

1 **Studies on target-specificity and biological activity of *Streptococcus* serum**
2 **antibody and amikacin sulfate conjugates**

3 **Abstract**

4 The concentration of the conventional antimicrobial drugs is low in the animal body tissue
5 and body fluids (except the few parts, such as brain) because of the drug metabolism in the
6 liver. Bacteria are mainly distributed in the target organs when they infect animals. Even
7 within the target organ, the combination of drugs and bacteria is also depend entirely on
8 random collisions.

9 To evaluate the target-specificity and biological activity of streptococcus serum antibody and
10 sulfate amikacin conjugates, we used polyethylene glycol 6000 (PEG6000) as the coupling
11 agent to prepare the conjugates of streptococcus of serum antibody and amikacin sulfate.
12 Here, we analyzed the conjugates specificity, streptococcus serum antibody reactionogenicity
13 and immunogenicity in conjugates. Besides, we also detected sulfate amikacin acute toxicity,
14 antimicrobial activity and bioavailability. As a result, conjugates specially bind with
15 Streptococcus instead of *Escherichia coil*, pasteurella and Staphylococcus aureus using
16 Fluorescence staining. Biological activity results showed that conjugates maintain
17 Streptococcus serum antibody reactionogenicity, decrease Streptococcus serum antibody
18 immunogenicity and increase Streptococcus serum antibody response sensitivity.
19 Simultaneously, the results indicated that conjugates reduce the acute toxicity of amikacin
20 sulfate and improve amikacin sulfate bioavailability and antimicrobial activity.

21 **Key words:** PEG; *Streptococcus* serum antibody; sulfate amikacin

22

23 **Introduction**

24 The concentration of the conventional antimicrobial drugs is low in animal body tissues and
25 body fluids (with a few exceptions, such as brain) because of drug metabolism in the liver.
26 Bacteria are mainly distributed in the target organs when they infect the animals. Even within
27 the target organ, the combination of drugs and bacteria also depends entirely on random
28 collisions. To guarantee the curative effect of drugs, higher drug concentration must be
29 maintained within the bacterial colonies for a prolonged amount of time. Therefore, the

30 antibiotics were given at a high dose within a certain time period of treatment. As a result,
31 drugs were deposited in tissues, especially in the adipose tissue [Levisky and Bowerman
32 2000], and formed drug residues. Drug metabolism can cause not only waste but also organ
33 damage [Chua et al. 2014; Le et al. 2015]. Additionally, some bacteria evolve in the presence
34 of the drugs and form drug resistant strains [Ampaire et al. 2015]. Therefore, the
35 development of pathogenic bacteria treatment programs aimed at bacteria-specific molecular
36 targets has become a hot spot of present research.

37 Because antigens can specifically bind to the antibody, a desired characteristic of antibody
38 targeting drugs [Elgersma et al. 2015; Gaborit et al. 2015; Marquez-Rodas et al. 2015; Shin et
39 al. 2015; Zhou et al. 2015] is that small drug molecules can couple with specific antibodies
40 and then be delivered to particular pathogenic bacterium multiple times without changing the
41 concentration. This would avoid drug waste caused by normal drug distribution, thereby
42 reducing drug consumption and shortening the course of treatment. We prepared targeted
43 antimicrobial agents through antimicrobial coupling to the antibody molecules, which can
44 significantly improve the drug therapeutic effect and eliminate adverse reactions.

45 In this study, we prepare *Streptococcus* serum antibody-sulfate amikacin conjugates with
46 polyethylene glycol (PEG6000) as the coupling agent and then evaluate the conjugates'
47 specificity and *Streptococcus* serum antibody and sulfate amikacin biological activity. This
48 study will provide a theoretical and experimental basis for bacteria-targeted drug
49 development. In this study, we conjugated small molecule antibiotics and biomolecule
50 antibodies supramolecularly. We evaluated the bioactivity of the small molecule antibiotics
51 and biomolecule antibodies in the supermolecular model. We optimized methods to search
52 for antibiotics and accumulated related data about how to improve the bacterial patterns of
53 antibiotics to provide a solution to resolve the abuse of antibiotics.

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55 **Materials and methods**

56 **Preparing the sulfate amikacin and *Streptococcus* serum antibody conjugates**

57 A *Streptococcus* oil emulsion inactivated vaccine was prepared with *Streptococcus* strain
58 01026 and immunized rabbits (Animal experiments were performed following a protocol
59 approved by the Institutional Animal Committee of Hunan Agricultural University.) to
60 produce the rabbit *Streptococcus* antisera. The conjugates were the mixture of *Streptococcus*
61 serum antibodies, sulfate amikacin and PEG6000 (400:2:9) (with PEG60000 as the
62 crosslinking agent). The conjugates were checked by electron microscopy with
63 phosphotungstic acid dye staining.

64 **The effect of the conjugates on the biological activity of *Streptococcus* serum antibodies**

65 **Comparison of *Streptococcus* serum antibody reactogenicity**

66 **Conjugate response efficiency assay**

67 The serum antibody and conjugates response efficiency were detected by an indirect ELISA
68 method [Bertolotti et al. 2015]. *Streptococcus* strain 01026 was embedded by glutaraldehyde
69 and blocked, and the titers of *Streptococcus*, immune rabbit serum antibody and healthy
70 rabbit serum was determined by ELISA. Healthy rabbit serum served as a negative control
71 and physiological saline as the blank control.

72 **Conjugate response sensitivity assay**

73 *Streptococcus* bacteria and colloidal gold labeled serum antibodies [Byzova et al. 2014] were
74 mixed at a 4:1 ratio. The mixture was harvested at different time points and centrifuged at
75 2000 rpm/min for 30 min. The precipitation was embedded and sliced. The slices were
76 stained with phosphotungstic acid and examined under the EM.

77 **Conjugate response specificity assay**

78 *E. coli* strain C44103, *Streptococcus* strain 01026, *Pasteurella multocida* strain 4401 and
79 *Staphylococcus aureus* strain C26112 were mixed with the conjugates (4:1), respectively.

80 After incubating at room temperature for 30 min, *Streptococcus* serum antibody response
81 specificity was observed by sections after fluorescence staining.

82 **Comparison of *Streptococcus* serum antibody immunogenicity**

83 **Preparation of immune serum**

84 Ten healthy rabbits (1.8 ± 0.2 kg) were randomized into two groups ($n = 5$ animals/group).
85 Control (*Streptococcus*) and conjugates (1 mg/each) were injected into the rabbits every 15
86 days. After 21 days, the rabbits were starved and were provided drinking water. All
87 rabbits were sacrificed by drawing-out all of the blood in their hearts next day. The
88 serum was isolated, incubated at 56°C for 30 min and then passed through a $0.3 \mu\text{m}$ pore size
89 filter and stored in -20°C .

90 **Detection of *Streptococcus* serum antibody response immunogenicity**

91 The response immunogenicity of the *Streptococcus* serum antibody and conjugates were
92 detected by an indirect ELISA method. *Streptococcus* strain 01026 was embedded with the
93 carbonate buffer solution and blocked; the titers of immune rabbit serum antibody and
94 healthy rabbit serum were detected by ELISA. Healthy rabbit serum served as a negative
95 control, and physiological saline served as the blank control.

96 **Conjugates' effect on biological activity of sulfate amikacin**

97 **Acute toxicity assay**

98 Twenty mice were randomized into two groups ($n = 10$ animals/group): sulfate amikacin (125
99 mg/kg body weight) and conjugates (750 mg/kg body weight) were injected intraperitoneally
100 (i.p.) into the mice. Mice were monitored daily for appearance and behavior, dietary wishes,
101 activity behaviors, defecation, central nervous system symptoms and death.

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105 **Antimicrobial activity assay *in vitro***

106 **The determination of minimal inhibitory concentrations (MIC)**

107 Sulfate amikacin and conjugates were diluted into a certain concentration by
108 microdilution method (5 mg/mL, 1 mg/mL, 500 µg/mL, 100 µg/mL, 50 µg/mL, 10 µg/mL, 5
109 µg/mL, 1 µg/mL and 0.5 µg/mL) and added to 96-well plates. 50 µL diluted bacteria liquid
110 ($10^6 \sim 10^7$ /mL) were co-incubated with sulfate amikacin or conjugates at 37°C for 18 h. The
111 lowest drug concentration with no bacterial growth is the minimal inhibitory concentration.

112 **The determination of minimum bactericidal concentration (MBC)**

113 One hundred microliters of the minimal inhibitory concentration were placed into no
114 resistance agar medium and cultured overnight at 37°C. The minimum bactericidal
115 concentration is the highest drug concentration, with less than five bacterial colonies.

116 **Sulfate amikacin activity assay**

117 **Determination of *Streptococcus* LD₅₀**

118 Sixty mice (20 ± 2 g) were divided into 10 groups (n = 6 animals/group). The *Streptococcus*
119 01026 cultures were diluted with broth medium into 10^{-1} - 10^{-10} by a 10 times dilution method
120 and then injected intraperitoneally (i.p.) into the mice (0.2 mL/rabbit). The LD₅₀ was
121 calculated by the Karber method [Shingaki et al. 2015].

122 ***Streptococcus* treatment animal model**

123 The LD₅₀ dose of *Streptococcus* was injected into the muscles of 180 mice (20 ± 2 g), and the
124 mice were divided into six groups (n = 30 animals/group). When symptoms appeared, five
125 groups of mice were injected with serum antibodies (0.2 mg), sulfate amikacin (0.2 mg),
126 conjugates (0.4 mg), conjugates (0.2 mg) and conjugate injection (0.1 mg), respectively. Mice
127 were monitored every 12 h for three days.

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130 **Sulfate amikacin pharmacokinetic parameters assay**

131 Twenty rabbits (1.8 ± 0.2 kg) were divided into two groups: i.p injection of the control
132 (sulfate amikacin 10 mg/kg body weight) or i.p injection of the conjugates (10 mg/kg body
133 weight). Blood samples were taken from the ear vein of the rabbits at 0, 15, 30, 60, 90, 120,
134 180, 240, 300 and 360 min after treatment. The samples were centrifuged, and then the
135 plasma concentrations of the supernatants were determined by a microbiological method.
136 Pharmacokinetic parameters were obtained from the plasma concentration-time data treated
137 with the MCP-KP pharmacokinetic program. A two-sample *t*-test was used to compare
138 sulfate amikacin pharmacokinetic parameters in conjugates versus control [Shingaki et al.
139 2015].

140 **Results**

141 **Preparing the conjugates of the sulfate amikacin and *Streptococcus* serum antibody**

142 To prepare the conjugates of the sulfate amikacin and *Streptococcus* serum antibody,
143 *Streptococcus* serum antibodies, sulfate amikacin and PEG6000 were mixed (400:2:9) and
144 tested by electron microscopy. As shown in Fig 1, all sulfate amikacin were attached to the
145 antibody molecule. To analyze the stability of the conjugates, the conjugates were stored in
146 4°C for 30 d, 90 d and 180 d and observed under EM. Sulfate amikacin was still attached to
147 the *Streptococcus* serum antibody and no free sulfate amikacin (data not shown) was seen.

148 **Conjugates specifically binding *Streptococcus***

149 To detect the response specificity of the conjugates, *Streptococcus* strain 01026, *E. coli* strain
150 C44103, *Pasteurella multocida* strain 4401, and *Staphylococcus aureus* strain C26112 were
151 respectively mixed with conjugates (1 mg/mL). Fluorescence staining results indicated that
152 the conjugates only bind with *Streptococcus*, not with *Escherichia coli*, *Pasteurella* and
153 *Staphylococcus aureus* (Fig 3A-B).

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155 **Conjugates improve *Streptococcus* serum antibody biological activity**

156 **Conjugates maintain *Streptococcus* serum antibody reactogenicity**

157 To compare *Streptococcus* serum antibody response efficiency, Serum antibody and
158 conjugate response efficiency were detected by an indirect ELISA. Fig 2 indicated that the
159 ELISA value of the conjugates is slightly less than *Streptococcus* serum antibody, but the
160 ELISA titer of conjugates is 1:1024, the same as *Streptococcus* serum antibody. Therefore,
161 the conjugates do not affect *Streptococcus* serum antibody response efficiency.

162 **Conjugates increase *Streptococcus* serum antibody response sensitivity**

163 To analyze the *Streptococcus* serum antibody in the conjugates' response sensitivity,
164 conjugates and *Streptococcus* serum antibody were labeled with colloidal gold. According to
165 Fig 3D, we can see that the conjugates combine with *Streptococcus* cell surfaces when
166 conjugates and *Streptococcus* were mixed for 3 min. After mixing for 7 min, conjugates
167 entered into *Streptococcus* bacteria (Fig 3F). The *Streptococcus* serum antibody combined
168 with the *Streptococcus* cell surface after being mixed for 4 min and entered into the
169 *Streptococcus* bacteria after 8 min, Therefore, the conjugate response sensitivity is higher
170 than *Streptococcus* serum antibody response sensitivity.

171 **Conjugates decrease *Streptococcus* serum antibody immunogenicity**

172 Specific antiserum was generated by immunizing rabbits with either *Streptococcus* or the
173 conjugates. *Streptococcus* serum antibody and conjugate immunogenicity were detected by
174 an indirect ELISA method. The results show that the titer of *Streptococcus* serum antibody is
175 1:64, and the conjugates is only 1:8 (Fig 4). The *Streptococcus* serum antibody
176 immunogenicity is four times the immunogenicity of the conjugates.

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180 **Conjugates enhance sulfate amikacin biological activity**

181 **Conjugates reduce the acute toxicity of sulfate amikacin**

182 Mice were injected intraperitoneally with sulfate amikacin (125 mg/kg body weight) and
183 conjugates (750 mg/kg body weight). After seven days, five of the mice injected with sulfate
184 amikacin were dead, but no mice injected with the conjugates died. Only 20% of the mice
185 injected with conjugates had reduced ambulation and sleepiness symptoms, but they returned
186 to normal two hours after the injection.

187 **Conjugates improve sulfate amikacin antimicrobial activity**

188 To test sulfate amikacin antimicrobial activity, we measured the MIC and MBC of sulfate
189 amikacin and conjugates. Table 1 data indicate that the *Streptococcus* MIC and MBC of
190 conjugates are 0.5 µg/mL and 1 µg/mL, respectively, which are 20 and 50 times greater than
191 sulfate amikacin, respectively. The bacteriostatic effects of *Staphylococcus aureus* and *E. coli*
192 conjugates are not obvious compared with *Streptococcus*.

193 To further observe curative effects, serum antibodies (0.2 mg), sulfate amikacin (0.2 mg) and
194 conjugates at three concentrations (0.4 mg, 0.2 mg, 0.1 mg) were injected into a
195 *Streptococcus* animal model, respectively. As shown in Table 2, the effective rate and
196 cure rate of conjugates at 0.4 mg is 100% and 90%, respectively, while the rates for sulfate
197 amikacin are 50% and 10%, respectively. Conjugates have twice the effective rate and nine
198 times the cure rate of sulfate amikacin. We also noticed that conjugates can clearly improve
199 sulfate amikacin antimicrobial activity.

200 **Conjugates improve sulfate amikacin bioavailability**

201 To further study the change of sulfate amikacin metabolic parameters, sulfate amikacin and
202 conjugates were injected intraperitoneally (i.p.) into the rabbits and pharmacokinetic
203 parameters were obtained from plasma concentration-time data treated with the MCP-KP
204 pharmacokinetic program. Table 3 data show that the half-life (T_{1/2}) of sulfate amikacin

205 terminal elimination extended, the drug-time area under the curve (AUC) increased, and the
206 apparent volume of distribution (VD) and clearance rate (CL) decreased in conjugates.
207 Pharmacokinetic parameters changed significantly ($P < 0.01$) in conjugates compared with
208 sulfate amikacin.

209 **Discussion**

210 *Streptococcus* serum antibodies, sulfate amikacin and PEG6000 were mixed (400:2:9) to
211 form conjugates. Response specificity assays show that conjugates specifically bind
212 *Streptococcus* (Fig 3A-B). The response efficiency assay results indicate that conjugates
213 maintain *Streptococcus* serum antibody reactogenicity (Fig 2). At the same time, conjugates
214 increase *Streptococcus* serum antibody response sensitivity (Fig 3D-F). Conjugates not only
215 improve the antibody targeting but also significantly reduce the body's resistance to
216 antibodies [Taylor and Lindorfer 2010]. Therefore, antibodies can be effective as bacteria-
217 targeted drugs.

218 The increase in the *Streptococcus* serum antibody response sensitivity in conjugates can be
219 mainly attributed to the mechanism of antibody targeting *in vitro*. The negative charge of an
220 antigen decreases when an antibody binds with antigen, which promotes the negative charged
221 antibody to move to the antigen. The speed of antibody moving to the antigen mainly
222 depends on the binding speed of the antigen and antibody and the antibody moving speed in
223 the solution. The faster the binding speed of the antigen and antibody, the greater the voltage
224 difference is around the antigen and stronger the antibody attraction. Because the conjugates
225 are composed of *Streptococcus* serum antibody, PEG6000 and sulfate amikacin, the
226 conjugates have a larger volume compared to *Streptococcus* serum antibody and can bind
227 faster to *Streptococcus*. The conjugates made with PEG6000 have better water solubility than
228 the *Streptococcus* serum antibody, therefore the conjugates move faster than the
229 *Streptococcus* serum antibody in the electrolyte solution. At the same time, PEG6000 is fat-

230 soluble and can stimulate the conjugates passing quickly into the cell membrane. Although
231 the conjugates molecular size is bigger than the *Streptococcus* serum antibody, the conjugates
232 entered into *Streptococcus* bacteria faster than the *Streptococcus* serum antibody (Fig 3D-F).
233 The response immunogenicity results indicated that *Streptococcus* serum antibody
234 immunogenicity is four times higher than the conjugates (Fig 4). PEG6000 is a type of
235 coupling agent often used during conjugate formation [Southern et al. 2009] that allows
236 conjugates to have better water solubility and reduces the conjugate's immunogenicity
237 [Schwenk et al. 2014].

238 To examine sulfate amikacin biological activity, we analyzed the sulfate amikacin acute
239 toxicity, antimicrobial spectra and pharmacodynamics *in vitro* and *in vivo*. Results show that
240 the conjugates reduced the sulfate amikacin acute toxicity, narrowed the antimicrobial spectra
241 and enhanced the pharmacodynamics (Tables 1-3). The polymers of the sulfate amikacin and
242 *Streptococcus* serum antibody are more safe and effective than sulfate amikacin, which will
243 provide a theoretical and experimental basis for bacteria-targeted drug development.

244 The antibacterial effects of conjugates may be due to adsorption, the release on contact and
245 membrane fusion. First, conjugates attach on the surface of bacterial cells through the serum
246 antibody. Second, the PEG6000 in the conjugates and bacteria experience a contact release
247 effect and the conjugates enter into the bacterium by increasing the membrane permeability
248 or membrane fusion [Lason et al. 2013] because PEG6000 is easily dissolved in lipids and
249 induces membrane fusion. Once fusion of the conjugates and bacterial cell membrane occurs,
250 the wall and the membrane of the bacterial cells are damaged, which increases membrane
251 permeability. Finally, the balance of osmotic pressure is broken, and the loss of intracellular
252 material results in cell death [Liu et al. 2010]. Additionally, the antibody carrying conjugates
253 can directly enter into the cell cytoplasm and exert antibacterial activities. These reasons

254 enable the conjugates to significantly outperform the sulfate amikacin in terms of
255 antibacterial activity.

256 Sulfate amikacin was protected by PEG6000 and *Streptococcus* serum antibody through
257 coupling. The retention time of was longer, and the amount of sulfate amikacin removed was
258 less than these before coupling. At the same time, conjugates can target pathogens by
259 antibody binding [Sanchez-Barcelo and Mediavilla 2014]. These reasons result in the
260 increase in the drug-time area under the curve (AUC) and bioavailability.

261 The application of antibody-based drugs for targeting bacteria is beneficial to humans and
262 animals. The diagnosis of bacterial disease can not only be qualitative but also quantitative
263 [Schulte et al. 2014]. According to the number of the pathogenic bacteria in the body,
264 bacterial diseases may be cured by antibody-targeted drugs. In general, antibody-targeted
265 drugs can eliminate the adverse reactions and organ damage caused by drug residues,
266 reduce or stop the formation the drug resistant strains, prolong the life of antibiotics and give
267 obsolete antibacterial drug new life.

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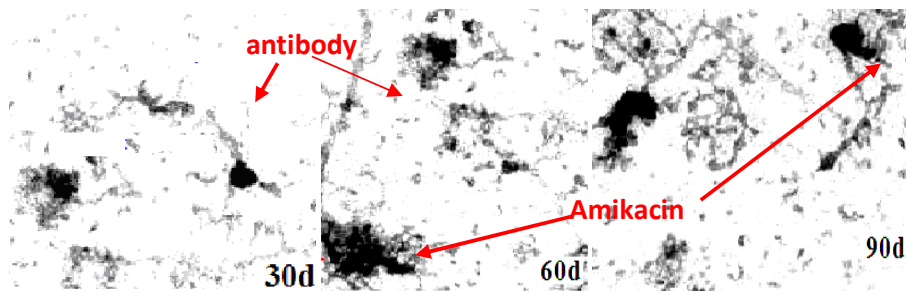
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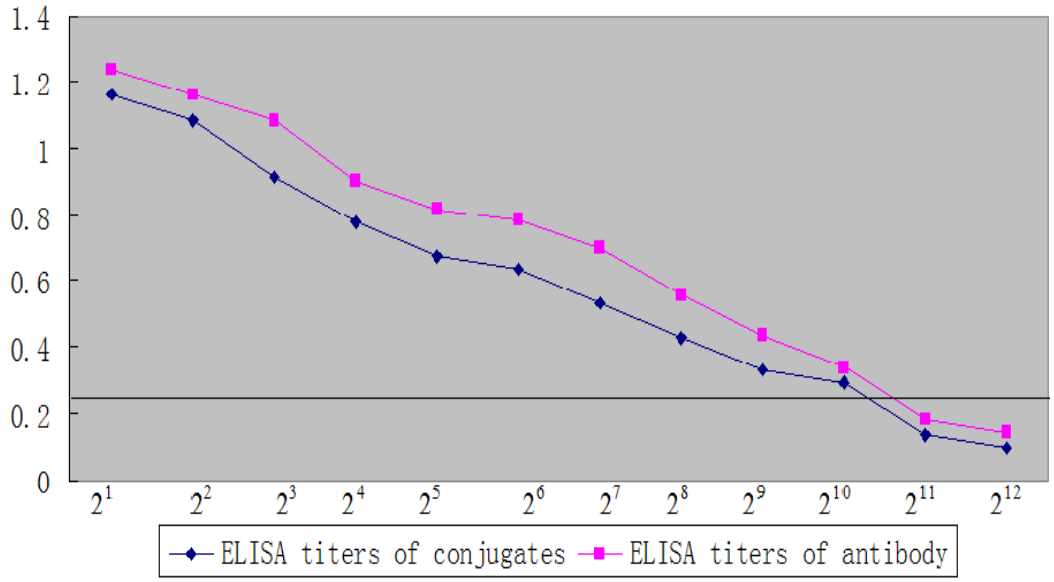
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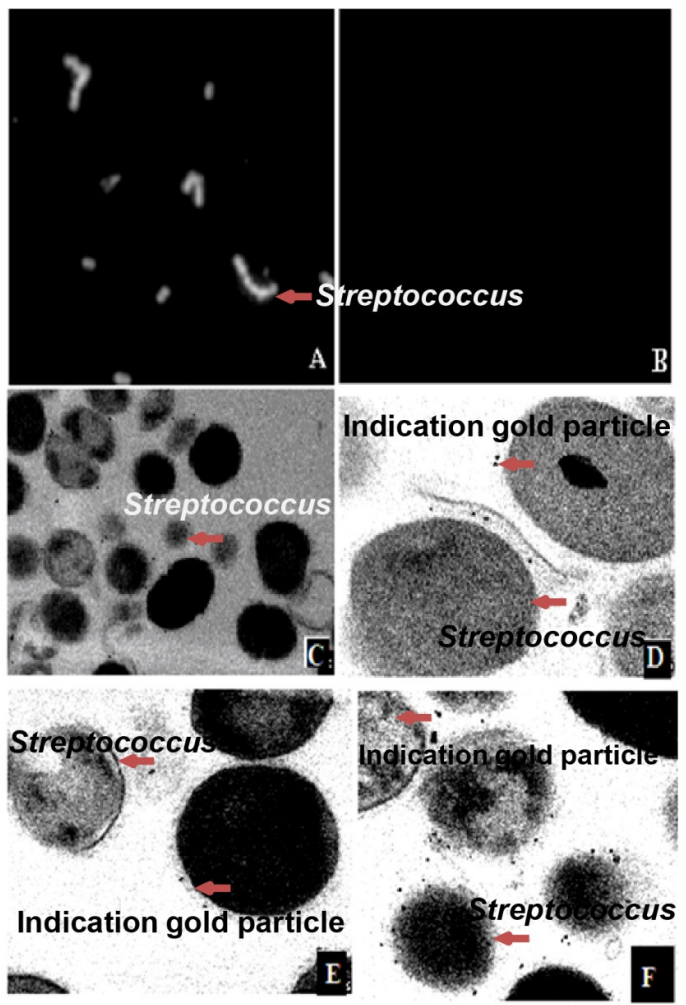
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328 Fig. 1 Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images of the conjugates



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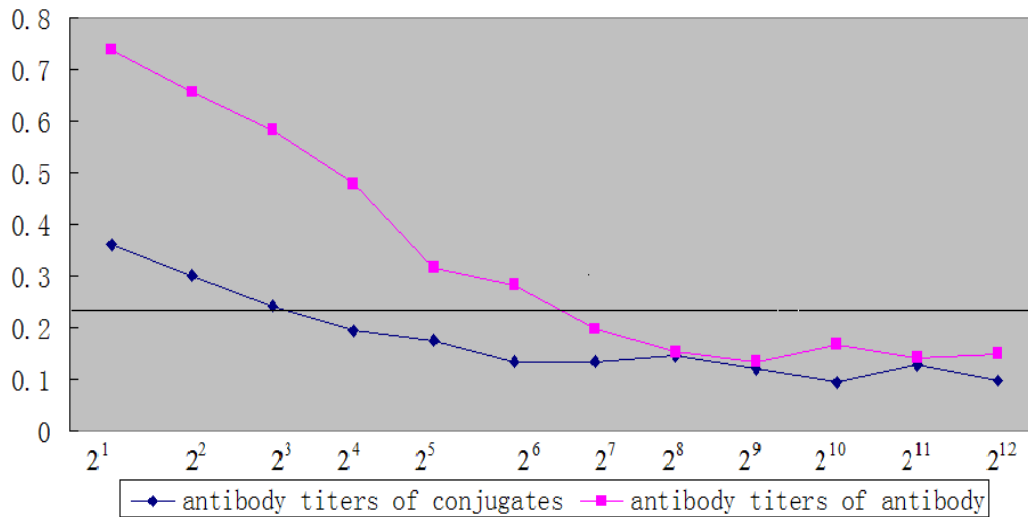
330 Fig. 2 Conjugates do not affect Streptococcus serum antibody response efficiency



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332 Fig. 3 Conjugates effect on biological activity of Streptococcus serum antibodies

333 (A) Immunofluorescence microscopy image of the mixture of the conjugates and
 334 Streptococcus incubated for 3 min (100x). (B) Immunofluorescence microscopy
 335 image of the mixture of the conjugates and Streptococcus incubated for 2 min
 336 (100x). (C) Streptococcus without the immunogold-labeled conjugate (50,000x). (D)
 337 Immunogold-labeled conjugates and Streptococcus incubated for 2 min (50,000x).
 338 (E) Immunogold-labeled conjugates and Streptococcus incubated for 3 min
 339 (50,000x). (F) Immunogold-labeled conjugates and Streptococcus incubated for 7
 340 min (50,000x).



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342 Fig. 4 Conjugates decreased Streptococcus serum antibody immunogenicity

343 **Table 1 The comparison of in vitro antimicrobial activity of sulfate amikacin and conjugates**

strain	conjugates		sulfate amikacin	
	MIC	MBC	MIC	MBC
Streptococcus	0.5 µg/ mL	1 µg/mL	10 µg/mL	50 µg/mL
Staphylococcus	>5 mg/ mL	>5 mg/mL	10 µg/mL	50 µg/mL
Escherichia coli	>5 mg/mL	>5 mg/mL	5 µg/mL	10 µg/mL
salmonella	>5 mg/mL	>5 mg/mL	1 µg/mL	5 µg/mL

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**Table 2 The comparison of curative effect of sulfate amikacin and conjugates
in *Streptococcus* animal model**

Category and the total number of treatment	effective number	cure number	effective rate (%)	cute rate (%)
Serum antibody 30	0	0	0%	0%
Sulfate amikacin 30	15	3	50%	10%
conjugate (0.4 mg) 30	30	27	100%	90%
conjugate (0.2 mg) 30	30	22	100%	75%
conjugate (0.1 mg) 30	30	18	100%	65%

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Table 3 The comparison of pharmacokinetics parameters of sulfate amikacin and conjugates

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	T1/2(h)		V _d (L/kg)		CL(L/kg.h)		AUC(mg.h/L)	
	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II
1	0.986	3.9564	0.290	0.0524	0.1882	0.0092	53.12	204.74
2	0.962	4.0576	0.161	0.0533	0.1158	0.0091	86.33	206.55
3	0.771	3.6430	0.229	0.0543	0.204	0.0103	48.99	181.81
4	0.884	3.7814	0.205	0.0542	0.1604	0.0100	62.33	181.89
5	1.073	3.7200	0.137	0.0549	0.0884	0.0102	113.09	183.77
6	1.317	3.6430	0.218	0.0543	0.1057	0.0103	94.61	181.81
7	1.249	3.8502	0.340	0.0536	0.1741	0.0101	57.45	202.34
8	1.457	3.9319	0.290	0.0537	0.1273	0.0099	78.57	195.72
9	1.437	3.8134	0.304	0.0539	0.1354	0.0097	73.86	187.78
10	1.045	3.7313	0.169	0.0540	0.1121	0.0095	89.20	180.69
\bar{X}	1.12	3.8316	0.23	0.0538	0.14	0.0098	76	191.75
$\pm s$	0.24	0.1712	0.07	0.001	0.04	0.0006	20	12.72
P	<0.01		<0.01		<0.01		<0.01	

I: sulfate amikacin II: conjugates

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