

1 **Population Pharmacokinetics of Liposomal Amphotericin B in Immunocompromised**
2 **Children**

3 Running Title: Pharmacokinetics of liposomal amphotericin in children

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36 **Conflicts of Interest**

37 WWH has acted as consultant, received research support for Merck, Pfizer Inc., Astellas,

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47

48 **Keywords**

49 Liposomal, amphotericin B, children, pediatrics, pharmacokinetics, invasive fungal disease

50

51 **Abstract**

52 **Background** Liposomal amphotericin B (LAmB) is widely used in the treatment of invasive
53 fungal disease (IFD) in adults and children. There are relatively limited PK data to inform
54 optimal dosing in children that achieves systemic drug exposures comparable to those of
55 adults.

56 **Objectives** To describe the pharmacokinetics of LAmB in children aged 1-17 years with
57 suspected or documented IFD.

58 **Methods** Thirty-five children were treated with LAmB at dosages of 2.5-10 mg kg⁻¹ daily.
59 Samples were taken at baseline and at 0.5-2.0 hourly intervals for twenty-four hours after
60 receipt of the first dose (n=35 patients) and on the final day of therapy (n=25 patients).
61 LAmB was measured using high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC). The
62 relationship between drug exposure and development of toxicity was explored.

63 **Results** An evolution in PK was observed during the course of therapy resulting in a
64 proportion of patients (n=13) having significantly higher maximum serum concentration
65 (C_{max}) and area under the concentration time curve (AUC_{0-24}) later in the course of therapy,
66 without evidence of drug accumulation (C_{min} accumulation ratio, AR < 1.2). The fit of a 2-
67 compartment model incorporating weight and an exponential decay function describing
68 volume of distribution best described the data. There was a statistically significant
69 relationship between mean AUC_{0-24} and probability of nephrotoxicity (OR 2.37; 95% CI
70 1.84-3.22, p=0.004).

71 **Conclusions** LAmB exhibits nonlinear pharmacokinetics. A third of children appear to
72 experience a time-dependent change in PK, which is not explained by weight, maturation or
73 observed clinical factors.

74 **Introduction**

75 The small unilamellar liposomal formulation of amphotericin B (LAmB;
76 AmBisome®) is widely used for the treatment of invasive fungal disease (IFD) in adults and
77 children. This compound has been available for over two decades and is a first line agent in
78 the treatment of serious opportunistic diseases that include invasive aspergillosis, invasive
79 candidiasis, cryptococcal meningoencephalitis, and mucormycosis. (1-4)

80 Despite extensive clinical experience, many of the details relating to the underlying
81 pharmacological properties of LAmB remain unclear. A limited number of datasets and
82 population pharmacokinetic (PK) models have been reported for LAmB. (5-7) These analyses
83 were based on data gathered from patients receiving relatively low dosages and exclusively
84 sampled early in the course of therapy. There are very limited data reporting the PK of
85 LAmB in pediatric populations.

86 A better understanding of the pharmacological properties of LAmB remains a priority
87 and would enable optimal dosing, particularly for special populations such as infants and
88 children. Dosages ranging from 2.5-10 mg kg⁻¹ per day were studied and each patient was
89 intensively sampled. The individual PK profiles for a sub-population of participants (n=25)
90 were compared at the commencement and end of therapy.

91

92 **Materials & Methods**

93 ***Patients, Antifungal Regimen***

94 This study was designed as a prospective, multi-center, open-label phase II clinical
95 trial. Study protocol approval was obtained from the Ethics Committees of the National
96 Cancer Institute (Bethesda MD, USA); Children's National Medical Center (Washington DC,
97 USA) and Georgetown University Medical Center (Washington DC, USA). Informed consent
98 was obtained prior to enrolment in each case. A total of 35 children with a diagnosis of
99 confirmed or suspected IFD were enrolled. Patients received LAmB infused over one hour at
100 dosages of 2.5, 5.0, 7.5, or 10.0 mg kg⁻¹ daily (n= 9, 13, 8, and 8, respectively). Two patients
101 received LAmB as treatment for more than one discrete clinical episode requiring antifungal
102 therapy. Patients undergoing multiple discrete episodes were assigned the same identification
103 number on each occasion and were handled using the dosing reset function in Pmetrics.

104 LAmB (AmBisome®; Gilead Sciences, Inc., Foster City, California) was supplied as
105 a lyophilized powder and stored at 2-8°C until use. Powder (50 mg) was reconstituted with
106 12.5 mL of sterile water to a concentration of 4 mg⁻¹ mL, and then further diluted in 5%
107 dextrose. Reconstituted drug was used within 6 hours.

108 ***Pharmacokinetic Sampling***

109 PK samples were obtained on the first and last day of therapy. The first day of LAmB
110 administration was defined as day one. Heparinized whole-blood samples (0.6-1 mL) were
111 collected by peripheral intravenous catheter. Samples were obtained prior to administration,
112 and at 0.5-2.0 hourly intervals for 24 hours following the start of each infusion. A total of 7-
113 12 samples were obtained per patient within each sampling period (total sampling blood
114 volumes < 3 mL/kg within 24 hours). Sampling was repeated in sixteen patients on the last

115 day of therapy (12-41 days) using the same sampling schedule. Plasma fractions were
116 separated by centrifugation at 1,500 g for 10 min at 4°C and stored at -80°C until analysis.

117 Concentrations of LAmB in plasma were determined by a high-performance liquid
118 chromatographic assay. (8) Briefly, total active drug and internal standard, 3-nitrophenol,
119 were extracted in methanol and separated by reversed-phase chromatography. The separation
120 was performed isocratically using a Supelcosil ABZ+Plus analytical column (3 µm particle
121 size, 150 mm x 4.6 mm internal diameter; Supelco, Bellefonte, Pennsylvania), coupled by a
122 Keysone C18 guard column (3 µm particle size, 7.5 mm x 4.6 mm 7.5 by 4.6 mm; Western
123 Analytical, Murrieta, California). The mobile phase, consisting of 10 mM sodium acetate
124 buffer, including 10 mM EDTA (pH 3.6) and acetonitrile (650:350, vol/vol), was delivered at
125 a flow rate of 1.0 ml/min using a Spectra-Physics Model 250 pump (Thermo Separations, San
126 Jose, California). UV absorbency peaks were detected at a wavelength of 406 nm using a
127 Waters Model 440 UV-VIS detector (Waters Corp, Milford, Massachusetts). Two
128 overlapping standard curves were used: 0.05 to 20 µg/ml and 0.5 to 200 µg/ml. The assay was
129 linear over a range of 0.05-20 and 0.5 to 200 µg/mL ($r^2 > 0.995$). Intra- and inter-day
130 coefficients of variation were 9.5 and 7.0%, and 5.4 and 6.0%, respectively, and the limit of
131 quantification was 0.05 µg/ml. The average recovery was 90.5% at the concentrations of
132 quality control samples with a standard deviation of 6.2%.

133

134 ***Population Pharmacokinetic Modeling***

135 Data were analysed using a non-parametric methodology within the program Pmetrics
136 (version 1.2.6; University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA). (9) The observed data
137 were weighted using the inverse of the estimated assay variance.

138 Structural models were constructed and used to fit patient data. One-, two- and three-
139 compartment models with zero-order drug input into the central compartment and both first-
140 order and nonlinear (Michaelis-Menten) elimination from the central compartment were
141 explored. A proportion of patients had concentration-time profiles that indicated an intra-
142 individual change in PK during the course of therapy (n=13; 52%). Affected individuals
143 demonstrated a marked increase in excursion of drug concentrations from C_{max} to C_{min} and a
144 disproportionate increase in AUC_{0-24} (Figure 1). This change was not associated with rising
145 trough concentrations, suggesting the phenomenon did not result from drug accumulation
146 resulting from conventional nonlinear (Michaelis-Menten) kinetics ($AR < 1.2$). Inspection of
147 the data suggested the clearance of drug was the same in both sampling periods. Hence, the
148 following structural model that allowed Vd to change with time was explored. In this model,
149 volume contracted with time and was described using an exponential decay function.
150 Clearance (Cl) was scaled according to weight using a standard 0.75 power function. The
151 differential equations describing the final model were as follows:

$$\frac{\delta X(1)}{\delta t} = R(1) - (Cl * (\frac{wt}{70})^{0.75} / Vd) * X(1) - K_{cp} * X(1) + K_{pc} * X(2)$$

$$\frac{\delta X(2)}{\delta t} = K_{cp} * X(1) - K_{pc} * X(2)$$

$$\frac{\delta Vd}{\delta t} = -Vin * K + Vfin$$

152

153 Where: $X(1)$ and $X(2)$ represent the total (bound and free) amount of LAMB (mg) in the
154 central (c) and peripheral (p) compartments, respectively. $R(1)$, K_{cp} and K_{pc} represent the
155 rate of infusion into the central compartment ($mg\ h^{-1}$) and first-order inter-compartmental rate
156 constants, respectively. Clearance (Cl) is normalised according to a 70 kg individual and
157 allometrically scaled. The volume of the central compartment (Vc) is described by an

158 exponential decay function in which initial volume (V_{in}) reduced over time according to a
159 rate constant (K) to a final volume (V_{fin}).

160 The goodness-of-fit of each model to the data was assessed by visual inspection of the
161 observed-predicted values and following linear regression of the observed-predicted values
162 both before after the Bayesian step. The coefficient of determination (r^2), slope and intercept
163 of each regression were calculated. Statistical comparison of models was based on likelihood
164 ratio, in which twice the likelihood difference was evaluated against a χ^2 distribution with an
165 appropriate number of degrees of freedom. In addition, predictive performance was assessed
166 according to weighted-mean error (a measure of bias) and bias-adjusted weighted-mean-
167 squared error (a measure of precision).

168 The final selected model was validated using a nonparametric bootstrap resampling
169 technique. Three hundred bootstrap datasets were constructed based on random sampling
170 with replacement using ADAPT 5. Measures of central tendency and dispersion and the 95%
171 confidence interval (CI) for each parameter value were calculated and compared with
172 estimates from original data. The selected structural model was then implemented within the
173 simulation module of ADAPT 5. (10) Bayesian estimates of the PK parameters for each
174 patient were used to calculate simulated peak plasma concentration (C_{max}), trough plasma
175 concentration (C_{min}), and area under the concentration time curve over 24 hours (AUC_{0-24}) at
176 defined therapeutic time points.

177 Potential relationships between measures of drug exposure (C_{max} , C_{min} , absolute
178 LAmB dosage, weight adjusted dosage, AUC_{0-24} , and mean AUC_{0-24}) and toxicity were
179 explored. Toxicity was defined as changes from baseline values at commencement of therapy
180 as follows: nephrotoxicity as an increase in serum creatinine (SCr) of ≥ 0.5 mg/dL or
181 doubling of baseline value, hypokalemia as a fall in potassium of ≤ 3.0 mmol/L or $\geq 50\%$ from

182 baseline, anemia as an hemoglobin of ≤ 8.0 g/dL, and hepatotoxicity as a rise in bilirubin by
183 ≥ 1.5 mg/dL or AST or ALT ≥ 3 times above baseline. A conservative definition was used to
184 define change in biological parameters in order to overcome variability in sampling between
185 patients; pre-treatment value was subtracted from the highest measurement observed for each
186 patient during the treatment course.

187

188 **Results**

189 The patient demographics of the study cohort are summarized in table 1. The mean \pm
190 SD weight was 26.9 ± 14.0 kg with a range of 8.8-67.5 kg. There was wide variability in the
191 duration of therapy: the mean \pm SD was 11.9 ± 9.41 days of therapy with a range of 1-41
192 days. The most common underlying diagnosis was hematological malignancy (n =21). Nine
193 patients had undergone allogeneic hematopoietic stem-cell transplantation (HSCT) and 23
194 received concomitant antineoplastic chemotherapy. The majority of patients received LAmB
195 as empirical therapy for suspected IFI (n=31). Seven patients received treatment for
196 confirmed IFI. There were two cases of invasive aspergillosis due to *A. fumigatus*, and a
197 further case that developed during treatment with LAmB that was classified as a
198 breakthrough infection. Three patients had invasive candidiasis: one central-line infection
199 and one severe oesophagitis due to *C. albicans*, and one case of candidaemia caused by *C.*
200 *parapsilosis*. There was a single case of cryptococcal meningoencephalitis complicating HIV
201 infection. Clinical success was defined according to clinical, radiological, and mycological
202 response during the study period plus relapse-free survival at 2 months after the end of
203 therapy. Clinical success was reported in 76% of probable (n=29) and 43% (n=3) of proven
204 fungal infections.

205 The Bayesian estimates for clearance (Cl) obtained from standard two-compartment models
206 for each patient were plotted against weight. A relationship between the \log_{10} -transformed
207 estimates was apparent. The performance of models incorporating an allometric power
208 function was therefore investigated using a scaling exponent fixed at 0.75. No significant
209 relationship was found between Bayesian estimates for volume (Vd) and weight. Differences
210 in clinical factors that might be predicted to alter the PK of LAmB were explored. No
211 significant differences were identified in liver function, serum albumin, white blood cell
212 (WBC) count and total protein concentrations, use of parenteral nutrition and concomitant
213 steroids. A relatively poor fit of standard model structures was apparent (see, for example
214 performance of a standard two-compartment model, figure 2). Conventional compartmental
215 model structures failed to account for the widening excursion of drug concentrations
216 observed in a portion of patients. The parameter estimates for the base and final model are
217 summarized in table 2. The fit of the selected model incorporating a function describing
218 contraction in Vd was satisfactory ($r^2 = 0.90$), and compared favourably to a standard 2-
219 compartment model. The final model consisted of eight support points. Measures of bias and
220 precision were acceptable (see figure 2). The bootstrap mean and 95% CI values for
221 parameters closely approximated the estimates obtained from the final model (table 3),
222 indicating that the parameter estimates from the final model were robust. Both the mean and
223 median parameter values resulted in comparable intercept, slopes and overall r^2 values. The
224 log-likelihood value for the final model was significantly better (more positive) than for the
225 standard 2-compartment model ($\chi^2 = 48.95$, $p = <0.001$). Figure 3 shows the simulated
226 concentration-time profiles and raw data for two examples of patients that exhibited time-
227 dependent and time-independent changes in PK profiles.

228 Dose-exposure relationships were further explored. No correlation between absolute
229 dose and exposure (C_{\max} , C_{\min} or AUC_{0-24}) was observed, an expected finding given the

230 significant variability in weight within the study population. Significant relationships
231 between dose per-unit-weight and exposure were observed. Plots of dose-normalized C_{max}
232 and AUC_{0-24} suggest nonlinearity (figure 4), although a dosing threshold associated with a
233 discrete change in exposure was not observed.

234 Transient renal impairment and hypokalemia were common, occurring in 46% (n=16)
235 and 23% (n=8) of patients, respectively. A significant correlation between steady state
236 exposure (AUC_{0-24}) and change in serum creatinine (ΔSCr) was observed (Figure 5, $r=0.594$,
237 $p=0.015$). A statistically significant relationship between mean AUC_{0-24} and probability of
238 developing nephrotoxicity (OR 2.37; 95% CI 1.84-3.22, $p=0.004$). There was insufficient
239 clinical information to explore the impact of other potential determinants of renal impairment
240 (for example disease severity and concomitant nephrotoxic drugs) in this study cohort. No
241 significant correlations were found between LAmB exposure (in terms of absolute dose,
242 weight adjusted dose, AUC_{0-24} or mean AUC_{0-24}) and other toxicity including hypokalemia,
243 anemia, and hepatotoxicity.

244

245 **Discussion**

246 Liposomal amphotericin B is used extensively for the treatment of IFD. Dosages of
247 3-6 $mg\ kg^{-1}$ are approved in the U.S.A and the E.U. in both adults and children. These
248 dosages are not based on an in-depth knowledge of the pharmacology of the drug, but rather
249 results from preclinical in vivo studies and clinical trials that have attempted to identify
250 regimens that appear safe and effective. There continues to be considerable uncertainty
251 regarding the lowest effective dosage of LAmB that achieves adequate antifungal effect. As
252 a result, dosages of 1-15 $mg\ kg^{-1}$ have been studied in a range of clinical settings including

253 empirical therapy, invasive aspergillosis, invasive candidiasis, and cryptococcal
254 meningoencephalitis. (11-14)

255 Phase I/II clinical studies of LAmB in children and adults have highlighted variable,
256 dose-dependent PK. Children and adults receiving LAmB at conservative daily doses of 1-3
257 mg kg⁻¹ exhibit linear PK that are described by standard two- or three-compartment models
258 with first-order elimination. (6, 7)(5) Limited data suggest nonlinearity at higher dosages.
259 Walsh *et al.* observed time-dependent nonlinear PK and an apparent paradoxical dose-
260 dependent exposure plateau in adults receiving daily dosages of 7.5-15 mg kg⁻¹. (3) The data
261 from paediatric patients in this study similarly suggests that a proportion of patients exhibit
262 time-dependent nonlinear PK. When the concentration-time profiles of patients exhibiting
263 nonlinear PK are examined a significant excursion in C_{min}-C_{min} is observed, a change not
264 associated with a proportional increase in half-life that would be expected with classical
265 nonlinear (Michaelis-Menten) clearance, but rather appears to reflect a contraction in the
266 volume of distribution during the course of therapy. Whereas the limited data from adults has
267 suggested a paradoxical dose-dependent reduction in exposure at doses >7.5 mg kg⁻¹, in
268 children higher doses appear to be associated with an increased probability of nonlinearity.
269 The reason for this difference is unclear and warrants further study.

270 High-density lipoproteins (HDL) mediated opsonization of lipid formulations of
271 amphotericin B within plasma has been shown to drive uptake into mononuclear phagocytes
272 and deposition within the liver and spleen. (15-18) Hong *et al.* reported a negative correlation
273 between Bayesian estimates volume of distribution and the fraction of HDL-associated
274 LAmB in 21 children and adolescence receiving LAmB at daily doses of 0.8-6 mg kg⁻¹. We
275 hypothesize that variable HDL saturation and/or phagocyte uptake may be the
276 pathophysiological processes driving the inter-individual variability observed in this study.
277 However, many patients in this small clinical cohort exhibited significant fluctuations in

278 hematological parameters such as WBC count over the course of antifungal therapy,
279 primarily due to underlying hemato-oncological diagnoses, and we were not able to further
280 characterise relationships between specific hematological parameters and volume contraction.
281 Other significant data such as plasma HDL concentrations were not quantified in this study.
282 This is an interesting hypothesis that warrants further study in experimental models and/or as
283 part of larger clinical trials. LAmB is generally well tolerated with a significantly improved
284 toxicity profile when compared to conventional amphotericin B deoxycholate. (14) Dosages
285 of LAmB as high as 15 mg kg⁻¹ daily have been reportedly well tolerated in adults. (3) A
286 number of studies including one large RCT have, however, described dose-dependent toxicity
287 with significantly higher rates of renal impairment and hypokalemia at dosages at or above 10
288 mg kg⁻¹ daily. (1) In this study, a significant proportion of patients developed transient renal
289 impairment and/or hypokalemia during the course of treatment. In view of the limited data
290 available, significant inter-individual variability and lack of obvious inflection point in this
291 relationship further analysis to define exposure thresholds was not possible. The correlation
292 between drug exposure and Δ SCr observed here suggests, however, that clinical vigilance
293 and assiduous monitoring of renal function is required to minimize the probability of toxicity
294 associated with LAmB.

295 Taken together these data suggest that a significant proportion of pediatric patients
296 receiving LAmB at daily doses > 5.0 mg kg⁻¹ exhibit nonlinear PK with significantly higher
297 peak concentrations and overall drug exposure. This phenomenon was not predicted by
298 clinical covariates quantified in this study. Therapeutic drug monitoring (TDM) is thus likely
299 to be of value in identifying this subpopulation in order to prevent toxicity. Effective
300 implementation of TDM would require a more detailed understand of exposure-toxicity
301 relationships and data describing disease severity in children with proven or probably IFD in
302 order to define target exposure thresholds.

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305

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308

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397 Table 1 Patient demographics of cohorts undergoing sampling on day one of therapy and at
 398 steady state
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Demographic	Day one (n=35)	Steady state (n=25)
Age ($\mu \pm$ SD, range; years)	8.7 \pm 4.6 (1 - 17)	10.5 \pm 6.6 (1 - 17)
Gender (M:F)	22:13	15:10
Weight ($\mu \pm$ SD, range; kg)	26.9 \pm 14.0 (8.8 - 67.5)	25.4 \pm 16.2 (11.2 - 67.5)
Duration of therapy ($\mu \pm$ SD, range; days)	11.9 \pm 19.4 (1 - 41)	15.5 \pm 11.3 (9.5 - 41)
Underlying diagnosis (no. patients)		
Hematopoietic stem cell transplant		
Leukemia	6	5
Sickle cell disease	1	1
Aplastic anemia	1	0
Chemotherapy		
Leukemia	8	5
Lymphoma	7	5

Solid tumor	7	4
HIV	4	4
Chronic granulomatous disease	1	1
Clinical syndrome (no. patients)		
Established infection	6	6
Empiric treatment	29	19
Pathogen		
<i>Candida albicans</i>	2	2
<i>Candida parapsilosis</i>	1	1
<i>Aspergillus fumigatus</i>	3	3
<i>Cryptosporidium</i>	1	1
Clinical response		
Success	29	21
Failure	8	4
Breakthrough	1	0

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403 Table 2. The parameter estimates for the final 2-compartment pharmacokinetic model

Parameter	V _{in} (L)	V _{fin} (L)	K _{cp} (h ⁻¹)	K _{pc} (h ⁻¹)	K (h ⁻¹)	Cl (L h ⁻¹ 70 kg ⁻¹)
Base model						
Mean	4.543	n/a	0.28	0.888	n/a	0.488
Median	4.095	n/a	0.184	0.254	n/a	0.545
Standard Deviation	3.44	n/a	0.252	0.387	n/a	0.29
Error (CV%)	75.72	n/a	90.025	43.581	n/a	59.426
Selected model						
Mean	10.654	2.326	0.21	0.057	0.303	0.67
Median	7.998	2.986	0.178	0.033	0.027	0.665
Standard Deviation	1.523	0.978	0.130	0.01	0.094	0.239
Error (CV%)	14.295	42.064	61.905	17.544	31.023	35.672

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405 CV%, coefficient of variation; V_{in}, initial volume of distribution; V_{fin}, final volume of
 406 distribution; K, first-order inter-volume rate constant; K_{cp}/K_{pc}, first-order inter-
 407 compartmental rate constants; Cl, clearance.

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415 Table 3. Bootstrap estimates of the selected pharmacokinetic model

Parameter	Bootstrap		Final model	
	Mean estimate	95% CI	Mean estimate	95% CI
V _{in} (L)	10.677	10.646 – 10.87	10.654	10.67 – 10.87
V _{fin} (L)	2.345	2.181 – 3.023	2.326	2.162 – 3.01
K _{cp} (h ⁻¹)	0.311	0.127 – 0.42	0.210	0.108 – 0.388
K _{pc} (h ⁻¹)	0.057	0.043 – 0.061	0.057	0.043 – 0.061
K (h ⁻¹)	0.303	0.21 – 0.355	0.302	0.21 – 0.351
Cl (L h ⁻¹ 70 kg ⁻¹)	0.675	0.555 – 0.781	0.670	0.548 – 0.797

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419 Figure 1. Concentration-time profiles for each patient on day one of therapy (n=35) and at
 420 completion of therapy (n=25). Closed circles are the raw pharmacokinetic data from each
 421 patient.

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423 Figure 2. Scatter plots showing observed-versus-predicted values for population
 424 pharmacokinetic models after the Bayesian step with a standard 2-compartment model (A)
 425 and selected model (B). Open circles, dashed lines and solid lines represent individual

426 observed-predicted data points, line of identity, and the linear regression of observed-
427 predicted values, respectively.

428

429 Figure 3. Concentration-time profiles for two patients receiving LAmB (10 mg kg^{-1}). Initial
430 (V_{in}) and final (V_{fin}) estimates for volume of distribution (V_d) are shown. Open circles and
431 solid lines represent the raw data and simulated concentration-time profiles for each patient,
432 respectively. Patient A exhibits evolving PK with a contraction in the V_d while patient B
433 exhibits stable V_d .

434

435 Figure 4 Comparisons of dose-normalised C_{max} (A) and AUC_{0-24} (B) at steady state with
436 respect to dose per unit weight. Solid and dashed lines represent linear regression and 95%
437 confidence intervals, respectively.

438

439 Figure 5. Relationship between Bayesian estimates of AUC_{0-24} at steady state with respect to
440 change in serum creatinine. Solid and dashed lines represent linear regression and 95%
441 confidence intervals, respectively.

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