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Development and Evaluation of Drug Delivery System for Glaucoma

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Abstract: *Glaucoma is a progressive and chronic eye complication characterized by elevated intraocular pressure (IOP) and consequential optic nerve damage, ultimately leading to blindness. Current therapeutic interventions mainly focus on frequent topical administration of IOP-lowering agents. However, ocular tissues cause prompt clearance of the administered drugs, thereby leading to low bioavailability and reduced patient compliance. This necessitates the development of advanced delivery systems that not only enhance the ocular residence of therapeutic agents but also govern drug release at the site of interest in a spatiotemporally controlled manner. The emergence of nanomedicine and stimuli-responsive delivery systems partially helped to achieve these objectives. These systems show improved permeability, longer ocular retention, or stimuli-responsive drug release, thereby offering on-demand drug release at the site of interest. This review discusses the anatomy and physiology of ocular tissues, emphasizing their barrier properties for drug delivery in glaucoma therapy. The challenges associated with conventional drug delivery approaches, routes of drug administration, and the need for the development of advanced drug delivery systems have also been emphasized. Furthermore, recent advances in the development of polymeric ophthalmic drug delivery systems and formulation strategies are mentioned with a special emphasis on nanoparticles, in situ gels, and stimuli-responsive systems. Finally, we present our perspectives on scale-up issues, regulatory hurdles, and clinical translation of advanced drug delivery systems.*

Keywords: Glaucoma therapy, Intraocular pressure (IOP), Optic nerve damage, Drug delivery barriers, Nanomedicine, Stimuli-responsive systems, Polymeric nanoparticles, Clinical translation challenges

I. INTRODUCTION

Glaucoma is a chronic, progressive optic neuropathy that represents one of the leading causes of irreversible blindness worldwide. It is characterized by damage to the optic nerve and gradual loss of visual field, often associated with elevated intraocular pressure.[1] The disease affects millions of people globally, and projections suggest that by 2040 more than one hundred million individuals will be living with glaucoma.[2] This immense burden makes glaucoma not only a medical challenge but also a socioeconomic issue, as vision loss profoundly impacts quality of life, independence, and productivity. Despite decades of research, glaucoma remains incurable, and current therapeutic strategies are aimed primarily at slowing disease progression by lowering intraocular pressure.[1]

The conventional approach to glaucoma therapy relies heavily on topical ophthalmic formulations such as eye drops containing beta-blockers, prostaglandin analogs carbonic anhydrase inhibitors, and alpha-adrenergic agonists. These drugs are effective in reducing intraocular pressure, but their clinical success is limited by several inherent drawbacks[3]

The ocular bioavailability of drugs administered through eye drops is extremely poor, with less than five percent of the applied dose reaching intraocular tissues. This is due to multiple physiological barriers including tear turnover, blinking, nasolacrimal drainage, and the protective corneal epithelium. As a result, patients are required to administer eye drops multiple times a day to maintain therapeutic drug levels. Frequent dosing schedules, combined with the difficulties of proper instillation technique, contribute to poor patient adherence, particularly among elderly individuals

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who form the majority of glaucoma cases.[2] Moreover, drugs absorbed through the nasolacrimal duct may enter systemic circulation, leading to undesirable side effects such as bradycardia, hypotension, or respiratory complications.

These limitations highlight the urgent need for improved ophthalmic drug delivery systems that can enhance drug bioavailability, prolong therapeutic action, and reduce dosing frequency. [1] Advances in pharmaceutical technology have opened new avenues for ocular drug delivery, and novel systems such as nanoparticles, liposomes, dendrimers, in-situ gels, and ocular inserts are being explored to overcome the shortcomings of conventional eye drops. The rationale behind these systems is to increase corneal penetration, provide sustained and controlled drug release, minimize systemic absorption, and improve patient compliance.[2] Nanoparticle-based formulations, for example, can encapsulate anti-glaucoma drugs, protecting them from degradation and facilitating controlled release. In-situ gels, which undergo sol-to-gel transition upon contact with ocular fluids, can prolong drug residence time on the ocular surface. Similarly, ocular inserts and contact lens-based delivery systems offer the potential for continuous drug release over extended periods, thereby reducing the burden of frequent dosing.[4]

The significance of developing and evaluating advanced ophthalmic drug delivery systems for glaucoma lies in their potential to transform clinical practice. Improved drug delivery can enhance therapeutic outcomes, slow disease progression, and preserve vision.[3] Sustained release systems reduce the burden of frequent dosing, improving adherence and convenience for patients. Effective drug delivery systems can also reduce the need for surgical interventions and long-term management costs, thereby alleviating the economic burden on healthcare systems. Furthermore, exploring novel delivery platforms contributes to the broader field of ocular pharmacology and nanomedicine, advancing scientific knowledge and opening new possibilities for treating other ocular diseases.[1]

The present research aims to design, develop, and evaluate a novel ophthalmic drug delivery system for glaucoma. The objectives include formulation development using advanced techniques such as nanoparticle encapsulation or in-situ

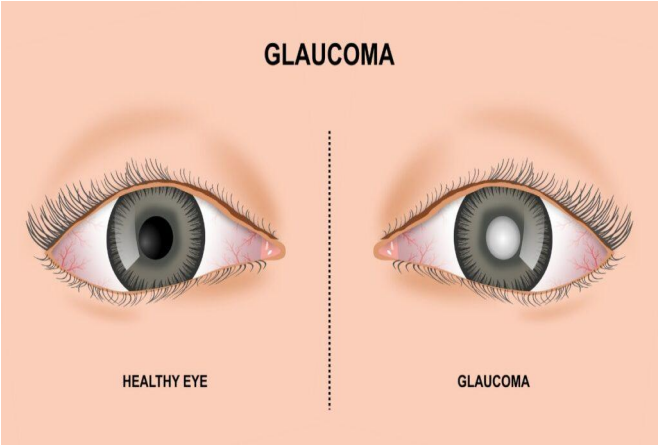

Fig.1: Eye with Glaucoma

gelation, physicochemical characterization to assess particle size, zeta potential, drug loading efficiency, and stability, in-vitro release studies to evaluate drug release kinetics and sustained release potential, and ex-vivo or in-vivo evaluation to study corneal penetration, ocular bioavailability, and intraocular pressure-lowering efficacy.[4] Comparative analysis with conventional eye drops will be undertaken to determine the relative advantages in terms of efficacy, safety, and patient compliance.

The scope of this thesis encompasses a comprehensive review of glaucoma pathophysiology and current treatment modalities, followed by detailed methodology for formulation development. Evaluation will include laboratory studies, animal models, and statistical analysis of results. The discussion will interpret findings in the context of existing literature, highlighting the advantages and limitations of the developed system.[1] Finally, the conclusion will summarize the outcomes and suggest directions for future research, such as clinical trials and commercialization potential.

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The anticipated outcomes of this research include the development of a stable and effective ophthalmic drug delivery system capable of sustained release, enhanced ocular bioavailability compared to conventional formulations, reduction in dosing frequency, and demonstration of safety and tolerability in preclinical models. Such outcomes would contribute significantly to the advancement of ocular drug delivery technologies and provide valuable insights into their potential for clinical application.[3]

In summary, glaucoma remains a major global health challenge, with current therapies limited by poor bioavailability and patient non-compliance. The development of novel ophthalmic drug delivery systems offers a promising solution to these challenges. By combining pharmaceutical innovation with clinical need, this study seeks to create a formulation that not only improves therapeutic efficacy but also enhances patient quality of life.[2] The evaluation of such systems will provide valuable insights into their potential for clinical application, paving the way for future advancements in glaucoma management.

2. Anatomy and Physiology of Eye

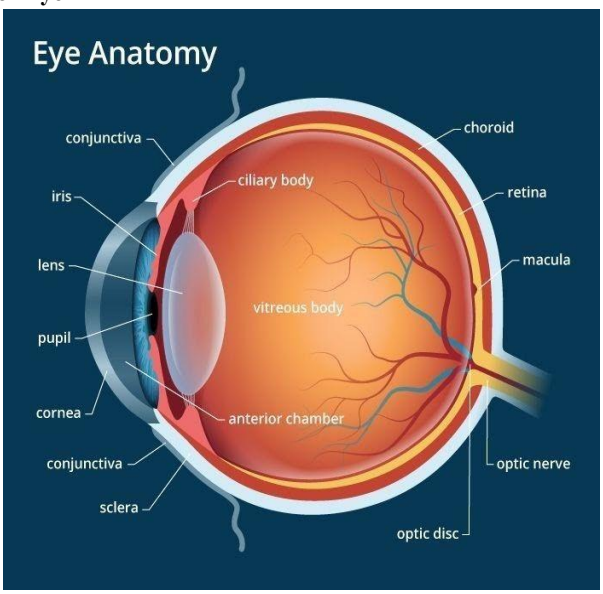

Fig.2: Anatomy of Glaucoma

The eye globe has complex and intricate anatomy and physiology. Tissues such as the cornea, conjunctiva, sclera, ciliary body, iris, and lens comprise the anterior segment, whereas the optic nerve, vitreous humor, retina, sclera, and choroid constitute the posterior segment. These unique and intrinsic anatomical barriers have evolved to protect the eye while performing coordinated physiological processes for visual perception. Therefore, these anatomical structures enable the eye to function as a precise optical system by translating the light into visual images. These ocular tissues are briefly described below and are depicted in Fig.1[16]

A) Ocular tissues

a) Cornea. The cornea is a transparent and avascular layered tissue composed of the endothelium, Descemet's membrane, stroma, Bowman's layer, and epithelium. The cornea covers the iris, pupil, and anterior chamber and functions as the primary refractive surface. Corneal clarity is crucial for vision, and opacity can impair sight.

b) Sclera. The sclera is a tough outer layer that provides structural support and protection. The scleral thickness and durability help to maintain the eye shape.

c) Iris. The iris is the colored part located between the cornea and lens. Iris muscles help to adjust the pupil size, which in turn controls the amount of light entering the eye.

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d) Pupil. The pupil is the aperture at the centre of the iris that enables entry of light. The pupil size changes in response to the intensity of light (dilating in dim light and constricting in bright light), thereby controlling the amount of light reaching the retina.

e) Lens. The lens is a flexible and transparent structure that helps in focusing the light onto the retina. The lens's elasticity decreases with age, leading to presbyopia, wherein focusing on close objects becomes difficult.

f) Vitreous humor. The vitreous humor is a gel-like material that fills the space between the retina and lens.

g) Retina. This light-sensitive layer captures light and converts it into electrical signals. The optic nerve transmits these signals to the brain. The retina contains retinal pigmented epithelial cells (that form the outer blood–retinal barrier), amacrine cells, bipolar cells, horizontal cells, photoreceptor cells (rods and cones), Müller cells, and ganglionic cells. The retina's central portion is known as the macula and is responsible for sharp and detailed central vision.

h) Optic nerve. The optic nerve is composed of retinal ganglion cell (RGC) axons that transmit visual information to the brain

B) Diseases affecting the eye

These complex and sensitive tissues are susceptible to various diseases that can affect the anatomical and physiological processes of the eye, ultimately leading to vision impairment. The most common eye diseases that affect vision are noted below.

a) Cataract. Cataracts are characterized by opacification of the lens that causes blurred vision, eventually leading to vision loss. This pathological condition is commonly associated with aging. Furthermore, cataract can be progressed during trauma, radiation, or diabetes. Current therapeutic interventions for cataract include surgical methods wherein the clouded lens is replaced with a clear artificial lens. The emerging therapeutic interventions include drug-based therapies wherein therapeutic agents are administered to reverse or halt the opacification of the lens.

b) Age-related macular degeneration (AMD). AMD affects the macula of the retina. AMD can be classified into two forms: dry AMD and wet AMD (characterized by abnormal blood vessel growth) under the retina. AMD can be treated *via* administration of vitamin-based supplements or anti-VEGF injections.

c) Diabetic retinopathy. Diabetic retinopathy is characterized by pathological neovascularization in the retina. During diabetes, hyperglycemia causes loss of blood vessel integrity, leading to edema (macular edema) during the early stage and neovascularization during the late stage. The most common symptoms of diabetic retinopathy include blurred vision and dark areas in the visual field. Current therapeutic interventions include diabetes management by controlling blood sugar levels, LASER photocoagulation, and intravitreal administration of anti-VEGF drugs.

d) Dry eye syndrome. Dry eye syndrome is observed when the tears produced by the eyes are not sufficient or evaporate too quickly. This condition can cause discomfort, a gritty sensation,

(A) Conjunctival vessels dilated at the corneal edge and hazy cornea

redness, or blurred vision. It is often exacerbated by prolonged screen use, environmental factors, or underlying conditions like Sjögren's syndrome. The available therapeutic interventions include lifestyle changes, topical administration of artificial tears, and/or medications or procedures to increase tear production or decrease tear drainage.

e) Retinal detachment. Retinal detachment occurs when the retina separates from its underlying structures, which can lead to permanent vision loss. Symptoms include sudden flashes of light, floaters, and a shadow or curtain over part of the visual field. Treatment typically involves surgery to reattach the retina.

f) Glaucoma. Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that cause progressive damage to the optic nerve, often due to elevated IOP. The optic nerve damage impairs the transmission of visual impulses to the brain, ultimately leading to vision loss. Glaucoma can be classified into two types: (i) open-angle glaucoma (OAG, also known as wide-angle glaucoma), the most common form, and (ii) angle-closure glaucoma (ACG, also known as narrow-angle glaucoma), which is less common but more severe. During early stages, glaucoma often presents no symptoms; as the disease progresses, peripheral vision is lost first, followed by central vision. [16,17]

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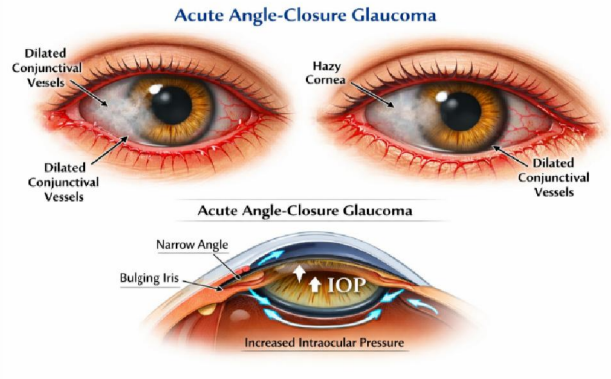
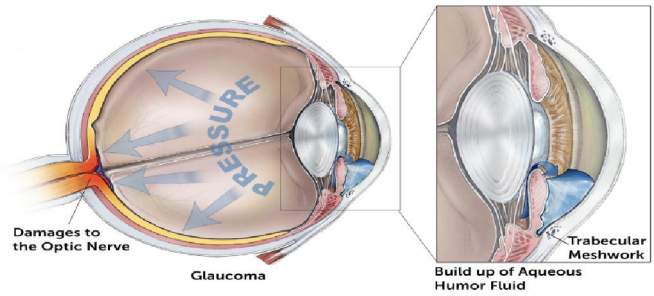
3. Overview of Glaucoma

Glaucoma is an eye disease in which the optic nerve is damaged in a characteristic pattern.This can permanently damage vision in the affected eye and lead to blindness if left untreated. It is normally associated with increased fluid pressure in the eye (aqueous humour). The term 'ocular hypertension' is used for people with consistently raised intraocular pressure (IOP) without any associated optic nerve damage. Conversely, the term 'normal tension' or 'low tension' glaucoma is used for those with optic nerve damage and associated visual field loss but normal or low IOP [20]. The nerve damage involves loss of retinal ganglion cells in a characteristic pattern. There are many different subtypes of glaucoma, but they can all be considered to be a type of optic neuropathy. Raised intraocular pressure is the most importantand only modifiable risk factor for glaucoma. However, some may have high eye pressure for years and never develop damage, while others can develop nerve damage at a relatively low pressure.[3] Untreated glaucoma can lead to permanent damage of the optic nerve and resultant visual field loss, which over time can progress to blindness.



(A) Conjunctival vessels dilated at the corneal edge and hazy cornea consists of acute angle closure glaucoma.



(B) Pressure created at the eye ball.

Fig.3 (A) and (B).

Glaucoma can be roughly divided into two main categories, "open angle" and "closed angle" (or "angle closure") glaucoma. The angle refers to the area between the iris and cornea, through which fluid must flow to escape via the trabecular meshwork. Closed angle glaucoma can appear suddenly and is often painful; visual loss can progress quickly, but the discomfort often leads patients to seek medical attention before permanent damage occurs. Open angle, chronic glaucoma tends to progress at a slower rate and patients may not notice they have lost vision until the disease has progressed significantly [3]. Glaucoma has been called the "silent thief of sight" because the loss of vision often gradually over a long period of time, and symptoms only occur when the disease is quite advanced. Once lost, vision cannot normally be recovered and so treatment is aimed at preventing further loss. Worldwide, glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness after cataracts. It is also the leading cause of blindness among African Americans. Glaucoma affects one in 200 people aged fifty and younger, and one in 10 over the age of

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eighty. If the condition is detected early enough, it is possible to arrest the development or slow the progression with medical and surgical means [2]. There main types of glaucoma: open-angle glaucoma and closed-angle glaucoma (also called angle closure glaucoma). Open-angle glaucoma accounts for 90% of glaucoma cases in the United States. It is painless and does not have acute attacks The only signs are gradually progressive visual field loss, and optic nerve changes (increased cup-to-dis ratio on fundoscopic examination) [22]

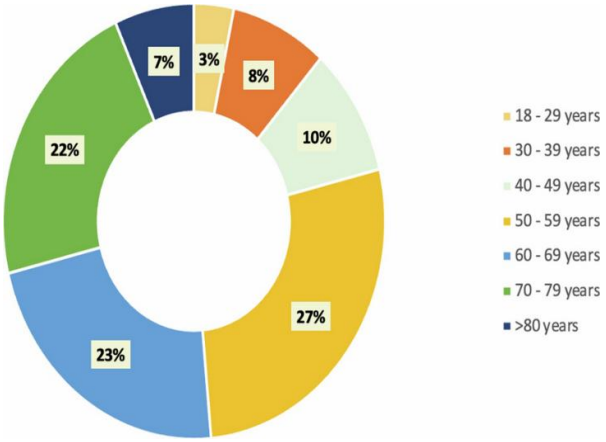

Fig.4: Incidence of glaucoma in India by age

Closed angle glaucoma accounts for less than 10% of glaucoma cases in the United States, but as many as half of glaucoma cases in other nations (particularly Asian countries) [2]. About 10% of patients with closed angles present with acute angle closure crises characterized by sudden ocular pain, seeing halos around lights, red eye, very high intraocular pressure (>30 mmHg) nausea and vomiting, sudden decreased vision, and a fixed, mid-dilated pupil. Acute angle closure is an emergency [21] Over the last decade the prevalence of glaucoma has been reported by the Vellore Eye Survey, Andhra Pradesh Eye Disease Study, Aravind Comprehensive Eye Survey, Chennai Glaucoma Study, and West Bengal Glaucoma Study. There have been some differences largely because of methodological variations. We use the reported age and gender stratified prevalence estimates from these studies and the Indian population census estimates to calculate the number of persons with glaucoma or at risk of the disease in the country. On the basis of the available data, we estimate that there are approximately 11.2 million persons aged 40 years and older with glaucoma in India. Primary open angle glaucoma is estimated to affect 6.48 million persons. The estimated number with primary angle-closure glaucoma is 2.54 million. Those with any form of primary angle-closure disease could comprise 27.6 million persons. Most of those with disease are undetected and there exist major challenges in detecting and treating those with disease [23]. In the light of the existing manpower and resource constraints, we evaluate options for improving case detection rates in the country in Fig:4.

- **Symptoms of Glaucoma**

In the early stages of the disease, most cases of open-angle glaucoma present no noticeable signs or symptoms. Vision stays normal and there is no pain. But, even without symptoms, irreversible damage can be happening to your optic nerve.[17] If glaucoma remains untreated for a long period of time, you may begin to notice some symptoms. Some cases of closed-angle glaucoma, especially during an acute attack, are associated with symptoms, which are discussed below. The main symptom of glaucoma is loss of peripheral vision. This means that you can see things clearly in front of you, but objects to the side and out of the corner of your eye may be missed As the disease progresses, it may seem as though you are looking through a tunnel.[18] Over time, the remaining forward vision may decrease and the field of vision narrows until blindness results. Depending on the type of glaucoma one may have experience some of the following symptoms like blind spots, blurred vision, vague eye aching, inability to adjust the eye to darkened rooms,

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difficulty focusing on close work, loss of side vision and fluctuating vision. More serious symptoms associated with acute angle-closure glaucoma [19]
(a medical emergency) that may require immediate medical attention which includes sore, reddened eye decreased vision, seeing colored halos, rings, or rainbows around lights tearing swollen eyelids headache nausea or vomiting.[22]

- **Prevention of Glaucoma**

There are no specific guidelines for preventing or reducing the risk of glaucoma. Early detection and treatment of glaucoma, before it causes major vision loss, is the best way to control the disease Since vision loss is gradual and usually only affects the peripheral vision at first, most patients don't notice any visual changes until significant damage has been done.[39] One needs to examine their eyes regularly by an eye care specialist, especially if they are at high risk for glaucoma Many times it might be the case of glaucoma the patient may be unaware about the same due to lack of clinical evidences.[40] If left untreated, such people may lose the vision permanently. Hence, regular comprehensive eye examination may solve such cases.

***Screening tests*:** Regular eye exams by an eye care professional are the best way to screen for glaucoma Because most people experience no symptoms with glaucoma, it is important to schedule a regular eye exam and the tests like visual acuity, tonometry, gonioscopy, pupil dilation, ophthalmoscopy, perimetry (visual field test), pachymetry, nerve fiber layer analysis.[41]

***Screening guidelines*:** Ask your doctor for guidelines specific for your individual situation The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends the following general screening guidelines healthy adults with no risk factors for eye disease:
At least once between ages 20-29
At least twice between ages 30-39
Age 40-64: every 2 to 4 years
Age 65 and older: every 1 to 2 years [42]

- **Treatment of Glaucoma**

The management of glaucoma depends on the type, the underlying cause, and the severity of the disease. Treatment may involve medications, in the form of eye drops or oral drugs, laser procedures, or surgery however; glaucoma cannot be cured The focus and goal of treatment is to control the disease and prevent or slow any further visual damage from occurring. Numerous studies have shown that lowering the pressure inside the eye (intraocular pressure) decreases the risk of glaucoma progression. Just how much to lower the pressure and exactly how to do it is a different matter for every patient. In fact, some patients and their physicians may decide not to treat glaucoma, but instead to simply monitor for any progression.[28] If the doctor prescribes treatment, it is important that patient have to follow the regimen as closely as possible Most treatments for glaucoma are designed to lower and control intraocular pressure (IOP), which can damage the optic nerve that transmits visual information to the brain. Glaucoma eye drops often are the first choice over glaucoma surgery and can be very effective at controlling IOP to prevent eye damage. If there is a good candidate for glaucoma eye drops, then the patient may be prescribed more than one type to achieve the best IOP control. In fact, many types of glaucoma eye drops can enhance the effects of other types. Depending on patient's general health and other medical conditions, however, patient may be a poor candidate for glaucoma eye drops. This is because medications placed in the eye are absorbed into the conjunctival blood vessels on the eye's surface. A certain percentage of the active ingredient of the medication, though small, will enter the bloodstream and may adversely affect functions such as heart rate and breathing. Likewise, some types of eye drops may worsen certain existing medical conditions such as asthma. Some glaucoma drugs also can interact with other common medications such as digitalis, prescribed for heart conditions.[29]

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- **Challenges in Treatment of Glaucoma**

The prime challenge of designing a therapeutic system is to achieve an optimal concentration of a drug at the active site for the appropriate duration to provide ocular delivery systems with high therapeutic efficacy. The anatomy, physiology and barrier function of the cornea compromise the rapid absorption of drugs. Frequent instillations of eye drops are necessary to maintain a therapeutic drug level in the tear film or at the site of action. But the frequent use of highly concentrated solutions may induce toxic side effects and cellular damage at the ocular surface. Poor bioavailability of drugs from ocular dosage forms is mainly due to the precorneal loss factors which include solution drainage, lacrimation, tear dynamics, tear dilution, tear turnover, conjunctival absorption, nonproductive absorption, transient residence time in the cul-de-sac, and the relative impermeability of the corneal epithelial membrane are the major challenges to anterior segment drug delivery following topical administration. Due to these physiological and anatomical constraints, only a small fraction of the drug, effectively 1% or even less of the instilled dose, is ocularly absorbed. To be clinically effective, topical formulation has to possess balance between lipophilicity and hydrophilicity with higher contact time.[32]

- **Ocular barriers for drug delivery**

Ocular barriers can be broadly classified into anterior and posterior barriers. The anterior ocular barriers such as tear film, corneal epithelium, conjunctiva, sclera, retinal pigmented epithelium, choroidal vasculature, and the blood–aqueous humor barrier disallow or readily clear the administered drugs, thereby resulting in lower bioavailability. In the context of glaucoma treatment, the anterior ocular barriers present significant challenges for effective drug delivery. Furthermore, posterior barriers also play an essential role during advanced stages of glaucoma, when therapeutic interventions are targeted towards posterior eye tissues such as the optic nerve head or retina. These barriers include vitreous humor, inner limiting membrane (ILM), and blood–retinal barrier (BRB). Understanding these barriers helps formulation scientists develop novel drug delivery strategies that can improve drug delivery to the target site. These ocular barriers are briefly described in the following section.[33]

Tear film. Tear film covers the surface of the eye and is the first and foremost barrier encountered after topical administration of medicaments. Tear film consists of three layers: a mucin layer, an aqueous layer, and a lipid layer. This barrier dilutes and washes away the topically administered drugs, thereby reducing the contact time with the cornea. Reflex tearing, induced by eye drop instillation, further decreases drug concentration by increasing tear flow, leading to the loss of a substantial portion of the administered drug (>90% of the administered dose).

Corneal epithelium. The corneal epithelium is the most critical barrier for the penetration of drugs. This is a multi-layered structure with tight junctions between the cells, which cause hindrance to the passage of hydrophilic and large-sized molecules. Since the corneal epithelium is lipophilic, this may favor the absorption of small-sized lipophilic molecules. These characteristics of corneal epithelium limit the entry of hydrophilic drugs, which are often more effective for glaucoma treatment.

Conjunctiva and sclera. Conjunctival and scleral tissues cover the anterior part of the eye and act as substantial barriers to drug permeation. Since the conjunctiva has a large surface area and rich blood supply, systemic absorption of drugs takes place, which can lead to lower bioavailability of topically administered drugs in the anterior eye tissues. However, the sclera may not be a substantial barrier for hydrophilic drugs compared with the cornea. However, the sclera can limit the penetration of larger molecules.

Blood–aqueous barrier (BAB). This barrier regulates the entry of constituents from the blood into the aqueous humor. This barrier is composed of tight junctions of the endothelial cells of the iris blood vessels and the non-pigmented epithelium of the ciliary body. The BAB restricts the passage of large, hydrophilic molecules and proteins, thereby preventing the absorption of drugs from the systemic circulation into the aqueous humor. However, the absorption of topically administered drugs may not be affected by this barrier.

Vitreous humor. The vitreous fills the space between the retina and lens. This acts as a physical barrier for the diffusion of the majority of drugs, especially for larger molecules. On the other hand, the slow turnover of the vitreous

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facilitates the residence of intravitreally administered drugs in the vitreous humor, thereby prolonging therapeutic action. However, a fraction of the therapeutic agents reaches the retina or optic nerve head due to its slow turnover rate.

Inner limiting membrane (ILM). The ILM constitutes the innermost layer of the retina, acting as a selective barrier that limits the penetration of substances from the vitreous into the retina. The ILM acts as a barrier for more prominent, hydrophilic drugs. In recent times, DDS have been specifically designed to penetrate or bypass the ILM, and as a consequence, bioavailability in the posterior segment can be improved.

Blood–retinal barrier (BRB). The BRB is analogous to the blood–brain barrier, consisting of tight junctions of endothelial cells (inner BRB) and the retinal pigment epithelium (outer BRB). The BRB restricts the entry of drugs from the bloodstream into the retina and optic nerve head, which makes systemic drug delivery less effective. The literature reveals that smaller lipophilic molecules can cross the BRB, while larger or hydrophilic drugs are primarily excluded.

Drugs instilled as eye drops exit ocular tissues *via* tear ducts, conjunctival, or choroidal circulation. Drug diffusion into the cornea and bulbar conjunctiva and subsequent accumulation in these tissues may contribute to optimal bioavailability. However, physiological mechanisms such as blinking reflexes, lacrimal turnover, drug binding to conjunctival mucins, melanin, efflux transporters, or tear proteins may cause clearance and/or limited bioavailability of free drug. In addition to this, diseased eyes with pathophysiological alterations may experience even more obstacles. For example, during anterior uveitis, the presence of precipitates of keratin or white blood cells and corneal surface proteins hinders the transport and/or delivery of topically administered drugs. Moreover, diseased eyes show elevated albumin levels in the tear fluid compared with healthy eyes. Such an elevated concentration of albumin facilitates drug–protein interactions, thereby causing hindrance to drug absorption (unbound drug can be easily transported into the ocular tissue) and consequential bioavailability. In addition, reports have demonstrated that there is a substantial difference in the clearance of drugs among aphakic eyes, unmodified candida-infected eyes, phakic eyes, and aphakic vitrectomy eyes. These data imply that clearance differences need to be studied when designing therapeutic delivery systems during diseased states.[34]

- **Methods to overcome ocular barriers**

Anterior ocular tissues such as the cornea, conjunctiva, or sclera act as strong physical barriers and cause hindrance to the permeation of drugs. The major pathways for drug absorption and/or permeation across these ocular tissues can be classified into two types, *i.e.* (i) paracellular and (ii) transcellular. The paracellular pathway involves the transport of administered nanoparticles between the epithelial cells (of corneal or conjunctival tissues), whereas, the transcellular pathway includes transport of nanoparticles through the epithelial cells. The literature reveals that corneal tissue is composed of cellular (epithelium and endothelium) and acellular components (Descemet membrane, Bowman's layer, and stroma). Furthermore, corneal epithelial cells are tightly bound together by cell adhesion proteins – occludins such as ZO-1 and ZO-2[35]. These tight junctional proteins can cause hindrance to the paracellular transport of nanoparticles. The conjunctival tissue is composed of basal lamina, goblet cells, and epithelial cells that possess tight intercellular junctional proteins, which strongly disallow free diffusion of high molecular weight molecules and nanoparticles *via* the paracellular route. Therefore, the major pathway of nanoparticle transport in these tissues (cornea and conjunctiva) may be the transcellular pathway. The literature reveals that nanoparticles, when they come into contact with ocular tissues, readily undergo internalization. Subsequently, the internalized particles get transported into the intracellular organelles through any of the following processes: (a) fusion with early endosomes; (b) recycling back to the plasma membrane; (c) transport to lysosomes; (d) localization in subcellular compartments; or (e) transport across the cell (transcytosis)[36] It is speculated that nanoparticles (due to their smaller size and high aspect ratio) may undergo transcytosis thereby crossing the cellular barriers, and subsequently get infiltrated through the acellular barriers. However, no studies thus far have demonstrated the mechanism of nanoparticle transport across the ocular barriers. In addition to these transport processes, the ocular retention time (intracellular, intercellular, or acellular) of nanoparticles also plays a pivotal role in ophthalmic drug delivery.

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The development of innovative ocular DDS that can sustain the release of entrapped medicaments while improving the permeability and residence time of administered drugs at the ocular tissues is the need of the hour. The literature reveals that various strategies have been explored thus far to improve drug delivery to ocular tissues.[37] These strategies include (i) the use of nanocarriers such as liposomes, nanoparticles, or dendrimers to enhance drug penetration and prolong drug retention in the eye; (ii) the development of prodrugs that facilitate corneal permeability and are subsequently converted into the active drug at the tissue of interest; (iii) inclusion of permeation enhancers in ophthalmic formulations that can reversibly open tight junctional proteins present between corneal/conjunctival epithelium; or (iv) development of *in situ* gel systems that increase the residence time of drugs on the ocular surface. These approaches aim to bypass or mitigate the barrier properties of ocular tissues, thereby improving drug bioavailability and therapeutic effect in glaucoma treatment.[38]

The emergence of advanced drug delivery strategies wherein pathological or physiological stimulus is used for non-invasive or minimally invasive site-specific delivery of therapeutic agents in quantities that enable therapeutic effect for extended durations has helped to achieve effective treatment for glaucoma. Furthermore, the use of nanoparticulate systems such as polymeric nanoparticles, micelles, dendrimers, microemulsions, liposomes, nanosuspensions, nano-implants/needles, or hydrogels has offered substantial benefits, including increased solubility and stability, targeted release of therapeutic agents, extended residence time, and enhanced permeability, together contributing to improved therapeutic efficacy. The developed DDS can be injected into the eye (through intravitreal, subretinal, subchoroidal, intrastromal, suprachoroidal, intrascleral, subconjunctival, or intracameral routes), implanted at specific tissues, or administered topically as an eye drop.

The following section discusses various routes for drug administration and the pathway of drug diffusion after administration.

4. Medical Therapy for Glaucoma

Currently, five classes of drugs area Available for use in patients with glaucoma or elevated intraocular pressure. No perfect medicine has been developed all have some side-effects. Moreover, in some patients, medication fails to reduce IOP adequately. It is important therefore to balance efficacy, tolerability and side effects on a patient by patient basis. The treatment program can change over the time that glaucoma is treated. In some cases the change is necessary because of an unwanted side effect from the medication. In other cases, prescribing a stronger drug or adding another medication is necessary to maintain control of the eye pressure The most frequently used medical therapies are as follows: [51]

I) **Beta blockers**: It lowers the pressure in the eye by Currently reducing aqueous production. These drugs are divided into two classes: 1) nonselective beta-blockers (timolol, levobunolol, metipranolol, carteolol) and 2) beta 1 selective (betaxolol). Used in a variety of glaucoma eye drops, beta-blockers were at one time the drugs of first choice in treating glaucoma. These drugs work by decreasing fluid (aqueous) production in the eye and now are often prescribed as an adjunct to or in combination with prostaglandins. These eye drops have the potential to reduce heart rate and may cause adverse side effects in individuals with certain heart problems, lung problems diabetes, depression or other conditions. For these reasons, discuss about medical history in detail with eye doctor before using beta-blockers. Example of beta-blockers used in glaucoma treatment are TimopticXE, Istalol and Betoptic S.[52]

II) **Prostaglandins:** Drugs known as prostaglandins used in eye drops often have the best user compliance because they are require only once daily. Prostaglandins generally work by relaxing muscles in the eye's interior structure to allow better outflow of fluids, thus reducing buildup of eye pressure.These drugs have a few common side effects, including stinging and burning when put in the eye, eye color change (darkening of the eye) due to an increase of pigmentation in their is and lengthening and curling of the eyelashes. Examples of prostaglandins used

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in the treatment of include glaucoma-Xalatan (Pfizer), Lumigan (Allergan), Travatan Z(Alcon) and Rescula (Novartis). Latanoprost was the first of this class to be generally available, and it climbed rapidly to the position of most frequently prescribed drug for glaucoma, despite complaints about its cost. It has the advantage of effectiveness in lowering eye pressure with once daily dosing.[52]

III) **Alpha-adrenergic agonists:** These drugs work by decreasing rate of aqueous humor production and can be used alone or in combination with other anti-glaucoma eye drops. Common side effects associated with this classification of eye drop include red or bloodshot eyes (ocular injection), upper lid elevation, an enlarged (dilated) pupil and itching. Examples of this class include Iopidine (Alcon), Alphagan (Allergan) and Alpha-gan-P (Allergan). Carbonic [53]

IV) **Carbonic Anhydrase inhibitors:** These drugs work by decreasing rate of aqueous humor production. They are usually used in combination with other anti-glaucoma eye drops and not alone. This classification of drug is also used in oral form (pills). Common side effects experienced with this classification of eye drop include burning, a bitter taste, eyelid reactions and eye redness (ocular injection). Examples of this class include Trusopt (Merck) and Azopt (Alcon). The systemic (pill)form of carbonic anhydrase inhibitors (CAI) are Dismox(Sigma), Neptazane (Wyeth-Ayerst) and Daranide (Merck, Sharp & Dohme). About half of patients cannot tolerate oral CAIs due to their systemic side effects, which include fatigue, depression, loss of appetite, weight loss, loss of libido, kidney stones, metallic taste and tingling in fingers and toes (peripheral neuropathies) [54]

V) **Parasympathomimetics:** These drugs work by increasing the outflow of aqueous humor from the eye. They are frequently used to control IOP in narrow-angle glaucoma.These eye drops cause the pupil to constrict, which assists in opening the narrowed or blocked angle where drainage occurs. Common side effects experienced with these types of eye drops include brow ache, pupil constriction, burning, and reduced night vision. Examples of this class include pilocarpine, carbachol, echothiophate and demecarium. [55]

VI) **Epinephrine:** The epinephrine class of drugs has a dual effect on the eye. These drugs work by decreasing the rate of aqueous humor production and increasing the outflow of aqueous humor from the eye. Common side effects experienced with this classification of eye drop include pigmented eye surface membrane deposits, blocked tear ducts and heart palpitations with an increased heart rate. Examples of this class include epinephrine and Allergan's Propine [56]

VII) **Hyperosmotic agents:** These drugs are usually for people with a severely high IOP that must be reduced immediately before permanent, irreversible damage occurs to the optic nerve. Hyperosmotic agents reduce IOP by lowering fluid volume in the eye. They are usually given only on a one-time, emergency basis. Examples of these drugs include oral glycerin and isosorbide orally, and mannitol and urea intravenously [57]

VIII) **Combination glaucoma drugs:** Study results show that half of individuals with glaucoma require more than one type of medication to control IOP. For this reason, a few ophthalmic pharmaceutical companies have produced "combination" eye drops that can include two different anti-glaucoma medicines in the same bottle. For convenience, doctor might prescribe combined IOP-lowering medications.Typically, these combined medications have the additive effect of reducing IOP. Examples of medications of this type include Cosopt (Merck),Combigan(Allergan) and DuoTrav [58]

The following drugs are classified as Antiglaucomic agents:
Acetazolamide,Betaxolol,Brimonidine,Brizolamide,Carbidopa,Levadopa, Carteolol, Dorzolamide, Timolol, Ephinephrine, Latanoprost, Pilocarpine, Levobunolol.

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5.Approaches In the Treatment of Glaucoma

The goal of researchers is to treat a disease consistently and accurately. Currently the knowledge in this field is rapidly expanding and many concepts and drug delivery strategies are emerging out. The various approaches attempted in the early stages like bioavailability improvement and controlled release drug delivery for the treatment of glaucoma. The various approaches that have been attempted to increase the bioavailability and the duration of the therapeutic action of antiglaucomic drugs can be divided into two categories. (a) First to maximize the corneal drug absorption and minimize the precorneal drug loss through viscosity and penetration enhancers, prodrug, gel, liposomes and niosomes. (b) Second one is based on the use of sustained/controlled drug delivery systems which provide the controlled and continuous delivery of ophthalmic drugs, such as implants, inserts, nanoparticles, micro particulates, and colloid. Traditional approaches like viscosity enhancers, gel, penetration enhancer, prodrug, improve the ophthalmic bioavailability of the drugs to the anterior segment of the eye. Various modern approaches like in situ gel, ocuserts, nanosuspension, nanoparticles, liposomes, niosomes, punctal plug delivery system and implants improve the ophthalmic bioavailability of the drugs and controlled the release of the antiglaucomic drugs to the anterior segment of the eye.Moreover, approaches like intravitreal injections, iontophoresis, sub conjunctival injection, and periocular route are used to deliver ophthalmic drugs to the posterior segment of the eye.

Hydrogel

Hydrogel (also called aquagel) is a network of polymer chains that are hydrophilic, sometimes found as a colloidal gel in which water is the dispersion medium. Hydrogels are highly absorbent (they can contain over 99.9% water) natural or synthetic polymers. Hydrogels also possess a degree of flexibility very similar to natural tissue, due to their significant water content. Hydrogels are cross-linked; three-dimensionally Hdrophilic networks that swells but not dissolve when brought into contact with water. Hydrogels can be formulated in a varietyof physical forms, including slabs, microparticles, nanoparticles, coatings, and films. Hydrogels based drug delivery system for the treatment of glaucoma is the popular approach preferred by the researcher's nowadays. Hydrogel systems prepared from the polymers that exhibit reversible phase transition. Such systems can be formulated in liquid phase suitable to be administrated by instillation into the eye cavity and which upon exposure to the stimuli such as pH, temperature, and ion activated etc., changes to the gel phase and thus improves the residence time and corneal bioavailability of the drug. There are various methods used to cause sol to gel phase transition on ocular surface such as temp dependent concept (pluronics), pH triggered systems (including cellulose acetate hydrogen phthalate latex, Carbopols, Ion activated systems including gelrite, gellan and carbopol/pluronics. Vinod et al., had developed hydrogels which was therapeutically effacious, stable, non-irritant and provide a sustained release of drug over 8 hr time period [23,59]

Liposomes

Liposomes are the microscopic vesicles composed of one or more concentric lipid bilayers, separated by water or aqueous buffer compartments. Liposomes possess the ability to have an intimate contact with the corneal and conjunctival surfaces, which increases the probability of ocular drug absorption. This ability is especially desirable for drugs that are poorly absorbed, the drugs with low partition coefficient, poor solubility, or those with medium to high molecular weights. The behavior of liposomes as an ocular drug delivery system has been observed to be, in part, due to their surface charge. Positively charged liposomes seem to be preferentially captured at the negatively charged corneal surface as compared with neutral or negatively charged liposomes. It is droppable, biocompatible, and biodegradable in nature. It reduced the toxicity of the drug. It provides the sustained release and site-specific delivery. Liposomes are difficult to manufacture in sterile preparation. It has limitation like low drug load and inadequate aqueous stability. Liposomal formulation of brimonidine tartrate has prepared and IOP-lowering activity of liposomes was determined and compared with that of pure drug solution and showed that the IOP-lowering action of liposomes sustained for a longer period of time. The results of the study indicate that it is possible to develop a safe and physiologically effective topical formulation that is also convenient for patients [29,41]

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Niosomes

Niosomes are bilayered structural vesicles made up of nonionic surfactant which are capable of encapsulating both lipophilic and hydrophilic compounds. Niosomes reduce the systemic drainage and improve the residence time, which leads to increase ocular bioavailability. They are non-biodegradable and non-biocompatible in nature. In a recent approach to deliver cyclopentolate, niosomal formulation was developed. It released the drug independent of pH, resulting in significant enhancement of ocular bioavailability. Niosomal formulation of coated (chitosan or carbopol) timolol maleate exhibited significant IOP lowering effect in rabbits as compared with timolol solution. Niosomal formulation of brimonidine tartrate has prepared and IOP-lowering activity of niosomes was determined and compared with that of pure drug solution and showed that the the IOP-lowering action of nano-vesicles sustained for a longer period of time. The results of the study indicate that it is possible to develop a safe and physiologically effective topical formulation that is also convenient for patients.[60,57,27]

Nanoparticles/nanospheres

These are polymeric colloidal particles, ranging from 10 nm to 1 mm, in which the drug is dissolved, entrapped, encapsulated, or adsorbed. Encapsulation of the drug leads to stabilization of the drug. They represent promising drug carriers for ophthalmic application. They are further classified into nanospheres (small capsules with a central cavity surrounded by a polymeric membrane) or nanocapsules (solid matricial spheres). Marchal-Heussler et al., found that the nano-capsules show a better effect than the nanospheres, probably because the drug (betaxolol, carteolol) is in a unionized form in the oily core and can diffuse at a greater rate into the cornea. Several authors suggest that the better efficiency of nanocapsules is due to their bioadhesive properties, resulting in an increase in the residence time and biological response. Hence, it improved the ocular bioavailability of the drug and reduced dosing frequency. Alonso et al., have also reported that the nanoparticles of poly-e-caprolactone containing cyclosporin show a better corneal absorption with respect to the oily solution of the drug [20,60]

Nanosuspension

It is defined as sub-micron colloidal system which consists of poorly water-soluble drug, suspended appropriate dispersion medium stabilized by surfactants. It usually consists of colloidal carriers like polymeric resins which are inert in nature. It improves the ocular bioavailability of the drug by prolonging the contact time. Charge on the surface of nanoparticles facilitates its adhesion to the cornea. Cloricromene (AD6) was formulated in nanosuspension by using Eudragit RS100 and RL100. AD6-oaded eudragit retarded nanoparticles suspension offered a significant edge in enhancing the shelf life and bioavailability of the drug. [31]

Microemulsion

Microemulsion is stable dispersions of water and oil, facilitated by a combination of surfactant and co surfactant in a manner to reduce interfacial tension. Microemulsion improves the ocular bioavailability of the drug and reduces frequency of the administration. [30,33]

Prodrug

The principle of prodrug is to enhance corneal drug permeability through modification of the hydrophilicity (or lipophilicity) of the drug. Within the cornea or after corneal penetration, the prodrug is either chemically or enzymatically metabolized to the active parent compound. Thus, the ideal prodrug should not only have increased lipophilicity and a high partition coefficient, but it must also have high enzyme susceptibility. Enzyme systems identified in ocular tissues include esterases, ketone reductase, and steroid 6-hydroxylase. Prodrug is considered as a new drug entity so extensive pharmacokinetic and pharmacologic information is required for proper design. Thus it is concluded that prodrug can be the drug delivery system for the treatment of glaucoma [62]

Ocular inserts

The ocular inserts provides more controlled, sustained, and continuous drug delivery by maintaining an effective drug concentration in the target tissues and yet minimizing the number of applications. It reduces systemic adsorption of the drug. It causes accurate dosing of the drug. It as disadvantages like patient incompliance, difficulty with self-insertion, foreign body sensation, and inadvertent loss from the eye. A number of ocular inserts were prepared utilizing

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different techniques to make soluble, erodible, nonerodible, and hydrogel inserts. Ocular inserts can be the valuable technique for the treatment of glaucoma. [63]

Laser and surgery

Glaucoma can also be treated with the use of laser therapy. The primary strategy involves "burning" holes in various areas within the eyes including the ciliary and the pigmented trabecular meshwork cells. The benefits of such therapy areas include non-invasive, needing less patient compliance and lowering the possibility of infection or bleeding. The IOP of most patients can decrease about 20-30%, but the treatment effect wears off 5-10% every year. In combination with timolol, the two year IOP lowering success rate is 70%, compared with the laser alone (44%) and timolol alone (30%). A common form of surgery is trabeculectomy, which creates a guarded channel allowing aqueous humor to flow from the anterior chamber inside the eye to sub-Tenon and subconjunctival space. The benefits of surgery include stabilizing IOP and bypassing the requirements for strict patient compliance and continuous drug costs. Surgery is considered as the last option because if surgery fails then it may be immediate blindness due to complications such as choroidal effusion, hypotonic maculopathy, suprachoroidal hemorrhage and optic nerve snuffing.[64]

6. Classification of Opthalmic Drug Delivery system

Delivering drugs to the eye is challenging due to barriers like tear turnover, blinking, corneal epithelium, and blood-retinal barriers. Ophthalmic drug delivery systems (ODDS) are classified based on route of administration, formulation type, and technology used. Below is a detailed classification. [25,26]

1. **Conventional Ophthalmic Drug Delivery Systems**

These are the oldest and most widely used systems, primarily for anterior segment diseases.

a) Eye Drops (Solutions)

- Description: Sterile aqueous solutions containing dissolved drugs.
- Advantages: Easy to administer, inexpensive, widely accepted.
- Limitations: Rapid tear turnover and drainage reduce bioavailability.
- Examples: Ciprofloxacin drops, artificial tears.

b) Suspensions

- Description: Insoluble drug particles dispersed in liquid medium.
- Advantages: Longer contact time compared to solutions.
- Limitations: Risk of particle irritation, need for shaking before use.
- Examples: Prednisolone acetate suspension.

c) Ointments

- Description: Semi-solid preparations in petroleum or mineral oil base.
- Advantages: Prolonged retention time, useful for night-time therapy.
- Limitations: Cause blurred vision, greasy feel.
- Examples: Erythromycin ophthalmic ointment.

d) Emulsions

- Description: Oil-in-water systems for poorly soluble drugs.
- Advantages: Improve solubility and stability of lipophilic drugs.
- Limitations: Require stabilizers, may cause irritation.
- Examples: Cyclosporine ophthalmic emulsion (Restasis).

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ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 6, Issue 13, May 2026
Impact Factor: 8.2

1. **Novel Ophthalmic Drug Delivery Systems**

These advanced systems aim to overcome limitations of conventional methods.

a) Ocular Inserts

- Description: Solid or semi-solid devices placed in the conjunctival sac.
- Advantages: Provide controlled and sustained release.
- Limitations: Insertion discomfort, risk of expulsion.
- Examples: Ocusert (pilocarpine insert for glaucoma).

b) Nanoparticle-Based Systems

- Description: Drug encapsulated in nanoparticles, nanosuspensions, or nanomicelles.
- Advantages: Enhance penetration, protect drug from degradation, sustained release.
- Limitations: Complex formulation, stability issues.
- Examples: Dexamethasone nanosuspension.

c) Liposomes and Niosomes

- Description: Vesicular carriers made of phospholipids (liposomes) or non-ionic surfactants (niosomes).
- Advantages: Biocompatible, improve corneal penetration, reduce toxicity.
- Limitations: Stability and storage challenges.
- Examples: Liposomal amphotericin B for fungal keratitis.

d) Hydrogels and In-Situ Gelling Systems

- Description: Polymers that swell or gel upon contact with tear fluid.
- Advantages: Provide sustained release, improve retention.
- Limitations: Variable gelation depending on tear composition.
- Examples: Timolol in-situ gel formulations.

e) Microneedles

- Description: Tiny needles that deliver drugs directly into ocular tissues.
- Advantages: Painless, bypass corneal barrier, targeted delivery.
- Limitations: Still experimental, require specialized devices.

f) Iontophoresis

- Description: Uses mild electric current to enhance drug penetration.
- Advantages: Non-invasive, effective for posterior segment diseases.
- Limitations: Requires device, potential tissue irritation.
- Examples: OcuPhor system for macular degeneration.

2. **Implantable Ophthalmic Drug Delivery Systems**

Implants are designed for long-term, sustained release, especially for posterior segment diseases.

a) Biodegradable Implants

- Description: Made of polymers that gradually degrade, releasing drug.
- Advantages: No need for removal, sustained release.
- Limitations: Limited drug load, degradation rate variability.
- Examples: Ozurdex (dexamethasone implant).

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ISSN: 2581-9429 Volume 6, Issue 13, May 2026 Impact Factor: 8.2

b) Non-Biodegradable Implants

- Description: Permanent devices that release drug over months or years.
- Advantages: Long-term therapy, high drug load.
- Limitations: Require surgical removal after depletion.
- Examples: Retisert (fluocinolone implant for uveitis).

c) Refillable Reservoir Implants

- Description: Devices with refillable drug reservoirs.
- Advantages: Long-term use without replacement.
- Limitations: Require periodic refilling procedures.
- Examples: Port Delivery System (PDS) with ranibizumab.

3. Contact Lens–Based Drug Delivery Systems

Contact lenses are being engineered to act as drug reservoirs.

a) Soaked Contact Lenses

- Description: Lenses soaked in drug solution before application.
- Advantages: Simple, increases drug contact time.
- Limitations: Rapid release, limited duration.

b) Drug-Loaded Contact Lenses

- Description: Drugs incorporated into lens matrix during manufacturing.
- Advantages: Sustained release, improved patient compliance.
- Limitations: Complex fabrication, risk of altering lens properties.

c) Nanoparticle-Coated Lenses

- Description: Lenses coated with drug-loaded nanoparticles.
- Advantages: Controlled release, targeted deliv**ery.**
- Limitations: Stability and safety concerns.

d) Stimuli-Responsive Lenses

- Description: Lenses that release drugs in response to stimuli (pH, temperature, enzymes).
- Advantages: Smart, personalized therapy.
- Limitations: Still experimental, require validation.

7. Evaluation Parameters of ODDS

1. Physicochemical Evaluation Parameters

a) Clarity and Appearance

- Eye formulations must be clear and free from particulate matter.
- Suspensions should have uniform particle distribution.
- Ointments must be smooth without grittiness.
- Cloudiness or precipitation indicates instability.

b) pH and Buffering Capacity

- The normal tear pH is around 7.4.
- Formulations should be close to physiological pH to avoid irritation.

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ISSN: 2581-9429 Volume 6, Issue 13, May 2026 Impact Factor: 8.2

- Buffering capacity must be optimized: strong buffers resist tear dilution but may cause discomfort.

c) Viscosity

- Higher viscosity increases drug retention time.
- However, excessive viscosity can blur vision and reduce patient compliance.
- Polymers like hydroxypropyl methylcellulose are often used to adjust viscosity.

d) Osmolarity

- Tears are isotonic with 0.9% NaCl.
- Hypertonic or hypotonic formulations cause irritation, reflex tearing, and reduced drug absorption.
- Isotonicity is maintained using sodium chloride, mannitol, or dextrose.

e) Drug Content and Uniformity

- Each dose must contain the correct amount of drug.
- Uniform distribution is essential in suspensions and emulsions.
- Analytical methods like HPLC are used for quantification.

f) Particle Size

- For suspensions, particle size should be below 10 µm to avoid irritation.
- Nanoparticles and liposomes are evaluated for size distribution using dynamic light scattering.
- Smaller particles enhance penetration and stability.

g) Surface Charge (Zeta Potential)

- Important for colloidal systems like nanoparticles and liposomes.
- Determines stability and interaction with ocular tissues.
- Positive charges may enhance corneal penetration but risk toxicity.

2. Sterility and Microbiological Evaluation

a) Sterility Testing

- Since the eye is highly sensitive, formulations must be sterile.
- Sterility is tested using culture methods (membrane filtration, direct inoculation).
- Autoclaving, filtration, or aseptic processing ensures sterility.

b) Preservative Efficacy

- Multi-dose containers require preservatives like benzalkonium chloride.
- Preservative efficacy testing ensures microbial growth inhibition.
- However, preservatives must not damage ocular tissues.

c) Endotoxin Testing

- Pyrogenic substances can cause inflammation.
- Limulus Amebocyte Lysate (LAL) test is used to detect endotoxins.

3. Stability Studies

a) Physical Stability

- Evaluates changes in color, clarity, viscosity, and phase separation.
- Suspensions must resist sedimentation and caking.
- Emulsions should remain stable without creaming or cracking.

b) Chemical Stability

- Drug degradation (hydrolysis, oxidation) must be monitored.
- Stabilizers and antioxidants are added to improve shelf life.
- Accelerated stability studies predict long-term behavior.

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ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 6, Issue 13, May 2026
Impact Factor: 8.2

c) Photostability

- Many ophthalmic drugs are light-sensitive.
- Packaging in amber bottles or opaque containers prevents degradation.

4. In Vitro Evaluation Parameters

a) Drug Release Studies

- Carried out using diffusion cells or dialysis membranes.
- Simulated tear fluid is used as medium.
- Provides information on release kinetics (zero-order, first-order, diffusion-controlled).

b) Permeation Studies

- Ex vivo corneal tissues or artificial membranes are used.
- Measures drug penetration across corneal epithelium.
- Franz diffusion cells are commonly employed.

c) Mucoadhesion Testing

- For systems like hydrogels and nanoparticles.
- Determines adhesion strength to ocular mucosa.
- Stronger adhesion improves retention and bioavailability.

5. In Vivo Evaluation Parameters

a) Ocular Irritation Studies

- Draize test in rabbits is traditionally used.
- Assesses redness, swelling, tearing, and corneal damage.
- Alternatives include in vitro cytotoxicity assays to reduce animal use.

b) Pharmacokinetics

- Measures drug concentration in ocular tissues (aqueous humor, vitreous, retina).
- Helps determine absorption, distribution, metabolism, and elimination.
- Techniques include microdialysis and LC-MS/MS analysis.

c) Pharmacodynamics

- Evaluates therapeutic effect (e.g., reduction in intraocular pressure for glaucoma drugs).
- Clinical endpoints include visual acuity, retinal thickness, or inflammation reduction.

d) Retention Time

- Fluorescent markers or radiolabeled drugs track residence time in the eye.
- Longer retention correlates with better efficacy.

6. Patient-Centric Evaluation Parameters

a) Comfort and Tolerability

- Burning, stinging, or blurred vision reduces compliance.
- Patient feedback is crucial during clinical trials.
- Formulations must balance efficacy with comfort.

b) Ease of Administration

- Eye drops are easy but require frequent dosing.
- Inserts, implants, and contact lenses may be less convenient.
- Devices must be user-friendly.

c) Dosing Frequency

- Frequent dosing reduces compliance.

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ISSN: 2581-9429
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Impact Factor: 8.2

- Sustained-release systems improve adherence.
- Evaluation includes patient preference studies.

7. Regulatory and Quality Control Parameters

a) Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) Compliance

- Ensures consistent quality and safety.
- Includes sterile manufacturing, validated processes, and quality checks.

b) Bioequivalence Studies

- Generic formulations must demonstrate equivalence to innovator products.
- Parameters include drug release, tissue penetration, and therapeutic effect.

c) Packaging Evaluation

- Containers must maintain sterility and stability.
- Dropper bottles should deliver consistent volume per drop.
- Tamper-proof and patient-friendly designs are preferred. [11,12,13]

8. Challenges associated with Ophthalmic Drug Delivery

The delivery of drugs to the eye is intrinsically challenging because of several physiological and anatomical barriers that limit drug bioavailability and efficacy The cornea acts as a major barrier to drug absorption because of its tightly packed epithelial cells and hydrophobic nature, hindering the permeation of hydrophilic drugs. Similarly, the conjunctiva, a highly vascularized membrane lining the inner surface of the eyelids and covering the sclera, facilitates drug absorption into the systemic circulation, thus reducing the drug amount available to reach the target tissues within the eye. The blood–aqueous barrier (BAB), formed by tight junctions between the non-pigmented ciliary epithelium cells, restricts the entry of many substances from the bloodstream into the aqueous humor, further limiting drug penetration. Furthermore, the lacrimal system, responsible for tear production and drainage, efficiently removes topically applied drugs from the ocular surface, reducing the contact time and overall drug absorption. Novel drug delivery systems, such as nanoparticles, liposomes, and novel ocular inserts, are being explored to overcome these barriers and enhance drug penetration into the eye. Despite the potential benefits of these advanced drug delivery systems, challenges remain in terms of toxicity, stability, scale-up, and clinical performance. Systemic drug administration to reach the anterior segment of the eye is hampered by the BAB, which is formed by inner ciliary epithelia, endothelia around the iris, and ciliary muscle capillaries, thereby greatly diminishing ocular bioavailability of many drugs. Modification of drugs to improve their permeability, developing formulations that prolong contact time with the ocular surface, and employing targeted drug delivery systems are crucial strategies for improving the effectiveness of glaucoma medications.[32]

9. Challenges and Advances in Local Drug Delivery for Glaucoma

The pharmacological management of glaucoma often involves the long-term use of topical eye drops, which can lead to a range of local and systemic side effects, and the financial burden of medications can also be a significant barrier to treatment adherence. Topical glaucoma medications, such as prostaglandin analogs, beta-blockers, and alpha-adrenergic agonists, are associated with various adverse effects, including ocular irritation, stinging, redness, blurred vision, and allergic reactions. Prostaglandin analogs, while highly effective in lowering intraocular pressure, can cause changes in iris pigmentation, eyelid skin darkening, and periocular tissue atrophy, which can be cosmetically concerning for some patients. Clinical studies have revealed that the use of topical prostaglandin analogues only results in a roughly 50% reduction in visual field progression when compared to a placebo. A controlled randomized trial involving glaucoma patients treated with latanoprost 0.05% eye drops or a placebo demonstrated that after 24 months, the mean IOP reduction was 3.8 mm Hg in the latanoprost group compared to 0.9 mm Hg in the placebo group.[44] Although current glaucoma treatments exhibit the capability to effectively lower IOP, they often struggle to

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consistently regulate the IOP diurnal curve. Studies have indicated that an increase in IOP fluctuations corresponds to an elevated risk of visual field deterioration. Additionally, prolonged IOP fluctuations exceeding 24 h have been implicated in glaucoma progression. Therefore, continuous monitoring of IOP throughout a 24-h timeframe could offer a more accurate assessment of factors influencing IOP variability. Beta-blockers, once a mainstay of glaucoma therapy, can cause systemic side effects such as bradycardia, hypotension, and bronchospasm, particularly in susceptible individuals with underlying cardiovascular or respiratory conditions. Alpha-adrenergic agonists can lead to systemic effects such as dry mouth, fatigue, and dizziness, limiting their use in certain patient populations. Carbonic anhydrase inhibitors can also result in side effects that some patients cannot tolerate. A substantial portion of glaucoma patients (74%) are unwilling to use eye drops, leading to exploration of alternative treatment strategies such as subconjunctival injections administered every three months. Subconjunctival injections or implants have gained some traction as a less invasive and well-received option for managing and treating glaucoma.[34]

The cumulative effect of these side effects can significantly impact a patient's quality of life and willingness to adhere to the prescribed treatment regimen. In many developing countries, the cost of glaucoma medications is a major obstacle to treatment adherence, as patients may need to take these medications for the rest of their lives. The expense of medications can be especially burdensome for patients with limited financial resources, leading to missed doses or discontinuation of treatment, which can have devastating consequences for their vision. Finding cost-effective strategies to manage glaucoma, such as generic medications or patient assistance programs, is critical to improving access to treatment and preventing vision loss in this vulnerable population. The ideal treatment choice is also affected by the efficacy, compliance, and potential side effects of the prescribed medication. For a drug to be effective, it has to lower the IOP by at least 20%.[33]

10. Adherence to Treatment

Adherence to prescribed treatment regimens is a critical determinant of success in managing chronic conditions such as glaucoma, but it remains a significant challenge in clinical practice. Glaucoma often requires long-term, if not lifelong, treatment with topical eye drops, which can be difficult for patients to adhere to consistently over time. Several factors contribute to poor adherence, including forgetfulness, complex dosing schedules, lack of understanding of the disease and treatment, side effects, and cost. As glaucoma is frequently asymptomatic until significant vision loss has occurred, patients may not perceive the immediate benefits of treatment and may be less motivated to adhere to the prescribed regimen. Simplifying treatment regimens, providing thorough patient education, addressing side effects, and promoting open communication between patients and providers are essential strategies for improving adherence and maximizing treatment outcomes in glaucoma. Studies have shown that interventions such as medication reminder systems, adherence aids, and motivational interviewing can be effective in improving adherence to glaucoma medications. Qualitative studies reveal that a patient's knowledge of their disease, personal biographies, and living conditions affect adherence to glaucoma medication. Furthermore, creating a supportive and collaborative environment where patients feel empowered to actively participate in their care can significantly enhance adherence and improve long-term outcomes. Understanding adherence barriers is necessary to determine strategies to improve medication adherence and achieve optimum outcomes. [46,47]

11. Research and Development of Ophthalmic Drug Delivery System for Glaucoma:

Glaucoma is a chronic, progressive optic neuropathy that remains one of the leading causes of irreversible blindness worldwide. It is characterized by damage to the optic nerve, often associated with elevated intraocular pressure (IOP), although other factors such as vascular dysregulation and genetic predisposition also contribute. The primary therapeutic strategy for glaucoma is the reduction of IOP, which has been shown to slow disease progression and preserve vision. Traditionally, topical eye drops have been the mainstay of treatment, delivering prostaglandin analogs, beta-blockers, carbonic anhydrase inhibitors, or alpha agonists directly to the ocular surface.[38] However, conventional eye drops face significant limitations, including poor bioavailability, rapid precorneal clearance, and patient non-

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compliance due to the need for frequent dosing. These challenges have spurred extensive research into novel ophthalmic drug delivery systems designed to improve therapeutic efficacy, enhance patient adherence, and minimize systemic side effects.

The eye presents unique anatomical and physiological barriers that complicate drug delivery. The corneal epithelium is lipophilic and restricts hydrophilic drug penetration, while the stroma is hydrophilic and limits lipophilic drug diffusion.[39] Tear turnover, blinking, and nasolacrimal drainage rapidly eliminate instilled drugs, resulting in less than five percent of the administered dose reaching intraocular tissues. Moreover, the blood-ocular barriers, including the blood-aqueous and blood-retinal barriers, further restrict systemic drug penetration. These obstacles necessitate innovative strategies that can bypass or overcome ocular defenses while maintaining safety and comfort for patients.[40]

One of the most promising avenues of research is nanoparticle-based drug delivery. Nanoparticles, typically composed of biodegradable polymers such as poly (lactic-co-glycolic acid) or chitosan, can encapsulate glaucoma medications and release them in a sustained manner. Their small size allows them to penetrate ocular tissues more effectively than conventional formulations, and surface modifications can enhance corneal adhesion or target specific ocular cells. Lipid-based nanoparticles, including solid lipid nanoparticles and nanostructured lipid carriers, have been investigated for their ability to solubilize hydrophobic drugs like prostaglandin analogs. Stimuli-responsive nanoparticles, which release drugs in response to changes in pH, temperature, or enzymatic activity, represent an exciting frontier, offering the potential for on-demand drug release tailored to ocular conditions.[41]

Another area of development is in situ gelling systems. These formulations are instilled as liquids but undergo sol-to-gel transition upon exposure to ocular conditions such as temperature, pH, or ionic strength. The resulting gel increases residence time on the ocular surface, reducing drug loss due to tear turnover and providing controlled release. Thermosensitive gels, for example, remain liquid at room temperature but gel at ocular surface temperature, ensuring ease of administration and prolonged retention. Such systems have shown promise in delivering timolol and latanoprost with improved bioavailability compared to conventional drops.[42]

Ocular inserts represent a more device-oriented approach. These are thin polymeric films or rods placed in the conjunctival sac, where they gradually release drugs over days or weeks. Inserts such as Ocusert, which delivered pilocarpine for glaucoma, demonstrated the feasibility of sustained release decades ago, though issues of patient comfort limited widespread adoption. Modern inserts are being designed with biocompatible polymers and improved ergonomics to minimize foreign body sensation. The advantage of inserts lies in their ability to provide consistent drug levels without requiring daily patient intervention, thereby addressing compliance issues.[43]

Drug-eluting contact lenses are another innovative platform. Contact lenses can be engineered to contain drug reservoirs or nanoparticles embedded within their matrix, releasing medication continuously while simultaneously correcting refractive errors. This dual functionality makes them particularly attractive for patients who already wear lenses. Studies have shown that lenses loaded with prostaglandin analogs can maintain therapeutic drug levels for extended periods, significantly outperforming eye drops in terms of bioavailability. Challenges remain in ensuring uniform drug release and maintaining lens transparency, but ongoing research is addressing these concerns.[49]

Microneedles and ocular implants represent more invasive but highly effective strategies. Microneedles, which are tiny projections capable of penetrating ocular tissues with minimal discomfort, can deliver drugs directly into the sclera or suprachoroidal space, bypassing surface barriers. Biodegradable implants, placed intraocularly or periocularly, can release drugs for months, reducing the need for frequent dosing. For example, bimatoprost implants have been developed to provide sustained IOP reduction for several months, offering a solution for patients with poor adherence to topical therapy. While surgical placement is required, the long-term benefits may outweigh the risks for certain patient populations.[50]

Comparing these systems highlights the trade-offs inherent in their design. Eye drops remain simple and inexpensive but suffer from poor bioavailability and compliance issues. Nanoparticles offer enhanced penetration and sustained release but face challenges in large-scale manufacturing and regulatory approval. In situ gels provide longer retention and ease of administration but may cause transient blurred vision. Inserts deliver sustained release but can cause

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discomfort. Contact lenses combine vision correction with drug delivery but have limited drug-loading capacity. Implants provide long-term release but require invasive procedures. Each system must balance efficacy, safety, patient comfort, and practicality to achieve clinical success.[51]

Clinical translation of these technologies faces several hurdles. Manufacturing consistency is critical, particularly for nanoparticle and gel systems, where small variations can affect drug release profiles. Regulatory pathways demand extensive safety and efficacy data, especially for devices intended for long-term ocular use. Patient acceptance is another key factor; even the most effective system will fail if patients find it uncomfortable or inconvenient. Therefore, research must not only focus on pharmacological outcomes but also on human factors engineering and patient-centered design.[17]

Future directions in ophthalmic drug delivery for glaucoma are particularly exciting. Smart drug delivery systems are being envisioned, capable of releasing medication in response to real-time changes in IOP or other ocular parameters. Such systems could integrate biosensors with drug reservoirs, creating closed-loop therapeutic devices. Gene therapy vectors are also under investigation, aiming to deliver neuroprotective agents directly to retinal ganglion cells, addressing the underlying pathology rather than just lowering IOP. Combination devices, such as contact lenses or implants equipped with sensors to monitor IOP and adjust drug release accordingly, represent the convergence of biotechnology and digital health. These innovations could usher in an era of personalized glaucoma management, tailored to each patient's disease progression and lifestyle.[18]

In conclusion, the research and development of ophthalmic drug delivery systems for glaucoma is a dynamic and rapidly evolving field. From nanoparticles and gels to inserts, contact lenses, and implants, each approach seeks to overcome the limitations of conventional eye drops by improving bioavailability, sustaining drug release, and enhancing patient compliance. While challenges in scale-up, regulation, and patient acceptance remain, the trajectory of innovation points toward increasingly sophisticated, patient-friendly, and effective therapies. The ultimate goal is not only to reduce IOP but also to preserve vision and quality of life for millions of individuals affected by glaucoma. As research continues to integrate advances in materials science, nanotechnology, and digital health, the future promises transformative solutions that could redefine the standard of care in glaucoma management.[39]

12. Discussion

Glaucoma is a progressive optic neuropathy characterized by damage to the optic nerve, often associated with elevated intraocular pressure (IOP). It is one of the leading causes of irreversible blindness worldwide. The primary therapeutic strategy for glaucoma is the reduction of IOP, usually achieved through pharmacological agents delivered topically to the eye.[34] However, conventional ophthalmic drug delivery methods, such as eye drops, face significant limitations that have prompted the development of advanced drug delivery systems.

The eye is a highly protected organ, and its unique anatomy poses several barriers to effective drug delivery. Static barriers such as the corneal epithelium, conjunctiva, sclera, and blood–aqueous barrier restrict drug penetration.[35] Dynamic barriers including tear turnover, blinking, nasolacrimal drainage, and conjunctival blood flow further reduce drug retention. As a result, less than 5% of the drug administered via eye drops reaches the intraocular tissues, necessitating frequent dosing and leading to poor patient compliance. Moreover, systemic absorption through the nasolacrimal duct can cause unwanted side effects.[36]

To overcome these challenges, researchers have explored novel ophthalmic drug delivery systems that enhance bioavailability, prolong drug residence time, and improve patient adherence. Among these, nanoparticle-based systems have gained significant attention. Nanoparticles composed of biodegradable polymers such as PLGA can encapsulate drugs like timolol or latanoprost, allowing sustained release and deeper penetration into ocular tissues.[37] Liposomes and dendrimers also offer controlled release and targeted delivery, minimizing systemic exposure.

In situ gels represent another promising approach. These formulations remain liquid during administration but undergo gelation upon contact with tear fluid, triggered by changes in pH, temperature, or ionic strength. The gel matrix prolongs drug retention on the ocular surface, reducing dosing frequency and improving therapeutic outcomes.[38]

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Stimuli-responsive gels, which release drugs in response to specific triggers such as enzymes or temperature changes, provide an additional layer of precision in drug delivery.

Ocular inserts and drug-eluting contact lenses are designed to provide continuous drug release over extended periods.[39] Inserts placed in the conjunctival sac gradually release medication, while contact lenses can be engineered to deliver drugs while simultaneously correcting vision. These systems significantly improve adherence by reducing the need for frequent eye drop instillation. However, patient acceptance and comfort remain important considerations.

Implantable devices have also emerged as effective long-term solutions. Intracameral implants, such as the bimatoprost sustained-release implant, can lower IOP for several months with a single administration. Microneedle-based systems offer minimally invasive delivery directly to intraocular tissues, bypassing surface barriers and ensuring targeted drug deposition. While these methods are more invasive compared to topical drops, they provide unmatched efficacy in maintaining therapeutic drug levels.[17]

Despite these advancements, several challenges remain in translating novel systems into clinical practice. Manufacturing complexity, scalability, and regulatory approval processes pose significant hurdles. Long-term safety and biocompatibility must be thoroughly evaluated, particularly for implantable and nanoparticle-based systems. Patient acceptance is equally critical, as convenience and comfort often dictate adherence [18].

Looking ahead, the future of ophthalmic drug delivery for glaucoma lies in integrating smart technologies and personalized medicine. Biosensor-enabled systems capable of monitoring IOP in real time and releasing drugs accordingly could revolutionize treatment. Combination therapies that deliver both IOP-lowering agents and neuroprotective compounds may provide holistic management of glaucoma. Personalized delivery systems tailored to individual patient profiles could further optimize outcomes. [38,39,40]

13. Future Scope

The future of ophthalmic drug delivery for glaucoma is expected to be shaped by innovations that combine sustained release, precision targeting, and patient-friendly designs. Conventional eye drops, though widely used, suffer from poor bioavailability and frequent dosing requirements, which often compromise patient adherence. Emerging technologies aim to address these limitations by creating systems that deliver drugs more effectively and for longer durations.

Nanotechnology will play a central role in this evolution. Nanoparticles, liposomes, and dendrimers are being developed to penetrate ocular barriers more efficiently and provide controlled release. These systems can be engineered to respond to specific ocular conditions, such as changes in pH or enzymatic activity, ensuring that drugs are released only when needed. This level of precision could significantly reduce side effects and improve therapeutic outcomes.

Smart drug delivery systems are another promising avenue. In situ gels that transform into a gel upon contact with tear fluid already extend drug retention, but future versions may integrate biosensors capable of monitoring intraocular pressure in real time. Such systems could autonomously release medication when pressure rises, offering dynamic and personalized control of glaucoma progression.

Implantable devices are also expected to advance further. Current intracameral implants provide months of sustained drug release, but future designs may last years, using biodegradable materials that eliminate the need for surgical removal. Microneedle-based systems could evolve into platforms capable of delivering multiple drugs simultaneously, addressing both pressure reduction and neuroprotection.

Personalized medicine will likely become a cornerstone of glaucoma therapy. Genetic profiling and biomarker analysis could guide the selection of the most effective drug delivery system for each patient. Artificial intelligence may support this personalization by analyzing patient data to predict disease progression and recommend tailored interventions.

In summary, the future scope of ophthalmic drug delivery systems for glaucoma lies in integrating nanotechnology, smart biosensors, implants, and personalized medicine into cohesive solutions. These innovations promise to transform glaucoma management from a burdensome routine into a seamless, intelligent process that preserves vision and enhances quality of life.

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II. CONCLUSION

Ocular drug delivery is difficult because of multiple barriers imposed by the eye against the entry of medicament. There are no specific guidelines for preventing or reducing the risk of glaucoma. Regular comprehensive eye examination may reduce the severity of disease. The modern goals of glaucoma management are to avoid glaucomatous damage and nerve damage, and preserve visual field and total quality of life for patients with minimal side effects. This requires appropriate diagnostic techniques and follow-up examinations and judicious selection of treatments for the individual patient. Effective and safe treatment is a massive challenge for scientists in the field because of the nature of disease and presence of the ocular barriers. Over the years attempt have been made to improve the bioavailability of drugs as well as sustained/controlled the effect of medicament through the various approaches like niosomal or liposomal delivery systems, hydrogel systems as well as implants or ocuserts. The risks and benefits of each type of treatment must be carefully considered to maximize the treatment's benefits while minimizing adverse effects. So it is concluded that the development of novel techniques and novel therapeutic agents continue to provide ocular delivery systems with high therapeutic efficacy.

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Volume 6, Issue 13, May 2026
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