PURIFICATION OF HER-2 VARIANTS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to the field of affinity purification of proteins. More particularly, the present invention relates to improvements in metal affinity protein purification, especially purification of histidine tagged or histidine rich proteins that have been recombinantly produced in insect cells. The invention also relates to specific purification schemes suitable for histidine-tagged protein variants derived from the EGFR (endothelial growth factor receptor) family of proteins, especially the cancer-associated antigen HER-2.

Further, the present invention relates to an immunogenic variant of human HER-2 that is capable of raising an immune response in humans, which also targets the native human HER-2 molecule.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The cancer associated membrane protein HER-2 is a member of the EGFR family of proteins. This particular protein has shown promise as an immunogen in active specific immunotherapy of certain cancers, notably breast cancer and colorectal cancer.

The assignee of the present patent application has previously filed patent applications relating to active vaccination against the HER-2 antigen, cf. WO 00/20027 which is hereby incorporated by reference herein. Further research in this field has now identified preferred HER-2 variants for such vaccines, but a general problem in protein chemistry is to devise im-

proved means for obtaining satisfactory yields of recombinant protein with a high degree of purity.

Immobilized metal ion affinity chromatography (IMAC) was first introduced by Porath (Porath, J., J. Carlsson, I. Olsson, G. Belfrage [1975] Nature 258:598-599.) under the term metal chelate chromatography and has been previously reviewed in several articles (Porath, J. [1992] Protein Purification and Expression 3:263-281; and articles cited therein). The IMAC purification process is based on the employment of a chelating matrix loaded with soft metal ions such as Cu^{2+} and Ni^{2+}. Electron-donating groups on the surface of proteins, especially the imidazole side chain of histidine, can bind to the non-coordinated sites of the loaded metal. The interaction between the electron donor group with the metal can be made reversible by lowering the pH or by displacement with imidazole. Thus, a protein possessing electron-donating groups such as histidine can be purified by reversible metal complex/protein interactions.

In 1991, Ford et al. (Ford, C., I. Suominen, C. Glatz [1991] Protein Expression and Purification 2:95-107) described protein purification using IMAC technology (Ni-NTA ligand) as applied to recombinant proteins having tails with histidine residues (polyhistidine recombinant proteins, "His-tagged proteins"). This method takes advantage of the fact that two or more histidine residues can cooperate to form very strong metal ion complexes.

Numerous variations of this technology exists, where the histidine residues are attached as "tags" to the relevant recombinant protein in various combinations, e.g. including recognition sites for specific proteases so that the his tag can be subsequently removed enzymatically.

Expression of proteins in insect cells require the use of various specialised culture media and also entails contamination of the recombinant protein with various insect cell derived constituents that are not found in bacteria, fungi and mammalian cells. Purification schemes devised for recombinant proteins produced in bacteria, fungi, or mammalian cells are therefore not necessarily the optimum choice when a protein produced in insect cells will need to be purified.

There is therefore a continuing need for improvements in protein purification in order to obtain pharmaceutical grade protein derived from recombinant production in insect cells.

OBJECT OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the invention to provide an improved method for purifying recombinant EGFR family protein expressed in insect cells. It is a further object of the invention to provide an immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein that is useful in e.g. cancer treatment by means of specific active immunotherapy.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present inventors have devised a novel method for purifying EGFR family protein to a degree of purity, which is acceptable for pharmaceutical use, notably for use as vaccine agents.

Hence, in one aspect, the present invention relates to a method for purification of an EGFR family derived protein, said protein being recombinantly produced in an insect cell culture and said protein being one that is suitable for purification by means of immobilised metal affinity chromatography, the method comprising obtaining, from said insect cell culture, a

substantially cell-free sample containing said EGFR family derived protein, and thereafter enriching for said EGFR family derived protein by means of subsequent steps of:

- diafiltration and exchange of culture medium with buffer,
- immobilized metal affinity chromatography (IMAC),
- size exclusion chromatography (SEC), and
- anion exchange chromatography (AIE).

Another aspect of the invention relates to an immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein that comprises the amino acid sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO: 2, residues 17-677.

LEGENDS TO THE FIGURE

Fig. 1: Chromatographic profile of the IMAC.
The arrow indicates the 104.1 peak.

Fig. 2: Chromatographic profile of the SEC.
The arrow indicates the monomer peak.

Fig. 3: Chromatographic profile of the AIE.
The arrow indicates the 104.1 peak.

Fig. 4: The pMT/hHER2MA5-5DUniHis vector p992, plasmid map.
hHER2MA5-5D: Gene coding for the hHER2MA5-5DUH protein (nucleotides 3604-5592).
P2 epitope: Sequence coding for the P2 epitope in the hHER2MA5-5DUH protein (nucleotides 4357-4401).
P30 epitope: Sequence coding for the P30 epitope in the hHER2MA5-5DUH protein (nucleotides 5500-5562).
SV40 late Polyadenylation site: Poly A signal (nucleotides 263-268).
ColE1: Origin of replication for replication in *E. coli* (nucleotides 701-1434).

Ampicillin resistance gene: Gene conferring ampicillin resistance in bacteria (nucleotides 1579-2439).

Metallothionein promoter: Promoter that can be induced with a number of compounds (e.g. cadmium) (nucleotides 3050-3415).

Kozak like sequence: Ribosomal binding site (nucleotides 3493-3501).

BiP signal sequence: Signal sequence directing the HER2 variant protein to secretion into the extracellular compartment (nucleotides 3502-3555).

UniHis sequence: Sequence coding for the UniHis tag used for purification of the HER2 AutoVac protein (nucleotides 3556-3597).

Dipeptidase stop sequence: Used if the UniHis tag is to be cleaved from the HER2 AutoVac protein (nucleotides 3598-3603).

DETAILED DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

In the following a number of terms and expressions will be defined in the context of the present invention.

"An EGFR family derived protein" denotes a protein which is homologous to or identical with human EGFR (or ErbB-1); human HER-2/neu (ErbB-2); HER-3 (ErbB-3); or HER-4 (ErbB-4).

An "autologous" EGFR family protein is in the present specification and claims intended to denote an EGFR family polypeptide of an animal that is going to be vaccinated against its own EGFR family protein. In other words, the term is only relevant when the relation to the animal that it going to be vaccinated is considered.

The terms "T-lymphocyte" and "T-cell" will be used interchangeably for lymphocytes of thymic origin which are responsible for various cell mediated immune responses as well as for effector

functions such as helper activity in the humeral immune response. Likewise, the terms "B-lymphocyte" and "B-cell" will be used interchangeably for antibody-producing lymphocytes.

An "antigen presenting cell" (APC) is a cell which presents epitopes to T-cells. Typical antigen-presenting cells are macrophages, dendritic cells and other phagocytizing and pinocytizing cells. It should be noted that B-cells also functions as APCs by presenting T_H epitopes bound to MCH class II molecules to T_H cells but when generally using the term APC in the present specification and claims it is intended to refer to the above-mentioned phagocytizing and pinocytizing cells.

"Helper T-lymphocytes" or "T_H cells" denotes CD4 positive T-cells, which provide help to B-cells and cytotoxic T-cells via the recognition of T_H epitopes bound to MHC Class II molecules on antigen presenting cells.

The term "cytotoxic T-lymphocyte" (CTL) will be used for CD8 positive T-cells, which require the assistance of T_H cells in order to become activated.

A "specific" immune response is in the present context intended to denote a polyclonal immune response directed predominantly against a molecule or a group of quasi-identical molecules or, alternatively, against cells which present CTL epitopes of the molecule or the group of quasi-identical molecules.

The term "polypeptide" is in the present context intended to mean both short peptides of from 2 to 10 amino acid residues, oligopeptides of from 11 to 100 amino acid residues, and polypeptides of more than 100 amino acid residues. Furthermore, the term is also intended to include proteins, *i.e.* functional biomolecules comprising at least one polypeptide; when compri-

sing at least two polypeptides, these may form complexes, be covalently linked, or may be non-covalently linked. The polypeptide(s) in a protein can be glycosylated and/or lipidated and/or comprise prosthetic groups.

The term "subsequence" means any consecutive stretch of at least 3 amino acids or, when relevant, of at least 3 nucleotides, derived directly from a naturally occurring amino acid sequence or nucleic acid sequence, respectively.

By the term "down-regulation an autologous EGFR family protein" is herein meant reduction in the living organism of the amount and/or activity of the relevant EGFR family protein. The down-regulation can be obtained by means of several mechanisms including removal of the CEA by scavenger cells (such as macrophages and other phagocytizing cells), and even more important, that cells carrying or harbouring the antigen are killed by CTLs in the animal.

The term "immunogen" is intended to denote a substance capable of inducing an immune response in a certain animal. It will therefore be understood that an autologous EGFR family protein is not an immunogen in the autologous host - it is necessary to use either a strong adjuvant and/or to co-present T helper epitopes with the autologous protein in order to mount an immune response against autologous protein and in such a case the "immunogen" is the composition of matter which is capable of breaking autotolerance.

The term "immunogenically effective amount" has its usual meaning in the art, *i.e.* an amount of an immunogen, which is capable of inducing an immune response, which significantly engages pathogenic agents, which share immunological features with the immunogen.

The term "pharmaceutically acceptable" has its usual meaning in the art, *i.e.* it is used for a substance that can be accepted as part of a medicament for human use when treating the disease in question and thus the term effectively excludes the use of highly toxic substances that would worsen rather than improve the treated subject's condition.

A "foreign T-cell epitope" is a peptide which is able to bind to an MHC molecule and which stimulates T-cells in an animal species. Preferred foreign epitopes are "promiscuous" epitopes, *i.e.* epitopes, which binds to a substantial fraction of MHC class II molecules in an animal species or population. A term, which is often used interchangeably in the art, is the term "universal T-cell epitopes" for this kind of epitopes. Only a very limited number of such promiscuous T-cell epitopes are known, and they will be discussed in detail below. It should be noted that in order for the immunogens which are used according to the present invention to be effective in as large a fraction of an animal population as possible, it may be necessary to 1) insert several foreign T-cell epitopes in the same analogue or 2) prepare several analogues wherein each analogue has a different promiscuous epitope inserted. It should be noted that the concept of foreign T-cell epitopes also encompasses use of cryptic T-cell epitopes, *i.e.* epitopes which are derived from a self-protein and which only exerts immunogenic behaviour when existing in isolated form without being part of the self-protein in question.

A "foreign T helper lymphocyte epitope" (a foreign T_H epitope) is a foreign T cell epitope, which binds an MHC Class II molecule and can be presented on the surface of an antigen presenting cell (APC) bound to the MHC Class II molecule. It is also important to add that the "foreignness" feature therefore has two aspects: A foreign T_H epitope is 1) presented in the

MHC Class II context by the animal in question and 2) the foreign epitope is not derived from the same polypeptide as the target antigen for the immunization - the epitope is thus also foreign to the target antigen.

A "CTL epitope" is a peptide, which is able to bind to an MHC class I molecule.

The term "adjuvant" has its usual meaning in the art of vaccine technology, *i.e.* a substance or a composition of matter which is 1) not in itself capable of mounting a specific immune response against the immunogen of the vaccine, but which is 2) nevertheless capable of enhancing the immune response against the immunogen. Or, in other words, vaccination with the adjuvant alone does not provide an immune response against the immunogen, vaccination with the immunogen may or may not give rise to an immune response against the immunogen, but the combined vaccination with immunogen and adjuvant induces an immune response against the immunogen which is stronger than that induced by the immunogen alone.

"Diafiltration" is a technique using ultrafiltration membranes to remove salt or solvent, exchange buffers, or fractionate different size biomolecules in macromolecular solutions. Macromolecules retained by the ultrafiltration membrane are concentrated while solvent and lower molecular weight species are removed. However, a simple concentration of the macromolecular sample will not completely remove the smaller species. Therefore, the smaller species must be "washed" from the sample using multiple wash volumes (diafiltration). After the diafiltration process, the sample can be concentrated for further analysis or purification. This is an advantage compared with gel filtration or dialysis when the sample can be diluted during the separation process, requiring an additional concen-

tration step. There is no loss or contamination using diafiltration as could occur with a two-step process.

"Immobilised metal affinity chromatography" (IMAC) is a chromatographic technique where proteins are purified as a consequence of their affinity for certain divalent metal ions, cf. the description in the "Background of the Invention".

"Size exclusion chromatography" (SEC) is a chromatographic technique, where proteins and other macromolecules are fractionated according to their physical size. Small molecules are retained in pores of the matrix and are therefore eluted slowly, whereas larger molecules are excluded and therefore eluted early from the matrix.

"Anion Exchange Chromatography" (AIE) is a chromatographic technique, where molecules having a net negative charge are retained on the column matrix and subsequently eluted by displacing with anion from the elution buffer or by changing net charge of the protein.

Description of the preferred embodiments

The present invention relates to a purification process that is especially tailored for purification of EGFR family derived proteins that have been produced recombinantly in insect cells. The present invention was conceived in connection with efforts that have led to the preparation of immunogenic variants of the human cancer-associated antigen HER-2 - these variants are produced in the DES® expression system, an expression system owned by GlaxoSmithKline and marketed by *i.a.* Invitrogen. The system utilises S2 Drosophila cells and specialised vectors. The use of S2 cells as host cells for recombinant production has, however, posed its own set of problems to solve vis-à-vis

the HER-2 variant in question, and these problems have been solved by using the inventive method (*i.a.* problems with co-migrating proteins which are derived from the S2 cells).

The particular protein that is used in the Examples is a variant of human HER-2, which is immunogenic in humans - the variant includes the amino acid sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO: 2, residues 17-677. However, since this amino acid sequence is not in itself suitable for IMAC, it contains an N-terminal histidine tag (amino acid residues 1-14 in SEQ ID NO: 1) that can be cleaved off by an aminodipeptidase (dipeptidyl peptidase I, DPPI, cf. Pedersen J *et al.*, 1999, Protein Expression and Purification **15**, 389-400). The stop sequence for the diaminopeptidase consists of residues 15 and 16 in SEQ ID NO: 2.

Therefore, in general the instant purification method is especially suited for EGFR family derived proteins that include a heterologous amino acid sequence that facilitates purification by means of IMAC. This sequence may be native to the EGFR family derived protein, but more often it is heterologous amino acid sequence (i.e. not naturally associated with the EGFR family derived protein). Preferred amino acid sequences for this purpose are rich in histidine residues (e.g. the His_6 tag and other amino acid sequences with several consecutive histidine residues). The most preferred heterologous amino acid sequence that facilitates IMAC purification is the one comprising residues 1-14 of SEQ ID NO: 2.

The EGFR derived protein subjected to the inventive process is preferably one that comprises a substantial part of the amino acid sequence of human EGFR or human HER-2, and it is especially preferred the this substantial part is mainly derived from the extracellular portion of human EGFR or human HER-2.

Most preferred is a variant of human HER-2, and in the most preferred embodiments, the variant of human HER-2 includes at least one foreign T helper cell epitope.

As mentioned above, the inventive process has been conceived in connection with work on recombinant production of certain variants of human HER-2 antigen. These variants are characteristic in including promiscuous foreign T-helper epitopes that are introduced into the amino acid sequence of human HER-2 extracellular domain. Preferred variants of human HER-2 include tetanus toxoid epitopes P2 (residues 269-282 of SEQ ID NO: 2) and P30 (residues 649-669 of SEQ ID NO: 2) and the most preferred variant has an amino acid sequence that consists of residues 1-677 of SEQ ID NO: 2

Diafiltration/buffer exchange

The step of diafiltration/buffer exchange is performed at a temperature from about 2 to about 25°C. However, preferably temperatures in the lower part of the range are used, e.g. temperatures below 20°C, such as below 15°C or below 10°C. Most preferred temperatures are in the range between 2 and 9°C, such as in the range between about 3°C and about 9°C, with a most preferred temperature range from about 3 to about 8 and especially preferred from 4 to about 6°C. At higher temperatures (e.g. beyond 10°C) there is a tendency that the protein aggregates, and this can be counteracted by adding a detergent, such as a Tween type detergent.

Normally, the diafiltration is performed in two rounds so as to initially concentrate macromolecular compounds in the sample of culture medium and thereafter to exchange culture medium with buffer. These procedures are done following standard procedures

in the art, cf. also the examples. It is preferred that the concentration step results in a concentration of between 2 and 25 times of the macromolecular compounds, such as a concentration between 2 and 20 times, 3 and 15 times, between 3 and 10 times. Preferred concentration of macromolecular compounds is in the range of between 4 and 8 times, and the most preferred concentration is about 5 times or to a total protein concentration of the medium not exceeding 3 mg/ml, or preferably not exceeding 2 mg/ml.

The buffer exchange is typically performed in two subsequent steps of which the first takes place at a pH of at least 6.5 and at most 7.2 and of which the second takes place at a pH of at least 7.0 and of most 8.0. It is, however, possible to perform both steps at the same pH in the overlapping part of the two ranges. Typically, the buffer exchange is performed using a phosphate buffer.

After completion of the buffer exchange, the stringency of the following steps is preferably increased by adding an agent to the sample that will compete for binding to the chromatographic matrix in the IMAC step so as to reduce the amount of non-significant binding by contaminating constituents. For example, addition of imidazole, histidine or a high salt concentration buffer to the diafiltrated and buffer can be done to increase the stringency. Preferably, when imidazole is used, it is added so as to reach a concentration in the range between about 0.05 to about 20 mM, preferably in the range from about 0.5 to about 15 mM, such as in the range from about 1 to about 10 mM. Especially preferred is concentration of imidazole in the range from about 2 to about 9 mM, such as a concentration from about 3 to about 8 mM. most preferred is an imidazole concentration of about 4 to about 6 mM, such as a concentration about 5 mM.

When using a high salt concentration buffer (often NaCl), the concentration is in the range from 100 mM up to about 1 M.

It is also preferred to add a detergent to the diafiltrated and buffer changed sample prior to the IMAC step. The detergent will normally be selected from a polyoxyethylene sorbitan fatty acid ester such as Tween 20, Tween 40, Tween 60, Tween 80, and Tween 85, an alkylaryl polyether alcohol such as Triton X100, a non-ionic detergent, and a carbohydrate based detergent such as octylglycoside. The detergent is advantageously added to reach a concentration of between about 0.05% (v/v) and 10% (v/v), such as about 0.1% (v/v).

IMAC

The IMAC step involves charging of a chromatographic medium with a divalent metal ion prior to application of the buffer exchanged sample thereto. Typically, the divalent metal ion is selected from the group consisting of Ni^{2+}, Cu^{2+}, Zn^{2+}, Co^{2+}, and Fe^{2+}. Preferably, the divalent metal ion is Zn^{2+}.

Elution of the chromatographic medium in the IMAC is performed by applying imidazole, histidine, a high salt concentration buffer, or a change of pH onto the chromatographic medium (typically in a chromatographic column). For instance, when using imidazole for elution, this is advantageously done by applying the imidazole in one single step at a concentration between about 50 mM and about 500 mM (such as between 100 and 400 mM), preferably at a concentration of about 200 mM. Alternatively, when histidine is used this is done by applying the histidine in one single step at a concentration between about 20 mM and 400 mM (such as between 50 and 200 mM), preferably about 100 mM. The high salt concentration buffer usually contains NaCl in concentrations up to about 1 or even 2 M.

SEC

The average pore size of the SEC matrix is preferably one that separates globular protein between 10 kDa and 600 kDa.

After having applied the sample to the matrix, elution is done with a phosphate or TRIS buffer or, alternatively, with a biological buffer such as HEPES. The preferred buffer is a TRIS buffer.

pH is maintained in the range of about 7 to about 8 during the SEC and preferably the pH is kept about 7.5.

If relevant and necessary (*i.e.* when a phosphate buffer is used in the SEC step), samples containing the EGFR family derived protein obtained from SEC, is diluted before the AIE step so as to adjust the phosphate concentration to less than 15 mM, such as to the range between 10 and 12.5 mM. However, it is surprising that the AIE can be performed at all using such a phosphate buffer concentration.

AIE

The final step in the purification procedure of the invention is at least one AIE step, whereof one is performed using a strong anion exchange matrix - in preferred embodiments, there is also a preceding step involving use of a weak anion exchange matrix. This preferably involves loading of the sample containing the EGFR family derived protein obtained after SEC on a strong or weak anion exchange matrix. Typically, the elution is performed with a buffered (phosphate, TRIS or a biological buffer such as HEPES) NaCl solution at a pH between 7 and 8, preferably about pH 7.5.

The protein obtained in the eluate after these steps has a clinical grade purity and is substantially free of contaminants derived from the insect cell culture.

It is contemplated that an AIE step utilising a weak anion exchange matrix will be applicable as a step between the IMAC and SEC steps, instead of including it as part of the concluding AIE step.

Further optional steps

After diafiltration it is advantageous to include a virus clearance step (e.g. with 2% Tween 20 and 0.3% TnBP) and it is further advantageous to include a virus filtration step after AIE (e.g. using a Planova 15N filter or a similar filter), where both steps are included in order to ensure that the resulting product is free of clinically unacceptable contaminants. However, in the event a virus-free system is employed, these two steps are non-essential.

HER-2 variant of the invention

As mentioned above, the present inventive method has been conceived when purifying a variant of the human HER-2 tumour antigen. This particular variant has proven to be especially well-suited as a vaccine agent for inducing immunological reactions against autologous HER-2 so this particular variant is also a part of the present invention.

In general, the specific use, formulation, recombinant production, suitable vectors and host cells as well as other details pertaining to this specific HER-2 variant can be found in the disclosure of WO 00/20027. Hence, in the following only a brief discussion will be provided that specifically pertains to the variant. Hence, the disclosure of WO 00/20027 is included by

reference herein and provides for the necessary teachings concerning immunization with HER-2 variants and the general methods for producing these and their formulation. Also the disclosure in WO 00/20027 relating to nucleic acid vaccination against autologous HER-2 is incorporated by reference herein.

As mentioned above, another aspect of the present invention relates to an immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein that comprises the amino acid sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO: 2, residues 17-677. It is preferred that this variant is a polypeptide that consists of the amino acid sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO: 2, residues 1-677, *i.e.* a variant that also includes a histidinyl-rich purification tag consisting of residues 1-14 in SEQ ID NO: 2, and an aminopeptidase stop sequence consisting of residues 15 and 16 in SEQ ID NO: 2.

Also included in the present invention is a nucleic acid fragment that encodes this immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein, such as a DNA fragment. An especially preferred DNA fragment has the HER-2 variant encoding sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO: 1.

Useful tools in the recombinant production of HER-2 variants are vectors carrying the nucleic acid fragment of the invention. Especially preferred is a vector capable of autonomous replication. Typically, the vector is selected from the group consisting of a plasmid, a phage, a cosmid, a mini-chromosome, and a virus.

Expression vectors are especially preferred. A typical expression vector of the invention comprises, in the 5'→3' direction and in operable linkage, a promoter for driving expression of the nucleic acid fragment of the invention, optionally a nucleic acid sequence encoding a leader peptide enabling secre-

tion of or integration into the membrane of the polypeptide fragment, the nucleic acid fragment of the invention, and optionally a nucleic acid sequence encoding a terminator.

For recombinant production, a host cell transformed with the vector of the invention is especially preferred. A particularly interesting host cell is an insect cell, and most preferred is a drosophila derived host cell such as an S2 cell.

Also part of the invention is a stable cell line which carries the vector of the invention and which expresses the nucleic acid fragment of the invention, and which optionally secretes or carries on its surface the immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein of the invention.

Furthermore, the invention also provides for an immunogenic composition for immunizing against HER-2 protein in a human comprising the immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein described above in admixture with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier or vehicle and optionally an adjuvant. Details on suitable formulations can be found in WO 00/20027.

Alternatively, the vaccine may be in the form of a nucleic acid vaccine (for details concerning this technology, cf. WO 00/20027). Thus, also part of the invention is an immunogenic composition for immunizing against HER-2 protein in a human comprising the vector described above in admixture with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier or vehicle and optionally an adjuvant

Also embraced by the scope of the present invention is a method for immunizing a human against autologous HER-2, the method comprising administering, to the human being, an immunogenically effective amount of

- the immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein described herein or an immunogenic composition comprising the variant, or

- the vector described herein or an immunogenic composition comprising said vector.

It is especially preferred that this immunization method (as well as the different means for immunization described herein) is used for treating or ameliorating cancer.

PREAMBLE TO THE EXAMPLES

The following exemplification utilizes the "104.1 molecule" (cf. SEQ ID NO: 2) which is an immunogenic analogue of the cancer associated HER-2 protein. However, it will be understood by the person skilled in the art that the general teachings of the present invention are applicable for other His tagged proteins, especially those produced recombinantly in insect cell systems.

The purification process consists of the following 4 general purification steps:

1. Diafiltration with buffer change of fermentation supernatant.

2. Immobilized Metal Affinity Chromatography (IMAC)

3. Gel filtration/Size Exclusion Chromatography (SEC)

4. Anion Exchange Chromatography (AIE)

There is additionally 2 virus clearance steps included in the currently preferred process, one virus inactivation step and one virus filtration step.

Diafiltration/buffer exchange

The diafiltration serves three purposes 1) to concentrate the substance "104.1" 2) to remove low molecular weight substances from the fermentation medium that could interfere with the subsequent capture step, such as metal ions and 3) to change buffer into a buffer more suitable for metal chelate chromatography (IMAC). Buffer exchange takes place in one or two steps. The first step is into 50 mM phosphate buffer pH 7.0; the second step into 50 mM phosphate buffer pH 7.5 is optional. If diafiltration is performed into pH 7.5, this pH sequence seems to be critical because going directly into pH 7.5 leads to precipitation of non-identified components from the insect cell fermentation medium. Concentration is mainly performed to reduce loading time in the subsequent IMAC and to reduce consumption of buffer in the buffer exchange step and is not found essential for the process, as the subsequent IMAC by nature is a concentrating process step. The concentration scale is presently about 5 times or to a total protein concentration of the medium not exceeding 3 mg/ml (preferably not exceeding 2 mg/ml), but experiments using 10 times concentration also seem to work when protein level does not become to high and it is expected that it is possible to go higher, such as 20 or even 25 times. Further concentration than the 5 times described in the protocol may improve the process, as it would decrease the loading time on the following IMAC column.

Sample preparation for IMAC

The diafiltrate can prior to application to the IMAC column be prepared by adding imidazole to a final concentration of 0-10 mM, when imidazole is used in eluent buffer; if no imidazole (or a similar substance) is added, we have experienced co-purification of other proteins from the insect cells with 104.1.

On the other hand, when elution is made with L-Histidine, salt is added to the elution buffer instead. Furthermore, Tween 20 is added (after filtration) to a final concentration of 0.1% (v/v). Up to 5% can be applied for the IMAC step and higher concentration than 0.1% will lead to less dimer formation. Other detergents are also expected to be useful, obviously other Tween detergents (Tween 40, 60, 80 and 85).

IMAC

The substance 104.1 has a so-called His-tag in the N-terminus that has affinity for complexed divalent metal ions immobilized on the column matrix. Critical parameters are choice of divalent metal ion and choice of elution agent/method. Ni^{2+}, Cu^{2+} and Zn^{2+} can all be used as the chelating metal ion. However, Zn^{2+} has provided good recovery and fewer impurities. For elution of captured 104.1 several strategies can be used. 1) Application of imidazole to the column 2) application of histidine to the column 3) application of high salt concentration buffer to the column, and 4) change of pH on the column.

The presently preferred process uses elution by application of 100 mM L-Histidine in one step. However, down to 50 mM can be used but the result is less concentrated 104.1 and lower recovery. It is also possible to use imidazole (applied as a 200 mM solution), and also this can be used at lower (down to 50 mM) concentrations with the same effect on recovery.

SEC

The example below describes that the SEC is run in TRIS buffer. However, phosphate seems to work as well, but TRIS is more suitable for the subsequent AIE than phosphate. When using phosphate or a TRIS buffer containing salt, dilution of the SEC

eluate is necessary before application on the AIE column in order to reduce the phosphate concentration, and this will not be necessary with a TRIS buffer only.

If the IMAC has been run in a Tween-20 concentration higher than 0.4%, it should be adjusted to < 0.4% in the SEC, as the 104.1 protein does not bind to the AIE column if the concentration of Tween-20 is higher than 0.2%. This may differ when the AIE is run in other buffer systems.

Sample preparation for AIE Chromatography

The relevant fractions from SEC are diluted in water, 1 volume eluate + 3 volumes of water, to reduce the phosphate concentration when run in phosphate as it interferes with the AIE chromatography. This issue is also discussed in the SEC paragraph.

AIE Chromatography

The critical parameters are the pH and ionic strength of the sample and buffer systems.

If the SEC has been run in TRIS, the sample preparation (dilution in water) can be avoided and the loading volume (and loading time) will be reduced. When the AIE is run in TRIS buffer including salt, the AIE is diluted in TRIS buffer until an ionic strength below 3 mS/cm is reached.

Final bulk product is analysed by SDS-PAGE, western blotting (WB), ELISA, HPLC, visual inspection, OD_{280}, pH, Limulus Amoebocyte Lysate (LAL) and amino acid analysis. Intermediate products are analysed by SDS-PAGE, WB, ELISA and OD_{280}.

As will be apparent, the AIE is preferably performed as two consecutive steps, where a first step utilises a weak anion exchange matrix and a second step utilises a strong anion exchange matrix. It is contemplated, however, that the step using a weak AIE matrix can be moved so as to be introduced between the IMAC and SEC steps.

EXAMPLE 1

Culturing of HER-2 variant 104.1

Cell line production

A polyclonal culture of S2 Drosophila melanogaster cells was transfected with a pMT vector (DES® system, Invitrogen) containing the gene coding for the HER2 variant 104.1; the entire nucleic acid sequence of this pMT vector is set forth in SEQ ID NO: 1. The cells were in parallel transfected with a plasmid carrying a gene conferring hygromycin resistance enabling the usage of hygromycin for selection of transfected cells.

A limited dilution technique was used for isolation of single cell clones and a Master Cell Bank (MCB) was produced from the selected cell line.

HER2 protein AutoVac production

One vial from the MCB is resuscitated in a T-flask and propagated in shake flasks containing ExCell420 media (JRH) at 25°C to obtain enough biomass for the inoculation of a bioreactor. A total of $45x10^9$ cells is diluted into 3000 mL with ExCell 420 supplemented with 4 mM Glutamine, 0.1 % Pluronic F68, and 0.5 mL/L PD30 antifoam. The 3000 mL are used to inoculate an Applikon bioreactor (7 L working volume) where the culture grows

for 3 days at 25°C, dO_2 = 50% (100% = air saturation), pH = 6.5 ± 0.1 (adjusted with 5 % H_3PO_4 and 0.5 M NaOH), and stirred at 170 rpm.

This culture is diluted with ExCell 420 supplemented with 4 mM Glutamine, 0.1% Pluronic F68, and 0.5 mL/L PD30 antifoam to a total cell concentration of 15 x 10^6 cells/mL and used for inoculation of a 15 L working volume Applikon Bioreactor maintaining 25°C, dO_2 = 50 % (sparging with pure oxygen), pH = 6.5 ± 0.1 (adjusted with 5 % H_3PO_4 and 0.5 M NaOH), and stirred at 142 rpm. The culture is continuously diluted with ExCell 420 supplemented with 4 mM Glutamine and 0.1 % Pluronic F68 until a total volume of 10 L is reached. The dilution rate is adjusted daily to prevent the cell number to drop below 15 x 10^6 cells/mL. PD30 antifoam is added manually to the culture to maintain a total concentration of 0.5 mL/L.

When filling is completed, perfusion is initiated at 1 RV/day (reactor volumes per day) using the BioSep cell (AppliSens) acoustic retention device to prevent cell loss with the removed media. At a cell concentration of 30 x 10^6 cells/mL, the culture is induced by addition of a total of 2 µM $CdCl_2$ (10 mM stock) to the culture and to the medium reservoir.

The fermentation medium is harvested, centrifuged to obtain a cell free supernatant, and filtrated through a PALL filter 0.8/0.22 µm. The resulting sterile supernatant is either stored at -80°C until use (storage up to three months at -80°C has not produced detectable stability problems) or stored at 4°C without for up to one week (also without any detectable degradation of the protein).

The culture is terminated 10 days post induction and the residual culture media in the bioreactor is discarded.

EXAMPLE 2

Diafiltration/Concentration and Buffer Change

Before use, the fermentation supernatant from Example 1 is, if kept at -80°C, thawed slowly at 4°C over night (the last 3 to 4 hours can be performed in cold water), and thereafter stored for a maximum of 3 days at 4°C. Otherwise, the fermentation supernatant is used directly.

The fermentation supernatant is centrifuged in a Sorvall RE 5C Plus Centrifuge in SCA3000 tubes at 10,000 rpm for 15 min, at 4°C.

Diafiltration is performed in a cold room at 5 ± 3°C on a Pro-Flux M12 (Millipore) with a Pellicon 2 Cassette filter 30K 0.5 m^2 (Millipore, Cat# P2B030A05). The filter is before use stored in 0.1 M NaOH. Before diafiltration the filter is therefore thoroughly washed through with milli-Q water: The standard reservoir is filled with milli-Q water (3L) and washed with water through the filter until 200 ml is left in the reservoir. This procedure is repeated 3 times until a total of 12 litres has passed through the filter. Now, diafiltration can be instigated:

A maximum of 15 L fermentation supernatant is concentrated about 5 times or to a total protein concentration of the medium not exceeding 2 mg/ml, as measured by a calorimetric method.

The recirculation pump is started. The backpressure valve should be partly locked, to give an outlet pressure that shows back pressure (e.g. 0.2 bar). The pump speed is adjusted to 30-50%. The pressure difference should show 0.7 - 1.2 Bar, as this is when the filter's maximum capacity is used and flow over

filter correspond to 3-4 L/min (e.g. Outlet P=0.2 Bar, Inlet P=1.0 bar, ΔP=0.8). Inlet pressure should show max 1.4 bar considering tubing life and performance. If a higher inlet pressure is desired, the recirculation pump pressure can be elevated (%) or the mechanical pressure on the tubing could be elevated by applying higher pressure on the tubing (scale 0-5). When the back pressure valve is closed, a higher inlet and higher outlet pressure is received. The back pressure valve should never be completely shut.

Subsequently, the concentrated fermentation supernatant is subjected to buffer exchange in one or two steps, first using 10 volumes 50 mM Na_2HPO_4/NaH_2PO_4, pH 7.0, and then in the optional second step by 10 volumes 50 mM Na_2HPO_4/NaH_2PO_4, pH 7.5: The standard reservoir on the ProFlux M12 Millipore apparatus is filled with buffer to a total volume of 3L and also the side reservoir is filled with buffer. The setting on the apparatus is the same as when concentrating the sample.

The volume of the buffer changed sample (Vb) is measured and a sample is taken out for SDS-PAGE (Sb). The concentrated buffer changed sample is portioned into 11 ml and 50 ml lots and frozen quickly to -80°C.

Analysis of the Diafiltrate

pH and ionic strength is measured to assure efficiency of the buffer exchange.

Total protein concentration is estimated spectrophotometrically at 280 nm in a 1 cm cuvette. A 10 times diluted sample (diluted in 50 mM sodium phosphate buffer pH 7.5) with 50 mM sodium phosphate buffer pH 7.5 is used as reference (using the approximation Abs_{280} of 1 = 1 mg/ml total protein). The total

protein concentration can additionally be measured by a calorimetric Bradford method (BioRad). The specific concentration of variant 104.1 is measured by ELISA and the diafiltrate is furthermore analysed by SDS-PAGE, silver stained and WB-ECL detection.

Remarks to the Diafiltration Step

It is important to start the buffer exchange at pH below 7.1 before changing to pH 7.5. Otherwise, residual components from the fermentation medium precipitate.

Diafiltered samples have been stored at -80 °C for several months without change in performance in the quantitative HER-2 ELISA. However, when thawed, even short exposure to 37°C and 54°C dramatically decreases the performance of the diafiltrate in the same ELISA. When kept at 0 °C (ice/water) and 4 °C after thawing from -80 °C, the performance in the ELISA of the diafiltrate is stable for up to at least 4 hours.

After diafiltration, it is convenient to inactivate any virus that might be present in the diafiltrate. To do this, samples are thawed at 2-8°C and pooled, subsequently filtered through 1.0/0.45/0.2 µm filters, where after 50% Tween-20, and TnBP are added to a final concentration of 2% and 0.3%, respectively. The solution is kept at 2-8°C for 16-20 hours while gently stirring. The solution is then 0.2 µm filtered prior to the subsequent IMAC chromatography step (Example 3).

EXAMPLE 3

IMAC

The general chromatographic principle for IMAC is affinity between a "tag" on the protein and a metal ion chelate complex on the column matrix. The chromatographic matrix is POROS 20MC or, preferably, 50MC (both from Applied Biosystems) and the chelating metal ion is Zn^{2+}. The 104.1 molecule is provided with a His-tag and the buffer system for binding of the His-tag to the column matrix is 50 mM Na_2HPO_4/NaH_2PO_4, 0.1% Tween20, pH 7.5.

2-4 mg 104.1 per ml column material is loaded and subsequently eluted using 100 mM L-Histidine, 50 mM Na_2HPO_4/NaH_2PO_4, pH 7.5, 0.1 % Tween20. Alternatively, when eluting with 200 mM Imidazole, the buffer system for binding also contains 5 mM Imidazole.

Instrument: VISION Work Station (Applied Biosystems).
Software: Data analysis software for Vision, BioCAD 700E, version 3 series software, Perseptive Biosystem.
Detection: UV absorbance at λ = 280 and 220 nm.
Conductivity: 0 - 200 mS
pH calibrated at: 7.0 and 10
Temperature: The procedure was made with buffers and column at room temperature (20-24°C) and loading of sample on ice and fraction collection at 10°C.

Sample Preparation

To the diafiltrate containing the 104.1 molecule, 800 mM imidazole is added to a final concentration of 5 mM imidazole when an Imidazole containing buffer is used for elution in the IMAC,

whereas Tween-20 is added to a final concentration of 0.1% (v/v) when L-histidine is used for elution in the IMAC. Immediately before application to the column the sample is filtrated by vacuum through a 0.22 µm filter. The sample is kept at 5 ± 3°C (preferably 4°C) until application to the column where it is held on ice when applied. Handling time at room temperature should be minimized.

Column

POROS 20MC or 50 MC (preferred) in a 16 x 100 mm (20.1 ml) PEEK column (Applied Biosystems) packed at 2000-2500 psi - other columns depending on the scale of the purification procedure, are equally useful.

Column Charge (strip-charge) Program

Flow: 10 ml/min.

1. 5 CV of 50 mM $NaPO_4$ (abbreviation for NaH_2PO_4/ Na_2HPO_4) pH 7.5, 0.1% Tween-20 (strip).
2. 5 CV H_2O (Milli-Q).
3. 40 CV 100 mM $ZnCl_2$, pH 4.5.
4. 40 CV H_2O (Milli-Q).
5. 20 CV 50 mM $NaPO_4$ pH 7.5, 0.1% Tween-20.

The column should be charged before each run.

Chromatography Program

Flow rate 30 ml/min, loading 5 ml/min.

Fraction collection size 9 ml, and 5 ml at the elution peak with 100 mM L-histidine (or, where applicable, at elution peak

with 200 mM imidazole). Collect in a cooled (10°C) fraction collector.

The solution containing the virus inactivated diafiltrate is loaded on to the column at 4°C and washed with 20 CV 50 mM $NaPO_4$ pH 7.5, 0.1% Tween 20, 0.5 M NaCl followed by 5 CV of 50 mM $NaPO_4$ pH 7.5, 0.1% Tween 20 prior to elution with 50 mM $NaPO_4$ pH 7.5, 0.1% Tween 20, 100 mM Histidine.

Pool the fractions from the eluted peak from chromatogram (cf. Fig. 1). Begin pooling at peak start and collect a total of 50 ml (or 1.5 column volumes) or pool fractions based on SDS-PAGE/WB results or ELISA to a total of 50 ml. This pool can be saved over night at 5±3°C or carried on to SEC straight away. Storage of pool up 7 days at 5±3°C, -20°C and colder than -70°C has shown no loss in total protein after filtration through 0.22 µm filter when analysed on SDS PAGE and WB-ECL.

Sanitization of column

Wash the column with 5 CV 1 M NaOH, 2 M NaCl, followed by 10 CV of water. If further sanitization is needed see the RSP from the manufacturer. The column is stored in 30% EtOH at 5-30°C.

Analysis of IMAC Intermediate

Start material, flow through and eluted fractions are analysed by WB-ECL and SDS-PAGE/silver stained.

Analysis of IMAC Pool

The pool is analyzed by WB-ECL and SDS-PAGE/silver stained, HPLC and $OD_{280\ nm}$ (on 10 times diluted sample). The specific 104.1 concentration is determined by ELISA.

EXAMPLE 4

SEC Gel Filtration Chromatography

The gel filtration step is run in mM Tris, 0.1% Tween-20, pH 7.5, but 50 mM Na_2HPO_4/NaH_2PO_4 can substitute the Tris as buffer system. Fifty ml from IMAC of Example 3 is loaded by Superloop (Pharmacia) on a Superdex 200 prep grade matrix.

Instrument: BioCAD 700E Work Station for Perfusion Chromatography equipped with a semi-preparative flow cell to reduce the back pressure on the column.

Software: Data analysis software for Vision, BioCAD 700E, version 3 series software, Perseptive Biosystem.

Detection: UV absorbance at λ = 280 and 220 nm.

Conductivity: 0 - 200 mS

pH calibrated at: 7.0 and 10

Temperature: Buffers and column are room temperature (20-24°C) and the sample is loaded directly from 4°C. Fractions containing the monomer 104.1 should be moved to 4°C directly after collection if the collector is not cooled.

Sample Preparation

The Pool from IMAC in buffer, 50 mM Na_2HPO_4/NaH_2PO_4, 0.1% Tween20, 100 mM L-Histidine (or 200 mM Imidazole), pH 7.5, requires no special preparation. The sample should be kept cool (5±3°C) until loading.

Column

Superdex 200 prep grade, packed in Pharmacia column XK 50x960mm (1884 ml) at 15 ml/min as final flow rate. Load maximum 50 ml.

Chromatography Program

General flow rate 8 ml/min, load 5 ml/min.

Fraction size 9.0 ml

1. Equilibration 1.5 CV 20 mM Tris, 0.1% Tween-20, pH 7.5
2. Load: via 50 ml Super Loop, 5 ml/min
3. Elution 1.2 CV 20 mM Tris, 0.1% Tween-20, pH 7.5

The fractions from the monomer peak (cf. Fig. 2) are pooled by comparing gel and/or SE/RP-HPLC results to obtain a pure product (approximately 130 ml). This pool can be saved over night at 5±3°C or carried on directly to the AIE chromatography of Example 5. Storage of pool up to 7 days at 5±3°C, -20°C and colder than -70°C has shown no loss in total protein after filtration through 0.22 µm filter when analysed by SDS PAGE and WB-ECL.

Sanitization and cleaning of column

The column is cleaned by running 0.5 NaOH in the reversed flow direction for 1-2 h at 6.5 ml/min (20 cm/h) followed by 3 bed volumes of buffer. For sanitization run 0.5-1.0 NaOH in reversed flow direction, 13 ml/min (40 cm/h) for 30-60 min followed by 3-5 bed volumes of sterile buffer. The column is stored in 20% ethanol at 4-8°C. For additional information confer manufactures manual.

Analysis of the SEC Intermediate

Start material and eluted fractions are analyzed by WB-ECL, SDS-PAGE/silver stained and SE/RP-HPLC.

Analysis of SEC Pool

The pool is analysed by WB-ECL and SDS-PAGE/silver stained, HPLC and $OD_{280\ nm}$. The specific 104.1 concentration is determined by ELISA.

Remarks to SEC

Make sure that the sample is kept at 5±3°C between IMAC and loading from the Superloop.

If the fraction collector is not cooled (10°C) make sure that fractions are moved to cold room/fridge immediately after the collection.

When the column is frequently used, a constant flow (0.2 ml/min) of 20 mM Tris, pH 7.5, 0.1% Tween 20 is applied to the column (alternatively 50 mM Na_2HPO_4/NaH_2PO_4 is used instead of 20 mM Tris and if that is the case, Tween-20 is used at 0.5%).

EXAMPLE 5

AIE Chromatography

First optional step

Anion Exchange Chromatography is first optionally performed on a Poros 50PI matrix column. The column is equilibrated with 20 mM Tris HCl, 0.1% Tween 20 at pH 7.5. Post-equilibration, a sample is retained for bio burden testing.

The SEC eluate is loaded onto the column at 4°C and the column washed with 20 CV 20 mM Tris HCl, 0.1% Tween 20 at pH 7.5 followed by product elution with 20 mM Tris HCl, 250 mM NaCl,

0.1 % Tween 20 pH 7.5. The product pool is 0.2µm filtered, analysed by OD280 nm, 104.1 ELISA, RP-HPLC and SE-HPLC, and stored at 2-8°C for up to 3 days.

The Poros 50PI column is flushed with H_2O (milli-Q) and cleaned with 10 CV of 2 M NaCl, 1 M NaOH before storage in 20 mM NaOH. It is sanitised with 5 CV of 0.5 M NaOH and flushed with H_2O (milli-Q) before equilibration and subsequent re-use.

Mandatory step

Anion exchange chromatography is performed at pH 7.5 (20 mM TRIS), preferably on a strong anion exchange perfusion matrix POROS 50HQ (Applied Biosystems) in a PEEK 4.6x100 mm (1.662 ml) column. 104.1 is eluted in 200 mM NaCl.

Instrument: VISION Work Station for Perfusion Chromatography.
Software: Data analysis software for Vision, BioCAD 700E, version 3 series software, Perseptive Biosystem.
Detection: UV absorbance at λ = 280 and 220 nm.
Conductivity: 0 - 200 mS
pH calibrated at: 7.0 and 10
Temperature: The procedure was made with buffers and column at room temperature (20-24°C) and loading of sample from ice. The fraction collector was cooled to 10°C.

Sample Preparation

If the first optional AI step is omitted, the SEC intermediate may be diluted 1+3 (to 25%) in water containing 0.1% Tween-20 under gentle magnetic stirring. Otherwise, the POROS 50PI eluate is diluted in 15 volumes 20 mM Tris HCl, 0.1% Tween-20 at pH 7.5 to reduce conductivity. The sample should be kept cool (5±3°C) until and during loading.

Column

POROS 50HQ is packed in a 4.6 x 100 mm (1.662 ml) PEEK column (Applied Biosystems) at 2000-2500 psi.

Chromatography Program

General flow rate 10 ml/min, load sample 5 ml/min.

Fraction size: 9 ml during sample load, 1 ml during 1st elution step, and 5 ml during 2nd elution step

Anion Exchange Chromatography is performed on a Poros 50HQ matrix column at 4°C. The column is equilibrated with 20 mM Tris HCl, 0.1% Tween 20 at pH 7.5. Post-equilibration a sample is retained for bio burden testing.

The sample is loaded onto the column and the column washed with 10 CV 20 mM Tris HCl, 0.1% Tween 20 at pH 7.5 and 10 CV 20 mM Tris HCl, 20 mM NaCl, 0.1% Tween 20 at pH 7.5 followed by product elution with 20 mM Tris HCl, 200 mM NaCl, 0.1 % Tween 20 pH 7.5.

The fractions from the elution peak (cf. Fig. 3) are pooled by comparing gel results to obtain a concentration of more than 2.5 mg/ml or OD_{280nm} more than 2.5. The fractions can be kept over night at 5±3°C before pooled. Storage of pool up to 7 days at 5±3°C, -20°C and colder than -70°C has shown no loss in total protein after filtration through 0.22 µm filter when analysed by SDS PAGE and WB-ECL.

Sanitization of column

Wash the column with 10 column volumes (CV) of 1 M NaOH, 2 M NaCl, followed by 20 CV of water. If further sanitization is

needed confer manufacturer's manual. The column is stored in 30% ethanol at 5-30°C.

Analysis

Start material, flow through and eluted fractions are analysed by WB-ECL and SDS-PAGE/silver stained.

Analysis of AIE Pool

The pool is analysed by WB-ECL and SDS-PAGE/silver stained, Appearance and description, pH, HPLC, LAL and $OD_{280\ nm}$ (use 3 times diluted sample). The specific 104.1 concentration is determined by ELISA.

Remarks to AIE

If the SEC intermediate is diluted less than 1 + 3 (25%) 104.1 is detected in the run-through from the AIE due to interference from the phosphate buffer.

Up to 25 mg 104.1 has been applied to the AIE column without detectable amounts of 104.1 in the run-through.

Optional virus filtration

Virus filtration and the subsequent dilution and filling of drug substance take place in a Class 100 environment. Prefiltration purified bulks from one or more Poros 50HQ runs are removed from frozen storage and thawed at 2-8°C. They are then 0.1 µm filtered and passed through a Planova 20N virus filtration membrane. The filter is retained for integrity testing. The virus filtered material is adjusted to a concentration of 2.5-3.0 mg/ml by measurement of OD280 nm.

Storage of Final Bulk Product

The final bulk product is stored at temperatures colder than -70°C in a polypropylene container or CZ vial after filtration through 0.22 µm filter.

The product thus obtained has a purity which is suitable for clinical use.

CLAIMS

1. A method for purification of an EGFR family derived protein, said protein being recombinantly produced in an insect cell culture and said protein being one that is suitable for purification by means of immobilised metal affinity chromatography, the method comprising obtaining, from said insect cell culture, a substantially cell-free sample containing said EGFR family derived protein, and thereafter enriching for said EGFR family derived protein by means of subsequent steps of
- diafiltration and exchange of culture medium with buffer,
- immobilized metal affinity chromatography (IMAC),
- size exclusion chromatography (SEC), and
- anion exchange chromatography (AIE).

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the EGFR family derived protein includes a heterologous amino acid sequence that facilitates purification by means of IMAC.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the heterologous amino acid sequence is rich in histidine residues.

4. The method according to claim 3, wherein the heterologous amino acid sequence comprises residues 1-14 of SEQ ID NO: 2.

5. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the EGFR family derived protein comprises a substantial part of the amino acid sequence of human EGFR or human HER-2.

6. The method according to claim 5, wherein the substantial portion is mainly derived from the extracellular portion of EGFR or HER-2.

7. The method according to claim 5 or 6, wherein the EGFR family derived protein is a variant of human HER-2.

8. The method according to claim 7, wherein the variant of human HER-2 includes at least one foreign T helper cell epitope.

9. The method according to claim 8, wherein the variant of human HER-2 includes tetanus toxoid epitopes P2 (residues 269-282 of SEQ ID NO: 2) and P30 (residues 649-669 of SEQ ID NO: 2).

10. The method according to claim 9, wherein the variant of human HER-2 includes amino acid residues 17-677 of SEQ ID NO: 2.

11. The method according to claim 10, wherein the amino acid sequence of the variant of human HER-2 consists of residues 1-677 of SEQ ID NO: 2.

12. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the step of diafiltration/buffer exchange is performed at a temperature from about 2 to about 25°C, preferably at a temperature of about 3 to about 8°C, optionally with the addition of a detergent such as Tween when the temperature is beyond 10°C.

13. The method according to claim 12, wherein the diafiltration is performed in two rounds so as to initially concentrate macromolecular compounds in the sample of culture medium and thereafter to exchange culture medium with buffer.

14. The method according to claim 13, wherein the macromolecular compounds are concentrated between about 2 and about 25 times.

15. The method according to claim 14, wherein the macromolecular compounds are concentrated about 3-5 times.

16. The method according to any one of claims 12-15, wherein the buffer exchange is performed in one or two subsequent steps of which the first takes place at a pH of at least 6.5 and at most 7.2 and of which the second optional step takes place at a pH of at least 7.0 and of most 8.0.

17. The method according to any one of claims 12-16, wherein a phosphate buffer is used for the buffer exchange.

18. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein imidazole, histidine or a high salt concentration buffer is added to the diafiltrated and buffer exchanged sample or wherein the buffer exchanged sample is substantially unaltered.

19. The method according to claim 18, wherein imidazole, when added, is added to reach a concentration of between about 0.05 to about 20 mM.

20. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein a detergent selected from a Polyoxyethylene sorbitan fatty acid ester such as Tween 20, Tween 40, Tween 60, Tween 80, and Tween 85, an alkylaryl polyether alcohol such as Triton X100, a non-ionic detergent, and a carbohydrate based detergent such as octylglycoside, is added to the diafiltrated and buffer exchanged sample to reach a concentration of between about 0.05% (v/v) and 10% (v/v), such as about 0.1% (v/v).

21. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the IMAC step involves charging of a chromatographic medium with a divalent metal ion prior to application of the buffer exchanged sample.

22. The method according to claim 21, wherein the divalent metal ion is selected from the group consisting of Ni^{2+}, Cu^{2+}, Zn^{2+}, Co^{2+}, and Fe^{2+}, preferably Zn^{2+}.

23. The method according to claim 21 or 22, wherein elution of the chromatographic medium is performed by applying imidazole, histidine, a high salt concentration buffer, or a change of pH onto the chromatographic medium.

24. The method according to claim 23, wherein elution of the chromatographic medium is performed by applying imidazole in one single step at a concentration between about 50 mM and about 500 mM, preferably at a concentration of about 200 mM, or wherein elution is performed by applying histidine in one single step at a concentration between about 20 mM and 400 mM, preferably about 100 mM.

25. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the SEC step involves elution with a phosphate or TRIS buffer or a biological buffer, such as HEPES.

26. The method according to claim 25, wherein the pH is maintained at about 7-8, preferably about 7.5.

27. The method according to claim 25 or 26, wherein the average pore size of the SEC matrix separates globular protein between 10 kDa and 600 kDa.

28. The method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein samples containing the EGFR family derived protein ob-

tained from SEC, if necessary, is diluted before the AIE step so as to adjust a phosphate concentration to less than 15 mM, such as to the range between 10 and 12.5 mM.

29. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the AIE step involves loading of the sample containing the EGFR family derived protein obtained after SEC on a strong or weak anion exchange matrix, or both.

30. The method according to claim 29, wherein elution is performed with a buffered NaCl solution at a pH between 7 and 8.

31. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein a virus inactivation step is introduced between the diafiltration/buffer exchange and IMAC steps.

32. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the AIE step is followed by a virus filtration step.

33. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, where an AIE step utilising a weak anion exchange column is introduced between the IMAC and SEC steps.

34. An immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein that comprises the amino acid sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO: 2, residues 17-677.

35. The immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein according to claim 34 that consists of the amino acid sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO: 2, residues 1-677.

36. A nucleic acid fragment that encodes the immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein according to claim 34 or 35.

37. The nucleic acid fragment according to claim 36, which is a DNA fragment.

38. A vector carrying the nucleic acid fragment according to claim 36 or 37.

39. The vector according to claim 37, which is capable of autonomous replication.

40. The vector according to claim 37 or 39 being selected from the group consisting of a plasmid, a phage, a cosmid, a mini-chromosome, and a virus.

41. The vector according to any one of claims 37-40, which is an expression vector.

42. The vector according to claim 41, comprising in the 5'→3' direction and in operable linkage, a promoter for driving expression of the nucleic acid fragment according to claim 36 or 37, optionally a nucleic acid sequence encoding a leader peptide enabling secretion of or integration into the membrane of the polypeptide fragment, the nucleic acid fragment according to claim 36 or 37, and optionally a nucleic acid sequence encoding a terminator

43. A transformed host cell carrying the vector of any one of claims 37-42.

44. A stable cell line which carries the vector according to claim 41 or 42 and which expresses the nucleic acid fragment according to claim 36 or 37, and which optionally secretes or carries the immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein according to claim 34 or 35 on its surface.

45. An immunogenic composition for immunizing against HER-2 protein in a human comprising the immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein according to claim 34 or 35 in admixture with a pharma-

ceutically acceptable carrier or vehicle and optionally an adjuvant.

46. An immunogenic composition for immunizing against HER-2 protein in a human comprising the vector according to claim 41 or 42 in admixture with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier or vehicle and optionally an adjuvant

47. A method for immunizing a human against autologous HER-2, the method comprising administering an immunogenically effective amount of

- the immunogenic variant of HER-2 protein according to claim 34 or 35, or
- the immunogenic composition according to claim 45, or
- the vector according to claim 41 or 42, or
- the immunogenic composition according to claim 46,

to the human being.

48. The method according to claim 47 wherein the immunization against autologous HER-2 protein is used for treating or ameliorating cancer.