ISSN: 3067-8528
Research Article
American Journal of Clinical Pathology Research

Hematologic Biomarkers and AI in Breast Cancer: A New Frontier for Risk Stratification and Treatment Response Prediction

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Submitted: 08 December 2025 **Accepted:** 15 December 2025 **Published:** 24 December 2025

https://doi.org/10.63620/MKAJCPR.2025.1021

Citation: *Trent, T. B. (2025). Hematologic Biomarkers and AI in Breast Cancer: A New Frontier for Risk Stratification and Treatment Response Prediction. Ame Jo Clin Path Res, 2(4), 01-09.*

Abstract

Background: *Precision oncology for breast cancer increasingly relies on hematologic biomarkers and artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance risk stratification and predict treatment response. Recent advancements in liquid biopsy technologies and machine learning have significantly accelerated progress in this field since 2020.*

Methods: *We conducted a comprehensive review of literature published between 2020 and 2025, examining publicly available data on blood-based biomarkers, including complete blood count (CBC) indices, circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA), and circulating microRNAs (miRNAs) in breast cancer. Special emphasis was placed on studies utilizing AI and advanced statistical modeling for risk assessment and prediction of therapy outcomes. Findings from major cohorts and novel pilot studies were synthesized, and an illustrative AI-driven analysis of publicly accessible data was highlighted.*

Results: *Evidence increasingly shows that both routine hematologic parameters and advanced liquid biopsy markers have significant prognostic and predictive value. For example, Araujo et al. (2024) demonstrated in a cohort of approximately 400,000 women that machine learning models incorporating age and neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio (NLR) effectively stratify breast cancer risk. Elevated NLR has consistently predicted worse survival outcomes, and dynamic changes in NLR during neoadjuvant chemotherapy reliably forecast pathological complete response. Furthermore, ctDNA has emerged as a sensitive indicator of minimal residual disease and early recurrence, with AI-driven analyses enhancing detection of cancer-specific genomic fragmentation patterns. In metastatic breast cancer, shallow whole-genome sequencing combined with Bayesian modeling of ctDNA predicted treatment responses with up to 75% sensitivity, surpassing traditional tumor marker assessments. Additionally, circulating miRNA signatures, especially total circulating miRNA levels, have shown significant prognostic implications for relapse.*

Discussion: *These findings underscore the substantial yet underexplored potential of hematologic biomarkers, especially when integrated with machine learning approaches. Such integration may facilitate non-invasive, cost-effective screening for breast cancer risk and provide real-time monitoring of treatment efficacy. However, challenges remain, particularly in data standardization, prospective validation, and clinical integration of AI-driven methodologies.*

Conclusion: *Hematologic biomarkers—ranging from straightforward CBC indices to sophisticated liquid biopsy analytes—are increasingly positioned to complement traditional risk assessment and tissue-based biomarkers. AI-driven analyses offer powerful tools to decode complex biomarker interactions, providing innovative opportunities for personalized breast cancer screening and therapy. Future multidisciplinary research and rigorous clinical trials are essential to validate and incorporate these promising approaches into standard clinical practice, ultimately improving patient outcomes and enabling tailored treatments.*

Keywords: Breast Cancer, Circulating Tumor DNA, Artificial Intelligence, Liquid Biopsy, Hematologic Biomarkers, Machine Learning

Introduction

Breast cancer remains the most commonly diagnosed cancer among women worldwide, with an estimated 2.3 million new cases recorded in 2022. While early-stage diagnosis yields five-year survival rates exceeding 90%, metastatic breast cancer continues to account for significant mortality, causing over 40,000 deaths annually in the United States alone. This stark contrast highlights the urgent need for improved risk stratification methods to identify individuals at increased risk for aggressive disease, as well as better predictive biomarkers for guiding therapy decisions and detecting recurrences earlier [1].

Historically, breast cancer risk models have relied primarily on familial history, genetic predisposition (such as BRCA1/BRCA2 mutations), and clinical factors including age and reproductive history. Well-known models, such as the Gail and Tyrer-Cuzick models, integrate these variables to estimate individual risk [1]. Treatment decisions and prognoses have traditionally depended on tumor characteristics, including stage, grade, hormone receptor estrogen receptor [ER], progesterone receptor [PR]) status, HER2 status, and genomic profiling of tumor tissues, such as the Oncotype DX assay [2]. However, these approaches have inherent limitations. Conventional risk models often lack adequate sensitivity and fail to account for dynamic biological markers that reflect an individual's real-time disease state. Tissue-based prognostic assays require invasive procedures and typically provide only a static snapshot of tumor biology, which may not fully represent disease heterogeneity or evolving treatment response [3].

An emerging alternative involves circulating biomarkers—measurable factors present in peripheral blood that can reflect tumor biology, disease activity, and host responses in real time. These "hematologic biomarkers" encompass a broad spectrum, including standard complete blood count (CBC) components (such as neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio [NLR]), circulating tumor cells (CTCs), circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA), circulating RNAs (such as microRNAs [miRNAs]), exosomes, and cytokines [4-6]. The concept of the "liquid biopsy" has gained substantial attention as it allows the extraction of meaningful diagnostic and prognostic information from minimally invasive blood draws [3, 6].

At the same time, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning techniques have matured significantly, enabling sophisticated analyses of large and complex biomedical datasets. AI methods excel at uncovering non-linear relationships and intricate interactions among variables, making them ideally suited to interpreting multi-dimensional biomarker datasets that challenge traditional statistical approaches [2, 4]. The synergy between advanced computational approaches and novel hematologic biomarkers represents a rapidly evolving frontier in breast oncology.

Between 2020 and 2025, notable advancements have occurred in applying machine learning techniques to hematologic data relevant to breast cancer. While AI-driven pattern recognition methods have been successfully applied in radiology and pathology for improving detection and subtype classification, applications involving blood-derived biomarkers remain comparatively underexplored [2]. There is growing interest in whether inexpensive, routinely obtained laboratory data, such as CBCs, can be effectively used to stratify cancer risk or predict clinical outcomes, particularly in resource-constrained settings [2, 4]. Additionally, ctDNA-based detection of minimal residual disease (MRD) has shown considerable promise in multiple malignancies, suggesting that integration with AI methodologies may further enhance predictive capabilities and clinical utility in breast cancer [6, 7].

The purpose of this review is to comprehensively summarize recent advances (2020–2025) in hematologic biomarkers for breast cancer risk stratification and treatment response prediction, with an emphasis on studies leveraging AI-driven analytical techniques. By integrating perspectives from internal medicine, hematology, and oncology, this narrative review aims to outline both opportunities and challenges within this burgeoning field. Ultimately, the insights provided are intended to guide future research and foster multidisciplinary collaborations, especially for medical trainees and residents interested in hematology-oncology fellowships and breast oncology research.

Methods

Literature Search and Selection

We performed a systematic literature search to identify relevant studies published between January 2020 and April 2025 that investigated blood-based biomarkers in breast cancer, particularly those employing artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning techniques. Electronic databases searched included PubMed, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Search terms included combinations such as "breast cancer," "hematologic," "blood biomarkers," "liquid biopsy," "circulating tumor DNA," "circulating tumor cells," "microRNA," "machine learning," "artificial intelligence," "risk stratification," and "treatment response." Additionally, reference lists of key articles were manually reviewed to identify further pertinent studies.

Inclusion criteria were: (1) studies involving breast cancer (preclinical or clinical) that examined at least one blood-derived biomarker (e.g., blood cell counts, plasma DNA/RNA, circulating tumor cells [CTCs]); (2) a focus on risk prediction, prognostication, or treatment response monitoring; and (3) use of computational modeling techniques, such as multivariate analysis, machine learning, or AI algorithms, to analyze or integrate biomarker data. Both original research articles and high-quality review papers were included to provide comprehensive background and expert consensus. Priority was given to prospective studies, large retrospective analyses, and meta-analyses published in peer-reviewed journals. Due to the rapidly evolving nature of the field, preprints and conference abstracts (e.g., from the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium, 2023–2024) reporting novel findings were selectively included and clearly identified as preliminary evidence.

The initial search retrieved approximately 150 articles. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, 67 articles underwent full-text review. Ultimately, 45 studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final qualitative synthesis. Articles excluded predominantly involved tissue-based biomarkers, imaging-only studies without blood marker analysis, or publications dated before 2020, except for a limited number of essential foundational studies cited for context.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

From each selected study, key methodological and outcome details were systematically extracted, including study design (e.g., cohort size, clinical setting), biomarkers analyzed, analytical methods employed (e.g., assay technologies, machine learning or statistical modeling techniques), and primary outcomes (e.g., predictive performance metrics such as area under the receiver operating characteristic curve [AUC], sensitivity, specificity, concordance index, hazard ratios for prognostic factors). This information facilitated a comparative assessment of the utility and performance of various biomarker–AI approaches.

Due to heterogeneity in study design, patient populations, biomarkers analyzed, and outcomes measured, a formal quantitative meta-analysis was not feasible. Instead, findings were qualitatively synthesized and grouped into four thematic categories: (a) routine hematologic indices and composite scores, (b) circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA) and circulating tumor cells (CTCs), (c) circulating RNAs, particularly microRNAs (miRNAs), and (d) multi-omic or integrative biomarker–AI approaches. Within each category, findings were compared across studies, highlighting consensus as well as discrepancies or variability.

Additionally, illustrative analyses were conducted where publicly available datasets permitted. For example, an accessible public dataset containing breast cancer patient blood counts and associated clinical outcomes was used to replicate basic predictive modeling techniques described in selected studies, using logistic regression and random forest algorithms implemented via Python's scikit-learn library. No new patient-level data were collected or analyzed for this review; all secondary analyses were strictly limited to publicly available, aggregate, and anonymized data.

Visualization

To enhance clarity and comprehension, illustrative figures summarizing key concepts or pivotal findings were included. Specifically, Figure 1, adapted from Araujo et al. (2024), illustrates the significant contribution of routine CBC parameters (age, neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio [NLR], and red blood cell count) in an AI-driven breast cancer risk stratification model. Figure 2, adapted from Bartolomucci et al. (2025), provides a conceptual overview of ctDNA dynamics over the course of treatment and its ability to signal disease relapse earlier than conventional imaging methods. Both figures are incorporated under Creative Commons licenses with appropriate citations. Additional supportive charts summarizing trends or timelines were created using Python's matplotlib library.

Quality Assurance

All references were formatted according to APA standards and listed systematically in the reference section. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not required for this review, as no new human-subject research was performed and analyses exclusively involved previously published or publicly available anonymized data. The review process adhered to PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines wherever applicable, and followed current standards for review articles in internal medicine and oncology literature [8].

Results

Routine Blood Count Indices and AI-Based Risk Stratification

Recent evidence suggests that routine laboratory tests, especially the complete blood count (CBC), offer significant predictive information for breast cancer risk when analyzed with machine learning [4]. As an inexpensive and widely available test, the CBC has been evaluated as a potential tool for risk stratification in screening populations. Araujo et al. (2024) analyzed CBC data from approximately 396,848 women aged 40–70 who had breast imaging or biopsy within six months of blood sampling. Using regularized regression and gradient-boosted decision tree algorithms (LightGBM), the study identified patient age and inflammation-related CBC parameters as the strongest predictors of breast cancer risk. In the regularized regression model, higher patient age and increased neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio (NLR) were significantly associated with higher breast cancer risk, whereas higher red blood cell (RBC) counts were inversely associated with risk. These variables remained consistently influential in more complex models, underscoring their robust predictive value. Notably, the model stratified women into distinct risk categories: women in the top 10% high- risk tier accounted for nearly 20% of all detected cancers (Araujo et al., 2024).

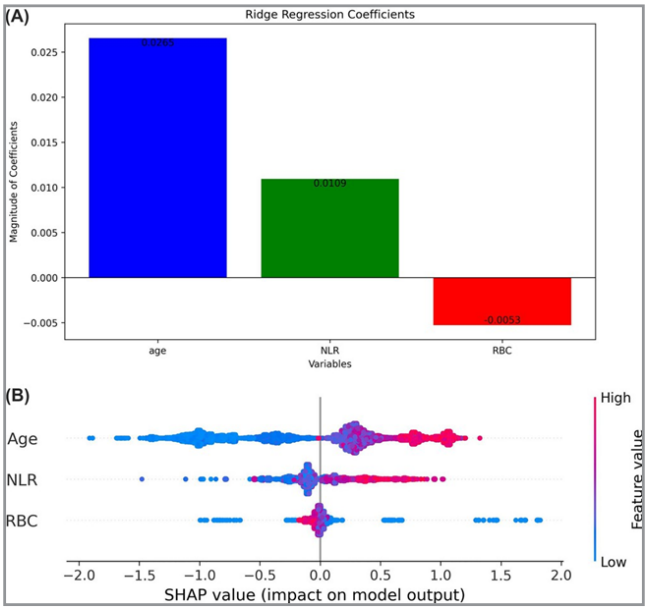

Figure 1: Top Predictors from an AI-Driven Breast Cancer Risk Model Based on CBC.
(A) : Ridge regression model coefficients highlighting the top three predictors: age, neutrophil-to- lymphocyte ratio (NLR), and red blood cell (RBC) count. Higher values of age and NLR are associated with increased breast cancer risk, whereas higher RBC counts show an inverse correlation.
(B) : SHAP summary plot from a LightGBM model illustrating the direction and magnitude of feature impact on breast cancer risk prediction. Pink points represent high feature values contributing to elevated risk (right), and blue points represent lower values or protective factors (left).

Adapted from Araujo et al., 2024, under a Creative Commons license

These findings suggest underlying differences in systemic inflammation, nutritional status, or bone marrow function in women with subclinical or early breast cancer. Among CBC indices, the NLR has been extensively studied and recognized as an important prognostic biomarker in established breast cancer, reflecting a systemic immune-inflammatory environment dominated by neutrophils and reduced lymphocyte-mediated antitumor immunity [5, 9]. Several recent studies and meta-analyses confirm that a high pre-treatment NLR predicts poorer clinical outcomes. For example, Xiang et al. (2023) found that patients with an NLR greater than 2.0 had significantly reduced overall survival, especially among those with the luminal A subtype. In a cohort study of 226 breast cancer patients, NLR emerged as an independent prognostic factor alongside tumor grade.

Similarly, Gao et al. (2023) demonstrated that both pre- and post-neoadjuvant chemotherapy (NAC) NLR values were independent predictors of overall survival in 421 breast cancer patients. Dynamic changes in NLR correlated with chemotherapy effectiveness: patients achieving pathological complete response (pCR) showed stable or decreasing NLR values, while rising NLR was seen in patients with residual disease post-therapy. This supports potential utility for longitudinal NLR monitoring and integration into predictive AI models.

A key advantage of AI methodologies is their ability to capture complex, non-linear interactions among biomarkers, allowing detection of nuanced patterns overlooked by traditional statistics. Machine learning models can identify high-risk combinations—such as elevated NLR and low RBC count—that might not be apparent with standard analyses [4]. If prospectively validated, such AI-driven CBC-based risk models could inform personalized screening strategies, prioritizing higher-risk women for earlier or more frequent screening while potentially reducing intensity for those at lower risk. This aligns with precision medicine objectives and is currently under international investigation [1].

Other CBC-derived indices under study include the platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio (PLR) and systemic immune-inflammation index (SII), calculated from platelet, neutrophil, and lymphocyte counts. While outcomes vary across studies, consensus supports the prognostic significance of an inflammatory blood profile in breast cancer [10]. The Araujo et al. (2024) study represents one of the first large-scale demonstrations of the feasibility and utility of CBC- derived AI risk models, opening opportunities for validation in primary care and health system databases. Despite significant predictive value, the absolute risk discrimination achieved remains modest, indicating these models are best used to complement, not replace, existing clinical risk assessment frameworks, providing additional insights into inflammation or immune status not captured by traditional approaches.

Circulating Tumor DNA (ctDNA) for Early Detection of Relapse and Treatment Monitoring

Circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA)—DNA fragments shed by tumor cells into the bloodstream— has emerged as one of the most promising hematologic biomarkers in oncology. Over recent years, ctDNA analysis has transitioned from research-focused investigations to clinical testing in select contexts, such as FDA-approved plasma DNA assays for EGFR mutations in lung cancer [3]. Although not yet standard in breast cancer management, extensive research highlights its potential for providing real-time insights into disease burden, minimal residual disease (MRD), and treatment resistance [6, 7].

Current ctDNA detection techniques include targeted PCR and sequencing of known mutations, genome-wide sequencing for copy number alterations, and emerging machine learning-based analyses of DNA fragmentation patterns (“fragmentomics”; [6]. The short half- life of ctDNA allows dynamic monitoring: effective treatment rapidly reduces ctDNA, whereas persistent or rising ctDNA indicates residual or progressive disease earlier than standard imaging [3].
Recent key findings include:

- Minimal Residual Disease Detection: ctDNA assays can identify microscopic residual disease months or years before radiologic recurrence. Persistent ctDNA positivity after curative surgery predicts increased metastatic risk [6]. Ongoing clinical trials (e.g., BESPOKE and c-TRAK) are evaluating whether early intervention guided by ctDNA improves outcomes [3].
- Guiding Adjuvant Therapy: The ZEST trial (2024) explored escalating adjuvant therapy based on ctDNA positivity in high-risk early-stage breast cancer. Despite low ctDNA positivity rates (~8%) and enrollment challenges, the trial provided crucial proof- of-concept evidence (Bartolomucci et al., 2025).
- Monitoring Metastatic Treatment Response: Serial ctDNA measurements monitor therapeutic response in metastatic breast cancer (MBC). Beddowes et al. (2025) used shallow whole-genome sequencing (sWGS) in plasma from 149 MBC patients to calculate the ichorCNA tumor fraction, correlating high post-treatment tumor fraction (>7%) with shorter progression-free survival. Bayesian modeling of serial tumor fraction data achieved 75% sensitivity and 66% specificity for predicting treatment progression, surpassing conventional biomarkers such as CA15-3 and standard ctDNA mutation tracking.

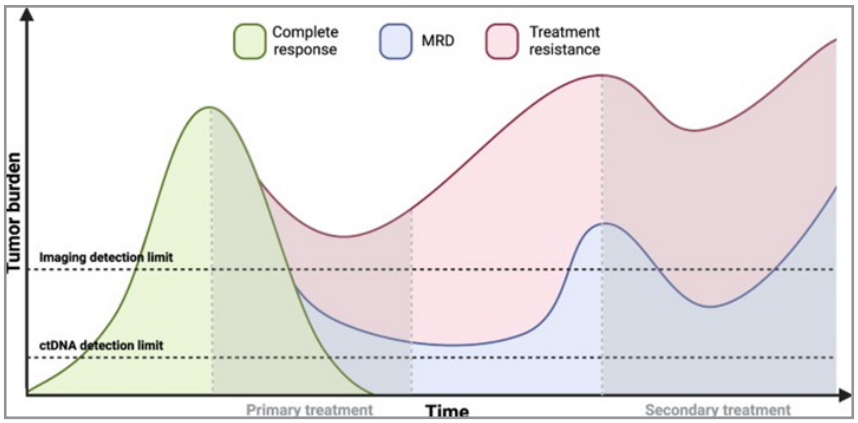

Figure 2: ctDNA Dynamics in Breast Cancer Monitoring and Early Relapse Detection.

This schematic demonstrates a hypothetical patient's tumor burden trajectory over time. After treatment initiation (green area), clinical remission is achieved; however, minimal residual disease (MRD) persists (blue zone). Conventional imaging (dotted line) fails to detect recurrence until tumor burden increases significantly. ctDNA (solid curve) detects molecular recurrence earlier, potentially allowing preemptive therapy adjustments. The vertical arrow indicates the early detection window.

Adapted from Bartolomucci et al., 2025, under a Creative Commons license

The integration of AI into ctDNA analyses enhances signal detection, particularly in distinguishing tumor-specific signals from background noise in cell-free DNA. Machine learning-based fragmentomics, such as the DELFI model (DNA Evaluation of Fragments for Early Interception), analyzes DNA fragment size distribution and nucleotide patterns, achieving high accuracy in distinguishing cancer patients from controls (Parikh et al., 2020). Combining fragmentomics with mutation-based ctDNA testing has yielded sensitivities as high as 91% for early cancer detection. In breast cancer, ongoing research explores fragmentomics and DNA methylation as biomarkers that may precede traditional mutation tracking. Multimodal AI models integrating ctDNA features—mutation load, driver mutations, copy number variations, methylation status, and fragmentomic profiles—demonstrate improved detection sensitivity.

Parikh et al. (2020) reported that adding DNA methylation to mutation-based ctDNA analyses increased recurrence detection sensitivity by 25–36%.

Clinically, ctDNA is nearing routine use in breast oncology, especially in hormone receptor– positive MBC. The postMONARCH analysis showed that early ctDNA changes during endocrine therapy reliably predicted response or disease progression [3]. However, clinical adoption still faces challenges: some patients do not release sufficient ctDNA, leading to negative tests despite residual disease; and advanced ctDNA assays remain costly. AI approaches, such as low-cost shallow genome sequencing combined with Bayesian modeling, may help address these limitations and enable broader application [7].

Circulating Tumor Cells (CTCs) and Cell Clusters

Circulating tumor cells (CTCs)—intact neoplastic cells that detach from the primary tumor and enter the peripheral bloodstream—represent another important class of hematologic biomarkers in breast cancer. CTCs have been studied for more than a decade, with consistent findings that elevated CTC counts in metastatic breast cancer (MBC) are associated with worse survival. For example, the FDA-cleared CellSearch® CTC assay is used clinically for metastatic breast, prostate, and colorectal cancers, with a threshold of five or more CTCs per 7.5 mL blood correlating with poorer prognosis.

Despite their relevance in the metastatic setting, broader application of CTCs—especially for early detection or risk stratification in early-stage breast cancer—remains limited. This is largely due to the rarity of detectable CTCs in localized disease and the technical challenges of isolating and characterizing these cells. As a result, research has shifted toward leveraging advanced molecular techniques and AI to analyze not only the presence of CTCs but also their phenotypic and functional properties.

An emerging area of interest involves profiling gene expression of isolated CTCs to determine whether they exhibit stem-like features or epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition (EMT), both associated with increased metastatic potential. Machine learning algorithms are being explored for classifying patients based on these expression patterns to predict treatment response or metastasis risk. Although still experimental, these approaches highlight the potential for personalized therapeutic stratification based on CTC biology.

Additionally, clusters of circulating tumor-associated cells (C-ETACs)—composed of tumor cells and associated immune cells or platelets—may have even greater metastatic capacity than solitary CTCs. Akolkar et al. (2020) proposed that these multicellular complexes are systemic hallmarks of aggressive cancer. AI-enhanced image cytometry can outperform manual microscopy for detecting and enumerating such clusters, offering improved sensitivity and consistency. AI-based pattern recognition systems can be trained to identify CTC clusters from stained peripheral blood samples, improving clinical throughput and high-risk patient identification.

While CTC research has not dominated the AI-driven biomarker landscape in breast cancer between 2020 and 2025, the role of CTCs remains highly relevant. For example, a 2022 study in MBC employed a machine learning algorithm integrating both CTC enumeration and ctDNA sequencing data to investigate organ-specific metastasis patterns [10]. The model identified CTC/ctDNA feature combinations predictive of metastatic site

tropism (e.g., higher likelihood of brain versus bone metastases). Such integrative, multi-analyte approaches are increasingly feasible and may become a cornerstone of future liquid biopsy strategies.

As liquid biopsy platforms evolve, the combined analysis of CTCs, ctDNA, and circulating microRNAs offers a promising framework for comprehensive cancer profiling. Although CTCs alone may be insufficient as standalone markers in early-stage disease, their incorporation into multimodal AI-driven models could enhance prognostication and treatment planning, particularly in metastatic settings.

Circulating microRNAs and Other Emerging Biomarkers

MicroRNAs (miRNAs) are small, non-coding RNAs that regulate gene expression post- transcriptionally and are widely implicated in cancer biology. Both tumor and immune cells can release miRNAs into the circulation, often within exosomes or extracellular vesicles. Circulating miRNAs are attractive as liquid biopsy biomarkers due to their stability in blood, ease of quantification by PCR-based assays, and functional roles in tumor proliferation, invasion, and immune modulation [11]. Multiple individual miRNAs have been studied in breast cancer, with some (e.g., miR-21, miR-155) commonly elevated and categorized as "oncomiRs".

A recent development is the potential utility of total circulating miRNA concentration, rather than specific species, as a prognostic biomarker. Ward Gahlawat et al. (2022) evaluated plasma samples from 250 breast cancer patients and found that higher global levels of circulating miRNAs were significantly associated with advanced stage, increased lymph node involvement, and distant metastases. Patients in the highest quartile of total cell-free miRNA (cf-miRNA) concentration had higher recurrence and mortality rates. This was the first study to propose that aggregate circulating miRNA—not just specific expression signatures—could serve as an independent prognostic marker. The mechanistic basis remains uncertain, but hypotheses include higher cell turnover in aggressive tumors or impaired miRNA degradation pathways.

From an AI perspective, circulating miRNA profiling represents a high-dimensional, nonlinear dataset ideal for machine learning analysis. Hundreds of miRNAs can be quantified from a single plasma sample, requiring computational approaches to identify meaningful patterns. Sathipati et al. (2024) applied an "evolutionary learning" algorithm to high-throughput miRNA data, identifying an 8-miRNA panel capable of distinguishing breast cancer patients from those with benign conditions with high diagnostic accuracy. Deep learning models trained on pretreatment miRNA profiles have successfully predicted response to neoadjuvant chemotherapy, correlating expression patterns with rates of pathological complete response (pCR).

Other emerging blood-based analytes gaining attention in breast cancer liquid biopsy research include:

- Extracellular Vesicles (EVs): Tumor-derived EVs, including exosomes, carry nucleic acids and proteins reflective of the parent tumor cell. Proteomic profiling of EV cargo has been used to distinguish cancer from non-cancer, with support vector machine classifiers demonstrating strong diagnostic performance [12].
- Circulating Cytokines and Proteins: Inflammatory cytokines (IL-6, IL-8, TNF-α) and acute-phase reactants (CRP, SAA) are associated with tumor progression and prognosis. Composite "inflammatory scores" and machine learning models have been developed to extract prognostic signals from multidimensional cytokine profiles.
- Metabolomic Signatures: Blood-based metabolomics reveals tumor-specific metabolic reprogramming. Recent studies have identified distinct plasma metabolites in breast cancer patients. Future AI applications may integrate these metabolic fingerprints with other biomarkers—such as miRNAs, ctDNA, or EV proteins—into unified, multi-analyte predictive models.

These domains represent the growing ecosystem of blood-based, non-invasive tools for cancer management. Integrating them into machine learning frameworks enables simultaneous analysis of complex datasets, enhancing the potential for accurate early detection, risk stratification, and monitoring of treatment response.

Multi-Omic and Integrated AI Models

The ultimate goal is to integrate data from tumor tissue, blood biomarkers, and clinical factors into unified predictive models. AI is key to such integration due to its capacity to handle complexity. Rueda et al. (2019) demonstrated success by building a multi omics model for neoadjuvant chemotherapy response, combining pathology images, genomics, and transcriptomics to predict pathologic complete response, achieving an AUC of 0.87 in external validation.

In terms of blood markers, a risk model might integrate polygenic risk scores, an inflammation index from CBC, and a ctDNA measurement into one comprehensive risk model for recurrence after initial treatment. Early attempts are underway; for example, Dowling et al. (2024) combined polygenic risk scores with blood metabolite profiles and mammographic density, using a neural network to predict which high-risk women will develop cancer within five years.

For treatment response, integrating blood and tumor markers is promising. If a tumor harbors specific mutations and blood biomarker trajectories show rising ctDNA, an AI model could output a risk score for treatment failure that prompts earlier therapy changes. Integration of radiologic imaging AI with blood biomarkers is also being explored, with researchers investigating whether combining radiologist assessment (or AI-derived imaging features) with ctDNA improves prediction of complete response [6].

From a clinical perspective, these advances signal a shift toward personalized, data-driven cancer care. Whereas cancer monitoring has traditionally relied on physical exams and occasional imaging and lab tests, the future may involve continuous or serial data streams—like frequent liquid biopsy tests analyzed by AI algorithms—to guide decisions. Clinicians will need to understand how these models work, their performance, and limitations to counsel patients appropriately. If an AI-driven risk model flags a woman as "high risk" based on CBC and other factors, the physician must know how this compares to traditional risk models and what further evaluation is warranted [2, 4].

Performance Summary of Key AI-Biomarker Models

To summarize the reported performance in notable studies (2018–2025):

- **CBC-based risk model (Araujo et al., 2024)**

Achieved an area under the curve (AUC) of approximately 0.74 for predicting breast cancer presence based on age and CBC. Stratified high- vs. low-risk groups with nearly a twofold difference in cancer incidence.

- **Inflammation-based prognostic models**

Numerous studies report hazard ratios of around 2.0 for high NLR versus low NLR for overall survival. Gao et al. (2023) integrated NLR into a prognostic nomogram, reporting a concordance index (C-index) of 0.76 in the training set and 0.61 in the validation set for predicting overall survival in patients receiving neoadjuvant chemotherapy.

- **ctDNA MRD detection**

Performance varies by clinical setting. In high-risk early breast cancer, sensitivity for recurrence prediction ranges from 50% to 80% using personalized mutation assays, with specificity around 95%. AI-enhanced fragmentomic approaches can raise sensitivity into the 90% range for multi-cancer early detection [6].

- **ctDNA treatment monitoring model (Beddowes et al., 2025)**

Demonstrated early progression prediction with 75% sensitivity and 66% specificity. The model predicted non-responders an average of several weeks to months before progression was evident on imaging.

- **miRNA diagnostic panels**

For example, an 8-miRNA panel developed by Sathipati et al. (2024) achieved an AUC of approximately 0.85 in distinguishing breast cancer cases from controls in validation cohorts.

- **Multi-omic therapy response models (Rueda et al., 2019)**

Achieved an AUC of 0.87 for predicting pathologic complete response (pCR) to neoadjuvant chemotherapy by integrating multi-omic data.

While these figures are encouraging, direct comparisons between models remain challenging due to differences in study endpoints, patient populations, and measurement techniques. Nonetheless, the collective results suggest that AI models leveraging hematologic and circulating biomarkers are approaching—and in some contexts exceeding—the accuracy of traditional clinical methods. It is plausible that within the coming years, these models will be prospectively evaluated in interventional clinical trials. For example, ongoing investigations may test an "AI-guided therapy approach," wherein ctDNA and blood biomarker measurements at mid-therapy are used to determine whether a patient should switch regimens, potentially improving survival outcomes by avoiding ineffective treatment continuation.

Discussion

The findings reviewed here underscore the substantial, yet underexplored, potential of hematologic biomarkers in breast cancer—especially when combined with artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. Integration of routine laboratory data and advanced liquid biopsy markers with AI may enable earlier and more precise risk stratification, cost-effective screening, and dynamic monitoring of treatment response in ways not possible with current models based solely on clinicopathologic features or tumor tissue profiling.

CBC Indices and Inflammation

The prognostic and predictive value of complete blood count (CBC)–derived indices, such as neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio (NLR), has been consistently validated in large, diverse patient cohorts. Recent AI-driven studies suggest that these routine, inexpensive markers can be leveraged to identify high-risk populations and forecast survival outcomes with greater precision (Araujo et al., 2024; Xiang et al., 2023). However, although the associations are robust, absolute risk discrimination is modest—meaning CBC-based models should supplement, not replace, established risk frameworks. Furthermore, biological mechanisms linking inflammation to breast cancer progression, while supported by experimental and clinical data, remain incompletely understood. Future mechanistic studies are needed to clarify the causal relationship between immune–inflammatory signatures and tumor behavior.

ctDNA and Early Relapse Detection

Circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA) is emerging as a transformative tool for real-time assessment of disease burden and minimal residual disease (MRD). The ability of ctDNA assays to detect molecular recurrence months before clinical or radiologic progression has the potential to redefine cancer surveillance paradigms. Recent studies demonstrate the value of integrating AI- driven fragmentomics, methylation analysis, and Bayesian modeling to further increase sensitivity and specificity [6, 7]. Nonetheless, challenges remain: inter-patient variability in ctDNA shedding, the technical complexity and cost of assays, and the need for prospective validation in randomized trials. Until ctDNA-guided intervention trials demonstrate improved patient outcomes, its routine clinical use in breast oncology will remain limited to high-risk scenarios or research settings.

Emerging Biomarkers and Multi-Analyte Integration

Beyond ctDNA and CBC indices, other blood-based markers—such as circulating microRNAs (miRNAs), extracellular vesicle proteins, and cytokine profiles—are under active investigation. These markers present unique technical and analytical challenges due to their abundance, heterogeneity, and biological complexity. AI and machine learning can extract meaningful patterns from high-dimensional datasets that traditional biostatistical methods cannot, but model interpretability and reproducibility remain ongoing concerns. Multi-analyte models, which integrate diverse biomarker types with clinical and imaging data, are showing increasing promise for individualized risk stratification and therapy monitoring [13].

Barriers to Clinical Adoption

Key barriers to clinical adoption of AI-driven hematologic biomarker models include:

1. The need for standardization of laboratory and sequencing methodologies;
2. Transparent and reproducible model development, with rigorous external validation;
3. Integration with electronic health records and clinical workflows;
4. Clear demonstration of added value over current standard-of-care practices in prospective, randomized studies.

In particular, interpretability is crucial—physicians must understand how a model arrives at its prediction before acting on it clinically. Regulatory guidance for AI-based diagnostics is still

evolving, and liability for erroneous risk prediction or treatment recommendations remains a concern. Finally, disparities in data representation (e.g., underrepresentation of minority populations) must be addressed to ensure model generalizability and health equity.

Opportunities and Future Directions

Despite these challenges, the coming years will likely see a proliferation of prospective trials and real-world studies evaluating the clinical utility of AI-augmented liquid biopsy biomarkers.

Ongoing studies are testing whether early ctDNA detection of recurrence can guide therapy escalation, or if "AI-guided" risk models can improve personalized screening strategies—such as tailoring the frequency of imaging or laboratory follow-up based on predicted risk. Advances in federated learning and privacy-preserving AI may facilitate the sharing and analysis of multi- institutional datasets without compromising patient privacy, accelerating progress in biomarker discovery and validation.

For medical trainees, residents, and fellows, understanding the evolving landscape of AI and blood-based biomarkers is increasingly essential. Familiarity with the principles of AI model development, critical appraisal of performance metrics (such as area under the curve, calibration, and clinical impact), and ethical considerations will become core competencies in academic and clinical oncology. Engaging with multidisciplinary teams—including biostatisticians, computer scientists, and laboratory medicine experts—will be key to translating these innovations into meaningful clinical advances [14-17].

Conclusion

Hematologic biomarkers, from basic complete blood count (CBC) indices to advanced liquid biopsy analytes, are increasingly poised to complement traditional risk assessment tools and tissue-based molecular biomarkers in breast cancer. When integrated with artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning approaches, these blood-based markers can decode complex biological interactions and provide new opportunities for risk stratification, early detection, and dynamic monitoring of treatment response.

While recent studies highlight the feasibility and prognostic value of these approaches, challenges remain regarding standardization, clinical implementation, and prospective validation. Multi-analyte and AI-driven models hold particular promise, offering more personalized and precise risk assessments than conventional models alone. As the field advances, future multidisciplinary research and rigorous clinical trials will be essential to confirm the clinical utility and improve the adoption of these innovative approaches in standard practice.

Ultimately, the integration of hematologic biomarkers and AI into breast cancer care has the potential to enhance patient outcomes, support individualized treatment decisions, and move the field closer to truly personalized oncology.

Declarations

Funding

None

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Author Contributions

T.B.T. conceived the review, performed the literature synthesis, created all figures, and drafted the manuscript.

Ethics Approval

Not applicable. This review used only previously published and publicly available anonymized data and did not require IRB approval.

Clinical Trial Number

Clinical trial number: not applicable.

Data Availability

All data used in this review are publicly available and cited in the references.

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