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A Comprehensive Review of Modified release dosage forms and its Formulation Approaches, In-Vitro Characterizations, and Pharmaceutical Applications

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R Nepolean[1], K Chandramohan[2], K Rajkumar[3]*, D Anbarasu[4] and S Sivasankari[3]

[1]Professor and Principal, Thanthai Roever College of Pharmacy, The Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University, India

[2]Vice Principal & Professor and Head, Department of Pharmaceutics, Thanthai Roever College of Pharmacy, The Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University, India

[3]PG Student, Department of Pharmaceutics, Thanthai Roever College of Pharmacy, The Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University, India

[4]Associate Professor, Department of Pharmaceutics, Thanthai Roever College of Pharmacy, The Tamilnadu Dr. M.G.R. Medical University, India

***Corresponding Author:** K Rajkumar, PG Student, Department of Pharmaceutics, Thanthai Roever College of Pharmacy, Perambalur-621212, Tamilnadu, India.

Abstract

Modified release dosage forms are designed in order to control the release of the drug, optimize the pharmacokinetic profiles and the adherence of patients in comparison to conventional immediate release systems. This review defines the historical evolution, categorization and formulation strategies of these technologies ranging from hydrophilic and hydrophobic matrix systems to reservoir based designs, osmotic mechanisms and gastroretentive approaches. It focuses on how the polymer properties, solubility of the drug and the kinetic pathway affect the controlled release of therapeutics. *In vitro* evaluation methodologies such as dissolution profiling in biorelevant media, mathematical modelling, swelling erosion assessment, morphological characterization and stability evaluation are discussed to demonstrate the use of such methodologies to predict *in vivo* performance. Pharmaceutical application, throughout chronic disease management and site specific delivery, emphasizes the therapeutic benefit of MR systems in the long lasting plasma concentration, decreasing the number of administrations as well as ensuring safety. Emerging trends such as smart responsive materials, AI assisted formulation design and 3D printing are presented as future directions for personalized modified release dosage therapies.

Keywords: Modified release dosage forms; Matrix technology; Osmotic delivery; Gastroretentive systems; controlled drug release

Introduction

Modified released (MR) dosage forms are one of the most active and revolutionary changes in modern drug delivery science. The traditional immediate release formulations can be characterized by rapid absorption of the drug, unpredictable plasma levels, and requirement of frequent dosing, MR systems are carefully designed to control the rate, timing, and spatial distribution of the drug release in the gastrointestinal tract. This controlled modulation provides a number of therapeutic benefits, including sustained plasma concentrations, improved bioavailability, minimized adverse events, improved patient compliance and optimized pharmacokinetic pharmacodynamic (PK-PD) relationships. The scientific bias of MR systems is based on the possibility to adapt the drug release profile, such as sustained, controlled, delayed, pulsatile, targeted, based on physicochemical properties of the active substance and particular clinical requirements [1].

The history of MR technology began with simple hydrophobic wax matrices and polymer-coated tablets that provided a moderate level of control over drug release. As the field of pharmaceutical sciences evolved, the formulation often needed for rapid absorption, fluctuating plasma levels, and frequent administration. A hydrophilic polymer matrix, semi-permeable membrane based reservoir systems, ion exchange resin complexes and osmotic pump platforms significantly enhanced precision of diffusion and osmosis driven release processes. These platforms enabled the use of more predictable and reproducible release kinetics with resultant inter- and intra-patient variability being reduced [2].

During the last few decades, new technologies have dramatically changed the MR landscape. Multiparticulate systems, pellets, granules, microspheres, and beads have come to the forefront due to both their dose flexibility and reduced risk of dose dumping, and physiology robustness of these systems. Gastroretentive MR systems, which include floating, mucoadhesive and expandable formulations, have been the solutions for addressing problems in which the drugs are facing with narrow absorption windows or drugs that are unstable in the intestinal environment [3]. Parallel developments in lipid based carriers, nanostructured systems and hybrid polymer lipid matrices have widened the range of applicable molecules for MR dosage forms even further, to molecules that are poorly soluble or biopharmaceutically difficult to deliver.

Contemporary MR technologies are gaining more and more benefits from digital and computational innovations. 3D and 4D printing allows the production of precision mapped structures that have exceptional customizable release properties, artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms are used for predictive modelling of dissolution behavior, excipient interactions and formulation optimization [4, 5]. These developments are helping to propel MR dosage forms towards a future in which MR dosage forms can be used for personalized therapeutics, where drug release profiles can be individually tailored for a patient and disease state.

Given the tremendous rate of evolution with these technologies, a comprehensive understanding of MR systems is invaluable for researchers as well as formulation scientists [6, 7]. This study is a critical review of the formulation principles, polymeric and technological approaches, in *in vitro* characterization methodologies and pharmaceutical applications of MR dosage forms with emphasis on recent trends and future directions in this area.

Classification and Historical Development of Modified Release Dosage Forms

Conceptual Origin and Need for Modified Release

The development of modified release dosage forms emerged from a basic need to overcome the fast absorption rates and limited duration of immediate release dosage forms. Some of the problems with conventional dosage forms were fluctuating plasma concentrations, frequent dosing administration, and inconsistent therapeutic outcomes. Recognizing these limitations, early pharmaceutical scientists started looking for ways to control the release kinetics of the drug, prolong the duration of exposure, and deliver controlled levels of the drug in the plasma [8, 9]. This conceptual origin laid the foundation for the scientific evolution of modified release drug delivery.

Early and Traditional Modified release dosage form systems

The earliest MR systems emerged in the mid 20th century, and featured mostly the use of hydrophobic wax matrices, sugar coated beads, and simple polymer film coatings. These systems offered a very basic control (diffusion or erosion) and were very critical step forward. The technology was significantly improved with the introduction of hydrophilic polymers such as hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC), sodium alginate, and poly (ethylene oxide) which allowed for swelling controlled release and more predictable sustained release. These systems in the early days were the backbone of traditional sustained and controlled release dosage forms [10].

Expansion into Conventional Controlled-Release Technologies

As formulation science advanced, more complex platforms of MR technologies became available. Multiparticulate systems, such as pellets, granules, microspheres and microcapsules, attracted much attention because of their consistent distribution on the gastrointestinal tract, their ability to decrease dose dumping, and their flexibility across patient populations [1, 11]. Reservoir based devices using semipermeable membranes and ion exchange resin complex were used with the more reproducible modulation of release. The development of osmotic pump system, especially OROS tablets was used to achieve the zero order release independent of biological factors.

Emergence of Specialized and Targeted MR Platforms

Modern pharmaceutical challenges, including poor solubility, inconsistent absorption and short drug half lives have led to the development of specialized MR systems. Gastroretentive platforms are floating, mucoadhesive, and expandable systems that achieve prolonged gastric residence to provide ample time for drugs that have a narrow absorption window. Lipid based MR systems, nanostructured lipid carriers, and polymer lipid hybrid matrices for controlling the release of BCS II and BCS IV drugs. These technologies increase the applicability of MR to the therapeutic management of complex molecules and chronic disease [12, 13, 14].

Integration of Advanced Materials and Engineering Approaches

Advancements in polymer chemistry, material engineering and nanotechnology further developed MR systems. Novel biodegradable polymers, stimuli responsive materials and hybrid nanocomposites enable designers to finely control the drug diffusion, erosion and degradation mechanisms. Microfabrication techniques are used to introduce drug depots that include microchannels with engineered porosity for fine controlled release for precision therapies [15].

Next-Generation and Future MR Innovations

The latest advancements revolutionize the potential of MR drug delivery to a new era of personalization and adaptability. 3D and 4D printing makes it possible to achieve intricate internal geometries, as well as dynamic and stimuli responsive materials. Smart MR systems with the ability to respond to pH, temperature, magnetic fields or enzymes are being investigated for chronotherapy and targeting diseases. Additionally, artificial intelligence and machine learning are contributing to the formulation prediction, dissolution modelling and excipient optimization. These new generation innovations make MR technologies integral parts of precision medicine of the future [16].

Formulation Approaches in Modified-Release Dosage Forms

Hydrophilic Matrix Systems

Hydrophilic matrix systems are one of the most commonly used approaches employed in modified release dosage design. Swellable polymers in the form of hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC), hydroxypropyl cellulose (HPC), poly (ethylene oxide) (PEO), xanthan gum, guar gum and sodium alginate in these formulations. When these polymers are exposed to the aqueous environment of the gastrointestinal tract, they quickly hydrate to vesicle, in that a viscous gel network is formed which effectively encapsulates the dosage form. This gel barrier is the first barrier of diffusional and erosional control that acts along the gastrointestinal passage to control drug release. The rate of hydration, polymer viscosity grade, gel strength, and drug to polymer ratio have a significant impact on the thick-

ness and stability of the gel layer, and therefore modulate the rate of drug release. Hydrophilic matrices are very versatile and can be used with water soluble as well as poorly soluble drugs [17, 18, 19].

Hydrophobic Matrix Systems

In terms of the sustained release drug delivery, hydrophobic matrices are designed by adding a host of water insoluble excipients such as ethyl cellulose, glyceryl behenate, stearic acid, hydrogenated vegetable oils, carnauba wax, and fatty alcohols of different types to provide a barrier that hinders the penetration of aqueous medium. Consequently, the rate of influx of dissolution medium into the matrix is significantly retarded, which reduces the rate of dissolution of the therapeutic agent. The rate of release obtained in these systems are mostly due to the diffusion in hydrophobic pores or surface limited erosion of the polymeric scaffold over a prolonged period of time [20, 21, 22]. This technique is particularly beneficial when considering highly water soluble pharmaceuticals that normally disintegrate prematurely if formulated with standard hydrophilic matrices, at the same time, the hydrophobic barrier confers strong moisture stability while rescuing molecules that are prone to oxidation. Advanced processing strategies such as melt granulation and hot melt extrusion have been shown to improve the homogenous distribution of such hydrophobic carriers which ensure uniform release profiles across huge production batches.

Reservoir (Membrane Controlled) Systems

Reservoir systems represent a central drug core that is packaged in semi permeable, rate-controlling membrane, which is made up from polymers such as cellulose acetate, ethyl cellulose, polyvinyl acetate or acrylic copolymers such as Eudragit. Drug liberation occurs as the gastrointestinal fluids penetrate the membrane, dissolving the core and facilitating the diffusion of the solubilized drug through the membrane matrix, or through programmed sized micropores. The permeability, thickness of walls and uniformity of this membrane are the main factors which will determine the release behaviour. Consequently, reservoir formulations offer a reliable platform for finely modulating extended, or delayed, release, which is especially useful in multiparticulate pellets, mini- and coated tablets where uniformity of dosage form and patient compliance are of the utmost importance [23].

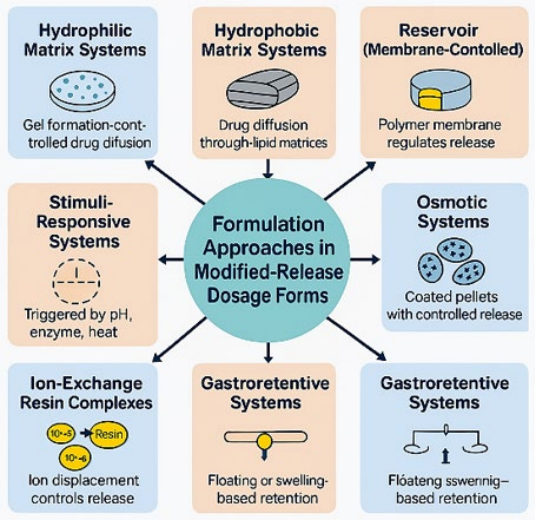

Figure 1: Novel approaches of Modified release dosage form.

Osmotic Drug Delivery Systems

Osmotic drug delivery systems (ODDS) use osmotic pressure gradients as the basic driving force for releasing the drug. These devices usually involve an osmogen (usually sodium chloride or potassium chloride) sandwiched inside a semi permeable membrane composed of cellulose acetate with an orifice drilled at the exact scale at the microscopic level. Upon exposure to aqueous environments, water permeates the membrane, thereby creating an internal osmotic pressure of elevated levels, which forces the drug solution or suspension through the orifice at zero order rate [24]. Such a mechanism efficiently separates drug release from variable gastrointestinal pH, motility, and fed fasted states and thus ensures a very robust and steady state plasma concentration profile that is indispensable for a long-term, chronic therapeutic regimen.

Multiparticulate Delivery Systems

Multiparticulate drug delivery systems such as pellets, granules, beads, microspheres and microcapsules provide the multiplicity of formulation and therapeutic benefits over single unit dosage forms. By achieving a consistent dispersion throughout the gastrointestinal tract, such systems reduce the risk of dose dumping and increase the reproducibility of drug release. Conventional manufacturing techniques such as extrusion spheronization, spray drying, layering onto inert spheres and microencapsulation are routinely employed. The use of functional polymer coatings allows one to achieve sustained, controlled, pulsatile or delayed release profiles. Consequently, multiparticulate systems are especially indicated for pediatric and geriatric populations as well as for drugs which require flexible dosing schedules [25, 26].

Gastroretentive Drug Delivery Systems

Gastroretentive systems are designed to increase the gastric residence time of the drug, thereby enhancing the solubility and bioavailability of medications for which the absorption window is narrow, or pH dependent solubility. These strategies include the use of floating systems based on gas generating agents, swelling matrices based on expansion beyond the pyloric diameter, mucoadhesive formulations based on chitosan or carbomers and high-density tablets that are designed to resist gastric emptying. The cumulative effect of these approaches is an increased therapeutic efficacy for agents such as levodopa, metformin, ciprofloxacin by keeping the drug at the optimal place in the stomach for optimal absorption time [26, 27].

Ion Exchange Resin Complexes

Ion exchange resins forms the complexes with the drug molecules through ionic interactions and, therefore, release the drug in a controlled manner based on the displacement of ions in the gastrointestinal environment. This technology offers a dual benefit of both controlled release kinetics and effective taste masking and therefore improved patient compliance. Polystyrene sulfonate based resins and polymethacrylic acid derivatives are commonly used in liquid matrix to release formulations that act as suspension, syrups, and chewable dosage forms, and they provide an elegant format solution when the patient's compliance is a primary obstacle to ingesting a medication [25].

Lipid Based and Nanostructured Carriers

Lipid based systems include solid lipid nanoparticles (SLNs), nanostructured lipid carriers (NLCs), lipospheres and lipid matrices, which provide sustained release due to lipid crystallinity, controlled enzymatic degradation and diffusion across lipid compartments. These formulations usually enhance the solubility and bioavailability of lipophilic substances. Moreover, they promote lymphatic uptake and thus reduce first pass metabolism and help to increase systemic exposure, which is a critical consideration for drugs with poor oral bioavailability [28, 29, 30].

Advanced and Stimuli-Responsive Systems

Contemporary sustained release platforms are well integrated stimuli responsive materials to physicochemical stimuli such as, pH, temperature, enzymatic activity, redox potential, magnetic fields or light. Such systems are capable of unparalleled programmability

and patient specific modification of drug release kinetics. Emerging technologies such as 3D printing, 4D shape transforming polymers, nanocomposites and micro fabricated drug depots allow to control the structure, porosity and release kinetics of implants [31]. These innovations provides the personalized controlled drug delivery.

In-Vitro Characterization of Modified-Release Dosage Forms

Physicochemical and Preformulation Analysis

The characterization of modified releasing dosage forms is opened by a systematic physicochemical evaluation of both active pharmaceutical ingredient and excipients. Key parameters (aqueous solubility, pKa, partition coefficient (log P), hygroscopicity) limit the choice of an adequate strategy of release modification. Advanced solid state methods, such as differential scanning calorimetry (DSC), thermogravimetric analysis (TGA), Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) and powder X ray diffracted analysis (XRD) provide important insight into thermal transitions, polymorphic states, drug excipient compatibility and crystals evolutions throughout the formulation development process. Complementary evaluation methods of powder flow indices, particle size distribution and compressibility provide insight to the manufacturability and consistency of the final dosage form [32, 33, 34].

In Vitro Dissolution Studies and Release Profiling

Dissolution testing forms the backbone of evaluation of a modified release drug and gives the time dependent profile of drug's release. There are still the United States Pharmacopeia's Apparatus I and II for matrix and coated formulations, and Apparatus III and IV for improved bio relevance of complex systems like osmotic pumps, multiparticulate, and nanostructured carriers. Utilization of biorelevant media synthetic gastric fluid (SGF), simulated intestinal fluid (SIF), FaSSIF (fasted state intestinal fluid), and FeSSIF (fed state intestinal fluid) closely replicates the physiological transition and increases the *in vivo* predictive capability. For delayed and pulsatile release systems, the release behavior should be captured by deployment of pH- and timed switch methods and so called staged dissolution protocols [35, 36, 37].

Mathematical Modeling and Kinetic Interpretation

Mathematical modeling uses raw data of a dissolution process and turns it into a mechanistic result. The zero order model, which is characterized by a constant drug release rate, differs from that of first border which suggests concentration dependence. The Higuchi model explains diffusion controlled transport in porous matrices, while the Korsmeyer Peppas equation allows distinguishing between anomalous transport mechanisms as well as combining diffusion and erosion [38, 39]. Flexible curve fitting methods, such as the Weibull and Hoffenberg models are especially useful in the case of heterogeneous systems. Ultimately, the results from the kinetic modeling can not only be used in the optimization of the formulation, but they can also be used in quality control and regulatory justification.

Swelling, Erosion, and Gel Layer Dynamics

Hydrophilic matrix systems rely highly on polymer swelling and gel formation of the layers. Empirical swelling index studies are used to quantify the hydration kinetics while the erosion assays are applied to quantify the rate of polymer dissolution and matrix degradation. Gel strength measurements and front imaging techniques provided by confocal or stereo microscopy give direct information about gel layer thickness and structural integrity with dissolution. Correlating these physicochemical evaluations with the observed drug release mechanisms is still a crucial step in drug *in vivo* performances [40, 41, 42].

Structural and Morphological Characterization

Surface Topology and Internal Microstructure have a decisive influence on the drug release performance. Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) is used to reveal pores, defects of the coatings, and polymer distribution, and atomic force microscopy (AFM) provides the nanoscale roughness data of the surface. Cross sectional imaging determines uniformity of layers, adhesion of coating, and architecture of pellets or tablets and helps to provide a complete snapshot of dosage form physical attributes. Post dissolution morphological

analysis further clarifies the role of the mechanism of action, such as pore formation, surface erosion or membrane rupture that provides understanding of a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted dynamics controlling modified-release drug delivery [43, 44].

Mechanical Integrity, Robustness, and Performance Testing

Mechanical characterization can be used to verify that the modified release dosage forms maintain their structural integrity during handling, and transit, throughout the gastrointestinal tract. Parameters such as hardness, friability, tensile strength and robustness studies should be carefully studied to get an understanding of mechanical stability influence with alteration of formulation. Pump tablets, multiparticulate and coated systems require special testing of impact resistance. Mechanical performance can have a direct impact on the release kinetics and performance.

Stability, Storage Behavior, and Release Profile Retention

Stability studies conducted under ICH standardized conditions are necessary to determine the long term stability of the dosage form characteristics. Accelerated, intermediate and real time stability testing is needed to evaluate the integrity of the chemicals at the molecular level, moisture sensitivity, physical consistency and retention of release profiles. Dissolution testing of stability samples establishes if MR performance is maintained or changed by the degradation of polymers, changes in crystallinity or the instability of coatings. These assessments are essential to approval by the authorities and for setting shelf life [45].

Pharmaceutical Applications of Modified-Release Dosage Forms

Chronic Disease Management

Modified release dosage forms are widely used in chronic therapeutic fields where maintaining a constant drug exposure is crucial. Cardiovascular drugs like diltiazem, metoprolol and nifedipine have an advantage with sustained release profiles that will minimize plasma fluctuations, decrease dosing frequency and increase adherence. In the case of diabetes, prolonged release metformin enhances absorption, minimizes gastrointestinal intolerance and stabilizes glycemic control.

Central Nervous System Disorders

Modified release systems are being used routinely to control psychiatric and neurological conditions that need constant doses of drugs. Extended release drugs for antipsychotics and antidepressants and anticonvulsants address the problems of neurotoxicity, breakthrough symptoms, and compliance. MR opioid formulations have an additional benefit of providing prolonged analgesia with abuse deterrent mechanisms.

Respiratory and Pain Management

For respiratory diseases, modified release theophylline and leukotrienes are the main antagonists which provide sustained bronchodilation, and enhance circadian rhythm. Chronic pain therapy benefits from modified release opioid systems assure for longevity of analgesia, reduction of dosing frequency, and improved patient compliance [46].

Gastroretentive and Site-Specific Delivery

Modified release technologies improve the performance of drugs with narrow absorption windows or those drugs with pH- dependent solubility. Gastroretentive systems increase gastric residence time, hence increasing bioavailability of molecules like levodopa, baclofen, and ciprofloxacin. Enteric and colon targeted modified release formulations are the most efficient way to treat diseases in the gastrointestinal tract, such as inflammatory bowel disease and ulcerative colitis risk.

Biopharmaceutics of Poorly Soluble and High-Potency Drugs

Lipid based and nanostructured modified release carriers that enhance dissolution rate and controlled release of poorly water soluble or high potency molecule. These are platforms that provide a reduction in frequency of dosing, along with more predictable

pharmacokinetics.

Pediatric and Geriatric Applications

Multiparticulate MR dosage forms including pellets, sprinkles and ion exchange resin suspensions offer flexibility in dosing regimen, increased swallowability and safety profile to the pediatric and geriatric population. These systems allow for accuracy in dose change and ensure a uniformity of coverage [47].

Chronotherapy and Circadian-Driven Delivery

There are several modified release platforms used for chronotherapeutic purposes that synchronize the release of drugs with specific circadian rhythms. Such systems are useful for diseases such as asthma, hypertension, and rheumatoid arthritis, for which symptom severity varies in predictable ways on daily patterns [48].

Future Perspectives

Future development of modified release dosage forms will be driven by the convergence of smart materials, sophisticated engineering and data driven formulation. Smart, stimuli-responsible polymers that can modulate drug release in response to changes in, for example, pH, enzymes, temperature or biological signals will allow for more adaptive and patient specific therapies. Additive manufacturing technologies specifically 3D printing and 4D printing will transform MR formulations by allowing the precise customization of structures as well as multi layered architectures and on demand personalization [49]. Artificial intelligence and machine learning will become more important in predictive modeling of release kinetics, excipient interaction, and optimization of formulation parameters, thus shortening development cycles. Nanotechnology driven systems such as hybrid nanocarriers and multifunctional lipid polymer systems will enable controlled delivery of complicated molecules such as peptides and poorly soluble APIs. Moreover, sustainable manufacturing strategies using biodegradable polymers and solvent-free processing will dictate environmentally accountable modified release manufacture and will position pharmaceutical innovation in sustainability alignment in global level.

Innovations	***Description***	***Advantages***	***Limitations***
Smart Sense and Drug Release Systems	Dosage forms which monitor biological signals (pH spikes, enzyme, inflammation) and then release drugs in response to a need.	Allows real time adjustive therapy and minimum calculation error when the dosing is required.	Some of the most sensitive materials and their triggers have to be tuned very fine.
AI-Designed MR Blueprints	AI postulates optimal polymers, architecture, and route of release before starting the formulation.	Reduces time of experimentation and provides the company with the most optimized drug profiles.	Deeply relies on data libraries of high quality.
Programmable 4D-Printed Tablets	Tablets which can alter the shape or porosity or release behavior upon ingestion	Presents one system of an individualized release pattern and multi-phase dosing	Limited printable pharmaceutical grade smart materials.
Nano-Hybrid MR Microcarriers	Combination of lipids, polymers, and nanoparticles to produce multiple-layered multi-acting carriers.	Increases solubility, targeting and increases the action of the therapeutic activity.	Complicated fabrication and scale up problems.
Sustainable, Patient Specific MR Platforms	Solvent free, green polymers and patient genomics.	Reduces environment foot print and supports precision medicine.	Needs high-tech diagnostics and environmentally friendly excipients.

Table 1: Innovative Future Perspectives of Modified Release Dosage Forms.

Conclusion

These modified release dosage forms have become extremely advanced drug administration platforms that can optimize therapy results using regulated, sustained, and specific drug delivery techniques. Emerging technology of polymer science, multiparticulate technologies, osmotic systems, lipid based carriers, and nanotechnology have greatly expanded their applicability in various fields of therapeutics. Detailed reservoir characterization guarantees mechanistic insights and entire performance reliability, and fortifies clinical reliability. Future modified release systems can be very personalized, flexible, and sustainable with the emerging innovations (stimuli responsive materials, AI driven design and 3D or 4D printing). Taken together, MR technologies are still driving patient centered, effective, and precision directed pharmaceutical treatment.

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