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Synthesis and Characterization of Pt(IV) Fluorescein Conjugates to Investigate Pt(IV) Intracellular Transformations

Ying Song[†], Kogularamanan Suntharalingam[†], Jessica S. Yeung, Maksim Royzen[†], and Stephen J. Lippard^{†,*}

[†]Department of Chemistry, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, United States

Abstract

Pt(IV) anticancer compounds typically operate as prodrugs that are reduced in the hypoxic environment of cancer cells, losing two axial ligands in the process to generate active Pt(II) species. Here we report the synthesis of two fluorescent Pt(IV) prodrugs of cisplatin in order to image and evaluate the Pt(IV) reduction process in simulated and real biological environments. Treatment of the complexes dissolved in PBS buffer with reducing agents typically encountered in cells, glutathione or ascorbate, afforded a 3- to 5-fold fluorescence turn-on owing to reduction and loss of their fluorescein-based axial ligands, which are quenched when bound to platinum. Both Pt(IV) conjugates displayed moderate cytotoxicity against human cancer cell lines, with IC₅₀ values higher than that of cisplatin. Immunoblotting and DNA flow cytometry analyses of one of the complexes, Pt(IV)FL₂, revealed that it damages DNA, causing cell cycle arrest in S or G2/M depending on exposure time, with ultimately triggering of apoptotic cell death. Fluorescence microscopic studies prove that Pt(IV)FL₂ enters cells intact and undergoes reduction intracellularly. The results are best interpreted in terms of a model in which the axial fluorescein ligands are expelled through lysosomes, with the platinum(II) moiety generated in the process binding to genomic DNA, which results in cell death.

Keywords

platinum anticancer agent; DNA; apoptosis; cancer

INTRODUCTION

Cisplatin and other platinum-based anticancer drugs are widely used to treat cancer, including testicular, head and neck, prostate, ovarian, breast, and lung.^{1,2} Acquired resistance and unpleasant side effects, however, have prompted the investigation of Pt(IV) complexes as an alternative for safer and more effective delivery of platinum.^{3–5} Many octahedral Pt(IV) prodrugs have been reported with axial ligands designed to optimize physical, redox, and/or pharmacokinetic properties.^{6–9} Nevertheless, owing to their suboptimal efficacy, only a few Pt(IV) compounds have entered, or are under consideration

*To whom correspondence should be addressed: lippard@mit.edu.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting information

¹H, ¹³C, and ¹⁹⁵Pt NMR spectra of each compound, fluorescence images of cells, cell killing curves, UV-vis absorption and fluorescence spectra. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

for, clinical trials.^{2, 10, 11} A better understanding of their molecular mechanisms of action is necessary in order to generate potent Pt(IV) complexes with improved clinical outcomes.

Several Pt(IV) compounds in biological environments have been studied using elemental imaging techniques, such as electron microscopy, X-ray fluorescence, X-ray absorption near-edge spectroscopy (XANES), and micro-XANES.^{5, 12–14} Based on the results of these investigations, a general mechanism has been proposed in an attempt to unify the Pt(IV)-based prodrug approach, as illustrated in Figure 1.¹⁵ Pt(IV) compounds are considered to be kinetically inert. They can either enter cancer cells intact or following reduction by extracellular agents, such as glutathione or ascorbate. Reduction of Pt(IV) can also occur inside the cell, resulting in square-planar Pt(II) compounds after the loss of two axial ligands. The active Pt(II) species can then enter the nucleus and bind to genomic DNA.

Fluorescence imaging can provide a quantitative readout of dynamic processes that occur in live cells.¹⁶ In this respect, a Pt(IV)/Pt(II) redox-sensitive optical probe would be valuable for improving our understanding the biotransformation of Pt(IV) prodrugs. Specifically, a fluorescent probe sensitive to the oxidation state of platinum could be used to study cellular uptake, subcellular localization, and the kinetics of intracellular prodrug reductive activation. A small number of fluorescently labeled Pt(IV) compounds have recently been described in the literature.^{17–20} Notably, none of these compounds has been successfully used in live cell imaging to monitor Pt(IV) reduction. The present work attempts to fill this void by introducing two new fluorescent Pt(IV) complexes that can serve as reporters of prodrug activation in live cell imaging studies.

Here, we present the design and synthesis of two prodrugs of cisplatin, Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ and Pt(IV)FL₂ (Scheme 1). These Pt(IV)-conjugates have been used to image the transformation of Pt(IV) to Pt(II), a key step in Pt(IV) prodrug activation. Both probes contain fluorescein, an effective fluorescent reporter frequently applied in live cell imaging. Fluorescein was chosen because it (i) is non-toxic, (ii) displays excellent photophysical properties and gives good contrast against the background in cellular studies, (iii) can be readily synthesized on the gram-scale, and (iv) is routinely used in cell imaging and allows common filter sets to be used. In the parent Pt(IV) complexes, two fluorescein molecules are held in close proximity at opposing axial positions. This disposition of fluorescein groups was chosen based on the expectation of diminished luminescence, an OFF-state, owing to quenching through homo fluorescence resonance energy transfer (homo-FRET).²¹ The heavy metal effect can also contribute to quenching.²² The intracellular reduction of Pt(IV) to Pt(II) is envisaged to release the two axial fluoresceins and consequently restore their fluorescence (ON-state), as depicted in Scheme 1. Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ and Pt(IV)FL₂ are fluorescence probes that turn on upon activation. There are several advantages of such probes over conventional “always-on” probes. For instance, probes that can be activated (i) will turn on under specific conditions triggered by a specific biological event and (ii) display superior sensitivity over conventional probes because the signal is maximized upon activation while the background is minimized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Synthesis of fluorescein conjugated Pt(IV) complexes

The desired Pt(IV) compounds were prepared in four steps. In the first step, cisplatin was oxidized with H₂O₂ to form *c,c,t*-[PtCl₂(NH₃)₂(OH)₂], **1** (Scheme 2).⁵ Compound **1** was allowed to react with *N*-Boc aminopropanoic acid anhydride, **2**, to yield **3**. The Boc protecting groups were removed using trifluoroacetic acid to generate compound **4** with two terminal amino groups in the axial positions. The pendant amino groups were then used to introduce either thiourea or amide linkages to fluorescein, forming Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ or

Pt(IV)FL₂. Specifically, Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ was prepared by treating **4** with fluorescein isothiocyanate (FITC), whereas Pt(IV)FL₂ was synthesized by coupling **4** with fluorescein NHS ester. Both Pt(IV) compounds exhibit poor water solubility. Concentrated solutions were therefore prepared in DMF and diluted with aqueous buffer immediately prior to all photophysical measurements and biological studies.

Photophysical properties

We chose, as fluorescein axial ligands, FITC-COOH and FL-COOH in order to compare their absorption and fluorescence properties when attached to the Pt(IV) center and before and after reduction-triggered release (Scheme 1). The photophysical properties of the Pt(IV) complexes and the corresponding axial ligands were measured in pH 7.4 PBS buffer at 25 °C. The results are listed in Table 1. The absorption and emission spectra of FITC-COOH and FL-COOH are characteristic of the fluorescein chromophore. Both axial ligands have an absorbance maximum at 493 nm and a strong fluorescence emission signal at 520 nm. The fluorescence quantum yields, measured by using fluorescein as a standard, are 0.77 for FITC-COOH and 0.90 for FL-COOH. The additional carboxylate group has minimal effect on the emission properties of fluorescein.

The extinction coefficients of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ and Pt(IV)FL₂ are approximately twice those of the corresponding axial ligands, which is consistent with the presence of two chromophores per Pt(IV) complex. On the other hand, the fluorescence quantum yields of the Pt(IV) complexes are more than 2.5-fold lower than those of the corresponding axial ligands. This partial fluorescence quenching is attributed to homo-FRET between the two chromophores.²³ We do not exclude the possibility of heavy metal quenching, which has been previously described for other Pt(IV) complexes.¹⁹ Figure S1 (Supporting Information, SI) illustrates the overlap between excitation and emission spectra of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂, which is necessary for the homo-FRET quenching process to occur.

Influence of reducing agents on fluorescence

The effects of two biologically relevant reducing agents, glutathione (GSH) and sodium ascorbate (Asc), on the fluorescence of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ and Pt(IV)FL₂ were investigated under simulated physiological conditions (PBS, pH 7.4, 37 °C). The intracellular concentration of GSH is ~ 0.5–10 mM, whereas plasma concentrations of this reducing agent are typically in the micromolar range (2–20 μM).²⁵ The plasma concentration of Asc is approximately 50 μM, and the intracellular concentrations are several orders of magnitude higher.^{26, 27} In an attempt to mimic biologically relevant concentrations, we studied the responses of 5 μM Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ or Pt(IV)FL₂ to a 10- or 1000- fold excess of Asc or GSH. The fluorescence at 520 nm was observed as a function of time (Figures 2, S2, and S3 in SI).

A five-fold fluorescence turn-on occurred upon treatment of 5 μM Pt(IV)FL₂ with 5 mM GSH over a 7 h period. Based on quantum yields (Table 1), such a turn-on is consistent with the release of both axial ligands following Pt(IV) reduction. By comparison, FL-COOH did not show a fluorescence response to the addition of GSH (Figure S4). The release of the axial ligands was further confirmed by LC-MS analysis. A 100-fold excess of GSH or Asc was mixed with Pt(IV)FL₂ in PBS at pH 7.4 and the absorbance of the effluent was monitored at 490 nm. Over time, the Pt(IV)FL₂ peak decreased in the presence of GSH or Asc with half-lives of 2.0 h and 1.2 h, respectively, whereas fluorescence due to the axial ligand FL-COOH increased (Figures S5, S6). When Pt(IV)FL₂ and 100 equiv of GSH were mixed in PBS without adjusting the pH to 7.4, no obvious peak corresponding to the formation of FL-COOH was observed. This result indicates that reduction of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ by GSH is pH-sensitive and that, under acidic conditions, Pt(IV) reduction by GSH is slow.

Such retardation of the rate of reduction is most likely due to the protonation state of the thiol.

A small increase in fluorescence intensity was observed in PBS at pH 7.4 in the absence of any reducing agents, which depends both on pH and solution composition (Figure 3). At pH 7.4, there was a 1.8-fold increase of fluorescence in 6 h, whereas at pH 6.0 the increase was 1.2-fold. Under acidic conditions (sodium citrate buffer, pH = 4.5 and 5.5) there was minimal enhancement in emission, suggestive of acid mediated stability. This behavior was further investigated using LC-MS. In PBS at pH 7.4 the axial ligands of Pt(IV)FL₂ detach over the time period of 7 h, $t_{1/2}$ = 5.8 h (Figure S7). Remarkably, in Millipore water (pH ~7) no obvious dissociation was observed over the same time period (Figure S8). The phenomenon of axial ligand hydrolysis in Pt(IV) complexes has been reported in recent literature.²⁸ Nonetheless, the dissociation rate of FL-COOH from Pt(IV)FL₂ in PBS, pH 7.4, was three to four times slower than that in the presence of a reducing agent, GSH or Asc, under the same conditions. It appears that reduction is essential for complete activation of the Pt(IV) compounds.

There are two possible mechanisms to account for the release of the axial ligands and concomitant increase in emission intensity, namely, ligand substitution and hydrolysis. Pt(IV) complexes are in general kinetically inert to ligand displacement by water or similar nucleophiles. Hydrolysis of an acetate ligand in the axial position of a Pt(IV) complex is determined by the Lewis acidity of the metal ion and can be facilitated by hydroxide ion under basic conditions through deprotonation of the equatorial amines. Additional studies beyond the scope of this work are required to establish the mechanism.

In order to investigate the potential of the Pt(IV) compounds as live cell imaging and therapeutic agents, their stability was studied in culture medium (DMEM) and human plasma. Upon addition of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ to DMEM or human blood plasma at a final concentration of 5 μ M, an ~ 2.5-fold increase in fluorescence occurred over the course of 7 hours (Figure 4). This enhancement can be attributed to reduction of Pt(IV) by agents such as L-cysteine, present in both solutions. However, the fluorescence enhancement is 2–3 fold lower than that observed in the presence of biomimetic concentrations of exogenous GSH or Asc. Therefore, Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ is unlikely to undergo full reduction in DMEM or plasma and can be considered sufficiently stable for use in cellular studies.

Cytotoxicity studies

The antiproliferative activities of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂, Pt(IV)FL₂, and cisplatin as a control were evaluated by MTT assay in the human cervical cancer cell line HeLa and human lung cancer cell line, A549. Table 2 summarizes the 50% growth inhibitory concentration (IC₅₀) values of these compounds, and Figure S9 shows representative dose–response curves. Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ and Pt(IV)FL₂ display similar toxicity profiles. Pt(IV)FL₂, however, is slightly more toxic than Pt(IV)(FITC)₂. Both complexes exhibit lower potency compared to cisplatin (10–20 fold). Overall, the IC₅₀ values are analogous to those reported for other Pt(IV) compounds.¹⁵ We do not expect the fluorescein moiety to cause cell toxicity in the μ M range, so cell killing is likely to result from the activated Pt(II) species produced inside cells.

Fluorescence cell imaging

The most important property of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ and Pt(IV)FL₂ in the present context is that they allow us to monitor cellular uptake and conversion of Pt(IV) to Pt(II) by fluorescence microscopy. To evaluate this capability, HeLa cells were incubated with 15 or 50 μ M Pt(IV)FL₂ for 1, 3, 8, 24, or 48 h. During the final 30 min of incubation, a nuclear stain, Hoechst 33258, and a lysosomal stain, LysoTracker[®] Red DND-99, were added to examine

the sub-cellular distribution of the observed fluorescence signals. The results of the fluorescence microscopic experiments are presented in Figures 4 and S10. After a one hour treatment with 15 μM Pt(IV)FL₂, there is a pronounced intracellular green signal, a punctate pattern originating from the fluorescein chromophore. With time, the green fluorescence becomes more intense and more uniformly dispersed within the cell. Control experiments indicated that the axial ligand, FL-COOH, has very poor cell permeability and does not produce noticeable intracellular green fluorescence when incubated with cells (Figure S11). This finding leads us to conclude that the green fluorescence observed upon treatment with Pt(IV)FL₂ originates from fluorescein entering the cell as part of an intact Pt(IV) complex.

We next quantitated the time-dependent increase in intracellular fluorescein fluorescence with ImageJ software. The fluorescence intensity was averaged over 10 cells and adjusted for background for each time point. Quantitation of the fluorescence microscopy data, shown in Figure S12, reveals continuous uptake over 24 h. We are unable to derive absolute concentrations of platinum or fluorescein from the image data because the fluorescence increase is a consequence of both free and bound fluorescein. There is a lack of an internal reference for quantitation of fluorescence intensity inside cells.

Co-localization experiments showed that the green fluorescence overlaps with the lysosomal stain as a function of time. No overlap with a nuclear stain was observed. Figure 6 shows that the Pearson's coefficient,²⁹ a measure of the correlation of the green fluorescein signal and the red lysoTracker signal, increases during the period of exposure. We therefore propose that Pt(IV)FL₂ enters the cells, undergoes reduction and releases its axial ligands to form an active Pt(II) species. The co-localization data suggest that, upon release from the Pt(IV) coordination sphere, the axial ligands are sequestered by lysosomes. The active Pt(II) species, on the other hand, presumably enters the nucleus and interacts with genomic DNA. In support of this mechanism, DNA from Pt(IV)FL₂ or cisplatin treated HeLa cells was isolated and the platinum content analyzed. Comparable levels of platinum, ~ 1 pmol/ μg of DNA, were associated with DNA of cells treated with either Pt(IV)FL₂ or cisplatin (Figure S13).

Cell-based analysis

To understand the effect of Pt(IV)FL₂ on cell cycle progression, DNA-flow cytometric studies were carried out. HeLa cells were treated with Pt(IV)FL₂ at the IC₅₀ concentration of 15 μM for 24 or 48 hours and the cell cycle distribution was analyzed by flow cytometry and compared to that of untreated cells (Figures S14–17). Twenty-four hours after addition of Pt(IV)FL₂ to the cells there was an accumulation in S phase, a 27.0% increase relative to untreated cells. Arrest at G2/M occurred after 48 h. A similar cell cycle profile was obtained following treatment with 20 μM cisplatin, a 24.6 % increase in S phase after 24 h and a 63.0% in G2/M phase after 48 h. These flow cytometric data reveal that Pt(IV)FL₂ induces cellular responses similar to those induced by cisplatin, as expected for intracellular conversion to this compound.

To gain further insight into the cellular response evoked by Pt(IV)FL₂, immunoblotting analyses were carried out. Changes in expression levels of proteins associated with the DNA damage response pathway and apoptosis were monitored (Figure 7). Up-regulation of the phosphorylated form of histone H2AX (γ -H2AX) was detected upon incremental addition of Pt(IV)FL₂, indicative of DNA damage.^{30, 31} This observation is consistent with translocation of the platinum moiety to the nucleus following intracellular reduction. Cancer cells can circumvent DNA damage by one of several DNA repair mechanisms, including nucleotide excision and mismatch repair. If DNA damage is extreme, a cell that is unable to repair itself will undergo apoptosis. Apoptosis is executed by a family of cysteine proteases called caspases, which are responsible for the proteolytic cleavage of many key proteins

including the nuclear enzyme poly(ADP-ribose) polymerase, PARP-1.³² Caspases are activated by proteolytic processing of the inactive zymogen into the cleaved active form. Upon treatment with Pt(IV)FL₂ a clear increase in the levels of cleaved caspase-3, -7, and -9 were observed, suggesting that Pt(IV)FL₂ induces apoptosis. Furthermore, the caspase-3 substrate, PARP-1, which is involved in DNA repair, is also cleaved upon Pt(IV)FL₂ addition, providing further evidence for apoptosis. These cellular responses are similar to those induced by cisplatin treatment. These data therefore support the hypothesis that the platinum fluorescein complexes act as prodrugs for cisplatin.

SUMMARY

We report two cisplatin prodrugs, Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ and Pt(IV)FL₂. The fluorescent ligands attached to the axial positions allow imaging of the reduction of Pt(IV) reduction. Addition of the biologically relevant reducing agent GSH results in ligand dissociation and a 5-fold turn-on in fluorescence. The Pt(IV) agents are suitable for live cell imaging as demonstrated with HeLa cells. After cell entry, Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ releases its axial ligands, reflecting reduction. The axial ligands accumulate in lysosomes over time, suggesting excretion through the lysosomal pathway. Intracellular reduction with axial ligand expulsion also results in formation of cytotoxic Pt(II) species. Our data are consistent with these activated species entering the nucleus, causing genomic DNA damage, and inducing apoptotic cell death. Toxicity studies indicate that both Pt(IV) complexes are potent cytotoxic agents against cervical and lung cancer cell lines, to an extent similar to that of clinically tested Pt(IV) compounds. Flow cytometry and immunoblotting experiments confirm the induction of apoptosis. Therefore the two Pt(IV) compounds can be utilized to study intracellular Pt(IV) reduction and have potential as anti-cancer therapeutics.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

General considerations

Reactions were carried out in a fume hood in the dark. Solvents and reagents were used as received from commercial sources without further drying or purification.

Instrumentation

NMR measurements were recorded on a Bruker DPX-400 NMR spectrometer or a 400 Bruker NMR spectrometer in the Department of Chemistry Instrumentation Facility at MIT at 25 °C with either chloroform-*d* (CDCl₃), methanol-*d*₄ (CD₃OD), or *N,N*-dimethylformamide-*d*₇ (DMF-*d*₇) as the solvent. All chemical shifts (δ) are reported in parts per million (ppm). ¹H and ¹³C NMR spectra were referenced internally to residual solvent peaks. ¹⁹⁵Pt NMR spectra were referenced externally to K₂PtCl₄ in D₂O (δ = -1628 ppm). IR samples were prepared as KBr pellets and Fourier transform infrared spectra were recorded with a ThermoNicolet Avatar 360 spectrophotometer using *OMNIC* software. Electrospray ionization mass spectrometry (ESI-MS) measurements were recorded on an Agilent Technologies 1100 series LC-MSD trap. Graphite furnace atomic absorption spectroscopy was carried out using a Perkin-Elmer AAnalyst600 GFAAS. All spectroscopic characterization of newly prepared Pt(IV) compounds are provided in the SI, Figure S18–S34.

Photophysical measurements

Emission spectra were acquired with a Photon Technology International QM-4/2003 fluorimeter. 3 μ L of a 5 mM stock solution of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ or Pt(IV)FL₂ in DMF was diluted to 3 mL in PBS, pH 7.4, to make a 5 μ M aqueous solution of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ or Pt(IV)FL₂ for all fluorescence studies. Optical absorption spectra were acquired with a Cary

1E spectrophotometer. Quantum yields for fluorescence were measured using fluorescein in 0.01M NaOH (aq) as the reference over a range of five different absorbance values with the highest absorbance being no more than 0.1 A. U.

General cell culture conditions

Human cervical cancer cells, HeLa, and lung carcinoma cells A549 were obtained from ATCC. Cells were grown at 37 °C in 5% CO₂ in a humidified incubator. All cells were grown in DMEM complemented with 10% FBS, and 1% penicillin/streptomycin.

Cytotoxicity assay

The colorimetric MTT (3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide) assay was used to evaluate the cytotoxicity of the platinum complexes. On day one, cells were plated in 96-well plates at a cell density of 1×10^3 cells/well in 100 μ L of DMEM and incubated for 24 h. On day two, the medium was removed and cells were treated with medium containing platinum complexes at the following concentrations (μ M): 100, 50, 25, 12.5, 6.25, 3.13, 1.56, 0.78, and 0.39. On day four, the medium was removed and cells were incubated with 90 μ L of fresh medium and 10 μ L of MTT solution (5 mg/mL in PBS) per well. Cells were incubated in the dark for 2 h at 37 °C. At the end of the incubation, the MTT solution was then replaced with 100 μ L of DMSO per well to dissolve the formed purple crystals. The absorbance of the purple formazan was recorded with a BioTek Synergy HT multidetection microplate reader at 550 nm.

Fluorescence microscopy

Images were acquired on a Zeiss Axiovert 200 M inverted epifluorescence microscope equipped with an EM-CCD digital camera (Hamamatsu) and an X-Cite 120 metal halide lamp (EXFO). Differential interference contrast (DIC) and fluorescence images were obtained using an oil immersion 63 \times objective lens, with an exposure time ranging from 250 ms to 1.75 s. Fluorescence emission was detected using Zeiss filter sets as follows: DAPI channel, Filter Set 49, excitation G 365, beamsplitter FT 395, emission BP 445/50; FITC channel, Filter Set 38 HE, excitation BP 470/40, beamsplitter FT 495, emission BP 525/50; red channel, Filter Set 43 HE, excitation BP 550/25, beamsplitter FT 570, emission BP 605/70. The microscope was operated with Volocity software (Improvision) and images were analyzed with Volocity software.

Flow cytometry

HeLa cells (1×10^6 cells) were incubated with 16.3 μ M of Pt(IV)FL₂ for 24 or 48 h at 37 °C. Cells were harvested from adherent cultures by trypsinization; floating cells were recovered from culture media to assess cell viability. Following centrifugation at 1000 rpm for 5 min, cells were washed with PBS and fixed with 70% ethanol in PBS. Fixed cells were collected by centrifugation at 2500 rpm for 3 min, washed with PBS and centrifuged as before. Cellular pellets were re-suspended in 50 μ g/mL propidium iodide in PBS for nucleic acids staining and treated with 100 μ g/mL RNase. DNA content was measured on a FACSCalibur HTS-1 flow cytometer (BD Biosciences) using laser excitation at 488 nm and 10,000 events per sample were acquired. Cell cycle profiles were analysed using the ModFit software (Verity Software House).

Western blot analyses

HeLa cells (5×10^5 cells) were incubated with Pt(IV)FL₂ (10, 20, and 30 μ M) for 72 h at 37 °C. Cells were washed with PBS, scraped into SDS-PAGE loading buffer (64 mM Tris-HCl (pH6.8)/9.6% glycerol/2% SDS/5% β -mercaptoethanol/0.01% Bromophenol Blue) and incubated at 95 °C for 10 min. Whole cell lysates were resolved by 4–20% sodium

docecylsulphate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE; 200 V for 1 h) followed by electro transfer to polyvinylidene fluoride membrane, PVDF (350 mA for 1 h). Membranes were blocked in 5% (w/v) non-fat milk in PBST (PBS/0.1% Tween 20) and incubated with one of the following primary antibodies: anti-cleaved caspase-3 (Cell Signalling Technology), anti-cleaved caspase-7 (Cell Signalling Technology), anti-cleaved caspase-9 (Cell Signalling Technology), anti-cleaved PARP-1 (Cell Signalling Technology), anti-phospho-Histone H2A.X (Cell Signalling Technology) or anti- α -actin (Sigma Aldrich). After incubation with horseradish peroxidase-conjugated secondary antibodies, immune complexes were detected with the ECL detection reagent (BioRad) and analysed using an imager fitted with a chemiluminescence filter.

Synthesis of c,c,t -[Pt(NH₃)₂Cl₂(OCO(CH₂)₂NHBoc)]₂, **3**

A suspension of c,c,t -[PtCl₂(NH₃)₂(OH)₂], **1**, (200 mg, 0.599 mmol) and *N*-Boc aminopropanoic acid anhydride, **2**, (1.08 g, 2.99 mmol) in DMF (2 mL) was stirred overnight at 50 °C. The resulting clear yellow solution was clear yellow and filtered through a pad of Celite®. DMF was removed under a stream of compressed air and a small amount of methanol was used to dissolve the reaction residue. This methanol solution was added in a dropwise into water with stirring. A white precipitate formed immediately and was isolated by centrifugation. The final compound was obtained after washing with water and dried under vacuum. Yield: 156 mg (38.5%). mp. 183–185 °C. ¹H{¹³C} NMR (400 MHz, DMF-*d*₇): /ppm 6.98 – 6.44 (m, 6H), 3.18 (q, 4H), 2.37 (t, 4H), 1.35 (s, 18H). ¹³C{¹H} NMR (101 MHz, DMF-*d*₇): /ppm 179.89, 156.24, 78.09, 37.43, 36.71, 28.14. ¹⁹⁵Pt{¹H} NMR (86 MHz, DMF-*d*₇): /ppm 1156. IR (KBr, cm⁻¹): 3456, 3220, 2979, 2926, 1692, 1673, 1640, 1592, 1511, 1438, 1368, 1335, 1303, 1251, 1232, 1167, 1063, 971, 853, 779, 680, 560. HRMS (–): *m/z* [M–H][–] calcd.: 675.1316, obsd.: 675.1331. Anal. Calc. for C₁₆H₃₄N₄O₈PtCl₂: C, 28.41; H, 5.07; N, 8.28. Found: C, 28.84; H, 5.11; N, 8.33.

Synthesis of c,c,t -[Pt(NH₃)₂Cl₂(OCO(CH₂)₂NH₂)]₂·TFA, **4**·TFA

Solid white c,c,t -[Pt(NH₃)₂Cl₂(OCO(CH₂)₂NHBoc)]₂, **3**, (50.0 mg, 0.134 mmol) was dissolved in 1 mL of TFA/DCM mixture (1:1, v/v) and stirred for 0.5 h at room temperature. The TFA solution was removed under a stream of compressed air. A small amount of DCM was used to redissolve the residue. The resulting solution was added in a drop wise manner to an excess of cold diethyl ether. A precipitate was formed immediately and collected by centrifugation to yield a white, hygroscopic solid, which was used directly without purification in the next step of synthesis. Yield: 43.85 mg (68.8%). ¹H{¹³C} NMR (400 MHz, D₂O): /ppm 7.83 – 7.20 (m, 4H), 6.40 (dd, *J* = 70.1, 50.4 Hz, 6H), 3.09 (s, 4H), 2.70 (d, *J* = 10.2 Hz, 4H). ¹³C{¹H} NMR (101 MHz, D₂O): /ppm 178.99, 36.08, 32.35. ¹⁹⁵Pt{¹H} NMR (86 MHz, D₂O): /ppm 1070.80. HRMS (+): *m/z* [M+H]⁺ calcd: 447.0409, obsd: 447.0401.

Synthesis of c,c,t -[Pt(NH₃)₂Cl₂(OCO(CH₂)₂NH(FITC))]₂, [Pt(IV)(FITC)]₂

Compound **4** (44 mg, 0.097 mmol) and FITC (33 mg, 0.0850 mmol) were dissolved in 2 mL of anhydrous DMF. Upon addition of DIPEA (20 μ L, 0.115 mmol), the yellow reaction mixture changed to a darker orange color and was stirred vigorously overnight at room temperature. DMF was removed under a stream of compressed air. The resulting residue was dissolved in a small amount of methanol and added in a drop wise manner into water. An orange solid was formed immediately, which was further washed with diethyl ether and water. The solids were collected by centrifugation and dried under vacuum to yield an orange colored solid. Yield 19 mg (yield 44.7%). ¹H{¹³C} NMR (400 MHz, DMF-*d*₇): /ppm 10.34(s, 2H), 8.53 (s, 4H), 8.25 (s, 4H), 7.90 (d, *J* = 8.4 Hz, 2H), 7.26 (d, *J* = 8.3 Hz, 2H), 6.88 (s, 6H), 6.79-6.51 (m, 12H), 3.78 (d, *J* = 6.7 Hz, 4H), 2.62 (d, *J* = 7.1 Hz,

4H). $^{13}\text{C}\{^1\text{H}\}$ NMR (100 MHz, DMF- d_7): /ppm. 181.74, 180.61, 169.58, 160.83, 153.22, 142.60, 130.12, 129.97, 125.03, 117.32, 113.41, 111.14, 103.13, 41.56, 36.19. $^{195}\text{Pt}\{^1\text{H}\}$ NMR (86 MHz, DMF- d_7): /ppm 1169.9. ESI-MS (-): m/z [M-H] $^-$ calcd: 1253.1, obsd: 1253.6. HRMS (-): m/z [M-2H] $^{2-}$ calcd: 626.0459, obsd: 626.0464.

Synthesis of **c,c,t-[Pt(NH₃)₂Cl₂(OCO(CH₂)₂NH(FL))₂] [Pt(IV)FL₂]**

57 mg (0.1207 mmol) of fluorescein NHS ester and 37 mg (0.04248mmol) of **4** were dissolved in 1 mL of anhydrous DMF. 20 uL (0.115 mmol) of DIPEA was subsequently added into the reaction mixture. The reaction mixture was stirred overnight at room temperature in dark. DMF was removed under a stream of compressed air. The residue was dissolved in a small amount of methanol, and the solution was added in a dropwise manner into water. Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ was obtained after filtration and washed with water and diethyl ether. The final product was obtained after drying in vacuum as a light yellow solid. Yield 10 mg, 6.3%. $^1\text{H}\{^{13}\text{C}\}$ NMR (400 MHz, DMF- d_7): /ppm 8.79 (s, 1H), 8.30 (1H, d), 8.29 (d, 1H), 6.80-6.60 (m, 8H), 3.51 (t, 2H), 2.50 (t, 2H). $^{13}\text{C}\{^1\text{H}\}$ NMR (100 MHz, DMF- d_7): /ppm 179.65, 168.61, 165.44, 160.51, 153.49, 152.69, 141.44, 129.83, 129.63, 129.07, 125.01, 123.06, 113.09, 110.05, 102.71, 37.18, 36.18. $^{195}\text{Pt}\{^1\text{H}\}$ NMR (86 MHz, DMF- d_7): /ppm 1159.27. HRMS(-): m/z [M-H] $^-$ calcd: 1191.1232, obsd: 1191.1247.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

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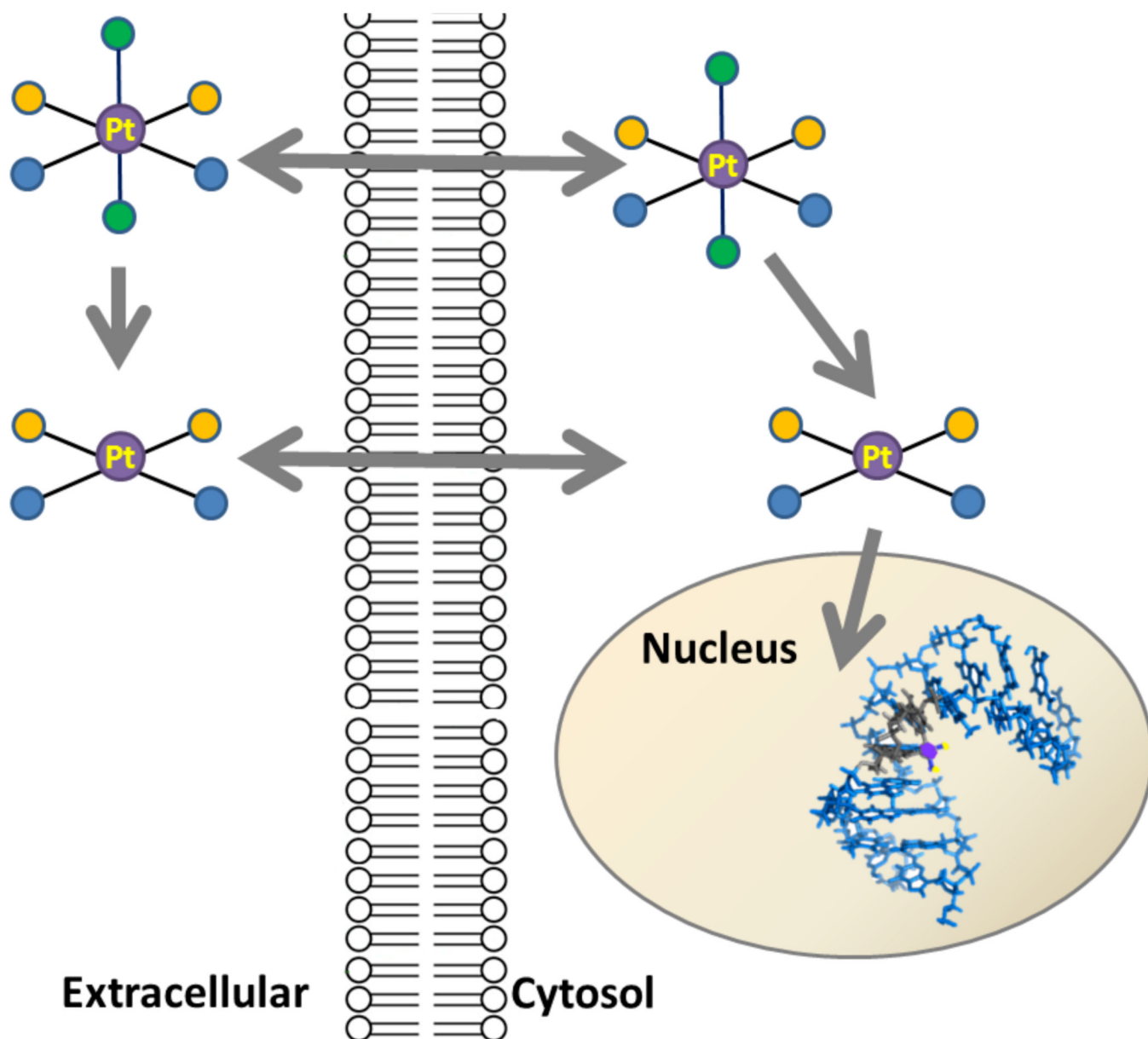


Figure 1.
Schematic illustration of Pt(IV) prodrug activation in a cellular environment.

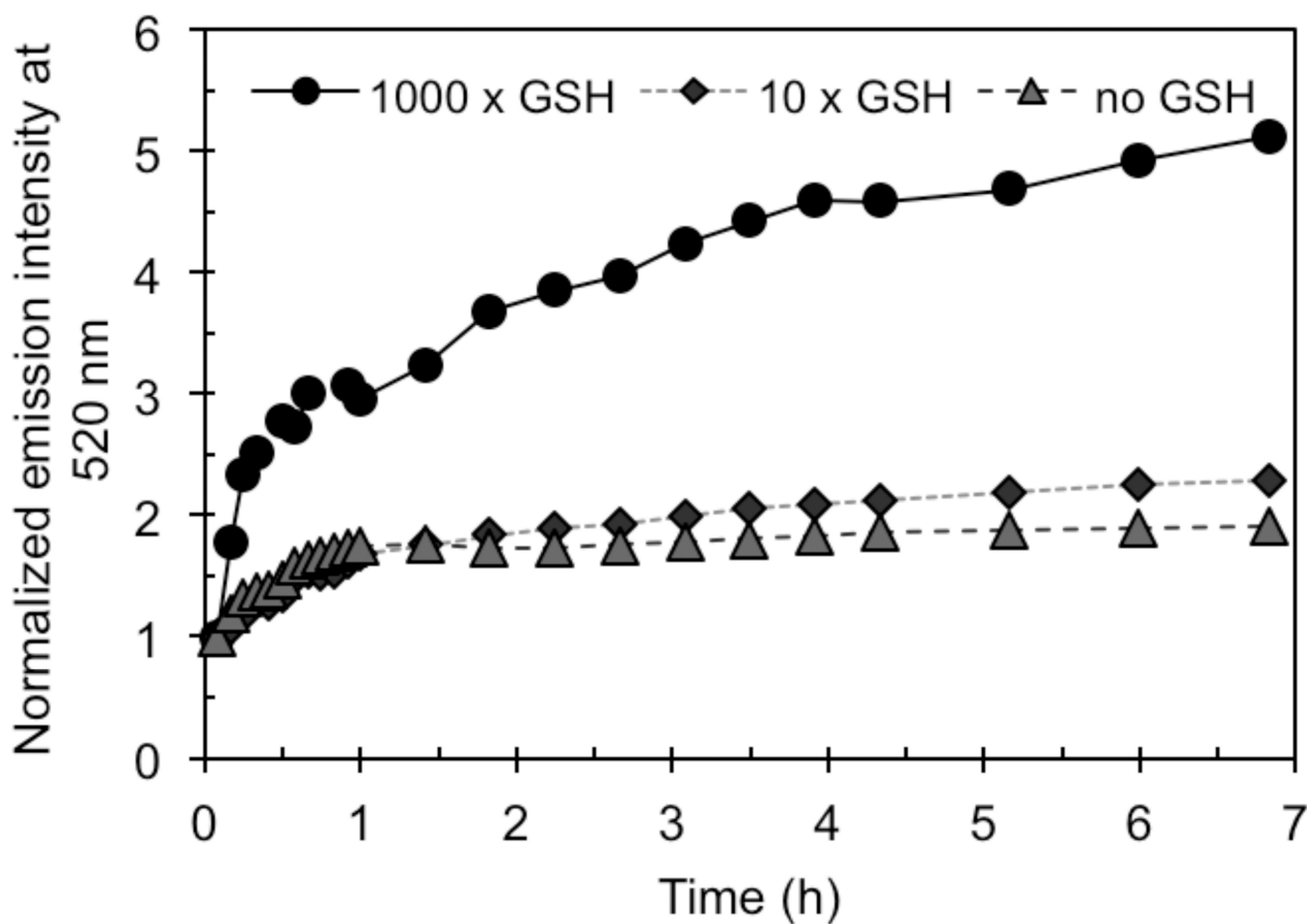


Figure 2. Fluorescence intensity at 520 nm of 5 μM Pt(IV)FL₂ in PBS, pH 7.4 at 37 °C following addition of varying concentrations of GSH (50 μM or 5 mM) over time. The data are an average of three independent determinations and the error associated with each point is <1%.

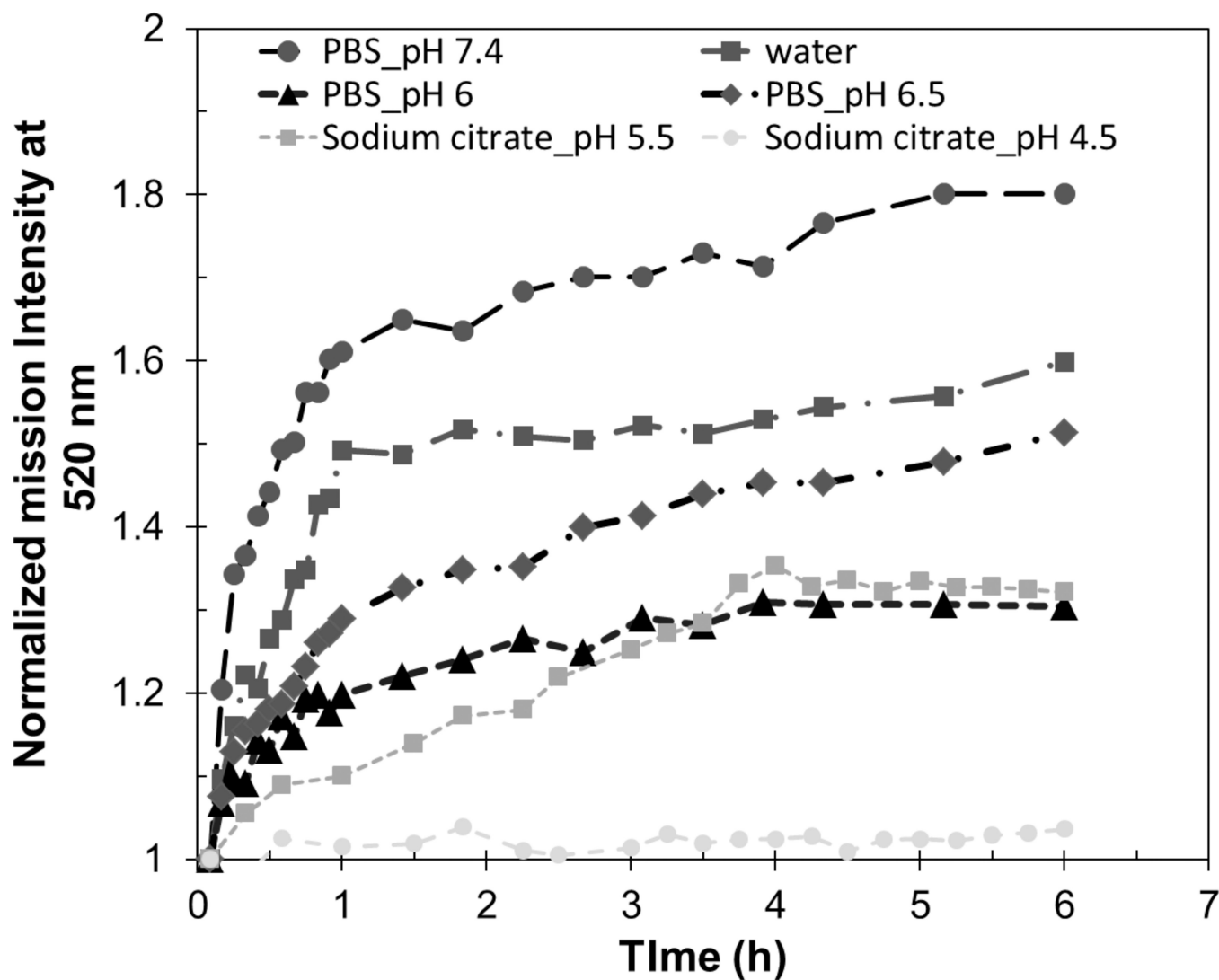


Figure 3. Fluorescence intensity of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ at 520 nm over time in PBS buffer at pH values of 6.0, 6.5, and 7.4, sodium citrate buffer at pH values 4.5 and 5.5, and in unbuffered Millipore (pH ~7.0) water over time, at 37 °C. The data are an average of three independent determinations and the error associated with each point is <1%.

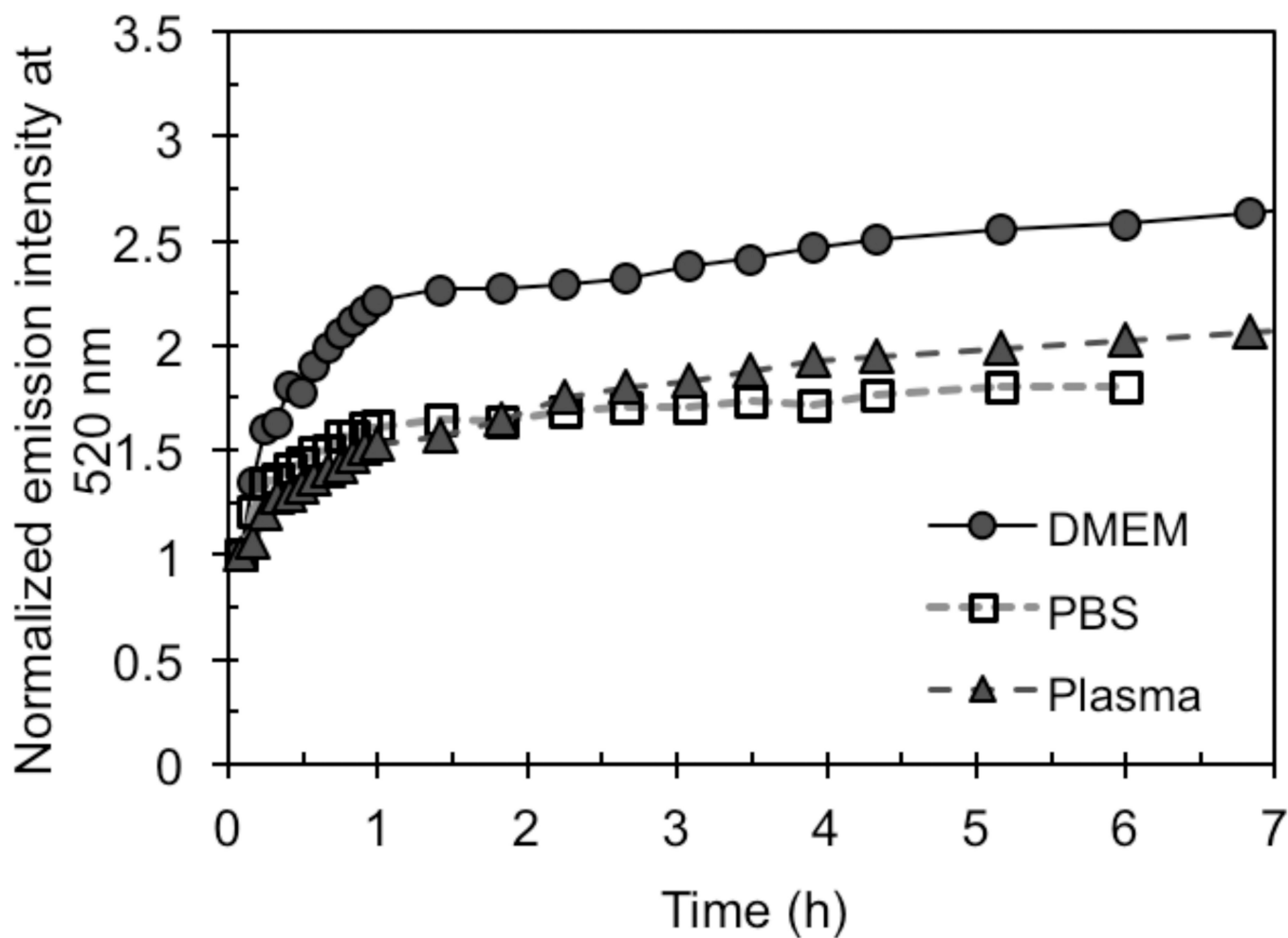


Figure 4. Fluorescence intensity of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ at 520 nm over time in DMEM cell culture medium (without phenol red), and human plasma (1:4 dilution in PBS) in comparison to that in PBS, pH 7.4 at 37 °C. The data are an average of three independent determinations and the error associated with each point is <1%.

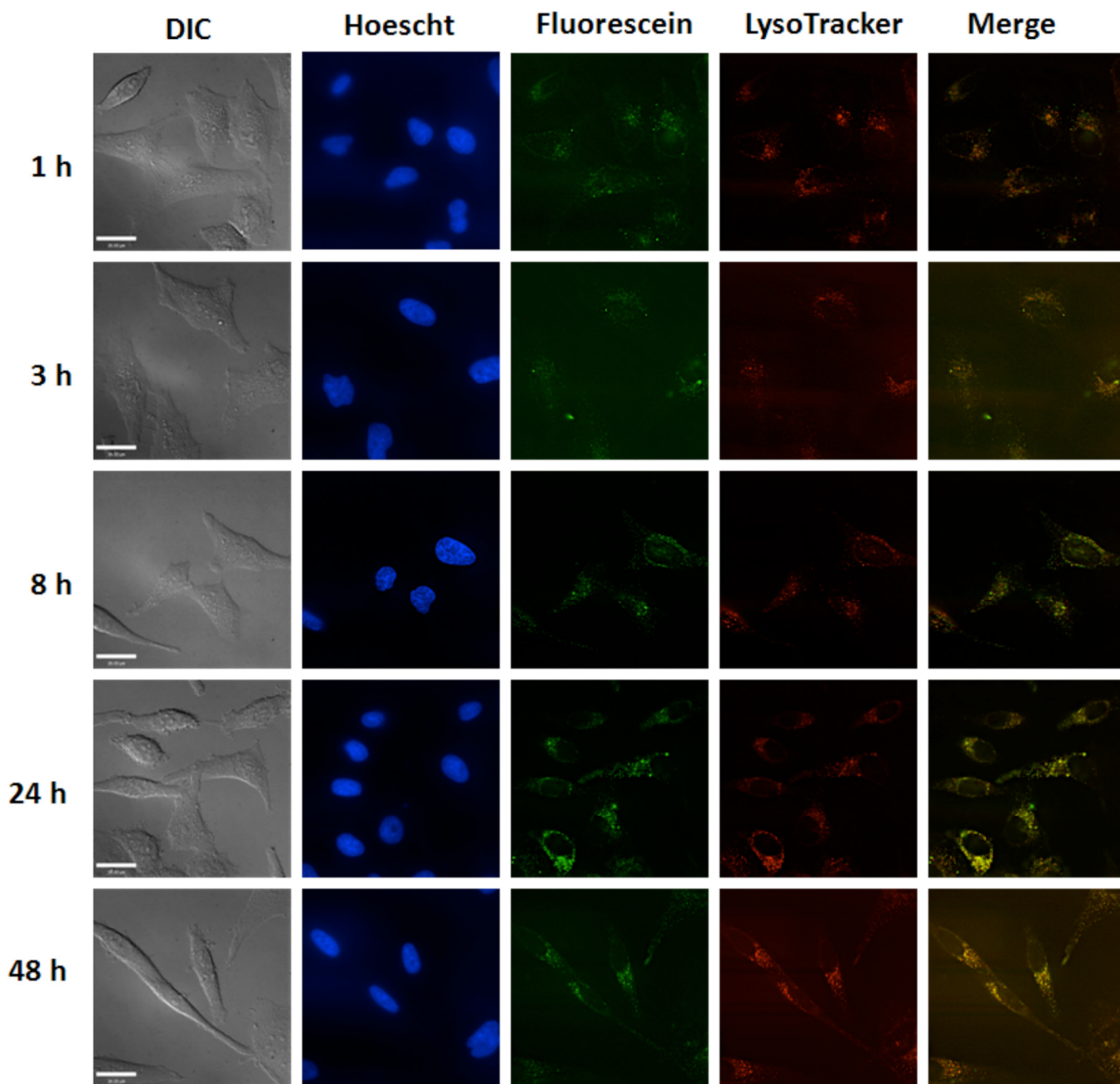


Figure 5. Fluorescence images of HeLa cells treated with 15 μM of Pt(IV)FL₂ for 1, 3, 8, 24, and 48 h. Scale bar = 26 μm . In addition, cells were incubated with Hoechst (10 μM) and LysoTracker[®] (10 μM) for 30 min.

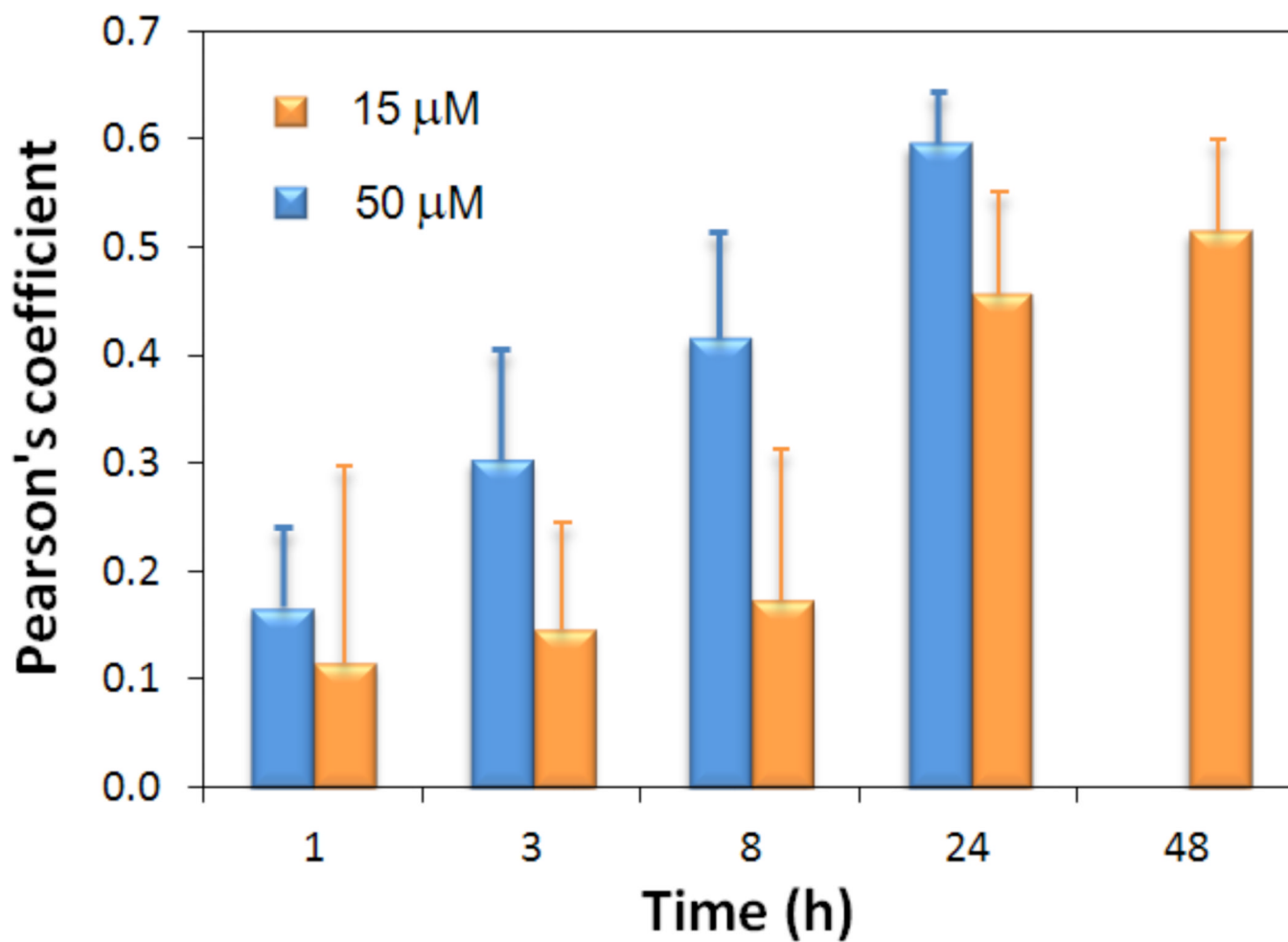


Figure 6. Pearson's coefficients of the correlation of the green fluorescein signal and the red lysoTracker[®] signal from fluorescence images of HeLa cells treated with 15 μM and 50 μM Pt(IV)FL₂ at 1, 3, 5, 24, and 48 h. Each data point represents the average of nine regions in different cells of the same dish.

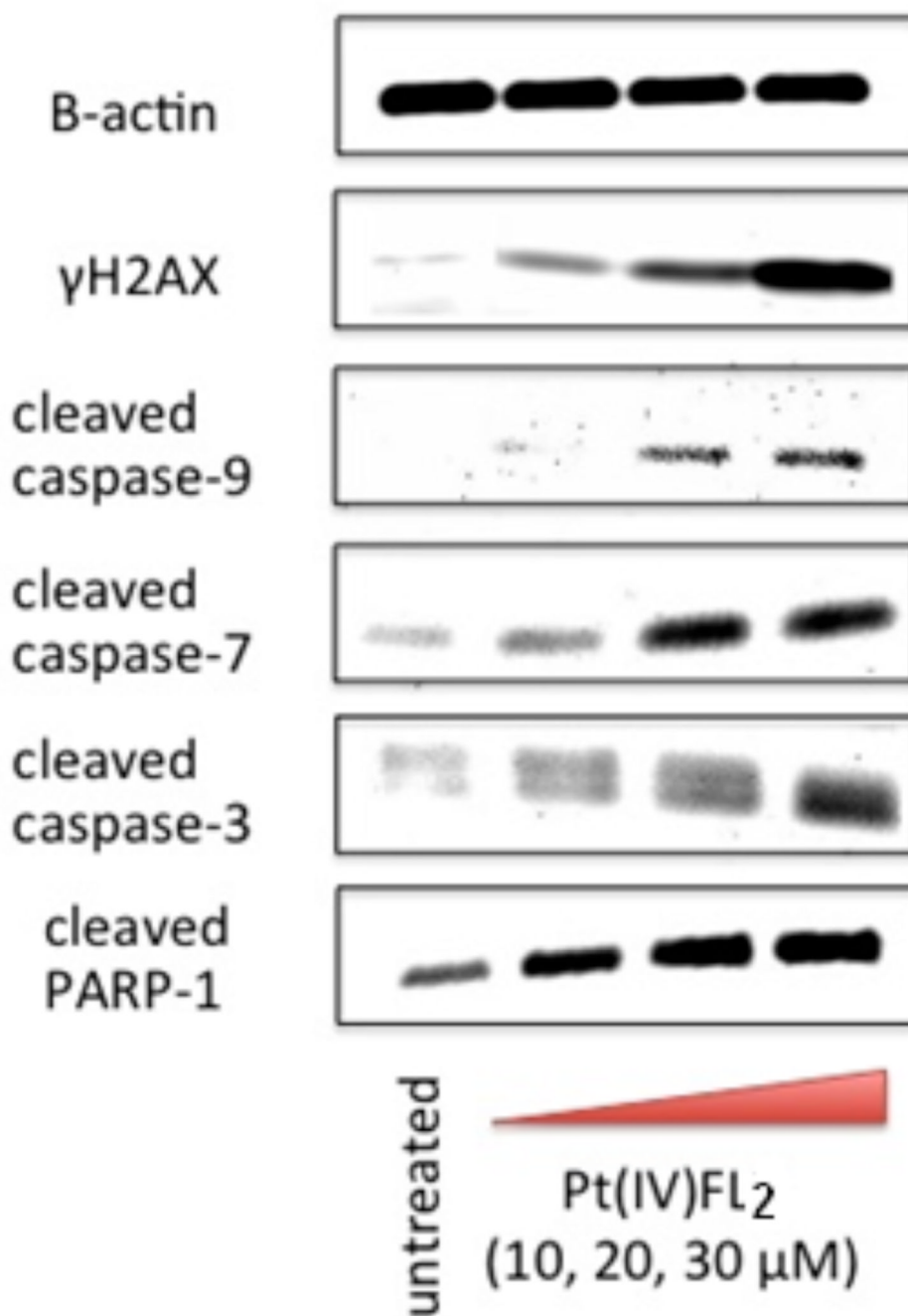


Figure 7. Analysis of protein expression in HeLa cells following 72 h incubation with Pt(IV)FL₂ at 0, 10, 20, or 30 μM.

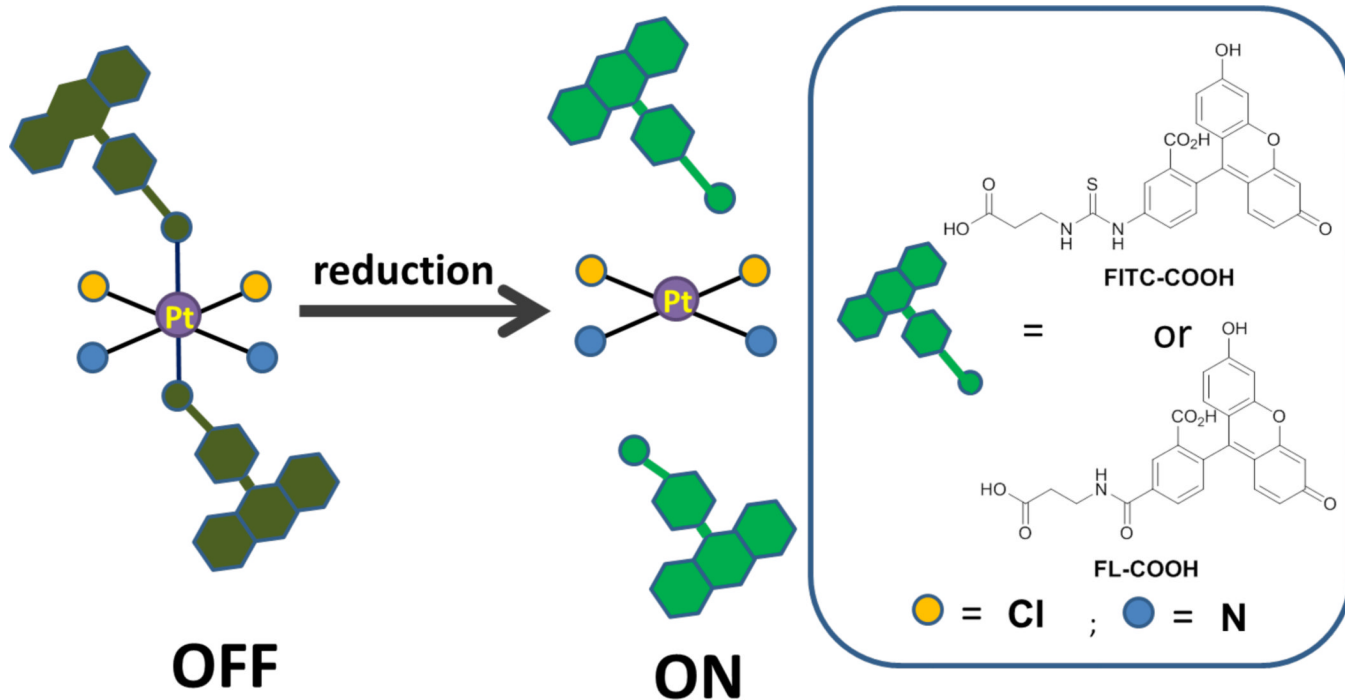
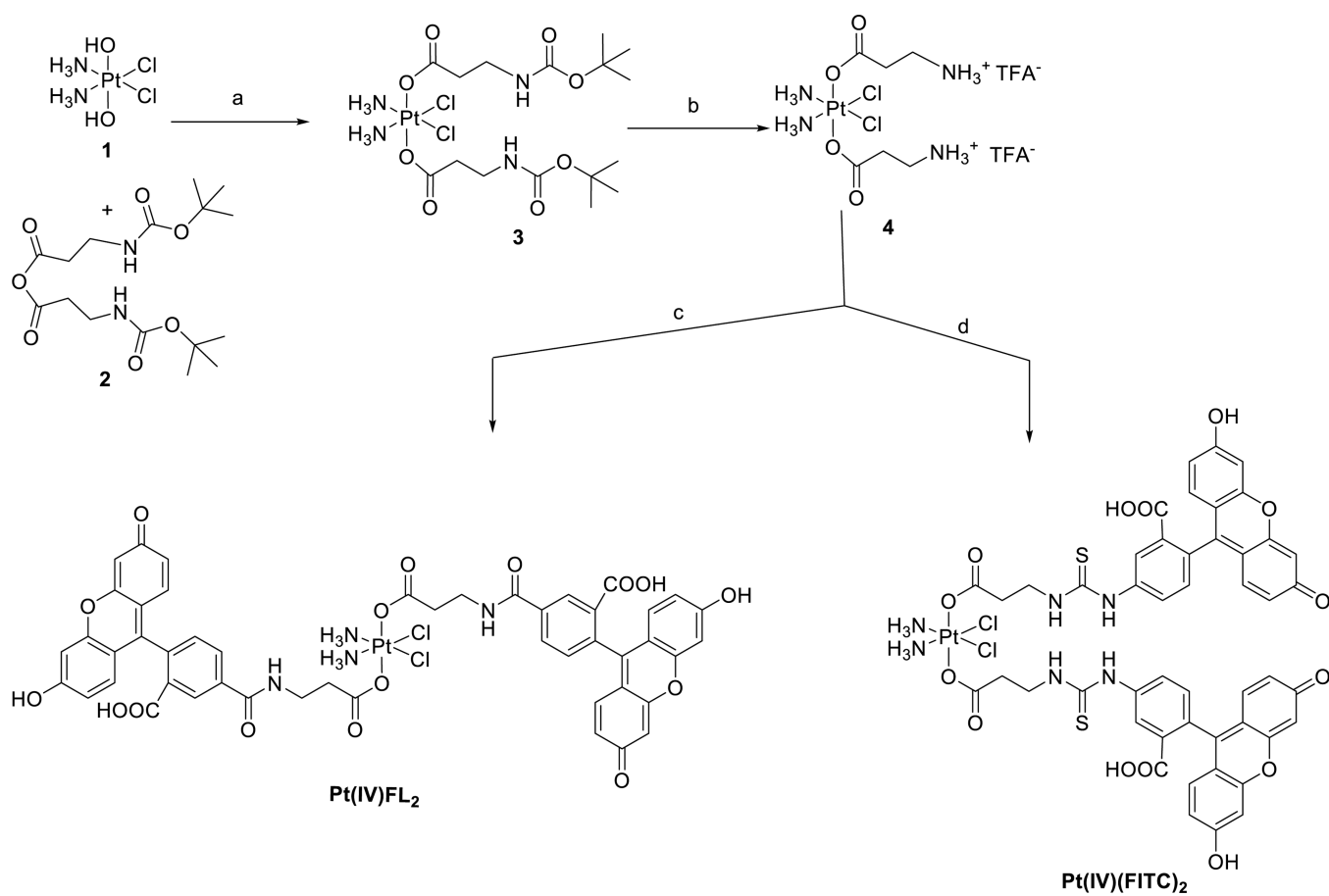
**Scheme 1.**

Illustration of the fluorescence ‘turn-on’ of the Pt(IV) complexes described in this work following reduction of platinum and release of the axial fluorescein ligands.

**Scheme 2.**

Preparation of Pt(IV)FL₂ and Pt(IV)(FITC)₂. Conditions: (a) DMF, 50 °C; (b) trifluoroacetic acid/dichloromethane; (c) fluorescein-NHS, DIPEA, DMF; (d) FITC, DIPEA, DMF.

Table 1

Photophysical properties of Pt(IV)(FITC)₂ and Pt(IV)FL₂ and their corresponding free axial ligand FITC-COOH and FL-COOH. (25 °C, PBS buffer)

	Absorption max (nm)	$\times 10^5$ (M ⁻¹ cm ⁻¹)	Emission max (nm) ^a	Quantum Yield
Pt(IV)(FITC) ₂	493	2.63	520	0.29
FITC-COOH	493	1.30	520	0.77
Pt(IV)FL ₂	493	2.91	520	0.32
FL-COOH	493	1.45	520	0.90
fluorescein ^a	490	7.69	521	0.93 ²⁴

^aExcitation wavelength, 493 nm.

Table 2IC₅₀/μM values of Pt(IV) compounds in comparison to those of cisplatin.

cells	cell type	Cisplatin	Pt(IV)(FITC) ₂	Pt(IV)FL ₂
A549	Lung cancer	2.5 (0.8)	20.6 (0.1)	12.7(1.4)
HeLa	Cervical cancer	1.4 (0.3)	20.8 (2.0)	16.3(3.1)

* average of three independent experiments