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ANIMAL SOURCES OF HUMAN CAMPYLOBACTERIOSIS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Veterinary Public Health

At Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

FASIUDDIN AHMED

1999
This thesis is dedicated to the memory
Of
My Beloved Father
ABSTRACT

New Zealand has one of the highest reported rates of *Campylobacter* infections in humans in the developed world. It is the single largest notifiable disease in all regions of the country. Consumption of poultry meat has been widely implicated both overseas and in New Zealand as the main cause of human infections. The potential contribution of other animals especially cattle and sheep is less well known. The present study was undertaken to fill this gap in knowledge.

Faecal samples from 300 cattle and 158 sheep were collected from local abattoirs and farms plus 50 samples from the sheep slaughterhouse environment and examined for the presence of thermophilic *Campylobacter* spp. *Campylobacter* spp. were isolated from 45% of the cattle, 44% of the sheep and 56% of the environmental samples. *C. jejuni* and *C. hyointestinalis* were the predominating species isolated from cattle followed by *C. coli* and *C. lari*. In sheep and in environmental samples from the sheep abattoir *C. jejuni* was the only species isolated. The isolation rate and the species of *Campylobacter* varied between beef and dairy cattle, bull and heifer calves, age of the heifer calves, and time of the year. The high isolation rate of *Campylobacter* from the cattle, sheep and their environment strongly suggests the possibility of these microorganisms finding their way into milk and meat, as faecal contaminants at the farm and slaughter level. There is also the potential to contaminate the environment and water following disposal of abattoir effluents and run off from farms.

The species of the isolates from human diarrhoeal cases were found to be predominantly *C. jejuni* (95%) and *C. coli* (5%). Molecular typing of *C. jejuni* using *Sma* I generated pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (PFGE) profiles yielded 13 to 16 different patterns in the cattle, sheep and human isolates showing a large inter-species variation in the isolates even from the same sources. However, indistinguishable as well as closely related profiles (pulsotypes) were found across the isolates from cattle, sheep and humans. The results obtained from the PFGE typing strongly indicate that cattle and sheep may be important reservoirs of human campylobacter infections. It was also observed that a few closely related types mostly dominate the *C. jejuni* populations in
the host animal species. The possibility of faecal contamination from these animals at slaughter and thus *C. jejuni* entering the meat was studied.

Retail packs of beef (25), lamb (25) and chicken (50) mince purchased from local supermarkets were examined. A combined selective enrichment and PCR based method was evaluated to offer a rapid, sensitive and specific detection method for the identification of *C. jejuni* from meats. *C. jejuni* was detected by culture and PCR in 44% of the chicken, 16% of the lamb and 12% of the beef mince samples. These results lend credibility to our contention that faecal contamination of sheep and beef carcasses at slaughter has significant implications for food safety. The much higher rate of detection in chicken mince may be related to a higher prevalence of infection in chickens or to the method of processing which may facilitate spread between birds and/or between product.

The *C. jejuni* isolates from the animal and human sources were also examined for antibiotic resistance by the disc diffusion method to antibiotics commonly used for the treatment of campylobacter infections in humans. No resistance was detected in the cattle and sheep isolates. Two human isolates exhibited resistance to tetracycline with MICs of >128 µg/ml. All other human isolates were found susceptible to the antibiotics tested. The nil to negligible resistance detected in the animal and human isolates of *C. jejuni* suggest that it is not a major problem in New Zealand at the present time however, further work is required to examine the situation in more intensively farmed species and monitor any changes in human isolates over time.
Acknowledgements

I consider it a privilege to record my deepest sense of gratitude to Professor Colin Wilks for his generous support, constant encouragement and constructive counsel all along the course of investigation and preparation of this manuscript. I would also like to thank him for his genuine concern for my welfare.

I am indeed thankful to my co-supervisor Stan Fenwick for his help and guidance throughout my studies as well as to my other supervisors Per Madie and Alan Murray who have been so generous with their time.

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Thanks are also due to the team of microbiologists at the Palmerston North Medical laboratory who have provided the human isolates of Campylobacter and to Ayad Alkaissi at the Meat works in collection of samples from animals.

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# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction ........................................................................... 1
1.2 Objectives of this study .................................................. 5

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ........................................ 6

2.1 General characteristics of *Campylobacter* .................................. 6
2.2 Species of the genus *Campylobacter* ....................................... 6
2.3 Sources of infection for people ................................................ 7
2.4 Animal carriage of *Campylobacter* species .................................. 9
2.5 Milk and meat as sources of infection ......................................... 11
2.6 Isolation and identification of *Campylobacter* ............................. 13
   2.6.1 Isolation ........................................................................ 14
   2.6.2 Serotyping ..................................................................... 15
   2.6.3 Biotyping ...................................................................... 16
   2.6.4 Phagetyping ................................................................... 17
   2.6.5 Whole cell protein profiles ........................................... 17
   2.6.6 Plasmid profile analysis ............................................... 18
   2.6.7 Multilocus enzyme electrophoresis .................................... 18
2.6.8 Restriction endonuclease analysis .................................................. 19
2.6.9 Ribotyping .................................................................................... 20
2.6.10 Pulsed field gel electrophoresis .................................................. 21
2.6.11 Random amplified polymorphic DNA ......................................... 22
2.6.12 Polymerase chain reaction .......................................................... 24
2.6.13 Nucleic acid sequence based amplification ................................. 27
2.8 Antibiotic resistance among *Campylobacter* species ...................... 29

CHAPTER THREE: ISOLATION AND IDENTIFICATION OF
*Campylobacter* SPECIES FROM FAECES OF CATTLE, SHEEP AND
HUMANS .................................................................................................. 34

3.1 Introduction ...................................................................................... 34

3.2 Materials and methods ...................................................................... 36
  3.2.1 Sampling ...................................................................................... 36
  3.2.2 Human clinical isolates ............................................................... 37
  3.2.3 Isolation techniques .................................................................... 37

3.2.4 Identification of *Campylobacter* ................................................ 38
  3.2.4.1 Presumptive identification of intestinal thermophilic
          *Campylobacter* ......................................................................... 38
  3.2.4.2 Confirmative identification and species differentiation of the
          thermophilic *Campylobacter* .................................................. 39

3.3 Results ............................................................................................. 40
  3.3.1 Results of *Campylobacter* isolation from beef cattle ................. 40
  3.3.2 Results of *Campylobacter* isolation from dairy cattle ............... 41
  3.3.3 Results of *Campylobacter* isolation from heifer calves .............. 41
  3.3.4 Results of *Campylobacter* isolation from bull calves ............... 45
  3.3.5 Results of Campylobacter isolation from sheep ......................... 45
  3.5.6 Results of *Campylobacter* isolation from sheep environmental
          samples ....................................................................................... 45
  3.5.7 Results of identification of *Campylobacter* spp. from humans ...... 45

3.4 Discussion ......................................................................................... 46
CHAPTER FOUR: TYPING OF CAMPYLOBACTER JEJUNI ISOLATES FROM CATTLE, SHEEP AND HUMANS BY PULSED-FIELD GEL ELECTROPHORESIS (PFGE) ................................................................. 52

4.1 Introduction ......................................................................................... 52
4.2 Materials and Methods ........................................................................ 53
  4.2.1 Bacterial isolates ........................................................................... 53
  4.2.2 DNA preparation .......................................................................... 53
  4.2.3 Restriction endonuclease digestion of plug-incorporated DNA ...... 54
  4.2.4 Pulsed-field gel electrophoresis of digested DNA ...................... 55
  4.2.5 Interpretation of pulsed-field profiles ........................................ 56
4.3 Results ............................................................................................... 56
  4.3.1 Results of PFGE of C. jejuni strains isolated from cattle .......... 56
  4.3.2 Results of PFGE of C. jejuni strains isolated from sheep .......... 64
  4.3.3 Results of PFGE of C. jejuni strains isolated from humans ....... 64
  4.4.4 Comparison of the PFGE profiles of C. jejuni isolates from animal and human sources ................................................................. 64
4.4 Discussion .......................................................................................... 65

CHAPTER FIVE: ANTIMICROBIAL SUSCEPTIBILITY PATTERNS OF CAMPYLOBACTER JEJUNI ISOLATED FROM CATTLE, SHEEP AND HUMANS ........................................................................ 70

5.1 Introduction ........................................................................................... 70
5.2 Materials and Methods ......................................................................... 71
  5.2.1 Bacterial strains ........................................................................... 71
  5.2.2 Antibiotic susceptibility testing .................................................... 71
  5.2.3 Minimal inhibitory concentration ............................................... 72
5.3 Results .................................................................................................. 73
  5.3.1 Results of antimicrobial susceptibilities of human, cattle and sheep isolates .......................................................... 73
5.3.4 Results of determination of the minimal inhibitory concentrations of the resistant isolates ........................................... 73

5.5 Discussion ................................................................. 74

CHAPTER SIX: DEVELOPMENT OF POLYMERASE CHAIN REACTION FOR IDENTIFICATION OF CAMPYLOBACTER JEJUNI FROM MEAT SAMPLES ................................................................. 80

6.1 Introduction ................................................................. 80

6.2 Materials and Methods ................................................... 80

6.2.1 Oligonucleotide primer selection ........................................ 80

6.2.2 DNA extraction from bacteria ........................................... 81

6.2.2.1 DNA extraction based on proteinase-K digestion and phenol-chloroform purification ........................................... 81

6.2.2.2 DNA extraction by boiling method ........................................ 82

6.2.2.3 DNA extraction using QIAGEN DNA kit ........................................ 82

6.2.3 PCR reaction components ............................................... 83

6.2.3.1 Taq DNA polymerase system ............................................... 83

6.2.3.2 HotStarTaq DNA polymerase system ........................................ 83

6.2.4 Optimisation procedures ................................................ 83

6.2.4.1 Magnesium concentration ................................................ 83

6.2.4.2 Denaturation, annealing and extension times and temperature .... 83

6.2.4.3 Number of amplification cycles .......................................... 84

6.2.5 Standard PCR reaction components and conditions ................ 84

6.2.6 Specificity and sensitivity of the PCR .................................... 85

6.2.7 Generation and labelling of probe ........................................ 87

6.2.8 Validation and identity of 735 bp PCR product ....................... 87

6.2.9 PCR product analysis .................................................. 88

6.3 Results ........................................................................ 89

6.3.1 DNA extraction ......................................................... 89

6.3.2 Polymerase systems ..................................................... 89

6.3.3 Optimisation of PCR .................................................... 95
LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 3
3.1 Reported carriage rate of Campylobacter species in adult cattle in various countries ........................................ 35
3.2 Protocol used for the identification of thermophilic Campylobacter species ....................................................... 40
3.3 Showing the percentages of isolations of Campylobacter species from adult cattle, calves and sheep .......................... 42
3.4 Results of Sheep abattoir environment sampling ........................................................................................................ 43
3.5 Isolations of Campylobacters in different months in cattle ............................................................................................... 44

Chapter 4
4.1 Gel running parameters ................................................................................................................................................... 55
4.2 Types and pulsotypes of C.jejuni among 35 cattle isolates ............................................................................................... 57
4.3 Types and pulsotypes of C.jejuni among 50 sheep isolates .............................................................................................. 58
4.4 Types and pulsotypes of C.jejuni among 50 human isolates ............................................................................................ 59

Chapter 6
6.1 Bacterial species and sources of isolates used in the assessment of the PCR specificity and sensitivity ......................... 86

Chapter 7
7.1 Results of isolation of C. jejuni from different meat samples by culture and PCR ........................................................ 104
LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 4
4.1 Representative PFGE profiles of C. jejuni cattle isolates .......................... 60
4.2 Representative PFGE profiles of C. jejuni sheep isolates .......................... 61
4.3 Representative PFGE profiles of C. jejuni human isolates .......................... 62
4.4 Common PFGE profiles in humans, cattle and sheep isolates .................. 63

Chapter 5
5.1 PCR for Tet O gene in resistant C. jejuni isolates .................................. 75

Chapter 6
6.1 1.5% agarose gel with PCR products amplified by the AH 1
and AH2 primers using DNA extracted by different methods
from C. jejuni ................................................................. 90
6.2 1.5% agarose gels showing PCR products using the standard
Taq polymerase and HotStarTaq polymerase systems ............................... 91
6.3 Optimisation of magnesium concentration ............................................. 92
6.4 Sensitivity of the PCR using purified DNA .......................................... 93
6.5 Specificity of the PCR ............................................................... 94

Chapter 7
7.1 PCR of chicken mince ................................................................. 105
7.2 PCR of lamb mince ................................................................. 106
7.3 PCR of beef mince ................................................................. 107
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PFGE</td>
<td>Pulsed-field gel electrophoresis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCR</td>
<td>Polymerase chain reaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASBA</td>
<td>Nucleic acid sequence based amplification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCDA</td>
<td>Charcoal-cefoperazone-desoxycholate agar</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCVA</td>
<td>Campylobacter-cefoperazone-vancomycin amphotericin</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSM</td>
<td>Charcoal selective media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Heat stable</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Heat labile</td>
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<tr>
<td>FBP</td>
<td>Ferrous metabisulphite pyruvate medium</td>
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<td>OMP</td>
<td>Outer membrane protein</td>
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<td>Sodium dodecyl sulphate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis</td>
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<td>Restriction endonuclease analysis</td>
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<td>Ribonucleic acid</td>
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<tr>
<td>HACCP</td>
<td>Hazard analysis critical control point</td>
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<tr>
<td>RFLP</td>
<td>Restriction fragment length polymorphism</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERIC</td>
<td>Enterobacterial repetitive intergenic consensus</td>
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<td>RAPD</td>
<td>Random amplified polymorphic DNA</td>
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<tr>
<td>REP</td>
<td>Repetitive extragenic palindrome</td>
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<td>GBS</td>
<td>Guillain-Barre syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELGA</td>
<td>Enzyme linked gel assay</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBF</td>
<td>Campylobacter blood free agar</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSI</td>
<td>Triple sugar iron agar</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDTA</td>
<td>Ethylene diamine tetra acetic acid</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSA</td>
<td>Bovine serum albumin</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHEF</td>
<td>Contour clamped homogenous electric field</td>
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<td>Tris borate EDTA</td>
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<td>MIC</td>
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<td>Digoxigenin</td>
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<td>bp</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>