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Abstract Asthma is an inflammatory chronic disease characterized by airway obstructions disorders. The treatment is usually done by inhalation therapy, in which pressurized metered-dose inhalers (pMDIs) are a preferred device. The objective of this paper is to characterize and simulate a pMDI spray plume by introducing realistic factors through a computational fluid dynamics (CFD) study. Numerical simulations were performed with Fluent® software, by using a three-dimensional “testbox” for room environment representation. An HFA-134a with salbutamol formulation was used for characterization, whose were taken as input for the CFD simulations. Spray droplets were considered to be composed by ethanol, salbutamol and HFA-134a. Propellant evaporation was taken into consideration, as well as, drag coefficient correction. Results showed an air temperature drop of 3.3 °C near the nozzle. Also, an increase in air velocity of 3.27 m/s was noticed. The CFD results seem to be in good agreement with Dunbar (1997) data on particle average velocity along the axial distance from the nozzle.

Keywords (separated by '-') Computational fluid dynamics - Discrete phase model - Drug particles - Lagrangian tracking - pMDI - Spray characterization



A CFD Study of a pMDI Plume Spray

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José C. Teixeira and Helena C. Marques

Abstract Asthma is an inflammatory chronic disease characterized by airway obstructions disorders. The treatment is usually done by inhalation therapy, in which pressurized metered-dose inhalers (pMDIs) are a preferred device. The objective of this paper is to characterize and simulate a pMDI spray plume by introducing realistic factors through a computational fluid dynamics (CFD) study. Numerical simulations were performed with Fluent[®] software, by using a three-dimensional “testbox” for room environment representation. An HFA-134a with salbutamol formulation was used for characterization, whose were taken as input for the CFD simulations. Spray droplets were considered to be composed by ethanol, salbutamol and HFA-134a. Propellant evaporation was taken into consideration, as well as, drag coefficient correction. Results showed an air temperature drop of 3.3 °C near the nozzle. Also, an increase in air velocity of 3.27 m/s was noticed. The CFD results seem to be in good agreement with Dunbar (1997) data on particle average velocity along the axial distance from the nozzle.

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1 Introduction

The inhalation therapy is a cornerstone in treatment of airway diseases. Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disorder associated with airway hyper responsiveness, which can be characterized by episodes of wheezing, breathing difficulties, chest tightness and coughing [1]. More than 300 million worldwide are affected by this disease which is responsible for the death of 220 thousand per year, growing at a rate of 50 % per decade [2]. Anti-inflammatory and bronchodilator drugs are used with the objective of reducing the inflammation of the pulmonary tissue, which causes the diameter reduction of the bronchus [3].

Pressurized metered-dose inhalers (pMDIs) are one of the major aerosol-generating devices used for aerosol delivery of bronchodilators in ambulatory patients [4]. Drug dose effectiveness in inhaled delivery is difficult to measure due to the fact that only a small fraction of the pMDI nominal dose reaches the lower respiratory tract. The pMDI is a small, cost-effective and very portable device containing between 100 and 400 doses. This device comprises a disposable canister with a pressurized mixture of propellants, surfactants, preservatives, flavoring agents and active drugs. This mixture is released from the canister through a metering valve [4].

The particle size of the aerosol produced by a pMDI depends on the pressure of the propellant mixture, ambient temperature, valve design, drug concentration and actuator orifices. In fact, there is a relationship between the actuator nozzle diameter and the particle size distribution, as well as, the ethanol concentration [5].

Moreover, the effectiveness of pMDIs is deeply associated with how the metering valve delivers, in an accurately and reproducibly manner, a measured volume and how it forms a propellant-tight seal for high pressure. According to Dhand [4], high-vapor-pressure propellants produce finer aerosol sprays, whereas increasing the drug concentration increases aerosol particle size. The actuator nozzle controls the atomization process in order to guarantee the formation of a spray plume. The canister, typically made of aluminum, holds a high internal pressure of 3–5 atm [6–8].

The application of computational fluid dynamics (CFD) in the design of aerosol drug delivery technologies has been proved to be a valuable tool when inhaler performance is investigated. The pMDI actuation is a complex phenomenon which involves turbulent flow, multiple phases, heat and mass transfer between the droplets and the environment. Several studies have been developed in order to model, numerically, pharmaceutical aerosols as a multi-phase flow, in which inhaled air is the continuous phase and the particles or droplets the discrete phase.

Dunbar et al. [9], performed a theoretical investigation of a pMDI spray by a CFD study consisting on the construction of actuator flow from the metered

59 chamber to the nozzle, which was based on a quasi-steady-state for flow analysis
60 during a single actuation. The objective was to examine droplet formation and its
61 trajectory during the inhaler actuation. The predicted results were validated against
62 experimental data obtained using phase Doppler particle analysis (PDPA). Compar-
63 ing the numerical results with the experimental data, it was observed that for a
64 distance of 25 mm from the spray orifice, the droplet velocity and size distributions
65 are in agreement, although such correlation does not hold further downstream [9].

66 Kleinstreuer et al. [10], experimentally validated a computational fluid-particle
67 dynamics model developed to simulate the airflow, droplet spray transport and
68 aerosol deposition in a pMDI considering several conditions, including different
69 nozzle diameters and the use of a spacer. Also, the properties of both chloro-
70 fluorocarbon (CFC) and hydrofluoroalkane-134a (HFA) were investigated. The
71 results indicated that the use of HFA, smaller valve orifices and the inclusion of
72 spacers yields the best performance in terms of droplets deposition. Smyth et al.
73 [11] also performed a spray pattern analysis for pMDIs, studying the influence of
74 orifice size, particle size, and droplet motion correlations.

75 Recently, Ruzycki et al. [12] presented a comprehensive review in the use of
76 CFD in inhaler design. The authors enlightened that the application of CFD
77 modeling techniques for pMDIs, nebulizers and DPIs improves the aerosol
78 transport and deposition understanding and, therefore, allows for an intuitive
79 optimization of inhaler technologies whereas saving time and resources.

80 Previous studies in the simulation of the pMDI spray plume were made by the
81 authors [13–16]. After an extensive review of the pMDI properties and charac-
82 teristics, a CFD simulation was made but considering the particles to be solid (i.e.
83 made of active pharmaceutical ingredient) [15].

84 This work aims to characterize and simulate a pMDI spray by means of a
85 commercial CFD software (i.e. Fluent[®] v14.0 from ANSYS[®]). A pMDI salbuta-
86 mol formulation was used for characterization. CFD simulations were performed
87 in a three-dimensional “testbox”. Spray droplets were injected and tracked
88 accounting for propellant evaporation, aerodynamic size distribution, gravity,
89 Brownian motion, drag coefficient corrections, turbulence and energy exchange.
90 The input injection file was created using a Python language script.

91 2 Spray Characterization

92 2.1 Spray Dynamics

93 The spray dynamics can be effectively evaluated through images obtained by using
94 a high speed digital video camera. This technique is able to record up to 10,000
95 frames per second, which is very suitable for understanding and capturing details of
96 transient phenomena despite the difficulties related with the illumination required.
97 Specifically for the delivery of aerosol drugs, the potential of such technique is

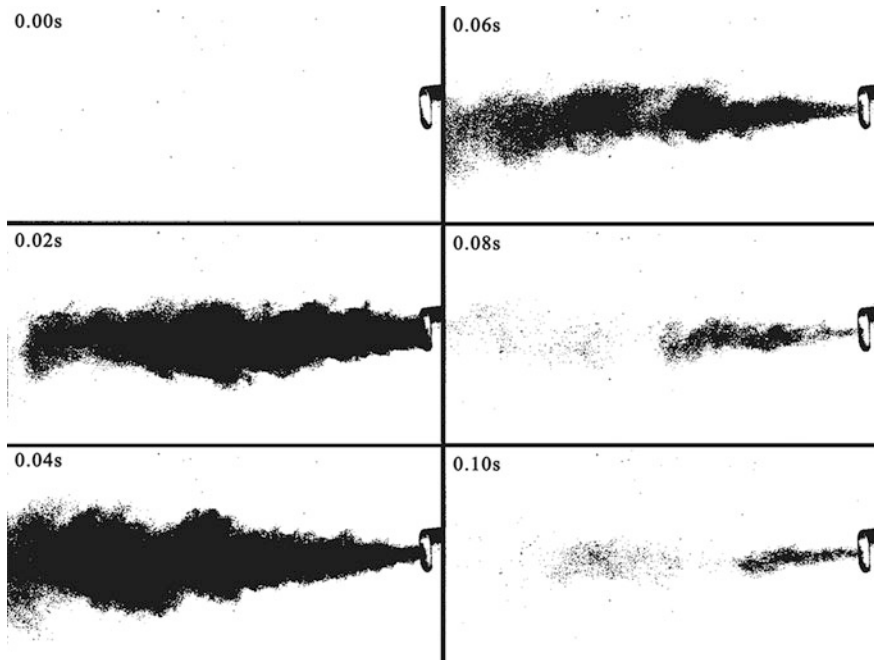


Fig. 1 High speed images of a puff taken from a salbutamol HFA-134a pMDI. These images were treated with greyscale and inverted colors after application of a threshold filter for easier visualization of the plume

suitable due to the very nature of the spray exiting from a high pressure canister. Nevertheless, the greatest advantage of this technique is its ability to capture the transient nature of the aerosol formation over the delivery time.

Using a high-speed camera (FASTCAM-APX RS 250KC), a puff event from the pMDI HFA-134a spray was recorded. Images were captured with an interval of 0.02 s (see Fig. 1). Those were taken at a rate of 6,000 frames per second, allowing to confirm the duration of the spray (0.1 s) and to calculate the spray angle (approximately 17°) by visual analysis.

2.2 Aerodynamic Size Distribution

Particle size distribution can be characterized either as Probability Density Function (PDF) or as a Cumulative Distribution Function (CDF). A particle size distribution is usually denoted by an independent variable, x , and two additional adaptable parameters [17].

The spray particle/droplets can be described through different mathematical distributions, being the Log-Normal, Rosin-Rammler and Nukiyama-Tanasawa the most cited. Amongst these distributions, it is well accepted that the pharmaceutical

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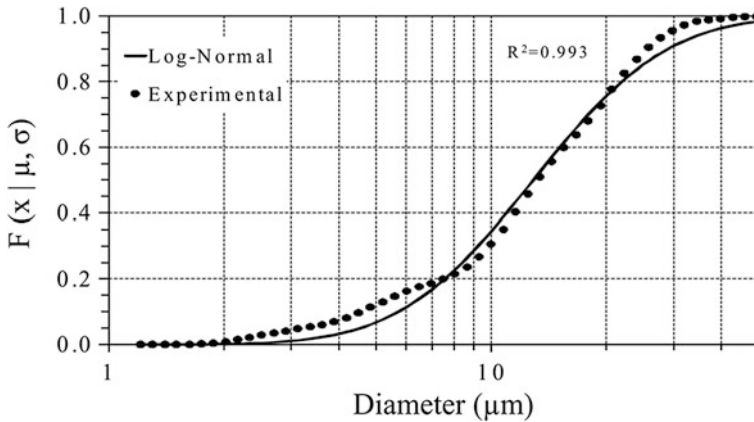


Fig. 2 Graphical representation of the pMDI HFA-134a salbutamol experimental data and its fitting for the log-normal CDF distribution. Measurements obtained at 100 mm from the laser beam

aerosols can be reasonable represented by the Log-Normal distribution fitting the measured data to the CDF as shown by Eq. (1). The Log-Normal PDF (Eq. 2) was derived from the normal distribution [17].

$$F(x; \mu, \sigma) = \frac{1}{2} \operatorname{erfc} \left[-\frac{\ln x - \mu}{\sigma\sqrt{2}} \right] \quad (1)$$

$$f(x; \mu, \sigma) = \frac{1}{x\sigma\sqrt{2\pi}} e^{-(\ln x - \mu)^2 / 2\sigma^2} \quad (2)$$

where σ is the geometric standard deviation (which shall be $\neq 0$), μ represents the mean diameter and erfc is the complementary error function. Using the laser diffraction analysis technique (Malvern 2,600 particle sizer), a pMDI spray plume of HFA-134a formulation of salbutamol was measured. Data were fitted to the Log-Normal CDF distribution model (1) using the least-squares method. Through the calculation of the Pearson coefficient of determination (i.e. R^2 -squared value) and its maximization ($R^2 = 0.993$), the distribution parameters were obtained: $\mu = 2.55$ and $\sigma = 0.634$. Such values are in agreement with those usually reported in the literature. The experimental results and its Log-Normal CDF curve are shown in Fig. 2.

2.3 Axial Velocity

The velocity of the droplets decreases along the axial distance from the nozzle, due the momentum exchange with the air. As reported by Dunbar [18], using PDPA measurements of a HFA-134a spray plume during an actuation, values were taken

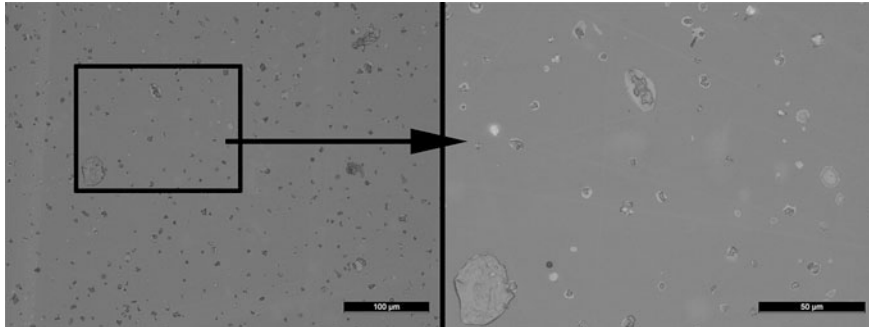


Fig. 3 Graphical representation of the pMDI HFA-134a salbutamol experimental data and its fitting for the log-normal CDF distribution. Measurements obtained at 100 mm from the laser beam

137 at different distances from the nozzle of the actuator. Consistent with their mea-
 138 surements, Dunbar concluded that a HFA propellant formulation produces a spray
 139 with higher velocities than a CFC formulation. This feature is due to the higher
 140 vapor pressure used in the HFA formulation. The plume behaves like a spray up to
 141 a distance of 75 mm from the nozzle and as an aerosol downstream that distance,
 142 where the droplet motion is being influenced by the gas [18].

143 2.4 Particle Shape and Size

144 Using an optical microscope (Leica DM 2,500 M) for the visual analysis of the
 145 particle shape and size, a set of images were taken. After a single puff being
 146 discharged against a glass plate, it was observed under the microscope at two
 147 different magnifications (see Fig. 3). It is possible to observe that the particles
 148 present a very irregular shape, although a limitation of the technique is the reduced
 149 depth of field. Also, it can be noticed that some particles present a solid craggy
 150 surface (i.e. salbutamol sulfate crystals) and others are encapsulated within a
 151 smooth spherical droplet of propellant that did not evaporate.

152 3 Spray Simulation

153 The pMDI is one of the most common drug delivery devices used in developed
 154 countries to treat asthma in children and adults. It mainly consists of salbutamol,
 155 which is the most frequently prescribed short-acting β -agonist (SABA) [7, 19, 20].

156 This CFD study accounts for the temperature, velocity, turbulence, droplet
 157 tracking and evaporation of its propellant, as well as, its concentration in the air.

Table 1 Thermo-physical properties of the formulation

Properties	HFA-134a	Ethanol	Salbutamol
Density (kg/m^3)	1,311	790	1,230
Specific heat (J/kg K)	982	2,470	–
Latent heat (J/kg)	182,000	855,237	–
Boiling point (K)	247	351	–
Binary diffusivity (m^2/s)	9.709E–6	1.370E–5	–

3.1 Spray Injection Properties

The most important characteristics of the pMDI spray for the simulation are: spray cone angle (see Sect. 2.1); initial velocity (considered 100 m/s [8, 21]); aerodynamic size distribution; components present in the formulation; nozzle diameter (i.e. 0.25 mm [8, 10, 11, 21]); temperature (i.e. 215 K [22]); and mass flow rate. The aerodynamic size distribution parameters, discussed above in Sect. 2.2, used to configure the injection input file ranged from 1.22 to 49.5 μm , distributed along 80 intervals. From the knowledge of the drug dose delivered per puff labeled by the manufacturer (i.e. 100 μg) and the puff duration discussed in Sect. 2.1 (i.e. 0.1 s), a spray mass flow rate of $1.0\text{E}-6$ kg/s was estimated.

For the creation of the input injection file, a Python language script was programmed. Into this file, the injections are placed, by a uniform random distribution, within the nozzle area. Properties such as diameter, temperature, and mass flow rate are attributed to each injection. After that assignment, the corresponding velocity components for each injection are calculated. They are calculated according to their distance to the center of the nozzle, so that their initial velocity vectors form a solid cone. The algorithm also calculates the corresponding mass flow rate value for each injection, as a function of its diameter assuming a Log-Normal distribution. It is ensured that the sum of all mass flow rates in the file equals the total mass flow rate defined initially. The total number of injections on the file was 16,200.

The formulation properties of the pMDI spray droplets were assumed to be composed by partial fractions of HFA-134a (91.1 % w/w), ethanol (8.5 % w/w) and salbutamol (0.4 % w/w) [23]. The properties for each component are listed in Table 1.

The spray parameters used to configure the solver were obtained from various references, though some caution is required.

3.2 Geometry and Grid

The domain geometry was taken as a “testbox” consisting of a simple parallelepiped form with the dimensions of $0.2 \times 0.2 \times 0.3$ m representing a fraction of a room environment. The pMDI actuator and canister was included in the middle of

Fig. 4 A “testbox” representation where, the *red* plane (A) is the boundary condition ‘velocity inlet’ and the *green* plane (B) is the boundary ‘outflow’

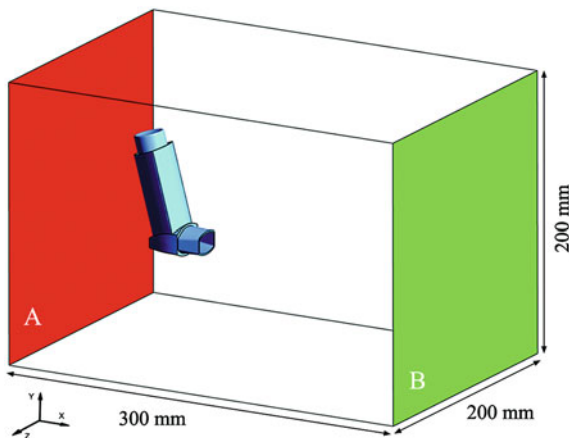
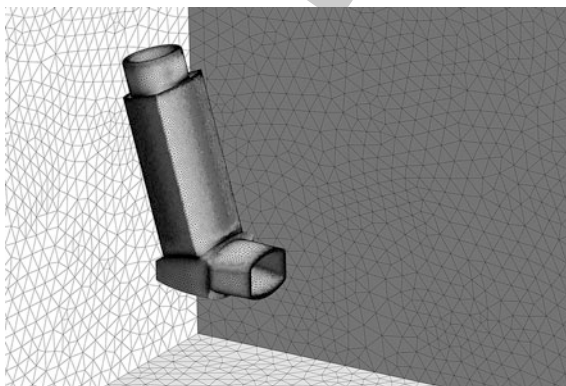


Fig. 5 3D domain grid representation, focusing the pMDI walls refinements for proximity and curvature



189 it. The spray injection point, the actuator’s nozzle, is located in the origin point,
 190 see Fig. 4. The geometry was drawn using an external design program and then
 191 loaded into the ANSYS® platform.

192 The numerical grid, by discretization of the domain, was generated, consisting
 193 in tetrahedral and wedge elements, with sizes ranging from 0.1 to 20.0 mm. That
 194 resulted in a computational grid of 3,060,339 elements and 1,022,403 nodes.
 195 Several refinements, close to the wall zones of high proximity and curvature,
 196 were included (as shown in Fig. 5). The grid quality reports showed a good quality
 197 according to the Skewness parameter, with an average value of 0.21.

198 The boundary conditions were defined as: a ‘Velocity Inlet’ (see Fig. 4 “A”),
 199 forcing air to move uniformly inside the domain at 0.01 m/s and with a temper-
 200 ature of 293 K; and an ‘Outflow’ (see Fig. 4 “B”), enabling the freely motion of
 201 the air, as well as particles. For the remaining four external walls, a ‘Symmetry’
 202 boundary condition was assumed. The pMDI actuator and canister boundaries
 203 were considered ‘Wall’, trapping all the particles that collide with them.

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3.3 CFD Configuration

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To account for the transient effects of a real pMDI spray plume, an unsteady simulation was made using a time step of 0.01 s for the flow field and 0.005 s for the particle tracking. The solution of the differential equations for mass and momentum was done in a sequential manner, using the SIMPLE algorithm [24–26]. The standard discretization scheme was used for the pressure and the second order upwind scheme for the energy, turbulence, momentum and air species concentration equations.

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For the turbulence calculation, the SST $k-\omega$ model was used. This model is adequate for low-Re simulations and it has been used in the literature for this type of flow [10, 27–29].

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Convergence was reached in the simulation by using a criterion value of $1.0E-5$ for the continuity (pressure), velocity components, turbulence, species and a value of $1.0E-10$ for the energy.

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Droplets were considered as being multi component, as described above, where only the HFA is evaporating into the environment. This is initially simulated without any HFA gas, as well as, the air entering by the “velocity Inlet” boundary. As the HFA fraction is evaporating, it drastically reduces the diameter of the droplet, and changes its trajectory. On the other hand, the HFA concentration in the environment increases, making it harder for more particles to evaporate in areas of high concentration. The gravitational acceleration was assumed 9.81 m/s^2 along the y axis direction. For the configuration of the Discrete Phase Model (DPM) droplet tracking model, the drag between both phases, Brownian motion for small particles and turbulence exchange were accounted. Through a User Defined Function (UDF), a customized drag law was included in the solver. This law was based in the work of Clift and his collaborators plus a correction for particles below $1 \mu\text{m}$ known as the Cunningham correction slip factor [28, 30].

The total number of particle streams injected during the simulation was approximately 323,200.

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4 Results

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4.1 Contour Fields

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Figures 6, 7 and 8 show the contours for air velocity magnitude, air temperature and spray mass concentration, respectively, taken at a XY plane located at $z = 0$ and $t = 0,1 \text{ s}$. The air velocity field (see Fig. 6) ranges from 0.0 to 3.27 m/s, being the lowest value found in almost all domain, because the ambient air was assumed stagnant. The maximum value is found at the nozzle exit, resulting from momentum exchange imposed by the high velocity spray particle injection.

Fig. 6 Air velocity magnitude contours took at the XY plane ($z = 0$ and $t = 0.1$ s)

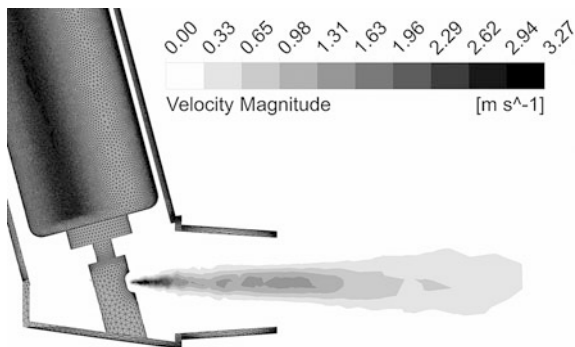
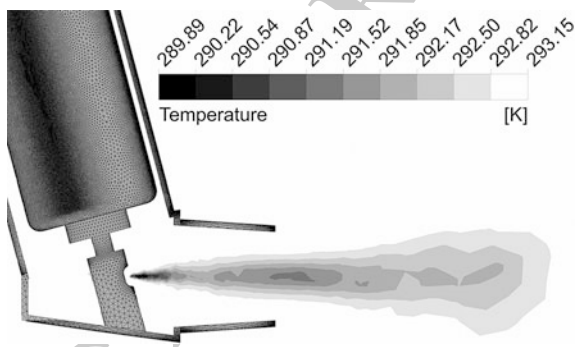


Fig. 7 Air temperature contours took at the XY plane ($z = 0$ and $t = 0.1$ s)



241 Observing the air temperature (see Fig. 7), it can be concluded that it ranges
 242 from 289.89 to 293.15 K, where the higher variation can be found at the spray
 243 plume formation zone. A sudden drop of 3.3 K occurs at the nozzle exit, due to
 244 the injection of droplets with an initial temperature of 215.15 K [22]. This temperature
 245 drop results from the energy exchange needed to evaporate the propellant.

246 Analyzing the HFA mass fraction present in the air (see Fig. 8), it can be
 247 perceived that its value is between 0 and $2.9E-3$. The higher concentration zone,
 248 at the end of the injection period ($t = 0.1$ s), is located ahead of the nozzle, more
 249 specifically at the exit of the pMDI actuator mouthpiece. It has the shape of a spray
 250 plume. As expected, the droplets evaporate more in the periphery of the actuator
 251 zone, where HFA diffusion into the air is more effective.

252 4.2 Particle Trajectory

253 As shown in Fig. 9, the particle velocity magnitude in the spray plume ranges from
 254 approximately 100 m/s (as described in Sect. 3.1) to 0.01 m/s (the input air
 255 velocity as described in Sect. 3.2). The particles located downstream the actuator
 256 mouthpiece decelerate rapidly until they match the air velocity. Larger particles

Fig. 8 HFA mass fraction contours took at the XY plane ($z = 0$ and $t = 0.1$ s)

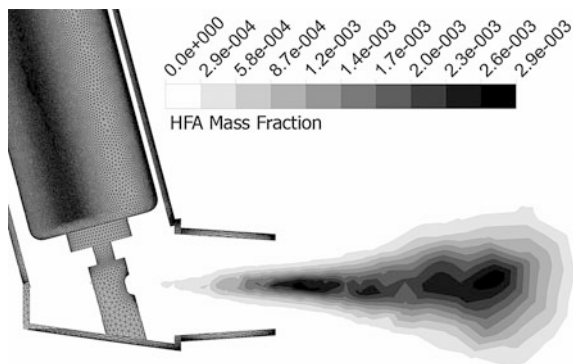


Fig. 9 Representation of the particle streams at the end of the injection ($t = 0.11$ s), with particles colored by its velocity magnitude. The particle streams are draw as spheres with proportional size scaled 20 times more than the real diameter

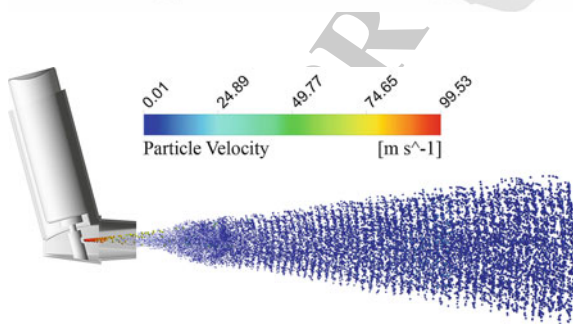
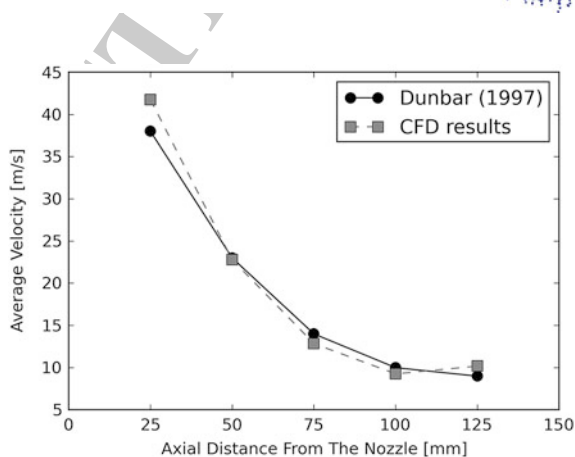


Fig. 10 Comparison of Dunbar [18] data with our CFD results, in terms of particle averaged velocity along the axial distance from the nozzle of a pMDI using a formulation only with HFA-134a

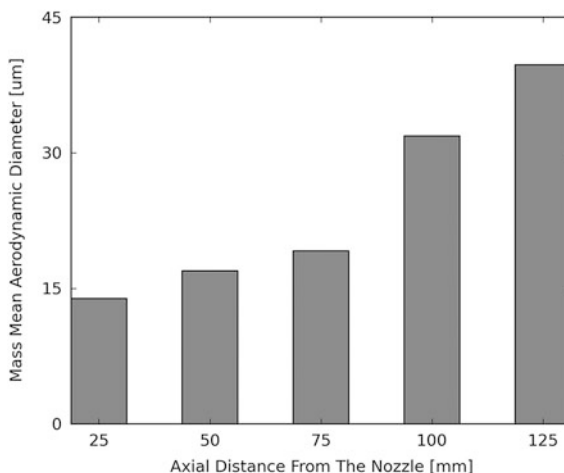


257 travel further into the still air than smaller ones. The influence of the gravitational
 258 acceleration is noticeable for higher particles when the slip velocity equals zero.

259 After other post-processing of the CFD results, took at different nozzle distances,
 260 results were obtained (see Figs. 10, 11).

261 In Fig. 10, the average velocity of the drug particles/droplets, took at the spray
 262 plume centerline for different distances from the nozzle, is reported. The results
 263 are then compared against data reported by Dunbar [18] for a formulation

Fig. 11 Representation of the mass mean aerodynamic diameter along the axial distance from the nozzle



264 containing only HFA 134a. A good agreement between the CFD and the experi-
 265 mental results was found.

266 Figure 11 reports the Mass Mean Aerodynamic Diameter (MMAD), which is a
 267 common pharmaceutical measure to evaluate the size distribution of particles. This
 268 was calculated by considering the mass in the cumulative form and plotted against
 269 its corresponding diameter. Then, the diameter for which the mass fraction reached
 270 50 % of the total was calculated. The results show that the value of MMAD
 271 increases with the distance from the nozzle, which can be indicative that particles
 272 of higher diameter travel further than the smaller ones.

273 5 Conclusions and Future Work

274 The study herein reported the characterization of a pMDI spray plume, of salbu-
 275 tamol and HFA-134a as propellant. The spray plume showed to be a transient jet,
 276 with effects that are dependent on the canister pressure. There is no constant
 277 delivery of the spray plume, but almost all the dose is aerosolized in the first 4/10
 278 of the spray duration.

279 Microscopy showed that particles do not present a regular shape when in solid/
 280 dry state, although if they are involved in propellant they are almost spherical. The
 281 existence of a multi-component droplet confirmed the need for that approach in the
 282 simulation.

283 The aerodynamic size distribution of the pMDI sprays are usually accurately
 284 fitted by Log-Normal distribution. This was confirmed showing a good coefficient
 285 of determination for the experimental data obtained by laser diffraction analysis.

286 The spray characteristics were introduced in the CFD model and the spray
 287 droplets trajectory calculated in still air. Results showed that air temperature can



288 drop over 3.3 K and increase its velocity 3.27 m/s, in the proximities of the
289 actuator's nozzle.

290 A good agreement between the CFD and the experimental data from Dunbar
291 [18] was found, regarding the average velocity along the axial distance. Also, it
292 was found that the MMAD value increases with the axial distance.

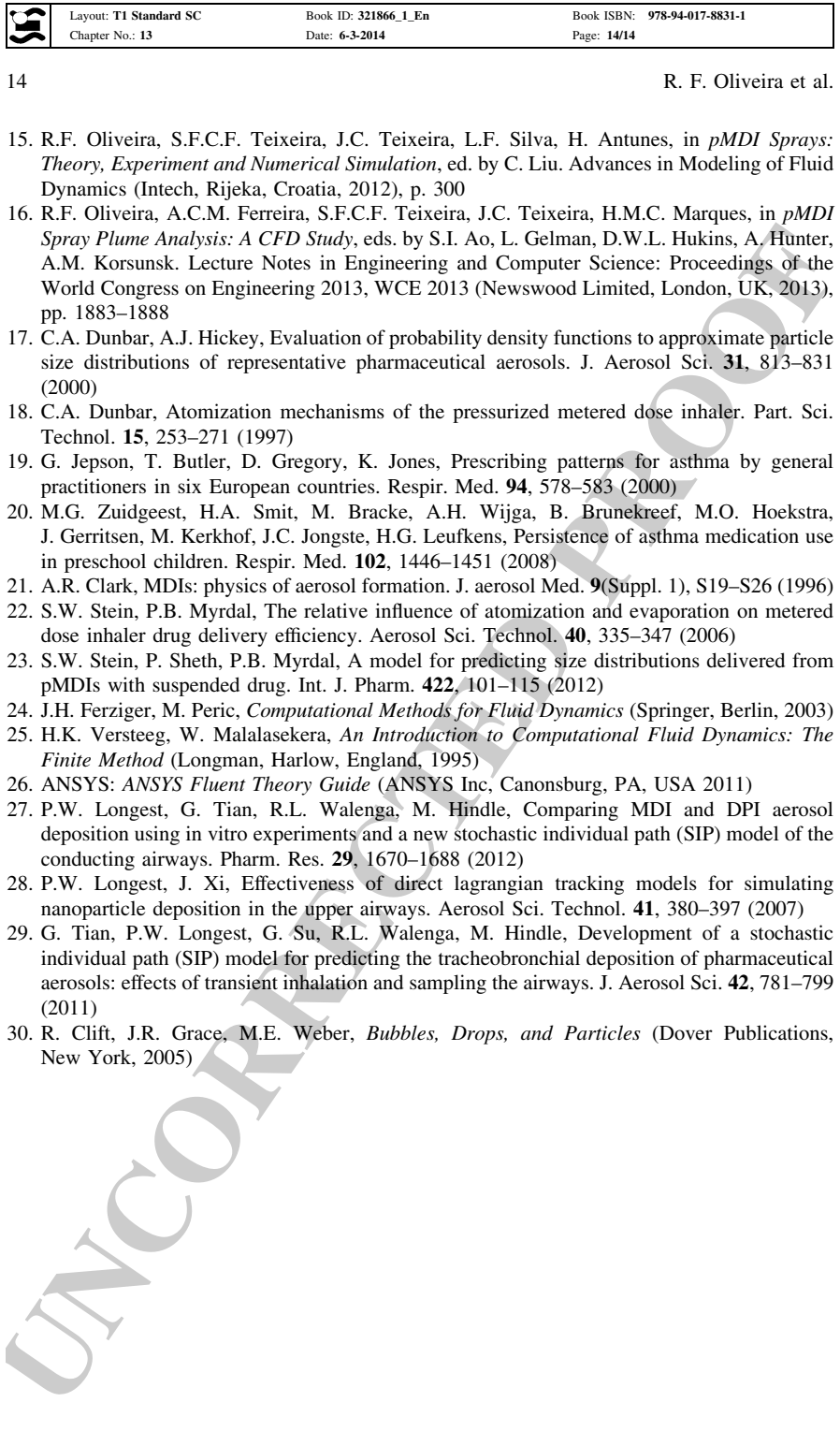
293 Spray characteristics used contributed to a correct configuration of the spray in
294 the CFD software.

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