Blockade of CD40 ligation or a CD40L gene knockout can retard atherosclerotic plaque development in atherosclerosis-prone mice (Mach F *et al.*, *Nature* 394: 200-203, 1998; and Lutgens E *et al.*, *Nat Med* 11: 1313-1316, 1999). CD40 ligation on immune cells with stimulating anti-CD40 antibodies has been reported to induce the expression of Sema4D (CD100) (Kumanogoh A *et al.*, *Immunity* 13: 621-31, 2000).

[0005] SEMA4D has been implicated in various processes such as enhancing the immune response, angiogenesis, epithelial morphogenesis and bone remodeling (Kruger RP *et al.*, *Nat Rev Mol Cell Biol* 6: 789-800, 2005; Pasterkamp R.J., *Nat Rev Neurosci* 13:605-618, 2012; and Kang S *et al.*, *Seminars in Cell & Dev Biol* 24:163-171, 2013). Lymphocytes, macrophages, endothelial cells and platelets in atherosclerotic plaques express plexin-B1 on their membrane surface, a high affinity receptor for Sema4D (Basile JR *et al.*, *Moll Cell Biol* 25: 6889-6898, 2005; Delaire S *et al.*, *J Immunol* 166: 4348-4354, 2001; and Chabbert-de Ponnat I *et al.*, *Int Immunol* 17: 439-447, 2005). Sema4D expressed by T cells or released from the T cell membrane can, therefore, have certain effects on cells located in atherosclerotic plaques (Basile JR *et al.*, *Mol. Cell Biol* 25: 6889-6898, 2005; Delaire S *et al.*, *J Immunol* 166: 4348-4354, 2001; and Chabbert-de Ponnat I *et al.*, *Int Immunol* 17: 439-447, 2005). Previous studies revealed pro-angiogenic activity of Sema4D on endothelial cells *in vitro* and *in vivo* (Conrotto P *et al.*, *Blood* 105: 4321-4329, 2005; and Basil JR *et al.*, *Cancer Res* 64: 5212-5224, 2004.). Moreover, high level of expression of Sema4D was observed in several squamous cell carcinomas suggesting a critical role of Sema4D in tumor-induced angiogenesis *in vivo* (Basile JR *et al.*, *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 103: 9017-9022, 2006.). Thus, Sema4D can affect plaque growth by, *e.g.*, promoting the neovascularization process occurring in atheroma. In fact, one study revealed that deleting the Sema4D gene in atherosclerosis-prone ApoE deficient (ApoE-/-) mice delayed the growth of atherosclerotic plaques and neovascularization in the plaque area, suggesting that blocking the Sema4D signal during the progression phase of atherosclerosis can prevent the plaque growth and neovascularization (Yukawa K *et al.*, *Int. J Mol. Med.* 26: 39-44, 2010).

BRIEF SUMMARY

[0006] Methods for using semaphorin 4D binding molecules for treatment of atherosclerosis are disclosed herein. According to examples of the invention illustrated herein, there is provided a use of an effective amount of an isolated antibody or antigen-binding

fragment thereof which specifically binds to Semaphorin-4D (SEMA4D) in the preparation of a medicament for inhibiting, suppressing, reducing or delaying growth of atherosclerotic plaques in a subject having atherosclerosis. In one aspect, the present invention refers to use of an effective amount of an isolated antibody or antigen-binding fragment thereof which specifically binds to Semaphorin-4D (SEMA4D) in the preparation of a medicament for inhibiting, suppressing, reducing or delaying growth of atherosclerotic plaques in a subject having atherosclerosis, wherein the antibody or antigen-binding fragment thereof inhibits SEMA4D interaction with its receptor. Also disclosed is a method for reducing, inhibiting, suppressing and/or delaying atherosclerotic

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. Use of an effective amount of an isolated antibody or antigen-binding fragment thereof which specifically binds to Semaphorin-4D (SEMA4D) in the preparation of a medicament for inhibiting, suppressing, reducing or delaying growth of atherosclerotic plaques in a subject having atherosclerosis, wherein the antibody or antigen-binding fragment thereof inhibits SEMA4D interaction with its receptor.

2. The use of claim 1, wherein the antibody or antigen-binding fragment thereof can inhibit, delay, or reduce neovascularization around atherosclerotic plaques in a subject.

3. Use of an isolated antibody or antigen-binding fragment thereof that specifically binds to Semaphorin-4D (SEMA4D) in the preparation of a medicament for inhibiting, delaying, or reducing neovascularization in a subject having atherosclerosis.

4. The use of any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the receptor is Plexin-B1, Plexin-B2, or CD72.

5. The use of any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the antibody or antigen-binding fragment thereof inhibits SEMA4D-mediated Plexin-B1 signal transduction.

6. The use of any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the subject has cardiovascular disease.

7. The use of claim 6, wherein the cardiovascular disease is selected from the group consisting of coronary heart disease, ischemic heart disease, coronary artery disease, cardiomyopathy, hypertensive heart disease, heart failure, cor pulmonale, cardiac dysrhythmias, inflammatory heart disease endocarditis, inflammatory cardiomegaly, myocarditis, valvular heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, peripheral arterial disease, congenital heart disease, rheumatic heart disease, and a combination thereof.

8. The use of any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the antibody or antigen-binding fragment thereof comprises a variable heavy chain (VH) comprising VHCDRs 1-3 comprising SEQ ID NOs 6, 7, and 8, respectively, and a variable light chain (VL) comprising VLCDRs 1-3 comprising SEQ ID NOs 14, 15, and 16, respectively.

9. The use of claim 8, wherein the VH and VL comprise, respectively, SEQ ID NO: 9 and SEQ ID NO: 17 or SEQ ID NO: 10 and SEQ ID NO: 18.