

*PPAR $\gamma$  agonists negatively regulate  $\alpha$ IIb $\beta$ 3 integrin outside-in signalling and platelet function through upregulation of protein kinase A activity*

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Unsworth, A. J., Kriek, N., Bye, A. P. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2061-2253>, Naran, K., Sage, T., Flora, G. D. and Gibbins, J. M. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0372-5352> (2017) PPAR $\gamma$  agonists negatively regulate  $\alpha$ IIb $\beta$ 3 integrin outside-in signalling and platelet function through upregulation of protein kinase A activity. *Journal of Thrombosis and Haemostasis*, 15 (2). pp. 356-369. ISSN 1538-7933 doi: 10.1111/jth.13578 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/68309/>

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To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jth.13578>

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# PPAR $\gamma$ agonists negatively regulate $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 integrin outside-in signaling and platelet function through up-regulation of protein kinase A activity

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**To cite this article:** Unsworth AJ, Kriek N, Bye AP, Naran K, Sage T, Flora GD, Gibbins JM. PPAR $\gamma$  agonists negatively regulate  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 integrin outside-in signaling and platelet function through up-regulation of protein kinase A activity. *J Thromb Haemost* 2017; **15**: 356–69.

## Essentials

- peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor  $\gamma$  (PPAR $\gamma$ ) agonists inhibit platelet function.
- PPAR $\gamma$  agonists negatively regulate outside-in signaling via integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3.
- PPAR $\gamma$  agonists disrupt the interaction of G $\alpha$ 13 with integrin  $\beta$ 3.
- This is attributed to an upregulation of protein kinase A activity.

**Summary.** *Background:* Agonists for the peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor (PPAR $\gamma$ ) have been shown to have inhibitory effects on platelet activity following stimulation by GPVI and GPCR agonists. *Objectives:* Profound effects on thrombus formation led us to suspect a role for PPAR $\gamma$  agonists in the regulation of integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 mediated signaling. Both GPVI and GPCR signaling pathways lead to  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 activation, and signaling through  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 plays a critical role in platelet function and normal hemostasis. *Methods:* The effects of PPAR $\gamma$  agonists on the regulation of  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 outside-in signaling was determined by monitoring the ability of platelets to adhere and spread on fibrinogen and undergo clot retraction. Effects on signaling components downstream of  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 activation were also determined following adhesion to fibrinogen by Western blotting. *Results:* Treatment of platelets with PPAR $\gamma$  agonists inhibited platelet adhesion and spreading on fibrinogen and diminished clot retraction. A reduction in phosphorylation of several

components of  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 signaling, including the integrin  $\beta$ 3 subunit, Syk, PLC $\gamma$ 2, focal adhesion kinase (FAK) and Akt, was also observed as a result of reduced interaction of the integrin  $\beta$ 3 subunit with G $\alpha$ 13. Studies of VASP phosphorylation revealed that this was because of an increase in PKA activity following treatment with PPAR $\gamma$  receptor agonists. *Conclusions:* This study provides further evidence for antiplatelet actions of PPAR $\gamma$  agonists, identifies a negative regulatory role for PPAR $\gamma$  agonists in the control of integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 outside-in signaling, and provides a molecular basis by which the PPAR $\gamma$  agonists negatively regulate platelet activation and thrombus formation.

**Keywords:** blood platelets; platelet activation; platelet glycoprotein GPIIb-IIIa complex; PPAR gamma; protein kinase A.

## Introduction

Platelets play a vital role in the prevention of blood loss following vascular injury. Through a balance of inhibitory and activating signals, circulating platelets are maintained in a quiescent state in the undamaged circulation and are only activated when signals such as exposed subendothelial matrix proteins at sites of vascular injury outweigh endogenous inhibitory signaling. Platelets adhere rapidly to the site of injury and become activated, characterized by granule secretion, formation of thromboxane A2 and activation of integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3, which is converted from a low to a high-affinity conformation, enabling it to bind to fibrinogen and von Willebrand factor (VWF). This initial activation is followed by platelet shape change and aggregation that is supported by fibrinogen binding to the high-affinity integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3. Formation of a fibrin coat and clot retraction, which is driven through integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3-stimulated outside-in signaling, then stabilizes the growing thrombus [1].

Inhibitory mechanisms are essential for preventing the formation of unwanted thrombi and for limiting thrombus

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Received 13 April 2016

Manuscript handled by: J. Heemskerk

Final decision: P. H. Reitsma, 3 November 2016

growth and size. Platelets are inhibited through a number of endogenous mechanisms, including by nitric oxide and prostacyclin released from the healthy endothelium [2] and via signaling receptors on the cell surface such as PECAM-1 and G6b [3–5]. A recently identified class of intracellular inhibitory receptors is nuclear receptors. Usually involved in the regulation of the transcription of genes, several nuclear receptors have been identified in human platelets and have been shown to play a role in the regulation of platelet activity [2,3,6–10]. One such receptor is the peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor- $\gamma$  (PPAR $\gamma$ ), a member of the nuclear hormone superfamily [8,10]. In nucleated cells, the PPAR $\gamma$  receptor is known to function in the regulation of many metabolic pathways, including lipid and glucose metabolism and homeostasis [11–13]. Recent studies suggest that the actions of nuclear receptors are not restricted to gene transcription because increasing evidence supports non-genomic actions of these receptors [14,15]. Studies using platelets support non-genomic roles for the PPAR $\gamma$  receptor [7,9,12,16,17]. Agonists for PPAR $\gamma$ , such as thiazolidinediones that are in use as a treatment for type 2 diabetes mellitus, have been shown to have inhibitory effects on platelet signaling and activation [6–8,18,19], which could underlie the reported reduction in atherosclerosis, reduced inflammation and cardio-protective effects in patients treated with PPAR $\gamma$  agonists [12,13,16,20–24].

We have previously observed the ability of PPAR $\gamma$  agonists to interfere with GPVI-proximal signaling, but this cannot explain the PPAR $\gamma$  agonist-dependent inhibition observed following stimulation of platelets with thrombin and other GPCR agonists. Because the integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 outside-in signaling pathway shares several components with the GPVI signaling pathway [25], and is essential for GPCR-induced platelet activation, we investigated whether the PPAR $\gamma$  receptor is involved in the regulation of integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 signaling and the mechanisms by which its agonists negatively regulate platelet function.

The results described here support a role for PPAR $\gamma$  in the negative regulation of integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 outside-in signaling through the up-regulation of PKA activity and subsequent inhibition of phosphorylation of  $\beta$ 3 and downstream components of the integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 signaling pathway.

## Materials and methods

### Reagents

Fibrinogen, bovine thrombin, H89, GW9662 and IMBX were purchased from Sigma Aldrich (Poole, UK). 15dPGJ2 was purchased from Enzo Life Sciences and Ciglitazone and SQ22536 from Tocris Bioscience (Bristol, UK). The cAMP ELISA kit was from Enzo Life Sciences (Exeter, UK). Primary anti-FAK (focal adhesion kinase) (C20), Syk (N-19), PLC $\gamma$ 2 (Q20),  $\beta$ 3 (C20) and actin (C11) antibodies were purchased from Santa Cruz Biotechnology (Heidelberg, Germany). Phospho-specific primary

antibodies for  $\beta$ 3 Y779 and Akt S473 were from Abcam (Cambridge, UK). Anti-phospho-PKC (protein kinase C) substrate, phospho-S157 and S239 VASP and phospho-Ser 19 myosin light chain antibodies were purchased from New England BioLabs (Cell Signalling, Hitchin, UK), and anti-phospho-Tyr 4G10 antibody was purchased from Millipore (Watford, UK). Fluorophore conjugated secondary antibodies, Fluo-4 calcium indicator dye and Alexa-488 and Alexa-647 conjugated phalloidin were purchased from Life Technologies (Paisely, UK). All other reagents were from previously described sources [26].

### Human washed platelet preparation

Human blood was obtained from consenting aspirin-free healthy volunteers, in accordance with the procedures approved by the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee. Blood was collected into 4% (w/v) sodium citrate before mixing with acid citrate dextrose (29.9 mM Na<sub>3</sub>C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>5</sub>O<sub>7</sub>, 113.8 mM glucose, 72.6 mM NaCl and 2.9 mM citric acid [pH 6.4]). Washed platelets were prepared by centrifugation at  $100 \times g$  for 20 min, followed by centrifugation twice at  $1000 \times g$  for 10 min in the presence of  $1.25 \mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$  prostacyclin (PGI<sub>2</sub>) as described previously [27]. Platelets were resuspended in modified Tyrode's-HEPES buffer (134 mM NaCl, 0.34 mM Na<sub>2</sub>HPO<sub>4</sub>, 2.9 mM KCl, 12 mM NaHCO<sub>3</sub>, 20 mM N-2-hydroxyethylpiperazine-N-2-ethanesulfonic acid, 5 mM glucose and 1 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>, pH 7.3) and rested for 30 min at 30 °C before use.

### Spreading on fibrinogen

Washed platelets ( $2 \times 10^7 \text{ mL}^{-1}$ ), pretreated with PPAR $\gamma$  agonists or vehicle control (0.1% v/v dimethylsulfoxide [DMSO]), were exposed to fibrinogen ( $100 \mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$ ) coated coverslips (blocked with 1% bovine serum albumin [BSA]) and incubated for 45 min at 37 °C. Non-adherent platelets were removed and coverslips washed with phosphate buffered saline (PBS) before fixing using 0.2% (v/v) paraformaldehyde solution. Platelets were permeabilised in 0.1% (v/v) Triton-X100 prior to staining with Alexa 488 conjugated-phalloidin for 1 h. Adherent platelets were then imaged with a 100x magnification oil immersion lens on a Nikon A1-R confocal microscope. Adhesion and spreading data in each experiment were measured by counting the number of platelets and the extent of spreading in five fields of view chosen randomly from each sample.

### Clot retraction assay

Human washed platelets at  $5 \times 10^8 \text{ mL}^{-1}$  were added to aggregometer tubes in the presence of 2 mg mL<sup>-1</sup> fibrinogen and 2 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub> and preincubated with 15dPGJ2 or vehicle control (0.1% v/v DMSO). Clot retraction was initiated by adding an equal volume of 2 U mL<sup>-1</sup>

thrombin and left for 1 h at room temperature before the weight of the clot was measured.

#### *Adhesion on collagen under flow*

Adhesion on collagen in the presence of integrillin (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) was studied *in vitro* using microfluidic flow cells (Vena8, Cellix Ltd, Dublin, Ireland) as described previously [28]. DiOC6 loaded human whole blood with or without treatment, in the presence of integrillin (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ), was perfused through collagen-coated (100  $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$ ) Vena8Biochips at a shear rate of 20  $\text{dyn cm}^{-2}$ . Platelet adhesion was determined by comparing fluorescence intensity in the vehicle and treated samples.

#### *Immunoblotting and immunoprecipitation*

Following adhesion to fibrinogen or stimulation with thrombin (0.1 U  $\text{mL}^{-1}$ ) for 5 min under non-stirring conditions, washed platelets ( $4 \times 10^8$  cells  $\text{mL}^{-1}$ ) were lysed in an equal volume of NP40 buffer (300 mM NaCl, 20 mM Tris base, 2 mM EGTA, 2 mM EDTA, 1 mM PMSF, 10  $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$  aprotinin, 10  $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$  leupeptin, 0.7  $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$  pepstatin A, 2 mM sodium orthovanadate, 2% (v/v) NP-40, pH 7.3) and proteins of interest isolated by immunoprecipitation using 1  $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$  of appropriate antibodies. Prior to immunoblotting, which was performed as described previously [7], the lysates of adhered washed platelets were corrected for the level of adhesion by determining the protein concentration of each sample. Proteins were detected using fluorophore-conjugated secondary antibodies and visualized using a Typhoon FLA 9500 Fluorimager and Image Quant software (GE Healthcare, Chalfont, Buckinghamshire, UK). Band intensities were quantified and levels of the immunoprecipitated protein or loading control were measured and used to normalize the phosphorylation data for protein loading levels.

#### *Statistical analysis*

Statistical analyses were performed on data using GraphPad prism software (GraphPad Software, San Diego, CA, USA). Data were analyzed using Student's *t*-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Values obtained in several experiments were converted into percentages for comparison of controls with treated samples.  $P \leq 0.05$  was considered statistically significant. Unless stated otherwise, values are expressed as mean  $\pm$  SEM; *n* values are  $\geq 3$ .

## **Results**

#### *PPAR $\gamma$ agonists negatively regulate adhesion and spreading on fibrinogen*

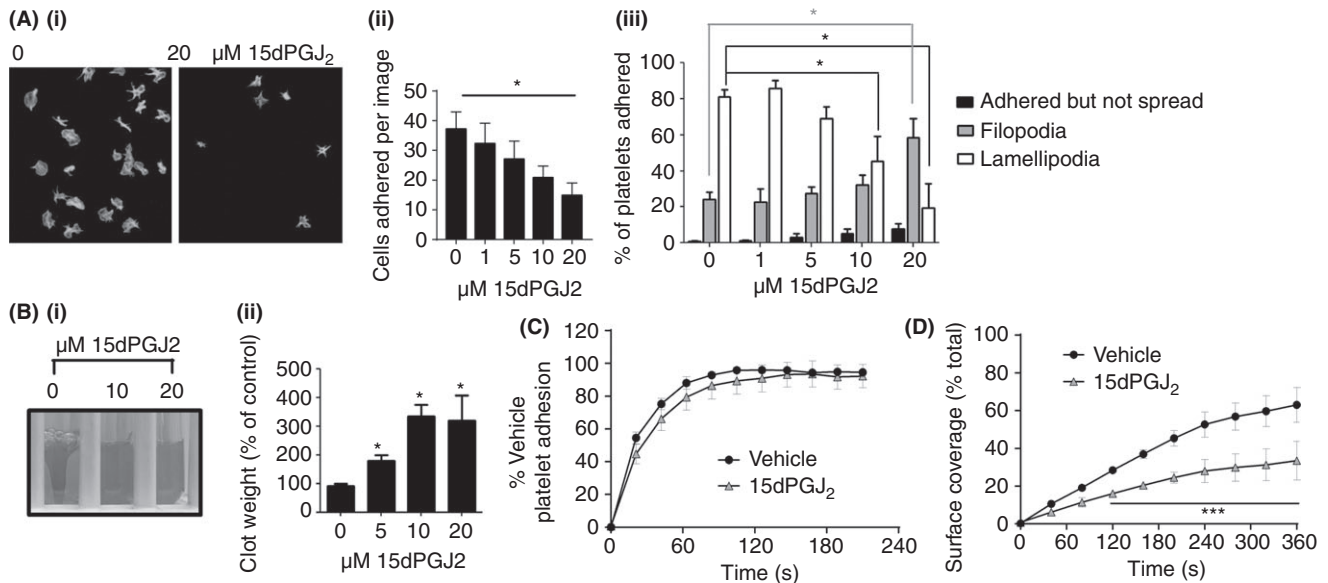
Following fibrinogen binding and clustering of integrin  $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta 3$ , outside-in signaling is initiated, leading to platelet shape change and spreading. To determine whether the

PPAR $\gamma$  receptor plays a role in the regulation of outside-in signaling through integrin  $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta 3$ , adhesion and spreading on fibrinogen (100  $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$ ) were analyzed in the presence and absence of PPAR $\gamma$  receptor agonists. Additional platelet agonists were not added, to enable the study to focus (primarily) on outside-in signaling through  $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta 3$ . As shown in Fig. 1, treatment of platelets with increasing concentrations of the endogenous PPAR $\gamma$  agonist 15dPGJ2 caused a significant decrease in the ability of the platelets to adhere to and spread on fibrinogen when compared with vehicle-treated controls. 15dPGJ2 (20  $\mu\text{M}$ ) caused  $\sim 50\%$  inhibition of adhesion and a significant reduction in spreading. A reduction in surface area coverage was observed following treatment with increasing concentrations of 15dPGJ2 (data not shown) and  $\sim 50\%$  fewer platelets generated lamellipodia compared with vehicle control (0.1% v/v DMSO). Inhibition of both adhesion and spreading was also observed in the presence of inhibitors of ADP and thromboxane A2 (Figure S1A), which is in agreement with previously published data showing PPAR $\gamma$  agonist-induced inhibition of aggregation is independent of regulation of the release of secondary mediators [7]. Longer time-courses for adhesion and spreading were also studied, to test whether the defect in spreading was a result of reduced adhesion kinetics. As shown in Figure S1(B), a delay in platelet adhesion kinetics is observed following treatment with 15dPGJ2, where after 90 min the number of adhered platelets treated with 15dPGJ2 was similar to the number of vehicle-treated platelets adhered at 45 min. Treatment of platelets with two alternative synthetic PPAR $\gamma$  agonists, ciglitazone and rosiglitazone (20  $\mu\text{M}$ ), both thiazolidinediones, also caused inhibition of both adhesion and spreading on fibrinogen compared with the untreated control (Figure S2). In contrast to the PPAR $\gamma$  agonists 15dPGJ2 and Ciglitazone, the PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist GW9662 (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) did not alter platelet adhesion or spreading on fibrinogen under static conditions compared with vehicle control (Figure S2C).

#### *15dPGJ2 inhibits platelet clot retraction*

Outside-in  $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta 3$  signaling is essential for the process of clot retraction that is required for thrombus stabilization. As our studies of adhesion and spreading indicate a role in integrin  $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta 3$  outside-in signaling, the effect of 15dPGJ2 (Fig. 1B), ciglitazone and rosiglitazone (Figure S2Aiv, Biv) on clot retraction was explored. Pre-incubation of platelets with all three PPAR $\gamma$  ligands resulted in an increase in clot weight and therefore an inhibition of clot retraction after 90 minutes, compared with vehicle control (0.1% v/v DMSO). These results support a negative regulatory role for the PPAR $\gamma$  receptor agonists in outside-in signaling mediated via integrin  $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta 3$ .





**Fig. 1.** The effect of the peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor  $\gamma$  (PPAR $\gamma$ ) agonists on outside-in signaling. Human washed platelets pre-treated for 10 min with or without increasing concentrations of 15dPGJ2 (1, 5, 10 and 20  $\mu\text{M}$ ) or vehicle control were exposed to fibrinogen (100  $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$ )-coated coverslips. (A) (i) Representative images of spreading and adhesion after 45 min in vehicle and treated samples. Platelets were stained with phalloidin Alexa-488 for visualization. Images were taken under oil immersion with magnification  $\times 100$ . (ii) Adhesion: number of platelets adhered were counted in five randomly selected fields of view for each experiment and the number of cells adhered expressed as a percentage of the vehicle treated control. (iii) Spreading: platelets were classified into three different categories to determine the extent of their spreading (Adhered but not spread. Filopodia: platelets in the process of extending filopodia. Lamellipodia: platelets in the process of extending lamellipodia, including those fully spread). At least 100 platelets of each type were scored. Results expressed as relative frequency, as a percentage of the total number of platelets adhered. (B) Clot retraction. Human washed platelets pretreated for 10 min with or without increasing concentrations of 15dPGJ2 (5, 10 and 20  $\mu\text{M}$ ) or vehicle control were added to aggregometer tubes in the presence of 2 mg mL<sup>-1</sup> fibrinogen and 2 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>. Clot retraction was initiated by adding 1 U mL<sup>-1</sup> thrombin and left to proceed for 1 h at room temperature. Clot retraction was determined by weighing the clot. (i) Representative images using red blood cell stained platelet rich plasma (shown). (ii) Data expressed as percentage of vehicle treated control. (C and D) DiOC6 loaded human whole blood was pretreated with vehicle (circles) or 20  $\mu\text{M}$  15dPGJ2 (triangles) in the presence of integrillin (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) to prevent platelet aggregation for 5 min before (C) perfusion through collagen-coated (100  $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$ ) Vena8Biochips or (D) perfusion through fibrinogen-coated (100  $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$ ) Vena8Biochips at a shear rate of 20 dyn cm<sup>-2</sup>. Platelet adhesion and surface area coverage were determined after 5 min by comparing fluorescence intensity in the vehicle and treated samples. Unless stated otherwise, results represent mean + SEM for  $n \geq 3$ . \*Indicates  $P \leq 0.05$  in comparison with vehicle controls.

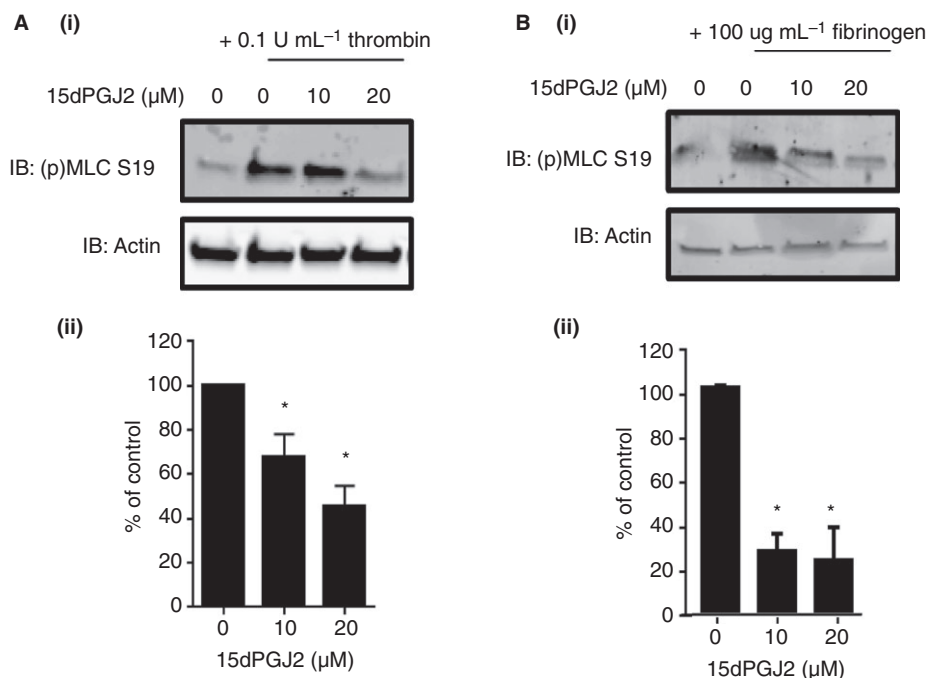
#### PPAR $\gamma$ agonists do not alter adhesion to collagen under flow

It has been previously described that treatment of platelets with PPAR $\gamma$  agonists results in a significant inhibition of thrombus formation on collagen under flow conditions [7]. As we have shown that PPAR $\gamma$  agonists inhibit integrin  $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta 3$  outside-in signaling, we sought to determine whether this previously observed reduction in thrombus formation on collagen could be attributed to impaired  $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta 3$  signaling and thrombus instability rather than to reduced adhesion to collagen. Platelets were treated with integrillin, an antagonist of integrin  $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta 3$ , to prevent fibrinogen binding, outside-in signaling and platelet aggregation, and the ability of platelets to adhere to collagen under arterial flow was determined. As shown in Fig. 1(C), no difference in adhesion to collagen (measured as overall fluorescence) was observed in 15dPGJ2-treated whole blood compared with vehicle control (0.1% v/v DMSO) in the presence of integrillin, suggesting that the early stages of thrombus formation (adhesion) on

collagen are unaffected. In contrast, adhesion to fibrinogen under flow was reduced following treatment with 15dPGJ2 (Fig. 1D), further supporting a role for 15dPGJ2 in the negative regulation of outside-in signaling *in vitro*. We therefore hypothesize that the previously described inhibition of thrombus formation [7] is a result of a reduction in integrin function and outside-in signaling.

#### PPAR $\gamma$ agonists reduce myosin light chain phosphorylation

Integrin  $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta 3$  outside-in signaling driven platelet shape change and spreading requires cytoskeletal remodeling. A major regulator of this process is myosin IIa. Phosphorylation of the myosin light chain on serine 19 downstream of RhoA enables the interaction of myosin with actin filaments, a process essential for shape change and platelet spreading. We therefore asked whether phosphorylation and activation of the myosin light chain is altered in platelets following treatment with agonists for PPAR $\gamma$ .



**Fig. 2.** The effect of 15dPGJ2 on phosphorylation of the myosin light chain. Effect of the peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor  $\gamma$  (PPAR $\gamma$ ) agonist 15dPGJ2 (0, 10, 20  $\mu$ M) on the phosphorylation of the myosin light chain at Ser19 was determined using (A) thrombin-stimulated (0.1 U mL<sup>-1</sup>) and (B) fibrinogen-adhered (100  $\mu$ g mL<sup>-1</sup>) human washed platelets. Platelet lysates were examined by immunoblot analysis using a myosin light chain phospho-site-specific antibody for S19. Blots were reprobed for total actin to control for protein loading. (i) Representative blots shown. (ii) Levels of phosphorylation were quantified and expressed as a percentage of vehicle treated controls. Results represent mean  $\pm$  SEM for  $n \geq 3$ . \*Indicates  $P < 0.05$  in comparison with vehicle controls.

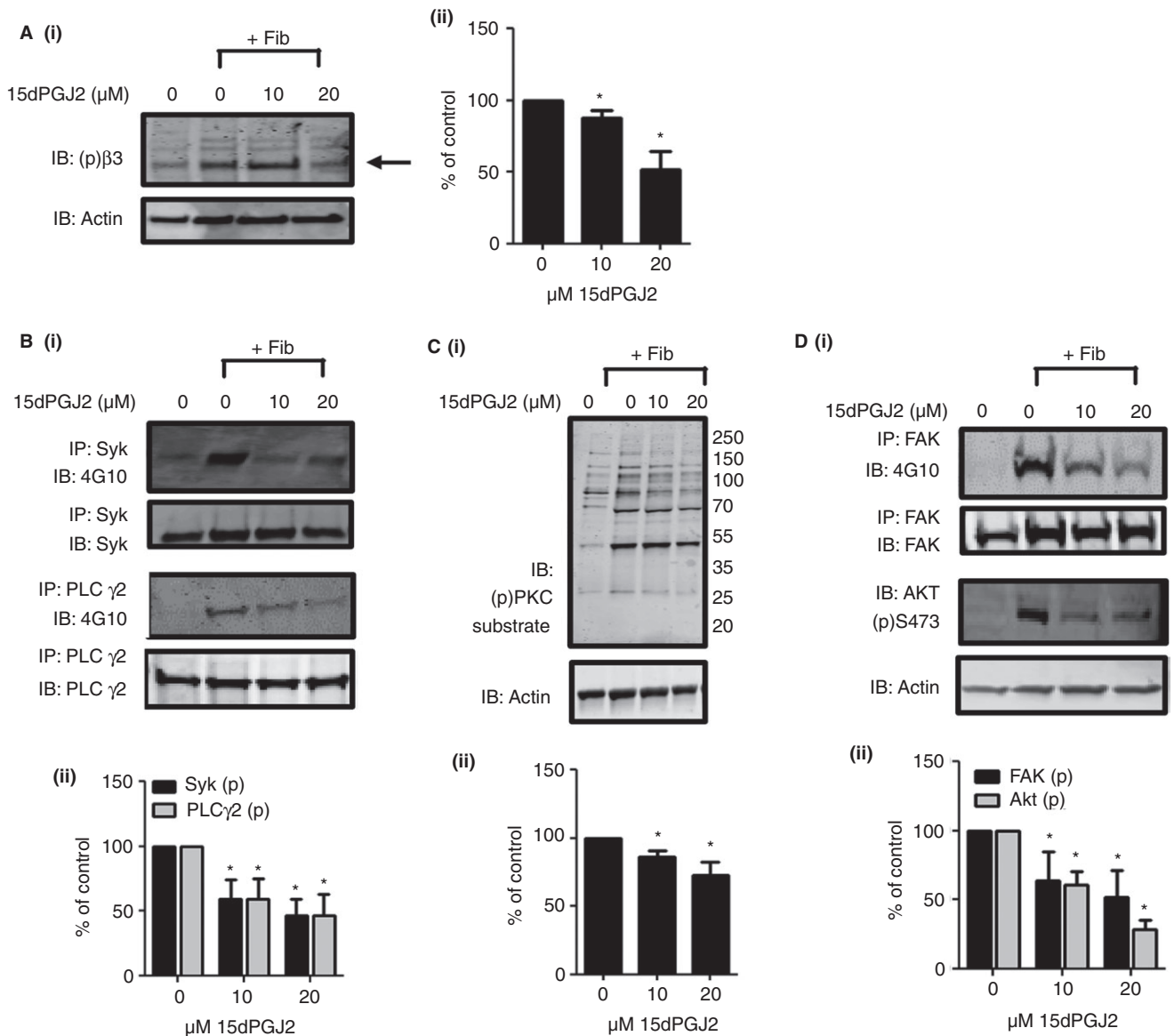
Pretreatment of human washed platelets with 15dPGJ2 (10, 20  $\mu$ M) caused a significant reduction in myosin light chain phosphorylation compared with vehicle control (0.1% v/v DMSO) in both thrombin (0.1 U mL<sup>-1</sup>)-stimulated and fibrinogen (100  $\mu$ g mL<sup>-1</sup>)-adhered platelets (Fig. 2). Similar results in thrombin-stimulated platelets were also achieved following treatment with ciglitazone (20  $\mu$ M) (Figure S3A). This suggests that PPAR $\gamma$  agonists may act to negatively regulate the components of the integrin  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta$ 3 signaling pathway.

#### PPAR $\gamma$ agonist 15dPGJ2 inhibits phosphorylation of integrin $\beta$ 3 and downstream signaling

Phosphorylation of integrin  $\beta$ 3 at Y773 (Y747 in mice) is essential for outside-in signaling by  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta$ 3 [29–32] because phosphorylation at this site is required for the dissociation of talin and association of G $\alpha$ 13, which enables a ‘switch’ from inside-out to outside-in signaling [33,34]. The effect of 15dPGJ2 and ciglitazone on phosphorylation of  $\beta$ 3 at Y773 was determined in fibrinogen (100  $\mu$ g mL<sup>-1</sup>)-adhered platelets. The number of adhered platelets was normalized to ensure any alterations in phosphorylation were not a result of altered adhesion. Adhesion to fibrinogen was associated with an increase in phosphorylation of  $\beta$ 3 and, as shown in Fig. 3(A) and Figure S3(B), treatment with either 20  $\mu$ M 15dPGJ2 or

ciglitazone caused a reduction of ~50% and ~30%, respectively, in  $\beta$ 3 Y773 phosphorylation in comparison with vehicle control-treated platelets.

This reduction in  $\beta$ 3 phosphorylation may alter the ability of  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta$ 3 to bind to fibrinogen and propagate outside-in signaling, as previously published data show that PPAR $\gamma$  agonists reduce fibrinogen binding in agonist-stimulated platelets [7] but may also prevent outside-in signal transduction following fibrinogen binding to the integrin. In support of the latter a significant reduction (~50%) in both Syk and PLC $\gamma$ 2 phosphorylation (Fig. 3B) was observed in fibrinogen-adhered washed platelet lysates treated with the PPAR $\gamma$  agonist. Protein kinase C (PKC) is a key mediator of downstream signaling events and its activity is regulated by intracellular calcium levels and production of diacylglycerol. Consistent with the inhibition of PLC $\gamma$ 2, analysis of levels of PKC substrate phosphorylation, a marker of PKC activity, showed a reduction in phosphorylation of approximately 25% in fibrinogen-adhered platelets that had been pretreated with 15dPGJ2 compared with vehicle controls (Fig. 3C). A similar reduction in the level of PKC substrate phosphorylation was observed following treatment with ciglitazone (data not shown), supporting that these ligands act through PPAR $\gamma$  to negatively regulate integrin  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta$ 3 outside-in signaling.



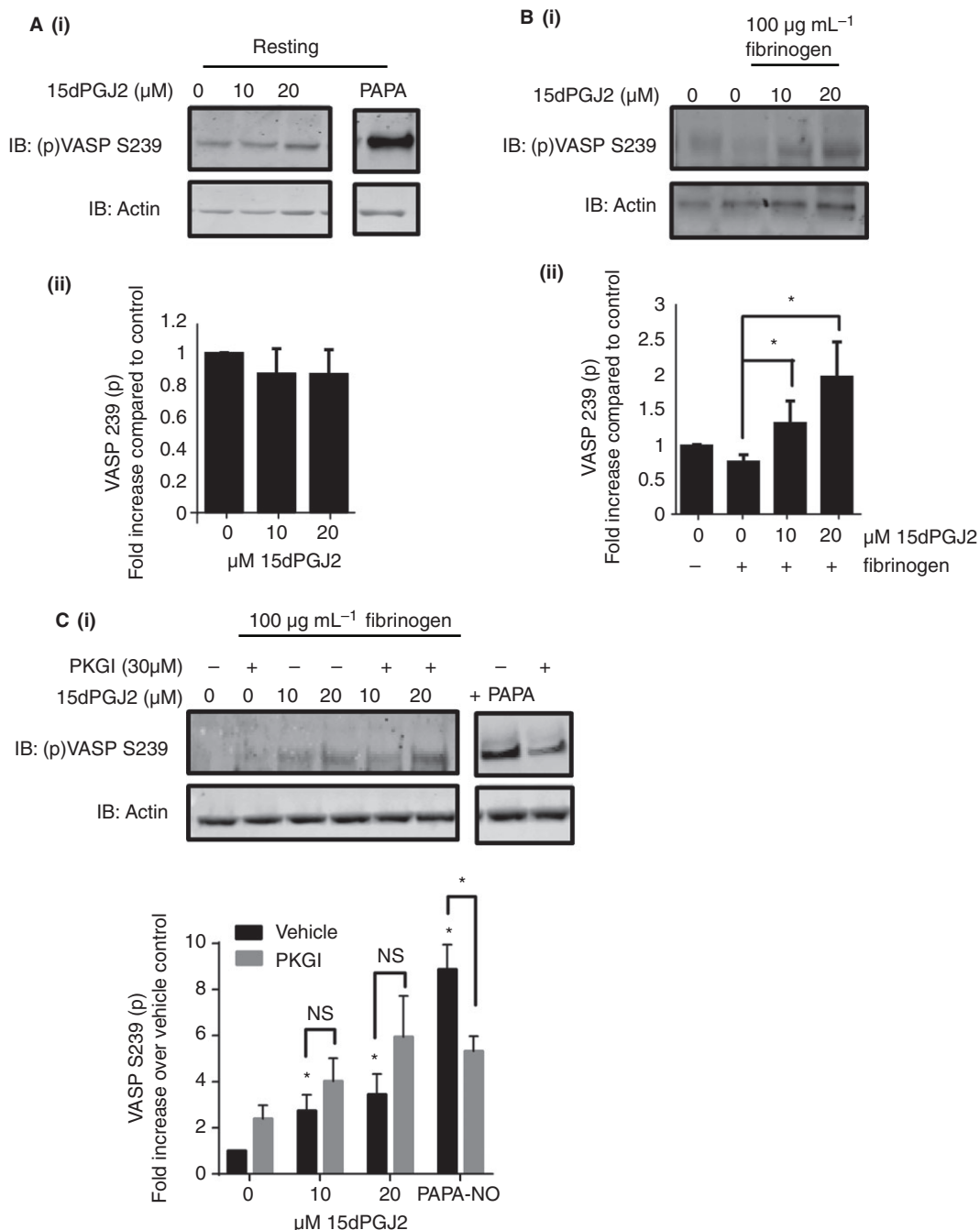
**Fig. 3.** The effect of the peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor  $\gamma$  (PPAR $\gamma$ ) agonist 15dPGJ2 on phosphorylation of integrin  $\beta$ 3 signaling components. 15dPGJ2-treated (0, 10 and 20  $\mu$ M) human washed platelet lysates were tested for phosphorylation of (A) the integrin  $\beta$ 3 tail at Y773, (B) Syk and PLC $\gamma$ 2 phosphorylation, (C) protein kinase C (PKC) substrate phosphorylation and (D) focal adhesion kinase (FAK) and Akt phosphorylation. 15dPGJ2 or vehicle treated platelets were adhered to fibrinogen, lysed in SDS PAGE Laemmli sample buffer, separated on SDS PAGE gels and transferred to poly(vinylidene difluoride) (PVDF) membranes before immunoblotting with a  $\beta$ 3 phospho-site-specific antibody for Y773, a phospho-site-specific antibody for the PKC substrate recognition sequence and an Akt phospho-site-specific antibody for S473. Syk, PLC $\gamma$ 2 and FAK were immunoprecipitated from lysates prior to addition of laemmli sample buffer and phosphorylation detected using 4G10 antibody. Blots were reprobed for total  $\beta$ 3, Syk, PLC $\gamma$ 2 or actin to confirm equal loading. (i) Representative blots shown. (ii) Levels of phosphorylation were quantified and expressed as a percentage of vehicle treated controls. Results represent mean  $\pm$  SEM for  $n \geq 3$ . \*Indicates  $P < 0.05$  in comparison with vehicle controls.

#### PPAR $\gamma$ agonist-treated platelets show reduced focal adhesion kinase phosphorylation

A key step in the second wave of cytoskeletal rearrangements following the release of ADP and secondary mediators, is the phosphorylation and activation of focal adhesion kinase (FAK) and PI3-kinases, which are essential for platelet spreading [35–39]. Treatment of platelets

with the PPAR $\gamma$  agonist 15dPGJ2 caused a 50% reduction in phosphorylation of FAK in comparison with controls (Fig. 3D), which is consistent with the ability of the PPAR $\gamma$  agonists to inhibit  $\beta$ 3 phosphorylation and platelet shape change and spreading. The effect of 15dPGJ2 on Akt phosphorylation, a key downstream effector of PI3K, was also determined. As shown in Fig. 3(D), fibrinogen-adhered human washed platelets pretreated with





**Fig. 4.** 15dPGJ2 does not affect cyclic GMP-dependent protein kinase (PKG) activity. (A) Resting and (B) fibrinogen-adherent human washed platelets were treated with increasing concentrations of 15dPGJ2 (10 and 20  $\mu$ M) or vehicle for 10 min or prior to 45 min of adhesion to fibrinogen (C) in the presence and absence of an inhibitor of PKG, Rp-8-Br-PET-cGMPs (PKGI) (30  $\mu$ M), and lysed in laemmli sample buffer. NO-donor PAPA-nonoate treated resting platelets were included as a positive control for PKG activation. Platelet lysates were analyzed by immunoblotting for VASP S239 phosphorylation, which is the PKG selective phosphorylation site on VASP. Actin was used to control for protein loading. (i) Representative blots are shown and (ii) levels of phosphorylation were quantified and expressed as fold increase compared with vehicle control. Results represent mean  $\pm$  SEM for  $n \geq 3$ . \*Indicates  $P < 0.05$  in comparison with vehicle controls.

15dPGJ2 displayed decreased levels of Akt Ser473 phosphorylation, with  $\sim 70\%$  inhibition following treatment with 20  $\mu$ M 15dPGJ2 in comparison with vehicle-treated controls. These observations further support a negative role for the PPAR $\gamma$  agonists in the regulation of  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 outside-in signaling.

#### PPAR $\gamma$ agonists up-regulate PKA but not PKG activity

Negative regulators of platelet activation can function either by reducing positive signaling or by increasing inhibitory signaling. The cyclic nucleotides cAMP and cGMP, through activation of adenylyl cyclase and cyclic AMP-

dependent protein kinase (PKA) and soluble guanylyl cyclase and cyclic GMP-dependent protein kinase (PKG), respectively, have both been shown to inhibit adhesion and spreading on fibrinogen and platelet cytoskeletal rearrangements [40,41]. Agonists for the other PPAR receptors, PPAR $\alpha$  and PPAR $\beta/\delta$ , have also been shown to inhibit platelets through increasing cAMP levels [17,42]. To determine whether PPAR $\gamma$  agonists achieve inhibition of  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 through the up-regulation of cyclic nucleotide signaling, the effect of PPAR $\gamma$  agonists 15dPGJ2 and ciglitazone on cGMP and cAMP signaling was determined.

Resting human washed platelets were treated with 15dPGJ2 (10, 20  $\mu$ M) for 10 min prior to lysis (resting samples) or adhesion to fibrinogen (100  $\mu$ g mL<sup>-1</sup>). The samples were then analyzed for VASP phosphorylation at Ser239, which is the PKG selective phosphorylation site. Interestingly, although no alteration of VASP S239 phosphorylation was observed in resting platelets (Fig. 4A) an increase in VASP S239 was observed in fibrinogen-adhered (100  $\mu$ g mL<sup>-1</sup>) platelets (Fig. 4B) following treatment with 15dPGJ2. This suggested that in fibrinogen-activated platelets PKG activity is increased following treatment with 15dPGJ2. This increase in VASP S239 phosphorylation in fibrinogen-adhered platelets was not prevented following treatment with the PKG inhibitor (Rp-8-Br-PET-cGMPs) (30  $\mu$ M) at a concentration that was capable of reversing NO donor PAPA-Nonoate (100  $\mu$ M) mediated increases in VASP S239, thereby suggesting the increase in VASP S239 phosphorylation is independent of PKG activity (Fig. 4C).

It has been previously described that PKA can be responsible for phosphorylation of VASP at S239 [43]. The PKA signaling cascade has also been shown to negatively regulate platelet shape change and spreading through regulation of RhoA [40]. The ability of PPAR $\gamma$  agonists to alter PKA activity was therefore determined. As shown in Fig. 5(A, B), treatment with 15dPGJ2 caused a significant increase (8–10-fold following treatment with 20  $\mu$ M) in VASP S157 phosphorylation in both resting and fibrinogen-adhered platelets compared with vehicle alone. This increase in VASP S157 phosphorylation was also observed in ciglitazone-treated platelets (Figure S3C) and correlated with concentrations of 15dPGJ2 that caused a reduction in MLC S19,  $\beta$ 3 Y773 phosphorylation and other integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 outside-signaling components (Figs 2 and 3).

#### PPAR $\gamma$ agonists up-regulate PKA activity

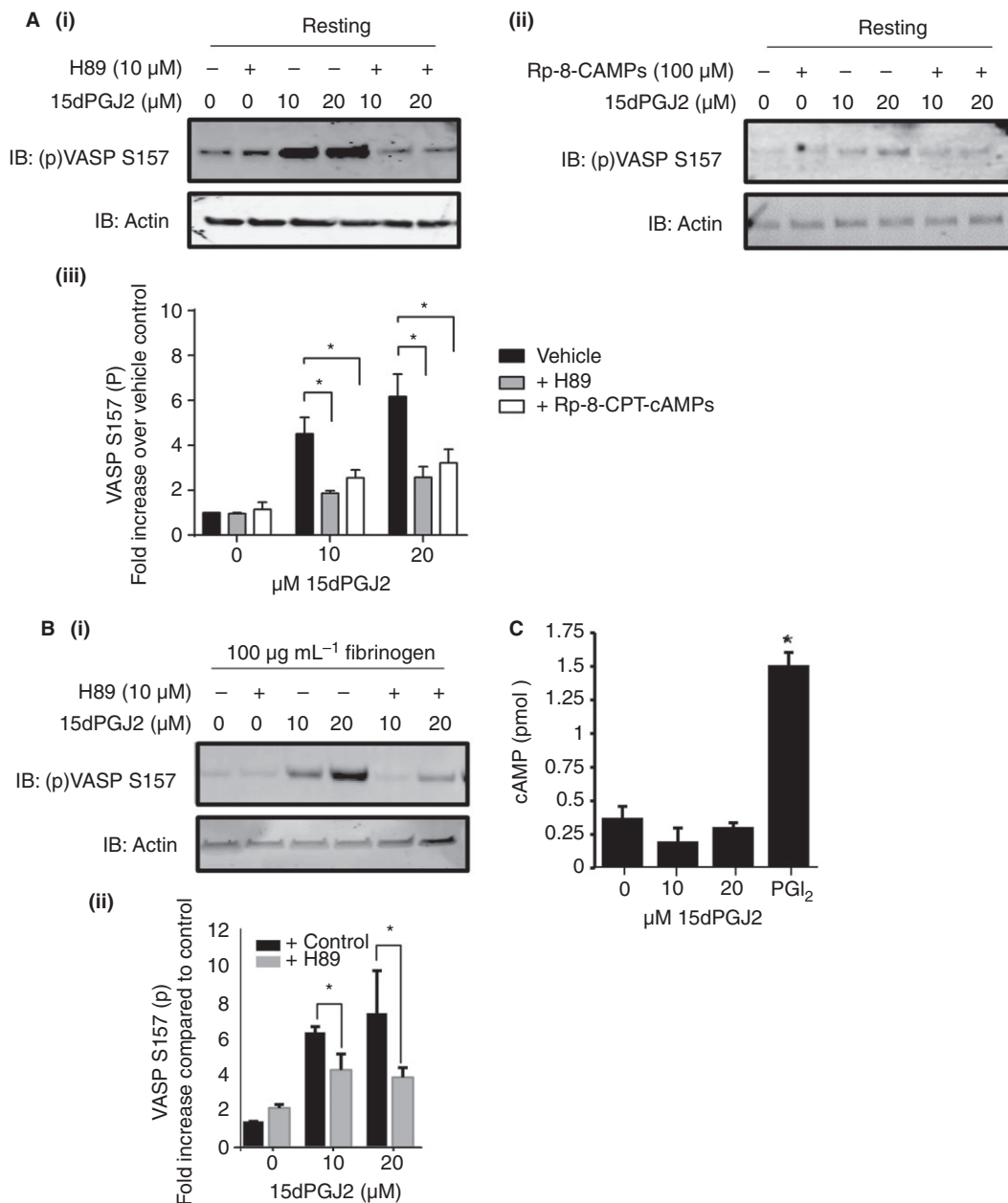
Pretreatment with PKA inhibitors H89 (10  $\mu$ M) or Rp-8-CPT-cAMPs (100  $\mu$ M) reduced both 15dPGJ2 and ciglitazone-mediated increases in VASP S157 phosphorylation in resting and fibrinogen-adhered platelets (Fig. 5A,B and Figure S3C), supporting our hypothesis that the increase

in VASP S157 phosphorylation following treatment with either PPAR $\gamma$  agonist is a result of an increase in PKA activity (Fig. 5A,B).

In addition to PKA, VASP has also been shown to be phosphorylated in platelets by the classical PKC isoforms following stimulation by both GPVI agonists and thrombin [44–46]. PKC activity following treatment of platelets with 15dPGJ2, however, appeared to be unaffected because this was not associated with an increase in PKC substrate phosphorylation (Figure S4A) and treatment with a pan-PKC inhibitor GF109203X (10  $\mu$ M) did not prevent the 15dPGJ2 and ciglitazone-induced increases in VASP S157 phosphorylation. (Figure S4B and C). VASP can also be phosphorylated at S157 by AKT, which is activated downstream of PI3-kinase, although PPAR $\gamma$  agonist-induced increases in VASP S157 phosphorylation were not prevented following treatment by either the PI3-kinase inhibitor LY29400 (100  $\mu$ M) or AKT inhibitor AKT inhibitor IV (5  $\mu$ M) (Figure S5), which provides further support that the effect of PPAR $\gamma$  agonists is a result of activation of PKA.

Activation of PKA is widely known to occur following stimulation of Gs coupled receptors, including the prostaglandin receptors: the IP, DP and EP receptors [2]. Although more widely known as an endogenous ligand of PPAR $\gamma$ , 15dPGJ2 has also been identified as a possible ligand for the DP1 and DP2 receptors. To rule out that the observed effects were a result of PPAR $\gamma$  ligands activating the prostaglandin receptors, VASP S157 phosphorylation was measured in 15dPGJ2 (10, 20  $\mu$ M) and ciglitazone (10, 20  $\mu$ M)-treated resting platelets in the absence and presence of a DP/EP receptor antagonist AH6809 (10  $\mu$ M) [47] and IP receptor antagonist Ro1138452 (10  $\mu$ M) [48,49]. As shown in Figure S6, at concentrations of AH6809 and Ro1138452 that are capable of reversing PGD2 and PGI2-mediated inhibition of platelet function [47,49], no reversal of PPAR $\gamma$  ligand-induced VASP S157 phosphorylation was observed, suggesting that neither 15dPGJ2 nor ciglitazone activates PKA via activation of the prostaglandin receptors (Figure S6).

Interestingly, and in further support of lack of involvement of Gs coupled signaling, no apparent alteration in cAMP levels was observed in resting platelets treated with increasing concentrations of 15dPGJ2 (Fig. 5C), suggesting that the PPAR $\gamma$  agonists primarily regulate platelet activity through the up-regulation of PKA activity rather than through the alteration of cAMP levels. Furthermore, treatment of platelets with the PKA inhibitor H89 but not the adenylyl cyclase inhibitor SQ22356, reversed 15dPGJ2-induced inhibition of adhesion to fibrinogen and clot retraction (Fig. 6A and B). Treatment with H89 also reversed 15dPGJ2-mediated inhibition of both MLC and  $\beta$ 3 phosphorylation in thrombin-stimulated and fibrinogen-adhered platelets (Fig. 6C and D).

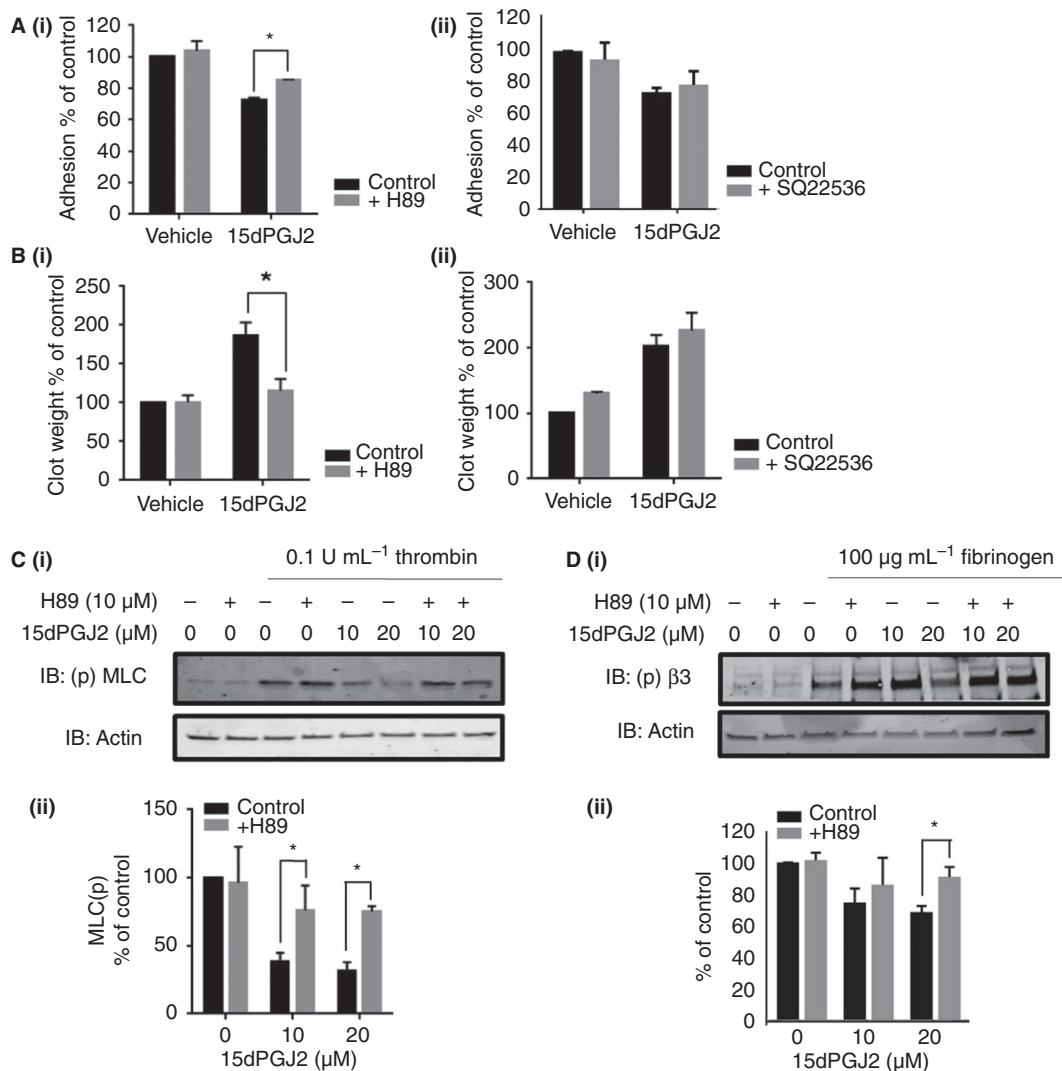


**Fig. 5.** The peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor  $\gamma$  (PPAR $\gamma$ ) agonists alter cyclic AMP-dependent protein kinase (PKA) activity in platelets. (A) Resting and (B) fibrinogen-adherent human washed platelets were treated with 15dPGJ2 (10 and 20  $\mu$ M) in the presence or absence of PKA inhibitor H89 (10  $\mu$ M) or Rp-8-cAMPs (100  $\mu$ M) for 10 minutes or prior to adhesion to fibrinogen for 45 min and then lysed in laemmli sample buffer. PGI<sub>2</sub>-treated resting platelets were included as a positive control for PKA activation. Platelet lysates were analyzed by immunoblotting for VASP S157 phosphorylation, which is the PKA phosphorylation site on VASP. Actin was used to control for protein loading. (A) (i and ii) Representative blots are shown and (iii) levels of phosphorylation were quantified and expressed as fold increase compared with vehicle control. (B) (i) Representative blots are shown and (ii) levels of phosphorylation were quantified and expressed as fold increase compared with vehicle control. (C) Levels of cAMP were determined in 15dPGJ2-treated (10 and 20  $\mu$ M) resting washed platelets using a cAMP ELISA assay kit (Enzo) as per the manufacturer's instructions. Results represent mean  $\pm$  SEM for  $n \geq 3$ . \*Indicates  $P < 0.05$  in comparison with vehicle controls.

#### PPAR $\gamma$ ligands inhibit integrin $\beta 3$ interaction with $G\alpha 13$

In addition to RhoA, which is located further downstream in integrin signaling,  $G\alpha 13$  is hypothesized to be phosphorylated and regulated by PKA at a site that could result in conformational changes potentially altering its interaction with its binding partners, including  $\beta 3$

[2,50,51]. Upon binding of the integrin to fibrinogen,  $G\alpha 13$  is thought to bind to the cytoplasmic domain of  $\beta 3$  and is considered to be the directional 'switch' that initiates outside-in signaling [32,33]. To ascertain whether PPAR $\gamma$  ligands disrupt this interaction, the interaction of  $\beta 3$  with  $G\alpha 13$  in thrombin-stimulated platelets in the presence and absence of PPAR $\gamma$  ligands was determined.



**Fig. 6.** Inhibition of cyclic AMP-dependent protein kinase (PKA) activity rescues 15dPGJ2-induced inhibition of outside-in signaling. Human washed platelets were pretreated for 10 min with 15dPGJ2 (10 and/or 20  $\mu$ M) or vehicle control in the absence or presence of (i) H89 (10  $\mu$ M) or (ii) adenylyl cyclase inhibitor SQ22536 (100  $\mu$ M) before (A) exposure to fibrinogen (100  $\mu$ g mL<sup>-1</sup>)-coated coverslips. The number of adhered platelets was expressed as a percentage of the vehicle treated control. (B) Clot retraction assays were performed as described previously. Clot retraction was determined by weighing the clot. (C) Stimulation with 0.1 U mL<sup>-1</sup> thrombin for 5 min before lysis in laemmli sample buffer and (D) exposure to fibrinogen-coated coverslips (100  $\mu$ g mL<sup>-1</sup>) for 45 min. Platelet lysates were analyzed by immunoblotting for (C) myosin light chain phosphorylation using a site-specific antibody for S19 and (D)  $\beta$ 3 phosphorylation using a phospho-site-specific antibody for Y773. Actin was used to control for equal loading. (i) Representative blots shown. (ii) Levels of phosphorylation were quantified and expressed as a percentage of vehicle treated control. Results represent mean + SEM for  $n \geq 3$ . \*Indicates  $P < 0.05$  in comparison with vehicle controls.

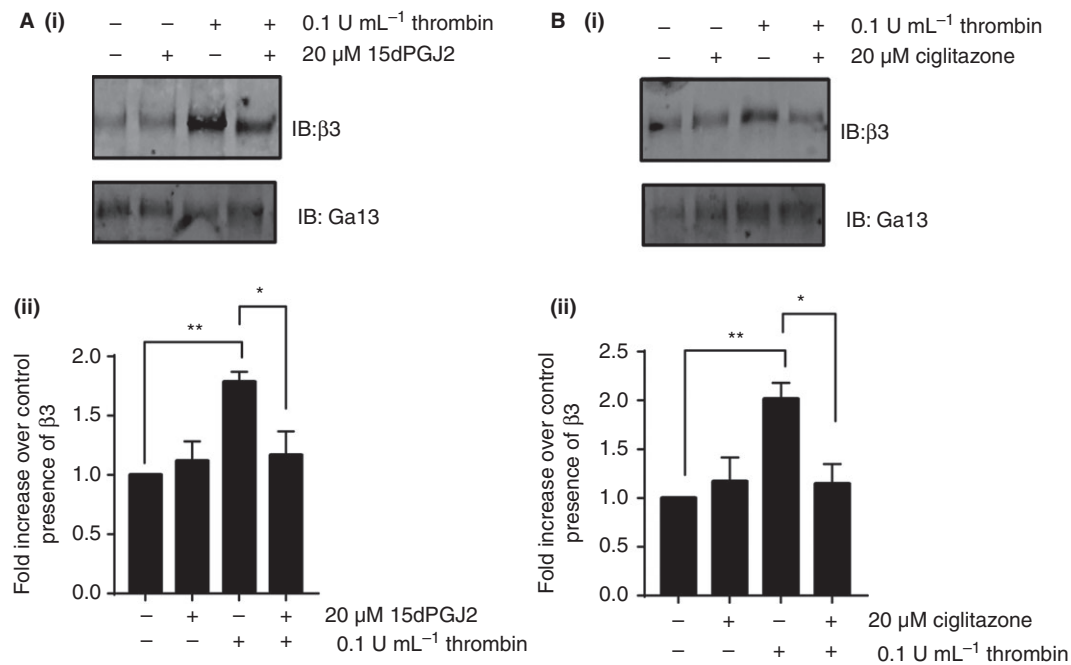
$\beta$ 3 was co-immunoprecipitated with G $\alpha$ 13 using an antibody raised against G $\alpha$ 13. As expected, an increase in the amount of co-immunoprecipitated  $\beta$ 3 was observed following stimulation with thrombin (0.1 U mL<sup>-1</sup>) compared with resting platelets and this interaction was significantly reduced following treatment with either 15dPGJ2 or ciglitazone (Fig. 7).

## Discussion

Outside-in signaling following fibrinogen binding to integrin  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta$ 3 plays a critical role in platelet function

and normal hemostasis and is a necessary secondary activation pathway downstream of several platelet agonists, including both GPVI and GPCR agonists [52].

PPAR $\gamma$  agonists have been shown to have inhibitory effects on both GPVI and thrombin-evoked inside-out signaling and platelet activation [6–8] and it is thought that the PPAR $\gamma$  agonists inhibit GPVI-induced platelet activation by altering the interaction of PPAR $\gamma$  with, and then phosphorylation of, GPVI signaling proteins, including Syk, LAT and PLC $\gamma$ 2, proteins that are shared by integrin  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta$ 3 outside-in signaling. We therefore investigated whether PPAR $\gamma$  agonists are involved in the



**Fig. 7.** The peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor  $\gamma$  (PPAR $\gamma$ ) ligands inhibit integrin  $\beta 3$  interaction with G $\alpha 13$ . Human washed platelets were pretreated for 10 min with (A) 15dPGJ2, (B) ciglitazone (20  $\mu$ M) or vehicle control before stimulation with 0.1 U mL<sup>-1</sup> thrombin for 3 min and reactions stopped by lysis in NP40 lysis buffer. G $\alpha 13$  was immunoprecipitated from these lysates prior to addition of laemmli sample buffer and the level of interaction with  $\beta 3$  determined by blotting for total  $\beta 3$  and G $\alpha 13$  in these pull-down samples. (i) Representative blots shown. (ii) Levels of  $\beta 3$  in each sample were quantified and expressed as a fold change over resting control. Results were normalized to the level of G $\alpha 13$  present. Results represent mean  $\pm$  SEM for  $n \geq 3$ . \*Indicates  $P < 0.05$  in comparison with vehicle controls.

regulation of outside-in signaling mediated through the platelet integrin  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta 3$  and hence play a wider role in the regulation of platelet activation.

Binding of integrin  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta 3$  to and adhesion of platelets on fibrinogen initiates 'outside-in' signaling that leads to cytoskeletal changes involved in the generation and extension of filopodia and lamellipodia and platelet spreading [52]. Agonists for PPAR $\gamma$ , including 15dPGJ2, a natural PPAR $\gamma$  agonist, and a synthetic agonist, ciglitazone, caused an inhibition of both platelet adhesion and spreading on fibrinogen in comparison to vehicle-treated platelets. Clot retraction, another functional process that requires  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta 3$  outside-in signaling [53], was also inhibited, providing further evidence that PPAR $\gamma$  agonists regulate processes involved in  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta 3$  outside-in signaling. Studies exploring the effect of 15dPGJ2 on platelet adhesion to collagen or fibrinogen under flow established that although treatment with 15dPGJ2 reduced platelet adhesion to fibrinogen, 15dPGJ2 does not alter platelet adhesion to collagen, suggesting that earlier observations of PPAR $\gamma$  agonist-induced inhibition of thrombus formation [7] could be attributed to reduced  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta 3$  outside-in signaling during the later stages of thrombus formation rather than earlier adhesion events.

Upon binding of the integrin to fibrinogen, the G protein subunit G $\alpha 13$  is thought to bind to the cytoplasmic domain of  $\beta 3$ , a process that is enhanced by GPCR signaling [32,33] and is considered to be the directional 'switch' that

initiates outside-in signaling through integrin  $\alpha$ Ib $\beta 3$ . This recruitment of G $\alpha 13$  to  $\beta 3$  leads to the activation of the Src family kinases (SFKs), including c-Src, which results in the SFK-dependent phosphorylation of two tyrosine residues in the  $\beta 3$  tail, Y747 (Y773 in humans) and Y759, which is critical for outside-in signaling and interaction with other signaling and intracellular molecules. Y747 negatively regulates talin binding and Y759 protects against calpain cleavage [29–31,33,34,52–54]

In platelets pretreated with the PPAR $\gamma$  agonist 15dPGJ2, a significant reduction in phosphorylation of  $\beta 3$  at Y773 was noted (Fig. 3A), suggesting that the negative regulation of integrin- $\alpha$ Ib $\beta 3$ -dependent processes occurs because of a direct negative regulation of the  $\beta 3$  integrin itself. This negative regulation of  $\beta 3$  signaling by the PPAR $\gamma$  agonists is further supported by attenuation of all downstream signaling (Fig. 3B,C), including phosphorylation and activation of Syk, PLC $\gamma 2$  and PKC activity, known downstream components of one branch of  $\beta 3$ -dependent c-Src-activated signaling [25,52,53,55,56], and phosphorylation and activation of FAK and PI3K, key mediators in the secondary wave of outside-in signaling [35–38] (Fig. 3D). In addition, RhoA signaling, which occurs following activation of c-Src and is required for cytoskeleton rearrangements, cell spreading and platelet clot retraction [57], was also altered in PPAR $\gamma$  agonist-treated platelets and myosin light chain phosphorylation (an effector of RhoA activity) was reduced in 15dPGJ2-treated platelets compared with vehicle controls.



Global inhibition of  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 signaling by PPAR $\gamma$  agonists suggests negative regulation occurs upstream in the signaling pathway. However, control of the level of platelet activation is the result of a balance of activatory and inhibitory signaling. Reduction in these activating markers could also be a result of the up-regulation of endogenous inhibitory signaling pathways. This balance of inhibitory vs. activating signals controls the ability of the platelet to respond to platelet agonists.

A role for PPAR $\gamma$  agonists in pathways known to inhibit  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 signaling was also considered. Agonists for other PPARs, including PPAR $\alpha$  and PPAR $\beta/\delta$ , have been shown to inhibit platelet activity through increasing cAMP levels and PKA activity [17,42]. The cAMP and PKA signaling cascade has been shown to negatively regulate a number of platelet functions [2,40,58,59], including intracellular calcium mobilization and phosphorylation of G $\alpha$ 13 [50,51], which are important mediators of outside-in signaling. Platelets treated with either 15dPGJ2 or ciglitazone showed a significant increase in PKA-mediated VASP S157 phosphorylation that was not associated with activation of the DP, EP or IP prostaglandin receptors or an increase in cAMP levels. In support of this, treatment of platelets with PKA inhibitor H89, but not the adenylyl cyclase inhibitor SQ22536, rescued the PPAR $\gamma$  agonist-dependent inhibition of platelet adhesion to fibrinogen, clot retraction and integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 signaling.

Although the physiological relevance is as yet unclear, studies have shown that the PKA phosphorylation site of G $\alpha$ 13 (T203) is a region that could undergo conformational changes, potentially altering its interaction with its binding partners, including  $\beta$ 3 [2,50,51]. We observed that treatment of platelets with PPAR $\gamma$  agonists caused a decrease in G $\alpha$ 13 association with  $\beta$ 3, which would prevent c-Src-dependent phosphorylation of  $\beta$ 3 and dissociation of talin, attenuating signaling downstream of integrin  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 (Figure S7). We hypothesize that this inhibition of  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 outside-in signaling could also underlie the observed inhibition of stable thrombus formation previously described *in vitro* and *in vivo* [7,19].

This study provides further evidence for a role for agonists of nuclear receptors in the negative regulation of platelet activation and supports previous reports that suggest PPAR $\gamma$  agonists are cardio-protective. PPAR $\gamma$  agonists, thiazolidinediones, are currently used in the treatment of diabetes mellitus type 2. As there is an increased risk of cardiovascular disease associated with diabetes, treatment with PPAR $\gamma$  agonists could complement the effects of other antiplatelet therapies in reducing the risk of thrombosis.

## Addendum

A. J. Unsworth designed the research, performed experiments, analyzed results and wrote the manuscript. N. Kriek and A. P. Bye performed experiments, analyzed

results and edited the manuscript. K. Naran performed experiments and analyzed results. T. Sage and G. D. Flora performed experiments. J. M. Gibbins designed the research and wrote the manuscript.

## Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the British Heart Foundation (grants RG/09/011/28094, RG/13/93/30593 and RG/15/2/31224). G.D.F was supported by a Felix Scholarship and K.N. was supported by a Wellcome Trust Summer Scholarship.

## Disclosure of Conflict of Interests

The authors state that they have no conflict of interest.

## Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

**Fig. S1.** The kinetics of adhesion and spreading on fibrinogen.

**Fig. S2.** PPAR $\gamma$ -dependent inhibition of outside-in signaling.

**Fig. S3.** Ciglitazone inhibition of  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 outside-in signaling is associated with up-regulation of PKA activity.

**Fig. S4.** PPAR $\gamma$  up-regulation of VASP S157 phosphorylation is not due to activation of PKC.

**Fig. S5.** PPAR $\gamma$  ligand up-regulation of VASP S157 phosphorylation is not dependent on PI3K or AKT activity.

**Fig. S6.** PPAR $\gamma$  ligand up-regulation of VASP S157 phosphorylation is not dependent on DP, EP or IP receptor activation.

**Fig. S7.** Negative regulation of  $\alpha$ IIB $\beta$ 3 outside-in signaling by PPAR $\gamma$  agonists.

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