HOMOGENEOUS VACCINE COMPOSITION FOR THE TUMOR TREATMENT AND ITS OBTANING METHOD.

Technical field:

The present invention relates to biotechnology, particularly with the human health. In an embodiment, the present invention describes protective and /or therapeutic cancer vaccines, principally vaccine compositions to elicit a significant increase of the immune response against the Epidermal Growth Factor (EGF), whose oncological relevance has been broadly demonstratiod, mainly for the growth of tumors of epithelial origin.

Previous Art:

The EGF receptor (EGFR) system, including the ligands, is a molecular complex which specifically regulates the cellular growth and its effect on the uncontrolled growth of epithelial tumors.

In the tumorigenic process, the deregulation of paracrine and autocrine processes for activation of the EGRF, involve the over-expression of the growth factors as well as the increased synthesis and/or mutation of the receptors.

The EGF is a 53 amino acids polypeptide, with an apparent molecular weight of 6045 Da. This peptide was isolated and purified for the first time by Cohen S., J. Biol. Chem. 20 (1962) 237, 1.555).

The EGF is a member of the EGFR ligands family; this family comprises structural and functionally related proteins. Others members of this family are: Transforming Growth Factor (TGF), anmphiregulin (AR), criptol (CR1), heparine binding growth factor, betaceluline and ephireguline. On the other hand the family of the poxvirus includes proteins related with the EGF; among them the most characterized is the vaccinia virus growth factor (VGF).

All these molecules are able to bind the EGFR with the consequent receptor activation, so they are known as EGFR ligands and play a role in the normal and tumor cell growth.

The EGFR is a 170 kDa glycoprotein; the gene has already been cloned and sequenced. The intra-cellular domain of this receptor is associated with the tyrosine kynase activity of molecules that shows a structural homology with those proteins coded by the v-erb-B oncogen, and they are involved with the malignant transformation process (HELDIN C.H. (1984), CELL 37, 9-20.).

The experimental evidences of the last years about the relation between the EGFR and its ligands system with cancer, makes it a very attractive target for cancer immunotherapy.

Previous results have demonstratiod the efficacy for cancer of the active immunotherapy with the EGF based vaccine. In fact, preclinical and clinical evidences have been obtained about the immunogenicity and lack of toxicity caused by vaccination with the hrEGF linked to a carrier protein (González and cols. (1996), Vaccine Research 5(4), 233-243.)

EP 0 657 175 describe a vaccine composition that comprises autologous EGF coupled to carrier protein which inhibit the growth of EGF depending tumors by an auto-immune effect.

The vaccine composition described in EP 0 657 175, is conjugated vaccines comprising the EGF coupled to a carrier protein (the P64K protein, the cholera toxin B chain , the titanic toxoid protein and / or monoclonal antibodies) and as a consequence is obtained an heterogeneous and low reproducible mixture of conjugated species.

The novel vaccine composition described in the present invention comprises the autologous EGF as active principle, and is characterized for having a homogeneous chemical composition, with a defined purity, eliciting higher immunogenicity, a substantially increased clinical activity and with fewer immunizations for getting a therapeutical effect.

The lower autologous antigen content in the vaccine composition of the present invention surprisingly doesn't induce lower EGF antibody titers in humans by the contrary, it rather induce significant increase of the anti-EGF antibody titers. The lower amount of EGF contents and its derivatives in the vaccine composition was obtained by developing of a purification method based on membrane filtration, which is also an object of the present invention.

Furthermore, the present invention provides a homogeneous and reproducible vaccine composition with a higher clinical effect and lower immunizations, meaning a great advantage in cancer therapy and for the patient, in comparison with vaccine compositions previously described.

The vaccine composition of the present invention could also comprise appropriate adjuvants such as Aluminium hydroxide or Montanide.

In another embodiment, the present invention relates to a sanitary procedure for the manufacture of said vaccine composition, appropriate for its use in humans by parenteral route.

The procedure comprises a suitable method for the covalent conjugation of the hrEGF to the carrier protein P64K, and the purification of this conjugated by using ultra filtration membranes in a range of 50-100 kDa, to remove the biologically inactive species conjugated (without immunogenic activity), as well as other chemical impurities.

Detailed Description of the Invention.

The present invention discloses a novel vaccine composition based on the autologous EGF having said vaccine composition a homogeneous chemical composition with defined purity, and which is able to elicit potentate immunogenicity and a substantially increased clinical activity. Additionally, with the vaccine composition of the present invention are able higher therapeutic doses without increasing the number of injections when the therapeutic dose must be increased, because by the procedure to obtain the vaccine composition of the present invention it is possible to increase the concentration of the conjugated species hrEGF–rP64K , which is known as potency.

Surprisingly, the inventors found that when decreasing the content of the autologous antigen by a novel purification procedure the vaccine composition of the present invention is able to elicit a significant increase of the immune response against the autologous EGF in comparison with heterogeneous EGF-based vaccines previously reported.

The vaccine composition obtained from the decrease of the content of the autologous antigen through the membrane ultrafiltratrion purification methodology has a homogeneous composition where the immunologically active species (conjugated species hrEGF-rP64K) shows molecular weight superior to 60kDa. This vaccine composition shows a molecular exclusion chromatographic profile characterized because the species carrying the biological activity represents more than the 90% of the total chromatogram area, corresponding to the total vaccine composition, as it is shown in Figure 4

Mass Spectrometry analysis of the present vaccine composition has revealed its structural features. The peptide maps of two different lots show a high homology between lots in the position s as well as in the ratio (Figure 5). This high homology between lots confirms the accuracy of the parameters of the chemical conjugation as well as the purification procedures, both described by the present invention. Mass Spectrometry analysis further revealed the sequence of the major peptides derived from the vaccine composition of the present invention. (Table 3)

In the present vaccine composition the conjugation ratio between the EGF and P64K proteins is 1:2, which means 2 molecules of EGF per P64K molecule.

Methodology for obtaining the vaccine composition.

Purification procedure for decreasing the content of autologous EGF.

Starting from experimental observations that evidenced that a decrease on the hrEGF content in the vaccine composition increase its immunological action, is developed a

method for decrease the content in hrEGF in the heterogeneous mixture of conjugates; enriching the vaccine composition in conjugated species of high molecular weight (immunologically active species) and free of glutaraldehyde.

The purification procedure using ultrafiltration membranes in a range among 50-100kDa developed and described in the present invention, consists of two stages:

In the initial stage successive changes of tampon solution are performed (diafiltration) to remove glutaraldehyde and to eliminate the excess of autologous protein, either free or forming conjugated hrEGF-hrEGF of different sizes. During this stage, between 10 and 15 changes of the tampon solution are carried out.

The second stage is the concentration of the purified chemical conjugated, in which more than 90% of its composition corresponds to immunogenic species hrEGF-rP64K. During the concentration stage the initial volume of the chemical conjugated is reduced until reaching a final protein concentration (conjugated species hrEGF-rP64K) in a range among 1-12 mg/mL. This versatility in the range of concentrations of the active principle (total milligrams of conjugated hrEGFrP64K for milliliters) for this vaccine composition is a great advantage for cancer therapy. This allows increasing the treatment dose without implying for the patient an increment in the frequency of immunization and/or an increase in the number of immunization sites.

With the purpose of monitoring the quality of the purification of the chemical conjugated it was evaluated the pH and the conductivity of the one retained and of the permeate. It was also carried out the determination of protein concentration by the method described by Lowry D.H. and col. J. Biol Chem 191: 495-498, 1951 and the percent of homogeneity were determined from the analysis of the gel filtration chromatography (HPLC-FG).

The singularity of this methodology assures that the obtained vaccine composition has a homogeneous composition and defined purity, characterized by the major presence of the immunologically active species: conjugated hrEGF-rP64K.

Surprisingly, the removal of the excess of autologous protein (hrEGF) free or polymeric doesn't cause the reduction, but rather it allows to increase significantly the concentration of anti-EGF antibodies (at 1/1000 dilution), to 10 times more this obtained when immunizing mice with polymers of hrEGF and with free hrEGF. The reduction of the content of autologous protein in the vaccine composition causes in patient increments of at least 2 times the maximum titer of anti EGF antibodies. This increment of the antibody titers is even observed in those patients that receive half of per immunization (2.4 mg) in comparison with patients that receive dose of 4.8 mg per dose of the vaccine composition described in EP 0657 175. These results indicate that the vaccine composition, described in the present invention has bigger immunological

activity per milligram of immunologically active protein, as compared with other vaccine compositions.

Obtaining a chemical conjugated between the recombinant protein P64K (rP64K) and the human recombinant Epidermal Growth Factor (hrEGF).

Starting from the evaluation and optimization of the conditions for the chemical conjugation reaction between the proteins hrEGF and rP64K a conjugation method is developed that requires of a high molar proportion of the autologous protein, 10 moles of hrEGF for each rP64K mol, to guarantee high conjugation efficiency among both. The necessary excess of autologous protein during the chemical conjugation, to guarantee its efficiency, is eliminated subsequently through the purification method of membrane ultrafiltration as previously described, that allows obtaining a vaccine composition with high homogeneity. The procedure described in the present invention to guarantee an appropriate chemical conjugation among both proteins consists of a single step and begins mixing the hrEGF protein previously concentratiod (>6 mg/mL) and the protein rP64K (≥ 1 mg/mL) in the conjugation reactor. To this protein mixture is added the PBS/$MgCl_2$ solution (pH 6.8-7.2) and the conjugation solution of glutaraldehyde 0.5%. The mixture is maintained in constant stirring for 2 hours at temperature 22°C± 2°C. The final protein concentration in the reaction mixture for the hrEGF is 0.82 mg/mL and for the protein rP64K it is 0.89 mg/mL. The total protein concentration during the conjugation reaction is of 2 mg/mL and the final concentration of the glutaraldehyde in the reaction mixture is of 0.05%.

The vaccine composition according to the present invention can be employed together with appropriated adjuvants, such as aluminum hydroxide or Montanide.

In another aspect, the present invention involves a sanitary procedure for obtaining of a vaccine composition, to be administered by parenteral route, procedure that minimizes the opportunities of microbial contamination of the vaccine composition during the conjugation allowing to carry out the purification methodology of the chemical conjugated in few hours and facilitating the increment of the volume of the vaccine composition to be obtained, among other advantages. The following examples illustratio more in detail the present invention.

The Example 1 describes the molecular characterization of the vaccine composition described in the present invention. The molecular characterization includes: the chromatographic identification by HPLC-FG of the conjugated species formed during the conjugation reaction, the determination of the conjugation ratio between the proteins hrEGF and rP64K and the definition of the peptides map that characterizes to this novel vaccine composition.

The Example 2 describes the bio-assays in mouse carried out to evaluate the immunogenicity of the novel vaccine composition described in the present invention.

The Example 3 describes the effectiveness in the clinical use of the present vaccine composition in the treatment of lung tumors of epithelial origin.

The Example 4 describe obtaining the vaccine compositions adjusted a at different potency (total milligrams of conjugated hrEGF-rP64K/vial), using the same conjugation methodology and purification as described in the present invention.

The Example 5 shows the removal of the glutaraldehyde used in the conjugation reaction by means of the purification methodology of the chemical conjugated through a 50kDa ultrafiltration membrane.

EXAMPLES:

EXAMPLE 1: Molecular characterization of the vaccine composition described in the present invention (vaccine composition A).

1.1 Chromatographic characterization of the vaccine composition described in the present invention.

For the chromatographic characterization of the vaccine composition purified by ultra filtration, homoligomeric conjugated hrEGF-hrEGF and rP64K-rP64K were used as indicators

The chromatographic profiles shown by the homoligomeric conjugated (hrEGF-hrEGF and rP64K-rP64K) were compared with the chromatographic profile shown by the conjugated without purifying obtained by the chemical conjugation reaction among the proteins hrEGF and rP64K. In Figure 1 are shown the profiles of the homoligomeric conjugates rP64K-rP64K and the profile obtained when carrying out the chemical conjugation between the proteins hrEGF and rP64K (chemical conjugated without purifying by ultrafiltración). The circulated area belongs to the conjugated species hrEGF-rP64K. The profile of the conjugated rP64K-rP64K doesn't show total coincidence with this of the chemical conjugated hrEGF-rP64K due to the contribution of the hrEGF molecules conjugated to the rP64K.

In Figure 2 are shown the results obtained after carrying out an un-naturalized electrophoresis in reduced conditions and a Western Blot of the vaccine composition purified by ultrafiltración. The development was carried out with an anti-EGF antibody conjugated with alkaline phosphatase. The EGF is a protein of apparent molecular weight of 6kDa so; it should be located in the inferior area of the gel. It identification by means of inmuno-detection with anti-EGF antibodies in the area corresponding to the proteins of molecular weigh apparently superiors to 6 kDa confirms that hrEGF

molecules exist together to the rP64K in the area of the gel corresponding to the conjugated species hrEGF-rP64K.

When comparing the chromatographic profile of the chemical conjugated hrEGF-rP64 without purification with this of the homoligomeric conjugated hrEGF-hrEGF, it can be appreciated that exist a correspondence between both profiles. This evidence confirm that after the valley, exist a zone that corresponds to the hrEGF species conjugated in between them (EGF polymers) as well as free hrEGF (Figure 3).

The molecular exclusion chromatographic profile (Figure 4) of the vaccine composition object of the present invention shows that the area corresponding to the conjugated species hrEGF-rP64K, constitute more than the 90% of the total area of the chromatogram (shadow area) evidencing the high homogeneity of the described vaccine composition.

1.2. Conjugation ratio between the proteins hrEGF and rP64K in the vaccine composition described in the present invention.

With the objective of determining the conjugation ratio of the hrEGF and the rP64K in the vaccine composition, the moles of each one of the constitutive proteins were determined For this it was taken a vaccine composition obtained from the 50kDa ultrafiltration process, and the chromatographic fraction corresponding to the rhEGF-rP64K conjugated species was collected. These fractions were subjected to amino acid analysis.

The determination of the conjugation ratio was carried out by 2 methods.

1. A method was based in the estimation of the quantity of Phenylalanine (Phe) and Threonine (Thr) in the vaccine composition (aminoacid only present in the rP64K molecule). The quantities of these amino acids were used to determine the quantity of rP64K. Starting from this last one, and keeping in mind the total quantity of amino acids of the mixture, the quantity of EGF was determined.
2. The other method was based on the direct determination of the relative quantities of each protein, using the amino acid sequence and based in the quantification of those amino acids Asparagine+Aspartic (Asx), Glutamine + Glutamic (Glx), Glicine (Gly) and Alanine (Ala) (residues highly stable to the acid hydrolysis and commonly used in the quantification of proteins).

Tables 1 and 2show the results obtained by each method.

Mean quantity of rP64K	**Mean quantity of hrEGF**	**Mean ratio of conjugation**
12,07 nmoles	23,13 nmoles	1,92

Table 1: Determination of the conjugation ratio between the hrEGF and rP64K proteins carrying out the determination of aminoacidic composition of the vaccine composition purified by ultrafiltración, based on the method of determination of the quantity of Phenilalanina (Phe) and Threonina (Thr)

Protein	Quantity of protein	Conjugation ratio
rP64K	12,04 nmoles	2,00
hrEGF	24,05 nmoles	

Table 2: Determination of the conjugation ratio between the hrEGF and rP64K proteins carrying out the determination of aminoacidic composition of the vaccine composition purified by ultrafiltration, based on the method of determination of the relative quantities of the amino acids Asparagine+Aspartic (Asx), Glutamine + Glutamic (Glx), Glicine (Gly) and Alanine (Ala)

The results obtained by both methods shows correspondence in the estimate of the conjugation ratio among the hrEGF:rP64K proteins for the vaccine composition described in the present invention. The calculated ratio of conjugation was of (1:2), which means 2 hrEGF molecules for each rP64K molecule.

1.3. The peptide maps characterizing the vaccine composition described in the present invention.

With the objective of characterizing the structure of the vaccine composition presented in the present invention and to evidence the reproducibility of the procedure it was developed and characterized the peptide map obtained after the digestion of the conjugated fractions hrEGF-rP64K with the endoprotease Glu-C. Each one of the fractions of the obtained map were identified and sequenced by Mass Spectrometry.

Figure 5 shows the peptide maps obtained starting from two vaccine compositions obtained independently, where a great similarity is appreciated in the peptides that appeared and in its relative proportion. The reproducibility among those peptide maps obtained starting from both vaccine compositions is an indicative of the control that exist over the conditions in which the procedures of chemical conjugation and purification (described in the present invention) happen.

The identification of the peptides contained in each fraction of the map was obtained by the analysis of each one of them by the MALDI method (Matrix Assisted Laser Desorption Ionization) and by the ESI-MS method (Electrospray

Ionization/Electronebulization by ionization). In Table 3 the sequence of the major peptides is shown.

Peak	Peptides
HG05	[illegible]
	QAAPTGE
HG06	SIGMAAE
	[illegible]
HG08	[illegible]
HG09	KISE
	[illegible]
HG11	AAAAPAQEAPKAA
	[illegible]
HG12	SIGMAAE
HG14	VKVKVGDKISE
HG15	VAWVGE
HG16	VAWVGETE
	[illegible]
HG17	VCLAIE
HG18	VRHLAANGIKYPEPE
HG19	[illegible]
	VRHLAANGIKYPEPE
HG20	[illegible]
	RVIPGVAYTSPE
	[illegible]
	VRHLAANGIKYPEPE
HG21	KAGVAVTDRGFIE
	[illegible]
	GGPGGYSAAFAAADE
HG22	[illegible]
	GLKVAIVE
HG23	[illegible]
	MGCDAADIGKTIHPHPTLGE
	[illegible]
HG24	[illegible]
	YDVVVLG

Peak	Peptides
HG25	AVLVAAGRAPNGKLISAE
	[illegible]
	TGRIIGGGIVGPNGGDMIGE
HG26	[illegible]
	VRHLAANGIKYPEPELD
HG27	TGRIIGGGIVGPNGGDMIGE
	[illegible]
HG28	GGLIVVVE
HG29	GGLIVVVE
	TGRIIGGGIVGPNGGDMIGE
	YRFDNIMVNTKTVAVEPKED
HG30	AIGDIVGQPMLAHKAVHE
	AIGDIVGQPMLAHKAVHE
HG31	ALDKYACNGVVGYIGE
	ALDKYACNCVVGYIGE
HG32	AEVIPGVAYTSPE
	LDIDMLRAY
	MDVPAEVAGVVKE
HG33	TGRIIGGGIVGPNGGDMIGE
	ALDKYACNCVVGYIGE
	GYCLHDGVCMYIE
	RCDYRDLKVWE
HG34	NCAGHKAYFDARVIPGVAYTSPE
HG35	GANAPKEPQRYDAVLVAAGRAPNGKLISAE
HG36	GANAPKEPQRYDAVLVAAGRAPNGKLISAE
	NCAGHKAYFDARVIPGVAYTSPE
	VIDEVRHLAANGIKYPE
HG37	MGTVYSTLGSRLDVVE
HG38	IIGGGIIGLE
	MDVPAEVAGVVKEVK
	NSDSECPLSHDGYCLHDGVCMYIE
HG39	VVVLGGGPGGYSAAFAAADE
HG40	MGTVYSTLGSRLDVVE
HG41	LKVRDIGGHENVDIIAVE

Peak	Peptides
HG42	RCQYRDLKWWEL
HG43	[illegible]
	ASGRAIANGCDNGFTKLIFDAE
HG44	[illegible]
HG47	[illegible]
	AIANGCDNGFTKLIFDAE
HG48	[illegible]
HG49	VNVGDTIAVDDTLITLD
	[illegible]
	YRFDNIMVNTKTVAVEPKEDGVYVTFE
	[illegible]
	NGFTKLIFDAETGRIIGGGIVGPNGGDMIGE
HG50	[illegible]
HG51	RCQYRDLKWWEL

Table 3. Aminoacidic composition of the major peptides obtained after the digestion of the EGF-P64K conjugated fraction with the endoprotease Glu-C. The aminoacidic composition was determined by MALDI and ESI-MS.

EXAMPLE 2.

Inmunogenicity of the vaccine composition described in the present invention.

In this example is described the biological activity assay carried out for evaluation of the inmunogenicity of the vaccine composition described previously (vaccine composition A) in comparison with a vaccine composition described in EP 0657 175 (called vaccine composition B)

For the assay it was carried out the inoculation of 10 mice with an unique dose of 200 µL of a water in oil emulsion (50/50% v/v) of the inmunogens (conventional vaccine composition obtained by dialysis, vaccine composition obtained by purification with ultrafiltration membrane and permeated obtained from purification process by UF/DF where conjugated species hrEGF-hrEGF are present), with the adjuvant MONTANIDE ISA 51. The protein dose applied for each immunogen is referred in Table 4.

In the 14 days following the inoculation it was carried out the serum extraction from the animals and the evaluation of the anti-EGF antibody titers by means of an ELISA. The positive criterion for the assay was that the measured optical density at 405nm must be higher than the double of the mean value obtained for the blank. The blank is obtained

when adding to the well blockade buffer instead serum. The test of Mann-Whitney was applied to the analysis of the data, by using a statistical program.

Immunogens	Protein concentration (Lowry)
Vaccine composition A	1.5 mg/mL
Vaccine composition B	1.5 mg/mL
Homopolymeric conjugates of hrEGF and hrEGF free obtained from the purification by UF/DF of the vaccine composition A	0.6 mg/mL

Table 4: Immunogens evaluated and protein concentrations to be inoculated by animal according to the corresponding for the of biological activity assay.

In Figure 6, the results of the biological activity assay are shown as evidences of the immunogenic activity of each evaluated immunogen. The components of the immunogen corresponding to the homopolymeric hrEGF conjugates and free hrEGF, doesn't show relevant biological activity, because their response is at the level of the positive criteria for the assay or inferior. These results verify the hypothesis that the EGF by itself doesn't induce an immunogenic response.

The statistical analysis of all the results when applying the " Mann-Whitney Test" (Table 5) showed highly significant differences for the anti-hrEGF antibody titers 1/1000 with p=0.0004 and for the 1/100 titer with p=0.0006 for group of animals inoculated with the vaccine composition A as compared to the titers reached for the group of animals inoculated with the vaccine composition B. This indicates that the vaccine composition A, purified by means of an ultrafiltration membrane has bigger immunogenic activity per milligram of protein that the vaccine composition B, obtained by the purification method based on dialysis membrane.

The vaccine composition A produces an increment of the concentration of antibodies anti EGF (at 1/1000 dilution) 10 times higher as compared with this reached when immunizing with the conjugates corresponding to polymeric hrEGF and free hrEGF.

When comparing with the vaccine composition previously described in EP 0657175 the vaccine composition described in the present invention produced an increment of twice the concentration of anti-rhEGF antibodies.

Statistical analysis about the anti-hrEGF antibody titers in mice. (dilution 1/1000)

Mann-Whitney Test and CI: G1 1/1000; G3 1/1000

		N	Median
G1 (Preparado Vacunal B)	1/1000	20	0,4300
G3 (Preparado vacunal A)	1/1000	20	0,7120

Point estimate for ETA1-ETA2 is -0,3115
95,0 Percent CI for ETA1-ETA2 is (-0,4500;-0,1790)
W = 278,0
Test of ETA1 = ETA2 vs ETA1 not = ETA2 is significant at 0,0004
The test is significant at 0,0004 (adjusted for ties)

Statistical analysis about the anti-hrEGF antibody titers in mice. (dilution 1/100)

Mann-Whitney Test and CI: G1 1/100; G3 1/100

		N	Median
G1 (Preparado vacunal convencional)	1/100	20	1,0785
G3 (Preparado vacunal por ultrafiltración)	1/100	20	1,3040

Point estimate for ETA1-ETA2 is -0,2590
95,0 Percent CI for ETA1-ETA2 is (-0,4389;-0,1149)
W = 282,5
Test of ETA1 = ETA2 vs ETA1 not = ETA2 is significant at 0,0006
The test is significant at 0,0006 (adjusted for ties)

Table 5: Statistical report: the Mann-Whitney test used to evaluate the immunogenicity of both vaccine compositions through the anti-hrEGF antibody titers in mice.

EXAMPLE 3.

Evaluation of the clinical efficacy of the vaccine composition disclosed by the present invention in the treatment of lung tumors of epithelial origin.

The objective of this example is to evaluate in patients the immunogenicity elicited by the Vaccine composition A in comparison with the immunogenicity induced by the Vaccine composition B obtained by the method of purification by dyalisis.

In this study patient with advanced stages Non Small Cell Lung Cancer (NSCLC) tumors were treated. Two groups of patients were defined (patients vaccinated with the preparation B and patients vaccinated with the preparation A described in the present invention). The vaccine composition dose per patient in each group was as follows: Patients vaccinated with the preparation B received 1,2 mg of total protein per immunization site, while patients vaccinated with the preparation B received 0,6 mg of total proteins per immunization site. For both groups the immunization sites were 4. All patients received oncospecific therapy, at least 4 weeks before starting the trial.

Immunizations were performed by intramuscular route and continued occurring monthly.

The humoral immune response of both groups of patients was evaluated through their serum. The main variable for evaluating the results was the specific anti-EGF antibody titer. This parameter was determined through an ELISA. The positive values were those that gave optical density readings 2 times higher than the negative control. The reported antibody titer is the maximal dilution of positive serum.

The analysis of the immune response for patients in each group, as represented in Table 6, showed that the geometric mean of the maximal antibody titer in the group of patients treated with the preparation A corresponds to 1:56421, while in the group of patients immunized with the preparation B was of 1:23515. That means that the vaccine composition described in the present invention elicited an increase of twice the geometric mean of the maximal antibody titers as compared with the titters reached with the preparation B.

Historically the not immunized patients show an anti- autologous EGF antibody titer of 1:500. Therefore the vaccine composition described in the present invention (vaccine composition A) causes an increase of at least 100 times the title of anti-EGF antibodies in non-immunized patients.

	Total of patients	**Geometric mean**
Vaccine composition A	11	56421
Vaccine composition B	9	23515

Table 6. Result of the analysis of the geometric mean of immunogenicity for both vaccine compositions through the measurement of anti-EGF antibody titers in patient's serum.

It is important to stress that the group of patients immunized with the Vaccine composition A, described in the present invention, showed a superior geometric mean of the anti-EGF antibody titers receiving half of the quantity of total proteins per immunization (2.4 mg) that the one received by the group of patients immunized with the Vaccine composition B (4,8mg of total proteins), what constitutes a surprising result. These results evidence that the excess of autologous protein hrEGF, either in form of polymers or free, doesn't contribute to more immunogenicity of the vaccine composition, but it dilutes the immunological action of the chemical conjugated hrEGF-rP64K.

EXAMPLE 4:

Obtaining the vaccine composition adjusted to different potency (concentration of total proteins per vial).

With the purpose of demonstrating the capacity to obtain vaccine compositions with different potency (concentrations of total proteins per vial) it was carried out the purification methodology like it is described below:

Assay 1: When concluding the diafiltración the purified chemical conjugated was concentratiod until a final concentration of proteins of 2 mg/mL.

Assay 2: When concluding the diafiltración the purified chemical conjugated was concentratiod until a final concentration of proteins of 5 mg/mL.

Assay 3: When concluding the diafiltración the purified chemical conjugated was concentratiod until a final concentration of proteins of 12 mg/mL.

In all the assays the total volume of chemical conjugates employee was 1500 mL, it was operatiod at a trans-membrane pressure of 1,5 bar and 7 tampon solution changes were carried out during the diafiltracion. For the realization of this evaluation two selection criteria were established:

The first one was to reach a homogeneity percent of the vaccine composition > 80%.

The second criterion was the non-presence of precipitated proteins during the purification operation.

The results, presented in Table 7, shows the vaccine compositions adjusted at different protein concentrations per mL, guaranteeing high levels of homogeneity (90.92% ,96.79% and, 95.50% of species conjugated hrEGFrP64K) and without producing precipitation of proteins.

Protein concentration	Percent of homogeneity of the vaccine composition
2 mg/mL	92 00%
5 mg/mL	96.79 %
12 mg/mL	95.50 %

Table 7: Values corresponding to the percent of homogeneity in the vaccine compositions adjusted to different final protein concentrations.

EXAMPLE 5:

Glutaraldehyde removal from the vaccine composition of the present invention.

To evaluate the removal of the conjugation agent (glutaraldehyde) it was quantified the residual glutaraldehyde contents in the vaccine composition B and in the vaccine

composition A, by means of a reverse phase chromatographic separation method (HPLC-RP), employing a C-8 column.

This method required firstly, the precipitation of the protein contained in the samples with perchloric acid and later a reaction with phenylhydracine.

Figure 7 show that the residual content of this impurity in both vaccine compositions was smaller than 0.2 ug/mL or smaller than 0.002 ppm, (highest concentration limit established for this impurity) from an initial concentration of 530 mg/mL or 530 ppm. Even when both preparations fulfill the established specification for this impurity, Figure 7 illustratio that the vaccine composition A (obtained when applying the ultrafiltration method for purification of the chemical conjugated) possesses an inferior content of glutaraldehyde, what contributes to a great security for the patient that uses this vaccine composition.

Brief Description of the Figures.

Figure 1. Shows the overlapping of the chromatogram of a homoligomeric conjugated rP64K-rP64K with the chromatogram of a not purified chemical conjugated EGF-P64K. In the circle is shown the coincidence of profiles between both chromatograms. The X axis represents the time until elution for each component of the sample and the Y axis represents the value of intensity at 216 nm for each component of the sample, as indicator of protein concentration.

Figure 2. Immuno-detection with an anti EGF antibody conjugated with alkalyne phosphatase, after SDS-PAGE electrophoretic separation for the vaccine composition obtained by ultrafiltration Line 1: Molecular weight marker, Line 2 vaccine composition.

Figure 3. Shows the overlapping of the chromatograms corresponding to the homoligomeric hrEGF-hrEGF conjugated and of the chromatogram corresponding to a chemical conjugated hrEGF - rP64K without purify. In the circle is shown the coincidence of species among both chromatograms. The X axis represents the time for elution of each component and the Y axis represents the value of intensity at 216 nm of each sample component, as indicator of the protein concentration.

Figure 4. Chromatographic profile corresponding to the vaccine disclosed by the present invention. The shady area corresponds to the hrEGF-rP64K conjugated species. The X axis represents the time for elution of each fraction and the Y axis represents the value of intensity at 216 nm of each component in the sample, as indicator of the protein concentration.

Figure 5. The peptide map of the chromatographic fraction corresponding to the conjugated hrEGF-rP64K. These are the results from two vaccine compositions purified independently by an ultrafiltration membrane. The X axis represents the time and the Y axis represents the units of mili intensity.

Figure 6. Anti-hrEGF antibody titers in mice immunized with different immunogens: Conventional vaccine composition, vaccine composition purified by ultrafiltration and permeate proceeding from the ultrafultration purification method. X axis corresponds to the sera dilutions from each animal and the Y axis represents the value of optical density at 405 nm of each sample, as indicator of the protein concentration.

Figure 7. Chromatographic profile by HPLC-RP obtained during the quantification of the residual glutaraldehyde content of the vaccine composition obtained by the purification method using 50kDa ultrafiltration membranes (vaccine composition A) and for the vaccine composition using dialysis purification method (vaccine composition B).

CLAIMS

1. A vaccine composition comprising as active principle the protein conjugated hrEGF-rP64K, wherein each P64K protein molecule is bound to two hrEGF molecules and the conjugation rate between rP64K carrier protein and the hrEGF is 12.04:24.05 nmolar and said composition is an homogenous mix of the conjugated hrEGF-rP64K being free of others molecular species like hrEGF polymers or free hrEGF.
2. The vaccine composition according to claim 1 wherein the homogenous mix of the conjugated hrEGF-rP64K is free of glutaraldehyde.
3. The vaccine composition according to claim 1 wherein the homogenous mix of the conjugated hrEGF-rP64K additionally contains an appropriate adjuvant, selected from the group comprising aluminum hydroxide or Montanide.
4. The vaccine composition according to claim 3 wherein the adjuvant is Montanide.
5. The vaccine composition according to claim 3 wherein the adjuvant is aluminum hydroxide.
6. The vaccine composition according to claim 1 wherein the homogenous mix of the conjugated hrEGF-rP64K is able to induce an increase of at least 10 times the anti-EGF antibodies titters in the serum of immunized mammals.
7. The vaccine composition according to claim 1 wherein the homogenous mix of the conjugated hrEGF-rP64K is able to induce an increase of at least 10 times the anti-EGF antibodies titters in the serum of humans.
8. The vaccine composition according to claim 1 wherein the homogenous mix of the conjugated hrEGF-rP64K is able to induce an increase of at least 100 times the anti-EGF antibodies titters in the serum of humans.
9. A procedure for obtaining the vaccine composition of claim 1 under sanitary standard wherein said procedure comprises appropriate conditions for the covalent conjugation of the EGF to the rP64K carrier protein and purification of the molecular complex, by using an ultrafiltration membrane, to remove the biologically inactive conjugated species and other chemical impurities.

10. The procedure of claim 9, wherein the conjugation reaction consists of a single step that begins mixing the hrEGF protein previously concentrated (>6 mg/mL) and the P64K protein (≥1 mg/mL) in the conjugation reactor, and then adding to the mixture solution PBS/MgCl2 (pH 6.8-7.2) and the conjugation solution of glutaraldehyde 0.5%, and said mixture is incubated at 22°C± 2°C with continuous stirring for two hours.
11. The procedure of claim 10, wherein the parameters of conjugation between the proteins hrEGF and rP64K fix the conjugation rate to two hrEGF molecules for each rP64K molecule.
12. The procedure for obtaining the vaccine composition according to claim 9, wherein the conjugated protein is purified by an ultrafiltration/diafiltration method using a membrane having a pore size between 50 and 100 kDa.
13. The procedure for obtaining the vaccine composition according to claim 12, wherein the conjugated protein is purified by an ultrafiltration/diafiltration method using a membrane having a pore size of 50 kDa.
14. The procedure for obtaining the vaccine composition according to claim 12, wherein the conjugated protein is purified by an ultrafiltration/diafiltration method using a membrane having a pore size of 100 kDa.
15. The vaccine composition comprising as active principle the conjugated protein hrEGFrP64K, wherein said vaccine composition is purified by the procedure of claim 13.
16. The vaccine composition comprising as active principle the conjugated protein hrEGFrP64K, wherein said vaccine composition is purified by the procedure of claim 14.
17. The vaccine composition comprising as active principle the conjugated protein hrEGFrP64K, wherein the final concentration of the total protein is in the range 1-12 mg/mL.
18. Use of the vaccine composition of claim 15 for the manufacture of a reagent to elicit an immune response against the human EGF.
19. Use of the vaccine composition of claim 16 for the manufacture of a reagent to elicit an immune response against the human EGF.

20. Use of the vaccine composition of claim 15 for the manufacture of a reagent useful for the treatment of epithelial tumors.

21. Use of the vaccine composition of claim 16 for the manufacture of a reagent useful for the treatment of epithelial tumors.