

Gastric non-*Helicobacter pylori* *Helicobacter* infections: origin and significance for human health

Bram Flahou, Richard Ducatelle, Frank Pasmans, Koen Chiers, Annemieke Smet, Miet Vermoote, Lien De Cooman, Guangzhi Zhang, Jungang Liang, Freddy Haesebrouck

Department of Pathology, Bacteriology and Avian Diseases, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Ghent University, Merelbeke, Belgium

Besides the well-known gastric pathogen *Helicobacter pylori*, other helicobacters with typical spiral morphology have been detected in a minority of human patients presenting for upper gastrointestinal endoscopy. This group of non-*H. pylori* helicobacters (NHPH), also referred to as *H. heilmannii* sensu lato, includes gastric *Helicobacter* species colonizing the stomach of carnivores and *H. suis*, naturally colonizing the stomach of pigs. Previous epidemiological reports have suggested that direct contact with animals, especially pigs, is a risk factor for humans to contract an infection with one of these bacteria. Recently, we also demonstrated the presence of viable *H. suis* bacteria in pork samples, suggesting that pork can serve as a source of *H. suis* infections for humans. Disregarding the source of infection, NHPH can cause severe gastric pathology in rodent models of human gastric disease. In contrast to the predominant Th1/Th17 inflammatory response associated with a *H. pylori* infection, *H. suis* rather causes a Th2/Th17 response, which may lead to the development of MALT lymphoma-like lesions, indeed observed in long-term infected Mongolian gerbils. Besides a pronounced inflammatory response, *H. suis* also causes necrosis of parietal cells in experimentally infected mice and gerbils, despite the absence of homologues of known *H. pylori* virulence factors such as the *cagPAI* and *VacA*. Recently, we have identified *H. suis* GGT as the key cell death-inducing factor. Through degradation of reduced glutathione into its degradation products, *H. suis* (and *H. pylori*) GGT causes an increase of extracellular H₂O₂ concentrations, generated in a cell-independent manner and causing lipid peroxidation. This leads to different types of cell death, including apoptosis and necrosis/oncosis, depending on the amount of extracellular glutathione available as a GGT substrate. In conclusion, our findings clearly show that, in humans suffering from gastric disease, the possible involvement of NHPH, including *H. suis*, should not be neglected.