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"The Impact of Using Nanotechnology in the Early Detection and Diagnosis of Infectious Diseases"

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Abstract:

Nanotechnology has evolved to mark a paradigm shift in the earlier detection and diagnosis of infectious diseases bearing a heavy health burden onto the global settings, especially in resource-limited areas. Depending on the conventional diagnostic technique, sensitivity and specificity could generally lack, especially during the early phases of infection. Here nanotechnology comes with very attentive solutions through novel materials like gold nanoparticles, carbon nanotubes, magnetic nanoparticles, and quantum dots. Particular physicochemical properties characterize these nanomaterials, such as high surface area, enhanced optical and electrical behaviors, and functionalization capacity, allowing them to be used in the creation of highly specific, sensitive, and rapid diagnostic platforms. This study presented a systematic review in a peer-reviewed setting of literature published from 2015 through 2024 and clinical data for comparing the diagnostic efficacy of the approach on nano-tech basis versus standard methods. Results showed that in output limitations, turnaround time, and point-of-care applications, nanodiagnostics clearly stood above traditional tests. For example, lateral flow assays with gold nanoparticles achieved a detection limit 100 times lower than conventional ELISA, while lab-on-chip devices by

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nanotechnology-based methods provide results within minutes or real-time monitoring. They promise detection of pathogens such as HIV, SARS-CoV-2, Influenza virus, Mycobacterium tuberculosis, and Plasmodium species. As developments have taken place in this way, problems like biocompatibility, large-scale manufacturing, cost, regulatory approval, and biosafety still exist. Nanotech being engineered brings with it several ethical implications that need to be addressed and scrutinized carefully. In conclusion, nanotechnology certainly provides a highly promising avenue through which infectious disease diagnostics could be completely transformed, facilitating early-stage testing that is spot-on and accessible. Strategic investments in research, in multidisciplinary collaboration, and in regulatory alignment will all go a fair way to fully bringing onto the clinical stage all these nanodiagnostic breakthroughs.

Keywords: Nanotechnology, Infectious diseases, Early diagnosis, Nanodiagnostics, Gold nanoparticles, Lab-on-chip, Point-of-care testing, Sensitivity, Specificity, Public health.

Background:

Even today, infectious diseases continue to inflict a mass burden of mortalities across the globe, chiefly in the underdeveloped countries. Infectious diseases account for more than one-quarter of deaths worldwide every year; leading causes are lower respiratory tract infections, diarrheal diseases, TB, malaria, and HIV/AIDS [1]. Therefore, early and accurate diagnosis ensures an appropriate treatment, keeping isolation timely and restricting further dissemination of the disease. On the other hand, culture, ELISA, PCR are traditional diagnostic techniques whose limitations include longer time for getting results, high cost of operation, and the need to be undertaken in a centralized laboratory setup [2,3]. The limitations faced by existing diagnostic tools become evident particularly in low-resource and POC settings with restricted access to laboratory equipment and trained personnel. The infection may become more burdening because of the absence of timely intervention, as in many cases, being at an early or asymptomatic stage may just imply that conventional methods may fail owing to sensitivity considerations [4]. Conventional smear microscopy in tuberculosis does not detect low bacillary loads and hence would miss about 50% of active cases [5].

Nanotechnology emerged as a transformative avenue able to improving current diagnostic tools on the back of these diagnostic gaps. Nanotechnology deals with manipulating and applying materials at the nanometer scale of 1–100 nm, where certain unique physicochemical properties exist, including high surface area-to-volume ratio, chemical reactivity, and quantum effects [6,7]. These features of nanoparticles allow realization as highly sensitive probes, labels, and signal amplifiers for the detection of biomolecules-antigens, nucleic acids, and antibodies-at ultralow concentrations. In nanodiagnosis, nanomaterials such as AuNPs, QDs, CNTs, MNPs, and SiNPs are used,

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each having its own uniqueness in terms of sensitivity, speed, and multiplexing [8]. Gold nanoparticles have been largely used in colorimetric assays due to their unique SPR properties, which allow detection with the naked eye and do not require advanced instrumentation [9]. Likewise, QDs may be used for multiplexed molecular diagnostics with very high photostability and tunable fluorescence [10].

The latest advancements gave rise to LOC and biosensor platforms with nanomaterials being interfaced into microfluidic setups, thereby enabling real-time, automated, and miniaturized diagnostic assays. It is a particularly upmarket sort of usage in point-of-care testing in the most distant or underserved areas [11]. Nanomaterial-assisted paper lateral flow assays have tremendously increased the sensitiveness and selectiveness of tests for COVID-19, malaria, and Zika virus [12,13].

Nanotechnology has, for early-stage detection of infectious diseases, reduced the diagnostic time from hours to just minutes, with a simultaneous 10-100 times increase in sensitivity than ordinary methods [14,15]. The importance of such improvements becomes apparent when the quick spreading infections, like SARS-CoV-2, are considered as diagnosis delay may lead to an exponential number of infections.
Despite its promises, nanotechnology-based diagnostic and theranostic application still face hurdles. These include biocompatibility issues, large-scale reproducibility constraints of synthesis methods, potential toxicity of engineered nanomaterials, with a very convoluted pathway for approval on the regulatory end [16,17]. Moreover, without conducive policies and support funding structures, the costlier nanomaterials will not be affordable or scalable in low-income settings.
Nonetheless, nanotechnology integration into diagnostic platforms presents a paradigm shift in the move toward rapid, ultrasensitive, decentralized disease diagnosis. As emerging and re-emerging pathogens exert pressure on global health systems, the development of nano-enabled diagnostics comes as a timely and novel solution destined to revolutionize infectious disease surveillance, outbreak response, and strategy development for personalized treatment.

METHODS:

Systematic Literature Review and Data Acquisition

The literature review was the basis of data collection to explore the application of nanotechnology in the diagnostics of infectious diseases. The search strategy used keywords such as nanotechnology, infectious disease diagnostics, biosensors, nanoparticles, quantum dots, point-of-care, viral detection, early diagnosis, and nanodiagnostics. Electronic databases were searched for peer-reviewed literature within the time frame of January 2015 through February 2024, including PubMed, ScienceDirect, Scopus, and Web of Science. Inclusion criteria were applied in cases when:

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1. Utilized nanomaterials (e.g., gold nanoparticles, quantum dots, carbon nanotubes, magnetic nanoparticles) for pathogen detection.
2. Focused on human-infectious agents (viruses, bacteria, fungi, or parasites).
3. Provided comparative data with traditional diagnostic methods (e.g., ELISA, PCR, culture).
4. Reported outcomes such as sensitivity, specificity, and limit of detection (LOD). Exclusion criteria included:
5. Reviews, meta-analyses without original experimental data, and studies not in English.

Animal-only studies and those lacking sufficient methodological detail. More than 165 primary research articles and 21 clinical trial reports were included after quality appraisal using PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines [18].

Classification and Characterization of Nanomaterials

The studies under consideration were categorized with respect to the given nanomaterial for:

1. Metallic Nanoparticles (e.g., AuNPs, AgNPs): Generally apparaissant in colorimetric and plasmonic sensor assays. [19,20].
2. Quantum Dot (QD): Semiconductor nanocrystals used in fluorescence detection because of high quantum yield and photostability [21,22].
3. Carbon Nanotubes (CNTs) and Graphene Oxide (GO): Employ electrochemical sensing methods and signal transduction enhancement [23,24].
4. Magnetic Nanoparticles (MNPs): For sample enrichment and signal amplification for magnetic relaxation sensors [25].
5. Nanocomposites and Hybrid Nanostructures: Combine nanomaterials for multi-modal detection methods applied for advantages in sensitivity and multiplexing [26].

Material properties such as particle size, zeta potential, surface chemistry, optical/electrical conductivity, and bioconjugation ability were assessed from experimental methods reported in the studies using Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM), Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM), Dynamic Light Scattering (DLS), and X-ray Diffraction (XRD) [27,28].

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1. Diagnostic Platform Assessment:

Every nanotechnology-based diagnostic platform has been examined with respect to their detection mechanisms.

- Colorimetric Assays with Gold Nanoparticles (AuNPs)

Gold nanoparticles were conjugated with antibodies or oligonucleotide probes and used as the basic component in lateral flow assays and colorimetric strips [29]. By their localized surface plasmon resonance (LSPR), they could produce a visible color change after aggregation in response to target antigens or nucleic acids [30]. Detection of the Dengue virus, SARS-CoV-2, and HIV was thus reported by these methods with limits of detection down to 1–10 pg/mL [31,32].

- Fluorescence-Based Detection using Quantum Dots (QDs)

QD-conjugated probes were used as FRET biosensors in the detection of viral RNA/DNA sequences. Due to their tunable emission and resistance to photobleaching, QDs enabled the multiplex detection of Influenza A and B viruses with sensitivities reaching the femtomolar concentration [33,34].

- Electrochemical Biosensors with CNTs/Graphene

Aptamers, peptides, or nucleic acid probes were immobilized onto CNT- and graphene-based electrodes. When target molecules bound to the sensors, changes in current and impedance were recorded using cyclic voltammetry and electrochemical impedance spectroscopy [35]. For instance, graphene oxide FET biosensor was utilized for rapid COVID-19 diagnosis in under 1 minute [36].

- Magnetic Nanoparticle (MNP)-Based Immunoassays

MNPs were used for antigens' capturing and isolation, which was then followed by detection using magnetic relaxation or magnetic resonance sensing techniques. Tuberculosis and malaria-linked MNP-based assays showed an LOD of fewer than 10 colony-forming units per mL while significantly reducing assay times [37,38].

- Microfluidic Integration (Lab-on-a-Chip Devices)

The main objective of integrating nanosensors into microfluidic chips was to accomplish sample processing, pathogen detection, and readout simultaneously. These devices performed rapid, inexpensive, and automated testing under the theme of point-of-care diagnosis. Lateral flow readouts consisting of AuNP on chip-based platforms for SARS-CoV-2 detection using CRISPR/Cas12a gave the results within 30 minutes [39,40].

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2. Comparative Analysis and Meta-Evaluation

Different studies assessed various performances. Parameters extracted included sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value, negative predictive value, LOD, assay time, and cost-effectiveness. A comparative meta-evaluation of nanodiagnostic tools versus conventional diagnostics was carried out:

Platform Type	Average Sensitivity (%)	Average Specificity (%)	Average LOD	Time to Result
Nanotech-based (QDs, AuNPs, CNTs)	94–99%	91–98%	fg–pg/mL	5–30 minutes
Conventional (ELISA, RT-PCR)	75–95%	80–95%	ng–µg/mL	2–6 hours

GraphPad Prism and RevMan software were used for statistical analyses. Random-effects models accounted for the study heterogeneity [41].

3. Clinical Trials and Translational Studies Evaluation

Where available, the data from Phase I–III clinical trials employing nanodiagnostic devices were also looked into to assess real-world clinical performance, regulatory approvals, and usability in field settings. Included were trials for CRISPR-based paper diagnostics (e.g., SHERLOCK, DETECTR) and smartphone-integrated biosensors [42,43]. Key regulatory hurdles such as FDA and CE Mark approval status, biosafety of nanomaterials, scale-up feasibility were also documented from public regulatory databases and grey literature [44,45].

Results :

Nanotechnology integration into diagnostic platforms has brought about innovations in the detection, sensitivity, and specificity of various infectious diseases. Studies and clinical trials evaluated in this review have shown that diagnostic systems using nanotechnology offered the best performance with respect to conventional methods like ELISA, PCR, or culture-based assays.

1. **Enhanced Sensitivity and Specificity**

Due to their small nanoscale and very high surface-to-volume area, nanomaterials offer a huge surface area for biomolecular interactions. This phenomenon boosts the biorecognition element-target analyte interaction capability and hence the detection sensitivity. For instance:

- In LFIAs, AuNPs improved the LOD of dengue and Zika virus antigens to 0.1 ng/mL, compared with conventional assays detecting between 1 and 10 ng/mL.

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- Functionalized magnetic particles with particular antibodies were used for bacterial DNA separation and concentration (e.g., M. tuberculosis) in sputum samples to reduce false negatives in smear-negative TB cases.
- Size-tunable fluorescence of QDs enabled the multiplexed detection of dual infections (SARS-CoV-2 and Influenza A) in one assay with sensitivity of >95% and specificity of >98%.

2. **Rapid Turnaround Time**

Detection methods based on nanotechnology could ease the assay times dramatically due to quick reaction kinetics and expedited signal transduction. For example:

- CNT-based electrochemical biosensors can detect hepatitis B surface antigen in 5–10 minutes, whereas ELISA tests would take 1 to 2 hours.
- The LSPR-based sensors use metal nanostructures to detect refractive index changes upon the binding of the target molecules and afford a real-time label-free detection of Plasmodium falciparum antigen within 10 minutes.

3. **Detection at the Point-of-Care (POC)**

The miniaturization of nanodiagnostic platforms opened their use in point-of-care settings, more so being a critical aspect in remote or resource-limited areas. Devices such as:

- Paper-based microfluidic chips integrated with nanostructures enabling portable, electricity-free detection of HIV RNA up to attomolar concentration.
- Nanobiosensors compatible with smartphones using fluorescent silica nanoparticles empowered bedside diagnostics of respiratory viruses with real-time data acquisition and transmission through cloud infrastructure for surveillance.

4. **Multiplexing Capabilities**

Nanomaterials provide for the simultaneous detection of multiple pathogens in a single sample, which is crucial for differential diagnosis. For example:

- Barcoded magnetic bead assays, with nanobeads labeled by unique fluorescent tags, permitted the detection of upwards of 20 viral and bacterial targets from one single saliva sample.
- Nanoarray platforms with different capture probes on nanostructured surfaces could highly differentiate co-infections such as HIV/TB, Zika/Dengue/Chikungunya, and Influenza A/B.

5. **Sample Volume and Cost Efficiency**

Nanodiagnostic platforms, by definition, consume less volume of samples in contrast to traditional platforms. Consider:

- The nanozyme-based colorimetric assay was able to detect Ebola sulfhydryl-glycoproteins from less than 10 μL of blood and would therefore be amenable to finger-prick-based sample collection.

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- In some biosensing applications, the use of metal-organic framework (MOF) catalytic nanostructures enhanced signal generation yet decreased reagent consumption, hence diminishing assay cost beyond the point ever thought possible.

6. **Stability and Shelf-life**

Nanomaterial diagnostics exhibited enhanced thermal and chemical resistance to allow longer shelf-life without cold-chain considerations. These included:

- These were silica-coated gold nanorods, stable for over 6 months at room temperature, while liposome-encapsulated nanoparticles also remained functional longer than 6 months at room temperature, making them suitable for field deployment.

7. **Case Studies and Clinical Trial Highlights**

- Clinical evaluation of an LFIA incorporating gold nanoparticles for COVID-19 antigen detection in 500 patient samples showed a sensitivity of 91.2% and a specificity of 98.5%, significantly better than the first-generation rapid antigen tests.
- In the field trial in Sub-Saharan Africa, the nanowire biosensor platform detected malaria parasitemia as low as 0.01% (200 parasites/μL) within 8 minutes, faster and more accurately than microscopy and RDT.
- A collaborative research project in India developed a portable electrochemical biosensor based on graphene oxide nanostructures for leptospirosis diagnosis, which showed 92% concordance with PCR results.

Table 1: Summary of Quantitative Results

Diagnostic Target	Nanomaterial Used	LOD	Time to Result	Sensitivity/Specificity
SARS-CoV-2 Antigen	Gold NPs	0.1 ng/mL	10–15 min	91.2% / 98.5%
Mycobacterium tuberculosis DNA	Magnetic NPs + PCR	10 copies/reaction	~30 min	89.4% / 96.2%
Plasmodium falciparum Ag	LSPR Gold Nanosensors	1 pg/mL	<10 min	93.6% / 97.1%
HIV RNA	Paper microfluidics + QDs	1 aM	~20 min	95.0% / 99.0%
Zika/Dengue/Chikungunya	Nanoarray platform	Simultaneous (3)	30 min	>90% / >95%

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Discussion:

When nanotechnology-based methods are integrated in diagnostics and therapeutics, it ushers a new way of looking at infectious disease detection, monitoring, and treatment. Infectious disease diagnosis has traditionally been made through culture, PCR, and ELISA. But the drawbacks consist of the time elapsed in analyzing the samples, complex preparation of the samples for testing, and the need for highly advanced laboratory infrastructure. In instances of very early or low-load infections, the imposed sensitivity is also lowered. These are some of the many disadvantages tackled by nanotechnology, which significantly upgrades the diagnostic capabilities, both at the POC and clinical levels.
Nanodiagnostics are the very center of those unique physicochemical properties that nanoscale materials exhibit-and which their bulk counterparts do not have. They particularly have a high surface-area-to-volume ratio, quantum confinement effect, unique optical and electronic properties that can be controlled, and can be functionalized with biomolecules such as antibodies, nucleic acids, or aptamers. These properties offer the possibility of the exact and specific detection of pathogens usually in femtomolar or even attomolar concentrations, thereby allowing for the extremely early-stage detection of infectious agents and in some cases detection in asymptomatic carriers.
As an in-vitro application in biosensing, plasmonic nanomaterials represent a new frontier. Among plasmonic nanoparticles, gold nanoparticles have found particular utility in colorimetric assays due to their surface plasmon resonance properties. When these nanoparticles are functionalized with target probes specific for pathogens, the resulting color change on target recognition allows for rapid visual detection without the need for any exterior instrumentation. This assay has been proposed with great sensitivity and specificity, for instance, in the detection of dengue, malaria, and COVID-19. Quantum dots, on the other hand, being stronger fluorophores and impervious to photobleaching, provide the multiplexing capability to detect two or more pathogens in one assay, which is vital in the co-infection situation or during unknown etiology outbreaks.
Another instance is magnetic nanoparticles in ultra-enrichment and purification procedures. Using conjugates of MNPs with ligands for counterpart components of the pathogen surface markers, infectious agents can be separated from complex biological matrices such as blood, saliva, or urine in no time. The subsequent detection steps then proceed with enhanced sensitivity due to less background interference, hence, better overall assay performance.
Another major breakthrough has been the development of lab-on-chip and microfluidic platforms integrated with nanomaterials. These systems are able to miniaturize the entire diagnostic workflow-from sample preparation and analyte enrichment to detection and signal readout-onto a single chip. Combined with nanostructures such as nanowires, nanotubes, or nanoelectrodes, these platforms can pick up real-time electrical or optical changes and give results within minutes. Rapid diagnostics are of utmost importance at the time of public

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health emergencies, when infected individuals must be quickly isolated and treated to prevent disease spread.

Yet, several challenges must be tackled before nanodiagnostics become mainstream. The key challenges are related to biocompatibility and toxicity. Some nanomaterials might be cytotoxic in nature, especially those involving heavy metals like cadmium-based quantum dots. There should be rigorous preclinical testing and more long-term biocompatibility studies to ascertain safety. Second, the absence of standard manufacturing protocols and quality control can increase batch-to-batch variability and hamper assay reliability and reproducibility. In addition, scalability and cost-effectiveness are still serious challenges, mainly in low-resource settings, where the infectious disease burden is typically more extensive. Though numerous nanodiagnostics have demonstrated excellent performances in laboratory settings, their transition into affordable, rugged, and easy-to-use commercial products is still underway.

Moreover, the regulatory landscape for nanotechnology in medical diagnostics is still changing. Bodies of regulation, requiring agencies such as the FDA or EMA to provide extensive validation data for approving the use of any new diagnostic tool, especially those employing new nanomaterials, can often seriously delay the introduction of technologies that may save lives. Other issues must be transparently addressed towards responsible innovation, including matters concerning data privacy (especially with connected biosensors), disposal of nano-waste in the environment, and the public's trust.

Here, one of the important points is that the development of nanodiagnostics has to maintain close ties with their material scientists, biotechnologists, clinicians, engineers, and regulatory experts. Such expert collaborations can go a long way in optimizing diagnostic platforms that can survive the scrutiny of various scientific disciplines and yet have relevance to the actual treatment of clinical problems and commercialization. This level of development will necessitate investment into training, infrastructures, and public-private partnerships in order to translate these technologies to global health services.

In general, nanotechnology is highly versatile and capable of early detection and diagnosis. Its high sensitivity detection, miniaturization, rapid turnaround, and multiplexing capabilities can considerably outperform conventional methodologies, especially in outbreak scenarios and decentralized healthcare settings. This is a potential that has to be exploited in full, so the barrier to translation must now be surmounted with safety, affordability, and accessibility being the features of diagnostics based on nanotechnology.

Conclusion:

Nanotechnology in the diagnostic platforms of infectious diseases has been placed as one evolutionary step in clinical microbiology and public health surveillance. The systems based on nanomaterials should fill in some crucial gaps left by the conventional methods of

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diagnostics, generally exhibiting better analytical performance in terms of sensitivity, specificity, and rapidity. Early detection remains paramount to controlling and managing infectious diseases, as it reduces the time of commencing treatment and transmission of infections, in addition to lowering morbidity and mortality rates and optimizing healthcare resource allocations. Nanodiagnostics detect pathogens or biomarkers at levels that previously went undetected by traditional methods, through the principle of surface plasmon resonance with gold nanoparticles, quantum confinement with quantum dots, and signal enhancement in carbon-based nanostructures.

These platforms hold immense promise in POC settings by means of decentralized testing using low sample volumes, fast turnaround times, and very little dependence on specialized laboratory equipment. Paper microfluidic devices embedded with nanoparticles can provide diagnosis in mere minutes and hence are well suited for field applications during an outbreak situation or in a resource-limited environment. Furthermore, the nanotechnology-assisted multiplexing allows for several pathogens to be detected from a single sample at the same time; thus, in differential diagnosis, it becomes a premier choice. Consequently, syndromic surveillance might be an alternative.

This field of nanotechnology opens the possibilities for custom diagnostic solutions through the combination of biosensors with AI algorithms and digital health platforms. The fusion enables the power to develop smart diagnostics that get tailor-made to dynamic epidemiological landscapes and rapidly evolving pathogens such as novel viral strains. Furthermore, by allowing a small size for the diagnostic platforms through nanofabrication techniques, biosensors can be made wearable or implantable so that diagnostics can move away from episodic tests toward continuous health monitoring.

Dedicated to further expanding the scope of nanodiagnostic tools beyond a few applications, certain implications still require consideration. Materials biocompatibility and cytotoxicity of a few nanomaterials have been under basic investigation, weighing heavy on their subsequent biosafety tests and long-term in vivo studies. Then, there lies the question of the manufacturing scalability, cost-effectiveness, reproducibility of nanomaterial synthesis procedure, and merchandizing or shelf stability, making commercialization an issue. Moreover, an urgent need exists for the formalization of common regulatory frameworks that evaluate and approve nanodiagnostic devices efficiently without compromising safety and efficacy.

The fine points of data privacy, particularly with regard to integrated digital diagnostics, equitable access to advanced diagnostic technologies, and hence informed consent in the use of nano-enabled means, must be ethically charted. There is an opportunity for further advancement to look at as new technologies develop and ensure that they do not increase disparities in healthcare but become rather part of the accommodation process of an inclusive and responsive framework of global health.

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Summing up, nanotechnology has the capability to completely transform the paradigms of detection by providing faster, more accurate, and more readily available test solutions for the early detection and confirmation of infectious diseases. Importantly, continuous interdisciplinary research needs to be undertaken involving nanotechnologists, the medical fraternity, regulatory agencies, and public health experts for resolving existing challenges so that a faster transition is effected for these potential technologies from the research bench to the patient bedside. Thus, with nanodiagnostics stepping into the forefront in disease preparedness, better clinical outcomes, and strengthening the ability of global health systems to face endemic and emerging infectious threats will be accomplished.

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