

Editorial

Recent Developments in Ocular Nanotherapy

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There are 285 million visually impaired people in the world out of which, 39 million are blind. The leading causes of blindness are cataract, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD), corneal opacities, diabetic retinopathy and trachoma. Cataract (opacification of lens) alone is responsible for 51% of total blindness [1]. Although modern cataract surgery is safe and effective, a majority of world population cannot afford it [2]. Most alternative anti-cataract synthetic drugs have failed in clinical trials due to massive side effects [3]. Current Nanotherapy approaches have gained fair bit of success in both synthetic approaches (Quercitrin) [4] and natural therapy (Curcumin) [5].

Glaucoma is the second most leading cause of blindness [6]. It is a progressive optic neuropathy and has been commonly associated with elevated intraocular pressure (IOP) [7]. Conventional drug delivery system for treatment of glaucoma comprises of ocular drops and has been linked with numerous disadvantages such as: natural anatomical barrier (low residence time), poor patient compliance, local and systemic side effects [8]. Several sustained release drug delivery systems for anti-glaucoma drugs have been proposed that include intraocular implants [9], ophthalmic inserts [10], nano- and microparticles [11], liposomes [12], nanoemulsions [13] and contact lenses [14]. However, due to potential benefits of nanoparticles (NPs) over other delivery systems further research is focussed on finding new drugs and developing better nanoformulations. One such study introduced latanoprost (an ester prodrug of prostaglandin F_{2a}) with an efficiency to lower the IOP. Latanoprost acid (LA) is the pharmacologically active component of latanoprost. LA was entrapped in biocompatible and biodegradable nanoparticles formed using poly (lactide-poly(ethylene glycol) (PLA-PEGF) copolymers. The in vivo studies revealed that LA loaded NPs proved to be a promising system for curing glaucoma without inducing any side effects [15].

Topical drug delivery is considered as the easiest method for ophthalmic drug delivery and has gained patient compliance over the period of time. Once a drug is topically applied, due to the natural tear drainage and blinking action of the eye there is a 10 fold reduction in drug concentration in eye within 4-20 minutes [16]. Thus the

residence time of the drug in precorneal space and penetration to ocular tissue is reduced to 5-6 minutes and 1% to 3% respectively [17]. The mucoadhesive nanoparticles that interact with the mucosal layer of cornea have been a big success in ophthalmic drug delivery, as they can increase the drug residence time in precorneal space up to 20 minutes [18]. The best advantage of using NPs is that their surface can be modified as per requirement. Thus, surface modifications in NPs can significantly increase the bioavailability, corneal penetration and conjunctival uptake of drug loaded NPs [19]. It has also been established that due to the above mentioned reasons the therapeutic efficacy of drugs loaded in polymeric NPs is significantly increased [20]. Eudragit S, methyl methacrylate methacrylic acid and chitosan are some of the mucoadhesive polysaccharides that can prolong their presence on the ocular surface [21].

Chitosan is known to increase transepithelial absorption by reversal opening of tight junctions [22]. Poly-β amino ester (PBAE) is a biodegradable and biocompatible cationic polymer that is recently being used for nanoparticle synthesis for ophthalmic drug delivery [23]. Another new mucoadhesive polymer Durasite (cross linked, poly acrylic acid, Inspire pharmaceuticals, Durham, NC) has been designed to increase the drug residence time in precorneal space in order to improve the effect of topical delivery [24]. There have been several limitations associated with the use of nanoformulations such as, mucoadhesive polymers in solution get hydrated and their mucoadhesivity is reduced [25], other non-mucoadhesive polymers are not retained on eye for significant period therefore alternative drug delivery approaches such as nano-gels have been developed. Levofloxacin nanoparticle laden in situ gel is one such system that has been used to enhance ocular retention [26]. Other studies are focussed on improving the properties of mucoadhesive polymers by mixing other polymers eg. Cationic chitosan and anionic dextran sulphate have been used to form mucoadhesive chitosan-dextran sulphate nanoparticles with enhanced retention capability [27]. Aptamers (functional nucleic acid ligands) with enhanced specificity towards the target antigen are the current and advanced therapeutics that have been commonly used in nanodelivery systems in cancer, eye and inflammatory diseases [28]. Chimerization of aptamers enhances their capability by diversifying their use in targeted therapy [29]. In a recent approach an epithelial cell adhesion molecule (EPCAM) aptamer (EpDT3)-doxorubicin (Dox) conjugate was used to target cancer stem cells using retinoblastoma (RB) cell line as a model [30]. RB is most common cancer found in the retina of children under the age of 2-3 years [31]. It was found that the EpDT-3-Dox conjugate selectively induced apoptosis in cancer as well as cancer stem cells and did not harm the non-cancerous cells. Apart from aptamers other nucleic acid based therapeutics such as RNA interference (RNAi) approach has also gained huge success in inhibiting invasiveness of RB cells [32]. Therefore, the current therapeutic approach has shifted from conventional nanoparticle based therapy to highly targeted aptamers, mucoadhesive polymer mixtures, nano-emulsions and nano-gels.

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