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# Compositional shifts within the denture-associated bacteriome in pneumonia – an analytical cross-sectional study

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### 41 1.4 Keywords

42 bioinformatics, 16S rRNA, microbiology, respiratory infection, oral health, removable dentures

### 43 1.5 Repositories:

44 The 16S rRNA gene sequences, associated datasets and metadata generated for this study are  
45 available through the NCBI SRA (accession number PRJNA971933) Open Science Framework online  
46 repository: <https://osf.io/mknsu/>

47

### 48 1.6 Abbreviations:

49 CAP – community acquired pneumonia; DMFT – decayed, missing and filled teeth; HAP – hospital  
50 acquired pneumonia; OTU – operational taxonomic unit; PRP – putative respiratory pathogen; VAP –  
51 ventilator associated pneumonia

## 52 2. Abstract

53 **Introduction:** Bacterial pneumonia is a common cause of morbidity and mortality in elderly  
54 individuals. While the incidence of edentulism is falling, approximately 19% of the UK population wears  
55 a full or partial removable denture. Despite advances in denture biomaterials, the majority of dentures  
56 are fabricated using polymethyl-methacrylate. Growing evidence suggests that colonisation of the oral  
57 cavity by putative respiratory pathogens predisposes individuals to respiratory infection, by  
58 translocation of these microorganisms along the respiratory tract.

59 **Hypothesis/Gap Statement:** We hypothesized that denture surfaces provide a susceptible colonisation  
60 site for putative respiratory pathogens, thus could increase pneumonia risk in susceptible individuals.

61 **Aim:** This study aimed to characterise the bacterial community composition of denture-wearers in  
62 respiratory health compared with individuals with a confirmed diagnosis of pneumonia.

63 **Methodology:** This was an analytic cross-sectional study, comparing frail elderly individuals without  
64 respiratory infection (n=35) to hospitalised patients with pneumonia (n=26). The primary outcome was  
65 the relative abundance of putative respiratory pathogens identified by 16S rRNA metataxonomic  
66 sequencing, with qPCR used to identified *S. pneumoniae*.

67 **Results:** There was a statistically significant increase in the overall relative abundance of putative  
68 respiratory pathogens ( $p < 0.0001$ ), with a greater than 20-fold increase in the bioburden of these  
69 microorganisms. In keeping with these findings, there were significant shifts in bacterial community  
70 diversity (Chao index,  $p = 0.0003$ ) and richness (Inverse Simpson index  $p < 0.0001$ ) in the denture-  
71 associated microbiota of pneumonia patients compared with control subjects.

72 **Conclusion:** Within the limitations of this study, our evidence supports the role of denture acrylic  
73 biomaterials as a potential colonisation site for putative respiratory pathogens, which may lead to  
74 increased risk of pneumonia in susceptible individuals. These findings support prior observational  
75 studies which have found denture-wearers to be at increased risk of respiratory infection. Further  
76 research is needed to confirm the sequence of colonisation and translocation to examine potential  
77 causal relationships.

### 78 **3. Data summary**

79 The authors confirm all supporting data, code and protocols have been provided within the article or  
80 through supplementary data files.

### 81 **4. Introduction**

82 Lower respiratory tract infections, including pneumonia, are the fourth leading cause of death  
83 worldwide, and the most common cause of death due to infectious disease<sup>1</sup>. Globally, pneumonia has  
84 a bimodal distribution of incidence, affecting the very young and elderly. However, in the United  
85 Kingdom, much of Europe and the USA, pneumonia demonstrates a predilection for the elderly, with  
86 a ten-fold increase in pneumonia cases in patients over 65 years of age<sup>2</sup> and 85% of pneumonia-related  
87 deaths occurring in individuals over the age of 60 years<sup>3</sup>.

88 The term pneumonia describes a clinical phenotype of acute inflammation in the lower respiratory  
89 tract<sup>4</sup> which does not necessarily reflect an infectious aetiology. However, most pneumonias occur  
90 secondary to microbial infection, which may be viral, bacterial, fungal, or polymicrobial<sup>5</sup>. In the UK and  
91 much of Europe, pneumonia is most frequently bacterial in aetiology<sup>6</sup>. Diagnosis of pneumonia is  
92 challenging due to the non-specific clinical signs and symptoms associated with the disease.  
93 Determining a microbial aetiology is confounded by difficulties obtaining a representative sample, free  
94 from contaminating microorganisms originating in uninfected regions of the respiratory tissues or  
95 oropharynx, and the inability to distinguish microbes colonising the respiratory tissues from infective  
96 species<sup>7</sup>.

97 A burgeoning body of research has revealed an association between changes in oral microbial  
98 communities and respiratory infection in susceptible individuals<sup>8,9,10,11</sup>. This is most clearly supported  
99 in ventilator-associated pneumonia (VAP) which can affect mechanically ventilated intensive care  
100 patients. Here, an increase in the relative abundance of putative respiratory pathogens (PRPs) in dental  
101 plaque occurs following intubation of patients in intensive care, with subsequent reversal of this  
102 community perturbation following extubation<sup>12,13</sup>. Further, a recent systematic review found evidence  
103 supporting the effectiveness of oral care to reduce VAP, although the effect size was modest and the  
104 overall quality of evidence available was low<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, a number of researchers have recovered PRPs  
105 from denture surfaces<sup>15,16,17</sup> while enhanced oral care, including denture care, has been found to  
106 reduce the incidence of pneumonia among long-term care facility residents<sup>18</sup>. The presence of an  
107 endotracheal tube offers a direct conduit to the lungs and necessitates open mouth posture,  
108 facilitating the acquisition of exogenous microorganisms; bypassing the host immune system and  
109 enabling translocation to the respiratory tissues<sup>19</sup>. That a similar relationship appears to exist between  
110 the denture-associated oral microbiota and respiratory infection suggests that the presence of an  
111 artificial biomaterial surface may itself promote colonisation by PRPs, forming a reservoir that can seed  
112 infection of the respiratory tissues in susceptible individuals.

113 Despite indirect evidence suggesting that the oral microbial communities of denture-wearing  
114 individuals may contribute to pneumonia risk, direct support for a mechanistic role for denture  
115 biomaterial surfaces in promoting respiratory infection is lacking. This study therefore aimed to  
116 compare the community composition of denture-associated oral bacteria in patients with a clinical  
117 diagnosis of pneumonia with respiratorily healthy care home residents. We hypothesized that there  
118 would be an increase in the abundance of putative respiratory pathogens, and the specific pathogens  
119 *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Streptococcus pneumoniae* on denture surfaces  
120 of individuals with clinically diagnosed bacterial pneumonia (based on clinical, radiographic findings in  
121 accordance with the British Thoracic Society guidelines, 2009<sup>20</sup>), compared with other oral sites and  
122 respiratorily healthy participants.

## 123 **5. Methods**

### 124 **Participant recruitment and sample collection**

125 Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Wales REC 6; reference 16/WA/0317. All  
126 participants provided written consent for this study. This was a cross-sectional study which conforms  
127 with STROBE guidelines for human observational studies.

128 Participants were recruited from private long-term residential/nursing care facilities in Cardiff, or from  
129 the respiratory/geriatric wards in University Hospital Wales and University Hospital Llandough, Wales,  
130 UK. Recruitment was undertaken between March 2017-March 2018. Participants were excluded from  
131 either group if they lacked capacity to provide consent; were receiving palliative end-of-life care; had  
132 taken part in another study in the preceding 6 months; were severely immunosuppressed,  
133 immunocompromised; or had a diagnosis of oro-pharyngeal or lung malignancy. Care home residents  
134 were excluded if they had a history of respiratory infection in the previous 30 days. Hospitalised  
135 patients were included only if there was a confirmed diagnosis of pneumonia supported by

136 radiographic signs. Where this information was not readily available, a diagnosis was sought from the  
137 treating respiratory physician.

138 For each participant, a brief dental history and examination was undertaken; including denture  
139 cleaning habits, oral mucosal inflammation (assessed by Newton's index<sup>21</sup> and a record of decayed,  
140 missing and filled teeth<sup>22</sup> as a surrogate marker of previous oral disease burden. Imprint cultures were  
141 taken from the dorsal tongue, denture-bearing palatal mucosa and denture-fit surface of each  
142 participant, and transferred sequentially to Mannitol Salt agar (Lab M, Heywood, UK) and  
143 Pseudomonas agar (Lab M, Heywood, UK) for 60 s each. Sterile cotton swabs were taken from the  
144 same sites using a standardised technique and transferred to Amies transport medium.

145 Agar plates were incubated aerobically at 37°C for 24-72 h until distinct colonies could be identified.  
146 Cultured microorganisms were characterised by routine histological staining and biochemical testing  
147 to differentiate *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*. The antimicrobial susceptibility  
148 of *S. aureus* and *P. aeruginosa* isolates was tested according to the EUCAST disc-diffusion method<sup>23</sup>.

149 **Bacterial DNA extraction from oral and denture samples, and detection of *Streptococcus***  
150 ***pneumoniae* by qPCR and 16S rRNA gene sequencing**

151 Microbial swabs were aseptically transferred to 10 ml bijou bottles containing 1 ml of 0.9% PBS by  
152 cutting the swab neck with flame-heated scissors. DNA extraction was performed using the Qiagen  
153 PuraGene kit (Qiagen, Manchester, UK) using the protocol for Gram-positive bacteria, with a final  
154 elution volume of 20 µl. The following modifications were added to this protocol: bijou bottles  
155 containing microbial swabs were vortexed at high speed for 1 min, and the resultant cell suspension  
156 transferred by pipetting to a 1.5 ml microcentrifuge tube on ice. Cell suspensions were centrifuged for  
157 1 min at 5000 x *g* and the supernatant discarded by pouring. The resultant cell pellet was then  
158 resuspended in 1 ml of Qiagen PuraGene cell suspension solution (Qiagen, Manchester, UK).



159 Due to the challenges associated with speciating *S. pneumoniae* by 16S rRNA gene sequencing, a  
160 species-specific TaqMan™ assay which targeted the autolysin-encoding gene *lytA* was used for  
161 detection of this microorganism by qPCR. The primers used in this assay were:

162 Forward primer sequence: ACGCAATCTAGCAGATGAAGCA,

163 Reverse primer sequence: TCGTGCGTTTTAATTCCAGCT,

164 Probe sequence: YY-TGCCGAAAACGCTTGATACAGGGAG-BHQ1

165 This assay had previously been published as part of a multiplex diagnostic assay<sup>24</sup>. The sensitivity and  
166 specificity of the assay in single-plex use was confirmed by standard curve, using reference strains  
167 *S. pneumoniae* ATCC 49619, *Streptococcus gordonii* ATCC 10558 and *Streptococcus sanguinis* ATCC  
168 7863 in 10-fold serial dilutions to a lower limit of approximately 10 cells/ml. PCR was undertaken in  
169 triplicate using a QuantStudio 6 Flex instrument (Applied Biosystems™, California, USA).

170 Library preparation and sequencing was undertaken by Research and Testing Laboratories (RTL, Texas,  
171 USA) using the Illumina Miseq 28f and 519r primers to overlap the V1 – V3 hypervariable regions of  
172 the 16S rRNA gene. A two-step amplification process was used with a preamplification step employing  
173 the Illumina i5 and i7 primers initially Sequencing parameters and primer sequences used can be  
174 found in the supporting information.

#### 175 **16S rRNA gene sequence pre-processing**

176 Sequencing data was provided as paired FASTQ files for each sample. Generation of 16S rRNA gene  
177 sequences was undertaken using the open-source software MOTHUR<sup>25</sup>. The Illumina MiSeq standard  
178 operating procedure was followed throughout. Paired end reads were first assembled with the  
179 `make.contigs` command. This command combines the data from the paired FASTQ files and  
180 provides a quality score for each file. Each contig was then filtered using the `screen.seqs`  
181 command, using the parameters: `maxn = 0, maxambig = 0, maxhomop = 5, maxlength`



182 = 605. Reads were subsampled to 675 which resulted in the exclusion of 3 samples (2 from  
183 pneumonia patients, 1 from a care home resident).

184 Rare operational taxonomic units OTUs (<10 reads) were excluded from further analysis and any OTUs  
185 with less than 98% coverage or 97% sequence identity to a known bacterial species were categorised  
186 to genus level only. After manual scanning, OTUs that would not be expected to occur in the oral cavity  
187 were re-examined using the NCBI BLASTn database.

## 188 **Statistical analyses**

189 No power calculation was undertaken for this pilot study, due to lack of available data to inform  
190 estimates. The primary outcome was the frequency of detection/culture of *S. pneumoniae*,  
191 *P. aeruginosa* and *S. aureus*. Secondary outcomes included the relative abundance of putative  
192 respiratory pathogens, diversity and species richness of the bacterial communities for each oral site.  
193 Statistical analysis was conducted using R<sup>26</sup>, SPSS 21, Graphpad Prism 8.0 and Microsoft Excel. Simple  
194 descriptive summary statistics were generated for participant demographic data and oral health  
195 measures. Age, Charlson Index<sup>27</sup>, Denture Hygiene Score, Newton's Classification and DMFT scores  
196 were treated as continuous variables. The remaining data were analysed as categorical variables.  
197 Distribution of data was assessed by visual inspection of histograms, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of  
198 normality (alpha set to p<0.05) and inspection of Q-Q plots. To assess differences between participant  
199 cohorts at baseline, the Kruskal-Wallis test was undertaken on nonparametric data, while one-way  
200 ANOVA was used to analyse normally distributed continuous data. Categorical variables were analysed  
201 using the Chi-Squared ( $\chi^2$ ) goodness of fit test. Missing data was excluded from analyses.

202 Alpha diversity was measured by the Chao2 and Inverse Simpson Indices. Alpha diversity indices were  
203 compared using the Kruskal-Wallis test and Median K-tests.

204 PRP species were assigned to 10 groupings: enterococci, *Acinetobacter* spp. *Enterobacteriaceae*,  
205 *Haemophilus* spp., *Klebsiella* spp., *P. aeruginosa*, *Serratia* spp., *S. aureus*, *Escherichia coli* and *S.*

206 *pneumoniae*. The percentage relative abundance of PRP species was calculated and analysed using the  
207 Two-Stage Linear Step-up Procedure of Benjamini, Krieger and Yekutieli<sup>28</sup> to control the false discovery  
208 rate, with Q-value set at 0.05. Fold differences between participant cohorts' PRP relative abundance  
209 were calculated for each oral site.

210 Percentage relative abundance was converted to decimal data, and Linear discriminant analysis of  
211 Effect Size (LEfSe) conducted using the open access galaxy module<sup>29</sup>.

## 212 **6. Results**

### 213 **Participant demographics and clinical characteristics**

214 We recruited a total of 66 denture-wearing individuals from long term residential care facilities (n =  
215 35) and hospital wards (n = 26) between March 2017-March 2018. Participants were pre-screened by  
216 care facility and hospital staff based on the provided inclusion/exclusion criteria and their professional  
217 assessment of whether it would be appropriate to approach the individuals under their care. Of the  
218 133 potential participants approached, 61 were recruited for the study. Reasons for non-participation  
219 were: not currently wearing dentures (n=24), unable to provide informed consent (n=20), declined to  
220 consent (n=11), unclear diagnosis in hospital patients (n=6), immunocompromised or palliative care  
221 (n=6), recent respiratory infection in care home residents (n=5). Participant demographic information  
222 is summarised in Table 1. Pneumonia patients were significantly younger than care home residents  
223 (Mean difference 4 years, p = 0.0006). All pneumonia patients received antibiotic therapy (intravenous  
224 amoxicillin and clarithromycin, n = 15; other, n = 11), while only 4 of the 35 care home residents  
225 included had received antibiotics in the preceding 6 months. All participants were deemed to have a  
226 safe swallow with normal oral intake at the time of assessment. Otherwise, there were no significant  
227 differences observed between participant cohorts.

### 228 **Culture isolation and antimicrobial susceptibility testing of target microorganisms**

229 Both *S. aureus* and *P. aeruginosa*, two pathogens frequently associated with respiratory infection and  
230 a range of healthcare associated infections, were recovered from the oral cavities of individuals in both  
231 cohorts (Supplementary Data: Table 1). There was no statistically significant difference between  
232 recovery rates between patients with pneumonia and respiratorily healthy individuals.

233 Cultured isolates of *S. aureus* and *P. aeruginosa* were tested for susceptibility to a range of relevant  
234 antimicrobials (Supplementary Data: Table 2). Resistance rates varied between different  
235 antimicrobials, with no clear trend for isolated microbes from pneumonia patients to exhibit increased  
236 resistance to  $\beta$ -lactams, although there was greater resistance of *S. aureus* isolates to macrolides.

### 237 **Analysis of metataxonomic sequencing data**

238 Analysis of metataxonomic sequencing data revealed an increased relative abundance of  
239 *Enterobacteriaceae* in all oral sites of patients with pneumonia. Although there was a trend of  
240 increased relative abundance of most PRP species, this did not reach the threshold of statistical  
241 significance (Figure 1). However, when the cumulative relative abundance of all PRPs was assessed,  
242 there was a significant increase noted in pathogenic bioburden compared with respiratorily health care  
243 home residents (Figure 2a). Calculation of the fold-difference in the cumulative relative abundance of  
244 PRPs showed that the increase in pathogenic bioburden was especially elevated in denture samples,  
245 with a greater than 20-fold increase in PRPs (Figure 2b).

246 In keeping with these findings, there were significant compositional shifts in the microbial  
247 communities, with a decrease in species richness and beta diversity in bacterial communities (Figure  
248 3) measured by Chao2 and Inverse Simpson indices, respectively. The decreased community diversity  
249 and species richness were observed in dorsal tongue and denture samples only.

250 Further exploration of bacterial community composition by linear discriminant analysis (LDA)  
251 confirmed an increased bioburden of PRP species with a concomitant reduction in typical oral  
252 commensals in pneumonia patients (Figure 4).

253 **7. Figures and tables**

254

255 **Table 1: Summary participant information**

	Care home residents (n=35)			Pneumonia patients (n=26)		
<b>Mean Age (S.D.)</b>	88 (7.6)			84 (8.2)		
<b>Gender (%)</b>	15% male			15% male		
<b>Antibiotics in last 90 days (%)</b>	15%			100%		
<b>Smoking History (%)</b>	15% current smokers			8% current smokers		
	54%	31% never smoked		ex-smokers	65% ex-smokers	
				27% never smoked		
<b>Mean Charlson Comorbidity Index# (S.D.)</b>	5.5 (0.97)			5.1 (2.11)		
<b>Mean DMFT score* (S.D.)</b>	Decayed	Missing	Filled	Decayed	Missing	Filled
	1.6 (2.00)	25.0 (5.33)	2.3 (4.38)	1.8 (1.48)	24.3 (5.77)	3.6 (3.06)
<b>Complete or Partial Denture (%)</b>	62.9% Complete			59.6% Complete		
	27.1% Partial			15.4% Partial		
	(10% no denture in one arch)			(25% no denture in one arch)		
<b>Acrylic or Cobalt Chromium Denture (%)</b>	91.4% Acrylic			92.3% Acrylic		
	8.6% Cobalt chromium			7.7% Cobalt chromium		
<b>Mean Denture Cleanliness Index+ (S.D.)</b>	1.8 (1.11)			1.6 (1.19)		
<b>Mean Newton Index\$ (S.D.)</b>	0.9 (0.53)			1.1 (0.80)		

256 # Charlson Comorbidity Index scores a number of physiological measures and diseases to provide estimate of 10-year  
 257 survival. The Maximum score (highest mortality risk) is 33. A score of 7 or greater indicates a predicted 10-year survival rate  
 258 of 0%.

259 \* A DMFT score is indicative of Decayed, Missing, Filled Teeth. Absence of a tooth, or the presence of any dental restoration  
 260 or caries scores 1 point. The maximum score is 28. Wisdom teeth were not included in this score.

261 + Denture Cleanliness Index scores denture cleanliness from 0 (pristine denture surfaces) to 4 (damaged dentures).

262 \$ Newton Index scores palatal inflammation from 0 (normal, healthy mucosa) to 3 (grossly erythematous, swollen mucosa).

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264

265 **Figure 1:**

266 **Relative abundance (%) of putative respiratory pathogens from each oral site**

267 OTUs are grouped at either genus or species level to collate bacteria associated with respiratory  
268 infection at the lowest discriminatory phylogenetic level.

269 Note that the Y axis features a  $\log_{10}$  scale. Mean values shown, error bars represent 95% confidence  
270 intervals.

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308 **Figure 2:**

309 **a) – Cumulative relative abundance (%) of PRPs identified in care home residents compared to**  
310 **respiratory ward patients.** Mean values shown. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

311 **b) – Fold difference of PRP cumulative relative abundance in respiratory ward patients, normalised**  
312 **to care home residents.** Fold difference calculated using mean values reported in a).

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315 **Figure 3 – Chao (upper panel) and Inverse Simpson (lower panel) indices for oral sites in each**  
316 **participant cohort**

317 Individual data points with representative box plots shown.

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334 **Figure 4: LeFSe analysis of differential OTU relative abundance between participant cohorts for**  
335 **denture samples**

336 a) Histogram of significantly different Linear Discriminant Analysis scores for samples.

337 b) Cladogram representing taxonomic relationships of significantly different abundances  
338 between cohort samples.

339 Green indicates taxa with increased abundance in pneumonia patients, red indicates taxa  
340 with increased abundance in samples from care home residents. Yellow circles represent  
341 taxa which showed no significant differences between cohorts. The diameter of each circle in  
342 the cladogram is proportional to the relative abundance of the taxon represented.

343

## 344 **8. Discussion**

345 While there has been mounting interest in exploring artificial biomaterial surfaces in the oral cavity as

346 potential reservoirs of respiratory pathogens, this was the first study to directly explore compositional



347 shifts in the denture-associated oral microbiome correlated with pneumonia status; using  
348 contemporary molecular techniques to limit selectivity bias. Not only was an increased bioburden of  
349 putative respiratory pathogens in individuals with pneumonia found; there was a concurrent loss of  
350 species richness and diversity typically associated with a dysbiotic shift in the microbial community.  
351 Importantly, these differences were especially pronounced in denture samples, highlighting the role  
352 of dentures as a possible nidus for respiratory infection.

353 In order to reach, colonise and infect the lungs, bacteria must either pass from an external source  
354 through the oral cavity, or intrinsically through the gastrointestinal tract<sup>30</sup>. Thus, the relationship seen  
355 between the oral microbiome and pneumonia status may hold diagnostic potential, due to the close  
356 anatomical approximation of the oral cavity with the lungs and gastrointestinal tract, and the interface  
357 formed with the external environment. Given the poor reliability of sampling the infected lung<sup>7</sup>, which  
358 must be performed essentially 'blind', the ease of access to the oropharynx for microbial sampling  
359 could lead to rapid, reliable identification of potential causative microorganisms, and provide  
360 antimicrobial susceptibility profiles to aid diagnosis and treatment of pneumonia<sup>31</sup>.

361 Recruitment of eligible participants was a major challenge encountered during this study as many care  
362 home residents were cognitively impaired and thus unable to consent. Similarly, a number of  
363 pneumonia patients had cognitive impairment either as a background comorbidity or due to acute  
364 delirium. The cross-sectional design of this study was another limitation. As recruited respiratory ward  
365 patients had received a diagnosis of pneumonia prior to recruitment, it was not possible to track  
366 changes in composition of the oral microbiota from respiratory health to disease. Similarly, there was  
367 no follow-up to examine shifts in microbial communities upon resolution of pneumonia. Performance  
368 status (e.g. Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group, ECOG<sup>32</sup>) other frailty measures such as the G8  
369 assessment<sup>33</sup> were not evaluated in this study. This would be an important addition to any future  
370 research to characterise the degree of frailty in the study population, as this may impact pneumonia

371 risk. It was therefore not possible to determine if changes in the oral microbiome preceded pneumonia  
372 onset, a key step in determining causality<sup>34</sup>.

373 The study participants were recruited pragmatically with inclusion criteria that were as open as feasible  
374 to ensure participants would be representative of the typical care-home and respiratory ward  
375 populations. However, exclusion of certain groups such as those with severe cognitive impairment or  
376 major comorbidities and immunocompromise means that the study findings may be impacted by this  
377 selection bias, limiting the generalisability of the findings. All patients with suspected pneumonia  
378 received empirical antibiotic therapy according to local policy, which reflects the British Thoracic  
379 Society guidelines on the management of severe community acquired pneumonia<sup>35</sup>. As only a low  
380 proportion of care home residents had received any antimicrobials in the preceding 30 days,  
381 differential antibiotic use is a potential confounder for the altered oral microbial composition seen.  
382 However, several factors suggest that while antibiotic use may have contributed to reduced community  
383 diversity and species richness, the differences cannot be entirely explained by antibiotic use alone.  
384 Firstly, it would be expected that denture-associated biofilms would be least affected by antibiotic use  
385 compared with other oral sites, as biofilms may confer antimicrobial tolerance to constituent  
386 microbes<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, antibiotics must traverse the oral mucosal barrier, diffuse through the palatal  
387 microbial biofilm and then penetrate the denture-associated biofilm in sufficient concentration to  
388 perturb microbial communities.

389 It should be noted that *Enterobacteriaceae* are typically not susceptible to macrolide antibiotics such  
390 as clarithromycin and are intrinsically resistant to amoxicillin and other beta-lactamases<sup>37</sup>. The  
391 aggressive use of these antibiotic regimes in pneumonia patients may act as a selective pressure to  
392 suppress growth and survival of normal oral microbes, particularly *Streptococcaceae*, leading to an  
393 increased relative abundance of more virulent microorganisms<sup>38</sup>. Nonetheless, the finding that the  
394 difference in relative abundance of PRPs between cohorts was most pronounced in denture samples  
395 suggests that antibiotic use was unlikely to be the primary contributor to the changes in microbial

396 community composition. Notably, no *S. aureus* isolates recovered from respiratory ward patients were  
397 resistant to amoxicillin, compared to over one quarter of those from care home residents. However,  
398 macrolide resistance was more than doubled in respiratory ward *S. aureus* isolates. There were much  
399 higher rates of resistance to the beta-lactam antibiotic piperacillin-tazobactam in *P. aeruginosa* isolates  
400 from care home residents compared with pneumonia patients, as was seen for the related  
401 cephalosporin ceftazidime. However, resistance of *P. aeruginosa* isolates to ciprofloxacin, a  
402 fluoroquinolone antibiotic, was found to be much higher among pneumonia patients than care home  
403 residents. While the low number of both *S. aureus* and *P. aeruginosa* isolates recovered precludes any  
404 reliable statistical evaluation, the equivocal resistance patterns observed suggest that antibiotic  
405 treatment may not have exerted a major selective pressure upon the oral microbiota. This was  
406 particularly evident in the case of *S. aureus* isolates, where amoxicillin sensitive strains were isolated  
407 from respiratory ward patients' samples despite empiric therapy with this agent.

408

## 409 **Conclusions**

410 This study revealed that perturbations within the denture-associated oral microbiome are associated  
411 with pneumonia. Having demonstrated an association between a deranged oral microbiome and an  
412 increase in the bioburden of putative respiratory pathogens, the premise for a causal association is  
413 established. Future research should aim to further disentangle the relationship between oral health,  
414 the oral microbiome and pneumonia pathogenesis; as well as assessing the impact of effective oral  
415 and denture care on modulating the oral microbiome and decreasing pneumonia risk in susceptible  
416 individuals.

## 417 **9. Author statements**

### 418 **9.1 Author contributions**

419 Joshua Twigg contributed to conception, design, data acquisition and interpretation, drafted and  
420 critically revised the manuscript

421 Ann Smith contributed to data acquisition and interpretation, and critically revised the manuscript  
422 Clotilde Haury contributed to design, data acquisition and interpretation, and critically revised the  
423 manuscript  
424 Melanie J Wilson contributed to conception, design, data interpretation and critically appraised the  
425 manuscript  
426 Jonathan Lees contributed to conception, design and critically appraised the manuscript  
427 Mark Waters contributed to conception, design and critically appraised the manuscript  
428 David W Williams contributed to conception, design, data interpretation and critically appraised the  
429 manuscript  
430 All authors gave their final approval and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

## 431 **9.2 Conflicts of interest**

432 The author(s) declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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## 437 **9.4 Ethical approval**

438 Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Wales REC 6; reference 16/WA/0317. All  
439 participants gave informed consent for this study.

## 440 **9.5 Consent for publication**

441 NA

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