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The repertoire of small molecule PET probes for neuroinflammation imaging: challenges and opportunities beyond TSPO

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Abstract

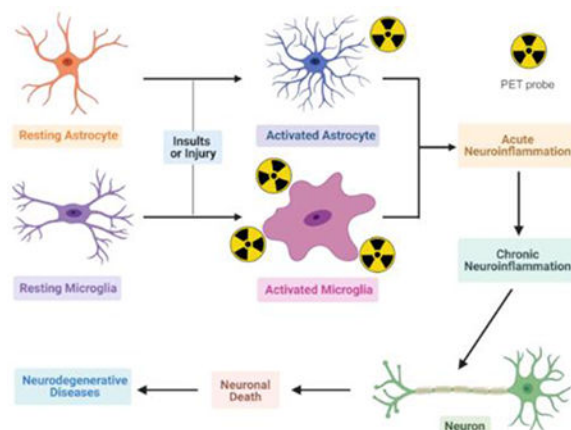
Neuroinflammation is an adaptive response of the central nervous system to diverse potentially injurious stimuli, which is closely associated with neurodegeneration and typically characterized by activation of microglia and astrocytes. As a noninvasive and translational molecular imaging tool, positron emission tomography (PET) could provide a better understanding of neuroinflammation and its role in neurodegenerative diseases. Ligands to TSPO, a putative marker of neuroinflammation, have been the most commonly studied in this context, but suffer from serious limitations. Herein we present a repertoire of different structural chemotypes and novel PET ligand design for classical and emerging neuroinflammatory targets beyond TSPO. We believe that this review will support multidisciplinary collaborations in academic and industrial institutions working on neuroinflammation and facilitate the progress of neuroinflammation PET probe development for clinical use.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT

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Keywords

Neuroinflammation; Neurodegenerative disease; Microglia; Astrocyte; positron emission tomography (PET)

1. Introduction

Neuroinflammation is an adaptive response of nervous tissue to a variety of stimuli or insults, including infection, toxins, misfolded proteins and autoantigens. It typically involves the activation of glia cells (i.e., microglia and astrocyte) in the central nervous system (CNS) through release of second lipid messenger and inflammatory mediators such as reactive oxygen/nitrogen species (ROS/RNS), chemokines and cytokines (Figure 1).¹ Inflammatory mediators govern the response to inflammatory stimuli and minimize the damage from the inflammatory insult.

Microglia are the principal immune cells in the CNS, constantly sensing the cellular environment and responding to maintain homeostasis. Of note, microglia have a very high sensitivity to stimuli and their activation is typically transient with a response time of 20-40 minutes.² Initially, a theory of the M0/M1/M2 continuum was proposed to describe microglial phenotypes. Within this theory, in response to a stimuli, such as lipopolysaccharide (LPS), the homeostatic M0 microglia can be activated into an amoeboid-like morphology, which can be polarized to two forms, namely M1 microglia and M2 microglia.³⁻⁵ While M1 microglia are proinflammatory and primarily responsible for removing the stimuli or insult by release of various inflammatory factors such as reactive oxygen species (ROS), TNF- α and prostaglandins, the major role of M2 microglia is to mitigate the inflammatory response and protect the neurons by expressing growth factors and other neuroprotective factors.⁶ However, this M0/M1/M2 conceptualization appears to be oversimplified, leading to conflicting interpretations of findings in some PET inflammatory imaging work.⁷ More recent studies have identified at least eight microglial phenotypes, based on transcriptomic profiling of microglial in different disease and response modes. Some current phenotypes are named LPS-related transcriptomic signature microglia, microglia neurodegenerative

phenotype, disease-associated microglia, proliferation-related transcriptomic signature microglia, and interferon-related transcriptomic signature microglia.⁷ As research continues to characterize more microglial phenotypes, an understanding of the microglial function in neuroinflammation and neurodegenerative diseases will grow.

Astrocytes are another type of CNS-resident glial cells, which have high expression in the white and gray matter and are best known for their role in the regulating brain energy metabolism, extracellular glutamate uptake, and maintenance of CNS homeostasis via several ion channels.^{8–11} In response to CNS insults, such as brain injury or CNS diseases, astrocytes are activated to undergo astrogliosis and fibrosis, which exerts an important role in the recovery of injured tissue, blood-brain barrier (BBB) repair, restricting infection or inflammatory cell spread, and neuroprotection against CNS diseases.^{12–15} Despite these benefits, dysfunction of reactive astrocyte may contribute to or exacerbate neuroinflammation or neurodegenerative disorders either by gain of detrimental functions or by loss of normal effects.¹⁶ Previously, reactive astrocytes have been proposed to constitute two subtypes, namely A1 astrocyte and A2 astrocyte. A2 astrocytes are protective to synapses through upregulation of various neurotrophic factors, while A1 astrocytes, which are activated by M1 microglia, are toxic or destructive to synaptic integrity and neuronal survival.^{17, 18} Particularly, high densities of A1 astrocytes are observed in various human neurodegenerative disorders including Alzheimer's disease (AD), Huntington's disease (HD), Parkinson's disease (PD), amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), and multiple sclerosis (MS), suggesting a central role of A1 astrocyte in the pathophysiology of neurodegeneration. Nevertheless, this classification of A1/A2 astrocytes is also likely too simplistic, and more recent studies have determined multifarious activation states of astrocytes, which are not only associated with the type of insult or disease state, but also with the cell type and CNS region.¹⁹

Neuroinflammation can exert both, neurotoxic and neuroprotective effects, dependent on different activation states of immune cells. Generally, neuroinflammatory responses could be beneficial to the CNS through activation of the innate immune system to minimize and repair the damage caused by insults.^{20, 21} However, in chronic neuroinflammatory conditions such as neurodegenerative disorders, microglia and astrocytes are persistently activated with sustained generation of pro-inflammatory factors, resulting in vicious cycles of inflammation, cellular dysregulation, injury and degeneration.^{22–25} As such, neuroinflammation has emerged as a common driver of multiple neurodegenerative diseases.²⁶ Neurodegenerative diseases are pathological defined by characteristic misfolded protein inclusions in neuronal cells, or in the case of Alzheimer's disease, extracellular aggregates as well. Such lesions include extracellular amyloid beta plaque (A β) and intracellular tau protein in AD, tau protein in some frontotemporal dementias (FTD), progressive supranuclear palsy and corticobasal degeneration, α -synuclein in PD and related Lewy body diseases and multiple system atrophy, TDP-43 in amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and some frontotemporal dementias, and huntingtin in HD. In general, these aggregated misfolded proteins are toxic to neuronal cells, disrupting intracellular trafficking and other functions. In a prion-like fashion, protein misfolding and intracellular aggregation in these neurodegenerative diseases propagate from neuron to neuron, spreading progressively through the brain. As they do, sickened and dying cells release distress signals, eliciting

neuroinflammation, which in turn, can accelerate death in vicious cycles, and this toxicity might spread to all brain regions to trigger neuroinflammation and neurodegeneration. For example, in AD, extracellular fibrillar and soluble oligomeric species of A β are recognized as exogenous stimuli, leading to uncontrolled neuroinflammation together with upregulated ROS levels and oxidative stress, and ultimately resulting in neuronal death, propagation of neuroinflammation, as well as exacerbation of tau and A β pathology.^{27–30} In addition, mounting data indicated that neuroinflammation is also inextricably involved in pain,^{31–33} cancers,^{34, 35} and other neurodegenerative disorders including PD, epilepsy, and MS.^{36–38}

Positron emission tomography (PET) has emerged as a noninvasive and translational imaging technique to visualize and quantify in vivo biochemical processes in real-time.^{39–41} Compared with other imaging methods, such as fluorescence imaging, PET is characterized by greater tissue penetration, better quantification and facile animal-to-human translatability. At typical PET probe doses of less than 100 ug/person, biological responses to the probe are negligible, allowing PET to support and mitigate the risk for clinical translation of therapeutic drug candidates through an improved understanding of their pharmacokinetics, target engagement, and mode-of-action. PET has provided a better understanding of neuroinflammation, neurological disorders and neurodegenerative diseases.^{42–51} Despite these benefits, developing novel suitable radioligands for PET imaging of neuroinflammation-related targets is still a demanding task, which must meet several selection criteria. The first step entails the identification and validation of a suitable protein target, which acts as a surrogate or proxy index for neuroinflammatory conditions. The target of interest should have adequate number of binding sites (B_{\max}) and/or dynamic range to encompass levels across disease and physiological conditions. In other words, the B_{\max} of this target must vary adequately to allow detectable pathological-to-normal signals using PET ligands. Secondly, radioligands must have excellent binding affinity (K_d) and selectivity to a specific target to enable an adequate signal to noise ratio against noise coming from off-target and non-specific binding. A B_{\max}/K_d ratio of 10 has been proposed to be able to successfully detect a biological target with a PET tracer. Thirdly, radioligands must rapidly cross the BBB, which might be impeded by poor intrinsic permeability or/and intensive interaction with the efflux transporters in the BBB, such as P-glycoprotein (Pgp) and breast cancer resistance protein (Bcrp). Generally, a radioligand with low molecular weight (MW < 500 Da), moderate lipophilicity ($\log D = 1.5–3.0$), low polar surface area (PSA < 75 Å²), and low hydrogen-bonding capability (< 1 hydrogen bond donor) exhibits good permeability across the BBB.^{52–54} Finally, the short lived nuclides typically used for labelling of small molecules (¹¹C: $t_{1/2} = 20.4$ min, ¹⁸F: $t_{1/2} = 109.8$ min) impose additional limits in tracer candidate selection with regard to fast and efficient radiochemistry methodology, despite significant improvements in the radiochemical synthesis methods in most recent times.^{48, 55}

For a very long time, a central player in imaging neuroinflammation with PET has been the translocator protein (TSPO), which has been reviewed by our group and others.^{42–47} While TSPO PET still constitutes the most widespread application in current clinical neuroinflammation imaging, its use and interpretation is largely limited by several quantification-related caveats, including polymorphism associated difference in binding affinity, incomplete cellular specificity for microglia and a microglial phenotype, as well

as its inability to distinguish between pro- and anti-inflammatory microglia. Furthermore, TSPO PET imaging represents only one of many aspects of neuroinflammatory responses that may differ across people and diseases. Beyond recent developments of next generation TSPO ligands, novel enzymes, receptors and intracellular signalling molecules are under development and investigation for PET imaging of neuroinflammation, especially in neurodegenerative disorders.^{56–62} Compared with the existing review articles that primarily focus on PET imaging evaluation, we present herein a repertoire of novel PET ligands designed for classical and emerging biological targets (beyond TSPO) involved in the neuroinflammatory pathway as well as different structural chemotypes and radiolabeling strategies for these PET ligands. We have two explicit inclusion criteria for the topics in this work, including (1) PET ligands that have shown their potential in preclinical models and/or validated in higher species for future translation or extended study in disease population; and (2) emerging or not fully validated biological targets that could be the focus of next generation PET ligands towards imaging of neuroinflammation (Figure 1 and Table 1). We believe that this review will support multidisciplinary collaborations in academic and industrial institutions working on neuroinflammation and facilitate the progress of neuroinflammation PET probe development for clinical use.

1. PET probes for cyclooxygenase (COX)

Cyclooxygenase (COX), also termed prostaglandin H synthase, is the key enzyme regulating the transformation of arachidonic acid and plays an important role in activating the inflammatory pathway by the production of prostaglandins, cytokines, chemokines, and ROS.¹¹⁷ In mammals, COX exists in two major subtypes, namely COX-1 and COX-2, which share 63% amino acid sequence identity and differ in distribution patterns, functions and regulatory mechanisms.^{118, 119}

1.1 PET probes for cyclooxygenase 1 (COX-1)

COX-1 is widely distributed in most brain tissues with enrichment in medulla, midbrain, and pons, and mainly functions to control the transformation of arachidonic acid to prostaglandins. Of note, COX-1 participates in several processes related to cellular homeostasis and is thus deemed a “housekeeping” enzyme. As well, recent studies have demonstrated that changes in COX-1 expression and/or activity are closely involved in neuroinflammation. For example, in a chronic neuroinflammation mouse model induced by interleukin-1 β overexpression, the expression of COX-1 was elevated and this variation could be fully abolished by pharmacological blockade or genetic deletion of COX-1.¹²⁰ Consistent with this report, LPS or A β _{1–42} induced inflammatory response and neuronal damage could also be attenuated by pharmacological blockade or genetic deletion of COX-1.^{63, 121} In addition, COX-1 inhibition has been shown to attenuate tau phosphorylation and A β deposition as well as to prompt improvement of learning and memory in AD mice.¹²²

The evident role of COX-1 in neuroinflammation has stimulated the research on the development of potent and selective COX-1 PET probes. [¹¹C]**1** ([¹¹C]ibuprofen) and ketoprofen methyl ester [¹¹C]**2** ([¹¹C]KTP-Me) were initially reported as potential COX-1

PET ligands (Figure 2).¹²³ However, [¹¹C]ibuprofen exhibited relatively low binding affinity (IC₅₀ COX-1 = 7.6 μM), no selectivity between COX-1 and COX-2 (IC₅₀ COX-2 = 7.2 μM with human whole blood assay), as well as high plasma binding, thus impeding its further evaluation.¹²⁴ In contrast, [¹¹C]KTP-Me has emerged as the first promising COX-1 PET probe with reasonable in vitro binding affinity and selectivity (COX-1: IC₅₀ = 0.047 μM, COX-2: IC₅₀ = 2.9 μM).⁶⁴ The selective binding of [¹¹C]KTP-Me to COX-1 was also confirmed by ex vivo autoradiography, wherein a remarkably decreased uptake of [¹¹C]KTP-Me in the brain was observed in COX-1 deficient mice, but not in COX-2-deficient mice, when compared with the wild-type controls. PET imaging studies of [¹¹C]KTP-Me indicated significantly elevated radioactivity accumulation in the LPS-injected striatum (standard uptake value, SUV = 0.97) compared with the contralateral control (SUV = 0.26), which was consistent with the increased COX-1 expression. Further translation into human use revealed favorable brain uptake, reaching a plateau of 1.5 SUV in the cortex at 2 min p.i., followed by a gradual elimination with 40% of peak radioactivity remaining at 60 min p.i.¹²⁵ Metabolic analysis revealed that the parent [¹¹C]KTP-Me disappeared from plasma within the initial 2–3 min, forming a hydrophilic metabolite [¹¹C]KTP, which may hamper the interpretation and quantification of the PET signal in the brain. Other recent studies rendered the discovery of three 1,2,4-triazole-based COX-1 PET ligands with high binding affinities and selectivity over COX-2 (>200 fold), namely [¹¹C]**3** ([¹¹C]PS1) (human COX-1: IC₅₀ = 5.0 nM, human COX-2: IC₅₀ > 1 μM), [¹¹C]**4** ([¹⁸F]PS2) (human COX-1: IC₅₀ = 4.0 nM, human COX-2: IC₅₀ = 0.84 μM), and [¹¹C]**5** ([¹¹C]PS13) (human COX-1: IC₅₀ = 1.0 nM, human COX-2: IC₅₀ > 1 μM).^{65, 126} PET imaging studies of [¹⁸F]PS2 in rhesus monkeys indicated high initial brain uptake with a peak SUV of 4.11 at 7 min p.i., followed by a rapid washout (SUV = 1.05 at 85 min). However, its further development was likely discouraged by skull uptake due to radiodefluorination in vivo. [¹¹C]PS1 and [¹¹C]PS13 also revealed high radioactivity accumulations in non-human primate (NHP) brains with 4.26 and 4.29 peak SUV, respectively. Compared with [¹¹C]PS1 (SUV = 0.62 at 85 min p.i.) and [¹⁸F]PS2, [¹¹C]PS13 exhibited a much slower elimination rate from the brain, declining by 54% to 1.99 SUV at 85 min p.i., which likely suggested the highest specific binding in the brain for [¹¹C]PS13. Compartmental modeling revealed that the total volume of distribution (V_T) of [¹¹C]PS13 could be reduced by 87% and 72% by unlabeled PS13 and KTP-Me, respectively, without any influence by the COX-2 inhibitor MC1, confirming its high specific signal for COX-1. More importantly, in a neuroinflammatory monkey model with [¹¹C]PS13, the LPS- or ibotenic acid-injected ipsilateral basal ganglia exhibited higher radioactivity accumulation compared with the untreated contralateral control.¹²⁷ Moving forward into COX-1 imaging in healthy human, [¹¹C]PS13 revealed excellent test-retest variability and good time-stability, together with high uptake in the hippocampus (SUV_{max} = ca. 2.5), occipital cortex (SUV_{max} = ca. 2.7), thalamus, and brainstem.¹²⁸ It was also demonstrated that V_T of [¹¹C]PS13 correlated well with COX-1 transcript and expression levels in healthy individuals. Altogether COX-1 represents a promising target for neuroinflammation imaging and [¹¹C]PS13 merits further investigation in preclinical models of neuroinflammation and clinical research study.

1.2 PET probes for cyclooxygenase 2 (COX-2)

By contrast to the wide distribution of COX-1 in most brain tissues, COX-2 is typically expressed at a low level in normal brain tissues, but its expression can be dramatically changed by challenge with inflammatory stimuli.^{57, 119} In contrast to the established role of COX-1, the role of COX-2 in neuroinflammation is controversial.¹²⁹ In one study, higher levels of COX-2 were observed in several inflammatory animal models, and inhibition of COX-2 revealed some anti-inflammatory effects.⁶⁶ In other studies, by contrast, COX-2 was demonstrated to play a prominent role in neuroprotection, and detrimental effects were induced by pharmacological blockade or genetic deletion of COX-2. For example, COX-2 deficient mice exhibited exacerbated LPS-induced neuroinflammatory response compared with wild-type mice.¹³⁰ Nonetheless, there is a consensus that COX-2 is closely implicated in neuroinflammatory processes.

So far, a number of COX-2 inhibitors have been labeled with carbon-11 or fluorine-18 and evaluated for in vivo COX-2 imaging. [¹⁸F]**6** ([¹⁸F]desbromo-DuP-697) was initially disclosed as COX-2 ligand with moderate binding affinity ($K_i = 250$ nM) (Figure 3).¹³¹ As demonstrated by ex vivo biodistribution and autoradiography studies in rats, [¹⁸F]desbromo-DuP-697 revealed heterogeneous distribution with high radioactivity levels in most cortical regions, and good binding specificity with 40% displaceable binding by the COX-2 inhibitor NS-398. Unfortunately, it failed to demonstrate any specificity in inflamed paw, as similar radioactivity levels were accumulated in the inflamed paw (SUV = 0.17 at 2 h p.i.) and the healthy control paw (SUV = 0.20 at 2 h p.i.). Further, the radioactivity in the inflamed paw was not displaced by NS-398, which was possibly attributed to the low expression levels of COX-2 in paws. Subsequently, a potent and selective COX-2 inhibitor, Celecoxib (IC_{50} COX-2 = 40 nM; IC_{50} COX-1 = 8 μ M), containing a diarylpyrazole core, was labeled with carbon-11 or fluorine-18. Although [¹¹C]**7** ([¹¹C]Celecoxib)^{132–134} and [¹⁸F]**8** ([¹⁸F]Celecoxib)¹³⁵ revealed reasonable brain uptake in both rodents (3 %ID/mL at 10–15 min p.i.) and NHPs (SUV_{max} = 1.2–2.0 in various brain regions at 3–10 min p.i.), these two tracers failed to demonstrate specific binding in the brain. In addition, a rapid metabolic rate was observed for [¹¹C]Celecoxib in baboons with < 25% parent fraction at 10 min p.i. One ¹¹C-labeled and two ¹⁸F-labeled Celecoxib derivatives ([¹¹C]**9** (IC_{50} COX-2 = 8 nM; IC_{50} COX-1 = 2.6 μ M),¹³⁶ [¹⁸F]**10** (IC_{50} COX-2 = 0.36 μ M; IC_{50} COX-1 > 100 μ M)¹³⁷ and [¹⁸F]**11** (IC_{50} COX-2 = 1.7 nM; IC_{50} COX-1 = 0.38 μ M)¹³⁸ were also disclosed and all of them exhibited good metabolic stability in rodents. While [¹¹C]**9** failed to cross the BBB in rats (0.20 %ID/g at 15 min p.i.), [¹⁸F]**10** exhibited low uptake and retention in COX-2 expressing HCA-7 (human colorectal cancer cell line) tumors in mice. Considering the reasonable brain uptake of [¹⁸F]**11** in mice, a more efficient method for its radiolabeling other than electrochemical radiofluorination needs to be established to address the issues in regard to the poor radiochemical yield (2% RCY) and low molar activity (~0.11 GBq/ μ mol). In addition to the diarylpyrazole core in Celecoxib and its derivatives, several COX-2 inhibitors containing a diaryl pentacyclic core were also radiolabeled with carbon-11 or fluorine-18, such as diarylfuranone [¹¹C]**12** ([¹¹C]Rofecoxib, IC_{50} COX-2 = 18 nM; IC_{50} COX-1 > 50 μ M),^{133, 139, 140} diarylimidazole [¹¹C]**13** (IC_{50} COX-2 = 4 nM; IC_{50} COX-1 > 10 μ M) and [¹¹C]**14** (IC_{50} COX-2 = 5 nM; IC_{50} COX-1 = 3.3 μ M),¹⁴¹ diarylindole [¹¹C]**15** (IC_{50} COX-2 = 0.006 nM; IC_{50} COX-1 > 10 μ M),¹⁴¹ diacylcyclopentene [¹¹C]**16**

(IC₅₀ COX-2 = 5 nM; IC₅₀ COX-1 = 9.9 μM),¹⁴² diarylindazole [¹⁸F]**17** (IC₅₀ COX-2 = 0.4 μM; IC₅₀ COX-1 > 30 μM),¹⁴³ as well as diarylisoxazole [¹⁸F]**18** (IC₅₀ COX-2 = 2 nM; IC₅₀ COX-1 > 100 μM),¹⁴⁴ [¹¹C]**19** ([¹¹C]TMI, IC₅₀ COX-2 < 1 nM; IC₅₀ COX-1 500 μM),¹⁴⁵ and [¹¹C]**20** ([¹¹C]MOV, IC₅₀ value not available).¹⁴⁶ However, almost all these ligands failed in preclinical studies due to limited brain uptake and/or lack of specific signal. Remarkably, [¹¹C]TMI exhibited favourable brain uptake, heterogeneous distribution (SUV_{max} = 2-5 in various brain regions), 20–30% displaceable binding by the COX-2 inhibitor meloxicam and excellent metabolic stability in baboons. Strenuous efforts have rendered the discovery of two promising COX-2 ligands: [¹⁸F]**21** ([¹⁸F]Pyricoxib, IC₅₀ COX-2 = 40 nM; IC₅₀ COX-1 = 8 μM)¹⁴⁷ with a diaryl heterohexacyclic core and its analogue, [¹¹C]**22** ([¹¹C]MC1, IC₅₀ COX-2 = 1 nM; IC₅₀ COX-1 > 1 μM).^{148–152} More recently, two ¹⁸F-labeled analogues of MC1 were also reported ([¹⁸F]**23** and [¹⁸F]**24**), albeit without in vivo evaluation.¹⁵⁰ Although [¹⁸F]Pyricoxib entered mouse brains (1.74 %ID/g at 60 min p.i.), no specific signal was demonstrated under healthy conditions as suggested by an even higher radioactivity accumulation in the brain (3.79 % ID/g at 60 min p.i.) under Celecoxib-pretreatment conditions. However, in COX-2 expressing HCA-7 mouse xenografts, specific binding was confirmed. Similar to [¹⁸F]Pyricoxib, [¹¹C]MC1 did not reveal any binding specificity in most organs of NHPs including the brain under normal conditions, despite high brain uptake (SUV_{max} = 2.9 at 2 min p.i.). In contrast, in the LPS-treated putamen of monkeys, [¹¹C]MC1 exhibited a significantly increased radioactivity accumulation (41%) compared to the healthy control.⁶⁷ These results suggested that the lack of specific binding in the brain for almost all COX-2 PET probes might be attributed to the low expression levels of COX-2. More importantly, [¹¹C]MC1 could also enable the diagnosis of patients with rheumatoid arthritis, a kind of peripheral inflammatory disorder, which exhibited increased COX-2 binding in inflamed joints of patients compared with that of healthy control. The binding specificity of [¹¹C]MC1 towards COX-2 was further validated by the blocking effect in a pretreatment experiment with a COX-2 inhibitor celecoxib. Considering the fact that COX-2 expression can be induced by neuroinflammation, COX-2 may be of more interest for neuroinflammation imaging compared with COX-1 and more efforts need to be devoted to improve binding specificity of COX-2 PET probes.

2. PET probes for reactive oxygen species (ROS)

ROS is a class of highly reactive molecules, which is generated through electron introduction to oxygen in a diversity of enzymatic processes and chemical reactions and includes superoxide anion (O₂^{•-}), hydroxyl radical (•OH) and other radicals.¹⁵³ ROS is responsible for oxidative stress and expression of some ROS is vital for various physiological processes, including cell survival, proliferation, differentiation, and apoptosis.¹⁵⁴ Generally, the ROS level is low due to instant anti-oxidant regulation.⁶⁸ Following an inflammatory insult, microglial cells are activated into the proinflammatory M1 isoform to evoke a fast elevation of the ROS level, which would further upregulate the activated M1 phenotype. In some cases, this is a beneficial acute cellular response to eliminate the inflammatory insult, however, sustained microglial activation and persistent ROS generation might contribute to tissue injury in chronic neuroinflammation and

neurodegenerative disorders. It has been demonstrated that the cerebral ROS level is prone to increase with age, which possibly coincides with the elevated MAO-B activity.¹⁵⁵ In addition, overexpression of ROS was observed in diverse AD cellular and animal models as well as AD patients.¹⁵⁶ In PD, increased ROS levels are also deemed as a contributor to the degeneration of dopaminergic neurons.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, PET imaging of ROS may serve as a promising strategy for in vivo mapping of neuroinflammation in neurodegenerative diseases.

To this end, [¹¹C]**25** ([¹¹C]ascorbic acid, also known as [¹¹C]vitamin C) was developed as a ROS PET probe, which can be readily oxidized by ROS to form [¹¹C]dehydroascorbic acid (DHA) and has demonstrated an increased radioactivity uptake in several cellular models with either exogenous or endogenous ROS generation, such as U87 glioma cells, human HL60 promyelocytic leukemia cells and neutrophils (Figure 4A).¹⁵⁸ However, since [¹¹C]ascorbic acid is not capable of penetrating the BBB, no further evaluation was pursued. Recently, [¹¹C]**26** ([¹¹C]HM) and its deuterated isotopolog [¹¹C]**27** ([¹¹C]HM-D) were reported as promising ROS PET probes.⁶⁹ Herein [¹¹C]HM was selectively oxidized by superoxide anion to generate a charged species [¹¹C]**32** ([¹¹C]ox-HM), which was then trapped in tissues as an imaging agent (Figure 4B). Preliminary evaluation of [¹¹C]HM and [¹¹C]HM-D in rat brains revealed fast radioactivity uptake and SUV plateaus of 1.8 and 1.65 at 2 min p.i., respectively. After initial high uptake, a rapid clearance was observed for both probes with the SUV declining to 0.22 and 0.13 at 40 min p.i., respectively. The latter provided a low background for accurate detection of increased ROS levels under diseased conditions. Moreover, ex vivo autoradiography and in vivo PET imaging both indicated a significantly increased [¹¹C]HM uptake in the cerebral hemisphere that was treated with sodium nitroprusside (SNP), a reagent that prompted ROS production by blocking the oxidative phosphorylation. Three ¹⁸F-labeled analogs of [¹¹C]HM were also reported, namely [¹⁸F]**28** ([¹⁸F]FDMT),¹⁵⁹ [¹⁸F]**29** ([¹⁸F]ROStrace),⁷⁰ and [¹⁸F]**30** ([¹⁸F]FDHM).⁷¹ While [¹⁸F]FDMT failed to penetrate the BBB of mice, rendering it impossible to map the increased ROS levels in neuroinflammation, both [¹⁸F]ROStrace and [¹⁸F]FDHM exhibited high initial uptake in mouse brains with the uptake up to ca. 10 %ID/cm⁻³ and ca. 2.3 SUV, respectively. Furthermore, in LPS-treated mice exhibiting neuroinflammation, [¹⁸F]ROStrace revealed an approximately 150% increased brain uptake compared to the control group. Similar to [¹¹C]HM, [¹⁸F]FDHM also exhibited higher uptake in the SNP-treated cerebral hemisphere compared with the contralateral side. [¹¹C]**31** ([¹¹C]DHQ1) is another promising PET probe for in vivo imaging of ROS, which readily entered the mouse brains (ca. 3.5 SUV at 3 min p.i.) with its oxidative product generated from the reaction with ROS trapped in the brain.⁷² Pretreatment with apocyanin, a NOX2 inhibitor capable of regulating the brain redox status, led to a faster elimination of radioactivity from the brain, which indicated that the oxidation of [¹¹C]DHQ1 to *N*-methylquinolinium species, a kind of trapping mechanism, was inhibited. Despite favorable in vivo characteristics, further studies need to be performed to validate and quantify the oxidized forms of these probes as well as the changes of ROS levels in neuroinflammation.

3. PET probes for cannabinoid type 2 receptor (CB2R)

Notwithstanding the relatively low physiological levels of cannabinoid type 2 receptor (CB2R) in the CNS, studies have shown that neuroinflammation is accompanied by CB2R

upregulation on activated microglia that infiltrate the brain and spinal cord.^{73, 160, 161} Notably, CB2R activation was linked to protective anti-inflammatory effects, thus channeling the development of various CB2 agonists for CNS-related and peripheral pathologies.¹⁶² Indeed, the CB2R is considered a promising target for the management of neuroinflammatory disorders such as AD,¹⁶³ MS, PD and ALS.¹⁶⁴ Along this line, CB2R agonists were found to reduce pro-inflammatory cytokine release and the migration of immune cells.^{165, 166} In contrast to cannabinoid type 1 receptor (CB1R)-targeted pharmacotherapy, however, CB2R agonists lack psychoactive side effects due to the relatively low abundance of CB2R in the healthy CNS.^{167, 168} In addition to the various drug development programs, CB2R has been suggested as a biomarker for neuroinflammation. As such, the development of CB2R-targeted PET probes for *in vivo* receptor quantification is currently ongoing. Nonetheless, despite considerable efforts, CB2R-targeted PET radioligand development has only yielded marginal progress in the past several years. In particular, previously reported radioligands were plagued by high nonspecific binding, limited brain uptake, rapid extensive metabolism and poor selectivity over CB1R. Although the vast majority of probes did not meet their expectations during *in vivo* studies, some of the examples presented below harbor potential for successful clinical translation. A summary of selected CB2R PET radioligands is provided in Figure 5.

Thiazole derivatives **33** (A-836339) and **34** have been initially discovered as highly potent and selective CB2R agonists. Indeed, A-836339 exhibited a subnanomolar binding affinity for CB2R ($K_i = 0.7$ nM) and high selectivity over CB1R ($K_i = 270$ nM).⁷⁴ The carbon-11 labeled version, [¹¹C]**33** ([¹¹C]A-836339), was obtained from the respective desmethyl precursor. PET imaging experiments revealed a significantly increased brain uptake in LPS-treated CD1 mice ($SUV_{max} = 2.3$), as compared to control animals ($SUV_{max} = 0.5$).⁷⁴ Similarly, in the APP/PS1 mouse model of Alzheimer's disease, an enhanced brain uptake was observed in the AD group, as compared to wild-type animals.⁷⁴ Encouraged by these findings, Moldovan et al. developed a radiofluorinated analog, [¹⁸F]**34**, with improved potency (K_i CB2R = 0.4 nM) and selectivity (K_i CB1R = 380 nM).¹⁶⁹ However, [¹⁸F]**34** was plagued by metabolic instability, as well as the presence of radiometabolites in the brain.¹⁶⁹ While further reports on a suitable radiofluorinated analog of [¹¹C]A-836339 are pending, Savonenko et al. investigated the utility of [¹¹C]A-836339 as a PET biomarker for neuroinflammation in a mouse model of A β amyloidosis.¹⁷⁰ Similar to the observations in APP/PS1 animals, the authors found an increased tracer uptake in A β amyloidosis mice, which was significantly reduced by co-administration of non-radioactive CB2R ligand AM630. Conversely, in two distinct rodent models of cerebral ischemia (involving LPS or AMPA treatment), [¹¹C]A-836339 failed to monitor the changes of CB2R expression by PET imaging.¹⁷¹

Oxoquinolines have served as a structural basis for the development of a series of CB2R PET radioligands. Indeed, the most extensively studied oxoquinoline-based probe, [¹¹C]**35** ([¹¹C]NE40), has been translated into the clinic.¹⁷² The synthesis of [¹¹C]NE40 was accomplished by ¹¹C-methylation of the respective phenolic precursor with either [¹¹C]CH₃I or [¹¹C]methyl triflate.^{173, 174} NE40 exhibited a binding affinity of 9.6 nM (K_i CB2R) and a selectivity factor (preference for CB2R over CB1R) of ~ 100. Furthermore, [¹¹C]NE40

proved to be CB2R specific in the rodent spleen, an organ that inherently contains high number of CB2R expressing immune cells, while showing a fast washout from the CB2R-deficient healthy rodent brain.¹⁷⁴ In contrast, CB2R specific binding of [¹¹C]NE40 was observed in the brain of rats that underwent stereotactic injection of an adeno-associated viral vector (AAV2/7) encoding for hCB2R in the right striatum, and therefore displayed local hCB₂R overexpression.⁷⁵ Evens et al. further reported a moderate initial tracer uptake in the rhesus monkey brain ($SUV_{max} = 1.5$), thus indicating that [¹¹C]NE40 is able to penetrate the BBB. Nonetheless, when translated into the clinic, [¹¹C]NE40 PET did not show the anticipated CB2R upregulation in the brains of AD patients. Similarly, there was no relationship between [¹¹C]NE40 brain uptake on PET and regional or global amyloid load.¹⁷⁵ While the authors stated that the attenuated uptake in AD patients may have been attributed to neuronal degeneration, concerns have also been raised about the suitability of this probe for CB2R-targeted PET imaging in AD.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, considering the high baseline expression of CB1R in the CNS, a high selectivity factor is required to prevent off-target binding to the CB1R.

Slavik et al. synthesized a series of novel 4-oxoquinoline derivatives based on the structure of KD2, a CB2 ligand that exhibited a K_i of 1.7 nM for CB2R.^{176, 177} Upon structure-activity relationship (SAR) studies, compound **36** (RS-016) exhibited the most favorable *in vitro* performance characteristics, thereby showing an improved affinity ($K_i = 0.7$ nM) and lipophilicity ($\text{Log}D_{7.4} = 2.8$), as compared to KD2.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, in a mouse model of LPS-induced neuroinflammation, PET scans with [¹¹C]**36** ([¹¹C]RS-016) revealed higher CB2R expression levels in different brain regions of LPS-treated animals including the hippocampus, cortex and cerebellum. [¹¹C]RS-016 was further employed for the detection of atherosclerosis, whereby the probe was successfully employed to visualize the CB2R *in vivo* in rodent and *in vitro* in human atherosclerotic lesions.¹⁷⁸ Subsequently, a radiofluorinated analog of [¹¹C]RS-016 was developed, namely, [¹⁸F]**37** ([¹⁸F]RS-126).¹⁷⁹ Despite the encouraging *in vitro* results obtained with [¹⁸F]RS-126, including high CB2R specificity on autoradiograms of the rodent spleen, no specific binding was detected in the brain of LPS-treated mice with [¹⁸F]RS-126. Similarly, [¹⁸F]RS-126 did not detect CB2R overexpression in transgenic R6/2 HD mice, despite evident CB2R mRNA upregulation.¹⁸⁰ In addition, given the relatively high nonspecific binding, [¹⁸F]RS-126 did not exhibit any CB2 specificity by autoradiography using human post-mortem ALS spinal cord tissue. Conversely, a close derivative of [¹¹C]RS-016 bearing an additional hydroxyl group, [¹¹C]**38** ([¹¹C]RS-028) exhibited less nonspecific binding and allowed the visualization of CB2R upregulation in autoradiograms of post-mortem human ALS spinal cord sections. Unfortunately, the application of [¹¹C]RS-028 was limited by a rapid washout from CB2-rich organs such as the spleen, thus resulting in poor *in vivo* specificity. The authors suggested that [¹¹C]RS-028 may suffer from rapid enzymatic degradation. As such, to assess the influence of the O-alkyl chain length and oxygen position on metabolic fate, [¹⁸F]**39** ([¹⁸F]AH-040) and [¹⁸F]**40** ([¹⁸F]AH-043) were designed and synthesized. Despite their improved metabolic stability, the selectivity of [¹⁸F]AH-040 and [¹⁸F]AH-043 towards CB2R over the CB1R was significantly reduced. Given that a high selectivity over CB1R is crucial for successful CNS-targeted visualization of CB2R, the reduced selectivity hampered the further evaluation of [¹⁸F]AH-040 and [¹⁸F]AH-043.¹⁸⁰

Although some thiophene-based derivatives, such as **41** (AAT-015, Ki CB2R = 3.3 ± 0.5 nM, Ki CB1R = 1.0 ± 0.2 μ M) and AAT-778 (Ki CB2R = 4.3 ± 0.7 nM, Ki CB1R = 1.1 ± 0.1 μ M), showed promising pharmacology data, the corresponding radiolabeled analogues did not achieve any specific binding – neither by *in vitro* autoradiography nor by PET imaging.¹⁷⁹ Accordingly, this class of compounds was deemed unsuitable for CB2R-targeted PET imaging. Another class of reported CB2R ligands constitutes the potent *N*-arylamide oxadiazole derivatives, **42** (MA2) and **43** (MA3).¹⁸¹ The radioligands, [¹¹C]**42** ([¹¹C]MA2) and [¹⁸F]**43** ([¹⁸F]MA3) revealed high brain uptake in PET experiments. While specific accumulation of [¹⁸F]MA3 was observed in brain regions overexpressing human CB2R in rodents, no CB2R specificity was evident in PET experiments with [¹⁸F]MA3 in nonhuman primates.¹⁸² Another structural scaffold, that is based on a triazine core, has been exploited for the purpose of CB2R PET radioligand development.¹⁸³ As such, a deuterated high-affinity CB2R ligand, [¹⁸F]**44**, was found to readily cross the BBB in baboons and rhesus macaques. In another study, [¹⁸F]**45** was selected as the compound with the most ideal *in vitro* performance characteristics, however, [¹⁸F]**45**-based PET imaging was plagued by rapid metabolism and elimination, prompting the termination of its further development as a CB2R PET radioligand.¹⁸⁴

To date, 2,5,6-trisubstituted pyridines constitute the most promising class of CB2R PET radioligands for clinical translation. While initial PET experiments with [¹¹C]**46** ([¹¹C]RSR-056) revealed a substantial increase in brain uptake following LPS-induced treatment in rodents, it is worthwhile mentioning that the increased [¹¹C]RSR-056 accumulation in the brain was only in part attributed to CB2R binding. The latter was evident from the relatively weak signal reduction under blockade conditions, which did not reduce the signal to baseline levels observed in control animals.¹⁸⁵ It has been suggested that neuroinflammation may have resulted in partial damage of the BBB, leading to an enhanced CNS penetration of the tracer in LPS treated animals.¹⁸⁶ In a subsequent study, the same authors designed a series of fluorinated derivatives by introducing structural diversity at positions 2 and 5 of the pyridine ring. Indeed, these efforts resulted in the discovery of the radiofluorinated analog, [¹⁸F]**47**, with a binding affinity of 6 nM, a prolonged physical half-life of 109.8 min as well as a selectivity index of ~ 600 over CB1R.¹⁸⁷ By *in vitro* autoradiography studies on rodent spleen sections, [¹⁸F]**47** proved to be CB2R-specific. Further, [¹⁸F]**47** was sensitive to the CB2R receptor upregulation in ALS postmortem spinal cord tissues. Despite these encouraging *in vitro* findings, [¹⁸F]**47** showed only limited *in vivo* specificity for the CB2R-rich rodent spleen. To address this issue, the influence of structural modifications at position 6 of the pyridine ring was assessed, ultimately prompting the discovery of [¹⁸F]**48** ([¹⁸F]RoSMA-18), a pyridine derivative with outstanding target affinity (*K*_i hCB2R = 0.7 nM) and selectivity (>12,000) over CB1R across different species.⁷⁶ Indeed, [¹⁸F]RoSMA-18 showed excellent specificities for the CB2R-positive spleen tissue by *in vitro* autoradiography as well as by PET imaging and *ex vivo* biodistribution in rodents. Further, [¹⁸F]RoSMA-18 was successfully employed to detect CB2R upregulation in human ALS spinal cord tissue. While the high selectivity and specificity of [¹⁸F]RoSMA-18 was confirmed in CB2R knockout mice, PET experiments in Wistar rats corroborated the specific and reversible CB2R binding in the CB2-positive spleen. Although only intact tracer was detected in the

rat brain upon intravenous injection of [^{18}F]RoSMA-18, *in vivo* defluorination was evident by the considerable amount of skull and spinal radioactivity uptake, which was not reduced under blockade conditions. Notably, substitution of the hydrogen atoms in the fluoropropyl side chain with deuterium atoms afforded [^{18}F]49 ([^{18}F]RoSMA-18- d_6), in which case no defluorination and radioactivity accumulation in the skull was observed.⁷⁶ Given the outstanding performance characteristics, [^{18}F]RoSMA-18- d_6 is currently considered a promising candidate for clinical translation.

4. PET probes for monoamine oxidase B (MAO-B)

Monoamine oxidase (MAO) is a flavoenzyme mainly residing in the outer mitochondrial membrane.^{188–191} MAO is predominantly responsible for the oxidative deamination of a number of monoamine neurotransmitters with concomitant release of ROS, which may contribute to the generation of oxidative stress and neuroinflammation.¹⁹² MAO can be divided into two isoforms, namely MAO-A and MAO-B. Despite a certain degree (ca. 70%) of amino acid sequence identity, MAO-A and MAO-B exhibit different distributions, substrates and clinical implications. While MAO-A is primarily located in catecholaminergic neurons and preferentially degrades 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT) in human brain, MAO-B, as the major enzyme responsible for dopamine metabolism in human CNS, has higher expression in glial cells as well as histaminergic and serotonergic neurons.⁷⁷ For clinical applications, MAO-A deficiency is involved in aggression and its inhibitors could serve to treat mood and depression disorders,^{193–197} whereas MAO-B inhibitors, such as rasagiline and selegiline (deprenyl), are generally used as neuroprotective drugs for PD, a dopamine-deficiency disease,^{198–203} as well as AD.^{204, 205} In this review, we particularly focus on the recent development of MAO-B targeted PET ligands attributed to the involvement of MAO-B in astroglial cells in the neuroinflammation and neurodegenerative diseases. It has been demonstrated that high levels of MAO-B, but not MAO-A, are expressed in astrocytes, and particularly in reactive astrocytes, suggesting the potential usefulness of MAO-B PET probes for *in vivo* astrogliosis imaging.²⁰⁶ Moreover, increased MAO-B expression in astrocytes might contribute to the parkinsonian pathologies and exacerbate the degenerative process, implicating that inhibition of MAO-B function likely provides protection from harmful activation of astrocytes as well as neuroinflammation and neurodegenerative diseases.

In the development of MAO-B-specific PET ligands, a promising irreversible radioligand [^{11}C]50 ([^{11}C]L-deprenyl, $K_i = 0.97 \mu\text{M}$)²⁰⁷ was developed for human studies, which demonstrated high brain uptake and binding specificity in both mice²⁰⁸ and humans (Figure 6).⁷⁸ By *in vitro* autoradiography studies, a remarkably increased binding of [^{11}C]L-deprenyl was observed in the temporal lobe and white matter of AD patient tissues, as compared with healthy controls.²⁰⁹ The accumulated radioactivity could be efficiently blocked by the MAO-B inhibitor rasagiline, but not by the MAO-A inhibitor, pirlindole. A ^{18}F -labeled analog of L-deprenyl ([^{18}F]52 ([^{18}F]fluorodeprenyl)) was also developed, and demonstrated high brain uptake (ca. 6.0 SUV), heterogeneous distribution pattern and specific binding in cynomolgus monkeys.²¹⁰ In addition, the limitation regarding the quantification of MAO-B activity with irreversible PET probes could be partially addressed by use of α -deuterium substituted radioligands, leading to the development of

[¹¹C]**51** ([¹¹C]*L*-deprenyl-D₂) and [¹⁸F]**53** ([¹⁸F]fluorodeprenyl-D₂), which attenuated the reaction rate between the radioligand and MAO-B, thus enabling the calculation of net blood-brain washout for *L*-deprenyl.^{211, 212} So far, [¹¹C]*L*-deprenyl-D₂ has demonstrated its usefulness in assessing the MAO-B occupancy for a specific drug in human brains²¹³ and indicated a decrease of MAO-B density in brains of tobacco smokers.^{214, 215} Moreover, several applications of [¹¹C]*L*-deprenyl-D₂ have also been validated in patients. While in patients with temporal lobe epilepsy, [¹¹C]*L*-deprenyl-D₂ exhibited significantly higher binding within the epileptogenic lobe, compared with the contralateral loci,^{216–218} in patients with AD or mild cognitive impairment, [¹¹C]*L*-deprenyl-D₂ enabled the assessment of astroglycosis levels, which is positively correlated with Aβ deposition and negatively correlated with decreased gray matter density.^{219, 220} Another irreversible MAO-B PET probe, [¹⁸F]**54** ([¹⁸F]fluororasagiline)²²¹, and its isotopologue, [¹⁸F]**55** ([¹⁸F]fluororasagiline-D₂)²²², were also shown to provide good uptake in NHP brains (ca. 2.5 SUV). However, the BBB penetration of radiometabolites of these irreversible MAO-B PET probes rendered *in vivo* quantification challenging.²²³

Compared with irreversible PET probes, reversible variants might provide advantages with regard to *in vivo* quantification. In this scenario, the potent reversible MAO-B inhibitor Ro-19-6327 (IC₅₀ = 20 nM) was radiolabeled for studies in humans, leading to the formation of [¹²³I]**56** ([¹²³I]Ro-43-0463) and [¹⁸F]**57** ([¹⁸F]Ro-43-0463).^{224, 225} While [¹²³I]Ro-43-0463 demonstrated good *in vivo* characteristics for SPECT imaging, only limited brain radioactivity accumulation was observed for [¹⁸F]Ro-43-0463, which is possibly attributed to its lower lipophilicity. A more promising reversible MAO-B PET probe, [¹¹C]**58** ([¹¹C]MD230254), was synthesized with [¹¹C]phosgene, which revealed high binding affinity (IC₅₀ = 4 nM) and ca. 70% specific binding in NHP brains.⁷⁹ The ¹⁸F-labeled analogue of MD230254 was also reported ([¹⁸F]**59** ([¹⁸F]FBPO)), but was hampered for further application by *in vivo* defluorination.²²⁶ Another reversible radioligand, [¹¹C]**60** ([¹¹C]SL25.1188), with high binding affinity (K_i = 2.9 nM for human MAO-B) was afforded by use of a novel [¹¹C]CO₂ fixation strategy, which could partially overcome the production site restriction with [¹¹C]phosgene.²²⁷ Preclinical evaluation of [¹¹C]SL25.1188 in NHP indicated good BBB penetration with the highest radioactivity accumulated in striatum (V_T = 10.3) and thalamus (V_T = 10.9).²²⁸ Moreover, high *in vivo* metabolic stability and good specific binding (55-70% of total radioactivity) were corroborated in NHP brains. More importantly, [¹¹C]SL25.1188 is the first reversible MAO-B PET probe validated for human use.⁸⁰ Ongoing exploration has led to the development of ¹⁸F-labeled analogue [¹⁸F]**61**.²²⁹ However, reduced binding affinity and selectivity, fast kinetics, and *in vivo* defluorination impeded its further application. Most recently, a promising ¹⁸F-labeled reversible MAO-B PET probe [¹⁸F]**62** ([¹⁸F]SMBT-1) was developed with high *in vitro* binding affinity (K_d = 3.7 nM) and selectivity.²³⁰ Notably, [¹⁸F]SMBT-1 is a repurposing of the first generation tau ligand scaffold based on [¹⁸F]THK-5351, which was found to be non-selective against MAO-B.²³¹ Autoradiography studies of [¹⁸F]SMBT-1 demonstrated higher radioactivity levels in AD brain sections compared with that in the normal control, and the radioactivity could be completely displaced by the MAO-B inhibitor lazabemide, indicating higher specific binding of [¹⁸F]SMBT-1 to MAO-B in AD brains. Further biodistribution studies revealed a high initial uptake (7.85 %ID/g at 2 min p.i.), rapid washout (0.20 %ID/g at

60 min p.i.), and no radiometabolites in normal mouse brains. These promising results provoked the translation of [^{18}F]SMBT-1 into first-in-human studies, wherein [^{18}F]SMBT-1 demonstrated robust and reversible binding to MAO-B.⁸¹ Pretreatment with the selective MAO-B inhibitor *L*-deprenyl resulted in 85% diminished radioactivity, indicating high selectivity of [^{18}F]SMBT-1 to MAO-B. All these results suggest that [^{18}F]SMBT-1 warrants more evaluations under normal and disease conditions in preclinical and clinical trials.

4.2 Alternative approach for the mapping of MAO activity

The utilization of metabolic trapping is an alternative approach for the *in vivo* mapping of MAO activity. In this scenario, the radiotracer is selectively oxidized or deaminated by brain MAO to generate a more polar and/or charged radiometabolite, which could not pass the biological membranes, including the BBB, and is thus trapped in the brain as an imaging agent. On the other hand, the unmetabolized radiotracer will be rapidly eliminated from the brain. To this end, [^{11}C]50 ([^{11}C]MPTP) was first synthesized and evaluated in baboons as a metabolic trapping agent for MAO-B (Figure 7).²³² The radioactivity accumulated in baboon striatum and substantia nigra was attributed to trapping of *in situ* generated pyridinium radiometabolite [^{11}C]MPP⁺, which could be decreased by the MAO-B inhibitor tranylcypropane. Then [^{11}C]64 ([^{11}C]DMPEA) was developed for MAO-B PET imaging with [^{11}C]dimethylammonium as the trapped radiometabolite.²³³ In mice, [^{11}C]DMPEA readily penetrated the BBB, reached a plateau of 7.9 %ID/g in the brain at 1 min p.i., and decreased to 2.8 %ID/g at 60 min. Of note, the radioactivity in mouse brains was significantly reduced by pretreatment with the MAO-B inhibitor *L*-deprenyl, whereas no obvious influence was detected with the MAO-A inhibitor clorgyline, indicating specificity and selectivity of [^{11}C]DMPEA towards MAO-B. When translated to human use, [^{11}C]DMPEA also demonstrated good BBB penetrating ability with gradually increased radioactivity accumulation in the brain. The different elimination pattern of [^{11}C]DMPEA in mice and humans were attributed to a much slower elimination rate of unmetabolized [^{11}C]DMPEA in human brain. Recently, [^{11}C]65 ([^{11}C]PHXY) and [^{11}C]66 ([^{11}C]COU) were also disclosed as promising metabolic trapping agents for MAO.²³⁴ Although in rat brain, both probes failed to demonstrate any selectivity between MAO-A and MAO-B, in NHP brains, [^{11}C]PHXY exhibited good specificity to MAO-A, whereas [^{11}C]COU exhibited more sensitivity to MAO-B inhibition.

5. PET probes for sphingosine-1-phosphate receptor (S1PR)

Sphingosine 1-phosphate receptor (S1PR) is a family of G-protein-coupled receptors with five subtypes (S1PR1-5).²³⁵⁻²³⁸ The S1PR employs several mechanisms by directly interacting with its substrates and modulates extracellular signaling pathways and functions involved with cyclic adenosine monophosphate, protein kinase B, mitogen-activated protein kinase, protein kinase C, and phospholipase D.^{239, 240} Regulation of S1PR is essential in both physiological and pathological states, particularly in immune systems, cardiovascular and CNS.

5.1 PET probes for sphingosine-1-phosphate receptor subtype 1 (S1PR1)

S1PR1, the primary receptor, is widely expressed in neurons and glia in the CNS²⁴¹ and plays an important role in anti-inflammatory processes and neuroprotection.^{82, 242, 243} The expression and activity of S1PR1 is maintained in a balance between the synthesis by sphingosine kinase-1 (SphK1) and degradation by sphingosine 1-phosphate lyase (SPL). Delisle²⁴⁴ demonstrated that the activity of SphK1 could be reduced, whereas the expression of SPL was increased by A β peptides, which finally led to a significant decrease of S1PR1 in AD patients' frontal cortex as well as the hippocampus. Besides the loss of the neuroprotective function in AD pathogenesis, S1PR1 over-activity was also reported to be involved in PD. The evidence showed that α -Synuclein, associated with PD progression, caused the expulsion of S1PR1 from neurons and led to impaired inhibitory G-protein signaling.²⁴⁵ Additionally, the mRNA level of S1PR1 was also observed as decreased in the brain of experimental PD and AD models²⁴⁶. Studies in mice models also revealed the participation of S1PR1 in the progress of multiple sclerosis (MS) and EAE.^{247, 248} More importantly, the neuroinflammation could be attenuated by S1PR1 deletion or activity inhibition in mice.²⁴⁹ All these evidence suggested S1PR1 within the CNS as target for neuroinflammation and neurodegenerative diseases.

As a potential therapeutic target for the treatment of neuroinflammation and neurodegenerative diseases, S1PR1-specific imaging would help understanding the pathophysiology of S1PR1 in the CNS^{250–252}. However, the development of S1PR1 imaging agents suitable for clinical studies is still a challenge. The primary effort to develop S1PR1 PET tracers was focused on radiolabeling of the derivative of fingolimod (FTY720, IC₅₀ = 603.75 nM), which is an oral immunomodulatory drug approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2010 for treating the relapsing form of multiple sclerosis (Gilenya®) and chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy.^{253, 254} The iodinated analogue of FTY720, **67** (BZM055), showed similar pharmacokinetic properties and was first labeled with iodine-123 for SPECT imaging ([¹²³I]**67** (Figure 8)).²⁵⁵ However, the low phosphorylation rate (9%) by SphK2, limited brain penetrating capability, and a fast clearance rate prevented its translation into clinical investigations. Further radiolabeling of FTY720 derivatives rendered two S1PR1 radioligands [¹⁸F]**68** and [¹⁸F]**69**.²⁵⁶ In the spleen typically containing S1PR1 positive immune cells, both [¹⁸F]**68** and [¹⁸F]**69** demonstrated high radioactivity levels, which amounted to 7% ID/mL at 10 min p.i. and 7.8% ID/mL at 30 min p.i., respectively. Unfortunately, the biodistribution studies of [¹⁸F]**68** and [¹⁸F]**69** revealed fast kinetics in mice and it is also unclear how rapidly and efficiently these two FTY720 derived radioligands undergo phosphorylation. All these factors mentioned above rendered them less suitable tracers for in vivo imaging studies.

Considering the required phosphorylation step for FTY720 derivatives, a novel S1PR1 PET probe [¹⁸F]**70** was developed and tested in vivo, which is an analogue of the S1PR1 ligand W146 (K_i = 4.1 nM) and does not require the phosphorylation step for binding.²⁵⁷ Although [¹⁸F]**70** revealed favorable mouse brain uptake (8 %ID/cm³ p.i. at 2 min) and good in vitro stability in mouse serum, the fast in vivo metabolic rate and defluorination impeded its application as a suitable PET imaging ligand.

The next generation of S1PR1 therapeutics and PET ligands mainly focused on compound **71** (TZ3321) with excellent binding potency ($IC_{50} = 2.13$ nM) and selectivity (> 450 fold) over S1PR2 and S1PR3. Preliminary biodistribution studies of radioligand [^{11}C]**71** ([^{11}C]TZ3321, also known as [^{11}C]CS1P1) in mice revealed favorable brain uptake (7 %ID/g at 60 min).^{83, 258} As demonstrated by PET imaging and autoradiography studies, [^{11}C]TZ3321 revealed significantly higher uptake in EAE mouse models compared with the vehicle, which is consistent with higher S1PR1 expression levels in EAE. Subsequently, two S1PR1 PET ligands [^{18}F]**72** ($IC_{50} = 2.63$ nM) and [^{18}F]**73** ($IC_{50} = 9.65$ nM) based on an oxadiazole scaffold were explored.^{259, 260} Evaluation of [^{18}F]**72** in the LPS-induced acute liver injury mouse models suggested that the high uptake of [^{18}F]**72** in the liver (SUV = 7 at 10 min p.i.) was associated with the S1PR1 expression. However, both [^{18}F]**72** and [^{18}F]**73** failed to penetrate the rat BBB with limited brain uptake of 0.027 and 0.46 %ID/g at 5 min p.i., respectively. More recently, four novel oxadiazole-derived radioligands with different hydroxyl alkyl tails were developed ([^{18}F]**74**-[^{18}F]**77**).⁸⁴ PET imaging studies in NHPs indicated high brain uptakes for radioligands [^{18}F]**74** ($IC_{50} = 6.7$ nM, SUV \approx 3.8 at 4 min p.i.), [^{18}F]**75** ($IC_{50} = 14$ nM, SUV \approx 3.2 at 5 min p.i.) and [^{18}F]**77** ($IC_{50} = 15.4$ nM, SUV \approx 2.5 at 4 min p.i.), whereas [^{18}F]**76** only revealed a minimum brain uptake of \sim 0.7 SUV. Motivated by these promising preclinical results and the fact that one S1PR1 PET probe [^{11}C]CS1P1 ([^{11}C]TZ3321) has been advanced into clinical trials,²⁶¹ more efforts are warranted to validate these ligands in preclinical disease models and clinical translation.

5.2 PET probes for sphingosine-1-phosphate receptor subtype 2 (S1PR2)

Among the five subtype receptors, S1PR2 plays a pivotal role in regulating blood brain barrier (BBB) functions in the CNS. S1PR2 is widely expressed in neuronal and vascular cells, and is essential for the growth of injured neurons and vascular systems. It was demonstrated that genetic deletion of S1PR2 promoted vascular repair and reduced neurological deficits in stroke mouse models.²⁶² Moreover, the increased expression of S1PR2 was observed in EAE mice and MS patients, and genetic deletion or pharmacological blockade of S1PR2 could reduce the severity of neuroinflammation.²⁶³ Consequently, S1PR2 may serve as a promising imaging target for assessing the progress of neuroinflammation and related disorders. JTE-013 ($IC_{50} = 68.5$ nM) is a well-known S1PR2 selective antagonist,²⁶⁴ and radiolabeling of its derivative led to the discovery of radioligand [^{11}C]**78** ([^{11}C]TZ34125), which revealed favorable binding affinity ($IC_{50} = 9.52 \pm 0.70$ nM) and good selectivity over S1PR1 and S1PR3 (>100 fold) (Figure 8).²⁶⁵ Despite limited brain uptake in mice due to interaction with P-gp, [^{11}C]TZ34125 was sensitive to sexual dimorphism of S1PR2 expression in SJL mice (SUV = 0.58 and 0.48, respectively in female and male mouse cerebellum at 30 min p.i.). Most recently, a ^{125}I -labeled ligand [^{123}I]**79** ([^{123}I]TZ6544) was disclosed with excellent binding affinity ($K_d = 4.31$ nM), high selectivity (>300 fold over S1PR1, S1PR3, S1PR4, and S1PR5), and binding specificity towards S1PR2.²⁶⁶

6. PET probes for purinergic receptors

Purinergic receptors constitute key elements of the CNS by mediating cellular neuroinflammatory responses and regulating functions of microglia, astrocytes and

neurons.²⁶⁷ As such, purinergic receptors are broadly implicated in CNS disorders such as AD, ALS, PD, MS, HD, traumatic brain injury (TBI), cerebral ischemia, epilepsy, neuropathic pain and psychiatric disorders.^{268–272} Depending on their endogenous ligands, purinergic receptors can be classified into either P1 (activated by adenosine) and P2 receptors (activated by extracellular nucleotides). P2 receptors are typically subdivided into P2X that are ATP-gated ion channels and P2Y metabotropic receptors that constitute G-protein-coupled receptors.²⁷³ Following an insult of the brain, a rapid release of adenosine triphosphate (ATP) or uridine triphosphate (UTP) has been observed in damaged brain regions, ultimately triggering microglial activation.^{272, 274–276} Given their implications in contemporary neuroinflammation imaging, this chapter focuses on recent advances in the development of probes for imaging P2X ligand-gated ion channel type 7 receptor (P2X7R) and purinergic metabotropic 12 receptor (P2Y12R).

P2X7R is involved in microglial activation, proliferation and apoptosis.⁸⁵ Of note, P2X7R encompasses one extracellular loop, bearing the ATP-binding site, two transmembrane domains as well as intracellular N- and C-terminal domains.²⁷⁷ Under normal physiological conditions, P2X7R expression in the CNS is rather limited.^{85, 278} However, following brain injury, the expression of P2X7R increases substantially, thereby promoting inflammasome formation as well as the release of proinflammatory cytokines/chemokines.^{85, 273} Notably, long-lasting high extracellular ATP levels and excessive release of proinflammatory cytokines have been linked to neuroinflammation. Further, P2X7R overexpression was shown to promote microglial activation and proliferation in primary hippocampal cultures of rat brains.²⁷⁹ Along this line of reasoning, P2X7R expression was significantly enhanced in various preclinical neuroinflammation models as well as in postmortem brain samples of AD patients.²⁸⁰ Therefore, imaging P2X7R may offer a promising diagnostic and prognostic approach for neurodegenerative diseases.

A series of P2X7R ligands have been radiolabeled with either carbon-11 or fluorine-18 (Figure 9). [¹¹C]**80** ([¹¹C]JNJ-54173717, IC₅₀ hP2X7R = 4.2 nM) is one of the first brain penetrant ¹¹C-labeled radioligands for P2X7R-targeted imaging.²⁸¹ Indeed, biodistribution experiments in rats unveiled that [¹¹C]JNJ-54173717 readily crossed the BBB. In the striatum of a rat model of hP2X7R overexpression, high tracer uptake was detected, whereby striatal tracer uptake was substantially reduced by pretreatment with a non-radioactive antagonist, JNJ-42253432, indicating hP2X7R-specific binding of [¹¹C]JNJ-54173717 in vivo. Further, [¹¹C]JNJ-54173717 exhibited considerable brain uptake in rhesus monkeys (SUV_{max} = ca. 3.2), suggesting that the probe is brain penetrant in NHPs and warrants clinical translation.²⁸¹ As such, the first-in-man study of [¹¹C]JNJ-54173717 has recently been reported, and demonstrated its utility in quantifying P2X7R expression in the CNS.⁸⁶ Given the encouraging results obtained with [¹¹C]JNJ-54173717, a radiofluorinated analog, [¹⁸F]**81** ([¹⁸F]JNJ-64413739, IC₅₀ hP2X7R = 1.0 nM) was developed.⁸⁷ Indeed, PET imaging with [¹⁸F]JNJ-64413739 in NHPs revealed high specificity for P2X7R. The latter was further corroborated by blocking experiments of [¹⁸F]JNJ-64413739 in rodents, thus highlighting the utility of this probe to visualize P2X7R. Indeed, a dose-dependent inhibition of tracer binding with P2X7R antagonists was observed on rodent brain tissue as well as the human brain.^{87, 282, 283} Although the overall promising characteristics

strongly support the further use of [¹⁸F]JNJ-64413739 for imaging P2X7R in clinical neuroinflammation, the lack of a suitable brain reference region not expressing the target, which would allow the non-invasive assessment of P2X7R abundance in different brain regions as well as the binding potential, precluded the exploitation of the full potential for kinetic modeling with this probe.⁸⁷ In contrast to [¹⁸F]JNJ-64413739, attempts to develop a P2X7R-targeted PET radioligand based on the structure of A-740003 (IC₅₀ hP2X7R = 40 nM) were unsuccessful.²⁸⁴ In particular, biodistribution studies in healthy rats showed only traces of [¹¹C]82 ([¹¹C]A-740003) in the brain, possibly owing to low BBB permeability. Similarly, a radiofluorinated derivative of A-804598 with reduced bulkiness, [¹⁸F]83 ([¹⁸F]EFB, Ki hP2X7R = 2.9 nM), suffered from low brain uptake in vivo – despite exhibiting high in vitro affinities for human and rat P2X7R.²⁸⁵ Given the implication of P2X7R in neuroinflammation, continuous research efforts prompted the development of another class of successful PET radioligands that were based on a benzamide core structure. The most extensively investigated candidate of this class was [¹¹C]84 ([¹¹C]GSK1482160, IC₅₀ hP2X7R = 3 nM).^{88, 286, 287} Of note, biodistribution studies with [¹¹C]GSK1482160 showed enhanced radiotracer uptake in the brain of LPS-treated mice, as compared to control animals.⁸⁸ Pretreatment with non-radioactive GSK1482160 resulted in a significant reduction of brain uptake in LPS-treated mice. In a rodent EAE model, [¹¹C]GSK1482160 uptake in the CNS correlated with P2X7R-positive cell counts, number of activated microglia and overall disease severity.²⁸⁷ Further, PET studies with [¹¹C]GSK1482160 showed homogeneous distribution in healthy NHP brains (SUV_{max} in NHP ca. 2.5).²⁸⁷ Overall, these studies indicate that [¹¹C]GSK1482160 is a suitable PET radioligand to visualize P2X7R expression on activated microglia. A radiofluorinated analog of [¹¹C]GSK1482160, [¹⁸F]85 ([¹⁸F]IUR-1601, IC₅₀ P2X7R = 7.9 nM), was recently developed by Gao et al.²⁸⁸ Although [¹⁸F]IUR-1601 has been successfully evaluated in vitro, no in vivo data has been reported to date. PET studies with [¹¹C]86 ([¹¹C]SMW139, IC₅₀ hP2X7R = 24.5 nM), another ¹¹C-labeled P2X7R-targeted PET radioligand, were conducted in rats, with the peak SUV value of ca. 3.5. Of note, a 1.5-fold higher radioactivity uptake was observed in the right striatum of rats locally overexpressing hP2X7R (induced by striatal injection of adeno-associated viral (AAV) vector), as compared to the contralateral striatum, and this effect was successfully reversed by pretreatment of the animals with JNJ-4796556.^{89, 289, 290} Although [¹¹C]SMW139 was not sensitive to P2X7R overexpression on postmortem brain tissues of AD patients,^{289, 290} first-in-man studies as well as studies in MS patients have been recently reported, with promising initial findings that warrant further clinical evaluation of this novel probe.^{89, 289, 290}

In contrast to P2X7R, P2Y12R is a metabotropic chemoreceptor that is primarily expressed in platelets within the circulatory system. In the CNS, P2Y12R is primarily localized on microglial cells.^{291, 292} P2Y12R activation is triggered by adenosine diphosphate (ADP), with an EC₅₀ of 60 nM.²⁹³ Due to the key function of P2Y12R in promoting platelet aggregation, a number of P2Y12R antagonists are currently used to prevent thromboembolic events in clinical practice.²⁹⁴ Further, given the established role in microglial chemotaxis and cytokine signaling, P2Y12R is an attractive diagnostic target, particularly, when exploited for non-invasive imaging modalities with high sensitivity such as PET.²⁷⁸ In the healthy brain, P2Y12R expression is relatively high on M2-type microglia,⁹⁰ however,

P2Y₁₂R expression was downregulated under neuroinflammatory conditions following LPS treatment.^{90, 295} Similarly, P2Y₁₂R expression was reduced in human postmortem AD brain tissues.⁹⁰ Although P2Y₁₂R-targeted imaging is considered a promising approach to further elucidate the differential role of microglial subtypes, there is only one reported P2Y₁₂R PET radioligand, [¹¹C]**87** (IC₅₀ P2Y₁₂ = 6 nM) to date (Figure 9).^{296, 297} By in vitro autoradiography, [¹¹C]**87** was found to specifically bind to mouse brain tissue sections, as evidenced by blocking studies with ticagrelor, a P2Y₁₂R antagonist.⁹¹ Nonetheless, subsequent in vivo imaging experiments in rats indicated low metabolic stability of [¹¹C]**87** as well as limited brain uptake, potentially owing to Pgp efflux.²⁷⁸ Despite the abovementioned challenges in P2Y₁₂R-targeted PET tracer development, P2Y₁₂R is one of few targets that seems to be selectively expressed on M2 microglia. Accordingly, there is a consensus that a suitable P2Y₁₂R PET radioligand would substantially facilitate the classification of microglial cells, thereby potentially enabling non-invasive staging of neuroinflammatory conditions.

7. PET probes for colony stimulating factor 1 receptor (CSF1R)

Colony stimulating factor 1 receptor (CSF1R) is a cell-surface tyrosine kinase expressed in microglia and macrophages.²⁹⁸ CSF1R is a receptor for the cytokine CSF1 (colony stimulating factor 1) and is directly responsible for the survival, differentiation, and function of microglia and macrophages. Emerging evidence has indicated a close association of CSF1R with neuroinflammation. For example, in brains with severe neuroinflammation such as AD, MS, hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy (HIE) and glioblastomas, CSF1R levels were substantially upregulated, as evidenced by either animal models or post-mortem analysis of patient samples.^{92, 299–306} Moreover, inhibition of CSF1R offered an attenuation of neuroinflammation and prevented the progression of these diseases. Therefore, CSF1R has emerged as an interesting PET imaging target for neuroinflammation.

Thus far, only a few PET probes have been disclosed for CSF1R. [¹⁸F]**88** (IC₅₀ = 169 nM) is the first reported CSF1R PET ligand,³⁰⁷ derived from the orally bioactive CSF1R inhibitor GW2580 (IC₅₀ = 0.47 μM with freshly isolated human monocytes) (Figure 10).³⁰⁸ However, neither in vitro nor in vivo evaluation was provided. Subsequently, another CSF1R PET ligand, [¹¹C]**89** ([¹¹C]AZ683), was reported.⁹³ [¹¹C]AZ683 exhibited a high binding affinity (K_i = 8 nM, IC₅₀ = 6 nM) and good selectivity for CSF1R (>250 fold over 95 other kinases). Preclinical evaluation of [¹¹C]AZ683 demonstrated some brain influx and retention in both rats (SUV_{max} = 0.5) and rhesus macaques (SUV_{max} = 1.1). Although the initial brain uptake of [¹¹C]AZ683 in NHPs was slightly higher than that in rats, it remains to be validated whether the uptake is suitable for distinguishing the PET signal differences between neuroinflammatory models and healthy controls. More recent work led to the development of [¹¹C]**90** ([¹¹C]CPPC) with higher binding affinity (IC₅₀ = 0.8 nM).⁹⁴ Although [¹¹C]CPPC did not exhibit very high brain influx in healthy mice (ca. 0.6 SUV), the PET signal was significantly increased in LPS-treated AD (59% increased signal vs. control group), transgenic AD (31% increase vs. control group) and EAE (100% increase vs. control group) mouse models. These observations were consistent with the elevated expression levels of CSF1R in the neuroinflammatory mouse brains.^{92, 299–306} In LPS-treated baboons, [¹¹C]CPPC revealed an even bigger increase in the brain uptake (120%

compared with controls). Postmortem autoradiography with [^{11}C]CPPC demonstrated a remarkable increase of tracer binding (75-99%) in brain sections of AD patients. Notably, the tracer binding could be partially blocked by several CSF1R inhibitors. Recently, [^{11}C]CPPC was further translated into imaging studies in rhesus monkeys with the peak SUV up to 2.4-4.6 in various brain regions.³⁰⁹ Although these preliminary results are promising, a major issue with [^{11}C]CPPC is the low specific binding towards CSF1R. For example, in a microglia-depleted mouse model, only 14% reduction of the radioactivity was observed in the brain, while CSF1R-knockout mice indicated comparable brain uptake compared with healthy control animals. Soon after, considerable nonspecific binding of CPPC was further demonstrated with [^3H]91 ([^3H]CPPC) in the CNS, as evidenced by low displacement of the radioactivity by CSF1R inhibitors PLX3397, PLX5622, and BLZ945 (15%, 16%, and 25%, respectively).³¹⁰ Most recently, a novel CSF1R PET probe [^{11}C]92 ([^{11}C]GW2580) was disclosed, which exhibited improved sensitivity to capture inflammatory microgliosis compared with [^{11}C]CPPC.³⁰⁹ Despite only with moderate binding affinity ($\text{IC}_{50} = 470 \text{ nM}$), [^{11}C]GW2580 rapidly penetrated the BBB of mice and rhesus monkeys with the brain SUV up to 1.2 and 3.1, respectively. More importantly, remarkably increased radioactivity uptake was found in the lesioned striatum of LPS-treated mice and in the forebrains of *App^{NL-G-F/NL-G-F}*-knock-in mice, which was in agreement with the elevated CSF1R expression levels. Pretreatment with unlabeled GW2580 resulted in significantly reduced uptake in the whole brain and complete abolishment of the difference between LPS-treated striatum and non-treated counterpart. Accordingly, [^{11}C]GW2580 may represent a promising chemical phenotype for CSF1R, which may require more efforts in medicinal chemistry development to improve binding affinity and validation in the preclinical models.

8. Emerging biological targets in neuroinflammatory processes for PET ligand development

8.1 The receptor for advanced glycation end products (RAGE)

The receptor for advanced glycation end products (RAGE), which was named after its initially identified ligands, AGEs (advanced glycation end products), belongs to the immunoglobulin receptor superfamily.⁹⁵ Recent studies have demonstrated that RAGE plays an important role in various neurodegenerative diseases, including AD, MS, stroke, and ALS.³¹¹ Under healthy conditions, the expression levels of RAGE are low in almost all organs except the liver. However, in acute and chronic inflammatory disorders, RAGE expression levels are significantly upregulated.⁹⁵ In humans, RAGE exists in two isoforms, namely membrane-bound full length RAGE (fRAGE) and soluble RAGE (sRAGE).³¹¹ In particular, sRAGE keeps the extracellular ligand-binding region, which can capture endogenous RAGE ligands and offer a remarkable blockade of their binding to fRAGE, thus relieving cellular inflammation and stress mediated by uncontrolled RAGE activity. Therefore, sRAGE may serve as a potential therapeutic and predictive imaging target for disease protection. [^{18}F]93 ([^{18}F]RAGER), which is based on the RAGE inhibitor FPS-ZM1, is the first RAGE PET ligand with good in vitro binding affinity ($K_d = 15 \text{ nM}$) and sufficient binding potential ($B_{\text{max}}/K_d = 2$) (Figure 11).^{96, 312} Although [^{18}F]RAGER exhibited an in vitro off-target binding to the human melatonin MT1 receptor ($K_i = 90$

nM),³¹³ in vivo PET imaging studies demonstrated specific binding of [¹⁸F]RAGER to RAGE in both rats and NHPs, which warrants further evaluations to probe the selectivity of [¹⁸F]RAGER between fRAGE and sRAGE isomers. Subsequently, [¹¹C]FPS-ZM1 was successfully synthesized by palladium-catalyzed carbonylation with [¹¹C]CO.^{314, 315} However, high nonspecific binding was observed for [¹¹C]94 ([¹¹C]FPS-ZM1) in both wild-type and AD mice by in vitro autoradiography experiments, which was possibly attributed to its high lipophilicity (cLogP = 5.25). Most recently, [¹⁸F]95 ([¹⁸F]InRAGER) was reported as a selective PET ligand for fRAGE ($K_d = 1$ nM), which was achieved via isotopic exchange with [¹⁸F]KF.⁹⁷ Although high initial brain uptake ($SUV_{max} = ca. 2.0$) was observed in rats, the development of new radiosynthetic methods is necessary to address poor radiochemical yield and low molar activity.

8.2 MER tyrosine kinase (MERTK)

MER tyrosine kinase (MERTK) is a macrophage cell-surface protein in the TAM (namely TYRO3, AXL, MER) tyrosine kinase family.³¹⁶ In the brain, MERTK shows high expression in the microglia and astrocytes and emerging data have indicated the implication of MERTK in neuroinflammation.⁹⁸ In addition, a close association between polymorphism of the MERTK gene and MS susceptibility was reported.³¹⁷ Despite extremely low or even undetectable levels in the healthy brain, the expression of MERTK is significantly elevated in a variety of neuroinflammatory diseases. For instance, by postmortem analysis, soluble MERTK was upregulated in the brain of MS patients.³¹⁸ Although the precise role that MERTK exerts in neuroinflammation remains elusive, a suitable MERTK PET probe would provide a valuable tool to better understand the underlying mechanisms. To date, only one MERTK PET probe has been reported, namely [¹⁸F]96 ([¹⁸F]JHU16907) (Figure 11).⁹⁹ [¹⁸F]JHU16907 revealed good binding affinity ($IC_{50} = 2.5$ nM) and high initial brain uptake in mice. Preliminary evaluation of [¹⁸F]JHU16907 in LPS-treated mice demonstrated a remarkably increased radioactivity accumulation (35%) in the brain. Moreover, the radioactivity in LPS-treated mouse brains could be significantly blocked (62%) by unlabeled JHU16907, suggesting a good specific binding of [¹⁸F]JHU16907. Despite these promising preliminary results, evaluation of [¹⁸F]JHU16907 in higher species is yet to be reported.

8.3 Soluble epoxide hydrolase (sEH)

Epoxide hydrolases, which include soluble epoxide hydrolase (sEH) and microsomal epoxide hydrolase (mEH), are key enzymes responsible for the degradation of epoxyeicosatrienoic acids (EETs).¹⁰⁰ EETs, which are generally produced from arachidonic acid by a cytochrome P450-catalyzed epoxidation reaction, represent an important class of signalling lipids with anti-inflammatory and anti-apoptotic effects as well as a function to regulate cerebral blood flow. The pharmacological blockade or genetic deletion of sEH represents a predominant approach for elevating the levels of EETs in vivo, which have demonstrated to provide protection against neuroinflammation in several disorders, such as AD, PD, vascular cognitive impairment, ischemia, seizure, and depression.¹⁰⁰ As such, sEH has emerged as a potential PET imaging target in these diseases. To date, [¹⁸F]97 ([¹⁸F]FNNDP) is the only one available sEH PET probe, which exhibited good potency ($IC_{50} = 8.7$ nM) (Figure 11).³¹⁹ In CD-1 mice, [¹⁸F]FNNDP demonstrated good BBB permeability (5.24 %ID/g at 5 min in striatum) and regional brain uptake. In sEH knock-out mice, a

remarkable decrease of [^{18}F]FNDP uptake (~90%) was also demonstrated. These results indicated excellent specific binding of [^{18}F]FNDP to sEH. Further evaluation of [^{18}F]FNDP in baboons suggested rapid and heterogeneous brain uptakes with higher radioactivity levels in putamen, insula, frontal cortex and amygdala, and lower levels in white matter and cerebellum.^{319, 320} Blocking experiments demonstrated excellent specific binding of [^{18}F]FNDP to sEH in NHPs (~90%). Clinically, validation of [^{18}F]FNDP in healthy adults indicated excellent BBB permeability with high uptake in all brain regions ranging from ~2.4-3.4 SUV except corpus callosum ($\text{SUV}_{\text{max}} = 1.5$).¹⁰¹ The heterogeneous distribution of [^{18}F]FNDP is aligned with the expression patterns of sEH in human brains. Accordingly, [^{18}F]FNDP may represent a promising radioligand for human sEH imaging in normal and disease conditions, and more efforts for validation of [^{18}F]FNDP in the preclinical neuroinflammatory models and clinical translation are warranted.

8.4. Phosphodiesterase subtypes (PDE4B, PDE4D and PDE7)

As a subtype of the cyclic nucleotide phosphodiesterases (PDEs), phosphodiesterase-4 (PDE4) is specifically responsible for the hydrolysis of the second messenger cyclic adenosine monophosphate (cAMP), a critical regulator for microglia homeostasis. PDE4 can be further divided into four subtypes, namely PDE4A, PDE4B, PDE4C, and PDE4D.^{51, 102} In particular, PDE4B is widely expressed in most immune and inflammatory cells, such as T cells, B cells, microglia, monocytes and macrophages. It has been demonstrated that PDE4B exerts a critical role in neuroinflammation in a range of injury and neurological disorders, and PDE4B inhibition could provide improved efficacy in treating patients with neuroinflammation. Although selective PDE4B inhibitors remain in preclinical evaluation and initial forays seem promising, two PDE4 pan-inhibitors, apremilast and roflumilast, have been approved for the treatment of peripheral inflammation related conditions. To date, [^{18}F]98 ([^{18}F]PF-06445974) is the only available PDE4B-preferring PET probe with excellent in vitro binding affinity ($\text{IC}_{50} < 1 \text{ nM}$) and good selectivity among PDE4A (> 4 fold), PDE4C (> 17) and PDE4D (> 36) (Figure 12).¹⁰³ PET imaging studies of [^{18}F]PF-06445974 in NHPs demonstrated excellent BBB permeability with a peak SUV of ~3. A heterogeneous radioactivity distribution pattern was observed with the highest level in the thalamus, followed by putamen, caudate, cortex, cerebellum, and hippocampus in a decreasing order. Pre-treatment with a Pfizer-proprietary PDE4B inhibitor led to marked reduction of the radioactivity levels of [^{18}F]PF-06445974 in various brain regions. In all, [^{18}F]PF-06445974 represents an excellent starting point to develop PDE4B-selective PET probe warranting further development in preclinical disease models as well as clinical trials.

PDE4D has been demonstrated to be involved in neuroinflammation and inhibition of PDE4D could attenuate neuroinflammation and provide neuroprotection in AD.¹⁰⁴ Recently, four lead PDE4D inhibitors were labeled with carbon-11 and evaluated in mice and monkeys with PET ([^{11}C]99 ([^{11}C]T1953), [^{11}C]100 ([^{11}C]T2525), [^{11}C]101 ([^{11}C]T1650), and [^{11}C]102 ([^{11}C]T1660)), which exhibited excellent binding affinity ($\text{IC}_{50} = 5.12, 0.5, 3.9,$ and 2.8 nM , respectively), high selectivity (> 100 fold over PDE4B), and moderate brain uptake in mouse and, in particular in monkey brains (mice: $\text{SUV}_{\text{max}} = 0.94, 1.44, 1.76,$ and 1.76 , respectively, monkeys: $\text{SUV}_{\text{max}} = 4.32, 5.09, 3.28,$ and 3.52 , respectively) (Figure 12).¹⁰⁵ While radioligands [^{11}C]T1953 and [^{11}C]T2525 failed to deliver any specific PET

binding in monkey brains, both [^{11}C]T1650 and [^{11}C]T1660 exhibited considerable PDE4D-specific binding (37-48% decreased V_T values), as demonstrated by pharmacological block experiments with a PDE4 inhibitor rolipram or a selective PDE4D inhibitor BPN14770. [^{11}C]T1650 was further progressed into a first-in-human study with favorable brain uptake ($\text{SUV}_{\text{max}} = 4.39$) and specific binding (30% decreased $\text{SUV}_{60-120 \text{ min}}$ by pretreatment with PDE4D-selective inhibitor BPN14770). However, the V_T value increased steadily over scan duration, indicating the accumulation of radiometabolites in the brain. Overall, these results indicate the feasibility of PDE4D PET imaging in NHPs, but further radioligand optimization remains necessary to avoid problematic brain penetrant radiometabolites.

PDE7 is another subtype of PDEs, which is involved in pro-inflammatory processes. It has been indicated that inhibition of PDE7 function may be beneficial for the treatment of neuroinflammation and confer neuroprotection.¹⁰⁶ In contrast to diverse therapeutics agents, the development of PDE7-selective PET probes has lagged far behind. In 2015, two radioligands [^{18}F]103 ([^{18}F]MICA-003, $\text{IC}_{50} = 17.0 \text{ nM}$) and [^{11}C]104 ([^{11}C]MICA-005, $\text{IC}_{50} = 1.7 \text{ nM}$) were disclosed as potential PDE7 PET probes (Figure 12).^{321, 322} Evaluation in mice indicated that both radioligands rapidly penetrated the BBB with a peak uptake of 5% ID/g and 1.74 SUV, respectively. Nonetheless, the homogenous distribution for both radioligands and the brain penetrating radiometabolite for [^{18}F]MICA-003 rendered them unfavorable for in vivo quantification of PDE7. Most recently, a promising PDE7 radioligand [^{11}C]105 ([^{11}C]MTP38, $\text{IC}_{50} < 10 \text{ nM}$)³²³ was prepared via ^{11}C -cyanation of an appropriate bromo precursor with [^{11}C]HCN.¹⁰⁷ In vivo evaluation of [^{11}C]MTP38 demonstrated favorable BBB penetration and highest uptake was observed in the striatum with a peak SUV of approximating 4.5 in rats and 5 in monkeys. Pretreatment with unlabeled MTP38 or a selective PDE7 inhibitor MTP-X led to remarkably reduced radioactivity retention, indicating moderate binding specificity of [^{11}C]MTP38 to PDE7.³²⁴ However, it is worth mentioning that the lead MTP38 shows equal potency towards PDE7 subtypes, namely PDE7A and PDE7B. First-in human PET studies of [^{11}C]MTP38 were subsequently conducted, which exhibited good BBB penetration, reversible binding, and heterogeneous distribution with SUV of 4-8 in various brain regions. As proof of concept, [^{11}C]MTP38 demonstrated high feasibility of imaging PDE7 in human and served as a novel chemical scaffold for further modification to improve specific binding and subtype selectivity.

8.5. CX3C chemokine receptor 1(CX3CR1)

The CX3C chemokine receptor 1 (CX3CR1) is also known as fractalkine (CX3CL1) receptor or G-protein coupled receptor 13 (GPR13). In the brain, CX3CR1 plays an important role in neuroinflammation of sustaining the microglial hemostasis in the brain and is used as immune histological marker for microglia.^{108, 325} It has been demonstrated that CX3CR1 deficiency led to the dysregulation of microglial responses and microglial neurotoxicity, which further contributed to the generation of ischemic damage.¹⁰⁸ In 2015, [^{18}F]106 ([^{18}F]FBTTP, $K_i = 23 \text{ nM}$) was reported as a potential CX3CR1 PET probe.³²⁶ Initial PET imaging studies in mice demonstrated the ability to cross the BBB, but further information about in vitro and in vivo validation remains to be reported (Figure 13).^{109, 327} In addition, a ^{64}Cu -labeled macromolecule ([^{64}Cu]vMIP-II-comb) was synthesized by

conjugating the viral macrophage inflammatory protein-II (vMIP-II) with a ^{64}Cu -linked nanoparticle.³²⁸ [^{64}Cu]vMIP-II-comb was specific for chemokine receptors, and proved to be useful for in vivo macrophage mapping in mouse models of peripheral diseases, such as vascular injury and inflammatory atherosclerosis. Overall, CX3CR1 is a promising imaging target for neuroinflammation, and further studies are warranted to develop a suitable brain-penetrant small-molecule PET ligand.

8.6. Nucleotide oligomerization domain (NOD)- like receptor protein 3 (NLRP3)

Nucleotide oligomerization domain (NOD)-like receptor protein 3 (NLRP3) represents one subtype of the NOD-like receptor (NLR) family, which is widely expressed in microglia and macrophages, and functions as an intracellular sensor for the detection of various insult or stimuli, such as pathogen and endogenous danger signals.¹¹⁰ Upon activation, NLRP3 is transformed into inflammasome, which is a cytosolic multiprotein oligomer, serving to mediate the proinflammatory cytokine release. Overall, NLRP3 is closely associated with neuroinflammation and multiple neurodegenerative diseases, such as PD and AD, and inhibition of NLRP3 represents an emerging and promising strategy for treatment of these disorders.¹¹⁰

To date the development of NLRP3 PET probes remains in its infancy. In 2020, [^{11}C]107 ([^{11}C]MCC950) was disclosed as the first potential NLRP3 PET radioligand, with favorable binding affinity ($\text{IC}_{50} = 8 \text{ nM}$) (Figure 13).¹¹¹ However, PET imaging studies indicated no brain uptake and rapid washout in several species, such as mice ($\text{SUV}_{\text{max}} = 0.06$), rats ($\text{SUV}_{\text{max}} = 0.06$), and rhesus monkeys ($\text{SUV}_{\text{max}} = 0.48$), impeding its further investigation. Soon after, another radioligand [^{11}C]108 was prepared and evaluated in mice.³²⁹ Despite some specific binding (26%) towards NLRP3 in thyroid gland, the in vivo application of [^{11}C]108 for neuroinflammation was hampered by unfavorable binding affinity ($\text{IC}_{50} = 900 \text{ nM}$) and limited brain uptake in mice (1.7 %ID/g). Further optimization on improved binding affinity and increased brain uptake will be necessary to identify lead PET ligands for NLRP3.

8.7. Myeloperoxidase (MPO)

Myeloperoxidase (MPO) is a heme-containing peroxidase catalyzing the generation of ROS and other reactive oxidants, which displays high expression in several proinflammatory innate immune cells, such as microglia, monocytes, neutrophils, and macrophages.¹¹² Emerging evidence indicates that excessive MPO activity is closely associated with tissue damage in diverse diseases, especially those characterized by inflammation. As such, inhibition of harmful MPO activity represents an emerging and promising therapeutic strategy for inflammation-related diseases. AZD3241 is a recently reported MPO inhibitor with moderate in vitro binding affinity ($\text{IC}_{50} = 1.2 \text{ }\mu\text{M}$) and its radiolabeling with carbon-11 led to the development of radioligand [^{11}C]109 ([^{11}C]AZD3241; Figure 13).¹¹³ PET imaging studies of [^{11}C]AZD3241 in monkeys revealed a good brain uptake with maximum SUV of 3.0. The homogeneously distributed radioactivity and rapid washout in monkey brains was proposed to be attributed to low MPO expression levels in healthy monkey brains. More recently, [^{18}F]110 ([^{18}F]MAPP) was prepared and evaluated in mice, which exhibited favorable BBB penetration.¹¹⁴ Notably, in a complete Freund's adjuvant (CFA)

paw inflammation model, [^{18}F]MAPP exhibited 4 times higher radioactivity accumulation on the CFA-treated side than that on the PBS-treated side. Moreover, the radioactivity on the CFA-treated side could be markedly blocked (57%) by pretreatment with the MPO-specific inhibitor PF-1355, indicating some binding specificity of [^{18}F]MAPP towards MPO. Overall, [^{18}F]MAPP is a promising MPO-specific PET probe warranting further development and validation in preclinical disease models as well as potential clinical trials.

8.8. Glycogen synthase kinase 3 (GSK-3)

Glycogen synthase kinase 3 (GSK-3) is a serine/threonine kinase mediating the phosphorylation at the serine or threonine residues of a specific substrate.^{330–332} In mammals, GSK-3 is present in two highly related isoforms GSK-3 α and GSK-3 β , sharing 85% overall amino acid identity and 97% identity in the ATP binding pocket. It has been demonstrated that GSK-3 possesses diverse substrates including the AD-related tau protein. Further, dysfunction of GSK-3 is implicated in multiple neurological disorders, such as neuroinflammation and AD.^{333–335} Of note, GSK-3 β exhibits extremely high levels in neural tissues, where it contributes to the development of the adult mammalian brain.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, it is not surprising that GSK-3 β has emerged as a key component of neuroinflammation. For example, following LPS administration, upregulated GSK-3 β activity was observed in rats.³³⁶ Postmortem immunoblotting studies of brain samples from AD patients also revealed elevated GSK-3 β levels, as consistent with most cellular and transgenic rodent experiments, and the increased GSK-3 β levels were mainly co-localized with neurofibrillary tangles (NFTs) that are composed of hyperphosphorylated tau protein.^{337–339} Therefore, GSK-3 inhibition might provide a rational approach for the treatment of neurological disorders, and GSK-3 PET imaging may present a useful tool to validate GSK-3 drug candidates and to monitor the progress of AD or non-AD tauopathies.

Despite the great potential of GSK-3, so far, no GSK-3 PET probe has been advanced to clinical trials. The major obstacle possibly arises from the lack of highly potent and selective GSK-3 radioligands with sufficient BBB penetration. To date, only a handful of GSK-3 PET probes have been disclosed for in vivo evaluation (Figure 14). Among them, [^{11}C]111 ([^{11}C]AR-A014418, $K_i = 170$ nM),^{340, 341} [^{11}C]112 ([^{11}C]PyrATP-1, $K_i = 4.9$ nM),³⁴² oxadiazole-based radioligands [^{11}C]113-115 ($\text{IC}_{50} = 35\text{--}66$ nM)³⁴³ and [^{11}C]116 ([^{11}C]A1070722, $K_i = 0.6$ nM) failed to substantiate appropriate brain uptake in rodents and NHPs. Although [^{11}C]117 ([^{11}C]SB-216763, $K_i = 9$ nM, $\text{IC}_{50} = 34$ nM) exhibited favorable BBB penetration with a peak SUV of 2.5 at 3 min p.i. in mice and 1.9 at 5 min p.i. in baboons, respectively, homogeneous distribution and the lack of selectivity over structurally similar kinases impeded its further application.^{189, 344} A ^{18}F -labeled derivative of SB-216763 ([^{18}F]118, $\text{IC}_{50} = 1.7$ nM) was also synthesized and evaluated in Sprague–Dawley rats, but exhibited inadequate brain uptake (ca. 0.45 %ID/cc) and high non-displaceable binding.³⁴⁵ The failure of these radioligands for in vivo GSK-3 imaging may be attributed to their low binding affinity to GSK-3, insufficient lipophilicity and interactions with efflux proteins (Pgp and BCRP) at the BBB. We have recently developed a highly potent and selective GSK inhibitor, 119 (PF-367, GSK-3 β $\text{IC}_{50} = 2.1$ nM determined by a recombinant human enzyme assay), which demonstrated good efficacy in the regulation of tau phosphorylation both in vitro and in vivo, as well as exquisite selectivity towards

GSK-3 over a panel of kinases.³⁴⁶ The radiolabeling of PF-367 with carbon-11 gave rise to a promising GSK-3 PET probe, [¹¹C]119 ([¹¹C]PF-367), which readily penetrated the BBB of NHPs with a peak SUV of 1.0 at 5 min p.i. Pharmacological blocking with unlabeled PF-367 resulted in a faster washout of [¹¹C]PF-367 and decreased brain radioactivity levels were thus observed at late time points with approximately 30% of displaceable binding. Nonetheless, one concern about [¹¹C]PF-367 arose from its virtually homogeneous distribution pattern and considerable skull uptake. Ongoing efforts rendered the discovery of several ¹¹C-labeled analogues of PF-367 with comparable or better binding affinity, selectivity and in vivo brain exposure ($SUV_{max} = 0.84-3.08$ in rodents), such as [¹¹C]120 ([¹¹C]PF-618, GSK-3 β $IC_{50} = 2.5$ nM), [¹¹C]121 ([¹¹C]PF-627, GSK-3 β $IC_{50} = 3.6$ nM), [¹¹C]122 ([¹¹C]OCM-37, GSK-3 β $IC_{50} = 1.5$ nM), [¹¹C]123 ([¹¹C]OCM-44, GSK-3 β $IC_{50} = 2.0$ nM), and [¹¹C]124 ([¹¹C]OCM-51, GSK-3 β $IC_{50} = 0.031$ nM).¹¹⁶ Despite exhibiting the highest binding affinity, [¹¹C]OCM-51 showed the lowest BBB penetration ($SUV_{max} = 0.84$) in rat brains, which is possibly due to substantial peripheral binding to GSK-3 before entering the brain and a more rapid elimination from the circulation. In contrast, [¹¹C]PF-618 and [¹¹C]OCM-44 exhibited the highest radioactivity accumulation in rat brains with a peak SUV of up to 3.08. Further, evaluation of [¹¹C]PF-618, [¹¹C]OCM-37 and [¹¹C]OCM-44 in rhesus monkeys revealed high brain radioactivity levels ($SUV_{max} = 3.0-4.0$) and favourable binding kinetics. Moreover, the gray matter exhibited higher uptake than the white matter, which coincided with the brain distribution of GSK-3 and contrasted with the in vivo profile of [¹¹C]PF-367. Overall, these findings suggest that [¹¹C]PF-618, [¹¹C]OCM-37 and [¹¹C]OCM-44 represent lead GSK-3 PET probes and warrants detailed kinetic profiling in higher species.

Outlook and Conclusion

The development of PET probes that selectively bind to different neuroinflammation-related targets is an exciting research area that has received much attention from academia and industry. It is envisioned that these efforts will substantially contribute to a better understanding of neuroinflammation and neurodegenerative diseases, as well as ultimately their clinical diagnosis and management. One major challenge in PET imaging of neuroinflammation lies in the identification of suitable targets, which must satisfy the following criteria: (1) The target must have adequate expression (high B_{max}) and high binding affinity (K_i/K_d) of the corresponding ligand for successful PET visualization ($B_{max}/K_d \gg 10$); (2) The target must serve as a proxy for one aspect in the neuroinflammatory process and a substantial change of target expression/density must result from such processes in order to distinguish pathological states from a healthy situation; and (3) The target must be druggable or traceable, which means that the target should contain some pharmacophores or pockets for the binding of a small molecule ligand. Additionally, it's also critical to continuously develop suitable PET molecules for the existing and validated biological targets that concurrently lack excellent binding affinity, high selectivity, high BBB penetration, suitable brain kinetics and reasonable metabolic profile.

To date, several promising targets have been elucidated for neuroinflammation imaging, whereas a number of PET probes were translated to humans. These probes are targeted towards TSPO, COX-1, CB2R, MAO-B, S1PR1, P2X7R, sEH, PDE4D and PDE7. Given

that neuroinflammation is a key hallmark of neurodegeneration, it is not surprising that strenuous efforts have been made to overcome the limitations of TSPO imaging, which undoubtedly remains the current reference standard in the clinic. Nonetheless, the diverse landscape of critical biological targets in neuroinflammation underscores the complexity of inflammatory processes in the central nervous system. The availability of suitable probes for these targets not only harbours potential to provide a superior diagnostic readout but will also contribute to an improved understanding in the field. In recent years, a rapidly growing number of novel targets, including enzymes, intracellular signalling molecules, G-protein coupled receptors, ion channels and members of the immunoglobulin receptor superfamily, have been exploited for neuroinflammation imaging. In addition, attributed to the length and focus of this review, we exclude many exciting druggable targets in neuroinflammatory pathway due to the lack of companion PET ligands. These targets, to name a few, prostaglandin EP2 receptor,³⁴⁷ p38 mitogen-activated protein kinases,³⁴⁸ tumor necrosis factor³⁴⁹ and autotaxin,³⁵⁰ represent new research directions and unmet clinical need for PET ligand development for neuroinflammation. Furthermore, recent development of PET neuroligands for the endocannabinoid pathway,⁵⁰ metabotropic/ionotropic glutamate signalling receptors⁴⁹ and phosphodiesterases,⁵¹ for example, mGluR₂, TARP g8, NMDAR (GluN2B), AMPAR^{351–354} offers a great opportunity to study crosstalk and signalling interaction under neuroinflammatory conditions and physiopathology of neurodegenerative diseases. In all, it is of paramount significance to take advantage of modern drug discovery efforts and establishment of translational preclinical disease models to drive future development of innovative PET probes. We hope that this review will draw attention from academia and industry, thereby nourishing future projects that focus on the diagnosis and management of neuroinflammation and neurodegenerative disorders..

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ABBREVIATION

Aβ	amyloid beta plaque
AD	Alzheimer's disease
ALS	amyotrophic lateral sclerosis
ATP	adenosine triphosphate
BBB	blood-brain barrier
Bcrp	breast cancer resistance protein

CB1R	cannabinoid type 1 receptor
CB2R	cannabinoid type 2 receptor
CNS	central nervous system
COX	cyclooxygenase
CSF1	colony stimulating factor 1
CSF1R	colony stimulating factor 1 receptor
CX3CR1	CX3C chemokine receptor 1
EET	epoxyeicosatrienoic acids
fIRAGE	membrane-bound full length RAGE
GPR13	G-protein coupled receptor 13
GSK-3	glycogen synthase kinase 3
HD	Huntington's disease
HIE	hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy
%ID/g	% percentage injected dose per gram of tissue
LPS	lipopolysaccharide
MAO	monoamine oxidase
mEH	microsomal epoxide hydrolase
MerTK	Mer tyrosine kinase
MPO	myeloperoxidase
MS	multiple sclerosis
NHP	non-human primate
NLRP3	NOD-like receptor protein 3
P2X7R	P2X ligand-gated ion channel type 7 receptor
P2Y12R	purinergic metabotropic 12 receptor
PD	Parkinson's disease
PDE	phosphodiesterase
PET	positron emission tomography
Pgp	P-glycoprotein
RAGE	receptor for advanced glycation end products

RNS	reactive nitrogen species
ROS	reactive oxygen species
S1PR	sphingosine-1-phosphate receptor
sEH	soluble epoxide hydrolase
SphK1	sphingosine kinase-1
sRAGE	soluble RAGE
SUV	standard uptake value
TBI	traumatic brain injury
TSPO	translocator protein
UTP	uridine triphosphate
NOD	nucleotide oligomerization domain

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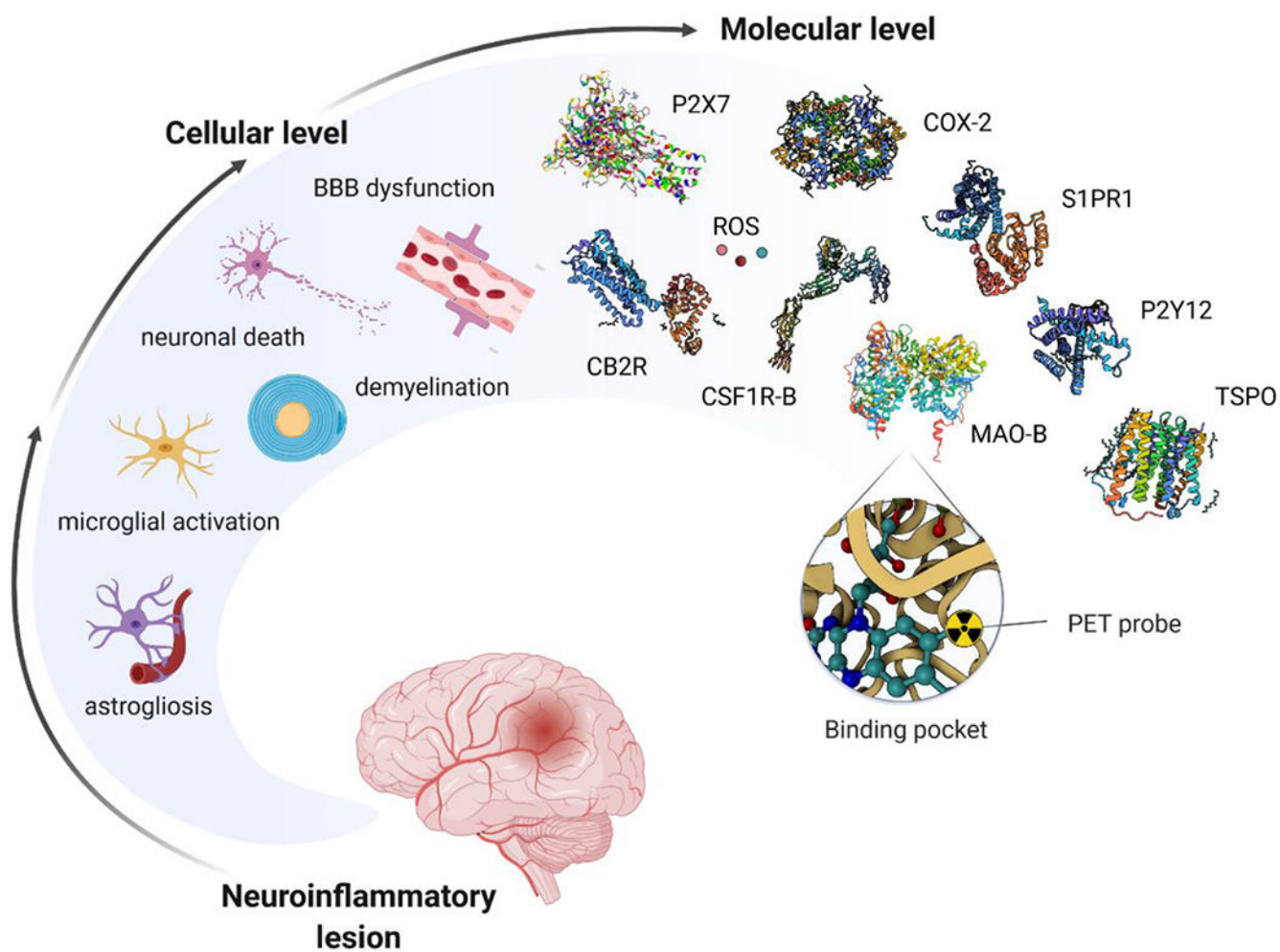


Figure 1.
Cellular and molecular hallmarks of neuroinflammation.

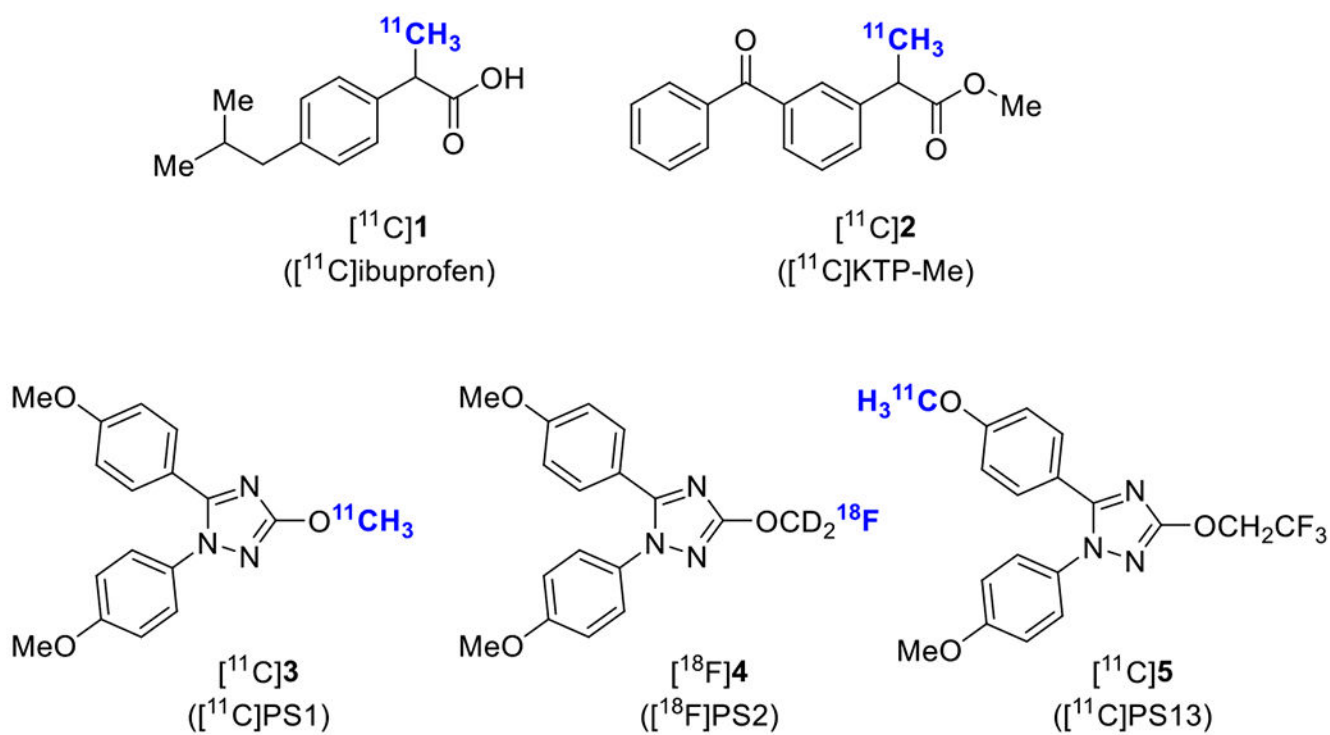


Figure 2.
Representative PET probes for COX-1.

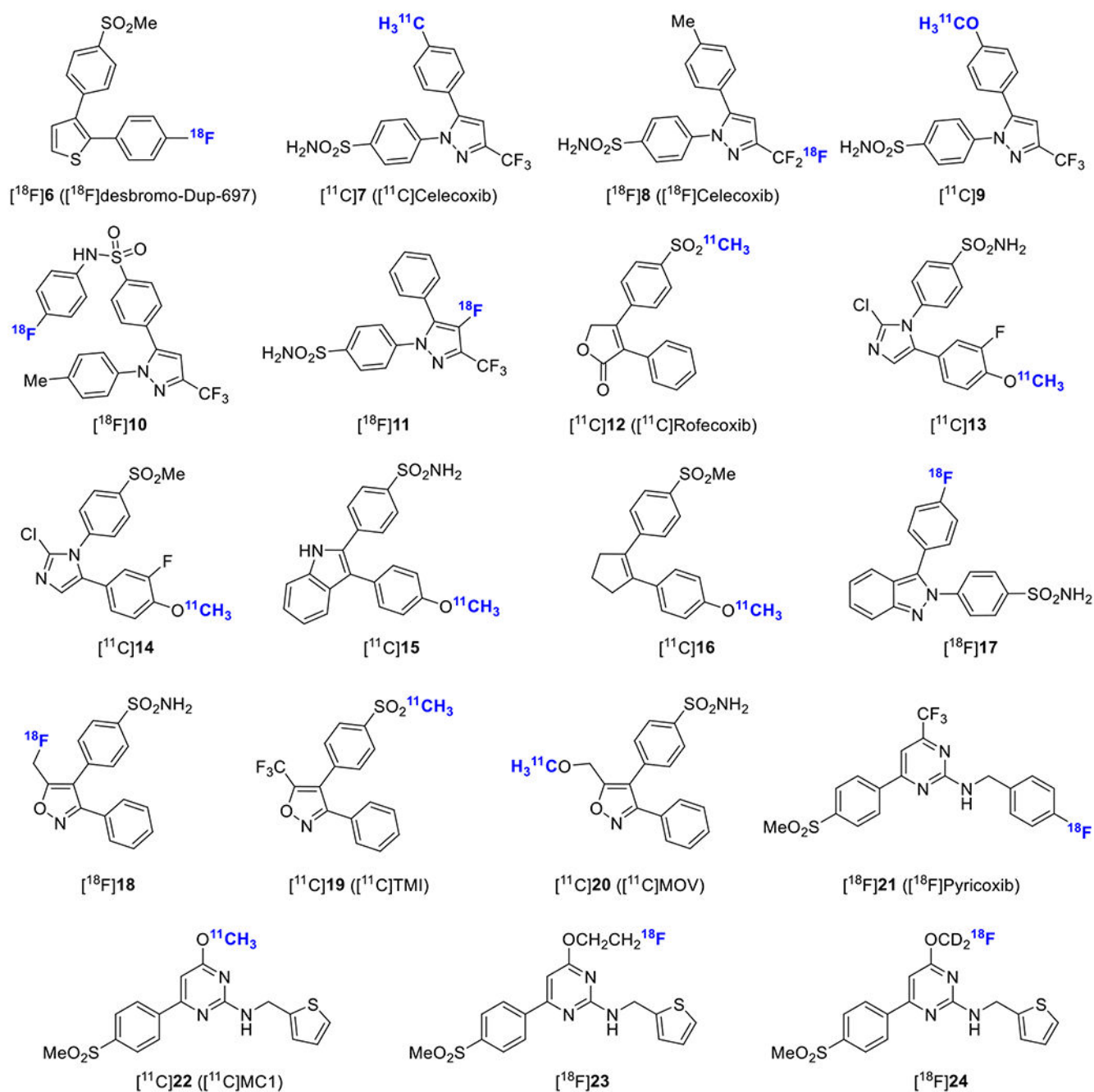


Figure 3.
Representative PET probes for COX-2.

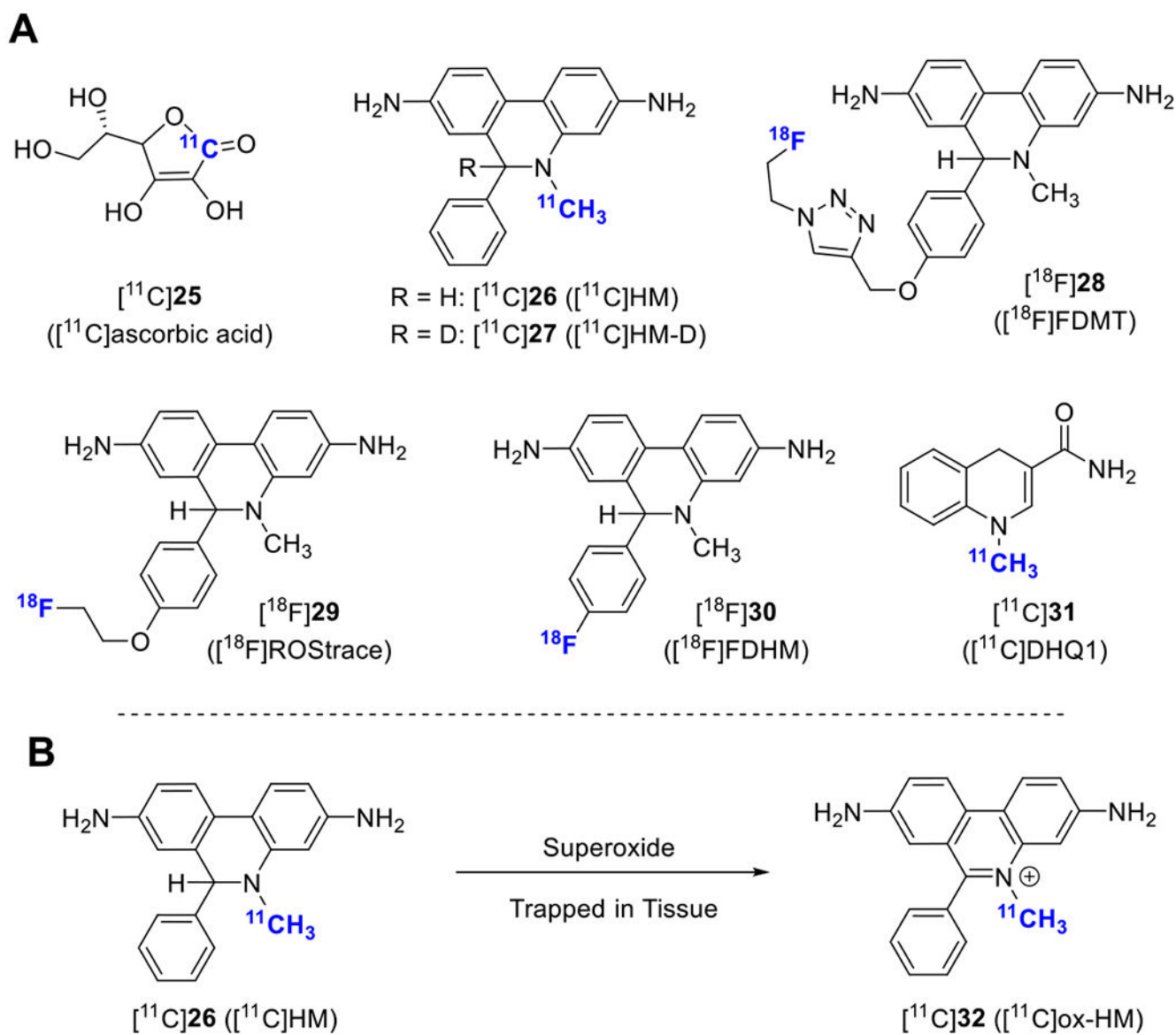


Figure 4.

A) Representative PET probes for ROS and B) mode of action of $[^{11}\text{C}]26$.

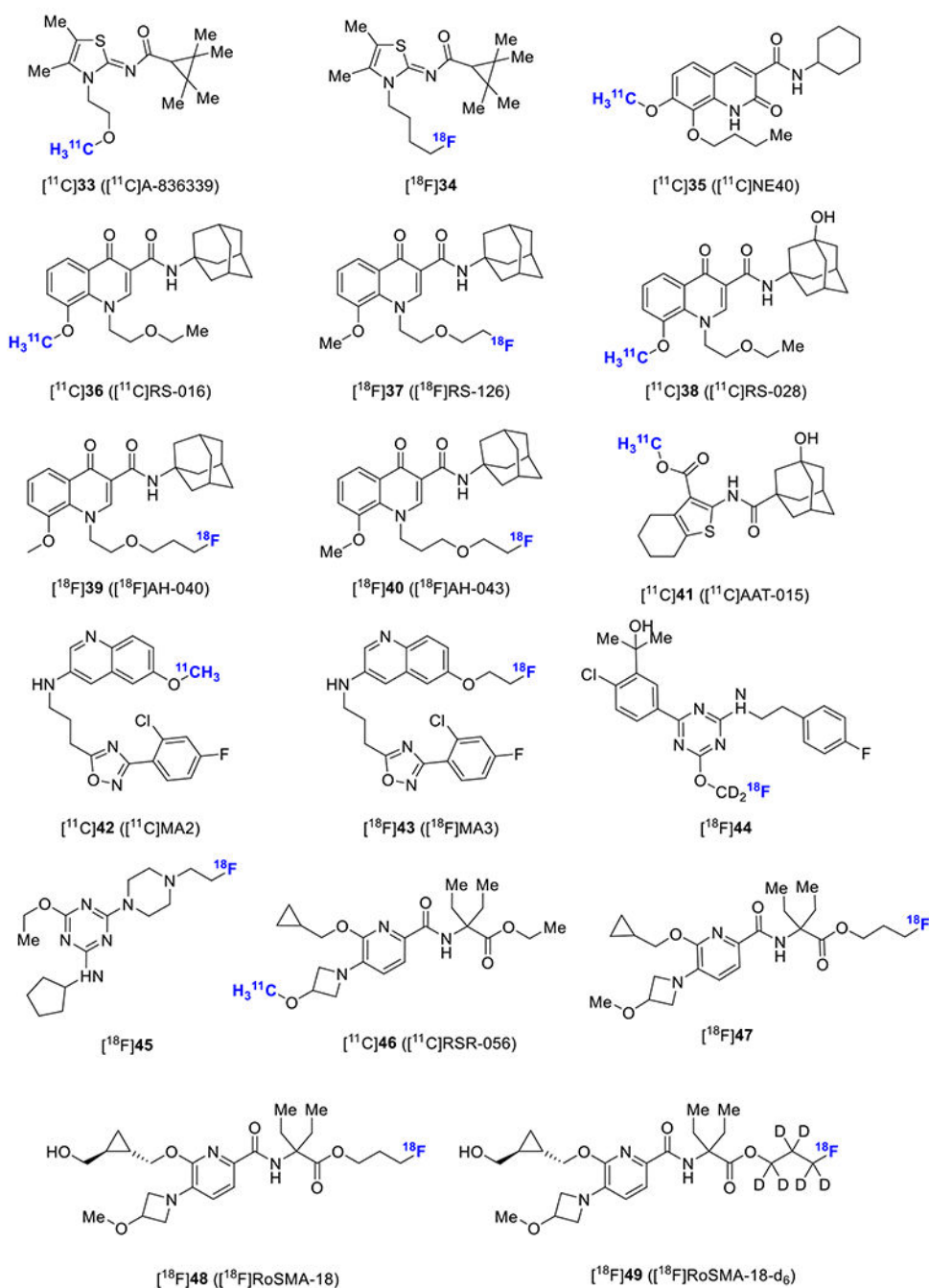


Figure 5.
Representative PET probes for CB2R.

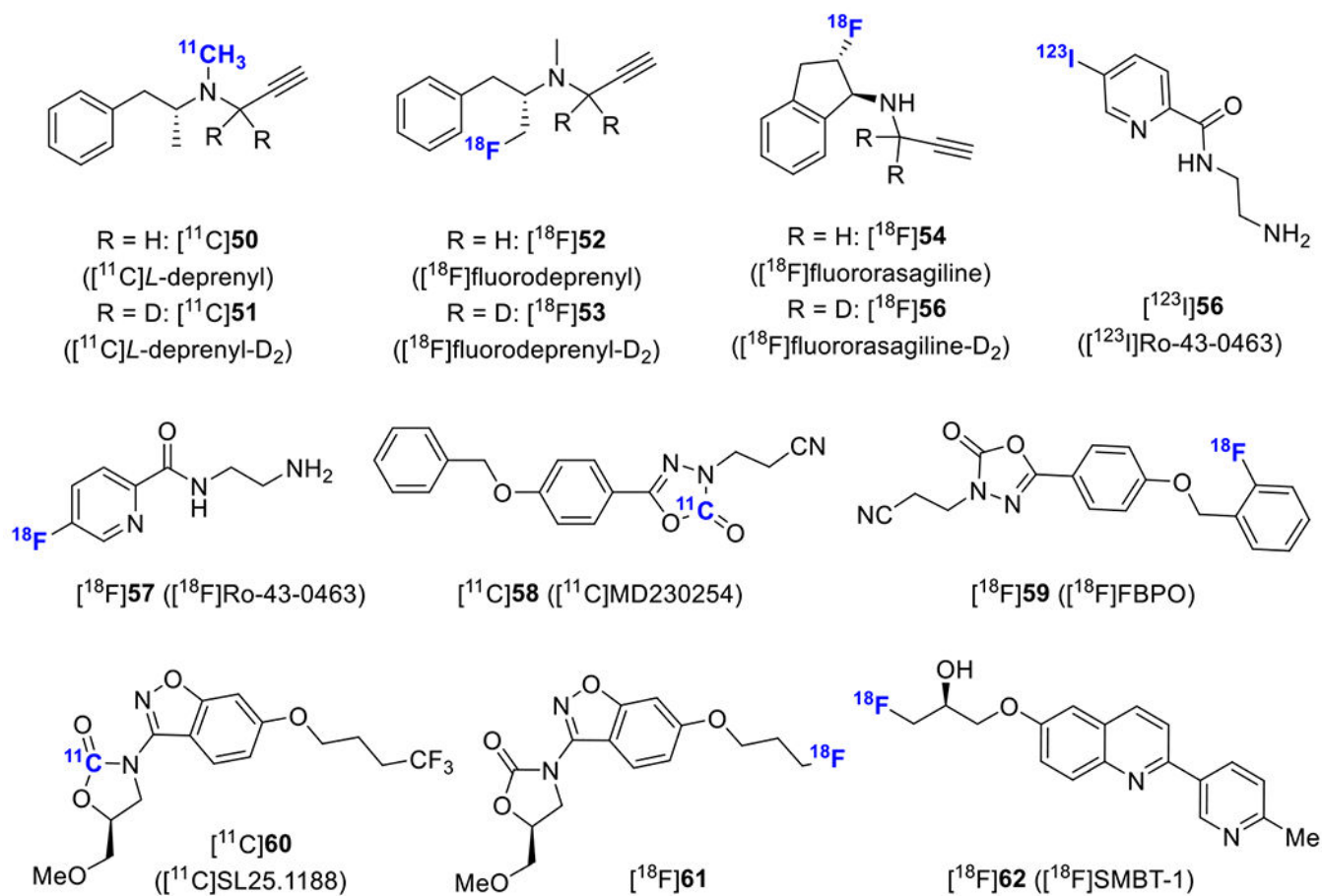


Figure 6.
 Chemical structures of MAO-B selective PET probes.

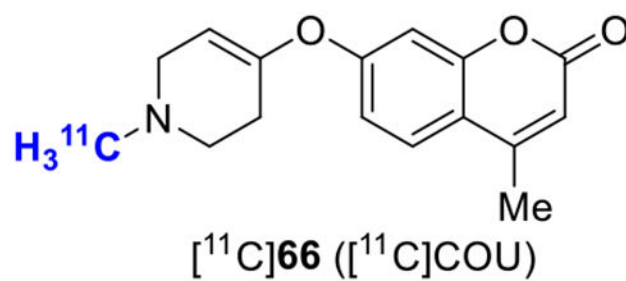
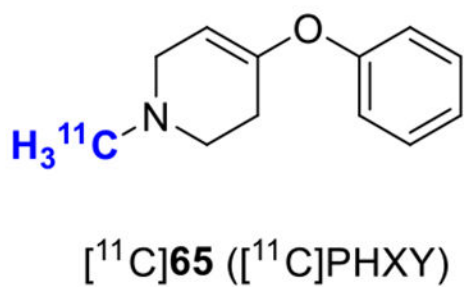
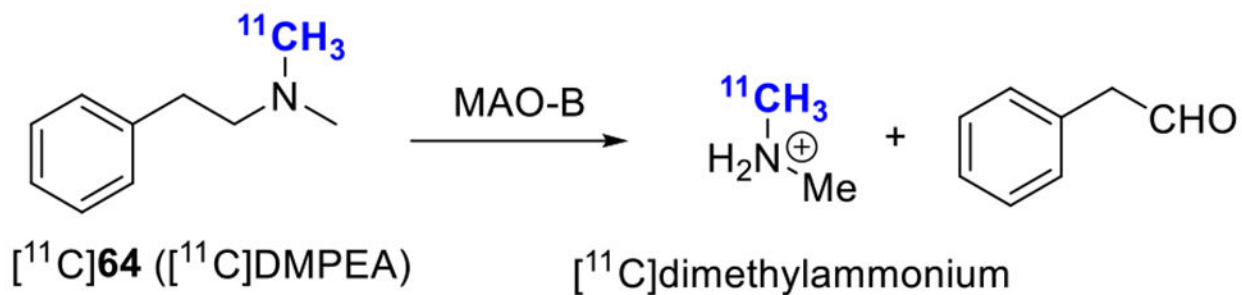
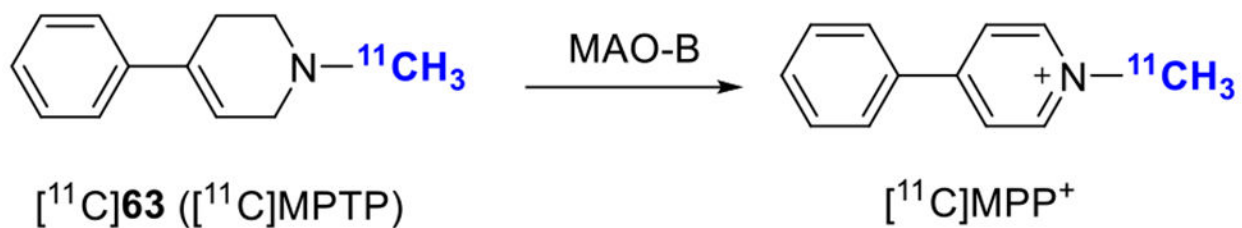


Figure 7.
Chemical structures of metabolic trapping agents for MAO.

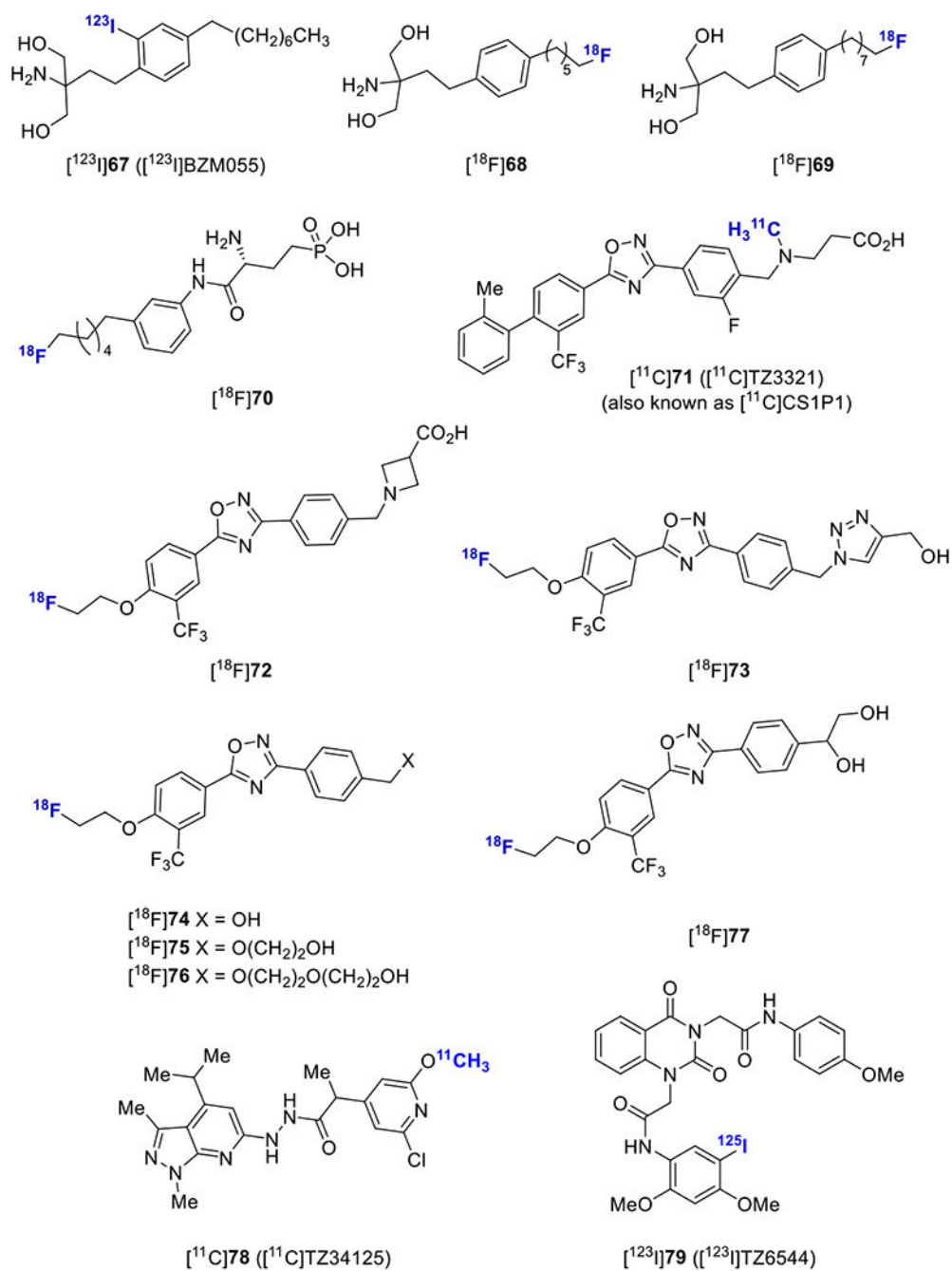


Figure 8.
 Representative imaging probes for S1PR1 (**67-78**) and S1PR2 (**78** and **79**).

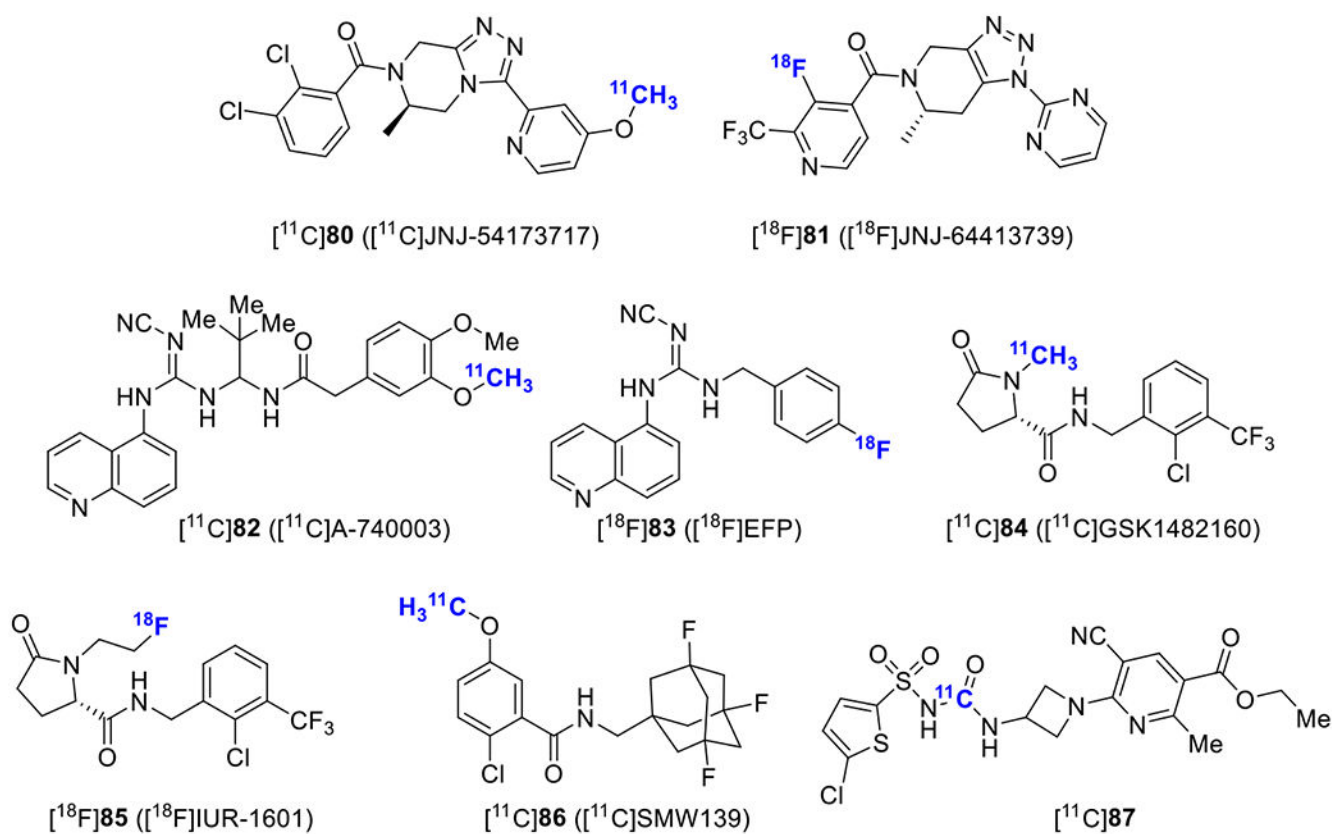


Figure 9. Representative PET probes for purinergic receptors (compounds **80-86** for P2X7R, compound **87** for P2Y12R).

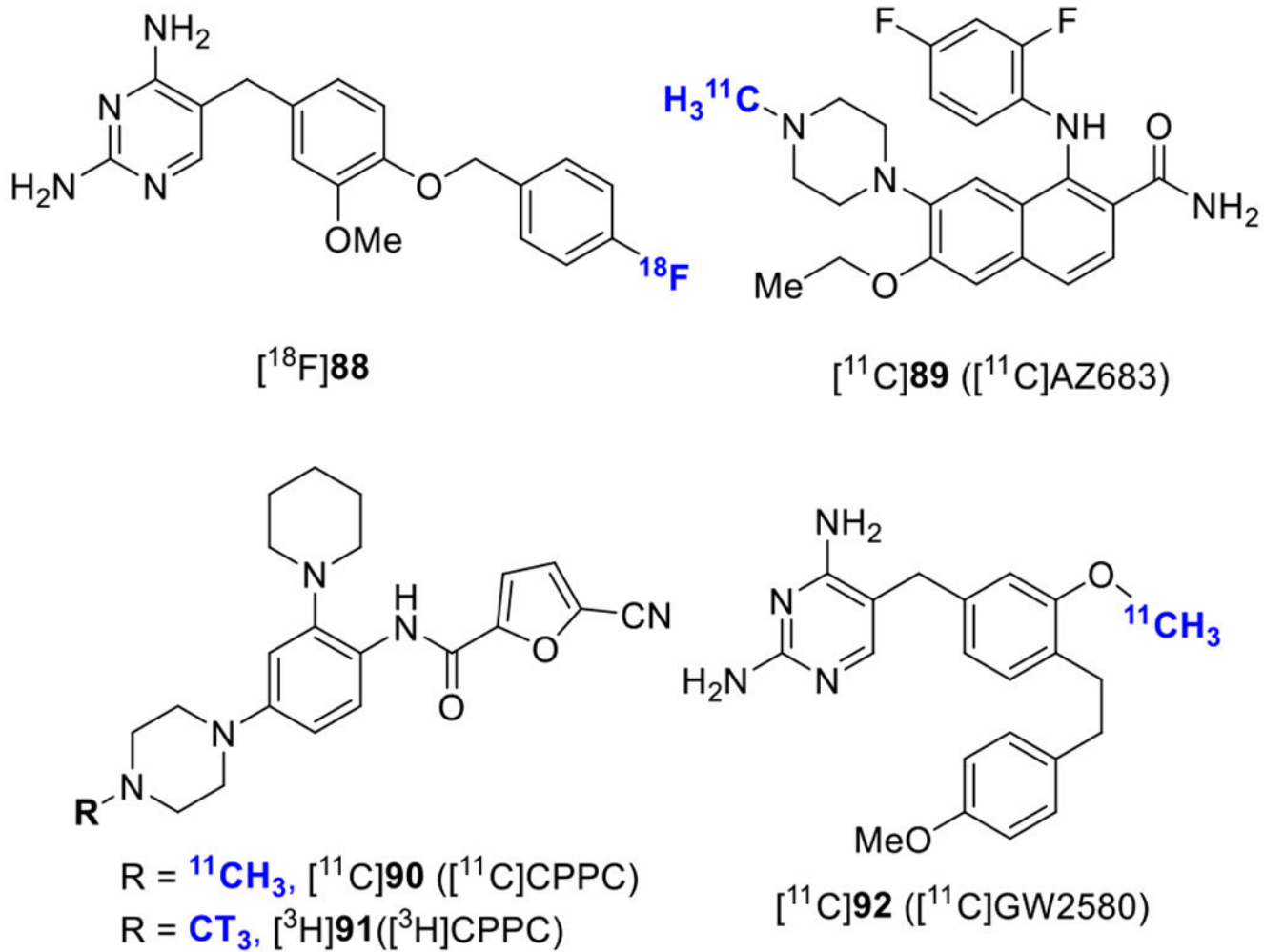


Figure 10.
Representative PET probes for CSF1R.

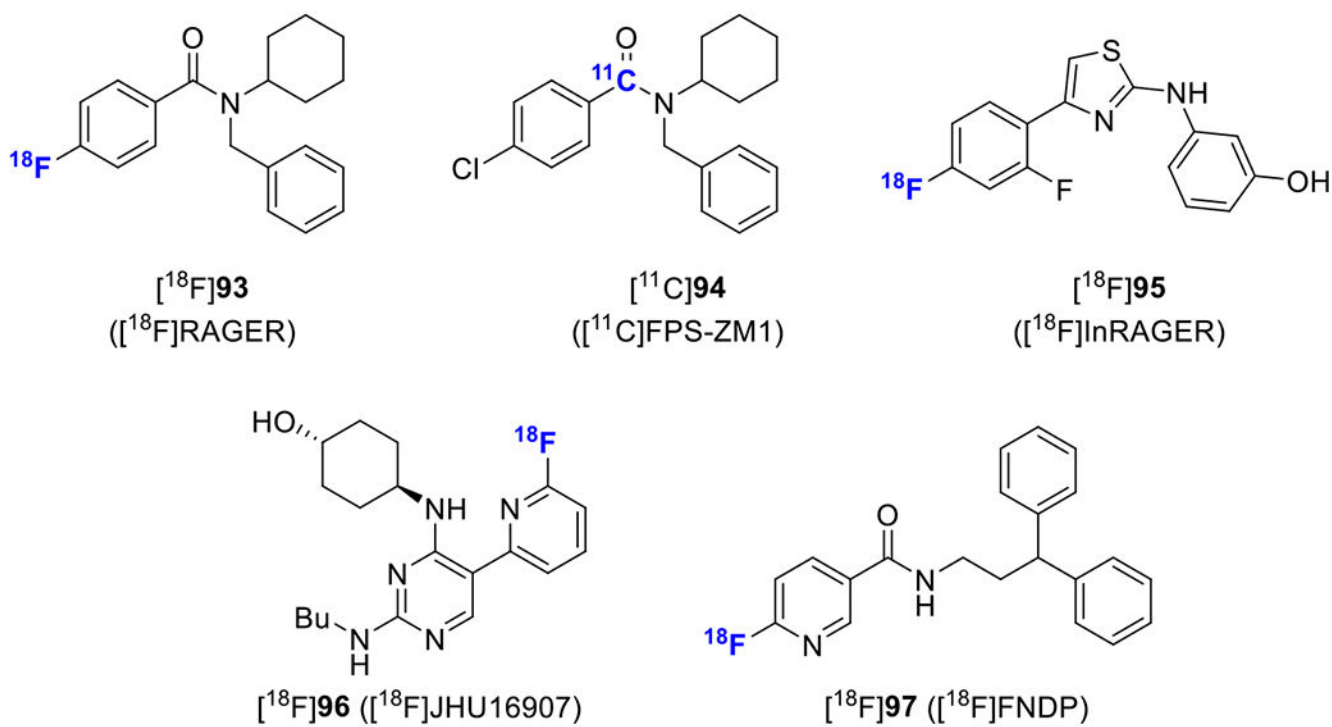


Figure 11. Representative PET probes for RAGE (compounds **93-95**), MERTK (compound **96**) and sEH (compound **97**).

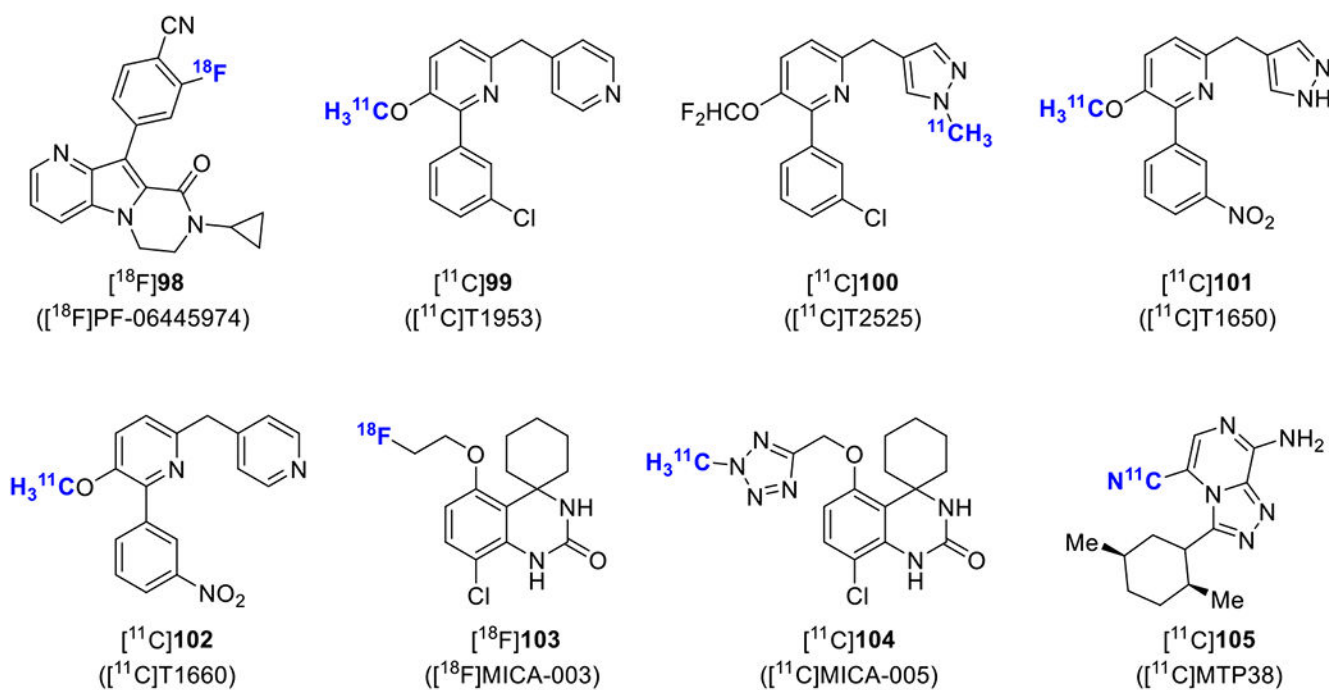


Figure 12.
Representative PET probes for PDE4B (**98**), PDE4D (**99-102**), and PDE7 (**103-105**)

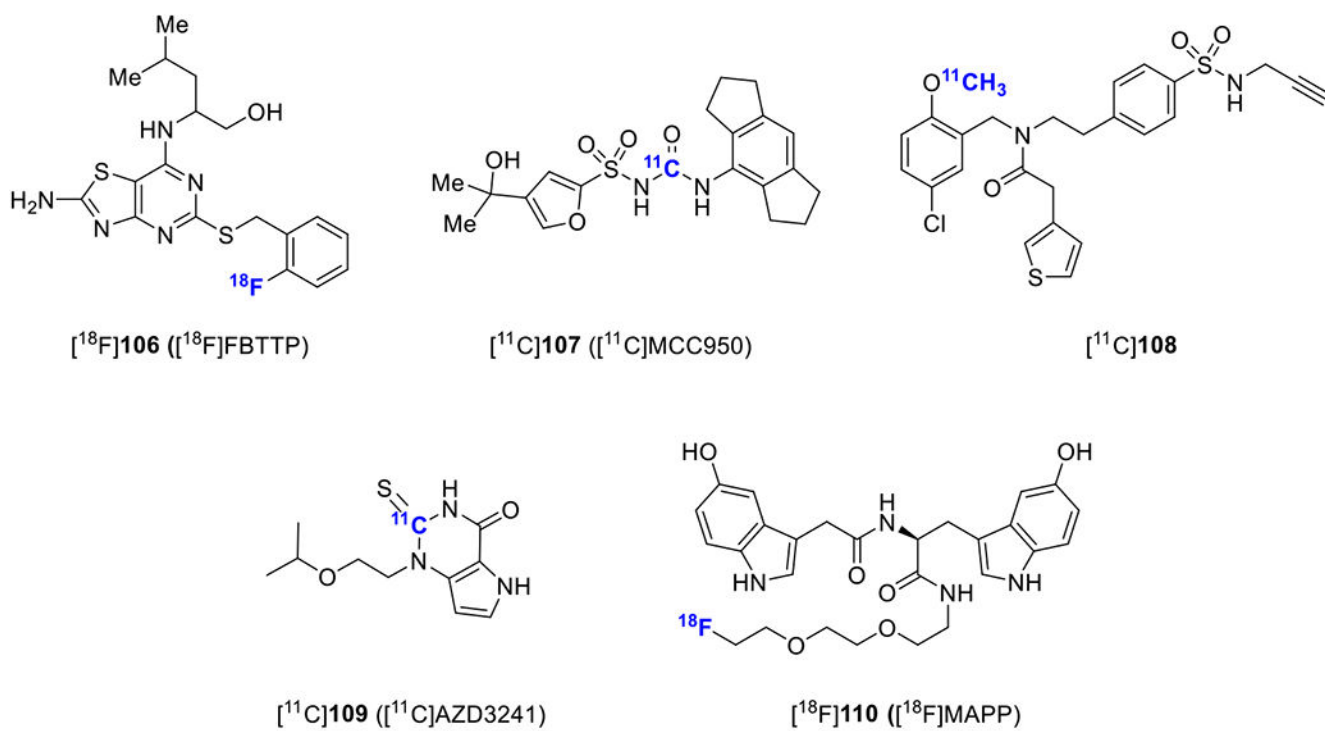


Figure 13.
Representative imaging probes for CX3CR1 (compound **106**), NLRP3 (compound **107** & **108**) and MPO (compound **109** & **110**)

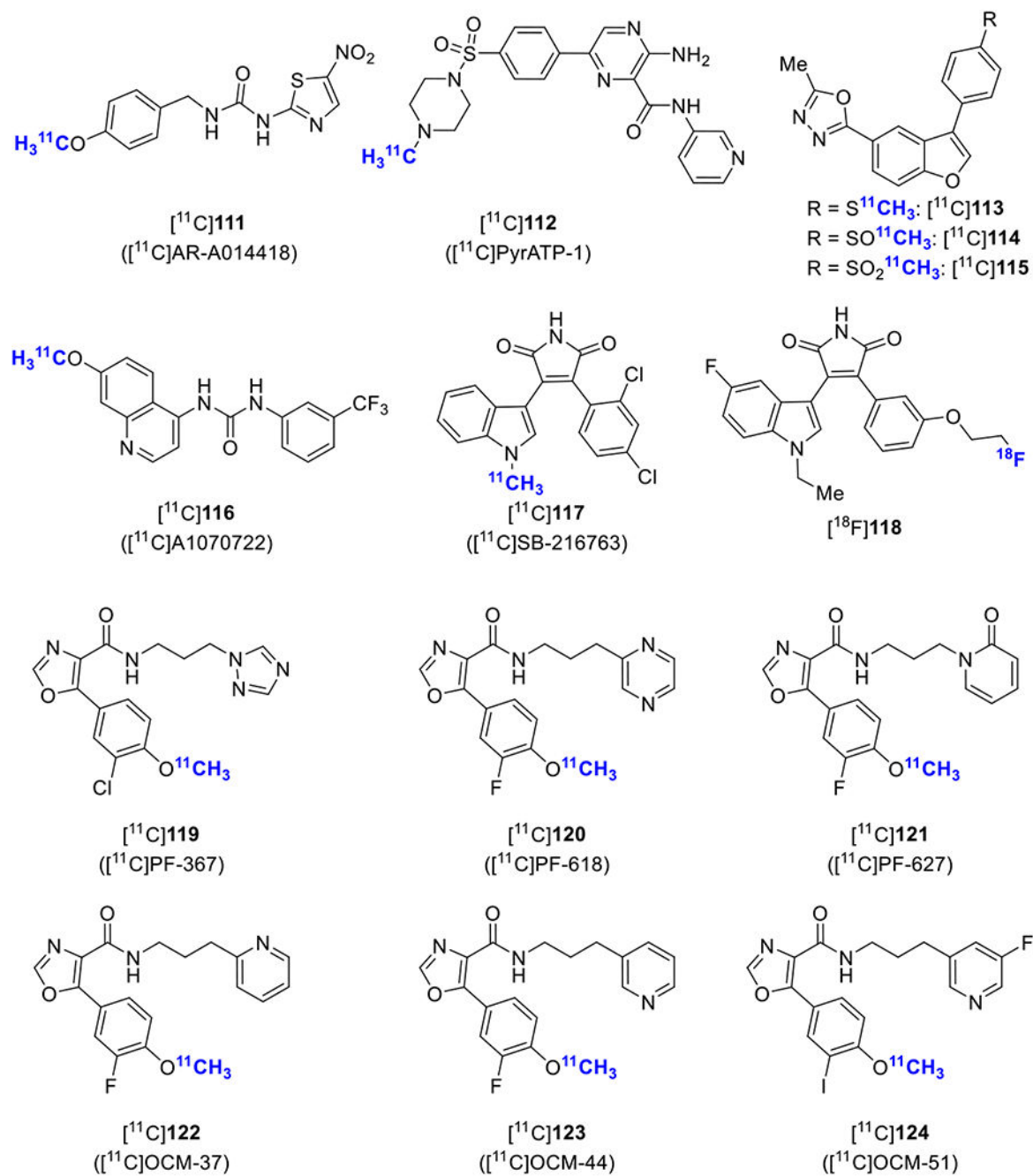


Figure 14.
Representative PET probes for GSK-3.

Table 1.

PET imaging of neuroinflammation: Potential targets and respective probes beyond TSPO imaging.^{a-c}

Target	Cell expression	Expression in neuroinflammation	Representative PET probes ^a	Binding affinity	Stage of research	comments or current status ^b
COX-1 ⁶³	Microglia	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]KTP-Me ⁶⁴	IC ₅₀ = 47 nM	humans	Rapid metabolic rate
			[¹¹ C]PS13 ⁶⁵	IC ₅₀ = 1 nM	humans	CE
COX-2 ⁶⁶	Microglia	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]MC1 ⁶⁷	IC ₅₀ = 1 nM	humans	CE
ROS ⁶⁸	Microglia	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]HM-D ⁶⁹ [¹⁸ F]ROStrace ⁷⁰ [¹⁸ F]FDHM ⁷¹ [¹¹ C]DHQ1 ⁷²	-- ^c	rodents	CE
CB2R ⁷³	Microglia Astrocyte	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]A-836339 ⁷⁴	K _i = 0.7 nM	rodents	CE
			[¹¹ C]NE40 ⁷⁵	K _i = 9.6 nM	humans	No correlation between tracer uptake and amyloid load
			[¹⁸ F]RoSMA-18-d ₆ ⁷⁶	K _i = 0.7 nM	rodents	CE
MAO-B ⁷⁷	Astrocyte>>Microglia	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]L-deprenyl-D ₂ ⁷⁸	K _i = 0.97 μM	humans	Irreversible binding
			[¹¹ C]MD230254 ⁷⁹	IC ₅₀ = 4 nM	NHPs	CE, reversible binding
			[¹¹ C]SL25.1188 ⁸⁰	K _i = 2.9 nM	humans	CE, reversible binding
			[¹⁸ F]SMBT-1 ⁸¹	K _d = 3.7 nM	humans	CE, reversible binding
S1PR1 ⁸²	Microglia >> Astrocyte	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]TZ3321 ⁸³	IC ₅₀ = 2.13 nM	humans	CE
			[¹⁸ F]74 ⁸⁴	IC ₅₀ = 6.7 nM	NHPs	CE
P2X7R ⁸⁵	Microglia >> Astrocyte	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]JNJ-54173717 ⁸⁶	IC ₅₀ = 4.2 nM	humans	CE
			[¹⁸ F]JNJ-64413739 ⁸⁷	IC ₅₀ = 1 nM	humans	CE
			[¹¹ C]GSK1482160 ⁸⁸	IC ₅₀ = 3 nM	NHPs	CE
			[¹¹ C]SMW139 ⁸⁹	IC ₅₀ = 24.5 nM	humans	CE
P2Y12R ⁹⁰	Microglia (M2)	Downregulated	[¹¹ C]87 ⁹¹	IC ₅₀ = 6 nM	rodents	Limited brain uptake
CSF1R ⁹²	Microglia	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]AZ683 ⁹³	IC ₅₀ = 6 nM	NHPs	CE
			[¹¹ C]CPPC ⁹⁴	IC ₅₀ = 0.8 nM	NHPs	Low specific binding
RAGE ⁹⁵	Microglia	fRAGE: upregulated sRAGE: downregulated	[¹⁸ F]RAGER ⁹⁶	K _d = 15 nM	NHPs	CE
			[¹⁸ F]InRAGER ⁹⁷	K _d = 1 nM	rodents	Lack of efficient radiolabeling method
MERTK ⁹⁸	Microglia Astrocyte	Upregulated	[¹⁸ F]JHU16907 ⁹⁹	IC ₅₀ = 2.5 nM	rodents	CE

Target	Cell expression	Expression in neuroinflammation	Representative PET probes ^a	Binding affinity	Stage of research	comments or current status ^b
sEH ¹⁰⁰	Astrocyte	Upregulated	[¹⁸ F]FNDP ¹⁰¹	IC ₅₀ = 8.7 nM	humans	CE
PDE4B ¹⁰²	Microglia	Upregulated	[¹⁸ F]PF-06445974 ¹⁰³	IC ₅₀ < 1 nM	NHPs	CE
PDE4D ¹⁰⁴	Microglia	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]T1650 ¹⁰⁵	IC ₅₀ = 3.9 nM	humans	Problematic brain penetrant radiometabolites
PDE7 ¹⁰⁶	Microglia	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]MTP38 ¹⁰⁷	IC ₅₀ < 10 nM	humans	CE
CX3CR1 ¹⁰⁸	Microglia	Upregulated	[¹⁸ F]FBTTP ¹⁰⁹	K _i = 23 nM	rodents	CE
NLRP3 ¹¹⁰	Microglia	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]MCC950 ¹¹¹	IC ₅₀ = 8 nM	NHPs	Limited brain uptake
MPO ¹¹²	Microglia	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]AZD3241 ¹¹³	IC ₅₀ = 1.2 μM	NHPs	Irreversible binding
			[¹⁸ F]MAPP ¹¹⁴	--	rodents	CE
GSK-3 ¹¹⁵	Microglia Astrocyte	Upregulated	[¹¹ C]PF-618 ¹¹⁶	IC ₅₀ = 2.5 nM	NHPs	CE
			[¹¹ C]OCM-37 ¹¹⁶	IC ₅₀ = 1.5 nM	NHPs	CE
			[¹¹ C]OCM-44 ¹¹⁶	IC ₅₀ = 2 nM	NHPs	CE

Notes:

^a. This is a representative but not exhaustive list.

^b. "CE" is indicated as Continued Efforts (CE) on the evaluation (advantages or shortcomings) of referred radioligands; it is premature to conclude that whether they are successful before completing in-depth study.

^c. --, not applicable