

THE PATHCARE NEWS

16s rRNA PCR A new molecular test improves PathCare laboratories' capacity to detect and identify bacteria involved in 'difficult' infections

A 16s rRNA molecular test is now offered by the molecular laboratory in our reference laboratory at N1 City, Goodwood. The test is useful in the diagnosis of bacterial infection in cases where culture does not yield positive results due to fastidious growth requirements of the infecting agent, very low organism counts or when organisms are no longer viable due to exposure to antimicrobial agents. This technique can also be utilized to identify organisms cultured when conventional methods fail.

Q: What is 16s rRNA?

A: It is ribosomal RNA which is conserved in all bacteria, but has highly specific nucleic acid sequences unique to every species.

Q: How does the test work?

A: A PCR is done on the specimen in order to 'fish' for any bacterial RNA which may be present. These segments are then amplified and sequenced in order to obtain a genetic 'fingerprint', which can then be identified with the use of a web-based databank.

Q: On what specimens can this be performed?

A: Any specimen from a normally sterile site is suitable (for example heart valves, CSF, and aspirates from vitreous fluid and joints). Care must be taken to avoid contamination, as any bacterial RNA which may be present in the sample will be detected.

Q: Which organisms can be detected and identified using the 16s rRNA technique?

A: All bacteria, including tuberculosis and organisms with incomplete cell walls e.g. rickettsia and mycoplasmas. Viruses and fungi, however, cannot be detected using this technique.

Q: What about cases where the patient has already received antimicrobials?

A: Because this test does not rely on the viability of organisms, it can still be positive providing that the patient's immune system has not yet mopped up bacterial residues.

Q: What may influence the sensitivity of the test?

A: A control is built into the test to indicate the presence of inhibitors of the PCR reaction which may be present in the specimen. A very low number of organisms or a diluted sample (for instance peripheral blood) may also be below the limit of detection of this test.

Q: What may influence the specificity of the test?

A: Contamination of the specimen by skin flora or environmental organisms may lead to failure of the test, or problems with its interpretation, as organisms not relevant to the infective process may be detected. The detection of a pathogen associated with the specific infection increases the positive predictive value of the result.

Q: Would this test be useful in all kinds of infection?

A: This test performs best when infection is caused by a single type of bacteria. In cases of, for example, endocarditis and incompletely treated meningitis it has been shown to improve patient outcome and also to limit the unnecessary use of especially broad spectrum antimicrobial drugs. Mixed infections would not yield good results. Soft tissue and intra-abdominal infections are mostly polymicrobial in nature and this test will not be suitable in such cases.

Q: Can the 16s rRNA test also indicate antimicrobial sensitivity?

A: No. However, when dealing with a known bacterial infection better choices can be made in line with published data regarding antimicrobial susceptibilities of the identified organism.

Q: What is the turn-around time of this test?

A: 16s rRNA batches will be run twice a week and results should be available within 2 to 5 days.

Q: How do I request this test?

A: Because this is a highly specialized and low-volume test, it is not included on the menu of the standardised request form. It can be requested in the "other test" text box, and we also invite you to discuss cases where you consider this test to be of potential value to the management of your patient with the clinical microbiologist on call.

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For further reading: Clinical Microbiological Reviews 2004; 17(4): 840 - 862; Journal of Microbiological Methods 2009; 76: 217 – 225

DIE PATHCARE NUUS

16s rRNA PKR

'n Nuwe molekulêre toets verbeter PathCare laboratoriums se vermoë om bakterieë aan te toon en te identifiseer in 'moeilike' infeksies.

'n 16s rRNA molekulêre toets word nou deur die molekulêre laboratorium in die PathCare verwysingslaboratorium by N1 Stad, Goodwood, aangebied. Dit word voorgestel vir die diagnose van bakteriële infeksie in steriele monsters waar kweking negatief is weens organismes wat kieskeurige groei-behoeftes het, baie lae organisme tellings of wanneer organismes as gevolg van blootstelling aan antimikroiale middels nie meer lewensvatbaar is nie. Die tegniek kan ook gebruik word vir die identifikasie van gekweekte organismes wanneer konvensionele metodes vaal.

V: Wat is 16s rRNA?

A: Dit is ribosomale RNA wat in alle bakterieë voorkom, maar hoogs spesifieke nukleïensuur volgordes maak dit uniek tot elke spesie.

V: Hoe werk die toets?

A: 'n PKR word op die pasiënt se monster uitgevoer wat 'vis' vir enige bakteriële RNA wat teenwoordig mag wees. Dit word dan geamplifiseer en daarna word die spesifieke nukleïensuur volgorde van segmente bepaal. Hierdie volgordes word met 'n databank op die internet vergelyk wat ons dan in staat stel om die organismes te identifiseer.

V: Op watter monsters kan dit uitgevoer word?

A: Enige monster vanaf 'n steriele area kan hiervoor geprosesseer word (byvoorbeeld hartkleppe, SSV en aspirate van vitreale vog en gewrigte). Wees egter uiters versigtig om kontaminasie te vermy aangesien enige bakteriële RNA wat in die monster teenwoordig is, geamplifiseer sal word.

V: Watter organismes kan deur die 16s rRNA molekulêre tegniek geïdentifiseer word?

A: Alle bakteriëë, insluitende tuberkulose en organismes met onvolledige selwande soos rickettsia en mikoplasmas. Virusse en swamme is egter 'onsigbaar' vir hierdie tegniek.

V: Wat daarvan as die pasiënt reeds antibiotika ontvang het?

A: Omdat die toets nie afhanklik is van die lewensvatbaarheid van die organismes nie, kan dit steeds positief wees mits die pasiënt se immuunsisteem nie reeds die afgebreekte organismes opgeruum het nie.

V: Wat kan die sensitiwiteit van die toets beïnvloed?

A: Kontaminasie van die monster deur vel- en omgewings organismes kan die toets faal en ook interpretasie bemoeilik aangesien dit kan lei tot die identifikasie van organismes wat nie werklik by die infektiewe proses betrokke is nie. Die aantoning van 'n patogeen geassosieerd met infeksie in die area waarvan die monster kom, verhoog die positiewe voorspellingswaarde van die uitslag.

V: Is die toets van waarde by alle tipes bakteriële infeksie?

A: Hierdie toets vaar die beste in infeksies wat deur 'n enkele tipe organisme veroorsaak word. In spesifieke gevalle soos byvoorbeeld endokarditis en half behandelde meningitis kan dit pasiënt uitkomste verbeter en ook die gebruik van onnodige en breë spektrum antibiotika voorkom. Gemengde infeksies kan toetsresultate belemmer. Sagteweefsel infeksies en gastro-intestinale absesse is dikwels polimikrobaal van aard en daarom sal die 16s rRNA toets selde in sulke gevalle van waarde wees.

V: Kan 16s RNA ook antimikroiale sensitiwiteit aandui?

A: Nee. As 'n bakteriële infeksie egter bewys is en 'n spesifieke identifikasie gemaak is, kan antimikroiale terapie volgens bekende weerstandigheidsprofiële van die organisme aangepas word.

V: Hoe vinnig kan resultate verwag word?

A: Die 16s rRNA toetse sal twee maal per week uitgevoer word en resultate sal dus binne twee tot vyf dae beskikbaar wees.

V: Hoe vra ek hierdie toets aan?

A: Omdat hierdie 'n baie gespesialiseerde toets is wat in lae volumes aangevra sal word, verskyn dit nie op die standaard aanvraagvorm nie. Dit kan aangevra word deur dit aan te dui onder 'ander toetse'. Ons nooi u ook om gevalle waar u reken hierdie toets 'n bydrae kan maak tot die hantering van u pasiënt, met die kliniese mikrobioloog aan diens te bespreek.

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Lees verder: Clinical Microbiological Reviews 2004; 17(4): 840 - 862; Journal of Microbiological Methods 2009; 76: 217 – 225