

# A chronically implantable, hybrid cannula–electrode device for assessing the effects of molecules on electrophysiological signals in freely behaving animals

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## Abstract

We describe a device for assessing the effects of diffusible molecules on electrophysiological recordings from multiple neurons. This device allows for the infusion of reagents through a cannula located among an array of micro-electrodes. The device can easily be customized to target specific neural structures. It is designed to be chronically implanted so that isolated neural units and local field potentials are recorded over the course of several weeks or months. Multivariate statistical and spectral analysis of electrophysiological signals acquired using this system could quantitatively identify electrical “signatures” of therapeutically useful drugs.

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**Keywords:** Drug delivery; Single-unit recording; Local field potential recording; Drug screening; Neural prosthetics

## 1. Introduction

For many decades, animal models have been used for the identification of drugs that ameliorate psychiatric, neuropathological and neuro-degenerative disorders. The principle means of assessing efficacy has been the measurement of behavioral responses. The development of anti-depressant drugs is an excellent example of the successful application of this methodology (Cryan et al., 2002). Similarly, the development of drugs for the treatment of epilepsy uses behavioral assays of seizure activity (White, 2002, 2003). However, behavioral assessment is an indirect measurement of drug effects on neural circuitry. Recent data have shown that electrophysiological signals are modulated by anti-depressant drugs (Szabo et al., 1999; Szabo and Blier, 2001) and serve as a predictor of drug efficacy (Gallinat et al., 2000; Hegerl and Juckel, 2000; Hegerl et al., 2001). In addition, the effects of infusing substances into the striatum have been quan-

tified using electrophysiology to understand their relationship to disorders such as Parkinson’s disease and schizophrenia (Pierce and Rebec, 1995; Stanford et al., 2007). These results suggest that systematic and quantitative electrophysiological screening of pharmaceuticals may prove to be a useful tool in drug development for a variety of neurological and psychological pathologies.

More recently, due to the rapidly developing field of neural prosthetics and brain stimulation a need has arisen to maintain chronic, i.e. several years, electrophysiological contact with neurons in the brain. Currently available, chronically implanted micro-electrode arrays for recording single neural units in neural prosthetic applications lose signals over time. In most cases these micro-electrodes fail completely after being implanted in the brain for several months to a few years. This loss of signal is thought to be primarily due to the inflammatory response engendered by insertion of the electrodes into the brain and subsequent relative motion of the electrodes and the brain (Polikov et al., 2005; Szarowski et al., 2003; Turner et al., 1999). Even arrays that float with the brain suffer from inflammatory responses that could be ameliorated by a pharmacological intervention (House et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2006; Vetter et al., 2004; Warren et al., 2004).

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The device described here offers a simple and effective way to approach both drug development and electrode contact longevity issues. Although several cannula–electrode devices have been designed for use in both behaving rats (Laird et al., 1979; Rebec et al., 1993) and monkeys (Kliem and Wichmann, 2004), the device presented here possesses several significant advantages. It is extremely light weight, simple to use, highly configurable, bio-compatible, and can acquire both isolated neural units and local field potentials (LFPs), while delivering drugs through a cannula.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Assembly of the cannula–multielectrode array

An apparatus for simultaneously measuring electrophysiological signals and for infusing reagents in close proximity to the electrodes is described. The device is comprised of a body, a cannula, and electrodes mounted on the body so that reagents supplied by the cannula are delivered in proximity of the electrodes. The cannula and electrode can be arbitrarily configured with respect to each other in order to allow the device to be customized for optimal implantation in specific brain regions.

The device (Fig. 1) is based upon a commercially available cannula system (Brain Infusion kit II, Alzet). The electrodes are made up first, as single long “hat pins”. Holes are drilled at the desired location into one of the electrode mounting disks supplied with the Alzet kit. The rigid hat pin electrode is placed through the pre-drilled hole with the desired length extending below the electrode mounting disk and tacked in place using a small amount of biomedical grade cyanoacrylate glue. The length of electrode above the electrode mounting disk is trimmed to a shaft of approximately 1 mm and stripped of insulation. A flexible 33 gauge insulated copper wire lead is soldered to the electrode shaft so that it is at a right angle to the shaft and parallel to the electrode mounting disk. The other end of the copper lead wire can then be attached to any convenient electrical connector. The cannula is then slid into the central hole of the electrode mounting disk, until the desired length of the cannula is protruding below the disk, and tacked in place using the cyanoacrylate glue. The gap between the electrode mounting disk and the base of the cannula assembly is filled with Loctite M-31CL Medical Device Epoxy to protect wire leads and strengthen the device.

The electrodes are manufactured from the biocompatible materials, platinum/iridium alloy and Paralene-C insulation. The units tested utilize 75  $\mu\text{m}$  diameter electrodes sharpened to 1–2  $\mu\text{m}$  with impedance of  $\sim 0.3 \text{ M}\Omega$ . The electrodes and cannula extended 2.5 mm and 2.0 mm below the electrode mounting disk. Electrode materials and construction can also be customized according to the needs for insertion into different brain structures, e.g. longer electrodes for recording from deep brain structures. The electrode manufacturing and device assembly is carried out by Micro Probe Inc. (Gaithersburg, MD, USA).

Using the current version of the device, saline is infused using an osmotic mini-pump (Alzet). This pump uses the force gen-

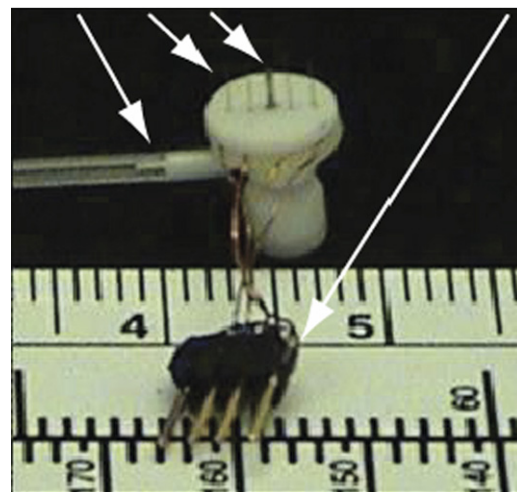
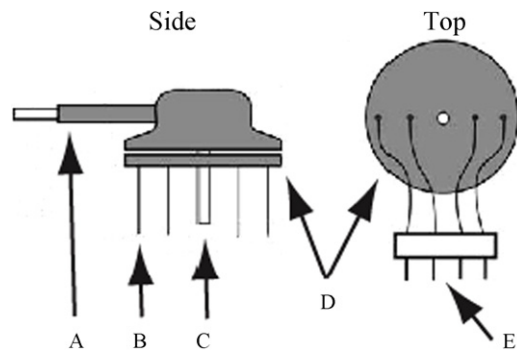


Fig. 1. A schematic and picture of the cannula–electrode device are shown. The schematic shows a side view of the entire device and a top view of the disk upon which the electrodes are mounted, and the electrical connector. The picture displays the complete device next to a scale in centimeters. (A) Coupling to osmotic pump; (B) electrode; (C) cannula; (D) electrode mounting disk; (E) electrical connector.

erated by an osmotic gradient to slowly infuse liquid over the course of several days-to-weeks with no intervention.

### 2.2. Surgical implantation

The surgical implantation of the device is performed using a minimally invasive procedure. An extended borehole procedure is performed. The device is then stereotaxically implanted through the craniotomy. The duramater is pierced by the cannula and electrodes, but is otherwise left intact. The device is anchored to the skull using titanium bone screws (Osteomed, Addison, TX) and an island of methyl methacrylate forming a small head cap. A pocket is formed by blunt dissection of a subcutaneous space between the scapulae and the osmotic pump is placed into this pocket and connected to the cannula–electrode device with plastic tubing. The scalp is sutured around the head-cap, leaving the electrical connector exposed (Fig. 2). A skilled operator can implant the device in approximately 20 min from the onset of anesthesia.

It was reported that cyanoacrylate gel (loctite 454) is a more effective and easier means of cannula–electrode fixation since it does not require the use of skull screws for anchoring (Criado et al., 2003). This would greatly reduce the time required for implantation.

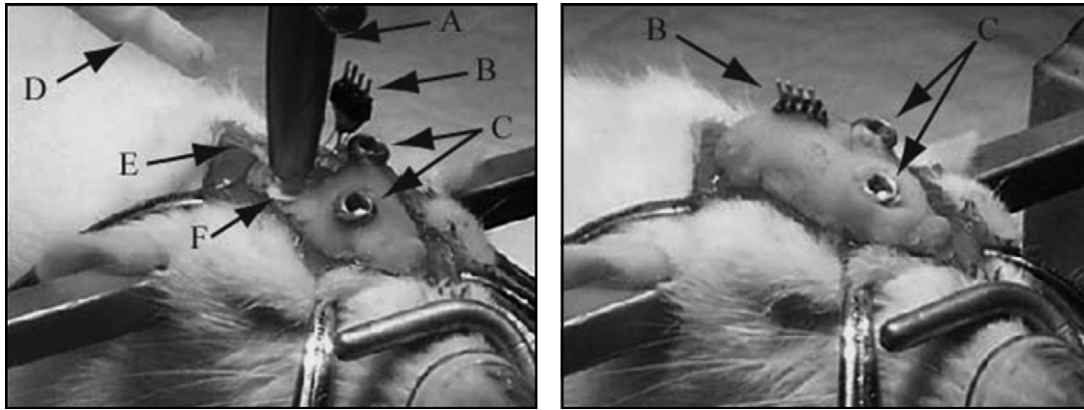


Fig. 2. The left panel shows the insertion of the cannula–multielectrode device using a stereotaxic arm after placement of the osmotic pump sub-cutaneously between the scapulae. The right panel shows the completed procedure with the electrical connector embedded in the acrylic head-cap. (A) Stereotaxic arm; (B) electrical connector; (C) titanium screws; (D) syringe applying acrylic; (E) tube connecting to osmotic pump; (F) cannula–multielectrode device.

### 2.3. Data acquisition and analysis

Since astrocytes often form a barrier around chronically implanted electrodes, we use immunohistochemical staining for the astrocyte marker, glial fibrillary acidic protein (GFAP) (Jankowsky et al., 2000). Briefly, animals are given an anesthetic overdose and transcardially perfused with 10% formalin. Brains are then removed and immediately frozen in pre-chilled isopentane. After embedding in Cryo-M-Bed (Bright, Huntingdon, UK), 20  $\mu$ m frozen sagittal sections through the region where the cannula–electrode device was implanted are collected. The sections are incubated overnight at 4 °C with anti-GFAP antibody diluted 1:500 in blocking solution, and then incubated with a secondary antibody conjugated to a fluorescence marker for visualization.

Electrophysiological data can be acquired using standard amplification, filtering, and analog to digital converting systems. We recorded isolated neural-units and LFP using two signal paths and with different filters applied to each path. We used a Dam-80 isolation amplifier and filter (World Precision Instruments) and a National Instruments DAQ card. Electrical signals are amplified with a gain of 10k and filtered at either 100–10,000 Hz for recording neural units, or 0.1–10,000 Hz to acquire LFPs. Alternatively, a single broadband neural signal could be recorded and differentially digitally filtered offline.

### 3. Results

We successfully implanted this device into the frontal or parietal cortices of five rats, and obtained both electrophysiological and histological data. Activated astrocytes are a key part of the inflammatory response to neural injury, and increased GFAP staining is a reliable maker of this response (Eng et al., 2000; Polikov et al., 2005; Szarowski et al., 2003; Turner et al., 1999). Several weeks post-implantation, we sacrificed the rats and performed GFAP immunohistochemistry. As expected, compared to the non-implanted hemisphere, the tissue around the electrode exhibits increased GFAP immunostaining (Fig. 3).

We also collected electrophysiological data at two to five time points over many weeks post-implantation (Figs. 4 and 5). Even though an increase in the inflammatory response was detected by immunohistochemistry, we are able to collect high quality electrophysiological data. As calculated by spike peak-to-peak divided by the RMS of the whole recording, the signal to noise ratio of

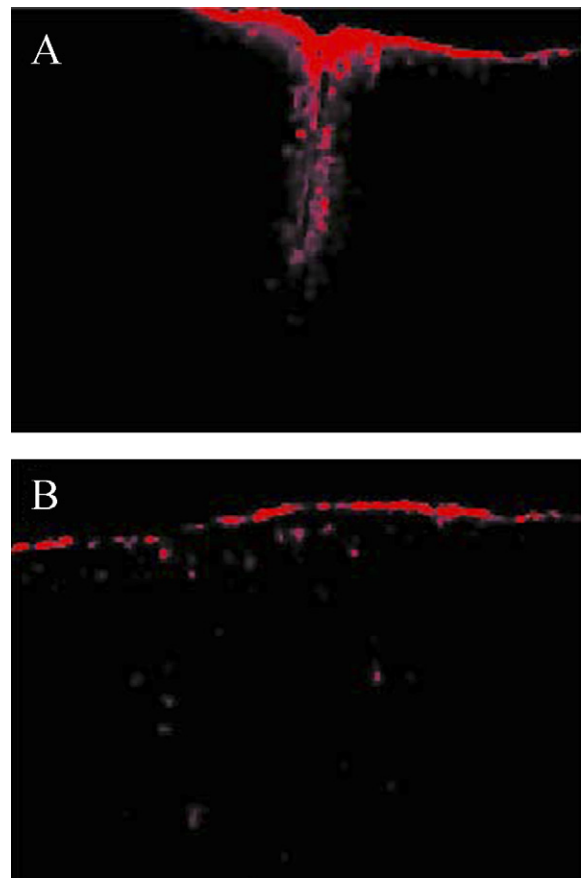


Fig. 3. Immunohistological staining for GFAP shows (A) an increased inflammatory response at the site of one of the electrodes in comparison with (B) the contralateral hemisphere where no electrodes were placed. Animal was sacrificed at 30 days post-device implantation.

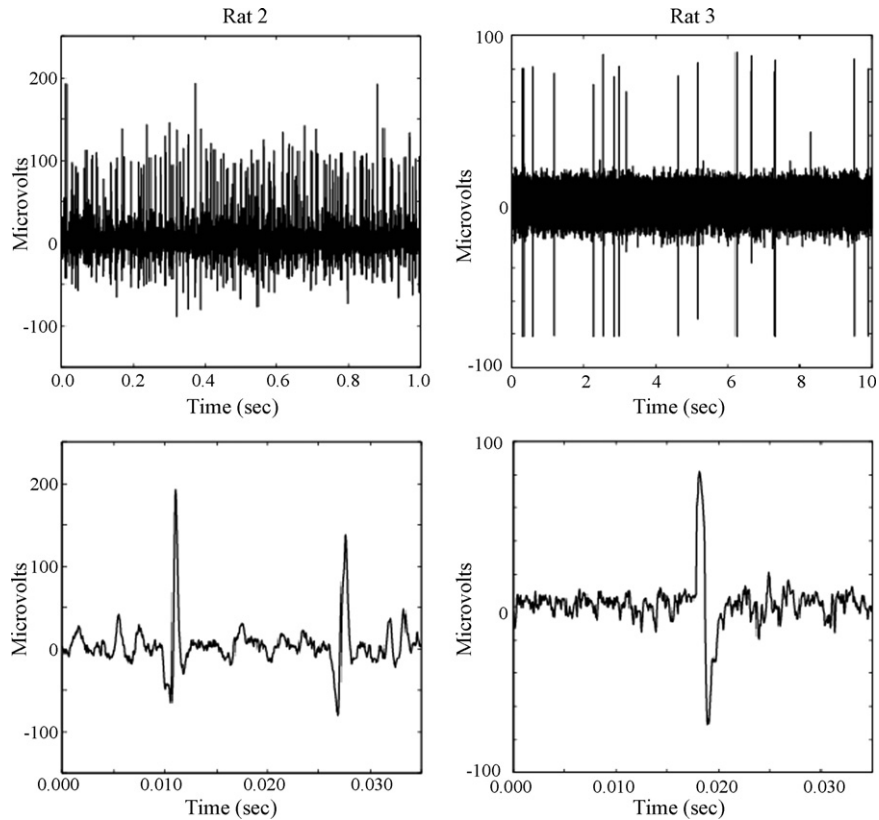


Fig. 4. Electrophysiological data collected from the cannula–electrode device from two rats (band pass filtered 300–10000 Hz). The top panels show multiple spikes over the course of one second for rat 2 and 10 s for rat 3. The middle panels zoom in on the temporal scale to show two single spike discharges. This data was collected at 12 days (rat 3) and 7 months (rat 2) post-array implantation.

the recordings displayed in Fig. 4 is 19:1 for rat 2 and 25:1 for rat 3. Both the high frequency spike data and the spectral analysis of the LFP demonstrate electro-physiological activity 2 weeks post-implantation.

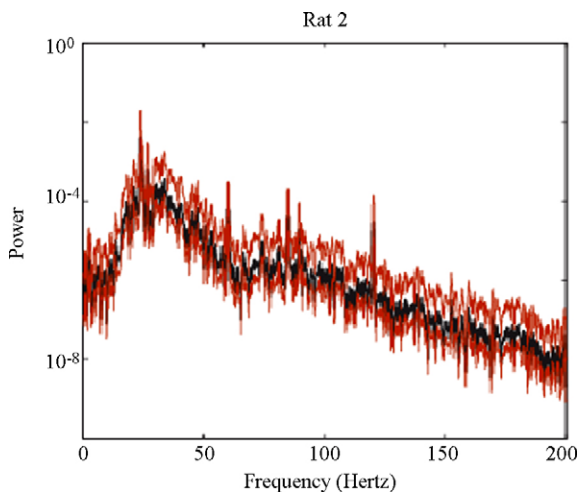


Fig. 5. Spectral analysis of electrophysiological data collected from the cannula–electrode device from one rat (wideband filtered 0.1–10,000 Hz). The LFP exhibits a peak in the power spectrum in the beta and low gamma frequencies (10–50 Hz) typical of recordings from the cerebral cortex. The data was acquired 15 days post-array implantation. Red lines are equal to one standard error.

#### 4. Discussion

The cannula–electrode device described here allows recording of the electrical signal from single neural units, and the more global LFP signal, at multiple sites. The recordings of electrical activity are made while a reagent is infused in close proximity to the recording electrodes. Similar devices used by others are capable of recording at only a single location (Kliem and Wichmann, 2004; Rebec et al., 1993), or only EEG signals (Laird et al., 1979). The present device is highly configurable so that electrical recordings and reagent infusion can be targeted to specific neural structures.

We recorded electrical activity from, and infused saline into, the cerebral cortex, which served as a proof of concept for the functionality of the device. Further work is, however, needed to determine the effects of specific reagents on neural activity using this device, as well as the ability of this device to record from multiple structures, e.g. the basal ganglia and cerebral cortex, simultaneously. In addition, since cytokines such as interleukin (IL)-1, -4, -8, -10 and tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$  (TNF- $\alpha$ ) can enhance repair of injured tissue (Spera et al., 1998; Tanuma et al., 1997; Wang et al., 2002; Wang and Shuaib, 2002), it would be interesting to use the described cannula–electrode device to determine if such anti-inflammatory agents can prolong the useful lifespan of the electrode arrays.

Recent studies have shown that electrophysiological signals from isolated neurons are affected by neuroactive drugs such as

anti-depressants (Szabo et al., 1999; Szabo and Blier, 2001), and that evoked potential responses can serve as a marker of anti-depressant efficacy (Gallinat et al., 2000; Hegerl and Juckel, 2000; Hegerl et al., 2001; Linka et al., 2004, 2005). Such results suggest that there are likely to be electrophysiological signatures for neuro-active drugs effective against a variety of neuro-pathologies. Recordings of neural units and LFP may allow for the detection of such signatures in localized neural structures. The effects of intra-cerebral infusion of pharmaceutical agents could then be examined for their effects upon electrophysiological signatures.

This device could also serve as a tool for determining pharmaceutical methods of improving the longevity of chronically implanted electrodes used in neural prosthetic applications. When coupled with telemetry for wireless transmission of the neural signals (Harrison et al., 2007; Neihart and Harrison, 2005), there is no need for a trans-cutaneous electrical connector, so the skin can be sutured completely closed over the acrylic head-cap. In such a configuration the device could provide continuous infusion of reagents and monitoring of signals in the freely behaving animal without requiring a wired connection and a commutator.

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