

**Genomic Epidemiology of *Escherichia coli* in  
Human Blood-Stream Infections**

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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MSc. (Biotechnology)

# **Certificate of Original Authorship**

I, Priyanka Shirish Hastak, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Science, School of Life Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged.

I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in this thesis.

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**Priyanka Shirish Hastak**

**Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021**

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Statement:

This thesis is by compilation. The first and second result chapters are publications. The publications are listed in the section below. The last result chapter will be submitted for publishing shortly. The figures, tables and supplementary data is provided at the end of each chapter or as separate files in folder submitted with the thesis.

## **Publications arising from this thesis**

**1. Hastak, P.;** Cummins, M.L.; Gottlieb, T.; Cheong, E.; Merlino, J.; Myers, G.S.A.; Djordjevic, S.P.; Chowdhury, P.R. Genomic profiling of *Escherichia coli* isolates from bacteraemia patients: A 3-year cohort study of isolates collected at a Sydney teaching hospital. *Microb. Genom.* 2020, 6,e000371. <https://doi.org/10.1099/mgen.0.000371>

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**Priyanka Hastak:** Methodology, Writing- Original Draft, Sample Collection, Writing- Reviewing and Editing, Data Curation, Visualisation. **Piklu Roy Chowdhury:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing- Reviewing and Editing, Validation, Data Curation, Project administration, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Resources. **Garry Myers:** Supervision, Validation, Time Management, Methodology, Project Administration, Writing- Review and Editing. **Steven Djordjevic:** Supervision, Validation, Time Management, Writing- Review and Editing, Funding acquisition. **Tom Gottlieb:** Project administration, Fund acquisition, Resources. **John Merlino:** Methodology, Resources. **Elaine Cheong:** Project administration, Resources. **Max Cummins:** Methodology, Software, Visualisation.

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**Contents presented in chapter 6 will be included in a manuscript which is in preliminary draft stages.**

**Hastak, P.,** Gottlieb, T., Cheong, J., Myers, G., Djordjevic, S.P., and Roy Chowdhury, P.

Comparative genomic analysis of ST38 *Escherichia coli* from human, animal and environmental settings reported in Australia and globally.

# **Table of Contents**

<b>Certificate of Original Authorship</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgement</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Publications arising from thesis</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>List of abbreviations</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Thesis Overview</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2.1 Antibiotic Resistance: A Global Health Concern</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2.2 Antimicrobial Resistance in blood-stream infection (BSI)</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.2.1 Aetiology of BSI</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.2.2 Hospital onset and community onset infections</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.2.3 <i>Escherichia coli</i> - the most prevalent Gram-negative pathogen in BSI</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>2.3 Genetic mechanisms that drive the rapid evolution of MDR pathogens</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>2.4 Mobile genetic elements and their role in AMR</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>2.4.1 Transposable elements</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.4.2 Plasmids</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>2.4.3 Genomic islands (GIs)</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>2.4.4 Integrons</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>2.5 Fitness and survival of <i>E. coli</i> clones</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>2.6 <i>E. coli</i> sequence types and phylogeny</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>2.7 Conclusion</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>2.8 References</b>	<b>40</b>

<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>3.1 Collection of strains</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>3.2 Genomic epidemiology</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>3.3 Research Methods</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.3.1 DNA isolation</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.3.2 Sequencing assembly</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>3.3.3 Strain identification and phylogeny</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>3.3.4 Gene identification</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>3.3.5 Comparative genomics and data visualisation</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>3.4 References</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Genomic profiling of Escherichia coli isolates from bacteraemia patients: A 3-year cohort study of isolates collected at a Sydney teaching hospital</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>4.1 Declaration</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>4.2 Abstract</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>4.3 Introduction</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>4.4 Methods</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>4.4.1 <i>Escherichia coli</i> collection and growth conditions</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>4.4.2 Antimicrobial resistance phenotyping</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>4.4.3 Genomic DNA extraction and sequencing library preparation</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>4.4.4 Whole genome sequencing and assembly</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>4.4.5 Gene identification and MLST analysis</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>4.4.6 Phylogenetic Analysis</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>4.5 Results</b>	<b>62</b>



<b>4.5.1 Isolate metadata</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>4.5.2 Phylogeny and Sequence Type distribution</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>4.5.3 Genetic context of Class 1 integrons and resistance genes</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>4.5.4 <i>E. coli</i> phylogroups and virulence gene profiling</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>4.4.5 Plasmid replicon diversity within the cohort</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>4.5 Discussion</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>4.6 Acknowledgements and Funding</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>4.7 References</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>4.8 Figures, tables and supplementary data</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Chapter 5: <i>Escherichia coli</i> ST8196 is a novel, locally evolved member of the ST131 clonal complex</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>5.1 Introduction</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>5.2 Methodology</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>5.2.1 Bacterial strains and growth conditions</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>5.2.2 Genomic DNA extraction, library preparation and whole genome sequencing</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>5.2.3 Genotypic profiling and genome-wide comparison of isolates</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>5.2.4 Phylogeny analysis of ST8196 isolates</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>5.3 Results and Discussions</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>5.3.1 EC233 and EC234 represented ST8196, a novel sequence type within ST131 clonal complex</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>5.3.2 Genotypic profiling of ST131 and ST8196 isolates that cluster together suggest major differences are within accessory regions of the genomes</b>	<b>84</b>

<b>5.3.3 Pangenome analysis ST131 subclade with ST8196 isolates in Mr Bayes phylogeny analysis</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>5.3.4 Plasmids in EC234_ST8196</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>5.4 Conclusions</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>5.5 References</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>5.6 Figures, tables and supplementary data</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Chapter 6: Comparative genomic analysis of ST38 <i>Escherichia coli</i> from human, animal and environmental settings reported in Australia and globally</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>6. 1 Declaration</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>6.2 Abstract</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>6.3 Introduction</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>6.4 Materials and methodology</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>6.4.1 <i>E. coli</i> strains</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>6.4.2 Antibiotic resistance phenotyping</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>6.4.3 DNA extraction, library preparation and whole genome sequencing</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>6.4.4 Gene identification and MLST</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>6.4.5 Annotations</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>6.4.6 Phylogenetic analysis and figures</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>6.4.7 Comparative Genomics</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>6.5 Results</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>6.5.1 SNP phylogeny and gene distribution in ST38 <i>E. coli</i></b>	<b>102</b>
<b>6.5.2 Antimicrobial resistance and virulence factors in ST38 <i>E. coli</i></b>	<b>104</b>
<b>6.5.3 Genomic comparison of closely related ST38 <i>E. coli</i></b>	<b>106</b>
<b>6.5.4 IncFII and IncI1 plasmids circulating in our cohort</b>	<b>108</b>

<b>6.6 Discussion</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>6.7 References</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>6.8 Figures, tables and supplementary data</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Chapter 7: General Discussion</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>7.1 Prevalence CO and HO <i>E. coli</i> BSI</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>7.2 Epidemiological distribution of <i>E. coli</i> BSI</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>7.3 Epidemiology of antimicrobial resistance and mobile genetic elements circulating in <i>E. coli</i> BSI population</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>7.4 Novel ST8196 <i>E. coli</i> identified in BSI</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>7.5 Multi drug resistant ST38 <i>E. coli</i> an emerging and evolving pathogen</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>7.6 Summary and limitations</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>7.7 References</b>	<b>132</b>

## **List of abbreviations:**

AMR	Antimicrobial Resistance
ARG	Antimicrobial Resistance Gene
MGE	Mobile Genetic Element
IS	Insertion Sequence
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
cc	Clonal complex
bp	Base pair
CRL	Complex Resistance Locus
BSI	Blood-stream infections
ESBL	Extended-spectrum beta-lactamase
ETEC	Enterotoxigenic <i>Escherichia coli</i>
ExPEC	Extraintestinal Pathogenic <i>Escherichia coli</i>
UTI	Urinary Tract Infection
LCBs	Locally Colinear Blocks
LGT	Lateral Gene Transfer
MDR	Multiple-Drug (Antibiotic) Resistance
MLST	Multi-locus Sequence Typing
ST	Sequence Type
SNP	Single Nucleotide Polymorphism
WGS	Whole Genome Sequence
HO	Hospital Onset
CO	Community Onset
TE	Transposable Elements

GI	Genomic Island
MLST	Multi-Locus Sequence Typing
CS	Conserved Segment
ICU	Intensive Care Unit
VAG	Virulence Associated Genes

## **Abstract:**

Blood-stream infections (BSI) are associated with high mortality and morbidity world-wide. The most common aetiological agent of these infections is *Escherichia coli*. The rise of multi-drug resistant (MDR) *E. coli* is a major concern in clinical medicine and needs to be monitored for implementation of infection control strategies. The misuse of antimicrobials in clinical treatment, and as growth promoters in food-producing animals, is a key component of the rapid evolution of MDR *E. coli*. MDR organisms spread antimicrobial resistance and virulence factors by lateral gene transfer via mobile genetic elements (MGEs). Despite this, there is limited knowledge of the origins and underlying mechanisms of BSI MDR *E. coli* infections in Australia.

We conducted genomic epidemiological analyses of *E. coli* from human blood-cultures collected from a Sydney teaching hospital. The collection was dominated by *E. coli* causing community onset BSI, with clones carrying a plethora of virulence and antimicrobial resistance genes. Clinical class 1 integrons associated with IS26 were identified in a number of sequence types (ST), indicating that they are important drivers of evolution and spread of clinically important antimicrobial resistance genes. We identified IncFII-IncFIB plasmids in the majority of our collection. A number of STs harboured ColV like IncFII plasmids, carry a number of important virulence traits, were also identified. We observed a novel ST, ST8196, that clustered with globally disseminated *E. coli* ST131 isolates. We also identified an emerging ST, ST38, that exhibited resistance to a broad range of clinical beta-lactamases that have been identified in a number of pandemic *E. coli* isolates.

Our study provides evidence that *E. coli* BSIs in Australia have a reservoir of antimicrobial resistance and virulence determinants that are potentially circulating not only in the community and hospital settings but across agricultural settings. These genes are not only present to clinical settings but can circulate within different ecosystems potentially via plasmids or other MGEs. Our findings also reveal that there are specific antimicrobial resistance genes such as ESBLs that are found in dominant *E. coli* clones in both humans and food producing animals. This is likely to occur due the overuse of antimicrobials in human and animal settings that is driving the increase in antimicrobial resistance among bacteria that cause diseases. It is therefore

essential to rigorously monitor these infections to help manage the global problem of antimicrobial resistance, and to reduce or prevent disease outbreaks.