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Stability Indicating RP-HPLC Method Development and Validation of Fostemsavir in Bulk Drug and Marketed Formulation by Implementing a Quality by Design Approach

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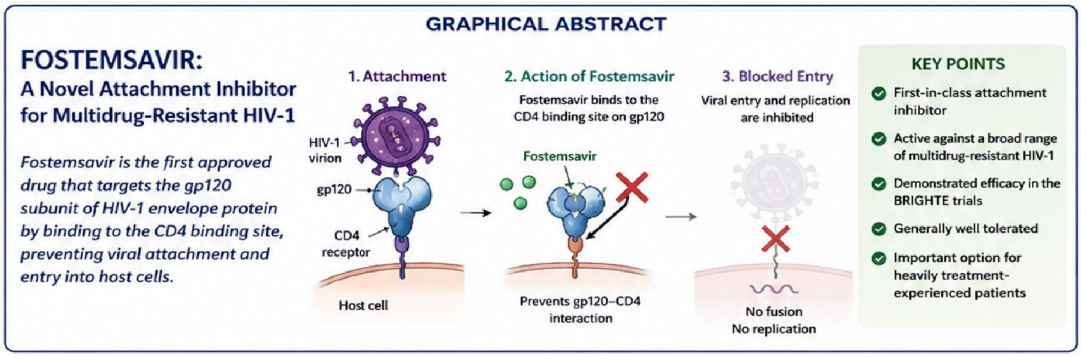
Abstract: *Fostemsavir is a first-in-class HIV-1 attachment inhibitor approved for the treatment of heavily treatment-experienced adults with multidrug-resistant HIV-1 infection. The drug represents a major therapeutic advance for patients with limited antiretroviral options due to resistance, intolerance, or treatment failure. Fostemsavir is a prodrug of temsavir, which binds directly to the gp120 subunit of the HIV envelope glycoprotein and prevents viral attachment to CD4+ T lymphocytes. This review critically analyzes previously published review articles, clinical trials, and pharmacological studies related to fostemsavir. The paper summarizes its mechanism of action, pharmacokinetics, pharmacodynamics, clinical efficacy, resistance patterns, drug–drug interactions, safety profile, and emerging future applications. Evidence from the BRIGHTE trial demonstrated sustained virologic suppression and immunologic improvement in heavily treatment-experienced individuals receiving fostemsavir-based therapy. Despite its promising efficacy, resistance-associated mutations within gp120 remain a clinical concern. Fostemsavir is generally well tolerated, with gastrointestinal disturbances, headache, and hepatic abnormalities among the most commonly reported adverse effects. Current evidence supports fostemsavir as a valuable therapeutic option for multidrug-resistant HIV infection, particularly in patients with limited alternatives. Future studies focusing on pediatric populations, pregnancy, long-term resistance surveillance, and combination regimens may further define its place in HIV therapy.*



Keywords: Fostemsavir, HIV-1, attachment inhibitor, temsavir, multidrug resistance, antiretroviral therapy, gp120

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I. INTRODUCTION

Human immunodeficiency virus type 1 (HIV-1) remains a major global public health challenge despite significant advances in antiretroviral therapy (ART) [1]. Combination ART has transformed HIV infection into a manageable chronic disease; however, treatment failure due to drug resistance, toxicity, poor adherence, and long-term exposure to antiretroviral agents continues to affect heavily treatment-experienced patients [2]. The emergence of multidrug-resistant HIV strains has created an urgent need for novel therapeutic agents with unique mechanisms of action [3].

Fostemsavir is a novel attachment inhibitor developed specifically for heavily treatment-experienced individuals with multidrug-resistant HIV-1 infection [4]. It was approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2020 under the brand name Rukobia [5]. Unlike conventional antiretroviral agents that target viral replication after cellular entry, fostemsavir prevents viral attachment at the earliest stage of infection by binding directly to the gp120 envelope glycoprotein [6].

Several major review articles have contributed to the current understanding of fostemsavir. Early reviews by Cahn et al. (2018) described fostemsavir as a promising attachment inhibitor with activity against multidrug-resistant HIV strains [10]. These authors emphasized the novelty of its mechanism and its lack of cross-resistance with existing antiretroviral classes.

Subsequent reviews by Hiryak and Koren (2020) and Chahine (2021) focused extensively on pharmacology, clinical trial evidence, and its therapeutic role in heavily treatment-experienced individuals [7,11]. These reviews highlighted the significance of the phase III BRIGHTE study and discussed the favorable efficacy and safety profile of fostemsavir. However, resistance data were still limited at that time.

Berruti et al. (2021) evaluated fostemsavir as a therapeutic option in HIV management and stressed its clinical value in salvage therapy [12]. Their review also discussed patient adherence and quality-of-life considerations associated with oral twice-daily administration.

A more detailed pharmacological review by Muccini et al. (2022) analyzed efficacy, tolerability, and place in therapy [13]. The authors concluded that fostemsavir filled an important gap in heavily treatment-experienced patients with few remaining treatment options.

The comprehensive review by Heidary et al. (2024) expanded previous knowledge by discussing pharmacokinetics, pharmacodynamics, resistance mechanisms, drug interactions, and safety in greater detail [4]. This review integrated evidence from multiple clinical trials and post-marketing data.

Most recently, Schapiro et al. (2025) specifically analyzed resistance-associated polymorphisms and the clinical significance of gp120 mutations [8]. Their review provided important insights into viral susceptibility and mechanisms of reduced temsavir activity. [18]

Collectively, these published reviews demonstrate a progressive evolution in understanding fostemsavir. Earlier reviews focused on drug approval and initial efficacy, whereas newer reviews increasingly emphasize resistance surveillance, long-term safety, and clinical optimization. [19]

This review critically analyzes the currently available literature on fostemsavir, with emphasis on pharmacology, mechanism of action, clinical efficacy, resistance mechanisms, drug interactions, safety profile, and future therapeutic directions. [20]

1. Pharmacology and Mechanism of Action

Fostemsavir is a phosphonooxymethyl prodrug of temsavir, the active antiviral compound [21]. After oral administration, intestinal alkaline phosphatases rapidly hydrolyze fostemsavir into temsavir, which subsequently exerts antiviral activity [22].

Temsavir selectively binds to the HIV-1 envelope glycoprotein gp120 near the CD4 binding site [23]. This interaction stabilizes gp120 in a closed conformation and prevents attachment of the virus to host CD4+ T cells [24]. As a result, viral entry into host cells is inhibited at the earliest stage of the viral replication cycle.

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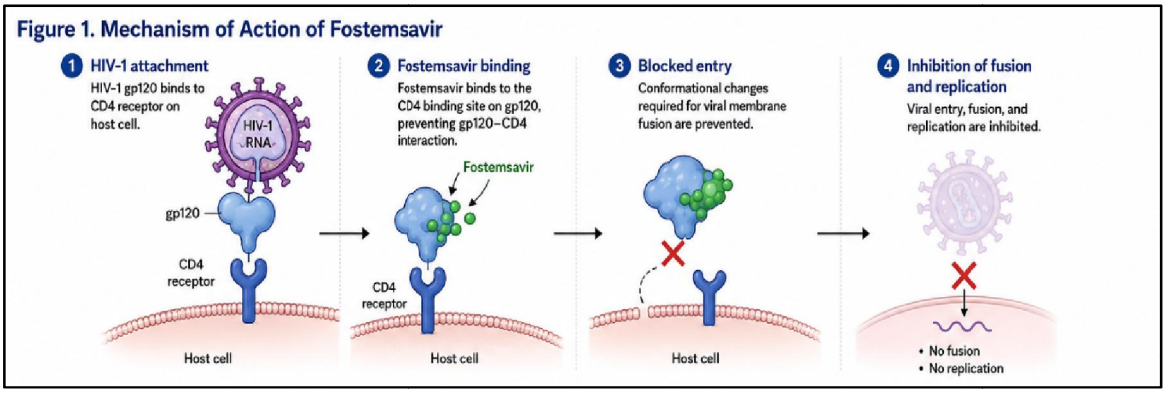

Unlike CCR5 antagonists or fusion inhibitors, fostemsavir acts independently of viral tropism [26]. This feature broadens its activity against both CCR5-tropic and CXCR4-tropic HIV strains.

Studies have shown that temsavir possesses broad antiviral activity against diverse HIV-1 subtypes, including multidrug-resistant isolates [25]. Importantly, there is minimal cross-resistance between fostemsavir and currently approved antiretroviral classes such as integrase inhibitors, protease inhibitors, and reverse transcriptase inhibitors [27].

Medicinal chemistry investigations revealed that structural optimization of temsavir improved oral bioavailability and antiviral potency [28]. The development of the prodrug fostemsavir addressed the low solubility limitations associated with earlier attachment inhibitor compounds.

2. Pharmacokinetics and Pharmacodynamics

Fostemsavir is administered orally as an extended-release formulation, typically at a dose of 600 mg twice daily [29]. Following administration, the drug is converted to temsavir through alkaline phosphatase-mediated hydrolysis [30].

Temsavir reaches peak plasma concentrations approximately two hours after administration [31]. The drug demonstrates moderate protein binding and a terminal elimination half-life that supports twice-daily dosing [32].

Metabolism primarily occurs through esterase-mediated hydrolysis and cytochrome P450 3A4 (CYP3A4)-mediated oxidation [33]. Consequently, strong CYP3A inducers such as rifampin, carbamazepine, phenytoin, and St. John's wort significantly reduce temsavir concentrations and are contraindicated [34].

Interestingly, gastric pH changes do not substantially alter temsavir absorption, allowing coadministration with proton pump inhibitors and H2 receptor antagonists [35]. This characteristic differentiates fostemsavir from several other antiretroviral agents.

Pharmacodynamic studies demonstrated dose-dependent reductions in HIV-1 RNA levels during monotherapy phases [36]. Viral load reductions observed within days of treatment initiation confirmed the rapid antiviral activity of temsavir.

Studies evaluating hepatic and renal impairment showed no clinically significant alterations requiring dose adjustments in mild-to-moderate dysfunction [37]. However, caution remains necessary in severe hepatic disease due to limited clinical data.

III. CLINICAL EFFICACY

3.1 The BRIGHTE Trial

The phase III BRIGHTE trial remains the most important study evaluating fostemsavir in heavily treatment-experienced adults with multidrug-resistant HIV-1 infection [38]. Participants had extensive resistance, intolerance, or contraindications to multiple antiretroviral classes.

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The trial included a randomized cohort and a non-randomized cohort. In the randomized cohort, participants received either fostemsavir or placebo in addition to failing therapy for eight days, followed by optimized background therapy with open-label fostemsavir [39].

Results demonstrated significant viral load reductions in the fostemsavir group compared with placebo during the initial eight-day period [40]. Long-term follow-up revealed sustained virologic suppression and substantial increases in CD4+ T-cell counts.

At 96 weeks, many participants achieved HIV-1 RNA levels below 40 copies/mL despite extensive prior treatment failure [41]. Immunologic recovery was also significant, supporting the long-term effectiveness of fostemsavir-based regimens.

3.2 Comparative Efficacy

Indirect comparative analyses suggested that fostemsavir provides efficacy comparable or superior to other available salvage therapies for heavily treatment-experienced patients [42]. The drug demonstrated meaningful clinical benefits even among individuals with advanced immunosuppression.

The efficacy of fostemsavir appears strongest when combined with at least one additional fully active antiretroviral agent [43]. Combination therapy remains essential to reduce the risk of virologic failure and resistance emergence.

3.3 Role in Salvage Therapy

Fostemsavir has become an important component of salvage therapy regimens for heavily treatment-experienced individuals [44]. Clinical guidelines increasingly recommend its use when constructing optimized regimens for patients with limited treatment options.

The oral administration route and unique mechanism of action provide additional advantages compared with injectable salvage therapies such as ibalizumab [45].

Table 1: Clinical Trials Evaluating Fostemsavir

Study / Trial	Phase	Study Population	Treatment Regimen	Duration	Primary Endpoint	Key Findings	Clinical Significance
AI438011	Phase IIb	Treatment-experienced HIV-1 patients	Fostemsavir + optimized background therapy (OBT)	24–48 weeks	Reduction in HIV-1 RNA	Significant dose-dependent viral load reduction observed	Supported further clinical development of fostemsavir
AI438006	Phase IIa	HIV-1 infected adults	Temsavir monotherapy	Short-term	Change in plasma HIV-1 RNA	Rapid antiviral activity demonstrated within days	Confirmed proof-of-concept for attachment inhibition
BRIGHTE Randomized Cohort	Phase III	Heavily treatment-experienced patients with ≥1 active antiretroviral option	Fostemsavir 600 mg BID + OBT	96 weeks	HIV-1 RNA <40 copies/mL	Significant viral suppression and CD4+ improvement	Basis for FDA approval

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BRIGHTE Non-randomized Cohort	Phase III	Patients with no fully active approved antiretroviral options remaining	Fostemsavir + investigational agents + OBT	96 weeks	Virologic response	Clinically meaningful viral suppression despite extensive resistance	Demonstrated efficacy in highly resistant HIV infection
BRIGHTE Extension Study	Long-term extension	Participants continuing BRIGHTE therapy	Continued fostemsavir-based regimen	Up to 240 weeks	Long-term safety and efficacy	Durable virologic suppression with acceptable tolerability	Supported long-term use in salvage therapy
Pharmacokinetic Interaction Studies	Phase I	Healthy volunteers	Fostemsavir with CYP3A modulators	Variable	Drug exposure and safety	Strong CYP3A inducers significantly reduced temsavir exposure	Established contraindications and interaction guidance
Hepatic/Renal Impairment Study	Phase I	Patients with hepatic or renal impairment	Single-dose fostemsavir	Short-term	Pharmacokinetic changes	No major dose adjustment required in mild-to-moderate impairment	Expanded clinical usability

Table 2. Virologic and Immunologic Outcomes in the BRIGHTE Trial

Outcome Parameter	Week 24	Week 48	Week 96
HIV-1 RNA <40 copies/mL	Significant proportion achieved suppression	Sustained suppression observed	Durable suppression maintained
Mean CD4+ T-cell increase	Moderate improvement	Continued increase	Substantial immune recovery
Treatment discontinuation due to adverse events	Low	Low	Acceptable long-term tolerability
Serious adverse events	Limited occurrence	Consistent with advanced HIV population	No major new safety signals

Table 3. Common Resistance-Associated gp120 Mutations Linked to Reduced Temsavir Susceptibility

Mutation	Location in gp120	Effect on Drug Susceptibility	Clinical Relevance
S375H	gp120 attachment pocket	Reduced temsavir binding	Frequently associated with resistance
M426L	gp120 binding region	Decreased susceptibility	Observed during virologic failure
M434I	gp120 envelope region	Reduced antiviral activity	Contributes to resistance development
M475I	gp120 conformational	Impaired drug efficacy	Associated with decreased viral

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	site		susceptibility
T202E	gp120 polymorphic site	Potential reduction in susceptibility	Emerging resistance-associated mutation

Table 4. Common Adverse Effects Reported with Fostemsavir Therapy

Adverse Effect	Frequency	Severity	Clinical Consideration
Nausea	Common	Mild to moderate	Usually manageable without discontinuation
Diarrhea	Common	Mild	Symptomatic management may be required
Headache	Common	Mild	Frequently self-limiting
Abdominal pain	Less common	Mild to moderate	Monitor persistent symptoms
Rash	Occasional	Mild	Rarely requires treatment discontinuation
Elevated liver enzymes	Occasional	Moderate	Increased monitoring in hepatitis coinfection
Insomnia	Occasional	Mild	May affect treatment adherence
Immune reconstitution inflammatory syndrome (IRIS)	Rare	Variable	Observed in severely immunocompromised patients

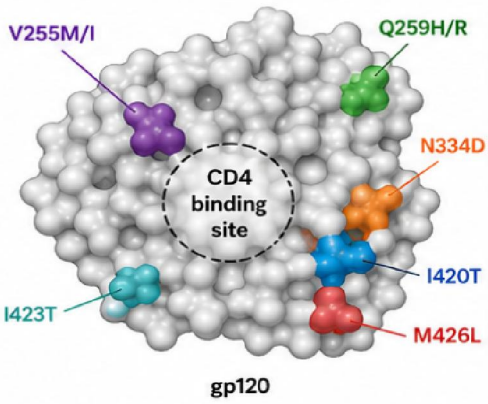
IV. RESISTANCE MECHANISMS

Resistance remains one of the major challenges associated with fostemsavir therapy. Temsavir resistance is primarily associated with mutations in the gp120 envelope glycoprotein [8].

Key resistance-associated substitutions occur at positions S375, M426, M434, and M475 within gp120 [8]. Mutations such as S375H, M426L, M434I, and M475I reduce susceptibility to temsavir by altering the drug-binding pocket.

Recent evidence also identified T202E as a potential resistance-associated substitution [8]. The clinical impact of these mutations varies depending on viral subtype and the presence of additional polymorphisms.

Figure 2. Resistance-Associated gp120 Mutations



Major gp120 Mutations and Their Impact

Mutation	Location (gp120)	Impact
V255M/I	Outer domain	Reduces fostemsavir binding
Q259H/R	Outer domain	Decreases susceptibility
N334D	Outer domain	Accessory resistance
I420T	Bridging sheet	Decreases susceptibility
I423T	Bridging sheet	Decreases susceptibility
M426L	Bridging sheet	Decreases susceptibility

Note: Mutations often occur in combination and may affect viral fitness.

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Importantly, naturally occurring polymorphisms associated with reduced susceptibility are relatively uncommon among circulating HIV-1 group M strains [8]. Nevertheless, certain subtypes may exhibit baseline variability in susceptibility.

Clinical resistance typically emerges during virologic failure, especially when fostemsavir is combined with insufficiently active background therapy [4]. Therefore, resistance testing and careful regimen optimization are essential before treatment initiation.

Despite these concerns, cross-resistance between fostemsavir and other antiretroviral classes remains limited [10]. This property supports its utility in patients with extensive multidrug resistance.

V. DRUG–DRUG INTERACTIONS

Drug–drug interactions are clinically important because heavily treatment-experienced patients frequently receive multiple concomitant medications [4].

Strong CYP3A inducers substantially decrease temsavir plasma concentrations and should not be coadministered [11]. Contraindicated medications include rifampin, carbamazepine, phenytoin, mitotane, and enzalutamide [43].

Temsavir may also increase concentrations of certain coadministered drugs through inhibition of transport proteins such as OATP1B1 and breast cancer resistance protein (BCRP) [44]. Careful monitoring is necessary when combining fostemsavir with statins or other substrates of these transporters.

Unlike some protease inhibitors, fostemsavir demonstrates relatively manageable interaction profiles with acid-suppressing agents [45]. This improves treatment flexibility in patients with gastrointestinal comorbidities.

Caution is advised when combining fostemsavir with medications that prolong the QT interval because supratherapeutic temsavir concentrations may increase QT prolongation risk [46].

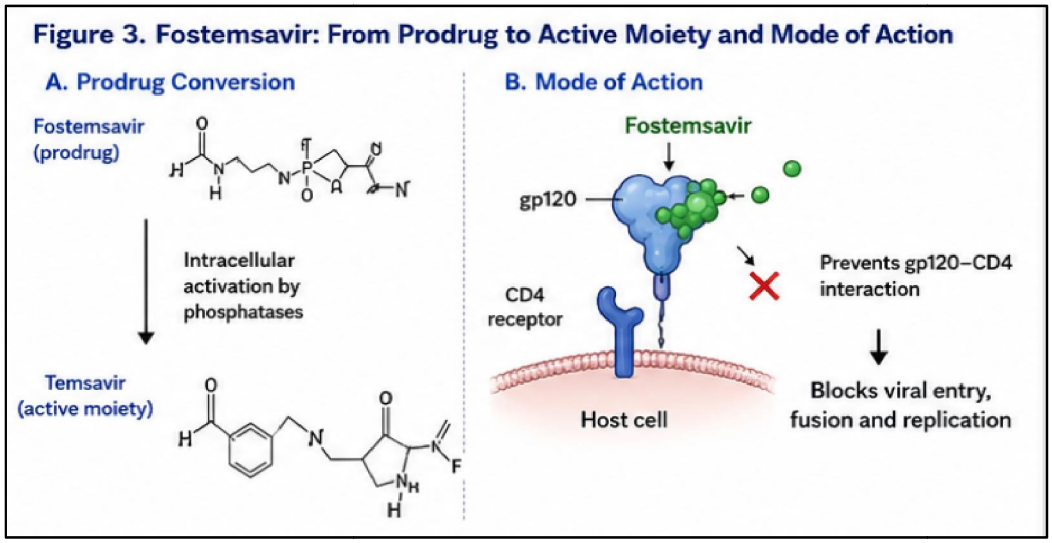
Overall, the interaction profile of fostemsavir is considered manageable when clinicians carefully review concomitant medications.

VI. SAFETY AND TOLERABILITY

Clinical trials and post-marketing studies suggest that fostemsavir is generally well tolerated [4]. The most commonly reported adverse effects include nausea, diarrhea, headache, abdominal pain, fatigue, rash, and insomnia [47].

Most adverse events are mild to moderate in severity and rarely lead to treatment discontinuation [48]. Gastrointestinal symptoms appear to be the most frequent treatment-related complaints.

Hepatic abnormalities have been observed, particularly among patients coinfected with hepatitis B or hepatitis C viruses [49]. Liver function monitoring is therefore recommended during therapy.



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Immune reconstitution inflammatory syndrome (IRIS) has occasionally been reported following initiation of fostemsavir-containing regimens, especially in severely immunocompromised patients [50].

Cardiac safety studies demonstrated that therapeutic doses of fostemsavir do not significantly prolong the QT interval [51]. However, caution is warranted at supratherapeutic exposures.

Long-term safety data from the BRIGHTE trial showed acceptable tolerability over extended follow-up periods [52]. Importantly, the benefits of viral suppression and immune recovery generally outweighed the risks associated with adverse events.

VII. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although fostemsavir has already established an important role in multidrug-resistant HIV treatment, several future research areas remain important.

First, additional studies are needed to evaluate fostemsavir in pediatric populations, pregnant women, and elderly patients [4]. Current data in these groups remain limited.

Second, long-term resistance surveillance is necessary to monitor the emergence of gp120 mutations and evolving viral susceptibility patterns [8]. Expanded global surveillance programs may improve understanding of subtype-specific resistance.

Third, researchers are exploring novel combination regimens incorporating fostemsavir with long-acting antiretroviral agents [13]. Such approaches may improve adherence and treatment durability.

Fourth, future investigations may evaluate whether attachment inhibition could have broader applications beyond salvage therapy, including earlier treatment lines or prevention strategies.

Finally, ongoing phase IV and post-marketing studies will provide additional information regarding long-term safety, effectiveness, and real-world clinical outcomes [4].

VIII. CONCLUSION

Fostemsavir represents a major advancement in the management of heavily treatment-experienced individuals with multidrug-resistant HIV-1 infection. Its unique mechanism of action as an attachment inhibitor provides an important therapeutic option for patients with limited alternatives.

Evidence from clinical trials and published reviews demonstrates that fostemsavir achieves meaningful viral suppression and immune recovery while maintaining an acceptable safety profile. The BRIGHTE trial confirmed its long-term efficacy in highly treatment-experienced populations.

Resistance-associated gp120 mutations remain an important concern; however, the overall prevalence of clinically significant resistance polymorphisms appears relatively low. Careful patient selection, resistance testing, and optimized background therapy remain critical for treatment success.

Current literature supports fostemsavir as a valuable component of salvage therapy regimens. Future studies focusing on long-term resistance monitoring, special populations, and innovative combination strategies will further clarify its role in modern HIV management.

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