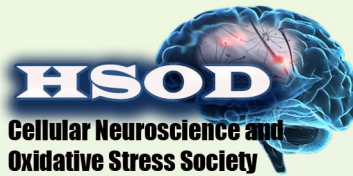


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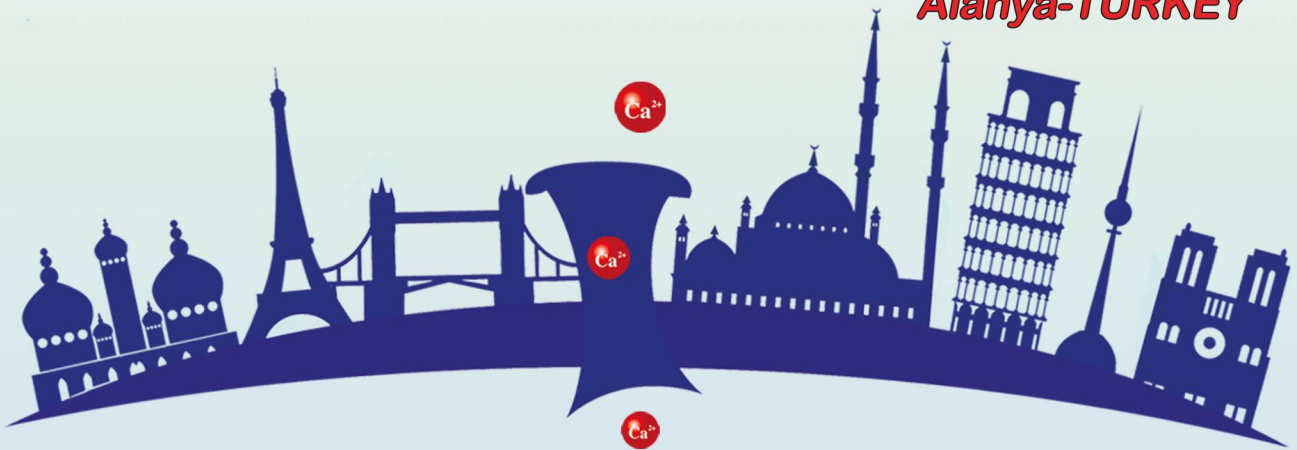


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Fullpaper Oral Presentation 1. Effect of venlafaxine on hippocampal BDNF levels in depression-induced rats.

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Fullpaper Oral Presentations

► Fullpaper Oral Presentation 1

Effect of venlafaxine on hippocampal BDNF levels in depression-induced rats

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List of Abbreviations;

5-HT: 5-hydroxytryptamine

BDNF: Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor

BSA: Bovine Serum Albumin

Ca²⁺: Calcium

CMS: Chronic Mild Stress

ECT: Electroconvulsive therapy

IL-1 β : interleukin-1 Beta

LTP: Long-Term Potentiation

mRNA: Messenger Ribonucleic Acid

NE: Norepinephrine

SNRI: Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitor

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

SSRIs: Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors

TrkB: Tyrosine Kinase B

Abstract

Although antidepressant drugs have been used for approximately 60 years, very little is known about their effect mechanism. Structural abnormalities, particularly in the hippocampus, are observed in brain structures of depressed patients.

The correction of these abnormalities with treatment suggests that major depressive disorders may be associated with a decrease in cellular elasticity and structural plasticity, and antidepressant treatments may provide benefits by treating these disorders. In this study, we aimed to investigate the effect of venlafaxine treatment on the brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) and BDNF levels in the hippocampus of depression-induced rats by using the chronic mild stress (CMS) model.

In this study, 30 eight-week-old, Wistar albino male rats were divided into three groups. The first group received venlafaxine (20 mg/kg) with CMS, the second group a placebo with CMS, and the third group only a placebo (n = 10) for four weeks. At the end of the four-week period, BDNF levels in hippocampus tissues were measured.

The measurements showed that the BDNF levels of the depressed group were significantly lower than those of the control group. In our study, the hippocampal BDNF levels of the venlafaxine-administered group were similar to those of the control group and significantly higher than those of the depressed group.

In conclusion, these findings show that the BDNF, which has an important function in neuroplasticity, plays a role in depression pathophysiology, and venlafaxine prevents the BDNF decrease observed in depression. This latter result supports the view that depression treatment prevents the long-term complications of the disorder.

Keywords: Depression; BDNF; Venlafaxine; Hippocampus; Neuroplasticity.

Introduction

Although antidepressant drugs have been used for approximately 60 years, very little is known to date about their effect mechanism. It is currently believed that antidepressants show their main biochemical effects

by affecting intrasynaptic concentrations of serotonin and noradrenaline. However, clinical and preclinical studies performed in recent years demonstrated that major depressive disorders might be associated with the cellular elasticity and plasticity decrease in the brain structures of affected patients, and antidepressants could be useful in treating these disorders (Manji et al., 2000; Manji et al., 2001; Manji and Duman, 2001)

The first studies about antidepressants' action mechanism in depression focused on the variations in receptor levels and neurotransmitter concentrations. However, several problems are related to this model (Duman et al., 1997). These ideas contradict the finding that therapeutic effects of antidepressants require chronic administration, but norepinephrine (NE) reuptake inhibition by serotonin occurs in a short time. In time, along with the monoamine theory, several studies pointed out an essential role related to the intracellular pathways regulating the neuroplasticity and neurodegeneration in depression etiology. Antidepressant therapy blocks the neurogenesis downregulation caused by stress (Malberg and Duman, 2003). The increase in brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) expression was shown to be a response to antidepressant therapy with different antidepressant classes, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) (fluoxetine, fluvoxamine, and sertraline), selective NE reuptake inhibitors (desipramine), and dual amine reuptake inhibitors (imipramine and milnacipran) (Popoli et al., 2002).

A member of the neurotrophin family, BDNF activates the cell surface receptor with high affinity (TrkB) that matches the phosphatidylinositol-3-kinase and protein kinase B activation. Neurogenesis plays an important role in the BDNF, brain development, and plasticity by promoting synaptic plasticity and cell survival. During the development process of the cerebral cortex and hippocampus, the BDNF triggers the differentiation of neural stem cells to neurons and promotes new neuron development (Lee et al., 2002; Cheng et al., 2003). Therefore, the BDNF serves an essential function in preventing neuron deaths, and in the adult brain, it supports cell survival throughout stressful events, such as ischemia and trauma (Larsson et al., 1999). Additionally, the BDNF stimulation in synapses develops the long-term potentiation [LTP],

which is a synaptic refreshment process associated with learning and memory (Ernfors and Bramham, 2003; Leal et al., 2017). The majority of researchers focus on the hippocampus, which is known to have a role in mood disorders. The hippocampus is specifically sensitive to structural disruptions triggered by stress (Arborelius et al., 1999; Sapolsky, 2000)

Understanding the role of neurotrophic factors in depression will contribute to the knowledge about depression etiology and pathophysiology. Moreover, as antidepressant therapies cannot be limited to the release and reuptake of neurotransmitters or molecules that modulate their interaction with receptor systems, new molecules with more selective effects, including these action mechanisms, will be developed (Uzbay, 2005).

In this study, we aimed to investigate the effect of venlafaxine treatment on the BDNF and hippocampus BDNF levels of rats with the chronic mild stress (CMS) model-induced depression.

Materials and Methods

Experimental animals

This study used thirty 8-week-old, Wistar albino male rats, each weighing 200 ± 15 grams. Before the experiment, the rats were allowed to adapt to the environment for one week. The animals were kept in individual plastic cages with beds. Unless indicated otherwise, the rats had access to the standard rat food and tap water throughout the experiment. To allow the rats to get used to the sucrose, they could reach it (1% solution) freely during the week before the experimental procedure. The cage temperature was maintained at 22 ± 2 °C; 12 hours each of light and dark cycles were maintained, with the lights turned on at 6:00 in the morning. The study was approved by the Local Experimental Animal Ethical Committee of Suleyman Demirel University (SDU).

The rats were divided into three groups. The first group received venlafaxine 20 mg/kg ($n = 10$) with CMS, the second group a placebo with CMS ($n = 10$), and the third group only a placebo ($n = 10$). The rats were placed into specially prepared cages with beds, with one rat staying in each cage. Homogeneous distribution was provided among the groups.

Chronic mild stress model and sucrose preference test

In rats, CMS has been used as the depression model. The CMS procedure has been considered a suitable model to study the beginning of the antidepressant effect on animals (Willner, 1997). The CMS model was first described by Willner (1990). Anhedonia, evaluated by the sucrose consumption test in rats, has been suggested to be a depression model with etiological reliability (Dias et al., 2003). The CMS model has been used in many studies to evaluate the effectiveness of psychotropic drugs (Sanchez et al., 2003; Orsetti et al., 2006). The depression model, developed with CMS in rats, has high validity (Van Kampen et al., 2002).

The rats were given food, water, and 1% sucrose solution as much as they wanted to make them adapt to the environment and taste sucrose. The sucrose preference test performed in the rats was the test initiation. This test was used to define the anhedonia term particularly the decrease in sucrose intake and preference compared with baseline values and the control group in the sucrose preference test (Grippo et al., 2002). In the sucrose preference test, water and sucrose consumption of the rats within one hour was observed after they were kept without food and water for 20 hours (by measuring the weight of the bottle full of water and sucrose before the test). The results were recorded as basal values. This test was performed at 12:00 every Wednesday for four weeks, and the results were recorded. Then the CMS procedure was performed. The CMS-related procedures are presented in Table 1. This test was repeated for four weeks. During CMS, the rats orally received 20 mg/kg venlafaxine, a serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI) group antidepressant. The same amount of normal saline was given orally to the control group.

Procedure

The experiment was terminated by decapitation of all the rats under 10% ketamine and 2% xylazine anesthesia. After sacrificing them, their brain tissues were removed, and hippocampus BDNF levels were measured by using the ELISA method.

Homogenization of hippocampus samples and measurement of BDNF levels

Hippocampus tissues and serum samples were weighed as soon as the removal was finished, and they were stored in a -80°C deep freeze. One week after the dissection, 100 mM Tris/HCl (pH 7) buffer containing 2% bovine serum albumin (BSA), 1 M NaCl, 4 mM EDTA.Na₂, 2% Triton X-100, 0.1% sodium azide and protease inhibitors (Sigma) 5 µg/mL aprotinin, 0.5 µg/mL antipain, 157 µg/mL benzamidin, 0.1 µg/mL pepstatin A, and 17 µg/mL phenylmethyl-sulfonyl fluoride was prepared according to the ChemiKine™ BDNF Sandwich ELISA kit procedure. After the samples were thawed, the hippocampus tissues were diluted 10 times, using the Tris/HCL buffer, and cold-homogenized at 9,500 rpm with the Ultra-Turrax T25 homogenizer. The homogenates were obtained by centrifugation for 30 minutes at 14,000 xg. The hippocampus homogenates and serum samples were studied according to the kit procedure (after twice diluting with the sample diluent), with their 20 times- and twice-diluted forms, respectively. Irrigations in this procedure were performed with the Elx50 automatic strip washer (Bio-Tek Instruments, Inc.), whereas the absorbance readings were performed automatically with the Microwell System-Reader 530 (Organon Teknika).

Statistical analysis

Statistical evaluations were performed using the SPSS 15.0 for Windows software. Generally, the significant differences between groups were evaluated by using the Kruskal–Wallis analysis of variance. Paired comparisons of the groups were performed using the Mann-Whitney U test. The Wilcoxon signed-ranks test was used to evaluate the changes in the sucrose preference tests compared to the baseline. The p value of <0.05 was considered significant.

Table 1. Chronic mild stress

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Leaving waterless	16:00 →	08:00					
Giving empty water bottle		08:00-09:00					
Lightening the cage continuously	16:00 →	08:00			17:00 →	10:00	
Sloping the cage		11:00-17:00					
Separating the cages	→→	08:00		18:00 →	14:00	10:00	→→
Wetting the beds (300cc)					17:00 →	10:00	
90 DB noise						10:00-13:00	
Switching lights on and of continuously	11:00-16:00			13:00-15:00			

Table 2. Weekly sucrose preference test results of the three groups included in the study.

	Group 1 (Venlafaxine + CMS) Mean ± SD (ml)	Group 2 (CMS) Mean ± SD (ml)	Group 3 (Control) Mean ± SD (ml)
Basal	6.50 ± 3.50	6.78 ± 2.44	6.78 ± 2.99
Week 1	6.20 ± 2.39	5.44 ± 3.57	5.67 ± 2.73
Week 2	6.80 ± 2.49	6.56 ± 2.83	6.67 ± 2.87
Week 3	6.70 ± 1.83	4.67 ± 2.40 ^c	8.00 ± 2.83
Week 4	6.30 ± 1.34 ^{a,b}	4.00 ± 1.41 ^d	8.67 ± 1.41

^aGroup 1 is significantly higher than Group 2: $z = -2.91$, $p = 0.003$.

^bGroup 1 is significantly lower than Group 3: $z = -2.83$, $p = 0.004$.

^cGroup 2 is significantly lower than Group 3: $z = -2.32$, $p = 0.02$.

^dGroup 2 is significantly lower than Group 3: $z = -3.56$, $p < 0.0001$.

Table 3. Hippocampus BDNF levels of the three groups at the end of the study.

	Group 1 (Venlafaxine + CMS)	Group 2 (CMS)	Group 3 (Control)
BDNF (ng/mL)	5.84 ± 0.89 ^{a,b}	4.88 ± 0.40 ^c	5.75 ± 0.61

^aGroup 1 is significantly higher than Group 2: $z = -2.368$, $p = 0.018$.

^bThere is no significant difference between Groups 1 and 3: $z = -0.163$, $p = 0.873$.

^cGroup 2 is significantly lower than Group 3: $z = -2.782$, $p = 0.004$.

Results

Sucrose preference test results

Table 2 shows the results of the sucrose preference tests performed before and during the experiment. The comparison of the groups' test results revealed that the fourth-week results of Group 1 were significantly higher than those of Group 2 and significantly lower than those of Group 3 ($z = -2.91$, $p = 0.003$, $z = -2.83$, $p = 0.004$). Additionally, the third- and fourth-week results of Group 2 were found to be significantly lower than those of Group 3 ($z = -2.32$, $p = 0.02$, $z = -3.56$, $p < 0.0001$).

Hippocampus BDNF levels

Table 3 shows the BDNF levels in the hippocampus tissues obtained after the beginning of the experiment. The tissue levels are 5.84 ± 0.89 in Group 1, 4.88 ± 0.40 in Group 2, and 5.75 ± 0.61 in Group 3. There is a difference between the levels of Group 1 and Group 2, but the statistical significance is within the limit ($z = -2.368$, $p = 0.018$). No statistically significant difference is found between the BDNF levels of Group 1 and Group 3 ($z = -0.163$, $p = 0.873$). However, Group 2 has significantly lower levels than those of Group 3 ($z = -2.782$, $p = 0.004$). The hippocampus BDNF levels of the three groups at the end of the study are indicated collectively in Table 3.

Discussion

Our study's findings show that CMS is an effective method in inducing depression in rats, which had been demonstrated in previous depression studies as well (Gittos and Papp, 2001; Grippo et al., 2005). Moreover, in our study, the results of sucrose preference tests are significantly lower in the placebo plus the CMS-administered rat group compared with the venlafaxine plus CMS-administered group and the control group. This outcome suggests that the antidepressant effectiveness of venlafaxine has become evident. Similar results had been demonstrated in clinical and experimental studies (Dilbaz et al., 1999).

In our study, hippocampus BDNF levels are found to be significantly lower in depression-induced rats than in the control group. The brain and hippocampus BDNF levels had been investigated in several studies using different depression models. Four studies using the activity restriction model (Nibuya et al., 1995; Smith et

al., 1995; Ueyama et al., 1997; Vaidya et al., 1997). and two studies using the social isolation model (Barrientos et al., 2003; Pizarro et al., 2004) reported decreased hippocampus BDNF levels. In contrast, another study reported an unchanged, rat hippocampus BDNF expression with CMS (Gronli et al., 2006). Two studies used the depression model with the restraint test; one reported decreased hippocampus BDNF levels (Xu et al., 2004), whereas the other study indicated no changes (Kuroda and McEwen, 1998). Although the reason for these different results could not have been fully understood, it is thought to be associated with the timing of BDNF measurements.

In studies conducted on humans, low serum BDNF levels were reported in patients with major depressive disorders (Shimizu et al. 2003; Gonul et al., 2005; Gonul et al., 2005; Molendijk et al., 2011; De et al., 2014; Bus and Molendijk, 2016; Pedrotti Moreira et al., 2018).

Lower hippocampus BDNF levels in our study's CMS group and the other findings in the literature support the argument that the BDNF plays a role in depression pathophysiology. The BDNF is involved in the regulation of synaptic protein synthesis and regulates the neurotransmitter secretion via upregulation of secretory mechanisms (Tyler and Pozzo-Miller, 2001). The BDNF provides stable and long-term development of neuron functions (Tartaglia et al., 2001).

Similar BDNF levels between the venlafaxine with the CMS-administered group and the control group support the claim that antidepressant therapy is not only symptomatic but also provides changes that will positively contribute to brain pathology causing depression or caused by depression. It has been suggested that low BDNF levels may play a role in the pathophysiology of major depressive disorders, and antidepressants may increase BDNF levels in depressive patients (even indirectly). Several studies reported that antidepressant agents of different classes increased the serum BDNF levels that were low in depressive patients (Yoshimura et al., 2007; Piccinni et al., 2008; Lee and Kim; 2008; Huang et al., 2008; Guilloux et al., 2012). The BDNF levels of depressive patients treated with venlafaxine were shown to be significantly higher than those of patients who did not receive treatment

(Matrisciano et al., 2009). In electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) -administered depressive patients, the BDNF levels were observed to increase (Marano et al., 2007; Piccinni et al., 2009; Bumb et al. 2015). Post-mortem studies showed high BDNF levels in the hippocampi of antidepressant-treated patients (Chen et al., 2001). In post-mortem depressive patients, decreased BDNF levels in their hippocampi and cerebral cortices were determined (Dwivedi et al., 2003). In another post-mortem study, decreased BDNF levels were found in major depressive patients who committed suicide (Pandey et al., 2008). In depressive patients who attempted suicide, serum BDNF levels were lower than those of the healthy control group (Deveci et al., 2008). Another study reported no significant changes in the serum BDNF levels of depressive patients receiving venlafaxine and fluoxetine therapy (Terzi et al., 2009).

Studies performed on rats also showed that antidepressant drugs and ECT increased hippocampus BDNF levels (Nibuya et al., 1995; Tyler and Pozzo-Miller, 2001; Altar et al., 2003; Xu et al., 2003). and regulated the stress-dependent BDNF decrease (Duman, 2004). On the other hand, one study reported that venlafaxine therapy did not affect the BDNF level (Solberg et al., 2001). Studies performed using venlafaxine showed that it prevented low BDNF levels in rats in which depression was induced with the chronic restraint test (Xu et al., 2004; Xu et al., 2006). In the chronic, unpredictable stress model, it was observed that chronically low doses of venlafaxine (5 mg/kg) increased the hippocampal BDNF amount, but the same effect was not observed with 10 mg/day venlafaxine administration (Li et al., 2011). An increased hippocampal BDNF level was observed with venlafaxine administration without the BDNF depression model in rats (Czubak et al. 2009). In our study, the hippocampal BDNF levels of the venlafaxine-administered group were similar to those of the control group and higher than those of the depressed group, but the statistical significance was within the limit. We used the 20 mg/kg/day venlafaxine dose in our study. Our study supports that of Xu et al. (2006). However, we used the CMS model in the rats, the closest one to depression in humans.

In our study, low BDNF levels in CMS-administered rats and nonlow levels in rats receiving

venlafaxine treatment support the neuroplasticity theory in depression etiology suggested in recent years.

The downregulation of neurotrophic factor expression in some studies showed that structural changes might exist in depressed patients (Manji et al., 2003). Neuroimaging studies reported decreased hippocampus volume in depressed patients (Bremner et al., 2000; Rajkowska et al., 2000; Sapolsky, 2000). Antidepressant therapy resulted in the stimulation of neurotrophic factors and regulation of cellular morphology and/or neurogenesis. Chronic antidepressant therapy was found to increase neurogenesis in the hippocampus of adult rodents (Madsen et al., 2000; Manev et al., 2001; Sachs and Caron, 2015).

Some studies reported that antidepressant therapy reversed hippocampus atrophy in depressed patients (Watanabe et al., 1992; Sheline et al., 2003; Vermetten et al., 2003; Sachs and Caron, 2015). However, no study using venlafaxine that has been conducted on humans is available. The prominent point of these clinical studies involved cell loss and volume decrease associated with depressive disorders. It had been shown that venlafaxine prevented low BDNF levels and hippocampal cell proliferation decrease in depression. Czeh et al. (2001) reported that chronic tianeptine therapy might reverse disorders triggered by stress, such as a decrease in hippocampus volume and neurogenesis (Watanabe et al., 1992; Czeh et al., 2001).

Although it is hard to investigate the underlying mechanisms of the variations in the BDNF levels of depressed patients, some inferences could be made from the clinical data. Depression is typically associated with high adrenal glucocorticoid levels, and adrenal glucocorticoids decrease BDNF levels in rodents (Smith et al., 1995). Cytokines may have a role in the effects of depression on the BDNF. It was reported that interleukin-1 Beta (IL-1 β) levels increased in depression (You et al., 2011). The IL-1 β decreased glutamate secretion as much as it decreased Ca²⁺ flow (Murray et al., 1997); a decrease in Ca²⁺ flow might cause a decrease in the activity-dependent expression of BDNF in dentate gyrus (Duman, 2004).

Due to the role of the 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT) system in depression, the BDNF seems to have a significant effect on the branching of both intact 5-HT

neurons and neurons with neurotoxin lesions. The BDNF infusions cause hyperinnervation of 5-HT axons in the infusion site in either the cerebral cortex or hippocampus (Mamounas et al., 1995). This finding supports the claim that BDNF plays an important role in the plasticity of 5-HT neurons and can contribute to the arrangement of 5-HT nerve conduction in response to stress and antidepressant treatment.

One study reported that adult neurogenesis contributed to the antidepressant response, and it was mandatory for antidepressant drug therapy (Santarelli et al., 2003). Externally administered BDNF showed an antidepressant effect on rats (Siuciak et al., 1997; Shirayama et al., 2002; Duman, 2004; Ye et al., 2011).

The data obtained in this study supports the finding that BDNF levels that play an important role in neural plasticity are low in patients with depression. These studies are important to test the validity of the neurotrophic hypothesis associated with depression. The upregulation of the neurotrophic factors can stop the cell loss and atrophy caused by depression and even reverse them. This can both contribute to the effects of antidepressant treatment and prevent the complications associated with depression over the long term.

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Authors contributions:

AD and İE formulated the present hypothesis and were responsible for writing the report. AD was responsible for inducing experimental depression and conducting tests of depression intensity. HM and OA were responsible for BDNF analyses. HV made critical revision for the manuscript.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or

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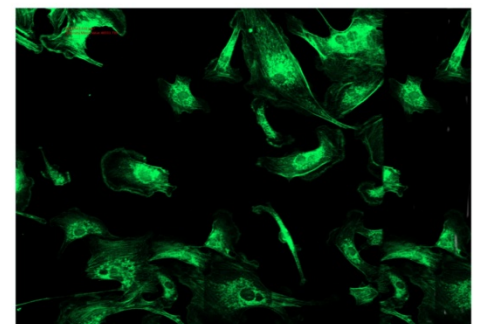
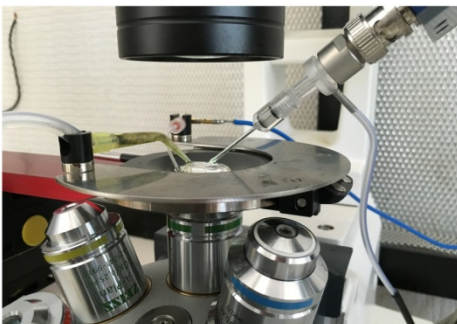
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