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Review on Using Nanotechnology to Treat Cancer

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ABSTRACT

Cancer continues to be a global health problem, considering that it has an unacceptably high incidence and mortality necessitating the search for new ways for diagnosis and therapy. Nanotechnology has emerged as a promising tool in the field of oncology to provide futuristic solutions for targeted drug delivery, advanced imaging, and improved therapeutic outcomes. Classes of nanoparticles like liposomes, dendrimers, and polymeric carriers allow targeted delivery of drugs thereby minimizing systemic toxicity and enhancing efficacy. Nanotechnology improves early detection of cancer by means of quantum dots, magnetic nanoparticles, and biosensors while improving diagnostic accuracy. Although few years away from real-time application, integration of both therapeutics and diagnostics into theranostic approaches will facilitate personalized therapy.

However, hostile features like toxicity, large-scale production, and regulatory treatment must be cleared for clinical success. Therefore, this review deals with the current advances in nanotechnology-based cancer treatment applications, challenges, and future perspectives, which show great promise in revolutionizing patient care in oncology.

Introduction

Cancer Cancer persists as a significant cause of death, thereby manifesting itself as a huge health burden, while posing the proverbial puzzle to medical professionals, researchers, and healthcare systems. Now that some strides have been made with respect to the treatment of cancers with surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy, the limitations of such conventional approaches are becoming apparent. These treatments very often resist, exhibit non-specific toxicity, or inefficiently target cancerous cells. Therefore, there is an unambiguous need for treatment options that are more effective with less toxicity. It is in the light of such concerns that nanotechnology emerged as an area that holds promise for innovation in cancer therapy.

Nanotechnology involves the art of manipulating materials at the nano scale, ranging from about 1 to 100 nm. Materials of this size manifest properties quite different in their physical, chemical, and biological behavior, which vary from their behavior at macroscopic level. These properties have been the basis of their application in various fields, and in oncology, they provide a novel approach to improving drug delivery, imaging diagnostics, and therapeutic targeting and personalization. This review article will highlight the significance of nanotechnology in cancer treatment from the perspective of key mechanisms of action, advances already made in the field, and applications that might be in the near future for improved cancer care. We will also argue some of the issues that nanotechnology could resolve within the paradigm of conventional cancer therapies.

Nanoparticles in cancer treatment

Nanoparticles are defined as fabricated materials of size ranging from 1 to 100 nm in size. Due to their small dimension, huge surface area with the ability to functionalize with various molecules, nanoparticles are outstanding candidates in the development of cancer therapy. Nanotechnology applications constitute the continuing field for drug delivery, imaging, and theranostics (combined diagnostics or therapeutics).

Each of these applications retains tremendous advantages over standard therapy. The development and exploration of ongoing research will continuously broaden the benefits associated with all these areas.

1. Drug Delivery

Some of the most frequent applications of nanotechnology in cancer therapy are the development of advanced drug delivery systems. Traditional chemotherapeutic agents often lacked specificity, that is, those drugs shown targeting not only cancer cells but also healthy cells, which can cause side effects, including hair loss, nausea, and immune suppression. Nanoparticles, however, can be designed to create a more targeted attack only on the tumor cells, causing less collateral damage to healthy tissue and improving the overall efficiency of the drug.

Mechanisms of Targeted Drug Delivery

Nanoparticles can achieve highly effective drug delivery through those two primary mechanisms:

Passive Targeting: This method takes advantage of the grossly permeable and very much retained (EPR) reservoirs where the nanoparticles potentially accumulate within a tumor tissue owing to their leaky blood vessels. Since the blood vessels and microvessels present in most tumors are usually more made up of open-ended smaller holes than those normal tissues do, this allows nanoparticles to be passed much easily inside the tumor microenvironment.

Active Targeting: This method involves coating the surface nanoparticles with ligands or antibodies able to bind, specifically, on receptors highly present or overexpressed at the surface of tumor cells. As such, this method allows drugs to be delivered with high specificity, adding checks and balances on treatment selectivity against normal cells. One such instance would be the lipid-based nanoparticles called liposomes.

These are widely used for delivering chemotherapeutic drugs; one example is doxorubicin. Using liposomal doxorubicin was shown to minimize systemic toxicity of the drug while accumulating at the tumor site more effectively for therapeutic efficacy (1, 2).

Nanoparticle Types Used in Drug Delivery

Liposomes: These are hollow spherical particles consisting of lipid bilayers, capable of entrapping hydrophilic and up-the-hydrophobic type of drugs. Hence, they can provide controlled release and reduce toxicity effects. Liposomes are commonly discovered in cancer therapy due to their possessing biocompatibility features and the types of drugs they can entrap, which are quite many (3).

Polymeric Nanoparticles: These nanoparticles are composed of biocompatible and biodegradable polymers allowing a controlled drug release over long periods of time. Their advantages include customized profiles for drug release, increased bioavailability of drug attached to nanoparticles, and reduced side effects (4).

Gold Nanoparticles: These nanoparticles are frequently used in cancer therapies owing to their very promising optical and chemical properties. These can also be functionalized to have drugs or imaging agents. They are among those most widely applied in drug delivery.

2. Nanotechnology in Imaging

Nanotechnology has made great strides in improving many forms of cancer imaging; allowing visualizing tumors very accurately, and therefore very useful for earlier diagnosis and treatment planning. Using nanoparticle-based contrast agents, it will be easy for clinicians to detect tumors at early stages, modify the course of the patient's treatment according to tumor progression over time, and determine possible responses to treatment.

They can be utilized for imaging.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI):

Superparamagnetic iron oxide nanoparticles are used as MRI contrast agents, as these nanoparticles increase the magnetic properties of the target tissue and generate sharper and defined images, which are essential for exact localization of the tumor (6).

Fluorescence Imaging*: Quantum dots are a single type of a kind of nanoparticle that is used in fluorescence imaging to image and track cancer cells due to its unique ability to fluoresce. The light emitted by these nanoparticles can exist at two specific wavelengths, making them excellent at detecting very minute amounts of cancer cells in real time (7).

Computed Tomography (CT): Nanoparticles could improve CT imaging by increasing the disparity of contrast in healthy and cancerous tissues, making them easily spatially distinguishable by the clinician to the uninformed eye (8).

3. Theranostics: Combined Therapy and Diagnosis

Theranostics is the term used to explain a common platform that amalgamates therapeutic and diagnostic capabilities. This integrated approach set new standards for the accuracy of therapy as they would allow real-time monitoring of the therapeutic effects while the application of targeted therapy has taken place.

Nanoparticles are very appropriate for such applications as theranostics as they offer the advantage of carrying both therapeutic (drug or gene) and diagnostic agents (imaging part for contrast in therapy).

Magnetic Nanoparticles: Both experimental and clinical applications of these nanoparticles include diagnostic imaging (for instance, MRI) as well as therapeutic (example, magnetic hyperthermia) applications. In magnetic hyperthermia, the tumor-specific death of tumor cells can be achieved by heating magnetic nanoparticles with an external magnetic field, leaving healthy tissue unaffected (9).

Gold Nanoparticles: Gold nanoparticles are commonly used in photothermal therapy. They have a capacity for efficient absorption and conversion of shining energy into localized heat, which can ultimately kill cancer cells. This method allows for tumor cell destruction by low damage to surrounding healthy tissue (10). Current Advances in Nanotechnology for Cancer Treatment Recently, progress in nanotechnology has enabled the formulation of many nanomedicines into clinical trials, whereas some have had their certification for clinical use. This makes advancements in nanotechnology apply to the practice of cancer treatment on a routine basis.

1. Nanomedicines in Clinical Trials

Very few formulations based on nanoparticles have shown considerable gains in clinical trials, some of which have been approved for use. *Doxil®,* a liposomal formulation of doxorubicin, is an example of such. It achieves favorable results in treating a variety of cancer types: breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and Kaposi's sarcoma. In addition, it is way more effective at tumor treatment than regular anti-cancer drugs while minimizing the systemic toxicity of chemotherapy (11).

2. Nanoparticle-Based Immunotherapy

Nanotechnology has been harnessed in immunotherapy, which is the activation of the immune system against cancerous cells. These nanoparticles could incorporate immune checkpoint inhibitors, monoclonal antibodies, or cancer vaccines that will aid in localizing their effect at the tumor site, which in turn enhances the body's recognition of the cancer cell in immune attack. This is a new way to enhance the efficiency of these therapies and help overcome some limitations of existing treatments (12).

3. Photothermal and Photodynamic Therapy

Nanoparticles, especially gold and carbon-based nanoparticles, have been used in photothermal and photodynamic therapy. Photothermal therapy is the phenomenon where sunlight activates the nanoparticles to generate localized heat that eventually destroys cancer cells; photodynamic therapy produces reactive oxygen species (ROS) from light-activated nanoparticles, both events detrimental to cancer cells. These therapies are non-invasive and alternative highly promising salutary treatments against localized tumors (13).

Difficulties and Restrictions Although there has been progress in nanotechnology for cancer treatment, some adverse effects remain.-

1. Toxicity and Biocompatibility

Multiple nanoparticles have shown positive results in several studies but do not rule out toxicity and biocompatibility issues. Nanoparticles may accumulate in vital organs and, thus, cause adverse effects in patients. Therefore, meticulously designed nanoparticles require extensive preclinical tests and clinical trials to ensure their safety (14).

2. Scalability and Costs

There is still a big challenge with calibrating the production of nanoparticles in scale, ensuring reproducible quality. Even when producing nanoparticles that meet the highly stringent requirements needed for clinical uses, it will always cost a lot.

3. Regulatory Issues

The procedure of regulatory approval for nanomedicines is quite complicated and continues to evolve. The regulatory agencies are still working at establishing concrete due processes in terms of safety and efficacy. However, the regulatory system for these advanced sorts of therapies is still ongoing, which makes them take longer before being available for patients (16).-

Conclusion

Nanotechnology could change the future of cancer treatment with better, targeted therapies and diagnostic imaging, and perhaps even combining the two functions into a single, multifunctional platform. Undoubtedly, much needs to be done in terms of toxicity, scalability, and regulatory approval, but research continues, as evidenced by ongoing trials, which prove the capability of nanotechnology in transferring cancer treatment into the future. Over time and advancement, the evolution of nanotechnology will change how patients receive cancer treatment for better accuracy, safety, and efficiency, so much so that patients worldwide will benefit from this transformation.

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