Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research B 315 (2013) 360–363

Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research B

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/nimb

A compact biological cell irradiation system with a Van de Graaff accelerator

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 30 November 2012
Received in revised form 5 March 2013
Accepted 29 March 2013
Available online 6 April 2013

Keywords:
Accelerator
Ion beam applications
Biological effect of radiation

ABSTRACT

This report describes the development of a compact microcell irradiation system in the 3 MV KN Van de Graaff accelerator in the Accelerator Laboratory of National Tsing Hua University (NTHU). The main feature of this system is backscattering, a technique whereby a 100 nm gold scattering foil is placed in the center of a scattering chamber, instead of a 90° bending magnet. The incident particles produced by the accelerator bombard the scattering foil and scatter isotropically. A set of micro pinholes was installed above the scattering foil and directed the 90° scattering particles to irradiate the cell target. This innovation simplifies the system design and massively reduces the cost and space requirements for system construction.

1. Introduction

As radio-oncology progresses, developing an ion microbeam cell irradiation system for biological cells has gained importance. It is able to allow precise meter radiation dosage to individual cells, to increase the precision of radiation delivery, and to select individual cells or regions of tissue [1]. It offers a unique tool for studying DNA damage, and the bystander effect. In the past years, a number of laboratories have begun to construct micro-irradiation systems for radiobiological research [2,3]. They used either a set of complex micro-collimators or a series of quadrupole magnets to confine the beam spot size within the micrometer scale. Although both of these methods have been successfully applied in cell micro-irradiation experiments, constructing a microbeam system has limitations. The two most important limitations are its complex design and the costly equipment. For this report, we established a scattering chamber with a set of pinholes for micro-irradiation purposes. This system is constructed with the 3 MV KN Van de Graaff accelerator in the Accelerator Laboratory of National Tsing Hua University (NTHU).

2. Irradiation system design

Fig. 1 is a schematic diagram of the scattering chamber. Its main feature is that it uses a backscattering technique instead of a bending magnet that changes beam direction from horizontal to vertical. Backscattering theory and the numerical calculation are similar to those of our previous report [4]. However, the chamber size is much smaller for shrinking the distance between the scattering chamber and the cell-supporting chamber. A 100 nm gold scattering foil was placed at the center of the scattering chamber, and tilted at a 45° angle. A long carbon canal was placed in front of the scattering foil to confine the angle of the incident beam within 2°. To suppress the bremsstrahlung radiation, the inner wall of the scattering chamber was shielded with carbon sheets, and a beam absorption chamber was connected with the scattering chamber to absorb forward-moving particles. When the particles produced from accelerator were incident to the scattering chamber, they collided with the foil atoms and scattered isotropically. An exit aperture was opened immediately above the scattering foil to give the 90° scattering particles access to air for cell irradiation. Accurately measuring the number of irradiating particles on a cell is crucial [5,6]. In this system, the number of irradiating particles can be monitored by measuring the number of incident particles on the scattering foil.

3. Cell-supporting chamber and culture dish

A cell-supporting chamber, as Fig. 1 shows, was constructed on the exit aperture to provide a stress-free environment for the cell sample. In this chamber, the temperature was kept at 37 °C, and a 5% CO_2 mixed air flow was supplied continuously. The chamber

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nimb.2013.03.042

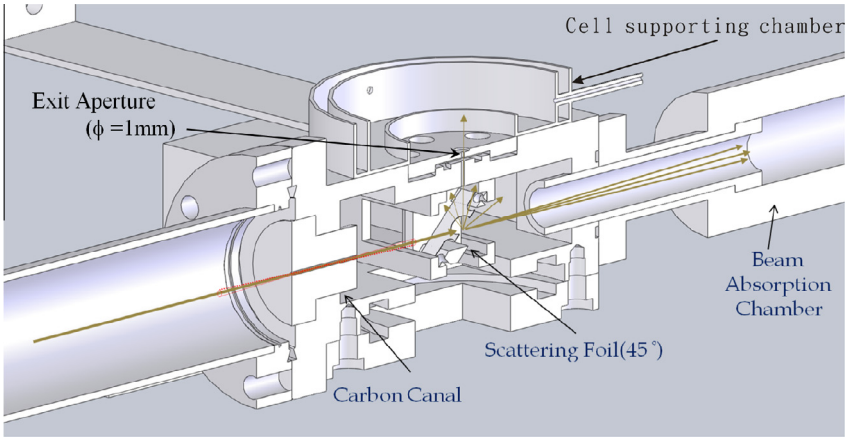

Fig. 1. The schematic diagram of the irradiation chamber.

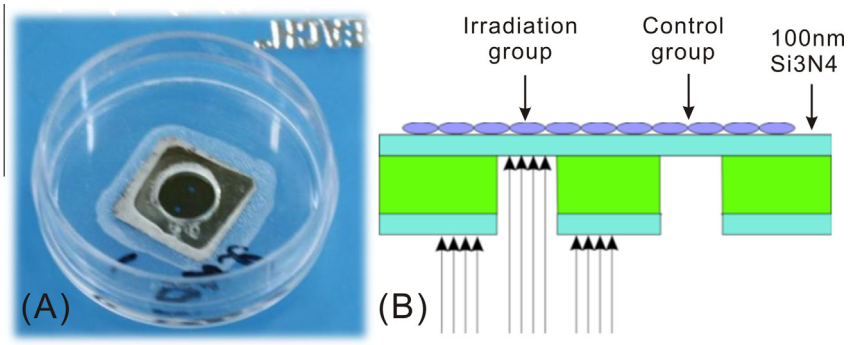

Fig. 2. The homemade cell culture dish. (A) Photo of the cell culture dish. An 8 mm width hole was opened at the bottom, and a sheet of a silicon nitride membrane chip was attached to it. (B) The schematic diagram of the silicon nitride membrane chip. This chip contains a layer of a 100 nm silicon nitride membrane, and two 1×1 mm^2 windows were opened on it.

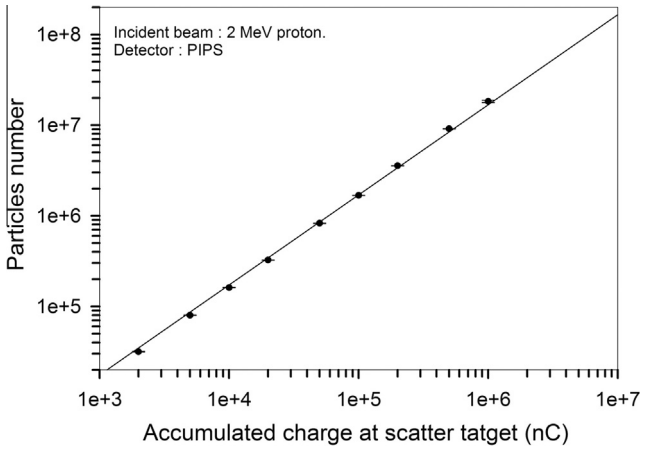

Fig. 3. The relationship between the outgoing particle number and the accumulated charge on the scattering foil. The solid line is the regression line.

was connected with an automatic three-axial high-precision stepper motor to control the cell position automatically and precisely. At the bottom of the supporting chamber, a 3.5 cm hole was opened at the center to mount a homemade culture dish. Fig. 2 shows a photo of the homemade cell culture dish. The base of the culture dish was a piece of silicon wafer. This wafer contained a 100 nm silicon nitride membrane layer, and two 1×1 mm^2 windows were opened on it, as shown in Fig. 2(B). These two windows divided the cell samples into an irradiation group and a control group, and the 5 mm gap prevented any interaction between them. The advantage of using the silicon nitride membrane-based culture dish is not only that it has the lowest energy loss, but also that it has the best cell adhesive ability [7].

4. Micro pinhole collimator

To extend the application of the irradiation system from broad beam irradiation to micro-irradiation, a micro-pinhole collimator was designed and constructed to shrink the spot size from a millimeter to micrometer scale. The micro-pinhole collimator was fabricated using the inductively coupled plasma reactive ion etching (ICP-RIE) technique to etch the silicon wafer. The ICR-RIE technique is commonly used in microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) processes to fabricate a high aspect ratio structure on silicon. It can achieve the requirements for a high etch rate and deep anisotropic silicon etching, and also maintains device dimensions from the mask to the base of the etched structures [8].

The range of 3 MeV proton particles in silicon is 93.3 μm and 48.4 μm for 2 MeV proton particles. To avoid multi-scattering in a micro-pinhole, which causes the irradiating spot size to increase, the thickness and diameter of the pinholes were designed in 100 μm and 5 μm, respectively. In this study, SF_6/O_2 and C_4F_8 were used as etch and passivation gasses, respectively, and the flow rates were 130/13 standard-state cubic centimeter per minute