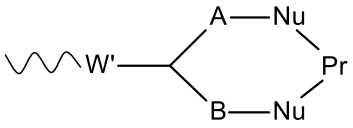
CLAIMS

1. A conjugate of a protein or peptide with a therapeutic, diagnostic or labelling agent, the conjugate containing a protein or peptide bonding portion and having a linker which connects the therapeutic, diagnostic or labelling agent to the protein or peptide bonding portion, the linker including a polyethylene glycol portion; in which the protein or peptide bonding portion has the general formula:



(I)

in which Pr represents the protein or peptide, each Nu represents a nucleophile present in or attached to the protein or peptide, each of A and B independently represents a C_{1-4}alkylene or alkenylene chain, and W' represents an electron withdrawing group or a group obtained by reduction of an electron withdrawing group; and in which the polyethylene glycol portion is or includes a pendant polyethylene glycol chain which has a terminal end group of formula $-CH_2CH_2OR$ in which R represents a hydrogen atom, an alkyl group, or an optionally substituted aryl group.

2. A conjugate according to Claim 1, in which R represents a hydrogen atom or a C_{1-4}alkyl group.

3. A conjugate according to Claim1 or 2, in which the pendant polyethylene glycol chain has a number average molecular weight of up to 75,000 g/mole.

4. A conjugate according to Claim3, in which the pendant polyethylene glycol chain contains from 2 to 50 polyethylene glycol units.

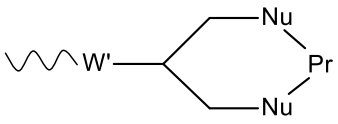
5. A conjugate according to any preceding claim, in which each Nu represents a sulfur atom present in a cysteine residue in the protein or peptide Pr.

6. A conjugate according to any of Claims 1 to 4, in which each Nu represents an imidazole group present in a polyhistidine tag attached to the protein or peptide Pr.

7. A conjugate according to any preceding claim, which comprises a therapeutic agent.

8. A conjugate according to any preceding claim, in which the protein is a receptor or ligand binding protein or an antibody or antibody fragment.

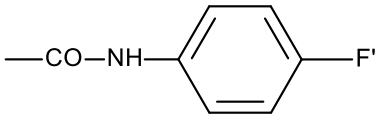
9. A conjugate according to any preceding claim, in which the protein or peptide bonding portion has the formula



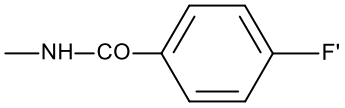
(Ia).

10. A conjugate according to any preceding claim, in which W' represents a keto group or a CH.OH group.

11. A conjugate according to any preceding claim, which includes the grouping:



(Va) or

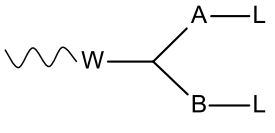


(Vb)

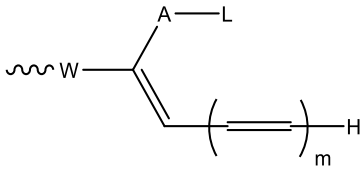
in which F' represents the protein or peptide bonding portion of formula I.

12. A conjugate according to any preceding claim, which includes two or more of the pendant polyethylene glycol chains.

13. A conjugating reagent capable of reacting with a protein or peptide, and including a therapeutic, diagnostic or labelling agent, the reagent having a linker which connects the therapeutic, diagnostic or labelling agent to a functional grouping, the linker including a polyethylene glycol portion; the functional grouping having the formula:



(II) or



(II')

in which W represents an electron withdrawing group, each of A and B independently represents a C_{1-4}alkylene or alkenylene chain, and each L independently represents a leaving group; and in which the polyethylene glycol portion is or includes a pendant polyethylene glycol chain which has a terminal end group of formula $-CH_2CH_2OR$ in which R represents a hydrogen atom, an alkyl group, or an optionally substituted aryl group.

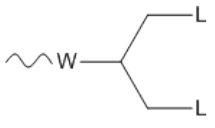
14. A conjugating reagent according to Claim 13, in which R represents a hydrogen atom or a C_{1-4}alkyl group.

15. A conjugating reagent according to Claim 13 or 14, in which the pendant polyethylene glycol chain has a molecular weight of up to 75,000.

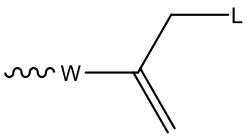
16. A conjugating reagent according to Claim 15, in which the pendant polyethylene glycol chain contains from 2 to 50 polyethylene glycol units.

17. A conjugating reagent according to any of Claims 13 to 16, which comprises a therapeutic agent.

18. A conjugating reagent according to any of Claims 13 to 17, in which the functional grouping has the formula



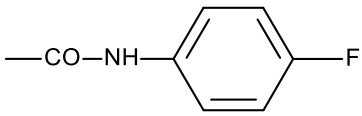
(IIa) or



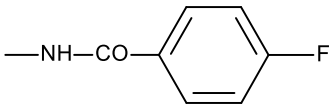
(II'a)

19. A conjugating reagent according to any of Claims 13 to 18, in which W represents a keto group.

20. A conjugating reagent according to any of Claims 13 to 19, which includes the grouping:



(VIa) or



(VIb)

in which F represents the functional grouping of formula II or II'.

21. A conjugating reagent according to any of Claims 13 to 20, in which each L represents -SP, -OP, $-SO_2P$, $-OSO_2P$, $-N^+PR^2R^3$, halogen, or -OØ, in which P represents a hydrogen atom or an alkyl, aryl, or alkyl-aryl group, or is a group which includes a portion $-(CH_2CH_2O)_n-$ in which n is a number of two or more, and each of R^2 and R^3 independently represents a hydrogen atom, a C_{1-4}alkyl group, or a group P, and Ø represents a substituted aryl group containing at least one electron withdrawing substituent.

22. A conjugating reagent according to Claim 21, in which each L represents a group of formula –SP or $–SO_2P$, and P represents a tosyl group or a group which includes a portion $-(CH_2CH_2O)_n-$.

23. A conjugating reagent according to any of Claims 13 to 22, which includes two or more of the pendant polyethylene glycol chains.

24. A process for the preparation of a conjugate according to any of Claims 1 to 13, which comprises reacting a conjugation reagent according to any of Claims 13 to 23 with a protein or a peptide.