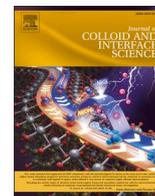




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A Serum-Stable supramolecular drug carrier for chemotherapeutics fabricated by a Peptide-Photosensitizer conjugate

Jincan Chen^{a,e}, Yang Zhou^c, Meiru Song^c, Yijian Chen^a, Dong Wang^{a,e}, Yunmei Huang^d, Ping Hu^a, Chen He^{a,e}, Tao Dai^{a,e}, Lei Zhang^{a,e}, Mingdong Huang^c, Zhuo Chen^{a,e,*}, Peng Xu^{b,*}^a State Key Laboratory of Structural Chemistry, Fujian Institute of Research on the Structure of Matter, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Fujian College, University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Fuzhou, Fujian 350002, China^b College of Biological Science and Engineering, Fuzhou University, Fuzhou, Fujian 350116, China^c College of Chemistry, Fuzhou University, Fuzhou, Fujian 350116, China^d Academy of Integrative Medicine, Fujian University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Fuzhou, Fujian 350122, China^e University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100049, China

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ABSTRACT

Supramolecular assemblies fabricated by peptide-photosensitizer conjugates have attracted increasing attentions in recent years as drug carriers for chemotherapeutics (CTs). However, these assemblies have been known to suffer from disintegration by serum components leading to off-target drug release, and thereby impairing anti-tumor effects and causing systemic toxicities. To address this problem, this study reports a nano-architectural self-assembly peptide-photosensitizer carrier (NSPC) fabricated by conjugating a phthalocyanine derivative (MCPZnPc) and ϵ -poly-L-lysine (EPL). By engineering the core and peripheral interactions, MCPZnPc-EPL (M–E) NSPC firmly encapsulated multiple CTs, creating CT@M–E NSPCs that were highly stable against disintegration in serum. More importantly, CT@M–E NSPCs exhibited controlled release of CTs in tumor tissues. The antitumor effects of CTs were further promoted by the synergism with the reactivated photodynamic effect. Furthermore, M–E NSPC-encapsulation optimized CTs' biodistribution reducing adverse effects *in vivo*. This study provides a serum-stable supramolecular drug delivery system with photodynamic effect, which is applicable for a broad-range of CTs to promote antitumor effects and ameliorate adverse effects.

1. Introduction

Chemotherapy remains one of the main therapeutic modalities for most types of cancers. It involves the administration of cytotoxic drugs to inhibit mitosis or damage chromosomal DNA inducing the apoptosis of tumor cells [1]. However, by intervening with mitosis, chemotherapeutics (CTs) also cause undesirable off-target damages in healthy tissues containing cells with rapid divisions [2], e.g., causing myelosuppression due to attacking bone marrow cells [3]. Thus, pharmaceutical formulations are applied to enhance tumor-targeting properties and minimize off-target damages in healthy tissues. Clinically used drug delivery systems (DDSs) for CTs include: 1) polyethylene glycol (PEGylation), e.g., PEGylated doxorubicin; 2) liposomes, e.g., liposomal cytarabine (DepoCyt®), liposomal daunorubicin (DaunoXome®); and 3) recombinant albumin, e.g., albumin-encapsulated

paclitaxel (Abraxane®) [4]. In a phase III clinical trial, compared to Taxol® (paclitaxel formulated with Cremophor EL), Abraxane® resulted in a higher overall response rate (33% vs. 19%), longer tumor progression time (23-week vs. 17-week), and reduced adverse effects, e.g., neutropenia (9% vs. 22%) and hypersensitivity reactions (4% vs. 12%) [5].

Peptide-based supramolecular assemblies have attracted increasing attentions because of their natural composition and fascinating functions, including optical, photodynamic, photothermal, and photocatalytic properties [6–8]. These supramolecular assemblies are constructed by the driving force of non-covalent intermolecular interactions, e.g., electrostatic, polar, van der Waals, or π - π interactions [9,10]. Supramolecular assemblies are also of great interests as DDSs for anticancer drugs [11,12], especially nano-architectural self-assembly peptide-photosensitizer conjugates (NSPCs) [13]. NSPCs are fabricated

* Corresponding authors at: No.2, Fuzhou University Town New Area Xueyuan Road, Fuzhou, Fujian, China.

E-mail addresses: zchen@fjirsm.ac.cn (Z. Chen), pengxu@fzu.edu.cn (P. Xu).<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcis.2023.05.131>

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