Direct Brain Targeted Nanostructured Lipid Carriers for Sustained Release of Schizophrenic Drug: Formulation, Characterization and Pharmacokinetic Studies

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ABSTRACT

Background: Systemic drug delivery in schizophrenia is a major challenge, owing to the Blood-brain Barrier (BBB) and P-glycoprotein related effects. Consequently, herein an attempt is made to systemically deliver the most desirable schizophrenia drug, Quetiapine Fumarate (QF) via non-invasive intranasal route using Nanostructured Lipid Carrier (NLC) approach. Materials and Methods: The desired QF loaded NLCs were developed using central composite statistical design and the developed formulations were monitored for improving QF bioavailability and their brain targeting efficacies. Results: The optimized formulation displayed a 2-fold increase (compared to virgin QF) in ex-vivo nasal diffusion at the 6th hr, with no sign of structural damage (upon histopathological examinations). While, QF blood-brain ratio showed 10-fold increase for NLCs administered through nasal route (in comparison to intravenous route), thereby supporting prolonged retention of QF at the site of action. Similarly, the concentration of QF (in the brain) delivered via nasal route exhibited 4-fold increment at all-time points thereby supporting a potential nose to brain transport and effective bypassing of BBB. Conclusion: The results obtained infers that non-invasive intranasal route can be used as a potential alternative to conventional treatment options towards efficient management of schizophrenia.

Key words: Nanostructured lipid carriers, Quetiapine fumarate, Schizophrenia, Brain Targeting, Intranasal route.

INTRODUCTION

Schizophrenia is a chronic re-occurring psychotic disorder, which originates at a young age and lasts for a lifetime.¹-³ The most common symptoms of schizophrenia include cognitive dysfunction, acute psychosis and related negative symptoms.⁴,⁵ Additionally, whether schizophrenia represents a single or syndromal illness is yet to be ascertained and hence, defining its sub-groups is of considerable interest.⁶,⁷ According to World Health Organization (WHO) statistics, more than 21 million people are affected by schizophrenia (worldwide) and the death rate of these affected population is (2-2.5) times higher than the general population.⁸ Moreover, the effective method of its treatment demands a continuous presence of the drug at the target site (brain) for a prolonged duration of time. Nevertheless, systemic drug delivery to treat schizophrenia is a potential challenge, owing to BBB effects, which often obstructs the efficient transport of a rational drug (to the brain).⁹,¹² Accordingly, the non-invasive route of drug administration as a potential alternative to conventional oral and parenteral routes has attracted considerable scientific interest.¹³

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Besides, owing to its rich vascular structure, effective by-passing of first-pass metabolism and large surface area of absorption, nasal route displays increased efficiency in transporting the drug (to the brain) via olfactory and trigeminal region in upper nasal mucosa, thereby dodging the BBB. All these positive attributes makes it logical to deliver the developed drug through the nasal route. Yet, toxicity related factors, the potential of the delivery system and its inherent ability to target specific delivery sites have often limited the wider scope of nasal drug delivery.

Usage of colloidal carriers for drug delivery has gained a lot of attention towards the effective treatment of brain disorders as they target the active site very efficiently, (in comparison to other routes of administration). Delivering these nanocarriers through nasal route also enables effective brain targeting and minimizing systemic exposure, when compared to oral route.

In recent years, NLC, which is considered as a modified version of solid lipid nanoparticle (SLN), where drug gets encapsulated in solid-lipid and liquid-lipid is increasingly preferred over SLN, as it overcomes major disadvantages of SLN, such as low drug loading and drug expulsion related issues.

Further, QF is a second generation, atypical antipsychotic drug, with a half-life of 6hrs and requires repeated dosage (i.e. 25 to 300mg per day) with poor oral bioavailability. Additionally, the said drug also suffers from extensive first-pass metabolism and very low absorption. QF is a lipophilic drug, which displays pH-dependent solubility, thereby resulting in very low drug concentration in the brain, especially during oral administration. Accordingly, an alternative approach for administration is required to overcome these limitations. Thus, herein we intend to establish the QF delivery efficacy (to the brain) via NLC based nasal route, which may aid to enhance the permeation and bioavailability and thereby act as an effective approach towards systemic drug delivery.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

Quetiapine fumarate was obtained as a gift sample from Divis Laboratories Pvt. Ltd., (Hyderabad, India). While, Gelucire 43/01 and 44/14, was gifted by Gattefosse (France). Further, Capmul MCM, Captex 200, Cremophor EL, Sterotex FL were also obtained as a gift sample from Abitec Group, (USA). However, Span 80, PEG 400 and Oleic acid were purchased from Merck (Mumbai, India). While, Tween 80, Tween 20 and polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) were purchased from Loba Chemie Pvt. Ltd., (Mumbai, India).

Experimental animals

The study was conducted after obtaining approval (No. 155/P0/Re/S/99/CPCSEA) from the institutional animal ethical committee of JSS College of Pharmacy, Mysuru. Wister albino rats weighing 180-200g were selected for bio-distribution studies, as per the guidelines set by National Institutes of Health, all the animals were humanely treated.

Methods

Solubility studies

The solubility of QF in various solid and liquid components was ascertained, so as to handpick the best suitable excipient towards the effective formulation of desired NLC’s. In a typical procedure, an excess of drug (QF) was mixed in the respective excipients using a vortex mixer. The mixtures obtained were set aside for 72 h and followed by centrifugation at 5,000 rpm for 10 min. From obtained centrifuged solutions, 0.5 ml of supernatant was drawn out, diluted and analyzed for QF solubility using electronic spectral studies (UV1800, Shimadzu, Japan). While for solid lipids, the minimum amount of molten lipid required to solubilize the desired drug was quantified via visual observation, wherein the formation of a clear solution of melted lipid with QF was considered the end point.

Compatibility studies

Differential Scanning Calorimetry (DSC) thermogram was obtained with Shimadzu DSC-60 calorimeter over a temperature range of 40 to 300°C and at a constant heating rate of 20°C/min.

Construction of pseudo-ternary phase diagrams

Pseudo ternary phase diagrams which are essential in optimizing the S mix ratio were constructed using aqueous titration technique. Wherein, the selected oil phase was heated and maintained at a temperature of 75°C, to which selected S mix was added in varying ratios (so as to form homogeneous mixtures) as depicted in Table 1. The mixtures so obtained where then titrated against the desired aqueous phase and the changes observed were recorded visually. Finally, the pseudo-ternary phase diagrams were designed using TriPlot Software (Version 4.1.2).

Formulation of NLCs containing quetiapine fumarate

The desired NLC formulations were prepared using hot homogenization, followed by rapid ultra-sonication, wherein selected quantity of desired drugs were dissolved in molten lipids and simultaneously, aqueous
phase consisting of all other components were heated separately at a constant temperature. Post drug dissolution obtained blend was transferred to aqueous medium with vigorous stirring for 5 min at 10,000 rpm with a hot homogenization (Polytron® PT1600E). Further, a probe sonicator was used to sonicate the obtained emulsion and desired NLC was stored in amber coloured glass vials at a temperature of 2-10°C.

Experimental design
In order to demonstrate the response surface model by attaining different combination of values Design expert software (Version 11, Stat-Ease Inc. and Minneapolis, U.S.A.) was employed. Central composite design (CCD) is used to form a second order quadratic equation without using complete three level factorial experiment. A 2 factor, 2 level central composite design was used to design the optimized procedure to formulate the desired NLC. Wherein the selected independent variables are oil phase and $S_{\text{mix}}$ (Surfactant: Co-Surfactant) while selected dependent variables were drug loading, entrapment efficiency and particle size. This leads to process of optimization with a small experimental design (13 runs).

Evaluation of QF-NLCs

Drug loading and encapsulation efficiency
The amount of QF loaded in relation to the lipid phase and its encapsulation efficiency was determined by centrifuging (REMI laboratory Instrument, India) a fixed volume of desired NLC for 20 min at 10000 rpm. The supernatant so obtained was diluted appropriately and the amount of QF loaded and encapsulation efficiency was quantified using UV spectrophotometric measurements at 248 nm (UV1800, Shimadzu, Japan), using the following equations;

\[
\text{Drug Loading (DL) (\%) } = \left( \frac{W_d - W_s}{W_n} \right) \times 100 \quad (1)
\]

\[
\text{Entrapment efficiency (EE) } \% = \left( \frac{W_d - W_s}{W_d} \right) \times 100 \quad (2)
\]

Where $W_d$ is Total weight of drug is taken, $W_s$ is the weight of drug in the supernatant and $W_n$ is the total weight of obtained NLC.

Particle size and polydispersity index
Particle size and Polydispersity Index (PDI) of NLCs were measured using (Model Zetasizer Nano ZS, Malvern Ltd., UK).

Surface morphology
The surface morphology of QF-NLC was recorded using a (Hitachi Noran System 7 scanning electron microscope (SEM), USA).

In vitro drug release studies in optimized QF loaded NLC
The drug release studies for QF-NLC was accomplished using dialysis membrane (Hi-media, Mumbai, India) with a molecular weight limited to 10 kDa. In a typical experimental set-up, a NLC equivalent to 100mg of selected drug was measured and placed on dialysis membrane. The bag so formed, was placed in beaker containing a fixed quantity of simulated nasal fluid (SNF) (pH 6.4) i.e. 250 ml maintained at a temperature of 37°C. From which, samplings were carried out at predetermined intervals, during which 2 ml of aliquots were repeatedly withdrawn from receptor compartment and replenished with fresh buffer. Finally, the concentration of QF released was quantified spectrophotometrically at 248 nm (UV1800, Shimadzu, Japan).

Ex-vivo permeation studies using sheep nasal mucosa
Sheep nasal mucosa was used to perform ex-vivo permeation studies for both pure drug and drug loaded NLCs. Sheep nasal mucosa was excised and collected from a slaughter house followed by washing with PBS solution and isopropyl alcohol, so as to remove excess of fat surrounding the tissue. In order to place the samples on donor and receptor component of diffusion cell, obtained nasal mucosa was sliced into small pieces with a thickness of 0.2mm. The mounted samples was finally stabilized using PBS treatment for 15 min at a temperature of 39±0.5°C. The resulting sample was then mounted on a rim of receptor compartment with freshly filled dissolution media and donor compartment was placed over it. Finally, the samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Oil phase (Oleic acid: Gelucire 44/14)</th>
<th>$S_{\text{mix}}$ (Surfactant: Co-Surfactant)</th>
<th>Oil Phase: $S_{\text{mix}}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1:1</td>
<td>1:0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.8</td>
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<td>2:1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2:1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1:2</td>
<td>3:1</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Excipient combinations.
were considerably drawn from the respective compartments and analyzed for the amount of QF permeated across the tissue using UV absorbance studies at 248 nm (UV1800, Shimadzu, Japan).37

**Nasal ciliotoxicity studies**

The nasal ciliotoxicity studies were performed with freshly isolated sheep mucosa, where each tissue sample was treated with Isopropyl Alcohol (IPA) (positive control), optimized NLCs (the formulation under study) and PBS (negative control). The tissue samples so processed were stored in 10% formalin solution for 2 hr, followed by H and E staining for histopathological imaging.38

**In-vivo bio-distribution studies**

For in-vivo bio-distribution studies, the selected animals were grouped into two, wherein, one group received intranasal formulations, while the other received a dose which is equivalent to 2.3 mg/kg body weight intravenously via injection through tail vein. Nevertheless, for intranasal administration, a 50 µl dose was administered by holding the rats from back in slanted position from formulation which is equivalent to 6 mg/ml.39

**Pharmacokinetic and brain distribution study**

The plasma and brain samples required for pharmacokinetic and brain distribution studies were collected by suitably anesthetizing the animals, before scarification. The typical plasma and brain sample collections involved drawing of 2ml of blood at different time intervals, by employing tail vein collection technique and the same was stored in Ethylene Diamine Tetraacetic Acid (EDTA) tubes under cold conditions. However for plasma separation, centrifugation was done for 15 min at 5000 rpm for the drawn blood samples. Further, obtained plasma was mixed with internal standard and 2 ml of acetonitrile was added to bring about protein precipitation. Post-precipitation, the plasma samples were further thoroughly mixed and centrifuged for a short period of time (5min at 4000rpm). To finish, supernatant obtained from the centrifuged solutions was collected and prior to analysis the obtained samples were dried at ambient temperatures and reconstituted with the selected mobile phase and filtered through membrane filter.

Post blood collection, animals were decapitated immediately and the skull was slit to excise the brain carefully. In order to get free from attached blood vessels the obtained brain tissue was quickly washed with saline water and marked with the help of a filter paper and stored in PBS. The stored tissues were then homogenized for 1 min at 10000 rpm followed by centrifugation and the obtained samples were analysed by using HPLC. Post analysis various pharmacokinetic parameters were calculated by using formulas which were cited elsewhere.40,41

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Screening of components and equilibrium solubility studies**

The selection of right excipient towards the effective formulation of NLC is mostly dependent on the solubility of the desired drug (in actual excipients). Accordingly, the solubility of QF was determined in various vehicles (solid lipids, liquid lipids, surfactants and co-surfactants) and the results obtained are presented in Figure 1 and 2. Form the results it was evident that in liquid lipids Oleic acid, in surfactants Tween80 and Transcutol-p and in solid lipids Gelucire 44/14 had shown maximum solubility, which was considered for further studies.

**Drug-excipient compatibility characterization**

**Differential scanning calorimetry (DSC) studies**

The DSC thermograms of virgin QF and its physical mixture (QF, Oleic acid and Gelucire 44/14) are presented in Figure 3. The DSC thermogram of QF
displayed melting endotherm at 175.3°C, which is in agreement with the melting point of QF. While, the physical mixture displayed two peaks, first at 42.8°C (corresponding to the oil phase), where the drug may be molecularly dispersed in corresponding lipids. While, the second peak at 174.5°C may be attributed to virgin QF, indicating the absence of undesirable drug-lipid interactions.

**Pseudo-ternary phase diagrams**

The (drug excipient) formulations which remained as nanoemulsions (when dispersed) were subjected to further studies. Based on the pseudo-ternary phase diagram Figure 4 and 5, nanoemulsions composed of Oleic acid and Gelucire 44/14 as the oil phase, Tween 80 and Transcutol-p as surfactant and co-surfactant were selected for further optimization. As can be seen from Figure 4 and 5, the nanoemulsion formation area increases with an increase in surfactant to co-surfactant ratio and was highest at 3:1 (Figure 4d). Consequently, the surfactant to co-surfactant ratio was maintained at 3:1 for further optimizations.

**Formulation of QF-NLC**

The QF-NLC consisting of Gelucire 44/14 + Oleic Acid (1:1 ratio), Tween 80 and Transcutol-p used as surfactants and co-surfactants in 3:1 ratio was formulated via homogenization (under hot) followed by rapid-ultra sonication. The as prepared, QF-NLC formulation existed as pale yellow color and milky dispersions.

**Response analysis for optimization of QF-NLC**

The effect of dependent variables on entrapment efficiency and drug loading (as established by central composite design) is presented.

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**Table 2: Variables in central composite design of QF-NLC.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent factors</th>
<th>Design level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncoded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil Phase (%)</td>
<td>X₁</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S_mix (%)</td>
<td>X₂</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in Table 3. As can be seen, both Oil phase and Smix displayed a monotonous dependence on entrapment efficiency and drug loading (Figure 6 (a and b) and 7(a and b)). Accordingly, with an increase in the concentration of oil phase, there occurred a significant increment in both (entrainment efficiency and drug loading) responses, thereby reducing the escaping nature of the drug into the external phase. Moreover, for optimized formulation, entrapment efficiency was found to be 78.5% with a drug loading of 22.36%, while the rest of the drug remained free in the dispersion media (21.5% of the loaded 22.36%). Thus, 21.5% of loaded 22.36% drug (present in dispersion media) was considered as the loading dose. While, 78.5% of loaded 22.36% (amount of drug entrapped in NLC) was considered to be the maintenance dose (towards sustained delivery). Further the desired polynomial equations, showed a good fit of responses at different concentrations (Table 4), thereby supporting the significance of the said model. The average particle size of optimized QF-NLC was found to be around 109.54 nm, while PDI was around 0.425 units. The results obtained infers that the selected excipients had led to effective development of desired NLC.

**Drug loading ($R_1$) = $-103.22066 +23.18426 Oil phase + 5.03266 Smix - 0.99453 Oil phase * Smix - 1.17044 Oil phase^2 + 0.047341 Oil phase * Smix^2 + 0.002968 Oil phase * Smix^2

**Entrapment efficiency ($R_2$) = $-238.25937 +56.96427 Oil phase + 14.29878 Smix - 2.87573 Oil phase * Smix - 2.68312 Oil phase^2 + 0.076560 Smix^2 + 0.132772 Oil phase^2 + 0.010734 Oil phase * Smix^2**

**Effect of dependent variables on particle size and PDI**

From the above Table 3, it was evident that Oil phase have positive influence over particle size, while the effect is negative, with Smix, as shown in (Figure 6e and 7c). Further, results also suggested that an increase in concentrations of oil phase leads to formation of aggregates, which in turn increases the particle size from 98.7 to 220.6 (as shown in Table 3). With increase in the concentration of Smix there is a rapid decrement in particle size. Further the desired polynomial equations, showed a good fit of responses at different concentrations (Table 4), thereby supporting the significance of the said model. The average particle size of optimized QF-NLC was found to be around 109.54 nm, while PDI was around 0.425 units. The results obtained infers that the selected excipients had led to effective development of desired NLC.

**Particle Size ($R_3$) = +152.90 +33.52 Oil phase - 16.02 Smix - 12.97 Oil phase * Smix - 3.47 Oil phase^2 + 1.80 Smix^2 + 3.54 Oil phase^2 * Smix + 14.46 Oil phase * Smix^2**

**Optimized formulation**

The QF-NLC was developed by clearly defining the required limits of responses (Table 5). The combinations of variables, which resulted in NLCs achieving the required specifications were calculated using design expert software. The overlapping of the obtained results (over the predicted values) confirms the practicability and hence, validation of the model.

**Surface Morphological behaviors of QF-NLC**

The SEM photomicrograph of QF-NLC (Figure 8) supported that particles were spherical in shape and near homogeneous with relatively smoother surfaces.

**Comparative account of drug release via in vitro studies**

The in vitro drug release profiles of QF-NLC compared with virgin QF (Figure 9) supported that, QF-NLC displayed sustained drug release. Accordingly, the drug
Figure 6: Three-dimensional response surface plot depicting the impact of oil Phase and $S_{mix}$ on (a) drug loading (b) entrapment efficiency and (c) particle size of QF-NLCs.

Figure 7: Contour plot showing the impact of oil Phase and $S_{mix}$ on (a) drug loading (b) entrapment efficiency and (c) particle size of QF-NLCs respectively.

release from virgin QF was rapid (95.34 ± 3.58% over 8 hr), in contrast to a prolonged release from QF-NLC (44.44 – 71.56% over 24 hr), thereby supporting sustained delivery of the desired drug and hence, the effectiveness of the developed formulation. Additionally, the QF release pattern from the optimized formulation was bi-phasic, associated with an initial short timed (2 hr) burst release, followed by a long term (24 hr) sustained release. The observed bi-phasic release may be owed to initial rapid QF release from the NLC surface, followed by later stage prolonged release from NLC core. Nevertheless, the kinetic analysis of in vitro QF release profile (from QF-NLC) conforming the Higuchi model supported that, the drug release profile was also a function of the solubility of drug in the desired excipient, lipid concentration and finally the particle size.\textsuperscript{42}

Cumulative drug permeation measurements via ex-vivo diffusion studies

The ex-vivo diffusion studies of virgin QF and optimized QF-NLC with sheep nasal mucosa revealed that the cumulative drug permeated across the nasal mucosa was significantly higher for QF-NLC (in contrast to virgin QF). Accordingly, about 79.56±0.18% of QF
Table 4: Summary of ANOVA for responses of QF-NLC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>P value</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>326.88</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>7.471E+05</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Oil Phase</td>
<td>11.86</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.86</td>
<td>1.897E+05</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-S&lt;sub&gt;mix&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>24.29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24.29</td>
<td>3.886E+05</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
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<td>33.01</td>
<td>5.281E+05</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>64.32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64.32</td>
<td>1.029E+06</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3821</td>
<td>6114.13</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;B</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>6.303E+05</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>89170.54</td>
<td>&lt; 0.0001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of fit</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure error</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cor Total</td>
<td>326.88</td>
<td>12</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Central composite design enabled QF-NLC (optimized formulation) obtained via independent variables and their effects on dependent responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Oil Phase (%)</th>
<th>S&lt;sub&gt;mix&lt;/sub&gt; (%)</th>
<th>Drug loading (%)</th>
<th>Entrapment efficiency (%)</th>
<th>Particle size (nm)</th>
<th>Desirability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predicted</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22.36</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>0.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21.98</td>
<td>78.24</td>
<td>109</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Error</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was permeated from the optimized NLC formulation, while the same was around 39.37\(\pm\)0.28\% for the virgin QF (at the end of the same time interval (6 hr)). Consequently, the steady state flux achieved from virgin QF was found to be 1.56 \(\mu\)g/cm\(^2\)/h, whereas, for QF-NLC, it was recorded as 4.52 \(\mu\)g/cm\(^2\)/h. The observed higher flux may be attributed to the presence of permeation enhancing surfactants in QF-NLC. Moreover, the relatively higher lipophilicity of QF allows significantly better permeation through the nasal mucosa.\(^{43}\)

**Nasal ciliotoxicity studies**

Nasal ciliotoxicity studies aimed to establish the toxicity of excipients employed towards the development of QF-NLCs revealed that the nasal mucosa samples treated with PBS (negative control) showed no nasociliary damage and the epithelial layers were intact. However, treatment with IPA (positive control) caused extensive damage to the nasal mucosa with subsequent loss of epithelial cells, loss of cilia and shrinkage of the mucosal layer. However, the nasal mucosa samples treated with optimized QF-NLC showed no adverse effects (Figure 10). Accordingly, the nasal ciliotoxicity studies established that all the excipients involved in the formulation of QF-NLC were safe enough for nasal administration.

**Quantification of drug concentration via *in-vivo* bio-distribution studies**

The brain and plasma concentrations after administration of QF-NLC via intranasal (IN) and intravenous (IV) routes and their corresponding pharmacokinetic parameters are shown in Table 6. While the mean plasma and brain concentration versus time profile of QF-NLC delivered through various routes are summarized in Figure 11. The distribution studies revealed that the concentration of QF in brain following IN administration was significantly higher at all time points. Nevertheless, when IV route was followed, the concentration of QF was highest in blood plasma (at all-time points) and lowest in the brain. The obtained results supported that the distribution of the drug in systemic circulation was lower with formulations administered intranasally then intravenously, thereby...
Table 6: Pharmacokinetic parameters following IN and IV administration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameters</th>
<th>Tissue/organ</th>
<th>Formulation and route of administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>QF-NLC IN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plasma</td>
<td>348±14.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brain</td>
<td>245±26.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C&lt;sub&gt;max&lt;/sub&gt; (ng/ml) / (ng/gm)</td>
<td>Plasma</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T&lt;sub&gt;max&lt;/sub&gt; (min)</td>
<td>Brain</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUC&lt;sub&gt;0-360&lt;/sub&gt; (ng min ml&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;/ (ng min gm&lt;sup&gt;-1&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>Plasma</td>
<td>45090±3235.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brain</td>
<td>37650±2374.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t&lt;sub&gt;1/2&lt;/sub&gt; (hr)</td>
<td>Plasma</td>
<td>1.85 ± 0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brain</td>
<td>1.94 ± 0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTE (%)</td>
<td>Brain</td>
<td>485.76±10.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTP (%)</td>
<td>Brain</td>
<td>90.26±6.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal Bioavailability (%)</td>
<td>Plasma</td>
<td>60.71 ± 8.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brain</td>
<td>356.87±19.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean±SD, n = 3, C<sub>max</sub>- Maximum concentration, T<sub>max</sub>- Maximum time, AUC- Area under curve, DTE – drug targeting efficiency, DTP- direct transport percentage

indicating potential nose to brain transport. Further, the blood/brain ratio for a drug administered intranasally was significantly higher (0.15±0.007), which supports increased and prolonged retention of the drug at the site of action (~ 3-5 times higher, than IV administration). Moreover, lower T<sub>max</sub> (time taken to attain maximum concentration) value of 15 min in the brain, compared 30 min in plasma may be owed to direct nose to brain transport, following IN administration. Additionally, the DTE and DTP value for QF-NLC via nasal administration was found to be 455.76 ± 10.25 and 85.26 ± 6.45, supporting higher targeting efficiency. The lesser nasal bioavailability of QF in plasma may be attributed to the fact that, the nasally administered drug makes use of olfactory and trigeminal nerve for drug transport, thereby successfully by passing the BBB.  

CONCLUSION

The desired QF loaded NLCs were developed using central composite statistical design, which furnished the most favorable concentrations of the oil phase and S<sub>mix</sub> to obtain optimal responses (minimum size and maximum drug loading and/or release). The current study demonstrated superior brain uptake of QF following non-invasive intranasal route, which may maximize the therapeutic index and reduce dosing frequency. Furthermore, the observed increase in QF permeation flux and higher DTE and DTP values for QF-NLC supports the favorable effect of NLC towards effective bypassing on BBB and modulation of tight junctions. The study also supports that the optimized QF loaded NLC (O-QF-NLC) can permeate through the nasal mucosa and into the receptor compartment (as such). To sum up, the current findings support that QF-NLC could be a promising approach towards direct brain targeting via the intranasal route.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ABBREVIATIONS

QF: Quetiapine fumarate; NLC: Nanostructured lipid carrier; BBB: Blood brain barrier; IN: Intranasal; IV: Intravenous; C<sub>max</sub>: Maximum concentration; T<sub>max</sub>: Maximum time; AUC: Area under curve; DTE: Drug targeting efficiency; DTP: Direct transport percentage; PBS: Phosphate buffer solution; IPA: Isopropyl alcohol; SEM: Scanning electron microscopy; DSC: Differential scanning calorimetry; EDTA: Ethylene diamine tetraacetic acid; RPM: Rotations per minute; HPLC: High Performance Liquid Chromatography.

REFERENCES

SUMMARY

• In this present study an attempt was made to systemically deliver the most desirable schizophrenia drug, quetiapine fumarate (QF) via non-invasive intranasal route using nanostructured lipid carrier (NLC) approach.

• Results obtained from solubility studies suggested that Oleic acid and Gelucire 44/14 are selected as solid lipid and liquid lipid to formulate QF-NLC. From DSC thermograms it was observed that QF was compatible with the selected lipids. Based on ternary phase diagrams obtained 3:1 S/O ratio (Oleic acid and Gelucire 44/14 as the oil phase, Tween 80 and Transcutol-p as surfactant and co-surfactant) was selected for further optimization of QF-NLC.

• Based on the results obtained from the pre-formulation studies further optimization to formulate desired NLCs was done by using central composite design by employing homogenization followed by ultra-sonication technique. Formulated drug loaded NLCs had shown enhanced entrapment efficiency and drug loading with decreased particle size.

• SEM photo-micrograph of QF and QF-NLCs had revealed that particles were spherical in shape and near homogeneous with relatively smoother surfaces. Formulated QF-NLCs had shown a sustained release when compared with pure drug solutions and also achieved higher flux when compared with pure drug with no structural damage to nasal mucosa. In vivo bio distribution studies suggested that concentration of QF in brain following IN administration was significantly higher at all-time points. Thereby, indicating potential nose to brain transport when compared with intravenous route.