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# What do secreted phospholipases A<sub>2</sub> have to offer in combat against different viruses up to SARS-CoV-2?



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## ABSTRACT

Secreted phospholipases A<sub>2</sub> (sPLA<sub>2</sub>s) form a widespread group of structurally-related enzymes that catalyse the hydrolysis of the *sn*-2 ester bond of glycerophospholipids to produce free fatty acids and lysophospholipids. In humans, nine catalytically active and two inactive sPLA<sub>2</sub> proteins have been identified. These enzymes play diverse biological roles, including host defence against bacteria, parasites and viruses. Several of these endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may play a defensive role in viral infections, as they display *in vitro* antiviral activity by both direct and indirect mechanisms. However, endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may also exert an offensive and negative role, dampening the antiviral response or promoting inflammation in animal models of viral infection. Similarly, several exogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, most of them from snake venoms and other animal venoms, possess *in vitro* antiviral activities. Thus, both endogenous and exogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may be exploited for the development of new antiviral substances or as therapeutic targets for antagonistic drugs that may promote a more robust antiviral response. In this review, the antiviral versus proviral role of both endogenous and exogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s against various viruses including coronaviruses is presented. Based on the highlighted developments in this area of research, possible directions of future investigation are envisaged. One of them is also a possibility of exploiting sPLA<sub>2</sub>s as biological markers of the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 infection.

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## 1. Introduction

Phospholipases A<sub>2</sub> (PLA<sub>2</sub>s) comprise a superfamily of intracellular and secreted enzymes that catalyse the hydrolysis of

glycerophospholipids at the *sn*-2 position, releasing free fatty acids and lysophospholipids [1,2]. Secreted PLA<sub>2</sub>s (sPLA<sub>2</sub>s) completely differ from intracellular PLA<sub>2</sub> enzymes in structure, enzymatic properties, tissue distribution and biological functions. sPLA<sub>2</sub>s

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constitute a family of structurally-related enzymes which are widespread in nature and exert highly diverse biological functions [3–7]. Nine catalytically-active sPLA<sub>2</sub>s and two catalytically-inactive sPLA<sub>2</sub>-like proteins (classified into groups and sub-groups) are present in humans and other mammals [3]. These human sPLA<sub>2</sub>s are small proteins of 14–18 kDa with 6–8 disulphide bonds and a highly conserved His–Asp catalytic dyad at the active site using Ca<sup>2+</sup> as a key cofactor for catalysis. They are also termed endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s and are involved in a myriad of physiological and pathological processes, from digestion, lipid metabolism, skin homeostasis, spermatogenesis or host defence to regulation of the immune response and inflammation in disease conditions such as asthma, sepsis and cardiovascular diseases. sPLA<sub>2</sub>s participate to such processes by various mechanisms, for instance by modifying the lipid composition of cellular membranes or by producing pro- and/or anti-inflammatory lipids from both cellular and noncellular lipid components such as cell membranes, lipoproteins, microvesicles, mitochondria or foreign phospholipids from microbes and food [3,8,9].

sPLA<sub>2</sub>s are also found in large amount in animal venoms, especially in those from snakes, scorpions and bees [5–7]. Venom sPLA<sub>2</sub>s are structurally similar to endogenous mammalian sPLA<sub>2</sub>s but display toxic effects including neurotoxicity, myotoxicity, anticoagulant activity, cardiotoxicity and haemolytic activity. They can be considered as exogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s when injected to mammals, acting as weapons to kill preys. However, they are also viewed as pharmacological agents to possibly cure diseases [10–12]. As such, they are valuable research tools for analysing physiological and pathophysiological conditions in humans as well as promising molecules for the development of new therapeutic agents [13–16].

Both endogenous and exogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s play direct and indirect roles in host defence against various types of bacteria, parasites and viruses [17–21]. For example, an early study showed that several snake and bee venom sPLA<sub>2</sub>s exhibit direct antiviral activity by blocking HIV-1 virus entry into host cells [21]. Later, it was shown that group III, V and X (GIII, GV and GX) endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s play antiviral roles against adenoviruses and HIV-1 by different mechanisms [22–24]. Other studies have shown that the levels of endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s are upregulated after infection by dengue virus, H1N1 or coronavirus [25–28] and can modulate the antiviral response by indirect immune mechanisms [27,28].

In this review, we present the different antiviral activities of both endogenous and exogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s but also their antagonistic role in worsening viral infection. It appears that sPLA<sub>2</sub>s interfere with the life cycle of various viruses at different steps and also act indirectly by immunomodulation of the antiviral immune response. Some of their modes of antiviral action may be used to formulate strategies for the development of diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, perhaps even agents to treat viral infections.

## 2. Human sPLA<sub>2</sub>s

In mammals, mainly based on information obtained from mice (m) and humans (h), 11 to 12 sPLA<sub>2</sub> members have been identified: GIB, GIIA, GIIC (pseudogene in humans), GIID, GIIE, GIIF, GIII, GV, GX, GXIIA, GXIIB and otoconin-90. These sPLA<sub>2</sub>s are usually classified into three structural collections, *i.e.* the collection of I/II/V/X sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, and the collections of III and XII sPLA<sub>2</sub>s [3,4,29]. The corresponding human sPLA<sub>2</sub> gene names are PLA2G1B, PLA2G2A, PLA2G2C, PLA2G2D, PLA2G2E, PLA2G2F, PLA2G3, PLA2G5, PLA2G10, PLA2G12A, PLA2G12B and OC90.

Mammalian sPLA<sub>2</sub>s are differentially expressed in tissues and cell types, and play distinct, mostly non-redundant, roles that may be dependent or independent of their enzymatic activity. All but two mammalian sPLA<sub>2</sub>s are enzymatically active, with a wide range

of specific activities depending on the nature of glycerophospholipids, and *in vitro* versus *in vivo* settings [30,31]. GXIIB sPLA<sub>2</sub> is a catalytically-inactive sPLA<sub>2</sub>-like protein due to substitution of the highly conserved histidine by a leucine residue in the active site [29]. Despite its obvious lack of enzymatic activity, the protein has been shown to play a role in hepatic triglyceride metabolism by an unknown molecular mechanism [32]. Otoconin-90 is another sPLA<sub>2</sub>-like protein found in the inner ear and involved in balance regulation [33–35]. It possesses a tandem repeat of two sPLA<sub>2</sub>-like domains [33] with substitutions in key amino acids involved in enzymatic activity, rendering it catalytically inactive. It can however still bind Ca<sup>2+</sup> ion, which is important for its binding properties within the inner ear extracellular matrix called otoconia [33–35]. The proposed biological functions of endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s are largely based on observations from transgenic and/or knock-out mouse lines [8,36,37]. Although a large number of important sPLA<sub>2</sub> functions have been revealed by using this approach, it should be emphasized that the results obtained in mice and humans are not always comparable. For example, GIIC sPLA<sub>2</sub>, which is abundantly expressed in meiotic cells in the mouse testis, is found as a pseudogene in the human genome [38,39]. Similarly, GIIE sPLA<sub>2</sub> may play various roles related to inflammation and obesity in the mouse [40] but is barely expressed in most human cells [41,42]. GX sPLA<sub>2</sub> is present in the acrosome of mouse spermatozoa while it seems that GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> and/or other sPLA<sub>2</sub>s are present in human spermatozoa [43–45]. Furthermore, most studies were performed with sPLA<sub>2</sub> knock-out mouse lines in the C57Bl/6 background, where the GIIA sPLA<sub>2</sub> is naturally absent due to a frameshift mutation [46], while this sPLA<sub>2</sub> is highly expressed in other mouse strains like Balb/C [46] or in human tissues where it participates to inflammation and associated diseases, cancer and antibacterial defence among other functions [3,47–49]. This raises issues for possible redundancy, overlooked or overestimated roles of certain sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, and the translational impact of the findings from mice to humans. Therefore, with the aim to better understand the biological roles of the different human sPLA<sub>2</sub>s in diseases, which may be useful for diagnosis and treatment, it is reasonable to combine the key observations obtained from mouse models with those directly derived from human studies, from tissue distribution and function of human sPLA<sub>2</sub>s in healthy and disease conditions up to analyses of sPLA<sub>2</sub> gene polymorphisms and mutations [50–56].

Finally, it should be mentioned that endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s exhibit complex enzymatic properties depending on the lipid membranes that they will encounter once secreted. Indeed, they can act on a large variety of lipid substrates to produce multiple lipid mediators or modify the biochemical or biophysical properties of cell membranes or extracellular microvesicles, making their action both complex and unique to the microenvironment in which each of the different sPLA<sub>2</sub>s operate. sPLA<sub>2</sub>s act primarily on different extracellular or noncellular phospholipids such as those of the plasma membrane, lipoproteins, lipid microparticles, lung surfactant, skin lipid bodies, food and bacterial membranes, mitochondria, but also on intracellular membranes during their secretion [8,19,30,31,50], [57–63]. Products of sPLA<sub>2</sub> phospholipolysis, free fatty acids and lysophospholipids, are involved in a number of cellular pathways by generation of multiple bioactive lipid mediators, promotion of membrane remodelling, modification of extracellular noncellular lipid components, such as microparticles and lipoproteins, lung surfactant, or degradation of foreign phospholipids from microbes, microbiota and dietary components in response to given micro-environmental cues.

Some of the major biological effects of endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s and their potential involvement in various human disorders are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Key biological roles of endogenous mammalian sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, including their potential antiviral and/or proviral biological roles (underlined). The table is largely summarized from Refs. [9,40]; with additional information on GIB [56,64], GIII [23], GV [22,23], GX [22,23,27], GXIIA [65–68] and otoconin-90 [33–35].

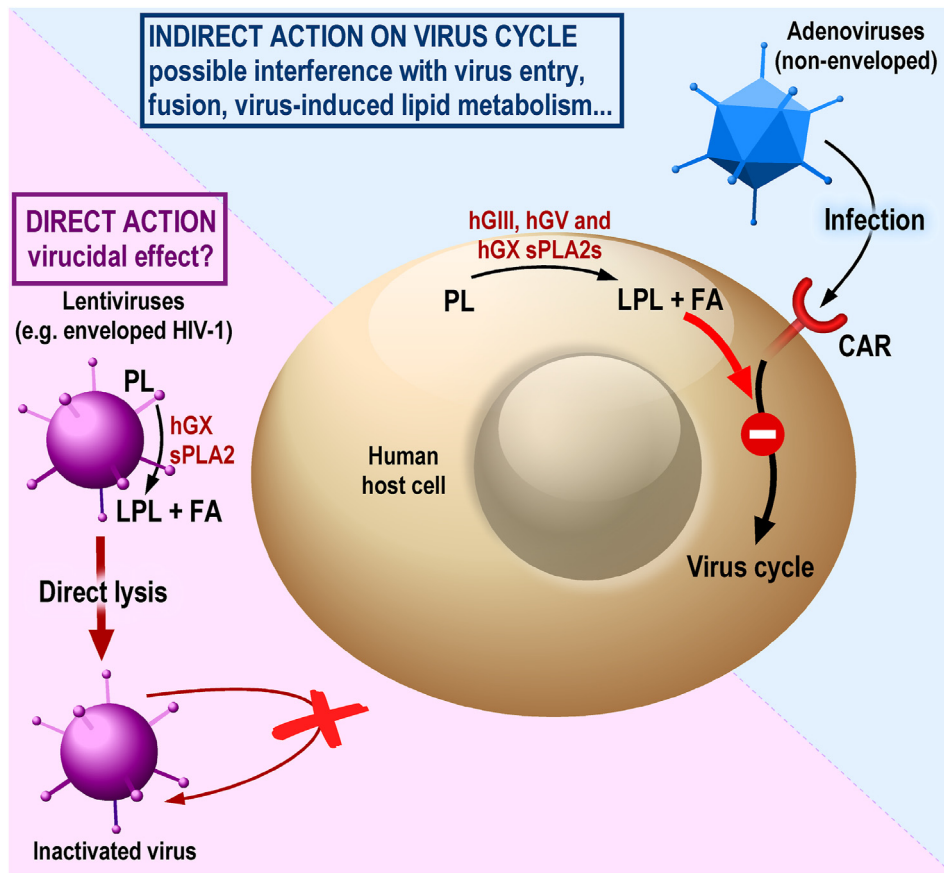
Endogenous mammalian sPLA <sub>2</sub>	Tissue and cell distribution	Physiological role	Pathophysiological role
GIB	pancreatic acinar cells, duodenum, ileum, stomach, lung, blood, spermatozoa	digestion of dietary phospholipids in the small intestine, immune response	obesity, lung inflammation, <u>anergy of T cells in HIV infection (i.e. proviral role)</u> , anthelmintic
GIIA	intestine, Paneth cells, platelets, leukocytes, synoviocytes, skin, biological fluids (blood, tears, seminal and synovial fluid, lung alveolar space)	regulation of intestinal microflora, inflammation and lipid metabolism, role in host defence and in innate and immune responses, direct killing of Gram-positive bacteria and of commensal bacteria	amplification of inflammation in many inflammatory diseases and cardiovascular diseases, role in sepsis and various bacterial and <u>viral infections</u> , role in cancer and metastasis
GIID	immune system, lymphoid and dendritic cells, M2 macrophages, regulatory T cells	anti-inflammatory, resolution of Th1 immunity, candidate as an immune checkpoint	decrease of immune response, anti-tumour response, <u>antiviral immunity in H1N1 and SARS-CoV infections (i.e. proviral role)</u>
GIIE	adipocytes, hair follicles, uterus	fat deposition in adipose tissue and liver, hair follicle homeostasis, lipid metabolism	obesity (age-induced anti-obesity?), skin disorders
GIIF	skin, suprabasal keratinocytes	skin homeostasis, lipid metabolism	skin disorders such as cancer and psoriasis
GIII	intestine, liver, epididymal epithelial cells, mast cells, colonic epithelial cells, aorta, skin, brain	male fertility, mast cell maturation	anaphylaxis, colon cancer and colitis, atherosclerosis, skin inflammation, <u>antiviral (adenovirus) role</u>
GV	bronchial epithelial cells, endothelial cells, macrophages, dendritic cells, hematopoietic cells, cardiomyocytes, aorta, hypertrophic adipocytes, pancreatic β-cells, gut epithelium, brain	host defence, surfactant degradation, M2 macrophage polarization, Th2 immunity, phagocytosis of microorganisms, phagocytosis of immune complexes, apoptosis of injured myocardial cells, reduced adipose tissue inflammation by unsaturated fatty acids, anti-arthritis, anti-obesity	airway lung injury, asthma, atherosclerosis, aortic inflammation, myocardial infarction, aneurysm, <u>antiviral (adenovirus) role</u>
GX	airway epithelium, intestinal mucosa, stomach, immune system, macrophages, adrenal glands, dorsal root ganglia, hematopoietic cells, neutrophils, adipocytes, sperm acrosome, hair follicles	enhanced lipid accumulation and TLR4 signalling in macrophages, reduced corticosteroid synthesis by downregulating adrenal steroidogenic acute regulatory protein, neuritogenesis and pain transmission, macrophage function, reduced Th1 immunity and atherosclerotic plaque formation, suppression of insulin secretion, phospholipid digestion in the gastrointestinal lumen, repression of adipogenesis by inhibiting liver X receptor activation, anti-atherosclerosis, anti-obesity, sperm fertility, hair homeostasis	airway inflammation, asthma, decreased tissue damage by neutrophils, hypercorticosteronemia, pain, aneurysm, myocardial infarction, diabetes, adiposity, alopecia, <u>antiviral (adenovirus) role</u> , <u>antiviral immunity in H1N1 infection (i.e. proviral role)</u>
GXIIA	ubiquitous, neurons, epithelial cells of gastrointestinal tract	neurogenesis and cognition, host defence, killing of Gram-positive bacteria <i>in vitro</i> , poorly understood molecular mechanisms	lipid metabolism disorders?
GXIIB	liver, intestine	triglyceride metabolism by unknown molecular mechanisms, anti-steatosis effect	lipid metabolism disorders?
Otoconin-90	inner ear	maintenance of inner ear balance system	imbalance

### 3. Antiviral activity of endogenous mammalian sPLA<sub>2</sub>s

Mammalian sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, especially GIIA sPLA<sub>2</sub>, are involved in direct and indirect host defence against various pathogens, including bacteria, parasites and viruses, and as such represent an important component of the innate immune system [17,18,24,27,28,47,56,64], [69–72]. For example, studies as early as back in 1979 have shown that GIIA sPLA<sub>2</sub> can exert direct killing of Gram-positive bacteria [73,74]. It was a result of the ability of this enzyme, due to its highly positive net charge, to penetrate the bacterial peptidoglycan envelope, to reach the bacterial plasma membrane and to hydrolyse it [18,47]. In addition, the same sPLA<sub>2</sub> is responsible for an indirect host response triggering innate immune response, possibly via hydrolysis of lipid microvesicles or mitochondria released by activated platelets (or other cells) to release potent lipid mediators, or when certain bacterial strains manipulate the host defence activity within a bacterial niche [57,61,75]. Multiple studies have shown that GIIA sPLA<sub>2</sub> has *in vitro* and *in vivo* antibacterial activity against various bacterial strains [17,18,47,69,70].

The antiviral activity of endogenous mammalian sPLA<sub>2</sub>s is much less documented than their antibacterial roles. It was first reported *in vitro* for two potent plasma membrane-hydrolysing sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, hGV and hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, which could prevent host cells from being infected with adenoviruses [22,23] (Table 1). These two sPLA<sub>2</sub>s are

expressed in human airway epithelium and macrophages, and the expression of hGV sPLA<sub>2</sub> is upregulated by virus-related stimuli of these cells. Adenovirus particles were insensitive to exogenously added hGV and hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub>s. However, addition of recombinant hGV and hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, but not hGIIA, to HEK293 cells suppressed the number and size of adenovirus plaque formation. In contrast to the main antibacterial action of sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, which depends on their direct hydrolytic action on bacterial membranes [70], the antiviral action of GV and GX sPLA<sub>2</sub>s was indirect and dependent on their ability to act on host cell membranes (Fig. 1), leading to a decrease in adenovirus entry by clathrin-mediated endocytosis. The observation that suppression of adenoviral infection by hGV and hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub>s depends on catalytic activity was confirmed with catalytically-inactive sPLA<sub>2</sub> mutants and supported by the finding that lysophosphatidylcholine, an sPLA<sub>2</sub>-hydrolytic product of phosphatidylcholine enriched in the outer leaflet of the plasma membrane, also suppresses adenoviral infection. It was also suggested that the innate immune action of these sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may be directed not only against adenoviruses but also against other respiratory viruses [22]. Besides endogenous GV and GX sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, hGIII sPLA<sub>2</sub> was also able to inhibit adenovirus entry into host cells [23]. It was shown that, in addition to the catalytically-active sPLA<sub>2</sub> domain, the N-terminal domain unique to this enzyme is required for the anti-adenoviral effect observed in human bronchial



**Fig. 1.** The antiviral action of endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s in *in vitro* cell systems. Some sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, for example human, may act on viruses either directly, by degrading their lipid envelope (virucidal effect?), such as in the case of HIV-1, or indirectly, by acting on cell lipid membranes to prevent effective production of viral particles, such as in the case of non-enveloped adenoviruses. Via enzymatic activity, sPLA<sub>2</sub>s hydrolyse phospholipids (PL) from the virus or infected cellular membranes to produce lysophospholipids (LPL) and free fatty acids (FA) that can disturb some key steps of the viral life cycle or lipid metabolism of the host cell. The enveloped virus (e.g. HIV-1), with a lipid membrane derived from host plasma membrane, and the non-enveloped (no lipid) virus (e.g. adenovirus) are shown in violet and blue, respectively. The dashed line separates direct versus indirect sPLA<sub>2</sub> actions on cells. CAR, coxsackievirus and adenovirus receptor.

epithelial cells. This suggests a slightly different antiviral mechanism in the case of hGIII sPLA<sub>2</sub>. By lipidomics analysis, the authors provided evidence that hGIII, hGV and hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub>s target different phospholipids in host cell membranes, all leading to production of lysophosphatidylcholine, which was proposed to be responsible for the antiviral action. However, the *in vivo* role of these sPLA<sub>2</sub>s against adenovirus infection remains to be demonstrated.

In a subsequent study, it was found that endogenous hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub> displays antiviral activity against different enveloped lentiviruses including HIV-1, while the enzyme was found unable to prevent adenovirus infection, which contrasts with the above study [24]. The enzymatic activity of hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub> was necessary for the observed antiviral effect (Fig. 1). Other endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s such as hGIIA, hGIID, hGIII, hGV and hGXIIA appeared to be ineffective, yet this was not analysed using pure recombinant enzymes. The antiviral activity was proposed to be due to a direct virucidal effect, *i.e.* direct hydrolysis and degradation of the viral membrane [24]. It was assumed that the lipid envelope of HIV-1 may be susceptible to the enzymatic action of hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub>, since it originates from the host cell membranes and is rich in its outer leaflet in zwitterionic phospholipids including phosphatidylcholine [76], while hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub> has been shown to hydrolyse phosphatidylcholine from the plasma membrane of live cells [77,78]. However, more detailed lipidomics studies have shown that the lipid composition of the HIV virus particles is unique and distinct from the cell plasma membrane [79–81], leaving unknown the enzymatic properties of this sPLA<sub>2</sub>

on the surface of HIV particles and whether it has a real capacity to directly hydrolyse and kill the virus (*i.e.* via a virucidal effect). Furthermore, the concentration of recombinant hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub> that inhibits HIV-1 infection in cellular assays versus the one that would produce the direct virucidal activity were not determined. Interestingly, the antiviral activity was observed despite the resistance of virus preparations to lysis by antibody-mediated complement activation, indicating that the sPLA<sub>2</sub> may act independently of the adaptive immune response or when the complement pathway is ineffective. As hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub> is highly expressed in the intestinal mucosa [82,83], the primary site of HIV-1 replication on natural infection, the authors suggested further studies to explore the role of hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub> in the innate immunity against HIV-1 infection in the gastrointestinal system. Application of the recombinant protein and/or upregulation of hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub> expression may thus limit viral replication and reduce the incidence of productive replication at the primary infection sites. However, as above for other sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, the *in vivo* role of hGX sPLA<sub>2</sub> against HIV-1 infection remains to be demonstrated.

In a mouse model of infection by H1N1 influenza virus, mGX sPLA<sub>2</sub> (*Pla2g10* gene) has been involved in host antiviral response, but in a negative and likely indirect manner [27]. Survival after infection was greater in *Pla2g10*-deficient mice than in wild-type littermates. mGX sPLA<sub>2</sub> was induced by H1N1 infection in bronchial epithelial cells and inflammatory cells, and was involved in the production of potent proinflammatory lipid mediators, likely

contributing to acute lung injury. On the other hand, B and T cell antiviral responses were stronger in *Pla2g10*-deficient mice, suggesting that *Pla2g10* promotes excessive lung inflammation and inhibits an efficient adaptive immune response, leading to poor survival. Collectively, these *in vivo* findings suggest that GX sPLA<sub>2</sub> is a “proviral sPLA<sub>2</sub>” which contrasts with its above *in vitro* antiviral activity (Table 1). Based on data in this mouse model, GX sPLA<sub>2</sub> may be a potential therapeutic target that should be inhibited during influenza infection. However, its *in vivo* antiviral or proviral role after infection with adenovirus or HIV-1 (with mouse adapted strains and related lentiviruses) remains unknown and should be tested in relevant animal models.

Soon after, it has been shown that mGIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> (*Pla2g2d* gene) is negatively involved in the adaptive immune response in a mouse model of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) infection [28]. mGIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> is a basic protein which was cloned from spleen and other lymphoid tissues and show a modest *in vitro* enzymatic activity as compared to its close paralog GIIA sPLA<sub>2</sub> [30,84]. However, *in vivo*, mGIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> was shown to preferentially cleave phosphatidylethanolamine esterified with various polyunsaturated fatty acids at the *sn*-2 position [85], releasing not only omega-6 arachidonic acid but also omega-3 eicosapentaenoic and docosahexaenoic acids, which are precursors of potent anti-inflammatory lipid mediators (resolvins) involved in resolution of inflammation during infection [86]. In mice and humans, GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> is expressed mainly in dendritic cells and M2 macrophages of secondary lymphoid organs, such as spleen and lymph nodes, is downregulated by pro-inflammatory stimuli, and is likely playing an anti-inflammatory and pro-resolving role [40]. For these reasons, it was termed a “resolving sPLA<sub>2</sub>” that ameliorates inflammation through mobilisation of pro-resolving lipid mediators [40,85]. A dual role for GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> as an immunosuppressive endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub> in inflammation and cancer was proposed in which it exerts an anti-inflammatory effect but decreases the anti-tumour effect, thereby promoting tumour development [87]. An immunosuppressive function of GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> was proposed even earlier, when it was cloned from lymphoid tissues of lymphotoxin-deficient mice [88], and shown to be highly expressed in regulatory T cells and to mediate the immunosuppressive function of these cells [89]. Regarding its role during viral infection, a critical role of mGIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> in age-related susceptibility to SARS-CoV infection was observed [28], revealing a proviral role of this sPLA<sub>2</sub>. The authors carried out most of the experiments in mice, but the conclusions they made may be applicable to humans. In agreement with this, oxidative stress was found to induce GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> expression in mice and in human monocyte-derived macrophages. The study showed that GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub>, whose expression in lung dendritic cells increased with age in response to oxidative stress and also during coronavirus infection, contributed to worse outcome in mice infected with SARS-CoV. These results were supported by the observation that GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub>-deficient mice, in comparison with wild-type mice, showed a much higher rate of survival after infection with not only SARS-CoV but also influenza A viruses. On the contrary, the attenuated antiviral immunity in transgenic mice overexpressing GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> leads to severe lung inflammation and early death. The proposed molecular mechanism is that GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub>, expressed in lung dendritic cells, produces prostaglandin D<sub>2</sub> and other lipid mediators that prevent the migration of dendritic cells to lymph nodes, thereby suppressing T-cell activation. This results in a decreased antiviral immunity and, hence, increased viral infection [90]. Accordingly, the specific inhibition of GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> represents a potentially therapeutic approach for the treatment of patients with severe respiratory infection due to influenza viruses or coronaviruses [40]. Very recently, it has been reported on the unexpected role of mGIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> in the lung, serving as an

important modulator of respiratory dendritic cell activation, with protective and pathogenic effects in respiratory CoV infections and immunization [91]. Together, these findings on a proviral role of GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> during infection with coronavirus and influenza viruses are similar to those observed for GX sPLA<sub>2</sub> and H1N1 infection, suggesting that both sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may share some common molecular mechanisms of action and may be both targeted by specific inhibitors for the treatment of infections with respiratory viruses.

Finally, recent studies suggest that hGIB sPLA<sub>2</sub> may negatively contribute to infection by HIV-1 by an indirect mechanism leading to anergy of CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells, which may be at the basis of the chronic immunodeficiency syndrome observed in HIV patients [56]. This sPLA<sub>2</sub> may act catalytically at the surface of CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells in synergy with enzymatic cofactors such as the HIV gp41 envelope protein or degradation products. Importantly, the *in vitro* effects of the sPLA<sub>2</sub> on CD4<sup>+</sup> T cell anergy is dependent on its enzymatic activity and can be blocked by a specific neutralizing antibody, which may represent a therapeutic molecule. However, the effect of GIB sPLA<sub>2</sub> on T cell anergy should be further demonstrated in *in vivo* models of HIV infection or T cell immune dysfunction. The cellular source of hGIB sPLA<sub>2</sub> that is found in the plasma of HIV patients also remains to be determined.

#### 4. Antiviral activity of exogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s

More than two decades ago, before studies with endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s on viruses, it was shown that several venom sPLA<sub>2</sub>s exhibit a potent antiviral activity against HIV-1 *in vitro* [21] (Table 2 and Fig. 2). In this study, the bee venom sPLA<sub>2</sub> (bvPLA<sub>2</sub>) and three snake venom sPLA<sub>2</sub>s were found to be potent inhibitors of HIV-1 replication (IC<sub>50</sub> < 1 nM). hGIB and hGIIA sPLA<sub>2</sub>s did not show such inhibitory effects while other human sPLA<sub>2</sub>s could not be tested in those days, because they were either unknown or not available as recombinant pure proteins [4,5]. Four venom sPLA<sub>2</sub>s among 11 enzymes — taipoxin from the Australian coastal taipan (*Oxyuranus scutellatus scutellatus*), the basic sPLA<sub>2</sub> (CM-III) from the Mozambique spitting cobra (*Naja mossambica mossambica*), nigexine from the black-necked spitting cobra (*Naja nigricollis*), and bvPLA<sub>2</sub> from honey bee (*Apis mellifera*) — were able to protect human primary blood leukocytes from infection by various HIV-1 strains [21]. The observed inhibition resulted neither from a direct virucidal effect nor from a cytotoxic effect on host cells. Time-of-addition experiments monitoring the antiviral effect of sPLA<sub>2</sub> after the virus was added to host cells showed that the inhibitory sPLA<sub>2</sub>s did not interfere with physical binding of the virus to the cell surface but blocked virus entry, possibly by interfering with the complex fusion step between viral envelope and plasma membrane. Accordingly, the inhibitory sPLA<sub>2</sub>s were effective when added to cells before the virion uncoating step and dissociation of the reverse transcriptase complex from host cell membranes, but were ineffective after these steps (Fig. 2). In a follow-up study, a variant of HIV-1 was selected from a mixture of HIV-1 particles present in primary HIV isolates for its resistance to bvPLA<sub>2</sub> inhibition [103]. It turned out that this variant, HIV<sub>RBV-3</sub>, could escape from inhibition of cell entry to increasing doses of bvPLA<sub>2</sub> by evolving or selecting a particular envelope glycoprotein mutated in the N-terminal region and the V1–V2 loop extensions [103]. These mutations allowed the HIV-1 variant to infect cells by a completely different clathrin endosomal-dependent pathway and to become resistant to inhibition by bvPLA<sub>2</sub> by about 100-fold, when compared to the original virus. In an effort to identify the region of bvPLA<sub>2</sub> involved in its inhibitory effect, a series of bvPLA<sub>2</sub> peptides were screened, and an N-terminal 15-amino acid peptide was found to block entry of T-tropic HIV-1 strains into host cells, obviously without requiring enzyme catalytic activity. However,

**Table 2**

Antiviral activity of exogenous venom sPLA<sub>2</sub>s. Most of them are monomeric sPLA<sub>2</sub>s homologous to mammalian endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s. They belong to groups IA, IB, IIA or III according to the historical classification of sPLA<sub>2</sub>s [1]. Heterodimeric crotoxin is composed of a basic GIA sPLA<sub>2</sub> (CB) and an acidic (CA) enzymatically-inactive subunit of three peptides derived from a GIA sPLA<sub>2</sub> precursor. Taipoxin is a heterotrimeric protein whose α and β subunits are GIA sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, and with the γ subunit similar to a GIB pro-sPLA<sub>2</sub>. D49 and K49 denotes enzymatically-active and -inactive sPLA<sub>2</sub> variants, respectively, due to a substitution of the conserved aspartic acid residue at position 49 in the Calcium-binding loop (binding of the Ca<sup>2+</sup> cofactor is needed for catalytic activity) of enzymatically-active sPLA<sub>2</sub>s with a lysine residue.

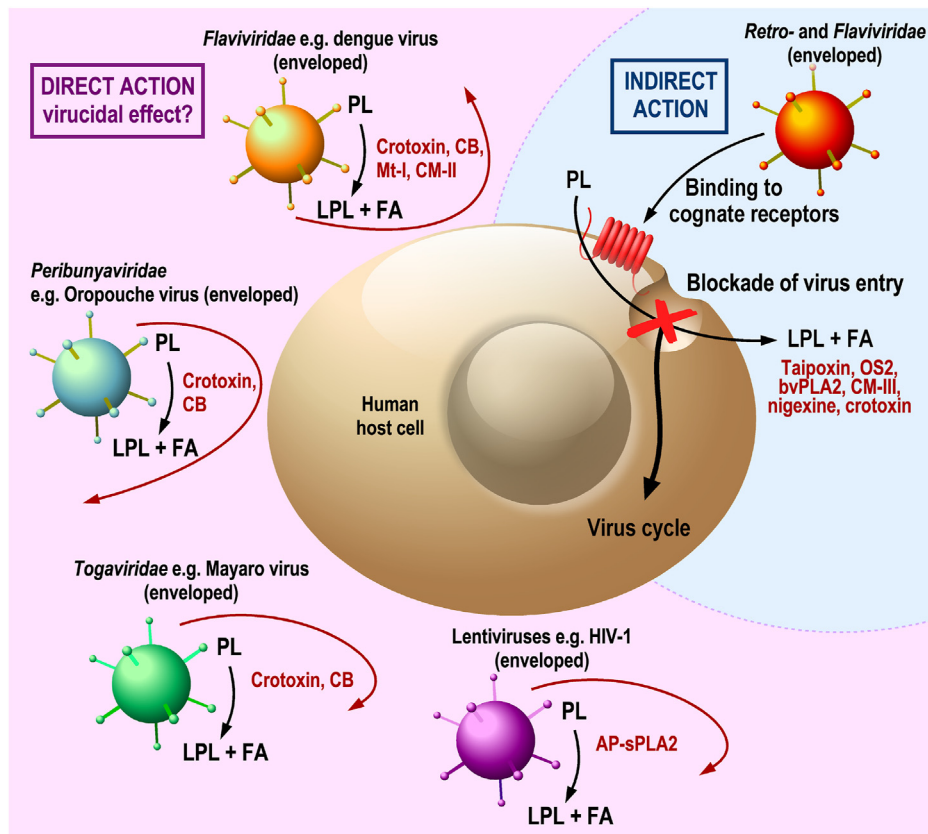
Exogenous sPLA <sub>2</sub>	Venom source	Type of viruses tested	Proposed mechanism of antiviral activity	Dependence on enzymatic activity	Reference
bvPLA <sub>2</sub> , CM-III, nigexine, taipoxin and OS2	<i>Apis mellifera</i> , <i>Naja mossambica mossambica</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> , and <i>Oxyuranus scutellatus scutellatus</i> (honey bee and three snake species)	Retroviridae (lentiviruses)	inhibition of HIV-1 entry step, inhibition of both M- and T-tropic strains	dependent	[21,93,103]
p3bv (15-aa bvPLA <sub>2</sub> peptide)	<i>Apis mellifera</i> (honey bee)	Retroviridae	inhibition of the interaction between the CXCR4 chemokine co-receptor and HIV-1 T- but not M-tropic strains, thereby preventing virus binding to host cells	independent	[93]
AP-sPLA <sub>2</sub>	<i>Acanthaster planci</i> (starfish)	Retroviridae	unknown, against HIV infection	not determined	[94]
Bl-D49 and K49 sPLA <sub>2</sub> s crotoxin, crotoxin B subunit (CB PLA <sub>2</sub> ), and recombinant CB1 and CB2 isoforms	<i>Bothrops leucurus</i> (snake) <i>Crotalus durissus terrificus</i> (snake)	Flaviviridae Flaviviridae, Peribunyaviridae, Togaviridae, Picornaviridae	preventing cells from being infected with dengue virus possible virucidal activity against dengue, yellow fever and Zika viruses (all <i>Flaviviridae</i> ) and other enveloped viruses from <i>Peribunyaviridae</i> and <i>Togaviridae</i> families by enzymatic cleavage of the virus lipid bilayer envelope that would cause a destabilization of the E proteins on the virus surface, leading to its inactivation	not determined likely dependent	[95] [96–99]
crotoxin and its CB PLA <sub>2</sub> subunit	<i>Crotalus durissus terrificus</i> (snake)	Flaviviridae	possible virucidal activity against hepatitis C virus ( <i>Flaviviridae</i> ) and/or interference with virus entry into host cells	not determined	[100]
CM-II	<i>Naja mossambica mossambica</i> (snake)	Flaviviridae, Retroviridae, Coronaviridae, Togaviridae, Herpesviridae, Orthomyxoviridae, Paramyxoviridae, Picornaviridae, Rhabdoviridae	possible specific virucidal activity against hepatitis C, dengue and Japanese encephalitis viruses (all <i>Flaviviridae</i> ) and other viruses whose envelope is derived from the endoplasmic reticulum membrane by attacking their membranes; but also virucidal against HIV-1 whose membrane buds from the plasma membrane	likely dependent	[101]
Mt-I (D49) and Mt-II (K49)	<i>Bothrops asper</i> (snake)	Flaviviridae, Herpesviridae, Orthomyxoviridae, Picornaviridae, Rhabdoviridae	possible virucidal activity against dengue and yellow fever viruses (both <i>Flaviviridae</i> )	dependent	[102]

surprisingly, the mechanism of action of this peptide was different from that of the whole bvPLA<sub>2</sub> molecule, as the peptide selectively inhibited T- but not M-tropic HIV-1 viruses by interfering with binding of HIV-1 to the CXCR4 chemokine coreceptor on target cells [93]. Conversely, bvPLA<sub>2</sub> was active on both T- and M-tropic HIV-1 strains and did not bind to the CXCR4 co-receptor. Finally, additional structure–function studies using the neurotoxic snake venom sPLA<sub>2</sub> OS2 (from *Oxyuranus scutellatus scutellatus* venom), which was also effective at inhibiting HIV-1, showed that the N-terminal region of OS2 and its enzymatic activity were both important to inhibit HIV-1 infection [92].

During the last decade, several other studies have been carried out, showing a broad antiviral activity of different snake venom sPLA<sub>2</sub>s (Table 2 and Fig. 2). From these reports, it is difficult to unequivocally conclude that enzymatic activity of an sPLA<sub>2</sub> is absolutely necessary for the antiviral effect observed. For example, both catalytically-active (D49) and catalytically-inactive (K49) sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, isolated from the venom of the Bahia lancehead (*Bothrops leucurus*), seemed to show similar antiviral activity in a cellular model of infection by the dengue virus [95]. However, since no dose–response curves to measure the relative IC<sub>50</sub> values between D49 and K49 sPLA<sub>2</sub>s were performed, it is difficult to compare the relative activity of the two types of sPLA<sub>2</sub>s and exclude the possibility of a minor contamination of the K49 sPLA<sub>2</sub> preparation with the D49 active sPLA<sub>2</sub> purified from the same venom. Furthermore,

some reports claimed that sPLA<sub>2</sub>s exert a direct virucidal activity but this was not conclusively demonstrated by either measuring the direct hydrolytic activity of the sPLA<sub>2</sub> on viral particles or performing lipidomics analyses, or by washing out the sPLA<sub>2</sub> after the incubation of viruses with this latter, or by addition of an sPLA<sub>2</sub> inhibitor that would prevent the subsequent action of the sPLA<sub>2</sub> on cells at the time of addition of the virus–sPLA<sub>2</sub> mixture to host cells.

It was reported that crotoxin from the South American rattlesnake (*Crotalus durissus terrificus*) exhibits antiviral activity against dengue and yellow fever viruses [96]. In addition to preventing the cells from viral infections, the authors observed a pronounced effect of crotoxin when preincubated with the virus particles, suggesting a virucidal effect. However, the sPLA<sub>2</sub>–virus mixture was not separated before addition to cells, leaving open the possibility that the sPLA<sub>2</sub> acts in a subsequent step of infection, for instance by interfering with the cell machinery during virus binding or entry. Crotoxin B (CB), the catalytically-active subunit of heterodimeric crotoxin, appeared to lose antiviral activity when its enzymatic activity is inhibited [97,98]. The virucidal action of crotoxin may be the result of hydrolysis of glycerophospholipids on the virus envelope, leading to a disruption of the lipid bilayer and destabilization of envelope (E) proteins on the viral surface. Molecular dynamics simulations suggested that crotoxin may gain access to the dengue virus lipid bilayer through the pores found on each of the twenty 3-fold vertices in the E protein shell on the virus surface



**Fig. 2.** The antiviral action of exogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s in *in vitro* cell systems. Direct action: certain venom sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may exert an antiviral activity by direct hydrolysis of the lipid viral envelope (virucidal effect?). The surface of various enveloped viruses, with the lipid membrane budding from different host cell membranes, is shown by different colours (orange, originating from the endoplasmic reticulum; blue-green, from the Golgi apparatus; green, from the plasma membrane; violet, from the plasma membrane (e.g. HIV-1) or endoplasmic reticulum). Indirect action: venom sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may exert antiviral activity by binding and hydrolysis of host cell membranes, thereby inhibiting one or several of the first steps of viral infection: from binding of viruses to entry or virus-driven lipid metabolism. The dashed line separates both direct and indirect sPLA<sub>2</sub> actions on cells. A red curved arrow denotes the unsuccessful attack of a virus on the host cell as a result of the sPLA<sub>2</sub> action. AP-sPLA<sub>2</sub>, a catalytically-active sPLA<sub>2</sub> from *Acanthaster planci* starfish; CB, crotoxin B subunit; CM-II and CM-III, catalytically-active sPLA<sub>2</sub>s from *Naja mossambica mossambica* snake venom; Mt-I, a catalytically-active sPLA<sub>2</sub> from *Bothrops asper* snake venom. Other abbreviations used are the same as those in Fig. 1 and Table 2.

[98]. However, definitive experimental evidence supporting this scenario is lacking. Crotoxin and its CB subunit had antiviral activity not only against *Flaviviridae* viruses (such as dengue, yellow fever and Zika) but also against *Peribunyaviridae* and *Togaviridae* viruses whose envelopes are different, originating from Golgi and plasma membranes, respectively. For example, two recombinant enzymatically active CB variants, CB1 and CB2, showed antiviral effects, not only against dengue, yellow fever and Zika viruses, but also against chikungunya virus (*Togaviridae*) [99]. In a separate study [100], crotoxin and its CB subunit were effective against *in vitro* infection with hepatitis C virus (*Flaviviridae*). The results indicated that CB blocks viral infection by action on the virus particle and host cells [100]. Thus, crotoxin and its CB subunit exert antiviral effects by possibly acting at different stages of the virus life cycle.

Mt-I, a myotoxic sPLA<sub>2</sub> from terciopelo (*Bothrops asper*) snake venom was shown to exert antiviral activity against the enveloped viruses of *Flaviviridae* family, similar to that of crotoxin and CB [102]. Interestingly, the results showed that Mt-I, which is catalytically active (D49), was approximately 1,000-fold more potent than its catalytically inactive variant Mt-II (K49), suggesting a critical role of the sPLA<sub>2</sub> enzymatic activity in the antiviral effect of Mt-I sPLA<sub>2</sub>.

An interesting finding resulted from the study of the antiviral action of the CM-II sPLA<sub>2</sub> isolated from the venom of the Mozambique spitting cobra (*Naja mossambica mossambica*) against

different types of viruses [101]. CM-II possesses potent antiviral activity (IC<sub>50</sub> values of 0.03–1.3 ng/ml, *i.e.* less than 1 nM) against hepatitis C, dengue and Japanese encephalitis viruses, all from the *Flaviviridae* family, whose viral particles bud from the endoplasmic reticulum. In contrast, CM-II was virtually ineffective against viruses that bud either from the plasma membrane (Sindbis, influenza and Sendai viruses) or the trans-Golgi network (herpes simplex virus). One exception was HIV-1, which was inhibited by CM-II with an IC<sub>50</sub> value of 5.4 ng/ml, a finding in line with the IC<sub>50</sub> value measured for the analogous CM-III sPLA<sub>2</sub> in an earlier study [21]. The potent antiviral activity of CM-II against hepatitis C and dengue viruses was inhibited by the broadly specific sPLA<sub>2</sub> inhibitor manoalide, suggesting that enzymatic activity is necessary. Thus, based on differences in the physicochemical properties of the phospholipid bilayers of viruses and host cells, broad-spectrum antiviral sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may be developed to specifically target viral envelope lipid bilayers derived from the endoplasmic reticulum without targeting the lipid bilayers of host cell membranes.

Most recently, AP-sPLA<sub>2</sub>, isolated from the crown-of-thorns starfish (*Acanthaster planci*) was shown to exert *in vitro* activity against HIV infection of peripheral blood mononuclear cells [94]. The authors hypothesized but did not demonstrate that AP-sPLA<sub>2</sub>, like endogenous GX sPLA<sub>2</sub> [24], directly hydrolyses the HIV phospholipid bilayer envelope which causes the virus to become inactive.



Overall, these studies have shown that several but not all venom exogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s can exert potent and broadly specific antiviral effects against different viruses by multiple mechanisms, from a possible direct virucidal action to more complex interplay between sPLA<sub>2</sub>, virus and host cells, from primary binding to the plasma membrane and specific receptors to physical virus entry, membrane fusion, internalization, multiplication and budding steps. In most cases, the exact mechanism of action, which may even be miscellaneous for a single sPLA<sub>2</sub> acting on different viruses, remain to be discovered or at least ascertained by well-designed experiments. Furthermore, a major limitation is that all of these studies were performed only *in vitro* in cellular models of viral infection. Their therapeutic potential should be confirmed by performing *in vivo* experiments to provide a pathophysiological relevance of the findings.

## 5. Conclusion and future perspectives

sPLA<sub>2</sub>s constitute an important family of both enzymatically active and inactive proteins with a wide spectrum of activities whose biological functions, including antiviral action, have not been completely elucidated. Endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s play an important but complex role in the innate immune system, sometimes defensive, sometimes offensive [8,9,104]. These yin-yang roles, for instance the proviral or antiviral effects of sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, are sometimes observed when a particular biological system is analysed in *in vitro* versus *in vivo* conditions, and as such is difficult to understand as a whole. Furthermore, it is difficult to definitely conclude from the current studies whether a certain sPLA<sub>2</sub> is directly or indirectly influencing the virus life cycle, from direct virucidal effect to indirect effect on the binding, entry, or even budding steps of viruses to host cells (Figs. 1 and 2). As a great deal of studies presented above has reported on the antiviral effects of sPLA<sub>2</sub>s by using *in vitro* cellular models of viral infections, there is a need to perform the corresponding *in vivo* experiments. Only *in vivo* results will expose the real antiviral potential of sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, acting either as therapeutic molecules or as “offensive” molecules whose activity would need to be hampered by active site-specific inhibitors or inhibitory antibodies. Most intensively, efforts should be concentrated on the most potent sPLA<sub>2</sub> representatives acting on the virus life cycle, such as GIII, GV and GX sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, which may act on both host cell membranes and the viral envelope that has a lipid membrane derived from host cells, yet with subtle differences in their membrane lipid composition and biophysics. sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may also play an indirect role in the antiviral adaptive immune response where, interestingly, some sPLA<sub>2</sub>s like GX but also GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub> have a negative (proviral) effect on the viral infection by H1N1 and SARS-coronavirus adapted to mouse strains [27,28]. In addition, it has been recently shown that GIB sPLA<sub>2</sub> is a new player in lentiviral infections, where it may exert a proviral role by inducing CD4<sup>+</sup> T cell energy and thereby participate to the pathophysiology of HIV infection [56]. Here, the specific or combined inhibition of involved sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may be beneficial to prevent viral infection. Exogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, mostly but not exclusively of snake venom origin, also display antiviral effect that may be mediated by their enzymatic activity to either directly attack the host-derived membranes of certain enveloped viruses or interfere with the viral cell cycle at different steps. Whether these sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may be used as antiviral agents *in vivo* remains to be demonstrated, considering of course their toxicities.

Future research on the antiviral potential of sPLA<sub>2</sub>s may thus proceed in four major directions. (1) Confirmation or disproval of the promising *in vitro* antiviral effects of certain venom and endogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s by conducting appropriate *in vivo* studies. (2) Description of the exact molecular mechanism(s) of direct or

indirect antiviral activity of the various sPLA<sub>2</sub>s, as a starting point for development of new antiviral sPLA<sub>2</sub>-based therapies. This would also include unravelling of the indirect mechanisms by which GX and GIID sPLA<sub>2</sub>s (or possibly other isoforms) exacerbate H1N1 and coronavirus infections to pave the way for new therapeutic avenues. (3) Further description of the broadly specific antiviral role of endogenous and exogenous sPLA<sub>2</sub>s against various types of viruses, up to infection by SARS-CoV-2 virus, the etiological agent of the Covid-19 pandemic. (4) Exploration of the possibility that various sPLA<sub>2</sub>s such as GX or GIID may represent new biomarkers of severity in viral infections, as recently shown for the inflammatory-type GIIA sPLA<sub>2</sub> in Covid-19 patients with severe disease [105].

## Authors' contributions

J.P. wrote the first drafts of the manuscript, figures and tables, F.B. and G.L. significantly upgraded and polished the main text, figures and tables, and I.K. checked the facts and reviewed the manuscript.

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