

August 27-28, 2018 Zurich, Switzerland

Chemistry Education

and Research

8th Edition of International Conference on

J Org Inorg Chem 2018, Volume 4 DOI: 10.21767/2472-1123-C5-015

CANCER CELL IMAGING USING IN *SITU* GENERATED GOLD NANOCLUSTERS

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In situ generated fluorescent gold nanoclusters (Au-NCs) are used for bio-imaging of three human cancer cells, namely, lung (A549), breast (MCF7), and colon (HCT116), by confocal microscopy. The amount of Au-NCs in non-cancer cells (WI38 and MCF10A) is 20–40 times less than those in the corresponding cancer cells. The presence of a larger amount of glutathione (GSH) capped Au-NCs in the cancer cell are ascribed to a higher glutathione level in cancer cells. The Au-NCs exhibit fluorescence maxima at 490–530 nm inside the cancer cells. The fluorescence maxima and matrix-assisted laser desorption ionization (MALDI) mass spectrometry suggest that the fluorescent Au-NCs consist

of GSH capped clusters with a core structure (Au8-13). Time-resolved confocal microscopy indicates a nanosecond (1–3 ns) lifetime of the Au-NCs inside the cells. This rule out the formation of aggregated Au-thiolate complexes, which typically exhibit microsecond (.1000 ns) lifetimes. Fluorescence correlation spectroscopy (FCS) in live cells indicates that the size of the Au-NCs is .1–2 nm. For in situ generation, we used a conjugate consisting of a room-temperature ionic liquid (RTIL, [pmim][Br]) and HAuCl4. Cytotoxicity studies indicate that the conjugate, [pmim][AuCl4], is non-toxic for both cancer and non-cancer cells.

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