

Metabolic Forest: Predicting the Diverse Structures of Drug Metabolites

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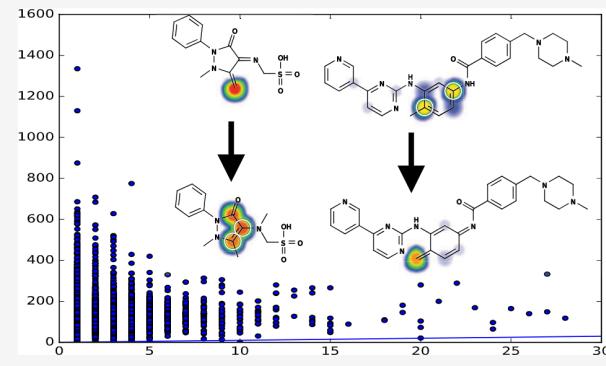
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ABSTRACT: Adverse drug metabolism often severely impacts patient morbidity and mortality. Unfortunately, drug metabolism experimental assays are costly, inefficient, and slow. Instead, computational modeling could rapidly flag potentially toxic molecules across thousands of candidates in the early stages of drug development. Most metabolism models focus on predicting sites of metabolism (SOMs): the specific substrate atoms targeted by metabolic enzymes. However, SOMs are merely a proxy for metabolic structures: knowledge of an SOM does not explicitly provide the actual metabolite structure. Without an explicit metabolite structure, computational systems cannot evaluate the new molecule's properties. For example, the metabolite's reactivity cannot be automatically predicted, a crucial limitation because reactive drug metabolites are a key driver of adverse drug reactions (ADRs). Additionally, further metabolic events cannot be forecast, even though the metabolic path of the majority of substrates includes two or more sequential steps. To overcome the myopia of the SOM paradigm, this study constructs a well-defined system—termed the metabolic forest—for generating exact metabolite structures. We validate the metabolic forest with the substrate and product structures from a large, chemically diverse, literature-derived dataset of 20 736 records. The metabolic forest finds a pathway linking each substrate and product for 79.42% of these records. By performing a breadth-first search of depth two or three, we improve performance to 88.43 and 88.77%, respectively. The metabolic forest includes a specialized algorithm for producing accurate quinone structures, the most common type of reactive metabolite. To our knowledge, this quinone structure algorithm is the first of its kind, as the diverse mechanisms of quinone formation are difficult to systematically reproduce. We validate the metabolic forest on a previously published dataset of 576 quinone reactions, predicting their structures with a depth three performance of 91.84%. The metabolic forest accurately enumerates metabolite structures, enabling promising new directions such as joint metabolism and reactivity modeling.



INTRODUCTION

Safety problems are one of the primary causes of drug candidate attrition.^{1–3} Furthermore, idiosyncratic adverse drug reactions (IADRs) frequently only arise after approval, incurring significant resources.^{4,5} Many IADRs present as drug-induced liver injury, the leading driver of drug withdrawal from the market.^{6–10} Although IADRs are poorly understood, many are linked to bioactivation: enzymatic conversion of drugs to electrophilically reactive metabolites.^{11–15} Reactive metabolites covalently bind to nucleophilic sites within biological macromolecules, including DNA^{16–18} and off-target proteins.^{19–21} Conjugation to DNA is frequently mutagenic,^{22,23} and conjugation to proteins can disrupt their functions^{24,25} or incite adverse immune responses leading to IADRs.^{26–30}

Detecting reactive metabolites early in the development process is essential to minimize toxicity risk.^{10,31–33} If bioactivation is observed for a particular lead compound, small structural differences may avoid reactive metabolite

formation without significantly affecting its pharmacophore.^{4,34} Mass spectrometry assays utilizing simple traps such as glutathione or cyanide is frequently used for initial screening of reactive metabolites-forming compounds.^{35,36} However, while glutathione and cyanide both only have a single nucleophilic side, macromolecules such as protein and DNA are much larger and contain multiple nucleophilic sites.³⁷ Consequently, binding to glutathione and cyanide may not accurately predict binding to protein and DNA, hence a significant caveat for assays utilizing these simple traps.^{38,39}

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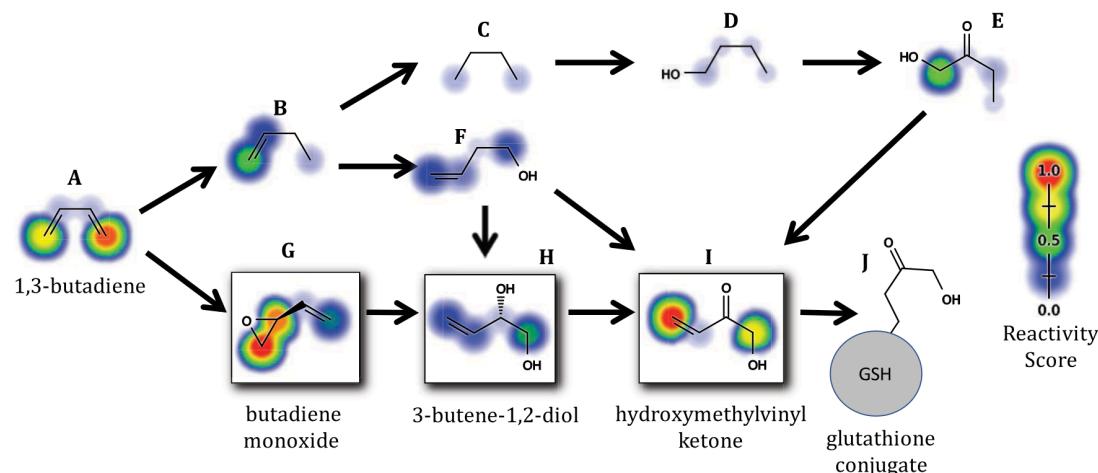


Figure 1. Metabolic forest explores metabolic pathways by sequentially applying metabolism rules. These pathways can reproduce experimentally observed structures or enumerate new structures. Oftentimes, there are several possible pathways between substrates and metabolites. For example, butadiene (A), a carcinogenic industrial chemical,^{15,79–81} has several known metabolites.⁸¹ The bottom pathway, (A) → (G) → (H) → (I) → (J), demonstrates an experimentally elucidated pathway. First, cytochromes P450 and myeloperoxidase epoxidize 1,3-butadiene^{82–84} form butadiene monoxide (G). Second, epoxide hydrolase forms 3-butene-1,2-diol (H).⁸⁵ Third, cytochromes P450 form hydroxymethylvinyl ketone (I), a highly reactive Michael acceptor.⁸⁶ Fourth, glutathione conjugates to the reactive metabolite (J).⁸⁶ Three alternative pathways are shown. The (A) → (B) → (F) → (I) → (J) pathway has an equivalent number of metabolic steps, with two different intermediates (B, F) from the experimentally known pathway. The (A) → (B) → (C) → (D) → (E) → (I) → (J) pathway has several additional steps. The color shading on each site shows reactivity score assigned by our published reactivity model.⁷⁷ The score ranged from 0 to 1, displayed as rainbow shading on each site in accordance with the provided reactivity scale. The scale provides both color and size cue for prediction interpretation.

Binding to biological macromolecules can be more accurately quantified in experiments with radiolabeled compounds.^{34,40} Still, radiolabeled compounds are generally not used until the late stage of preclinical development because they are expensive to synthesize.

Computational approaches could facilitate reactive metabolite detection by rapidly flagging drug candidates susceptible to bioactivation, thereby reducing both the total number of needed experiments and the chances of missing potentially toxic molecules. Currently, the dominant computational aid for avoiding bioactivation is the structural alert approach.^{41–43} Using a database of structural alerts, which are simply motifs such as phenols or furans that are often bioactivated, molecules containing those substructures can easily be flagged.⁴⁴ However, structural alerts have several shortcomings: they are often not actually bioactivated due to specific molecular context, they do not match all drugs that produce reactive metabolites, and they are purely retrospective.^{45–47}

Instead, several alternative, more flexible approaches have the potential to learn concepts from the data that generalize to never-before-seen structures. The majority of the work focus on predicting sites of metabolism (SOMs): the specific atoms that are metabolically modified by enzymes.^{47–64} while others concentrate on metabolite structure inference from the parent compound.^{65–72}

A molecule's SOMs can be used to infer the structures of its metabolites or suggest where a molecule might be rationally redesigned. However, SOM predictors also have limitations. First, they omit consideration of reactivity and therefore miss the second half of the bioactivation mechanism. As a result, benign metabolic steps like hydroxylation are indistinguishable from bioactivation events like epoxidation. For example, the epoxidation of carbamazepine to carbamazepine-10,11-epoxide, which is linked to adverse reactions,^{73–75} would eventually form the same product as hydroxylation at both carbons of the

bond where the epoxide forms. Second, SOM models are limited by datasets containing missing intermediates that elude experimental detection. For example, one systematic review of experimental metabolism literature reported that only 45.6% of all metabolites were formed by a single step, compared to 32.0 and 26.5% of metabolites that were generated by two or three or more steps, respectively.⁷⁶ Both shortcomings of the SOM paradigm are solvable by explicitly enumerating metabolite structures.

There are published computational metabolism tools that infer metabolite structures from parent compounds.^{65–72} In this work, we built the metabolic forest: a collection of metabolism rules that rapidly enumerates metabolite structures for one or several sequential steps (Figure 1). To rigorously evaluate its ability to reproduce experimentally observed structures, we quantified performance across a large, literature-derived dataset of tens of thousands of reactions. By performing a systematic search between reported substrates and products, the metabolic forest automatically labels SOMs (and reveals manual annotation errors) and suggests missing intermediate structures. The metabolic forest predicts many different types of metabolism, including quinone formation. Although their formation is nontrivial to programmatically represent, quinone species are especially important to include in a useful method because they compose over 40% of known reactive metabolites.⁷⁶ Using the quinone and epoxide structures generated by the metabolic forest, we link previously developed metabolism^{45,63} and reactivity⁷⁷ models to generate bioactivation hypotheses. A direct comparison of our approach to BioTransformer,⁷² SyGMA,⁷⁰ and GLORY⁷¹ is shown in our subsequent work.⁷⁸

DATA AND METHODS

Phase I Metabolism Data. We measured the performance of the metabolite predictor on the phase I metabolism dataset,

detailed in our recent study.⁶⁴ In short, these data consisted of 20 736 *in vitro* and *in vivo* phase I human records from the literature-derived Accelrys Metabolite Database (AMD). We identified five categories of phase I metabolism: stable oxygenation, unstable oxygenation, dehydrogenation, hydrolysis, and reduction, and manually labeled 10 280, 5811, 2794, 3869, and 1590 sites of metabolism. Due to their complex, often multistep mechanisms, quinone formations do not fit well into the criteria used to extract and label the phase I dataset. Instead, to quantify performance at predicting quinone structures, we used a dataset from one of our previous studies consisting of 576 quinone formations extracted from the AMD.⁴⁵

Metabolic Forest. We built a metabolite structure predictor that rapidly enumerates trees of metabolic pathways. This algorithm—codenamed the metabolic forest—was built in python using the 2017.09.01 release of RDKit, an open-source cheminformatics package.⁸⁷ The metabolic forest included 24 reaction rules (**Table 1**). Each rule belonged to

Table 1. Twenty-Four Rules Used by the Metabolic Forest, Their Associated Ruleset, and Their Type

rule	ruleset	type
acetylation	conjugation	
azo splitting	hydrolysis	
benzodioxole reduction	reduction	
dealkylation	unstable oxygenation	
dehydration	reduction	
dephosphorylation	hydrolysis	
epoxide opening	stable oxygenation	
glucuronidation	conjugation	
glutathionation	conjugation	
hydrolysis	carbonyl cleavage	smarts reaction rule
hydroxylation	stable oxygenation	
nitrogen oxidation	stable oxidation	
nitrogen reduction	reduction	
oxidative dehalogenation	unstable oxygenation	
oxygen reduction	reduction	
reductive dehalogenation	reductive dehalogenation	
sulfation	conjugation	
sulfur oxidation	stable oxygenation	
sulfur reduction	reduction	
dehydrogenation	dehydrogenation	
hydrogenation	reduction	resonance pair rule
quinone formation	quinone formation	
epoxidation	stable oxygenation	
tautomerization	tautomerization	resonance structure rule

a ruleset, including (1) each of the five broad classes of phase I metabolism labeled in our simultaneous study,⁶⁴ (2) conjugation, (3) quinone formation, and (4) tautomerization. The conjugation and tautomerization rulesets encompass transformations that were sometimes implicitly included in our phase I and quinone formation datasets, perhaps due to experimental limitations.

For phase I metabolism, the stable oxygenation ruleset included the epoxidation, hydroxylation, nitrogen oxidation, and sulfur oxidation rules, the unstable oxygenation ruleset included the dealkylation and oxidation dehalogenation rules, the dehydrogenation ruleset included a lone dehydrogenation

rule, the hydrolysis ruleset included the dephosphorylation, epoxide opening, carbonyl cleavage, and azo splitting rules, and the reduction ruleset included the benzodioxole reduction, dehydration, hydrogenation, nitrogen reduction, sulfur reduction, oxygen reduction, and reductive dehalogenation rules.

The conjugation ruleset included four rules specifying the reactions acetylation, glucuronidation, glutathionation, and sulfation.

The quinone formation ruleset included a single quinone formation rule that both modeled the two-electron oxidation that directly forms quinones and several types of reactions that often set the stage for that oxidation, such as aromatic hydroxylation.

Similarly, the tautomerization ruleset had a single eponymous rule. Tautomerization, although not generally regarded as a type of metabolism, nevertheless plays a role in known metabolic pathways of drugs like clopidogrel⁸⁸ and ranitidine.⁸⁹

Programmatically, these rules fell into three archetypes: SMARTS rules, resonance pair rules, and resonance structure rules, detailed in the following sections.

SMARTS Rules. Many of the reaction rules used the reaction SMARTS syntax provided by the open-source cheminformatics library RDKit (**Table 2**).⁸⁷ Reaction SMARTS syntax is derived from SMARTS patterns, and has similarities to the alternative reaction languages “SMIRKS”^{90,91} and “SMILES”.⁹² Reaction SMARTS are a compact method for encoding transformations that occur on a small number of localized atoms. For example, the string: “[#6h:1]»[*:1]O” expresses a hydroxylation reaction where the oxygen (“O”) is connected with a single bond to a carbon with at least one hydrogen (“[#6h:1]”). The oxygen will be protonated during a sanitization step before outputting the final structure. The exact Reaction SMARTS used for each rule—developed by manual inspection and adjustment—are listed in **Table 2**.

Resonance Pair Rules. Reaction SMARTS work well for encoding transformations that occur on small groups of neighboring atoms. However, Reaction SMARTS do not extend well to reactions that can occur at distal sites on a molecule due to resonance structures. For example, quinone formation reactions are challenging to encode because they can involve several atoms across one or more rings, and by definition, entail a loss of aromaticity. Consequently, there is no way to write a well-generalized SMARTS rule for quinone formation because bond and atom attributes shift simultaneously. A SMARTS rule matching a certain quinone formation may not generalize to even slightly different ring patterns, despite identical underlying principles.

Instead, we designed resonance reaction rules that share a common task: finding a path across the conjugated or aromatic systems within a molecule, while also efficiently iterating through the resonance structures in that molecule. This task is more complicated than one might initially imagine because input molecules may have many possible resonance structures and many possible paths through those resonance structures. Several implementations were tested but ultimately abandoned due to combinatorial explosions on certain problematic types of molecules. Ultimately, we found an efficient implementation that enables rapid computation of resonance-based metabolites, even across large aromatic systems like polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

Fundamentally, this implementation considers various resonance structures in turn. However, rather than naively

Table 2. Reaction SMARTS Used by the Metabolite Prediction Algorithm

rule	reaction SMARTS
acetylation	[#7,#8,#16;h:1]>>[*:1][#6](=[#8])[#6]
azo splitting	[#7:1]=[#7:2]>>[*:1].[*:2]
benzodioxole reduction	[#6R:1]-[#8R:2]-[#6H2R:3]-[#8R:4]-[#6R:5]>>([*:1]-[*:2].[*:3].[*:4]-[*:5])
dealkylation	[#6H3:1][#7,#8H0,#16:2]>>([*:2].[*:1](=O)O)
	[#6H3:1][#7,#8H0,#16:2]>>([*:2].[*:1]=O)
	[#6H3:1][#7,#8H0,#16:2]>>([*:2].[*:1]-O)
	[#6H2:1][#7,#8H0,#16:2]>>([*:2].[*:1](=O)O)
	[#6H2:1][#7,#8H0,#16:2]>>([*:2].[*:1]-O)
	[#6H1:1][#7,#8H0,#16:2]>>([*:2].[*:1]=O)
	[#6H1:1][#7,#8H0,#16:2]>>([*:2].[*:1]-O)
	[#6H0:1][#7,#8H0,#16:2]>>([*:2].[*:1]-O)
	[#6:1][#6:2]>>(O-[*:1].[*:2])
	[#6h:1][#6:2]>>(O-[*:1].[*:2])
	[#6h:1][#6:2]>>(O=[*:1].[*:2])
	[#8H1:3]-[#6:1]-[#7,#8,#16:2]>>([*:3]=[*:1].[*:2])
dehydration	[#6,#7:1]-[#8H1:2]>>[*:1].[*:2]
	[#6:3]-[#6:1]-[#8H1:2]>>[*:3]=[*:1].[*:2]
	[#6,#7:1]-[#8:2]>>[*:1].[*:2]
dehydrogenation	[#16v4:1]-[Oh:2]>>[*:1]=[*:2]
	[#6h:1]-[#6D1H3,#6D2H2,#6D3H1,#7D2H1,#7D1H2,#7D3,#8H1:2]>>[*:1]=[*:2]
dephosphorylation	[#8:1]=[#15:2]-[#8:3])([#8:4)][#8:5][#6:6]>>[*:1]=[*:2]([*:3])([*:4])[*:5].O[*.6]
epoxidation	[#6:1]=[#6,#7:2]>>[*:1]1-[*:2]([O]1
epoxide opening	[#6:1]1[#8:2][#6:3]1>>([*:2][*:3][*:1])
	[#6:1]1[#8:2][#6:3]1>>([*:2][*:3][*:1]O)
glucuronidation	[#6:1][#6:2](=[O,N,P,S:3])[#8:4]>>O1C(C(=O)O)C(O)C(O)C(O)C([*:4][*:2](=[#8:3])[*:1])1
	[#8H1:1][#6:2]>>O1C(C(=O)O)C(O)C(O)C(O)C([*:1][*:2])1
glutathionation	[#6:1]1[#8:2][#6:3]1>>C(CC(=O)N[C@H](CS([*:1][*:3][*:2]))C(=O)NCC(=O)O)[C@H](C(=O)O)N
	[#6:1][Cl:2]>>C(CC(=O)N[C@H](CS([*:1]))C(=O)NCC(=O)O)[C@H](C(=O)O)N
	[#16h1:1]>>C(CC(=O)N[C@H](CS([*:1]))C(=O)NCC(=O)O)[C@H](C(=O)O)N
hydrogenation	[#6:1][#6:2]>>[*:1]=[*:2]
	[#6:1]=[#6:2]>>[*:1]-[*:2]
hydrolysis	[#8,#16:1]=[#6:2]-[#7,#8,#16:3]>>([*:1]=[*:2](O).[*:3])
	[#8,#16:1]=[#6:2]-[#7,#8,#16:3]>>([*:1]=[*:2].[*:3])
hydroxylation	[#6h:1]>>[*:1]O
	[#6h2:1]>>[*:1]=O
nitrogen oxidation	[#7v3:1]>>[*:1]O
	[#7v3:1]>>[*:1]=O
nitrogen reduction	[#7:1](=[#8:2])-[#8:3]>>[*:1].[*:2].[*:3]
	[#7:1]([#8:2]) [#8:3]>>[*:1].[*:2].[*:3]
	[#8:2]=[#7:1]-[#8:3]>>[*:1].[*:2].[*:3]
	[#8:2]=[#7:1]-[#8:1:3]>>[*:1]=[*:2].[*:3]
	[#7D2:1]=[#8:2]>>[*:1]
	[#7:1]-[#8:2]>>([*:1].[*:2])
oxidative dehalogenation	[#9,#17,#35,#53,#85:1]-[#6:2]>>[*:1].[*:2]O
	[#9,#17,#35,#53,#85:1]-[#6h1:2]>>[*:1].[*:2]=O
	[#9,#17,#35,#53,#85:1]-[#6H2:2]>>[*:1].[*:2](O)=O
	[#9,#17,#35,#53,#85:1]-[#6:2][#6H1:3]>>[*:2](O)[*:3]-[*:1]
	[#9,#17,#35,#53,#85:1]-[#6:2]-[#9,#17,#35,#53,#85:3]>>[*:1].[*:2](O)=O.[*:3]
	[#9,#17,#35,#53,#85:1]-[#6:2]-[#9,#17,#35,#53,#85:3]>>[*:1].[*:2](O)O.[*:3]
oxygen reduction	[#8:1]=[#6,#7:2]>>[*:1]-[*:2]
	[#8:1]-[#8:2]>>[*:1].[*:2]
reductive dehalogenation	[#9,#17,#35,#53,#85:1]-[#6:2]>>[*:1].[*:2]
	[#9,#17,#35,#53,#85:1]-[#6:2]-[#6:3]>>[*:1].[*:2]=[*:3]
sulfation	[#6:1][#8:2]>>[*:1][*:2]S(=O)(=O)O
	[#6:1]1=[#6:2][#6:3]2[#8:7][#6:4]2[#6:5]=[#6:6]1>>[*:1]1=[*:2][*:3]=[*:4](-S(C)(=O)(=O))[*:5]=[*:6]1
sulfur oxidation	[#16;v2,v4:1]>>[*:1]O
	[#16;v2,v4:1]>>[*:1]=O
sulfur reduction	[#16:1]=[#8:2]>>[*:1].[*:2]
	[#16:1]-[#16:2]>>[*:1].[*:2]

Table 3. Transforms Used by the Resonance Pair Rules

rule	endpoint (transforms)	system type
dehydrogenation	[#6h:1][#6D1H3,#6D2H2,#6D3H1,#7D2H1,#7D1H2,#8H:2] ("single2double") [#6h:1][#7D3:2] ("single2double", "addPlus1")	conjugated
hydrogenation	[*:1] [#6R:1][#6D1H3,#6D2H2,#6D3H1,#7D2H1,#7D1H2,#8H:2] ("single2double") [#6D2H1:1] ("addO")	conjugated
quinone formation	[#6H0R:1]-[F,Cl,Br,I:2] ("replaceHalogenWithO", "single2double") [#6H0R:1][#7D3:2] ("single2double", "addPlus1") [#6R:1][#7,#8:2][#6:3] ("dealk", "single2double")	aromatic

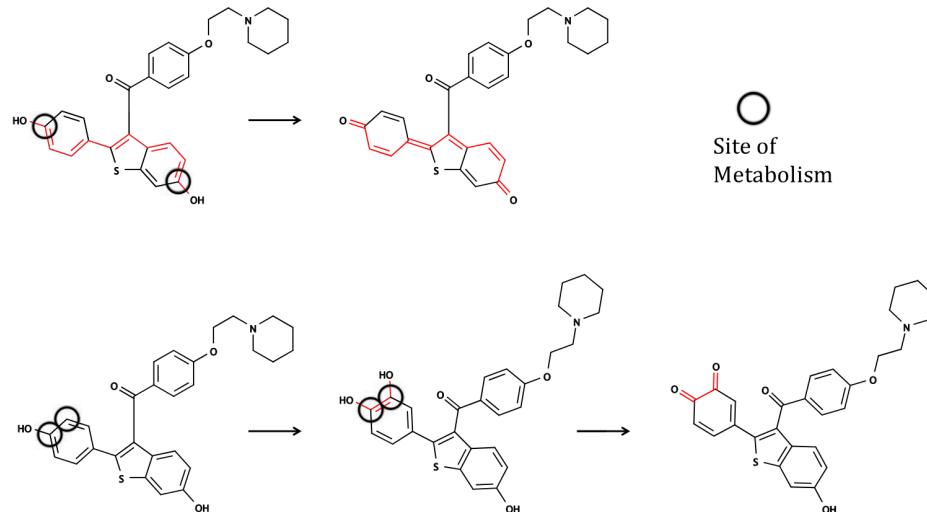


Figure 2. Raloxifene illustrates the quinone prediction method. Various resonance structures are considered in turn. For each structure, all paths between each pair of atoms are examined. Each atom pair is tested for compatibility with several predefined endpoint structures. A valid path is indicated by red bonds on the upper left. For this path, both endpoints are hydroxyls, in purple, which form a long-range quinone in a one-step, two-electron oxidation when the single and double bonds swap, as indicated by the arrows. Two-step quinone formations are also predicted by our method, such as that formed by hydroxylation followed by oxidation to form the lower right structure.

consider all resonance structures for an input molecule, only potentially useful resonance structures are produced. This approach is practical owing to the insight that conjugated-system-based metabolic events can only occur across a single conjugated system, so the various conformations of any other conjugated system are not relevant. First, a molecule is fragmented into its constitutive conjugated systems. Next, for each conjugated-system fragment, all resonance structures are generated for that fragment and then reattached to the rest of the molecule. As a result, the total number of resonance structures produced by a molecule is a linear combination of the number of resonance structures in each of its conjugated systems, rather than a multiple. This approach significantly cuts down on the total number of resonance structures produced but does not forgo any resonance structure that might be relevant for a given transformation, which can only occur across a single conjugated system.

In particular, pairs of atoms within each resonance structure were considered in the resonance pair rule (Algorithm 1). Only pairs that matched all of the following criteria: (1) both within the same conjugated system, (2) at least one connecting path that alternated double and single bonds, and (3) both matching any of several predefined endpoint structures, were considered. Each of these endpoint structures had a corresponding list of possible structural modifications. For each valid pair, each possible combination of modifications was performed. For each resulting structure, for each connecting

path of alternating single and double bonds between the two atoms, a final structure was generated by swapping the single and double bonds.

Algorithm 1 The resonance pair algorithm. Algorithm takes inputs (1) the molecule, (2) endpoint patterns as SMARTS strings, and (3) sets of atoms that are grouped by connected system, aromatic or conjugate as needed determined for the rule.

```

1: procedure RESONANCEPAIRALGORITHM(Molecule;Transforms,Systems)
2:   T ← all matches in Molecule to Transforms
3:   for S in Systems do
4:     for KekuleForm (K) in S do
5:       PairedMatches (A1, A2) in both S and T do
6:         P ← path of alternating single/double bonds between A1 and A2, with start and end double bond
7:         M ← transform S in Molecule to match K
8:         M ← apply transform from A1 to M
9:         M ← apply transform from A2 to M
10:        M ← swap single and double bonds along P in M
11:        yield M

```

The exact specifications of the three resonance pair rules, dehydrogenation, hydrogenation, and quinone formation rules, are detailed in Table 3. Dehydrogenation and hydrogenation considered conjugated systems, as previously described. However, due to its mechanism, the quinone formation rule only needed to consider aromatic systems (Figure 2).

Resonance Structure Rules. The tautomerization and epoxidation rules also used resonance structures, but are distinct from the resonance pair rules because they do not perform combinations of modifications on pairs of atoms. The tautomerization rule works by iterating through resonance structures and enumerating all atoms one-bond away from each conjugated system (Algorithm 2). For each of these neighboring atoms, all paths from the neighbor through each atom within the conjugated system, where the number of

double and single bonds was the same, were considered. For each path, all double and single bonds were swapped to emit a tautomer. The tautomerization rule does not change the overall number of double bonds, single bonds, or hydrogens. The epoxidation rule used resonance structures and a pattern listed in Table 2 to replace double bonds between carbons with epoxides.

Algorithm 2 The tautomerization algorithm.

```

1: procedure TAUTOMERIZATIONRULE(Molecule)
2:   for S in ConjugatedSystems do
3:     for KekuleForm (K) in S do
4:       for Neighbor (N) in Molecule not in S do
5:         for Atom (A) in S do
6:           P — path of alternating single/double bonds between A and N, with equal number of single
   and double bonds
7:           M ← swap single and double bonds along P in M
8:         yield M

```

Algorithm for Predicting Depth Two or Three Metabolite Structures. To search for multiple-step metabolites, a breadth-first search was performed, with depth capped at two or three. In this algorithm, the search continued until a metabolic path was found between substrate and metabolite. For example, for a depth two search, each depth one metabolite was first considered in turn. If any of the depth one metabolites matched the experimentally known metabolite, the search terminated. Otherwise, all of the depth one metabolites were considered, one at a time. For each depth one metabolite, all its metabolites were generated (equivalent to depth two metabolites relative to the starting reactant). If any of those depth two metabolites matched the experimentally known product, the search terminated. This process continued until either a match was found or the specified depth limit was exceeded. This search is only limited by the size of the input molecule, the quality of the rulesets, and the computational power available. In this study, we at most ran a depth three search to find paths between substrates and metabolites, but deeper searches are readily possible. This algorithm can also be modified to only take as input a substrate structure, and generate all possible metabolites to a given depth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We explored several applications of the metabolic forest. First, we quantified performance at accurately reproducing metabolite structures and the corresponding pathways across a large, literature-derived dataset of phase I reactions. Second, using these pathways, we automatically labeled SOMs, thereby also fixing any mistakes in the original, manual labels. Third, we measured the intermediate metabolites generated when finding paths between substrates and metabolites. Fourth, we quantified how well the metabolite predictor produced quinone structures, a reaction type that is both especially challenging to represent and especially important for anticipating toxicity.

Accurate Predictions of Metabolite Structures. This study aimed to develop a system for accurately predicting metabolite structures. With this in mind, a critical metric was the percentage of AMD records for which the metabolite predictor generated the exact experimentally observed metabolite. Each AMD record includes the structures of both substrate and product. Using these structures, a useful method should find a series of transformations linking substrate and product, for any record that adheres to known metabolism patterns.

We performed several experiments to measure the ability of the metabolic forest to accurately predict the product structures of 20 736 AMD records (Table 4). First, we ran

Table 4. Performance of Several Methods at Reproducing the Structure(s) Linking the Substrates and Products of 20 736 AMD Records^a

reaction type	depth three	depth two	depth one	annotated site
overall	88.77	88.43	79.42	78.36
C-hydroxylation	91.29	91.07	84.71	84.24
hydrolysis	86.73	86.41	75.53	75.70
N-dealkylation	90.09	89.91	81.42	81.17
reduction	82.71	82.33	70.15	68.59
aliphatic hydroxylation	92.69	92.45	86.60	86.07
aromatic hydroxylation	92.11	92.06	86.85	86.55
O-dealkylation	91.57	91.4	86.15	85.76
C-oxidation	83.39	82.61	56.69	55.07
hydrogenation	84.71	84.32	66.87	66.72
N-demethylation	88.66	88.42	80.11	79.88
O-demethylation	93.89	93.72	90.58	90.31
dehydrogenation	86.93	86.04	68.89	66.31
epoxidation	79.19	78.51	70.54	70.54
oxidation	77.41	76.24	54.08	48.69
S-oxidation	85.9	85.32	77.24	73.86
N-oxidation	88.71	87.62	80.88	80.88
ring opening	55.25	53.22	19.49	16.10
dehalogenation	62.6	58.33	43.09	29.88
dearomatization	65.29	65.08	51.45	46.49
N-deacylation	92.26	92.26	80.87	80.18
O-deacylation	97.65	97.65	90.85	90.85
aromatization	62.34	59.48	40.26	26.23
oxidative n-dealkylation	91.29	91.29	86.19	85.59
chain shortening	67.2	67.2	12.54	7.40
N-reduction	78.35	78.35	69.76	69.42
oxidative deamination	88.65	87.23	74.47	74.11
glutathionation	34.53	34.53	27.35	0.00
optical resolution	94.44	94.44	91.67	91.67
tautomerization	56.13	52.36	8.02	6.60

^aFor each reaction type, the highest performance is in bold. Any score not statistically different from the best performance is in italics (using a *P*-value cutoff of 0.05).

an annotated search, whereby we generated all metabolite structures for all of a molecule's manually labeled SOMs; which resulted in an overall performance of 78.36%. Second, we ran a depth one search (Algorithm 3), which improved over the known site search with an overall performance of 79.42%. Deepening the search to depths two or three depth significantly increased the overall performance to 88.43 and 88.77%, respectively. Previous experience with the AMD suggested that many reactions reported in a single record may in fact be two or more metabolic steps, and this is confirmed by the superior performance of the two and three depth search compared to the one depth search.

Algorithm 3 The breadth-first search algorithm. Algorithm takes inputs (1) the substrate, (2) the metabolite, (3) a ruleset (a collection of metabolic rules) and (4) a depth limit.

```

1: procedure BFSMETABOLITE(Substrate, Metabolite, RuleSet, Depth)
2:   Intermediates(I) = []
3:   for Rule(R) in RuleSet do
4:     for Transforms in R do
5:       T — all matches in Substrate to Transforms
6:       for Site(S) in T do
7:         M — apply T at S on Substrate
8:         if M == Metabolite then return M
9:         else
10:           I — append M to I
11:   if Depth >= 1 then
12:     for M in I do
13:       BFSMetabolite(M, Metabolite, RuleSet, Depth - 1)

```

For a given input molecule, the total number of structures generated in multiple steps combinatorially explodes. Con-

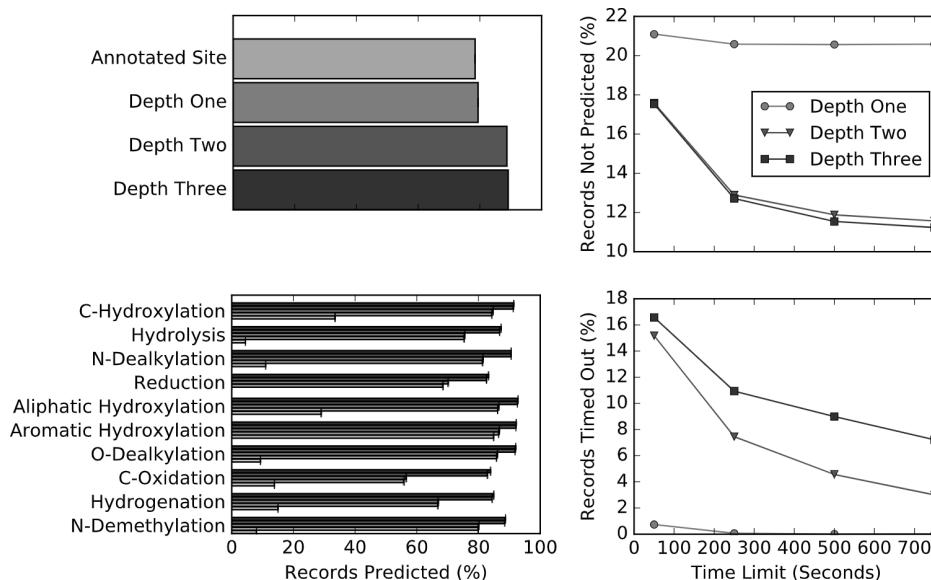


Figure 3. Metabolic forest took as input the reactant and product structures of AMD records. For each of the 20 736 records, the algorithm performed a breadth-first search to link the reactant and product using a collection of metabolic rules. These searches continued until the exact product structure is found, the depth-limited was reached, or a maximum time limit was exceeded. Top left: the overall percentage of records for which a valid pathway was found, using a time limit of 1000 s. In the annotated site comparison experiment, a depth one search was restricted to using sites of metabolism matching those that were manually annotated during construction of the dataset. Bottom left: performance is broken down for the 10 most frequent reaction types of the dataset, as recorded in the AMD. Detailed results are reported in Table 4. Top right: percent error as a function of the maximum time limit allowed per record. The depth one search requires little running time to exhaust all possibilities. In contrast, performances of the depth two and depth three search are improved by allowing for a longer search. Bottom right: the corresponding number of records that timed out for each depth and time limit.

sequently, for each breadth-first search, we measured performance at five time cutoffs of 50, 125, 250, 500, and 750 s/reaction record. For searches of depth one, the time cutoff had minimal effect on performance. This is as expected because all depth one possibilities were explored within the allotted time window. In contrast, searches of greater depth often required a longer run time to find a valid solution (Figure 3).

Examples of records for which a path was successfully elucidated are shown in Figure 4. For example, for zotepine, it was straightforward to find a one-step sulfur oxidation linking substrate and its metabolite. Also highlighted in Figure 4 are examples of records for which a valid path was not found. For example, for a capsaicin metabolite, glutathione attaches to an unsubstituted carbon on a phenyl ring and a hydroxyl is simultaneously added at a different carbon meta to the glutathionation site. Some steps seem to be missing, as the simultaneous glutathionation and meta hydroxylation is not a known metabolic pathway. Although we might hope to capture this metabolite with a deeper or faster search by combining metabolism rules, encoding a rule for such an idiosyncratic case would suggest mere memorization of the data, rather than generation of metabolically logical structures.

Inferred Intermediate Metabolite Structures. Many AMD records have missing intermediates (Figure 5). Such records are often immediately obvious during manual inspection, for they often entail multiple transformations at different parts of the molecule, such as two hydroxylations. Another frequent variety is sequential transformations at a single site being conflated into a single reaction. For example, some halogenated aromatic rings are reported to immediately form quinones, without reporting the intermediate dehalogenation event that needs to take place before the two-electron

oxidation to a quinone. As previously discussed, we implemented a depth-first search algorithm to infer intermediate metabolite structures. To quantify the number of missing metabolites discovered, we subtract the number of metabolites found by the depth one search from the number of metabolites found by the depth two search. This resulted in 1868 metabolites, which can be interpreted as missing metabolites in AMD records.

Automatic Detection of Mislabeled Sites. Comparing the annotated site search to the depth one search revealed cases where SOMs were mislabeled (Figure 6). Across 20 736 phase I reaction records, the depth one search found a reaction connecting reactant and product in 79.42% of cases. In contrast, an annotated site search that limited rules to generating structures by modifying at least one of the manually annotated SOMs only had a performance of 78.36%. The comparable performance of 79.42 and 78.36% implies that the metabolic forest produces SOMs that are of similar validity as those produced by manual labor. Furthermore, mistakes in the human annotations are revealed by examining cases where the depth one search found a solution, but the annotated-site-limited search failed.

Accurate Generation of Quinone Structures. Accurate quinone structure generation is an especially important task for a metabolite structure predictor. Quinone species, including quinone-imines, quinone-methides, and imine-methides, represent over 40% of reactive metabolites.⁷⁶ Many drugs are vulnerable to quinone formation due to the ubiquity of the phenyl ring in drug design. Due to their abundance, quinone formation in drug metabolism has been extensively studied experimentally.^{105–109} Recently, we published the first study that explicitly predicted quinone formation.⁴⁵ However, that

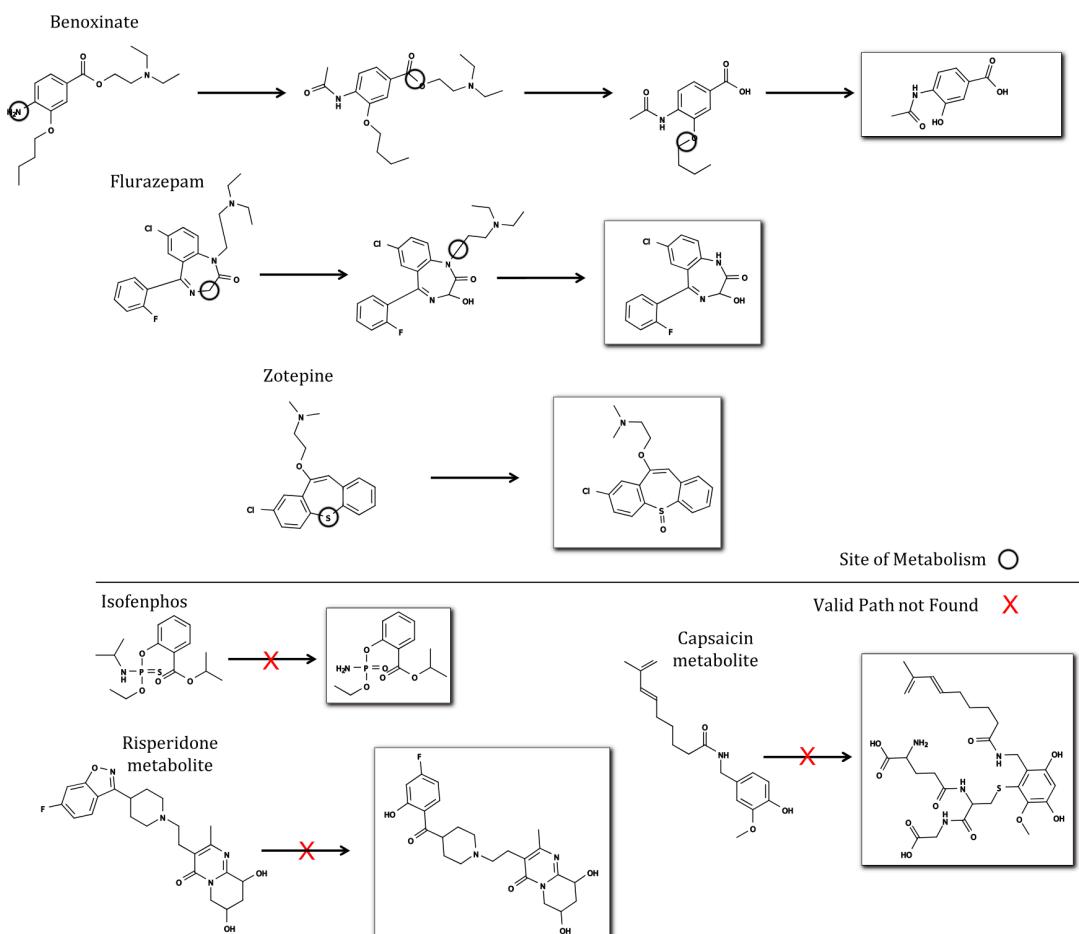


Figure 4. Examples of success and failure reaction records from metabolism literature. Top: transformation pathways successfully found by the metabolic forest, including a three-step reaction pathway of benoxinate,⁹³ a two-step reaction pathway of flurazepam,⁹⁴ and a one-step pathway of zotepine.⁹⁵ Bottom: records where the metabolic forest failed to find a pathway between substrate and product, including a simultaneous dealkylation and desulfuration of isofenphos,⁹⁶ a ring opening of a risperidone metabolite,⁹⁷ and a simultaneous glutathionation and hydroxylation of a capsaicin metabolite.⁹⁸ Experimentally observed metabolites are enclosed within boxes. Inferred sites of metabolism are circled. Records for which no pathway was found linking substrate and metabolite are marked with red crosses.

model had the limitation—common to most previous metabolism models—of only making predictions on the input molecule, and not producing actual metabolite structures.

For the present study, we designed a specific rule for quinone structure prediction. To evaluate performance at predicting quinone structures, we used the exact dataset from our previous quinone study.⁴⁵ Quinone formation reactions are challenging to encode because they can involve a variety of substituents and by definition entail a loss of aromaticity. Nevertheless, we accurately modeled quinone formation using a combination of SMARTS reaction rules and more fine-coded chemical programming (Algorithm 1). To our knowledge, this is the first published algorithm for predicting the structure of quinones.

The algorithm finds quinone not only in simple cases but also across aromatic systems spanning multiple rings (Figure 2). Across the 576 quinone formations reactions, the metabolic forest finds a formation pathway 91.84, 91.84, and 76.22% of the time, for depth three, two, and one searches, respectively (Figure 7).

Limitations. The metabolic forest accurately produced the metabolite structures across a large, literature-derived dataset

of 20 736 phase I reaction records. Although diverse, this data may have biases that limit our results. For example, many short-lived intermediates are difficult or impossible to experimentally detect. As a result, such transitory molecules are likely underreported in metabolic studies. Due to our focus on accurately reproducing literature-derived data, our current tool may not be as well tuned to these underreported intermediates.

Secondly, the search algorithm naively considers all possible combinations of rules, without regard to biological patterns that make some combinations more likely than others. For example, the current method blindly mixes phase I and phase II reactions, ignoring the well-known paradigm of redox reactions often introducing functional groups for subsequent conjugation reactions.⁷⁶ Additionally, the search does not take into account the connectivity distance between the sites modified by subsequent metabolic steps. It would be logical to start the search at each depth near the site most recently modified, to reduce the number of false paths considered for reactions that are highly correlated, such as hydroxylation followed by quinone formation.¹⁵

A third possible caveat is the risk of incorrect metabolite structures in the data misinforming the design of the metabolic

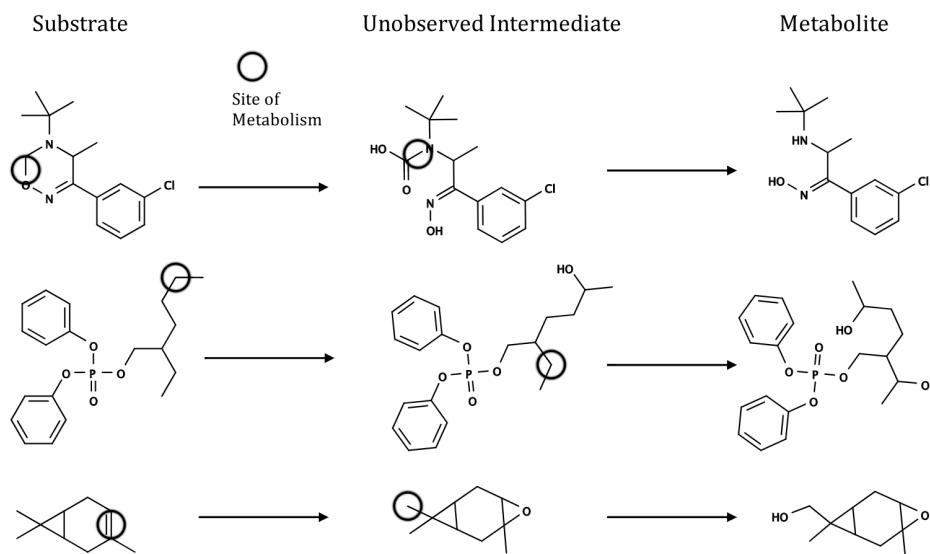


Figure 5. Missing intermediate structures can be predicted from those records for which a depth two or depth three search found a metabolic pathway not found at depth one. Three examples are visualized. Each substrate–metabolite pair could only be linked by searching a depth greater than 1. Such hypothesized intermediates can be short-lived and consequently difficult to observe experimentally, yet may have important biological consequences. Top row: a candidate prodrug of the antidepressant bupropion.⁹⁹ Middle row: the plasticizer additive and flame retardant 2-ethylhexyl diphenyl phosphate.¹⁰⁰ Bottom row: Δ³-carene, a natural monoterpene.¹⁰¹

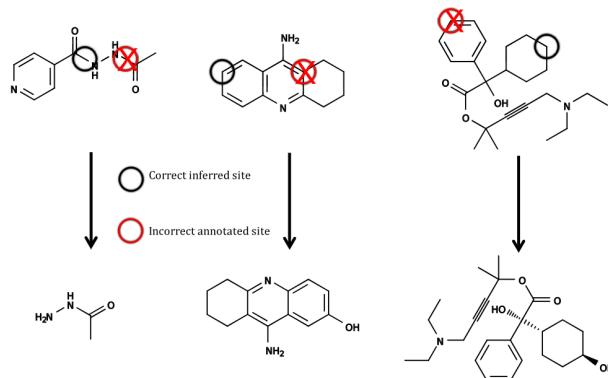


Figure 6. Across 20 736 phase I reactions, the depth one search found a reaction connecting reactant and product in 79.42% of cases, whereas the manually annotated sites only had a performance of 78.36%. By examining reactions solved by the depth one search but not the annotated sites, labeling mistakes were revealed. Three examples are shown, where the incorrect, manually annotated sites are circled in red and crossed, and the correct sites uncovered by the depth one search are circled in black. From left to right: acetylisoniazid,¹⁰² tacrine,¹⁰³ and (NS-21), a former drug candidate for bladder disorders.¹⁰⁴

rules. The potential impact of this possibility on our reported accuracies seems low because the large dataset size of 20 736 records made the effect of any single record negligible. Furthermore, when constructing the metabolic forest, only a small fraction of the data was inspected. It seems more likely that incorrect or unorthodox metabolite structures resulted in a performance underestimation. For example, one poorly performing reaction type was glutathionation reaction because glutathione was reported as several slightly different forms in the data and therefore did not match any product structure. Explicitly encoding all of these glutathione forms would be undesirable because it would unnecessarily expand the total

number of possible structures at each depth and place undue emphasis on a single reaction type.

Case Study. Building a bioactivation model by linking models of metabolism^{47,63,77} and reactivity^{45,116} was a primary motivation for constructing an accurate method of metabolite structure generation. The full construction and analysis of this unified bioactivation model is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, to demonstrate the value of the metabolic forest, we built a prototype implementation. In this system, we used the explicit metabolite structures generated by the metabolic forest to unite three, heretofore incompatible, models: the previously discussed quinone formation model,⁴⁵ a model of epoxidation,⁶³ and a model of reactivity.⁷⁷

The quinone formation and epoxidation models were originally conceived as specialized metabolism studies, with their respective focuses chosen because quinones and epoxides together represent around 50% of all known reactive metabolites.^{76,117} However, classifying quinones and epoxides as either reactive or nonreactive is a generalization because reactivity is actually a continuum. For example, there are naturally occurring epoxides¹¹⁸ and other small-molecule-containing epoxides that are known to be nonreactive.¹¹⁹ In these cases, the presence of electron-donating groups on the carbons in an epoxide often stabilized the motif, by reducing the electron deficiency. Similarly, nearly identical quinones can vary widely in their reactivity and toxicity.¹²⁰ Consequently, evaluating the reactivity of possible quinones and epoxides enables a ranking of possible structures that may drive toxicity.

The quinone model predicts how likely quinones are to form at both the site and molecule levels. Similarly, the epoxidation model yields probabilistic scores for epoxide formation, also at the site- and molecule level. The reactivity model predicts reactivity to biological macromolecules, including DNA and protein, as well as glutathione and cyanide, which are frequently used experimentally to detect reactive molecules.^{38,39} To build our bioactivation model, we constructed a pipeline where, for a given input molecule, all of the

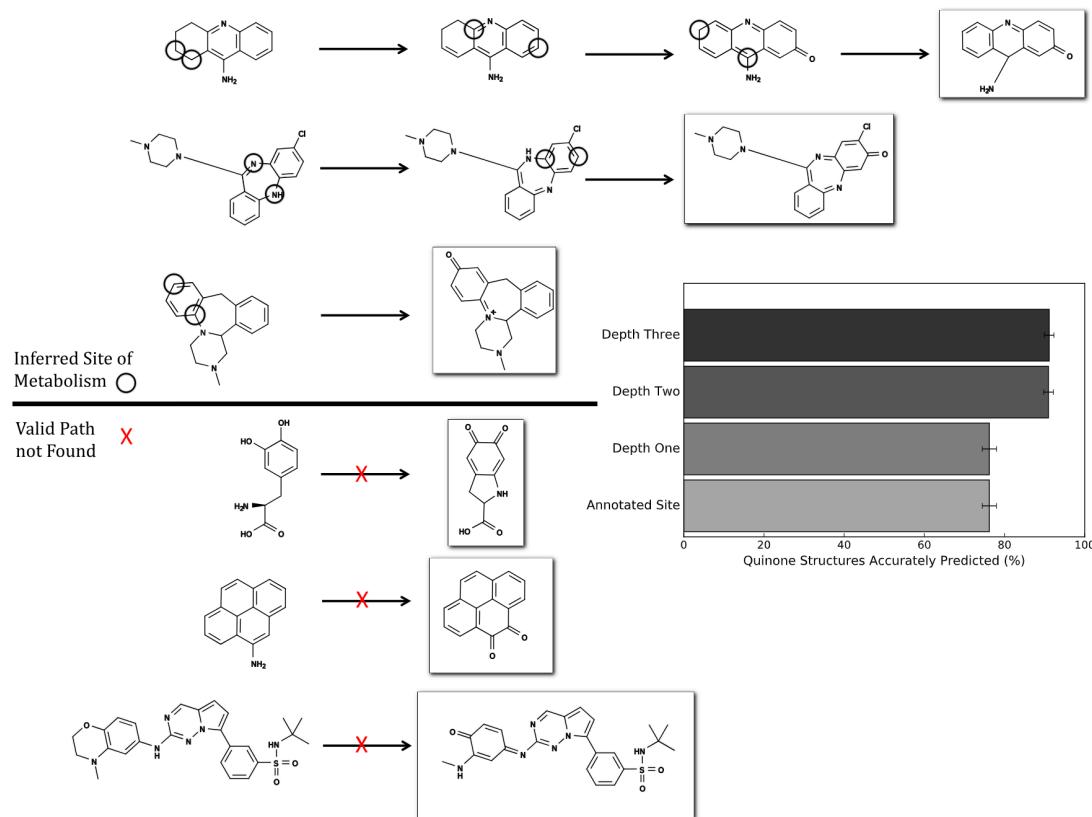


Figure 7. Metabolic forest accurately produced quinone structures. Across a dataset of 576 quinone formations,⁴⁵ the metabolic forest found a formation pathway 91.84, 91.84, and 76.22% of the time, for depth three, two, and one searches, respectively. Bottom half: examples of experimentally observed quinones successfully reproduced by depth one, two, and three searches. From top to bottom: the starting drugs are tacrine, a cholinesterase inhibitor;^{110,111} clozapine, an atypical antipsychotic;³⁹ and mianserin, an antidepressant.¹¹² Third to bottom: dihydroxyphenylalanine.¹¹³ Second to bottom row: a quinone is formed from 4-nitropyrene, an urban air pollutant from diesel engines.^{16,114} Bottom: a kinase inhibitor drug candidate.¹¹⁵

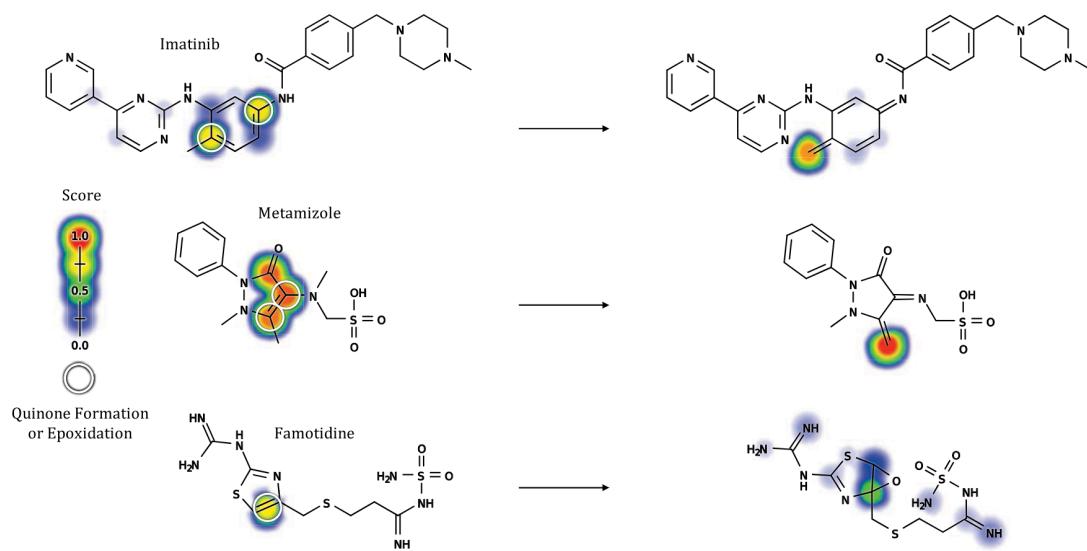


Figure 8. Previously developed models of metabolism and reactivity are connected by the metabolic forest to generated bioactivation hypotheses for several IADR-associated drugs, whose IADR drivers were never elucidated. Top: the chemotherapy drug imatinib has been implicated in several cases of idiosyncratic, severe hepatotoxicity.^{4,121} Middle: the analgesic metamizole was withdrawn from the market in several countries due to cases of agranulocytosis.^{123–127} Bottom: famotidine, a histamine H₂ receptor antagonist, has been associated with idiosyncratic reactions, including toxic epidermal necrolysis.¹³⁰ The colored shading represents the quinone formation score⁴⁵ for imatinib and metamizole, the epoxidation score⁶³ for famotidine, and the reactivity scores⁷⁷ of all three predicted metabolites.

structures of all possible epoxides and quinones were generated, and these structures submitted to the reactivity model. By multiplying the probabilistic metabolism scores from the epoxidation and quinone models by the reactivity scores, metabolites can be identified that are both likely to form and likely to be reactive. In the future, we plan to quantitatively use these bioactivation scores to predict reactive metabolite formation, and to systematically evaluate its performance at this task. Here, we highlight a few examples where the metabolite predictor has generated hypotheses about reactive metabolites that may be responsible for IADRs (Figure 8).

The chemotherapy drug imatinib has been implicated in several cases of idiosyncratic, severe hepatotoxicity.^{4,121} However, no reactive metabolite has been detected.¹²² Our models predict formation of a highly reactive quinone-methide. Our quinone formation model⁴⁵ predicted formation of a quinone-imide that is also predicted to be highly reactive by our reactivity model.⁷⁷ The potent nonopiod analgesic metamizole was withdrawn from the market in several countries, including the United States, due to cases of agranulocytosis.^{123–127} The mechanism of this toxicity has not been elucidated, although evidence has been found for an immunoallergic origin, suggestive of a bioactivation mechanism.¹²⁸ A cation radical has been observed in incubations with myeloperoxidase,¹²⁹ but without evidence of its formation *in vivo* the culprit of metamizole remains an open question. Our bioactivation model presents an alternative hypothesis: the formation of a reactive quinone on metamizole's pyrazolone motif. Famotidine, a histamine H₂ receptor antagonist, has been associated with unexplained idiosyncratic reactions, including toxic epidermal necrolysis.¹³⁰ A reactive epoxide forming on the thiazole within famotidine is a possible explanation suggested by epoxidation and reactivity scores.

CONCLUSIONS

This study established a validated, accurate tool for predicting metabolic structures across one or several metabolic steps. Our method combined simple rules encoded by reaction SMARTS with novel algorithms for complex, resonance-structure-based transformations, including quinone formation, hydrogenation, dehydrogenation, and tautomerization. We validated the metabolite structure predictor on a diverse collection of 20 736 records from a literature-derived database. Beginning with the substrate of each record, a breadth-first search successfully found a transformation resulting in the exact experimentally observed product 79.42, 88.43, and 88.77% of the time when generating a metabolite tree limited to one, two, or three successive rules, respectively. We also validated our method on a previously published dataset of 576 quinone formations,⁴⁵ producing the correct quinone structure with accuracies of 76.22, 91.84, and 91.84% with searches of depths one, two, and three, respectively. Our tool can also be used to infer missing intermediate structures, and to automatically label sites of metabolism. Most importantly, the metabolite predictor enables integration of metabolism and reactivity models to construct a bioactivation model. Until now, metabolite structures were the missing link in that endeavor. We constructed a prototype model that predicted novel putative reactive metabolites for the drugs imatinib, metamizole, and famotidine, each of which is associated with IADRs, the causes of which have never been elucidated. These reactive metabolites are specific, testable hypotheses about the

mechanism of their parent drug's idiosyncratic toxicity. We plan to comprehensively model bioactivation using the metabolite predictor and expect that accurate enumeration of possible metabolite structures will become a cornerstone of many other future investigations.

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Notes

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADR, adverse drug reaction; AMD, Accelrys Metabolite Database; IADR, idiosyncratic adverse drug reaction; SOM, site of metabolism

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