



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***ASSESSMENT OF PATHOGENICITY OF COMMUNITY-ACQUIRED
METHICILLIN-RESISTANT *Staphylococcus aureus* ISOLATES IN
PERITONITIS-INDUCED MICE***

NUR IZZATIE BINTI ZULKIFLEE

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By

NUR IZZATIE BINTI ZULKIFLEE

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti
Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science**

July 2019

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
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July 2019

Chair : Seri Narti Edayu Sarchio, PhD
Faculty : Medicine and Health Sciences

Staphylococcus aureus strain with distinct genetic backgrounds may exhibit different virulence in animal models as well as associations with different clinical outcomes. Methicillin-Resistant *S. aureus* (MRSA) is known to be more problematic as it cannot be treated with common antibiotics. Traditionally, MRSA infections have been limited to hospitals and predisposed immune-compromised individuals. Recently, MRSA infections have been reported to occur outside of hospital setting. There has been an alarming increase in the incidence of Community-Acquired MRSA (CA-MRSA) infections. CA-MRSA can be a serious threat to public health, which spreads in community. In addition, the present of Panton-Valentine Leucocidin (PVL), pore-forming gene, has also been reported to be epidemiologically associated with CA-MRSA and may cause aggressive infections. Peritonitis is one of the results of *S. aureus* infection which caused potentially fatal inflammation of the peritoneum. *S. aureus* contributed for the greatest number of positive peritonitis cultures from patients with continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis and end-stage renal disease. Since the presence of CA-MRSA is continuously emerging, it is important to continue monitoring the distribution pattern and the pathogenic status of CA-MRSA in the community. In this study, the pathogenicity of CA-MRSA isolates were assessed using *in vivo* model of peritonitis with comparison to a clinical isolate, ATCC 700699 MRSA (ATCC-MRSA). Two different CA-MRSA isolates (CA-MRSA1 and CA-MRSA2) were previously isolated from a healthy population were studied. Mice were assigned into 4 groups and intraperitoneally injected with 200 μ l of 10^9 CFU/ml of ATCC-MRSA, CA-MRSA1 and CA-MRSA2, respectively. Control group was injected with sterile DPBS. After inoculation, mice were observed twice daily until 72 hours post-infection and any distress signs were recorded. Mice were euthanized at 72 hours post-inoculation or had severe symptoms. Interested organs and peritoneal lavage were collected for bacterial load and

histopathological analysis. All mice inoculated with MRSA showed clear signs of illness and developed symptoms of peritonitis ($p < 0.001$). In addition, CA-MRSA caused significant mortality rate and higher Peritonitis Severity Scoring (PSS) scores compared to un-infected mice, but comparable to reference isolate, ATCC-MRSA, with 80% and 100% of mortality recorded in CA-MRSA2 and CA-MRSA1, respectively. There is no significant difference in mortality rate between CA-MRSA and ATCC-MRSA-infected mice. Bacterial count in liver, lung and spleen tissues isolated from CA-MRSA-infected mice were comparable to ATCC-MRSA group. Although it was not statistically different, CA-MRSA2 showed slightly higher bacterial counts compared to CA-MRSA1 and ATCC-MRSA in culture samples. In addition, histopathological comparison had showed mild increase in various indicators including inflammation, necrosis, edema, and haemorrhage, in tissue samples isolated from all MRSA-infected groups. Tissues isolated from CA-MRSA- and ATCC-MRSA-infected mice showed consistent histopathological scores. Abscess was only observed in CA-MRSA2 tissues samples. These results indicate that nasal carriage CA-MRSA isolated from a healthy population has potential to cause peritonitis, with comparable severity as clinical isolate, ATCC-MRSA. Together, information obtained from this study provide new insight on the virulence status of MRSA nasal carriage isolates. Without appropriate intervention, CA-MRSA is likely to be a continuous threat to public health for the foreseeable future. Thus, it is important to ensure consistent practices are adopted towards early diagnosis, appropriate intervention and widespread surveillance to increase awareness that needed in terms of information or education on the risks, management and treatment of MRSA.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

PENILAIAN KEPATOGENAN CA-MRSA PADA TIKUS TERINDUKSI DENGAN PERITONITIS

Oleh

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Strain *S. aureus* yang berbeza latar belakang genetik boleh mempengaruhi tahap virulen dan hasil klinikal di dalam model haiwan. MRSA dikenali sebagai bakteria yang merbahaya kerana ia tidak boleh dirawat dengan antibiotik biasa. Umumnya, jangkitan MRSA adalah terhad di hospital dan individu-individu dengan sistem imun yang lemah. Kini jangkitan MRSA telah dilaporkan berlaku di luar hospital. Terdapat peningkatan jangkitan CA-MRSA yang membimbangkan dan ini boleh menjadi ancaman serius kepada kesihatan orang awam, sekiranya ia merebak di kalangan komuniti. Di samping itu, kehadiran Panton-Valentine Leucocidin (PVL), iaitu gen yang membentuk liang, dilaporkan berkait secara epidemiologi dengan CA-MRSA dan menyumbang kepada jangkitan yang agresif. Peritonitis adalah salah satu akibat daripada jangkitan *S. aureus* yang boleh menyebabkan keradangan peritoneum pembawa maut. *S. aureus* menyumbang kepada sejumlah besar kultur positif peritonitis daripada pesakit yang menjalani dialisis peritoneal berterusan dan pesakit buah pinggang tahap akhir. Oleh kerana terdapat peningkatan jangkitan CA-MRSA, adalah penting untuk terus memantau pola taburan dan status patogenik CA-MRSA di kalangan masyarakat. Dalam kajian ini, keupayaan patogenisiti dan kelangsungan hidup CA-MRSA dinilai menggunakan model tikus peritonitis, dibandingkan dengan isolat klinikal, ATCC 700699 MRSA (ATCC-MRSA). Dua isolat CA-MRSA: CA-MRSA1 dan CA-MRSA2, yang sebelum ini telah dipencil daripada populasi sihat akan dikaji. Mencit dibahagikan kepada 4 kumpulan, dan disuntik secara intraperitoneal dengan 200 μL 10^9 CFU/mL ATCC-MRSA, CA-MRSA1 dan CA-MRSA2. Kumpulan kawalan disuntik dengan DPBS steril. Selepas inokulasi, mencit dipantau dua kali sehari selama 72 jam selepas jangkitan, dan sebarang tanda-tanda peritonitis dicatatkan untuk skor tahap ketetapan dan analisis survival. Mencit dieuthanasia 72 jam selepas jangkitan atau sekiranya tenat. Sampel tisu dan cecair peritoneum diambil dan diproses untuk kiraan bakteria, dan skor histopatologi. Semua mencit yang disuntik dengan MRSA menunjukkan tanda-tanda penyakit dan gejala peritonitis yang ketara

($p < 0.001$). Selain itu, CA-MRSA turut menyebabkan kematian yang signifikan dan skor PSS yang lebih tinggi berbanding mencit yang tidak dijangkiti, iaitu setara dengan ATCC-MRSA, yakni 80% dan 100% kematian direkodkan di CA-MRSA2 dan CA-MRSA1, setiap satu. Namun, tiada perbezaan signifikan pada kadar kematian di antara mencit yang dijangkiti CA-MRSA dan ATCC-MRSA. Jumlah kiraan bakteria pada sampel hati, limpa dan peparu mencit yang dijangkiti CA-MRSA juga adalah setara dengan ATCC-MRSA. Walaupun tidak berbeza secara statistik, CA-MRSA2 menunjukkan jumlah bakteria yang sedikit tinggi berbanding CA-MRSA1 dan ATCC-MRSA. Di samping itu, perbandingan histopatologi pada sampel tisu yang diambil dari semua mencit yang dijangkiti MRSA menunjukkan sedikit peningkatan pada tahap keradangan, nekrosis, edema, dan pendarahan. Tisu dari mencit yang dijangkiti CA-MRSA dan ATCC-MRSA menunjukkan skor histopatologi yang sepadan. Abses pula hanya dilihat dalam sampel tisu CA-MRSA2. Keputusan ini menunjukkan bahawa CA-MRSA yang diisolasi dari hidung pembawa sihat berpotensi menyebabkan peritonitis setanding isolat klinikal, ATCC-MRSA. Keseluruhannya, maklumat yang diperolehi dari kajian ini memberikan pandangan baharu tentang status kepatogenan MRSA di kalangan pembawa. Tanpa sebarang alternatif serta usaha yang sewajarnya, CA-MRSA berpotensi untuk kekal menjadi ancaman kepada kesihatan dan komuniti awam pada masa akan datang. Oleh itu, adalah penting untuk memastikan amalan yang konsisten diterapkan terhadap diagnosis awal, langkah-langkah kawalan dan pengawasan yang meluas bagi meningkatkan tahap kesedaran seperti perkongsian maklumat atau pendidikan yang berkaitan dengan risiko, pengurusan dan rawatan MRSA.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATCC	American Type Culture Collection
CLSI	Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute
mg	Milligram
MHA	Mueller-Hinton Agar
MIC	Minimum Inhibitory Concentration
min	Minute
ml	Millilitre
mM	Millimol
mm	Millimetre
MSA	Mannitol Salt Agar
RPM	Revolutions Per Minute
sec	Seconds
°C	Degree celcius
µL	Microlitre
CA-MRSA	Community-Acquired Methicillin Resistant <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>
HA-MRSA	Hospital-Acquired Methicillin Resistant <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>
CFU	Colony Forming Units
LB broth	Luria-Bertani broth
O.D.	Optical Density
PBS	Phosphate Buffered Saline
TSA	Tryptic Soy Agar
ATCC-MRSA	ATCC-Methicillin Resistant <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>
CDC	Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
PVL	Panton-Valentine Leukocidin
PD	Peritoneal Dialysis
ECM	Extracellular Matrix
SCC _{mec}	Staphylococcal Cassette Chromosome
MLST	Multi-Locus Sequence Typing
TSST-1	Toxin-1
SEA-E	Staphylococcal Enterotoxins
TH	T Helper Cells
BSI	Bloodstream Infections
SSIs	Surgical Site Infections
RNA	Ribonucleic Acid
i.v.	Intravenous
i.p.	Intraperitoneal
TSB	Tryptic Soy Broth
NaCl	Sodium Chloride
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
IACUC	Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
PSS	Peritonitis Severity Scoring
CLSI	The Clinical & Laboratory Standards Institute
PBPP2a	Penicillin Binding Protein
BCPFTs	Bicomponent Pore Forming Toxins

KC	Kupffer Cells
HACP	Healthcare-Associated Pneumonia
HAP	Hospital-Acquired Pneumonia
VAP	Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia
ELISA	Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay
IgG	Immunoglobulin G
PMNs	Polymorphonuclear Cells



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Staphylococcus aureus is known as commensal pathogen which colonizes of the human anterior nares. About 20–30% of individual are persistent carriers of *S. aureus*, whereas 30% are intermittent carriers which are colonized transiently, and the rest of the population are never colonized (Plata et al., 2009; Ryu et al., 2014). *S. aureus* nasal carriage is a risk factor for infection in human. *S. aureus* has been an important human pathogen throughout history and is currently a leading cause of bacterial infections worldwide.

S. aureus infections are ranging from minor skin infection, severe abscesses to life-threatening endocarditis and sepsis. Methicillin-resistant *S. aureus* (MRSA) represents big threat to the public health system. It is notorious as the prime cause of hospital-associated infections. MRSA is more problematic than other type of *Staphylococcus* because it cannot be treated with common antibiotics, including methicillin (Batabyal et al., 2012). In fact, *Staphylococcus* bacteria only become a problem when they cause infection. Traditionally, MRSA infections have been limited to hospitals and predisposed immune-compromised individuals. However, MRSA infections have recently been reported to occur outside of hospital settings (Chambers, 2001). There has been an alarming increase in the incidence of community-acquired MRSA (CA-MRSA) infections, and its prevalence has continued to increase (Ryu et al., 2014). CA-MRSA is defined as MRSA isolated from outpatients with no history of hospitalization within the past 1 year, and who presented no other established risk factors for MRSA infection, such as surgery, residence in a long-term care facility, dialysis, or indwelling percutaneous medical devices or catheters (Yamamoto et al., 2010). In addition, CA-MRSA is classified as an epidemic and a serious threat to public health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in their report from the National Nosocomial Infections Surveillance conducted in 2004, the prevalence of MRSA in outpatient settings is 31.1% among all *S. aureus* isolates, and most of those MRSA cases were community-associated (Amiry, 2015).

However, the basis for the apparent increased virulence of CA-MRSA strain is incompletely understood. Many factors have been proposed to contribute to the success of CA-MRSA as a pathogen including increased fitness, improved

evasion of the host immune system, and unique toxins production. One of the factors is the present of Panton-Valentine Leukocidin (PVL) genes, a pore-forming toxin that has been epidemiologically associated with CA-MRSA infections (Correa-Jiménez et al., 2016). In addition, PVL is usually absent in hospital-acquired MRSA (HA-MRSA) strains, and are more common in CA-MRSA compared to CA-MSSA (methicillin-susceptible *S. aureus*) isolates with a prove of a recent molecular study showed the presence of PVL in almost all of the CA-MRSA strain (Kim & Park., 2014).

1.2 Problem Statement

Peritonitis that is caused by *S. aureus* is a serious complication of peritoneal dialysis (PD), and commonly occurred due to technique failure (Li et al., 2010). Peritonitis causes damage to the peritoneal membrane, impairing ultrafiltration and therapy adaptation, which may be a temporary or permanent condition (Figueiredo et al., 2013). It is reported that peritonitis resulted in about 18% of the infection-related mortality in PD patients; with *S. aureus* contributed to the greatest number of positive peritonitis cultures in healthcare setting (Battelino et al., 2013). *S. aureus* has been identified as the most frequent pathogens isolated within the inflamed peritoneal catheter exit-site (ES) in patients who is undergoing PD. Furthermore, the presence of nasal carriage *S. aureus* increases the likelihood of ES infections, and its eradication with local antibiotics decrease infectious catheter complication (Kreft et al., 2001). This is consistent with the report that nasal carriers of *S. aureus* has an increased risk of acquiring an infection with this pathogen (Tong et al., 2015).

Recently, in Malaysia, peritonitis is one of the major causes of death among PD patients, as the median peritonitis rate in Malaysia was 1 in 38.2 patient-months in 2009 and 1 in 40.5 patient-months in 2013. The total death rate from peritonitis from 2009 to 2013 was 20.3%. Thus, studies have identified several risk factors associated with PD-related peritonitis. They have found that *S. aureus* is the highest risk factor of peritonitis (Ong et al., 2017). This prevalence showed that *S. aureus* is highly potential in causing peritonitis. In addition, Szeto et al. (2007) suggested that the overall clinical outcome of *S. aureus* peritonitis is not encouraging as they found only 51% of patients with MSSA peritonitis and 46% with MRSA peritonitis had complete cure without need for catheter removal, relapse, or recurrent or repeat peritonitis. Besides, *S. aureus* peritonitis developed in approximately one third of the patients with complete prevention. They reported that more than half of the peritonitis occurred within 3 months after completion of antibiotics. Apart from that, Govindarajulu et al. (2010), showed that MRSA peritonitis was independently predictive of an increased risk of permanent hemodialysis transfer and tended to be associated with a high risk of hospitalization.

In recent years, there is an alarming increase in the rate of *S. aureus* carriage in the community. At the same time, the emergence of CA-MRSA also increase the burden in association with infection, with a high incidence of CA-MRSA reported in both children and adult populations (David et al., 2010). As the number of patients with CA-MRSA infection increase, the risks of inappropriate antimicrobial treatment, subsequently treatment failure, and death are also increase (Rasmussen et al., 2011). Patients diagnosed with CA-MRSA infection usually lacked of risk factors compared to patients infected by HA-MRSA (Rasmussen et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2006). It was reported that CA-MRSA composed of more-diverse clonal groups, with higher potential in transmission and virulence than HA-MRSA (Choo, 2017; Huang et al., 2006; Green et al., 2010). Recent study has documented that CA-MRSA clones have replaced classic HA-MRSA clones in many countries (Choo, 2017). While HA-MRSA possess *SCCmec* I, II and III (Kumari et al., 2016), CA-MRSA usually carries *SCCmec* type IV, V or VI (Huang et al., 2006; Green et al., 2010) along with gene for Panton-Valentine Leukocidin (PVL) production. However, little is known about the virulence status of CA-MRSA isolate, and the determinants of the carrier state are yet to be understood.

1.3 Significance of Study

It was reported that the total death rate due to peritonitis between 2009 and 2013 in Malaysia was about 20.3%, with *S. aureus* identified as the highest risk factor and the most common cause of peritonitis (Ong et al., 2017; Baretti et al., 2012). While MRSA-peritonitis was independently predictive of an increased risk of permanent hemodialysis transfer, and tended to be associated with a high risk of hospitalization (Govindarajulu et al., 2010), the basis for the apparent increased virulence of CA-MRSA strain from a healthy population that has potential to cause peritonitis is incompletely understood (Gordon and Lowy., 2008). CA-MRSA is most likely to be a continuous threat to public health, and people are exposed to this potential threat in daily basis. This is a worrying situation because a single positive nose culture increases the risk for *S. aureus* peritonitis (Piraino et al., 1993; Wanten et al., 1996). Thus, it is important to continue monitoring the distribution pattern and the pathogenic status of CA-MRSA in the community. To assess the virulence status of CA-MRSA nasal carriage isolated from a healthy population, we compared the pathogenicity, the survival rate and the severity of peritonitis symptoms in mice infected with CA-MRSA isolates to the reference isolate, ATCC 700699 MRSA (ATCC-MRSA), using a mice model peritonitis.

1.4 Hypothesis

In Malaysia, peritonitis is one of the major causes of death among PD patients, the median peritonitis rate in Malaysia was 1 in 38.2 patient-months in 2009 and 1 in 40.5 patient-months in 2013, which caused 20.3% of death (Ong et al., 2017). According to Aktas et al. (2011) the rate of *S. aureus* carriers in the PD patient in hospital setting is the highest among the other dialysis, and MRSA-peritonitis was independently predictive of an increased risk of permanent haemodialysis (Govindarajulu et al., 2010). Nevertheless, it was recently reported that the clinical sequelae of PVL+ *S. aureus* infections tend to be more severe than PVL- *S. aureus* infections (Lo et al., 2010; Ma et al., 2012), in which typically associated with CA-MRSA (Ma et al., 2012). Thus, it is hypothesized that CA-MRSA is most likely to have comparable virulence status as HA-MRSA.

1.5 Objective

1.5.1 General Objective

To assess the pathogenicity of nasal carriage of CA-MRSA isolates in peritonitis-induced mice.

1.5.2 Specific Objective

- a) To evaluate the survival rate and the peritonitis severity scoring (PSS) of CA-MRSA isolates in peritonitis-induced animal.
- b) To assess the bacterial load in peritoneal fluid, blood and organs of interest post-intraperitoneal injection with CA-MRSA isolates.
- c) To identify histopathological changes of several organs of interest post-intraperitoneal injection with CA-MRSA isolates.

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Nur Izzatie Binti Zulkiflee was born on 14th September 1991 in Melaka, Malaysia. She is the eldest in the family. She received her primary education at Sekolah Kebangsaan Batu Berendam, Melaka in 1998 until 2003. Upon completion her secondary education programme at Maktab Rendah Sains MARA (MRSM) Batu Pahat, Johor in 2008, she attended a year of Foundation in Science and Technology, programme at Kolej MARA Kulim under Universiti Kuala Lumpur from 2009 until 2010. She then pursued her study at Universiti Kuala Lumpur Institute of Medical Science Technology (UniKL MESTECH). In 2014, she obtained her degree in Bachelor in Clinical Laboratory Science (Honours). During her undergraduate years, she had a great experience while attending her internship course at Department of Pathology, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia. She have learnt and gained practical skills by applying techniques and theories learnt in classes. She started her postgraduate study in 2015 at Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia. She was grateful for having the opportunity to pursue her Master in Medical Microbiology under supervision of Dr. Seri Narti Edayu Sarchio.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Nur Izzatie Zulkiflee, Norhidayah Mat Azis, Norhafizah Mohtarrudin, Mohd Nasir Mohd Desa, Seri Narti Edayu Sarchio. 2018. *Assessment of pathogenicity of community-acquired MRSA isolate in a mice model of peritonitis*. Oral presentation at the 2nd International Conference on Biomedical and Health Sciences Research (ICBHSR) 2018. The Everly Hotel, Putrajaya, Malaysia. October 22-23. Oral presentation OP-16. Program page: 28.

Nur Izzatie Zulkiflee, Mohammad Asyaari Zakaria, Mohd Nasir Mohd Desa, Seri Narti Edayu Sarchio. 2017. *Assessment of colonization and survivability of community-acquired Staphylococcus aureus in peritonitis*. Poster presentation at the 2nd International Anatomical and Biomedical Scientific Conference (IABS) 2017. Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia. August 1-2. Poster number P17. Program page: 46.

Seri Narti Edayu Sarchio, **Nur Izzatie Zulkiflee**, Suhaili Shamsi, Faizah Md Yassin. 2016. *Graphene Oxide: A safe nano platform for bio-applications?*. Poster presentation at the 3rd Pan-Asian Biomedical Science Conference. Premiera Hotel Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. December 7-8. Poster number DT-P029. Program page: 161



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