I'm a Scourge, and I am Getting Stronger

Sorry I don’t give autographs, as I simply haven’t got the time. My claim to fame, you ask? Well, I’m a Gram-negative bacteria that has become one of the most difficult pathogens to treat! I know other bugs say they’re tough, but they don’t mess with me, and you won’t want to, either.

I shouldn’t claim all the credit for my status, although my sudden rise has gone to my head, if you haven’t already noticed. Ah, vanity! My species was largely unknown several decades ago, but we have risen to power and prominence partly because of our clan’s ability to trigger infections in immunocompromised patients. I can cause a spectrum of infections, but I most commonly affect the lower respiratory tract, followed by blood and wound invasion. If your patients develop ventilator-associated pneumonia or central line-associated bloodstream infection, I’m most likely the culprit.

I am primarily a healthcare-associated pathogen, thus the risk factors for colonization and infection by me and my kin are also healthcare-associated. Risk factors for acquisition include recent exposure to antimicrobial agents, presence of central venous catheters or urinary catheters, severity of illness, duration of hospital stay, location in an intensive care unit, larger hospital size, and recent surgery.

I am notorious in hospitals now because I have acquired resistance genes to virtually all antibiotics capable of treating Gram-negative bacteria, including the fluoroquinolones and the cephalosporins. Some members of our clan have accumulated resistance genes in sizable amounts within the bacterial chromosome, and the only conventional remaining treatment options were the carbapenems. But not so fast! We possess a specific β-lactamase gene that has the awesome ability to confer carbapenem resistance.

There’s been a lot of talk recently about this so-called antibiotic of last resort, colistin, which is now considered to be the final antimicrobial capable of treating infections caused by us. But guess what? Scientists are now isolating strains in our clan that are resistant to this potent antibiotic as well. I’m pretty proud to say that I rank up there with my good buddies, methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) and Clostridium difficile as a threat to patients worldwide and a confounding factor in the global fight against antimicrobial resistance. I’m a scourge upon mankind, and I’m loving the attention!

Researchers who have studied me and my clan report that mortality for carbapenem-resistant infections ranges from 16 percent to 76 percent, as opposed to 5 percent to 53 percent! So you tell me — aren’t I worth fighting? To that end, you can try to wipe me out by administering antimicrobial therapy to patients, but you probably should pay some attention to environmental hygiene and good handwashing too.

Who am I?

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