## **Supporting Information**

## Org. Commun. 10:3 (2017) 144-177

# Synthesis and NMR characterization of dendrimers based on

# 2, 2-bis-(hydroxymethyl)-propanoic acid (bis-HMPA)

## containing peripheral amino acid residues for gene transfection

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#### Synthesis of N-BOC-amino acids 16a-f



### General Procedure for protecting Amino Acids 15a-f:

A solution of the amino acid and base in the proper solvent system was cooled to 0 °C and treated with di-*tert*-butylcarbonate (1.1 equiv./amino group). The mixture was left overnight at r.t. under magnetic stirring. The disappearance of amino acid was checked by TLC using EtOAc containing a spatula tip of ninhydrin as the eluent. The mixture was concentrated at reduced pressure to half the volume, extracted with hexane to remove unreacted di-*tert*-butylcarbonate and the organic phase was washed with satd. aq. NaHCO<sub>3</sub>. The combined aqueous phases were cooled to 0 °C and acidified with 10% aq. KHSO<sub>4</sub> to pH = 2, extracted with Et<sub>2</sub>O (**16a**) or EtOAc (**16b-f**) and dried (Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>). The removal of the solvents at reduced pressure afforded the desired amino acid. Table 1 collects data for the preparation of protected amino acids **16a-f**.

#### Table 1. Preparation of BOC-protected amino acids 16a-f

Amino acid	Solvent	Base	N-BOC	Yield
(g; mmol)	v/v (mL)	(mmol)	Amino acid	%
15a	t-BuOH	NaOH 1N	16a	84
(1.00; 13.2)	(10)	(14.5)		
15b	$H_2O$	Et <sub>3</sub> N	16b	94
(1.00; 11.2)	(100)	(33.6)		
15c	Dioxane/H <sub>2</sub> O	NaOH 1N	16c	94
(1.00; 9.7)	2/1 (30)	(9.7)		
15d	Dioxane/H <sub>2</sub> O	NaOH(s)	16d	94
(2.00; 13.1)	1/1 (18)	(26.2)		
15e	Dioxane/H <sub>2</sub> O	NaOH 1N	16e	93
(2.00; 13.7)	1/1 (40)	(13.7)		
15f	DMF/H <sub>2</sub> O	Et <sub>3</sub> N	16f	67
(1.00; 6.4)	1/1.3 (5.9)	(24.4)		

*N-BOC-Glycine* (16a): White crystalline powder, mixture of rotamers, m. p.: 88-90 °C (Lit.<sup>1</sup>: 87-88 °C). FTIR (KBr, cm<sup>-1</sup>): 3500-2400 (OH), 3410 (NH), 1749 (C=O acid + urethane), 1535 (NH). <sup>1</sup>H NMR of rotamer A (minor) (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz):  $\delta = 1.46$  [s, 9H, C(*CH*<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 3.91 (br d, 2H, *CH*<sub>2</sub>COOH), 6.83 (br s, 1H, N*H*), 10.24 (br s, 1H, COO*H*). <sup>13</sup>C NMR of rotamer A (minor) (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz):  $\delta = 28.28$  [C(*CH*<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 43.40 (N*C*H<sub>3</sub>), 81.83 [*C*(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 157.29 (*C*=O urethane), 174.04 (*C*=O acid). <sup>1</sup>H NMR of rotamer B (major) (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz):  $\delta = 1.46$  [s, 9H, C(*CH*<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 3.97 (d, 2H, *J* = 5.3 Hz, *CH*<sub>2</sub>COOH), 5.19 (br s, 1H, N*H*), 10.24 (br s, 1H, COO*H*). <sup>13</sup>C NMR of rotamer B (major) (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz):  $\delta = 28.28$  [C(*CH*<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 42.24 (N*C*H<sub>3</sub>), 80.44 [*C*(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 156.03 (*C*=O urethane), 174.83 (*C*=O acid). NMR data were consistent with those of the literature.<sup>1</sup>

*N-BOC-Sarcosine* (**16b**): Off-white crystalline powder, mixture of rotamers. m. p.: 88-90 °C. FTIR (KBr, cm<sup>-1</sup>): 3500-2400 (OH), 3114 (NH), 1764 (C=O acid), 1751 (C=O urethane). <sup>1</sup>H NMR of rotamer A (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz):  $\delta = 1.44$  [s, 9H C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 2.94 (s, 3H, NCH<sub>3</sub>), 3.95 (s, 2H, CH<sub>2</sub>COOH). <sup>13</sup>C NMR of rotamer A (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz):  $\delta = 28.26$  [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 35.57 (NCH<sub>3</sub>), 50.21 (CH<sub>2</sub>COOH), 80.67 [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 155.63 (C=O urethane), 175.03 (C=O acid). <sup>1</sup>H NMR of rotamer B (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz):  $\delta = 1.47$  [s, 9H C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 2.95 (s, 3H, NCH<sub>3</sub>), 4.03 (s, 2H, CH<sub>2</sub>COOH). <sup>13</sup>C NMR of rotamer B (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz):  $\delta = 28.32$  [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 35.64 (NCH<sub>3</sub>), 50.78 (CH<sub>2</sub>COOH). <sup>80.67</sup> [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 156.43 (C=O urethane), 175.14 (C=O acid). NMR data were consistent with those of the literature.<sup>2</sup>

*N-BOC-GABA* (*16c*): Yellowish viscous resin, mixture of rotamers. FTIR (film, cm<sup>-1</sup>): 3500-2400 (OH), 3345 (NH), 1715 (C=O acid + urethane), 1528 (NH). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz):  $\delta = 1.44$  [s, 9H, C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 1.82 (m, 2H, CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>), 2.39 (t, 2H, J = 7.3 Hz, CH<sub>2</sub>COOH), 3.17 (m, 2H, CH<sub>2</sub>NH), 4.81 (major) and 6.11 (two br s, 1H, NH), 10.78 (br s, 1H, OH). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz):  $\delta = 25.15$  (CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>), 28.39 [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 31.35(CH<sub>2</sub>COOH), 40.21 (major) and 40.96 (CH<sub>2</sub>NH), 79.47 (major) and 80.75 [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 156.26 (major) and 157.76 (C=O urethane),178.26 (C=O acid). NMR data were consistent with those of the literature.<sup>3</sup>

#### Synthesis of N-Methyl-GABA (15d):

A mixture of *N*-methylpyrrolidone (1.00 g, 0.010 mol, 0.97 mL), NaOH (1.62 g, 0.04 mol) and H<sub>2</sub>O (6 mL) was kept at reflux under magnetic stirring for 4 h then added with 12 M HCl up to pH = 1-2. The removal of the solvent at reduced pressure gave a solid residue which was treated with hot EtOH filtered and washed with the same solvent to extract the desidered product, the solvent was removed under reduced pressure to obtain an oil which was crystallized with acetonitrile to afford *N*-methyl-GABA hydrochloride as a off-white hygroscopic solid ( 0.9214 g, 0.0060 mol, 59 %, Mp. 115-119 °C). A portion of 0.4848 g was washed in turn with acetone and diethyl ether achieving **15d** as crystalline powder (0.4465 g, 0.0029 mol).

*N-Methyl-GABA* (**15***d*): White crystalline powder, m. p.: 122-123 ° C, Lit.<sup>4</sup> 120-121 °C. FTIR (KBr, cm<sup>-1</sup>): 3500-2400 (OH + NH<sub>2</sub><sup>+</sup>), 1732 (C=O), 1571 (NH). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO- $d_6$ , 300 MHz):  $\delta = 1.84$  (m, 2H, CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>), 2.36 (t, 2H, J = 7.4 Hz, CH<sub>2</sub>COOH), 2.49 (s, 3H, CH<sub>3</sub>NH<sub>2</sub><sup>+</sup>), 2.86 (t, 2H, J = 7.4 Hz, CH<sub>2</sub>NH<sub>2</sub><sup>+</sup>), 9.22 (broad s, 1H, NH<sub>2</sub><sup>+</sup>). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (DMSO- $d_6$ , 75.5 MHz):  $\delta$  22.24 (CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>), 31.96 (CH<sub>2</sub>COOH), 33.48 (CH<sub>3</sub>NH<sub>2</sub><sup>+</sup>), 48.79 (CH<sub>2</sub>NH<sub>2</sub><sup>+</sup>), 174.90 (C=O acid).

*N*-Methyl-GABA hydrochloride was used in the BOC-protection reaction as described above to give *N*-methyl-*N*-BOC-GABA (**16d**).

*N-methyl-N-BOC-GABA* (*16d*): Yellowish viscous resin. FTIR (film, cm<sup>-1</sup>): 3500-2400 (OH), 3166 (NH), 1728 (C=O acid + urethane). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz):  $\delta = 1.45$  [s, 9H, C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 1.84 (m, 2H, CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>), 2.36 (t, 2H, *J* = 7.3 Hz, CH<sub>2</sub>COOH), 2.85 (s, 3H, CH<sub>3</sub>N), 3.28 (t, 2H, *J* = 7.3 Hz, CH<sub>2</sub>N), 10.78 (br s, 1H, *OH*). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz):  $\delta = 22.88$  (CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>), 28.41 [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 31.11 (CH<sub>2</sub>COOH), 34.16 (CH<sub>3</sub>N), 47.94 (CH<sub>2</sub>N), 79.79 [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 156.05 (C=O urethane), 178.43 (C=O acid). NMR data were consistent with those of the literature.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>*a*</sup>*N*, <sup>*c*</sup>*N* -*diBOC-L-Lysine* (**16e**): Off-white glassy solid, mixture of rotamers. FTIR (KBr, cm<sup>-1</sup>): 3500-2400 (OH), 3374 (NH), 1713 (C=O acid + urethane), 1529 (NH). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz):  $\delta$  = 1.45 [s, 18H, C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 1.30-2.00 (m, 6H, CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>), 3.11 (m, 2H, CH<sub>2</sub>NH), 4.11-4.38 (m, 1H, CHNH), 4.70 and 6.30 (two m, 1H, <sup>*c*</sup>NH), 5.27 (d, *J* = 7.9 Hz, 1H, <sup>*a*</sup>NH), 8.50 (broad s, 1H, *OH*). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz):  $\delta$  = 22.42 (CH<sub>2</sub>), 28.35 [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 28.42 [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 29.45 (CH<sub>2</sub>), 32.10 (CH<sub>2</sub>), 40.13 (major) and 41.24

 $(CH_2NH)$ , 53.24 (major) and 54.58 (CHNH), 79.34 (major) and 80.86 [ $C(CH_3)_3$ ], 79.95 (major) and 81.48 [ $C(CH_3)_3$ ], 155.79 (major) and 156.88 (C=O urethane), 156.33 (major) and 158.16 (C=O urethane), 176.27 (C=O acid). NMR data were consistent with those of the literature.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>*a*</sup>N, <sup>*im*</sup>N -*diBOC-L-Histidine* (**16***f*): Off-white solid, mixture of regioisomers, m. p. : 165-168. Lit.<sup>7</sup>: 165-167 °C. FTIR (KBr, cm<sup>-1</sup>): 3500-2400 (OH), 3406 (NH), 3141 (CH=), 1762 (C=O acid), 1714 (C=O urethane), 1497 (NH). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz):  $\delta = 1.47$  [s, 9H, C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 1.60 [s, 9H, C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 3.15-3.34 (m, 2H, CH<sub>2</sub>), 4.49 (m, 1H, CHNH), 5.49 (d, 1H J = 5.8 Hz, NH), 7.21 (s, 1H, CH imidazole), 8.17 (s, 1H, CH imidazole). <sup>13</sup>C NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz):  $\delta = 27.86$  [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 28.39 [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 29.71 (CH<sub>2</sub>), 52.77 (CHNH), 79.74 [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 86.57 [C(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>3</sub>], 115.63 (CH imidazole), 136.40 (quaternary C imidazole), 136.92 (CH imidazole), 146.29 (C=O urethane), 155.21(C=O urethane), 173.02 (C=O acid).

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Figure S1. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound G4(A) (9)



Figure S2. <sup>13</sup>H NMR and DEPT-135 (DMSO- $d_6$ , 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound G4(A) (9)



Figure S3. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d*<sub>6</sub>, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound G4(OH) (10)



Figure S4. <sup>13</sup>C NMR (DMSO- $d_6$ , 75.5 MHz) spectrum of compound G4(OH) (10)



Figure S5. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz) spectrum of 16b.



Figure S6. <sup>13</sup>C NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz) spectrum of compound 16b



a) DMSO-d6



Figure S7. Comparison of <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectra of G4(OH) (10) (a), G4(16a) (17) (b) and G4(15aHCl) (23) (c)





Figure S8. Comparison of <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectra of G4(OH) (10) (a), G5(16a) (47) (b) and G5(15aHCl) (56) (c)



Figure S9. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 17



Figure S10. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 17



Figure S11. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 23



Figure S12. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (DMSO-*d*6, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 23



Figure S13. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 47



Figure S14. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 47



Figure S15. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 56



Figure S16. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (DMSO-*d*6, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 56



Figure S17. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 53



Figure S18. <sup>13</sup>C NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz) spectrum of compound 53



Figure S19. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectra of compound 62



Figure S20. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (DMSO-*d*6, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 62



Figure S21. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 18



Figure S22. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 18



Figure S23. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 24



Figure S24. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (DMSO-d6, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 24



Figure S25. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 57



Figure S26. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 57



Figure S27. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 19



Figure S28. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 19



Figure S29. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CD<sub>3</sub>OD, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 25



Figure S30. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (CD<sub>3</sub>OD, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 25



Figure S31. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CD<sub>3</sub>OD, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 58



Figure S32. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (CD<sub>3</sub>OD, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 58



Figure S33. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CD<sub>3</sub>OD, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 63



Figure S34. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (CD<sub>3</sub>OD, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 63



Figure S35. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 20



Figure S36. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 20



Figure S37. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CD<sub>3</sub>OD, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 26



Figure S38. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (CD<sub>3</sub>OD, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 26



Figure S39. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 24



Figure S40. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (DMSO-*d*6, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 27



Figure S41. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 59



Figure S42. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (DMSO-d6, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 59



Figure S43. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 55



Figure S44. <sup>13</sup>C NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz) spectrum of compound 55



Figure S45. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-d6, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 64



Figure S46. <sup>13</sup>C NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 75.5 MHz) spectrum of compound 64



Figure S47. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 28



Figure S48. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (DMSO-*d*6, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 28



Figure S49. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 51



Figure S50. <sup>13</sup>C NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz) spectrum of compound 51



Figure S51. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 60



Figure S52. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (DMSO-*d*6, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 60



Figure S53. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 52



Figure S54. <sup>13</sup>C NMR (CDCl<sub>3</sub>, 75.5 MHz) spectrum of compound 52



Figure S55. <sup>1</sup>H NMR (DMSO-*d6*, 300 MHz) spectrum of compound 61



Figure S56. <sup>13</sup>C NMR and DEPT-135 (DMSO-*d6*, 75.5 MHz) spectra of compound 61



□ Calculated ■ Experimental

Figure S57. Comparison between computed and experimental molecular weighs of all prepared dendrimers



Figure S58. Potentiometric titration curves of all prepared dendrimers compared with PEI-b and G4-PAMAMs



**Figure S59.** Buffer capacity ( $\beta$ ) of all prepared dendrimers compared with PEI-b and G4-PAMAMs



**Figure S60.** Average buffer capacity ( $\overline{\beta}$ ) of all prepared dendrimers compared with PEI-b and G4-PAMAMs



**Figure S61.** *p*DNA binding assay. P = *p*DNA, A6 = **61**, A7 = **60**, A8 = **59**, A9 = **27** 



Figure S62. *si*RNA adhesion assay: 60 (a), 27 (b), 61 (c), 59 (d).



Figure S63. Images obtained with a double fluorescence microscope on transfected cells in incomplete culture medium (a) and in complete medium (b).



Figure S64. Cytofluorometric analysis of compound 27.

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