Bacterial adherence on UHMWPE doped with Vitamin E: an in vitro study

Molina-Manso D, Gómez-Barrena E, Esteban J, Adames H, Martínez MJ, Cordero J, Fernández-Roblas R, Puértolas JA

1Dept. Of Clinical Microbiology, IIS Fundación Jiménez Díaz
2Dept. of Orthopaedics, Hospital Fundación Jiménez Díaz, Autónoma University, Madrid, Spain
3Dept. of Material Science, Zaragoza University, Spain
4Dept. of Orthopaedics, Hospital La Princesa, Autónoma University, Madrid, Spain

E-mail: dmolina@fjd.es

Abstract. Biomaterials may improve its capacity to resist bacterial adherence, and subsequent infection through material changes. Our aim was to test the bacterial adherence to vitamin E (VE) doped UHMWPE with S. aureus and S. epidermidis (collection and clinical strains), compared to virgin material. Experimental UHMWPE with 3%, 0.4%, and commercial 0.1% VE concentration (1000 ppm) were tested. The biofilm-developing ability was used as a covariable. The collection strain of S. aureus showed significantly less adherence to the commercial VE UHMWPE (p=0.036) but the clinical strains did not significantly modified its adhesion to UHMWPE in presence of VE. The collection strain of S. epidermidis showed significantly less adherence to experimental UHMWPE with VE, independently of the concentration used (p=0.008). However, only 1 of the 4 clinical strains under study clearly confirmed these results in commercial VE polyethylene. Vitamin E doped UHMWPE affects the adherence of some S. aureus and S. epidermidis strains, independently of the concentration in use, but the results showed important intraspecies differences.

1. Introduction

Limited information is available regarding the adherence of microorganisms that cause orthopedic infection to biomaterials currently used in orthopedic implants. Yet it is important to understand the differences between orthopedic biomaterials to bacterial adherence, and to devise new methods for protecting these materials from such phenomenon.

Of particular interest is the polyethylene, today implanted as ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene (UHMWPE). Vitamin E (VE) has been recently incorporated to UHMWPE to decrease oxidation that may cause material degradation [1-5]. In vitro studies have also confirmed that VE remains within the material [6], thus the innovation has been accepted for the intended proposal, but it is not known if the susceptibility of microorganism adherence to polyethylene previously studied by
our group [7] is altered by the addition of VE, which would be of significant clinical importance. Particularly, when potential effects of VE on chronic infection are currently being investigated, favoring the antibiotic action through cellular immunity enhancement [8] and cellular redox state [9].

The bacterial adhesion process is a complex series of physical and chemical interactions between the substratum and the microbe, and thus can be modified with changes in the biomaterial under risk. The use of VE in UHMWPE as a method to minimize material oxidization may also change the surface of the substratum and the bacterial adhesion process, thus limiting the extent of subsequent infection. With this hypothesis, we set the aims of the present study in the investigation of the adherence of the most frequently isolated bacterial species from orthopedic infections (*Staphylococcus aureus* and *Staphylococcus epidermidis*) in VE doped UHMWPE, compared to virgin material. For this, we investigated different VE concentrations with both collection and also with clinical strains isolated from orthopaedic infections.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. UHMWPE

The raw material used in the first part of the study was a compression molded sheet of GUR 1050 UHMWPE (Orthoplastics Ltd., Lancashire UK), from which 3 mm thick and 20 mm diameter discs were machined. All discs were grounded and polished up to an average surface roughness of $R_a = 0.80 \pm 0.05 \mu m$ using SiC papers. Vitamin E was introduced into UHMWPE by diffusion, soaking the disc in a bath of VE ($\alpha$-tocopherol, Aldrich Chemicals). Two VE concentrations were prepared with the previous method, and gravimetric changes confirmed a VE content of 3 wt% and 0.4 wt% in the discs. All discs were sterilized with gas-plasma sterilization 10 days before the experiments were performed.

The second part of the study was performed in a commercial GUR 1020 UHMWPE with vitamin E, at a concentration of 1000 ppm (0.1%) obtained by blending (Meditech, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA). Specimens of $228 \pm 13 \mu m$ thick and of $1 cm^2$ area were cut from a sheet. The average roughness measured by a confocal microscope was $0.42 \pm 0.15 \mu m$. Commercial GUR 1020 UHMWPE sheets without vitamin E were used as controls.

2.2. Bacterial strains

Collection strains of biofilm producing *S. aureus* 15981, provided by Dr. Lasa [10], and *S. epidermidis* ATCC 35984 were used in the first set of experiments with different concentrations of VE (3% and 0.4%).

Clinical strains of both species were also tested in the second set of experiments performed using the commercial VE UHMWPE at a concentration of 0.1%. 5 *S. aureus* clinical strains and 4 *S. epidermidis* strains were used, besides the collection strains that were also used to confirm in this material the results of the first set of experiments. These clinical strains were isolated from cases of prosthetic joint infections using a sonication protocol previously described [11]. These strains were identified using conventional techniques. Quantification of the biofilm forming ability of the strains was tested and graded from 0 to 3 using the Stepanovic method [12].

2.3. Adherence study

Five samples of each experimental (3% and 0.4%) and commercial VE UHMWPE were tested for each bacterial strain. After overnight culture in Tryptic-soy broth, bacteria were harvested by 20 minute centrifugation at 3500g, and washed twice with sterile Phosphate Buffered Saline (PBS). Bacteria were then suspended and diluted in PBS to a concentration of $10^7$ colony-forming units (CFU)/ml. The biomaterial samples were placed in this bacterial suspension and incubated for 90 minutes at $+37^\circ C$. After the incubation, specimens were rinsed twice with PBS, and sonicated during 5 minutes in equal volume of PBS. The number of adhered bacteria was quantified by 1:10 serial plate counts.
SPSS 17.0 was used as statistical package (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL).

3. Results

In the experiments with the collection strains, no significant differences were observed in the adherence of *S. aureus* to UHMWPE at any of the experimental concentrations used in the study (ANOVA, p=0.561). Mann-Whitney test showed non-significant differences in the adherence of *S. aureus* on UHMWPE with 3% VE (p=0.222) or with 0.4% VE (p=0.421), versus UHMWPE without VE. When the experiment was performed with the collection strain of *S. epidermidis*, significant differences in the adherence among series was detected with ANOVA (p=0.001), and post-hoc tests confirmed that differences were between control and VE doped material. Mann-Whitney test showed that the difference between control and UHMWPE with 3% VE concentration was significant (p=0.008), and that the difference stood when the VE concentration was lowered to 0.4% (p=0.008), as seen in Figure 1.

When clinically isolated strains were studied on the 0.1% VE UHMWPE, no significant differences were obtained comparing in a paired t-test the culture counts of all *S. aureus* strains (p=0.107) and of *S. epidermidis* strains (p=0.252) on virgin versus VE-UHMWPE. However, the results were highly variable among individual strains. One factor ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis tests, used in view of the n=5 repetitions of the experiment per strain, showed that culture counts significantly differ among strains of *S aureus* in virgin (p=0.010) and VE (p=0.014), while with *S. epidermidis*, differences were significant in VE (p=0.003) among strains. When each strain was investigated in both materials, Mann-Whitney test showed that *S. aureus* clinical strains did not significantly decrease its adherence to VE (table 2), but it did in the collection strain (p=0.036). Mann-Whitney tests in *S. epidermidis* collection strain did not significantly modify (p=0.841) its adherence when in the presence of VE UHMWPE, but it did in of the 2 of the 4 clinical strains under investigation (table 1), although one strain in the decrease and one with an increase.
Table 1: Comparison of adherence per clinical strain, virgin UHMWPE versus commercial VE UHMWPE (Mann-Whitney test, p>0.05).

| Clinical strain | Microorganism | Culture from sonicated material after adherence to virgin UHMWPE (mean±SD) | Culture from sonicated material after adherence to Vitamin E UHMWPE (mean±SD) | Significance |
|-----------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1               | *S. aureus*   | 4.33±4.58                                       | 1.23±0.39                                       | 0.114        |
| 2               | *S. aureus*   | 0.75±0.40                                       | 0.74±0.27                                       | 0.690        |
| 4               | *S. aureus*   | 3.59±4.25                                       | 1.32±0.51                                       | 0.200        |
| 61              | *S. aureus*   | 1.39±0.81                                       | 1.28±0.81                                       | 0.886        |
| 95              | *S. aureus*   | 0.08±0.04                                       | 0.27±0.38                                       | 0.343        |
| Collection strain | *S. aureus* | 1.11±0.34                                       | 0.12±0.10                                       | 0.036*       |
| 53              | *S. epidermidis* | 0.38±0.36                                   | 3.20±1.38                                       | 0.008*       |
| 55              | *S. epidermidis* | 1.21±0.68                                   | 5.61±6.67                                       | 0.886        |
| 74              | *S. epidermidis* | 1.31±1.07                                   | 1.58±0.74                                       | 0.686        |
| 101             | *S. epidermidis* | 2.65±1.51                                   | 0.07±0.05                                       | 0.009*       |
| Collection strain | *S. epidermidis* | 0.64±0.17                                   | 0.75±0.56                                       | 0.641        |

The investigation on the covariable established by the Stepanovic grading of biofilm-forming ability showed that this grade did not influence changes in adherence of *S. aureus* strains on VE UHMWPE (p=0.305, Kruskal-Wallis test) or virgin material (p=0.133, Kruskal-Wallis test), but did in the case of *S. epidermidis* on VE UHMWPE (p=0.002, Kruskal-Wallis test) and virgin material (p=0.020, Kruskal-Wallis test). When the ANOVA test with Bonferroni post hoc was used to clarify the effect of multiple comparisons of culture counts among Stepanovic graded strains, significant differences were found in the adherence on virgin UHMWPE and VE UHMWPE as shown in table 2 and 3.

Table 2: Descriptive culture counts of *S. epidermidis* clinical strains grouped by Stepanovic grade (mean±SD).

| UHMWPE          | Stepanovic grade | n  | Mean   | SD    |
|-----------------|------------------|----|--------|-------|
| Virgin          | 0                | 5  | 2.64700| 1.515188 |
|                 | 1                | 8  | 1.26375| 0.835394 |
|                 | 2                | 5  | 0.38480| 0.357527 |
| Vitamin E       | 0                | 5  | 0.0700 | 0.04899 |
|                 | 1                | 8  | 1.8771 | 1.29404 |
|                 | 2                | 5  | 3.2020 | 1.37905 |
Table 3: Comparison of *S. epidermidis* culture counts of strains with different Stepanovic grading for the 2 studied materials (ANOVA with Bonferroni post hoc test, significance with *p*>0.0125).

| Polyethylene       | Compared Stepanovic grades | Bonferroni significance (*p*>0.0125) |
|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Virgin UHMWPE      | 0 vs 1                     | *p*=0.079                            |
|                    | 1 vs 2                     | *p*=0.416                            |
|                    | 0 vs 2                     | *p*=0.007*                           |
| Vitamin E UHMWPE   | 0 vs 1                     | *p*=0.041                            |
|                    | 1 vs 2                     | *p*=0.106                            |
|                    | 0 vs 2                     | *p*=0.002*                           |

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Significant efforts have been placed in the control of UHMWPE oxidation as a means to lower material and implant failure in total joint replacements. Vitamin E doped material is one of these proposals. The burden of total joint replacement failure is also related to infection. Infection related to orthopaedic implants frequently develops from biofilm formation after bacterial colonization of the biomaterial. In this study, VE affects the adherence of *S. epidermidis* on UHMWPE but not that of *S. aureus* on collection strains. This finding stood with different concentration of VE, and there was no apparent relationship to VE dosage.

The mechanism by which VE may affect the bacterial adherence to UHMWPE is currently unknown.

The relative adherence to a certain material thus may be associated to strains differences. As we demonstrated in this study, the evaluation of clinical strains is mandatory to ascertain the consistency of results in adherence studies. In this sense, we tested several clinical strains randomly chosen from the bank of clinical strains isolated from patients with orthopaedic infection. We found significant variability among these clinical strains, and the VE effect detected with collection *S. epidermidis* strain in the experimental setting was not confirmed in the commercial VE UHMWPE but in one of the particular 4 clinical strains that were used in our study. On the opposite, a detected effect by VE with collection *S. aureus* strain was insignificant in the experiments but definitely observed in the commercial VE polyethylene, while the selected 5 clinical strains failed to confirm a decrease adherence to VE UHMWPE.

Stepanovic grading was used to search for a relationship between the capability of forming biofilm as a severity index of the potential pathogenic effect of the strain and the adherence to UHMWPE. A paradoxal effect was found with virgin UHMWPE, as less adherence was observed for higher Stepanovic grades, while high adherence was found in higher Stepanovic grades on VE UHMWPE. Other studies of biofilm formation on UHMWPE doped with vitamin E are on the way to follow this issue.

Potential effects of VE on infection are currently being investigated, but mostly directed towards immunomodulation in chronic diseases [8]. Also, a cellular redox state change has been invoked as a beneficial factor of VE [9]. As adherence is modulated by surface redox state, this may affect adherence mechanisms on certain microorganism strains, yet unclear. We were able to confirm that incorporating VE produces changes in the surface compared with the virgin UHMWPE [7]. Despite the appealing of this hypothesis, we were only capable of confirming that VE significantly affected the adherence in some clinical and collection strains, but not in others, and the clues to understand why some strains are more susceptible to the VE than others are not yet clarified. Nevertheless, VE incorporates a biological surplus in the modified material that is effective in reducing the adherence of some strains of *S. aureus* (collection strain in our study) and *S. epidermidis* (collection in one set of
experiments, clinical strain in the other set) despite the absence of specific antibacterial effect of vitamin E tested by microdilution (data not shown).

We think this finding could introduce an added value to vitamin E doped UHMWPE, although this is an *in vitro* study on the very early stage of the colonization process. The use of clinical strains is mandatory in these studies, because of intrinsic intra and interspecies variability among different bacterial genera, but the limitation is that the number of clinical strain to be tested to clarify this issue could be extremely high and out of the capabilities of an experimental research study.

**Acknowledgements**

The work is funded by a grant from MEC (Spain), MAT2006-12603-CO2-O2. The group is also funded by Comunidad de Madrid (S-0505/MAT0324, S2009/MAT-1472) and MCYT (CONSOLIDER-INGENIO 2010 CSD 2008-0023 FUNCOAT). DMM was granted by Fundación Conchita Rabago de Jimenez Diaz. The authors also thank Dr. J.J. Granizo, epidemiologist, for his help with the statistical analysis.

**References**

[1] Parth M, Aust N, Lederer K. 2002. Studies on the effect of electron beam radiation on the molecular structure of ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene under the influence of alpha-tocopherol with respect to its application in medical implants. *J Mater Sci Mater Med*. 13(10):917-21.

[2] Wolf C, Krivec T, Blasig J, Lederer K, Schneider W. 2002. Examination of the suitability of alpha-tocopherol as a stabilizer for ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene used for articulating surfaces in joint endoprostheses. *J Mater Sci Mater Med*. 13(2):185-9.

[3] Oral E, Greenbaum ES, Malhi AS, Harris WH, Muratoglu OK. 2005. Characterization of irradiated blends of alpha-tocopherol and UHMWPE. *Biomaterials*. 26(33):6657-63.

[4] Shibata N, Tomita N, Onmori N, Kato K, Ikekuchi K. 2003. Defect initiation at subsurface grain boundary as a precursor of delamination in ultrahigh molecular weight polyethylene. *J Biomed Mater Res A*. 67(1):276-84.

[5] Oral E, Wannomae KK, Hawkins N, Harris WH, Muratoglu OK. 2004. Alpha-tocopherol-doped irradiated UHMWPE for high fatigue resistance and low wear. *Biomaterials*. 25(24):5515-22.

[6] Oral E, Malhi AS, Muratoglu OK. 2006. Mechanisms of decrease in fatigue crack propagation resistance in irradiated and melted UHMWPE. *Biomaterials*. 27(6):917-25.

[7] Kinnari TJ, Esteban J, Zamora N, Fernandez R, Lopez-Santos C, Yubero F, et al. 2010. Effect of surface roughness and sterilization on bacterial adherence to ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene. *Clin Microbiol Infect*. 16(7):1036-41

[8] Meydani SN, Han SN, Wu D. 2005. Vitamin E and immune response in the aged: molecular mechanisms and clinical implications. *Immunol Rev*. 205:269-84.

[9] Victor VM, Rocha M, De la Fuente M. 2004. Immune cells: free radicals and antioxidants in sepsis. *Int Immunopharmacol*. 4(3):327-47.

[10] Valle J, Toledo-Aranza A, Berasain C, Ghigo JM, Amorena B, Penades JR, et al. 2003. SarA and not sigmaB is essential for biofilm development by Staphylococcus aureus. *Mol Microbiol*. 48(4):1075-87.

[11] Esteban J, Gomez-Barrena E, Cordero J, Martin-de-Hijas NZ, Kinnari TJ, Fernandez-Roblas R. 2008. Evaluation of quantitative analysis of cultures from sonicated retrieved orthopedic implants in diagnosis of orthopedic infection. *J Clin Microbiol*. 46(2):488-92.

[12] Stepanovic S, Vukovic D, Hola V, Di Bonaventura G, Djukic S, Cirkovic I, et al. 2007.
Quantification of biofilm in microtiter plates: overview of testing conditions and practical recommendations for assessment of biofilm production by staphylococci. *APMIS*. 115(8):891-9.