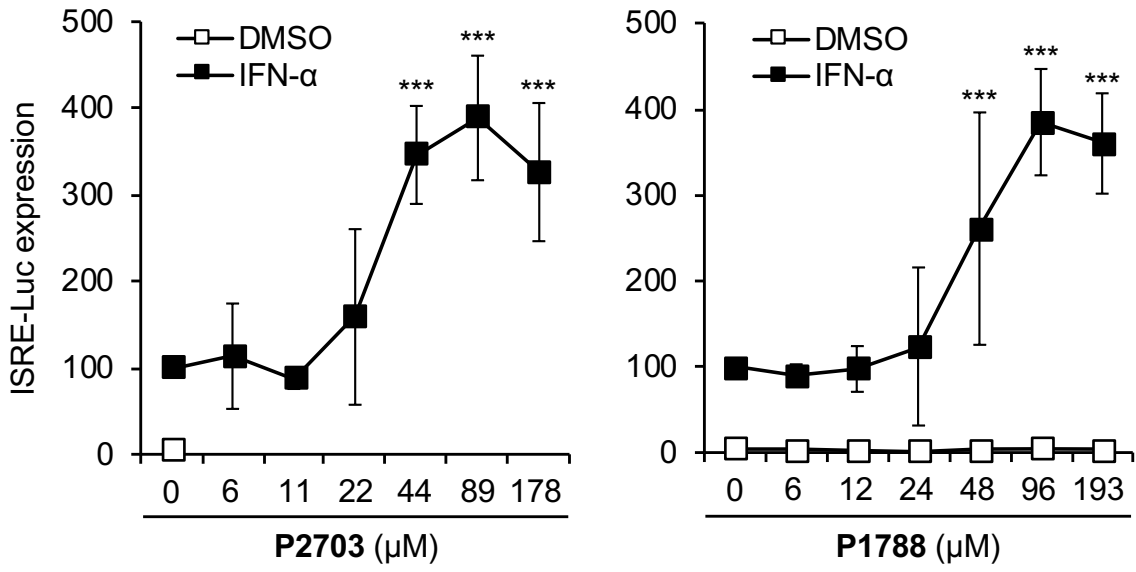


Figure 2

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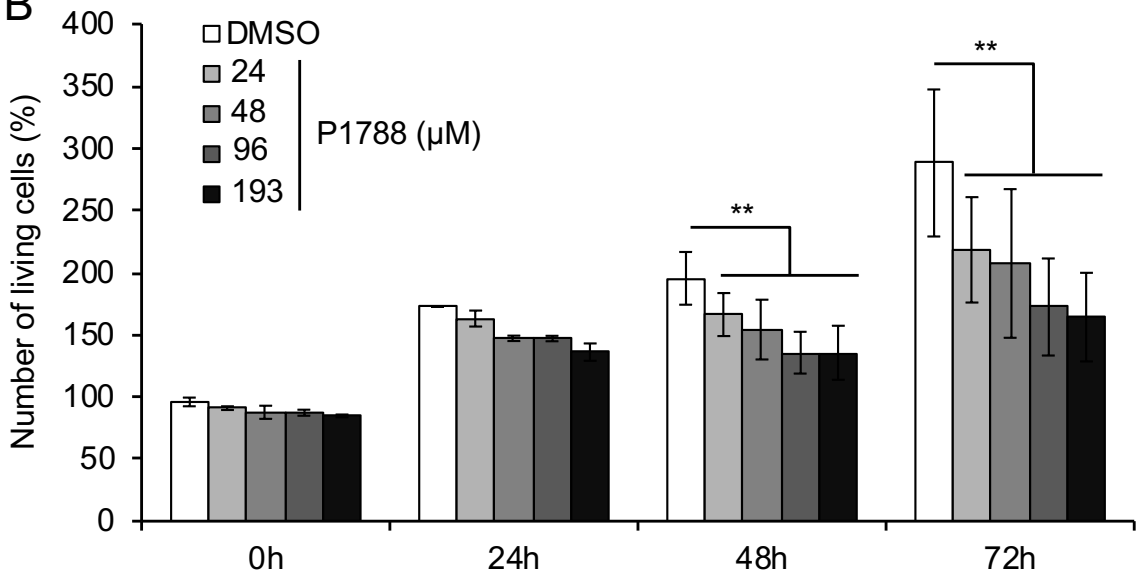
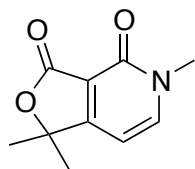
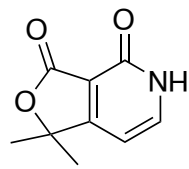




Figure 3



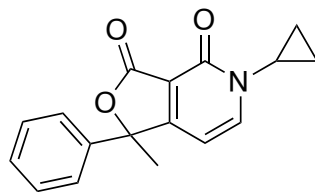
**Cerpegin**



**Norcerpegin**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

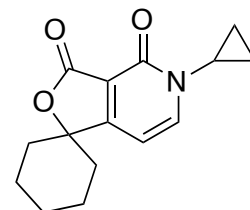
FTD



**P2703**

$pEC_{50} = 4.57$

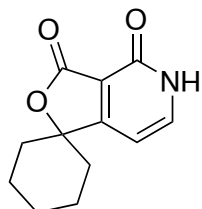
$E = -41.9$  kcal/mol



**P1788**

$pEC_{50} = 4.35$

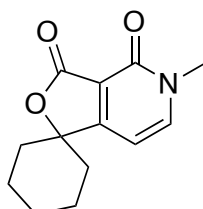
$E = -41.2$  kcal/mol



**P2512**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

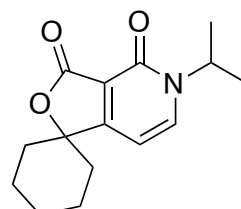
FTD



**P1781**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

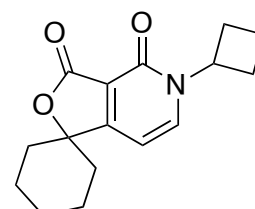
FTD



**P2705**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

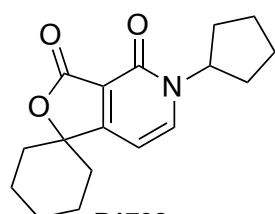
$E = -42.7$  kcal/mol



**P2707**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

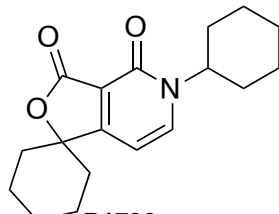
$E = -42.3$  kcal/mol



**P1792**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

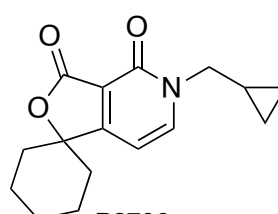
FTD



**P1793**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

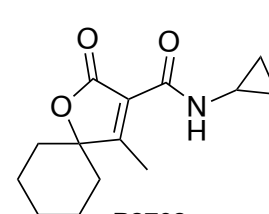
FTD



**P2706**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

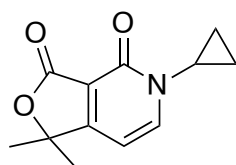
FTD



**P2708**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

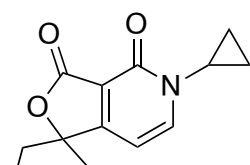
$E = -40.6$  kcal/mol



**P2701**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

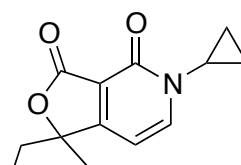
$E = -34.7$  kcal/mol



**P2702**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

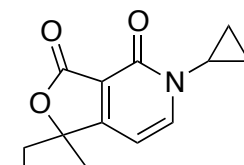
FTD



**P2718**

$pEC_{50} < 3.8$

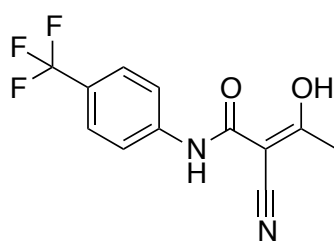
$E = -40.6$  kcal/mol



**P2717**

$pEC_{50} = 4.28$

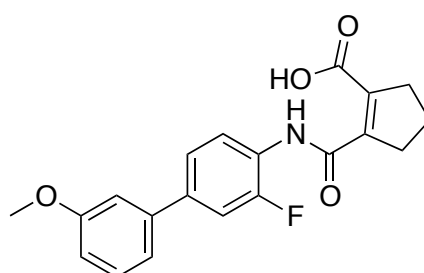
$E = -41.7$  kcal/mol



**Teriflunomide**

$pEC_{50} = 5.05$

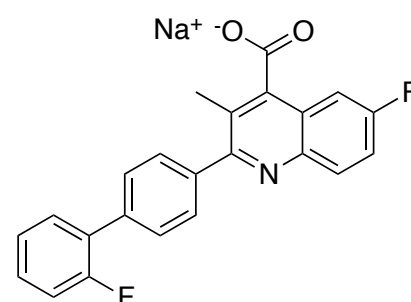
$E = -61.6$  kcal/mol



**Vidofludimus**

$pEC_{50} = 5.56$

$E = -62.3$  kcal/mol



**Brequinar sodium salt**

$pEC_{50} = 7.26$

$E = -47.3$  kcal/mol

Figure 4

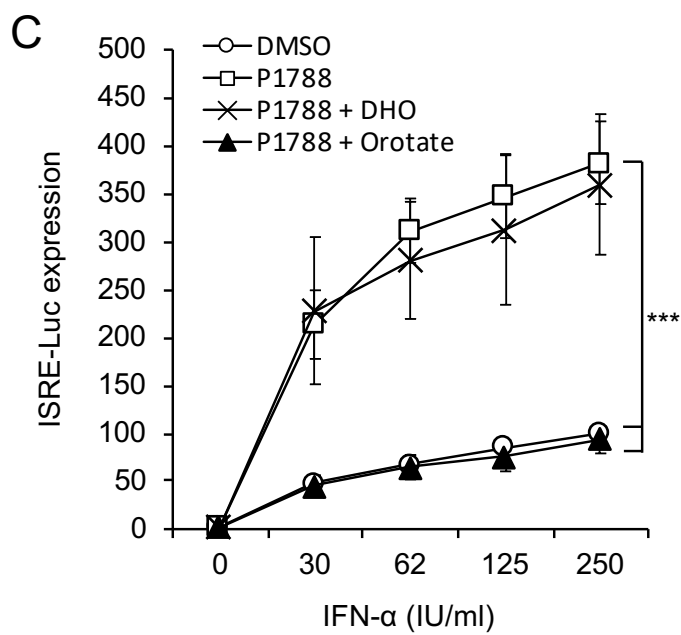
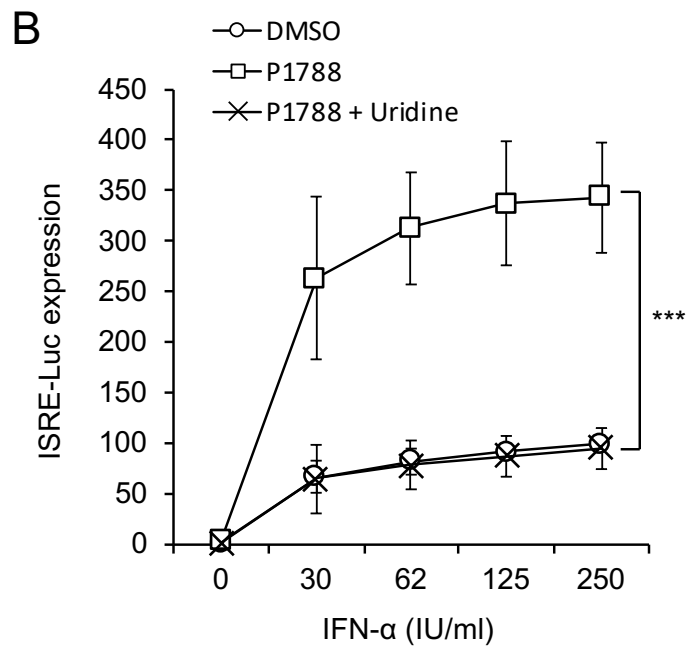
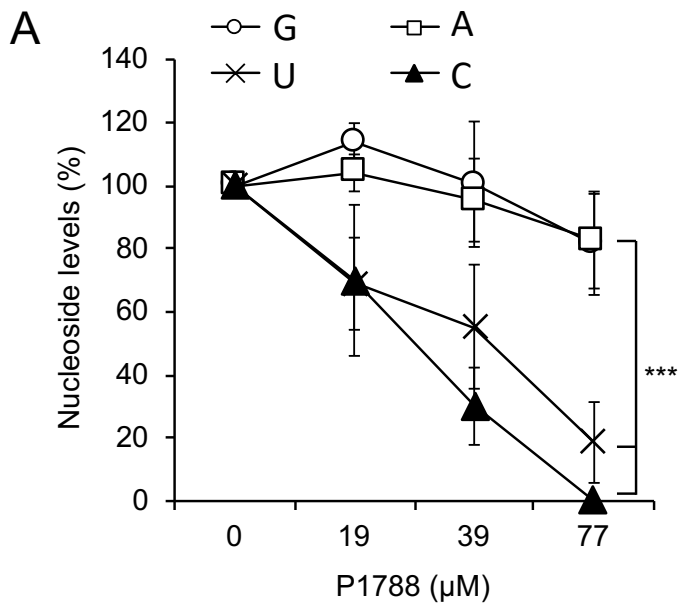


Figure 5

A

IFN- $\alpha$ (IU/ml)	DMSO					P1788				
	0	30	60	125	250	0	30	60	125	250
ISG15	1	49	66	70	76	2	123	163	200	226
IFIT3	1	21	44	56	69	2	39	69	99	129
IFIT1	1	24	37	49	65	1	51	85	115	145
IFIT2	1	6	15	28	45	2	26	61	112	165
IFI6	1	4	18	25	33	2	47	64	80	91
IFI27	1	2	14	23	33	3	44	83	117	143
IFITM3	1	2	11	13	16	1	6	12	14	15
DDX58	1	2	8	11	14	2	16	23	31	38
Mx2	1	1	2	4	7	2	7	13	20	28
IFIT5	1	2	3	3	3	1	3	3	4	5
PKR	1	1	2	3	3	1	2	3	3	4
PML	1	1	2	2	3	1	3	4	5	5

B

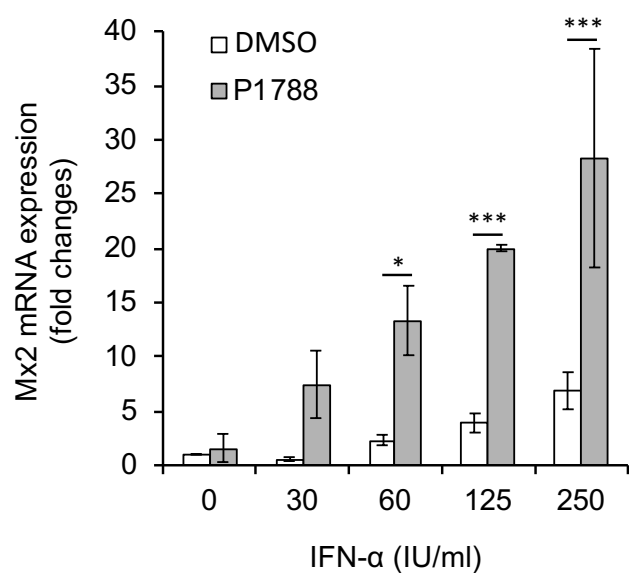


Figure 6

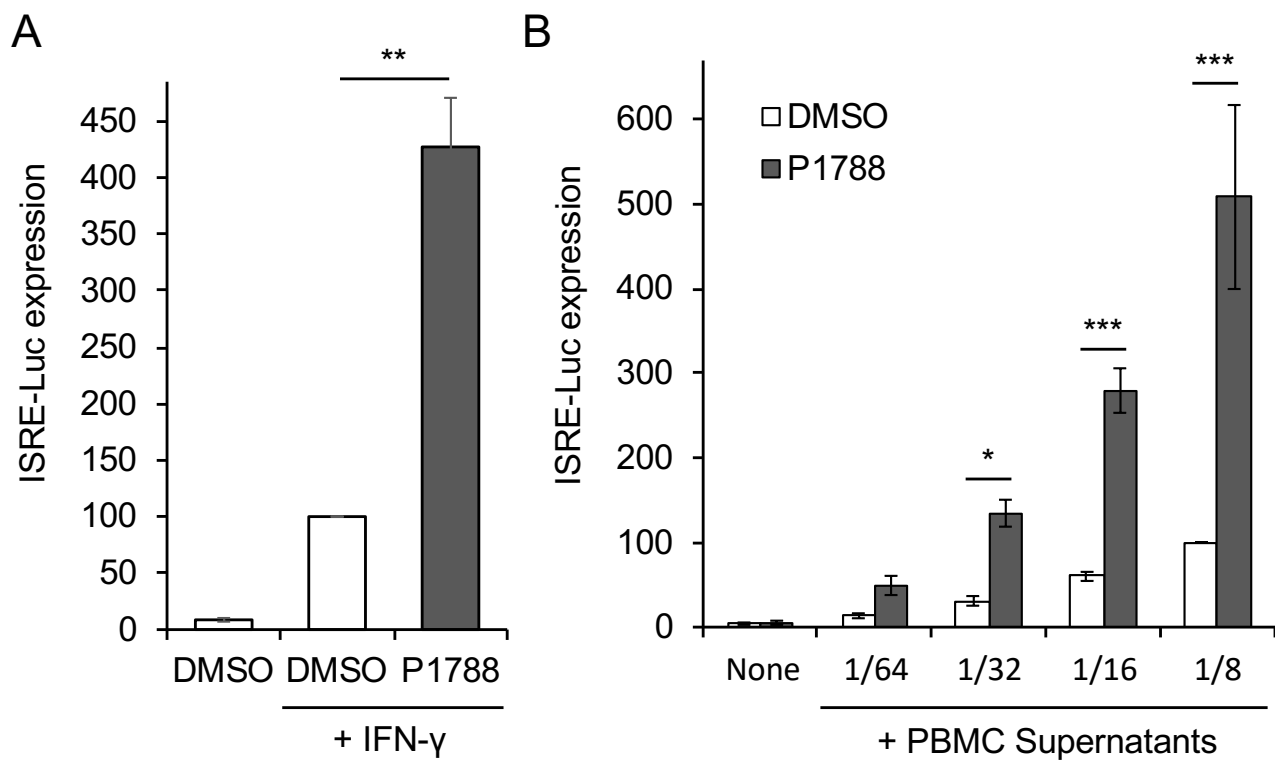
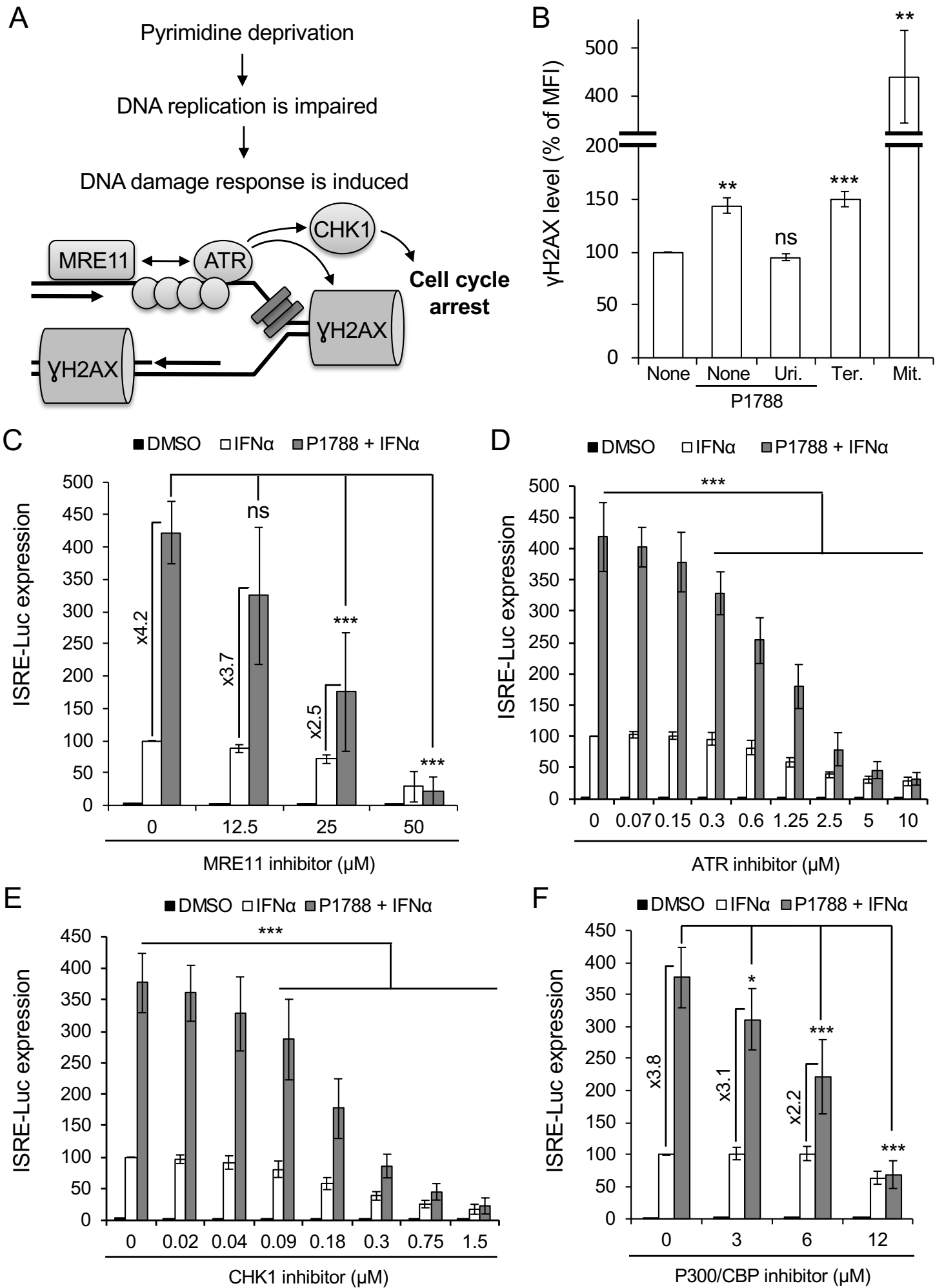
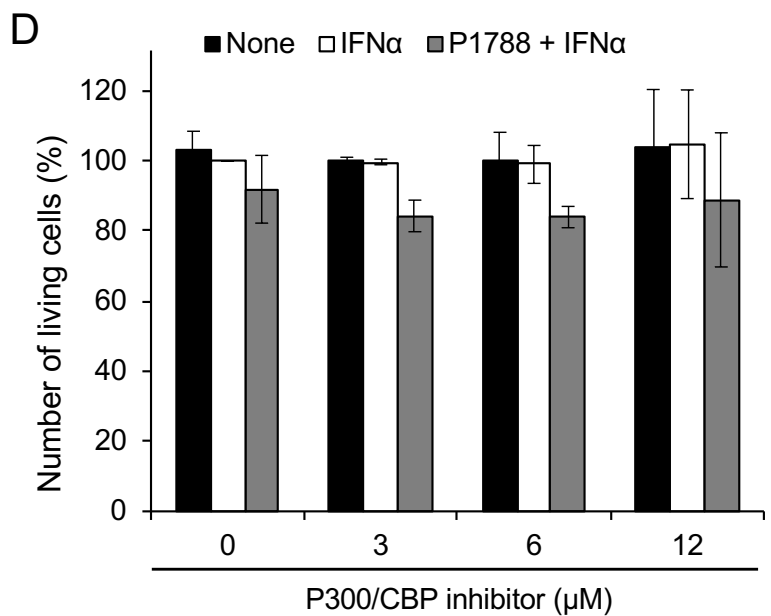
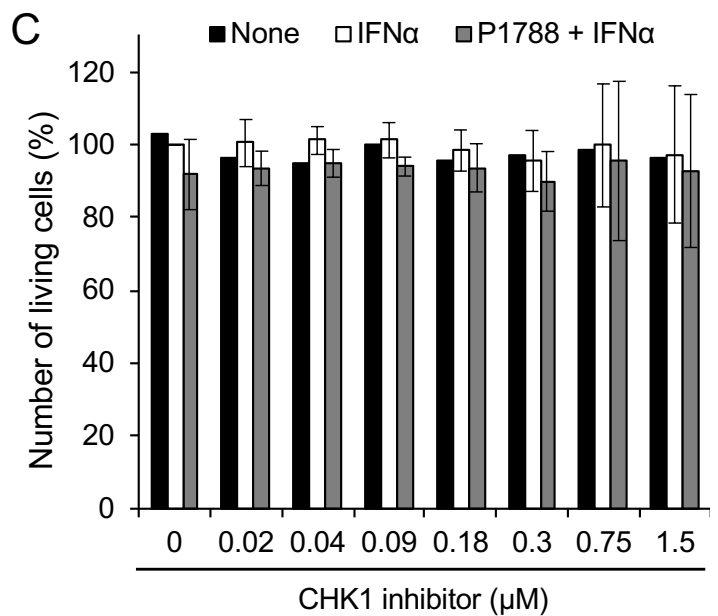
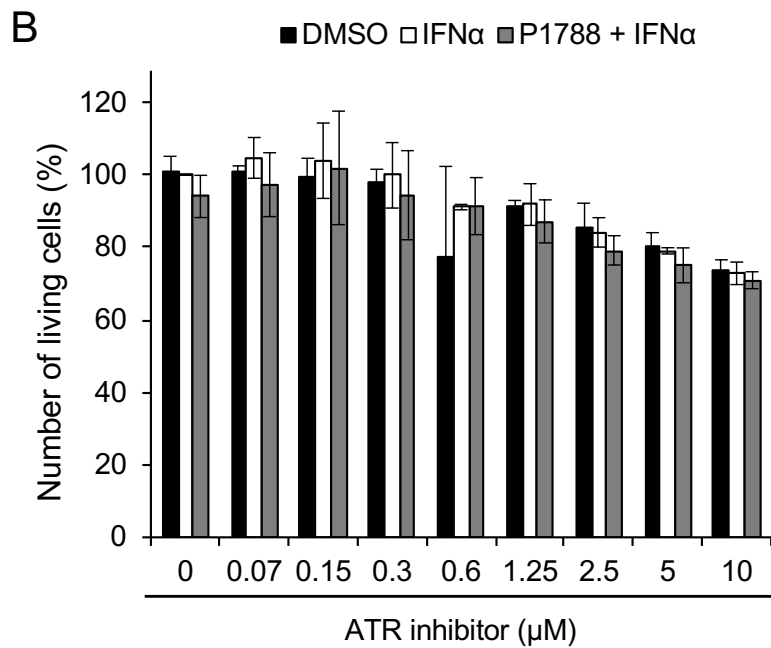
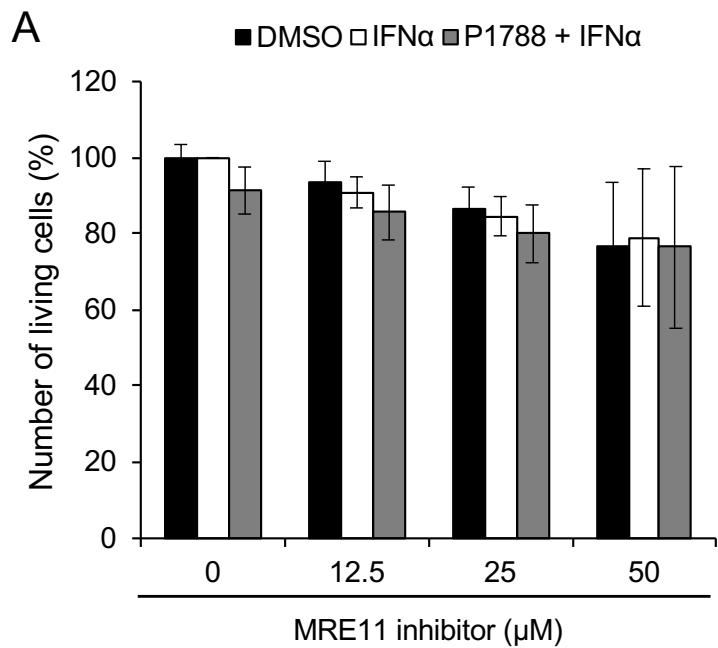


Figure 7





## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Metabolite analysis

The protocol we used for nucleoside/nucleotide quantification in HEK-293 cells was previously described in detail [25]. Briefly, cells were plated in 6-well plates at  $1 \times 10^6$  cells per well and after 24 h, P1788 (80  $\mu$ M final concentration) or DMSO alone was added. 24 h later, cells were washed with PBS and cellular pellets were deproteinized by adding an equal volume of 6% perchloric acid. After 10 min of incubation on ice and clearing of the extracts by centrifugation (13,000 rpm for 10 min at 4°C), supernatants were supplemented with double-distilled water (v/v) and neutralized by the addition of 2 M  $\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3$ . Extracts were analyzed by HPLC onto a C18 Supelco 5- $\mu$ m (250 by 4.6 mm) column (Sigma) at 45°C using a mobile phase delivered at a flow rate of 1 ml/min. Buffer A contained 10 mM tetrabutylammonium hydroxide, 10 mM  $\text{KH}_2\text{PO}_4$ , and 0.25% MeOH and was adjusted to pH 6.9 with 1 M HCl. Buffer B contained 5.6 mM tetrabutylammonium hydroxide, 50 mM  $\text{KH}_2\text{PO}_4$ , and 30% MeOH and was neutralized to pH 7.0 with 1 M NaOH. The following stepwise gradient elution program was used: A to B at 60:40 at 0 min, 40:60 at 30 min, and 40:60 at 60 min. Products were monitored spectrophotometrically at 254 nm with a diode array detector (PDA) and quantified by integration of the peak absorbance area. Calibration curves were generated with reference nucleosides. Finally, raw data were normalized to the total number of viable cells present in the well in order to take into account minor differences between culture conditions.

1 **Supplementary Table I. Cytokine expression levels in culture supernatants of human**  
 2 **PBMC activated with R848.**

<b>Cytokine</b>	<b>PBMC alone</b>	<b>PBMC + R848</b>
IL-1 $\beta$	ND	12 ng/ml
IL-6*	ND	65 ng/ml
TNF- $\alpha$	ND	11 ng/ml
IP10	0.002 ng/ml	0.028 ng/ml
IFN- $\lambda$ 1	0.002 ng/ml	0.016 ng/ml
IL-8*	0.149 ng/ml	214 ng/ml
IL-12p70	ND	0.009 ng/ml
IFN- $\alpha$ 2	ND	0.097 ng/ml
IFN- $\lambda$ 2/3	ND	ND
GM-CSF	ND	0.043 ng/ml
IFN- $\beta$	ND	0.015 ng/ml
IL-10	ND	0.283 ng/ml
<b>IFN-<math>\gamma</math></b>	<b>ND</b>	<b>4.2 ng/ml</b>

3 *ND stands for “Not Detected”. All concentrations were measured on raw PBMC supernatants,*  
 4 *except for IL-6 and IL-8 where supernatants were diluted 12 times (\*).*

5



1 **Supplementary Table II: List of RT-qPCR primers**

<b>Primer ID</b>	<b>GenBank ID</b>	<b>Amplicon size (nt)</b>	<b>Sequence 5' to 3'</b>
RPL13A-F	23521	82	AACAGCTCATGAGGCTACGG
RPL13A-R			TGGGTCTTGAGGACCTCTGT
ISG15-F	9636	117	CAGCGAACTCATCTTTGCCAG
ISG15-R			GACACCTGGAATTCGTTGCC
IFIT3-F	3437	94	AACAGATGTCCTCCGCAGTG
IFIT3-R			TGTGGATTCCAACACCCGTT
IFIT1-F	3434	84	ATGCGATCTCTGCCTATCGC
IFIT1-R			CCTGCCTTAGGGGAAGCAAA
IFIT2-F	3433	84	AATAGGACACGCTGTGGCTC
IFIT2-R			AGGCTGGCAAGAATGGAACA
IFI6-F	2537	83	GGGTGGAGGCAGGTAAGAAA
IFI6-R			GACGGCCATGAAGGTCAGG
IFI27-F	3429	106	ATCAGCAGTGACCAGTGTGG
IFI27-R			GGCCACAACCTCCTCCAATCA
IFITM3-F	10410	118	GAAGATGGTTGGCGACGTGA
IFITM3-R			CACTGGGATGACGATGAGCA
DDX58-F	23586	152	ATCCAAACCAGAGGCAGAGGAA
DDX58-R			ACTGCTTCGTCCCATGTCTGAA
MxA-F	4599	74	AAGCTGATCCGCCTCCACTT
MxA-R			TGCAATGCACCCCTGTATACC
IFIT5-F	24138	99	CACTATGGCCGCTTTCAGGA
IFIT5-R			GCGAAGGGGTGATCTGTCTT
PKR-F	5610	102	GTGGACCTCTACGCTTTGGG
PKR-R			GATGCCATCCCGTAGGTCTG
PML-F	5371	97	AGTGAGCTCAAGTGCGACAT
PML-R			CAAAGGCACTATCCTGCTCCT

2

3

## 1 Characterization of synthesized molecules

2  
3 **Norcerpegin.** 1,1-dimethylfuro[3,4-*c*]pyridine-3,4(1*H*,5*H*)-dione was previously described in  
4 [1].

5  
6 **P2703.** 5-cyclopropyl-1-methyl-1-phenylfuro[3,4-*c*]pyridine-3,4(1*H*,5*H*)-dione. Yield 73%,  
7 mp. 186°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO-*d*<sub>6</sub>/CCl<sub>4</sub>) δ (ppm): 0.98 (m, 4H), 1.96 (s, 3H), 2.49 (m,  
8 1H), 6.42 (d, *J* = 6.8 Hz, 1H), 7.37 (m, 5H), 7.88 (d, *J* = 6.9 Hz, 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (75 MHz,  
9 DMSO-*d*<sub>6</sub>/CCl<sub>4</sub>) δ (ppm): 6.31, 6.38, 24.92, 31.71, 38.67, 38.94, 39.22, 39.49, 39.77, 40.05,  
10 40.33, 95.48, 124.61, 127.81, 128.23, 139.00, 145.39, 157.07, 159.42, 165.52, 170.03. MS  
11 [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 282.11 (32%), [M+Na]<sup>+</sup> 304.09 (76%), [2M+Na]<sup>+</sup> 585.20 (100%).  
12 HRMS [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: calcd for C<sub>17</sub>H<sub>16</sub>O<sub>3</sub>N [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 282.1125 found 282.1125.

13  
14 **P1788.** 5'-cyclopropyl-3'*H*-spiro[cyclohexane-1,1'-furo[3,4-*c*]pyridine]-3',4'(5'*H*)-dione. Yield  
15 76%, mp. 235-236°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR, (500 MHz, DMSO-*d*<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 0.88 (m, 2H), 1.02 (m, 2H),  
16 1.36 (m, 1H), 1.57 (m, 4H), 1.72 (m, 3H), 1.89 (dt, *J* = 4.0, 13.1 Hz, 2H), 3.3 (m, 1H), 6.56 (d,  
17 *J* = 6.8 Hz, 1H), 8.01 (d, *J* = 6.8 Hz, 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR, (125 MHz, DMSO-*d*<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 6.4 (2CH<sub>2</sub>),  
18 21.6 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 23.8, 32.1, 33.7 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 83.4, 98.4, 110.1, 146, 157.9, 166.3, 171.3. MS [ESI<sup>+</sup>,  
19 MeOH]: [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 260.1 (70%), [2M+Na]<sup>+</sup> 541.2(100%). El. anal. calcd. for C<sub>15</sub>H<sub>17</sub>NO<sub>3</sub> : C  
20 69.48; H 6.61; N 5.40; Found: C 69.66; H 6.63; N 5.40.

21  
22 **P2512.** 3'*H*-spiro[cyclohexane-1,1'-furo[3,4-*c*]pyridine]-3',4'(5'*H*)-dione was previously  
23 described in [3][4].

24  
25 **P1781.** 5'-methyl-3'*H*-spiro[cyclohexane-1,1'-furo[3,4-*c*]pyridine]-3',4'(5'*H*)-dione, previously  
26 described in [4], was obtained from the general procedure described above.

27  
28 **P2705.** 5'-isopropyl-3'*H*-spiro[cyclohexane-1,1'-furo[3,4-*c*]pyridine]-3',4'(5'*H*)-dione. Yield  
29 61%, mp. 199-200°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO-*d*<sub>6</sub>/CCl<sub>4</sub>) δ (ppm): 1.38 (m, 1H), 1.38 (d, *J*  
30 = 6.8 Hz, 6H), 1.61 (m, 2H), 1.81 (m, 7H), 5.16 (m, 1H), 6.46 (d, *J* = 6.9 Hz, 1H), 8.03 (d, *J* =  
31 6.9 Hz, 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (75 MHz, DMSO-*d*<sub>6</sub>/CCl<sub>4</sub>) δ (ppm): 21.29, 21.36, 23.84, 33.96, 45.85,  
32 82.33, 95.46, 110.40, 141.67, 155.83, 165.31, 169.92. HRMS [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: calcd for  
33 C<sub>15</sub>H<sub>20</sub>O<sub>3</sub>N [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 262.1438 found 262.1439.

34

1 **P2707.** 5'-cyclobutyl-3'H-spiro[cyclohexane-1,1'-furo[3,4-c]pyridine]-3',4'(5'H)-dione. Yield  
2 59%, mp. 214-215°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR, (500 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 1.37 (m, 1H), 1.57 (m, 4H),  
3 1.74 (m, 5H), 1.90 (m, 2H), 2.26 (m, 2H), 2.34 (m, 2H), 5.0 (m, J = 8.6 Hz, 1H), 6.65 (d, J =  
4 6.8 Hz, 1H), 8.23 (d, J = 6.8 Hz, 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR, (125 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 14.3, 21.6  
5 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 23.8, 29.3 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 33.7 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 50.8, 83.4, 98.7, 109.9, 143.5, 156.7, 166.4, 171.1.  
6 HRMS [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: calcd for C<sub>16</sub>H<sub>20</sub>O<sub>3</sub>N [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 274.1438 found 274.1440.

7  
8 **P1792.** 5'-cyclopentyl-3'H-spiro[cyclohexane-1,1'-furo[3,4-c]pyridine]-3',4'(5'H)-dione. Yield  
9 86%, mp. 233°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR, (500 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 1.36 (m, 1H), 1.57 (m, 4H), 1.65  
10 (m, 3H), 1.71 (m, 4H), 1.83 (m, 2H), 1.9 (m, 2H), 2.02 (m, 2H), 5.11 (m, J = 7.8 Hz, 1H), 6.64  
11 (d, J = 6.8 Hz, 1H), 8.16 (d, J = 6.8 Hz, 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR, (125 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 21.6  
12 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 23.7 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 23.8, 31.5 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 33.7 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 56.2, 83.3, 99.1, 109.9, 143.5, 156.8,  
13 166.4, 170.8. HRMS [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: calcd for C<sub>17</sub>H<sub>22</sub>O<sub>3</sub>N [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 288.1594 found 288.1600.

14  
15 **P1793.** 5'-cyclohexyl-3'H-spiro[cyclohexane-1,1'-furo[3,4-c]pyridine]-3',4'(5'H)-dione. Yield  
16 59%, mp. > 270°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR, (500 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 1.21 (m, 1H), 1.40 (m, 3H), 1.58  
17 (m, 6H), 1.73 (m, 6H), 1.84 (m, 2H), 1.89 (m, 2H), 4.72 (m, 1H), 6.64 (dd, J = 2, 6.8 Hz, 1H),  
18 8.20 (dd, J = 2, 6.8 Hz, 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR, (125 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 21.6 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 23.8,  
19 24.6, 25.4 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 31.5 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 33.7 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 53.6, 83.3, 98.9, 109.9, 143.3, 156.4, 166.4, 170.6.  
20 HRMS [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: calcd for C<sub>18</sub>H<sub>24</sub>O<sub>3</sub>N [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 302.1751 found 302.1755.

21  
22 **P2706.** 5'-(cyclopropylmethyl)-3'H-spiro[cyclohexane-1,1'-furo[3,4-c]pyridine]-3',4'(5'H)-  
23 dione. Yield 67%, mp. 195-196°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>/CCl<sub>4</sub>) δ (ppm): 0.50 (m,  
24 4H), 1.25 (m, 1H), 1.41(m, 1H), 1.77 (m, 9H), 3.82 (d, J = 7.2 Hz, 2H), 6.39 (d, J = 6.7 Hz,  
25 1H), 8.08 (d, J = 6.7 Hz, 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (75 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>/CCl<sub>4</sub>) δ (ppm): 170.67, 165.30,  
26 156.27, 145.82, 110.49, 95.45, 52.34, 40.04, 39.76, 39.49, 39.21, 38.93, 34.00, 23.84, 21.35,  
27 10.41, 3.24. HRMS [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: calcd for C<sub>16</sub>H<sub>20</sub>O<sub>3</sub>N [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 274.1438 found 274.1439.

28  
29 **P2708.** N-cyclopropyl-4-methyl-2-oxo-1-oxaspiro[4.5]dec-3-ene-3-carboxamide. Yield 62%,  
30 mp. 141-143°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR, (500 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 0.51 (m, 2H), 0.71 (m, 2H), 1.29  
31 (m, 1H), 1.41 (m, 2H), 1.54 (m, 2H), 1.71 (m, 3H), 1.82 (m, 2H), 2.33 (s, 3H), 2.76 (m, 1H),  
32 8.09 (s, 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR, (125 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 5.9 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 12.6, 21.5 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 22,  
33 23.7, 31.9 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 87.9, 118, 161.6, 170.2, 178.3. HRMS [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: calcd for C<sub>14</sub>H<sub>20</sub>O<sub>3</sub>N  
34 [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 250.1438 found 250.1440.

1  
2 **P2701.** 5-cyclopropyl-1,1-dimethylfuro[3,4-c]pyridine-3,4(1H,5H)-dione. Yield 66%, mp.  
3 224-225°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR, (500 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 0.89 (m, 2H), 1.03 (m, 2H), 1.53 (s, 6H),  
4 3.33 (m, 1H), 6.58 (d, J = 6.8 Hz, 1H), 8.04 (d, J = 6.8 Hz, 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR, (125 MHz, DMSO-  
5 d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 6.5 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 25.3 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 32.1, 82.1, 98.2, 109.9, 146.2, 157.8, 166.2, 171.6.  
6 HRMS [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: calcd for C<sub>12</sub>H<sub>14</sub>O<sub>3</sub>N [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 220.0968 found 220.0969.

7  
8 **P2702.** 5-cyclopropyl-1-ethyl-1-methylfuro[3,4-c]pyridine-3,4(1H,5H)-dione. Yield 61%, mp.  
9 158°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>/CCl<sub>4</sub>) δ (ppm): 0.78 (t, J = 7.4 Hz, 3H), 0.91 (m, 2H),  
10 1.10 (m, 2H), 1.53 (s, 3H), 1.91 (m, 2H), 3.36 (m, 1H), 6.38 (d, J = 6.8 Hz, 1H), 7.91 (d, J =  
11 6.8 Hz, 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (75 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>/CCl<sub>4</sub>) δ (ppm): 6.28, 6.38, 7.15, 23.85, 30.63,  
12 31.63, 38.94, 39.22, 39.49, 39.77, 40.05, 95.45, 111.32, 144.94, 157.01, 165.44, 169.68. HRMS  
13 [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: calcd for C<sub>13</sub>H<sub>16</sub>O<sub>3</sub>N [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 234.1125 found 234.1125.

14  
15 **P2718.** 5-cyclopropyl-1,1-diethylfuro[3,4-c]pyridine-3,4(1H,5H)-dione. Yield 63%, mp. 176-  
16 178°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR, (500 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 0.64 (t, J = 7.39 Hz, 6H), 0.9 (m, 2H), 1.03  
17 (m, 2H), 1.88 (q, J = 7.4 Hz, 2H), 1.94 (q, J = 7.4 Hz, 2H), 3.35 (tt, J = 4.12, 7.43 Hz, 1H), 6.48  
18 (d, J = 6.8 Hz, 1H), 8.03 (d, J = 6.8 Hz, 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR, (125 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 5.7  
19 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 21.6 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 24, 29.2, 36.3, 91.7, 97.2, 100.8, 143.3, 154.3, 158.4, 171.7. HRMS [ESI<sup>+</sup>,  
20 MeOH]: calcd for C<sub>14</sub>H<sub>18</sub>O<sub>3</sub>N [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 248.1281 found 248.1284.

21  
22 **P2717.** 5'-cyclopropyl-3'H-spiro[cyclopentane-1,1'-furo[3,4-c]pyridine]-3',4'(5'H)-dione.  
23 Yield 72%, mp. 190-192°C. <sup>1</sup>H NMR, (500 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 0.89 (m, 2H), 1.02 (m,  
24 2H), 1.89 (m, 6H), 2.09 (m, 2H), 3.33 (m, 1H), 6.55 (d, J = 6.9 Hz, 1H), 8.03 (d, J = 6.9 Hz,  
25 1H). <sup>13</sup>C NMR, (125 MHz, DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>) δ (ppm): 6.5 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 24.5 (2CH<sub>2</sub>), 32.1, 37.9 (2CH<sub>2</sub>),  
26 91.8, 98.2, 110.9, 146.1, 157.5, 166.2, 169.5. MS [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 246.11 (48%),  
27 [M+Na]<sup>+</sup> 268.09 (52%), [2M+Na]<sup>+</sup> 513.20 (100%). HRMS [ESI<sup>+</sup>, MeOH]: calcd for  
28 C<sub>14</sub>H<sub>16</sub>O<sub>3</sub>N [M+H]<sup>+</sup> 246.1125 found 246.1128.

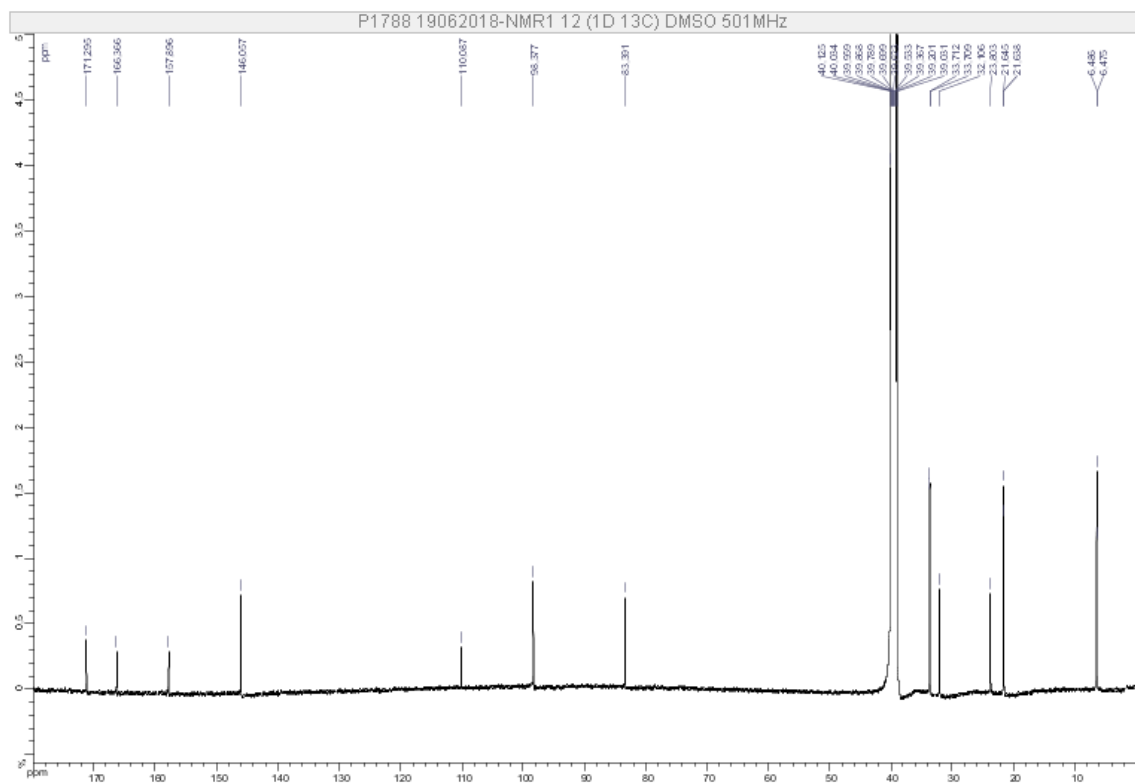
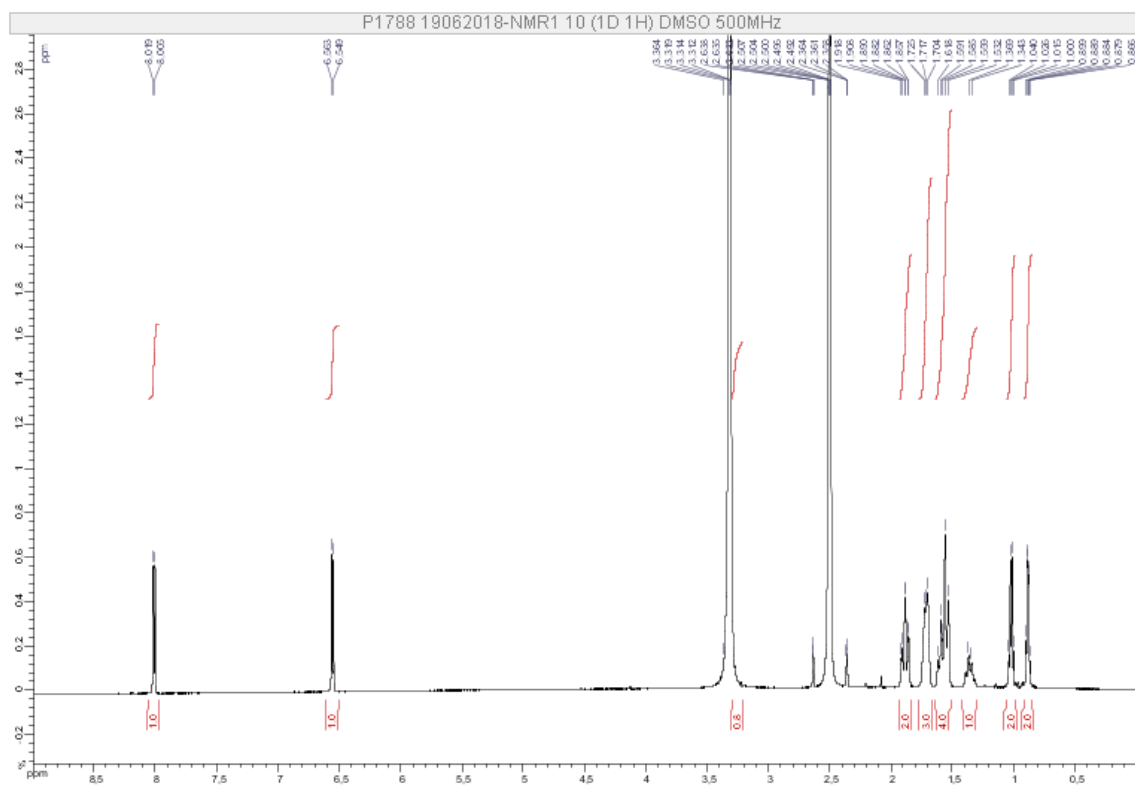
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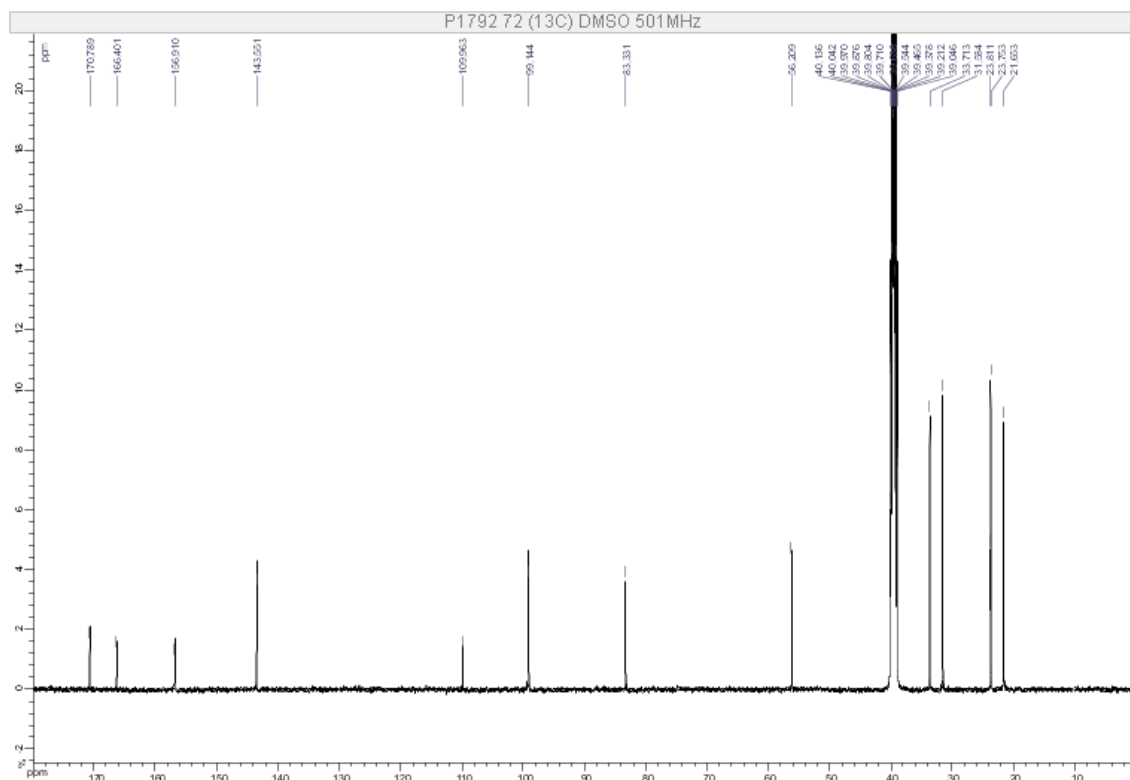
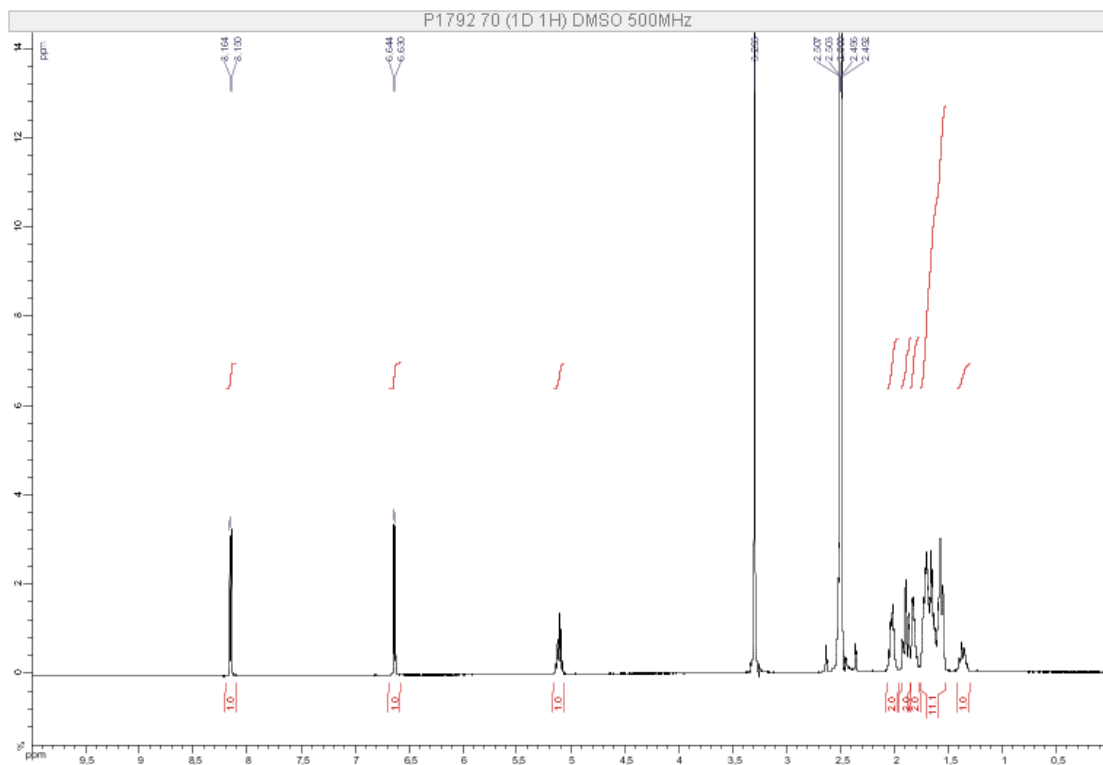
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14

# Supplementary material – NMR DATA

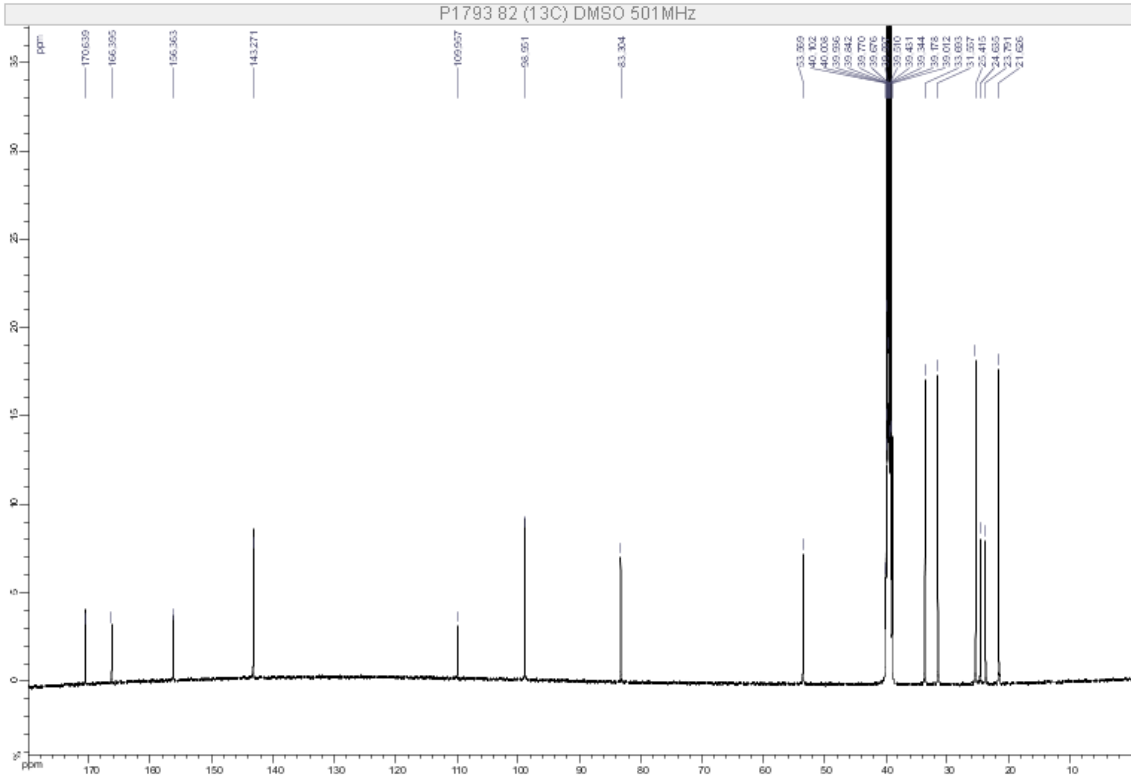
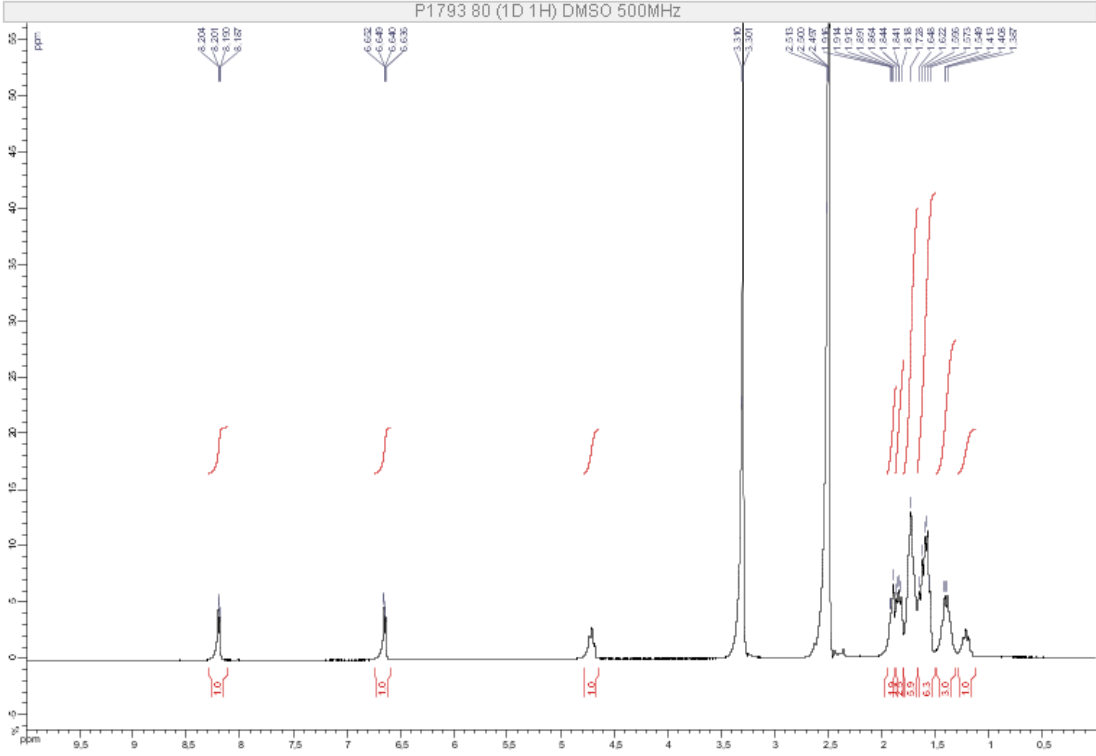
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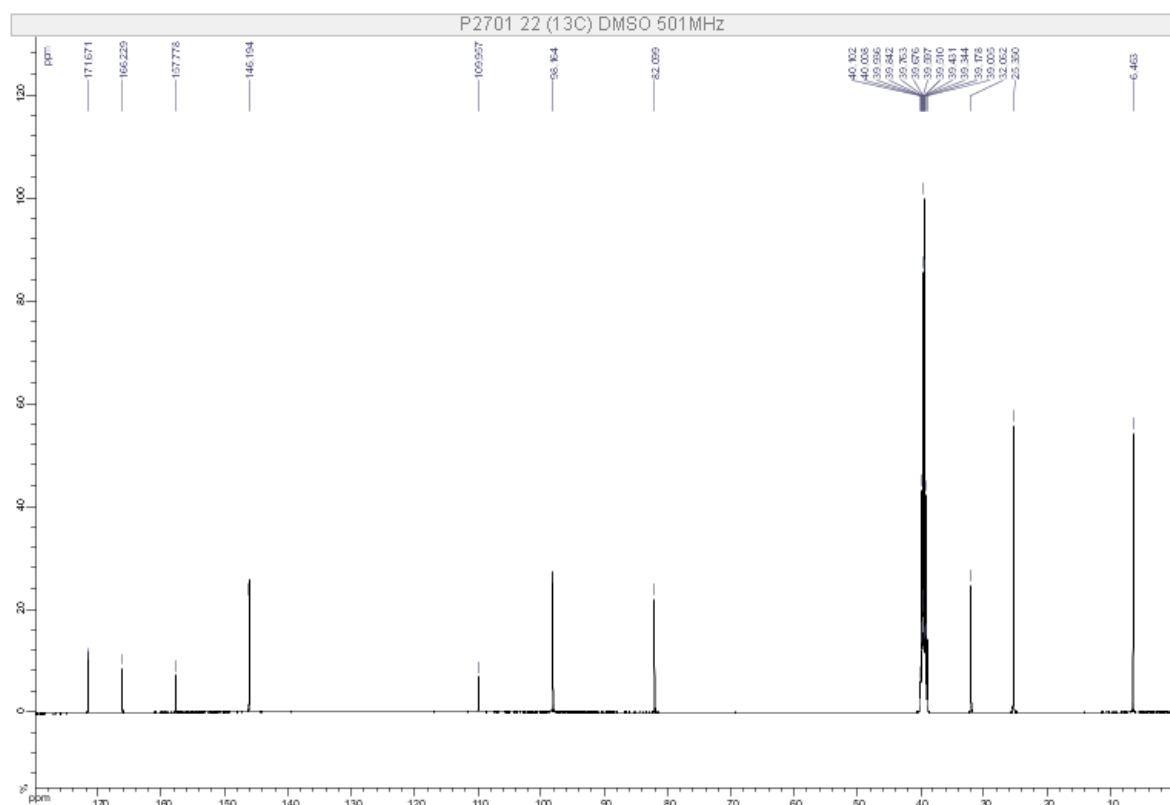
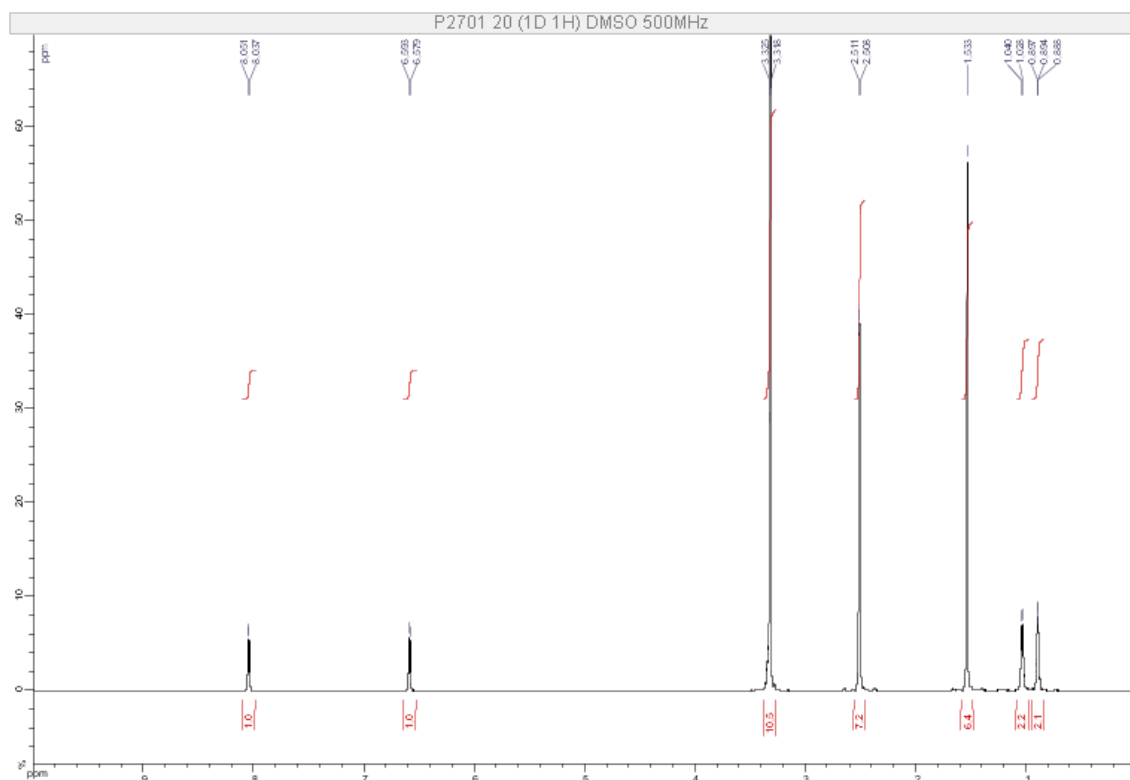


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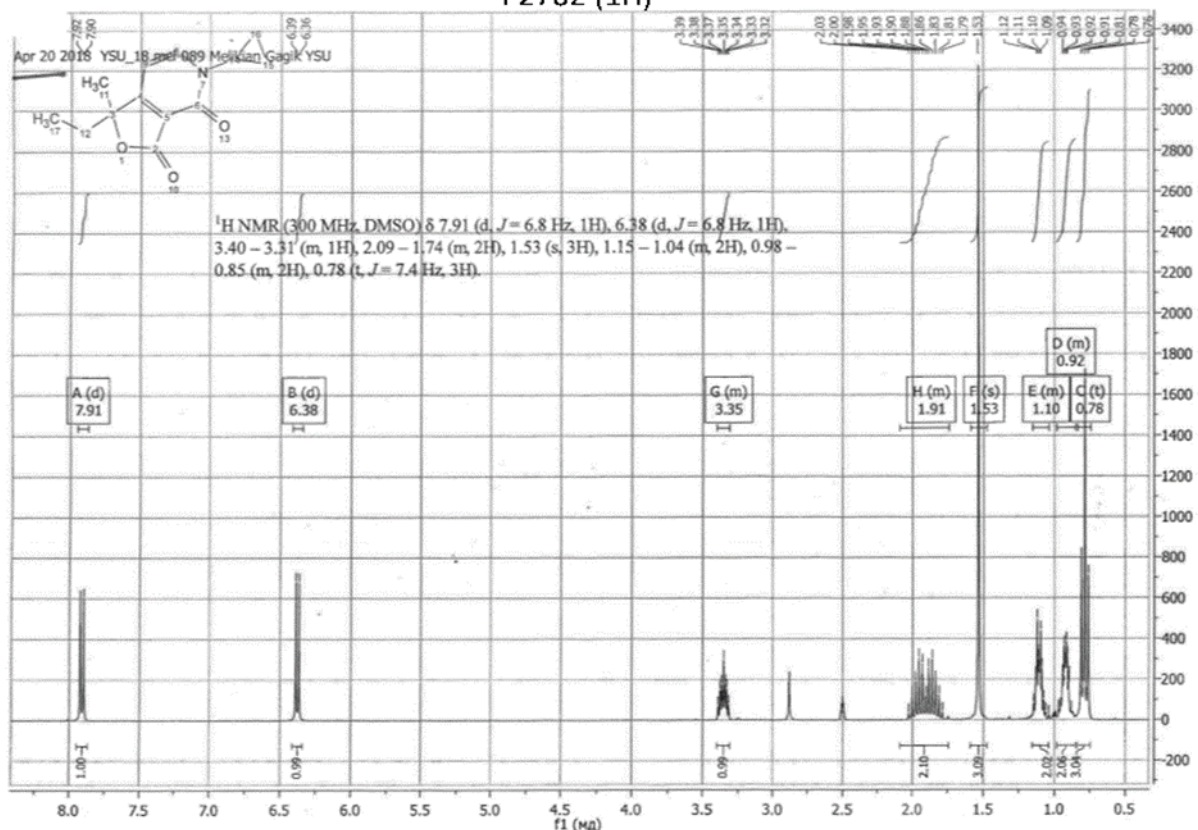


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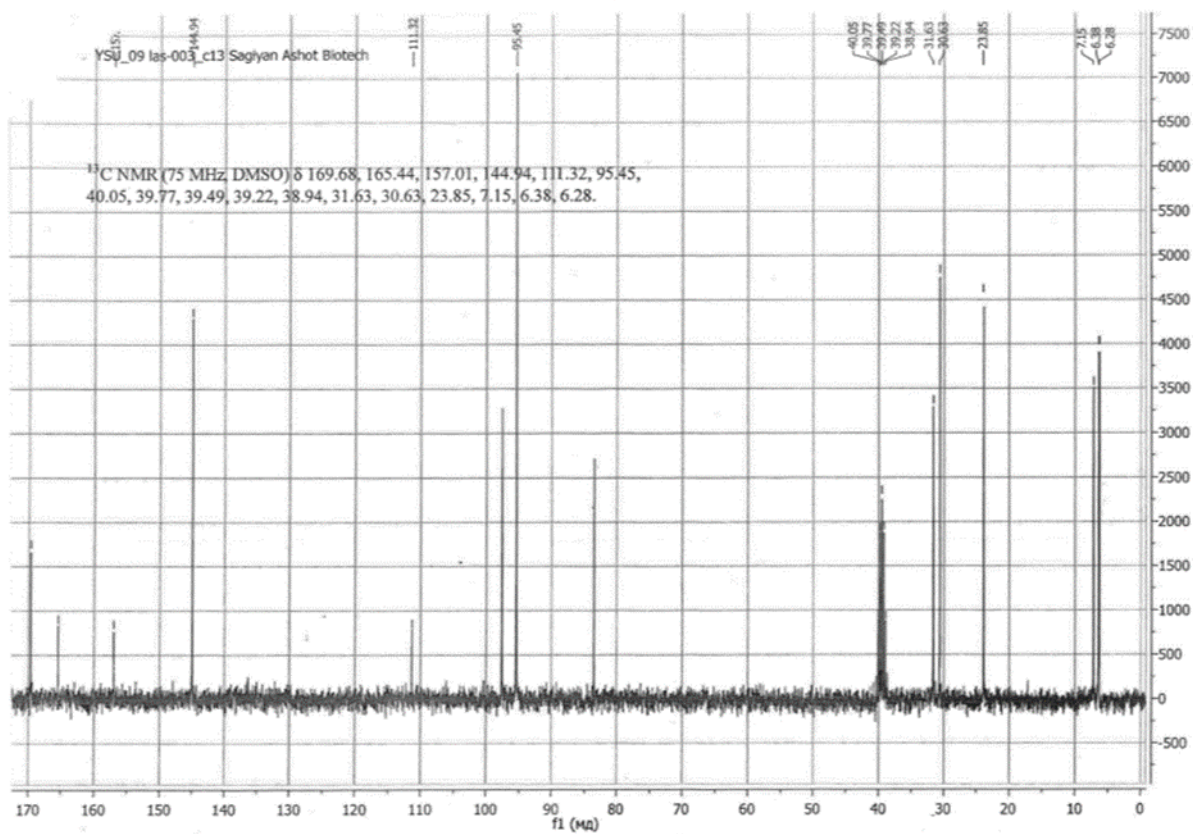


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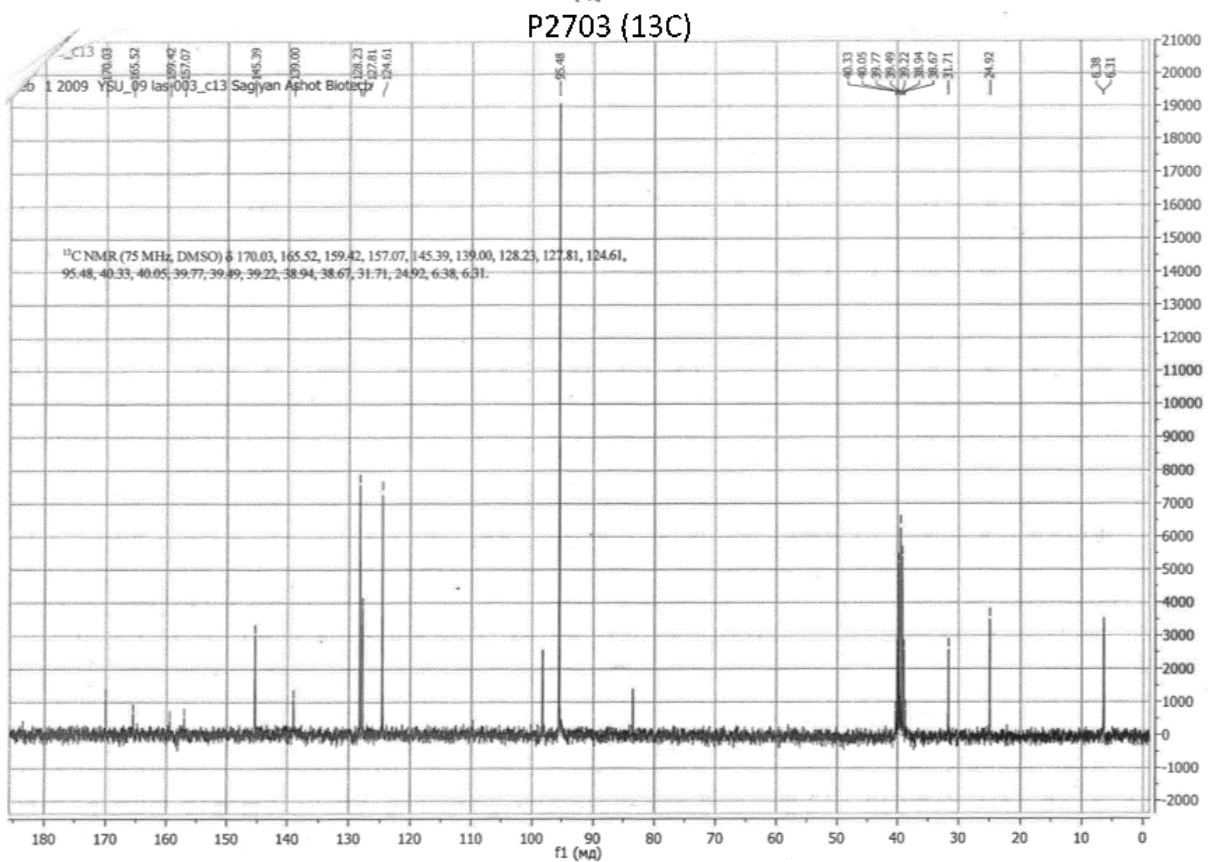
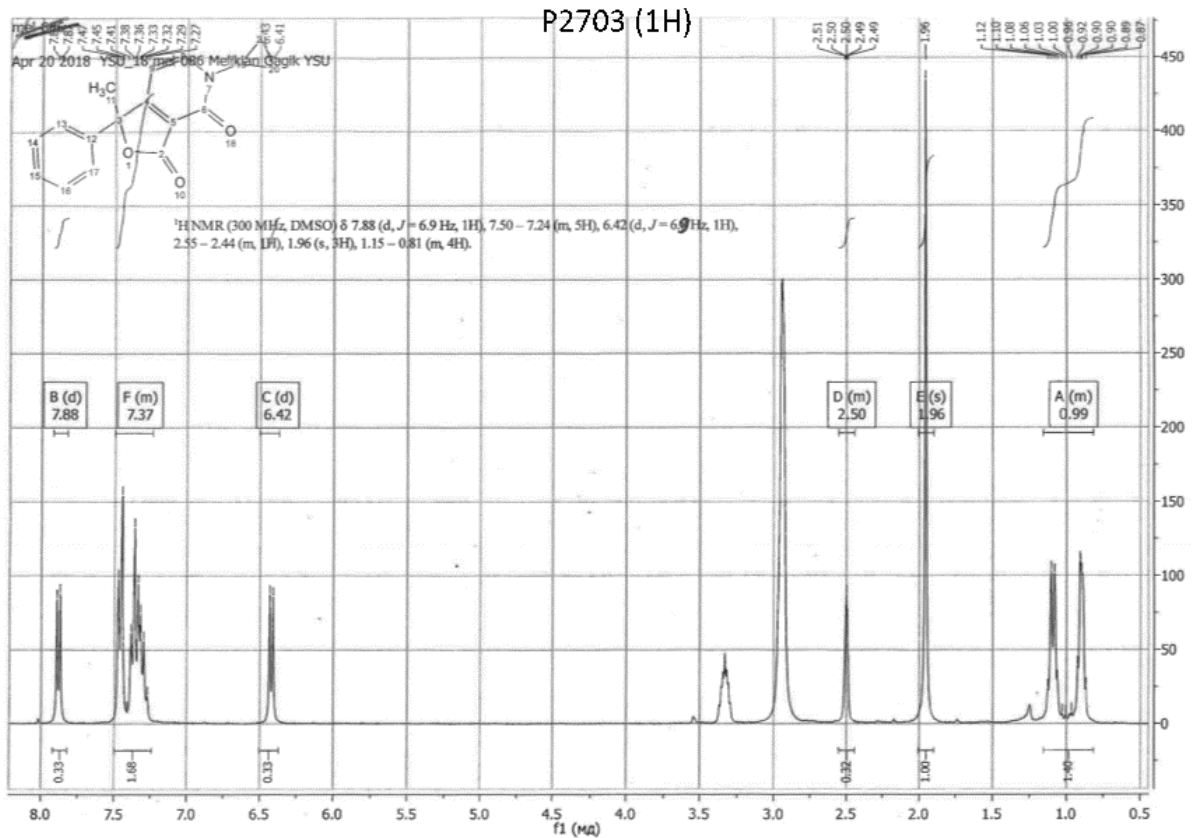
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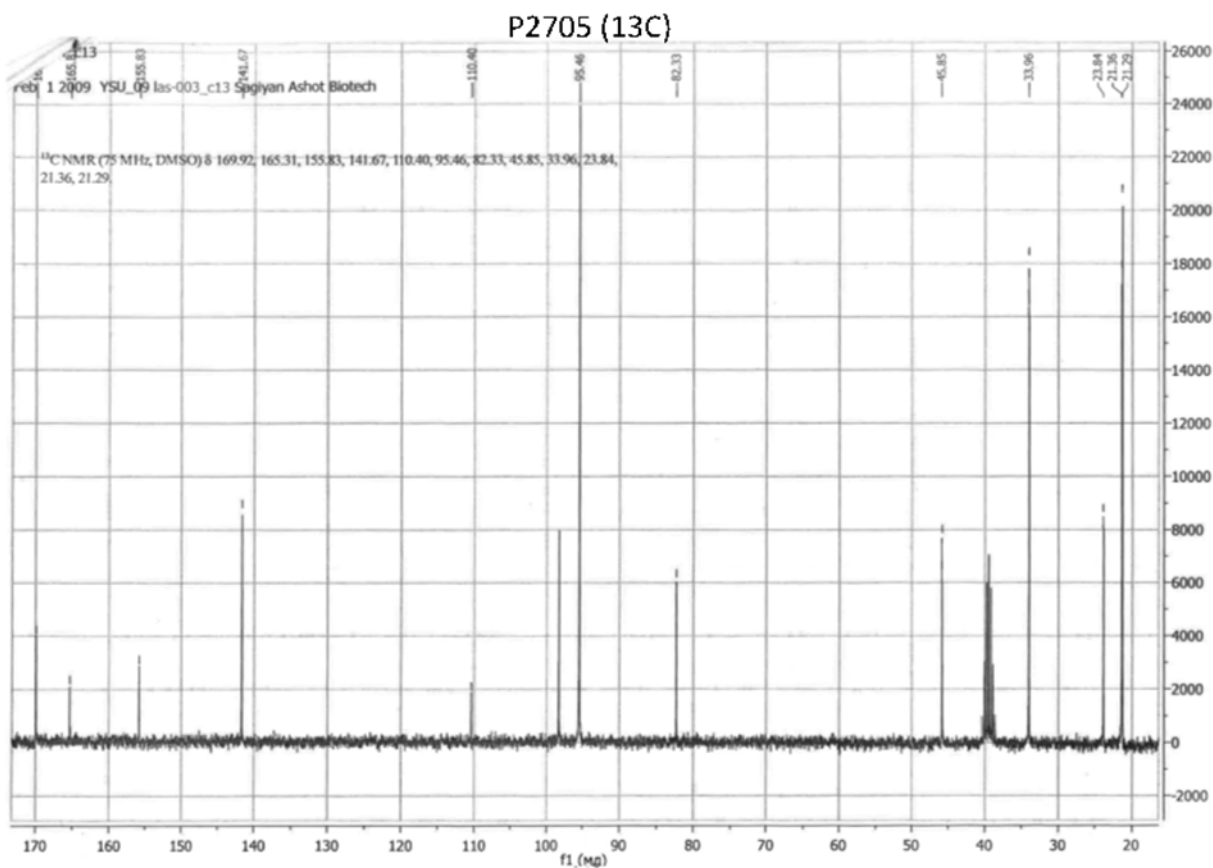
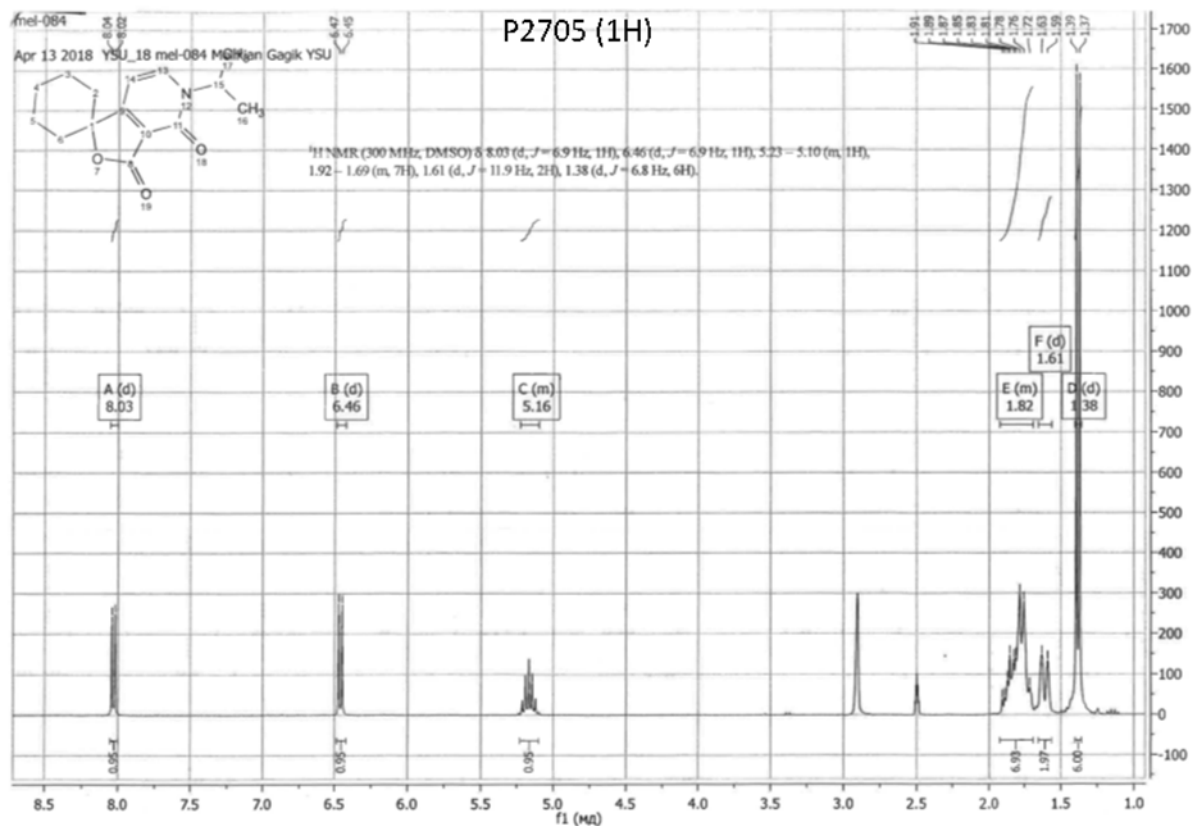
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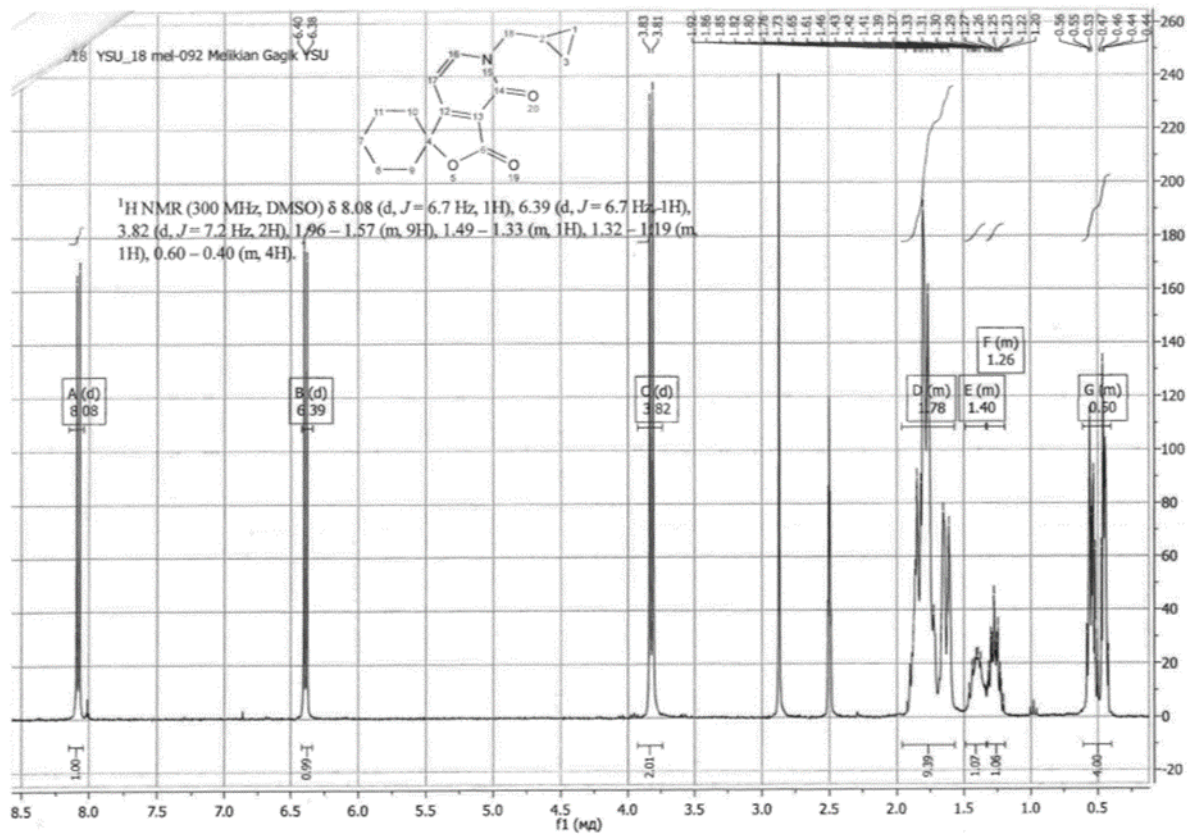


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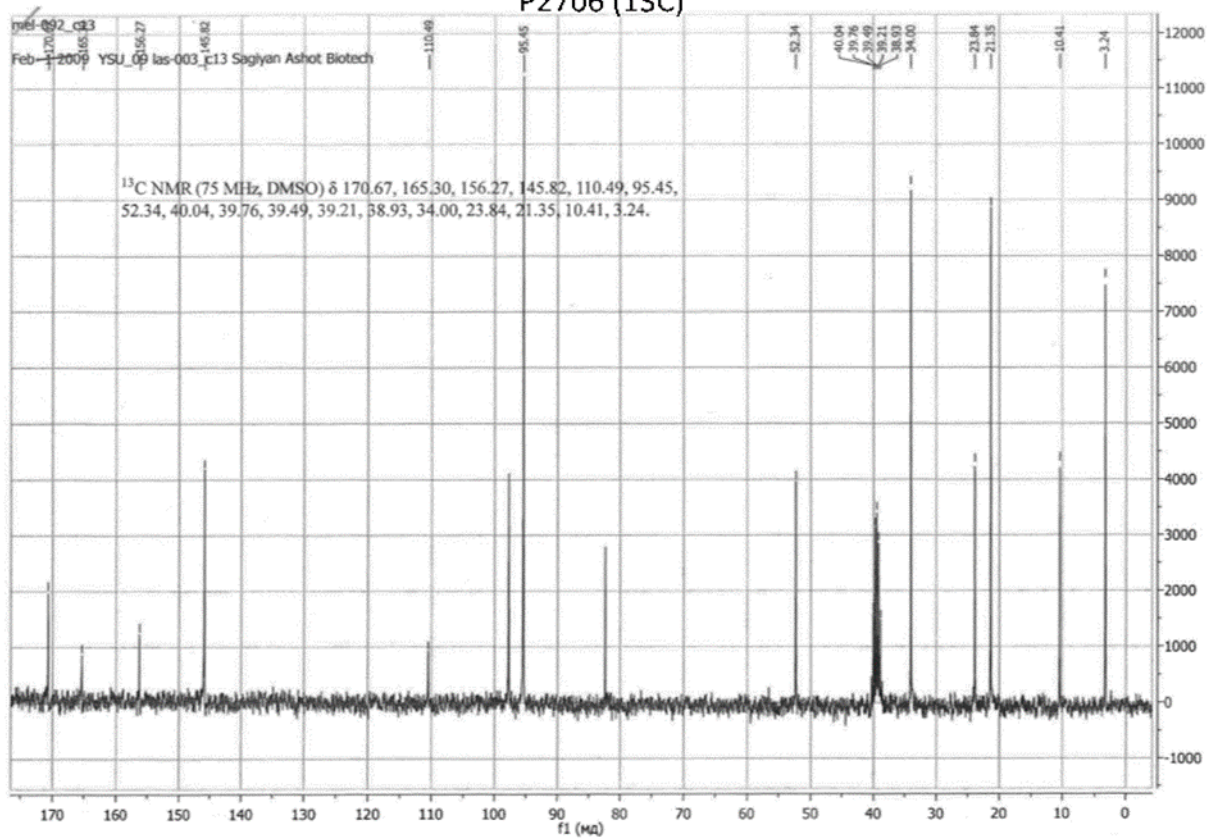


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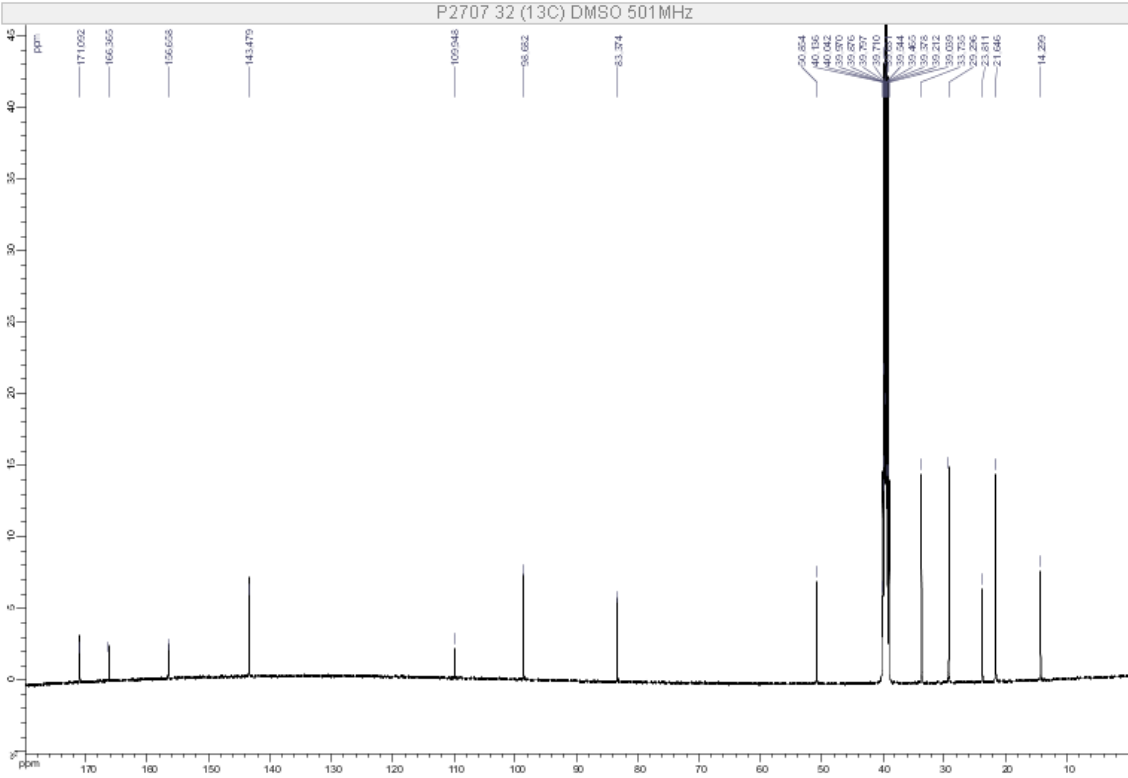
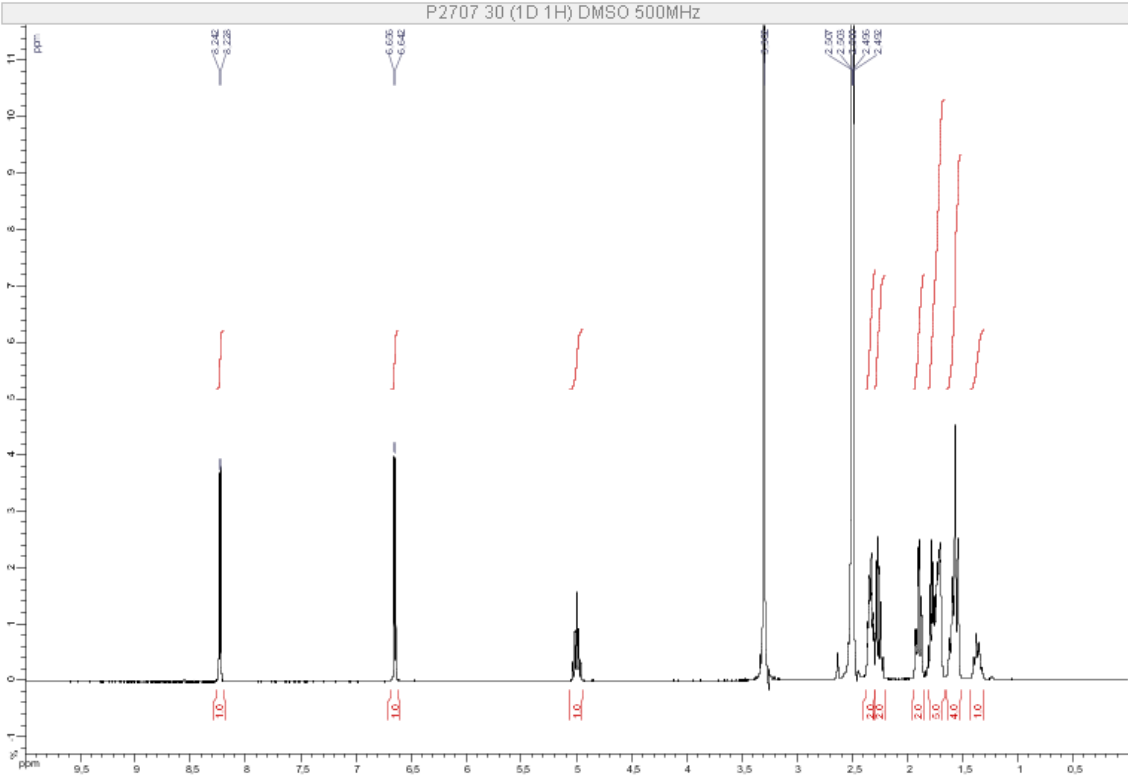
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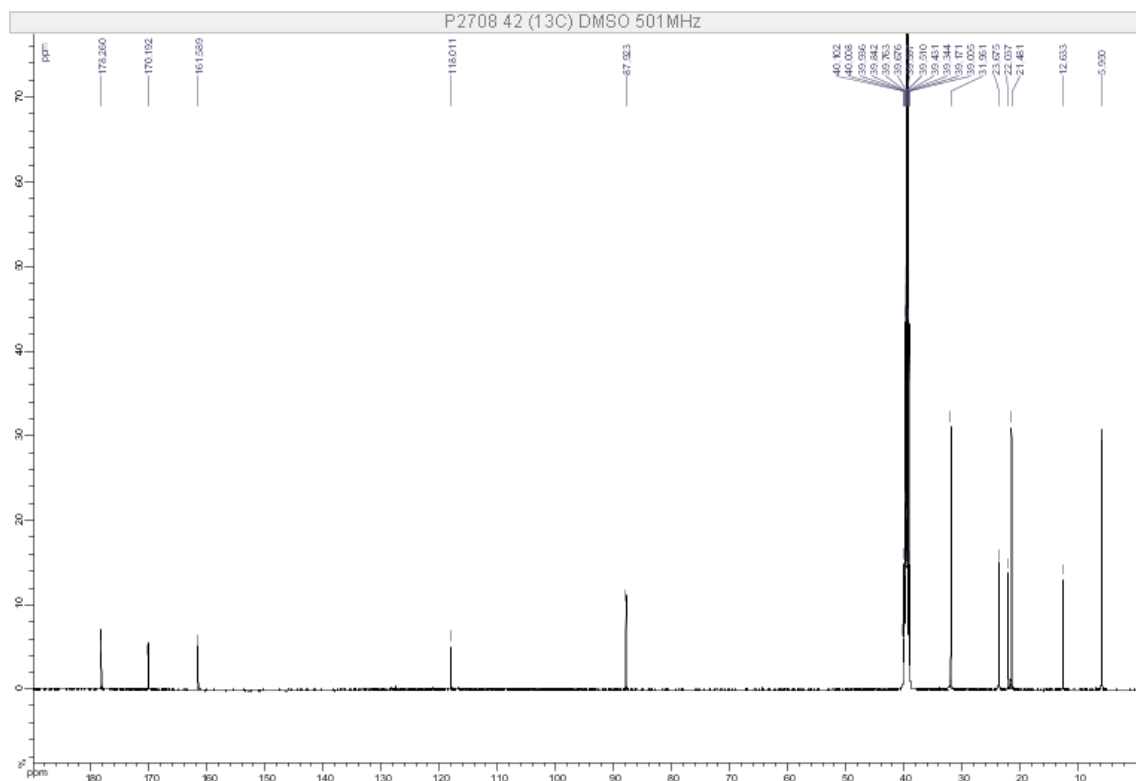
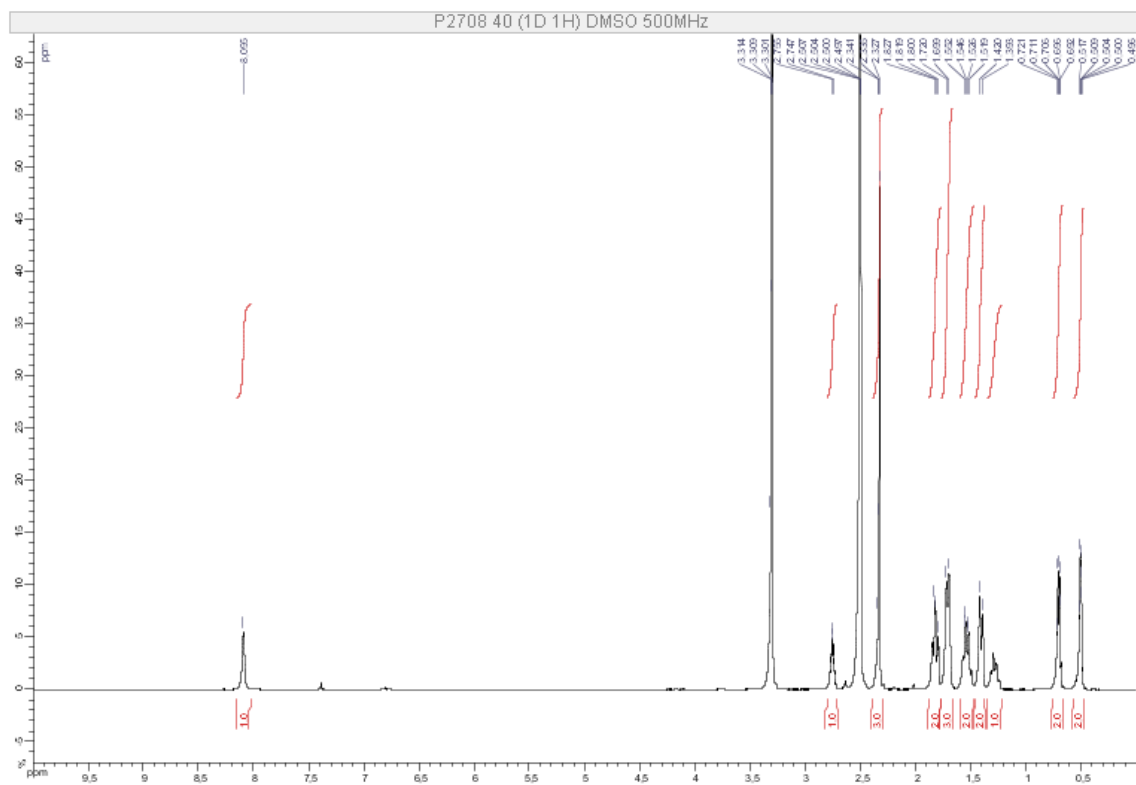
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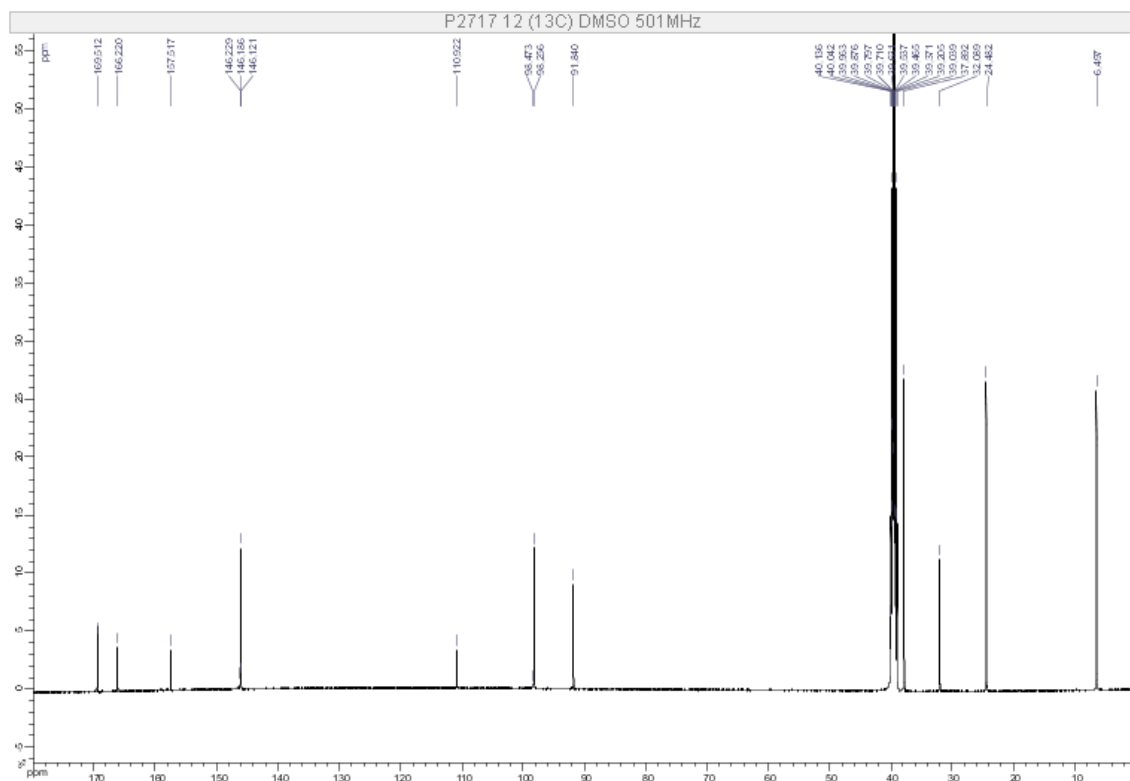
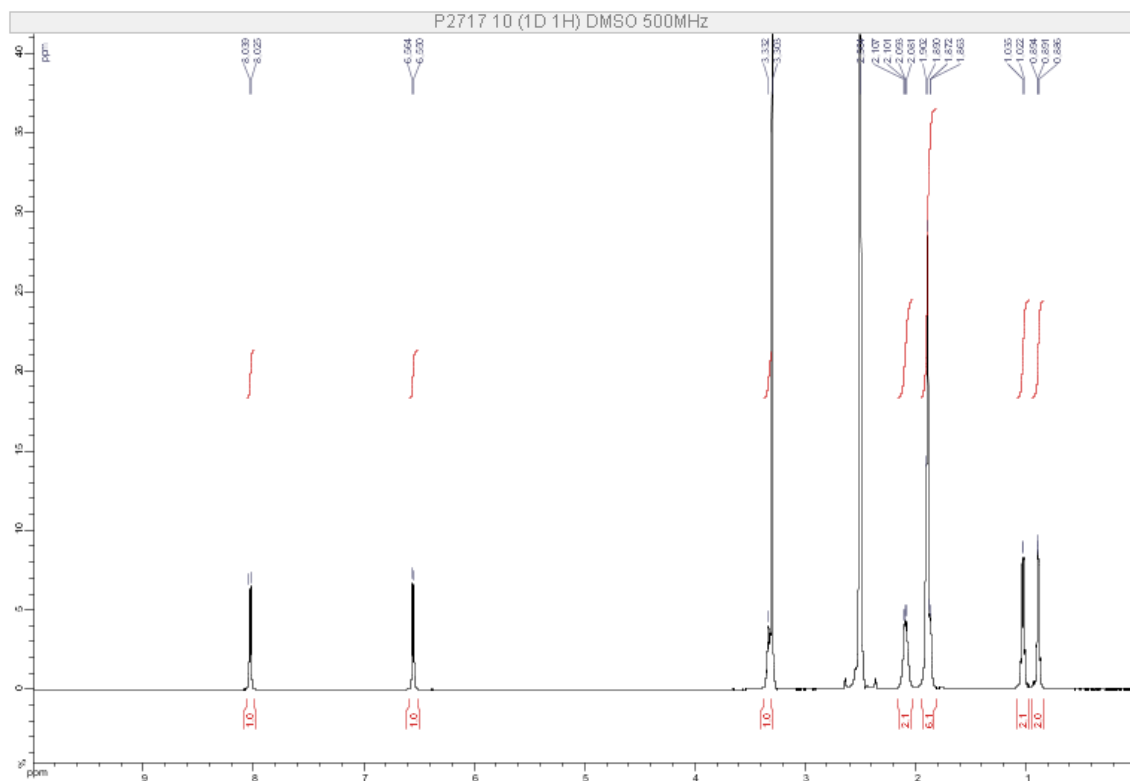
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# NMR data P2708



# NMR data P2717





NMR data P2718

