

MINI-REVIEW

Biosensitive and antibacterial coatings on metallic material for medical applications

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Abstract

Metallic materials are commonly used for load-bearing implants and as internal fixation devices. It is customary to use austenitic stainless steel, especially surgical grade type 316L SS as temporary and Ti alloys as permanent implants. However, long-term, poor bonding with bone, corrosion, and release of metal ions, such as chromium and nickel occur. These ions are powerful allergens and carcinogens and their uncontrolled leaching may be avoided by surface coatings. Therefore, bioactive glasses (BGs) became a vital biomedical material, which can form a biologically active phase of hydroxycarbonate apatite on their surface when in contact with physiological fluids. To reduce the high coefficient of friction and the brittle nature of BGs, polymers are normally incorporated to avoid the high-temperature sintering/densification of ceramic-only coatings. For medical application, electrophoretic deposition (EPD) is now used for polymer (organic) and ceramic (inorganic) components at room temperature due to its simplicity, control of coating thickness and uniformity, low cost of equipment, ability to coat substrates of intricate shape and to supply thick films in composite form, high purity of deposits as well as no phase transformation during coating. Although extensive research has been conducted on polymer/inorganic composite coatings, only some studies have reported multifunctional properties, such as biological antibacterial activity, enhanced cell adhesion, controlled drug release ability, and mechanical properties. This review will focus on biodegradable coatings, including zirconium, chitosan, gelatin, cellulose loaded with antibacterial drugs/metallic ions/natural herbs on biostable substrates (PEEK/PMMA/PCL/PLLA layers), which have the potential of multifunctional coating for metallic implants.

KEYWORDS

bioceramics, biocomposites, biomaterials, biopolymers, bone and teeth implants

1 | INTRODUCTION

Stainless steel-based implants are frequently used in orthopedic and other applications. These implants have limitations due to their bioinert nature and the potential of uncontrolled release of metallic ions under

physiological conditions, which restricts the use of stainless steel for clinical applications (Rehman, Bastan, et al., 2017; Rehman, Ferraris, et al., 2017; Torkaman et al., 2017). One of the inherent problems of prosthesis implantation is the fixation and maintenance of a stable interface between the device and the host tissue at the cellular and organ

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level (Kitsugi et al., 1996). The method of prosthesis fixation is based on mechanical fixation (through screws, bolts, nuts, etc.), bone cement fixation (pure or composite cement), biological fixation (simple porous ingrowth or modified by electrical and pulsed electromagnetic field stimulation), and direct bonding fixation (chemical) (Duan & Wang, 2006). However, most frequent fixation problems are related to (i) infection, (ii) wear, (iii) migration and failure of implants, and (iv) implant loosening (Anthony et al., 1990; Geetha et al., 2009). These problems manifest into osteolysis in the bone bed, which is the major cause of long-term implant loosening (Maloney et al., 1990; Purdue et al., 2006). Therefore, there is a need for development of material for orthopedic implants that has a low wear rate.

Wear is the mechanical removal of material during the process of relative motion between two or more contacting surfaces, which can affect the performance of joint prosthesis. Abrasive, adhesive, fatigue, and corrosive mechanisms can be applied through the wear of metal components of joint prostheses. In addition, severe wear followed by mechanical damage may lead to the premature failure of prostheses (Kamachimudali et al., 2003), and corrosion of bioimplants in the physiological environment takes place via electrochemical reactions (Gurappa, 2002; Manivasagam et al., 2010). The electrochemical reactions that occur on the surface of the implanted alloy are identical to those observed during exposure to seawater, that is, aerated sodium chloride. Metals and alloys used as surgical implants induce passivity by the presence of surface protective films, which inhibit corrosion and limit, to some extent, the usage (Rondelli & Vicentini, 1999). Major types of corrosion faced by currently used implant material are pitting, crevice, galvanic, intergranular stress-corrosion cracking, corrosion fatigue, and fretting corrosion (Barbosa, 2016). It is, therefore, customary to use austenitic stainless steels, especially surgical grade type 316L SS as temporary implants (Kamachimudali et al., 2003). Surgical grade type 316L stainless steel orthopedic implants could corrode in the physiological environment and release toxic metal ions, such as iron, chromium, and nickel, which are powerful causes for allergies and carcinogens (Hanawa, 2004). Failure analyses of grade implants have shown that about 90% of them were triggered by pitting and crevice corrosion (Sivakumar & Rajeswari, 1992).

To date, many aspects have been addressed by modifying the surface of stainless steel and other metallic implants, such as titanium (Ti) alloys. The surface modification of metals can improve the interface between the implant and surrounding tissue at biological, chemical, and physical levels (Pishbin et al., 2013; Seuss et al., 2015; Torkaman et al., 2017). Surface coatings also address various other aspects, such as bioactivity, corrosion resistance, and cell adhesion by fabricating composite coatings, for instance, by thermal and plasma spraying of hydroxyapatite (HA) (Cordero-Arias & Boccaccini, 2017; Radda'a et al., 2017). The lack of bioactivity of metals has been addressed by using bioactive glass (BG) (Ciraldo et al., 2019; Wajda et al., 2018), first invented by Hench (2006), which supports the formation of bonds between the implant and bone (Kumar et al., 2017). The mechanism might be the slow release of calcium and silicon ions at critical concentrations, which stimulate cell proliferation and growth. The relatively high stiffness of BG can cause long-term stress shielding in high load-bearing applications

(Hench & Jones, 2015). Metallic ions, including silver, strontium, and copper and many more are now incorporated in BG (Rehman, Bastan, et al., 2017; Rehman, Ferraris, et al., 2017; Tejido-Rastrilla et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2018), and exhibit features, such as antibacterial effects and angiogenesis (El-Rashidy, Waly, Gad, Röther, et al., 2018; Kaya et al., 2018; Goodman et al., 2013; Williams, 1987).

Composite coatings comprising biopolymers and BG reduce (i) the stress shielding effect, (ii) inhibit the uncontrolled release of toxic ions, and (iii) improve the attachment and proliferation of osteoblasts (Mehdipour & Afshar, 2012). These support the cellular interaction between the natural bone and implant. Thus, implanted medical devices should also provide resistance against the growth of bacterial biofilms (regardless of the implant material), which is one of the primary reasons for implant failure (Navarro et al., 2008). Consequently, there is a need to inhibit the growth of biofilms because they are resistant to the immune system and antibiotics (Boccaccini et al., 2010; Ferraris et al., 2010, 2012; Pishbin et al., 2013; Seuss et al., 2015). Systemic drug management is less useful because of improper blood circulation and low concentration of antibiotics at the injury site. However, the local delivery of drugs and metallic ions, including copper, silver, zinc, and biomolecules (i.e., antibacterial peptides) is a way to deal with infections because local delivery systems maintain a high concentration of bioactive agents at the desired site. Furthermore, local drug delivery systems allow the controlled release of drugs, thus decreasing possible cytotoxic effects associated with uncontrolled drug release (Baino et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2014; Ouyang et al., 2016; Pishbin et al., 2013, 2014). Nevertheless, extensive use of antibiotics has triggered the growth of antibacterial-resistant strains, which are regarded now as a “global threat.” As a result, alternative procedures for dealing with bacterial infections need to be pursued (Ferraris et al., 2010, 2012; Pishbin et al., 2013).

2 | IMPLANTABLE BIOMATERIALS

Biomaterials are mostly of natural or synthetic nature, and normally a product of multiple components that interact with the biological system. They can be classified into the following groups: metal, bioceramics, biopolymers, and biocomposites (Ballarre et al., 2020; Gritsch et al., 2018a, 2018b; Thamaraiselvi & Rajeswari, 2004; Valiev et al., 2008). Another classification of biomaterial was proposed by Hench and Thompson (2010) for orthopedic implants on the basis of their bioactivity and resorbability, for example, “class A” biomaterials, which are osteo-productive (their surface is colonized by osteogenic stem cells *in vivo*); and “class B” biomaterials, which are osteoconductive and act as a scaffold for cells (Jones, 2013).

Normal metals are bioinert and easy to mold into any shape. They possess high mechanical strength, are fatigue-resistance but corrosive, and can cause toxicity due to active ion release. Passive metals, however, including gold, titanium, chromium, zirconium, have acceptable low corrosion rates, and their corrosion products, although in small amounts, can be found in surrounding tissues and can cause adverse effects (Williams, 1987). Therefore, in modern medical engineering, these metals are coated with

ceramics as these polymers have excellent elastic moduli and are useful as scaffolds for complicated structures. Bioceramics are of versatile nature (bioinert/active/degradable), of good biocompatibility, and able to regenerate bone. They have been used for the repair and reconstruction of damaged parts of the skeleton (Hench, 1991). Natural forms of biopolymers are derived from living organisms, including collagen, cellulose, chitosan, and synthetic polymers, such as polyurethane, polytetrafluoroethylene, polylactic acid, which can be fabricated with tailored properties and architecture from different monomers. Synthetic biopolymers have, however, better mechanical properties and controlled degradation rates compared with natural polymers; thus, their degradation product can cause some local effects, that is, lowering of pH that may lead to cell or tissue necrosis (Mohanty et al., 2005).

Orthopedic implants are important for treating bone traumas caused by disease or accident. Over the years, the demand for implantable biomaterial that can be used in orthopedics, cardiology, dental and vascular therapy, trauma, spine, and wound care has risen sharply (Łapa et al., 2019, 2020; Unalan, Endlein, et al., 2019; Unalan, Slavik, et al., 2019; Winkler et al., 2018). Now, they have become standard practice in modern medicine and range from small implants, such as bolts and nuts to stabilize fractured bones or dental implants to replace teeth, to total hip replacements. Metallic implants, including 316L stainless steel, titanium, and cobalt-chromium alloys are those most extensively used for fracture fixation and bone remodeling. Due to their longstanding stability under a highly aggressive physiochemical *in vivo* environment and outstanding mechanical properties, they have good wear, corrosion, and friction resistance. But in the physiological environment, these materials may be degraded and trigger the release of unwanted metal ions that damage local tissues, cause inflammatory reactions, and osteolysis of surrounding tissue. These reactions can damage the fixation, which can be seen as the possible origin of implant failure. Stainless steel implants are considered inferior to Ti alloy implants with regard to osseointegration, biocompatibility, and corrosion resistance. Hence, 316L stainless steel is to date only used for short-term bone fracture fixation in the form of fracture plates, nails, and screws (Sumita, 1997).

When the implant comes in contact with body tissue, a biofilm can form on its surface. In the initial phase, bacteria engage passively with the surface of the implant. During the later stage, a biofilm develops that can grow by forming extracellular polymeric substances and polysaccharide intercellular adhesins, which are especially dangerous if caused by multiresistant bacteria contracted during surgery; this can lead to infections and implant rejection (Arciola et al., 2012).

With the increased demand for metallic implants for body part replacements, it is, therefore, imperative to overcome the infection-related limitations of the materials by designing implants to be infection-resistant. Furthermore, the issue of low osseointegration of orthopedic implant material with the adjacent bone tissue needs to be addressed. As infections give rise to bacteria forming a biofilm on

the implant, implant surfaces must be functionalized to inhibit or prevent biofilm growth. There are several methods, such as adding silver ions or antibacterial drugs to the surface and modifying the surface roughness (Campoccia et al., 2013).

3 | BONES, TEETH, AND HA

The main inorganic components of bone and tooth enamel are calcium phosphate (Ca:P) comprising calcium cations together with orthophosphate, pyrophosphate, and metaphosphate anions and sometimes with hydroxide or hydrogen ions (Eliaz & Metoki, 2017). Calcium phosphate (Ca:P) at a ratio of 1.67 has a similar composition to natural bone and is the most widely used form of HA (Lertcumfu et al., 2016). It can be extracted from natural sources or is prepared in the laboratory. HA forms crystals in a physiological medium and binds strongly to the bone; it is biocompatible, bioactive, and osteoconductive and is considered to be an excellent bone graft material (Sobczak-Kupiec et al., 2017). Nano-HA (1–100 nm), which possesses a high surface area, can easily be integrated into cells and promotes osteoblast adhesion, differentiation, proliferation, and osteointegration (Mondal et al., 2017). Due to its uniform microstructure and chemical homogeneity, it enhances the calcium deposition on its surface leading quickly to newly formed bone tissue and inhibiting abnormal growth of cancer cells in bone, liver, and throat. The physical properties (solubility, degradability, and mechanical behavior) depend on the particle size, and its degradation rate can stimulate bone growth in a physiological setting and exhibits excellent mechanical strength compared with bulk particles. A lot of research has been done on synthesizing nano-HA particles with physical, mechanical, chemical, and biological properties similar to natural bone. To improve the biological properties of the HA nanoparticles, a number of researchers have synthesized metal-doped or metal-substituted HA nanoparticles. Ion substitution in the HA structure, for example, replacing OH⁻ ions with ions of comparable charge and size, such as F⁻ and Cl⁻ is possible. The sites for PO₄³⁻ ions can also be substituted by silicate ions and calcium cations by Ag⁺, Zn²⁺, Ce³⁺, Mg²⁺, or Sr²⁺. Some ions, such as Cu²⁺ occupy, however, an interstitial position in the HA lattice structure. In a partial exchange, fractions of anions or cations can be replaced by substitution (Cacciotti, 2016).

Nevertheless, differences in ionic radii and surface charge for the incoming versus departing ion can be critical. Doping ions of different charge, for example, phosphate with carbonate ions, is also conceivable. Under this condition, a positively charged vacancy is created, which is then counteracted by the synchronized loss of one calcium (Ca²⁺) cation and one hydroxyl anion (OH⁻). Metal doping or ion substitution can change the physical properties of HA. Ion doping has a wide range of applications in biomedical sciences, including biocompatible coatings, enhanced bone regeneration, drug delivery, and biomarkers for medical and antimicrobial purposes (Dorozhkin, 2013; Karthika et al., 2015; Ratnayake et al., 2017; Tite et al., 2018).

4 | RESPONSES TO IMPLANTS

Cell attachment is connected with the interaction of the biomaterial with collagen, adsorption of proteins, and cells on biomaterial surfaces followed by bone formation. In a physiological environment, the biomaterial can release ionic products, which increase local concentration, for example, Ca^{2+} and PO_4^{3-} ions, and the precipitation of apatite layer on its surface bonds to bone (Choi et al., 2014). Bone grafts and implants must be biocompatible and should not elicit local or systemic toxic effects. Four kinds of tissue responses to implants are known: (i) if toxic material is present, the surrounding tissue will die; (ii) if a graft/material is nontoxic but inert, fibrous tissue will surround the material; (iii) if the material is nontoxic and bioactive, then an interfacial bond will be formed between the material and tissue; (iv) if the material is nontoxic and dissolves, then the surrounding tissue will be replaced. Many studies have shown that all kinds of calcium phosphate are biocompatible both in vitro and in vivo (Eliaz & Metoki, 2017). The first body response on the implantation of a bone graft or biomaterial is inflammation, which is followed by the ingrowth of preosteoblasts and their differentiation into osteoblasts. This process can take a few days, depending on the implanted material and is followed by osteoinduction, osteoconduction, and mechanical support, which takes weeks to years and depends on the nature of the biomaterial.

5 | METAL IONS AS DOPANTS

Over the years, there has been a huge rise in antibiotic-resistant bacterial strains, which has limited the use of antibiotics in infection control. Microorganisms express resistance against antibiotics through a variety of mechanisms, that is, preventing the penetration through the cell membrane, expulsion via efflux pumps, modification of the target, and inactivating proteins. Another cause of the ineffectiveness of antibiotics is biofilm formation around orthopedic implants, as antibiotics cannot penetrate through biofilms (Li & Webster, 2018).

Consequently, metal ions have been used as dopants in bioceramics and biomaterials to induce resistance against fungi and bacteria. These include silver, zinc, copper, cerium, strontium, magnesium, nickel, titanium, europium, yttrium ions, and anions, such as selenium and fluoride (Alshemary et al., 2015; Ciraldo et al., 2018; El-Rashidy, Waly, Gad, Hashem, et al., 2018; El-Rashidy, Waly, Gad, Röther, et al., 2018; Gritsch et al., 2018a, 2018b; Łapa et al., 2019, 2020; Wajda et al., 2019). Thus, the antimicrobial properties of these metals depend on their physical state and surface properties, which rely on the method of synthesis. Radovanovic et al. (2014) synthesized silver-substituted HA by the coprecipitation method, which showed antibacterial action against *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Klebsiella pneumonia*, *Providencia stuartii*, and *Citrobacter freundii*. Unalan, Slavik, et al. (2019) demonstrated that Cu-HA coating deposited on titanium substrate by the electrophoretic deposition (EPD) method had a significant

antibacterial effect on *Escherichia coli* strains. Co-substitution of Ag-(tri-calcium phosphate [TCP]) lattice with copper ions showed even higher antibacterial properties than Ag-TCP used against *E. coli* and *S. aureus*, and co-substitution of copper and magnesium in TCP lattice and copper-zinc-HA coating increased the antibacterial properties even more. Zinc incorporation as a secondary ion in HA also improved MC3T3-E1 cell proliferation, initial adhesion, and antibacterial efficiency, and Sr^{2+} ions in combination with copper in HA reduced the toxic effect in cells (Ciraldo et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2016).

The mechanism for the antibacterial action of metallic ions in bioceramics (HA, calcium phosphate) is not entirely clear. It is believed that potent ions enter the bacterial cell disturbing the intracellular ATP production that interrupts the DNA replication activity. They accumulate inside the bacteria changing the membrane permeability by affecting the steady release of lipopolysaccharides and proteins. The metallic ions produce reactive oxygen species with constituents of the bacterial membrane and wall that modify the bacterial structure leading to its death (Gutierrez et al., 2011). The response of surrounding cells toward synthesized biomaterial is also crucial for biomedical application (Supova, 2015). When a bone graft is implanted in the body, it undergoes immediate body inflammation, hemorrhaging, and the formation of new blood vessels. After the implantation, osteoinductive proteins trigger the migration of mesenchymal stem cells into the graft site, where they change into osteoblasts and osteoclasts. Bone grafts take about 1 month to become part of the body when new bone is formed around the old, necrotic bone. A recent study has shown that cells behave distinctly to different types of implant material as the osseointegration between biomaterial and cells depends on material surface properties, such as chemistry, topography, and surface energy. These characteristics determine the adsorption of biological molecules on the surface of the biomaterial and their orientation. Cell adhesion mostly involves van der Waal's or ionic forces, which are short-term and rapid and induce signal transduction, promote transcription, and regulate gene expression in the presence of biological fluid followed by proliferation and differentiation.

Deligianni et al. (2005) have shown that surface roughness and hydrophobicity determine the surface charge, which influences cell attachment and protein adsorption on positively/negatively charged surfaces. Furthermore, it was reported that the orientation and 3D structure of adsorbed proteins on biomaterial affect cell morphology, proliferation, and differentiation. Additionally, the size of the particles has a significant influence on cell attachment; human bone-derived cells MG-63 and U-2OS, for instance, were shown to respond more quickly to minor variations in chemistry and surface properties compared with other cells. Biological studies displayed that both human and animal osteoblasts (MC3T3-E1, MG-63, and SaOS-2) attached more readily to HA and TCP leading to increased cell proliferation (Czekanska et al., 2014). Xu et al. (2012) argued that different shapes, sizes, and surface areas of HAs affect the biological properties of osteoblast proliferation, cellular activity, apoptosis, and osteogenic gene expression.

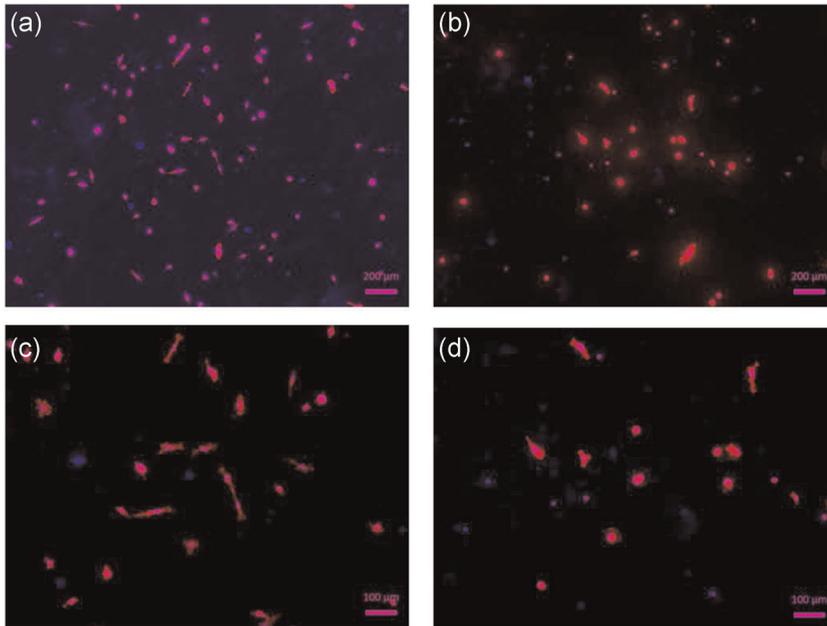


FIGURE 1 Fluorescence images of bone murine stromal cells ST-2 on stainless steel coated (a) with chitosan-gelatin electrophoretic deposition (EPD); (b) with chitosan-gelatin-SiGe NPs EPD; (c) chitosan-gelatin EPD coating; and (d) SS chitosan-gelatin-SiGe NPs EPD. Magnification (a, b) at $\times 100$ and (c, d) at $\times 200$. Nucleus staining in blue (4',6-diamidino-2-phenylindole [DAPI]) and cell cytoplasm in red (phalloidin). Taken from Aydemir et al. (2020) with permission from Elsevier

6 | COMPOSITE COATINGS BY EPD

The incorporation of metallic nanoparticles and natural herbs in biomedical devices has gained much attention in the last few years (Ferraris et al., 2010, 2017; J. S. Kim et al., 2007; Maráková et al., 2017; Mokhena & Luyt, 2017; Pishbin et al., 2013). Although nanoparticles have been used in numerous applications, their possible cytotoxic effect has not been studied adequately (T. S. Kim

et al., 2017; Wijnhoven et al., 2009). Moreover, natural herbs might reduce the cytotoxic effect but maintaining antibacterial properties requires a specific design for orthopedic implants. Therefore, a technological need to improve metallic implant surface properties is called for to develop multifunctional bioactive polymer/inorganic composite coatings. Extensive research has, therefore, been carried out on polymer/inorganic composite coatings by EPD. However, only a few reports of multistructured coatings, which address aspects of

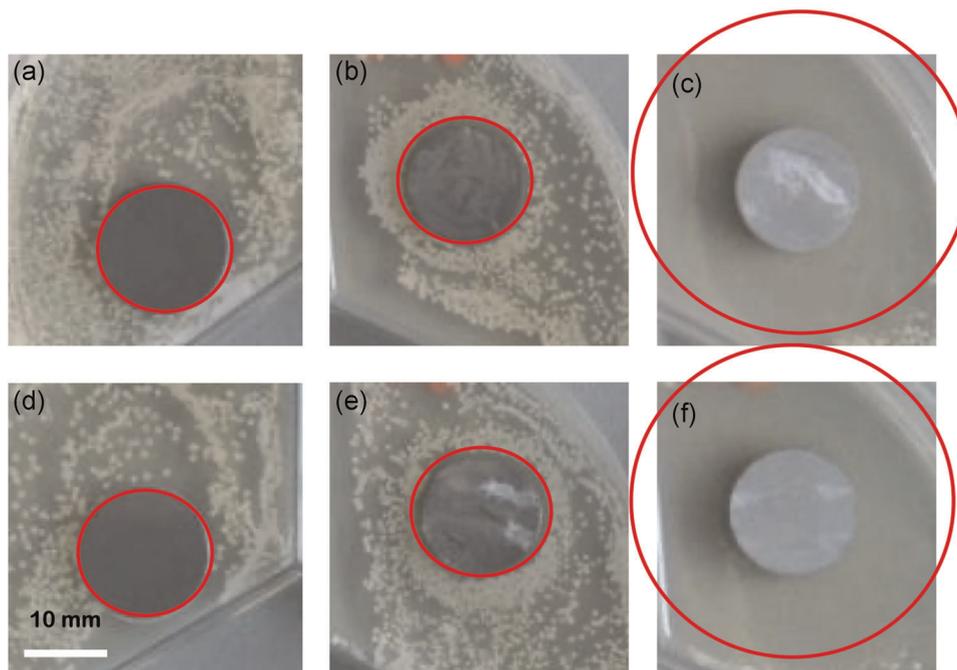


FIGURE 2 Bacterial inhibition test over 24 h. Incubation of *Staphylococcus aureus* (a-c) and *Escherichia coli* (d-f) with bare stainless steel (a, d); stainless steel coated with chitosan-gelatin electrophoretic deposition (EPD) (b, e); stainless steel coated with chitosan-gelatin-SiGe NPs EPD (c, f). Taken from Aydemir et al. (2020) with permission from Elsevier

bioactivity, antibacterial activity, enhanced cellular attachment, controlled drug release capability, and mechanical integrity have been prepared (Aydemir et al., 2020; Boccaccini et al., 2006; Sun et al., 2008; Zhitomirsky et al., 2009) (Figures 1 and 2).

Only recently, comprehensive research investigations focusing on EPD of biodegradable coatings (e.g., chitosan/gelatin/zein loaded with gentamicin/lawsone/curcumin and other substances) on bio-stable substrates (polyetheretherketone [PEEK], polymethyl methacrylate [PMMA], titanium, 316L SS, etc.) and biodegradable substrates have led to a new family of multifunctional coatings for metallic implants (Ciraldo et al., 2019; El-Rashidy, Waly, Gad, Hashem, et al., 2018; Gritsch et al., 2018a; Rehman et al., 2018; Unalan, Endlein, et al., 2019). Therefore, to address the increasing problem of bacterial infections, biodegradable coatings will in the future provide targeted drug delivery systems of incorporated natural herbs, metallic ions, and biological molecules to improve corrosion and wear resistance, bioactivity, biocompatibility, and antibacterial resistance of the metallic orthopedic implants (Virk et al., 2019).

7 | CONCLUSIONS

In general, metallic implants have excellent mechanical properties; however, they are bioinert. Applying bioactive coatings, especially metal ion-substituted HA to the surface, to improve corrosion and microbiology, has received wide attention. Several techniques for coating inorganic material on metallic implants have been proposed, including thermal spraying, plasma spraying, biomimetic coating, sol-gel dip coating, pulsed laser deposition, and EPD. All these methods have their own advantages/disadvantages that should be weighed up before biomedical application (Besra & Liu, 2007).

To date, EPD allows for cheap and quick coating of various materials with conductive substrates by immersing them in a suspension containing particles of the material and applying an electric field. For successful coating, several parameters related to EPD processes need to be optimized before using metallic implants coated with HA to combat antibacterial and antifungal properties, and currently, EPD is the most frequently applied technique to produce coatings, using ions, such as selenium, copper, and others incorporated in HA.

Finally, although the fabrication and biocompatibility of the various biomaterials, in terms of geometry, dimension, porosity, photoactivity, and surface chemistry, which generate less toxic biological responses have been unique over the years. Their successful development for theranostic therapies, that is, translation into a clinical setting remains largely unexplored mainly due to long-term biocompatibility uncertainties. Therefore, future in vitro and in vivo studies of functionalized biomaterial need to be carried out to improve biological responses and to diminish side effects before these can be translated into routine clinical settings (Kafshgari & Goldmann, 2020) and (Tesler et al., 2021; Maqbool et al., 2021).

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Note in press: Relevant patents entitled "Bone morphogenetic protein-conjugated monoclonal antibodies against hapten-dope metal scaffolds for prosthesis implants", and "Silicone- or fluorosilicone-coated solid substrates and process for their preparation" were filed in 1992 by Dr. J.L. Alonso in Spain and in 2021 with the EPO (application No. EP21166558) by Dr. A.B. Tesler and Dr. W.H. Goldmann et al., respectively.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are openly available in a public repository that issues data sets with DOIs.

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