

# **The role of CB<sub>1</sub> in intestinal permeability & inflammation**

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## **Running Title:**

Endocannabinoids control permeability and inflammation via CB<sub>1</sub>

## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>AEA</b>	<b>Anandamide</b>
<b>2-AG</b>	<b>2-Arachidonoyl glycerol</b>
<b>NAPE</b>	<b>N-acylphosphatidylethanolamine</b>
<b>NAPE PLD</b>	<b>N-acylphosphatidylethanolamine phospholipase D</b>
<b>NAAA</b>	<b>N-acyl ethanolamine-hydrolysing acid amidase</b>
<b>FAAH</b>	<b>Fatty acid amide hydrolase</b>
<b>MAGL</b>	<b>Monoacylglycerol lipase</b>
<b>DAGL</b>	<b>Diacylglycerol lipase</b>
<b>LPS</b>	<b>Lipopolysaccharide</b>
<b>TEER</b>	<b>Transepithelial electrical resistance</b>

**BACKGROUND:** The endocannabinoid system has previously been shown to play a role in the permeability and inflammatory response of the human gut. Our study was to determine the effects of endogenous AEA and 2-AG on the permeability and inflammatory response of intestinal epithelium under normal, inflammatory and hypoxic conditions.

**METHODS:** Human intestinal mucosa was modelled using Caco-2 cells. Human tissue was collected from planned colorectal resections. Accumulation of AEA and 2-AG was achieved by inhibiting their metabolising enzymes URB597 (FAAH inhibitor) and JZL184 (MAGL inhibitor). Inflammation and ischaemia were simulated with TNF $\alpha$  and IFN $\gamma$  and oxygen deprivation. Permeability changes were measured by transepithelial electrical resistance (TEER). The role of the CB<sub>1</sub> receptor was explored using CB<sub>1</sub> knock down (CB<sub>1</sub>Kd) intestinal epithelial cells. Endocannabinoid levels were measured using LC-MS. Cytokine secretion was measured using multiplex and ELISA.

**RESULTS:** URB597 and JZL184 caused a concentration-dependent increase in permeability via CB<sub>1</sub> ( $p<0.0001$ ), and decreased cytokine production. Basolateral application of JZL184 decreased permeability via CB<sub>1</sub> ( $p<0.0001$ ). URB597 and JZL184 increased the enhanced (worsened) permeability caused by inflammation and hypoxia ( $p<0.0001$  and  $<0.05$ ). CB<sub>1</sub>Kd cells showed reduced permeability response to inflammation ( $p<0.01$ ) but not hypoxia. 2-AG levels were increased in response to inflammation and hypoxia in Caco-2 cells. In human mucosal tissue, inflammation increased the secretion of GM-CSF, IL-12, IL-13 and IL-15, which was prevented with ex vivo treatment with URB597 and JZL184, and inhibited by a CB<sub>1</sub> antagonist.

**CONCLUSION:** Endogenous AEA and 2-AG production and CB<sub>1</sub> activation play a key modulatory roles in normal intestinal mucosa permeability, and also in inflammatory and hypoxic conditions.

Keywords: Gut, Endocannabinoids, Anandamide, 2-AG, Inflammation

## Introduction

A key function of the gastrointestinal tract is to form a barrier between the noxious exterior environment and sterile submucosa, whilst actively absorbing the vital nutrients necessary for homeostasis (1). This selective permeability is achieved through a set of complex mechanisms including the secretion of a mucous barrier at the epithelial layer, production of mucosal antibodies by immune cells and through a continuous layer of epithelial cells bound together by specialised tight junctions (2–5). Dysregulation of these mechanisms has been shown to lead to intestinal diseases such as Crohn's disease, Ulcerative Colitis, Coeliac disease, and Irritable Bowel Syndrome (6–9). Despite increasing interest in the factors governing permeability and inflammation within the gut, the responsible mechanisms have not yet been fully elucidated.

Endocannabinoids are intercellular lipid signalling molecules derived on demand from membrane precursors, themselves derived from arachidonic acid (10). The two most well described ligands within this system are anandamide (AEA) and 2-arachidonoyl glycerol (2-AG). AEA production commences with the activation of N-acyltransferase, promoting the conversion of the membrane lipid phosphatidylethanolamine to N-acylphosphatidylethanolamine (NAPE). This in turn is converted by NAPE phospholipase D (NAPE-PLD) into AEA (11). AEA is transported across into the intracellular compartment and catabolised by fatty acid amide hydrolase (FAAH) and N-acyl ethanolamine-hydrolysing acid amidase (NAAA) (11, 12). 2-AG is produced by the hydrolysis of phosphatidylinositol to diacylglycerol (13). This is converted to 2-AG by the action of diacylglycerol lipase (DAGL). Following its biological effects, 2-AG is transported to the intracellular compartment and catabolised to arachidonic acid by monoacylglycerol lipase (MAGL), though may also be catabolised by FAAH, serine hydrolase  $\alpha$ - $\beta$ -hydrolase domain 6 (ABHD6) and serine hydrolase  $\alpha$ - $\beta$ -hydrolase domain (ABHD12) (12, 14). Both AEA and 2-AG are agonists of the two major cannabinoid G-coupled protein receptors CB<sub>1</sub> and CB<sub>2</sub>, but also at other non-classical sites including TRPs, PPARs, and GPR55.

AEA and 2-AG have been shown to play roles in gut motility, nausea, and nociception (15). We have also shown that AEA and 2-AG, acting at CB<sub>1</sub>, increase intestinal permeability in healthy Caco-2 cells, and worsen the increased permeability caused by hypoxia and cytokine-induced inflammation (16, 17). These findings, taken with evidence showing that patients with active colitis have increased colonic levels of AEA and 2-AG, and that endocannabinoid production is increased

during sepsis, suggested that AEA or 2-AG acting at the CB<sub>1</sub> receptor increase permeability and may act to decrease inflammation (18, 19). Blockade of the CB<sub>1</sub> receptor has been shown to limit the hypotensive and vasodilator effects of lipopolysaccharide (LPS) in rats, and to protect the rat liver from endotoxaemia and prolonged the survival of rats with severe acute pancreatitis (20–22).

However, several studies have also shown that AEA protects against gastrointestinal disease (23–26). Engel *et al.* found that intraperitoneal administration of AEA to mice with trinitro benzosulphonic acid (TNBS) induced colitis reduced macro- and microscopic colitis scores, reduced pro-inflammatory cytokine production and also reduced immune cell infiltration, suggesting decreased gut permeability (23). More recently two similar studies showed that inhibition of FAAH, causing accumulation of AEA, will decrease production of pro-inflammatory cytokines and reduce proliferation of leucocytes and lead to decreased colitis scores in experimental murine colitis induced by dextran sodium sulphate (DSS) (27, 28). However data regarding the effects of AEA and 2-AG in human tissue are lacking. We hypothesised that endogenously produced AEA and 2-AG may act to increase permeability via CB<sub>1</sub> as per our previous findings (16, 17), whilst having a separate but simultaneous anti-inflammatory effect.

To address the hypothesis, the aim of the present study was to determine the effects of endogenously produced AEA and 2-AG on the permeability and inflammatory response of intestinal epithelial cells under normal, inflammatory and hypoxic conditions. To achieve this we caused accumulation of AEA and 2-AG by inhibition of their metabolising enzymes with URB597 (a FAAH inhibitor) and JZL184 (a MAGL inhibitor). The role of the CB<sub>1</sub>receptor was explored using CB<sub>1</sub> knock down (CB<sub>1</sub>Kd) intestinal epithelial cells and CB<sub>1</sub> and TRPV1 antagonists in explant human colonic tissue.

## Materials and Methods

Caco-2 cells (European Collection of Cell Culture, Wiltshire, UK; passages 62-86) were cultured in T75 cell culture flasks in Minimal Essential Medium Eagle supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS), 1% penicillin/streptomycin and L-glutamine at 37°C in 5% CO<sub>2</sub> and 95% air. In some experiments, the CB<sub>1</sub> receptor was knocked down as previously described (29). For this, wild type Caco-2 cells were seeded at 2x10<sup>5</sup> cells per well in a 6-well culture plate overnight before transfection with 29-mer shRNA corresponding specifically to the human Cnr1 receptor gene in retroviral HuSH pRS plasmid vector (Gene ID = 1268; OriGene product code: TR316500; Insight Biotechnology Limited, Middlesex, UK) for 48h, termed CB<sub>1</sub>Kd-Caco-2. Vector control cells (termed control-Caco2) were transfected with non-effective 29-mer scrambled shRNA cassette in the pRS plasmid vector. All procedures were performed based on the manufacturer's protocol using TurboFectin 8.0 transfection reagent (OriGene product code: TF81001; Insight Biotechnology Limited, Middlesex, UK). After 48h, cells were transferred to 96-well plates and maintained in complete medium with puromycin (0.06μL/mL) for selection. Within two weeks, 3 to 4 clonal populations of cells were selected, passaged and cultured for experiments with continued selection pressure. Transfection efficiency was checked by immunoblotting for CB<sub>1</sub> receptor expression (see method below) using (CB<sub>1</sub> receptor antibody (1:1000; Cambridge Bioscience # 10006590) (Koay et al, 2014). Two clones were further assessed for CB<sub>1</sub> receptor knockdown by the [35S] GTPγS binding assay using the synthetic CB<sub>1</sub> receptor agonist, arachidonyl-2'-chloroethylamide (ACEA) as per Shore et al. 2014 (30). One clone was taken forward for further experiments.

For permeability studies, cells were seeded at 20,000 cells on 6.4mm diameter, 0.4μm pore size polyethylene terephthalate inserts (BD Biosciences, Bedford, UK) and grown for 14-18 days. Transepithelial electrical resistance (TEER) was measured using a voltohmometer (EVOM<sup>2</sup>) (World Precision Instruments, Sarasota FL, USA) as an indicator of cellular permeability. Caco-2 cell monolayers with TEER value greater than 1000 Ω.cm<sup>2</sup> were used. Caco-2 cell monolayers were washed twice in HBSS (+ N-2-hydroxyethylpintestinal permeabilityerazine-N'-2-ethanesulfonic acid or HEPES and P/S) and baseline TEER measured.

To establish the effect of endocannabinoid degradation inhibition on Caco-2 permeability, URB597 (FAAH inhibitor, IC<sub>50</sub> low nM), JZL184 (MAGL inhibitor, IC<sub>50</sub> low nM) (1nM-10 μM) or DMSO (vehicle 0.01%) were applied to the Caco-2 monolayer apical or basolateral membranes. TEER

measured every 30 minutes for the first 2 hours and at 8, 24, 36 and 48 hours. To identify the target sites of action, the receptor antagonists AM251 (100nM), AM630 (100nM), GW9662 (100nM), GW6471 (500nM), capsazepine (500nM), SB 366791 (100nM) and O-1918 (500nM) were co-applied with URB597 or JZL184. The effects of 10  $\mu$ M URB597 and JZL184 were also tested in CB<sub>1</sub>Kd Caco-2 cells.

To investigate the effects of AEA and 2-AG basolaterally on Caco-2 cell permeability, cell monolayers were washed twice in HBSS and baseline TEER in each insert was measured. Endocannabinoids AEA and 2-AG (10 $\mu$ M) or vehicle (0.1% ethanol) were applied to the basolateral compartment of inserts and TEER was measured every 30 minutes for 2 hours and after 8, 24, 36 and 48 hours.

### **Inflammatory model**

Caco-2 cell monolayers were grown on transwell inserts. 10 ng.ml<sup>-1</sup> interferon-gamma (IFN $\gamma$ ) was added to the basolateral compartment and after 8 hours, 10 ng.ml<sup>-1</sup> of tumour necrosis factor-alpha (TNF $\alpha$ ) was added to the media for another 16 hours as previously described (17). URB597, JZL184 or vehicle (DMSO 0.01%) were applied to either the apical or basolateral membranes as indicated. In some experiments, this protocol was carried out in the CB<sub>1</sub>Kd cells.

### **Ischaemia/reperfusion model**

Caco-2 cell monolayers were grown on transwell inserts. Hypoxic conditions were simulated using a GasPak™ EZ Anaerobe Pouch System (BD Biosciences, Bedford, UK) for 4 hours after which time the cells returned to normoxia. URB597 10 $\mu$ M, JZL184 10 $\mu$ M or vehicle were applied to the Caco-2 membranes. In some experiments, this protocol was carried out in the CB<sub>1</sub>Kd cells and for more prolonged periods of hypoxia (6 and 8 h).

### **Measurement of cytokine production**

To quantify the effect of AEA, 2-AG, URB597 and JZL184 on the inflammatory response in caco-2 cells we measured the media concentrations of two key cytokines involved in the cell stress response, interleukin 8 (IL-8) and IL-6, after 24 hours of incubation. Concentrations were measured

using ELISA according to manufacturer's instructions (IL-8 and IL-6, both DUOSET ELISA kits R&D Systems Minneapolis, US).

### **Measurement of endocannabinoid levels**

A quantitative LC-MS/MS method was used for analysis of AEA and 2-AG levels in cell samples, based on a previously reported procedure (31). For these experiments, Caco-2 cells were grown in T75 flasks and subjected to the inflammatory or ischaemia/reperfusion protocols. Cell lysates and medium were stored at -80°C before analysis. Internal standard (0.42 nmol AEA-d8) was added to a 0.4 ml aliquot of each sample followed by solvent extraction (ethyl acetate: hexane; 9:1 v/v), centrifugation and evaporation. Prior to analysis, each sample extract was reconstituted in acetonitrile. An Applied Biosystems MDS SCIEX 4000 Q-Trap hybrid triple-quadrupole–linear ion trap mass spectrometer (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA) operated in positive electrospray ionisation mode was used in conjunction with a Shimadzu series 10AD VP LC system (Shimadzu, Columbia, MD, USA) using an ACE 3 C8, 100 x 2.1 mm, 3 µm particle size column (Advanced Chromatography Technologies Ltd., Aberdeen, UK). Quantification was performed by measuring specific AEA and 2-AG precursor and product ions together with a calibrated internal standard method.

### **Human Tissue Experimentation**

Experiments on *ex vivo* human colonic tissue were performed by obtaining healthy colonic tissue from patients undergoing elective bowel resection for bowel cancer at Royal Derby Teaching Hospital NHS Trust, Derbyshire (n=7). After gaining informed consent, samples of normal colon at least 10cm proximal to any bowel tumour were obtained immediately after resection within the operating theatre. Sections of tissue 2cm x 2cm were removed from the operative sample and transferred on ice to the laboratory within ten minutes, in pre-chilled Eagle's Minimum Essential Medium supplemented with 1% FBS 1% penicillin/streptomycin and 1% non-essential amino acids mixture (Sigma-Aldrich). Once in the laboratory, samples were pinned on Stylgard plates (Living Systems Instrumentation, VT, US) and the mucosa with submucosa was dissected free from the underlying muscularis layer. Mucosal samples were then further dissected into approximately 20 2mm x 2mm sections and placed in individual wells of 24-well polystyrene plates (Corning Incorporated, USA), each containing 1ml of media, treatments with inflammation as described

above (IFN $\gamma$  and TNF $\alpha$  over 24 hours), in the absence or presence of URB597 and JZL184 or vehicle as appropriate in duplicate (DMSO 0.01%), and in the presence of antagonists of CB<sub>1</sub> (AM251) and TRPV1 (SB366791). Samples were incubated for 24 hours at 37°C in 5% CO<sub>2</sub> and 95% humidity. At the end of the 24 hour experimental period media was collected and stored at -80 °C until analysis.

Levels of the cytokine Granulocyte Macrophage-Colony Stimulating Factor (GM-CSF), IL-12, IL-13 and IL-15, IL-1 $\beta$ , IL-10, MCP-1 and MIP1 $\alpha$  were measured from undiluted media using a Multiplex human cytokine assay according to the manufacturer's instructions (Merck Millipore Catalogue No. CYTOMAG-60K) using a Magpix plate reader (MAGPX 11326002, Luminex, Texas US).

## Chemicals

AEA, 2-AG, AM251, AM630, GW9662, GW6471, SB366791 and capsazepine were purchased from Tocris Bioscience (Bristol, UK). JZL184 and URB597 were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Poole, UK). IFN $\gamma$  and TNF $\alpha$  were purchased from Invitrogen (Paisley, UK).

## Statistical analysis

TEER values are stated as the mean  $\pm$  standard error (SEM). Data recorded at each time point and for ELISA and mass spectrometry determinations of molecular concentrations were compared using one-way or two-way ANOVA as indicated. The overall effect over time of each drug was measured using area under the curve (AUC) values. Statistical significance between manipulations and controls were determined by Dunnett's post-hoc test. Significance was set at the 5% level. Differences between experimental groups in human tissue experiments were compared using repeated measures-ANOVA, using post hoc Friedman testing where appropriate. All statistical analysis was performed using GraphPad Prism 7.01 (GraphPad Software Inc, La Jolla, USA).

## Results

### The effect of FAAH and MAGL inhibition on TEER

To determine whether inhibiting the breakdown of AEA and 2-AG had an effect on TEER, URB597 and JZL184 were applied to the apical and basolateral compartments of Caco-2 monolayers. When applied to the apical membrane, URB597 (FAAH inhibitor) decreased Caco-2 monolayer resistance in a concentration-dependent manner, which was significantly different from vehicle at 1, 3 and 10  $\mu$ M concentrations (Figure 1A). AUC analysis of the 48hr time course showed the effect of URB597 at the apical membrane was only inhibited by the CB<sub>1</sub> receptor antagonist AM251 (Figure 1B). At the basolateral membrane, inhibition of FAAH activity with URB597 also caused a fall in TEER in a concentration-dependent fashion, significantly different from vehicle at 1, 3 and 10  $\mu$ M concentration after 30 minutes of incubation and 300nM after 2hr of incubation (Figure 1C), and this effect was inhibited by CB<sub>1</sub> antagonist AM251, and the TRPV1 receptor antagonist capsazepine (Figure 1D).

Apical application of the MAGL inhibitor JZL184 caused a decrease in TEER in a concentration-dependent manner, which was significantly different to vehicle at 300nM, 1  $\mu$ M, 3  $\mu$ M and 10  $\mu$ M concentrations (Figure 2A). This effect was only inhibited by the CB<sub>1</sub> antagonist AM251 (Figure 2B). In contrast, application of JZL184 to the basolateral membrane increased TEER in a concentration-dependent manner after 2 hours (Figure 2C), again inhibited by AM251 (Figure 2D).

### Effects of basolateral application of AEA and 2-AG on TEER

We have previously reported that apical application of AEA and 2-AG to Caco-2 monolayers decrease TEER but basolateral application was not examined previously (16). Based on the findings that basolateral application of JZL194 increased TEER, we examined the effects of basolateral application of AEA or 2-AG on TEER and found that 2-AG (10  $\mu$ M), but not AEA, increased TEER when applied to the basolateral membrane which was significantly different from vehicle after 2 hours (Figure 2E).

## **Effects of FAAH and MAGL inhibition on hyper-permeability induced by cytokines or hypoxia**

Since increasing cellular endocannabinoid levels with either URB597 or JZL184 increased Caco-2 permeability, we examined the effects of these compounds in times of increased permeability associated with inflammation or hypoxia. As expected, application of inflammatory cytokines to Caco-2 cells decreased TEER (Figure 3A). Application of URB597 (10  $\mu$ M) or JZL184 (10  $\mu$ M) at the apical membrane caused a further decrease in TEER beyond the effect of cytokines alone (Figure 3A). 4h hypoxia also caused a fall in TEER of Caco-2 monolayers with recovery occurring over 68h (Figure 3B). Application of URB597 (10 $\mu$ M) or JZL184 (10 $\mu$ M) at the apical membrane prevented recovery of TEER over the experimental period compared to control. The recovery in TEER was reduced in the presence of both URB597 and JZL184 ( $p<0.05$  for both inhibitors at 72 hours).

## **Effects of FAAH and MAGL inhibition on CB<sub>1</sub>Kd Caco-2 TEER**

To confirm the pharmacological data suggesting that the effects of FAAH and MAGL inhibition on permeability were CB<sub>1</sub>-mediated, we examined these compounds in CB<sub>1</sub>Kd Caco-2 cells. No effects of URB597 or JZL184 (10  $\mu$ M) were found when applied to the apical or basolateral membranes of CB<sub>1</sub>Kd Caco-2 cells (Figure 4A).

## **Effects of cytokine and hypoxia on wild type and CB<sub>1</sub>kd Caco-2 cells**

Because endogenous production of AEA and 2-AG appeared to govern paracellular permeability through CB<sub>1</sub> (Figure 1B, 2B), we sought to find the effect of reducing the CB<sub>1</sub> receptor expression on Caco-2 permeability under inflammatory and hypoxic conditions. Basolateral application of cytokines to both CB<sub>1</sub>Kd and control cells caused a decrease in TEER (Figure 4B). However, the fall in TEER in CB<sub>1</sub>Kd cells was significantly less compared to control cells from 36h to 72h ( $p<0.05$  and 0.01 respectively, Figure 4B). By contrast, oxygen deprivation caused a similar fall in TEER in control and CB<sub>1</sub>Kd cells after 4h, 6h or 8h of hypoxia (Figure 4C). In both CB<sub>1</sub>Kd and control cells, a recovery in TEER occurred after 4h of hypoxia, though not after 6 or 8h periods.

## **Effects of hypoxia and inflammation on the endogenous production of AEA and 2-AG**

Because inflammatory conditions and hypoxia caused a fall in TEER similar to the effect of FAAH and MAGL inhibition in non-inflamed Caco-2 cells, we sought to find the effect of hypoxia and inflammation on the endogenous production of AEA and 2-AG. Neither hypoxia nor inflammatory cytokines had any significant effect on the production of endogenous AEA (Figure 5A), however both conditions caused a significant increase in the production of 2-AG ( $p<0.0001$ , Figure 5 B).

## **Effects of AEA and 2-AG on the production of inflammatory cytokines**

As inflammation, hypoxia, application of AEA or 2-AG, or inhibition of their degradation, caused a fall in TEER in Caco-2 monolayers, we sought to find if AEA or 2-AG have any pro-inflammatory effects after 24 hours of exposure. Externally applied AEA, URB597 and JZL184 caused a decrease in the production of IL-8 compared to vehicle (figure 5C), and AEA, 2-AG, URB597 and JZL184 all caused reduced levels of IL-6 (figure 5D), confirming their previously established anti-inflammatory effects.

## **Effect of URB597 and JZL184 on the production of inflammatory cytokines in human colonic tissue**

We then sought to find the effect of FAAH and MAGL inhibition on the inflammatory response in human colonic tissue, using Multiplex analysis to measure a range of cytokines. Inflammation caused a significant rise in the secretion of GM-CSF, IL13 and IL-15 (all  $p<0.05$ , fig 6 A, C & D) and IL-12 ( $p<0.01$ , fig 6 B), and a non-significant increase in the secretion of IL-1 $\beta$  and MIP-1 $\alpha$  (fig 6 E & F). IFN $\gamma$  and TNF $\alpha$  did not affect the secretion of IL-10 and MCP-1 (data not shown). Both URB957 and JZL184 significantly prevented an increase in secretion of GM-CSF, IL-12, IL-13 and IL-15 in the presence of inflammation. URB597 and JZL184 also prevented the non-significant increase in the secretion of IL-1 $\beta\alpha$  and MIP-1 $\alpha$ . URB597 and JZL184 alone had no effect on any of the measured cytokine levels. The anti-inflammatory effects of URB597 and JZL184 were prevented by the AM251, but not SB366791 (fig 6). Alone, the CB<sub>1</sub> and TRPV1 antagonists did not affect cytokine secretion.

## Discussion

We have previously shown that exogenously applied endocannabinoids increase the permeability of the intestinal epithelium (16, 17). In the present study, we sought to investigate the effects of the endogenously produced endocannabinoids AEA and 2-AG, by inhibiting their degradation, on intestinal permeability under control, inflammatory and hypoxic conditions, and explore the role of CB<sub>1</sub> in modulating gut permeability. Our data show that FAAH and MAGL cause an increase in epithelial permeability through activation of CB<sub>1</sub> at the apical surface in control conditions, or when permeability is increased by inflammation or hypoxia, whilst simultaneously reducing inflammatory cytokine levels in Caco-2 cells. Knockdown of the CB<sub>1</sub> receptor reduced the permeability response to inflammation. In contrast, blocking endocannabinoid degradation under hypoxic conditions reduced the recovery of epithelial resistance. We also found that 2-AG is produced by intestinal epithelial cells in response to inflammation and hypoxia, but not AEA. Finally, we compared the anti-inflammatory effects of FAAH and MAGL inhibition seen in Caco-2 cells to their effect on the inflammatory response in human tissue. We found that FAAH and MAGL inhibition in explant human colonic tissue were anti-inflammatory, and that CB<sub>1</sub> blockade prevented their effects. We suggest that endogenous production of endocannabinoids by intestinal epithelial cells increases permeability and simultaneously prevents inflammation through CB<sub>1</sub>.

We previously reported that apical application of exogenous AEA and 2-AG increased permeability in Caco-2 monolayers and sought to examine in the present study whether upregulation of cellular endocannabinoids by inhibition of their degradation would have a similar effect. In agreement with our previous study we found that inhibition of FAAH and MAGL at the apical membrane causes increased permeability and this effect was inhibited by CB<sub>1</sub> receptor antagonism or knockdown, confirming the role for CB<sub>1</sub> in modulating gut permeability. As URB597 and JZL184 do not activate CB<sub>1</sub> (32, 33), this suggests that accumulation of endogenously produced AEA and 2-AG at the apical epithelial layer increase permeability via CB<sub>1</sub> (16).

Treatment of Caco-2 cells with inflammatory cytokines caused nearly a 20% drop in TEER (increased permeability). Apical treatment with both URB597 or JZL184 caused a further decrease in TEER in addition to the effect of the cytokines, in line with our previous studies in which falls in TEER caused by inflammation were exacerbated by the apical application of AEA and 2-AG (17). Furthermore, hypoxia caused ~35% drop in TEER, with recovery and return to baseline

permeability over 72 hours. As in the inflammatory protocol, treatment with URB597 and JZL184 delayed the recovery of TEER compared to control cells. We therefore hypothesise that endocannabinoids, via CB<sub>1</sub>, play a key role in the development and recovery from permeability increases caused by inflammation. To investigate this hypothesis, we conducted similar permeability experiments with CB<sub>1</sub>Kd cells and found that CB<sub>1</sub>Kd monolayers exposed to inflammatory cytokines do not exhibit as great a decrease in permeability compared to control cells. However, no differences were seen between control and CB<sub>1</sub>Kd cells subjected to hypoxic conditions. This suggests that in the gut, CB<sub>1</sub> is a critical component of the permeability changes seen in inflammation but not hypoxia.

Interestingly we have found that basolateral FAAH inhibition increased permeability and this was inhibited by antagonism of both CB<sub>1</sub> and TRPV1. However, in the presence of CB<sub>1</sub> knockdown, FAAH inhibition had no effect on permeability, i.e. no contribution of TRPV1 remained after CB<sub>1</sub> knockdown. This suggests that at the basolateral layer the ability for TRPV1 to modulate permeability is dependent on the presence and activation of CB<sub>1</sub>. This may be because AEA agonism of CB<sub>1</sub> causes positive allosteric modulation of the TRPV1 receptor. Alternatively, stimulation of CB<sub>1</sub> may cause accumulation of a second ligand, which may occupy or positively modulate TRPV1. Supporting this, it has been shown that CB<sub>1</sub> activation increases the secretion of palmitoylethanolamide (PEA), which then may cause a conformational change in the TRPV1 receptor, greatly increasing its affinity for AEA (34, 35). This “entourage effect” has been seen in the endocannabinoid system, though has not yet been fully defined (34, 36).

Another finding within this study is that JZL184 caused increased permeability at the apical layer, but decreased permeability at the basolateral layer. Both effects were prevented by CB<sub>1</sub> antagonism with AM251. We also confirmed that exogenous application of 2-AG (but not AEA) decreased permeability at the basolateral membrane. Not only is it interesting that 2-AG has differential effects on permeability at each membrane, but also that activation of the same basolateral CB<sub>1</sub> receptors with AEA caused an increase in permeability, the opposite effect. The latter observation may be explained by structural differences between AEA and 2-AG at the CB<sub>1</sub> binding site, as it has previously been observed that 2-AG can produce greater differences in intracellular [Ca<sup>2+</sup>] (37–39). It is conceivable therefore, that differential permeability effects at the same receptor sites are due receptor bias at CB<sub>1</sub>, in addition to the effects of TRPV1 co-dependency described above. What

is yet to be determined is the physiological mechanism that causes opposing permeability effects at different sides of the epithelium with the same ligand.

Hypoxia and inflammation in this study both caused an increase in the production of intracellular or secreted 2-AG. This supports previous suggestions that increased of endocannabinoids in human intestinal tissue acting at CB<sub>1</sub> can lead to alterations in gastrointestinal permeability and have an anti-inflammatory in response to an inflammatory stimulus (40). For example in samples from patients with Ulcerative Colitis, Crohn's disease and Coeliac disease, all diseases of inflammation and increased permeability, levels of AEA or 2-AG have been found to be raised (26, 41, 42). Furthermore, inflammatory bowel disease patients with the highest disease scores were found to have the highest gut AEA concentrations (43). This suggests that there may be an association between high levels of AEA and 2-AG, acting at the CB<sub>1</sub> receptor in response to an inflammatory stimulus, leading to increased gut permeability and its secondary consequences such as translocation of bacterial and lipopolysaccharide, but also simultaneously decreasing the inflammatory response.

We found that AEA and 2-AG, or inhibition of their catabolism, exert an anti-inflammatory effect on Caco-2 epithelial cells manifesting as a reduction in IL-6 and IL-8 secretion. To support these findings we repeated parallel experiments in explant human colonic tissue and found for the first time that inhibition of FAAH and MAGL had significant anti-inflammatory effects. We found these effects were blocked by antagonism of the CB<sub>1</sub> receptor. Coupled with our permeability findings in the Caco-2 cells, we hypothesise that the permeability-enhancing effects of AEA and 2-AG are therefore likely to be distinct from their anti-inflammatory role. In support of the anti-inflammatory effect of CB<sub>1</sub> agonism, CB<sub>1</sub> deficient mice are more susceptible to experimental colitis (44) and administration of AEA or FAAH to mice with TNBS-induced colitis decreases the inflammatory response (23, 27). Additionally, studies in explant human tissue treated with pro-inflammatory cytokines have shown that AEA appears to prevent inflammation of the epithelium measured by macro and microscopic colitis scores, and levels of matrix metalloproteinase activity (45, 46). The effect of 2-AG in human colonic tissue has not yet been reported. This is the first study to report the anti-inflammatory effect of endogenously enhanced AEA and 2-AG concentrations in human colonic tissue. AEA and 2-AG therefore are likely to have dual roles as anti-inflammatory and pro-permeability agents. As the CB<sub>1</sub> receptor may be a target for treating diseases such as Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's disease further work must focus on how these two agents cause their effects

downstream from receptor activation. Additionally we investigated for a role for TRPV1, as seen in basolateral Caco-2 cells, but found that its blockade did not affect the inflammatory response.

In conclusion we have shown in a Caco-2 model of intestinal permeability that endogenous production of AEA and 2-AG increases the permeability of epithelial monolayers, both in health and disease states, despite simultaneously producing anti-inflammatory effects both in cell culture and explant human tissue. However, our data also showed that 2-AG has opposite effects on permeability at the apical and basolateral membranes, and that AEA and 2-AG activation of CB<sub>1</sub> receptors at the basolateral membrane have opposite effects on permeability. 2-AG is upregulated by inflammation and hypoxia in this model. This complex pharmacology suggests further studies are required to fully understand the role of the endocannabinoid system in modulating gut permeability, and that pharmacological manipulation may lead to effective new therapeutic approaches to serious intestinal diseases.

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Drafting or revision of the manuscript; all

Approval of the final version of the manuscript: all

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## Figure Legends

### **Figure 1. Increasing anandamide concentrations (using URB597) increases Caco-2 permeability via CB1.**

The effects of URB597 applied apically (A) or basolaterally (C). Integrated response over time (area under curve) on the effects of URB597 in the presence of various receptor antagonists (B and D), on Caco-2 permeability as measured by TEER. Data are given as means and standard error bars S.E.M (n=3). Concentration response curves were compared by two-way repeated measures ANOVA with Dunnett's post-hoc test comparing against the vehicle response (\*). Integrated response over time (AUC) data were compared using one-way ANOVA with post hoc analysis of selected pairs (\* versus vehicle, † versus URB597 3 $\mu$ M alone; \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\*\*\* p<0.0001, ††††<0.0001).

### **Figure 2. Increasing 2-AG concentrations (using JZL184) modulates Caco-2 permeability via CB1.**

The effects of JZL184 applied apically (A) and basolaterally (C) on Caco-2 permeability as measured by TEER. Integrated response over time (area under curve) on the effects of receptors antagonists on JZL184 apically (B) and basolaterally (D). The effects of basolateral application of AEA and 2-AG on Caco-2 permeability (E). Data are given as means and standard error bars S.E.M. (n=3). Concentration-response curves were compared by two-way repeated measures ANOVA with Dunnett's post-hoc test comparing against the vehicle response (\*). Integrated response over time (AUC) data were compared using one-way ANOVA with post hoc analysis of selected pairs (\* denotes versus vehicle; \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\*\*\* p<0.0001).

### **Figure 3. Increasing AEA or 2-AG causes further increases in permeability after inflammation or hypoxia.**

A. The effect of URB597 and JZL184 applied after 24 hours inflammatory cytokine treatment on Caco-2 permeability as measured by TEER. B. The effect of URB597 and JZL184 after 4 hours of hypoxia on Caco-2 permeability as measured by TEER (B). Data are given as means with error bars

representing SEM ( $n=3$ , \*  $P<0.05$ , \*\*  $P<0.01$  \*\*\*  $P<0.001$ ), comparing between control and experimental data by two-way ANOVA with Dunnett's post-hoc test.

**Figure 4. *CB<sub>1</sub> contributes to increased permeability associated with inflammation but not hypoxia.***

The effect of URB597 and JZL184 (apical and basolateral) in Caco-2 CB<sub>1</sub>kd cells on permeability as measured by TEER (A). The effect of pro-inflammatory cytokines (B) and hypoxia (C) in wild type and CB<sub>1</sub>KO Caco-2 cells on permeability as measured by TEER. Data are given as means with error bars representing SEM (\*  $p<0.05$ , \*\*  $p<0.01$  \*\*\*  $p<0.001$  compared to control, #  $p<0.05$ , ##  $p<0.01$  ## compared to wild type Caco-2 cells). Data were compared by ANOVA with Dunnett's post-hoc test.

**Figure 5. 2-AG is increased by hypoxia and inflammation, and both AEA and 2-AG are anti-inflammatory in Caco-2 cells.**

The effects of hypoxia and inflammation on the endogenous production of AEA (A) and 2-AG (B) in cultured Caco-2 cells determined by LC-MS. The effects of AEA and 2-AG on cytokine production in Caco-2 cells determined by ELISA (C and D respectively). Data are given as means and standard error bars S.E.M, ( $n=6$ , \*  $P<0.05$ , \*\*  $P<0.01$  \*\*\*  $P<0.001$ ), comparing control and experimental data by one-way ANOVA with Dunnett's post-hoc test.

**Figure 6: URB597 and JZL184 are anti-inflammatory in the human colon, acting via CB<sub>1</sub>**

The effects of URB597 and JZL184 on the secretion of GM-CSF (A), IL-12 (B), IL-13 (C) IL-15 (D), MIP-1a (E) & IL-1b (F) in response to an inflammatory protocol in explant human colonic tissue in the presence of antagonists of CB<sub>1</sub> (AM251) and TRPV1 (SB366791), measured by multiplex (compared using repeated measures ANOVA,  $n=7$ ). Data presented as mean +/- SEM per condition. \* represent significant difference from vehicle, \* $<0.05$ , \*\* $<0.01$ , \*\*\* $<0.001$ .