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A.L. Wollenberg, T.M. O'Shea, J.H. Kim, A. Czechanski, L.G. Reinholdt, M.V. Sofroniew, T.J. Deming



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## Injectable polypeptide hydrogels via methionine modification for neural stem cell delivery

<sup>1</sup>A.L. Wollenberg\*, <sup>2</sup>T.M. O'Shea\*, <sup>2</sup>J.H. Kim, <sup>3</sup>A. Czechanski, <sup>3</sup>L.G. Reinholdt, <sup>2</sup>M.V. Sofroniew, and <sup>1</sup>T.J. Deming†.

<sup>1</sup> Departments of Bioengineering, Chemistry and Biochemistry, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California 90095-1600, USA.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Neurobiology, David Geffen School of Medicine, University of California, Los Angeles, California 90095-1763, USA.

<sup>3</sup> The Jackson Laboratory, Bar Harbor, Maine, 04609, USA.

\* These authors contributed equally to this work.

† Corresponding Author

### Abstract:

Injectable hydrogels with tunable physiochemical and biological properties are potential tools for improving neural stem/progenitor cell (NSPC) transplantation to treat central nervous system (CNS) injury and disease. Here, we developed injectable diblock copolypeptide hydrogels (DCH) for NSPC transplantation that contain hydrophilic segments of modified L-methionine (Met). Multiple Met-based DCH were fabricated by post-polymerization modification of Met to various functional derivatives, and incorporation of different amino acid comonomers into hydrophilic segments. Met-based DCH assembled into self-healing hydrogels with concentration and composition dependent mechanical properties. Mechanical properties of non-ionic Met-sulfoxide formulations (DCH<sub>MO</sub>) were stable across diverse aqueous media while cationic formulations showed salt ion dependent stiffness reduction. Murine NSPC survival in DCH<sub>MO</sub> was equivalent to that of standard culture conditions, and sulfoxide functionality imparted cell non-fouling character. Within serum rich environments *in vitro*, DCH<sub>MO</sub> was superior at preserving NSPC stemness and multipotency compared to cell adhesive materials. NSPC in DCH<sub>MO</sub> injected into uninjured forebrain remained local and, after 4 weeks, exhibited an immature astroglial phenotype that integrated with host neural

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