

# DRUG NANOTARGETING FOR TREATMENT OF NEURODEGENERATIVE DISEASE

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### ABSTRACT:

Microvascular endothelial dysfunction precedes, often by decades, the cognitive decline associated with Alzheimer's disease. Hence, preservation of a healthy cerebrovascular endothelium represents an important therapeutic target. By incorporating appropriate drug(s) into biobased (lipid cubic phase) nanocarriers, one obtains a multitasking combination therapeutic which targets certain cell-surface scavenger receptors, mainly class B type I (i.e., SR-BI), and crosses the blood-brain barrier. Such colloidal-nanocarrier targeting allows for various Alzheimer's-related cell types to be simultaneously searched in a holistic integrative approach. This (colloidal-nanocarrier) targeting advantage, in vivo, may be particularly important when delivering pleiotropic natural substances (e.g., an isoflavone) or for repurposing an FDA-approved drug.

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**KEYWORDS:** Alzheimer's disease; cognitive impairment; drug delivery; nanoemulsion; SR-BI; vascular dementia

## 1. Introduction

Vascular brain lesions occur frequently in people over 70 years old, and recent reviews provide much evidence that a large percentage of dementia cases may be associated with cerebrovascular disease. Accordingly, vascular cognitive impairment is the second leading cause of dementia behind Alzheimer's disease, and often is a co-morbidity in the Alzheimer's patient. Furthermore, growing data from various animal models indicate that cerebrovascular dysfunction often precedes cognitive impairment as well as the onset of neurodegenerative changes in Alzheimer's disease.

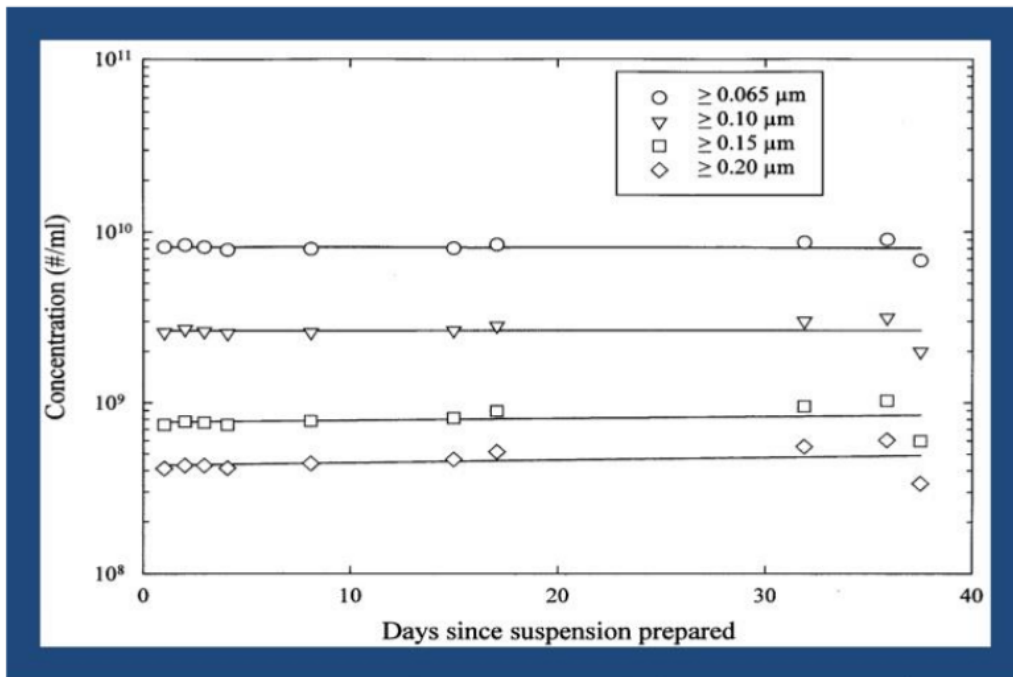
## 2. Endothelial Dysfunction, and Targeted Nanotherapy for Early Dementia

Small-vessel disease is commonly found in patients who have other brain pathologies, such as plaques and tangles associated with neurodegenerative disease. The vascular changes associated with small-vessel disease include alterations in the morphology of cerebral microvasculature, resulting in blood-brain barrier (BBB) breakdown with leakage of blood-borne molecules. It is not surprising, therefore, that multiple epidemiological studies have revealed a marked overlap among risk factors for small-vessel cerebrovascular disease and late-onset Alzheimer's disease.

It has been reported continually that *endothelial* modulation and/or repair is practicable by pharmacological targeting via SR-BI receptors. Since SR-BI has already been

identified as a major receptor for high-density lipoprotein or HDL (with their major apolipoprotein (*apo*)A-I), as well as for the recently reviewed<sup>[1,2]</sup> “lipid-coated microbubble/nanoparticle-derived” (LCM/ND) nanoemulsion (see below), this multitasking lipid nanoemulsion can arguably serve as a targeted, apoA-I-based, (SR-BI mediated) therapeutic agent for common (late-onset) dementias.<sup>[16-18]</sup> Documented similarities in the lipid composition of HDL versus these nanoemulsion (drug-carrier) particles may enable such LCM/ND nanoemulsions to mimic, in part, HDL-particle heterogeneity.<sup>[1,2]</sup>

This targeted-delivery-approach, using the proposed LCM/ND lipid nanoemulsion for treating the more common (late-onset) dementias, receives added impetus from continual findings of cerebrovascular pathology<sup>[1,19-29]</sup> and an apparent endothelium dysfunction<sup>[2,17,18,25,30-36]</sup> in both Alzheimer's disease and its major risk factors.<sup>[1,2,29-41]</sup> Incorporating certain drug molecules into the LCM/ND lipid nanoemulsion type (yielding particle sizes mostly < 0.1 μm in diameter – see Figure 1), known to be a successful drug carrier,<sup>[42,43]</sup> would make the following possible:  
Various cell types, all potentially implicated in Alzheimer's disease,<sup>[1,2]</sup> can be simultaneously nanotargeted via cell-surface SR-BI.<sup>[42,43]</sup>



3 Figure 1. LCM/ND nanoemulsion stability over time. (Adapted from ref. 42).

Physical characterization of the actual size distribution, of the LCM/ND lipid nanoemulsion particles, has been described in detail earlier.<sup>[42]</sup> Basically, collaborative multidisciplinary analyses of the nanoemulsion particle sizes, particularly in the submicron range, were carried out at CT Associates, Inc. LCM/ND nanoemulsion size distributions were measured using three different techniques, i.e., optical particle counting (see below), dynamic light scattering, and scanning electron microscopy; the first of these techniques yielded the most data. Five different optical particle counters, all manufactured by Particle Measuring Systems (Boulder, CO), were used to measure the scattered light over different collection angles. (The five counters utilize different light sources and measure the scattered light over different collection angles. Hence the

raw data collected may vary between these counters, over short data-collection periods, and prior to further statistical analysis, since the amount of light scattered is a complicated function of the illuminating light properties, scattering angle, and refractive index. Nonetheless, detailed statistical analyses of the resulting data confirmed that the five instruments all measured similar particle concentrations.) The filtered LCM/ND lipid nanoemulsion contained close to  $10^{10}$  particles  $< 0.10 \mu\text{m}$  per ml, with most ( $\sim 90\%$ ) of the nanoemulsion particles being smaller than  $0.2 \mu\text{m}$  in diameter (cf. Fig. 1).<sup>[42]</sup> The effect of concentration on the nanoemulsion size distributions was also determined using the S100 optical particle counter. It was thought that if the total concentration of LCM/ND nanoemulsion material changed, the size distribution might also change as a new equilibrium condition was achieved. (The experiment was performed by preparing different dilutions of nanoemulsion material, then injecting the various dilutions into water at different rates using the dilution/flow system set up for the S100 instrument. In this way, multiple concentrations could be obtained in both the injecting and final suspensions.) All of the measurements were found to be essentially identical, indicating that the LCM/ND lipid nanoemulsion did *not* change particle size when subjected to the different concentration conditions. In addition, the effect of LCM/ND nanoemulsion age on the particle size distribution was determined by measuring the nanoemulsion size distribution at different times over 37 days, using the M65 optical particle counter. *No* change in the size distribution with time (over at least 1 month) was evident.<sup>[42]</sup> In summary, the LCM/ND nanoemulsion size distribution in deionized water was measured using several analytical techniques. This nanoemulsion was found to contain close to  $10^{10}$  particles  $< 0.1 \mu\text{m}$  per ml, when measured using optical particle

counters. A large majority (~90%) of the nanoemulsion particles were smaller than 0.2  $\mu\text{m}$  in diameter.

### 3. LCM/ND Nanoemulsion Type, and Targeting via Lipid Cubic Phases

Monoglyceride is the largest fraction (by wt. %) of the lipids used to produce (Filmix®) LCM/ND nanoemulsions. As a group, monoglycerides exhibit the ability to self-assemble into varied and useful dispersed cubic phases (among other liquid-crystalline phases) when placed in contact with water.<sup>[42,44,45]</sup> The (lyotropic or solvent-induced) cubic liquid-crystalline phases can be grouped into two distinct classes: *bicontinuous* cubic phases<sup>[46]</sup> and micellar or *discontinuous* (e.g., type *Fd3m*) cubic phases<sup>[47]</sup>.

A noteworthy lipid cubic phase of the latter category is based upon packings of discrete inverse micellar aggregates and is formed by a variety of lipid systems.<sup>[47]</sup> Seddon et al.<sup>[48]</sup> point out that the most frequently observed such (inverse micellar cubic) structure is a cubic phase of crystallographic space group *Fd3m*, which requires a heterogeneous mixture of polar lipids<sup>[49,50]</sup>. The *dispersed Fd3m* cubic phase is particularly relevant to the earlier-described (Filmix®) LCM/ND lipid nanoemulsion; namely, both structures often specifically include cholesterol and three categories of (saturated) glycerides, that is, tri-, di-, and monoglycerides.<sup>[51,52]</sup> Hence, the monoglyceride content probably plays a dominant role in supporting the evident long-term stability of the liquid-crystalline lipid nanoparticles in such nanoemulsions.<sup>[42]</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In this particular targeted-delivery approach, the self-assembled “lipid particle” structure itself (upon intravenous injection of the LCM/ND nanoemulsion) is apparently successfully utilized as the “active” targeting ligand – which is directed via (adsorption of) plasma lipoproteins, including notably apoA-I, toward the appropriate receptors on the target-cell surface. This likely adsorption of apoA-I and, hence, targeting success of these nanoemulsion particles is understandable.<sup>[42]</sup> When the above information is combined with the known <sup>1</sup> heterogeneity of HDL particles as well as the well-documented multiligand capability of SR-BI, then again <sup>14</sup> SR-BI emerges as the prime candidate (of all lipoprotein receptors) for major involvement in the enhanced endocytosis of LCM/ND nanoemulsion particles into, and transcytosis across, the endothelial-cell layer of the BBB.<sup>[42]</sup>

#### 4. Brain Injury, Edaravone, Resveratrol, and Alzheimer's Disease

<sup>3</sup> Besides considerations about amyloid pore formation (regarding calcium fluxes and Alzheimer's disease) described in the literature (e.g., <sup>5</sup> <sup>[53-58]</sup>), an especially important pathophysiological overlap exists between brain injury and Alzheimer's-disease brain. Wang et al.<sup>[59]</sup> have pointed out that <sup>5</sup> activated astrocytes may contribute to increased oxidative stress and neuroinflammation following neurotrauma, i.e., traumatic brain injury (TBI). <sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the drug Edaravone has been used successfully, in past TBI research, due to its neuroprotective and antioxidative effects on the brain after TBI. <sup>6</sup> These pharmacological effects lead to a decreased inflammatory response and decreased glial activation, thereby reducing neuronal death and improving neurological function.<sup>[59]</sup> Similarly, Itoh et al.<sup>[60]</sup> have reported that intravenous Edaravone administration (in



rats) reduced cerebral dysfunction following TBI, suggesting its potential as an effective clinical therapy.<sup>[60]</sup>

In view of the above description of TBI, the effects of the drug Edaravone, and the pathophysiological overlap of TBI with many characteristics of Alzheimer's disease brain (cf. above), it is logical and consistent that Jiao et al.<sup>[61]</sup> have recently reported that Edaravone can also ameliorate Alzheimer's disease-type pathologies and cognitive deficits of a mouse model of Alzheimer's disease. These investigators further state that their above findings suggest that Edaravone is a promising drug candidate for Alzheimer's disease by targeting multiple key pathways of the disease pathogenesis.<sup>[61]</sup> This recommendation by Jiao et al. of Edaravone (for treating Alzheimer's disease) fits well with the initial drug candidates suggested elsewhere,<sup>[1]</sup> based on low-molecular-weight and sufficient lipophilicity, for incorporation into the LCM/ND lipid nanoemulsion (as again proposed here) to treat Alzheimer's disease (cf.<sup>[62]</sup>).

While the risk factors for dementia trigger widespread inflammation and oxidative stress (e.g.,<sup>[63,64]</sup>), it is also true that these two processes can result in more biological effects than enhanced calcium load in brain tissue and neurodegeneration (cf. <sup>[65-67]</sup>). In fact, oxidative stress and inflammation each involve pathophysiological cascades associated with a wide range of pathologies and especially aging.<sup>[67]</sup> Accordingly, Khalil et al.<sup>[68]</sup> found that Alzheimer's disease impaired the interaction of HDL (and apoA-I) with the SR-BI receptor, and their experimental results indicated that such patients had higher levels of oxidative stress.<sup>[68,69]</sup> The authors concluded that their clinical study provides evidence for the first time that the functionality of

HDL is impaired in Alzheimer's disease, and that this alteration may be caused by Alzheimer's disease-associated oxidative stress and inflammation.<sup>[68,69]</sup>

Lastly, in addition to the above-described repurposing of the FDA-approved drug Edaravone (cf. Abstract and this Section, paragr. 1&2), it was alluded to earlier that targeted delivery of pleiotropic natural substances (cf. Abstract) -- such as docosahexaenoic acid (DHA),<sup>[2]</sup> astaxanthin,<sup>[70]</sup> and resveratrol (e.g., <sup>3</sup>[71-73]) -- fit well with the initial drug candidates suggested elsewhere.<sup>[1]</sup> <sup>5</sup>These suggested drug candidates were based on low-molecular-weight and sufficient lipophilicity, regarding incorporation into the LCM/ND lipid nanoemulsion (as again proposed here), for targeted treatment of Alzheimer's disease. As particularly concerns resveratrol, Broderick et al.<sup>[71]</sup> have recently emphasized that this plant polyphenol <sup>7</sup>has gained interest as a non-pharmacological (dietary) approach for the treatment and prevention of Alzheimer's disease. <sup>7</sup>(Resveratrol is a major ingredient found in red wine, grape seeds, and certain nuts and berries.[e.g., 71]). These authors cite published evidence that resveratrol <sup>7</sup>attenuates learning impairment and delays the onset of neurodegeneration in transgenic murine models of Alzheimer's disease; moreover, a significant reduction in the number of activated <sup>7</sup>microglia and decreased inflammation in APP/PS1 mice following resveratrol treatment has been reported.<sup>[71]</sup> In summary, the above-described targeting advantage, using the LCM/ND lipid nanoemulsion, may be particularly important when delivering pleiotropic natural substances or for repurposing an FDA-approved drug in order to now treat late-onset dementia.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

A desirable feature for a parenteral lipid nanoemulsion is the ability to avoid "reticuloendothelial system" (RES) capture and hence circulate for a prolonged period in the bloodstream, thereby allowing the opportunity for cell-selective targeting of drugs. Accordingly, it is interesting to consider much evidence in the literature, reviewed elsewhere,[42] which indicates that a sizable portion of intravenously injected LCM/ND lipid nanoemulsion bypasses the RES to then become endocytosed by target cells. One probable reason for this repeated experimental observation is that the colloidal nanoparticles are uncharged (in such lipid nanoemulsions) and, hence, these dispersed liquid-crystalline phases are all unlikely to be captured easily by the RES during circulation (prior to adsorption of plasma apoA-I and subsequent receptor-mediated endocytosis); the charge neutrality greatly increases the blood-tissue compatibility.[42] Another factor which can prolong the half-life in the bloodstream, of a circulating lipid nanoemulsion, relates to particle size; namely, the size of the lipid emulsion particles themselves is known to influence the RES uptake of intravenous lipid emulsions. Various investigators have reported that "small-particle" (~0.10  $\mu\text{m}$  in diameter) lipid emulsions displayed: (1) a reduced hepatic uptake; and (2) a much slower plasma clearance, or a significantly greater area under the plasma concentration-time curve. Accordingly, the above trend would help explain why LCM/ND lipid nanoemulsion formulations (cf. Fig. 1) have been found capable of largely avoiding RES capture and display a prolonged circulation in the bloodstream.[42]

As specifically concerns neurodegenerative disease, <sup>9</sup>vascular dementia (like Alzheimer's disease) is a common cause of cognitive impairment – where there is an increased risk with

aging, a rapid step-wise disease progression, and a high mortality rate.[74] The known risk factors driving vascular dementia include diabetes and hypertension. Accordingly, both clinical and experimental data indicate that cerebrovascular disease can lead to cerebral hypoperfusion, thereby altering brain metabolism and leading to cognitive impairment[74] (cf. [75]). Past studies (e.g., [76,77]) have already shown that low-grade inflammation and endothelial dysfunction contribute to reduced information processing speed and executive functioning in an older population. Biomedical application of colloidal drug-nanocarriers, capable of crossing the BBB, can potentially be extended to the treatment of complex medical disorders like vascular dementia and (late-onset) Alzheimer's disease.[76-80] Recent published work has demonstrated that nanocomplexes can be readily transported into brain capillary endothelial cells (bovine and porcine) via SR-BI receptor-mediated endocytosis[7] (see also[81-83]). Accordingly, endothelial modulation and repair become feasible by pharmacological targeting[8-12,84-88] via SR-BI receptors (cf. [13,88]). The proposed multitasking combination therapeutic, described herein, appears likely to display greater efficacy at different stages of Alzheimer's disease (cf. [41]). Moreover, the effects of the various cell types targeted (via SR-BI[88]) may be additive, multiplicative, or otherwise synergistic.

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