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Aetiology and consequences of reproductive tract diseases in dairy cows

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

at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand

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2014

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Abstract

Reproductive tract diseases of dairy cows are common world-wide and results in a decrease in reproductive performance. The research presented in this thesis evaluates the available diagnostic methods for reproductive tract diseases, including the quality of published reports describing these methods in dairy cows. To improve the accuracy of cow-side diagnostic tests for reproductive tract diseases more research is needed, specifically to establish optimal cut-points, timing of examination and test variability (i.e. intra- and interobserver agreement). Moreover, future manuscripts reporting on diagnostic methods for reproductive tract diseases could be improved by using checklists for quality of design and reporting as a guideline.

Research was also done to assess the presence of intrauterine bacteria in early postpartum New Zealand dairy cows and their association with the subsequent reproductive tract infection, inflammation and reproductive performance. The isolation of intrauterine bacteria, irrespective of type, at 23 days postpartum was associated with a decrease in pregnancy within three weeks for the start of the seasonal breeding programme (planned start of mating; PSM; $P = 0.05$). *Escherichia coli* isolated at 23 days postpartum tended to increase the time to pregnancy ($P = 0.09$). However, the presence of *E. coli* within the first week postpartum was not significantly associated with isolation of *Trueperella pyogenes* three weeks later ($P = 0.53$). An interesting finding was the positive association between the elevated recruitment of polymorphonuclear cells in the early postpartum period and a decreased time to pregnancy ($P = 0.05$).

Susceptibility data, based on minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC), was generated for a range of antimicrobials against *E. coli* and *T. pyogenes* from intrauterine origin. Between-herd and between age-

group differences in MIC were detected ($P \leq 0.05$). Cows diagnosed with intrauterine *E. coli* with an MIC of ≥ 8 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ at 23 days postpartum tended to be at lower risk of pregnancy within six weeks of PSM relative to an MIC of < 8 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ ($P = 0.09$). No interpretative criteria are available for MIC data of antimicrobials against uterine isolates. Hence, more research is required on pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic profiles for veterinary antimicrobials.

This thesis describes the first isolation of apparent antibodies to bovine herpesvirus type 4 and the DNA of bovine lymphotropic herpesvirus in New Zealand dairy cattle, both of which may play an important role in the pathogenesis of reproductive tract diseases. Further studies are required to investigate the true impact of these viruses.

The research presented in this thesis provided data useful for further improvement of diagnosis and treatment of reproductive tract diseases in dairy cows.

Acknowledgements

As I'm sitting here surrounded by piles of paper collected over the last number of years, notes, draft versions of manuscripts, and multiple printouts of peer-reviewed manuscripts I'm reflecting on the last few years that have been entirely dedicated towards the creation of this thesis. Returning to New Zealand to start this PhD project was life-changing in many ways. I am pleased to have this opportunity to thank a large number of people. Without them this demanding journey would have been an ordeal.

Foremost, I would like to sincerely thank Scott McDougall, who I call my main supervisor. Scott brought me back to New Zealand and gave me the opportunity to do this PhD. His energetic drive and (positive) pressure to meet deadlines were detrimental to normal working hours but kept me going. His efforts and extensive knowledge obviously assisted greatly with the completion of this thesis. Scott, thank you for everything; I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to work with you. Cord Heuer, who I call my chief supervisor, and Bryce Buddle, who I call my micro(biology) supervisor, completed my supervisory team. Although Bryce's hope to turn me into a full-time laboratory-based microbiologist probably quickly vanished, hopefully I did not disappoint him too much. Bryce, your knowledge and scientific views, even though you are very modest about that, were of great help. Cord had the joyful task of educating me the world of statistics. This was initially nearly impossible, as at first I enrolled into the EpiCentre's advanced statistical course ('821') before the beginner courses ('720' and '721'). Cord, while this totally freaked me out, I am convinced that you did your very best. Together with Cord, I have to thank Hilli for all dinner invitations when visiting Palmerston North. Hilli, you are an amazing cook!

There were also 'unofficial supervisors' to whom I owe gratitude. With regards to microbiology part of this thesis, Hassan Hussein and Tao Zheng were enthusiastic and knowledgeable tutors. All discussions

we had were very helpful in giving me the confidence to do all the laboratory work. It is much appreciated to have worked alongside each of you. That Stephen LeBlanc was going to do his sabbatical in New Zealand was exciting news and his timing of arrival was impeccable. Stephen assisted with some sample collection at the time that I was absolutely exhausted. Additionally, the many discussions about reproductive tract diseases and life in general were fantastic. Stephen's input into this thesis was well beyond expectations and greatly appreciated. Stephen, thank you very much.

I would also like to express my gratitude to all co-authors of the systematic review (Chapter 2 of this thesis): Scott and Stephen, as mentioned above, but also Jocelyn Dubuc, Susanne Meier, Wolfgang Heuwieser, Sebastian Arlt, and Robert Gilbert. It turned out to be a truly big project with input from everybody involved. As one of you described it once to me: "Thanks for this revisit of grad school. My fault." Thank you all for your patience and help.

Funding is instrumental for any kind of research. The primary financial support was provided by Cognosco, the research subsidiary of Anexa Animal Health (formerly known as Animal Health Centre). Additional funding, in alphabetical order, came from AgResearch, Hopkirk Research Institute, Bayer New Zealand Ltd, Animal Health, New Zealand dairy farmers through DairyNZ, Pfizer Animal Health NZ LTD and Pfizer VMRD. Support from all funders is greatly appreciated.

Anexa Animal Health and its staff are acknowledged for their support and putting up with me. In particular staff at Cognosco. A special thank you is for Sébastien Hudault. Séb's assistance with sample collection went well beyond expectations. Without any animal handling experience, you learned very quickly. You were well organised and your work ethics were remarkable! Jaimie Hunnam, thank you for all your support, feedback on manuscripts drafts, sushi lunches, hugs during trying times, and probably more. Conversely, your timing of getting pregnant was poor, very poor...how could you?! Lucky the end result was worth it. Tom Brownlie, while at Anexa and thereafter, thank you for all your advice on how

to deal with supervisors and academic processes. Raglan was a true safe haven! We have done it! Chris Compton is acknowledged for his input behind the scenes. It was good to hear things from a slightly different perspective. Good luck with your PhD, a brave decision. Cathy Yanez, Jo Niethammer, Elizabeth Blythe, Amanda Hallett, and Laura Clausen, you girls rock! Thanks. All Anexa farmers and their staff participating in my studies are acknowledged with thanks for their enormous help and flexibility.

IT support and database creation was primarily from Andy Taylor. Your SQL input and work ethics were incredible. Thank you for all last minute work and some very late hours to help me achieve deadlines. Alongside Andy were Ian Potts and Simon Verschaffelt for further computer support. What would the world do without you guys?

The first contact with conducting research was during my final years of Vet School. In my opinion, Utrecht University was very progressive in accommodating students to spend three months on a small research project and it is encouraging that other vet schools now have similar concepts in their curriculum. I was fortunate to be able to do two projects. The choice of pursuing a PhD after working in clinical veterinary practice was greatly influenced by Herman Barkema, Ryan O'Handley, Fabienne Uehlinger, and in particular Wendela Wapenaar. Wen, I thought I knew how tough it was...now I know.

This project would not have been feasible without the many friends, old and new, in New Zealand and overseas. Thank you for putting up with me and your understanding, or often not: What is it you are doing? Why? Some of you literally put me in your house, from a bed for a night up to an extended house sitting stay: Thank you, Bryce and Noelle, Katie and Mike, Chris and Jane, Tom, Jo and Chris, Steve and Nenita, Scott and Fiona, Debbie, Cate, Jacky, Cord and Hilli, Nelly and Séb. However, special thanks are for Annie Watts. Annie, you are an amazing lady! I cannot express my gratitude towards you in any way that would cover what you have done for me. When moving overseas away from family, some become

like family. Annie of course is one of them. Nick and Johanna, and Jan and Dorine are part of that as well. To all friends, there will be more time to catch up again! Looking forward to that!

Above all, and as always, my profoundest thanks goes to my family, including she who knows but doesn't want to be named here. It's not always easy to live on the other side of the world, but she makes life a lot better!

Abbreviations

AI	Artificial insemination
BCS	Body condition score
BHBA	β -hydroxybutyric acid
BHI	Brain heart infusion
BLAST	Basic local alignment search tool
BLHV	Bovine lymphotropic herpesvirus
BoHV-4	Bovine herpesvirus type 4
bp	Base pair
BUN	Blood urea nitrogen
CCFA	Ceftiofur crystalline free acid
CFU	Colony forming unit
CL	Corpus luteum
CLSI	Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute
DIM	Days in milk
ELISA	Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay
EnPEC	Endometrial pathogenic <i>Escherichia coli</i>
EUCAST	European Committee on Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing
MAC	Macrophages
MIC	Minimum inhibitory concentration
MIC ₅₀	The antimicrobial concentration that inhibits 50% of the bacterial isolates
MIC ₉₀	The antimicrobial concentration that inhibits 90% of the bacterial isolates

NEFA	Non-esterified fatty acid
OD	Optical densities
ONPG	An enzymatic test for Ortho-nitrophenyl- β -galactosidase
OUMI	ONPG, urase, motility, indol agar tests
PBMC	Peripheral blood mononuclear cells
PGE ₂	Prostaglandin E ₂
PGF _{2α}	Prostaglandin F _{2α}
PMN	Polymorphonuclear cells
PSM	Planned start of mating (the seasonal start of the breeding season)
PVD	Purulent vaginal discharge
RFM	Retained foetal membranes
ROC	Receiver-operating characteristic analysis
Se	Sensitivity (the proportion of diseased animals that test positive)
Sp	Specificity (the proportion of non-diseased animals that test negative)
TAGS	Tests in absence of a gold standard
TSI	Triple sugar iron agar test
VDS	Vaginal discharge score

List of publications

2014

MW de Boer, SJ LeBlanc, J Dubuc, S Meier, W Heuwieser, S Arlt, RO Gilbert, S McDougall. 2014. *Invited review*: Systematic review of diagnostic tests for reproductive-tract infection and inflammation in dairy cows. *Journal of Dairy Science* 97:3983-3999.

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MW de Boer, T Zheng, BM Buddle, S McDougall. 2014. Detection of bovine herpesvirus type 4 (BoHV-4) antibodies and bovine lymphotropic herpesvirus (BLHV) in New Zealand dairy cows. *Proceedings of the XXVIII World Buiatrics Congress 2014 Cairns, Australia, in press.*

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