# A novel engineered fusion protein effectively targets and expands disease specific anti-tumor T-cells

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## Summary


- Cue Biopharma's Immuno-STAT™ (Selective Targeting and Alteration of T Cells) platform is designed to directly engage with and modulate the activity of antigen-specific targeted T cells *in vivo* through a singular molecular framework.
- To develop CUE-100 series biologics, core components were engineered to target via a peptide-HLA complex (pHLA), directing the co-stimulatory molecule (MOD) activity to disease-associated T-cells.
- The affinity of Interleukin 2 (IL-2) for its receptors was modified to reduce interaction with non-target cells while maintaining stimulatory activity (MOD attenuation).
- Manufacturability was confirmed by determination of production and yield following expression in a CHO cell system and purification to homogeneity.
- To demonstrate the utility of the platform, CUE-101, comprised of an effector attenuated human immunoglobulin G (IgG1) Fc domain, an affinity attenuated form of the cytokine IL-2, and a pHLA with a peptide epitope derived from the human papilloma virus E7 protein (HPV16-E7) was generated. CUE-101 demonstrates specific binding to antigen-specific T cells. A murine surrogate has shown antitumor activity in mouse tumor models.

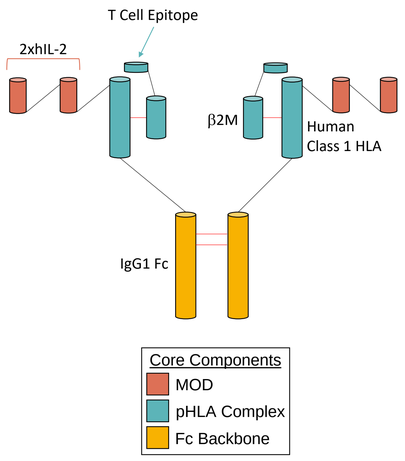




**Figure 1 – Diagram illustrating CUE-100 Immuno-STAT (IST) series framework and core components**

## pHLA Allele and MOD Diversity

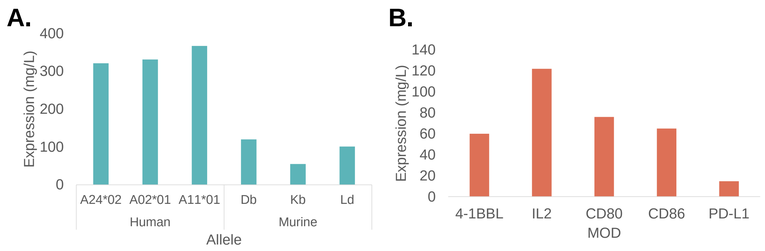
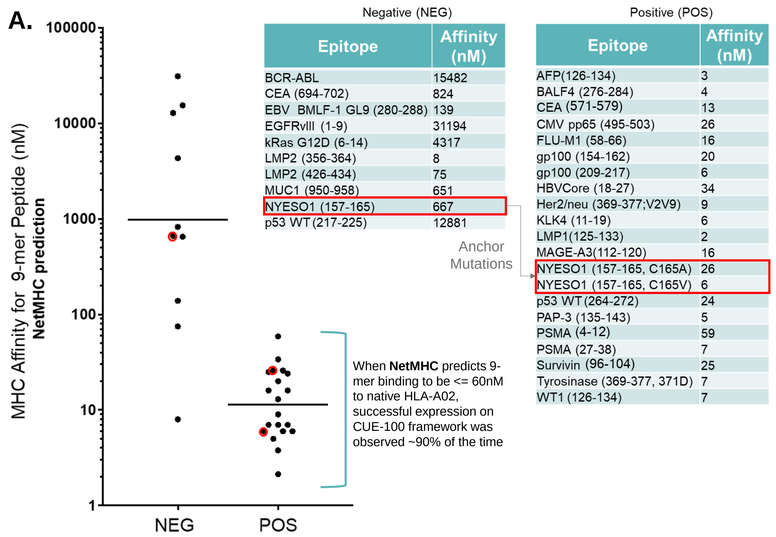



**Figure 2 – The CUE-100 framework allows for combinatorial design of unique molecules with stimulatory and inhibitory MODs expressed on a variety of human and mouse MHC alleles.** (**A**) Expression titer as measured by Bio-Layer Interferometry (BLI) following transient CHO cell expression indicates high manufacturability of Immuno-STATs containing various human and mouse MHC alleles. (**B**) Expression titer as measured by BLI following transient CHO cell transfection indicates both stimulatory and inhibitory MODs can be successfully integrated onto the CUE-100 IST series framework. PD-L1 was expressed on IST bearing the murine Kd allele and additional MODs were expressed on ISTs bearing the human A02*01 allele.

## Peptide Diversity




Negative (NEG)

| Epitope | Affinity (nM) |
|---|---|
| BCR-ABL | 15482 |
| CEA (694-702) | 824 |
| EBV BMLF-1 GL9 (280-288) | 139 |
| EGFRvIII (1-9) | 31194 |
| kRas G12D (6-14) | 4317 |
| LMP2 (356-364) | 8 |
| LMP2 (426-434) | 75 |
| MUC1 (950-958) | 651 |
| NYESO1 (157-165) | 667 |
| p53 WT (217-225) | 12881 |

Anchor Mutations

Positive (POS)

| Epitope | Affinity (nM) |
|---|---|
| AFP(126-134) | 3 |
| BALF4 (276-284) | 4 |
| CEA (571-579) | 13 |
| CMV pp65 (495-503) | 26 |
| FLU-M1 (58-66) | 16 |
| gp100 (154-162) | 20 |
| gp100 (209-217) | 6 |
| HBVCore (18-27) | 34 |
| Her2/neu (369-377;V2V9) | 9 |
| KLK4 (11-19) | 6 |
| LMP1(125-133) | 2 |
| MAGE-A3(112-120) | 16 |
| NYESO1 (157-165, C165A) | 26 |
| NYESO1 (157-165, C165V) | 6 |
| p53 WT (264-272) | 24 |
| PAP-3 (135-143) | 5 |
| PSMA (4-12) | 59 |
| PSMA (27-38) | 7 |
| Survivin (96-104) | 25 |
| Tyrosinase (369-377, 371D) | 7 |
| WT1 (126-134) | 7 |

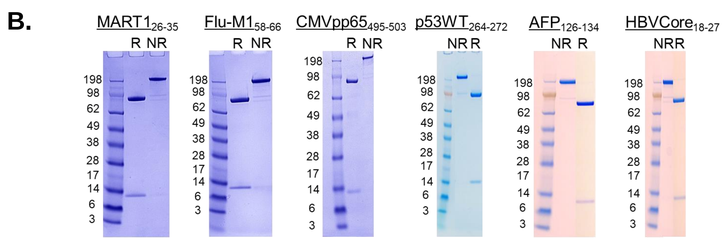
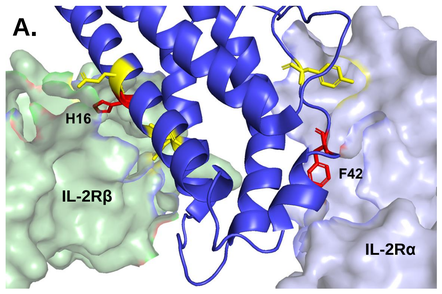



**Figure 3 – CUE-100 IST series framework allows for diverse, predictable pHLA expression.** (**A**) Peptide sequences from indicated 9-mer epitopes were analyzed by the NetMHC affinity prediction software and grouped into either negative (NEG) or positive (POS) bins depending on initial expression success. A direct correlation was observed between peptide affinity and protein producibility. As demonstrated with NYESO1(157-165) indicated in red, anchor modifications, such as C165A or C165V on NYESO1(157-165), can rescue poor protein production. (**B**) Reduced (R) and non-reduced (NR) SDS-PAGE of representative examples of ISTs bearing 9-mer and 10-mer pHLAs.

## Affinity Attenuation of MOD




*Deborah J. Stauber et al. PNAS 2006;103:8:2788-2793

B.

| IST+ | Exp. (mg/L) |
|---|---|
| hIL2(wt) | 94 |
| hIL2(F42A) | 352 |
| hIL2(H16A,F42A) | 135 |
| hIL2(D20K,F42A) | 311 |
| hIL2(D20L,F42A) | 11 |
| hIL2(F42A,N88R) | 310 |
| hIL2(D20K,F42A,Q126A) | 158 |
| hIL2(D20L,F42A,Q126A) | 8 |
| hIL2(F42A,N88R,Q126A) | 212 |
| hIL2(E15A,D20K,F42A) | 82 |
| hIL2(E15A,D20L,F42A,) | 4 |
| hIL2(E15A,F42A,N88R) | 204 |

C.

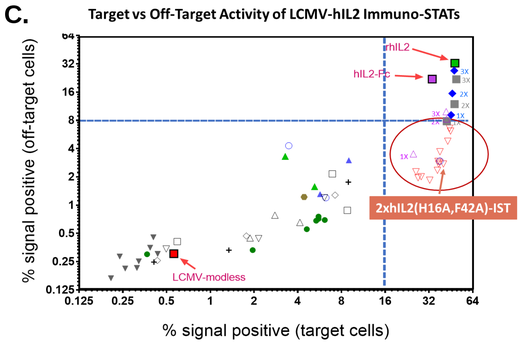
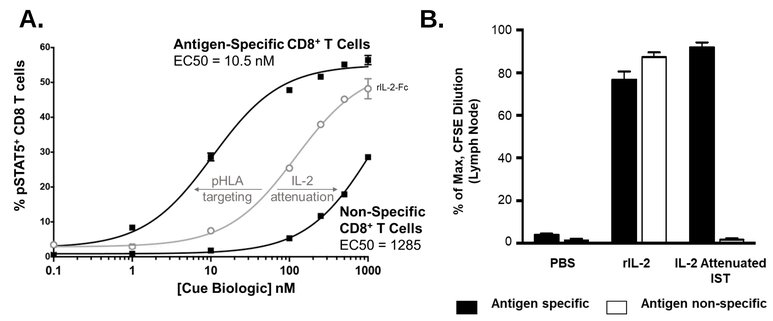



**Figure 4 – Protein expression level and biological activity of affinity attenuated hIL-2 both drive MOD selection.** (**A**) Diagram depicting IL-2 and its interaction with IL-2R α and β subunits derived from Stauber et. al.* Residues selected for mutation are indicated in yellow and red, with final selected substitutions of H16 and F42 indicated in red. (**B**) Immuno-STATs (ISTs) bearing mutations leading to affinity attenuation of hIL-2 were evaluated for expression following transient CHO cell transfection by BLI. (**C**) Attenuated hIL-2 bearing ISTs were evaluated for biological activity using pSTAT5 staining on target (from LCMV transgenic mice) and off-target (from BL6 mice) CD8⁺ T cells as a measure of target cell specific IL-2 induced signaling. The percentage of pSTAT5 positive cells in both groups was assessed for each IL-2 variant relative to wildtype recombinant IL-2 (rhIL2) in order to select the IL-2 component for the CUE-100 series. 2xhIL2(H16A,F42A) was selected for further characterization.

## MOD Cellular Validation




C. Demonstration of signaling attenuation in non-antigen specific T cells

| Description | $EC_{50}$-LCMV | $EC_{50}$-BL6 | Fold Difference (BL6/LCMV) | $\Delta_{log}$ EC50 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| IL-2 Wild Type | 42.92 | 88.53 | 2.07 | 0.03 |
| IL-2 Wild Type-Fc | 120.8 | 119.5 | 0.99 | 0 |
| IL-2 Wild Type IST | 2.89 | 103.2 | 35.66 | 1.55 |
| IL-2 Attenuated IST | 10.5 | 1285 | 122.38 | 2.09 |

D. Demonstration of attenuation to IL-2Rα/β in direct binding studies

| | Human IL-2R | $K_D$ (nM) | $K_{on}(M^{-1}s^{-1})$ | $K_{off}(s^{-1})$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| wt IL-2 | IL-2Rα | 10.7 ± 1.4 | $5.5x10^5$ ± $1.6x10^5$ | $5.8x10^{-3}$ ± $1.5x10^{-3}$ |
| atnu IL-2 | | 1180 ± 124.9 | $3.1x10^5$ ± $2.3x10^5$ | $5.2x10^{-1}$ ± $0.4x10^{-1}$ |
| | | | | |
| wt IL-2 | IL-2Rβ | 197 ± 1.6 | $5.9x10^5$ ± $1.2x10^5$ | $1.2x10^{-1}$ ± $0.2x10^{-1}$ |
| atnu IL-2 | | 613.2 ± 31.0 | $7.1x10^5$ ± $2.0x10^5$ | $4.4x10^{-1}$ ± $1.3x10^{-1}$ |

**Figure 5 – Characterization of attenuated MOD.** (**A**) Cue Immuno-STAT, CUE-100-LCMV, bearing the LCMV derived peptide $gp_{33-41}$ in the context of H-$2D^b$ fused to IL-2(F42A,H16A) was used to stimulate antigen-specific splenic CD8⁺ T cells (P14 TCR Tg, C57BL/6 background) versus wildtype C57BL/6 splenic CD8⁺ T cells, and phosphorylation of STAT5 (pSTAT5) measured as a readout of IL-2R signaling. Potency of IL-2R activation on antigen-specific CD8⁺ T cells was enhanced relative to rIL-2-Fc while activation of IL-2R in non antigen-specific CD8⁺ T cells was significantly reduced relative to rIL-2-Fc. rIL-2-Fc did not differentiate between antigen-specific and non-specific cells. (**B**) Splenic CD8⁺ T cells from P14 T cell receptor transgenic mice (CD45.1⁺) and CD8⁺ T cells from wildtype C57BL/6 mice (CD45.2⁺) were labeled with carboxyfluorescein succinimidyl ester (CFSE) and cotransferred into C57BL/6 recipient mice. CUE-100-LCMV or wildtype IL-2 were then administered to recipient mice. Four days later, the degree of T cell proliferation was measured by flow cytometry via CFSE dilution with antigen specific versus non-specific CD8⁺ T cells differentiated by CD45 allelic expression. CUE-100-LCMV selectively enhanced proliferation of antigen specific versus non-specific CD8⁺ T cells *in vivo*, while wildtype IL-2 induced proliferation of both antigen specific and non-specific CD8⁺ T cells equivalently. (n=3-4). (**C**) CD8⁺ T cells from P14 TCR Tg and C57BL/6 mice were isolated from spleens, stimulated with the indicated IL-2 variant, stained with PE-labeled α-pSTAT5, and the resulting fluorescence was quantified to determine % of cells that were pSTAT5 positive. ISTs bearing the attenuated hIL-2 showed a 122.4 fold difference in $EC_{50}$ between antigen-specific and non-specific T cells. (n=4). (**D**) $K_D$ values of wild type (wt) IL-2 and attenuated IL-2 (H16A, F42A) against the cognate receptors were measured directly via BLI. Attenuated IL-2 showed reduced affinity binding to IL-2R α and β subunits.

## CUE-100 Manufacturability

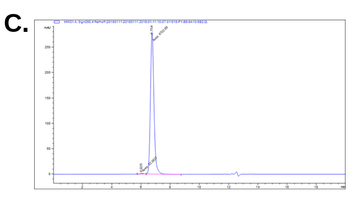
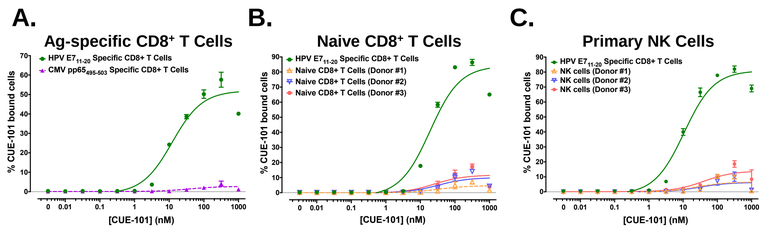



**Figure 6 – Resulting optimized CUE-100 IST series framework bearing attenuated MOD demonstrates robust manufacturability.** (**A**) Simplified flow diagram of the purification process of CUE-100 IST series proteins. (**B**) Reduced (R) and non-reduced (NR) SDS-PAGE of purified CUE-100-HPV. (**C**) Analytical HPLC-SEC was performed on purified protein and demonstrated >95% homogeneity.

## CUE-101 selectively binds antigen-specific T cells



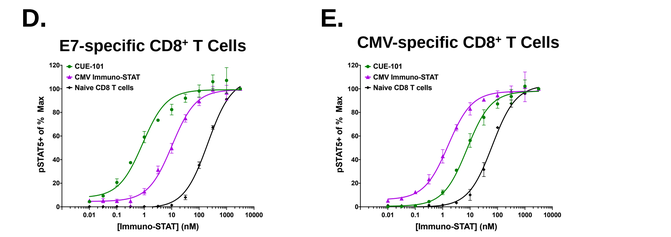




**Figure 7 – CUE-101 selectively binds and stimulates signal transduction in human antigen (Ag) - specific CD8⁺ T cells.** (**A-C**) CUE-101 potently and selectively binds to E7-specific T cells but not to $CMVpp65_{495-503}$-specific T cells (**A**), primary naïve CD8⁺ T cells (**B**), or primary NK cells (**C**) that also express IL-2 receptor (IL-2R). (**D-E**) The pHLA specificity of CUE-101 enables potent and selective stimulation of phosphorylation of STAT5 (pSTAT5) immediately downstream of IL-2R engagement on target T cells. (**D**) CUE-101 (HPV-directed) induces pSTAT5 with greater potency in $E7_{11-20}$-specific CD8⁺ T cells than does a CMV-directed Immuno-STAT. (**E**) A CMV-directed Immuno-STAT induces pSTAT5 with greater potency in CMV $pp65_{495-503}$-specific CD8⁺ T cells than does CUE-101. Induction of pSTAT5 is further reduced in naïve CD8⁺ T cells relative to activated antigen-specific CD8⁺ T cells.

## CUE-101 murine surrogate inhibits tumor growth in the TC-1 syngeneic model

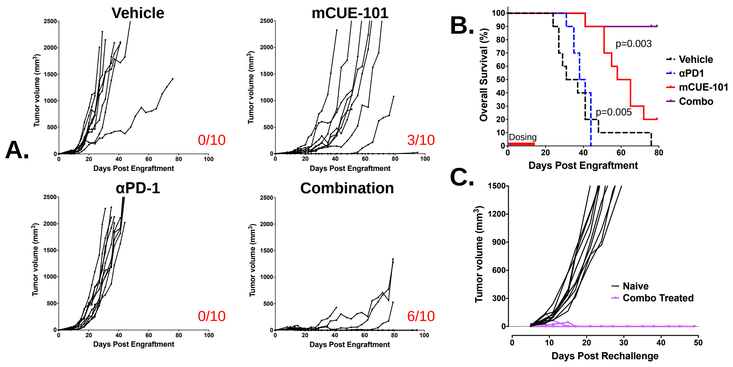



**Figure 8 – CUE-101 murine surrogate (mCUE-101) inhibits TC-1 syngeneic tumor growth alone and in combination with αPD-1 blockade, and generates immunologic memory.** (**A**) Spider plots of individual tumor volume growth following treatment with the indicated agents. The frequency of tumor-free mice at Day 90 post-injection is indicated. (**B**) Kaplan-Meier survival analysis confirms single agent mCUE-101 significantly extends overall survival in this model, with significant further survival upon combination treatment with αPD-1. (**C**) Mice remaining tumor-free after combination treatment were re-challenged with TC-1 tumors 97 days post primary tumor challenge. While naïve mice all formed tumors, previously treated animals rejected tumor formation, thus demonstrating functional immunologic memory.

## Conclusions

Cue Biopharma's Immuno-STAT platform exploits rational protein engineering to generate therapeutic molecules for selective T cell modulation in immuno-oncology, autoimmunity, and chronic infectious diseases. The core engineered framework is comprised of a MOD, a pHLA complex, and an Fc backbone. The CUE-100 series of biologics allows for incorporation of both stimulatory or inhibitory MODs, which are expressed with human or mouse MHC Class I alleles bound to diverse peptides within a predictable range of binding affinity. MOD selection is driven by both manufacturability and specific biological activity, which can be validated through *in vitro*, *ex vivo*, *in vivo*, and direct ligand-receptor binding assays. The modularity and flexibility of the Immuno-STAT platform allows for incorporation of diverse MHC alleles, antigenic peptides, and relevant biological signals, which can be applied to target different disease indications.

The lead candidate, CUE-101, selectively binds and stimulates TCR and IL-2R-mediated signal transduction in antigen-specific CD8⁺ positive T cells *in vitro*. A murine surrogate, mCUE-101, inhibits TC-1 syngeneic tumor growth alone and in combination with αPD-1 blockade, as well as generates immunologic memory. The novel mechanism of action of CUE-101, namely targeted activation of tumor-antigen-specific CD8⁺ T cells via delivery of reduced affinity mutant IL-2, supports its increased potential for anti-cancer efficacy and reduced toxicity relative to non-targeted forms of immunotherapy.

**Presented at the Protein Engineering Summit (PEGS) • April 8-12, 2019 • Boston, MA**