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African ST173 Cryptococcus deuterogattii strains are commonly less susceptible to fluconazole: An unclear mechanism of resistance

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Objectives: Fluconazole (FCZ), either alone or in combination, is often administered for treatment of cryptococcal meningitis, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Its extensive use has led to the emergence of FCZ-resistant strains. The mechanisms underlying FCZ resistance are poorly documented for yeasts belonging to the Cryptococcus gattii species complex. The literature suggests that resistance could be due to mutations in and/or overexpression of the ERG11 gene (encoding the 14α-demethylase) and efflux pumps such as MDR and AFR (two subclasses of ABC transporters). Here we highlight the presence of genotype VGL1 strains (Cryptococcus deuterogattii) from the Ivory Coast with a rare sequence type (ST173) associated with high FCZ minimum inhibitory concentrations (MICs) compared with strains originating from the Pacific Northwest (USA).

Methods: Mechanisms of FCZ resistance were investigated in 28 Ivorian clinical C. deuterogattii isolates recovered from three patients during their antifungal treatment and follow-up.

Results: The results demonstrated that: (i) these strains exhibited no mutations in the ERG11 gene; (ii) some strains had increased ERG11 and MDR1 mRNA expression, whilst AFR1 and AFR2 were not overexpressed in strains with high FCZ MICs compared with the expression levels for strains with low FCZ MICs; and (iii) exposure to FCZ in strains with high MICs induced AFR1 mRNA overexpression.

Conclusion: This study demonstrated that the FCZ resistance mechanism commonly described in Cryptococcus neoformans was not responsible for resistance to FCZ in rare subtype strains.

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1. Introduction

Cryptococcus gattii and Cryptococcus neoformans are the main aetiological agents of cryptococcal meningitis (CM). These pathogens infect humans and other animals that inhale the desiccated environmental propagules and/or spores from the environment, resulting in pneumonia and/or severe meningitis. In 2014, annual fatalities from CM were estimated at 181,100 deaths globally, with 135,900 of these occurring in sub-Saharan Africa [1]. CM causes 15% of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)-related mortality in sub-Saharan Africa, which has the most people bearing the burden of CM [2]. Until 2017, the therapeutic regimen recommended for the control of neurocryptococcosis during the consolidation and maintenance phases involved amphotericin B (AmB) and 5-fluorocytosine (5FC). Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) published new recommendations in the event that AmB is unavailable, proposing the use of fluconazole (FCZ) at a high dose combined with oral 5FC. In sub-Saharan Africa, including the Ivory Coast, FCZ is the most commonly administered drug for cryptococcosis treatment; 80% of Cryptococcus infections are treated with FCZ monotherapy [3]. However, recurrence of cryptococcosis during FCZ maintenance therapy has been reported [4,5]. This drug arsenal leads to variations in prognosis and poor survival outcomes. Furthermore, different antifungal susceptibility patterns have been observed among cryptococcal species. Isolation of Cryptococcus strains with increased resistance to azole antifungals is often reported. In general, the C. gattii species complex shows higher minimum inhibitory concentrations (MICs)

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to azoles compared with isolates from the C. neoformans species complex [6–8]. The mechanisms of resistance toazole antifungals are (i) overexpression of the ERG11 gene encoding lanosterol 14-α demethylase, (ii) mutations in ERG11 that result in decreased susceptibility of the enzyme (Erg11p) to azole-induced inhibition, and (iii) overexpression of plasma membrane proteins that pump azoles out of the cell. The FCZ-resistant phenotype has been associated with two point mutations in the ERG11 gene that are responsible for the amino acid substitutions G470R [9] and G484S [10] in C. neoformans strains. Other studies have demonstrated the role of efflux pumps by overexpressing the two ATP-binding cassette (ABC) transporters AFR1 and MDR1 [4,11,12]. Among the resistance mechanisms, innate heteroresistance to FCZ in vitro and in vivo was also reported for C. neoformans in which minor, highly resistant subpopulations have been produced due to adaptive formation of disomic chromosomes [13–15]. The five lineages within the C. gattii species complex have the ability to adapt to higher concentrations of FCZ in a stepwise manner, resulting in homogeneous resistant populations in vitro. The mechanisms ofazole resistance in the C. gattii species complex were essentially studied in genotype VGII strains (Cryptococcus deuterogattii) from a North American outbreak or in the C. gattii reference strain R265. In these strains, neither overexpression of the azole target gene ERG11 nor mutations in the ERG11 coding sequences could explain the high MICs of azole observed [16].

In this study, we explored the mechanisms leading to the lower susceptibility of Ivorian C. deuterogattii isolates to FCZ. After determining the susceptibility profile of 28 Ivorian clinical C. deuterogattii strains to fiveazole antifungals [FCZ, itraconazole (ITR), posaconazole (PSC), voriconazole (VRZ) and isavuconazole (ISA)] as well as AmB and 5FC, the ERG11 genes in all strains were sequenced to search for point mutations. Then, ERG11, MDR1, AFR1 and AFR2 mRNA levels were compared with those of the reference strain R265. The aim of this study was to determine whether the mechanisms commonly described in FCZ resistance in yeast are also involved in Ivorian strains of C. deuterogattii.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Strains and growth media

A total of 28 clinical isolates of C. deuterogattii were analysed in this study. The isolates were from cerebrospinal fluid samples of three Ivorian human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)-positive patients during their follow-up. None of the patients received systemic antifungal treatment prior to their hospitalisation. All of the isolates were recovered during antifungal treatment. Cryptococcus neoformans serotype A reference strain H99 (genotype VNI) and C. deuterogattii serotype B reference strain CBS10514 (R265; genotype VGIIa) were used as control strains. The two quality control strains Candida krusei ATCC 6258 and Candida parapsilosis ATCC 22019 were used for in vitro antifungal susceptibility testing as recommended by the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI) [17]. The media used in this study included yeast extract–peptone–dextrose (YPD) liquid medium or Sabouraud chloramphenicol agar. RPMI medium was used for antifungal microdilution susceptibility testing.

2.2. Antifungal susceptibility testing

The in vitro susceptibility profile of Cryptococcus spp. against AmB, 5FC, FCZ, VRZ, ITR, PSC and ISA was determined using the reference broth microdilution method in accordance with the CLSI [17]. The final antifungal concentration ranges were as follows: 0.125–16 μg/mL for AmB; 0.25–64 μg/mL for FCZ and 5FC; and 0.03–16 μg/mL for VRZ, ITR, PSC and ISA. MICs for FCZ, 5FC and VRZ were defined as concentrations causing a 50% reduction in turbidity compared with growth of the control strain at 72 h. For AmB, the MIC was defined as the concentration resulting in 100% inhibition relative to the growth of the control.

No breakpoints are available for C. neoformans and the five lineages within the C. gattii species complex, in which case the epidemiological cut-off values (ECVs) were used to discriminate wild-type (WT) strains from non-WT strains with reduced susceptibility to some antifungals [18,19].

2.3. DNA extraction

Genomic DNA was extracted from each strain using a NucleoSpin® Blood Quick Extraction Kit (Machery–Nagel GmbH and Co. KG, Duren, Germany) with modifications as previously described [20]. One aliquot was used for each of the experiments described in this study.

2.4. Molecular typing

2.4.1. Serotyping by multiplex PCR

To determine the molecular serotype of the isolates, four primers designed for cloning the LAC1 gene and a pair of primers for the CAP64 gene [21] were used in a slightly modified method as previously described [20,22].

2.4.2. Restriction fragment length polymorphism–PCR (PCR–RFLP) genotyping of the UR54 gene

PCR-RFLP analyses were also performed using the UR54 and SJ01 primers. The PCR conditions were as follows: initial denaturation at 94 °C for 2 min; 35 cycles of denaturation at 94 °C for 45 s, annealing at 61 °C for 1 min and extension at 72 °C for 2 min; and a final extension cycle at 72 °C for 10 min. Then, 10 μL of each PCR product was double-digested using Sau96I (15 U) and Hhal (15 U) for 5 h at 37 °C and the digested fragments were visualised on 1.5% agarose gels stained with ethidium bromide. Migration patterns were captured with an InGenius LR apparatus (Syngene, Cambridge, UK). Molecular profiles obtained via PCR fingerprinting were analysed based on the presence or absence of readily apparent and well-defined bands in the digitised gel images using GeneSnap and GeneTool software and were integrated in a database using GeneDirectory software (http://www.syngene.com/genedirectory-2/).

2.4.3. Multilocus sequence typing (MLST) and analysis

The International Society for Human and Animal Mycology (ISHAM) MLST consensus schemes described for the C. neoformans and C. gattii species complexes was used in this study. The six genes CAP59, GDP, LAC1, PLB1, SOD1 and UR54 as well as the IGS1 region were partially amplified [23]. PCR amplicons were purified and were sequenced using forward primers by GENEWIZ (London, UK). Sequences were manually edited and aligned using BioEdit software. Alleles types and sequences types (STs) were assigned by sequence comparison with the C. neoformans and C. gattii databases at http://mlst.mycologylab.org/.

2.4.4. ERG11 sequencing

The whole ERG11 gene was amplified by PCR as followed: initial denaturation at 94 °C for 5 min; 35 cycles of denaturation at 94 °C for 1 min, annealing at 57 °C for 30 s and extension at 72 °C for 1 min; and a final extension cycle at 72 °C for 10 min with specific primers for C. neoformans and C. deuterogattii, respectively (Table 1). Amplicons were purified and sequenced by GENEWIZ (Leipzig, Germany) using the four primers a, b, d and e for C. neoformans and primers a, c, d and f.
for C. deuterogattii to sequence the whole ERG11 gene (Table 1). Sequences were manually edited and aligned using BioEdit software.

2.5. RNA isolation and reverse transcription quantitative PCR (qRT-PCR) analysis

For RNA extraction, cells were grown overnight in 10 mL of YEPD medium on a shaker at 30°C. Following 24 h of growth, cells were harvested by centrifugation to obtain ~1 × 10⁶ cells.

For RNA extraction following FCZ exposure, each strain was grown for 5 days in 10 mL of YEPD medium supplemented with a subinhibitory FCZ concentration (0.5 × MIC). After 5 days, cells were harvested by centrifugation to obtain ~1 × 10⁶ cells.

Total RNA was extracted using an Ambion RiboPure™ Yeast Extraction Kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA) following the manufacturer’s recommendations for RNA isolation. RNA samples were treated with DNase to remove genomic DNA contamination. Following extraction, RNA was quantified using a Nanodrop 2000 spectrophotometer and the quality of the purified RNA was assessed using an Agilent 2100 Bioanalyzer (Agilent Technologies, Santa Clara, CA, USA).

cDNA was synthesised using a SuperScript™ III First-Strand Synthesis System (Invitrogen) followed by reverse-transcription quantitative PCR (qRT-PCR) using a LightCycler® 480 Real-Time PCR Instrument (Roche). Forward and reverse primer sequences for ERG11, MDR1, AFR1, AFR2 and actin are shown in Table 2 and were used at an annealing temperature of 57°C. Data were normalised to levels of the actin gene and were expressed as the amount of mRNA relative to that of strain R265.

3. Results

All of the strains studied were C. deuterogattii. They all exhibited a VGII genotype (serotype B) and were ST173 (GenBank accession nos. MN431744 for CG Cap59 allele4; MN431749 for CG_GPD1_al-lele21, MN431753 for CG_IGS1allele21, MN431758 for CG_LA_C1_allele4, MN431763 for CG_PLB1_allele16, MN431766 for CG_SOD1_allele93 and MN431771 for CGURA5_allele22). The strains were recovered from three patients during their follow-up.

3.1. Antifungal susceptibility profiles

The MIC distributions for theazole compounds (FCZ, ITR, PSC, VRZ and ISA) and AmB and 5FC are shown in Tables 3 and 4 for the 28 clinical C. deuterogattii strains and the two reference strains [CBS10514 (R265) (C. deuterogattii B/VGII) and H99 (C. neoformans A/VNI)].

The FCZ MIC distribution among the 28 clinical strains was as follows: 10 (35.7%) had an MIC ≤ 8 µg/mL (Cg1 to Cg10); and 18 (64.3%) had an MIC ≥ 16 µg/mL (Cg11 to Cg28). The FCZ MICs were distributed as follows: 0.5 µg/mL (1; 3.6%); 2 µg/mL (1; 3.6%); 4 µg/mL (4; 14.3%); 8 µg/mL (4; 14.3%); 16 µg/mL (10; 35.7%); 32 µg/mL (7; 25.0%); and 64 µg/mL (1; 3.6%). According to the ECVs, only 1 isolate (3.6%) was non-WT to FCZ. The MIC distributions of other azole compounds (VRZ, PSC, ITR and ISA) were also analysed. For ITR, all of the strains had a MIC < 0.5 µg/mL; for VRZ, 26 (92.8%) had an MIC ≤ 0.5 µg/mL and 2 (7.1%) (Cg11 and Cg28) had an MIC of 0.5 µg/mL; for PSC, 22 (78.6%) had an MIC < 0.5 µg/mL and 6 (21.4%) had an MIC of 1 µg/mL; and for ISA, all of the strains exhibited MICs of 0.03–0.06 µg/mL.
Table 4
Minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) distribution of fluconazole, itraconazole, posaconazole, voriconazole, isavuconazole, amphotericin B and 5-fluorocytosine for 28 Cryptococcus deuterogattii clinical strains obtained using the reference broth microdilution method.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antifungal agent</th>
<th>No. of isolates at MIC (µg/mL) of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluconazole</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itraconazole</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posaconazole</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voriconazole</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isavuconazole</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphotericin B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Fluorocytosine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ND, not determined.

For AmB, all of the clinical strains tested had an MIC of 0.25–1 µg/mL. Regarding the MIC of 5FC, only one clinical strain had an MIC of 64 µg/mL; all of the other strains had 5FC MICs of 0.25–8 µg/mL.

3.2. No mutations in the ERG11 gene of Ivorian clinical Cryptococcus deuterogattii strains are responsible for fluconazole resistance

The ERG11 gene from C. deuterogattii strain R265, C. neoformans strain H99 and 28 Ivorian clinical C. deuterogattii strains (GenBank accession no. MN447654) was sequenced. The ERG11 gene sequences of the Ivorian strains were compared with those of the two reference strains using BioEdit software (Table 5). A single mutation (C101A) in the Ivorian C. deuterogattii strains was detected, regardless of whether they had high or low FCZ MICs. This point mutation was not present in the two reference strains R265 or H99. This mutation results in substitution of histidine at position 50 with asparagine (H50N).

3.3. ERG11 mRNA overexpression was observed in some strains of Cryptococcus deuterogattii with high fluconazole MICs, but expression of AFR1 and AFR2 mRNA did not change

Fig. 1 shows the expression levels of ERG11, MDR1, AFR1 and AFR2 mRNA for all of the clinical strains studied. Fold changes were obtained by comparing the ratio (gene of interest/housekeeping gene) for each Ivorian C. deuterogattii strain with that of the reference strain R265. mRNA expression levels for ERG11 and the three efflux pump genes (MDR1, AFR1 and AFR2) were higher in all of the Ivorian C. deuterogattii strains compared with strain R265. Fig. 1A shows that for strains Cg11 to Cg28 (FCZ MIC >16 µg/mL) changes for ERG11 varied between 3.9- and 23.8-fold, whereas for strains Cg1 to Cg10 (MIC <8 µg/mL) they varied between 3.3- and 6-fold. Expression levels of the ERG11 gene were higher in strains with high FCZ MICs (>16 µg/mL) than in strains with low FCZ MICs (<8 µg/mL). Six strains (Cg11, Cg12, Cg13, Cg14, Cg18 and Cg24) showed an increase in ERG11 mRNA expression with a fold change >10. Overall expression of ERG11 mRNA varied within the strains with high MICs of FCZ (Cg10 to Cg28) but remained constant for the 10 strains with low FCZ MICs (Cg1 to Cg10).

Finally, for the three efflux pump genes (MDR1, AFR1 and AFR2) there was no change in gene expression between the strains (Fig. 1B–D).

The fold change of each gene was also compared with the MIC of FCZ for each corresponding strain (Fig. 2.1). It was confirmed that the most important ERG11 gene fold change was observed in strains with FCZ MICs ≥16 µg/mL. In strains with high FCZ MICs, ERG11 mRNA expression was increased, however this was not observed for the other studied genes.

3.4. Fluconazole exposure induced an increase in the mRNA expression of AFR1 in strains with high fluconazole MICs (≥16 µg/mL)

The effect of exposure to a subinhibitory FCZ concentration for each strain on the expression level of ERG11, MDR1, AFR1 and AFR2 mRNA in the 28 Ivorian clinical strains was also studied. Fig. 3 shows the fold changes in expression obtained by comparing mRNA expression of the studied gene in each strain with or without exposure to FCZ.

Exposure to FCZ induced an increase in ERG11 mRNA expression in all strains (Fig. 3A). One strain (Cg17) showed a very large increase in ERG11 mRNA expression following exposure to FCZ (28.9-fold).

For MDR1 (Fig. 3B), the most important fold change was observed for strains with a FCZ MIC ≥16 µg/mL (e.g. Cg12, Cg15, Cg16, Cg17, Cg25 and Cg27).

For AFR1, an increase in mRNA expression was observed for strains Cg11 to Cg28 (FCZ MIC ≥16 µg/mL) and the fold change varied between 3.9 and 23.8. There was an increase in AFR1 mRNA expression following exposure to FCZ in this group of strains compared with strains Cg1 to Cg10.

For AFR2, only 7 (25.0%) of the 28 strains showed an increase in mRNA expression, with a fold change between 1.27 and 4.1. We can conclude that mRNA expression of ERG11 and AFR1 was increased in 77.8% (19/24) of the strains with FCZ MICs >16 µg/mL following FCZ exposure. FCZ exposure had a different effect on gene expression for strains with MICs of FCZ ≥16 µg/mL compared with the other strains.

The fold change of each gene, obtained by comparing mRNA expression levels with or without FCZ exposure, was also compared with the FCZ MIC of the respective strain (Fig. 2.2). It was confirmed that exposure to FCZ induced an increase in AFR1 expression in strains with a FCZ MIC ≥16 µg/mL.

4. Discussion

Cryptococcus deuterogattii clinical strains were first reported in the Ivory Coast in 2016 [8,20,22,24]. The strains were all identified as ST173 by MLST. ST173 was previously described only once [25] and it was hypothesised that it had originated in Africa.

Table 5
Nucleotide mutations in the ERG11 gene and amino acid substitutions from Ivorian Cryptococcus deuterogattii isolates compared to ERG11 sequences from reference strains H99 and R265.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolate No</th>
<th>Nucleotide mutation</th>
<th>Amino acid substitution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cg1 to Cg28</td>
<td>C101A</td>
<td>H50N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS10514 (R265)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. neoformans H99</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C, cytosine; A, adenine; H, histidine; N, asparagine.

Base numbers are with respect to the first ATG codon of the ERG11 gene.
The antifungal susceptibility profile of the strains to azoles, AmB and 5FC was analysed. In the literature, the ECVs of FCZ for C. deuterogattii (B; AFLP6/VGII) strains varied. The most studied C. deuterogattii strains were from Vancouver Island (USA). By MLST, these strains, which are composed of three clonal expansions (a, b and c), were characterised as ST20, ST7, ST6 and ST49 [26,27]. The C. deuterogattii strains from the North American outbreak were separated according to their ECVs for FCZ. The ECV for the C. deuterogattii genotype AFLP6A/VGIIa was 8 μg/mL, whilst it was 32 μg/mL for the other strains [VGLb, c and others] [18,28,29]. No ECVs were published for the Ivorian C. deuterogattii ST173 strains. There is growing evidence that antifungal drug susceptibility may vary by molecular type or geographical location [30,31]. Among the Ivorian C. deuterogattii population, we found that 28.6% (8/28) of the Cryptococcus strains had elevated FCZ MICs (≥32 μg/mL). The entire population had WT MICs for the other azole compounds, i.e. ITR, VRZ, PSC and ISA. Recently, ECVs were proposed for ISA, a new water-soluble triazole used for the treatment of invasive aspergillosis and other mycoses (0.25 μg/mL for C. gattii without variance according to genotype) [32-34]. All of the Ivorian strains were WT isolates. It is interesting that they were susceptible to ISA. Information regarding the activity of ISA is scarce with regard to emerging yeast pathogens that exhibit various susceptibilities to clinically available antifungals.

Many mutations in ERG11 are related to FCZ resistance and their effect on ERG11p has been reported. The first was the amino acid substitution G484S in a clinical strain of C. neoformans [10]. The second involved the replacement of glycine with asparagine at amino acid 470 (G470R), which is located in the proximity of the catalytic domain of the protein and contributes to a decrease inazole affinity for ERG11p [9]. The third was a missense mutation in ERG11p (Y145F) that is responsible for the differential susceptibilities between two different kinds of triazoles: FCZ/VRZ and ITR/PSC [35]. By culturing in medium containing VRZ, multi-azole-resistant strains of C. neoformans were obtained and these strains encoded a protein with a G344S substitution [36]. In 2013, a study of two...
VGIIc strains with high FCZ MICs (32 μg/mL and 64 μg/mL) showed ERG11p sequences that contained a single amino acid substitution (N249D) not present in the deduced ERG11p sequence of any other C. deuterogattii strains studied. These variations in ERG11 coding sequences were not responsible for the high azole MICs observed for the C. deuterogattii strains from the North American outbreak studied [16]. This finding is in agreement with those from the present study. A point mutation was found in the ERG11 gene, the H50N substitution in ERG11p, that was not present in reference strains R265 or H99. It appears that the Ivorian C. deuterogattii VGII ST173 strains possessed a point mutation in the ERG11 gene regardless of their FCZ MIC. Only two mutations in ERG11p have been shown to be responsible for FCZ resistance in C. neoformans and, to date, no mutation in ERG11 has been shown to be involved in FCZ resistance in strains of the C. gattii species complex, even among the most virulent strains described, i.e. the C. deuterogattii strains from the North American outbreak.

The other major mechanism of FCZ resistance involves over-expression of multidrug efflux transporters (MDR1, AFR1/PDR11 and AFR2) [37,38]. Overexpression of these drug efflux transporters has been linked to azole resistance [39]. More recently, it was suggested that PDR11 alone may be responsible for triazole resistance in C. deuterogattii isolates from the North American outbreak [38], and deletion of PDR11, but not MDR1, has a significant effect on susceptibility to FCZ. Therefore, involvement of MDR1 in azole resistance appears to be controversial, especially in C. deuterogattii strains [4,16,40]. To explain the high FCZ MICs in the Ivorian C. deuterogattii strains, the expression levels of ERG11, AFR1, AFR2 and MDR1 mRNA were studied. Some strains had a high level of ERG11 and MDR1 expression without a correlating high FCZ

Fig. 3. mRNA expression level of (A) ERG11, (B) MDR1, (C) AFR1 and (D) AFR2 in isolates after exposure to fluconazole (FCZ) over 5 days. The expression level of each gene was determined by reverse transcription quantitative PCR (qRT-PCR) and was normalised to that of the actin gene. The fold change was obtained by comparing the expression level of each gene in strains exposed to FCZ with the expression level of each gene in the same strain not exposed to FCZ. Values represent the mean ± standard deviation of three biological replicates.
MIC. This increase was not observed for all strains and it appears to be strain-specific. On the other hand, neither of the efflux pumps AFR1 or AFR2 were implicated, which is in contrast to the findings described in the literature. It was also observed that exposure to FCZ induced an increase in AFR1 mRNA expression, especially in strains with high FCZ MICs. The mechanisms commonly described in C. neoformans were not found to be involved in the increased MICs FCZ in the Ivoryian C. deuterogattii strains. We conclude that the mechanisms do not appear to be the same as the mechanisms described for C. deuterogattii from the North American outbreak. These results could be explained because the sequence type of the Ivoryian strains (ST173) differs from that of the reference strain R265 (VGLa; ST20) and strains from the North American outbreak.

It remains important to discover why these specific strains isolated in Ivory Coast exhibit elevated FCZ MICs. To better characterise these strains, whole-genome or transcriptome-sequencing analysis could be used to find genes and proteins responsible for the increased FCZ MICs in the Ivoryian C. deuterogattii strains, and the virulence of the strains in animal models should be studied.

Competing interests

None declared.

Ethical approval

This study was approved by the ethical committees of the Ivory Coast [021/MSLS/CNER-kp]. Written informed consent was provided by the patient or a family member prior to sample collection, and data were anonymised.

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