

Response to Ian Phillips and Anna King

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The report by Professor Phillips and Miss King [1] brings to our attention several aspects of the UK and the French standards for disk diffusion antibiotic susceptibility tests which have converged during the years of development in the field. The authors conclude that international standardization might be closer than ever in the sense that pragmatic consensus may now be attainable. An error in their report relating to media used in Sweden certainly does not contradict this important message.

The error which I would like to point out refers to the statement: 'unlike the Swedes, who use PDM Antibiotic Sensitivity Medium (AB Biodisc), and ...'. This hegemony of one medium was certainly true several years ago, but today the market in Sweden for disk diffusion media is also shared by Oxoid IsoSensitest medium. Therefore, the media trend in Sweden is also towards a diversity worthy of the European tradition.

In spite of this increased flexibility, the national reference body in Sweden, SRGA [2], has been able to provide guidelines for both methodological standardization and for interpretation of results [3,4]. The concept of species-related zone diameter interpretive breakpoints [3,5] is used throughout the country, giving improved accuracy of the disk diffusion test [3]. These guidelines are issued for the two growth media used in Sweden, PDM (AB Biodisc) and IsoSensitest (Oxoid Ltd) [4]. Quality control limits are similarly issued for both media [6]. All information about zone breakpoints and control limits is regularly updated by SRGA and available on the Internet, on the web address: <http://www.ltkronoberg.se/ext/raf/raf.htm>.

As mentioned by Phillips and King, the two types of media are indeed very similar. When the Swedish interpretive zone breakpoints for the different bacterial groups on the two media are compared for the different antibiotics, this striking similarity is apparent. Most of the time the zone breakpoints are identical, sometimes they differ by 1 mm, and there are occasional differences of greater magnitude. It is clear that manufacturers have

come a long way in the standardization of the growth media used for disk diffusion antibiotic susceptibility tests.

The report by Phillips and King also provide the information that the French as well as the UK standards advocate an inoculum size which is 100-fold lighter than the inoculum according to NCCLS recommendations [1]. I would like to add that, also in Sweden (as well as in most other Scandinavian countries), the lighter inoculum is the recommended standard, giving several advantages over the NCCLS inoculum [4]. This common practice might further facilitate a future European consensus.

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