

A Novel EEV-Conjugated PMO, ENTR-701, Reduces Nuclear Foci and Corrects Aberrant Splicing in Myotonic Dystrophy Type 1 Preclinical Models

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INTRODUCTION

- Myotonic dystrophy type 1 (DM1) is a multi-systemic disease that affects over 40,000 individuals in the US and 50,000 in Europe.
- Pathology manifests as myotonia, muscle weakness and atrophy, cardiac conduction abnormalities, pulmonary complications, cataracts, and endocrine dysfunction.¹
- Currently there are no approved therapies for DM1.
- DM1 is caused by a CUG trinucleotide repeat expansion in the *DMPK* (dystrophia myotonica protein kinase) mRNA that sequesters splicing regulatory proteins such as MBNL (muscleblind-like).²
- Mutant *DMPK* mRNA and MBNL proteins aggregate to form nuclear foci.³ MBNL splicing activity is decreased as a result of nuclear sequestration, thereby inhibiting splicing and expression of many downstream transcripts.^{4,5}
- One therapeutic approach for treatment of DM1 is the use of oligonucleotide therapeutics to sterically block CUG repeat expansions.
- There are significant barriers to the development of oligonucleotide-based therapies such as limited exposure and poor endosomal escape in target tissue after systemic administration.
- We developed an Endosomal Escape Vehicle (EEV™) delivery platform based on cyclic cell-penetrating peptides (cCPPs) to improve cellular uptake and enhance endosomal escape of oligonucleotides and other biologics.⁶⁻⁷
- ENTR-701 is our lead clinical candidate for the treatment of DM1.

OBJECTIVES

- To examine the therapeutic potential of ENTR-701 in preclinical models of DM1.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- ENTR-701 consists of a phosphorodiamidate morpholino oligomer (PMO) that blocks CUG repeats in an allele-specific manner, conjugated to our EEV platform (Figure 1)
- Nuclear foci reduction, mutant transcript levels and correction of aberrant splicing were assessed in cellular models and HSA-LR mice
- HeLa480 cells stably expressing either (CTG)₄₈₀ or (CTG)₀ DMPK transgenes showed MBNL1-dependent aberrant splicing⁸
- Immortalized myoblasts were derived from DM1 patient primary skeletal muscle cells and contain 2,600 CUG repeats within the 3'UTR of *DMPK*⁹
- HSA-LR¹⁰ mice carry a transgene with a (CTG)₂₂₀ repeat expansion in the 3'-UTR of the human skeletal actin gene (*ACTA1*) which recapitulates molecular pathology and results in a myotonia phenotype.

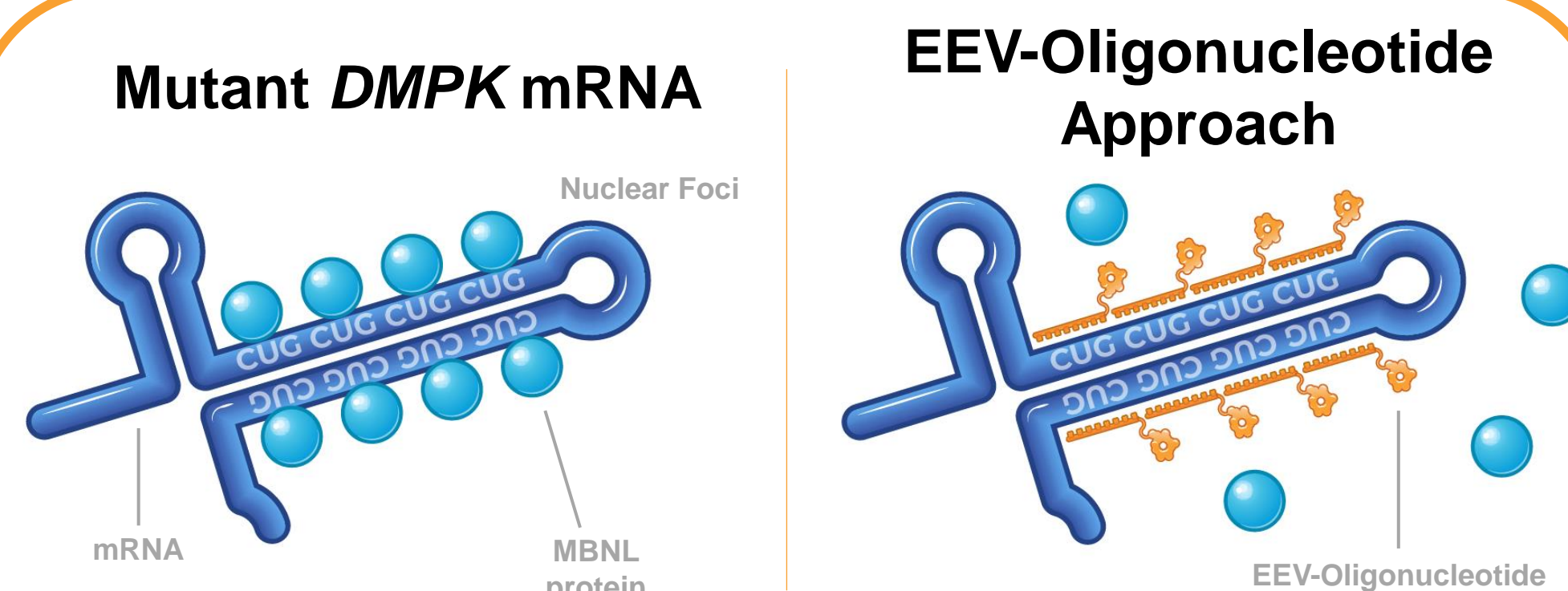


Figure 1. Mechanism of EEV-PMO Conjugate in DM1. Steric blockade of CUG repeats on mutant *DMPK* mRNA leads to reduced nuclear foci, selective mRNA reduction, normal MBNL function, and corrected spliceopathy.

ENTR-701 in HeLa480 Mutant *DMPK* Cell Line

ENTR-701 reduced nuclear foci in HeLa480 cells (Figures 2A, 2B). In addition, free uptake of ENTR-701 selectively reduced (CUG)₄₈₀ containing *DMPK* mRNA (Figure 2C).

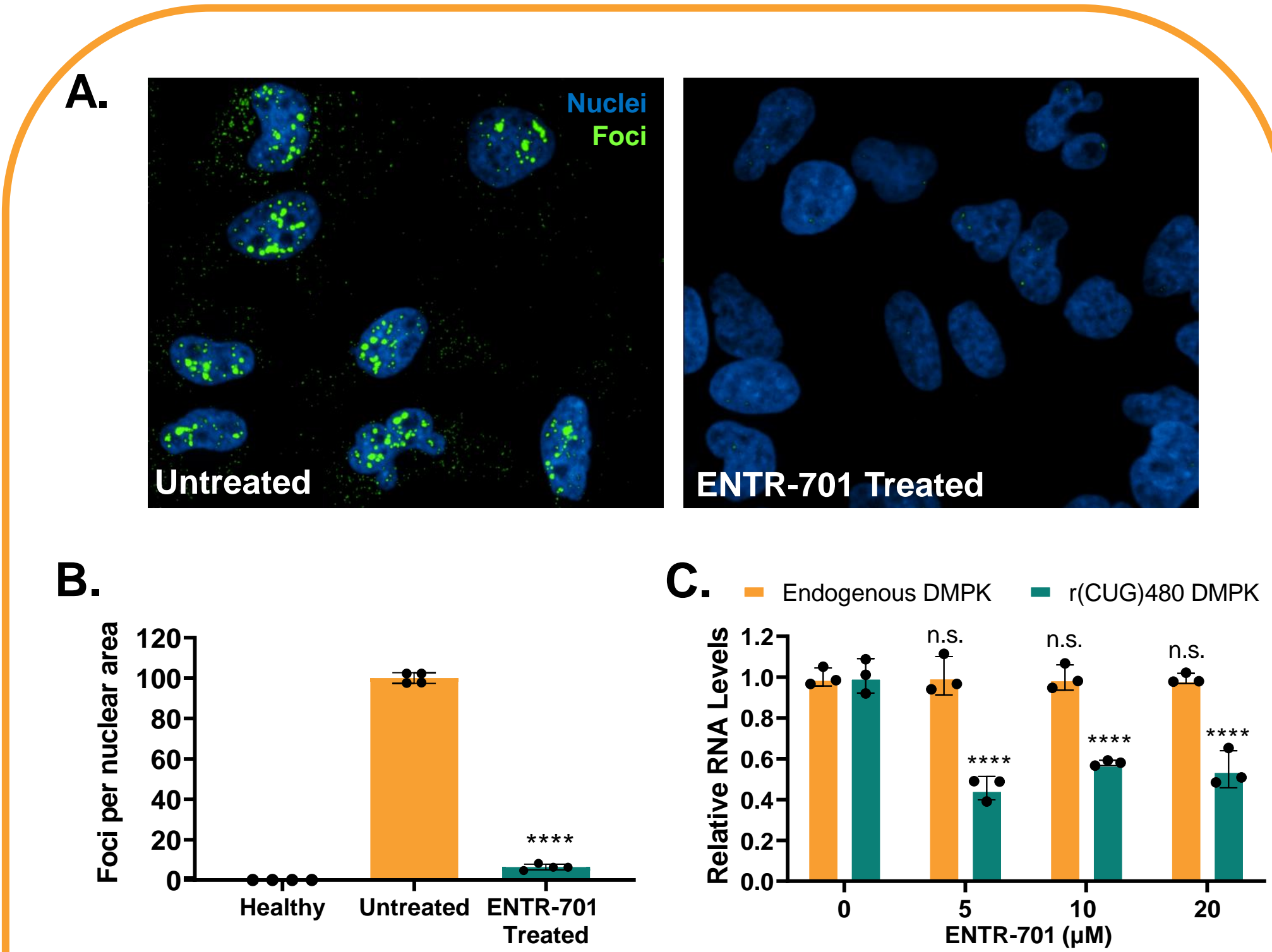


Figure 2. ENTR-701 Reduces Nuclear Foci and Mutant mRNA in HeLa480 Cells. HeLa480 cells were treated with ENTR-701 and number of nuclear foci were analyzed by immunofluorescence (A, B). *DMPK* transcript levels were measured by qPCR. Mutant r(CUG)₄₈₀ levels were normalized to untreated samples (C). Data shown as mean ± standard deviation. ****p<0.0001 vs. untreated (B) and vs. 0 μM (C), n.s., not significant compared to 0 μM (panel C).

Treatment of DM1 Patient-Derived Myotubes with ENTR-701

ENTR-701 treatment in DM1 patient-derived muscle cells resulted in significant nuclear foci reduction (Figures 3A, 3B) and correction of aberrant splicing (Figure 3C).

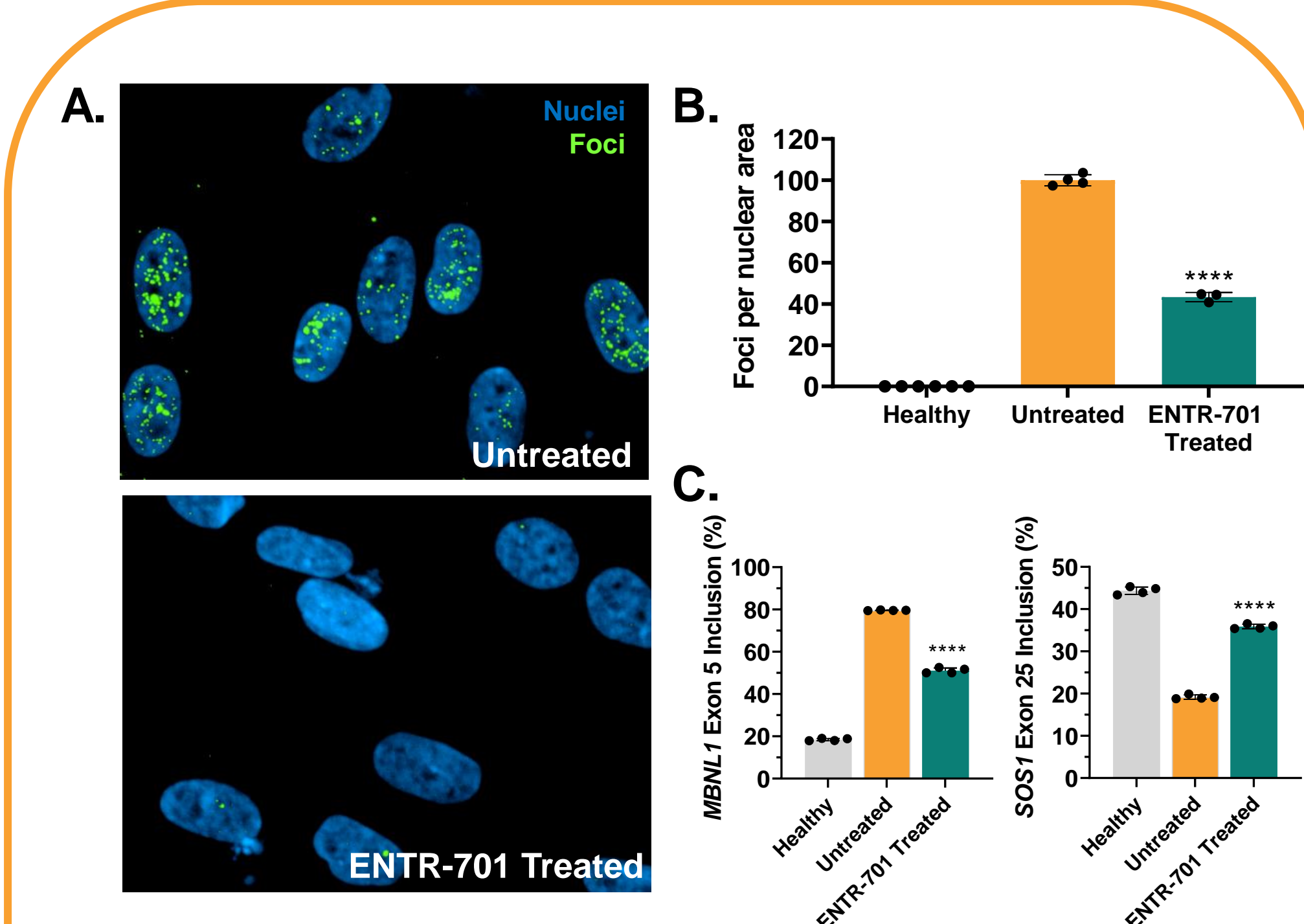


Figure 3. ENTR-701 Reduces Nuclear Foci and Corrects Aberrant Splicing in DM1 Patient-Derived Cells. Immortalized DM1 patient-derived myotubes were treated with ENTR-701. Nuclear foci area was quantitated relative to total nuclear area and normalized to untreated cells (A, B). *MBNL1* exon 5 and *SOS1* exon 25 inclusion were analyzed by RT-PCR and Labchip (C). Data shown as mean ± standard deviation. ****p<0.0001 vs. untreated.

RESULTS

Efficacy of ENTR-701 in HSA-LR Mouse Model of DM1

ENTR-701 treatment reduced the number of nuclear foci (Figure 4A, 4B), corrected aberrant splicing of *Atp2a1* (Figure 4C) and reduced HSA-LR(CUG)₂₂₀ mRNA in HSA-LR mice (Figure 4D).

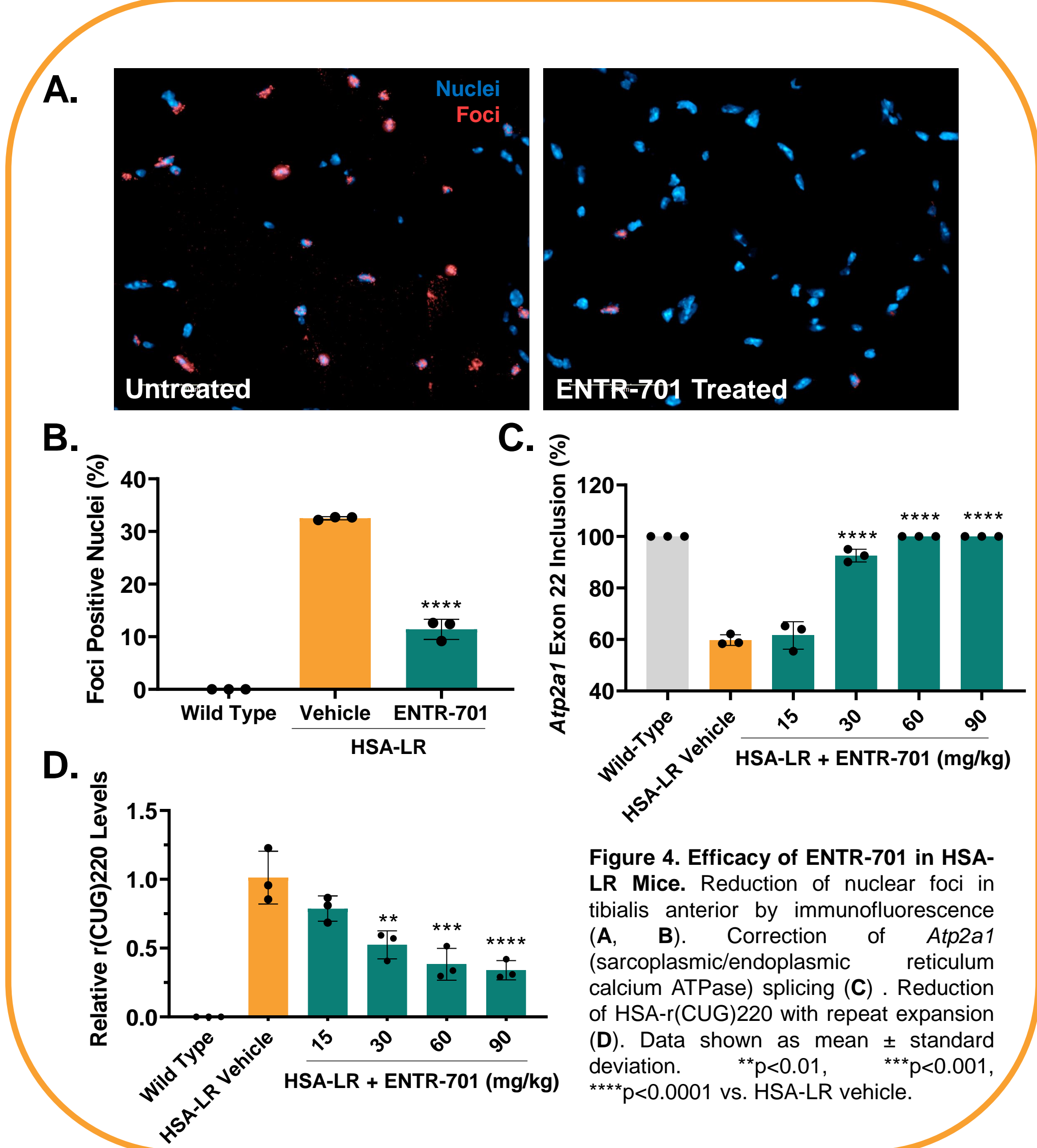


Figure 4. Efficacy of ENTR-701 in HSA-LR Mice. Reduction of nuclear foci in tibialis anterior by immunofluorescence (A, B). Correction of *Atp2a1* (sarcolemmal/endoplasmic reticulum calcium ATPase) splicing (C). Reduction of HSA-r(CUG)₂₂₀ with repeat expansion (D). Data shown as mean ± standard deviation. **p<0.01, ***p<0.001, ****p<0.0001 vs. HSA-LR vehicle.

Durable Efficacy of ENTR-701 in HSA-LR Mice

A single dose of ENTR-701 corrected aberrant splicing of *Mbnl1* (Figure 5A), *Atp2a1* (Figure 5B), and *Nfix* (Figure 5C) for at least 8 weeks post-dose.

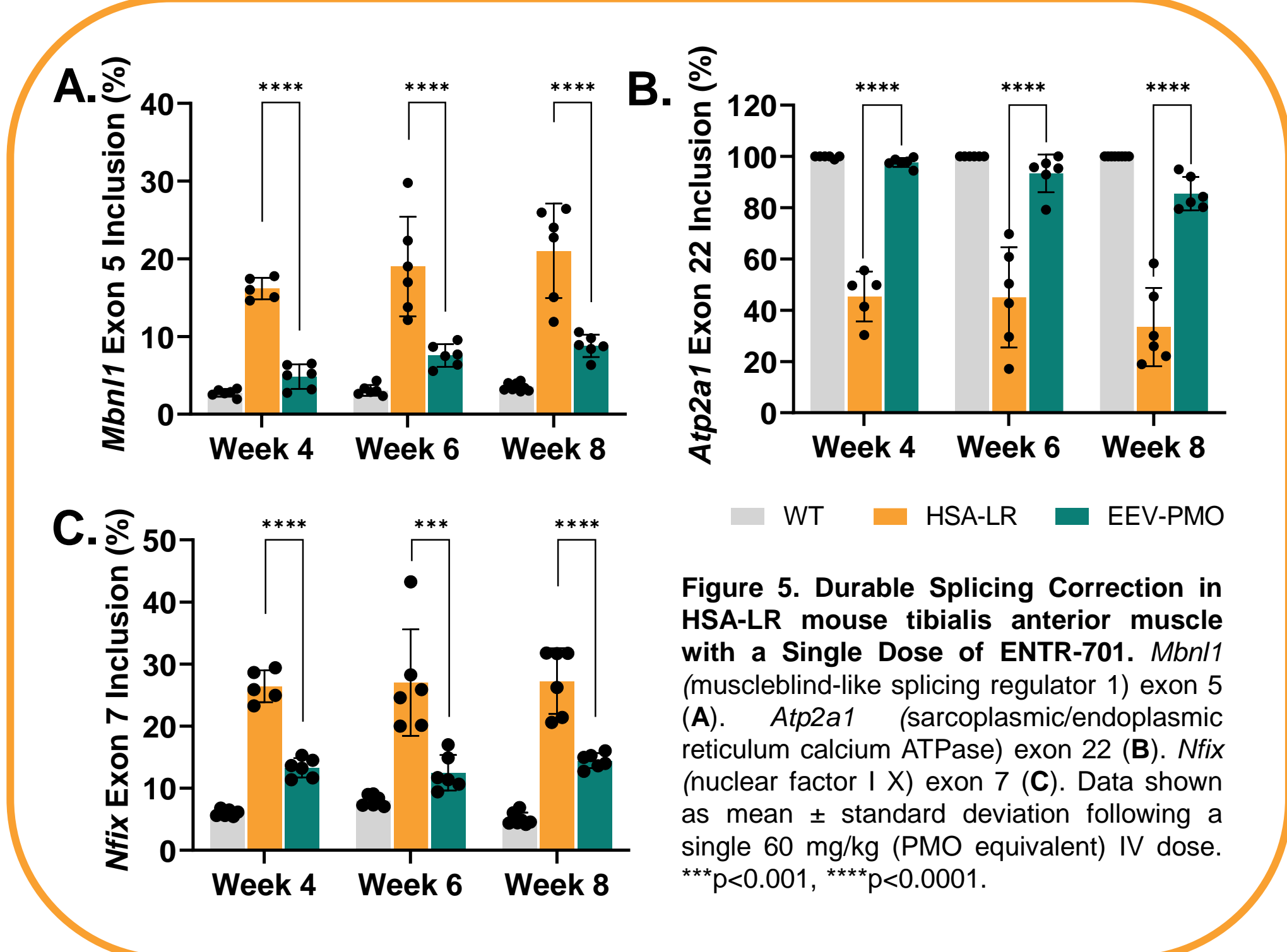


Figure 5. Durable Splicing Correction in HSA-LR mouse tibialis anterior muscle with a single dose of ENTR-701. *Mbnl1* (muscleblind-like splicing regulator 1) exon 5 (A). *Atp2a1* (sarcolemmal/endoplasmic reticulum calcium ATPase) exon 22 (B). *Nfix* (nuclear factor 1 X) exon 7 (C). Data shown as mean ± standard deviation following a single 60 mg/kg (PMO equivalent) IV dose. ***p<0.001, ****p<0.0001.

Spliceopathy in HSA-LR mice corrected with ENTR-701

RNAseq data illustrates that HSA-LR splicing defects are corrected after treatment with ENTR-701 (Figure 6).

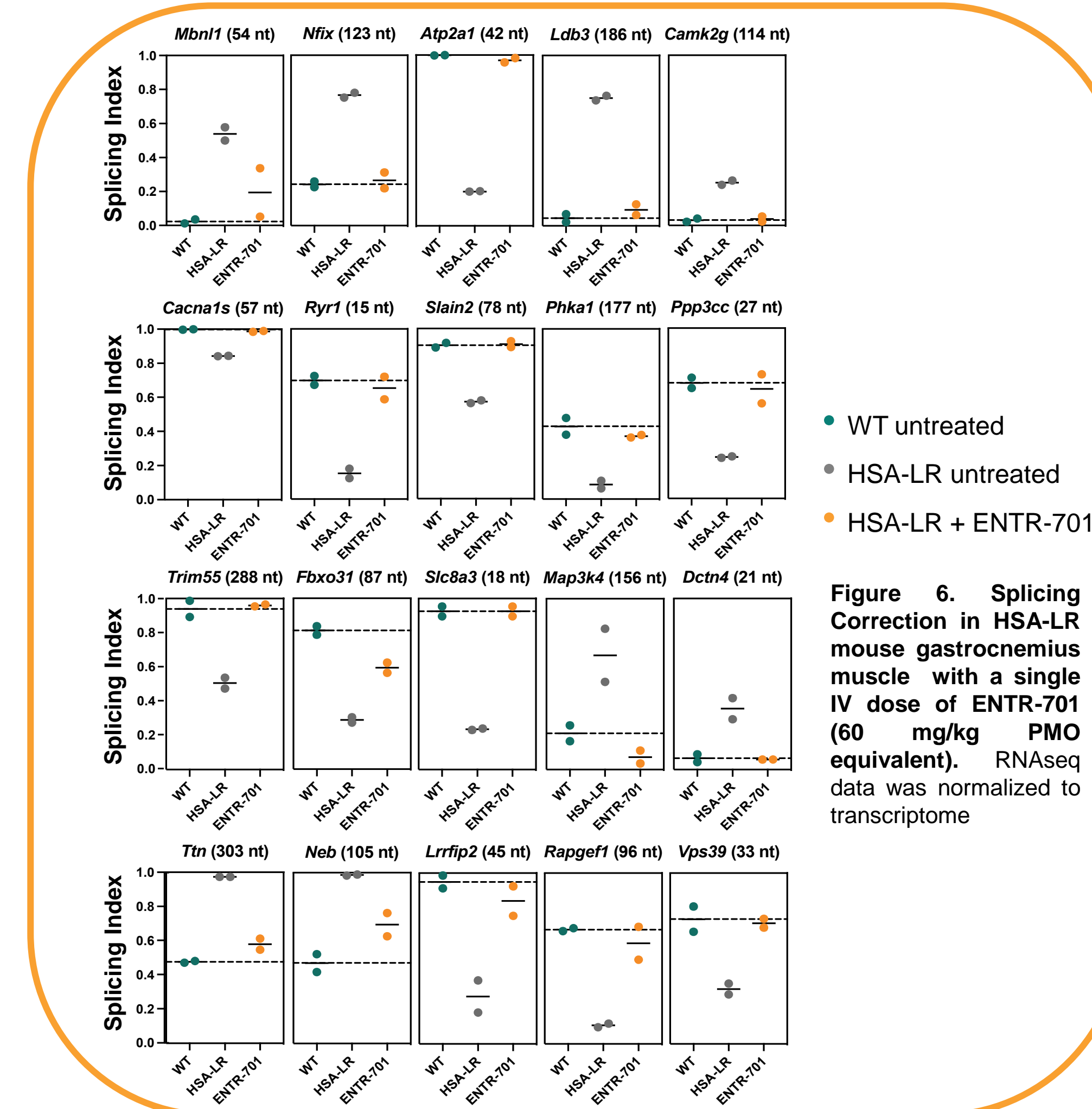


Figure 6. Splicing Correction in HSA-LR mouse gastrocnemius muscle with a single IV dose of ENTR-701 (60 mg/kg PMO equivalent). RNAseq data was normalized to transcriptome

ENTR-701 Rescues the Myotonia Phenotype in HSA-LR mice

A single 60 mpk (PMO equivalent) dose of ENTR-701 ameliorated observable pinch-induced myotonia symptoms for at least 8 weeks post-dose.

CONCLUSIONS

- Our DM1 clinical candidate, ENTR-701, reduces nuclear foci and CUG-repeat expansion containing transcript levels in the HeLa480 cell model and the HSA-LR mouse model of DM1.
- DM1 patient-derived muscle cells with 2600 CUG repeats also showed a reduction in nuclear foci when treated with ENTR-701.
- ENTR-701 corrected aberrant downstream splicing in all three models.
- A single dose of ENTR-701 demonstrates durable splicing correction and ameliorates myotonia for at least 8 weeks post-dose.
- These results illustrate the therapeutic potential of the EEV-oligonucleotide approach for DM1 and support further study of ENTR-701 in patients with DM1.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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