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NANOTECHNOLOGY: A MODERN TECHNIQUE FOR NEW GENERATION - A REVIEW

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Abstract:

Their unique size-dependent properties make these materials superior and indispensable in many areas of human activity. This brief review tries to summarize the most recent developments in the field of applied nanomaterials, in particular their application in biology and medicine, and discusses their commercialization prospects.

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INTRODUCTION:

Living organisms are built of cells that are typically 10 μm across. However, the cell parts are much smaller and are in the sub-micron size domain. Even smaller are the proteins with a typical size of just 5 nm, which is comparable with the dimensions of smallest manmade nanoparticles. This simple size comparison gives an idea of using nanoparticles as very small probes that would allow us to spy at the cellular machinery without introducing too much interference Understanding of biological processes on the nanoscale level is a strong driving force behind development of nanotechnology [1-3]. Out of plethora of size-dependant physical properties available to someone who is interested in the practical side of nanomaterials, optical and magnetic [4] effects are the most used for biological applications

Nano-particle usually forms the core of nano-biomaterial. It can be used as a convenient surface for molecular assembly, and may be composed of inorganic or polymeric materials. It can also be in the form of nano-vesicle surrounded by a membrane or a layer. The shape is more often spherical but cylindrical, plate-like and other shapes are possible. The size and size distribution might be important in some cases, for example if penetration through a pore structure of a cellular membrane is required. The size and size distribution are becoming extremely critical when quantum-sized effects are used to control material properties. A tight control of the average particle size and a narrow distribution of sizes allow creating very efficient fluorescent probes that emit narrow light in a very wide range of wavelengths. This helps with creating biomarkers with many and well distinguished colours. The core itself might have several layers and be multifunctional. For example, combining magnetic and luminescent layers one can both detect and manipulate the particles. Examples of biological coatings may include antibodies, biopolymers like collagen [5-8], or monolayers of small molecules that make the nanoparticles biocompatible [9]. In addition, as optical detection techniques are wide spread in biological research, nanoparticles should either fluoresce or change their optical properties. The approaches used in constructing nano-biomaterials are schematically presented below (Figure 1).

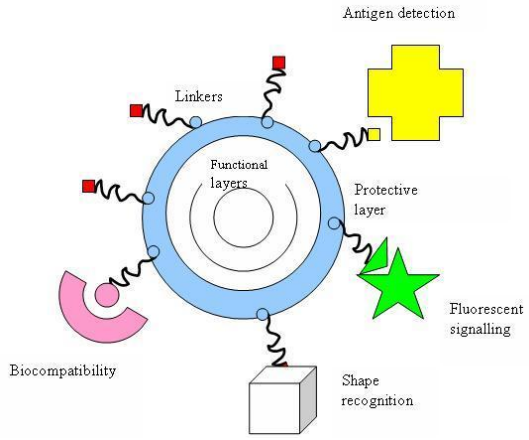

Fig 1: Constructing Nano-Biomaterials

Tissue engineering

Natural bone surface is quite often contains features that are about 100 nm across. If the surface of an artificial bone implant were left smooth, the body would try to reject it. Because of that smooth surface is likely to cause production of a fibrous tissue covering the surface of the implant. This layer reduces the bone-implant contact, which may result in loosening of the implant and further inflammation. It was demonstrated that by creating nano-sized features on the surface of the hip or knee prosthesis one could reduce the chances of rejection as well as to stimulate the production of osteoblasts. The osteoblasts are the cells responsible for the growth of the bone matrix and are found on the advancing surface of the developing bone.

The effect was demonstrated with polymeric, ceramic and, more recently, metal materials. More than 90% of the human bone cells from suspension adhered to the nanostructured metal surface [10-11], but only 50% in the control sample. In the end this findings would allow to design a more durable and longer lasting hip or knee replacements and to reduce the chances of the implant getting loose.

Titanium is a well-known bone repairing material widely used in orthopaedics and dentistry. It has a high fracture resistance, ductility and weight to strength ratio. Unfortunately, it suffers from the lack of bioactivity, as it does not support cell adhesion and growth well. Apatite coatings are known to be

bioactive and to bond to the bone. Hence, several techniques were used in the past to produce an apatite coating on titanium. Those coatings suffer from thickness non-uniformity, poor adhesion and low mechanical strength. In addition, a stable porous structure is required to support the nutrients transport through the cell growth.

Cancer therapy

Photodynamic cancer therapy is based on the destruction of the cancer cells by laser generated atomic oxygen, which is cytotoxic. A greater quantity of a special dye that is used to generate the atomic oxygen is taken in by the cancer cells when compared with a healthy tissue. Hence, only the cancer cells are destroyed then exposed to a laser radiation. Unfortunately, the remaining dye molecules migrate to the skin and the eyes and make the patient very sensitive to the daylight exposure. This effect can last for up to six weeks.

To avoid this side effect, the hydrophobic version of the dye molecule was enclosed inside a porous nanoparticle [12-14]. The dye stayed trapped inside the Ormosil nanoparticle and did not spread to the other parts of the body. At the same time, its oxygen generating ability has not been affected and the pore size of about 1 nm freely allowed for the oxygen to diffuse out.

Protein detection

Proteins are the important part of the cell's language, machinery and structure, and understanding their functionalities is extremely important for further progress in human well-being. Gold nanoparticles are widely used in immunohistochemistry to identify protein-protein interaction. However, the multiple simultaneous detection capabilities of this technique are fairly limited. Surface-enhanced Raman scattering spectroscopy is a well-established technique for detection and identification of single dye molecules [15-17]. By combining both methods in a single nanoparticle probe one can drastically improve the multiplexing capabilities of protein probes. The group of Prof. Mirkin has designed a sophisticated multifunctional probe that is built around a 13 nm gold nanoparticle. The nanoparticles are coated with hydrophilic oligonucleotides containing a Raman dye at one end and terminally capped with a small molecule recognition element (e.g. biotin). Moreover, this molecule is catalytically active and will be coated with silver in the solution of Ag(I) and hydroquinone. After the probe is attached to a small molecule or an antigen it is designed to detect, the substrate is exposed to silver and hydroquinone solution. A silver-plating is happening close to the Raman dye, which allows for dye signature detection with a standard Raman microscope[18-23]. Apart from being able to recognise small molecules this probe can be modified to contain antibodies on the surface to recognise proteins. When tested in the protein array format against both small molecules and proteins, the probe has shown no cross-reactivity.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

There are some developments in directing and remotely controlling the functions of nano-probes, for example driving magnetic nanoparticles to the tumour and then making them either to release the drug load or just heating them in order to destroy the surrounding tissue. The major trend in further development of nanomaterials is to make them multifunctional and controllable by external signals or by local environment thus essentially turning them into nano-devices.

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