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CHEZ LE MAMMIFERE

(54) Title: NOVEL METHOD FOR TESTING THE DIFFERENTIATION STATUS IN PANCREATIC CELLS OF A MAMMAL

(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

The present invention relates to a novel method for testing the developmental status in pancreatic cells of a mammal. The present invention further relates to applications in the medical field that directly arise from the method of the invention. Additionally, the present invention relates to transgenic mammals comprising at least one inactivated Pax6 allele and optionally at least one inactivated Pax4 allele.



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(54) Title: NOVEL METHOD FOR TESTING THE DIFFERENTIATION STATUS IN PANCREATIC CELLS OF A MAMMAL (57) Abstract The present invention relates to a novel method for testing the developmental status in pancreatic cells of a mammal. The present invention further relates to applications in the medical field that directly arise from the method of the invention. Additionally, the present invention relates to transgenic mammals comprising at least one inactivated Pax6 allele and optionally at least one inactivated Pax4 allele.		

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

5 Novel Method For Testing The Differentiation Status In
Pancreatic Cells Of A Mammal

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to methods for
10 testing the differentiation status of pancreatic cells in
a mammal; for instance, by ascertaining the level or
status of Pax6 mRNA and/or protein in pancreatic cells
(or pre-pancreatic cells) and comparing the level or
status with the corresponding level or status in normal
15 pancreatic (or pre-pancreatic) cells. This method
provides a means for diagnosis or detection of diseases
which arise from certain pancreatic or brain cells,
especially a means for diagnosis or detection of, for
instance, hypoglycemia or mental diseases. The method
20 can be performed in conjunction with ascertaining the
level or status of Pax4 mRNA and/or protein in pancreatic
cells (or pre-pancreatic cells) and comparing the level
or status with the corresponding level or status in
normal pancreatic (or pre-pancreatic) cells.

25 The data set forth below shows that deficiency
in Pax6 expression is indicative of deficiency or failure
in α -cell development, and ergo glucagon production (and
thus hypoglycemia and mental disease). The invention
thus relates to restoring Pax6 expression for treatment,
30 prevention or delaying a pancreatic or brain disease such
as hypoglycemia or mental disorder from improper
expression of the glucagon gene; and ergo transgenic
mammals having restored Pax6 expression by modification
so as to comprise at least one first nucleic acid
35 molecule having a sequence encoding a functional and
expressible Pax6 protein and optionally a second nucleic
acid sequence encoding a functional and expressible Pax4

WO 98/29565

PCT/EP97/07320

protein. Alternatively or additionally, the invention relates to administration of Pax6 alone or with Pax4 and/or of an agent for stimulating expression of Pax6 or Pax4 and Pax6, for treatment, prevention or delaying a
5 pancreatic or brain disease such as hypoglycemia or mental disorder from improper expression of the glucagon gene.

Since the data set forth below shows that deficiency in Pax6 expression is indicative of deficiency
10 or failure in α -cell development and ergo glucagon production (and thus hypoglycemia), the present invention also relates to transgenic mammals modified so as to comprise at least one inactivated Pax6 allele. This mammal has numerous utilities, including as a research
15 model for pancreatic and/or brain diseases such as hypoglycemia and/or mental disorder; and therefore, presents a novel and valuable animal in the development of therapies, treatment, etc. for diseases caused by deficiency or failure of pancreatic cells. Accordingly,
20 in this instance, the mammal is preferably non-human, e.g., a laboratory animal such as a mouse or rat.

Further, since improper expression of Pax6 may also cause maladies such as tumors, the invention also relates to a transgenic mammal modified so as to comprise
25 at least one inactivated Pax6 allele for treatment, prevention or the delay of a pancreatic disease caused by improper expression of Pax6, such as tumors. In this instance, the mammal can be a human, as the introduction into the mammal of the at least one inactivated Pax6
30 allele is for therapy. The therapy also can include (in addition to the introduction of the at least one inactivated Pax6 allele) introduction into the mammal of at least one inactivated Pax4 allele. Alternatively or additionally, the invention relates to administration of
35 an agent which inhibits Pax6 or Pax4 and Pax6 for treatment, prevention or delaying a pancreatic disease

caused by improper expression of Pax6, such as tumors.

Moreover, from the data herein, Pax4 and Pax6 determine the cell fate of the endocrine progenitor during development. In particular, in a first step, the Pdx1 gene defines the region of the endoderm that will give rise to pancreatic exocrine and endocrine progenitors since its expression occurs before expression of Pax genes and mice lacking Pdx1 do not form a pancreas. The onset of Pax expression in the pancreas divides endocrine progenitors into two populations: cells expressing both Pax4 and Pax6 differentiate into mature β -cells while cells expressing only Pax6 differentiate into α -cells. Absence of Pax4 diverts all progenitors into the α -cell lineage since Pax6 remains present in these cells. Deletion of Pax6 eliminates the α -cells lineage altogether or may divert progenitors to the β -cells lineage. When both Pax4 and Pax6 are absent, progenitors fail to develop into mature endocrine cells. Thus both Pax genes are required for endocrine cell differentiation during pancreatic development.

Accordingly, the present invention further relates to methods for testing the differentiation status of pancreatic cells in a mammal by ascertaining the level or status of Pax4 and Pax6 mRNA and/or protein in pancreatic cells (or pre-pancreatic cells) and comparing the level or status with the corresponding level or status in normal pancreatic (or pre-pancreatic) cells. This method provides a means for diagnosis or detection of diseases which arise from certain pancreatic cells, especially a means for diagnosis or detection of, for instance, diabetes, such as juvenile diabetes, and/or hypoglycemia.

Additionally the invention relates to restoring Pax4 and Pax6 expression for treatment, prevention or delaying a pancreatic disease such as diabetes, e.g., juvenile diabetes and/or hypoglycemia; and ergo

transgenic mammals having restored Pax4 and Pax6
expression by modification so as to comprise at least one
first nucleic acid molecule having a sequence encoding a
functional and expressible Pax4 protein and a second
5 nucleic acid sequence encoding a functional and
expressible Pax6 protein. Alternatively or additionally,
the invention relates to administration of Pax4 with Pax6
and/or of an agent for stimulating expression of Pax4 and
Pax6, for treatment, prevention or delaying a pancreatic
10 disease such as diabetes, e.g., juvenile diabetes and/or
hypoglycemia.

Several documents are cited throughout the text
of this specification.

15

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The pancreas is an essential organ possessing
20 both an exocrine function involved in the delivery of
enzymes into the digestive tract and an endocrine
function by which various hormones are secreted into the
blood stream. The exocrine function is assured by acinar
and centroacinar cells that produce various digestive
25 enzymes (amylase, proteases, nuclease, etc.) and
intercalated duct cells that transport these enzymes in
alkaline solution to the duodenum.

The functional unit of the endocrine pancreas
is the islet of Langerhans which are scattered throughout
30 the exocrine portion of the pancreas and are composed of
four cell types: α -, β -, δ - and PP-cells, reviewed in
Slack, Development 121 (1995), 1569-1580. β -cells
produce insulin, represent the majority of the endocrine
cells and form the core of the islets, while α -cells
35 secrete glucagon and are located in the periphery.
 δ -cells and PP-cells are less numerous and respectively

WO 98/29565

PCT/EP97/07320

secrete somatostatin and a pancreatic polypeptide. Insulin and glucagon are key regulators of blood glucose levels. Insulin lowers blood glucose level by increasing the cellular uptake of glucose and its conversion to glycogen. Glucagon elevates blood glucose levels by intervening with the breakdown of liver glycogen. Common pancreatic disorders affecting endocrine function include Diabetes mellitus and hormone secreting tumors.

All four endocrine cells are thought to originate from a common pluripotent precursor that is derived from the endoderm. Early during pancreatic development, these precursors co-express several hormones such as insulin and glucagon. In mouse, the α -cells are the first endocrine cells to differentiate at day 9.5 post-conception (p.c.), followed by the β - and δ -cells at day 14.5 p.c. and the PP-cells at postnatal day 1. Very little is known on the molecular and genetic factors involved in defining the lineage of the different endocrine cells. One of the few genes described so far is the homeobox gene Pdx1 which is expressed during the initial stages of pancreatic development and becomes restricted to the β -cells in adult islets (Guz et al., Development 121 (1995), 11-18). Homozygous mouse Pdx1 mutants fail to develop a pancreas and die a few days after birth (Jonsson et al., Nature 371 (1994), 606-609).

Two members of the Pax gene family, Pax6 and Pax4, are also expressed in endocrine cells during pancreatic development. Until now, however, it was not known how in particular the Pax6 and the Pax4 gene affects pancreatic development.

A method for testing for a variety of differentiation parameters in the pancreas was hitherto not available but is nevertheless highly desirable. Results obtainable by such a method would be expected to have a significant impact on, e.g., the diagnosis and therapy of pancreas related diseases.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a novel method for testing the differentiation status of pancreatic cells in mammals. In accordance with an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for testing the developmental status in pancreatic cells of a mammal comprising

- (a) determining the level or status of Pax6 mRNA in pancreatic cells of said mammal; and/or
- (b) determining the level or status of Pax6 protein in pancreatic cells of said mammal; and
- (c) comparing said level or status of Pax6 mRNA and/or Pax6 protein with the corresponding level in normal pancreatic cells.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, there is provided a transgenic mammal comprising at least one inactivated Pax6 allele.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, there is provided use of an effective dose of a nucleic acid sequence encoding a functional and expressible Pax6 protein and optionally a second nucleic acid sequence encoding a functional and expressible Pax4 protein, for the preparation of a pharmaceutical composition for treating, preventing and/or delaying hypoglycemia and/or neuronal disorders, e.g. mental disorders, in a mammal.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, there is provided use of an effective dose of a functional Pax6 protein and optionally a functional Pax4 protein, for the preparation of a pharmaceutical composition for treating, preventing and/or delaying hypoglycemia and/or neuronal disorders, e.g. mental disorders, in a mammal.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, there is provided a method for treating hypoglycemia comprising:

- (a) removal of a cell from a mammal;
- (b) introduction of a functional and expressible Pax6 and optionally a functional and expressible Pax4 gene into said cell; and
- (c) reintroducing the cell obtained as a product of step (b) into said mammal or into a mammal of the same species.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, there is provided a method for treating a neuronal disorder, e.g. a mental disorder comprising:

- (a) removal of a cell from a mammal;
- (b) introduction of a functional and expressible Pax6 and optionally a functional and expressible Pax4 gene into said cell; and
- (c) reintroducing the cell obtained as a product of step (b) into said mammal or into a mammal of the same species.

The present invention further relates to applications in the medical field that directly arise from the method of the invention. Additionally, the present invention relates to transgenic mammals comprising at least one inactivated Pax6 gene and optionally at least one inactivated Pax4 gene.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, a technical problem underlying the present invention was to provide such a method for monitoring the differentiation status of pancreatic cells. The solution to said technical problem is achieved by the embodiments characterized in the claims.

Thus, the present invention relates to a method for testing the differentiation status in pancreatic cells of a mammal comprising

- (a) determining the level or status of Pax6 mRNA in pancreatic cells of said mammal; and/or
- (b) determining the level or status of Pax6 protein in pancreatic cells of said mammal; and
- (c) comparing said level or status of Pax6 mRNA and/or Pax6 protein with the corresponding level in normal pancreatic cells.

In connection with the present invention, the term "level" denotes the amount of mRNA or protein produced. The term "status" includes the options that the gene, mRNA, protein or a transcription control element, e.g. promoter/enhancer sequence may bear a mutation, deletion or any other modifications which would affect the overall activity of the gene when compared to the wild-type normal gene product. Included in this term are post-translational modifications of the protein.

In accordance with the present invention, it

was surprisingly found that Pax6 is expressed in the pancreas.

The method of the present invention allows for the first time a detailed study of the development of 5 different cell types, i.e. α -, β -, δ - and PP-cells in the pancreatic tissue. As is demonstrated by the appended examples, the Pax6 gene, optionally in conjunction with the Pax4 gene is involved in the early steps of pancreatic development. This surprising result allows 10 the monitoring of cell fate as well as the investigation of the development of diseases which arise from certain cell types contained in the pancreas. The results presented in accordance with the present invention furthermore allow the conclusion that Pax6 and/or Pax4 15 are master regulators for specific pancreatic cells.

Thus, Pax6 appears to be a master regulator of α -cells. Pax6 is also expressed in non-pancreatic cells. Pax6 expression is detected in a subset of cells found in the developing spinal cord. In particular, expression of the 20 Pax6 gene is observed in the prospective forebrain and hindbrain and is maintained in the brain, eye and neural tube throughout development (Grindley et al., Development 121 (1995), 1433-1442; Stoykova et al., Development 122 (1996), 3453-3465). Therefore, Pax6 may likewise play a 25 role in the differentiation status of these cells. The lack of Pax6 gene expression can be monitored by using the marker "Small eyes".

Accordingly, the method of the present invention provides a means for diagnosis or detection of 30 diseases which arise from certain cells such as pancreas cells and brain cells, especially a means for early diagnosis or detection; for instance, detection or diagnosis of hypoglycemia or mental diseases.

In a preferred embodiment, the method of the 35 present invention further comprises

(d) determining the level or status of Pax4 mRNA in

WO 98/29565

PCT/EP97/07320

- pancreatic cells of said mammal; and/or
- (e) determining the level or status of Pax4 protein in pancreatic cells of said mammal; and
 - (f) comparing said level or status of Pax4 mRNA and/or
- 5 Pax4 protein with the corresponding level in normal pancreatic cells.

This embodiment of the present invention allows the study of the synergistic effects of the Pax6 and the Pax4 gene products. It is expected that the analysis of

10 said synergistic effect provides deeper insights into the regulation of cell specific development in the pancreas.

From said deeper insight the development of diagnostic and pharmaceutical compositions related to pancreas-specific diseases will greatly benefit.

- 15 In a further preferred embodiment of the method of the invention, said mammal is in the

- (i) embryonic;
- (ii) newborn; or
- (iii) adult stage.

- 20 As has been shown in accordance with the present invention, the Pax6 gene, preferably in conjunction with the Pax4 gene, is expressed at a different level and at different stages of mammalian pancreas and brain development. The specific analysis of
- 25 the developmental stage of pancreatic cells at the embryonic, newborn or adult stage will provide further insights into, e.g., specific disease states associated with the respective stages. For example, it is expected that the etiology of, e.g., hypoglycemia will be
- 30 elucidated by applying the method of the present invention, as well as by employing the transgenic mammals (non-human) according to the invention (discussed *infra*; see also the examples). Additionally, it is expected that with the knowledge obtained from studying the
- 35 expression of Pax6 in the pancreas and by employing the transgenic mammals (non-human) according to the invention (discussed *infra*; see also the examples), insights into

WO 98/29565

PCT/EP97/07320

the etiology and treatment of mental diseases will be attained. This is because it is known that the Pax6 gene product and the glucagon gene are expressed in the brain (Drucker and Asa, J. Biol. Chem. 263 (1988), 13475-13478; 5 Lee et al., Endocrinology 127 (1990), 2217-2222; Lui et al., Endocrinology 126 (1990) 110-117; Han et al., J. Neurosci. Res. 16 (1986), 97-107). Upon the basis of this knowledge, new pharmaceutical active drugs, e.g. against hypoglycemia and mental diseases, will be 10 developed and tested.

The method of the invention can be applied to a variety of mammals, depending on the purpose of the investigation. Thus, in a preferred embodiment, the mammal is a mouse. This embodiment is particularly 15 useful for basic research to understand more clearly the functional interrelationship of different proteins which regulate the development of the pancreas. In a further embodiment the mammal is a human. In this embodiment, preferably diagnostic and therapeutic applications are 20 envisaged.

In a further preferred embodiment of the method of the invention, steps (a) and optionally (d) and/or (b) and optionally (e) are carried out *in vivo*.

This embodiment of the invention is expected to 25 be useful in particular in basic research or in therapeutic applications.

In a further preferred embodiment of the method of the invention, steps (a) and optionally (d) and/or (b) and optionally (e) are carried out *in vitro*.

30 The advantages of this embodiment would be expected to lie primarily in diagnostic applications and, again, in basic research.

In a further preferred embodiment of the method of the invention, said determination in step (a) and 35 optionally in step (d) is effected by employing
(i) a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to at least a part of the Pax6 gene and preferably encoding at

least part of the Pax6 protein and optionally a second nucleic acid sequence corresponding to at least a part of the Pax4 gene and preferably encoding at least part of the Pax4 protein;

- 5 (ii) a nucleic acid sequence complementary to the nucleic acid sequence(s) of (i); or
(iii) a primer or a primer pair hybridizing to the nucleic acid sequence(s) of (i) or (ii).

In accordance with this embodiment of the
10 present invention, the method of testing the differentiation status can be effected by using a nucleic acid molecule encoding the Pax6 gene and/or the Pax4 gene or a part thereof, e.g., in the form of a Southern or Northern blot or *in situ* analysis. Said nucleic acid
15 sequence may hybridize to a coding region of either of the genes or to a non-coding region. In the case that a complementary sequence in accordance with (ii) is employed in the method of the invention, said nucleic acid molecule can again be used in Northern blots.
20 Additionally, said testing can be done in conjunction with an actual blocking, e.g., of the transcription of the gene and thus may have therapeutic relevance. Furthermore, a primer or oligonucleotide can also be used for hybridizing to one of the above-mentioned Pax genes
25 or corresponding mRNAs. The nucleic acids used for hybridization can, of course, be conveniently labeled by incorporating or attaching, e.g., a radioactive or other marker. Such markers are well known in the art. The labeling of said nucleic acid molecules can be effected
30 by conventional methods.

Additionally, the presence or expression of Pax6 and optionally Pax4 can be monitored by using a primer pair that specifically hybridizes to either of the corresponding nucleic acid sequences and by carrying out
35 a PCR reaction according to standard procedures.

Specific hybridization of the above mentioned probes or primers preferably occurs at stringent

hybridization conditions. The term "stringent hybridization conditions" is well known in the art; see, for example, Sambrook et al., "Molecular Cloning, A Laboratory Manual" second ed., CSH Press, Cold Spring Harbor, 1989; "Nucleic Acid Hybridisation, A Practical Approach", Hames and Higgins eds., IRL Press, Oxford, 1985.

Further modifications of the above-mentioned embodiment of the invention can be easily devised by the person skilled in the art.

An additional embodiment of the present invention relates to a method wherein said determination in step (b) and optionally of step (e) is effected by employing an antibody or fragment thereof that specifically binds to the Pax6 protein and optionally by employing a second antibody or fragment thereof which specifically binds to the Pax4 protein.

Antibodies or fragments thereof to the aforementioned protein can be obtained by using conventional methods which are described, e.g., in Harlow and Lane "Antibodies, A Laboratory Manual", CSH Press, Cold Spring Harbor, 1988. These antibodies may be monoclonal antibodies or comprised in polyclonal antisera or fragments thereof. The antibody used in the method of the invention may be labeled with detectable tags such as a histidine flags or a biotin molecule.

In a further preferred embodiment of the method of the present invention, said pancreatic cells are α -cells or β -cells.

In accordance with the present invention, it was found that Pax6 is expressed in α -cells and β -cells. Moreover, Applicant could show that Pax6 is expressed in somatostatin-producing δ -cells and in PP-cells.

Disruption of the Pax6 gene function therefore allows a close monitoring of the development of said cells in the pancreas. Since Pax4 is also expressed in β -cells, Pax6

WO 98/29565

PCT/EP97/07320

expression may be required to establish a competent background for Pax4 to act.

Since both Pax6 and Pax4 are regulatory proteins required for proper differentiation of endocrine cells, this embodiment may allow a variety of conclusions with regard to the generation of diseases such as pancreatic tumors.

Accordingly, a further preferred embodiment relates to a method wherein said differentiation status is indicative of a malignancy or malignant potential of said pancreatic cell. Overexpression or absence of a functional Pax6 and optionally Pax4 product may induce normal endocrine cells to become cancerous. In accordance with this statement, allelic deletions in chromosome 7q in the vicinity of the Pax4 gene are observed in many pancreatic carcinomas (Alberto et al., Cancer Res. 56 (1996), 3808-3818). Pax6, and optionally Pax4, may also interact with other oncogenic factors.

Malignancy or malignant potential is used in accordance with this invention preferably but not exclusively in connection with pancreatic tumors such as insulinoma, glucagonomas, somatostatinomas and ductal cell adenocarcinomas.

The present invention relates in a further preferred embodiment to a method that further comprises

- (a') prior to said testing removal of a solid pancreatic tumor from said mammal; and
- (b') after said testing, at least partial elimination of the expression of the Pax6 and optionally the Pax4 gene in cells of said tumor, if said gene(s) is/are over-expressed or stimulation of expression of the Pax6 gene and optionally the Pax4 gene or introduction of a functional and expressible Pax6 gene and optionally a functional and expressible Pax4 gene into said cells if said gene(s) is/are under-expressed or not expressed; and
- (b'') reintroducing the cells obtained as a product of step (b') into said mammal.

In this context, and as used throughout this specification "functional" Pax6 (Pax4) means a protein having part or all of the primary structural conformation of the Pax6 (Pax4) protein possessing the biological
5 property of contributing to the development of endocrine cells into α -cells and Langerhans cells (β -cells), said protein being the product of procaryotic or eukaryotic expression of a Pax6 (Pax4) encoding DNA sequence and having an amino acid sequence comprising the amino acid
10 sequence of SEQ ID No. 2 (SEQ ID No. 4) or any fragment or derivative thereof by way of amino acid deletion, substitution, insertion, addition and/or replacement of the amino acid sequence given in SEQ ID No. 2 (SEQ ID No. 4). Also comprised by the term "functional" Pax6 (Pax4)
15 protein is the capability of said protein or part thereof to generate a specific immune response such as an antibody response.

This embodiment of the present invention is suited for therapy of tumors, in particular in humans.
20 Therefore, it is envisaged that pancreatic tumor cells are monitored for the expression level of the Pax6 protein and optionally Pax4 protein. Detection of an over-expression of said protein(s) would allow the conclusion that said over-expression is interrelated to
25 the generation or maintenance of the tumor. Accordingly, a step would be applied to reduce the expression level to normal levels. This can be done, for example, by at least partial elimination of the expression of the Pax6 gene by biological means, for example, by the use of ribozymes,
30 antisense nucleic acid molecules or intracellular antibodies against either the Pax6 or Pax4 protein. Furthermore, pharmaceutical products may be developed that reduce the expression levels of Pax6. While it is presently unclear how Pax6 and optionally Pax4 are
35 regulated in pancreatic tissue, it is possible that different developmental and hormonal factors determine

the levels of activity of these genes. For example, small molecules are known to repress the expression of certain genes. It has been demonstrated that activin A, a member of the TGF β superfamily, can downregulate Pax6
5 expression in the developing spinal cord (Pituello et al., Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 92 (1995), 6952-6956). Similar molecules may downregulate Pax6 or optionally Pax4 expression in the pancreas. On the other hand, lack of expression or under-expression may be remedied by a
10 functional Pax6 gene and optionally a functional Pax4 gene which should both be expressible in the tumor cells.

Stimulation or induction of expression can be obtained again by the use of small molecules or other means, this time activating Pax6 gene expression. In this regard, it
15 is important to note that the present invention envisages the possibilities that one of said Pax genes is over-expressed whereas the second Pax gene is under-expressed in said malignant state. Finally, surgical removal or chemotherapeutic treatment of
20 pancreatic tumors in humans often leaves the patient without a significant number of glucagon producing cells.

Pax6 and optionally Pax4 may be used in tissue engineering (Langer and Vacanti, Science 260 (1993), 920-924) for the development of functional substitutes
25 for missing or damaged α - and β -cells. Pancreatic tumor cells that have reverted *in vitro* to a normal levels of Pax6 expression, and optionally of Pax4 expression, can be re-introduced into the patient so that the said patient is provided with normal glucagon- and optionally
30 insulin-producing cells of his own genetic background thereby reducing the risk of immunological rejection of the cells.

In a further preferred embodiment of the present invention, the testing for differentiation status
35 in pancreatic cells is a testing for the developmental status in α -cells, which as shown by the examples, is

indicative of hypoglycemia. Hypoglycemia is often the result of deficiency or failure in α -cell development. The examples show that deficiency in Pax6 expression is indicative of deficiency or failure in α -cell development 5 and ergo in glucagon production (and thus hypoglycemia).

Early diagnosis of hypoglycemia is particularly advantageous and of considerable medical importance. Thus, it is a preferred embodiment to employ methods of the invention for diagnosis or detection of hypoglycemia. 10 This preferred embodiment can be used to diagnose hypoglycemia in the coronar villi, i.e. prior to the implantation of the embryo. Furthermore, hypoglycemia can, with the method of the present invention, be diagnosed via amniocentesis. The early diagnosis of 15 hypoglycemia in accordance with all applications of the methods of the invention allows for treatment directly after birth before the onset of clinical symptoms.

In a particularly preferred embodiment of the method of the invention, said testing for differentiation 20 status in said α -cells is carried out in an embryonic or newborn mammal.

As has been indicated hereinabove, it is particularly preferred to include at least one further step in the method of the invention, which is specific 25 for different pharmaceutical and genetic therapeutic approaches. As mentioned above, different small pharmaceutically active molecules could be used to activate Pax6 and therefore induce differentiation and production of glucagon producing α -cells and the 30 development of Langerhans islets. Likewise, intracellular targeting of active Pax6 would advance similar consequences. In accordance with this statement, pancreatic ductal epithelial cells have been proposed to contain potential stem cells for endocrine cells types. 35 Induction of Pax6 activity in said cells but not exclusively in said cells are expected to promote

WO 98/29565

PCT/EP97/07320

differentiation into glucagon producing cells.

In a further preferred embodiment of the method of the invention, said differentiation status of pancreatic cells is the result of the activity of a medicament or of a gene therapy approach. For example, said differentiation status may be influenced by gene therapy approaches where an functional Pax6 and optionally Pax4 gene is introduced *in vivo* into cells using a retrovirus vector (Naldini et al., Science 272 (1996), 263-267; Mulligan, Science 260 (1993), 926-932) or other appropriate vectors. Likewise, in accordance with the present invention, cells from a patient can be isolated, modified *in vitro* to differentiate into α -cells and Langerhans islets of β -cells using standard tissue culture techniques and reintroduced into the patient.

In a particularly preferred embodiment, said medicament or gene therapy approach affects the expression level of the Pax6 gene and, optionally, of the Pax4 gene at the mRNA or protein level.

The above embodiments of the present invention allow, *inter alia*, testing of a medicament for its influence on expression of the aforementioned Pax genes.

As has been stated further hereinabove, abnormal expression levels of Pax6 and optionally of Pax4 are expected to be a causative agent in the generation of, for example, solid tumors of the pancreas. The method of the invention thus allows the testing of medicaments, the application of which would allow the cell to return to a normal expression level. Said normal expression level would be expected to have a direct influence on, e.g., the malignancy of a cell. For example, if a disease or tumor is a direct or indirect result of an under-expression of Pax6, the physician treating the respective patient would administer a medicament that stimulates expression of Pax6.

In a further preferred embodiment of the method

the invention, the testing for differentiation status in pancreatic cells is a testing for the developmental status in Pax6 knockout mice that are optionally at the same time Pax4 knockout mice.

5 In an additional preferred embodiment of the method of the present invention, said method further comprises introducing a functional and expressible Pax6 gene and optionally further comprising introducing a functional and expressible Pax4 gene into ductal
10 epithelial cells which possess a similar yet different differentiation pathway as compared to α - and β -cells. With this embodiment of the invention, the person skilled in the art is in the position to redirect the fate of ductal epithelial cells into α - and β -cells. Thus, said
15 cells are expected to differentiate after transfection with the Pax6 gene into α -cells and the β -cells to form Langerhans islets. A corresponding pharmaceutical application is envisaged, if a patient suffers from a α -cell- and thus glucagon deficiency. It is envisaged
20 that this method is carried out *in vitro* or *in vivo*.

The present invention further relates to a transgenic mammal comprising at least one inactivated Pax6 allele. As to research uses of the transgenic mammal especially, it is preferred that the mammal be
25 non-human.

The transgenic animal of the present invention can advantageously be used for monitoring the development of different cells, for example, in the pancreas. However, the use of the transgenic mammal is not confined
30 to the study of pancreatic development. Since Pax6 is, in accordance with the present invention, now believed to be a master regulator for α -cells, its influence can also be studied in other cell types of the body.

Since the transgenic animal of the invention
35 which is preferably a transgenic mouse in the homozygous state has severe pancreatic and neuronal disorders that,

in the case of transgenic mice, lead to death within a few minutes after birth, said transgenic animal can further be used for the investigation of diseases associated with developmental disorders, in particular in
5 the pancreas and the brain. Since the transgenic mice are deficient in glucagon producing cells and present clinical symptoms similar to human patients suffering from hypoglycemia, said mice can serve as an animal model for therapeutic and pharmaceutical research against
10 hypoglycemia. For the same reasons as set out hereinabove, said transgenic mammals, preferably said transgenic mice, can be used as a model system to study mental diseases.

Preferably, the transgenic mammal of the
15 invention further comprises at least one inactivated Pax4 allele.

This embodiment allows the study of the interaction of Pax6 and Pax4 on the development of the mammal or certain tissues thereof, in particular, of the
20 pancreas. All the applications that have been herein before discussed with regard to the Pax6 transgenic mammal also apply to the mammal that carries two transgenes. It might be also desirable to inactivate Pax6 gene expression and optionally Pax4 gene expression
25 at a certain stage of development and/or life of the transgenic animal. This can be achieved by using, for example, tissue specific, developmental and/or cell regulated and/or inducible promoters which drive the expression of, e.g., an antisense or ribozyme directed
30 against the RNA transcript encoding the Pax6 protein and optionally to the Pax4 encoding RNA. A suitable inducible system is for example tetracycline-regulated gene expression as described, e.g., by Gossen and Bujard (Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 89 USA (1992), 5547-5551) and
35 Gossen et al. (Trends Biotech. 12 (1994), 58-62).

Accordingly, in this embodiment, the transgenic mammal is preferably non-human, e.g., a laboratory animal

such as a mouse or rat.

In another preferred embodiment of the invention said transgenic mammal is human, a mouse or a rat. Since at least one inactivated Pax6 allele can be introduced into a mammal for therapeutic applications, as discussed above, the transgenic animal can be a human.

In accordance with the present invention, the transgenic animal may be homozygous or heterozygous for either inactivated Pax4 or inactivated Pax6 or for both inactivated genes.

Moreover, the present invention relates to the use of and methods employing at least one first nucleic acid sequence encoding a functional and expressible Pax6 protein and optionally a second nucleic acid sequence encoding a functional and expressible Pax4 protein for the preparation of a pharmaceutical composition for treating, preventing and/or delaying hypoglycemia and/or neuronal disorders in a mammal. According to the invention, vectors containing said nucleic acid sequences may be operatively linked to regulatory elements allowing for expression of said nucleic acid sequences and/or for targeting of said nucleic acid sequences to pancreatic cells.

Further, the invention relates to the use of a functional Pax6 protein and optionally a functional Pax4 protein for the preparation of a pharmaceutical composition for the treatment, prevention and/or delay of hypoglycemia and/or a neuronal disorder in a mammal. The term "functional" bears the same meaning as outlined herein-above.

Preferably, the mammal referred to in the above embodiments is a human, a rat or a mouse. And thus, the invention further comprehends a transgenic mammal modified so as to comprise at least one first nucleic acid molecule comprising a sequence encoding a functional and expressible Pax6 protein and optionally a second nucleic acid molecule comprising a sequence encoding a

functional and expressible Pax4 protein (wherein the mammal has expression of the nucleic acid molecule(s)). The mammal can be modified pre-natally or post-natally, e.g., after a method of the present invention shows low, 5 impaired or no Pax6 protein or mRNA, for treatment, prevention or delaying hypoglycemia or mental disease; and, the modification can be by techniques discussed herein or by techniques within the ambit of the skilled artisan, without undue experimentation from this 10 disclosure.

It is envisaged by the present invention that the nucleic acids and proteins are administered either alone or in any combination, and optionally together with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier or excipient. Said 15 nucleic acid sequences may be stably integrated into the genome of the mammal. On the other hand, viral vectors may be used which are specific for certain cells or tissues, preferably pancreas and/or brain, and which persist in said cells thereby conferring expression of 20 the Pax genes in said cells. Suitable pharmaceutical carriers and excipients are well known in the art. Elements capable of targeting a nucleic acid molecule and/or protein to specific cells are described in the prior art, for example, Somia et al., Proc. Natl. Acad. 25 Sci., USA 92 (1995), 7570-7574. The pharmaceutical compositions can be administered to the mammal at a suitable dose, which can be determined from this disclosure and knowledge in the art, without undue experimentation by the skilled artisan taking into 30 consideration typical factors such as the species, age, sex, weight, condition of the mammal, the route of administration, whether a Pax6 protein or Pax4 and Pax6 proteins are being administered, whether an agent for inhibiting or stimulating Pax6 or Pax4 and Pax6 is being 35 administered, whether a nucleic acid or acids are being administered, and whether the nucleic acid or acids are for expression of Pax6 or Pax4 and Pax6 or are for

inhibiting expression of Pax6 or Pax4 and Pax6, *inter alia*. A typical dose can be, for example, in the range of 0.001 to 1000 μ g (or of nucleic acid for expression or for inhibition of expression in this range); however, 5 doses below or above this exemplary range are envisioned, especially considering the aforementioned factors.

Administration of the suitable compositions may be effected in different ways, e.g., by intravenous, intraperitoneal, subcutaneous, intramuscular, topical or 10 intradermal administration. The pharmaceutical compositions prepared according to the invention can be used for the prevention or treatment or delaying of different kinds of diseases, for example, pancreas related diseases, namely hypoglycemia or different kinds 15 of acquired or in-born neural disorders, neural degenerations and related disorders such as mental diseases. Said diseases and disorders are preferably derived from endocrine or neural tissues, e.g. pancreas and brain.

20 Furthermore, it is possible to use a pharmaceutical composition which comprises a nucleic acid sequence which encodes a Pax6 protein and optionally a nucleic acid sequence encoding a Pax4 protein for gene therapy. Naturally, both sequences may be also comprised 25 in the same vector. As described above, the diseases often evolve when cells lose both functional copies of the Pax genes. In such a case, introduction of functional copies of the corresponding gene may help to ameliorate the situation. For example, research 30 pertaining to gene transfer into cells of the germ line is one of the fastest growing fields in reproductive biology. Gene therapy, which is based on introducing therapeutic genes into cells by *ex-vivo* or *in-vivo* techniques is one of the most important applications of 35 gene transfer. Suitable vectors and methods for *in-vitro* or *in-vivo* gene therapy are described in the literature and are known to the person skilled in the art; see,

WO 98/29565

PCT/EP97/07320

e.g., Giordano, Nature Medicine 2 (1996), 534-539; Schaper, Circ. Res. 79 (1996), 911-919; Anderson, Science 256 (1992), 808-813; Isner, Lancet 348 (1996), 370-374; Muhlhauser, Circ. Res. 77 (1995), 1077-1086; Wang, Nature Medicine 2 (1996), 714-716; WO94/29469 or WO 97/00957, and references cited therein. The Pax6 and optionally Pax4 encoding gene(s) may be designed for direct introduction or for introduction via liposomes, or viral vectors (e.g. adenoviral, retroviral) into the cell. For example, the sequences encoding the human Pax6 and optionally the Pax4 gene may be operatively linked to regulatory sequences allowing the expression of said gene(s) in the target cells and tissue. In genetic diseases the introduction of a normal or a functionally adequate allele of a mutated nuclear gene represents gene replacement therapy (see, e.g., Mouellic, Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA, 87 (1990), 4712-4716; Joyner, Gene Targeting, A Practical Approach, Oxford University Press), which is applicable mainly to monogenetic recessive disorders such as, for example, diabetes and hypoglycemia.

Thus, in a further embodiment, the invention relates to a method for treating hypoglycemia comprising:

- (a) removal of a cell from a mammal;
- 25 (b) introduction of a functional and expressible Pax6 gene and optionally a functional and expressible Pax4 gene into said cell; and
- (c) reintroducing the cell obtained as a product of step (b) into said mammal or into a mammal of the same
- 30 species.

Yet, in a further embodiment, the invention relates to a the method for treating a neuronal disorder comprising:

- (a) removal of a cell from a mammal;
- 35 (b) introduction of a functional and expressible Pax6 gene and optionally a functional and expressible Pax4 gene into said cell; and

(c) reintroducing the cell obtained as a product of step (b) into said mammal or into a mammal of the same species.

It is to be understood that the introduced genes are functional and expressible after introduction into said cell and preferably remain in this status during the lifetime of said cell.

Preferably, said mammal is a human, rat or mouse.

10 In a preferred embodiment of the method of the invention, said cell is a germ line cell or embryonic cell or derived therefrom. An embryonic cell can be for example an embryonic stem cell as described in, e.g., Nagy, Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 90 (1993) 8424-8428. In a
15 most preferred embodiment, said cell is an egg cell or derived therefrom.

Suitable vectors and methods for *in-vitro* or *in-vivo* gene therapy are described in the literature and are known to the person skilled in the art. The
20 pharmaceutical compositions according to the invention can be used for the treatment of kinds of diseases hitherto unknown as being related to the expression and/or non-expression of the Pax6 gene and/or the Pax4 gene.

25 These and other embodiments are disclosed and encompassed by the description and examples of the present invention. For example, further literature concerning any one of the methods, uses and compounds to be employed in accordance with the present invention may
30 be retrieved from public libraries, using for example electronic devices. For example the public database "Medline" may be utilized which is available on the Internet.

Further
35 databases and addresses.

are known to the person skilled in the art.

An overview of patent information in biotechnology and a survey of relevant sources of patent information useful for retrospective searching and for current awareness is given in Berks, TIBTECH 12 (1994), 352-364.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

10 This disclosure may best be understood in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, incorporated herein by reference, which show:

Figure 1 (Figs. 1a, 1b, 1c). Targeted replacement of Pax6 by the β -galactosidase gene and
15 generation of heterozygous mice.

Structure of wild type and targeted Pax6 loci.

Deletion of the Pax6 initiation codon and the entire paired domain was produce by inserting the β -galactosidase-neomycin cassette pGNA developed by
20 Philippe Brulet (Le Mouellic, H., et al., Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. 87 (1990), 4712-4716).
Abbreviations: A, ATG; B, Bam HI; K, Kpn I; RV, Eco RV; S, Spe I.

Figure 2 (Figs. 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 2f, 2g, 25 2h). β -galactosidase activity in heterozygous Pax6-LacZ embryos at different stages of development.

Pax6/ β -galactosidase staining was first detected in the open neural plate and closed neural fold (arrowheads) of day 8.0 embryos. At day 8.5, strong
30 β -galactosidase staining was observed in the prospective forebrain (f) and hindbrain (h) and progressed caudally has the neural tube (n) closed. No expression was detected in the prospective midbrain (m) region. At day 9.5, the forebrain divides into the telencephalon (t),
35 diencephalon (d) and the optic vesicle forms. Strong

β -galactosidase activity was also detected in the hindbrain, neural tube and developing pancreas (arrowhead). Expression was maintained in the brain, eye, neural tube and pancreas throughout development and 5 persisted in some cells of the adult animal.

Figure 3 (Figs. 3a, 3b). β -galactosidase activity in homozygous Pax6-LacZ at day 13.5 p.c.

-/- animals lacked eyes and olfactory bulb (arrowhead)

10 Figure 4 (Figs. 4a, 4b, 4c). β -galactosidase activity in embryo and newborn pancreas of heterozygous Pax6-LacZ mice.

a, β -galactosidase activity in day 9.0 p.c. +/- embryo. Strong staining is detected in the 15 prosencephalon, diencephalon, optic vesicle, neural tube and pancreas (arrowhead).

b, Sagittal section of day 10.0 p.c. +/- embryo. Only a subset of cells in the pancreatic bud were stained blue corresponding to positive

20 β -galactosidase expression. Magnification, X400.

Abbreviations: f, foregut; p, pancreatic bud.

c, Newborn pancreas stained for β -galactosidase activity and counterstained hematoxylin-eosin. Blue β -galactosidase positive cells were found only in islets of 25 Langerhans indicating that Pax6 is expressed in endocrine cells only.

Figure 5 (Figs. 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d, 5e, 5f). Analysis of β -galactosidase, insulin and glucagon expression in newborn pancreases of +/- and -/- Pax6 30 deficient mice.

β -galactosidase staining is restricted to islet of Langerhans of +/- mice (a, b, c). Blue stained cells expressed either insulin (a) or glucagon (b, c). Insulin-producing cells form the core of the islet while 35 glucagon-producing cells are located at the periphery

(marked by arrowhead). In -/- mice (d, e, f), β -galactosidase positive cells expresses insulin only and failed to organize into islet-like structures. Panels a, b and d, e are adjacent sections. Magnification is X200.

5 Figure 6 (Figs. 6a, 6b). Analysis of insulin and glucagon expression in newborn pancreas of homozygous Small eye mouse mutant.

Pancreas of homozygous Small eye animal produce only insulin (arrowhead). Insulin-producing cells were not organized in islets of Langerhans but remained scattered throughout the exocrine tissue. Glucagon synthesis was never detected indicating that the α -cell population was absent. Magnification is 200X.

Figure 7 (Figs. 7a, 7b). Analysis of amylase expression in exocrine tissues newborn pancreas of +/- and -/- Pax6 deficient mice.

Amylase expression in the exocrine tissue remained unaffected in -/- mice.

Figure 8 (Figs. 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d). Analysis of β -galactosidase, insulin, glucagon and Pdx1 expression in newborn pancreases of mice homozygous for both Pax6 and Pax4.

Few β -galactosidase positive cells were observed in mice lacking both Pax4 and Pax6 (a, b). These cells expressed neither insulin (a) or glucagon (b). However, Pdx1 positive cells could be detected in the pancreas. Magnification panels a, b is 200X; c, d is 400X.

Figure 9. Proposed model for the role of Pax4 and Pax6 during differentiation of α - and β -cells during pancreatic development.

At day 8.5 p.c., Pdx1 expression define the region of the endoderm that will give rise to the exocrine and endocrine progenitor cells. The onset of Pax gene expression in the endocrine progenitor at day 9.0 p.c. defines these cells into two types of

precursors. Precursors expressing both Pax4 and Pax6 will develop into mature insulin-producing β -cells while precursors expressing only Pax6 differentiate into glucagon-producing α -cells. Deletion of Pax4 diverts the β -cell lineage into the α -cell lineage. Absence of Pax6 eliminates the lineage for α -cells.

Figure 10. Analysis of β -galactosidase, somatostatin and PP expression in newborn pancreata of heterozygous (+/-) and homozygous (-/-) Pax6 mutant mice. Blue stained cells expressed either somatostatin or PP. In +/- mice, both cells types were located at the periphery of the islets of Langerhans (marked by arrowhead). In -/- mice, somatostatin and PP cells were still present but failed to organize into islet-like structures. Magnification, X200.

Figure 11. Hormonal concentrations in pancreata of wild type, heterozygous and homozygous Pax6 mutant newborn mice. Little or no differences in insulin or glucagon concentration was observed between wild type and heterozygous animals. Homozygous animals showed a 70 % reduction in insulin concentration and a 100% reduction of glucagon.

Figure 12. Northern blot analysis of pancreatic tumor cell lines. High expression of Pax6 correlated with high expression of insulin and sometime glucagon.

A better understanding of the present invention and of its many advantages will be had from the following examples, given by way of illustration.

EXAMPLES

Antibodies used against insulin, glucagon and amylase are commercially available from several companies. The antibodies used in Applicants' experiments were purchased from Boehringer Mannheim. The

Pdx1 antibody was a generous gift from Prof. Thomas Edlund (Department of Microbiology, University of Umea, S-901 87 Umea, Sweden). Antibodies with the same specificity i.e. which specifically recognize the Pdx1 protein can be prepared using the Pdx1 protein as an antigen according to conventional procedures.

Example 1: Preparation of construct for homologous recombination and generation of Pax6-deficient mice
10

Pax6-deficient mice were generated by homologous recombination in embryonic stem (ES) cells using well established techniques; for example, A.L. Joyner, Editor, "Gene targeting: a practical approach", 15 Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993. Briefly, an 11.5 kb genomic DNA fragment was isolated from a 129Sv mouse genomic library by homology screening using for probe a fragment of the Pax6 cDNA describe by Walter and Gruss, Development 113 (1993), 1435-1449). Production of 20 genomic library, homology screening and all cloning steps were done using techniques well known in the art; see, for example, Sambrook et al., "Molecular Cloning, A Laboratory Manual" second ed., CSH Press, Cold Spring Harbor, 1989; "Nucleic Acid Hybridisation, A Practical 25 Approach", Hames and Higgins eds., IRL Press, Oxford, 1985. The Pax6 initiation codon and the entire paired domain were replaced by inserting a β -galactosidase-neomycin cassette into the BamHI-KpnI restriction site of the genomic DNA thus creating a 30 mutation that eliminates any functional Pax6 protein (figure 1). The targeting construct was then introduced into the embryonic stem cell line R1 (Nagy, A., et al., Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. 90 (1993), 8424-8428). Approximately 107 ES cells in a tris-phosphate buffer 35 solution containing 30 μ g of linearized targeting construct was electroporated with a single pulse of 500

5 μ F/250 volt at room temperature. Cells were then plated
 and selected against the antibiotic G418 for two weeks.
 Resistant clones were individually isolated and their DNA
 was digested with the restriction enzymes SpeI-EcoRV and
 5 analysed by Southern blot using a probe specific for the
 Pax6 locus. Mutated Pax6 allele generated a 8.2 kb
 fragment compared to a 11 kb fragment wild type alleles.

Out of 200 colonies analysed, 3 were found to contains a
 mutated Pax6 allele. Chimeric animals were produce by
 10 aggregating ES cells of a mutant clone to 8 cell morula
 embryos from the NMRI mouse line. Chimeric animals were
 then mated for germline transmission.

Example 2: Expression of Pax6 in developing and newborn
 15 animals

β -galactosidase activity was analysed in
 heterozygous embryos during development. Embryos were
 isolated at different stages of development and fixed 30
 20 minutes in 2% formaldehyde/0.02% glutaraldehyde in
 phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) and stained overnight at
 30°C in a PBS solution containing 0.1% X-gal, 2 mM MgCl₂,
 5 mM K₃Fe(CN)₆, 5 mM K₄Fe(CN)₆, 0.2% Nonidet P-40TM and 2.5
 mM deoxycholic acid. Pax6/ β -galactosidase staining was
 25 first detected in the open neural plate and closed neural
 fold of day 8.0 embryos (figure 2). A few hours later at
 day 8.5, strong β -galactosidase staining was observed in
 the prospective forebrain and hindbrain and progressed
 caudally has the neural tube closed. No expression was
 30 detected in the prospective midbrain region. At day 9.5,
 the forebrain divides into the telencephalon,
 diencephalon and the optic vesicle forms. Strong
 β -galactosidase activity was also detected in the
 hindbrain, neural tube and developing pancreas.
 35 Expression was maintained in the brain, eye, neural tube
 and pancreas throughout development and persisted in some

cells of the adult animal. β -galactosidase expression corresponded with the Pax6 expression pattern previously described by *in situ* analyses (Walter and Gruss, Development 113 (1991), 1435-1449). Applicants did not
5 detect any ectopic β -galactosidase expression in mutant animals.

Homozygous animals lacked eye and nasal bulb which resulted in craniofacial malformations (Figure 3).

They also had defects in the dien- and telencephalon and
10 died a few minutes after birth. The phenotypes observed in homozygous Pax6-LacZ mice were similar to the ones described in homozygous Small eye mutants (Stoykova, A., et al., Development 122 (1996), 3453-3465; Grindley, J.C., et al., Development 121 (1995), 1433-1442).

15

Example 3: Expression of Pax6 in endocrine cells of pancreas

Pax6 expression was analysed in developing
20 pancreas by studying β -galactosidase activity in heterozygous Pax6-LacZ embryos. β -galactosidase positive cells were first detected in discrete cells of the pancreatic bulge at day 9.0 p.c. Pax6 expression was maintained in a subset of cells during pancreatic
25 development and became restricted to the islets of Langerhans in newborn and adult animals (figure 4). No Pax6 expression was detected in the exocrine tissue.

Hormonal production in embryonic and newborn pancreas was verified by indirect immunochemistry using a
30 monoclonal antibody specific for insulin or glucagon (figure 5a, b, c). Cells expressing Pax6 synthesized either glucagon or insulin indicating that Pax6 is expressed in both α - and β -cells. Pancreases were isolated and stained for β -galactosidase activity as
35 describe above. After staining, tissues were embedded in

paraffin and 10 μ m sections were performed. All Immunohistochemistry analysis on paraffin sections were accomplished after β -galactosidase staining according to standard procedure. Briefly, sections were rehydrated in a series of ethanol dilutions and prehybridized in a blocking solution containing 1 mg/ml blocking reagent (Boehringer Mannheim cat.# 1096176), 20% foetal calf serum, 100 mM maleic acid, 150 mM NaCl for 30 minutes at room temperature in a humid box. The blocking solution was removed and sections were then hybridised overnight in a humid box at room temperature with a primary antibody against glucagon or insulin. Both primary antibodies were obtained from Sigma (Cat# G-2654; I-2018) and diluted 1:500 in blocking buffer. Sections were then washed 3 times 10 minutes in a TBST buffer containing 10 mM Tris-Cl pH 8.0, 150 mM NaCl, 0.05% TweenTM-20 and hybridised overnight with a secondary anti-mouse-IgG antibody couple to horse radish peroxylase (Cappel Teknika Corp. antibody cat.# 55559). Sections were again washed 3 times in TBST buffer and stained in a TBST solution containing 0.5 mg/ml diaminobenzidine, 0.066% H₂O₂.

Example 4: Analysis of insulin and glucagon in mice lacking the Pax6 gene

β -galactosidase positive cells were still detected in the pancreas of homozygous Pax6 mutant newborn animals. However, they failed to form islets and remained scattered throughout the exocrine tissue (figure 5d, e, f). Furthermore, β -galactosidase positive cells produced only insulin. Glucagon-producing cells were never detected indicating that the α -cells population was absent in homozygous mutant pancreas. Similar results were obtained with the natural mouse mutant Small eye (figure 6) which also contains a mutated Pax6 alleles

(Van de Meer-Jong, R., et al., Genomics 7 (1990), 270-275)

Furthermore, although the β -cell population in pancreas of homozygous mutant Pax6 mice still produced 5 insulin, they did not form islets of Langerhans. In normal pancreas, the formation of islets is not clonal by origin (Deltour, L., et al., Development 112 (1991), 1115-1121) but is thought to be the result of cell migration and aggregation occurring late in development 10 (Herrera, P.L., et al., Development 113 (1991), 1257-1265). It is possible that Pax6 may be involved in organising the endocrine cells into islets. Recent studies suggest that cell adhesion molecules play an important role in forming islets (Dahl, U., et al., 15 Development 122 (1996), 2895-2902; Moller, C.J., et al., Mol. Endocrinol. 6 (1992), 1332-1342; Rouiller, D.G., et al., Dev. Biol. 148 (1991), 233-242) and it has been shown that Pax6 can bind to the promoter of at least one cell adhesion molecule (Chalepakis, G., et al., DNA Cell 20 Biol. 13 (1994), 891-900). Finally, the exocrine tissue of homozygous pancreas was compared to heterozygous pancreas for amylase production (Sigma antibody cat.# A-8273). No difference was observed between homozygous and heterozygous indicating that the exocrine tissue was 25 unaffected in the absence of Pax6 (figure 7).

Example 5: Both Pax4 and Pax6 are required for differentiation of endocrine

30 Since the Pax4 gene is required for β -cells differentiation because mutant mice do not develop insulin-secreting cells. The fate of endocrine cells in the pancreas of newborn animals lacking both Pax6 and Pax4 was analysed. A small population of β -galactosidase 35 positive cells was still observed within the exocrine tissue. While cells did not produce any insulin or

WO 98/29565

PCT/EP97/07320

glucagon, expression of the homeobox gene Pdx1 could be detected (figure 8). Since Pdx1 is expressed only in precursor cells and mature β -cells (Guz, Y., et al., Development 121 (1995), 11-18) and homozygous Pax4 mice lacking β -cells do not express Pdx1, Applicants' results suggest that the endocrine precursor cells remained present in the pancreas of Pax4/Pax6 homozygous newborn mice but failed to differentiate into mature endocrine cells.

10 Based on Applicants' observations, Applicants propose that Pax4 and Pax6 determine the cell fate of the endocrine progenitor during development (figure 9). In a first step, the Pdx1 gene defines the region of the endoderm that will give rise to pancreatic exocrine and
15 endocrine progenitors since its expression occurs before expression of Pax genes (Serup, P., et al., Biochem. J. 310 (1995), 997-1003; Guz, Y., et al., Development 121 (1995), 11-18) and mice lacking Pdx1 do not form a pancreas (Jonsson, J., et al., Nature 371 (1994),
20 606-609). The onset of Pax expression in the pancreas divides endocrine progenitors into two populations: cells expressing both Pax4 and Pax6 differentiate into mature β -cells while cells expressing only Pax6 differentiate into α -cells. Absence of Pax4 diverts all progenitors
25 into the α -cell lineage since Pax6 remains present in these cells. This is supported by the observation that homozygous Pax4 mutant mice while lacking β -cells, have a larger than normal α -cell population. Deletion of Pax6 eliminates the α -cells lineage altogether or may divert
30 progenitors to the β -cells lineage. When both Pax4 and Pax6 are absent, progenitors fail to develop into mature endocrine cells. Thus both Pax genes are required for endocrine cell differentiation during pancreatic development.

35

Example 6: Expression of Pax6 in pancreatic δ - and PP-cells

Pax6 expression in somatostatin-producing δ -cells and in 5 PP-cells was analysed by studying β -galactosidase activity in heterozygous and homozygous Pax6-LacZ newborn mice (figure 10). Hormonal production in newborn pancreas was verified by indirect immunocytochemistry using a monoclonal antibody specific for somatostatin or 10 pancreatic polypeptide (PP). Cells producing either somatostatin or PP expressed Pax6 indicating that Pax6 is also expressed in δ -cells and PP-cells. Both cell types were found in the periphery of the islet of Langerhans. These cells still present in homozygous animals but were 15 not organized in islets. Newborn pancreata were isolated and stained for β -galactosidase activity as described in example 2 while the indirect immunocytochemistry was performed as described in example 3. The monoclonal antibodies against somatostatin and PP were obtained from 20 Dacko (Cat# A0566, A0619).

Example 7: Insulin and glucagon concentrations in pancreata of heterozygous and homozygous Pax6 mutant newborn mice

25

Insulin and glucagon production in complete pancreata from heterozygous or homozygous newborn Pax6-LacZ mice was quantified by radioimmunoassay (RIA). No significant differences in insulin or glucagon concentrations were 30 observed between wild type and heterozygous animal (figure 11). However, a three fold decrease in insulin concentration and a complete absence of glucagon production was observed in homozygous animals. These results are in agreement with those obtained by 35 immunocytochemistry (example 4) and suggest that Pax6 is

WO 98/29565

PCT/EP97/07320

required for the generation of α -cells during pancreas development and may be implicated in the regulation of the insulin gene in β -cells. Recently, it has also been demonstrated that the Pax6 protein can bind and activate the insulin promoter (Sander et al., Genes Dev. 11 (1997), 1662-1673).

RIAs for insulin were performed using a commercially available kit from Linco Research (Cat#: RI-13K) and done according to the manufacturer's instructions. Pancreata from wild type and mutant mice were isolated just before birth by cesarean section at e19 of gestation. Individual pancreata were placed in 40 μ l of acid extraction buffer (80 ml ethanol, 17.9 ml distilled water, 2.1 ml concentrated HCl) and sonicated on ice to extract their protein contents. After an overnight incubation at 4°C, samples were centrifuged 15 minutes at 13 000 rpm. Supernatants were then transferred into a new tube and the RIA were performed with a 1:1000 to 1:10 000 dilution of each protein extraction. Briefly, 100 μ l of each diluted extract were incubated 18 hours at 4°C with 100 μ l rat insulin antibody and 100 μ l 125I-insulin label. Samples were then precipitated in 1 ml precipitating reagent for 20 minutes at 4°C and centrifuged 15 minutes at 2000 rpm. Supernatants were decanted and pellets counted in a scintillation counter.

RIA for glucagon were performed using a commercially available kit from Linco Research (Cat#: GL-32K) according to the manufacturer's instructions. Proteins from newborn wild type and mutant pancreata were isolated as describe above and 100 μ l of each diluted samples were incubated at 4°C for 18 hours with 100 μ l rat glucagon antibody followed by 24 hours incubation at 4°C with 100 μ l 125I-glucagon label. Samples were then precipitated in 1 ml precipitating reagent for 20 minutes at 4°C and centrifuged 15 minutes at 2000 rpm. Supernatants were

decanted and pellets counted in a scintillation counter.

Example 8: Expression of Pax6 in pancreatic tumor cell lines

5

Pax6 expression levels in various insulinoma (RIN 5F, β TC1), glucagonoma (α TC 1-9), somatostatinoma (RIN 14 β), islet tumor (HC 13, HC 13T, RINm) and ductal adenocarcinoma (mPAC) cell lines were analysed (figure 10 12). Very high Pax6 expression was detected in β TC1 and HC 13 cell lines while moderate levels were observed in RINm, RIN 5F and RIN 14 β lines. Little or no expression was detected in mPAC, α TC 1-9 and HC 13T cell lines.

Pancreatic endocrine tumors are often associated with 15 high hormonal secretion. High levels of insulin and glucagon expression was observed in tumor cell lines which express high levels of Pax6 suggesting that a relationship may exist between abnormal Pax6 expression and aberrant hormonal production in endocrine tumors. 20 Furthermore, Pax6, insulin and glucagon expression was abolished after the islet tumor cell line HC 13 is dedifferentiated into the fibroblastic cells line HC 13T. Expression levels in the different cells lines were evaluated by conventional Northern blot analysis as 25 describe, e.g., Sambrook et al., "Molecular Cloning: A Laboratory Manual", CSH Press, Cold Spring Harbor, 1989. Briefly, cells were trypsinized and transferred in a tube containing 1 ml homogenization buffer (3M LiCl, 6M Urea, 0.1% SDS) and sonicated 3-4 times 20 seconds on ice. 30 After overnight incubation at 4°C, lysates were centrifuged 30 minutes at 18600 rpm. RNA pellets were washed twice in 1 ml 3M LiCl, dissolved in 500 μ l solubilization buffer (10mM Tris-Cl pH 7.5, 0.5% SDS) and purified by phenol-chloroform extraction followed by 35 ethanol precipitation. 20 μ g of RNA was migrated on an agarose gel and transferred onto a nylon membrane

WO 98/29565

PCT/EP97/07320

according to standard Northern blot protocols. Membranes were then hybridized with either a mouse Pax6 cDNA probe (EMBL accession # X63963), an mouse glucagon cDNA probe (EMBL acc.# Z46845) or a rat insulin cDNA probe (EMBL 5 acc.# J04807). Cell lines RINm (cat# CRL-2057), RIM 5F (cat# CRL-2058) and RIN 14 β (cat# CRL-2059) were obtained from American Type Culture Collection. Cell lines β TC1, α TC 1-9, HC 13, HC 13T and mPac can be isolated from Rip1Tag2 transgenic mice (Hanahan, D., Nature 315 10 (1985), 115-122) using conventional tissue culture techniques.

Having thus described in detail preferred embodiments of the present invention, it is to be 15 understood that the invention defined by the appended claims is not to be limited by particular details set forth in the above description as many apparent variations thereof are possible without departing from the spirit or scope thereof.

20

SEQUENCE LISTING

(1) GENERAL INFORMATION:

(i) APPLICANT:

- (A) NAME: Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur Förderung
der Wissenschaften e.V.
- (B) STREET: none
- (C) CITY: Berlin
- (E) COUNTRY: Germany
- (F) POSTAL CODE (ZIP): none

(ii) TITLE OF INVENTION: NOVEL METHOD FOR TESTING THE DIFFERENTIATION
STATUS IN PANCREATIC CELLS OF A MAMMAL

(iii) NUMBER OF SEQUENCES: 4

(iv) CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS:

- (A) ADDRESSEE: MBM & CO.
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- (E) COUNTRY: CANADA
- (F) POSTAL CODE: K1P 5P9

(v) COMPUTER READABLE FORM:

- (A) MEDIUM TYPE: Floppy disk
- (B) COMPUTER: IBM PC compatible
- (C) OPERATING SYSTEM: PC-DOS/MS-DOSTM
- (D) SOFTWARE: PatentIn Release #1.0, Version #1.30 (EPO)

(vi) CURRENT APPLICATION DATA:

- (A) APPLICATION NUMBER: 2,276,460
- (B) FILING DATE: 30-DECEMBER-1997
- (C) CLASSIFICATION:

(vii) PRIOR APPLICATION DATA:

- (A) APPLICATION NUMBER: US 08/778,394
- (B) FILING DATE: 31-DECEMBER-1996
- (C) CLASSIFICATION:

(viii) ATTORNEY/AGENT INFORMATION:

- (A) NAME: SWAIN, Margaret
- (B) REGISTRATION NUMBER:
- (C) REFERENCE/DOCKET NUMBER: 144-107

(ix) TELECOMMUNICATION INFORMATION:

- (A) TELEPHONE: 613/567-0762
- (B) TELEFAX: 613/563-7671

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 1:

(i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:

- (A) LENGTH: 2481 base pairs
- (B) TYPE: nucleic acid
- (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
- (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(ii) MOLECULE TYPE: other nucleic acid

- (A) DESCRIPTION: /desc = "oligonucleotide"

(ix) FEATURE:

- (A) NAME/KEY: CDS
- (B) LOCATION: 163..1470

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 1:

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TTCGAGCCCC GTGGGATCCG GAGGCTGCCA ACCAGCTCCA GC ATG CAG AAC AGT 174
                                         Met Gln Asn Ser
                                         1

CAC AGC GGA GTG AAT CAG CTT GGT GGT GTC TTT GTC AAC GGG CGG CCA 222
His Ser Gly Val Asn Gln Leu Gly Gly Val Phe Val Asn Gly Arg Pro
 5                               10                               15                               20

CTG CCG GAC TCC ACC CGG CAG AAG ATC GTA GAG CTA GCT CAC AGC GGG 270
Leu Pro Asp Ser Thr Arg Gln Lys Ile Val Glu Leu Ala His Ser Gly
                               25                               30                               35

GCC CGG CCG TGC GAC ATT TCC CGA ATT CTG CAG ACC CAT GCA GAT GCA 318
Ala Arg Pro Cys Asp Ile Ser Arg Ile Leu Gln Thr His Ala Asp Ala
                               40                               45                               50

AAA GTC CAG GTG CTG GAC AAT GAA AAC GTA TCC AAC GGT TGT GTG AGT 366
Lys Val Gln Val Leu Asp Asn Glu Asn Val Ser Asn Gly Cys Val Ser
                               55                               60                               65

AAA ATT CTG GGC AGG TAT TAC GAG ACT GGC TCC ATC AGA CCC AGG GCA 414
Lys Ile Leu Gly Arg Tyr Tyr Glu Thr Gly Ser Ile Arg Pro Arg Ala
 70                               75                               80

ATC GGA GGG AGT AAG CCA AGA GTG GCG ACT CCA GAA GTT GTA AGC AAA 462
Ile Gly Gly Ser Lys Pro Arg Val Ala Thr Pro Glu Val Val Ser Lys
 85                               90                               95                               100

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Ile Ala Gln Tyr Lys Arg Glu Cys Pro Ser Ile Phe Ala Trp Glu Ile
                               105                               110                               115

CGA GAC AGA TTA TTA TCC GAG GGG GTC TGT ACC AAC GAT AAC ATA CCC 558
Arg Asp Arg Leu Leu Ser Glu Gly Val Cys Thr Asn Asp Asn Ile Pro
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135 140 145	
CAA CAG ATG GGC GCA GAC GGC ATG TAT GAT AAA CTA AGG ATG TTG AAC	654
Gln Gln Met Gly Ala Asp Gly Met Tyr Asp Lys Leu Arg Met Leu Asn	
150 155 160	
GGG CAG ACC GGA AGC TGG GGC ACA CGC CCT GGT TGG TAT CCC GGG ACT	702
Gly Gln Thr Gly Ser Trp Gly Thr Arg Pro Gly Trp Tyr Pro Gly Thr	
165 170 175 180	
TCA GTA CCA GGG CAA CCC ACG CAA GAT GGC TGC CAG CAA CAG GAA GGA	750
Ser Val Pro Gly Gln Pro Thr Gln Asp Gly Cys Gln Gln Gln Glu Gly	
185 190 195	
GGG GGA GAG AAC ACC AAC TCC ATC AGT TCT AAC GGA GAA GAC TCG GAT	798
Gly Gly Glu Asn Thr Asn Ser Ile Ser Ser Asn Gly Glu Asp Ser Asp	
200 205 210	
GAA GCT CAG ATG CGA CTT CAG CTG AAG CGG AAG CTG CAA AGA AAT AGA	846
Glu Ala Gln Met Arg Leu Gln Leu Lys Arg Lys Leu Gln Arg Asn Arg	
215 220 225	
ACA TCT TTT ACC CAA GAG CAG ATT GAG GCT CTG GAG AAA GAG TTT GAG	894
Thr Ser Phe Thr Gln Glu Gln Ile Glu Ala Leu Glu Lys Glu Phe Glu	
230 235 240	
AGG ACC CAT TAT CCA GAT GTG TTT GCC CGG GAA AGA CTA GCA GCC AAA	942
Arg Thr His Tyr Pro Asp Val Phe Ala Arg Glu Arg Leu Ala Ala Lys	
245 250 255 260	
ATA GAT CTA CCT GAA GCA AGA ATA CAG GTA TGG TTT TCT AAT CGA AGG	990
Ile Asp Leu Pro Glu Ala Arg Ile Gln Val Trp Phe Ser Asn Arg Arg	
265 270 275	
GCC AAA TGG AGA AGA GAA GAG AAA CTG AGG AAC CAG AGA AGA CAG GCC	1038
Ala Lys Trp Arg Arg Glu Glu Lys Leu Arg Asn Gln Arg Arg Gln Ala	
280 285 290	
AGC AAC ACT CCT AGT CAC ATT CCT ATC AGC AGC AGC TTC AGT ACC AGT	1086
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295 300 305	
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Val Tyr Gln Pro Ile Pro Gln Pro Thr Thr Pro Val Ser Ser Phe Thr	
310 315 320	
TCA GGT TCC ATG TTG GGC CGA ACA GAC ACC GCC CTC ACC AAC ACG TAC	1182
Ser Gly Ser Met Leu Gly Arg Thr Asp Thr Ala Leu Thr Asn Thr Tyr	
325 330 335 340	

AGT	GCT	TTG	CCA	CCC	ATG	CCC	AGC	TTC	ACC	ATG	GCA	AAC	AAC	CTG	CCT	1230
Ser	Ala	Leu	Pro	Pro	Met	Pro	Ser	Phe	Thr	Met	Ala	Asn	Asn	Leu	Pro	
				345					350					355		
ATG	CAA	CCC	CCA	GTC	CCC	AGT	CAG	ACC	TCC	TCA	TAC	TCG	TGC	ATG	CTG	1278
Met	Gln	Pro	Pro	Val	Pro	Ser	Gln	Thr	Ser	Ser	Tyr	Ser	Cys	Met	Leu	
			360					365					370			
CCC	ACC	AGC	CCG	TCA	GTG	AAT	GGG	CGG	AGT	TAT	GAT	ACC	TAC	ACC	CCT	1326
Pro	Thr	Ser	Pro	Ser	Val	Asn	Gly	Arg	Ser	Tyr	Asp	Thr	Tyr	Thr	Pro	
		375					380					385				
CCG	CAC	ATG	CAA	ACA	CAC	ATG	AAC	AGT	CAG	CCC	ATG	GGC	ACC	TCG	GGG	1374
Pro	His	Met	Gln	Thr	His	Met	Asn	Ser	Gln	Pro	Met	Gly	Thr	Ser	Gly	
	390					395					400					
ACC	ACT	TCA	ACA	GGA	CTC	ATT	TCA	CCT	GGA	GTG	TCA	GTT	CCC	GTC	CAA	1422
Thr	Thr	Ser	Thr	Gly	Leu	Ile	Ser	Pro	Gly	Val	Ser	Val	Pro	Val	Gln	
405					410					415					420	
GTT	CCC	GGG	AGT	GAA	CCT	GAC	ATG	TCT	CAG	TAC	TGG	CCT	CGA	TTA	CAG	1470
Val	Pro	Gly	Ser	Glu	Pro	Asp	Met	Ser	Gln	Tyr	Trp	Pro	Arg	Leu	Gln	
				425					430					435		
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GACAACACAC ACTAGATATA TGTA AAAACT ATCTGTTGGT TTTCCAAAGG TTGTTAACAG															2010	
ATGAAGTTTA TGTGCAAAAA AGGGTAAGAT ATGAATTCAA GGAGAAGTTG ATAGCTAAAA															2070	
GGTAGAGTGT GTCTTCGATA TAATACAATT TGTTTTATGT CAAAATGTAA GTATTTGTCT															2130	
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(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 2:

- (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
 (A) LENGTH: 436 amino acids
 (B) TYPE: amino acid
 (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(ii) MOLECULE TYPE: protein

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 2:

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 Ala His Ser Gly Ala Arg Pro Cys Asp Ile Ser Arg Ile Leu Gln Thr
 35 40 45
 His Ala Asp Ala Lys Val Gln Val Leu Asp Asn Glu Asn Val Ser Asn
 50 55 60
 Gly Cys Val Ser Lys Ile Leu Gly Arg Tyr Tyr Glu Thr Gly Ser Ile
 65 70 75 80
 Arg Pro Arg Ala Ile Gly Gly Ser Lys Pro Arg Val Ala Thr Pro Glu
 85 90 95
 Val Val Ser Lys Ile Ala Gln Tyr Lys Arg Glu Cys Pro Ser Ile Phe
 100 105 110
 Ala Trp Glu Ile Arg Asp Arg Leu Leu Ser Glu Gly Val Cys Thr Asn
 115 120 125
 Asp Asn Ile Pro Ser Val Ser Ser Ile Asn Arg Val Leu Arg Asn Leu
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 Ala Ser Glu Lys Gln Gln Met Gly Ala Asp Gly Met Tyr Asp Lys Leu
 145 150 155 160
 Arg Met Leu Asn Gly Gln Thr Gly Ser Trp Gly Thr Arg Pro Gly Trp
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 Tyr Pro Gly Thr Ser Val Pro Gly Gln Pro Thr Gln Asp Gly Cys Gln

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Glu	Asp	Ser	Asp	Glu	Ala	Gln	Met	Arg	Leu	Gln	Leu	Lys	Arg	Lys	Leu	
	210					215					220					
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			260					265					270			
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		275					280					285				
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	290					295					300					
Phe	Ser	Thr	Ser	Val	Tyr	Gln	Pro	Ile	Pro	Gln	Pro	Thr	Thr	Pro	Val	
305					310					315					320	
Ser	Ser	Phe	Thr	Ser	Gly	Ser	Met	Leu	Gly	Arg	Thr	Asp	Thr	Ala	Leu	
				325					330					335		
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		355				360						365				
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	370					375					380					
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Val	Pro	Val	Gln	Val	Pro	Gly	Ser	Glu	Pro	Asp	Met	Ser	Gln	Tyr	Trp	
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Pro	Arg	Leu	Gln													
			435													

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 3:

(i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:

- (A) LENGTH: 1275 base pairs
- (B) TYPE: nucleic acid
- (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
- (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(ii) MOLECULE TYPE: other nucleic acid

- (A) DESCRIPTION: /desc = "oligonucleotide"

(ix) FEATURE:

- (A) NAME/KEY: CDS
- (B) LOCATION: 166..1161

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 3:

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      5                      10                      15

CGG CCC CTT CCT CTG GAC ACC AGG CAG CAG ATT GTG CAG CTA GCA ATA      270
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Gln	Glu	Asp	Gln	Ser	Leu	His	Trp	Thr	Gln	Leu	Arg	Ser	Pro	Ala	Val	
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180					185					190					195	
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Asp	Ser	Val	Ala	Arg	Gly	Lys	Leu	Ala	Ala	Ala	Thr	Ser	Leu	Pro	Glu	
				200					205					210		
GAC	ACG	GTG	AGG	GTT	TGG	TTT	TCT	AAC	AGA	AGA	GCC	AAA	TGG	CGC	AGG	846
Asp	Thr	Val	Arg	Val	Trp	Phe	Ser	Asn	Arg	Arg	Ala	Lys	Trp	Arg	Arg	
			215					220					225			
CAA	GAG	AAG	CTG	AAA	TGG	GAA	GCA	CAG	CTG	CCA	GGT	GCT	TCC	CAG	GAC	894
Gln	Glu	Lys	Leu	Lys	Trp	Glu	Ala	Gln	Leu	Pro	Gly	Ala	Ser	Gln	Asp	
		230					235					240				
CTG	ACG	ATA	CCA	AAA	AAT	TCT	CCA	GGG	ATC	ATC	TCT	GCA	CAG	CAG	TCC	942
Leu	Thr	Ile	Pro	Lys	Asn	Ser	Pro	Gly	Ile	Ile	Ser	Ala	Gln	Gln	Ser	
	245					250					255					
CCC	GGC	AGT	GTA	CCC	TCA	GCT	GCC	TTG	CCT	GTG	CTG	GAA	CCA	TTG	AGT	990
Pro	Gly	Ser	Val	Pro	Ser	Ala	Ala	Leu	Pro	Val	Leu	Glu	Pro	Leu	Ser	
260					265					270					275	
CCT	TCC	TTC	TGT	CAG	CTA	TGC	TGT	GGG	ACA	GCA	CCA	GGC	AGA	TGT	TCC	1038
Pro	Ser	Phe	Cys	Gln	Leu	Cys	Cys	Gly	Thr	Ala	Pro	Gly	Arg	Cys	Ser	
				280				285						290		
AGT	GAC	ACC	TCA	TCC	CAG	GCC	TAT	CTC	CAA	CCC	TAC	TGG	GAC	TGC	CAA	1086
Ser	Asp	Thr	Ser	Ser	Gln	Ala	Tyr	Leu	Gln	Pro	Tyr	Trp	Asp	Cys	Gln	
			295				300						305			
TCC	CTC	CTT	CCT	GTG	GCT	TCC	TCC	TCA	TAT	GTG	GAA	TTT	GCC	TGC	CCT	1134
Ser	Leu	Leu	Pro	Val	Ala	Ser	Ser	Ser	Tyr	Val	Glu	Phe	Ala	Cys	Pro	
		310					315					320				
GCC	TCA	CCA	CCC	ATC	CTG	TGC	ATC	ATC	TGATTGGAGG	CCCAGGACAA						1181

Ala Ser Pro Pro Ile Leu Cys Ile Ile
325 330

GTGCCATCAT CCCATTGCTC AACTGGCCA TAAGACACCT CTATTTGACA GTAATAAAAA 1241

CCTTTTCTTA GATGTTAAAA AAAAAAAGG GGGG 1275

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 4:

(i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:

(A) LENGTH: 332 amino acids

(B) TYPE: amino acid

(D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(ii) MOLECULE TYPE: protein

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 4:

Met	Gln	Gln	Asp	Gly	Leu	Ser	Ser	Val	Asn	Gln	Leu	Gly	Gly	Leu	Phe	1	5	10	15
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Leu	Ala	Ile	Arg	Gly	Met	Arg	Pro	Cys	Asp	Ile	Ser	Arg	Ser	Leu	Lys	35	40	45	
Val	Ser	Asn	Gly	Cys	Val	Ser	Lys	Ile	Leu	Gly	Arg	Tyr	Tyr	Arg	Thr	50	55	60	
Gly	Val	Leu	Glu	Pro	Lys	Cys	Ile	Gly	Gly	Ser	Lys	Pro	Arg	Leu	Ala	65	70	75	80
Thr	Pro	Ala	Val	Val	Ala	Arg	Ile	Ala	Gln	Leu	Lys	Asp	Glu	Tyr	Pro	85	90	95	
Ala	Leu	Phe	Ala	Trp	Glu	Ile	Gln	His	Gln	Leu	Cys	Thr	Glu	Gly	Leu	100	105	110	
Cys	Thr	Gln	Asp	Lys	Ala	Pro	Ser	Val	Ser	Ser	Ile	Asn	Arg	Val	Leu	115	120	125	
Arg	Ala	Leu	Gln	Glu	Asp	Gln	Ser	Leu	His	Trp	Thr	Gln	Leu	Arg	Ser	130	135	140	
Pro	Ala	Val	Leu	Ala	Pro	Val	Leu	Pro	Ser	Pro	His	Ser	Asn	Cys	Gly	145	150	155	160
Ala	Pro	Arg	Gly	Pro	His	Pro	Gly	Thr	Ser	His	Arg	Asn	Arg	Ala	Ile	165	170	175	

THE EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION IN WHICH AN EXCLUSIVE
PROPERTY OR PRIVILEGE IS CLAIMED ARE DEFINED AS FOLLOWS:

1. A method for testing differentiation status in pancreatic cells of a mammal, comprising:
 - (a) determining the level or status of Pax6 mRNA or Pax6 protein, or both Pax6 mRNA and protein in pancreatic cells of said mammal; and
 - (b) comparing said level or status of Pax6 mRNA or Pax6 protein or both Pax6 mRNA and protein with the corresponding level in normal pancreatic cells; wherein said comparing indicates said differentiation status of said pancreatic cells of said mammal.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein said mammal is in the
 - (a) embryonic;
 - (b) newborn; or
 - (c) adult stage.
3. The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein said mammal is a mouse.
4. The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein said mammal is a human.
5. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein step (a) is carried out *in vivo*.
6. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein step (a) is carried out *in vitro*.

7. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 6,
wherein said determination in step (a) is effected by
employing
 - (i) a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to at
least a part of the Pax6 gene;
 - (ii) a nucleic acid sequence complementary to the
nucleic acid sequence of (i); or
 - (iii) a primer or a primer pair hybridizing to the
nucleic acid sequence of (i) or (ii).
8. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 6,
wherein said determination in step (a) is effected by
employing an antibody or a fragment thereof that
specifically binds to the Pax6 protein.
9. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 8,
wherein said pancreatic cells are α -cells or β -cells.
10. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 9,
wherein said differentiation status is indicative of a
malignancy or malignant potential of said pancreatic
cells.
11. The method according to claim 10, further comprising
 - (a') prior to said testing obtaining a solid
pancreatic tumor that has been removed from said
mammal; and
 - (b') after said testing, at least partial elimination
of the expression of the Pax6 gene, if said Pax6 gene
is over-expressed or stimulation of expression of the
Pax6 gene or introduction of a functional and

expressible Pax6 gene into said cells if said Pax6 gene is under-expressed or not expressed; wherein the cells obtained as a product of step (b') are for re-introduction into said mammal.

12. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein said differentiation status in α -cells or β -cells is indicative of hypoglycemia.
13. The method according to claim 12, wherein said differentiation status in α -cells or β -cells is tested in an embryo or in a newborn.
14. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein said differentiation status is the result of the activity of a medicament.
15. The method according to claim 14, wherein said medicament affects the expression level of the Pax6 gene or both Pax6 and Pax4 genes at the mRNA or the protein level.
16. The method according to any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein said differentiation status is tested in Pax6 knockout mice or Pax6/ Pax4 double knockout mice.
17. Use of a functional and expressible Pax6 gene or both functional and expressible Pax6 and Pax4 genes for treatment of a mammal in need thereof, wherein differentiation status of pancreatic cells in said mammal is determined by the method of any one of claims 1 to 9.

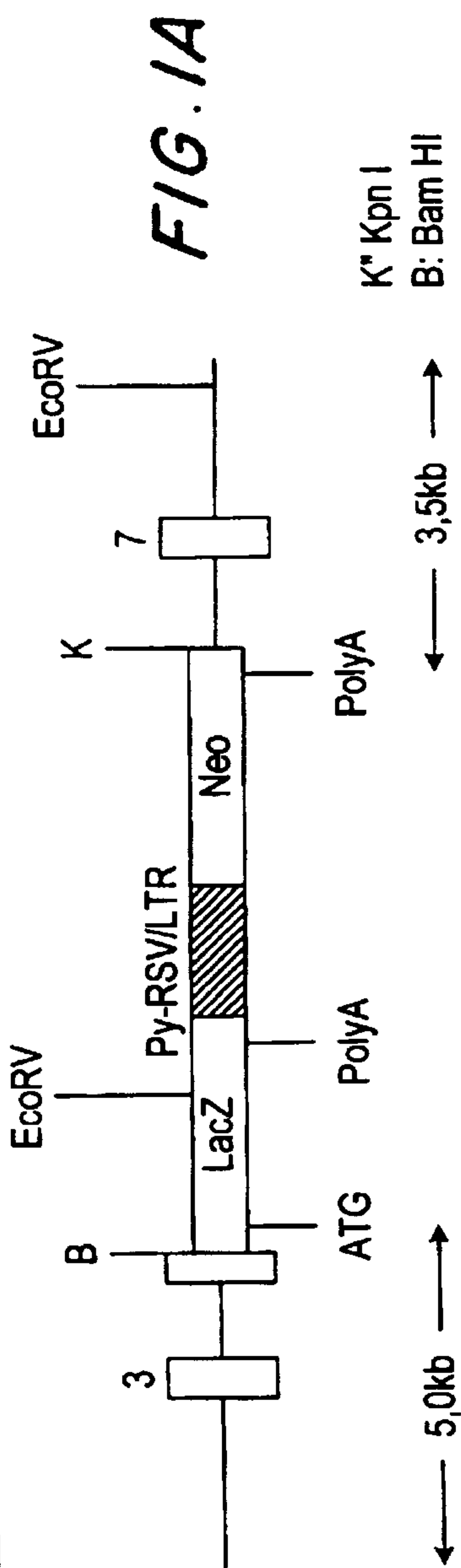
18. Use of a therapeutically effective amount of a functional Pax6 protein or both a functional Pax6 and Pax4 protein, for treatment of a mammal in need thereof, wherein differentiation status of pancreatic cells in said mammal is determined by the method of any one of claims 1 to 9.
19. An isolated mammalian cell comprising at least one inactivated Pax6 allele.
20. The isolated mammalian cell according to claim 19, further comprising at least one inactivated Pax4 allele.
21. Use of a nucleic acid sequence encoding a functional and expressible Pax6 protein or a nucleic acid encoding a functional and expressible Pax6 protein and a second nucleic acid sequence encoding a functional and expressible Pax4 protein, for the preparation of a pharmaceutical composition for treating, preventing or delaying hypoglycemia in a mammal.
22. Use of a therapeutically effective amount of a nucleic acid sequence encoding a functional and expressible Pax6 protein or a nucleic acid encoding a functional and expressible Pax6 protein and a second nucleic acid sequence encoding a functional and expressible Pax4 protein, for treating, preventing or delaying hypoglycemia in a mammal.
23. The use according to claim 21 or 22, wherein the nucleic acid sequence is operatively linked to

regulatory elements allowing for the expression or targeting or expression and targeting of the Pax6 protein or the Pax6 protein and Pax4 protein to specific cells.

24. Use of a functional Pax6 protein or a functional Pax6 and a functional Pax4 protein, for the preparation of a pharmaceutical composition for treating, preventing or delaying hypoglycemia, in a mammal.
25. Use of a therapeutically effective amount of a functional Pax6 protein or a functional Pax6 and a functional Pax4 protein, for treating, preventing or delaying hypoglycemia in a mammal.
26. The use according to any one of claims 21 to 25, wherein said mammal is a human, rat or mouse.
27. An *ex vivo* method for treating hypoglycemia comprising:
 - (a) obtaining a cell that has been removed from a mammal; and
 - (b) introducing a functional and expressible Pax6 and optionally a functional and expressible Pax4 gene into said cell;wherein the cell obtained as a product of step (b) is for reintroduction into said mammal or into a mammal of the same species.
28. The method of claim 27, wherein the mammal is a human, rat or mouse.

29. The method of claim 27 or 28, wherein the cell is a germ cell or an embryonic cell or derived therefrom.
30. The method of any one of claims 27 to 29, wherein the cell is an egg cell or derived therefrom.

TARGETING VECTOR



WILD TYPE ALLELE

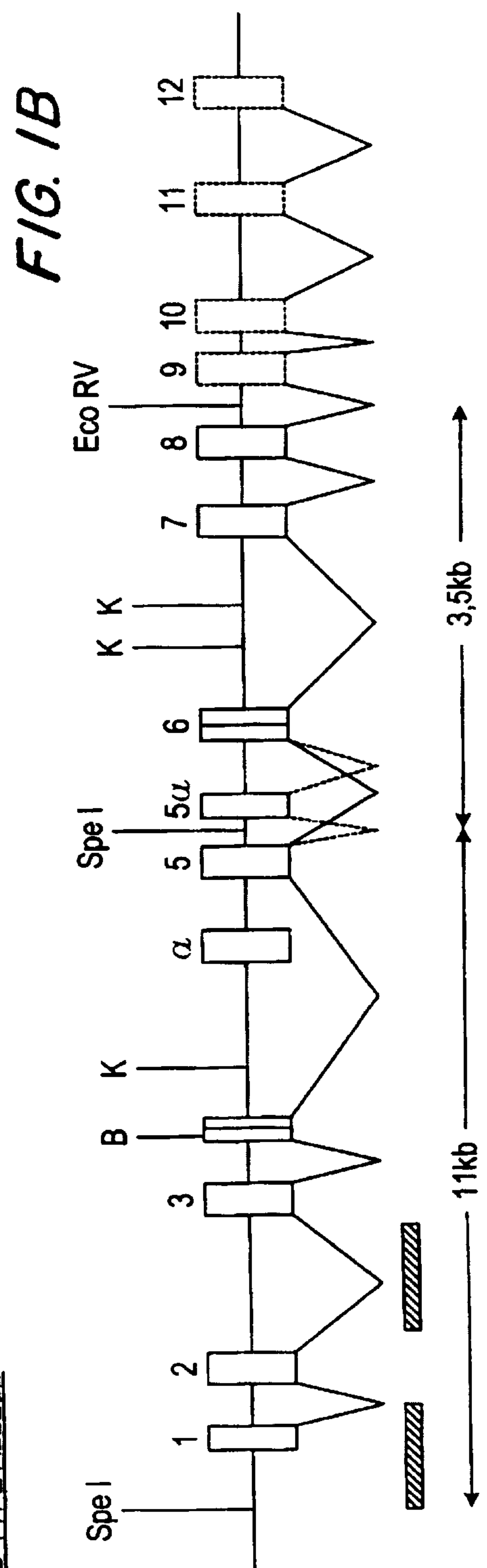
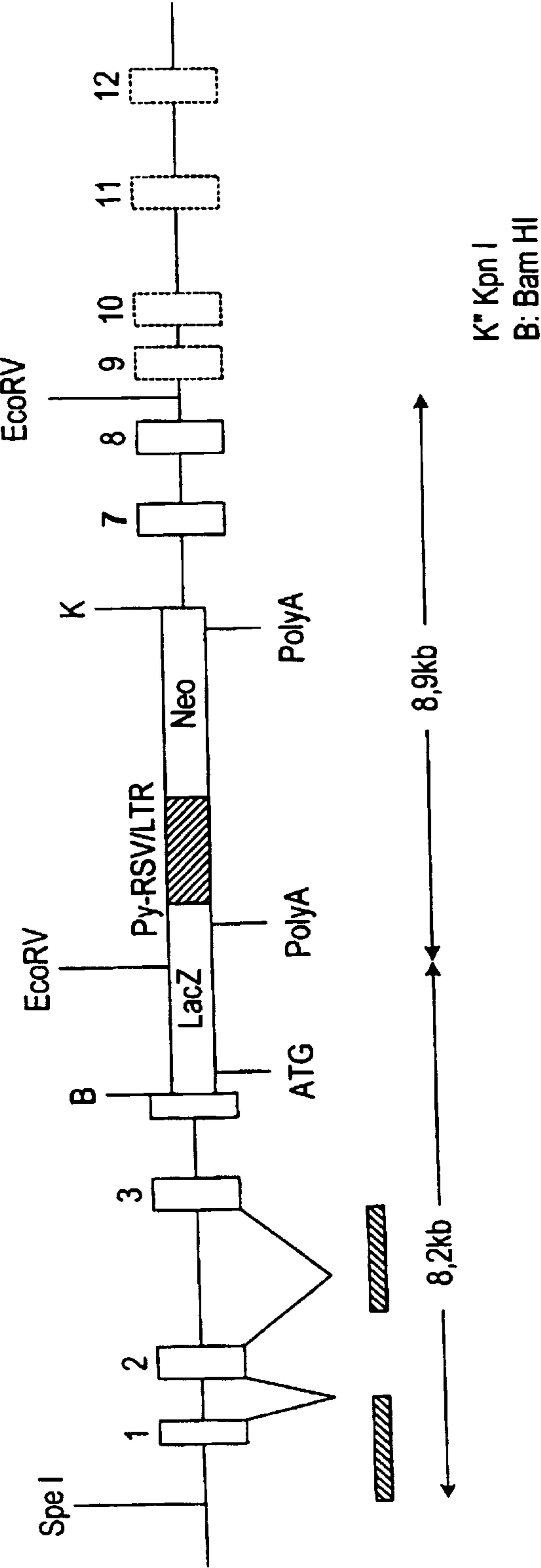
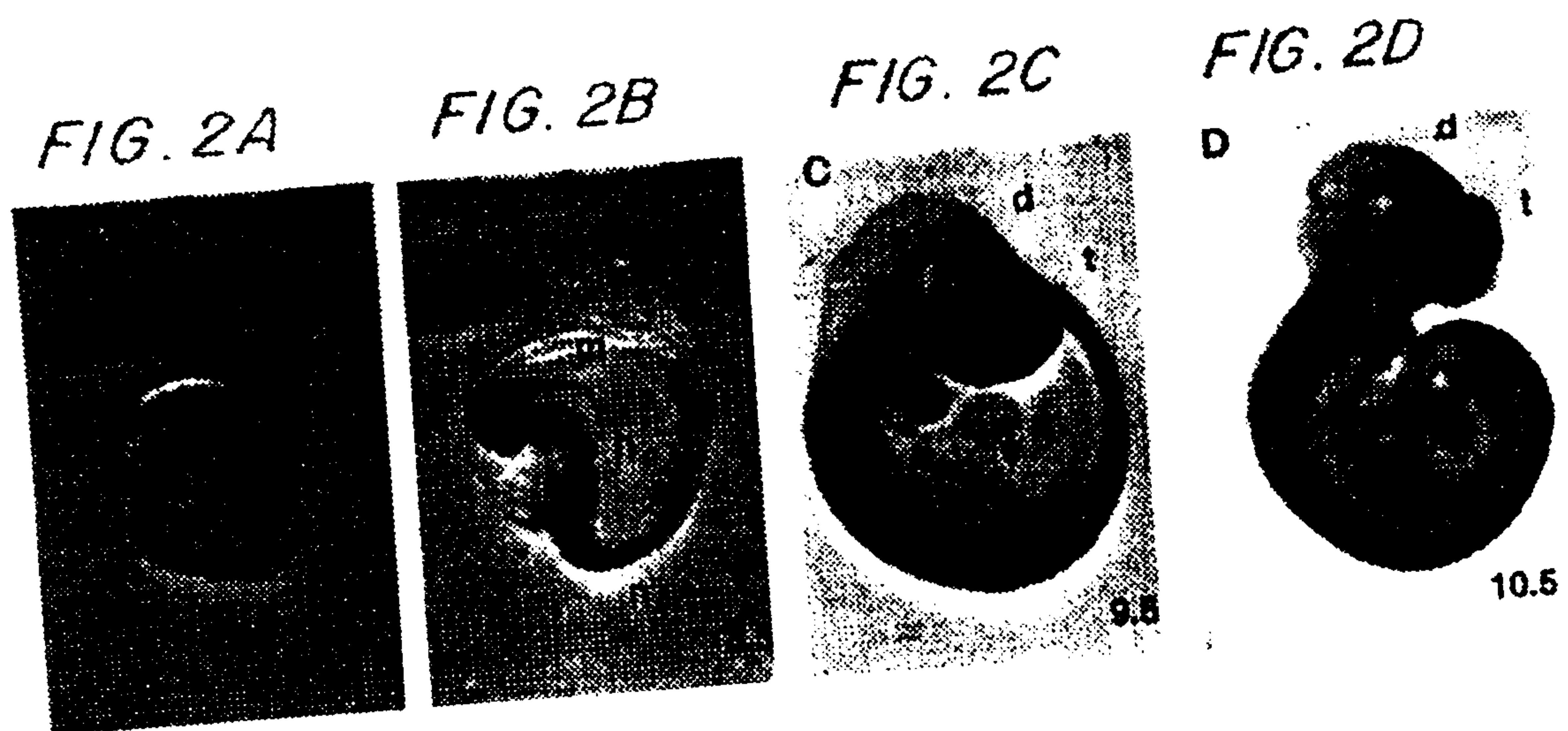
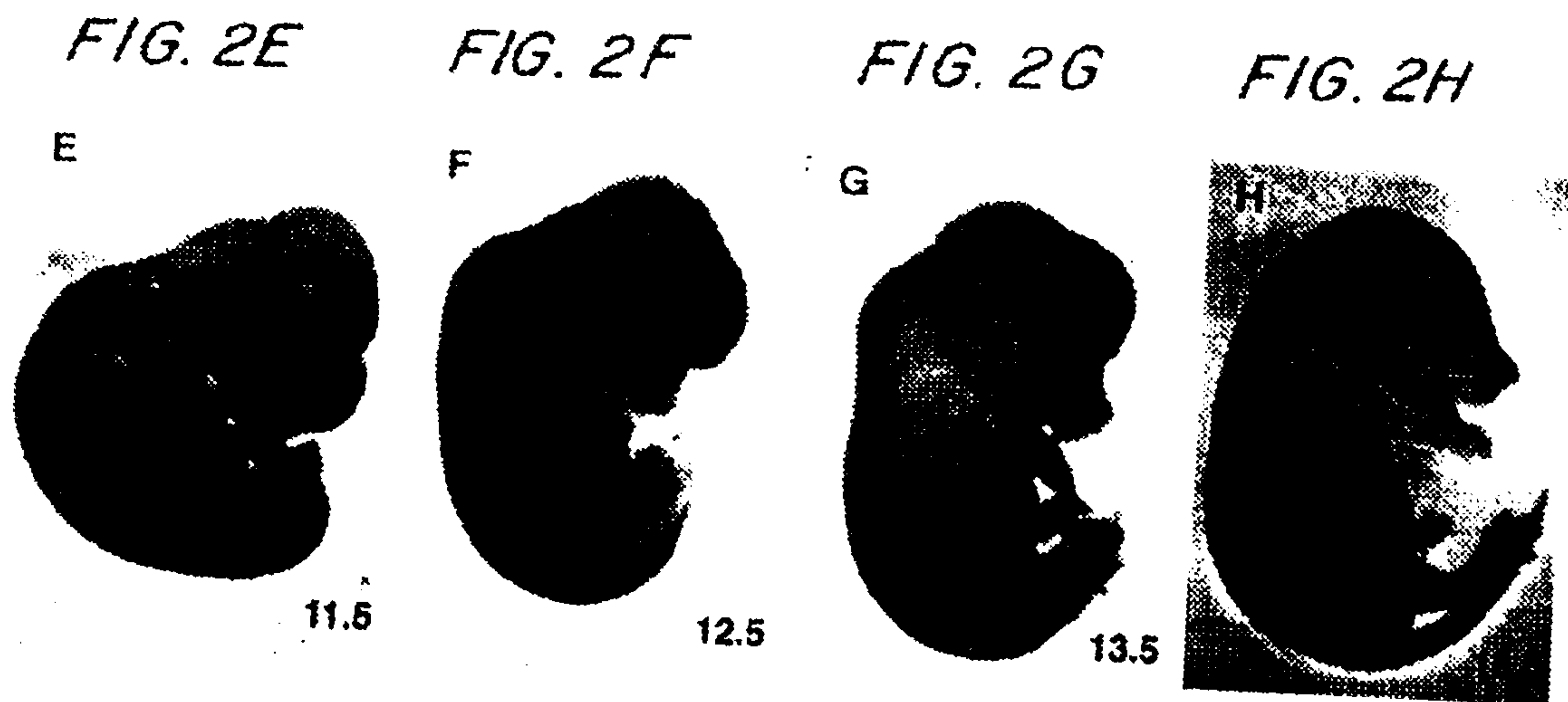


FIG. 1C

TARGETED ALLELE







$\pm/-$

A

$-/-$

B



FIG. 3A



FIG. 3B

FIG. 4A



FIG. 4B

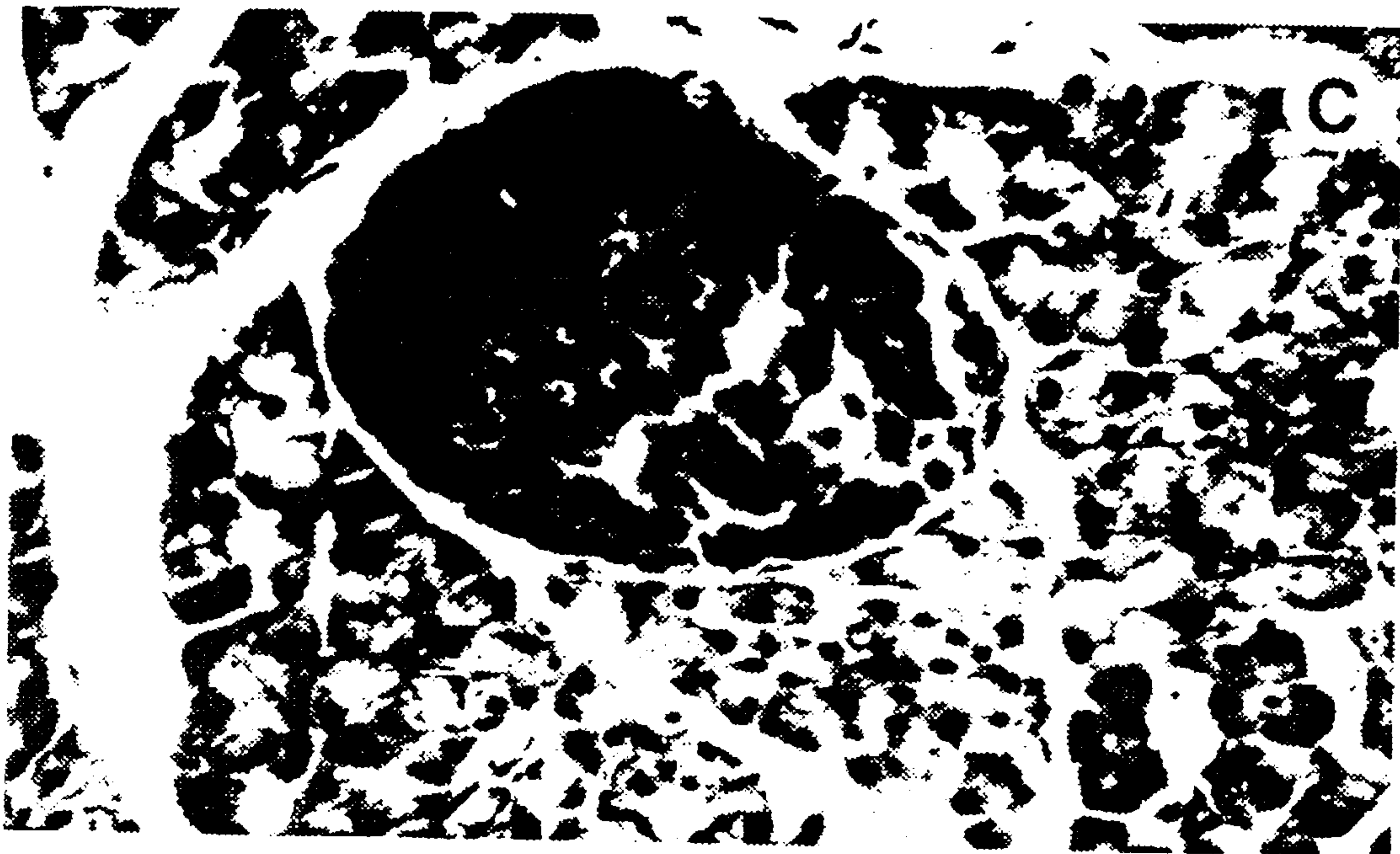
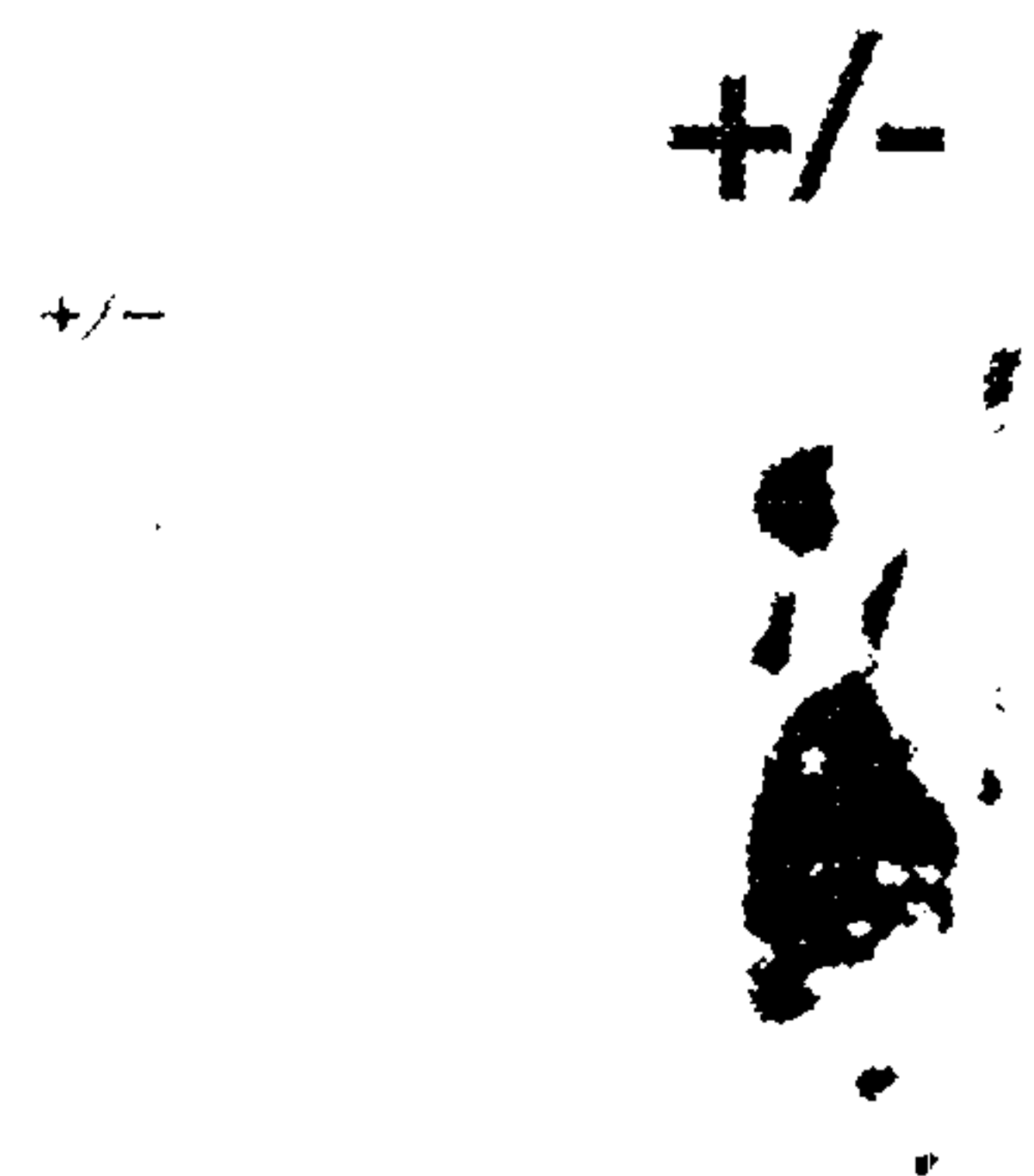


FIG. 4C



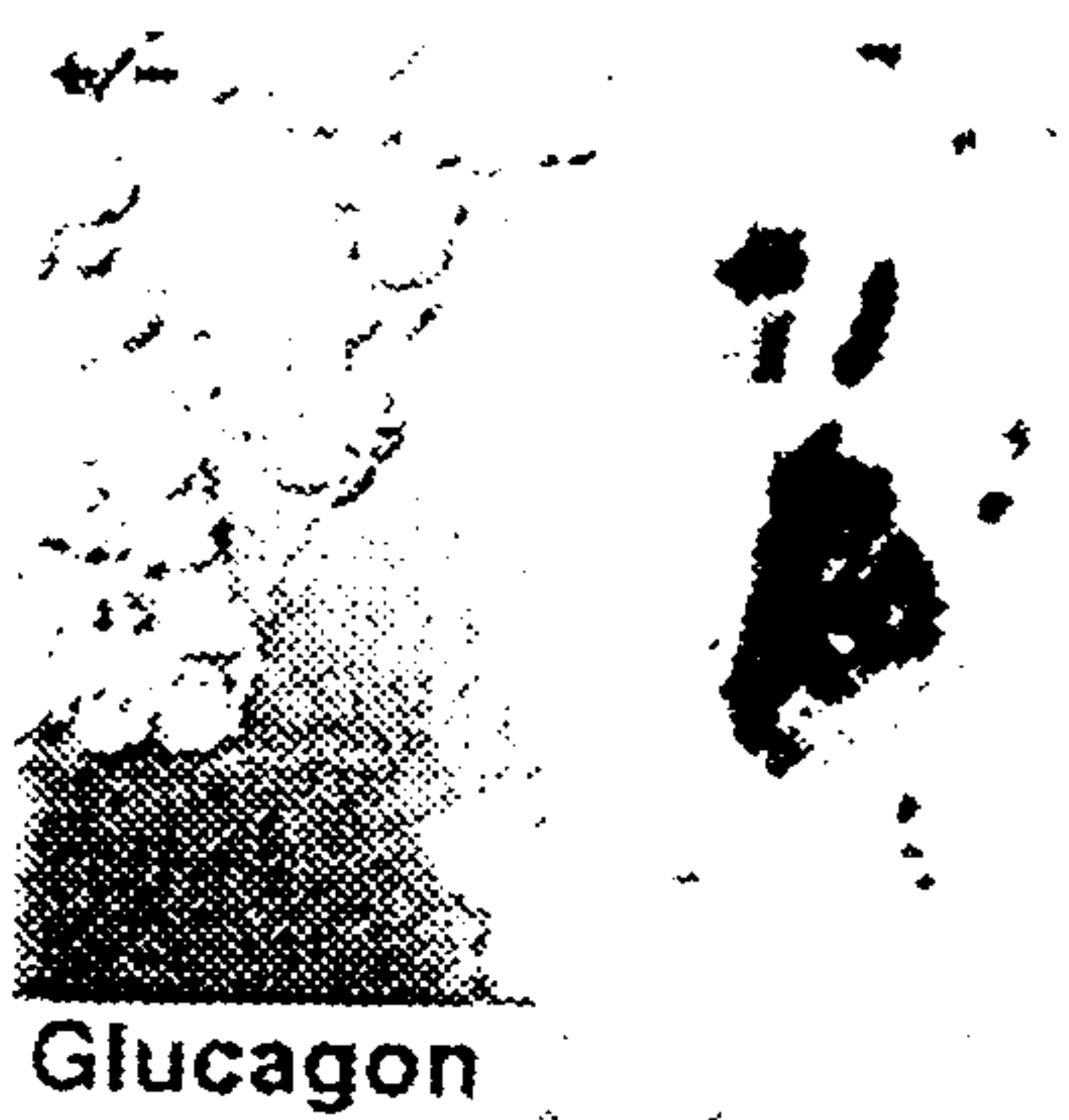
Insulin

FIG. 5A



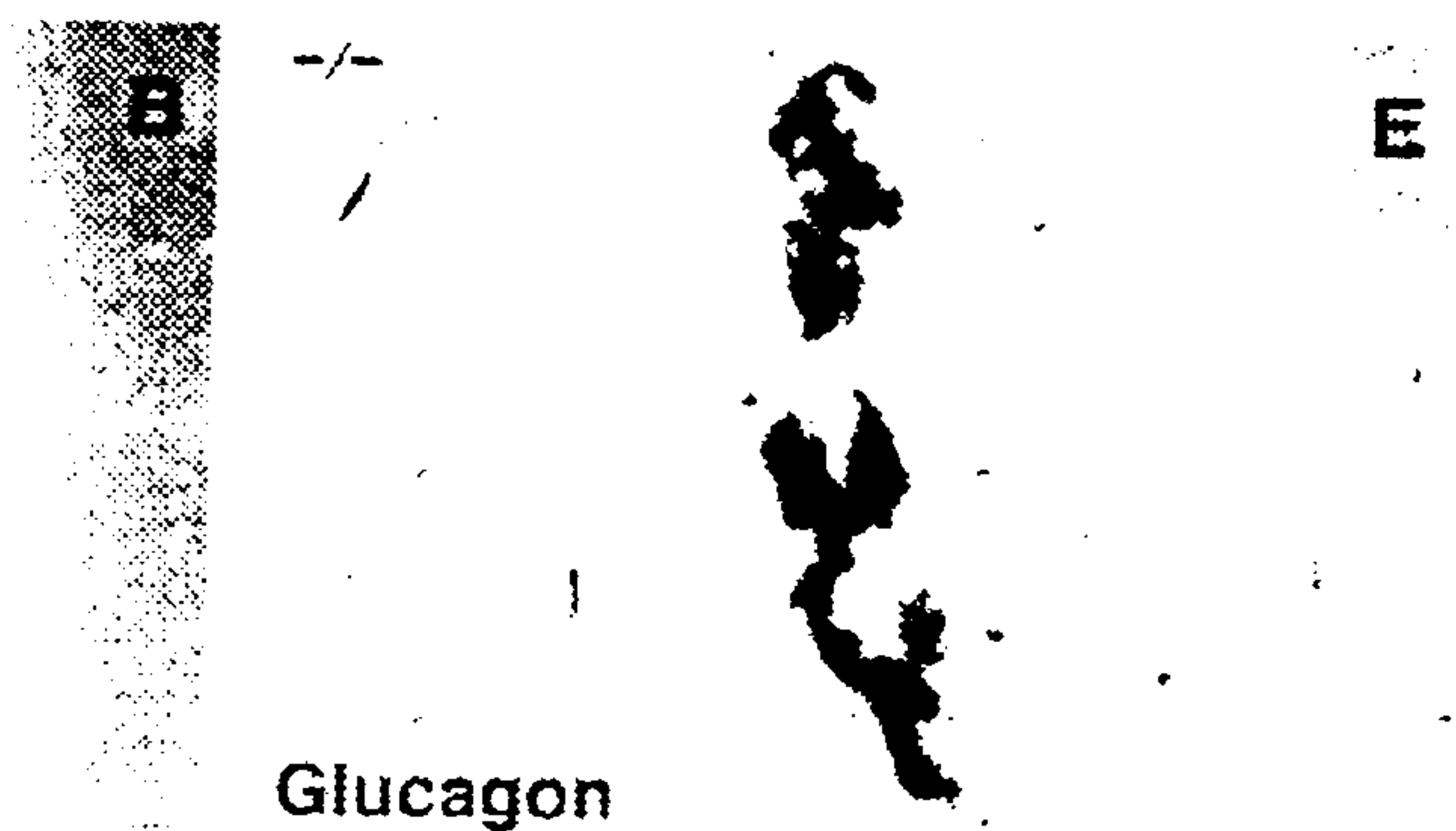
Insulin

FIG. 5D



Glucagon

FIG. 5B



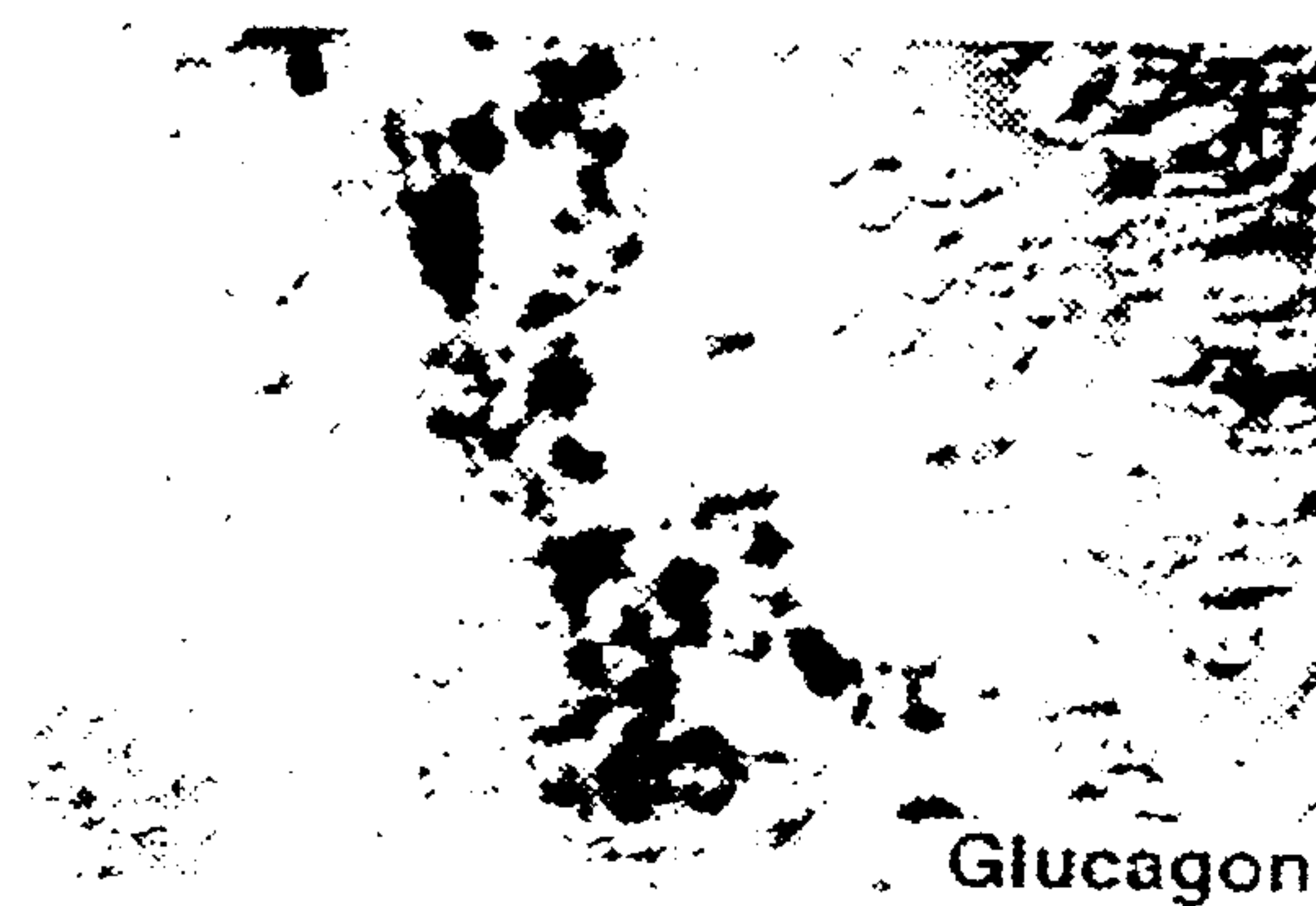
Glucagon

FIG. 5E



Glucagon

FIG. 5C



Glucagon

FIG. 5F

FIG. 6A

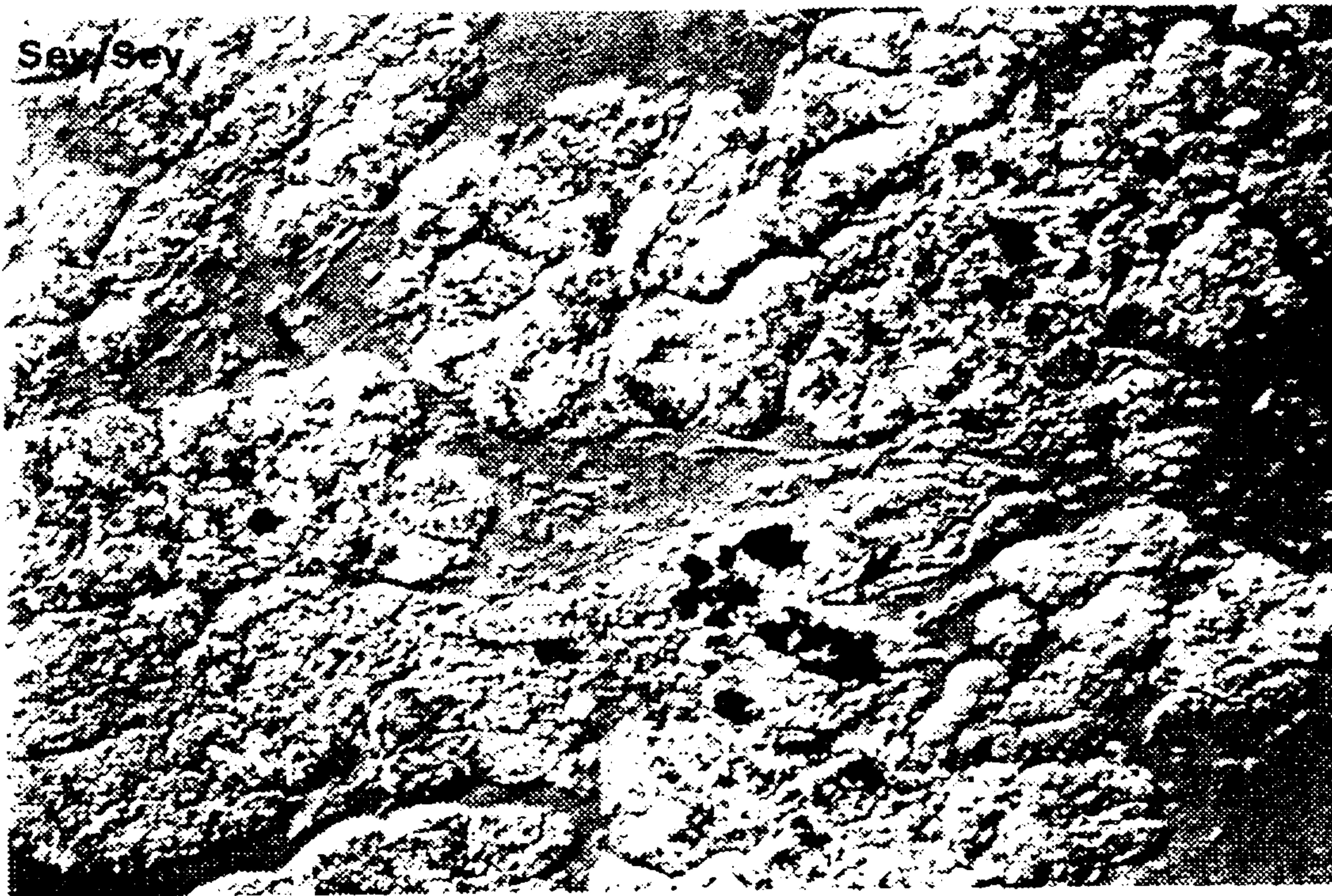


FIG. 6B

FIG. 7

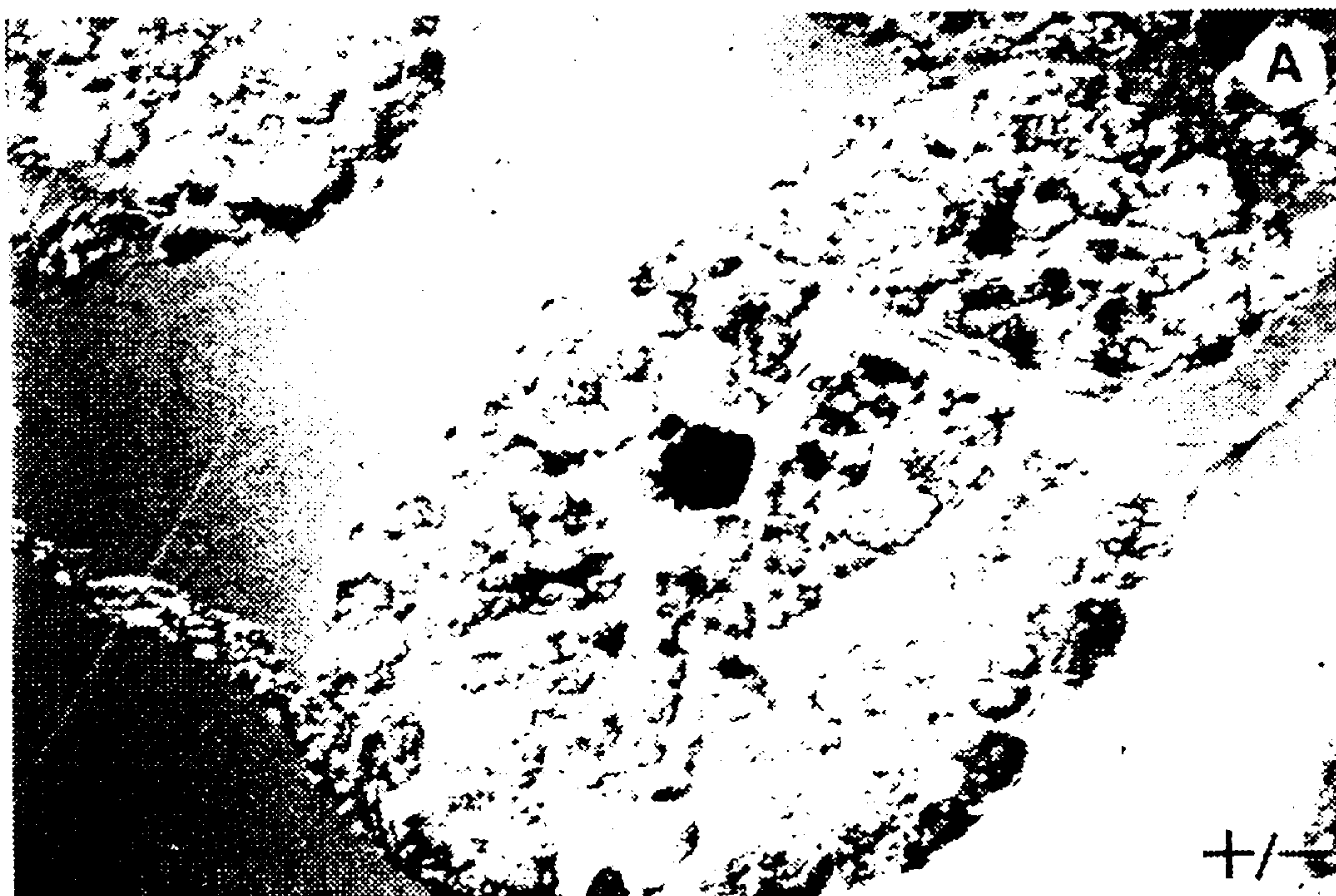


FIG. 8A

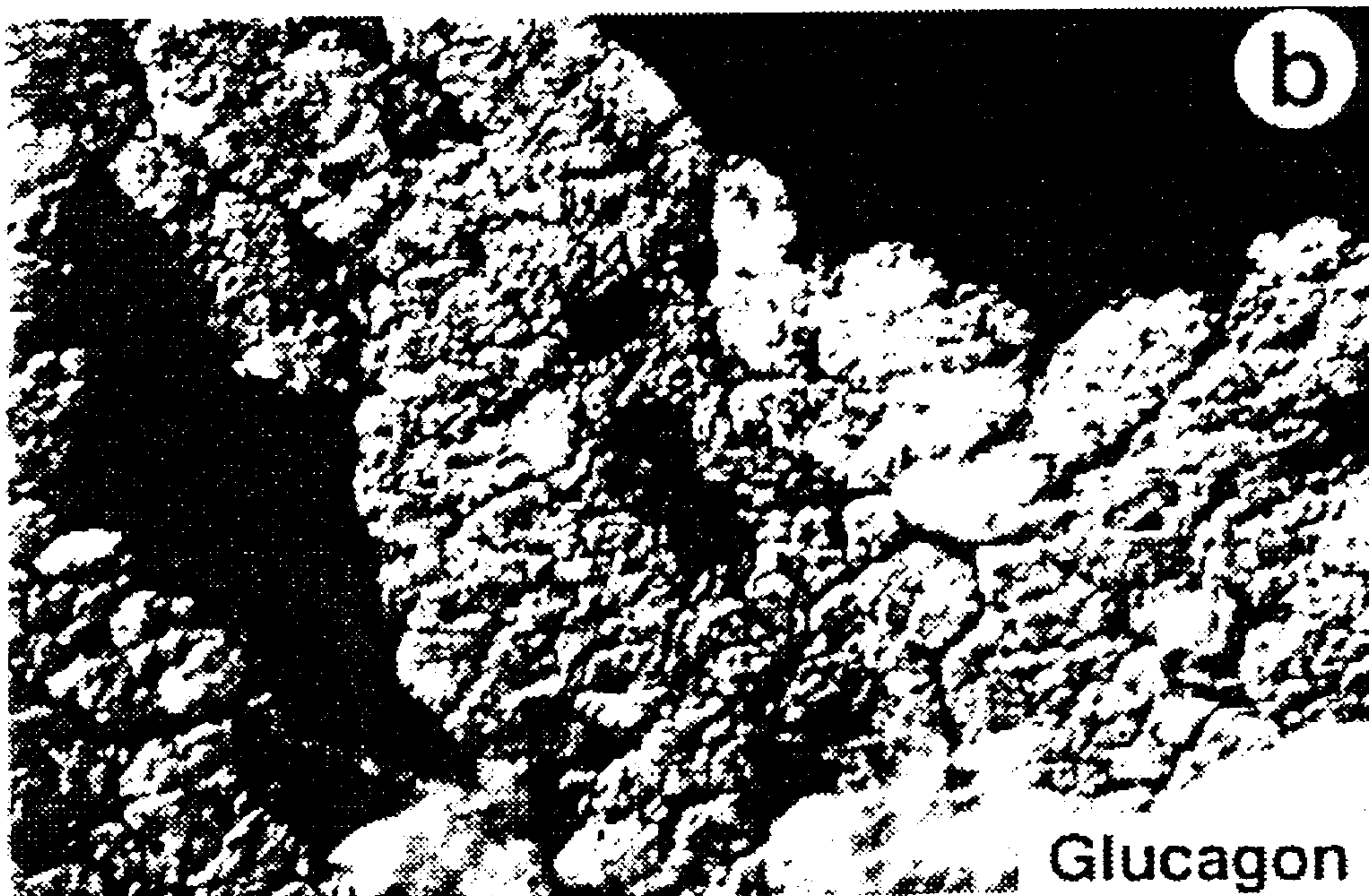
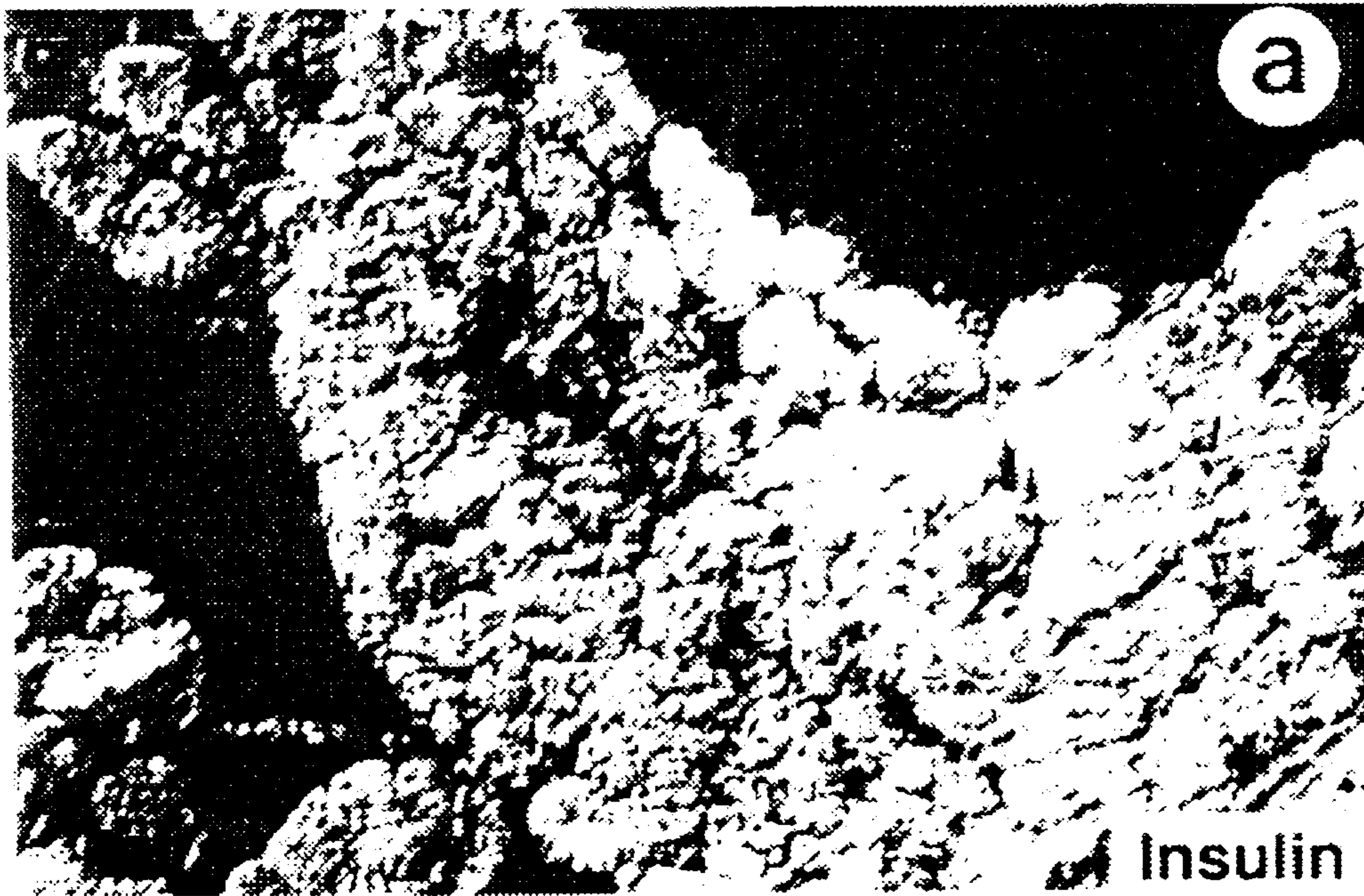


FIG. 8B

FIG. 8C

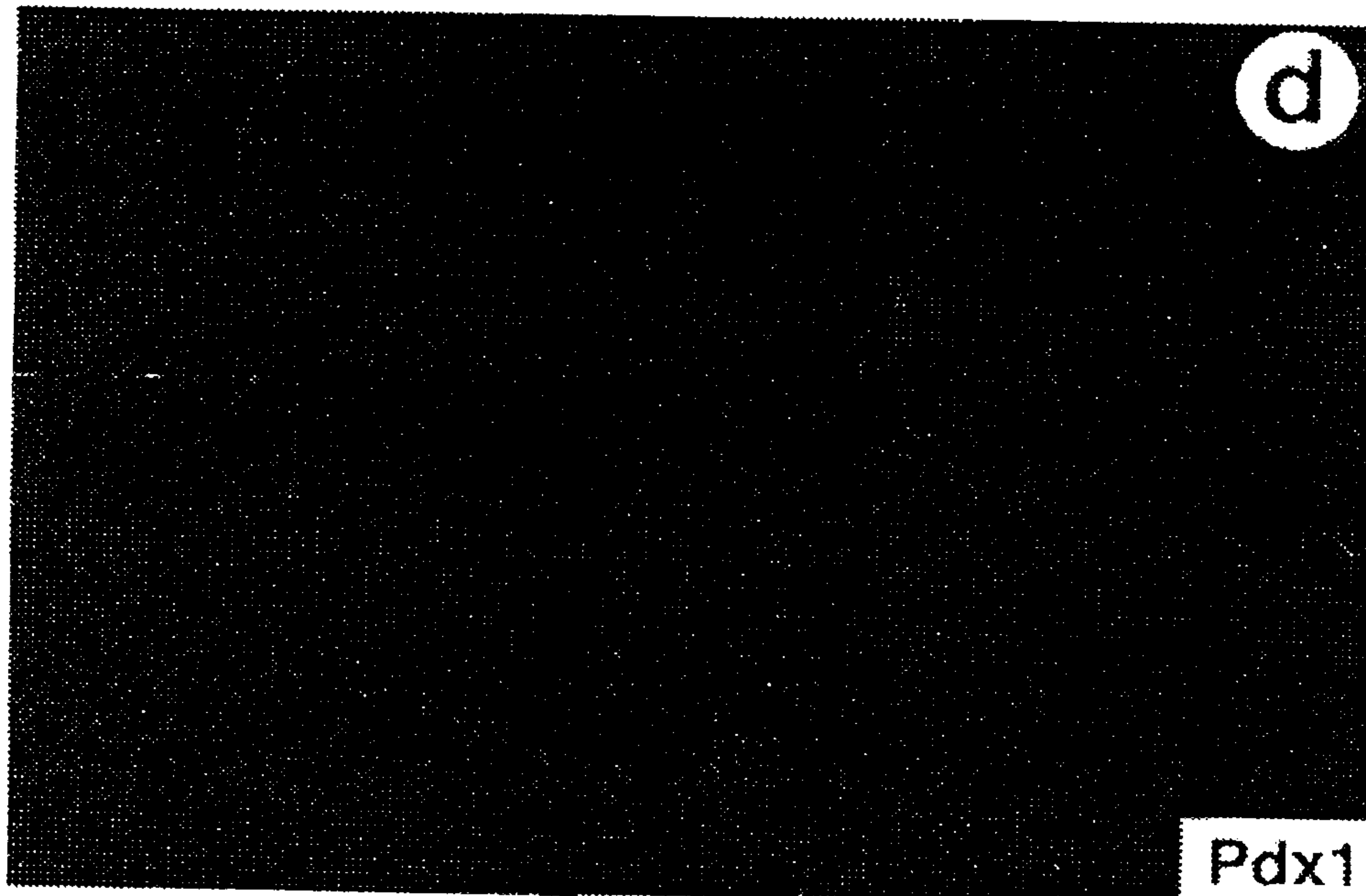
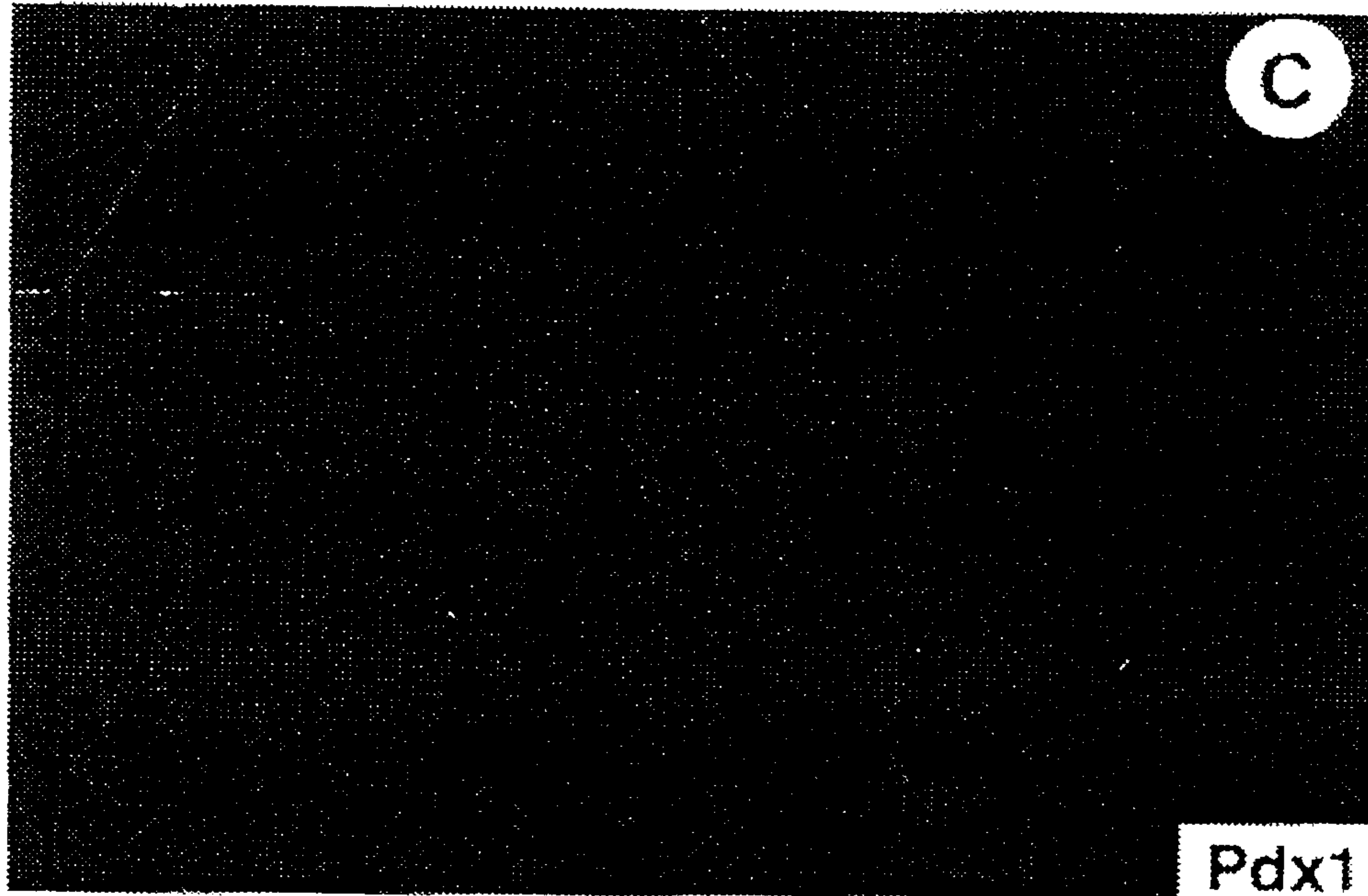


FIG. 8D

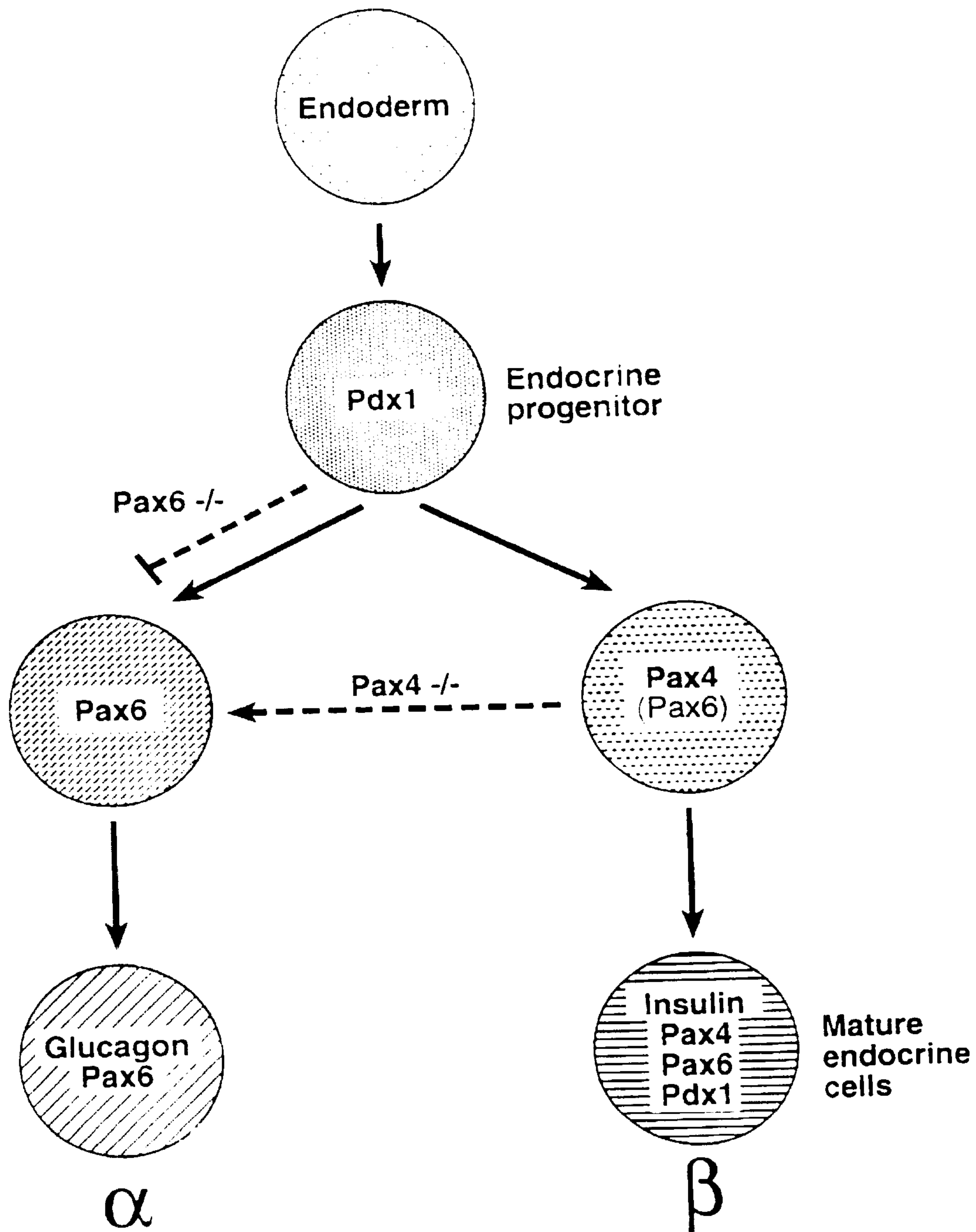


FIG.9

FIG. 10

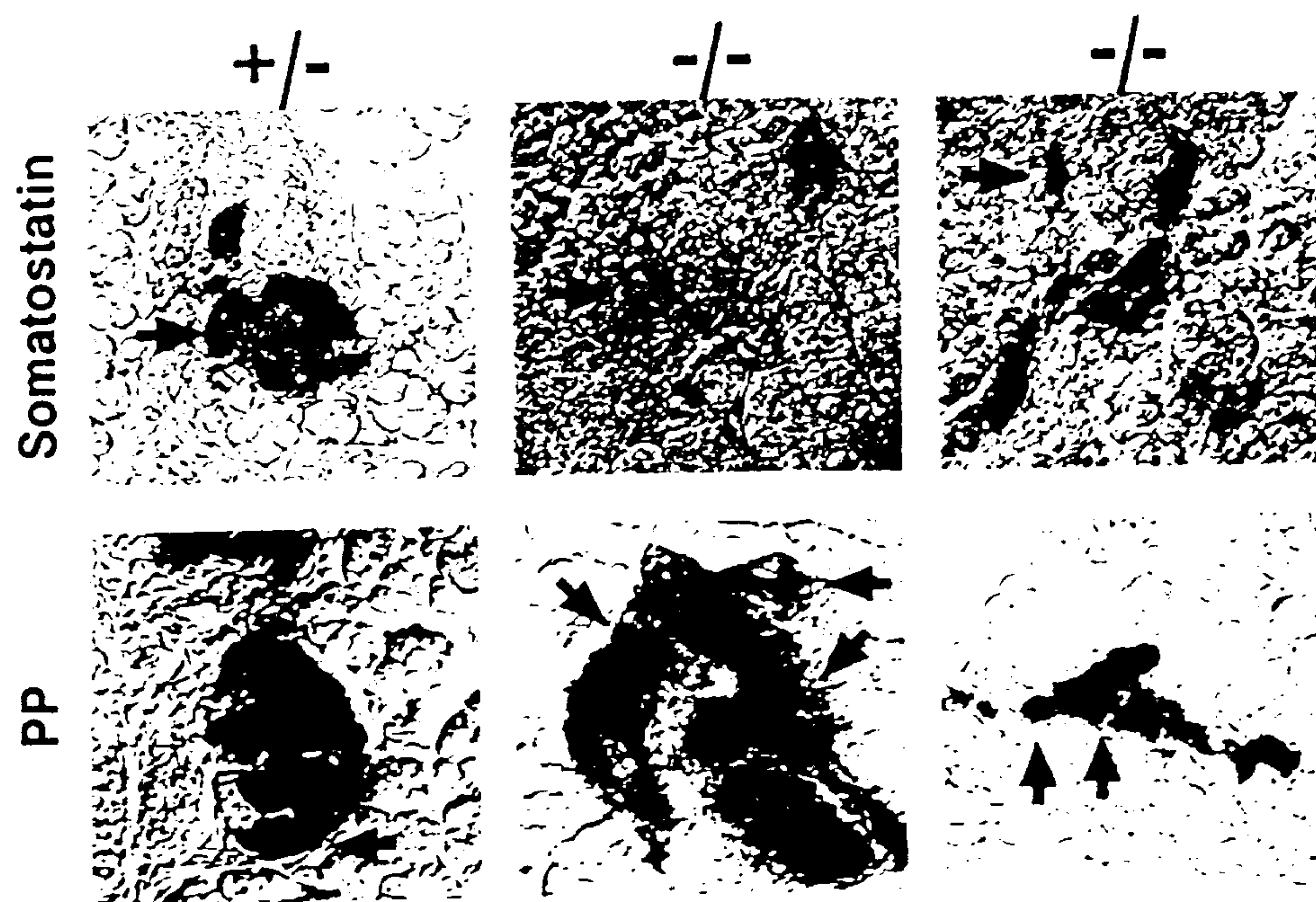


FIG. 11

Genotype	n	Insulin (µg/mg protein)	Glucagon (ng/mg protein)
Wild type	6	3.4±0.33	775±185
Heterozygous	8	3.5±0.69	531±161
Homozygous	8	1.1±0.26	0*

* Glucagon levels were too low to measure

Hormone concentrations were determined in protein extracts isolated from individual pancreata. Values shown represent the mean value from the number of samples assayed

FIG. 12

