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Complex Class 1 Integrons with Diverse Variable Regions, Including aac(6')-Ib-cr, and a Novel Allele, qnrB10, Associated with ISCR1 in Clinical Enterobacterial Isolates from Argentina $^{\triangledown}$

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Transferable quinolone resistance has not previously been reported in Argentina. Here we describe three complex class 1 integrons harboring the novel allele qnrB10 in a unique region downstream of orf513, one of them also containing aac(6')-Ib-cr within the variable region of integrons. The three arrays differed from $bla_{\text{CTX-M-2}}$ -bearing integrons, which are broadly distributed in Argentina.

Three types of transferable (i.e., plasmid-encoded) quinolone resistance mechanisms have been reported so far, i.e., (i) a quinolone-protective mechanism encoded by the qnr genes (15), (ii) a double class antibiotic-modifying enzyme encoded by a two-point mutation allele of aac(6')-Ib [named aac(6')-*Ib-cr*] which acetylates ciprofloxacin and norfloxacin (14), and (iii) an efflux pump encoded by the *qepA* gene (12, 19). Different transferable qnr determinants have been described so far, i.e., qnrA, qnrB, and qnrS (15). The qnrB determinants were associated with either the orf1005 gene, which encodes a putative transposase (7), or the *orf513* recombinase gene (5), the latter included in a region recently named ISCR1 (16). The origin of qnrB is unknown, although QnrB-like proteins were recently found in members of the Vibrionaceae family (13). Here we describe a novel quinolone resistance determinant, gnrB10, downstream of orf513 and embedded within different complex class 1 integrons.

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To investigate the occurrence of qnr genes in Argentina, we focused on clinical isolates resistant to ciprofloxacin and to at least two different families of antibiotics. Eighteen enterobacterial isolates from three hospitals from Buenos Aires were analyzed for the presence of the qnrA, qnrB, and qnrS genes by

PCR (Table 1). None of them contained *qnrA* or *qnrS*, but eight isolates were *qnrB* positive (Table 2). Sequence analysis (NCBI BLAST V2.0) confirmed the identification of a novel *qnrB* allele, designated *qnrB10* (accession number DQ631414), which showed maximal nucleotide identity (97%) with *qnrB5* (6). The deduced QnrB10 protein (226 amino acids) has 98% and 95% identity with QnrB5 and QnrB1, respectively. The *qnrB10* gene was cloned into the pCR2.1 vector (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA) by following the manufacturer's recommendations. The expression of this gene, under induction with 1 mM isopropyl-1-thio-β-D-galactopyranoside (IPTG), increased the ciprofloxacin MIC 32-fold compared to that for the host strain, *Escherichia coli* DH10B (Table 3).

Two qnrB10-bearing isolates showing different resistance profiles, Enterobacter cloacae E705 and Klebsiella pneumoniae M7943, were selected for further studies. Relevant susceptibility data (4) are shown in Table 3. To gain insights into the possible mechanisms of dissemination of qnrB10, we characterized its genetic environments in both isolates. For this, we used standard PCR long amplification conditions (fragments > 4 kb) implemented with the Elongase kit (Invitrogen) in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations, followed by DNA sequencing (Table 1; Fig. 1A). Each isolate harbored a complex class 1 integron with a different variable region 1 (vr-1) composed of the 5' conserved sequence (5'-CS) and the 3'-CS but exhibiting another unique variable region, vr-2, located between ISCR1 and the second copy of the 3'-CS (Table 2; Fig. 1A). The E705 integron, named In131::ISCR1::qnrB10 (see below for a discussion of the nomenclature), showed a new vr-1 comprising the aac(6')-IId and aadA1a cassettes, while the In37::ISCR1::qnrB10 integron harbored aac(6')-Ib-cr, bla_{OXA-30}, catB3, and arr-3. This last array has been previously found in In37 from an E. coli isolate from China, which has qnrA1 in vr-2 (accession number AY259086) (18), and in the integron from a K. pneumoniae strain isolated in France which harbors qnrB4 in vr-2 [plasmid pRBDHA, accession number

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work.

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TABLE 1. Primers used in PCR and DNA sequencing

Target and primer ^a	No.b	Sequence (5'-3')	Reference	
qnr genes qnrA or -C (screening) qnr-F qnr-R		TCAGCAAGAGGATTTCTCA GGCAGCACTATTACTCCCA	This study	
qnrS (screening) qnrS-F qnrS-R		ACGACATTCGTCAACTGCAA TAAATTGGCACCCTGTAGGC	6	
qnrB (screening) qnrB-F qnrB-R	1 2	CCGACCTGAGCGGCACTGA CGCTCCATGAGCAACGATGCCT	This study	
qnrB10 (complete gene) ^c qnrB-Met-F qnrB-STOP-R		ATGTTGTCATTACTGTATA CTAACCAATCACAGCGATG	This study	
Complex class 1 integrons				
intII Inti1-R Inti1-F Sulpro3 (F)	3	TTCGAATGTCGTAACCGC CGAGGCATAGACTGTAC GCCTGACGATGCGTGGA	11 8	
vr-1 5'CS (F) 3'CS (R)	5 6	GGCATCCAAGCAGCAAG AAGCAGACTTGACCTGA	8	
orf513 (3'-CS junction), orf513-R5'	7	CGTAACCGTTTGTTTGAGTG	This study	
orf513 (screening) orf513-F orf513-R		ATGGTTTCATGCGGGTT CTGAGGGTGTGAGCGAG	2 11	
vr-2 orf513-F3' sul1-R	8 9	GTTCGATCCATCACAGAG TTTGAAGGTTCGACAGC	This study 1	
orf5, orf5 lower (R)		TGTCGACGTGGGTGAAT	This study	
orf6, In21-R	10	CGGTCGGACTGCAAGTGA	This study	
Resistance cassettes and other genes of the integrons characterized in this study				
aadA1 aadA1-F aadA1-R		TTGCTGGCCGTACATTTG TCATTGCGCTGCCATTC	This study	
aac(6')-Ib (any variant) and aac(6')-IId aacF7334 aacR7907 aac6IB (R) aacA4R (F)	11 12	CATCACAAAGTACAGCATCGTGACCAACAG TTAGGCAACACTGCGTGTTCGCTCGAATGC TGTGACGGAATCGTTGC AAACACGCCAGGCATTC	This study 8 1	
bla _{OXA-30} oxaⅢ-F oxaⅢ-R		CATTATTTGAAGGAACTGAAG CACCAGTTTTCCCATACAGT	This study	
catB3 catout3'-1 (F) arr3out5'-1 (R)	13	TTTCTGCTCTATCGGGAG TTGTTAGACGGCAAACTC	This study	
arr-3, sapC-sapB	14	GACTTGCTAACCACAGGG	This study	
arr-3, arr3-F sapC1-R sapB4-F		GAATGTGATTCAGTATCG AACCCGTCGGCACAGGCCCG	This study	
arr-3, sapA sapA-F sapA-R	15	CAGTGGGTTCGTCTATTGC CGTTACTGTCCGTCGCC	This study	
arr-3, sapA-qnrB10 Junction sapA3-R qnrB-F3'		GCAGCAGCCTGACCACTC CTTGGCATCGCTGTGATTG	This study	

^a Only relevant primers (F, forward; R, reverse) are shown. Other sequence-based primers used in primer walking were excluded for brevity. ^b Numbers correspond to primer locations in the PCR chart shown in Fig. 1A. ^c Primers used for cloning *qnrB10* in the pCR2.1 vector.

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AJ971343; aac(6')-lb-cr had not been recognized at the time it was published] (17). However, as shown in Fig. 1B, vr-1 of the In37::ISCR1::qnrB10 integron differed from the other two since it lacks a 101-bp duplication of the 3'-CS located at the 5' end of the aac(6')-lb-cr cassette. Also, the W \rightarrow R mutation in this gene presented a silent change (CGG \rightarrow AGG) with respect to the previously reported variant (14).

The genetic environments of qnrB10 in the two integrons described here, $\Delta(3')$ sapC-sapB-sapA and $\Delta(5')$ pspF, mirrored a conserved architecture found in all of the qnrB contexts previously reported (accession numbers AM234698 and AJ971343) that includes the location of gnrB alleles in an orientation opposite to that of orf513 (Fig. 1A) (3, 5, 17). The sap operon encodes a putative peptide transport system in gram-negative bacteria, while the *pspF* gene is a transcriptional activator of the stress-inducible psp operon. However, a deeper analysis of the qnrB2, qnrB4, and qnrB10 environments showed relevant differences. The sap and psp operons were truncated at different outer points, and the intergenic regions between sapA and the qnrB alleles were different (Fig. 1A). Moreover, analysis of the inner boundary of the second 3'-CS showed deletions of different lengths in this element when comparing the complex class 1 integrons described so far (Fig. 1C). These data suggest that the qnrB alleles are located in similar genetic contexts from probably different genomic sources, as has been described previously for $bla_{\text{CTX-M-2}}$ alleles (1, 16).

To our knowledge, there is no real consensus on the naming of complex class 1 integrons. Therefore, we tried to follow the simplest criterion. We show here three class 1 integrons with essentially the same vr-1 [aac(6')-Ib-cr, bla_{OXA-30}, catB3, and arr-3] but different vr-2s. Since these three harbored the same array of cassettes with alleles that are supposed to confer the same antimicrobial resistance profile, we named the integron from K. pneumoniae M7943 In37, focusing on vr-1. In order to specify the genetic platform of the complex class 1 integrons, we added the genetic specification of vr-2, resulting In37::ISCR1::qnrA1 and In37::ISCR1::qnrB4-bla_{DHA-1} for the integrons described by Wang et al. (18) and Verdet et al. (17), respectively, and In37::ISCR1::qnrB10 for our finding in K. pneumoniae M7943.

Transfer of In131::ISCR1::qnrB10 and In37::ISCR1::qnrB10 was assayed by biparental conjugation as described before (10), with *E. coli* J53-AzR (azide resistant) as the recipient strain. Transconjugants were selected on Mueller-Hinton agar supplemented with sodium azide (100 μg/ml) and ampicillin (100 μg/ml), sulfamethoxazole (100 μg/ml), or kanamycin (50 μg/ml). Only In37::ISCR1::qnrB10 was detected in a transconjugant, named M7943-TC2, that had the quinolone and amino-

TABLE 3. Susceptibility profiles of relevant clinical isolates, bacterial recipient for conjugation experiments, transconjugants, clones, and strains used in this study

Strain	MIC $(\mu g/ml)^a$										
	NAL	CIP	NOR	LVX	OFX	GAT	MXF	KAN	TOB	AMK	
E. cloacae E705	≥256	≥64	≥64	≥64	≥64	32	≥64	≥256	32	8	
K. pneumoniae M7943	128	32	32	4	8	4	8	128	16	16	
E. coli M7943-TC2	16	2	2	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	64	16	4	
E. coli J53-AzR	4	0.015	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.03	0.06	2	0.25	0.5	
E. coli DH10B/pCRQB10 ^b	8	0.125	0.125	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.125	≥256	0.25	2	
E. coli DH10B/pCR2.1	2	0.004	0.008	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.004	≥256	0.25	2	
E. coli DH10B	2	0.004	0.008	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.004	1	0.25	1	

^a MICs (4) were analyzed under induction by 1 mM IPTG. The antibiotics used for MIC determination were as follows: NAL, nalidixic acid; CIP, ciprofloxacin; NOR, norfloxacin; LVX, levofloxacin; OFX, ofloxacin; GAT, gatifloxacin; MXF, moxifloxacin; KAN, kanamycin; TOB, tobramycin; AMK, amikacin.

[&]quot;Antimicrobial resistance and reduced susceptibility were tested by the disk diffusion method (4). Abbreviations: AMC, amoxicillin-clavulanic acid; AMK, amikacin; AMP, ampicillin; CAZ, ceftazidime; CHL, chloramphenicol; CIP, ciprofloxacin; CTX, cefotaxime; FEP, cefepime; GEN, gentamicin; MEM, meropenem; NAL, nalidixic acid; SFI, sulfisoxazole; SXT; trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole; TET, tetracycline; TZP, piperacillin-tazobactam.

^b The presence of *qnrB10* was tested by PCR and sequence analysis (Table 1).

b The complete qnrB10 gene was cloned into pCR2.1 in the sense orientation with respect to the lac promoter.

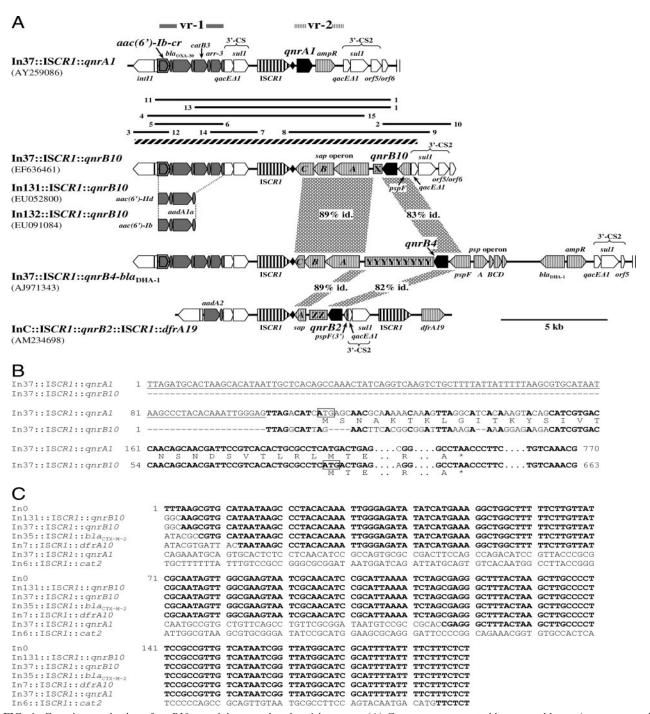


FIG. 1. Genetic organization of qnrB10-containing complex class 1 integrons. (A) Genes are represented by arrowed boxes (qnr genes are in black), attC is represented by vertical ovals, and the putative origin of replication of ISCR1 (16) is represented by a black diamond. The 3'-CS and the second copy of this element (3'-CS2) are shown by white arrowed boxes. The hatched horizontal bar indicates the sequenced regions (13,281 bp in In37::ISCR1::qnrB10 and 10,762 bp in In131::ISCR1::qnrB10). Thick horizontal lines indicate the principal amplicons obtained by PCR cartography of the qnrB10-bearing integrons (numbers indicate the corresponding primers in Table 1). The integrons In37::ISCR1::qnrA1 (18) and In37::ISCR1::qnrB4-bla_{DHA-1} (17), having essentially the same vr-1 as In37::ISCR1::qnrB10, were included for comparison (sequences were truncated at the two vertical thin lines). Shaded areas with percentages depict identities (id.) between vr-2s. The X, Y, and Z boxes indicate regions of no homology with GenBank sequences. (B) Comparison of the aac(6')-lb-cr cassettes of In37::ISCR1::qnrA1 and In37::ISCR1::qnrB10 (nucleotides 1492 to 2261 and 1040 to 1702 in the sequences with accession numbers AY259086 and EF636461, respectively). Sequences are numbered from the first nucleotide following the junction with the 5'-CS, and dashes represent gaps introduced to maximize alignment (ClustalX software, available at ftp://ftp-igbmc.u-strasbg.fr/pub/). Identical nucleotides in the two sequences are in bold. The 101-bp duplication of the 3'-CS is underlined. The start (boxed) and stop (*) codons of each aac(6') Ib-cr gene are indicated, and the amino acid sequence of the deduced protein is shown below each nucleotide sequence (14). For brevity, other regions showing 100% nucleotide (or amino acid) identity are represented by dots. The silent CGG-to-AGG change (see the text for details) is also shown. (C) Deletions at the inner boundary of 3'-C\$2. Nucleotide sequences correspond to In0 (normal 3'-CS, M73819), In131::ISCR1::qnrB10 (EÙ052800), In37::ISCR1::qnrB10 (EF636461), In35::ISCR1::bla_CTX-M-2 (AY079169), In7::ISCR1::dfrA10 (L06418), In37::ISCR1::qnrA1 (AY259086), and In6::ISCR1::cat2 (U04277). The deletion endpoint in 3'-CS2 is defined by the first base appearing in bold. Base 1 of In0 corresponds to the nucleotide at position 65 from the normal 3'-CS.

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glycoside resistance profiles for aac(6')-Ib-cr and qnrB10 genes (Table 2). The presence of In37::ISCR1::qnrB10 was also confirmed by PCR cartography.

The other six qnrB10-producing isolates studied here showed the same vr-2 rearrangement and either vr-1 of In131::ISCR1::qnrB10 or a different one composed of the aac(6')-Ib and aadA1a cassettes (Table 2; Fig. 1A), which was named In132. None of the qnrB10-bearing integrons studied here showed the In35 rearrangement [aac(6')-Ib- bla_{OXA-2} -orfD], which is the most widespread complex class 1 integron involved in the dispersion of $bla_{CTX-M-2}$ in the bacterial population from Argentina (2).

Recently, Toleman et al. proposed that ISCR1 is involved in the spread of class 1 integrons through a mechanism that mobilizes adjacent DNA sequences (16). This is in agreement with the finding that cassettes are more often transferred as part of the entire integron structure than as individual gene cassettes (9). The finding of In37 derivatives from different geographical regions with diverse vr-2s is consistent with the speculations of Toleman et al. On the basis of this hypothesis, we would also expect to find In35 associated with *qnrB10* in our nosocomial isolates.

In conclusion, the particular epidemiology of complex class 1 integrons found in isolates harboring a novel qnrB allele, as well as the emergence of aac(6')-Ib-cr cassettes in our bacterial population, evidences the need for national surveillance in order to estimate the prevalence of these mechanisms.

Nucleotide sequence accession numbers. The nucleotide sequences determined in this work have been submitted to the GenBank database and assigned accession no. DQ631414, EF636461, EU052800, and EU091084.

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