

## Research Article

# Fluorine-18 labelling of PNAs functionalized at their pseudo-peptidic backbone for imaging studies with PET

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## Summary

Peptide nucleic acids (PNAs) form a unique class of synthetic macromolecules, originally designed as ligands for the recognition of double-stranded DNA, where the deoxyribose phosphate backbone of original DNA is replaced by a pseudo-peptide *N*-(2-aminoethyl)glycyl backbone, while retaining the nucleobases of DNA. We have previously developed an original method to label oligonucleotide-based macromolecules with the short-lived positron-emitter fluorine-18 ( $t_{1/2}$ : 109.8 min) using the *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide reagent. Using this method, we herein report the fluorine-18-labelling of 13 decameric PNAs (**OLP\_1-13**), of the same sequence (CTCATACTCT), but presenting selected modification of the pseudo-peptidic backbone at two or three of the thymine residues (positions 2, 5 and 8). Structural characteristics of these backbone modifications include either an amino acid side chain (L-Lys, L-Glu, L-Leu and L-Arg) or a glycosyl moiety (mannose, galactose, fucose, *N*-Ac-galactosamine and *N*-Ac-glucosamine) attached via an appropriate spacer. *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide was synthesized in three radiochemical steps from 4-cyano-*N,N,N*-trimethylanilinium trifluoromethanesulfonate and HPLC-purified in 85–90 min (typical production: 3.7–4.8 GBq starting from a batch of 29.6–31.4 GBq of [<sup>18</sup>F]fluoride). Conjugation of the fluorine-18-labelled bromoacetamide reagent with the PNAs was performed in a mixture of acetonitrile and HEPES buffer (0.1 M, pH 7.9) for 10 min at 60°C and gave the corresponding pure labelled

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oligodeoxyribonucleotides, this methodology has already been reliably and routinely applied to all the popular chemical modifications of oligonucleotides, such as full-length phosphorothioate diester internucleosidic-bond deoxyribonucleotides,<sup>11–13</sup> hybrid methylphosphonate/phosphodiester internucleosidic-bond deoxyribonucleotides and 2'-*O*-methyl-modified oligoribonucleotides.<sup>12,14</sup> Pharmacokinetics of most of these fluorine-18-labelled oligonucleotides have then been established with PET and their metabolism also partially evaluated.<sup>15</sup> More recently, the methodology has also been successfully applied to the fluorine-18-labelling of Spiegelmers,<sup>16</sup> single-stranded mirror-image oligonucleotides consisting of L-ribose (L-RNA) or L-2'-deoxyribose (L-DNA) units.<sup>17,18</sup> It has so far been used once for the labelling of a selected PNA with fluorine-18.<sup>19</sup> Several groups have prepared radiometal-labelled PNAs or fluorescent chimerical PNA-peptide conjugates.<sup>9,10</sup> The strategies employed use all chemical properties of the pseudo-peptidic backbone allowing the functionalization of the C- and N-terminus end, as well as internal amino-acid-C- $\alpha$  functionalization by introduction of non-glycine residues or reactive linkers.<sup>20</sup> In the only example of fluorine-18-labelling, a cysteine residue was added to the original PNA structure (at the N-terminus end), allowing the conjugation of this modified PNA with the *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide reagent via the thiol function.

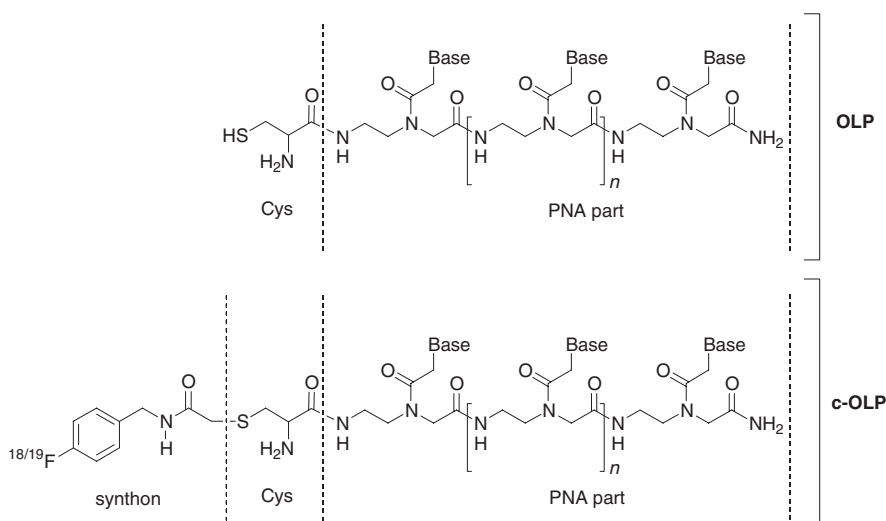
In the present study, we have extended our investigations to the fluorine-18-labelling of various decameric PNAs (**OLP\_1-13**) using the *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide reagent based on previously developed methodology<sup>19</sup> and report that this strategy can routinely and efficiently be applied to the labelling of this particular class of oligonucleotide-like macromolecules. Thirteen PNAs, of the same sequence but presenting selected modifications of the pseudo-peptidic backbone were labelled with fluorine-18 ([<sup>18</sup>F]**c-OLP\_1-13**) (Figure 2).

## Results and discussion

### Chemistry

Table 1 summarizes the principal characteristics of the 13 decameric PNAs (**OLP\_1-13**) used as starting material in the present study. All PNAs (**OLP\_1-13**) present the same base sequence (CTCATACTCT), and were all functionalized at their N-terminus end with a cysteine residue whereas their C-terminus end were all amidified ((HS)Cys-CTCATACTCT-NH<sub>2</sub>) (see also Figure 2).

Besides the original PNA sequence (**OLP\_1**), 12 decameric PNA analogues, showing the same sequence, but presenting selected modification of the pseudo-peptidic backbone were used (**OLP\_2-13**). Within this original PNA sequence (**OLP\_1**), modified thymine residues (T) were introduced at positions



**Figure 2.** Structure and prosthetic [*radio*]labelling of an N-terminus-modified PNA (OLP)

**Table 1.** Sequences and analytical data for OLP\_1-13/c-OLP\_1-13

Name	Sequence <sup>a</sup>	X <sup>b</sup>	Y <sup>c</sup>	HPLC <sup>d,e</sup> (min)	MS calculated/ found <sup>d,f</sup>
OLP_1/c-OLP_1	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	—	—	13.1	2905 2903
OLP_2/c-OLP_2	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>2</sub>	Y <sub>1</sub>	12.3	3455 3452
OLP_3/c-OLP_3	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>1</sub>	Y <sub>2</sub>	11.7	3341 3340
OLP_4/c-OLP_4	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>1</sub>	Y <sub>1</sub>	11.8	3341 3342
OLP_5/c-OLP_5	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>2</sub>	Y <sub>3</sub>	13.1	3421 3423
OLP_6/c-OLP_6	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>3</sub>	Y <sub>2</sub>	11.2	3474 3473
OLP_7/c-OLP_7	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>1</sub>	Y <sub>5</sub>	11.3	3684 3683
OLP_8/c-OLP_8	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>1</sub>	Y <sub>3</sub>	11.9	3309 3306
OLP_9/c-OLP_9	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>1</sub>	Y <sub>4</sub>	11.5	3684 3687
OLP_10/c-OLP_10	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>4</sub>	—	11.3	3110 3121
OLP_11/c-OLP_11	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>5</sub>	—	12.4	3122 3123
OLP_12/c-OLP_12	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>6</sub>	—	17.3	3073 3071
OLP_13/c-OLP_13	(HS)Cys-C T C A T A C T C T-NH <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>7</sub>	—	13.6	3203 3200

<sup>a</sup> A: adenine; C: cytosine; G: guanine; T: thymine; T: modified thymine; see Figure 3(A) and 3(B).

<sup>b</sup> X<sub>1-7</sub>: see Figure 3(B).

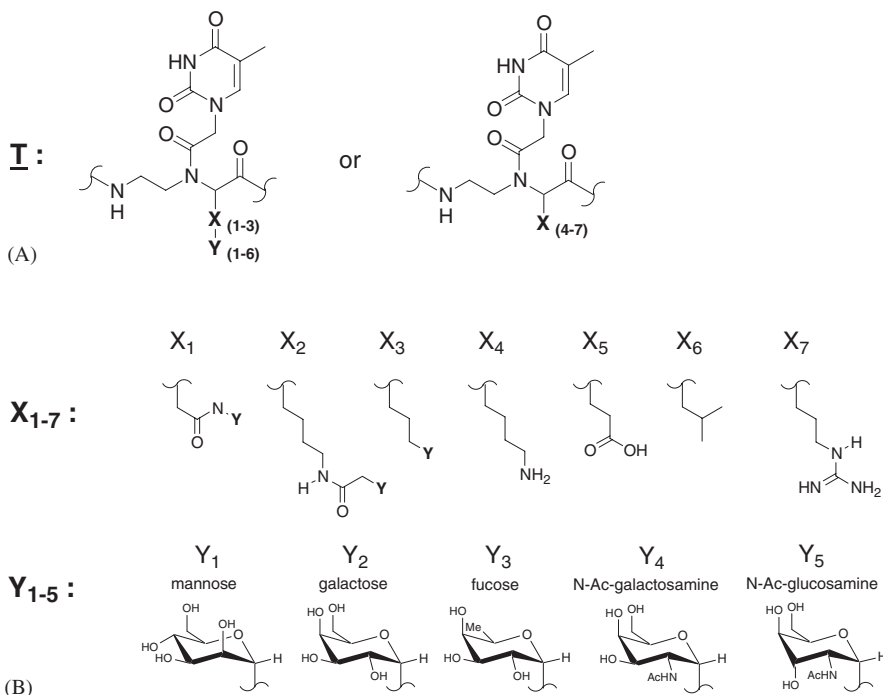
<sup>c</sup> Y<sub>1-5</sub>: see Figure 3(B).

<sup>d</sup> Analytical data for the conjugated PNAs (c-OLP\_1-13).

<sup>e</sup> HPLC R<sub>t</sub> (see HPLC C).

<sup>f</sup> Mass spectrometry data (Cary Spectrometer, Varian).

5 and 8 (OLP\_2-5) or 2, 5 and 8 (OLP\_6-13). Structural characteristics of the backbone modifications are indicated in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 3(A) and (B) and include either (1) an amino acid side chain: L-Lys, L-Glu, L-Leu or L-Arg (respectively coded X<sub>4</sub>, X<sub>5</sub>, X<sub>6</sub> and X<sub>7</sub>) or (2) a glycosyl moiety: mannose, galactose, fucose, N-Ac-galactosamine or N-Ac-glucosamine



**Figure 3. Modified thymine residues (I): nature of the chemical modifications**

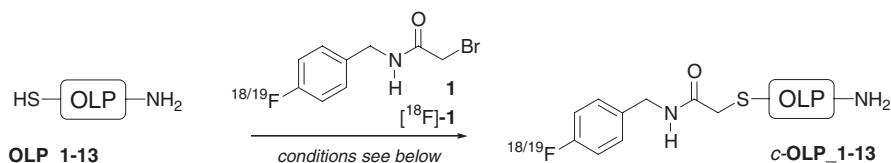
(respectively coded Y<sub>1</sub>, Y<sub>2</sub>, Y<sub>3</sub>, Y<sub>4</sub> and Y<sub>5</sub>), attached via an appropriate alkyl-based spacer (X<sub>1</sub>, X<sub>2</sub>, X<sub>3</sub>).

*N*-(4-Fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide (**1**) was prepared in 60–65% non-optimized yields from commercially available 4-fluorobenzylamine and bromoacetyl bromide in the presence of *N*-methylmorpholine.<sup>11</sup>

The conjugation of the *N*-(4-fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide (**1**, about 10 equivalent excess) to the PNAs (**OLP\_1-13**), bearing a cysteine at the N-terminus end, was carried out in a mixture of acetonitrile and phosphate buffer saline (PBS, 0.1 M aq. pH 8.75), at 60°C for 20 min (Scheme 1). These conditions gave the desired non-labelled conjugated PNAs (**c-OLP\_1-13**) that were purified by semi-preparative HPLC (Table 1). Mass spectrometry analysis confirmed the mono-conjugation of the *N*-(4-fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide with the PNAs (Table 1).

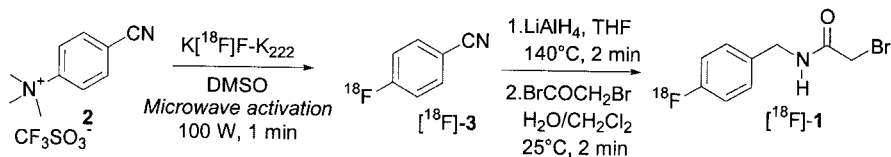
### Radiochemistry

*Fluorination of the conjugating reagent: preparation of N-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide ([<sup>18</sup>F]-1).* *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide ([<sup>18</sup>F]-**1**, Scheme 2), was synthesized in three steps from 4-cyano-*N,N,N*-trimethylanilinium trifluoromethanesulfonate (**2**, prepared from commercial 4-dimethylaminobenzonitrile<sup>11</sup>). The first radiochemical step, the introduction of fluorine-18 into the benzonitrile ring, was performed in hot DMSO, using the

Conditions

for fluorine-19 : PBS 0.1 M, pH 8.75 / ACN (1/1 v:v), 20 min, 60°C

for fluorine-18 : HEPES 0.1 M, pH 7.9 (or PBS 0.1 M, pH 8.75) / ACN (1/1 v:v), 10 min, 75°C

**Scheme 1. Synthesis of conjugated PNAs (c-OLP\_1-13)****Scheme 2. Preparation of *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide ([<sup>18</sup>F]-1)**

K[<sup>18</sup>F]F-K<sub>222</sub> complex by microwave activation at 100 W for 1 min, giving the desired 4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzonitrile ([<sup>18</sup>F]-3). The second step, the reduction of the cyano function, was performed with LiAlH<sub>4</sub> in refluxing THF (120°C) for 2 min, giving the desired labelled 4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzylamine. The final step, the condensation with bromoacetyl bromide, occurred cleanly in 2 min at room temperature in a 10/1 (v/v) mixture of CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>/H<sub>2</sub>O. Semi-preparative HPLC gave pure *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide ([<sup>18</sup>F]-1). Typically, starting from a batch of 29.6–31.4 GBq (800–850 mCi) of [<sup>18</sup>F]fluoride, we produced 3.7–4.8 GBq (100–130 mCi) of HPLC-purified *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide ([<sup>18</sup>F]-1) in about 90 min.

*Conjugation of the N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide with the PNAs. Conjugation of the PNAs (OLP\_1-13) with the HPLC-purified *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide [<sup>18</sup>F]-1 (Scheme 1) was carried out in a mixture of acetonitrile and HEPES buffer (0.1 M, pH 7.9) for 10 min at 75°C, according to a slightly modified procedure already published.<sup>19</sup> Phosphate buffer saline (PBS, 0.1 M aq. pH 8.75) was also used in the present study without showing notable yield differences. The labelled conjugated PNAs ([<sup>18</sup>F]c-OLP\_1-13) were then purified by RP-HPLC. The procedure has been fully automated on our Zymate robot system.

*Quality control of the fluorine-18-labelled conjugated PNAs ([<sup>18</sup>F]c-OLP\_1-13).* As demonstrated by HPLC analysis, radiosynthesized labelled conjugated PNAs ([<sup>18</sup>F]c-OLP\_1-13) co-eluted with the authentic synthesized reference compounds. The fluorinated conjugated PNAs ([<sup>18</sup>F]c-OLP\_1-13) were found to be >95% chemically and radiochemically pure. The

preparations were shown to be free of non-radioactive starting PNAs and radiochemically stable for at least 120 min.

## Experimental

### General

*Chemicals.* Chemicals were purchased from Aldrich, Sigma and Fluka and were used without further purification. Thirteen PNAs (**OLP-1-13**) (10 mers) were used in the present study and were synthesized at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

*Chromatography systems.* Thin-layer chromatography (TLC) was run on precoated plates of silica gel 60F<sub>254</sub> (Merck). The compounds were localized at 254 nm using a UV lamp. Flash chromatography was conducted on silica gel 63–200  $\mu\text{m}$  (Merck) at 0.3 bar (compressed air). The following HPLC systems were used:

HPLC A: semi-preparative normal-phase HPLC: column Prep Nova-Pak<sup>®</sup> HR Silica Waters (7.8  $\times$  300 mm, 60  $\text{\AA}$ , 6  $\mu\text{m}$ ), UV detector 440 Waters, Geiger-Müller detector; solvents: CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>/EtOAc (95/5 : v/v); isocratic elution, flow rate: 5 ml/min.

HPLC B: semi-preparative RP-HPLC: column C18  $\mu$ Bondapak<sup>®</sup> Waters (300  $\times$  7.8 mm, porosity 10  $\mu\text{m}$ ), 600 Controller Gradient system Waters, UV detector multiwavelength 490E Waters (254 nm); solvents: X: 0.1% TFA in water and Y: 0.1% TFA in 90% ACN/10% H<sub>2</sub>O; gradient elution: linear 30 min from 90/10 (X/Y) to 50/50 (X/Y), then wash-out 10 min at 50/50 (X/Y), flow rate: 5 ml/min.

HPLC C: analytical RP-HPLC: column Partisil ODS3 Waters (4.6  $\times$  150 mm, porosity 5  $\mu\text{m}$ ), 600 Pump and 600 Controller Waters, UV detector Series 1100 (254 nm) Hewlett Packard, Flow One Scintillation Analyzer Packard equipped with a positron-dedicated cell for radioactivity monitoring; solvents: X: 0.1% TFA in water and Y: 0.1% TFA in 90% ACN/10% H<sub>2</sub>O; gradient elution: linear 30 min from 90/10 (X/Y) to 50/50 (X/Y), then wash-out 10 min at 50/50 (X/Y); flow rate: 1.3 ml/min.

*Spectroscopy.* NMR spectra were recorded on a Bruker AMX (300 MHz) apparatus using the hydrogenated residue of the deuterated solvents (DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>,  $\delta$  = 2.50 ppm) and/or TMS as internal standards for <sup>1</sup>H NMR as well as the deuterated solvents (DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>,  $\delta$  = 39.5 ppm) and/or TMS as internal standards for <sup>13</sup>C NMR. The chemical shifts are reported in ppm, downfield from TMS (<sup>1</sup>H and <sup>13</sup>C) (s, d, t, q, dd, m, b for singlet, doublet, triplet, quadruplet, doublet of doublet, multiplet (or multi sharp-peak system) and broad, respectively). The mass spectra were measured on a Cary Spectrometer (Varian) and a Quattro VG (Fison, Manchester, UK).

*Miscellaneous.* Radiosyntheses using fluorine-18 were performed in a 7.5 cm lead-shielded cell using a computer-assisted Zymate robot system (Zymark Corporation, USA). Microwave activation was performed with a MicroWell 10 oven (2.45 GHz), Labwell AB (Sweden). Specific radioactivity was determined as follows: the area of the absorbance peak corresponding to the radiolabelled product was measured on the HPLC chromatogram and compared to a standard curve relating mass to absorbance.

*Radioisotope availability.* No-carrier-added aqueous [ $^{18}\text{F}$ ]fluoride ion was produced on a CGR-MeV 520 cyclotron by irradiation of a 2 ml water target using a 17 MeV proton beam on 95%-enriched [ $^{18}\text{O}$ ]water by the [ $^{18}\text{O}(\text{p},\text{n})^{18}\text{F}$ ] nuclear reaction and was transferred to the appropriate hot cell. Typical production: 29.6–31.4 GBq (800–850 mCi) of [ $^{18}\text{F}$ ]F $^{-}$  at the end of bombardment for a 20  $\mu\text{A}$ , 45 min (56 000  $\mu\text{C}$ ) irradiation. A complete description of the target hardware and operation can be found in reference Dolle *et al.*<sup>11</sup>

### Chemistry

*N*-(4-fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide (**1**). Synthesized from commercially available 4-fluorobenzylamine according to Dolle *et al.*<sup>11</sup> Rf (heptane/EtOAc: 50/50) : 0.35.  $^1\text{H}$  NMR (DMSO- $d_6$ , 300.0K):  $\delta$ : 8.80 (bt, 1H); 7.32 (dd,  $J$ : 8.1, 5.70 Hz, 2H); 7.15 (t,  $J$ : 8.1 Hz, 2H); 4.31 (d,  $J$ : 6 Hz, 2H); 3.92 (s, 2H).  $^{13}\text{C}$  NMR (DMSO- $d_6$ , 300.0K):  $\delta$ : 166.1 [C]; 161.3 [C, d,  $J$ : 249 Hz]; 135.0 [C, d,  $J$ : 2 Hz]; 129.2 [CH, d,  $J$ : 8 Hz]; 115.1 [CH, d,  $J$ : 23 Hz]; 41.9 [CH $_2$ ]; 29.4 [CH $_2$ ]. MS (DCI/NH $_4^+$ ): C $_9$ H $_9$ BrFNO: 265 [M + NH $_4^+$ ]; 263 [M + NH $_4^+$ ]; 248 [M + H $^+$ ]; 246 [M + H $^+$ ].

*Conjugation of PNAs with N*-(4-fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide (**1**). *General procedure for preparation of non-labelled conjugated PNAs (c-OLP\_1-13).* All non-labelled conjugated PNAs (**c-OLP\_1-13**) were prepared according to a slightly modified procedure described by Hamzavi *et al.*<sup>20</sup> Briefly, to a solution of PNAs (**OLP\_1-13**, 1.3 mg) in phosphate buffer saline (0.5 ml, 0.1 M, pH 8.75) was added an excess of *N*-(4-fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide (10 equivalent) in acetonitrile (0.5 ml) and the mixture was heated at 60°C for 20 min (Scheme 1). Solvents were removed under reduced pressure and the conjugated PNAs (**c-OLP\_1-13**) were purified by semi-preparative RP-HPLC before characterization by mass spectrometry. Analytical HPLC data (HPLC C) of **c-OLP\_1-13** and mass spectrometry analyses are summarized in Table 1.

### Radiochemistry

*Preparation of the K[ $^{18}\text{F}$ ]F-K $_{222}$ -complex.* In order to recover and recycle the [ $^{18}\text{O}$ ]water target, the 2 ml of aqueous [ $^{18}\text{F}$ ]fluoride from the target holder were



passed through an anion exchange resin (Sep-Pak<sup>®</sup> Light Waters AccellTM Plus QMA Cartridge in the chloride form, washed with 5 ml 1 M aq. NaHCO<sub>3</sub> and then rinsed with 50 ml of water) by helium pressure (1.5–2.0 bar). Helium was blown through the column to maximally extract the last traces of [<sup>18</sup>O]water. See References<sup>21,22</sup> for more practical details. The [<sup>18</sup>F]fluoride ion was then eluted from the resin using 1.0 ml of a 4.5 mg/ml aqueous K<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> solution into a Vacutainer<sup>®</sup> tube containing 12.0–15.0 mg of Kryptofix<sup>®</sup><sub>222</sub> (K<sub>222</sub>: 4,7,13,16,21,24-hexaoxa-1,10-diazabicyclo[8.8.8]hexacosane). The resulting solution was then gently concentrated to dryness at 145–150°C under a nitrogen stream for 10 min to give no-carrier-added K[<sup>18</sup>F]F-K<sub>222</sub> complex as a white semi-solid residue.<sup>23</sup>

*N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide ([<sup>18</sup>F]-**1**). Synthesized in three steps starting from 4-cyano-*N,N,N*-trimethylanilinium trifluoromethanesulfonate according to the procedure described in references.<sup>11,12</sup> *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide was purified using HPLC (HPLC A: Rt: 10.0–10.5 min). Typically, 3.7–4.8 GBq (100–130 mCi) of pure *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide could be obtained in 85–95 min starting from a 29.6–31.4 GBq (800–850 mCi) aliquot of a cyclotron-produced [<sup>18</sup>F]F<sup>−</sup> batch.

*General procedure for the preparation of fluorine-18 conjugated PNAs ([<sup>18</sup>F]c-OLP\_1-13)*. 1 mg of OLP (**OLP\_1-13**) dissolved in a mixture of 200 µl of acetonitrile and 500 µl of HEPES buffer (0.1 M, pH 7.9) or 500 µl of phosphate buffer saline (PBS, 0.1 M aq. pH 8.75) was mixed with the HPLC purified *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide, redissolved in 300 µl of acetonitrile, and heated without stirring under a slight flow of nitrogen for 10 min at 75°C (Nitrogen flow caused concentration of the reaction mixture). 1 ml of deionized water was finally added and labelled conjugated PNAs ([<sup>18</sup>F]c-**OLP\_1-13**) were separated from starting PNAs (**OLP\_1-13**) and unreacted *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide by semi-preparative RP-HPLC (HPLC B).

*Formulation and quality control*. The HPLC-fraction containing the labelled conjugated PNAs ([<sup>18</sup>F]c-**OLP\_1-13**) was concentrated to dryness under reduced pressure, taken up with physiological saline and finally filtered on a 0.22 µm GS-Millipore filter (vented). As demonstrated by HPLC analysis (HPLC C), radiosynthesized labelled conjugated PNAs ([<sup>18</sup>F]c-**OLP\_1-13**) co-eluted with the authentic synthesized reference compounds. The radiolabelled products were found to be >95% chemically and radiochemically pure. The preparations were shown to be free of non-radioactive precursor and radiochemically stable for at least 120 min.

## Conclusion

In the present study, we report the fluorine-18 labelling of 13 decameric PNAs (**OLP\_1-13**) with fluorine-18 using our *N*-(4-[<sup>18</sup>F]fluorobenzyl)-2-bromoacetamide reagent. The whole synthetic procedure, including the preparation of the fluorine-18-labelled reagent, provides up to 0.9 GBq (25 mCi) of HPLC-purified labelled PNAs ([<sup>18</sup>F]**c-OLP\_1-13**) in 160 min with a specific radioactivity of 45–65 GBq/μmol (1.2–1.7 Ci/μmol) at the end of synthesis starting from 29.6 to 31.4 GBq (800–850 mCi) of [<sup>18</sup>F]Fluoride.

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