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Engineer *P. multocida* Heparosan Synthase 2 (PmHS2) for Size-Controlled Synthesis of Longer Heparosan Oligosaccharides

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Abstract

Pasteurella multocida heparosan synthase 2 (PmHS2) is a dual-function polysaccharide synthase having both a1-4-N-acetylglucosaminyltransferase (a1-4-GlcNAcT) and B1-4glucuronyltransferase (β 1–4-GlcAT) activities located in two separate catalytic domains. We found that removing PmHS2 N-terminal 80-amino acid residues improved enzyme stability and expression level while retaining its substrate promiscuity. We also identified the reverse glycosylation activities of PmHS2 which complicated its application in size-controlled synthesis of oligosaccharides longer than hexasaccharide. Engineered 80PmHS2 single-functionglycosyltransferase mutants 80PmHS2_D291N (a1-4-GlcNAcT lacking both forward and reverse β 1–4-GlcAT activities) and 80PmHS2_D569N (β 1–4-GlcAT lacking both forward and reverse a1-4-GlcNAcT activities) were designed and showed to minimize side product formation. They were successfully used in a sequential one-pot multienzyme (OPME) platform for sizecontrolled high-yield production of oligosaccharides up to decasaccharide. The study draws attention to the consideration of reverse glycosylation activities of glycosyltransferases, including polysaccharide synthases, when applying them in the synthesis of oligosaccharides and polysaccharides. The mutagenesis strategy has the potential to be extended to other multifunctional polysaccharide synthases with reverse glycosylation activities to generate catalysts with improved synthetic efficiency.

Graphical Abstract

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information.

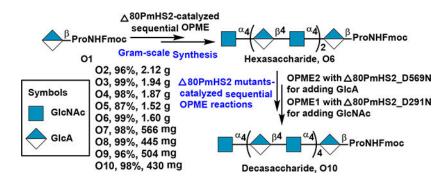
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These authors contributed similarly to this work.

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

Supporting figures and experimental details for cloning and characterization of 80PmHS2 and mutants; detailed synthetic procedures, nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy and high-resolution mass spectrometry (HRMS) data, and NMR spectra of products (PDF)



Keywords

biocatalysis; bacterial polysaccharide; carbohydrate; chemoenzymatic synthesis; glycosaminoglycan

Heparin (HP) and heparan sulfate (HS) glycosaminoglycans (GAGs) are structurally complex, sulfated linear polysaccharides known to bind to over 300 different human proteins.¹ They are biosynthesized from heparosan, which is a polysaccharide backbone containing a -4GlcNAca1-4GlcA β 1- disaccharide repeat, followed by orchestrated functions of a group of carbohydrate post-glycosylational modification (PGM) enzymes to produce diverse sulfation and epimerization patterns.^{2–3} HP is a clinically used anticoagulant while both HP and HS may have broader potential applications including cancer treatment and protection against virus infections.^{4–5} Due to their structure complexity, detailed structure-activity relationships of HP and HS remain unclear.^{6–7} Structurally defined synthetic compounds will provide invaluable standards and probes to better understand their important roles and accelerate their applications.

Despite much progress,^{8–12} the process for chemical synthesis of HS and HP oligosaccharides is still tedious and challenging especially for longer structure targets. Chemoenzymatic methods are powerful alternatives.^{13–18} Glycosyltransferases and polysaccharide synthases involved in the production of heparosan-based capsular polysaccharides have been identified from pathogenic bacteria Escherichia coli K5,19 Pasteurella multocida Type D (PmHS1),²⁰ and Avibacterium paragallinarum genotype II.²¹ Pasteurella multocida heparosan synthase 2 (PmHS2) which was not part of bacterial capsule biosynthesis loci has been discovered in *Pasteurella multocida* type A, D, and F strains.²² Both PmHS1²⁰ and PmHS2²² are dual function polysaccharide synthases having both α 1–4-N-acetylglucosaminyltransferase (α 1–4-GlcNAcT) and β 1–4glucuronyltransferase (\beta1-4-GlcAT) activities contributed by two separate catalytic domains¹⁴ similar to the case in PmHS1.^{14, 23} Compared to PmHS1, PmHS2 has higher expression levels in E. coli, no requirement for an oligosaccharide primer, and a higher substrate promiscuity.²⁴ PmHS2 has been used broadly in enzymatic synthesis of heparosan polysaccharides,^{14–15} and in chemoenzymatic synthesis of HP and HS oligosaccharides and their derivatives with^{16–17} or without¹⁸ Escherichia coli K5 a1–4-GlcNAcT (EcKfiA).

Nevertheless, the expression level (17–20 mg/L culture) and the stability of PmHS2¹⁸ can be improved. Additionally, PmHS2 was efficient in synthesizing short oligosaccharides up to

hexasaccharides²⁵ but longer glycans were obtained in lower yields (e.g. 35% yield for a decasaccharide).¹⁷ On the other hand, longer HS oligosaccharides (e.g. octasaccharides– dodecasaccharide) were required for strong interaction with some HP-binding proteins.^{26–29} For example, decasaccharide was found to be minimum for efficient binding of bone morphogenetic protein-2 (BMP-2).³⁰ We planned to engineer PmHS2 to improve its application in size-controlled chemoenzymatic synthesis of heparosan, HS, HP oligosaccharides and derivatives.

Analyzing PmHS2 protein sequence using XtalPredRF³¹ (Figure S1A) and BLAST (Figure S1B) predicted that its N-terminal 80 amino acid residues might be nonessential to its glycosyltransferase activities and unfavorable for its crystallizability and stability. Indeed, removing the N-terminal 80 amino acid residues of PmHS2 (Figure S2) (17–20 mg/L culture) resulted in 80PmHS2 (Figure S3) (60–80 mg/L) with a 3–4-fold improved expression level (Figure S4) and an improved thermal stability (Figure S5). In contrast to PmHS2 which precipitated easily during dialysis, 80PmHS2 remained soluble. 80PmHS2 could also survive lyophilization without loss of activity (Figure S6). On the other hand, 80PmHS2 (pI 6.61) and PmHS2³² (pI 6.83) share similar pH profiles (Figure S7) and donor substrate promiscuities (Figure S8). A previously synthesized stable GlcAβ2AA¹⁸ was used as a fluorescent-labeled acceptor substrate in these assays to allow easy product detection by high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) with a diode array or UV/Vis detector.

To facilitate reaction monitoring, product purification, and allow easy removal from the products for downstream conjugation with proteins or other molecules, a fluorophore tag was introduced to two possible monosaccharide substrates. GlcAβProNHFmoc (**O1**) and GlcNAcaProNHFmoc were synthesized from the corresponding glycosylpropylazides GlcAβProN₃¹⁸ and GlcNAcaProN₃³³ by catalytic hydrogenation followed by coupling with *N*-(9-fluorenylmethoxycarbonyloxy)succinimide (Fmoc-Suc) (see ESI).

Activity comparison (Table S1) showed that GlcAβProNHFmoc (**O1**) was a more efficient substrate than GlcNAcaProNHFmoc for both PmHS2 (157-fold) and 80PmHS2 (130-fold) in disaccharide production. Apparent kinetics studies with GlcAβ2AA (Table S2) showed that PmHS2 ($3.4\pm0.2 \text{ s}^{-1}$) and 80PmHS2 ($3.5\pm0.2 \text{ s}^{-1}$) have similar k_{cat} values while PmHS2 ($4.0\pm0.6 \text{ mM}$) has a lower K_M value than 80PmHS2 ($5.3\pm0.7 \text{ mM}$), resulting in a slightly higher catalytic efficiency for PmHS2 ($0.9 \text{ s}^{-1} \text{ mM}^{-1}$) than 80PmHS2 ($0.7 \text{ s}^{-1} \text{ mM}^{-1}$).

Starting from GlcA β ProNHFmoc (**O1**), 80PmHS2 with improved expression and stability permitted size-controlled gram-scale synthesis of heparosan oligosaccharides ranging from disaccharide (**O2**) to hexasaccharide (**O6**) in excellent yields using a sequential one-pot multienzyme (OPME) platform. In this platform (Scheme 1), GlcNAc-activation/transfer (**OPME1**) and GlcA-activation/transfer (**OPME2**) systems (each contains 80PmHS2, a kinase, a nucleotidyltransferase, and an inorganic pyrophosphatase) were used alternately to extend the acceptor substrate chain one monosaccharide at a time. Each OPME reaction was carried out for 1–2 days, the product was purified and used as the acceptor substrate for the next OPME reaction.

As shown in Scheme 1, disaccharide GlcNAca1–4GlcA β ProNHFmoc (**O2**) was enzymatically synthesized from **O1** using a one-pot four-enzyme GlcNAc-activation and transfer system (**OPME1**) containing *Bifidobacterium longum* N-acetylhexosamine-1kinase (BLNahK),³⁴ *Pasteurella multocida* N-acetylglucosamine-1-phosphate uridylyltransferase (PmGlmU),³⁵ *Pasteurella multocida* inorganic pyrophosphatase (PmPpA),³³ and 80PmHS2. The reaction went to completion and the product was readily purified by passing the reaction mixture through a C18 cartridge and eluting with a gradient solution of CH₃CN in water. Purified disaccharide **O2** (2.12 g) was obtained in an excellent 96% yield. Trisaccharide GlcA β 1–4GlcNAca1–4GlcA β ProNHFmoc (**O3**) (1.94 g) was synthesized from purified disaccharide **O2** using a one-pot four-enzyme GlcA-activation and transfer system (**OPME2**) containing *Arabidopsis thaliana* glucuronokinase (AtGlcAK),³⁶ *Bifidobacterium longum* UDP-sugar pyrophosphorylase (BLUSP),³⁷ PmPpA, and

80PmHS2 with a purified yield of 99%. Repeating the alternate **OPME1** and **OPME2** reactions with C18-cartridge-based product purification after each OPME reaction led to the formation of tetrasaccharide **O4** (1.87 g, 98%), pentasaccharide **O5** (1.52 g, 87%), and hexasaccharide **O6** (1.60 g, 99%).

OPME reactions of GlcNAc activation and transfer to glucuronides **O1**, **O3**, and **O5** (**OPME1**) were highly efficient and *N*-acetylglucosaminides **O2**, **O4**, and **O6** were obtained in nearly quantitative yields (96–99%). In the case of OPME reactions of GlcA activation and transfer to *N*-acetylglucosaminides **O2** and **O4** (**OPME2**) for the formation of glucuronides **O3** and **O5**, the reaction with **O2** went well and **O3** was obtained in an excellent 99% yield. However, when tetrasaccharide **O4** (an *N*-acetylglucosaminide longer than **O2**) was used as an acceptor for the formation of **O5**, the presence of **O3** byproduct was observed, indicating that the terminal GlcNAc in the acceptor **O4** was removed in the reaction. The side product formation was minimized by monitoring the reaction progress carefully and stopping the reaction promptly to obtain **O5** in 87% yield.

Overall, the sequential OPME platform containing 80PmHS2 was efficient in gram-scale synthesis of heparosan oligosaccharides up to hexasaccharide **O6** from monosaccharide **O1**. When hexasaccharide **O6** (an *N*-acetylglucosaminide even longer than **O4**) was used as the acceptor substrate for the β 1–4-GlcAT activity of 80PmHS2, the formation of both longer and shorter oligosaccharide byproducts (Figure S9) was observed, which complicated product purification and lowered synthetic yields.

We hypothesized that the formation of longer and shorter oligosaccharide byproducts in the OPME reaction for the synthesis of **O7** from **O6** was due to the reverse glycosylation activity of 80PmHS2. Such activity was reported for some glycosyltransferases involved in natural product glycosylation,^{38–39} mammalian sialyltransferases,⁴⁰ and bacterial sialyltransferases *Pasteurella multocida* sialyltransferase 1 (PmST1) and *Photobacterium damselae* α 2–6-sialyltransferase (Pd2,6ST),^{41–42} but was not observed for others.⁴⁰ Such activity, however, has never been shown for polysaccharide synthases. To test the hypothesis, hexasaccharide **O6** was incubated with 80PmHS2 in the absence or the presence of different concentrations of uridine 5'-diphosphate (UDP). As shown in Table S3, the amounts of 80PmHS2 reverse glycosylation products (oligosaccharides of various sizes

ranging from mono- to dodecasaccharide) increased and the concentration of **O6** decreased significantly with the increase of UDP concentration. The same effects were observed for PmHS2 (Table S3), demonstrating that the reverse glycosylation property was not introduced by the N-terminal protein sequence truncation in 80PmHS2. The chain reactions caused by the forward and reverse glycosylation reactions of 80PmHS2 in the presence of **O6** and UDP are illustrated in Scheme 2. Starting from **O6**, the reverse $\alpha 1$ –4-GlcNAcT activity of

80PmHS2 produces **O5** and UDP-GlcNAc. The resulting **O5** is used by the reverse β 1–4-GlcAT activity of 80PmHS2 to produce **O4** and UDP-GlcA. On the other hand, the UDP-GlcA obtained is used together with **O6** by the β 1–4-GlcAT activity of 80PmHS2 to produce **O7** and UDP. The α 1–4-GlcNAcT activity of 80PmHS2 uses **O7** and UDP-GlcNAc to produce **O8** and UDP. Similarly, the newly formed longer and shorter oligosaccharides in the reaction mixture are used as the substrates in combined 80PmHS2-catalyzed forward and reverse glycosylation reactions for the formation of additional oligosaccharides of longer and shorter lengths.

Time course studies using GlcNAc-terminated **O6** as the substrate for 80PmHS2 (Figure S10) showed that longer incubation times led to a continuous decrease of **O6** concentration and increased dispersity of oligosaccharide products with a preference toward the accumulation of GlcNAc-terminated oligosaccharides (**O2**, **O4**, **O8**, and **O10**). The production of oligosaccharides of different sizes indicated that both α 1–4-GlcNAcT and β 1–4-GlcAT activities of 80PmHS2 have the corresponding reverse glycosylation activities. Indeed, incubating 80PmHS2 with GlcA-terminated pentasaccharide **O5** in the presence of UDP (Figure S11) also showed a time-dependent increase of the product dispersity although GlcA-terminated oligosaccharide products (**O3**, **O7**, and **O9**) dominated. Increased product dispersity with the increase of time was also observed previously in PmHS2-catalyzed polymerization reactions,^{15, 43} although reverse glycosylation was not realized as a likely major contributor.

The formation of UDP-GlcNAc by reverse glycosylation of **O6** using 80PmHS2 in the presence of UDP was further confirmed by a coupled enzyme assay (Scheme 3) inspired by Mehr et al. for indirectly detecting CMP-sialic acid formed in a reverse-sialyltransferase reaction.⁴¹ To do this, an additional glycosyltransferase *Neisseria meningitidis* β 1–3-N-acetylglucosaminyltransferase (NmLgtA)⁴⁴ and its acceptor 4-methylumberliferyl β -lactoside (Lac β MU)⁴⁵ were added to the reaction of 80PmHS2 in the presence of **O6** and UDP. As expected (Table S4), GlcNAc β 1–3Lac β MU formed by NmLgtA-catalyzed reaction was observed only in the reaction containing all components including NmLgtA,

80PmHS2, and UDP (**Reaction 1** in Table S4) but not in the one lacking NmLgtA (**Reaction 2** in Table S4), 80PmHS2 (**Reaction 3** in Table S4), or UDP (**Reaction 4** in Table S4).

Since reverse $\alpha 1$ -4-GlcNAcT and $\beta 1$ -4-GlcAT activities of 80PmHS2 cause challenges in size-controlled enzymatic synthesis and purification of longer oligosaccharide products, mutagenesis studies of 80PmHS2 were planned to generate single-function glycosyltransferases by mutating the key catalytic base residues of the other glycosyltransferase domains. The previously reported strategy of generating single-functional glycosyltransferases of PmHS2¹⁴ and PmHS1²³ by mutating the

glycosyltransferase DXD motifs was not adopted due to the significant decrease of the stability of the PmHS2 mutants¹⁴ which would adversely affect their application in synthesis. In the absence of known PmHS2 crystal structures, a 80PmHS2 I-TASSER^{46–47} model was generated. The β 1–4-GlcAT domain in 80PmHS2 I-TASSER model aligned well with the GalNAcT and GlcAT domains of *Escherichia coli* K4 chondroitin polymerase (EcKfoC) (PDB ID: 2Z86 and 2Z87)⁴⁸ (Figure S12), identifying D291 as a possible catalytic base. Similarly, a potential key catalytic residue (D569) in the 80PmHS2 α 1–4-GlcNAcT domain was identified by aligning its I-TASSER model with the structures of *Neisseria meningitidis* lipopolysaccharyl- α 1,4-galactosyltransferase (NmLgtC)^{49–51} and bovine α 1–3-galactosyltransferase (α 3GalT)⁵² (Figure S13).

D291N and D569N mutants of 80PmHS2 were generated (Figure S14). Their expression levels (50–60 and 60–70 mg/L culture, respectively) were comparable to that of 80PmHS2 (60–80 mg/L culture). The D291N mutant retained the α 1–4-GlcNAcT activity and lost the β 1–4-GlcAT activity of 80PmHS2. In contrast, the D569N mutant retained 80PmHS2 β 1–4-GlcAT activity while its α 1–4-GlcNAcT activity decreased 548-fold (Figure S15). The corresponding reverse glycosylation activities of 80PmHS2 also decreased significantly in the mutants. As shown in Figure S16, under conditions mimicking synthetic reactions with 30 mM UDP (Figures S16A–B), no reverse glycosylation oligosaccharide products were observed for either mutants, demonstrating the efficiency of the mutants in blocking the cascade chain reactions shown in Scheme 2 and avoiding the generation of multiple oligosaccharide byproducts.

80PmHS2_D569N mutant was used as a single function β 1–4-GlcAT (lacking both forward and reverse α 1–4-GlcNAcT activities) in high-yield OPME synthesis (**OPME2**) (Scheme 4) of longer GlcA-terminated heparosan oligosaccharides including heptasaccharide **O7** (566 mg, 98%) and nonasaccharide **O9** (445 mg, 96%), respectively, from the corresponding GlcNAc-terminated 80PmHS2_D569N oligosaccharide acceptors **O6** and **O8**. 80PmHS2_D291N mutant was used as a single function α 1–4-GlcNAcT (lacking both forward and reverse β 1–4-GlcAT activities) for high-yield OPME (**OPME1**) synthesis of longer GlcNAc-terminated oligosaccharides including octasaccharide **O8** (504 mg, 99%) and decasaccharide **O10** (430 mg, 98%), respectively, from the corresponding GlcA-terminated 80PmHS2_D291N oligosaccharide acceptors **O7** and **O9**. In these preparative-scale OPME reactions, unwanted oligosaccharide byproducts were not observed.

Various NMR experiments for **O1–O10** including ¹H and ¹³C NMR, HSQC, and HSQC-TOCSY (90 ms and 10 ms) enabled signal assignments and the observation of key correlations. HSQC spectra provided C–H coupling information, and HSQC-TOCSY with 90 ms and 10 ms mixing times indicated independent coupling correlations of terminal and internal GlcA or GlcNAc residues. In the example of **O3** containing two GlcA residues, the chemical shifts of the internal GlcA are more downfield for H3 (differ by 0.30 ppm), H4 (differ by 0.17 ppm), H5 (differ by 0.07 ppm), C1 (differ by 0.11 ppm), C2 (differ by 0.73 ppm), C3 (differ by 0.34 ppm), C4 (differ by 4.95 ppm), and C5 (differ by 3.18 ppm), but more upfield for H-1 (differ by 0.18 ppm) than that of the terminal GlcA.

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In conclusion, N-terminal truncated 80PmHS2 with improved expression level and stability was shown to be an efficient catalyst for gram-scale sequential OPME synthesis of heparosan oligosaccharides up to hexasaccharide **O6**. Reverse glycosylation activities of 80PmHS2 ware abareaterized and shown to be responsible for poor yields and

80PmHS2 were characterized and shown to be responsible for poor yields and complications in 80PmHS2-involved OPME synthesis of longer oligosaccharides. Key catalytic base residues for the β 1–4-GlcAT and the α 1–4-GlcNAcT activities of 80PmHS2 were identified. 80PmHS2_D569N and 80PmHS2_D291N mutants were generated as single functional β 1–4-GlcAT and α 1–4-GlcNAcT with significantly decreased reverse α 1– 4-GlcNAcT and reverse β 1–4-GlcAT glycosyltransferase activities, respectively. They have been used as efficient catalysts for sequential OPME synthesis of longer length heparosan oligosaccharides (**O7–O10**). The study draws attention to the consideration of reverse glycosylation activities of glycosyltransferases including polysaccharide synthases when applying them in the synthesis of oligosaccharides and polysaccharides. The mutagenesis strategy has the potential to be extended to other multifunctional polysaccharide synthases with reverse glycosylation activities, especially those use sugar nucleotides containing the same nucleotide component, to generate catalysts with improved synthetic efficiency.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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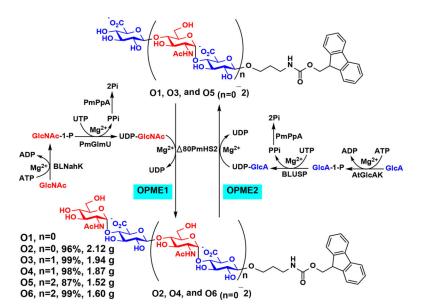
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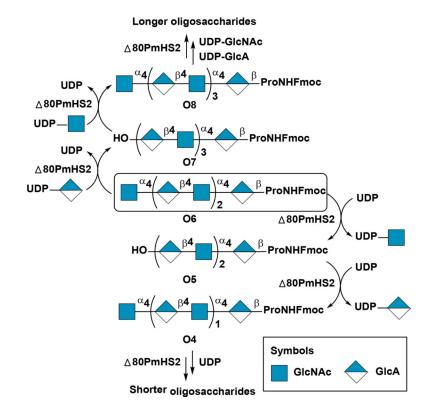
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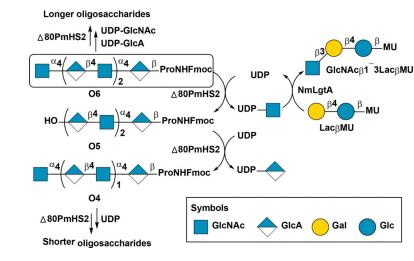
Scheme 1.

80PmHS2-dependent sequential one-pot multienzyme (OPME) synthesis of heparosan oligosaccharides O2–O6.



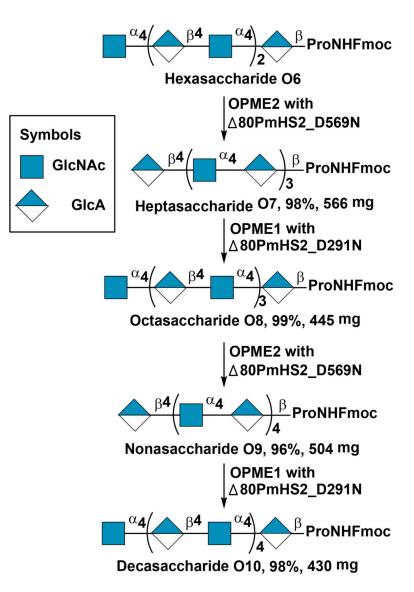
Scheme 2.

Schematic illustration of the chain reactions caused by forward and reverse glycosylation activities of 80PmHS2 in the presence of hexasaccharide O6 and UDP.



Scheme 3.

Schematic illustration for indirectly detecting UDP-GlcNAc formed in the reverse glycosylation reaction of 80PmHS2 in the presence of UDP and hexasaccharide O6 using a coupled enzyme assay with NmLgtA and Lac β MU.



Scheme 4.

Sequential OPME synthesis of heparosan oligosaccharides O7-O10.