

Community-associated methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (CA-MRSA) in children: a microbiological and epidemiological study

Abstract

Novel methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* have been causing infections in the community and are now invading hospitals. In this study we aimed to determine, using risk factors for healthcare associated infections as an epidemiological parameter, and antimicrobial susceptibility profile as a surrogate for SCCmec type and microbiological parameter, the characteristics of circulating *S. aureus* clinical isolates. After searching for risk factor for healthcare-associated infections, 11 of the 15 MRSA isolates were epidemiologically considered HCA-MRSA and 4 CA-MRSA. Using the microbiological classification (multiresistance), five were considered HCA-MRSA and 10 were considered CA-MRSA. Interestingly, of the 11 isolates considered epidemiological HCA-MRSA (presence of any risk factor), six had a microbiological profile (non-multiresistant) consistent with CA-MRSA circulating clones. Of the 11 isolates considered epidemiological HCA-MRSA, six had a microbiological profile consistent with CA-MRSA circulating clones. Our results clearly show that the boundaries between CA-MRSA and HCA- are increasingly difficult to determine.

Keywords

Staphylococcus aureus; MRSA; antimicrobial resistance; oxacillin

Introduction

Staphylococcus aureus commonly colonizes our species in different anatomical sites. Traditionally it is more frequently found in the nose. However, recent evidence suggests that oropharynx could be an even more important site of colonization¹. Some specific populations, as cystic fibrosis patients, are more commonly colonized than the general population². Depending on host and pathogen factors, *S. aureus* may cause infection. Infectious syndromes include, but are not limited to respiratory, skin and soft tissue, osteoarticular and bloodstream infections. *S. aureus* is an important etiologic agent of both community- and healthcare-associated infections¹⁻³.

Resistance to antimicrobial agents has complicated the treatment of *S. aureus* infections. After penicillin resistance, methicillin resistance disseminated worldwide, first in the hospitals and eventually in the community³⁻⁶. These new community-associated methicillin resistant *S.*

aureus(CA-MRSA)clones, described originally in the 1990s, have some differences when compared to the traditional healthcare-associated (HCA-MRSA) clones. CA-MRSA are usually resistant to less antimicrobial agents, usually only to beta-lactams and macrolides. These are the phenotypical implications of the presence of different Staphylococcal cassette chromosome *mec*(SCC*mec*) types. SCC*mec*isa mobile genetic element that includes *mecA*gene, responsible for methicillin resistance in *S. aureus*. CA-MRSA most commonly carrySCC*mec*types IV or V⁴⁻⁶. Some of these clones also have a specific virulence profile, frequently producing Panton-Valentine leukocidin and other typical virulence factors⁴⁻⁷.

These new clones have also been reported causing nosocomial infections, substituting, at least in part, traditional health-care associated MRSA clones. In our setting, although CA-MRSA is still not common, clones carrying SCC*mec* IV have been increasingly found in different hospitals⁸⁻¹². In the present study, we aimed to characterize*S. aureus* clinical isolates regarding their epidemiological (presence or absence of risk factors for health-care associated infections) and microbiological (antimicrobial multiresistance or non-multiresistance as a surrogate for SCC*mec* type) profiles.

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53 **Methods**

54 From July 2009 to April 2012, *S. aureus* isolates from children hospitalized in Santa Casa de São
55 Paulo, a tertiary care-center in São Paulo, Brazil, were included. All isolates grew in cultures
56 from sterile sites and we included only one isolate per patient. Bacterial identification was
57 conducted using traditional biochemical methods (Gram stain, catalase, coagulase and DNase)
58 and antimicrobial susceptibility testing was performed according to current Clinical and
59 Laboratory Standards Institute criteria¹³.

60 Methicillin-resistant isolates resistant to four or more different classes of antibiotics were
61 considered multiresistant (HCA-MRSA by microbiological classification), whereas isolates
62 resistant to three or less classes were considered non-multiresistant (CA-MRSA by
63 microbiological classification).

64 Clinical charts were e and searched for the presence or any risk factors for health-care
65 associated infections, including hospitalization within the previous year, chronic disease that
66 implicates in frequent contact (≥6/year) with hospital environment, or current hospitalization
67 for at least 48 hours. Isolates were considered HCA-MRSA (epidemiologically) if any of these
68 risk factors were present, and were considered CA-MRSA (epidemiologically) if they were all
69 absent. The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee.

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71 **Results and Discussion**

72 Fifty-five isolates were included during the study period, 47 from blood, six from abscesses,
73 one from pleural fluid and one from spinal fluid. Regarding oxacillin resistance, 34 were MSSA
74 and 21 were MRSA. Eleven patients were excluded (5 MSSA and 6 MRSA) because clinical
75 charts were not available for review, reducing the total to 29 MSSA and 15 MRSA isolates.

After searching for risk factor for healthcare-associated infections, 11 of the 15 MRSA isolates were epidemiologically considered HCA-MRSA and 4 CA-MRSA. Using the microbiological classification (multiresistance), five were considered HCA-MRSA and 10 were considered CA-MRSA. Interestingly, of the 11 isolates considered epidemiological HCA-MRSA (presence of any risk factor), six had a microbiological profile (non-multiresistant) consistent with CA-MRSA circulating clones.

Although these novel SCCmec type IV MRSA clones were first reported in the community, there is increasing evidence that they are replacing traditional hospital circulating clones⁸⁻¹⁰. In Brazil, the Brazilian clone (SCCmec type III) have been disseminated nationally in hospitals, but recent evidence shows that different clones carrying a type IV cassette are disseminating as a cause of healthcare-associated infections^{11,12}.

Although the number of isolates included in our study is low, and we have not performed molecular typing, phenotypic susceptibility testing served as a surrogate for the SCCmec type, since we have previously and consistently reported the strong correlation between these parameters. In addition, its results clearly show that the boundaries between CA-MRSA and HCA- are increasingly difficult to determine. Nosocomial isolates cause infection in patients without risk factors and community isolates invade the hospital causing health-care associated infections. In these challenging epidemiological and microbiological situation, knowledge of local and global circulating clones is paramount to ensure the appropriate preventive and therapeutic approaches.

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144 **Table 1. Epidemiological and microbiological classification of MRSA isolates from children**
145 **hospitalized at Santa Casa de São Paulo, Brazil, 2009-2012.**

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Classification		Epidemiological		
		CA	HCA	Total
Microbiological	CA	4	6	10
	HCA	0	5	5
	Total	4	11	15

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