

Blood–brain barrier and laser technology for drug brain delivery

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Here, we discuss an important problem in medicine as development of effective strategies for brain drug delivery. This problem is related to the blood–brain barrier (BBB), which is a “customs” controlling the entrance of different molecules from blood into the brain protecting the normal function of central nervous system (CNS). We show three interfaces of anatomical side of BBB and two functional types of BBB — physical and transporter barriers. Although this protective mechanism is essential for health of CNS, it also creates a hindrance to the entry of drugs into the brain. The BBB was discovered over 100 years ago but till now, there is no effective methods for brain drug delivery. There are more than 70 approaches for overcoming BBB

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including physical, chemical and biological techniques but all of these tools have limitation to be widely used in clinical practice due to invasiveness, challenge in performing, very costly or limitation of drug concentration.

Photodynamic therapy (PDT) is usual clinical method of surgical navigation for the resection of brain tumor and anti-cancer therapy. Nowadays, the application of PDT is considered as a potential promising tool for brain drug delivery via opening of BBB. Here, we show the first successful experimental results in this field discussing the adventures and disadvantages of PDT-related BBB disruption as well as alternatives to overcome these limitations and possible mechanisms with new pathways for brain clearance via glymphatic and lymphatic systems.

Keywords: Blood–brain barrier; laser technologies; photodynamic therapy; brain drug delivery.

1. The First 100 Years of BBB Research and Nowadays

The history of blood–brain barrier (BBB) begins from the end of 19th century. In 1885, Paul Ehrlich studied anti-bacterial effects of different acidic vital dyes and observed that if dyes were injected intravenously, they would stain peripheral organs except brain and spinal code (the choroid plexus was stained, but cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) was not).¹ In 1909 and 1913, student of Ehrlich Edwin Godlman repeated this experiment but additionally made the injection of trypan blue into the CSF in rabbits and showed that the brain and spinal code were stained by dye but not by peripheral organs.^{2,3} Despite the fact that Enrich did not understand the paradoxical futures of BBB and Gordman made historical error owing to belief that anatomical side of the BBB is of choroid plexus (not parenchymal microvessels), the concept of BBB is attributed to these two names.⁴ Currently, using of intravenous injection of Evans Blue is a classical test for the study of BBB permeability (Fig. 1).

In early 1920s, Lina Stern and Gautier proposed the term “BBB”, which was widely accepted. She performed detailed studies of the permeability of

wide range of different substances from blood into CSF (1921), into subarachnoid and ventricular CSF (1923) and into brain (1922).^{6–8} This term shows both anatomical position and function of BBB: the BBB locates between blood and the brain on complex of endothelial cells of cerebral microvessels (the arteriole-capillary-venule level) and his main function is controlling the passage of blood-borne agents into the central nervous system (CNS) protecting the brain against pathogens.

In 1928, Stern and Rapoport clearly showed existing two routes of entry from blood into brain: one directly across the microvessels — the endothelial BBB and the other via the choroid plexus — the epithelial blood–CSF barrier.^{9,10} The arachnoid barrier is also mentioned as special type of barrier. It is avascular epithelial barrier, which separates the sagittal sinus from the dura projecting arachnoid villi into this main cerebral vein, thereby allowing the CSF movement out of the brain to blood.

However, until the late 1950s, many researchers had doubts that the physical barriers exist and the progress in the study of BBB actively started after the 1960s due to progress in optical visualization of brain tissues and vessels.¹¹

2. The Structure and Functions of Barriers Between Blood and Brain

Nowadays, it is widely well accepted that there are three principle interfaces of barrier between blood and brain: the BBB, the blood–CSF barrier and arachnoid barrier¹² (Fig. 2). All organisms with a well-developed CNS have the BBB. Mammalians such as rat, mouse, rabbit, guinea-pig, dog, sheep and human have similar mechanisms of BBB

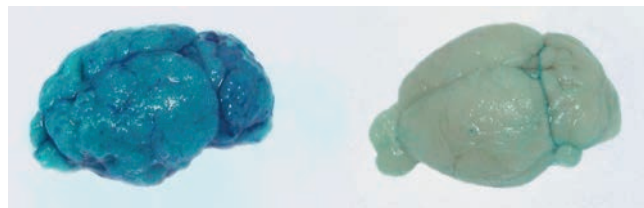


Fig. 1. The example of BBB disruption in adult rats after severe stroke (left) and the intact brain (right). The blue color of brain tissues suggest the high BBB permeability to *Evans blue* injected intravenously. Figure was taken from Ref. 5.

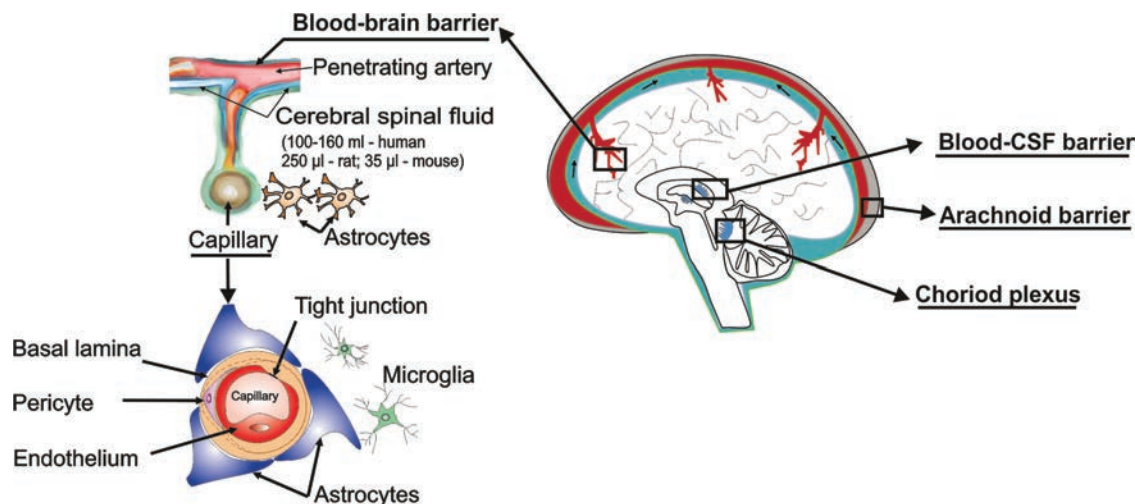


Fig. 2. Three interfaces of barriers: (1) the BBB, which locates between blood and the brain on complex of endothelial cells of cerebral microvessels (the arteriole-capillary-venule level); (2) the epithelial blood–CSF barrier lies at the choroid plexus of ventricular system of the brain; (3) the avascular arachnoid barrier separates the sagittal sinus from the dura projecting arachnoid villi into this main cerebral vein allowing the CSF movement out of the brain to blood.

function.¹³ Therefore, researchers are free to choose a subject for the study of BBB.

The physical BBB form three elements: endothelial cells, embedded with them pericytes and covering them astrocyte end-feet (Fig. 2). The diffusion BBB presented by complex of intra- and transmembrane proteins^{14,15} (Fig. 3). Tight junctions are located on the apical membrane of cerebral endothelium and contain the family of claudins, occludin, junctional adhesion molecules as well as in

cytoplasm of endothelial cells including zonula occludens proteins (ZO-1, ZO-2, ZO-3 and cingulin) bound to actin cytoskeleton.^{16–18} Adhesion junctions are located at the part of basement membrane of the paracellular space and are composed of cadherin, integrin and their associated proteins.¹⁹

Claudins as major component of tight junctions were identified by Furuse in 1998.²⁰ There are at least 24 members of claudin family in mouse and human.^{21,22} Occludin was identified by Furuse in 1993

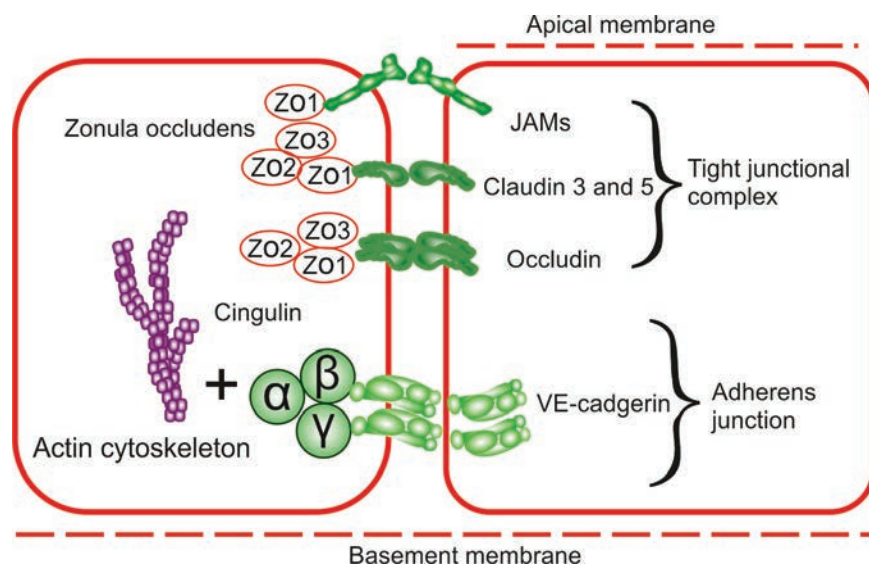


Fig. 3. The schematic illustration of tight junctions in cerebral endothelial cells. Tight junctions contain transmembrane proteins such as the family of claudins, occludin, junctional adhesion molecules as well as proteins in cytoplasm of endothelial cells including zonula occludens proteins (ZO-1, ZO-2, ZO-3 and cingulin) bound to actin cytoskeleton. Adhesion junctions are composed of cadherin, integrin and their associated proteins.

in chicken²³ and then by others in mammals.^{24–26} Occluding and claudin assemble are composed of intramembranous strains and together form the main component of the BBB. Both these proteins bind to complex of cytoplasmic scaffolding proteins (ZO-1, ZO-2, ZO-3) controlling the actin/myosin cytoskeleton system and diameter of paracellular space.^{12,15,27}

The third type of tight junction protein — junctional adhesion molecules, which belong to immunoglobulin family, was identified by Martin-Padura in 1998.²⁸ These proteins are involved in cell-to-cell adhesion and monocyte transmigration through BBB.^{29,30}

Cytoplasmic proteins (ZO-1, ZO-2, ZO-3, cingulin and others) known as membrane-associated guanylate kinase-like proteins and they play a role in organizing proteins at the cellular plasma. COOH-terminal of ZO-1 and ZO-2 bind actin, which is primary cytoskeleton protein. Thus, these complex cross-links transmembrane proteins provide supporting to architecture of endothelial cells.³¹

Adherens junctions assemble include cytoplasmic cadherin, which forms adhesive contacts between endothelial cells due to its connection with the actin cytoskeleton via intermediary submembranal proteins — catenins. Cadherin bind to β and γ -of catenin, which are linked to the actin via α -subunits of catenin.¹⁷ Adherens junctions hold the endothelial cell together giving the BBB structure support.

Tight junctions are presented in cerebral blood vessels in the early embryonic development restricting the passage of low-molecular-weight molecules into the brain.³² For instance, tight junctions appear on eight weeks of gestation in human, at 13 days in mice when the first vessels appear in the cortex.³³ But, gene expression of tight junctions undergoes changes from postnatal period to adulthood. However, the age-differences in the BBB remains poorly studied.

3. Transport Systems Across BBB

Transport barrier is a complex of proteins of endothelial cells, which are involved in mechanisms to enter different molecules from blood into brain. Figure 4 shows different routes of transport across the BBB. Passive diffusion into brain is generally correlated with lipid solubility. For instance, the diffusion of dissolved blood oxygen and carbon dioxide into brain is passive via their concentration gradient.

Molecules such as glucose, amino acids, nucleosides, small peptides, which are necessary for the brain metabolism, across the BBB via express specific solute transporters located both at luminal and apical membranes.^{12,34,35} The orientation of transporters result the preferential direction of transport

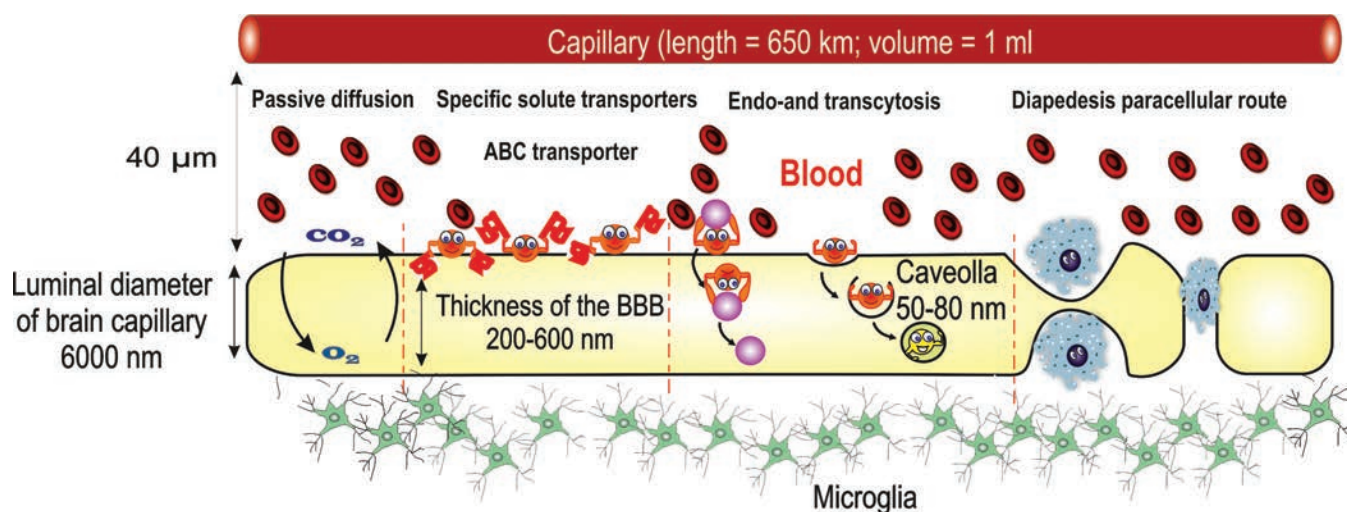


Fig. 4. The schematic illustration of transport across the BBB: (1) passive diffusion into brain for lipid solubility substances such as dissolved in blood oxygen and carbon dioxide; (2) specific solute transporters for metabolic molecules as glucose, amino acids, nucleosides, small peptides; (3) ABC transporter using ATP — binding cassette for many drugs via complex of proteins — P-glycoprotein, Multidrug Resistance Protein, the Multidrug Resistance-associated proteins; breast Cancer Resistance Protein; (4) endo- and transcytotic mechanisms for transport through the BBB of macromolecules such as proteins and peptides; (5) diapedesis and paracellular route for migration of immune cells from blood into brain.

into or across of endothelial cells and direction from blood into brain and from brain into blood.

The major transporter for many drugs and cholesterol is ABC transporter (ATP — binding cassette) that is family proteins containing 48 members grouped into seven sub-families.³⁶ Among proteins of ABP transport several sub-groups play greatest role: (1) P-glycoprotein (plays greatest significance); (2) Multidrug Resistance Protein; (3) the Multidrug Resistance-associated proteins: (4) breast Cancer Resistance Protein^{37–39} Macromolecules (proteins, peptides, for instance, insulin, immunoglobulin G, transferrin, etc.) across the BBB via endo- and transcytotic mechanisms including two processes.^{40–42} First, receptor-mediated mechanism, where the binding of macromolecular ligands and receptors on the surface of endothelial cell triggers an formation of endocytotic vesicles. Second, adsorptive-mediated transcytosis is related with excess positive charge on molecule, which renders cationic inducing endocytosis.

Over 100 years, it was believed that only in pathological state, the mononuclear leukocytes, monocytes and macrophages are not able to penetrate the BBB.^{43–45} Recently, it was discovered that immune cells can cross the BBB.^{11,12,46} There is an evidence that in normal BBB, immune cells are able to enter into the brain via diapedesis but not through paracellular route without opening tight-junctions complex, which is more obvious during inflammation.⁴⁷

4. Photodynamic Therapy as a Potential Tool for Brain Drug Delivery

These protective mechanisms, including physical and transporter barriers, strongly restrict the entrance of many drugs into the CNS. The last decade has been characterized by progress in different classes of medications, among which only two are used for the therapy of CNS diseases.⁴⁸ There are 7000 drugs, which are registered in the Comprehensive Medicinal Chemistry database, only 5% can treat the neurological diseases due to reason that antibodies, recombinant proteins, gene therapeutics and most small molecules do not cross BBB.^{48–50} This is the reason why the approaches for overcoming of BBB have received significant attention from researches around the world in the last four decades. The search in PubMed for last five years

using words “brain drug delivery” show more than 10.370 citation. If the first 100 years of history of the BBB (1880–1980) was focused on the study of anatomical structure and physiology of the BBB, nowadays, it is focused on the period for the development of technologies for the brain drug delivery. There are more than 70 different physical, chemical and biological methods for overcoming of the BBB.^{51–54} However, no approaches for the opening of BBB, which are widely used in daily clinical practice due to their invasiveness and challenge in performing such as intra-arterial injection of mannitol, limitation of drug concentration using intranasal drug delivery or area of treatment (1–3 mm) using focused ultrasound.^{55–57}

Here, we discuss technology, which is used in clinical practice but with completely new view on this method as novel approach for the brain drug delivery. Photodynamic therapy (PDT) with using 5-aminolevulinic acid (5-ALA)-PDT is a valuable method for surgical navigation of glioblastoma.^{58–61} PDT is a form of therapy that combines a light source and nontoxic photosensitizing agents (photodynamic dyes). The systematically or topically administered photosensitizer is specifically accumulated in diseased tissue. When concentration of photosensitizer is sufficient, it is activated by exposure to light appropriated for its excitation. The excited photosensitizer interacts with molecular triplet oxygen ($^3\text{O}_2$) and produces $^1\text{O}_2$ resulting the tissue oxidation. The mechanisms of $^1\text{O}_2$ generation is the light-induced transition of one of electrons in a higher-energy orbital from the ground state (triplet oxygen) in a short-lived ($\tau_{\text{fl}} = 10^{-6}$ – 10^{-9} s) electronically excited state (singlet oxygen).

5-ALA is most preferable photosensitizer in medicine because it can be orally administered and is relatively safe.^{58–61} 5-ALA itself does not produce fluorescence, after administration into blood, 5-ALA is metabolized in the cells to protoporphyrin IX that accumulates in tumor tissues giving photodynamic effect via light activation of the target tissue and allowing the neurosurgeon easily to detect and accurately resect tumor (Fig. 5).⁵⁸

5-ALA naturally accumulates in the vascular endothelial cells including cerebral vasculature allowing “vascular targeted” PDT.^{62,63} Compared to normal tissues, most types of cancers are especially active in both the uptake and accumulation of photosensitizers agents, which makes cancers especially vulnerable to PDT. Currently, in

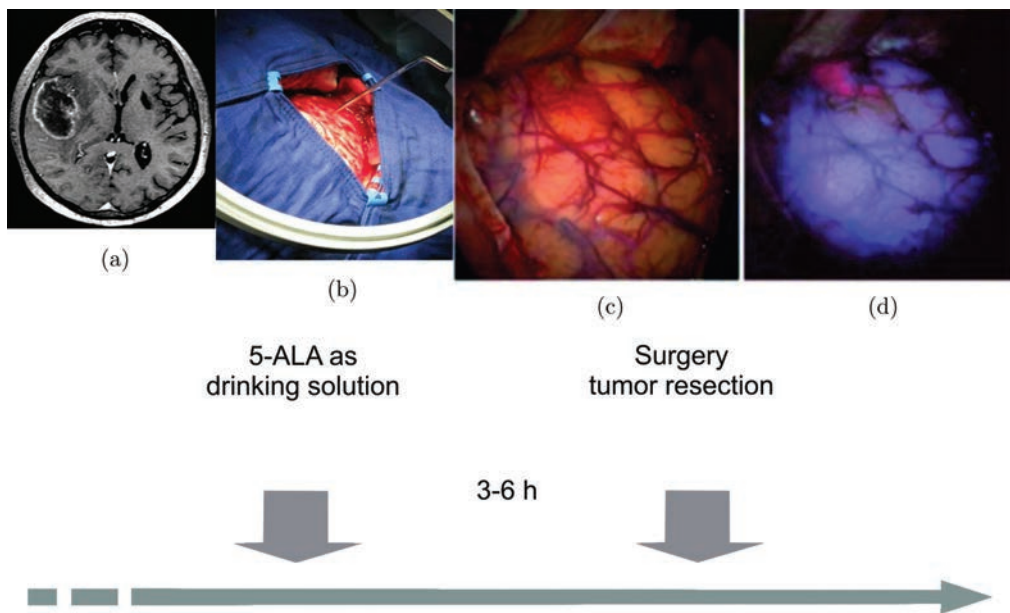


Fig. 5. The fluorescence guided resection of glioblastoma in patient: (a) — magnetic resonance imaging of glioblastoma (arrowed); (b) — preparation of surgical area; (c) — the surface of brain after craniectomy; (d) — specific fluorescence of 5-ALA in ultraviolet 3–6 h after 5-ALA administration per os. Figure presented with permission of Herbert Stepp, University Hospital of Munich, Germany.

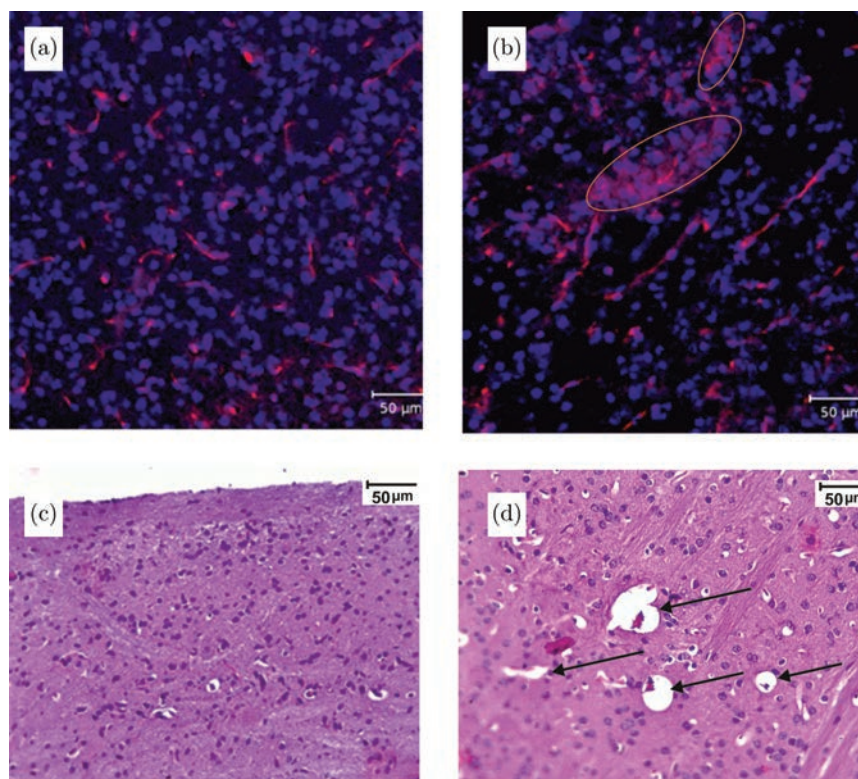


Fig. 6. The PDT-induced opening of the BBB using 5-ALA (laser: 635 nm, 20 J/cm², 60 mV, 333 s; 5-ALA — 20 mg/kg, i.v.). In the left — control (a and c), no laser effects; in the right — 90 min after PDT. (b) — the extravasation of dextran (circled) from cerebral vessels into the brain parenchyma. (d) — The perivascular edema (arrowed) in the area of laser application. Figure was taken from Semyachkina-Glushkovskaya Ref. 84.

PDT of brain tumors is used with various photosensitizers.⁶⁴

However, PDT has serious consequence such as vasogenic edema, which appears after PDT performing.⁵⁹ The one reason of PDT-induced accumulation

of water in perivascular space is the PDT-related opening of BBB.

So, the traditional explanation of anti-cancer PDT effect is $^1\text{O}_2$ -induced damage of the endothelial cells resulting tumor microvasculature collapse.^{65,66}

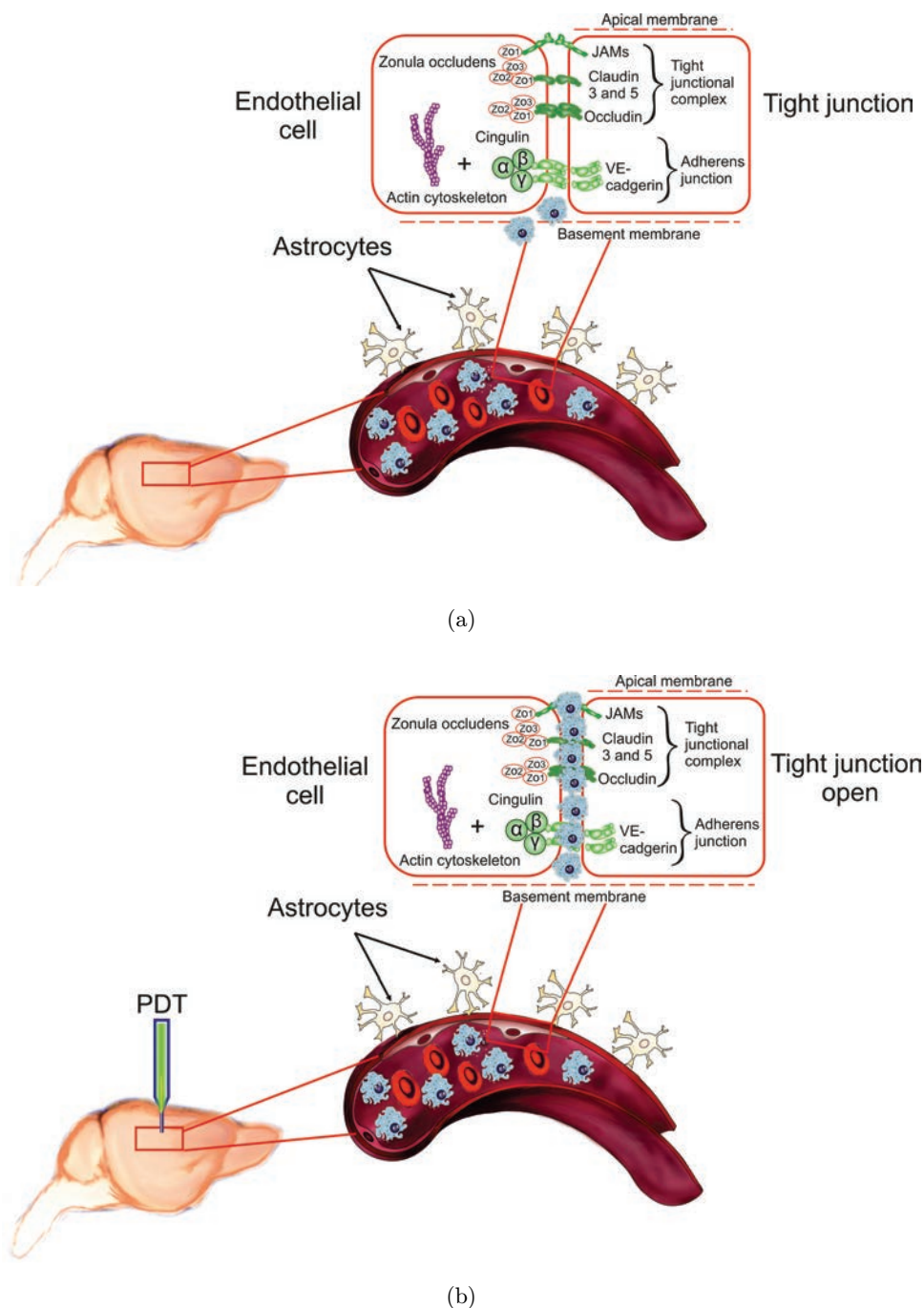


Fig. 7. The schematic illustration of PDT-mediated BBB disruption and macrophages migration from blood into brain. The photosensitizers binds in the cerebral endothelial cells, under light exposure photosensitizers stimulates $^1\text{O}_2$ generation, which causes the enlargement of endothelial gaps due to changes of the cytoskeleton, cell rounding and constriction via microtubule depolarization. (a) — the normal state (intact BBB), (b) — the PDT-induced opening of BBB for macrophages.

However, several studies show that PDF increases the BBB permeability temporally.^{67–70}

Hirschberg *et al.* using 400 μm bare flat-end quartz fiber (635 nm) and stereotaxic procedure clearly show that the ALA-PDT causes the opening of BBB. At the low fluence levels of 9L, the ALA-PDT opens the BBB rapidly without any damages of brain tissues, the disrupted BBB is observed during 2 h following PDT and restored during the next 72 h.⁶⁷ The disruption of BBB is greater using the higher fluence level of 26 J but the damages of surrounding tissues (necrosis, edema, hemorrhage) are observed for 17 days.

We confirmed these results in our work. Using laser 635 nm (10–40 J/cm^2 , 40–100 mV, 250–400 s) and 5-ALA (NIOPIK, Russia, 20 mg/kg, i.v.) we showed maximal increase in the BBB permeability in middle dose of laser influences on the brain

tissues (15–20 J/cm^2 , 40–60 mV, 375–333 s) while higher dose was not accompanied by more pronounced changes in the BBB disruption (Fig. 6).

The mechanisms responsible for PDT-mediated increase in BBB disruption remain poorly understood. Some authors believe that PDT has direct effect on the capillary endothelial cells⁷¹ inducing the increasing of endothelial gaps⁷² due to changes of the cytoskeleton, cell rounding and constriction via microtubule depolarization.^{73,74}

Several authors show the efficiency of PDT-related BBB disruption for targeted macrophages migration from blood into brain with the aim to improve PDT of glioma using macrophages as transport system through the BBB for gold nanoparticles (Fig. 7).^{68–70} The nanoparticles show great promise for PDT.⁷⁵ Madsen *et al.* in experiment *in vivo* showed that PDT (the photosensitizer —

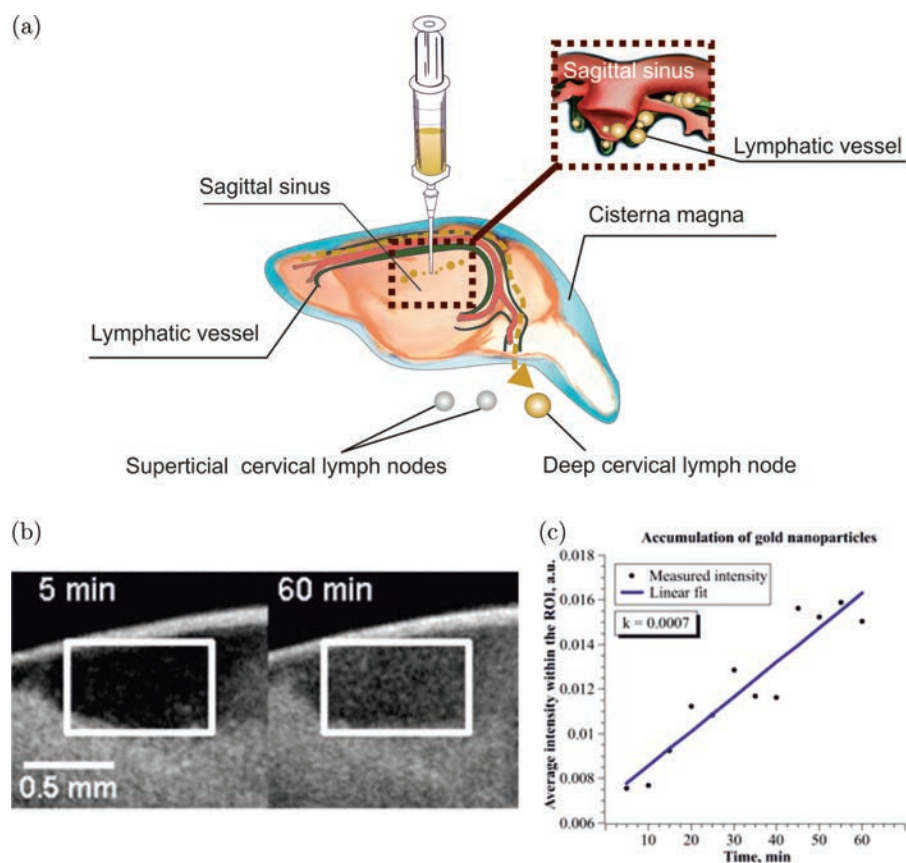


Fig. 8. The imaging of glymphatic pathway of brain clearance from GNRs. (a) — illustration of experiment: GNRs are injected into the brain parenchyma; GNRs drain from the brain via the meningeal lymphatic vessels; in 20 min after injection, GNRs accumulate in the deep cervical lymph node with maximal effect 1 h later; (b) — the OCT image of the deep cervical lymph node before injection of GNRs (left); the OCT images illustrating accumulation of GNRs in the deep cervical lymph node 60 min after injection of GNRs (right); (c) — average intensity of OCT signal within the ROI showing linear accumulation of nanoparticles in the deep cervical node with the slope $k = 0.0007$. Detailed information about k value interpretation is given in the text. Figure in modification was taken from Ref. 85.

aluminum phthalocyanine disulfonate (AlPcS_{2a}), $\lambda = 670$ nm; light dose = 2.5 J) is effective for the opening of BBB and the migration of systemically administered exogenous macrophages loaded with iron oxide nanoparticles (120–180 nm) in brain of rats.⁶⁸ Trinidad *et al.* in experiments *in vitro* using macrophages loaded gold nanoparticles (120 nm) and human FaDu cancer cell line (head and neck squamous cell carcinoma) showed reducing two-fold the cell viability after PDT (AlPcS_{2a}-mediated $\lambda = 670$ nm, fluence level 0.25 J/cm²) combined with photothermal therapy ($\lambda = 810$ nm, at 14 W/cm² irradiance).⁷⁶

Despite the promising effect of PDT on the transportation of macrophages through the BBB, there is an important question: “How the brain cleans from gold nanoparticles and is it possible to use this procedure for human?”

The latest discoveries of glymphatic and lymphatic systems, playing the role of clearance of the brain, allow to answer this question.^{77–79} In our experiments, gold nanorods (GNRs) are injected directly into the brain parenchyma, which show the accumulation of GNRs in the deep cervical lymph node in 20 min after injection suggesting activation of clearance systems of the brain immediately after treatment (Fig. 8).

5. Conclusion

PDT-related reversible opening of BBB might be new promising step in the progress of treatment of CNS diseases. For example, the targeted effect of PDT on the BBB can be useful in anti-cancer therapy, when it is necessary to have focusing treatment. While PDT-non specific opening BBB is can be suitable for neurotropic drugs delivery and treatment CSN pathology such as Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s diseases, depression etc. Although the PDT-related opening of BBB is attractive, it needs further studies for optimization of PDT condition and tissue oxygenation status, photosensitizer concentration and pharmacokinetics/distribution, scheme of laser illumination and personalized dosimetry (i.e., light, photosensitizer, ¹O₂) to avoid vessel damages such as edema, constriction, thrombosis, hemorrhages.^{80–82} To assess efficacy of PDT with curative intent, high quality comparative, randomized studies are needed. Palliative treatment with PDT seems to increase the quality of life in otherwise untreatable patients. Note,

intrigue “gold key” has been found to overcome the limitations of PDT, such as low light penetration and high toxicity of photosensitizers, by direct generation of ¹O₂ using quantum-dot laser diodes emitting in the near infrared spectral range (1067 nm, 1268 nm).⁸³

Acknowledgments

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