Bacteriological and Antimicrobial Sensitivity Profile of Burn Wound Infections in a Tertiary Care Hospital of Uttarakhand

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Burn wound injuries are one of the most common, invasive and devastating forms of trauma. Despite the recent advances in burn wound management, bacterial infections persist as an important complication and leading cause of morbidity and mortality among burnt patients. Identification and antimicrobial susceptibility pattern of bacterial pathogens associated with burn wounds can help clinicians to plan patient management effectively and efficiently.

Materials & Methods: This prospective study was conducted for a period of one year (July 2016- June 2017). A total of 160 specimens (wound swabs and pus exudates) from burn wound patients received at microbiology department for culture and sensitivity were included in the study. Once received the samples were processed immediately as per the standard operating procedures of our laboratory. Identification and antimicrobial sensitivity testing of the bacterial isolates was performed on VITEK®2 COMPACT automated identification and antimicrobial susceptibility testing (ID/AST) system (bioMerieux, France) and interpreted as per Clinical Laboratory Standards Institute guidelines. The use of automated VITEK®2 COMPACT system for ID/AST ensures accurate results for most of the clinical isolates and eliminates the requirement of human analysis and error of results.

Results: A total of 160 samples were received from burn wound patients, out of which 113 (70.6%) were culture positive. P. aeruginosa, A. baumannii and Proteus mirabilis were the most predominant gram-negative isolates whereas S. aureus, Coagulase-negative staphylococcus and Str. pyogenes were the most commonly isolated gram-positive organisms. Antimicrobial sensitivity profile of bacterial isolates revealed Piperacillin-tazobactam, imipenem, ceftazidime-sulbactam and colistin to be the most effective antimicrobials against gram-negative isolates, whereas linezolid, teicoplanin, vancomycin and amikacin were the most effective drugs against gram-positive isolates.

Conclusion: Due to the increased morbidity and mortality associated with the burn wound infections, early detection of the causative agents and the intervention are a prerequisite for better clinical outcomes of burnt patients. Data extrapolated from our study can be helpful for primary care physicians to optimize the treatment modalities, articulating policies for empiric antimicrobial therapy and to minimize the rate of infection among burn wound patients.

Key Words: Multi drug resistant, Pseudomonas aeruginosa, Staphylococcus aureus, Total body surface area, VITEK

INTRODUCTION

Burns injury, one of the most common, invasive and devastating forms of trauma is a global public health concern. It causes damage to the largest organ in the human body, the skin, which functions to provide homeostasis, thermoregulation, sensation, immunological defense and acts as a formidable barrier against various infections.¹ World Health
Organization (WHO) has estimated that burn injury results in 265,000 deaths annually, with nearly half of these occurring in the WHO Southeast Asia Region. 

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RESULTS

Out of total 160 patients, the majority of the cases were seen in age group between 31 years to 40 years (27.5%). Males (60.7%) were more commonly affected than females (39.3%) and the male: female ratio was 1.5:1. Table 1 depicts the gender and age-wise distribution of burn wound patients. Among the causes of burn, thermal burns (36.2%) were found to be the most predominant followed by electric burns (26.9%) and scald burns (16.2%). Table 2 shows the distribution of the type of burns.

Out of total 160 samples, processed bacterial growth was seen in 113 (70.6%) samples while 47 (29.4%) samples showed no growth. Among the 113 samples with bacterial growth, gram-negative organisms (68; 60.2%) outnumbered the gram-positive organisms (45; 39.8%). *P. aeruginosa*, *A. baumannii* and *Proteus mirabilis* were the most predominant gram-negative isolates whereas *S. aureus*, Coagulase-negative staphylococcus (CONS) and *Staphylococcus pyogenes* were the most commonly isolated gram-positive organisms. Table 3 shows the distribution of various bacterial isolates grown from burn wounds of the patients.

Antimicrobial sensitivity testing was carried out for all 113 bacterial isolates. Piperacillin-tazobactam, imipenem, cefoperazone-sulbactam and colistin showed maximum activity for gram-negative isolates, whereas linezolid, teicoplanin, vancomycin and amikacin were the most effective drugs against gram-positive isolates. Table 4 depicts the antimicrobial sensitivity profile of all the bacterial isolates.

DISCUSSION

In the present study a total of 160 samples were collected, out of which, 113 samples showed growth with an isolation rate of 70.6%, a finding which was in tandem with the previous studies by Srinivasan et al. Dutta et al., and Richcane et al. who reported the isolation rate to be as high as 86.28%, 88.23% and 90.7% respectively.

Regarding the sex distribution of the patients in the present study, males (60.7%) outnumbered the females (39.3%) with male: female ratio of 1.5:1. The possible reasons for this male preponderance can be related to socio-economic and cultural habits of earning the livelihood primarily by males and also to their adventurous nature and the greater desire to be active in comparison to their female counterparts.

Our findings were in concordance with previous studies by Aali et al., Ghaffare et al. and Richcane et al. but were in contrast to the studies by Khurram et al. and Latikasharma et al.

Among the causes of burn, thermal burns (36.2%) were found to be the most predominant followed by electric burns (26.9%) and scald burns (16.2%). A study by Shahzad et al. also reported thermal burns to be the most common cause of burn injuries. Various other studies by Richcane et al., Agbenorku et al., and Mahalakshmy et al., have reported scald burns as the most common cause of burn injuries. The most affected age group in our study was between 31 to 40 years (27.5%) of age, a finding that is in parallel to the various other studies. The probable reasons for this are, the active involvement of this age group in outdoor work and more common exposure to fire-related work (household and occupational). In contrast to our findings, various other studies reported age group of 0-5 years as the most common age group suffering from burns.

Underdevelopment of the cognitive function, tendency of being more active during early developmental stages and to pull or push objects...
Nosocomial infection in burnt patients is a major challenge for clinicians. A previous study reported that 75% of all deaths among burnt patients were associated with infection. Our study results revealed a high isolation rate of about 70.6% with gram-negative isolates comprising the predominant bacterial etiology. The presence of gram-negative organisms in the majority of the cases suggests that most of such wounds may either have resulted due to prolonged hospital stay or due to prolonged time between the injury and the hospital admission. The predominance of gram-negative bacteria in burns has been documented in several studies where they have been shown to be an independent predictor of mortality among burn patients.

Studies by Bessa et al. and Hwee et al. also support our view by stating that the long hospital stay is directly proportional to high incidence of burn wound infections particularly of gram-negative etiology and is inversely proportional to the positive clinical outcome of the patients. One of the major factors adding to the complication of burn wound patients is a multi drug resistant (MDR) organism. Any MDR strain if sets in the hospital environment, can persist for months. Robust microbiological surveillance as well as restrictive antibiotic policy can be helpful in prevention and treatment of such MDR isolates. Moreover, overcrowding in burn ward is an important cause of cross-infection and must be avoided to prevent any nosocomial infection among patients.

In the present study, *P. aeruginosa* was the most commonly isolated gram-negative bacteria followed by *A. baumannii* and *P. mirabilis*. Similar findings, with *P. aeruginosa* being the predominant isolate among burn wound patients have been reported previously. High prevalence of these pathogens is associated with their ability to flourish well in a moist environment and their prolonged persistence in hospital environment, which eventually can result in a high level of antibiotic resistance among such pathogens, particularly in *Pseudomonas* spp. Moreover, the local practices like application of cow dung, toothpaste, fountain pen ink and mud paste over the burn wound can also be the possible reason for isolation of these organisms from the burn wound patients.

Among the gram-positive organisms, *S. aureus* was the most predominant followed by CONS and *S. pyogenes*. Although various other studies have shown *S. aureus* to be the most predominant etiological agent in burn wound patients, but in the present study it was found to be the second most common isolate after *P. aeruginosa*. Similar observations have been reported by previous studies as well. CONS accounted for 8.9% of the total organisms isolated from the burn wounds, a finding which is in tandem with previous studies by Mama et al. and Richcane et al. who reported CONS in 14.5% and 2.3% respectively from the burn wound infections. CONS, although is a normal skin flora, but is a common contaminant of the burn wounds.

The use of automated VITEK®2 COMPACT system for identification and antimicrobial susceptibility testing ensures accurate results for most of the clinical isolates and eliminates the requirement of human analysis and error of results.

**CONCLUSION**

The most common isolate from burn wound patients in our study was *P. aeruginosa*, *S. aureus* and *A. baumannii*, majority of them being resistant to commonly prescribed antimicrobials. The emerging drug-resistant strains and the scarcity of any newer antibiotic in the pipeline make active microbial surveillance in the clinical settings more imperative. Due to the increased morbidity and mortality associated with the burn wound infections, early detection of the causative agents and the intervention are a prerequisite for better clinical outcome of burnt patients. Although completely eliminating such infections seems to be difficult, but reducing the rate of burn wound infections to minimal will surely be beneficial in reducing patient morbidity and mortality, as well as in preventing the pharmacotherapeutic and pharmacoeco-
nomic losses.

A multidimensional approach in this regard ensuring close clinical liaison between the surgical team, the microbiologist and the infection control team can surely turn the tide in favor of the patients as well as the clinicians. We realize that data extrapolated from our study may not be representative of the whole Indian scenario and must be interpreted cautiously. However, the findings of our study can serve as a template to optimize hospital antimicrobial policy and antimicrobial prescribing guidelines. The relevant and regular policy and protocol changes can definitely overcome the burn wound infection rate in any healthcare facility. Given the considerable clinical and economic consequences of burn wound infections, the goal of a healthcare system should be “zero tolerance” to such infections and the associated adverse events.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Authors acknowledge the immense help received from the scholars whose articles are cited and included in references of this manuscript. The authors are also grateful to authors/editors/publishers of all those articles, journals and books from where the literature for this article has been reviewed and discussed.

Financial Support: None, Conflict of Interest: Nil

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Table 1: Gender and age-wise distribution of burn wound patients. (n=160)

| Age group (in years) | Males | Females | Total |
|----------------------|-------|---------|-------|
| 0 - 10               | 07    | 13      | 20    |
| 11 - 20              | 14    | 11      | 25    |
| 21 - 30              | 17    | 07      | 24    |
| 31 - 40              | 29    | 15      | 44    |
| 41 - 50              | 19    | 10      | 29    |
| 51 - 60              | 11    | 07      | 18    |
| Total                | 97    | 63      | 160   |

Table 2: Distribution of the type of burns observed in the study. (n=160)

| Type of burns   | No. of cases | Percentage |
|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| Thermal burn    | 58           | 36.2       |
| Electric burn   | 43           | 26.9       |
| Scald burn      | 26           | 16.2       |
| Flame burn      | 22           | 13.8       |
| Chemical burn   | 11           | 6.9        |
| TOTAL           | 160          | 100%       |
Table 3: Distribution of the various bacterial isolates grown in clinical samples from burn wound patients. (n=113)

| Organism                        | Number (%) |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| **Gram-negative organisms (n=68)** |            |
| *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*        | 23 (20.3)  |
| *Acinetobacter baumannii*       | 17 (15)    |
| *Proteus mirabilis*             | 14 (12.4)  |
| *Klebsiella pneumoniae*         | 07 (6.2)   |
| *Escherichia coli*              | 04 (3.6)   |
| *Enterobacter cloacae*          | 03 (2.7)   |
| **Gram-negative organisms (n=45)** |        |
| *Staphylococcus aureus*         | 19 (16.8)  |
| CONS                            | 10 (8.9)   |
| *Streptococcus pyogenes*        | 09 (7.9)   |
| *Enterococcus faecalis*         | 07 (6.2)   |
| **Total**                       | 113        |

CONS: Coagulase negative staphylococcus

Table 4: Antimicrobial sensitivity profile of bacterial isolates from the burn wound patients.

| Antibiotics | *P. aeruginosa* n=23 | *A. baumannii* n=17 | *P. mirabilis* n=14 | *K. pneumoniae* n=07 | *E. coli* n=04 | *E. cloacae* n=03 | *S. aureus* n=19 | CONS n=10 | Str. Pyogenes n=09 | Ent. faecalis n=07 |
|-------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|
| AMK         | 8.7                  | 17.6                | 21.4                | 71.4                 | 75.0          | 66.7             | 89.5             | 90.0      | NT                | NT                |
| AMP         | 8.7                  | 5.9                 | 14.3                | 14.3                 | 25.0          | 0.0              | 10.5             | 20.0      | NT                | NT                |
| AMC         | 4.3                  | 9.5                 | 14.3                | 28.6                 | 50.0          | 66.7             | 63.1             | 80.0      | NT                | NT                |
| CTX         | 13.0                 | 11.8                | 7.1                 | 28.6                 | 50.0          | 0.0              | NT               | NT        | NT                | NT                |
| CIP         | 34.8                 | 5.9                 | 14.3                | 28.6                 | 25.0          | 0.0              | 31.6             | 70.0      | NT                | NT                |
| CLD         | NT                   | NT                  | NT                  | NT                   | NT            | NT               | 57.9             | 60.0      | NT                | 71.4              |
| COT         | 8.7                  | 11.8                | 35.7                | 28.6                 | 50.0          | 33.3             | 57.9             | 80.0      | 33.3              | 42.8              |
| CFS         | 86.9                 | 64.7                | 64.3                | 57.1                 | 50.0          | 33.3             | NT               | NT        | NT                | NT                |
| COL         | 86.9                 | 94.1                | NT                  | 85.7                 | 100           | 100              | NT               | NT        | NT                | NT                |
| CEF         | 56.5                 | 17.6                | 35.3                | 14.3                 | 25.0          | 0.0              | NT               | NT        | NT                | NT                |
| ERT         | NT                   | NT                  | NT                  | NT                   | NT            | NT               | 68.4             | 70.0      | 77.8              | 74.1              |
| GEN         | 8.7                  | 17.6                | 21.4                | 57.1                 | 50.0          | 33.3             | 78.9             | 70.0      | NT                | NT                |
| GEN-HL      | NT                   | NT                  | NT                  | NT                   | NT            | NT               | NT               | NT        | NT                | 42.8              |
| IMI         | 91.3                 | 82.3                | 78.6                | 85.7                 | 100           | 100              | NT               | NT        | NT                | NT                |
| LNZ         | NT                   | NT                  | NT                  | NT                   | NT            | NT               | NT               | NT        | NT                | NT                |
| PIP-TZ      | 95.6                 | 64.7                | 92.8                | 85.7                 | 100           | 100              | NT               | NT        | NT                | NT                |
| PN-G        | 8.7                  | 5.9                 | 0.0                 | 0.0                  | 0.0           | 0.0              | 10.5             | 20.0      | 100               | 85.7              |
| TEC         | NT                   | NT                  | NT                  | NT                   | NT            | NT               | NT               | NT        | NT                | NT                |
| TIG         | 86.9                 | 94.1                | 92.8                | 85.7                 | 100           | 100              | 63.1             | 90.0      | 44.4              | 57.1              |
| VAN         | NT                   | NT                  | NT                  | NT                   | NT            | NT               | NT               | NT        | 100               | 100               |

Sensitivity pattern shown in the table is the percentage of the isolates sensitive to the antibiotic. Intermittently sensitive isolates were considered as resistant.

AMK: Amikacin; AMP: Ampicillin; AMC: Amoxycillin-clavulanate; CTX: Ceftriaxone; CIP: Ciprofloxacin; CLD: Clindamycin; COT: Co-trimoxazole; CFS: Cefoperazone-sulbactam; COL: Colistin; CONS: Coagulase negative staphylococcus; CEF: Cefuroxime; ERT: Erythromycin; GEN: Gentamicin; GEN-HL: Gentamicin-high level; IMI: Imipenem; LNZ: Linezolid; PIP-TZ: Piperacillin-tazobactam; PN-G: Penicillin; TEC: Teicoplanin; TIG: Tigecycline; VAN: Vancomycin