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CRISPR-Cas9 system: A new-fangled dawn in gene editing, Gupta D, Bhattacharjee O, Mandal D, Sen MK, Dey D, Dasgupta A, Kazi TA, Gupta R, Sinharoy S, Acharya K, Chattopadhyay D, Ravichandiran V, Roy S, Ghosh D, Gupta D, et al. Life Sci. 2019 Sep 1;232:116636. doi: 10.1016/j.lfs.2019.116636. Epub 2019 Jul 8. Life Sci. 2019. PMID: 31295471

Review. Genome engineering is a powerful tool for a wide range of applications in biomedical research and medicine. The development of the clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats (CRISPR)-Cas9 system has revolutionized the field of gene editing, thus facilitating efficient genome editing through the creation of targeted double-strand breaks of almost any organism and cell type. In addition, CRISPR-Cas9 technology has been used successfully for many other purposes, including regulation of endogenous gene expression, epigenome editing, live-cell labelling of chromosomal loci, edition of single-stranded RNA and high-throughput gene screening. The implementation of the CRISPR-Cas9 system has increased the number of available technological alternatives for studying gene function, thus enabling generation of CRISPR-based disease models. Although many mechanistic questions remain to be answered and several challenges have yet to be addressed, the use of CRISPR-Cas9-based genome engineering technologies will increase our knowledge of disease processes and their treatment in the near future. Genome engineering is a powerful tool for a wide range of applications in biomedical research and medicine. It enables the study of gene function and gene regulation through the generation of in vitro (cellular) or in vivo (animal) disease models and could play a key role in the development of gene therapy for genetic disorders. Because the pioneering technology of Capecchi made it possible to introduce specific gene modifications [1], the generation of targeted genomic changes has advanced from a limited technique hampered by technological difficulties and restricted to only a few organisms to a general method adopted by researchers across a wide range of scientific disciplines. For many years, genome engineering based on homologous recombination technology was limited by the need for complex targeting and selection constructs. The subsequent development of recombinering (phage-based homologous recombination) [2-5] simplified the generation of target vectors while simultaneously making it possible to engineer large fragments of DNA. Our ability to make specific changes in the genome has increased since it was demonstrated that controlled double-strand breaks (DSBs) enhance targeted genome modifications [6, 7]. In the mid-1990s, two groups demonstrated that induction of DSBs using the rare cutting *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* restriction endonuclease I-SceI increases the probability of obtaining targeted homologous recombination events (by at least 2-fold compared with spontaneous homologous recombination). This finding was followed by two independent studies in the late 1990s, which demonstrated that a specific zinc finger (ZF) domain could be fused to a nonspecific cleavage domain (FokI) [8] and that ZF proteins could be engineered as building blocks by modification of recognition sequence domains using either a 9 bp or 18 bp target sequence in a specific and predetermined manner [9]. Both studies paved the way for the use of ZF domains as a nuclease system [10]. Zinc-finger nucleases (ZFNs) are artificial endonucleases consisting of a FokI cleavage domain fused to an engineered ZF DNA-binding domain [8, 10, 11]. Fifteen years after the introduction of ZFNs, transcription activator-like effector (TALE) binding proteins secreted by *Xanthomonas* bacteria were discovered [12, 13]. The main advantage of this new, alternative system for induction of DSBs was that in contrast to ZFNs, which are composed of arrays of 3–6 ZF modules joined together to create a DNA-binding domain with specificity to 9–18 bp per ZF monomer, the TALE DNA-binding motifs typically consist of a tandem repeat of 34 amino acids. Each repeat recognizes and binds to a single base. This specificity is based on two variable amino acids known as the repeat variable diresidue. The discovery of the DNA recognition code facilitated the prediction and assembly of TALE DNA-binding domains and led this method to be more widely used by researchers than the ZF counterpart [14]. The next breakthrough in genome engineering was quick to appear. In 2012, a natural bacterial immune system was harnessed to modify DNA in a programmable manner [15], leading to the development of the CRISPR (clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats)-Cas9 system as a genome engineering tool. Bacteria were first used in this field 20 years ago as part of basic research, with the first description of repeat sequences present in bacteria [16] that were later shown to constitute an adaptive immune system [17] against viral infections and invading DNA [18].Two separate studies paved the way for the CRISPR application. The first showed Cas9 to be a ribonucleoprotein that, in combination with crRNA (CRISPR targeting RNA), mediates DNA cleavage [19]. The second (Doudna and Charpentier) showed that the three components considered essential for CRISPR-Cas9 function (Cas9 endonuclease, crRNA and tracrRNA) could be simplified to two by fusing the cr- and tracrRNAs (trans- activating crRNA) to form a single guide RNA (sgRNA), thus widening the range of application for genome engineering [15]. CRISPR-Cas9 was consolidated as an editing tool in 2013, when several groups reported edition of mammalian genomes [20, 21]. We refer the reader to three excellent reviews of the discovery and implementation of CRISPR-Cas9 as a genome engineering tool [22–24].One of the most important advantages of the CRISPR-Cas9 system is that it does not rely on protein engineering (as occurred with ZFNs, meganucleases and TALE nucleases (TALENs)), but on Watson–Crick base-pairing between the sgRNA and the target DNA to be recognized [25]. In addition, CRISPR-Cas9 is easy to use, because only a small, new 20 nt fragment of RNA must be synthesized to target a new locus, thus avoiding the laborious and time-consuming design and cloning of full protein domains, as in ZFN- and TALEN-based approaches [14]. Synthesis of small fragments also enables multiplex application, thus making it possible to target several loci [26] and potentially generate chromosomal rearrangements such as deletions and translocations [27, 28]. CRISPR-Cas9 can also be used in high-throughput approaches [29]. Comparison of systems used to interrogate gene function: benefits of CRISPR-Cas9 The gold standard for defining gene function is to disrupt its expression and analyse the consequences. Various approaches can be applied. For over a decade, RNAi (interference RNA) was the best available tool [30, 31] and was widely used by the research community. RNAi is an easy, rapid, inexpensive and high-throughput approach based on application of double-stranded RNAs to silence a gene. However, it does not always produce a complete loss of function, varies between experiments and laboratories and has unpredictable off-target effects; in addition, inhibition is temporary, thus limiting its application in clinical practice [32, 33]. The development of ZFNs and TALENs enabled complete loss of function that perfectly mimicked a genetic mutation, thus enabling more refined control of gene expression beyond simple knockdown [34]. Although customized nucleases provided a generalized method for generation of targeted changes in the genome, they were limited by the complexity of protein engineering and targeting efficiency that depended on selectable markers. The versatility and simplicity of CRISPR-Cas9 has made it the most widely used tool for genome targeting experiments. Furthermore, regular development of new CRISPR applications increases the utility of the platform. Using customized nuclease technologies as genome engineering tools enables a broad range of genetic modifications. ZFNs, TALENs and the CRISPR-Cas9 system operate in a similar manner and enable targeted genetic modifications by inducing targeted DSBs in the genome. DSBs are repaired by two highly conserved DNA mechanisms, namely, homology-directed repair (HDR) and non-homologous end joining (NHEJ) (Figure 1A) [35–37]. The HDR pathway is based on the use of a donor DNA template that is recombined at the DSB site, resulting in accurate repair. HDR can be used to introduce specific sequences or mutations into a target region of the genome. On the other hand, the more prevalent NHEJ pathway is an error-prone system that is associated with the generation of insertions and deletions (indels) during the repair process and can therefore be used to induce specific gene knockout through generation of frameshift mutations. This alternative approach makes it possible to rule out positional effects associated with many types of genetic analysis and enables gene function analysis in the complex, native chromosomal environment. Open in new tabDownload slide Principal applications of the CRISPR-Cas9 system. (A) DNA double-strand breaks (DSB) produced by CRISPR-Cas9 can follow two different pathways, namely, the error-prone NHEJ repair pathway and the HDR repair pathway, which can be used to introduce specific genome alterations. (B) An alternative use of this system relies on dead Cas9 (dCas9), an inactivated protein that can be fused to functional effectors or domains to mediate fluorescent labelling of DNA loci, transcriptional control and epigenome modification. (C) Pooled screening can be carried out using genome-scale guide RNA libraries. PAM: protospacer adjacent motif; DSB: double strand break; sgRNA: single guide RNA; NHEJ: non-homologous end joining; HDR: homologous-directed repair; indel: insertion and/or deletion. CRISPR-Cas9: not just a genome editing tool In addition to enabling efficient genome editing through the creation of targeted DSBs, CRISPR-Cas9 technology has been successfully used for many other purposes (Figure 1B and C). One of its first applications outside the field of gene editing was regulation of endogenous gene expression. The use of CRISPR technology for efficient and scalable disruption of gene expression is a powerful tool for studying gene function, developmental pathways and disease mechanisms. A catalytically inactive version of Cas9 (deadCas9 or dCas9) can be recruited by sgRNAs to specific target gene promoters; if dCas9 is fused to a repressor (CRISPRi) or activator domain (CRISPRa) (e.g. KRAB or VP64), it can trigger gene silencing or activation. The CRISPRi alternative was initially shown to produce consistent and robust knockdown of gene expression leading to reduced target RNA in both human and yeast cells [38]. More recently, this approach was adapted to repress gene expression in a wide variety of organisms and cell types including bacteria, plants and human induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) [39–41]. In line with these approaches, it has been shown that CRISPRa can activate transcription of endogenous genes efficiently, although this activation is mild [42–48]. The various modifications of this system that have been developed to strengthen activation of transcription include fusion of the VP64 activation domain to both ends of dCas9, fusion of 10 copies of the minimal VP16 transcriptional activation domain to dCas9 and a synergistic action clustering 3–4 sgRNAs to the promoter [44, 46]. CRISPRa also enables robust multiplexed endogenous gene activation when sgRNAs targeting multiple genes are simultaneously introduced into cells [44].Almost every cell in an organism has the same DNA sequence. Nevertheless, cells have the potential to differentiate into the many different types that form the organism. This exceptional achievement results from fine regulation of the expression of genes and access to chromatin. The epigenome is a record of chemical changes in DNA and histones including DNA methylation, histone post-translational modifications and non-coding RNAs. Genome reprogramming and epigenome editing are branches of genome editing aimed at targeted alteration of chromatin marks and gene expression without modifying the genome sequence. To edit the epigenome with high spatial and temporal specificity, dCas9 has been fused to functional domains of DNA methylation or demethylation enzymes or histone modifiers that can easily target specific DNA loci [49–52]. Epigenome editing is a novel approach that enables durable gene regulation, with promising applications in basic research and molecular medicine.CRISPR has also been applied in live-cell labelling of chromosomal loci, thus facilitating visualization of chromosomal dynamics and increasing our understanding of many fundamental intra-nuclear processes. Inactive dCas9 has been fused to fluorescent proteins to achieve in vivo labelling of a specific locus [53, 54]. It is even possible to engineer multicolour versions of CRISPR using catalytically inactive Cas9 endonuclease (dCas9) from different bacterial orthologs [55] and an extended palette of fluorescent probes to efficiently label various target loci. In vitro assays have demonstrated that Cas9 protein has the ability to edit single-stranded RNA (ssRNA) [56]. Doudna et al. revealed high-affinity binding of Cas9 to ssRNA targets with homology to sgRNA sequences when the protospacer adjacent motif is presented in trans as a separate DNA oligonucleotide.Multiplex application of the CRISPR-Cas9 system is well established. In addition, high-throughput synthesis of sgRNAs facilitates the creation of sgRNA libraries. This approach enables in vitro and in vivo gene function screening approaches and thus provides an accessible platform for interrogation of genes involved in disease processes [57]. CRISPR-Cas9-mediate generation of cells and animal models CRISPR-based genome engineering technology has facilitated the rapid generation of animals in vivo and in vitro disease models. The new alternatives include the following: (i) Genome editing in single-cell embryos via direct injection of sgRNAs and Cas9 mRNA. This approach has been used successfully to generate mouse [58], rat [59] and monkey models [60], thus revealing the full potential of the CRISPR-Cas9 system for efficient and quick creation of genetically modified animals in which one or several genes have been simultaneously altered. (ii) In vivo gene editing, which involves direct delivery of the CRISPR-Cas9 system to specific cells in their native tissues, thus bypassing the need for germline-modified mutant strains. This alternative can be applied to existing disease models and transgenic strains and has promising applicability in gene therapy strategies. In vivo edition has been achieved through the use of viral vectors, mainly adeno-associated viruses (AAVs), with defined tissue-specific tropism [61, 62]. (iii) Combination of gene editing with human iPSCs, which enables the generation of models of genetically complex disorders. Using this approach, it is possible to study human genome alterations in various genetic backgrounds. iPSCs from patients can be differentiated in culture to identify disease-affected cells that can be used to recapitulate disease pathogenesis in vitro. CRISPR can be used to revert targeted mutations in iPSCs from individuals with disease, thus elucidating the effect of such mutations and providing proof-of-principle for gene therapy. Biomedical modelling CRISPR-based disease models have been generated for cancer [63], neurological diseases [64] and other Mendelian or complex genetic human diseases to investigate the molecular mechanisms underlying pathogenesis (Table 1). The models are also excellent platforms for testing gene therapy or for high-throughput screening of new drugs. Table 1. Overview of the use of the CRISPR-Cas9 system in the context of disease modelling Disease . CRISPR approach . Reference . Cancer KIBRA and KIBRA knockout in MDA-MB-231 cell line model Mavuluri et al., 2016 Cancer Simultaneous edition of multiple gene sets in individual pancreas cells of adult-mice by transfection-based multiplexed delivery Maresch et al., 2016 Cancer PVCR1 knockout in an invivo invasive breast carcinoma model Loayza-Puch et al., 2016 Cancer PD-1 knockout model to reprogram primary human T cells Su et al., 2016 Cancer NoxO1 knockout in an in vitro human colon cancer cell model Joo et al., 2016 Cancer JunB knockout in an in vitro head and neck squamous cell carcinoma cell model Hyakusoku et al., 2016 Cancer Systematic TP53 gene knockout in an in vitro HCT116 colorectal and H460 lung cancer cell model Wenzel et al., 2016 Cancer MET exon 14 deletion in an in vitro HEK293 cell line model Togashi et al., 2015 Cancer Somatic multiplex-mutagenesis applied for high-throughput analysis of gene function in mice Weber et al., 2015 Cancer TP53 knockout in an in vitro oesophageal adenocarcinoma cell model Liu et al., 2015 Cancer Lkb1 knockout in an in vivo pancreas cancer model Chiou et al., 2015 Cancer High-throughput loss-of-function screening in non-small-cell lung tumour growth and lung metastasis Chen et al., 2015 Cancer Reproduction of the t(2;13)(q36.1;q14.1) translocation of human alveolar rhabdomyosarcoma in mouse myoblast cells Lagutina et al., 2015 Cancer Correction of a loss-of-function PKCβ mutation in a patient-derived colon cancer cell line Antal et al., 2015 Cancer Knockout of a panel of tumour suppressor genes in a Kras(G12D)-driven lung cancer model Sánchez-Rivera et al., 2014 Cancer Induction of the inv(2)(p21p23) chromosomal inversion in the NIH/3T3 cell line and in an in vivo lung model Maddalo et al., 2014 Cancer Reproduction of the t(11;22) and t(8;21) translocations in human HEK293, mesenchymal and haematopoietic cells Torres et al., 2014 Cancer Pten and p53 knockout and reproduction of a β-catenin activating point mutation in an in vivo liver model Xue et al., 2014 Cancer MLL3 knockout in mouse haematopoietic stem and progenitor cells Chen et al., 2014 Neurological Tnm1 knockout mouse model Alkelai et al., 2016 Neurological Fluorescent labelling of the GABAergic subtype in iPSCs-derived neurons Liu et al., 2016 Neurological Pmm2 knockout in an in vivo Drosophila model Parkinson et al., 2016 Neurological Dmd exon 23 deletion in the tibialis anterior muscles in a mouse model of Duchenne muscular dystrophy Tabebordbar et al., 2016 Neurology Dmd exon 23 deletion in an mdx mouse model of Duchenne muscular dystrophy Nelson et al., 2016 Neurological Dmd exon 23 deletion in an mdx mouse model of Duchenne muscular dystrophy by intraperitoneal, intramuscular or retro-orbital AAV9 delivery Long et al., 2016 Neurological DMD exons 45–55 deletion in human iPSCs hiPSC Young et al., 2016 Cardiovascular Generation of cardiac-specific Cas9 transgenic mice and Myh6 knockout by AAV9 delivery in cardiomyocytes Carroll et al., 2015 Cardiovascular Pcsk9 knockout by AAV delivery in an in vivo mouse liver model Ding et al., 2014 Infectious Adaptation of the CRISPR/Cas9 system to human cells for intracellular defence against foreign DNA and viruses using HIV-1 infection as a model Liao et al., 2015 Infectious Suppression of HBV viral gene expression and replication by targeting and cleavage of conserved regions in the HBV genome Ramanan et al., 2015 Immunodeficiency Multiple targeting of mouse B2m, IL2rg, Prf1, Prkdc and Rag1 genes to generate immunodeficient mouse models Zhou et al., 2013 CRISPR-based disease models include the following: Cancer models: Numerous excellent studies have been carried out with the aim of generating accurate and specific in vivo and in vitro cancer models [63]. For example, Maresch et al. [65] recently reported the results of their study on the generation of pancreatic cancer by simultaneous edition of multiple gene network sets using transfection-based multiplex delivery of CRISPR-Cas9 components to the pancreas of adult mice. In the same study, the authors modelled complex chromosomal rearrangements, a hallmark of pancreatic cancer. In 2014, Sanchez-Rivera et al. [66] described an approach for functional characterization of candidate genes in mouse models of cancer. As proof of concept, they used a Kras (G12D)-driven lung cancer model. They also used CRISPR-Cas9 to edit the genome of tumour suppressor genes with known loss-of-function alterations in human lung cancer, resulting in the generation of lung adenocarcinomas in mice.Neurological disease models: Several high-quality studies describe the generation of neurological models. Two excellent examples include the study by Liu et al. [67] and that by Tabebordbar et al. [68]. Liu et al. used CRISPR-Cas9-mediated genome engineering in an iPSC-based model to explore the underlying mechanism of epilepsy caused by SCN1A loss-of-function mutations. Their model was based on a knock-in strategy to fluorescently label and distinguish GABAergic subtype neurons derived from edited iPSCs and the iPSCs of patients and controls. This approach showed that Nav1.1 was expressed primarily on GABAergic neurons but rarely on glutamatergic neurons in this differentiated neuronal system. Tabebordbar et al. developed and tested a CRISPR in vivo approach to directly edit the genome of mouse muscle and muscle stem cells harbouring frame-disrupting mutations in the Dmd (Duchenne muscular dystrophy) gene. The delivery by AAVs of Cas9 coupled with sgRNAs targeting both ends of exon23 induces the deletion of the exon in the mutated Dmd gene, thus producing a truncated but functional protein. This treatment partially resolved muscle functional deficiencies.Cardiovascular disease models: Carroll et al. [69] recently reported the generation of a transgenic cardiac-specific Cas9 mouse. Cas9 mice robustly express high levels of Cas9 exclusively in heart cardiomyocytes after injection of a Cas9 expression plasmid regulated by Myh6 promoter into mouse zygotes. As a proof-of-concept experiment, the authors used AAVs to deliver sgRNAs against Myh6 and demonstrated cardiac-specific genome editing at the Myh6 locus. In 2014, Ding et al. [70] introduced targeted loss-of-function mutations into the endogenous Pcsk9 gene using adenovirus-delivered Cas9 and sgRNAs targeting Pcsk9 in mouse liver. The authors reported a high rate of mutagenesis (around 50%) and analysed their related pathophysiological effects. A reduction in blood cholesterol levels was observed in the mice.Infectious disease models: Expression of CRISPR-Cas9 components through transient transfection of cells transduced with a GFP reporter lentivirus led to targeted disruption of both pre-integration viral genomes and integrated proviruses [71]. CRISPR has also been used to specifically target HIV in latently infected T-cell lines and in the cellular reservoirs of HIV (monocytes/macrophages), thus providing long-term resistance to HIV-1. Ramanan et al. [72] demonstrated that the CRISPR-Cas9 genome engineering tool can target and cleave conserved regions in the chronic hepatitis B virus genome, resulting in strong suppression of viral gene expression and replication.Immunodeficiency models: In 2014, Huang and coworkers [73] showed how the use of multiplex CRISPR can generate several types of immunodeficient mouse strains by microinjection of embryos with Cas9 mRNA and multiple sgRNAs targeting B2m, IL2rg, Prf1, Prkdc and Rag1 mouse genes. CRISPR-associated concerns Although the simplicity and accessibility of CRISPR-Cas9 are key advantages, some important concerns have yet to be addressed. Delivery Delivery of the programmable nuclease is a key problem in genome engineering. The choice of vehicle for the CRISPR system depends on the purpose of the experiment and can vary from viral to non-viral methods. Vehicles include DNA, mRNA and even ribonucleoprotein complexes (RNP).Viral vectors are promising vehicles for delivery of CRISPR components for two main reasons: (i) their defined tropism can be retargeted through almost any tissue or cell type; and (ii) they can be administered locally or systemically depending on individual requirements. Therefore, they are considered a flexible tool with wide applicability [74]. Available vectors for delivery of enzymes and nucleases include adenoviruses [75], baculoviruses [76], integrative and non-integrative lentiviruses [77–79]. Currently, the most attractive gene delivery vectors are AAVs, which are non-pathogenic human viruses that afford long-term transgene expression without genomic integration [80]. Given the nature of their DNA, they can serve as a vehicle for Cas9 and also for template DNA to repair target cells [81, 82]. However, their major drawback is that the size of the cargo they can transport is limited (only 4.7 kb, including some structural and regulatory elements), thus restricting their capacity for Cas9 or the guide sequences in the vector [83]. To resolve this issue and avoid the use of two separate vectors, smaller Cas9 orthologs, such as those derived from *Staphylococcus aureus*, have been developed. These orthologs are easier to pack, making them ‘editor’s choice’ for in vivo genome editing [84].Non-viral delivery systems can carry plasmid DNA, mRNA and RNPs and are a suitable alternative for cell culture owing to their high expression levels, reproducibility and speed. Of note, the transient nature of these systems provides an advantage over integrative counterparts (such as lentiviruses), which have pronounced off-target effects [85]. Non-viral delivery systems can be applied through nucleofection, electroporation and transfection with liposomal agents. Electroporation is the most widely used option, mainly because it can be applied in almost every cell type and even in ex vivo genome modification in clinical practice [86]. Despite the wide applicability of this approach, its efficacy depends on the target cells. This is a major consideration for ex vivo gene delivery settings. Furthermore, applicability is not optimal for in vivo settings [87]. Hydrodynamic injection was recently proposed as an alternative to non-viral delivery and has proven useful for genome editing in the mouse liver [88]. However, it has been associated with disruption of cardiovascular function and major liver damage, thus generating concern over its use in large animals and its restriction to the liver [89]. Off-target effects and specificity The major concern surrounding the CRISPR-Cas9 system since its development has been the high rate of off-target effects that it generates [90]. However, it was subsequently demonstrated that off-target effects could be specific to different cell types and highly dependent on correct functionality of cell DSB repair machinery [91]. In fact, the incidence of off-target mutations has been demonstrated to be low in human pluripotent stem cells with functional DSB repair machinery [92, 93] and high in human cell lines in which the DSB pathway has been altered [94].Despite these initially contradictory results, several alternatives have been developed to overcome off-target effects, as follows: Alteration of guide sequences, by shortening sgRNA [trugRNA (truncated guide RNA)] [95], adding extra nucleotides at the 5’ end of the guide sequence [96] and even optimizing sgRNA structure [97]. All of these methods have demonstrated improved target specificity and reduced undesired mutagenesis at non-target sites.Nickases, i.e. mutant Cas9 versions with one catalytic domain altered (D10A or H840A) that cleave only one strand and have to be used in pairs. This strategy almost abolished off-target activity without reducing on-target cleavage [98].Regulation of the amount of CRISPR components. To paraphrase Paracelsus, only the dose makes the poison. Similarly, some of the off-target effects of CRISPR/Cas9 have been attributed to the high quantity or concentrations used [94, 99, 100]. This issue could be addressed by means of an appropriate optimization procedure in the use of correct amounts of the CRISPR components in specific experimental settings [101].Fusions. To improve specificity in DNA cleavage, dCas9 has been fused with the FokI nuclease domain. These fusions enable higher specificity and achieve off-target effects comparable with those reached with paired nickases [102, 103]. Moreover, two different units have been fused where truncated guides were used in conjunction with dCas9-FokI fusions, thus providing a highly specific alternative for genome engineering in human cell lines [104].Regulation of the time that the components (Cas9 and guide sequences) are available in the target cell. This indirect approach comprises several options, including inducible vectors [46, 105], split Cas9 [106] and even synchronization of the cell cycle phase [107]. However, one of the more important advantages is the use of Cas9 RNP instead of plasmid DNA or viral vectors: this improvement was shown to be useful not only for human and mouse cells [108–110], but also for cells that had previously been refractory to genome modification [111]. Cas9 RNP has a rapid mechanism of action (owing to the presence of the preassembled complexes) and is degraded rapidly, thus reducing the rate of off-target effects. Furthermore, delivery has proven to be less stressful for human embryonic stem cells [109]. Concluding remarks CRISPR-Cas9 has revolutionized biomedical science by enabling genome modifications at single-nucleotide resolution in almost any cell type and organism. The speed with which CRISPR is advancing reflects its utility, simplicity and efficiency. The widespread use of subsequent applications based on CRISPR have made it a multifunctional platform whose applicability goes beyond single gene edition to perform multiplexed edition, sequence-specific regulation of gene expression and genome-wide screens of other platforms. These new methodological developments have considerably increased the technological alternatives for studying gene function and for modelling in several organisms and diseases. Furthermore, the combination of CRISPR-based genome engineering and genome-wide association studies could play a key role in the development of personalized therapy.However, despite the rapid development of CRISPR technology, many mechanistic questions remain unanswered, and several challenges have yet to be addressed. First, existing delivery methods must be optimized and new approaches created for delivery of CRISPR elements to the target cell to achieve sufficient levels of efficiency. Secondly, efficiency must be coupled with specificity, and new methods for controlling targeted edition-avoiding off-target effects need to be investigated. In summary, considerable research is necessary before CRISPR can be comprehensively applied in basic and biomedical research and therapy. Nevertheless, we believe that CRISPR-Cas9-based genome engineering technologies will help us to better understand disease processes and their treatment in the near future.CRISPR-Cas9 is a powerful genome engineering tool based on the targeted induction of double-strand breaks in almost any organism and cell type.CRISPR-Cas9 system has many applications other than gene editing. These include regulation of endogenous gene expression, epigenome editing, live-cell labelling, edition of RNA and high-throughput gene screening.CRISPR-Cas9 simplifies the study of gene function and facilitates the creation of in vitro and in vivo disease models that recapitulate disease features.Raul Torres-Ruiz obtained his PhD in Molecular Biology from the Autonoma University in Madrid. He is currently working as a postdoctoral researcher at the Human Cancer Genetics Department, Spanish National Cancer Centre (CNIO). His research is focused on the implementation of genome engineering tools and the generation of cancer models.Sandra Rodriguez-Perales received her PhD in Genetics from the Complutense University in Madrid. She is currently working as research scientist at the Department of Human Cancer Genetics, Spanish National Cancer Centre (CNIO). Her research is focused on deciphering chromosomal translocation mechanisms to understand their role in the development of childhood sarcoma. Acknowledgments R.T.-R. and S.R.-P. designed, coordinated, and collected the data for the review. S.R.-P. and R.T.-R. wrote the manuscript. Funding This study was supported by FIS project no. PI14/01884, which was awarded to Sandra Rodriguez-Perales by the Spanish National Research and Development Plan, Instituto de Salud Carlos III with cofunding from FEDER. The funders had no role in the study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish or preparation of the manuscript. References 7. et al. . 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