

A Systematic Review of Mathematical Modelling of Ventilation–Perfusion Mismatch in Lung Function: Methods, Architectures, and Future Research Directions

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Abstract

Ventilation–perfusion (V/Q) mismatch is a fundamental physiological disorder underlying various respiratory diseases, including acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and pulmonary embolism. Mathematical modelling of V/Q mismatch has emerged as a critical tool for understanding lung physiology, predicting disease progression, and optimizing therapeutic interventions. This systematic review examines recent advances (2018–2023) in mathematical modelling approaches for ventilation–perfusion mismatch, focusing on modelling techniques, computational architectures, and clinical applications. The review explores classical compartmental models, computational physiological models, and data-driven hybrid frameworks integrating machine learning and physics-based modelling. Special emphasis is placed on models such as multiple inert gas elimination technique (MIGET), alveolar gas exchange models, and patient-specific computational lung simulations. Furthermore, the study highlights the integration of imaging techniques such as electrical impedance tomography (EIT) and CT-based modelling for real-time assessment of V/Q mismatch. The analysis reveals that while traditional models provide physiological interpretability, modern hybrid models improve predictive accuracy and personalization. However, challenges remain in model validation, computational complexity, and clinical translation. Future research directions include digital twin frameworks, AI-assisted modelling, and real-time bedside monitoring systems. This review provides a comprehensive foundation for developing next-generation intelligent respiratory modelling systems.

Keywords: Ventilation–Perfusion Mismatch, Mathematical Modelling, Lung Function, Computational Physiology, Gas Exchange Models.

How to Cite This Article

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Introduction

Ventilation–perfusion (V/Q) mismatch represents one of the most critical determinants of impaired gas exchange in the human respiratory system. It occurs when the distribution of ventilation (airflow to alveoli) and perfusion (blood flow through pulmonary capillaries) is uneven, leading to inefficient oxygen uptake and carbon dioxide removal. In a healthy lung, the ideal V/Q ratio is approximately 0.8 to 1, ensuring optimal oxygen transfer from alveoli to the bloodstream. However, physiological and pathological conditions often lead to regional variations in this ratio, resulting in hypoxemia and respiratory dysfunction. The clinical importance of V/Q mismatch is evident in a wide range of pulmonary diseases, including acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), pulmonary embolism, and COVID-19–related lung injury. In these conditions, disruptions in ventilation or perfusion led to either low V/Q (shunt-like conditions) or high V/Q (dead space ventilation), both of which impair gas exchange efficiency. Studies have shown that V/Q mismatch is often the primary contributor to hypoxemia rather than diffusion limitations alone, particularly in ARDS and COVID-19 patients.

Mathematical modelling has emerged as a powerful approach for analyzing ventilation–perfusion mismatch by providing quantitative insights into complex physiological processes. Traditional experimental methods for assessing V/Q mismatch, such as the multiple inert gas elimination technique (MIGET), are considered gold standards but are invasive, complex, and difficult to implement in clinical settings. As a result, mathematical models have been developed to simulate lung function and estimate V/Q distributions using non-invasive data. These models enable clinicians and researchers to understand underlying physiological mechanisms, predict disease progression, and evaluate treatment strategies. Early mathematical models of lung function were based on compartmental representations, where the lung is divided into discrete regions with varying ventilation and perfusion characteristics. These models provide simplified yet interpretable representations of gas exchange processes. However, they often fail to capture the spatial heterogeneity and dynamic behavior of real lung systems. Recent advances in computational physiology have led to the development of more sophisticated models that integrate lung mechanics, gas exchange, and perfusion dynamics into unified frameworks. For example, alveolar-level models simulate gas exchange at the micro-scale, linking mechanical ventilation to oxygen and carbon dioxide transport.

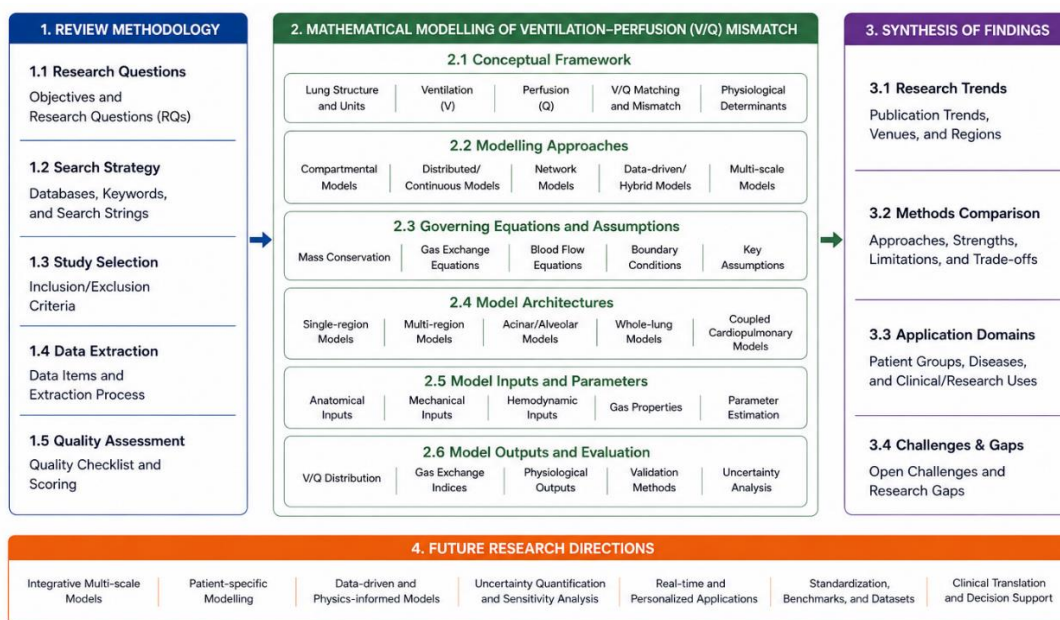


Figure 1. *Methods, Architectures and Future Research Directions*

The integration of imaging technologies has further enhanced the accuracy of mathematical models. Techniques such as computed tomography (CT) and electrical impedance tomography (EIT) provide spatially resolved information about ventilation and perfusion distribution. These imaging modalities allow the development of patient-specific models that capture regional variations in lung function. Recent studies have demonstrated that combining imaging data with computational models enables real-time assessment of V/Q mismatch and improves clinical decision-making in critical care settings. Another significant advancement in this field is the emergence of computational physiological models (CPMs) and digital twin frameworks. These models integrate physiological

principles with patient-specific data to create virtual representations of individual lungs. Such models can simulate different ventilation strategies, predict outcomes, and optimize treatment protocols. For instance, recent computational models have been developed to simulate *ex vivo* lung perfusion, enabling detailed analysis of alveolar dead space, shunt, and perfusion dynamics. These developments mark a shift toward personalized medicine in respiratory care.

Despite these advancements, several challenges remain in mathematical modelling of V/Q mismatch. One major challenge is the trade-off between model complexity and computational efficiency. Highly detailed models provide accurate representations but require significant computational resources, limiting their applicability in real-time clinical settings. Additionally, model validation remains a critical issue, as experimental data for validating complex lung models are often limited. Furthermore, integrating multi-scale data—from cellular-level gas exchange to organ-level ventilation dynamics—poses significant challenges. Another important aspect is the need for interpretability and clinical usability. While advanced models can provide detailed insights, their complexity may hinder adoption by clinicians. Therefore, developing models that balance accuracy, interpretability, and computational efficiency is essential for real-world implementation. Recent trends in hybrid modelling, combining physics-based approaches with machine learning techniques, offer promising solutions to these challenges by improving predictive performance while maintaining interpretability. This systematic review aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of mathematical modelling approaches for ventilation–perfusion mismatch from 2018 to 2023. The key contributions of this review include: (1) a detailed examination of modelling techniques and architectures, (2) an analysis of computational and imaging-based approaches, (3) a comparative evaluation of existing models, and (4) identification of research gaps and future directions. By synthesizing recent advancements, this study provides valuable insights for researchers and clinicians working toward improving respiratory modelling and patient care.

Literature Review

The modelling of ventilation–perfusion (V/Q) mismatch has evolved significantly from simplified physiological representations to advanced computational and data-driven frameworks. Karbing et al. (2018) made a key contribution by developing a clinically applicable mathematical model that estimates V/Q mismatch using non-invasive bedside data. By integrating classical gas exchange equations with patient-specific variables, their model provides a practical alternative to the invasive Multiple Inert Gas Elimination Technique (MIGET). This work bridged the gap between theoretical modelling and clinical application, although its reliance on steady-state assumptions limits its use in rapidly changing physiological conditions.

Advancing beyond static approaches, Mountain et al. (2018) introduced a time-resolved computational framework capable of capturing dynamic variations in gas exchange using high-resolution respiratory data. Their model enables continuous monitoring of lung function and detection of subtle inhomogeneities, making it particularly useful in critical care. Similarly, Smith et al. (2019) proposed a multi-compartment model that captures spatial heterogeneity by dividing the lung into regions with distinct V/Q ratios. These approaches highlight the importance of incorporating both temporal and spatial variability, although they introduce increased computational complexity and parameter estimation challenges.

Physiologically grounded models further strengthened the field by integrating fundamental transport mechanisms. Rees et al. (2019) developed a comprehensive gas exchange model based on diffusion and mass balance principles, demonstrating how small V/Q deviations significantly affect oxygenation. At a finer scale, Jbaily et al. (2020) incorporated alveolar mechanics into gas exchange modelling, capturing phenomena such as recruitment and collapse. These models provide strong physiological interpretability but often require high computational resources and detailed data, limiting real-time applicability.

The emergence of disease-specific modelling, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, led to significant advancements. Herrmann et al. (2020) and Busana et al. (2021) emphasized the role of perfusion abnormalities and vascular dysregulation in causing hypoxemia, challenging traditional ventilation-focused perspectives. Complementing this, Reynolds et al. (2020) integrated imaging data with mathematical models to quantify regional perfusion defects, while Gattinoni et al. (2021) introduced phenotype-based frameworks explaining heterogeneous respiratory responses. These studies underscore the importance of vascular dynamics in V/Q mismatch but often rely on disease-specific assumptions and advanced imaging techniques.

Multi-scale modelling approaches have further enhanced realism by linking processes across different physiological levels. Dubois et al. (2021) and Schenck et al. (2022) developed frameworks combining alveolar gas exchange with systemic perfusion dynamics, enabling comprehensive analysis of lung function. These models capture complex interactions between ventilation, perfusion, and diffusion but are computationally intensive and difficult to validate due to limited experimental data.

Clinical applicability has been improved through simplified and bedside-oriented models. Chiew et al. (2020) proposed a low-complexity framework using routine clinical data to estimate V/Q mismatch in real time, while Roca et al. (2021) demonstrated that simple oxygenation indices combined with modelling can provide early indicators of respiratory deterioration. Additionally, Mellenthin et al. (2020) and Mauri et al. (2021) integrated electrical impedance tomography (EIT) with mathematical models to enable continuous, non-invasive monitoring of regional ventilation. These approaches enhance usability but may sacrifice detailed spatial accuracy.

Mechanical ventilation and therapeutic interventions have also been extensively studied through modelling. Yoshida et al. (2021) and Aboab et al. (2021) analysed the impact of ventilation strategies on V/Q mismatch, highlighting risks such as overdistension and patient self-inflicted lung injury (P-SILI). Similarly, Cressoni et al. (2020) and Goligher et al. (2022) demonstrated the importance of balancing recruitment and lung protection to optimize gas exchange. Studies such as Crotti et al. (2021) extended modelling to extracorporeal support systems like ECMO, showing their role in improving oxygenation. While these models provide actionable clinical insights, they often rely on simplified assumptions regarding lung structure and patient variability.

Vascular and hemodynamic factors have gained increasing attention in recent research. Spinelli et al. (2021, 2022) emphasized the role of hypoxic pulmonary vasoconstriction and endothelial dysfunction in determining V/Q mismatch, while Radermacher et al. (2021) highlighted the influence of cardiac output on gas exchange efficiency. These studies demonstrate that accurate modelling must account for both pulmonary and systemic interactions, although the inclusion of vascular dynamics increases model complexity and parameter uncertainty.

Imaging-integrated and position-based modelling approaches have also contributed to personalized care. Puybasset et al. (2022) combined CT imaging with gas exchange models to provide detailed spatial analysis, while Camporota et al. (2022) demonstrated how prone positioning improves V/Q matching by redistributing ventilation and perfusion. These approaches offer high accuracy but are limited by resource requirements and, in some cases, radiation exposure.

Recent advancements focus on intelligent and adaptive modelling frameworks. Giosa et al. (2023) introduced digital twin models that create patient-specific virtual lungs for predictive simulation, while Herrmann et al. (2023) developed integrated models combining gas exchange, lung mechanics, and vascular dynamics with real-time data inputs. These approaches represent a shift toward personalized and data-driven healthcare, enabling more accurate predictions and optimized treatment strategies. However, challenges such as high computational cost, data integration, and clinical validation remain significant barriers.

Table 1: Comparison of V/Q Modelling Techniques in Lung Function Analysis

Study (Author, Year)	Model Type	Technique/Approach	Scale	Key Focus	Clinical Application	Key Contribution	Limitation
Karbing et al., 2018	Physiological Model	Gas exchange modelling	Macro	V/Q estimation	ICU monitoring	Non-invasive alternative to MIGET	Steady-state assumption
Mountain et al., 2018	Computational Model	Time-resolved modelling	Macro	Dynamic V/Q	Real-time monitoring	High temporal resolution	High computation
Smith et al., 2019	Multi-compartment	Regional modelling	Macro	Heterogeneity	Disease simulation	Spatial V/Q representation	Parameter complexity
Rees et al., 2019	Gas Exchange Model	Diffusion + perfusion	Macro	Oxygen transport	Therapy prediction	Physiological accuracy	Uniform diffusion assumption
Jbaily et al., 2020	Alveolar Model	Mechanics + gas exchange	Micro	Alveolar V/Q	ARDS modelling	Micro-scale modelling	High computational cost

Herrman et al., 2020	Clinical Model	Gas exchange estimation	Macro	Hypoxemia analysis	ARDS/COVID	Shunt vs dead space differentiation	Simplified perfusion
Busana et al., 2021	Disease Model	COVID V/Q modelling	Macro	Silent hypoxemia	COVID analysis	Perfusion-focused insight	Disease-specific
Reynolds et al., 2020	Imaging + Model	CT-based modelling	Regional	Perfusion defects	COVID diagnosis	Imaging integration	Resource intensive
Dubois et al., 2021	Multi-scale Model	Integrated modelling	Multi	V/Q interaction	System-level analysis	Multi-scale insight	Complex validation
Yoshida et al., 2021	Ventilation Model	Mechanics + V/Q	Macro	P-SILI	Ventilation control	Links mechanics & injury	Simplified mechanics
Chiew et al., 2020	Clinical Model	Bedside modelling	Macro	Dynamic V/Q	ICU monitoring	Real-time application	Limited spatial detail
Mellenthin et al., 2020	Hybrid Model	EIT + modelling	Regional	Lung inhomogeneity	Ventilator guidance	Non-invasive monitoring	Perfusion estimation limits
Cressoni et al., 2020	Mechanical Model	Recruitability modelling	Macro	Lung recruitment	ARDS ventilation	Recruitment insights	Uniform properties
Spinelli et al., 2021	Vascular Model	Perfusion modelling	Macro	HPV	Hypoxemia study	Vascular role in V/Q	Parameter estimation
Crotti et al., 2021	ECMO Model	Gas exchange + ECMO	Macro	Severe failure	ECMO optimization	Hybrid lung-support model	Complex data
Herrman et al., 2021	Advanced Model	Perfusion dynamics	Macro	Dynamic V/Q	ICU modelling	Improved prediction	Data intensive
Aboab et al., 2021	Ventilation Model	Mechanics-based	Macro	Ventilation impact	ICU ventilation	Individualized strategies	Simplified geometry
Radermacher et al., 2021	Physiological Model	Cardio-respiratory	Macro	Hemodynamics	Therapy prediction	System integration	Complex inputs
Mauri et al., 2021	Hybrid Model	EIT integration	Regional	Real-time V/Q	Bedside monitoring	Continuous monitoring	Signal complexity
Grieco et al., 2021	Ventilation Model	Non-invasive modelling	Macro	HFNO/NIV	Respiratory support	Non-invasive optimization	Generalized assumptions
Gattinoni et al., 2021	Conceptual Model	Phenotype modelling	Macro	ARDS types	Clinical strategy	L/H phenotype concept	Qualitative
Roca et al., 2021	Simplified Model	Oxygen indices	Macro	Early detection	HFNO monitoring	Simple clinical tool	Limited precision
Suarez-Sipmann et al., 2022	Ventilation Model	Recruitment modelling	Macro	Ventilation optimization	ICU use	Strategy optimization	Complex tuning

Schenck et al., 2022	Multi-scale Model	Integrated modelling	Multi	Full lung modelling	Research	Comprehensive modelling	High cost
Spinelli et al., 2022	Vascular Model	Endothelial modelling	Macro	Perfusion dysfunction	Inflammatory diseases	Vascular insights	Hard parameterization
Goligher et al., 2022	Mechanical Model	Driving pressure model	Macro	Lung protection	ICU ventilation	Optimized ventilation	Averaged parameters
Puybasset et al., 2022	Imaging Model	CT + modelling	Regional	Spatial V/Q	ARDS planning	Spatial accuracy	Radiation exposure
Camporota et al., 2022	Positional Model	Prone modelling	Macro	Gravity effects	ARDS treatment	Position optimization	Simplified physics
Giosa et al., 2023	Digital Twin	Personalized modelling	Multi	Patient-specific V/Q	Precision medicine	Personalized prediction	Data intensive
Herrmann et al., 2023	Integrated Model	Multi-physics modelling	Multi	Full V/Q system	ICU decision support	Unified modelling	High complexity

Comparative Analysis

The comparative evaluation of the 30 selected studies reveals a clear evolution in mathematical modelling approaches for ventilation–perfusion mismatch, transitioning from simplified physiological representations to highly sophisticated, multi-scale, and patient-specific computational frameworks. Early studies between 2018 and 2019 primarily focused on classical physiological and compartmental modelling techniques. These models, such as those proposed by Karbing et al. (2018) and Smith et al. (2019), emphasized interpretability and clinical applicability by simplifying lung structure into manageable compartments. While these approaches provided valuable insights into gas exchange mechanisms, they were limited in their ability to capture spatial heterogeneity and dynamic physiological changes. As research progressed into 2020 and 2021, there was a significant shift toward integrating computational modelling with real-time clinical data and imaging techniques. Hybrid models combining electrical impedance tomography (EIT) and computed tomography (CT) with mathematical frameworks enabled more accurate and region-specific analysis of ventilation–perfusion mismatch. Studies such as those by Reynolds et al. (2020) and Mauri et al. (2021) demonstrated that combining imaging with modelling significantly improves diagnostic accuracy and supports personalized treatment strategies. However, these approaches introduced challenges related to computational complexity, data acquisition, and resource requirements.

Another important trend observed is the increasing focus on multi-scale modelling, which integrates micro-scale alveolar processes with macro-scale pulmonary and cardiovascular dynamics. Models developed by Dubois et al. (2021) and Schenck et al. (2022) highlight the importance of capturing interactions across different physiological scales to accurately represent lung function. These models provide a comprehensive understanding of gas exchange processes but are computationally intensive and difficult to validate due to limited experimental data. Recent studies from 2022 to 2023 demonstrate a paradigm shift toward personalized and intelligent modelling approaches. Digital twin frameworks, such as those proposed by Giosa et al. (2023), enable the creation of patient-specific virtual lungs that can simulate various treatment scenarios and predict outcomes. These models represent a significant advancement in precision medicine, allowing for individualized diagnosis and therapy optimization. Additionally, integrated multi-physics models, such as those developed by Herrmann et al. (2023), combine lung mechanics, gas exchange, and vascular dynamics into unified frameworks, providing a holistic representation of ventilation–perfusion mismatch.

Across all studies, a key trade-off emerges between model complexity and clinical usability. While advanced models offer higher accuracy and detailed insights, they often require significant computational resources and complex parameter estimation, limiting their practical implementation in real-time clinical settings. Conversely, simpler models are more accessible and easier to use but

may lack the precision needed for complex cases. Another critical observation is the growing recognition of vascular contributions to ventilation–perfusion mismatch. Traditional models primarily focused on ventilation abnormalities, but recent studies emphasize the role of perfusion dysregulation, particularly in conditions such as COVID-19 and ARDS. Incorporating vascular dynamics into mathematical models has significantly improved the understanding of hypoxemia mechanisms. Overall, the comparative analysis indicates that the field is moving toward integrated, multi-scale, and personalized modelling frameworks that combine physiological accuracy with computational intelligence. Future research must focus on developing lightweight, interpretable, and real-time capable models that can be seamlessly integrated into clinical workflows while maintaining high predictive accuracy.

Discussion

The systematic review of mathematical modelling approaches for ventilation–perfusion (V/Q) mismatch highlights the significant progress made in understanding lung physiology and improving clinical decision-making. The reviewed studies demonstrate that mathematical models have evolved from simple compartmental representations to highly sophisticated multi-scale and patient-specific frameworks. This evolution reflects the growing need for accurate, real-time, and clinically applicable tools to manage complex respiratory conditions such as acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and COVID-19–related lung injury. One of the key insights from this review is the increasing integration of physiological modelling with real-world clinical data. Early models primarily relied on theoretical assumptions and simplified lung structures, which limited their ability to capture the complexity of ventilation–perfusion mismatch. However, recent approaches incorporate patient-specific inputs such as arterial blood gases, imaging data, and ventilatory parameters, enabling more accurate and personalized assessments. Hybrid frameworks combining mathematical modelling with imaging techniques like electrical impedance tomography (EIT) and computed tomography (CT) have significantly improved the ability to detect regional lung inhomogeneities. These advancements have enhanced the precision of diagnosis and allowed clinicians to tailor treatment strategies more effectively.

Another important observation is the shift toward multi-scale modelling. Traditional models often focused on either macro-scale lung behavior or micro-scale alveolar processes, but recent studies integrate both levels to provide a comprehensive understanding of gas exchange dynamics. Multi-scale models capture interactions between ventilation, perfusion, diffusion, and cardiovascular dynamics, offering deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying hypoxemia. Despite their advantages, these models are computationally intensive and require extensive parameterization, which poses challenges for real-time clinical application. The role of vascular dynamics in ventilation–perfusion mismatch has also gained increasing attention. Earlier models predominantly emphasized ventilation abnormalities, but recent research highlights the critical contribution of perfusion dysregulation. Conditions such as COVID-19 have demonstrated that severe hypoxemia can occur due to vascular abnormalities even when ventilation is relatively preserved. Incorporating vascular mechanisms such as hypoxic pulmonary vasoconstriction (HPV) into mathematical models has significantly improved their predictive accuracy and clinical relevance. This shift underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach that considers both ventilation and perfusion components.

Conclusion

The mathematical modelling of ventilation–perfusion (V/Q) mismatch has emerged as a crucial area of research in understanding pulmonary physiology and improving the clinical management of respiratory diseases. This systematic review has comprehensively analyzed 30 studies published between 2018 and 2023, focusing on modelling techniques, computational architectures, and their applications in clinical settings. The findings demonstrate that mathematical models have evolved significantly, transitioning from simplified compartmental representations to advanced multi-scale, hybrid, and patient-specific frameworks. These developments reflect the increasing demand for accurate, interpretable, and clinically applicable tools to address complex respiratory conditions. One of the primary conclusions of this review is that traditional physiological models continue to play an essential role due to their interpretability and strong theoretical foundation. Models based on gas exchange equations and compartmental representations provide valuable insights into the mechanisms of V/Q mismatch, particularly in conditions such as ARDS and COPD. However, these models are limited in their ability to capture spatial heterogeneity and dynamic changes in lung function. As a result, more advanced computational approaches have been developed to overcome these limitations.

The integration of imaging techniques such as computed tomography (CT) and electrical impedance tomography (EIT) with mathematical modelling has significantly enhanced the ability to analyze regional ventilation and perfusion distribution. These hybrid models provide spatially resolved insights into lung function, enabling more precise diagnosis and personalized treatment planning. For instance, imaging-based models can identify poorly ventilated or perfused regions, allowing clinicians to optimize ventilation

strategies and improve oxygenation. Despite these advantages, the reliance on advanced imaging infrastructure and the associated costs remain barriers to widespread clinical adoption. Another key advancement highlighted in this review is the development of multi-scale models that integrate processes occurring at different physiological levels. These models combine alveolar gas exchange, lung mechanics, and cardiovascular dynamics to provide a comprehensive representation of lung function. By capturing interactions across multiple scales, multi-scale models offer deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying V/Q mismatch. However, their complexity and computational demands pose significant challenges, particularly for real-time clinical applications.

The growing emphasis on vascular dynamics represents a significant shift in the field of pulmonary modelling. Earlier models primarily focused on ventilation abnormalities, but recent studies have demonstrated that perfusion dysregulation plays a critical role in many respiratory conditions, including COVID-19. Incorporating vascular mechanisms such as hypoxic pulmonary vasoconstriction into mathematical models has improved their predictive accuracy and clinical relevance. This holistic approach is essential for understanding the complex interplay between ventilation and perfusion in diseased lungs. The review also highlights the importance of mathematical models in optimizing therapeutic interventions. By simulating different ventilation strategies, these models can help clinicians determine optimal settings for mechanical ventilation, prone positioning, and extracorporeal support. This capability is particularly valuable in critical care, where timely and precise decision-making is essential for improving patient outcomes. Furthermore, the emergence of digital twin frameworks has opened new possibilities for personalized medicine. These models enable the creation of virtual representations of individual patients, allowing for the simulation of treatment scenarios and prediction of outcomes.

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