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Zinc oxide nanocrystals combined with ultrasound for the controlled generation of Reactive Oxygen Species / Vighetto, V.; Ancona, A.; Racca, L.; Limongi, T.; Troia, A.; Canavese, G.; Cauda, V.. - ELETTRONICO. - (2021), pp. 115-116. (Intervento presentato al convegno CancerTO - Nanoscience in Cancer Immunotherapy tenutosi a Virtual meeting nel March 9–11, 2021) [10.3389/978-2-88966-543-3].

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2924579 since: 2021-10-13T10:25:16Z

*Publisher:*

Frontiers

*Published*

DOI:10.3389/978-2-88966-543-3

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# Zinc oxide nanocrystals combined with ultrasound for the controlled generation of Reactive Oxygen Species

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## OBJECTIVES

Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS) effects on living cells viability and proliferation are numerous. Due to their ability to react with different types of biological molecules, ROS are involved in many cell functions<sup>1</sup>. The ability of maintain the redox homeostasis is crucial and an imbalance can lead to a variety of possible diseases. Controlled generation of ROS can be exploited to generate oxidative stress in cells, leading to cell death, with the aim of developing drug and drug-free therapeutic tools for anticancer treatments. Aminopropyl-functionalized ZnO NCs (ZnO-NH<sub>2</sub> NCs) are proved able to produce ROS in a tunable and reproducible manner, when stimulated by ultrasound (US), using an already approved medical device, LipoZero G39. The generation of hydroxyl radicals is the result of inertial cavitation under the US exposure.

## METHODS

Dynamic Light Scattering technique, Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopy, Transmission Electron Microscopy, X-Ray Diffraction were used to characterize the ZnO-NH<sub>2</sub> NCs previously synthesized via microwave-assisted sol-gel synthesis. A large variety of parameters were evaluated: US frequency and power as well as ZnO-NH<sub>2</sub> NCs concentration. The generation of ROS was evaluated by Passive Cavitation Detection, Electron Paramagnetic Resonance and Ultrasound B-mode imaging.

## RESULTS

When ZnO-NH<sub>2</sub> NCs were present in the aqueous solution a significative enhancement of ROS production, and an improved cavitation signal was measured compared with the water alone. The same behavior was verified in PBS, cell culture media and in presence of tissue mimicking materials<sup>2</sup>, as ex vivo tissue and phantom.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is verified that ZnO-NH<sub>2</sub> NCs are ultrasound responsive nano-agent due to their ability to induce inertial cavitation under pulsed US exposure, which consequently leads to a large ROS production. Controlled ROS production was also assessed in biological media as PBS and cell culture media. This result suggests the applicability of this technology in the biological field, as a possible tool to induce cancer cells death, predicting high potential healthcare applications.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 678151 – Project Acronym "TROJANANOHORSE" - ERC Starting Grant) and from the Moschini Spa company in the PoliTo-Proof of Concept project n.16417.

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