Research & Reviews: Journal of Pharmacognosy and Phytochemistry

e-ISSN: 2347-1234

Marine Pharmacognosy: Exploration of Bioactive Compounds from Marine Resources

A. Venkata Suresh*

Department of Pharmacognosy and Marine Biotechnology, Coastal Research Institute, Visakhapatnam, India

Perspective

Received: 01-Sep-2025, Manuscript No. jprpc-25-188762; **Editor assigned:** 03-Sep-2025, Pre-QC No. jprpc-25-188762 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 17-Sep-2025, QC No jprpc-25-188762; **Revised:** 22-Sep-2025, Manuscript No. jprpc-25-188762 (R); **Published:** 29-Sep-2025, DOI: 10.4172/2347-1234.13.015

***For Correspondence**

A. Venkata Suresh, Department of Pharmacognosy and Marine Biotechnology, Coastal Research Institute, Visakhapatnam, India

E-mail: suresh.venkata@gmail.com

Citation: A. Venkata Suresh, Marine Pharmacognosy: Exploration of Bioactive Compounds from Marine Resources. J Pharmacogn Phytochem. 2025.13.015.

ABSTRACT

Marine pharmacognosy is an emerging field of natural product research that focuses on the discovery and study of bioactive compounds derived from marine organisms. The marine environment, which covers more than 70% of the Earth's surface, represents a vast and largely unexplored source of chemically diverse and biologically active compounds. Marine organisms such as algae, sponges, corals, mollusks, and microorganisms produce unique secondary metabolites with significant pharmacological properties. These compounds exhibit a wide range of biological activities, including anticancer, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, antiviral, and antioxidant effects. This article provides a comprehensive overview of marine pharmacognosy, including its scope, sources of marine natural products, methods of extraction and isolation, pharmacological activities, and applications in drug discovery. The role of advanced analytical techniques and challenges in marine drug development are also discussed. The integration of marine biotechnology with pharmacognosy holds great promise for the development of novel therapeutic agents in the future.

Keywords

Marine pharmacognosy, marine natural products, bioactive compounds, marine organisms, drug discovery, marine biotechnology

INTRODUCTION

Pharmacognosy traditionally focuses on natural products derived from terrestrial plants; however, the marine environment has emerged as a significant and promising source of novel bioactive compounds. Marine pharmacognosy is the study of medicinal substances obtained from marine organisms, including plants, animals, and microorganisms.

The marine ecosystem is characterized by extreme environmental conditions such as high pressure, varying salinity, and limited light penetration. These conditions have led marine organisms to develop unique biochemical pathways, resulting in the production of structurally diverse and biologically potent compounds.

Over the past few decades, marine pharmacognosy has gained considerable attention due to the discovery of several marine-derived drugs. These discoveries highlight the immense potential of marine resources in addressing unmet medical needs.

This article aims to provide a detailed overview of marine pharmacognosy, including its sources, chemical diversity, biological activities, and applications.

Marine Sources of Bioactive Compounds

Marine organisms are a rich source of bioactive compounds with unique chemical structures.

1. Marine Algae

Marine algae, including red, green, and brown algae, produce a variety of compounds such as polysaccharides, polyphenols, and terpenoids. These compounds exhibit antioxidant and antiviral activities.

2. Marine Sponges

Sponges are among the most studied marine organisms due to their rich chemical diversity. They produce alkaloids, peptides, and terpenoids with potent biological activities.

3. Marine Microorganisms

Marine bacteria, fungi, and actinomycetes are prolific producers of bioactive compounds. They are a major source of antibiotics and anticancer agents.

4. Marine Invertebrates

Organisms such as corals, mollusks, and tunicates produce unique secondary metabolites with pharmacological potential.

Chemical Diversity of Marine Natural Products

Marine natural products are characterized by their structural complexity and diversity.

1. Alkaloids

Marine alkaloids exhibit strong cytotoxic and antimicrobial properties.

2. Terpenoids

Terpenoids from marine sources show anti-inflammatory and anticancer activities.

3. Peptides and Proteins

Marine peptides often have potent biological activities, including enzyme inhibition and immune modulation.

4. Polyketides

Polyketides are a diverse group of compounds with antibiotic and anticancer properties.

5. Steroids

Marine steroids exhibit anti-inflammatory and antiviral activities.

Extraction and Isolation Techniques

The extraction and isolation of marine bioactive compounds involve several steps:

1. Sample Collection

Marine organisms are collected using diving, dredging, or remote-operated vehicles.

2. Extraction Methods

Solvent extraction using methanol, ethanol, or dichloromethane

Supercritical fluid extraction

3. Isolation Techniques

Column chromatography

Thin-layer chromatography (TLC)

High-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC)

4. Structure Elucidation

Nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR)

Mass spectrometry (MS)

Biological Activities of Marine Natural Products

Marine-derived compounds exhibit a wide range of biological activities:

1. Anticancer Activity

Many marine compounds show potent cytotoxic effects against cancer cells.

2. Antimicrobial Activity

Marine natural products are effective against bacteria, fungi, and viruses.

3. Anti-inflammatory Activity

They reduce inflammation by modulating immune responses.

4. Antiviral Activity

Marine compounds have shown activity against viruses such as HIV and influenza.

5. Antioxidant Activity

They help protect cells from oxidative stress.

Marine-Derived Drugs

Several drugs derived from marine sources have been approved for clinical use:

Cytarabine: Anticancer drug derived from marine sponge

Trabectedin: Used in cancer therapy

Ziconotide: Used for pain management

These examples demonstrate the therapeutic potential of marine natural products.

Role in Drug Discovery

Marine pharmacognosy plays a crucial role in drug discovery:

1. Lead Compound Identification

Marine organisms provide novel chemical scaffolds for drug development.

2. Bioassay-Guided Screening

Used to identify active compounds from marine extracts.

3. Structure-Activity Relationship (SAR)

Helps optimize the biological activity of compounds.

Challenges in Marine Pharmacognosy

Despite its potential, marine pharmacognosy faces several challenges:

Difficulty in sample collection

Environmental concerns and sustainability

Complexity of chemical structures

Limited supply of bioactive compounds

High cost of research and development

Future Perspectives

The future of marine pharmacognosy is promising, with advancements in technology and interdisciplinary research:

Marine biotechnology for sustainable production

Genetic engineering of marine organisms

High-throughput screening techniques

Exploration of deep-sea ecosystems

These developments will enhance the discovery and development of marine-derived drugs.

CONCLUSION

Marine pharmacognosy is a rapidly growing field that offers immense potential for the discovery of novel bioactive compounds. The unique chemical diversity of marine organisms provides valuable opportunities for drug development and therapeutic applications.

Despite challenges such as sustainability and complexity, advancements in technology and research methodologies are paving the way for future discoveries. Marine pharmacognosy will continue to play a significant role in the advancement of pharmaceutical sciences and global healthcare.

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