

Trojan-horse silk fibroin nanocarriers loaded with a re-call antigen to redirect immunity against cancer

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To cite: Bari E, Ferrera F, Altosole T, *et al.* Trojan-horse silk fibroin nanocarriers loaded with a re-call antigen to redirect immunity against cancer. *Journal for ImmunoTherapy of Cancer* 2023;**11**:e005916. doi:10.1136/jitc-2022-005916

► Additional supplemental material is published online only. To view, please visit the journal online (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jitc-2022-005916>).

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Accepted 23 December 2022



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ABSTRACT

Background The current challenge for immunotherapies is to generate effective antitumor immunity. Since tumor immune escape mechanisms do not impact pre-existing and consolidated immune responses, we tested the hypothesis of redirecting a pregenerated immunity to cancer: to recall a non-tumor antigen response against the tumor, silk fibroin nanoparticles (SFNs) have been selected as ‘Trojan-horse’ carriers, promoting the antigen uptake by the tumor cells.

Methods SFNs have been loaded with either ovalbumin (OVA) or CpG oligonucleotide (CpG) as antigen or adjuvant, respectively. In vitro uptake of SFNs by tumor (B16/F10 melanoma and MB49 bladder cancer) or dendritic cells, as well as the presence of OVA-specific T cells in splenic and tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes, were assessed by cytometric analyses. Proof-of-concept of in vivo efficacy was achieved in an OVA-hyperimmune B16/F10 murine melanoma model: SFNs-OVA or SFNs-CpG were injected, separately or in association, into the subcutaneous peritumoral area. Cancer dimensions/survival time were monitored, while, at the molecular level, system biology approaches based on graph theory and experimental proteomic data were performed.

Results SFNs were efficiently in vitro uptaken by cancer and dendritic cells. In vivo peritumor administration of SFNs-OVA redirected OVA-specific cytotoxic T cells intratumorally. Proteomics and systems biology showed that peritumoral treatment with either SFNs-OVA or SFNs-CpG dramatically modified tumor microenvironment with respect to the control (CTR), mainly involving functional modules and hubs related to angiogenesis, inflammatory mediators, immune function, T complex and serpins expression, redox homeostasis, and energetic metabolism. Both SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG significantly delayed melanoma growth/survival time, and their effect was additive.

Conclusions Both SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG induce effective anticancer response through complementary mechanisms and show the efficacy of an innovative active immunotherapy approach based on the redirection of pre-existing immunity against cancer cells. This approach could be universally applied for solid cancer treatments if translated into the clinic using re-call antigens of childhood vaccination.

WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN ON THIS TOPIC

⇒ The current challenge for cancer vaccines is to generate effective immune responses against cancer, overcoming the several cancer immune escape mechanisms that hamper tumor antigen-directed immune responses.

WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS

⇒ Our innovative approach redirects an already existing, robust, consolidated immune response against cancer. It exploits a ‘Trojan-horse’ strategy using silk fibroin nanoparticles as a vehicle of both an antigen and an adjuvant within the tumor.

HOW THIS STUDY MIGHT AFFECT RESEARCH, PRACTICE OR POLICY

⇒ This strategy, translated into clinics, could be universally applied to any cancer and any patient, using, as the immunogen, a re-call antigen: possible objectives consist both in eradication (i.e., in non-metastatic tumors like glioblastoma) and palliation (i.e., treatment of surgically unresectable tumor masses of any nature).

INTRODUCTION

Cancer vaccines should induce effector cancer-specific immune responses. However, although several cancer vaccines have been generated and tested in clinical trials, their general clinical efficacy rate was very poor,¹ and only one cancer vaccine, sipuleucel-T, received approval for clinical use.² The main reasons for the failure of vaccination strategy in cancer treatment are the low immunogenicity of tumor-associated antigens and the tumor capacity to downregulate their expression and generate a tolerogenic tumor microenvironment (TME).³ Cancer vaccines based on tumor neoantigens originating from tumor-specific gene mutations⁴ present some drawbacks since they are generally not shared among patients and are poorly presented

by (human leukocyte antigen) HLA molecules.⁵ Moreover, they require complex and expensive technologies that dramatically impact therapy costs. Hence, there is an urgent need to imagine new approaches of cancer vaccination to overcome the current difficulties. Clinical evidence teaches that tumor immune suppression does not significantly impact pre-existing, consolidated immune responses, like those induced early in life by pediatric vaccinations.⁶ Hence, a new perspective for cancer vaccination could be redirecting pre-existing immunity against tumor. This innovative strategy requires a vector able to vehicle the antigen target of the pre-existing immunity within tumor cells in association with a potent adjuvant able to subvert the immune suppressive milieu present in TME.

In this regard, nanoparticles are a promising tool in cancer immunotherapy.^{7,8} They allow optimal delivery of antigens and adjuvants in TME. They may accumulate passively due to the enhanced permeability and retention effect or through specific active targeting.⁹ In addition, the fact that nanoparticles may be internalized by both tumor cells and dendritic cells (DCs) allows the delivery of antigens in both cell types, thus facilitating the onset and development of an immune response. In particular, silk fibroin (SF) nanoparticles are of great interest since they are biocompatible, biodegradable, and have adequate mechanical properties for stable delivery and optimal in situ retention of drugs or antigens.^{10–12}

Based on the above, we explored the efficacy of a ‘Trojan-horse’ model of cancer immunotherapy to recall a pre-existing immunity toward the tumor. To this aim, we used silk fibroin nanoparticles (SFNs) as a vehicle for both the antigen, ovalbumin (OVA), and the adjuvant, CpG, in OVA pre-immunized mice. Injectable formulations of SFNs loaded with OVA or CpG were designed, their in vitro internalization by cancer and DCs was determined, and their protecting efficacy against tumor growth was evaluated in a murine model. Application of high-throughput proteomics and systems biology approaches based on protein–protein interaction (PPI) network models¹³ allowed the definition of functional modules and hubs involved in their activity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Preparation of injectable formulations of SFNs

SF was extracted and solubilized according to a previously reported procedure described in the online supplemental material. SFNs were then prepared by exploiting the fibroin desolvation in acetone.^{10,12} Briefly, for SFNs preparation, SF (1.5% w/v) was added dropwise to acetone; for SFNs-OVA, a solution of SF (1% w/v) and OVA (Merck, Darmstadt, Germany) (0.5% w/v) was prepared and then added dropwise to acetone; for SFNs-CpG, a solution of SF (1.5% w/v) and CpG (TIB Molbiol, Genoa, Italy) (0.1% w/v) was prepared and then added dropwise to acetone. The fibroin/acetone volume ratio was 1:5 in all cases. The nanoparticle suspension was further processed

and freeze-dried as reported in the online supplemental material. Final formulations were stored at 4°C until use (maximum of 3 months). In addition, a physical mixture of SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG was prepared by mixing the freeze-dried formulations of SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG in a 1:1 ratio.

Characterization of SFNs injectable formulations

As reported in the online supplemental material, OVA loading in SFNs-OVA was evaluated by size exclusion chromatography, quantifying the residual presence of unbound OVA in the washed supernatants.

Loading of CpG into SFNs-CpG was verified by analyzing the nanoparticles’ micro-analytical composition by a high-resolution scanning electron microscopy (TESCAN, Mira 3 XMU) equipped with an In-Beam SE detector operating at 8 kV and by energy dispersive spectrometry operating at 20 kV. Before the analysis, the samples were coated with carbon using a Cressington 208C.

The dimensional distribution of SFNs was analyzed using NanoSight NS300 equipment (Malvern Panalytical, Great Malvern, Worcestershire, UK); the mean size, polydispersity index (PDI) and zeta potential were analyzed by Zetasizer Nano Zs (Malvern Panalytical) (see online supplemental material). Chemical-physical characterization was performed by recording Mid-infrared (IR) (650–4000 cm⁻¹) spectra on powder samples using a Bruker Equinox 55 spectrometer equipped with a pyroelectric detector (deuterated-triglycine-sulfate (DTGS) type) with a resolution of 4 cm⁻¹. Following the procedures reported in the online supplemental material, temperature and enthalpy values were measured by differential scanning calorimetry (DSC) by a NEXTA DSC (Hitachi, Europark Fichtenhain A12, Krefeld, Germany) equipped with a DSC821e module and an intracooler device for subambient temperature analysis (Julabo FT 900); a Mettler STARE thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) system (PerkinElmer Pyris 1, Wellesley, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA) with simultaneous DSC (TGA/DSC1) measured mass losses on heating.

Finally, the residual humidity, osmolarity and pH of the reconstituted product were measured (see online supplemental material).

Analysis of SFNs internalization by cancer cells

Analyses of SFNs internalization were performed on cancer cell lines and on tumor cells incubated either ex vivo or in vivo with SFNs. Analyses were conducted using either curcumin-loaded SFNs (SFNs-CUR) or SFNs-OVA. In the latter case, an fluorescein isothiocyanate (FITC) rabbit anti-OVA antibody (Abcam, Cambridge, UK) was used as a revealing agent. SFNs internalization was detected by either flow cytometry, using an FACSCanto II flow cytometry (BD) equipped with three lasers (488 nm, 640 nm, 405 nm) using FACSDiva software V.6 (BD), or confocal microscopy, using an Olympus FV500 confocal microscope (Olympus Corporation). Detailed

information on these procedures is provided in the online supplemental material.

Mice

Mice, 7–10 weeks old, female C57BL/6J were purchased from Envigo RMS (San Pietro al Natisone, Udine, Italy) and housed under specific pathogen-free conditions in the animal facility at the Istituto di Ricovero e Cura a Carattere Scientifico (IRCCS) Ospedale Policlinico San Martino, Genoa, Italy. All the procedures were carried out by animal facilities qualified staff according to the guidelines provided in Italian Ministero della Salute D.Lgs 26/2014. The protocol concerning the experiments followed the recommendation and received approval from the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (Organizzazione Per il Benessere Animale of IRCCS Ospedale Policlinico San Martino of Genoa) and the National Istituto Superiore di Sanità (protocol # 1000/2020-PR).

Analysis of SFNs internalization by DCs

The analysis of SFNs internalization by DCs was performed by flow cytometry on splenic DCs and DCs present in the TME. Detailed information on these procedures is provided in the online supplemental material.

Adipose adult stromal cells generation

Adipose adult stromal cells were generated as described in detail in the online supplemental material.

MTT assay

Methyl thiazolyl diphenyl-tetrazolium bromide (MTT) assay to assess cell viability was performed as described in the online supplemental material.

Administration of SFNs to tumor-challenged mice

Seven-week-old C57BL/6J female mice were immunized subcutaneously with a suspension of OVA (60 µg) (Merck, Darmstadt, Germania) and CpG 1826 (TIB MolBiol, Genoa, Italy) (30 µg), dissolved in 100 µL saline phosphate buffer without calcium and magnesium (PBS). Two subsequent boosters were administered 15 and 30 days after the first immunization. Ten days after the last booster, B16/F10 mouse melanoma cells or MB49 bladder cancer cells (10^5 cells/mouse) were injected subcutaneously into the mice. Neoplastic nodules were seen at the injection site 7–10 days after tumor cell administration. Mice, randomly distributed among the different treatment and untreated control groups (six mice per group), were administered with SNFs, SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG suspended in PBS at 1 mg/mL and sonicated at 59 MHz for 15–30 min at room temperature before subcutaneous injection into the peritumoral area (200 µg per mouse). Each mouse received three nanoparticle injections 1 week apart. Mice were observed daily by researchers who administered the treatments, and blind operators registered tumor sizes. Tumor masses were measured with a caliper at 2–3 days intervals by measuring long and short axes. Volume was calculated according to the formula: tumor volume = $\frac{1}{2}$ (length ×

width²) in cm³. Mice were sacrificed when tumors reached >1 cm³ or ulceration/bleeding developed.

The experiments aimed at demonstrating the eventual therapeutic effects of SFNs were performed only on the orthotopic B16/F10 melanoma model, more representative of the corresponding human disease than the heterotopic MB49 bladder cancer model, and sized based on our previous experience with the model, following the 3R principle (replacement, reduction and refinement). Tumor measures and laboratory analyses were conducted blind from the treatment group.

Intracellular staining for interferon- γ and interleukin-10 detection

Splenocytes and intratumoral T lymphocytes were purified from OVA hyper-immune C57BL/6J mice challenged with MB49 bladder cancer cells treated or not with SFNs: specimens were minced and passed through a cell strainer to obtain a homogenous cell suspension. Then, lymphocytes were purified by centrifugation on a Ficoll gradient Lympholyte-H Cell Separation Media (Cedarlane, Burlington, Canada). After red blood cell lysis (red blood cell lysing buffer, Merck), splenocytes or tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes were seeded in 96 wells of round-bottomed plates (Corning, Somerville, Massachusetts, USA) in triplicate at 10^6 cells/well in a volume of 100 µL of culture medium (Gibco Life Technologies, Milan, Italy) in the presence or not of OVA (100 µg/mL) overnight. At the end of incubation, the cells were stained with Efluor V450 rat anti-mouse CD3 (Thermo Fisher catalog no 48-0032-82) and PE-Cyanine7 rat anti-mouse CD8 (BD catalog no 552877) antibodies, fixed and permeabilized by BD Cytofix Cytoperm (BD), and incubated with allophycocyanine rat anti-mouse interleukin (IL)-10 (Thermo Fisher catalog no 17-7101-82) and FITC rat anti-mouse interferon (IFN)- γ (Thermo Fisher catalog no 11-7311-82) antibodies. Cells were then analyzed by LSRFortessa X20 flow cytometer (BD).

Cytotoxic assay

B16/F10 melanoma or MB49 bladder cancer cells were incubated overnight with SFNs-OVA or unloaded SFNs as a control in x-vivo medium (Lonza, Basilea, Switzerland) at 37°C in 5% CO₂. Then, the cells were labeled with 5 (6)-carboxyfluorescein diacetate N-succinimidyl ester (CFDA-SE) fluorescent dye (Thermo Fisher Scientific) to track the target cells. Then CFDA-SE labeled cells were seeded in 96 round-bottomed well plates (Corning) at 10^5 cells/well in 200 µL of culture medium. Next, these target cells were incubated overnight with 10^6 /well effector T cells sorted (using Dynabeads Flow-Comp Mouse Pan-T, Thermo Fisher Scientific) from spleen or tumor of OVA hyper-immune mice challenged with either B16/F10 or MB49 cells and treated with SFNs-OVA. Finally, the target cell lysis was measured by adding the viability dye 7-aminoactinomycin D (7-AAD) (BD) at the end of the incubation and expressed as a

percentage of the CFDA-SE+7-AAD+cells. Samples were analyzed using an LSRFortessa X20 flow cytometer (BD).

Proteomic analysis

Sample preparation for liquid chromatography with tandem mass spectrometry analysis

Paraffin-embedded tissue sections from three mice per group of treatment were deparaffinized, proteins were extracted and digested, and the protein mixtures were analyzed by liquid chromatography with tandem mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS) analysis, as previously reported.¹⁴ The online supplemental material details sample preparation, chromatographic, and MS procedures.

MS/MS data processing

All raw files produced by LC-MS/MS were processed by the SEQUEST HT algorithm in Proteome Discoverer V.2.5 software (Thermo Fisher Scientific, California, USA). Experimental MS/MS spectra were compared with the theoretical mass spectra obtained by *in silico* digestion of a *Mus musculus* protein database containing 55,315 sequences (www.uniprot.org, accessed on March 1, 2022). The following searching criteria were set: trypsin enzyme, the maximum number of missed cleavages per peptide was set to two, mass tolerances of ± 50 ppm for precursor ions and ± 0.8 Da for fragment ions. Percolator node was used with a target-decoy strategy to give a final false discovery rate ≤ 0.01 based on *q* values, considering a maximum Δ CN of 0.05. Only peptides with peptide lengths of 5–30 amino acids, confidence at ‘Medium’ level and rank 1 were considered. Protein grouping and strict parsimony principles were applied.

Protein profiles preprocessing, statistical evaluations and quantitative analysis

Peptide spectrum matches (PSMs) of the identified proteins were normalized using a total signal normalization method and compared using a label-free quantification approach as previously reported.¹³ Briefly, data matrix dimensionality (MB49 bladder carcinoma, 24 samples \times 3011 distinct proteins; B16/F10 melanoma, 24 samples \times 2735 distinct proteins) was reduced by linear discriminant analysis (LDA) and proteins with *p* value ≤ 0.05 were retained. Pairwise comparisons (CTR vs SFNs-OVA, CTR vs SFNs-CpG) were performed; fold change of proteins selected by LDA was estimated by DAVE index¹⁵ comparing the average PSMs (avPSMs). Specifically, positive DAVE values indicate proteins upregulated in CTR, whereas negative DAVE values indicate proteins upregulated in SFNs-OVA or SFNs-CpG. Finally, differentially expressed proteins (DEPs) selected by LDA were processed by Spearman’s rank correlation and hierarchical clustering by applying Ward’s method and the Euclidean distance metric. All processing was performed by JMP V.15.2 SAS software.

MB49 bladder carcinoma and B16/F10 melanoma PPI network models

Mus musculus PPI network models were reconstructed starting from all proteins identified in MB49 bladder carcinoma and B16/F10 melanoma using the STRING Cytoscape’s application¹⁶; physical and/or functional interactions were filtered by considering only those ‘experiments’ or/and ‘databases’ annotated, with a STRING score ≥ 0.15 and ≥ 0.35 , respectively. Using the same approach, other two PPI network models were reconstructed starting from DEPs selected for MB49 bladder carcinoma and B16/F10 melanoma, respectively; DEPs were grouped in functional modules by the support of the GO enrichment tool inserted in STRING Cytoscape’s Application.¹⁶

Reconstructed networks were globally analyzed at the topological level by Analyzer application integrated into Cytoscape V.3.8.2.¹⁷ In addition, Centiscape Cytoscape’s application¹⁸ calculated betweenness and centroid centralities, and nodes with above-average values were considered PPI hubs.¹⁹ Finally, the statistical significance of all topological results was tested by considering randomized network models²⁰; they were reconstructed and analyzed by an in-house R script based on VertexSort (to build random models), igraph (to compute centralities), and ggplot2 (to plot results) libraries; results were visualized in the form of violin plots.

Statistical analysis

Raw data were processed through STATGRAPHICS XVII (StatPoint Technologies, Warrenton, Virginia, USA). A general linear analysis of variance model was generated to evaluate the data. In detail, tumor size data in mice were analyzed considering the treatment and the time as fixed factors and the tumor size as the response variable. The function was then followed by a least significant difference test to estimate the differences between means. Statistical significance was set at *p* < 0.05.

RESULTS

Preparation and characterization of SFNs

Injectable formulations containing SFNs, SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG were prepared and characterized before *in vitro* and *in vivo* testing (figure 1).

Figure 1A shows the morphological analysis of the formulations containing SFNs, SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG at three different magnifications (rows a, b and c). As seen at all magnifications, especially row c, the nanoparticles are immersed in a homogeneous matrix of mannitol. At all magnifications, especially rows a and b, the nanoparticles appear round, without apparent aggregates, and with smooth surfaces. Figure 1B shows that the yield percentage was consistently above 70%. The OVA loading percentage was 32.7% for SFNs-OVA. Overall, high encapsulation efficiency for OVA was obtained. For SFNs-CpG, the CpG loading was verified by analyzing their micro-analytical composition. The relative abundance of

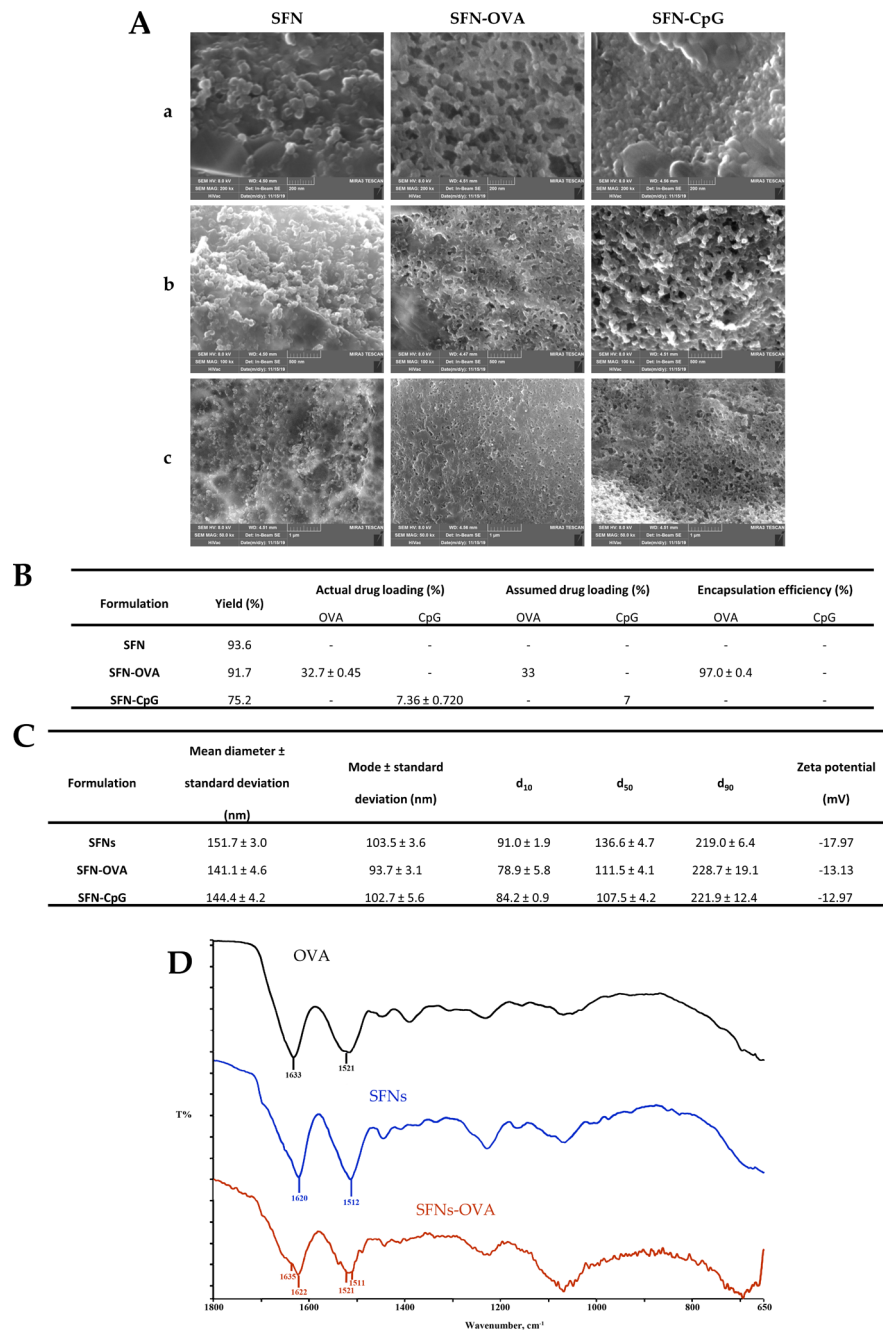


Figure 1 Characterization of SFNs. (A) Morphological investigation by SEM of SFNs, SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG at 200k× (a), 100k× (b) and 50k× (c). (B) Yield, encapsulation efficiency and drug loading for the formulations prepared. Data are reported as mean±SD, n=3. (C) Mean diameter, mode, d₁₀, d₅₀ and d₉₀ for all the samples. Values are reported in nm as mean value±SD, n=5. Z potential is reported in mV. (D) Physico-chemical characterization by IR: enlarged IR spectra between 1800 and 650 cm⁻¹ for OVA, SFNs and SFNs-OVA. IR, infrared; OVA, ovalbumin; SFNs, silk fibroin nanoparticles; SEM, scanning electron microscopy.

phosphorus atoms in the mixture was traced back to the percentage amount of CpG, which was 7.36%±0.720w/w.

All nanoparticle formulations showed a mean diameter of about 150 nm (figure 1C) and a negative surface charge. No significant increase in particle size or change in Z potential was observed after the loading of SFNs with OVA or CpG. The PDI values were lower than 0.3 for all the formulations, confirming that the samples are

monodisperse. Overall, the nanoparticle size, morphology and shape are optimal for cancer cells' uptake.²¹

Figure 1D shows the IR spectra between 1800 and 650 cm⁻¹. The protein amide I and II bands are present between 1600–1700 and 1500–1600 cm⁻¹, respectively, the most sensitive region of the IR spectrum for protein secondary structure analysis. In particular, the band at 1633 cm⁻¹ in the OVA sample confirmed the presence of

β -sheet structure. Even in the SFNs spectrum, the high content of β -sheet domains is revealed by the characteristic bands in the spectral region of amide I at 1620 cm^{-1} (C=O stretching) and amide II at 1512 cm^{-1} (N–H bending). For SFNs-OVA, the typical bands of amide I and II of the two protein components are distinguishable. This technique did not reveal the presence of CpG in SFNs-CpG as below the sensitivity (data not shown).

The DSC thermal analysis supported the spectroscopic data: all the samples showed a typical profile of an amorphous compound with an endothermic effect around 270°C, associated with a loss of mass in the thermogravimetric curve, linked to sample decomposition (data not shown).

The residual humidity of freeze-dried formulations never exceeded 3%, and the osmolarity value was always between 320 and 350 mOsm/Kg. Moreover, the measured pH value was always in the range of 7.2–7.6.

Internalization of SFNs by cancer cells and DCs

Experiments were conducted to demonstrate that nanoparticles can be effectively up-taken by tumor cells and that this phenomenon is not restricted to a specific cell line or histological type. This first set of experiments was performed using SFNs-CUR, taking advantage of the autofluorescence emitted by curcumin, that makes the test fast and very sensitive. Interestingly, all tested cancer cells showed the capacity to internalize SFNs-CUR although with variable efficiencies, ranging from 40% (LLC1 cells at 1 hour) to 99% (5637 cells at 1 hour) of the total cell population (figure 2, panels A and B). Repeating the experiments using SFNs-OVA, that would have been subsequently administered to mice in the *in vivo* experiments, we observed again that all tested cell lines internalized the nanoparticles (online supplemental figure S1). Notably, internalization of soluble OVA (i.e., not carried by SFNs) was negligible unless the antigen was mixed with unloaded nanoparticles (a phenomenon likely due to a partial spontaneous OVA absorption on SFNs followed by their internalization by cancer cells). Next, the experiments were repeated on B16/F10 melanoma cells and MB49 bladder cancer cells purified from excised tumors exposed either *ex vivo* or *in vivo* to SFNs-OVA. Figure 2C,D show cell internalization of OVA in all experimental conditions.

We also observed that both splenic DCs and DCs present within TME could uptake fibroin nanoparticles (figure 2E and F).

These findings collectively suggest that fibroin nanoparticles are an effective tool to vehicle antigen and adjuvant into both tumor cells and DCs, providing the immunological basis for redirecting effective immune responses within the TME.

In the view of administering SFNs *in vivo* a relevant issue concerns their eventual direct cytotoxicity. Analysis of cell viability in the above reported tests revealed that SFNs internalization induced a moderate level of cytotoxicity on cancer cells (no more than 20% mortality) but not on

healthy DCs, suggesting that nanoparticles may slightly impact on viability of cancer cells but not of healthy cells (online supplemental figure S2A). These data were confirmed by an MTT assay that showed a moderate loss of viability only by cancer cells after 4 hours of exposition to SFNs (again no more than 20% mortality), while viability of one line of adipose tissue-derived stem cells from a healthy donor was not affected (online supplemental figure S2B).

Assessment of immunological and biological effects mediated by SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG on TME

Based on the above, we tested the effects of SFNs, SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG *in vivo*. In particular, we addressed two issues: (a) whether SFNs-OVA could redirect into TME and against tumor cells a pre-existing immune response to a non-tumor antigen such as OVA; (b) whether local administrations of either SFNs-OVA or SFNs-CpG were able to induce proteomic changes within TME.

Concerning the first issue, splenic and tumor-infiltrating T lymphocytes were purified from B16/F10 and MB49 cell challenged OVA-hyperimmune mice peritumorally treated with SFNs or SFNs-OVA. Figure 3A and B show that only tumor cells pre-incubated with SFNs-OVA, but not those pre-incubated with unloaded SFNs, were efficiently killed by splenic (14% and 18% of cell lysis for B16/F10 and MB49 cells, respectively) and tumor-infiltrating T cells (19% and 16% of cell lysis for B16F10 and MB49 cells, respectively).

Since in the MB49 tumor we found a richer T-cell tumor infiltrate than in the B16/F10 melanoma, we could also perform experiments testing OVA-specific IFN- γ production by tumor-infiltrating T lymphocytes. Figure 3C shows that IFN- γ -secreting CD4+ and CD8+ OVA-specific T splenocytes were observed in OVA pre-immunized animals, as expected. The frequency of these cells increased in animals treated with SFNs-OVA (figure 3D). When intratumoral T cells were analyzed, IFN- γ -secreting CD4+ and CD8+ OVA-specific T lymphocytes were observed in animals treated with SFNs-OVA but not in untreated ones (figure 3E and F). In the same experiments, the frequency of IL-10-secreting OVA-specific T splenocytes was negligible (figure 3C–3F), suggesting that SFN-OVA immunization privileges the expansion of potential effectors over regulatory T cells.

Concerning the landscape of proteomic variations induced by SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG treatments, 2735 and 2463 proteins were identified in B16/F10 melanoma and MB49 bladder cancer, respectively; only 1067 proteins were shared by both models, likely as a result of the different biology of the respective tissues (online supplemental figure S3, datafiles S1 and S2). By comparing the characterized protein profiles, 245 and 332 proteins were found differentially expressed in B16/F10 melanoma and MB49 bladder cancer models, respectively (online supplemental figure S3, datafiles S3 and S4). Of note,

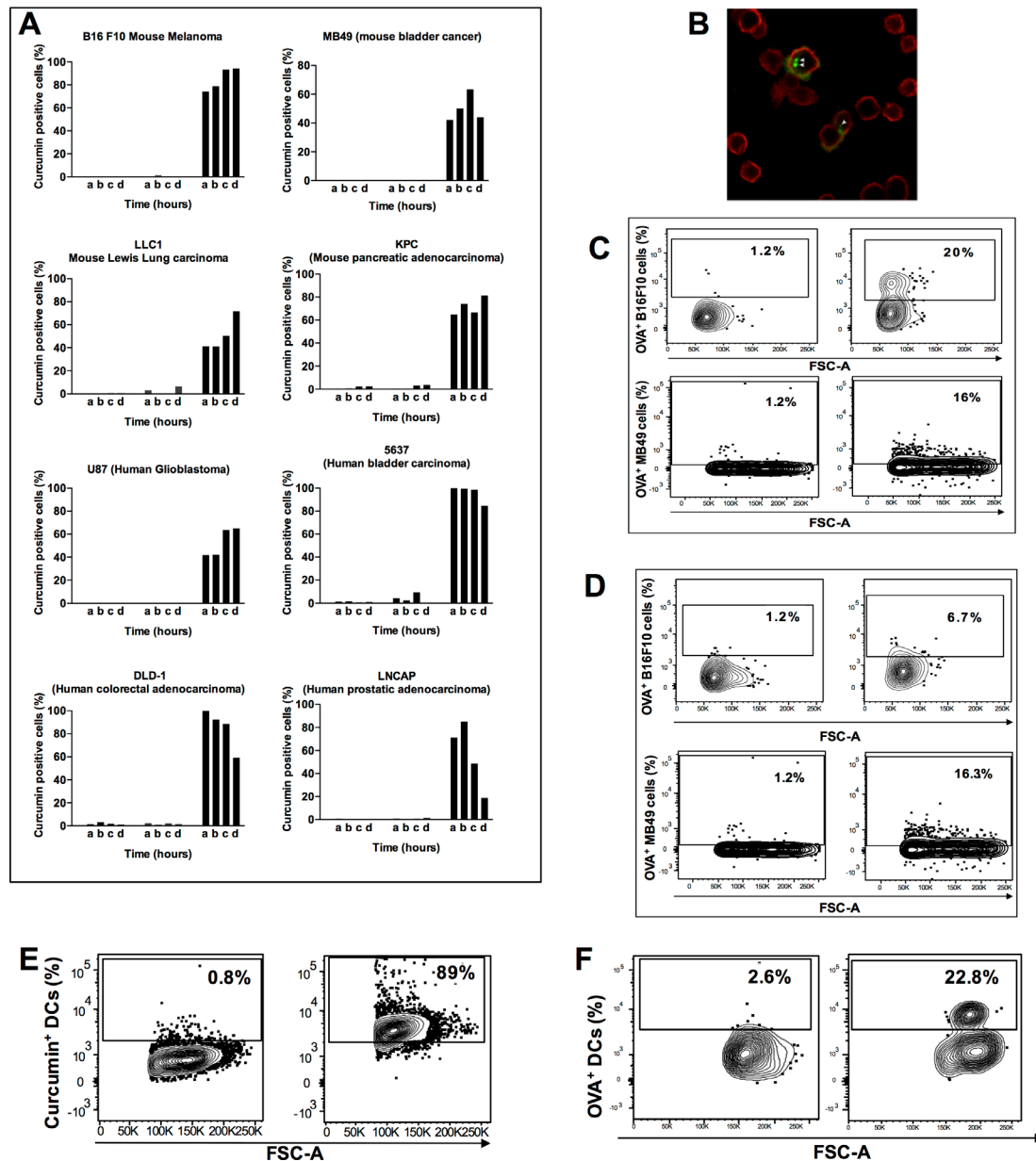


Figure 2 SFNs internalization by cancer cells and DCs. (A) Different mouse or human cancer cell lines were incubated for (a) 1 hour, (b) 2 hours, (c) 4 hours, and (d) 24 hours, alone (left bars) or in the presence of unloaded SFNs (middle bars) or curcumin loaded SFNs (right bars), and evaluated by flow cytometry using a green light-emitting laser; (B) Tumor cells derived from tumors excised from MB49 challenged mice were incubated with curcumin loaded SFNs for 4 hours and evaluated by confocal microscopy (plasma membrane of cells: red signal; curcumin SFNs: green signal). (C) B16/F10 melanoma cells (upper row) and MB49 bladder cancer cells (lower row) purified from an excised tumor were incubated (right panels) or not (left panels) for 4 hours with SFNs-OVA, then fixed and permeabilized before incubation with an anti-OVA FITC labeled mAb and the following cytometric analysis. (D) B16/F10 melanoma cells (upper row) and MB49 bladder cancer cells (lower row) purified from an excised tumor treated peritumorally (right panels) or not (left panels) in vivo with SFNs-OVA were fixed and permeabilized before incubation with an anti-OVA FITC labeled mAb and the following cytometric analysis. (E) Splenic DCs from C57BL/6J mice were incubated (right panel) or not (left panel) for 24 hours with curcumin-loaded SFNs and evaluated by flow cytometry; (F) DCs purified from B16/F10 melanoma tumor excised from SFNs-OVA treated (right panel) or not treated (left panel) mice were fixed and permeabilized before incubation with an anti-OVA FITC labeled mAb and the following cytometric analysis. DCs, dendritic cells; FITC, fluorescein isothiocyanate; FSC-A, forward scatter; mAb, monoclonal antibody; OVA, ovalbumin; SFNs, silk fibroin nanoparticles.

a set of them resulted regulated with the same trend in both models (table 1).

In this context, following SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG treatments, we observed downregulation of proteins

involved in metastatic progression of cancer cells, such as Hmga1,²² or erythrocytes (Ank1, Hba-a1, Hbb-b2, Hbb-bs) and blood vessel (Plg) development. On the other hand, proteins involved in endocytosis/major

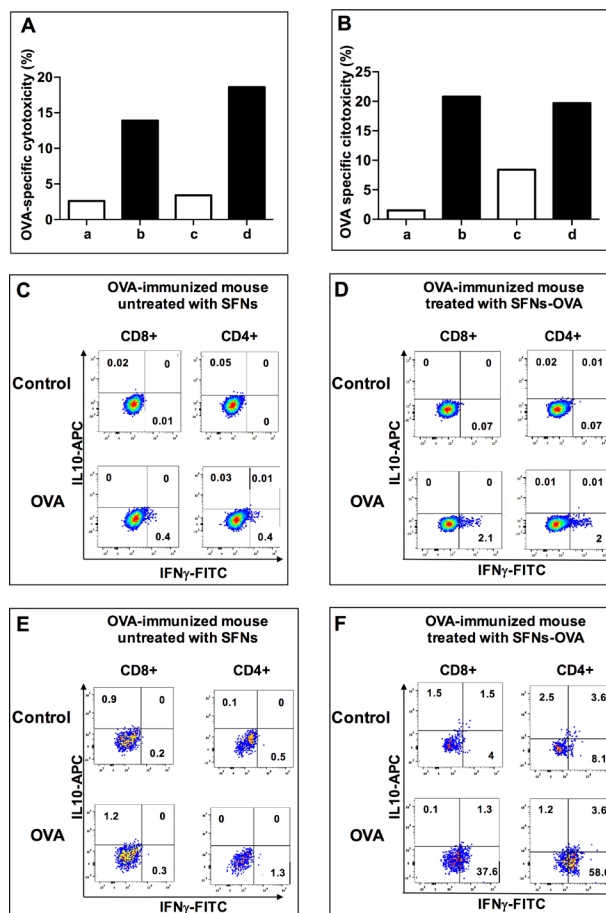


Figure 3 Intratumor expansion of IFN- γ -secreting and cytotoxic OVA-specific T lymphocytes by treatment with SFNs-OVA of tumor-challenged mice pre-immunized against OVA. (A) Cytotoxic activity against B16/F10 melanoma cells pre-exposed to unloaded SFNs (white) or SFNs-OVA (black) by either splenocytes (a–b) or tumor-infiltrating T lymphocytes (c–d) from a representative OVA pre-immunized C57BL/6J mouse challenged with B16-F10 cells and intratumorally treated with SFNs-OVA. (B) Cytotoxic activity against MB49 bladder carcinoma cells pre-exposed to unloaded SFNs (white) or SFNs-OVA (black) by either splenocytes (a–b) or tumor-infiltrating T lymphocytes (c–d) from a representative OVA pre-immunized C57BL/6J mouse challenged with MB49 cells and intratumorally treated with SFNs-OVA. (C) Expansion of OVA-specific T splenocytes in a representative OVA pre-immunized C57BL/6J mouse challenged with MB49 bladder carcinoma cells. Upper row: frequencies of IFN- γ -secreting and IL-10-secreting T splenocytes in a non-antigen stimulated in vitro culture; lower row: frequencies of IFN- γ and IL-10-secreting splenocytes in an OVA stimulated in vitro culture; (D) Expansion of OVA-specific T splenocytes in a representative OVA pre-immunized C57BL/6J mice challenged with MB49 bladder carcinoma cells and intratumorally treated with SFNs-OVA. Upper row: frequencies of IFN- γ -secreting and IL-10-secreting T splenocytes in a non-antigen stimulated in vitro culture; lower row: frequencies of IFN- γ -secreting and IL-10-secreting T splenocytes in an OVA stimulated in vitro culture; (E) Expansion of tumor-infiltrating OVA-specific T lymphocytes in a representative OVA pre-immunized C57BL/6J mouse challenged with MB49 bladder carcinoma cells. Upper row: frequencies of IFN- γ -secreting and IL-10-secreting T lymphocytes in a non-antigen stimulated in vitro culture; lower row: frequencies of IFN- γ -secreting and IL-10-secreting T lymphocytes in an OVA stimulated in vitro culture; (F) Expansion of tumor-infiltrating OVA-specific T lymphocytes in a representative OVA pre-immunized C57BL/6J mouse challenged with MB49 bladder carcinoma cells and peritumorally treated with SFNs-OVA. Upper row: frequencies of IFN- γ -secreting and IL-10-secreting T lymphocytes in a non-antigen stimulated in vitro culture; lower row: frequencies of IFN- γ -secreting and IL-10-secreting T lymphocytes in an OVA stimulated in vitro culture. All the experiments were replicated three times. APC, allophycocyanine; FITC, fluorescein isothiocyanate; IFN, interferon; IL, interleukin; OVA, ovalbumin; SFNs, silk fibroin nanoparticles.

histocompatibility complex class II antigen presentation (Capza2, Rab7a, Cltc) and collagen-containing extracellular matrix (Dcn, Lum, Coll1a1) were upregulated.

Similarly to their effects on protein expression, SNFs-OVA and SFN-CpG treatments modulated specific functional modules by inducing an analogous expression trend in both models: proteins involved in the immune system function and the vesicle-mediated transport

increased their expression, while those related to angiogenesis and T-complex were downregulated (figure 4, online supplemental figures S4–S5).

Indeed, the different biology between the two cancer models could explain some differences and specificities observed following SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG treatments, such as downregulation of keratins, potential prognostic markers in melanoma,²³ and SERPINs,²⁴ that appeared

Table 1 Differentially expressed proteins with the same expression trend in both models

Gene name	B16/F10melanoma		MB49 bladder cancer	
	CTR vs SFNs-OVA*	CTR vs SFNs-CpG	CTR vs SFNs-OVA	CTR vs SFNs-CpG
Ank1	2.0	2.0	1.6	2.0
Ero1a	1.1	2.0	0.2	0.4
Hba-a1	1.1	1.2	1.0	0.7
Hbb-b2	0.9	0.8	0.8	1.3
Hbbs	1.5	1.5	0.7	1.2
Hmga1	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Myadm	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.6
Plec	1.4	0.9	0.4	1.2
Plg	1.5	0.8	1.0	0.9
Snrpf	2.0	1.4	2.0	2.0
Stom	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Aldh2	-0.4	-0.8	-1.0	-1.5
Capza2	-1.4	-1.6	-0.4	-0.8
Cltc	-0.8	-0.6	-0.5	-0.5
Col1a1	-1.1	-1.0	-0.9	-1.3
Dcn	-1.4	-1.4	-2.0	-2.0
Lum	-2.0	-2.0	-2.0	-2.0
Msn	-0.4	-0.7	-1.0	-1.3
Rab7a	-1.0	-1.4	-1.0	-0.3
Rps16	-0.9	-0.7	-0.5	-0.2

*For each pairwise comparison (CTR vs SFNs-OVA; CTR vs SFNs-CpG) DAve index is shown; positive DAve values indicate proteins upregulated in CTR (downregulated in SFNs treatments), while negative DAve values indicate proteins upregulated following SFNs treatments (downregulated in CTR).
CTR, control; OVA, ovalbumin; SFN, silk fibroin nanoparticle.

more consistent in the B16/F10 melanoma model than in the MB49 one (online supplemental figure S6).

Comparing the effects differentially mediated by SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG treatments, SFNs-OVA were found to be more effective in reducing angiogenesis, while SFNs-CpG in reducing keratins expression and in upregulating proteins involved in immune system activity (online supplemental figures S4–S6).

Hub proteins as key players of the proteome modulation mediated by SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG treatments

Interesting indications that support the efficacy of SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG treatments emerged from the topological analysis of PPI network models (online supplemental figure S7).

In this context, concerning the B16/F10 melanoma model, both Akt1 and Pik3r2, the best-ranked hubs in untreated tumors, were not identified in any B16/F10 samples treated with SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG (Data file S5), likely sign of tumor suppressive effect based on the well-known protumoral effects of both pathways reported in melanoma and other cancers.^{25 26} Conversely, Itgb2, whose expression was reported to correlate with the infiltration of all types of immune cells,^{27 28} potentially predisposing to improved effectiveness of immunotherapy and

improved overall survival, was the best-ranked hub in all B16/F10 samples treated with SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG (Data online supplemental file 5). Fau was another interesting hub found in all B16/F10 samples treated with SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG since it has been proposed as a candidate tumor suppressor protein acting by regulation of apoptosis in human cells.²⁹

Concerning the MB49 bladder cancer model, we found high mobility group protein HMGI-C (Hmga2) as the best-ranked hub protein (Data file S6); this protein, which was not identified in any MB49 samples treated with SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG, has been widely associated with cancer progression,³⁰ also in the bladder,³¹ and is specifically targeted to inhibits bladder cancer metastasis.^{32 33} On the opposite, cAMP-dependent protein kinase (PKA) catalytic subunit beta (Prkacb), a catalytic subunit of cAMP-dependent PKA that regulates numerous fundamental biological processes such as metabolism, development, memory, and immune response, resulted the best hub of all MB49 samples treated with SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG and of B16/F10 melanoma samples treated with SFNs-OVA (Data files S5 and S6). This is of relevance since Prkacb gene encodes several splice variants, including C β 2, which is enriched in T cells, B cells and natural killer cells,³⁴ and its increased expression is associated with a favorable prognosis in different cancers.³⁵ The best-ranked hubs following treatment with SFNs-OVA in MB49 samples were cytotoxic granule-associated RNA binding protein TIA1 (Tia1) and nuclear factor of kappa light polypeptide gene enhancer in B cells 1 (Nfkb1). Noteworthy, Tia1 has been described as an important tumor suppressor molecule,²⁹ and other authors speculated that CD8/Tia1+infiltrating TME confer superior survival to patients with localized osteosarcoma.³⁶ Also of note, the knockout of Nfkb1, an important regulator of NF- κ B activity in vivo, has been associated in mouse models with increased inflammation and susceptibility to certain forms of DNA damage, leading to cancer and a rapid aging phenotype.³⁷

Therapeutic efficacy of the different SNFs formulations

OVA hyperimmune, B16/F10 melanoma-challenged C57BL/6J mice were untreated or treated peritumorally with either unloaded SFNs, SFNs-OVA, SFNs-CpG or the combination of SFNs-OVA plus SFNs-CpG. Both treatments with SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG significantly slowed tumor growth compared with the last two control groups of mice (figure 5). When B16/F10 melanoma-challenged mice were treated with a combination of SNFs-OVA and SFNs-CpG, tumor growth was significantly reduced compared with control mice and mice treated with either SFNs-OVA alone or SFNs-CpG alone (figure 5), showing a remarkable additive effect likely due to the association of their mechanisms of action. Proteomic analyses were performed on tumor specimens from mice treated with the combination of SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG to assess this possibility (figure 6).

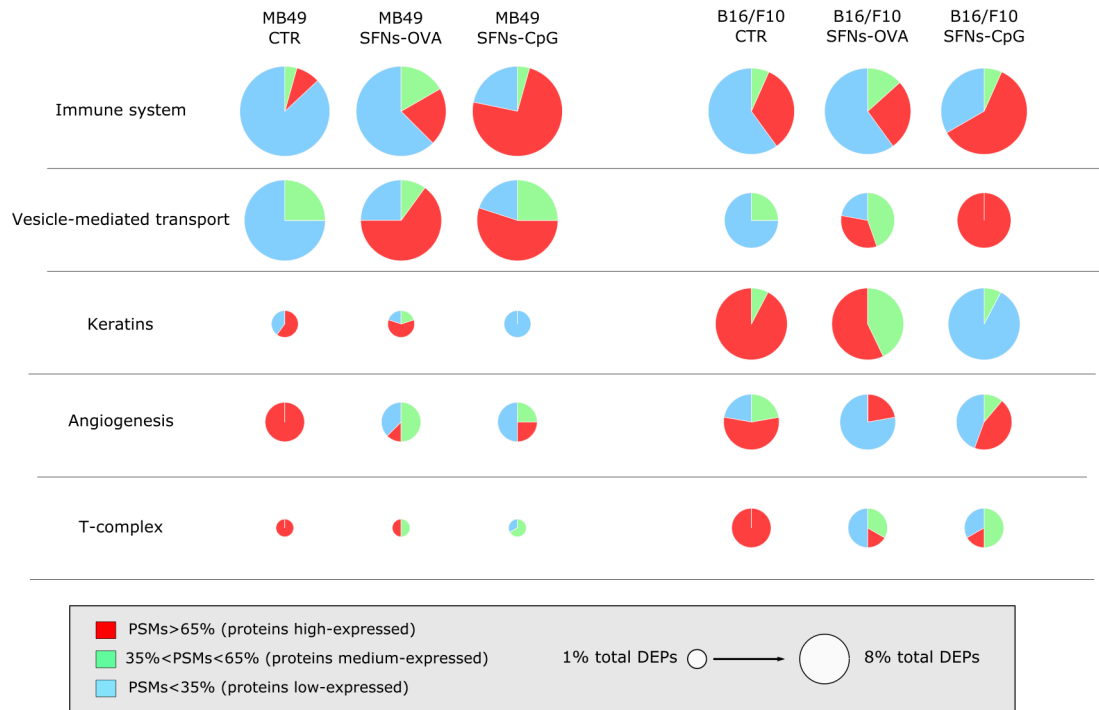


Figure 4 Proteomic and systems biology outcomes of SFNs administration at the tumor site. The analyses evidence the functional modules affected by SFNs-OVA and SFN-CpG treatments in both MB49 bladder cancer and B16/F10 melanoma models. Red, green and blue color codes indicate the percentage of proteins with high-, medium- and low expression, respectively, based on a PSMs-based label-free quantification. The pie chart size is proportional to the number of DEPs per module. CTR, control; DEP, differentially expressed protein; OVA, ovalbumin; SFNs, silk fibroin nanoparticles.

Correlation among DEP profiles was observed, indicating a consistent proteome remodeling and a synergic effect of SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG treatment (figure 6). This mainly appeared evident for keratins, complement

and coagulation cascades, angiogenesis, SERPINs and erythrocyte-related proteins, which were mainly downregulated following the action of both SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG. Of note, keratins' downregulation appeared

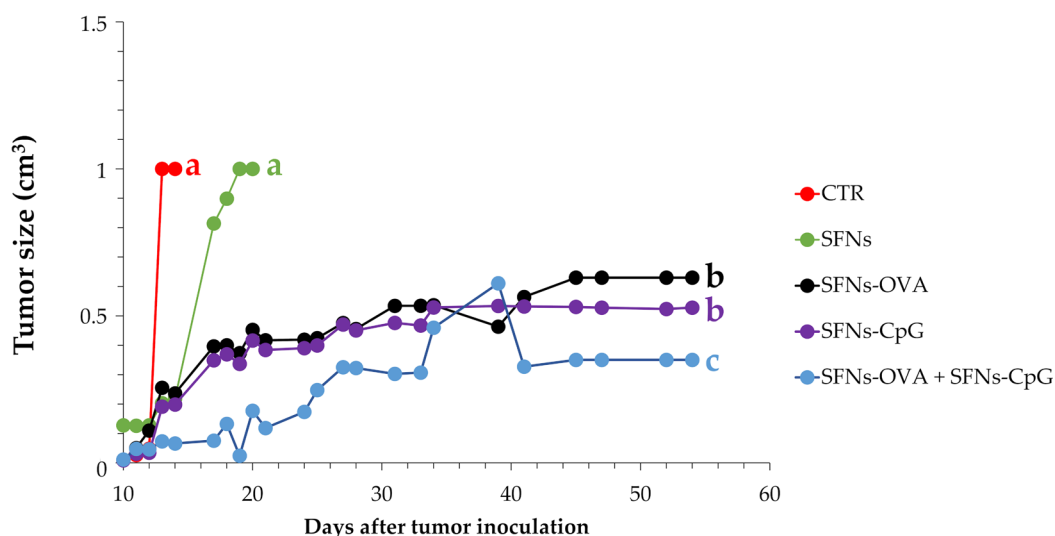


Figure 5 Effects of SFNs-OVA, SFNs-CpG, and their combination on B16/F10 melanoma growth. Tumor size is shown as a function of time (days after tumor inoculation) and treatment with or without SFNs. Mice (six per group) were sacrificed when the tumor reached 1 cm³. Data are reported as mean values, and error bars were not displayed on the plots for clarity, but uncertainties were within ~15%. Different letters indicate a significant difference between the means of the corresponding groups: in particular, a p value < 0.00001 was found in the comparisons a versus b and a versus c, while a p value < 0.001 was observed in the comparison b versus c. The same letters indicate no significant differences (p > 0.05) (multifactor analysis of variance, and Fisher's least significant difference, least significant difference, to discriminate among the means). CTR, control; OVA, ovalbumin; SFNs, silk fibroin nanoparticles.

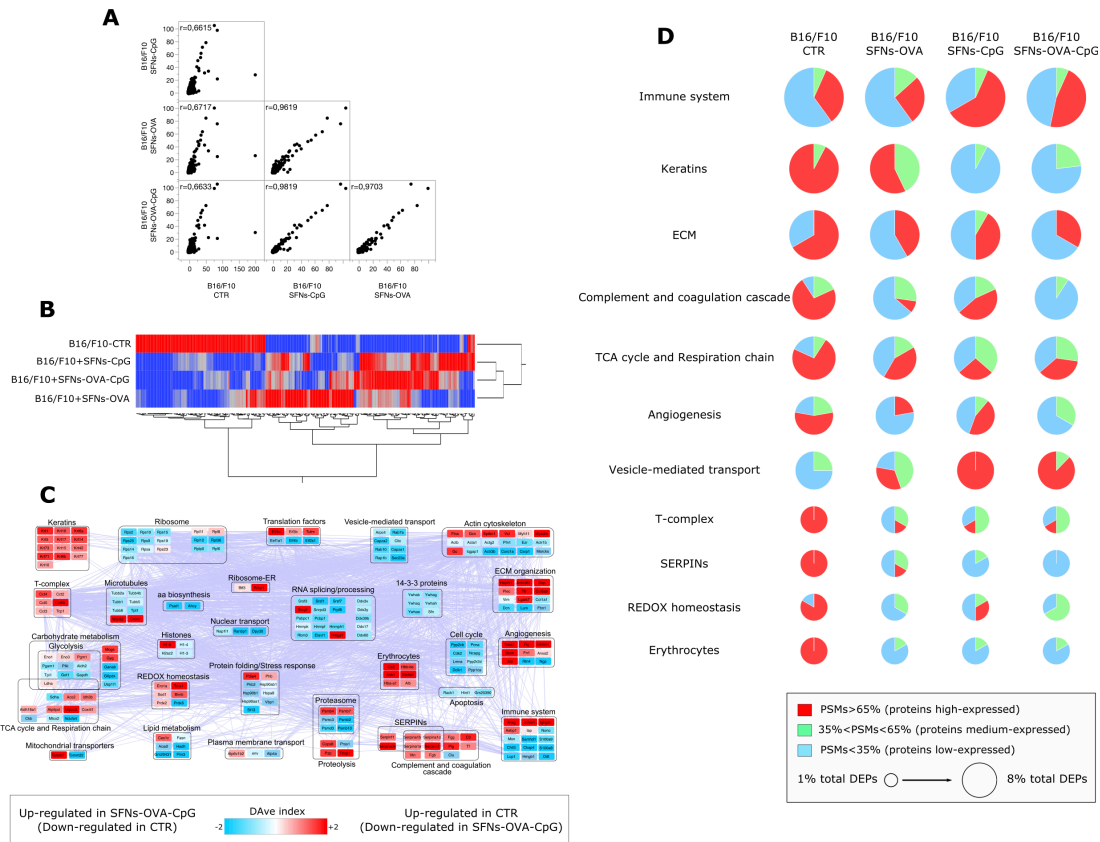


Figure 6 Proteome and functional modules characterized by nLC-hrMS/MS analysis of tissues from the B16/F10 melanoma model. (A) Spearman's correlation and hierarchical clustering (B) among profiles of DEPs. (C) PPI network model reconstructed by Cytoscape's STRING application starting from proteins differentially expressed by comparing B16/F10 melanoma model untreated (CTR) and treated with SFNs-OVA plus SFNs-CpG. Proteins were grouped in functional modules. The red color code (positive Dave values) indicates proteins upregulated in CTR (vs SFNs-OVA plus SFNs-CpG samples), while the blue color code (negative Dave values) indicates proteins upregulated in SFNs-OVA plus SFNs-CpG samples (vs CTR). (D) Functional modules most affected by SFNs treatments in B16/F10 melanoma model. Red, green and blue color codes indicate the percentage of proteins with high expression, medium expression and low expression, respectively, based on a PSMs-based label-free quantification. The pie chart size is proportional to the number of DEPs per module. CTR, control; DEP, differentially expressed protein; ECM, extracellular matrix; OVA, ovalbumin; PSMs, peptide spectrum matches; SFNs, silk fibroin nanoparticles; TCA, tricarboxylic acid cycle.

mainly mediated by the presence of CpG, while OVA mainly affected the downregulation of the complement and coagulation cascades, suggesting not only an additive mechanism of action but complementary as well.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we explored an innovative active immunotherapy approach aimed at redirecting a previously consolidated immune response toward the tumor against a re-call antigen. In our system, a non-tumor-associated antigen was delivered within tumor cells using SFNs. SF has been selected as the material to nanoencapsulate antigen and adjuvant because it is biocompatible, it provides mechanical durability, and its enzyme-mediated degradation supports the sustained intracellular release after nanoparticle uptake by cancer cells.²¹ Clearly, based on the use of SFNs, our system provides a safety profile that escapes the concerns related to administering live pathogens

to potentially immune-compromised patients, which has been recently reported.³⁸ Also, following administration in mice, the lack of inflammatory signs at peripheral tissues seems to rule out the risks related to the onset of inflammatory/autoimmune manifestations; this is probably linked to the fact that, in our model, SFNs are administered at the tumor site, and both tumor and DCs exert a preferential uptake. In this regard, the selective uptake of SFNs by tumors may be further refined through the functionalization of the nanoparticle surface with ligands able to provide active targeting, and many examples in the literature exploited the large amounts of available amino and carboxyl groups in fibroin peptides to link oligonucleotides or peptides.^{39–44} This may also avoid the onset of an autoimmune response when the nanoparticles are uptaken by healthy instead of tumor cells.

Our data also showed that our approach effectively redirected immunity against a re-call antigen toward

the tumor, involving in this process both innate and adoptive arms of the immune response (in particular, DCs, which were shown to efficiently uptake SFNs, and T cells, respectively). Concerning DCs, their involvement is important since these cells orchestrate innate and adaptive immune responses, so their function is crucial for effective anticancer immunity.⁴⁵ Concerning T cells, both CD4+ and CD8+ IFN- γ -secreting/cytotoxic T cells were detected among tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes of SFNs-OVA treated mice, specifically demonstrating the efficiency of our ‘Trojan horse’ strategy in redirecting the anti-OVA immune response against tumor cells.

The proteomic analyses of tumors treated with SFNs, and their evaluation at a holistic level by network models, allowed us to appreciate the involvement of not strictly immune-mediated mechanisms among the effects of the treatments.

Indeed, our data envisage the possibility of translating into clinics this ‘Trojan-horse’, immune response-centered strategy, that is, adopting, as immunogens, antigens of the compulsory vaccines recommended by the international health institutes for the prevention of infectious diseases. The advantage of this ‘Trojan-horse’ approach would be that each single patient with cancer, independently from the tumor’s histological nature, could have already at play the appropriate immunological background to be treated. Hence, this approach would recapitulate the essence of personalized medicine with the need for universality. The ‘Trojan-horse’ approach could also synergize well with immune checkpoint inhibitors, favoring the unleashing of T cells effector activities. Finally, based on the continuous improvement of technologies for local site delivery of immunotherapies,⁴⁶ our innovative strategy could find a role in the treatment with eradication purpose of non-metastatic tumors, such as glioblastoma, as well as in palliative therapy of all surgically unresectable tumor masses. However, to ensure clinical success, many challenges in the translation from bench to bedside still must be addressed for SFNs, ranging from the technological and Good Manufacturing Practice large-scale manufacturing challenges, including quality control and batch release requirements, to the biological ones, including biocompatibility, biodegradability and safety, as we recently discussed in detail.⁴⁷

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Acknowledgements The authors thank Dr Sara Tengattini from University of Pavia, Department of Drug Sciences for OVA quantitative analysis, and Dr Ilaria Giuseppina Tredici from the Arvedi Laboratory, CISRIC (Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi e Ricerche per la Conservazione del Patrimonio Culturale), Pavia, Italy for the scanning electron microscopy and energy dispersive spectrometry analyses. Also, The authors also thank Professor Lorenzo Moretta and Professor Paola de Candia for their precious suggestions and comments on the manuscript.

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Funding This research was funded by grants from: Ministero della Salute, Progetto 5M-2019-2366468 – 5 per mille, ‘Generazione di organoidi tumorali da neoplasia solida ed ematologiche’; PON ELIXIR CNR-BiOMICS (PIR01_00017), Elixir Implementation Study Proteomics (2019–2021 and 2021–2023) and Italian Ministry of Health (RF2019-12370396); Interreg V-A Italy-Switzerland 2014–2020—ATEX—Advanced Therapies Experiences (Project ID 637541).

Competing interests Data presented in this manuscript pertain to the Italian Patent Application N. 102019000008658 ‘Immunizzazione antitumorale mediata da nanoparticelle e basata su un’immunità preesistente’ filed on June 11, 2019, granted on April 21, 2021, and the international patent application PCT/IB2020/055456 ‘Nanoparticles for use in the redirection against the tumour of a non-tumour-specific immune response, based on a pre-existing immunity’, Publication number WO/2020/250153, filed on June 10, 2020. The authors who are co-inventors in these patents are EB, FF, DF, SP, MLT and GF.

Patient consent for publication Not applicable.

Ethics approval Not applicable.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

Data availability statement All data relevant to the study are included in the article or uploaded as supplementary information. All data are available in the main text or the Supplemental materials.

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Data file S5. Protein hubs selected by Betweenness and Centroid centralities by processing protein-protein interaction (PPI) networks reconstructed from (A) Hubs in SFNs-OVA, SFNs-CpG and SFNs-OVA-CpG, (B) Hubs in SFNs-OVA and SFNs-OVA-CpG, (C) Hubs in SFNs-OVA and SFNs-OVA-CpG, (D) Hubs in SFNs-CpG and SFNs-OVA-CpG.

A)	Gene Name	Betweenness				Centroid				Av.PSMs				LDA	
		CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	F Ratio	Prob>F
	Akt1	12602				-269				0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0		
	Pik3r2	11732				-470				0,1	0,0	0,0	0,0		
	Ubxn7	11481				-460				0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0		
	Lipc	7749				-384				0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0		
	Mapk10	7349				-507				0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0		
	Map3k3	7058				-528				0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0		
	Lamc2	5401				-424				0,1	0,0	0,0	0,0		
	Cdh3	3980				-586				0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0		
	Tmed10	3707				-637				0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0		
	Thop1	2615				-602				0,8	0,0	0,0	0,0	4,1	2,0E-02
	Spta1	2548				-583				0,4	0,0	0,0	0,0		
	Gspt1	2252				-429				0,4	0,0	0,0	0,0		
B)	Gene Name	Betweenness				Centroid				Av.PSMs				LDA	
		CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	F Ratio	Prob>F
	Itgb2		23896	33042	15114		-252	-274	-313	0,0	0,2	1,0	0,9		
	Fau		13210	10568	11027		-269	-253	-297	0,0	1,0	0,8	0,8		
	Srsf1		9636	9829	6749		-386	-389	-455	0,0	0,3	2,2	2,2	7,8	1,2E-03
	Rab8b		6992	10154	12918		-407	-432	-426	0,0	0,2	0,5	0,2		
	Calr		6588	9943	9114		-502	-434	-509	0,0	0,3	1,0	0,6		
	Rab5c		5959	4700	11772		-511	-547	-513	0,0	0,1	0,3	0,5		
	Eef1b2		5883	3448	6019		-434	-497	-532	0,0	0,1	0,2	0,7		
	Fkbp1a		5242	5155	7405		-569	-538	-608	0,0	0,3	0,5	0,4		
	Eif2s1		4172	5370	3470		-406	-456	-437	0,0	0,3	1,3	1,9	7,7	1,3E-03
	Dlst		2772	4429	3073		-647	-579	-693	0,0	0,1	0,3	0,3		
	Ube2l3	2015	2395	3703	3294	-655	-703	-598	-686	0,5	1,7	1,0	1,1		
C)	Gene Name	Betweenness				Centroid				Av.PSMs				LDA	
		CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	F Ratio	Prob>F
	Prkacb		51208		34091		-293		-302	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,5		
	Nedd8		7840		5451		-497		-474	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,3		
	Pik3r1		7182		14950		-366		-412	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,2		
	Pik3cd		6530		8912		-439		-461	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,3		
	Rock2		5534		4018		-362		-370	0,0	0,3	0,0	0,2		
	Ctnna1		4499		11688		-468		-483	0,0	0,3	0,0	0,2		
	Eif4e		3568		5394		-455		-429	0,0	0,3	0,0	0,2		
	Acly		2754	1026	3090		-696	-732	-741	0,0	0,4	1,4	0,5		
	Fmr1		2594		3167		-425		-456	0,0	0,4	0,0	0,2		
D)	Gene Name	Betweenness				Centroid				Av.PSMs				LDA	
		CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	SFNs-OVA-CpG	F Ratio	Prob>F
	Ruvbl1			8990	6113			-539	-513	0,0	0,0	0,3	0,3		
	Cndp2			6253	5560			-651	-657	0,0	0,0	0,2	0,3		
	G6pdx			6083	5488			-538	-628	0,0	0,0	0,9	1,4	4,0	2,2E-02
	Capn1			5546	7453			-526	-570	0,0	0,0	0,7	0,3		
	Dnm1l	1237	1519	4429	4216	-696	-746	-640	-703	2,0	0,3	0,5	1,0		
	Hk1			4264	4290			-700	-726	0,0	0,0	0,5	0,6		
	Ppp2cb			3864	6221			-534	-574	0,0	0,0	1,5	1,6	6,8	2,4E-03
	B2m			3847	5663			-555	-586	0,0	0,0	0,8	0,3		
	Prkar1a			3776	3621			-635	-510	0,0	0,0	0,3	0,3		
	Capzb			3102	5551			-581	-592	0,0	0,0	0,3	0,3		

Data file S6. Protein hubs selected by Betweenness and Centroid centralities by processing protein-protein i for MB49 bladder cancer hubs in CTR, B) Hubs in SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG, C) Hubs in SFNs-OVA, D) Hubs in

A)	Gene Name	Betweenness			Centroid			Av.PSMs			LDA	
		CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	F Ratio	Prob>F
	Hmga2	111707			18			0,50	0,00	0,00		
	Rab12	20057			-418			0,17	0,00	0,00		
	Prkcb	18983			-302			0,19	0,00	0,00		
	Bag3	12000			-414			0,15	0,00	0,00		
	Rb1	9883			-332			0,15	0,00	0,00		
	Smad2	9603			-439			0,15	0,00	0,00		
	Apob	9178			-410			0,17	0,00	0,00		
	Rock1	6764			-567			0,15	0,00	0,00		
	Pias3	6684			-736			0,19	0,00	0,00		
	Rabgef1	6620			-726			0,19	0,00	0,00		
	Ccnh	6330			-756			0,19	0,00	0,00		
	Prkcq	5662			-509			0,17	0,00	0,00		
	Kdr	5509			-383			0,19	0,00	0,00		
	Gaa	5430			-718			0,19	0,00	0,00		
	Tlr4	5390			-598			0,15	0,00	0,00		
	Syk	5246			-677			0,56	0,00	0,00		
	Aldh7a1	4868			-693			0,15	0,00	0,00		
	Anxa1	4565	1284	1055	-739	-909	-781	24,46	22,15	16,81		
	Copb2	4128	786		-667	-836		0,56	0,84	0,00		
	Sf3b1	4075			-490			0,15	0,00	0,00		
	Slf1	4049			-719			0,17	0,00	0,00		
	Eif2a	4024			-466			0,45	0,00	0,00		
	Derl1	3581	2324		-671	-874		0,56	0,16	0,00		
	Rpl10a	3547			-395			0,15	0,00	0,00		
	Pdia6	3531	824	197	-747	-846	-734	8,28	10,13	10,40		
	Tep1	3345			-655			0,15	0,00	0,00		
	Stat3	2875			-642			0,15	0,00	0,00		
	Sar1b	2866			-728			0,60	0,00	0,00		
	Myo6	2797			-484			0,15	0,00	0,00		
B)	Gene Name	Betweenness			Centroid			Av.PSMs			LDA	
		CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	F Ratio	Prob>F
	Prkacb		51120	46999	-213	-306		0,00	1,50	1,26	3,3	4,0E-02
	Rac2		15334	16542	-312	-313		0,00	1,14	2,28	4,1	2,1E-02
	Ptpn6		9382	6040	-439	-487		0,00	0,98	4,36	4,9	1,1E-02
	Kat2a		7134	6998	-452	-482		0,00	0,17	0,21		
	Calr		7080	10145	-531	-477		0,00	1,81	0,36	5,5	6,6E-03
	Dnm2		6921	3550	-519	-479		0,00	0,82	0,69		
	Rab8b		6197	10095	-452	-410		0,00	0,85	1,63		
	Eef1b2		5738	3665	-619	-537		0,00	0,17	0,18		
	Cltb		5537	3278	-471	-466		0,00	0,65	0,42		
	Csk		4912	5001	-463	-414		0,00	0,49	1,86	3,8	2,6E-02
	Tardbp		3979	4553	-621	-653		0,00	0,82	0,17		
	Sec22b		3721	4098	-761	-639		0,00	0,33	0,97		
	Ckb		3546	4362	-531	-456		0,00	0,51	6,83	4,5	1,4E-02
	Ddb1		3410	2774	-394	-534		0,00	0,17	0,17		
	Cryab		3170	2496	-516	-469		0,00	0,68	0,17		
	Lrp1		2947	2611	-663	-586		0,00	0,82	0,24		
C)	Gene Name	Betweenness			Centroid			Av.PSMs			LDA	
		CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	F Ratio	Prob>F
	Tia1		67385		-123			0,00	0,16	0,00		
	Nfkb1		12600		-288			0,00	0,16	0,00		
	Speg		10822		-668			0,00	0,16	0,00		
	Ssrp1		3973	1112	-777	-742		0,00	1,50	0,24	8,8	6,4E-04
	Copa		3536		-642			0,00	0,16	0,00	4,4	1,6E-02
D)	Gene Name	Betweenness			Centroid			Av.PSMs			LDA	
		CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	CTR	SFNs-OVA	SFNs-CpG	F Ratio	Prob>F
	Polr2a			15905		-396		0,00	0,00	0,37		
	Me1			4901		-592		0,00	0,00	4,94	3,5	3,3E-02
	Fabp5			4424		-557		0,00	0,00	1,21	3,4	3,6E-02

1 **Supplemental material**

2

3

4 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

5 **Preparation of injectable formulations of SFNs**

6 *Bombyx mori* cocoons (kindly donated by Nembri Industrie Tessili S.r.l., Capriolo, BS, Italy) were
7 cut into fine pieces and degummed in a Na₂CO₃ aqueous solution (0.02 M) at 100 °C for 30
8 minutes; the degummed silk fibroin (SF) fibres were washed in distilled water and dried at room
9 temperature. Then, SF was solubilized in an aqueous LiBr (9.3 M) solution at 60°C for 4 hrs; the
10 obtained solution was dialyzed against distilled water for 72 hrs at room temperature using tubes of
11 dialysis-regenerated cellulose (Spectrum Laboratories, Milan, Italy) with a 3-5 kDa Molecular
12 Weight Cut-Off (MWCO). The SF final concentration (9.16% w/v) was determined by freeze-
13 drying at a pressure of 8 x 10⁻¹ mbar and a temperature of -50 °C for 72 hrs (Modulyo[®] Edwards
14 Freeze dryer, Kingston, NY, USA).

15 For SFNs preparation, SF (1.5% w/v) was added dropwise to acetone; for SFNs-OVA, a solution of
16 SF (1% w/v) and OVA (Merck, Darmstadt, Germany) (0.5% w/v) was prepared and then added
17 dropwise to acetone; for SFNs-CpG, a solution of SF (1.5% w/v) and CpG (TIB Molbiol, Genoa,
18 Italy) (0.1% w/v) was prepared and then added dropwise to acetone. The fibroin/acetone volume
19 ratio was 1:5 in all cases. Next, all the nanoparticle suspensions were dialyzed against deionized
20 water, obtained from a Milli-Q[®] Direct Water Purification System (Millipore, Milan, Italy), for 72
21 hrs at room temperature using tubes of dialysis-regenerated cellulose (12 kDa MWCO). Then, SFNs
22 were centrifuged at 10000 rpm for 5 min and washed with water three times to remove any residual
23 unloaded OVA or CpG. Finally, nanoparticles were re-suspended in deionized water; mannitol was
24 added at the concentration of 0.5% w/v as a cryoprotectant and to reduce the formation of
25 aggregates. The final mixture was aliquoted into vials before freeze-drying at a pressure of 8 x 10⁻¹
26 mbar and a temperature of -50 °C for 72 hrs (Modulyo[®] Edwards Freeze dryer, Kingston, NY,
27 USA). Final formulations were stored at 4°C until use (maximum of three months). In addition, a

28 physical mixture of SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG was prepared by mixing the freeze-dried
29 formulations of SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG in a 1:1 ratio.

30

31

32 **Characterization of SFNs injectable formulations**

33 Loading of ovalbumin (OVA) in SFNs-OVA was analyzed as follows. Briefly, 5 μ L of the solution
34 was analyzed in a liquid chromatographer (Agilent HPLC series 1100 system, Santa Clara, CA,
35 USA) using a TSK-gel SuperSW 2000 column (4.6 \times 300 mm) and a mobile phase composed of 0.1
36 M Na₂SO₄ and 0.05% NaN₃ in 0.1 M phosphate buffer, pH 6.7. Flow rate and temperature were
37 fixed at 0.35 mL/min and 25 °C, respectively. Three batches for each formulation were considered,
38 and each sample was analyzed in triplicate. After calibration (5 points, 3 replicates, 0.1-1 mg/mL),
39 the encapsulation efficiency % (EE) was calculated as:

$$40 \quad EE = (\text{total amount of OVA} - \text{unbounded OVA}) / \text{total amount of OVA} \times 100$$

41 The OVA loading % was calculated as:

$$42 \quad \text{Loading \%} = (\text{total amount of OVA} - \text{unbounded OVA}) / \text{weight of SFNs}.$$

43 The dimensional distribution of SFNs was analyzed using NanoSight NS300 equipment (Malvern
44 Panalytical, Grovewood Rd, WR14 1XZ, Great Malvern, Worcestershire, UK). The nanoparticle
45 formulations were dispersed in water, vortexed for 30 s, sonicated for 30 min and filtered by a 0.45
46 μ m filter before the analysis. Five measurements of 90 s each were performed for each sample. Data
47 were analyzed with the NTA software 3.0.

48 The dimensional distribution of SFNs was analyzed using NanoSight NS300 equipment (Malvern
49 Panalytical, Grovewood Rd, WR14 1XZ, Great Malvern, Worcestershire, UK). The nanoparticle
50 formulations were dispersed in water, vortexed for 30 s, sonicated for 30 min and filtered by a 0.45
51 μ m filter before the analysis. Five measurements of 90 s each were performed for each sample. Data
52 were analyzed with the NTA software 3.0. The analyses of the mean size, polydispersity index (PDI)
53 and zeta potential of SFNs were analyzed by Zetasizer Nano Zs (Malvern Panalytical, Grovewood

54 Rd, WR14 1XZ, Great Malvern, Worcestershire, UK) performed as follows. First, aqueous
55 suspensions (1 mg/ml) of all SNFs were prepared and allowed to equilibrate overnight at 25°C with
56 gentle stirring. Then the nanoparticle dispersions were filtered with a 0.45 µm filter and analyzed.
57 The measurements were performed in triplicate for each sample. Next, to measure the Z-potential,
58 all SNFs were suspended (1 mg/ml) in KCl 1 mM, allowed to equilibrate overnight at room
59 temperature with gentle stirring, and analyzed.

60 Thermal analysis of SNFs was performed as follows. Mid-IR (650–4000 cm⁻¹) spectra were
61 recorded on powder samples using a Bruker Equinox 55 spectrometer equipped with a pyroelectric
62 detector (DTGS type) with a resolution of 4 cm⁻¹. Temperature and enthalpy values were measured
63 by differential scanning calorimetry (DSC) by a NEXTA DSC (Hitachi, Europark Fichtenhain A12,
64 47807 Krefeld, Germany) equipped with a DSC821e module and an intracooler device for sub-
65 ambient temperature analysis (Julabo FT 900). Samples in the range 1–3 mg were weighed (Mettler
66 M3 Microbalance) and placed in sealed aluminium pans with pierced lids ($\beta = 10 \text{ K min}^{-1}$, nitrogen
67 atmosphere (flow rate 50 mL min⁻¹), -10/400 °C temperature range). The instrument was
68 preventively calibrated with indium as a standard reference. Measurements were carried out at least
69 in triplicate. A Mettler STARe thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) system (Perkin Elmer Pyris 1,
70 Wellesley, Minneapolis, MN, USA) with simultaneous DSC (TGA/DSC1) was used to measure
71 mass losses upon heating 2–3 mg samples in alumina crucibles with lids ($\beta = 10 \text{ K min}^{-1}$, nitrogen
72 atmosphere (flow rate 50 mL min⁻¹), 30/400 °C temperature range). Calibration procedure and
73 triplicate measurements were applied, as for DSC above.

74 After allowing the samples to rebalance at room temperature, residual humidity was determined by
75 Coulometric Titrator HI904 (Hanna Instruments). The titration was performed twice for each vial
76 (n=3 vials for each formulation). The osmolarity was measured using a micro osmometer (Precision
77 System Inc., Natick, MA) after reconstitution of 10 mg of lyophilized sample in 2 ml saline (0.9%
78 w/v NaCl in deionized water) at 37°C. The pH of the reconstituted product was measured by a pH
79 meter (Mettler-Toledo, US).

80

81 **Analysis of SFNs internalization by cancer cells**

82 For this experiment, SFNs loaded with curcumin were used. Briefly, SF aqueous solution was
83 diluted (1.5% w/v) and added dropwise to the acetone containing 0.08 mg/ml of curcumin. After
84 dialysis (12 kDa MWCO), SFN-CUR suspension was freeze-dried at 8×10^{-1} mbar and -50° C.

85 Curcumin-SFNs were incubated with the following mouse or human cancer cell lines: a) MB49
86 (murine bladder cancer); b) LLC1 (mouse Lewis lung carcinoma); c) B16/F10 (murine melanoma);
87 d) U-87 (human glioblastoma); e) DLD-1 (human colon adenocarcinoma); f) KPC (human
88 pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma); g) LNCap.FGC (human prostate adenocarcinoma); h) 5637
89 (human bladder carcinoma). All cancer cell lines were purchased from ATCC except for the MB49
90 cell line (Sigma-Aldrich, Milan, Italy) and KPC cell line (Ximbio, London, UK).

91 Cancer cell lines (25000 cells/well in 24-well plates) were grown adherently in the presence of
92 culture medium, constituted by RPMI culture medium (Gibco-ThermoFisher Scientific, Waltham,
93 Massachusetts, US) added with 10% Fetal Bovine Serum (FBS) and 1% Penicillin, Streptomycin,
94 Amphotericin B Mixture (Lonza, Basel, Switzerland), at 37° C in 5% CO_2 . SFNs loaded with either
95 curcumin or OVA were added to the cultures at a concentration of 200 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ for 1, 2, 4 and 24
96 hours. Cancer cells cultured alone or in the presence of empty SFNs were the negative control of
97 the experiments. After the incubation, the cancer cells were harvested by trypsinization (Trypsin-
98 EDTA, Euroclone Milan, Italy) for 5 min at 37° C and 5% CO_2 , washed and re-suspended in 200 μl
99 of fresh culture medium. Vital 7- AAD dye (0.25 $\mu\text{g}/\text{sample}$) (Becton Dickinson, BD, Franklin
100 Lakes, New Jersey, US) was added to each sample to identify the dead cells by cytofluorimetric
101 analyses. The cell suspension was analyzed by a FACS Canto II flow cytometry (BD) equipped
102 with three lasers (488 nm, 640 nm, 405 nm) using FACS DIVA software v6 (BD). This analysis
103 benefited from the different light excitation and emission frequencies of fibroin and curcumin: in
104 particular, 515 nm (excitation) and 585 nm (emission) for fibroin, 488 nm (excitation) and 525 nm

105 (emission) for curcumin. Hence, the analyses were conducted using a violet light-emitting laser for
106 the fibroin and a green light-emitting laser for the curcumin.

107 Ex vivo internalization of SFNs loaded with curcumin by excised tumors was analyzed by confocal
108 microscopy. First, C57BL/6J mice were challenged with MB49 bladder cancer cells as described
109 below. When tumors reached 1 cm³ dimension, mice were sacrificed, and the tumor was excised,
110 minced and passed through a cell strainer (40 μm) to obtain a homogenous cell suspension. Then,
111 tumor cells were re-suspended in culture medium and co-incubated, or not, with SFNs at a
112 concentration of 200 μg/ml for 1, 4 and 24 hrs. Then, the internalization of curcumin-loaded SFNs
113 by tumor cells was analyzed by confocal microscopy. In particular, the plasma membrane of cells
114 treated with curcumin-loaded SFNs was labelled with Alexa594-conjugated wheat germ agglutinin
115 (ThermoFisher Scientific, Waltham, Massachusetts, US) following the manufacturer's instruction
116 and optic sections were acquired by using an Olympus FV500 confocal microscope (Olympus
117 Corporation). The green signal (curcumin), the red signal (Alexa594), and the bright field were
118 imaged using a sequential acquisition mode.

119 Ex vivo internalization of SFNs loaded with OVA by excised tumors was analyzed as follows. First,
120 C57BL/6J/6 mice were challenged with B16/F10 melanoma cells as described below (section
121 Mice). Then, when tumors reached 1 cm³ dimension, mice were sacrificed, and the tumor was
122 excised, minced and passed through a cell strainer (40 μm) to obtain a homogenous cell suspension.
123 Then, tumor cells were re-suspended in culture medium and co-incubated, or not, with OVA-loaded
124 SFNs at a concentration of 200 μg/ml for 4 hrs. Then, the internalization of OVA-loaded SFNs by
125 tumor cells was analyzed by flow cytometry as described below.

126 In vivo internalization of SFNs loaded with OVA was also analyzed. In brief, C57BL/6J mice were
127 challenged with B16/F10 melanoma cells, as described below. When tumors reached 0.5 cm³
128 dimension, SFNs loaded with OVA (200 μg per mouse) were injected subcutaneously into the peri-
129 tumoral area. Mice were sacrificed after 4 hrs from SFNs injection. A control mouse challenged
130 with B16/F10 melanoma cells was sacrificed as control. Intracellular staining for OVA was

131 performed. To this aim, tumors were collected, minced and passed through a cell strainer (40 μ m)
132 to obtain a homogenous cell suspension. Cells (10^6) were stained with LIVE/DEAD™ Fixable
133 Aqua Dead Cell Stain Kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, US) to identify the dead cells
134 by cytofluorimetric analyses and then incubated with a PerCP-Cyanine 5.5 mouse anti-mouse
135 CD45.2 antibody (BD) for 15 min at RT. Then they were fixed and permeabilized by BD Cytotfix
136 Cytoperm (BD) and incubated with a FITC rabbit anti-OVA antibody (Abcam, Cambridge, UK).
137 Cells were then analyzed by an LSR Fortessa X20 flow cytometer (BD).

138

139 **Analysis of SFNs internalization by DCs**

140 Splenic DCs were magnetically separated from C57BL/6J spleen cells using Pan Dendritic Cell
141 Isolation Kit (Miltenyi Biotec, Bergisch Gladbach, Germany) according to manufacturer
142 instructions. In brief, the C57BL/6J spleen was collected, minced and passed through a cell strainer
143 (40 μ m) to obtain a homogenous cell suspension. DCs were isolated by depletion of non-target cells
144 (negative selection) performed through immune-magnetic separation on LS columns (Miltenyi
145 Biotec). DCs were then seeded at 5×10^5 cells/well in 24-well plates in the presence of culture
146 medium at 37°C in 5% CO₂. SFNs loaded with curcumin (25 μ g/ml) were added to the culture for 4
147 and 24 hours. DCs were stained with Fixable Viability Stain 780 (BD) and anti-mouse PE-Cy7-
148 labelled anti-CD11c antibody (BD catalog no. 558079) at the end of incubation.

149 Concerning intratumoral DCs, in vivo internalization of SFNs-OVA was analyzed by flow
150 cytometry. C57BL/6J mice were challenged with B16/F10 melanoma cells as described below.

151 When tumors reached 0.5 cm³ dimension, SFNs loaded with OVA (200 μ g per mouse) were
152 injected subcutaneously into the peri-tumoral area. Mice were sacrificed after 4 hrs from SFNs
153 injection. A control mouse challenged with B16/F10 melanoma cells was sacrificed as control.
154 Intracellular staining for OVA was performed. To this aim, tumors were collected, minced, and
155 passed through a cell strainer (40 μ m) to obtain a homogenous cell suspension. Cells derived from
156 tumors (10^6) were stained with LIVE/DEAD™ Fixable Aqua Dead Cell Stain Kit (Thermo Fisher

157 Scientific, Waltham, MA, US) to identify the dead cells by cytofluorimetric analyses and then
158 incubated with a PerCP-Cyanine 5.5 anti-mouse CD45.2 (BD catalog no. 561096), Phycoerythrin
159 (PE) rat anti-mouse MHC-II (IA/IE) (Thermo-Fisher Scientific catalog no 12-5321-82) and PE-
160 Cyanine 5.5 Armenian hamster anti-mouse CD11c (Thermo-Fisher Scientific catalog no 35-0114-
161 82) antibodies for 15 min at RT then fixed and permeabilized by BD Cytofix Cytoperm (BD), and
162 incubated with a Fluorescein Isothiocyanate (FITC) rabbit anti-OVA antibody (Abcam, Cambridge,
163 UK catalog no. ab85584). Cells were then analyzed by an LSR Fortessa X20 flow cytometer (BD).

164

165 **ADAS generation**

166 Adipose tissue was derived from liposuction waste from a healthy donor after obtaining the
167 informed consent. Briefly, the sample was digested with an enzymatic solution (collagenase type I
168 0.1% in PBS) at 37°C for 1 h before centrifugation at 1200 rpm for 5 min at RT. The pelleted
169 stromal vascular fraction (SVF), containing the mesenchymal stromal cells, was suspended in
170 alpha-MEM supplemented with 10% FCS to block the residual collagenase activity. The pellet was
171 suspended in an amount of medium corresponding to the initial lipo-aspirate volume and divided
172 into 100-mm diameter Petri dishes (2 ml cell suspension/dish).

173 To the first confluence the cells were plated for the analysis of the nanoparticle's toxicity by
174 thiazolyl blue (MTT; Sigma) assay.

175

176 **MTT assay**

177 Cells (3×10^3 /well) were plated in wells of a 96-well plate and incubated with SFNs (200 µg/ml) for
178 1, 4 and 24 hours at 37°C. At each considered time, culture medium was removed and replaced with
179 0.5 ml of serum-free medium and 25 µl of 3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium
180 bromide (stock solution, 5 mg/ml). After 3 hour incubation in the dark, the medium was removed,
181 and the converted dye was solubilized with absolute ethanol. Absorbance of converted dye was
182 measured at a wavelength of 570 nm with background subtraction at 670 nm. Percent cell viability

183 was calculated as follows: $100 \times \text{mean (of triplicates) optical density of SFNs treated samples} / \text{mean}$
184 $\text{optical density of untreated controls}$.

185

186

187 **Sample preparation for Liquid Chromatography with tandem mass spectrometry (LC-**
188 **MS/MS) analysis**

189 Paraffin-embedded tissue sections from B16/F10 melanoma and MB49 bladder carcinoma mouse
190 models were deparaffinized in hexane using three solvent changes. Each embedded biopsy was cut
191 to obtain 10 μm sections from the same block. Slices were transferred into a 5 ml collection tube
192 and added to hexane (Sigma-Aldrich Inc., St Louis, MO, USA). The samples were gently vortexed
193 and placed on a rotary shaker for 10 minutes at room temperature. The samples were then
194 centrifuged at 4800 rpm for 15 minutes at 20°C. Supernatants were discarded, and pellets
195 underwent two additional hexane washes. Finally, the pellets were dried under a gentle nitrogen
196 flow and stored at -20°C.

197 Dewaxed tissues were solubilized in RapiGest™ SF reagent (Waters Co, Milford, MA, USA) at
198 the final concentration of 0.5% (w/v) and then incubated under stirring 100°C for 20 minutes and
199 subsequently at 80°C for 2 hrs. Protein concentration was assayed using the SPN™ Protein Assay
200 kit (G-Biosciences, Maryland Heights, MO, USA). From each sample, 50 $\mu\text{g} \pm 0.5 \mu\text{g}$ of proteins
201 were digested by adding Sequencing Grade Modified Trypsin (Promega, Madison, WI, USA) at an
202 enzyme/substrate ratio of 1:50 (w/w) and incubating them overnight at 37°C; an additional aliquot
203 of Trypsin was added (enzyme/substrate ratio of 1:100 w/w) in the morning and the digestion
204 continued for 4 hrs. The enzymatic reaction was chemically stopped with the addition of 0.5% TFA
205 (Sigma-Aldrich Inc., St. Louis, MO, USA), and a subsequent incubation at 37°C for 45 minutes
206 completed the acidic hydrolysis of RapiGest. The water-immiscible degradation products were
207 removed by centrifuging at 13,000 $\times g$ for 10 min. Finally, the tryptic digested mixtures were
208 desalted using PepCleanTMC18 spin column (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA),

209 concentrated in a SpeedVac (Savant Instruments, Farmingdale, NY, USA) at 60 °C and re-
210 suspended in 0.1% formic acid (Sigma-Aldrich Inc., St. Louis, MO, USA) at a concentration of 0.2
211 µg/µL.

212

213 **LC-MS/MS analysis**

214 Trypsin-digested mixtures were analyzed using a platform consisting of a nano-liquid
215 chromatographic system, the Eksigent nanoLC-Ultra 2D System (Eksigent, AB SCIEX Dublin, CA,
216 USA), configured in trap-elute mode coupled with a high-resolution mass spectrometer. For each
217 experimental condition, three biological replicates were analyzed in twice technical replicates for a
218 total of 48 LC-MS/MS runs. Briefly, samples were first loaded on the nanoLC trap (200 µm x 500
219 µm ChromXP C18, 3 µm, 120 Å) and washed with the loading pump running in isocratic mode
220 with 0.1% formic acid in water for 10 min at a flow rate of 3 µL/min. The automatic switching of
221 the nanoLC ten-port valve then eluted the trapped mixture on a nano-reversed phase column (75 µm
222 x 15 cm 3C18-CL, 3 µm, 120 Å), through a 150 min gradient of eluent B (eluent A, 0.1% formic
223 acid in water; eluent B, 0.1% formic acid in acetonitrile), at a flow rate of 300 nL/min. Specifically,
224 the gradient was: from 5–10% B in 3min, 10–40% B in 130 min, 40–95% B in 10 min and holding
225 at 95% B for 10 min. Mass spectra were acquired using an LTQ-Orbitrap XL-ETD mass
226 spectrometer (Thermo Fisher Scientific, San José, CA, USA), equipped with a nanospray ionization
227 source (Thermo Fisher). The spray capillary voltage was set at 1.7 kV, and the ion transfer capillary
228 temperature was held at 220 °C. Full mass spectra were recorded in positive ion mode over a 400–
229 1600 m/z range and with a resolution setting of 30000 FWHM and scan rate of 2 spectra per
230 second, followed by five low-resolution MS/MS events, sequentially generated in a data-dependent
231 manner on the top five most intense ions selected from the full MS spectrum (at 35% collision
232 energy), using the dynamic exclusion of 0.5 min for MS/MS analysis. Mass spectrometer scan
233 functions and high-performance liquid chromatography solvent gradients were controlled by the
234 Xcalibur data system version 1.4 (Thermo Fisher Scientific).

235

236 **RESULTS**

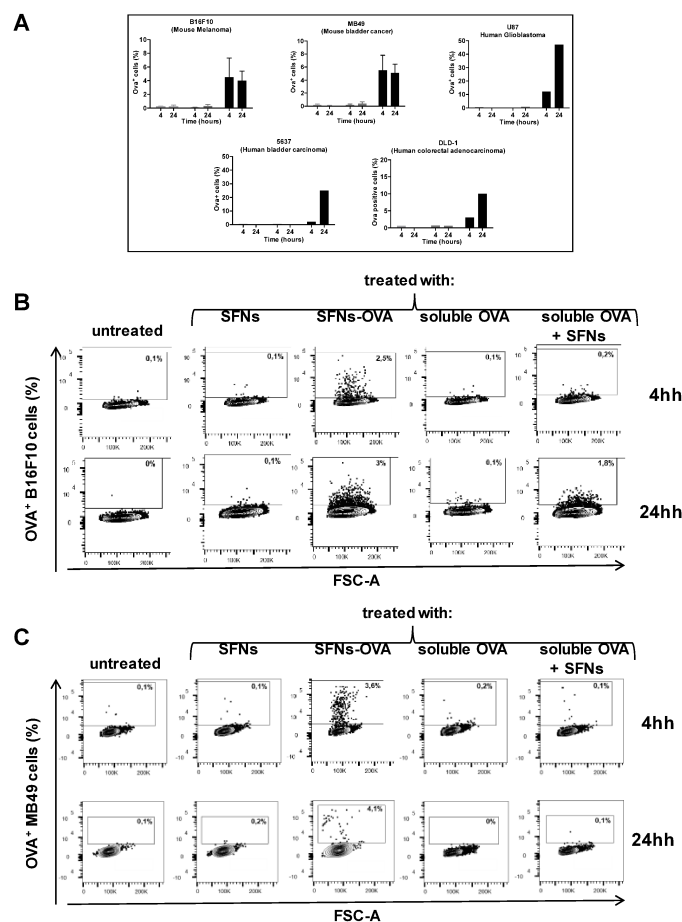
237 The DSC thermal analysis supported the spectroscopic data. The nanoparticles showed a typical
238 profile of an amorphous compound with an endothermic effect around 270°C, associated with a loss
239 of mass in the thermo-gravimetric curve, linked to sample decomposition (data not shown). The
240 residual humidity never exceeded 3%, indicating an effective lyophilization of the product that
241 preserves its stability and effectiveness. Further analyses were performed to check the suitability of
242 each formulation for in vivo administration. First, four vials were randomly selected for each
243 formulation, and quality control was performed by visual inspection of the cake's appearance. A
244 solid and porous cake was formed, free of defects following the aqueous solvent's evaporation
245 during lyophilization. The cake dissolved rapidly by adding saline solution (0.9% w/v NaCl in
246 water), generating a nanoparticle suspension that looked clear and free of subvisible particles. For
247 each formulation, the osmolarity value was always within the range required for injectable
248 formulations (250-350 mOsm/Kg) and, in particular, always between 320 and 350 mOsm/Kg.
249 Moreover, the measured pH value was always in the range of 7.2 to 7.6.

250 SFNs-CUR had the same characteristics (morphology, particle size and size distribution, zeta
251 potential, physical-chemical properties) as SFNs, SFNs-OVA and SFNs-CpG.

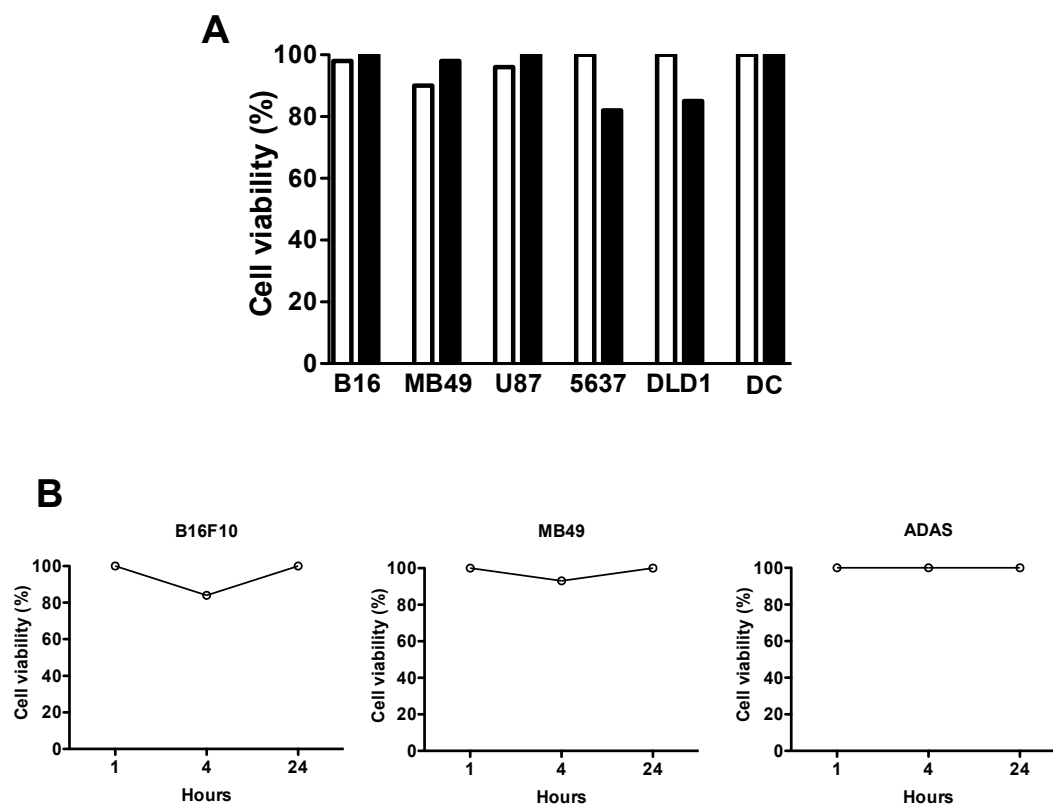
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254 SUPPLEMENTAL FIGURES



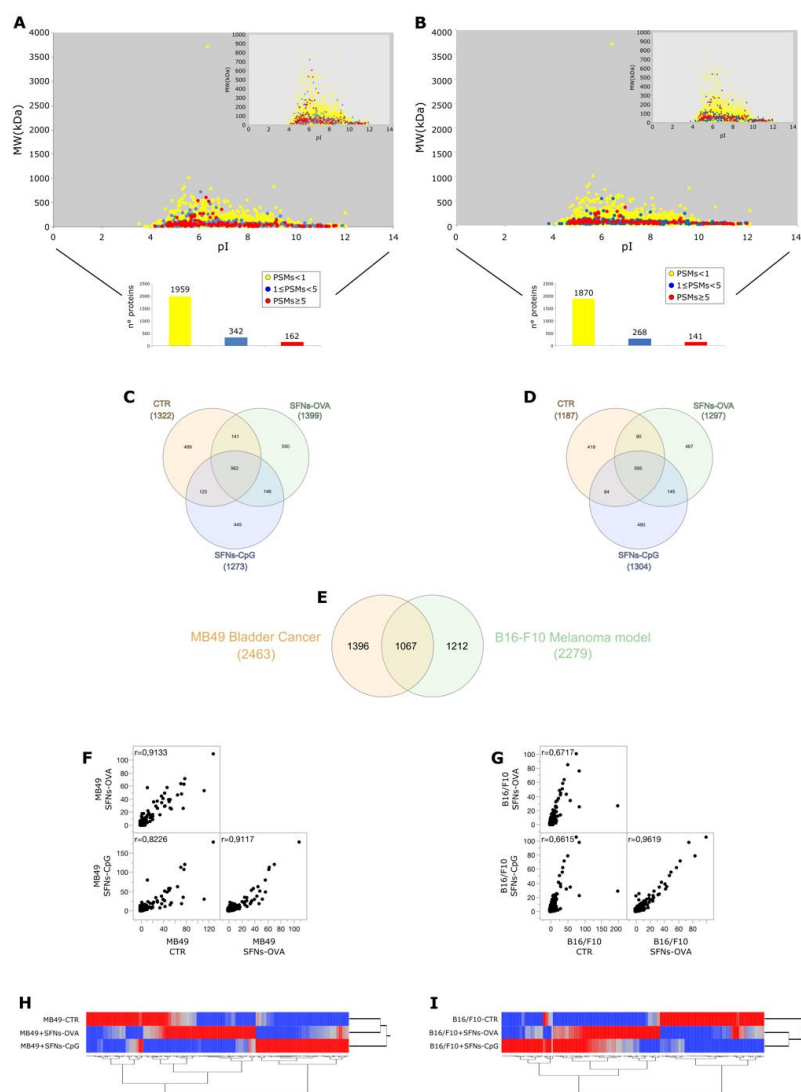
255 Figure S1. Analysis of nanoparticle internalization. (A) Analysis of SFNs-OVA internalization by
 256 different cancer cell lines: the different mouse or human cancer cell lines were incubated for 4
 257 24 hours, alone (light grey bars) or in the presence of unloaded SFNs (dark grey bars) or SFNs-
 258 OVA (black bars), intracellularly stained with anti-OVA FITC antibody and evaluated by flow
 259 cytometry; (B) B16/F10 melanoma cell line was incubated for 4 (upper panels) or 24 (lower
 260 panels) hours alone or with either SFNs, SFNs-OVA, soluble OVA, soluble OVA mixed with
 261 unloaded SFNs, then fixed and permeabilized before incubation with an anti-OVA FITC labelled
 262 mAb and the following cytometric analysis; (C) MB49 bladder cancer cell line was incubated for 4
 263 (upper panels) or 24 (lower panels) hours alone or with either SFNs, SFNs-OVA, soluble OVA,
 264 soluble OVA mixed with unloaded SFNs, then fixed and permeabilized before incubation with an
 265 anti-OVA FITC labelled mAb and the following cytometric analysis.
 266



267

268 Figure S2. Viability of different cancer and healthy cell types after SFNs internalization. (A) Cancer
 269 cells (25000 cells/well in 24-well plates) or splenic DCs (5×10^5 cells/well in 24-well plates) were
 270 incubated in the presence or not of SFNs-OVA at a concentration of 200 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ for 4 (white bars)
 271 and 24 (black bars) hours; Then the cells were stained with LIVE/DEAD™ Fixable Aqua Dead Cell
 272 Stain Kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, US) to identify the dead cells by
 273 cytofluorimetric analyses. Data are expressed as $100 \times$ viability of untreated cells /viability of treated
 274 cells. (B) MTT viability analysis on B16/F10 and MB49 cancer cell lines and on Adipose Adult
 275 Stromal Cells (ADAS) from an healthy donor after 1, 4 or 24 hour incubation alone or in the
 276 presence of SFNs at a concentration of 200 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$. Percent cell viability was calculated as follows:
 277 $100 \times$ mean (of triplicates) optical density of SFNs treated samples/mean optical density of
 278 untreated controls.

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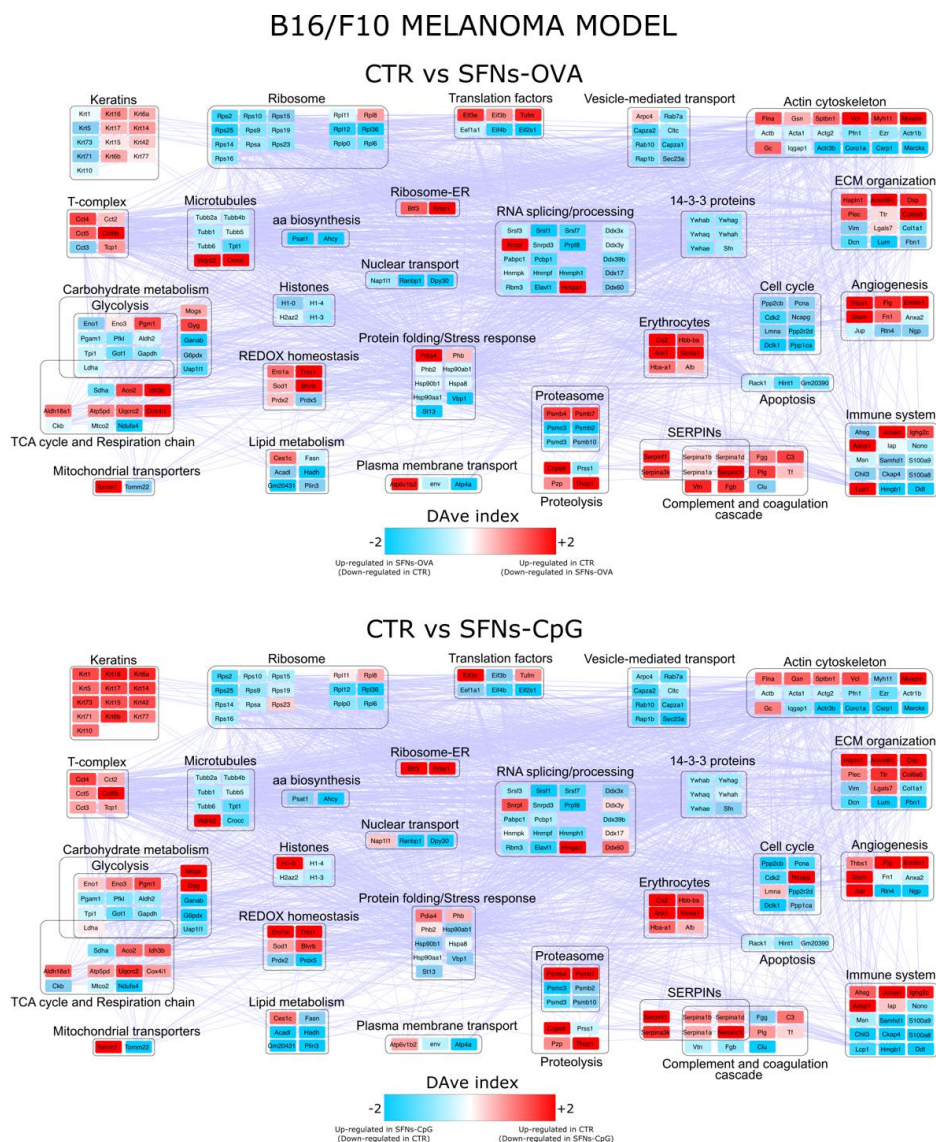
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281 **Figure S3.** nLC-hrMS/MS analysis results. Proteins identified in MB49 bladder cancer (A) and
 282 B16/F10 melanoma (B) model plotted by their pI and MW; color codes indicate proteins identified
 283 using average Peptide spectrum matches (PSMs)<1 (yellow), average $1 \leq$ average PSMs < 5 (blue),
 284 average PSMs ≥ 5 (red). Venn diagrams of proteins identified in MB49 bladder cancer (C) and
 285 B16/F10 melanoma (D) model. E) Venn diagram among proteins identified in MB49 bladder
 286 cancer and B16/F10 melanoma model. Spearman's correlation among profiles of differentially

13

- 287 expressed proteins (DEPs) in MB49 bladder cancer (F) and B16/F10 melanoma (G) models.
- 288 Hierarchical clustering from DEPs in MB49 bladder cancer (H) and B16/F10 melanoma (I) model.
- 289

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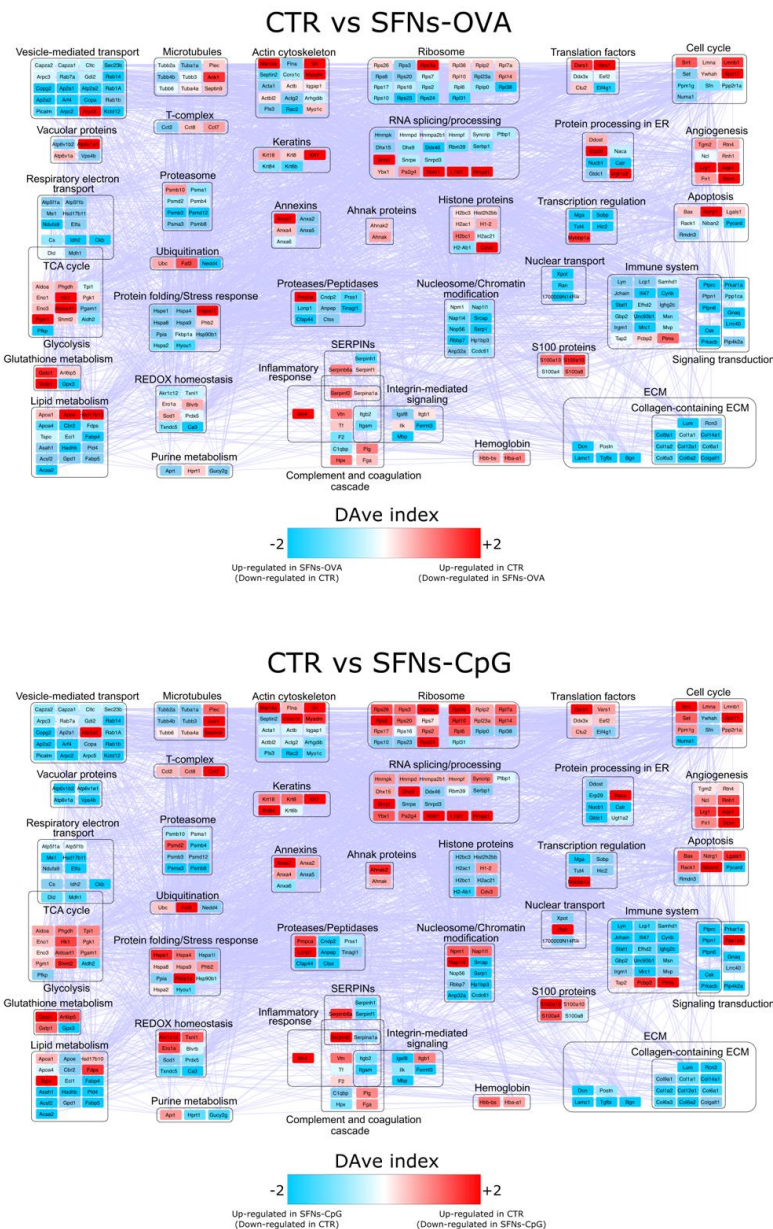
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292 **Figure S4.** Protein-protein interaction network model reconstructed by Cytoscape's STRING App
 293 starting from proteins differentially expressed in B16/F10 melanoma model untreated (CTR) and
 294 treated with SFNs-OVA or SFNs-CpG. Proteins were grouped in functional modules. Red color
 295 code (positive Dave values) indicates proteins up-regulated in CTR (vs SFNs-OVA or/and vs
 296 SFNs-CpG), while the blue color code (negative Dave values) indicates proteins up-regulated in
 297 SFNs-OVA or/and SFNs-CpG (vs CTR).

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MB49 BLADDER CANCER MODEL



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Figure S5. Protein-protein interaction network model reconstructed by Cytoscape's STRING App

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starting from proteins differentially expressed in MB49 bladder cancer model untreated (CTR) and

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treated with SFNs-OVA or SFNs-CpG. Proteins were grouped in functional modules. Red color

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code (positive Dave values) indicates proteins up-regulated in CTR (*vs* SFNs-OVA or/and *vs*

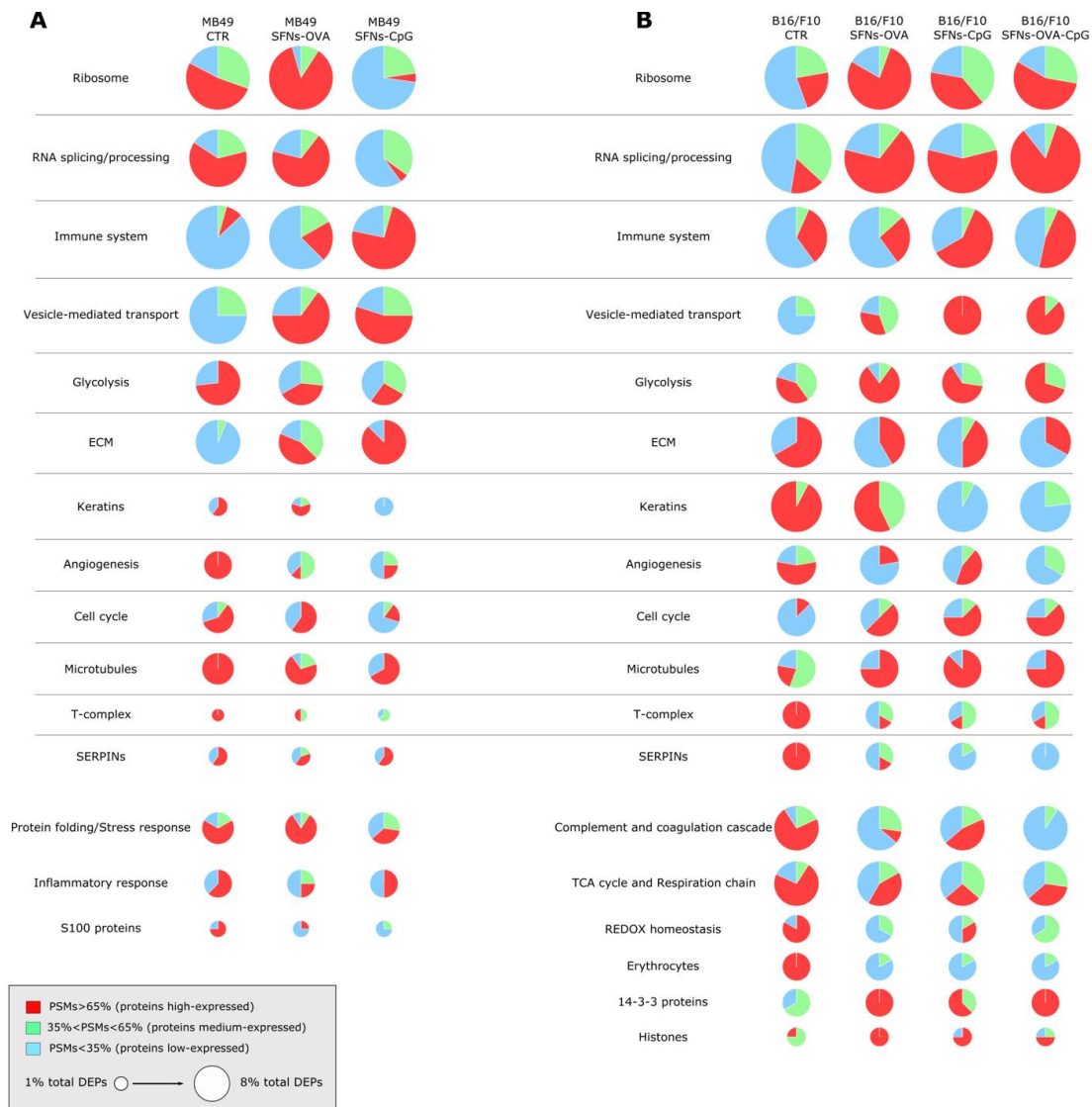
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SFNs-CpG), while the blue color code (negative Dave values) indicates proteins up-regulated in

305

SFNs-OVA or/and SFNs-CpG (*vs* CTR).

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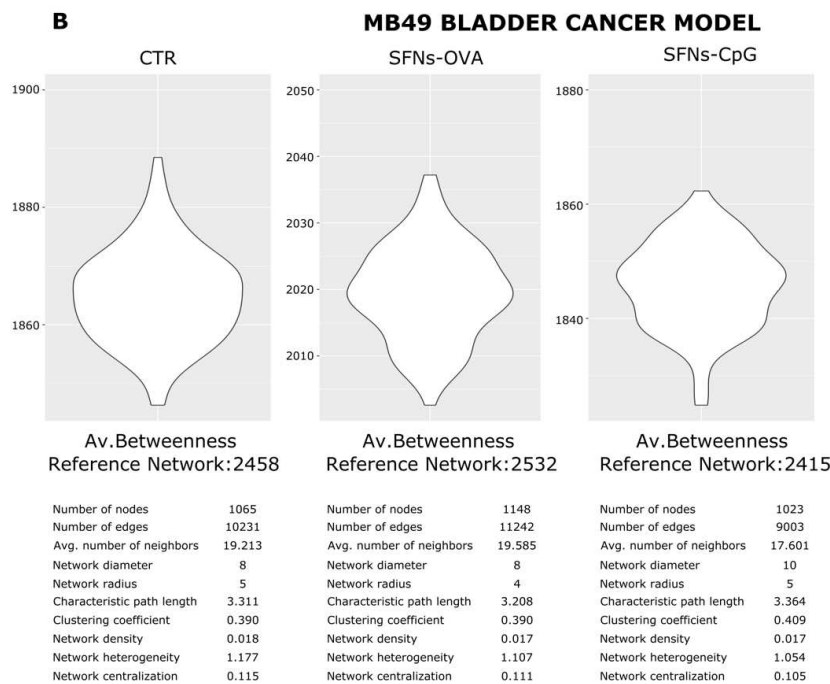
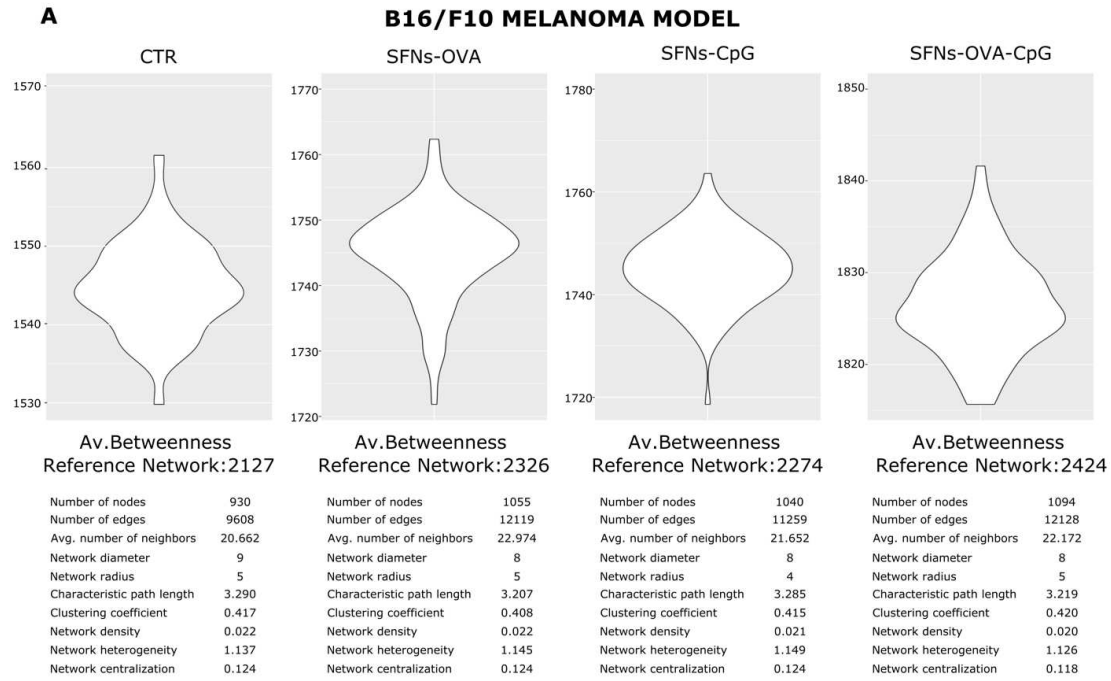
308 **Figure S6.** Pie charts showing the functional modules (Biological processes, Molecular function
 309 and Protein families) mostly affected by SFNs treatments in MB49 bladder cancer (A) and B16/F10
 310 melanoma (B) models. Red, green and blue color codes indicate the percentage of proteins with
 311 high-, medium- and low expression, respectively, based on a PSMs-based label-free quantification.
 312 The pie chart size is proportional to the number of DEPs per module.

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318 **Figure S7.** Violin plots reporting the average betweenness calculated in random network models
319 reconstructed from protein identified in B16/F10 melanoma (A) and MB49 bladder cancer (B)
320 models; the average betweenness in reference networks is shown. The topological parameters
321 calculated by Cytoscape's Network Analyzer App are reported for both models and each
322 reconstructed network.

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