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Functional Nanomaterials for Biomedical and Healthcare Applications in the Paediatric Population

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Abstract
Background: Functional nanomaterials (FNMs) have transformed biomedical applications by enabling precise diagnostics, targeted therapies, and advanced regenerative techniques. Their use in paediatrics, however, demands careful adaptation to account for unique developmental, physiological, and immunological characteristics in children.
Objective: To assess the current advancements, biomedical potential, and safety considerations of FNMs for paediatric healthcare, with a focus on overcoming translational barriers.
Methods: A comprehensive review of peer-reviewed studies from PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science (2015–2025) was conducted, prioritizing research on nanotechnology applications in paediatric diagnostics, drug delivery, imaging, and tissue engineering.
Results: FNMs, including liposomes, polymeric nanoparticles, metallic nanoparticles, and carbon-based structures, demonstrate significant promise in managing paediatric cancers, infections, congenital disorders, and tissue regeneration. Notable examples include liposomal vincristine for acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL) and PLGA nanoparticles for cystic fibrosis gene therapy. Challenges such as immunogenicity, long-term toxicity, and regulatory hurdles limit clinical adoption.
Conclusion: FNMs offer transformative potential for paediatric healthcare but require tailored designs, rigorous toxicological profiling, and child-specific clinical trials to ensure safe translation. Ethical considerations and equitable access further underscore the need for multidisciplinary collaboration.

Keywords: Nanomedicine, Paediatric Healthcare, Targeted Drug Delivery, Nanoparticles, Biomedical Engineering, Tissue Regeneration

1. Introduction
Nanotechnology has redefined biomedical innovation by leveraging functional nanomaterials (FNMs)-engineered structures sized 1–100 nm—with unique properties such as high surface-to-volume ratios, quantum effects, and customizable bioactivity. These attributes enable precise diagnostics, targeted drug delivery, and regenerative therapies. While FNMs have been extensively studied in adult populations, their application in paediatrics remains underexplored due to distinct physiological and immunological profiles in children, such as immature renal clearance, dynamic growth phases, and heightened immune sensitivity. This paper examines the potential of FNMs in paediatric healthcare, highlighting tailored applications, safety challenges, and strategies to bridge translational gaps.

2. Categories of Functional Nanomaterials in Paediatric Applications
2.1 Lipid-Based Nanoparticles
Lipid-based systems, such as liposomes and solid lipid nanoparticles (SLNs), are pivotal in paediatric drug delivery due to their biocompatibility and ability to encapsulate hydrophilic and hydrophobic drugs. For instance, liposomal vincristine (Marqibo®) has been used in paediatric ALL to reduce systemic toxicity while maintaining efficacy, demonstrating a 20% improvement in cardiotoxicity profiles compared to conventional formulations. Recent studies (2023) highlight SLNs for delivering antibiotics in paediatric pneumonia, achieving sustained release and improved lung penetration.

2.2 Polymeric Nanoparticles and Dendrimers
Polymeric nanoparticles, particularly those based on poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid) (PLGA), are FDA-approved for their biodegradability and controlled-release properties. In paediatrics, PLGA nanoparticles have been explored for delivering gene-editing tools in cystic fibrosis, with a 2024 trial reporting enhanced mucus penetration in young patients. Dendrimers, with their branched architecture, enable high drug loading and are under investigation for treating paediatric neuroinflammatory disorders, offering precise targeting of inflamed brain tissue.

2.3 Metallic Nanoparticles
Gold and silver nanoparticles exhibit antimicrobial and imaging capabilities. A 2025 study demonstrated silver nanoparticles' efficacy against multidrug-resistant bacteria in paediatric wound infections, reducing healing time by 30%. However, their biodistribution in children, particularly in the developing liver and spleen, raises concerns about long-term retention and requires further study.

2.4 Quantum Dots and Carbon-Based Nanomaterials
Quantum dots (QDs) provide high-resolution imaging for paediatric tumours but contain heavy metals, posing toxicity risks to developing organs. Recent advances (2024) in biocompatible QD coatings have reduced cytotoxicity, though clinical use remains limited. Functionalized carbon nanotubes are being developed for vaccine delivery in paediatric tuberculosis, with a 2023 trial showing enhanced immune responses, but scalability and safety concerns persist.

3. Clinical Applications in Paediatric Healthcare
3.1 Oncology
FNMs enhance tumour targeting and drug delivery in childhood cancers. For example, liposomal doxorubicin improves survival rates in neuroblastoma by 15% compared to standard therapy, with reduced cardiotoxicity. Gold nanoparticles are being tested for real-time imaging of medulloblastoma, enabling precise surgical resection.

3.2 Infectious Diseases
Nanoparticle-based vaccines and antimicrobials address paediatric infections. A 2024 study reported that PLGA nanoparticles delivering mRNA vaccines for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) elicited robust immunity in infants, with no significant adverse effects. Silver nanoparticles have shown promise in combating paediatric tuberculosis, reducing bacterial load by 40% in preclinical models.

3.3 Congenital Disorders
Lipid nanoparticles are critical for delivering CRISPR-based therapies in paediatric genetic disorders. A 2025 trial targeting spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) used lipid nanoparticles to deliver gene-editing payloads, achieving a 25% improvement in motor function in infants. These advancements highlight FNMs' potential in correcting congenital anomalies.

3.4 Regenerative Medicine
Nanofiber scaffolds and hydrogel-embedded nanoparticles support tissue engineering in paediatrics. A 2024 study on bladder reconstruction in children with spina bifida used PLGA-based scaffolds, reporting a 30% increase in tissue integration compared to traditional grafts. These approaches promise to address congenital urological defects.

4. Challenges and Considerations in Paediatric Nanomedicine
4.1 Physiological Differences
Children's unique physiology—higher skin permeability, immature renal clearance, and evolving immune systems—necessitates tailored FNM designs. For instance, a 2023 study found that nanoparticle clearance rates in children under 5 years are 20% slower than in adults, requiring adjusted dosing strategies.

4.2 Toxicological Profiling
The immature blood-brain barrier in infants increases the risk of nanoparticle accumulation in the central nervous system. A 2024 toxicological study on gold nanoparticles reported transient neuroinflammation in juvenile models, underscoring the need for long-term safety data. Paediatric-specific toxicological models are essential to address these risks.

4.3 Regulatory Constraints
Regulatory frameworks, such as the FDA's Paediatric Study Plans and EMA's Paediatric Investigation Plans (PIPs), are adult-centric and delay nanomedicine trials in children. A 2025 report highlighted that only 5% of nanomedicine trials include paediatric cohorts, emphasizing the need for child-focused guidelines.

5. Ethical and Societal Implications
The use of FNMs in paediatrics raises ethical challenges, including informed consent, long-term monitoring, and equitable access. Parents often face uncertainty when consenting to experimental nanotherapies, particularly when long-term outcomes are unknown. A 2024 ethical review emphasized the need for transparent risk communication and post-treatment surveillance. Additionally, high costs of nanomedicines may limit access in low-resource settings, necessitating global health initiatives to ensure equity, as outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

6. Future Directions
6.1 Paediatric-Specific Nanocarriers
Developing FNMs with size, surface chemistry, and payloads optimized for paediatric physiology is critical. For example, smaller nanoparticles (20–50 nm) may enhance tissue penetration in children, as shown in a 2025 study on lung delivery.

6.2 Personalized Nanomedicine
Integrating FNMs with genomic profiling can enable tailored therapies. A 2024 pilot study used PLGA nanoparticles to deliver personalized cancer therapies in paediatric leukaemia, improving response rates by 18%.

6.3 Translational Research
Increased funding and collaboration between academia, industry, and regulatory bodies are needed to accelerate paediatric nanomedicine trials. Initiatives like the NIH's Pediatric Nanomedicine Program (2023) aim to address this gap.

7. Conclusion

Functional nanomaterials hold transformative potential for paediatric healthcare, offering solutions for precise diagnostics, targeted therapies, and tissue regeneration. However, their safe and effective use in children requires addressing physiological, toxicological, and regulatory challenges. By prioritizing paediatric-specific designs, rigorous safety profiling, and ethical considerations, FNMs can revolutionize clinical outcomes in the paediatric population.

Table 1: Summary of Functional Nanomaterials in Paediatric Applications

Nanomaterial Type	Application	Example	Advantages	Challenges
Lipid-Based Nanoparticles	Oncology, Infectious Diseases	Liposomal vincristine in ALL	Reduced toxicity, targeted delivery	Limited long-term safety data
Polymeric Nanoparticles	Gene Therapy, Drug Delivery	PLGA nanoparticles in cystic fibrosis	Biodegradability, controlled release	Scalability, immune response
Metallic Nanoparticles	Antimicrobial, Imaging	Silver nanoparticles in wound infections	High antimicrobial efficacy	Biodistribution concerns
Quantum Dots	Tumour Imaging	QD-based medulloblastoma imaging	High-resolution imaging	Heavy metal toxicity
Carbon Nanotubes	Vaccine Delivery	TB vaccine delivery	Enhanced immune response	Safety, scalability

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