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Inorganic nanoparticles as potential regulators of immune response in dendritic cells

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Inorganic Nanoparticles as Potential Regulators of Immune Response in Dendritic Cells

Nanomedicine

Inorganic Nanoparticles as Potential Regulators of Immune Response in Dendritic Cells

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT:

mmunotherapy. **Materials & methods:** gold and silica¹
cells' lysates and characterized from a compositional
ure Dendritic Cells (DC) were challenged with the pr
files, viability and morphology were evaluated. Fir
rmined. **Aim:** The spontaneous adsorption of proteins on nanoparticles (NPs) in biological media is exploited to prepare association complexes of NPs and proteins from cancer cells' lysates for application in cancer immunotherapy. **Materials & methods:** gold and silica NPs were synthesized, incubated with cancer cells' lysates and characterized from a compositional and physico-chemical point of view. Immature Dendritic Cells (DC) were challenged with the protein-coated NPs and their maturation profiles, viability and morphology were evaluated. Finally, lymphocytes T proliferation was determined. **Results & conclusions:** silica and gold NPs bind different pools of biomolecules from the same lysates, opening the possibility to be used as selective carriers for antigens. When incubated with immature DCs, NPs were efficiently endocyted without cytotoxic effects. Finally, AuNPs promoted DC maturation and DC-mediated lymphocyte proliferation, at variance with SiO₂NPs. Overall, these results demonstrate that the spontaneous formation of different protein *coronas* on different NPs represents a possible approach to fast, easy, costeffective DC stimulation tools, that may eventually become of use for cancer immunotherapy.

KEYWORDS: Nanoparticles; Protein Corona; Cancer Immunotherapy

INTRODUCTION

 In spite of the intense efforts and progresses of medical research, the treatment of tumors still represents an open challenge. A relatively recent and promising approach for cancer therapy is based on the stimulation of the immune system of the patient itself against the tumor, thus adopting a vaccination strategy for tumor treatment [1]. Because of the immune system's extraordinary

power, its capacity for memory, its exquisite specificity, and its central and universal role in human biology, cancer immunotherapy has the potential to achieve complete, long-lasting remissions and cancer cure, with few or no side effects, and for any cancer patient, regardless of cancer type. However, while the basic concept of cancer immunotherapy can appear straightforward, its translation into medical application is still far to reach, due to several open challenges. A main role in cancer immunotherapy is played by dendritic cells (DCs), that possess intrinsic antigenpresenting properties to elicit a potent tumor antigen-specific T-cell-driven immune response [2-4]. The efficient delivery of tumor antigens to immature DCs, recognition of antigens by these cells and induction of DC maturation are key steps of the entire process. However, many hurdles have to be overcome to obtain the desired immune response. In fact, not only the antigen must be recognized by the DCs, but the maturation of a correct subset of those cells must be induced [5] and the mature DCs have to trigger the differentiation of antigen-specific T cells into effector T cells able to exert anti-cancer cytotoxicity [6].

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e desired immune response. In fact, not only the antige

aturation of a correct subset of those cells must be The use of nanomaterials has been recently presented in a few studies on cancer immunotherapy; mainly organic and biodegradable NPs have been used [7,8], but some inorganic materials have also been tested [9]. These systems have been used for several purposes, from the study of nanoparticles internalization in dendritic cells [10] to the delivery of antigens [7, 11]. However, a sophisticated methodology is often required to synthesize NPs and, in particular, to conjugate them with a specific antigen that has to be first of all selected, and then modified or even synthesized [12,13]. In this work we present a new and simpler approach to nanoparticle-based antigen delivery.

Silica and gold NPs (SiO₂NPs and AuNPs) are among the most investigated nanodevices for biomedical applications. Both types of nanoparticles are characterized by well-established and easyto-follow synthetic routes, high biocompatibility and tunable physicochemical properties (size, charge, shape). Due to the high surface energy of NPs, determined by the high surface/volume ratio [14-16], when they are dispersed in a biological medium, biomolecules, mostly proteins but also

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nucleic acids and lipids, are adsorbed on the surface of NPs forming a so-called protein corona [7,14-16]. The protein corona is a dynamic system, that changes its composition constantly [15,16] and can be seen as an integral part of the nanosystem [17]. It is formed by a wide variety of biomolecules, some bound tightly to NP surface, forming the hard corona, others loosely bound and constituting the soft corona. While the hard corona follows the NP through all the biological events [14], the biomolecules in the soft corona continually exchange with other proteins in solution [15,16]. The NPs' physicochemical features, such as composition, surface charge and size [16,18], deeply influence the nature of their protein corona, whose composition in turn provides the physiological identity of NPs [19,20], being it what cells "see" and come in contact with. The influence that this protein layer has on the bioactivity of nanostructures is one of the most most addressed topics in nanomedicine [14].

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Parawe exploited the spontaneous formation of lys In this work we have exploited the spontaneous formation of lysate coronas on NPs to buildup nanoparticle-based carriers for cancer immunotherapy applications. The simplest biocompatible, easily synthesized and common NP types, i.e. AuNPs and SiO₂NPs, were prepared according to Turkevich-Frens [21,22] and Stober [23] methods, respectively and characterized through Dynamic light scattering (DLS), transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and zeta potential. The NPs were exposed to two different types of whole cancer cell lysates, a hepatic (Hep G2) and an ovarian (A2780) cancer cell line. The lysates were obtained from whole cells and the protein corona was characterized through DLS, circular dichroism (CD) and mass spectrometry to determine their thickness and composition for each NP and cells' lysate type. Biological studies on the interaction of the two types of NPs with immature DCs were performed to evaluate the cells' internalization efficiency and possible cytotoxic effects. Finally, the effects of the NPs on the maturation of immature DCs and on DCs-mediated lymphocyte proliferation were investigated.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Chemicals and culture media

Exportancy Chalfont, UK). RPMI 1640, heat-inactivated foetal
in and trypan blue were from Sigma-Aldrich. Immur
diniMACS (Miltenyi Biotec, Bergisch Gladbach, Ge
Pierce (Waltham, MA). Carboxyfluorescein diaceta
trogen (Camar **NPs Syntheses:** Tetraethylorthosilicate (TEOS; 98%), 3-aminopropyl triethoxysilane, citric acid and rhodamine B isothiocyanate were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO). Ethanol (>99.8%) and chloroauric acid were acquired from Fluka (Buchs, Switzerland). Ammonia (30%) was bought from Panreac (Castellar del Vallès, Spain). High-purity deionized water (18.2 MΩcm) was produced using A10 Milli-Q (Millipore, Darmstadt, Germany) and was used in all preparations. Dialysis tubing cellulose membranes (14,000 Da) were acquired from Sigma-Aldrich. **Cell culture:** Dulbecco's phosphate buffered saline was from EuroClone (Milan, Italy). Ficoll/Paque were from GE Healthcare (Little Chalfont, UK). RPMI 1640, heat-inactivated foetal bovine serum (FBS), penicillin, streptomycin and trypan blue were from Sigma-Aldrich. Immunomagnetic separation was achieved with MiniMACS (Miltenyi Biotec, Bergisch Gladbach, Germany). BCA Protein Assay Kit was from Pierce (Waltham, MA). Carboxyfluorescein diacetate succinimidyl ester (CFSE) was from Invitrogen (Camarillo, CA). Trypan blue, 7-amino-actinomycin D (7-AAD) were from Sigma. **Whole Cell Lysates:** Hep G2 whole cell lysate was purchased from Novus Biologicals (Littleton, CO) and employed for DLS, CD and mass spectrometry; A2780 ovary carcinoma lysate was gently provided by Prof. Banci's group (CERM, Florence, Italy) and employed for DLS, CD and mass spectrometry experiments, as well as for assays in the interaction between $NPs@PC$ and DC; HCT-8 colon carcinoma lysate was obtained by HCT-8 colon carcinoma cell line kindly provided by Marcella Coronnello, (University of Florence).

Synthesis of NPs

Gold nanoparticles (AuNPs): AuNPs were synthesized following Turkevich et al. [21,22]. Briefly, 2 mL of 1% (wt/vol) trisodium citrate aqueous solution were rapidly injected into 20 mL of 1 mmol/L chloroauric acid (HAuCl ⁴) boiling solution under vigorous stirring. The formation of NPs was indicated by the colour change of the solution, which turns from the original pale yellow to burgundy. After 15 minutes the solution was cooled down in a water-ice bath. The AuNPs were

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stored at 4° C and the dispersion was centrifuged (5 min -500 x g) at 15° C prior to use in order to remove aggregates.

Silica NPs (SiO₂NPs): SiO₂NPs were synthesized with the Stöber's process [23]. H₂O, EtOH and NH ⁴OH were mixed using a magnetic stirrer in a 40 ml Vial. TEOS was then added dropwise to the mixture while stirring. The solution was kept under stirring at room temperature for 48 hours.

S in ethanol in the presence of ammonia. To this aim,
of absolute ethanol, ammonia and water was stirred for
damine B isothiocyanate was added to the initial all
luorescent NP; the mixture was left at room tempera
a proper **Rhodamine B-labeled silica nanoparticles (RhB-SiO₂NPs): RhB-SiO₂NPs were prepared** according to the work of Canton et al.[24] Briefly, they were prepared by hydrolysis and condensation of TEOS in ethanol in the presence of ammonia. To this aim, a solution containing appropriate quantities of absolute ethanol, ammonia and water was stirred for 5 minutes to ensure complete mixing. Rhodamine B isothiocyanate was added to the initial alkaline hydro-alcoholic solution to produce fluorescent NP; the mixture was left at room temperature overnight, under gentle stirring. Then a proper amount of TEOS in absolute ethanol was added and the reaction proceeded at room temperature for 48 h. The stable colloidal solution of NPs in water was separated from ammonia and ethanol by dialysis.

Coating of nanoparticles with a protein corona

The protocol adopted for the formation of the protein corona from lysates was the following: a determined amount of NPs (specified in the different sections) was incubated at room temperature with 200 µg/ml lysate under stirring. After 1 h, NPs were centrifuged at 8000 *g* for 10 min in order to separate them from unbound lysate. The procedure was repeated three times to ensure full removal of the unbound lysate. For DC maturation experiments, the protein content of the supernatant was quantified by BCA assay, in order to evaluate the amount of protein-bound lysate.

Cell Culture

Human buffy coats were obtained from healthy blood donors in the respect of Helsinki declaration and the Italian law and according to local ethic committee (authorization 0011762/2010). Monocyte-derived immature DC were obtained as previously reported [25]. NPs were added to DCs for 48 h while the concentration of FBS was reduced to 1% to minimize a possible influence of

serum factors on DCs maturation. In some experiments maturation-inducing cytokines [25] were added together with NPs. In control experiments, DCs were matured by cultivating them for 6 days in complete medium followed by 48 h with the further addition of maturation-inducing cytokinesì. Cells were checked by phase contrast microscopy throughout culture. Cell viability was assessed by Trypan blue absorption as well as by flow cytometry with 7-AAD staining

Allogeneic lymphocytes were recovered culturing PBMCs (isolated as above described from donors others than those from whom monocytes had been harvested) for 45 min in complete medium and harvesting suspended cells. The latter cells were centrifuged at 160 x *g*, for 10 min at 20°C, counted and used for mixed lymphocyte culture.

Interaction of NPs with DCs

The latter cells were centrifuged at 160 x g, for 10

mphocyte culture.
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 For Review Added to immature DCs at concentrations of 1
 For Review Added at concentration of 2
 For Formation Constr Uncoated NPs were added to immature DCs at concentrations of 10 and 100 μ g/mL, in order to assess uptake, intracellular distribution, cell viability and maturation. Nanoparticles functionalized with 10 μ g/mL cell lysate were added at concentration of 25 and 75 μ g/mL for SiO₂NPs and AuNPs respectively, in order to have the same coated surface area exposed per unit volume of culture medium. The conditions of challenge of DCs are specifically described in the SI.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Nanoparticles' characterization

SiO₂NPs and AuNPs were chosen as the prototypes of biocompatible inorganic NPs, of easy and tunable synthesis, that can be convenient carriers for applications in cancer immunotherapy. The simplest and most established synthesis protocols (St öber[23] and Turkevich-Frens[21,22] for SiO ²NPs and AuNPs, respectively), described in details in the material and methods section, were adopted.

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Figure 1. Characterization of NPs. (a, b) Representative TEM images of (a) gold NPs (AuNPs) and (b) silica NPs (SiO ²NPs); (c) Representative normalized autocorrelation functions of the scattered intensity of AuNPs (red line and filled markers) and SiO₂NPs (green line and empty markers), which give information on the hydrodynamic size of the NPs; (d) Summary of the main physicochemical features of the NPs: hydrodynamic diameter as obtained from DLS through cumulant fitting stopped at the second order (D_H) and related polydispersity index (PDI); diameter of the NPs (D) evaluated from TEM; zeta potential (ζ-Pot.) of the NPs.

Formularity TEM images of SiO₂NPs); (c) Representative normalized autocorrela

SiO₂NPs); (c) Representative normalized autocorrela

AuNPs (red line and filled markers) and SiO₂NPs (d)

information on the hydrodyna Figure 1 reports the main physicochemical features of the NPs. Figure 1a and 1b display representative TEM images of AuNPs and of $SiO₂NPs$, respectively, which indicate the average diameter of the synthesized NPs as: 20 ± 2 nm for AuNPs and 104 ± 5 nm for SiO₂NPs (see Table in Figure 1d). Figure 1c displays representative normalized DLS curves of the same NPs. From the comparison of the profiles of the autocorrelation functions (ACF) of the scattered intensity it is clear that DLS is consistent with TEM. From the analysis of the ACFs through the cumulant fitting stopped at the second order it is possible to evaluate the hydrodynamic diameter (D_H) and the polydispersity index (PDI) of the two samples, reported in Figure 1d, whose values are slightly higher with respect to those obtained by TEM analysis. Both Turkevich-Frens and Stöber syntheses allow varying the synthetic procedure to tune the size of the obtained NPs. Finally, the table reported in Figure 1d contains the zeta potential values obtained for the aqueous dispersions of the two types of: both SiO ²NPs and AuNPs are characterized by a negative zeta potential, due to the presence of silanol groups on the surface of SiO₂NPs and the electrically stabilizing coating of

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AuNPs by the citrate anion, respectively. The relatively high negative surface charge of the NPs might decrease the ability of the NPs to interact with the DC cell membrane (which is negatively charged as well) and to be internalized. However, in the design of nanostructured materials it is necessary to provide colloidal stability, while avoiding toxic effects (that are generally present when cationic NPs are employed). In summary, two types of NPs were synthesized through common, well-established synthetic procedures, leading to NPs with different core nature, size and zeta potential.

Interaction of nanoparticles with cancer cell lysates

Formulation 1991
 F Composition, size and charge of NPs are expected to have a major influence in the formation of NP-protein corona complexes. The Nanoparticles synthesized as described in the previous section were incubated with ovarian cancer cells lysate (A2780) or with hepatic cancer cells lysate (Hep G2), according to the protocol described in the experimental section, and then purified through repeated centrifugation to eliminate the unbound lysate. Finally, the coronated NPs (indicated as $AuNPs@PC$ and $SiO₂NPs@PC$) were dispersed in ultrapure water and analyzed through DLS, zeta potential and CD to characterize the protein corona layer.

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Figure 2. Protein corona formation. (a,b) Representative DLS curves acquired for (a) AuNPs and (b) SiO ²NPs in before (orange for AuNPs and grey for SiO ²NPs lines and empty circles) and incubated with Hep G2 (green lines and filled triangles) and A2780 (blue lines and filled circles) cell lysates; (c,d) CD spectra registered for (c) bare Hep G2 cell lysate (green line and empty triangles) and Hep G2 lysate-coated SiO ²NPs@PC (grey line and empty squares), AuNPs@PC (yellow line and empty circles); (d) bare A2780 lysate (blue line and empty triangles) and A2780 lysate-coated SiO ²NPs@PC (grey line and empty squares), AuNPs@PC (orange line and empty circles).

I after formation of the protein corona from Hep G2 a
cubation leads to a clear increase of the decay times
e, ascribable to the formation of larger and more poly
, clearly due to the interaction with the biomole
same samp Figure 2a-b reports the representative DLS profiles of AuNPs (Figure 2a) and $SiO₂NPs$ (Figure 2b) before and after formation of the protein corona from Hep G2 and A2780 lysates. For both kinds of NPs, incubation leads to a clear increase of the decay times of the ACF and to a change of curve slope, ascribable to the formation of larger and more polydisperse objects with respect to neat NPs, clearly due to the interaction with the biomolecules. Zeta potential measurements on the same samples confirm this hypothesis. Upon incubation with the cell lysate a value of -30 mV is obtained for both types of NPs, in spite of their different starting surface potential, diameter and coating, possibly indicating that a similar surface modification has occurred for both types of NPs. From the ACF profiles, displayed in Figure 2a-b, two interesting effects are clearly highlighted: first, both for $SiO₂NPs$ and for AuNPs the decay of the ACF is longer for exposure of the NPs to A2780 than to Hep G2. Moreover, it can be observed that for both lysates the variation in the ACF profiles is much more marked for $AuNPs$ than $SiO₂NPs$. Both effects clearly highlight that the formation of NP-protein corona assembly is not a random process and that the physicochemical characteristics of the NPs and the composition of the biological medium determine the final architecture. The analysis of the DLS curves through the cumulant fitting stopped at the second order provides the hydrodynamic diameter and polydispersity of NPs@PC, summarized in Table 1. Comparing the hydrodynamic diameters for the coronated nanoparticles (NPs@PC) with those obtained for the naked NPs, it is possible to estimate the thickness of the protein shell, also reported in Table 1. Consistently with the ACFs' profiles of the, the protein corona is thinner for Hep G2 (around 25 nm for SiO ²NPs and 52 nm for AuNPs coated by Hep G2

lysate vs. 62 nm and 109 nm for A2780 cell lysate-covered SiO ²NPs and AuNPs, respectively). Moreover, the corona is thicker for AuNPs than $SiO₂NPs$ (see Table 1). These values are higher than what reported in the literature for typical protein corona thicknesses of SiO ²NPs and AuNPs in serum, [26,27]. This can be related to the different composition of whole cell lysates and serum, that probably determines a much more complex composition and structure of the corona decorating the surface of NPs, with a possibly multilayered architecture.

Lysate	D_{H} [nm]	PDI	PC [nm]
SiO, NPs@PC			
HepG2	182 ± 5	02	\approx 25
A2780	256 ± 9	02	≈ 62
AuNPs@PC			
HepG2	$140 + 8$	0.4	≈ 52
A2780	$183 + 9$	02	≈ 109

FORMALLE 1998
 For Az780 256 ± 9 0.2 ≈ 25
 Az780 256 ± 9 0.2 ≈ 62
 For Az780 140 ± 8 0.4 ≈ 52
 Az780 140 ± 8 0.4 ≈ 52
 Az780 140 ± 8 0.2 ≈ 109
 For Allenare 1998
 For Allenare 1998 Table 1. Protein corona DLS characterization. DLS data on the protein corona formed on SiO₂NPs (SiO₂NPs@PC) and AuNPs (AuNPs@PC) from Hep G2 and A2780 whole cell lysates, respectively; hydrodynamic diameter (D_H) and polydispersity index (PDI) of the protein-corona coated NPs, as obtained from the cumulant fitting stopped at the second order of the DLS experimental curves; estimated thickness of the protein corona (PC) calculated from the difference between the hydrodynamic diameter of NPs@PC and bare NPs, estimated from DLS, divided by two.

 Figures 2c and 2d compare the CD spectra measured for cell lysates from A2780 (Figure 2c) and Hep G2 (Figure 2d) with those obtained for the AuNPs@PC and $SiO₂NPs@PC$ after exposure to the two lysates. The spectra recorded for AuNPs@PC and $SiO_2NPs@PC$, show a clear CD effect in the wavelength range between 230 and 190 nm, typically referred to proteins, further confirming the formation of the protein corona for both NPs in both cell lysates. From the comparison of the spectra obtained with the two lysates, we can notice that the minimum at 210 nm, present in both samples, is more pronounced in the ovarian cancer lysate (Figure 2d), possibly indicating a compositional difference of the two lysates that can be consistent with the previously discussed differences in the protein corona formation. However, the lysates contain many different biomolecules and proteins and the attribution of the CD profile to a single class of componenets is

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not possible. While some qualitative conclusions can be drawn, with this method it is not possible to determine any compositional differences in the protein corona of SiO ²NPs@PC and AuNPs@PC.

**For Revision Contains and Consumer SIO, NP@A2780 SIO, NP@HeP62

For Revision Consumers SIO, NP@A2780 SIO, NP@HeP62**
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 Figure 3. Composition of SiO ²NP@PC and AuNP@PC Composition of the protein corona of (a, b) AuNPs@PC and (c,d) $SiO₂NP@PC$ upon incubation with (a,c) A2780 cell lysate and (b,d) Hep G2 cell lysate. The differences in composition between the coronas of Au and $SiO₂$ NPs with A2780 and Hep G2 lysates are summarized in these four charts. For each combination of nanoparticle type and lysate are reported the proteins contained classified by their biological function. Au and SiO₂ NPs clearly bind different libraries of proteins. This is true considering the protein corona obtained from the same lysate on the two different nanoparticles, but also comparing the pool of proteins adsorbed on the same nanoparticle from the two different lysate.

In order to identify the protein corona composition, the protein shells of the NPs, were analyzed by mass spectrometry. The shotgun mass spectrometric approach allowed the identification of 499 proteins (Table S4, supporting information) for the ovarian cancer lysate and 84 proteins for the Hep G2 lysate (Table S1, supporting information). The marked difference between the number of proteins identified for A2780 and Hep G2 can be tentatively explained by assuming a non-complete removal of the protease inhibitor cocktail originally present in the Hep G2 sample (Hep G2 is a commercial lysate, unlike A2780 lysate), which partially inhibits protein digestion. Concerning the composition of the protein corona, the main results are summarized in Figure 3 for both nanoparticles. As highlighted in the mass spectrometry data extensively reported in the SI, a first

difference is represented by the number of proteins bound on AuNPs and $SiO₂NPs$ from both A2780 and Hep G2 lysates. In the coronas adsorbed from hepatic cancer lysate 109 proteins were identified for SiO ²NPs and 30 proteins for AuNPs. Similarly, from ovarian cancer lysate, 75 proteins were adsorbed on SiO ²NPs and 33 proteins on AuNPs. Thus, Silica NPs bind a double (for A2780) and triple (for Hep G2) amount of proteins. According to literature, gold has a preferential affinity for some amino acidic residues [28]. Therefore, the higher number of different proteins adsorbed on SiO ²NPs can be due to a lower specificity.

then analyzed using three different protein databases
the National Center for Biotechnology Information (N
From these databases, the proteins were classified accord
he coronas adsorbed from a single lysate, it is clear tha The proteins list was then analyzed using three different protein databases: The Human Protein Atlas, UniProtKB and the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI). By crossing the information obtained from these databases, the proteins were classified according to their biological function. Comparing the coronas adsorbed from a single lysate, it is clear that AuNPs and SiO₂NPs bind different libraries of proteins, as shown in Figure 3. Considering Hep G2 lysate's coronas, it can be noticed that, while on AuNPs the highest percentage of protein is cytoskeleton-related, on SiO₂NPs, the highest percentage is related to gene transcription and protein biosynthesis. Moreover, on AuNPs, cell signaling and proteolytic proteins were identified, that are absent on SiO ²NPs. In the case of $A2780$ lysate the situation is different. $SiO₂NPs$ are able to bind histones and oxidative stress, proteolytic and gene transcriptional proteins, that were not found on AuNPs. The highest percentages of proteins, though, are represented by metabolism and cytoskeleton related ones for both NPs.

 Summarizing these observations, we can state that $AuNPs$ and $SiO₂NPs$ are not only able to bind different libraries of protein from one kind of lysate, but they can also select different classes depending on the lysate source. Using The Human Protein Atlas, we extended further this analysis. In the coronas adsorbed from both lysates, some cancer related proteins were identified. In particular, for A2780 on SiO ²NPs, 15 cancer related proteins are present, 12 of which are scarce or absent in healthy tissues, while on AuNPs 11 cancer related proteins are found, scarcely present or absent in healthy subjects. For SiO₂NPs-Hep G2 lysate corona 23 proteins are cancer related, 8 of $\mathbf{1}$ $\overline{2}$

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which scarce or absent in healthy subjects, while on AuNPs the cancer related proteins are 7, including Tubulin α 1A chain, scarce in healthy tissues. Moreover, using the same database, we verified that the NPs are coated with six proteins been recognized as FDA-approved drug targets for cancer. Four of them are bound to SiO ²NPs, and the remaining two to AuNPs.

In summary, these results confirm the selective nature of protein adsorption on NPs from biological media, depending on the chemical nature of the particle core. Moreover, this protein corona is enriched in some classes of proteins, if compared to its cell lysate source. The ability to concentrate disease-related biomolecules is particularly important in view of the therapeutic applications of these NPs. For the purposes of this study, the NPs were tested concerning their ability to stimulate dendritic cells to trigger immunoresponse to cancer.

Interaction of nanoparticles with dendritic cells

lecules is particularly important in view of the thera
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er immunoresponse to cancer.
Articles with dendritic cells
y monitor the interaction and internalization of t In order to qualitatively monitor the interaction and internalization of the NPs, in the absence and in the presence of their protein coating, with DCs cells, we performed a TEM and fluorescence microscopy investigation. In particular, while electron microscopy is especially suitable to monitor the highly electrondense AuNPs, the exact SiO ²NPs intracellular localization by means of TEM is more elusive, due to the lower contrast. To this aim, Rhodamine-labeled SiO₂NPs (RhB-SiO₂NPs) were synthesized, [24] as described in the experimental section, and characterized (SI, Figure S1), to be monitored with fluorescence microscopy.

Figure 4 summarizes the microscopy data collected for the different NPs and NPs@PC. Fluorescence microscopy showed that the interaction between $RhB-SiO₂NPs$ and DCs is fast and leads to NPs' internalization (Fig 4a-d). Quantitative analysis of fluorescence (see SI, Figure S2) showed that both the number of cells internalizing NPs and the fluorescence intensity per cell, connected to the amount of NPs internalized, depend on NPs' concentration. Both values were significantly higher with 100 μ g/mL than 10 μ g/mL NPs; they did not increase significantly between 4 and 24 h incubation for both concentrations of NPs, indicating that the maximum load

per responsive cell was reached in a short time. A possible explanation is that the particles are recycled from lysosomes outside the cell by exocytosis, so that the amount present in a cell at any moment after a steady state is reached depends on the concentration of NPs in the medium. The results were independent of the addition of maturation-stimulating cytokines.

Concerning AuNPs, TEM showed that AuNPs were uptaken through endocytosis and then localized in endosomes and lysosomes, similarly to what reported in the literature [29,30], as displayed in Figure 4e-g.

charge of NPs is expected to induce electrostatic reptorane, limiting their ability to interact with cells. Our lively internalized by DCs, confirming the small effect gocytic cells [29]. Moreover, no significant differenc The negative surface charge of NPs is expected to induce electrostatic repulsion with negatively charged cellular membrane, limiting their ability to interact with cells. Our results show that both type of NPs are effectively internalized by DCs, confirming the small effect of negative charge on internalization by phagocytic cells [29]. Moreover, no significant differences in internalization were detected in the absence and in the presence of protein corona, for both SiO ²NPs and AuNPs. The efficient internalization of corona-coated NPs is particularly interesting and unexpected: generally, it is well-established that the passivation of NPs with the protein corona shell decreases the surface energy of NPs and, thus, the tendency of NPs to interact with biomembranes and to be internalized by cells [31,32]. In the present case, the NP@PC complexes, coated with cancer cell lysates, efficiently interact and are internalized by DCs, with no appreciable difference with respect to the as-synthesized ones,

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Figure 4. Interaction of NPs and NPs@PC with DCs: internalization Fluorescence microscopy images of (a,b) RhB-SiO₂NPs and (c,d) RhB-SiO₂NPs@PC uptake by DCs after 24 hours from addition; bar = 10 μ m; (e-h) TEM of DCs incubated 48 h with (e, f) AuNPs and (g,h) Au-NPs@PC; $bar = 2\mu m$ (e), 1 μm (f), 500 nm (g), 100 nm (h). NPs appeared in small vesicles and in larger vacuoles mainly in the Golgi area, representing late endosomes and lysosomes

For Review Only 2013 (b) and NPs@PC with DCs: internalization Flu SiO₂NPs and (c,d) RhB-SiO₂NPs@PC uptake by DC: (e-h) TEM of DCs incubated 48 h with (e, f) AuNPs and (f), 500 nm (g), 100 nm (h). NPs appeared in smal Besides internalization, the same NPs in the absence and in the presence of protein corona coating were also tested in terms of biocompatibility. Challenge with both types of NPs, did not lead to the appearance of signs of cell sufferance or death, as judged by light and electron microscopy and exclusion of trypan blue.[30]. Flow cytometry also confirmed that NPs were not cytotoxic (Supplementary Table S7), in line with what reported in the literature. [33-35] Our data agree with the results of Tomic et al. showing that different sized Au-NPs from 10 to 50 nm are not toxic between 10 and 200 µg/ml. Kunzmann [33] reported that silica coated iron oxide NPs were nontoxic for human monocyte derived cells, at all concentration tested, while they found a dosedependent toxicity for primary Mo-DCs with smaller silica-coated nanoparticles (30 nm and 50 nm). A size-dependent and cellular type-dependent effect has been also reported, indicating a higher toxicity on macrophages with respect to endothelial cells [34]. Nabeshi has demonstrated that the cellular uptake and cytotoxicity increased with reduction in particle size [35], using mouse

epidermal Langerhans cell line XS52 treated with silica particles with diameter of 70, 300, or 1000 nm.

Both SiO ²NPs and AuNPs are thus efficiently endocyted and non toxic and could therefore be a particularly attractive carrier for clinical applications [36].

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Fration markers expression, with the exception of CD86

Function markers expression, with the exception of CD86

Function (see Figure 6b). This is in line with Vallhov In Figure 5 the maturation profile of the DCs challenged with the NPs at two different concentrations (10 μ g/ml and 100 μ g/ml) is compared to that of immature DCs (Imm, negative control) and to DCs stimulated with inflammatory cytokines (positive control). The maturation profile of DCs showed that NPs did not significantly influence immature DCs phenotype, as demonstrated by maturation markers expression, with the exception of CD86 following 100 μ g/ml AuNPs, which was significantly upregulated ($23 \pm 8\%$ and $66 \pm 8\%$ for DCs without NPs and DCs with 100 μ g/ml AuNPs, respectively). However, DCs were not fully matured as demonstrated by lymphocyte proliferation (see Figure 6b). This is in line with Vallhov, who reported that human monocyte-derived DCs (Mo-DCs), did not fully maturated when co-cultured with NPs, even if there was a significant increase of CD86 positive cells [37]. Thus, we can conclude that, even if some effects on CD86 marker are observed upon exposition of DCs to NPs, this is not related to DC maturation, and the effect of both types of NPs on the maturation of the DCs has to be considered negligible.

Figure 5. Interaction of NPs with DC: maturation DC maturation with nude SiO ²NPs and AuNPs, 10 e 100 μ g/ml. Imm = immature DCs; MAT = DCs stimulated with inflammatory cytokines (positive control); $SiO₂NPs$ or AuNPs 10 μ g/ml and $SiO₂NPs$ or AuNPs 100 μ g/ml =

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DCs incubated with SiO₂NPs or AuNPs at 10 and 100 μ g/ml, respectively. Mean \pm SE, N=6; $*P<0.05$ and $*P<0.01$ vs Imm.

For DCs challenged with the bare lysate and bare NPs
DCs stimulated with inflammatory cytokines (positive
a significant increase in DC maturation, with respect
d in the presence of NPs. Nevertheless, a clear differe
SiO₂ Finally, we tested the interactions of the coronated NPs with DCs, to verify their immunogenic potential. In order to correctly compare AuNPs@PC and SiO₂NPs@PC, different NPs' amounts were chosen (75 μ g/ml and 25 μ g/ml for AuNPs and SiO₂NPs, respectively, both within the range of ineffectiveness on DCs), allowing the same exposed surface area toward cell lysate, evaluated taking into account the different sizes and densities of the cores, and co-cultured with immature DCs. In Figure 6a the maturation profile of the DCs challenged with the NPs@PC is displayed and compared to those of DCs challenged with the bare lysate and bare NPs, with immature DCs (negative control) and DCs stimulated with inflammatory cytokines (positive control). Clearly, the lysate alone provokes a significant increase in DC maturation, with respect to the immature DCs, which is not increased in the presence of NPs. Nevertheless, a clear difference is observed in the effects of AuNPs and SiO₂NPs on DC maturation. The incubation of immature DCs with NPs@PC showed that the presence of a protein corona triggered a significant increase in the expression of CD80 and CD83 when cells where incubated with protein coated AuNPs@PC, as compared with immature DCs. The increase, expressed as percentage values of immature DC, was $21.3 \pm 5.5\%$ for CD80 and $15.2 \pm 4.4\%$ for CD83. Such an increase was not observed with $SiO₂NPs@PC$. Thus, notwithstanding the same amount of lysate transported by the two NPs to the DCs, a different biological response is observed for the SiO ²NPs and AuNPs, that can be attributed either to the sole different composition, size and charge of the NPs, or to the different pool of adsorbed proteins in the corona.

For All 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ **For All 10 Figure 6. a Interaction of NPs@PC with DC: a)** DC maturation with lysate-functionalized NPs. Imm = immature DCs; MAT= DCs stimulated with inflammatory cytokines (positive control); AuNPs = immature DCs incubated with 75 μ g/ml AuNPs; SiO₂NPs = immature DCs incubated with 25 μ g/ml SiO₂NPs; lysate = immature DCs incubated with 10 μ g/ml lysate (without NPs); AuNPs@PC = DCs incubated with AuNPs (75 μ g/ml) coated with 10 μ g/ml lysate; SiO₂NPs@PC = DCs incubated with SiO₂NPs (25 μ g/ml) coated with 10 μ g/ml lysate. Mean \pm SE; N = 4; *P<0,05 e **P<0,01 vs Imm; $^{\wedge}P \le 0.05$ vs SiO₂NP + lys ADS. **b** Mixed lymphocyte reaction. T lymphocyte proliferation in response to DC treated with NPs and 10 µg/ml of tumor lysate, as measured by CFSE dilution assay. Imm = lymphocytes incubated with immature DCs; MAT = lymphocytes incubated with DCs matured with inflammatory cytokines (positive control); lysate = lymphocytes incubated with DCs pulsed with 10 µg/ml lysate; AuNPs = lymphocytes incubated with DCs pulsed with 75 μ g/ml of AuNPs; SiO₂NPs = lymphocytes incubated with DCs pulsed with 25 μ g/ml of SiO₂NPs; AuNPs@PC = lymphocytes incubated with DCs pulsed with 75 μ g/ml of Au-NPs adsorbed with 10 μ g/ml of tumor lysate; SiO₂NPs@PC = lymphocytes incubated with DCs pulsed with 25 μ g/ml of SiO₂NPs adsorbed with 10 μ g/ml of tumor lysate; PHA = lymphocytes stimulated with [5 µg/ml] phytohaemoagglutinin (without DCs). Mean \pm SE; N = 4; *P<0,05, ***P<0,001 vs Imm; ^P<0.05 vs SiO2NPs@PC.

As a final experiment, we assessed the effect of NPs@PC on DC ability to stimulate lymphocyte proliferation. The main results are displayed in Figure 6b. DC-treated with uncoated SiO ²NPs or AuNPs did not stimulate lymphocyte proliferation significantly. The proliferative response of both $CD4^+$ and $CD8^+$ lymphocytes to DCs treated with proteins of cell lysate - without NPs - was

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Example 12 is observed in the effects of AuNPs@PC and SiO₂N
re able to induce both CD4⁺ and CD8⁺ proliferation,
d significantly the proliferation only of CD4⁺ lymph
⁺, however, could be also due to Treg expansio significantly higher than that elicited by immature DCs and comparable to that elicited by mature DCs -without lysate nor NPs -. The proliferation induced by DCs treated with NPs@PC never exceeded that achieved with DCs treated with lysate alone. Even if it has been reported that proteins coated on NPs may undergo conformational changes, leading to the exposure of new epitopes [38], many studies reported that only a few tumor associated antigens (about 10%) exert immunogenicity and among them only very few are effectively associated with tumor rejection [39]. However, consistently with what observed in the previously discussed experiment on DC maturation (Figure 6a), a clear difference is observed in the effects of AuNPs@PC and SiO ²NPs@PC: DCs treated with AuNPs@PC were able to induce both $CD4^+$ and $CD8^+$ proliferation, while SiO₂NPs@PCtreated DCs stimulated significantly the proliferation only of $CD4^+$ lymphocytes (P<0.05, n=5). The increase of CD4⁺, however, could be also due to Treg expansion, considering the low maturation profile of DCs treated with lysate alone or SiNPs@PC. A clear difference between the biological response of DCs to the two types of NPs is thus observed.

CONCLUSION

In this work we exploited the spontaneous tendency of inorganic NPs in biological media to decorate their surface with a protein corona coating, to build-up a self-assembled nanocarrier for possible application in cancer immunotherapy. Two simple nanoparticles, Turkevich-Frens citrated AuNPs and Stober SiO ²NPs were chosen as prototypes of easy-synthesized biocompatible NPs of different composition, size and charge. We demonstrated that both NPs, exposed to cancer cells lysates decorate their surface with a protein corona coating, of different composition depending on the lysate biological origin and the physicochemical features of the NPs. When incubated with immature DCs, no toxicity effects were detected, while both NPs, in the absence and in the presence of the protein corona coating, where efficiently internalized. Finally, significant differences were observed in the biological response of immature DC to $SiO_2NPs@PC$ and $AuNPs@PC$ and in the

induced Lymphocytes T proliferation, suggesting that the different composition and physicochemical features of the NPs, determining a different composition of their protein corona coating from cells' lysates, can in turn determine a different biological response of the DCs to the system. This is indeed a promising result, representing a first step to exploit the spontaneous selfassembly of the protein corona on NPs' surface to build-up a simple, cost-effective, easy synthesized and tunable inorganic NPs-based nanocarrier for cancer vaccines application.

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SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

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Supplementary data and methods, including the complete mass spectrometry results, the full

physicochemical RhB-SiO ²NPs characterization and the quantitative fluorescence microscopy

analysis on RhB-SiO ²NPs interacting with DCs are available at the journal website.

FINANCIAL AND COMPETING INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no competing interests.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The spontaneous formation of nanoparticles-protein complexes, obtained from interaction of NPs with cancer cells lysates is investigated, to build-up nanodevices for potential application in cancer immunotherapy.
- ianeous formation of nanoparticles-protein comple
of NPs with cancer cells lysates is investigated, to bui
oplication in cancer immunotherapy.
Silica NPs were synthesized through simple synthetic
incer cells' lysates: this • Gold and Silica NPs were synthesized through simple synthetic routes and exposed to different cancer cells' lysates: this leads to the spontaneous association of NP complexes with biomolecules, in particular cancer-related proteins and FDA-approved cancer therapy targets.
- Gold and Silica NPs exhibit a different behavior when exposed to the same lysates: they bind different pools of proteins and exhibit a different specificity towards the same protein classes. The NP's nature determines the physicochemical features and composition of the final nanodevice.
- Gold and Silica NPs, in the absence and in the presence of the protein corona coating, are non toxic and efficiently internalized by dendritic cells.
- No effects on the maturation of dendritic cells is induced by the bare nanoparticles in the absence of protein corona coating, while nanoparticles-protein corona complexes, affect the maturation of dendritic cells.
- A clear difference between the behavior of gold nanoparticles-protein corona and of silica nanoparticles-protein corona complexes is observed both in promoting the maturation of dendritic cells and T lymphocyte proliferation.
- In summary, the different physicochemical features of the core of the nanoparticles (composition, size, surface charge) determine the composition of the protein corona and the interaction with dendritic cells.

Supporting Information for:

Inorganic Nanoparticles as Potential Regulators of Immune Response in

Dendritic Cells

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Supplementary Figures and Tables

 $\mathbf{1}$ $\overline{2}$ 3 $\overline{\mathbf{4}}$ 5 6 $\overline{7}$ $\,8\,$ 9

Table S1 Identified protein list for Hep G2 cell lysate. The protein with the highest protein score is hit number 1 and so on.

Table S2 Identified protein list from the protein corona of SiNPs exposed to Hep G2 cell lysate. The protein with the highest protein score is hit number 1 and so on.

Table S3 Identified protein list from the protein corona of AuNPs exposed to Hep G2 cell lysate. The protein with the highest protein score is hit number 1 and so on.

 $\mathbf{1}$ $\overline{2}$ $\overline{3}$

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S7

 $\mathbf{1}$ $\overline{2}$ 3 $\overline{\mathbf{4}}$ 5 $\,6$ $\overline{7}$ $\bf 8$ $\boldsymbol{9}$

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 $\mathbf{1}$ $\overline{2}$ 3 $\overline{\mathbf{4}}$ 5 $\,6$ $\overline{7}$ $\bf 8$ $\boldsymbol{9}$

S13

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S14

 $\mathbf{1}$ $\overline{2}$ 3 $\overline{\mathbf{4}}$ 5 $\,6$ $\overline{7}$ $\,8\,$ $\boldsymbol{9}$

S15

S16

Table S4 Identified protein list for A2780 cell lysate. The protein with the highest protein score is hit number 1 and so on.

S17

S18

 $\mathbf{1}$

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 $\mathbf{1}$

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Table S5 Identified protein list from the protein corona of SiNPs exposed to A2780 cell lysate. The protein with the highest protein score is hit number 1 and so on.

Table S6 Identified protein list from the protein corona of AuNPs exposed to A2780 cell lysate. The protein with the highest protein score is hit number 1 and so on.

Rh-SiNPs characterization

 $\overline{7}$

 $\overline{\mathbf{4}}$

 $\mathbf{1}$ $\overline{2}$

Figure S1: Dynamic light scattering ACF registered for Rh-SiNPs; summary of Rh-SiNPs main properties: hydrodynamic diameter (D_H) , polydispersity (PDI) and surface potential.

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Figure S2 (a) Percentage of DCs with internalized fluorescent silica NPs (10 e 100 μ g/ml) after 4 e 24 h of incubation without maturation-inducing cytokines. Mean and standard error of two (10 μ g/mL NPs) and four (100 μ g/mL) independent experiments. At each time point, the difference between NPs concentrations was significant ($*p<0.05$), while the difference between time points for each concentration was not significant; (b) Fluorescence intensity of DCs that internalized fluorescent silica NPs (10 e 100 µg/ml) after 4 e 24 h of incubation without maturation-inducing cytokines. Arbitrary units; the mean and standard error were calculated assuming each cell as a sample unit; $N = 15{\sim}35$ depending on experiment. The difference between NPs concentrations was significant (**p<0,01) at 4h, while the different between 4 and 24 h was significant (**p<0,01) for the 10 µg/ml concentration; (c) Percentage of DCs that internalized fluorescent silica NPs (100 μ g/ml) after 4 and 24 h of incubation with and without maturation-inducing cytokines; N=2. No significant difference was found.

Table S7 Effect of AuNPs and SiNPs on DC viability (%) assessed by means of flow cytometry. Dead cells were excluded by 7-ADD. Means \pm SEM, n=5

Supplementary Materials and Methods

 Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM) of NPs Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM) images were acquired with a STEM CM12 Philips electron microscope. The nanoparticle samples dispersed in hexane solution were cast onto a carbon-coated copper grid sample holder, followed by evaporation at room temperature.

New York, USA (BI 9000 AT correlator card and BI 200
by an EMI 9863B/350 photomultiplier. The light source
nt Innova diode pumped Nd-YAG laser, (λ =532 nm, 20
e (λ =633 nm, 5 mW). The laser long term power stabilit
re **Dynamic Light Scattering (DLS)** DLS experiments were carried out on a Brookhaven Instrument apparatus, New York, USA (BI 9000 AT correlator card and BI 200 SM goniometer). The signal is detected by an EMI 9863B/350 photomultiplier. The light source was the doubled frequency of a Coherent Innova diode pumped Nd-YAG laser, $(\lambda = 532 \text{ nm}, 20 \text{ mV})$, or alternatively a JDS Uniphase He-Ne $(\lambda=633 \text{ nm}, 5 \text{ mW})$. The laser long term power stability was 0.5%. Selfbeating detection was recorded using decahydronaphthalene (thermostated by a water circulating system) as index matching liquid. A temperature probe was inserted in the sample while simultaneously recording autocorrelation functions. Measurements have been performed at 25°C on 0.5 ml samples previously transferred into cylindrical Hellma scattering cells. For each sample at least three separate measurements were performed at the scattering angle $\theta = 90^{\circ}$ corresponding to the scattering vector q. Data analysis has been performed according to standard procedures, and interpreted through a cumulant expansion of the field autocorrelation function, arrested to the second order.

One of the most common methods to fit DLS autocorrelation functions is the Cumulant method, from which in addition to the sum of the exponentials above, more information can be derived about the polydispersity of the system as follows:

$$
g_1(q,\tau) = \exp(-\Gamma \tau)[1 + (\mu_2/2!) \tau^2 - (\mu_3/3!) \tau^3 + ...)
$$
\n(1)

where $(\mu_2/2!) \tau^2$ is the second order polydispersity index. An alternative method for analyzing the autocorrelation function for highly polydisperse or multimodal system can be achieved through an inverse Laplace transform through the CONTIN algorithm, developed by Provencher[1].

 Zeta Potential Zeta potential measurements were carried out using a Zeta Potential Analyzer (Brookhaven Instruments Corporation, Holtsville, NY). Zeta potential values were $\mathbf{1}$

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obtained from the electrophoretic mobility u, according to Helmholtz-Smoluchowski equation (Eq. 2):

$$
\zeta = (\eta/\varepsilon)u\tag{2}
$$

with η being the viscosity of the medium and ε the dielectric permittivity of the dispersing medium. The zeta potential values are reported as averages from 5 measurements on each sample.

 Circular Dichroism Circular Dichroism measurements were performed on a JASCO J-600 spectropolarimeter, in the 350-190 nm range, using Hellma 1 mm pathlength quartz cuvettes**.**

the 350-190 nm range, using Hellma 1 mm pathlength com-
 Franchine Community To follow the incorporation of fluorescentimental condition a drop of culture medium containing

to a microscopic slide, covered with a coversl **Fluorescence microscopy** To follow the incorporation of fluorescent silica NPs, for each experiment and experimental condition a drop of culture medium containing about 100 unfixed cells was transferred to a microscopic slide, covered with a coverslip, observed in an Axioskop microscope equipped for epifluorescence (Zeiss, Oberkochen, Germany) and captured with an Axio Vision 4 system, consisting of a digital multichannel fluorescence module and dedicated software (Zeiss). The number of unlabelled and that of labelled cells were counted and the percentage of labelled cells per slide was computed. Among labelled cells, the intensity of fluorescence was measured with ImageJ for Windows (NIH, Bethesda, MD): each labelled cell was outlined by hand and the software was used to measure the surface area (in square pixel, pixel size $0.0256 \mu m^2$) and the mean labelling intensity (in arbitrary units, maximum intensity $= 255$) of the cell. The two measures were multiplied for each other to obtain the total labelling per labelled cell.

 Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM) of DCs Cytocentrifugates were fixed in 2% formaldehyde and 2.5% glutaraldehyde in 0.1 mol/L cacodylate buffer, pH 7.4, osmicated and embedded in epoxy resin. Sections were stained with gadolinium acetate [2] and either lead citrate or bismuth subnitrate [3], and observed in a Jeol JEM 1010 electron microscope (Tokyo, Japan) at 80 kV. Photomicrographs were taken with a digital camera MegaView III (Soft Imaging System, Muenster, Germany) connected with a personal computer (Dell, Round Rock, Texas) with dedicated software (AnalySIS, Soft Imaging System, Muenster, Germany).

 Flow cytometry analysis of DC maturation.Dendritic cells incubated with NPs were harvested and stained with following fluorescent monoclonal antibodies to analyze their maturation: phycoerythrin (PE) conjugated CD83, fluorescein isothiocyanate (FITC) conjugated CD80 and allophycocyanin (APC) conjugated CD86 (all from BD Biosciences, San Jose, CA). In order to block Fc-mediated unspecific binding, cells were pre-incubated with 1% FBS in PBS for 30 min at 4°C. 7-AAD was used to recognize dead cells and exclude them from analysis. Isotype-matched antibodies were used as negative controls. Flow cytometry was performed on FACScanto II and data was analyzed with FACs Diva Software (BD Biosciences).

Solution Example 1 Solutions. 2x10⁵ lymphocytes were stained with the fermion of the stature of the statured 5 day-incubated with NPs. Immature DCs, DCs matured d with 5 µg/ml phytohaemoagglutinin (PHA, Biochrom ther 5 **Mixed lymphocyte reaction** Lymphocytes were stained with the fluorescent dye CFSE following manufacturer instructions. $2x10^5$ lymphocytes were cultured 5 days in complete medium with $4x10^4$ DCs pre-incubated with NPs. Immature DCs, DCs matured with cytokines and lymphocytes stimulated with 5 µg/ml phytohaemoagglutinin (PHA, Biochrom, Holliston, MA) were used as controls. After 5 days lymphocytes were recovered and stained with the following fluorescent monoclonal antibodies following manufacturer's instructions: PerCP-Cy5.5 conjugated CD3, CD4-PE and CD8-APC (BD Bioscience). Block of Fc-mediated unspecific binding and flow cytometry analysis were performed as above. Isotype-matched antibodies were used as negative controls.

Statistics Quantitative data were expressed as mean \pm standard error (SE) and analyzed as appropriate by ANOVA and Student t-test for paired data. Statistical significance was assumed for $P<0.05$.

Mass spectrometry

Solvents, reagents and materials

d (TFA, 40967, eluent additive for LC-MS eluent addi
a-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA). Sequencing grade m
d from Promega (Madison, WI, USA) and Lys-C End
ic (Rockford, IL, USA). The hand-made desalting/puril
Tips) were prepa Water (412091) and acetonitrile (412042), both UHPLC-MS grade, were purchased from Carlo Erba (BP 616, F-27106, Val de Reuil Cedex, France). Methanol LC-MS grade (34966), ammonium hydrogen carbonate (Ambic, 09830), dithiothreitol (DTT, 43815), iodoacetamide (IAA, 57670), formic acid (56302, eluent additive for LC-MS), acetic acid (49199-F, eluent additive for LC-MS) and trifluoroacetic acid (TFA, 40967, eluent additive for LC-MS eluent additive for LC-MS) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA). Sequencing grade modified trypsin (Tryp, V5111) was purchased from Promega (Madison, WI, USA) and Lys-C Endoproteinase MS-grade from Thermo Scientific (Rockford, IL, USA). The hand-made desalting/purification STop And Go Extraction tips (StageTips) were prepared [4] using C18 Empore Disks (2215) purchased from 3M (MN, USA). Microcon centrifugal filter devices with a nominal cutoff of 10 kDa (MCRPRT010) were purchased from Merck Millipore (Tullagreen, Carrigtwohill Co. Cork, Ireland).

Lysate solution purification from protease inhibitor cocktail

First of all, the protease inhibitor cocktail (P8340, Sigma) was removed from both the lysates: 10 µl of lysate solution, containing 15 µg of lysate, were loaded onto a centrifugal filter device (cut off 10 kDa) together with 490 μ l of H₂O, spinned for 20 minutes at 13000 rpm, diluted again to 500 μ l with H₂O and spinned for 30 minutes at 13000 rpm; the inverted filters were then spinned at 4000 rpm for 3 minutes thus recovering 30 µl of purified lysate solution.

Protein reduction, alkylation and digestion

The following six solutions were subjected to the reduction, alkylation and digestion protocol in use in our laboratory [5].

Solutions 1) and 2): 30 µl of purified lysate aqueous solution of Hep G2 (or A2780) containing 15 µg of lysate (considering a 100% recovery from the previous centrifugation steps).

Solutions 3), 4), 5), 6): 30 μ l of AuNPs (or SiNPs) incubation solution purified from the unbound lysate (Hep G2 or A2780) containing less than 7.5 µg of bound lysate.

The reduction step was performed by adding 1 μ l of 0.5 μ g/ μ l DTT aqueous solution to the six samples and incubating for 30 minutes at RT. The alkylation step was performed by adding 1 µ of $2.5 \mu g/\mu$ IAA aqueous solution to the six samples and incubating for 20 minutes at RT in the dark. The samples were then three-fold diluted with Ambic 50 mM (pH 8.5) to the final volume of 90 µl. A first digestion step was performed by adding 1 μ l of 0.4 μ g/ μ l LysC aqueous solution to each sample and incubating for 3 hours at 37°C. A second digestion step was performed by adding 1 µl of 0.5 μ g/ μ l Tryp aqueous solution to the six samples and incubating overnight at 37°C. The digestions were stopped by adding 20 µl of 10% TFA to each sample (final pH value under 3; final sample volume about 110μ . Digested samples 1) and 2) were directly purified on StageTip while NPs were preventively removed from digested samples 3), 4), 5), 6).

Removal of AuNPs and SiNPs from digested samples

The AuNPs and SiNPs were removed from the peptide mixture coming from samples 3), 4), 5) and

- 6) [6]:
- 400 µl of CH₃CN were added to the 110 µl of peptide mixture (final volume 510 µl)
	-
- Frace Transform digested samples 3), 4), 5), 6).
 Ind SiNPs from digested samples

Since Transform the peptide mixture coming from

CN were added to the 110 µl of peptide mixture (final vers were centrifuged at 13000 rpm - the four samples were centrifuged at 13000 rpm for 5 minutes to pellet the NPs
- in the four Eppendorf it was not possible to see precipitation and it was decided to conservatively withdraw only 450 µl
	- this volume was concentrated to less than 100 µl before StageTip purification step.

StageTip purification step and nanoLC-MS/MS analyses

The entire volume of the six digested samples was purified on Stage $Tip⁴$ following the standard protocol and the eluates were concentrated and reconstituted to 20 µl in 0.5% CH₃COOH [7]. The six peptide mixtures were submitted to nanoLC-MS/MS analysis on an Ultimate 3000 HPLC (Dionex, San Donato Milanese, Milano, Italy) coupled to a LTQ-Orbitrap mass spectrometer (Thermo Fisher, Bremen, Germany). For each solution a volume of 5 µl was directly injected on a self-made nanocolumn packed with an Aeris Peptide XB-C18 phase (75 μ m i.d. \times 15 cm, 3.6 μ m, 100 Å, Phenomenex, Torrance, CA, USA) and eluted at 300 nL/min flow rate. The mobile phase composition was: H_2O/CH_3CN 97/3 with 0.1% HCOOH (phase A) and CH_3CN/H_2O 80/20 with 0.1% HCOOH (phase B). The elution gradient program was: 0 min, 2% B; 40 min, 2% B; 68 min, 15% B; 168 min, 25% B; 228 min, 35% B; 273 min, 50% B; 274 min, 90% B; 288 min, 90% B;

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289 min, 2% B; 309 min, 2% B. Mass spectra were acquired in positive ion mode, setting the spray voltage at 1.8 kV, the capillary voltage and temperature at 45 V and 200 °C, respectively, and the tube lens at 130 V. Data were acquired in data dependent mode with dynamic exclusion enabled (repeat count 2, repeat duration 15 s, and exclusion duration 30 s); survey MS scans were recorded in the Orbitrap analyzer in the mass range of 300–2000 m/z at a 15,000 nominal resolution at m/z = 400; then up to five of the most intense ions in each full MS scan were fragmented (isolation width 3 m/z, normalized collision energy 30) and analyzed in the IT analyzer. Monocharged ions did not trigger MS/MS experiments.

Data processing and analysis

Examplyis
 Examplyis Examply Almond Marth 2.4 search engine (Matrix 1:
 Example 18 was SwissProt (version March 15, 2015) and the tax
 For Example 18 experimental mass values were monoisotopic. The performed allowi The six raw files were analyzed using Mascot 2.4 search engine (Matrix Science Ltd., London, UK). The database used was SwissProt (version March 15, 2015) and the taxonomy was restricted to *homo sapiens*. The experimental mass values were monoisotopic. Trypsin digestion was assumed. Searches were performed allowing: (i) up to two missed cleavage sites, (ii) 10 ppm of tolerance for the monoisotopic precursor ion and 0.8 mass units for monoisotopic fragment ions, (iii) carbamidomethylation of cysteine and oxidation of methionine as variable modifications. A target-decoy search was used: a false discovery rate (FDR) of 1% was imposed and the criterion used to accept protein identification included probabilistic score sorted by the software. Output files were summarized at the protein level to include one protein (the best identified protein in the protein family present in the hit) per hit.

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- ple and rapid staining method for enhancing the contrasting and rapid staining method for enhancing the contrasting and position, nanoelectrospray, and LC/MS sample pretrees 5, 663-670 (2003). puto B, Michelucci E, Dani FR [4] Rappsilber J, Ishihama Y, Mann M. Stop and go extraction tips for matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization, nanoelectrospray, and LC/MS sample pretreatment in proteomics. *Anal. Chem.* 75, 663-670 (2003).
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