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**The role of extracellular polymeric substances in
Pseudomonas aeruginosa biofilm architecture**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Microbiology

at Massey University, Palmerston North

New Zealand.

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July, 2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First I would like to thank Allah, the most gracious the most beneficent, who blessed me with health, courage and strength so I could submit my dissertation.

I am very much thankful to my supervisor Prof. Bernd Rehm for his continuous support, encouragement and guidance. I found him a great mentor especially the way he has inculcated a new passion for research in me. I would like to quote the translation of a verse which the most famous Urdu poet, Dr. Muhammad Iqbal wrote for his teachers at Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich, Germany: "O God! What magic have you granted to the teachers, that they create pearls out of pebbles and stones."

I would like to thank my co-supervisor Dr. Zoe Jordens for her help from the day one I came to this Institute. From the very first paper I enrolled at Massey University to the last page I have written in my thesis, I have enjoyed her support and 'the' guidance (especially in correct usage of articles in my manuscripts).

Moreover, I will be very grateful to the teaching and supporting staff at the IMBS (now IFS) who have helped me during my PhD work. I must extend my personal thanks to Prof. Barry Scott, former head of the Institute, for his continuous support towards students. "Thank you very much Paul, Katrina, Cynthia, Ann and Pat, for being very much supportive and for patiently answering to my 'last minute requests'"

A special thanks to my workmates who have been very kind and helpful during my stay in the Bernd's Lab. I owe a special thanks to David, Fata, Zahid, Natalie and Iain for their invaluable suggestions during the process of writing.

I do not have words to show my love and thank to my Parents. I know how much they were missing me, but I am sure they will be happy for my achievement, which will bring some relief to the pain of me being away from them. I am very thankful to my wife for her love and moral support throughout our married life. Huge thanks to my brother Aaqil for his support to the family during 'bad patches' of our domestic economy. Thanks to my sister for her moral support and taking care of our parents in absences of me and my wife. Love to both of my cutest daughters who had to live without Papa for three years.

I feel indebted to all my friends here and in Pakistan for their moral and actual support. Thanks to Ibrar Ahmed for his tireless efforts in helping me in the process of editing the final drafts. I am thankful to my flatmates/ friends Hamid, Faisal and Islah for being supportive and kind, especially during the last phase in my thesis writing.

Last but not least, I am very grateful to the Higher Education Commission (HEC), Government of Pakistan for financing me in terms of the scholarship to pursue my doctoral studies at Massey University. Thanks to my parent institute University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Lahore, for granting me study leave to complete my PhD.

In short, I would like to thank all my well-wishers who believed in me when I ceased to believe in myself.

ABSTRACT

Pseudomonas aeruginosa is an opportunistic pathogen. It causes chronic lung infections in the cystic fibrosis patients. These infections become highly resistant to antibacterial treatments. Bacteria develop this resistance because they become protected inside biofilms. Biofilms are microbial communities enmeshed in a partially self-produced and partially recruited, impregnable extracellular matrix. The matrix is composed of extracellular DNA, proteins, lipids and exopolysaccharides. The exopolysaccharides play an imperative role in architecture of the biofilm matrix. *P. aeruginosa* produces three distinct exopolysaccharides; Psl, Pel and alginate. In this study, non-mucoid strain PAO1 and mucoid (producing excessive alginate) strain PDO300 of *P. aeruginosa* were used to generate mutants deficient in one or more exopolysaccharides. Role of these three exopolysaccharides in biofilm formation was investigated. Results showed that the absence of alginate altered the architecture of biofilms in PDO300 as well as in PAO1, when compared to biofilms formed by the respective parent strains. Psl was found indispensable for mushroom-like shape of the biofilms in both strains. Pel was required for the compactness of the biofilms, but PAO1 formed mushroom-like structures even in the absence of Pel. However, Pel-deficient PDO300 did not form mature biofilm, suggesting differential role of Pel in the two strains. Psl-only as well as Pel-only, producing mutants were able to form multilayer biofilm. Production of one type of exopolysaccharide appeared to influence production of the other types of exopolysaccharide. Psl-deficient mutants increased the production of Pel, while Pel-deficient mutants showed a ten-fold increase in the production of alginate. Furthermore, absence of negatively charged alginate in the biofilm was compensated by eDNA. Regulation of exopolysaccharide biosynthesis operons showed a high expression of *psl* operon in PAO1, whereas its expression in PDO300 was surprisingly low and confined to a few cells near the base. A high and uniform expression of the *algD* operon in PDO300 was observed at all times during biofilm development. A low expression of *algD* operon was also detected in PAO1. Expression of the *pel* operon was confined to the stalk of PDO300 and PAO1. The role of PelF, the only glycosyltransferase encoded by *pel* operon, in Pel biosynthesis was investigated and found to be a soluble glycosyltransferase which uses UDP-glucose towards Pel biosynthesis. Site directed mutagenesis revealed that conserved R-325 and K-330 were essential for the PelF activity.

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