

REVIEW ARTICLE

Nanocarrier Based Advances in Drug Delivery to Tumor: An Overview

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Abstract: Background: Nanotechnology deals with the manufacturing of materials at the atomic and molecular scale. According to the National Nanotechnology Initiative, nanotechnology denotes those structures which are nearly in 1–100 nm size regime in at least one dimension.

Objective: Nanotechnology in drug delivery has been evidenced into nanocarriers that possess distinct properties both *in vitro* and *in vivo*, which may be used in targeting drugs to various diseases especially tumors. In the last few years, there has been a keen concern in the formulation of various new drug delivery systems employing nanotechnology. Different nanodevices or nanocarriers like liposomes, dendrimers, polymersomes, transfersomes, and nanoparticles *etc.* have been employed for the targeted drug delivery.

Conclusion: This review summarizes the advances in nanocarriers in terms of their methods of preparation and potential applications especially in tumors.

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1. NANOTECHNOLOGY IN DRUG DELIVERY

The word “Nano” implies dwarf in Latin and it counts 10^{-9} divisions or parts. The beginning of nanotechnology is a debatable matter, however, the record of the invention of the scanning tunneling microscope could be found in the year 1980 [1]. The United States launched the National Nanotechnology Initiative in 2000 as one of the world’s first programs of its kind that revolutionized capture quality at nanometric scale like nanorobots killing cancer cells [2]. Nanotechnology deals with the processes and products that exist at molecular and atomic level. Nanotechnology is an emerging field of pharmacy involving changes in physical and chemical properties of materials [3]. It includes control of material shape and size by virtue of design, synthesis and characterization at nano scale. When the particle is reduced to nano size, it results in changes in properties such as increase in the surface area and higher surface area to volume ratio *etc.* So far, there are two basic ways to produce nanoparticles *viz.* (a) the “top-down” technique which refers to reduction of the particles from large size to nanometer size, (b) the “bottom-up” method in which individual atoms and molecules are combined to produce nanodevices in various shapes and sizes such as nanospheres or nanotubes. However, the latter approach is less popular [4]. Many

nanoparticle based formulations have been developed and tested to remarkable effect in small animal models, but unfortunately the outcomes thus obtained have depicted a circumscribed clinical success [5]. Various factors like meticulous understanding of the limitations associated with nanoparticles, recognizing the misconceptions which are prevailing in the field *etc.* are necessitated in order to successfully translate the before said results in clinical phases. Various strategies based on nanoparticles can effectively enhance the drug delivery by concentration on the associated problems like increasing their drug loading capacity, targeting affinity, and spatiotemporal control of drug release [6]. (Fig. 1) represents chronological development of drug delivery systems.

In this view, major attention would be on various aspects of drug-delivery in nanotechnology. Various names like, nanocarriers, nanoconstructs *etc.* have been used to refer to the nanoparticles which have been developed for drug delivery. “Nanoparticle” represents all mentioned various formulations, like liposomes, polymer micelles, and solid particles [7-11]. Nearly all literature including papers on nanoparticles commonly conclude: nanotechnology possess an outstanding potential in drug delivery [12]. There is an urge to define the need in order to attain tangible results.

Numerous reasons fetch the attention of nanoscale sized drug delivery systems by the scientists. Engineering of the drug particles can be done to form nanoscale size materials [13]. Due to the enhanced permeability and retention effect

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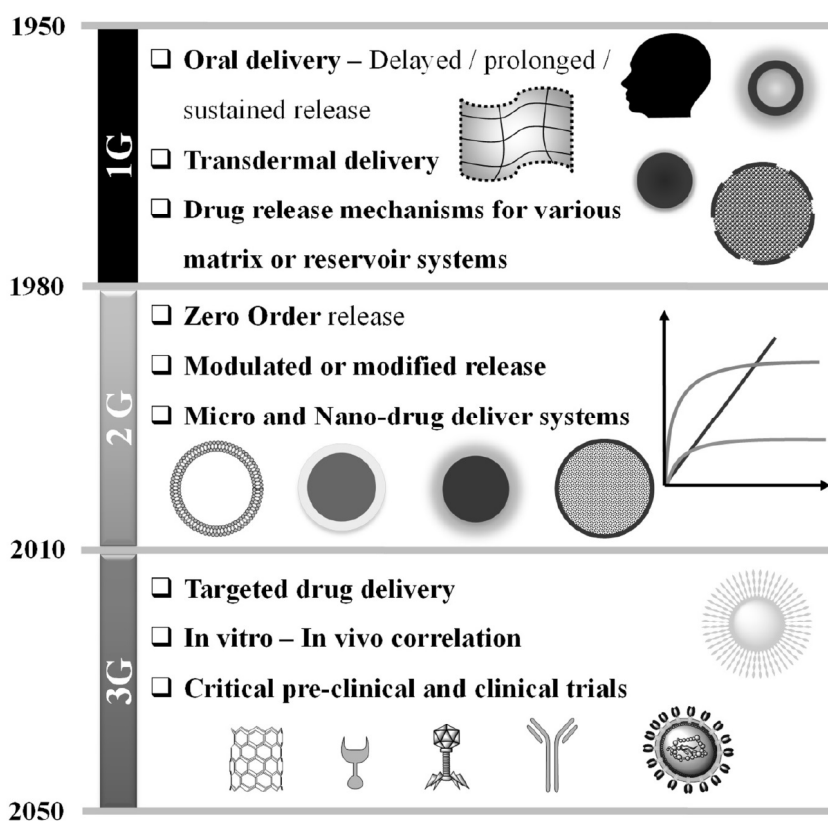


Fig. (1). Chronological development of drug delivery systems. (1G: First generation, 2G: Second generation and 3G: Third generation).

(i.e. EPR), nanosized systems (sizes less than eukaryotic or prokaryotic cells) can ultimately reach the inaccessible areas like tumor cells in high amount and can vitiate the lymphatic drainage therefore, they could be employed for the peroral delivery of proteins and genes [14]. They could be utilized for targeting the reticuloendothelial cells, thereby alleviating passive targeting of drug to the macrophages of liver and spleen and therefore, rendering a natural system for preventing the occurrence of various infections [15]. Safe and biocompatible nanomaterials should be employed for this purpose. They should not impede the blood vessels and need to be less invasive and less toxic in order to safely target the particular tissue [16]. They should protect the drug degradation in the gastrointestinal tract and aid in bypassing the “first-pass” metabolism which occurs in the liver. They usually persist in the blood circulation for a longer period of time, particularly the ones coated with hydrophilic polymers and thus, desirable for increasing the efficacy of drugs with short half-lives and could be employed to monitor the drug as sustained release formulation [17]. The solubility of poor water soluble drugs is increased, onset of therapeutic action is enhanced, and the dose is lowered. The premature loss of drug *via* rapid clearance and metabolism could also be precluded. Retention because of bio-adhesion is also enhanced [18]. (Fig. 2) represents targeting strategies in drug delivery.

2. NANOCARRIERS

Nanotechnology, applies the principles of engineering, electronics, physical and material science, and manufacturing at a molecular or submicron level [19, 20]. Nanodevices

are used in a wide variety of fields, including sensor, targeted drug delivery, therapeutic agents, cellular imaging and diagnostics, and others. Drug delivery systems based on nanomaterials provide important tools to enhance the chemotherapeutics efficacy [21]. Nanotechnology based novel drug delivery systems are being exploited for the treatment of various diseases including cancer and diabetes, and gene therapy *etc.* The major benefits of this mode of treatment are enhanced drug targeting and increased safety. Nanotechnology has also been employed in diagnostic medicine in the form of contrast agents, magnetic nanoparticles *etc.* In conventional systems, safety and efficacy of the drug employed for chemotherapy are the major factors affecting the treatment results in a patient suffering from cancer. These drugs possess poor cell specificity and depict severe toxic effects like bone marrow suppression, gastric erosion, hair loss, cardiomyopathy *etc.* on other systems [22].

2.1. Need of Nanocarriers

Nanotechnology is a novel field of science that renders a new hope, the tools and technology to work at atomic level levels. It displays numerous advantages for an ideal drug delivery as (a) it presents engineering of particles smaller than 100 nm that provide better delivery of drugs to very small parts within the body [23], (b) it promises to bridge the gap between ‘the structure’ and ‘the function’ of bio molecules over and above between ‘human physiology’ and ‘pathophysiology’, (c) nanocarriers provide efficient drug delivery to ameliorate aqueous solubility of drug [24, 25], that increases the bioavailability [26] for timely release of

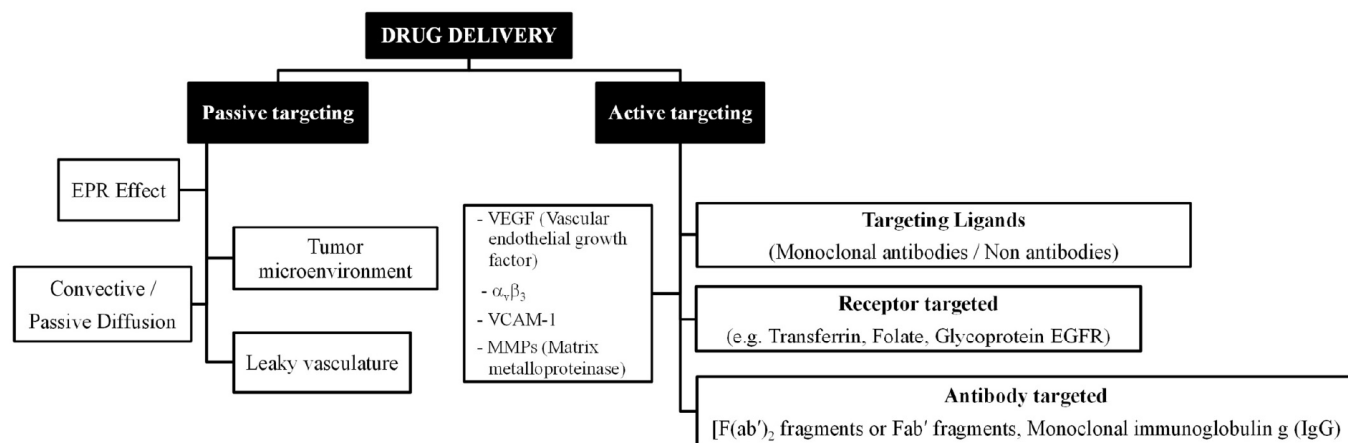


Fig. (2). Targeting strategies in drug delivery.

drug molecules, efficient drug targeting [27], and reducing drug toxicity [28]. (Fig. 3) represents drug delivery potential of multipronged nanocarrier to tumors.

2.2. Types and General Methods of Preparation

Nanocarriers are devices of nanoscale (below 1 μm) composed of various biodegradable materials like natural or synthetic polymers, lipid or phospholipids and organometallic compounds [29]. Nanocarriers due to their submicron size possess a very high surface to volume ratio resulting in increased dissolution rate. Nanocarriers include various submicron systems like nanoparticles, nanocapsules, lipid complexes, polymeric micelles, liposomes, polymersomes, fullerenes, nanopores, nanoshells, quantum dots, nanocrystals, nanotubes and dendrimers *etc.* (Fig. 4 and Table 1) [19].

2.2.1. Liposomes

Liposomes are identified for their capability to protect encapsulated agents, prolong their duration of action, rendering effective intracellular delivery. Liposomes allow the enclosed sphere to encapsulate hydrophilic drugs within the central compartment, while the drugs which are insoluble in water can be entrapped in the hydrophobic region of the membrane. The liposome size may vary from very small (0.025 μm) to large (2.5 μm) vesicles according to their types [30-32]. The method of preparation of liposomes has been represented diagrammatically in (Fig. 5) [33].

2.2.2. Polymersomes

The core of the vesicles consists of an aqueous phase and the surrounding coating bilayers are of polymer; the resulting particles are called as polymersomes and the size ranges between 5nm-5 μm [34]. The vesicles of the polymersomes are analogous to liposomes and useful in the delivery of hydrophilic drugs which can be encapsulated in their aqueous reservoir, but they are different from liposomes in the external bilayer because the external bilayer of polymersomes is composed of amphiphilic copolymers. The diblock copolymers PEG-b-PBD (polybutadiene) and PEG-b-PEE (polyethylene) are strong vesicle or polymersome formers [35, 36]. Polymersomes usually own a higher density of PEG on their surface and longer circulation times in comparison

to PEGylated liposomes [37]. The complete method of preparation of polymersomes has been represented in (Fig. 6) [38, 39].

2.2.3. Dendrimers

Dendrimers are systems for targeted drug delivery due to their nanometer size range, functionalization and ease of preparation [62, 63]. Its molecules consist of a small molecule or a linear polymer core using connectors and branching units. Interaction of dendrimer molecules with the molecular environment is mainly controlled by their terminal groups. Loading of drug molecules can occur in the interior of the dendrimers, showing their attachment to surface groups as well. The synthesis of dendrimers starts from the central core and works towards the periphery (Divergent synthesis) since dendrimers are built from AB_n – type monomers, and the generation of branching units double or triple the number of peripheral functional groups [63, 64]. (Table 2 and Table 3) summarize medical application of nanocarriers and marketed products or products in clinical trials with their indications, respectively. (Table 4) enlists the examples of nanocarriers as drug vehicle for cancer treatment.

2.2.4. Polymeric Micelles

There are various advantages possessed by polymeric micelles above the conventional surfactant micelles due to their better thermodynamic stability in physiological solution, as shown by their low critical micelle concentration (CMC) [100, 101]. Micelles have a reasonably narrow size distribution in the nanometer range (10-100 nm) and these systems are employed for the systemic delivery of water insoluble drugs. The size range of polymeric micelles (less than 100 nm in diameter) renders them an ideal drug delivery carrier since they evade renal exclusion and the RES, and it also enhances endothelial cell permeability *via* passive diffusion [102, 103]. As for example, a system based on doxorubicin (DOX) is conjugated to poly(ethylene glycol)-poly(α,β -aspartic acid) block copolymer [PEG-PAsp(DOX)] [104]. Various thermosensitive polymers have been employed in the preparation of micelles. For example, thermosensitive amphiphilic block copolymer, and P-(N,N-isopropylacrylamide-co-N-hydroxymethylacrylamide)-b-caprolactone [P-(NIPAAm-co-NHMAAm)-b-PCL] have

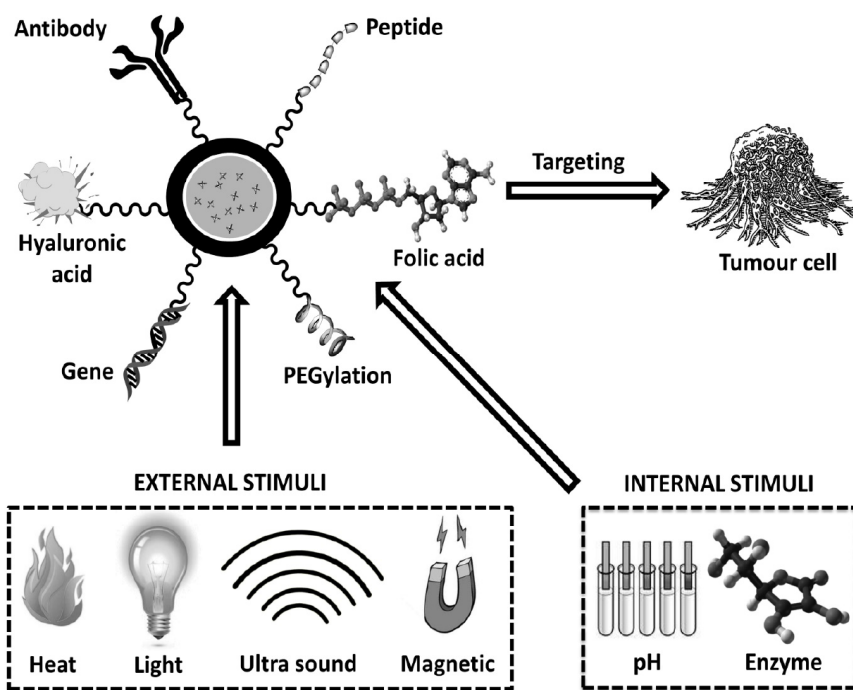


Fig. (3). Drug delivery potential of multipronged nanocarrier to tumors.

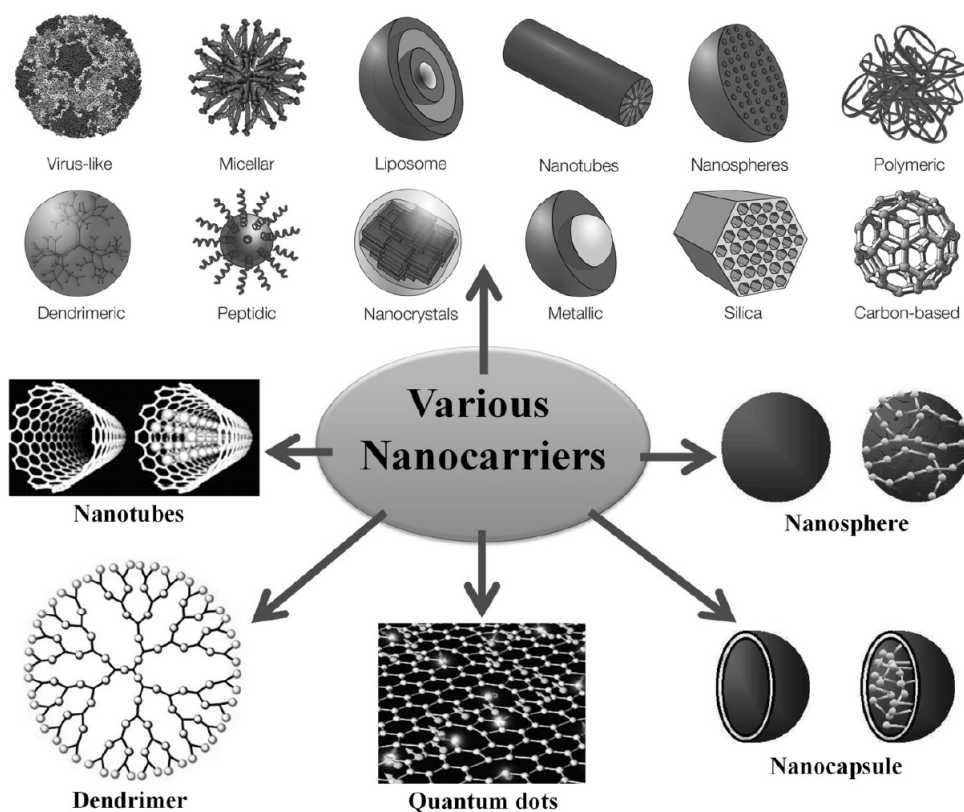


Fig. (4). Different types of nanocarriers.

been used in the preparation of DOX-loaded micelles [105]. The method selected for the preparation of block co-polymer micelles is dependent on the solubility of the co-polymer being used. The methods of preparation of micelles have been represented in (Figs. 7 and 8) [106-109].

2.2.5. Nanoparticles

The term nanoparticles is used to designate the novel drug delivery systems that are submicron ($< 1\mu\text{m}$) in size or are colloidal systems, usually made up of polymers. Nanoparticles are constituted of both vesicular (nanocapsules)

Table 1. Different methods of preparation of nanocarriers along with crucial parameters.

| | Nanocarrier | Name of Method | Crucial Parameters | Size | Advantages | Disadvantages | Ref. |
|-----------|---|---|---|--|---|--|----------|
| LIPOSOMES | Mechanical Dispersion Methods of Passive Loading | | | | | | |
| | | ➤ Thin film hydration using hand shaking (MLVs) method. | Mechanical energy is needed for the swelling of lipids & dispersion of casted lipid film is lent by manual agitation. | MLVs – 500 nm | Lipid soluble compounds can be encapsulated efficiently (100%). It does not disturb structural composition of the membrane. | Wastage of large amounts of water soluble compounds occurs during swelling (only 25-35% of total volume gets entrapped). | [40] |
| | | ➤ Thin film hydration using non-shaking method. | By displaying the film to a stream of water-saturated nitrogen for 15 min accompanied by swelling in aqueous medium without shaking. | ULVs - 20 to >1000 nm | The percent encapsulation efficiency as high as 30% (at 100 mg lipid ml ⁻¹) is achieved. | Large amount of water soluble compounds are wasted during swelling. | [40] |
| | | ➤ French pressure cell liposome. | Size of FPL (French press liposomal) is variable, depending on lipid composition, temperature and pressure. | Uni- or oligo-lamellar liposomes of intermediate size (30-80 nm in diameter depending on the applied pressure) | Liposomes show more stability in comparison to sonicated liposomes. Leakage of contents from liposomes is slower & lower than sonicated liposome. | High initial cost of the press that consists of an electric hydraulic press and pressure cell. | [41, 42] |
| | | ➤ Sonicated unilamellar vesicles (SUVs) | The size and distribution are affected by composition and concentration, temperature, sonication time and power, volume and sonication tuning. | Approx. 20 to >1000 nm (SUVs) | Bath sonicator is more suitable for large volume of diluted lipids. | It causes leakage of contents from liposomes. It suffers from overheating of the liposomal dispersion causing lipid degradation. | [43] |
| | | ➤ Microemulsification liposomes (MEL) | Microfluidiser pumps the fluid at very high pressure (10,000psi, 600-700bar) through 5µm orifices. The nature of hydration medium and the membrane components affect the size distribution of the vesicles. | Small multi-lamellar vesicles approx. 500 nm | It is able to process sample with a very high proportion of lipids (20% or more by weight) and also efficient for encapsulation of water-soluble materials. | The presence of negative lipids tends to decrease their size. | [44] |
| | | ➤ Dried-reconstituted vesicles (DRVs) | It provides organized membrane structure, which on addition of water (one tenth the volume of original SUVs) can rehydrate, fuse and reseal to form vesicles with high capture efficiency. | Uni- or oligo-lamellar vesicles of the order of 1.0 µm or less in diameter. | High entrapment of water soluble component and suitable only for unilamellar vesicles. | The incorporation rates with multilamellar vesicles are quite low. | [45] |
| | ➤ Freeze thaw sonication (FTS) method | In this process, SUVs rupture and refuse during which the solute equilibrates between inside and outside. And the liposomes fuse amongst themselves & enhance remarkably in size. | ULVs- 20 nm to >1000 nm | It is a simple, rapid and mild for entrapped solutes, and also provides a high proportion of large unilamellar vesicles formation. | Neutral liposomes cannot be subjected to freezing and thawing method. Sucrose, divalent metal ions and high ionic strength salt solution cannot be entrapped efficiently. | [46, 47] | |

(Table 1) contd....

| | Nanocarrier | Name of Method | Crucial Parameters | Size | Advantages | Disadvantages | Ref. |
|---------------|---|---|--|--|---|--|----------|
| | Solvent dispersion methods for passive loading | | | | | | |
| | | ➤ Ethanol injection method | The rate of injection is high (sufficient) to achieve proper mixing. | 100 nm | Low risk of degradation of sensitive lipids. | Difficulty to remove residual ethanol from phospholipid membrane. If the mixing is not enough, it forms lipid aggregates and larger vesicles. | [48] |
| | | ➤ Ether injection method | Injecting the immiscible organic solution very slowly into an aqueous phase through a narrow needle at the temperature of vaporizing the organic solvents. | LUVs- 20 nm to >1000 nm | Sensitive lipids are to be treated very gently. | Very low risk of oxidative degradation provided ether is free from peroxides. Encapsulation efficiency is low and it requires long time to produce a batch of liposomes. | [49] |
| | | ➤ Reverse phase evaporation method | Removal of solvent from an emulsion by evaporation is essential and bath sonicator is required for the formation of droplets. | ULVs an average diameter of 0.5 μm. | It provides high encapsulation efficiency (nearly 50%). | Removal of free drug is difficult by dialysis, and requires high cost of vortex mixer. | [50] |
| | | ➤ Rapid solvent exchange vesicles (RSEVs) | For passing the organic solution of the lipids through the orifice of blue-tripped syringe under the vacuum into a tube containing aqueous buffer is required. | LUVs- 20 nm to >1000 nm | It provides fast and efficient removal of solvents, and does not require a high volatile solvent. It requires not more than a minute for preparation of liposomes. | High initial cost of vortexor is required. | [51] |
| TRANSFERSOMES | Detergent Depletion (Removal) Methods of Passive Loading | | | | | | |
| | | ➤ Dialysis | A higher CMC (critical micelle concentration) depicts that the equilibrium is strongly shifted towards the bulk solution, thus removal from the mixed membrane <i>via</i> dialysis turns comparatively easily. | ~100 nm | It provides large unilamellar vesicles, rapid clearance of RES uptake and high entrapped volume. | Its thermodynamic stability is less. | [40] |
| | | ➤ Rotary evaporation method | The organic solvent was evaporated by rotary evaporation under reduced pressure at 40°C, and probe sonicator was employed to prepare small multilamellar from LMVs. | Average diameter of vesicle is 500 nm. | It can deform and pass through narrow constriction (from 5-10 times less than their own diameter) without considerable loss and high deformability gives better penetration of intact vesicles. | It is chemically unstable due to its predisposition to oxidative degradation. | [52, 53] |
| | ➤ Vortexing-sonication method | Vortexing of the blend is performed to obtain a milky suspension and sonicated, accompanied by extrusion <i>via</i> a polycarbonate filter. | 100nm. | High deformability gives better penetration. | It depicts chemical instability due to its predisposition to oxidative degradation. | [54] | |

(Table 1) contd....

| | Nanocarrier | Name of Method | Crucial Parameters | Size | Advantages | Disadvantages | Ref. | |
|---------------|---|--|--|--|---|--|----------|--|
| NIOSOMES | ➤ | Hand shaking method | Mechanical energy is necessitated for the swelling of lipids & dispersion of casted lipid film is imparted by manual agitation. | Approx. 500 nm | It does not disturb structural composition of the membrane. | Wastage of a large amount of water soluble compounds takes place during swelling. | [49, 55] | |
| | ➤ | Ether injection method | It requires 14-gauge needle to slowly inject ether solution into aqueous phase. | LUVs- 20 to >1000 nm | This method is used to treat sensitive lipid very gently. | Little danger of inducing oxidative degradation provided ether is free from peroxides. Encapsulation efficiency is very low. | [49] | |
| | ➤ | Reverse phase evaporation method | Removal of solvent from an emulsion by evaporation is essential and bath sonicator is required for the formation of droplets. | ULV diameter 0.5 μ m. | It provides high encapsulation efficiency (nearly 50%). | Removal of free drug is difficult. | [56] | |
| DENDRIMER | ➤ | Divergent synthesis | In which the synthesis starts from a polyfunctional core and continues radially outwards by successive step-wise activation and condensation. | 1-100 nm | It provides molecular recognition and self-assembling system. Its 3D structure owning besides well-defined surface functionality. | It can cause trailing generations due to impurities. It is very difficult to purify due to the relative size differences between perfect and imperfect dendrimers are quite small. | [57] | |
| | ➤ | Convergent synthesis | In which the synthesis starts at the periphery of the final macromolecule and proceeds inwards. | Approx. 100 nm | It provides more monodispersed final dendrimers because it is much easier to remove impurities. | Dendrimers made <i>via</i> this method are not as large as those made by divergent methods due to the crowding because of steric effects developed along the core | [57] | |
| NANOPARTICLES | Polymerization of monomers | | | | | | | |
| | ➤ | Radiation polymerization | The molecular weight as well as particle size increases with: increasing monomer concentration, decreasing temperature and decreasing initiator concentration. | Nanospheres <1 μ m | Due to their larger surface area, nanoparticles have higher loading capacity. | High surface energy that may lead to high aggregation in biological system. | [58] | |
| | ➤ | Emulsion polymerization | Precaution should be taken to prevent too quick polymerization that may lead to the formation of unwanted agglomerates. | 100 nm diameter of PMMA copolymer and doxorubicin nanoparticles. | This method is used to prepare polycyanoacrylate nanospheres by anionic polymerization. | The molecular weight of the polymers formed cannot be controlled easily and during the polymerization, the monomers may react with the drug, leading to the inactivation. | [58] | |
| | Dispersion of preformed polymers | | | | | | | |
| ➤ | Emulsification/solvent evaporation method | Both these methods need high-speed homogenization or sonication. | Nanoparticle <1 μ m | It is commonly used to prepare nanoparticles of water-soluble drugs. | Large amount of emulsifiers, time and energy consuming techniques are required. | [59] | | |

| Nanocarrier | Name of Method | Crucial Parameters | Size | Advantages | Disadvantages | Ref. |
|-------------|--|---|------------------------|--|---|------|
| | ➤ Controlled precipitation (Desolvation) | In this method, the polymer is precipitated from its solution by the addition of a non-solvent or some salts. | Nanoparticle <1000 nm | There is no need of any additive like surfactants, protective colloids. | Purification step is essential to remove various added materials and also requires continuous monitoring in order to prevent the formation of large agglomerates. | [60] |
| | ➤ Supercritical fluid technology | It is used to process the particles in high purity and without any trace of organic solvents. | Nanoparticles < 100 nm | It consists of the growth of the particles in a well-controlled manner to obtain a desired morphology. | High initial cost of SCF machine. | [61] |

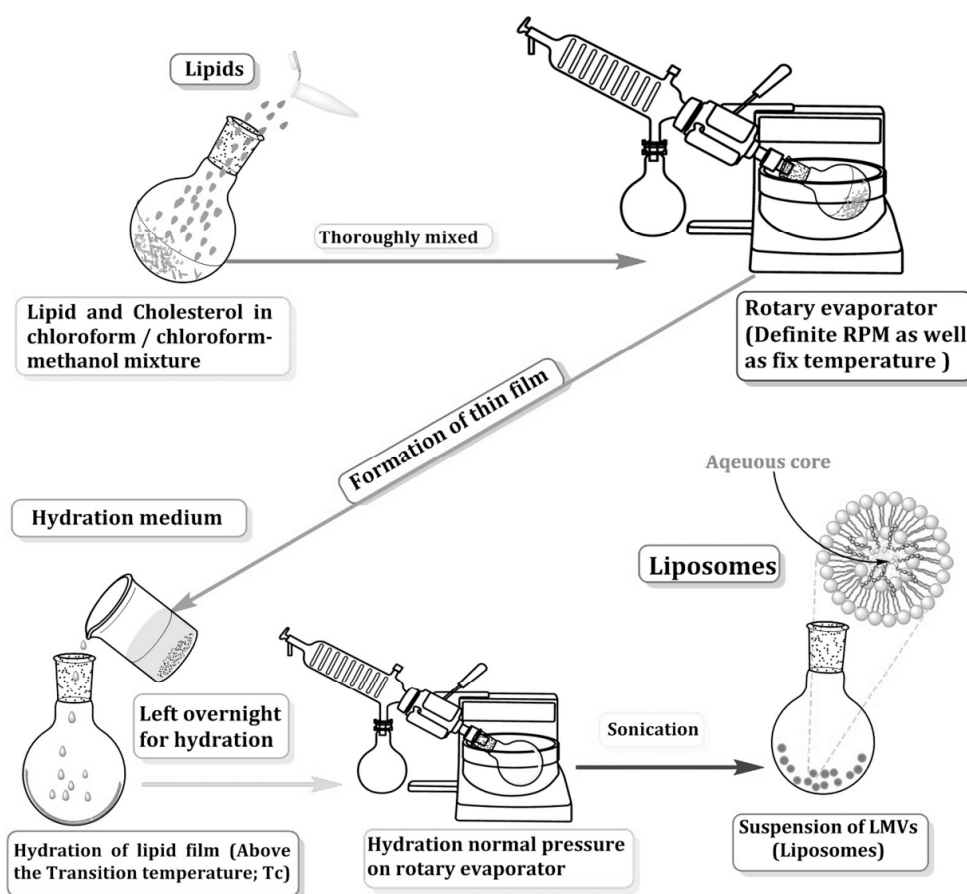


Fig. (5). Method of preparation of Liposomes.

and matrix system (nanospheres). Nanocapsules are systems in which the drug is restricted to a cavity enveloped by a distinct polymeric membrane and size range between 100 – 300 nm, while nanospheres are systems in which the drug is dispersed throughout the polymer matrix with size ranging from 100 – 200 nm [110, 111]. Several thermosensitive polymers have been used in the preparation of nanoparticles. Na *et al.* (2006) prepared biodegradable thermo-sensitive nanoparticles from poly(L-lactic acid)/poly (ethylene glycol) alternating multi-block copolymer as a drug carrier for lung cancer carcinoma [112].

Nanospheres are formulated by two methods depending on the polymers to be utilized. Polymers like biodegradable polyesters in various techniques like solvent evaporation, emulsification and salting out may be employed to prepare the nanospheres. But the most common technique is solvent displacement method which is also known as nanoprecipitation. This has been depicted in (Fig. 9) [113, 114]. Nanocapsules are commonly prepared by the interfacial deposition of preformed polymers. The method of preparation has been represented in (Fig. 10) [115].

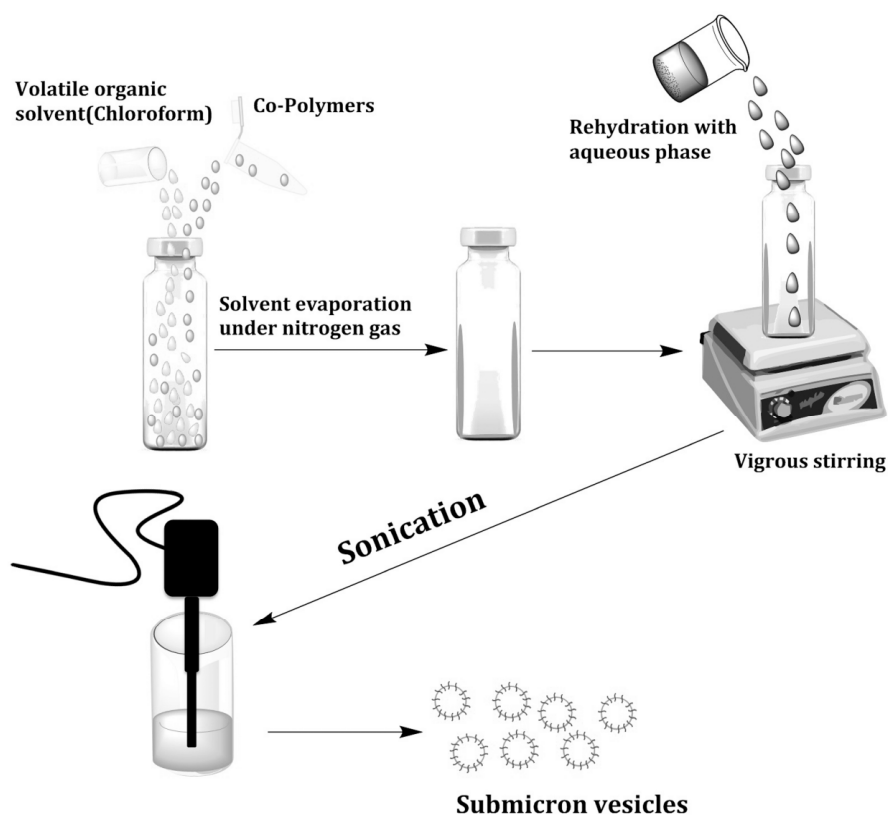


Fig. (6). Method of preparation of Polymersomes.

Table 2. Medical application of nanocarriers.

| Systems | Product | Description | Use | Manufacturer |
|--------------|---|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Liposome | Doxil® | Liposomal doxorubicin | Ovarian tumour | Ortho Biotech |
| Liposome | AmBisome® | Liposomal preparation of amphotericin-B | Fungal infection | Astellas Pharma US |
| Nanoparticle | Abraxane® | Albumin bound taxane particles | Non-small cell lung cancer | Abraxis oncology |
| Nanoparticle | Combidex®/ Ferumoxtran-10 | Iron oxide nanoparticles | MRI contrast agent | AMAG Pharmaceuticals |
| Nanobubble | MRX 815 | Nanobubble technology | Treatment of intravascular clots | IMA Rx Therapeutics |
| Dendrimer | VivaGel® | Dendrimer based microbicide gel | HSV prevention | Star pharma Pvt. Ltd. |
| Nanoparticle | INGN 401 | Nanoparticle formulation of tumour suppression gene FUS1 | Lung cancer | Introgen Therapeutics Inc. |
| Dendrimer | Dendrimer-magnevist [#] | PMMAM dendrimers | MRI imaging agent | Dendritic Nanotechnologies Inc. |
| Nanoshell | Aurolase™ | Gold nanoshell | Head and neck cancer | Nanospectra Biosciences Inc. |
| Nanoparticle | Targeted Nanotherapeutic (TNT) TM system | TNT with polymer coated iron oxide magnetic particle | Solid tumour | Triton Biosystems |
| Nanoparticle | MRX 952 | Nanoparticle preparation to encapsulate camptothecin analogues | Tumours | IMA Rx Therapeutics |

Table 3. Marketed products or products in clinical trials with their indications.

| | Compound | Product | Status | Indications | Ref. |
|-------------------------|--|------------------|-----------------|--|----------|
| Liposomes | Liposomal Doxorubicin | Daunoxome | Market | Kaposi's sarcoma | [65] |
| | Stealth Liposomal Doxorubicin | Doxil/Caelyx | Market | Kaposi's sarcoma, refractory ovarian cancer, refractory breast cancer | [66, 67] |
| | Liposomal Doxorubicin | Myocet | Market (Europe) | Metastatic breast cancer in combination with cyclophosphamide | [68, 69] |
| | Liposomal lurtotecan | OSI-211 | Phase-II | Recurrent ovarian cancer, recurrent small-cell lung cancer | [70] |
| | Liposomal paclitaxel | LEP ETU | Phase-I/II | Advanced solid tumors | [71] |
| | Liposomal oxaliplatin | Aroplatin | Phase-II | Advanced colorectal cancer | [72] |
| | Liposomal interleukin-2 | Oncolipin | Phase-II | Immune stimulant for use with a liposomal vaccine against non-small cell lung cancer | [73] |
| Polymeric Nanoparticles | Albumin-Paclitaxel | Abraxane/ABI-007 | Market | Metastatic breast cancer | [74] |
| | Paclitaxel-Poliglumex | CT-2103; Xyotax | Phase-III | Non-small cell lung cancer, ovarian cancer | [75, 76] |
| | HPMA-copolymer-doxorubicin | PK1; FEC28069 | Phase-II | Lung cancer, breast cancer and various other cancers | [77, 78] |
| | HPMA-copolymer-doxorubicin-galactosamine | PK2; FEC28069 | Phase-I/II | Particularly hepatocellular carcinoma | [79] |
| | PEG-aspartic acid-doxorubicin micelle | NK911 | Phase-I | Pancreatic cancer | [80] |
| | HPMA copolymer-paclitaxel | PNU166945 | Phase- I | Various cancers | [81] |
| | PEG-camptothecin | Prothecan | Phase-II | Various cancers | [82, 83] |
| | HPMA copolymer-camptothecin | MAG-CPT | Phase-I | Various cancers | [84, 85] |

Table 4. Examples of nanocarriers as drug delivery vehicle for cancer treatment.

| | Drug Type | Cancer Type | Formulation | Remarks | Ref. |
|------------------|-------------|---|--|--|------|
| Carbon Nanotubes | Cisplatin | Lung cancer | Injectable chemotherapeutics with cisplatin entrapped in amino-functionalized multiwalled carbon nanotubes | Functionalization of carbon nanotubes with amino moiety enhances the drug accumulation in tissues such as- lung, and reduces drug accumulation in kidney & liver. It does not affect the biodistribution of cisplatin. | [86] |
| | Oxaliplatin | Metastatic and advanced colorectal cancer | Oxaliplatin is incorporated into the inner cavity of multiwalled carbon nanotubes, and polyethylene glycol 600 is used to surface functionalize the nanotubes to enhance their water solubility and reduce cytotoxicity. | The carbon nanotubes selectively deliver oxaliplatin to tumor tissues and enhance the overall efficacy of drug. | [87] |
| | Paclitaxel | General cancer | Paclitaxel is incorporated into different carbon allotropes like graphene oxide, carbon nanotubes, and nano-diamonds | The delivery systems own adequate surface-to-volume ratio, thermal conductivity and rigid structural properties. | [88] |

(Table 4) contd....

| | Drug Type | Cancer Type | Formulation | Remarks | Ref. |
|---------------------|----------------|--|--|--|------|
| | Doxorubicin | Breast cancer | A steroid-macromolecular bioconjugate based on polyethylene glycol-linked 17 β -estradiol is appended to intrinsically cell-penetrable multi-walled carbon nanotubes. | The developed delivery system initiates intranuclear drug delivery and is effective against breast cancer <i>in-vivo</i> . | [89] |
| | Doxorubicin | Breast cancer cell line MCF-7 | Folic acid-appended polyethylene glycol engineered multiwalled carbon nanotubes are loaded with doxorubicin. | The nanoconjugate is more effective in tumor growth suppression because of its stealth nature and taken up by the cultured MCF-7 <i>via</i> caveolae-mediated endocytosis when compared to free drug. | [90] |
| | Tamoxifen | 4T1 cells | An asparagine-glycine-arginine peptide modified single-walled carbon nanotube system is developed by a simple noncovalent approach, and loaded with tamoxifen. | In the developed system, the optical property of single-walled carbon nanotubes and the cytotoxicity of tamoxifen are retained. The tamoxifen loaded, asparagine-glycine-arginine modified single-walled carbon nanotubes exhibit enhanced cellular uptake, antitumor effects, and cell apoptosis when given in combination. | [91] |
| Quantum Dots | Herceptin | Breast cancer cells SK-BR3 | Herceptin, a typical monoclonal antibody, is immobilized on the surface of cadmium selenide/zinc sulphide core-shell quantum dots. | The growth of breast cancer cells is completely inhibited through specific binding of herceptin to Her-2 receptor of SK-BR3 membrane and causes interaction between quantum dots and breast cancer cells. | [92] |
| | Busulfan | Lung cancer | The inorganic imaging agent SPIONs, manganese-doped zinc sulphide quantum dots and busulfan are encapsulated in poly (lactic-co-glycolic acid) vesicles <i>via</i> emulsion-evaporated method. | The biodegradable polymeric vesicles are presented in the form of the nanocarrier which affords multimodal bioimaging and anticancer drug delivery. | [93] |
| | Doxorubicin | General cancer cell | Positively charged copper indium disulfide quantum dots electrostatically interact with negatively charged poly (L-glutamic acid) conjugated with doxorubicin. | The nanocarrier affords multimodal bioimaging and anticancer drug delivery. | [94] |
| Dendrimers | Methotrexate | Somatostatin receptor-overexpressed tumor | The octreotide is conjugated to polyamidoamine dendrimer and is used as the nanocarrier of methotrexate. | Specific receptor-mediated endocytosis is induced by octreotide to allow target drug delivery. | [95] |
| | Cisplatin | Ovarian, head, neck, and testicular cancer | Dendrimer-cisplatin complex is prepared by composite method. | The dendrimer-cisplatin complexes demonstrate relatively slow release of cisplatin due to the formation of strong bonds between cisplatin and dendrimer. | [96] |
| | Acetylshikonin | Leukemia K562 and breast cancer SK-BR3 | Polyamidoamine dendrimers and their polyethylene glycol-grafted derivatives are employed to load the drug through strong intermolecular interaction. | The solubility of acetyl shikonin increases and formed nanoparticles can effectively inhibit the growth of tumor cells. | [97] |
| | Curcumin | Breast cancer cell line T47D | Polyamidoamine dendrimers encapsulate curcumin. | The curcumin-loaded polyamidoamine dendrimers show no cytotoxicity on cancer cells. Additionally, they increase the inhibitory effect on telomerase activity and decrease the IC ₅₀ for proliferation. | [98] |
| Gold and Iron Oxide | Cisplatin | SKOV3 ovarian cancer cells and tumor xenograft | The gold nanorod is stabilized with polyethylene glycol. | The mild hyperthermia (42-43°C) effect induced <i>via</i> treating tumor the gold nanorods with free cisplatin at a cytostatic concentration of 5 μ M. | [99] |

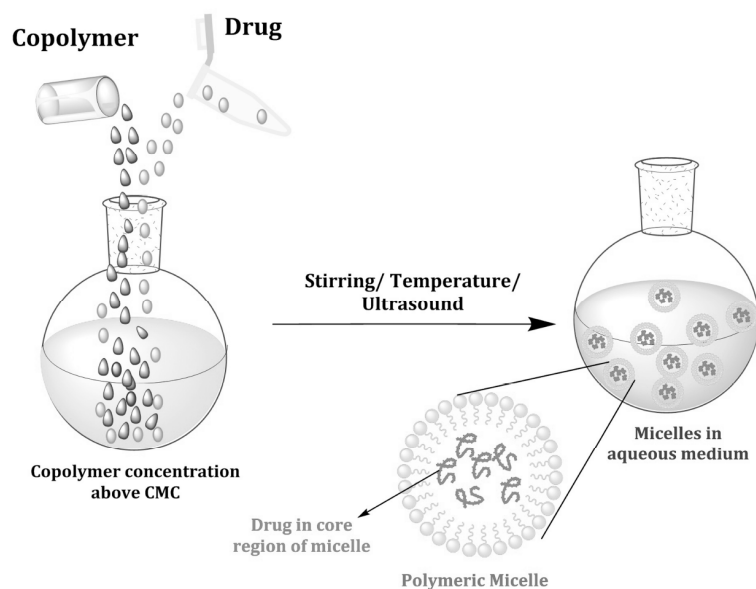


Fig. (7). Direct dissolution method for preparation of micelles.

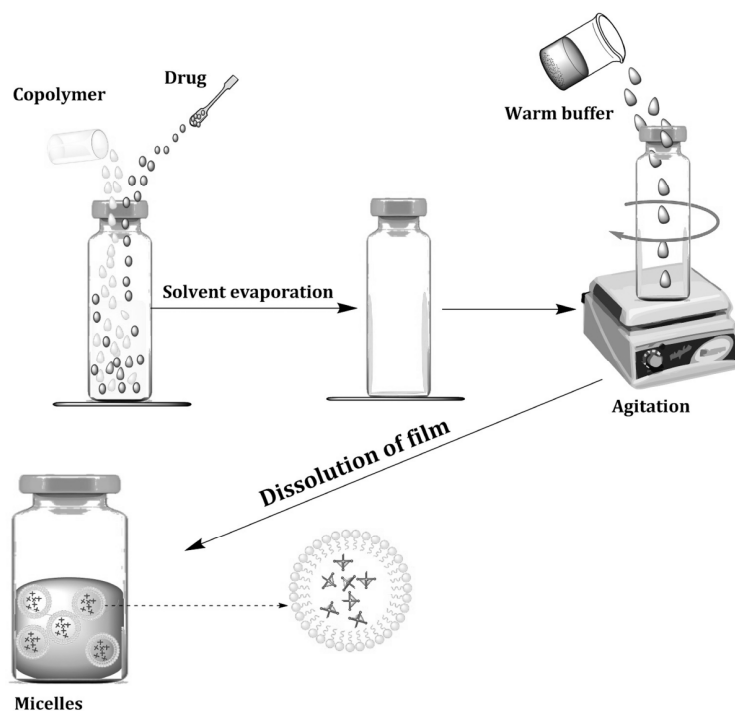


Fig. (8). Film casting method for the preparation of micelles.

2.2.6. Nanotubes, Nanowires and Fullerenes

Nanoconstructs that have earned much attention are hollow, carbon based case like structures-nanotubes and fullerenes. Nanotubes and nanowires are the self-assembling sheets of atoms arranged in the form of tubes and thread like structures of nanoscale range [116]. Nanotubes are of two types- single walled and double walled carbon nanotubes. Single walled nanotubes have an internal diameter of 1-2 nm and multi-walled nanotubes have an internal diameter of 2-5 nm with 0.36 nm distances between the layers of multi-walled carbon nanotubes, and these vary in their length ranging from 1 μ m to a few micrometers. The solubility of carbon

nanotubes can be enhanced by incorporation of carboxylic or ammonium groups to their structure, and it could be utilized for transporting the peptides, nucleic acids and other drug molecules. For example, Indium-111 radionuclide labeled carbon nanotubes are under investigation for destroying the cancer cells selectively [117].

Fullerenes possess spherical structures which are called as "Bucky balls", and the soluble derivatives of fullerenes, like C-60 a soccer ball shaped arrangement of 60 carbon atoms per molecule, are promising pharmaceutical agents. The most common form of fullerenes is Buckminster fullerene, measuring about 7 \AA in diameter with 60 carbon

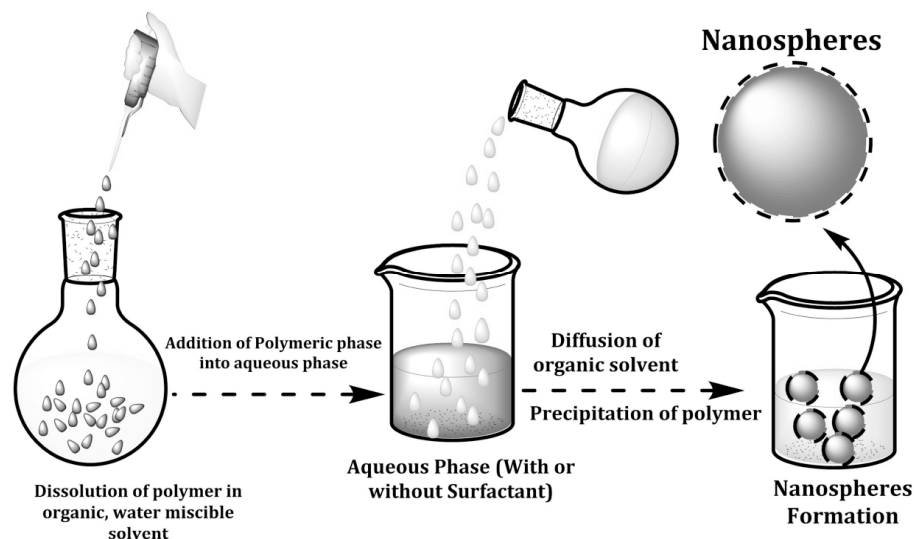


Fig. (9). Solvent displacement method (nanoprecipitation method) for the preparation of nanospheres.

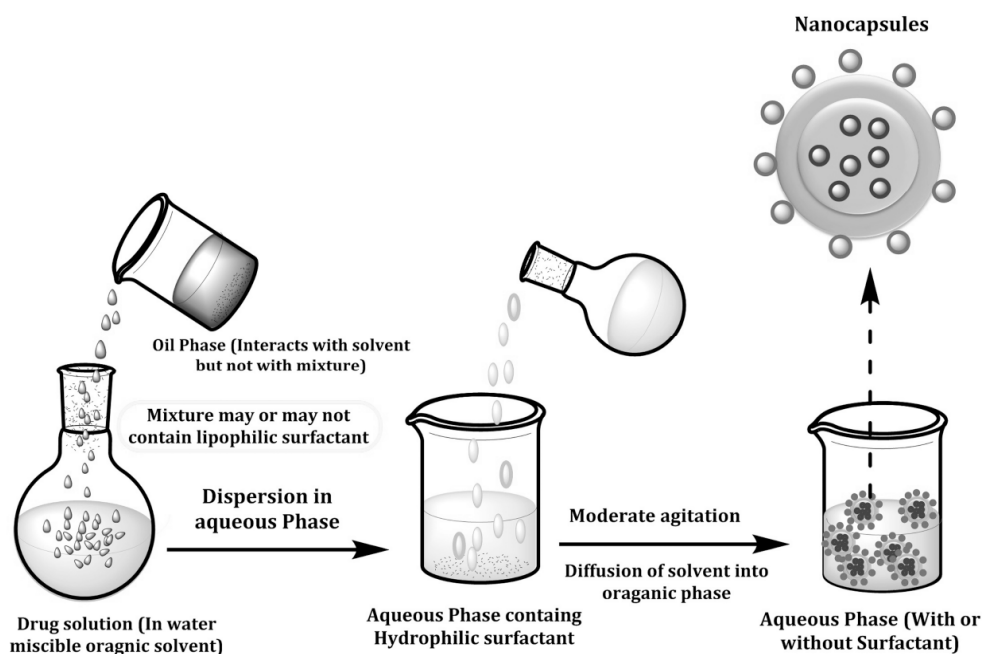


Fig. (10). Method of preparation of Nanocapsules.

atoms arranged in a shape known as truncated isohedrons. Fullerenes are very effective in tissue selective and intracellular targeting of mitochondria and used for drug transport of antiviral drugs, antibiotics and anti-cancer agents [118]. Fullerenes and carbon nanotubes are prepared by several techniques like electric arc discharge, laser ablation, chemical vapor deposition or combustion processes [119].

2.2.7. Nanocrystals, Quantum Dots and Nanosuspension

Nanocrystals are aggregates of about hundreds or thousands of molecules that are combined in a crystalline form, composed of pure drug with only a thin coating constituted of surfactant. Nanocrystal production technique is called as “Nanonisation” [120]. To formulate nanosuspensions, the drug is dispersed in aqueous surfactant solutions by high speed stirring, and the obtained microsuspension is then ho-

mogenized to nanosize by wet milling [121], high-pressure homogenization [122], nanocrystallization from super saturated solution [123] and spray drying [124].

Quantum dots are nanocrystals around 2-10 nm which can be made to fluoresce when induced by light. It comprises of an inorganic core, the size of which influences the color emitted by an organic shell and an aqueous organic coating to which bio-molecules are conjugated. Quantum dots could also be utilized for the imaging of sentinel node in patients suffering from cancer for tumor staging and planning of therapy, and it can be utilized for different malignancies like – melanoma, breast, lung and gastrointestinal tumors [125].

2.2.8. Nanoshells, Nanopores and Nanosponges

Nanopores comprise of wafers with high density of pores (20 nm in diameter). The pores permit the entry of oxygen,

glucose and few other products like insulin, but it does not permit immunoglobulin and cells to pass through them. It is employed as a device to protect transplanted tissues from the host immune system, at the same time, employing the profit of transplantation. Nanoshells consist of nanoparticles with a core of silica and a coating of thin metallic shell. This technology is being evaluated for cancer therapy [22]. Various drug carrier systems which are based on magnetic nanocomposites have gained attention in cancer therapies for enhancing the bioavailability and minimizing the adverse effects. For example, pH sensitive core-shell magnetic nanoparticles (NPs) are synthesized by several methods like coprecipitation, microemulsion, sol-gel reactions, aerosol/vapor processes and sonolysis *etc.* [126, 127]. (Fig. 11) shows a scheme representing the synthesis of gold nanoshells. pH responsive core-shell magnetic NPs are envisaged for controlled release of drugs into the tumor site by pH change:

- magnetite@silicon dioxide ($\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{SiO}_2$),
- Fe_3O_4 @titanium dioxide (TiO_2),
- β -thiopropionate-polyethylene glycol (PEG)-modified $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@m\text{SiO}_2$,
- Fe_3O_4 NPs core coated with SiO_2 with an imidazole group modified PEG-polypeptide (mPEG-poly-L-Asparagine),
- polyacrylic acid (PAA) and folic acid (FA) coating of the iron oxide NP core,

PEG-modified polyamidoamine (PAMAM) dendrimer shell with Fe_3O_4 core [128].

Current researches which have been conducted in drug delivery have introduced mesoporous and nanoporous structures as nanocarriers, like inorganic or organic-based nanosponges. Amongst them, very less toxicity and low biodegradability were depicted *in vivo* by the inorganic systems based on metal. Due to this outcome, researches have shifted their focus from the organic nanosystems. In cyclodextrin-

based nanosponges, the building blocks consist of hyper-cross-linked polymers with cyclodextrin units [129]. Poor water solubility is one of the major drawbacks of anticancer drugs. Nanosponges can play a major role in enhancing the wetting property and solubility of molecules that possess very low aqueous solubility. The complexation of drugs with nanosponges will disperse the drug molecules within the nanosponge structure to evade crystallization. Cyclodextrin-based nanosponges can provide protection to anticancer drugs, a slow and prolonged release, enhanced oral bioavailability, and trigger drug release using an internal or external stimulus upon suitable modification [2, 130].

Amongst numerous sub-areas in drug delivery, major nanotechnology research has been concentrated on tumor targeted drug delivery. This field can be utilized in defining a goal and in assessing the progress of nanotechnology in the past few years. Often, Doxil[®] and Abraxane[®] have been employed as examples of nanotechnology-based drug-delivery systems, mainly due to their size range lying within nanometers. Doxil (a PEGylated liposome formulation) was developed and commenced in the early 1980s, and it was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1995. It was approved due to its equivalent efficacy and decreased cardiotoxicity or enhanced safety profiles in comparison to free doxorubicin. The nanotechnology in drug delivery is aimed at delivering the drug the target site for increased efficacy and decreased side effects. Liposomes have been exploring for the last six decades followed by PEGylation technology for the last four decennia [131]. Earlier methods of preparation were employed for preparing them before the evolution of the concept of modern nanotechnology. There arises a question that only due to the size at nanoscale level did the drug delivery formulation become a nanotechnology system, disregarding how it is prepared? This would depict that the existing nanotechnology in drug-delivery systems has no advancements in its technology instead it is only a modification in its name [85]. Nanoscale

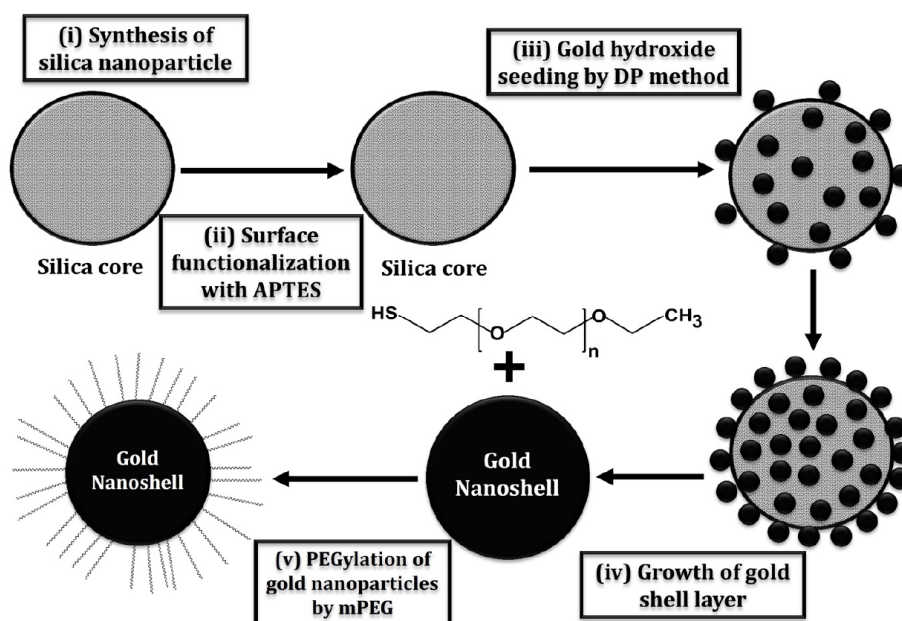


Fig. (11). Scheme representing synthesis of gold nanoshell.

drug delivery systems like nanoparticles, nanoliposomes, dendrimers, fullerene, nanopores, nanotubes, nanoshells, quantum dots, nanocapsules, nanospheres, nanocrystals, and nanosponges *etc.* are considered to possess a potential to bring a revolution in the field of nanotechnology. Nanomaterials could be employed for the development of novel drug delivery systems and reformulating the existing drugs to increase the effectiveness, patent protection, patient-compliance, safety of drugs and to make it economic [132]. (Table 5) summarizes the typical representative targets employed in ligand-mediated drug delivery and (Table 6) shows targeting strategies used for drug delivery to sub-cellular compartments. (Fig. 11) depicts a scheme of receptor mediated endocytosis (RME) of a tumor targeted ligand coupled nanocarrier.

3. RECENT ADVANCEMENTS

Various nanocarriers have shown good potential in drug and gene delivery. Numerous nanosystems like nanostructured lipid carriers (NLCs), liposomes, niosomes and transfersomes have been employed in cancer targeting of drug/gene cargoes. siRNA/miRNA and small molecule co-

delivery has demonstrated a better therapeutic result. Few challenges, like hostile bioenvironment, have precluded systemic delivery and thus clinical applications of this method. An ideal carrier system ought to efficiently load these agents, protect them from degradation *in vivo* and deliver to the target site. Besides, they need to be non-toxic and non-immunogenic. A promising option has been given by various nanocarriers for co-loading these agents and achieving efficient transfection *in vivo* with high specificity. Nanocarriers like lipidic and polymeric nanoparticles, SNALPs, micelleplexes, dendriplexes and inorganic nanoparticles have demonstrated their potential to simultaneously deliver the siRNA/miRNA and hydrophobic small molecule. Various factors like physicochemical properties such as molecular weight, solubility profiles and stability *etc.* and pharmacokinetic properties like absorption, bioavailability, half-life, biodistribution, metabolism, excretion, and stability in biological environment) govern the selection of a nanocarrier for co-delivery of small molecule and miRNA/siRNA. An adequate cationic charge is needed for loading miRNA/siRNA, whereas, a hydrophobic small molecule necessitates a hydrophobic environment in the nanocarrier to get

Table 5. Few targets employed in ligand-mediated drug delivery.

| Targeting Ligands | Affinity Moiety | Target Location | Application | References |
|--|--|------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|
| Folate receptor | Folate | Cell surface, caveoli | Cancer and Inflammation | [133] |
| VEGF receptor | Ab (Avastin [®]), peptides, aptamers | Cell surface | Vasculature in solid tumors | [134, 135] |
| Transferrin receptor | Transferrin, Ab, aptamers | Cell surface | Cancer and blood-brain barrier | [132, 136] |
| MUC1 | Antibody and aptamers | Cell surface | Breast and bladder cancer | [137] |
| MMPs | Antibody and peptides | Extra cellular matrix | Cancer and inflammation | [138, 139] |
| Selections | Antibody, oligosaccharides, aptamers | Cell surface | Tumor vasculature and inflammation | [140] |
| IL-2 receptor | Antibody and peptides | Cell surface | Cancer and immunity | [141, 142] |
| IGF-1 receptor | Antibody and Ab-derived peptides | Cell surface | Cancer | [143] |
| $\alpha v \beta 3$ and $\alpha v \beta 5$ integrins | RGD peptides, aptamers | Cell surface and lipid rafts | Vasculature in solid tumors | [144, 145] |
| EGF receptor (ErbB1) | Antibody (Erbbitux [®]), aptamers | Cell surface and lipid rafts | Metastatic colorectal cancer | [146] |
| Endoglin | Antibody, Ab-derived peptides, aptamers | Cell surface-caveoli | Vasculature in solid tumors | [147] |
| ErbB2 | Ab (Herceptin [®]) and aptamers | Cell surface | Breast and ovarian cancer | [148] |
| EDB-Fn | Antibody | Extracellular matrix | Cancer | [149] |
| LHRH receptor | Peptides (Lupron [®] , Zoladex [®]) | Cell surface | Prostate cancer | [150] |
| Insulin receptor | Antibody, Ab-derived peptides, aptamers | Cell surface-caveoli | Cancer and LSDs | [151, 152] |
| gp60 | Albumin and antibody | Caveoli | Vascular targeting | [153] |

Ab = antibody; Aptamer = only nucleic acid-based affinity molecules are shown; VEGF = vascular endothelial growth factor; MUC1 = mucin 1; VCAM-1 = vascular cell adhesion molecule 1; gp60 = albumin receptor glycoprotein 60; LHRH = luteinizing hormone-releasing hormone; EDB-Fn = extracellular matrix fibronectin; IL = interleukin; MMP = matrix metalloproteinase; IGF-1 = insulin-like growth factor; EGF = epithelial growth factor.

Table 6. Targeting strategies used for drug delivery to sub-cellular compartments.

| Sub-cellular Target | Targeting Moiety | References |
|-------------------------|---|------------|
| Membrane anchors | Human low-affinity nerve growth factor | [154] |
| | Acylation | [155] |
| | Palmitoylation | [156] |
| Cell penetration | TAT peptide | [157] |
| | Penetratin | [158] |
| | Peptoids | [159] |
| Lysosomes | Integrins | [144, 145] |
| | EGF receptor | [146] |
| | Folate receptor | [133] |
| | ICAM-1 | [160, 161] |
| | LHRH receptor | [150] |
| | LFA-1 | [161] |
| | Mannose-6-phosphate receptor | [151, 152] |
| | MUC1 | [137] |
| | VCAM-1 | [162] |
| | VEGF receptor | [134, 135] |
| | Selectins | [140] |
| Endosomal escape | TMEM192 | [163] |
| | TAT peptides | [157] |
| | Hemagglutinin | [164] |
| Golgi & ER | GALA & KALA peptides | [165] |
| | Cholera toxin | [166] |
| Mitochondria | Cytochrome oxidase subunits | [167] |
| | Proteins | [167] |
| Transcytosis | Transferrin receptor | [4] |
| | IGF-1 receptor | [143] |
| | ICAM-1 | [168] |
| | gp60 | [153] |
| | Amino peptidase P | [169] |
| | Insulin receptor | [170] |
| | LDL | [171] |
| | Glycosphingolipid globotriaosylceramide (Gb3) | [172] |
| | Glycoprotein-2 (GP-2) | [173] |

efficiently encapsulated. On co-loading the drug and miRNA in the nanocarrier, a better pharmacokinetics can be attained specifically for the siRNA/miRNA which is highly prone to degradation by the nucleases found in the biological milieu.

Moreover, combination chemotherapeutics offer various advantages like reversal of drug resistance, synergistically acting drugs, and improved efficacy in comparison to single drug therapy [174-176]. Although, each drug possesses its

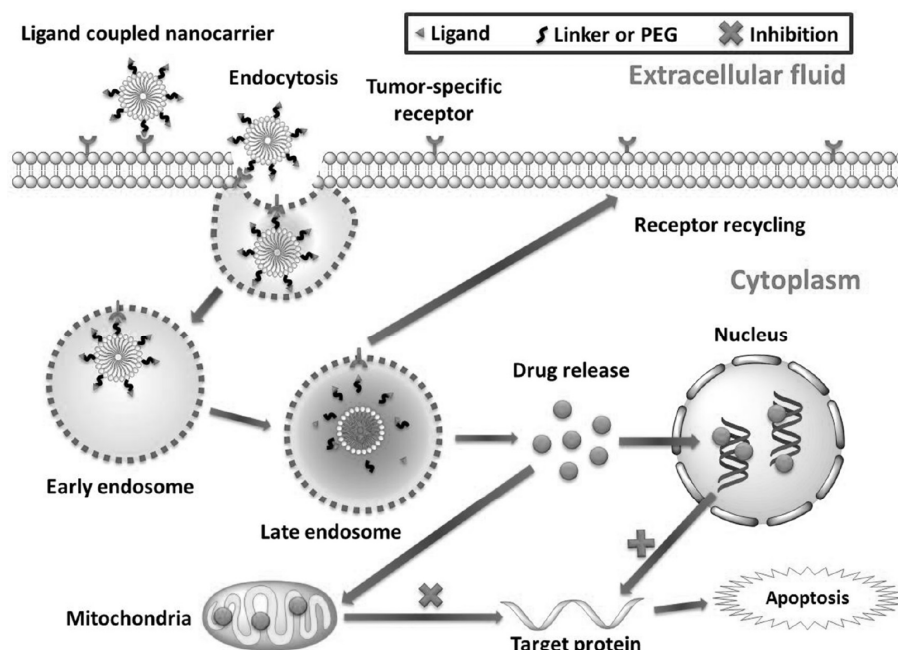


Fig. (12). Schematic representation of the Receptor Mediated Endocytosis (RME) of a tumor targeted ligand coupled nanocarrier.

unique pharmacokinetics, the administration of drug in conventional way will alter the optimized synergistic drug ratio for analysis which may further lead to inadequate therapeutic results *in vivo* [14]. Polymer and/or lipid-based nanosystems which have been designed for single drug therapy are currently being used for the co-delivery of multiple drugs [11]. Further, pharmacokinetics of the loaded molecules can be altered by modifying the surface characteristics of the nanocarriers. PEG has been widely employed for enhancing the surface hydrophilicity which renders stealth effect to the nanocarriers and raises their residence time of the blood circulation. Moreover, the surface of these systems can be modified to achieve active targeting to the tumors [175]. The application of miRNAs for cancer therapy is based on the findings that miRNA expression is deregulated in cancer tissues and the ability of miRNAs to target multiple genes and modify the cancer phenotypes. Cancer is a complex disease which involves dysregulation of multiple genes, whereas miRNAs can regulate different disease pathways and reduce the chances of cancer. Moreover, distinctive miRNA expression profiles have been found to link with specific cancer types, allowing for the discrimination and identification of poorly differentiated tumours. Thus, miRNAs have depicted applicability as cancer therapeutics [177].

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Nanotechnology is the main driving force behind various revolutionary changes taking place in the field of medicine. Nanotechnology and its application to nanomedicine have resulted in technological advancements across myriad fields of materials technology and have ameliorated the biomedical understanding. Nanocarriers such as liposomes, transferosomes, polymersomes, functionalized nanoparticles, fullerenes, nanotubes *etc.* are few examples of advances in nanotechnology that are currently being applied for the treatment of various diseases including cancer. These nano-

carriers with advancing nanotechnology based tactics in drug delivery have emerged as promising cargoes to deliver bio-active to sub-cellular compartments at pathophysiological sites. Current research is in quest to achieve better safety and efficacy of the existing therapeutics, and it will lead to the development of newer therapeutic tools with the desired patient compliance, cost-effectiveness and ease in regulatory approval in the near future.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Not applicable.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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Declared none.

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