An Electroencephalography Bioassay for Preclinical Testing of Analgesic Efficacy

Suguru Koyama1,2,3, Brian W. LeBlanc1,2, Kelsey A. Smith1,2, Catherine Roach1,2, Joshua Levitt1,2, Muhammad M. Edhi1,2, Mai Michishita3, Takayuki Komatsu3, Okishi Mashita4, Aki Tanikawa4, Satoru Yoshikawa3 & Carl Y. Saab1,2

We present a multimodal method combining quantitative electroencephalography (EEG), behavior and pharmacology for pre-clinical screening of analgesic efficacy in vivo. The method consists of an objective and non-invasive approach for realtime assessment of spontaneous nociceptive states based on EEG recordings of theta power over primary somatosensory cortex in awake rats. Three drugs were chosen: (1) pregabalin, a CNS-acting calcium channel inhibitor; (2) EMA 401, a PNS-acting angiotensin II type 2 receptor inhibitor; and (3) minocycline, a CNS-acting glial inhibitor. Optimal doses were determined based on pharmakokinetic studies and/or published data. The effects of these drugs at single or multiple doses were tested on the attenuation of theta power and paw withdrawal latency (PWL) in a rat model of neuropathic pain. We report mostly parallel trends in the reversal of theta power and PWL in response to administration of pregabalin and EMA 401, but not minocycline. We also note divergent trends at non-optimal doses and following prolonged drug administration, suggesting that EEG theta power can be used to detect false positive and false negative outcomes of the withdrawal reflex behavior, and yielding novel insights into the analgesic effects of these drugs on spontaneous nociceptive states in rats.

More than 15% of adults in the United States suffer from chronic pain1. Ineffective therapies and narrow therapeutic windows of available drugs2 are contributing to the opioid epidemic3. The scant success rate of drug development is partly attributed to poor translatability of analgesic efficacy in pre-clinical models, which is based predominantly on behavioral assays. Of these, the most commonly-used are withdrawal reflexes that are qualitative and suffer from a poor temporal resolution. Even when operant behaviors4 and other types are considered5,6, their relevance to brain states underlying nociception and pain assessment in the clinic is not direct nor at times evident7. Hence, there is an emerging interest in novel methods that measure stimulus-independent ‘spontaneous’ pain in an observer-independent manner, especially methods that could be applied to humans. One such approach with a promising translational potential is cortical theta power using quantitative electroencephalography (EEG)8.

Earlier studies suggested that resting state EEG oscillations in the theta band are enhanced in neurogenic pain patients and attenuated after therapeutic thalamic lesions9,10. Our laboratory was first in reverse-translating these findings to animal models in order to elucidate the mesoscale neural networks underlying pain-induced theta oscillations. In a series of studies, we showed that oscillations within the low frequency theta (4–8 Hz) band are enhanced in various rodent model of pain using spectral analysis of the local field potential11, electrocorticography12, and EEG13. We also demonstrated that pain-induced theta power is reversed upon spontaneous resolution of pain and attenuated following administration of analgesics at effective doses12,13. Furthermore, we demonstrated a causal relation between pain-induced theta power, sensory behavior and micro-scale unitary activity in thalamus14, and proposed a hypothetical framework of cortical hierarchy mediating pain processing15. Other laboratories have since used low frequency oscillations in the context of pain assessment in rodent models16,17. For example, Chang et al. demonstrated that theta oscillations can be evoked by transient nociceptive stimuli, are developmentally regulated starting at (but not prior to) postnatal day 21, and manifest during adulthood in the paw incision mouse model18.

1Department of Neurosurgery, Rhode Island Hospital, Providence, RI, USA. 2Department of Neuroscience, Brown University, Providence, RI, USA. 3Laboratory for Pharmacology, Asahi KASEI Pharma Corporation, Shizuoka, Japan. 4Laboratory for Safety Assessment & ADME, Asahi KASEI Pharma Corporation, Shizuoka, Japan. Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to C.Y.S. (email: carl_saab@brown.edu)
Here, we use EEG theta power to monitor spontaneous nociceptive states in rats and to measure the anti-nociceptive effects of a compound with known analgesic effects in humans (pregabalin), and other drugs with promising (EMA401) or inconclusive results (minocycline) in clinical trials. (1) Pregabalin is a CNS-acting calcium channel inhibitor and first line medication for several chronic pain conditions. (2) EMA 401 is a PNS-acting angiotensin II type 2 receptor (AT2R) antagonist with promising Phase 2 clinical trial results. Several small-molecule AT2R antagonists are known to have anti-nociceptive effects in rodent pain models. To date, only EMA401 has been shown to have analgesic effects in clinical trials after 3 weeks of daily oral administration. EMA300, an analog to EMA401, has been reported to have cumulative efficacy on hypersensitivity induced in a rodent neuropathy model. However, the equivalent optimal dose of EM401 in rats is unknown. (3) Minocycline is a CNS-acting glial inhibitor with mixed results in animal and human studies. According to the literature, the anti-nociceptive effects of 40 mg/kg (i.p.) minocycline manifest upon prophylactic, but not prolonged treatment in the CCI rat model. However, prolonged treatment with minocycline (p.o.) at 80 mg/kg has been shown to reverse mechanical allostynia in a rat model of painful diabetic neuropathy. Moreover, the analgesic efficacy of minocycline in human studies is inconclusive, even at relatively high doses.

Hence, we hypothesized that pain-induced theta power is attenuated only upon administration of a given drug at a therapeutically effective dose. Doses were determined based primarily on published data in equivalent rodent models and administration routes. Otherwise, we performed pharmacokinetic studies and determined sub-therapeutic and supra-therapeutic doses according to cited clinical studies.

We report parallel trends in the reversal of theta power and paw withdrawal latency (PWL) in response to analgesic administration of pregabalin and EMA 401, but not minocycline. We also note divergent trends at non-optimal doses and following prolonged drug administration. Our results highlight the utility of EEG theta power as an interdisciplinary bioassay for the screening of analgesic efficacy in pre-clinical animal models.

Results
Experimental design and control experiments. A total of 67 rats were used. Experimental timeline is shown in the study (Fig. 1B). Figure 1C shows representative EEG waveforms during epochs of awake, resting states under naive and CCI conditions from the same animal. As we previously reported, rats with CCI showed higher power in the theta range [4–8] Hz compared to naive. To evaluate these observations quantitively, power spectral densities (PSD) were computed for the time intervals shown, resulting in mean theta power values (Fig. 1C).

All rats receiving CCI developed a significant and time-dependent increase in resting state theta power and a sustained decrease in PWL beginning at day 7 until day 14 after CCI, but not sham CCI surgery (for theta power n = 6 rats in CCI sham, 10 in CCI d7, and 39 in CCI d14; for PWL n = 4 rats in CCI sham, 13 in CCI d7, and 39 in CCI d14; Fig. 1D), suggesting successful reproduction of the neuropathic pain model and confirming our previous findings.

Although both theta power and PWL values reliably predict nociceptive states in rats with CCI (i.e. increased theta power and decreased PWL, Fig. 1E, lower right quadrant), no significant correlation between these two measures was found (r² = 0.02, p = 0.31, n = 67 rats).

In preparation for the drug efficacy experiments, control experiments were performed to rule out confounding variables or adverse effects of animal handling and drug administration. Results showed that neither intraperitoneal (5% Tween 80 in saline, 3 mL/kg) nor oral (0.5% methyl cellulose, 5 mL/kg) vehicle treatment modulated theta power or PWL in rats at day 14 after CCI (n = 5 rats in i.p. group and n = 4 rats in p.o. group; Fig. 1F).

Pregabalin. The optimal dose for pregabalin was based on a previous study whereby we showed that 10 mg/kg of pregabalin (i.p.) attenuated pain-induced theta power and PWL in rats at day 14 after CCI. To further determine the sub-optimal and supra-optimal doses relative to clinical data, we performed a titration PK study. Pregabalin was administered at 3 and 100 mg/kg (i.p.). Pregabalin plasma concentration has been reported to have good linearity at doses of 3 mg/kg and 100 mg/kg (≥ 3.18 (21) μg/mL, represented as mean or geometric mean (% coefficient of variation), the same hereafter) corresponded to Cmax in humans between 300 and 600 mg/day [6.39 (20) and 11.4 (17) μg/mL, respectively], which are considered to be well within the range of effective analgesic doses in many clinical trials (Supplemental Fig. 1A and Table 1). A 3 mg/kg dose in rats [3.24 (14) μg/mL] corresponded to the Cmax value of 150 mg/day in humans [3.18 (21) μg/mL]39, a dose with an efficacy considered as insufficient or subtle. Rat plasma concentrations at 30 mg/kg [33.0 (5.4) μg/mL] corresponded to slightly higher than steady state level of 600 mg/day in humans (0.244–18.6 μg/mL, represented as range)35. On the other hand, 100 mg/kg in rats [99.3 (20) μg/mL] exceeded published reports in human studies. Based on these data, we characterized 3, 10, 30 and 100 mg/kg of pregabalin in rats (i.p.) as sub-therapeutic, therapeutic (i.e. optimal), supra-therapeutic and overdose, respectively, according to clinical standards (Table 1).

We then evaluated the effects of 3, 10, and 30 mg/kg pregabalin (i.p.) on theta power and PWL in rats at day 14 after CCI. Pregabalin significantly attenuated theta power in rats with CCI only at the therapeutic dose of 10 mg/kg (0.83 ± 0.12 relative to CCI), but not the sub-therapeutic or supra-therapeutic dose of 3 and 30 mg/kg (0.91 ± 0.11, and 1.24 ± 0.29, respectively; n = 7 rats; Fig. 2A). Interestingly, pregabalin significantly enhanced PWL at all doses (1.42 ± 0.10, 1.54 ± 0.08, and 1.47 ± 0.14 at 3, 10 and 30 mg/kg, respectively, relative to CCI).

EMA401. EMA401 was administered in rats at 1 and 10 mg/kg (p.o.) and plasma concentration 30 min after 10 mg/kg dose in rats [1.59 (70) μg/mL] was determined to be comparable to clinical data [1.01 (65) μg/mL]
We also confirmed that the distribution of EM401 was peripherally restricted (data not shown), as previously reported. In addition, we investigated EM401’s exposure after daily administration (once/day for 7 days), which was found to be not cumulative. Considering the similar affinity of EM401 to both human and rat AT2R, we therefore characterized 10 mg/kg (p.o.) as therapeutic dose for EM401.

We then evaluated the effects of single administration of 10 mg/kg EM401 (p.o.) on theta power and PWL in rats at d14 after CCI, which resulted in a significant attenuation of theta power (0.71 ± 0.13 relative to CCI) and increase in PWL (1.26 ± 0.11 relative to CCI; n = 6 rats; Fig. 1B). Upon daily administration of 10 mg/kg (p.o.) starting at d7 after CCI, however, the reversal effects on theta power were significant at d7 and d11 but not at d14 after CCI (0.76 ± 0.07, 0.77 ± 0.08, and 0.87 ± 0.12 at day 7, 11 and 14, respectively; n = 6 rats; Fig. 1C), suggesting short-acting effects with regards to resting state nociception, whereas PWL showed significant and cumulative anti-hyperalgesic effects throughout 7 days of treatment (1.60 ± 0.19, 2.13 ± 0.28, and 2.27 ± 0.30 at days 7, 11 and 14, respectively).

Minocycline. Considering the toxicity of prolonged systemic (i.p.) minocycline relative to the reduced exposure following oral (p.o.) administration, we chose to test the efficacy of single and daily administrations of 80 mg/kg (p.o.) on theta power and PWL. Results show that single administration of minocycline at d14 after CCI had no effects on theta power (0.96 ± 0.13) or PWL (1.08 ± 0.10) relative to CCI (n = 5 rats; Fig. 2D).
| Mode of action | Efficacy in human | Dose (mg/kg) | Plasma concentration in rat mg/mL (% covariance) | Observation time (min) | Corresponding plasma concentration in human |
|----------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Pregabalin (CNS, Ca2+ channel) | + (1st line medication) | 3 | 3.29 (14) | 30 | Sub-therapeutic dose Similar to Cmax of 150 mg/day: 3.18 (21) mg/mL [Chew et al.] |
| | | 10 | 11.3 (4.9)*b | 30 | Therapeutic dose Between Cmax of 300 mg/day: 6.39 (20) mg/mL and 600 mg/day: 11.4 (17) mg/mL [Chew et al.] |
| | | 30 | 33.0 (5.4)*b | 33 | Supra-therapeutic dose Slightly higher than steady state level of 600 mg/day: 0.244–16.8 mg/mL a [Dworkin et al.] |
| | | 100 | 99.3 (20) | 30 | Overdose |
| EMA401 (PNS, AT2R) | +(Phase 2) | 10 | 1.59 (70) | 30 | Therapeutic dose Similar to Cmax of 200 mg/day: 1.01 (65) mg/mL b [Rice et al.] |
| Minocycline (CNS, glia) | – | 80 (p.o.) | 12.8 (27) | 120 | Therapeutic dose (inconclusive) Higher than clinical (200 mg/day) dose: 3.19–4.59 mg/mL a [Sumitani et al.] |

Table 1. Drug dose in rat relative to therapeutic window in humans. Drug plasma concentrations shown as geometric mean (% covariance) except for *a and *b where range and mean, (% covariance) are presented, respectively.

Earlier administration of minocycline at d7 after CCI significantly attenuated theta power (0.71 ± 0.06), however, minocycline’s efficacy was short-lasting and non-significant at later time points after daily administration (0.95 ± 0.11 and 1.37 ± 0.45 at day 11 and 14, respectively) (n = 7 rats on d7 and d11 CCI and 5 on d14 CCI; Fig. 2E). With regards to PWL, minocycline had no effect at any day throughout the daily treatment regimen (0.91 ± 0.05, 1.00 ± 0.08 and 0.94 ± 0.04 at day 7, 10 and 14, respectively).

Discussion
In spite of our increased knowledge of the biology, physiology and neural circuits of pain, little success has been achieved recently in developing new analgesic agents. Pain assessment is a key step in the regulatory process which, regrettably, continues to be based on qualitative criteria reported by the patient (visual analogue scale orVAS) and evoked reflex behaviors in response to acute stimuli in animal models.39,40 Whereas stimulus-independent behavioral paradigms have been recently proposed (prismac scales, conditioned place preference41, burrowing42, brain imaging43), those tend to be low throughout, subjective and lack the temporal resolution necessary for real-time measurement of spontaneous nociceptive states.

In this study, we present evidence for the positive identification of analgesic efficacy in a rat model of neuropathic pain using a novel EEG theta power assay for the quantitative assessment of spontaneous nociceptive states. We also present data showing the high sensitivity of theta power in detecting false positive and false negative outcomes of the common hyperalgesia test. Three drugs belonging to different families of agents were selected: (1) pregabalin: a CNS target which has a recognized clinical utility as pain therapeutic; (2) EMA401: a PNS target with promising clinical trial results; (3) minocycline: a glial target with inconclusive efficacy (Table 2).

Singl...
Figure 2. (A) The efficacy of pregabalin was analyzed 0.5 h after i.p. administration, whereby 10 mg/kg pregabalin attenuated CCI-induced theta power. Mean theta was represented as the ratio of CCI + pregabalin relative to CCI. Pregabalin reversed PWL at all single-doses tested. Arrows indicate inconsistent results between PWL and theta power (i.e. false positives). (B) The efficacy of EMA401 was analyzed 0.5 hr after p.o. administration, which attenuated theta power and increased PWL after single dose administration. (C) Daily administration for 7 consecutive days starting at d7 CCI, however, had a short-lasting effect on theta power for the first 5 days but a sustained reversal effect on PWL. Arrow indicates inconsistent result between PWL and theta power (i.e. false positive). (D) Single administration of minocycline (80 mg/kg, p.o.) at d14 after CCI had no effects on theta power or PWL. (E) The same dose of minocycline (80 mg/kg, p.o.) significantly attenuated theta power at d7 after CCI but not PWL, while having no effects on subsequent days following consecutive daily treatment starting d7 CCI. Arrow indicates inconsistent result between PWL and theta power (i.e. false negative).
days. Our results with regards to prolonged treatment effects on theta power, however, are inconsistent with those of a human study whereby orally administered EMA401 was effective in reducing VAS in patients with postherpetic neuralgia after 3 weeks of treatment, but not before, at a dose of 100 mg/kg twice-daily. This might be attributed to model or species differences, suggesting a previously unknown mechanism of action of EMA401 worth exploring in future studies (see48 for a review of EMA401’s developmental program).

Minocycline (p.o.), whose analgesic efficacy is controversial or subtle in clinical studies, did not reverse theta power induced during the chronic phase of CCI, but showed subtle attenuation of theta power at an early phase, an effect that was short-lasting upon daily exposure at the same dose. Interestingly, minocycline was reported to be ineffective in ameliorating VAS in patients with neuropathic pain, consistent with the lack of an effect on theta power during the later stage CCI in this study. In support of our behavioral results, daily minocycline treatment (80 mg/kg once/day, p.o.) for 3 weeks started four weeks after induction of diabetes has been shown to attenuate mechanical allodynia while failing to produce significant changes in PWL in a rat model of peripheral diabetic neuropathy. Importantly, it has also been shown that PWL and mechanical allodynia are attenuated when minocycline is administered preemptively prior to CCI (up to 40 mg/kg, i.p.), but not at a later chronic stage. Therefore, theta power is able to detect putative false negative results generated by the PWL test during the early phase of CCI, revealing possible new mechanism of actions for minocycline and glial inhibition in the early phase of neuropathic pain following nerve injury.

In general, the ability to detect false positive or false negative outcomes is crucial to the drug development process. The incorrect assertion of analgesic activity of an agent may arise for several reasons, including the behavioral paradigm in question. To minimize such likelihood, several controls have been recommended, including the concurrent comparisons of a given novel compound with standard, well-characterized agents, consideration of dose-response curves for a side effect profile, detailed pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic analysis, and time-dependent effects upon repeated exposure. Our study incorporates most of these recommendations in the experimental design. A few cases in point illustrating the importance of false analgesic activity are the disappointingly positive reports that intracortical recordings from S1 layer IV show increased theta power in rats with CCI, despite strong evidence for efficacy in pre-clinical studies using behavioral tests. Furthermore, we showed that theta can be induced in healthy humans subjected to a moderately painful cold-water immersion test. Accordingly, we presented a unifying framework for the hierarchical processing of nociceptive information at the cellular and network levels. Collectively, and in light of evidence presented in this study, we conclude that EEG theta power is a reliable bioassay for testing analgesic efficacy in pre-clinical animal models of pain.

| Drug       | PREGABALIN | EMA401 | MINOCYCLINE |
|------------|------------|--------|-------------|
| Target     | CNS (Ca++, channels) | PNS (AT2R) | CNS (microglia) |
| Dose       | 3 mg/kg (i.p.) | 10 mg/kg (i.p.) | 30 mg/kg (i.p.) |
| Pain phase | Late       | Late   | Late       |
| Equivalent human dose | Low | Optimal | High |
| Behavioral efficacy (PWL) | + | + | + |
| EEG efficacy (θ power) | – | + | Side effects |
| Clinical efficacy (VAS) | – | + | Side effects |
| Different results between PWL & θ power | False positive | True positive | False positive |

Table 2. Summary of analgesic efficacy.
**Methods**

**Experimental animals.** Adult (200–300 g) male Sprague Dawley rats (Harlan Laboratories, South Easton, MA) were housed under a 12-hour light/dark cycle in a temperature and humidity-controlled environment. Food and water were given ad libitum. All the methods were carried out in accordance with the relevant guidelines and regulations and experiments were approved by the Rhode Island Hospital Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee.

**Electrode implant.** These procedures were performed under anesthesia (isoflurane, 2–3.5%). The head was fixed in a stereotaxic apparatus, and skull was exposed after a small skin incision. A stainless steel screw electrode (0–80 ga 1/8 inch, impedance = 0.6 Ω; component Supply Company, Fort Meade, FL) was placed over intact skull (i.e. epicranially) corresponding to primary somatosensory cortex or S1 contralateral to nerve injury (Bregma = 2, 2 mm lateral). Minimal craniotomies were used to place 3 stabilization screws (corresponding to Bregma +1.4, 2 mm bilaterally and Bregma −4.8 mm, midline). The EEG screw was threaded with a silver wire and attached to a female miniature pin connector (A&M Systems, Sequim, WA). All screws were anchored to the skull chronically using dental acrylic (Fig. 1B). Signal reference was provided by a silver wire permanently threaded to the skin at the back of the neck.

**Chronic constriction injury (CCI).** The sciatic nerve was exposed unilaterally after skin incision at the mid-thigh level and blunt dissection of the biceps under deep anesthesia (isoflurane, 3%). Four chronic gut ligatures were tied loosely around the nerve 1 mm apart, and the overlying muscles and skin were closed in layers with 4–0 Ethilon sutures. A minor modification was introduced, consisting of loose ligatures, to minimize nerve damage and deafferentation. Rats with this slightly modified CCI procedure gradually develop typical signs of sensory hypersensitivity associated with neuropathic pain, such as guarding the affected hind paw and thermal hypersensitivity. These signs last longer than 2 weeks after CCI, as we previously demonstrated11–13. For CCI sham surgery, the sciatic nerve was similarly exposed but not ligated.

**Electrophysiological recording.** Pin connectors from EEG electrode was tethered to preamplifier headstage leading to a multichannel amplifier (iso-DAM8A; WPI Inc, Sarasota, FL). EEG waveforms were amplified (DAM80; World Precision Instruments, Sarasota, FL). Then, data were lead to a processing system (micro 1401mkII; Cambridge Electronic Design, CED, Cambridge, United Kingdom) and analyzed offline using Spike 2 (CED). Rats were allowed to move freely during EEG recording in Plexiglas chambers. After 15 minutes of acclimation, EEG recording was performed. Each EEG recording session was 3 to 5 minutes per animal. EEG waveforms were recorded at a sampling frequency of 16.7 kHz, and then down-sampled off-line to 250 Hz. Only data during awake resting periods (defined as alertness but idle with no locomotor behavior) were further analyzed. Potentials generated due to vigorous myogenic activity (such as scratching) were excluded from analysis. These artifacts can be easily identified on the basis of monitoring the animal’s behavior, voltage amplitude, and spectral frequency typically >30 Hz, and they were further corroborated using an automated artifact detection algorithm recently developed in our laboratory (Supplemental Fig. 3)59.

**Power spectra density (PSD).** Fast Fourier transform was used to convert EEG waveform from the time domain to the frequency domain. Power values were generated in 27 frequency bins between 3 and 30 Hz. Awake resting periods were selected and Fast Fourier transformed, then average PSD was calculated. Mean PSD theta was computed between 4 and 8 Hz (Fig. 1C). Each ‘period’ was a continuous interval between 7 and 20 seconds, and 3–5 periods were averaged to obtain one value for mean theta per condition.

**Thermal hyperalgesia.** EEG recording was performed first for ~10 min during resting states (no stimulation). The rat was then untethered from the EEG leads and placed in the behavioral apparatus for 15 min acclimation, followed by 5 min PWL testing. Thermal sensitivity of the hindpaw was assessed by measuring the latency of the withdrawal reflex in response to a radiant heat source (Paw withdrawal stimulator, Department of Anesthesiology, University of California, SD). A radiant heat source (4.7 A) was applied to the plantar surface of the hind paw. Paw withdrawal latencies (PWL) in response to 4 thermal stimulations were averaged for each paw. Stimulation to each paw were separated by at least 2 minutes intervals.

**Algicес treatments and drug used.** Pregabalin was dissolved in 5% Tween 80 (Sigma Aldrich) in saline formulated for intraperitoneal (i.p.) delivery of 3, 10, and 30 mg/kg in a volume of 3 mL/kg. EMA401 and minocycline (Sigma Aldrich) were suspended in 0.5% methyl cellulose solution (Wako) for oral administration (p.o.) of 10 mg/kg and 80 mg/kg respectively, in a volume of 5 mL/kg.

**Pharmacokinetics (PK) studies.** Rats (n = 3 per group) were intraperitoneally treated either with 3 or 100 mg/kg of pregabalin, or orally either with 1 or 10 mg/kg of EMA401, or 80 mg/kg of minocycline. At 0.5, 1, and 2 hours after treatment, approximately 150 μL of blood was collected from the jugular vein using a heparinized syringe with a needle. Blood samples were then centrifuged at 1700 g at 4 °C for 10 minutes. Plasma samples were then separated and stored at −20 °C until analysis. Five or 10 μL of plasma samples were diluted with 300 μL of deproteinization solution containing internal standards (5 nM buspirone, 20 nM tolbutamide, 10 nM reserpine in acetonitrile/methanol = 9: 1) and shaken for 5 minutes at room temperature, and centrifuged at 1000 g for 15 minutes. Then, the supernatant was analyzed by LC-MS/MS (Xevo TQ-S Tandem Quadrupole Mass Spectrometry, Waters) for quantification of pregabalin. Data analysis were performed with MassLynx Mass Spectometry Software and TargetLynx Application manager (Waters).
Statistical analysis. Values regarding theta power and PWL are reported as mean ± SEM and then converted to ratio relative to naive or CCI values for standardized representation of the data. One sample t-test was used for comparison between naive and CCI, and paired t-test was used for comparison between CCI and after treatment in the same animals, respectively. Values regarding drug plasma concentration are reported as geometric (% of covariance) or range. Correlation analysis was used to compare EEG with PWL values. A P value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant and denoted by asterisk (*) in figures.

Data Availability
The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

References
1. Kennedy, J., Roll, J. M., Schrauder, T., Murphy, S. & McPherson, S. Prevalence of persistent pain in the U.S. adult population: new data from the 2010 national health interview survey. The journal of pain: official journal of the American Pain Society 15, 979–984 (2014).
2. Finnerup, N. B. et al. Pharmacotherapy for neuropathic pain in adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis. The Lancet. Neurology 14, 162–173 (2015).
3. Skolnick, P. & Volkow, N. D. Re-energizing the Development of Pain Therapeutics in Light of the Opioid Epidemic. Neuron 92, 294–297 (2016).
4. Suška, K. J. Conditioned place preference paradigm: a novel approach for analgesic drug assessment against chronic pain. Pain 58, 355–366 (1994).
5. Langford, D. J. et al. Coding of facial expressions of pain in the laboratory mouse. Nature methods 7, 447–449 (2010).
6. Vrinten, D. H. & Hamers, F. F. ’CatWalk’ automated quantitative gait analysis as a novel method to assess mechanical allosthenia in the rat; a comparison with von Frey testing. Pain 102, 203–209 (2003).
7. Mogil, J. S. Animal models of pain: progress and challenges. Nature reviews. Neuroscience 10, 283–294 (2009).
8. Malher, L. P. et al. Electroencephalography and analgesics. British journal of clinical pharmacology 77, 72–95 (2014).
9. Sarnthein, J., Stern, J., Aufenberg, C., Rousson, V. & Jeanmonod, D. Increased EEG power and slowed dominant frequency in patients with neuropgenic pain. Brain: a journal of neurology 129, 55–64 (2006).
10. Stern, J., Jeanmonod, D. & Sarnthein, J. Persistent EEG overactivation in the cortical pain matrix of neuropgenic pain patients. NeuroImage 31, 721–731 (2006).
11. LeBlanc, B. W. et al. T-type calcium channel blocker 2944 restores cortical synchrony and thalamocortical connectivity in a rat model of neuropathic pain. Pain 157, 255–263 (2016).
12. Leblanc, B. W., Lii, T. R., Silverman, A. E., Alleyne, R. T. & Saah, C. Y. Cortical theta is increased while thalamocortical coherence is decreased in rats of acute and chronic pain. Pain 155, 773–782 (2014).
13. LeBlanc, B. W., Bowary, P. M., Chao, Y. C., Lii, T. R. & Saah, C. Y. Electroencephalographic signatures of pain and analgesia in rats. PLoS ONE 15, 2330–2340 (2016).
14. LeBlanc, B. W. et al. Thalamic Bursts Down-regulate Cortical Theta and Noceiceptive Behavior. Scientific reports 7, 2482 (2017).
15. Saah, C. Y. & Barrett, L. F. Thalamic Bursts and the Epic Pain Model. Front Comput Neurosci 10, 147 (2016).
16. Chang, P., Fabrizi, L., Olhede, S. & Fitzgerald, M. The Development of Noceiceptive Network Activity in the Somatosensory Cortex of Freely Moving Rat Pups. Cerebral cortex (New York, N.Y.: 1991) 26, 4513–4523 (2016).
17. Choi, S., Yu, E., Hwang, E. & Ilamas, R. R. Pathophysiological implication of CaV3.1 T-type Ca2+ channels in trigeminal neuropathic pain. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 113, 2270–2275 (2016).
18. Rice, A. S. C. et al. EMA401, an orally administered highly selective angiotensin II type 2 receptor antagonist, as a novel treatment for postherpetic neuralgia: a randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled phase 2 clinical trial. Lancet (London, England) 383, 1637–1647 (2014).
19. Smith, M. T., Lau, T., Wallace, V. C., Wyse, B. D. & Rice, A. S. Analgesic efficacy of small-molecule angiotensin II type 2 receptor antagonists in a rat model of antiretroviral toxic polyneuropathy. Behav Pharmacol 25, 137–146 (2014).
20. Nazemi, S., Manaheji, H., Zaringhalam, J., Sadeghi, M. & Haghparast, A. Post-injury repeated administrations of minocycline improve the antinociceptive effect of morphine in chronic constriction injury model of neuropathic pain in rat. Pharmacology, biochemistry, and behavior 102, 520–525 (2012).
21. Zarei, M., Sabetkasesi, M. & Moini-Zanjani, T. Paradoxical effect of minocycline on established neuropathic pain in rat. EXCLI journal 16, 228–235 (2017).
22. Amorim, D. et al. Minocycline reduces mechanical allodynia and depressive-like behaviour in type-1 diabetes mellitus in the rat. Behavioural brain research 327, 1–10 (2017).
23. Vonder Haar, C. et al. Comparison of the effect of minocycline and simvastatin on functional recovery and gene expression in a rat traumatic brain injury model. Journal of neurotrauma 31, 961–973 (2014).
24. Sumitani, M. et al. Minocycline Does Not Decrease Intensity of Neuropathic Pain Intensity, But Does Improve Its Afffective Dimension. Journal of pain & palliative care pharmacotherapy 30, 31–35 (2016).
25. Martinez, V. et al. The efficacy of a glial inhibitor, minocycline, for preventing persistent pain after lumbar discectomy: a randomized, double-blind, controlled study. Pain 154, 1197–1203 (2013).
26. Vaneelden, P. et al. Effect of minocycline on lumbar radicular neuropathic pain: a randomized, placebo-controlled, double-blind clinical trial with amitriptyline as a comparator. Anesthesiology 122, 399–406 (2015).
27. Syngle, A., Verma, I., Krishan, P., Garg, N. & Syngle, V. Minocycline improves peripheral and autonomic neuropathy in type 2 diabetes: MIND study. Neurological sciences: official journal of the Italian Neurological Society and of the Italian Society of Clinical Neurophysiology 35, 1067–1073 (2014).
28. Vartanian, M. G. et al. Activity profile of pregabalin in rodent models of epilepsy and ataxia. Epilepsy research 68, 189–205 (2006).
29. Lau, W. et al. A back translation of pregabalin and carbamazepine against evoked and non-evoked endpoints in the rat spared nerve injury model of neuropathic pain. Neuropharmacology 73, 204–215 (2013).
30. Buvanendran, A., Kroin, J. S., Kari, M. & Tuman, K. J. Can a single dose of 300 mg of pregabalin reach acute antihyperalgesic levels in the central nervous system? Regional anesthesia and pain medicine 35, 535–538 (2010).
31. Chew, M. L. et al. Pregabalin controlled-release pharmacokinetics in healthy volunteers: analysis of four multiple-dose randomized clinical pharmacology studies. Clinical drug investigation 34, 627–637 (2014).
32. Chew, M. L. et al. Pharmacokinetics of pregabalin controlled-release in healthy volunteers: effect of food in five single-dose, randomized, clinical pharmacology studies. Clinical drug investigation 34, 617–626 (2014).
33. Dworkin, R. H. et al. Pregabalin for the treatment of postherpetic neuralgia: a randomized, placebo-controlled trial. Neurology 60, 1274–1283 (2003).
34. Randinittis, E. J. et al. Pharmacokinetics of pregabalin in subjects with various degrees of renal function. Journal of clinical pharmacology 43, 277–283 (2003).
35. Richter, R. W. et al. Relief of painful diabetic peripheral neuropathy with pregabalin: a randomized, placebo-controlled trial. *The journal of pain: official journal of the American Pain Society* 6, 253–260 (2005).
36. Freeman, R., Durso-DeCruz, E. & Emir, B. Efficacy, safety, and tolerability of pregabalin treatment for painful diabetic peripheral neuropathy: findings from six randomized, controlled trials across a range of doses. *Diabetes care* 31, 1448–1454 (2008).
37. Anand, U. et al. Angiotensin II type 2 receptor (AT2R) localization and antagonist-mediated inhibition of capsaicin responses and neurite outgrowth in human and rat sensory neurons. *European journal of pain (London, England)* 17, 1012–1026 (2013).
38. Smith, M. T., Wyse, B. D. & Edwarp'd, S. R. Small molecule angiotensin II type 2 receptor (AT(2)R) antagonists as novel analgesics for neuropathic pain: comparative pharmacokinetics, radioligand binding, and efficacy in rats. *Pain Med* 14, 692–705 (2013).
39. Cobos, E. J. & Portillo-Salido, E. “Bedside-to-Bench” Behavioral Outcomes in Animal Models of Pain: Beyond the Evaluation of Reflexes. *Curr Neuropsychopharmacol* 11, 560–591 (2013).
40. Deuis, J. R., Dvorakova, L. S. & Vetter, I. Methods Used to Evaluate Pain Behaviors in Rodents. *Front Mol Neurosci* 10, 284 (2017).
41. King, T. et al. Unmasking the tonic-aversive state in neuropathic pain. *Nat Neurosci* 12, 1364–1366 (2009).
42. Andrews, N., Harper, S., Issop, Y. & Rice, A. S. Novel, nonreflex tests detect analgesic action in rodents at clinically relevant concentrations. *Ann N Y Acad Sci* 1245, 11–13 (2011).
43. Upadhay, J. et al. Imaging drugs with and without clinical analgesic efficacy. *Neuropsychopharmacology* 56, 2659–2673 (2011).
44. Arnn, J. et al. Wireless-based portable EEG-EOG monitoring for real time drowsiness detection. *Conf Proc IEEE Eng Med Biol Soc* 2013, 4977–4980 (2013).
45. Jodicke, J. et al. Separation of low-voltage EEG-activity during mental activation from that during transition to drowsiness. *Brain Topogr* 26, 538–546 (2013).
46. Siók, C. J., Taylor, C. P. & Hajas, M. Anxiolytic profile of pregabalin on elicited hippocampal theta oscillation. *Neuropsychopharmacology* 56, 379–385 (2009).
47. Graversen, C. et al. The analgesic effect of pregabalin in patients with chronic pain is reflected by changes in pharmaco-EEG spectral indices. *British journal of clinical pharmacology* 73, 363–372 (2012).
48. Keppel Hesselink, J. M. & Schatman, M. E. EMA401: an old antagonist of the AT2R for a new indication in neuropathic pain. *J Pain Res* 10, 439–443 (2017).
49. Yaksh, T. L., Woller, S. A., Ramachandran, R. & Sorkin, L. S. The search for novel analgesics: targets and mechanisms. *F1000Prime Rep* 7, 56 (2015).
50. Sindrup, S. H., Graf, A. & Sfikas, N. The NK1-receptor antagonist TKA731 in painful diabetic neuropathy: a randomised, controlled trial. *European journal of pain (London, England)* 10, 567–571 (2006).
51. Huggins, J. P., Smart, T. S., Langman, S., Taylor, L. & Young, T. An efficient randomised, placebo-controlled clinical trial with the irreversible fatty acid amide hydrolase-1 inhibitor PF-04457845, which modulates endocannabinoids but fails to induce effective analgesia in patients with pain due to osteoarthritis of the knee. *Pain* 153, 1837–1846 (2012).
52. Kinsey, S. G. et al. The CB2 cannabinoid receptor-selective agonist O-3223 reduces pain and inflammation without apparent cannabinoid behavioral effects. *Neuropharmacology* 60, 244–251 (2011).
53. Gonzalez, M. I., Field, M. J., Hughes, J. & Singh, L. Evaluation of selective NK(1) receptor antagonist CI-1021 in animal models of inflammatory and neuropathic pain. *The journal of pharmacology and experimental therapeutics* 294, 444–450 (2000).
54. Chen, S. R., Xu, Z. & Pan, H. L. Stereospecific effect of pregabalin on ectopic afferent discharges and neuropathic pain induced by sciatic nerve ligation in rats. *Anesthesiology* 95, 1473–1479 (2001).
55. Goyal, S., Singla, S., Kumar, D. & Menaria, G. Comparison of the Effects of Zonisamide, Ethosuximide and Pregabalin in the Comparison Constriction Injury Induced Neuropathic Pain in Rats. *Annals of medical and health sciences research* 5, 189–196 (2015).
56. Uhelski, M. L., Davis, M. A. & Fuchs, P. N. Pain affect in the absence of pain sensation: evidence of asomatopsia after somatosensory cortex lesions in the rat. *Pain* 153, 885–892 (2012).
57. Vieck, C. I., Whitel, B. L., Favorov, O. V., Brown, A. W. & Tommerdahl, M. Role of primary somatosensory cortex in the coding of pain. *Pain* 154, 334–344 (2013).
58. Levitt, J., Choo, H. J., Smith, K. A., LeBlanc, B. W. & Saab, C. Y. Electroencephalographic frontal synchrony and caudal asynchrony during painful hand immersion in cold water. *Brain research bulletin* 130, 75–80 (2017).
59. Levitt, J. et al. Automated detection of electroencephalography artifacts in human, rodent and canine subjects using machine learning. *J Neurosci Methods* 307, 53–59 (2018).

Acknowledgements

This work was funded by an investigator-initiated grant from Asahi KASEI Pharma Corp.

Author Contributions

S.K. and C.S. analyzed data and wrote the manuscript; S.K., B.L., K.S., C.R., M.E. performed behavioral and E.E.G. studies; J.L. performed E.E.G. artifact detection; M.M., T.K., O.M., A.T., S.Y. performed P.K. studies.

Additional Information

Supplementary information accompanies this paper at https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-34594-2.

Competing Interests: B.L., K.S., C.R., J.L., M.E. and C.S. declare no competing interests. S.K., M.M., T.K., O.M., A.T. and S.Y. are employed by Asahi KASEI Pharma Corp.

Publisher’s note: Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

© The Author(s) 2018