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Magnetic Resonance Imaging Biomarker Calibration Service: NMR Measurement of Isotropic Water Diffusion Coefficient

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Abstract

This document describes a calibration service to measure the water diffusion coefficient, or diffusivity, in reference materials and tissue mimics using nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) techniques. This calibration is restricted to materials which exhibit isotropic Gaussian water diffusion. The measurement uses the water proton spin as a tag and standard NMR gradient techniques to measure diffusion of the proton magnetization, which, in low viscosity fluids, is largely determined by the physical motion of water molecules. The calibrated materials are meant to be used in phantoms (calibration devices) to verify the accuracy of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)-based water diffusion measurements. The local diffusion coefficient (often referred to as the apparent diffusion coefficient in complex materials) and other associated parameters, are used as image-based biomarkers to assess the state of tissue cellular density, detect tissue anomalies, characterize tumor type, evaluate treatment efficacy, and assess neural connectivity and neural tissue degeneration. A biomarker, as defined by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, is “a characteristic that is objectively measured and evaluated as an indicator of normal biological processes, pathogenic processes, or biological responses to a therapeutic intervention.” (1) Diffusion coefficients, which describe the rate that water protons move due to random thermal motion, are phenomenological parameters that must be carefully defined and measured to enable rigorous quantification and their use as biomarkers for clinical decision making. Diffusion parameters, in addition to being dependent on local material properties, are dependent on environmental parameters such as temperature, which must be controlled and precisely and accurately measured.

Keywords

Biomarker; magnetic resonance imaging; MRI; MRI phantoms; NMR; nuclear magnetic resonance; proton magnetization diffusion; water diffusion.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Calibration Service Summary	2
3. Theory of Measurement	3
3.1. Diffusion Model and Measurement Equations	3
3.2. Pulsed Gradient Spin Echo Sequence	6
4. Sample Geometry and Measurement System	10
4.1 NMR system	11
4.1.1 Magnetic Field Ramp and Shimming	12
4.1.2 NMR time base verification:	12
4.1.3 Probe tuning:	12
4.1.4 NMR radiofrequency (RF) power calibration:	14
4.1.5 NMR instrument linewidth and peak integration:	17
4.1.6 Triaxial gradient system:	18
4.2 Sample cells	21
4.3 Fiber optic temperature probe and temperature control system	24
4.4 Gradient Calibrations	26
4.5 PGSE Robustness Tests	29
4.5.1 Gradient recovery and eddy current compensation	30
4.5.2 Gradient pulse shape and spacing	31
4.5.3 Computed vs. measured <i>b</i> -values	33
4.5.4 <i>t</i> 180 Test	34
4.5.5 Water calibration	35
5. Standard Operating Procedures	37
5.1 Diffusion Measurement Protocol	37
5.2 System Startup and Calibration	37
5.3 Prerun calibrations	38
5.4 Data Acquisition	38
5.5 Data Analysis	39
6. Uncertainty Evaluation	41
6.1 Introduction	41
6.2 Overview of Measurement System Uncertainties	43
6.3 Non-Ideal Pulse Sequence (NPS)	46
6.4 Local Environment Variation (LE)	46
6.5 Non-ideal material properties (NM)	49
6.6 Data Analysis (DA)	50