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Relatório de Estágio e Monografia intitulada “Diet, microbiota and epigenetics – a dynamic and adjustable triade to explore new treatment approaches” referentes à Unidade Curricular “Estágio”, sob a orientação da Dra. Ana Cristina Gonçalves Martins Pimentel e do Professor Doutor João António Nave Laranjinha apresentados à Faculdade de Farmácia da Universidade de Coimbra, para apreciação na prestação de provas públicas de Mestrado Integrado em Ciências Farmacêuticas.

Setembro de 2020

Eu, Katerina Reva, estudante do Mestrado Integrado em Ciências Farmacêuticas, com o nº 2015231182, declaro assumir toda a responsabilidade pelo conteúdo do Documento Relatório de Estágio e Monografia intitulada “Diet, microbiota and epigenetics – a dynamic and adjustable triade to explore new treatment approaches” apresentado à Faculdade de Farmácia da Universidade de Coimbra, no âmbito da unidade de Estágio Curricular.

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Coimbra, 10 de setembro de 2020.

(Katerina Reva)

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Parte I

RELATÓRIO DE ESTÁGIO EM FARMÁCIA COMUNITÁRIA



I. LISTA DE ABREVIATURAS E SIGLAS

ANF – Associação Nacional de Farmácias

CCF – Centro de Conferência de Faturas

CNP – Código Nacional do Produto

COVID-19 – *Corona Virus Disease*

DCI – Denominação Comum Internacional

MNSRM – Medicamento Não Sujeito a Receita Médica

MNSRM-EF – Medicamento Não Sujeito a Receita Médica Dispensa Exclusiva em Farmácia

MSRM – Medicamento Sujeito a Receita Médica

OTC – *Over The Counter*

PSBE – Produtos de Saúde e Bem Estar

PVF – Preço de Venda à Farmácia

PVP – Preço de Venda ao Público

SARS-CoV-2 – *Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2*

SNS – Serviço Nacional de Saúde

SWOT – *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats*

2. INTRODUÇÃO

O Estágio Curricular do Mestrado Integrado em Ciências Farmacêuticas constitui a etapa final de formação dos alunos e sua preparação como futuros profissionais de saúde. Permite o contacto com as diversas atividades que integram o conteúdo do Ato Farmacêutico (delineado no Artigo 75º do Decreto-Lei n.º 131/2015, de 4 de setembro de 2015 – Estatuto da Ordem dos Farmacêuticos).

O seguinte relatório descreve o Estágio Curricular que realizei na Farmácia São Sebastião, entre os meses de maio e agosto de 2020. Ao longo deste, fui acompanhada pela equipa da farmácia constituída por 4 farmacêuticos nos quais se incluem a diretora técnica e farmacêutica adjunta. Sem dúvida sinto que experienciei um estágio muito *sui generis* e em condições muito particulares devido ao período pandémico de SARS-CoV-2 e COVID-19 em que decorreu. Além do mais assisti também à fase de mudança de instalações da farmácia, tendo grande parte do estágio decorrido já nas novas instalações. Sinto que estes fatores tiveram um forte impacto na minha experiência como estagiária e contribuíram grandemente para a minha aprendizagem.

Este relatório está organizado sob a forma de uma análise SWOT (*Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats*), acrescentando no final alguns dos casos práticos que considerei que integram os conhecimentos teóricos e práticos que fui assimilando ao longo da frequência do estágio.

3. ANÁLISE SWOT

3.1. Pontos Fortes

Integração na equipa de trabalho da farmácia

Ao longo do meu percurso de estágio a equipa residente da farmácia mostrou-se sempre muito disponível para esclarecer qualquer dúvida que surgisse e, de igual modo, auxiliou-me com qualquer percalço que enfrentasse ao realizar as tarefas que me foram designadas. Esta interação teve uma grande importância não só para a minha aprendizagem, mas também para ganhar confiança na minha função como futura farmacêutica e fomentar o meu sentido de responsabilidade.

Finalmente, já na fase em que passei a realizar atendimentos, foram feitas rigorosas avaliações e reflexões relativamente à minha postura, decisões, comunicação e conselhos feitos aos utentes. Este ponto foi de extrema importância para desenvolver o meu espírito crítico e preparar-me como futura profissional de saúde.

Grande número de utentes fidelizados

A farmácia possui um elevado número de utentes fidelizados. Estes residem nas zonas que circundam a farmácia e fidelizaram-se ainda durante as localizações antigas da mesma, no bairro São Sebastião e na Avenida Elísio de Moura. A maioria dos utentes levanta medicação para as suas situações crónicas e solicita produtos para outros casos esporádicos, estando recetivos às informações transmitidas pela equipa. O conhecimento que fui obtendo da história clínica dos utentes permitiu-me realizar um atendimento mais personalizado. A familiaridade e confiança na interação entre os utentes e a equipa foram um ponto essencial para me sentir confortável e segura ao lidar com os utentes e quaisquer problemas que me fossem levantados.

Intervenção junto dos utentes (aconselhamento de produtos, esclarecimento de dúvidas, etc.)

Por norma, muitos utentes dirigem-se à farmácia para pedir aconselhamento sobre situações de saúde esporádicas. Na minha experiência de estágio, a equipa com que trabalhei demonstrou um elevado conhecimento, tanto a nível de identificação de problemas de saúde como ao nível das melhores abordagens terapêuticas para estes, desde as mais frequentes, às que já caíram em algum desuso. Ademais, posso atestar que esta equipa revelou também um grande foco para com o bem-estar do utente, em detrimento da preocupação com 'a venda'

e optando assim, quando indicado, por não ceder qualquer medicação caso não houvesse real necessidade para tal. A observação destes atendimentos constituiu um ótimo método de aprendizagem e o grande apoio que me foi prestado pelos meus colegas permitiu que eu fosse gradualmente assimilando estas capacidades e espírito de trabalho.

Medição de parâmetros fisiológicos e bioquímicos

De acordo com o Artigo 36º do Decreto-Lei n.º 307/2007 as farmácias podem prestar serviços farmacêuticos direcionados para promoção da saúde e bem-estar dos utentes. Neste sentido, ocasionalmente alguns utentes da farmácia requisitavam a medição de parâmetros bioquímicos e fisiológicos, sendo a tensão arterial o mais frequente destes. A prestação deste serviço era realizada num local adequado, garantindo o conforto e privacidade do utente, cumprindo sempre as regras de distanciamento e higiene adequadas ao presente cenário pandémico. Ainda assim, estes momentos permitiam uma maior proximidade com os utentes e abriam espaço para um diálogo mais detalhado, com possibilidade de o utente colocar as suas dúvidas ou comentar o seu estado de saúde. No seio destas circunstâncias fiz o meu melhor por dar esclarecimentos quanto a indicação, posologia, interações, e efeitos secundários de determinados medicamentos, incentivar para implementação de estilos de vida saudáveis e alertar para situações em que fosse mais indicado recorrer ao médico.

Contacto com o sistema SIFARMA 2000®

O *software* informático utilizado no quotidiano da Farmácia São Sebastião é o SIFARMA 2000®. O sistema foi desenvolvido pela Glintt S.A. e pertence à Associação Nacional de Farmácias (ANF). Este sistema auxilia a gestão da farmácia a vários níveis, desde o atendimento ao trabalho feito em *back office*. Na criação e receção de encomendas, permite coisas como a verificação dos prazos de validade dos medicamentos, número de embalagens em *stock*, acerto do Preço de Venda à Farmácia (PVF) e do Preço de Venda ao Público (PVP). Foi também possível verificar, e aprender, com o grande trabalho que a equipa realiza continuamente com o sistema na consulta de histórico de vendas, na manutenção de *stock* mínimo e máximo conforme as vendas e na conferência de receituário e faturação.

Na componente de atendimento ao utente o *software* revelou-se uma componente essencial no *modus operandi* da farmácia. Com a possibilidade da criação de uma ficha de utente, é feita a consulta de todo o tipo de dados e histórico durante o atendimento,

facilitando a interação com o utente, agilizando o processo e otimizando ao máximo o atendimento.

Em grande parte dos atendimentos que realizei, a consulta aprofundada de certos dados de cada utente foi um elemento essencial para uma resposta célere e precisa da minha parte. Exemplos incluem: dados biográficos, historial de produtos adquiridos na farmácia e de laboratórios relativos a medicação crónica, vendas suspensas por regularizar, existência de crédito, etc. Em paralelo com a consulta destes dados, foi também possível gerir os *stocks* relativos aos produtos requisitados pelos utentes. Em particular, a funcionalidade de encomenda instantânea permitia esclarecer se é possível a obtenção de um determinado produto requisitado pelo utente.

Numa fase final do processo de atendimento ao utente o sistema inclui um passo obrigatório de verificação das embalagens recolhidas, com passagem dos seus códigos CNP. Este passo permitiu em certos momentos a deteção de erros nas embalagens recolhidas.

Estas funcionalidades do sistema revelaram-se muito úteis e deram um apoio essencial para o meu desempenho no atendimento ao utente.

Técnicas de venda

Durante o percurso do estágio foi-me dada uma larga noção da importância de garantir sustentabilidade económica da farmácia. De modo a conseguir alcançar este objetivo, a equipa recorre a técnicas de venda e ao *merchandising*.

No que concerne às técnicas de venda constarei como o uso destas possibilitou o incremento das vendas dos produtos, sendo as técnicas do *cross selling* e *up selling* as mais praticadas pela equipa. Na primeira técnica denotei particularmente o uso do *cross primário*, que atende a necessidades complementares que o doente possa ter. Neste aspeto, na organização dos produtos em *back office* são colocados estrategicamente produtos para facilitar a técnica de venda. Isto permitia o agilizar do atendimento e dar um melhor serviço ao utente. Outras técnicas que vi frequentemente utilizadas para contribuir para os indicadores financeiros da farmácia e que se incluem no *up selling* incluem o uso do cartão Saúde e contorno da barreira do preço, que consiste no desdobramento do preço pelas doses totais disponíveis ou duração de uso. Por vezes a equipa recorria a outras técnicas como cedência de amostras, de modo a captar o interesse do utente e aumentar o potencial de venda de um produto numa próxima visita à farmácia.

Numa dimensão exterior à gestão do espaço de venda, eram publicitadas campanhas através das redes sociais da farmácia, que permitia alcançar um número maior de pessoas.

Todas estas técnicas permitem uma maior rotação dos produtos e consequente sustentabilidade económica para a farmácia.

3.2. Pontos Fracos

Aconselhamento de determinados produtos

Ao ingressar em estágio, o conhecimento que possuía em algumas áreas como dermofarmácia e cosmética, bucodentários, ortopedia, ostomias e produtos de uso veterinário não era muito aprofundado. Estas áreas incluem maioritariamente MNSRM, MNSRM-EF e PSBE (Produtos de Saúde e Bem Estar) e a correta orientação dos produtos depende fortemente dos conhecimentos do farmacêutico, não só porque é garantida a saúde do utente como porque um bom atendimento e aconselhamento constitui uma oportunidade para atrair e fidelizar um cliente. Assim, numa fase inicial assisti aos atendimentos e aconselhamentos prestados pela equipa, o que constituiu um ótimo método de aprendizagem. Em complemento, com auxílio de materiais de estudo cedidos pela farmácia, estudei os produtos e quais as situações para que são indicados. Depois de ter começado os atendimentos, o aconselhamento dos produtos das áreas mencionadas constituiu um grande desafio, especialmente numa fase inicial. Perante muito estudo e prática consegui tornar o meu aconselhamento melhor, não deixando de pedir confirmação ou supervisão por parte da equipa. Ainda assim, devido à escassez de solicitação de alguns produtos específicos e ainda ao curto período de experiência ao balcão, a capacidade de resposta perante algumas situações não evoluiu até ao ponto desejado. Para isto também contribuiu a consciência da repercussão que as minhas decisões e aconselhamentos poderiam ter na saúde do utente e na reputação da farmácia.

Dificuldade na associação de princípios ativos a nomes comerciais

Alguns medicamentos são mais facilmente identificáveis pelo seu nome comercial do que pelo princípio ativo. Por vezes sucedeu-se alguns utentes apresentarem as suas receitas prescritas por Denominação Comum Internacional (DCI) e questionarem se vinha prescrito um medicamento concreto, chamando pelo seu nome comercial. Sucede-se que os medicamentos são prescritos por DCI e nem sempre é visível o seu nome comercial na receita. Tendo isto em conta, a associação entre o nome comercial e princípio ativo não era imediata e a comunicação com o utente era dificultada. Numa fase inicial este

constrangimento era rapidamente resolvido com auxílio do SIFARMA 2000[®]. À medida do tempo, o contacto frequente com estes medicamentos permitiu solidificar esta associação.

Duração e sazonalidade do estágio

Os quatro meses que permaneci na Farmácia São Sebastião foram bastante dinâmicos e permitiram adquirir e consolidar diversos conhecimentos. O tempo passado na receção e organização das encomendas permitiu ter uma boa noção da localização dos produtos na farmácia, tanto para os MSRM como os MNSRM e OTCs. Esta noção foi extremamente importante para numa fase posterior rentabilizar o tempo gasto no atendimento. Com o tempo passado na componente de atendimento foi possível consolidar muitos conhecimentos e ganhar capacidade de aconselhamento em situações mais comumente apresentadas pelos utentes, como problemas gastrointestinais e do sistema respiratório, pequenos traumas da pele, dor ligeira tratada com paracetamol ou ibuprofeno e dúvidas relativamente a posologias. Contudo, não foi possível ganhar confiança no aconselhamento em algumas situações mais raramente levantadas. Exemplos são alimentação e medicação em população pediátrica, problemas ortopédicos, problemas veterinários, higiene íntima, etc. Acredito que com mais tempo e prática dedicados à componente do atendimento, poderia ter-me deparado com mais situações e ganho mais confiança e autonomia. Para além disto e estágio apanhou o período das férias de verão. Com isto houve vários momentos de pouco movimento na farmácia e menor número de situações clínicas apresentadas. Contudo, perante estas condições, os momentos foram aproveitados para discutir com a equipa os aconselhamentos feitos e aprimorar o meu conhecimento sobre certas patologias e melhores abordagens terapêuticas.

3.3. Oportunidades

Formação contínua

Uma grande parte dos OTCS apresentados nos lineares da farmácia prende-se com dermocosmética. As marcas que representam estes produtos procuram constantemente a inovação através do aprimoramento dos produtos existentes e do lançamento de novos produtos. Com isso, as marcas dinamizam diversas sessões de formação sobre os seus produtos, convidando todos elementos da equipa da farmácia a assistir. Tendo em conta o panorama epidémico de COVID-19 em que decorreu o meu estágio, não houve hipótese para uma organização presencial destas sessões, sendo isto contornado com formações via

internet. Durante o período de estágio tive oportunidade de assistir a algumas destas sessões, que constituíram uma mais valia para a minha aprendizagem. O observar destas sessões de formação e dos atendimentos feitos pela equipa permitiram melhorar o meu aconselhamento nos produtos desta área.

Mudança de instalações e organização do espaço

Uma das experiências particulares do estágio prendeu-se com o assistir da mudança de instalações da farmácia. Com isto apercebi-me da grande dinâmica de gestão da farmácia, tanto na dimensão do espaço de interação com o utente, como em *back office*, indo desde a adaptação do novo *layout* e disposição dos equipamentos para trabalho diário, ao suporte de sistemas informáticos e aparelhos diversos.

Denoto em particular a oportunidade de observar na prática o processo dinâmico que decorreu no que concerne à gestão de categorias. Os pontos que melhor interiorizei e interliguei com os conhecimentos teóricos adquiridos incluem: adaptação do *layout* da farmácia, arrumação adequada do sortido e dos produtos das gamas, dinamização de zonas quentes e frias, organização cuidada dos lineares, e procura por um ambiente agradável, limpo, luminoso e capaz de proporcionar uma experiência agradável de compra.

Contacto com entidades de comparticipação

Ao contactar com as receitas os com os MSRM ganhei conhecimento sobre as entidades de comparticipação que existem e os critérios exigidos por estas para um correto funcionamento. Existem várias entidades que participam o PVP dos MSRM, sendo o regime de comparticipações do Estado, de acordo com o Serviço Nacional de Saúde (SNS) o mais proeminente e identificável através do plano 01. Dentro do SNS existem outros regimes de comparticipação especiais, habitualmente dirigidos para indicações terapêuticas ou medicamentos específicos. Estes regimes são regidos por determinados despachos ou portarias. O processamento dos regimes e consequente comparticipação do medicamento depende do cumprimento das regras de prescrição e correta menção dos despachos ou portarias na receita. Com a dispensa de medicamentos via receita eletrónica os planos já vêm associados. Com as receitas manuais, a inserção do plano do SNS ou de outro indicados é feita pelo utilizador através do SIFARMA®, onde para cada plano existe um código informático. Para além das entidades de comparticipação existem outras entidades às quais os utentes podem aderir e que atuam em complementaridade no PVP dos MSRM. O plano de comparticipação com o qual contactei mais frequentemente foi o correspondente aos

Serviços de Assistência Médico-Social (SAMS). De modo a poder usufruir da comparticipação, o utente deve acompanhar-se do cartão com o número de beneficiário, de modo a que o farmacêutico o possa associar no ato de dispensa do medicamento.

Durante o estágio tive ainda oportunidade de assistir ao fecho do receituário, que garante que a farmácia possa ver reembolsado o montante correspondente às comparticipações feitas pelas entidades no PVP dos medicamentos. A documentação relativa aos medicamentos e outros produtos de saúde que são comparticipados pelo SNS é enviada para o Centro de Conferência de Faturas (CCF), localizado na Maia. Tendo aderido ao Acordo de Transmissão de Faturação Eletrónica, a farmácia envia por meio eletrónico a documentação relativa ao receituário processado com os serviços de dispensa eletrónica, O restante receituário não processado com serviços de dispensa eletrónica, correspondente a receitas manuais, é enviado em formato papel. A informação enviada deve cumprir as exigências do CCF e incluir fatura (em duplicado), receitas médicas, relação resumo de lotes e verbete de identificação de lotes. O processo relativamente às outras entidades de comparticipação é semelhante, com a diferença de que a documentação é enviada para a ANF.

Preparação de medicamentos manipulados

A Farmácia São Sebastião destaca-se pelo elevado número de medicamentos manipulados que prepara. A preparação do manipulado é feita de acordo com as “Boas Práticas na Preparação de Medicamentos Manipulados” da Portaria n.º 594/2004, de 2 de junho. Apesar de não ter preparado nenhum medicamento manipulado, assisti ao processo inerente à preparação destes, tendo assistido mais frequentemente a medicamentos como pomada de enxofre, cápsulas de ivermectina e xarope de trimeptoprim. Tal como com os MSRM, é exigida uma receita médica devidamente prescrita, com inserção do código respetivo do manipulado desejado. Perante todos os dados necessários é feito o preenchimento de uma Ficha de Preparação, com os devidos cálculos das quantidades de matérias primas a usar, o protocolo de preparação seguido, cálculos relativamente ao PVP a atribuir, entre outros. É também feito o controlo do stock das matérias primas utilizadas, dando-se a sua quebra através SIFAMRA®.

É de notar que são também feitas preparações extemporâneas no momento de dispensa do medicamento ao utente. Assisti principalmente à preparação de suspensões de antibiótico onde a forma farmacêutica comercializada é em granulado. Neste caso torna-se

também importante transmitir ao utente as condições de conservação, necessidade de agitar antes de tomar, prazo de utilização e as posologias tendo em conta a forma farmacêutica.

3.4. Ameaças

O impacto da COVID-19

O estágio curricular decorreu perante o cenário pandémico causado pelo SARS-CoV-2. Com a doença causada por este, a COVID-19, foram implementadas várias medidas de prevenção e contenção da pandemia (ANF, Plano de Contingência COVID-19, 2020). Algumas destas medidas tiveram impacto na atividade da farmácia. Um exemplo prende-se com as consultas médicas feitas à distância e consequente encaminhamento de receitas via *e-mail* ou telefone. As receitas recebidas via telefone ou email dificultaram a noção do doente quanto à medicação que tem para levantar. Para além disso, provocaram o gasto de algum tempo de atendimento para a abertura de várias receitas que iam ficando acumuladas no telefone. Num segundo exemplo, aliado ao uso obrigatório de máscara, foram instaladas outras medidas sanitárias como disponibilização de solução antisséptica para desinfeção das mãos e colocação de barreira física transparente entre o utente e o farmacêutico. No contexto prático, a comunicação através de máscara e barreira física nem sempre foi fácil e dificultou alguns atendimentos.

De acordo com o plano de contingência da COVID-19 era feita a produção local de produtos de base alcoólica para higienizar as mãos. Foi encarregue da preparação de solução antisséptica de base alcoólica (SABA) A, à base de etanol 96° puro, peróxido de hidrogénio a 3%, glicerina pura e água purificada.

Perante o cenário de ruturas de *stock* foi criada pela ANF a linha I400, que permitia ao doente saber em farmácias próximas da sua área de residência podia encontrar um medicamento que tivesse esgotado na Farmácia São Sebastião. Foi ainda implementada a cedência de medicamentos hospitalares na farmácia de acordo com a “Operação Luz Verde”, uma iniciativa articulada entre a Ordem dos Farmacêuticos, ANF e Ordem dos Médicos, de modo garantir a continuidade da terapêutica para doentes que precisam de se deslocar ao hospital para adquirir a sua medicação (ANF, Ordem dos Farmacêuticos e Ordem dos Médicos, Operação Luz Verde, 2020).

Pedidos de MSRM sem receita médica

Durante o período que frequentei a farmácia foi frequente ver pedidos de MSRM sem apresentação da respetiva receita. Esta situação intensificou-se perante cenário pandémico e atrasos nas consultas médicas dos utentes. Apesar de ser possível a resolução de alguns destes casos, como em pacientes que pedem medicação crónica e cujo controlo da doença é conhecido, em outros a rejeição da cedência do medicamento foi inevitável. Isto levou por vezes reações de incompreensão e más interpretações por parte dos utentes e constituiu um desafio no que concerne a transmitir que estava em causa o zelo pela saúde do utente e uso racional do medicamento.

Medicamentos esgotados

Enquanto permaneci farmácia deparei-me com a realidade de alguns medicamentos que escasseiam ou entram em rutura de *stock*. Em alguns casos a falta do medicamento tem graves consequências para a saúde dos doentes, como casos de insulínodépendentes, Alguns utentes não compreendiam esta situação, reclamando que precisavam do medicamento pedido. Em alguns destes casos sucedeu-se a difícil tarefa de explicar aos utentes que a medicação que tomam de forma crónica passou a estar indisponível por tempo indeterminado. Por vezes foi inclusive necessário o encaminhamento dos utentes ao médico de modo a alterar a abordagem terapêutica de modo a ser possível atender as necessidades do utente.

O cenário pandémico da COVID-19, principalmente a sua fase inicial, constituiu uma agravante para esta situação, uma vez que era levantado um número excessivo de embalagens de um certo medicamento, provocando rutura temporária de *stock* deste.

4. CASOS PRÁTICOS

Caso Prático 1

Utente do sexo feminino com cerca de 40 anos pede algo para a prisão de ventre. Queixa-se que há uns dias não vai à casa de banho e já começou a sentir algum desconforto, apontando para a zona abdominal. Quando é questionada se costuma ter esta situação recorrentemente, diz que não e que por alguma razão nos últimos dias anda assim. Ao conversar mais um pouco com a utente foi possível descobrir que naquela semana tinha começado a trabalhar e que com isso houve uma mudança drástica no seu regime. Para além disso, o seu horário de trabalho é irregular, podendo trabalhar tanto de dia como de noite. De modo a aprimorar conhecimento sobre se a obstipação não estaria associada a alguma medicação, perguntou-se à utente se fez algum tratamento nos últimos tempos ou se fazia alguma medicação cronicamente, ao qual esta respondeu que não.

Dada o carácter agudo e pontual da situação, foi cedido um laxante de ação rápida, Dulcolax®. Foi explicado que, sendo um comprimido à base bisacodilo, um de laxante estimulante, este iria promover o peristaltismo e a secreção de água, provocando assim o amolecimento das fezes e a defecação (Rang and Dale, 2012, p. 368; Soares, 1995). Foi indicado que deveria tomá-lo à noite, esperando sentir os efeitos na manhã seguinte. Foram ainda explicadas e incentivadas algumas medidas não farmacológicas, como uma dieta rica em fibras, ingestão de 1 a 2L de água por dia, prática de exercício físico e o evitar de posições estáticas prolongadas (Soares, 1995). No caso da utente, salientou-se a medida relativa à educação intestinal, com criação um horário regular para “ir à casa de banho”, em que não houvesse pressas ou stress e a utente pudesse fazer a sua higiene intestinal com conforto. Finalmente foi alertado que caso não houvesse alívio sintomático no espaço de uma semana, deveria consultar um médico.

Caso Prático 2

Utente do sexo feminino com cerca de 25 anos dirigiu-se à farmácia e pediu um antibiótico para a bexiga, uma vez que sentia um incomodo na zona infra abdominal. Perante este pedido foi explicado de imediato que não podia ser feita a dispensa do medicamento sem ida ao médico, execução de um diagnóstico preciso, e apresentação de receita médica. De seguida foram feitas questões sobre os sintomas que a utente apresentava, de modo a perceber se de facto se tratava de infeção urinária ou se era caso de outra possível patologia. A utente comentou que vai muitas vezes à casa de banho e que sente algum

desconforto na zona infra abdominal. Quanto a sintomas comuns de infeção como dor ao urinar, sensação de esvaziamento incompleto, mau cheiro na urina, febre ou náuseas (Imam, 2018), disse que não tinha. Em conversa, a utente acrescenta que pede o antibiótico porque 'já sabe que vai ter infeção urinária', uma vez que as tem frequentemente. Perante este cenário, foi explicado primeiramente que as mulheres são mais propícias a ter infeções urinárias devido à disposição anatómica da uretra em relação à vagina e ânus, canal uretral mais curto e colonização microbiana do ambiente vaginal e perianal (McLellan and Hunstad, 2016). Torna-se então importante um cuidado higiénico correto de modo a evitar a ascensão das bactérias pelo canal uretral e o aparecimento de infeções. Foram incentivados cuidados como ingestão de uma maior quantidade de água e alimentos ricos em vitamina C, uma boa higiene antes e depois das relações sexuais, e a lavagem da zona genital e perianal de frente para a trás (Imam, 2018). Finalmente, foi cedido Rotercysti[®], um medicamento com 500mg de extrato de folhas de *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*, cujos principais constituintes são derivados de hidroquinonas, polifenóis (taninos), ácidos fenólicos, triterpenos e flavonóides (European Medicines Agency, 2018; Sigmaaldrich). Estes têm propriedades antissépticas, antimicrobianas e diuréticas, que colaboram para o alívio dos sintomas das infeções urinárias ligeiras (European Medicines Agency, 2018; Sigmaaldrich; Afshar *et. al.*, 2018). Contudo, foi sublinhado que, caso não sentisse alívio dos sintomas com a toma do medicamento, devia consultar o médico, de modo a poder fazer um diagnóstico preciso e selecionar a terapêutica antibiótica adequada.

Caso Prático 3

Utente masculino com cerca de 40 anos dirige-se à farmácia com uma lesão no canto dos lábios. Esta apresentava algumas vesículas e tinha um aspeto ligeiramente inflamado. O utente comentou que experimentou pôr álcool, o que o fez sentir a lesão mais irritada, e confessou que rebentou as bolhas iniciais. Perante observação da lesão que aparentava ter as características de uma infeção mucocutânea por Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV), questionei o utente se sentiu formigueiro nos momentos iniciais em que a lesão se revelou, sendo este um sintoma inicial de infeção por HSV (Vilata Corell, 2008), ao qual este respondeu que sim. Questionei finalmente se porventura já tinha tido herpes, ao qual respondeu que sim, comentando que 'já tinha sido há uns anos e foi resolvido'.

Depois de feita uma análise rigorosa dos dados e do que se podia observar na lesão, comecei por explicar que uma vez tendo uma infeção por HSV, apesar de os sintomas desaparecerem, o agente patogénico passa a permanecer em estado latente no corpo,

podendo reativar-se periodicamente no espaço de vários anos. Esta reativação pode dever-se a várias causas, como *stress*, sistema imunológico deprimido, queimaduras solares, estados febris associados a infeções, entre outros (Vilata Corell, 2008; Kaye, 2018). Tendo em conta o carácter contagioso da infeção foram ainda incentivadas algumas medidas de prevenção a ter durante o período da manifestação viral e até à cicatrização completa da lesão, como: evitar beijar, fazer sexo oral, partilhar copos ou garrafas de água.

Seguidamente foi cedido Zovirax[®], um creme à base de aciclovir, tendo sido explicado que este fármaco iria atuar como um antiviral (Rang and Dale, 2012, p. 644), resolvendo a infeção e aliviando os sintomas associados à mesma. De modo a aliviar o estado inflamatório foi aconselhada a aplicação de gelo, devendo ter cuidado com a superfície que contacta com o lábio de modo a não transferir a infeção (Kaye, 2018). Foi ainda acrescentado que devia evitar tocar ou coçar na lesão, de modo a conter ao máximo a disseminação do vírus e agravamento dos sintomas, e evitar aplicar álcool diretamente na lesão, de modo a evitar o agravamento da irritação da mesma.

5. CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

Considero que o estágio que realizei na Farmácia São Sebastião foi uma experiência muito enriquecedora e importante para a minha formação como futura profissional de saúde. A dinamização dos conhecimentos adquiridos ao longo dos 5 anos de MICF e a familiarização com matérias mais abordadas na prática profissional constituiu sem dúvida um grande desafio. O contacto com a equipa fez-me aperceber dos desafios inerentes à gestão e manutenção da farmácia e da sua equipa de profissionais. Além disto, fez-me valorizar a postura do farmacêutico comunitário como um agente de saúde focado no bem-estar do utente em detrimento do impacto económico que este tem para a farmácia.

Finalmente, deixo o meu sincero obrigada à Farmácia São Sebastião e em especial à Dra. Ana Pimentel por todo acolhimento e dedicação para me ensinar a ser uma melhor farmacêutica.

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Parte 2

MONOGRAFIA

DIET, MICROBIOTA AND EPIGENETICS – A DYNAMIC
AND ADJUSTABLE TRIADE TO EXPLORE NEW
TREATMENT APPROACHES

I. LISTA DE ABREVIATURAS E SIGLAS

4EPS – 4-ethylphenylsulfate

AhR – Aryl hydrocarbon receptor

DMHTs – Histone demethylases

DNMTs – DNA methyltransferases

FAD – Flavin adenine dinucleotide

GPCRs – G protein-coupled receptors

HATs – Histone acetyltransferases

HDACs – Histone deacetylases

HMTs – Histone methyltransferases

JmjC – JumonjiC

LSD – Lysine-specific demethylases

NAD⁺ – Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide oxidised form

NADH – Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide reduced form

NLRP3 – NOD-, LRR- and pyrin domain- containing 3

PXR – Pregnane X receptor

SAH – S-adenosyl-homocysteine

SAM – S-adenosylmethionine

SCFAs – Short-chain fatty acids

TMAO – Trimethylamine N-oxide

α -KG – α -ketoglutarate

2. RESUMO

O conhecimento sobre a influência da dieta na fisiologia humana, tanto na saúde como na doença, tem, nos últimos anos, sido alvo de renovado interesse, considerando-se, atualmente, a dieta como uma das variáveis ajustáveis mais importantes em saúde humana. Uma das vias pelas quais a dieta pode influenciar a saúde é a modulação do microbiota intestinal. Estudos recentes mostraram que o microbiota intestinal tem um papel relevante na Biologia humana, incluindo a modulação da expressão genética. Em estreita ligação com estes conceitos, a epigenética trouxe novas perspectivas sobre o conhecimento da ação de fatores ambientais na expressão genética, em que se incluem os metabolitos derivados da microbiota. Assim, nos últimos anos, estudou-se intensamente a relação entre modificações epigenéticas aberrantes e doença, nomeadamente o efeito de flutuações nas concentrações de metabolitos cruciais do microbiota na atividade de moduladores epigenéticos. Destes estudos resultaram conclusões interessantes sobre a ação moduladora de metabolitos específicos e consequente atividade epigenética, os quais podem abrir caminhos novos sobre a utilização de fármacos epigenéticos.

Aqui revêm-se os conhecimentos atuais sobre os efeitos moduladores da dieta no microbiota intestinal, com destaque para a ação de metabolitos derivados do microbiota no hospedeiro, como é que os fatores ambientais, incluindo os metabolitos derivados do microbiota intestinal, influenciam a atividade dos agentes epigenéticos e as consequências das alterações epigenéticas no contexto da saúde e da doença.

Tendo por base estas relações, formulámos a hipótese da tríade dinâmica dieta-microbiota-epigenética e propomos que a seleção de alvos epigenéticos e modulação da dieta à luz destes constitui uma potencial abordagem inovadora quanto à prevenção e tratamento da doença.

Palavras-chave: Dieta; Microbiota; Metabolitos; Epigenética; Tratamento.

3. ABSTRACT

It is known since early days that diet has a strong influence on human physiology, being an important adjustable variable in determining health and disease. More recently, diet-driven gut microbiota changes emerged as a pathway in influencing the host's physiology, establishing microbiotic metabolites as a key mechanistic link underlying microbiota actions. In connection with these notions, epigenetics has brought new insights to our understanding of how environmental factors influence cellular genetic expression, pinpointing gut microbiota metabolites as one of the relevant factors. Intense efforts have been dedicated to mechanistically establish the links between aberrant epigenetic modifications and disease, and how variations in specific metabolites influence epigenetic agent's activity. Overall, these studies brought new insights on how specific metabolites shape the epigenetic landscape of cells and organs, highlighting new therapeutic strategies for the use of epigenetic drugs.

Here, we review the current knowledge on the effect of diet in shaping microbiotic intestinal populations and how microbiotic metabolites interact with the host. These notions will be instrumental to address the modulatory role of environmental factors, including microbiotic metabolites, on epigenetic changes in health and disease development.

Finally, we propose a dynamic diet-microbiota-epigenetics triade as concept of relevance in terms of health and disease, suggesting that targeting specific epigenetic changes via diet constitutes a potential innovating strategy for treatment and disease prevention.

Keywords: Diet; Microbiota; Metabolites; Epigenetics; Treatment.

4. INTRODUCTION

The onset and development of diseases is dictated not only by genetic heritage but also by environmental triggers. The gut microbiota, a community of bacteria, viruses, fungi and archaea that populates several mucosal surfaces, including the human gastrointestinal tract, is in close contact with the exterior environment, being part of the interface that connect the environmental factors with the host (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017; Zmora, Suez *et. al.*, 2019). A dysfunctional gut microbiota interface has been robustly linked to major diseases and conditions, including cancer, autoimmune diseases, cardiovascular disease, obesity, metabolic diseases, major depressive disorders (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Bultman 2017; Chen, Sun *et. al.*, 2017; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017; Knauf, Brewer *et. al.*, 2019; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et. al.*, 2019; Allum and Grundberg, 2020).

Gut microbiota produce metabolites through fermentative reactions and these are considered an environmental factor that can have several effects on the host. These effects happen through the mechanism of epigenetic modifications, i.e. changes in gene expression that are not dictated by DNA sequence, being the most known DNA methylation and histones methylation and acetylation. The enzymes responsible for these epigenetic modifications, histone acetyltransferases and deacetylases, histone methyltransferases and demethyltransferases and DNA methyltransferases use several metabolites including those coming from gut microbiota's fermentative reactions (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Wong, Qian *et. al.*, 2017; Tiffon, 2018; Wang, Long *et. al.*, 2018). In addition, gut microbiota metabolites might have interesting effects on these enzymes. For example, short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), which are produced by the gut microbiota, inhibit histone deacetylases and in doing so interfere with several physiological pathways that support homeostasis or may trigger disease, such as cancer (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Bultman, 2017; Chen, Sun *et. al.*, 2017). Because such effects underly both physiologic and pathologic conditions, the interaction between gut microbiota metabolites and epigenetic enzymes has great potential regarding novel therapeutic approaches. Indeed, over the last years, several studies have shown interesting results based on the implementation of specific metabolite-based treatment (Wong, Qian *et. al.*, 2017; Wang and Zhao, 2018; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et. al.*, 2019; Zmora, Suez *et. al.*, 2019) and the concept of epigenetic drugs emerged along with them (Wong, Qian *et. al.*, 2017).

Considering that gut microbiota's metabolites are, in great part, influenced by food consumption, several studies have explored the modulatory effects of diet on gut microbiota an ensued health impact on the host (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Tilg and Moschen, 2015;

Krautkramer, Kreznar *et. al.*, 2016; Bultman, 2017; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et. al.*, 2019; Zmora, Suez *et. al.*, 2019).

In this review we propose that the dynamic diet-microbiota-epigenetics triad might support the development of innovative approaches in terms of health and disease. We suggest that once an epigenetic target of interest is identified, diet shaping or selecting certain metabolite-based diets constitute potential prevention and treatment approaches to disease. As a conceptual background for this hypothesis we provide an overview on the effects that various diets have on microbiota, the metabolites that are ensued formed and the effects that diet shaping has on the microbiotic populations and consequent metabolite production. We also address epigenetic activity and metabolic requirements of epigenetic enzymes from both a physiologic and pathologic viewpoint, exploring cases where changes in metabolite concentrations influence epigenetic activity. Ultimately, identifying possible molecular targets and the epigenetic agents that interact with such targets, we explore the potential effects of diet shaping in disease prevention and treatment in light of the dynamic diet-microbiota-epigenetics triade.

5. GUT MICROBIOTA

All surface barriers of the human body are populated by microorganisms. Such organisms live in dynamic communities, consisting of bacteria, viruses, fungi and archaea, collectively known as 'microbiota' (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Rooks and Garrett, 2016; Knauf, Brewer *et. al.*, 2019). The human gastrointestinal tract is no exception. It is colonized by microbiota with increasing densities along intestine, reaching up to 10^{11} bacteria/grams of luminal content in the colon (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017). The digestive functions and the composition of the bacteria depend on nutritional availability and their location within the tract. Thus, gut microbiota are not the same between the small and large intestines (Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et. al.*, 2019).

The amount of genetic information that we can extract from the microbiota is incredibly diverse and the magnitude of interactions between the microbiota's components is huge. Hence, it is of no surprise that the microbiota influence the host's physiology in many ways (Cuevas-Sierra, Ramos-Lopez *et. al.*, 2019; Knauf, Brewer *et. al.*, 2019). The microbiota contribute in several physiological processes, like exogenous food digestion, metabolization of endogenous chemical compounds (secreted by microbial and host cells) and synthesis of bile acids and vitamins (Chen, Sun *et. al.*, 2017; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017;

Cuevas-Sierra, Ramos-Lopez *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, the microbiota are also responsible for modulating the gut immune function, controlling the intestinal epithelial barrier, preventing pathogenic microorganisms propagation, and even regulating host's genetic expression (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Singh, Chang *et al.*, 2017; Wang and Zhao, 2018; Cuevas-Sierra, Ramos-Lopez *et al.* 2019; Zmora, Suez *et al.* 2019). Once its homeostasis is broken, i.e., dysbiosis, the microbiota can contribute to the onset and/or development of disease (Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017; Singh, Chang *et al.*, 2017; Wang and Zhao, 2018; Knauf, Brewer *et al.*, 2019). Of note, Kolodziejczyk *et al.* and other studies suggest that the microbiota is not only playing a role in modulating pathogenesis, but might be modulated as a treatment modality of a wide range of pathologies, from metabolic disorders to neurological diseases (Rooks and Garrett, 2016; Singh, Chang *et al.*, 2017; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019; Zmora, Suez *et al.*, 2019).

In sum, just like with every components of the body, it is important to maintain microbiota's equilibrium and, to achieve this, the host is equipped with several genetically determined mechanisms. One of these mechanisms involves the goblet cells of the mucosal epithelia. These cells secrete a viscous gel that plays the role of a protective mucus layer, acting as a physical barrier between the host and the microorganisms (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Knauf, Brewer *et al.*, 2019). Adding to this physical barrier effect, there are some compounds, namely immunoglobulin A and antimicrobial proteins, which are respectively produced by the plasma and Paneth cells, that limit bacterial adherence to the epithelium. These mechanisms are regulated by the intestinal mucosa's immune system (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Knauf, Brewer *et al.*, 2019).

5.1 Shaping microbiota

The microbiota are not a static component of the body. On the contrary, they are highly dynamic considering the bidirectional communication with the host and the environment. It may seem surprising, but the intestinal environment of a fetus is, for all intents, practically sterile. The shaping of gut microbiota starts at birth when we receive bacteria from caregivers (maternal genital tract and colon) and from the overall environment (Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019; Zmora, Suez *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, in neonates, both the number and diversity of microbiota are small, but by the time they are 2 years old, the microbiota get established and remain relatively constant throughout the subject's lifespan. There are important events in early life that strongly influence the intestinal microbiota, including type of feeding, delivery mode, gestational age, antibiotic

usage and hospitalization (Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019). However, some degree of flexibility is retained and we can modulate the diversity and composition of the microbiota through the exposure to various noncommunicable factors (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Knauf, Brewer *et al.*, 2019; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019). Several sources indicate that amongst these factors, diet is the most relevant in shaping the microbiota. Notably, the impact of diet influencing microbiota overtakes the one of genetic backgrounds (Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019).

Nutrients can shape microbiota's growth (Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019; Zmora, Suez *et al.*, 2019), inducing effects ranging from short-term and reversible to life-lasting effects, eventually influencing the host's physiology (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Knauf, Brewer *et al.*, 2019; Zmora, Suez *et al.*, 2019). Short effects may be achieved by acutely altering the intake of specific macronutrients, whereas long-lasting effects are induced by persistent dietary factors (Knauf, Brewer *et al.*, 2019). There are several studies in literature regarding this dynamic interaction (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Knauf, Brewer *et al.*, 2019), as depicted in **Table 1**.

The range of the effects of short-term nutritional changes on the microbiota is not yet fully understood, since the existing studies are controversial. However, there is plenty evidence of a dynamic relationship between diet and microbiota. Bearing in mind this relationship and the knowledge that microbiota can influence the host's physiology, it is possible to suggest that by modulating the bacterial populations expressed in the gut, it is possible to shape the host's physiology. The mechanisms underlying this concept will be later discussed.

5.2 Gut microbiota's metabolites

As mentioned previously, certain bacteria are specialized in the metabolism of certain nutritional components (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019; Zmora, Suez *et al.*, 2019). Via such a process, bacteria is able to produce several metabolites that are normally not produced by the host (Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019). These metabolites include, amongst others, small organic acids, vitamins, bile acids, lipids, and choline metabolites (Krautkramer, Kreznar *et al.*, 2016; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019). Among the several metabolites, the most frequently studied are the small organic acids, which are in great part represented by the short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) (Krautkramer, Kreznar *et al.*, 2016; Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017). **Table 2** summarizes some relevant examples of bacterial metabolization of dietary products.

Table I. Dietary impact on the microbiotic population.

Nutritional Behavior	Microbiotic panorama	References
Omnivorous	Increase in <i>Bacteroides</i> and <i>Bifidobacterium</i> species, <i>Escherichia coli</i> , and Enterobacteriaceae.	(Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019)
Omnivorous or Vegans	Equal presence of <i>E coli</i> biovars; <i>Klebsiella</i> , <i>Enterobacter</i> , <i>Citrobacter</i> and <i>Clostridium</i> species; other Enterobacteriaceae.	(Tilg and Moschen, 2015)
High in animal protein temporary diet	Increased <i>Bacteroides</i> , <i>Alistipes</i> , <i>Bilophila</i> and <i>Clostridia</i> . Decrease in Firmutes (<i>Eubacterium rectale</i> , <i>Ruminococcus bromii</i> and <i>Roseburia</i> species) and <i>Bifidobacterium</i> .	(Singh, Chang et al., 2017; Cuevas-Sierra, Ramos-Lopez et al., 2019; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019; Zmora, Suez et al., 2019)
High in plant protein temporary diet	Increase in Bifidobacteria and commensal Lactobacilli; decrease in <i>Bacteroides</i> and <i>Clostridium perfringens</i> .	(Singh, Chang et al., 2017; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019)
High in resistant starch temporary diet	Increased proportions of Firmicutes bacteria related to <i>Ruminococcus bromii</i> .	(Tilg and Moschen, 2015)
Diet rich in unsaturated fat	Increase in Lactobacillus, Streptococcus, Bifidobacteria and <i>Akkermansia muciniphila</i> .	(Singh, Chang et al., 2017)
Diet rich in saturated fat	Increase in <i>Bacteroides</i> , <i>Bilophila</i> , <i>Faecalibacterium prausnitzii</i> .	(Singh, Chang et al., 2017)
High in fibre diet	Increase of bacterial abundance; Increase in <i>Bacteroides</i> , <i>Bifidobacterium</i> , <i>Lactobacilli</i> , <i>Roseburia</i> , <i>Eubacteria</i> and <i>Ruminococcus</i> ; Decrease of <i>Enterococcus</i> and <i>Clostridium</i> species; Actinobacteria depleted.	(Singh, Chang et al., 2017; Cuevas-Sierra, Ramos-Lopez et al., 2019; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019)
Diet rich in polyphenols	Increase in Bifidobacteria and Lactobacilli; decrease of <i>Bacteroides</i> , <i>Clostridia</i> , <i>Salmonella typhimurium</i> and <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i> .	(Singh, Chang et al., 2017)
Rural diet	Increase in <i>Bacteroidetes</i> (including the genera <i>Xylanibacter</i> and <i>Prevotella</i>); increase in the microbiota variety.	(Hullar and Fu, 2014; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019; Zmora, Suez et al., 2019)
Urbanized diet	Loss of <i>Treponema</i> species; loss of microbiota diversity.	(Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019; Zmora, Suez et al., 2019)
Temporary calorie-restrictive diet	Decrease in <i>Blautia coccooides</i> ; Increase in <i>Bacteroides</i> .	(Zmora, Suez et al., 2019)

Members of *Bifidobacterium*, *Bacteroides* and *Ruminococcus* genera are primary degraders. They encode carbohydrate-active enzymes (CAZymes), which allows them to degrade glycans (indigestible carbohydrates), like resistant starch, cellulose, fructo- oligosaccharides, etc. On the contrary, the human genome only encodes a limited number of these enzymes (Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019; Zmora, Suez et al., 2019).

Actinobacteria, from which *Bifidobacterium spp.* are an example, are specialized in degrading specific types of fibre. *Bacteroides*, *Alistipes* and *Bilophila* are bile-tolerant bacteria (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Singh, Chang et al., 2017).

Firmicutes – *Eubacterium rectale*, *Roseburia* and *Ruminococcus bromii* – are plant polysaccharides metabolizers (Zmora, Suez et al., 2019).

Table 2. Link between food components, bacterial metabolism and the resulting metabolites.

Food component	Metabolizing agents	Metabolite	References
Dietary fibre (undigested complex carbohydrates)	<i>Faecalibacterium prausnitzii</i> , <i>Bifidobacterium spp.</i> , <i>Lactobacillus spp.</i> , <i>Roseburia sp.</i> , <i>Eubacterium spp.</i>	Short-chain fatty acids (SCFA)s.	(Hullar and Fu, 2014; Krautkramer, Kreznar et al., 2016; Chen, Sun et al., 2017; Singh, Chang et al., 2017; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019)
L-carnitine, choline and phosphatidylcholine (particularly from red meat)	<i>Proteus mirabilis</i> , and bacteria that are present in higher abundances in omnivores populations. Other specific microbial species that contribute remain unknown.	Trimethylamine N-oxide (TMAO).	(Koeth, Wang et al., 2013; Hoffman, Petriello et al., 2017; Singh, Chang et al., 2017; Qin and Wade, 2018; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019; Zmora, Suez et al., 2019)
Tryptophan	<i>Escherichia coli</i> , <i>Clostridium spp.</i> and <i>Bacteroides spp.</i> , <i>Enterococcus faecalis</i> .	Indole and indole derivatives.	(Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019; Roager and Licht, 2018; Wang and Zhao, 2018)
Tyrosine	Concrete species remain unknown.	4-hydroxyphenylacetic acid and 4-ethylphenylsulfate (4EPS).	(Wang and Zhao, 2018; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019)
Phenylalanine	Concrete species remain unknown.	Phenylacetic acid.	(Hoyles, Fernandez-Real et al., 2018; Wang and Zhao, 2018; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng et al., 2019)
Glucosinolates	<i>Escherichia coli</i> , <i>Bifidobacterium sp.</i> , <i>Bacteroides thetaiotaomicron</i> , <i>Enterococcus faecium</i> , <i>Enterococcus faecalis</i> and <i>Peptostreptococcus sp.</i>	Isothiocyanates.	(Hullar and Fu, 2014)
Catechins	Concrete species remain unknown.	Methylated catechins, phenolic products, and ring fission products (ex. valerolactone).	(Hullar and Fu, 2014; Kawabata, Yoshioka et al., 2019)
Ellagitannins	<i>C. coccoides</i> , <i>Bifidobacterium spp.</i> , and <i>Lactobacillus spp.</i>	Urolithins.	(Hullar and Fu, 2014; Bultman, 2017; Kawabata, Yoshioka et al., 2019)
Phytoestrogens	<i>Lactococcus garvieae</i> , <i>Eggerthella sp. YY7918</i> , <i>Adlercreutzia equolifaciens</i> , <i>Slackia isoflavoniconvertens</i> , <i>Slackia equolifaciens</i> , <i>Slackia sp. NATTS</i> .	Dihydrogenistein, dihydrodaidzein, equol, enterolactone, enterodiol and O-desmethylangolensin (O-DMA).	(Bultman, 2017; Wang and Zhao, 2018)
Anthocyanins	Concrete species remain unknown.	Protocatechuic acid (PCA).	(Wang and Zhao, 2018; Kawabata, Yoshioka et al., 2019)
Nitrate	Concrete species remains unknown, although studies point out Actinobacteria and Firmicutes as highest nitrate-reducers.	Nitrite.	(Koch, Gladwin et al., 2017; Rocha and Laranjinha, 2020)

SCFAs include mostly acetate, butyrate and propionate (proportion of 3:1:1), and others less frequent, such as caproate, formate, and lactate (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Krautkramer, Kreznar et al., 2016). Indole and 4EPS are further metabolized in the liver, originating respectively, indoxyl sulfate and P-cresylsulfate (Wang and Zhao, 2018). Nitrite is further metabolized into nitric oxide (Koch, Gladwin et al., 2017; Rocha and Laranjinha 2020).

It was previously mentioned that modulating the bacterial populations expressed in the gut possibly results in shaping the host's physiology. The pathways supporting such interaction are largely mediated by the microbial metabolites (**Table 2**), which are physiologically active molecules and can affect human physiology via both, positive and negative ways (Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et. al.*, 2019; Hullar and Fu, 2014; Chen, Sun *et. al.*, 2017). **Figure 1** shows relevant examples of metabolite's physiological effects that can lead to either, health or disease. It is of relevance to note that besides **Figure 1** metabolites other ones capture interest as well. Brief examples are tryptophan derived indole and tyrosine derived phenylacetic acid and 4-hydroxyphenylacetic acid, which constitute uremic toxins (Nallu, Sharma *et. al.*, 2017; Wang and Zhao, 2018), ellagitannins derived urolithins with anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidative effects (Kawabata, Yoshioka *et. al.*, 2019), nitrate and nitrite derived nitric oxide with vasodilation, redox signalling and immune response modulation properties (Koch, Gladwin *et. al.*, 2017; Rocha, Correia *et. al.*, 2019; Rocha and Laranjinha, 2020).

Regarding metabolite's pathologic outcomes, several studies report associations between metabolites and disease development, both in humans and mice. Indeed, there are robust associations regarding malignancy, obesity, metabolic syndrome, inflammatory bowel disorders, diabetes mellitus and cardiovascular disease (Krautkramer, Kreznar *et. al.*, 2016; Chen, Sun *et. al.*, 2017; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017; Wang and Zhao, 2018). However, there are also studies reporting microbiota metabolites as agents in preventing and managing pathologic states. One example refers to SCFAs, in particular butyrate that by inhibiting genetic expression in human colon cancer cells leading to their apoptosis may act as an anticancer agent. (Bultman, 2017; Wang and Zhao, 2018). The underlying molecular mechanism will be elaborated further on. Other pathways by which SCFAs contribute to diminish tumorigenesis, include attenuation of inflammation, signalling through G protein-coupled receptors or activating immune cells (Bultman, 2017; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017). A further important example is related with the stress-induced cell responses by isothiocyanates, specifically sulforaphane, which acts like butyrate and reveals promising testing results in mice (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Bultman, 2017). Also of mention, urolithins also play a role as anticancerigenous agents by diminishing inflammation. The underlying mechanism consists of downregulating cyclooxygenase 2, thus lowering prostaglandin production (Bultman, 2017).

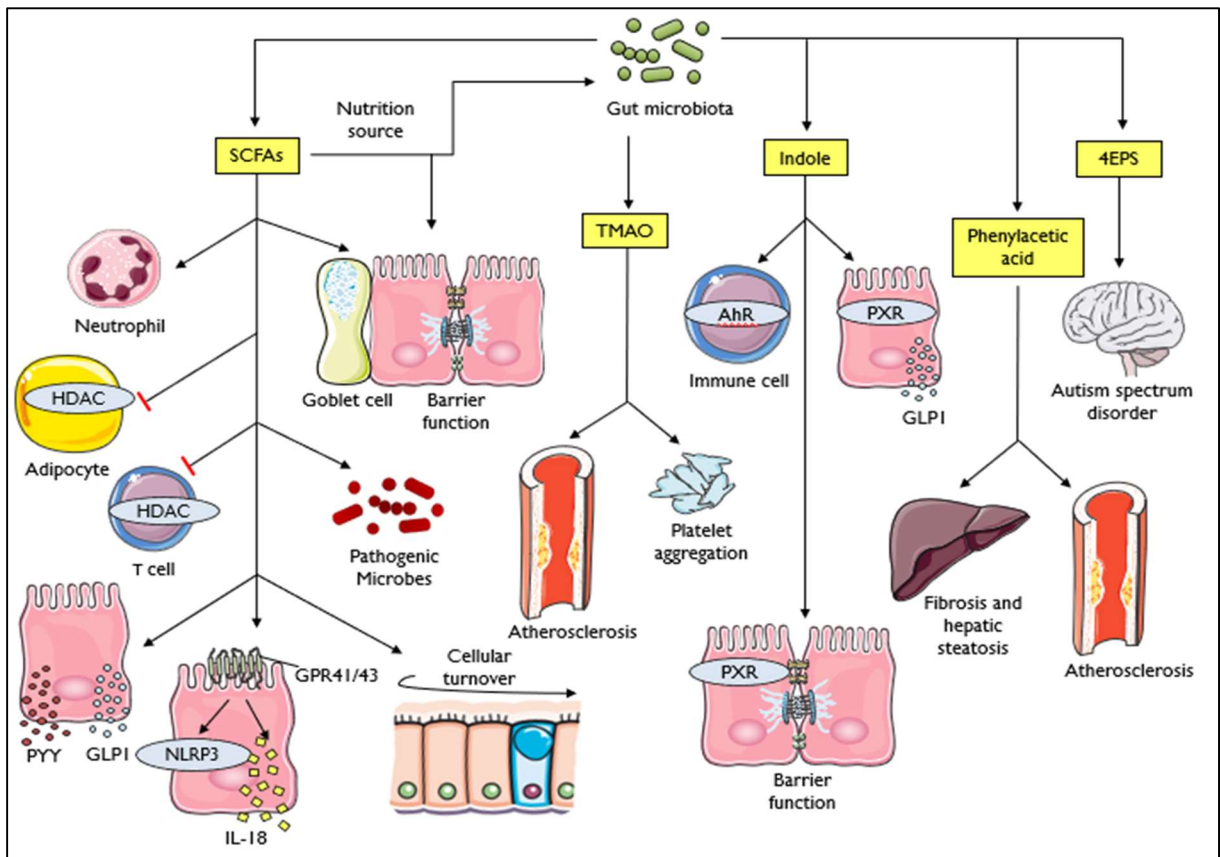


Figure 1. Microbiotic metabolites and their physiologic effects.

SCFAs have several functions: major nutrition sources for intestinal epithelial cells (IECs) and the gut microbiota; promoting barrier function and expression of mucin in goblet cells, cell differentiation, anti-inflammation and apoptosis; working as neutrophils recruiters and inflammation aggravators; HDAC inhibition in adipocytes, which induces apoptosis; induction of Treg cells by inhibiting HDACs; inhibition of pathogenic microbes proliferation by creating an acidic pH condition; promoting colonic epithelium turnover through effects of HDAC inhibition; stimulating the production of the PYY and GLPI, acting consequently on the central nervous system's regulation of energy expenditure and food intake; signaling molecules, acting as ligands for GPCRs, like GCPR 41 and 43 expressed on IECs. GCPR 43 regulates the NOD-, LRR- and pyrin domain-containing 3 (NLRP3) inflammasome and IL-18 secretion (a pro-inflammatory cytokine) (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Krautkramer, Kreznar *et al.*, 2016; Rooks and Garrett, 2016; Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017; Qin and Wade, 2018; Knauf, Brewer *et al.*, 2019; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019); TMAO is a proatherogenic compound associated with prevalence of cardiovascular diseases and also platelet aggregation and risk of thrombosis. The mechanisms by which TMAO leads to the mentioned effects are well known (Koeth, Wang *et al.*, 2013; Singh, Chang *et al.*, 2017; Wang and Zhao, 2018; Zmora, Suez *et al.*, 2019). TMAO is a robust clinical biomarker regarding cardiovascular disease and contributes to mortality risk in several diseases (Wang and Zhao, 2018). Indole modulates immune responses through AhR signaling. Works on barrier function regulation through PXR signaling and GLPI secretion modulation through PXR signaling, having therefore effects on insulin secretion and appetite suppression. (Roager and Licht, 2018; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019; Zmora, Suez *et al.*, 2019). 4EPS is believed to lead to autism spectrum disorder, with the inherent mechanisms being explored. (Rooks and Garrett, 2016; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019). Phenylacetic acid effects are fibrosis and hepatic steatosis (Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019), which contributes to the development of atherosclerosis, insulin resistance, and fatty liver disease (Hoyle, Fernandez-Real *et al.*, 2018; Tiffon, 2018). HDAC – histone deacetylases; SCFAs – short-chain fatty acids; PYY – peptide tyrosine-tyrosine; GLPI – glucagon-like peptide I; GPCRs – G protein-coupled receptors; TMAO – trimethylamine N-oxide; AhR – aryl hydrocarbon receptor; PXR – pregnane X receptor; 4EPS – 4-ethylphenylsulfate.

It should be noted that there are some endogenous compounds that undergo microbial metabolization and the corresponding metabolites gain new functions. One of the most studied interactions regarding this concept relates to bile acids. Although the majority of bile acids (around 95%) undergoes a process of ileum absorption and deliver back to the liver, a small amount passes to the colon, undergoing anaerobic microbial metabolism (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Wang and Zhao, 2018). The originated metabolites, also mentioned as secondary bile acids, are deoxycholic acid, lithocholic acid and ursodeoxycholic acid (Wang and Zhao, 2018). These bile acids increase in response to high fat diets (Hullar and Fu, 2014), being present in higher amounts in patients with cardiovascular disease (Wang and Zhao, 2018) and have well-documented effects regarding disease development and prevention (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Wang and Zhao, 2018).

Although we focus on metabolites, such as the SCFAs, the microbiota produce other types of compounds that might impact on the host, like miRNA (Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017; Qin and Wade 2018). These effects and their mechanisms will be later addressed.

It is possible to conclude that depending on the microbiotic populations expressed in the gut, there are different metabolites circulating that, in turn, different several physiological effects. Along with the notions discussed in this chapter, diet modulation appears clearly as a powerful tool to shape the host's physiology. Regarding physiological and pathological effects of metabolites and the underlying molecular mechanisms, these will be explored in the following chapter as the second link of the diet-microbiota-epigenetics triade.

Several studies have addressed the cross-talk between microbiota and disease states. Although our focus is on the diet-microbiota-epigenetics triade, it should be noted that besides metabolites the intestinal microbiota generate other physiologically active compounds that have various effects on the host (Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017). In this regard, several mechanisms explain how microbiotic components can cause the onset or progress of disease, being epigenetic modifications one of them. Prominent examples of diseases related to intestinal microbiota are obesity (Cuevas-Sierra, Ramos-Lopez *et al.*, 2019), rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus (Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017; Knauf, Brewer *et al.*, 2019), Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis, autism (Ma, Xing *et al.*, 2019), colorectal cancer (Bultman, 2017), inflammatory bowel diseases (Aleksandrova, Romero-Mosquera *et al.*, 2017) and kidney disease (Knauf, Brewer *et al.*, 2019).

6 EPIGENETICS

In this chapter, we briefly review key concepts of epigenetic changes, bearing in mind that through microbiota's metabolites it is possible to achieve a dynamic shaping of our physiology. This rationale will enable to establish the basis to explore the second link of the dynamic diet-microbiota-epigenetics triade.

The definition of epigenetics varies amongst the existing literature. Cavalli *et. al.* define it as “*the study of molecules and mechanisms that can perpetuate alternative gene activity states in the context of the same DNA sequence*” (Cavalli and Heard, 2019). There is no doubt that epigenetics refers to dynamic changes in our genes that influence several biological processes, from cell development, to differentiation and aging (Zhao, Wang *et. al.*, 2015; Chen, Sun *et. al.*, 2017; Wong, Qian *et. al.*, 2017; Cavalli and Heard 2019). These changes are characteristic for being heritable, reversible (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Cavalli and Heard, 2019), and also not dictated by our DNA sequence, rather by several environmental signals (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Zhao, Wang *et. al.*, 2015; Chen, Sun *et. al.*, 2017). These environmental signals come from several sources, like nutritional behaviour, toxins and pollutants exposure, smoking, physical activity, etc (Hoffman, Petriello *et. al.*, 2017; Donkin and Barrès, 2018; Tiffon, 2018). Microbial metabolites can too be included in these signals, comprising the linking element by which the human microbiota can influence the hosts gene expression (Chen, Sun *et. al.*, 2017).

Epigenetics mechanisms involve the non-coding RNAs and the reversible and regulated chemical modification of both, histones and DNA bases. The two major well-known epigenetic control mechanisms include the post-translational modification of histones by acetylation and methylation and DNA cytosine methylation (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Zhao, Wang *et. al.*, 2015; Cavalli and Heard, 2019). Regarding histones, these are proteins responsible for tightly wrapping DNA into chromatin and the modification of histone core and tails influences DNA's availability for transcription by reorganizing chromatin packing (Hullar and Fu, 2014). These epigenetic control mechanisms are represented in **Figure 2**, along with the description of the enzymes responsible for epigenetic reactions. Besides histone modification by acetylation and methylation, which will be extensively explored in this work, there are other posttranslational modifications (PTMs) that can occur in the genome and have an impact on the regulation of gene expression, including sumoylation, ubiquitination, phosphorylation, biotinylation, etc (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Zhao, Wang *et. al.*, 2015; Wong, Qian *et. al.*, 2017; Tiffon, 2018; Zhang and Shi, 2020).

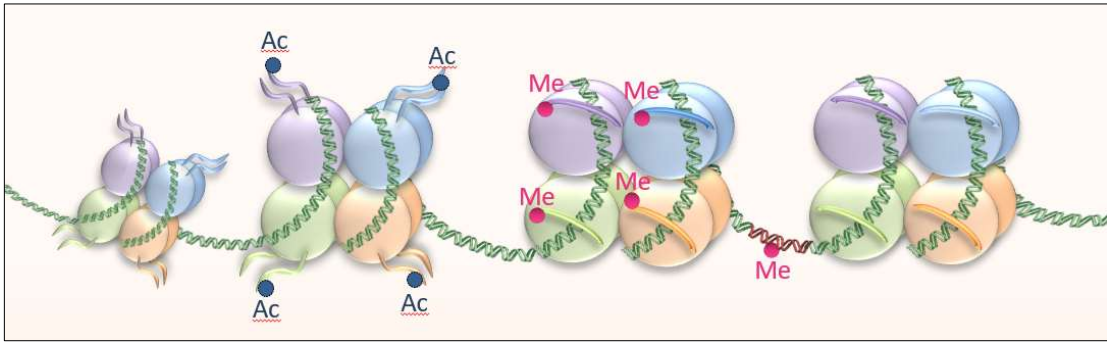


Figure 2. Epigenetic mechanisms of histones and DNA chemical modifications.

Histone acetylation (represented in blue circles) is responsible for loosening the chromatin structure, increasing its accessibility and leading to active transcription (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017). Histone acetyltransferases (HATs) are responsible for this mechanism, transferring an acetyl group to the lysine residues of histones tails, whereas histone deacetylases (HDACs) are responsible for removing acetyl groups, leading to gene repression (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Bultman, 2017; Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017). Histone methylation (represented in pink circles) is responsible for both genetic activation and suppression, depending on the number and position of the methyl groups (Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018). Methylation of arginine residues leads to transcription activation, whereas methylation of lysine residues can lead both to activation and suppression. However, in most cases methylation turns genes “off” while demethylation turns genes “on” (Zhao, Wang *et al.*, 2015). Histone methyltransferases (HMTs) are responsible for these mechanisms, transferring from one to three methyl groups to the residues of histone proteins. The reverse process is catalysed by histone demethylases (DMHTs), which remove methyl groups (Zhao, Wang *et al.*, 2015; Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018). DNA methylation occurs in cytosine residues and causes both the blockage to the access of RNA polymerases and transcriptional factors (Brown *et al.*, 2007) and the recruiting of epigenetic readers (Mahmood and Rabbani, 2019). The hyper methylation of the so called CpG islands located in gene promoter regions leads to gene silencing and inactivation. DNA methyltransferases (DNMTs) are responsible for the methylation mechanism (Hullar and Fu, 2014). The reverse process is catalysed by DNA demethylases.

Ac – acetyl; Me – methyl.

Conceptually, the epigenetic modifiers are also grouped into categories: writers (enzymes that introduce a chemical group – the epigenetic mark), readers (part of the transcriptional molecular machinery that recognizes the epigenetic mark), and erasers (enzymes that remove the chemical group). Writers like HATs, HMTs, and DNA methylases are responsible for adding epigenetic marks, whereas erasers remove those marks, being HDACs and DMHTs examples of these (Chiappinelli, Zahnow *et al.*, 2016; Cavalli and Heard, 2019). Readers recognise epigenetic marks, bind to the respective chromatin regions and summon agents of the chromatin remodelling complex. Depending on the context, both transcriptional repression and activation can result. Examples of readers are methyl-binding proteins (MBP), which recognise and bind to methylated CpGs (Mahmood and Rabbani, 2019).

Regarding histone tails acetylation and methylation, it occurs in specific aminoacid residues, often lysine and arginine residues, having different consequences depending on the modified residue and the epigenetic reaction (Zhao, Wang *et al.*, 2015; Bultman, 2017; Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017; Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018). For example, the methylation of lysine 4

in histone 3, or H3K4me, is related to transcription activation, whereas the trimethylation of lysine 9 in histone 3, or H3K9me3, is related to transcription repression (Zhao, Wang *et al.*, 2015). There are specific lysine residues that have received more attention, like lysine 4, 9, 27, 36 and 79, which can be found in histone 3 (Park, Kim *et al.*, 2020). Lysine residue 20 on histone 4 has also been extensively studied (Park, Kim *et al.*, 2020). These are just examples to illustrate that depending not only on the aminoacid residues but also on the degree of modification and the relative position of the aminoacid in the polypeptide chain the output in terms of gene expression may vary.

Histone modification by acetylation influences gene expression by modulating the interaction of the protein with DNA via modification of residues electrical charges. For example, lysine positively charged residues bind strongly to negatively charged DNA, shrinking nucleosomes and blocking the access of transcriptional factors. However, when lysine residues are acetylated their positive charges are eliminated and the interactions with the DNA decrease. Under these conditions, the chromatin structure is loosened and transcriptional factors gain access to DNA allowing active transcription to happen (Abdul, Yu *et al.*, 2017; Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017; Park, Kim *et al.*, 2020).

Regarding the enzymes mentioned in **Figure 2**, it should be noted that they constitute families and each of them is divided into several types. HATs, which are responsible for histone acetylation, consist of the p300/CBP, GCN5/PCAF and MYST type (Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018). HDACs are also divided into several families, being one key example the sirtuin family. There are seven types of sirtuins, SIRT1-SIRT7, from which SIRT1 and SIRT6 possess HDAC activity (Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018). Regarding HMTs, which participate in histone methylation, they consist of two enzyme families: Dot1-like proteins and SET-domain containing (Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017). DMHTs, which participate in histone demethylation, are generally divided into two types, the JumonjiC (JmjC) domain and lysine-specific demethylases (LSD). Regarding DNA demethylation enzymes, these have one well known group, the mammalian ten–eleven translocation methylcytosine dioxygenase (TET) family (Wang and Zhao, 2018).

Besides the chemical modification of histones and DNA, there are other epigenetic agents such as noncoding RNAs (ncRNAs) (Qin and Wade, 2018; Cavalli and Heard, 2019), which are RNAs strains that do not encode proteins and participate in biological processes, by regulating several pathways, including transcription and translation. NcRNAs include microRNAs (miRNAs), long non-coding RNAs, and other small RNAs (Qin and Wade, 2018). Amongst these, microRNAs (miRNAs) are the most studied, regulating gene expression at a post-transcriptional level (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Cavalli and Heard, 2019;

Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017; Qin and Wade, 2018). MiRNAs exert their effects by interacting with other molecules (notably proteins), by affecting mRNA stability or making imperfect base-pairing with mRNA at the three prime untranslated region (Shenderov, 2012; Hullar and Fu, 2014; Qin and Wade, 2018).

6.1 Epigenetic modifications and disease

Being part of the body's regulatory machinery, it is not a surprise that epigenetic dysregulation plays a significant role in triggering pathological processes (Zhao, Wang *et al.*, 2015; Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017). Recent studies connect aberrant epigenetic modifications to several diseases, most notably cancer (Bultman, 2017; Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017; Cavalli and Heard, 2019), autoimmune diseases (Zhao, Wang *et al.*, 2015; Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017; Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018), metabolic diseases (Cavalli and Heard, 2019; Allum and Grundberg, 2020), parasitic diseases (Laugier, Frade *et al.*, 2017) age related Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases (Cavalli and Heard, 2019), and neurological disorders (Cavalli and Heard, 2019). Regarding autoimmune diseases, there is an apparent close association between aberrant epigenetic modifications and both over-production of inflammatory cytokines and dysregulated immune homeostasis (Zhao, Wang *et al.*, 2015), and strong correlations exist between these processes and type I diabetes mellitus, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, systemic lupus erythematosus (Zhao, Wang *et al.*, 2015; Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017; Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018).

Mechanistically, the epigenetic events that can lead to an altered cell function and development of pathological state, include aberrant DNA methylation at gene's promoter regions, blockage to transcription factors access and inhibiting RNA polymerase II (Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017). This is clear in the case of human cancer, a widely studied pathology with several interfering factors, in which a huge diversity of aberrant epigenetic modifications were already found. The most observed are site-specific CpG promoter hypermethylation and global DNA hypomethylation (Thakur and Chen, 2019). DNMT isoforms, like DNMT1, DNMT3A and DNMT3B, are overexpressed, leading to aberrant DNA methylation of tumour suppressor gene's promoter regions (Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, West *et al.* suggest that cancer is characterized by the overexpression of HDAC from all classes, and, in fact, this process was observed in several cancer types, like breast, gastric, lung, colorectal, liver, prostate, among others (West and Johnstone, 2014). HDAC-mediated histone deacetylation leads to tumour suppressor genes transcription repression. Another commonly known alteration in cancer is the depletion of sirtuin 6 (which intermediates

H3K9 and H3K56 deacetylation and has a tumour suppressive role), leading to altered levels of acetylated histone 3 and the aberrant involvement of Myc and glycolytic target genes, resulting in tumorigenesis. (Cavalli and Heard, 2019; Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017; Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018). **Table 3** depicts examples of diseases, epigenetic fingerprints and their physiologic consequences.

Given that altered epigenetic marks, as regulated by the enzyme family of writers and erasers, are altered in disease states, it was soon realized that by modulating the activity of such writers and erasers the disease could eventually be prevented. Thus, epigenetic drugs have been developed as novel therapeutic approaches to correct aberrant epigenetic modifications. Just to give a well-known example, West *et al.*, explore the idea of HDAC inhibitors as anticancer agents (West and Johnstone, 2014).

6.2 Microbiota's metabolites interact with epigenetic agents

The enzymes responsible for epigenetic reactions use metabolites from several biochemical pathways (Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018; Qin and Wade 2018), including acetyl-CoA, ATP, flavin adenine dinucleotide (FAD), nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD⁺), S-adenosylmethionine (Akondy, Fitch *et al.*, 2017), succinate, fumarate, and α -ketoglutarate (α -KG) (Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018; Thakur and Chen, 2019). These metabolites act as substrates, allosteric modulators and enzyme co-factors. Interestingly enough, the steady state concentration of some of these compounds is dependent on diet availability (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017; Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018). **Figure 3** illustrates these notions.

For the purpose of the hypothesis formulated in this work, it is of relevance to note that, in addition to host metabolites, gut microbiota metabolites may also interfere with epigenetic modifications and affect epigenetic enzymes activity (Shenderov, 2012; Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017; Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018), thus constituting the mechanistic link between microbiota and epigenetics in the diet-microbiota-epigenetics triade. These metabolites include a series of low weight microbial molecules, that act as inductors, participants or modifiers in epigenetic activity. In addition to the already mentioned SCFAs, examples of these microbial molecules range from endotoxins, lectines, peptides and proteins, to co-factors, signalling molecules and enzymes (Shenderov, 2012).

Focusing on the enzymes responsible for histone acetylation and methylation and for DNA methylation, we highlight metabolites that act as enzyme substrates and might be of therapeutic interest.

Table 3. Aberrant epigenetic modifications related to disease.

Disease	Modifications	References
Colorectal cancer	Epigenetic mutation targeting several genes, like APC, GATA4, MLH1 and p16INK4a.	(Bultman, 2017)
	It has been reported that several miRNAs manage chromatin structure by regulating Polycomb group-related genes and HDAC; however, dysregulation of miRNAs can result in overexpression of HDACs in cancer cells. HDAC-1 is a target of miR-449a in prostate cancer, and downstream expression of miR-449a can influence the overexpression of HDAC-1.	(Abdul, Yu et al., 2017)
Lupus erythematosus	Overexpression of various genes in CD4 ⁺ T cells, like ITGAL, PRF1, TNFSF7, TNFSF5, leading to the activation of B cells and over production of autoantibodies.	(Zhao, Wang et al., 2015)
Rheumatoid arthritis	Patients with RA have lowered DNA methyltransferase expression in Treg cells and significantly reduced DNA methylation in the Foxp3 promoter. There are other interesting findings in the existing studies (Zhao, Wang et al. 2015).	(Zhao, Wang et al., 2015)
Type 1 diabetes mellitus (T1D)	Several aberrant DNA and histone modifications. Regarding DNA methylation, some examples are increased methylation in the insulin-like growth factor-binding protein 1 (IGFBP1) gene, leading to increased levels of circulating IGFBP1; hypermethylation of promoter regions of Interleukin-2 receptor alfa chain gene; hypermethylation of Foxp3 gene promoter; etc. The cellular consequences for these aberrant patterns are well known (Zhao, Wang et al. 2015). An example of histone aberrant epigenetic modifications are HDACs reduced expression in CD4 ⁺ T cells.	(Zhao, Wang et al., 2015)
Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2D)	H3K27me3 modification in myocytes, downregulating genes responsible for muscle function and upregulating genes involved in T2D inflammation. Several genes related to risk of T2D with aberrant DNA methylation, including FTO, KCNQ1, IRS1, TCFL2 and THADA.	(Stols-Gonçalves, Tristão et al., 2019)
Obesity	Several obesity-related genes with differential methylation, including CD36, CLDN1, HAND2, HOXC6, SORBS2 and PPARG; H3K9me in white adipose tissue regarding differentiation from white to brown adipose cells.	(Stols-Gonçalves, Tristão et al., 2019)
Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD)	PNPLA3 (patatin-like phospholipase domain containing 3) gene hypermethylation.	(Stols-Gonçalves, Tristão et al., 2019)

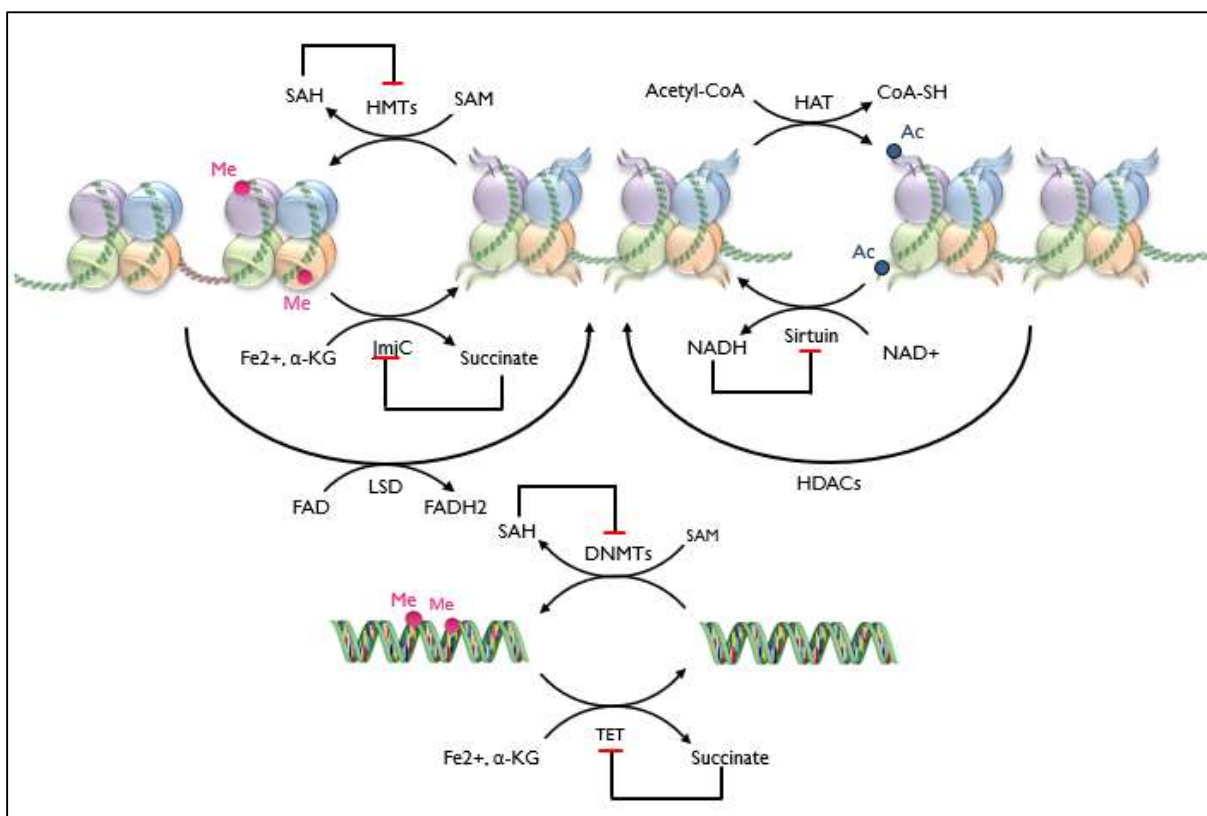


Figure 3. Epigenetic enzymes and their metabolic needs.

Several metabolites are used as substrates, allosteric modulators and enzymatic co-factors, as shown. SAH – S-adenosylmethionine reduced form; SAM – S-adenosylmethionine; HMTs – histone methyltransferases; HAT – histone acetyltransferases; Ac – Acetyl; Me – Methyl; α -KG – α -ketoglutarate; JmjC – JumonjiC; NADH – nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide reduced form; NAD⁺ – nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide; HDACs – histone deacetylases; FAD – flavin adenine dinucleotide; FADH₂ – flavin adenine dinucleotide reduced form; LSD – lysine-specific demethylases; DNMTs – DNA methyltransferases; TET – ten-eleven translocation methylcytosine dioxygenase family;

As shown in **Figure 3**, HATs use acetyl-CoA as a substrate for histone acetylation, transferring the acetyl group to lysine residues of histones. Therefore, the acetyl-CoA availability determines the histone acetylation level, a reaction associated with transcriptional activation and critical for rapidly proliferating cells (like cancer cells) (Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017; Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018; Thakur and Chen, 2019). On the other hand HDACs, notably sirtuins are known to use NAD⁺ in their deacetylation activity (Shenderov, 2012; Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018). As a result of this reaction, NAD⁺ turns into NADH, the reduced state of NAD⁺. Therefore, the NAD⁺/NADH ratio, which is closely associated with cellular energy status, is believed to positively regulate sirtuin activity (Shenderov, 2012; Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017). Low NAD⁺ concentration and a consequent decreased NAD⁺/NADH ratio have an inhibitory effect on sirtuins. A low NAD⁺/NADH ratio can be generated by high glycolytic activity, which happens in cancer cases and generates increased amounts of acetyl-CoA. These, in turn, contribute to increased HATs activity, a situation that combined with

repressed sirtuins, contributes to histone acetylation and ultimately to aberrant gene transcription (Wong, Qian *et. al.*, 2017; Wang, Long *et. al.*, 2018).

For the purpose of this work, it is worth mentioning that gut microbiota are considered to be an important source acetyl group donor for acetyl-CoA formation and acetylation reaction (Shenderov, 2012). Microbial sources for acetyl-CoA formation include β -alanine, cysteine and vitamin B5, which can be both generated by the microbiota and found in food (Shenderov, 2012). Regarding other microbial metabolites, butyrate and sulforaphane, which were previously mentioned here as agents for cancer therapeutics, inhibit HDAC (Shenderov, 2012; Bultman, 2017; Tiffon, 2018; Wang, Long *et. al.*, 2018). By accumulating in the nucleus of human colon cancer cells and inhibiting genetic expression, these metabolites lead to cellular apoptosis (Bultman, 2017; Wang, Long *et. al.*, 2018). Moreover, sulforaphane, which is formed after microbial metabolization of garlic and cruciferous vegetables (Shenderov, 2012) has been recognized as a DNA demethylating agent in breast cancer cell lines (Hullar and Fu, 2014). HDAC inhibiting activity has also been assigned to diallyl disulphide, a garlic compound (Tiffon, 2018). Urolithins too play a role as anticancerigenous agents by diminishing inflammation. The underlying mechanisms include reduction of HAT activity in stimulated immune cells (Hullar and Fu, 2014).

DNMTs and HMTs use S-adenosylmethionine (Akondy, Fitch *et. al.*, 2017), which works as a methyl donor group (Wong, Qian *et. al.*, 2017; Wang, Long *et. al.*, 2018; Thakur and Chen, 2019). After the methylation reaction, SAM turns into its reduced form SAH, which potently inhibits DNMTs and HMTs. It follows that, SAM/SAH ratio influences methyltransferase activity (Wong, Qian *et. al.*, 2017) and an excessive SAM availability can contribute to CpG sites hypermethylation, resulting in inappropriate gene silencing (Wong, Qian *et. al.*, 2017; Thakur and Chen 2019). Again, gut microbiota play a significant role in histone and DNA methylation via production of several metabolites that act both as substrates and cofactors for the methylation reaction as methyl donors (Shenderov, 2012; Chen, Sun *et. al.*, 2017). Examples of these are betaine, choline and methionine, which act as substrates, and folate and B group vitamins, which act as cofactors (Shenderov, 2012). An insufficient provision of methyl groups and cofactors for the methylation reaction leads to DNA hypomethylation and increased risk of malignancy and cerebral, coronary, hepatic and vascular diseases (Shenderov, 2012).

Regarding DMHTs reaction in **Figure 3**, LSD is a FAD-dependent enzyme. The JmjC domain enzymes, they require Fe^{2+} and α -KG for their oxidative demethylation reaction (Wong, Qian *et. al.*, 2017; Wang, Long *et. al.*, 2018). TET family, which is responsible for DNA demethylation, are as well oxygenases that depend on α -KG, Fe^{2+} and O_2 to perform

the methylation reaction (Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017; Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018). Curiously, the metabolites fumarate and succinate act as α -KG competitive antagonists for inhibiting JmjC domain enzymes and TET family (Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017; Thakur and Chen 2019).

From the above discussion, it can be surmised that knowing in detail which and how metabolites act on specific metabolic enzymes opens a pathway for selecting metabolite rich diets and integrating the diet-microbiota-epigenetics triade as a therapeutic approach.

7 THE THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF THE DIET-MICROBIOTA-EPIGENETICS TRIADE CONCEPT

As discussed in this review, gut microbiota has measurable effects on the host's physiology and these effects can be modulated through dietary and probiotic shaping. In close association with this pathway, it is envisaged that epigenetics might be a key process bridging diet-induced microbiota changes and host physiopathological state. Given this conceptual background, it is suggested that the selective modulation of the components of the triade, affecting the dynamic relationship among diet, gut microbiota and epigenetics, might constitute a novel therapeutic strategy in the prevention of disease. As discussed, several studies support the dynamic relationship among diet, microbiota and epigenetics (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Bultman, 2017, ; Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017). For instance, it is known that the gut microbiota are shaped by diet (Singh, Chang *et al.*, 2017; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019; Zmora, Suez *et al.*, 2019) and that gut microbiota has a modulatory role in epigenetic-induced changes in gene expression of the host (Shenderov, 2012; Hullar and Fu, 2014; Bultman, 2017; Cuevas-Sierra, Ramos-Lopez *et al.*, 2019).

Therefore, the concept of epigenetic drugs is emerging with a high therapeutic potential associated (Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018). Several studies have already focused on how different diets affect human health from a molecular mechanism viewpoint (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Singh, Chang *et al.*, 2017; Tiffon, 2018; Zmora, Suez *et al.*, 2019) and the healthier effects of Mediterranean diet over Western diet is a prime example. Western-style diet, which is commonly known to predispose regular consumers to health problems, is rich in saturated and trans fats, sugar, salt, animal protein (mostly red meat), and low in fibre, fresh fruit and vegetables, seafood, and mono and polyunsaturated fats. The ingestion of these macronutrients is known to increase the gut populations of *Bacteroides* and *Enterobacteria*, and decrease beneficial *Bifidobacterium*, *Bacteroidetes*, *Firmicutes*, *Eubacterium* and *Lactobacillus species*. As already discussed, increasing of specific bacterial populations

might lead to the production of metabolites with harmful effects. The reverse relationship is also verified, being the decrease of beneficial bacteria associated with less production of so-called healthy metabolites. Consequently, problems like non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, cancer, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes mellitus, inflammation and obesity are a major health concern in western societies (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017; Tiffon, 2018; Zmora, Suez *et. al.*, 2019).

On the other hand, the Mediterranean diet which is considered a healthy balanced diet, rich in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids, fiber, polyphenols, vegetable source protein, fresh fruits and vegetables. The intake of fish, poultry and red wine is moderated. Products like milk derivatives, saturated fats, red meat, processed meat, and sweets are consumed at low doses. It is also accepted that Mediterranean diet is associated with the production of gut microbiota metabolites that exert beneficial effects in the host. This diet increases populations of *Bifidobacteria*, *Lactobacilli*, *Eubacteria*, *Prevotella* and other *Firmicutes*. Besides producing metabolites of interest, like the already explored SCFAs, these bacteria are beneficial for other effects they have on the host. For example, in mice, lactic acid bacteria and *Bifidobacteria* downregulated T effector-mediated inflammatory responses and upregulated anti-inflammatory T regulatory cell expression, and *Lactobacillus spp.*, thus alleviating obesity-associated metabolic complications (Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017). As a corollary of these healthy effects, this diet is commonly associated with lower rates of cardiovascular and heart disease, cancer incidence, and overall mortality (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017; Tiffon, 2018; Zmora, Suez *et. al.*, 2019).

Regarding the modulation of diet-microbiota-epigenetics axis, there are interesting cases worth being explored in some detail. One example comes from gut bacteria that produce SCFA's. It has been shown that the population of these bacteria increases with specific nutritional behaviour, including high consumption of plant protein, unsaturated fats, fiber and polyphenols, among other compounds (Tilg and Moschen, 2015; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et. al.*, 2019) and, noteworthy, it is commonly known that this nutritional pattern is linked to a healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, as discussed above, it is known that gut microbiota SCFAs exert several physiologic effects in the host, encompassing barrier function enhancement, pathologic microbes growing inhibition, and modulation gene expression via epigenetic mechanisms that include HDAC inhibition (Hullar and Fu, 2014; Bultman, 2017; Wang and Zhao, 2018). HDAC inhibition is of great interest from a therapeutic viewpoint as it inhibits gene expression in cancer cells (Bultman, 2017; Wang, Long *et. al.*, 2018), being butyrate the gut microbiota-derived SCFA that stands out. Indeed, while in normal cells butyrate undergoes mitochondrial β -oxidation, in cancer cells it does

not, partially because cancer cells under the Warburg effect, rely at a great extent on aerobic glycolysis to obtain ATP. Under such conditions, butyrate might accumulate in the nucleus, where it functions as a HDAC inhibitor. The relevance of this mechanism is further apparent when considering that, in cancer cells, HDACs are overexpressed, silencing important life-cycle regulation genes (Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017). Thus HDAC inhibition by butyrate has a positive outcome in terms of inhibition of cell proliferation and induction of apoptosis (Bultman, 2017; Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017).

Still on the side of disease management, but regarding intake control, we suggest that TMAO is a metabolite where research should focus on. TMAO is mostly produced by gut bacteria that are present in people enjoying a omnivorous behaviour, and increases specifically following high consumption of red meat (Koeth, Wang *et al.*, 2013; Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et al.*, 2019; Zmora, Suez *et al.*, 2019). Significantly, it is well known that red meat consumption is associated with a less healthy lifestyle and several studies have established disease-promoting TMAO effects, notably in atherosclerosis development and thrombosis risk grow (Koeth, Wang *et al.*, 2013; Singh, Chang *et al.*, 2017; Wang and Zhao, 2018; Zmora, Suez *et al.*, 2019). Mechanistically, TMAO effects rely on its ability to interact with several molecules. Regarding atherosclerosis, it activates mitogen-activated protein kinase in endothelial cells and vascular smooth muscle cells, and also nuclear factor- κ B, triggering inflammatory gene expression and leucocytes adhesion to endothelial cells. TMAO also activates NLRP3 inflammasome, decreases the expression of key bile acid biosynthesis enzymes and increases foam cell formation (Wang and Zhao. 2018). Regarding thrombosis risk, TMAO increases calcium release by the endoplasmic reticulum in platelet cells, leading to their aggregation (Wang and Zhao. 2018).

When looking for epigenetic targets of interest, a notion we have addressed above, one should bear in mind that epigenetic enzymes suffer regulation at several levels, including the modulatory action of diet-dependent substances. Indeed, there are crucial nutrients, like oxygen, glutamine and glucose from which that they depend on. Metabolic manipulation can consequently modulate epigenetic activity (Wang, Long *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, under pathologic states, some of these enzymes are overexpressed and/or have their activity modified (Zhao, Wang *et al.*, 2015; Bultman, 2017; Chen, Sun *et al.*, 2017; Wong, Qian *et al.*, 2017; Cavalli and Heard, 2019). We, thus, suggest that changing the concentration of the metabolites might modulate the activity of epigenetic enzymes with a positive health impact.

This conceptual approach can be illustrated in the case of cancer. Interestingly, as it has already been mentioned, cancer cells have a different metabolic profile when compared to normal cells, exhibiting higher glycolytic fluxes largely due to the Warburg effect (Wong,

Qian *et. al.*, 2017; Thakur and Chen, 2019). It was also mentioned that having higher concentrations of butyrate cancer cells undergo HDAC activity (Bultman, 2017; Tiffon, 2018; Wang, Long *et. al.*, 2018). Accordingly, there are studies supporting that treatment with butyrate and other HDAC inhibitors promotes the reversion on cancer cells glycolytic phenotype (Wong, Qian *et. al.*, 2017). These studies support the notion that aiming for a specific epigenetic target and modulating diet according to it is of potential interest for treatment prevention and management of cancer.

Although we focus on diet-dependent gut microbiota shaping, it should be mentioned that in addition to this approach, there are studies exploring treatment approaches by means of prebiotics and probiotics supplementation (Chen, Sun *et. al.*, 2017, ; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017; Zmora, Suez *et. al.*, 2019). Briefly, prebiotics consist of non-digestible dietary components that selectively stimulate the development and/or activity of health-promoting bacteria in the large intestine (Markowiak and Śliżewska, 2017; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017; Zmora, Suez *et. al.*, 2019). Probiotics integrate bacterial strains that aim at filling the gut with beneficial commensal bacteria, granting favourable metabolic results to the host (Zmora, Suez *et. al.*, 2019). The therapeutic approaches using both, prebiotics and probiotics, revealed encouraging results. As an example, concerning the first group, it has been generally suggested that administration of prebiotics based in inulin, fructo-oligosaccharides (FOS) and galacto-oligosaccharides (GOS) can boost the abundance of *Bifidobacterium* and *Lactobacillus spp.* (Zmora, Suez *et. al.*, 2019), which have been shown here to have beneficial effects. Resistant starch and whole grain barley seem to increase the presence of *E.rectale*, *Roseburia*, and *Ruminococcus* (Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017) and prebiotics based on arabino-oligosaccharides (AOS), FOS and polydextrose can reduce *Clostridium* and *Enterococcus* species (Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017). Regarding probiotics, supplementing healthy overweighted adults with strains of *Bifidobacteria*, *Lactobacilli* and *Streptococcus* resulted in the increase of population of selective gut microorganisms, particularly the administrated strains and decrease of coliforms and *Escherichia Coli*. These individuals had their levels of triglycerides, total cholesterol, and other obesity associated parameters reduced. On top of this, insulin sensitivity and beneficial HDL-cholesterol improved (Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017). These findings reinforce the notion that it is possible to achieve a desired physiological response by shaping microbiotic population. It should be noted that some of the compounds that constitute prebiotics and probiotics are part of food ingredients of easy and daily access. Sources of prebiotics involve AOS, FOS, GOS, xylooligosaccharides (XOS), fructans, polydextrose, inulins, soybeans, unrefined wheat and barley and raw oats (Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017). These compounds can be found in dietary fibre, fruits and vegetables (Markowiak

and Śliżewska, 2017; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017). Probiotics can be found in fermented milk products and yoghurt (Markowiak and Śliżewska, 2017; Singh, Chang *et. al.*, 2017). Most part of this food components integrate the Mediterranean diet and might contribute for the healthy effects of this diet, as discussed above.

Overall, the concepts and studies discussed above support that by identifying specific targets in disease, the modulation of diet-microbiota-epigenetics axis is of great interest in terms of health-promoting effects, representing an accessible and practical way for disease prevention and management amongst the population. Preliminary studies already addressed this strategy. Interesting examples include individuals with family medical history of atherosclerosis and the beneficial effect of TMAO levels management through diet (Kolodziejczyk, Zheng *et. al.*, 2019). Wang and Zhao supported the consumption of anthocyanins as stimulators of *Bifidobacterium spp.* and *Lactobacillus spp.* growth and their microbiotic metabolite gallic acid, decreasing harmful *Clostridium histolyticum* (Wang and Zhao, 2018). Cuevas-Sierra *et. al.* reported that supplementing a normal diet with 22g of resistant starch and 25g of nonstarch polysaccharide increases abundance of *Rominooccus bromii*, resulted in high production of SCFAs, increased butyrate production and facilitated carbohydrates fermentation (Cuevas-Sierra, Ramos-Lopez *et. al.*, 2019). As discussed above, butyrate is considered an agent for cancer therapeutics and SCFAs have several beneficial effects on the body. Finally, Zmora *et. al.* reviewed a myriad of dietary components (from red meat, to fat and fiber) and potential effects they might have on decreasing or increasing disease risk, having microbiota as an intermediate (Zmora, Suez *et. al.*, 2019). Tiffon reviewed dietary components that may have protective effects against cancer (Tiffon, 2018).

8 SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In conclusion, gut microbiota are in close contact with the environment and act as a bridge between human diet and the body. Therefore, gut microbiota can be shaped by dietary behaviour, translating the diet-induced changes to the host by sending messages via specific metabolites and other substances that modulate metabolic and physiological pathways in the body. Noteworthy, part of these gut-derived signals are interpreted via epigenetic mechanisms and the resulting physiologic expression can interfere both for health and disease states of the host. Thus, whereas many pathological states have inherent epigenetic causes, external factors, such as gut microbiota metabolites, can impact on the progression of disease.

Although there is plenty of evidence connecting diet-dependent microbiota shaping and epigenetic modifications, the underlying mechanisms remain largely unclear in humans. It must be kept in mind that, as in the case of drugs, there are many factors at an individual level that can interfere with dietary responses. Therefore, more studies are required in humans, particularly studies focusing on individual responses to similar diets. The more distinguishing factors are identified, the deeper will be the knowledge of human responses to particular diets.

Regarding the second link of the diet-microbiota-epigenetics axis, a better understanding of the food components that work as direct agents, triggering the microbiotic and epigenetic activity is of great importance. Such a piece of information together with the knowledge of crucial epigenetic targets for certain pathological states establishes the conceptual background that opens the possibility to manage epigenetic activity via a properly designed diet.

The clear understanding of the abovementioned dynamic relationships will permit a deeper management of health and disease issues and the implementation of innovative therapeutic strategies.

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