Pseudomonas aeruginosa extracellular products inhibit staphylococcal growth, and disrupt established biofilms produced by Staphylococcus epidermidis

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Multiple bacterial species often coexist as communities, and compete for environmental resources. Here, we describe how an opportunistic pathogen, Pseudomonas aeruginosa, uses extracellular products to interact with the nosocomial pathogen Staphylococcus epidermidis. S. epidermidis biofilms and planktonic cultures were challenged with P. aeruginosa supernatant cultures overnight. Results indicated that quorum-sensing-controlled factors from P. aeruginosa supernatant inhibited S. epidermidis growth in planktonic cultures. We also found that P. aeruginosa extracellular products, mainly polysaccharides, disrupted established S. epidermidis biofilms. Cellulase-treated P. aeruginosa supernatant, and supernatant from pelA, pslF and pelApslBCD mutants, which are deficient in polysaccharide biosynthesis, diminished the disruption of S. epidermidis biofilms. In contrast, S. epidermidis supernatant in overnight cultures had no effect on established P. aeruginosa biofilms and planktonic growth. These findings reveal that P. aeruginosa extracellular products are important microbial competition factors that overcome competition with S. epidermidis, and the results may provide clues for the development of a novel strategy for controlling S. epidermidis biofilms.

INTRODUCTION

Microbial species coexist in multicellular communities, and compete for common nutritional resources (Smith, 2002). In most ecological niches, surface-associated bacteria often form tightly packed exopolysaccharide-encased colonies, known as biofilms, to survive in hostile environments, and to occupy nutritional niches (Hall-Stoodley et al., 2004). Recent studies have shown that certain bacterial species secrete extracellular products that inhibit the settlement of potential competitors (Burgess et al., 1999). Bacteria produce natural products, such as secreted signalling molecules, biosurfactant and polysaccharide, that interfere with biofilm formation and cell-to-cell communication (Irie et al., 2005; Rasmussen & Givskov, 2006; Valle et al., 2006). Because biofilms are the most common mode of bacterial growth in nature, we hypothesize that there are many different methods used by bacteria to disrupt established biofilms formed by other bacterial species.

To test this hypothesis, we investigated the interaction between Pseudomonas aeruginosa and Staphylococcus epidermidis. P. aeruginosa is a ubiquitous Gram-negative bacterium that is frequently responsible for nosocomial and burn infections. P. aeruginosa is a model organism for the study of quorum-sensing extracellular virulence factors and biofilm formation (Costerton et al., 1995; Latifi et al., 1995; Passador et al., 1993). P. aeruginosa possesses two N-acyl-l-homoserine lactone (AHL)-dependent quorum-
sensing systems (Pesci et al., 1997) and a 2-heptyl-3-hydroxy-4(1H)-quinolone (PQS)-based quorum-sensing system (D’Argenio et al., 2002; Diggle et al., 2003; McKnight et al., 2000). *P. aeruginosa* quorum-sensing systems regulate biosurfactant rhamnolipid production, motility and the release of biofilm matrix materials (Allesen-Holm et al., 2006; Pesci et al., 1997; Shront et al., 2006). *P. aeruginosa* also produces two distinct extracellular polysaccharides (from the *pel* and *psl* genes) as structural components of the biofilm matrix (Friedman & Kolter, 2004a).

*S. epidermidis* is a Gram-positive, spherical, pathogenic bacterium responsible for nosocomial infections. It forms biofilms on the surfaces of indwelling medical devices (Rupp & Archer, 1994). *P. aeruginosa* and *S. epidermidis* commonly coexist in infected patients; for example, in the colonization of surfaces of indwelling medical devices and hydrogel contact lenses (Gilsdorf et al., 1989; Henriques et al., 2005). In the lungs of cystic fibrosis (CF) patients, *P. aeruginosa* is the predominant bacterium, but it can coexist with other species, including staphylococci (Govan & Deretic, 1996).

In the present study, we show that quorum-sensing-controlled factors from *P. aeruginosa* supernatant can inhibit *S. epidermidis* growth in planktonic cultures. We also show that *P. aeruginosa* supernatant uses an extracellular-polysaccharide-dependent process to disrupt established *S. epidermidis* biofilms. The release of extracellular polysaccharide is independent of AHL- and PQS-based quorum-sensing systems.

**METHODS**

**Bacteria, and growth conditions.** *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 (strain PA00001) was obtained from the Pseudomonas Genetic Stock Center (East Carolina University School of Medicine, Greenville, North Carolina, USA). The *lasI* mutation was constructed by allelic replacement in PAO1, as described by Hentzer et al. (2003). The *pslA* mutant was constructed by D’Argenio et al. (2002) via transposon insertion in PAO1. The *rhlA* mutant was constructed by allelic replacement in PAO1, as described by Pamp & Tolker-Nielsen (2007). *peLA* and *psd* mutants were from the *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 transposon mutant library (University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA) (Jacobs et al., 2003). *S. epidermidis* 1457 wild-type (WT) and the *agr* quorum-sensing mutant were kindly provided by Dr Yuan Lu (Li et al., 2004). Tryptic soy broth (TSB; Oxoid) containing 0.25% glucose was used as the culture medium for the production of biofilms by *S. epidermidis* in a static chamber system and in microtitre plates. Luria–Bertani (LB; Oxoid) broth was used as the culture medium for *P. aeruginosa* growth and biofilm formation. ABT minimal medium [15 mM (NH$_4$)$_2$SO$_4$, 40 mM Na$_2$HPO$_4$, 20 mM KH$_2$PO$_4$, 50 mM NaCl, 1 mM MgCl$_2$, 0.1 mM CaCl$_2$, and 0.01 mM FeCl$_3$], supplemented with 0.05% glucose, was used to measure the amount of polysaccharide in the supernatant of *P. aeruginosa* strains. Biofilms and batch cultures were grown at 37°C, except when indicated otherwise. SYTO9 and propidium iodide (PI) (Live/Dead reagents; Molecular Probes) were used at a concentration of 1 μM for staining live (SYTO9, green signal) and dead (PI, red signal) bacteria in biofilms.

**Preparation of supernatants of *P. aeruginosa* and *S. epidermidis* strains.** Overnight cultures (14 h) of *P. aeruginosa* in LB broth, or *S. epidermidis* in TSB containing 0.25% glucose, were centrifuged, and the crude supernatant was filtered (0.22 μm filter). Next, 10 μl filtered supernatant was plated on a LB or TSB agar plate to test possible contamination, and the remaining supernatant was stored at −20°C for further use.

**Cultivation of bacterial biofilms, and challenge by bacterial supernatants**

**Polystyrene microtitre plates.** Biofilm cultivation in polystyrene microtitre plates was carried out essentially as described by Christensen et al. (1985). Briefly, overnight cultures of *S. epidermidis* strains grown in TSB (containing 0.25% glucose) were diluted 1:200. The diluted cultures were transferred to wells of polystyrene microtitre plates (200 μl culture per well), and incubated at 37°C for 24 h. The wells were then washed gently three times with 200 μl sterile PBS, and a 100 μl volume of prepared *P. aeruginosa* supernatant was added to each well. LB broth was used instead of supernatant as a negative control in this assay. After 2 h incubation at 37°C, the wells were washed gently three times with 200 μl sterile PBS, air-dried, and stained with 2% crystal violet for 5 min. Then, the plate was rinsed under running tap water, air-dried, and the crystal violet was resuspended in ethanol, and the OD$_{590}$ was determined. For heat inactivation of the proteins in the *P. aeruginosa* supernatant, the supernatant was heated at a 100°C water bath for 20 min. To inactivate the polysaccharide, the supernatant was treated with cellulase (5 mg ml$^{-1}$; MP Biomedicals) at 37°C for 1 h, then the cellulase was inactivated by heat before it was added to the microtitre plate. Treatment of the supernatant with alginate lyase (1 mg ml$^{-1}$; Sigma) instead of cellulase was used for comparison.

**The static-chamber system.** *S. epidermidis* biofilms were grown in coverglass cell culture chambers (Nunc), as described previously (Qin et al., 2007). Briefly, overnight cultures of *S. epidermidis* strains grown in TSB (containing 0.25% glucose) were diluted to OD$_{600}$ 0.01, inoculated into the wells of a chamber (1.5 ml per well), and incubated at 37°C for 24 h. Then, the chamber was washed gently three times with 1 ml sterile PBS, and 1 ml prepared *P. aeruginosa* supernatant was added to each well. After incubation at 37°C for 2 h, the chamber was washed gently three times with 1 ml sterile PBS, stained by using the Live/Dead reagents for 15 min, and observed under the microscope.

**Construction of the peLA complemented strain.** For genetic complementation of the *peLA* mutant, a 2.8 kb DNA fragment containing the entire *peLA* locus, with a unique overlapping EcoRI or *XbaI* cloning site, was PCR amplified by use of the primers *peAF* (5’-GGATTTCATGCGTGTTCCGCAGAAAG-3’) and *peAR* (5’-GCTCAGCTCAAGCGGAGAATGTTG-3’). The amplified fragment was cloned into the shuttle vector pUCP22 (Herreto et al., 1998), and electroporated into the *peLA* mutant, yielding the complemented strain.

**Construction of the pelApslBCD mutant.** The allelic exchange vector pMPSL-KO was constructed in pEX18 Ap by amplifying a DNA fragment containing genes PA2232–PA2235 of the *psl* locus by using primers *MPSLUP* (5’-GGATTTCATGCGTGTTCCGCAGAAAG-3’) and *MPSLDN* (5’-GCTCAGCTCAAGCGGAGAATGTTG-3’). The PCR product was ligated to the suicide vector pEX18 Ap via *KpnI* and HindIII restriction sites. PA2232–PA2234, and parts of PA2232 and PA2235, were replaced by a blunt-ended Sad fragment containing the gentamicin-resistance cassette from pPS858. The construct pMPSL-KO1 was then mobilized into the *peLA* strain to generate an allelic replacement, as described by Hoang et al. (1998).

**Measurement of the polysaccharide in the supernatant of *P. aeruginosa* strains.** The supernatant of *P. aeruginosa* strains was diluted, and adjusted to a 1 ml sample volume with sterile MilliQ water. A 0.5 ml volume of 6% phenol was added, and allowed to
react for 10 min. Next, 2.5 ml H2SO4 was added to the solution, and allowed to react for 20 min. The OD490 was then measured. ABT minimal medium was used as a background control. The amount of polysaccharide in the supernatant of *P. aeruginosa* strains was calculated based on a standard glucose concentration curve, in which different concentrations of glucose were prepared in the same way as the *P. aeruginosa* supernatants.

**Crude polysaccharide matrix isolation.** Isolation of crude polysaccharide matrix from the supernatant of overnight cultures of *P. aeruginosa* strains was performed using a method based on an ethanol-precipitation method (Friedman & Kolter, 2004a, b). An aliquot of 1 M NaOH was added to the supernatant, and the sample was vortexed every 2 min for 15 min. The sample was centrifuged at 39 000 r.p.m. (19 000 g) in an ultracentrifuge for 1 h at 4 °C. The supernatant was removed, and filtered through a 0.2 µm filter. The filtrate was neutralized with concentrated HCl, precipitated by the addition of ethanol to 70%, and stored at −20 °C overnight. The precipitate was collected by centrifugation at 9000 r.p.m. (4400 g) for 30 min at 4 °C. The pellet was washed with 70% ethanol, allowed to dry for 45 min, resuspended in water, and then lyophilized. The lyophilized material was resuspended in water, dialysed against water, and then lyophilized, weighed, and resuspended in sterile PBS for further use.

**Microscopy and image acquisition.** All microscope observations and image acquisitions were performed with a Zeiss LSM 510 confocal scanning laser microscope (CLSM; Carl Zeiss) equipped with detectors and filter sets for monitoring SYTO9, PI, 7-hydroxy-9H-1,3-dichloro-9,9-dimethylacridin-2-one (DDAO) and tetramethylrhodamine isothiocyanate (TRITC) fluorescence. Images were obtained using a ×63/1.4 objective or a ×40/1.3i objective. Simulated 3D images and sections were generated using the IMARIS software package (Bitplane).

**Influence of *P. aeruginosa* supernatant on *S. epidermidis* growth.** An overnight culture of *S. epidermidis* was diluted to OD600 0.05 in 50 ml fresh TSB (containing 0.25% glucose). A 1 ml volume of prepared supernatant of *P. aeruginosa* was added, and the culture was incubated at 37 °C with shaking. The OD600 was measured at 1 h intervals.

**Lysis of *S. epidermidis* by *P. aeruginosa* supernatant.** Lysis of *S. epidermidis* on agar in a Petri dish was performed by thoroughly swabbing a TSB agar plate with an overnight culture of *S. epidermidis* to a turbidity of OD600 0.1. After drying, 5 µl of an overnight culture of *P. aeruginosa* was spotted onto the agar, air-dried and incubated at 37 °C for 24 h. Plates were imaged using an Alpha Innotech documentation system.

**Statistical analysis.** Two-tailed Student’s *t* tests were performed with a computer (Excel 2007), and *P*<0.05 was considered significant.

### RESULTS

**P. aeruginosa** supernatant inhibits *S. epidermidis* growth

We first investigated the interaction of *P. aeruginosa* and *S. epidermidis* in planktonic conditions, and on agar plates. As shown in Fig. 1(a, b), addition of the supernatant from *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 WT inhibited the growth of *S. epidermidis* 1457 WT and *agr* quorum-sensing mutant cultures, as compared with the control. In contrast, the supernatant from two *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 quorum-sensing mutants (*lasIrhlI* and *pqsA*) did not inhibit *S. epidermidis* growth. The supernatant from *P. aeruginosa* rhlA (deficient in rhamnolipid production) showed an inhibitory effect that was similar to that of *P. aeruginosa* PAO1. This indicates that the quorum-sensing-regulated biosurfactant does not inhibit *S. epidermidis* growth. For *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 WT and *lasIrhlI* mutant, addition of the supernatant from either *S. epidermidis* 1457 WT or *agr* mutant (quorum-sensing mutant) had no influence on growth of *P. aeruginosa* (Fig. 1c, d). On TSB agar plates, overnight cultures of *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 WT and the rhlA mutant strain lysed *S. epidermidis* 1457 cells effectively. However,
the diameter of the lysis zone was decreased by approximately 75 and 70%, respectively, when overnight cultures of lasIrhlI and pqsA mutants were used (Fig. 1e, P<0.05). In contrast, overnight cultures of S. epidermidis strains did not lyse P. aeruginosa cells (data not shown).

**P. aeruginosa supernatant disrupts established S. epidermidis biofilms**

To test the interaction of *P. aeruginosa* and *S. epidermidis* under biofilm conditions, we challenged established biofilms of *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 WT with supernatant from *S. epidermidis* 1457 WT, and vice versa. Biofilms were grown in microtitre plates in TSB for 24 h, and treated with supernatants for 2 h at 37 °C. As controls, we treated bacterial biofilms with fresh LB broth or TSB. At the end of the treatment period, the residual biofilm was stained with crystal violet, and the OD590 was measured. The results showed that the supernatant from *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 could efficiently remove >80% (P<0.05) of the *S. epidermidis* biofilm, while the supernatant from *S. epidermidis* 1457 had no effect on the *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 biofilm (Fig. 2).

We further studied disruption of the *S. epidermidis* 1457 biofilm by *P. aeruginosa* supernatant in a static-chamber cultivation system (Fig. 3). An established biofilm (24 h) of *S. epidermidis* 1457 in the static-chamber system was treated with supernatant from *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 WT for 0, 20, 40, 60, 90 and 120 min at 37 °C. After washing, the cells in the biofilm were stained with SYTO9 and PI, and observed by CLSM. As the treatment time increased, the *P. aeruginosa* supernatant was able to reduce the multilayered *S. epidermidis* biofilms down to a single layer on the surface of the static chamber, but almost all of the residual biofilm cells were living (no red PI staining was observed in the images). Detached *S. epidermidis* cells were collected and stained with Live/Dead reagent. Results indicated that most of the bacteria were alive after detachment from the chamber surface (data not shown).

**Disruption of S. epidermidis biofilms by P. aeruginosa supernatant is mainly due to secreted polysaccharides**

The composition of *P. aeruginosa* supernatant is very complex, so we were interested in learning which components were involved in the disruption of *S. epidermidis* biofilms. Thus, we compared the biofilm-disruption abilities of supernatants from isogenic mutants of *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 in microtitre plates. The mutants were: the *lasIrhlI* double mutant, which is deficient in AHL-based quorum-sensing; the *pqsA* mutant, which is deficient in PQS-based quorum-sensing; the *rhlA* mutant, which is deficient in biosynthesis of biosurfactant rhamnolipid; the *pelA* mutant, which is deficient in biosynthesis of cellulase-susceptible polysaccharide; and the *psf* mutant, which is deficient in biosynthesis of another polysaccharide. The polysaccharide mutants were chosen because recently Valle *et al.* (2006) have reported that a soluble capsular polysaccharide derived from *Escherichia coli* strains prevents biofilm formation by a wide range of Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria. Therefore, we hypothesized that the extracellular polysaccharide produced by *P. aeruginosa* may have a similar function to that of the *E. coli* polysaccharide. Our results showed that the supernatants of *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 and the *rhlA* mutant substantially disrupted the biofilm formed by *S. epidermidis* 1457 in microtitre plates, and the supernatants of *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 quorum-sensing mutants (*lasIrhlI* and *pqsA*) showed only slightly less ability to disrupt the biofilm (Fig. 4a). Notably, among the mutants, the supernatant of the *pelA* strain had significantly decreased ability to remove the *S. epidermidis* biofilm (Fig. 4a, P<0.05). The supernatant of another polysaccharide-biosynthesis-deficient strain, the *psf* mutant, also showed reduced ability for removing the *S. epidermidis* biofilm, producing results that were similar to those of the *pelA* mutant in our assay (P<0.05). The supernatant of the *pel* and *psl* double mutant (*pelApslBCD*) showed virtually no ability to remove the *S. epidermidis* biofilm (P<0.05). Interestingly, the supernatants from the *pelA* and the *psf* mutants showed similar ability to *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 WT strain in inhibiting *S. epidermidis* growth in planktonic conditions (Fig. 4b). These data also indicate that the extracellular polysaccharide secreted by *P. aeruginosa* is not involved in inhibition of *S. epidermidis* growth.

In addition, similar results to those obtained using microtitre plates were obtained using the static-chamber system (Fig. 5). The control *S. epidermidis* culture (treated with LB broth) formed compact microcolonial biofilm structures (Fig. 5a), while treatment with the supernatants of *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 and the *rhlA* mutant completely...
reduced these compact structures to single-cell layers (Fig. 5b, e). The supernatant of the P. aeruginosa PAO1 quorum-sensing mutants (lasIrhlI and pqsA) showed reduced ability (Fig. 5c, d) to inhibit the biofilm structure. Interestingly, treatment with supernatant of the pelA or the pslF mutant had little effect on the surface microcolonies, and this was especially so for the pelApslBCD double mutant (Fig. 5f–h).

To investigate whether cellulase-susceptible polysaccharide from the P. aeruginosa PAO1 WT supernatant was able to disrupt S. epidermidis 1457 WT biofilms, we used cellulase-pretreated P. aeruginosa PAO1 supernatant to treat an established S. epidermidis biofilm. We found that cellulase-pretreated PAO1 supernatant had virtually no ability to remove S. epidermidis biofilms (Fig. 6, *P* < 0.05). As a control, alginate-lyase pretreatment of the P. aeruginosa PAO1 supernatant had no effect on its ability to disrupt biofilms. Heating the supernatant did not destroy the inhibitory ability either. A complementation plasmid carrying the pelA gene (pelA+pUCP22::pelA) was able to restore the biofilm-removing ability of the supernatant from the pelA mutant, whereas the control plasmid (pelA+pUCP22) was not able to restore the activity (Fig. 6).

We also measured the amount of polysaccharide in the supernatant from P. aeruginosa PAO1 WT and its isogenic mutants. The results showed that the amount of polysaccharide was similar in supernatants from P. aeruginosa PAO1 and the quorum-sensing mutants lasIrhlI and pqsA (0.8–0.9 mg ml\(^{-1}\)). In comparison, the amount of polysaccharide was significantly reduced in the supernatants from P. aeruginosa pelA (~0.3 mg ml\(^{-1}\)) and pslF (0.5 mg ml\(^{-1}\)) mutants, and reduced even further in that of the pelApslBCD mutant (only ~0.06 mg ml\(^{-1}\)). The pelA complemented strain (pelA+pUCP22::pelA) recovered polysaccharide levels similar to that produced by PAO1, but the control plasmid strain (pelA+pUCP22) produced results that were similar to those of the pelA mutant (Fig. 7).

Finally, to confirm that P. aeruginosa extracellular polysaccharide is involved in disrupting established S. epidermidis biofilms, we isolated the crude polysaccharide
matrices from the supernatant of *P. aeruginosa* strains, and assessed their effects on the biofilms by measuring the OD₅₉₀. Compared with the PBS control, the matrices from *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 and quorum-sensing mutants showed marked disruption of the biofilms in microtitre plates (Fig. 8). In contrast, the matrices isolated from *P. aeruginosa* *pelA*, *pslF* and *pelApslBCD* mutants had significantly less ability to disrupt the biofilms (*P*=0.05).

**DISCUSSION**

Bacteria grown in biofilms have greatly enhanced tolerance to stress, antimicrobial agents, and host immunological defences (Hall-Stoodley *et al.*, 2004). Biofilm-related infections pose serious health problems for hospital patients with indwelling medical devices (Donlan, 2001). Thus, developing effective anti-biofilm strategies for the treatment of biofilm-related infections is critical. However, once established, biofilms are extremely difficult to eradicate. Current first-line antibiotics are ineffective at eradicating biofilms (Hall-Stoodley *et al.*, 2004). 2-Heptyl-4-hydroxyquinoline N-oxide from *P. aeruginosa* cultures has been reported to have anti-staphylococcal activity (Machan *et al.*, 1992). Our results suggest that the production of these anti-staphylococcal compounds is under the control of quorum sensing, because *P. aeruginosa* lasIrhlI and pqsA mutants showed marked reduction in the production of anti-staphylococcal compounds in plank-
tomic cultures and on agar plates (Fig. 1). In fact, *P. aeruginosa* produces more than 55 quinolones/quinolines in addition to PQS (Deziel *et al.*, 2004; Lepine *et al.*, 2004), and these possess significant antibiotic activity against Gram-positive bacteria (Deziel *et al.*, 2004; Machan *et al.*, 1992). Antimicrobial quinolines can be packaged into extracellular membrane vesicles (MV) to cause direct lysis of *S. epidermidis* (Mashburn & Whiteley, 2005). Another extracellular protein secreted by *P. aeruginosa* that has notable staphyloytic activity is LasA protease (Kessler *et al.*, 1993), and its expression is under the control of a lasRhlI quorum-sensing system (Nouwens *et al.*, 2003).

Moreover, the anti-staphylococcal compounds controlled by *P. aeruginosa* quorum-sensing systems (especially the *psp* system) may be partially involved in disrupting *S. epidermidis* biofilms, although our results showed that this contribution is very limited (Figs 4 and 5). Interestingly, MVs have also been found in the matrix of *P. aeruginosa* biofilms (Schooling & Beveridge, 2006), but it remains unknown whether MVs are effective against *S. epidermidis* cells embedded in a biofilm structure. Likewise, the same question exists regarding the staphyloytic activity of LasA protease against *S. epidermidis* biofilm cells. In most cases, the cell density is always low when a bacterium starts to invade niches occupied by other species. Thus, the organism is unable to activate its quorum-sensing systems, and use quorum-sensing-regulated products to compete with other species. This may explain events that occur in some CF patients: in the early stage of CF, *P. aeruginosa* inhabits lung tissues, along with other species, including staphylococci, and *P. aeruginosa* eventually becomes the only or the prominent pathogen within these patients as their disease progresses (Govan & Deretic, 1996).

In this study, we reported that *P. aeruginosa* might employ quorum-sensing-independent extracellular products (mainly polysaccharides) to disrupt established *S. epidermidis* biofilms. Two operons have been found to be involved in the biosynthesis of polysaccharide in *P. aeruginosa*: pel (Friedman & Kolter, 2004b) and *psl* (Jackson *et al.*, 2004). The pel operon contains seven adjacent genes that are responsible for the production of a glucose-rich matrix material required for the formation of biofilms by *P. aeruginosa* PA14 strain (Friedman & Kolter, 2004b). The exopolysaccharide encoded by the *psl* locus is essential for *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 biofilm formation, because a disruption of the first two genes of the *psl* cluster (PA2231 and PA2232) severely compromises biofilm initiation (Jackson *et al.*, 2004). Interestingly, our results indicated that the polysaccharides produced by the pel and *psl* systems were able to disrupt established *S. epidermidis* biofilms. This type of disruption activity by the polysaccharides has also been found in *Staphylococcus aureus* biofilms (Z. Qin & others, unpublished data).

We hypothesize that the disruption of staphylococcal biofilms by *P. aeruginosa* polysaccharide is independent of a bactericidal effect, because the supernatants from *P. aeruginosa* pel*A* and *pslF* mutants were able to inhibit *S. epidermidis* growth in planktonic conditions, as did the supernatant from the PAO1 WT strain (Fig. 4). Moreover, the *S. epidermidis* cells detached from the biofilms after *P. aeruginosa* supernatant treatment have been shown to be mostly alive (Z. Qin & others, unpublished data). Our data also indicate that the biosynthesis of polysaccharide by pel and *psl* is independent of the quorum-sensing systems, because the production of polysaccharide in *P. aeruginosa* quorum-sensing mutants (*lasRhlI* and *psqA*) was comparable to that of the PAO1 WT strain (Fig. 7). More recently, it has been reported that *P. aeruginosa* can produce an organic compound: cis-2-decenoic acid, which is capable of inducing the dispersion of established biofilms and inhibiting biofilm development by many Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria (Davies & Marques, 2009). However, it remains unknown whether the regulation of cis-2-decenoic acid biosynthesis is associated with pel, *psl* or quorum-sensing systems.

Interestingly, the major structural component of the staphylococcal biofilm matrix is polysaccharide intercellular adhesin (Heilmann *et al.*, 1996). Therefore, it is of interest to know how polysaccharide derived from *P. aeruginosa* can interact with the staphylococcal biofilm matrix components (e.g. polysaccharide intercellular adhesin) to disrupt them. Although the polysaccharide encoded by pel in *P. aeruginosa* is cellulase susceptible, chemical analysis has revealed that it is not cellulose (Friedman & Kolter, 2004b). These findings warrant further investigation into the chemical structure of these polysaccharides produced by *P. aeruginosa*. Such studies may provide more...
information about the mechanisms of biofilm removal by *P. aeruginosa*. Despite these unresolved questions, extracellular polysaccharides secreted by *P. aeruginosa* could represent a promising strategy to be used against staphylococcal biofilms in future applications.

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