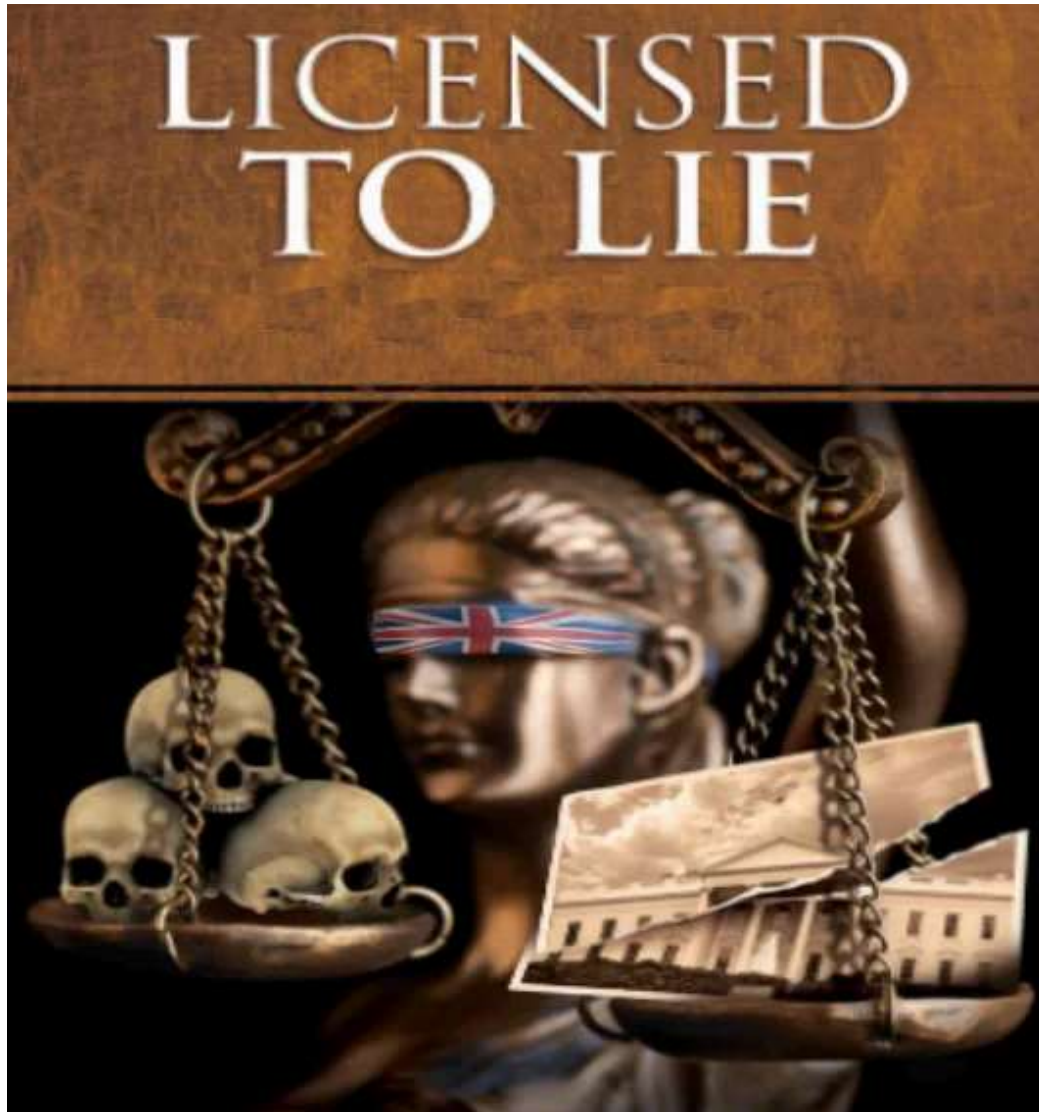


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PORTON DOWN LABORATORY HEAD GIVEN LICENCE TO LIE IN NOVICHOK SHOW TRIAL

Posted By *Editor* On November 14, 2024 @ 10:52 pm In Skripal | [No Comments](#)



[1]



by John Helmer, Moscow

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Anthony Hughes, the retired judge (titled Lord Hughes of Ombersley) directing the Dawn Sturgess Inquiry in London, opened the questioning of a senior British Government chemical warfare agent on Wednesday by telling him “you’re not bound by your statement, but by all means use it to refresh your recollection” — [page 5](#). [3]

This is a licence to lie. The head of chemical and biological analysis at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) at Porton Down was given the cipher MK26 to conceal his name — his face screened from view in the videotape of the hearing — to do just that.

Hughes also arranged for his assisting counsel, Andrew O'Connor KC, to give the government official this version of the witness oath. "May I ask you," O'Connor said ^[3], "whether you have had an opportunity to read through this statement before giving evidence today? A. Yes, I have. Q. Are its contents true to the best of your knowledge and belief? A. Yes, they are. Q. Thank you."

As Hughes and O'Connor know very well, the official oath in British courtroom practice is that witness swears his testimony ^[4] "shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

In this case, the judge and his lawyer gave the witness a licence not to tell the whole truth.

Just in case these licences to lie and to evade the truth were spotted by the public, O'Connor told MK26 that he and Hughes accepted his "statement does not contain everything that you can say about these matters because there are some further issues, further material that is covered by the restriction [secrecy] orders. A. Yes, that's correct. Q. As a result, it's right, is it not, that you will be coming back when the Inquiry sits in its closed sessions to give further evidence and on that occasion you will be able to provide the Chair with the information which you cannot provide today? A. Yes." — page 6 ^[5].

According to the exhibits MK26 ^[6] had signed for the Inquiry, of the two pages of witness statement he had signed to the police on July 16, 2018, everything has been blacked out except one short paragraph giving the official accreditation of the workshops MK26 headed at the DSTL Porton Down. A second witness statement MK26 signed for the Coroners Court on August 20, 2019, comprises five pages, but they have all been censored. The only lines which remain say ^[7]: "I have complied with, and will continue to comply with, my duty to the court to provide independent assistance by way of objective unbiased opinion in relation to matters within my expertise." At the Bar this is recognized as the Queen Gertrude defence for lying; it comes from "the lady doth protest too much, methinks", the well-known line from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. A Defence Ministry employee cannot be independent, or objective, or unbiased in relation to his official work orders.

The political significance of the Porton Down lying has been international. It was the foundation of the claim the British Government made to its NATO allies five weeks after Sergei and Yulia Skripal's collapse that the UK was the target of a Novichok attack by Russia.

According to a letter ^[8] sent to the NATO headquarters by Sir Mark Sedwill, then the Prime Minister's national security advisor and supervisor of intelligence operations, "I would like to share with you and Allies further information regarding our assessment that it is highly likely that the Russian state was responsible for the Salisbury attack. Only Russia has the technical means, operational experience and the motive. The OPCW's. [Organization for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons] analysis matches the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory's [DSTL Porton Down] own, confirming once again the findings of the United Kingdom relating to the identity of the toxic chemical of high purity that was used in Salisbury. OPCW have always been clear that it was their role to identify what substance was used, not who was responsible... of course, the DSTL analysis does not identify the country or laboratory of origin of the agent used

in this attack...We therefore continue to judge that only Russia has the technical means, operational experience and motive for the attack on the Skripals and that it is highly likely that the Russian state was responsible. There is no plausible alternative explanation.”

Sedwill was lying. Porton Down was lying. OPCW repeated the lies it was given by the British. There was, there still is, a plausible alternative explanation.

In his appearance at Hughes’s hearing this week, MK26 tried to conceal this with what an independent British organic chemist with comparable expertise to MK26 describes as “camouflage science – faulty assumptions, missing chemical names, speculative findings, a day of witchcraft.”

At the beginning of the Porton Down official’s appearance, Hughes (*right*) warned him to stick to the official narrative that Novichok was the Russian weapon. “Don’t tell us anything that we ought not to know,” Hughes let slip, “and still less anything that other hostile people of any kind ought not to know.” — [page 46](#) ^[10]. This was a ruling by the judge that lying to the Russians or to skeptical members of the British public was not only necessary, but the duty of the witness.



[9]

Hughes also intervened to correct a question asked of MK26 by a lawyer representing the Sturgess family.

“[Q] ‘Over the past weekend, [Russian] foreign minister [Sergei] Lavrov said that the Russian Federation had somehow obtained information to suggest that the chemical used was identified by a world leading laboratory as BZ. In fact, the four OPCW designated laboratories did not detect BZ in any of the samples collected in Salisbury.’ Is that then confirming that there was no other analysis –”

“LORD HUGHES: Well, hang on a minute, never mind what a British Government representative may have said: was there any BZ in the samples that you looked at?”

“A [MK26]. There was no BZ in any of the samples that we looked at, either in our labs at Porton Down or, as they’re saying there, in any of the samples that were submitted to the OPCW laboratories. The only related chemical to BZ was in the control sample included by the OPCW as a quality control measure and that was a precursor, not BZ itself.” — [page 205](#) ^[11].

Hughes was implying that MK26 was not a British Government representative when the judge knew that to be false. Porton Down is an agency of the UK Ministry of Defence; MK26 is a British government employee; testifying in front of Hughes, he was representing the British Government’s chemical warfare laboratory. Earlier in the hearing, Hughes himself had reminded him of his official orders not to disclose government-classified information.

A British source was asked to assess MK26’s testimony and witness statements with the independence of not being employed or contracted by a government agency, not under state secrecy orders, and not vetted or rehearsed by Hughes, his lawyers or police advisors. The

source is a British organic chemist who describes himself as a “published academic in the field of high resolution chromatography.” He has requested the same anonymity which Hughes ordered for the Porton Down agent.

He disputes the scientific validity of a question-and-answer exchange between MK26 and Hughes’s assisting counsel at page 83-84 of the [hearing transcript](#) ^[3].

“Q. If we just read the bottom line of this page [of MK26’s witness statement], going over to the next, it says: ‘Samples from both Yulia Skripal and Sergei Skripal were positive for the presence of a Novichok-butyrylcholinesterase nonapeptide, a characteristic marker for exposure to a particular nerve agent of the Novichok class.’ This is very much the territory we were discussing earlier.

A.[MK26] Yes.

Q. That those tests indicated the presence of a particular Novichok?

A. Yes.

Q. The same particular Novichok within both of their bodies; is that right?

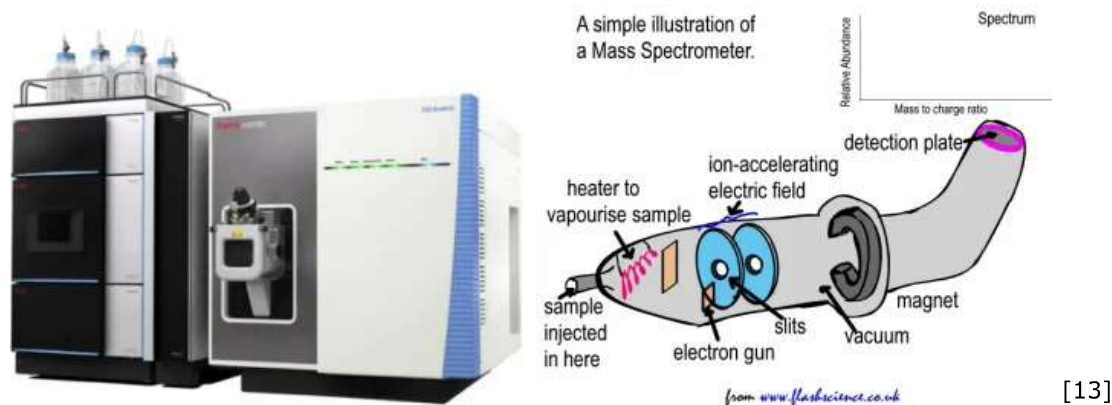
A. Yes, that’s correct.”

The source says this is incorrect. “The nonapeptide described cannot through mass spectrometry be described as “Novichok- butyrylcholinesterase. Two reasons. The nerve agent loses an atom when the reaction with the butyryl cholinesterase occurs. In the case of what we know of A232 and A234 [Novichok], the atom lost from the nerve agent would be fluorine.”

“However, when the atom is not known, then using the structure of the nonapeptide to identify the nonapeptide, which is claimed to have been detected, is not good science.

The lost atom could have been fluorine, chlorine, bromine, or astatine. The structure is not properly identified — the ‘free’ unreacted ‘Novichok’ has not been identified in this analysis. In the South Korean Defense Ministry research paper of [June 2021](#) ^[12], the nonapeptide was identified, but the parent ion — the actual molecule — needs to be present, so that proper identification is possible. No parent ion, with only the nonapeptide, as MK26 reports, means that his lab does not know which atom fell off the molecule of the nerve agent when it bounded to the AChE [Acetylcholinesterase].”

The source insists that the mass spectrometry which MK26 claims to have used to detect Novichok cannot have done so.



Left, a current-generation Liquid Chromatography Mass Spectrometry (LC-MS) machine. Right, a diagrammatic representation of how the technology works. For clearer understanding, [click to view video](#) [14].

"The LC-MS/MS [liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry] would be used to identify the spectrum of the nonapeptide adduct [15] where the A234 [Novichok] molecule has bound to the nonapeptide — nona means nine, that's the carbon chain length of the peptide. Note the fluorine (F) atom is now missing. The fluorine atom would be needed to properly identify the original nerve agent. So a chemist using the mass spectral information to elucidate the structure of the original, the unbound nerve agent, could not do so. MK26 cannot assume, he should not have assumed that the nerve agent contained a fluorine atom in the first place. But DSTL are claiming that unbound, unreacted 'free' Novichok was also detected. They need that claim in order to identify the particular nerve agent in the blood sample.

However, the literature does not show A234 (or A232) spectra. MK26's evidence is that he needed the unreacted nerve agent to be found in the sample, in order to make his 'identify the identical match' claim."

"Of course, if he and DSTL were totally convinced of the work they have done, then the specific chemical would be named. A234 is Ethyl (1- (diethylamino) ethylidene) phosphoramidofluoridate. Why won't they confirm this? Why is the hearing being told that Novichok was identified but the chemical name of what MK26 and his lab claim to have identified is being withheld? Why is Porton Down not naming the specific chemical they claim to have found?"

The source points out that the international research literature shows that well before the alleged Russian attack in Salisbury in March 2018, A234 Novichok had been synthesized and stocked by military laboratories in the US, South Korea, and Iran, as well as in the UK. This means that Porton Down already had stocks of Novichok, and that MK26's evidence confirms samples of this Novichok were used by MK26 to provide the "matches" he claims pinpointed Russian Novichok. That is a lie, according to the expert source.

Sedwill's claim in his NATO letter, repeated in parliament by then-Prime Minister Theresa May and in the press by then-Foreign Minister Boris Johnson that "only Russia has the technical means, operational experience and the motive" for the Novichok reportedly found on the Skripals, their front door-handle, Sturgess, and the perfume bottle on her kitchen table – that claim was false.

The source is also skeptical of MK26's evidence on how his laboratory measured and concluded that "the toxic chemical was of high purity. The latter is concluded from the almost complete absence of impurities." — [page 115](#) ^[3].

"Scientifically," the source has responded, "to determine if something is of high purity, there are two ways of determining this. First, compare the sample with a reference material. If in the example of alcohol, if I had a reference material which had a known purity, e.g. 99% ethanol, then I could calculate that my whiskey contained 40% ethanol. Second, measure all the expected impurities (including the unknown ones!), add them up, and the balance is the calculated purity of the chemical. The second version is unpopular, as it expensive to source 'pure' impurities, so that becomes a spiral of factoring in that the impurity reference material is not 100% pure. So the first method is very much preferred."

"However, you need a reference material of known purity, in order to calculate the purity of the sample. This means MK26 is admitting that Porton Down already had the reference 'Novichok'."

The source is also suggesting that if Porton Down already had high-purity Novichok in stock, there is alternative explanation for the appearance of the alleged Russian Novichok in Salisbury between March and June of 2018; and that alternative should have been examined in the public hearing. However, no lawyer for the Skripals or for Sturgess rose in front of Hughes on Wednesday to cross-examine MK26. His hearsay evidence is thus missing proof that what was reported to have been discovered as a Russian attack weapon had not been fabricated by Porton Down, on orders from the Defence Ministry, Sedwill and Prime Minister May.

The judge's assisting counsel O'Connor (*right*) did ask one crucial question.

"Q. MK26, you will be aware that in other publications and other places on the internet, an even more straightforward allegation has been made that Porton Down did, in fact, make Novichok, did, in fact, perhaps make the Novichok that was involved in this case. From that paragraph and those other references, there are obvious questions that arise, including, for example, did DSTL have the capacity in 2018 to synthesise Novichok; if so, had it in fact produced Novichok at that time and in what quantities; and also is there any possibility at all that any Novichok produced at Porton Down could have been involved in either the Salisbury or the Amesbury poisonings? Those and other questions arise, MK26, but is there anything you can say about those issues today in open, or do we need to explore them in closed?"



[16]

A. No, there is nothing I can say in open." — [page 47](#) ^[3].

"This is telling," the source comments. "If the head of chemical analysis at DSTL knew the answer to be no, he would have said so at the hearing. This means that in the closed session, he is going to say yes. That means that Porton Down did and can make Novichok. The lawyers and the press should have been all over this."

A lawyer source comments: "This is an example of hearsay defending itself by proposing to whisper."

To assist readers understand the organic chemistry, biomedical terms, and technology which have been used in the presentation of Porton Down's evidence for Novichok, the expert source was asked to provide this summary in layman's language.



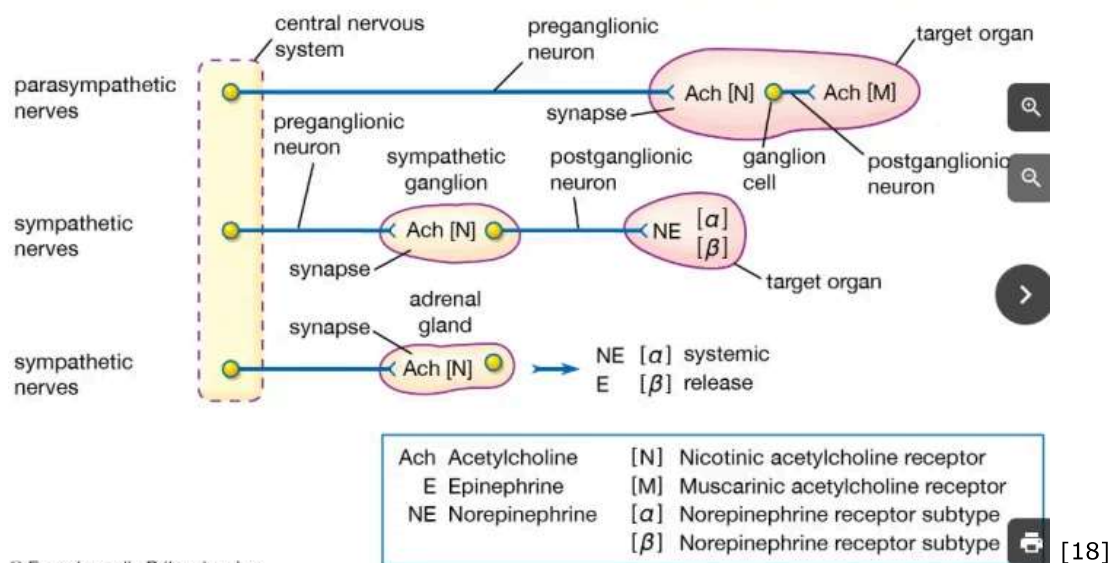
What does a nerve agent do, and how does Liquid Chromatography combined with Mass Spectrometry held the scientist find out what is going on?

[17] Our nervous system uses two simple molecules acetyl and choline which when combined form the imaginatively named Acetylcholine.

Acetylcholine is needed by our nervous system, but too much of it causes muscles to spasm and our nervous system to misfire.

Technically: AChE's primary role is to terminate neuronal transmission and signaling between synapses. It does this by rapidly breaking down ACh molecules, preventing them from acting for too long and allowing them to be recycled.

DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATION OF ACETYLCHOLINE IN THE TRANSMISSION OF NERVE IMPULSES



Acetylcholine Esterase (AChE) breaks down the acetylcholine molecule back to its original two components, so AChE performs the role of moderator of the acetylcholine levels in the body, and also allows the acetyl and choline molecules to be reused, rather than new starting materials to be made. AChE performs this breakdown of acetylcholine many billions of times every second.

When an organophosphate (OP) is ingested or breathed in, or applied to the skin, the OP disrupts, or more correctly, inhibits the function of AChE enzyme.

Another esterase performing the same function is butyrylcholine esterase. Scientists like studying this one as it is present in plasma, and we know scientist like working with blood.

Both acetylcholine esterase AChE and butyrylcholine esterase BuChE are inhibited by the OP.

They stop working; acetylcholine is not broken down; the nervous system goes into overdrive.

How do scientists discover what's going on and what do they measure? It is relatively simple to measure AChE and BuChE. There are medicines which are sometime given to Alzheimer's and dementia patients to reduce acetylcholine esterase levels — in other words to stimulate the nervous system. So clinicians have relatively simple medical devices to measure AChE and BuChE.

Knowing the esterase level is low, but not knowing what caused the inhibition requires another technique. This is Liquid Chromatography combined with Mass Spectrometry, or LC-MS as we scientists call it.

Simply put, samples, such as blood extracts, are introduced to a short column, where they are separated from each other, and then introduced to a spectrometer. The separated compounds are then ionised; that is they become charged, and their masses are accurately determined.

Some, and in fact most chemicals fall apart to some extent during this process. This is not a bad thing, as seeing a picture (spectrum) of not just the intact molecule, but also knowing the weight of the fragments allows the computer to match the molecule and its fragment ions against a library of stored spectra.

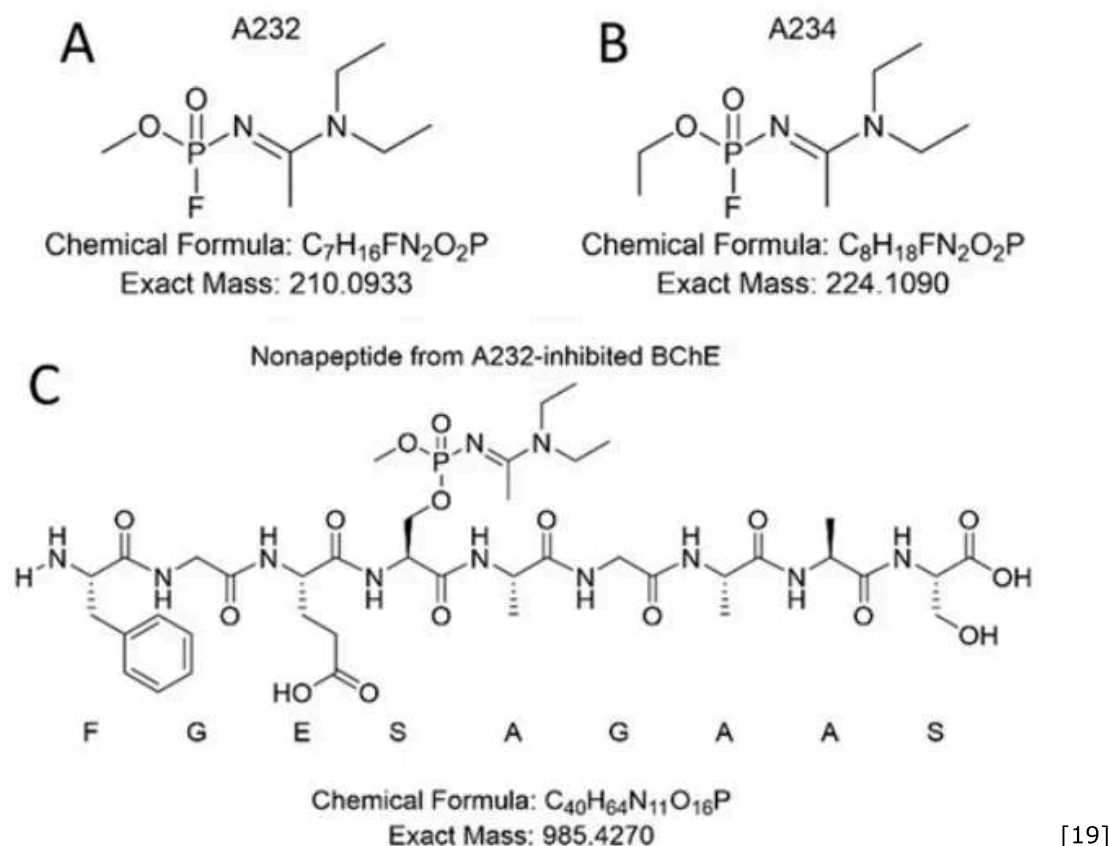
If you get a good match, then maybe your compound which is in the blood sample can be identified.

In the DSTL testimony, MK26 explained that a peptide, which was a fragment of the BuChE molecule, had a piece of the purported Novichok attached to it. This meant the picture produced by the sample (the spectrum) holds very important information.

The first part is the nonapeptide (a short chain of amino acids, in this instance nine) but even more significantly, the OP nerve agent is stuck to it. That means in the case of DSTL and the Skripal blood samples and Dawn Sturgess too, that the nerve agent can be 100% identified by LC-MS.

But wait, let's re-run Porton Down's decision-making.

In the action of the nerve agent bonding to the nonapeptide, one or maybe more of the atoms which make up the nerve agent are lost. Maybe the fluorine atom, maybe not. As the structure is not a complete picture, then the scientist cannot identify the actual structure of the nerve agent, because at least one of the atoms of the molecule is missing.



But wait, take another look.

It seems the blood sample contains the nerve agent itself. Not bound or reacted to anything, just there on its own. With this knowledge, if true, comes great danger.

How does the scientist know that the picture produced by the mass spectrometer really is the nerve agent? Well, we have a reference sample, don't we? No, we don't, because we have been told repeatedly that only Russia can make it.

Now it is beginning to look like the picture, (spectrum) for the nerve agent is not a very good one, technically or legally speaking. But not to worry – we have a library spectrum to compare it to, don't we? No we don't. This material is too secret to put in a commercial software library.

So let's look at the academic literature. There it looks like the US, Iran and South Korea have made the same nerve agent and have run their samples on their own LC-MS.

”

[20]

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- [14] click to view video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOGM2gOHKPc>
- [15] nonapeptide adduct:
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