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Sheng Xia
Children's Mercy Hospital

Heather Menden
Children's Mercy Hospital

Nicholas Townley MD
Children's Mercy Hospital

Sherry M. Mabry
Children's Mercy Hospital

Michael F. Nyp
Children's Mercy Hospital

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Sheng Xia, Heather Menden, Nicholas Townley MD, Sherry M. Mabry, Michael F. Nyp, Donald W. Thibeault, and Venkatesh Sampath

DELTA LIKE 4 (DLL4), AN ENDOTHELIAL SPECIFIC NOTCH LIGAND IS CRITICAL FOR LUNG VASCULAR ARBORIZATION AND ALVEOLARIZATION



Sheng Xia, Heather Menden, Nick Townley, Sherry M. Mabry, Michael F. Nyp,
Donald W. Thibeault, Venkatesh Sampath



Children's Mercy Kansas City, Department of Pediatrics, Division of Neonatology, Kansas City, MO

Introduction

- Human and mouse lung development progress temporally from the embryonic, pseudo-glandular, canalicular, saccular and alveolar phase.
- Vascular development parallels lung development, resulting in an arborized network with terminal capillaries in close proximity to alveoli.
- The relative contribution of vasculogenesis vs. angiogenesis to distal lung development remains unclear. Further, the contribution of endothelial cell (EC) angiogenesis to lung development is unknown.
- Herein, we investigated the role of Delta like 4 (DLL4), a regulator of embryonic angiogenesis in vascular arborization and alveolarization.

Hypothesis and Objectives

Hypothesis: DLL4-dependent angiogenesis is essential for distal vascular arborization and normal alveolarization.

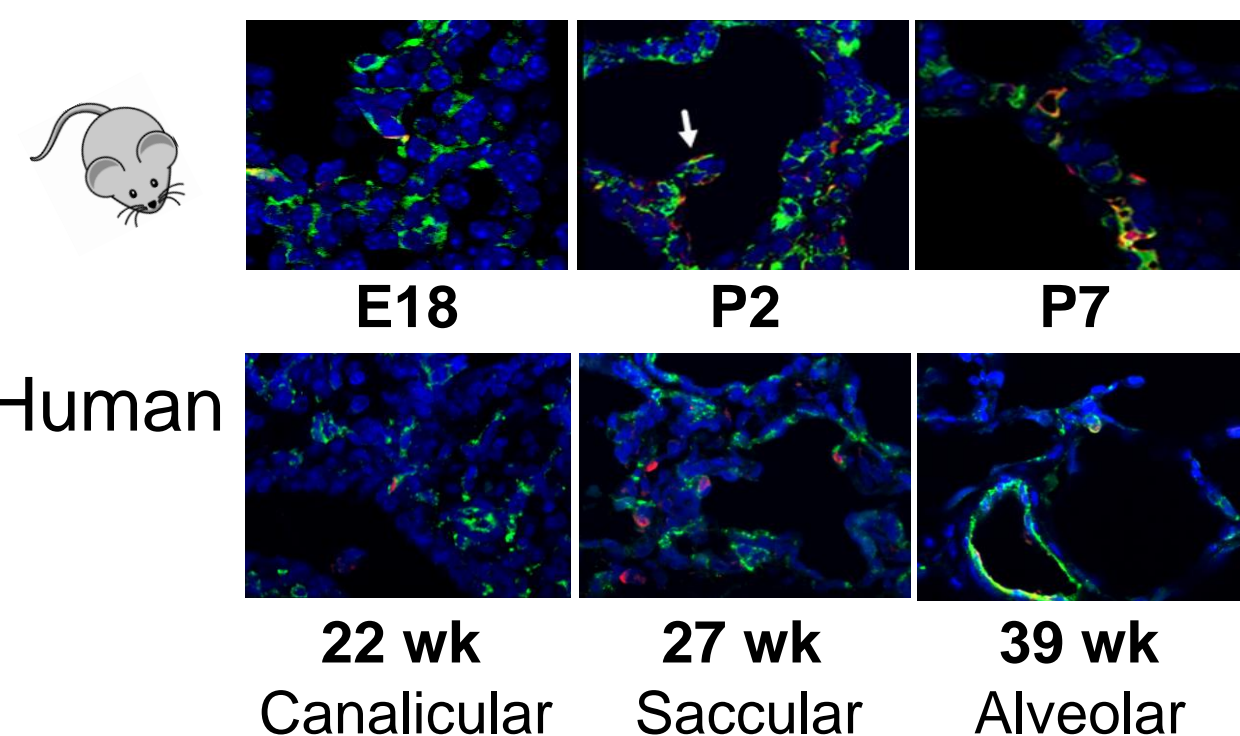
Objectives: 1) To map DLL4 during mouse and human lung development using wild-type and *Dll4-LacZ* mice. 2) To investigate the effect of DLL4 haploinsufficiency and EC-specific *Dll4* deletion on lung vascular development and alveolarization.

Methods

- DLL4 mapping in mouse & human:** DLL4 & PECAM IF/IHC in WT, *DLL4^{+/lacZ}* mice, human autopsy lung samples, X-gal in *DLL4^{+/lacZ}* mice.
- Mouse gene expression:** Whole lung RNA expression by qRT-PCR.
- Mouse lung morphometry:** Radial alveolar count (RAC) quantification was done to assess alveolarization in *WT* and *DLL4^{+/lacZ}* mice.
- Tamoxifen-inducible *Dll4* deletion:** *Dll4^{+/-Loxp}* (F) X *Dll4^{+/-Loxp}*; *VE-cad-CreERT2* (M). Female injected with Tamoxifen on P2, P3, P4.

Results

DLL4 expression from Canalicular to Alveolar Phase

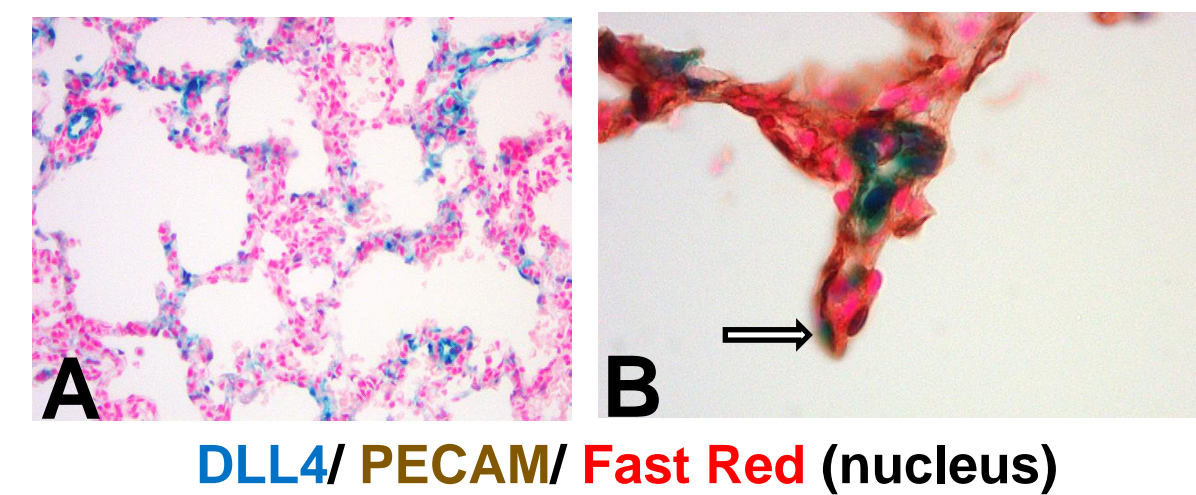


DLL4/ PECAM/DAPI (nucleus)

Arrow inset represents DLL4 expression in alveolar septum in PECAM+ cells. 63x; n=3.

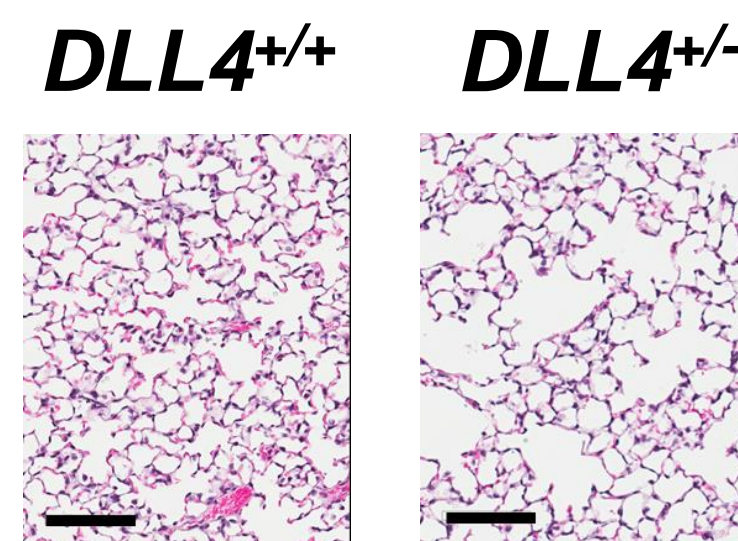
Results

DLL4 Lung Mapping Using *Dll4^{+/lacZ}* Reporter Mice

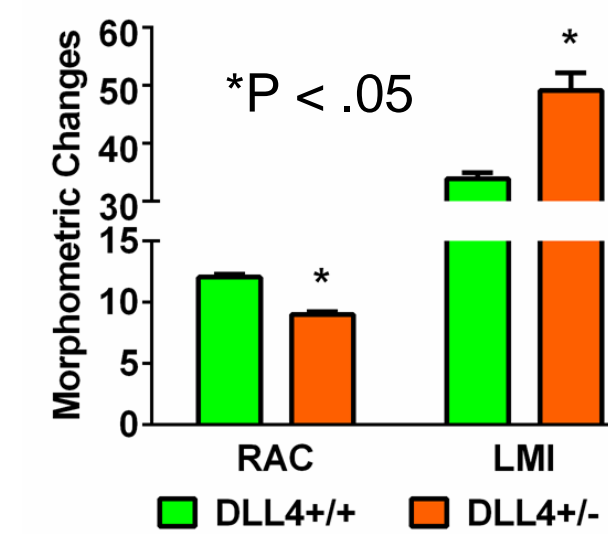


- A. X-gal (blue) indicates DLL4 in distal lung capillary EC.
B. Arrow - DLL4 in alveolar septum in PECAM+ cells (lung EC). 40x; n=3.

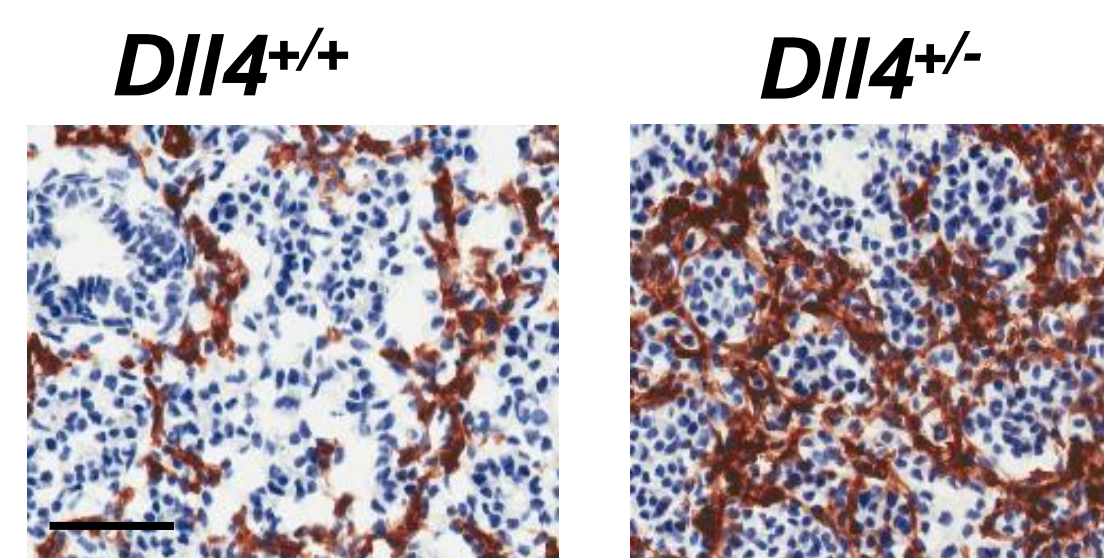
DLL4 Haploinsufficiency Causes Defective Alveolarization in Mice



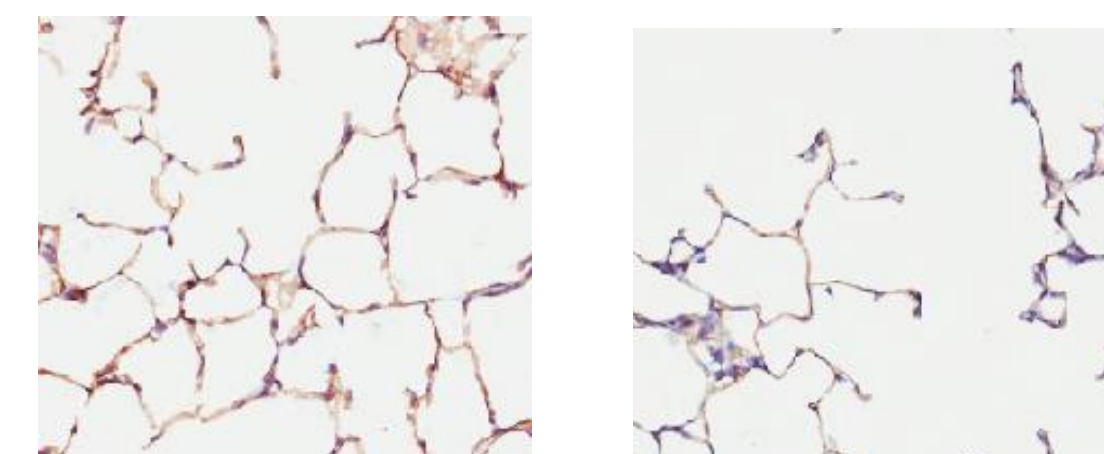
Inflation-fixed P28 mouse lungs
Scale bar = 100 μm



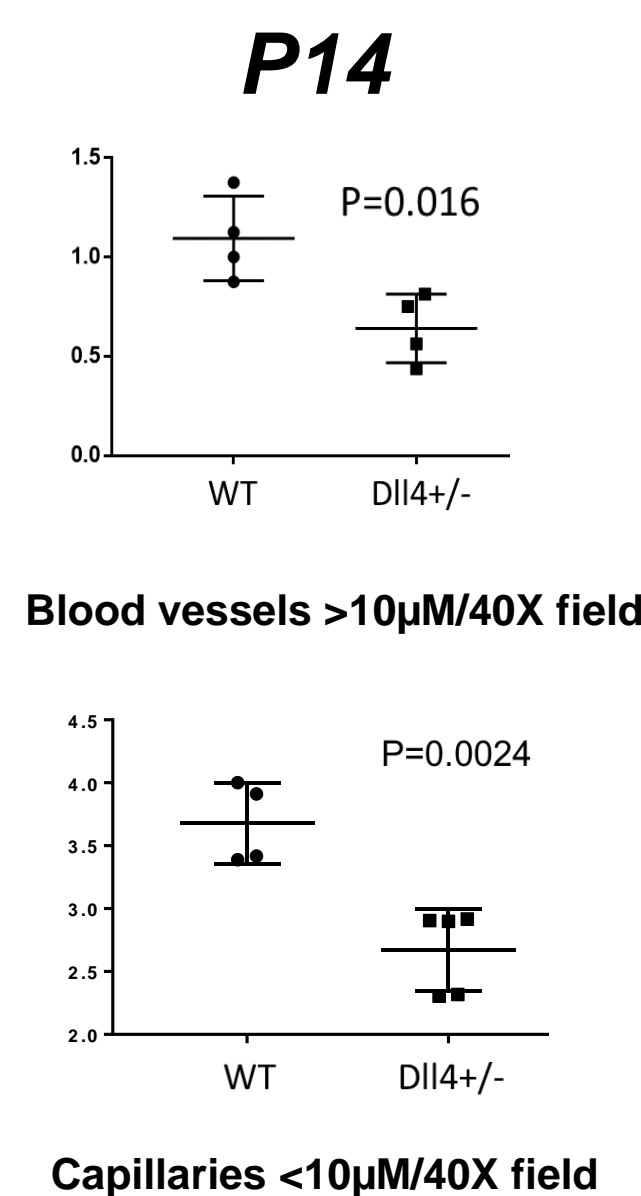
Aberrant Pulmonary Vascular Development in *Dll4^{+/-}* Mice



E17.5 Canalicular Stage

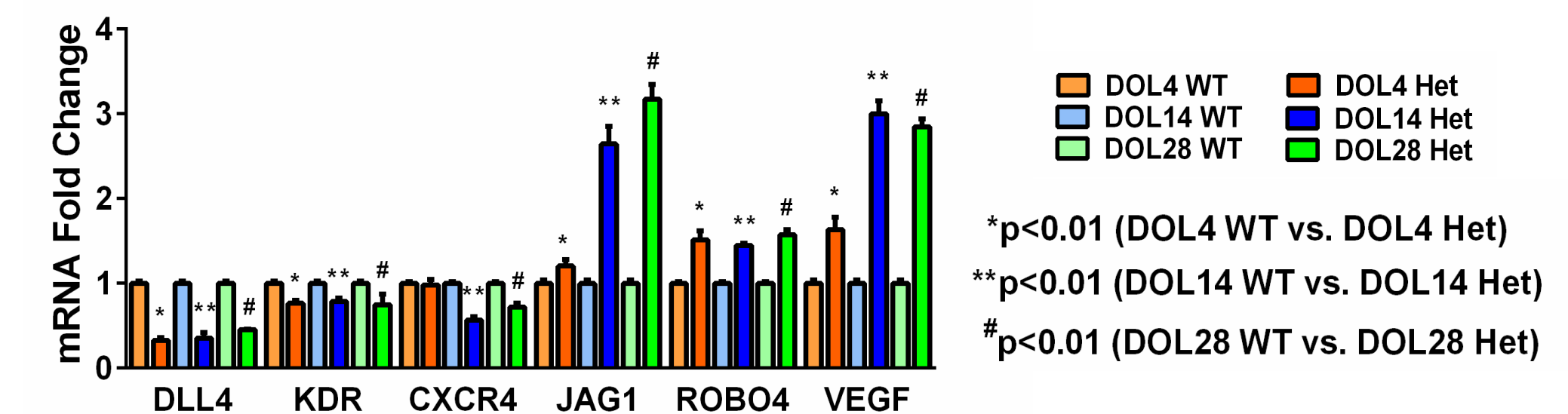


P14 Alveolar Stage



Results

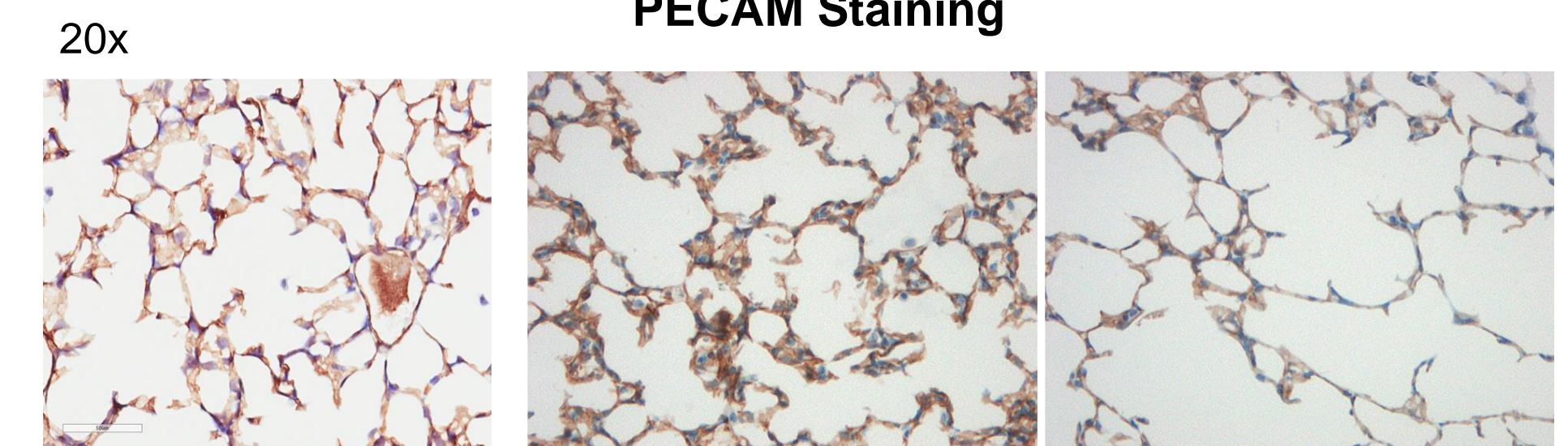
DLL4 Haploinsufficiency Causes Defective Alveolarization in Mice



Dll4 Deletion in EC Impairs Lung alveolarization

Dll4^{+/-Loxp} (F) crossed with *Dll4^{+/-Loxp}*; *VE-cad-CreERT2* (M)
Dam treated with tamoxifen - P4 and P5

P14 Mid-Alveolar Phase PECAM Staining



WT

Dll4loxp+/-;cre

Dll4loxp/loxp;cre

Conclusion

- DLL4 is expressed from the canalicular to the alveolar phase of lung development in mice & humans, indicating that DLL4-dependent angiogenesis contributes to vascular development.
- Dll4^{+/-}* mice have decreased expression of tip cell EC fate markers, with increased expression of stalk cell EC markers and VEGF. *Dll4^{+/-}* mice have dysmorphic microvasculature, impaired angiogenesis and disrupted alveolar development.
- Pilot data suggest that EC-*Dll4* deletion impairs alveolarization.
- Future:** Investigate how EC-DLL4 directs alveolarization, and *Dll4*'s role in defective Bronchopulmonary Dysplasia vasculature.