JOURNAL OF COMPREHENSIVE PHARMACEUTICAL AND BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES
Content Available at www.uniquepubinternational.com
(An online peer reviewed Journal) ISSN (O): XXXX-XXXX

Review Article
OPEN ACCESS

NANOPARTICLE-BASED DRUG DELIVERY SYSTEMS IN CANCER PHARMACOLOGY: EMERGING INNOVATIONS AND THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL

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Article History: Received: 23 Feb 2026, Revised: 12 Mar 2026, Accepted: 03 Apr 2026

Abstract: Cancer remains one of the leading causes of mortality worldwide despite major advances in pharmacological therapies. Conventional chemotherapy is frequently associated with poor selectivity, severe systemic toxicity, multidrug resistance, and limited bioavailability. Recent innovations in pharmacology have increasingly focused on nanoparticle-based drug delivery systems (NDDS), which provide targeted and controlled drug release with improved therapeutic outcomes. Nanotechnology integrates pharmacology, molecular biology, and material science to enhance the effectiveness of anticancer drugs while minimizing adverse effects. Various nanocarriers including liposomes, polymeric nanoparticles, dendrimers, solid lipid nanoparticles, and metallic nanoparticles have shown considerable promise in overcoming the limitations of traditional chemotherapy. These systems improve drug solubility, prolong circulation time, enhance tumor targeting via the enhanced permeability and retention (EPR) effect, and reduce off-target toxicity. Emerging approaches such as ligand-mediated targeting, stimuli-responsive nanoparticles, and theranostic nanomedicine represent the future of precision oncology. This review discusses the recent advances, pharmacological mechanisms, clinical applications, advantages, limitations, and future perspectives of nanoparticle-based cancer therapeutics.

Keywords: *Nanotechnology, Cancer Pharmacology, Drug Delivery Systems, Targeted Therapy, Nanomedicine, Liposomes, Polymeric Nanoparticles, Precision Medicine, Controlled Drug Release, Cancer Therapy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cancer continues to be a major global health burden, accounting for millions of deaths annually [1]. Despite advances in chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and immunotherapy, effective treatment remains challenging due to drug resistance, non-specific toxicity, and poor pharmacokinetic profiles of anticancer agents [2]. Conventional chemotherapeutic drugs often distribute non-selectively throughout the body, damaging healthy tissues alongside malignant cells [3].

Innovative approaches in pharmacology have therefore focused on improving drug delivery systems. Nanotechnology has emerged as one of the most promising fields in modern pharmacological research because nanoparticles can selectively deliver therapeutic agents to diseased tissues while minimizing systemic toxicity [4]. Nanoparticles typically range between 1–100 nm and possess unique physicochemical properties such as increased surface area, enhanced drug-loading capacity, and tunable release mechanisms [5].

Nanoparticle-based drug delivery systems (NDDS) can improve the therapeutic index of drugs by enhancing bioavailability, prolonging circulation time, and enabling targeted delivery [6]. These systems also facilitate the transport of poorly soluble drugs and biological molecules such as proteins, peptides, and nucleic acids [7].

2. CLASSIFICATION OF NANOPARTICLE DRUG DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Several nanoparticle systems have been developed for cancer pharmacotherapy. Each possesses distinct pharmacological and physicochemical characteristics.

1. Liposomes

Liposomes are spherical vesicles composed of phospholipid bilayers capable of carrying hydrophilic and lipophilic drugs [8]. Liposomal drug formulations improve drug stability and reduce toxicity by preventing direct exposure of healthy tissues to chemotherapeutic agents [9]. Liposomal doxorubicin is one of the most successful FDA-approved nanoformulations for cancer treatment.

2. Polymeric Nanoparticles

Polymeric nanoparticles are prepared using biodegradable polymers such as poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid) (PLGA), polyethylene glycol (PEG), and chitosan [10]. These systems provide sustained drug release,

enhanced stability, and improved pharmacokinetic profiles.

3. Dendrimers

Dendrimers are highly branched macromolecules with a central core and multiple surface functional groups [11]. Their structural flexibility allows conjugation with drugs, targeting ligands, and imaging agents.

4. Solid Lipid Nanoparticles

Solid lipid nanoparticles combine the advantages of liposomes and polymeric nanoparticles while improving physical stability and controlled release characteristics [12].

5. Metallic Nanoparticles

Gold, silver, and magnetic nanoparticles are used for targeted therapy, imaging, and photothermal treatment [13]. Gold nanoparticles are especially useful due to their biocompatibility and optical properties.

Table 01: Types of Nanoparticles and Their Pharmacological Applications

Type of Nanoparticle	Major Characteristics	Pharmacological Applications
Liposomes	Biocompatible phospholipid vesicles	Targeted chemotherapy
Polymeric nanoparticles	Controlled and sustained release	Drug and gene delivery
Dendrimers	Branched structure with high drug loading	Targeted therapy
Solid lipid nanoparticles	Improved stability and low toxicity	Oral and topical drug delivery
Metallic nanoparticles	Optical and magnetic properties	Imaging and photothermal therapy

Table 01 summarizes the major nanoparticle systems and their pharmacological applications in cancer treatment [8–13].

3. MECHANISMS OF TARGETED DRUG DELIVERY

Targeted drug delivery improves therapeutic efficacy while reducing adverse effects. Nanoparticles achieve targeting through passive and active mechanisms.

Passive Targeting

Passive targeting depends on the Enhanced Permeability and Retention (EPR) effect [14]. Tumor blood vessels possess leaky vasculature, allowing nanoparticles to accumulate preferentially in cancer tissues. Poor lymphatic drainage further promotes nanoparticle retention within tumors [15].

Active Targeting

Active targeting involves attaching ligands such as antibodies, peptides, transferrin, or folic acid to nanoparticle surfaces [16]. These ligands specifically bind receptors overexpressed on tumor cells, thereby enhancing drug uptake and therapeutic specificity.

Stimuli-Responsive Drug Release

Modern nanocarriers can release drugs in response to internal stimuli (pH, enzymes, redox conditions) or external stimuli (temperature, ultrasound, magnetic field, light) [17]. Such systems improve site-specific drug release and reduce systemic toxicity.

4. RECENT INNOVATIONS IN NANOPHARMACOLOGY

Gene Delivery Systems

Nanoparticles are increasingly used for delivering genetic materials including siRNA, mRNA, and CRISPR-Cas9 systems [18]. Lipid nanoparticles gained worldwide attention due to their role in mRNA vaccine delivery technologies.

Artificial Intelligence-Assisted Nanomedicine

Artificial intelligence (AI) is now being integrated into nanomedicine for predictive drug design, toxicity assessment, and personalized therapy optimization [19].

Theranostic Nanoparticles

Theranostic nanoparticles combine therapeutic and diagnostic functions in a single platform [20]. These systems allow simultaneous imaging and treatment monitoring.

Biomimetic Nanoparticles

Biomimetic nanoparticles are coated with cell membranes derived from red blood cells, platelets, or cancer cells to evade immune detection and improve targeting efficiency [21].

Table 02: Recent Innovations in Nanopharmacology

Innovation	Description	Clinical Importance
Stimuli-responsive nanoparticles	Drug release triggered by pH or temperature	Improved targeting
Gene-delivery nanocarriers	Delivery of siRNA and mRNA	Gene therapy
AI-assisted nanomedicine	Machine learning for drug optimization	Personalized medicine
Theranostics	Combined diagnosis and therapy	Real-time monitoring
Biomimetic nanoparticles	Cell membrane-coated nanoparticles	Immune evasion

These recent innovations have significantly improved the therapeutic potential of nanomedicine in cancer pharmacology [17–21].

5. CLINICAL APPLICATIONS OF NANOMEDICINE

Nanoparticle-based therapeutics are currently used in the treatment of multiple cancers including breast

cancer, lung cancer, ovarian cancer, glioblastoma, and prostate cancer [22].

Several clinically approved nanoformulations include:

- Liposomal doxorubicin
- Albumin-bound paclitaxel
- Liposomal daunorubicin
- Nanoliposomal irinotecan

These formulations demonstrate reduced cardiotoxicity, enhanced tumor accumulation, and improved patient survival rates [23].

6. ADVANTAGES OF NANOPARTICLE DRUG DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Nanomedicine offers several pharmacological advantages:

- Enhanced drug solubility
- Improved bioavailability
- Controlled and sustained release
- Reduced systemic toxicity
- Improved patient compliance
- Enhanced targeting efficiency
- Ability to overcome multidrug resistance [24]

7. LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Despite remarkable progress, NDDS still face several limitations:

- High production costs
- Difficulty in large-scale manufacturing
- Potential long-term toxicity
- Stability concerns
- Regulatory approval challenges [25]

In addition, nanoparticle interactions with biological systems remain incompletely understood, necessitating further toxicological and pharmacokinetic studies.

8. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Future research in nanopharmacology is expected to focus on personalized medicine, multifunctional nanoparticles, and precision-targeted therapeutics [26]. Integration of biotechnology, genomics, and artificial intelligence may revolutionize cancer treatment by enabling individualized therapy based on tumor biology. The development of biodegradable and environmentally safe nanoparticles will also play a critical role in future clinical applications [27].

9. CONCLUSION

Nanoparticle-based drug delivery systems represent a transformative advancement in cancer pharmacology. Their capacity for targeted delivery, controlled release, and enhanced therapeutic efficacy has significantly improved the safety and effectiveness of anticancer therapy. Emerging innovations such as stimuli-responsive systems, AI-assisted nanomedicine, and theranostic nanoparticles are paving the way toward precision medicine. Although challenges related to toxicity, scalability, and regulation persist, continuous advancements in nanotechnology are expected to further expand the clinical utility of nanomedicine in oncology.

10. FUNDING

No funding from any major organizations

11. INFORM CONSENT AND ETHICAL STATEMENT

Not applicable

12. ACKNOWLEDFEMENT

Not Declared

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