

# A Rapid, Label-Free, *In Situ* Assay Method for Cell Proliferation and Drug Toxicity

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## Abstract

Inhibition of cell proliferation is a sensitive marker of cytotoxicity. Many proliferation assays use indirect measurements or require harvesting and/or staining of cells, analyzing only a sub-sample of the treated cells. These assays are destructive and do not allow kinetic measurements. The Celigo™ Adherent Cell Cytometer is a novel, cell imaging product that combines whole well, *in situ* imaging with automated software for label-free brightfield cell image analysis. In this study, Celigo was used to screen a compound library for effects on cell proliferation in adherent and non-adherent cell lines. Human lung carcinoma (A549) and promyelocytic leukemia (HL-60) cells were treated with a panel of compounds to inhibit proliferation. Calculated IC<sub>50</sub> values and single point tests were comparable between the two methods for selected compounds. Label-free assay conditions enabled kinetic assessment of growth, providing additional information on growth characteristics and early detection of inhibition. Finally, the Celigo system used image-based analysis to measure changes in cell morphology upon compound treatment. These data indicate that certain anti-proliferative compounds can have secondary effects on cell health or physiology, which manifest in changes in cell morphology.

## Whole Well Imaging and Analysis

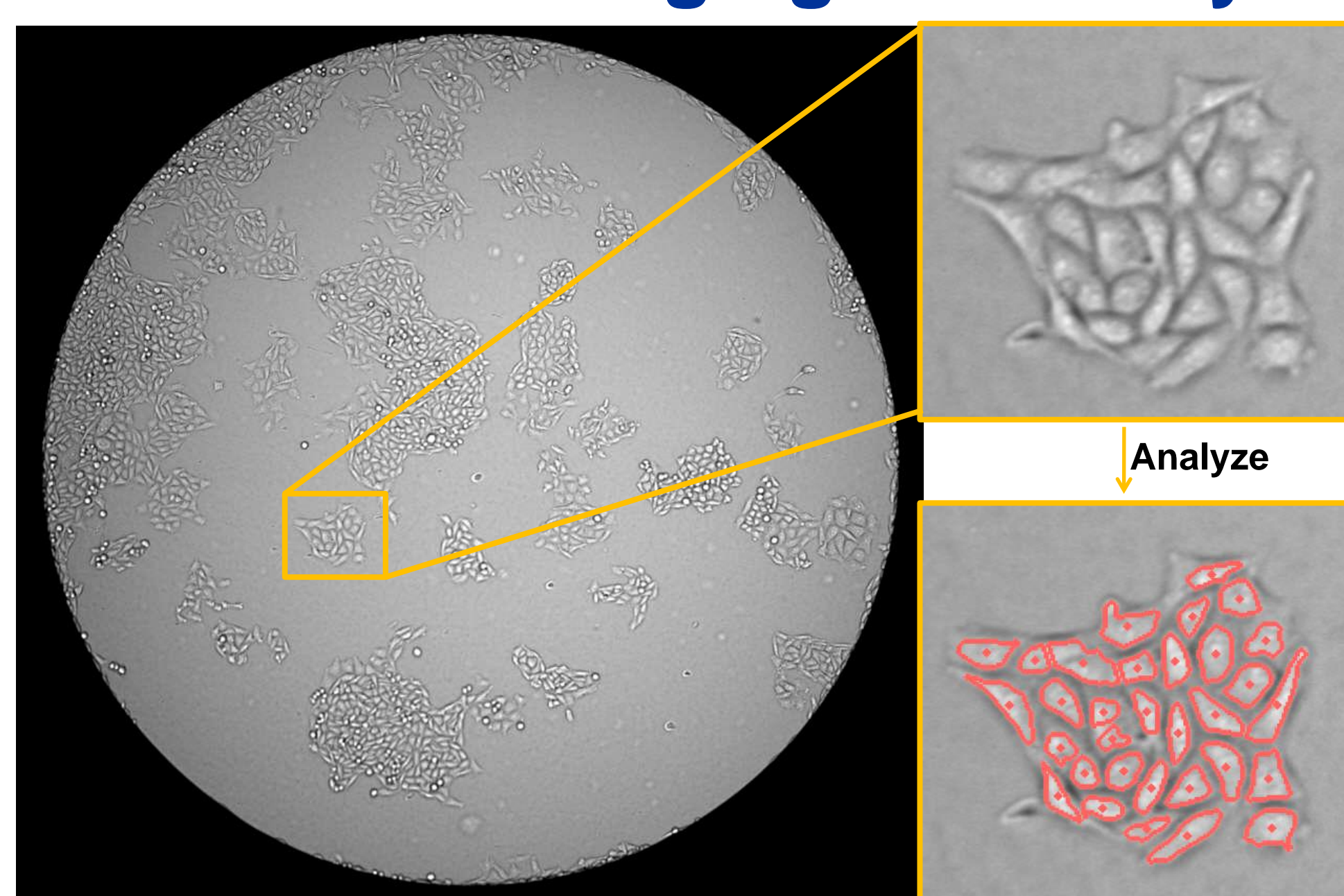


Fig 1. The Celigo Cytometer acquires high-quality whole-well images of a 384 well microplate without mechanical stage movements. The proprietary analysis algorithm identifies the individual cells (orange outlines) and provides quantitative outputs. This capability enables critical assessment of all cells within a well, even at the edges, eliminating the need for averaging or cell count estimation.

## Brightfield Cell Counting Validation

- Brightfield label-free cell counting accurately counts adherent and non-adherent cells in microplates
- Direct cell counting results are cell-type independent

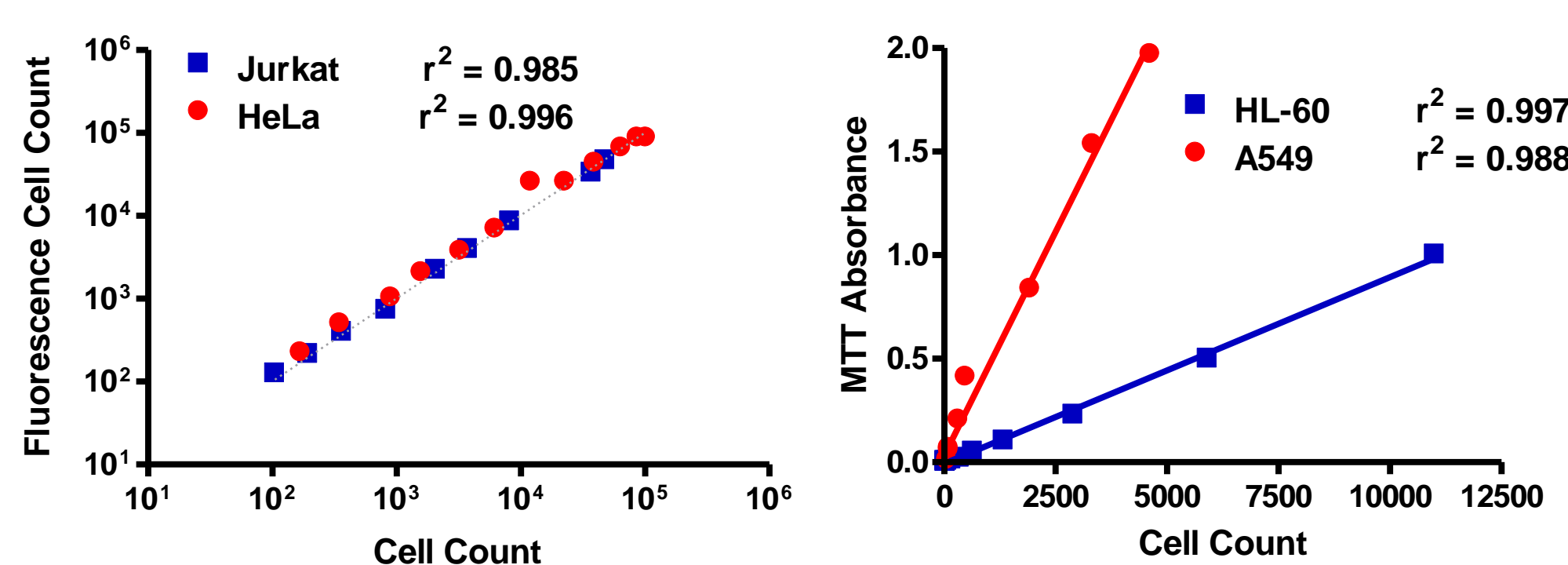


Fig 2. (A) HeLa and Jurkat cells were plated in a dilution series in 96 well plates and counted in brightfield and fluorescence on Celigo with resulting r<sup>2</sup> values of >0.98. (B) HL-60 and A549 cells were plated in a dilution series in 384 well plates and counted in brightfield using the Celigo Cytometer. Replicate plates were processed using the MTT assay. Cell counts correlated well with MTT absorbance over a broad range of cell densities.

## Celigo Cytometer



- Analyze cell cultures *in situ* with minimal disturbance
- Eliminate enzymatic disruption of sample during preparation procedures
- Image cells in brightfield and fluorescence on the same platform
- Analyze every cell in every well in brightfield mode with no "edge effect"

## Label-Free Monitoring of Effects on Proliferation

- Brightfield label-free mode can quantify effects of compounds on cell proliferation in human cells

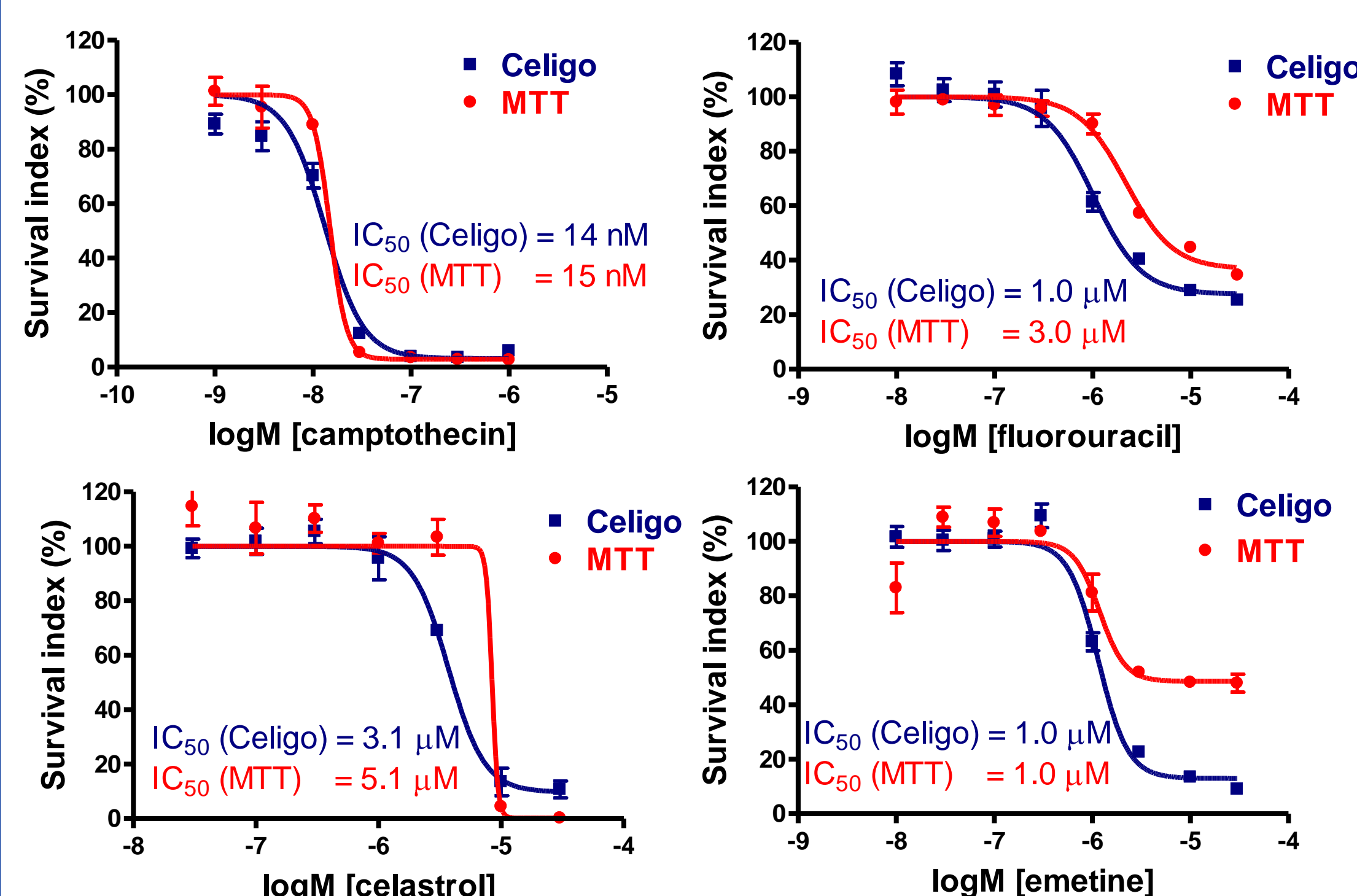


Fig 3. Effects of compounds on proliferation measured with the Celigo Cytometer versus MTT assay. HL-60 and A549 cells were treated with compounds from 1 nM to 30 μM (depending on compound) for 48 hr in 384 well microplates. The Survival Index (% remaining cells or MTT signal compared to negative control, DMSO) was calculated for each treatment well and IC<sub>50</sub> values were determined for each compound.

- Good correlation of label-free direct cell counting assay results with MTT metabolic endpoint assay

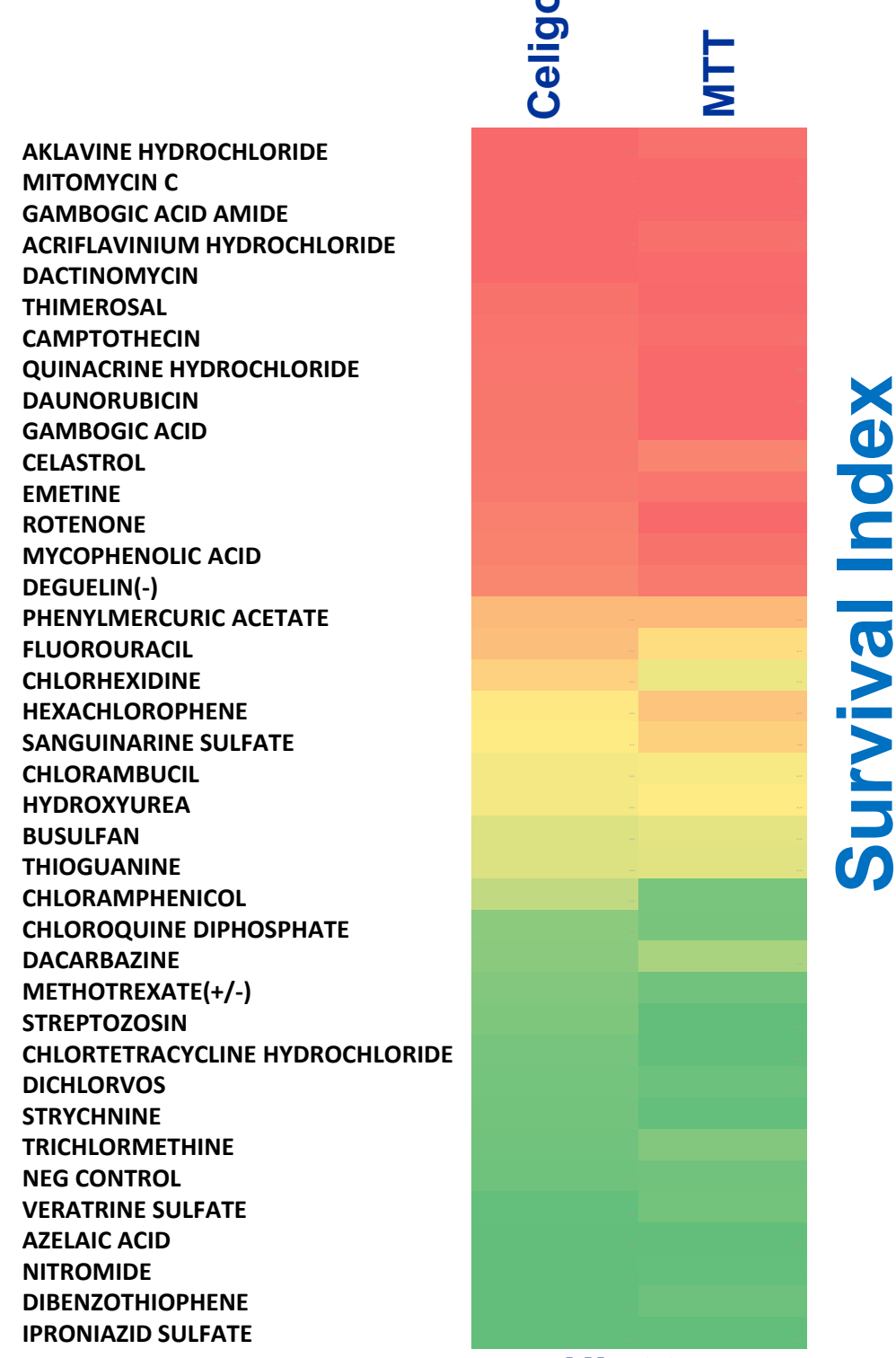


Fig 4. Comparison of treatment effects measured with the Celigo Cytometer versus MTT assay. Heat map of Survival Index (SI%) for compounds tested at a single concentration (10 μM) in the HL-60 cell line and assayed using the Celigo Cytometer's label-free cell counting application or MTT assay. The average of two independent experiments are presented. Survival Index is represented by colors ranging from Red to Green. Red = low survival, yellow = medium survival, green = high survival. Values were ranked by percentile, with the 10th percentile survival being the lowest, the 50th percentile the medium, and the 90th percentile the highest survival.

## *In Situ* Growth Tracking

- Kinetic growth tracking detects early growth inhibition

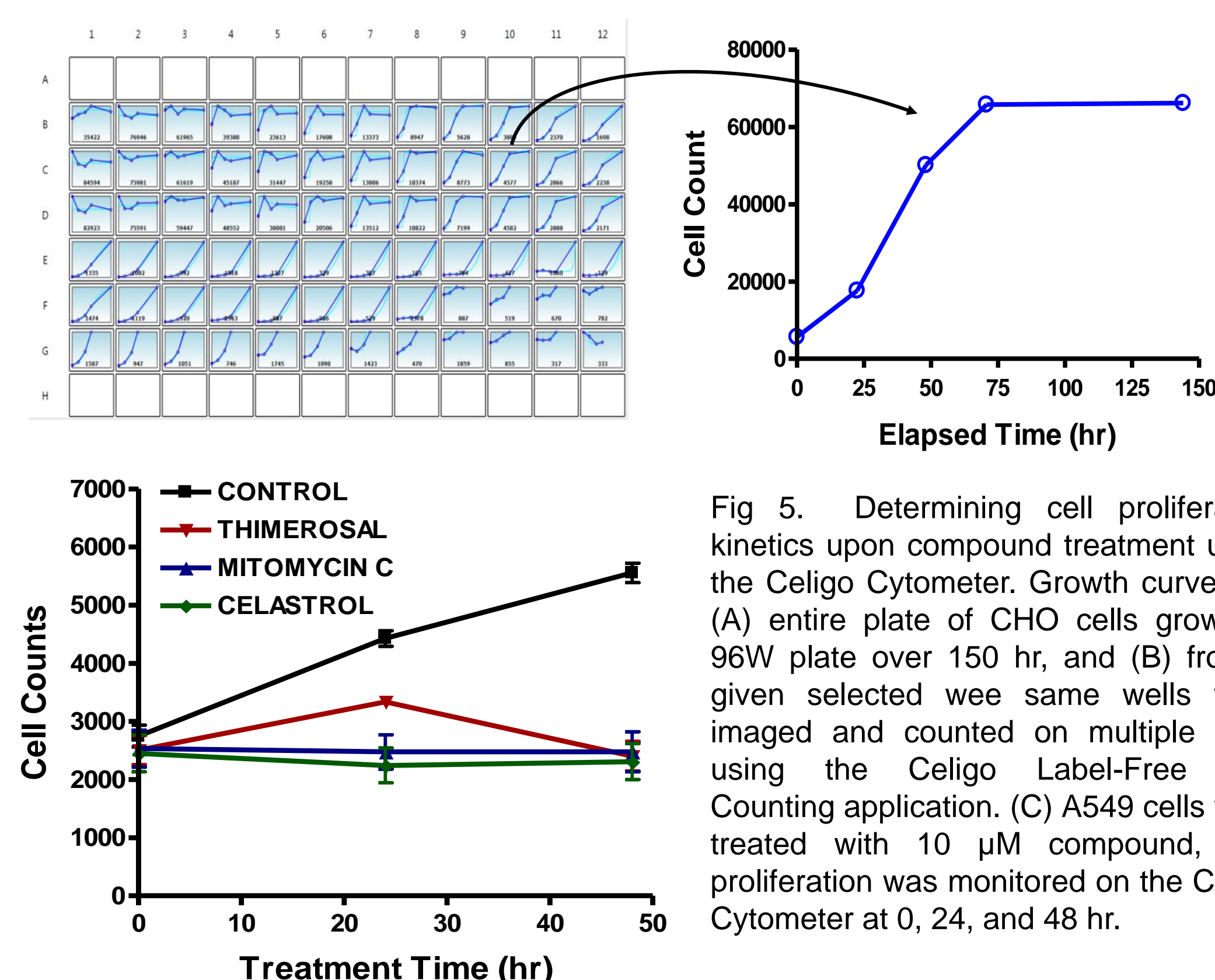


Fig 5. Determining cell proliferation kinetics upon compound treatment using the Celigo Cytometer. Growth curves for (A) entire plate of CHO cells grown in 96W plate over 150 hr, and (B) from a given selected well same wells were imaged and counted on multiple days using the Celigo Label-Free Cell Counting application. (C) A549 cells were treated with 10 μM compound, and proliferation was monitored on the Celigo Cytometer at 0, 24, and 48 hr.

## Kinetic, Label-Free Morphology Tracking

- Brightfield label free mode can kinetically monitor cell morphology and growth

### Control 48 hr      Camptothecin 48 hr

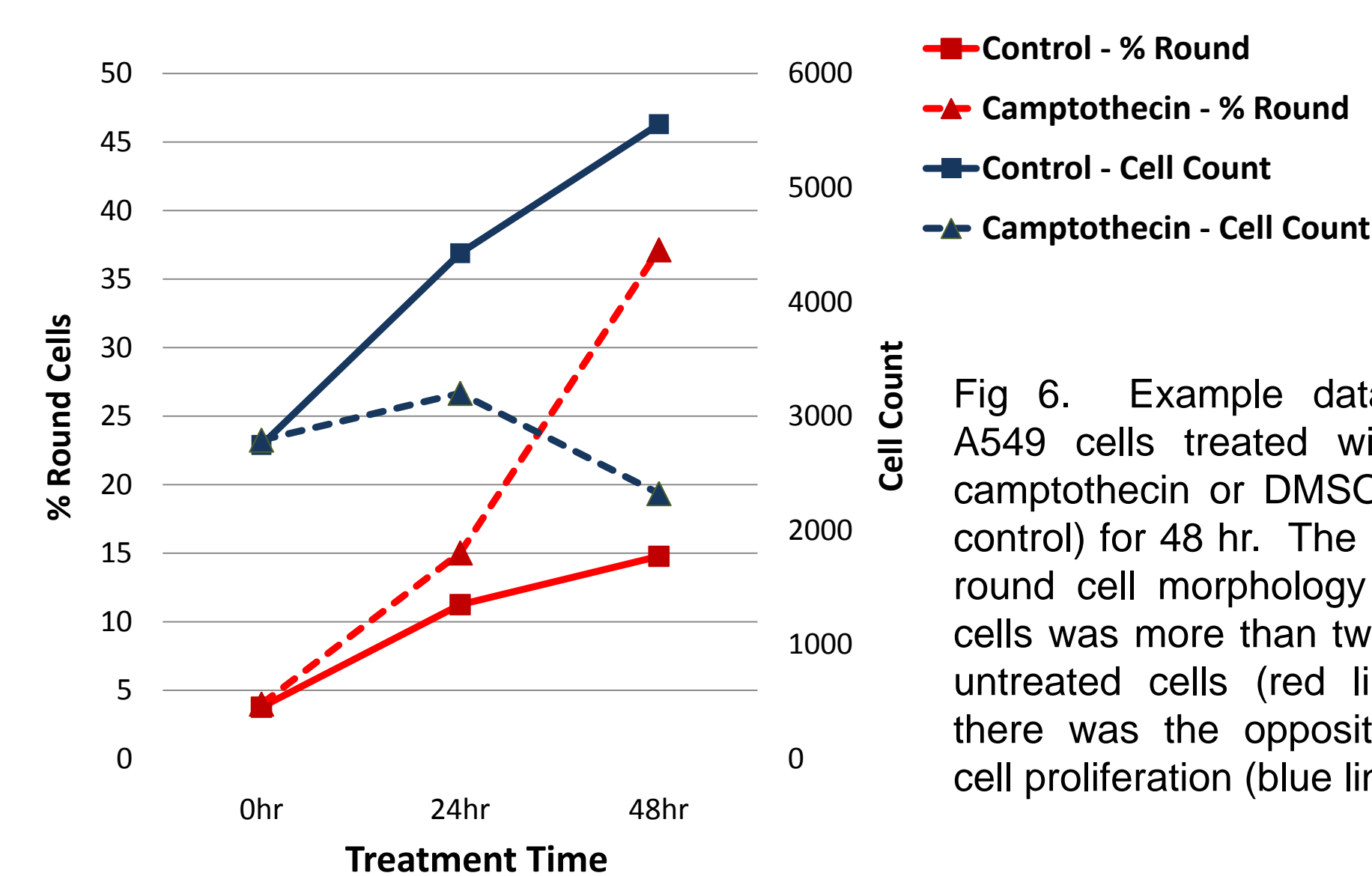
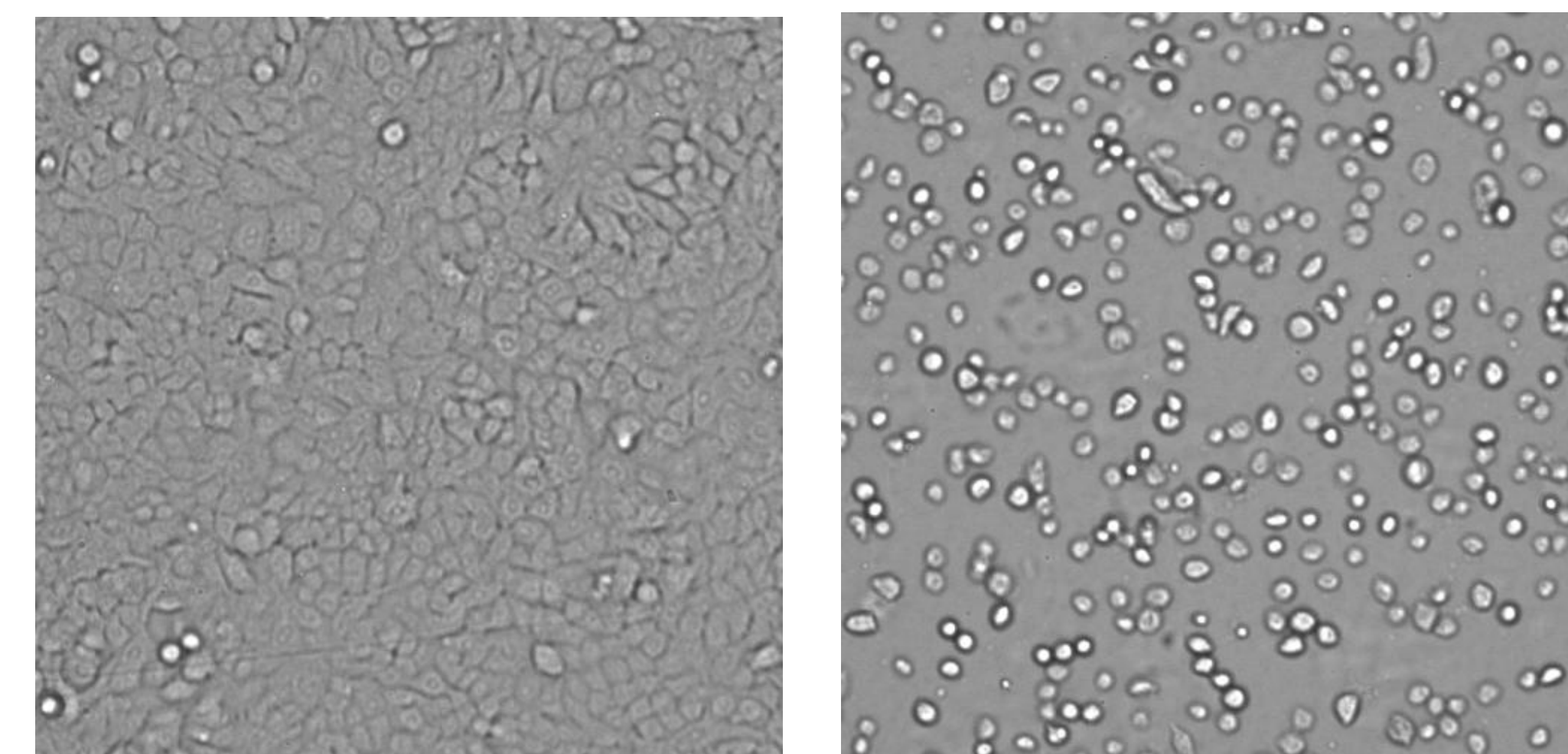


Fig 6. Example data showing A549 cells treated with 10 μM camptothecin or DMSO (negative control) for 48 hr. The increase in round cell morphology of treated cells was more than twice that for untreated cells (red lines) while there was the opposite trend in cell proliferation (blue lines).

- Morphological analysis identified growth-inhibiting compounds that demonstrated differential effects on morphology suggesting different mechanisms of action

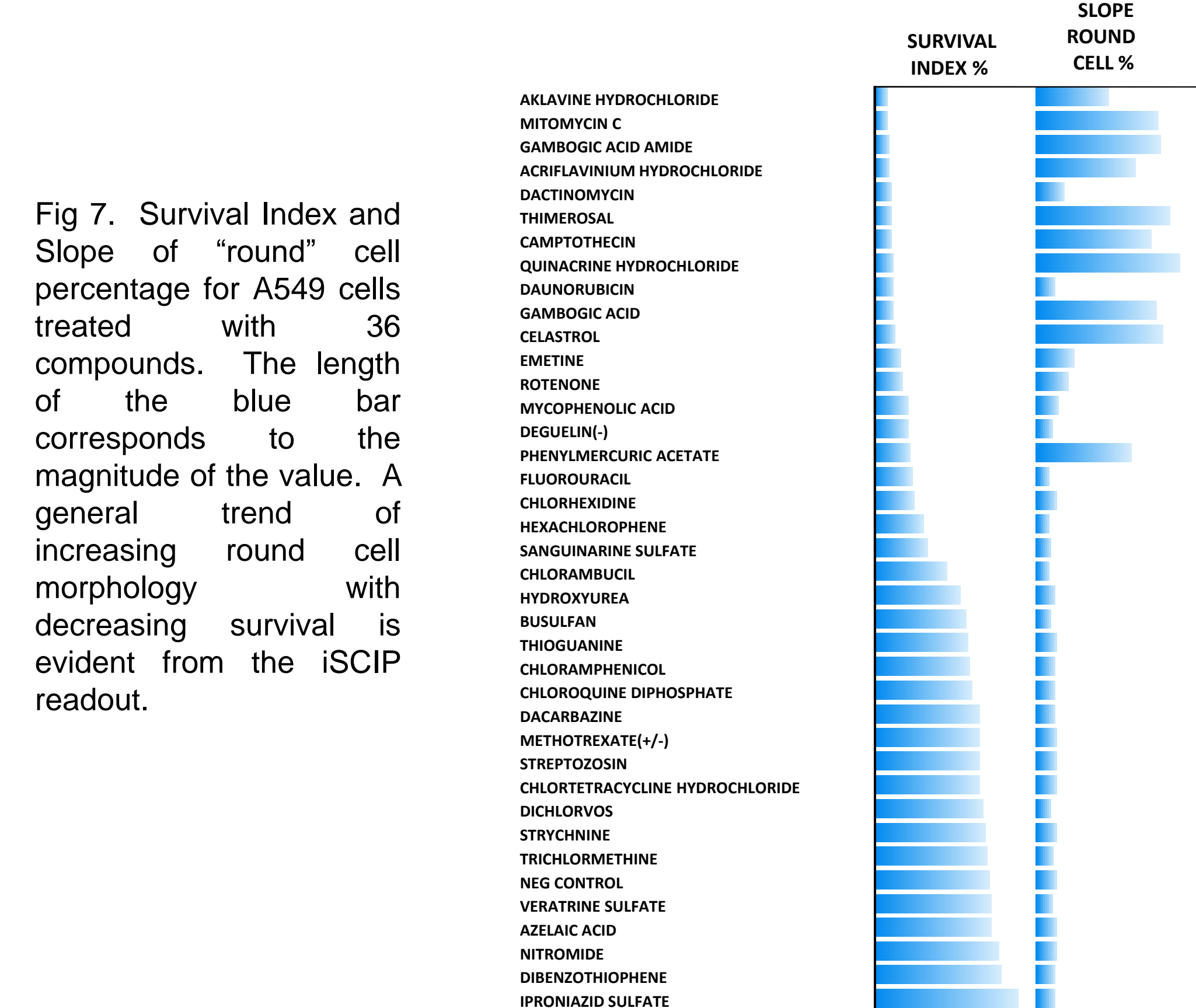


Fig 7. Survival Index and Slope of "round" cell percentage for A549 cells treated with 36 compounds. The length of the blue bar corresponds to the magnitude of the value. A general trend of increasing round cell morphology with decreasing survival is evident from the iSCIP readout.

## Conclusions

These data demonstrate the use of label-free, brightfield cell counting to identify compounds that inhibit growth of human cells in culture. The Celigo adherent cell cytometer accurately counts cells *in situ* and direct cell counting is independent of cell type. Growth inhibition results are comparable to a common, endpoint MTT assay. In addition, label-free growth tracking identifies early growth inhibition which potentially reduces the assay time. Finally, direct detection of cells in brightfield mode enables morphological assessment in parallel to growth inhibition. The Celigo cytometer provides a rapid, lower cost, and sensitive method for assessing compound effects on cell proliferation and cell toxicity.