

A Systems Biology Approach to Advancing Adverse Outcome Pathways for Risk Assessment

Natàlia Garcia-Reyero • Cheryl A. Murphy
Editors

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 Springer

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Preface

In 2007, the National Research Council (NRC) released a document titled “Toxicity Testing in the twenty-first Century: A Vision and a Strategy”, that called for a paradigm shift in toxicology testing. The NRC report advocated for a testing platform to be based on *in vitro* methods instead of whole animal testing, and that takes a pathway approach by studying perturbations of biological systems and key toxicity pathways. This approach would ideally use a combination of computational biology and a comprehensive array of high-throughput *in vitro* tests, preferably with cells and tissues. The adverse outcome pathway (AOP) framework was born out of this NRC’s call for action. The concepts underlying the AOP framework are not necessarily new. Risk assessors and researchers had already adopted mode-of-action based approaches to determine mechanisms underlying adverse toxic effects, and biologists and ecologists had espoused translating stress responses across levels of biological organization for decades. However, what was new was the organizing framework and structure, the common terminology and a convergence of new tools (omics, computational, crowd-sourcing, global connectivity) that helped solidify the framework and propel it forward. Now, almost a decade after its conception, we have made great progress and the momentum is on the side of further development and advances. Currently, there is a worldwide community of scientists that contribute to the online knowledgebase, and there are regularly scheduled workshops and meetings that continue to move the science and framework forward, bringing in an increasingly broader range of expertise. Those that work on AOPs are no longer just biologists, but also include computer scientists, mathematicians, modelers, and social scientists. The framework started as an approach to collect and organize biological information with the original purpose to determine how toxic chemicals can perturb the biological pathways and affect apical endpoints relevant to individual and population risk assessment. However, because the AOP framework is chemically agnostic, it can eventually be used to determine the impacts of any stressor, and as such can potentially unite biologists that work at every level of biological organization. The goal of this book was to explore the current state of the science and regulatory aspects, but also to think a little outside the box and bring in authors that could discuss areas of research that have not been addressed fully but would be

required to move the AOP framework forward. While the title of this book implies the use of systems biology approaches to advance the AOP framework, we also wanted to include chapters focusing on novel technologies or approaches to advance the understanding of potential molecular initiating events, key events or different levels of biological organization. We asked authors to discuss topics such as epigenetics, omics, genetic engineering, cell free assays, life history and adaptation, behavior and social acceptance. We also asked authors to discuss non-model species, invertebrates, plants and the potential of the zebrafish embryo. We wanted to describe novel quantitative and weight of evidence approaches that have the potential to overcome some barriers to prediction and we also wanted to reach scientists that have not been very active in this field yet. We hope that by including these topics and authors in this collection that this helps to advance the AOP framework by connecting to a broader range of scientific expertise and by embracing new areas of research.

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Contents

1 Advancing Adverse Outcome Pathways for Risk Assessment	1
Natàlia Garcia-Reyero and Cheryl A. Murphy	
2 Use of High-Throughput and Computational Approaches for Endocrine Pathway Screening	15
Patience Browne, Warren M. Casey, and David J. Dix	
3 Cell-Free Assays in Environmental Toxicology	31
Adeline Arini, Krittika Mittal, and Niladri Basu	
4 The Fish Embryo as a Model for AOP Development.....	43
Lucia Vergauwen, Steven Van Cruchten, and Dries Knapen	
5 Invertebrate Model Species in AOP Development.....	75
Geoff Hodges, Steve Gutsell, Nadine Taylor, Erica Brockmeier, Emma Butler, Cecilie Rendal, and John Colbourne	
6 Non-model Species in Ecological Risk Assessment	107
Markus Hecker	
7 Green Algae and Networks for Adverse Outcome Pathways.....	133
Anze Zupanec, Smitha Pillai, Diana Coman Schmid, and Kristin Schirmer	
8 Neurobehavioral Analysis Methods for Adverse Outcome Pathway (AOP) Models and Risk Assessment	149
Francisco X. Mora-Zamorano, Jeremy K. Larson, and Michael J. Carvan III	
9 The Application of Omics Data to the Development of AOPs	177
Mary T. McBride	

10	Use of Genetic Manipulation for Evaluating and Understanding Adverse Outcome Pathways	199
	Christopher Warner, Natàlia Garcia-Reyero, and Edward Perkins	
11	Considering Epigenetics in Adverse Outcome Pathways	219
	Kristine L. Willett	
12	Tiered Approaches to Incorporate the Adverse Outcome Pathway Framework into Chemical-Specific Risk-Based Decision Making	235
	Jeremy Leonard, Shannon Bell, Noffisat Oki, Mark Nelms, Yu-Mei Tan, and Stephen Edwards	
13	The Development of Quantitative AOPs	263
	Irvin R. Schultz and Karen H. Watanabe	
14	Linking Adverse Outcome Pathways to Dynamic Energy Budgets: A Conceptual Model	281
	Cheryl A. Murphy, Roger M. Nisbet, Philipp Antczak, Natàlia Garcia-Reyero, Andre Gergs, Konstadia Lika, Teresa Mathews, Erik B. Muller, Diane Nacci, Angela Peace, Christopher H. Remien, Irvin R. Schultz, and Karen H. Watanabe	
15	Weight of Evidence Frameworks in Evaluation of Adverse Outcome Pathways	303
	Taylor Rycroft, Olivia Massey, Christy M. Foran, and Igor Linkov	
16	Using a Vitellogenesis Model to Link in vitro Neurochemical Effects of Pulp and Paper Mill Effluents to Adverse Reproductive Outcomes in Fish	317
	Brandon M. Armstrong, Cheryl A. Murphy, and Niladri Basu	
17	Use of Adverse Outcome Pathways in Human Risk Assessment and Toxicology	349
	Catherine Willett, Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Bette Meek, and Carl Westmoreland	
18	Use and Acceptance of AOPs for Regulatory Applications	379
	Clemens Wittwehr	
19	The Future of Adverse Outcome Pathways: Analyzing their Social Context	391
	Kevin C. Elliott, Cheryl A. Murphy, and Natàlia Garcia-Reyero	
	Index	405

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