Insecticide rotations delay evolution of resistance in a minority of model runs when compared to sequential use.

Andy South \* and Ian M. Hastings

Department of Parasitology, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Liverpool L3 5QA, UK.

[southandy@gmail.com](mailto:southandy@gmail.com), [andy.south@lstmed.ac.uk](mailto:andy.south@lstmed.ac.uk)

[ian.hastings@lstmed.ac.uk](mailto:ian.hastings@lstmed.ac.uk)

\* Corresponding author

## Abstract

Insecticide resistance threatens the control of the vectors of dangerous diseases including malaria, dengue and zika. Recent increases in insecticide resistance in public health are an evolutionary process caused by sustained exposure of insect populations to a small number of available insecticides. Resistance is a particular problem in public health as compared to agriculture because insecticides need to be longer lasting to provide affordable protection and there are fewer available active ingredients. Efforts to limit the development of insecticide resistance are grouped under the term Insecticide Resistance Management (IRM). The main strategies advocated to reduce the development of resistance are 1) rotations, 2) sequences, 3) mixtures and 4) mosaics. Rotations regularly switch between the use of different insecticides with a short time step (one or a few years) irrespective of resistance levels. Sequences, in contrast, switch from one insecticide to another only when resistance levels have reached a critical, defined threshold usually over a longer timescale.

Rotations are often advocated as one of the best options for limiting the development of resistance.

Testing different IRM strategies in the field is difficult and there has been little recent modelling work on insecticide rotations.

In this paper a model is described allowing rotations and sequences to be compared in terms of their effect on the evolution of insecticide resistance. The model is used to develop a mechanistic understanding of when and why insecticide resistance is likely to evolve faster with rotations or sequences.

The results suggest that under more likely circumstances than not the evolution of insecticide resistance will reach resistance thresholds at very similar times for rotations and sequences.

However under a less common, but still plausible, set of circumstances there are predicted to be large adavnatages to using a rotations as compared to a sequence.

The advantages to a rotation only occur when there are costs of resistance or dispersal from untreated areas, and there is high dominance of cost and low dominance of selection.

The mechanisms for these results are explained.

Other operational factors will favour rotations or sequences aside from the implications for the evolution of resistance. Developing an understanding of the evolutionary implications allows a more explicit consideration of these other factors on their own merits.

## Introduction

Despite much field and modelling work on the evolution of resistance under different insecticide or drug strategies [1] there is a small evidence base to support decisions about the use of insecticides in public health [2].

Rotations are advocated as one of the most favoured approaches for Insecticide Resistance Management (IRM)[3].

In a rotation the insecticide used is changed on a set time interval irrespective of resistance levels. Sequential use, in contrast, denotes the practice of using an insecticide until resistance to it reaches a certain threshold and then switching to another. Different rotation time intervals can be considered, e.g. in vector control for Malaria, Indoor Residual Spraying may be repeated every year (around 10 anopheles mosquito generations) and Insecticide Treated Nets may be replaced every two years (around 20 generations). Multiples of these intervals could be used as the rotation interval. Multiple generational rotations like this contrast with the situation in agriculture where a rotation is sometimes more tightly defined as having an interval of a single generation [4].

Here a modern modelling approach is described to allow an assessment of the potential benefits, in terms of the evolution of resistance, of rotations over sequences.

## Methods

A population genetic model was developed simulating changes over time in the frequencies of resistant and susceptible alleles in response to fitness differences. The model uses a similar approach that has been used to compare insecticide mixtures and sequences [5]. The implementation is simpler here because for rotations and sequences there is only a need to follow one insecticide at a time. The simpler implementation allows the model to be run for an unlimited number of insecticides. The algebra behind the model is described in the supplementary information.

1. Sequences : one insecticide is used until resistance threshold frequency (0.5 in this case) is reached, then switch to a new insecticide.
2. Rotations : use insecticide for set time, switch to another.

In both cases the choice of the new insecticide to use was made by going through the list of available insecticides and choosing the next one for which resistance was below the threshold. Thus there is the potential to switch back to insecticides that had been used earlier in a model run if resistance had not reached the threshold or if resistance had declined below the threshold during a period when not in use.

In both cases a simulation run continued until no more insecticides remained below their resistance thresholds.

Within the model inputs effect fitness as shown in Figure 1, differences in fitness lead to the changes in allele frequencies over time.

The model was run under four main scenarios :

1. no resistance fitness costs or dispersal link to untreated areas
2. fitness costs of resistance added
3. dispersal link to untreated areas (no costs)
4. costs and dispersal

To generate a decline in resistance over time when an insecticide is not being used either fitness costs or a dispersal link to an untreated area are required.

#### Assessing relative performance of insecticide use strategies

It is necessary to choose a measure to quantify the performance of an insecticide-use strategy and enable comparison with an alternative. For this we summed the number of generations when an insecticide was deployed and the resistance allele frequency for that insecticide was below 0.5. This allowed comparison between strategies using a variable number of insecticides. Previously time-to-resistance, namely the number of generations it takes to reach a defined resistance threshold (usually a resistance allele frequency of 0.5), was used. Using time-to-resistance worked when considering just two insecticides, but when the number of insecticides is a variable it is not sufficient.

## Results

Example model runs are shown with no costs or dispersal (Fig 1), with just resistanace costs (Fig 2) and with just dispersal from untreated refugis (Fig 3).

#### Results1. no resistance fitness costs or dispersal from untreated refugia

When there are no resistance fitness costs or dispersal links to untreated refugia resistance frequencies do not decline when an insecticide is not in use (Fig 1). Thus for sequences once resistance thresholds are reached the resistance frequencies remain at that level and the insecticide cannot be re-used. For rotations resistance frequencies step upwards when insecticides are in use and remain at a plateau when they are not.

When there were no costs or dispersal there was no difference between rotations and sequences in the number of generations below the resistance threshold (Fig 4.1).

#### Results2. fitness costs of resistance added

With fitness costs included 67% of model runs, similar to those in the previous section, gave no difference between rotations and sequences in the number of generations below the resistance threshold.

In contrast to the previous section 7% of model runs generated an advantage of greater than 20% for rotations over sequences (Fig 4.2).

#### Results3. dispersal from untreated refugia added

Dispersal from untreated refugia gives smaller benefits of rotations over sequences and in fewer runs (Fig 4.3).

#### Results4. costs and dispersal

With both costs and dispersal the benefits of rotations are similar to when runs have costs alone (Fig 4.4).

#### Runs where rotations have substantial advantage over sequences

As shown in Fig 4.2 some runs with costs of resistance can show substantial advantages for rotations over sequences. Examples of one such run is shown in Fig 5.

A Partial Rank Correlation analysis identified that of the inputs, dominance of cost and dominance of selection had the greatest influence on the difference between rotations and sequences when resistance costs were included (Fig 6). A combination of high values of dominance of cost and low values for dominance of selection are required to give the greatest advantages to rotations, but do not guarantee this advantage (Fig 7).

## Discussion

Comparing time below resistance thresholds for rotations and sequences, the model shows :

1. rotations and sequences the same when no costs or dispersal
2. with resistance costs, 67% of runs the same for rotations and sequences, but 6-7% of runs have > 20% advantage for rotations
3. with dispersal from untreated refugia but no costs, small advantage of rotations but very few runs < 0.1% have >20% advantage.

In rare circumstances, when there are costs of resistance, rotations can lead to the resistance frequencies for a group of insecticides being kept below resistance thresholds for the length of the simulations where sequences run out of insecticides within around 100 generations. Is it possible that these rare circumstances where parameter values are 'just-right' could be implemented operationally ? The problem is that these rare circumstances rely on high costs of resistance, high dominance of these costs and low dominance of the selection for the resistance itself. These parameters are all not easy to measure and there isn't agreement on their likely values [7].

The importance of resistance costs for substantial evolutionary benefits of rotations over sequences points to the importance of the debate over the fitness costs of insecticide resistance e.g. [7]. *extend this discussion of fitness costs*

### Caveats

The model does not (although it could) include the potential effects of modifier genes ameliorating the costs of resistance alleles. It has been suggested that rotations could be favoured as a strategy because they keep resistance frequences lower and restrict selection pressure for modifier genes [3]. However, there is little evidence to support the existence of such modifier genes in insectide resistance []. Even with the existence of modifier genes it is unlikely that they would provide much of an advantage to rotations in the scenarios we describe. In the modelled scenarios the use of an insecticide is stopped when the resistance frequency for that insecticide reaches 0.5. Thus in all scenarios resistance frequencies do not remain at high levels for long. In this situation it seems unlikely that modifiers would be selected for.

### Conclusions

In their effect on the evolution of insecticide resistance, rotations and sequences are most often the same. If costs of resistance are included, infrequently (less than 7% of model runs set between plausible limits) there are substantial benefits to the rotation strategy over a sequence. There was never a substantial benefit of a sequence over a rotation. Whether or not insecticide rotations are predicted to offer sizeable benefits over sequences is dependent on coarse and fine scale issues about the nature of insecticide resistance that are yet to be agreed upon. The model shows that resistance costs are necessary to provide a substantial evolutionary advantage to rotations. However even when these requirements are satisfied particular combinations of inputs are required to generate the advantage of rotations.

The model only compares rotations and sequences in terms of their effect on the evolution of resistance. There are other operational reasons for why a sequence or a rotation may be favoured.

## TODO

*try to come up with brief name for model output to make it easier to refer to it later*

## Figures

Figure 1. Comparing the increase in resistance frequencies over time for a rotation and a sequence when there no resistance fitness costs or dispersal from untreated refugia. The upper plot shows a rotation with a regular interval and the lower plot a sequence when the insecticide is changed when a resistance threshold of 0.5 is reached. In this example the rotation and the sequence are stopped at the same time. For the sequence the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases to reach the threshold in one step and that insecticide cannot be used again. For the rotation the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases in shorter steps while it is in use and remains at the constant level while not. There are three insecticides, the resistance frequency for each is shown in the sub-plots, and the shaded boxes within each sub-plot show when that insecticide was in use. The simulation is stopped when there are no remaining insecticides for which the resistance frequency is below the threshold. All other inputs are kept constant between the rotation and the sequence.

Figure 1. Comparing the increase in resistance frequencies over time for a rotation and a sequence when there no resistance fitness costs or dispersal from untreated refugia. The upper plot shows a rotation with a regular interval and the lower plot a sequence when the insecticide is changed when a resistance threshold of 0.5 is reached. In this example the rotation and the sequence are stopped at the same time. For the sequence the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases to reach the threshold in one step and that insecticide cannot be used again. For the rotation the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases in shorter steps while it is in use and remains at the constant level while not. There are three insecticides, the resistance frequency for each is shown in the sub-plots, and the shaded boxes within each sub-plot show when that insecticide was in use. The simulation is stopped when there are no remaining insecticides for which the resistance frequency is below the threshold. All other inputs are kept constant between the rotation and the sequence.

Figure 2. Comparing the increase in resistance frequencies over time for a rotation and a sequence when there are resistance fitness costs. The upper plot shows a rotation with a regular interval and the lower plot a sequence when the insecticide is changed when a resistance threshold of 0.5 is reached. In this example the rotation lasts longer than the sequence. For the sequence the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases to reach the threshold in one step but in contrast to the previous figure resistance frequencies decline when the insecticide is not in use allowing it to be used again. For the rotation the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases in shorter steps while it is in use and similarly declines while not. There are three insecticides, the resistance frequency for each is shown in the sub-plots, and the shaded boxes within each sub-plot show when that insecticide was in use. The simulation is stopped when there are no remaining insecticides for which the resistance frequency is below the threshold. All other inputs are kept constant between the rotation and the sequence.

Figure 2. Comparing the increase in resistance frequencies over time for a rotation and a sequence when there are resistance fitness costs. The upper plot shows a rotation with a regular interval and the lower plot a sequence when the insecticide is changed when a resistance threshold of 0.5 is reached. In this example the rotation lasts longer than the sequence. For the sequence the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases to reach the threshold in one step but in contrast to the previous figure resistance frequencies decline when the insecticide is not in use allowing it to be used again. For the rotation the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases in shorter steps while it is in use and similarly declines while not. There are three insecticides, the resistance frequency for each is shown in the sub-plots, and the shaded boxes within each sub-plot show when that insecticide was in use. The simulation is stopped when there are no remaining insecticides for which the resistance frequency is below the threshold. All other inputs are kept constant between the rotation and the sequence.

Figure 3. Comparing the increase in resistance frequencies over time for a rotation and a sequence with dispersal from untreated refugia. The upper plot shows a rotation with a regular interval and the lower plot a sequence when the insecticide is changed when a resistance threshold of 0.5 is reached. In this example the rotation and the sequence last the same time. In both cases the resistance frequencies in the treated areas (red lines) increase when an insecticide is in use. Resistance frequencies in the untreated areas (blue lines) increase after those in the treated areas as a result of dispersal from the treated areas. When an insecticide stops being used the resistance frequency in the treated area declines due to dispersal from the untreated area. For the sequence the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases to reach the threshold in one step and consistent with the previous figure resistance frequencies decline when the insecticide is not in use allowing it to be used again. For the rotation the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases in shorter steps while it is in use and similarly declines while not. There are three insecticides, the resistance frequency for each is shown in the sub-plots, and the shaded boxes within each sub-plot show when that insecticide was in use. The simulation is stopped when there are no remaining insecticides for which the resistance frequency is below the threshold. All other inputs are kept constant between the rotation and the sequence.

Figure 3. Comparing the increase in resistance frequencies over time for a rotation and a sequence with dispersal from untreated refugia. The upper plot shows a rotation with a regular interval and the lower plot a sequence when the insecticide is changed when a resistance threshold of 0.5 is reached. In this example the rotation and the sequence last the same time. In both cases the resistance frequencies in the treated areas (red lines) increase when an insecticide is in use. Resistance frequencies in the untreated areas (blue lines) increase after those in the treated areas as a result of dispersal from the treated areas. When an insecticide stops being used the resistance frequency in the treated area declines due to dispersal from the untreated area. For the sequence the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases to reach the threshold in one step and consistent with the previous figure resistance frequencies decline when the insecticide is not in use allowing it to be used again. For the rotation the resistance frequency for each insecticide increases in shorter steps while it is in use and similarly declines while not. There are three insecticides, the resistance frequency for each is shown in the sub-plots, and the shaded boxes within each sub-plot show when that insecticide was in use. The simulation is stopped when there are no remaining insecticides for which the resistance frequency is below the threshold. All other inputs are kept constant between the rotation and the sequence.

Figure 4. Effect of cost and dispersal on the distribution of differences between rotations and sequences from model runs. The y axis is square root transformed to emphasise the infrequent runs where there is a significant benefit of rotations over sequences. 4.1 when there are no resistance costs or dispersal from untreated refugia, rotations and sequences produce the same results. 4.2, 4.4 when costs are added there are infrequent model runs where rotations last longer below resistance thresholds than sequences. For between 6 and 7% of runs including costs, rotations last more than 20% longer than sequences. 4.3 when dispersal from untreated refugia is included without costs there are even less frequent runs where rotations last longer than sequences (in just 4 out of 10000 runs rotations lasted greater than 20% longer than sequences).

Figure 4. Effect of cost and dispersal on the distribution of differences between rotations and sequences from model runs. The y axis is square root transformed to emphasise the infrequent runs where there is a significant benefit of rotations over sequences. 4.1 when there are no resistance costs or dispersal from untreated refugia, rotations and sequences produce the same results. 4.2, 4.4 when costs are added there are infrequent model runs where rotations last longer below resistance thresholds than sequences. For between 6 and 7% of runs including costs, rotations last more than 20% longer than sequences. 4.3 when dispersal from untreated refugia is included without costs there are even less frequent runs where rotations last longer than sequences (in just 4 out of 10000 runs rotations lasted greater than 20% longer than sequences).

Figure 5. Example of a model run where there is a substantial benefit of rotations over a sequence. For the sequence resistance thresholds are reached for all insecticides in a little over 100 generations or 10 years. For the rotation resistance levels for all insecticides are maintained well below resistance thresholds for the length of the simulation (500 generations or 50 years).

Figure 5. Example of a model run where there is a substantial benefit of rotations over a sequence. For the sequence resistance thresholds are reached for all insecticides in a little over 100 generations or 10 years. For the rotation resistance levels for all insecticides are maintained well below resistance thresholds for the length of the simulation (500 generations or 50 years).

Figure 6. Which model inputs have the greatest influence on the difference between rotations and sequences when costs alone are included ? Measured using Partial Rank Correlation Coefficients (PRCC). Dominance of cost and dominance of selection have the greatest influence.

Figure 6. Which model inputs have the greatest influence on the difference between rotations and sequences when costs alone are included ? Measured using Partial Rank Correlation Coefficients (PRCC). Dominance of cost and dominance of selection have the greatest influence.

Figure 7. Model runs with substantial benefits of rotations over sequences are associated with high dominance of cost and low dominance of selection. Dominace inputs are shown on the x and y axes. Small grey points indicate all model runs. Model runs in which rotations last greater than 20% longer than sequences are shown in colour with darker blue indicating those that have the greatest difference.

Figure 7. Model runs with substantial benefits of rotations over sequences are associated with high dominance of cost and low dominance of selection. Dominace inputs are shown on the x and y axes. Small grey points indicate all model runs. Model runs in which rotations last greater than 20% longer than sequences are shown in colour with darker blue indicating those that have the greatest difference.

Figure X. [todo need to modify caption from MJ paper, start by saying that only in left panel during application of the insecticide] The effect of model inputs on the fitness of genotypes for a single insecticide. Fitness is shown on the y-axis and the different genotypes (SS, SR, RR) on the x axis. Firstly the exposure input determines the proportion of the population in the left and right panels (exposed and not exposed). For those that are exposed (left panel) insecticide effectiveness sets the fitness for SS, resistance restoration 'restores' a portion of the fitness for RR and dominance of resistance determines how the fitness for SR lies between that of SS and RR. For those that are not exposed, fitness of SS is set to 1 by definition, resistance cost determines the fitness of RR and again dominance of cost determines how the fitness for SR sits between that of SS and RR. In this example effectiveness=0.8, resistance restoration=0.5 which 'restores' half of the fitness lost due to the insecticide, dominance of resistance=0.7 which sets the fitness of the SR closer to RR than SS. Resistance cost=0.3 which reduces fitness in the absence of the insecticide from 1 to 0.7, and dominance of cost=0.8 which sets fitness of SR close to RR.

Figure X. [todo need to modify caption from MJ paper, start by saying that only in left panel during application of the insecticide] The effect of model inputs on the fitness of genotypes for a single insecticide. Fitness is shown on the y-axis and the different genotypes (SS, SR, RR) on the x axis. Firstly the exposure input determines the proportion of the population in the left and right panels (exposed and not exposed). For those that are exposed (left panel) insecticide effectiveness sets the fitness for SS, resistance restoration 'restores' a portion of the fitness for RR and dominance of resistance determines how the fitness for SR lies between that of SS and RR. For those that are not exposed, fitness of SS is set to 1 by definition, resistance cost determines the fitness of RR and again dominance of cost determines how the fitness for SR sits between that of SS and RR. In this example effectiveness=0.8, resistance restoration=0.5 which 'restores' half of the fitness lost due to the insecticide, dominance of resistance=0.7 which sets the fitness of the SR closer to RR than SS. Resistance cost=0.3 which reduces fitness in the absence of the insecticide from 1 to 0.7, and dominance of cost=0.8 which sets fitness of SR close to RR.

## References

1. Consortium R. Heterogeneity of selection and the evolution of resistance. Trends in Ecology & Evolution. 2013;28:110–8. doi:[10.1016/j.tree.2012.09.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2012.09.001).

2. Sternberg ED, Thomas MB. Insights from agriculture for the management of insecticide resistance in disease vectors. Evolutionary Applications. 2017; February:1–11.

3. WHO. Global plan for insecticide resistance management in malaria vectors (GPIRM). Geneva.; 2012.

4. Sudo M, Takahashi D, Andow DA, Suzuki Y, Yamanaka T. Optimal management strategy of insecticide resistance under various insect life histories: Heterogeneous timing of selection and interpatch dispersal. 2017. doi:[10.1111/eva.12550](https://doi.org/10.1111/eva.12550).

5. Levick B, South A, Hastings IM. A Two-locus Model of The Evolution of Insecticide Resistance to Inform and Optimise Public Health Insecticide Deployment Strategies. PLOS Computational Biology. 2017;13:e1005327.

6. South A, Hastings IM. Insecticide resistance evolution with mixtures and sequences: A model-based explanation. Malaria Journal. 2018;17:1–20. doi:[10.1186/s12936-018-2203-y](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12936-018-2203-y).

7. Kliot A, Ghanim M. Fitness costs associated with insecticide resistance. Pest Management Science. 2012;68:1431–7.

8. Bourguet D, Genissel A, Raymond M, Raymond AM. Insecticide Resistance and Dominance Levels. Journal of Economic Entomology. 2000;93:1588–95. doi:[10.1603/0022-0493-93.6.1588](https://doi.org/10.1603/0022-0493-93.6.1588).