



Design and Performance Analysis of PCF-SPR Biosensor for Skin and Adrenal Gland Cancer Detection

Venkatrao Palacharla¹, Sai Santoshi Kancharla², Navya Sri Chittiprolu², Mallikharjuna Swamy Peyyala², Y S S G R K Nooka Babu Inti², Naga Sai Ajay Vemuri²

Department of ECE, Godavari Global University, Rajamahendravaram, INDIA.

Department of ECE, Godavari Institute of Engineering & Technology (A), Rajamahendravaram, INDIA

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KEYWORDS

SPR(Surface-Plasmon-Resonance), PCF(photonic-crystal-fiber), Biosensor, Cancer detection, Refractive index, FEM (finite-element-method), Wavelength Sensitivity, Amplitude Sensitivity.

ABSTRACT

We introduced a Highly sensitive Double-core Photonic Crystal Fiber Surface Plasmon Resonance biosensor to be used for an early-stage detection of skin and adrenal gland cancer. The Numerical Analysis is Performed using the finite element method in the COMSOL Multiphysics Software, with the aid of perfectly matched layers (to achieve satisfactory field absorption). The proposed biosensor has a circular air-hole shape with a bilayer plasmonic coating of Gold (Au) and Titanium dioxide (TiO₂). Gold is chosen because of its high plasmonic activity, chemical stability, and strong resonance response, and TiO₂ improves adhesion and mode coupling at the metal-dielectric interface. The dual-core structure also significantly enhances the coupling efficiency and the confinement of the electromagnetic field. Variations in refractive indices of healthy and cancerous Basal (skin) and PC12 (adrenal gland) cells are used to test the performance of the sensor. Several important performance metrics such as Resolution, Wavelength sensitivity, Figure of Merit (FOM) and Amplitude Sensitivity are greatly enhanced. The results ensure that the introduced PCF-SPR biosensor is a very compact and highly sensitive platform for early-stage cancer detection.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cancer is still one of the most critical health issues worldwide and it is responsible for large number of deaths every year according to the World Health Organization [1] Cancerous and normal cells have many

differences, including biochemistry, morphology, and refractive index (RI) in particular. These variations in RI produce a natural optical contrast which may be exploited for rapid, label-free sensing. Hence, a number of optical based sensing techniques such as Photonic

Crystal Fibers and Surface Plasmon Resonance have been proven to be efficient in detecting cancer related abnormalities. SPR is especially powerful because it enables molecular interactions to be observed live in real time without the need for any fluorescent or chemical labels. The development of SPR technology started with Otto in the year 1968, who demonstrated that light can excite surface plasmons, and was further developed by Kretschmann and Raether in 1971 through the first practical metal film SPR configuration. Therefore, PCF-SPR biosensors can detect minute variation in RI, which makes them of great interest for advanced cancer detection, biomarker sensing, and other diagnostic applications.

Ayushman, Ramola et al. (2021) [2] introduces an external coated PCF based Surface Plasmon Resonance biosensor for the identification of several cancer cells. The dual-lattice PCF structure adopts the air-holes sizes $d_1 = 0.25\lambda$ and $d_2 = 0.45\lambda$ with a pitch of $2 \mu\text{m}$, and the outer surface is covered with gold layer thickness 45 nm and an 85 nm titanium dioxide (TiO_2) layer. The parameters including Amplitude Sensitivity, Resolution, Wavelength Sensitivity, Figure of Merit (FOM) were investigated in the in COMSOL Multiphysics with FEM and a $2\text{-}\mu\text{m}$ PML. The sensor result showed out-standingly high sensitivity of 14,285.71 nm/RIU (TE mode) and 12,857.14 nm/RIU (TM mode), whereas the maximum amplitude sensitivity where achieved value of 15,010 RIU^{-1} (TE) and 13,240 RIU^{-1} (TM). The design also realized a quite small resolution of 7×10^{-6} RIU and a large FOM of 21.61 RIU^{-1} . This configuration demonstrates the potential role of TiO_2 and gold layers in enhancing the plasmonics for cancer biosensing applications.

Khalid Mohd Ibrahim et al. (2023) [3] presented a SPR biosensor employing a twin-core PCF Configuration for the early identification of cancerous cells. The PCF structure is developed with hexagonal pattern with three distinct air-hole diameters $0.38 \mu\text{m}$, $0.75 \mu\text{m}$, and $1.45 \mu\text{m}$ at a fixed pitch $1.8 \mu\text{m}$. A $1.3 \mu\text{m}$ analyte channel is located adjacent to the plasmonic zone for enhanced interaction with guided light. The plasmonic interface which is a 25 nm gold (Au) film capped with 12 nm TiO_2 adhesion layer, increases plasmon resonance intensity and chemical stability. A $1.50 \mu\text{m}$ PML layer is applied in the FEM analysis in COMSOL. The sensor attained a

maximum A_s of 4285.71 RIU^{-1} and W_s of 4078.43 nm/RIU with a resolution of 4×10^{-5} RIU.

Arefe Ehyae et al. (2023) [4] investigates a dual-core PCF refractive index sensor tailored for simultaneous multiple cancer cell sensing absence of metal-based SPR coatings. The structure comprises three circular rings of air holes with diameters of $2 \mu\text{m}$ (outer), $2.8 \mu\text{m}$ (middle), and $1.6 \mu\text{m}$ (inner) and has a central analyte channel of $3.6 \mu\text{m}$. A pitch of $3 \mu\text{m}$ is retained throughout the lattice that provides sense of strong coupling between the two cores. The refractive indices of the infected cells, which implies Jurkat, PC12, Basal, MCF-7, MDA-MB-231 and Hela were investigated via FEM-based mode analysis. The sensor obtained excellent wave length sensitivity of 12,857.14 nm/RIU (PC12), 12,500 nm/RIU (MCF-7), 11,250 nm/RIU (HeLa) and maximum resolution of 8×10^{-6} RIU. Even though the proposed design does not involve plasmonic materials, the dual-core mechanism results in considerable spectral shifts, proving its viability for precise RI-based cancer detection.

Sonia Akter and Hasan Abdullah (2024) [5] proposed a gold covered circular PCF SPR biosensor for high RI sensitivity in cancer detection. The pattern consists of several circular air-hole rings with two different hole radii $0.7 \mu\text{m}$ and $0.8 \mu\text{m}$, and a pitch of 4.1 to $4.7 \mu\text{m}$. The outer layer is deposited by a 50 nm Au plasmonic layer with enhanced resonance properties. Two-dimensional FEM simulations were conducted for the refractive index in between 1.380 and 1.401, with a PML used as the absorber of the outward waves. The sensor demonstrated outstanding performance with a maximum W_s of 13257.20 nm/RIU, FOM of 36.52 RIU^{-1} , and a large birefringence value of 8.3×10^{-4} . The up-scaled Au layer and the circular placement of analyte led to strong plasmon excitation and magnified detection sensitivity for RI-based biomedical sensing.

B. Nagavel et al. (2024) [6] introduced a dual-core bilateral-surface PCF-SPR biosensor to sense the RI changes of various cancer cells. The Design uses circular cladding air holes of two diameters $0.80 \mu\text{m}$ and $1.60 \mu\text{m}$ arranged radially around the core with a pitch of $2.0 \mu\text{m}$. A 40 nm gold overlaid on both sides of the dual-core region to form bilateral plasmonic coupling and thus the resonance interaction within the two plasmonic waveguide cores is strengthened. Based on FEM simulations, the sensor also exhibited more susceptibility

in breast cancer cell detection. It reached a W_s of 5714.28 nm/RIU, A_s of 899.248 RIU⁻¹ with a resolution of 3.33×10^{-5} RIU. The symmetrical design facilitated stronger light – plasmon interactions and delivered better sensing results than those obtained from the conventional single-surface SPR sensor.

II. STRUCTURAL MODELLING AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

The numerical identification and modal study of the recommend biosensor were performed using the finite element method in the software package COMSOL Multiphysics (Version 5.4). The FEM is well known important and accurate numerical simulation tool for the analysis of complex optical waveguide designs, as it can efficiently solve partial differential equations, including Maxwell's equations with high accuracy.

The Operating Mechanism of proposed sensor is that of the Surface Plasmon Resonance (SPR). Light waves travel through the core of the PCF via modified Total Internal Reflection; in contrast, the presence of air spaces leads to a part of the optical field protruding into the cladding region as an evanescent wave. At this point of phase matching, the maximum energy transfer occurs from the core mode to the plasmonic mode, leading to a strong peak in the confinement loss spectrum. The resonance wavelength at this point strongly depends on the refractive index of the biological sample in the sensing area, thus facilitating the detection of cancerous cells. Extensive studies have looked into how geometric parameters, such as the type of metal layer, thickness, positioning, and the size and number of air holes effect sensor performance [7–10].

In proposed Sensor Geometry the cladding exists of air holes in a circular lattice. Here, the center-to-center spacing between adjacent air holes, referred to as the Pitch(P), which is taken as 1.6 μ m from table1. The pitch determines the mode confinement and the single mode operation of the fiber. Concentric Air-Hole Arrangement the design under investigation consists of three different-sized air holes. The smallest air holes have a diameter of 0.58 μ m, provide strong confinement of light within the core-guided region. The central ring contains air holes of diameter 0.92 μ m, which serves as a transitional layer to regulate evanescent field leakage. The biggest air holes are the outermost ones, with diameter 1.25 μ m.

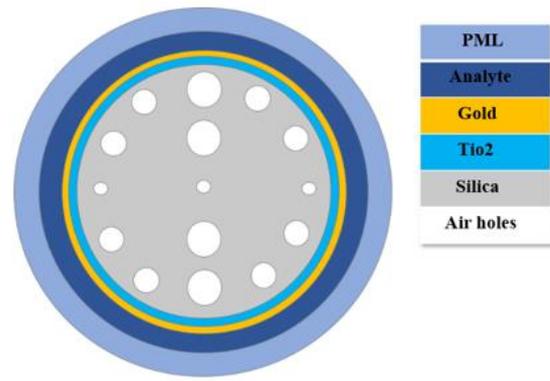


Fig. 1 Schematic representation of Proposed design

The gold (Au) layer is selected as the main plasmonic material owing to its chemical stability and bio-environmental non-oxidizability. Among available metals gold and silver are used most frequently [11]. The gold layer thickness (t_g) is set to 25 nano meters. However, adhesion of gold to silica fiber is weak. To overcome this a thin film of Titanium Dioxide (TiO₂) is first deposit between the silica and the gold film. The TiO₂ layer thickness (t_t) is fixed at 25[nm]. The analyte layer is of great importance since it mainly defines the sensing capability of the sensor with respect to different biological samples. The analyte layer ($t_a = 1.3 \mu\text{m}$) is situated very close to the plasmonic gold surface to maximize the overlap of the evanescent field with the target biological media.

PML was applied at the outermost boundary design [12]. It is a critical component in PCF simulations as it efficiently absorbs the radiative energy leaking from the core, thereby allowing for the accurate calculation of confinement loss. For this proposed design, the PML thickness is optimized from the table1.

Table1: Geometry of the Proposed biosensor

Parameter	Symbol	Value
Pitch	P	1.6[μm]
Inner hole diameter	D ₁	0.58[μm]
Middle hole diameter	D ₂	0.92[μm]
Outer hole diameter	D ₃	1.25[μm]
Thickness of TiO ₂	tt	25[nm]
Thickness of Gold	tg	25[nm]
Thickness of Analyte	ta	1.3[μm]
Thickness of PML	PML	1.5[μm]

III. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The proposed sensor allows for the excitation of various optical modes, such as surface plasmon modes, core-guided modes, and transmission modes, as well as two well-confined orthogonal modes polarized in the x- and y-directions. Fused silica is chosen as the background material for the PCF structure owing to its low propagation loss, high chemical stability, and high optical transparency. The refractive index of fused silica is modeled using the Sellmeier equation [13]. This allows for a detailed simulation of modal propagation, phase matching, and surface plasmon resonance excitation in the proposed PCF-SPR biosensor.

$$n_{\text{silica}}^2(\lambda) = 1 + \frac{0.6961663 \lambda^2}{\lambda^2 - (0.0684043)^2} + \frac{0.4079426 \lambda^2}{\lambda^2 - (0.1162414)^2} + \frac{0.8974794 \lambda^2}{\lambda^2 - (9.896161)^2} \quad (1)$$

n_{silica} is the ReI of quartz glass and operating wavelength denoted by λ in micrometers (μm).

Its optical constants are extracted by fitting the Drude-Lorentz model and for that equation is given as [14], which leads to the accurate calculation of the permittivity and allows for an accurate simulation of the SPP along the gold-analyte interface.

$$\epsilon_{\text{Au}}(\omega) = \epsilon_{\infty} - \frac{\omega_{\text{p}}^2}{\omega(\omega + i\gamma_{\text{D}})} - \frac{\Delta\epsilon \cdot \Omega_{\text{L}}^2}{(\omega^2 - \Omega_{\text{L}}^2) - i\Gamma_{\text{L}}\omega} \quad (2)$$

Where,

$$\epsilon_{\infty} = 5.9673, \omega = (2\pi c)/\lambda, \omega_{\text{D}} = (2113.60 \times 2\pi), \gamma_{\text{D}} = (15.920 \times 2\pi) \text{ THz}, \Delta\epsilon = 01.09, \Omega_{\text{L}} = (650.07 \times 2\pi), \Gamma_{\text{L}} = (104.86 \times 2\pi)$$

TiO₂ is introduced as an adhesion and high index buffer layer between silica and Au for the coupling efficiency improvement. Its refractive index is calculated by a dispersion relation of TiO₂. This layer enhances field confinement, blocks gold delamination, and bolsters plasmonic coupling to achieve high sensitivity and good repeatability. The refractive index dispersion of isotropic TiO₂ is estimated using the respective analytical formula given in [15].

$$n_{\text{TiO}_2}^2(\lambda) = 5.913 + \frac{2.441 \times 10^7}{(\lambda^2 - 0.803 \times 10^7)} \quad (3)$$

The relative refractive indices of normal and cancerous cells are provided in Table 2.

Table2: Normal and Infected Cancer cells differ in refractive indices.

Cancer	Associate Cell	Refractive index (RI)		Change in RI	References
		Health y cell	Cancer ous cell		
Adrenal gland	PC12	1.3810	1.3950	0.024	[3]
Skin	Basal cell	1.3600	1.3800	0.014	[3]

Confinement loss denotes that portion of energy leaked from the guided core mode into surface plasmon polariton mode. It is calculated from the unreal part of the effective index of refraction. A sharp peak of the CL means phase matching and resonance. By following this peak through the analyte refractive indices, one can achieve good sensitivity for the detection of biomolecular changes. The confinement-loss is calculated using the following equation [16].

$$\alpha_{\text{loss}} \left(\frac{\text{dB}}{\text{cm}} \right) = 8.856 \times \frac{2\pi}{\lambda} \times \text{img}(n_{\text{eff}}) 10^4 \quad (4)$$

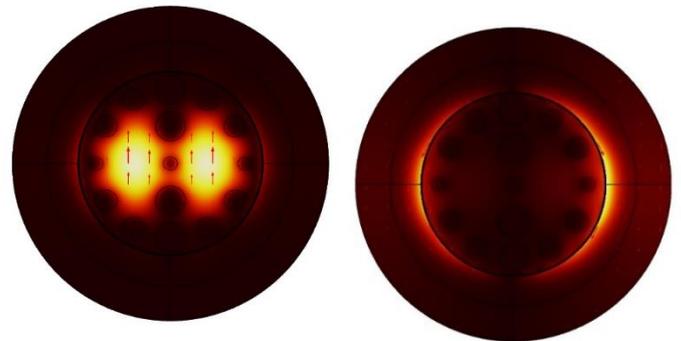


Fig. 2 Electric Field distributions of (a) core mode and (b) SPP-mode for optimal settings

Wavelength sensitivity quantifies the changing rate of the SPR resonance wavelength against the refractive index of the analyte. It is explained as the amount of resonance-wavelength shift for a given RI change. Strong plasmonic coupling shown in fig.2 corresponds to high sensitivity, and in PCF-SPR configurations this translates into higher early recognition of infected cells. Sensitivity using the wavelength interrogation (WI) method can be evaluated using Eq. [17].

$$S_w(\lambda) = \frac{\Delta\lambda_{\text{peak}}}{\Delta n_a} [nm/RIU] \quad (5)$$

Here, Δn_a is the difference in refractive index between two adjacent analytes, and $\Delta\lambda_{\text{peak}}$ is the corresponding variation in the resonance wavelength of the analytes. Amplitude sensitivity measures the change in magnitude of CL at a given wavelength as a function of analyte RI. Greater amplitude sensitivity implies more energy transfer to the plasmonic mode, which is also useful in cancer detection since minor biomolecular changes lead to the change of RI. The As can be described using the following formula [18].

$$S_A(\lambda) = -\frac{1}{\alpha(\lambda, n_a)} \times \frac{\partial \alpha(\lambda, n_a)}{\partial n_a} [RIU^{-1}] \quad (6)$$

Resolution is determined as the tiniest detectable vary in refractive index that can be measured by the sensor. It is given by the ratio of the smallest detectable wavelength change to the wavelength sensitivity of sensor. A smaller value of resolution indicates better sensing capability. In cancer detection applications, higher resolution is required to detect the smallest changes in refractive index corresponding to abnormal cell structures. The resolution (R) of the proposed biosensor is given by the expression [19].

$$\text{Res}(\lambda) = \Delta n_a \times \frac{\Delta\lambda_{\text{min}}}{\Delta\lambda_{\text{peak}}} [RIU] \quad (7)$$

The FOM characterizes the entire sensor performance through a tradeoff between the sensitivity in wavelength and the sharpness in resonance curve. A higher FOM implies a narrower FWHM width and a stronger discriminating ability, which are important for exact determination of cancerous cell signatures. The enhancement of the TiO₂-Au interface and PCF structure

design can be directly related to the FOM optimization in the presented design.

$$\text{Figure of Merit} = \frac{S_\lambda}{\text{FWHM}} [RIU^{-1}] \quad (8)$$

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

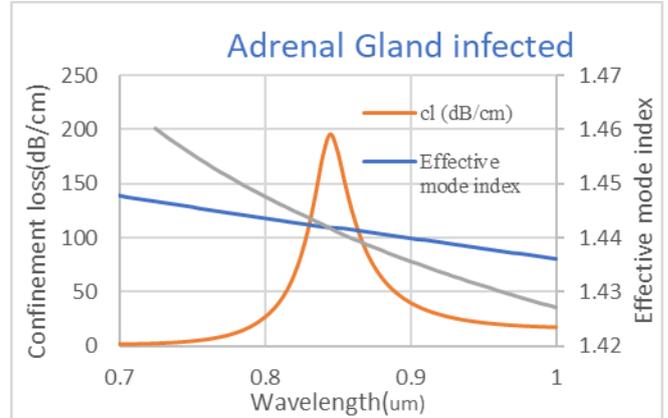


Fig. 3 Phase matching

We investigate the output of the suggested dual-core PCF-SPR biosensor for two cancers: Adrenal gland cancer (PC12 cells) and Skin cancer (Basal/Squamous cells). The sensor response is extracted by monitoring the confinement loss spectra for both normal and cancerous biomolecules. The results undoubtedly prove the strong excitation of surface plasmon resonance at Au/TiO₂ interface and show different resonance shifts due to the RI of bio-sample.

This graph shows the resonance condition for the infected skin cell, where the overlap of the effective indices of fundamental mode and Plasmon mode occurs at a wavelength of 955 nm. At this wavelength, the propagation loss also reaches its maximum value because of the increased energy transmit from fundamental mode to plasmon mode.

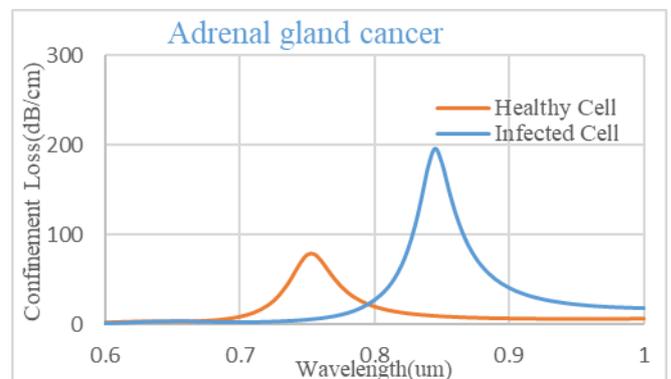


Fig.4 Wavelength shift of adrenal Gland Cancer

The Confinement Loss of normal and diseased adrenal gland cells are depicted in Fig.4. A substantial shift of the resonance wavelength for the infected case can be seen that validates strong RI-based coupling between the guided core mode and the plasmonic mode. The healthy cell results in a resonance at around 0.82 μm , while the infected cell yields a more pronounced and broader resonance around 0.95 μm , suggesting increased plasmonic absorption due to elevated analyte RI.

As a consequence of resonance shift, sensor sensitivity in terms of wavelength is 6428.57 nm/RIU, which indicates good spectral responses to small changes in RI. An addition of confinement loss with rise of the RI of the analyte is implied by the amplitude sensitivity of -978.13 RIU⁻¹. The calculated Rs of 1.5×10^{-4} RIU verifies that sensor is capable of detecting minute molecular alterations that are associated with adrenal cancer progression.

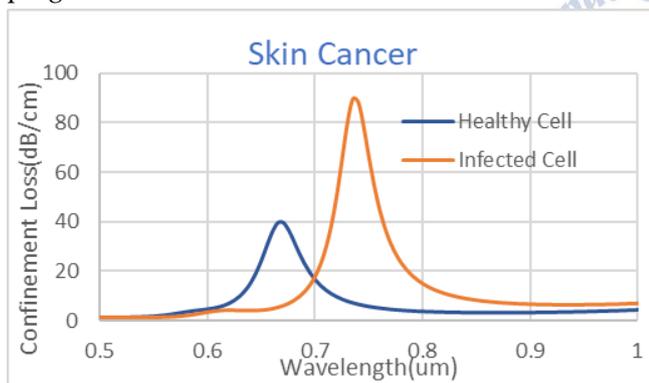


Fig.5 Wavelength shift of skin Cancer

The Figure 5 plots CL against wavelength for the healthy and infected skin layers. Similar to the adrenal case, the infected sample reveals a distinct redshift of the resonance peak from ~0.72 micrometer (healthy) to ~0.80 μm (infected). The infected cell peak intensity is much larger, which means there is stronger mode coupling caused by the larger real part of the refractive index of the cancerous skin tissue.

Suggested sensor has wavelength sensitivity 3250 nm/RIU which is much less than that of the adrenal gland detection but is still quite high for the monitoring of biological RI. The -592.27 RIU⁻¹ sensitivity corresponds to a uniform intensity change per unit RI increment.

The computed resolution of 3.07×10^{-4} RIU specifies that sensor can differentiate optical properties between normal and skin with cancer cells. More importantly, this sensor configuration possesses a high FOM of 65.00

which is the maximum among the two cases considered here, indicating that a sharper resonance and a stronger EM field will be obtained at the Au/TiO₂ interface.

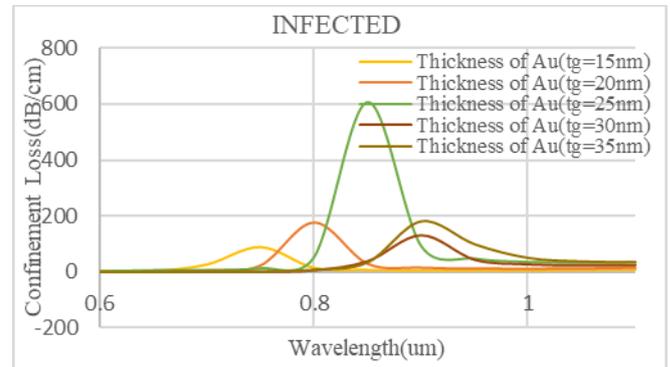


Fig.6 Dependence of confinement loss on gold layer thickness for adrenal gland cancer cells.

Figure 6 illustrates the effect of gold (Au) layer width on confinement loss spectrum of the preferred PCF-SPR biosensor for infected analyte. Gold thickness is varied from 15 nm to 35 nm to optimize plasmonic coupling. A pronounced resonance peak is observed at $t_g = 25$ nm, indicating maximum energy transfer between core mode and spp mode. Thinner Au layers result in weaker plasmon excitation due to insufficient electron density, while thicker layers reduce field penetration into the analyte, broadening resonance peak. Therefore, an optimized gold thickness is essential to achieve high sensitivity and strong SPR response.

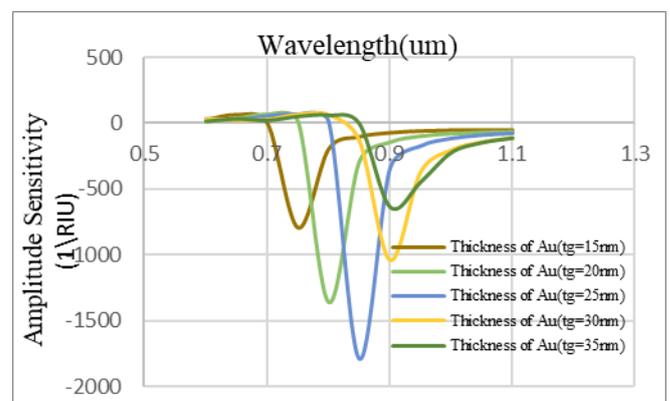


Fig. 7 Amplitude sensitivity as a function of Au layer thickness for infected PC12 cancer cells.

The figure 7 presents the variation of gold layer thickness on amplitude sensitivity of the suggested PCF-SPR biosensor. Strong negative peaks occur at resonance wavelengths, indicating efficient surface plasmon coupling. Among all cases, an Au thickness of 25 nm produces the deepest amplitude sensitivity dip, confirming optimal plasmonic excitation and maximum energy transfer. Thinner Au layers (15–20 nm) show weaker responses due to insufficient free electron density, while thicker layers (30–35 nm) reduce sensitivity because of increased metallic damping and limited evanescent-field penetration. Thus, 25 nm gold thickness provides the best sensing performance.

V. CONCLUSION

The simulated bilayer dual-core PCF-SPR biosensor with a Titanium dioxide/gold layer is highly sensitive for detecting normal and cancerous bio samples due to

changes in RI. The combined optimized circular analyte channel, multilayer plasmonic coating and enhanced dual-core mode coupling lead to strong SPR excitation with sharp confinement-loss peaks.

For the distinguish of adrenal gland cancer, the sensor exhibit a high wavelength sensitivity (6428.57 nm/RIU) and good detection resolution (1.5×10^{-4} RIU), which suggests a successful RI-dependent spectral discrimination. For skin cancer applications the sensor also demonstrates excellent FOM = (65 1/RIU) and good resonance separation which implies accurate and stable sensing.

In conclusion, the proposed PCF-SPR design could be a very reliable, compact and highly sensitive optical sensor for early cancer detection. The performance holds great promise to be incorporated in biomedical sensing, real-time cancer screening, and futuristic photonic diagnostic systems.

Table 3: Comparative Performance Analysis of the Proposed with Previously Reported Biosensors

Sensor	Cancerous cells	Ws (nm/RIU)	As (1/RIU)	Sr (RIU)	FOM (1/RIU)	References
Twin-core PCF SPR	PC12	3571.42	-2537.37	2.80×10^{-5}	-	[3]
	Basal cell	2500.00	-1611.02	4.00×10^{-5}	-	
C-shaped PCF SPR	PC12	1428.57	-489.66	7.00×10^{-5}	-	[22]
	Basal cell	1500.00	-447.97	6.70×10^{-5}	-	
Twin-core PCF SPR	PC12	4285.72	-750.443	2.33×10^{-5}	-	[6]
	Basal cell	3000.00	-360.236	3.33×10^{-5}	-	
Hexagonal PCF SPR	PC12	5714.29	-2361.97	1.75×10^{-5}	-	[20]
	Basal cell	3000.00	-1877.25	3.33×10^{-5}	-	
PCF-SPR	PC12	5500.00	-399	1.80×10^{-5}	-	[21]
	Basal cell	3150.00	-625	3.20×10^{-5}	-	
Twin-core PCF SPR	PC12	6428.57	-978.13	1.5×10^{-4}	142.85	Proposed work
	Basal cell	3250.00	-592.27	3.07×10^{-4}	65.00	

Conflict of interest statement

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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