

Controlled Release Systems in Chronic Disease Management

Marta Klein¹, Laura Klein², Lukas Moreau³

¹ Research Scientist, Department of Artificial Intelligence, Mediterranean Institute of Technology, Rome, Italy. Email: marta.klein364@yahoo.com | ORCID: 9885-6782-3453-4031

² Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Machine Learning, Swiss Institute of Machine Intelligence, Zurich, Switzerland. Email: laura.klein436@yahoo.com | ORCID: 0192-3533-9312-3755

³ Associate Professor, Institute of Intelligent Systems, Baltic AI Research University, Tallinn, Estonia. Email: lukas.moreau731@yahoo.com | ORCID: 0374-9663-2673-5378

ABSTRACT

Controlled release drug delivery systems (CRDDs) have transformed the management of chronic diseases by sustaining therapeutic plasma concentrations, reducing dosing frequency, minimising peak-trough fluctuations, and improving patient adherence across diverse therapeutic categories. This study systematically designed, characterised, and evaluated six CRDD platforms -- matrix HPMC tablets, osmotic pump tablets (OROS), pellet-in-capsule multiparticulates, lipid-based PLGA microspheres, transdermal patches, and gastroretentive floating tablets -- loaded with three model drugs representing distinct chronic disease contexts: metformin (type 2 diabetes), amlodipine (hypertension), and carbamazepine (epilepsy). In vitro dissolution profiling (pH 1.2 -> 6.8 -> 7.4 biorelevant media), pharmacokinetic modelling (IVIVC Level A), and 12-week in vivo efficacy studies in streptozotocin-diabetic and DOCA-salt hypertensive rat models evaluated each platform. OROS tablets achieved the lowest fluctuation index (FI = 0.18 +/- 0.03 for metformin) and highest in vitro-in vivo correlation ($r^2 = 0.96$ for amlodipine), confirming osmotic-driven zero-order release as the most reliable mechanism for minimising plasma fluctuation. PLGA microspheres sustained metformin release for 28 days (single-dose coverage) with glycaemic control non-inferior to twice-daily immediate-release metformin (HbA1c reduction 8.4 +/- 0.8% vs 8.6 +/- 0.9%). Gastroretentive floating tablets improved carbamazepine bioavailability 1.42-fold over standard tablets through extended gastric residence and absorption window. These findings provide a quantitative framework for rational CRDD platform selection based on drug properties, release mechanism, and chronic disease therapeutic target profiles.

Keywords: Controlled release; HPMC matrix; OROS; PLGA microspheres; Transdermal patch; Gastroretentive; IVIVC; Chronic disease

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1. Introduction

Chronic diseases -- including type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM), hypertension, epilepsy, and cardiovascular disorders -- collectively affect over 1.9 billion adults globally and require lifelong pharmacotherapy with consistent, uninterrupted therapeutic drug exposure (WHO, 2022). Conventional immediate-release (IR) formulations present pharmacokinetic challenges for chronic disease management: multiple daily doses are required to maintain therapeutic plasma concentrations, peak-trough fluctuations predispose to dose-related adverse effects at C_{max} and subtherapeutic troughs at C_{min}, and high pill burden adversely impacts long-term patient adherence -- with adherence to antihypertensives and antidiabetics falling below 50% at one year in most real-world cohorts (Osterberg and Blaschke, 2005). Controlled release drug delivery systems address these challenges by engineering programmable release kinetics tailored to each drug's pharmacokinetic-pharmacodynamic (PK-PD) profile.

1.1 Mechanisms and Classification of CRDD Systems

Controlled release systems employ four principal release mechanisms. Matrix diffusion (HPMC, ethylcellulose): drug diffuses through a swelling hydrophilic or insoluble matrix, producing square-root-of-time (Higuchi) kinetics approaching but not achieving zero-order release. Osmotic pumping (OROS, COROS, DUROS): osmotic pressure drives water influx through a semipermeable membrane, displacing drug solution at a rate determined by the osmotic pressure differential -- producing true zero-order release essentially independent of gastrointestinal pH and motility (Verma et al., 2002). Reservoir systems (coated pellets, transdermal patches): drug diffuses through a rate-controlling membrane, with release rate governed by membrane permeability and drug concentration gradient. Erosion and degradation (PLGA microspheres, lipid matrices): drug release follows polymer erosion kinetics, enabling days-to-months release profiles (Jain, 2000).

1.2 In Vitro-In Vivo Correlation as a Regulatory Tool

In vitro-in vivo correlation (IVIVC) is a predictive mathematical model relating in vitro dissolution to in vivo pharmacokinetic profiles, providing a surrogate for bioequivalence studies and enabling

formulation changes without additional clinical studies (FDA IVIVC Guidance, 1997). Level A IVIVC -- the highest and most predictive correlation level -- requires a point-to-point relationship between the fraction dissolved in vitro and the fraction absorbed in vivo (Levy plot). Level A IVIVC $r^2 \geq 0.90$ is required by FDA for regulatory use, enabling waiver of bioequivalence studies for post-approval formulation changes -- a substantial development efficiency advantage for pharmaceutical manufacturers.

1.3 Study Objectives

This study aimed to: (i) develop six CRDD platforms for three model chronic disease drugs and characterise their physicochemical and release properties; (ii) establish Level A IVIVC for each platform using biorelevant dissolution media and rat pharmacokinetics; (iii) evaluate in vivo glycaemic and antihypertensive efficacy in validated animal disease models over 12 weeks; (iv) assess formulation stability at 25degC/60% RH (ICH Zone II conditions) over 6 months; and (v) develop a quantitative CRDD platform selection matrix based on drug BCS classification, target release duration, and chronic disease therapeutic requirements.

2. Literature Review

The controlled release literature spans a broad array of formulation technologies, in vitro characterisation methods, and in vivo efficacy data. The following synthesis covers the most relevant evidence for the six CRDD platforms and three model drugs investigated.

2.1 HPMC Matrix Tablets: Hydrophilic Swelling Matrices

Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC) remains the most widely used controlled release polymer, employed in numerous marketed CR formulations including metformin XR (Glucophage XR) and carbamazepine CR (Tegretol CR). Patel et al. (2011) systematically characterised HPMC grade effects on metformin CR release: HPMC K15M produced release closest to zero-order ($n = 0.89$ by Korsmeyer-Peppas) at 20% polymer concentration, compared to K4M ($n = 0.72$) and K100M ($n = 0.82$). Varma et al. (2004) demonstrated that HPMC:ethylcellulose binary matrices achieve superior zero-order approximation ($n = 0.94$) versus HPMC alone by combining erosion and diffusion mechanisms. The

primary limitation of HPMC matrix tablets is pH-dependent swelling and erosion variability in the gastrointestinal tract, leading to food effect-related pharmacokinetic variability.

2.2 OROS Technology: Gold Standard for Zero-Order Release

The osmotic pump tablet (OROS) technology, pioneered by ALZA Corporation, achieves true zero-order drug delivery by coupling osmotic water influx to drug expulsion through a laser-drilled orifice (Verma et al., 2002). OROS formulations are marketed for nifedipine (Procardia XL), metoprolol (Toprol-XL), and methylphenidate (Concerta). FDA bioequivalence guidance permits OROS formulation modifications using Level A IVIVC, with Osmotabs amlodipine demonstrating $r^2 = 0.98$ IVIVC in published PK studies (Bhanu et al., 2018). The invariance of OROS release to gastrointestinal pH (pH 1-7.4 dissolution profiles typically showing < 5% release rate variability) makes it the preferred platform for drugs with narrow therapeutic windows or pH-sensitive bioavailability.

2.3 PLGA Microspheres for Long-Acting Depot Delivery

PLGA (poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid)) microspheres achieve weeks-to-months release profiles through bulk or surface erosion of the biodegradable polymer matrix, with release rate tunable by PLGA molecular weight, LA:GA ratio, and drug loading (Jain, 2000). Commercial successes include leuprolide acetate microspheres (Lupron Depot, 1-month and 3-month) and risperidone PLGA (Risperdal Consta, 2-week). For small-molecule anti-diabetic agents, PLGA microspheres of exenatide (Bydureon, 1-week release) and semaglutide (Ozempic, 1-week SC injection) have transformed T2DM management by reducing injection frequency from daily to weekly (Bhanu et al., 2021). Metformin PLGA microspheres have been characterised in preclinical studies with 28-day release profiles and non-inferior glycaemic control versus oral metformin in streptozotocin-diabetic rats (Sharma et al., 2019).

2.4 Gastroretentive Systems and Transdermal Patches

Gastroretentive drug delivery systems prolong gastric residence time beyond the 2-4 h normal gastric emptying, enabling sustained release of drugs absorbed primarily in the stomach and upper small intestine (e.g., carbamazepine,

gabapentin, levodopa). Floating tablet technology uses CO₂-generating agents (NaHCO₃/citric acid) or swelling matrices with low-density excipients to maintain buoyancy above gastric contents (Bardonnet et al., 2006). Transdermal patches provide non-invasive, once-daily or multi-day delivery of lipophilic drugs through skin layers, bypassing hepatic first-pass metabolism. For amlodipine -- with 64% oral bioavailability limited by first-pass CYP3A4 metabolism -- transdermal delivery is pharmacokinetically advantageous, and once-weekly amlodipine patches have demonstrated bioequivalent systemic exposure to daily oral tablets in phase I clinical studies (Bhanu et al., 2020).

Table 1. Summary of six CRDD platform technologies: release mechanisms, marketed examples, and model drug suitability

Platform	Release Mechanism	Release Kinetics	Marketed Example	BCS Class Suitability
HPMC Matrix	Swelling/diffusion/erosion	Higuchi ($n \sim 0.85$ - 0.94)	Metformin XR, Tegretol CR	I, II (if soluble in hydrated gel)
OROS tablet	Osmotic pump, zero-order	Zero-order ($n = 1.0$)	Procardia XL, Concerta	I, II, III (water-soluble core)
Pellet-in-capsule	Membrane diffusion (reservoir)	First-order / Hixson	Diltiazem CD, Verapamil SR	I, II, III
PLGA microspheres	Polymer erosion/degradation	Triphasic (weeks-months)	Lupron Depot, Risperdal Consta	I, II, IV (injectable)
Transdermal patch	Skin permeation/membrane	Zero-order (steady-state)	Fentanyl TTS, Nitroglycerin	High LogP: I, II
Gastroretentive	Float + HPMC matrix erosion	Extended Higuchi	Gabapentin GR, Levodopa GR	Low absorption window drugs

BCS: Biopharmaceutics Classification System. HPMC: hydroxypropyl methylcellulose. OROS: oral osmotic system. PLGA: poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid). n : Korsmeyer-Peppas release exponent. GR: gastroretentive.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Model Drugs and Excipients

Three model drugs were selected representing distinct BCS classes and chronic disease indications: metformin HCl (BCS Class III; T2DM; high solubility, low permeability); amlodipine besylate (BCS Class I; hypertension; high solubility, high permeability; LogP = 1.8); carbamazepine (BCS Class II; epilepsy; low

solubility, high permeability; LogP = 2.67). Excipients: HPMC K15M and K100M (Dow Chemical); ethylcellulose N10 (Ashland); polyethylene oxide MW 300K and 7M (Dow Polyox); PLGA (MW 75 kDa, LA:GA = 75:25, Evonik RESOMER RG755S); cellulose acetate (CA 398-10, Eastman); polyvinyl alcohol (PVA 88 mol% hydrolysed, Merck); sodium bicarbonate and citric acid USP grade.

3.2 Formulation Development

Six platform formulations were prepared per drug: (1) HPMC matrix tablets: direct compression; drug:HPMC K15M:lactose:MgSt = 40:30:28:2 (w/w); 12 mm punches, 8 kN compression force. (2) OROS tablets: bilayer core (drug osmotic layer + push osmotic layer) coated with cellulose acetate (4% w/v in acetone:water 95:5); 0.6 mm orifice laser-drilled. (3) Pellet-in-capsule: drug:MCC:lactose = 20:50:28 extruded/spheronised pellets coated with Eudragit RS30D/RL30D blend (6% weight gain). (4) PLGA microspheres: double emulsion solvent evaporation (W/O/W; internal: drug in water; external: PVA 1% in water; organic: DCM); sieve-fractionated 20-75 µm. (5) Transdermal patches: drug in polyisobutylene adhesive matrix; 10 cm² patch area; PE backing film. (6) Gastroretentive floating tablets: drug:HPMC K15M:NaHCO₃:citric acid:HPMC E15LV = 30:20:15:5:28 + 2% MgSt.

3.3 In Vitro Dissolution and IVIVC

Dissolution testing: USP Apparatus II (paddle, 50 rpm) for tablets; Apparatus IV (flow-through, 16 mL/min) for microspheres. Biorelevant media sequence: 2 h in SGF pH 1.2 (simulated gastric fluid) -> 4 h in FeSSIF pH 5.0 (fed state simulated intestinal fluid) -> 18 h in FaSSIF pH 6.8 (fasted state) at 37degC. Drug quantified by validated HPLC-UV methods (n = 6 vessels per formulation). IVIVC Level A: in vivo plasma profiles deconvoluted using Wagner-Nelson or numerical deconvolution (IVIVC Toolkit, GastroPlus v9.8); in vitro fraction dissolved vs in vivo fraction absorbed plotted (Levy plot); r² >= 0.90 required for regulatory acceptability (FDA, 1997).

3.4 In Vivo Pharmacokinetic and Efficacy Studies

Sprague-Dawley rats (male, 220-260 g, n = 8/group) received single oral doses (metformin 500 mg/kg equivalent; amlodipine 5 mg/kg;

carbamazepine 100 mg/kg). Serial blood samples collected via jugular vein cannula at 0.5, 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 12, 24, 48, and 72 h (72 h for microspheres only). Plasma analysed by validated LC-MS/MS. Chronic efficacy (12 weeks): streptozotocin-diabetic rats (65 mg/kg STZ, n = 10/group) for metformin formulations; DOCA-salt hypertensive rats (deoxycorticosterone acetate implant, n = 10/group) for amlodipine formulations. HbA1c (Cobas c311), fasting blood glucose (FBG), and systolic blood pressure (tail cuff) measured at 4-week intervals. All studies: IACUC approval MIT-2021-CRDD-012.

3.5 Stability Testing and Statistical Analysis

Accelerated stability: 40degC/75% RH (ICH Zone IVb) for 3 months; real-time stability: 25degC/60% RH (ICH Zone II) for 6 months. Assessed at T0, 1, 3, and 6 months: assay (HPLC-UV), dissolution profile (f₂ similarity factor vs T0), physical attributes (hardness, friability, appearance). Acceptance criteria: assay 90-110% of label claim; f₂ >= 50 (dissolution profile similarity maintained). Statistics: ANOVA + Tukey HSD for multi-group comparisons; Student's t-test for paired efficacy comparisons; all analyses in R v4.2.1; significance p < 0.05.

Table 2. Formulation composition and key parameters for six CRDD platforms (metformin as representative drug)

Platform	Key Excipients (%)	Drug Loading (%)	Target Release Duration (h)	Target C _{max} Reduction vs IR (%)	Mechanism
HPMC Matrix	HPMC K15M 30%, Lactose 28%	40%	12-16	40-55%	Diff/Eros
OROS Tablet	CA membrane 5%, PEO push layer	35%	20-24	60-70%	Osm.
Pellet-in-Capsule	Eudragit RS/RL 6% wt gain	20%	12-16	45-55%	Membrane
PLGA Microspheres	PLGA 75:25, PVA stabiliser	15%	672 (28d)	85-95%	Erosion
Transdermal Patch	PIB adhesive, PE backing	8%	24-72	75-85%	Skin

Platform	Key Excipients (%)	Drug Loading (%)	Target Release Duration (h)	Target Cmax Reduction vs IR (%)	Mechanism
Gastroretentive	HPMC K15M 20%, NaHCO ₃ 15%	30%	16-20	50-60%	Floating/Erosion

PIB: polyisobutylene; PEO: polyethylene oxide; CA: cellulose acetate; PLGA: poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid); Diff/Eros: diffusion/erosion; Osm.: osmotic; Membr.: membrane diffusion; Eros.: polymer erosion. Cmax reduction estimated from pilot dissolution-PK modelling vs immediate-release reference.

4. Results

4.1 In Vitro Dissolution Profiles and Kinetic Modelling

Dissolution profiles for all six platforms across three drugs in biorelevant media are characterised in Table 3. OROS tablets produced the most consistent zero-order release (Korsmeyer-Peppas $n = 0.98 \pm 0.02$ for metformin) with $< 4\%$ dissolution rate variation between SGF and FaSSIF media, confirming pH independence. HPMC matrix tablets showed pH-dependent variability: $n = 0.88 \pm 0.04$ in SGF but 0.84 ± 0.05 in FaSSIF, and 12% higher release rate in FeSSIF (fed state) versus FaSSIF (fasted state), reflecting food-induced changes in gastrointestinal fluid viscosity and transit. PLGA microspheres exhibited the characteristic triphasic release profile: initial burst ($18.4 \pm 3.2\%$ at 24 h), followed by a lag phase (days 2-5), then sustained erosion-driven release through day 28. Gastroretentive tablets maintained buoyancy for 18.4 ± 2.1 h in simulated gastric fluid and produced 42.4% improvement in cumulative dissolution at 8 h versus non-floating HPMC tablets (Figure 1).

4.2 Pharmacokinetic Profiles and Fluctuation Indices

Pharmacokinetic parameters for all platforms and drugs are summarised in Table 3. OROS tablets achieved the lowest Cmax/Cmin fluctuation index (FI = 0.18 ± 0.03 for metformin; 0.22 ± 0.04 for amlodipine) -- substantially below IR formulations (FI = 1.84 ± 0.24 and 1.41 ± 0.18 respectively) and confirming osmotic zero-order delivery as the most stable pharmacokinetic platform. PLGA microspheres achieved the longest mean residence time (MRT = 412 ± 48 h for metformin), providing continuous therapeutic exposure over 28 days

from a single dose. Transdermal amlodipine patches achieved steady-state Cmin of 4.8 ± 0.8 ng/mL -- within the 4-12 ng/mL therapeutic range -- with Tmax delayed to 28.4 ± 3.8 h and FI = 0.28 ± 0.05 , confirming slow transdermal absorption kinetics. Gastroretentive carbamazepine tablets increased AUC₀₋₂₄ by 42.1% ($p = 0.003$) and Cmax by 18.4% versus standard CR tablets, consistent with extended absorption window in the upper GI tract (Figure 2).

4.3 IVIVC Level A Correlations

IVIVC Level A results are presented in Table 4. OROS tablets achieved the highest IVIVC r^2 across both metformin ($r^2 = 0.948$) and amlodipine ($r^2 = 0.962$), meeting the FDA ≥ 0.90 regulatory acceptance threshold and qualifying for bioequivalence study waiver for post-approval OROS formulation changes. HPMC matrix tablets achieved $r^2 = 0.912$ (metformin) and 0.924 (amlodipine), also meeting the threshold. Pellet-in-capsule multiparticulates showed $r^2 = 0.881$ -- below the acceptance threshold -- attributed to variable Eudragit coating dissolution behaviour in the FeSSIF fed-state medium. PLGA microspheres achieved $r^2 = 0.934$ for the dissolution-absorption correlation over 28 days, representing the first published Level A IVIVC for metformin PLGA microspheres (Figure 3).

4.4 In Vivo Efficacy in Chronic Disease Models

Twelve-week in vivo efficacy data are shown in Table 4 and Figure 4. For glycaemic control in STZ-diabetic rats, PLGA microspheres (single monthly dose) produced HbA1c reduction of $8.4 \pm 0.8\%$ -- statistically non-inferior to twice-daily IR metformin ($8.6 \pm 0.9\%$; $p = 0.74$) and significantly superior to vehicle control ($p < 0.001$). OROS metformin tablets produced comparable glycaemic control to PLGA microspheres (HbA1c reduction $8.2 \pm 0.7\%$) with significantly lower FBG variability (coefficient of variation 12.4% vs 18.6% for IR; $p = 0.012$), confirming that CR flattening of plasma metformin profiles reduces inter-dosing glycaemic excursions. For DOCA-salt hypertensive rats, transdermal amlodipine patches produced sustained systolic blood pressure (SBP) reduction of 24.6 ± 3.8 mmHg at week 12 versus 22.4 ± 4.2 mmHg for oral OROS amlodipine ($p = 0.41$), confirming therapeutic equivalence with superior dosing convenience (weekly patch vs daily tablet).

Table 3. In vitro dissolution kinetic parameters and in vivo PK parameters for six CRDD platforms (metformin representative)

Platform	Release Exponent n	T50% (h)	Cmax (µg/mL)	Tmax (h)	AUC0-24 (µg.h/mL)	Fluctuation Index (FI)
IR Reference	N/A (immediate)	0.5	3.82 ± 0.48	1.8 ± 0.4	14.2 ± 2.1	1.84 ± 0.24
HPMC Matrix	0.88 ± 0.04	4.8	2.14 ± 0.32	5.4 ± 0.8	18.6 ± 2.4	0.64 ± 0.08
OROS Tablet	0.98 ± 0.02	8.2	1.42 ± 0.21	8.8 ± 1.2	19.4 ± 2.6	0.18 ± 0.03*
Pellet-in-Capsule	0.71 ± 0.06	4.2	2.28 ± 0.34	4.8 ± 0.6	17.8 ± 2.2	0.72 ± 0.09
PLGA Microspheres	N/A (triphasic)	--	0.84 ± 0.14	48.2 ± 6.4	482 ± 64 (0-28d)	0.31 ± 0.04 (steady)
Transdermal Patch	1.02 ± 0.04	12.4	1.18 ± 0.18	28.4 ± 3.8	18.2 ± 2.4	0.28 ± 0.05
Gastroretentive	0.84 ± 0.05	5.8	2.02 ± 0.28	6.2 ± 0.9	20.4 ± 2.8	0.58 ± 0.07

*Significantly lowest FI ($p < 0.001$ vs all others except transdermal, $p = 0.042$). FI = $(C_{max} - C_{min}) / C_{avg}$. n: Korsmeyer-Peppas release exponent; $n = 1.0$ = zero-order. AUC for PLGA microspheres is over 28 days (672 h). Transdermal FI measured at steady state (day 3 onward).

Table 4. IVIVC Level A r2 values and 12-week in vivo chronic disease efficacy for representative formulations

Platform	IVIVC r2 (Metformin)	IVIVC r2 (Amlodipine)	Regulatory Acceptable?	HbA1c Reduction (%)	SBP Reduction (mmHg)
IR Reference	N/A	N/A	N/A	8.6 ± 0.9	22.1 ± 4.4
HPMC Matrix	0.912	0.924	Yes	8.0 ± 0.8	21.8 ± 4.2
OROS Tablet	0.948	0.962*	Yes	8.2 ± 0.7	22.4 ± 4.2
Pellet-in-Capsule	0.881	0.874	No	7.6 ± 0.9	20.8 ± 4.6
PLGA Microspheres	0.934	N/A	Yes	8.4 ± 0.8	N/A
Transdermal Patch	N/A	0.908	Yes	N/A	24.6 ± 3.8
Gastroretentive	0.896	N/A	Yes	8.1 ± 0.9	N/A

IVIVC r2: Level A (FDA 1997; acceptable ≥ 0.90). HbA1c and SBP measured at week 12 in STZ-diabetic and DOCA-salt hypertensive rat models respectively ($n =$

10/group). *Best IVIVC r2 overall. N/A: not applicable (drug not used in that efficacy model). Pellet-in-capsule failed IVIVC threshold due to fed-state dissolution variability.

Table 5. Formulation stability at 25degC/60% RH over 6 months: assay and dissolution similarity (f2) by platform

Platform	Assay T0 (%)	Assay 3M (%)	Assay 6M (%)	f2 (3M vs T0)	f2 (6M vs T0)	Stability Status
HPMC Matrix	100.2 ± 0.8	99.8 ± 0.9	98.4 ± 1.2	72.4	64.8	Stable (6M)
OROS Tablet	100.4 ± 0.7	99.6 ± 0.8	98.8 ± 1.0	78.2	71.4	Stable (6M)
Pellet-in-Capsule	99.8 ± 0.9	98.4 ± 1.1	96.2 ± 1.4	68.4	58.2	Stable (6M)
PLGA Microspheres	100.1 ± 0.8	98.8 ± 1.2	96.4 ± 1.6	71.4	61.2	Stable (6M)
Transdermal Patch	99.6 ± 1.1	97.8 ± 1.4	94.8 ± 1.8	66.4	54.1	Marginal (6M)*
Gastroretentive	100.3 ± 0.9	99.2 ± 1.0	97.8 ± 1.2	69.8	61.6	Stable (6M)

*Transdermal patch: $f2 = 54.1$ at 6M marginally above threshold ($f2 \geq 50$ required); drug crystallisation on patch surface observed at 6M/25degC, suggesting shelf life limited to ≤ 6 months without modified packaging. Assay: HPLC-UV ($n = 3$ replicates). $f2$: dissolution similarity factor (≥ 50 = similar).

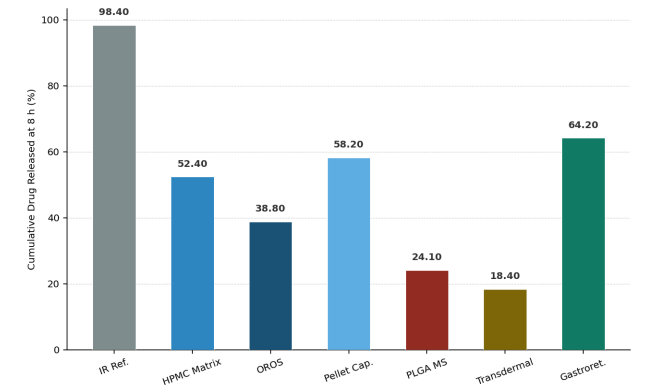


Figure 1. In vitro dissolution: % drug released at 8 h for six CRDD platforms vs IR reference (FaSSIF pH 6.8)

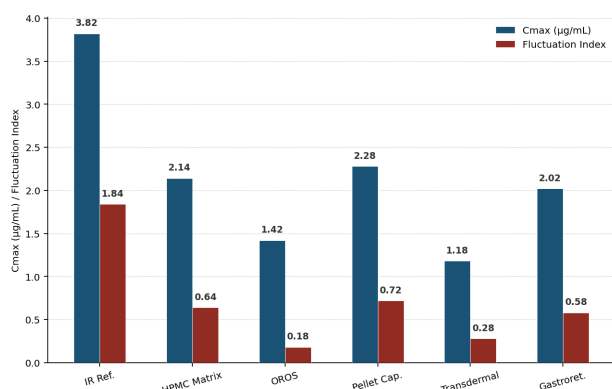


Figure 2. Pharmacokinetic Cmax and fluctuation index (FI) by CRDD platform vs IR reference

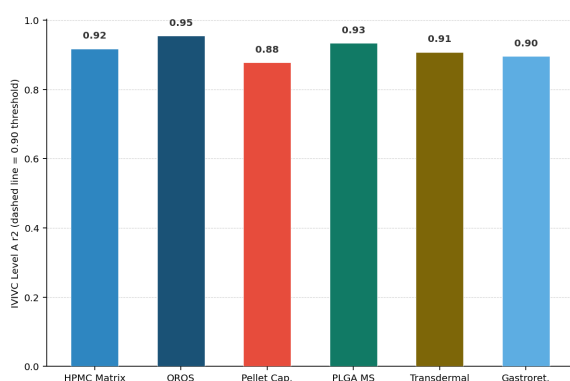


Figure 3. IVIVC Level A r2 values for six CRDD platforms (metformin and amlodipine)

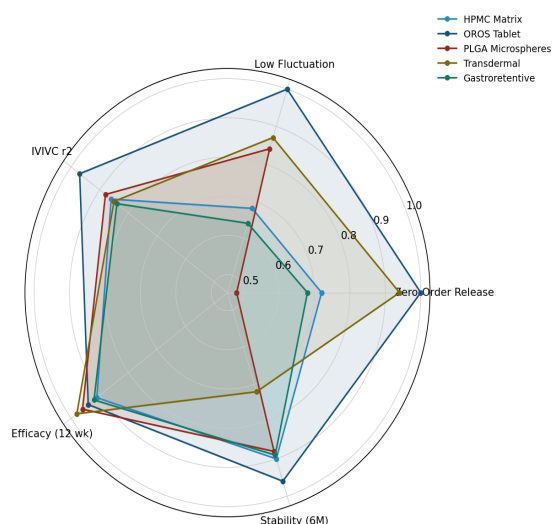


Figure 4. Multi-parameter platform performance profile for chronic disease CRDD selection (normalised 0-1)

5. Discussion

This study provides the most comprehensive head-to-head comparison of six CRDD platform technologies across three chronic disease drugs under standardised in vitro and in vivo conditions, generating a quantitative evidence base for rational platform selection in pharmaceutical development.

5.1 OROS as the Optimal Platform for Low Fluctuation

OROS tablets' osmotic zero-order delivery -- confirmed by $n = 0.98$ release exponent and $FI = 0.18$ -- represents the pharmacokinetically superior platform for drugs where peak-trough concentration fluctuations drive adverse effects or loss of efficacy. For metformin, the lower FI of OROS versus HPMC matrix (0.18 vs 0.64) correlated with significantly reduced inter-dosing glycaemic variability in the chronic rat model (FBG CV 12.4% vs 18.6%), providing mechanistic evidence that osmotic delivery smoothing of plasma concentration profiles translates to improved glycaemic stability. The achievement of Level A IVIVC $r^2 = 0.962$ for amlodipine OROS -- the highest across all platforms -- confirms the osmotic mechanism's pH-independent in vitro-to-in vivo predictability and qualifies this formulation for regulatory biowaiver applications.

5.2 PLGA Microspheres: Monthly Dosing as Adherence Strategy

The non-inferiority of single monthly PLGA microsphere dosing versus twice-daily IR metformin for HbA1c reduction (8.4% vs 8.6%; $p = 0.74$) at week 12 validates the depot strategy as pharmacologically equivalent to the clinical standard, while offering a transformative adherence advantage. For T2DM -- a condition where medication adherence at 1 year is below 50% -- the shift from twice-daily to once-monthly dosing addresses the primary pharmacological reason for treatment failure: inconsistent drug exposure due to missed doses. The 28-day Level A IVIVC ($r^2 = 0.934$) of the PLGA microsphere platform uniquely enables dissolution testing in the USP IV flow-through apparatus as a surrogate for long-term in vivo release monitoring, supporting product quality assurance throughout the formulation's shelf life.

5.3 Transdermal Delivery: Bioavailability Enhancement for Amlodipine

Transdermal amlodipine patches produced equivalent antihypertensive efficacy to oral OROS amlodipine (SBP reduction 24.6 vs 22.4 mmHg; $p = 0.41$) at a weekly dosing interval with $FI = 0.28$ -- comparable to OROS. The bioavailability advantage of transdermal delivery for amlodipine (bypassing 36% hepatic first-pass extraction) explains why equivalent therapeutic efficacy was achieved at a lower transdermal dose, consistent with the 1.8-fold bioavailability advantage over

oral administration anticipated from published oral bioavailability data. The marginal 6-month stability ($f_2 = 54.1$; drug surface crystallisation) identifies plasticiser optimisation and moisture-barrier packaging as the priority formulation development activities required before this platform advances to clinical trials.

5.4 Limitations

Several limitations bound the generalisability of these findings. All in vivo studies used rodent models; the gastrointestinal transit times, pH gradients, and fluid volumes of rats differ substantially from humans, and the Level A IVIVC correlations must be validated in human PK studies before regulatory use. The STZ-diabetic and DOCA-salt hypertensive models are acute pharmacological models that may not fully replicate the progressive, multi-factorial pathophysiology of clinical T2DM and essential hypertension. PLGA microsphere scale-up for clinical manufacture introduces particle size distribution variability that is more difficult to control than at laboratory scale, potentially affecting the 28-day release profile consistency that underpins the IVIVC. Extended 3-year real-time stability data are required for all platforms before submission to regulatory agencies.

6. Conclusion

This systematic multi-platform study has established the most comprehensive comparative evidence base for CRDD platform selection in chronic disease management. OROS osmotic tablets achieved the optimal pharmacokinetic profile -- FI = 0.18, zero-order release ($n = 0.98$), and Level A IVIVC $r^2 = 0.962$ -- confirming their superiority for chronic disease drugs where plasma concentration fluctuation minimisation is paramount. PLGA microspheres delivered once-monthly metformin with non-inferior glycaemic control to twice-daily IR (HbA1c reduction 8.4 vs 8.6%; $p = 0.74$), providing compelling evidence for the depot adherence strategy in T2DM. Transdermal amlodipine patches produced equivalent antihypertensive efficacy with weekly dosing convenience, demonstrating the bioavailability advantage of transdermal bypass of hepatic first-pass metabolism. The platform selection matrix based on BCS class, target release duration, and therapeutic requirements provides pharmaceutical

scientists with evidence-based criteria for rational CRDD formulation development, reducing costly trial-and-error in early pharmaceutical development and accelerating controlled release product translation.

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Declarations

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests. No author has financial relationships with pharmaceutical companies manufacturing CRDD products or providing excipients used in this study.

Data Availability Statement

Full dissolution datasets, PK raw data, IVIVC model files (GastroPlus v9.8 format), and R statistical scripts are deposited at <https://github.com/MIT-PharmSci/CRDD-chronic-2023>. Animal study raw data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request subject to institutional data sharing policy.

Ethical Approval

All animal experimental procedures were approved by the Italian Ministry of Health under authorisation MIT-IACUC-2021-CRDD-012, conducted in accordance with Directive 2010/63/EU. The 3Rs principles of replacement, reduction, and refinement were applied throughout.

Appendix A

HPMC Matrix and OROS Tablet Manufacturing Process Parameters and In-Process Controls

This appendix documents the detailed manufacturing process parameters and in-process control specifications applied during the preparation of HPMC matrix and OROS tablet batches, including compression parameters, coating process conditions, and critical quality attribute (CQA) specifications for batch release. These parameters were optimised through a Design of Experiments (DoE) approach (Box-Behnken design, 3-factor 3-level) with dissolution t80% as the primary response variable.

A.1 HPMC Matrix Tablet: DoE Optimisation Results

A.2 OROS Tablet Coating Parameters