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Parkinson's Disease and Stem Cell-Based Therapies: Current Research and Future Directions (2026)

DARSHANA PADMAKUMAR
CPS global school

Abstract - Parkinson's disease is a neurodegenerative disorder arising in elderly people above the age of 60. More than 10 million people worldwide are living with Parkinson's disease. The loss of dopaminergic neurons which produce and release dopamine leads to PD. These neurons play a crucial role in motor control and coordination. Current treatments include dopamine replacement therapy(DRT) which do not possess the potential in managing extreme motor symptoms in patients who have advanced PD. However, in recent years stem cell-based therapies have been studied due to their potential in treating PD. Cell replacement therapy(CRT) has emerged as a promising research area in which dopaminergic neurons are replaced with healthy neurons that seek to achieve sustained motor function improvements. Researchers have studied different types of stem cells, including embryonic stem cells (ESCs),neural stem cells (NSCs), mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs), and induced pluripotent stem cells (IPSCs).However, cell-based therapies still face various challenges such as tumorigenicity and ethical concerns for stem cells such as ESCs.However these challenges could be overcomed . For example, integrating nanotechnology and sttem cell based therapy could improve safety and efficasy of CRT. This review provides a comprehensive overview on the current treatments for Parkinson's disease using stem cells , the challenges and the future directions for this path of research such as nano-stem treatments.

I. INTRODUCTION

The substantial nigra pars compact area which is a region within the midbrain contain the dopaminergic neurons which produce dopamine - a vital neurotransmitter. The detoriation of these neurons leads to Parkinson's disease. There are about five million dopaminergic neurons in a healthy person. There are various motor symptoms such as rigidity, tremor, bradykinesia,and postural instability. Although age is a factor in the occurence of parkinson's disease ,gender has been a factor. it is found that men have the greater probability of having parkinson's instead of women.

Current treatments include medications such as : levodopa which is used as a dopamine replacement agent., and bromocriptine to relieve bradykinesia and rigidity. Deep brain simulation(DBS) has been established as a secure surgical treatment for patients with failed medical treatment or extreme side effects from medication . However , these treatments are not capable of curing or terminating the progression of the disease. They aid in controlling the major motor and non motor symptoms of PD.Despite the utility of these treatments in managing symptoms, their inability to halt disease progression necessitates the exploration of innovative approaches, such as stem cell-based therapies, which offer a promising avenue for not just managing but potentially reversing the course of PD

CRT has the potential to reduce or prevent the disease progression unlike the current treatments.The number of surviving dopaminergic neurons can be increased with CRT which could offer a more comprehensive and enduring solution , reducing patients reliance on symptomatic treatments and improving their overall quality of life . This ability makes cell replacement therapy a promising approach compared to the current treatments available for PD.

Stem cells are unspecialised cells , that can profilerate and have the ability to differentiate into any type of cell in an organism. These cells are present in embryos and adult somatic cells . In the 21st century , stem cells have been widely used in regenerative medicine. The exploration of the behaviour of stem cells including their multiplication, specialization ,movement and communication processes,has the potential to enhance tissue healing and regeneration after injury. The study of these stem cells could uncover novel paths to stimulate patient's natural repair mechanisms.

Integration of stem cell therapy and nanotechnology has been claimed to aid scientists to gain knowledge on the differentiation of stem cell regulation , which will lead the path to discover the game plan of stem

cell based therapy to increase safety and efficacy. Nanotechnology has various applications in stem cell isolation, purification and differentiation. Ideal substrates for large-scale stem cell proliferation is provided with nanotechnology This review also talking about the preclinical studies with animal models and clinical studies with fetal ventral mesenecephalic(FVM) graft tissues on PD patients.

Preclinical studies

Preclinical studies have been performed on animal models which have showcased the potential of stem cell types . It is shown that stem cells can differentiate into dopaminergic neurons and improve the motor functions such as walking and running.MSCs have been observed in these models for their distinct properties: neuroprotective and immunomodulatory.

Clinicial studies

Safety and efficacy has been a major setback in CRT, thus clinical trials on PD patients have been observed. The first set of trials utilized fetal ventral mesencephalic(FVM) graft tissues. Unfortunately , the outcomes of FVM transplantation has not been consistent over the years .Various patients were observed to develop graft induced dyskinesia. Open label trials were conducted on 2 PD patients in each trials in 1980's in Sweden and Mexico.These open label trials demonstrated that FVM can survive and integrate and show improvements in some patients by increasing dopamine uptake in the brain proved by PET scans. However, on the other hand twosubsequent double blind placebo controlled trials raised concerns on the efficacy and the graft induced dyskinesia .More recent clinical studies have explored other cell sources such as embryonic stem cels, induced pluripotent stem cells , but they are still in their early stages. Further research is needed to refine techniques before additional clinical trials.

Cell sources for CRT

This section introduces the types of stem cells used for cell replacement therapy (embryonic stem cells , neurals stem cells , mesenchymal stem cells , and induced pluripotent stem cells) along with their advantages and limitations.

1. Embryonic stem cells
2. Neural stem cells
3. Mesenchymal stem cells
4. Induced pluripotent stem cells

Induced pluripotent stem cells are obtained from adjusted embryonic and adult mouse fibroblasts .Thus is easily accessible allowing further PD research . Midbrain DA neurons can be generated using iPSC technology .As IPSC's can be obtained from the patient's own cells , these cells are suitable for autologous grafting overcoming ethical concerns and immune rejection thus eliminates the need for drugs which have severe side effects .

Preclinical studies based on animal models show that iPSC-derived dopamine neurons can survive, integrate and improve motor functions due to genetic compatibility . The non-invasive collection minimizes the discomfort patients face and simplifies the cell harvesting procedure , making it more practical for widespread clinical application. These advantages make iPSCs a promising tool for developing more effective and personalized treatments for PD.Nevertheless, IPSC's have been observed to have genetic instability due to non - random mutations on chromosomes.This decreases IPSC reproducibility due to various gene variants.Due to their pluripotent nature iPSCs posses tumorigenic potential and the use of oncogenic factors in the reprogramming process. The risk of tumor formation remains a significant drawback in clinical applications.Incomplete reprogramming can further exacerbate the risk.

Nanotechnology in CRT

"Nano" refers to dimensions ranging from 1-100 nm; it fills the gaps between atomic or molecular framework and macroscopic compounds.There are many benefits of integrating nanotechnology with stem cell therapy : nanotechnology can aid in enhancing targeted drug delivery to specific tissues or cells improving efficacy and reducing off-target effects of stem. Fluorescent nanostructures called quantum dots can enhance bioimaging, biosensing, and enhancing cell differentiation .Nanomaterials provide a protective layer to ameliorate the viability of stem cells and protect them against immunosuppression. For Parkinson's disease , nanoparticles can deliver drugs to specific regions of the brain which PD has affected such as dopamine replacement therapy.Neurtrophic factors can be delivered by nanoparticles to preserve dopaminergic neurons. Nanoengineered scaffolds and surfaces with specific topgraphical feautures are being developed to direct stem cell fate and diffrentiation into desired cell lineages .The scaffolds mimic the

architecture of natural extracellular matrix , these scaffolds can influence stem cell adhesion,profileration and differentiation without the need for chemical induction factors .The various stable nanomaterials are graphene and carbon nanotubes Although the integration of nanotechnology and stem-cell therapy has enhanced therapies , there are various challenges,such as biocompatibility and toxicity. There could be adverse effects on stem cells and adjacent tissues if the biocompatibility is not examined. Long-term security evaluation and extensive preliminary research needs to be conducted to ensure safety and efficacy.As the field progresses, it is expected that nanotechnology will play an increasingly important role in advancing stem cell-based therapies for various diseases and injuries. The combination of these technologies may lead to more effective treatments for neurodegenerative disorders, cardiovascular diseases, and other conditions where current therapies fall short. However, careful evaluation of safety profiles and rigorous preclinical testing will be crucial before these nanoenabled stem cell therapies can be translated into clinical applications.

Major challenges

The main setbacks of cell replacement therapy does not only stop at the limitations of each stem cell types as discussed above in the paper. It is found that the biological challenges can be overcomed by introducing a suicide gene in the cells to imrpove the saftey of neural transplants. .Researches brought hPSC line carrying a suicide gene to remove the profilerative cells surgically to improve the safety on parkinsonian rats and addresses concerns on low dopamine production. To accelerate the clinical translation process , the regulatory challenges must be overcomes .

One of the setbacks is the lack of standardised classification system.This causes the uncertainty in clinical outcomes which will create a setback in the exponential growth of the therapy

Additionally, high costs are required with developing and testing cell therapies.

Future directions

Personalizing patient specific CRT treatments according to factors like genetic factors and compatibility with autologous or allogenic sources.Exploring the combination of CRT along with other technology such as nanotechnology is effective . Nano-stem technology has been aiming to improve the efficiency of PD treatment.Nano-materials can manipulate and control the behaviour of NSCs . Nanomaterials have the capacity to reduce oxidative stress, neuroinflammation, and toxic protein aggregation demonstrate potential as innovative nanomedicines for overcoming the challenges associated with cell-based therapies in Parkinson's disease treatment.These bioactive nanomaterials offer a promising approach to address the limitations of current therapeutic strategies.Advanced nanodrug delivery systems are equipped to target ligands , which offer a sophisticated approach to support and expand stem cells for brain repair through controlled release of growth factors and other bioactive molecules , these can potentially enhance the efficacy of stem cell-based treatments. Improving the immunosuppression and cell delivery systems could make a change to reduce immunogenicity. Further development and clinical translation of cell sources needs to improved to fully enable the potential of CRT.It's important to address the ethical and regulatory concerns by conducting large-scale clinical trials to establish long-term safety . Gene-editing technology can be improvised to correct the mutations in patient-specific IPSCs.Co-transplantation with supportive cell types can be a strategy to improve graft-survival.Another way to improve graftsurvival is cell encapulation where a group of cells and entrapped in a spherical semipermeable membrane or bioengineered scaffolds.CRISPRCAS 9 gene editing technology has been found to aid in developing animal models and the integration of this phenomena and stem cell based therapy could aid in identifying new paths for therapy and treatments of parkinson's disease

II. CONCLUSION

Stem cell-based therapies, particularly cell replacement therapy (CRT), offer promising avenues for treating Parkinson's disease by potentially addressing the underlying neurodegeneration rather than merely managing symptoms. Various stem cell types, including embryonic stem cells, neural stem cells, mesenchymal stem cells, and induced pluripotent stem cells, have shown potential in preclinical studies. However, each cell type presents unique advantages and challenges, ranging from ethical concerns and tumor formation risks to limited

differentiation capacity and genetic instability. Future directions in this field should focus on personalizing treatments, combining CRT with emerging technologies like nanotechnology, and improving cell delivery systems and immunosuppression strategies. The development of nano-stem technologies and advanced drug delivery systems may enhance the efficacy of stem cellbased treatments while addressing current limitations. Despite the progress made, significant challenges remain in translating these therapies from bench to bedside. Continued research is crucial to improve the safety, efficacy, and reproducibility of CRT for Parkinson's disease. As our understanding of stem cell biology and Parkinson's disease pathophysiology advances, the potential for developing transformative treatments that can slow or halt disease progression becomes increasingly tangible, offering hope for millions of patients worldwide.

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