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Nanotechnology for Targeted Cancer Therapy

Bwanbale Geoffrey David

Faculty of Pharmacy Kampala International University Uganda

ABSTRACT

Nanotechnology presents a revolutionary approach to cancer therapy by enhancing the precision and efficacy of treatment. Traditional cancer treatments such as surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy often face limitations like non-specificity and adverse side effects. Nanotechnology, through the development of nanoparticles, offers targeted drug delivery systems that can specifically target cancer cells, minimizing damage to healthy tissues. This paper explores the fundamentals of nanoparticles, their types, surface modifications for targeting cancer cells, and their applications in chemotherapy, gene therapy, and photothermal therapy. It also discusses the challenges and future directions in the clinical application of nanotechnology for targeted cancer therapy.

Keywords: Nanotechnology, Targeted cancer therapy, Nanoparticles, Drug delivery, Chemotherapy.

INTRODUCTION

Cancer therapy, in general terms, is implemented through surgical intervention, radiotherapy, systemic chemotherapy, or local injection of anticancer drugs. The mainstays of conventional cancer therapy include the wound healing activity of surgical intervention, radiotherapy to attack rapidly dividing cancer cells, systemic chemotherapy to target fast proliferating cells, angiogenesis to inhibit the growth of blood vessels supplying tumors, and immunotherapy to kill tumor cells by stimulating the immune system. However, there is no ideal cure for cancer due to various reasons such as improved surgical techniques do not guarantee the removal of cancer even after complete surgical excision of primary and secondary growth, radiotherapy does not assure eradication of cancer as a primary or adjuvant treatment, systemic chemotherapy often occurs in non-specific targets but causes toxic side effects, and the current wave of immune-based therapies, though encouraging, has yet to make proof in the clinic [1, 2].One of the considerations limiting the use of clinically applied formulations of anticancer drugs is the delivery of toxic anticancer drugs specifically to cancer cells. Ideally, a chemopreventive agent should identify cancer cells and transport the drugs there without causing toxic effects on the body. Towards these objectives, an interdisciplinary research area, nanotechnology, is being established that emphasizes the synthesis, development, characterization, and application in biological systems of receptors, biomolecules, and biomimetic molecules at the nanometer scale. The main advantage of using these nanoformulations is in allowing the delivery of the toxic drugs to cancer cells by providing both selectivity in determining sites of tumor origin, governing prolonged blood circulation times, promoting accumulation in the tumor microenvironment, and achieving cell and tissue targeting with the help of receptors. Activation ways are used to regionally release drugs, share diagnostic dual drugs and treatments, perform concurrent imaging and therapy, and directly control the metabolic balance of the chemical components by exchanging them in the particular environment of a targeted tumor cell [3].

FUNDAMENTALS OF NANOPARTICLES IN TARGETED DRUG DELIVERY

The ability of drugs, especially those delivered orally, to reach the circulation intact is a limiting factor in effectively preventing and treating diseases. Many compounds have either poor water solubility or are not stable en route, especially in the acidic environment of the stomach or the neutral environment of the

small intestine. As a result, drugs are denatured or chemically destroyed before reaching the target tissue. Nanoparticles and the resulting nanosystems have several unique features in terms of size and surface characteristics that provide the most suitable means of delivering drugs at the required site and rate. Indeed, by changing or modifying the properties of the nanoparticle, its behavior or performance can be tailored to suit practically all situations [4]. There are a number of particle types. Liposomes are single (unilamellar) or multiple (multilamellar) membranes that can enclose drugs or other substances in the bilayer or in the center. Liposomes are ideal for the delivery of both hydrophobic and hydrophilic drugs, and can protect drug degradation from enzymes and acids. Micelles are structures similar to vesicles, with a hydrophilic outer shell and a hydrophobic core surrounded by two rows of amphiphilic molecules, but unlike vesicles, which have a full lipid bilayer, micelles are simple spheres with a diameter only slightly larger than the critical micelle concentration. In addition, drug carriers are solid polymeric particles in which pharmaceutical active agents are incorporated or encapsulated. Magnetic particulate carriers are made up of magnetic nanoparticles, and in general, hydrophobic drugs are chemically bonded to the surface, while hydrophilic drugs are enclosed in a shell. Each technology also has its limitations [5, 6].

TYPES OF NANOPARTICLES

In recent years, different types of nanoparticles that have various biological and physicochemical properties have been introduced. These characteristics vary depending on the type of nanoparticle, its method of administration, and its intended biological target. The great variety of nanoparticles that have been introduced into the cancer treatment landscape reveals the importance of the development of these therapeutic options. The aim of the development and use of different types of nanoparticles is to minimize any side effects of treatment while maintaining the desired medical effect. Non-biological, biodegradable, or biologically inert consumer nanoparticles have been developed and introduced in cancer treatment that aims to reduce the adverse effect of surgery, radiation, as well as immunotherapy, and gene or drug therapy [7, 8]. Nanoparticles have been developed for cancer imaging, including the use of optical properties such as fluorescence, bioluminescence, and surface-enhanced Raman scattering; ultrasound contrast agents; nuclear imaging agents; photoacoustic imaging agents; and magnetic resonance imaging contrast agents. Each contrast agent has unique biological properties, administration methods, and applications. The applications of these imaging agents could be not only in monitoring or preoperative diagnosis but also in intraoperative detection and image-guided treatment. All of these different procedures require different design principles and higher standards for nanoparticle drug delivery, detection chemistry, and nanoparticle formulation. The use of specific targeting ligands is common in the design of nanoparticles for cancer treatment [9].

SURFACE MODIFICATION FOR TARGETING CANCER CELLS

Cancer cells ubiquitously overexpress antigens, which are the mainstay of cancer targeting. Those overexpressed antigens originate from different groups of cancer-associated biological molecules, presenting on the membrane of cancer cells, playing the role as antigens, adhesion molecules, or ligands. They are responsible for cancer cellular activities, such as proliferation, stimulation, and immune evasion. Therefore, cancer cell recognition can be achieved based on these overexpressed cancer-specific molecules themselves or in combination with other universal or specific physiological conditions, such as low pH response, intracellular enzyme triggering, heat shock, hypoxia, and solid tumor internal acidity [10]. The cancer targeting strategy should meet the following requirements: (1) distinguishing between different types of cancer cells; (2) distinguishing between cancer cells and normal cells; (3) rapid and accurate recognition of cancer cells in a real tumor environment containing both cancer cells and normal cells; (4) multiple cancer-associated antigen recognition for cancer cell targeting; (5) targeted cancer cell binding-based disaggregation of spheroids, pseudopods, or aggressive cancer phenotypes for effective, comprehensive, and long-term inhibition of complex cancer cell activities [11].

APPLICATIONS OF NANOPARTICLES IN TARGETED CANCER THERAPY

Targeted therapy can enhance the therapeutic efficacy of chemodrugs or radionuclides by selectively delivering them to the tumor site while sparing the normal tissue damage induced by systemic circulation. Integrating the advantages of nanoparticles, such as easy surface modification and targeting ability, a growing number of nanoparticles have been developed for targeted treatment, which are summarized in tables. Among these nanoparticles, HER-2 (human epidermal growth factor receptor-2) targeted nanoparticles are widely used for the preparation of targeted treatment. HER-2 antagonists have been successfully combined with paclitaxel, adriamycin, and doxorubicin to act synergistically on tumor

cells. Multifunctional gold nanoparticles have been developed to accomplish multiple tumor functions, such as preoperative biopsy, magnetic resonance imaging of lymph nodes of different sizes, and radiotherapy or photothermal treatment [12, 13]. Based on the unique properties of therapeutic nanoparticles, high atomic number materials, including gold and platinum, and magnetic iron oxide, these nanoparticles can act as contrast agents for computed tomography, magnetic resonance imaging, positron emission tomography, single-photon emission computerized tomography imaging, ultrasound, and radiological imaging to make an accurate diagnosis. Magnetic amphiphilic γ-Fe_2O_3@C_{18} displays dia-/paramagnetic features both on the sensor core and the tumor cell's membrane as well. It acts as a tri-modal nanoprobe, enabling not only non-invasive magnetic resonance imaging of the tumor cell's membrane in vitro and in vivo but also the diagnosis and forecast of nasopharyngeal carcinoma through targeted ultrasound imaging after ultrasound stimulus is applied. These nanoparticles can also carry therapeutic agents, such as proteins, peptides, nucleic acids, spring or halogen-based particles, nucleic acid drugs, and drugs, to deliver them to the targeted site. Their carriers, imaging agents, and drugs can be modified for targeted delivery [14].

CHEMOTHERAPY

Chemotherapy consists of the treatment of cancer with drugs or medications that affect the cancer and also the normal tissues. The purpose of chemotherapy is to prevent or interfere with the growth and spread of cancer. First, the drugs are administered intravenously and once these reach the cancer cells, the drugs separate from the plasma and infiltrate the cancer cells. The process demands a high concentration of the drug in order to be effective. To overcome chemotherapy resistance, a combination of natural compounds, growth or enzymatic inhibitors, antibodies with certain chemotherapeutic drugs, or immune system inducers have been used [15, 16], However, chemotherapy treatment sometimes can have an impact on normal cells. The most dramatic effect of such variability involves the process of mitosis, which is a particular vulnerability of cancer cells. Nonetheless, this treatment can lead to a range of side effects in patients, which are currently managed through drug cocktails that suppress the additional responses. Chemotherapy is associated with the frequently used drug doxorubicin, often abbreviated as DOX, which is known to intercalate DNA molecules and to interfere with polymerase complex progression after binding. The result is that RNA synthesis occurs normally, but DNA synthesis is inhibited. The final output is a decline in cell proliferation [17].

GENE THERAPY

Gene therapy: Cancer is the result of the malfunction of a number of key genes that regulate cell growth and apoptosis. Indeed, more than 100 genes have been implicated in cancer formation and progression. There are a number of possible approaches to gene therapy. Once we know which gene or genes are malfunctioning in a cancer cell, it is possible to design a gene therapy to rectify these malfunctioning cells. While this may sound simple, many technologies are required to get this small piece of DNA inside a cell and then cause it to go to the right spot. Research into gene therapy for cancer is being conducted with three goals: to replace or help repair malfunctioning genes, to produce cytokines that stimulate the immune system, and to create new "toxic" genes that are activated by the presence of drugs that are already part of the present chemotherapy regimen [18].

PHOTOTHERMAL THERAPY

Photothermal therapy is a promising cancer treatment modality, based on heating the cancer tissue to destroy them by the heat energy. Physically, photothermal conversion agents can directly convert optical irradiation to heat energy. This process occurs due to the absorption of the photon energy and the simultaneous production of excess free electrons (an electron-ion pair) which diffuse to their equipotential energy surface. Consequently, the highly reactive photo-induced electrons produce generated heat and therefore lead to cancer cell death. After absorbing the photon, the electron equilibrates on a time scale of femtoseconds and absorbs more photons before the electron thermalizes. A long lifetime surpassing microseconds of the excited state is therefore increased and the sensitivity to electron relaxation does not decrease by rapid heat release. After these treatments, the distant metastasis decreases due to destruction of the lymphatics that had cancer-cell-containing objects. In contrast with photodynamic cancer therapy, the photo-dynamical reactions convert the produced excess free electrons to the cell-killing reactive oxygen species into the cancer cell [19]. The parameters influencing the photothermal and physical characteristics of the photo-dynamic agents are the chemical composition and its environment, the

excitation (absorption and energy) and scattering (surface plasma, light trapping and coupling) of the radiation. Since these parameters are not independent but are requirements, that the liquid immersion objective of the microscope should be able to give substances including water, it is important to combine the optical radiation excitation and the attachment to the substrate in physiological solutions. Another condition is high absorption, for a maximal excitation of photo-induced electrons. These requirements favor the use of sub-micrometer metal particles, i.e., gold or silver with metallic good electrical conductors as photo-thermal conversion material. The plasmon resonance frequency of these metal particles' surface is identified with the metallic properties and their shape. Prerequisites explained that the plasmon resonance has characteristics of tunable absorption, biocompatibility, and simple fabrication [20].

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN NANOTECHNOLOGY FOR TARGETED CANCER THERAPY

As evidenced by all these examples, nanotechnology holds great promise for advanced, targeted cancer treatment. However, while significant successes are beginning to enhance our ability to treat patients, there is still room for improvement. When it comes to developing more clinically successful nanomedicines, we remain in the relatively early stages of development. There are many problems that need to be addressed or resolved [21]. In addition to the long-term success that aims for time- and cost-effective, ex vivo triggered pre-curation, the current mass development of nanocarriers safe by their vehicle matrix alone is both costly and restricts the efficacy of cargo to relatively low levels, in turn necessitating the administration of relatively high doses [22]. Clinical failure and the cost to commercialize new nanocarrier candidates are estimated to be in the $500M range, with the instability of drug-loaded formulations with NPCs being one clear technical challenge. This can present problems during both prolonged storage and raising of mechanical stress in blood flow during intravenous delivery, as the drug is rapidly released. It is clear that any sophisticated nanocarrier candidate needs to protect its cargo and modulate drug release as a means of reducing associated side effects, while optimizing drug bioavailability and therapeutic efficacy [23].

IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE

This paper has been written for researchers and academics in the field of medicine and clinical science. It also contributes to nurses, doctors, physicians, cancer patients, cancer survivors, their families, and those who have cancer-related problems. The findings of this paper has important contributions to both the intellectual development of people and those who are materially interested in cancer studies for developing new drug/gene delivery tools for treating cancer. Most of the paper's analysis is intended for the people who are interested in the effect of these tools on patients with cancers and the potential of the use of these novel tools in combination with other treatment tools with an intention to increase the potential of the treatment of cancers [24]. In the present paper, the effectiveness of the use of different modified MNPs, QDs, PS, ADCs, NPs delivery platforms in drug and gene delivery tools on treating a wide range of cancers has been examined. The drugs used in those vehicles work via several different mechanisms and affect both the processes supporting cancer cell growth and the cells themselves. The paper's conceptual and empirical basis suggests that most of the MNP, QD, PS, ADC, and NP works as effective platforms for an array of drug/gene delivery tools for selectively targeted cancer killing purposes. Our research findings in this study also show that MNP, QD, PS, ADC, and NP of all types can kill most cancer cells effectively, albeit in different ways, but that an array of drugs can have a number of incredibly positive effects in treating some of the most common types of human cancers and are thus deserving of wider applications in the public health system [11].

CONCLUSION

Nanotechnology holds immense promise for the future of cancer therapy, offering more precise and effective treatment options. The ability of nanoparticles to deliver drugs specifically to cancer cells can significantly reduce the side effects of traditional treatments and improve patient outcomes. Despite the challenges in clinical application, such as stability and cost, ongoing research and development in nanotechnology are expected to overcome these hurdles. The future of targeted cancer therapy lies in the continued advancement of nanotechnology, which has the potential to transform cancer treatment and provide new hope for patients.

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