INTRODUCTION

Tetrahydrobiopterin (BH4, 6R-L-erythro-5,6,7,8-tetrahydrobiopterin) is a key cofactor for a set of enzymes, including nitric oxide synthases (NOSs), aromatic amino acid hydroxylases and alkylglycerol monooxygenase. Consequently, BH4 is associated with various biological processes and pathological states, including monoamine neurotransmitter formation, immune response, cardiovascular function, endothelial dysfunction and cancer.1-7 As shown in Figure 1, the primary enzymes involved in the pathway for the biosynthesis of BH4 include GTP cyclohydrolase I (GTPCH), 6-pyruvoyltetrahydropterin synthase (PTPS) and sepiapterin reductase (SPR).8,9 With regard to the regulation of BH4 biosynthesis, the major step controlling the pathway is GTP cyclohydrolase I. Besides, sepiapterin reductase takes part in the NADPH-dependent reduction of sepiapterin and 1'-oxo-2'-hydroxypropyl-tetrahydropterin, which are involved in the salvage and de novo synthetic pathways of tetrahydrobiopterin. Therefore, SPR is also essential for tetrahydrobiopterin biosynthesis.
Due to the important role of BH$_4$ in various biological processes, SPR is inferred to be required for many functions at the in vitro and in vivo levels. Therefore, tremendous efforts have been made in attempts to unfold the molecular basis of the function of SPR. Based on the analysis of crystals and nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) studies, the structure of SPR has been solved for various species. Moreover, gene cloning, recombinant expression and mutagenesis studies have enabled people to understand the biological functions and roles of SPR in different diseases. Meanwhile, many compounds have been identified in relation to SPR, which has provided potential therapeutics for brain dysfunction, cardiovascular disease and cancer. However, there are still many questions unresolved. In particular, there

**FIGURE 1** The biosynthetic pathway of tetrahydrobiopterin: de novo pathway from GTP and two other salvage pathways from sepiapterin and 1′-hydroxy-2′-oxopropyl-tetrahydropterin, respectively. DHFR: dihydrofolate reductase.
are different effects on biological processes induced by SPR inhibitors and SPR knockdown, for example effects on nitric oxide (NO) generation. Therefore, the main focus in this review will be on the structure, function, distribution and regulation of sepiapterin reductase. In addition, the relationship between SPR and different diseases will also be summarized to determine the possible clinical value of SPR.

2 | STRUCTURE OF SEPIAPTERIN REDUCTASE

Sepiapterin reductase has structural similarity to that of members of the NADP(H)-preferring short-chain reductase family, which contain a strictly conserved Tyr-Xaa-Xaa-Xaa-Lys sequence motif. Specifically, SPR exists in solution as a homodimer composed of two subunits with a molecular mass calculated to be approximately 28 kDa.10-13 The crystal structures of SPR (Figure 2) indicate that 261 amino acids of each monomer fold into a single domain with an α/β-structure. A seven-stranded anti-parallel oriented β-sheet in the centre of the molecule is sandwiched by two arrays of three α-helices. Six of these strands could form a classic nicotinamide-binding motif composed of βαβ units. The association of two monomers into the active homodimeric SPR leads to the formation of a four-helix bundle (helices αE and αF of each monomer).14,15

In addition to human beings, this enzyme has been identified in rats, mice, monkeys, Chlorobium tepidum (C tepidum), and Drosophila. In addition, the amino acid sequence comparison derived from cDNAs reveals high homology among these different species;16,17 for example, the sequence of human SPR (hSPR) shows 74% identity with the rat sequence,10 which suggests that the tertiary and quaternary structures of SPR may be conserved. Typically, the NADP(H) binding domain and the positions of active sites show high similarity. Remarkable differences among SPR from various sources are

![Figure 2](image-url)
The important role of SPR in the biosynthesis of nitric oxide has also been studied based on the conclusion that tetrahydrobiopterin is a limiting factor of nitric oxide generation. According to these results, SPR inhibitors could abolish cytokine-induced NO production in various cell types, such as murine macrophages and endothelial cells, but do not affect the constitutive level of NO. Nevertheless, knockdown or overexpression of SPR could significantly affect the constitutive level of NO both in vitro and in vivo. One hypothetical reason for this controversial conclusion is the function of the non-enzymatic activity of SPR in the regulation of NO generation. On the other hand, SPR is also involved in oxidative stress. It has been reported that SPR inhibitors could prevent the protective effect of sepiapterin against cell injury induced by H2O2 in endothelial cells. The knockout of SPR could impair mitochondrial function and increase the susceptibility of Dictyostelium discoideum Ax2 to oxidative stress. Meanwhile, these results have been proven by the SPR enzymatic inhibitor -SPRi3 in CD4+ T cells. However, site-directed mutagenesis of SPR indicates that mutation of Asp-257 to histidine abolished sepiapterin reduction activity but had minimal effects on reactive oxygen species production, suggesting the biological function of the non-enzymatic activity of SPR (Table 1). Moreover, our published study indicated that SPR could promote hepatic cellular carcinoma progression via FoxO3a/Bim signalling in a non-enzymatic manner, while its enzymatic activity might have no effect on hepatic cellular carcinoma development. Overall, SPR plays a key role in different biological processes, and these effects might be related not only to its enzymatic activity but also to its non-enzymatic function. Increasing studies prove that many enzymes are involved in tumour progression independent of their catalytic activities. For example, phosphoglycerate mutase 1, aside from its glycolytic enzymatic activity, could directly interact with u-smooth muscle actin and modulates cancer cell migration. In addition to its pyruvate kinase function, the M2 isoform of pyruvate kinase also promotes cyclin D1 expression through binding to β-catenin. Moreover, the interaction between lysine-specific histone demethylase 1 (LSD1) and the transcription factor is necessary for acute myeloid leukaemia survival, instead of the demethylase activity of LSD1. Thus, further studies are necessary to construct an integrated map of the molecular mechanisms of SPR.

4 | DISTRIBUTION AND REGULATION OF SEPIAPERIN REDUCTASE

It is reported that sepiapterin reductase has a wide distribution. As mentioned above, SPR has been detected in various species such as C. tepidum, Drosophila, chicken, rat, horse and humans. It has also been found in multiple tissues, including liver, kidney, thymus, brain, spleen, testis and blood. Specifically, in rats, SPR activities average 130 and 80 pmol/h/mg in the liver and the erythrocyte fraction of blood, respectively, while no activity is detected in the intestine and muscle. The enzyme mRNA presents in nearly all the peripheral tissues of goldfish,
including intestine and muscle; meanwhile, expression in the brain could be affected by fasting.\textsuperscript{55} Quantitative transcriptomics analysis and microarray-based immunohistochemistry have been used to analyse the tissue-specific expression of SPR in a representative set of major human organs and tissues.\textsuperscript{56,57} According to the results, which are presented in a database (gtexportal.org), SPR in normal tissue exhibits relatively high expression levels in the liver, kidney and colon (Figure 3). Furthermore, the distribution of SPR in the human brain has been demonstrated, and the data show that SPR is localized in the pyramidal neurons of the cerebral cortex, in a small number of striatal neurons, and neurons of the hypothalamic and brainstem monoaminergic region and olivary nucleus.\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore, the expression of the SPR gene is also high in liver cancer and colorectal cancer (Figure 3), based on data from The Cancer Genome Atlas dataset (cancergenome.nih.gov). Therefore, SPR might become a clinical biomarker of cancer.

Although the distribution of SPR is wide, no SPR mRNA has been detected in the human NK-like cell line YT or the murine erythroleukaemic cell line B8/3. Furthermore, the activity and expression of SPR depend on the types of cell lines. For example, in contrast to the liver cell line HepG2, the T-cell line HuT102 shows lower SPR activity.\textsuperscript{49} However, the enzymatic activity in human T lymphocytes could be continuously stimulated by lectin treatment and achieve a 4-fold increase.\textsuperscript{59} Moreover, rapid enhancement of SPR activity could be induced in T cells by the synergism of IFN-γ and IL-2 rather than by IFN-γ or by IL-2 alone.\textsuperscript{60} In the human neuroblast cell line BE2-M17, SPR mRNA and protein levels could be down-regulated by overexpression of wild-type α-synuclein.\textsuperscript{61} Lipopolysaccharide treatment has resulted in the up-regulation of SPR gene expression in the murine neuroblastoma (NB) cell line N1E-115\textsuperscript{62} and the striatum,\textsuperscript{63} while this effect of lipopolysaccharide has not been achieved in the murine locus coeruleus.\textsuperscript{64} Moreover, the serine amino acid residues of rat SPR and hSPR could be phosphorylated by Ca\textsuperscript{2+}/calmodulin-dependent protein kinase II and protein kinase C, but whether phosphorylation has an effect on the activity of SPR or not is controversial.\textsuperscript{65,66} In summary, the study of SPR regulation is rare. To better understand the biological function of SPR and to find new targets for disease therapies, more studies are needed to elucidate the mechanism of SPR regulation.

### 5 | Sepiapterin Reductase and Disease

As described above, SPR plays a key role in the de novo biosynthesis of BH\textsubscript{4}. BH\textsubscript{4} is a key cofactor for a set of metabolic enzymes and is associated with a large number of biological processes, such as monoamine neurotransmitter formation, immune response and pain sensitivity. Therefore, many studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between SPR abnormality and disease.

#### 5.1 | Sepiapterin reductase and brain dysfunction

Tetrahydrobiopterin is a key cofactor for enzymatic control of the synthesis and secretion of monoamine neurotransmitters, including dopamine and serotonin. Deficiency in the BH\textsubscript{4} level could result in neurotransmitter responsive disorders that are characterized by motor dysfunction, impaired muscle tone, movement

### Table 1: The different effects induced by SPR inhibitors or genetic edition in vitro or in vivo

| Biological function | Manipulation | Effect | System | Reference |
|---------------------|--------------|--------|--------|-----------|
| NO production       | N-acetylserotonin IL-1β Induced NO Production | Rat Glomerular Mesangial Cells | 36 |
|                     | IL-1α + IFN-γ Induced NO Production | Rat Cardiac Myocytes | 35 |
| Phenprocoumon       | IFN-γ Induced NO Production | Murine Macrophage | 37 |
|                     | IFN-γ + LPS Induced NO Production | Murine Vascular Endothelial Cells | 38 |
|                     | IFN-γ Induced NO Production | Murine Vascular Endothelial Cells | 38 |
|                     | TNF-α Induced NO Production | Murine Vascular Endothelial Cells | 38 |
|                     | LPS Induced NO Production | Murine Vascular Endothelial Cells | 38 |
| Phenprocoumon       | Had no Effect on Constitutive Level of NO | Murine Macrophage | 37 |
| SPR Overexpression   | Constitutive Level of NO | Bovine Aortic Endothelial Cells | 39 |
| SPR Knockdown        | Constitutive level of NO | Bovine Aortic Endothelial Cells | 39 |
| Reactive oxygen species | SPR13 | Impaired the Mitochondrial Function | CD\textsuperscript{4+} T Cells | 42 |
| sprayed | SPR Knockdown | Impaired the Mitochondrial Function | Dictyostelium Discoideum Ax2 | 41 |
| SPR\textsuperscript{D257H} | Abolished Sepiapterin Reduction Activity | Lung Epithelial Cells | 43 |
|                     | Had Minimal Effects on Reactive Oxygen Species Production | | |
disorders, epileptic seizures and mental retardation. Autosomal dominant mutations in the GTP cyclohydrolase I gene, the rate-limiting enzyme of BH₄ synthesis, have been identified as the main cause of these disorders. In 2001, SPD, an autosomal recessive disease, had been discovered first in patients with progressive psychomotor retardation, spasticity and dystonia. However, the diagnosis of SPD was compromised in mild phenotypes because of its variable presenting features and need for a sensitive method of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) analysis. Moreover, the pterins profile in CSF is similar to that in patients with defective dihydropteridine reductase. Therefore, only 62 cases of SPD have been reported to date. Commonly, patients exhibit motor and speech delay, axial hypotonia, dystonia, weakness, oculogyric crises and diurnal fluctuation. To avoid misdiagnosis, mutation analysis and activity detection in cultured fibroblasts from patients have been proposed to confirm SPD cases. The manifestations of SPD could be improved by the administration of L-DOPA or 5-hydroxytryptophan in combination with carbidopa in the clinic. Interestingly, no case treated with BH₄, which may, in theory, be of benefit, has shown improvement.

To elucidate the role of SPR in the regulation of BH₄ homeostasis and neurotransmitter responsive disorders, a mouse strain deficient

**FIGURE 3** The distribution of sepiapterin reduction in humans. A. The level of the SPR gene in various normal tissues. TPM: Transcripts Per Million. B. The comparison of SPR gene expression in different tumours. FPKM: Fragments per Kilobase Million
in the SPR gene has been generated.\textsuperscript{78-81} SPR-knockout (SPR\textsuperscript{-/-}) mice show lower levels of BH\textsubscript{4}, dopamine, serotonin and tyrosine hydroxylase in the brain and liver in contrast to the wild-type group. In contrast to the data of human patients, the serum phenylalanine level in transgenic mice is significantly increased. One reason for this difference might be that the salvage biosynthetic pathway from \(6\)-pyruvoylpteridino to BH\textsubscript{4} catalysed by 3α-hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase type 2 (HSDH2) and AR does not function in mice.\textsuperscript{32} Moreover, SPR\textsuperscript{-/-} mice exhibit motor dysfunction and developed dwarfism. In addition, most SPR\textsuperscript{-/-} mice die within 1-2 months. The administration of BH\textsubscript{4} and neurotransmitter precursors could rescue the growth retardation and high phenylalanine levels, but the level of BH\textsubscript{4} and tyrosine hydroxylase in the brain depends on the method of administration. Furthermore, the tyrosine diet ameliorates the abnormal motor behaviours and enhances mTORC1 activity without affecting dopamine expression in SPR\textsuperscript{-/-} mice, suggesting that the mTORC1 signalling pathway in the brain is one of the possible targets in understanding the abnormal motor behaviours related to SPR\textsuperscript{-/-} mice.

Considering that the human SPR gene is located within the region of 2.5 MB mapped to PARK3, which has been identified as an autosomal dominant form of Parkinson’s disease (PD), many researchers focus on the relationship between SPR and PD. There is conflicting evidence regarding whether the level of PD is related to PD. Zahra et al\textsuperscript{84} infer that SPR is not the major cause of PD in a Maltese population based on the data from 178 PD cases and 402 control samples. However, the data from Karamohamed et al\textsuperscript{85} and Tobin et al\textsuperscript{86} indicate that SPR mRNA level increases in the brains of PD patients, suggesting a compensatory effect of SPR in PD brain and a role of the SPR in PD pathogenesis. Collectively, several results have suggested that SPR might be associated with various types of brain dysfunction. Nevertheless, further studies are needed to confirm the role and the underlying mechanism of SPR in brain disorder.

5.2 | Sepiapterin reductase and chronic pain

The data of gene expression profiling in the dorsal root ganglion in three different models of neuropathic pain showed that three of the enzymes, including GTPCH, SPR and quinoid dihydropteridine reductase, which are critical to the control of intracellular levels of BH\textsubscript{4}, were highly regulated within injured sensory neurons.\textsuperscript{87} Although GTPCH, an obligate rate-limiting enzyme in BH\textsubscript{4} synthesis, plays an important role in chronic pain,\textsuperscript{88-90} the therapeutic index for GTPCH inhibitors might be relatively limited due to the side effects induced by the dramatic reduction of BH\textsubscript{4}.\textsuperscript{91,92} In contrast to GTPCH, SPR could be bypassed in the biosynthesis of BH\textsubscript{4}. Furthermore, N-acetylserotonin (NAS), an inhibitor of sepiapterin reductase, could significantly reduce chronic pain in the spared nerve injury model and the paw inflammation model through inhibiting BH\textsubscript{4} production.\textsuperscript{87} Therefore, SPR has become a more attractive drug target for chronic pain, and many studies have focused on the development of SPR inhibitors.\textsuperscript{91,93,94} In particular, Latremoliere et al\textsuperscript{95} developed a new SPR inhibitor—SPRI3—and proved that SPR inhibition was a viable approach for normalizing neuropathic and inflammatory pain hypersensitivity without unacceptable side effects. In summary, the enzymatic activity of SPR could regulate chronic pain and is a valuable target for the development of analgesics.

5.3 | Sepiapterin reductase and cardiovascular disease

Nitric oxide, synthesized by three nitric oxide synthases, is an important regulator of vascular tone. All NOS isoforms require BH\textsubscript{4} as cofactor for catalytic activity, reiterating that SPR might be implicated in cardiovascular disease. Many studies have demonstrated that cytokine-induced NO production in murine macrophages and endothelial cells could be abolished by SPR inhibitors.\textsuperscript{35-38} Gao and coworkers\textsuperscript{39} proved that the overexpression or depletion of SPR could affect NO production in endothelial cells and NO-dependent vasorelaxation in vivo. Furthermore, the endothelium-specific SPR deficiency in deoxycorticosterone acetate-salt hypertensive mice suggests the importance of SPR in maintaining normal blood pressure.\textsuperscript{95} Nevertheless, aortic endothelial SPR expression is unaffected in angiotensin II-induced hypertensive mice\textsuperscript{95} and mice with pulmonary hypertension induced by bleomycin.\textsuperscript{96} Moreover, the therapeutic effects of sepiapterin, a substrate of SPR, in hypertension depend on the level of SPR in the arteries. Therefore, strategies specifically targeting SPR might be necessary for restoring NOS function in different types of hypertension. Recently, the cardiovascular function of SPR gene-disrupted mice has been analysed.\textsuperscript{97} After weaning, SPR\textsuperscript{-/-} but not SPR\textsuperscript{-/-} adult mice suffered from hypertension with fluctuation and bradycardia due to the decrease in endothelium-dependent relaxation. At the same time, the imbalance of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems found in the SPR\textsuperscript{-/-} mice might contribute to cardiovascular instability. Besides, the SPR inhibitor NAS could completely inhibit the sepiapterin-stimulated tube formation of bovine aortic endothelial cells in vitro.\textsuperscript{98} Although the key role of SPR in cardiovascular disease has been proposed, the underlying mechanism remains unclear. Further studies are needed to answer the remaining questions.

5.4 | Sepiapterin reductase and cancer

In recent years, the role of BH\textsubscript{4} in the development of cancer has attracted increasing interest. As the terminal enzyme in the BH\textsubscript{4} biosynthetic pathway, SPR has also been studied in tumour progression. Tanaka et al\textsuperscript{99} find that N-acetylserotonin, an inhibitor of SPR, could inhibit DNA synthesis and initiate the differentiation of erythroleukaemia (MEL) cells, which is reversed by restoration of cellular BH\textsubscript{4} level with sepiapterin. However, results contradicting this suggestion have also been reported.
It has been demonstrated that none of the SPR inhibitors, including NAS, dicumarol, ethacrynic acid and N-chloroacetyldopamine, could induce the differentiation of MEL cells. Additionally, inhibition of the MEL cell growth rate induced by these inhibitors could not be prevented by the addition of BH4 or BH4-related pterins. \(^ {100} \)

In MOLT-4 T-lymphoblastic leukaemia cells and MCF-7 breast cancer cells, the depletion of BH4 using an SPR inhibitor does not affect cell proliferation. \(^ {101} \)

Remarkably, Kaplan-Meier analysis of 88 human NB tumours indicates that high SPR gene expression is significantly correlated with poor survival prognosis. In vitro, SPR-knockdown results in a significant decrease in the proliferation of NB cells, which presumably is relevant to the interaction between SPR and ornithine decarboxylase, which is a regulator of cell division, proliferation and apoptosis. \(^ {102} \) Sulfasalazine (SSZ), which has been identified as an SPR inhibitor, could inhibit the growth of NB cells and produce synergistic antiproliferative effects in combination with alpha-difluoromethylornithine. \(^ {103} \)

Furthermore, oral/intraperitoneal SSZ co-administration resulted in measurable inhibition of NB tumour growth in vivo. \(^ {104} \) Recently, it is reported that SPR is required for the proliferation of mature T cells in vitro and in vivo and that the inhibition of cancer induced by SPR inhibitors links to the immunosuppressive tumour environment. \(^ {42} \) All of these studies provide potential targets for cancer therapy, although further research illuminating the role of SPR in cancer progression and the mechanism underlying the regulation is needed.

6 | DRUGS TARGETING SEPIAPTERIN REDUCTASE

Given the pivotal role of SPR in various diseases, many compounds targeting SPR have been found. Valproic acid, a first-line drug in the treatment of bipolar disorder, is proven to have a strong

| Drug                      | Structure | IC\(_{50}\) (mM) in enzymatic assay | References |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Isosepiapterin            | ![Structure] | 0.065                             | [51]       |
| 6-Carboxypterin           | ![Structure] | 0.03                              | [31]       |
| Acetic Acid               | ![Structure] | 0.45                              | [51]       |
| Propionic Acid            | ![Structure] | 0.045                             | [51]       |
| N-Butyric Acid            | ![Structure] | 0.032                             | [51]       |
| Dicoumarol                | ![Structure] | 6.0x10^-4                         | [31]       |
| Rutin                     | ![Structure] | 0.06                              | [31]       |
| Indomethacin              | ![Structure] | 0.06                              | [31]       |
| Ethacrynic acid           | ![Structure] | 0.03                              | [31]       |
| N-Acetylserotonin         | ![Structure] | 6.0x10^-4                         | [31]       |
| Sulfasalazine             | ![Structure] | 2.3x10^-5                         | [107]      |
| N-Acetysulfapyridine      | ![Structure] | 2.9x10^-4                         | [107]      |
| Sulfapyridine             | ![Structure] | 4.8x10^-4                         | [107]      |
| Mesalamine                | ![Structure] | 3.7x10^-4                         | [107]      |
| Sulfathiazole             | ![Structure] | 1.4x10^-5                         | [108]      |
| Sulfamethoxazole          | ![Structure] | 1.9x10^-5                         | [108]      |
| SPR3                      | ![Structure] | 7.4x10^-5                         | [91]       |
| QM385                     | ![Structure] | 1.49x10^-9                        | [42]       |

**FIGURE 4** The chemical structure of SPR inhibitors and their IC\(_{50}\) values in an enzymatic assay.
up-regulatory effect on SPR at the gene and protein levels because of its histone deacetylase (HDAC) inhibitory activity. Two other HDAC inhibitors, trichostatin A and sodium butyrate, could also up-regulate SPR expression. In addition, the DNA methylation inhibitor 5′-aza-deoxycytidine induces a significant increase in SPR levels, with an over 8-fold increase at 1 μmol/L.

Various effective inhibitors of SPR have been identified as exhibited in Figure 4. The process of inhibitor development is divided into three stages. First, it is found that some sulphhydryl reagents, such as N-ethylmaleimide, and unconjugated pteridines, including isosepiapterin and aliphatic monocarboxylic acids, can inhibit the activity of SPR. Based on the fact that SPR belongs to a series of enzymes that have been classified as aldo-keto reductases, many inhibitors against general aldo-keto reductases, for example dicoumarol, rutin, indomethacin and ethacrynic acid, have been studied and proven to inhibit SPR enzyme activity towards either a carbonyl compound of a non-pteridine derivative or sepiapterin as substrate. The second stage begins with the introduction of a methodology combining yeast three-hybrid screening with affinity chromatography. Applying this approach, Chidley et al. and Haruki et al. found that sulphamides, such as sulphathiazole, sulphamethoxazole, SSZ and its metabolites, sulphapyridine and mesalamine, could inhibit the SPR enzyme activity with high potency. Moreover, the binding mode of sulphamides to SPR has been elucidated by crystallographic studies. The results show that SPR, NADP⁺ and sulphamides form a ternary complex, in which the sulpha drugs form specific hydrogen bonds with active site residues Ser157, Tyr170 and Asp257 of SPR. Finally, due to the limited bioavailability, low potency and complex metabolism of sulphamides, more potent SPR inhibitors, SPRi3 and QM385, have been developed. Compared to sulphamides, the third SPR inhibitors show a higher affinity to human SPR and higher potency in reducing BH₄ synthesis in cells. Recently, using NMR and X-ray supported fragment screening, Alen et al. obtained a new compound with good physicochemical and in vitro ADME properties that could function as a candidate for follow-up hit-to-lead optimization. All of these drugs provide possible therapies for various diseases; however, considering the toxicity and bioavailability of these inhibitors, new inhibitors should be developed. Otherwise, the different effects induced by SPR depletion and enzyme inhibition suggest that the non-enzymatic function of SPR provides a potential direction for the development of SPR inhibitors.

7 | FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The important biological function of SPR has been demonstrated by using molecular biological techniques, ranging from protein X-ray structure determinations to mutagenesis studies. Furthermore, a set of drugs targeting SPR have been identified, which makes the studies of the SPR enzymatic activity easier. In addition, the discovery of patients with SPD has provided new insight into the role of SPR in disease and provided potential therapeutic strategies and biomarkers for brain dysfunction, chronic pain, cardiovascular disease and cancer. However, for obtaining an integrated map of the molecular biology of SPR, many questions remain to be solved, such as the following. (a) What causes the different effects induced by SPR inhibitors or SPR knockdown? Does the non-enzymatic function of SPR work or not? What is the molecular mechanism modulating the function independent of the enzymatic activity? (b) What is the specific regulation pathway of SPR expression and the degradation pathway of the protein? Could drugs be developed based on these pathways? (c) Why do patients with SPD not show improvement after BH₄ treatment? Is this lack of improvement related to the non-enzymatic activity or not? (d) How does SPR regulate the progression of NB? Does SPR affect other types of tumours, such as lung cancer and gastric carcinoma? (e) Could compounds targeting the non-enzymatic activity of SPR treat diseases and produce reduced side effects compared to the inhibitors of enzymatic function or not?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the National Key Research and Development Program of China (No. 2017YFA0205200), the National Natural Science Foundation of China (No. 81773766 and 81903845) and the Science and Technology Research Project of Hubei Provincial Department of Education (No.Q20192007). Otherwise, we would like to thank Pei Wang for the collection of clinical data from datasets.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Yao Wu: Conceptualization (equal); Data curation (lead); Investigation (lead); Resources (equal); Writing-original draft (lead). Peng Chen: Investigation (supporting); Resources (equal); Writing-original draft (supporting); Writing-review & editing (equal). Li Sun: Funding acquisition (supporting); Writing-review & editing (equal). Shengtao Yuan: Funding acquisition (supporting); Writing-review & editing (equal). Zujue Cheng: Funding acquisition (supporting); Writing-review & editing (equal). Ligong Lu: Funding acquisition (supporting); Supervision (equal); Writing-review & editing (equal). Hongzhi Du: Conceptualization (equal); Funding acquisition (supporting); Supervision (equal); Writing-review & editing (equal). Meixiao Zhan: Funding acquisition (supporting); Supervision (equal); Writing-review & editing (equal).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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How to cite this article: Wu Y, Chen P, Sun L, et al. Sepiapterin reductase: Characteristics and role in diseases. J Cell Mol Med. 2020;24:9495-9506. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcmm.15608