Use of Raman Spectroscopy to Decrease Time for Identifying the Species of Candida Growth in Cultures

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Abstract

**Background:** The objective of this study is to establish Raman signatures from pure cultures of different Candida species using Raman Spectroscopy (RS) and use these signatures for rapid identification of unknown Candida species.

**Methods:** Pure cultures of five Candida species were evaluated using RS to build a limited signature library. ‘Raman Processing’ (RP) software was used for Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Differential Functional Analysis (DFA).

**Results:** Eleven principal components described at least 95% variance in the spectra. Raman spectroscopy can improve early identification of Candida species and may facilitate early optimal antifungal therapy.

**Conclusion:** Raman spectroscopy can improve early identification of Candida species and may facilitate early optimal antifungal therapy.

**Keywords:** Candida species, Raman, Spectrum analysis

Introduction

Late-onset sepsis occurs in 2-20% of extremely low birth weight neonates and up to 12% of these infections are due to candida species. Furthermore, candida Blood Stream Infections (BSIs) are associated with a 25-40% mortality rate. Invasive candida infections have also been associated with a 73% rate of neurodevelopmental impairment or death. Incidence of yeasts grown in a blood culture takes 24-48 hr which may delay appropriate antifungal therapy.

Raman Spectroscopy (RS) has been used to identify many characteristics of individual cell types including cancer tissue and stem cell types. RS measures the scattering of light by substances that have been excited through molecular vibrations within the compound. These molecular fingerprints can be used for qualitative identification of different compounds. It can potentially be used to create specific signatures for microorganisms like bacteria or fungi. Creating a reference library of specific signatures of clinically important pathogens may allow the use of spectroscopy as a tool for rapid identification of pathogens in clinical practice.

*Candida albicans* (*C. albicans*), *Candida parapsilosis* (*C. parapsilosis*), *Candida tropicalis* (*C. tropicalis*), and *Candida krusei* (*C. krusei*) are the most common agents that cause fungal BSIs in neonates. In addition, the incidence of *Candida glabrata* (*C. glabrata*) and *Candida krusei* (*C. krusei*) infections has increased due to increased use of fluconazole, to which these organisms are resistant. A small percentage of fungal BSIs are also caused by *Candida tropicalis* (*C. tropicalis*). The objective of this study was to establish signatures of *C. albicans*, *C. parapsilosis*, *C. glabrata*, *C. krusei* and *C. tropicalis* that have been grown on Sabouraud Dextrose Agar (SDA) using RS. A second objective was to determine if these signatures can be used to identify unknown candida isolates.

Materials and Methods

Colonies from five commonly occurring candida species grown on SDA media were evaluated. Candida species were obtained from American Type Culture Collection (*C. albicans*: ATCC 28815, *C. parapsilosis*: ATCC 34136, *C. glabrata*: ATCC 2001, *C. krusei*: ATCC 6258 and *C. tropicalis*: ATCC 13803). The identities of the samples were confirmed using API 20C identification system. All culture plates were inoculated using standard techniques of equal amount of inoculum and incubated for 24 hr. The plates with growth of fungi were directly placed under the Raman
spectroscope without additional processing. All spectral measurements (C. albicans: 115 spectra, C. para-
psilosis: 112 spectra, C. glabrata: 108 spectra, C. krusei: 117 spectra, C. tropicalis: 128 spectra from five SDA plates each and Unknown: 90 spectra from nine SDA plates) were obtained from 20-25 different points on each sample’s area of interest using Renishaw Wire 2.0 software.

Raman measurements were acquired using a Renishaw InVia Raman microscope (Renishaw, Gloucester-
shire, United Kingdom) by a 785 nm (infrared, IR) exci-
tation laser with 50× objective. A single-grating spec-
trograph with a 1200 line/mm grating combined with a holographic notch filter for Rayleigh scattering rejec-
tion were used. A 50× objective lens was used to focus the excitation laser beam to a spot size of ~4 µm× 
30 µm on a single colony on the SDA medium. Once 
the laser was initiated, collection of the back-scattered 
light took place with the laser power set at 100% 
(3 mW). Each spectrum consisted of the average of 2 
collections with a 10 s collection time and an extended 
range of 600 to 1800 cm⁻¹. Measurements were ob-
tained using Renishaw Wire 2.0 software. At least 20 
spectra were measured from different randomly select-
ed points on each sample. The Raman Processing 
Software (RP Software) was used to import and ana-
lyze the data 14. The acquired raw spectra were correct-
ed by subtracting background fluorescence, reducing 
noise, and normalizing the intensities. Data were ana-
lyzed using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and 
Discriminant Function Analysis (DFA). The peaks in 
Raman spectra (wavenumbers) that were most signifi-
cant to the classification process were identified. The 
biochemical correlates of these Raman peaks were also 
described using previously published work 15,16.

A data bank or library of different Raman signatures 
for each of the five candida species was created. Un-
known colonies of candida species were also derived 
using ATCC reference species (C. albicans, C. para-
psilosis, C. glabrata, C. krusei and C. tropicalis) after 
creating the initial library databank. The investigating 
team was blinded to the identity of the unknown can-
dida species. Colonies from cultures of unknown can-
dida species, derived from sources other than those that 
were used to create the library, were compared with the 
known Raman signatures to identify their species.

Results

When processed with RP Software, five candida 
species examined showed eleven principal components 
generated by PCA, which account for 95.2 percent of 
the variance. Then the principal components were fed 
into DFA classifier, which enabled categorizing of un-
known species. Figure 1 represents the mean normal-
ized curves for each species and demonstrates the key 
differentiators among them. The chemical structure of 
the fungal elements represents different peaks within 
the Raman spectra. Based on the known spectra, the 
trained DFA classifier was able to identify unknown 
sample signatures with 100% accuracy. These differen-
tiating peaks for different biological molecules have 
already been described 15,16. The Raman shift regions 
(wavenumbers/cm⁻¹) associated with significant peaks 
within the Raman spectra and corresponding biochemical 
elements are described in table 1. The Raman signa-
tures for all the unknown species evaluated were com-
piled and placed together in figure 2. This figure again 
demonstrates key differences among the unknown
Raman Spectroscopy for Candida Cultures

Table 1. Wavenumbers of significant peaks in Raman spectra and corresponding biochemical elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wave numbers (cm⁻¹)</th>
<th>Biochemical elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>649</td>
<td>Amino acid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>716</td>
<td>Nucleotide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>910</td>
<td>Glucose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1003</td>
<td>Phenylalanine ring breathing mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1083</td>
<td>Nucleic acid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1152</td>
<td>Protein/carotenoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1263</td>
<td>Amide III band component protein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1337</td>
<td>Amide III/tryptophan/nucleic acid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1452</td>
<td>Delta CH2/Delta CH3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1603</td>
<td>Phenylalanine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1656</td>
<td>Amide bonds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

In very low birth weight neonates with fungal BSIs, it is difficult at times to obtain blood samples for cultures and the amount of blood collected is sometimes suboptimal. This limits the sensitivity of blood cultures and some neonates with candida infections might go undiagnosed until an autopsy is performed. There are some non-culture methods for candida identification including testing for fungal antigens and DNA available either commercially or in the evaluation phase. Use of DNA technology for detection of candida has shown promise. In very low birth weight neonates, however, the detection of fungal BSIs using DNA technology is not superior to fungal lysis-centrifugation isolator system. The DNA technology would need use of costly reagents and technical expertise. The use of RS did not include use of any consumables and evaluation could be completed within 30 min per unknown sample.

Conclusion

RS is likely to reduce the identification time to only a few minutes, since Raman signatures were useful in identifying the unknown candida species with 100% percent confidence. This would be a significant advantage for very low birth weight neonates since they have limited ability to fight the invasive fungal infections. RS appears to be useful in decreasing time of identification of specific candida species after the organism has grown from a positive culture. Further studies are needed to explore the possibility of using Raman signatures for identification of organisms directly from clinical specimens.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the input is provided by Marilyn Fairfax, MD, PhD (Department of Pathology, Wayne State University), Marko Jovanovski (General Surgery, Wayne State University), and Luke Reisner.
PhD (Electrical and Computer Engineering, Wayne State University).

Financial Support
No financial support was received for the study.

References