

NANOPARTICLES FOR BIOMEDICAL USE: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

Maria Rasool

College of Allied Health Professional, Government College University Faisalabad

Seerat Zulqarnain

College of Allied Health Professional, Government College University Faisalabad

Maimoona Rasool

College of Allied Health Professional, Government College University Faisalabad

Maryam Khalil

Lyallpur Institute of Management & Sciences Faisalabad

Sania

Lyallpur Institute of Management & Sciences Faisalabad

Muhammad Usman

Lyallpur Institute of Management & Sciences Faisalabad

Sabira Sultana

Department of Eastern Medicine, Government College University Faisalabad

Maryam Khalil*

Lyallpur Institute of Management & Sciences Faisalabad

Muhammad Akram*

Department of Eastern Medicine, Government College University Faisalabad.

Corresponding Author Email: maimoonamit@yahoo.com

Author Details

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Corresponding E-mails & Authors*:

Muhammad Akram

maimoonamit@yahoo.com

Abstract

Nanotechnology has introduced groundbreaking openings in the field of medicine, with nanoparticles (NPs) at the forefront of this innovation. Characterized by their distinct size, tailored surface properties, and multifaceted functionality, NPs have found applications in medicine delivery, imaging diagnostics, and antimicrobial therapy. This review summarizes current developments in biomedical applications of nanoparticles, pressing their advantages, mechanism of action, and potential limitations. Innovative nanocarriers like liposomes, polymeric nanoparticles, and metallic nanostructures have significantly enhanced the therapeutic index of drugs while minimizing adverse effects. Furthermore, nanoparticles have enabled high-sensitivity

biosensing and real-time imaging, contributing to earlier disease detection and improved patient outcomes. It also explores the integration of diagnostic and therapeutic functions in theranostic (a medical approach that combines diagnostic imaging and targeted therapy using radioactive drugs) platforms and addresses the ongoing challenges related to toxicity, immunogenicity, regulatory approval, and large-scale production. Finally, future prospects are elaborated, emphasizing the growing potential of personalized nanomedicine, AI (Artificial Intelligence) -assisted diagnostics, and smart nanosystems in revolutionizing the landscape of biomedical science.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nanoparticles, delineated as particles with dimensions ranging between 1 and 100 nanometers. Due to their nanoscale size, they exhibit unique physical, chemical and biological properties not observed in their bulk counterparts (Zhang et al., 2021). Nanoparticles are not visible to the naked eye due to their sub-micron size. These properties include an increased surface-area-to-volume ratio, quantum effects, enhanced reactivity, and the ability to cross biological membranes, making them promising candidates for various biomedical applications. The introduction of nanotechnology into medicine has enabled new therapeutic approaches and diagnostic strategies, particularly in the areas of oncology, infectious diseases, and regenerative medicine (Fadeel et al., 2018). With continuous interdisciplinary collaboration, the field of nanomedicine is rapidly evolving, offering novel solutions for previously untreatable conditions. Antibiotic resistance is indeed escalating day by day, and it is becoming one of the most pressing global health concerns of our time. There are several reasons why antibiotic resistance is rising day by day. Unnecessary and improper use of antibiotics in both humans and livestock, and the other reason is lack of new antibiotics because pharmaceutical companies are producing fewer new antibiotics due to high cost and low profit margins. Resistant strains can spread rapidly across borders and inadequate

sanitation and hygiene in hospitals and communities contribute to resistance spread. Common infections are becoming harder to treat, surgeries and chemotherapy become riskier, multi-drug resistant "superbugs" (e.g., MRSA, CRE) are emerging.

Nanoparticles assist in a way that they offer an innovative strategy against resistant bacteria by disrupting bacterial membranes physically (e.g., silver or ZnO NPs), bypassing traditional resistance pathways, acting as antibiotic carriers for targeted delivery (Ventola et al., 2015).

Nanoparticle Classification & Synthesis

Nanoparticles can be classified based on their composition into organic, inorganic, and hybrid types. Organic nanoparticles include liposomes, dendrimers, and polymeric nanoparticles, while inorganic ones consist of metal-based nanoparticles such as gold (Au), silver (Ag), iron oxide (FeO), and quantum dots (tiny semiconductor nanocrystals exhibiting unique optical and electronic properties) (Ashoori, R. C. 1996). Hybrid nanoparticles combine both organic and inorganic components to harness multifunctionality (Albanese et al., 2012). Various synthesis techniques are used to produce nanoparticles, including chemical reduction, sol-gel methods, microemulsion techniques, and green synthesis which involves the use of biological materials like plants, bacteria, or fungi to create the nanoparticles (Iravani, 2011). These methods allow for control over particle size, shape, surface chemistry, and drug encapsulation efficiency, which are crucial parameters for biomedical applications.

Drug Delivery Systems

Nanoparticles have revolutionized targeted drug delivery, enhancing therapeutic efficiency while minimizing systemic side effects. Lipid-based nanoparticles like liposomes can encapsulate hydrophilic and hydrophobic drugs, offering controlled

release and improved bioavailability. They can be surface-modified with ligands to enable active targeting of cancer cells or inflamed tissues. Conventional drug delivery methods often suffer from poor bioavailability, systemic toxicity, and non-specific distribution. Nanoparticles can overcome these limitations by protecting drugs from degradation, enhancing solubility, and allowing for controlled and sustained release (Santos et al., 2019).

Polymeric nanoparticles such as those made from PLGA (Polylactic-co-glycolic acid), are biodegradable and biocompatible copolymer made of two different monomers lactic acid and glycolic acid which are linked together, are widely used in drug delivery systems and medical devices allowing sustained and site-specific delivery (Makadia & Siegel, 2011).

Nanoparticles enhance the sensitivity and specificity of diagnostic assays. Quantum dots, known for their strong fluorescence, are used in molecular imaging and cellular tracking (Medintz et al., 2005). Gold nanoparticles are widely used in biosensors and lateral flow assays due to their unique optical and surface plasmon resonance properties (Draz & Shafiee, 2018). Stimuli-responsive nanoparticles are a new frontier in drug delivery, releasing their cargo in response to changes in pH, temperature, or enzymatic activity, which are often altered in disease microenvironments (Torchilin, 2014).

Nanoparticles enhance imaging and theranostic modalities such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computed tomography (CT), and positron emission tomography (PET). Magnetic nanoparticles, especially superparamagnetic iron oxide nanoparticles (SPIONs), are effective contrast agents in (MRI) due to their magnetic properties and biocompatibility, improving visualization of soft tissues. They can

functionalized with antibodies or peptides for targeted imaging of tumors or atherosclerotic plaques (Gupta & Gupta, 2005).

Theranostic nanoparticles integrate therapeutic and diagnostic capabilities in a single platform. These multifunctional systems enable real-time monitoring of drug delivery and treatment efficacy, thus facilitating personalized medicine. For instance, gold nanoshells can be used for both photothermal therapy and optical imaging, providing a synergistic approach to cancer treatment (Jain et al., 2012).

The use of nanoparticles in diagnostics has revolutionized disease detection by improving the sensitivity and specificity of various assays. Gold nanoparticles exhibit strong surface plasmon resonance, making them ideal for colorimetric detection and biosensor development. They have been employed in point-of-care devices and lateral flow assays, particularly for detecting infectious agents like HIV, influenza, and SARS-CoV-2 (Draz & Shafiee, 2018).

Quantum dots are semiconductor nanocrystals that emit fluorescence when excited by light. Their high brightness, photostability, and size-tunable emission make them excellent tools for molecular imaging, cellular labeling, and multiplexed biomarker detection (Medintz et al., 2005). Magnetic nanoparticles are used in magnetic separation techniques for isolating specific cell types or biomolecules from complex biological samples, thereby improving diagnostic accuracy (Gupta & Gupta, 2005).

Antimicrobial and Antiviral Applications

The rise of multidrug-resistant pathogens has intensified the search for alternative antimicrobial strategies. Metal nanoparticles, particularly silver nanoparticles exhibit broad-spectrum antimicrobial activity by interacting with microbial membranes, generating reactive oxygen species (ROS), and disrupting DNA replication (Lara et al.,

2011).

Copper and zinc oxide nanoparticles have also demonstrated antiviral effects. They can interfere with viral attachment, entry, and replication, making them effective against enveloped viruses such as influenza and herpes simplex virus (Rai et al., 2016). Recent advances suggest their potential application in the prevention of viral transmission on surfaces and personal protective equipment (Rai et al., 2022).

Cancer remains one of the primary targets of nanoparticle-based therapies. Nanoparticles can exploit the enhanced permeability and retention (EPR) effect in tumors to passively accumulate at the tumor site. Additionally, active targeting through ligand-receptor interactions improves cellular uptake and reduces off-target effects (Kumar et al., 2023).

Drug-resistant cancers and tumor heterogeneity are being addressed through combination therapies using nanoparticles that co-deliver multiple drugs, genes, or immunomodulators. These platforms show promise in overcoming resistance mechanisms and enhancing therapeutic efficacy. Regenerative Medicine and Tissue Engineering: Nanoparticles are being integrated into scaffolds and hydrogels to support tissue regeneration and repair. They can deliver growth factors, stimulate stem cell differentiation, and enhance the mechanical strength of biomaterials (Alvarez-Paino et al., 2019). Magnetic nanoparticles are also used to guide and align cells in tissue constructs, mimicking native tissue architecture.

2. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Despite the promising potential of nanoparticles, several challenges hinder their clinical translation. Toxicity and long-term safety remain major concerns due to the potential for bioaccumulation issues, immune activation, and unforeseen cellular interactions.

Understanding their long-term effects and developing standardized toxicity testing protocols remains essential (Fadeel et al., 2018). Moreover, batch-to-batch variability, scalability of production, and regulatory hurdles complicate the commercialization of nanoparticle-based products. The lack of universally accepted guidelines for nanomedicine evaluation and approval also delays clinical adoption. Regulatory frameworks are also still developing, which can limit clinical translation.

3. FUTURE PROSPECTS AND INNOVATIONS

The future of nanomedicine lies in smart and personalized therapeutic systems. The convergence of nanotechnology with artificial intelligence (AI), genomics, and wearable devices will enable real-time health monitoring, early disease prediction, and tailored interventions. AI can assist in designing nanoparticles with optimized pharmacokinetics and targeting efficiency (Patel et al., 2023). Nanoparticles will likely play a crucial role in the development of precision medicine, offering individualized treatment plans with enhanced safety and efficacy. Emerging trends also include bioinspired and biodegradable nanoparticles that mimic natural systems, minimizing toxicity and improving biocompatibility. Advances in 3D printing and microfluidics will further facilitate the development of personalized nanocarriers and diagnostic tools.

4. CONCLUSION

Nanoparticles have significantly transformed the landscape of biomedical research and clinical practice. Their diverse applications in drug delivery, diagnostics, imaging, and antimicrobial therapy demonstrate their versatility and efficacy. Continued research and collaboration among scientists, clinicians, and regulatory bodies are essential for addressing current challenges related to toxicity, regulation, and scalability and unlocking the full potential of nanomedicine. As technological innovations progress,

nanoparticles are poised to become indispensable tools in the future of healthcare.

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