



Original article

Investigation of carbapenem resistance and the first identification of *Klebsiella pneumoniae* carbapenemase (KPC) enzyme among *Escherichia coli* isolates in Turkey: A prospective study



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ABSTRACT

Background: The aim of this study was to determine the presence of carbapenem resistance and carbapenemase production in *Escherichia coli* isolates from clinical samples in Turkey.

Methods: The prospective study included a total of 4,052 *Escherichia coli* isolates collected from patients admitted to a hospital from March 2011 to May 2012. We used ertapenem disc for screening carbapenemase production, and the confirmation was performed by using Etest. The resistance mechanisms and genetic relatedness of the carbapenem resistant strains were investigated by using PCR (polymerase chain reaction) and pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (PFGE), respectively.

Results: Among the 4,052 *E. coli* isolates, 24 (0.59%) were found to be carbapenem resistant. Of these, only 5 isolates were positive for OXA-48 and 2 isolates were positive for *Klebsiella pneumoniae* carbapenemase (KPC)-2. The KPC-2 producing *E. coli* strains (n = 2) were both isolated from the same patient. The *bla*_{KPC} genes were confirmed using DNA sequence analysis. The genetic relationship between the 24 *E. coli* strains studied by PFGE revealed that the strains were genetically unrelated.

Conclusions: This article confirms, to our knowledge for the first time, the detection of KPC-2-producing *E. coli* in Turkey, with OXA-48 being the most frequent carbapenemase in the study.

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1. Introduction

Infection caused by multidrug-resistant *Escherichia coli* and other *Enterobacteriaceae* has become an important clinical problem associated with reduced therapeutic possibilities. Carbapenems (imipenem, meropenem, and ertapenem) are considered to be the last line of defense against these bacteria, but increasing spread of mobile genetic elements carrying carbapenemase genes such as *bla*_{KPC}, *bla*_{VIM}, *bla*_{IMP}, *bla*_{OXA-48} have caused the loss of clinical efficacy of carbapenems [1]. Carbapenem resistance in

Enterobacteriaceae can be caused by a variety of mechanisms including the presence of carbapenemases or other *beta*-lactamases in combination with porin deficiency [2]. Especially, the occurrence of an outer-membrane porin deficiency and the expression of plasmid-mediated AmpC *beta*-lactamases were reported to be responsible for carbapenem resistance in *E. coli* [3]. Carbapenemase-producing *E. coli* has been relatively less reported, but an increase of carbapenem-resistant *Klebsiella pneumoniae* has been observed [4]. The first case of carbapenem-resistant *E. coli* strain had been described from Greece with the decreased carbapenem susceptibility and production of a metallo-*beta*-lactamase, VIM (Verona intergron-encoded metallo-*beta*-lactamase) [5]. *Klebsiella pneumoniae* carbapenemase (KPC) enzymes are most frequently detected in *K. pneumoniae*, but they are also being increasingly detected in *E. coli*. The first report of KPC-2 in *E. coli* was in 2006 [6]. During the following years, KPC-type enzymes continued to be reported in *E. coli* from United States, Israel, France and China [7–11]. A single report has been described in *E. coli* from

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United States, involving KPC-3 acquisition in a patient during imipenem therapy [12]. The first report of KPC-type carbapenemase from Turkey was in *K. pneumonia* [13]. Then two isolates producing *K. pneumonia* carbapenemase were also reported in *K. pneumonia* from Turkey [14]. The OXA-48 carbapenemase was first identified in *Enterobacteriaceae* in Turkey in 2001, and now OXA-48 is known to be endemic in Turkey [15]. Over the years, OXA-48 and OXA-48-like carbapenemases are also increasingly reported in *E. coli* from Germany, France, Israel, Senegal and Japan [16–20].

We undertook a prospective study to evaluate the presence of carbapenem resistance in clinical *E. coli* isolates, and identify the epidemiological and genetic relatedness as well as the enzymatic mechanisms leading to carbapenem resistance in this species. To our best knowledge, we reported the first KPC- producing *E. coli* in Turkey.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Bacterial strains

The study was conducted at Cerrahpasa Medical School, a 1300-bed tertiary care teaching hospital in Turkey. We investigated the presence of carbapenem resistance and carbapenemase production in clinical *E. coli* isolates collected from patients admitted to a hospital in Turkey from March 2011 to May 2012. If the samples from the same patient had been sent to the laboratory more than 7 days interval, the *E. coli* strains were considered as different isolates. Only 6 such isolates from the 3 patients were recovered in the study. All isolates were identified by using an automated VITEK 2 System (bioMerieux, France).

2.2. Antimicrobial drug susceptibility testing

Antibiotic susceptibility was determined by the disk diffusion method according to Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI) guidelines [21]. The following antimicrobial agents were tested: ampicillin, amoxicillin-clavulanic acid, cefuroxime, cefotaxime, ceftazidime, cefepime, gentamicin, netilmicin, amikacin, ciprofloxacin, piperacilin-tazobactam, trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole, ertapenem, imipenem, and meropenem. Double-disk synergy tests were performed for extended-spectrum β -lactamase (ESBL) detection as described previously [22]. We used ertapenem disc (10 μ g/ml; Oxoid Ltd, Basingstoke, UK) for screening carbapenemase production based on the CLSI recommendations, and the confirmation was performed by using ertapenem, imipenem and meropenem E-test strips (Liofilchem, Italy). All break points were applied according to the CLSI guidelines [21]. Quality control was

performed by using *E. coli* ATCC 25922 reference strain.

2.3. Screening of carbapenemase genes and sequencing of *bla*_{KPC}

The carbapenem-resistant *E. coli* strains were tested for the detection of *bla*_{KPC}, *bla*_{IMP}, *bla*_{VIM}, *bla*_{NDM}, *bla*_{OXA-48} carbapenemase genes, and genes encoding other β -lactamases (*bla*_{CTX-M}) by using PCR (polymerase chain reaction), as described previously [23,24]. 16s rRNA was also used as an internal control for excluding false negative results due to PCR inhibition, and negative controls were included each lots of PCR setups for excluding false positive results due to cross contamination. Amplifications were performed by using the primers listed in Table 1. Positive PCR product for *bla*_{KPC} gene was sequenced by using the amplification primers. The sequencing approach of bi directional DNA was performed by using dye terminator reaction with an automated system (ABI PRISM 310 Genetic Analyser, Applied Biosystems). The obtained sequence data were edited by using DNASTAR software (DNASTAR, Madison, WI). A BLAST (Basic Local Alignment and Search Tool) search was performed with National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) database.

2.4. PFGE

Epidemiologic relatedness of carbapenem-resistant *E. coli* strains was studied with using PFGE (pulsed-field gel electrophoresis) as described previously [25]. PFGE was conducted by macrorestriction of chromosomal DNA with *Xba*I and separation of restriction fragments using CHEF DRIF PFGE system (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Nazareth, Belgium). Migration of DNA fragments was normalized by using an appropriate mass marker, and computer-assisted analysis of PFGE patterns was conducted by using BioNumerics software (version 6.0; Applied Maths, Sint-Martens-Latem, Belgium). PFGE types were defined on the basis of DNA banding patterns in accordance with criteria defined by Tenover et al. [26].

3. Results

A total of 4.052 *E. coli* strains were isolated from the different clinical samples of patients during the period. 852 (21%) of the 4.052 *E. coli* isolates were found positive for ESBL production. Out of the 4.052 *E. coli* strains, 24 (0.59%) were found resistant to ertapenem, but all isolates were found susceptible to meropenem and imipenem with the disc diffusion method. The 24 strains isolated from 23 different patients were multidrug resistant, with different antibiotic susceptibilities. MICs of carbapenems showed

Table 1
Primers used for beta-lactamase detection.

β -lactamases	Primer abbreviation	Primer sequence	Tm ^a (°C)	Gene bank	Position	Product (bp)
<i>bla</i> _{VIM} ^b	Pan_VIM_Fw	TTCTCGCGGAGATTGARAAGC	54	JN819277	219–239	264
	Pan_VIM_Rev	TTGTCCGGYYGAATGCCGAGC			483–464	
<i>bla</i> _{IMP} ^b	Pan_IMP_Fw	GGAATAGAGTGGCTTAAATCTC	50	GU207399	372–393	188
	Pan_IMP_Rev	ARCCAAACYACTASGTTATC			560–543	
<i>bla</i> _{OXA-48} ^b	OXA-48_Fw	GCGTGTATTAGCCTTATCGGC	52	JN626286	5518–5537	722
	OXA-48_Rev	RGGCATATCCATATTCATCCG			6240–6220	
<i>bla</i> _{NDM-1} ^b	NDM_Fw	GGGCGAGTCGCTCCAACGGT	55	JQ734687	212–231	475
	NDM_Rev	GTAGTGCTCAGTGTCCGGCAT			687–668	
<i>bla</i> _{KPC} ^b	KPC_Fw	GCTGTCTTGTCTCATGGCC	55	JQ867396	394–414	836
	KPC_Rev	AATCCCTCGAGCGGAGTCTA			1230–1210	
<i>bla</i> _{CTX-M} ^b	CTXM_Fw	ATCTGACGCTGGGTAAAGC	50	JQ686201	695–713	162
	CTXM_Rev	ATATCGTTGGTGGTCCATA			857–838	

^a Tm, Temperature.

^b VIM, Verona integron-encoded metallo-beta-lactamase; IMP, Imipenemase; OXA-48, Oxacillinase-48; NDM, New Delhi metallo-beta-lactamase; KPC, *Klebsiella pneumoniae* carbapenemase; CTX-M, Cefotaxime-hydrolyzing beta-lactamase.

that 7 of the 24 isolates were ertapenem susceptible, two were imipenem resistant, and one were meropenem resistant. This condition can be interpreted as the decreased level of resistance or relatively lower specificity of disc diffusion test for carbapenems.

Based on the DNA sequence analysis, 21 of the 24 *E. coli* strains were found positive for *bla*_{CTX-M-15}. All of the 24 *E. coli* strains were negative for *bla*_{NDM}, *bla*_{VIM}, and *bla*_{IMP} carbapenemase genes, but the 5 and 2 isolates were positive for *bla*_{OXA-48} and *bla*_{KPC-2} genes, respectively. KPC positive *E. coli* strains (n = 2) were both isolated from the same patient. The obtained *bla*_{KPC} gene sequence was 100% identical to the nucleotide sequence of KPC-2 gene (GenBank accession number: JQ867396). The MIC values of carbapenems tested for carbapenem-resistant *E. coli* isolates, and the results of PFGE and PCR for *bla* genes are shown in Table 2.

The genetic relationship between the 24 strains studied by PFGE revealed eighteen different *Xba*I endonuclease-restricted DNA profiles, with band difference greater than seven, indicating that these *E. coli* strains were genetically unrelated, and the clonal spread was not responsible for the emergence of carbapenem-resistance in *E. coli* isolates. No major cluster was found. In the genotype one, 18. isolate carried the *bla*_{OXA-48} and *bla*_{CTX-M-15} genes and was resistant to gentamicin, amoxicillin-clavulanic acid, and piperacillin-tazobactam antibiotics, but the 20. isolate was negative for *bla*_{OXA-48} and *bla*_{CTX-M-15} genes and was susceptible to gentamicin, amoxicillin-clavulanic acid, and piperacillin-tazobactam antibiotics. There may have been transformation of plasmid DNA from the 18. sample to the 20. sample. Plasmid DNA analysis of the *E. coli* strains should be done to explain this condition. The KPC-2 positive *E. coli* isolates (3. and 6. isolates) from the same patients were clonally related, exhibiting identical restriction patterns. The results of PFGE and DNA sequence analysis are shown in Fig. 1.

4. Discussion

Carbapenem resistance has emerged recently, and carbapenem-resistant *Enterobacteriaceae* today are considered as an urgent threat [27]. For this reason, advanced studies which will provide some data about the epidemiology of resistance and the useful methods to detect carbapenem-resistant isolates are still certainly needed.

At the beginning of the 2012, ertapenem has been recommended for detecting carbapenemase production in *Enterobacteriaceae* [21]. In the study, we used the ertapenem disc for screening carbapenemase production, and found only ertapenem resistance by disc diffusion. Although all isolates with carbapenemase genes were resistant or intermediate to ertapenem, only two of the OXA-48 positive strains were resistance to imipenem and one were resistance to meropenem according to the E-test results. Ertapenem seems to be a sensitive agent in screening carbapenemases, which OXA-48 and KPC-2 are investigated, and it can be useful in centers where molecular tests are not available. In contrast to our study results, ertapenem is not advised as an indicator of carbapenem susceptibility in recent guidelines because isolates with AmpC/ESBL and decreased permeability have higher MICs for ertapenem than for imipenem or meropenem [28]. In our study, only 7 of the 24 (29.1%) carbapenem-resistant *E. coli* isolates were found positive for carbapenemase genes. This condition may be suggesting that OmpC and/or OmpF deficiency combined with AmpC can be the responsible mechanism for the development of carbapenem resistance in *E. coli* in Turkey. In a previous study, researchers investigated a carbapenem-resistant *E. coli* strain from a patient with peritonitis, and they found that the carbapenem resistance occurred because of a combination of OmpC loss and CTX-M production [29].

The KPCs are plasmid-encoded enzymes mostly reported in *K. pneumoniae* from the United States. The first KPC-positive

Table 2
MIC values of carbapenems tested for carbapenem-resistant *Escherichia coli* isolates, and results of PFGE and PCR analysis of *bla* genes.

Sample No	MICs of carbapenems (µg/m)			Beta-lactamases						Genotype
	Ertapenem	Meropenem	Imipenem	<i>bla</i> _{OXA-48}	<i>bla</i> _{KPC}	<i>bla</i> _{NDM-1}	<i>bla</i> _{VIM}	<i>bla</i> _{IMP}	<i>bla</i> _{CTX-M}	
1	32	4 ^c	2	Positive ^b	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	6
2	2	2	4 ^c	Positive ^b	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	6
3	32	1,5	3	Negative	Positive ^b	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	9
4	0,75	0,38	1,5	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	3
5	8	0,25	0,75	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	12
6	32	1,5	3	Negative	Positive ^b	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	9
7	0,032 ^a	0,016	0,19	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	7
8	0,047 ^a	0,032	0,125	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	5a
9	0,19 ^a	0,016	0,125	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	10
10	2	0,25	0,38	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	11
11	0,75	0,023	0,25	Positive ^b	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	13
12	0,25 ^a	0,016	0,25	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	8
13	4	0,19	0,19	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	15
14	0,75	0,125	0,75	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	Non typable ^d
15	0,25 ^a	0,032	0,19	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	18
16	2	0,19	0,19	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	4
17	0,25 ^a	0,064	0,125	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	16
18	8	2	4 ^c	Positive ^b	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	1
19	0,25 ^a	0,064	0,125	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	14
20	1	0,5	0,5	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	1
21	2	0,25	2	Positive ^b	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	17
22	4	0,5	0,25	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	14
23	2	0,5	0,75	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	2
24	4	1	1	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	5

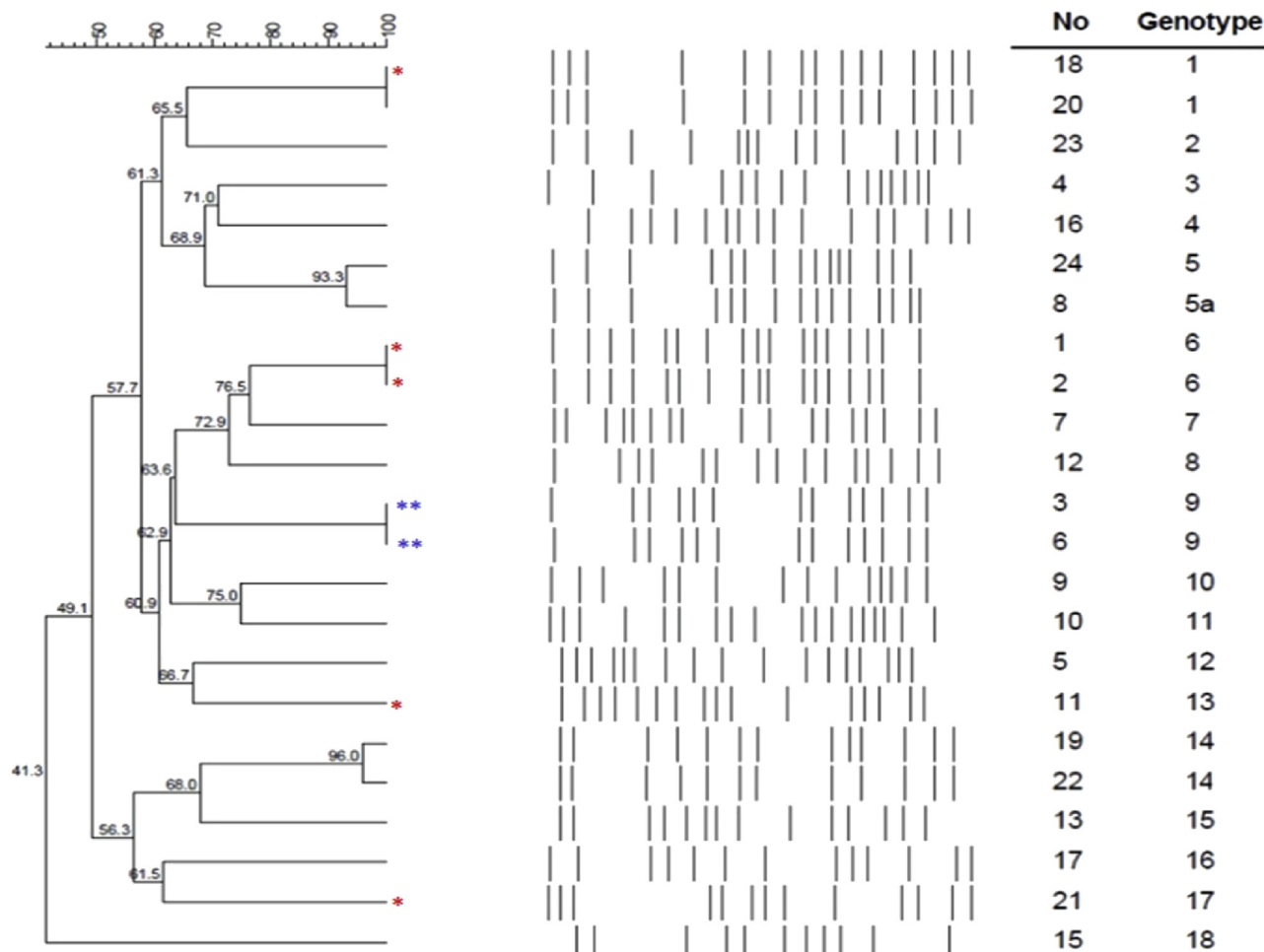
PFGE, Pulsed-field gel electrophoresis; PCR, Polymerase chain reaction, MIC, minimum inhibitory concentration.

^a Ertapenem susceptible isolates, MICs ≤ 0.5 µg/m.

^b OXA-48 and KPC-2-positive isolates.

^c Imipenem and meropenem resistant isolates, MICs ≥ 4 µg/m.

^d 14.sample was not typable by PFGE.



*OXA-48-positive isolates.

**KPC-2-positive isolates.

Fig. 1. Results of pulsed-field gel electrophoresis and DNA sequence analysis for the 24 carbapenem-resistant *Escherichia coli* isolates.

K. pneumoniae infection outside USA was reported in 2005 from France, the first outbreak was from Israel. Besides USA, Greece is considered as another country with epidemicity of KPC-producing bacteria. Other sporadic reports of KPC-positive strains were generally linked with travel histories to USA, Israel or Greece [2]. KPC-2-producing *K. pneumoniae* has recently been reported from Turkey [13,14], whereas KPC-2-producing *E. coli* has not been reported. This report confirms, to our knowledge for the first time, the arrival of KPC-2-producing *E. coli* in Turkey. The first KPC-positive strains from Turkey in *Escherichia coli* were isolated from the blood cultures of a Turkish patient with a long stay in intensive care unit.

Turkey has been accepted as the main reservoir for OXA-48 producers [30–32]. In our study, OXA-48 was also the most frequent carbapenemase, but there is no homogeneity among OXA-48 positive strains in antibiotic resistance profiles and carbapenem MICs. Continuous surveillance and molecular characterization of OXA-48 producers are needed to better understand the transmission pathways, and to establish proper infection control policies.

VIM- and IMP-type enzymes are known to be endemics in Greece, Taiwan, and Japan, but at the same time outbreaks and

single reports of VIM and IMP producers have been reported in many other countries. After the description of NDM-1 in *K. pneumoniae*, this gene began to be reported in *E. coli* generally in the strains isolated from patients with travel history to Indian subcontinent [2]. Despite the recent studies from Turkey with NDM-type carbapenemase strains in *Enterobacteriaceae* [14,33], there was no NDM-type carbapenemase in *E. coli* isolates in our study.

In conclusion, we report here the presence of carbapenem resistance in *E. coli* isolates from the clinical samples and the first identification of the KPC-2-producing *E. coli* isolates in Turkey. OXA-48-type carbapenemase was the most frequent, as it is generally reported in Turkey, and it is probable that KPC-type carbapenemase may be present more frequently in Turkey, especially in *K. pneumoniae*, but it is not been monitored routinely therefore it can not be detected. There is a need for more studies to understand better the epidemiology of resistance factors in *E. coli* in Turkey.

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