

СЕКЦІЯ СТУДЕНТІВ ВКУРСУ NEURO-ELECTRONIC INTERFACES

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Neuro-electronic interfaces are a visionary goal dealing with the construction of nanodevices that will permit computers to be joined and linked to the nervous system. This idea requires the building of a molecular structure that will permit control and detection of nerve impulses by an external computer. The computers will be able to interpret, register, and respond to signals the body gives off when it feels sensations. The demand for such structures is huge because many diseases involve the decay of the nervous system (ALS and multiple sclerosis). Also, many injuries and accidents may impair the nervous system resulting in dysfunctional systems and paraplegia. If computers could control the nervous system through neuro-electronic interface, problems that impair the system could be controlled so that effects of diseases and injuries could be overcome. Two considerations must be made when selecting the power source for such applications. They are refuelable and nonrefuelable strategies. A refuelable strategy implies energy is refilled continuously or periodically with external sonic, chemical, tethered, magnetic, or electrical sources. A nonrefuelable strategy implies that all power is drawn from internal energy storage which would stop when all energy is drained.

One limitation to this innovation is the fact that electrical interference is a possibility. Electric fields, electromagnetic pulses (EMP), and stray fields from other in vivo electrical devices can all cause interference. Also, thick insulators are required to prevent electron leakage, and if high conductivity of the in vivo medium occurs there is a risk of sudden power loss and "shorting out." Finally thick wires are also needed to conduct substantial power levels without overheating. Little practical progress has been made even though research is happening. The wiring of the structure is extremely difficult because they must be positioned precisely in the nervous system so that it is able to monitor and respond to nervous signals. The structures that will provide the interface must also be compatible with the body's immune system so that they will remain unaffected in the body for a long time. In addition, the structures must also sense ionic currents and be able to cause currents to flow backward. While the potential for these structures is amazing, there is no timetable for when they will be available.

References

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