



RSC Nanoscience & Nanotechnology

Microfluidics for Medical Applications

Edited by Albert van den Berg and Loes Segerink



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Microfluidics for Medical Applications

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Preface

Ever since the beginning of the research in the lab on chip (LOC) field, people have been searching for the “killer app”.¹ Unfortunately, unlike a field such as microelectronics, where Moore’s law for memories and processors has driven the development or, rather, set the agenda, over several decades, in the LOC area no such big application has been identified so far. Rather a very diversified field of applications has emerged over time, with areas such as LOC for analytical chemistry,² drug development,³ cell biology,⁴ DNA sequencing and analysis,⁵ chemical microreactors,⁶ and medical applications.⁷ Of all these, probably still the highest expectations are found in the latter area. This area is still emerging as indicated by the numerous scientific journals that publish articles relevant to this field, such as *Lab on a Chip*, *Analytical Chemistry*, *Microfluidics and Nanofluidics*, *Biomedical Microdevices*, *Biomicrofluidics* and *Integrative Biology*. Every week a lot of exiting new research is published, aiming to be applied for innovative medical devices, treatments, or diagnostics. While it is impossible to show all work performed in this field, with this volume we try to give an overview and perspective of this research field. Therefore we give an overview of the state-of-the-art given by a collection of world-wide top-level researchers, with contribution in three different, recently emerged subareas of this field: tissue and organs on chip, microfluidic tools for medicine, and point of care diagnostics.

For engineering microtissues on chip, 3D constructs are required, which serve as scaffolds for the different components of the tissue. Fibers are promising structures to make these constructs, which can be adapted in ways suited for the application. In Chapter 1 different types of fiber fabrication using microtechnology are discussed. Besides tissue engineering on chip, organs on chip is another emerging field in microfluidics. An example of this is the kidney on chip, which is discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter

was written by Kahp-Yang Suh, who totally unexpectedly and to our deep sadness passed away after finishing the chapter. As a tribute we decided to retain his chapter, to give the reader a nice insight into the brilliant work he did in the organs on a chip field. An overview of the current state-of-the-art is given with respect to this organ. Not only can organs be modelled with microfluidic systems, also the functioning of parts of the body can be modeled using such a system. An example is the functioning of the blood-brain barrier. Although these microfluidic systems are not yet as good as the conventional models, first steps are being made in the development of a reliable model. In Chapter 3 the current status of these microfluidics models is described as well as which parts need to be improved to end up with a model that will be better than the conventional one. An example of how these models can be used to understand a brain-related disease such as Alzheimer's disease is given in Chapter 4. In this chapter some fundamental questions regarding this disease are raised, which can be possibly answered with the help of microfluidics.

Besides the use of microfluidics to model the functioning of organs and as a tool to create constructs for tissue engineering, it can also be used in more general terms for medicine, which is the subject of Chapters 5 to 7. An example of this is the generation of bubbles for both contrast enhancement in ultrasound as well as drugs delivery at a specific spot. For the production of these monodisperse bubbles, also microfluidics can be used, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. The use of other spherical particles, the magnetic particles, is described in Chapter 6. These particles can be actuated with magnets and used for several assay steps in diagnostic devices. Chapter 7 shows the use of lab on a chip systems for assisted reproductive technologies, such as *in-vitro* fertilization and intracytoplasmic sperm injection. These treatments can benefit from miniaturization since it can improve the gamete selection, but also the procedures involved in cryopreservation and embryo development.

The latter section of the book covers some examples of point-of-care diagnostics using lab-on-a-chip systems. This is not solely restricted to traditional microfluidic systems, since the use of paper-based microfluidic tests is especially useful for diagnostics in the developing world. Chapter 8 includes examples of these paper-based devices, but also gives the requirements for testing in low-resource settings. A different example of point-of-care diagnostics is the detection of circulating tumor cells (CTCs). Although it is major challenge to increase the throughput of microfluidics systems to detect these rare cells (a few cells $(10\text{ mL})^{-1}$), it has potential to improve the detection limit (Chapter 9). A way to perform this detection makes use of electrical impedance measurements, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 10. Besides the detection of CTCs, the use of microfluidic impedance cytometry is shown for a full blood count. In addition to the detection of cells in a fluid, microfluidics can also be used to measure analytes in blood. A widespread application of this is the measurement of glucose for diabetics. Chapter 11 covers this example, but

also shows other routine clinical laboratory tests that are nowadays used. The last chapter of this book shows the development of a lab on a chip for ion measurements in biological fluids using capillary electrophoresis on chip. Here the steps are described that need to be taken to get a new microfluidic device ready for point-of-care measurements and practical application and market introduction.

We have tried to give you an overview of the diverse applications microfluidic technology can be advantageous in for medical applications. Some topics are still in the research phase, while others are currently incorporated in the hospital or patient's daily life. Furthermore in some cases it will serve as a tool to test drugs; others are used as a tool to detect certain disease markers. Finally we hope that with these examples, you get (more) inspired and enthusiastic to work in this wonderful multidisciplinary field and help to find the killer app!

Loes Segerink and Albert van den Berg

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Contents

Chapter 1	Microtechnologies in the Fabrication of Fibers for Tissue Engineering	1
	<i>Mohsen Akbari, Ali Tamayol, Nasim Annabi, David Juncker and Ali Khademhosseini</i>	
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Fiber Formation Techniques	2
1.2.1	Co-axial Flow Systems	2
1.3	Wet spinning	7
1.4	Melt spinning (Extrusion)	10
1.5	Electrospinning	12
1.6	Conclusions	15
	Acknowledgements	16
	References	16
Chapter 2	Kidney on a Chip	19
	<i>Laura Ha, Kyung-Jin Jang and Kahp-Yang Suh</i>	
2.1	Introduction	19
2.2	Kidney Structure and Function	20
2.3	Mimicking Kidney Environment	22
2.3.1	Extracellular Matrix	22
2.3.2	Mechanical Stimulation	23
2.3.3	Various Kidney Cells	24
2.3.4	Extracellular Environment	27
2.4	Kidney on a Chip	28
2.4.1	Microfluidic Approach for Kidney on a Chip	28
2.4.2	Fabrication of Kidney on a Chip	28
2.4.3	Various Kidney Chips	30

2.5 Future Opportunities and Challenges	33
References	35

Chapter 3 Blood-brain Barrier (BBB): An Overview of the Research of the Blood-brain Barrier Using Microfluidic Devices 40

Andries D. van der Meer, Floor Wolbers, István Vermes and Albert van den Berg

3.1 Introduction	40
3.2 Blood-brain Barrier	41
3.2.1 Neurovascular Unit	41
3.2.2 Transport	41
3.2.3 Multidrug Resistance	42
3.2.4 Neurodegenerative Diseases – Loss of BBB Function	43
3.3 Modeling the BBB <i>in Vitro</i>	44
3.3.1 Microfluidic <i>in Vitro</i> Models of the BBB: the “BBB-on-Chip”	45
3.3.2 Cellular Engineering	47
3.3.3 Biochemical Engineering	48
3.3.4 Biophysical Engineering	50
3.4 Measurement Techniques	51
3.4.1 Transendothelial Electrical Resistance	51
3.4.2 Permeability	51
3.4.3 Fluorescence Microscopy	52
3.5 Conclusion and Future Prospects	52
Acknowledgements	53
References	53

Chapter 4 The Use of Microfluidic-based Neuronal Cell Cultures to Study Alzheimer's Disease 57

Robert Meissner and Philippe Renaud

4.1 Alzheimer's Disease – Increased Mortality Rates and Still Incurable	57
4.2 Unknowns of Alzheimer's Disease	58
4.2.1 Molecular Key Players of AD	58
4.2.2 From Molecules to Neuronal Networks	59
4.3 Why Microsystems May Be a Key in Understanding the Propagation of AD	61
4.3.1 Requirements for <i>in Vitro</i> Studies on AD Progression	61
4.3.2 Establishing Ordered Neuronal Cultures with Microfluidics	62
4.4 Micro-devices-based <i>in Vitro</i> Alzheimer Models	71

4.4.1	First Microtechnology-based Experimental Models	71
4.4.2	Requirements of Future Micro-device-based Studies	74
4.5	Questions that May Be Addressed by Micro-controlled Cultures	76
	References	77
Chapter 5	Microbubbles for Medical Applications	81
	<i>Tim Segers, Nico de Jong, Detlef Lohse and Michel Versluis</i>	
5.1	Introduction	81
5.1.1	Microbubbles for Imaging	82
5.1.2	Microbubbles for Therapy	83
5.1.3	Microbubbles for Cleaning	84
5.2	Microbubble Basics	86
5.2.1	Microbubble Dynamics	86
5.3	Microbubble Stability	89
5.4	Microbubble Formation	91
5.5	Microbubble Modeling and Characterization	93
5.5.1	Optical Characterization	95
5.5.2	Sorting Techniques	95
5.5.3	Acoustical Characterization	95
5.6	Conclusions	97
	Acknowledgements	98
	References	98
Chapter 6	Magnetic Particle Actuation in Stationary Microfluidics for Integrated Lab-on-Chip Biosensors	102
	<i>Alexander van Reenen, Arthur M. de Jong, Jaap M. J. den Toonder and Menno W. J. Prins</i>	
6.1	Introduction	102
6.2	Capture of Analyte Using Magnetic Particles	105
6.2.1	The Analyte Capture Process	106
6.2.2	Analyte Capture Using Magnetic Particles in a Static Fluid	108
6.3	Analyte Detection	112
6.3.1	Magnetic Particles as Carriers	112
6.3.2	Agglutination Assay with Magnetic Particles	115
6.3.3	Surface-binding Assay with Magnetic Particles as Labels	117
6.3.4	Magnetic Stringency	120
6.4	Integration of Magnetic Actuation Processes	122
6.5	Conclusions	125

Acknowledgements	126
References	126
Chapter 7 Microfluidics for Assisted Reproductive Technologies	131
<i>David Lai, Joyce Han-Ching Chiu, Gary D. Smith and Shuichi Takayama</i>	
7.1 Introduction	131
7.2 Gamete Manipulations	132
7.2.1 Male Gamete Sorting	133
7.2.2 Female Gamete Quality Assessment	137
7.3 <i>In Vitro</i> Fertilization	139
7.4 Cryopreservation	141
7.5 Embryo Culture	144
7.6 Embryo Analysis	146
7.7 Conclusion	148
References	148
Chapter 8 Microfluidic Diagnostics for Low-resource Settings: Improving Global Health without a Power Cord	151
<i>Joshua R. Buser, Carly A. Holstein and Paul Yager</i>	
8.1 Introduction: Need for Diagnostics in Low-resource Settings	151
8.1.1 Importance of Diagnostic Testing	151
8.1.2 Limitations in Low-resource Settings	152
8.1.3 Scope of Chapter	152
8.2 Types of Diagnostic Testing Needed in Low-resource Settings	153
8.2.1 Diagnosing Disease	153
8.2.2 Monitoring Disease	158
8.2.3 Counterfeit Drug Testing	161
8.2.4 Environmental Testing	162
8.3 Overview of Microfluidic Diagnostics for Use at the Point of Care	162
8.3.1 Channel-based Microfluidics	163
8.3.2 Paper-based Microfluidics	164
8.4 Enabling All Aspects of Diagnostic Testing in Low-resource Settings: Examples of and Opportunities for Microfluidics (Channel-based and Paper-based)	171
8.4.1 Transportation and Storage of Devices in Low-resource Settings	172
8.4.2 Specimen Collection	173
8.4.3 Sample Preparation	174
8.4.4 Running the Assay	176

8.4.5	Signal Read-out	179
8.4.6	Data Integration into Health Systems	180
8.4.7	Disposal	183
8.5	Conclusions	183
	References	183

Chapter 9 Isolation and Characterization of Circulating Tumor Cells **191**

Yoonsun Yang and Leon W. M. M. Terstappen

9.1	Introduction	191
9.2	CTC Definition in CellSearch System	192
9.3	Clinical Relevance of CTCs	193
9.4	Identification of Treatment Targets on CTCs	195
9.5	Technologies for CTC Enumeration	196
9.6	Isolation and Identification of CTCs in Microfluidic Devices	199
9.6.1	Microfluidic Devices for CTC Isolation Based on Physical Properties	200
9.6.2	Microfluidic Devices to Isolate CTCs Based on Immunological Properties	202
9.6.3	Microfluidic Devices to Isolate CTCs Based on Physical as well as Immunological Properties	204
9.6.4	Characterization of CTCs in Microfluidic Devices	204
9.7	Summary and Outlook	205
	References	207

Chapter 10 Microfluidic Impedance Cytometry for Blood Cell Analysis **213**

Hywel Morgan and Daniel Spencer

10.1	Introduction	213
10.2	The Full Blood Count	217
10.2.1	Clinical Diagnosis and the Full Blood Count	217
10.2.2	Commercial FBC Devices	219
10.3	Microfluidic Impedance Cytometry (MIC)	220
10.3.1	Measurement Principle	221
10.3.2	Behavior of Cells in AC fields	222
10.3.3	Sizing Particles	225
10.3.4	Cell Membrane Capacitance Measurements	226
10.3.5	Microfluidic FBC Chip	227
10.3.6	Accuracy and Resolution	229
10.3.7	Antibody Detection	232

10.4	Further Applications of MIC	234
10.4.1	Cell Counting and Viability	234
10.4.2	Parasitized Cells	235
10.4.3	Tumor Cells and Stem Cell Morphology	235
10.4.4	High-frequency Measurements	237
10.5	Future Challenges	238
	References	238

Chapter 11 Routine Clinical Laboratory Diagnostics Using Point of Care or Lab on a Chip Technology **242**

Gábor L. Kovács and István Vermes

11.1	Introduction	242
11.2	Point-of-care Testing	243
11.2.1	Categorization of POCT Devices	243
11.2.2	Role of POCT in Laboratory Medicine	244
11.3	Glucometers	245
11.3.1	The WHO and ADA Criteria of Diabetes	245
11.3.2	Plasma Glucose or Blood Glucose	245
11.3.3	Glucometers in Medical Practice	246
11.3.4	Glucometers in Gestational Diabetes	248
11.3.5	Continuous Glucose Monitoring	249
11.4	i-STAT: a Multi-parameter Unit-use POCT Instrument	249
11.4.1	Clinical Chemistry	250
11.4.2	Cardiac Markers	253
11.4.3	Hematology	253
11.4.4	Clinical Use and Performance	254
11.5	Conclusions	256
	References	257

Chapter 12 Medimate Minilab, a Microchip Capillary Electrophoresis Self-test Platform **259**

Steven S. Staal, Mathijn C. Ungerer, Kris L. L. Movig, Jody A. Bartholomew, Hans Krabbe and Jan C. T. Eijkel

12.1	Introduction	259
12.2	Microfluidic Capillary Electrophoresis as a Self-test Platform	261
12.2.1	Conducting a Measurement	261
12.2.2	Measurement Process	262
12.2.3	From Research Technology to Self-test Platform	264
12.3	A Lithium Self-test for Patients with Manic Depressive Illness	267