

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1   General introduction .....	7
1.1 Breast cancer.....	9
1.1.1 Epidemiology.....	9
1.1.2 Risk factors .....	13
1.1.3 Breast cancer screening .....	14
1.1.4 Breast cancer classification .....	15
1.1.5 Treatment .....	18
1.2 MicroRNAs.....	21
1.2.1 Biogenesis .....	21
1.2.2 Target regulation.....	24
1.2.3 miRNAs in cancer .....	25
1.2.3.1 Transcriptional control of miRNAs .....	27
1.2.3.2 Genetic alterations of miRNA genes .....	29
1.2.3.3 Alterations in miRNAs biogenesis machinery .....	30
1.2.4 miRNA-based therapies .....	31
1.2.4.1 Viral vectors for miRNAs delivery .....	33
1.2.4.2 Nanoparticles for miRNAs delivery .....	33
1.2.5 miRNAs as biomarkers .....	37
CHAPTER 2   Objectives .....	43
CHAPTER 3   miR-99a-as therapeutic target .....	47
3.1 Abstract.....	51
3.2 Introduction .....	52
3.3 Materials and methods.....	53
3.3.1 Cell culture .....	53
3.3.2 miRNA and mRNA arrays, and data analysis.....	54
3.3.3 RNA extraction, reverse transcription, and quantitative real-time PCR .....	54
3.3.4 Patient's data acquisition and analysis .....	55
3.3.5 Cell transfection .....	55
3.3.6 Apoptosis analysis .....	56
3.3.7 IC <sub>50</sub> determination.....	56

3.3.8 miRNA-target prediction .....	56
3.3.9 Western blot .....	57
3.3.10 Luciferase reporter assay .....	57
3.3.11 Doxorubicin intracellular accumulation analysis .....	57
3.3.12 ABCG2 activity analysis .....	58
3.3.13 Synthesis of mesoporous silica nanoparticles .....	58
3.3.14 Characterization of nanoparticles .....	59
3.3.15 Cargo release studies .....	60
3.3.16 CD44 expression evaluation by flow cytometry .....	60
3.3.17 Nanoparticles' uptake and competition assay .....	61
3.3.18 <i>In vivo</i> experiments .....	61
3.3.19 Silicon biodistribution analysis .....	62
3.3.20 Immunohistochemistry .....	62
3.3.21 Statistical analyses .....	62
3.4 Results .....	63
3.4.1 miR-99a-5p is downregulated in doxorubicin-resistant breast cancer cells .....	63
3.4.2 miR-99a-5p overexpression associates with better clinical prognosis in breast cancer patients .....	64
3.4.3 miR-99a-5p regulates doxorubicin response <i>in vitro</i> .....	67
3.4.4 miR-99a-5p regulates doxorubicin sensitivity by directly targeting COX-2 .....	69
3.4.5 ABCG2 is a downstream target of miR-99a-5p and COX-2 .....	73
3.4.6 Nanoparticles targeting breast tumors for co-delivery of doxorubicin and miR-99a-5p .....	76
3.4.7 Anti-tumor activity of co-delivered doxorubicin and miR-99a-5p by NP-dox-miR99a in <i>in vivo</i> model .....	80
3.4.8 Nanoformulation protects from doxorubicin-induced cardiotoxicity .....	82
3.5 Discussion .....	84
3.6 Conclusion .....	88
3.7 Bibliography .....	90
3.8 Supporting information .....	95
CHAPTER 4   miR-99a-5p as biomarker .....	107
4.1 Abstract .....	111

4.2 Introduction .....	112
4.3 Materials and methods .....	114
4.3.1 Clinical samples .....	114
4.3.2 RNA Extraction from tissue and plasma.....	115
4.3.3 cDNA synthesis.....	115
4.3.4 miRNA expression analysis.....	116
4.3.5 TCGA database validation .....	116
4.3.6 Statistical analysis .....	117
4.4 Results .....	117
4.4.1. Study design to develop a novel miRNA biomarker .....	117
4.4.2. miR-99a-5p expression in tissue .....	118
4.4.2.1 Cohort #1: Discovery cohort .....	118
4.4.3 miR-99a-5p expression in plasma .....	121
4.4.3.1 Cohort #2: Testing cohort .....	121
4.4.3.2 Cohort #3: Validation cohort.....	124
4.3.4. miR-99a-5p as a biomarker for early BC detection.....	125
4.5 Discussion.....	127
4.6 Conclusions .....	131
4.7 Bibliography .....	132
CHAPTER 5   Biosensor for detection of circulating miR-99a-5p ....	139
5.1 Abstract .....	143
5.2 Introduction .....	144
5.3 Materials and methods .....	146
5.3.1 General techniques .....	146
5.3.2 Chemicals .....	146
5.3.3 Synthesis of solids .....	147
5.3.4 Cargo quantification.....	147
5.3.5 Detection protocol .....	148
5.3.6 Amplification assay .....	148
5.3.7 Selectivity assessment .....	148
5.3.8 Determination of sensitivity of miR-99a-5p in real competitive media.....	149
5.3.9 Validation in clinical samples .....	149
5.3.10 Ethical committee .....	150
5.3.11 Statistical analysis .....	150

5.4 Results and discussion.....	150
5.4.1 Design, synthesis, and characterization of the functional nanodevice .....	150
5.4.2 Controlled delivery studies .....	153
5.4.3 Validation in clinical samples .....	156
5.5 Conclusions .....	160
5.6 Bibliography .....	162
CHAPTER 6   General discussion.....	167
CHAPTER 7   Conclusions.....	173