Cancer metastasis-on-a-chip

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Published: 01/01/2013

Document Version
Accepted manuscript including changes made at the peer-review stage

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Download date: 11. Dec. 2018
Aim of the project

The aim is to create microfluidic devices that can be used to model and study (in vitro and real time) cancer metastasis from a primary tumor to a secondary site as happens in the human body.

Introduction

Cancer:
- number one cause of death in the Netherlands
- 12 million new cancer cases in 2008 globally
- WHO: this number will be doubled by 2030

urgent clinical need for new treatment options

Organ-on-chips: Creating a microenvironment inside a microfluidic chip where “mini-organs” can grow within their own specified microenvironment, and function and interact as in intact organs.¹ Lung-on-a-chip (Fig. 1) is one of the first examples in this field.

Limitations

- not representative of what happens in humans
- no direct and live observations of the processes
- ethical issues

New in-vitro models needed

Conceptual design:
The device contains a microchannel representing a blood vessel (bottom block) and organ micro-chambers (top block) where tumor cells and cells of the metastatic site are cultured. A porous membrane is also sandwiched between the blocks. In this configuration, the membrane is used as a substrate to culture cells on both sides, and forms the interface between the organs and the blood vessel.

As shown in Fig. 3, the chip is designed to study the invasiveness of the tumor cells and also the metastasis of the circulating tumor cells into a second organ.

What is new?

- Mimicking the contact between the blood vessel cellular layer and the tumor cell cultures
- Having different cell types in the organ chamber co-cultured in a structured and realistic manner
- Including static/dynamic stimulating elements for tumor cell migrations: chemical, mechanical and geometrical.

Collaborations:

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References:


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