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Author(s)	Gowda, Siddabasave Gowda B.; Fuda, Hirotohi; Yamamoto, Yusuke; Chiba, Hitoshi; Hui, Shu-Ping
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1 **A simple and efficient method for synthesis of Sn-Glycero-phosphoethanolamine**

2 Siddabasave Gowda B. Gowda¹, Hirotohi Fuda¹, Yusuke Yamamoto², Hitoshi Chiba³, and
3 Shu-Ping Hui^{1*}

4 1. Faculty of Health Sciences, Hokkaido University, Kita-12, Nishi-5, Kita-ku, Sapporo 060-
5 0812, Japan

6 2. Graduate School of Health Sciences, Hokkaido University, Kita-12, Nishi-5, Kita-ku,
7 Sapporo 060-0812, Japan

8 3. Department of Nutrition, Sapporo University of Health Sciences, Nakanuma, Nishi 4-2-
9 1-15, Higashi-ku, Sapporo 007-0894, Japan

10 * Correspondence: Shu-Ping Hui.

11 Faculty of Health Sciences, Hokkaido University,
12 Kita-12, Nishi-5, Kita-ku, Sapporo 060-0812, Japan.

13 E-mail: keino@hs.hokudai.ac.jp,

14 Tel. & Fax: +81-11-706-3693.

15 **Abstract:**

16 An efficient three-step strategy for the convenient synthesis of *Sn*-glycero-3-
17 phosphoethanolamine (GroPEtn) from a commercially available 1,2-Dipalmitoyl-*sn*-glycero-3-
18 phosphoethanolamine (DPPE) is reported. Direct hydrolysis of DPPE produce a complex
19 inseparable mixture, hence a protection and deprotection strategy is employed to prepare
20 GroPEtn. The primary amine of DPPE is protected with a highly stable acid-labile trityl group,
21 followed by strong base hydrolysis of *N*-trityl-DPPE gives *N*-trityl-GroPEtn. Further a mild,
22 rapid, and efficient deprotection method is established using trifluoroacetic acid to remove *N*-
23 trityl moiety, affords GroPEtn as a single product. This is the first semisynthetic approach and
24 efficient method to produce GroPEtn with a total yield of 66% in three steps. GroPEtn did not
25 show any cytotoxicity against human kidney (HK-2) cells and reporter gene assay for
26 activation of Keap1-Nrf2 mediated antioxidant defense mechanism showed no significant
27 effects.

28 **Keywords:** Glycerophospholipids, *Sn*-Glycero-phosphoethanolamine, acid hydrolysis, trityl
29 deprotection, Nuclear-magnetic resonance, High-resolution mass spectrometry.

30 **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

31 GPL: Glycerophospholipids

32 GroPEtn: *Sn*-Glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine

33 DPPE: 1,2-dipalmitoyl-*sn*-glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine

34 HK-2: Human kidney-2

35 NMR: Nuclear-magnetic resonance

36 HRMS: High-resolution mass spectrometry

37 Introduction

38 Glycerophospholipids (GPL) are the major components of cell membranes that have important
39 structural and functional properties(Casares *et al.* 2019). Chemically, they are the derivatives
40 of sn-glycero-3-phosphoric acid, synthesized by a de novo pathway at endoplasmic reticulum
41 and are transported to other membranous structures by phospholipid exchange and transfer
42 proteins(Fagone and Jackowski 2009). Several types of GPL are synthesized with a varying
43 polar head at the sn-3 position of the glycerol backbone, such as phosphatidylcholine (PC),
44 phosphatidylethanolamine (PE), phosphatidylserine (PS), phosphatidylinositol (PI), and
45 phosphatidylglycerol (PG). In addition to forming the physical boundary of cells with a suitable
46 environment, fluidity, and ion-permeability, GPL are involved in fundamental regulatory cellular
47 functions such as cell signalling and as an anchor for proteins in cell membranes(Frisardi *et al.*
48 *et al.* 2011). Phosphatidylethanolamine (PE) is one of the two-major GPL (along with PC) found
49 in cell membranes and is known to inhibit the mitochondrial respiratory activity and reduced in
50 age-related hippocampal neuron death in rodent models(Modica-Napolitano and Renshaw
51 2004).

52 *Sn*-Glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine (GroPEtn) is a breakdown product of PE, and
53 present in higher levels in normal liver relative to other organs(Tallan *et al.* 1954). It is known
54 to stimulate the growth of hepatocytes and dropped significantly during liver
55 regeneration(Nelson *et al.* 1996; Houweling *et al.* 1992). GroPEtn showed the enhanced
56 activity of epidermal growth factor in cultured hepatocytes(Nelson *et al.* 1996). Even though
57 several methods for synthesis of PE and lyso-PE were reported (Rakhit *et al.* 1969; Furukawa
58 *et al.* 2016; D'Arrigo and Servi 2010) there are no reports on the efficient synthesis of GroPEtn.
59 An effort to prepare GroPEtn starting from a glycerol derivative has been reported, however,
60 it is limited by multi-step reactions and poor reaction yield (Baer and Stancer 1953). GroPEtn
61 is also attempted to prepare by acidic hydrolysis of alkali stable phospholipid fraction extracted
62 from brain, however the yield is low and complexity exist in purification process(Ansell and
63 Spanner 1963). GroPEtn is a strong polar molecule with enhanced water solubility and as
64 reactive free amine moiety, which often cause the reaction by-products during the course of
65 synthesis. Due to growing interest in GroPEtn bioactivities, there is a crucial need for the
66 efficient method to produce GroPEtn. Herein, we report a three-step semisynthetic approach
67 for the synthesis of GroPEtn, which is suitable for the efficient production GroPEtn in high yield.
68 Also, its cell cytotoxicity and the role in Keap1-Nrf2 (Kelch ECH associated protein 1-nuclear
69 factor erythroid 2-related factor 2) activation is examined.

70 Materials and Method

71 Dipalmitoyl-*sn*-glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine, CDCl₃, trifluoroacetic acid, trityl bromide, and
72 sodium methoxide were obtained from Tokyo Chemical Industry (Tokyo, Japan), CD₃OD is
73 obtained from Cambridge Isotope Laboratories, Inc.. All other reagents of synthetic grade and
74 LC-MS grade (methanol) were purchased from Wako Pure Chemical Corporation (Tokyo,
75 Japan). TLC was performed on Merck pre-coated plates (20 cm × 20 cm; layer thickness, 0.25
76 mm; Silica Gel 60F₂₅₄); the spots were visualized by spraying Ninhydrin in ethanol or 5%
77 H₂SO₄ in methanol when applicable. Silica Gel N60 (spherical type, particle size 40-50 μm;
78 Kanto Chemical Industry) was used for column chromatographic purification. Proton and
79 carbon NMR was recorded with 400 MHz JNM-ECX400P (JEOL, Japan; ¹H: 400 MHz, ¹³C:
80 100 MHz); multiplicities are given as singlet (s), broad (br), doublet (d), double doublets (dd),
81 triple doublets (td), triplet (t), quintet (q), or multiplet (m). Chemical shifts are given in ppm. ¹H
82 NMR spectra were processed by ACD/NMR processor software (Advanced Chemistry
83 Development, inc.). High-resolution electrospray ionization mass spectra (HR-ESI-MS) was
84 recorded by Linear trap quadrupole (LTQ) Orbitrap XL (Thermo Fisher scientific). Low-
85 resolution electrospray ionization mass spectra (LR-ESI-MS) was recorded by LXQ (Thermo
86 Fisher scientific).

87 **N-Trityl-1,2-Dipalmitoyl-*sn*-glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine (Tr-DPPE)**; To a solution of
88 1,2-dipalmitoyl-*sn*-glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine **1** (DPPE: 100 mg, 0.144 mmol) in
89 dichloromethane (5 mL) and trimethylamine (97 μL, 4.8 eq, 0.693 mmol), Trityl bromide (84.26
90 mg, 1.8 eq, 0.2607 mmol) was added and stirred for overnight at room temperature under
91 nitrogen atmosphere. The reaction mixture was concentrated under reduced pressure and
92 resulting mixture was purified by flash column chromatography (CHCl₃:MeOH = 1:0~20:1, by
93 vol) to give Tr-DPPE **2** (122 mg, 91%) as a white solid. The ¹H-NMR and ¹³C-NMR of the
94 compound were identical to our previous report (Furukawa *et al.* 2016) (See Supporting
95 Information). R_f = 0.42 (CHCl₃:MeOH = 7:1, by vol); ¹H-NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.53-7.24
96 (m, 15 H), 5.14 (br m, 1 H), 4.32-4.29 (br d, 1 H, *J* = 11.3 Hz), 4.12-4.08 (br m, 2 H), 3.82 (br
97 m, 2 H), 3.04 (br s, 1 H), 2.22-2.15 (br m, 4 H), 1.56 (br s, 4 H), 1.24 (br s, 48 H), 0.9-0.84 (t,
98 6 H, *J* = 6.6 Hz); ¹³C-NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 173.30, 128.97, 128.87, 128.34, 128.07, 73.85,
99 63.89, 63.85, 62.64, 39.7, 34.21, 34.04, 31.89, 29.69, 29.63, 29.33, 29.13, 25.62, 24.83, 22.65,
100 14.07; HR-ESIMS calculated for C₅₆H₈₇O₈NP [M - H]⁻, 932.6175, found, 932.6165 (-1.07 ppm).

101 **N-Trityl-1,2-dihydroxy-*sn*-glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine (Tr-GroPEtn)**: To a solution
102 of Tr-DPPE **2** (120 mg, 0.128 mmol) in chloroform (3 mL) and methanol (2 mL), sodium
103 methoxide (15.2 mg, 2.2 eq, 0.282 mmol) was added and stirred for 5 h at room temperature.
104 The reaction mixture was concentrated under reduced pressure and resulting mixture was
105 purified by flash column chromatography (CHCl₃:MeOH:H₂O = 9:1:0~65:25:4, by vol) to give
106 Tr-GroPEtn **3** (53.2 mg, 90%) as a white solid. The ¹H-NMR and ¹³C-NMR of the compound

107 were identical to our previous report (Furukawa *et al.* 2016) (See Supporting Information). R_f
108 = 0.30 (CHCl₃:MeOH:H₂O = 65:25:4, by vol); ¹H-NMR (400 MHz, CD₃OD) δ 7.42-7.27 (m, 15
109 H), 4.08-3.94 (m, 2 H), 3.93-3.89 (m, 2 H), 3.87-3.75 (m, 1 H), 3.60-3.51 (m, 2 H), 3.27-3.25
110 (m, 1 H), 2.75 (br s, 2 H); ¹³C-NMR (100 MHz, CD₃OD) δ 142.53, 142.50, 129.63, 129.31,
111 128.83, 128.71, 74.51, 72.13, 72.06, 67.68, 67.62, 63.49; HR-ESIMS calculated for
112 C₂₄H₂₇O₆NP [M - H]⁻, 456.1581, found, 456.1582 (+2.2 ppm).

113 ***Sn*-Glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine(GPEA):** N-Trityl-1,2-dihydroxy-*sn*-glycero-3-phospho
114 ethanolamine (Tr-GroPEtn) **3** (50 mg, 0.109 mmol) was dissolved in 3 ml of anhydrous
115 methylene chloride/trifluoroacetic acid, 2:1, by vol.). The yellow solution was stirred at 0 °C for
116 5 min and then rapidly neutralized with 6 ml of 14% aqueous ammonia. The reaction mixture
117 was concentrated under reduced pressure and resulting residue is purified by column
118 chromatography (elution starting with ethylacetate:methanol (4:1) to
119 ethylacetate/methanol/water/acetic acid (2:1:1:0.3, by vol) to give GroPEtn **4** (19 mg, 81%) as
120 a white solid. R_f = 0.26 (EtOAc:MeOH:H₂O:CH₃COOH = 2:1:1:0.3, by vol); ¹H-NMR (400 MHz,
121 CD₃OD) δ 3.93 (m, 2 H), 3.64-3.78 (m, 2H), 3.46 (m, 1H), 3.64 (m, 1H), 3.16 (m, 1 H), 3.03
122 (m, 2H), 1.8 (brs, -NH₂); ¹³C-NMR (100 MHz, CD₃OD) δ 72.65, 72.57, 68.02, 67.97, 63.90,
123 63.10, 61.62, 41.76, 41.70; HR-ESIMS calculated for C₅H₁₄O₆NP [M - H]⁻, 214.0487, found,
124 214.0488 (-0.46 ppm).

125 **Cell cytotoxicity assay:**

126 Normal human kidney-2 (HK-2, CRL-2190) cells (1 × 10⁵/well) were seeded into 96-well plates
127 with minimum essential medium (MEM, Thermo Fisher Scientific) supplemented with 10%
128 fetal bovine serum (FBS) and 1% Penicillin-Streptomycin-Neomycin mixture (modified MEM).
129 GroPEtn was pre-dissolved in MEM and applied to the cells and incubated at 37°C under a
130 humidified atmosphere of 5% CO₂ in air for 24 h. Then the culture media was removed by
131 vacuum suction and a freshly prepared 10 μ L of CCK-8 reagent (Dojindo Molecular
132 Technologies) and 200 μ L of MEM were added, with additional incubation for about 1 h.
133 Followed by 50 μ L of 1% (w/v) sodium dodecyl sulfate solution was added to cease the
134 reaction and the absorbance was recorded using Wallac 1420 ARVO Mx plate reader
135 (PerkinElmer, Tokyo, Japan) at 450 nm. The half-maximal inhibitory concentration (IC₅₀) of
136 GroPEtn was analyzed by Prism 6.03 software (GraphPad, San Diego, CA, USA).

137 **Reporter gene assay for Keap1-Nrf2 signaling:**

138 HK-2 cells (1 × 10⁵/well) were seeded into 96-well plates with modified MEM and incubated at
139 37°C for 24 h. FuGENE HD Transfection Reagent was used with a reagent-to-total DNA ratio
140 of 4:1 (μ L/ μ g) to transfect the HK-2 cells according to manufacturer's protocol. The cells were
141 co-transfected with two luciferase reporter vectors pGL4.37[luc2p/ARE/Hygro] and

142 pGL4.75[hRluc/CMV] at a 20:1 mass ratio. After 24 h of transfection, the transfection reagent
143 was removed and GroPEtn was applied to the transfected cells and further incubated for 24
144 h. Then the luciferase activity was determined by Dual-Glo Luciferase Assay System
145 (Promega) according to the manufacturer's protocol. Activity was measured with a Wallac
146 1420 ARVO Mx plate reader and corrected for transfection efficiency by normalizing to hRluc
147 activity. Relative luciferase activity (fold) was calculated as the ratio of fluorescence intensity
148 in GroPEtn treated samples to that in the untreated control sample.

149 **Result and Discussion**

150 Glycerophospholipids are the major membrane lipids with broad bioactivities and several
151 synthetic routes were reported in the literature for its nonpolar derivatives (Ahmad *et al.* 2007;
152 Leßig and Fuchs 2010). However, synthesis of more polar GPL was limited in the literature.
153 In the course of our phospholipid research, we have developed a new and efficient route for
154 the synthesis of GroPEtn. Despite the simple structure of GroPEtn there is no single efficient
155 method of synthesis was reported. Due to the increasing biological importance of PE derived
156 water-soluble metabolites such as GroPEtn, there is a need for an efficient method to prepare
157 GroPEtn. To achieve this goal, we have designed a semisynthetic approach by using 1,2-
158 Dipalmitoyl-*sn*-glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine (DPPE) as a starting material. At first, an
159 effort to use direct alkali-mediated hydrolysis of DPPE as a strategy to obtain GroPEtn was
160 carried out using strong bases such as sodium methoxide or aqueous potassium hydroxide.
161 These attempts produced several inseparable by-products and in some cases ethanolamine
162 as a major product rather the GroPEtn. Furthermore, an attempt using mild bases such as
163 aqueous lithium hydroxide, potassium carbonate, and lithium carbonate were carried out but
164 reaction does not proceed. All the experimental conditions attempted in this study were listed
165 in **Table 1**. In our previous study involving synthesis of lyso-PE, we found that protection of
166 amine group is necessary to carry out the direct alkali hydrolysis of DPPE (Furukawa *et al.*
167 2016). More specifically, trityl protection of primary amine of GroPEtn makes the N-trityl bond
168 more stable during the synthesis and it is successfully employed in a previous PE and lyso-
169 PE synthesis (Furukawa *et al.* 2016). A three-step semisynthetic approach for the synthesis
170 of GroPEtn employed in the current study is shown in **Figure 1**.

171 The protection of an amine group of DPPE **1**, is carried out with tritylbromide to obtain
172 N-trityl-DPPE **2**, and the subsequent deacylation using Zemplen conditions afforded the
173 desired N-trityl-GroPEtn **3**, in 90% yield (Furukawa *et al.* 2016). The deacylation is carried out
174 under alkali conditions using sodium methoxide (2.2 eq) in a slight excess amount to the
175 previous method to accomplish the reaction towards completion and obtain a good yield. Next,
176 most challenging task is the deprotection of the N-trityl moiety, which is often cleaved either
177 by catalytic hydrogenation or by the treatment with acid. At first, the deprotection of trityl group

178 was carried out by the method reported earlier (Furukawa *et al.* 2016) in the synthesis of lyso-
179 PE, using 90% acetic acid, refluxing at the 120 °C for 5 min. However, this deprotection
180 approach produced several by-products introducing considerable difficulties in the final
181 purification process. Use of strong acids or harsh reaction conditions produces complex
182 mixture, due to the presence of reactive primary alcohol and ether moieties. In other words,
183 mild conditions could favor the hydrolysis by suppressing reaction by-products.

184 In this work we designed and developed a very mild deprotection strategy using
185 trifluoroacetic acid/dichloromethane (1:2) at 0 °C for 5 min, which produced GroPEtn **4**, as a
186 single product with a yield of 81%. The high yield of GroPEtn could be due to the complete
187 progress of the reaction under mild condition in a short period of time without any by-products.
188 Whereas direct hydrolysis of DPPE produces several by-products and often the product yield
189 is very low or not obtained. The pictorial representation of the trityl deprotection reaction, thin-
190 layer chromatographic detection, and spectra of high-resolution mass and MS/MS data of
191 GroPEtn are shown in **Figure 2**. The detailed NMR assignment of GroPEtn is described in the
192 method section and the spectra were provided in **Figure 3**. Unless stated harsh conditions or
193 long reaction time produces a complex inseparable mixture which limits the supply of GroPEtn,
194 whereas using this semisynthetic approach with facile acidic hydrolysis conditions we could
195 overcome this issue and able explore the unknown biological functions of GroPEtn.

196 The Nrf2 is a transcription factor that regulates the expression of many phase II and
197 antioxidant genes to maintain the cellular homeostasis. Small molecules are known to activate
198 Nrf2 pathway and protect the cells from oxidative stress induced damages (Joko *et al.* 2017).
199 Since, GroPEtn is a low molecular weight water soluble metabolite it is of great interest to
200 explore its antioxidant property. At first, the cell cytotoxicity of the GroPEtn against human
201 kidney-2 (HK-2) cells was tested using cell counting kit-8 (CCK-8) and the results are given in
202 **Figure 4A**. The CCK-8 assay was carried out according to the previously published literature
203 from our group (Joko *et al.* 2017). The data clearly show that GroPEtn as no toxicity even at
204 higher concentrations such as 1000 µM, indicates its potential to use as pharmaceutical
205 candidate where GroPEtn plays a beneficial role. Furthermore, to examine GroPEtn activity
206 against Keap1-Nrf2 pathway, we tested its activity using HK-2 cells by reporter gene assay
207 developed in our laboratory (Joko *et al.* 2017). The assay results showed that, GroPEtn as no
208 significant role in the Keap-Nrf2 activation (**Figure 4B**), which is crucial in antioxidant defense
209 mechanisms.

210 **Conclusion**

211 In this study, we successfully synthesized GroPEtn for the first time using a simple three-step
212 approach with high efficiency in a short period of time. This strategy could avoid the severe

213 by-products produced by direct alkali hydrolysis and hence can be employed for the
214 preparation of GroPEtn in high yield. Furthermore, GroPEtn did not show any toxicity against
215 HK-2 cells and no significant role in Keap1-Nrf2 activation. Since bioactivities of GroPEtn is
216 curbed by the lack of authentic standard, our study helps us to explore the importance of
217 GroPEtn, a breakdown product of PE in many biological processes.

218 **Conflict of Interest**

219 The authors declare no conflict of interests

220 **Acknowledgement**

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224 **Supporting Information**

225 The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the...

226 **References**

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Tables:**Table 1:** Direct hydrolysis of DPPE under various alkali conditions to obtain GroPEtn

[*1 mg of DPPE dissolved in chloroform: methanol (1:1) is used in each reaction.

Reaction status in each step monitored by TLC and "X"-refers to no reaction].

SN	Reagent*	Temperature	Time (hr)	Status#
1	1 M aq. KOH	RT	12	X
2	1M aq. KOH	60 °C	1	byproducts
3	NaOMe (1.1 eq)	RT	0.5	byproducts
4	1M aq. LiOH	RT	12	X
5	K ₂ CO ₃ (2 eq)	RT	12	X
6	LiCO ₃ (2 eq)	RT	12	X

Figure legends:

Figure 1: Semi-synthetic approach for efficient synthesis of GroPEtn from DPPE

Figure 2. Diagrammatic representation of hydrolysis of Tr-GroPEtn to GroPEtn and its mass spectrometric characterization. **A.** Pictorial representation of reaction process and detection of GroPEtn by TLC. **B.** Characterization of GroPEtn by linear trap quadrupole-Orbitrap mass spectrometry [* TLC elution gradient is: EtOAc:MeOH:H₂O:CH₃COOH (2:1:1:0.3)]

Figure 3. ¹H and ¹³C- NMR spectra of GroPEtn

Figure 4. A. Cell viability assay results of GroPEtn treated with HK-2 cells and **B.** Reporter gene assay results of GroPEtn in Nrf2 activation.

Graphical Abstract:

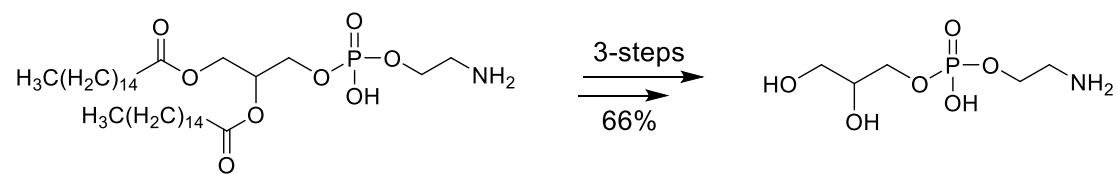


Figure 1:

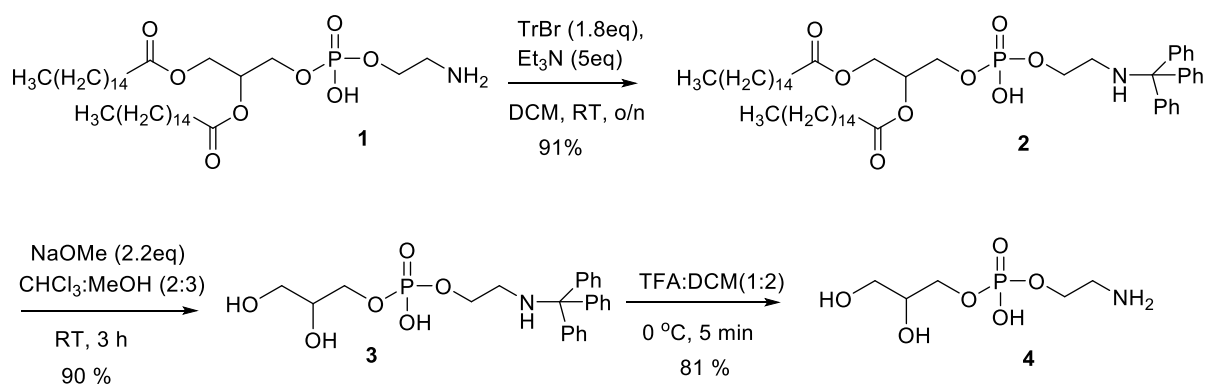


Figure 2.

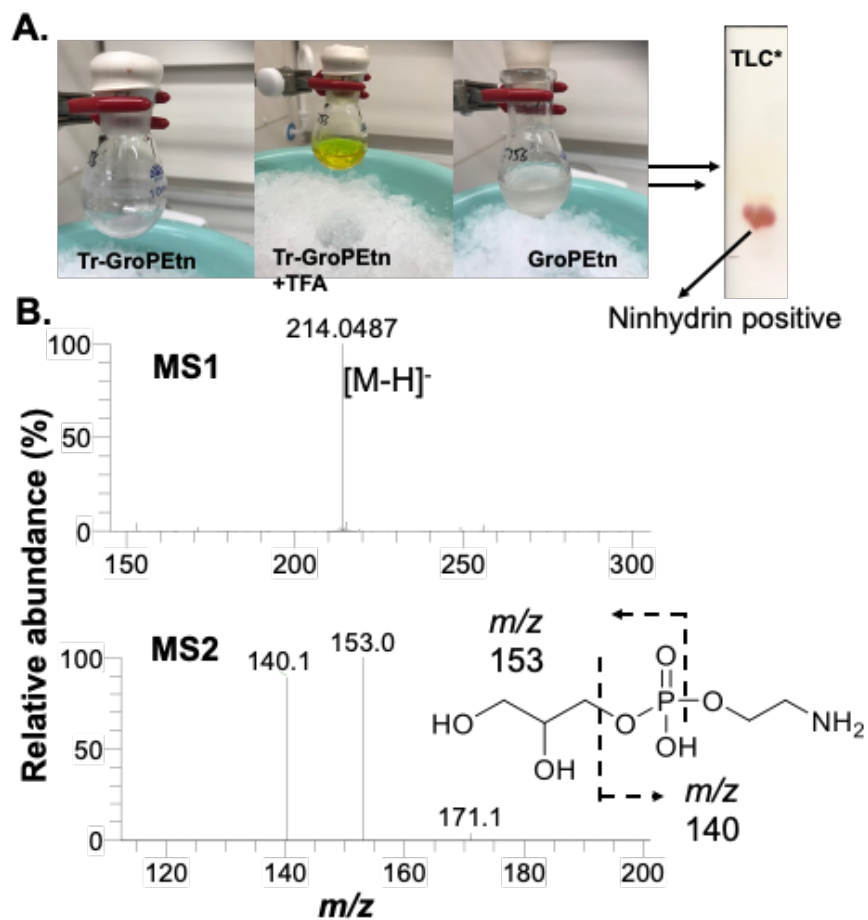


Figure 3.

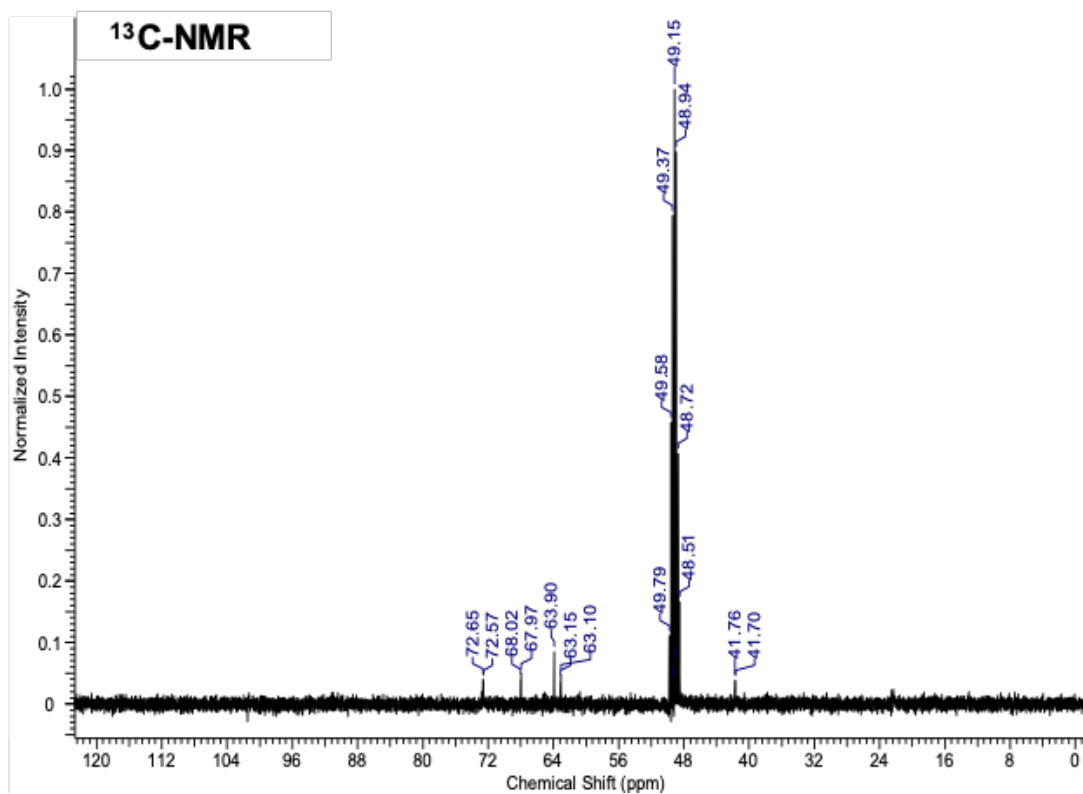
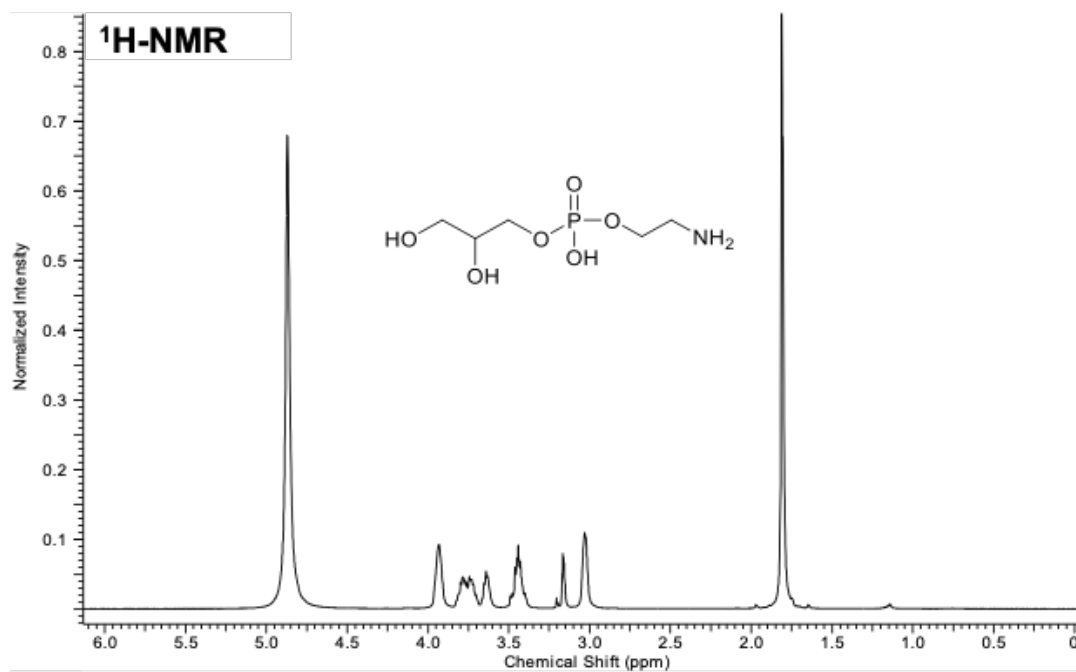
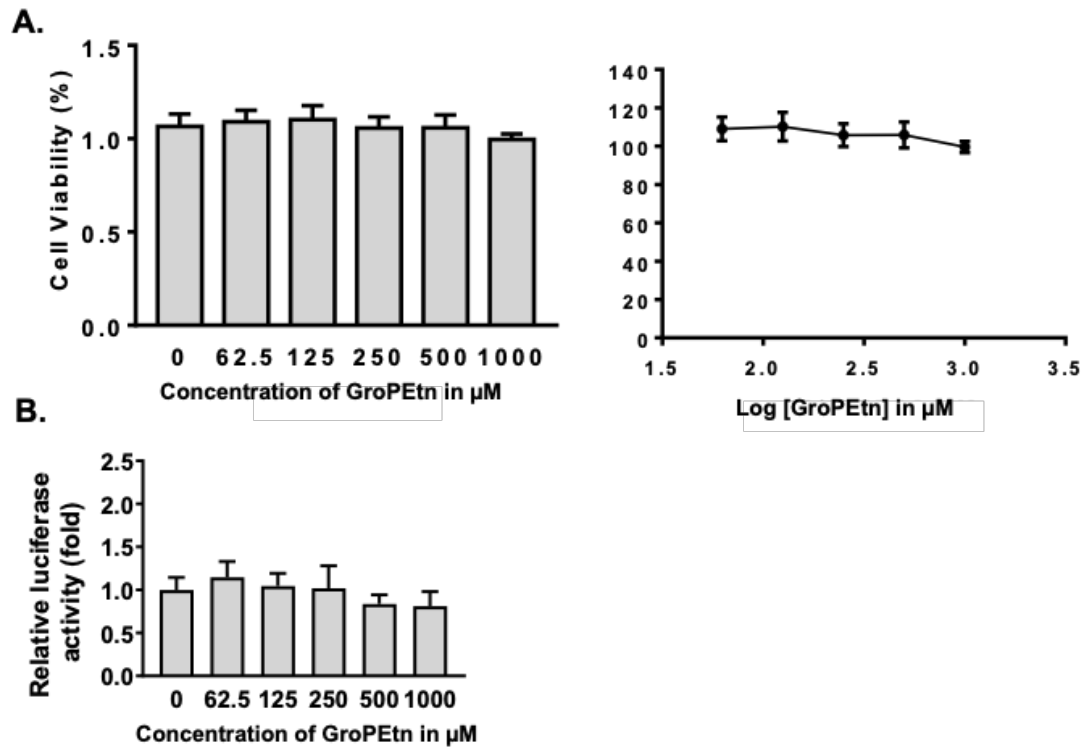


Figure 4.



Supporting Information for

A simple and efficient method for synthesis of Sn-Glycero-phosphoethanolamine

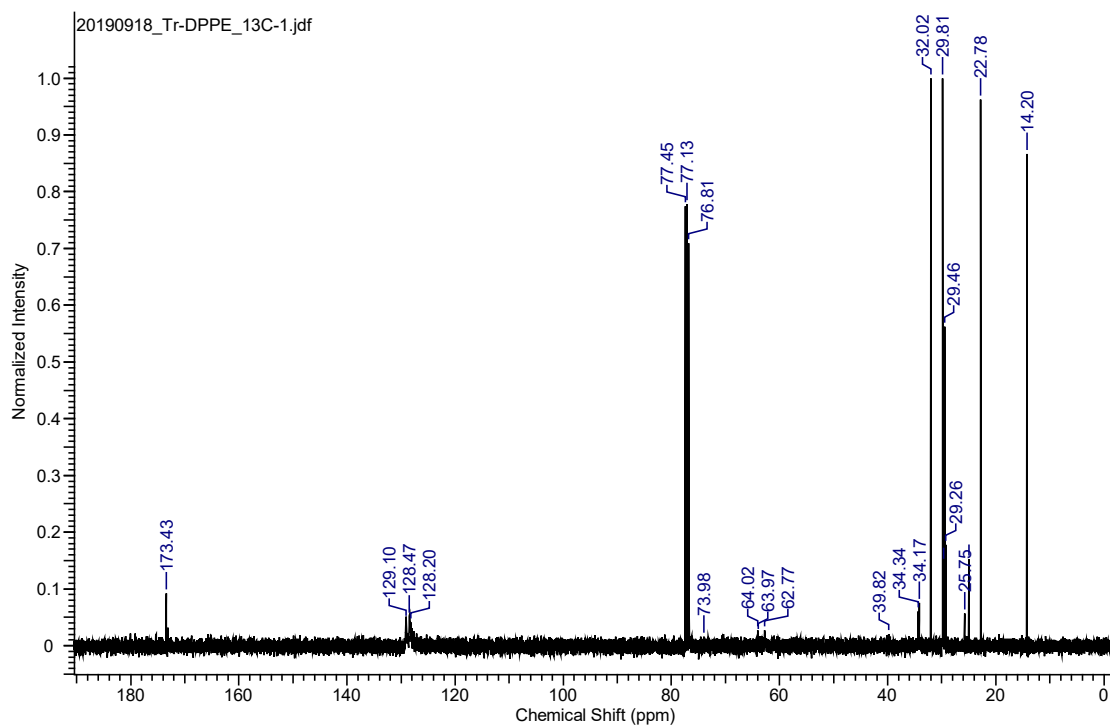
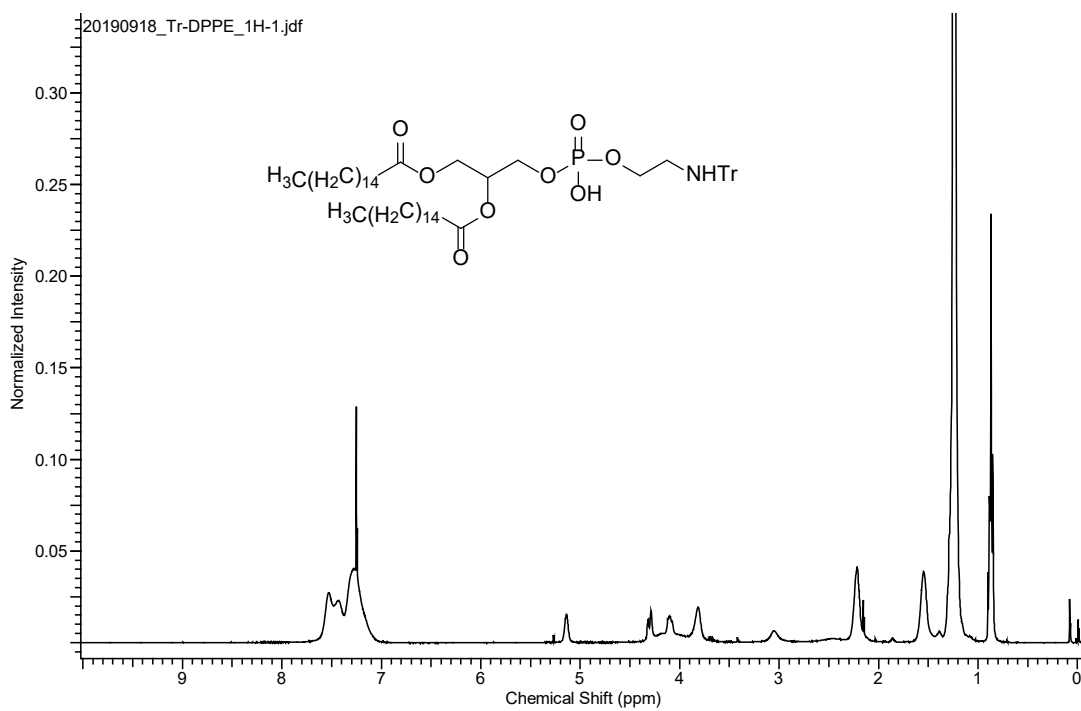
Siddabasave Gowda B. Gowda¹, Hirotohi Fuda¹, Yusuke Yamamoto², Hitoshi Chiba³, and Shu-Ping Hui^{1*}

1. Faculty of Health Sciences, Hokkaido University, Kita-12, Nishi-5, Kita-ku, Sapporo 060-0812, Japan
2. Graduate School of Health Sciences, Hokkaido University, Kita-12, Nishi-5, Kita-ku, Sapporo 060-0812, Japan
3. Department of Nutrition, Sapporo University of Health Sciences, Nakanuma, Nishi 4-2-1-15, Higashi-ku, Sapporo 007-0894, Japan

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1. ¹H and ¹³C-NMR of Tr-DPPE (2)



2. ^1H and ^{13}C -NMR of Tr-GroPEtn (3)

