

SELF-WETTING POROUS MEMBRANES (II)

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] Aromatic hydrophobic polymers such as polysulfone and polyethersulfone are attractive as membrane polymers for one or more of the following reasons: a high glass transition temperatures, amorphous glassy state, thermal and oxidative stability, excellent strength and flexibility, resistance to extreme pHs, and low creep even at elevated temperatures. However, these polymers are inherently hydrophobic and therefore porous membranes made from these polymers are not wettable by water.

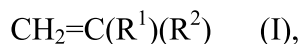
[0002] Attempts have been made to improve the surface wettability of porous membranes made from such polymers by numerous methods including coating and crosslinking a hydrophilic polymer, grafting of hydrophilic monomers by e-beam, gamma radiation, or UV or other radiation, surface oxidation, surface-initiated free radical grafting, blending with hydrophilic additives such as polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP), copolymers of PVP, polyvinylalcohol (PVA), copolymers of PVA, polyethylene oxide (PEO), copolymers of PEO and polypropylene oxide, and in situ polymerization of hydrophilic monomers.

[0003] Drawbacks are associated with one or more of the above attempted methods. For example, with the methods involving blending of hydrophilic additives, the additives tend to leach out of the porous membrane on prolonged use in aqueous environments. Approaches involving coating and crosslinking a hydrophilic polymer tend to shrink or modify the membrane pores, thereby limiting the usefulness of the membranes.

[0004] The foregoing shows that there exists an unmet need for preparing porous membranes from aromatic hydrophobic polymers that would produce water wettable surfaces and the surface wettability would be stable over extended periods of use.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] The invention provides a self-wetting porous membrane comprising an aromatic hydrophobic polymer and a wetting agent comprising a copolymer of formula A-B or A-B-A, wherein A is a hydrophilic segment comprising a polymerized monomer or mixture of monomers, wherein the monomer is of the formula (I):



wherein R¹ is hydrogen or alkyl, and R² is selected from substituted or unsubstituted heterocyclyl, substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl, formylamino, formylaminoalkyl, aminocarbonyl, alkylcarbonyloxy, and aminocarbonylalkyl substituted with a zwitterionic group, and B is polyethersulfone, wherein segments B and A are linked through an oxygen atom. The invention also provides a method of preparing such a self-wetting porous membrane.

[0006] The self-wetting porous membrane of the invention has high water wettability as evidenced by its high critical wetting surface tension (CWST) of 71 dynes/cm². The wetting additive has high degree of compatibility with the aromatic hydrophobic polymer and therefore does not leach out or leaches out only minimally. The wetting additive also distributes itself uniformly in the porous membrane. The porous membrane has high water permeability, for example, in the range of 330-620 LMH. The porous membrane also has a low non-specific protein binding (BSA), indicated by low level of fouling.

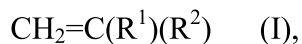
BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING(S)

[0007] Figure 1 depicts the BSA flux as a function of throughput for a PES membrane prepared with a WE3 wetting agent (PVP-co-PVAc) and a self-wetting membrane prepared with copolymer of Example 3 having 51 mol% of PVP in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

[0008] Figure 2 depicts the BSA throughput as a function of time for the membranes depicted in Figure 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0009] In an embodiment, the invention provides a self-wetting porous membrane comprising an aromatic hydrophobic polymer and a wetting agent comprising a copolymer of formula A-B or A-B-A, wherein A is a hydrophilic segment comprising a polymerized monomer or mixture of monomers, wherein the monomer is of the formula (I):



wherein R¹ is hydrogen or alkyl, and R² is selected from substituted or unsubstituted heterocyclyl, substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl, formylamino, formylaminoalkyl, aminocarbonyl, alkylcarbonyloxy, and aminocarbonylalkyl substituted with a zwitterionic

group, and B is polyethersulfone, wherein segments B and A are linked through an oxygen atom. "A" further comprises an end group.

[0010] The term "heterocyclyl" as used herein refers to a monocyclic heterocyclic group or a bicyclic heterocyclic group. The monocyclic heterocycle is a three-, four-, five-, six- or seven-membered ring containing at least one heteroatom independently selected from the group consisting of O, N, N(H) and S. The three- or four-membered ring contains zero or one double bond and a heteroatom selected from the group consisting of O, N, N(H) and S. The five-membered ring contains zero or one double bond, and one, two or three heteroatoms selected from the group consisting of O, N, N(H) and S. The six-membered ring contains zero, one or two double bonds and one, two or three heteroatoms selected from the group consisting of O, N, N(H) and S. The seven-membered ring contains zero, one, two, or three double bonds and one, two or three heteroatoms selected from the group consisting of O, N, N(H) and S. The monocyclic heterocycle can be unsubstituted or substituted and is connected to the parent molecular moiety through any substitutable carbon atom or any substitutable nitrogen atom contained within the monocyclic heterocycle.

[0011] Examples of heterocyclyl groups include pyridyl, piperidinyl, piperazinyl, pyrazinyl, pyrrolyl, pyranyl, tetrahydropyranyl, tetrahydrothiopyranyl, pyrrolidinyl, pyrrolidinonyl, furanyl, tetrahydrofuranlyl, thiophenyl, tetrahydrothiophenyl, purinyl, pyrimidinyl, thiazolyl, thiazolidinyl, thiazolinyl, oxazolyl, triazolyl, tetrazolyl, tetrazinyl, benzoxazolyl, morpholinyl, thiophosphorinyl, quinolinyl, and isoquinolinyl.

[0012] The term "heteroaryl" refers to a cyclic aromatic radical having from five to ten ring atoms of which at least one atom is O, S, or N, and the remaining atoms are carbon. Examples of heteroaryl radicals include pyridyl, pyrazinyl, pyrimidinyl, pyrrolyl, pyrazolyl, imidazolyl, thiazolyl, oxazolyl, isooxazolyl, thiadiazolyl, oxadiazolyl, thiophenyl, furanyl, quinolinyl, and isoquinolinyl.

[0013] Substituents on the heterocyclyl or the heteroaryl moiety can be alkyl, halo, hydroxy, nitro, carboxy, keto, oxo, amino, sulfoxy, sulfonyl, sulfonyloxy, phospho, phosphono, or any combination thereof. For example, a ring CH₂ group can be replaced by a C=O group. Substitution can be on a carbon atom or on a hetero atom such as ring nitrogen, for example, an alkyl group on ring nitrogen providing a quaternary ammonium group.

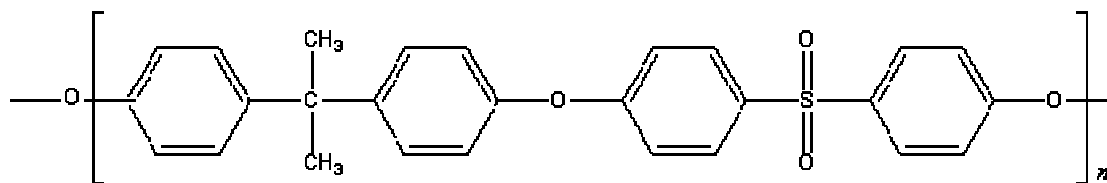
[0014] In accordance with an embodiment, the alkyl group is preferably a C₁-C₆ alkyl. Examples of alkyl groups include methyl, ethyl, n-propyl, isopropyl, n-butyl, sec-butyl, isobutyl, tert-butyl, n-pentyl, isopentyl, n-hexyl, and the like.

[0015] A zwitterionic group comprises a positively charged group and a negatively charged group separated by a suitable spacer atom, such as carbon, oxygen, or sulfur, or a moiety such as an alkyl moiety. Examples of positively charged groups include ammonium and quaternary ammonium groups. Examples negatively charged groups include carboxylate, sulfonate, and phosphonate.

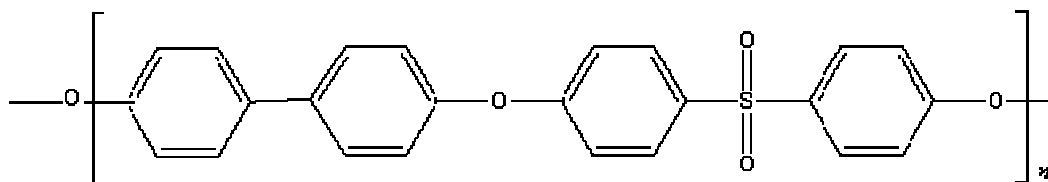
[0016] In an embodiment, R^1 is hydrogen or methyl, and R^2 is selected from pyrrolidinonyl, pyridinyl, imidazolyl, N-methylimidazolyl, formylamino, formylaminomethyl, aminocarbonyl, methylcarbonyloxy, and aminocarbonylpropyl substituted with a zwitterionic group.

[0017] In a particular embodiment, A is a hydrophilic segment comprising a polymerized monomer or mixture of monomers selected from 1-vinylpyrrolid-2-one, N-[3-(dimethylamino)propyl]methacrylamide, vinyl acetate, 1-vinylimidazole, 1-vinyl-3-alkylimidazolium, 1-vinyl-2-pyridine, 1-vinyl-4-pyridine, acrylamide, N-vinylformamide, and N-allylformamide, and 3-(methacrylamidopropyl)dimethyl(3-sulfopropyl)ammonium inner salt.

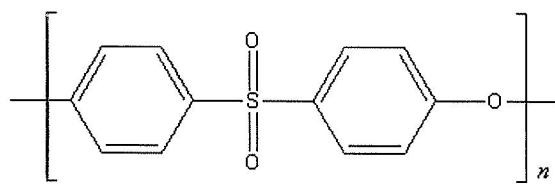
[0018] The aromatic hydrophobic polymer to form the membrane can be selected from polysulfone (PSU), polyphenylene ether sulfone (PPES), polyethersulfone (PES), polycarbonate (PC), polyether ether ketone (PEEK), poly(phthalazinone ether sulfone ketone) (PPESK), polyphenyl sulfide (PPS), polyphenyl ether (PPE), polyphenylene oxide (PPO) and polyetherimide (PEI), which have the following structures:



PSU

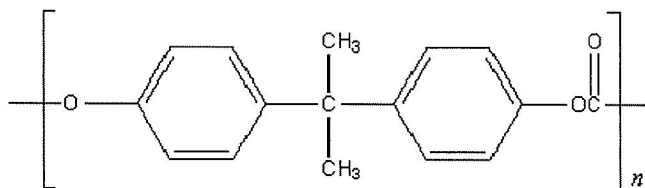


PPES



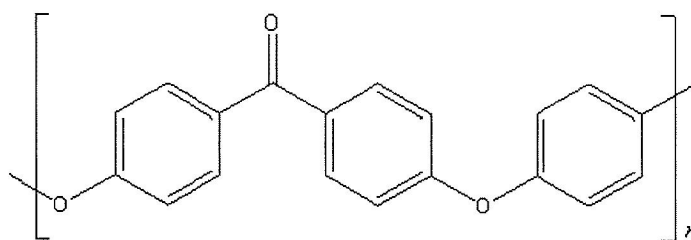
PES

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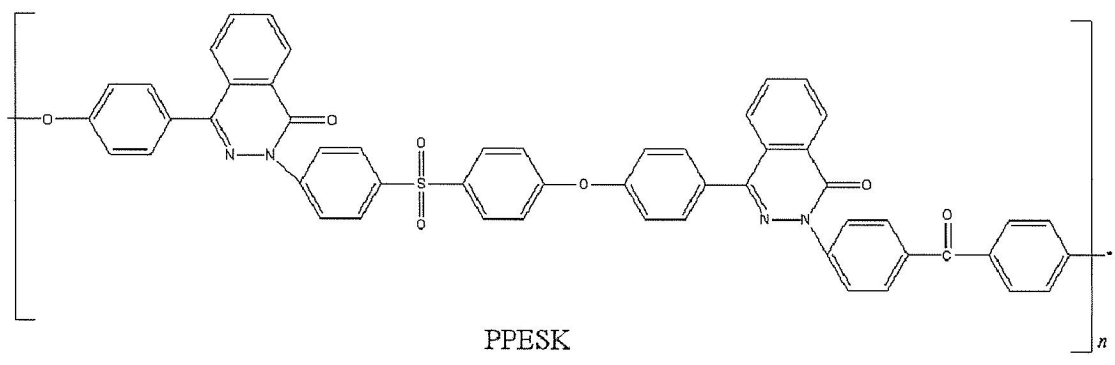
PC

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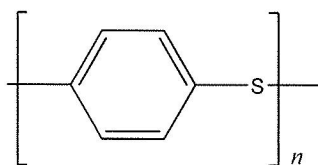
PEEK

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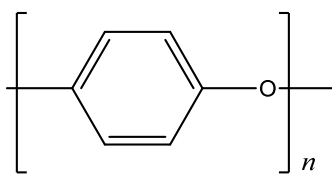
PPESK

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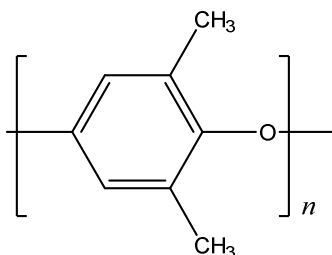


PPS

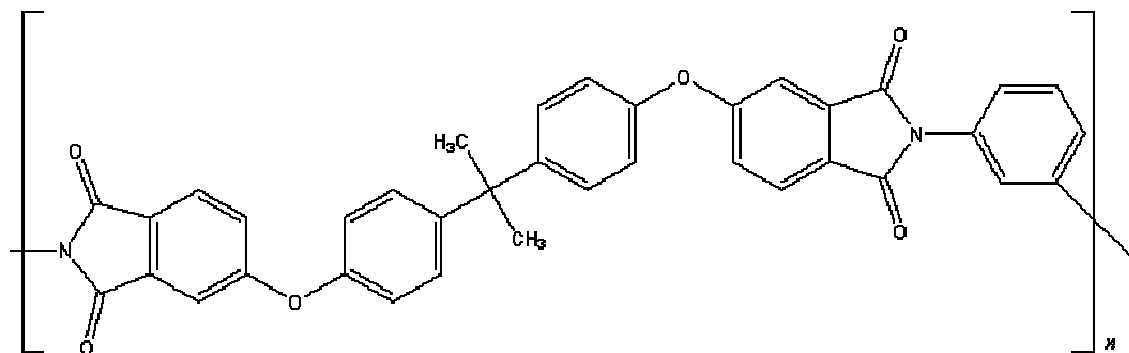
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PPE



PPO



PEI

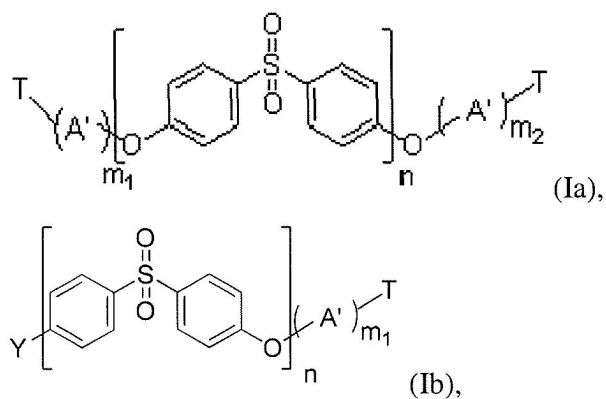
[0019] The aromatic hydrophobic polymer can have any suitable molecular weight, for example, a number average molecular weight of from about 25kDa to about 250kDa, preferably from about 50kDa to about 100kDa. The value of “n” in the aromatic hydrophobic polymer can be from about 30 to about 300, preferably from about 50 to about 250.

[0020] The aromatic hydrophobic polymeric segment B of the copolymer is polyethersulfone terminated with one or preferably two phenolic moieties. Such phenol-substituted moiety can be introduced by carrying out polycondensation in presence of excess of bisphenol S versus the bis(4-chlorophenyl)sulfone (or its fluoro-analog), as is known to those skilled in the art.

[0021] The number of repeat units, n, within each of the above aromatic hydrophobic segment B can be from about 10 to about 250, preferably from about 20 to about 200, and more preferably from about 30 to about 100.

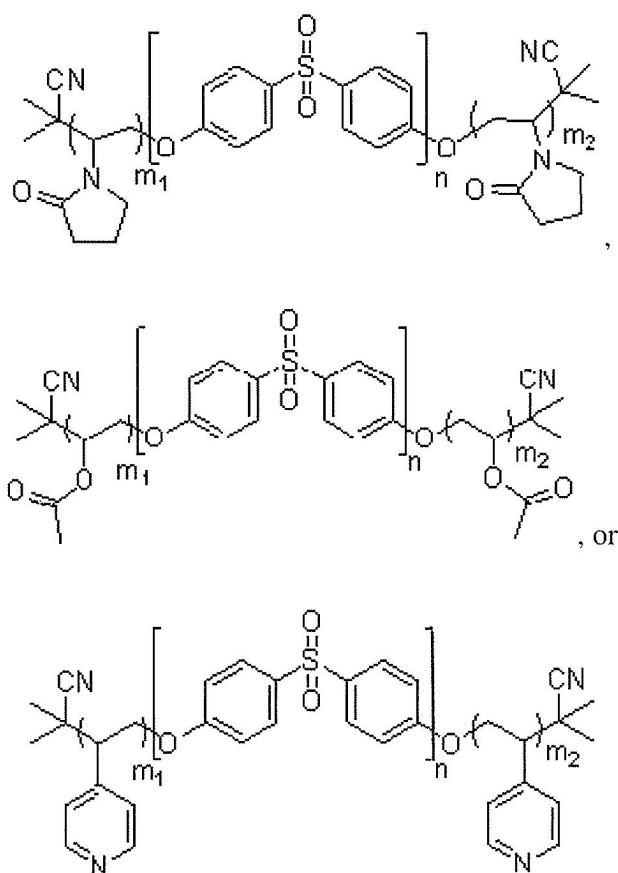
[0022] The number average molecular weight of the block copolymer is in the range of from about 5,000 to about 50,000 grams/mole, preferably about 10,000 to about 40,000 grams/mole.

[0023] In accordance with an embodiment, the copolymer is of the formula (Ia) or (Ib):



wherein A' is a polymeric segment of the hydrophilic monomer, T is an end group, and Y is chloro or fluoro.

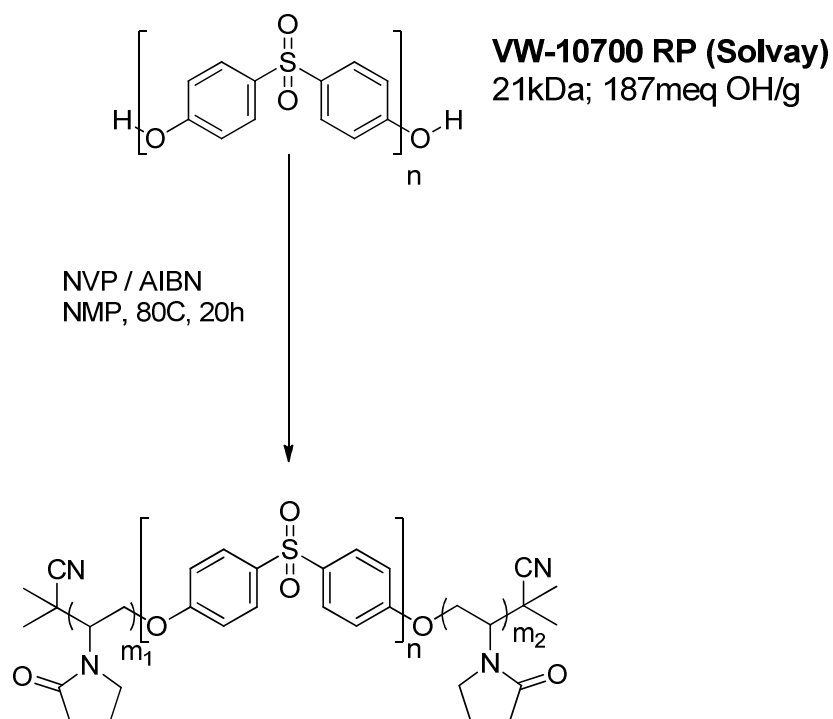
[0024] Specific examples of the copolymer include:



wherein m_1 or m_2 is from about 5 to about 80 and preferably from about 20 to about 60, and n is from about 20 to about 200 and preferably from about 30 to about 100.

[0025] Diblock copolymers of the type A-B can be prepared from a polymeric segment B having one terminal hydroxyl group and triblock copolymers of the A-B-A can be prepared from a polymeric segment B having two terminal hydroxyl groups.

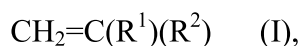
[0026] For example, the 1-vinylpyrrolid-2-one monomer can be polymerized on a preformed polymeric segment B. An example of a polymeric segment B that is commercially available is Solvay's bis-telechelic polyethersulfone VW-10700RP which has hydroxyl end groups. 1-Vinylpyrrolid-2-one is polymerized on the polymer as illustrated below:



[0027] Any suitable free radical initiator can be employed, for example, azoisobutyronitrile (AIBN), benzoyl peroxide, acetyl peroxide, lauryl peroxide, t-butyl peroxide, cumyl peroxide, t-butylperacetate, and t-butyl hydroperoxide.

[0028] Accordingly, the nature of the copolymers' end group (T in formulas (Ia) and (Ib)) can vary depending on the initiator employed. The 2-methylpropionitrile end group present in the formulas of the present invention is derived from the termination of the copolymerization with the radical generated from AIBN. Examples of other the end groups are benzoate, acetate, laurate, t-butyloxy, cumyloxy, and the like.

[0029] The present invention further provides a method of preparing a self-wetting porous membrane comprising: (i) casting a solution comprising a solvent, an aromatic hydrophobic polymer, and a copolymer of formula A-B-A, wherein A is a hydrophilic segment comprising a polymerized monomer or mixture of monomers, wherein the monomer is of the formula (I):



wherein R^1 is hydrogen or alkyl, and R^2 is selected from substituted or unsubstituted heterocyclyl, substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl, formylamino, formylaminoalkyl, aminocarbonyl, alkylcarbonyloxy, and aminocarbonylalkyl substituted with a zwitterionic group, and B is polyethersulfone, wherein segments B and A are linked through an oxygen atom, to a desired shape; (ii) subjecting the cast solution to phase inversion to form the self-wetting porous membrane; and (iii) optionally rinsing the self-wetting porous membrane with water.

[0030] The present invention further provides a self-wetting porous membrane prepared by the method described above.

[0031] In accordance with an embodiment of the invention, the self-wetting porous membrane is a porous membrane, e.g., a nanoporous membrane, for example, a membrane having pores of diameter between 1 nm and 100 nm, or a microporous membrane having pores of diameter between 1 μm and 10 μm .

[0032] A membrane-forming polymer solution is prepared by dissolving the polymer in a solvent or a mixture of solvents. A variety of polymers are suitable for use as membrane-forming polymers in the invention, and are known in the art. Suitable polymers can include, polymers such as, for example, polysulfone (PSU), polyethersulfone (PES), polyphenyl ether (PPE), polyphenylene ether sulfone (PPES), polyphenylene oxide (PPO), polycarbonate (PC), poly(phthalazinone ether sulfone ketone) (PPESK), polyether ether ketone (PEEK), polyether ketone ketone (PEKK) and polyetherimide (PEI) and blends thereof.

[0033] In addition to one or more polymers, typical polymer solutions comprise at least one solvent, and may further comprise at least one non-solvent. Suitable solvents include, for example, N,N-dimethylformamide (DMF); N,N-dimethyl acetamide (DMAC); N-methylpyrrolidone (NMP); dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), methyl sulfoxide, and mixtures thereof. Suitable nonsolvents include, for example, water; various polyethylene glycols (PEGs; e.g., PEG-200, PEG-300, PEG-400, PEG-1000); various polypropylene glycols;

various alcohols, e.g., methanol, ethanol, isopropyl alcohol (IPA), amyl alcohols, hexanols, heptanols, and octanols.

[0034] Typically, the copolymer A-B-A of the present invention is included in an amount of from about 3 to about 20 wt.%, preferably in the range of about 4 to about 15 wt. % in the membrane casting solution.

[0035] The membrane casting solution typically includes about 10 to about 30 wt.% of the aromatic hydrophobic polymer, about 0 to about 10 wt% an additive such as PEG, a polar solvent or mixture of solvents such as NMP, DMF, and/or DMAc in an amount up to about 90 wt%. A nonsolvent such as water and/or alcohol can also be included.

[0036] Typical quenching baths that may be utilized in the formation of the self-wetting membranes include, but are not limited to, baths which contain non-solvents such as water, alcohols and the like, either by themselves, or in combination with one or more polar solvents.

[0037] Suitable components of solutions are known in the art. Illustrative solutions comprising polymers, and illustrative solvents and nonsolvents include those disclosed in, for example, U.S. Patents 4,340,579; 4,629,563; 4,900,449; 4,964,990, 5,444,097; 5,846,422; 5,906,742; 5,928,774; 6,045,899; 6,146,747; and 7,208,200.

[0038] The aromatic hydrophobic polymer, the copolymer, and the solvent and other additives are first mixed together and then heated at a temperature of about 55 to about 75° C., preferably about 60 to about 65° C, until a homogeneous solution is obtained.

[0039] Flat sheet membranes can be prepared on a suitable substrate such as glass by casting a film having a suitable thickness, e.g., about 0.005 to about 0.006 inch using a doctoring knife. The cast film is coagulated in a quenching bath and washed in water for a period of time which is sufficient to leach out any material that is not directly bound to the hydrophobic-base polymer. The membrane is dried by methods known to those skilled in the art.

[0040] In addition to preparing flat sheet membranes, the self-wetting membranes of the instant invention can be formed into pleated membranes, hollow fiber membranes, tubular membranes and the like using processes that are well known in the art.

[0041] The present invention further provides a method of filtering a fluid, the method comprising passing the fluid through the self-wetting porous membrane.

[0042] Self-wetting porous membranes according to embodiments of the invention can be used in a variety of applications, including, for example, hemodialysis, microfiltration, and

ultrafiltration applications. Additionally they may also find use in diagnostic applications (including, for example, sample preparation and/or diagnostic lateral flow devices), ink jet applications, lithography, e.g., as replacement for HD/UHMW PE based media, filtering fluids for the pharmaceutical industry, metal removal, production of ultrapure water, treatment of industrial and surface waters, filtering fluids for medical applications (including for home and/or for patient use, e.g., intravenous applications, also including, for example, filtering biological fluids such as blood (e.g., virus removal)), filtering fluids for the electronics industry, filtering fluids for the food and beverage industry, beer filtration, clarification, filtering antibody- and/or protein-containing fluids, filtering nucleic acid-containing fluids, cell detection (including *in situ*), cell harvesting, and/or filtering cell culture fluids. Alternatively, or additionally, porous membranes according to embodiments of the invention can be used to filter air and/or gas and/or can be used for venting applications (e.g., allowing air and/or gas, but not liquid, to pass therethrough). Porous membranes according to embodiments of the invention can be used in a variety of devices, including surgical devices and products, such as, for example, ophthalmic surgical products.

[0043] In accordance with embodiments of the invention, the self-wetting porous membrane can have a variety of configurations, including planar, flat sheet, pleated, tubular, spiral, and hollow fiber.

[0044] Self-wetting porous membranes according to embodiments of the invention are typically disposed in a housing comprising at least one inlet and at least one outlet and defining at least one fluid flow path between the inlet and the outlet, wherein at least one inventive membrane or a filter including at least one inventive membrane is across the fluid flow path, to provide a filter device or filter module. In an embodiment, a filter device is provided comprising a housing comprising an inlet and a first outlet, and defining a first fluid flow path between the inlet and the first outlet; and at least one inventive membrane or a filter comprising at least one inventive membrane, the inventive membrane or filter comprising at least one inventive membrane being disposed in the housing across the first fluid flow path.

[0045] Preferably, for crossflow applications, at least one inventive porous membrane or filter comprising at least one inventive membrane is disposed in a housing comprising at least one inlet and at least two outlets and defining at least a first fluid flow path between the inlet and the first outlet, and a second fluid flow path between the inlet and the second outlet, wherein the inventive membrane or filter comprising at least one inventive membrane is across the first fluid flow path, to provide a filter device or filter module. In an illustrative

embodiment, the filter device comprises a crossflow filter module, the housing comprising an inlet, a first outlet comprising a concentrate outlet, and a second outlet comprising a permeate outlet, and defining a first fluid flow path between the inlet and the first outlet, and a second fluid flow path between the inlet and the second outlet, wherein at least one inventive membrane or filter comprising at least one inventive membrane is disposed across the first fluid flow path.

[0046] The filter device or module may be sterilizable. Any housing of suitable shape and providing an inlet and one or more outlets may be employed.

[0047] The housing can be fabricated from any suitable rigid impervious material, including any impervious thermoplastic material, which is compatible with the fluid being processed. For example, the housing can be fabricated from a metal, such as stainless steel, or from a polymer, e.g., transparent or translucent polymer, such as an acrylic, polypropylene, polystyrene, or a polycarbonate resin.

[0048] The following examples further illustrate the invention but, of course, should not be construed as in any way limiting its scope.

[0049] **Materials and Methods:** The starting material was Solvay's bis-telechelic polyethersulfone VW-10700 RP described to have the terminal phenol moiety with density of 0.187 millieq of OH per gram of resin, as determined by titration. The polymer had a $M_w=21332$, as determined by GPC analysis in DMAc (with PS standard). All the cited data has been provided in manufacturer's certificate of analysis. In-house analysis performed in DMF with 0.05N LiBr and PMMA as a standard gave the value of $M_w=31578$ and $PDI=1.62$.

[0050] Vinyl monomers were either vacuum distilled or passed through a column containing an inhibitor remover.

EXAMPLE 1

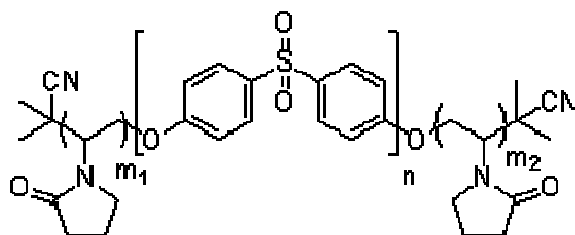
[0051] This example illustrates a general protocol of preparing copolymer A-B-A in accordance with an embodiment.

[0052] VW-10700 RP was dissolved in anhydrous NMP, followed by addition of the vinyl monomer and AIBN as radical initiator. The resulting mixture was purged with argon at ambient temperature for at least 2-5min, followed by the heating at 80 °C for 16-24h. After that time the reaction mixture was opened to air and added to excess of vigorously stirred non-solvent, usually at least 10 volumes of 2-propanol. The resulting precipitate was

filtered-off (or centrifuged in some cases), rinsed well with 2-propanol and dried in vacuum oven at 70 °C overnight. The obtained material was analyzed by GPC (DMF with 0.05N LiBr, calibrated with PMMA molecular weight standards) and the composition was determined by ^1H NMR analysis (in DMSO-d_6) and elemental analysis.

EXAMPLE 2

[0053] This example illustrates a method of preparing PVP-*b*-PES-*b*-PVP, with $(m_1+m_2)/n = 0.35$, in accordance with an embodiment of the invention:

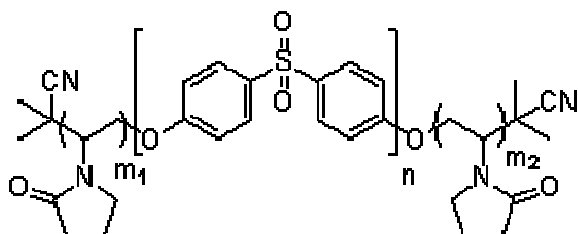


[0054] VW-10700RP (0.5g; 0.093mmol of OH), 1-vinylpyrrolid-2-one (1.0mL; 9mmol) and AIBN (8mg; 0.047mmol) were dissolved in anhydrous NMP (3mL) and copolymerized according to the general protocol, yielding 0.39 g of product.

[0055] ^1H NMR analysis indicated 35 molar % of VP unit as determined by comparing integration of signals between 7.80-8.20ppm (4H of PES unit) and between 1.20-2.40ppm (6H of VP unit). Elemental analysis (%N=2.46; %S=10.71) indicated 34 molar % of VP unit. GPC: M_w =31370; PDI=1.55.

EXAMPLE 3

[0056] This example illustrates a method of preparing PVP-*b*-PES-*b*-PVP, with $(m_1+m_2)/n = 0.50$, in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

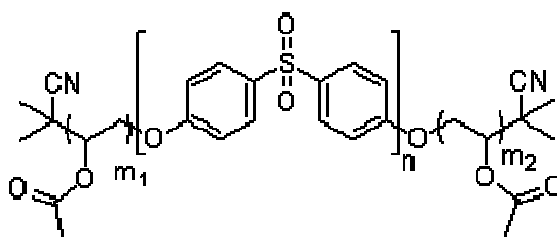


[0057] VW-10700RP (0.5g; 0.093mmol of OH), 1-vinylpyrrolid-2-one (2.0mL; 18mmol) and AIBN (16mg; 0.094mmol) were dissolved in anhydrous NMP (2mL) and copolymerized according to the general protocol, yielding 0.66 g of product.

[0058] ^1H NMR analysis indicated 50 molar % of VP unit as determined by comparing integration of signals between 7.80-8.20ppm (4H of PES unit) and between 1.20-2.40ppm (6H of VP unit). Elemental analysis (%N=4.09; %S=8.56) indicated 52 molar % of VP unit. GPC: M_w =32600; PDI=1.58.

EXAMPLE 4

[0059] This example illustrates a method of preparing PVAc-b-PES-b-PVAc with $(m_1+m_2)/n = 0.16$, in accordance with an embodiment of the invention:

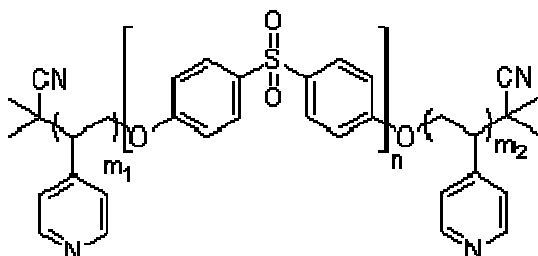


[0060] VW-10700RP (0.5g; 0.093mmol of OH), vinyl acetate (1.75mL; 18.7mmol) and AIBN (15mg; 0.092mmol) were dissolved in anhydrous NMP (3mL) and copolymerized according to the general protocol, except that methanol was used as a non-solvent to precipitate and wash the product (0.57g).

[0061] ^1H NMR analysis indicated 16 molar % of VAc unit as determined by comparing integration of signals between 7.80-8.20ppm (4H of PES unit) and between 4.60-4.80ppm (1H of VAc unit). GPC: M_w =30225; PDI=1.59.

EXAMPLE 5

[0062] This example illustrates a method of preparing P4VP-b-PES-b-P4VP with $(m_1+m_2)/n = 0.11$ in accordance with an embodiment of the invention:



[0063] VW-10700RP (0.5g; 0.093mmol of OH), 4-vinylpyridine (1.1mL; 10.2mmol) and AIBN (15mg; 0.092mmol) were dissolved in anhydrous NMP (3mL) and copolymerized according to the general protocol, using methanol as a non-solvent, yielding 0.41 g of product.

[0064] ^1H NMR analysis indicated 11 molar % of 4-VP unit as determined by comparing integration of signals between 7.20-7.30ppm (4H of PES unit) and between 6.50-6.70ppm (2H of 4-VP unit). Elemental analysis (%N=1.11; %S=12.90) indicated 16 molar % of 4-VP unit. GPC: M_w =32080; PDI=1.60.

EXAMPLE 6

[0065] This example illustrates a method of preparing self-wetting membrane in accordance with an embodiment of invention.

[0066] 5g of a polymer solution containing 30 wt% of PES E6020, 65 wt% of DMF and 5 wt% of NMP was combined with 12.5g of 160nm Li-doped HMDS-treated silica particles (described elsewhere by Harton *et al.*) suspended in DMF at 40 wt%. To this mixture, PEG1000 (0.23g), PVP-K90 (0.06g) and PVP-b-PES-b-PVP described in Example 3 (0.12g) were sequentially added, followed by homogenization at 30,000rpm for 5min and degassing at 200mbar for 30min. The resulting mixture was cast on a preformed PVOH thin film (prepared on a glass plate from 10% stock solution dried at 80°C for 2h) using a drawdown casting bar, placed in an oven for 8min at 60°C, then immediately placed in a water bath at 80°C for 1h. Finally, the film was soaked in 1N HCl for 30min, washed with water, and soaked in 10% aq. KOH overnight. The resulting membrane was washed with water for 2h and then dried at 70 °C for 1h.

[0067] For comparison, a membrane with formulation containing WE3 (Ashland's Plasdone™ S-630 copovidone) in place of copolymer of invention, was prepared as a standard. Samples were compared in terms of wettability, water flux, particle retention and BSA solution flux and throughput. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Properties of Membranes

Wetting Agent	CWST (dynes/cm)	WF @10psi (LMH)	WF @ 30psi (LMH)	LRV (62nm)	BSA Challenge
WE3 (PVP-co-VAc)	69	482	368	2.8	See Fig. 1 and 2
Example 3 (PVP-b-PES-b- PVP)	71	615	418	>3	See Fig. 1 and 2

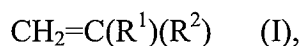
[0068] All references, including publications, patent applications, and patents, cited herein are hereby incorporated by reference to the same extent as if each reference were individually and specifically indicated to be incorporated by reference and were set forth in its entirety herein.

[0069] The use of the terms “a” and “an” and “the” and “at least one” and similar referents in the context of describing the invention (especially in the context of the following claims) are to be construed to cover both the singular and the plural, unless otherwise indicated herein or clearly contradicted by context. The use of the term “at least one” followed by a list of one or more items (for example, “at least one of A and B”) is to be construed to mean one item selected from the listed items (A or B) or any combination of two or more of the listed items (A and B), unless otherwise indicated herein or clearly contradicted by context. The terms “comprising,” “having,” “including,” and “containing” are to be construed as open-ended terms (i.e., meaning “including, but not limited to,”) unless otherwise noted. Recitation of ranges of values herein are merely intended to serve as a shorthand method of referring individually to each separate value falling within the range, unless otherwise indicated herein, and each separate value is incorporated into the specification as if it were individually recited herein. All methods described herein can be performed in any suitable order unless otherwise indicated herein or otherwise clearly contradicted by context. The use of any and all examples, or exemplary language (e.g., “such as”) provided herein, is intended merely to better illuminate the invention and does not pose a limitation on the scope of the invention unless otherwise claimed. No language in the specification should be construed as indicating any non-claimed element as essential to the practice of the invention.

[0070] Preferred embodiments of this invention are described herein, including the best mode known to the inventors for carrying out the invention. Variations of those preferred embodiments may become apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art upon reading the foregoing description. The inventors expect skilled artisans to employ such variations as appropriate, and the inventors intend for the invention to be practiced otherwise than as specifically described herein. Accordingly, this invention includes all modifications and equivalents of the subject matter recited in the claims appended hereto as permitted by applicable law. Moreover, any combination of the above-described elements in all possible variations thereof is encompassed by the invention unless otherwise indicated herein or otherwise clearly contradicted by context.

CLAIMS:

1. A self-wetting porous membrane comprising an aromatic hydrophobic polymer and a wetting agent comprising a copolymer of formula A-B-A, wherein A is a hydrophilic segment comprising a polymerized monomer or mixture of monomers, wherein the monomer is of the formula (I):



wherein R^1 is hydrogen or alkyl, and R^2 is selected from substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl, formylamino, formylaminoalkyl, aminocarbonyl, alkylcarbonyloxy, and aminocarbonylalkyl substituted with a zwitterionic group,

and B is polyethersulfone, wherein segments B and A are linked through an oxygen atom.

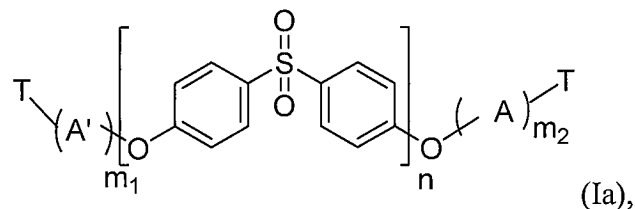
2. The self-wetting porous membrane of claim 1, wherein R^1 is hydrogen or methyl, and R^2 is selected from pyridinyl, imidazolyl, N-methylimidazolyl, formylamino, formylaminomethyl, aminocarbonyl, methylcarbonyloxy, and aminocarbonylpropyl substituted with a zwitterionic group.

3. The self-wetting porous membrane of claim 1 or 2, wherein the monomer of A is selected from N-[3-(dimethylamino)propyl]methacrylamide, vinyl acetate, 1-vinylimidazole, 1-vinyl-3-methylimidazole, 1-vinyl-2-pyridine, 1-vinyl-4-pyridine, acrylamide, N-vinylformamide, N-allylformamide, and 3-(methacrylamidopropyl)dimethyl(3-sulfopropyl)ammonium inner salt.

4. The self-wetting porous membrane of any one of claims 1-3, wherein the aromatic hydrophobic polymer is selected from polysulfone, polyethersulfone, polyphenylene ether, polyphenylene ether sulfone, polyphenylene oxide, polycarbonate, poly(phthalazinone ether sulfone ketone), polyether ketone, polyether ether ketone, polyether ketone ketone, polyimide, polyetherimide, and polyamide-imide.

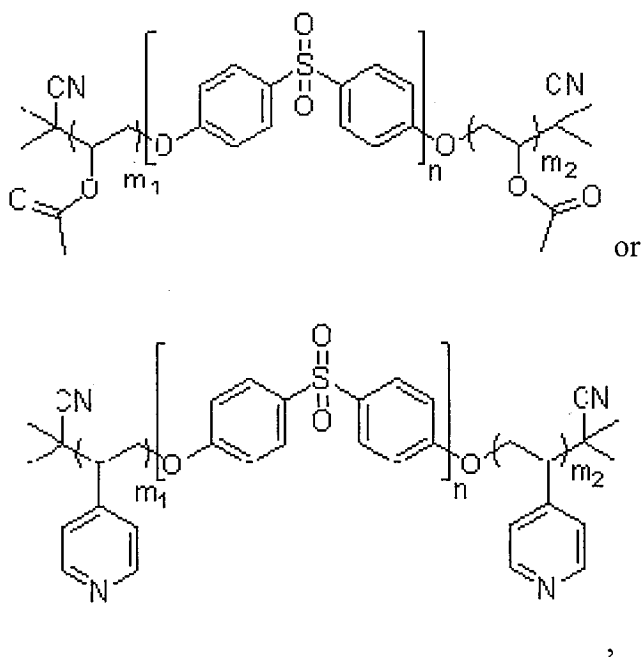
5. The self-wetting porous membrane of any one of claims 1-4, wherein the aromatic hydrophobic polymer is polysulfone or polyethersulfone.

6. The self-wetting porous membrane of any one of claims 3-5, wherein the copolymer is of the formula (Ia):



wherein A is the hydrophilic monomer, and Y is chloro or fluoro; wherein m_1 or m_2 is from 5 to 80; n is from 20 to 200; and T is an end group selected from 2-methylpropionitrile, benzoate, acetate, laurate, t-butyloxy, and cumyloxy.

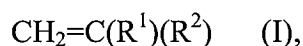
7. The self-wetting porous membrane of any one of claims 3-6, wherein the copolymer is of the formula:



wherein m_1 or m_2 is from 5 to 80 and n is from 20 to 200.

8. A method of preparing a self-wetting porous membrane comprising:

(i) casting a solution comprising a solvent, an aromatic hydrophobic polymer, and a copolymer of formula A-B-A, wherein A is a hydrophilic segment comprising a polymerized monomer or mixture of monomers, wherein the monomer is of the formula (I):



wherein R^1 is hydrogen or alkyl, and R^2 is selected from substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl, formylamino, formylaminoalkyl, aminocarbonyl, alkylcarbonyloxy, and aminocarbonylalkyl substituted with a zwitterionic group,

and B is polyethersulfone, wherein segments B and A are linked through an oxygen atom, to a desired shape;

(ii) subjecting the cast solution to phase inversion to form the self-wetting porous membrane; and

(iii) optionally rinsing the self-wetting porous membrane with water.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein R^1 is hydrogen or methyl, and R^2 is selected from pyridinyl, imidazolyl, N-methylimidazolyl, formylamino, formylaminomethyl, aminocarbonyl, methylcarbonyloxy, and aminocarbonylpropyl substituted with a zwitterionic group.

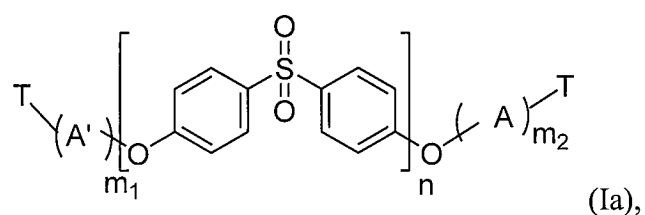
10. The method of claim 8 or 9, wherein the monomer of A is selected from N-[3-(dimethylamino)propyl]methacrylamide, vinyl acetate, 1-vinylimidazole, 1-vinyl-3-methylimidazole, 1-vinyl-2-pyridine, 1-vinyl-4-pyridine, acrylamide, N-vinylformamide, and N-allylformamide, and 3-(methacrylamidopropyl)dimethyl(3-sulfopropyl)ammonium inner salt.

11. The method of any one of claims 8-10, wherein the aromatic hydrophobic polymeric segment B is polyethersulfone.

12. The method of any one of claims 8-11, wherein the aromatic hydrophobic polymer is selected from polysulfone, polyethersulfone, polyphenylene ether, polyphenylene ether sulfone, polyphenylene oxide, polycarbonate, poly(phthalazinone ether sulfone ketone), polyether ketone, polyether ether ketone, polyether ketone ketone, polyimide, polyetherimide, and polyamide-imide.

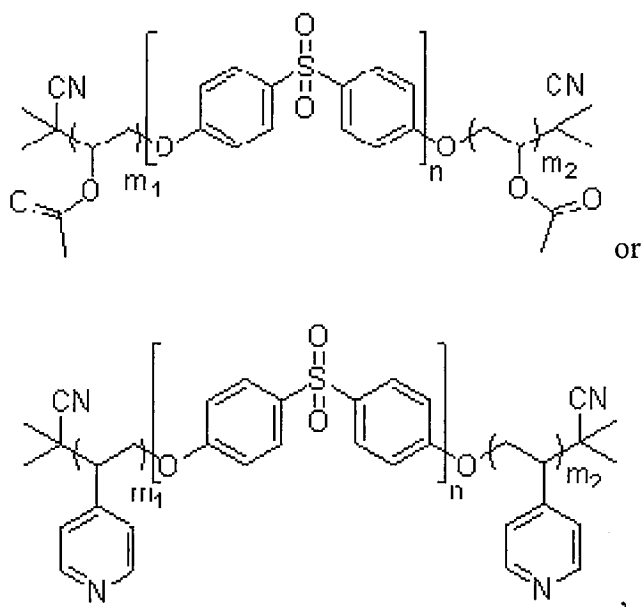
13. The method of any one of claims 8-12, wherein the aromatic hydrophobic polymer is polysulfone or polyethersulfone.

14. The method of any one of claims 10-12, wherein the copolymer is of the formula (Ia):



wherein A is the hydrophilic monomer, and Y is chloro or fluoro; wherein m_1 or m_2 is from 5 to 80; n is from 20 to 200; and T is an end group selected from 2-methylpropionitrile, benzoate, acetate, laurate, t-butyloxy, and cumyloxy.

15. The method of any one of claims 10-14, wherein the copolymer is of the formula:



wherein m_1 or m_2 is from 5 to 80 and n is from 20 to 200.

16. A method of filtering a fluid, the method comprising passing the fluid through the self-wetting porous membrane of any one of claims 1-7.