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REVIEW



## The impact of continuous renal replacement therapy on antibiotic pharmacokinetics in critically ill patients

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Mortality due to severe infections in critically ill patients undergoing continuous renal replacement therapy (CRRT) remains high. Nevertheless, rapid administration of adequate antibiotic therapy can improve survival. Delivering optimized antibiotic therapy can be a challenge, as standard drug regimens often result in insufficient or excessive serum concentrations due to significant changes in the volume of distribution and/or drug clearance in these patients. Insufficient drug concentrations can be responsible for therapeutic failure and death, while excessive concentrations can cause toxic adverse events.

**Areas covered:** We performed a narrative review of the impact of CRRT on the pharmacokinetics of the most frequently used antibiotics in critically ill patients. We have provided explanations for the changes in the PKs of antibiotics observed and suggestions to optimize dosage regimens in these patients.

**Expert opinion:** Despite considerable efforts to identify optimal antibiotic dosage regimens for critically ill patients receiving CRRT, adequate target achievement remains too low for hydrophilic antibiotics in many patients. Whenever possible, individualized therapy based on results from therapeutic drug monitoring must be given to avoid undertreatment or toxicity.

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## 1. Introduction

Renal replacement therapy (RRT) is generally performed in case of kidney failure, including acute kidney injury (AKI) or end-stage chronic kidney disease (CKD). This technique has been plagued with a confusing array of nomenclature in the literature because it includes peritoneal dialysis (PD), intermittent hemodialysis (IHD), sustained low-efficiency dialysis (SLED), extended daily dialysis (EDD) and continuous renal replacement therapy (CRRT). Moreover, CRRT encompasses different modalities, such as slow continuous ultrafiltration (SCUF), continuous veno-venous hemofiltration (CVVH), continuous veno-venous hemodialysis (CVVHD) or a combination of convective and diffusive therapies, e.g. continuous veno-venous hemodiafiltration (CVVHDF) [1].

In patients with AKI, the different renal functions are altered: glomerular filtration, tubular secretion, and reabsorption [2]. The objective of RRT is therefore to substitute kidney function of glomerular filtration by removing fluid overload, reestablishing physiological acid-base equilibrium and eliminating endogenous or exogenous toxins. The patient populations that benefit from RRT can vary significantly, but it is only in the intensive care unit (ICU) that all modalities of RRT are used [3–5]. In this setting, RRT is used frequently in 25–65% of ICU patients developing AKI during their stay [2,6–8]. AKI is usually multifactorial, but most frequent causes are shock, drug toxicity, and/or sepsis [9], a life threatening organ dysfunction caused by a dysregulated response to infection [10].

Antibiotics are therefore one of the drugs often administered to these critically ill patients receiving RRT. Mortality rates due to infection remain very high in this patient population, but rapid, appropriate and adequate antibiotic therapy may improve outcome [11–13]. Appropriate therapy means that the antibiotic administered is active *in-vitro* against the pathogen(s) responsible for the infection, and adequate therapy means that the concentration of the antibiotic at the site of the infection will be sufficient to treat these same pathogen(s). However, giving appropriate and adequate antibiotic therapy to critically ill patients receiving RRT can be a real challenge because they are at greater risk of presenting infections due to resistant pathogens compared to patients hospitalized in the general ward [14,15], and standard drug regimens often do not provide adequate drug concentrations at the site of the infection [12,16–18]. Indeed, critically ill patients (not only septic patients) present unpredictable pharmacokinetics (PK), showing significant inter- and/or intra-individual variability [19–21]. The PK variations are due to significant changes in the volume of distribution (VD) and the total body clearance of drugs (CL) caused by the host's response to infectious or noninfectious pathological changes, but also by the treatments given to these patients. The VD of hydrophilic drugs can be increased due to altered fluid balance, increased capillary permeability, or hypoalbuminemia, while the CL can be either decreased due to organ failure (i.e. acute liver failure for lipophilic drugs, and acute renal failure for hydrophilic drugs), or increased due to augmented renal clearance in the case of hydrophilic drugs [22]. The PK of

### Article highlights

- Rapid, appropriate and adequate antibiotic therapy is necessary to increase survival in critically ill patients with severe bacterial infections on continuous renal replacement therapy (CRRT)
- There is significant inter and/or intra-individual antibiotic pharmacokinetic (PK) variability in critically ill patients on CRRT, due to unpredictable changes in volume of distribution and drug clearance, very heterogeneous CRRT prescription (i.e. modality, intensity and the use of pre- or post-dilution fluid replacement) and to variability in drug regimens.
- Many critically ill patients on CRRT fail to reach antibiotic therapeutic target concentrations, at least for less susceptible strains.
- Individualized antibiotic therapy, guided by therapeutic drug monitoring and minimal inhibitory concentration (MIC) determination, should be given, whenever possible, to all critically ill patients on CRRT to increase chances of attaining therapeutic concentrations and avoid potentially toxic levels.

This box summarizes key points contained in the article.

drugs can be further impacted by organ support, such as RRT (and the different modalities used), or extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) or both [23].

The purpose of this article was therefore to perform a narrative review of the potential PK changes of different antibiotics in critically ill patients receiving CRRT, and to provide dose suggestions for these patients. We focused on CRRT to reduce variability in data analysis and drug regimen proposals; also, only the most frequently used antibiotics were discussed. We concluded this review with our opinion on how best to optimize antibiotic therapy in this patient population.

## 2. Pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic targets of antibiotics

When trying to optimize antibiotic therapy, it is important to know which are the targets of our therapy. The PK/Pharmacodynamics (PD) of an antibiotic is the relationship between its dose and effect. The dose of an antibiotic administered to a patient will result in different drug concentrations in different body fluids and tissues over time, otherwise defined as PKs. Antibiotic concentrations can be described by trough concentrations (i.e. the concentration measured just before administering the next dose of the antibiotic;  $C_{min}$ ), the maximal concentration after administration of a dose ( $C_{max}$ ), and the area under the concentration curve (AUC). The PD of an antibiotic is its *in-vivo* effect on killing or inhibiting bacterial growth at different concentrations. The pathogen's response to an antibiotic can be quantified by measuring the minimal antibiotic concentration (MIC) that inhibits bacterial growth under standard conditions. There are three different PK/PD indexes; antibiotics can be classified according to the PK/PD index that best describes their efficacy. Furthermore, specific PK/PD targets have been identified for most antibiotics to ensure optimal efficacy. The PK/PD indexes are as follows:

- The time that the free fraction of the antibiotic remains above the MIC of the pathogen ( $fT > MIC$ ). These

antibiotics are classified as time-dependent antibiotics because an increase in concentrations above fourfold the MIC of the pathogen will have little effect on efficacy;

- The ratio of the  $C_{max}/MIC$  during one dosing interval. These antibiotics are classified as concentration-dependent;
- The ratio of the AUC of the free fraction of the antibiotic/ $MIC$  of the pathogen ( $fAUC/MIC$ ). These antibiotics are classified as concentration-dependent antibiotics with time dependency [24].

As free drug concentration is not always measurable and protein link is neglectable for some drugs (i.e.  $\beta$ -lactams, aminoglycosides), total drug concentration can also be used to quantify  $T > MIC$ ,  $C_{max}/MIC$  and  $AUC/MIC$ . Moreover, although these PK/PD indexes can help guide clinicians to aim to obtain optimal efficacy, this is only a very simplified way of trying to describe very complex clinical situations. These PK/PD indexes have never been validated in situations with profoundly different PKs such as prolonged half-life and considerably extended dose intervals. For example, continuous infusion of  $\beta$ -lactam antibiotics is sometimes proposed to facilitate PD target attainment. However, data are emerging suggesting that PK/PD targets for  $\beta$ -lactam antibiotics to obtain the same level of bacterial cell kill may differ in function of whether the antibiotic is administered in a continuous or intermittent fashion [25].

## 3. Pharmacokinetic drug changes during CRRT: a general overview

In order to perform CRRT, patients need to be connected to a dialysis machine with a permeable membrane via an extracorporeal circuit (with a pump). The different CRRT modalities use convection, diffusion or both to substitute the kidney's function of glomerular filtration. Convection is the movement of water from the blood compartment, across a semi-permeable membrane to the dialysis machine, caused by a transmembrane pressure gradient resulting from differences in oncotic and hydrostatic pressure. Diffusion depends on the osmotic pressure gradient between the plasma and the dialyzer compartments; molecules will follow the pressure gradient from high to low pressure. In contrast to IHD, which uses both convection and diffusion during 3 to 4 hours sessions, and intermittent prolonged dialysis, which is performed during 6 to 12 hours sessions using conventional hemodialysis machines (but with lower blood and dialyzer flows), CRRT is performed continuously (e.g. 24 hours per day), with the possibility of eliminating molecules by convection (CVVH), diffusion (CVVHD), or both (CVVHDF). The different CRRT modalities and/or intensities employed can theoretically alter the PK of antibiotics due to changes in drug distribution or clearance. The PKs of antibiotics can be further altered in function of the physicochemical properties of the drug, and inherent specific patient characteristics at the given time.

### 3.1. Drug distribution

Although the VD of hydrophilic antibiotics can be very significantly increased in critically ill patients on CRRT, the intensity

of the RRT will have no effect on the VD of an antibiotic, as shown in a multicenter study on the effect of continuous hemodiafiltration intensity on the PKs of ciprofloxacin, meropenem, piperacillin-tazobactam and vancomycin in 24 critically ill patients [26]. Furthermore, the VD of an antibiotic can vary in function of the fluid status of the patient and/or the quantity of fluids removed during the dialysis procedure [27].

### 3.2. Drug clearance

Renal replacement therapy significantly alters the CL of renally excreted antibiotics. There are several factors that will influence the CL of the antibiotic when using CRRT: a) CRRT modality and intensity employed; b) the physicochemical properties of the molecule; c) patient's characteristics (Figure 1). Table 1 provides the estimated glomerular filtration rates obtained in function of each CRRT modality [28]. However, the intensity or « dose » of CRRT modalities can also vary. The « dose » of CRRT is the effluent flow rate (e.g., the outgoing flow rate), which is equal to the ultrafiltrate rate added to the dialyzate rate. Therefore, the greater the ultrafiltration rate (e.g. the quantity of water and solutes eliminated per unit of time), and/or the greater the dialyzate flow, the greater the CL of the antibiotic will be. To avoid significant variations in volume for the patient, fluids can be replaced either as pre- or post-dilution (e.g. before or after the dialyzate filter). When replaced as 'pre-dilution,' the CL of antibiotics will be reduced because the plasma is diluted before being filtered (e.g. the concentration gradient is reduced). When fluids are replaced as 'post-dilution,' drug CL is maximized. The membrane used for CRRT will also influence the CL of the antibiotic. As the size of the pores of the membrane increase,

**Table 1.** Estimated glomerular filtration provided by each continuous renal replacement therapy (CRRT) modality.

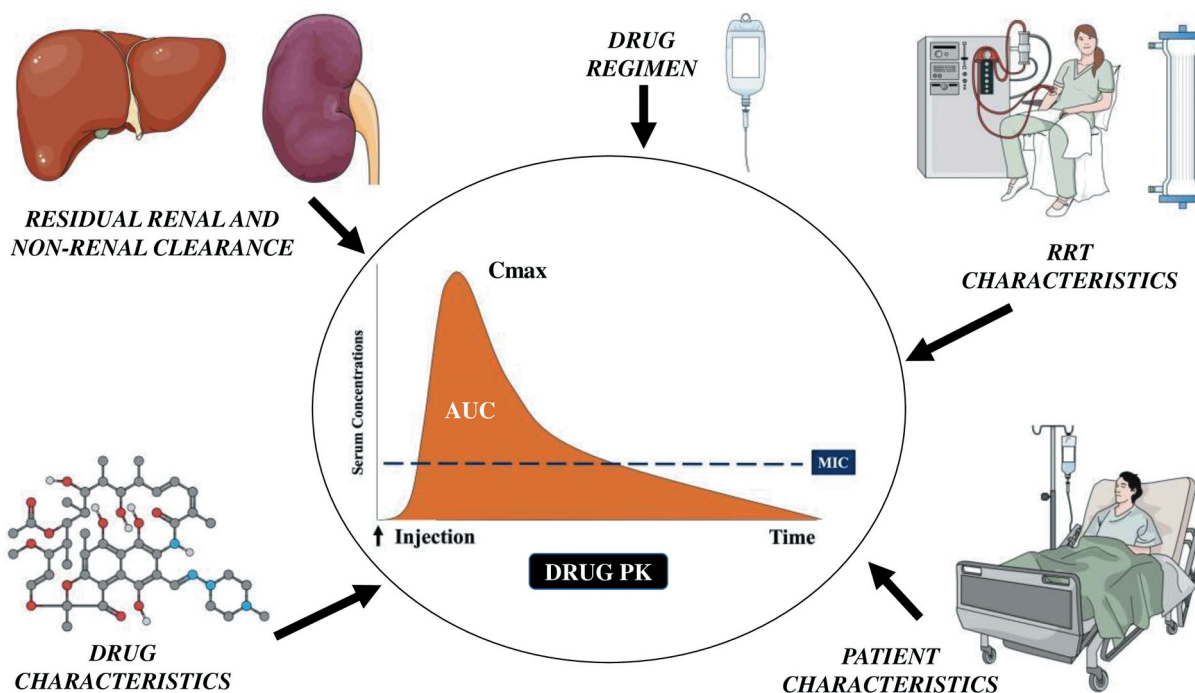
Renal replacement therapy	Glomerular filtration (mL/min)
CVVH	15–25
CVVHD	15–25
CVVHDF	30 à 40
SLED	10–50

Abbreviations: CVVH, continuous veno-venous hemofiltration; CVVHD, continuous veno-venous hemodialysis; CVVHDF, continuous veno-venous hemodiafiltration; SLED, sustained-low efficiency dialysis

the size, and number of molecules that can be filtered can increase as well. The membranes used for intermittent hemodialysis usually have small pores, not allowing the elimination of molecules bigger than 500 Da. On the other hand, membranes used for CRRT have bigger pores (20,000–50,000 Da), and are quite permeable to water and molecules of 1000–12,000 Da. Furthermore, as the surface area of the membrane increases, so does the filtration capacity of the membrane [29]. The membranes made of « natural » or biocompatible substances (e.g. cuprophane) have small pores. These membranes can be responsible for adsorption of certain molecules, especially in the case of polyacrylonitrile. The membrane is saturable; therefore, adsorption of antibiotics is a function of the frequency that the membrane is changed. The effects on the PK of antibiotics seem to be negligible, with the exception of amikacin and levofloxacin: these drugs fix irreversibly to the membranes made of polyacrylonitrile [30,31].

### 3.3. The physicochemical properties of a drug

When considering the molecule, the characteristics that can influence its CL are drug size, its hydrophilic, or lipophilic



**Figure 1.** Impact of different factors on antibiotic pharmacokinetics during critical illness and continuous renal replacement therapy.

nature, the VD, the degree of protein-binding and its ionization. Most antibiotics are bigger than 500 Da; a molecule smaller than 500 Da will be eliminated easily both by convection and diffusion, but if larger than 15,000 Da, it can only be eliminated by convection. The CRRT modalities that use convection (e.g. CVVH) eliminate bigger molecules than those dependent only on diffusion (e.g. CVVHD). If a molecule has a large VD, as observed with lipophilic drugs, the concentration in the plasma will only be a small fraction of the concentration of the antibiotic in the whole body. Therefore, because the drug will be eliminated by filtration of the plasma, the CL of the antibiotic via the CRRT will be minimal. When an antibiotic is protein-bound, the molecule is significantly larger (>50,000 Da) than when it is free or unbound. It is the free fraction of the antibiotic that is eliminated by CRRT. Antibiotics can sometimes be ionized. If they are charged positively (e.g. aminoglycosides), their elimination across the filtration membrane will be reduced by anionic molecules, such as albumin. On the other hand, anionic antibiotics, like ceftazidime and cefotaxime, will be pushed across the filtration membrane: this is known as the Gibbs-Donnan effect [29]. The coefficient of Sieving is a coefficient that take into account all of these factors that influence the CL of a molecule in case of ultrafiltration. More specifically, this coefficient is the ratio of a specific solute concentration in the ultrafiltrate to the mean plasma concentration (in theory, void of proteins) in the filter. This coefficient is specific for each solute and for every membrane. A molecule with a coefficient close to « 1 » will be almost completely eliminated by CRRT, but a molecule with a coefficient of « 0 » will not traverse the filter [32].

### 3.4. The patient

The patient-related factors are as follows: albumin serum levels, non-renal clearance of the antibiotic and the residual diuresis. When patients have hypoalbuminemia, the renal clearance of highly protein-bound antibiotics is increased [33]. Furthermore, an increase in the hepatic and biliary metabolism of a drug (e.g. fluoroquinolones) can sometimes be observed in patients with renal insufficiency [2]. Finally, critically ill patients needing CRRT will have varying levels of residual diuresis (and so drug clearance) over time. In a prospective, multicentric PK study including 30 critically ill patients on meropenem, higher or extended dosage regimens were needed in patients with residual diuresis compared to anuric patients to attain PD targets [34]. The same observation was made in another study on linezolid [35]. Assessment of residual renal function is challenging, as glomerular filtration rate (GFR) and creatinine clearance estimation based on the Modified Diet in Renal Disease (MDRD), the Cockcroft-Gault, or the Chronic Kidney Disease-Epidemiology Collaboration (CKD-EPI) equations are unreliable in this setting. Indeed, the MDRD and the CKD-EPI equations were developed in stable chronic kidney disease, and therefore are not appropriate for use in AKI. Serum creatinine has variable kinetics in critically ill patients, and when the kidney is injured, it may take at least 72 hours before a new steady state is established [36]. The

performance of measured creatinine clearance and GFR estimations using the MDRD, CKD-EPI and Cockcroft-Gold were compared to a gold standard GFR measurement by chromium-ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid; measured creatinine clearance performed best despite its' poor precision to determine GFR. Therefore, measured creatinine clearance during short urine collection periods is currently the most reliable method for GFR measurement in critically ill patients [37].

## 4. Pharmacokinetic drug changes during CRRT: specific drug considerations

### 4.1. Aminoglycosides

Aminoglycosides are small, hydrophilic molecules generally used to treat severe infections due to Gram-negative bacilli, including *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* [38]. The PK characteristics of all aminoglycosides are very similar [39]; they are poorly protein-bound, they have a small VD (~0.25 L/kg), and they are eliminated essentially by the kidneys. Aminoglycosides are concentration-dependent antibiotics with a significant post-antibiotic effect. The PK/PD index that best describes their efficacy is the C<sub>max</sub>/MIC; the PD target is a C<sub>max</sub>/MIC of 8 to 12 [40–42], although this has been validated when these drugs were used as monotherapy, mainly to treat urinary tract infections, and dosing was three administrations per day.

In the case of CRRT, aminoglycosides have a lower C<sub>max</sub> due to increased VD, and they are eliminated efficiently, as the Sieving coefficient is approximately 0.8 (e.g. suggesting that aminoglycosides traverse the filtration membrane very easily) [43]. A strategy of an extended-interval high-dose regimen (e.g. for amikacin: 25 mg/kg every 48 hours; for gentamicin and tobramycin: 7–8 mg/kg every 48 hours) associated with therapeutic drug monitoring (TDM) [44] should be the preferred approach for aminoglycoside treatment in critically ill patients receiving CRRT with severe infections [43]. However, if a high dose (e.g. >35 mg/kg) CRRT is administered, the interval between doses of aminoglycosides may be reduced to once daily [45]; this strategy is of particular interest for the management of multidrug resistant pathogens which remain susceptible to aminoglycosides (Table 2). In clinical practice, TDM should include the assessment of C<sub>max</sub> (e.g. 30–60 minutes after the onset of drug administration, as well as C<sub>min</sub> (e.g. before the next dose) [46,47]. To optimize efficacy, a C<sub>max</sub>/MIC ≥8–10 should be aimed for. To minimize risks of additional nephrotoxicity, a new dose of the aminoglycoside should be administered when the C<sub>min</sub> of amikacin is ≤2.5 mg/L and the C<sub>min</sub> of gentamicin or tobramycin is ≤0.5 mg/L [48]. Monitoring of C<sub>min</sub> is very useful to guide therapy because CL of aminoglycosides is very variable in critically ill patients undergoing CRRT (e.g. reported CL of amikacin in this population varies from 0.4 L/h to 7.10 L/h) [43,49].

### 4.2. β-lactams

β-lactams are the most widely used class of antibiotics in the world. They are hydrophilic, most often poorly protein-bound

Table 2. Drug regimens for main antibiotics administered in critically ill patients, with some proposed dosages according to the type of continuous renal replacement therapy.

Class	Drug	Dosage (IV)	Renal Excretion (%)	Vd (L/Kg)	CL tot (L/h)	CRRT			
						CWVH	CWHD	CVVHDF	SLED
Aminoglycosides	Amikacin	15 mg/Kg q24h	100	0.22–0.5	4	25 mg/Kg LD > TDM	25 mg/Kg LD > TDM	25 mg/Kg LD > TDM	25 mg/Kg LD > TDM
β-lactams	Gentamicin	7 mg/Kg q24h	100	0.36	3.4	7 mg/Kg LD > TDM	7 mg/Kg LD > TDM	7 mg/Kg LD > TDM	7 mg/Kg LD > TDM
	Penicillins Piperacillin/tazobactam	4.5 g q6h	63.8	0.24/0.40	11.9	4.5 g q8h	4.5 g q8h	4.5 g q6h	4.5 g q8h
	Carbapenems Meropenem	2 g q8h	65	0.35	7.8	1 g q12h	1 g q12h	1 g q8h	1 g q8h
	Cephalosporins Cefepime	2 g q8h	85	0.3	7.3–8.1	2 g LD > 2 g q24h	2 g LD > 2 g q24h	2 g q12 h	2 g LD > 1 g q6h
Fluoroquinolones	Moxifloxacin	400 mg q24h	20	1.7–3.5	10.7–14.7	400 mg q24h	400 mg q24h	400 mg q24h	400 mg q24h
	Levofloxacin	750 mg-1 g q24h	70	1.1–1.5	8.6–13.5	250 mg/24 h	250–500 mg/24 h	750 mg/24 h	500 mg/24 h
Glycopeptides	Ciprofloxacin	400 mg q8h	60	2.76	40.7	400 mg IV q12h	400 mg IV q12h	400 mg IV q12h	No Data
	Tetracycline	12 mg/Kg q12h x 3 days + 12 mg/Kg q24h	50	0.5–1.2	7.2 <sup>Δ</sup>	12 mg/Kg q12h x 3 days LD + 12 mg/Kg q48 h	400 mg/Kg q12h (1.2 g LD) > TDM	400 mg/Kg LD > TDM	No Data
	Vancomycin	15–20 mg/Kg q24h	90	0.47–1.1	7.2 <sup>Δ</sup>	25–30 mg/Kg + 500–750 mg q12h	20–25 mg/Kg LD > TDM	20–25 mg/Kg + 450 mg q12h	20–25 mg/Kg LD > TDM
Polymyxines	Colistin	9 MIU <sup>Δ</sup>	99	0.17	3	6.5 MIU q12h	6.5 MIU q12h	6.5 MIU q12h	4 MIU q12h
Lipopeptides	Daptomycin	4–6 mg/Kg q24h	60	0.5–0.8	0.8	6 mg/Kg q48 h	6 mg/Kg q48 h	8 mg/Kg q24h	6 mg/Kg q24h
Oxazolidinones	Linezolid	600 mg q6-8 h	30	0.5–0.8	4.7–8.3	600–900 mg q8-12 h <sup>o</sup>	600 mg q8-12 h	600 mg q8-12 h	600 mg q8-12 h

CRRT, continuous renal replacement therapy; CWVH, continuous veno-venous hemofiltration; CWHD, continuous veno-venous hemodialysis; CVVHDF, continuous veno-venous hemodiafiltration; SLED, sustained low-efficiency dialysis; LD, loading dose; <sup>Δ</sup> adult male who weighs 70 kg; <sup>o</sup>patients with residual renal function; CL, clearance; Vd, steady-state volume of distribution; t1/2, terminal elimination half-life.

with some exceptions, such as flucloxacillin [50] and ceftriaxone [51], with a small VD and eliminated from the body principally by the kidneys. They are time-dependent antibiotics and therefore the PK/PD index that best describes their efficacy is the time the concentration of the unbound fraction of the antibiotic remains above the MIC of the infecting pathogen (ft> MIC). Although there is debate concerning the optimal PD target for β-lactam antibiotics, two targets are regularly used in the literature in critically ill patients: ft>1x MIC and ft>4x MIC of the infecting pathogen during 100% of the dosing interval [52].

In the critically ill patient, the VD of many β-lactam antibiotics is increased, resulting in insufficient serum concentrations in the early phases of sepsis and septic shock [53]. A loading dose of broad-spectrum β-lactams (ceftazidime, cefepime, piperacillin-tazobactam, and meropenem) has been suggested to help rapidly attain adequate drug concentrations of the antibiotics at the site of the infection but awaits clinical validation studies. Usually, after a loading dose, drug regimens need to be adapted to the CL of the antibiotic. Nevertheless, because β-lactam loading doses are not yet validated for routine clinical practice, standard drug regimens of β-lactams should be administered during the first 48 hours of therapy in patients without chronic renal failure. Indeed, studies have shown that in patients with AKI receiving CRRT, drug concentrations are insufficient in these patients to provide adequate circulating levels when dosage regimens have been reduced immediately due to altered kidney function. By giving standard dosage regimens during the first 48 hours of treatment, the probability of PD target attainment early on in the infection is greater [54]. Furthermore, renal impairment is very dynamic in acutely infected patients. In a retrospective study on 18,500 patients with an acute urinary tract infection or bacterial pneumonia, 17.5% of the patient population presented an AKI on admission, but kidney injury was resolved in 57% of patients after 48 hours [55].

After these first 48 hours of antibiotic treatment, the dosage regimen needs to be adapted to the CL of the antibiotic. However, in the critically ill patient receiving CRRT, the CL of β-lactam antibiotics with renal elimination is very variable [56]. Studies have shown that the CL of meropenem and piperacillin-tazobactam is influenced by the different CRRT modalities and prescriptions, the effluent flow rate during CRRT, and residual renal function [7,57,58]. As such, high dialyrate rate is associated with higher drug CL and higher risk of underdosing. Table 2 provides a summary of proposed drug regimens during CRRT.

The great variability in the CL of these antibiotics makes it very difficult to provide clear recommendations concerning optimal dosage regimens to be administered. The lack of international consensus in the optimal dosage regimens for meropenem and piperacillin-tazobactam has been clearly shown in a recent prospective, observational multinational, PK study in 29 ICUs from 14 countries that included 381 patients on RRT. Very variable dosage regimens of these drugs were administered all over the world. Unfortunately, no associations between trough concentrations and dosage choice, clinical gravity, residual renal function, and albumin

concentrations could be identified [13]. As a result, TDM of  $\beta$ -lactam antibiotics must be performed whenever possible to help guide therapy, as insufficient serum concentrations and high drug exposures are associated with increased mortality [59,60].

$\beta$ -lactam antibiotic toxicity has been considered minimal in the past. However, with high PD targets for  $\beta$ -lactam antibiotics in critically ill patients, it is becoming more apparent that high concentrations of  $\beta$ -lactams can cause neurotoxicity (myoclonus, hallucinations, confusion, convulsions) and piperacillin/tazobactam can cause AKI as well, resulting in increased morbidity and mortality. Different thresholds for  $\beta$ -lactam toxicity have been proposed, but there is currently no consensus on this matter [61–64]. Nevertheless, as clinicians strive to attain PD targets rapidly, they must be aware that they may also increase the risk of causing other undesirable adverse events.

New  $\beta$ -lactam antibiotics are making their way to the clinic to provide therapeutic options to treat multi-drug resistant Gram-negative bacteria. These new antibiotics are combinations of either new  $\beta$ -lactams with older  $\beta$ -lactam inhibitors, or older  $\beta$ -lactams associated with new  $\beta$ -lactam inhibitors. The antibiotics that have already received FDA and EMA approval are ceftolozone-tazobactam, ceftazidime-avibactam, meropenem-vaborbactam, imipenem-relebactam and cefiderocol. Data concerning dosage regimens of these antibiotics in critically ill patients on CRRT is nevertheless scarce. There are currently only two case reports with PK data on ceftazidime-avibactam in critically ill patients with infections due to multidrug resistant *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (MIC: 8 mg/L). In both cases, regimens of 2.5 g q8h and 1.25 g q8h attained the PD target of  $100\%fT > 4 \times \text{MIC}$  [65,66].

In the case of ceftolozone-tazobactam, lower success rates were observed in patients with sepsis or those receiving CRRT than in non-septic patients, possibly due to lack of PD target attainment, in a multicentric (22 hospitals), retrospective study in Italy on 101 patients with serious and diverse infections due to *P. aeruginosa* (over 50% of strains were extensively resistant) [67]. Another population PK model-guided evaluation of dosing in six patients undergoing continuous veno-venous hemodiafiltration (CVVHDF) showed that CL of ceftolozone-tazobactam is decreased in this situation [68]. However, no dosage adjustments for patients receiving CRRT are currently recommended. There is currently no data on imipenem-relebactam, meropenem-varobactam, and cefiderocol in critically ill patients on CRRT.

### 4.3. Glycopeptides

Glycopeptides, such as teicoplanin and vancomycin, are active against Gram-positive pathogens, such as *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Enterococcus* spp. and *Staphylococcus epidermidis*.

Vancomycin is a large (1448 Da), hydrophilic molecule, with low protein-binding (varying from 10% to 50%) [69]. The antibiotic is concentration-dependent with time dependency; the PK/PD index that best describes its efficacy is the  $\text{AUC}_{0-24}/\text{MIC}$ . The widely accepted PD target is an  $\text{AUC}_{0-24}/\text{MIC} > 400$  [70,71].

To reach this PD target, target trough serum concentrations need to be above at least 10 to 15 mg/L when vancomycin is given intermittently, but between 20 and 25 mg/L when it is administered as a continuous infusion, for pathogens with a  $\text{MIC} \leq 1$  mg/L.

The VD of vancomycin is small, varying from 0.4 to 1.0 L/kg, and the CL varies from approximately 5.9 L/h to 7 L/h in non-critically ill patients with an apparent normal renal function [72,73]. This drug is eliminated essentially by the kidneys via glomerular filtration. In critically ill patients, the VD is significantly increased (ranging from 0.96 to 1.69 L/kg) [74,75], and the CL in patients undergoing CRRT is significantly decreased (varying from 2.0 to 2.5 L/h for an approximate intensity of 30 mL/minute) [74,76,77] when compared to non-critically ill patients.

Because of the increased VD and the decreased CL in patients on CRRT, a loading dose of 35 mg/kg over a 4 h period followed by 14 mg/kg/day given as a continuous infusion allows for rapid PD target attainment in the majority of patients. Patients can also receive intermittent dosage regimens of vancomycin, but PD targets are reached more rapidly, there is less variability in vancomycin serum concentrations, the treatment is less expensive, and there is less nephrotoxicity when continuous infusions are given instead of intermittent infusions [78,79]. Regardless of whether intermittent or continuous infusions of vancomycin are given, all patients receiving this antibiotic should benefit from TDM, followed by rapid dosage adjustments, as vancomycin CL is highly variable according to different CRRT doses.

Contrary to vancomycin, teicoplanin is strongly protein-bound (e.g. >90%), and it has a longer elimination half-life. However, teicoplanin also has similarities to vancomycin, as it is also a big hydrophilic molecule (>1560 Da), and essentially eliminated renally [80]. The PD index that best describes teicoplanin's antibacterial effect is the  $\text{AUC}/\text{MIC}$ ; a ratio of 610.4 is bactericidal for methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) causing a  $2 \log_{10}$  cell kill *in-vivo*. However, the antibacterial effect from even higher drug exposures caused emergence of drug resistance in a hollow-fiber infection model and a murine thigh infection model of MRSA. Higher teicoplanin exposure thresholds (e.g.  $\text{AUC}/\text{MIC} = 1500$ , corresponding to trough levels significantly greater than 25 mg/L) than those needed for bactericidal effect are therefore needed to suppress emergence of resistance in case of infection due to MRSA, but these thresholds are not attainable using current dosage regimens (e.g. 400 mg every 12 hours for 3 doses, followed by 400 mg once daily). This higher threshold is not even attainable with dosage regimens of 800 mg every 12 hours for 3 doses, followed by 400 mg every 12 hours [81]. Therefore, the clinician should consider administering another antibiotic if treating a serious infection due to MRSA in a critically ill patient. Finally, data concerning optimal dosage regimens in critically ill patients receiving RRT are scarce. A loading dose of 1200 mg followed by doses varying from 600 to 1800 mgs was required to achieve trough levels of 15–25 mg/L. Guidance with TDM is recommended due to considerable variability of drug PKs [82].

#### 4.4. Fluoroquinolones

Fluoroquinolones are small lipophilic molecules with a big VD; the VD of fluoroquinolones is not significantly altered in critically ill patients. They are concentration-dependent antibiotics with time dependency; maximal bactericidal effect is obtained when the AUC/MIC >125 or the C<sub>max</sub>/MIC >10 for Gram-negative infections [83], and AUC/MIC >30 for Gram-positive infections [70]. To attain PK/PD targets, the recommended doses for critically ill patients are 400 mg TID for ciprofloxacin, 1 g QD for levofloxacin, and 400 mg QD for moxifloxacin.

The three antibiotics are metabolized in different ways. Moxifloxacin is strongly protein-bound and is metabolized by the liver; dosage regimens do not need to be adapted in case of renal insufficiency or in case of CRRT. On the other hand, ciprofloxacin is poorly protein-bound and is eliminated both by the kidney and the liver which is mediated by CYP1A2 and unspecific biliary secretion. In case of AKI, the daily dose needs to be reduced only slightly because the loss of renal function is compensated by an increase in intestinal secretion and by the hepatic cycle. However, if there is concomitant hepatic insufficiency, doses may need to be reduced further [70,83]. Indeed, in a population PK model based on serum concentrations from 15 critically ill patients with severe infections, clearance of total ciprofloxacin was related to total bilirubin, but not to measured creatinine clearance. The predicted risk of over-exposure was 20% in elderly female patients (>65 years-old-women) with total bilirubin of 4 mg/dL [84]. Furthermore, ciprofloxacin is poorly eliminated by CVVH, and doses may need to be reduced in this situation. Indeed, CL of ciprofloxacin in patients undergoing CRRT has been reported to vary from 0.34 to 1.70 mL/min/kg [85], compared to 7 to 8 mL/minute/kg in patients with a normal renal function [86,87]. Nevertheless, in a population PK study using PK data from 42 critically ill patients receiving ciprofloxacin, and 10 of whom were receiving CVVH, no significant covariate could be found to add to the structural two-compartment model. In other words, PK variability could not be explained by different degrees of renal function. Significant inter-individual variability of PK parameters was observed, emphasizing the need to guide therapy with TDM [88]. Finally, levofloxacin is poorly protein-bound, and eliminated renally. Despite that CRRT enhances elimination of levofloxacin, the median CL was 0.42 to 0.58 mL/min.Kg in patients undergoing CVVH [85], compared to 2 mL/min.Kg in patients with a normal renal function [89,90]. Therefore, doses of levofloxacin must also be reduced in case of CRRT [83,91].

#### 4.5. Oxazolidinones

Oxazolidinones are a class of synthetic antibiotics active against Gram-positive pathogens; they are particularly of interest to treat infections due to methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE). Oxazolidinones exhibit their antibacterial effects by inhibiting protein synthesis. Today, two oxazolidinones are available: linezolid and, more recently, tedizolid [92].

Linezolid is a lipophilic concentration-dependent with time-dependent antibiotic. The PK/PD target is an AUC/MIC between 80 and 120. Its oral formulation has a bioavailability of 100%. (100%). The drug is 30% protein bound with a large VD of 36–47 l. It is eliminated from the body by renal and hepatic mechanisms (approximately 30% and 65%, respectively) the CL varies from 4.7 to 8.3 L/h [92]. The standard dosage regimen is 600 mg q12h; however, higher doses (e.g. 600 mg q6-8 h) may be needed in critically ill patient, particularly when the infection is due to a pathogen with an MIC ≥ 2 mg/L [92]. Furthermore, although no dosage adjustment is recommended in patients with renal dysfunction or on hemodialysis [93], clinical failure has been reported in critically ill septic patients with AKI treated with CRRT. In these patients, particularly those with residual renal function, the standard dose is insufficient; 900 mg q8h provides a higher probability of treatment success without compromising safety [35]. Another option to be considered is the administration of linezolid as a continuous infusion, although no data are available on drug PKs during CRRT using this modality of administration.

Tedizolid has greater *in-vitro* activity against key gram-positive pathogens such as MRSA, and VRE, and a half-life almost twofolds longer than linezolid. The PK index that best describes its efficacy is the AUC/MIC. The drug received FDA and EMA approval in 2014 and 2015, respectively, for acute bacterial skin and skin structure infections. The registered dose is 200 mg, once a day. *In-vitro* models do not support the need for dose adjustments when using CVVH or CVVHD, however clinical data is currently lacking [94].

#### 4.6. Colistin

Colistin is an old antibiotic that was « revived » as a treatment option for infections due to multidrug resistant Gram-negative bacteria, despite that its therapeutic index is very narrow. Indeed, the target therapeutic concentration is >2 mg/L, but there is a significant risk of developing renal insufficiency already at a drug concentration of 2.5 mg/L [95]. Colistin is a concentration-dependent antibiotic; the PK/PD index that best describes its efficacy is the AUC/MIC. Colistin is 10–50% protein-bound in critically ill patients, and it results from the hydrolysis of a pro-drug that is administered as colistin methane-sulfate (CMS). The amount of colistin present in a vial is expressed in colistin-based activity (CBA) or in international units (IU): 33 mg of CBA is equal to 1 million IU (MIU) of CBA [96].

A loading dose of 9 MIU of colistin is recommended, followed by a first maintenance dose 12–24 hours later (depending on the recommended interval of the maintenance dose). Without the loading dose, studies have shown that colistin plasma concentrations increase slowly over time (hours to days) [97]. In the absence of renal insufficiency, the CMS is eliminated mostly by glomerular filtration, and then reabsorbed by the tubules. However, in case of renal insufficiency, the CL of CMS and colistin is decreased and the conversion of CMS to colistin is increased. Nevertheless, in case of RRT, CMS



and colistin are efficiently cleared and therefore supplementary doses of CMS are needed. RRT removes 10% of colistin/hour; because the duration of intermittent HD, SLED and CRRT is significantly different from each other, the supplementary doses needed to depend on the RRT modality used. Total daily maintenance doses for patients receiving CRRT are even greater than doses needed by patients with a normal renal function [97]. Because of the narrow therapeutic index, TDM should be performed, whenever possible [97].

#### 4.7. Daptomycin

This is a concentration-dependent with time-dependent antibiotics active against Gram-positive pathogens. However, this antibiotic should not be used to treat infections due to *Enterococcus spp.* with MICs  $\geq 4$  mg/L because of poor clinical efficacy (even with doses of 10–12 mg/kg) [97]. The PK/PD index that best describes its clinical efficacy is the AUC/MIC.

Daptomycin has a very small VD of approximately 0.1 L/kg [98] due to high-protein binding (e.g. approximately 92%) [99]; approximately 60% of the drug is eliminated renally unchanged from the body and the half-life is long (e.g. 8–9 hours). The standard dosage regimen is 4–6 mg/kg/day in one administration per day. In critically ill patients, higher doses may be considered (i.e. 8–12 mg/kg), but the risk of toxicity (particularly muscular toxicity) will be increased. Toxicity can be monitored by measuring the blood CPK levels.

Although studies conducted in patients receiving hemodialysis reported low drug CL [100,101], in critically ill patients on CRRT with an infection due to *Staphylococcus aureus*, the combination of 6 mg/kg q24h daptomycin and a CRRT dose of 30–35 mL/h/kg provided the best balance between efficacy and safety [102]. The dosage regimen is the same as for patients with a normal renal function because the clearance of daptomycin in patients undergoing CRRT is similar to that observed in patients with a creatinine clearance  $\geq 30$  mL/minute: 0.53 L/h–0.94 L/h compared to 0.75 L/h [101].

#### 5. Conclusions

CRRT is frequently employed in critically ill patients all over the world. Antibiotics are frequently prescribed to these same patients because they often present infections. Delivering optimized antibiotic dosage regimens to critically ill patients undergoing CRRT remains a challenge because these patients present severe altered PK of antibiotics, their infections are severe, and often due to resistant or difficult-to-treat pathogens. The VD of hydrophilic antibiotics is often significantly increased regardless of whether or not the patient needs CRRT. The CL of renally eliminated antibiotics is significantly affected by the modality of the CRRT employed, the intensity of the CRRT delivered, the physicochemical characteristics of the antibiotic itself (e.g. size, ionization, lipophilic or hydrophilic character), and patient characteristics such as residual renal function which can vary significantly from patient to patient.

We have reviewed the most frequently used antibiotics in the ICU setting and discussed the influence of CRRT on the PKs

of these different antibiotics. Dosage regimens have also been proposed, but they are only offered as guidance to try to optimize antibiotic therapy.

#### 6. Expert opinion

The recently published results of the Sampling Antibiotics in Renal Replacement Therapy (SMARRT) study, a prospective, observational, multinational, pragmatic PK study in 29 ICUs from 14 countries in 381 critically ill patients on RRT (CVVH, CVVHD, CVVHDF, or prolonged intermittent RRT), showed that patients failed to reach optimal target trough concentrations in 26%, 36%, and 72% of patients receiving meropenem, piperacillin-tazobactam and vancomycin, respectively [13]. Furthermore, potentially toxic concentrations of antibiotics were observed in 50%, and 25% of patients receiving piperacillin-tazobactam and meropenem [13]. These results are disappointing as they illustrate to what point delivering optimized hydrophilic antibiotic dosage regimens to critically ill patients undergoing CRRT remains a challenge, despite significant efforts over the last 15 to 20 years to get the doses right, and despite that  $\beta$ -lactams and vancomycin are very frequently prescribed antibiotics in ICUs, worldwide. This study, the largest one on critically ill patients receiving RRT, concurs with other smaller studies showing that antibiotic dosing regimens, RRT prescriptions, and residual renal functions are very variable in the ICU setting [56,57,103]. Nevertheless, no specific RRT prescription or dosing regimen allowed to achieve more consistent target exposures. Furthermore, it was impossible to accurately predict dosing requirements despite statistical correlations between antibiotic dose and the estimated total renal clearance.

In light of these results, individualized therapy, guided by TDM is the only way forward in this setting. This individualized therapy may not be needed for all of the antibiotics covered in this review, but certainly for  $\beta$ -lactams, aminoglycosides, glycopeptides, polymyxins, and linezolid. This is in line with the recent position paper on antimicrobial TDM in critically ill adult patients, on behalf of the Infection Section of European Society of Intensive Care Medicine (ESICM), the Pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic and Critically Ill Patient Study Groups of European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID), Infectious Diseases Group of International Association of Therapeutic Drug Monitoring and Clinical Toxicology (IATDMCT) and Infections in the ICU and Sepsis Working Group of International Society of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy (ISAC) [48].

TDM should be performed after giving a first dose of the antibiotic. In the ICU setting, there is substantial evidence to give a loading dose for hydrophilic antibiotics, to compensate for the often-increased VD. This loading dose is the same dose to be given to all critically ill patients, regardless of their renal function. Loading doses have already been proposed and clinical validation studies have confirmed the improvement in rapid PK/PD target attainment for vancomycin, colistin, and amikacin [104–106]. Loading doses for  $\beta$ -lactam antibiotics has also been suggested, based on insufficient antibiotic concentrations in the very early stages of sepsis, but not yet validated [53].

TDM is based on the direct measurement of serum antibiotic concentrations at specific pre-determined relevant sampling time points, followed by feedback of accurate and timely results from bioanalytical assay methods for drug measurement to clinicians who then interpret the results in function of pre-defined therapeutic ranges. In the past, TDM has been used to minimize toxic effects of drugs, but it can also be used to optimize dosing in the critically ill patient with unpredictable PKs of antibiotics.

TDM-based dosing can be performed in several ways. The first way is for the clinician to compare results from TDM to the therapeutic target and adapt the dosage regimen. However, this method is the least accurate for dose adaptation. Dosing nomograms can also be used; they integrate PK/PD data with clinical parameters such as renal clearance. However, incorporating more than one covariate for dosing adjustments is not possible, and the PK sampling must be performed as pre-defined. Finally, dosing software can also be used with the application of population PK models. However, clinicians must remember that the precision of the dose prediction will depend on the quality of the PK model. Even when the PK model does describe a specific patient population, prediction performance can be variable. Therefore, clinical validation of the population models used in daily clinical practice should always be performed [107]. When considering optimizing dosage regimens in patients on CRRT, the validation should be performed in patients receiving the same modality of CRRT.

Despite efforts to optimize dosage regimens of frequently used antibiotics in critically ill patients undergoing RRT, many patients are still not within therapeutic ranges. Therefore, individualized therapy to increase therapeutic target attainment and to limit the risks of drug toxicity due to potentially excessive drug concentrations is essential. Studies should focus on demonstrating that TDM guided therapy will improve PK/PD target attainment and possibly improve survival in critically ill patients receiving CRRT. Indeed, only a few studies have tried to compare clinical outcomes of TDM-guided dosing of anti-infectious agents to those without TDM intervention [108–110]. In this light, well-designed and controlled studies focusing on individualized patient outcomes are being performed, aimed at trying to demonstrate the benefits of performing TDM as part of daily ICU practice. One study is exploring TDM-based dosed piperacillin/tazobactam to improve outcome in patients with sepsis (TARGET) in a multi-centric, randomized, controlled trial (German CTR: DRKS00011159) [111], and the other is exploring the effect of TDM of  $\beta$ -lactams and fluoroquinolones on clinical outcome in critically ill patients (the DOLPHIN trial). (EudraCT: 2017–004677-14) [112].

Finally, a last but important issue to consider when individualizing antibiotic treatment is the choice of antibiotic when patients are on CRRT, and recuperation of the renal function is anticipated. Indeed, some antibiotics are more nephrotoxic than others: aminoglycosides, glycopeptides, and colistin are more nephrotoxic than  $\beta$ -lactams, oxazolidones, and fluoroquinolones. Therefore, as a clinician, it makes sense to treat patients who may recuperate their renal function with the least nephrotoxic agent. In this light, when faced with an infection due to a multi-resistant Gram-positive pathogen, oxazolidones, and daptomycin are to be preferred over glycopeptides. This has been shown in a retrospective,

multicentric study assessing the impact of vancomycin compared to linezolid on renal function in 147 patients with renal failure not yet on RRT and admitted to ICUs. Renal function improved to a greater extent in patients receiving linezolid than vancomycin (percent increase in creatinine clearance: 95.96 vs. 55.06;  $p = 0.05$ ) [113]. A meta-analysis on seven randomized, controlled trials published from 1990 to September 2015, based on moderate quality evidence, showed that treatment with vancomycin is associated with a higher risk of AKI, with a relative risk of 2.45 (95% confidence interval: 1.69 to 3.55). The majority of other comparators to vancomycin was linezolid [114]. When considering infections due to Gram-negative bacilli,  $\beta$ -lactams and fluoroquinolones should be preferred to colistin [115] and aminoglycosides [116], because less nephrotoxic. However, when colistin and/or aminoglycosides are administered, it is often because a patient has a suspected or confirmed infection due to a resistant pathogen, or because the patient is in septic shock in the case of aminoglycosides.

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