In-vivo 19F Imaging of Sevoflurane in the Human Brain at Clinical-Relevant Concentrations

Maolin Qiu1, Ramachandra Ramani2, and R. Todd Constable3
1Diagnostic Radiology, Yale University School of Medicine, New Haven, CT, United States, 2Anesthesiology, Yale University School of Medicine, New Haven, CT, United States

Purpose: Direct Fluorine-19 (19F) imaging of anesthesia induced by Sevoflurane (C2H5F-O) will provide important information about the pharmacokinetics of inhalational agents such as drug delivery, cortical drug distribution, and molecular drug-brain interaction. Together with the pharmacology studies1-3, it may provide the whole picture of the neuronal mechanisms of general anesthesia. However, the extremely low cortical concentrations of Sevoflurane at clinically-relevant levels make in-vivo 19F imaging of Sevoflurane cortical distributions in humans very challenging.4-4. With the aid of recent advances in imaging, this study aims to assess the sensitivity of 19F imaging in detecting cerebral Sevoflurane concentrations in humans during 0.5MAC anesthesia, to measure the spatial distribution of Sevoflurane during anesthesia, and to investigate the pharmacokinetics of Sevoflurane based on MRI data. Our preliminary results provide new insights of cortical concentrations, cortical delivery, and the delivery of Sevoflurane at clinically-relevant doses.

Methods: 1H/19F imaging was performed on Siemens TimTrio 3T with a 1H/19F dual-tuned CP head probe (Stark Contrast). Six consenting (ASA I healthy) subjects have been recruited. 19F imaging data were collected with a TrueFisp sequence: TR=3.38ms; TE=1.68ms; n=56; In-place resolution=12.5x12.5mm2; Slice thickness=15mm; Inter-slice spacing=1.5mm; In-plane matrix size=40x40; and Slices=8. Advanced system adjustments and shimming were performed; RF frequency for 19F was set at ~150.09ppm manually, based on the system adjustment results; and the bandwidth was set to avoid the chemical shift artifacts from the single non-magnetic equivalent Fluorine nucleus that generates a small peak at 69.82ppm. Three experiments were performed: Phantom control (Exp1): 1H and 19F images of water and Sevoflurane (0.2mM in pure Ethanol) phantoms were collected (Fig 1); the purpose of this experiment was to demonstrate the water signal from the water phantom was not picked up during 19F imaging. Human awake condition control (Exp2): 19F imaging was performed in 4 subjects for the awake condition (without Sevoflurane delivery) while 2 Sevoflurane samples, 0.2mM and 5mM in pure Ethanol, were placed near the temples (Fig 2); the purpose of this experiment was to demonstrate during 19F imaging there were no confounding signals being picked up in the brain and the noise level in the brain region was the same as that in the background. In-vivo 19F imaging in subjects (Exp3): 19F image data were collected in 5 subjects (one excluded due to motion) to demonstrate the changes in image intensity indeed reflected changes in local Sevoflurane levels during 0.5MAC Sevoflurane anesthesia in the regions of interest. 1H brain anatomical images were collected to facilitate multi-subject integration for group analyses using BioImageSuite (Fig 3 & 4).

Results: Exp1 showed for 19F imaging (Fig 1, bottom row) there was no significant difference between the observed image intensity values inside the water phantom region (14.9) and the background (15.2); the intensity for the Sevoflurane phantoms was 166.5. During 1H imaging of phantoms, the images for the Sevoflurane phantoms were blurred because of the chemical shifts of multiple Ethanol 1H peaks (Fig 1, top row). Group analyses of Exp2 showed for 19F imaging of subjects for the awake condition (Fig 2), there was no significant difference in image intensity between the head region (15.5±4.8) and the background (16.1±5); the maximum image intensity for the 5mM sample exceeded 4095 and for the 0.2mM sample it was 126.6±13.3, which was lower than expected maybe because of the voxel size and partial volume effect. Compared to the results from Exp2, group analyses of Exp3 showed, during 0.5MAC Sevoflurane anesthesia, the image signal intensity within the brain increased significantly to 70.5±4.3; Significantly elevated signal of 197±21.1 in the scalp (between the brain and the skin) and of 75.8±12.3 outside the head were observed (Fig 3). Fig 4 shows the t-maps (t>8) from the group analysis of Exp3.

Discussion: The 19F signal intensity inside the brain was very stable across subjects, when normalized; the changes in the brain became most significant (Fig 4). Together with the control experiments, the t-maps show the observed increased signal in the brain during 19F imaging of anesthesia was indeed induced by Sevoflurane inhaled. The scalp had the highest 19F signal due to the high affinity of Sevoflurane to the fatty tissue. One interesting observation is, Sevoflurane vapor was detected and the level was likely higher than in the brain. Our speculation is, since there is hardly any Sevoflurane affinity to the brain tissues (GM/WM), in order to keep certain level in the brain, a partial pressure gradient must build up from the respiratory gas, alveolar, blood, BBB, to the brain, which is consistent with the observation of the quick recovery from Sevoflurane anesthesia. That also indicates BBB might play an important role in limiting the transfer of Sevoflurane into the brain. Previous in-vitro/animal studies showed clinically relevant concentrations of most commonly-used inhaled anesthetics were in the range of 0.2 to 0.5mM4-5. In this study 0.2mM Sevoflurane in pure Ethanol was examined. Based on our measurements of T1 for the 0.2mM phantom and the brain, which were 3.4ms and 2.1ms, respectively, the T2-corrected Sevoflurane concentration in the brain at 0.5MAC anesthesia was ~0.11mM, which is much lower than reported in the literature4-5, by assuming similar T1. In the scalp/fatty tissue it was ~0.32mM.

Conclusion: We have successfully demonstrated in-vivo detecting regional Sevoflurane with a 1H/19F dual-tuned CP head coil during anesthesia at 0.5MAC. Our results not only support the observations from previous animal studies, but have provided new insight into the delivery of this agent. Appreciation of the spatial distribution of this agent within the human brain becomes possible as more subjects are recruited.


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Fig 1. 1H (top row) and 19F (bottom row) images of water and 0.2mM Sevoflurane phantoms. The Sevoflurane phantoms were placed on the top of a water bottle. The scan time was ~30min for 19F.

Fig 2. 19F images from one subject during the awake condition. 5mM and 0.2mM Sevoflurane samples were placed near the subject’s temples. The scan time was ~30min.

Fig 3. Group mean of the Sevoflurane signals in the head.

Fig 4. T-maps of Sevoflurane at 0.5MAC (threshold t>8).