

## What is the best method? Recovery of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* and extended-spectrum $\beta$ -lactamase-producing *Escherichia coli* from inanimate hospital surfaces.

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1 What is the best method? Recovery of methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus  
2 aureus and extended-spectrum beta-lactamase producing Escherichia coli  
3 from inanimate hospital surfaces

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18  
19 Preliminary data arising from this study were presented at the International  
20 Healthcare Infection Society meeting in Liverpool, UK, November, 2012.

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25 ABSTRACT

26 Narrative abstract (50 words max)

27 Environmental sampling in hospitals, when required, needs to be reliable. We  
28 evaluated different methods of sampling methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus*  
29 *aureus* and extended-spectrum beta-lactamase producing *Escherichia coli* on  
30 five materials of the hospital setting. Petrifims and contact-plates were superior  
31 to swabs for all of the surfaces studied.

32

33 Keywords: MRSA, ESBL-*E. coli*, environmental contamination, hospital  
34 surfaces, swabs, contact-plates, petrifilms.

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Contamination of hospital surfaces by nosocomial microorganisms has long been recognized.<sup>1</sup> Transmission of these microorganisms occurs directly or indirectly, e.g. via contaminated healthcare workers' gloves.<sup>2</sup> Inadequate cleaning has also been associated with the transmission of healthcare-associated infections (HCAI).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the use of novel decontamination methods such as gaseous plasma requires reliable methods to monitor their microbiological effectiveness. The Center for Disease Control provide recommendations for evaluating hospital environmental cleaning however, these are not standard and they do not consider specific outbreak scenarios or other research driven investigations.<sup>4</sup> Sampling of the healthcare environment has been inconsistently reported using a variety of swabs (cotton, rayon or nylon flocked) or contact-plates.<sup>5,6</sup> Although common in the food industry, petrifilms have rarely been used in assessing environmental contamination within the healthcare setting.<sup>7</sup>

We compared the recovery and limit of detection (LoD) of two important HCAI pathogens, i.e. methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and extended spectrum  $\beta$ -lactamase producing *Escherichia coli* (ESBL-E), from different materials commonly found in hospitals using swabs, contact-plates and petrifilms.

## METHODS

Clinical strain 31(ST22-MRSA-IV) and ESBL-E clinical strain (CL2), both from our collection were used in this study.<sup>8,9</sup> Columbia blood agar (CBA) and ESBL Brilliance agar (Oxoid Ltd, UK) were used for MRSA and ESBL-E, respectively.

71 Cultures were grown aerobically overnight at 37°C with rotation in tryptic-soy  
72 broth (TSB) supplemented with 5% NaCl and Mueller-Hinton (MH) broth (Sigma  
73 Aldrich, Ireland) for MRSA and ESBL-E, respectively. Cultures were centrifuged  
74 for 10min at 15,500g and washed three times in phosphate buffered saline  
75 (PBS). The culture was adjusted to the density of a 0.5McFarland standard  
76 (approximately  $1 \times 10^8$  MRSA and  $3.2 \times 10^7$  ESBL-E CFU/mL) in PBS using a  
77 DensiChek™ colorimeter (Vitek). Serial dilutions ( $10^{-1}$  to  $10^{-6}$ ) were prepared in  
78 PBS and 50µl of each (including the original suspension) were applied to the  
79 sterile test surfaces. These were sections (25cm<sup>2</sup>) of; linoleum flooring (Forbo  
80 Flooring, Ireland), polyurethane mattress fabric (Meditec Medical, Ireland)  
81 provided by the Maintenance Department, Beaumont Hospital, Dublin,  
82 polypropylene (GoodFellow Cambridge Ltd., UK), powder-coated mild steel  
83 (Watermark Engineering, Ireland) and stainless steel. Test sections were washed  
84 for 30min (1% virkon solution for linoleum and mattress and 70% ethanol for  
85 powder coated mild steel, polypropylene and stainless steel) before placing in  
86 Petri-dishes under UV light for 30min before bacterial inoculation.

87       Inoculated sections were air dried in a laminar flow cabinet over 1h before  
88 recovery. The recovery of bacteria from surfaces was assessed using rayon and  
89 nylon flocked eSwabs (Copan, Italy), contact-plates - MRSA Chromagar (Cruinn  
90 Diagnostics Ltd, Ireland) selective for MRSA, Brilliance UTI agar (Oxoid Ltd, UK)  
91 selective for ESBL-E and 3M™Petrifilms; Staph Express Count for MRSA and  
92 Enterobacteriaceae Count for ESBL-E (3M Petrifilm Trafalgar Scientific, UK).  
93 Swabs were pre-moistened in PBS and the entire section then targeted. Swabs

were placed in 3mL of PBS in round-bottomed tubes and briefly vortex mixed. Serial dilutions were prepared to confirm the total viable count (TVC). Aliquots (10µl,100µl) of each suspension were spread onto CBA for MRSA and ESBL Brilliance agar for ESBL-E. Sterile contact-plates (65mm x 15mm) (VWR®) were poured with either MRSA Chromoagar (MRSA selective) or UTI brilliance agar (E. coli selective), dried and applied to the inoculated sections for 20 to 30s, ensuring firm contact with the surface. Petrifilms were prepared according to the supplier instructions. Briefly 1mL of sterile water was added to each petrifilm before storage at 4°C for 2h before use. Petrifilms were applied ensuring that the entire material section was covered. Sub-cultured plates from swabs, contact-plates and petrifilms were incubated at 37°C overnight. Colony enumeration was performed macroscopically the following day. The limit of detection (LoD) was defined as the lowest concentration of bacteria applied that was detected by a specific method.

Statistical data analysis was carried out using GraphPad Prism 5.00 software. The means of the  $\log_{10}(\text{CFU/mL})$  recovered between methods or between materials was compared by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). When significant, i.e.  $p < .05$ , further analysis on the variance of the means between methods was carried out by Tukey's multiple comparison test. Comparison of the recoveries between microorganisms was analysed by t-test.

## RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the recovery of MRSA from five materials, using four methods, at

different applied inocula (8 to 1 log<sub>10</sub>CFU/mL). Petrifilms were best in recovering MRSA from all materials except stainless steel, when contact-plates were better. After petrifilms, contact-plates were best for recovering MRSA from linoleum, powder-coated mild steel and polypropylene. The second best method for stainless steel was the petrifilm and for mattress the flocked swabs. For all surfaces, rayon swabs had the lowest recovery of MRSA, compared to petrifilms (\*\*P<.01). The LoD for MRSA was of 1x10<sup>2</sup> CFU/ml for all materials except linoleum (LoD of 1x10<sup>4</sup> CFU/ml).

Figure 2 shows the recovery of ESBL-E from five materials, using four methods at different inocula concentrations (7.5 to 1.5 log<sub>10</sub>CFU/mL). Petrifilms were best in recovering ESBL-E from all the materials followed by contact-plates. The lowest recovery of ESBL-E from all materials was with rayon and flocked swabs. Petrifilms and contact-plates were significantly better than either swab (\*\*P<.001). The LoD for ESBL-E from petrifilms was 3.2x10<sup>1</sup> CFU/ml for powder-coated mild steel, polypropylene and stainless steel, and 3.2x10<sup>2</sup> CFU/ml and 3.2x10<sup>3</sup> CFU/ml from mattress and linoleum, respectively.

The poorest recovery of MRSA and ESBL-E was with swabs. However, the recovery of MRSA using rayon and flocked swabs was significantly higher compared with ESBL-E from all surfaces (\*\*P<.01 and \*\*\*P<.001, respectively). The recovery of MRSA from powder-coated mild steel, polypropylene and stainless steel was greater than from the mattress and linoleum but this difference was not statistically significant. Similarly, ESBL-E recovery was not significantly different among the different materials.

## DISCUSSION

To our knowledge, this is the first study to evaluate petrifilms for assessing hospital surface contamination and compare it with other commonly used methods. Like contact-plates, petrifilms are a direct contact method advantageous over the aforementioned on its flexibility to adjust to non-flat surfaces (e.g. door handles). Interestingly, from those evaluated here, the petrifilm was the overall best method to recover both MRSA and ESBL-E from all surfaces tested followed by contact-plates. A previous study showed that Gram-positive contamination of the environment adjacent to 54 patients with Gram-positive infections versus 136 with Gram-negative infections was more heavily contaminated by Gram-positives (24.7%) than Gram-negatives (4.9%).<sup>10</sup> Our findings suggest that contamination by Gram-negatives may be underestimated in studies where direct contact methods were not used. We show that the recovery of MRSA and ESBL-E differ significantly according to the method used and the type of surface being screened. Particularly, for MRSA, recovery was lower from linoleum and mattress compared to other surfaces, possibly due to the high porosity of these materials allowing bacteria to penetrate and being harder to culture.

This study limitation includes not evaluating the materials characteristics (e.g. porosity, roughness, hydrophobicity), bacteria were enumerated per volume rather than per area, and surfaces were free of protein unlike often in practice.

In conclusion, notwithstanding financial considerations, we suggest that direct contact methods, i.e. petrifilms and contact-plates and not swabs, are best



163 for the detection of MRSA and ESBL-E in the healthcare environment. They are  
164 more rapidly processed than swabs and can be used as appropriate to the  
165 surface type. Additional work is needed to confirm these findings in the actual  
166 hospital environment.

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171 Potential conflicts of interest. H.H. has recent research collaborations with  
172 Steris Corporation, Inov8 Science, Pfizer & Cepheid and has also received  
173 lecture & other fees from Novartis, AstraZenca & Astellas. All other authors  
174 declare no potential conflict of interest.

Figure 1

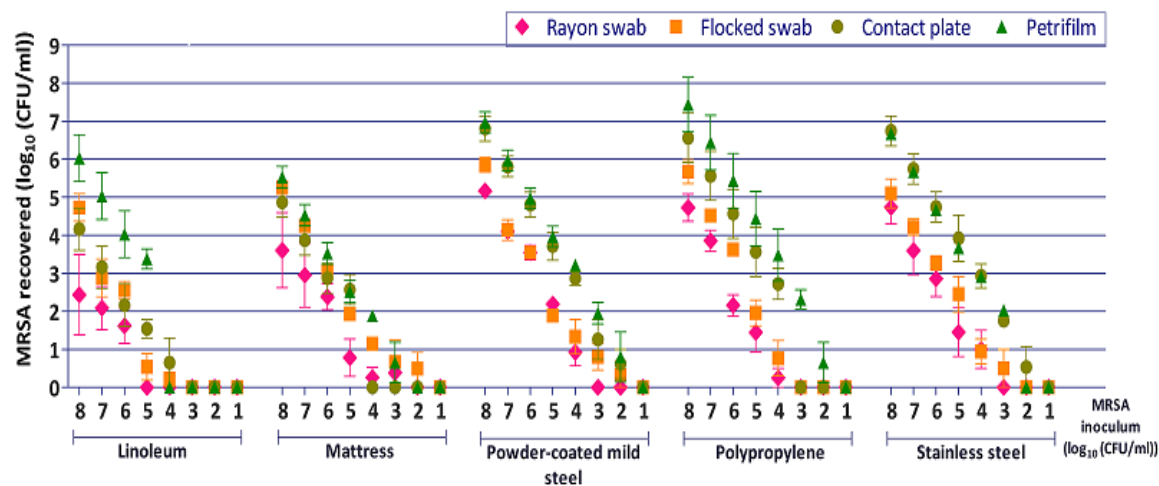
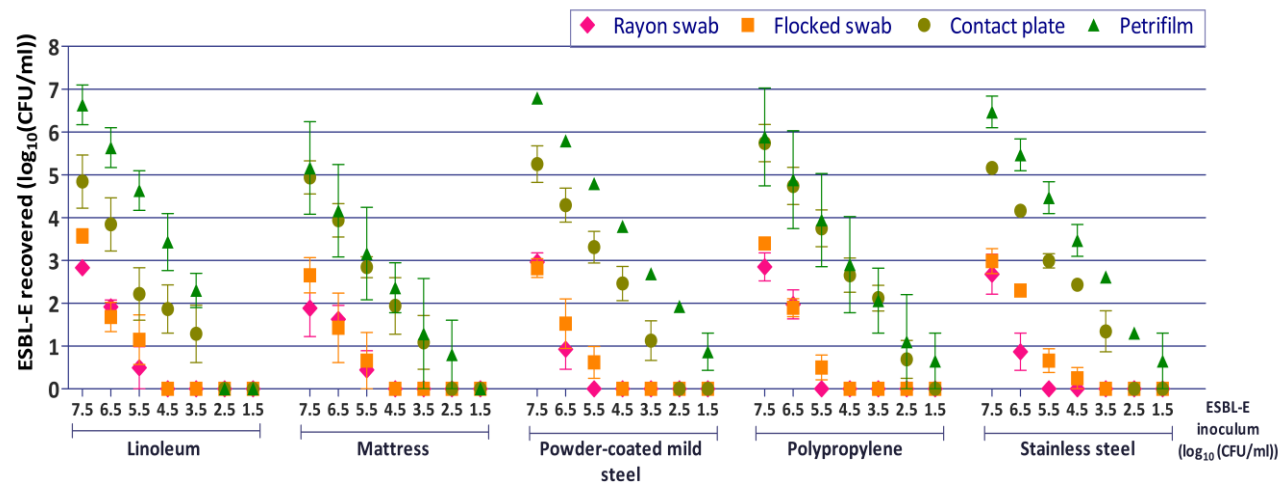


Figure 2



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222   FIGURE LEGENDS

223

224   Figure 1 – Numbers of MRSA inoculated and recovered using rayon and flocked  
225   swabs, contact-plates and petrifilm from surfaces common to the hospital  
226   environment. Each data point represents the mean of at least three individual  
227   assays  $n \geq 3$ , error bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM).

228

229   Figure 2 – Numbers of ESBL E. coli inoculated and recovered using rayon and  
230   flocked swabs, contact-plates and petrifilm from surfaces common to the hospital  
231   environment. Each data point represents the mean of at least three individual  
232   assays  $n \geq 3$ , error bars represent the standard error of the mean (SEM).