

Human-in-the-Loop Multi-Agent Ventilator Decision Support with Contextual Bandit Preference Learning

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Abstract. Ventilator decision support requires sequential decisions that track evolving physiology and disease trajectories while respecting safety boundaries and clinician specific tuning styles. Rule based approaches rarely generalize personalization, and end to end reinforcement learning or single large language model systems remain difficult to control and audit. We propose the **Ventilator Decision Support System (VDSS)**, a human in the loop multi agent framework that coordinates modular decision components through contract driven structured interfaces and produces traceable evidence for review. VDSS performs online preference adaptation with a contextual bandit, updating clinician specific preferences from the final accepted decision at each adjustment cycle and using them to guide subsequent recommendations. Structured rejection feedback triggers targeted replanning to reduce unproductive iterations and improve interaction stability. Retrospective ICU trajectory replay with expert review indicates higher recommendation acceptability and fewer interaction rounds to reach an acceptable plan, supporting clinically deployable human AI collaboration.

Keywords: Ventilator decision support · Multi agent system · Contextual bandit

1 Introduction

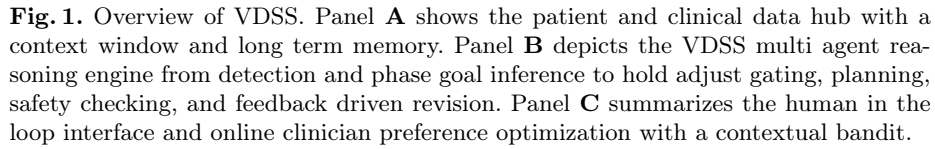
Mechanical ventilation is a central life sustaining therapy in the intensive care unit. Its clinical value extends beyond maintaining oxygenation and ventilation,

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as effective care requires continuous and fine grained adjustment of settings to match a patient’s evolving physiology [24, 4]. Ventilator management is inherently dynamic. Bedside teams must repeatedly revise decisions as lung mechanics, gas exchange, hemodynamics, and sedation levels change, while balancing multiple clinical objectives in real time [16]. At the same time, high quality titration depends on frequent assessment and rapid response by respiratory therapists and experienced clinicians [10]. This specialized workforce is persistently scarce in many health systems, and sustained workload together with shift handoffs makes it difficult to deliver consistently individualized management even within the same institution [6]. As patient volume rises and workflow pressure increases, a practical motivation for ventilator decision support is to embed expert practice in a scalable and reusable form that reduces cognitive burden and improves consistency [15].

Current practice is guided by protocols and accumulated experience, yet real ICU care presents persistent challenges for decision support [5]. Patient heterogeneity and nonstationary trajectories cause strategy benefits to vary across individuals and over time, limiting fixed rule reliability [9, 19]. Bedside titration often requires rapid setting changes based on multiple imperfect signals, and limited time to check and document the rationale can make adjustments inconsistent across cycles [21, 7]. Clinical teams further differ in risk tolerance, tuning style, and local conventions, and without explicit modeling and adaptation, decision support is unlikely to achieve sustained trust or uptake [8, 26]. Beyond a recommended setting, clinicians need a transparent link between the recommendation, the patient state, prevailing practice, and team preferences to support efficient repeated use [14]. These factors motivate ventilator decision support that is workflow aligned, coherent, and interpretable, while able to adapt as clinical preferences evolve [20, 1].

Motivated by these needs, we argue that in high risk clinical settings, point-wise model performance is necessary but not sufficient [22, 13]. Successful deployment instead hinges on decision support whose behavior can be inspected at the bedside and refined over time without breaking clinical workflow. We therefore propose the Ventilator Decision Support System, a human in the loop multi agent framework that decomposes ventilator decision making into modular agents and regulates inter agent communication through contract driven structured interfaces, enabling coherent multi round collaboration with a clear, auditable reasoning trace [27, 3]. The system uses layered short term and long term memory to manage trajectory level information and within round context, improving recommendation consistency and interaction stability [17]. It further incorporates a contextual bandit for online preference adaptation, treating the clinician’s final decision at the end of each adjustment cycle as feedback to update an individualized preference representation and guide subsequent recommendations. We validate this framework through retrospective ICU trajectory replay and expert review, showing improved recommendation acceptability and fewer interaction rounds to reach an acceptable recommendation [2].



- ## 2 Ventilator Decision Support System

VDSS organizes bedside ventilator titration as a contract governed multi-agent workflow rather than a single model that directly maps clinical inputs to ventilator recommendations. Here, agents refer to LLM or VLM reasoning modules with

defined clinical roles, role specific inputs, and schema constrained outputs, while graph routing, mode compatibility validation, and safety checking are implemented as deterministic control components. At each adjustment cycle t , VDSS forms the decision input x_t from the current bedside state, current ventilator settings, short term context, and long term memory. Physiological and ventilatory measurements are treated as state variables, whereas clinician adjustable ventilator settings, including ventilation mode, PEEP, oxygen concentration, pressure support, inspiratory pressure, and respiratory rate, are treated as action variables. This design maintains a traceable path from evidence extraction to decision reasoning and clinician facing communication.

When waveform data are available, the **Waveform Analyzer** first converts rendered pressure and flow traces into structured bedside cues, including waveform quality, asynchrony patterns, suspicious events, observed patient state, and uncertainty, thereby complementing tabular signals with dynamic ventilatory evidence [23]. The **Detection Agent** integrates these waveform-derived cues with physiological and ventilatory measurements to identify abnormalities and generate a structured state summary. This summary is then interpreted by the **Phase Goal Manager**, which infers the current treatment phase and specifies primary and secondary goals. Conditioned on the detected abnormalities and phase-consistent objectives, the **Hold/Adjust Gate** selects a branch decision $b_t \in \{\text{hold}, \text{adjust}\}$. This gate enables VDSS to avoid unnecessary titration when the current configuration is acceptable or when the available evidence is insufficient for safe adjustment.

The overall workflow is illustrated in Fig. 1. If $b_t = \text{hold}$, VDSS proceeds directly to cycle closure by generating a clinician-facing summary and structured record. If $b_t = \text{adjust}$, VDSS enters the active titration branch. The **Strategy Selector** determines the adjustment priority, the **Mode Select** agent evaluates whether a mode change is required under device- and mode-specific control semantics, and the **Parameter Planner** proposes a compact set of executable setting updates over allowable action variables. Before clinician review, proposed updates are passed through deterministic safety and compatibility checks, ensuring that generative planning remains bounded by explicit device, mode, and safety constraints. If the clinician rejects a recommendation, the **Reflect Agent** translates structured feedback into revision constraints and identifies the minimal decision layer to revisit, such as strategy selection, mode selection, or parameter planning. Once a recommendation is accepted, the **Note Generator** produces the final clinician-facing summary, stores an auditable cycle record, and extracts the preference signal used for subsequent preference adaptation.

2.2 Human in the Loop Interaction and Replanning

VDSS is structured around clinician confirmed adjustment cycles. After the reasoning engine produces candidate setting updates and they pass an initial *Safety* consistency check, the system pauses and presents the proposed ventilator mode and parameter updates together with the safety assessment and the current pref-

Algorithm 1 Cycle end preference update with a contextual bandit in VDSS

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1: Input: clinician  $d$ , context  $x_t$ , current settings, long term memory
2:  $k \leftarrow 1$ , accepted  $\leftarrow$  false
3: while  $\neg$ accepted and  $k \leq K_{\max}$  do
4:   Generate proposal  $a_t^{(k)}$ , apply Safety, present for clinician review, collect  $o_t^{(k)}$ 
5:   if  $o_t^{(k)} = \text{reject}$  then
6:     Reflect Agent produces revision constraints and selects the minimal decision
       stage to revisit
7:     Replan from the selected stage;  $k \leftarrow k + 1$ 
8:   else
9:      $\tilde{a}_t \leftarrow a_t^{(k)}$ ,  $K_t \leftarrow k$ , accepted  $\leftarrow$  true
10:  end if
11: end while
12: Note Generator outputs log summary  $s_t$  and preference signal  $p_t$ 
13: Update clinician preference state  $\theta_d \leftarrow \text{BanditUpdate}(\theta_d; x_t, \tilde{a}_t, h_t, p_t)$ 
14: Write  $s_t$  and  $p_t$  to long term memory

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erence context. This cycle level checkpoint matches bedside titration practice and makes clinician oversight an explicit component of the control loop [25].

For cycle t , interaction proceeds through rounds $k = 1, \dots, K_t$. The proposal at round k is $a_t^{(k)}$, and clinician feedback is $o_t^{(k)} \in \{\text{accept}, \text{reject}\}$. The cycle ends at the first accepted proposal, yielding the final accepted configuration $\tilde{a}_t$:

$$K_t = \min\{k : o_t^{(k)} = \text{accept}\}, \quad \tilde{a}_t = a_t^{(K_t)}. \quad (1)$$

Rejection is treated as a structured control signal. When a proposal is rejected, the system records the clinician rationale and the specific parameters at issue, and the *Reflect Agent* translates this feedback into revision constraints while localizing the minimal decision level to revisit. Replanning is then applied only to the implicated stage, with intermediate results reused whenever possible rather than rerunning the full pipeline. When waveform input is available, the *Waveform Analyzer* may be re executed to refresh evidence prior to revision so subsequent proposals remain grounded in current bedside cues. This targeted rollback mechanism keeps updates confined to the feedback relevant layer and reduces redundant inference across rounds.

Upon acceptance, the *Note Generator* closes the cycle by producing a structured summary of the final decision and extracting a clinician preference signal from the completed interaction. These outputs are written to long term memory to support trajectory continuity and subsequent preference adaptation, while the within cycle trace is retained for audit and for the cycle end preference update described next. Interaction is bounded by a maximum round budget $K_{\max}$ to maintain a controlled and reviewable process.

2.3 Online Preference Optimization with Contextual Bandit

VDSS adapts to clinician specific tuning styles via an online contextual bandit that is updated only after an adjustment cycle is resolved by clinician acceptance.

For each clinician d , the bandit maintains a preference state θ_d [11]. This state is provided to the reasoning engine as preference context and modulates candidate ranking and selection in subsequent cycles. At cycle closure, *Note Generator* produces two cycle level artifacts that are persisted in long term memory, namely a final patient log summary and a clinician preference signal.

Preference learning is defined over a fixed set of twelve long term preference categories, which correspond to the twelve bandit arms used for clinician modeling. These categories span preferences over adjustment granularity and adjustment style, as well as emphasis across clinical objectives and pragmatic workflow choices commonly observed in bedside titration. Specifically, the categories include preferences for mode level changes versus staying within the current mode, conservative small step updates versus target driven assertive adjustments, and prioritization of oxygenation, ventilation and acid base control, lung protection, hemodynamics, synchrony and comfort, and weaning. They further encode a tendency to focus on a single key parameter first and a tendency to defer action when available data or context are insufficient.

Let x_t denote the cycle context assembled from the data hub and memory, and let $h_t = \{(a_t^{(k)}, o_t^{(k)})\}_{k=1}^{K_t}$ denote the full interaction trace for cycle t . After a proposal is accepted, the final accepted settings $\tilde{a}_t$ and the preference signal p_t produced at cycle closure define a single cycle end update:

$$\theta_d \leftarrow \text{BanditUpdate}(\theta_d; x_t, \tilde{a}_t, h_t, p_t). \quad (2)$$

This update is driven by the clinician approved outcome and the full cycle trace rather than intermediate rejected proposals, aligning preference adaptation with bedside decision making.

3 Experiments

We evaluate VDSS using retrospective ICU trajectory replay with cycle based clinician review. The dataset is collected from a multi center ICU cohort and includes 1309 structured records and 7447 ventilator setting entries covering 13 ventilation modes across two ventilator brands, with the four most frequent modes accounting for 83.4% of all entries. We quantify next step replay by predicting the next clinically recorded setting update from the current bedside state and settings, reporting normalized error metrics and averaged R^2 .

Table 1 summarizes performance across replay and expert review. Across backbones, deploying models within VDSS yields substantially better replay accuracy and clinician ratings than direct single model generation. For example, under GPT-5.2, VDSS reduces MSE from 0.343 to 0.102 while improving the overall rating from 2.63 to 4.11. The ablations show consistent degradation when removing waveform evidence or preference context, with MSE increasing to 0.145 (NoImg) or 0.128 (NoPref) and overall ratings dropping to 3.62 and 3.89, respectively, indicating that both components contribute to more stable recommendations and clearer clinician facing justification. Similar gains are ob-

Table 1. Main results. Replay metrics are computed on the full dataset and clinician ratings (1–5) are from expert review of 100 cycles for single model baselines, VDSS, and VDSS ablations.

Method	Replay metrics			Clinician ratings (1–5)			
	MSE ↓	MAE ↓	R^2 ↑	Accept.	Safety	Clarity	Overall
Single model end to end							
Qwen3-VL-8B	0.486	0.595	-0.132	2.45	2.11	2.26	2.27
Qwen3-VL-235B	0.390	0.426	0.019	2.53	2.17	2.19	2.30
Gemini 3 Pro	0.362	0.386	0.130	2.80	2.31	2.24	2.45
GPT-5.2	0.343	0.381	0.153	2.75	2.43	2.71	2.63
VDSS (same backbone, multi agent)							
Qwen3(VL)-8B (VDSS)	0.175	0.210	0.354	3.30	4.12	3.56	3.22
Qwen3-VL-235B (VDSS)	0.130	0.183	0.661	3.51	4.20	3.79	3.59
Gemini 3 Pro (VDSS)	0.124	0.166	0.693	3.80	4.30	3.91	3.82
GPT-5.2 (VDSS)	0.102	0.162	0.743	4.09	4.46	4.15	4.11
Ablations (GPT-5.2 within VDSS)							
NoImg	0.145	0.194	0.660	3.69	4.26	3.75	3.62
NoPref	0.128	0.183	0.707	3.81	4.32	3.95	3.89
NoImgNoPref	0.158	0.202	0.620	3.50	4.15	3.61	3.46

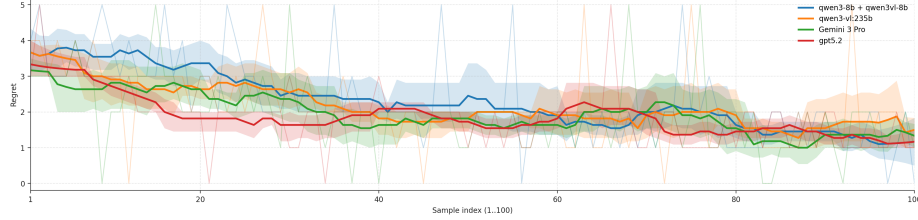


Fig. 2. Regret over 100 cycles from a single clinician, defined as $K_t - 1$ and capped by $K_{\max}$, shows an overall downward trend.

served across other backbones, suggesting that the improvement is driven by the VDSS workflow rather than any single model.

We do not emphasize conventional reinforcement learning because ventilation modes differ substantially in parameter sets and semantics, and per mode data are comparatively limited, which degrades generalization [12, 18]. The high risk setting further motivates a reviewable interaction loop with explicit safety checks and an auditable evidence trail, which is difficult to guarantee with end to end policies across heterogeneous modes.

We assess interaction efficiency through cycle level rejection dynamics on the same 100 cycle study. For each cycle t , interaction proceeds across rounds $k = 1, \dots, K_t$ and ends at the first accepted proposal. Regret within a cycle is the number of rejected proposals, $K_t - 1$, capped by the maximum round budget

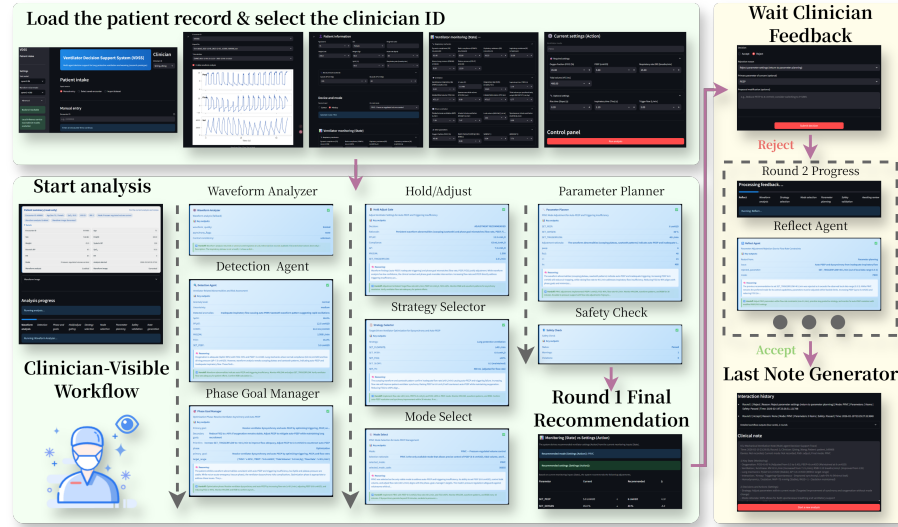


Fig. 3. Case study of one VDSS adjustment cycle.

$K_{\max}$. Fig. 2 shows an overall downward regret trend across model variants, consistent with improved interaction efficiency as preference context is updated.

We report runtime on an RTX 5070 Ti for local inference with Qwen3-8B and Qwen3-VL-8B. The workflow averages 305.3 s per cycle, and waveform analysis is the main bottleneck at 56.46 s. With external APIs, latency can vary with network conditions and server load. The framework maintains a completion failure rate below **7%**.

4 Case Study

Fig. 3 illustrates a complete adjustment cycle in the prototype interface. The clinician selects a clinician ID, loads a patient encounter, specifies the analysis time window, and enables waveform analysis when available. The patient is managed in PRVC with stable oxygenation and lung mechanics, while pressure and flow waveforms show a scooped inspiratory plateau and sawtooth patterns consistent with insufficient inspiratory flow and elevated auto PEEP risk. The system summarizes abnormalities and evidence, defines phase consistent objectives to improve synchrony and reduce auto PEEP risk while de escalating FiO2 when appropriate, and maintains PRVC while proposing a small set of safety checked parameter updates for review. The first proposal is rejected due to local feasibility constraints, which are converted into explicit revision constraints to replan from the implicated stage, yielding an updated recommendation accepted in the second round. The cycle ends with a structured note and an auditable

interaction log written to long term memory, and the accepted outcome updates clinician specific preferences for subsequent cycles.

5 Conclusion

We present a human in the loop multi agent ventilator decision support framework that combines contract governed modules with traceable evidence and safety checked recommendations, enabling interpretable and reviewable bedside titration. Retrospective ICU trajectory replay and expert review show improved acceptability and fewer interaction rounds, indicating that the framework is effective in practice. An online contextual bandit updates clinician specific preferences at cycle closure, which improves alignment with individual tuning styles and supports consistent, preference aware recommendations under the same safety boundaries.

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