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Protease-Activated Receptor 1 is implicated in irritable bowel syndrome mediators-induced signaling to thoracic human sensory neurons

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1 Abstract : words 243

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Proteases and Protease-Activated Receptors (PARs) are major mediators involved in irritable
bowel syndrome (IBS). Our objectives were to decipher the expression and functionality
(calcium signaling) of PARs in human dorsal root ganglia (DRG) neurons, and to define
mechanisms involved in human sensory neuron signaling by IBS patient mediators.

Human thoracic DRG were obtained from the national disease resource interchange.
Expression of PAR₁, PAR₂ and PAR₄ was assessed by immunohistochemistry and RT-qPCR in
whole DRG or in primary cultures of isolated neurons. Calcium signaling in response to PAR
agonist peptides (PAR-AP), their inactive peptides (PAR-IP), thrombin (10u/ml), supernatants
from colonic biopsies of IBS patients or healthy controls (HC), with or without PAR₁ or PAR₄
antagonist were studied in cultured human DRG neurons.

PAR₁, PAR₂ and PAR₄ were all expressed in human DRG, respectively in 20%, 40% and 40% of 13 the sensory neurons. PAR₁-AP increased intracellular calcium concentration in a dose-14 dependent manner. This increase was inhibited by PAR₁ antagonism. In contrast, PAR₂-AP, 15 PAR₄-AP and PAR-IP did not cause calcium mobilization. PAR₁-AP-induced calcium flux was 16 significantly reduced by pre-incubation with PAR₄-AP, but not with PAR₂-AP. Thrombin 17 increased calcium flux, which was inhibited by a PAR1 antagonist and increased by a PAR4 18 19 antagonist. Supernatants from colonic biopsies of IBS patients induced calcium flux in human sensory neurons compared to HC, this induction was reversed by a PAR₁ antagonist. 20

Taken together, our results highlight that PAR₁ antagonism should be investigated as a new
 therapeutic target for IBS symptoms.

23

24 Keywords: Proteases; PARs; Protease-Activated Receptors; Visceral pain; Inflammation;

25 Irritable Bowel Syndrome; Visceral hypersensivity; Thrombin; Human dorsal root ganglia

26 neurons.

27 Introduction

28 Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) affects 11 to 20% of the Western population with a higher prevalence in women [14; 31]. IBS associates abdominal pain, diarrhea (IBS-D), 29 constipation (IBS-C) or both (IBS-A, for alternate) [30]. Although IBS is a functional 30 gastrointestinal disorder, not associated with gross structural or biochemical abnormalities 31 32 [23], several recent studies indicate the presence of meaningful micro-organic changes [7]. 33 One of the emerging ideas to explain the visceral pain associated with IBS is that sensory neurons innervating the colon are hyperexcitable in these patients [10; 11; 13]. However, 34 35 because of the difficulties associated with human sensory neuron cultures, it has been difficult to evaluate the relevance of identified mediators in the context of human pathology. 36

37 Among the molecular targets explored to decipher neuronal hyperexcitability in IBS, several studies showed that proteases released by colonic biopsies of IBS patients were able 38 to activate mouse and rat intestinal neurons in vitro and to induce somatic and visceral 39 hypersensitivity in vivo [9; 13; 17; 38; 47]. Proteases are known to signal to mouse or rat 40 sensory neurons through the activation of Protease-Activated Receptors (PARs) [19; 46; 53; 41 42 55], a family of G protein-coupled receptors that includes 4 members: PAR₁, PAR₂, PAR₃ and 43 PAR₄ [40]. Only PAR₁, PAR₂ and PAR₄ seem to be able to signal through calcium mobilization 44 and to exert a role in nociception and pain (PAR₃ has been considered more as a co-factor 45 for other PAR activation [35] so far). $PAR_{1, 2}$ and 4 are activated by the proteolytic cleavage of their N-terminal domain, which reveals a tethered ligand that binds and activates the 46 receptors. The role of PARs in visceral inflammation and pain has been well studied in 47 animal models[49; 50]. Both PAR₁ and PAR₂ agonists induce calcium mobilization in rodent 48 49 sensory neurons[17; 21]. PAR₂ agonists induce pain in somatic and visceral models [51; 53], while PAR_1 and PAR_4 agonists attenuate nociception and pain symptoms in rodents [4-6; 32]. 50 51 In mouse sensory neurons, the calcium mobilization induced by supernatants from colonic biopsies of IBS patients is dependent on supernatant's proteolytic activity and on PAR₂ 52 expression in mouse primary afferents [17]. In contrast, PAR₄ activation inhibits PAR₂-53 induced calcium mobilization and intrinsic excitability of colonic dorsal root ganglia (DRG) 54 neurons, as well as overall pain [5; 6; 28]. However, in the context of human nociception and 55 56 pain, the effects of PAR agonists and PAR signaling mechanisms are largely unknown.

57 Proteases show different specificity for the different PARs[52]. For instance, thrombin 58 can activate PAR₁, PAR₃, PAR₄ and to a lower extend PAR₂, trypsin can activate PAR₂, PAR₃ 59 and PAR₄ and at high concentrations PAR₁ [25; 33; 42]. In the context of IBS, tryptase and 60 trypsin-3 are up-regulated, and are considered as possible endogenous agonists for PARs[9; 61 43].

Our study aimed at deciphering PAR signaling in human sensory neurons, determining whether proteases and PARs could play a role in human sensory neuron biology and nociceptive mechanisms. Further, we investigated human sensory neuron responses to IBS mediators in cultured human DRG neurons. Although not only neurons projecting from the digestive tract are present in our cultures, the present study could give insights in the response of human primary afferents to mediators present in IBS patient tissues.

68

69 Methods

70 Chemicals

Each agonist and inactive peptides of PARs, respectively PAR-AP and PAR-IP, where purchased from Genscript (France): PAR₁-AP (TFFLR), PAR₂-AP (SLIGKV), PAR₄-AP (GYPGQV), PAR₁-IP (RLLFT), PAR₂-AP (LRGILS) and PAR₄-AP (YAPGQV). Thrombin, PAR₁-antagonist (SCH79797), PAR₂ antagonist (GB83) and PAR₄-antagonist (ML354) were obtained from Tocris (Denver, USA).

76

77 Patient biopsies and supernatant collection

Colon biopsy samples from 24 patients with IBS (8 IBS-D, 8 IBS-C, 8 IBS-A) and 5 healthy 78 controls, HCs) undergoing colorectal cancer screening were collected during colonoscopy at 79 the Department of Medical and Surgical Sciences of the University of Bologna, Italy 80 81 (Supplementary Table 1, available online at http://links.lww.com/PAIN/A553). Rome III criteria were used for the diagnosis of IBS patients. Additional exclusion criteria were major 82 abdominal surgery, celiac disease, asthma, allergic disorders, anti-inflammatory treatments, 83 organic syndrome. Symptoms as bloating, pain and bowel habit changes in the last 12 84 months were also excluded from control group. 85

86

Supernatants from colonic biopsies were obtained following a previously validated and published method [8], with few modifications. Briefly, after removal, biopsies were immersed in plastic tubes containing 1 ml of Hepes-Krebs solution. After weighing the biopsies, supernatant volume was adjusted to incubate 15 mg of biopsies in 1 ml of buffer. Incubation was carried out in oxygenation at 37°C for 25 min. Samples were centrifuged at 200g for 10 min and supernatant collected and stored at –20°C until the assay.

93

94 Human Dorsal Root Ganglia Neurons Isolation

95 Experiments were conducted under the Institutional Review Board numbers IRB00003888, FWA00005831. Human DRG (thoracic position 11 and 12) were collected in Dulbecco's 96 Modified Eagle's medium by the National Disease Resource Interchange (NDRI). Twenty DRG 97 were obtained from 10 post-mortem donors (21-60 years old, 10 hours maximum post-98 99 mortem) with the following exclusion criteria: chemotherapy, drug abuse, infectious disease, 100 neurodegenerative diseases and opioid medications. None of the donors had a reported history of colitis or inflammatory bowel disease, but no information was provided about 101 102 possible IBS. DRG were cut in small pieces, rinsed in Hank's balanced salt solution (HBSS; Thermo Fisher, Villebon-sur-Yvette, France) and digested in L-Cystein (pH 7.4, Sigma Aldrich, 103 104 Missouri, USA), Papain (27 µg/ml, Sigma Aldrich, Missouri, USA) for 20 minutes at 37°C, 105 rinsed 2 minutes in Leibovitz's L15 Medium (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA) containing 10 % of FBS. A second enzymatic dissociation was 106 107 performed in 4 mg/ml dispase II (Sigma Aldrich, Missouri, USA), and 1 mg/ml collagenase 108 (collagenase (type IV, Serlabo Technologies, France) for 15 minutes at 37°C, followed by 109 mechanical dissociation. This step was repeated until complete dissociation of the DRG up to 4 times. Finally, neurons were plated in 8-wells Nunc[™] Lab-Tek[™] II CC2[™] chamber slide 110 111 system (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA) and cultured for 7 days in complete Neurobasal-A medium (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA) 112 containing penicillin (100 µg/ml), streptomycin (100µg/ml), B27 (1X, Thermo Fisher 113 Scientific, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA), L-glutamine (1X, Thermo Fisher Scientific, 114 115 Waltham, Massachusetts, USA), and inhibitors of mitosis (Cytosine-B-arabinofuranoside 116 1.5µM, F-Uridine 10µM, Uridine, 10µM, Sigma Aldrich, Missouri, USA). Cytosine-Barabinofuranoside was removed after 3 days of culture and the medium was changed every 117 118 2 days.

For RT-qPCR and single-cell PCR studies, human thoracolumbar DRG (T9-L1) were acquired from five (three females, two males) human adult organ donors (22.2 ± 2.08 years of age) during the removal of vital organs for transplantation. The harvested intact DRG were kept for quantitative-reverse-transcription-PCR (RT-qPCR) mRNA expression studies, while additional DRG were dissociated to allow individual DRG neurons to be isolated and studied with single-cell-reverse-transcription-PCR (RT-PCR).

125

126 Calcium imaging of human sensory neurons

After washing with HBSS, cultured neurons were incubated for 1 hour (30 min at 37°C 127 followed by 30 min at room temperature) in solution containing fluo-4 acetoxymethyl (AM) 128 1mM (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA) reconstituted in 0.01% 129 pluronic F-127 and 0.7% DMSO (Sigma Aldrich, Missouri, USA). The fluorescence was 130 131 measured at 460-490 nm excitation and 515 nm emission in each well. Neurons were 132 imaged using an inverted microscope (Zeiss, 10x-objective) and a CCD camera (Zeiss). Acquisition parameters were kept constant within each experiment. A kinetic of 80 133 134 recordings (one per second) was performed. From 0 to 5-sec basal fluorescence was 135 determined, from 6 to 60-sec, neurons were exposed to the different molecules studied and 136 finally to a KCl solution (50 mM), in order to discriminate neurons from glial cells. Neurons 137 were identified by Image J software and variations in the fluorescence intensity of each 138 neuron was measured. Results were expressed as Δ F/F, representing the fluorescence 139 intensity ratio between the highest measure during the 6 to 60 seconds period, and baseline 140 measure.

141

In a first set of experiments, neurons were treated with individual PAR agonist peptides: 142 PAR₁-AP (1, 10, 50 or 100 μ M), PAR₂-AP (100 μ M), PAR₄-AP (100 μ M) or neurons were pre-143 incubated for 5 minutes with PAR₂-AP (100 μ M) or PAR₄-AP (100 μ M), before being exposed 144 to PAR₁-AP (100 μ M). For these experiments, the inactive peptides (PAR-IP, 100 μ M) and 145 vehicle (HBSS) were used as control. In a second set of experiments, neurons were pre-146 incubated for 5 minutes with antagonist of PAR₁ (SCH79797, 10 µM) or its vehicle (HBSS, 147 148 0.01% DMSO) and treated with PAR₁-AP (100 μ M). In a third set of experiments, neurons 149 were pretreated 5 minutes with the PAR₁antagonist (SCH79797, 10 μM), the PAR₄ antagonist (ML354, 10 μ M) or vehicle (HBSS, 0.01% DMSO) and were then treated with thrombin (10 150

151 U/ml). In a last set of experiments, neurons were pretreated 5 minutes with the PAR₁ 152 antagonist (SCH79797, 10μ M) or vehicle, before being exposed to supernatants from colonic 153 biopsies of IBS-D, IBS-C, IBS-A patients or HCs.

154

155 Immunofluorescence in human Dorsal Root Ganglia

Experiments were conducted under the Institutional Review Board numbers IRB00003888, 156 and FWA00005831. Three Human DRG T11 and 3 DRG T12 (thoracic position 11 and 12) 157 were cryoprotected in Tissue-Tek® optimum cutting temperature compound (Sakura 158 Finetek, Netherlands) after their collection by the NDRI. Cryoprotected DRG were cut into 35 159 µm sections in a cryostat (Leica CM1950; Nanterre, France) and mounted on Superfrost 160 slides (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Villebonne-sur-Yvette, France). Cultured DRG neurons were 161 fixed with paraformaldehyde 4% during 20 min. Both slides and cultures were washed in 162 Phosphate Buffered Saline (PBS), 0.5% Triton X-100, and 1% Bovine Serum Albumin solution 163 (BSA, Sigma Aldrich, Missouri, USA) and were incubated overnight at 4°C with primary 164 antibodies diluted at 1:100 for tissues and 1:500 for cultures and directed against PGP9.5, 165 166 PAR₁, PAR₄ (respectively, AB86808, AB111976, AB70400, Abcam, Cambridge, England) and PAR₂ (LSB2321, LifeSpan, Seattle, USA). After washing in PBS, slices or cultures were 167 168 incubated with the appropriate secondary antibody conjugated to Alexa Fluor 488 or Alexa Fluor 555, they were washed, and mounted with ProLong Gold reagent containing 40,6-169 diamidino-2-phenylindole (DAPI, Molecular Probes). Controls for the specificity of the 170 171 antibodies include incubation in the absence of secondary antibody, incubation in the 172 presence of immunizing peptides and the use of PAR-deficient tissues or cells (not shown). 173 Images were acquired using Zeiss LSM-710 confocal microscopes (Carl Zeiss MicroImaging, Jena, Germany) with 10x objective in the inverted configuration [20]. Quantification of 174 175 labelling was determined using Image J software.

176

177 Quantitative-reverse-transcription-PCR (RT-qPCR):

RNA was extracted from either whole human DRG or single human DRG neurons using RNAisolation kits (PureLink[™] and Cells-to-CT[™]; Ambion). RT-qPCR was performed using humanspecific Taqman primers for PAR₁, PAR₂, PAR₄ and GAPDH (Hs00169258_m1,
Hs00608346 m1, Hs00765740 m1, Hs01006385 g1, Hs99999905 m1). The comparative

182 cycle threshold method was used to quantify the abundance of target transcripts to183 reference genes.

184

185 Single cell PCR:

186 26 single dissociated DRG neurons were picked using a micromanipulator at 40x magnification. Cells were under a continuous slow flow of sterile and RNA/DNAse free PBS to 187 reduce contamination. After a cell was picked, the glass capillary was broken into a tube 188 containing 10ul of Lysis buffer and DNAse (TaqMan[®] Gene Expression Cells-to-CT[™] Kit; 189 190 Ambion). The whole content was used for cDNA synthesis (SuperScript[®] VILO[™] cDNA 191 Synthesis Kit, Thermo Fisher) and PAR₁, PAR₂, PAR₄ expression was measured using Taqman[™] RT-qPCR for 50 cycles. For every coverslip, a bath control was taken and analyzed 192 together with samples. TUBB3 (Hs00964962 g1) expression served as positive control. One 193 cell was excluded because no TUBB3 expression was present. Twenty-six cells were used to 194 calculate frequency of presence of PAR₁, PAR₂ and PAR₄. 195

196

197 Statistical Analysis

198Data are presented as means \pm standard error of the mean (SEM). Analyses were performed199using GraphPad Prism 5.0 software (GraphPad, San Diego, CA). Comparisons between-200groups were performed by Mann-Whitney test or Wilcoxon matched pairs test. Multiple201comparisons within groups were performed by Kruskal-Wallis test, followed by Dunn's post-202test. Statistical significance was accepted at P < 0.05.</td>

203

204 Study approval

The collection of biopsies from colonic patients was approved by the local Ethic Committee (64/2004/O/Sper and EM14/2006/O) and conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. IBS patients and HCs gave their written and informed consent. Fixed and fresh human DRG were collected with the NDRI (reference: DCEN1 001), all human DRG trials were conducted following the opinion number 14-164 of the institutional review board (IRB00003888) of French institute of medical research and health.

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- 212

213 Results

214 -PAR expression in human DRG neurons-

215 In whole human DRG, PAR mRNA expression was assessed by RT-qPCR analysis. The relative mRNA abundance of PAR₂ was the highest followed by PAR₄ and PAR₁ (Figure 1a). 216 217 Then, to determine if PARs were expressed in neurons at the protein level, the percentage of neurons, identified by Pgp9.5 immunostaining and expressing each PAR was studied (Figure 218 1b). PAR₁, PAR₂ and PAR₄ were respectively expressed in 20%, 40% and 40% of neurons 219 (Figure 1c). The percentage of PAR-positive neurons was expressed in function of the 220 221 diameter of neurons. PAR₁ was preferentially expressed in 30 to 50 µM diameter neurons, 222 PAR₂ in neurons with a diameter < 30 μ M and PAR₄ in 30 to 50 μ M diameter neurons (Figure 223 1d).

PAR expression was then assessed in cultured human DRG neurons. Cultures were 224 225 90% pure for Pgp9.5 neuronal marker staining (Supplementary Figure 1, available online at http://links.lww.com/PAIN/A553). Single cell PCR experiments showed that PAR₁, PAR₂ and 226 PAR₄ mRNA were respectively expressed in 20%, 25% and 17% of neurons (Figure 2a left 227 228 panel). We found that 75% of PAR₁ expressing neurons also expressed PAR₂, 100% of the 229 PAR₄ expressing neurons also expressed PAR₂, whilst 25% of the PAR₁ expressing neurons 230 also expressed PAR₄ (Figure 2a right panel). PAR₁, PAR₂ and PAR₄ were respectively expressed at the protein level in 35%, 36% and 27% of neurons (Figure 2b and 2c). These 231 results demonstrate that human DRG neurons in culture continue to express PAR₁, PAR₂ and 232 PAR₄ and no major or significant difference was observed between the level of expression of 233 234 PARs in whole DRGs and in cultured DRGs.

235 -Effects of PAR agonists on calcium mobilization in human DRG neurons-

Calcium flux in response to specific synthetic agonist peptides of each PAR was quantified in human sensory neuron cultures. Only PAR1-activating peptide (PAR₁-AP, 100- μ M) evoked a transient increase in [Ca2+]i that was maximal after 20 seconds and declined to baseline afterwards, compared to PAR₂-AP and PAR₄-AP (Figure 3a). This activation was characterized by an increased percentage of responding neurons (Figure 3b) and increased amplitude (Δ F/F) of response (Figure 3c), compared to its inactive peptide (PAR₁-IP, 100- μ M). PAR₁-AP-induced calcium mobilization was dose-dependent (Figure 3d) and abolished by a PAR₁ antagonist (SCH79797, 10- μ M) (Figure 3d). Agonists and inactive peptides of PAR₂ and PAR₄ (all at 100- μ M) had no significant effect on calcium signaling in human cultured DRG (Figure 3a, 3b and 3c).

As PAR₂ and PAR₄ agonist peptides did not induce calcium mobilization, we tested
their potential inhibitory role on PAR₁-AP-induced calcium flux. Human DRG were pretreated
with PAR₂-AP or PAR₄-AP and, 5 min after later, PAR₁-AP was added (all agonists at 100 μM).
The transient increase in [Ca2+]i induced by PAR₁-AP was decreased by PAR₄-AP but not by
PAR₂-AP pretreatment (Figure 3e). Both the percentage of responding neurons and the
amplitude of response induced by a PAR₁ agonist were significantly reduced by PAR₄-AP, but
not by PAR₂-AP pretreatment (Figure 3f and 3g).

253 - Thrombin signals to human DRG neurons

Considering the calcium mobilization responses of human sensory DRG neurons to 254 PAR₁ and PAR₄ peptidic agonists, we investigated the effects of thrombin (10U/ml), a known 255 endogenous activator of both PAR₁ and PAR₄. The average amplitude of thrombin-induced 256 calcium response in human DRG neurons was significantly increased compared to vehicle 257 (Figure 4a). Pre-treatment with a PAR₁ antagonist (SCH79797, 10 µM) significantly reduced 258 259 the effects of thrombin on the percentage of responding neurons. Pre-treatment with a PAR_4 260 antagonist (ML354, 10 μ M) had no effect on this parameter (Figure 4b). Considering only neurons that responded to thrombin by mobilizing calcium (23% or all neurons), the 261 amplitude of their response to thrombin was significantly increased in the presence of PAR₄ 262 antagonist, but was not modified by a PAR₁ antagonist (Figure 4c). These results 263 demonstrated that in human DRG neurons, thrombin activates both PAR₁ and PAR₄, exerting 264 opposite effects in terms of calcium mobilization. 265

-IBS patient mediators mobilize calcium in human DRG neurons through a PAR₁-dependent mechanism-

IBS supernatants, but not supernatants from healthy control, evoked a transient increase in [Ca2+]i that was maximal after 30 seconds and declined to baseline afterwards (Figure 5a). Supernatants from colonic biopsies of IBS patients significantly increased the amplitude of the calcium flux response and the percentage of responding neurons compared to healthy control supernatants (Figure 5b and 5c). Neither the percentage of responding 273 neurons, nor the amplitude of the response of human neurons to IBS patient tissue biopsy 274 supernatants correlated with abdominal pain scores or abdominal frequency scores (supplementary Figure 2, available online at http://links.lww.com/PAIN/A553). When 275 considered by subgroups, only supernatants from IBS-A patients induced a significant 276 increase in the number of responding neurons (Supplementary Figure 3, available online at 277 http://links.lww.com/PAIN/A553). PAR₁ antagonist (SCH79797, 10 μM) pretreatment of 278 human sensory neurons decreased the transient increase in [Ca2+]i induced by IBS 279 supernatants (Figure 5d). The antagonist significantly reduced both the percentage of 280 responding neurons to IBS supernatants (all IBS subgroups together) and the amplitude of 281 their response (Figure 5e and 5f). 282

283

284 Discussion

Since their discovery in rodent neurons [46; 53], PARs have been considered as new 285 important therapeutic targets for the treatment of pain. A number of in vivo and in vitro 286 studies have confirmed this potential role for PARs, particularly in the context of visceral 287 pain and hypersensitivity [19; 49; 51; 52]. However, the relevance of considering PAR 288 signaling as an important pathway for human pain has not been thoughtfully addressed thus 289 290 far. Indeed, only one study performed in human subjects refers to a possible role for PAR₂ in pruritus[45], but no study has investigated the expression and functionality of PARs in 291 human DRG neurons. Here, we provide evidences that PAR₁, PAR₂ and PAR₄ are all expressed 292 in human sensory neurons. Furthermore, we showed that in culture, the expression of PARs 293 is generally conserved and that the culture conditions we have defined for human DRG 294 295 neurons can be used to investigate the functionality of human sensory neurons. Although our results provide new insights on human primary afferent signaling, the link to activation 296 297 of pain pathways would clearly require further experiments.

298 Previous studies performed in rodent primary afferents have demonstrated the 299 expression of the three functional PARs: PAR₁, PAR₂ and PAR₄ [21; 46]. We confirmed here 300 that those three receptors are also expressed in human primary afferent neurons both in cell 301 bodies of whole DRG neurons and in cultures. In rodent sensory neurons, both PAR₁ and 302 PAR₂ agonists induced calcium mobilization [15-17; 21]. In contrast, PAR₄ agonists did not 303 mobilize calcium, but decreased pro-nociceptive mediator-induced calcium signaling [6; 28]. 304 In human sensory neurons, we demonstrated that only PAR₁ agonist induced calcium mobilization. Like in rodents, in human DRG neurons, PAR₄ was not able to mobilize calcium, 305 but decreased calcium mobilization induced by other agonists. Taken together, our results 306 clearly demonstrated that both PAR₁ and PAR₄ were present and functional in human 307 308 primary afferents, where they exerted opposing effects. The PAR peptide agonists used in 309 the present study have been well characterized for their selectivity [26; 27]. The doses that were used for these peptide agonists in the present study are considered to be highly 310 311 selective for their targeted receptors in cell culture assays. Therefore, we can reasonably think that the results obtained are truly representative of PAR selective activation. Indeed, 312 this was confirmed for PAR₁ activation by incubation in the presence of the PAR₁ antagonist. 313 At the concentrations used, both SCH79797 and ML354 antagonists were considered 314 selective for inhibition of PAR₁ and PAR₄ respectively, compared to the inhibition of other 315 PARs [1; 57]. However, PAR1-independent effects have also been described for the 316 SCH79797 compound [22], and one cannot rule out that the effects of this antagonist alone 317 318 cannot be due to MAPK inhibition as it has been shown in cell lines at similar concentrations [22]. The PAR₄ antagonist ML354 is potent only at micro-molar ranges, showing a reasonable 319 320 selectivity for PAR₄, but one cannot rule out at this concentration off-target binding for this 321 antagonist [57].

Although DRG cultures were 90% pure for neurons, some glial cells or other supporting cells might still be present in our culture conditions. PARs are known to be expressed and functional in glial cells and to some extent, glial PAR activation might account for some of the calcium responses observed in our cultures.

326 Translating cellular signaling of sensory neurons into nociceptive response in vivo is 327 complex, and the study of calcium signaling in primary afferents cannot fully reflect pain pathway activation. We found no correlation between pain severity scores and pain 328 329 frequency scores with the percentage of responding neurons or with the amplitude of the response to IBS tissue supernatants. This could be due to the low number of samples we 330 included in this study considering the precious nature of human DRG neuron cultures. 331 332 Indeed, other animal studies suggest that calcium signals in sensory neurons are often 333 associated with pro-nociceptive signals. Calcium mobilization and increasing excitability of 334 neurons reflected the sensitization of neurons associated to visceral hypersensitivity [12]. 335 However, in rodents, while PAR_1 agonists mobilized calcium in primary afferents [21], they also increased nociceptive threshold and reduced inflammatory hyperalgesia [4; 32]. In the 336 present study, we showed that PAR₁ specific activation mobilized calcium in human sensory 337 338 neurons. The pro-nociceptive nature of this PAR₁ signal is supported by our subsequent 339 observations demonstrating the involvement of PAR₁ activation in IBS patient biopsy supernatants-induced activation of human sensory neurons. Interestingly, in human 340 submucosal and myenteric plexi, PAR₁-AP (TFLLR), thrombin or supernatants of colonic 341 342 biopsies from IBS patients were also able to induce spike discharges and calcium signaling. This reflected enteric neuronal excitability [29; 34]. This suggests that in humans, PAR₁ might 343 344 be functional both in submucosal and myenteric neurons, as well as in primary afferents (per our results). In the context of IBS, this means that PAR₁ could contribute as our results 345 suggested, to hyperexcitability of extrinsic sensory neurons leading to visceral 346 347 hypersensitivity symptoms, but could also contribute to motor and secretory dysfunctions controlled by intrinsic enteric neurons. However, one has to be careful establishing a link 348 349 between primary afferent response and activation of pain pathways, as in rodents, PAR₁ can be activated in primary afferents, but was shown to be analgesic. Therefore, the pro-350 351 nociceptive effects of PAR₁ agonists remain to be demonstrated in humans. Our study paves the way for studying in human clinical trials the potential that PAR₁ antagonists already 352 developed for use in human could have at reducing pain and hyperalgesia. 353

In agreement with the results previously generated in mouse primary afferents [6; 354 28], we observed in human neurons as well, that PAR₄-AP did not mobilize calcium, but 355 356 significantly reduced calcium mobilization of stimulated sensory neurons. Here, we 357 demonstrated for the first time an inhibitory effect for PAR₄ activation on human sensory 358 pathways, suggesting that like in rodents [5; 6], PAR₄ activation could contribute at reducing pain and hypersensitivity. Taken together, our results highlight opposite effects for PAR₁ and 359 PAR₄ activation in human primary sensory afferents. Considering that both receptors are 360 activated by thrombin, although at different concentrations, it was important to investigate 361 362 the overall effect of thrombin on human primary neuron calcium signaling. Thrombin is attracted to PAR₁ by a Hirudin-like site located at the N-terminal end of the receptor [56]. 363 364 Thrombin binding facilitates the cleavage of PAR₁, which thus does not require high 365 concentrations of thrombin for its activation (0.1 to 1u/ml). In contrast, PAR₄ has no hirudin-366 like site and higher concentrations of thrombin are requested to activate PAR_4 (10u/ml) [36]. We deliberately used a concentration of thrombin that would activate both PAR_1 and PAR_4 367 and observed that thrombin induced a PAR₁-dependent calcium mobilization in human 368 primary afferents (Figure 4 a,b). We also observed that the amplitude of the thrombin 369 370 response in human sensory neurons was reduced by concomitant PAR₄ activation. Indeed, PAR₄ blockade enhanced the amplitude of thrombin-induced calcium response (Figure 4c). In 371 keeping with these functional results, our single cell PCR data show that a population of 372 373 human DRG neurons expressing PAR₁ also expresses PAR₄. Interestingly, PAR₄ was strongly expressed in human DRG neurons. The magnitude of PAR₄ effect on PAR₁- or thrombin-374 induced calcium signals in primary afferents was not as strong as it could have been 375 376 expected considering the strong PAR₄ expression. In primary afferents, PAR₄ might have 377 other function than counteracting the PAR₁-induced signals.

378 In contrast to studies reporting calcium mobilization in rodent sensory neurons after stimulation with PAR₂-APs, or in other human cell lines [37; 54], we observed that human 379 380 sensory neurons did not mobilize calcium after exposure to PAR₂-APs. Interestingly, PAR₂ 381 expression in human sensory DRG neurons was clearly demonstrated both at the mRNA and protein levels (Figures 1 and 2). This result was quite surprising since numerous studies have 382 demonstrated that human cells expressing PAR₂, mobilize calcium after exposure to PAR₂ 383 tethered ligand synthetic peptide [39]. The lack of calcium mobilization in human sensory 384 neurons exposed to PAR₂ synthetic agonist does not mean that the receptor is silent or non-385 386 functional. Indeed, other signaling pathways that have been previously described for PAR₂, 387 such as pERK or cAMP signaling might be implicated in human sensory neurons. Such pathways would have to be investigated in future studies. Furthermore, in human 388 submucosal neurons, PAR₂-AP induces very weak calcium mobilization [34], while PAR₂ has 389 390 been shown to be functional and potently activated by the Trypsin-3 protease in the same neurons [43]. This suggests that depending on the type of agonists that are tested (synthetic 391 peptides or proteases), the cell response might be diverse and more or less potent. Similar 392 393 findings have been reported for PAR pharmacology in a number of cells and tissues [39].

394

395 One crucial step in studying the relevance of PARs as therapeutic targets is the 396 definition of protease profile and activities associated with pathological states. Indeed, the opposite roles for PAR₁ and PAR₄ we have defined here in human primary afferent signaling, 397 suggest that depending on the proteases present and their concentration, pro- or anti-398 nociceptive signals could be prominent. Thrombin can activate both PAR₁ and PAR₄, but as 399 400 mentioned above, at different concentrations. Therefore, the concentration of active 401 thrombin detected in colonic tissues from IBS patients could give an important indication on the activation status of PARs and the overall nociceptive signals. Cathepsin G activates PAR₄ 402 403 [44], and disarms PAR_1 [41]. Here again, the presence of cathepsin G in tissues could modify nociceptive status and accordingly participate to pain relief. Thus, it is clear that protease 404 profiling will be an important step towards our comprehension of nociceptive signaling to 405 406 primary afferents. However, the results presented here clearly defined that PAR₁ activation 407 on sensory neurons is involved in sensory response to mediators associated with IBS in humans, even though the proteases responsible for PAR₁ activation are not yet defined. 408 409 Whether PAR₁ activation can potentiate transient receptor potential channels as it was 410 demonstrated in rodent sensory neurons both for PAR₁ [48] and PAR₂ [2; 3; 15; 16; 18; 24] would still have to be confirmed in human primary afferents. 411

One major limitation of the present study though is that even if we have harvested thoracic DRGs containing neurons projecting from the colon, not all neurons present in the culture dishes are colonic projections. We cannot define whether colonic projections are responding to supernatants of IBS patients, or even whether colonic projections are indeed expressing the different PARs. In animal studies, retrograde labeling of projecting neurons is used to identify the origin of the neurons, but this is hardly applicable to human studies.

In conclusion, this study describes in human sensory neurons, the expression of PARs and their ability to generate calcium signaling. The results highlight the functionality of PAR₁ as an activator of calcium-dependent signaling and PAR₄ as an inhibitor of such signaling. Most importantly, mediators from IBS patient tissues signal to human primary afferent in a PAR₁-dependent mechanism, illustrating the potential of PAR₁ antagonism as a new therapeutic option to treat symptoms associated with IBS.

424

425 Authors participation

426 CD, TB, SG-C, SMB, and CR performed experiments and statistical analysis. MRG and GB

- 427 provided technical and material supports. CD, NC, NV have drafted the manuscript. NC and
- 428 NV designed and supervised the study and obtained funding.

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- 439

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610 Figure legends

Figure 1: Expression of PARs in whole human DRG. (a) Relative expression of PAR₁ 611 (white bar), PAR₂ (gray bar) and PAR₄ (black bar) mRNA in human DRG normalized with 612 GAPDH expression; n=5 human DRG from 5 different donors. (b) Representative pictures of 613 614 PAR_1 (blue), PAR_2 (red), PAR_4 (green) and PGP9.5 (white, arrows = neurons, arrow heads = nerves fibers) immunodetection on slices of human DRG; scale bar = $50 \mu m.$ (c) Percentage 615 of PAR expression on PGP9.5 positive cells in slices of T11 and T12 DRG from 3 donors. 616 For PAR_1 expression 154 neurons were counted, 162 for PAR_2 and 89 for PAR_4 . (d) 617 Percentage of PAR-immunoreactive neurons according to the diameter of neuronal perikarya. 618 (c), (d), $n = 3 \times (T11 + T12)$. For each condition, an average of the percentage obtained on 3 619 620 pictures was performed.

621

622 Figure 2: Expression of PARs in cultured human DRG neurons.

(a) Expression of PAR₁ (in white), PAR₂ (in gray) and PAR₄ (in black) mRNA transcripts by 623 single-cell RT-qPCR (left panel) of human neurons (TUBB3 positive cells). Pie charts 624 representation of the expression (dark color) or not (light color) of PAR₁ (in blue), PAR₂ (in 625 red) and PAR₄ (in green) mRNA in human neurons (right panel). Each segment represents a 626 single neuron. n = 26 neurons. (b) Representative pictures of PARs (in red) and PGP9.5 (in 627 green) immunodetection in cultures of human DRG; scale bar = 50 μ m. (c) Percentage of 628 PAR expression on PGP9.5-positive cells in human DRG neuron cultures from 5 different 629 donors. Two wells for each condition were counted:112 neurons for PAR₁ labelling, 134 for 630 PAR₂ and 88 for PAR₄ were counted. 631

632

Figure 3: Effects of PAR-AP in human sensory neurons.

(a) Representative trace of calcium flux experiment obtained in one well of human sensory 634 635 neuron culture exposed to PAR₁-AP, PAR₂-AP or PAR₄-AP (100 µM each). Percentage of responding neurons (b) and amplitude of intracellular calcium mobilization ($\Delta F/F$; c) in 636 637 human sensory neurons exposed to PAR agonist peptides (PAR-AP, 100 µM, black bar) or inactive peptides (PAR-IP, 100 µM, white bar). n=6 to 8 independent experiments of 3 wells 638 per condition and 20-53 neurons per well. (d) Calcium flux amplitude of responding neurons 639 exposed to PAR₁-IP (100 µM, white bar) or to increasing doses of PAR₁-AP (1, 10, 50 and 640 100 µM, black bar) pretreated or not with a PAR₁ antagonist (SCH79797, 10µM). n=4 to 5 641 independent experiments of 3 wells per condition and 36-62 neurons per well. (e) 642

Representative trace of calcium flux experiment obtained in one well of human sensory 643 neurons culture exposed to PAR₁-AP (100 µM) and pre-incubated with PAR₂-AP or PAR₄-644 AP (100 μ M each). Percentage of responding neurons (f) and amplitude of intracellular 645 calcium mobilization ($\Delta F/F$; g) in human sensory neurons exposed to PAR₁-AP (100 μ M, all 646 bars) and pretreated with PAR₂-IP or PAR₄-IP (100 µM, white bar), PAR₂-AP (100 µM, gray 647 648 bar) or PAR₄-AP (100µM, black bar). n=3 to 4 independent experiments of 3 wells per condition and 30-58 neurons per well. Statistical analysis was performed using Kruskal-649 Wallis analysis of variance and subsequent Dunn's post hoc test. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** 650 p<0.001, significantly different from the corresponding inactive-peptide groups; $\pounds \pounds p <$ 651 652 0.001, significantly different from PAR_1 -AP (100 μ M).

653

Figure 4: Effects of thrombin in human DRG neurons.

Percentage of responding neurons (a) and amplitude of intracellular calcium mobilization 655 $(\Delta F/F; \mathbf{b})$ in human DRG neurons exposed to thrombin (10 U/mL, black bar) or its vehicle 656 (HBSS, white bar). n=3 to 4 independent experiments of 3 wells per condition and 31-45 657 neurons per well. Statistical analysis was performed using Mann-Whitney test. * p<0.05, ** 658 659 p<0.01, significantly different from HBSS group. Percentage of responding neurons (c) and amplitude of intracellular calcium mobilization ($\Delta F/F$; **d**) in human sensory neurons exposed 660 to thrombin (10 U/mL, all bars) and pretreated with PAR₁ antagonist (SCH79797, 10 µM, 661 gray bar), PAR₄ antagonist (ML354, 10 µM, black bar) or their vehicle (HBSS, white bar). 662 n=3 independent experiments of 3 wells per condition and 39-68 neurons per well. Statistical 663 analysis was performed using Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance and subsequent Dunn's 664 post hoc test. * p<0.05, *** p<0.001, significantly different from the corresponding inactive-665 peptide groups. 666

Figure 5: Effects of supernatants from colonic biopsies of IBS patients or healthy controls on calcium mobilization in human DRG neurons.

(a) Representative trace of calcium flux experiment obtained in one well of human sensory neuron culture exposed to supernatant of diarrhea-predominant IBS patient (hexagon) or to healthy control (HC, circle). Amplitude of intracellular calcium mobilization (Δ F/F; b) in human sensory neurons and percentage of responding neurons (c) exposed to supernatants from colonic biopsies of IBS patients: constipation-predominant (-C, triangle), diarrheapredominant (-D, hexagon), alternate (-A, square) or to supernatants from colonic biopsies of healthy control (HC, circle). (d) Representative trace of calcium flux experiment obtained in

one well of human sensory neurons culture exposed to supernatant of alternate-predominant 676 IBS patient (square) and pretreated with PAR₁ antagonist (SCH79797, 10 µM, gray square) or 677 its vehicle (white square). Amplitude of intracellular calcium mobilization ($\Delta F/F$; e) in human 678 sensory neurons and percentage of responding neurons (f) exposed to supernatants from 679 colonic biopsies of IBS patients: constipation-predominant (-C, triangle), diarrhea-680 predominant (-D, hexagon) or alternate (-A, square) and pretreated with PAR₁ antagonist 681 (SCH79797, 10 µM), or its vehicle. Data are represented as scattered dot plot with line at 682 mean. Each symbol represents one patient. n=6 independent experiments of 3 wells per 683 684 condition and 42-53 neurons per well. Statistical analysis was performed using Mann-Whitney test (**b** and **c**) or Wilcoxon matched pairs test (**e** and **f**). * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, 685 significantly different from HC (**b** and **c**) or from IBS group (**e** and **f**). 686









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