

# We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

6,900

Open access books available

186,000

International authors and editors

200M

Downloads

Our authors are among the

154

Countries delivered to

TOP 1%

most cited scientists

12.2%

Contributors from top 500 universities



WEB OF SCIENCE™

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index  
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?  
Contact [book.department@intechopen.com](mailto:book.department@intechopen.com)

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.  
For more information visit [www.intechopen.com](http://www.intechopen.com)



---

## **Endophytic Fungi as Alternative and Reliable Sources for Potent Anticancer Agents**

---

Edwin O. Omeje, Joy E. Ahomafor,  
Theophilus U. Onyekaba, Philip O. Monioro,  
Ibekwe Nneka, Sunday Onyeloni,  
Charles Chime and Jonathan C. Eboka

Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/67797>

---

### **Abstract**

In comparison with other natural sources like plants, highly diverse microorganisms are narrowly explored, especially with respect to their limitless potentials as repositories of exceptionally bioactive natural products. Of these organisms, fungi inhabiting tissues of plant in a noninvasive relationship (endophytic fungi) have proven undeniably useful and unmatched as sources of potent bioactive molecules against several diseases such as cancer and related ailments. In general terms, endophytic fungi are highly prevalent organisms found in the tissue (intracellular or intercellular) of plants and at least for reasonable portion of their lives. It has been proven that virtually every plant, irrespective of habitat and climate, plays host to wide varieties of endophytes. Endophytic fungi produce metabolites produced by different biosynthetic pathways to that of the host plant, and this robustness equips them to synthesize unlimited structural entities and scaffolds of diverse classes. Interestingly too, the cohabitation/culture of these fungi with certain bacteria offers even stronger hopes for anticancer drug discovery. The endless need for potent drugs has necessitated the search of bioactive molecules from several sources, and endophytic fungi appear to be a recipe. This chapter is an attempt to present the current trend of research with these very promising organisms.

**Keywords:** microorganism, plants, sources, endophytes, fungi, anticancer, drug discovery

---

## 1. Introduction: the emergence of interest in endophytic fungi as sources of bioactive metabolites

Despite the fact that plant natural products (secondary metabolites) have been recognized as the most successful source of potential drug leads [1, 2], their recent implementation in drug discovery and development efforts have somewhat demonstrated a decline in interest [1]. Consequently, the need for new compounds to provide mitigation and relief in diverse human clinical conditions is ever-growing. In addition, the challenges of bacterial drug resistance, the emergence of highly virulent viruses and bacteria with organ transplant-associated complications demand very drastic drug discovery approaches in order to address them [3]. From the earliest times, when man directly tested plant materials for their potentials as medicines or foods to today when structured research approach has led to advancements in the discovery of bioactive natural product, it is evident that so much has been achieved in terms of the number of such agents that have great clinical importance. Notwithstanding, less than 10% of the world's biodiversity has been evaluated for potential biological activity, and therefore, many more useful natural lead compounds await discovery with the challenge being how to access this natural chemical diversity [4]. The search for bioactive natural products with potentials of addressing these identified challenges is as old as man's existence and has always relied heavily on the study of whole plant tissues (morphological parts) such as the roots (bark and inner tissues), leaves, stem (bark and inner tissues) and animal sources [5]. Unfortunately, the use of whole plant or animal tissues for the isolation of bioactive natural products has not been without its serious challenges. Fundamentally, the process leads to destruction of whole plant over time as the tissues are repeatedly collected without replenishment; most times, the existence of these plant species becomes threatened (**endangered**) and they are even lost after some years. Closely associated with this remarkable challenge are the problems of environmental degradation, land spoilage and the usually limited yield of the identified bioactive natural products. Secondly, the use of whole plant tissues in search of bioactive natural products has comparatively witnessed great wastage of research resources as a result of dereplication. Dereplication, which describes the process of fastly identifying or re-isolating already established biomolecules, is not only time and resources wasting but also discourages research zeal and excitement (reduction in interest). As at today, the probability of finding a novel bioactive molecule or chemical scaffold from whole tissues has further reduced because of dereplication. There are usually cross-family interactions among plant species in different biotopes complicated by most times poorly identified plant species, and as such, dereplication becomes a common challenge. Besides, the plant material has fixed biogenetic pathways which are tightly controlled by nature to produce predetermined secondary metabolites. As such and apart from the herculean plant tissue technology, man has little or no control over what a natural plant material produces as secondary metabolites. These identified problems led to loss of popularity in the natural product research efforts and, consequently, the development of combinatorial chemistry. Despite the great chemistry and huge investments witnessed in this era, not much breakthroughs have been recorded and, besides, combinatorial chemistry should act as a compliment to the natural product chemistry [6]. At this point, there arose a dire need for paradigm shift in the search for bioactive natural products. Accordingly,

over a decade ago and based on accumulated successful drug discovery story, it appeared that the search for novel secondary metabolites should be refocused and research efforts consequently centered on the organisms that inhabit unique biotopes [1]. Of these organisms, endophytes were quickly recognized as veritable sources of novel bioactive natural products. Endophytes have been viewed as outstanding sources of novel products because there are so many of them occupying literally millions of unique biological niches (higher plant) growing in so many unusual environments. In all these, the endophytic fungi have been shown to be exceptionally useful in the drug discovery process, especially in the western world. An intensive literature search revealed that endophytic populations of the plants in rain forests of the African continent have not been significantly explored. Regrettably, sketchy research data have largely been documented on few usually unharnessed and abridged studies with whole plant tissues. This apparent low interest in researches with microbes as sources of antimetabolites is much more worrisome in trans-Saharan Africa. The reasons are not farfetched, mainly owed to weak infrastructural framework and systems. In Nigeria, for example, which is the acclaimed most populous black nation in Africa (approximately 160 million people—2006 National Population Census data), there are large rainforest zones in strategic locations of the country. Unfortunately, despite this robust biodiversity in Nigeria, bioprospecting for active molecules from these interesting microbes has remained largely unharnessed, and even the few research efforts have relied heavily on the direct plant tissues, with little work on the potentialities of fungal endophytes as veritable sources of novel bioactive compounds. This is a serious aberration and a major affront against any meaningful drug discovery effort of not only in Nigeria but also in several other African Countries. Consequently, there is need to awaken and boost research interest in the use of these specialized microbes (endophytes) for the discovery of potent bioactive molecules against the ever-increasing disease burden globally. In addition, given the rapidly increasing population of Nigeria and accompanying demand for drugs, it is critically important to identify and develop renewable sources of pharmaceuticals and their precursors. It is in line with this thought that we proposed this book chapter on endophytes as alternative and reliable sources of potent anticancer agents. It is our modest expectation that, through concerted research efforts in this promising area of drug discovery process, several strongly potent and safe molecules will be identified, isolated, assayed, characterized and hopefully progress into the several stages of clinical trial program as potential part of the armamentarium against cancer and associated conditions.

## 2. Endophytic fungi and search for active metabolites

The use of microbial biotopes as reliable sources of bioactive natural products has received significant attention so far [7, 8]. Current available data reveal that more than 40% of novel potent bioactive molecules obtained in a period of nearly two and half decades and half were microorganism-derived. Furthermore, over 60% of the anticancer and 70% of the antimicrobial drugs currently in clinical use are natural products or natural product derivatives. This is not surprising in the light of their evolution over millions of years in diverse ecological niches and natural habitats. The avalanche of microbial diversity with exciting metabolic complexes

in plant tissues has been established in the last two decades and is continuing [8]. It is expedient to emphasize that the discovery of an endophytic fungus, from *Taxus brevifolia*, which produces highly selling anticancer agent called *taxol*, precipitated a surge in interest to researches with endophytes [9]. Accordingly, about a decade ago, it appeared that the search for novel secondary metabolites should be refocused and research efforts consequently centered on the organisms that inhabit unique biotopes [1]. Of these organisms, endophytes were recognized as veritable sources of novel bioactive natural products. Endophytes have been viewed as outstanding sources of novel products because there are so many of them occupying literally millions of unique biological niches (higher plant) growing in so many unusual environment. One very interesting feature of the endophytic fungi is that they are renewable, readily available and environmentally friendly sources of biologically active natural products. An intensive literature search revealed that endophytic populations of the plant in rain forests of the African continent have not been studied apart from few unharnessed studies with whole plant tissues. Despite this ugly and unacceptable picture, it is heartening to note that this trend is gradually changing as current research scholars of African origin, especially those from Nigeria and Cameroun with thrust in natural product chemistry focus more on endophytic fungi nowadays as compared to the use of whole plant tissues. In summary, the inadequacy of systematic exploitation of ecosystems for the discovery of novel microbial compounds had resulted in random sampling and has missed the true potential of many regions [10]. Numerous bioactive molecules have been isolated from endophytic fungi since this ground-breaking discovery [11–13]. It is known that these endophytic fungi are embedded within plant for a substantial part of their life cycle and, as well earlier stated, they are devoid of any established potential to cause diseases in the host [14, 15]. This attribute makes this class of microbes a unique resource base for the discovery and development of potent anticancer molecules without having to destroy whole plant tissues. Additionally, they have been found to be more active when compared to other types of fungi somewhat existing outside the host in terms of metabolic virility [6, 16]. It was previously thought that metabolic products are transferred between host plant and the endophyte, the theory of horizontal transfer from the host plant to its microbial symbiont [9, 11, 17, 18]. This belief has been disproved following the successful sequencing of the *taxadiene synthase* gene from the *taxol*-producing endophyte which established that the metabolic pathways of both the hosts and the endophytes are independent of each other. The implication of this is that there are ample opportunities available for the manipulation of the endophyte biosynthetic pathways [19] to yield wide varieties of molecules and scaffolds for drug discovery process. ‘Endophytism’ is, thus, a unique cost–benefit plant microbe association defined by ‘location’ (not ‘function’) that is transiently symptomless, unobstructive, and established entirely inside the living host plant tissues [20, 21]. Evidence of plant-associated microorganisms found in the fossilized tissues has revealed that endophyte-plant associations may have evolved from the time higher plants first appeared on the earth surface [22]. The existence of fungi inside the organs of asymptomatic plants has been known since the end of the nineteenth century [23], and the term, ‘endophyte’ was first proposed in 1866 [24]. Since their discovery and description, they have been isolated from various organs of different plant species, from aboveground tissues of liverworts, hornworts, mosses, lycophytes, equisetopsides, ferns and spermatophytes from the tropics to the arctic, and from the wild to agricultural ecosystems [25]. Interestingly, all plant species studied till date have been found



to harbor at least one endophyte. The most frequently encountered endophytes are fungi or bacteria (including actinomycetes), but future projections suggest that there could be revelation of nonendophytic microorganisms [3]. Endophytic fungi are a very diverse polyphyletic group of microorganisms; they can thrive asymptotically in the tissues of plants aboveground as well as belowground, including stems, leaves and/or roots [26]. Many endophytes have the potential to synthesize various bioactive metabolites that may directly or indirectly be used as therapeutic agents against numerous diseases [3, 19, 21, 27–29]. Occasionally and usually hitting major buck, endophytes that produce host plant secondary metabolites with therapeutic value or potentials have been discovered; some examples include paclitaxel (also known as taxol) [9] and podophyllotoxin [17, 30]. The production of bioactive compounds by endophytes, especially those exclusive to their host plant, is not only important from an ecological perspective but also from a biochemical and molecular standpoint. In contrast to the direct bioprospecting with known medicinal plants (the common problem being that of dereplication), exciting possibilities exist for exploiting endophytic fungi for the production of a plethora of known and novel biologically active secondary metabolites. The potential of microorganisms is further limited by the presence of orphan biosynthetic pathways that remain unexpressed under general laboratory conditions [31]. However, the vast choice of techniques pertaining to the growth and manipulation of microorganisms such as media engineering, coculture, chemical induction, epigenetic modulation and metabolite remodeling, coupled with the fermentation technology for scale-up, make them suitable for production of useful natural products, both known and novel [16]. Of the myriads of ecosystems on earth, those having the greatest biodiversity seem to be ones also having endophytes with the greatest number and the most biodiverse microorganisms. Tropical and temperate rain forests are the most biologically diverse terrestrial ecosystems on earth. As such, one would expect that areas of high plant endemism also possess specific endophytes that may have evolved with the endemic plant species. Ultimately, biological biodiversity implies chemical biodiversity because of constant chemical innovation that exists in ecosystems where the evolutionary race to survive is most active. Comparatively, tropical rainforests are a remarkable example of this type of environment because competition is great; resources are limited, and selection pressure is at its peak. This gives rise to a high probability that rainforests are excellent source of novel molecular structures and biologically active compounds [32]. Early researches in endophyte bioprospecting showed that a significantly higher number of tropical endophytes produced a larger number of active secondary metabolites than did fungi from temperate endophytes or other tropical substrata [33].

### **3. Isolation process and characterization of bioactive metabolites from endophytic fungi**

The choice of plants for the explorative study of endophytes in search of potent bioactive molecules is a very crucial issue that requires the right information. Since the biochemical pathways of both endophytes and their host are strongly correlated, it is expedient that medicinally useful plants in different cultures are selected for bioprospecting of endophytes. The isolation of

endophytic fungi is carried out using the most probable morphological part of the properly identified and document host plant, most times the leaves. The wholesome leaves of the selected plant are collected in sterile plastic bags from designated area with the aid of the geographic position system (GPS) and stored at refrigeration temperature (4°C) in preparation for the isolation of endophytic fungi. There are times during which samples might have to be transported over long distances, and it is required that contingent transport and sterile cold chain arrangements should be made to ensure the integrity of the plant part on arrival. In all the processes, it is required that strict sterility is maintained so as to ensure that no external organisms are introduced as contaminants to the culture. The following procedures are then followed:

- (i) The leaves or any other morphological part of interest is washed under flowing tap water for a minimum time of 10 min and dried under sterile dry air.
- (ii) With the aid of a sterilized scalpel (use of Bunsen flame) or other techniques, pieces of the leaves are cut out and sterilized further using these agents; 95% ethanol (1–2 min), 3.5% (v/v) sodium hypochlorite (3–4 min), 70% (v/v) ethanol (30–40 s) in that order.
- (iii) The sterilized samples will be washed trice in sterile distilled water and allowed to dry on filter papers under aseptic conditions. Subsequently, the samples are placed on the appropriate culture media of interest supplemented with an antibiotic concentration to prevent the growth of bacteria and depending on the substrate that will act as the primary carbon source in the medium. Some of the natural carbon sources include maltose, rice, beans, etc. The plating is usually done in replicates and inside air laminar flow hood of appropriate level of biosafety.
- (iv) The plates will then be incubated at room temperature (30–37°C). The fungal mycelium growing out from leaf discs were subsequently transferred to fresh MEA plates by hyphal tip transfers and incubated further at room temperature for 1–2 weeks. The purity of isolated endophytic fungi was checked and their antimicrobial and anticancer activity was determined. The endophytic fungal isolates were maintained in MEA for future studies. This is referred to as the primary culture. When the pure fungal species is identified and fully characterized (after affirmation of interesting activities in this instance, anticancer property using different robust *in vitro* techniques), large-scale production of the fungi will then involve the use of secondary culture technique in larger vessels for the harvest of larger quantity in preparation for isolation of the fungal metabolites. Sometimes, selected bacteria are cocultured with the fungi as a way of stimulating and manipulating and exploiting the metabolic pathways of these organisms. Modifications of these procedures vary from laboratory to laboratory.

#### 4. Identification of endophytic fungal isolates

Essentially, isolated endophytic fungi are identified based on both their macroscopic and microscopic structures [34]. Further identification sequel to establishment of satisfactory biological activities involves the use of biotechnological procedures. There are several taxonomical

classification guides available such as found in these references [35–38]. The nonspores are termed and classified as mycelia isolates. The fungal isolates with very interesting biological activity spectrum are further identified based on the analysis of nucleotide sequences of the internal transcribed spacer (ITS) regions of rDNA following the method described by earlier authors [39]. The confirmation of similarity of gene properties of the synthesized nucleotide rDNA sequence of ITS is usually compared with sequences from available GenBank using BLAST program of the National Institutes of Health, United States of America.

## **5. Large-scale endophytic fungal cultivation and extraction**

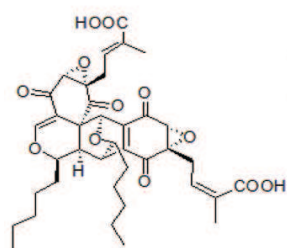
The large-scale cultivation of the endophytic fungi is also carried out on the selected media as described above and then transferred (inoculated) into a 500-ml or larger Erlenmeyer flasks containing appropriate nutrients depending on target. The setup will be incubated at room temperature for one month standard conditions. The broth is then filtered and extracted with an appropriate solvent such as ethyl acetate. The extract was dried over anhydrous sodium sulfate and then evaporated under vacuum in a rotary evaporator, to yield ethyl acetate extracts. The dried extract will be partitioned into several solvent fractions and recovered for further testing of biological activities. Subsequently, the fractions are subjected to several processes of chromatography and purifications steps to isolate pure metabolites which are tested and fully characterized using physicochemical and spectroscopic methods. In order to maximize the unlimited potentials of the endophytic fungi as reliable repository for anti-cancer bioactive metabolites and other drug discovery, modern research should target the selection and isolation of samples from diverse ecosystems, manipulating microbial physiology to activate microbial natural-product biosynthetic machinery, and genetically modifying strains for production of unnatural microbial natural products. By manipulating all three of these approaches, the diversity of an extract collection can be maximized, and in doing so, the chance of finding a ‘hit’ can be increased.

## **6. An overview of anticancer agents from endophytic fungi**

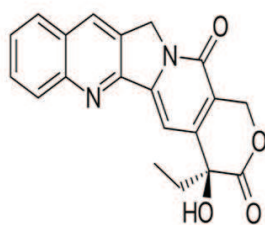
Although some battles have been won since the declaration of the ‘war on cancer’ in 1971 in the United States, the war is ongoing [40]. Furthermore, the much expected breakthrough in anticancer chemotherapy has been seriously challenged. Malignant tumors are one of the most serious diseases that damage human health in the modern world and the second largest deadly disease just after heart diseases [41], and as such, the search for newer anticancer agents remains endless. This search has, in recent times, shifted to the endophytic fungi. Interesting secondary metabolites are derived from endophytes which make them unmatched synthesizers of very useful complex chemical scaffolds inside their hosts [42, 43]. In comparison, most of these metabolites have been engaged in the fight against diverse diseases of man and animal [44]. Since the advent of taxol from an endophytic fungus, efforts have relied on the manipulation and optimization of the culture conditions and this approach has produced several chemical constituents and novel analogues with quite



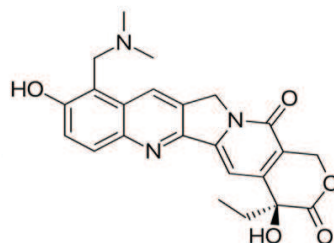
unique biochemistry [3]. For the purpose of this chapter, we limited our discussion to few selected important categories of bioactive metabolites produced by fungal endophytes of medicinal plants (**Figure 1**). Several authors in the past have reported excellent reviews on endophytes as potential sources of bioactive metabolites. One of such interesting reviews was published by Sanjana et al. [45] in 2012, covering their unmatched potentials as sources for anticancer, antioxidant, immunomodulatory, antiparasitic, antitubercular and insecticidal agents. In the current review, we attempt to present an updated chapter on endophytes as reliable sources of anticancer metabolites. Following the discovery of the multimillion dollar anticancer agent, taxol from the endophytic fungus *Taxomyces andreanae* [9], several others have been studied as potential repositories of anticancer agents. Taxol (paclitaxel) belongs to the diterpenoid class of natural products and is an exceptionally potent anticancer agent. Before, being isolated from the endophytic fungus *Taxomyces andreanae*, it was isolated for the first time, from the bark of *Taxus brevifolia*, commonly called yew plant from the South American pacific. The drug was subsequently approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), USA, for the treatment of selected cancers [46]. The diverse sources of taxol from endophytic fungi are shown in **Table 1**. Lee et al. [47] reported the isolation of a dimeric quinone Torreyanic acid from the endophytic fungus, *Pestalotiopsis microsporum* growing in the plant *Torreya taxifolia*. This compound was shown to possess potent cytotoxic activity through apoptotic mechanisms [47]. Camptothecin, a potent antineoplastic agent from endophytic *Entrophospora infrequens* isolated from the host plant, *Nothapodytes foetida*, was also reported by Puri et al. [48], as having pronounced activity against lung cancer and ovarian cancer cell lines. Several authors attempted the derivatization of analogues of Camptothecin, and a successful effort led to the discovery of two clinically useful anticancer drugs: topotecan and irinotecan. These potent anticancer compounds were extracted from the endophytic *Fusariumsolani* inhabiting *Camptotheca acuminata* [18]. Podophyllotoxin, a nonalkaloid lignin and its analogues are clinically relevant mainly due to their antiviral and anticancer activities; further, they are the precursors of many other useful anticancer drugs including etoposide, Teniposide and etopophos phosphate [49]. Podophyllotoxin and other related aryl tetralin lignans have also been reported to be produced by another novel endophytic fungus, *Trametes hirsute* with anticancer potential [17]. The different strains of endophytic fungi producing Podophyllotoxin are represented in **Table 2**. Various novel microbial sources of podophyllotoxin include *Aspergillus fumigatus* isolated from *Juniperus communis* [50], *Phialocephala fortinii* isolated from *Podophyllum peltatum* [30] and *Fusarium oxysporum* isolated from *Juniperus recurva* [49]. Ergoflavin, a novel anticancer agent, was isolated from the leaf endophytes of an Indian medicinal plant *Mimusops elengi*, belonging to family Sapotaceae. Ergoflavin is a dimeric xanthene linked at position-2, belonging to the ergochrome class of compounds [51]. Another compound from ergochrome class, i.e., secalononic acid D, a mycotoxin, isolated from the mangrove endophytic fungus also exhibits a good cytotoxic activity on HL60 and K562 cells by inducing leukemia cell apoptosis [52]. Wagenaar et al. [53] studied *Rhinocladiella* sp. inhabiting *Tripterygium wilfordii* and reported three novel cytochalasins: cytochalasin H, cytochalasin J and epoxycytochalasin H along with a known compound cytochalasin E. These compounds have been identified as 22-oxa-12-cytochalasins and have antitumor activity.



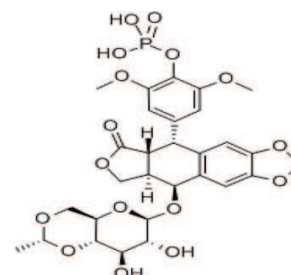
Torreyanic acid



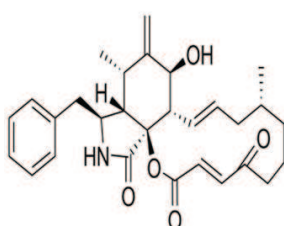
Camptothecin



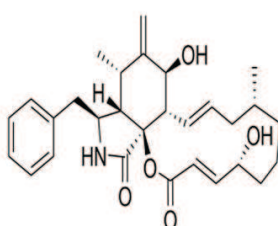
Topotecan



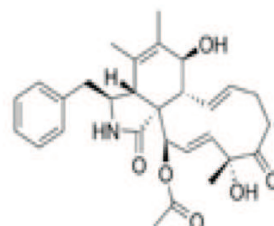
Etopophos



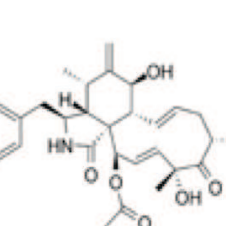
Cytochalasin A



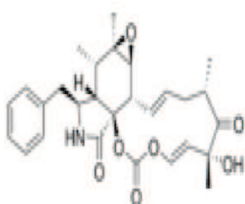
Cytochalasin B



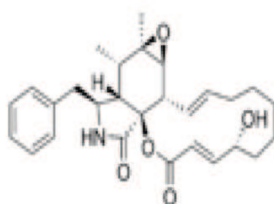
Cytochalasin C



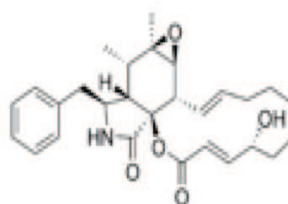
Cytochalasin D



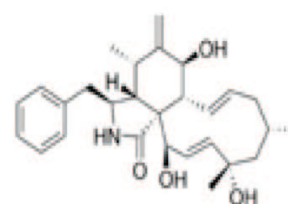
Cytochalasin E



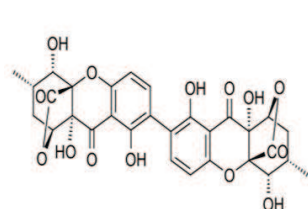
Cytochalasin F



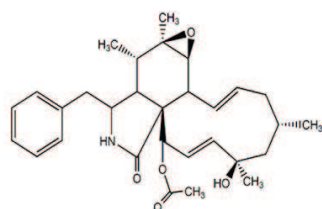
Cytochalasin H



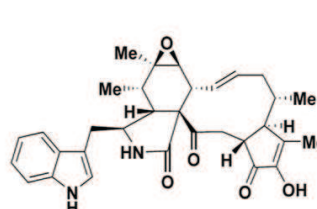
Cytochalasin J



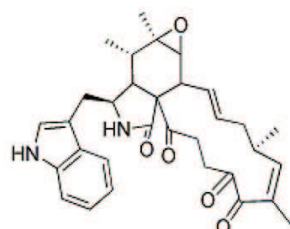
Ergoflavin



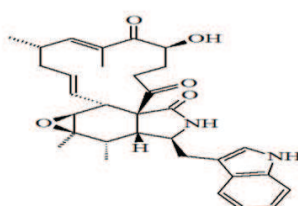
Epoxycytochalasin H



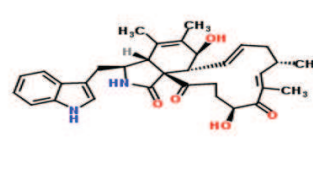
Chaetoglobosin U



Chaetoglobosin C



Chaetoglobosin F



Chaetoglobosin E

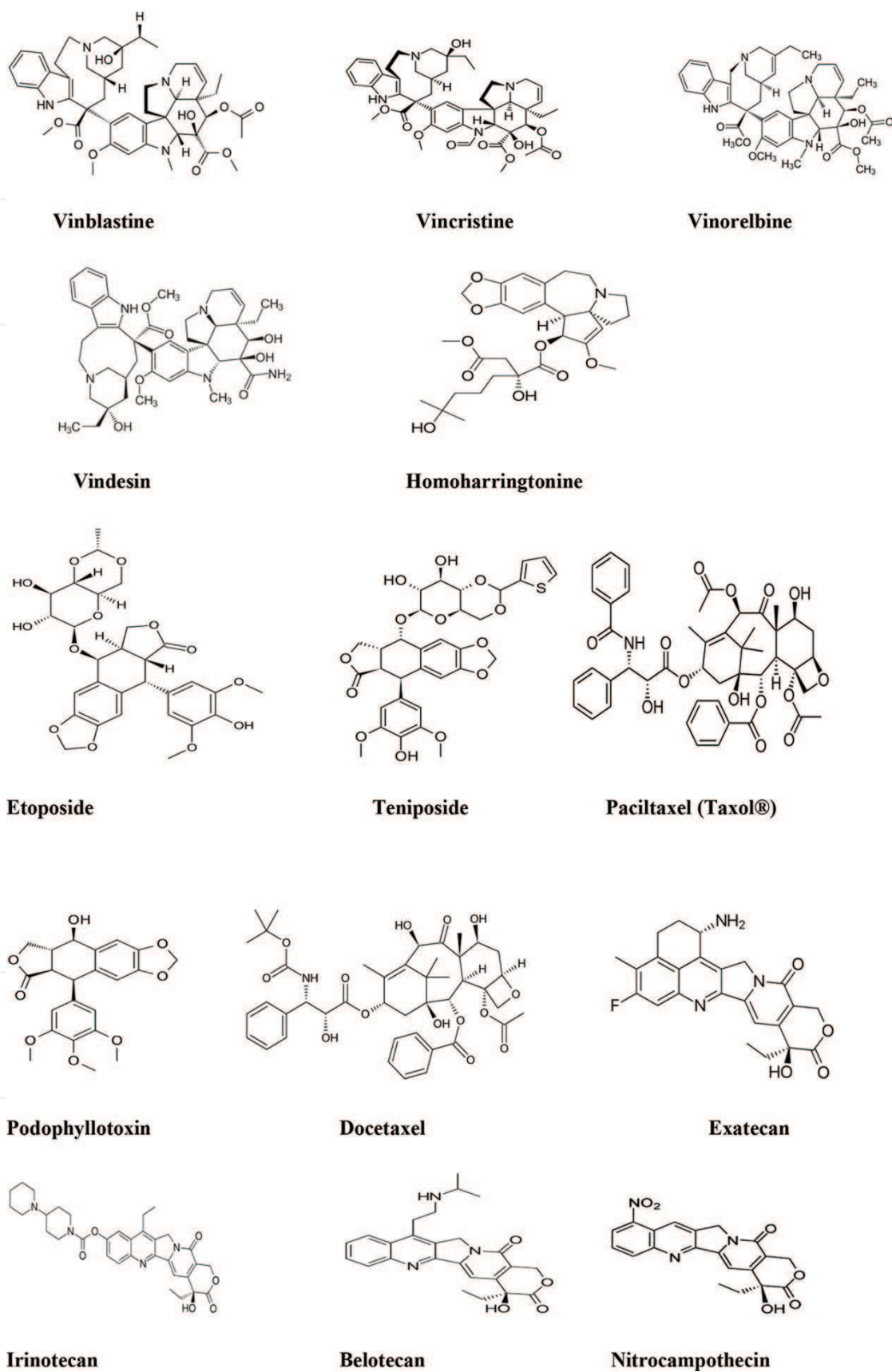


Figure 1. Selected structures of anticancer metabolites from endophytic fungi.

Endophytic fungus	Fungal strain	Host plant	Paclitaxel yield (µg/L)
<i>Alternaria</i> sp.	Ja-69	<i>Taxus cuspidata</i>	0.16
<i>Alternaria</i> sp.	–	<i>Ginkgo biloba</i>	0.12–0.26
<i>Alternaria alternata</i>	TPF6	<i>Taxus chinensis</i> var. <i>mairei</i>	84.5
<i>Aspergillus fumigatus</i>	EPTP-1	<i>Podocarpus</i> sp.	557.8
<i>Aspergillus niger</i> var. <i>taxi</i>	HD86-9	<i>Taxus cuspidata</i>	273.6
<i>Botryodiplodia theobromae</i>	BT115	<i>Taxus baccata</i>	280.5
<i>Botrytis</i> sp.	XT2	<i>Taxus chinensis</i> var. <i>mairei</i>	161.24
<i>Botrytis</i> sp.	HD181-23	<i>Taxus cuspidata</i>	206.34
<i>Cladosporium cladosporioides</i>	MD2	<i>Taxus media</i>	800
<i>Ectostroma</i> sp.	XT5	<i>Taxus chinensis</i> var. <i>mairei</i>	276.75
<i>Fusarium arthrosporioides</i>	F-40	<i>Taxus cuspidate</i>	131
<i>Fusarium lateritium</i>	Tbp-9	<i>Taxus baccata</i>	0.13
<i>Fusarium mairei</i>	Y1117	<i>Taxus chinensis</i> var. <i>mairei</i>	2.7
<i>Fusarium mairei</i>	UH23	<i>Taxus chinensis</i> var. <i>mairei</i>	286.4
<i>Fusarium solani</i>	–	<i>Taxus celebica</i>	1.6
<i>Fusarium solani</i>	Tax-3	<i>Taxus chinensis</i>	163.35
<i>Metarhizium anisopliae</i>	H-27	<i>Taxus chinensis</i>	846.1
<i>Monochaetia</i> sp.	Tbp-2	<i>Taxus baccata</i>	0.10
<i>Mucor rouxianus</i>	DA10	<i>Taxus chinensis</i>	–
<i>Ozonium</i> sp.	BT2	<i>Taxus chinensis</i> var. <i>mairei</i>	4–18
<i>Papulaspora</i> sp.	XT17	<i>Taxus chinensis</i> var. <i>mairei</i>	10.25
<i>Periconia</i> sp.	No. 2026	<i>Torreya grandifolia</i>	0.03–0.83
<i>Pestalotia bicilia</i>	Tbx-2	<i>Taxus baccata</i>	1.08
<i>Pestalotiopsis guepinii</i>	W-1f-2	<i>Wollemia nobilis</i>	0.49
<i>Pestalotiopsis microspora</i>	Ja-73	<i>Taxus cuspidata</i>	0.27
<i>Pestalotiopsis microspora</i>	Ne-32	<i>Taxus wallachiana</i>	0.5
<i>Pestalotiopsis microspora</i>	No. 1040	<i>Taxus wallachiana</i>	0.06–0.07
<i>Pestalotiopsis microspora</i>	Cp-4	<i>Taxodium distichum</i>	0.05–1.49
<i>Pestalotiopsis microspora</i>	Ne 32	<i>Taxus wallichiana</i>	0.34–1.83

Adapted from Zhao et al. (2010), *Endophytic fungi for producing bioactive compounds originally from their host plants* [62].

**Table 1.** Paclitaxel-producing endophytic fungi and their host plants.

A novel cytotoxic cytochalasan-based alkaloid chaetoglobosin U along with four known analogues, chaetoglobosin C, chaetoglobosin F, chaetoglobosin E and ponochalasin A, have been



Endophytic fungus	Fungal strain	Host plant	Podophyllotoxin content or yield
<i>Alternaria</i> sp.	–	<i>Sinopodophyllum hexandrum</i> (= <i>Podophyllum hexandrum</i> )	–
<i>Alternaria neesex</i>	Ty	<i>Sinopodophyllum hexandrum</i>	2.4 µg/L
<i>Fusarium oxysporum</i>	JRE1	<i>Sabina recurva</i> (= <i>Juniperus recurva</i> )	28 µg/g
<i>Monilia</i> sp.	–	<i>Dysosma veitchii</i>	–
<i>Penicillium</i> sp.	–	<i>Sinopodophyllum hexandrum</i>	–
<i>Penicillium</i> sp.	–	<i>Diphylleia sinensis</i>	–
<i>Penicillium</i> sp.	–	<i>Dysosma veitchii</i>	–
<i>Penicillium implicatum</i>	SJ21	<i>Diphylleia sinensis</i>	–
<i>Penicillium implication</i>	2BNO1	<i>Dysosma veitchii</i>	–
<i>Phialocephala fortinii</i>	PPE5, PPE7	<i>Sinopodophyllum peltatum</i>	0.5–189 µg/L
<i>Trametes hirsuta</i>	–	<i>Sinopodophyllum hexandrum</i>	30 µg/g

Adapted from Zhao et al. (2010), Endophytic fungi for producing bioactive compounds originally from their host plants.

**Table 2.** Podophyllotoxin-producing endophytic fungi and their host plants.

produced by the fungal endophyte *Chaetomium globosum* IFB-E019 isolated from *Imperata cylindrica*. Cheatoglobosin U exhibits cytotoxic activity against nasopharyngeal epidermoid tumor KB cell [54]. Chen et al. [55] reported Gliocladicillins A and B as effective antitumor agents in vitro and in vivo. They induced tumor cell apoptosis and also showed a significant inhibition on proliferation of melanoma B16 cells implanted into immunodeficient mice. Vincristine, an alkaloid with cytotoxic activity, was isolated from the endophytic mycelia sterilia inhabiting *Catharanthus roseus* [56]. This drug is mainly used as a chemotherapy regimen in acute lymphoblastic leukemia and nephroblastoma. Likewise, there are large numbers of anticancer agents produced by fungal endophytes inhabiting different medicinal plants. Several of such molecules are presently at different levels of clinical trials, and there are putative hopes that some of them will be approved for use in no distant time. Furthermore, the list of metabolites obtained diverse endophytic fungi with proven potent activity against several cancers is endless, thus indicating that these organisms hold the future in the attempt to conquer cancer therapeutically.

## 7. Conclusion

No doubt, endophytes remain an unmatched biodiversity and repository for novel natural compounds with useful biological activities and form simple to complex scaffolds for the generation of more potent of compound. Because of the diversity of potential of advantages including the application of modern biotechnological techniques, metabolic technology and microbial fermentation process, we can better understand and manipulate this important



microorganism resource and make it more beneficial for the mankind [33, 57–60]. We can conclude that the endophytic fungi are a novel and important microbial resource for producing bioactive compounds and have attracted attention of many researchers on their theoretical study as well as their potential applications [61]. The future of discovering anticancer agents from endophytic fungi is undoubtedly bright.

## Author details

Edwin O. Omeje<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Joy E. Ahomafor<sup>2</sup>, Theophilus U. Onyekaba<sup>2,3</sup>, Philip O. Monioro<sup>2</sup>, Ibekwe Nneka<sup>4</sup>, Sunday Onyeloni<sup>2</sup>, Charles Chime<sup>5</sup> and Jonathan C. Eboka<sup>2,6</sup>

\*Address all correspondence to: [edwin.omeje@unn.edu.ng](mailto:edwin.omeje@unn.edu.ng)

1 Department of Pharmaceutical and Medicinal Chemistry, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

2 Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, Faculty of Pharmacy Sciences, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

3 Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, Faculty of Pharmacy, Madonna University, Elele, River State, Nigeria

4 Department of Medicinal Chemistry, National Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development (NIPRD), Idu, Abuja, Nigeria

5 Department of Industrial Chemistry, Faculty of Applied Natural Sciences, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani, Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria

6 Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

## References

- [1] Mishra BB, Tiwari VK. Natural products: An evolving role in future drug discovery. *European Journal of Medicinal Chemistry*. 2011;**46**:4769-4807
- [2] Rey-Ladino J, Ross AG, Cripps AW, McManus DP, Quinn R. Natural products and the search for novel vaccine adjuvants. *Vaccine*. 2011;**29**:6464-6471
- [3] Strobel G, Daisy B, Castillo U, Harper J. Natural products from endophytic microorganisms. *Journal of Natural Products*. 2004;**67**:257-268
- [4] Cragg GM, Newman DJ. Biodiversity: A continuing source of novel drug leads. *Pure and Applied Chemistry*. 2005;**77**:7-24
- [5] Dias DA, Urban S, Roessner U. A historical overview of natural products in drug discovery. *Metabolites*. 2012;**2**(2):303-336

- [6] Strobel G, Daisy B. Bioprospecting for microbial endophytes and their natural products. *Microbiology and Molecular Biology Reviews*. 2003;**66**(4):491-502
- [7] Qadri M, Johri S, Shah BA, Khajuria A, Sidiq T, Lattoo SK, Abdin MZ, Riyaz-Ul-Hassan S. Identification and bioactive potential of endophytic fungi isolated from selected plants of the Western Himalaya. *SpringerPlus*. 2013;**2**:8. DOI: 10.1186/2193-1801-2-8
- [8] Porras-Alfaro A, Bayman P. Hidden fungi, emergent properties: Endophytes and microbiomes. *Annual Review of Phytopathology*. 2011;**49**:291-315
- [9] Stierle A, Strobel G, Stierle D. Taxol and taxane production by *Taxomyces andreanae*, an endophytic fungus of pacific yew. *Science*. 1993;**260**:214-216
- [10] Czarán TL, Hoekstra RF, Pagie L. Chemical warfare between microbes promotes biodiversity. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. 2002;**99**:786-790
- [11] Strobel G. Harnessing endophytes for industrial microbiology. *Current Opinion in Microbiology*. 2006;**9**(3):240-244
- [12] Wang LW, Zhang YL, Lin FC, Hu YZ, Zhang CL. Natural products with antitumor activity from endophytic fungi. *Mini-Reviews in Medicinal Chemistry*. 2011;**11**:1056-1074
- [13] Zhang Y, Han T, Ming Q, Wu L, Rahman K, Qin L. Alkaloids produced by endophytic fungi: A review. *Natural Product Communications*. 2012;**7**(7):963-968
- [14] Bacon CW, White JF. *Microbial Endophytes*. New York, NY: Marcel Dekker Inc.; 2000
- [15] Souvik K, Christian H, Michael S. Chemical ecology of endophytic fungi: Origins of secondary metabolites. *Chemistry and Biology*. 2012;**19**:792-798
- [16] El Amrani M, Debbab A, Aly AH, Wray V, Dobretsov S, Mueller WEG, Lin WH, Lai DW, Proksch P. Farinomalein derivatives from an unidentified endophytic fungus isolated from the mangrove plant *Avicennia marina*. *Tetrahedron Letters*. 2012;**53**:6721-6724
- [17] Puri SC, Nazir A, Chawla R, Arora R, Riyaz-Ul-Hasan S, Amna T, Ahmed B, Verma V, Singh S, Sagar R, et al. The endophytic fungus *Trametes hirsute* as a novel alternative source of podophyllotoxin and related aryl tetralin lignans. *Journal of Biotechnology*. 2006;**122**:494-510
- [18] Kusari S, Zuhlke S, Spiteller M. An endophytic fungus from *Camptotheca acuminata* that produces camptothecin and analogues. *Journal of Natural Products*. 2009;**72**(1):2-7
- [19] Staniek A, Woerdenbag HJ, Kayser O. Endophytes: Exploiting biodiversity for the improvement of natural-based drug discovery. *Journal of Plant Interactions*. 2008;**3**:75-93
- [20] Kusari S, Spiteller M. Camptothecin: Recent advances in plant-endophyte research. In: Patro LR, editor. *Natural Resources Conservation and Management*. New Delhi, India: Manglam Publications; 2012. pp. 1-32
- [21] Kusari S, Spiteller M. Metabolomics of endophytic fungi producing associated plant secondary metabolites: Progress, challenges and opportunities. In: Roessner U, editor. *Metabolomics*. Rijeka, Croatia: In Tech; 2012. pp. 241-266

- [22] Redecker D, Kodner R, Graham LE. Glomalean fungi from the Ordovician. *Science*. 2000;**289**:1920-1921
- [23] Guerin P. Sur la presence d'un champignon dans l'ivraie. *Journal de Botanique*. 1898;**12**: 230-238
- [24] De Bary A. Morphologie und physiologie der Pilze, Flechten and myxomyceten. In: Hofmeister's Handbook of Physiological Botany. Vol. II. Leipzig, Germany: Engelmann; 1866. pp. 1-335
- [25] Arnold AE. Understanding the diversity of foliar endophytic fungi: Progress, challenges and frontiers. *Fungal Biology Reviews*. 2007;**21**:51-66
- [26] Selim KA, El-Beih AA, Abd El-Rahman TM, El-Diwany AI. Biology of endophytic fungi. *Current Research in Environmental & Applied Mycology*. 2012;**2**(1):31-82. DOI: 10.5943/cream/2/1/3
- [27] Aly AH, Debbab A, Edrada-Ebel RA, Müller WEG, Kubbutat MHG, Wray V, Ebel R, Proksch P. Protein kinase inhibitors and other cytotoxic metabolites from the fungal endophyte *Stemphylium botryosum* isolated from *Chenopodium album*. *Mycosphere*. 2010;**1**:153-162
- [28] Khawar RN, Mishra A, Gond SK, Stierle A, Stierle D. Anti-cancer compounds derived from fungal endophytes: Their importance and future challenges. *Natural Product Reports*. 2011;**28**:1208-1228
- [29] Debbab A, Aly AH, Edrada-Ebel RA, Wray V, Müller WEG, Totzke F, Zirrgiebel U, Schächtele C, Kubbutat MHG, Lin WH, Mosaddak M, Hakiki A, Proksch P, Ebel R. Bioactive metabolites from endophytic fungus *Stemphylium globuliferum* isolated from *Mentha pulegium*. *Journal of Natural Products*. 2009;**72**:626-631
- [30] Eyberger AL, Dondapati R, Porter JR. Endophyte fungal isolates from *Podophyllum peltatum*. *Journal of Natural Products*. 2006;**69**:1121-1124
- [31] Hertweck C. Hidden biosynthetic treasures brought to light. *Nature Chemical Biology*. 2009;**5**:450-452
- [32] Redell P, Gordon V. Lessons from nature: Can ecology provide new leads in the search for novel bioactive chemicals from rainforest? In: Wrigley SK, Hayes MA, Thomas R, Chrystal EJT, Nicholson N, editors. *Biodiversity: New Leads for Pharmaceutical and Agrochemical Industries*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: The Royal Society of Chemistry; 2000. pp. 205-212
- [33] Bill G, Dombrowski A, Pelaez F, Polishook J, An Z. Recent and future discoveries of pharmacologically active metabolites from tropical fungi. In: Watling R, Frankland JC, Ainsworth AM, Isaac S, Robinson CH, editors. *Tropical Mycology: Mycomycetes*. Vol. 2. New York, NY: CABI Publishing; 2002. pp. 165-194
- [34] Thirawatthana P, Tanapat P, Jittra P, Anthony JSW, Prakitsin S. Antimicrobial and anti-cancer activities of endophytic fungi from *Mitrajyna javanica* Koord and Val. *African Journal of Microbiology Research*. 2013;**7**(49):5565-5572. DOI: 10.5897/AJMR12.2352

- [35] Ainsworth GC, Sparrow FK, Sussman AS. The Fungi: An Advanced Treatise. Vol. 4A. New York, USA: Academic Press; 1973
- [36] Ellis MB. More Dematiaceous Hyphomycetes. Kew, Surrey, England: Commonwealth Mycological Institute; 1976
- [37] von Arx JA. The Genera of Fungi Sporulating in Pure Culture. Vaduz, Liechtenstein: A.R. Gantner Verlag KG; 1978
- [38] Barnett HL, Hunter BB. Illustrated Genera of Imperfect Fungi. 4th ed. St. Paul, MN: APS Press; 1998
- [39] Rogers SO, Bendich AJ. Extraction of total cellular DNA from plants, algae and fungi. Plant Molecular Biology Manual. 1994;**D1**:1-8
- [40] Michelakis ED, Webster L, Mackey JR. Dichloroacetate (DCA) as a potential metabolic-targeting therapy for cancer. British Journal of Cancer. 2008;**99**(7):989-994. DOI: 0.1038/sj.bjc.6604554
- [41] Tu J-T, Sun H-X, Ye Y-P. Immunomodulatory and antitumour activity of triterpenoid fractions from the rhizomes of *Astilbe chinensis*. Journal of Ethnopharmacology. 2008;**119**:266-271
- [42] Owen NL, Hundley N. Endophytes—The chemical synthesizers inside plants. Science Progress. 2004;**87**:79-99
- [43] Tan RX, Zou WX. Endophytes: A rich source of functional metabolites. Natural Product Reports. 2001;**18**:448-459
- [44] Tejesvi MV, Mahesh B, Nalini MS, Prakash HS, Kini KR, Subbiah V, Shetty HS. Endophytic fungal assemblages from inner bark and twig of *Terminalia arjuna* W. and A. (Combretaceae). World Journal of Microbiology and Biotechnology. 2005;**21**: 1535-1540
- [45] Sanjana K, Suruchi G, Maroof A, Manoj KD. Endophytic fungi from medicinal plants: A treasure hunt for bioactive metabolites. Phytochemistry Reviews. 2012. DOI: 10.1007/s11101-012-9260-6
- [46] Cremasco MA, Hritzko BJ, Linda Wang NH. Experimental purification of paclitaxel from a complex mixture of taxanes using a simulated moving bed. Brazilian Journal of Chemical Engineering. 2009;**26**(1):207-218
- [47] Lee JC, Strobel GA, Lobkovsky E, Clardy J. Torreyanic acid: A selectively cytotoxic quinone dimer from the endophytic fungus *Pestalotiopsis microspora*. Journal of Organic Chemistry. 1996;**61**(10):3232-3233
- [48] Puri SC, Verma V, Amna T, Qazi GN, Spiteller M. An endophytic fungus from *Nothapodytes foetida* that produces camptothecin. Journal of Natural Products. 2005;**68**:1717-1719
- [49] Kour AS, Shawl S, Rehman S, Sultan P, Qazi PH, Suden P, Khajuria RK, Verma V. Isolation and identification of an endophytic strain of *Fusarium oxysporum* producing podophyllotoxin from *Juniperus recurva*. World Journal of Microbiology and Biotechnology. 2008;**24**:1115-1121

- [50] Kusari S, Lamshoft M, Spiteller M. *Aspergillus fumigates* Fresenius, an endophytic fungus from *Juniperus communis* L. Horstmann as a novel source of the anticancer pro-drug deoxypodophyllotoxin. *Journal of Applied Microbiology*. 2009;**107**(3):1019-1030
- [51] Deshmukh SK, Mishra PD, Kulkarni-Almeida A, et al. Anti-inflammatory and anticancer activity of ergoflavin isolated from an endophytic fungus. *Chemistry & Biodiversity*. 2009;**6**(5):784-789
- [52] Zhang JY, Tao LY, Liang YJ, et al. Secalonic acid D induced leukemia cell apoptosis and cell cycle arrest of G1 with involvement of GSK-3b/b-catenin/c-Myc pathway. *Cell Cycle*. 2009;**8**(15):2444-2450
- [53] Wagenaar MM, Corwin J, Strobel G, Clardy J. Three new cytochalasins produced by an endophytic fungus in the genus *Rhinocladiella*. *Journal of Natural Products*. 2000;**63**(12):1692-1695
- [54] Ding G, Song YC, Chen JR, Xu C, Ge HM, Wang XT, Tan RX. Chaetoglobosin U, a cytochalasin alkaloid from endophytic *Chaetomium globosum* IFB-E019. *Journal of Natural Products*. 2006;**69**(2):302-304
- [55] Chen Y, Guo H, Du Z, Liu XZ, Che Y, Ye X. Ecology-based screen identifies new metabolites from a *Cordyceps*-colonizing fungus as cancer cell proliferation inhibitors and apoptosis inducers. *Cell Proliferation*. 2009;**42**:838-884
- [56] Yang X, Zhang L, Guo B, Guo S. Preliminary study of vincristine-producing endophytic fungus isolated from leaves of *Catharanthus roseus*. *Chinese Traditional and Herbal Drugs*. 2004;**35**:79-81
- [57] Aly AH, Debbab A, Kjer J, Proksch P. Fungal endophytes from higher plants: A prolific source of phytochemicals and other bioactive natural products. *Fungal Diversity*. 2010;**41**:1-6
- [58] Bara R, Aly AH, Pretsch A, Wray V, Wang BG, Proksch P, Debbab A. Antibiotically active metabolites from *Talaromyces wortmannii*, an endophyte of *Aloe vera*. *The Journal of Antibiotics*. 2013;**66**(8):491-493. DOI: 10.1038/ja.2013.28
- [59] Bara R, Aly AH, Wray V, Lin WH, Proksch P, Debbab A. Talaromins A and B, new cyclic peptides from the endophytic fungus *Talaromyces wortmannii*. *Tetrahedron Letters*. 2013;**54**:1686-1689
- [60] Colegate SM, Molyneux RJ. *Bioactive Natural Products: Detection, Isolation and Structure Determination*. Boca Raton, FL, USA: CRC Press; 2008. pp. 421-437
- [61] Dias DA, Urban S, Roessner U. A historical overview of natural products in drug discovery. *Metabolites*. 2012;**2**:303-336
- [62] Zhao J, Zhou L, Wang J, Shan T, Zhong L, Liu X, Gao X. A. Mendez Vilas (Ed). *Endophytic fungi for producing bioactive compounds originally from their host plants*. 2010. *Current Research Technology and Education Topics in Applied Microbiology and Microbial Biotechnology*, pp. 567-576



