A 21-year survey of *Escherichia coli* from bloodstream infections

(BSIs) in a tertiary hospital reveals how community-hospital dynamics,

influence local BSI rates, the trends of the B2 phylogroup and the

STc131 pandemic clone

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ABSTRACT

Escherichia coli is overrepresented in all bloodstream infections (BSIs) series, mostly associated with a few clonal lineages. Its population structure has been analyzed but the dynamics remains to be fully understood. We analyze the dynamics of E. coli-BSIs in a sample of 649 isolates, representing all 7165 E. coli BSI episodes recorded in a tertiary hospital (1996-2016) according to clonal identification (phylogenetic groups/subgroups, STc131 subclades), antibiotic susceptibility (13 antibiotics), and virulence-associated genes (VAGs, 29 genes). Patient data were obtained from the laboratory system and clinical charts. The incidence of BSI-EC doubled from 1996 to 2016 (5.5 to 10.8 BSI episodes/1000 hospitalizations). Intertwined waves of community-acquired (CA) and hospital-acquired isolates (HA) episodes of both B2 and non-B2 phylogroups, occurred until B2 overtook non-B2 BSI episodes. ST131 contributed to increasing the B2 rates, but only transiently altered the population structure. B2 isolates predominates (53%), overrepresented by subgroups B2-I (STc131), B2-II, B2-IX, and B2-VI (25%, 25%, 14%, and 9%). We observed a remarkable increase only for B2-I-STc131 (C1/C2 subclades), a decreasing trend for phylogroup D, and oscillations for other B2 subgroups throughout the years. According to VAG patterns, B2 strains exhibit a population structure compatible with the niche specialization theory. A reservoir of B2 and non-B2 strains represented in human microbiota, flows from the community to the hospital and vice-versa, where they can either be selected or coexist. The increase of BSI is determined by waves of CA that predate the amplification of HA episodes of both B2 and non-B2 phylogroups in various time periods, influenced by FQR and microbiota composition.

IMPORTANCE

The gut microbiota is an important reservoir for bacteria that cause extraintestinal infections including sepsis, which is the third cause of mortality in Western countries and one of the Global Health threads recognized by the WHO since 2017. Most of the bloodstream infections (BSI) and UTIs due to *Escherichia coli* strains originate in the gut microbiota and belong to the phylogenetic group B2. Most B2 strains recovered from BSI infections are clonal lineages predominant in fecal isolates, often associated with outbreaks. Our study analyzes the long-term dynamics of B2 *E. coli* subtypes and reveals waves of different *E.coli* lineages including pandemic clones that emerge periodically and are established in the intestinal microbiota afterward. It also reflects that clonal amplifications in the community predates the clonal increases in hospitals which may favor the acquisition of antibiotic resistance in health centers and further dissemination of well adapted clones that become multidrug resistant.

INTRODUCTION

Escherichia coli is ubiquitously present in the gut microbiota of humans and other vertebrates, and also represents the primary cause of bloodstream infections (BSIs) and urinary tract infections (UTIs) (1, 2)**.** The increasing and progressive annual rate of BSIs episodes at a global level made the WHO to consider sepsis as a Global Health Threat in 2017 (https://www.global-sepsis-alliance.org/news/2017/5/26/wha-adopts-resolution-on-sepsis). The problem affects more than 30 million of people and increases 9-13% in Western countries where constitutes the third cause of mortality (3–6). The current knowledge suggests differences between countries but such information is highly fractioned in multicentric studies(3), mostly focused on antibiotic resistant BSI isolates (7), and performed at variable periods of time using different sampling criteria (3–8). Only studies from the UK, where surveillance of BSI is compulsory since 2011, provide a long-term comprehensive analysis of BSI and the population structure and the dynamics of *E. coli* causing BSI (6, 9).

The gut microbiota is often the origin of extraintestinal infections caused by *E. coli* (10) and vary between humans of different age and lifestyle (10, 11). Among the 7 major phylogenomic groups of the species, the B2 phylogenetic group is currently predominantly detected in clinical and fecal isolates from adults and children of Western areas (10–12). Moreover, the seven *E. coli* phylogenetic groups (A, B1, B2, C, D, E, F) and also the 10 B2-*E. coli* subgroups, are consistently overrepresented by certain sequence type complexes (STcs) [e.g.B2-I (STc131), B2-II (STc73), B2-IX (STc95), D (STc69) or F (STc648)], in isolates of different origins although their distribution vary between human populations (13–16).

Despite the apparent persistent structure of *E. coli* in the gut of Western individuals, clonal expansions of emerging STcs periodically occurred (15, 17). The STc131 represents the most emblematic example of a global emerging clone nowadays (17). A multicentric study in the UK describes how an emerging and pandemic clone STc131 contributes but only transiently alter the persistent population structure of *E. coli* (9). Nonetheless, the factors behind such *E. coli*

clonal expansions are not well understood and different evolutionary pathways including the

acquisition of antibiotic resistance, exist for different STcs (18).

The number of works related to the *E. coli* population structure contrasts with the scarcity of

longitudinal studies necessary for the understanding of long-term population dynamics of the

lineages, and the local evolutionarily stable strategies for each lineage that led to local lineage

conservation and coexistence (19). Local settings are important sources of information because

can reflect the dimensions of human populations structure (age, sex, interconectedness), and

offer stability in terms of the intensity of selection (e.g. common policies to control antimicrobial

resistance such as antibiotic use, infection control strategies), models of healthcare delivery,

and measuring approaches (diagnostic tools) (3, 8).

We retrospectively studied a randomized sample of 649 isolates drawn from a collection of 7165

E. coli isolates, which represented all BSI episodes registered at our institution between 1996

and 2016. This period coincided with the global emergence and amplification of various bla_{ESBLs}

genes and B2 *E. coli* clones and with the overall increase in the frequency of *E. coli* BSIs. The

aim of this study was to infer the local diversity and dynamics of *E. coli* causing BSIs, focusing

on the B2 phylogroup and the most abundant contemporary B2 subtype, the pandemic B2-I

STc131.

METHODS

Study design. Ramón y Cajal University Hospital is a tertiary-level public health center with 1155 beds that provides attention to 600,000 habitants in the Northern area of Madrid (Spain), which reflects a pyramid-age of "declining type", has full accessibility to primary attention care and have a predominant medium-high socioeconomic level. Of the total 21,695 positive blood cultures detected between January 1996 and December 2016, we identified 7165 *E. coli* that represented 1 isolate per patient and per BSI episode. A sample of nearly 10% of this *E. coli* collection, stratified by sex, age, and antimicrobial resistance pattern was sorted by statistical randomization and was further analyzed (649 *E. coli* isolates from 339 females and 310 males; < 1-98 years of age). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of our hospital.

BSIs are classified as hospital acquired (HA), community acquired (CA), and community-onset healthcare-associated (HCA), according to the date of the sample collection after patient admission and the patient exposure to hospitals before the BSI episode (8). Due to the inaccessibility to all the medical records of patients enrolled in this study, and their advanced age, we classified the episodes into HA (if the blood culture was obtained at the ICU, surgical, or medical areas after 48 h of admission) and CA+HCA (if the blood culture was obtained at the hospital emergency wards or at the day care centers) categories. UTIs were considered as the origin of BSI if *E. coli* was recovered from both the urine and blood samples, with a difference of ±24 h.

Characterization of the bacterial isolates. Blood culture isolates of *E. coli* are routinely frozen and stocked in skimmed milk at −70°C, and were subcultured onto brain-heart infusion agar prior to analysis. Bacterial susceptibility against 13 antibiotics (ampicillin, amoxicillin-clavulanic acid, cefotaxime, ceftazidime, meropenem, nalidixic acid, ciprofloxacin, streptomycin, kanamycin, gentamicin, tetracycline, chloramphenicol, and trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole) was performed by the disk-diffusion method (20).

Multiplex PCR assays allowed classifying the *E. coli* isolates into major phylogenetic groups A, B1, B2, C, D, E, and F (21); B2 subgroups (B2 I-X) (22); and B2-I-STc131 *E. coli* serotypes

(O16/O25b), clades (H41, H22, H30), and the H30 subclades C0 [H30, fluoroquinolone

susceptible (FQ^S)], C1 [H30-R, fluoroquinolone resistant (FQ^R)], C2 (H30Rx, FQ^R+$bla_{CTX-M-15}$),

and C1-M27 (H30-Rx, FQ^R+ $bla_{CTX-M-27}$) (22, 23). STc131 isolates were further analyzed by

pulsed field gel electrophoresis (PFGE). The presence of 29 virulence-associated genes

(VAGs) was determined for all B2 isolates by PCR (2, 24).

Statistical analysis. To calculate statistical significance, the chi-squared test, a 2-sample t-test

for normally distributed variables, and Kendall's correlation were used, considering p-values

<0.05 to be statistically significant.

RESULTS

Epidemiology of the 7165 *E. coli* isolates causing BSIs at Hospital Ramón y Cajal

The incidence of BSIs caused by *E. coli* doubled from 1996 to 2016 in our institution (5.5 to 10.8 BSI episodes/1000 hospitalizations). Although the overall number of BSI episodes in the hospital and community settings was similar at the beginning of the study in the mid 1990s, we observed a steady increase in both HA-BSIs and CA+HCA-BSIs from 1995 to 2002 (CA/HA ratio >1–2) followed by waves of alternative predominance of either CA-BSIs or HA-BSIs. The increases of BSI episodes in the community predated those in the hospital setting and would explain the wave dynamics between the hospital and the community-based populations and the overall shift in the ratio of BSI acquired in the community and the hospital (Figure 1). The analysis of antimicrobial resistance records in our department for the blood *E. coli* isolates revealed a coincidental increase in the rise of BSI infections and the increasing trends of *E. coli* resistant to fluoroquinolones (FQ^R) from 1994, and resistant to third-generation cephalosporins (3GC) from 2003. Rates of resistance to other antibiotics remained stable during the period of study (data not shown).

UTIs were identified as the origin of the BSI in one-third of the cases. This finding was more frequent in women than in men (42.33% vs. 26.77%, p≤.005) but not significantly different between patients of different age groups (p >.05). The proportion of polymicrobial BSIs was 9% (n = 57/649), and was similar for men and women (11.8% vs. 7.3% of the BSI cases, respectively).

Clonal diversity of *E. coli* causing BSI

Figure 2 shows the occurrence of various *E. coli* populations, namely phylogenetic groups, B2 subgroups, and B2-I (STc131) subclades. The predominant phylogenetic group was B2 (348/649; 53.06%), followed at a much lower frequency by D (11,4%), B1 (7,24%), A (6.3%), C (5.,1%), F (6.8%), E (0.9%) and Clades I and II (0.9%). Half of the B2 isolates corresponded to subgroups B2-I (25.6%) and B2-II (25.1%), which were followed by B2-IX (14.2%), B2-VI (9.5%) and others. Almost 10% of the isolates were catalogued as The STc131 isolates, clearly

predominant within the B2-I subgroup, represents 12.3% of the total BSI *E. coli* isolates and

21.8% of the B2 phylogroup. The STc131 isolates (serogroups O25b and O16 representing

92% and 8%, respectively) split in clade A (7/82, 9%), clade B (16/82, 20%), and clade C (59/82,

71%). Clade C comprised isolates of subclades C1 (29/82, 35.4%), C2 (22/82, 26.8%), C0 (6/82,

7.3%), and C1-M27 (2/82, 2.4%).

Distribution by Age. All phylogenetic groups were present in patients of all age groups, although

differences were observed for subgroups B2-I (STc131), B2-II, B2-VI, and B2-IX. This

distribution implies the clear predominance of B2-I in the elderly (>80 years) and B2-II in

individuals younger than 45 years. Others showed a bimodal distribution as B2-IX and B2-VI

(Figure S1).

Acquisition of the BSIs. Most B2 isolates were community based although intertwined waves of

CA+HCA-BSI and HA-BSI episodes of strains of both B2 and non-B2 phylogroups, which

occurred synchronously until 2008, when B2 clearly overtook non-B2 BSI episodes and STc131

become transiently predominant (Figure S2). Almost half of patients with STc131 (46%) were

admitted to the medical emergency ward with an established BSI, suggesting the frequent

presence of this clone in the community. As an example, we detected among these patients

several coincidences of strains with the same PFGE pattern corresponding to clades H22

(2000), C1 (2004, 2005), and C2 (2008-2011) (data not shown).

Temporal variation. Except for phylogroups B2-I (ST131) and phylogroup D, the trends of the

phylogroups did not significantly change during the period analyzed. However, the occurrence

of major subgroups (B2-II, B2-IX, B2-VI, B-IV, B2-VII) greatly varied through the years

suggesting episodes of transmission with transient amplifications as occurred for B2-I (STc131)

(Figure 3).

The STc131 *E. coli* was the only group increasingly recovered coinciding with its global

amplification (17). The strains of ST131 clade B were initially detected in 1996, and remained

steadily identified since then. In the current study, the ST131 of clade A was first detected in

2004, but we retrospectively identified STc131 clade A in clinical isolates of TEM-4 and TEM-24

producers from 1991 and 2000, respectively (25, 26) For the predominant ST131 clade C, the

subclade C0 (H30, FQ^S) emerged in 2000, followed by C1 (H30-R, FQ^R) in 2004, C2 (H30-Rx,

FQ^R $bla_{CTX-M-15}$) in 2006, and C1-M27 (H30-Rx, FQ^R $bla_{CTX-M-27}$) in 2016 (Figure 4). The number

of *E.coli* strains of phylogroup D decreased from the beginning of the study, but it varied

significantly through the years.

Antimicrobial susceptibility.

Figure 5 shows the antimicrobial susceptibility patterns in the sample of 649 *E. coli* isolates,

revealing that FQ^R appears in between 35% and 50% of the isolates of each phylogroup, with

B2 being less prevalent (17%), although it is of note that most FQ^R B2 isolates correspond to

STc131 (70% vs. 3.5% in non-ST131 B2). Only 6.1% of the total number of B2 isolates showed

a 3GC^R phenotype compatible with the production of an extended-spectrum beta-lactamase

(ESBL), further identified as CTX-M-15, CTX-M-14, and CTX-M-27, and was only detected

among STc131 isolates. Resistance to ampicillin (70.4%), streptomycin (39.6%), nalidixic acid

(32.8%), and cotrimoxazole (45%–50%) was frequent among the isolates of the various

phylogroups. Remarkable differences were observed for amoxicillin-clavulanic acid, kanamycin,

gentamicin, tetracycline, and chloramphenicol, mostly due to the phylogroup C isolates.

Susceptibility to the 13 antimicrobials tested was observed in 17% of the total number of

isolates tested, with the frequency of susceptible isolates higher among those of phylogroups A,

B1, B2, and F (15% each) than those of phylogroups D (10%), E (1%), and C (0%). Within B2, a

pan-susceptibility pattern was more frequent for non-STc131 than for STc131 isolates (26.8%

vs. 3.7%). The B2-STc131 strains showed a multiresistant profile (resistance against ≥4

antimicrobial agents) more frequently than other B2 members (56.6% vs. 11.6%; p <.001).

Virulence-associated gene profiling in the B2 phylogroup

According to the content of the VAG genes, the B2 *E. coli* strains were clustered into 2 large

groups and 10 subgroups, each comprising numerous gene combinations and showing variable

redundancies (Figure 6). Despite some VAG variability within each B2 subgroup, the results

suggest a conserved genetic structure related to virulence and colonization in the B2 strains

analyzed in this study. More than half (56%) of the B2-I (STc131) strains clustered in VAG 1.5.

Most (54%–75%) of the *E. coli* phylogenetic subgroup isolates B2-II, B2-III, B2-V, B2-VII, B2-IX,

and B2-X clustered in the VAG 2.6, 2.2, 2.9, 2.6, 2.7, and 2.4 groups, respectively (ordered by

frequency). A detailed analysis of virulence content is provided in Supplementary Text and

Figures S3, S4, S5, S6.

DISCUSSION

This work, one of the very few studies -and the first in Spain- to analyse the dynamics of *E. coli*

strains for a long period of time at a single centre, reveals intertwined waves of CA+HCA-BSI

and HA-BSI episodes of strains of both B2 and non-B2 phylogroups, which occurred

synchronously until B2 overtook non-B2 BSI episodes and the B2-I-STc131 became transiently

predominant and predate new waves of other major B2 subgroups. This dynamics is similar to

that observed in the UK (18) but further suggest that the burden of CA-BSI and HA-BSI

infections are closely related. Besides the risk of cross-infections/colonizations in the hospital

that led to local increases in BSIs in particular periods, species or clones which are part of the

microbiota of healthy individuals in the community might occasionally have an epidemic

structure, in our case providing a source of *E. coli* strains influencing the incidence of hospital

BSIs.

E. coli bacteremia, which was not considered common at the beginning of the 20th century, has

steadily increased from the past to the present, according to long surveys performed at Boston

City Hospital between 1935 and 1972 (27), at St. Thomas hospital in London between 1969 and

1986 (28), and more recently, at our and other hospitals in Western countries (most cross-

sectional or longitudinal multicentric studies) (3, 6, 8, 9, 29). The local survey performed during

the 1980s (28) reflected, for the very first time, a relatively constant proportion of *E. coli* among

all cases of BSI with where the incidence peak was coincidental with a community-based clonal

outbreak which led to the introduction of an *E. coli* O15:H12 clone in the hospital setting and a

subsequent increase in nosocomial BSI cases (28). Shortly afterwards, community-based and

hospital clonal outbreaks by *E. coli* of phylogroup D were extensively reported during the 1990s,

namely ST69 in the US and ST393 O15:H12 in the UK and Spain (15). During the 2000s, the

increasing of CA outbreaks of B2 *E. coli* lineages as STc73, STc95 and more recently, STc131,

became common (9, 14). Massot et al demonstrated that the shift in the population structure of

commensal *E. coli* from A and D groups in 1970s to B2 and F in 2000s could be influenced by

human interventions as antibiotic use (12). However, clonal expansions at local level have been

poorly analyzed and always under the perspective of antimicrobial resistance. Significant

changes in healthcare delivery and in the human population structure (age, interconnectedness,

diet), have been recently suggested to explain both the transmission (amplification) of

microorganisms and the acquisition of resistance even in the absence of personal history of

antibiotic consumption and other known risk factors for antimicrobial resistance (30–32).

The most comprehensive recent analysis, using European Antimicrobial Resistance

Surveillance System (EARSS) data from 2002 to 2008, highlighted a remarkable average

annual increase of 29.9% in the number of reported bacteremias caused by *E. coli* isolates

resistant to 3GCs. However, such increases were less noticeable in countries from Southern

Europe (3), probably because of the overrepresentation of major *E. coli* in hospitals predates

the acquisition of genes coding for resistance to first-line beta-lactam antibiotics (9, 13). What

we should be aware of the steady increase in the occurrence of FQ^R in all non-B2 groups since

the early 1990s that would reflect the selection, amplification and stabilization of certain *E. coli*

lineages as some of the phylogroups D, and more recently, of STc131 of phylogroup B2. These

lineages would have also been circulating in the community for decades before the emergence

of STc131 clade C, a FQ^R lineage that, in contrast with others, is predominant in individuals

>80y. FQ^R has recently been considered an advantage for the fitness of high-risk clones of *E.*

coli and other species (33, 34). Some FQ^R clones are predominant in the elderly, with a

sustained pattern in hospital (or day-care-center) admissions and personal clinical history that

facilitates the acquisition of other antibiotic resistances (35). An increasing cumulative "elderly

microbiota reservoir" of antimicrobial-resistant subpopulations of various bacterial species would

be congruent with the overrepresentation of community-based individuals with a BSI by STc131

at admission, with the age of the patients in our sample, and with the identification of identical

PFGE types in groups of unrelated patients. However, this does not fully explain the

overrepresentation of certain B2 lineages which are amplified time to time as it reflects the

waves of different B2 subgroups in Figure 3.

B2-I (STc131) was the only lineage that significantly increased during the period analyzed, and

this transient increase was due to the expansion of both C1 and C2 subclades, and probably, to

CTX-M-27 in the last years not included in the study according to the emergence of this

subclade in the community (36). Although the epidemiology of ST131 has extensively been

documented (17), this work and that by Kallonen (9) are the only ones that reveals the evolution

and coexistence of all STc131 subclades which, after a transient amplification, are incorporated

into the *E. coli* population structure (17, 36). The other predominant B2 subgroups varied

greatly through the period studied, suggesting some peaks of prevalent B2-II, B2-IX, B2-VI

clones and also others as B2-VII and B2-X and non-I/II which are poorly documented in the

literature. The correlation between VAG profiles and B2 subgroups reflects an apparent

structure of B2 populations in agreement with the niche specialization hypothesis (10, 37–39).

Although the concordance of specific VAGs with isolates of B2-II and B2-IX subgroups is

congruent with their categorization as uropathogenic *E. coli*, such a way explaining their

bimodal distribution in different age groups, most B2-I strains (STc131 clade C) exhibit a low

number of classical EC-VAGs while retaining some traits that would facilitate colonization and

persistence in the gut (40, 41). To explain the expansion of the STc131 and other emerging

lineages, such as STc648 (phylogroup F), studies that have applied mathematical models to a

high number of genomes suggest that negative frequency-dependent selection of previously

rare populations might have favored their increase (16, 41), and will foster the expansion of

some others in the future. However, these studies are fully focused on the microorganisms and

do not allow us to associate the observed changes with the type of hosts located either in

hospital or community compartments.

We are aware that the size of the sample analyzed (despite of the high number of isolates

analyzed it represents the 10% of the total number of BSI in our institution), and the lack of

whole genome comparative analysis might limit our conclusions about the clonal dynamics.

However, the long period analyzed at a single institution helps identifying relevant

epidemiological conditions that explain the expansion or particular *E. coli* populations observed

in our and other areas during recent years. Currently, the B2 *E. coli* strains are relevant units of

BSI pathogenicity, which should correlate with their success in particular microecological

landscapes, in part determined by interventions exerted on particular human populations

(particularly elderly patients). This view is in agreement with the concept of incorporating

ecological features in the identification of the fundamental units of bacterial diversity (38) and

pathogenicity. In fact, particular clones and lineages are differentially represented in a "human

microbiota reservoir" (elderly being a reservoir of high-risk B2 lineages) flowing from the

community to the hospital and vice versa, where they can either be selected or coexist as

predicted by an evolutionarily stable strategy (38). The evolutionary trajectories of recently

amplified major lineages indicate the relevance of undetected selective events, which could be

further amplified by the acquisition of antimicrobial resistance in settings under (or not) antibiotic

pressure (31, 32, 42). The early detection of the abundance and diversity of B2 subgroups of

clinical significance for BSI in metagenomic samples and the analysis of common causes that

enhance their selection, either in the hospital, nursing homes or the community, are priority

research challenges that warrant attention in an era that favor the pandemics of microorganisms

and antimicrobial resistance (43).

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 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

 None.

 AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

I.R. performed the wetlab work of the isolates collected from 1996–2012, assisted by C.R., and

participated in the study design, in the data analysis, and the writing of the initial draft of the

manuscript. A.S.F and M.S., assisted by PM, performed the wetlab work of the isolates

collected from 2012–2016, the categorization of all ST131s included in the study, the data

analysis, and the revision of the manuscript. V.F.L performed the bioinformatic and statistical

analysis of the results, most of the figures, and the revision of the manuscript. J.Z, E.L., and R.C.

participated in the study design and the revision of the manuscript. C.J.B. provided expertise

and participated in the revision of the manuscript. F.B. and T.M.C. participated in the study

design, data analysis, and wrote the manuscript. All the authors have read and approved the

final version of this manuscript.

FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. Incidence and Origin of BSI episodes caused by *Escherichia coli a*t the HRyC (1994-

2016). (A) Incidence of E. coli BSI (episodes/1000 hospitalizations); (B) Occurrence of

HCA+CA and HA episodes of BSI; (C) Ratio of HCA+CA/HA BSI episodes.

Abbreviations: HA = hospital acquired; CA= community acquired; HCA = community-onset

healthcare-associated.

Figure 2. Distribution of *E. coli* phylogroups and B2 subgroups. (A) Occurrence of the *E. coli*

phylogroups; *(*B) Occurrence of *E. coli* B2 subgroups A, B, C; (C) Occurrence of B2-I (STc131)

subclades C0/H30 (FQ^S), C1/H30-R (FQ^R), C2/H30Rx (FQ^R+*bla*$_{CTX-M-15}$), and C1-M27/H30-R

(FQ^R+ *bla*$_{CTX-M-27}$).

Figure 3. Temporal Distribution of *E. coli* populations at HRyC (1996-2016). (A and B)

Temporal distribution of *E. coli* phylogroups; (C and D) Temporal distribution of *E. coli* B2

subgroups; (C) Distribution of STc131 clades; (D) Timeline of the STc131 subclades C0, C1.

Figure 4. Temporal Distribution of *E. coli* populations at HRyC (1996-2016). (A) Distribution of

STc131 clades; (B) Timeline of the STc131 subclades C0, C1.

Figure 5. Antibiotic susceptibility of B2-*Escherichia coli* causing BSI. Abbreviations: AMC,

amoxicillin-clavulanic acid; AMP, ampicillin; CAZ, ceftazidime; CHL, chloramphenicol; CIP,

ciprofloxacin; CTX, cefotaxime; GEN, gentamicin; KAN, kanamycin; MEM, meropenem; NAL,

nalidixic acid; STR, streptomycin; TET, tetracycline; TMP/SXT, trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole;

Susceptible, susceptible to all 13 antibiotics analyzed.

Figure 6. Heatmap of 29 virulence factors (presence/absence) for the 348 B2 phylogenetic

group strains causing BSI at Ramón y Cajal University Hospital (1996–2016). VAGs: Virulence

Associated groups. VAGs were determined by hierarchical clustering using the Ward method

and Jaccard similarity distance.

Abbreviations of the VAGs tested. *Toxins*: *hlyA* (α-Hemolysin), *sat* (secreted autotransporter

toxin, a serine protease), *cnf1* (cytotoxic necrotizing factor 1), *cdtB* (cytolethal distending

toxin), *tsh* (temperature-sensitive hemagglutinin); *siderophores*: *iroN* (salmochelin receptor)*,*

iutA (aerobactin synthesis, receptor)*, ireA* (iron-regulated element, catecholate siderophore)*,*

fyuA (yersiniabactin receptor); *adhesins***:** fimbriae type P (*pap*GI, *pap*GII, *pap*GIII, *pap*A, *pap*C,

*pap*EF), *sfa/focDE* (type S fimbriae, sfa/foc S and F1C fimbriae); *afa/draBC,* Adhesinsd afa/dra

Dr antigen-binding adhesins (AFA I-III, Dr, F1845; *bmaE* (blood group M-specific adhesin*; iha*

(iron-regulated-gene-homologue adhesin); *protectins*: kpsMT II (group II capsule synthesis,

e.g., K1, K5, K12). kpsMT III Group III capsule synthesis (e.g., K3, K10, K54), *traT* (surface

exclusion; serum resistance-associated), *invasins*: ibeA-C (invasion of brain endothelium IbeA);

miscellanea: *cvaC* (microcin/colicin V; on plasmids with *traT, iss, iuc/iut*), *ompT* (outer

membrane protein T), *usp* (uropathogenic-specific protein, bacteriocin), PAI (malX, a PAI

CFT073 marker), *iss* (increased serum survival, outer membrane protein).

Supplementary Figure S1. Diversity of *E. coli* per age group. (A) Per phylogroup; (B) per B2

subgroup. Half of the B2 isolates corresponded to B2-II and B2-IX (33% and 21%) for patients

between 15 and 45 years, B2-I and B2-II (23% and 25%–28%) for patients between 45 and 80

years, and B2-I and B2-IX (36% and 20%) for patients >80 y

Supplementary Figure S2. Evolution in time of B2 and non-B2 lineages in hospital acquired

(HA) and community acquired (CA) BSI E. coli isolates.

The first increase in BSI (1994/1996–1999) occurred in the hospital and the community. While

the CA-BSI cases involve predominantly B2 but also non-B2 strains, the HA-BSI increases at

the expenses of episodes due to non-B2 strains. This was followed by an increase of CA-BSIs

(1999–2002) that involved predominantly non-B2 strains and an increase of HA-BSIs (2003–

2006) caused by non-B2 and B2 strains. Between 2006 and 2008, the ocurrence of CA-BSIs

reached that of HA-BSIs. The increase in B2 strains from the community predates a new

increase of nosocomial BSI mostly caused by B2 strains in the hospital (2009–2011) and

afterward, another convergence in frequency of HA and CA-BSI involved an increase in B2

strains in the community. Finally, the predominance of BSI in the community in 2016 involved

the increase of episodes caused by both B2 and non-B2 strains.

Supplementary Figure S3. Heatmap displaying the relative abundance of B2 phylogenetic

groups and VAG profiles. Variables showing goodness-of-fit are shown in red, whereas dark

blue regions indicate poor frequencies. Clustering of the B2 subgroups and VAGs and the

assembly statistics were performed using a hierarchical clustering method in R (hclust).

Abbreviations of the VAGs tested. *Toxins*: *hlyA* (α-Hemolysin), *sat* (secreted autotransporter

toxin, a serine protease), *cnf1* (cytotoxic necrotizing factor 1), *cdtB* (cytolethal distending

toxin), *tsh* (temperature-sensitive hemagglutinin; *siderophores*: *iroN* (salmochelin receptor)*,*

iutA (aerobactin synthesis, receptor)*, ireA* (iron-regulated element, catecholate siderophore)*,*

fyuA (yersiniabactin receptor); *adhesins***:** fimbriae type P (*pap*GI, *pap*GII, *pap*GIII, *pap*A, *pap*C,

*pap*EF), *sfa/focDE* (type S fimbriae, sfa/foc S and F1C fimbriae); *afa/draBC,* Adhesinsd afa/dra

Dr antigen-binding adhesins (AFA I-III, Dr, F1845; *bmaE* (blood group M-specific adhesin*; iha*

(iron-regulated-gene-homologue adhesin); *protectins*: kpsMT II (group II capsule synthesis,

e.g., K1, K5, K12). kpsMT III Group III capsule synthesis (e.g., K3, K10, K54), *traT* (surface

exclusion; serum resistance-associated), *invasins*: ibeA-C (invasion of brain endothelium IbeA);

miscellanea: *cvaC* (microcin/colicin V; on plasmids with *traT, iss, iuc/iut*), *ompT* (outer

membrane protein T), *usp* (uropathogenic-specific protein, bacteriocin), PAI (malX, a PAI

CFT073 marker), *iss* (increased serum survival, outer membrane protein).

Supplementary Figure S4. Heatmap displaying the relative abundance of B2 phylogenetic

groups and VAGs. Variables showing goodness-of-fit are shown in red, whereas dark blue

regions indicate poor performance. Clustering of the B2 subgroups and VAGs and the

assembly statistics were performed using a hierarchical clustering method in R (hclust).

Abbreviations of the VAGs tested. *Toxins*: *hlyA* (α-Hemolysin), *sat* (secreted autotransporter

toxin, a serine protease), *cnf1* (cytotoxic necrotizing factor 1), *cdtB* (cytolethal distending

toxin), *tsh* (temperature-sensitive hemagglutinin); *siderophores*: *iroN* (salmochelin receptor),

iutA (aerobactin synthesis, receptor), *ireA* (iron-regulated element, catecholate siderophore),

fyuA (yersiniabactin receptor); *adhesins*: fimbriae type P (*pap*GI, *pap*GII, *pap*GIII, *pap*A, *pap*C,

*pap*EF), *sfa/focDE* (type S fimbriae, sfa/foc S and F1C fimbriae); *afa/draBC,* Adhesinsd afa/dra

Dr antigen-binding adhesins (AFA I-III, Dr, F1845; *bmaE* (blood group M-specific adhesin; *iha*

(iron-regulated-gene-homologue adhesin); *protectins*: kpsMT II (group II capsule synthesis,

e.g., K1, K5, K12). kpsMT III Group III capsule synthesis (e.g., K3, K10, K54), *traT* (surface

exclusion; serum resistance-associated), *invasins*: ibeA-C (invasion of brain endothelium IbeA);

miscellanea: *cvaC* (microcin/colicin V; on plasmids with *traT, iss, iuc/iut*), *ompT* (outer

membrane protein T), *usp* (uropathogenic-specific protein, bacteriocin), PAI (malX, a PAI

CFT073 marker), *iss* (increased serum survival, outer membrane protein).

Supplementary Figure S5. Heatmap the relative abundance of each VAG in each VAG group.

Variables showing goodness-of-fit. Abbreviations of the VAGs tested. *Toxins*: *hlyA* (α-

Hemolysin), *sat* (secreted autotransporter toxin, a serine protease), *cnf1* (cytotoxic necrotizing

factor 1), *cdtB* (cytolethal distending toxin), *tsh* (temperature-sensitive hemagglutinin);

siderophores: *iroN* (salmochelin receptor), *iutA* (aerobactin synthesis, receptor), *ireA* (iron-

regulated element, catecholate siderophore), *fyuA* (yersiniabactin receptor); *adhesins*: fimbriae

type P (*pap*GI, *pap*GII, *pap*GIII, *pap*A, *pap*C, *pap*EF), *sfa/focDE* (type S fimbriae, sfa/foc S and

F1C fimbriae); *afa/draBC,* Adhesinsd afa/dra Dr antigen-binding adhesins (AFA I-III, Dr, F1845;

bmaE (blood group M-specific adhesin*; iha* (iron-regulated-gene-homologue adhesin);

protectins: kpsMT II (group II capsule synthesis, e.g., K1, K5, K12). kpsMT III Group III capsule

synthesis (e.g., K3, K10, K54), *traT* (surface exclusion; serum resistance-associated), *invasins*:

ibeA-C (invasion of brain endothelium IbeA); *miscellanea*: *cvaC* (microcin/colicin V; on

plasmids with *traT, iss, iuc/iut*), *ompT* (outer membrane protein T), *usp* (uropathogenic-specific

protein, bacteriocin), PAI (malX, a PAI CFT073 marker), *iss* (increased serum survival, outer

membrane protein).

Supplementary Figure S6. Heatmap of 29 VAGs (presence/absence) for 82 B2 ST131

causing BSIs at Ramón y Cajal University Hospital (1996–2016). The heatmap was annotated

with the FimH allele, ST131 serotype, patient age, and sex. Abbreviations of the VAGs tested.

Toxins: *hlyA* (α-Hemolysin), *sat* (secreted autotransporter toxin, a serine protease), *cnf1*

(cytotoxic necrotizing factor 1), *cdtB* (cytolethal distending toxin), *tsh* (temperature-sensitive

hemagglutinin); *siderophores*: *iroN* (salmochelin receptor)*, iutA* (aerobactin synthesis,

receptor)*, ireA* (iron-regulated element, catecholate siderophore)*, fyuA* (yersiniabactin

receptor); *adhesins*: fimbriae type P (*pap*GI, *pap*GII, *pap*GIII, *pap*A, *pap*C, *pap*EF), *sfa/focDE*

(type S fimbriae, sfa/foc S and F1C fimbriae); *afa/draBC,* Adhesinsd afa/dra Dr antigen-binding

adhesins (AFA I-III, Dr, F1845; *bmaE* (blood group M-specific adhesin*; iha* (iron-regulated-

gene-homologue adhesin); *protectins*: kpsMT II (group II capsule synthesis, e.g., K1, K5, K12).

kpsMT III Group III capsule synthesis (e.g., K3, K10, K54), *traT* (surface exclusion; serum

resistance-associated), *invasins*: ibeA-C (invasion of brain endothelium IbeA); *miscellanea*:

cvaC (microcin/colicin V; on plasmids with *traT, iss, iuc/iut*), *ompT* (outer membrane protein T),

usp (uropathogenic-specific protein, bacteriocin), PAI (malX, a PAI CFT073 marker), *iss*

(increased serum survival, outer membrane protein).

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Supplementary Text

Virulence-associated gene profiling in the B2 phylogroup of *Escherichia coli*

The presence of 29 virulence-associated genes (VAGs) was determined for all B2 isolates by PCR [1,2]. The B2 *E. coli* strains were clustered into 2 large groups and 10 subgroups on the basis of the content of the VAG genes. Each group comprises numerous gene combinations and showed variable redundancies. Most *E. coli* isolates analyzed here harbored *fyuA,* an outer membrane protein acting as a receptor for ferric-yersiniabactin (*fyu*) and a marker of PAIJ86IV (a "high pathogenicity island") [3,4]; *malX,* a phosphotransferase system enzyme and marker of PAICFT073 [5]; *ompT* (an extracellular protease active against host cationic peptides located on *E. coli* plasmids or chromosomes [6,7]; and *traT,* only located on F plasmids, which act as a surface exclusion protein, conferring serum resistance. [8]. However, the isolates differ in the presence of type P fimbriae, all of which contain various combinations of siderophores, toxins, and types S and I fimbriae, which are usually located on emblematic *E. coli* pathogenicity islands (PAIs). Despite some VAG variability within each B2 subgroup, more than half (56%) of the B2-I (STc131) strains clustered in VAG 1.5. Most (54%–75%) of the *E. coli* phylogenetic subgroup isolates B2-II, B2-III, B2-V, B2-VII, B2-IX, and B2-X clustered in the VAG 2.6, 2.2, 2.9, 2.6, 2.7, and 2.4 groups, respectively (ordered by frequency) (Figures 6, S3, S4, S5, S6).

The VAG 1.5 group only comprised isolates of the B2-I (STc131) and B2-VII subgroups (representing 54% and 33% of the isolates of these B2 subgroups, respectively). They contained the genes *iha, sat, iutA, kpsMT,* and sporadically *hlyA*, all frequently located on PAICFT073-pheV*,* and to a lesser extent, *afa/draBC* (25%) or *ibeA*. Some B2-I (STc131) isolates were also associated with VAG 1.8 (lacking traits of PAICFT073-pheV but containing *ibeA* and often *iroN*), VAG 2.4 (containing *iroN*, *ibeA,* and *papABCED*), and VAG2.9 (*papABCED)*. The analysis of STc131 isolates in Figure S6 reflects the diversity of VAGs within the ST131 groups H30 (or subclade C), H22 (or subclade B), and H41 (or subclade A); many of the isolates exhibiting VAGs could not be associated with any of the virotypes proposed by Dahbi et al. [9]

The VAG 2.7 was predominant in isolates of the B2-IX group (63%, p <.005) and was only

associated with this B2 subgroup. This VAG profile was characterized by *papACEF* genes, *ireA*

(encoding a protein involved in iron acquisition, adhesion to epithelial cells, resistance to stress,

and a high pH, a trait frequently associated with isolates causing UTIs and BSIs), and a variable

presence of genes in PAIU189 (*iss*, *cvaC*, and K1-capsule).

The VAG 2.6 profile comprised more than half of B2-II and B2-VII isolates and was linked to the

presence of type P fimbriae and with various traits associated with PAIJ96 (*hlyA, cnf1, sfa,*

ΔpapGIII), PAICFT073-serX *(sfa/focDE, iroN)*, and PAICFT073-pheV (*iutA, iha, iroN, sat,*

kpsMTK5).

The VAG 2.9 group was mostly associated with B2-V (50% of the isolates), and differs from

VAG 2.6 in the absence of *iroN* and *K5*. VAG 2.2 comprises most B2-III (73 of the isolates) and

VAG 2.4, most B2-X isolates. With the exception of B2-I and B2-IV, genes of most strains of B2-

II, B2-IX, and B2-IV have traditionally been associated with UTIs or BSIs.

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Figure 1

1A)

1B)

1C)

2A)

2B)

2C)

Figure 2

Figure 4

4A)

4B)

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure S1

Figure S2

Figure S3

Figure S4

Figure S5

Figure S6