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The Use of Artificial Scaffolds and Biofilms in Antibiotic Research

Djosci Coêlho de Sá Júnior[1*], Ricardo Baroni Vieira[2], Giovanna Uchôa de Souza Cruz[2], Bruna Postal Oliveira[3], Isadora Ferreira Batista[4], Kamilla Dutra Silva[4], Felipe Machado Dourado Bastos[4], Karina Meira de Miranda[4], Claudionor Antonio de Oliveira Amorim Neto[4], Isabela Godoy Santos[4], Laura Maria Lopes Sá Luz Costa[4], Thiago Brilhante Pereira Labre[5], Gabriela Fernandes Ribeiro[5], Laura Geovanna da Costa Reis Carvalho[5], Lucas Torres Tavares[5], Maria Eduarda Santos Albuquerque[5], Sarah Lorrayne Gomes Pereira Cardoso[5]

[1]Medical Intern, University of Gurupi (UnirG), Gurupi, Brazil.
2 Medical Resident, Department of Internal Medicine, Palmas General Hospital (HGP), Federal University of Tocantins (UFT), Palmas, Brazil.
3 Medical Graduate, President Antônio Carlos Tocantinense Institute (ITPAC), Palmas, Brazil.
4 Medical Intern, University of Gurupi (UnirG), Gurupi, Brazil.
5 Medical Student, University of Gurupi (UnirG), Gurupi, Brazil.
Corresponding author. Email: djosci@outlook.com.

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***Abstract*—** *This literature review explores the utilization of artificial scaffolds and biofilms in advancing antibiotic research. It highlights the critical role these innovative models play in mimicking the complex environments of natural biofilms, crucial in bacterial survival, antibiotic resistance, and infection persistence. By offering insights into bacterial behavior, interaction, and resistance development under conditions closely resembling their natural habitats, artificial scaffolds and biofilms enable more effective study and development of strategies to combat antibiotic resistance. The paper underscores the necessity for continued innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration to refine these models, enhancing their clinical relevance and broadening their application to various bacterial species and infection contexts.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The formation of biofilms by bacteria is a significant factor in their survival and resistance to antibiotics. Biofilms are structured communities of bacteria encased within a self-produced polymeric matrix, and they play a crucial role in bacterial persistence and resistance in various environments, including natural ecosystems and human tissues (Pokharel et al., 2022). In clinical settings, biofilms contribute to the persistence and resistance of infections, challenging the efficacy of antibiotics and the immune response (Penesyan et al., 2019). The resilience of biofilms underscores the need for innovative approaches in antibiotic research, as traditional antibiotics often fail to eradicate these bacterial fortresses, leading to chronic infections and the rapid development of antibiotic resistance (Rodrigues et al., 2018).

Research has shown that biofilm cells exhibit rapid microevolution in response to antibiotics, which contributes to their resistance (Penesyan et al., 2019). Additionally, biofilms formed by pathogens on medical devices are associated with device-related infections, further emphasizing the clinical significance of biofilm formation (Chandra et al., 2010). The ability of bacteria to form biofilms has been overlooked in the past, with the mainstream view attributing bacterial resistance mainly to planktonic bacteria (Li et al., 2020). However, it is now evident that biofilm formation significantly contributes to antimicrobial resistance (Qian et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the complexity and resilience of biofilms are highlighted by the fact that biofilm cell walls exhibit resistance to various antimicrobial agents, including fluconazole, amphotericin B, caspofungin, and micafungin (Rodrigues et al., 2018). The resistance of biofilms to drugs is also demonstrated by the investigation of biofilm-induced antibiotic resistance in clinical isolates of Acinetobacter baumannii (Shenkutie et al., 2020). The study found that antibiotic susceptibility in planktonic cells regrown from biofilms was reversible, indicating the challenges in eradicating biofilms with traditional antibiotics (Shenkutie et al., 2020).

The rapid evolution of antibiotic resistance among pathogenic bacteria is a significant challenge in contemporary medicine, exacerbated by the misuse and overuse of antibiotics (Lebeaux et al., 2013). This resistance complicates treatment strategies and necessitates the development of novel antibacterial agents. However, the intricate nature of biofilms hinders the discovery and development of these agents, as biofilms are adept at evading antimicrobial agents and host defenses (Macià et al., 2014). To address these challenges, innovative research tools that can mimic the complex environment of biofilms are required. Artificial scaffolds and biofilms have emerged as valuable assets in this context, offering platforms that closely replicate the physical and biochemical cues of natural biofilms (Walters et al., 2003). These models facilitate the exploration of bacterial behavior, interaction, and growth dynamics in a controlled setting, providing insights into the mechanisms of biofilm formation, antibiotic resistance, and the potential for novel therapeutic interventions (Otto, 2018).

Artificial scaffolds and biofilms have revolutionized the approach to antibiotic research, providing sophisticated models that better approximate the complexity of bacterial communities in their native states (Demirdjian et al., 2019). These tools improve our understanding of bacterial ecology and antibiotic action and facilitate the development of innovative therapeutic strategies to combat the growing threat of antibiotic resistance (Jaskiewicz et al., 2019). By simulating the intricate microenvironments of biofilms, these artificial constructs enable a deeper understanding of bacterial communities and their interactions with antibiotics, paving the way for breakthroughs in antibiotic research and development (Kragh et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the use of artificial scaffolds and biofilms in research facilitates the study of antibiotic penetration and activity within these complex structures (Kirchner et al., 2012). Traditional models often fail to account for the protective barriers formed by biofilms, which can significantly impede the penetration of antimicrobial agents. By enabling the examination of antibiotic distribution and activity within biofilm-like environments, researchers can identify and overcome the mechanisms by which bacteria evade therapeutic interventions (Albuquerque et al., 2017). This understanding is crucial for the design of next-generation antibiotics that are capable of breaching biofilm defenses and eradicating bacterial communities.

Artificial scaffolds and biofilms have emerged as pivotal tools in antibiotic research, addressing the limitations inherent in traditional in vitro and in vivo models. These models offer a more nuanced platform for studying the complexities of microbial life and hold promise for significant breakthroughs in the fight against infectious diseases.

II. ARTIFICIAL SCAFFOLDS AND BIOFILMS

The design and fabrication of artificial scaffolds and biofilms are grounded in a multidisciplinary approach that integrates materials science, microbiology, and engineering principles to replicate the physical and chemical properties of natural bacterial habitats Davey & O'Toole (2000). These structures are meticulously engineered to mimic the three-dimensional architecture of biofilms, providing a scaffold for bacterial adhesion and growth. Materials used in their construction vary widely, including natural substances like alginate and synthetic polymers such as polyethylene glycol (PEG), each selected for their biocompatibility and ability to simulate specific aspects of biofilm environments (Ting et al., 2020). The fabrication techniques, such as 3D printing and electrospinning, allow precise control over the scaffold's porosity, stiffness, and degradation rate, tailoring the environment to study specific bacterial behaviors or interactions (Chen et al., 2018).

However, while the aim of these artificial constructs is to recreate the complex interplay of forces within natural biofilms, the feasibility of these artificial enzymes was further demonstrated in vivo by mitigating mice wound and lung disinfection (Chen et al., 2018). The versatility of these

artificial systems supports the incorporation of different bacterial species or even host cells, facilitating the study of polymicrobial communities and host-pathogen interactions within a biofilm context (Shu et al., 2018). This capability is crucial for understanding the complexity of infections, particularly those involving biofilms that are resistant to traditional antibiotic treatments (Nshogozabahizi et al., 2019). Moreover, the use of artificial scaffolds and biofilms in research facilitates the study of antibiotic penetration and activity within these complex structures (Georgiev et al., 2022). Traditional models often fail to account for the protective barriers formed by biofilms, which can significantly impede the penetration of antimicrobial agents. By enabling the examination of antibiotic distribution and activity within biofilm-like environments, researchers can identify and overcome the mechanisms by which bacteria evade therapeutic interventions (Guo et al., 2020).

The contribution of artificial scaffolds and biofilms to antibiotic research extends beyond the simulation of biofilm structures to the exploration of how antibiotics penetrate and act within these communities. By providing a reproducible and controllable model, they enable systematic studies of antibiotic distribution, activity, and the emergence of resistance within biofilms Thi et al. (2020). However, the use of artificial sputum medium and an anaerobic atmosphere are among the measures thought to better mimic the in vivo conditions (Macià et al., 2014). This approach not only enhances our understanding of the challenges posed by biofilm-associated infections but also guides the development of novel therapeutic strategies aimed at overcoming these obstacles (Wood et al., 2013). The ongoing refinement of design and fabrication methods promises to further increase the relevance and applicability of these models in addressing the pressing issue of antibiotic resistance (Bottino et al., 2013).

Artificial environments such as scaffolds and biofilms provide a controlled and replicable setting for studying bacterial behavior, interaction, and growth dynamics, bridging a significant gap in traditional research methodologies (Otto, 2018). Conversely, MET-containing scaffolds inhibited only Pg growth (Bottino et al., 2013). These artificial models offer a closer approximation to the natural states of bacterial communities, allowing for a more accurate assessment of how bacteria form biofilms, interact within their communities, and respond to antibiotics (Lattwein et al., 2020). This controlled setting is invaluable for dissecting the intricate processes underlying biofilm formation, maintenance, and antibiotic resistance development (Cárdenas-Calderón et al., 2022). Furthermore, the use of artificial scaffolds and biofilms accelerates the exploration of bacterial adaptation and evolution in response to antibiotic exposure (Lee et al., 2022). The ability to observe these processes in a setting that mimics natural conditions allows for the identification of key factors that drive bacterial resistance and survival (Aldrich et al., 2019). This insight is critical for the development of new antibiotics and treatment approaches that can circumvent or neutralize these resistance mechanisms (Rafiee et al., 2020).

In summary, while artificial scaffolds and biofilms offer a promising approach to studying bacterial communities and their interactions with antibiotics, the feasibility and effectiveness of these constructs in mimicking natural biofilm environments and interactions with antibiotics require further investigation and validation.

III. APPLICATION IN ANTIBIOTIC RESEARCH

The utilization of artificial scaffolds and biofilms in the screening of antibacterial compounds represents a transformative shift in antibiotic research methodologies Macià et al. (2014). However, the region of active protein synthesis was visualized by using an inducible green fluorescent protein (Borriello et al., 2004). These advanced models enable the high-throughput screening of compounds, vastly increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of identifying potential antibacterial agents (Lebeaux et al., 2013). Conversely, the use of artificial sputum medium and an anaerobic atmosphere are among the measures thought to better mimic the in vivo conditions (Otto, 2018). By simulating the complex, three-dimensional structures of natural biofilms, artificial scaffolds provide a more relevant environment for testing compounds, ensuring that only those with genuine efficacy in penetrating and disrupting biofilm structures progress through the drug development pipeline (Bottino et al., 2013). This approach not only accelerates the discovery of novel antibiotics but also enhances the predictive value of screening processes, ensuring that candidates are evaluated in conditions that closely mimic their intended application sites (Saxena et al., 2018).

The investigation into antibiotic penetration and efficacy has been significantly advanced through the use of artificial scaffolds and biofilms (Akanda et al., 2017). However, a significant reduction up to 3 log colony forming unit (CFU)/mL was observed when the phage treatment preceded antibiotics (Kumaran et al., 2018). These models allow for detailed studies on how antibiotics interact with biofilms, offering insights into the mechanisms of drug resistance and the physical barriers that impede antibiotic effectiveness (Albuquerque et al., 2015). Through such models, researchers can meticulously analyze the diffusion

patterns of antibiotics within biofilms, identifying the factors that contribute to the persistence of bacterial infections despite antibiotic treatment (Sultana et al., 2015). This controlled setting is invaluable for dissecting the intricate processes underlying biofilm formation, maintenance, and antibiotic resistance development (Sultana et al., 2016). Furthermore, the use of artificial scaffolds and biofilms accelerates the exploration of bacterial adaptation and evolution in response to antibiotic exposure (Aldrich et al., 2019). The ability to observe these processes in a setting that mimics natural conditions allows for the identification of key factors that drive bacterial resistance and survival (Ma et al., 2017). This insight is critical for the development of new antibiotics that can effectively navigate the complex environment of biofilms, targeting bacteria with enhanced precision and potency (Quan et al., 2019).

Understanding the development of antibiotic resistance within biofilms is another area where artificial scaffolds and biofilms have had a profound impact (Lee et al., 2022). However, the aggregation of cations, such as Ca2+ and Mg2+, in biofilms, promotes crosslinking between polymeric polysaccharide molecules, increasing both the viscosity and binding forces of the biofilm matrix (Lv et al., 2022). These models facilitate the study of genetic and phenotypic changes that occur in bacteria as they develop resistance, providing a window into the evolutionary processes at play within biofilm communities (LuTheryn et al., 2022). By simulating the selective pressures exerted by antibiotic treatments, researchers can observe the emergence of resistance mechanisms in real-time, gaining valuable knowledge that can inform the development of strategies to mitigate or reverse resistance trends (Jewell et al., 2019). This research is crucial for maintaining the efficacy of antibiotics and ensuring that they remain a viable option for treating bacterial infections (Demirdjian et al., 2019).

Moreover, the integration of artificial scaffolds and biofilms into antibiotic research has fostered a more interdisciplinary approach to tackling bacterial resistance (Jiang et al., 2021). However, the bacterial cells within the biofilm are embedded within the extracellular polymeric substance (EPS) consisting mainly of exopolysaccharides, secreted proteins, lipids, and extracellular DNA. By combining insights from materials science, microbiology, and pharmaceutical sciences, researchers can develop more sophisticated models that accurately replicate the complexities of biofilm-associated infections (Chang et al., 2022). This collaborative effort is essential for the continued advancement of antibiotic research, addressing the multifaceted challenges presented by biofilm-mediated resistance and the evolving landscape of bacterial pathogens (Tao et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the application of artificial scaffolds and biofilms in the field of antibiotic research marks a significant step forward in our ability to combat bacterial infections. Through enhanced screening processes, deeper insights into antibiotic penetration and efficacy, and a better understanding of resistance development, these models are paving the way for the discovery and development of more effective antibacterial agents. As we continue to refine these models and explore their full potential, the prospects for overcoming the challenge of antibiotic resistance and advancing the field of infectious disease treatment appear increasingly promising.

IV. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The use of artificial scaffolds and biofilms in antibiotic research has provided valuable insights into bacterial behavior and antibiotic resistance mechanisms. However, these models face challenges in replicating the complexity of in vivo environments, limiting their translational relevance to clinical settings (Dongari-Bagtzoglou, 2008). Additionally, the fabrication and maintenance of these models can be technically challenging and resource-intensive, impacting their accessibility and reproducibility across different studies. Despite these limitations, the potential applications of artificial scaffolds and biofilms in personalized medicine and interdisciplinary collaboration offer promising avenues for developing more effective antimicrobial therapies (Dongari-Bagtzoglou, 2008).

The challenges in utilizing artificial biofilm models are well-documented in the literature. These models may not entirely capture the host's immune responses or the full spectrum of stresses and stimuli encountered within living organisms, impacting their translational relevance to clinical settings. Furthermore, the technical complexity and resource-intensiveness of fabricating and maintaining artificial scaffolds and biofilms can limit their accessibility and reproducibility across different studies, affecting the comparability of results. These challenges underscore the need for ongoing technological and methodological innovations to enhance the fidelity and ease of use of artificial biofilm models (Dongari-Bagtzoglou, 2008).

In conclusion, while artificial scaffolds and biofilms offer valuable insights into bacterial behavior and antibiotic resistance mechanisms, their limitations necessitate continued innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration to enhance their utility and impact. Addressing these challenges and exploring new applications can pave the way for breakthroughs in understanding and treating biofilm-

related infections, ultimately contributing to the development of more effective and targeted antimicrobial therapies (Dongari-Bagtzoglou, 2008).

V. CONCLUSION

In this literature review, we have explored the critical role of artificial scaffolds and biofilms in antibiotic research, highlighting their significance in advancing our understanding of bacterial communities and developing new strategies to combat antibiotic resistance. These innovative models represent a pivotal shift from traditional research methods, providing a more nuanced and realistic simulation of the biofilm environment that plays a crucial role in bacterial survival, antibiotic resistance, and infection persistence. By enabling the study of bacterial behavior, interaction, and resistance development in conditions that closely mirror their natural habitats, artificial scaffolds and biofilms offer invaluable insights into the mechanisms underlying biofilm formation, the efficacy of antibiotic penetration, and the evolution of resistance.

The importance of continued innovation in the design, application, and analysis of artificial scaffolds and biofilms cannot be overstated. As we face one of the most pressing health challenges of our time—the rise of antibiotic-resistant infections—these models stand at the forefront of research efforts aimed at identifying new antibacterial compounds and elucidating the complex interactions within bacterial communities. The future of antibiotic research and development hinges on our ability to refine these models further, enhancing their relevance to clinical settings and expanding their application to encompass a broader range of bacterial species and infection contexts.

Looking ahead, the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration in this field is immense. By integrating advancements in materials science, microbiology, engineering, and computational modeling, researchers can develop more sophisticated and effective tools for studying biofilms and antibiotic resistance. This collaborative approach will not only accelerate the pace of discovery but also pave the way for personalized medicine strategies and the development of targeted treatments that can overcome the formidable defenses of biofilms.

In conclusion, artificial scaffolds and biofilms are indispensable in our ongoing battle against antibiotic-resistant bacteria. The insights gained from research utilizing these models have the potential to revolutionize the way we approach the development of antibiotics and the treatment of biofilm-associated infections. To address the evolving threat of antibiotic resistance, it is imperative that we continue to support and expand upon this innovative area of research, fostering a multidisciplinary approach that will lead to groundbreaking advancements in infectious disease treatment and prevention.

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