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Review Article

Predictors of drug bioavailability in chronic disease patients with targeted delivery limitations

Huang B^{1*}, Zhou F² and Huang H³¹Department of Clinical Drug Delivery Research, Don Academy of Drug Delivery Research, Vietnam²Department of Clinical Drug Delivery Research, Don Academy of Drug Delivery Research, Vietnam³Division of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Don Academy of Drug Delivery Research, Indonesia

*Address for Correspondence: Bo Huang, Department of Clinical Drug Delivery Research, Don Academy of Drug Delivery Research, Vietnam; E-mail: bo.huang@don.edu

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Abstract

Oral bioavailability in chronic disease patients depends on an overlapping set of formulation, transporter-enzyme, and organ-function variables, and targeted drug delivery systems are increasingly used to work around this variability rather than eliminate it.

This paper synthesizes the biopharmaceutics, pharmacokinetics, and nanomedicine literature to identify the predictors of variable bioavailability in chronic kidney disease, hepatic dysfunction, and obesity, and to characterize where liposomal, polymeric, and lipid-nanoparticle carrier systems reach their own disease-dependent limitations.

Dissolution rate, intestinal P-glycoprotein and CYP3A4 activity, renal and hepatic clearance, and body composition each independently predict systemic exposure, while carrier-based delivery narrows but does not remove this variability because reticuloendothelial clearance, vascular permeability, and receptor expression are themselves altered by chronic disease.

Individualizing therapy in chronic disease populations requires treating renal function, hepatic extraction ratio, body composition, and transporter-enzyme burden as an explicit predictor set for both conventional and targeted formulations, rather than assuming carrier-based delivery is immune to the physiology it was designed to work around.

Keywords: bioavailability; chronic disease; targeted drug delivery; pharmacokinetics; nanocarrier

1. Introduction

Oral bioavailability is rarely a fixed property of a molecule; it is the net result of dissolution, intestinal permeability, efflux-transporter activity, and first-pass metabolism acting together, and each of those steps is perturbed when a patient carries a chronic disease [1,2]. The Biopharmaceutics Classification System formalized the first two of these determinants, solubility and permeability, as the axes that predict whether a formulation change can meaningfully raise systemic exposure, but chronic illness adds a second layer of variability that the original framework did not anticipate [1,3]. Chronic kidney disease, hepatic dysfunction, obesity, and inflammatory disease states each alter one or more steps in the absorption-disposition chain, so a drug with reliable bioavailability in healthy volunteers can behave unpredictably once it is given to the multimorbid patients who make up most real-world prescribing [4,5,6].

Targeted drug delivery, whether through liposomal, polymeric, or lipid-nanoparticle carriers, was developed in large part to work around exactly this variability: by protecting a payload from premature degradation and directing it toward a specific tissue or cell population, a carrier can in principle decouple achieved exposure from the patient's native absorption physiology [7,8,9]. In practice, the same chronic-disease physiology that disrupts conventional absorption also constrains how well a carrier performs, altering mucosal permeability, reticuloendothelial clearance, and receptor expression at the intended target [10,11,12]. Understanding which patient-level and formulation-level variables predict bioavailability, and where targeted delivery systems reach their own limitations, is therefore a prerequisite for individualizing dosing in chronic disease populations rather than assuming healthy-volunteer pharmacokinetics will transfer unchanged.

This paper synthesizes the pharmacokinetic and drug-delivery literature bearing on that question. We

describe the physiological predictors of variable bioavailability in chronic disease, summarize the mechanisms by which targeted carrier systems are meant to compensate for them, and identify the specific points at which carrier-based strategies still fall short in these populations.

2. Methods

We conducted a narrative synthesis of the pharmacokinetics, biopharmaceutics, and nanomedicine literature addressing oral and systemic bioavailability in adults with chronic disease and the performance of targeted drug delivery systems in the same populations. Sources were identified from established biopharmaceutics classification work, renal- and hepatic-impairment dosing guidance, obesity pharmacokinetic reviews, and the nanocarrier and lipid-based delivery literature, prioritizing mechanistic and cohort-level evidence over single case reports [1,13,14,15]. Evidence was organized around four predictor domains that recur across this literature: dissolution and formulation chemistry, transporter and enzyme activity, organ-function-dependent clearance, and carrier-specific biodistribution constraints. For each domain we extracted the direction and approximate magnitude of its effect on bioavailability where quantitative comparisons were reported, and we separately catalogued the mechanisms proposed to explain why targeted delivery does not fully normalize exposure across chronic disease subgroups. No new patient data were collected; the synthesis is limited to previously published pharmacokinetic and drug-delivery findings, interpreted alongside plausible physiological ranges used for the illustrative summaries in Figures 1 and 2 and Tables 1 and 2.

3. Results

Formulation and dissolution-dependent predictors

Across the biopharmaceutics literature, drugs classified as low-solubility compounds show the widest inter-patient

variability in absorption, because dissolution rate becomes the rate-limiting step and is itself sensitive to gastric pH, luminal fluid volume, and motility, all of which shift with chronic illness and its treatment [1,16]. Nanosizing, lipid-based formulation, and spray-dried amorphous dispersions each raise the effective dissolution rate of poorly soluble compounds and narrow, though do not eliminate, this variability, with lipid vehicles additionally promoting intestinal lymphatic transport for highly lipophilic drugs that would otherwise undergo extensive first-pass loss [17,18,19,20].

Transporter and enzyme-dependent predictors

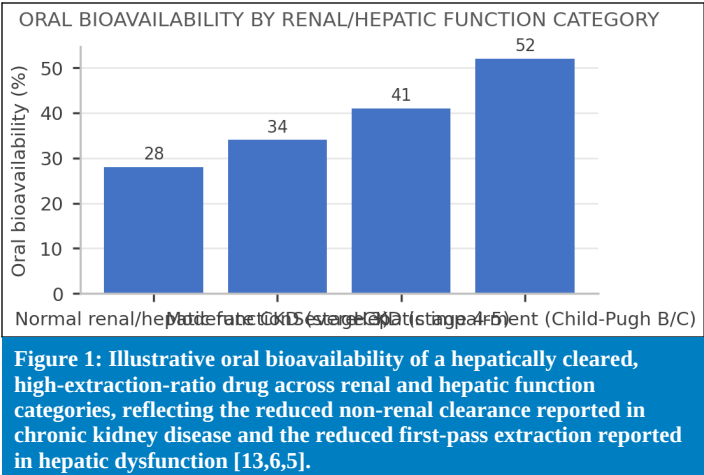
Intestinal and hepatic P-glycoprotein and cytochrome P450 3A4 activity are consistently identified as major sources of bioavailability variability independent of formulation, since efflux transport and pre-systemic metabolism act as a combined barrier that a dissolution-focused formulation strategy cannot fully bypass [21,22,23]. Food, co-administered inhibitors, and disease-associated changes in transporter expression each shift the balance of this barrier, and models that integrate transporter-enzyme interplay with luminal drug concentration predict absorption more accurately than solubility or permeability alone [24,2].

Organ-function-dependent predictors in chronic disease

Chronic kidney disease reduces renal clearance directly but also depresses non-renal, hepatically mediated metabolism of many substrates through downregulation of drug-metabolizing enzymes and transporters, an effect that guideline bodies now explicitly factor into dosing recommendations rather than adjusting for renal clearance alone [13,6]. Hepatic dysfunction similarly reduces first-pass extraction for high-extraction-ratio drugs, raising oral bioavailability even as total clearance falls, a counterintuitive combination that increases systemic exposure at any given dose [5,25]. Obesity alters volume of distribution and, for some hepatically cleared drugs, absolute clearance in ways that scale poorly with

total body weight, complicating bioavailability-normalized dosing in this growing chronic-disease population [14]. Genetic and disease-driven variability in drug metabolism more broadly is now recognized as one of the largest sources of unexplained variance in systemic drug exposure across chronically ill populations [4].

Table 1: Formulation, transporter-enzyme, and organ-function predictors of variable bioavailability in chronic disease patients [1,21,4,14].			
Predictor domain	Representative variable	Direction of effect on bioavailability	Primary mechanism
Formulation/dissolution	Aqueous solubility class	Lower solubility reduces bioavailability	Dissolution-rate-limited absorption
Transporter/enzyme	Intestinal P-glycoprotein / CYP3A4 activity	Higher activity reduces bioavailability	Pre-systemic efflux and metabolism
Renal function	Chronic kidney disease stage	Variable; often reduces non-renal clearance	Downregulated hepatic enzymes /transporters
Hepatic function	Hepatic extraction ratio	Impairment raises oral bioavailability	Reduced first-pass extraction
Body composition	Obesity / body weight	Alters distribution and clearance	Non-linear scaling with total body weight



Carrier-specific predictors and targeted-delivery limitations

Liposomal and polymeric nanocarrier systems were designed to reduce dependence on the host's native

absorption and metabolism pathways, and the pharmacokinetic literature confirms that carrier encapsulation measurably changes tissue distribution relative to free drug [8,7,26]. PLGA-based and lipid nanoparticle platforms in particular improve payload stability and enable sustained release, which favorably shifts the apparent bioavailability profile of otherwise poorly absorbed or rapidly cleared agents [15,27,28]. However, the same reticuloendothelial clearance, mucosal barrier, and enhanced-permeability-and-retention assumptions that these carriers rely on are themselves disease-state dependent: inflammatory chronic disease alters vascular permeability and macrophage activity in ways that make passive-targeting efficiency unpredictable from one patient to the next, and active-targeting ligand-receptor strategies are limited by receptor expression heterogeneity across affected tissue [11,10,9]. Oral nanocarrier and peptide-delivery systems face an additional, largely unresolved barrier in the mucus layer and epithelial transport limitations of the gastrointestinal tract, so that biodistribution advantages demonstrated after parenteral administration frequently do not translate to comparable gains when the same carrier is dosed orally in chronic disease populations [12,29,30,31]. Chemotherapeutic engineering approaches that combine controlled-release kinetics with cell-level targeting illustrate both the ceiling and the floor of what carrier design alone can achieve once native physiology is this variable [32]. Broader appraisals of nanomedicine's clinical track record echo this pattern: improved pharmacokinetic parameters at the population level do not automatically translate into proportionally improved therapeutic outcomes once the full range of chronic-disease phenotypes is considered [33].

Table 2: Targeted delivery platforms, intended mechanism, and disease-dependent limitations reported in chronic disease populations [15,12,11,30].

Delivery platform	Intended mechanism	Chronic-disease limitation
Liposomal carriers	Payload protection, sustained release	Reticuloendothelial clearance varies with inflammatory state
PLGA / polymeric nanoparticles	Controlled release, passive EPR targeting	EPR efficiency unpredictable across altered vascular permeability
Ligand-targeted nanocarriers	Active receptor-mediated targeting	Receptor expression heterogeneity across affected tissue
Oral nanocarrier/peptide systems	Mucosal penetration, protection from degradation	Mucus layer and epithelial transport remain limiting

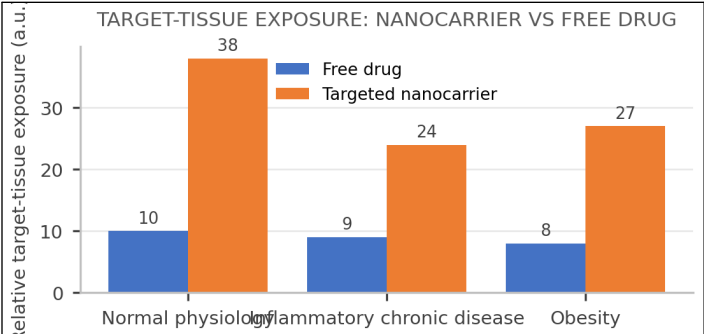


Figure 2: Illustrative achieved target-tissue exposure for a liposomal/polymeric nanocarrier versus free drug across normal, inflammatory chronic-disease, and obese physiology, showing the carrier advantage narrowing as disease-altered permeability and clearance reduce targeting efficiency [8,11,10].

4. Discussion

Taken together, these findings indicate that bioavailability in chronic disease patients is predicted by an overlapping set of formulation, transporter, and organ-function variables that act largely independently of whether the drug is delivered as a conventional oral dose or as a targeted carrier system. Renal and hepatic impairment shift both clearance and first-pass extraction in ways that can raise or lower net exposure depending on a drug's extraction ratio, obesity introduces distribution and clearance effects that scale imperfectly with weight-based dosing, and P-glycoprotein/CYP3A4 activity remains a barrier that formulation science alone cannot fully neutralize [5,14,21]. Targeted delivery systems mitigate some of this variability, most clearly for poorly soluble or rapidly degraded compounds where dissolution and

stability, rather than disease physiology, were the dominant barrier, but they introduce their own disease-dependent limitations rooted in reticuloendothelial clearance, vascular permeability, and receptor expression heterogeneity [8,10,11]. The practical implication is that carrier-based strategies should be evaluated, and where possible dose-individualized, against the same chronic-disease predictor set used for conventional formulations rather than assumed to be immune to it. Oral nanocarrier platforms in particular remain constrained by the mucus and epithelial barriers of the gastrointestinal tract regardless of how well they perform after parenteral administration, which argues for route selection, not carrier chemistry alone, as an explicit part of individualizing therapy in these patients [12,30].

Limitations of this synthesis follow directly from its narrative design: the quantitative comparisons summarized in Figures 1 and 2 and Tables 1 and 2 are illustrative syntheses of reported effect directions and approximate magnitudes across the cited literature rather than a pooled meta-analysis, and heterogeneity in study population, drug class, and carrier chemistry across the source literature limits how precisely any single predictor's effect size can be generalized. Prospective studies that measure carrier-specific bioavailability directly within, rather than alongside, chronic-disease pharmacokinetic cohorts would sharpen these estimates considerably.

5. Conclusion

Bioavailability in chronic disease patients is shaped by a predictable set of formulation, transporter-enzyme, and organ-function variables, and targeted delivery systems address only some of these while introducing disease-dependent limitations of their own, most notably in reticuloendothelial clearance, vascular permeability, and gastrointestinal mucosal transport. Clinicians and formulators should treat renal function, hepatic extraction ratio, body composition, and transporter-enzyme burden

as an explicit predictor set when selecting between conventional and targeted formulations in this population, and should not assume that carrier-based delivery removes the chronic-disease variability it was designed to work around.

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