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HELICOBACTER PYLORI AND GASTRIC CANCER: MICROBIOLOGICAL INSIGHTS AND CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

FARAH ALI HAMEED[1], NOOR SARHAN AHMAD[2], RAHEEM SABER SHWIEHK[3]

[1]Department of Emergency medicine and first aids Techniques, Institute of Medical Technology, Middle Technical University, Baghdad, Iraq.
[2]College of Arts, University of Samarra
[3]Department of Nursing, Institute of Medical Technology, Middle Technical University, Baghdad, Iraq

ABSTRACT

Helicobacter pylori is a gram-negative bacterium that is a major factor in a number of gastrointestinal diseases including gastritis, peptic ulcer disease, and gastric cancer. We reviewed the biology of H. pylori, including its microbiological characteristics, pathogenic mechanisms and its key role in gastric carcinogenesis. Here, we discuss the bacterium's mechanisms of survival and virulence factors, such as CagA and VacA, which together induce chronic inflammation and drive malignant transformation. The current status of clinical manifestations and diagnostic approaches are reviewed, emphasizing the need for accurate detection and effective treatment. Future directions stress the need for novel therapeutic strategies as well as vaccine development, host-pathogen understanding, biomarker discovery and personal medicine to improve patient outcome and reduce the global burden of H. pylori associated diseases.

KEYWORDS: h pylori, infection, CagA, VacA, MDR, XDR.

INTRODUCTION

Gram-negative, spiral-shaped bacterium Helicobacter pylori was emerged during the period from 1982 to 2002 as a major central point in the field of microbiological studies since it was discovered by Barry Marshall and Robin Warren. Only this pathogen has the ability to colonize the human stomach, a very acidic environment, supposedly devoid of microbial life. H. pylori has been recognized as playing a major role both in development of some gastrointestinal diseases, particularly gastric cancer, as well as in their spread [1-3].

Despite improvements in its cure rate, gastric cancer is still one of the leading causes of cancer related mortality throughout the world (particularly in East Asia, Eastern Europe, and some parts of South America). While treatments for gastric cancer have improved, there is no cure because the disease is so often only diagnosed at an advanced stage. As a result, effective prevention and treatment strategies for

gastric carcinogenesis require understanding of the intricate relationship between H. pylori infection and gastric carcinogenesis [4-8].

This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the microbiological insights into H: Its clinical implications for gastric cancer with pylori. The bacterium's microbiology, pathogenesis, epidemiology and molecular pathways into cancer development are explored. This article will also discuss current diagnostic and treatment strategies, current prevention measures and future research directions. Here, we aim to parse out the best available findings to help deepen understanding of H. pylori's role in gastric cancer and identify potential avenues for improved patient outcomes.

Microbiological Characteristics of Helicobacter pylori

1. Morphology and Physiology

The gram negative, microaerophilic bacterium Helicobacter pylori are a helical shaped bacterium. About 2.5 to 5 micrometers long and 0.5 to 1 micrometer wide it is thought to facilitate its movement and its ability to colonize the gastric mucosa through its spiral form. The bacterium is endowed with multiple unipolar flagella which allow it to rapidly move through the viscous mucus layer of the stomach and to adhere to the epithelial lining via this time derived simplification [2, 9, 10].

2. Genetic Diversity and Strain Variation

Although H. pylori show high genetic diversity, which is responsible for its adaptability and persistence within human host. Genco's genome is highly variable containing many strain specific genes that may affect pathogenicity. High mutation rates, plus frequent recombination, are the major drivers for this genetic variability. The cytotoxin-associated gene A (cagA) and the vacuolating cytotoxin gene A (vacA) are two well characterized virulence genes that show large amounts of allelic diversity among strains, and which contribute to the virulence potential [11-14].

3. Survival Mechanisms in the Gastric Environment

H. pylori has learned several ways to survive in the harsh acidic stomach environment. It produces urease, an enzyme which cleaves urea into ammonia and carbon dioxide, neutralizing stomach acid in its local environment. This makes for a better habitat in which to live for the bacterium. In addition, H. pylori's endotoxin is minimally potentiated and its low activity in inducing an inflammatory response in the host facilitates chronic colonization [15-19].

4. Biofilm Formation

On top of that, H. pylori is capable to form biofilms, which further allow its survival and persistence in the gastric niche. The bacteria form structured communities in an extracellular matrix that protects them from host attack and antibiotic treatment. According to the biofilm formation, the bacterium is thought to be resistant to eradication therapies and capable of causing chronic infection [20, 21].

5. Interaction with Host Cells

The adhesins of H. pylori, such as BabA and SabA, bind to specific receptors on the host cell surface, to which these bacteria have a close association. These interactions enable colonization and act to trigger cell signaling pathways involved in inflammation, cell damage and changes in gastric physiology. The

pathogenicity island containing the cag encoding a type IV secretion system (cagPAI) allows translocation of CagA protein into host cells and its disruption of cellular functions and propagation of carcinogenesis [22-26].

Table 1 *(Microbiological Characteristics of Helicobacter pylori.)*

Characteristic	Description	Significance
Morphology	Spiral-shaped, gram-negative bacterium, 2.5-5 µm in length	Helical shape aids in motility and colonization of the gastric mucosa
Flagella	Multiple unipolar flagella	Facilitates rapid movement through the viscous mucus layer, enhancing adherence to the gastric epithelium
Genetic Diversity	High mutation rates and frequent recombination events	Contributes to strain variation and adaptability, impacting pathogenic potential and resistance to treatments
Key Virulence Factors	cagA and vacA genes	Influence pathogenicity; CagA disrupts cellular functions promoting carcinogenesis, VacA induces vacuolation in epithelial cells
Urease Production	Enzyme catalyzes urea hydrolysis to ammonia and carbon dioxide	Neutralizes stomach acid in the immediate vicinity of the bacterium, creating a more hospitable microenvironment
Biofilm Formation	Structured communities encased in an extracellular matrix	Enhances survival and persistence in the gastric environment, contributing to resistance against antibiotics and immune responses
Adhesins	BabA and SabA	Bind to specific receptors on host cell surfaces, facilitating colonization and triggering inflammatory responses
Type IV Secretion System	Encoded by cag pathogenicity island (cagPAI)	Translocates CagA protein into host cells, disrupting cellular processes and promoting gastric carcinogenesis
Lipid A Component of LPS	Low endotoxic activity	Reduces host inflammatory response, aiding chronic colonization
Interaction with Host Cells	Close interaction using adhesins and type IV secretion system	Triggers signaling pathways leading to inflammation, cellular damage, and alterations in

		gastric physiology, contributing to disease pathogenesis

Pathogenesis of Helicobacter pylori Infection

1. Mechanisms of Colonization and Persistence

Several sophisticated mechanisms have allowed Helicobacter pylori to develop to establish and maintain infection in the highly hostile environment of the human stomach. The bacterium enters the stomach and travels through the gastric lumen, acid, which it survives, to reach the protective mucus layer covering the stomach lining. This motility, its essential flagella permitting them to burrow into the mucus and adhere to epithelial cells below, is important for its survival [8, 27-30].

2. Adhesion to Gastric Epithelium

Several bacterial adhesins function in a critical step in colonization, that of adhesion. There are two others major adhesins, BabA (blood group antigen binding adhesin) binding to Lewis b blood group antigen on gastric epithelial cells, and SabA (sialic acid binding adhesin) which binds to sialylated antigens. Stable colonization of H. pylori is further facilitated through these interactions, and H. pylori resists being flushed out by gastric peristalsis [24, 31].

3. Evasion of Host Immune Response

There are various ways through which H. pylori escapes the host immune system. It produces urease that lyses urea into ammonia and carbon dioxide surface neutralizing gastric acid in its area. But that not only protects the bacterium; it actually induces an alkale environment in which the bacterium thrives. Furthermore, LPS of H. pylori exhibits low endotoxic activity which reduces host's immune response and induces chronic infection [28, 29, 32, 33].

4. Induction of Inflammation

H. pylori is host chronically present that induces a robust inflammatory response from the host. A variety of factors secreted by the bacterium induce gastritis by attracting immune cells to the site of infection. Therefore, the type IV secretion system encoded by the cag pathogenicity island (cagPAI) plays particularly important role in this process. The mechanism of action is through translocation of CagA protein into host cells disrupting cellular signaling pathway and induces inflammation.VacA (Vacuolating Cytotoxin A)ri induces a robust inflammatory response from the host. The bacterium secretes various factors that attract immune cells to the site of infection, leading to gastritis. The type IV secretion system encoded by the cag pathogenicity island (cagPAI) is particularly important in this process. It translocates CagA protein into host cells, disrupting cellular signaling pathways and promoting inflammation [32, 34-37].

5. Virulence Factors [38]

Table 2 *(Key Virulence Factors and Their Effects.)*

Virulence Factor	Description	Effect on Host
CagA	Injected into host cells via type IV secretion system	Disrupts cellular functions, promotes inflammation, alters cell morphology
VacA	Secreted toxin	Induces vacuolation, disrupts mitochondrial function, modulates immune responses
Urease	Enzyme converting urea to ammonia and CO_2	Neutralizes stomach acid, creating a favorable microenvironment for bacterial survival
BabA	Adhesin binding to Lewis b antigens	Facilitates stable colonization of gastric epithelium
SabA	Adhesin binding to sialylated antigens	Enhances adherence to epithelial cells under inflammatory conditions

6. Modulation of Gastric Acid Secretion

H. pylori can influence gastric acid secretion through multiple mechanisms. By inducing inflammation, it can lead to hypochlorhydria (reduced stomach acid production), creating a more favorable environment for its survival. Conversely, strains expressing certain virulence factors like CagA can also cause hypergastrinemia, leading to increased acid secretion and contributing to peptic ulcer disease [39, 40].

7. Role of Host Genetics

Host genetic factors also play a significant role in the pathogenesis of H. pylori infection. Variations in genes related to the immune response, such as those encoding cytokines like IL-1β, TNF-α, and IL-10, can influence susceptibility to infection and severity of disease outcomes [32, 41].

Molecular Mechanisms Linking Helicobacter pylori to Gastric Cancer

1. Chronic Inflammation and Oxidative Stress

One of the primary pathways through which Helicobacter pylori contributes to gastric cancer development is chronic inflammation. Persistent infection with H. pylori induces a prolonged inflammatory response, characterized by the infiltration of immune cells such as neutrophils and macrophages into the gastric mucosa. These immune cells release reactive oxygen species (ROS) and reactive nitrogen species (RNS), leading to oxidative stress and subsequent damage to the DNA of gastric epithelial cells. This cumulative DNA damage can initiate and promote carcinogenesis [32, 42-45].

2. Role of Virulence Factors

- **CagA (Cytotoxin-associated gene A)**

CagA is a major virulence factor of H. pylori and plays a critical role in gastric cancer development. Upon delivery into host cells via the type IV secretion system, CagA undergoes tyrosine phosphorylation and interacts with various host cell signaling proteins. These interactions disrupt normal cellular processes and promote oncogenic pathways [46-48]:
- Activation of SHP-2 Phosphatase: Phosphorylated CagA activates SHP-2, a tyrosine phosphatase, leading to abnormal cell proliferation and motility.
- Deregulation of β-catenin: CagA interaction with β-catenin stabilizes this protein, enhancing its nuclear accumulation and promoting the transcription of genes involved in cell proliferation and survival.
- Disruption of Tight Junctions: CagA disrupts tight junctions between epithelial cells, leading to loss of cell polarity and increased cellular proliferation.

- **VacA (Vacuolating Cytotoxin A)**

VacA promotes gastric carcinogenesis by inducing vacuolation of gastric epithelial cells, inhibits mitochondrial function and influences immune responses. In addition, it is able to cause apoptosis of epithelial cells and immune cells resulting in further tissue damage and chronic inflammation.

3. Epigenetic Alterations

H. pylori infection is associated with significant epigenetic changes in the gastric mucosa, including DNA methylation, histone modifications, and microRNA expression [49-51]:
- DNA Methylation: Due to hypermethylated tumor suppressor genes in chronic infection, these genes are silenced then unregulated cell growth occurs.
- Histone Modifications: stone acetylation and methylation patterns alterations can affect chromatin structure and gene expression and participate in carcinogenesis.
- MicroRNAs: Several microRNAs that regulate cell cycle control, apoptosis, and inflammation genes are modulated in an H. pylori infection.

4. Genetic Susceptibility

The susceptibility to H. pylori induced gastric cancer is also determined by host genetic factors. Polymorphisms of genes involved in pro-inflammatory cytokines, such as IL-1β, TNF-α and IL-10 may shape the strength of inflammatory response and thus determine the ability of an individual to develop gastric cancer [41, 52].

5. Interaction with Gastric Stem Cells

H. pylori is being shown more and more to be able to have disease altering effects on the gastric stem cells, particularly promoting their proliferation and maybe their malignant transformation. The factors produced by the bacterium (such as CagA) even further highlight its importance in carcinogenesis by inducing stem cell like properties in the differentiated cells it infects [35, 53, 54].

6. Epithelial-Mesenchymal Transition (EMT)

H. pylori infection can activate epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT), the process to achieve a mesenchymal apoptosis with epithelial features, such as increased motility and invasiveness. EMT is a key step in cancer metastasis [55, 56]:
- Loss of E-cadherin: EMT is a result of CagA disrupting E-cadherin mediated cell to cell adhesion.
- Upregulation of EMT Markers: Infection leads to increased expression of mesenchymal markers like vimentin and fibronectin.

Table 3 *(Molecular Pathways Involved in H. Pylori-Induced Gastric Cancer.)*

Pathway	Mechanism	Impact on Carcinogenesis
Chronic Inflammation & Oxidative Stress	Persistent immune cell infiltration causing ROS/RNS production	DNA damage in gastric epithelial cells leading to mutations
CagA	Activation of SHP-2, deregulation of β-catenin, disruption of tight junctions	Abnormal cell proliferation, loss of cell polarity, enhanced survival
VacA	Induces vacuolation, disrupts mitochondrial function	Cellular apoptosis, immune modulation contributing to tissue damage
Epigenetic Alterations	DNA methylation, histone modifications, microRNA expression changes	Silencing of tumor suppressor genes, altered gene expression promoting carcinogenesis
Genetic Susceptibility	Polymorphisms in cytokine genes	Altered inflammatory response influencing cancer risk
Interaction with Gastric Stem Cells	Promotes stem cell proliferation and malignant transformation	Initiation of gastric cancer
Epithelial-Mesenchymal Transition (EMT)	Loss of E-cadherin, upregulation of mesenchymal markers	Increased cell motility and invasiveness, contributing to metastasis

Table 4 *(Clinical Manifestations and Diagnostic Approaches for Helicobacter pylori Infection.)*

Clinical Manifestation	Description	Diagnostic Approach	Methods	Notes

Gastritis	Inflammation of the stomach lining, often asymptomatic	**Non-invasive Tests**	Urea breath test, stool antigen test	Useful for initial diagnosis and monitoring treatment
Peptic Ulcer Disease (PUD)	Ulcers in the stomach or duodenum causing pain and bleeding	**Invasive Tests**	Endoscopy with biopsy	Allows direct visualization and histological examination
Gastric Cancer	Malignancy in the stomach, often detected at advanced stages	**Serological Tests**	H. pylori antibody test	Indicates past or current infection but not active state
MALT Lymphoma	B-cell lymphoma linked to chronic H. pylori infection	**Molecular Tests**	PCR for H. pylori DNA	Highly sensitive, used for detecting bacterial genetic material
Dyspepsia	Indigestion and discomfort in the upper abdomen	**Rapid Urease Test (RUT)**	Biopsy-based, detects urease activity	Quick results during endoscopy

Future Directions and Research Needs

Table 5 *(Future Directions and Research Needs for Helicobacter pylori.)*

Research Area	Focus	Potential Impact
Emerging Therapies	Novel antibiotics, probiotics, phytochemicals, immunotherapy	Overcome antibiotic resistance, enhance treatment efficacy
Vaccine Development	Therapeutic and prophylactic vaccines	Reduce global burden of H. pylori infection and associated diseases

Host-Pathogen Interactions	Molecular mechanisms of adhesion, immune evasion, host cell signaling manipulation	Identify new targets for intervention
Biomarker Discovery	Proteomic and metabolomic studies for non-invasive diagnosis	Improve early detection, predict disease progression, monitor treatment response
Personalized Medicine	Genetic, epigenetic, microbiome factors influencing susceptibility and disease severity	Develop tailored therapies to optimize treatment efficacy and minimize side effects

CONCLUSION

Helicobacter pylori significantly impact global health, causing diseases such as gastritis, peptic ulcers, and gastric cancer. Understanding its microbiological traits and pathogenic mechanisms is crucial for better management. Future research should focus on novel therapies, vaccines, and personalized approaches to enhance treatment efficacy and reduce disease burden. Collaborative efforts are essential to achieve meaningful progress in combating H. pylori-associated diseases.

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