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Unlocking the potential of Drug-Eluting Stents (DES): A Review of their Efficacy, Safety,and Future prospects

Karthik Bangaru, Usha Rani,Yasarapu Jagruithi
Department of pharmaceutics, Andhra university, visakhapatnam
Email: bangarikarthik007@gmail.com
Department of pharmaceutics, Andhra university, visakhapatnam
Email: usha.eatakota@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This review explores the evolution and advancements in the field of drug-eluting stents (DES) used for treating coronary artery disease. It discusses the limitations and improvements covered from first to fourth-generation DESs, which emphasizing the polymer coatings and followed by importance of drug pharmacology and innovative designs to enhance biocompatibility and reduce restenosis rates to optimize drug delivery. It also covers with advancements such as bioabsorbable polymers and improved anti-restenotic agents, the latest DES technologies strive for safety and efficacy along with better vascular healing while addressing past concerns like stent thrombosis and endothelial healing delays.

Keywords — Drug-eluting stents (DES), Polymer-coated stents , Stent surface modification , Controlled drug release systems, Next-generation DES

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I.INTRODUCTION

Drug-eluting stents (DES) have significantly revolutionized in treatment of coronary artery disease. Recent advances include combining pure mechanical support of bare-metal stents with the delivery of drugs preventing restenosis. The manufacturing process of these medical devices typically include a metallic scaffold that is coated with a polymer matrix and incorporates an antiproliferative agents. The process of these stent preparation consists of several steps like :- stent platform selection, modification of the surface, application of polymer coating, and incorporation of drug. Spray coating, dip coating, and electrospinning are a few efficient productive methods for preparing DES by applying drug-polymer mixture. Moreover, advanced innovations such as plasma treatment and chemical vapor deposition have been employed to augment drug adhesion and control its release kinetics. Material selection, drug type, and coating method influence stent performance, biocompatibility, and sustained delivery efficacy in preventing restenosis and promoting healing of the vessel. Manufacturing Drug Eluting Stents comprises stepwise complex procedures.

II. STENT PLATFORM SELECTION

Selection of an appropriate metal alloy for the outer layer of the stent that provides mechanical strength are important parameter to be consider (e.g., stainless steel, cobalt-chromium, platinum-chromium) these are selected based on factors such as radial strength, flexibility, and radiopacity , and coming to the design of stent geometry and also to optimize the mechanical properties and drug delivery ,computer aided design (CAD) and finite element analysis (FEA) technologies are employed.[1,3,15]

A. Surface modification

Surface modification is an ideal aspect to enhance drug adhesion and biocompatibility, thereby improving the stent's interaction with surrounding

tissue. To achieve an ideal surface modification utilization of techniques such as plasma treatment, chemical etching, or electropolishing are utilised for a suitable surface topography and promote polymer adhesion.

Recent drug eluting stents have indulged in exploration of novel surface modification techniques, such as nanopatterning or biomimetic coatings, to further enhance stent performance.[1,4]

B. Polymer coating

- Selection of biocompatible polymers are crucial step for drug elution process (e.g., PLGA, PEVA, PBMA) and these polymers are selected based on their degradation profiles, drug compatibility, and mechanical properties. And different methods used in polymer applications are :-

- Application of polymer using methods such as:

a) Spray coating: Atomization of polymer solution onto stent surface using precision spray nozzles under controlled environmental conditions.

b) Dip coating: Immersion of stent in polymer solution with precise control of dipping speed, duration, and withdrawal rate.

c) Electrospinning: Creation of nanofiber polymer coating using electric field, allowing for highly controlled fiber diameter and orientation.

Optimization of coating parameters such as solvent selection, polymer concentration, and application temperature are precisely monitored to achieve desired coating characteristics. Recent advances lead to development of multi-layer coating systems to fine-tune drug release kinetics and enhance overall stent performance.[2,3]

C. Drug incorporation

Selection of appropriate antiproliferative drug is major part in formulation process and these are selected based on efficacy, safety profile, and compatibility with the chosen polymer system (e.g., sirolimus, paclitaxel, everolimus).

- Incorporation of drug into polymer matrix can be done by :-

a) Direct mixing with polymer solution to create a homogeneous drug-polymer blend.

b) Encapsulation in nanoparticles to provide additional control over drug release and protect drug stability.

c) Layer-by-layer deposition to create complex drug release profiles or incorporate multiple therapeutic agents.

Consideration of drug stability during the manufacturing process, including protection from light, heat, and oxidation parameters are taken care during drug incorporation process recent studies opened a way exploration of novel drug incorporation techniques, such as supercritical fluid technology or microfluidic-assisted drug loading.[3]

D. Coating optimization

coating optimisation can be done by controlling the coating thickness and uniformity through precise adjustment of process parameters such as ,

- Optimization of drug-to-polymer ratio for desired release kinetics, balancing initial burst release with sustained drug delivery and implementation of advanced coating technologies, such as gradient coatings or stimuli-responsive systems, to enhance drug release control.[3]

- Coating optimisation open a way into development of bioresorbable polymer coatings that completely degrade over time, leaving behind only the bare metal stent.[2]

E. Surface characterization

Surface characterization is key aspect in strength and rigidity of drug eluting stent and this is followed upon analysis of coating morphology using microscopy techniques such as scanning electron microscopy (SEM) and atomic force microscopy (AFM).

- Assessment of drug distribution and polymer integrity using spectroscopic methods like Raman mapping and Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR).

- Evaluation of coating adhesion and durability through mechanical testing and simulated physiological conditions.[1]

- Utilization of advanced imaging techniques, such as micro-computed tomography (micro-CT), to assess coating uniformity and drug distribution in three dimensions.

F. Sterilization:-

Sterilization is vital part of the whole process and need of appropriate sterilization method that maintains the integrity of the drug, polymer, and

stent platform are prime factors (e.g., ethylene oxide, e-beam radiation).Validation of sterilization processes is necessary to ensure complete microbial inactivation without compromising stent performance.[1]
- Investigation of novel sterilization techniques, such as supercritical CO2 sterilization, may offer advantages for sensitive drug-polymer systems.[2]

III. EVALUATION PARAMETERS :-

Quality control and Evaluation parameters such as mechanical properties, including radial strength, flexibility, and fatigue resistance play an predominant factor in justification for there use in the first place. These also consist assessment of drug release profile through in vitro dissolution testing under simulated physiological conditions and ,
- Conduction of biocompatibility testing to ensure the safety of all materials used in the stent construction and Performance of in vitro cell culture studies to evaluate the stent's effect on endothelial cell growth and smooth muscle cell proliferation.Execution of in vivo animal studies to assess stent performance, drug release, and tissue response in a physiological environment.[2]
All these Implementations of rigorous quality management systems are to ensure consistency and traceability throughout the manufacturing process.[2,4]

These comprehensive methodologies are employed to produce DES with controlled drug release properties, optimized mechanical performance, and enhanced biocompatibility. The intricate balance of materials science, surface engineering, and pharmaceutical technology in DES manufacturing continues to evolve, driven by ongoing research and development efforts to improve clinical outcomes in interventional cardiology.[3]

IV. PHARMACOLOGY AND DRUG RELEASE:-

Coming to the pharmacology ,the process of restenosis is a condition which occur after vascular interventions and it is a complex series of events that involve various biological mechanisms including elastic recoil and inflammation. Researchers now have gained a better understanding in-stent restenosis which is due to studying and exploration of a wide range of drugs targeting different pathways which are believed to contribute to this process. These therapeutic options can be categorized into several types such as :- Immunosuppressive, antiproliferative, anti-inflammatory, antithrombotic, and prohealing agents. The ideal drug should prevent the formation of neointimal hyperplasia while supporting vascular healing and contribute for the re-endothelialization of the injured vessel wall and it is also necessary for the drug to have a broad therapeutic range and a strong safety profile at the required dosages. [4,1]

Clinical trials involving systemic administration of antithrombotic drugs and glucocorticoids to treat in-stent restenosis have generally not been successful. This is likely due to insufficient therapeutic concentrations reaching the damaged arteries so as inadequate mechanisms of action, or side effects limiting proper dosing. Numerous drug candidates have been reviewed extensively regarding this problems. The first drug-eluting stents are were introduced in the year 2003 and 2004 those are sirolimus-eluting and paclitaxel-eluting stents. Coming to moa of Paclitaxel and sirolimus they both known to suppress immune responses and cell proliferation effectively but they work through different mechanism of actions. Paclitaxel interferes with microtubule disassemble leading to cell cycle arrest, while sirolimus inhibits the enzyme mTOR thereby reducing the activity of kinases involved in cell growth.[4,3,1]

Localized drug delivery through stents provides several benefits, such as targeted release at the injury site with higher local concentrations of the drug and minimal systemic exposure and reducing the risk of toxicity. Controlled drug release can be achieved with polymer coatings or drug-loaded matrices. The challenge for developers is to design a stent that incorporates a suitable drug delivery system. This includes ensuring sustained drug release for at least three weeks post-deployment to prevent restenosis as well as creating a biologically inert and mechanically stable delivery vehicle. [4,6]

Most drugs need polymer coatings for effective delivery as they cannot adhere to metal stents. Paclitaxel has been successfully used in both direct and polymer-coated showing good results. Various materials have been proposed for these coatings, but proprietary polymers dominate the market all along the way. There are specific polymers that can significantly influence the drug release kinetics, for example, different paclitaxel-eluting stents have been developed with various release profiles showing the difference in the drug release with respective polymer.[4,9,15]

Innovative polymer coatings are being explored which include biocompatible materials that support re-endothelialization. Inorganic biomaterials have also been tested for their ability to enhance stent properties and reduce adverse reactions and Researchers are investigating biodegradable polymers that would dissolve after drug release which potentially eliminate long-term issues associated with conventional stents. A new biodegradable drug-eluting stent design may help minimize injuries to the vessel wall due to its biocompatible in nature. However, careful management of the inflammatory responses and potential embolization risks during degradation is essential. [8,15,]

Currently, available drug-eluting stents are primarily conventional designs without specific modifications for drug delivery. Future designs are likely to focus on optimizing stent properties to facilitate a better drug loading and improving their effectiveness in preventing restenosis.[4,9]

A. First-Generation Drug-Eluting Stents (Bare-Metal Stents + Early Drug Coating)

The first-generation DESs were appeared in the early 2000s to avoid issue of restenosis. These stents were infused with drugs such as paclitaxel or sirolimus to prevent the excessive tissue growth within the stent followed by implantation and coming to the drug it functions by hindering smooth muscle cell proliferation which is a major contributor to restenosis process. Although they effectively reduced restenosis the first-generation DESs came with certain drawbacks including :- Increased risk of late stent thrombosis (a clot formulating at the stent site)and also the possibility of delayed endothelial healing which led the vessel more vulnerable to clots and other complications.[3] These initial devices were mainly constructed from materials like stainless steel and were linked to the thicker drug coatings. Consequently, the stents possessed greater rigidity, and occasionally the coating was uneven.[3,2]

B. Second-Generation Drug-Eluting Stents (Improved Drug Delivery and Biocompatibility)

The second generation DESs came up with technological advancements in DESs, second-generation DESs were introduced in the mid-2000s to compensate the problems associated with first generation DESs as these stents aimed to avoid the limitations of the first generation by concentrating on:-

Better Biocompatibility: Utilizing materials such as cobalt-chromium alloys and other advanced metals to enhance stent flexibility and durability followed by biocompatibility.[3]

Thin Drug Coatings: The drugs were applied in thinner and more uniform layers which helped to reduce the thrombosis risk and allowed for more regulated drug release.[4]

Enhanced Polymer Coatings: The polymer coating responsible for drug release was also refined and several second-generation DESs incorporated with bioresorbable polymers that would decompose over time lowering the complications compared to permanent polymers.[1]

second-generation DES include the Xience V stent.This stent utilized drugs like everolimus and zotarolimus which showed improved safety and efficacy profile compared to the drugs from the first generation.[15,16]

C. Third-Generation Drug-Eluting Stents (Bioabsorbable Polymers and Further Optimization)

Third-generation DESs have developed the innovations achieved in second-generation stents even more. These stents concentrate on:

Bioabsorbable Polymers: bioabsorbable polymers are a driven change for future DESs and These polymers disintegrate over time, leaving solely the metal stent structure behind. This aids in

eliminating the long-term risks of negative effects from permanent polymers.[3,5,16]
Optimized Drug Delivery: An emphasis is placed on controlled, prolonged drug release that balances tissue growth inhibition with encouraging natural vessel healing.[7,3]
Improved Design and Materials: due to progressed new stent designs ,materials used in DESs such as magnesium or bioresorbable scaffolds are studied and explored more for enhancements in flexibility, strength, and healing factors in DESs.[9,3,13,]
Example of third-generation drug-eluting stent is the Absorb Bioresorbable Vascular Scaffold (BVS), although it was retracted from the market due to issues about long-term results, such as scaffold thrombosis.[9,13]

D. Fourth-Generation Drug-Eluting Stents (Bioabsorbable Scaffolds and Advanced Drug Formulations)

These are the recent DESs that are currently used ,fourth-generation DESs have evolved in technological progress for enhanced precision in drug delivery with improved patient safety, and quicker recovery durations. Notable characteristics of these stents comprise:
Complete Bioresorbability: The primary objective is to create stents that entirely dissolve after fulfilling their primary function and newer bioresorbable scaffolds (BRS) are constructed with compunds like polylactic acid or polyglycolic acid, which can be absorbed by the organism after accomplishing their role in artery repair.[3,1,13]
Sophisticated Coatings and Drug Selections: These stents incorporate cutting-edge medications, including newer generation sirolimus derivatives and various immunosuppressants that more precisely target the processes accountable for vessel blockage.
Tailored Release Profiles: Fourth-generation DESs frequently include tailored, multistage drug release, delivering an optimized therapeutic effect over a prolonged period.[2]
A case in point is the Orsiro Bioabsorbable Sirolimus-Eluting Stent, which is a next-generation apparatus featuring a bioresorbable coating.[4,16]

E. Bioabsorbable drug eluting stent :-

Bioabsorbable DES (detachable stents) deliver great short-term and long-term outcomes but vanish in a matter of months eliminating the need to use two antiplatelet drugs for a long time. Yet, their shortcomings have sparked curiosity about biodegradable tech. These stents crafted from polymers or metal mixes with or without drug coatings, can prop up the artery, allow natural healing, and then break down. This would remove the need for extended antiplatelet drug use and keep future surgery options open.[5,15]
A number of biodegradable stents have begun clinical trials, with many more in the early testing phase. Two main types of materials see use: natural biopolymers and metals that corrode. None of the materials or stents tested have struck the right balance between being body-friendly breaking down at the right speed to keep their strength, and not causing inflammation.[3,9,13]
In the late 1990s, doctors put a bioabsorbable stent made of high-molecular-weight poly-L-lactic acid (PLLA) into 15 patients. This showed it was possible, safe, and worked well. Coronary PLLA biodegradable stents are doable, safe, and effective in people, but we need to follow up with more patients over a long time to confirm they work well in the long run.[5,9,1]

The Cypher™ stent releases sirolimus to lower the chances of restenosis. Its coating contains PEVA, a polymer found in drug-delivery tools, including one the US FDA has approved to treat glaucoma. Another polymer PBMA, has seen use in skin adhesives before, but we don't have proof of its use in implanted devices. Parylene, a thin layer, helps stick the stent's metal to the polymer coatings.[3,14]
When it comes to biocompatibility, we don't have much historical data on these polymers in blood-contacting devices. Most of what we know comes from the company's FDA submission. The stent releases drugs in two ways: a slow-release and a fast-release version of sirolimus. To make the slow-release version, they add a drug-free top layer giving it three layers total. The fast-release version has just two layers. Tests show that the fast-release form lets out all the sirolimus in about 15 days, while the slow-release takes around 90 days. Looking at how it's released, we can see the slow-

release form doesn't give a steady output as you'd expect. This might happen because both forms have a quick burst at the start.[9,5,1]

V. LIMITATIONS

Although the rates of restenosis are significantly lower, the long term effectiveness of sirolimus-eluting stents is undermind by late stent thrombosis, which occurs with hypersensitivity and inflammation. This thrombosis can happen very late (after 12 months) or late (after 30 days), with reports of acute/subacute cases within 24 hours or 30 days. Stent related coronary deaths that stem from insufficient healing of the arteries are due to inadequate coverage of the stent, which leads to thrombosis, especially after withdrawal of DAPT. [4,14]

Research has shown that immune hypersensitivity associated with immune cells local to these stents contributes to late thrombosis. Arterial changes have also led to stent mal positioning and alteration of inflammatory response. In general, while drug-eluting stents have reduced thrombogenic potential when compared to bare metal stents, the hypersensitivity reactions are thought to originate from the stent polymer coating, sirolimus, and the kinetics of the drug release. As some other risk factors such as diabetes and advanced age increase the risk for thrombosis, research is turning towards biocompatible coatings to improve results.[6,10]

VI. FUTURE ASPECTS

Gene eluting stunts

Technological advancements have improved our understanding of in-stent restenosis and have led to significant progress in nucleic acid-based drug discovery, recombinant DNA technology, and gene transfer. These advancements provide effective alternatives to traditional therapies. Nucleic acid-based therapeutics which include RNA or DNA molecules can be delivered locally to target specific genes involved in the mechanism of restenosis. [2,13]

To explore this idea, a plasmid DNA-eluting gene was developed and coated with a biodegradable polymer known as PLGA. This new type of stent was tested using a GFP-DNA, allowing observation of its uptake and gene expression through fluorescence microscopy. Researchers believe that the DNA from the stent will diffuse through small damages caused during stent placement, allowing the DNA to enter smooth muscle cells. Another gene was also thought to be useful for promoting cell death in response to the inflammation from the PLGA polymer. [9,17]

Further studies demonstrated the benefits of gene-eluting stents by delivering plasmid DNA containing the coding sequence for the human vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF). A specific version of the stent named BiodivYsio was used for this purpose. The VEGF produced from gene transfection promoted the recovery of endothelial cells by activating their proliferation pathways, contrasting with other drugs that serve to inhibit cell growth. [9,2]

Additionally, researchers examined the local delivery of siRNA to prevent the production of proteins that contribute to in-stent restenosis. Moreover, stainless steel stents coated with hyaluronic acid were shown to effectively transfect genes and support claims that stents can be viable platforms for gene delivery. Unlike plasmid DNA, gene transfer therapy uses viral vectors, such as adenovirus, for gene delivery. Studies have shown that using an adenoviral vector to inhibit metalloproteinase-3 in stents can be effective. [2]

Comparisons between adenoviral and adeno-associated viral vectors also showed that while adenoviral delivery leads to shorter transgene expression, the latter offers better and longer-lasting transgene expression. Previous studies used a lacZ reporter gene to assess this, further indicating the potential of these vectors in gene therapy for cardiovascular applications.[5]

VII. CONCLUSION

Drug eluting stents DESs have progressed from past few decades and have been evolving on generation bases with minimizing respective problems and the drug delivery have been showed good safety and efficacy along with better vascular healing while diminishing past concerns like stent thrombosis and endothelial healing delays and, usage of biodegradable stents have led to diminished usage of anti platelet and anti thrombotic drugs additionally with the stent. Drug-eluting stents have grown out in the treatment of coronary artery

disease and developing though multiple generations to overcome the problems of their predecessors. The usage of biodegradable stents marks a potential to reduce inflammation and vascular complications associated with permanent implants. While problems remain in few DESs, the ongoing research and technological improvements assure us to overcome these hurdles. The continued refinement of materials, drug delivery mechanisms, and stent designs will likely lead to even more effective in cardiovascular disease. With each innovation, we move closer to the ideal of a temporary scaffold that supports vessel healing and then disappears thereby leaving behind a healthy and functioning artery. In conclusion, drug-eluting stents represent a dynamic and rapidly advancing field in interventional cardiology. Despite current limitations, the trajectory of innovation brings up a thought that these devices will play an crucial role in improving patient outcomes and quality of life. As we stand on the brink of new breakthrough and the future of drug-eluting stents blooms out offering hope for millions of patients worldwide.

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