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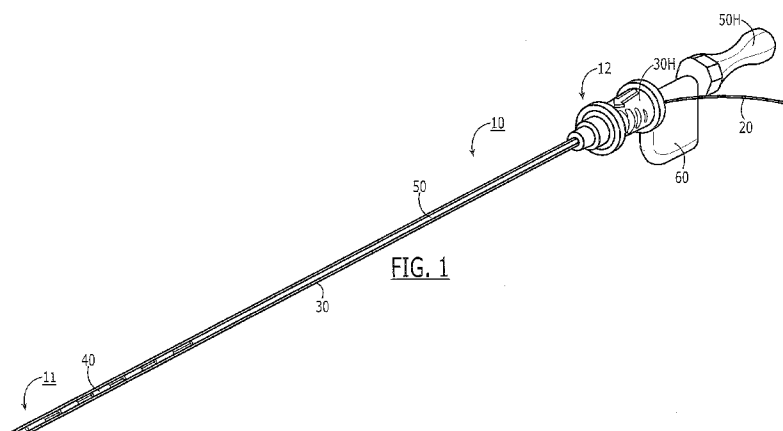
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(54) Title: TETHERED AND/OR VISUALLY CODED BRACHYTHERAPY DEVICES AND RELATED METHODS



(57) Abstract: Brachytherapy devices include a respective tether attached to a proximal end portion of the strands. The tether can be color-coded to match a color associated with the corresponding strand.

TETHERED AND/OR VISUALLY CODED BRACHYTHERAPY DEVICES AND RELATED METHODS

Related Applications

[0001] This application claims the benefit of and priority to U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. 61/375,289 filed August 20, 2010, the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference as if recited in full herein.

Field of the Invention

[0002] This invention relates to surgical devices.

Background of the Invention

[0003] Currently, small brachytherapy seeds are placed at defined intervals along a suture strand and placed into the prostate to treat a patient with prostate cancer. Several rows of seeds are typically implanted and several strands of seeds are used per row. An example of such a device is the RAPID Strand™ suture available from Oncura Inc., Arlington Heights, IL, which is described as an absorbable braided suture containing 10 evenly spaced oncology radioactive seeds (Iodine-125). *See also*, U.S. Patent Nos. 6,761,680, 6,997,862 and 7,211,039, the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference as if recited in full herein. The brachytherapy strands of seeds are typically used for treating prostate cancer but can be used to treat other cancers as well.

[0004] Despite the foregoing, there remains a need for improved brachytherapy strands and/or delivery systems that can allow for one or more of: identification, removal, and/or redeployment of improperly positioned brachytherapy seeds.

Summary of Embodiments of the Invention

[0005] Embodiments of the invention are directed to brachytherapy strands with radioactive seeds and an attached tether extending from a proximal end portion

thereof. The tether can be used for at least one of the identification, removal and/or redeployment of (improperly positioned) brachytherapy seeds.

[0006] Embodiments of the invention provide strands with visual indicia that corresponds to visual indicia on the tether, *e.g.*, color-coded ends and/or portions of strands, for ease of visual recognition during and/or after placement in a target intrabody location.

[0007] Embodiments of the invention provide an injector/plunger that resides in a delivery needle and accommodates passage of the tether at the time of deployment (either with an axially extending through-aperture or bore, outer slot or size clearance).

[0008] Embodiments of the invention provide visual indicia for each strand of seeds or for a particular row or column of seeds that can be visually and/or electronically identified. Where used, the electronic identification can comprise image recognition to provide the location of the corresponding strand in the target tissue, correlated to the visual (color-coded) indicia of the strand.

[0009] Embodiments of the invention are particularly useful for prostate brachytherapy treatments.

[0010] Some embodiments are directed to brachytherapy devices. The devices can include an implantable strand with radioactive material and a tether attached to a proximal end portion of the strand.

[0011] The tether can optionally include visual indicia. The radioactive material can include seeds, and at least a distal seed of the strand can have a color that corresponds to a color associated with the tether. The tether may be color-coded to match a color associated with the strand.

[0012] The brachytherapy device can be used in combination with a second brachytherapy device (and typically many more than two, such as between about 10-60). The second brachytherapy device also includes an implantable strand with radioactive material and a tether extending from and/or attached to a proximal end portion of the strand. The first device strand and the second device strand can have different color tethers.

[0013] Yet other embodiments are directed to brachytherapy assemblies. The assemblies include: (a) a needle; (b) a strand with radioactive material residing in a

distal end portion of the needle, the strand further comprising a tether that extends upstream of the radioactive material; and (c) a plunger residing in the needle configured to slidably hold the tether.

[0014] The tether and the strand can optionally include corresponding visual indicia.

[0015] The strand radioactive material may include a plurality of spaced apart radioactive seeds, and the tether and at least a distal seed can be color-coded.

[0016] The plunger can include a longitudinally extending bore and/or slot that receives the tether therein.

[0017] The tether can have a length sufficient to extend inside the needle to exit at a proximal portion of the needle and extend a distance beyond the needle.

[0018] The tether may reside in a center bore of the plunger inside the needle and exit the plunger and needle at a location that is proximate a handle associated with the needle.

[0019] The needle can include a needle handle at a proximal portion thereof and the plunger can include a plunger handle at a proximal portion thereof. In operation the plunger handle can slide the plunger a distance into the needle to force the strand with the radioactive material to exit the needle into target tissue.

[0020] The assembly may include a deployment guard that releasably resides between the needle handle and the plunger handle prior to active deployment.

[0021] The deployment guard can include a pair of arms that define a longitudinally extending channel that releasably holds a stem of the plunger.

[0022] At least one of the plunger handle, needle handle and tether can be color-coded to the strand and/or at least one radioactive material associated therewith.

[0023] Yet other embodiments are directed to a set of brachytherapy strands. The set includes a plurality of implantable strands of radioactive material, each strand comprising a respective tether. At least one of the tethers has different visible indicia than the others.

[0024] The strands can be color-coded to the corresponding tether.

[0025] The radioactive material may include a plurality of spaced apart seeds. Each strand comprises a color on a distal radioactive seed that is color-coded to the respective tether.

[0026] Still other embodiments are directed to brachytherapy template grids. The grids include a grid body with a set of channels arranged in defined columns and rows. At least one of the rows is configured to have different color indicia than other rows.

[0027] Yet other embodiments are directed to methods of carrying out a brachytherapy procedure. The methods include: (a) providing a needle with a strand of radioactive material having a tether and a plunger; (b) pushing the plunger; (c) slidably extending the plunger in the needle in response to the pushing step; and (d) forcing the radioactive material out of the needle based on the extending step while retaining the tether remains attached to the strand with a portion in the needle and a proximal portion extending outwardly therefrom.

[0028] The method can include pulling the tether toward the needle handle to retract the strand of radioactive material back into the needle.

[0029] The method can include slidably extending the tether through a slot or bore in the plunger a distance substantially equal to a distance the radioactive strand travels during the forcing step.

[0030] The method can include visually comparing visual indicia on the strand of radioactive material to corresponding visual indicia on the tether to identify a strand associated with a radioactive seed that is in an undesired location in the body.

[0031] Still other embodiments are directed to methods of fabricating a brachytherapy strand. The methods include (a) providing a strand of radioactive material; and (b) attaching a tether to a proximal end portion of the strand or forming the strand to define a longitudinally extending tether with a length that extends outside the body when the radioactive material is in the implanted position.

[0032] The method can include placing color indicia on the strand of radioactive material and placing corresponding color indicia on the tether.

[0033] The foregoing and other objects and aspects of the present invention are explained in detail in the specification set forth below.

[0034] It is noted that aspects of the invention described with respect to one embodiment, may be incorporated in a different embodiment although not specifically described relative thereto. That is, all embodiments and/or features of any embodiment can be combined in any way and/or combination. Applicant reserves the

right to change any originally filed claim or file any new claim accordingly, including the right to be able to amend any originally filed claim to depend from and/or incorporate any feature of any other claim although not originally claimed in that manner. These and other objects and/or aspects of the present invention are explained in detail in the specification set forth below.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0035] **Figure 1** is a side perspective view of an exemplary surgical delivery device according to embodiments of the invention.

[0036] **Figure 2** is an exploded view of the device shown in **Figure 1**.

[0037] **Figure 3A** is a side perspective view of a strand of radioactive seeds with a tether according to embodiments of the present invention.

[0038] **Figure 3B** is an enlarged view of the opposing end portions of the strand and tether shown in **Figure 3A** according to embodiments of the present invention.

[0039] **Figure 4A** is an enlarged side view of a needle (shown transparent) encasing an injector/plunger and tether.

[0040] **Figure 4B** is a section view taken along line 4B-4B in **Figure 4A**.

[0041] **Figure 4C** is a side section view of a portion of a needle encasing an injector/plunger and tether according to other embodiments of the present invention.

[0042] **Figure 4D** is a section view taken along line 4D-4D in **Figure 4C**.

[0043] **Figure 5** is a greatly enlarged side view of the device shown in **Figure 1** with certain components shown substantially transparent and illustrating a proximal exit path for a tether according to embodiments of the present invention.

[0044] **Figure 6A** is a side view of an exemplary plunger/injector (without the handle) according to embodiments of the present invention.

[0045] **Figure 6B** is a section view taken along line 6B-6B in **Figure 6A**.

[0046] **Figure 7A** is a side view of an exemplary delivery needle according to embodiments of the present invention.

[0047] **Figure 7B** is a section view taken along line 7B-7B in **Figure 7A**.

[0048] **Figure 8** is a side view of a delivery assembly according to embodiments of the present invention.

- [0049] **Figure 9** is a section view taken along lines 9-9 in **Figure 8**.
- [0050] **Figure 10** is an enlarged detail section view of the portion of the device shown in **Figure 8**.
- [0051] **Figure 11A** is a top view of an exemplary handle for the needle according to embodiments of the present invention.
- [0052] **Figure 11B** is a section view taken along line 11B-11B in **Figure 11A**.
- [0053] **Figure 11C** is a distal end view of the device shown in **Figure 11A**.
- [0054] **Figure 11D** is a proximal end view of the device shown in **Figure 11A**.
- [0055] **Figure 12A** is a top view of an exemplary plunger/injector handle according to embodiments of the present invention.
- [0056] **Figure 12B** is a distal end view of the device shown in **Figure 12A**.
- [0057] **Figure 12C** is a section view taken along line 12C-12C in **Figure 12B**.
- [0058] **Figure 13A** is a side view of a deployment guard according to embodiments of the present invention.
- [0059] **Figure 13B** is an end view of the device shown in **Figure 13A**.
- [0060] **Figure 13C** is a top view of the device shown in **Figure 13A**.
- [0061] **Figure 13D** is an enlarged view of a portion of the device shown in **Figure 13B**.
- [0062] **Figure 14** is an example of a template grid.

Description of Embodiments of the Invention

[0063] The present invention will now be described more fully hereinafter with reference to the accompanying figures, in which embodiments of the invention are shown. This invention may, however, be embodied in many different forms and should not be construed as limited to the embodiments set forth herein. Like numbers refer to like elements throughout. In the figures, certain layers, components or features may be exaggerated for clarity, and broken lines illustrate optional features or operations unless specified otherwise. In addition, the sequence of operations (or steps) is not limited to the order presented in the figures and/or claims unless specifically indicated otherwise. In the drawings, the thickness of lines, layers,

features, components and/or regions may be exaggerated for clarity and broken lines illustrate optional features or operations, unless specified otherwise.

[0064] The terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting of the invention. As used herein, the singular forms, "a", "an" and "the" are intended to include the plural forms as well, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise. It will be further understood that the terms "comprises," "comprising," "includes," and/or "including" when used in this specification, specify the presence of stated features, regions, steps, operations, elements, and/or components, but do not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, regions, steps, operations, elements, components, and/or groups thereof.

[0065] It will be understood that when a feature, such as a layer, region or substrate, is referred to as being "on" another feature or element, it can be directly on the other feature or element or intervening features and/or elements may also be present. In contrast, when an element is referred to as being "directly on" another feature or element, there are no intervening elements present. It will also be understood that, when a feature or element is referred to as being "connected", "attached" or "coupled" to another feature or element, it can be directly connected, attached or coupled to the other element or intervening elements may be present. In contrast, when a feature or element is referred to as being "directly connected", "directly attached" or "directly coupled" to another element, there are no intervening elements present. Although described or shown with respect to one embodiment, the features so described or shown can apply to other embodiments. The term "distal" refers to a direction or location that is closer to or toward a patient while the term "proximal" refers to the opposing direction or a location that is further away from the patient.

[0066] Unless otherwise defined, all terms (including technical and scientific terms) used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood by one of ordinary skill in the art to which this invention belongs. It will be further understood that terms, such as those defined in commonly used dictionaries, should be interpreted as having a meaning that is consistent with their meaning in the context of the present

application and relevant art and should not be interpreted in an idealized or overly formal sense unless expressly so defined herein.

[0067] The term "color-coded" means that the so-called components have a color that is the same or sufficiently similar so that the two components are readily visually identifiable as related.

[0068] The term "tether" refers to a flexible thread, suture, wire or other material that extends a length off a proximal end portion of an implantable brachytherapy strand that holds radioactive material (typically at least one radioactive seed, and more typically a plurality of spaced apart radioactive seeds) thereon. However, the radioactive material may be provided in other ways. The word "strand" refers to a flexible (typically implantable) biocompatible suture or other material (thread, filament and/or wire), typically a multi-suture (*e.g.*, braided suture) configuration that holds radioactive material, *e.g.*, seeds, in longitudinally spaced apart positions (in contrast to "loose seeds"). The strand can be axially stiff, while being radially flexible or may have other characteristics. *See, e.g.*, U.S. Patent Nos. 6,761,680 and 6,997,862 to Terwilliger et al., the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference as if recited in full herein. The tether can be an extension of the strand or may be a separate material, such as a different suture material that extends a length beyond that of the strand, typically a length sufficient to extend upstream of the strand to the proximal end of the needle and more typically a length sufficient to extend 1-12 inches beyond of the delivery needle. If the latter, the tether can be attached to the strand in any desired manner, *e.g.*, fused, tied, molded, or adhesively attached or attached using a clip, staple, friction, molded or via a mechanical clamp or other component. The tether may be a single monofilament suture or may be a multi-filament suture, including a braided suture.

[0069] The phrases "visual indicia" or "visible indicia" are used interchangeably and refer to an optically (typically visually) recognizable color, pattern and/or alphanumeric marking. The visual indicia can be color alone, color and pattern, pattern with the same color, or alpha numeric indicia alone or with color, or any combination of the above or other visually detectable features (typically visually detectable without magnification with normal eyesight). The visual indicia may comprise (gold) markers that are identifiable via X-ray or ultrasound. For example,

for a particular procedure between about 10-60 strands may be deployed (typically using a template with columns and rows for placement) for the dosing plan in the prostate. Each tether or sets of tethers for a particular use can comprise a different color (or different hues or intensity of color). Alternatively, some or even all of the tethers for a particular use may have the same color but may include a different pattern such as a different number and/or alpha indicator, dots, stripes, lines, geometric shapes or non-geometric shapes, combinations thereof or other visually distinguishable features. Preferably, each tether, each row or column of tethers, or spatially related tethers can have a visually different color for faster visual recognition as to which associated strand/seed is in a particular (*e.g.*, improper) location. Each tether **20** (**Figures 1-2**) can be attached to a respective strand that can also include corresponding visual indicia (*e.g.*, color) that corresponds to the associated tether.

[0070] **Figures 1 and 2** illustrate a surgical delivery assembly **10** having distal and proximal end portions **11**, **12**, respectively, with a tether **20** extending from the proximal end portion **12**. The assembly **10** includes a needle **30** that holds the strand of radioactive material **40** (*e.g.*, a suture **41** with spaced apart radioactive seeds **40s**). The assembly **10** also includes a plunger **50** (also known as an injector or ejector) that extends through the needle **30** to expel or push the radioactive material **40** (*e.g.*, radioactive seeds) into position in target tissue (*e.g.*, the prostate). The assembly **10** can also optionally include a releasable deployment guard **60** to inhibit undesired ejection of the radioactive material prior to insertion.

[0071] In particular embodiments, the tether **20** is biodegradable (as can be the strands **41**). In conventional designs, once the strands **40** are implanted, there are limited viable options to remove them except in a relatively invasive manner. In contrast, the tether **20** allows the strand **41** to be pulled out and re-positioned. The delivery assembly **10** can be configured to accommodate the tether **20**.

[0072] In particular embodiments, the strands **41** and tethers **20** can be color-coded or otherwise configured with corresponding visible indicia **42**, **22**, respectively, that identifies that a respective pair is related. Unfortunately, a relatively common mistake in conventional brachytherapy procedures occurs when a strand gets undesirably close to the urethra, urethral sphincter, bladder, rectum, neurovascular bundle or placed in an area that does not allow for desirable (*e.g.*, increased or

maximum) cancer control. For example, one or more strands or seeds may be pushed through the prostate and into the bladder or rectum. While one can go into the bladder with an endoscope and see that there is a strand extending into the bladder, it is difficult to tell which of the plurality (typically between 10-20 or more) strands **41** is causing the problem. In addition, there is no easy way to get it out without the tether **20**.

[0073] **Figure 3A** illustrates that the tether **20** can optionally include visual indicia **22**. In some embodiments, the handle **30H** and/or **50H** may alternatively or additionally include corresponding visual indicia **39**, **59**, respectively (**Figure 8**). The visual indicia **22** (and/or **39**, **59**) can be provided by a color, pattern or other marking of the tether **20** itself (all or a portion of the entire length of the tether) such as by a filament, strand or body of the tether or by a component integrally or releasably attached to the tether **20**, such as a clip, paper, elastomeric tag, end cap, sleeve, block body or other device (that can reside a distance away from the proximal end of the tether). The tether **20** can have a smaller diameter or size than that of the strand **41** of the radioactive implant **40**. In other embodiments, the tether **20** can have substantially the same cross-sectional size (and can be round or have another shape). The tether **20** can also optionally have different shapes or sizes over different segments (not shown). The tether **20** can have a length that is at least a major portion of the length of the needle **30**, *e.g.*, with a length sufficient to extend out a distance beyond the handle **30H** while being attached to the proximal end of the strand **41**. In particular embodiments, the tether **20** has a length that is between about 100 mm to about 500 mm; more typically between about 100-300 mm.

[0074] **Figure 3A** illustrates that a distal end portion of the strand **40** can include visible indicia **42** such as an end cap **42e** that has a color that corresponds to a color and/or other visible indicia **22** on the tether **20**. The visible indicia **42** may alternatively be placed on the strand/suture **41** upstream of the end seed **40s** or at both and/or other locations or extend the entire length of the suture **41** and/or on one or more seeds **40s** and the like. The visible indicia **42** can be provided by using a biocompatible color coating, seed material or encasement material for the seed (*e.g.*, colored titanium), and/or by painting, dyeing or otherwise providing the seed and/or strand thereat with an externally visible color that can be distinguished from at least

one other strand of radioactive material (*e.g.*, seeds **40s**). For example, a small (*e.g.*, about 1-5 mm, typically about 2.5 mm) distal color-coded end cap be placed on the most distal seed. The color can correspond to a particular row in a grid (see, *e.g.*, **Figure 14**) such as "red" for the most anterior row. The visual indicia **42** can be used so that at the time of cytoscopy, those strands **40** extending into the bladder or at other undesired locations can be more easily distinguished from one another. **Figure 3B** illustrates that the tether visual indicia **22** can include a color-coded "rope" or "string" and/or a proximal sleeve that can be color-coded to a corresponding distal seed and/or strand visual indicia **42** such as by color coding an end cap, end seed and/or strand thereof **42e** (shown by the shading).

[0075] **Figures 4A and 4B** illustrate that the plunger/injector **50** can include an axially extending bore **50a** (typically a center bore) that defines a channel for the tether **20**. **Figures 4C and 4D** illustrate that the tether **20** can be held against an outer surface of the plunger **50**. As shown in **Figure 4D**, the tether **20** can optionally be held in a slot **50s** formed in an outer wall of the plunger **50** for allowing the tether **20** and seeds **40s** to be slidably deployed from the needle **30**. In other embodiments, the tether **20** can be held between the plunger outer wall and the needle inner wall based on a snug clearance fit sized to allow the tether to slidably extend. The needle bore may optionally be stepped to have a smaller size downstream of the tether (proximate the seeds **40s**) to provide a desired snug fit for proper alignment at discharge while accommodating the tether **20** upstream of the seeds **40s**.

[0076] **Figure 5** illustrates that the tether **20** can be configured to extend through the needle handle **30H** a distance, then extend outside of the plunger **50** and needle handle **30H** at a proximal portion thereof. Thus, the plunger **50** can include an exit window **50w** downstream of the plunger handle proximate the needle handle (in the non-deployed position). However, other the assembly **10** can provide for other tether **20** exit locations.

[0077] **Figures 6A and 6B** illustrate an exemplary plunger **50** (without the handle **50H**). The plunger **50** may have a length " L_p " that is less than a length " L_n " of the needle **30**, such as between about 5-15 mm less and more typically about 12 mm less for a plunger having a length of about 146 mm. The diameter of the plunger

50 is typically small (*e.g.*, about 0.66 mm or less) and is sized to slidably snugly reside in the bore of the needle **30**.

[0078] **Figures 7A and 7B** illustrate an example of a needle **30** (without the handle). The needle can have an angled tip **30t** and a bore **30b**. The needle **30** can be any suitable size and typically has an OD (outer diameter) that is less than about 1.3 mm and an ID (inner diameter) that is about 0.84 mm. The needle **30** can be any suitable length, but is typically between about 158 mm to about 159 mm.

[0079] **Figures 8-10** illustrate the device **10** with the needle **30**, the plunger **50**, the tether **20** and the seeds **40s** assembled. **Figure 8** also illustrates that the handle **30H** and/or **50H** may include corresponding visual indicia **39**, **59** that corresponds to the tether indicia **22** and seed indicia **42**.

[0080] **Figures 11A-11D** illustrate an exemplary needle handle **30H** with a tapered bore **31** for slidably receiving the plunger **50**. The handle **30H** has a proximal end **35** and a distal end portion **32**. The handle **30H** may also include an arrow **36** to indicate that a clinician should slide the plunger **50** in that direction to eject the radioactive seeds **40s** (after removing the guard **60**).

[0081] **Figures 12A-12C** illustrate an exemplary plunger handle **50H**. The handle includes a receiving bore **51** for holding an end portion of the plunger body **50**. The handle **50H** includes opposing proximal and distal end portions, **52**, **55**, respectively.

[0082] **Figures 13A-13D** illustrate an exemplary deployment guard **60**. As shown, the guard **60** can include a pair of arms **61₁**, **61₂** that define an axially or longitudinally extending channel **63** therebetween that releasably engage the plunger **50**. The guard **60** resides between the needle handle **30H** and the plunger handle **50H** and holds a length of the plunger **50** in the channel **63** to block any longitudinally sliding movement of the plunger **50** prior to use. The arms **61₁**, **61₂** and channel **63** can extend in the longitudinal direction a distance of between about 15-25 mm, typically about 19 mm (such as about 19.05 mm) which can substantially correspond with (*e.g.*, be substantially the same as) the stroke distance of the plunger **50** during use. The guard **60** can have a substantially planar primary body **60b** that can be easily grasped for removal during use.

[0083] **Figure 14** illustrates a template grid **100** which can comprise visual indicia **122** that corresponds to the tether indicia **22** and/or strand **41** and/or seed **40s** (*e.g.*, be color-coded). For example, the grid **100** can be configured so that each of the outer wall or each entry channel **101** associated with a particular row/column can include the indicia **122**, *e.g.*, each channel or wall adjacent thereto can be color coded to correspond with the desired strand/tether color.

[0084] **Figure 14** also illustrates that the delivery device **10** can be pre-loaded with the suture/strand and seeds **40** and tether **20**, and the tether **20** and distal end portion of the radioactive material/strand **40** can be color-coded (each can be red). The needle or handles **30H**, **50H** may also optionally be color-coded to correspond with the tether **20** and/or strand/seed **40s**, **41**. During use, a clinician can insert the strand/needle assembly **10** into the correct color coded row or column (shown as each row being color coded). As shown by way of example only, a device **10** comprises "red" visible indicia **42** and **22** and is intended to be inserted into the grid at the row with the corresponding visible indicia **122**, *e.g.*, the "red" row.

[0085] It is contemplated that each row may have the same color but each column in that row may have some visual distinctive/unique identifier. For example, all strands on the most anterior row can have a red end cap, but one end cap may be solid while another may be striped. Different patterns or color demarcation (all being red) may help a user visually and faster identify which strand should be pulled (*e.g.*, solid red strand means it is in the anterior row, while striped red means it is in column B"). Thus, the indicia **22**, **42** for each grid row of strands **40** may have a common color and the indicia **22**, **42** for each grid column may have a common pattern. The grid **100** can include corresponding indicia **122** unique for each row and column.

[0086] It is contemplated that the color-coded tethers **20** and/or strands **40** can be provided as a set of individual colors or in groups of different colors with or separate from the grid **100** as a kit or kits of supplies for a surgical procedure.

[0087] In some embodiments, the plunger **50** and/or needle **30** can continue to hold the tether **20** (still connected to the strand **41**) after the seeds **40s** are deployed. If the location is deemed inappropriate, the user can pull the tether **20** outward (away from the body), thereby removing the seeds **40s**. It is also contemplated that the user may then reposition those seeds in a needle **30** for easy redeployment (the needle **30**

may be the same needle used to deliver the seeds **40s** or may optionally be a new needle that cooperates with the plunger **50** and tether **20**). Once in proper position, the tether **20** can be cut (typically at the level of the perineal skin) and left in position. The tether **20** can be absorbed by the body over time.

[0088] Embodiments of the invention provide visual indicia for each strand of seeds or for a particular row or column of seeds that can be visually and/or electronically identified. Where used, the electronic identification can comprise image recognition to provide the location of the corresponding strand in the target tissue, correlated to the visual (color-coded) indicia of the strand. The electronic identification can be visually displayed on a display or other image for clinician reference.

[0089] The foregoing is illustrative of the present invention and is not to be construed as limiting thereof. Although a few exemplary embodiments of this invention have been described, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that many modifications are possible in the exemplary embodiments without materially departing from the novel teachings and advantages of this invention. Accordingly, all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of this invention as defined in the claims. In the claims, means-plus-function clauses, if used, are intended to cover the structures described herein as performing the recited function and not only structural equivalents but also equivalent structures. Therefore, it is to be understood that the foregoing is illustrative of the present invention and is not to be construed as limited to the specific embodiments disclosed, and that modifications to the disclosed embodiments, as well as other embodiments, are intended to be included within the scope of the appended claims. The invention is defined by the following claims, with equivalents of the claims to be included therein.

THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A brachytherapy device, comprising:
an implantable strand with radioactive material; and
a tether attached to a proximal end portion of the strand.
2. The device of Claim 1, wherein the tether comprises visual indicia that corresponds to visual indicia associated with the strand and/or radioactive material of the strand.
3. The device of Claim 1, wherein at least a distal end of the strand has a color that corresponds to a color associated with the tether.
4. The device of Claim 1, wherein the tether is color-coded to match a color associated with the strand.
5. The device of Claim 1, wherein the tether has a length that is between about 100-300 mm.
6. The device of Claim 1, in combination with a second brachytherapy device, the second brachytherapy device comprising an implantable strand with radioactive material; and a tether attached to a proximal end portion of the strand, wherein the first device strand and the second device strand have different color tethers.
7. The combination of Claim 6, wherein the radioactive material of the strands comprises radioactive seeds, and wherein at least a distal seed of the first device strand and a distal seed of the second device strand comprise a different color that corresponds to a color of the respective tethers.
8. A brachytherapy assembly, comprising:
a needle;

a strand with radioactive material residing in a distal end portion of the needle, the strand further comprising a tether that extends upstream of the radioactive material; and

a plunger residing in the needle configured to slidably hold the tether.

9. The assembly of Claim 8, wherein the tether and the strand comprise corresponding visual indicia.

10. The assembly of Claim 9, wherein the strand radioactive material comprises a plurality of spaced apart radioactive seeds, and wherein the tether and at least a distal seed are color-coded.

11. The assembly of Claim 8, wherein the plunger comprises a longitudinally extending bore and/or slot that receives the tether therein.

12. The assembly of Claim 8, wherein the tether has a length sufficient to extend inside the needle to exit at a proximal portion of the needle and extend a distance beyond the needle.

13. The assembly of Claim 8, wherein the tether resides in a center bore of the plunger inside the needle and exits the plunger and needle at a location that is proximate a handle associated with the needle.

14. The assembly of Claim 8, wherein the needle comprises a needle handle at a proximal portion thereof, and wherein the plunger comprises a plunger handle at a proximal portion thereof, wherein, in operation the plunger handle slides the plunger a distance into the needle to force the strand with the radioactive material to exit the needle into target tissue.

15. The assembly of Claim 14, further comprising a deployment guard that releasably resides between the needle handle and the plunger handle prior to active deployment.

16. The assembly of Claim 15, wherein the deployment guard comprises a pair of arms that define a longitudinally extending channel that releasably holds a stem of the plunger.

17. The assembly of Claim 14, wherein at least one of the plunger handle, needle handle or tether is color-coded to the strand and/or at least one radioactive material associated therewith.

18. A set of brachytherapy strands comprising:
a plurality of implantable strands of radioactive material, each strand comprising a respective tether, wherein at least one of the tethers comprises different visible indicia than the others.

19. The set of Claim 18, wherein the strands are color-coded to the corresponding tether.

20. The set of Claim 18, wherein the radioactive material comprises a plurality of spaced apart seeds, and wherein each strand comprises a color on a distal radioactive seed that is color-coded to the respective tether.

21. A brachytherapy template grid, comprising:
a grid body with a set of channels arranged in defined columns and rows, wherein at least one of the rows is configured to have different color indicia than other rows.

22. A method of carrying out a brachytherapy procedure, comprising:
providing a needle with a strand of radioactive material having a tether and a plunger;
slidably extending the plunger in the needle; and
forcing the radioactive material out of the needle based on the extending step while the tether remains attached to the strand and extends through the needle to exit a

proximal portion thereof with a length sufficient to extend outwardly away from the needle.

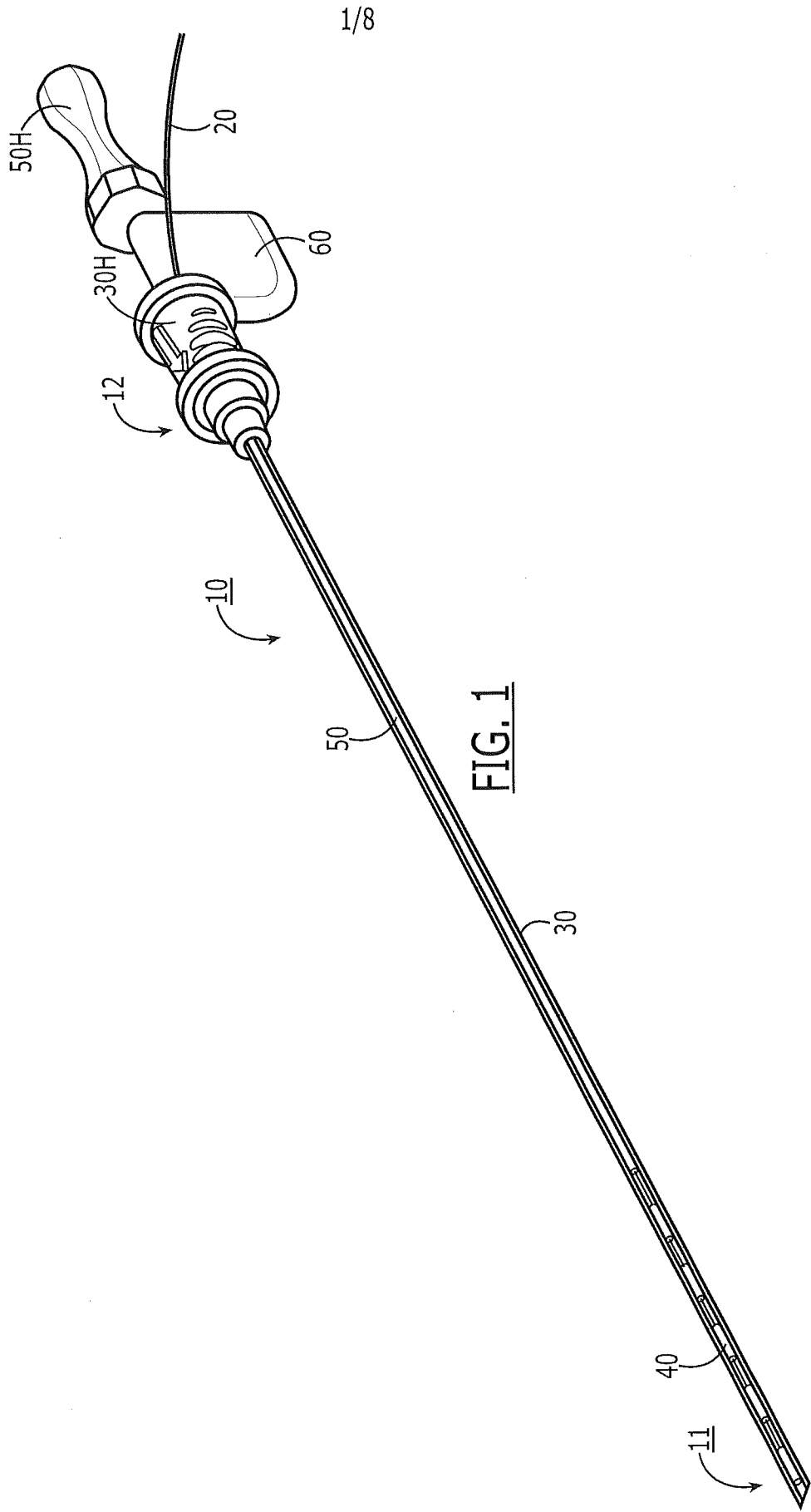
23. The method of Claim 22, further comprising pulling the tether toward a needle handle to retract the strand of radioactive material back into the needle.

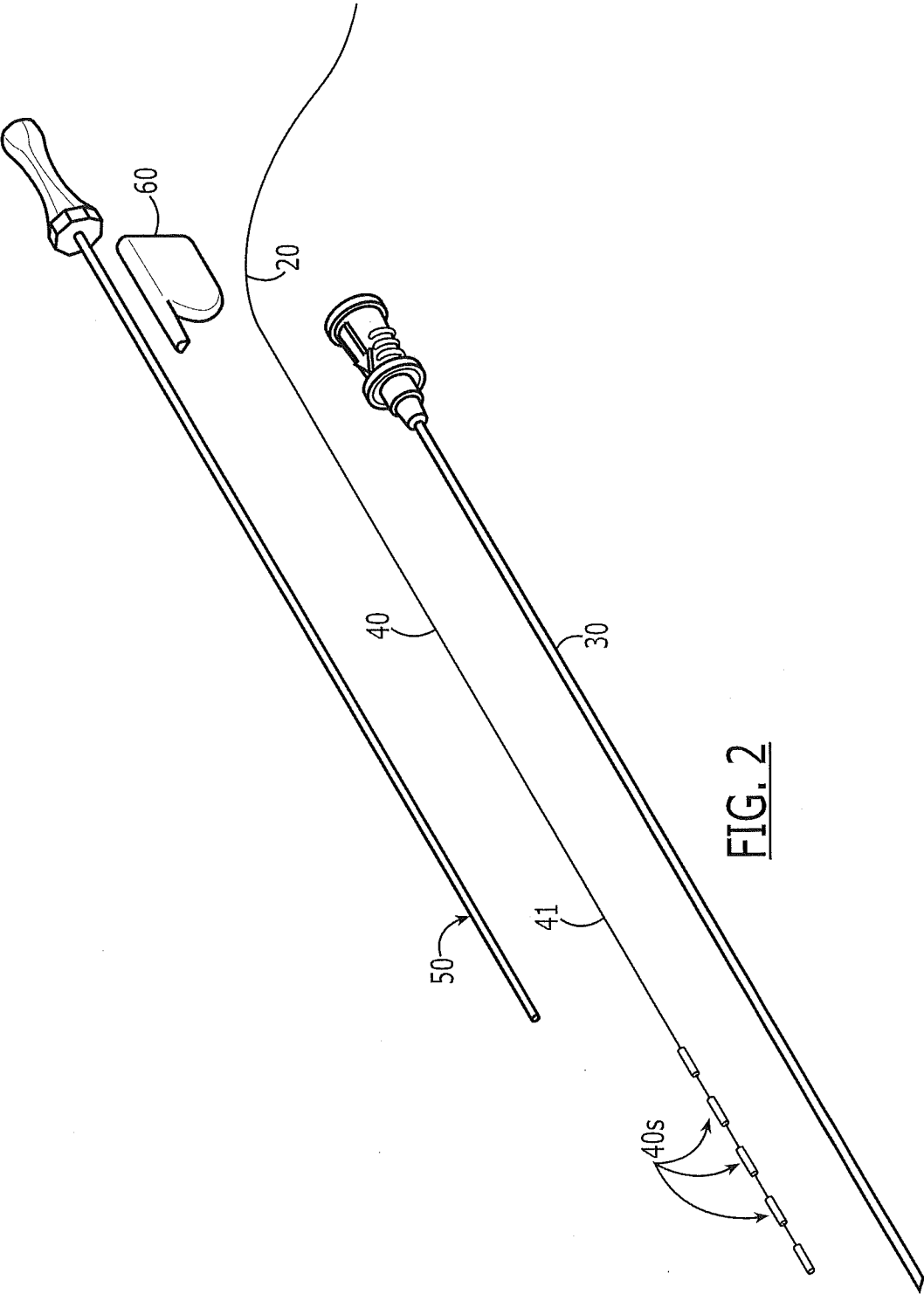
24. The method of Claim 22, further comprising slidably extending the tether through a slot or bore in the plunger a distance substantially equal to a distance the radioactive strand travels during the forcing step.

25. The method of Claim 22, further comprising visually comparing visual indicia on the strand of radioactive material to corresponding visual indicia on the tether to identify a strand associated with a radioactive seed that is in an undesired location in the body.

26. A method of fabricating a brachytherapy strand, comprising:
providing a strand of radioactive material; and
attaching a tether to a proximal end portion of the strand or forming the strand to define a longitudinally extending tether, wherein the tether has a length that extends outside the body when the radioactive material is in the implanted position.

27. The method of Claim 26, further comprising placing color indicia on the strand of radioactive material and placing corresponding color indicia on the tether.





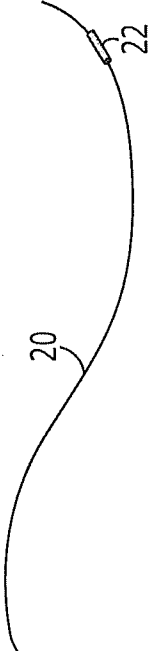


FIG. 3A

41

40

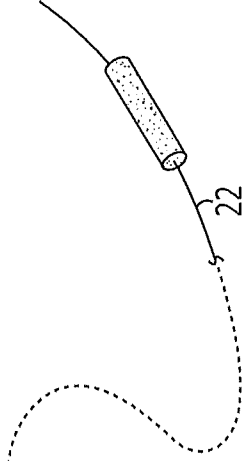


FIG. 3B

41

40



40s

42

42e

40s

42

42e

40s

42

42e

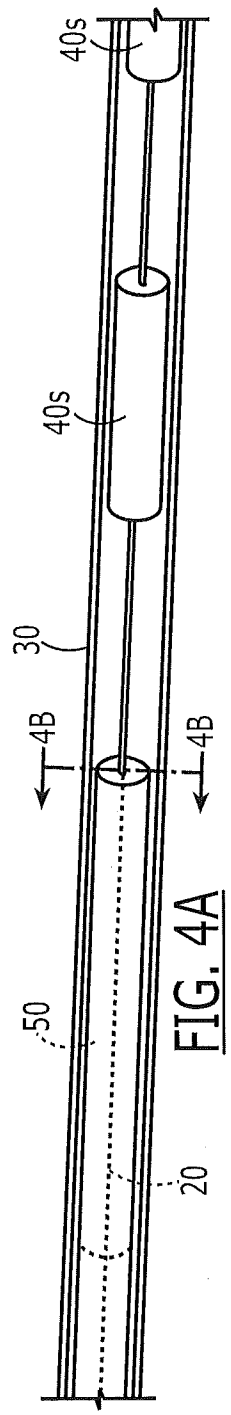


FIG. 4A

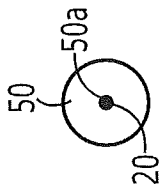


FIG. 4B



FIG. 4D

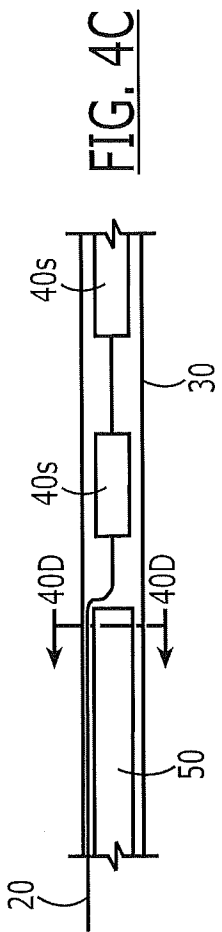


FIG. 4C

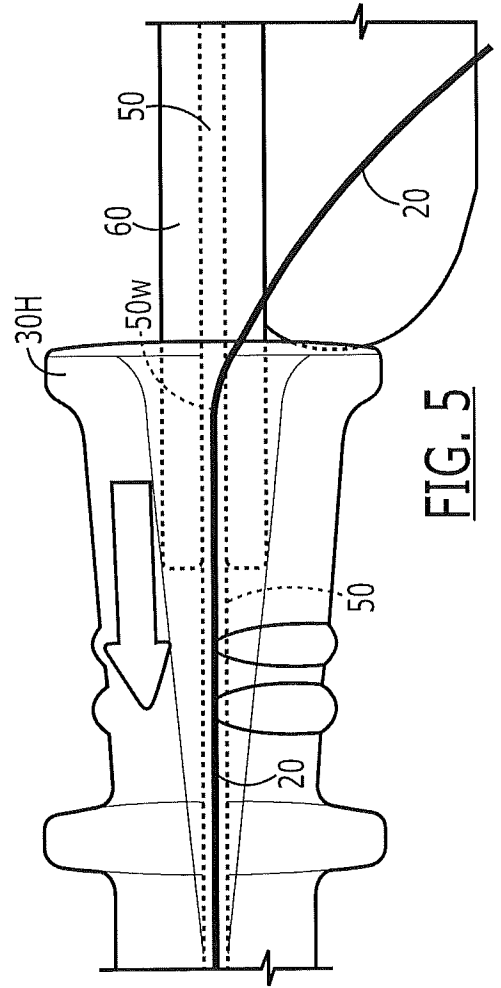
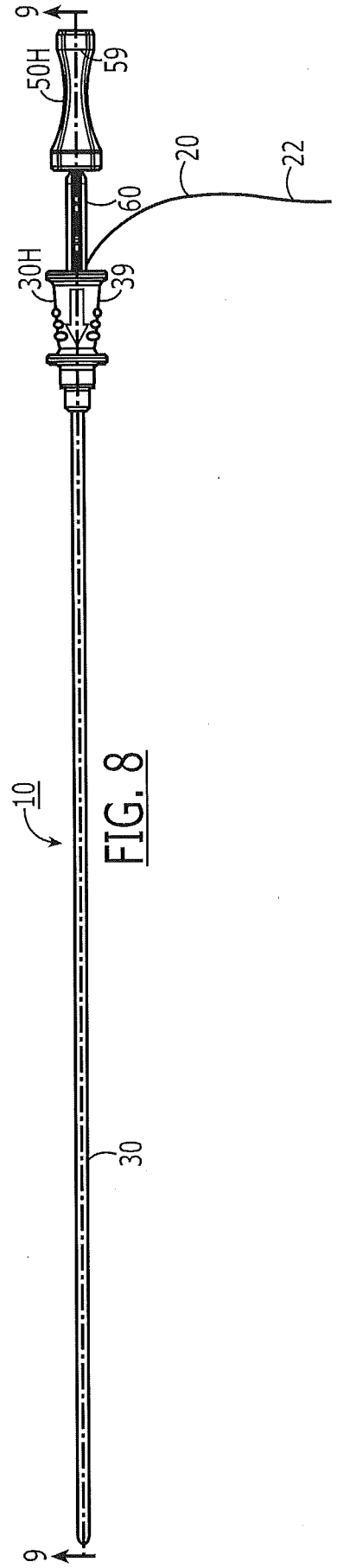
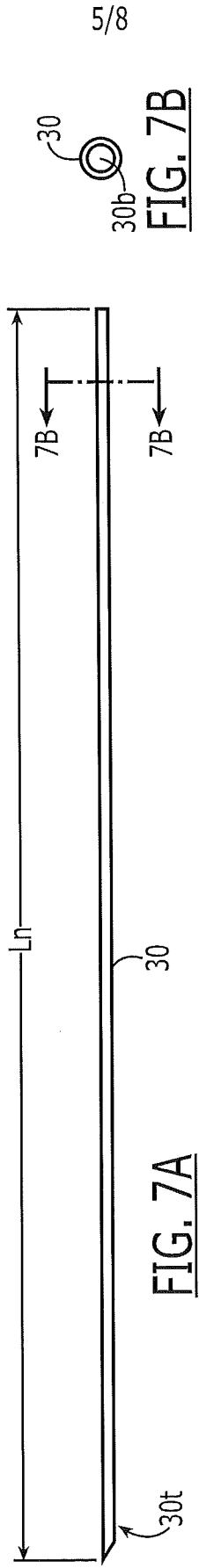
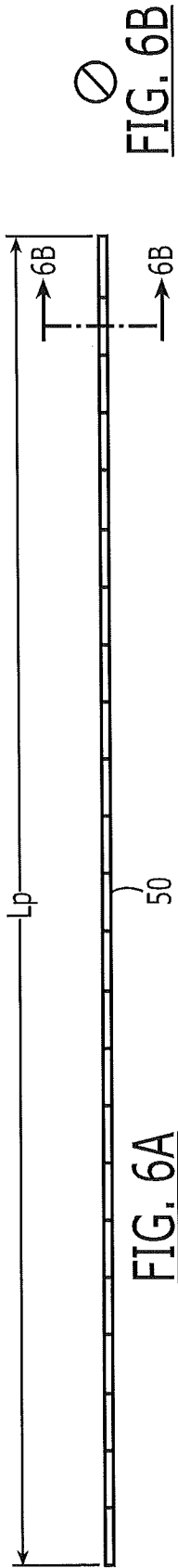


FIG. 5



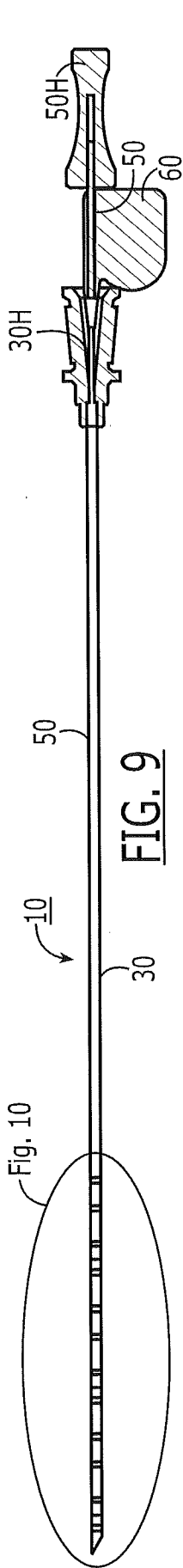


FIG. 9

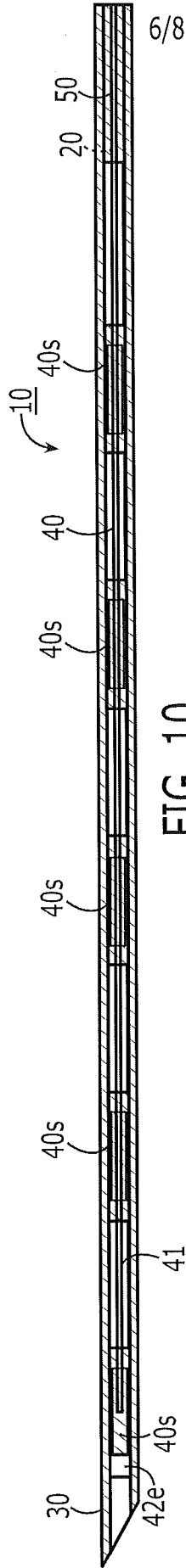


FIG. 10

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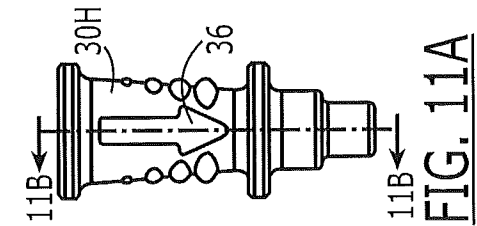


FIG. 11A

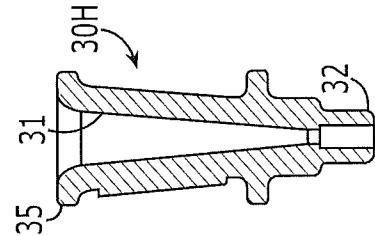


FIG. 11B

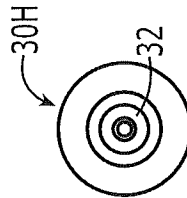


FIG. 11C

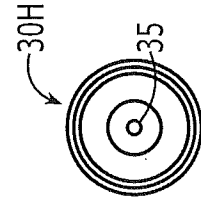


FIG. 11D

