Reviewer's report

Title: Spectrum and antibiotic sensitivity of bacteria contaminating upper gut in patients with malabsorption syndrome from the tropics

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Reviewer: Robert M Craig

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept after discretionary revisions

Review. Ghoshal, et al. Spectrum and antibiotic sensitivity of bacteria contaminating upper gut in patients with malabsorption syndrome from the tropics

The authors obtained bacteriologic material from the jejunum in 50 patients with malabsorption syndrome and from 12 control patients, with a catheter device that they developed and described previously, inserted through a pediatric colonoscope. Greater than 10^5 colonies of bacteria were identified in 21 of the 50 patients, but in none of the 12 controls. 34 of the 50 patients had some growth. Some uncontrolled observations suggested that quinolone antibiotics were more effective than tetracycline. They contend that malabsorption itself may be responsible for small intestinal bacterial overgrowth.

The study does add further information on small intestinal microbiology in malabsorption. Its major weakness is the failure to include the bacteriology for each malabsorptive entity. If all 7 patients with known small intestinal bacterial overgrowth and the majority of patients with tropical sprue had the significant bacterial cultures, > 10^5, then this does not give support to their contention that small intestinal bacterial overgrowth occurs more commonly in malabsorptive syndromes previously not known for this process. They should again be congratulated in their success in obtaining 100% collections of jejunal material for culture, an otherwise common problem for many other workers in this field.

Competing interests:

None declared.