

1 Bacterial strain displacement in inflammatory bowel diseases after 2 fecal microbiota transplantation

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26

27 **Abstract**

28 **BACKGROUND & AIMS:** Fecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) has been proved
29 to be efficient in treating Clostridium difficile infection disease, yet its efficacy in
30 treating Inflammatory bowel disease including Crohn's Disease (CD) and Ulcerative
31 Colitis (UC) at molecular level are blank.

32 **METHODS:** We performed a parallel study of patients with moderate to severe CD
33 (Harvey-Bradshaw Index ≥ 7) and UC (Montreal classification, S2 and S3).
34 Patients were treated with single FMT (via mid-gut, from healthy donors; n = 15). All
35 participants had their fecal samples collected and shotgun sequenced before FMT and
36 during their follow-up visits. The primary outcome was clinical remission and that of
37 CD is defined as a decrease of Harvey-Bradshaw > 3 , clinical remission of UC is
38 defined as a decrease of Mayo score > 3 . To describe and quantify the change of gut
39 microbiota of IBD patients after FMT, we monitored strain populations in 44 fecal
40 samples. Besides, we built a machine learning model to predict the existence and
41 abundance of post-FMT patients' species compositions.

42 **RESULTS:** Of all 15 patients, 3 days after FMT treatment, 8 out of 11 CD patients
43 were relieved, 3 out of 4 UC patients were relieved (Table S1).

44 We observed the transfer of donor strains to recipient was more abundant in UC than

45 in CD patients, persisting the follow-up time points. Besides, same-donor recipient
 46 differs in the degree of microbiota transfer. Furthermore, through building random
 47 forest classification and regression model, results showed that both the presence and
 48 abundance of some post-FMT patients' species were predicable, indicating a
 49 possibility of precision engineering of the recipients' gut microbiota under the FMT
 50 treatment.

51 **CONCLUSIONS:** FMT treatment efficiency differed in CD and UC patients and
 52 post-FMT patients' mOTU composition was predictable in our data set.

53

54 **KEYWORDS** :shotgun metagenomics; fecal microbial transplantation; Inflammatory
 55 bowel disease; strain-level analysis

56

57 **Introduction**

58 Fecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) is to transfer donor fecal suspension into a
 59 patient's gastrointestinal tract aiming at improving the recipient's gut microbial
 60 composition and confer a health benefit. Most of its prior applications were related to
 61 *Clostridium difficile*–associated disease (1). Recent years, FMT has been considered
 62 for Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) treatment. The two main forms of IBD are CD
 63 and UC, which shares many clinical, epidemiologic, and immunologic features. In
 64 previous studies, gut dysbiosis has been well described in IBD patients, and UC and
 65 CD were found to be of two distinct subtypes of IBD at the microbial community
 66 level (2). However, while several studies have made progress to reveal the

67 composition and temporal stability of UC patients' microbiota after FMT (3,4,5), the
68 same kind of investigations were lacking on CD patients. There were only a few case
69 reports of CD patients treating with FMT (6,7,8).

70 Nowadays, in exploring the mechanism of FMT treatment, methods to track the
71 bacteria engraftment from donor to recipient have come to at the strain level which
72 followed the principle that strain-level differences had functional and clinically
73 relevant consequences (9,10). In addition, towards the end of precision engineering, A
74 recent study used machine learning methods to quantitatively model bacterial
75 engraftment in diverse metabolic syndrome human host and examined a series of
76 factors that might promote the engraftment of individual strains (10). Combining
77 these two state-of-art insights in investigating the differences and principles of
78 bacterial engraftment among patients who under FMT treatment, we tended to
79 uncover such rules in 15 IBD patients.

80 In our study, Shannon index of all samples were measured, and the extent of changes
81 of the gut microbiome population structure after FMT were quantified at both species
82 and strain level. Varied and highly individualized patterns were found even within
83 patients who shared a donor, implying that personalized treatment may be of necessity.

84 Besides, we identified some most important factors that contributed to donor bacteria
85 engraftment and established relationships between post-FMT patients' species and
86 patients' biochemical indexes. The composition of pre-FMT recipient flora along with
87 its clinical phenotype made the greatest contribution to donor species transfer and

88 FMT therapeutic effect, implying the possibility of stratifying IBD patients to get
89 better and more controllable FMT treatment effect.

90

91 **Results**

92 **Bacteria diversity and abundance change at species level after treatment**

93 In our study, two batches of data were included which corresponding to FMT and
94 exclusive enteral nutrition (EEN) treatment of IBD respectively. In total, there were
95 72 fecal samples and for comparison, we separated them into 7 groups: 8 UC samples
96 before and after FMT, 22 CD samples before and after FMT, 10 healthy people fecal
97 samples, 28 CD samples before and after EEN.

98 Alpha-diversity was measured by Shannon index, and has been compared within and
99 among groups (figure 1A). We found Shannon index was significantly lower in all CD
100 patients than it was in healthy control (EEN CD patients P-value = 0.0021; FMT CD
101 recipients P-value = 0.0035) while the difference between UC patients and healthy
102 people were not significant (P-value = 0.57). Additionally, results showed that
103 Shannon index was not significantly improved after either treatment (p-value > 0.01.),
104 neither in CD nor in UC patients.

105 In terms of species abundance changes, we found that 3 days after FMT treatment,
106 there was a universally obtain of *Bacteroides*, a lower level of which in the gut
107 microbiota is associated with IBD in patients (11). And there were also some highly
108 individualistic performances such like CD-9 gained an abundant amount of
109 *Lactobacillus* which is considered to be probiotics while CD-1 had a great decrease in

110 Citrobacter which was considered to be pathogenic bacteria (figure1B). The amounts
111 of species each recipient gained from their donor after FMT were showed in figure
112 S1.

113 **Bacterial engraftment evaluation at the species level**

114 To investigate to what extent recipients' microbiome could be altered, we evaluated
115 both its degree and direction of change after FMT. For clear clarification of the origins
116 of post-FMT patients' microbiome, we divided their microbiome composition into
117 four parts: donor-specific species, recipient-specific species, donor- and recipient-
118 specific species (common species), and newly species. Results showed that microbial
119 communities underwent large compositional changes after FMT and changes
120 maintained throughout the follow-up time visits (figure 1B).

121 On average, 29.4% of the mOTUs came from the donor ($n = 11$, $SD = 14.4\%$) in CD
122 patients, while 28.2% of the mOTUs came from the donor ($n = 4$, $SD = 20\%$) in UC
123 patients. Species gained from donor in both types of IBD were not significantly
124 differed ($p = 0.89$). Our results were very similar to previous study (35% of the
125 mg-OTUs in the donor ($n = 436$, $SD = 27\%$) (9). As for EEN treatment, on average,
126 48.6% of the mOTUs were newly gained ($n = 14$, $SD = 24.1\%$) which instigated more
127 variation at the species level compared with autologous FMT individuals from *Simone*
128 *S. Li* paper (9).

129 Aiming at monitoring the direction of changes of IBD patients after FMT, we
130 measured the distance across donor-recipient pairs using Euclidean distance (Figure
131 2A). Results varied between different donor-recipient pairs. With only 4 patients have

132 2 follow-up time points, we found that CD-9 and UC-2 tended to be closer to their
 133 donors and further from their pre-FMT status. CD-2 showed a slightly tendency to be
 134 back to its initial status, yet the disturbance can be ignored (from 10.628 to 10.57).
 135 Surprisingly, CD-1 showed an increased distance both from their donor and pre-FMT
 136 status. Though CD-1,2 and UC-2 shared the same donor, the direction of their gut
 137 flora change after FMT varied. Besides, we explored the consistency of the abundance
 138 of mOTUs in the patients before and after FMT (Figure 2B). As expectedly, mOTUs
 139 in post-FMT patients had high correlation with those in the pre-FMT patient (median
 140 cosine similarity of UC patient mOTUs = 0.93, that of CD patients = 0.95). More
 141 importantly, results showed that the mOTUs in the post-FMT patient were perfectly
 142 correlated those in the donor (median cosine similarity of UC patient mOTUs = 0.95,
 143 that of CD patients = 0.91). Therefore, bacterial species in the post-FMT patient are
 144 shaped both by the host and donor.

145 **Bacterial engraftment evaluation at the strain level**

146 To compare the extent of strain-level changes among the study groups, we monitored
 147 those identified SNVs in baseline samples over all available time points. A higher
 148 level of single-site allelic variation in UC FMT recipients was observed compared
 149 with autologous FMT recipients ($P = 0.0056$) from a previous paper (9), CD FMT
 150 recipients ($P = 0.070$) and EEN treatment ($P = 0.059$). Higher level of SNV was also
 151 observed in CD FMT recipients and EEN treatment than that in the autologous FMT
 152 recipients ($P = 0.148$ and 0.234 , respectively). And unexpectedly, EEN treatment had

equivalent level of single-site allelic variation compared with CD FMT recipients (P=0.829) (figure 3).

To investigate whether the increased variation was due to the transfer and establishment of donor microbiota or not, we followed methods defined in a previously published paper (9). Across recipients, we observed the transfer of donor strains (figure 4). Donor-specific SNVs were most highly retained 3 days after FMT (UC: $62.8 \pm 25.3\%$ of determinant positions across recipients, CD: $11.4 \pm 10.3\%$) and were still presented 1 months later (UC: 46.9%, CD: $19.99 \pm 10.1\%$). This contrasted with much lower rates of variation observed at equivalent time points in autologous FMT recipients ($9.5 \pm 1.8\%$) (figure S4) and showed that the increased variation in post-FMT patients resulted from donor strain transfer instead of temporal variability or abundance variation beyond detection thresholds.

Furthermore, marked differences in colonization success were observed between UC or CD recipients who shared a donor (subjects CD-1,2,3,8, and UC-1,2). 3 days after treatment, UC-1,2 retained a higher amount of donor-specific SNVs compared with CD-1,2,3,8 (48.9%, 44.4%, 11.9%, 3.4%, 1.5% and 9.3%, respectively). Extensive coexistence of donor and recipient strains (CD: in $44.1 \pm 17.1\%$ of shared species, UC: $21.3 \pm 14.1\%$) were found in all other recipients, which persisted for at least one months. This suggested that novel strains can colonize in the gut without replacing the indigenous strain population of the recipient. It appeared that introduced strains were more likely to establish in a new environment if the species was already present. We sought to determine the extent of donor and recipient strain coexistence across species

175 and pattern of donor strains establishing alongside indigenous strains of the recipient
176 was seen.

177 While CD FMT species showed more resistance to introduced strains compared with
178 UC, durability of donor strains varied widely for most species. Donor strains of
179 *Bifidobacterium longum*, *Citrobacter sp*, *Bacteroides vulgatus*, *Dorea longicatena*,
180 *Eubacterium hallii* appeared to dominate recipient strains. In contrast, recipient strains
181 like *Clostridium scindens*, *Coprococcus comes*, *Burkholderiales bacterium*, *Alistipes*
182 *putredinis* showed resistance to donor strains (figure 4). What amazed us was that
183 EET treatment also presented the potential to change the recipient strains. *Bacteroides*
184 *sp*, *Klebsiella pneumonia* presented newly SNPs up to 40%, while
185 *Methanobrevibacter smithii* showed resistance to EEN treatment (figure 5).

186 Construction of a prediction model for post-FMT patients' mOTUs

187 We subsequently performed random forest analysis (RF analysis) to construct a
188 classification model to predict the presence and absence of species in post-FMT
189 patients and a regression model to predict the abundance of those species. Recipients'
190 and the donors' mOTUs along with their clinical metadata before FMT were used as
191 predictors to construct our model. As for classification, averaged across all predicted
192 species, we got area under the curve (AUC) = 74.2%, SD = 16%; for regression
193 model, we got $\rho = 0.478$, $P < 2.2e-16$ (figure 6A). Results indicated that for some
194 species of post-FMT patient both the existence and abundance were predictable.
195 However, the AUC area is relatively lower than a similar study being conducted by
196 Christopher S. Smillie *et al.* (10). Reasons may be that some other factors, such as diet,

197 bacterial species interactions, host genetics were not included in the construction of
 198 our model. (but in their model construction, taxonomy, abundance, clinical metadata,
 199 sequencing depth, Genome statistics, physiology, resource utilization are all included)
 200 The RF analysis assigned a variable importance score to each predictor to indicate
 201 their relative contribution to the model. Among the top 40 important variables we
 202 picked (see in methods part) (figure 6B). IgA score, T-cell and Th.cell.Induced of
 203 recipient were the top three clinical elements. *Streptococcus.anginosus*,
 204 *Bacteroides.plebeius*, *Clostridium.bolteae*, *Streptococcus.thermophilus* and
 205 *X.Ruminococcus..gnavus* were the top five species in the classification model.
 206 *Streptococcus.anginosus* was reported to be associated with colorectal cancer and
 207 *Ruminococcus..gnavus* was ever found to be associated with a certain kind of
 208 immunological rejection. Summarizing all those important variables, we found that
 209 species composition and clinic metadata of recipients took the prominent place. Thus,
 210 we suggested that in practice, people who fit the common healthy standards could be
 211 recruited as donor while patients may need to be stratified for better treatment effect.
 212 Our explanation for the importance of recipient phenotype, to some extent, was that it
 213 could reflect the gut healthy and immune status. To explain the biggest part of
 214 recipient mOTUs, we could assume that the engraftment of new species should have a
 215 competition process with those primitive microbiomes of recipient.

216 **Relationships between mOTU change with clinical indexes change**

217 Of all 15 patients, 3 days after FMT treatment, 8 out of 11 CD patients were relieved,
 218 3 out of 4 UC patients were relieved (table S1). Clinical improvement was defined as

219 decrease of Harvey-Bradshaw Index > 3 for CD, and decrease of Mayo score > 3 for
220 UC (table S1).

221 To evaluate the diagnostic value of FMT, we built relationships between mOTU
222 change with clinical indexes change by conducting a three-step procedure. Firstly, we
223 tested whether the clinical indexed change before and after FMT were significantly
224 higher than 0 using Student's t-test (figure 7A). Results showed that Mental status
225 change, appetite change, tenesmus change, stool form change, bloody purulent change,
226 mucous stool change, defecation change and abdominal pain score change were
227 significant while all the detected change of Immune factors were not significant such
228 like CD4.CD8, NK cell, TSC, Th.cell.Induced, B cell. Secondly, we linked the
229 changes of clinical indices with the changes of relative abundance of recipients'
230 mOTUs before and after FMT using spearman's correlation (figure 7B). We found
231 that the defecation change was significantly positively correlated with
232 *Selenomonas.artemidis* and two other unclassified species, while negatively correlated
233 with *Enterococcus.casseliflavus* and *Prevotella.bivia*. The change of CD4.CD8. and
234 Th.cell.Induced both significantly positively with *Streptococcus.sp..C150*. Besides,
235 the change of CD4.CD8. was significantly positively correlated with
236 *Streptococcus.infantis*, *Streptococcus.parasanguinis*, *Streptococcus.australis* while
237 negatively correlated with *Lactobacillus.salivarius* and *Streptococcus.gordonii*. The
238 change of TSC was significantly positively correlated with the change of
239 *Bacteroides.fragilis*. Thirdly, we tended to examine the relationships of FMT-induced
240 changes in biochemical markers with some disease-associated characteristics such as

disease duration, patients' age and so on (table S2). Results showed that CD4.CD8 change, Th.cell.Induced change (counted by Flow cytometry) and Abdominal pain score change were significantly negatively correlated with the start age of IBD disease ($p < 0.05$). In addition, CD4.CD8. change and Th.cell.Induced change were also significantly negatively correlated with Patients' age. Disease duration and age were also discovered to act as important predictors in our random forest classification model, we thus inferred that it may be profitable to have FMT at an early stage of IBD and that the younger the patient, the better the treatment effect based on this selected population.

Discussion

Fecal microbiota transplantation has been utilized sporadically for over 50 years and it is best known as a treatment for recurrent *Clostridium difficile* infection. However, the mechanism by which it exerts its therapeutic effects have not yet been fully elucidated.

Our results confirmed that CD patients were characterized with reduced diversity, all 15 IBD patients underwent significantly microbiota composition change 3 days after FMT treatment and most of them showed a relief of clinical symptoms.

Both the existence and abundance of some post-FMT gut mOTUs were predictable and correlated with recipients' and donors' mOTU and clinical indices such as IgM, IgA and CD4.CD8. The recipient gut microbiome was altered and this phenomenon could also be observed at the strain level. Our comprehensive survey of the gut microbiomes of IBD patients after FMT supported the notion that IBD as a group of

inflammatory conditions of the colon and small intestine that could be triggered by a dysbiosis of gut flora and be relieved via an introduction of fecal flora from healthy people. These findings acted as a basis for future microbiome-based therapeutics and patient stratification in preclinical and clinical phase of IBD. The identified elements need to be validated in larger and independent cohorts with better experiments design. Functional analysis of the species and in vitro characterizations of the strains will be necessary to verify whether a few of the identified markers are “key species” or “key strains” for the relief of IBD patients after FMT treatment. With further investigation of the possible mechanisms of FMT, there will be a great promise for the development of microbiota-based precision treatments.

Methods

Patients recruitment and metagenomic sequencing

For FMT analysis, DNA of bacteria and associated metadata were collected from 44 fecal samples of 25 individuals. Descriptions of the trial design, patient selection, donor screening, sample collection, sample processing and sequencing strategy were also concisely described in *Cui B et al.* (7) paper. Our data set consisted of 10 samples from 10 healthy people among which 6 are donors, and 22 samples from 11 FMT recipients who had one follow-up time points collected at day 0 and day 3 and 12 samples from 4 FMT recipients who had two follow-up time points collected at day 0, day 3 and either day 7 or day 30. As for EEN analysis, DNA extracted from 28 fecal samples of 14 CD patients who underwent EEN treatment were from Qing He *et al.*

(12) study. Samples were collected at baseline and after 2-week EEN treatment and standards of recruitment and sequencing strategy were described in that paper. Additionally, DNA extracted from 25 fecal samples of 5 individuals were obtained from the *Vrieze et al. (13)* study. Those 25 samples of 5 autologous individuals were collected at day 0(pre-FMT) and days 2,14,42,84 after FMT.

In summary, 34 samples were used in analysis of the allogenic FMT group; 25 for the autologous; 10 for the healthy group; and 28 for the EEN group.

Microbiota taxonomic profiling.

Raw reads were quality controlled by trimming low quality bases and removing host-related reads using cOMG with default parameters (13).

Species level profiling was conducted using m-OTUS.pl to generate the mOTUs profiles which maps the high quality reads against the m-OTUS.v1.padded database and outputs metagenomic OUT linkage groups (m-OTUS) generating both taxa previously identified and those yet to be isolated and characterized, as described by *Sunagawa S et al. (14)*. For strain-level profiling, high quality reads were mapped to over 5,000 bacterial species' representative genomes with default parameters using metaSNV (15).

Statistical analyses.

Statistical analyses were performed in R using the packages vegan, Hmcc, pROC, and randomForest. All statistical tests used were two-sided.

alpha-diversity. α -Diversity was calculated on the basis of the gene profile of each sample according to the Shannon index which is implemented in vegan.

307 Fecal microbiome derived features and visualization. Firstly, we departed its
308 composition into 4 parts: donor- and recipient-specific species, newly gained species
309 and species common to donor and recipient. After quantification of those 4 parts of
310 patients, we averaged those across CD and UC patients separately. Microbiota
311 variation between individuals was visualized using Bray-Curtis dissimilarity on the
312 mOTUs -abundance matrix. And distance between the donor and the recipient after
313 the transplantation and before and after the transplantation was compared.

314 A construction of the machine learning model. Clinic metadata of both recipient and
315 donor along with mOTUs of both recipient and donor were used as predictors of our
316 model to predict the existence and abundance of each mOTU of post-FMT patients.

317 Firstly, we picked a mtry parameter with the lowest error using rfcv function with
318 5-folded cross validation. Then we use the randomForest function to do classification
319 across all mOTUs. In total, we got 123 randomForest models and we computed auc
320 for each. We chose important variables only from those models which had a good
321 performance in prediction that means auc was bigger than 0.9. We extracted top 40
322 variables by ranking both their frequency and their contributions across those well
323 performed classification models.

324 Correlations between mOTUs change with clinical index change. To investigate
325 whether there is correlation between the clinical index change and some certain
326 mOTU change, we used rcorr function in Hmisc package to compute spearman
327 correlation of each motu-clinical index pair. And we used Benjamini-Hochberg to
328 adjust p value. After that, we pick those pairs with q-value smaller than 0.05 to draw a

329 network using Cytoscape (16).

330

331 **Additional files**

332

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343

344 **Availability of supporting data**

345 The quality-controlled sequencing reads can be found in the database under the
346 BioProject number

347

348 **Competing interests**

349 The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

350

351 **Consent for publication**

352

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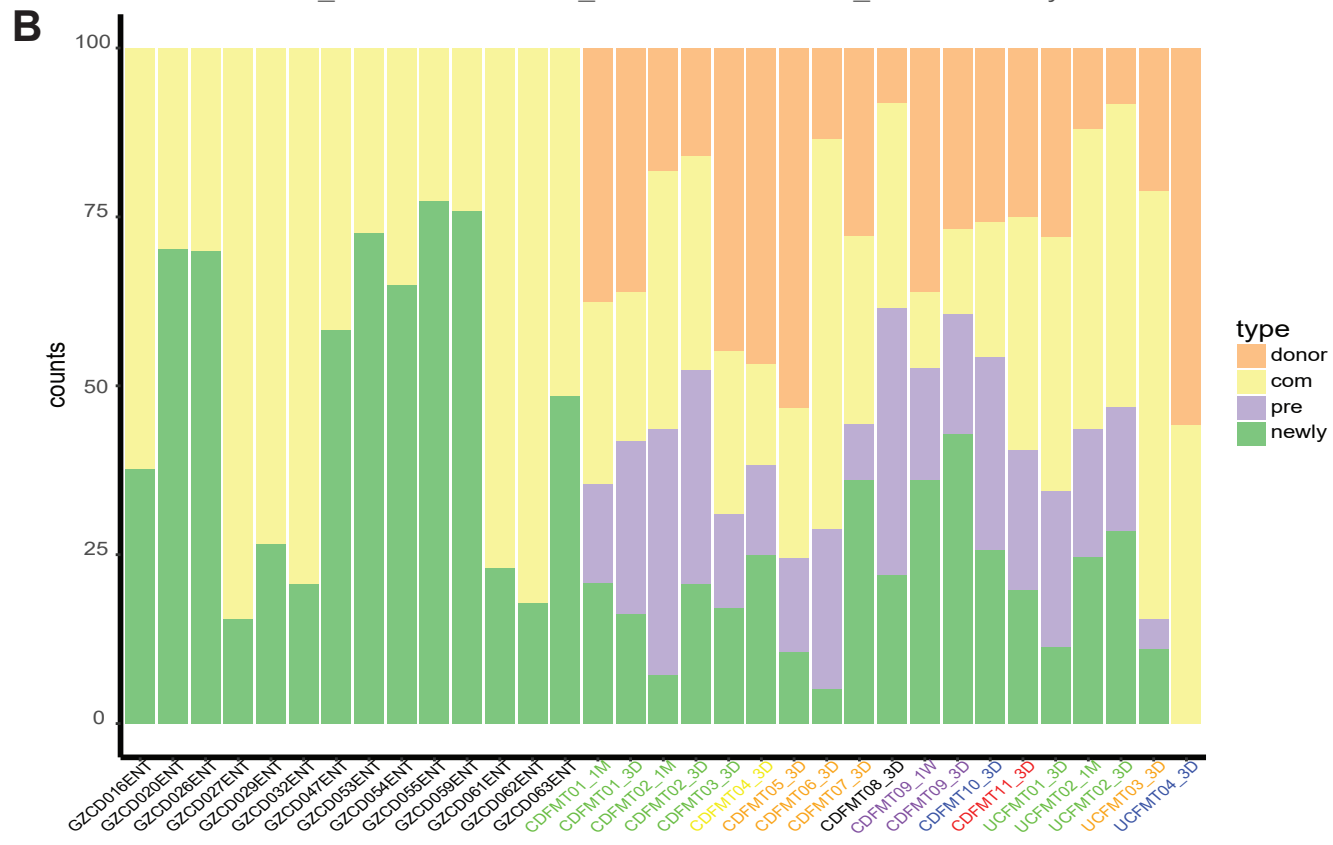
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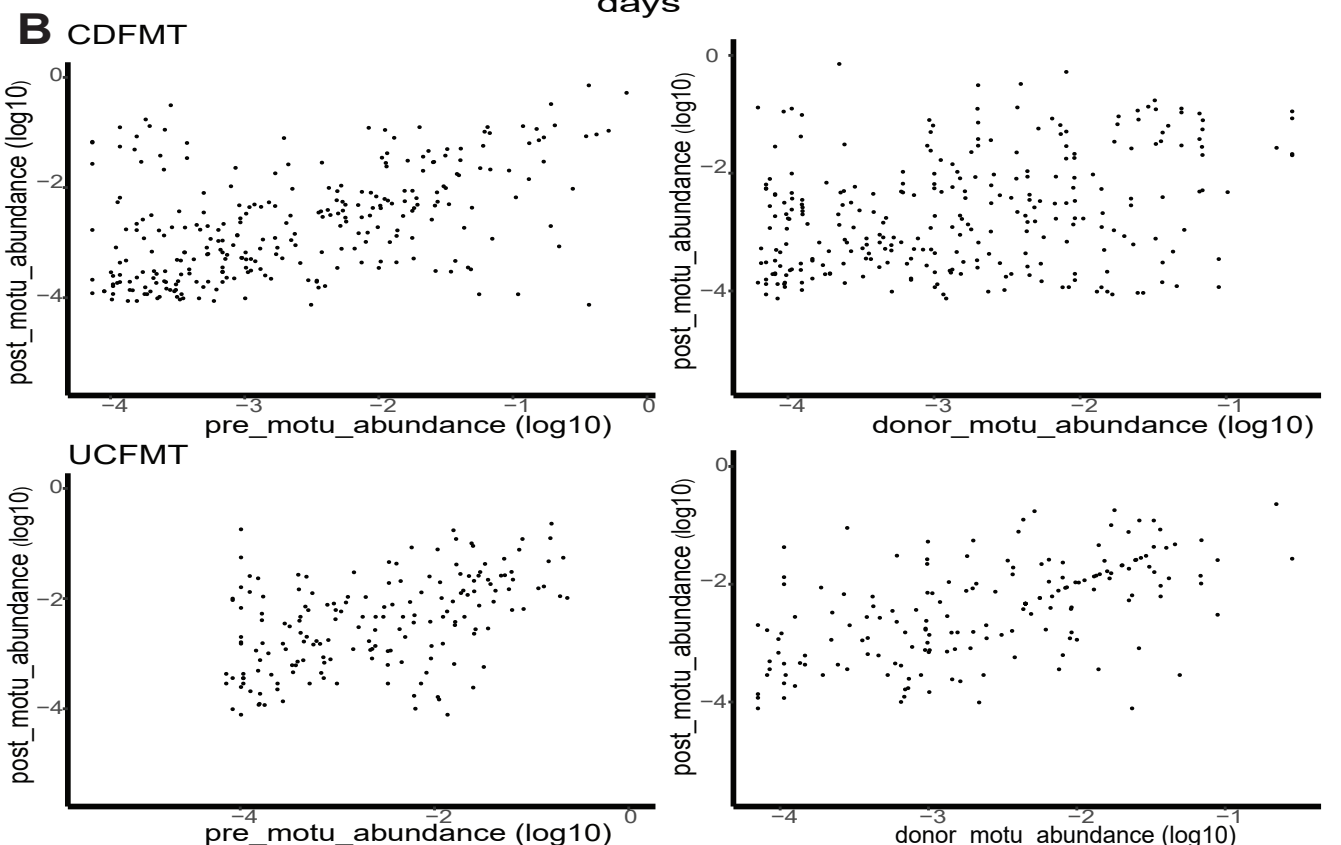
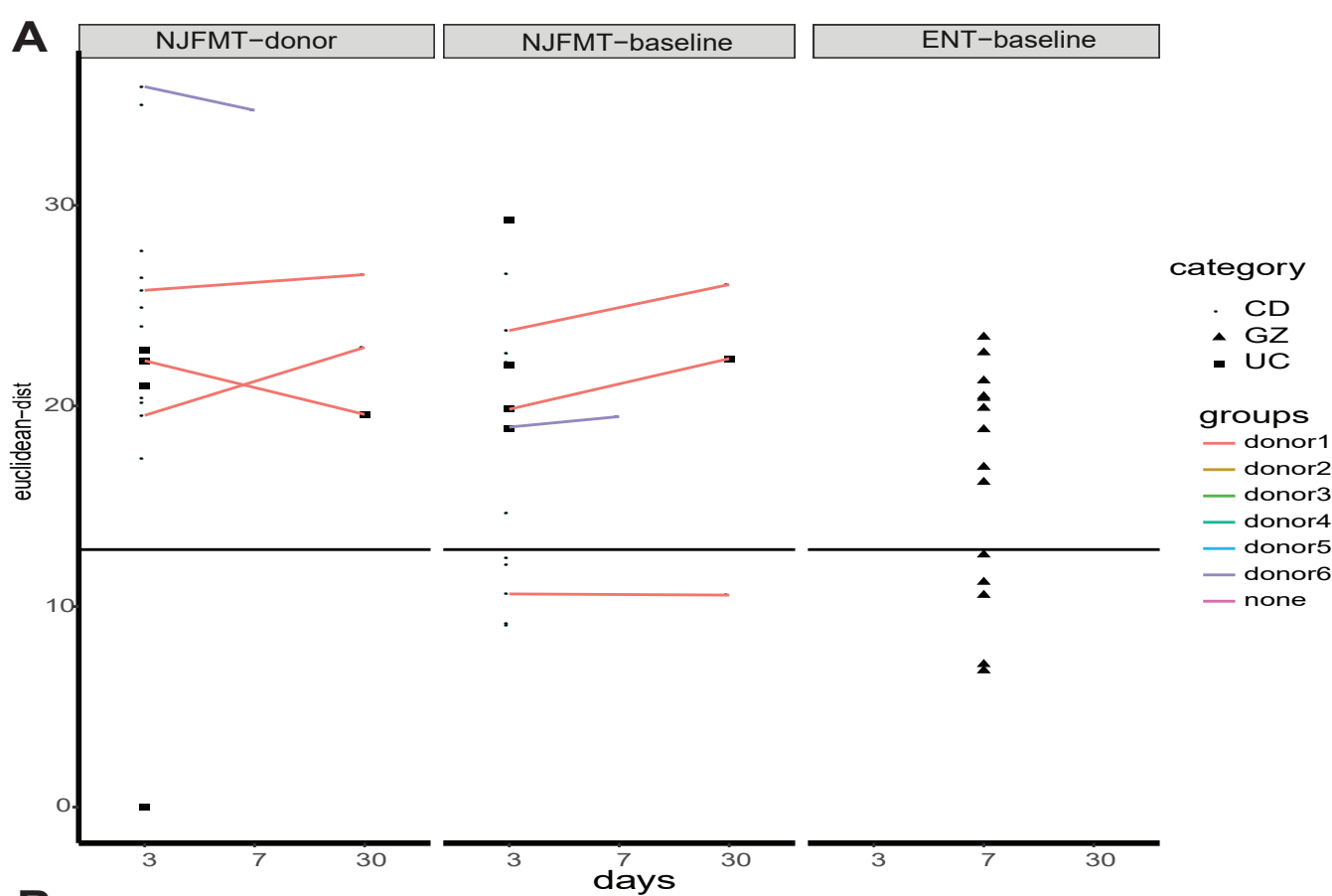
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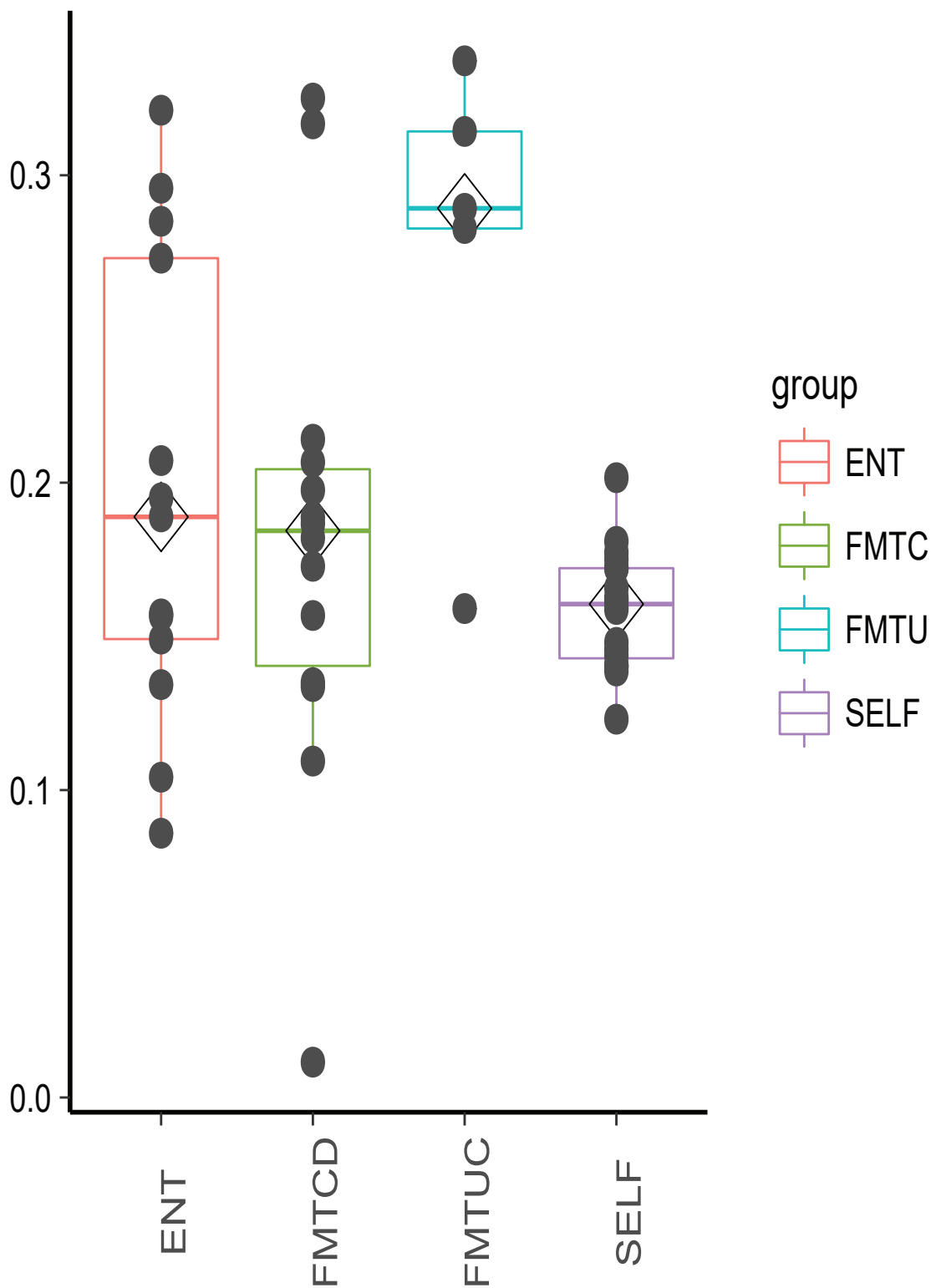
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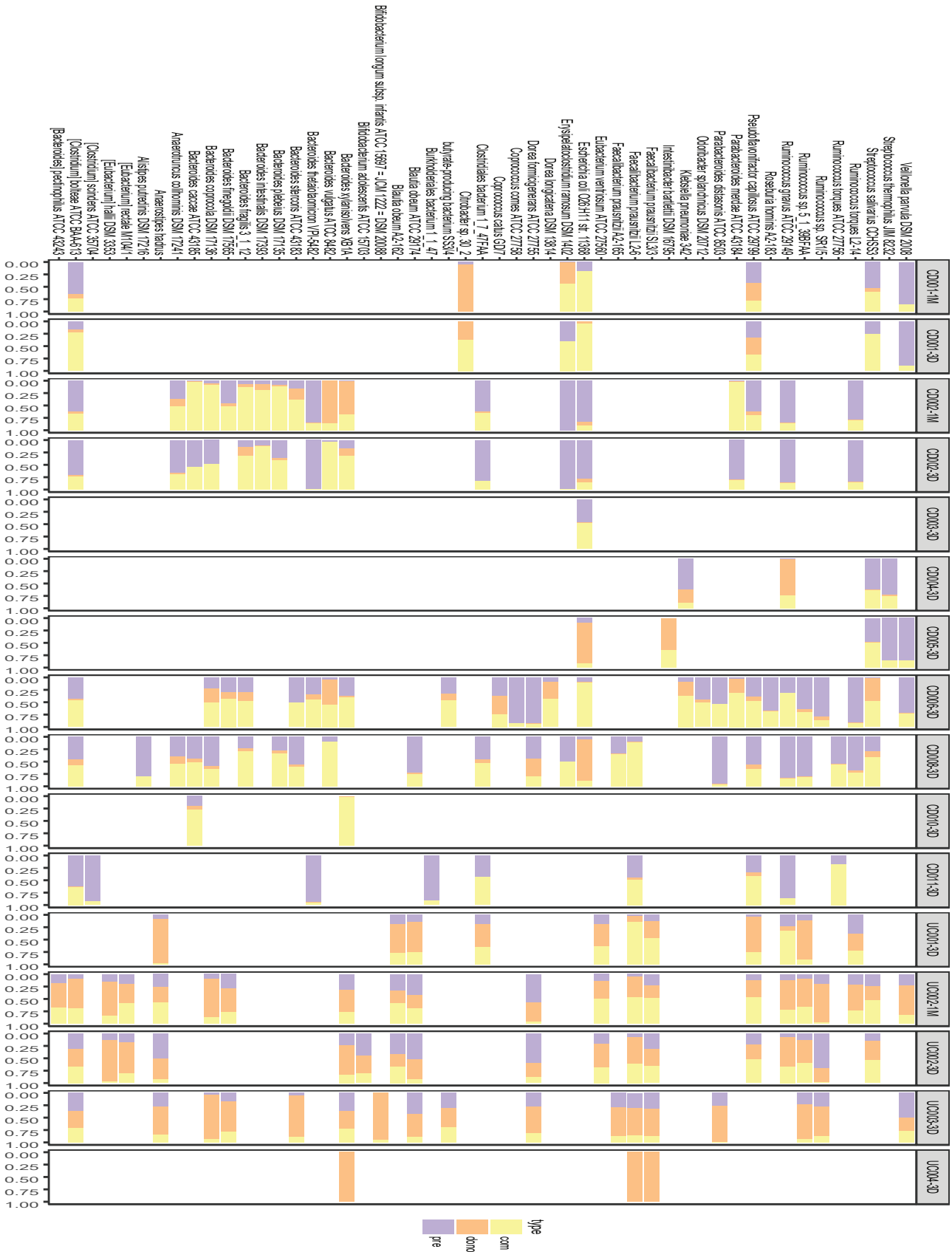
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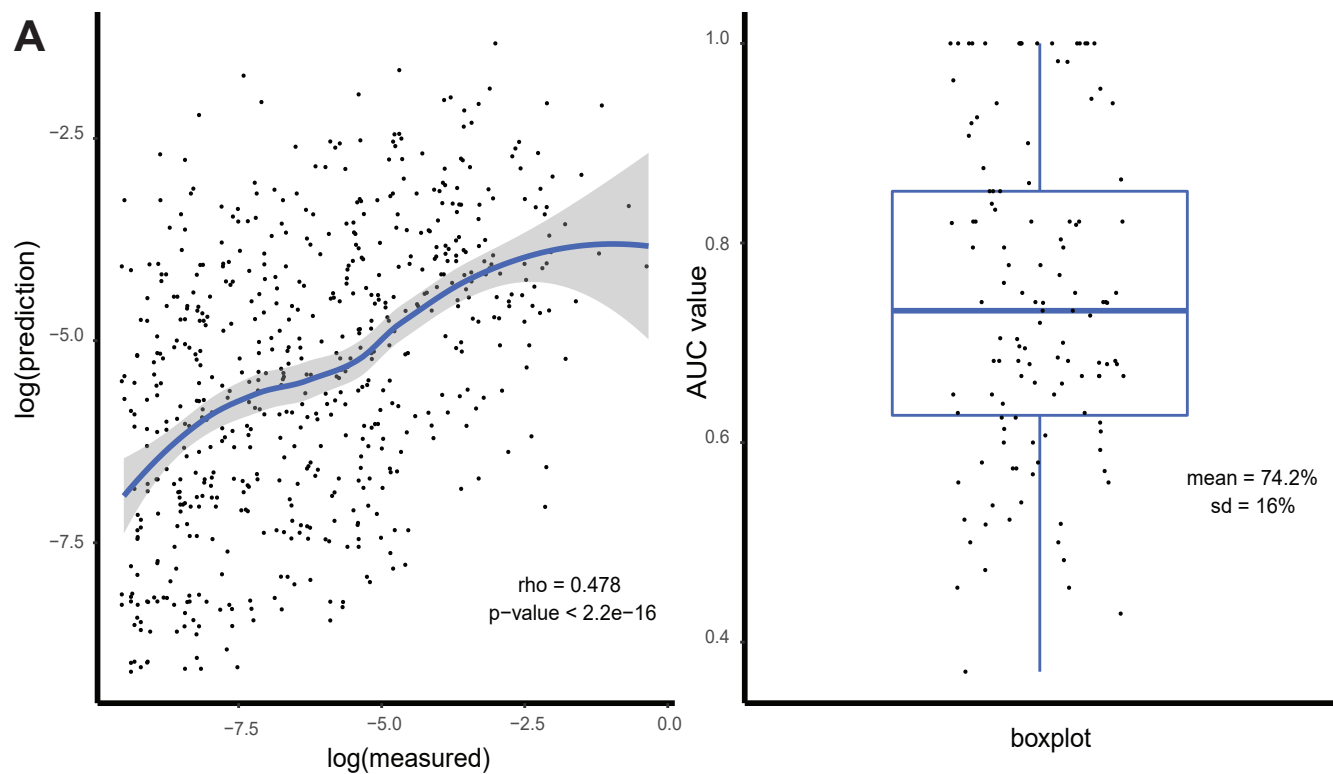
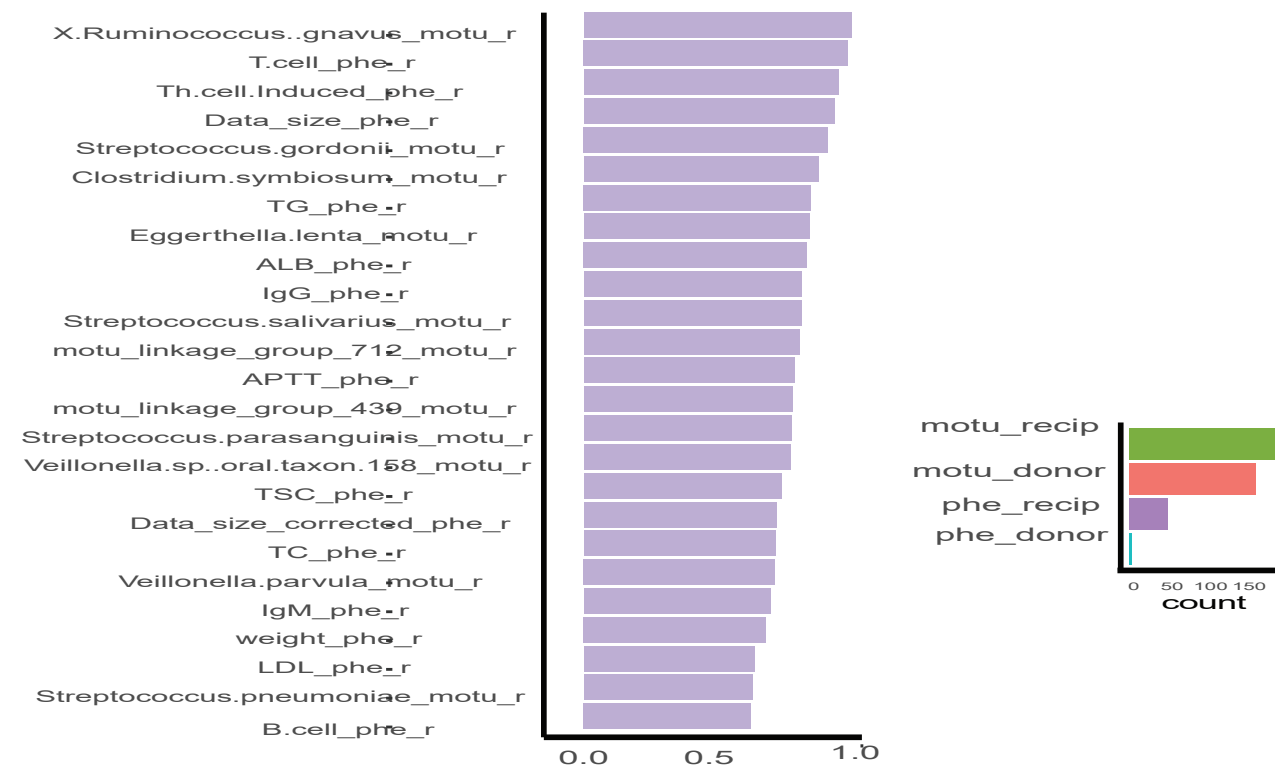


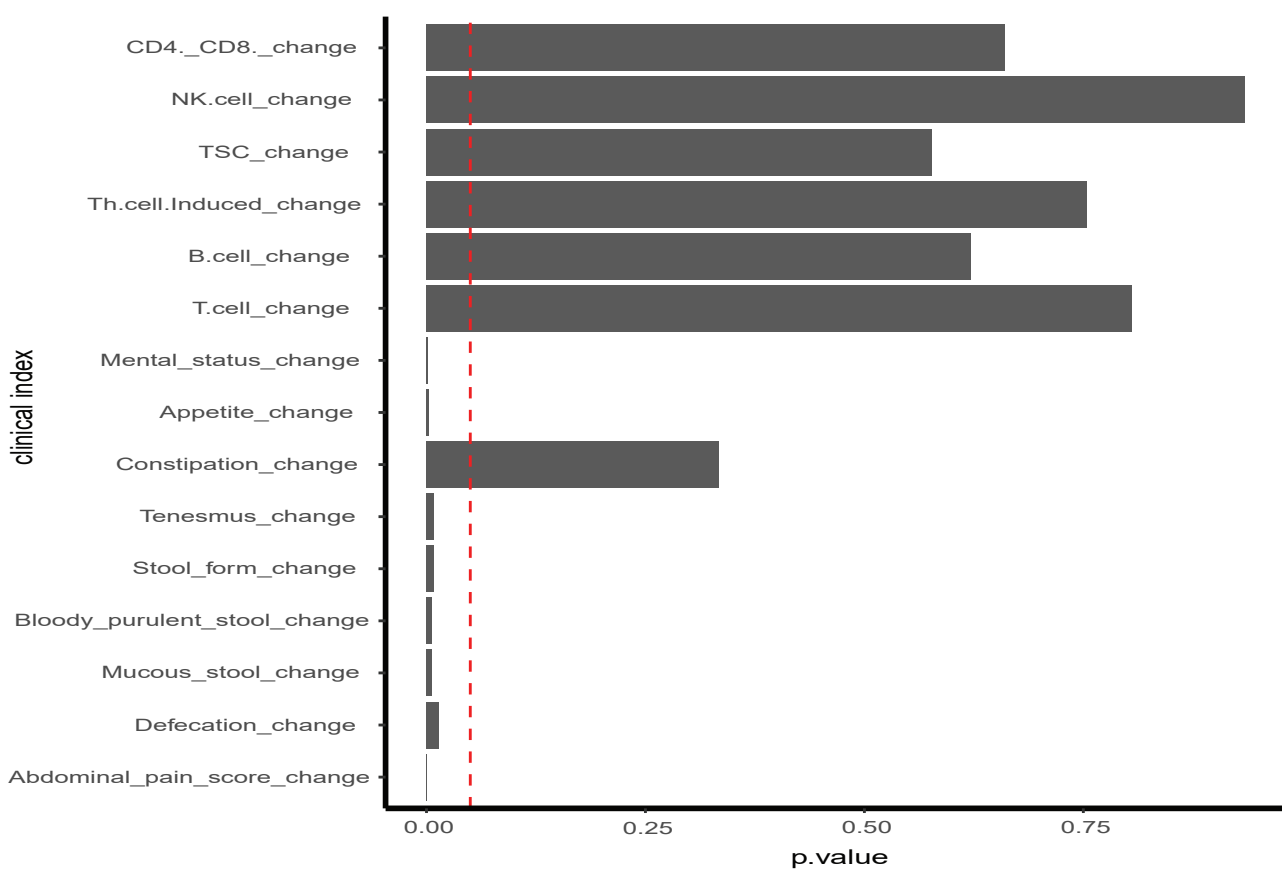


SNV distribution
(mean %across species)





A**B**

A**B**