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## Introduction to advanced functional nanomaterials for biomedical applications

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Nanotechnology has enabled significant progress in biomedical research within the last few decades. Indeed, materials at the nanoscale present unique and widely tunable physicochemical properties that allow numerous unconventional applications to be achieved, which are otherwise not quite possible at larger length scales. More recently, they have found additional usage when combined with other materials or technologies, enabling multiscale behaviours that are instrumental for applications that require multiplexed functionalities. Thus, the development and design of hybrid multifunctional nanomaterials have brought exciting innovations in nanomedicine, allowing breakthroughs in the potential treatment of many diseases.

This collection of reviews, minireviews, communications and research articles covers the rational design and syntheses of optical, electrical, magnetic and hybrid multifunctional nanomaterials for biomedical applications (e.g., diagnostics, therapies, drug delivery,

theranostics, biosensing and regenerative medicine). Indeed, some nanoparticles, such as iron oxide, gold and carbon-based materials, are able to provide both therapy and imaging modes. Gold nanoparticles can be used as biosensors due to their surface plasmon resonance properties. Hydrogels, liposomes, capsules or polymeric nanoparticles may encapsulate active ingredients, drugs or even nanoparticles. From the nanomaterial perspective, we can roughly group them into inorganic, organic and biological nanomaterials.

Inorganic nanomaterials include mesoporous nanomaterials (silica, carbon *etc.*) and oxide, metallic, carbon-based and upconverting nanoparticles, which display high surface specific areas with optical, magnetic and electronic properties. Notably, T<sub>1</sub> iron oxide nanoparticles can be fabricated as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) contrast agents, a paradigm shift from potentially toxic gadolinium. The deep studies of differently shaped magnetic nanoparticles will help harness their full potentials. The stakes are the control of their size, shape and composition but also their combination to enhance their multifunctionality and, finally, their functionalization to provide good biocompatibility, biodistribution and possibly targeting efficiency. Notably, beside magnetic hyperthermia treatment, photothermal and photodynamic therapy have made significant advances with multifunctional carbon dots, composite enzyme nanogels, anthracene crosslinked nanocomposites and the rapid eradication of bacterial biofilms.

Organic/biological nanomaterials include cell-derived vesicles, lipid nanoparticles, polymer nanoparticles, dendrimers, amino acid-assembled nanoparticles, nucleic acid nanoparticles, hydrogel nanoparticles, *etc.* The most exciting notion also lies here in the combined usage of different materials to address different practical needs. A major challenge in nanomedicine is to design targeted nanoplatforms that allow diagnosis, therapy, and follow-up by imaging (theranostics) adapted to each patient and disease. For example, van der Ven *et al.* develop an injectable hydrogel system that delivers gold nanoparticle–miRNA drug complexes for the treatment of heart diseases. Besides the creation of new functional nanomaterials, we are also excited to see researchers further link their innovations with the actual needs of translational medicine, such as a nanoclay-containing hydrogel to promote muscle proliferation and differentiation.

There are many other topic areas that are worthy of inclusion but were omitted due to space restrictions. As guest editors of this themed collection, we would like to thank all of the authors for the high quality of their contributions. Furthermore, we would like to thank the editorial staff from *Nanoscale* for their support, as well as our reviewers. It is our hope that researchers in chemistry, biology, physics, materials, medicine and beyond will enjoy reading these articles and use them in the next generation of nanomaterials for medical applications.

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**Nguyễn Thị Kim Thanh**

Professor Nguyễn Thị Kim Thanh, FRSC, FInstP, FIMMM FRSB held a prestigious Royal Society University Research Fellowship (2005–2014). She was appointed as a Full Professor in Nanomaterials in 2013 at University College London. She leads a very dynamic group conducting cutting edge interdisciplinary and innovative research on the

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