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Cardiovascular Applications of Medical Gases Unveiling Mechanistic Pathways and Targeted Delivery Innovations: A New Horizon in the Treatment of Coronary Artery Disease

Nazar Muhammad[1], Shah Hamayun[2], Sania Ikram[1], Umaima Khan[1], Zoha Waheed Abassi[1], Zubair Ahmed[3], Ayesha Bibi[4], Maryam Aftab[5*]

[1] Department of Biological Sciences, National University of Medical Sciences (NUMS) Rawalpindi 46000, Punjab, Pakistan.
[2] Department of Cardiology, Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), Islamabad, Punjab 04485, Pakistan
[3] Department of Pharmacy, Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat khyberpakhtunwa, Pakistan
[4] Riphah Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan
[5] Department of Biosciences, COMSATS University, Park Road 45520, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: maryambiochem88@gmail.com

Abstract - Cardiovascular disease (CVD) especially, coronary arteries disease (CAD) remains a major health challenge due to its complex pathophysiology, which involves endothelial dysfunction, inflammation, and oxidative stress. Traditional therapies primarily focus on symptom management and controlling risk factors, often lacking mechanisms to address the underlying causes of CVD. Gas-based therapies have emerged as promising novel treatments for CAD. Therapeutic gases such as nitric oxide, hydrogen, and carbon monoxide show potential in addressing the disease mechanisms directly. Nitric oxide, for example, has proven beneficial in treating pulmonary hypertension and other cardiovascular conditions. Hydrogen therapy offers antioxidant effects that reduce ischemic injury, while carbon monoxide—once thought of solely as a toxin—demonstrates anti-inflammatory properties and aids in vasodilation and tissue repair. This review explores the mechanisms, clinical applications, and challenges of these therapeutic gases, with an emphasis on safety, and delivery methods. As research in this field advances, gas therapy may become integrated into mainstream cardiovascular treatments, transforming approaches to CVD management by targeting interventions that could yield more favorable patient outcomes.

Keywords: Cardiovascular Disease, Gas Therapy, Nitric Oxide, Hydrogen Therapy, Carbon Monoxide.

1. Introduction

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) and CAD remain a leading cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide, affecting millions and placing a significant burden on healthcare systems [1]. Despite advancements in medical therapies and surgical interventions, the need for innovative treatments persists to improve patient outcomes and quality of life. While traditional management approaches focus on controlling symptoms and risk factors, there is a growing interest in novel therapeutic strategies that target the underlying pathophysiology of CAD [2].

Gas therapy has emerged as a promising new direction in cardiovascular medicine [3]. This approach leverages the unique biological effects of gases such as nitric oxide, hydrogen, and carbon monoxide to support cardiovascular health [4, 5]. These gases are integral to several physiological processes, including vasodilation, inflammation modulation, and cellular signaling. Understanding the mechanisms by which these gases exert their effects allows researchers to explore their potential as therapeutic agents [6-9].

Nitric oxide, for example, has shown significant potential due to its vasodilatory properties and its ability to improve blood flow, making it particularly useful in managing conditions like hypertension and heart failure [10, 11]. Hydrogen therapy is being investigated for its antioxidant properties and ability to reduce ischemic injury [12]. Although traditionally considered toxic, carbon monoxide has been recognized for its protective effects against oxidative stress and inflammation, highlighting the complex role these gases can play in cardiovascular health [13-16].

In this review, we will discuss the mechanisms, clinical applications, and challenges of gas therapy in the treatment of CAD. We will also elaborate on safety considerations, delivery methods, and standardization requirements essential for its effective integration into clinical practice. As research in this field continues to advance, there is great potential for gas therapies to be incorporated into routine clinical practice. With proper development, gas therapy could become a valuable adjunct or alternative to conventional treatments, offering new hope for improving patient outcomes in cardiovascular disease management.

2. Mechanisms of Action of Gas Therapy

2.1. Vasodilation and Blood Flow Regulation

One of the primary mechanisms by which gas therapy exerts its effects in cardiovascular disease is through vasodilation [17]. Gases such as nitric oxide (NO) play a crucial role in the relaxation of vascular smooth muscle, leading to the

widening of blood vessels [18-20] Nitric oxide is synthesized in the endothelium and diffuses into smooth muscle cells, where it activates guanylate cyclase [21, 22]. This enzyme increases the levels of cyclic guanosine monophosphate (cGMP), a secondary messenger that induces relaxation and subsequent vasodilation [23, 24]. Improved blood flow reduces vascular resistance and alleviates conditions such as hypertension, ultimately enhancing oxygen delivery to tissues [25-27]. This vasodilatory effect is particularly beneficial in acute settings, such as during myocardial ischemia, where restoring blood flow can prevent tissue damage and improve outcomes [27, 28].

2.2. Anti-Inflammatory Effects

Gas therapy also demonstrates significant anti-inflammatory properties, which are vital in managing cardiovascular diseases characterized by chronic inflammation [29, 30]. For instance, hydrogen has been shown to inhibit the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines and reduce oxidative stress, thereby mitigating the inflammatory response [31]. Carbon monoxide, traditionally viewed as a toxic substance, has paradoxical anti-inflammatory effects through its ability to suppress the activation of immune cells and promote the resolution of inflammation [29, 32]. By modulating inflammatory pathways, these gases help to protect cardiovascular tissues from damage associated with chronic inflammatory processes, such as atherosclerosis, and contribute to overall cardiovascular health [33].

2.3. Cellular Signaling Pathways

In addition to their direct physiological effects, gases involved in therapy also influence various cellular signaling pathways that are critical for cardiovascular function [34]. Nitric oxide, for example, not only facilitates vasodilation but also plays a role in apoptosis, cell proliferation, and angiogenesis through its interactions with different cellular targets [35-37]. By regulating these pathways, gas therapy can promote cell survival and tissue repair in the context of ischemic injury [38]. Hydrogen has been found to activate the Nrf2 pathway, enhancing the body's antioxidant defenses and providing further protection against oxidative damage [39]. Through these intricate signaling networks, gas therapy can modulate cellular behavior, enhancing the body's capacity to heal and adapt in response to cardiovascular stressors [40].

3. Clinical Applications of Gass therapies

3.1. Nitric Oxide in Cardiovascular Therapy

Nitric oxide (NO) has established itself as a critical therapeutic agent in the management of various cardiovascular conditions (**figure-1**) [41, 42]. It is particularly effective in treating pulmonary hypertension, where inhaled NO promotes selective vasodilation of pulmonary vessels, improving oxygenation and reducing right ventricular workload. Additionally, NO plays a vital role in managing acute coronary syndromes, where it helps restore blood flow during ischemic events [43]. Its rapid action and short half-life make it suitable for emergency settings, providing immediate relief while minimizing systemic side effects [44].

Moreover, the systemic administration of NO donors has shown promise in treating chronic conditions such as heart failure and hypertension [5, 45, 46]. By enhancing endothelial function and reducing vascular resistance, these therapies can improve cardiac output and alleviate symptoms in patients with compromised heart function [47, 48]. Recent studies also suggest that long-term exposure to NO may positively influence cardiovascular remodeling, suggesting potential benefits in chronic disease management [49]. Despite its efficacy, the clinical use of NO is not without challenges. The need for precise dosing and potential adverse effects, such as methemoglobinemia, necessitates careful monitoring. Nonetheless, ongoing research continues to refine its applications, exploring combination therapies that could enhance its benefits while minimizing risks [36, 50].

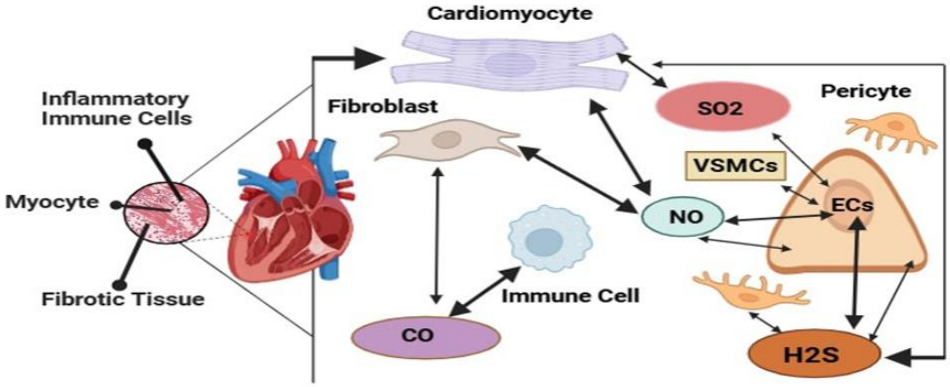

Figure 1: Schematic representation of endogenous gas transmitter production and interaction on various cardiovascular cell types.

In addition to the well-established role of ECs and VSMCs, immune cells and microvascular pericytes are emerging as significant contributors to cardio protection. Green cloud: NO; yellow cloud: H_2S; blue cloud: SO_2; red cloud: CO. Created with BioRender.com. CO, carbon monoxide; ECs, endothelial cells; H_2S, hydrogen sulfide; NO, nitric oxide; SO_2, sulfur dioxide; VSMCs, vascular smooth muscular cells [51, 52].

3.2. Hydrogen Therapy

Hydrogen therapy is gaining recognition for its potential cardiovascular benefits, particularly due to its antioxidant properties [53]. Clinical studies have demonstrated that inhalation or administration of hydrogen-rich solutions can significantly reduce oxidative stress and inflammation in cardiovascular diseases [54, 55]. For instance, hydrogen therapy has been shown to protect the heart during ischemia-reperfusion injury, reducing cell death and preserving myocardial function [53, 56]. This protective effect is attributed to hydrogen's ability to selectively neutralize harmful reactive oxygen species, making it a valuable adjunct in acute and chronic cardiovascular conditions [28, 57].

In addition to its acute benefits, hydrogen therapy is being explored for its potential role in long-term cardiovascular health [16, 58]. Early research indicates that it may improve endothelial function and reduce arterial stiffness, factors that contribute to cardiovascular risk. Patients with metabolic syndrome and heart failure may particularly benefit from hydrogen therapy, as it addresses oxidative stress and inflammation, both key contributors to these conditions [59]. Ongoing clinical trials are investigating these applications, aiming to solidify hydrogen's place in standard cardiovascular care. While promising, the clinical application of hydrogen therapy requires further exploration. Key challenges include determining optimal dosages, delivery methods, and long-term effects [60]. As research progresses, hydrogen therapy could become a critical component of comprehensive cardiovascular treatment strategies, offering new hope for patients [61].

3.3. Carbon Monoxide as a Therapeutic Agent

Carbon monoxide (CO), traditionally associated with toxicity, is now recognized for its therapeutic potential in cardiovascular medicine [62, 63]. Low concentrations of CO have been shown to exert cardioprotective effects by reducing oxidative stress and inflammation [51, 64, 65]. Clinical studies suggest that CO can improve outcomes in conditions such as heart failure and myocardial infarction by promoting vasodilation and enhancing blood flow. This unexpected utility is largely due to CO's interaction with heme oxygenase-1, which activates protective pathways in cardiovascular tissues as shown in **figure-2** [63, 66].

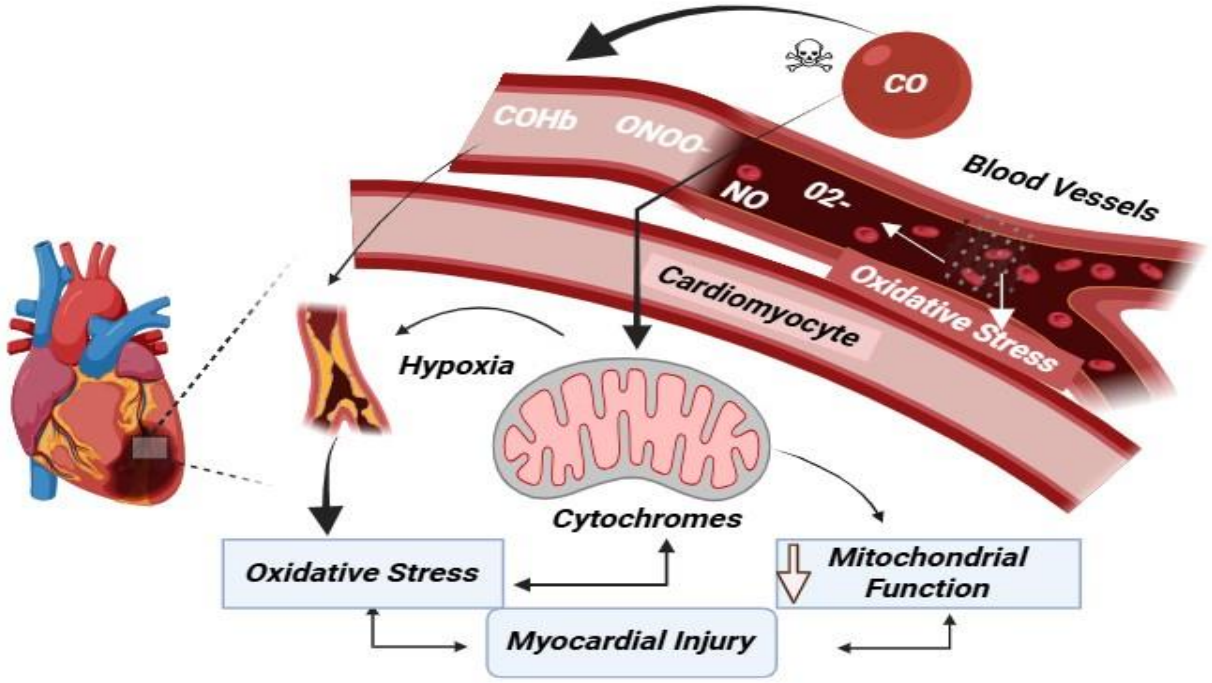

Figure 2: Pathophysiology of carbon monoxide poisoning in the heart. CO diffuses rapidly into the bloodstream as a component of inhaled pollutants. In addition to binding to hemoglobin, CO modulates platelet function to increase nitric oxide (NO) production. NO reacts with oxygen free radicals (O_2).

Furthermore, CO therapy is being investigated for its role in promoting angiogenesis, the formation of new blood vessels, which is crucial in ischemic heart disease [63, 67, 68]. By enhancing blood flow to compromised tissues, CO may support recovery and improve overall cardiac function. Initial findings indicate that CO halation or delivery via specialized systems can

positively influence outcomes in both acute and chronic cardiovascular scenarios [69]. Despite its potential, the clinical use of carbon monoxide poses significant challenges. Safety concerns regarding its use, particularly at higher concentrations, necessitate rigorous studies to establish safe dosing and administration protocols [70]. As research continues, carbon monoxide therapy may pave the way for novel treatment paradigms in cardiovascular care, highlighting the importance of understanding and harnessing the biological roles of gases traditionally deemed harmful [48, 71].

4. Gas Delivery Approaches

4.1. Inhalation Therapies

Inhalation therapy is one of the most common and effective methods for delivering gases directly to the lungs, making it particularly suitable for respiratory and cardiovascular conditions [72]. This method allows for rapid absorption of gases like nitric oxide and hydrogen, ensuring that they reach the systemic circulation quickly [73]. Inhaled nitric oxide, for example, has been widely used in clinical settings for treating pulmonary hypertension and acute respiratory distress syndrome [74, 75]. The advantage of inhalation therapy lies in its ability to deliver precise doses directly to the site of action while minimizing systemic side effects [76].

Inhalation devices can be tailored for specific patient needs, ranging from portable nebulizers to more advanced delivery systems used in intensive care units [77, 78]. The effectiveness of this method is contingent on careful monitoring and adjustment of flow rates and concentrations to ensure optimal therapeutic outcomes. Additionally, inhalation therapy is generally well-tolerated by patients, contributing to its popularity in clinical practice [79, 80]. However, challenges remain, including the potential for irritation of the respiratory tract and the need for specialized equipment. The ongoing research is focusing on improving delivery systems and exploring the combination of inhaled gases with other therapeutic agents to enhance their effects further [81, 82].

4.2. Intravenous Administration

Intravenous (IV) administration offers a more direct approach for delivering gases like carbon monoxide and hydrogen, enabling rapid and controlled dosing [83, 84]. This method is particularly beneficial in acute settings, where immediate therapeutic action is required. For instance, CO can be delivered intravenously in controlled doses to take advantage of its cardioprotective effects, such as reducing ischemia-reperfusion injury during surgical procedures [85].

IV administration allows for precise control over gas concentration and can be adjusted based on the patient's response [86]. It also facilitates the delivery of gases in combination with other therapeutic agents, potentially enhancing their overall efficacy. This method is particularly advantageous in critically ill patients, where rapid intervention can significantly impact outcomes [87]. Nonetheless, the use of IV gas delivery requires careful monitoring to prevent adverse effects associated with excessive dosing. Research is ongoing to establish safety protocols and optimal administration strategies, aiming to integrate IV gas therapy into standard clinical practice for various cardiovascular conditions [88].

4.3. Localized Delivery Systems

Localized delivery systems represent an innovative approach to gas therapy, focusing on targeted treatment to specific tissues or organs [89]. This method minimizes systemic exposure and maximizes therapeutic effects at the desired site. For example, localized delivery of nitric oxide can be achieved through the use of specialized catheters or implants that release the gas directly into the coronary arteries, enhancing its vasodilatory effects in regions affected by ischemia [5, 76, 90, 91]. Localized delivery systems are particularly advantageous in chronic conditions, where sustained release of therapeutic gases can promote healing and regeneration [92]. These systems can be designed to respond to physiological changes, allowing for dynamic delivery based on real-time needs. For instance, polymer-based scaffolds embedded with gas-releasing agents are being explored in tissue engineering applications for cardiac repair [93]. While localized delivery holds significant promise, challenges such as ensuring consistent gas release and maintaining biocompatibility must be addressed. Continued advancements in materials science and bioengineering are expected to enhance the feasibility and effectiveness of localized gas therapy, paving the way for more targeted and personalized approaches to cardiovascular treatment [94-96].

CAD remains a leading cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide, affecting millions of individuals and placing a significant burden on healthcare systems [97, 98]. Despite advancements in medical therapies and surgical interventions, the search for innovative treatments continues, driven by the need to enhance patient outcomes and quality of life. Traditional management approaches often focus on controlling symptoms and risk factors, but there is a growing interest in exploring novel therapeutic strategies that target the underlying pathophysiology of CAD [99-101].

Gas therapy has emerged as a promising avenue for intervention in cardiovascular medicine. This innovative approach harnesses the unique biological effects of specific gases, such as nitric oxide, hydrogen, and carbon monoxide, to promote cardiovascular health [71]. These gases play critical roles in various physiological processes, including vasodilation, inflammation modulation, and cellular signaling [102-104]. By understanding the mechanisms through which these gases exert their effects, researchers are beginning to unlock their potential as therapeutic agents. Nitric oxide, in particular, has garnered

significant attention for its ability to induce vasodilation and improve blood flow, making it a valuable tool in managing conditions such as hypertension and heart failure [10]. Meanwhile, hydrogen therapy is being investigated for its antioxidant properties and potential to reduce ischemic injury [56, 105]. Carbon monoxide, often viewed as a toxic gas, is now recognized for its protective effects against oxidative stress and inflammation, showcasing the complex and multifaceted roles these gases can play in cardiovascular health [103, 106, 107]. Despite the promising findings surrounding gas therapy, several challenges remain in its implementation and clinical application (Table-1) [108]. Issues related to safety, delivery methods, and standardization of protocols must be addressed to ensure optimal outcomes for patients. As research continues to advance, the integration of gas therapy into conventional cardiovascular treatment regimens could revolutionize the management of CAD, providing new hope for patients and clinicians alike [109, 110].

Table 1: List of recent literature studies based on clinical trials relevant to gas therapy in cardiovascular disease

Gasses	Application in CVD	Study/Review	Clinical Trials	Key Findings	Ref
Nitric Oxide (NO)	Pulmonary Hypertension (PH), Heart Failure (HF), Endothelial Dysfunction	- Inhaled NO in Acute Decompensated HF - Role of NO in Cardiovascular Disease	**NCT01995986** (Inhaled NO in HF with PH) - **NCT02598423** (NO in Pediatric Congenital Heart Disease) - **NCT02874363** (NO in Mitral Regurgitation and PH)	Nitric oxide (NO) enhances vasodilation and reduces pulmonary pressure, improving outcomes in PH, HF, and other cardiovascular conditions by relieving the strain on the heart.	[64, 111, 112]
Hydrogen Sulfide (H_2S)	Cardio protection, Ischemia-Reperfusion Injury, Atherosclerosis	- H_2S in Cardiovascular Disease - Hydrogen Sulfide and cardio protection	**NCT02192327** (H_2S in Acute Myocardial Infarction) - **NCT02899364** (H_2S Donor in Acute Coronary Syndromes) - **NCT03069362** (H_2S in Patients with HF and PH)	Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) reduces oxidative stress and inflammation, promotes vasodilation, and protects the myocardium from ischemia-reperfusion injury, showing promise in HF and MI treatment.	[113, 114]
Carbon Monoxide (CO)	Pulmonary Hypertension, Heart Failure, Atherosclerosis	- CO and Vascular Disease - CO and Cardiovascular Therapeutics	**NCT01523541** (Low-dose CO in PH and HF). **NCT02425579** (CO Therapy in Heart Transplantation). **NCT01385609** (CO for Ischemia-Reperfusion Injury in Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting)	Low-dose carbon monoxide (CO) has vasodilatory and anti-inflammatory properties, with clinical trials showing its potential for reducing PH, improving heart transplant outcomes, and protecting against ischemia-reperfusion injury.	[115, 116]

5. Challenges and Considerations

Despite the promising potential of gas therapy in cardiovascular medicine, several challenges must be addressed to ensure safe and effective clinical applications [117]. One significant concern is the potential toxicity associated with certain gases, particularly when used at higher concentrations or for prolonged durations. For instance, while nitric oxide is

beneficial for vasodilation, excessive exposure can lead to methemoglobinemia, a condition where hemoglobin is unable to carry oxygen effectively. Similarly, while carbon monoxide has therapeutic benefits, its well-known toxicity poses risks, requiring careful monitoring and precise dosing to avoid adverse effects [45, 118, 119]. Another critical consideration is the variability in individual patient responses to gas therapy. Factors such as underlying health conditions, concurrent medications, and genetic differences can influence how patients metabolize and respond to gas treatments [105, 120]. Personalized approaches that take these factors into account are essential to optimize therapeutic outcomes. This necessitates further research to identify biomarkers or predictive indicators that can guide individualized treatment strategies [121, 122].

Additionally, the standardization of gas delivery methods poses a challenge in clinical practice. With various delivery systems available ranging from inhalation to intravenous and localized methods, there is a need for consensus on best practices to ensure safety and efficacy [36, 123, 124]. This includes establishing clear guidelines for dosing, administration protocols, and monitoring protocols to mitigate risks. Collaboration among researchers, clinicians, and regulatory bodies will be crucial in developing these standards and promoting the safe integration of gas therapy into routine cardiovascular care [48, 125].

6. Conclusion and Future Perspectives

Gas therapy has emerged as a groundbreaking approach in the management of cardiovascular disease, offering innovative mechanisms for enhancing vascular function and mitigating tissue damage. The distinct biological effects of gases such as nitric oxide, hydrogen, and carbon monoxide have been shown to play critical roles in promoting vasodilation, reducing inflammation, and influencing cellular signaling pathways. These therapeutic gases can address various cardiovascular conditions, from acute emergencies like myocardial infarction to chronic issues such as heart failure and pulmonary hypertension. Despite the promising results observed in preclinical studies and initial clinical applications, several challenges remain. Safety concerns regarding gas toxicity, variability in individual patient responses, and the need for standardized delivery methods necessitate further research. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fully realizing the potential of gas therapy in clinical practice. As the body of evidence grows, it is essential to translate findings into routine clinical applications while ensuring patient safety and optimizing outcomes.

Looking ahead, the future of gas therapy in cardiovascular medicine appears bright, with several exciting avenues for research and development. One key area of exploration is the combination of gas therapy with existing treatment modalities. By integrating gases with traditional pharmacological agents or novel therapies, clinicians may enhance therapeutic efficacy while minimizing side effects. For example, combining nitric oxide with anti-inflammatory drugs could yield synergistic effects in managing chronic inflammatory conditions associated with cardiovascular disease. Moreover, advancements in drug delivery technologies will likely play a crucial role in optimizing gas therapy. Innovations in localized delivery systems, such as smart polymers and implantable devices, could provide targeted and controlled release of therapeutic gases directly to affected tissues. This would minimize systemic exposure and maximize local effects, particularly in patients with chronic ischemic conditions or those undergoing surgical interventions.

Furthermore, ongoing research into the molecular mechanisms of gas therapy will help to refine treatment protocols and identify patient-specific factors that influence responses. Personalized medicine approaches, driven by genetic, metabolic, and biomarker analyses, may enable clinicians to tailor gas therapies to individual patients, improving efficacy and reducing the risk of adverse effects. In conclusion, as research continues to advance, gas therapy is poised to become an integral part of the cardiovascular therapeutic landscape [126]. Collaborative efforts between researchers, clinicians, and regulatory bodies will be essential in overcoming current challenges and translating scientific discoveries into effective clinical applications. With continued innovation and exploration, gas therapy has the potential to transform the management of cardiovascular diseases, offering new hope to patients worldwide.

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