The epidemiology of non-Candida yeast isolated from blood: The Asia Surveillance Study

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Funding information
This study was supported by a grant from Pfizer (201108019RC) and the Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan (NSC 102-2314-B-002-158-MY3) to YC Chen. The sponsors had no role in the study design or conduct, preparation, review or approval of the manuscript or in the decision to submit the manuscript for publication.

Summary
Background: Current guidelines recommend echinocandins as first-line therapy for candidemia. However, several non-Candida yeast are non-susceptible to echinocandins (echinocandin non-susceptible yeast, ENSY), including Cryptococcus, Geotrichum, Malassezia, Pseudozyma, Rhodotorula, Saprochaete, Sporobolomyces and Trichosporon. In laboratories that are not equipped with rapid diagnostic tools, it often takes several days to identify yeast, and this may lead to inappropriate presumptive use of echinocandins in patients with ENSY fungemia. The aim of this study was to determine the distribution of ENSY species during a 1-year, laboratory surveillance programme in Asia.

*Other members of the study network are listed in the Appendix 1.
INTRODUCTION

The epidemiology of yeast infections and fungemia continues to evolve throughout the world, in parallel with advances in medical care for critically ill and immunocompromised patients and the extensive use of antifungal agents. Among human fungal pathogens, Candida species are the most common yeast that cause bloodstream infections. In the majority of guidelines, echinocandins are the recommended first-line therapy for candidemia, due to their clinical efficacy, fungicidal activity, favourable safety profile, and limited drug interactions, and concerns about fluconazole resistance.

Among non-Candida yeast, Cryptococcus is the most common fungal pathogen that causes community-acquired invasive fungal disease and is intrinsically resistant to echinocandins. In Taiwan, the proportion of Cryptococcus neoformans from blood or bone marrow increased from 14% (8/59) between 1957 and 1972 to 33% (29/87) between 1982 and 1997. In addition, the emergence of rare yeast species such as Trichosporon and Rhodotorula poses a major threat because of their low susceptibility and potential to develop resistance to one or more antifungal agents. Overall, common human yeast pathogens known to be intrinsically resistant or non-susceptible to echinocandins (echinocandin non-susceptible yeast, ENSY), including Cryptococcus, Geotrichum, Malassezia, Pseudozyma, Rhodotorula, Saprochaete, Sporobolomyces and Trichosporon.

Species identification is therefore important in order to target echinocandin therapy only at patients with susceptible yeast infections. However, it usually takes an additional 1-3 days to identify yeast to species level using either manual methods or commercially available API ID32C, AuxaColor and Vitek 2 systems. This delay in identification means that, in some cases, inappropriate echinocandin therapy may be initiated in patients with reported yeast isolation from blood. This underlines the limits of presumptive treatment for fungemia and stresses the necessity to introduce rapid identification methods for yeast species identification.

However, it is concerning that in a recent survey of mycology laboratory practice across seven Asian countries, rapid identification methods such as matrix-assisted laser desorption ionisation-time of flight mass spectrometry, and molecular identification methods such as PCR and sequencing were available only in 27 laboratories (12.3%) and 37 (16.9%) among 219 respondents, respectively. Most laboratories that perform identification with MALDI still require a subculture, which delays identification by 1 to 3 days (especially for slower growing basidiomycetous yeast). The potential impact of presumptive treatment with echinocandins for fungemia remains uncertain.

The aim of the current collaborative study was to determine the frequency of isolation from blood of yeast species that are intrinsically resistant or non-susceptible to echinocandins. The study was based on laboratory-based surveillance at 25 hospitals located in six Asian countries/regions. We also reviewed and compared published data around the world.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study design and mycology data collection

This was a 1-year, cross-sectional, laboratory-based surveillance study conducted between July 1, 2010 and June 30, 2011. It was designed...
by the Asia Fungal Working Group (AFWG) under the auspices of the International Society for Human and Animal Mycology. A total of 25 hospitals participated in the study, located in China (10 hospitals), Hong Kong (1), India (4), Singapore (1), Taiwan (6) and Thailand (3). Details of the background of these hospitals, the capacity and practice of their mycology laboratories, and the incidence and distribution of candidemia have been published elsewhere.21 The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board or Research Ethics Committee at 21 of the hospitals; approval for research was waived at the other four centres.

Fungi were identified by the local microbiology or mycology laboratories at each study site. Blood culture systems and methods for fungal identification were as previously described.21 Microbiology laboratories in the participating hospitals identify the yeast by morphology (17 of 25 hospitals), CHROMagar (15), API20C of ID32C (17), manual assimilation/fermentation tests (6) and automatic methods (such as Vitek) (12). Only four hospitals provided the molecular identification methods such as PCR and sequencing in routine practice during the study period. The data recorded for each isolate included the date of collection, hospital service, genus and species, whenever available. Duplicates were removed from the analysis. Yeast isolates were considered to be duplicate if they came from the same source type in the same patient, within 7 days of each other, and the final identifications were the same.22 The frequencies of ENSY among non-duplicate yeast isolated from blood cultures were analysed; these included Cryptococcus, Geotrichum, Malassezia, Pseudozyma, Rhodotorula, Saprochaete, Sporabolomyces and Trichosporon.4,12,15-17

### Table 1 Distribution of non-duplicate yeast isolates in blood or bone marrow specimens

| Fungus                          | Number of isolates | (%) |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----|
| Total yeast isolates            | 2155               | 100 |
| Candida species                 | 1980               | 91.9|
| Non-Candida spp.                | 175                | 8.1 |
| Cryptococcus species\(^{a,b}\)  | 109                | 5.1 |
| Trichosporon species\(^{a,c}\)  | 23                 | 1.1 |
| Rhodotorula species\(^{a}\)     | 10                 | 0.5 |
| Kodamaea (Pichia) ohmeri\(^{d}\)| 7                  | 0.3 |
| Malassezia species\(^{a,d}\)    | 4                  | 0.2 |
| Hansenula anomala (Pichia anomala)\(^{d}\)| 4 | 0.2 |
| Hansenula polymorpha\(^{d}\)    | 2                  | 0.1 |
| Yarrowia lipolytica\(^{d}\)     | 2                  | 0.1 |
| Other non-Candida yeast\(^{e}\) | 14                 | 0.6 |

\(^{a}\)Yeast that are intrinsically resistant or with high probability of non-susceptibility to echinocandins and ESCMID, and ECMM support a recommendation against use of echinocandins.12

\(^{b}\)Cryptococcus neoformans (102 isolates), Cryptococcus laurentii (2) and Cryptococcus spp. (5).

\(^{c}\)Trichosporon asahii accounted for 9 of these isolates.

\(^{d}\)Kodamaea (Pichia) ohmeri (7 isolates; 4 from Taiwan and 3 from China), Hansenula anomala (Pichia anomala) (4 isolates; 2 from Taiwan and 2 from India), Hansenula polymorpha (2 isolates; both from China), Malassezia species (4 isolates; 2 from Taiwan, 1 from Hong Kong and 1 from Thailand), Yarrowia lipolytica (2 isolates; both from Taiwan).

\(^{e}\)Fourteen isolates were not reported to a genus level.

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Fungal isolates

From 51 254 clinical isolates submitted across the 25 participating hospitals, 2155 non-duplicate yeast isolates from blood, and bone marrow specimens were included in the present analysis. Of these, 1980 (91.9%) isolates were Candida species and 175 (8.1%) were other, non-Candida yeast (Table 1). Among the 175 non-Candida yeast isolates, the majority were ENSY (146/175, 83.4%) which included Cryptococcus (109), Trichosporon (23), Rhodotorula (10) and Malassezia (4). In this study cohort, there were no Geotrichum, Pseudozyma, Saprochaete or Sporabolomyces which are intrinsically resistant to echinocandins.

#### 3.2 Genus distribution by country/region

The proportions of ENSY among yeast-in-blood isolates (overall, 146/2155, 6.7%) from each country/region are shown in Figure 1. ENSY proportions in most country/region are below 10%, except for Thailand, which ENSY proportions >20% were observed. The proportion of ENSY isolates in tropical countries/regions (India, Thailand and Singapore) is higher than that in non-tropical countries/regions (China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) (8.6% [51/593] vs 6.1% [95/1562], P = 0.038). However, the higher rate of Cryptococcus spp. in Thailand when compared with the rates in other countries is the main reason for the above-mentioned difference because, after excluding Cryptococcus spp., no significant difference was observed (1.6% [9/551] vs 1.9% [28/1495], P = 0.852).

Cryptococcus spp. were most frequently observed in Thailand (20.2% of 173 yeast-in-blood isolates) but were rare in India (0.6% of 341 isolates) (Figure 1). A total of 23 Trichosporon isolates were reported, of which 11 were from Taiwan and four were from China. Among 10 Rhodotorula isolates, eight were reported from Taiwan.

#### 3.3 Species distribution according to medical services

Among the 2155 yeast-in-blood isolates included in this analysis, information on the type of medical service from which they came were available for 2144 isolates. Of the 11 isolates for which medical service information was not available, three were ENSY. Thus, 143 ENSY were analysed according to medical service.

| Fungus                          | Number of isolates | (%) |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----|
| Total yeast isolates            | 2155               | 100 |
| Candida species                 | 1980               | 91.9|
| Non-Candida spp.                | 175                | 8.1 |
| Cryptococcus species\(^{a,b}\)  | 109                | 5.1 |
| Trichosporon species\(^{a,c}\)  | 23                 | 1.1 |
| Rhodotorula species\(^{a}\)     | 10                 | 0.5 |
| Kodamaea (Pichia) ohmeri\(^{d}\)| 7                  | 0.3 |
| Malassezia species\(^{a,d}\)    | 4                  | 0.2 |
| Hansenula anomala (Pichia anomala)\(^{d}\)| 4 | 0.2 |
| Hansenula polymorpha\(^{d}\)    | 2                  | 0.1 |
| Yarrowia lipolytica\(^{d}\)     | 2                  | 0.1 |
| Other non-Candida yeast\(^{e}\) | 14                 | 0.6 |
Overall, almost two-thirds (59.4%) of ENSY came from general wards other than haematology-oncology units (Figure 2A). However, this was largely because most yeast isolates overall came from these wards. When analysed according to each different type of medical service, the proportion of total isolates that were ENSY varied substantially, ranging from 2.9% in haematology-oncology wards to 25.0% in outpatient clinics (Figure 2B). The proportions of ENSY in outpatient clinics is higher than haematology-oncology wards and intensive care units (ICUs) (17.8% [24/135] vs 2.9% [6/206], \( P = 0.001 \); 17.8% [24/135] vs 4.8% [23/482], \( P = 0.003 \)).

Cryptococcus accounted for 87.5% (21/24) of non-Candida species isolated from ERs and 80.0% (4/5) from outpatient clinics. The proportion of Cryptococcus among non-Candida species in ERs was significantly higher than in ICUs (52.1% [12/23], \( P = 0.008 \)) and haematology-oncology wards (33.3% [2/6], \( P = 0.016 \)).

3.4 | Species distribution by season

Based on the date provided, the season of collection could be assigned to each isolate. The proportion of ENSY varied from 4.2% in
| Region/country     | Setting/patient population | Study period       | Patients (inpatients, outpatients or both) | Number of yeast isolates | Proportion of non-Candida yeast | Proportion of Cryptococcus spp. in non-Candida yeast | Remark                                                                 | References |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Global            |                             |                    |                                            |                          |                                 |                                                      |                                                             |            |
| Artemis study     | Multinational, multicentre, general | 1997-2007          | both                                       | 11,240                   | 32.2%                          |                                                      | Saccharomyces (11.7%), Trichosporon (10.6%), and Rhodotorula (4.1%) were the leading three non-Candida fungi. | 22         |
| Americas          |                             |                    |                                            |                          |                                 |                                                      |                                                             |            |
| US                | Single hospital             | 1998-2010          | both                                       | 2984                     | 3.1%                           | NA                                                   | Rhodotorula spp. (21 isolates), Saccharomyces (8) and Trichosporon (8) were the leading three non-Candida fungi. | 31         |
| Mexico            | Single hospital             | 2005-2014          | both                                       | 91                       | 34.1%                          | 93.9%                                               | Underlying disease was HIV/AIDS in 63% of cases            | 23         |
| Argentina         | Multicentre, Paediatric patients (<15 y) | 2007-2008          | inpatients                                 | 461                      | 8.9%                           | 78.0%                                               | C. neoformans was mainly associated with HIV/AIDS          | 28         |
| Brazil            | Single hospital             | 1996-2004          | both                                       | 1195                     | 14.6%                          | 45.4%                                               | Pichia anomala (18.4%) and Rhodotorula spp (16.1%) were also common. | 24         |
| Brazil            | Single hospital             | 2001-2003          | both                                       | 229                      | 2.6%                           | 100%                                                |                                                             | 25         |
|                   |                             | 2011-2013          |                                            | 288                      | 5.9%                           | 100%                                                |                                                             |            |
| Europe            |                             |                    |                                            |                          |                                 |                                                      |                                                             |            |
| Europe            | Multicentre, cancer patients | 2005-2009          | both                                       | 279                      | 7.5%                           | 19.0%                                               | 8 Trichosporon spp. (38.1%) were the most common isolates in non-Candida yeast | 32         |
| Sweden            | Nationwide                  | 2005-2006          | both                                       | 403                      | 1.0%                           | 0%                                                  | 21 Saccharomyces cerevisiae (65.6%) were the most common isolates in non-Candida yeast | 33         |
| Belgium           | Multicentre                 | 2005-2006          | both                                       | 412                      | 7.8%                           | 12.5%                                               | 22 S. cerevisiae (50%) were the most common isolates in non-Candida yeast | 26         |
| Denmark           | Nationwide                  | 2004-2006          | both                                       | 3982                     | 1.1%                           | 31.8%                                               | 19 Geotrichum (10.1%) were the second common non-Candida yeast | 27         |
| France            | Regional, Paris             | NA                 |                                            | 3668                     | 5.1%                           | 73.3%                                               |                                                             | 12         |
| Italy             | Single hospital             | 2005-2013          | both                                       | 1250                     | 1.9%                           | 29.2%                                               | Non-Candida yeast were dominated by Rhodotorula spp. (n = 9) and C. neoformans, which together accounted for 1.3% of all bloodstream isolates and 66.6% of all non-Candida yeast | 34         |
| Portugal          | Multicentre                 | 2011-2012          | inpatients                                 | 240                      | 3.8%                           | 88.9%                                               | C. neoformans was the most common isolate in non-Candida yeast | 29         |
| Spain             | Multicentre                 | 2009-2010          | both                                       | 1374                     | 1.9%                           | 38.5%                                               | C. neoformans was the most common isolate in non-Candida yeast | 35         |
| Region/country | Setting/population | Study period | Patients (inpatients, outpatients or both) | Number of yeast isolates | Proportion of non-Candida yeast | Proportion of Cryptococcus spp. in non-Candida yeast | Remark | References |
|----------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------|------------|
| Spain          | Multicentre paediatric patients (<15 y) | 2009-2010 | inpatients | 203 | 1.0% | 0% | Only two isolates were non-Candida yeast; one was *Trichosporon asahii*, the other was *Rhodotorula glutinis* | 36 |
| Spain          | Multicentre        | 2010-2011   | both | 781 | 2.4% | 26.3% | *C. neoformans* was the most common non-Candida yeast isolate, followed by *Trichosporon asahii* (15.8%) | 37 |
| Asia           | 25 hospitals       | 2010-2011   | both | 2071 | 7.8% | 67.7% | This study |
| China          | 10 hospitals       | 2010-2011   | both | 325 | 9.8% | 68.8% | This study |
| China          | Single hospital    | 2010-2012   | inpatients | 141 | 7.8% | 45.5% | *C. neoformans* was the most common isolate in non-Candida yeast | 38 |
| China          | 4 hospitals        | 2012-2013   | both | 137 | 8.0% | 9% | *Pichia* spp. were the most common isolates in non-Candida yeast (45%) | 39 |
| Hong Kong      | Single hospital    | 2010-2011   | both | 34  | 11.8% | 50% | This study |
| India          | Single hospital, paediatric patients | 2007 | inpatients | 102 | 21% | 0% | *P. anomala* was the most common isolate (85.7%), followed by *Trichosporon asahii* (14.3%) | 40 |
| India          | 4 hospitals        | 2010-2011   | inpatients | 305 | 2.6% | 25% | This study |
| Singapore      | Single hospital    | 2010-2011   | inpatients | 78  | 7.7% | 83.3% | This study |
| Taiwan         | 6 hospitals        | 2010-2011   | both | 1160 | 6.2% | 59.7% | This study |
| Thailand       | 3 hospitals        | 2010-2011   | both | 169  | 23.1% | 89.7% | This study |

*Pubmed search using the following phrase: (fungemia [Title/Abstract] OR yeast in blood cultures [Title/Abstract]) AND ("2007/1/1"[Date - Publication]: "2015/11/31"[Date - Publication]), accessed on 30 November 2015, limited to English literature. The publications that were most representative of the country/region or the most up-to-date were selected when more than one was found.*
autumn to 8.2% in winter, but these differences were not statistically significant. The proportions of individual species (Cryptococcus, Trichosporon and Rhodotorula) also did not vary substantially according to season, which was either due to small sample sizes or variations between countries (Figure S1).

4 | DISCUSSION

In this 1-year surveillance study conducted in 25 hospitals across Asia, yeast that were intrinsically resistant or non-susceptible to echinocandins accounted for 6.7% of 2155 non-duplicate isolates from the blood. The frequency varied from 2.9% in haematology-oncology wards to 25.0% in outpatient clinics.

Most non-Candida yeast are known to be resistant to echinocandins,4 and indeed, this study showed that 83.4% of such isolates were ENSY. Hence, it is clinically significant that non-Candida yeast accounted for 8.1% of all yeast-in-blood isolates (Table 1). Moreover, proportions varied substantially between the six countries/regions included in the survey, with non-Candida species making up 24.9% of isolates from Thailand but only 2.3% of those from India. This wide variation in the proportion of non-Candida species accords with other reports from around the world (summarised in Table 2). Overall, frequencies were higher in tropical countries, such as Mexico, Brazil and Thailand.23-25 Our study also showed similar results. (Figure 2)

In the present study, Cryptococcus was the predominant ENSY species. Cryptococcus is the leading ENSY pathogen in many countries worldwide (Table 2), although there are exceptions. For example, in Belgium and Denmark, Saccharomyces cerevisiae were the predominant non-Candida isolates.26,27 Higher proportions of Cryptococcus in blood are closely related to human immunodeficiency diseases.23,28-29 The proportions of non-Candida yeast varied from 1.0% to 34% in different countries, patient populations and medical settings (Table 2). In our study, almost a quarter of non-Candida yeast occurred in the outpatient clinics or ERs, which may explain the difference between hospital-based studies and inpatient-only studies (Table 2).

Not all yeast are susceptible to echinocandins.4,12,13,15,17 Furthermore, there are currently no guidelines or recommendations that explicitly describe how to select appropriate presumptive therapy for fungemia in regions where rapid identification systems are not available and non-Candida yeast-in-blood is common. Physicians in these countries should be familiar with common presentations and risk factors associated with Cryptococcus and other non-Candida infections (Table S1). For example, in Asia, cryptococcemia may be a possibility in a cirrhotic patient presenting at an ER, with altered mental status and community-acquired sepsis of unknown source. Rapid microbiological evidence can be obtained by examining spinal fluid with India ink and detecting antigens in serum. These additional clues and tests may help physicians to select the most appropriate antifungal agent.12

This study has several limitations. First, this laboratory-based surveillance study is limited by the overall lack of clinical, outcome, and epidemiologic data, and was unable to assess the impact among patients with ENSY fungemia treated with echinocandins. Second, although patient isolates were deduplicated if within 7 days, this study did not provide the numbers of patients with these 2155 yeast isolates represent. Third, we did not collect isolates for identification at a central reference laboratory. Among 175 non-Candida isolates, fourteen isolates were not identified to a genus level. Therefore, we probably underestimated the frequency and impact of rare and emerging yeast.4,12,16 Fourth, antifungal susceptibility testing for these ENSY were not performed during this surveillance; and hence, we are unable to comment on the emergence of resistance to echinocandins.

The main strength of this study is an Asian multicentre laboratory-based data analysis that the frequency of isolation from the blood of yeast species that are ENSY. The ENSY identified in this study were mainly belonged to Basidiomycetes (Cryptococcus, Trichosporon and Rhodotorula), a group well known intrinsically resistant to echinocandins. On the other hand, the non-Candida Ascomycetes (such as Pichia, Hansenula and Saccharomyces) were rarely identified. A recent large-scale study involving 1698 yeast isolates showed that Basidiomycetes are less susceptible all antifungal drugs tested compared to Ascomycetes.17

In conclusion, this study revealed that yeast that are intrinsically resistant or non-susceptibility to echinocandins are not uncommonly isolated from blood cultures in representative countries in Asia. These data suggest that an operational algorithm for management of patients when yeast are detected in blood specimens is warranted in areas where non-Candida yeast-in-blood is common and in hospitals that do not possess the latest diagnostic technology. Improved communication among physicians and laboratories, as well as the acquisition of modern, rapid laboratory equipment that can provide results to the species level (and/or in vitro susceptibilities) are needed to guide antifungal therapy for yeast isolated from blood cultures.30

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to the mycology staff at each hospital for their sustained efforts to support the clinical staff and for their commitment to improving practice in mycology laboratories. Additionally, the authors are grateful to Professor Calvin Kunin for critical review of the manuscript.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

This study was coordinated by the principal investigators, YC Chen and BH Tan. YC Chen initiated the project and core AFWG members (YC Chen, BH Tan, A Chakrabarti, RY Li, A Chindamporn, AL Tan, Z Liu, AK Patel, SP Watcharanan and PL Sun) designed the protocol together. YC Chen supervised SY Lin, LY Hsu and UI Wu for data analyses. SY Lin, PL Lu, JH Yang and YC Chen prepared the manuscript. The authors had full access to all the data in the study, critical review and comments during preparation, and had final responsibility for the decision to submit for publication.
TRANSPARENCY DECLARATIONS

YC Chen has received research grants from Pfizer and Gilead, those grants have nothing to do with this study. All authors declared no conflict of interests.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

How to cite this article: Lin S-Y, Lu P-L, Tan BH, et al.; on behalf of the Asia Fungal Working Group (AFWG). The epidemiology of non-Candida yeast isolated from blood: The Asia Surveillance Study. Mycoses. 2019;62:112-120. https://doi.org/10.1111/myc.12852

APPENDIX 1

Other members of the study network

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