

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Gene Therapy for Drug-Resistant Glioblastoma via Lipid-Polymer Hybrid Nanoparticles Combined with Focused Ultrasound

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Article Information

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Received [14 October 2020](#)

Accepted for publication 19 November 2020



Published 8 January 2021 Volume 2021:16 Pages 185–199



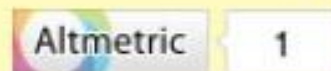
DOI <https://doi.org/10.2147/IJN.S286221>

Checked for plagiarism Yes

Review by [Single anonymous peer review](#)

Peer reviewer comments 2

Editor who approved publication: [Professor Israel \(Rudi\) Rubinstein](#)



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International Journal of Nanomedicine



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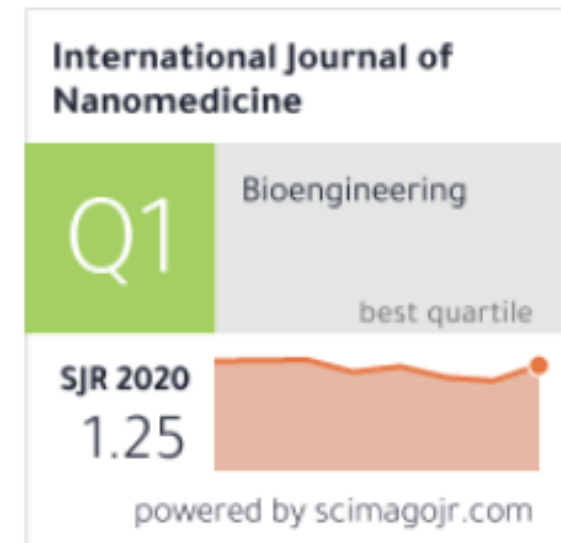


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- PubMed and PubMed Central (*Int J Nanomedicine*)
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- Science Citation Index Expanded (also known as SciSearch®)
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Abstract

FUS-assisted MBs-
LPHNspCas9/MGMT-cRGD
+ TMZ →
for drug(TMZ)-resistant
glioblastoma treatment

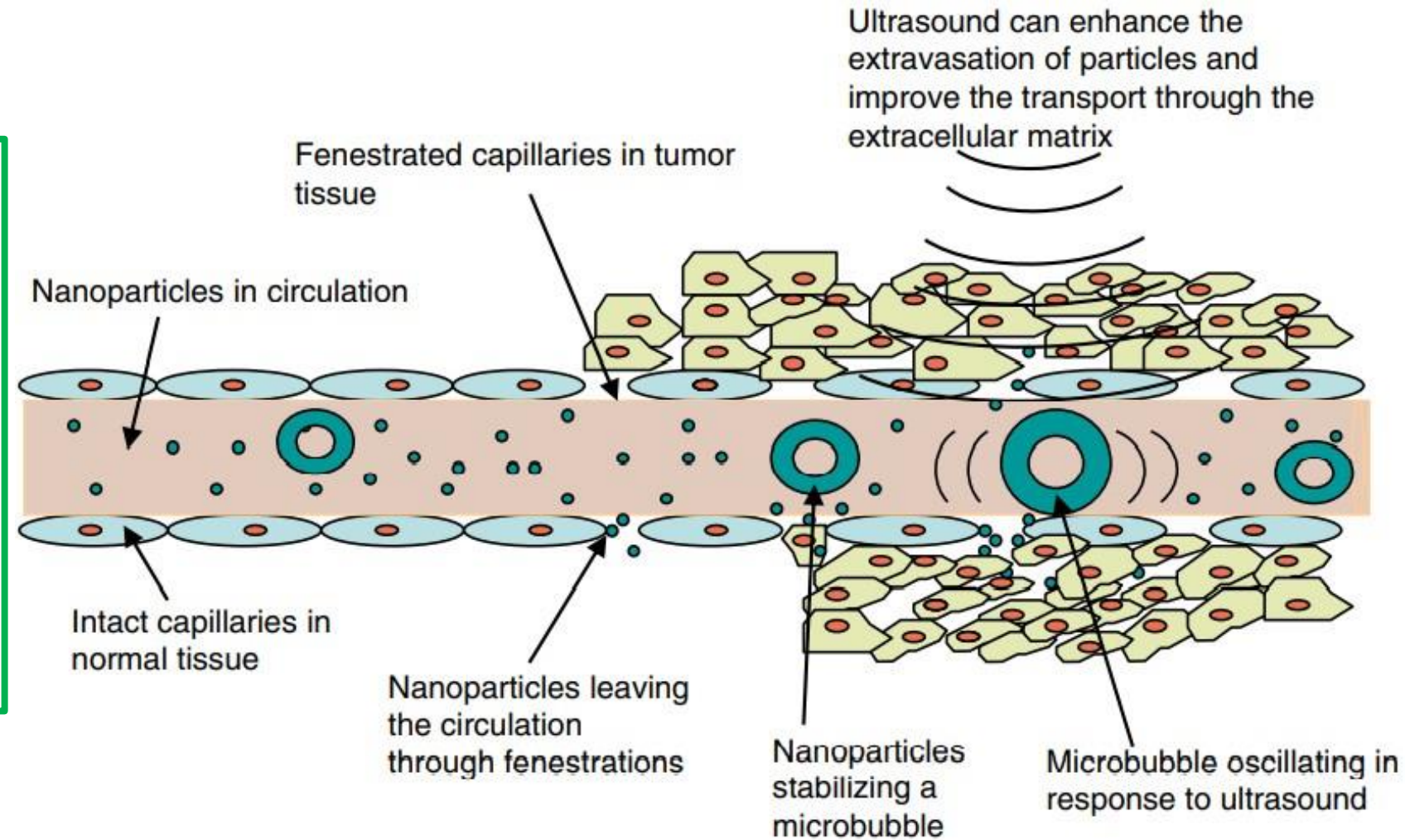


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introduction

- **Glioblastoma (GBM)** is the most common and lethal primary brain tumor in adults.
- The mean survival of patients is only **12–14 months** (even after treatment with comprehensive therapy).
- **Temozolomide (TMZ)**, is the main drug therapy for glioblastoma.
 1. easily cross the blood-brain barrier (BBB) and inhibit GBM cell proliferation
 2. low levels of systematic toxicity

- the therapeutic efficacy of TMZ is often limited by **O6-methylguanine-DNA methyltransferase (MGMT)**
- **Downregulating** the expression of MGMT can reduce chemoresistance
- **CRISPR/Cas9** has been considered one of the most significant **gene editing technologies**.
- This system shows tremendous potential for various cancer treatments.

- the **Cas9 endonuclease**, under the direction of **guide RNA (gRNA)**, can recognize and cleave specific DNA sequences.
- generating double stranded breaks (**DSBs**)
- leading to insertions, deletions or mutations at target genomic locations

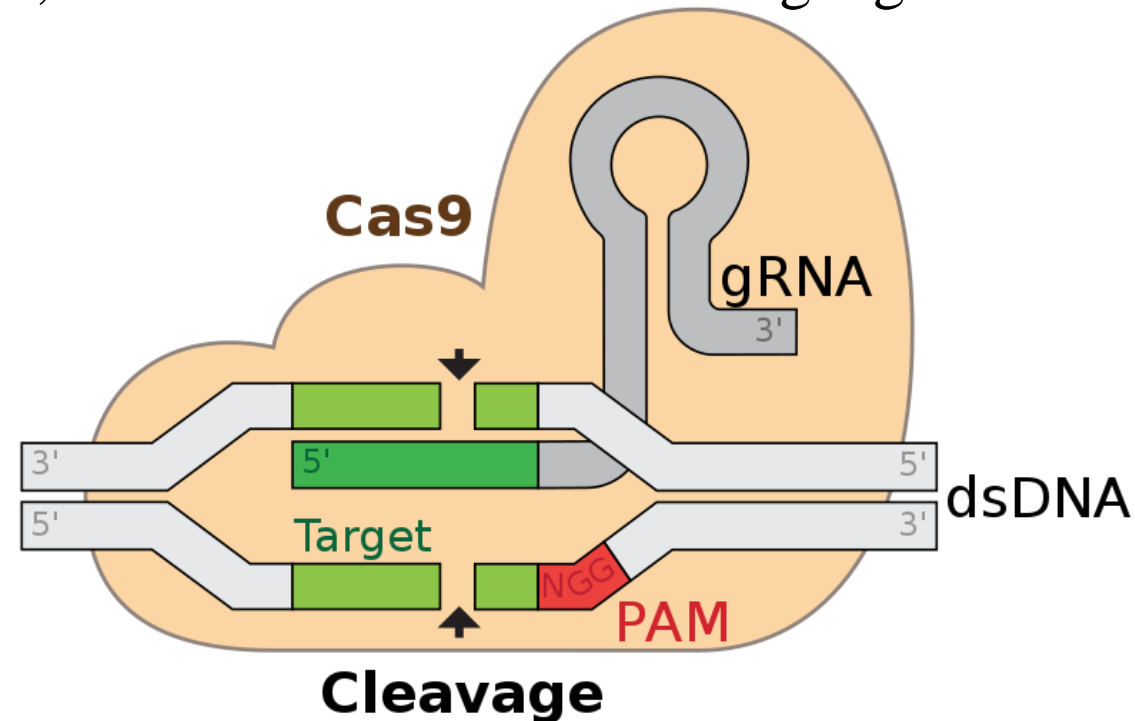
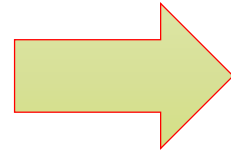


Image source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/>

• current delivery systems for CRISPR/Cas9 are mostly **viral vectors**.

• lentiviruses (LVs)

• adenoviruses (AVs)



immunogenic and **carcinogenic**, especially in vivo

• **non-viral vectors** have emerged as important **alternatives** for gene delivery

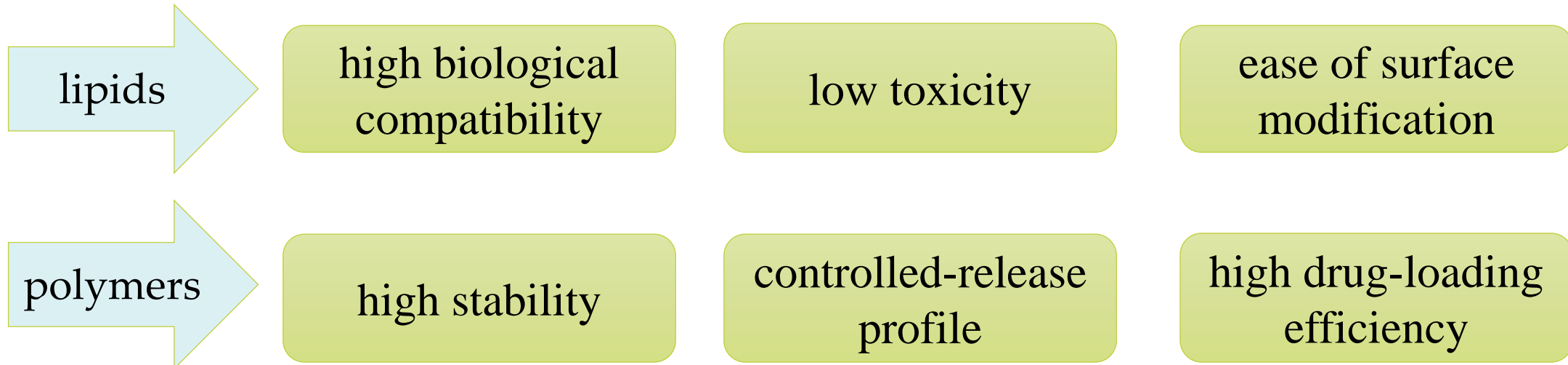


good
biocompatibility

low
immunogenicity

easy
modification

- **Nanoparticles**, such as lipid- and polymer-based systems, have made significant progress in targeting drug delivery over the past decades.
- **lipid-polymer hybrid nanoparticles (LPHNs)** were constructed for efficient and targeting delivery.
- combine the complementary advantages of lipids and polymer nanoparticles.



1. a **polymer core** encapsulating therapeutic agents
2. an **inner lipid layer** surrounding the polymer core, which can **confer biocompatibility** and **retain therapeutic agents** inside the polymer core
3. an **outer lipid-PEG layer** coating the lipid layer to **extend the blood circulation time** and enhance steric stabilization
4. PEG chains can be further modified with various **bioactive molecules** to meet different needs

Structure of a lipid-polymer hybrid nanoparticle (LPHNP)

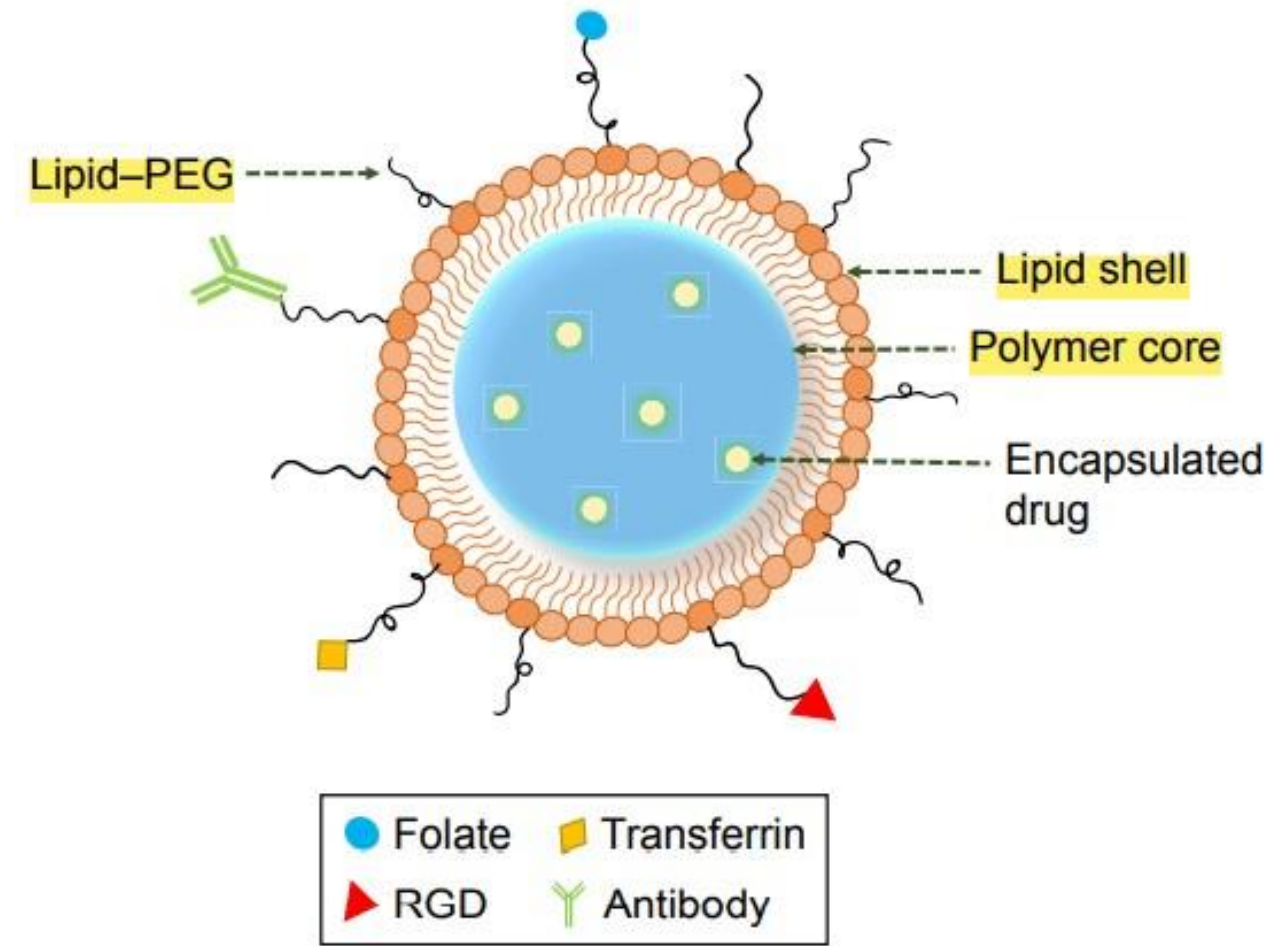


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➤ The BBB blocks more than 98% of material

- prevent toxic substances from entering the central nervous system (CNS)
- maintain brain homeostasis.

➤ important **alternative strategy** to permeabilize the BBB:

- * Focused ultrasound (**FUS**) combined with microbubbles (**MBs**)
- Noninvasive, reversible, local and site-specific
- through the cavitation effect
- without causing damage to the surrounding brain tissue.

- (LPHNspCas9/MGMT-cRGD) developed and evaluated the gene editing efficiency *in vitro*.
- * (cRGD peptide targets the overexpressed integrin $\alpha\beta3$ receptors in tumor cells)
- Subsequently, (MBsLPHNspCas9/MGMT-cRGD) complexes constructed for BBB-opening and targeting gene delivery *in vivo* under FUS irradiation.

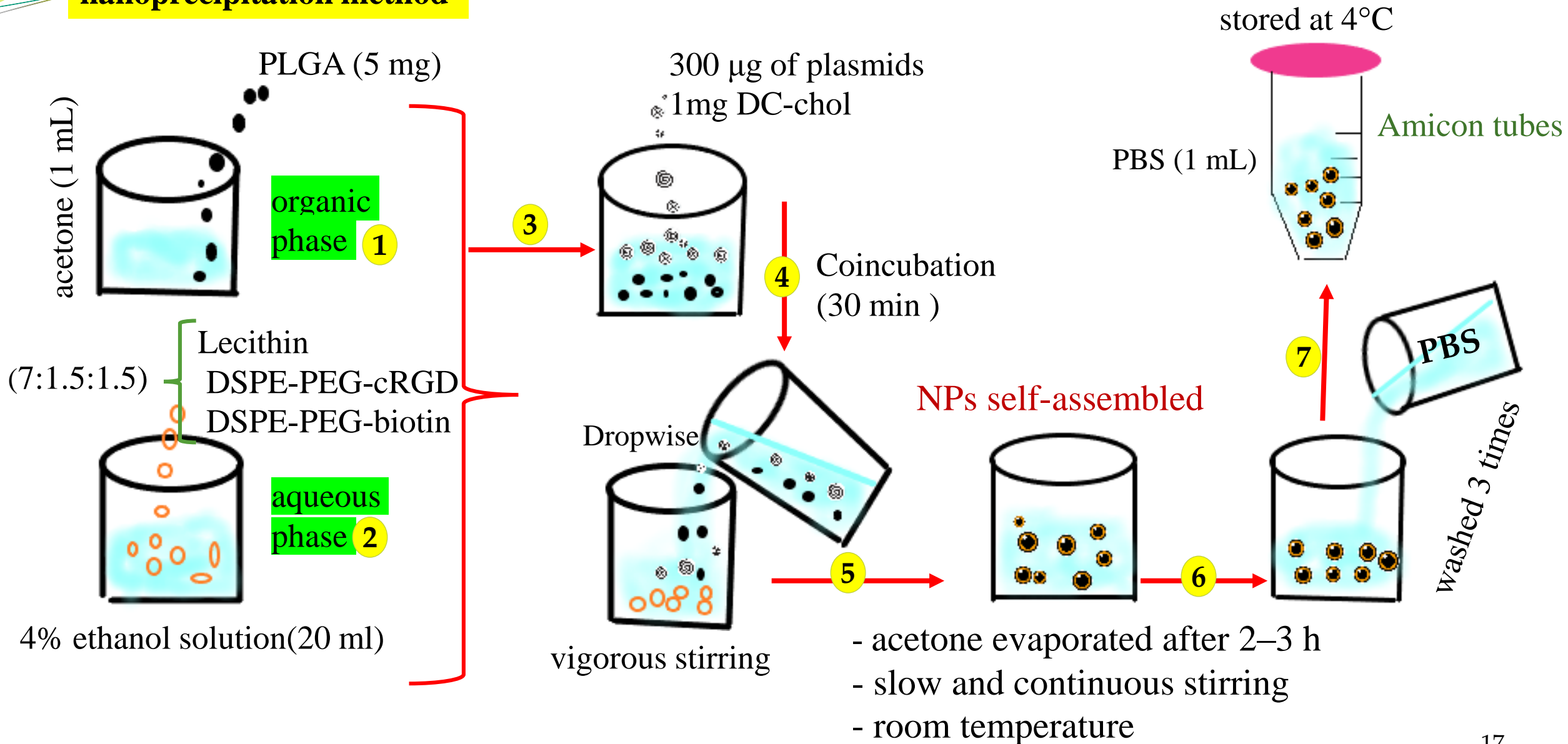
➤ **Resulting in:**

- a safe, efficient and multi-functional complex (with a high level of biosafety and biocompatibility)
- effective gene delivery (targeted delivery of CRISPR/Cas9)
- restore the sensitivity of GBM cells to TMZ, (treatment of TMZ-resistant glioblastoma)



Preparation and Characterization of Lipid-Polymer-Hybrid PEG Nanoparticles (LPHNs-cRGD)

nanoprecipitation method



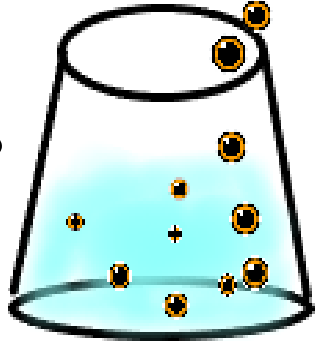
- The particle size, zeta potential and polydispersity index (PDI): **Zetasizer Nano ZS instrument**
- The morphology and structure of the LPHNs-cRGD were observed via **transmission electron microscopy(TEM)**
- **Stability of nanoparticles** was examined in MEM with 10% FBS (v/v) at 37°C
- **Fluorescence microscope** was used to observe **the DiI-labeled LPHNs-cRGD**
- The **encapsulation efficiency** of the **pCas9/MGMT** in LPHNs-cRGD was determined from the ratio of the amount of **encapsulated pCas9/MGMT** to the amount of **pCas9/MGMT initially added using PicoGreen dsDNA Quantitation Kit**
- The **structure of the plasmid** in nanoparticles was observed through **agarose electrophoresis** after extracted from nanoparticles

Release of pCas9/MGMT in vitro

carried out in PBS at 37°C

pCas9/MGMT-
loaded NPs (5 mg)

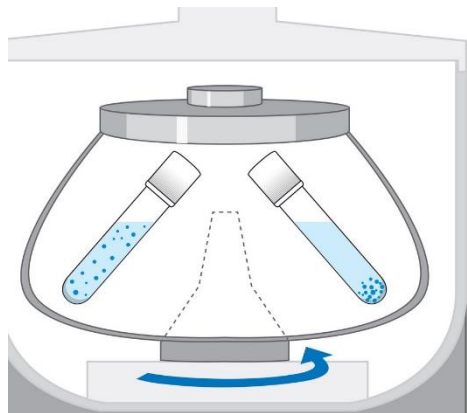
1 mL PBS



shaken slowly at 37°C.



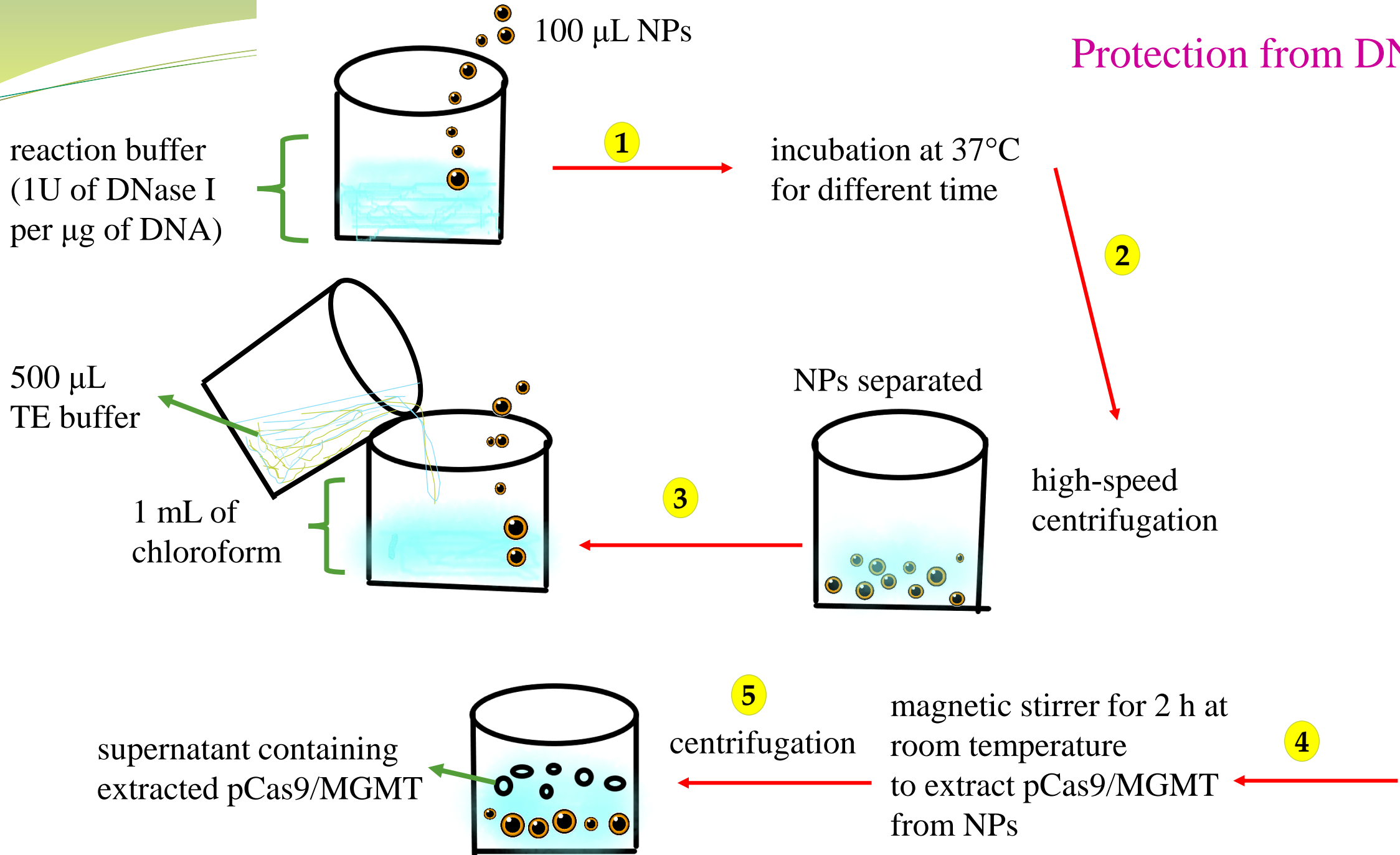
the solution was centrifuged




supernatants were collected
to measure the released
pCas9/MGMT using the
Picogreen assay

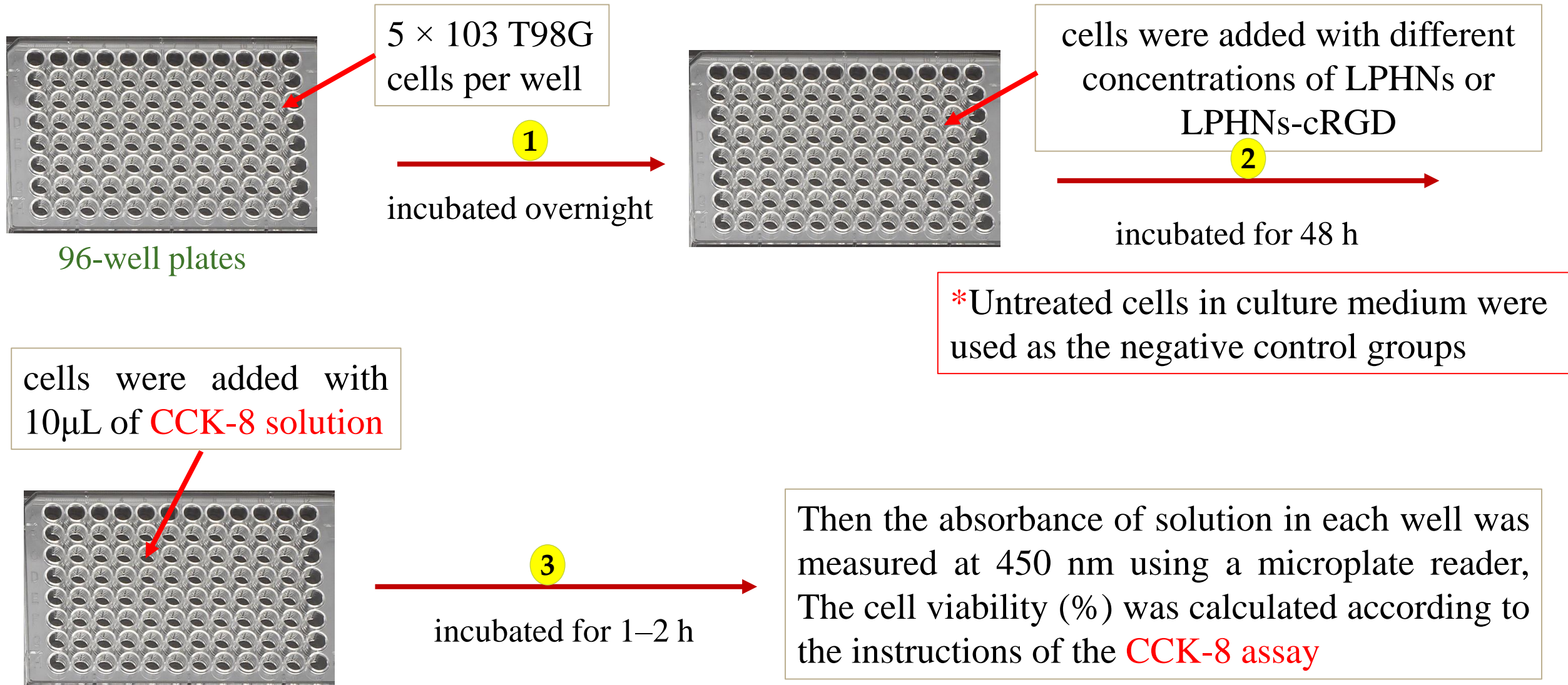
Nanoparticles were then
immediately resuspended
in fresh PBS and shaken in
the incubator at 37°C.

Protection from DNase I



- samples + DNA loading buffer, applied to a 0.8% agarose gel in 0.5 x TAE buffer containing gold-view for 40 min at 70 mV.
- images were observed using Bio-Rad imaging system
- As a control ,50 μ L naked pCas9/MGMT + DNase I  incubation(3 min at 37°C)

Cytotoxicity and Targeting Ability of LPHNs-cRGD in vitro



targeting ability of the LPHNs-cRGD toward T98G cells

Laser scanning confocal microscope (LSCM)

flow cytometry (FCM)



T98G cells

1

incubated overnight

control group / LPHNs group / LPHNs-cRGD group

cells mixed with different nanoparticles

confocal culture dishes

(density of 1.0×10^5 cells per dish)

24 h of incubation

2

LPHNs group + 10 μ L DiI-labeled LPHNs emulsions

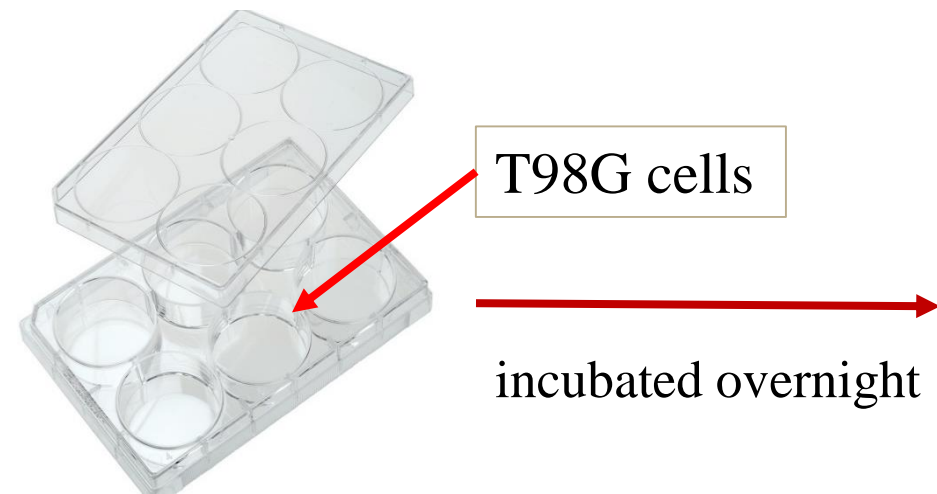
LPHNs-cRGD group + 10 μ L DiI-labeled LPHNs-cRGD emulsions.

4 h of coincubation

3

- cells in the dishes were rinsed 3 times with PBS
- fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde for 15 min at room temperature
- then stained with **DAPI** for 5 min & rinsing again
- the fixed cells were imaged using LSCM

For FCM



6-well plates
(density of 2.0×10^5 cells per dish)

- the cells were washed with PBS + digestion with trypsin
- Centrifugation
- suspension in 500 μL PBS
- fluorescence intensity of the cellular uptake was detected via FCM

Transfection Efficiency and Gene Editing with LPHNs-cRGD in vitro

evaluate the **transfection** efficiency

Fluorescence microscopy

FCM



T98G cells

incubated overnight
& treated with

naked pCas9/MGMT

LPHNspCas9/MGMT

LPHNspCas9/MGMT -cRGD

Lip3000 (positive control)

*amount of pCas9/MGMT: 5 μ g

6-well plates

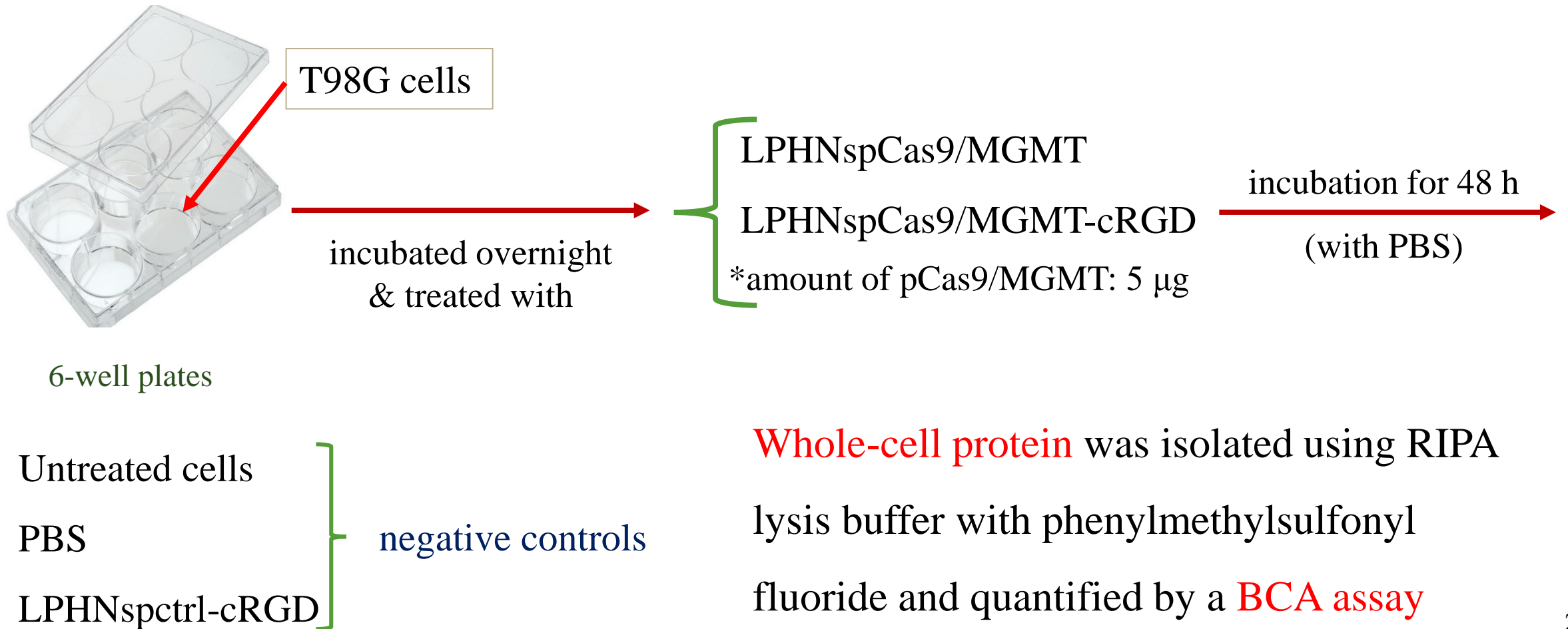
incubation for 48 h

EGFP expression was observed with a fluorescence microscope, and then cells were collected for FCM

Genome Editing

to test the **expression of MGMT protein** after transfection with different nanoparticle

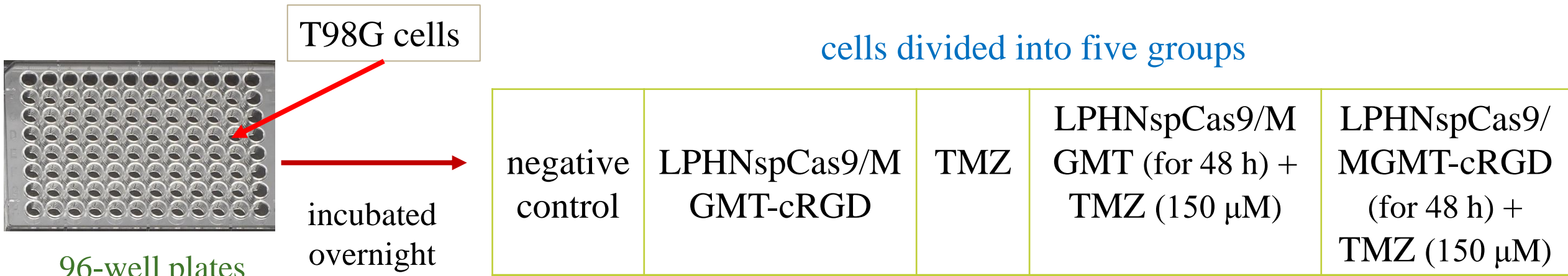
Western blotting



- Isolated protein was separated on **SDS-PAGE gel**
- transferred to polyvinylidene fluoride membranes
- The membranes were incubated with the appropriate **antibodies against MGMT**
- subsequently incubated with secondary anti-rabbit IgG-HRP antibodies
- Images were obtained using the BioRad imaging system

CCK-8 and Apoptosis Assays for Chemosensitivity Testing

Evaluate the sensitivity of the GBM cells to TMZ after treatment with LPHNspCas9/MGMT in vitro: **CCK8 and apoptosis assays**



*amount of pCas9/MGMT: 0.2 μ g

incubation for 36 h

cell viability was evaluated using the **CCK-8 assay**

apoptosis assay

T98G cells



6-well plates

incubated overnight

cells divided into five groups

negative control	LPHNspCas9/MGMT-cRGD	TMZ	LPHNspCas9/MGMT (for 48 h) + TMZ (150 μ M)	LPHNspCas9/MGMT-cRGD (for 48 h) + TMZ (150 μ M)
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*amount of pCas9/MGMT:5 μ g

incubation

the cells were washed three times with PBS, digested, centrifuged, and resuspended in 500 μ L of PBS. Finally, cells were subjected to

flow cytometry analysis

Preparation of Microbubbles (MBs) and MBs-LPHNs-cRGD

lipid film hydration method.



DPPC
DSPE-PEG-biotin
cholesterol (at a mass ratio of 5:2:1)

Chloroform (5 mL)

processed in a rotatory evaporator in a
water bath at 50°C to form lipid film



round-bottomed flask

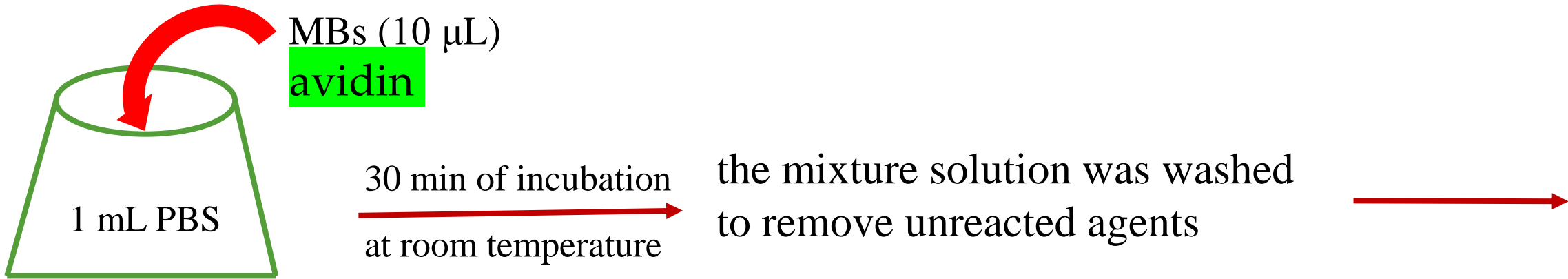
dried lipid film
was rehydrated



0.5 mL of PBS
glycerine solution (at a volume ratio
of 9:1) perfluoropropane (C3F8)

The mixture was rapidly
mechanically vibrated for 50 s.
the **biotinylated MBs** were
purified by centrifugation and
stored at 4°C for further use.

The MBs and LPHNs-cRGD were bound together via the **biotin-avidin linkage**.



biotin-avidin MBs +
LPHNs-cRGD emulsions

incubated for 1 h


MBs-LPHNs-cRGD obtained

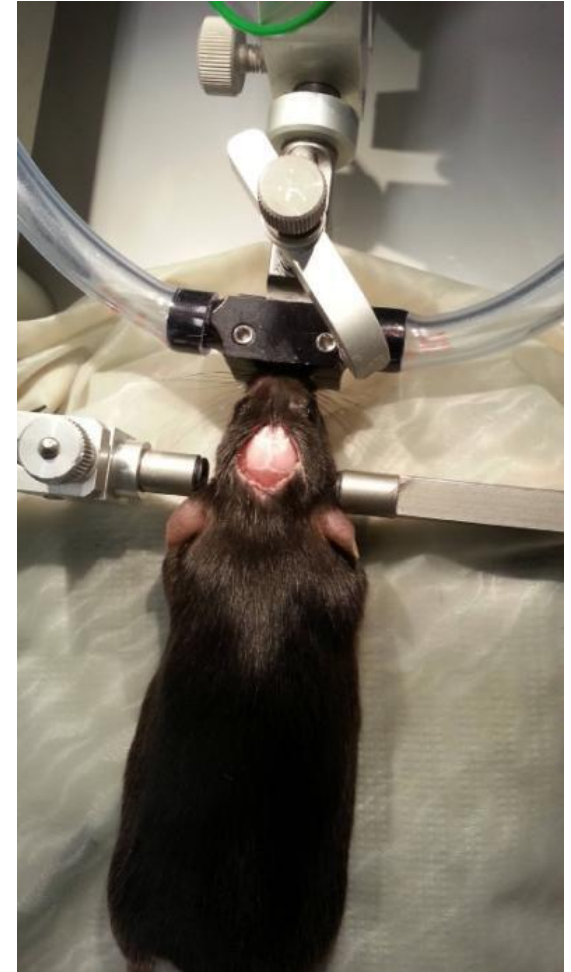
to confirm the connection
of the two nanoparticles:

DiO-labeled LPHNscRGD
DiI-labeled MBs

observed by fluorescence microscope

Opening the Blood Brain Barrier

- ✓ Mice (NOD-SCID mice (4–6 weeks)) were anesthetized with pentobarbital and immobilized on a stereotaxic device.
- ✓ The hair on top of the heads was shaved
- ✓ The focused ultrasound probe was placed above the heads of mice and vertically fixed on the stereotactic frame
- ✓ The mice were randomly divided into different groups according to the **irradiation times** and **amounts of MBs-LPHNs-cRGD**
- ✓ injected with **MBs-LPHNs-cRGD** through the tail vein,
exposed to **FUS irradiation** immediately +
injected with 2% **Evans blue** dye (EB) 1 h later 



- ✓ the mice were sacrificed and perfused transcardially with saline
- ✓ the brain tissue was removed
- ✓ and coronally incised for digital photography and H&E staining

Orthotopic Xenograft Model

- NOD-SCID mice were anesthetized with pentobarbital
- and immobilized on a stereotaxic device
- The T98G cells (2×10^5) were intracranially injected into the striatum of the mice
- Tumor growth was monitored by a 7.0T MRI scanner seven days after implantation.

Targeting Ability, Distribution and Biosafety in vivo

mice were divided into 4 groups

DiR-labeled LPHNs-cRGD

DiR-labeled MBs-LPHNs-cRGD.

DiR-labeled MBs-LPHNs +FUS irradiation.

DiR-labeled MBs-LPHNscRGD +FUS irradiation.

2 h and 24 h later → brains and major organs were collected for ex vivo imaging

Using
fluorescence
imaging system

→ The fluorescence intensity was calculated

mice were divided into 2 groups

➤ Control (intravenously injected Saline)

➤ MBs-LPHNs-cRGD

- The mice were sacrificed seven days after injection.
- The major organs (liver, spleen, kidneys, heart, and lungs) were harvested
- and fixed via polyoxymethylene for H&E staining

Therapeutic Effect in vivo

- Mice with orthotopic T98G glioblastoma were divided into five groups

control (was treated with saline)

TMZ alone

MBs-LPHNspCas9/MGMT-cRGD + TMZ

MBs-LPHNspCas9/MGMT + FUS + TMZ

MBs-LPHNspCas9/MGMT-cRGD +FUS +TMZ

Nanocomplexes injected intravenously then the mice were exposed to FUS irradiation immediately or not. Two days later, TMZ (50 mg/kg) was administered via daily intraperitoneal injection for 5 consecutive days.

- **Three mice** in each group were scanned with a **7.0T MRI** to monitor **tumor volume every seven days**
- then all mice were administered with the next cycle of treatment
- The mice were sacrificed when they demonstrated severe neurological symptoms.

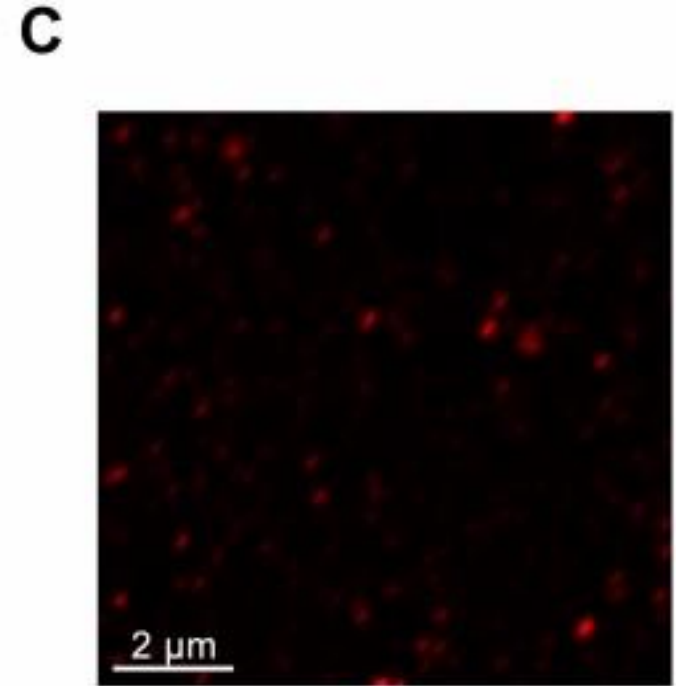
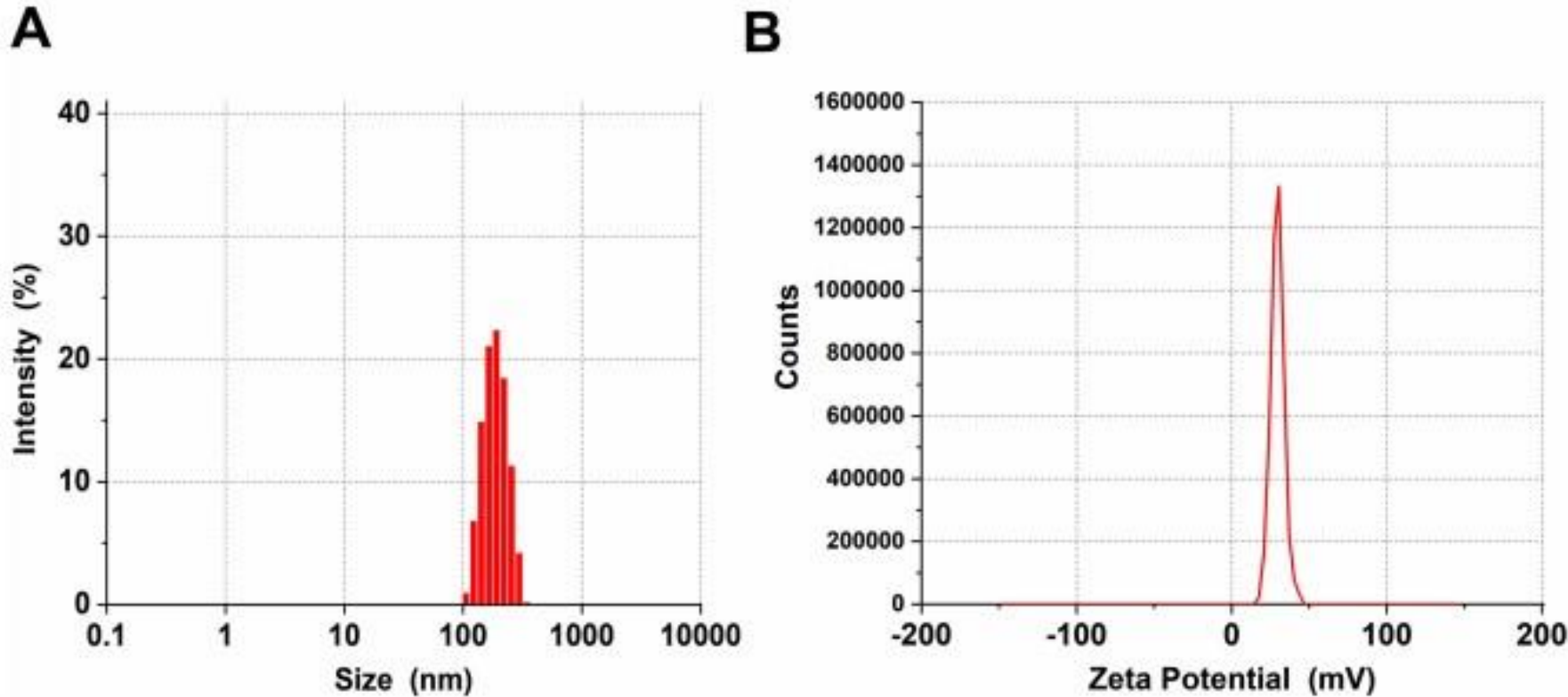
- Tumor volume was calculated as follows:
- $\text{volume} = [\text{length (max layer)} \times \text{width (max layer)}] \times \text{layers} \times 0.8/2$ (0.8 mean the slices interval)
- The survival of each mouse was recorded and the median survival for each group was calculated

Statistical Analysis

- All experiments were performed in triplicate
- analysis was performed using SPSS software (SPSS version 23.0) and GraphPad software (GraphPad Prism 8.0).
- Data are presented as the mean \pm standard deviation (SD). $p < 0.05$ were considered to be statistically significant

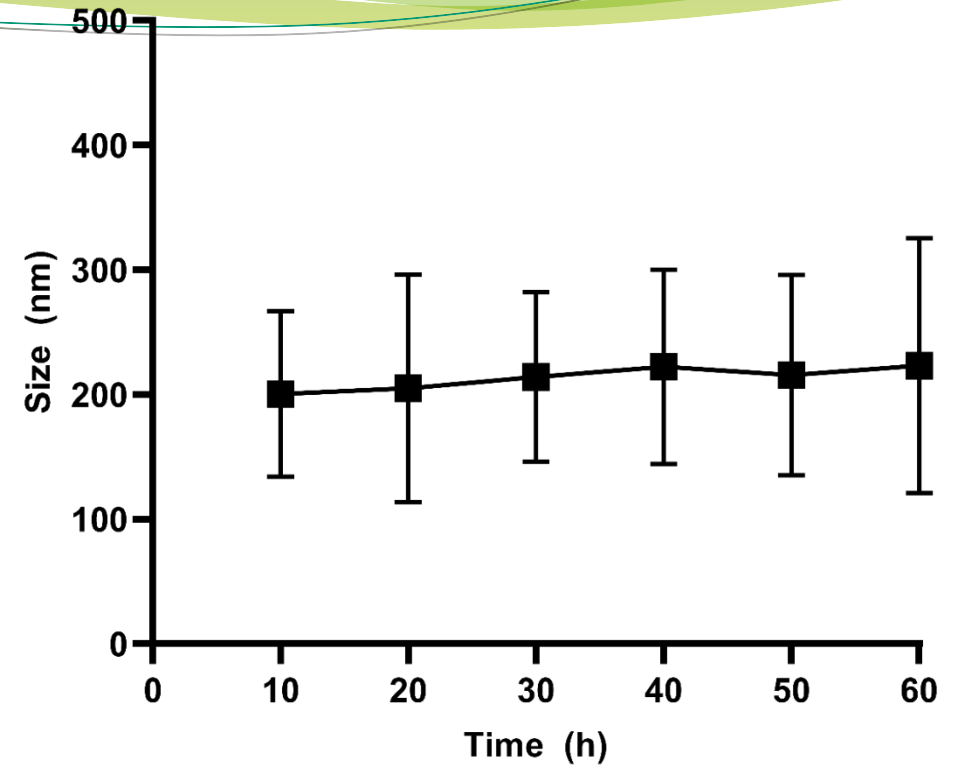
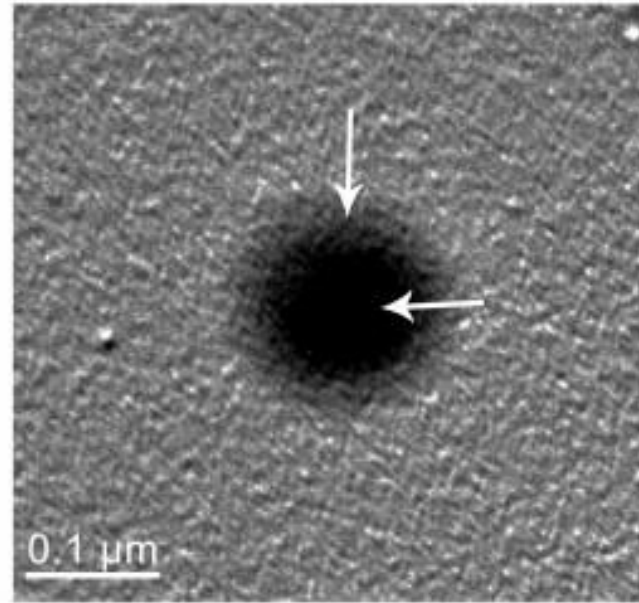
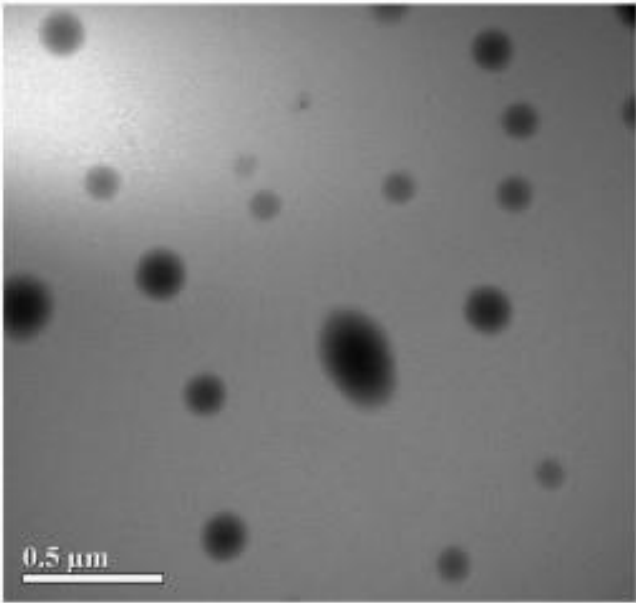


Formulation and Characterization of the LPHNs-cRGD



diameters and zeta potentials of the LPHNs-cRGD :
 179.6 ± 44.82 nm and 29.6 ± 4.33 mv, respectively,
with a small PDI (0.048)

staining by DiI :
the LPHNs-cRGD exhibited
uniform red fluorescence signal

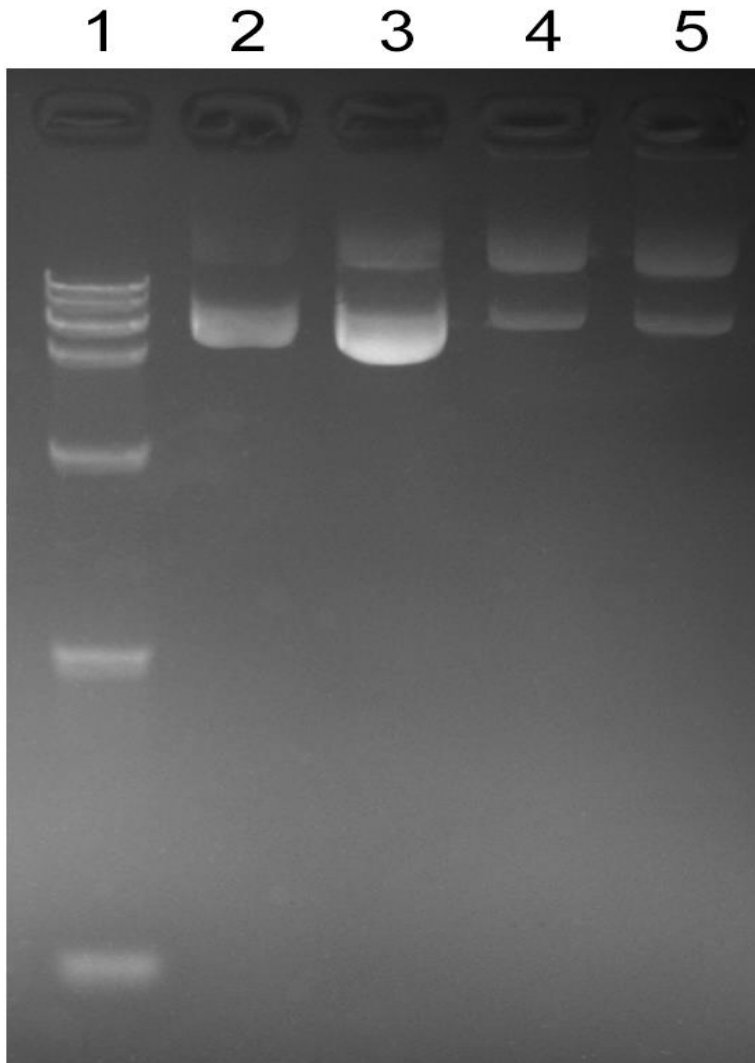


TEM showed that the LPHNs-cRGD had uniform spherical shape and typical core-shell structures

*the encapsulation efficiency was $76.5 \pm 7.2\%$

Size stability of LPHNs-cRGD under physiological conditions in MEM containing 10% FBS.

Gel electrophoresis for testing the **structural integrity of pCas9/MGMT** in nanoparticles

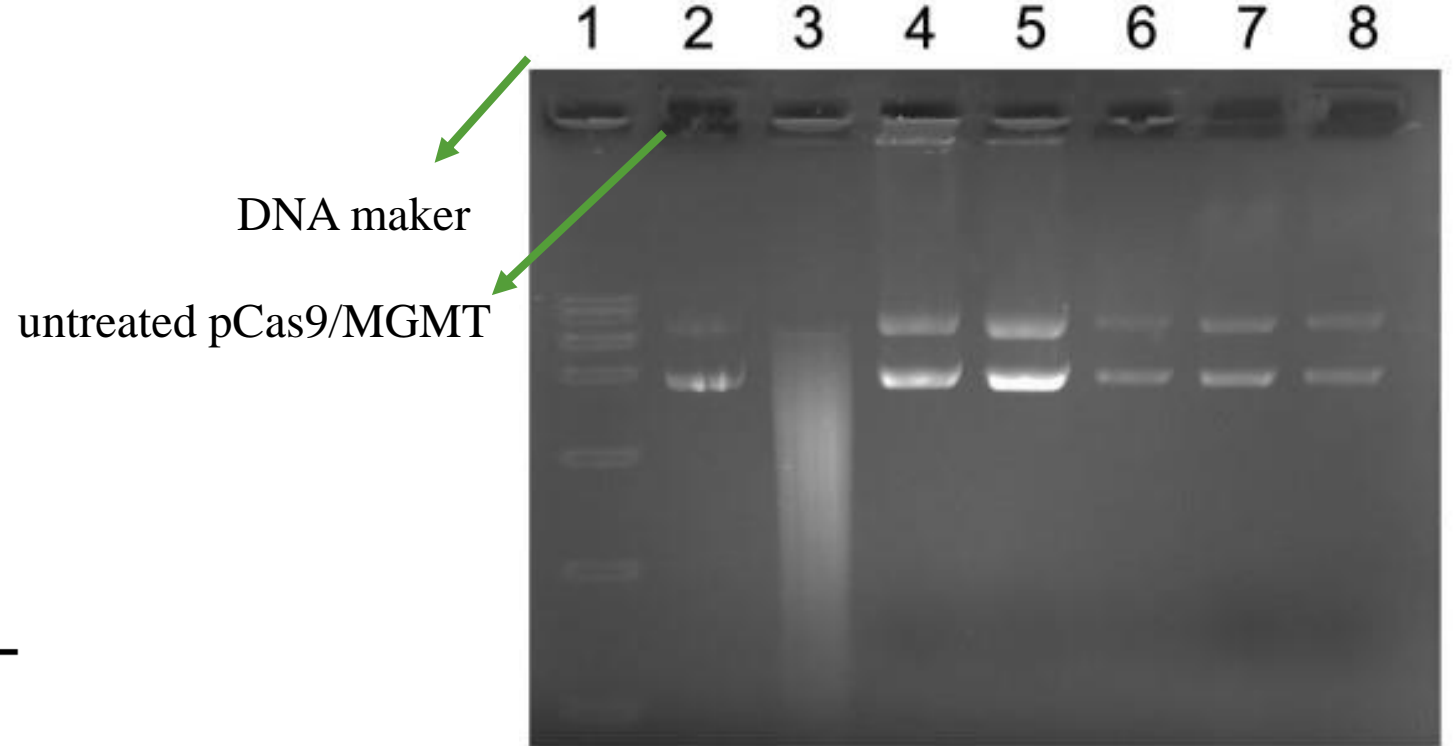
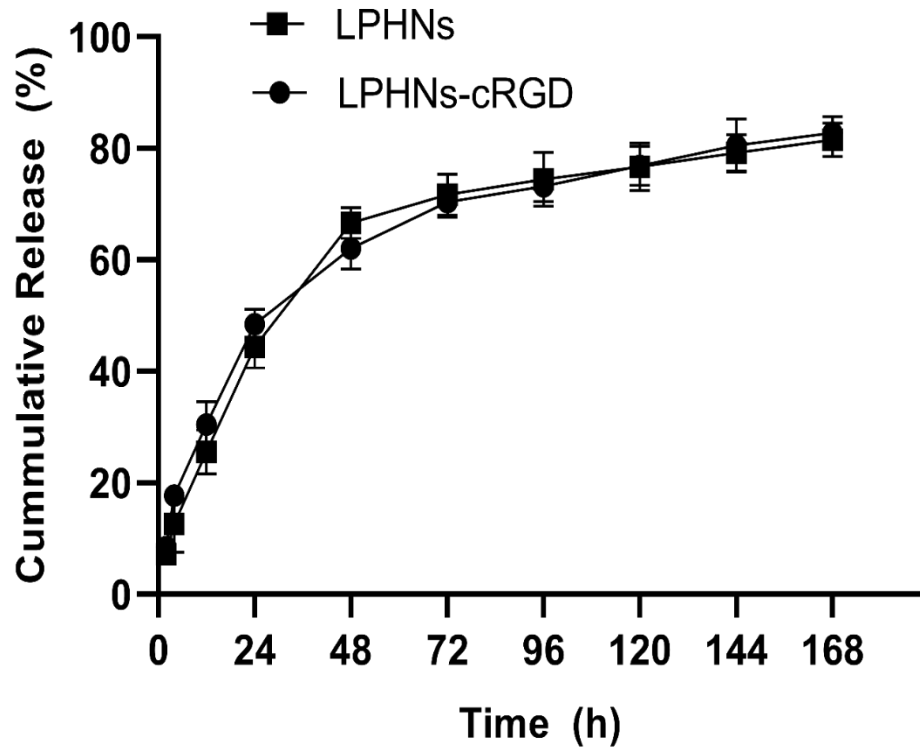


During the preparation process, the structure of the pCas9/ MGMT was **unaffected and remained intact**

- Lane 1, DNA marke
- Lane 2 and 3, untreated pCas9
- Lane 4 and 5, extracted pCas9/MGMT from LPHNs and LPHNs-cRGD, respectively

Release of Plasmids in vitro and Protection from DNase I

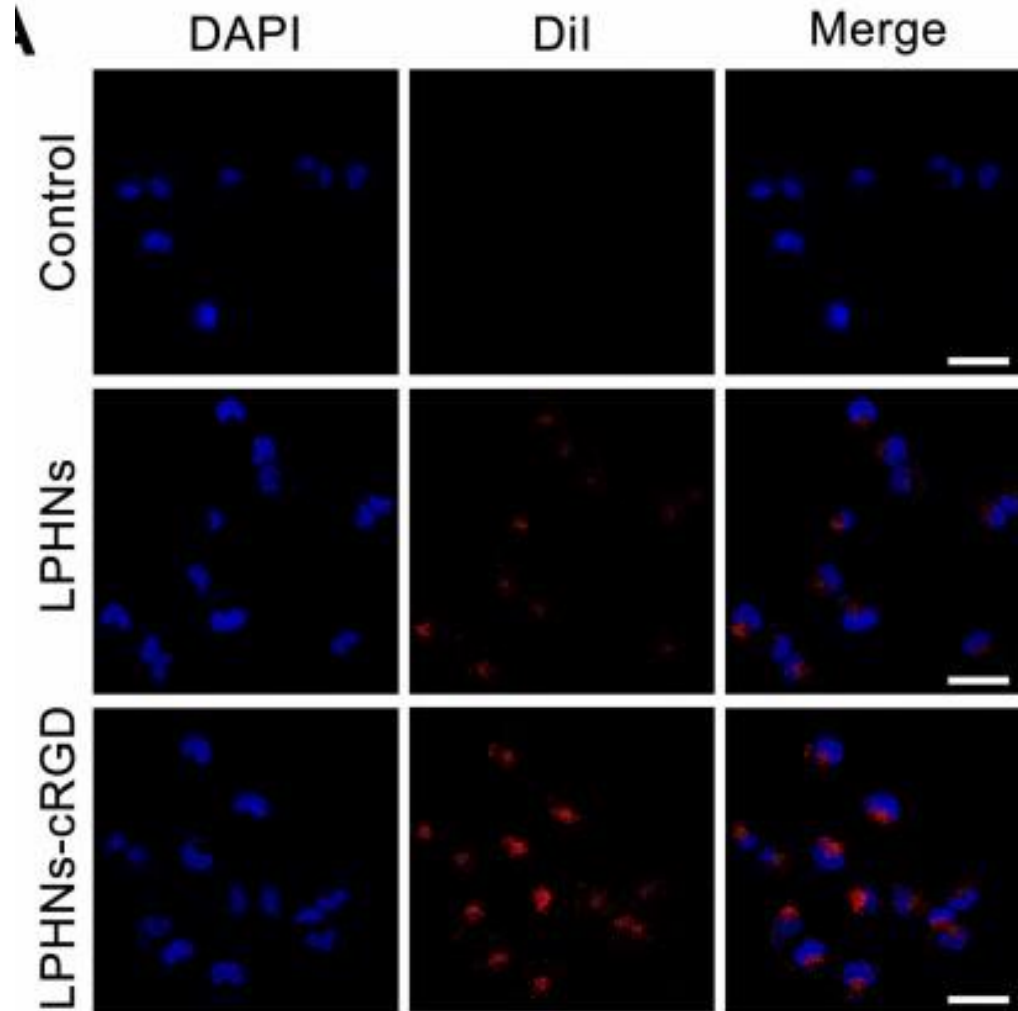
In PBS solution



Lane 3, naked pCas9/MGMT after incubation with DNase I for 3min
Lanes 4–8, the extracted pCas9/MGMT from LPHNs-cRGD after incubation with DNase I for 3 min, 15 min, 30 min, 1 h and 2 h, respectively.

Targeting Ability and Biosafety Study in vitro

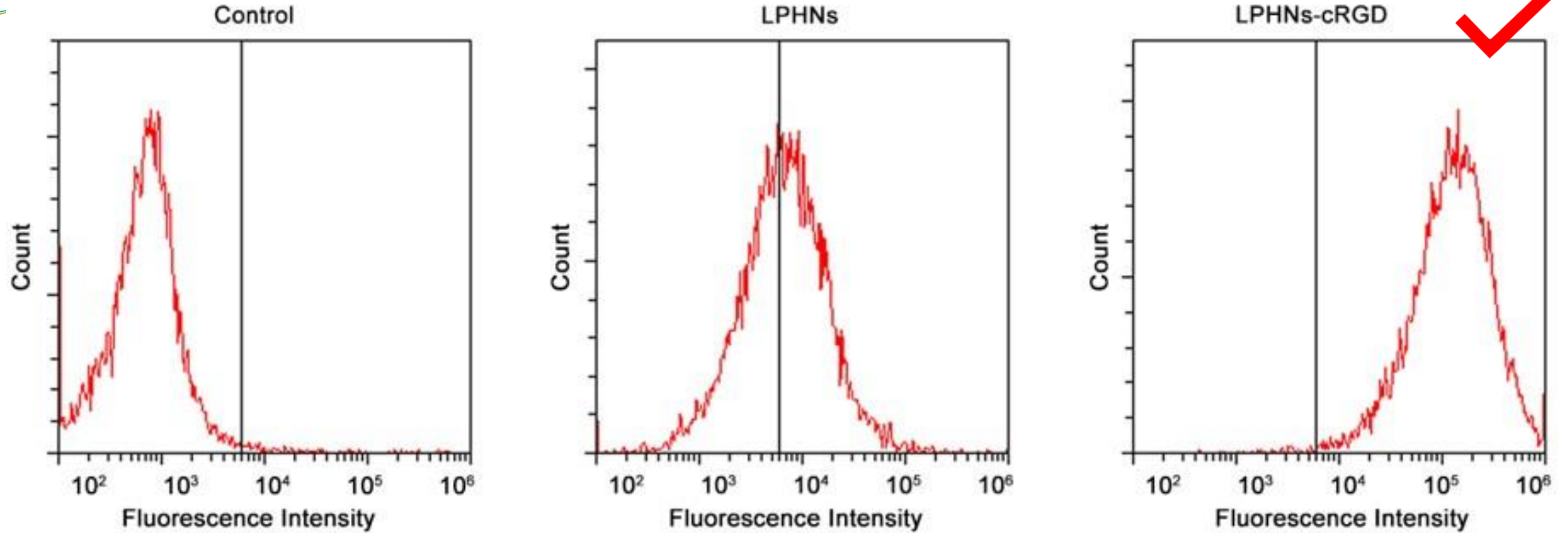
LSCM & FCM



strong red fluorescence in the T98G cells treated with the **LPHNs-cRGD**, which was much stronger than that in the LPHNs group

The **LSCM images** of T98G cells with different treatment

FCM results of T98G cells after different treatments



nanoparticles with **cRGD peptides** were **more readily taken up** than the nanoparticles without cRGD

in vitro biosafety of the nanoparticles

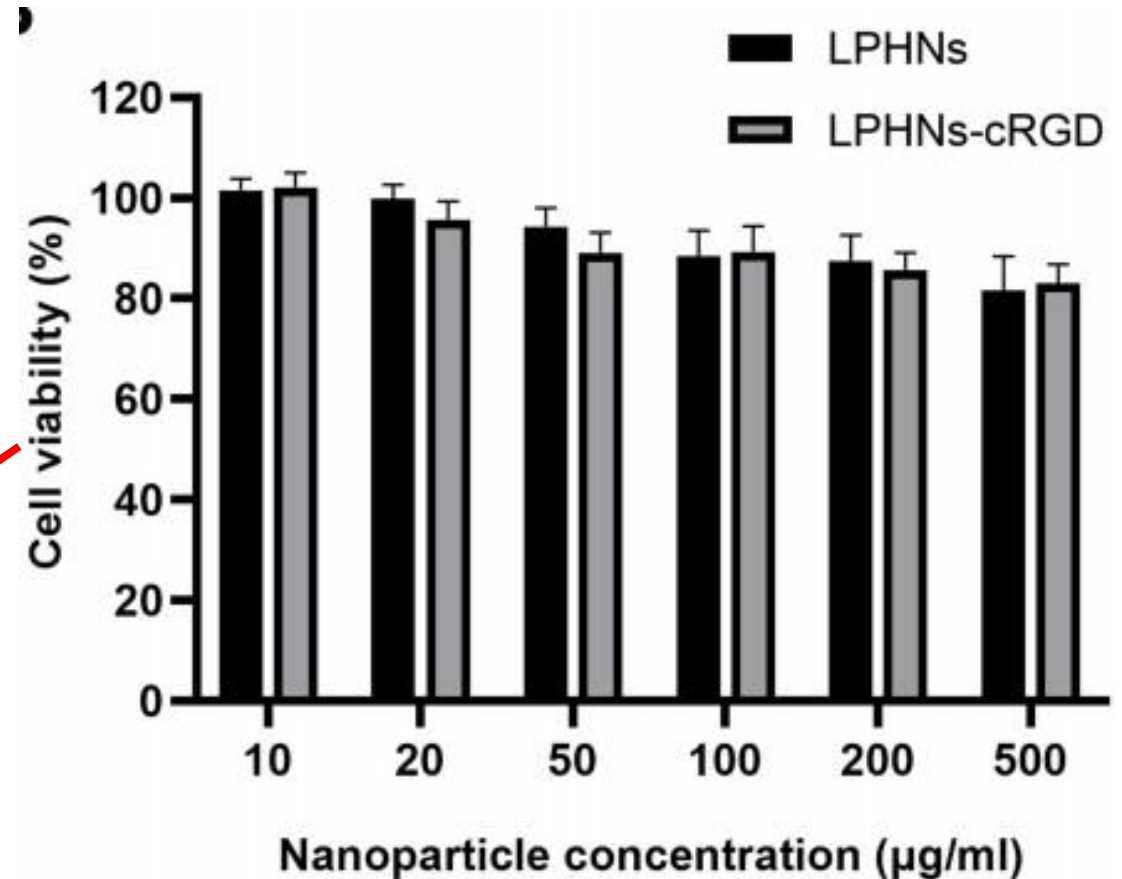
using a CCK-8 assay

to verify that the nanoparticles were biocompatible and non-toxic to cells.

cell viability >80%

nanoparticles were safe for cells

Cell viability at various concentrations of LPHNs and LPHNs-cRGD in T98G cells after 48 h (n=3).

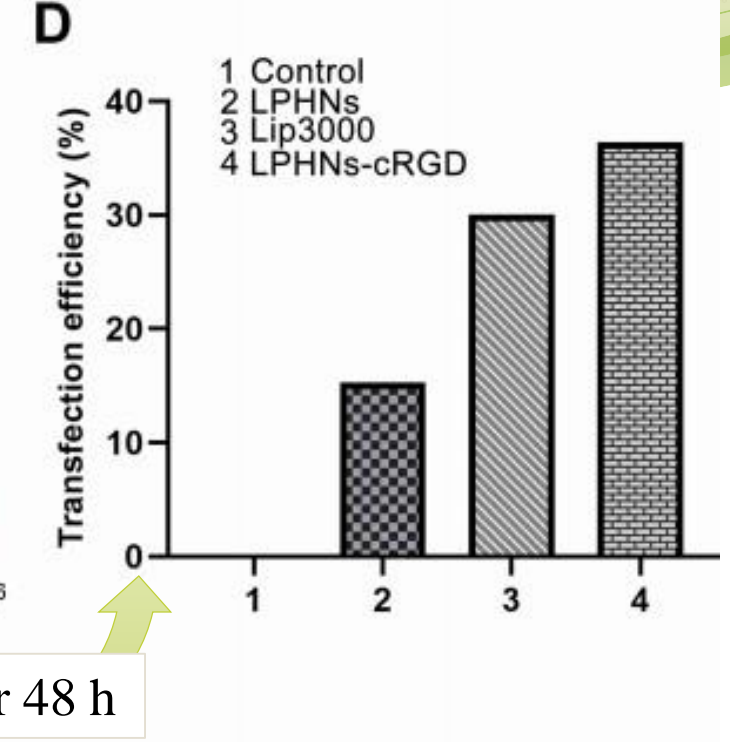
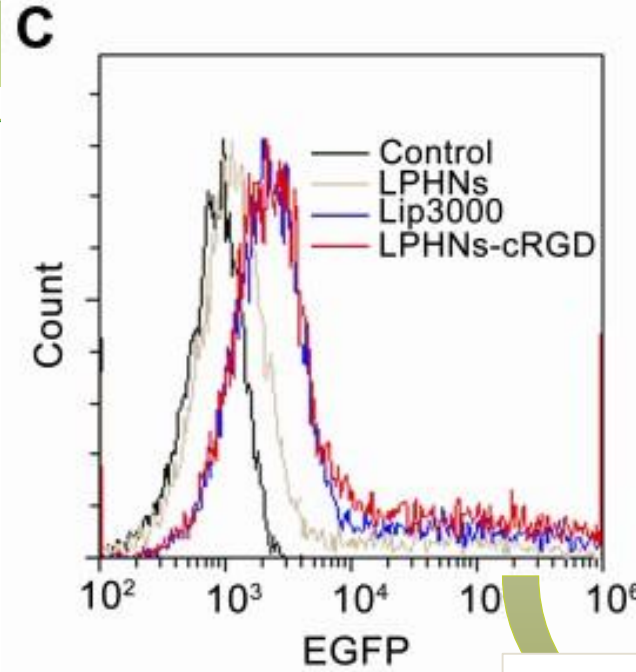


Transfection Efficiency

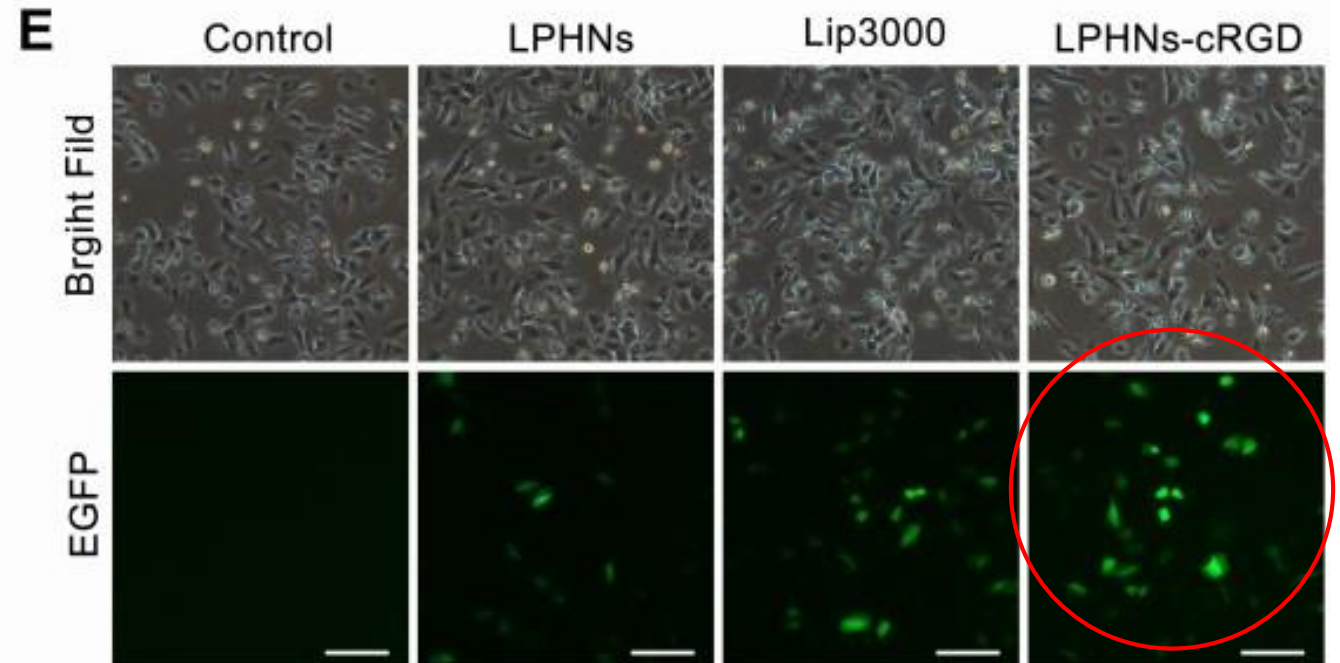
FCM and fluorescence microscopy

(C) and (D) FCM and statistical analysis of EGFP-positive T98G cells
(E) Microscopy images of EGFP expression in T98G cells at 48 h after transfection

✓ pCas9/MGMT encapsulated in the **LPHNs-cRGD** were successfully introduced into the T98G cells.



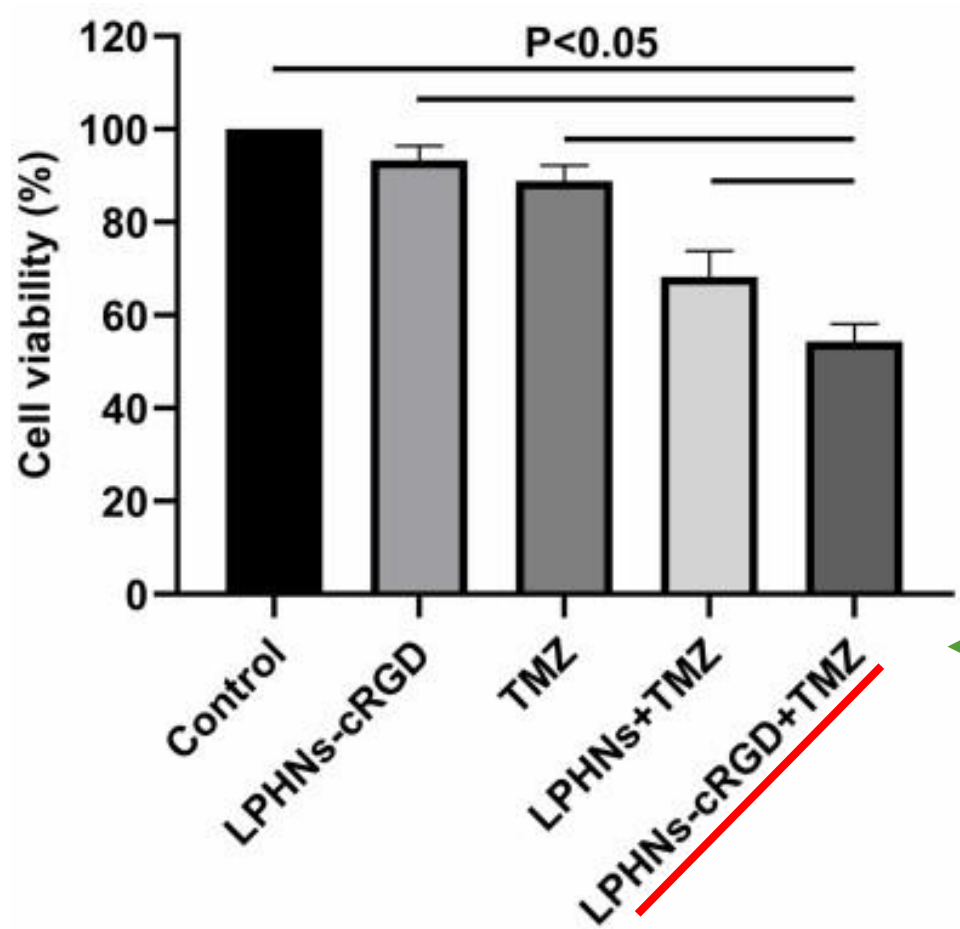
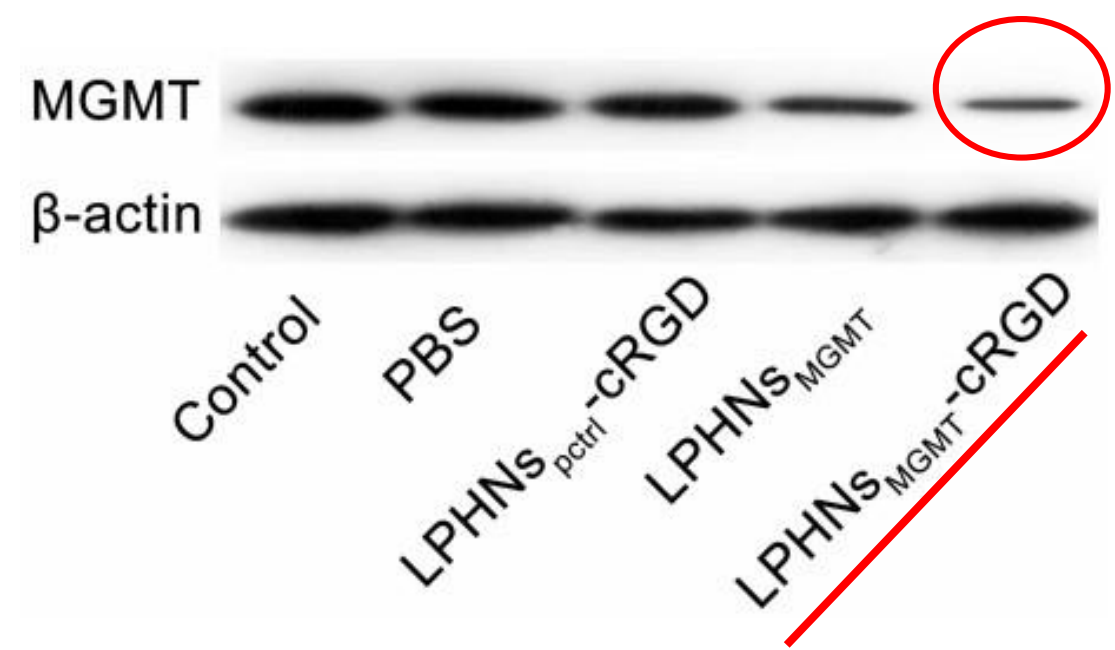
After 48 h



Genome Editing and Chemosensitivity Testing in vitro

to determine the MGMT protein expression :

Western blotting assays



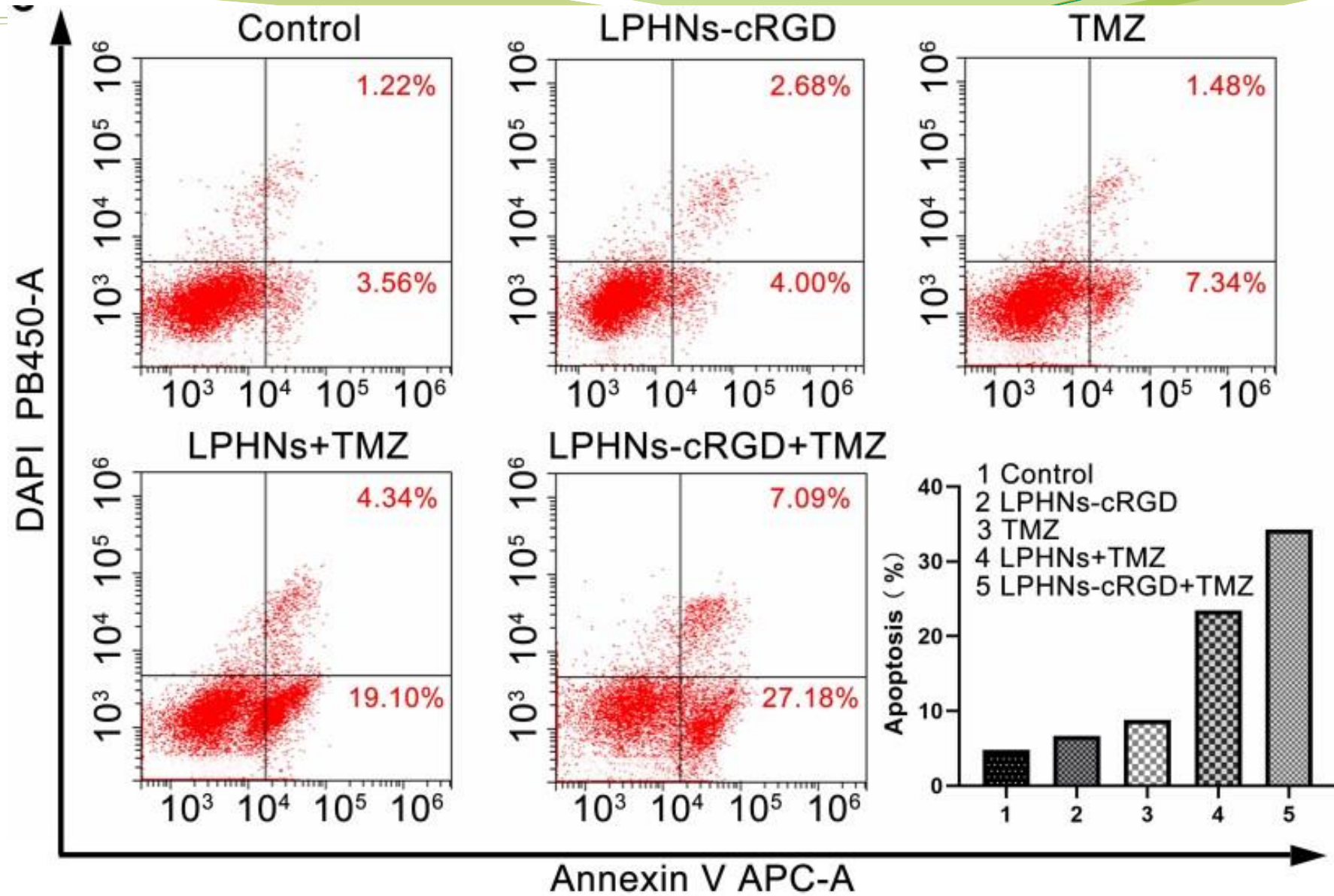
Cell viability of T98G cells after different treatments:

Combination treatment resulted in significantly

decreased cell viability, especially in the LPHNs_{sp}Cas9/MGMT-cRGD + TMZ group

The percent of apoptotic cells was significantly higher in the combination treatment group

LPHNspCas9/MGMT-cRGD + TMZ treatment induced more apoptosis compared with LPHNspCas9/MGMT + TMZ due to the targeting ability of the cRGD (23.44% vs 34.27%)



FCM analysis of apoptosis after different treatments.

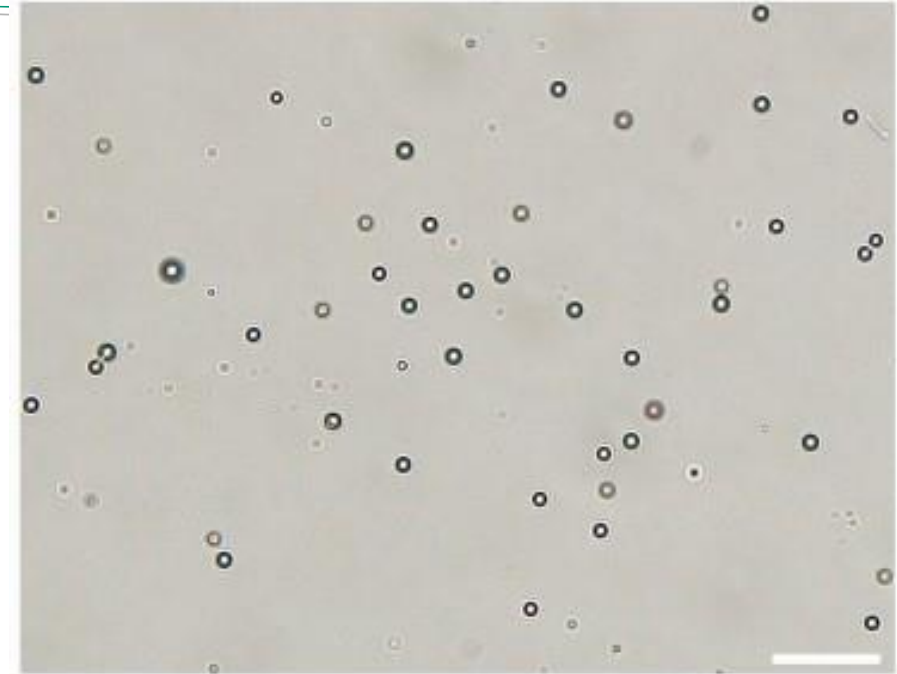
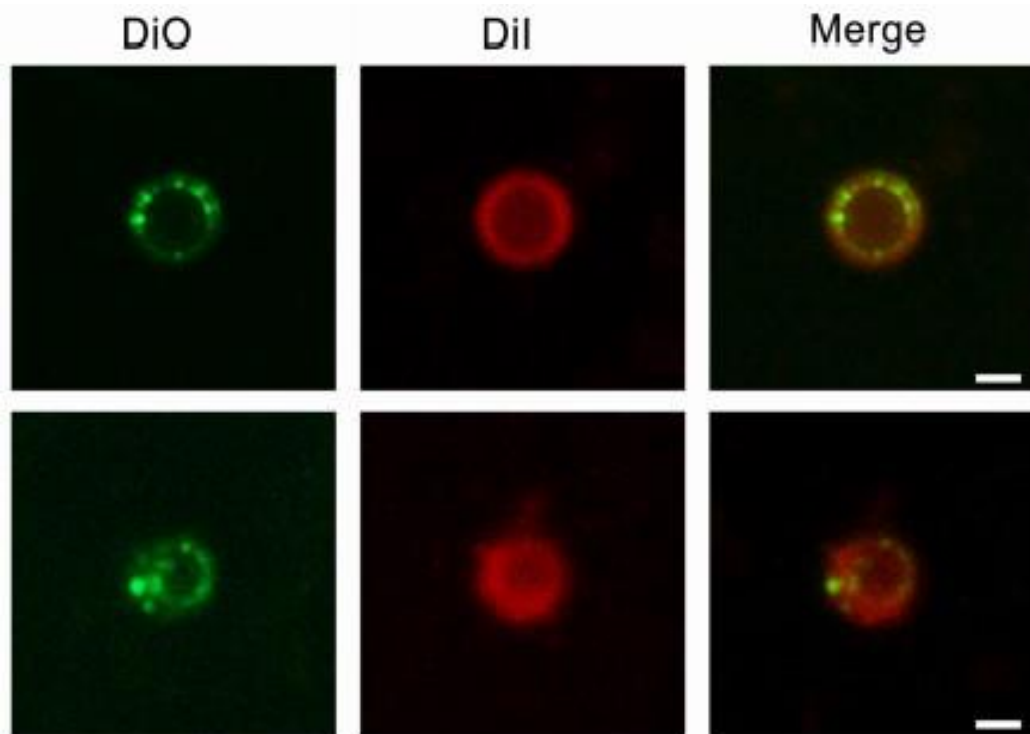
Local BBB Disruption

microscopy image of the MBs:

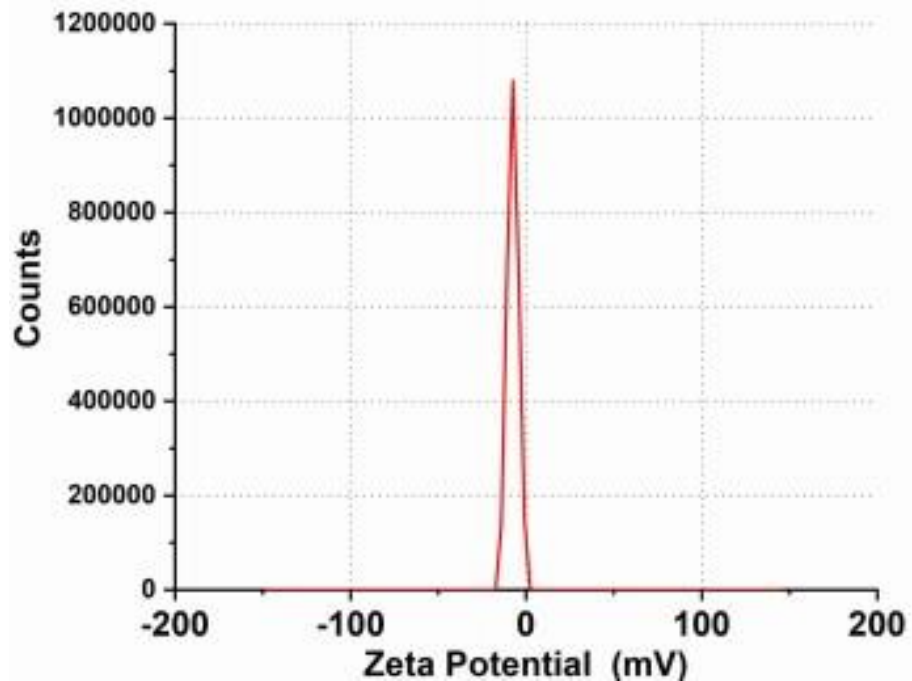
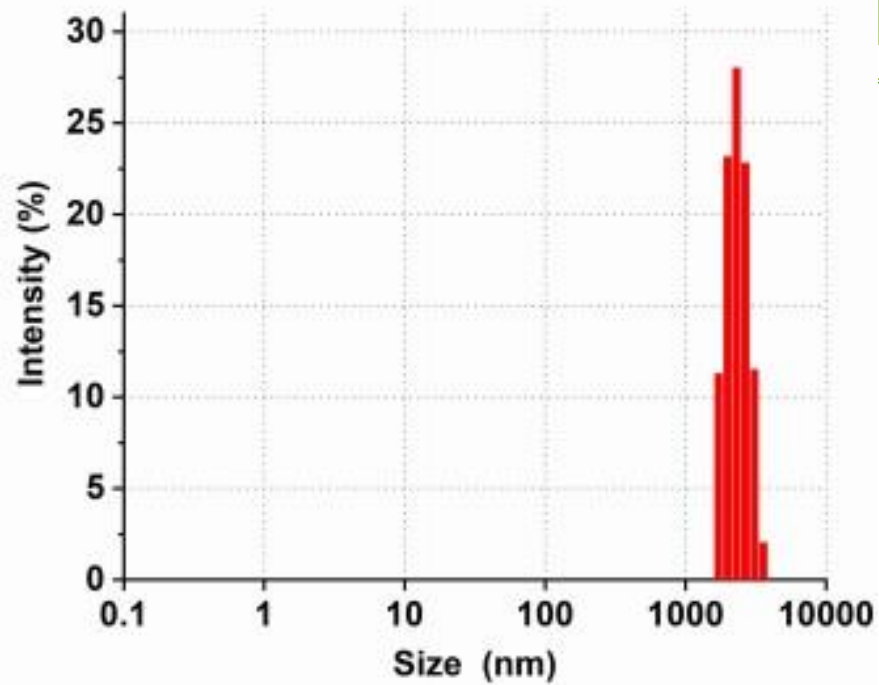
Density: $3.95 \pm 0.89 \times 10^9$ /mL,

Diameter: 1845.2 ± 366.7 nm

zeta potential: -16.2 ± 6.82 mV



Fluorescence image of MBs-LPHNs-cRGD complexes: illustrating that the LPHNs-cRGD adhered to the MBs' surface.



Particle size and zeta potential of
MBs-LPHNs-cRGD complexes:

Diameter: 2197.35 ± 448.7 nm

zeta potential: -7.49 ± 3.14 mV

BBB-opening experiment in vivo :
focused ultrasound intensity of 1.84 W

EB dye staining : to investigate the
permeability of the BBB

H&E staining: to observe whether there
were any **damages** to brain tissue

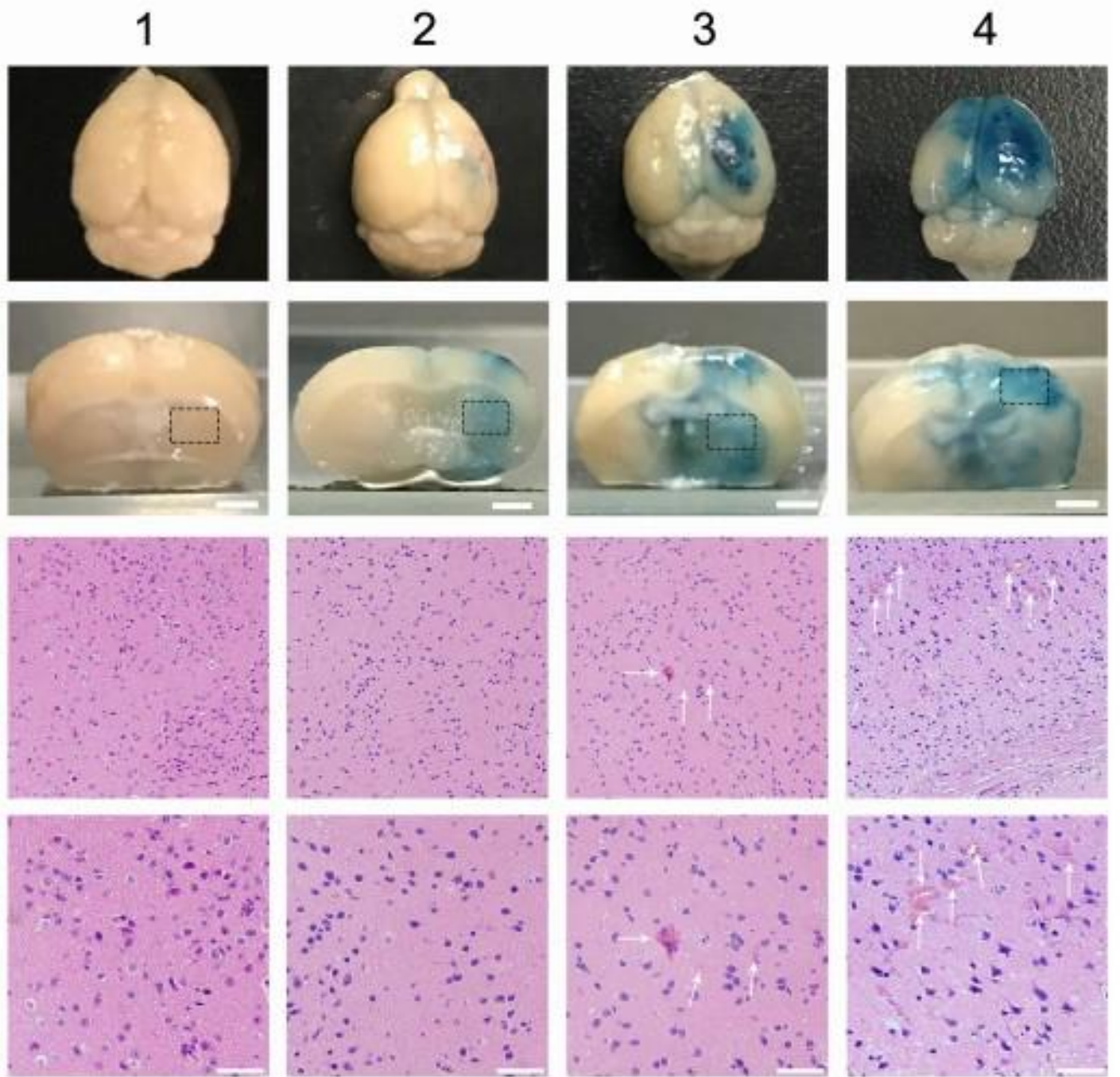
The FUS radiation time and amounts of
MBs-LPHNs-cRGD:

3 min and 2×10^6

3 min and 4×10^6

5 min and 4×10^6

3 min and 8×10^6



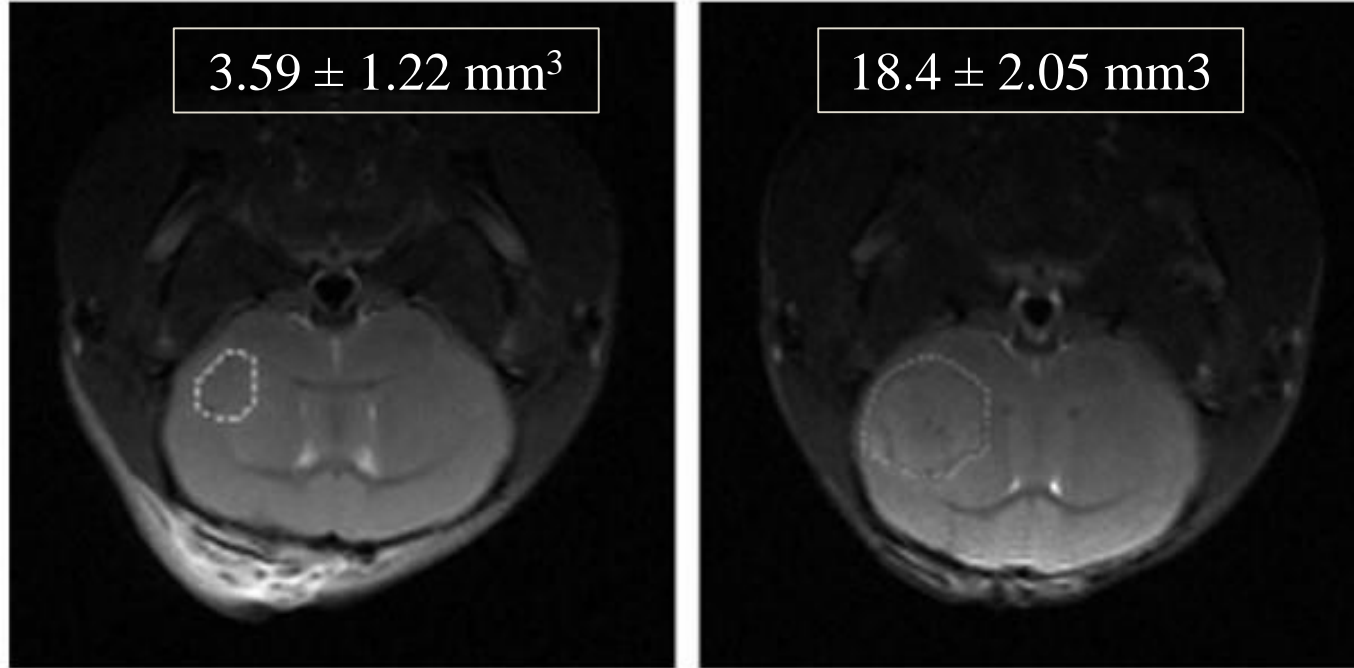
Targeting Ability, Biodistribution, and Biosafety in vivo

7 days

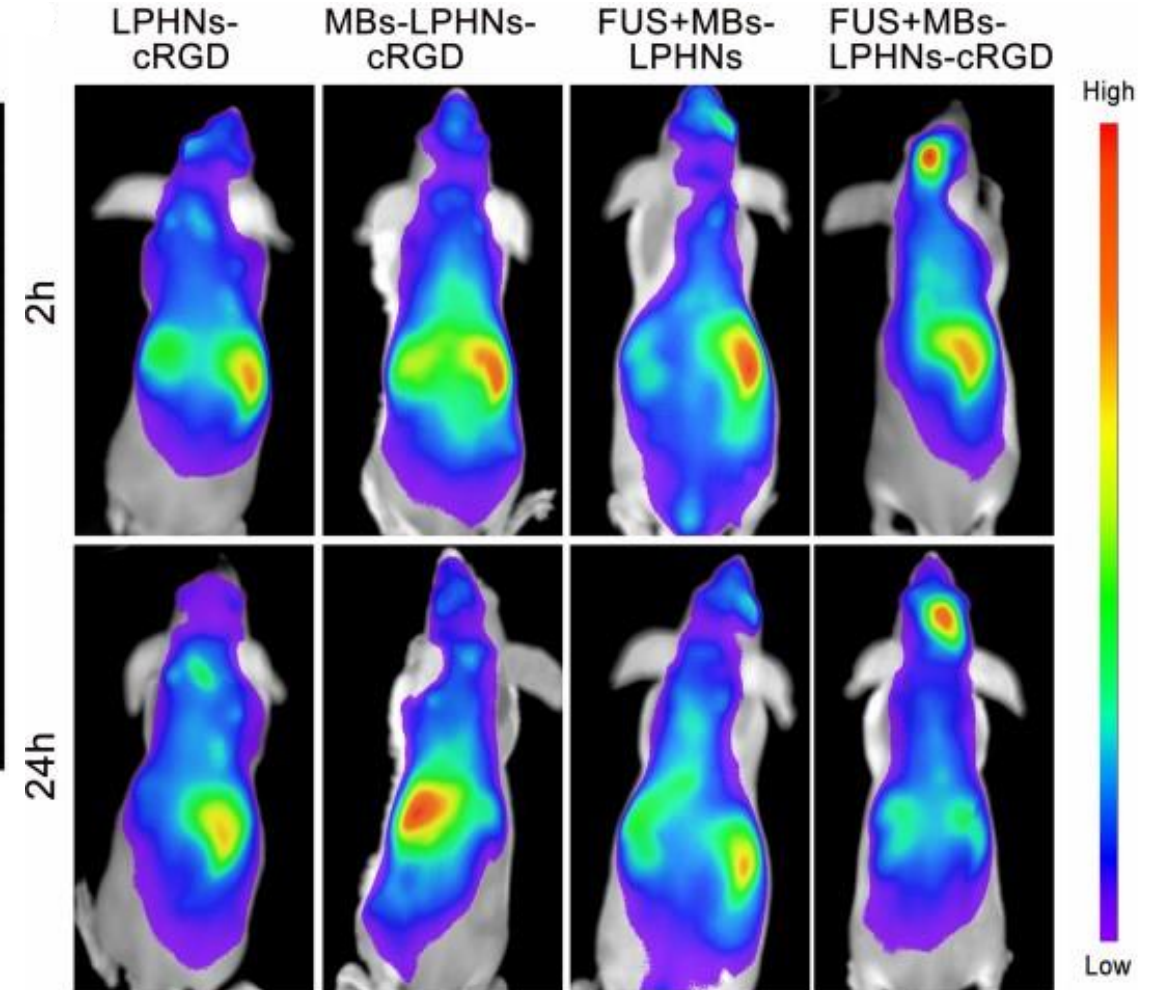
14 days

$3.59 \pm 1.22 \text{ mm}^3$

$18.4 \pm 2.05 \text{ mm}^3$



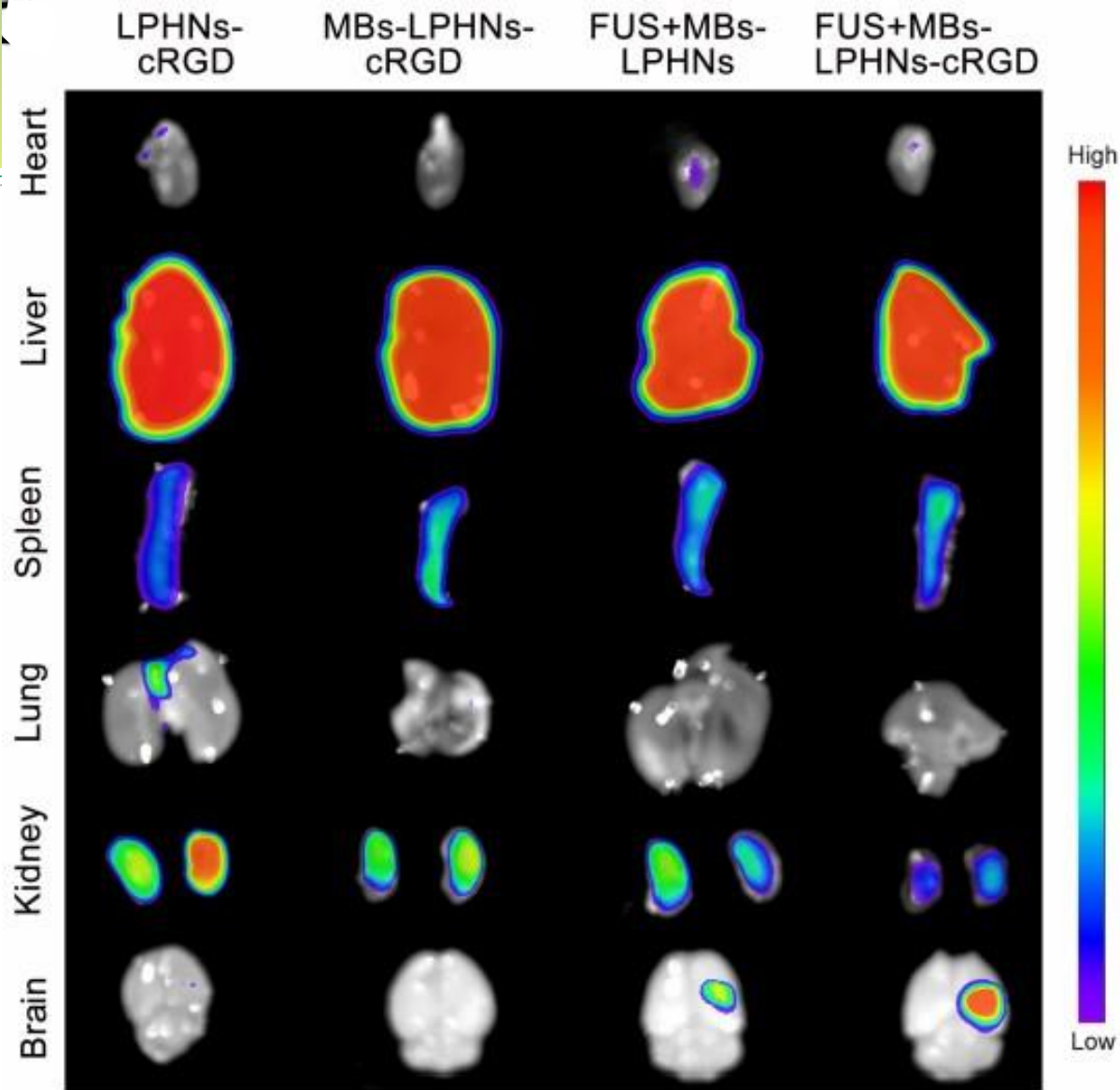
MRI images of orthotopic tumor after implantation of T98G cells



significant fluorescence signal was observed in brain after

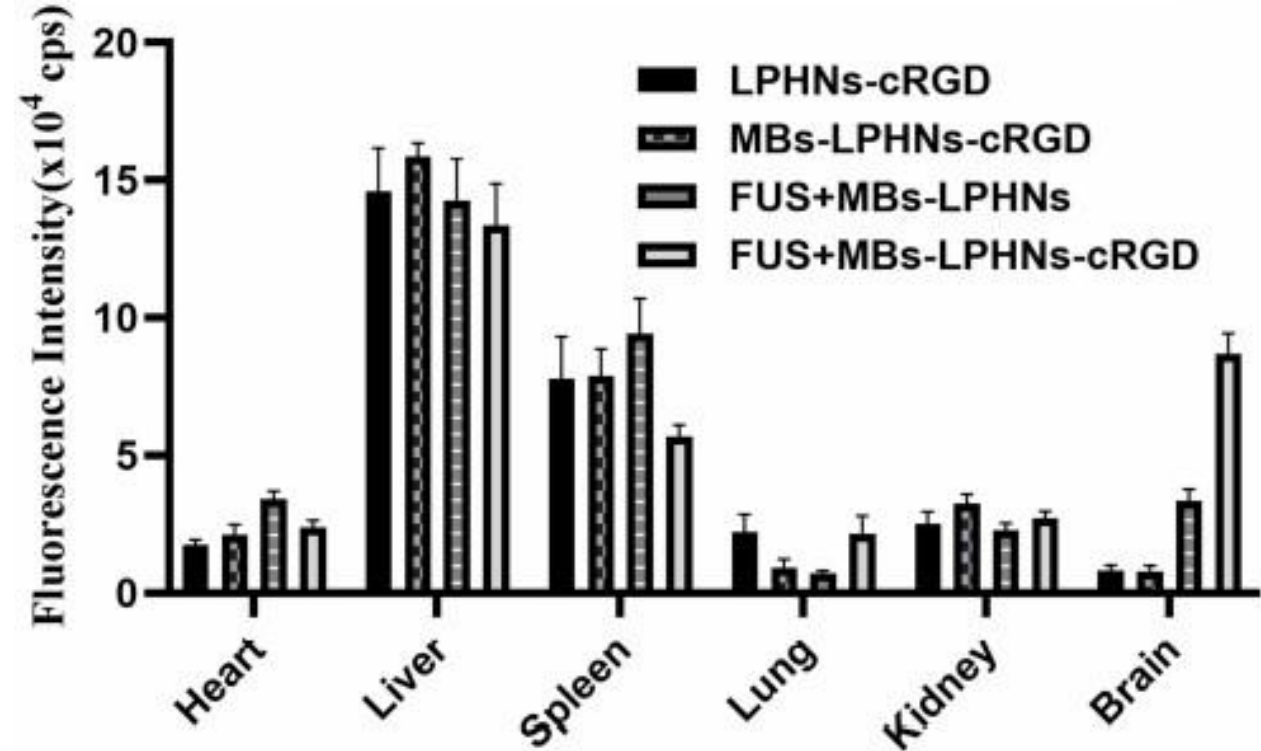
treatment with the **FUS-assisted MBs-LPHNs-cRGD complexes**

in vivo fluorescence imaging



ex vivo fluorescence images of major organs and brain of mice after 24 h of treatments

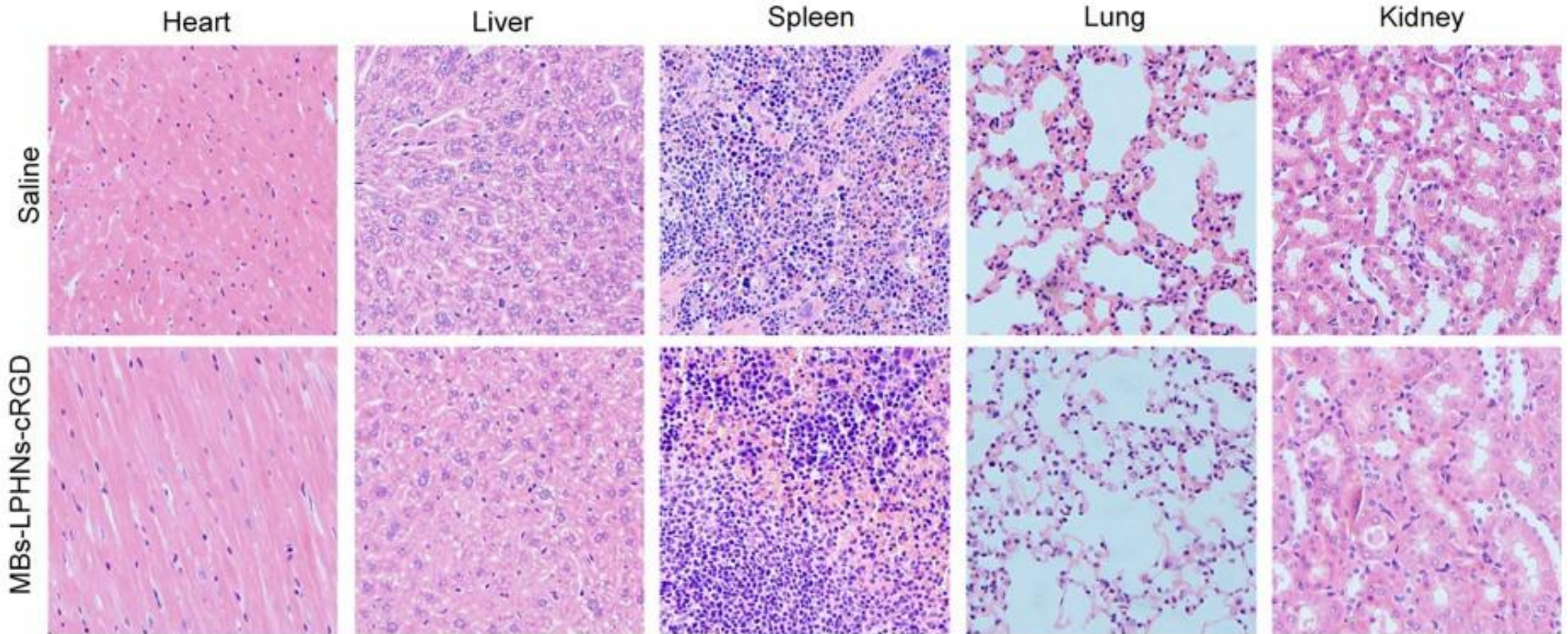
Corresponding quantitative analysis of fluorescence intensity in major organs (n=3)



FUS in combination with MBs can significantly promote nanoparticle delivery to the brain

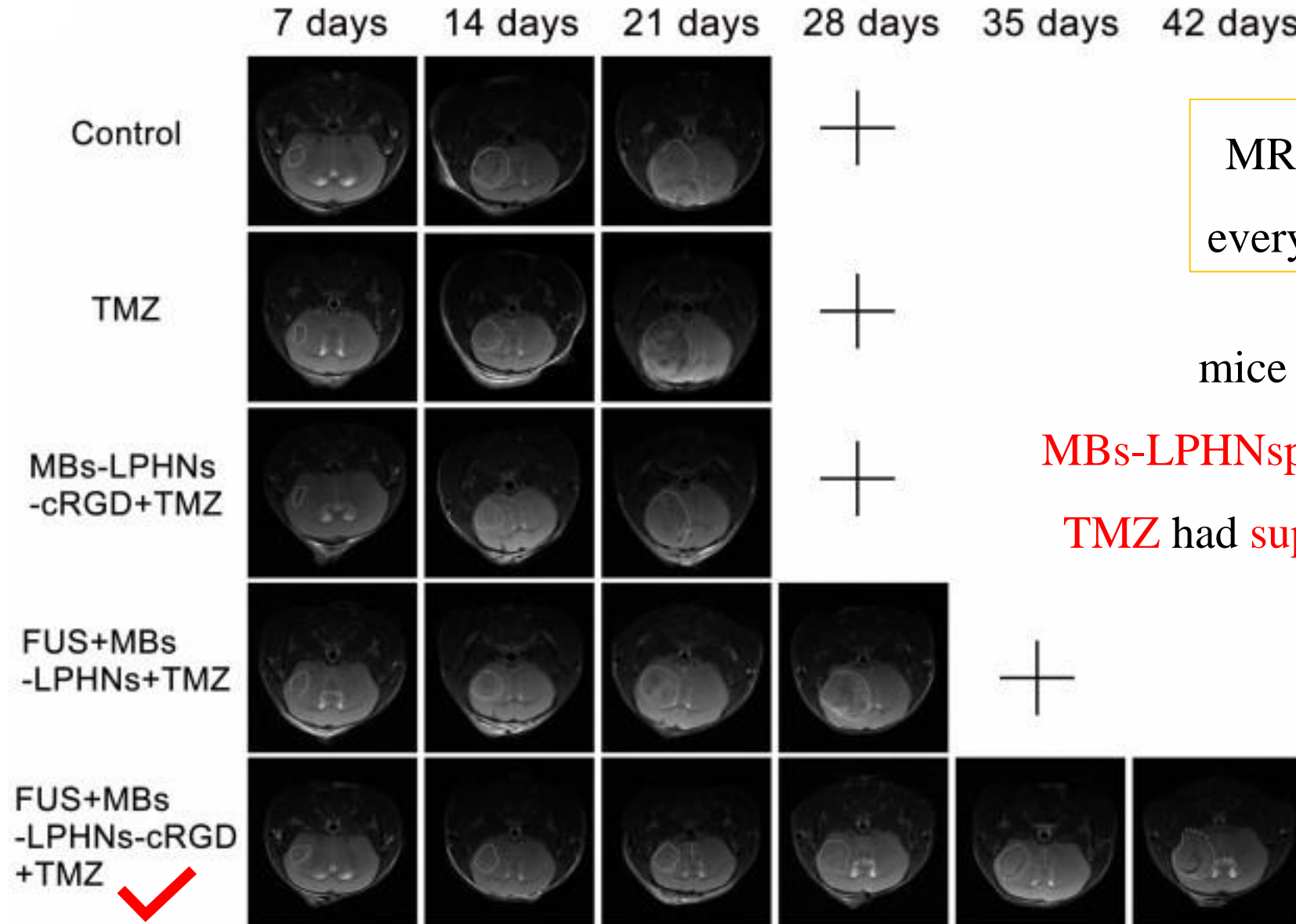
LPHNscRGD can exert an active targeting effect to further improve nanoparticle delivery in the tumor region in vivo

H&E staining of the major organs of mice 7 days after injection of MBs-LPHNs-cRGD and saline



no significant histological abnormalities between the two groups, indicating the **high histocompatibility** and **biosafety** of the nanoparticles in vivo

Therapeutic Effects of FUS-Assisted MBs-LPHNs-cRGD Complexes in vivo



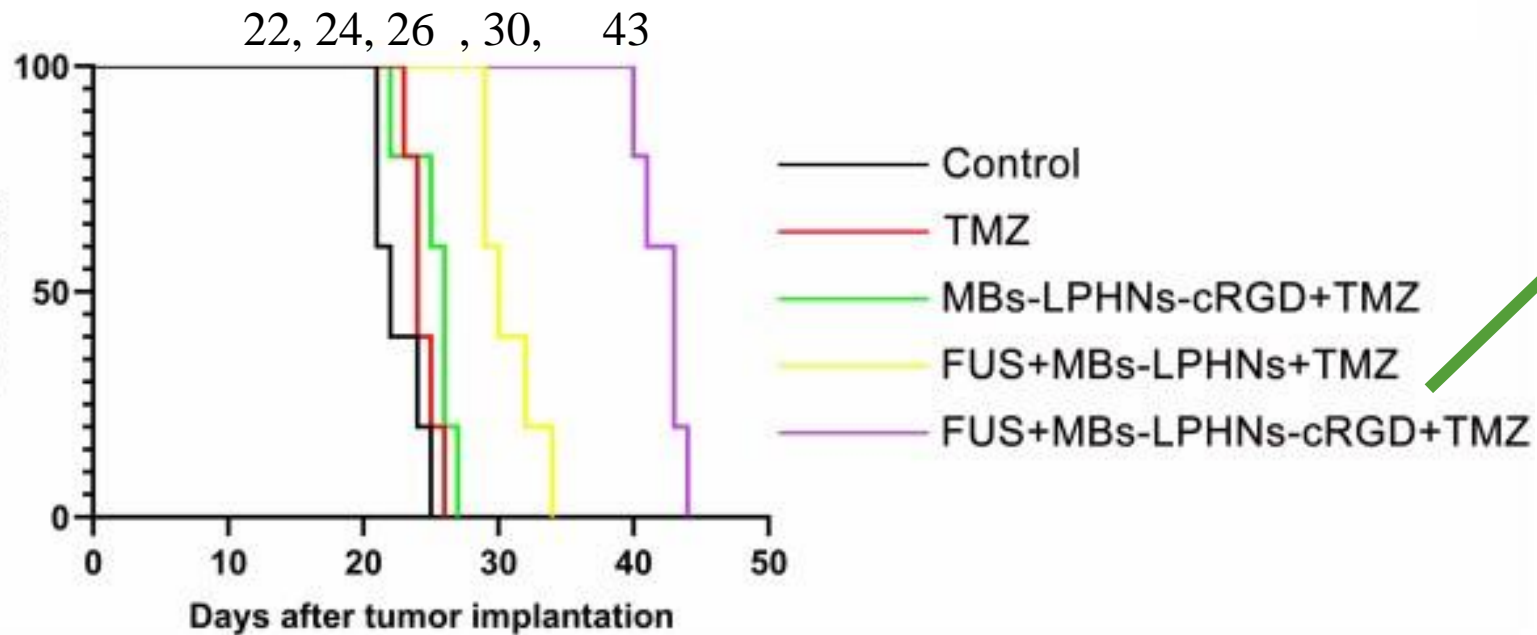
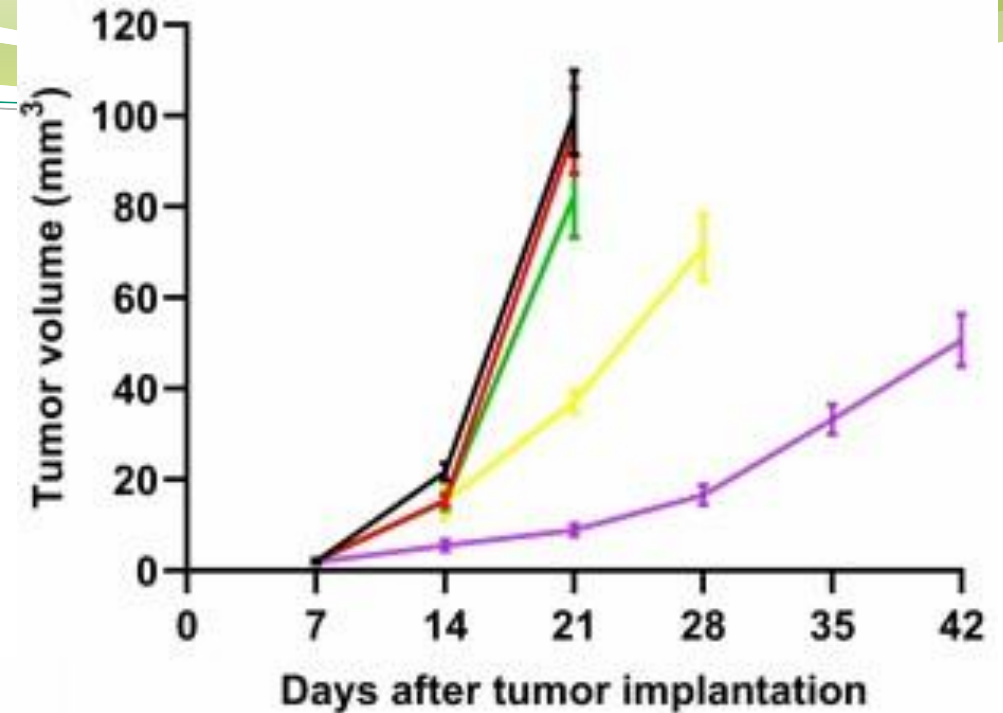
MRI images of tumors monitored every 7 days of different treatments

mice treated with **FUS-assisted MBs-LPHNs^{sp}Cas9/MGMT-cRGD complexes + TMZ** had **suppressed** tumor growth compared with other groups

FUS-assisted MBs-LPHNspCas9/MGMT-cRGD + TMZ:

tumor volume was smaller

At the time of death, the final tumor volume was also smaller



enhanced the therapeutic effect of TMZ in glioblastoma, inhibited the growth of glioblastoma, and prolonged survival in tumor bearing mice compared with other treatments

Discussion



- **MGMT protein** is an important factor in the **resistance of tumor cells to alkylating agents** (such as TMZ)
- **TMZ** induces the **O6 -methylguanine (O6 -MeG)** lesion in DNA,
→ resulting in **cell cycle arrest** and, eventually, **apoptosis**.
- **MGMT** can **remove the methyl adducts from DNA** and transfer it to the cysteine residue of the MGMT molecule
→ leading to the **repair of DNA** damage and irreversible inactivation of MGMT.
- Many studies have shown that **downregulation of MGMT expression** can **re-sensitize** GBM cells to TMZ.

In previous studies

signaling pathway interference

siRNA technology



instability and short working times

In CRISPR/Cas9 system

Used dual-gRNA sequences

can recognize two adjacent regions of the target gene and remove large fragments of nucleotides between the two sites

we used the "all-in-one" plasmid system

Cas9 expression cassette

dual-gRNA expression cassettes

instead of Cas9 mRNA or the Cas9 protein/ gRNA

ribonucleoprotein complexes (Cas9 RNPs).
(mRNA- or RNP-based delivery method)

plasmid DNA: more stable and cost-effective, and has a more sustained gene expression.



large size of the plasmid system: transfection efficiency and editing efficiency may be relatively low

LPHNs
nanoparticles

powerful drug delivery vehicle

high structural integrity and stability,
controlled drug release, high
biocompatibility and bioavailability

In this study synthesized by
nanoprecipitation

an **easier and more effective** alternative to emulsification-
solvent-evaporation (ESE) and **two-step** methods.

PLGA, an FDA-approved polymer

used as the polymer core

DC-chol, a type
of **cationic lipid**

used to adsorb the **pCas9/MGMT** by **electrostatic action**
and encapsulate it within the polymer core

PEG chains conjugated to
the **lipid (DSPE)**

enhance the **steric stability**

prolong circulation time in vivo

cRGD peptide + DSPE-PEG

targets integrin $\alpha v \beta 3$ receptors

To endow the delivery platform with active targeting ability

LPHNs-cRGD

have relatively small particle size (179 nm)

typical core-shell structure.

preparation process does not affect the plasmid structure

protect the plasmid against enzyme degradation

✗ But, the nanoparticles have a relatively wide size distribution

some strategies have been used to improve the size homogeneity of the LPHNs

optimizing formulation parameter

microfluidic nanoprecipitation process

FUS + MBs

plays an important role in drug delivery in the CNS.

LPHNs-cRGD + MBs

→ to obtain effective nanoparticle delivery

FUS irradiation

→ triggers MBs' vibrations

→ (BBB-opening)

separation of LPHNs-cRGD
from MBs

→ enter the brain and target tumor cells via
cRGD- α v β 3 reaction

FUS-MBs

→ the duration, burst length, pulse frequency of
FUS, and the composition, size,
concentration, dose of MBs and so on

→ should be carefully adjusted
to obtain **safe and effective**
BBB-opening

Tumors in the treatment group
were not completely eliminated
during the course of treatment.

→ possibly because the **CRISPR/Cas9**
system cannot effectively edit
genes in all GBM cells

→ due to the relatively **low**
transfection & editing
efficiency

the presence of glioma stem cells (GSCs) and genotype heterogeneity

could protect part of the GBM population from treatment

These residual tumor cells can continue to proliferate, leading to tumor recurrence

TMZ-resistance in glioblastoma → complicated process → whose mechanism has not been fully elucidated

MGMT: one of the many important factors

excision repair **(BER)**

DNA mismatch repair **(MMR)** system

In the future study

CRISPR/Cas9 system can be optimized to achieve an enhanced gene editing efficiency

several gRNAs that target key proteins in the TMZ-resistance pathway can be co-encapsulated in LPHNs-cRGD

We will also explore the potential **off-target** effects of CRISPR/Cas9




one of the main concerns in the clinical application of this system

Recently, many efforts have been made to improve the **specificity and reduce the off-target** effects of the CRISPR/Cas9 system



dCas9-FokI, SpCas9-HF1 and truncated guide RNAs

With these modified strategies, we hope that the FUS-assisted MBs-LPHNs-cRGD delivery system can significantly improve the specificity and reduce the off-target effects of CRISPR/Cas9 in glioblastoma treatment.



Conclusion

- developed a multi-functional (**MBsLPHNs-cRGD complexes**) CRISPR/Cas9 delivery system
- demonstrated the **inhibition effect** on the tumor growth in an orthotopic model of **glioblastoma** with **FUS-assisted BBB-opening**.
- LPHNs-cRGD { could efficiently deliver CRISPR/Cas9 plasmids into GBM cells
and **downregulate** the expression of MGMT
resulting in an **increased sensitivity** of the cells to TMZ
- FUS-MBs parameters were evaluated for effective BBB-opening to ensure biosafety
- FUS-assisted MBs-LPHNspCas9/MGMT-cRGD + TMZ treatment: **efficiently inhibited tumor growth** and **prolonged survival** in tumor-bearing mice.

- **biotoxicity** study { delivery platform had **high biocompatibility** and **biosafety**
which indicates its potential use in further clinical applications
- the **synergistic targeting ability** of the physically site-specific characteristics of FUS and the biologically active targeting ability of cRGD peptide significantly improve nanoparticle delivery into the CNS
- This study provides a **promising strategy** for drug-resistant glioblastoma treatment via a **safe, effective** and **targeted CRISPR/Cas9 delivery system**
- further illustrates the therapeutic applications of **FUS-assisted BBB-opening** in CNS diseases

THANK YOU

FOR YOUR

ATTENTION