The microbiota of the bilio-pancreatic system: a cohort, STROBE-compliant study

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Background: The gut microbiota play an essential role in protecting the host against pathogenic microorganisms by modulating immunity and regulating metabolic processes. In response to environmental factors, microbes can hugely alter their metabolism. These factors can substantially impact the host and have potential pathologic implications. Particularly pathogenic microorganisms colonizing pancreas and biliary tract tissues may be involved in chronic inflammation and cancer evolution.

Purpose: To evaluate the effect of bile microbiota on survival in patients with pancreas and biliary tract disease (PBD).

Patients and Methods: We investigated 152 Italian patients with cholelithiasis (CHL), cholangitis (CHA), cholangiocarcinoma (CCA), gallbladder carcinoma (GBC), pancreas head carcinoma (PHC), ampullary carcinoma (ACA), and chronic pancreatitis (CHP). Demographics, bile cultures, therapy, and survival rates were analyzed in cohorts (T1 death <6 months; T2 death <12 months; T3 death <18 months, T3S alive at 18 months).

Results: The most common bacteria in T1 were E. coli, K. pneumoniae, and P. aeruginosa. In T2, the most common bacteria were E. coli and P. aeruginosa. In T3, there were no significant bacteria isolated, while in T3S the most common bacteria were like those found in T1. E. coli and K. pneumoniae were positive predictors of survival for PHC and ACA, respectively. E. coli, K. pneumoniae, and P. aeruginosa showed a high percentage of resistant bacteria to 3CGS, aminoglycosides class, and quinolone group especially at T1, T2, and T3.

Conclusions: An unprecedented increase of E. coli in bile leads to a decrease in survival. We suggest that some strains isolated in bile samples may be considered within the group of risk factors in carcinogenesis and/or progression of hepatobiliary malignancy. A better understanding of bile microbiota in patients with PBD should lead to a multifaceted approach to rapidly detect and treat pathogens before patients enter the surgical setting in tandem with the implementation of the infection control policy.

Keywords: human bile microorganisms, survival, pancreatic and biliary tract disease, E. coli

Introduction

The gut microbiota plays an indispensable role in protecting the host against pathogenic microorganisms by modulating immunity and regulating metabolic processes. In response to environmental factors, microbes can hugely alter their metabolism. These factors can substantially impact the host and have potential pathologic implications. In 1989, Wells published a work in which he demonstrated that the post-surgical infections were more often to be found in patients with non-sterile bile. Since then, there is increasing interest in the bile microbiome of the hepatobiliary system. There is an increasing interest to investigate...
cohorts of patients according to the STROBE guidelines. STROBE stands for international collaboration of epidemiologists, methodologists, statisticians, researchers, and editors involved in the conduct and diffusion of observational studies, with the common aim of Strengthening the Reporting of OBservational studies in Epidemiology.3 The importance to target the bile microbiota may suggest avenues for future studies of biomarkers and therapeutic interventions in hepatobiliary disease.4–8

The primary malignancies of the biliary tract, ie, cholangiocellular carcinoma (CCA) and gallbladder carcinoma (GBC), have been traditionally diagnosed at an advanced stage and harbor a low sensitivity to radiation and chemotherapy.9 In the last decade, both the diagnostic and therapeutic approaches of these patients have started to change because of the improvement of imaging and the introduction of new chemical compounds addressing specific signaling pathways of carcinogenesis.9–12 On the other hand, the mortality in some groups of malignancies of the pancreatic-biliary system remains obscurely high with low survival rates.13–15 Our research question was to address the potential clinical impact of the bile microbiota in these patients and if Enterobacteriaceae are significantly associated with neoplasms of the pancreas and biliary tract.

Accumulating evidence indicates that a multidisciplinary approach to surgical and non-surgical treatment strategies for patients with complex pancreatic and biliary disease is crucial.16 Thus, a series of interdisciplinary meetings occurred in our institution with occasional foreign visitors with expertise in clinical pathology and public health. Preoperative biliary drainage (POBD) is often performed by endoscopic placement of an endo-biliary stent into the common bile duct (CBD) or via percutaneous transhepatic drainage of the biliary tract or after decompression of the biliary duct. Previous studies showed a favorable effect of POBD on postoperative morbidity and mortality, although a stent may be a significant risk factor for bacterial contamination of the biliary system. Subjects with microbiota that is resistant to antibiotics are at an increased risk of postoperative infection as also shown in previous research work from us and others.17–20 Moreover, oncologic patients may be affected by malnutrition or cachexia and exhibit a low quality of life, increased morbidity and mortality, prolonged hospital stays, and a reduced response to treatment.21–23 Postoperative complications may also influence biliary microbiota.24–26 In line with this research, we hypothesized that certain kinds of bacterial and/or fungal microorganisms isolated in bile might be associated with specific pancreas and biliary tract diseases (PBDs) especially in surgical patients undergoing surgery due to PBD. A particular strain might be responsible for a decrease in survival other than the neoplastic disease. We retrospectively investigated the microbiota in the bile of surgical patients with PBD for a correlation between dead/survived patients considering bacterial strains collected from the bile, the underlying disease, and the anti-infective therapy.

**Materials and methods**

**Study design and patients**

This study is a single-center cohort investigation that was performed in a quality assurance (QA)-certified academic setting.27 We retrieved the files of patients with a diagnosis of cholelithiasis (CHL), cholangitis (CHA), CCA, GBC, carcinoma of the head of the pancreas (PHC), ampullary carcinoma (ACA), and chronic pancreatitis (CHP). The patients were hospitalized at the Department of General and Emergency Surgery, University Hospital of Palermo, Italy, between June 2010 and June 2014, with follow-up until December 2016. The study population consisted of patients with positive culture of bile samples collected during endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP) from patients harboring hepatobiliary disease at an external quality assurance-certified General Surgery and Emergency Academic Unit by the same operator (FD) as previously published.28,29

Routine Antibiotic prophylaxis was not administrated in unselected patients underwent to ERCP for bile sampling as reported in the literature (Performance measures for ERCP and endoscopic ultrasound: a European Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ESGE) Quality Improvement Initiative).30 The operational guidelines for anti-infective prophylaxis used in the study period were previously reported31 and also available on the website of the University Hospital “P. Giaccone” of Palermo, Italy (http://www.policlinico.pa.it/portal/pdf/news/CIO/LineeGuidaAntibioticoProfilassiLast.pdf)

The patient population included hospitalized patients at the first surgery (58%) and patients readmitted at our unit (12%). Our surgical emergency reference admitted out-patients are also coming from several surgical groups (30%). All outpatients (30%) were emergency cases and showed a history of surgery. Moreover, half of the patients had a history of previous antibiotic treatment. The incidence of comorbidities such as diabetes and cardiovascular
In general, in reset-

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Antibiotic susceptibility test-

The study protocol

racted in elderly patients

and acute cholecystitis, a laparoscopic approach was pre-

had a fever because of acute CHA

serum bilirubin was more than 20 mg/dl or if the patient

operative biliary drainage was done with ERCP if the

table pancreatic cancer and periampullary neoplasms, pre-

incidence of incidence

0.05) then a minimum required difference for a significant difference between two propor-

method with Bonferroni p-value corrected for multiple comparisons according to Sheskin (2004).

Multi-comparison tests on continuous data were per-

in an open surgical approach.

All isolates were confirmed to be non-susceptible to

imipenem and/or meropenem according to the EUCAST

breakpoints as previously reported. Antibiotic suscepti-

bility testing and detection of the Extended-spectrum beta-

Lactamase (ESBL) were first performed by disk diffusion

double disk synergy test and then confirmed by Etest

(BioMerieux, Marcy l’Etoile, France) methods according to the guidelines of the European Committee specialized

on Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing (EUCAST).

All isolates were confirmed to be non-susceptible to

imipenem and/or meropenem according to the EUCAST

breakpoints as previously reported. As previously

reported, a multidisciplinary team meeting approved

the introduction of a specific antibiotic therapy in patients

who presented with at least one of the following speci-

mens positive for pathogens – peritoneal fluid, peritoneal

fluid cultures, drainage fluid/blood or bile or tissue – dur-

ing surgical procedures according to the Infectious

Diseases Society of America and the American Society

for Microbiology.

Candida spp. were also identified by both conventional morphological and biochemical methods as previously

reported.

Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis was performed using the Matrix Laboratory (MATLAB) analytical toolbox version 2008

(MathWorks, Natick, MA, USA). Data are explicitly presented as number and percentage for categorical vari-

bles. Continuous data expressed as the mean ± standard deviation (SD) unless otherwise speci-

fied. The multiple comparison chi-square tests were used to define signifi-

cant differences among percentages. If the chi-square test was significant (p<0.05), the residual analysis with the Z-test was performed. In the case of paired data, the multiple comparison Cochran’s Q tests were used to compare the differences among percentages under the consideration of the null hypothesis that there are no differences between the variables. When the Cochran’s Q test was positive (p<0.05), then a minimum required difference for a significant difference between two propor-

ions was calculated using the Minimum Required Differences method with Bonferroni p-value corrected for multiple comparisons according to Sheskin (2004).

Multi-comparison tests on continuous data were per-

formed with one-way ANOVA test to evaluate signifi-

cant differences among means. If the ANOVA test was positive, the Scheffé’s method, a technique for adjusting levels of significance in a linear regression analysis to

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justify multiple comparisons, was performed for pairwise comparison of subgroups. Also, univariate and multivariate linear correlation analysis was performed, where the test on Pearson’s linear correlation coefficient R was performed with the t-Student test, under the null hypothesis of Pearson’s linear correlation coefficient of R equals to zero. At this step, we defined an experimental probability distribution for the patients’ survival, therapy, disease, bacteria type, and gender. We assigned a score 1 in the case of survival after 18 months else zero, 1 to male and zeroed to female, 1 to therapy-sensitive and zero with therapy resistance, 1 for positive bacterial culture, and zero for sterile culture, and 1 for a pancreato-biliary disease and zero for no-disease.

To analyze the overall survival time, we categorized the patients in four cohorts: T₁, patients with death within six months; T₂, death within 12 months; T₃, death within 18 months, and T₃S patients alive at 18 months. Finally, we analyzed the effect of several risk factors on survival. For this scope, we defined the dichotomous variables: Cancer_disease (1= yes cancer: CCA, GBC, PHC, or ACA and 0 = no cancer, ie, inflammatory disease: CHL, CHA, or CHP) and Frequent_bacteria (1 = most frequent: K. pneumoniae, Pseudomonas spp or E. coli and 0 = Others). Particularly, the Kaplan–Meier survival curves were showed for no cancer and cancer group in Figure 2 and compared with the log-rank test; instead, the Cox proportional-hazards regression results are shown in Table 4 and Figure 3. All tests with p-value (p) <0.05 were considered significant.

**Results**

**Patients and grouping**

A total of 152 consecutive patients met our eligibility criteria and were enrolled in the study: 53.29% males and 46.71% females with age range of 26–93 (72±13; mean ± SD). Table 1 shows mean age, percentages by sex and isolates, pancreatic and biliary tract diseases, and anti-infective therapy administered in the enrolled patients divided by their follow-up control points (T₁, T₂, T₃, and T₃S). Also, we reported the antimicrobials used according to antimicrobial test against bacteria isolated. The statistical analysis among groups defined at T₁, T₂, T₃, and T₃S is presented in the last column of Table 1. A multivariate analysis was performed, among all control points for every variable considered and where the multivariate analysis was positive (p<0.05) a post hoc test with pairwise comparison was completed. In this case, only significant results are reported. By contrast of mean age, we found a significant difference (p<0.0001, one-way ANOVA); notably, there was a significant difference between T₁ patients and T₃S patients (75.56>65.15, p<0.005), ie, the dead patients within 6 months had an age significantly greater in comparison to survival patients at 18 months.

**Microbiota identification**

For bacteria, among T₁, T₂, T₃, and T₃S, there was a significant difference for Alcaligenes spp (p=0.0339), the highest frequency was localized at T₂ (p=0.0354) and for Gram-negative bacilli not identified (GNBNI) (p=0.0122) the highest frequency was localized at T₃ (p=0.0029).

In examining the pancreatic and biliary tract diseases, PHC was mostly observed in dead patients at T₁ (p<0.0001), CCA in deceased patients at T₂ (p<0.0001), GBC and ACA in deceased patients at T₃ (both p<0.0001), and CHL, in survival patients at T₃S (p<0.0001, p=0.0093). Regarding the therapy, there were no significant differences among patients who underwent to susceptibility to antibiotics at T₁, T₂, T₃, and T₃S.

**Survival graphics, disease, and microbiota**

Finally, we reported the survival rates among T₁ (80/152, 52.65%), T₂ (41/80, 51.25%), and T₃ (33/41, 80.49%). The survival rate was significantly higher in patients belonging to the T₃ cohort (p=0.0042). Particularly, the survival rates for patients with cancer only (CCA, GBC, PHC, or ACA) among T₁ (47/119, 39.50%), T₂ (9/47, 19.15%), and T₃ (1/9, 11.11%) and the survival rate for patients with no cancer (CHL, CHA, or CHP) among T₁ (33/33, 100%), T₂ (32/33, 96.97%), and T₃ (32/32, 100%). In these cases, we observed for cancer group a significant differences of survival rate among T₁, T₂ and T₃ (p=0.0154), but at significant level equal to 0.05 there were no significant survival rate higher/lower in comparison to others, even though at T₁ the survival rate was of 39.50% greater in comparison to others. Instead, for patients with no cancer, no significant differences there were among T₁, T₂, and T₃ (p=0.37). Table 2 shows the results of the statistical test into groups (ie, T₁ death within six months; T₂ death within 12 months; T₃ death within 18 months, and T₃S alive at 18 months). We observed that the most common bacteria in T₁ were E. coli (p<0.0001), K. pneumoniae (p=0.0215), and P. aeruginosa (p<0.0001), while the less frequently
Table 1 Characteristic of 152 studied patients divided in different groups by time of overall survival and significant multicomparison tests among groups: T₁ death within 6 months; T₂ death within 12 months; T₃ death within 18 months and T₃S alive at 18 months

| Parameters | T₁ | T₂ | T₃ | T₃S | p-value |
|------------|----|----|----|-----|---------|
| Patients % | 47.36% (72/152) | 25.65% (39/152) | 5.26% (8/152) | 21.71% (33/152) | – |
| Age (mean ± SD) | 75.6±10.4 | 71.5±8.8 | 77.1±6.5 | 65.2±17.5 | < 0.0001* (A) |
| Female | 43.1% (31/72) | 51.3% (20/39) | 25.0% (2/8) | 54.5% (18/33) | 0.385 (C) |
| Disease | | | | | < 0.0001* (C) |
| PHC (72) | 100% (72/72) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | T₁ vs T₃S: < 0.005*(Sc) |
| CCA (42) | 0.0% | 100% (39/39) | 0.0% | 9.1% (3/33) | T₃S: 0.0351*** (Z) |
| GBC (5) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 62.5% (5/8) | 0.0% | T₃S: < 0.0001*** (Z) |
| ACA (4) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 37.5% (3/8) | 3.0% (1/33) | T₃: < 0.0001** (Z) |
| CHL (27) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 81.8% (27/33) | T₂: 0.0123*** (Z) |
| CHA (1) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 3.0% (1/33) | 0.304 (C) |
| CHP (1) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 3.0% (1/33) | 0.304 (C) |
| % of patients with presence of specific pathogens isolated in bile samples | | | | | |
| Escherichia coli | 20.8% (15/72) | 28.2% (11/39) | 12.5% (1/8) | 24.2% (8/33) | 0.726 (C) |
| Klebsiella pneumonia | 12.5% (9/72) | 2.6% (1/39) | 12.5% (1/8) | 15.2% (5/33) | 0.295 (C) |
| Enterococcus spp. | 0.0% | 2.6% (1/39) | 0.0% | 3.0% (1/33) | 0.516 (C) |
| Enterobacter spp. | 1.4% (1/72) | 7.7% (3/39) | 0.0% | 6.1% (2/33) | 0.334 (C) |
| Citrobacter spp. | 5.6% (4/72) | 5.1% (2/39) | 12.5% (1/8) | 6.1% (2/33) | 0.877 (C) |
| Serratio spp. | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 3.0% (1/33) | 0.304 (C) |
| Aeromonas spp. | 1.4% (1/72) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.304 (C) |
| Pseudomonas aeruginosa | 23.6% (17/72) | 20.5% (8/39) | 25.0% (2/8) | 30.3% (10/33) | 0.809 (C) |
| Stenotrophomonas spp. | 5.5% (4/72) | 2.6% (1/39) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.454 (C) |
| Alcaligenes spp. | 0.0% | 10.3% (4/39) | 0.0% | 3.0% (1/33) | 0.0339 * (C) |
| Acinetobacter spp. | 9.7% (7/72) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 3.0% (1/33) | 0.121 (C) |
| Achromobacter spp. | 4.2% (3/72) | 7.7% (3/39) | 12.5% (1/8) | 3.0% (1/33) | 0.614 (C) |
| Brevundimonas spp. | 1.4% (1/72) | 5.1% (2/39) | 0.0% | 3.0% (1/33) | 0.655 (C) |
| Delfia spp. | 2.8% (2/72) | 2.6% (1/39) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.768 (C) |
| Elizabethkingia spp. | 1.4% (1/72) | 2.6% (1/39) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.797 (C) |
| GNBNII | 4.2% (3/72) | 2.6% (1/39) | 25.0% (2/8) | 0.0% | T₂: 0.0029** (Z) |
| Candida albicans | 5.6% (4/72) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.207 (C) |

(Continued)
isolated strains included: *Alcaligenes* spp. (*p*=0.0396), *Serratia* spp. (*p*=0.0396), and *Enterococcus* spp. (*p*=0.0396). In T2, the most common bacteria were *E. coli* (*p*<0.0001) and *P. aeruginosa* (*p*<0.0001), but no one was significantly less frequently seen in comparison to others. In T3, there were no bacteria isolated in comparison to others. In T3S, the most common bacteria were similar to those found in T1, while there were no bacteria significantly less frequent in comparison to others.

### Therapy and general drug resistance

We observed that *E. coli*, *K. pneumoniae*, and *P. aeruginosa* showed a high percentage of resistance to third-generation cephalosporins (3GCs), aminoglycosides class, and quinolone group, especially to levofloxacin in cohort one and two were the several numbers of enrolled pts are enrolled presented and/or alive.

On the other hand, the analysis of susceptibility test showed that *E. coli*, *K. pneumoniae*, and *P. aeruginosa* had a percentage of sensibility to adopted carbapenem of about 70%.

### Pancreatic/biliary tract diseases, microbiota, drugs, and correlation analysis

Regarding the pancreatic and biliary tract diseases, PHC was the most frequent disease in T1 (*p*<0.0001), CCA in T2 (*p*<0.0001), while GBC (*p*<0.0001) and ACA (*p*<0.0139) were more often seen in T3. At T3S, the most frequent pancreatic and biliary tract disease was CHL (*p*<0.0001), while less frequent diseases included PHC and GBC (*p*<0.0299). In other words, the PHC had the highest impact on dead patients within six months. About the antibiotic therapy, we observed that the most frequent treatments in T1 were meropenem (*p*<0.005) and imipenem (*p*<0.005), while the less commonly occurring therapy was levofloxacin (*p*<0.005). In T2, we more often encountered meropenem (*p*<0.005) and ertapenem (*p*<0.005), while the fewer common antibiotics were ciprofloxacin, levofloxacin, and 3CGs. In T3, there was no therapy, which was significant in any category. Conversely, in T3S, meropenem was the most frequent therapy identified (*p*<0.005). Fewer standard treatments

| Parameters | T1 | T2 | T3 | T3S | p-value |
|------------|----|----|----|-----|---------|
| % of Patients where the pathogens isolated in bile were sensible (S) to the specific therapy | | | | | |
| Meropenem | 79.2% (57/72) | 74.4% (29/39) | 75.0% (6/8) | 75.8% (25/33) | 0.98 (C) |
| Imipenem | 80.6% (58/72) | 71.8% (28/39) | 62.5% (5/8) | 72.7% (24/33) | 0.54 (C) |
| Ertapenem | 75.0% (54/72) | 76.9% (30/39) | 75.0% (6/8) | 72.7% (24/33) | 0.98 (C) |
| 3GCs + MT | 63.9% (46/72) | 51.3% (20/39) | 50.0% (4/8) | 42.4% (14/33) | 0.20 (C) |
| Aminoglycosides | 47.2% (34/72) | 38.5% (15/39) | 50.0% (4/8) | 36.4% (12/33) | 0.66 (C) |
| Ciprofloxacin | 58.3% (42/72) | 35.9% (14/39) | 37.5% (3/8) | 39.4% (13/33) | 0.08 (C) |
| Levofloxacin | 37.5% (27/72) | 18.0% (7/39) | 37.5% (3/8) | 33.3% (11/33) | 0.20 (C) |
| 3GCs | 43.1% (31/72) | 25.6% (10/39) | 25.0% (2/8) | 30.3% (10/33) | 0.24 (C) |
| Total survival rate | 52.6% (80/152) | 51.3% (41/80) | 80.5% (33/41) | 33 | 0.0033 (C) |
| Survival rate in cancer group only (CCA, GBC, PHC or ACA) | 39.50% (47/119) | 19.15% (9/47) | 11.11% (1/9) | 1 | 0.0154 (C) |
| Survival rate in no cancer group only (CHL, CHA or CHP) | 33/33 (100%) | 32/33 (96.97%) | 32 | No localized significant results at significant level α =0.05 |

**Notes:** T1 = death within 6 months, T2 = death within 12 months; T3 = death within 18 months; T3S = patients survival at T3. *Significant test; **Significant more frequent; ***Significant less frequent.

**Abbreviations:** GNBN1, gram negative bacilli not identified; N, no response; R, resistant; S, sensible; 3GCs, 3rd generation cephalosporin; MT, metronidazole; CCA, cholangiocarcinoma; GBC, gallbladder carcinoma; CHL, cholelithiasis; CHA, cholangitis; CHP, chronic pancreatitis; A, one way ANOVA test; Sc, Schaffè test for pairwise comparison; C, multicomparison chi-square test; Z, Z-test.
used in T3S were aminoglycosides, levofloxacin, and 3GCs (p<0.005).

Table 3 shows univariate and multivariate linear correlation analysis considering as dependence variable: survival patients and independence variables: age, gender, most frequently: isolated strains (E coli, K pneumoniae, P aeruginosa), underlying diseases (PHC, CCA, ACA, GBC, and CHL), and carbapenem class (meropenem, imipenem, and ertapenem).

By multivariate analysis, the negative significant predictors of survival were: PHC (p<0.0001), CCA (p<0.0001), ACA (p<0.0001), GBC (p<0.0001), and CHL (p=0.0040). There were no significant positive predictors. In other

Table 2 Multicomparison tests among percentages into groups: T1 death within 6 months; T2 death within 12 months; T3 death within 18 months and T3S alive at 18 months

| Parameters                  | T1                  | T2                  | T3                  | T3S                 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| **Bacteria**                |                     |                     |                     |                     |
| Escherichia coli            | <0.0001 * (C)       | <0.0001 * (C)       | 0.34 (C)            | <0.0001 * (C)       |
| Klebsiella pneumoniae       | 0.0215 ** (Z)       | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Enterococcus spp            | 0.0396 *** (Z)      | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Enterobacter spp            | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Citrobacter spp             | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Serratia spp                | 0.0396 *** (Z)      | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Aeromonas spp               | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Pseudomonas aeruginosa      | <0.0001 ** (Z)      | <0.0001 ** (Z)      | –                   | –                   |
| Stenotrophomonas spp        | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Alcaligenes spp             | 0.0396 *** (Z)      | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Acinetobacter spp           | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Achromobacter spp           | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Brevundimonas spp           | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Delftia spp                 | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Elizabethkingia spp         | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| GNBNII                      | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| **Disease**                 |                     |                     |                     |                     |
| PHC                         | <0.0001 ** (Z)      | 0.0165 *** (Z)      | –                   | 0.0299 *** (Z)      |
| CCA                         | 0.0073 *** (Z)      | <0.0001 ** (Z)      | –                   | –                   |
| GBC                         | 0.0073 *** (Z)      | 0.0165 *** (Z)      | <0.0001 ** (Z)      | 0.0299 *** (Z)      |
| ACA                         | 0.0073 *** (Z)      | 0.0165 *** (Z)      | 0.0139 ** (Z)       | –                   |
| CHL                         | 0.0073 *** (Z)      | 0.0165 *** (Z)      | –                   | <0.0001 ** (Z)      |
| CHA                         | 0.0073 *** (Z)      | 0.0165 *** (Z)      | –                   | 0.0299 *** (Z)      |
| CHP                         | 0.0073 *** (Z)      | 0.0165 *** (Z)      | –                   | –                   |
| **The most and less frequent** | **therapy used in patients with bile disease** | **T1** | **T2** | **T3** | **T3S** |
| Meropenem                   | <0.005 ** (Sh)      | <0.005 ** (Sh)      | –                   | <0.005 ** (Sh)      |
| Imipenem                    | <0.005 ** (Sh)      | –                   | –                   | <0.005 ** (Sh)      |
| Ertapenem                   | –                   | <0.005 ** (Sh)      | –                   | –                   |
| 3GCs plus MT                | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   |
| Aminoglycosides             | –                   | –                   | –                   | <0.005 *** (Sh)     |
| Ciprofloxacin               | –                   | <0.005 *** (Sh)     | –                   | –                   |
| Levofoxacin                 | <0.005 *** (Sh)     | <0.005 *** (Sh)     | –                   | <0.005 *** (Sh)     |
| 3GCs                        | –                   | <0.005 *** (Sh)     | –                   | <0.005 *** (Sh)     |

Notes: *Significant test; **Significant more frequent; ***Significant less frequent; T1 =6 months, T2 =12 months, and T3 =18 months; T3S = patients survival at T3.

Abbreviations: Q, multicomparison Cochran’s Q test; (Sh) Sheskin’s procedure for significant difference between two proportions; C, multicomparison chi-square test; Z, Z-test; GNBNII, Gram negative bacilli not identified; N, no response; R, resistant; S, Bacteria sensible to the therapy; NT, no therapy; 3GCs, 3rd generation cephalosporins; MT, metronidazole; CCA, cholangiocarcinoma; PHC, carcinoma of the head of the pancreas; ACA, ampullary carcinoma; GBC, gallbladder carcinoma; CHL, cholelithiasis; CHA, cholangitis; CHP, chronic pancreatitis.
Table 3 Univariate and multivariate linear correlation analysis on the most frequent bacteria and disease, age, gender, and survival patients

| Linear correlation analysis | Univariate analysis | Multivariate analysis |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| **Parameters**              | **R (p-value)**     | **Rpartial; p-value** |
| Survival patients/PHC      | −0.45 (<0.0001) *  | Multiple linear correlation coefficient = 1.0 |
| Survival patients/CCA      | −0.22 (0.0062) *   | Rpartial = −0.99; p-value <0.0001 * |
| Survival patients/ACA      | 0.33 (<0.0001) *   | Rpartial = −0.90; p-value <0.0001 * |
| Survival patients/GBC      | −0.55 (<0.0001) *  | Rpartial = −0.98; p-value <0.0001 * |
| Survival patients/CHL      | 0.43 (<0.0001) *   | Rpartial = −0.24; p-value <0.0040 * |
| Survival patients/E. coli  | −0.21 (0.0088) *   | Rpartial = 0.04; p-value =0.68 |
| Survival patients/K. pneumoniae | 0.16 (0.0495) * | Rpartial = 0.05; p-value =0.58 |
| Survival patients/Pseudomonas aeruginosa | 0.23 (0.0038) * | Rpartial = −0.07; p-value =0.45 |
| Survival patients/Meropenem | −0.20 (0.0157) * | Rpartial = 0.05; p-value =0.59 |
| Survival patients/Imipenem | 0.08 (0.31)        | Rpartial = −0.02; p-value =0.84 |
| Survival patients/Ertapenem | −0.13 (0.11)      | Rpartial = −0.08; p-value =0.38 |
| Survival patients/Age      | −0.10 (0.20)       | Rpartial = −0.16; p-value =0.06 |
| Survival patients/Gender   | −0.09 (0.25)       | Rpartial = −0.11; p-value =0.10 |
| PHC/E. coli                | 0.52 (<0.0001) *   | Multiple linear correlation coefficient =0.63 |
| PHC/K. pneumoniae          | −0.46 (<0.0001) *  | Rpartial = −0.29; p-value =0.0003 * |
| PHC/Pseudomonas aeruginosa | 0.13 (0.12)        | Rpartial = −0.27; p-value =0.0008 * |
| CCA/E. coli                | −0.35 (<0.0001) *  | Rpartial = −0.058; p-value =0.48 |
| CCA/K. pneumoniae          | 0.42 (<0.0001) *   | Multiple linear correlation coefficient =0.59 |
| CCA/Pseudomonas aeruginosa | −0.36 (<0.0001) *  | Rpartial = −0.42; p-value <0.0001 * |
| GBC/E. coli                | −0.12 (0.16)       | Rpartial = −0.09; p-value =0.26 |
| GBC/K. pneumoniae          | 0.13 (0.11)        | Rpartial = −0.43; p-value <0.0001 * |
| GBC/Pseudomonas aeruginosa | 0.03 (0.70)        | Multiple linear correlation coefficient =0.16 |
| ACA/E. coli                | −0.08 (0.31)       | Rpartial = −0.01; p-value =0.93 |
| ACA/K. pneumoniae          | 0.25 (0.0017) *    | Rpartial = −0.12; p-value =0.16 |
| ACA/Pseudomonas aeruginosa | −0.12 (0.15)       | Rpartial = −0.08; p-value =0.32 |
| CHL/E. coli                | −0.21 (0.0099) *   | Multiple linear correlation coefficient =0.16 |
| CHL/K. pneumoniae          | 0.43 (<0.0001) *   | Rpartial = −0.06; p-value =0.44 |
| CHL/Pseudomonas aeruginosa | −0.40 (<0.0001) *  | Rpartial = −0.20; p-value =0.0131 * |
| E coli/Meropenem           | 0.36 (<0.0001) *   | Multiple linear correlation coefficient =0.52 |
| E coli/Imipenem            | 0.51 (<0.0001) *   | Rpartial = −0.04; p-value =0.65 |
| E coli/Ertapenem           | 0.15 (0.06)        | Multiple linear correlation coefficient =0.52 |
| K. pneumoniae/Meropenem    | −0.24 (0.0027) *   | Rpartial = −0.22; p-value =0.0083 * |
| K. pneumoniae/Imipenem     | −0.75 (<0.0001) *  | Rpartial = −0.06; p-value =0.45 |
| K. pneumoniae/Ertapenem    | −0.33 (<0.0001) *  | Rpartial = −0.33; p-value <0.0001 * |
| Pseudomonas aeruginosa/Meropenem | 0.029 (0.72)  | Multiple linear correlation coefficient =0.59 |
| Pseudomonas aeruginosa/Imipenem | 0.45 (<0.0001) * | Rpartial = −0.32; p-value =0.0001 * |
| Pseudomonas aeruginosa/Ertapenem | 0.35 (<0.0001) | Multiple linear correlation coefficient =0.76 |

Notes: *significant test; R = Pearson’s linear correlation coefficient; Rpartial= the partial correlation coefficient is the coefficient of correlation of the variable with the dependent variable, adjusted for the effect of the other variables in the mode

Abbreviations: CCA, cholangiocarcinoma; PHC, carcinoma of the head of the pancreas; ACA, ampullary carcinoma; GBC, gallbladder carcinoma; CHL, cholelithiasis.
words, the presence of PHC, CCA, ACA, GBC, and CHL implicated a decreasing of survival.

In univariate analysis, the survival was negatively correlated to PHC \((p<0.0001)\), CCA \((p<0.0001)\), GBC \((p<0.0001)\), \textit{E. coli} \((p=0.0088)\), and meropenem \((p=0.0157)\). Conversely, the survival was positively correlated to ACA \((p<0.0001)\), CHL \((p<0.0001)\), \textit{K. pneumoniae} \((p=0.0495)\), and \textit{P. aeruginosa} \((p=0.0038)\). Considering each variable individually, we found that the presence of PHC, CCA, GBC, \textit{E. coli}, and meropenem was connected to patients with low survival. On the other hand, ACA, CHL, \textit{K. pneumoniae}, and \textit{P. aeruginosa} were connected with patients who survived more in comparison to others.

Considering additional analyses, we observed that in univariate and multivariate analysis \textit{E. coli} was a significant positive predictor of PHC, \textit{i.e.}, the presence of \textit{E. coli} is associated with PHC. In both univariate and multivariate analysis, \textit{K. pneumoniae} was a significant negative predictor of PHC, \textit{i.e.}, the presence of \textit{K. pneumoniae} does not implicate the presence of PHC.

In the univariate and multivariate analysis, \textit{K. pneumoniae} was a significant positive predictor of ACA, \textit{i.e.}, the presence of \textit{K. pneumoniae} implicates the diagnosis of ACA. In the univariate and multivariate analysis, \textit{E. coli} and \textit{P. aeruginosa} were significant negative predictors of gallstone disease, \textit{i.e.}, the presence of \textit{E. coli} or \textit{P. aeruginosa} may implicate the absence of CHL.

In univariate analysis alone, \textit{K. pneumoniae} was positively correlated to CHL, \textit{i.e.}, the presence of \textit{K. pneumoniae} would suggest CHL.

\textbf{Figure 1} summarizes all significant linear correlations described in Table 3. Particularly in Figure 1, the dependence variable: survival patients was associated with the vertical axis. The independent variables: PHC, CCA, ACA, GBC, CHL, \textit{E. coli}, \textit{K. pneumoniae}, \textit{P. aeruginosa}, meropenem, were located on the horizontal axis. Regarding bacteria, the scatter plot showed a negative correlation between \textit{E. coli} and survival variable. Moreover, the scatter plot showed a negative association between CCA and PHC and survival.

By Kaplan–Meier survival curves comparison, among patients with cancer (CCA, GBC, PHC, or ACA) and no cancer (CHL, CHA, or CHP), we confirmed a significant difference \((p\text{-value}<0.0001, \text{log-rank test, Figure 2})\).

Finally, we considered the Cox proportional hazard regression to evaluate the effect of several risk factors on

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Covariates} & \textbf{Percentages or mean ± SD} & \textbf{HR} & \textbf{95% CI} \\
\hline
\textbf{Age} & 72.3±12.6 & 1.0 & 0.99–1.03 & 0.48 \\
\textbf{Gender} & & & & \\
\hspace{0.5cm} Male & 53.3 (81/152) & 1.0 & 0.67–1.40 & 0.87 \\
\hspace{0.5cm} Female & 46.7 (71/152) & & & \\
\textbf{Therapy} & & & & \\
\hspace{0.5cm} % patients therapy Sensible & 94.7 (144/152) & 0.6 & 0.26–1.37 & 0.22 \\
\hspace{0.5cm} % patients therapy Resistant & 5.3 (8/152) & & & \\
\textbf{Frequent bacteria} & & & & \\
\hspace{0.5cm} \textit{K. Pneumoniae + Pseudomonas aeruginosa+ E. coli} & 57.9 (88/152) & 1.1 & 0.74–1.53 & 0.74 \\
\hspace{0.5cm} Others & 42.1 (64/152) & & & \\
\textbf{Disease type} & & & & \\
\hspace{0.5cm} % patients with cancer: CCA, GBC, PHC or ACA & 78.3 (119/152) & 73.6 & 10.1–537.5 & <0.0001 * \\
\hspace{0.5cm} % patients with inflammatory disease CHL, CHA or CHP & 21.7 (33/152) & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Cox proportional-hazards regression}
\end{table}

\textit{Note: *Significant test.}

\textit{Abbreviations: HR, hazard ratio(s); CCA, Cholangiocarcinoma; PHC, carcinoma of the head of the pancreas; ACA, ampullary carcinoma; GBC, gallbladder carcinoma; CHL, cholelithiasis; CHA, cholangitis; CHP, chronic pancreatitis HR, hazards ratio; CI, confidence interval; SD, standard deviation.}
The risk factors or covariates studied were represented by Age, Gender, Bacteria, and Disease variables. For this scope, two models were considered – the null model: $-2\ln(L_0)$, where $L_0$ is the likelihood to obtain the observations if the independent variables did not affect the outcome, and the full model: $-2\ln(L_0)$, where $L_0$ is the likelihood of achieving the views with all independent variables incorporated in the model. The difference between these two yields was estimated with the chi-square test, to define how well the independent variables may affect the outcome or dependent variable. By chi-square test, the $p$-value <0.0001, ie, there was evidence that at least one of the independent variables or covariates contributes to the prediction of the outcome. By this investigation, it results that only the presence of cancer provides a significant contribution to survival time in comparison to other covariates considered, as shown by Cox proportional hazard regression analysis (Figure 3 and Table 4).

**Discussion**

Bacteria and candida colonizing pancreatic and biliary tract tissues may be involved in chronic inflammation and cancer evolution. In the twenty-first century, scientists started hypothesizing that chronic inflammation caused by persistent bacterial infections might lead to carcinogenesis and bacterial toxins and secondary metabolites produced by the chronic bacterial infection might induce carcinogenesis, and some mechanisms of cholangiocarcinogenesis have been delineated. Emerging studies on pancreatic, biliary tract, and gallbladder disease have been identified as the significant pathogens implicated in inflammatory and tumor microenvironment (TME).

In comparison to these studies, our study analyzed two proper further investigations: we analyzed both the survival rate of different cohorts of patients about pathogens identified during bile culture after the first diagnosis of BPS,
Figure 2 The Kaplan–Meier curves comparison with log-rank test, considering the dichotomous variable: Cancer_disease, used to define two groups: group with cancer and group without cancer.

Figure 3 Cox proportional – hazard regression analysis. In the graph, a single survival curve at a mean of all covariates in the model is shown. The survival curve represents the probability (Y-axis) of surviving a given length of time (X-axis).
and we examined the survival rate regarding anti-infective therapy according to results of antimicrobial tests.

Regarding the first point, we found that E. coli, P. aeruginosa, and K. pneumoniae are the leading bacteria isolated.

When we analyze these three Gram-negative pathogens each examined individually about the following variables: survival time (T₁, T₂, T₃) and pathology of the biliary-pancreatic tract, the results obtained are different:

E. coli, P. aeruginosa, and K. pneumoniae were the most significant pathogens isolated in patients’ death within six months from diagnosis of PBD and again E. coli and P. aeruginosa were prevalent in patients’ death within the first year. Regarding underlying diseases, in general, the presence of E. coli, P. aeruginosa, and K. pneumoniae was statistically significant identified in the cancer population, and their presence reduces survival time.

In particular, E. coli seems to be the bacterium that most correlates with a reduction in survival and in univariate and multivariate analysis E. coli was a significant positive predictor of PHC.

These findings are in harmony with Costi et al who reported E. coli in the bile being significantly related to poor outcome in pancreaticoduodenectomies. A few years ago, we described an outbreak of colonization by ESBL-producing E. coli (ESBL-E. coli) in intensive care units. A variety of E. coli, called as ESBL-producing E. coli (ESBLEC), is currently considered a significant cause of bacteremia in cancer patients. These strains showed some microbiological determinants, including virulence factors, involving adhesion to and invasion of host cells, iron availability, toxic effects on host cells, or protecting factors against the host’s immune system. They are recognized as the etiologic agents of hospital infections mainly through the urinary tract. Moreover, they are playing a tremendous role in the host cells, or protecting factors against the host’s immune system. In the future, it would be interesting to investigate the protective role of Alcaligenes spp. in the gut microbiome.

Regarding the survival and anti-infective treatment, we found that E. coli, K. pneumoniae, and P. aeruginosa showed a high percentage of resistant to 3CGS, aminoglycosides class, and quinolone group, especially to levofloxacin. On the other hand, the analysis of susceptibility test showed that E. coli, K. pneumoniae, and P. aeruginosa had a percentage of sensibility to adopted carbapenem (meropenem, imipenem, and ertapenem) more than 70% of all isolated strains.

In fact, the prescription of meropenem due to the isolation of pathogens resistant to other class of antibiotics seems to be associated with a decrease in survival. The scatter plot for meropenem shows a negative linear correlation between survival and antibiotic, ie, if meropenem use/dosage increases, the survival decreases. On the other hand, the isolation of pathogens sensible to carbapenem class alone may be contributing to the emerging of particular multi-drug-resistant microbiota.

Moreover, in our study, K. pneumoniae was negatively associated with meropenem, imipenem, and ertapenem showing a decrease of sensitivity to the carbapenem class confirming two previously described cases.

Resistant pathogens are increasingly reported in cancer patients and may be associated with cancer screening tests. The widespread use of these drugs can lead to the emergence of metallo-beta-lactamase strains as the authors have
previous reported in NICU setting.\textsuperscript{55} Infectious disease consultants in an emergency setting often must prescribe an immediate antimicrobial therapy, which is based on comorbidities such as type 2 diabetes mellitus, obesity, chronic liver disease, alcoholism. Mono- or combined antimicrobial therapy needs to be chosen considering the most favorable pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic profiles, and tissue penetration against the isolated bacteria, as well as the acquisition and interpretation of the hospital ecology.\textsuperscript{33,34}

The Cox proportional-hazard regression indicates that only the presence of cancer disease \textit{per se} provides a significant contribution to survival time in comparison to other covariates.

In conclusions, our study suggests that some strains isolate in bile samples may be considered within the group of risk factors in carcinogenesis and/or progression of hepato-biliary malignancy.

Moreover, the knowledge of bile microbiota and susceptibility test results highlight the necessity to consider the multidisciplinary management of patients with inflammation and cancer of pancreatic and biliary tract disease PBD. The finding that pathogens isolated in gut microbiota belong to the same class of pathogens responsible for sepsis in cancer patients may indicate that dysbiosis favors the production of genotoxins and metabolites inducing the dysregulation of the immune response, which may favor carcinogenesis.

The primary limitation may entail the local event (single-center). A multicentric investigation involving several geographic areas may be warranted to address public health policies. This aspect may be important because the colonization by resistant germs could significantly influence the future medical approach.\textsuperscript{56} The development of inflammatory bowel disease that may be associated with biliary diseases highlights the qualitative and quantitative disorders of the microbiota of the intestine (dysbiosis). Increasing evidence indicates that dysbiosis favors indeed the production of genotoxins and metabolites inducing dysregulation of the immune response of the most closely associated with carcinogenesis.\textsuperscript{57} Some microorganisms occur in specific pancreatic and biliary diseases, and our data may be vital in addressing the anti-infective therapy in patients harboring PBD neoplasms.

Acknowledgments
We thank the patients and their families for supporting this study. This study has been supported by the University of Palermo (intramural grant).

Author contributions
All authors contributed to data analysis, drafting and revising the article, gave final approval of the version to be published, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Disclosure
Dr. C. Sergi has received research funding from the Women and Children’s Health Research Institute Hair Massacre, WCHRI Grant Application ID #2096. Dr. C. Sergi has also received fees for serving as a grant reviewer for the Women’s and Children Health Research Institute, Canada, Health and Medical Research Fund (HMRF), Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Polish National Health Center, and as a consultant for Guidepoint Global LLC. The authors report no other conflicts of interest in this work.

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