IJMPR 2025, 9(6), 23-24

International Journal of Modern Pharmaceutical Research
www.ijmpronline.com

ISSN: 2319-5878
IJMPR
Review Article
SJIF Impact Factor: 6.669

MICROBIOME-TARGETED DRUG DELIVERY: A NEW FRONTIER IN PRECISION MEDICINE

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Article Received on: 26/03/2025
Article Revised on: 16/04/2025
Article Accepted on: 06/05/2025

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ABSTRACT

The human gut microbiome is increasingly recognized as a key player in drug metabolism, therapeutic efficacy, and disease modulation. Microbiome-targeted drug delivery (MTDD) represents a cutting-edge approach that leverages the dynamic interplay between host and microbial communities to enhance site-specific drug action and minimize systemic side effects. This review explores the rationale behind MTDD, emphasizing the role of microbial dysbiosis in diseases such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), metabolic disorders, and colorectal cancer. We discuss various delivery strategies, including colon-targeted systems, probiotics, synbiotics, bacteriophage therapy, and microbiota-responsive nanocarriers. Challenges such as inter-individual variability in microbiota composition, formulation stability, and regulatory ambiguity are also addressed. Advances in CRISPR technology and personalized medicine are expected to further refine MTDD platforms. This evolving field holds immense promise in revolutionizing precision therapeutics through targeted microbiome modulation.

KEYWORDS: Microbiome**,** Drug Delivery**,** Gut Microbiota**,** Colon Targeting**,** Probiotics**,** Nanocarriers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The human gut microbiome plays a crucial role in host physiology, including metabolism, immune response, and drug pharmacokinetics. Microbiome-targeted drug delivery (MTDD) seeks to harness or modulate this microbial ecosystem to optimize therapeutic efficacy.[1,2]

2. Rationale for Microbiome-Targeted Delivery

- **Drug-Microbiome Interactions:** The gut microbiota can bioactivate, inactivate, or toxify drugs. For example, *Eggerthella lenta* inactivates digoxin.[1,3]
- **Disease Association:** Dysbiosis, or imbalance in gut flora, is associated with diseases such as IBD, diabetes, obesity, and colorectal cancer.[2,4]
- **Therapeutic Targeting:** Specific microbial taxa (e.g., *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii*) have anti-inflammatory properties and could be modulated for health benefits.[2]

3. DELIVERY STRATEGIES

a. Colon-Targeted Drug Delivery Systems

Colon-targeted systems utilize pH-sensitive coatings (e.g., Eudragit®), time-release mechanisms, or enzymatic degradation by colonic bacteria for site-specific release.[5,6]

b. Probiotic and Prebiotic Formulations

Probiotics (e.g., *Lactobacillus*, *Bifidobacterium*) are viable microorganisms administered to restore gut balance, while prebiotics (e.g., inulin, FOS) stimulate their growth. Both are delivered using encapsulation systems for gastric protection.[7,8]

c. Synbiotic Systems

Combining probiotics and prebiotics in a single formulation enhances colonization and efficacy. Synbiotics are increasingly explored in metabolic and gastrointestinal diseases.[9]

d. Bacteriophage Therapy

Bacteriophages are viruses that selectively target pathogenic gut bacteria, preserving beneficial flora. They offer narrow-spectrum, highly targeted microbial modulation.[10,11]

e. Microbiome-Modulating Nanocarriers

Nanoparticles and liposomes can be functionalized to interact with or deliver drugs to specific microbial communities. These systems are emerging for delivering antibiotics, RNA, or even CRISPR tools.[12,13]

4. Clinical Applications

- **IBD:** Microbiota-targeted delivery of 5-ASA or anti-inflammatory probiotics improves gut mucosal healing.[14]
- **Colorectal Cancer:** Bacteria-sensitive polymers can be used to deliver chemotherapy selectively to tumor-associated microbial environments.[15]
- **Metabolic Disorders:** Prebiotic fibers and engineered probiotics modulate microbial metabolites (e.g., SCFAs) influencing insulin resistance and obesity.[2,4]

5. Challenges and Limitations

- **Inter-individual Variability:** Microbiome composition differs widely among individuals, complicating standardization.[3]
- **Stability and Viability:** Maintaining the viability of live microbial products through gastric transit and storage is challenging.[7]
- **Regulatory Uncertainty:** Lack of global consensus on classification and approval pathways for microbiome-based therapeutics hinders translation.[16]

6. Future Prospects

- **Personalized Microbiome Therapy:** Stratifying patients based on microbiome profiles for tailored drug delivery is under development.[17]
- **CRISPR-based Editing:** Gene editing of microbial genes in situ offers high-precision control over microbiome composition.[18]
- **Advanced Responsive Systems:** Microbiome-sensitive polymers or nano-sensors that respond to bacterial metabolites for drug release are being designed.[13]

7. CONCLUSION

Microbiome-targeted drug delivery integrates pharmaceutics with microbial ecology and precision medicine. With advancements in biotechnology, nanotechnology, and microbiome analytics, MTDD offers exciting new therapeutic avenues, though regulatory, formulation, and translational hurdles remain.[2,16]

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