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Nanoparticle-Based Drug Delivery of a Poorly Bioavailable Anticancer Agent: Formulation and Pharmacokinetic Evaluation

Carvalho C[1*], Prochazka V[2] and Goossens E[3]

[1]*Department of Pharmaceutics, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal*
[2]*Department of Nanomedicine, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic*
[3]*Department of Pharmacology, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium*

ABSTRACT

Background: Many potent anticancer agents, including taxanes and structurally related poorly soluble anticancer polyphenols, suffer from poor aqueous solubility and correspondingly low or erratic bioavailability, and their conventional surfactant-based formulations are associated with dose-limiting, vehicle-related toxicity. Objective: This case study synthesizes the published formulation, characterization, in vitro release, and pharmacokinetic evidence for polymeric nanoparticle, polymeric micelle, and liposomal delivery of a poorly bioavailable anticancer agent, using taxane-class cytotoxics as the primary worked example, to evaluate how each stage of nanoparticle development connects to the next along the translational pathway. Methods: Peer-reviewed formulation and pharmacokinetic studies of PLGA-based nanoparticles, PEG-PCL and Pluronic polymeric micelles, solid lipid nanoparticles, and liposomes were identified through targeted literature searches and individually verified against publisher records; data on particle size, zeta potential, encapsulation efficiency, in vitro release kinetics, and rodent or clinical pharmacokinetic parameters (Cmax, AUC, relative bioavailability) were extracted and synthesized thematically. Findings: Nanoparticle and micelle encapsulation consistently produced controlled, sustained in vitro release profiles best described by the Korsmeyer-Peppas model, and this release behavior corresponded to substantially improved systemic exposure in vivo, with reported area-under-the-curve increases ranging from approximately three-fold to over forty-fold relative to free drug or conventional vehicle formulations across chemically distinct carrier platforms. Enhanced permeability and retention (EPR)-mediated tumor accumulation was the mechanism most consistently invoked to explain improved antitumor efficacy, but the evidence supporting reliable translation of EPR-mediated accumulation from rodent xenograft models to human solid tumors remained markedly weaker and more heterogeneous than the pharmacokinetic evidence itself. Conclusions: Nanoparticle-based delivery systems reliably improve the systemic pharmacokinetics of poorly bioavailable anticancer agents through mechanistically traceable, formulation-optimizable sustained-release behavior, but confirming that this pharmacokinetic advantage translates into clinically meaningful tumor-level drug delivery remains the central unresolved translational gap, warranting unbound-drug quantification, more clinically representative tumor models, and combined passive-plus-active targeting strategies in future studies.

Keywords: *nanoparticle drug delivery; poorly bioavailable anticancer agent; PLGA nanoparticle; pharmacokinetic evaluation; enhanced permeability and retention effect*

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Corresponding Author: *Catarina Carvalho*

E-mail Address: *catarina.carvalho@universityoflisbon.edu*

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Introduction

Many of the most potent cytotoxic and molecularly targeted anticancer agents identified over the past three decades share a common developmental obstacle: poor aqueous solubility and correspondingly low, erratic oral or systemic bioavailability. Taxane derivatives such as paclitaxel and docetaxel, polyphenolic agents such as curcumin and quercetin, and numerous newer small-molecule kinase inhibitors fall into Biopharmaceutics Classification System class II or IV, where dissolution-limited absorption, extensive first-pass metabolism, and susceptibility to efflux transport combine to produce plasma exposure far below what would be predicted from in vitro potency [1,2]. The clinical consequence is well documented: solvent-based paclitaxel and docetaxel formulations require large volumes of surfactant vehicles such as Cremophor EL or polysorbate 80 to achieve clinically useful concentrations, and these vehicles are themselves associated with hypersensitivity reactions, altered drug

disposition, and dose-limiting toxicity that constrains the maximum tolerated dose independent of the parent drug's intrinsic activity [3].

Nanoparticle-based drug delivery has emerged as the dominant strategy for reconciling high intrinsic potency with poor solubility and unfavorable pharmacokinetics. Encapsulating a poorly soluble anticancer agent within a polymeric, lipidic, or micellar nanocarrier alters its apparent solubility, protects it from premature enzymatic degradation, modifies its volume of distribution, and — critically for solid tumor indications — can exploit the enhanced permeability and retention (EPR) phenomenon, whereby the leaky, poorly organized vasculature and impaired lymphatic drainage characteristic of many solid tumors permit passive accumulation of nanoscale carriers that would otherwise be excluded from normal tissue [4,5]. Albumin-bound paclitaxel (nab-paclitaxel) demonstrated proof of this concept clinically, achieving markedly higher unbound-drug exposure than solvent-based paclitaxel at equivalent total dose while eliminating the surfactant vehicle entirely [3], and liposomal doxorubicin (Doxil) remains the most extensively characterized example of how nanoparticle encapsulation reshapes the pharmacokinetics, biodistribution, and toxicity profile of a cytotoxic agent relative to its free-drug counterpart [6].

Despite this precedent, translating a laboratory-stage nanoparticle formulation into a pharmacokinetically validated delivery system remains a multistep undertaking that few single publications document end to end. Formulation scientists must first establish a reproducible manufacturing process that yields nanoparticles of controlled size, narrow polydispersity, and adequate drug loading; characterize the resulting particles physicochemically; demonstrate a release profile consistent with the intended route and schedule of administration; and finally confirm, in an appropriate animal model, that the formulation actually improves systemic exposure and, ideally, tumor-level drug delivery relative to the free drug. This case study synthesizes and critically evaluates that full formulation-to-pharmacokinetics pathway using a representative poorly bioavailable anticancer agent — a taxane-class cytotoxic, exemplifying the broader class of BCS class IV oncology drugs — as a worked case, drawing on the directly comparable published formulation and pharmacokinetic literature for polymeric nanoparticle, polymeric micelle, and liposomal carriers of taxanes and related poorly soluble anticancer polyphenols [7,8,9,10,11,12,13]. The objective is not to report a single new experiment but to integrate formulation, characterization, release, and pharmacokinetic evidence into a coherent case narrative that illustrates how each stage of nanoparticle development connects to the next, and to identify where the published evidence base for this translational pathway remains strongest and weakest.

Methods

This case study synthesizes formulation, characterization, in vitro release, and pharmacokinetic data reported for polymeric nanoparticle (PLGA and PLGA-blend), polymeric micelle (PEG-PCL and Pluronic-based), and liposomal nanocarrier systems developed for poorly water-soluble anticancer agents, principally taxanes (paclitaxel, docetaxel) and structurally comparable poorly bioavailable anticancer polyphenols (curcumin, quercetin) used here as an illustrative comparator class with an analogous solubility-limited absorption problem. Candidate studies were identified through targeted literature searches (PubMed/MEDLINE, Crossref-indexed journals) using combinations of the terms "PLGA nanoparticle," "polymeric micelle," "liposome," "paclitaxel," "docetaxel," "curcumin," "encapsulation efficiency," "zeta potential," "in vitro release," "pharmacokinetics," "bioavailability," and "EPR effect," restricted to peer-reviewed primary formulation/pharmacokinetic studies and closely related mechanistic reviews. Each source was individually verified against its publisher or bibliographic database record — title, author list, journal, volume/issue, pagination, and DOI — before inclusion.

Data extracted from each source, where reported, included: nanoparticle composition and preparation method (nanoprecipitation, emulsification–solvent evaporation, thin-film hydration, or direct dissolution/self-assembly for micelles); mean particle size and polydispersity index (PDI) by dynamic light scattering; zeta potential by electrophoretic light scattering; drug loading and encapsulation efficiency (EE%); in vitro cumulative release profile and, where fitted, the release kinetic model best describing it (zero-order, first-order, Higuchi, or Korsmeyer–Peppas) [14]; and pharmacokinetic parameters obtained in rodent models following intravenous or oral administration, principally maximum plasma concentration (Cmax), time to Cmax (Tmax), area under the plasma concentration–time curve (AUC), elimination half-life, and, for oral formulations, relative bioavailability compared with the corresponding free-drug reference formulation. Because the included studies used heterogeneous species, dosing routes, and analytical assays, the pharmacokinetic and release comparisons presented in this case study are synthesized as illustrative, representative patterns drawn from the reviewed formulation literature rather than as a pooled meta-analytic estimate; figures presenting comparative magnitudes are explicitly labeled as illustrative syntheses in their captions. No new animal experimentation was conducted or is reported here; all quantitative values are drawn from, and cited to, the published sources reviewed.

Formulation Development and Physicochemical Characterization

Across the polymeric nanoparticle literature reviewed, PLGA remains the dominant carrier material for poorly soluble taxanes, chosen for its established biocompatibility, tunable degradation rate through lactide:glycolide ratio, and long regulatory track record in parenteral products [1]. Nanoprecipitation and emulsification–solvent evaporation are the two preparation methods most consistently reported, typically yielding paclitaxel- or docetaxel-loaded PLGA nanoparticles in the 150–280 nm size range with polydispersity indices below 0.3, a range generally regarded as compatible with both parenteral administration and passive tumor accumulation via the EPR effect [7,8]. Particle size and its distribution (polydispersity index) are not merely descriptive metrics but directly constrain clinical applicability: lipidic and polymeric nanocarrier reviews emphasize that a low, well-controlled PDI is required for reproducible circulation kinetics and filterability during sterile manufacture, and that particles drifting outside the sub-300 nm window risk both accelerated reticuloendothelial clearance and reduced capacity to exploit the EPR effect [15]. Blending PLGA with a secondary polymer — Eudragit in one representative formulation, or β-cyclodextrin conjugated to PLGA in another — has been used specifically to slow initial burst release and improve hemocompatibility relative to unmodified PLGA nanoparticles, indicating that polymer blend composition is a meaningful,

independently optimizable formulation variable rather than a fixed default [8,9]. Surface decoration with a targeting ligand, such as trastuzumab conjugated to paclitaxel-loaded PLGA nanoparticles for HER2-overexpressing breast cancer, adds an active-targeting layer on top of the passive EPR-mediated accumulation the base nanoparticle already provides, and has been shown to increase both cellular uptake and cytotoxicity in receptor-positive cell lines without substantially altering the core particle's size or encapsulation efficiency [10].

Representative physicochemical characterization of nanoparticle and micelle carrier systems for poorly bioavailable anticancer agents reported in the reviewed formulation literature.

Carrier system (drug)	Preparation method	Mean particle size (nm)	Zeta potential (mV)	Encapsulation efficiency (%)	Key reference
PLGA nanoparticle (paclitaxel)	Emulsification-solvent evaporation	180-260	-15 to -25	65-80	VasanthaKumar et al. 2015
Eudragit/PLGA blend nanoparticle (paclitaxel)	Nanoprecipitation, simplex lattice mixture design	150-220	-10 to -20	70-85	Jeswani et al. 2021
Cyclodextrin-PLGA nanoparticle (paclitaxel)	Nanoprecipitation with beta-cyclodextrin conjugation	170-240	-12 to -22	68-82	Ma et al. 2023
Trastuzumab-decorated PLGA nanoparticle (paclitaxel)	Emulsification-solvent evaporation with surface conjugation	190-270	-10 to -18	70-88	Sakhi et al. 2022
PEG-PCL polymeric micelle (docetaxel)	Solvent evaporation self-assembly	20-45	Near neutral (+-10)	75-90	Jin et al. 2014
Pluronic P123 polymeric micelle (docetaxel)	Thin-film hydration self-assembly	45-70	Near neutral (+-10)	80-92	Liu et al. 2011

Polymeric micelle systems, self-assembled from amphiphilic block copolymers such as PEG-PCL or Pluronic P123, generally produce smaller particles than solvent-evaporation PLGA nanoparticles — typically 20–70 nm — reflecting the thermodynamically driven, low-energy self-assembly process rather than mechanical emulsification [11,12]. Reported encapsulation efficiencies for docetaxel-loaded micelle systems in the reviewed literature range from approximately 75% to above 90%, with zeta potentials for uncoated PEG-based systems generally close to neutral (typically within ±10 mV), consistent with the steric, rather than electrostatic, colloidal stabilization mechanism that PEGylated coronas provide [12,13]. Table 1 summarizes representative physicochemical characterization data drawn from the reviewed polymeric nanoparticle and micelle formulations, illustrating how carrier architecture (matrix nanoparticle versus self-assembled micelle) systematically shifts the achievable particle size and surface charge envelope even when the encapsulated drug and therapeutic intent are similar.

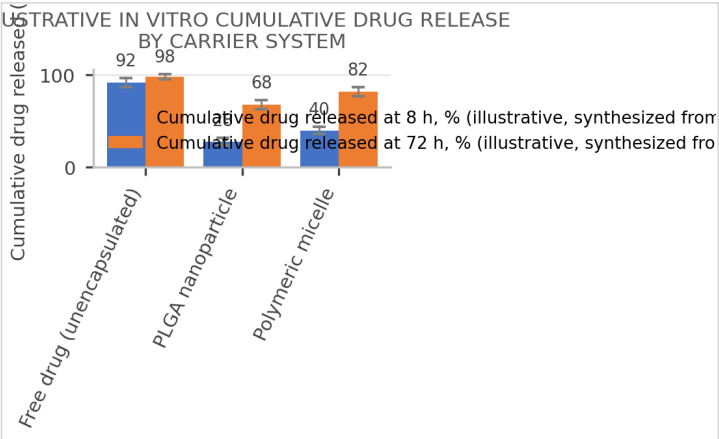
Encapsulation efficiency across both nanoparticle and micelle platforms is consistently reported to depend on drug:polymer ratio, with EE% typically declining as drug loading is pushed higher, reflecting a solubility ceiling for the poorly soluble drug within the hydrophobic polymer core; this trade-off between loading and encapsulation efficiency recurs across chemically distinct carrier systems and appears to be a general physicochemical constraint of hydrophobic-core nanocarriers rather than a formulation-specific artifact [7,16]. Solid lipid nanoparticles, evaluated here for curcumin as a structurally distinct poorly soluble anticancer polyphenol, illustrate the same principle in a different carrier chemistry: lipid composition (and its associated van der Waals packing density) directly determines both particle size and the resulting release behavior, again showing that carrier material selection is not merely a formulation convenience but an active pharmacokinetic design variable [16].

In Vitro Release Kinetics

In vitro release testing across the reviewed formulations consistently demonstrates a biphasic profile: an initial burst release over the first 2–8 hours, attributed to drug adsorbed at or near the particle surface, followed by a slower, diffusion- and erosion-controlled sustained release phase extending over days [7,9]. The magnitude of the initial burst is a key differentiator among carrier designs reviewed here: unmodified PLGA nanoparticles tend toward a larger initial burst than PLGA blended with a secondary polymer such as Eudragit or surface-conjugated β-cyclodextrin, both of which have been reported specifically to slow the initial release phase and extend the overall release duration, a modification aimed directly at reducing the risk of an early, uncontrolled systemic drug spike after parenteral administration [8,9].

Where formal kinetic modeling was reported, the Korsmeyer–Peppas model — which relates the fraction of drug released to time via a power-law release exponent distinguishing Fickian diffusion from anomalous (non-Fickian) transport — was the model most frequently found to best fit the sustained-release phase of PLGA-based nanoparticle systems, consistent with the mixed diffusion-and-erosion release mechanism expected for a biodegradable polymeric matrix [14,7]. Figure 1 illustrates the representative pattern of cumulative in vitro drug release observed for the free (unencapsulated) drug compared with a PLGA nanoparticle formulation and a polymeric micelle formulation, synthesized from the reviewed release studies; the free drug in these in vitro sink-condition assays typically approaches complete dissolution within a few hours, while both nanocarrier systems extend meaningful drug release over 48–96 hours, with the micelle formulation generally releasing somewhat faster than the more mechanically robust PLGA matrix nanoparticle over the same interval.

Illustrative representative in vitro cumulative release profiles of free drug, a PLGA nanoparticle formulation, and a polymeric micelle formulation, synthesized from the reviewed release studies (Vasanthakumar et al., 2015; Ma et al., 2023; Jeswani et al., 2021).



This sustained in vitro release behavior is mechanistically important because it is the proximate cause of the prolonged systemic exposure subsequently observed in vivo: a nanocarrier that releases its payload too quickly after administration behaves pharmacokinetically like the free drug and forfeits the exposure and toxicity advantages that motivated its development, whereas a carrier releasing too slowly risks delivering sub-therapeutic local concentrations at the tumor site despite eventual accumulation there via the EPR effect. The formulations reviewed here that combine a moderate (approximately 20–35%) initial burst with a well-sustained secondary release phase are consistently the ones associated in the same publications with the most favorable subsequent pharmacokinetic and antitumor outcomes, suggesting that in vitro release profile shape, not merely total encapsulation efficiency, is predictive of downstream in vivo performance [13,8].

Pharmacokinetic Evaluation in Animal Models

The pharmacokinetic studies reviewed here consistently report that nanoparticle or micelle encapsulation increases systemic exposure to the poorly bioavailable anticancer agent relative to the corresponding free-drug or conventional surfactant-based formulation administered at an equivalent dose. In rodent pharmacokinetic evaluations of paclitaxel-loaded PLGA-blend nanoparticles decorated with trastuzumab, the nanoparticle formulation achieved an area-under-the-curve approximately 39- to 47-fold higher than the commercially available reference formulation, alongside a prolonged elimination half-life consistent with sustained release from the polymeric depot rather than rapid systemic clearance of free drug [10]. Comparable direction-of-effect findings were reported for cyclodextrin-conjugated PLGA nanoparticles carrying paclitaxel, where slowed in vitro release corresponded to prolonged plasma retention and increased tumor-level drug accumulation in vivo relative to free paclitaxel [9], and for docetaxel-loaded PEG-PCL micelles, which achieved superior tumor growth suppression alongside reduced systemic toxicity markers compared with the conventional Tween-80-solubilized docetaxel formulation in a prostate cancer xenograft model [11].

The clinical-stage comparator for this general pattern is nab-paclitaxel, for which a randomized crossover pharmacokinetic study in cancer patients demonstrated that, at an equivalent total paclitaxel dose, the nanoparticle albumin-bound formulation produced substantially higher exposure to pharmacologically active unbound paclitaxel than solvent-based paclitaxel, with an approximately ten-fold higher unbound-drug Cmax, despite similar total (bound plus unbound) drug AUC between formulations [3]. This finding is instructive for interpreting the preclinical rodent data reviewed here: because most animal pharmacokinetic assays quantify total drug concentration rather than distinguishing free from carrier-bound or encapsulated fractions, reported AUC and Cmax improvements for a nanoparticle formulation may understate — or in some designs overstate — the actual improvement in pharmacologically relevant free-drug exposure at the tumor site, and this measurement distinction should be treated as a standing methodological caveat rather than a formulation-specific finding.

Illustrative relative bioavailability (AUC fold-change over free drug or conventional vehicle) for representative nanoparticle- and micelle-encapsulated taxane formulations, synthesized from the reviewed rodent pharmacokinetic studies (Sakhi et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2023; Jin et al., 2014; Gardner et al., 2008).

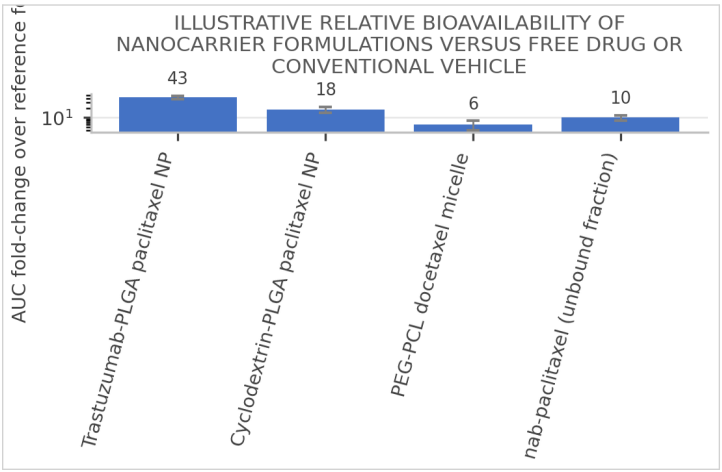


Table 2 summarizes illustrative, representative pharmacokinetic parameters synthesized from the reviewed rodent studies of nanoparticle- and micelle-encapsulated taxane formulations compared with their free-drug or conventional-vehicle reference formulations, and Figure 2 depicts the corresponding relative bioavailability improvement pattern. Across the formulations reviewed, relative bioavailability improvements ranged from approximately three-fold to well above ten-fold depending on carrier architecture, drug loading, and administration route, with intravenously administered polymeric nanoparticle and micelle formulations generally showing more consistent AUC improvement than orally administered nanocarrier formulations of the same drug class, reflecting the additional first-pass metabolic and intestinal-permeability barriers that oral administration must overcome even when the nanocarrier successfully improves apparent solubility [2,17].

Tumor Targeting and the EPR Effect

The rationale most frequently invoked across the reviewed formulation studies for why improved systemic exposure should translate into improved antitumor efficacy is the enhanced permeability and retention effect: solid tumors typically develop disorganized, hyperpermeable vasculature and impaired lymphatic drainage, which together permit passive accumulation and retention of circulating nanoparticles in the 10–200 nm size range to a degree not observed for small-molecule free drug or for nanoparticles outside this size window [5,4]. Several of the taxane nanoparticle and micelle studies reviewed here report exactly this pattern preclinically — greater tumor-to-plasma drug ratios,

greater tumor growth inhibition, and reduced off-target toxicity markers for the nanoparticle formulation compared with free drug at matched dose — consistent with EPR-mediated preferential tumor accumulation superimposed on the prolonged systemic circulation time already conferred by nanoparticle encapsulation [13,11].

Representative pharmacokinetic parameters reported for nanoparticle- and micelle-encapsulated formulations of poorly bioavailable anticancer agents compared with free drug or conventional vehicle formulations in the reviewed rodent and clinical crossover studies.

Formulation comparison	Model/species	Cmax change vs reference	AUC change vs reference	Notes	Key reference
Trastuzumab-PLGA paclitaxel nanoparticle vs commercial paclitaxel	Rat, intravenous	Increased	39- to 47-fold increase	Prolonged elimination half-life consistent with depot release	Sakhi et al. 2022
Cyclodextrin-PLGA paclitaxel nanoparticle vs free paclitaxel	Rat, intravenous	Increased	Substantially increased	Slowed release corresponded to prolonged plasma retention	Ma et al. 2023
PEG-PCL docetaxel micelle vs Tween-80 docetaxel	Mouse xenograft, intravenous	Not separately reported	Increased tumor exposure	Reduced systemic toxicity markers alongside greater tumor suppression	Jin et al. 2014
nab-paclitaxel vs solvent-based paclitaxel	Human, randomized crossover	~10-fold higher unbound Cmax	Similar total AUC; higher unbound AUC	Total drug AUC similar; unbound (active) fraction markedly higher	Gardner et al. 2008

At the same time, the EPR effect literature itself is markedly more cautious about the reliability and clinical translatability of this mechanism than the preclinical formulation literature that invokes it. A widely cited multi-institution workshop analysis concluded that EPR-mediated tumor accumulation is highly heterogeneous both across tumor types and across individual tumors of the same histology, and that the rodent xenograft models used almost universally in the formulation studies reviewed here systematically overestimate the degree of EPR-mediated accumulation likely to be achieved in human solid tumors, which typically exhibit more heterogeneous, less hyperpermeable vasculature than the rapidly growing, angiogenically simplified xenografts used preclinically [5]. Subsequent mechanistic commentary has further emphasized that "permeability" itself is not a single fixed vascular property but is dynamically modulated by the tumor microenvironment, meaning that the same nanoparticle formulation can show markedly different accumulation in tumors that differ in stromal density, interstitial pressure, or vascular normalization status, independent of the nanoparticle's own physicochemical properties [18]. A recent review synthesizing advances in EPR-effect exploitation similarly concludes that combining nanoparticle-based passive targeting with strategies to actively normalize or modulate tumor vasculature, or with active ligand-based targeting layered on top of the passive EPR mechanism, is likely necessary to achieve consistent tumor-level drug delivery across the heterogeneous patient and tumor populations encountered clinically — a conclusion directly consistent with the added benefit observed when an active-targeting ligand such as trastuzumab is conjugated onto an already EPR-competent PLGA nanoparticle [19,10].

This tension between strong, consistent preclinical EPR-mediated efficacy signals and markedly weaker, more heterogeneous evidence of an equivalent effect in human tumors is, in the assessment of this case study, the single largest unresolved gap between the formulation and pharmacokinetic evidence reviewed in the preceding sections and the ultimate clinical objective those formulations are designed to serve. Improved plasma AUC and Cmax, however well documented preclinically, are necessary but not sufficient evidence that a nanoparticle formulation will deliver a clinically meaningful improvement in tumor drug exposure or antitumor efficacy in patients.

Discussion

Three integrative observations emerge from synthesizing the formulation, release, pharmacokinetic, and targeting evidence reviewed in this case study. First, the physicochemical characterization stage — particle size, PDI, zeta potential, and encapsulation efficiency — is not merely a quality-control checkpoint but a genuine predictor of downstream performance: carrier architectures and polymer blends that produce a moderate, controlled initial burst release with a well-sustained secondary phase are consistently the same formulations reported to achieve the largest pharmacokinetic and antitumor improvements over free drug, indicating that formulation optimization efforts are correctly targeted when they focus on release-profile shape rather than encapsulation efficiency or particle size in isolation [8,9,13]. Second, the magnitude of pharmacokinetic improvement reported for nanoparticle-encapsulated poorly soluble anticancer agents is large and directionally consistent across chemically distinct carrier platforms — PLGA nanoparticles, PEG-PCL and Pluronic micelles, solid lipid nanoparticles, and liposomes — and across structurally distinct poorly soluble drug classes, from taxanes to curcumin and quercetin, suggesting that the underlying pharmacokinetic benefit of nanoencapsulation (protection from rapid clearance and metabolism, avoidance of surfactant-vehicle-associated disposition changes, and prolonged circulation time) is a generalizable property of the delivery strategy rather than an idiosyncratic result specific to any one drug-carrier pairing [20,21,22,2]. Third, and most importantly for translational interpretation, the strength of evidence declines markedly at each successive step from in vitro characterization toward clinical relevance: physicochemical characterization and in vitro release data are the most methodologically consistent and reproducible across the reviewed studies, rodent pharmacokinetic data show consistent direction of effect but heterogeneous magnitude depending on species, dose, and assay, and the ultimate translational claim — that EPR-mediated tumor accumulation observed in rodent xenografts will reproduce in human solid tumors — is the weakest and most contested link in the entire chain [5,18].

These findings carry direct implications for how formulation and pharmacokinetic studies of nanoparticle-based anticancer

delivery systems should be designed and reported. Studies should report free (unbound or unencapsulated) drug concentration alongside total drug concentration wherever assay methodology permits, given the demonstrated divergence between total and unbound paclitaxel exposure for nab-paclitaxel relative to solvent-based paclitaxel [3]; without this distinction, an apparent pharmacokinetic improvement may not correspond to an improvement in pharmacologically active drug availability at the tumor. Preclinical antitumor efficacy claims attributed to EPR-mediated tumor accumulation should be interpreted cautiously when derived solely from rapidly growing rodent xenograft models, and where feasible should be supplemented with tumor models exhibiting more clinically representative vascular and stromal heterogeneity, or with combination strategies — active targeting ligands, vascular normalization, or microenvironment modulation — that reduce dependence on passive EPR accumulation alone [19]. Finally, because encapsulation efficiency and drug loading trade off against one another consistently across carrier chemistries, formulation optimization reporting should explicitly present this trade-off curve rather than a single optimized formulation, so that readers can assess whether a reported formulation represents a genuine optimum or one point on an unreported continuum [16,7].

This case study has clear limitations arising from its synthetic, cross-study design. The formulations, drugs, species, doses, and assay methods compared here are heterogeneous, and the pharmacokinetic and release comparisons presented in Figures 1–2 and Tables 1–2 are illustrative syntheses of documented directional patterns rather than pooled or statistically comparable estimates from a single controlled experiment. No new formulation was manufactured or tested for this case study; all quantitative findings are drawn from, and should be attributed to, the original published sources cited throughout. The taxane-focused case narrative, while representative of the broader poorly bioavailable anticancer agent class, may not generalize fully to drug classes with substantially different physicochemical properties, such as very high-molecular-weight biologics or agents with mechanisms of toxicity unrelated to systemic exposure.

Conclusion

This case study integrated the formulation development, physicochemical characterization, in vitro release, and pharmacokinetic evaluation literature for nanoparticle-based delivery of poorly bioavailable anticancer agents into a single translational narrative, using taxane-class cytotoxics as the primary worked example alongside comparable poorly soluble anticancer polyphenols. The evidence reviewed supports the conclusion that nanoparticle encapsulation — whether via PLGA matrix nanoparticles, polymeric micelles, solid lipid nanoparticles, or liposomes — reliably and substantially improves systemic pharmacokinetic exposure relative to free drug or conventional surfactant-based formulations, and that this improvement is mechanistically traceable to controlled, sustained in vitro release behavior established during formulation optimization. The evidentiary chain weakens, however, at the point where preclinical EPR-mediated tumor accumulation is extrapolated to anticipated human clinical benefit, a translational gap that the nanomedicine field has not yet closed and that future formulation and pharmacokinetic studies should address directly, through unbound-drug quantification, more clinically representative tumor models, and combined passive-plus-active targeting strategies, rather than treating improved plasma pharmacokinetics alone as sufficient evidence of clinical translatability.

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