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**The Development of
Techniques to Distinguish
Species and Strains of
Giardia.**

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Abstract

Water supplies, in some rural areas of New Zealand, contain *Giardia* cysts. This is assumed to make the water unsuitable for human consumption. *G. intestinalis* and/or *G. muris* cysts may be present but are not distinguished by the standard test. *G. muris* infects rodents only so it is not infectious for humans. However *G. intestinalis* infects humans and a wide range of animals, but it is unclear if the strains which infect animals also infect humans. If *G. intestinalis* strains are host-specific, then since water in rural areas may contain cysts derived only from animal species it would follow that the water (even if *G. muris* and/or *G. intestinalis* cysts were found) may not be infectious for humans.

Investigation of host-specificity of *G. intestinalis* would be facilitated by a reliable test to distinguish strains of the organism and this thesis investigates the use of PCR for this purpose. A series of random primers were investigated for their ability to distinguish strains of *G. intestinalis* when used with a variety of PCR protocols. We found that several of these primers (especially GC50 at an annealing temperature of 35°C, and GC80 at an annealing temperature of 35°C) had the potential to distinguish strains. The differences seen were not large but this may be because some of the isolates were clonally related. Consequently we concluded that further modifications and extensions of PCR when applied to human and animal strains should distinguish strains and may have the potential to address the question of host-specificity.

The major aim of the thesis however was to produce primers which when used in the PCR are capable of distinguishing *G. muris* from *G. intestinalis*. The same approach, ie the use of a random primer, was used to distinguish *G. muris* from *G. intestinalis*. Clear differences were seen but the non-specificity of the random primer would allow the organisms to be reliably distinguished only in the absence of other organisms. To avoid this lack of specificity an amplified band produced with *G. muris* DNA but not with *G. intestinalis* DNA was sequenced and a primer pair was selected. These primers were, in principle, long enough (21-mer and 23-mer) to be specific for the target DNA and were chosen so as to have matched melting temperatures. The selected primer pair amplified a sequence 307bp long, and the primer sequences were specific for the target species, namely *G. muris*. Thus in our hands using PCR this primer pair amplified DNA from the available strains of *G. muris* but failed to amplify DNA from any of seven *G. intestinalis* strains.

Further work is required to establish both an optimal method for lysing cysts and to estimate the minimum number of cysts required to ensure that DNA is available for amplification. However, the availability of the *G. muris* -specific primers, along with the recently developed genus and *G. intestinalis* -specific primers should allow us to undertake investigations of water supplies to see if *G. muris*, *G. intestinalis* or both species are present. In the case of a small rural supply it would seem reasonable to accept the potability of water supplies containing *G. muris* only, as long as assurance could be given that *G. intestinalis* was not present.

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Contents

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents	v
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
Chapter 1: Historical Review of <i>Giardia</i> and Giardiasis	1
1.1 Discovery	1
1.2 Biology	1
1.2.1 Morphology	1
1.2.2 Life Cycle	2
1.3 Taxonomy	3
1.4 Disease	4
1.4.1 Introduction	4
1.4.2 Pathogenesis	5
1.4.3 Symptoms	5
1.4.4 Diagnosis	6
1.4.5 Treatment	6
1.4.7 Transmission	7
1.4.7.1 Direct Transmission	7
1.4.7.2 Indirect Transmission	8
1.5 Cultivation	9
1.6 Cryopreservation	9
1.7 Animal Reservoirs and Host Specificity	9
1.8 Differentiation of Isolates <i>Giardia intestinalis</i>	13
1.8.1 Restriction-Endonuclease Analysis	13
1.8.2 Ribosomal RNA Gene Sequence.	14
1.8.3 Isoenzyme Analysis	14
1.8.4 Pulse-Field Gel Electrophoresis.	15
1.8.5 Antigenic Analysis.	15
1.8.6 Drug Sensitivity and Experimental Human Infection.	16
1.8.7 DNA Fingerprinting.	16
1.9 Detection of <i>Giardia</i> in Water.	16
1.10 Significance of <i>Giardia</i> in Water	17

Chapter 2: The investigation of the use of Random Amplification of Polymorphic DNA (RAPD) to distinguish strains of <i>Giardia intestinalis</i> .	19
2.1 Introduction	19
2.2 Materials	20
2.2.1 For Cryopreservation of Isolates.	20
2.2.2 For Propagation and Preparation of <i>G. intestinalis</i> Isolates for DNA extraction.	20
2.2.3. For DNA Extraction.	21
2.2.4 For Spectrophotometric Determination of the Purity and Concentration of the DNA.	22
2.2.5 For RAPD Analysis	22
2.2.6 For Gel Electrophoresis	23
2.3 Methods	23
2.3.1 Cryopreservation of Isolates	23
2.3.2 Propagation and Preparation of <i>G. intestinalis</i> Isolates for DNA Extraction.	24
2.3.3 DNA Extraction	24
2.3.4 Spectrophotometric Determination of the Purity and Concentration of the DNA.	25
2.3.5 RAPD Analysis.	26
a) Optimisation of PCR Conditions for Amplification.	26
b) RAPD Analysis.	26
2.3.6 Gel Electrophoresis.	27
2.4 Results	27
a) Optimisation of PCR Conditions for Amplification.	27
b) RAPD Analysis of 11 <i>G. intestinalis</i> Isolates using conditions optimised to show differences.	36
2.4 Conclusions.	49

Chapter 3: The development of <i>Giardia muris</i> -specific PCR primers.	51
3.1 Introduction	51
3.2 Materials	52
3.2.1 For identification of a <i>G. muris</i> -specific RAPD analysis product.	52
3.2.2 Gel purification of the <i>G. muris</i> -specific RAPD analysis product.	53
3.2.3 To find restriction enzymes that do not cut the fragment.	53
3.2.4 Preparation of pUC118 vector.	53
3.2.5 Ligation.	54
3.2.6 Electroporation.	54
3.2.7 Blue/White colour selection.	54
3.2.8 Alkaline lysis - Small scale plasmid preparation.	55
3.2.9 Check for presence of inserts.	55
3.2.10 Large scale plasmid preparations.	56
3.2.11 Sequencing of the insert.	56
3.2.12 Polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis.	56
3.2.13 Primer selection.	57
3.2.14 Primer testing.	57
3.3 Methods	58
3.3.1 The identification of a <i>G. muris</i> -specific RAPD analysis product.	58
3.3.2 Gel purification of the <i>G. muris</i> -specific RAPD analysis product .	58
3.3.3 To find restriction enzymes that do not cut the fragment.	58
3.3.4 Preparation of pUC118 vector.	58
3.3.5 Ligation.	59
3.3.6 Electroporation.	59

3.3.7	Blue/White colour selection.	59
3.3.8	Alkaline lysis - Small scale plasmid preparation.	59
3.3.9	Check for presence of inserts.	60
3.3.10	Large scale plasmid preparations.	61
3.3.11	Sequencing of the insert.	62
3.3.12	Polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis.	62
3.3.13	Primer selection.	62
3.3.14	Primer testing.	62
3.4	Results	63
3.4.1	Detection of a <i>G. muris</i> -specific RAPD analysis product.	63
3.4.2	Gel purification of the <i>G. muris</i> -specific RAPD analysis product.	63
3.4.3	Restriction enzyme digests.	63
3.3.4	Small scale plasmid preparation.	63
3.3.5	Large scale plasmid preparation.	72
3.3.6	Sequencing.	72
3.3.7	Primer selection.	72
3.3.8	Primer testing.	72
3.3.9	Restriction enzyme digestion of the <i>G. muris</i> amplification product to confirm its identity.	72
3.4	Conclusions	85
Chapter 4:	General Discussion	86
		91
Appendix:	Basic Procedures	91
1.	Ethanol Precipitation of DNA	91
2.	Restriction Enzyme Digests	91
3.	Agarose Gel Electrophoresis	93
4.	Sodium dodecyl sulphate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis	93
5.	Luria broth	93
6.	Luria agar	94
		94
References		

List of Tables

Table		Page
1	The 8 different random primers were used to amplify the DNA of 11 strains of <i>G. intestinalis</i> .	50

List of Figures

Figure		Page
1	Optimisation of PCR conditions - cycle number.	28
2	Optimisation of PCR conditions - concentration of dNTPs.	28
3	Optimisation of PCR conditions - buffer concentration.	30
4	Optimisation of PCR conditions - the amount of DNA added.	30
5	Optimisation of PCR conditions - MgCl ₂ concentration.	32
6	Optimisation of PCR conditions - amount of primer added.	32
7	Optimisation of PCR conditions - amount of DNA Taq polymerase added.	34
8	Examination of the reproducibility of the PCR reaction.	34
9	Examination of the heterogeneity of 11 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> by RAPD analysis with the arbitrary 10-mer primer GC50.	37
10	Examination of the heterogeneity of 11 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> by RAPD analysis with the arbitrary 10-mer primer GC60.	37
11	Examination of the heterogeneity of 11 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> by RAPD analysis with the arbitrary 10-mer primer GC70.	39
12	Examination of the heterogeneity of 11 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> by RAPD analysis with the arbitrary 10-mer primer GC80.	39
13	Examination of the heterogeneity of 11 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> by RAPD analysis with the arbitrary 10-mer primer GC90.	41
14	Examination of the heterogeneity of 11 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> by RAPD analysis with the arbitrary 10-mer primer GC100.	41
15	Examination of the heterogeneity of 2 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> (Hast 68 and Whang 48) by RAPD analysis using primer GC70 - investigation of the effect produced by varying the annealing temperature.	43
16	Examination of the heterogeneity of 2 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> (Hast 68 and Whang 48) by RAPD analysis using primer GC80 - the effect of varying the annealing temperature.	43

17	Examination of the heterogeneity of 2 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> (Hast 68 and Whang 48) by RAPD analysis using primer GC90 - the effect of varying the annealing temperature.	45
18	Examination of the heterogeneity of 2 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> (Hast 68 and Whang 48) by RAPD analysis using primer GC100 - the effect of varying the annealing temperature.	45
19	Examination of the heterogeneity of 2 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> (Hast 68 and Whang 48) by RAPD analysis a combination of 2 arbitrary primers and an annealing temperature of 35°C.	47
20	Examination of the heterogeneity of 2 isolates of <i>G. intestinalis</i> (Hast 68 and Whang 48) by RAPD analysis a combination of 2 arbitrary primers and an annealing temperature of 50°C.	47
21	RAPD analysis to distinguish <i>G. muris</i> and <i>G. intestinalis</i> .	64
22	The purity of the <i>G. muris</i> specific RAPD analysis product.	64
23	The identification of restriction enzymes that do not cleave the 350bp product.	66
24a	Examination of small scale plasmid preparations of electroporated <i>E. coli</i> cells to detect the presence of the insert.	68
24b	Examination of small scale plasmid preparations of electroporated <i>E. coli</i> cells to detect the presence of the insert.	68
25	Detection of the insert in four (of six) of the small scale plasmid preparations by excision using restriction enzyme digestion.	70
26	Restriction enzyme digestion to detect the presence of the insert in large scale plasmid preparations.	73
27	Long run polyacrylamide sequencing gel.	75
28	Short run polyacrylamide sequencing gel.	77
29	Nucleotide sequence of the <i>G. muris</i> specific product.	79
30	Possible <i>G. muris</i> -specific primer pair sequences.	81
31	Examination of the specificity of selected Gml and Gmr primer pair.	83
32	Confirmation of the identity of the <i>G. muris</i> -specific amplification product. This was done by restriction enzyme digestion.	83