REVIEW ARTICLE

A review article of UPLC and its emerging application and challenges and opportunities

Yenugukesava[1]*, G. Dharmamoorthy[2]

[1]Department of Pharmaceutical Analysis, MB School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Mohan Babu University, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India, [2]Department of Pharmaceutical Analysis, Mohan Babu University, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India

Abstract

Ultra performance liquid chromatography (UPLC) has emerged as a powerful analytical tool in pharmaceutical applications, offering enhanced resolution, speed, and sensitivity compared to traditional high-performance liquid chromatography. This technique, which utilizes smaller particle sizes in the stationary phase and higher operating pressures, significantly improves the efficiency of drug analysis, quality control, and formulation development. UPLC plays a critical role in the separation and quantification of active pharmaceutical ingredients, excipients, and impurities in pharmaceutical products. It is widely employed in the analysis of complex matrices, such as biological fluids and dosage forms, enabling the accurate determination of drug concentration and pharmacokinetic parameters. In addition, UPLC is instrumental in the stability testing and shelf-life assessment of pharmaceuticals. The technique's advantages, including reduced analysis time, lower solvent consumption, and high-throughput capabilities, make it a preferred choice in the pharmaceutical industry for both regulatory compliance and R and D purposes. This overview highlights the various pharmaceutical applications of UPLC, demonstrating its impact on drug development, quality assurance, and patient safety.

Key words: Cost-effective, efficiency, high pressure, high separation, ultra performance liquid chromatography

INTRODUCTION TO UPLC IN PHARMACEUTICAL APPLICATIONS

Ultra performance liquid chromatography (UPLC) is an advanced form of liquid chromatography (LC) that utilizes sub-2-micron particles and operates at higher pressures (up to 15,000 psi) than traditional high-performance LC (HPLC). This results in higher resolution, faster analysis times, and better sensitivity, making UPLC an essential tool in pharmaceutical analysis.[1,2]

In pharmaceutical applications, UPLC is widely used for drug development, quality control, regulatory compliance, and analytical testing. It is particularly effective for the separation, identification, and quantification of complex mixtures of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), excipients, and impurities.[3]

KEY ADVANTAGES OF UPLC OVER TRADITIONAL HPLC[4-6]

- Faster analysis: UPLC's high efficiency and reduced particle size lead to much faster separations, significantly reducing analysis times
- Higher resolution: The small particle size and high pressure contribute to higher resolution of complex compounds
- Increased sensitivity: UPLC improves sensitivity, making it possible to detect trace amounts of components in pharmaceutical samples
- Improved throughput: The faster analysis times allow for increased sample throughput in pharmaceutical testing labs, leading to more efficient workflows.

APPLICATIONS IN DRUG DEVELOPMENT[7-9]

Pre-formulation studies

In the early stages of drug development, UPLC is used to study the chemical and physical properties of drug candidates,

Address for correspondence:
G. Dharmamoorthy, Department of Pharmaceutical Analysis, Mohan Babu University, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India.
E-mail: dharmamoorthy111@gmail.com

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including solubility, stability, and purity. This allows formulation scientists to optimize drug delivery systems (DDS) and ensure the stability of the drug in various environments.

Pharmacokinetics and bioanalysis

UPLC is used in bioanalytical laboratories for pharmacokinetic studies to measure the concentration of drugs in plasma, urine, or other biological fluids. It provides the sensitivity required to quantify low drug concentrations with precision, which is crucial for understanding drug absorption, distribution, metabolism, and excretion.

Metabolite profiling

UPLC is employed for metabolite profiling in drug development, where the primary drug is tested in animal models or human subjects to understand its metabolic pathways. By analyzing the parent compound and its metabolites, UPLC provides crucial data to improve the safety profile of drugs.

QUALITY CONTROL AND ASSURANCE[10-12]

Quantification of APIs

UPLC is commonly used in the pharmaceutical industry for routine quality control to ensure the correct dosage of APIs in drug products. The technology allows for highly accurate quantification, ensuring that the API content meets the prescribed specification.

Detection of impurities

The detection of trace impurities in drug formulations is crucial for regulatory compliance and product safety. UPLC can resolve impurities that might be missed with less sensitive methods. This is essential in determining the stability of a drug product and ensuring it remains within acceptable limits over time.

Stability studies

Stability testing is required by regulatory agencies to ensure that pharmaceutical products maintain their potency and safety throughout their shelf life. UPLC plays a key role in monitoring the degradation of drugs under various storage conditions, ensuring that products remain effective and safe to use.[13,14]

REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Pharmacopeia testing

UPLC is commonly used in compliance with pharmacopeial standards, such as those set by the United States Pharmacopeia, European Pharmacopeia, and other global authorities. These standards outline methods for the analysis of drugs and ensure consistent quality and safety of pharmaceutical products.

Good manufacturing practice (GMP)

UPLC is instrumental in maintaining GMP compliance during drug manufacturing. The ability to quickly and accurately assess product quality is vital to meet GMP standards, ensuring that all products are manufactured according to specified guidelines to guarantee safety, efficacy, and quality.[15]

Regulatory filings

Data generated by UPLC analysis are often used in regulatory submissions, such as new drug applications (NDAs) or Abbreviated NDAs. UPLC's speed, accuracy, and reliability make it a valuable tool in ensuring that regulatory bodies are provided with accurate and reproducible data.

PHARMACEUTICAL RESEARCH AND FORMULATION DEVELOPMENT[16,17]

Method development

UPLC is widely used in the development of new analytical methods for pharmaceutical formulations. Its high resolution and speed allow researchers to fine-tune and optimize analytical protocols quickly. UPLC's versatility also makes it suitable for both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

DDS analysis

UPLC plays an essential role in the analysis of DDS, including controlled-release and sustained-release formulations. By providing precise quantification of APIs over time, UPLC helps in optimizing the release profiles of DDS.

Bioequivalence studies

For generic drug development, UPLC is used to perform bioequivalence studies, ensuring that the generic drug has the same therapeutic effect as the brand-name drug. UPLC's sensitivity and ability to resolve complex mixtures make it ideal for testing the bioequivalence of different formulations.

ADVANCES IN UPLC INSTRUMENTATION AND TECHNIQUES[6,18]

Mass spectrometry (MS)-linked UPLC (UPLC-MS)

One of the major advancements in UPLC is its coupling with MS, which allows for the identification of compounds

based on their mass-to-charge ratio. UPLC-MS is particularly powerful in identifying unknown impurities or degradation products in drug formulations, as well as in the quantification of drugs and metabolites in biological samples.

UPLC for chiral separations

Chiral compounds, including enantiomers, play a critical role in the pharmaceutical industry, especially for drugs that exhibit different pharmacological effects based on chirality. UPLC provides high resolution for the separation of chiral molecules, aiding in the development of enantiomerically pure drugs.

Two-dimensional (2D)-Ultra high performance liquid chromatography

2D-UPLC combines two different chromatographic methods to provide higher resolution and sensitivity. This technique is valuable when analyzing very complex mixtures, such as biological samples, where multiple components need to be resolved simultaneously.

CASE STUDIES IN PHARMACEUTICAL UPLC APPLICATIONS[19]

Case study 1: Determination of residual solvents in drug formulations

UPLC has been used extensively to measure the concentration of residual solvents in drug products, which is a critical step in ensuring product safety. By using UPLC, it is possible to quantify trace amounts of solvents, such as methanol, ethanol, or acetone in final drug formulations.

Case study 2: Analysis of drug impurities in generic drug products

The use of UPLC in testing the quality of generic drugs has been demonstrated in numerous studies, where it has been employed to detect trace impurities and ensure the consistency of generic formulations relative to the branded drug.

CHALLENGES IN UPLC APPLICATIONS

Sample complexity

UPLC's sensitivity can be a double-edged sword when analyzing complex matrices such as biological fluids or herbal drug formulations. The presence of matrix effects and interferences from other compounds can pose challenges in quantifying the target compound accurately.

Cost considerations

While UPLC provides superior performance, it also comes with high initial costs for the instrumentation and ongoing maintenance. These costs may be a barrier for some smaller pharmaceutical companies, especially in the case of less common applications.

Method validation

Method validation for UPLC analysis requires a detailed understanding of the pharmaceutical product and the target compounds. Ensuring accuracy, precision, and reliability across different batches is crucial but can be a time-consuming process.

FUTURE TRENDS AND DIRECTIONS IN UPLC FOR PHARMACEUTICALS

Integration with data analytics

With the advent of big data and AI, UPLC data can be integrated with advanced data analytics tools to improve the method to predict drug behavior.

Miniaturization of UPLC systems

Development, streamline quality control processes, and Miniaturization are trend that could make UPLC even more accessible to a wider range of laboratories. Smaller, more compact systems could lower costs and expand UPLC's use in more routine analytical applications.

Green chemistry applications

The pharmaceutical industry is moving toward more environmentally friendly processes. UPLC's faster analysis times and smaller sample volumes contribute to reducing the consumption of solvents and energy, supporting sustainability efforts in pharmaceutical testing.

CONCLUSION

UPLC has revolutionized pharmaceutical analysis, offering higher resolution, sensitivity, and faster analysis times compared to traditional methods. From drug development to quality control, regulatory compliance, and research, UPLC has proven to be an invaluable tool in ensuring the safety, efficacy, and quality of pharmaceutical products. With ongoing advancements, UPLC will continue to play a key role in the pharmaceutical industry, particularly as the demand for faster, more efficient, and sustainable analytical solutions grows.

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