



focused on the elucidation of clinical health benefits and underlying mechanisms of probiotics, I chose to focus on the development of the abovementioned standardised analysis method. After 6 years of intensive research, with the aid of in-house renowned experts in the field of bacterial taxonomy, it is my opinion that the polymerase chain reaction-denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis (PCR-DGGE) methodology designed by myself and a team of expert colleagues shows reliable and reproducible output. It is important to realise that a standardised method for the general evaluation of probiotic products will face difficulties in matching the specificity of tests designed for the detection of one single strain or product. However, the PCR-DGGE method used in the study by Teversham and Elliott has been generally accepted through publication in renowned international peer-reviewed journals¹⁶⁻²² and is also applied by other research groups.²³ It shows highly reliable results for the identification of bacteria in probiotic products, although quantification still depends on cultivation media, generally known to be subject to bias. Future developments of the method will focus on modern techniques, such as real-time PCR for quantification and reverse transcriptase PCR to determine the metabolic activity of the strains in the product and *in situ*.

In conclusion, it is crucial that various parties (companies, scientists, government, journalists) collaborate through healthy criticism and communication, in order to realise the one important goal: delivering good quality probiotic products to the demanding and interested consumer, before they lose confidence and the probiotic market drops to insignificant and non-restorable levels.

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Probiotics — the traveller's dilemma

To the Editor: We note with interest — and some confusion — a point made by Paul Anley of Pharma Dynamics in his letter to *SAMJ*.¹

He questions the method of transport of probiotics sent to Belgium for an evaluation study. His products, he states, are 'particularly sensitive to atmospheric conditions and extremes of temperature' and were 'transported from South Africa under uncontrolled conditions.'

Are these not the very products recommended for the overseas traveller, to help alleviate the dreaded traveller's diarrhoea? How then should holidaymakers carry their medication?

One wonders too how these products withstand the rigours of their initial journey to South Africa and along the supply chain into the bathroom cupboard.

We trust the less robust probiotics on the market carry a warning on the label that they should be transported under strictly controlled conditions and not be subjected to extremes of temperature or air pressure.

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