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ABSTRACT

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Tissue removal probes comprise an elongated member, a drive shaft rotatably disposed within the member, and a rotatably tissue removal element mounted to the distal end of the drive shaft. One tissue removal element comprises a plurality of tissue-cutting filaments affixed at proximal and distal ends of the tissue removal element. The cutting filaments may have optional hinge points that allow the distal end of the tissue removal element to be inverted, thereby transforming the tissue removal element from a tissue-cutting device to a tissue-grasping device. Another tissue removal element may have a blunted tip to prevent distal tissue trauma and an irrigation port to provide irrigation fluid to the removed tissue and/or tissue removal element. Another tissue removal element has a proximal and distal spiral grooves that are oppositely pitched, so that removed tissue can be collected in the middle of the tissue removal element. Another tissue removal element has independent counter-rotating tissue removal elements to maintain stability during a bone cutting procedure. Still another tissue removal element takes the form of a drill bit with fluted cutting grooves. Yet another tissue removal element has cascading tissue-cutting notches that can be reciprocally moved to remove tissue within a hole.

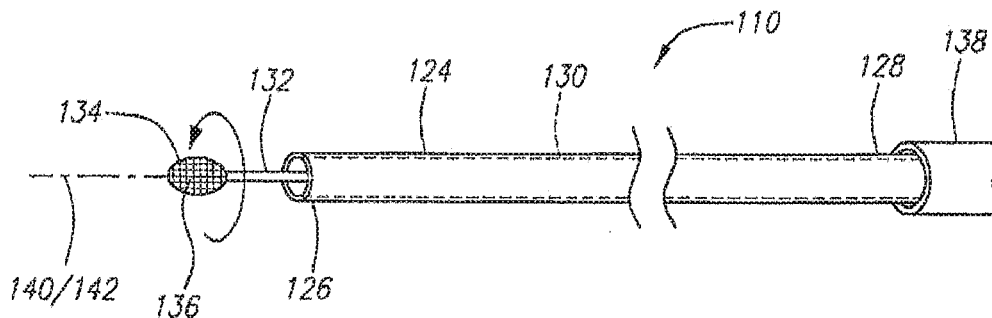
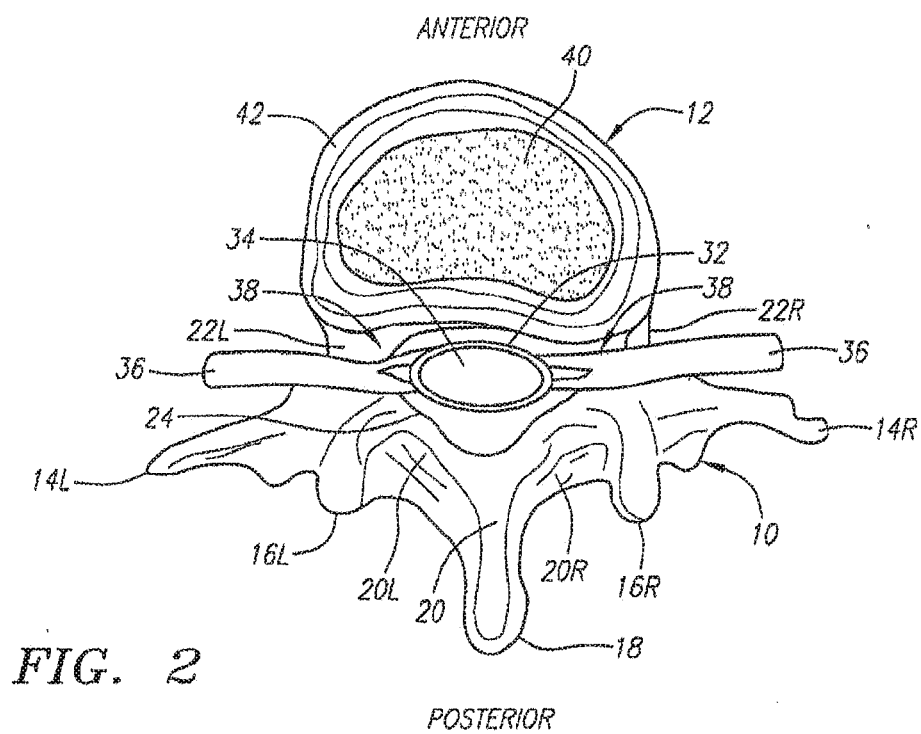
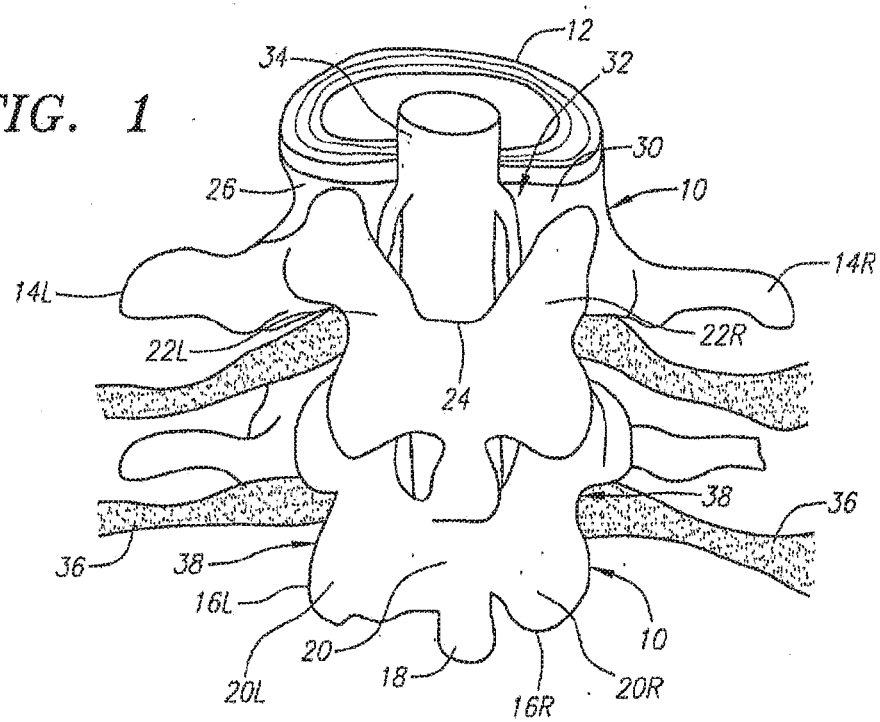


FIG. 1



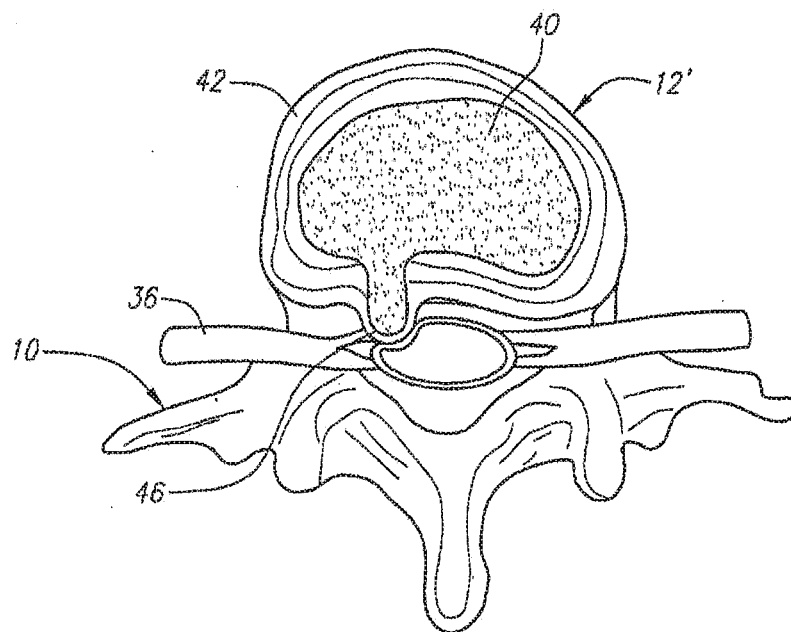


FIG. 3

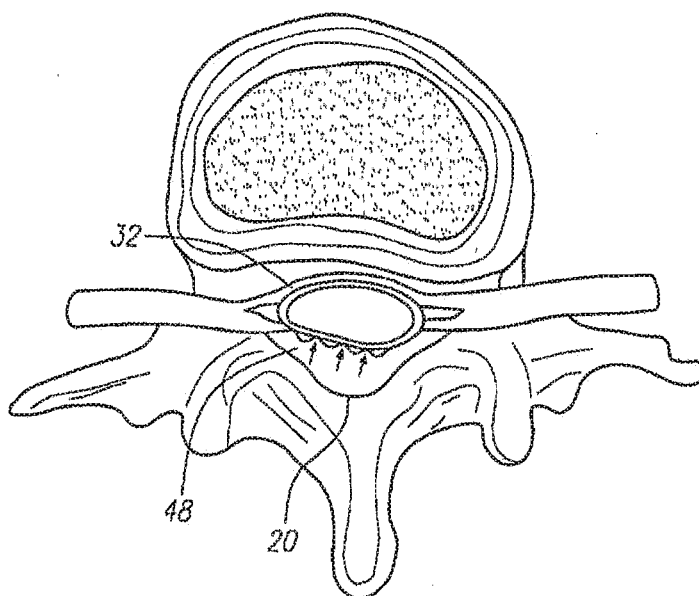


FIG. 4

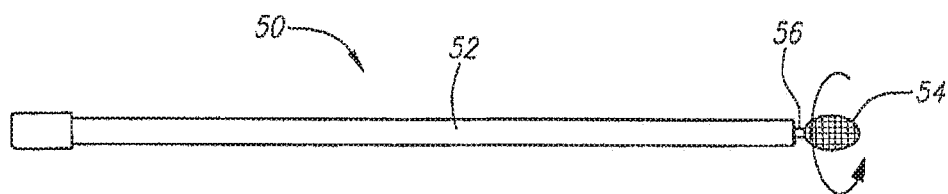


FIG. 5

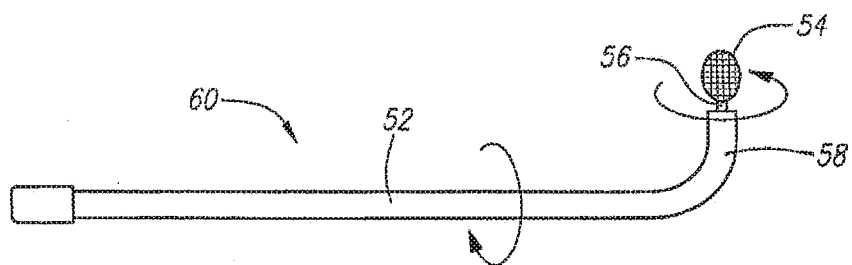


FIG. 6

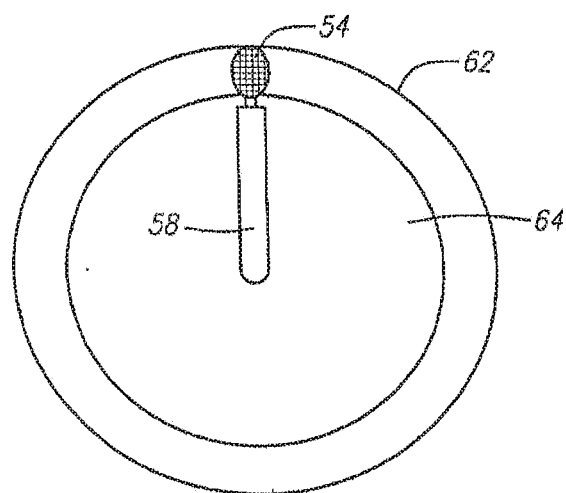


FIG. 7

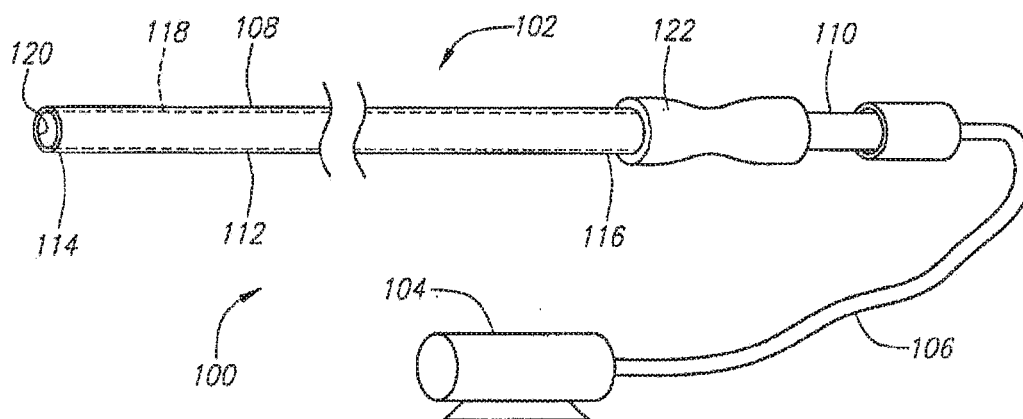


FIG. 8

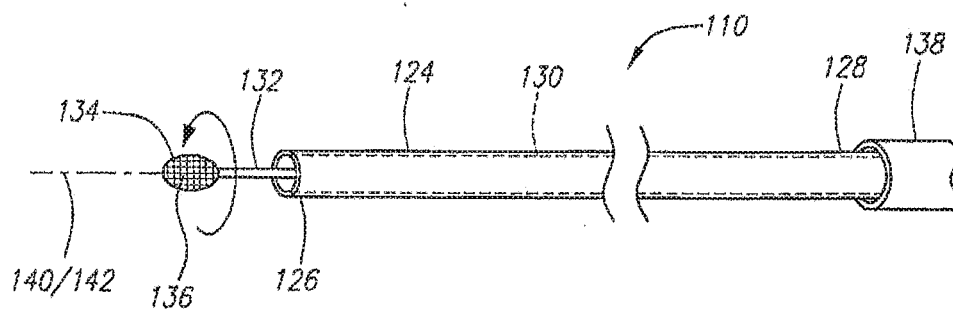


FIG. 9

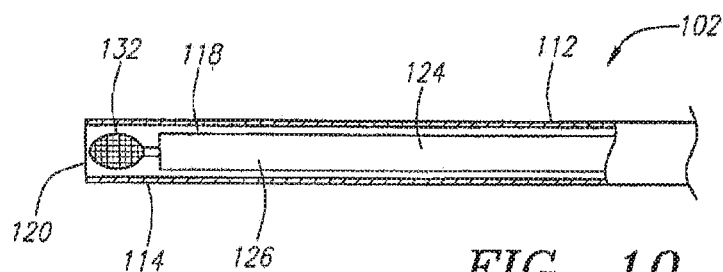


FIG. 10

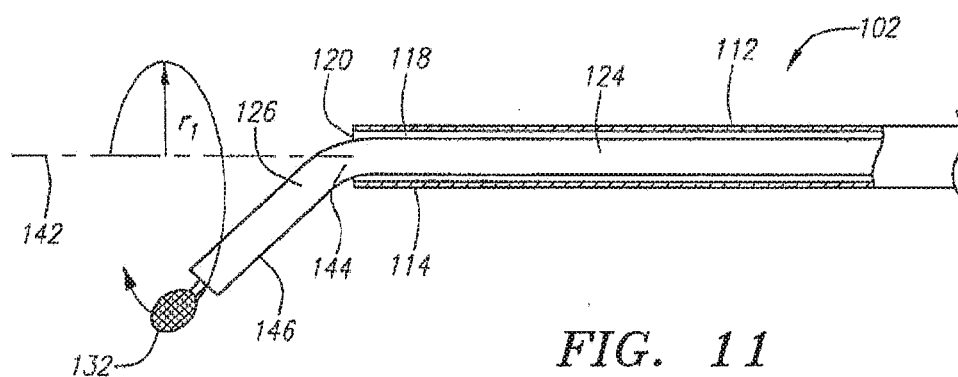


FIG. 11

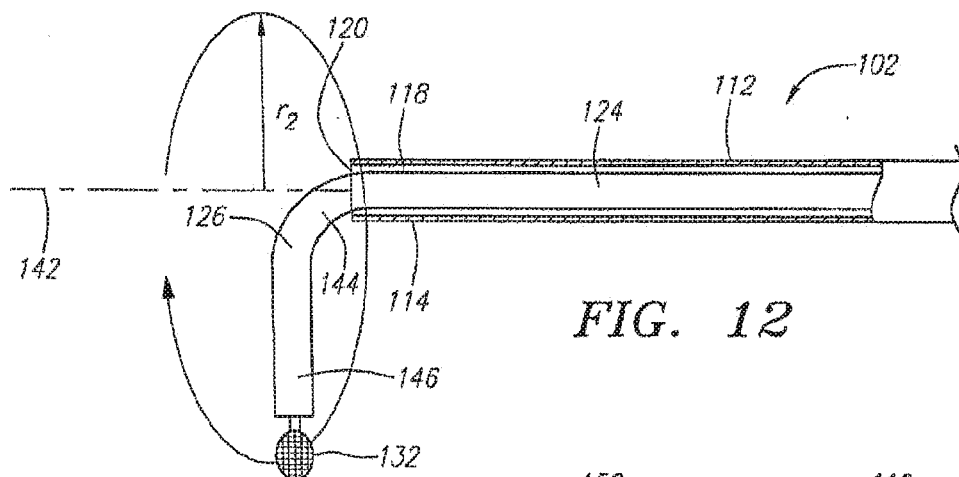
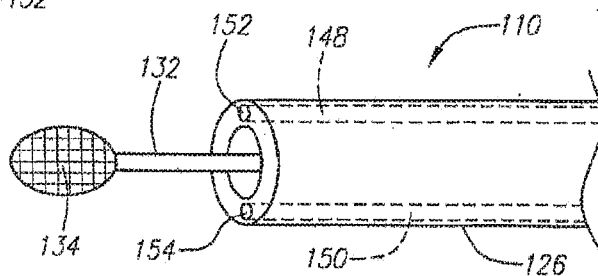


FIG. 12

FIG. 13



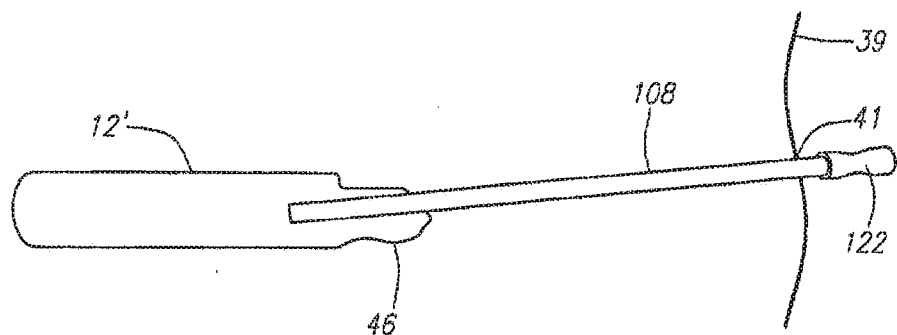


FIG. 14A

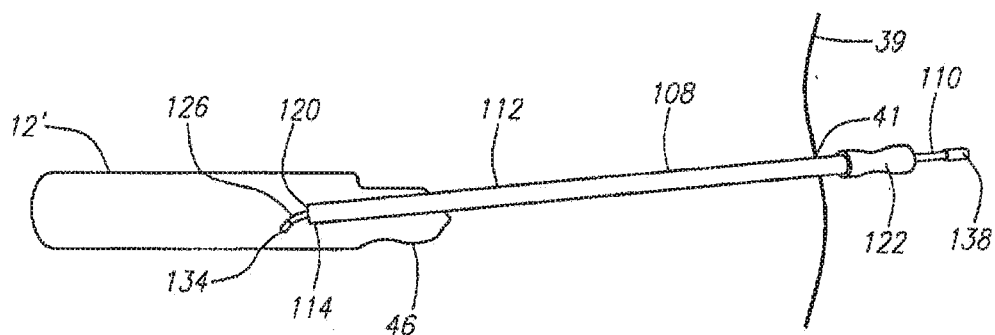


FIG. 14B

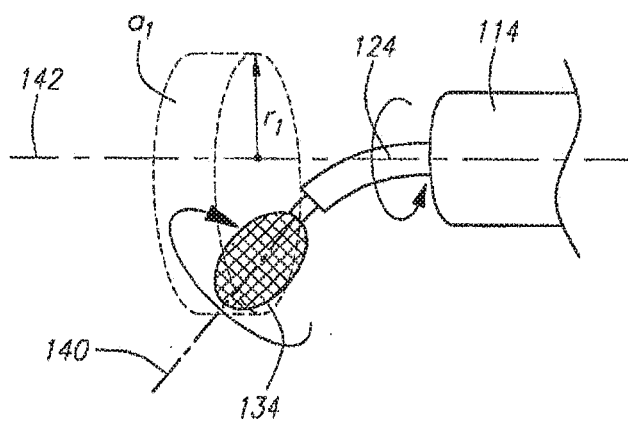


FIG. 14C

FIG. 14E

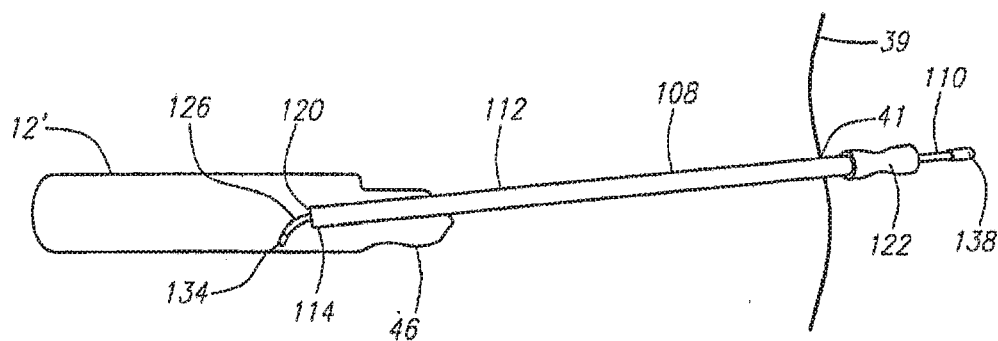


FIG. 14F

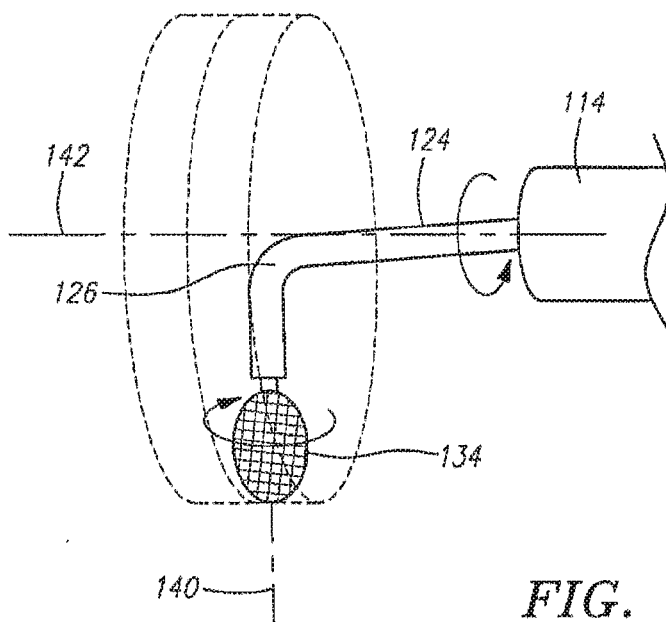


FIG. 14G

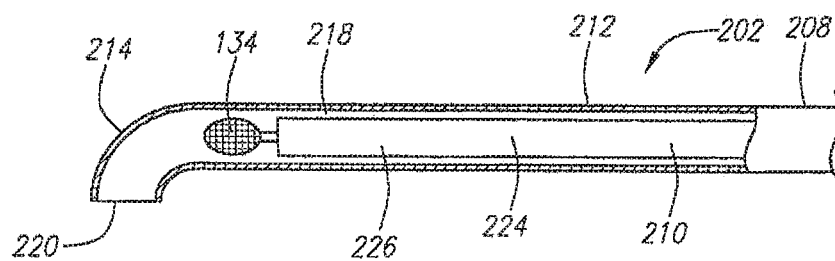


FIG. 15

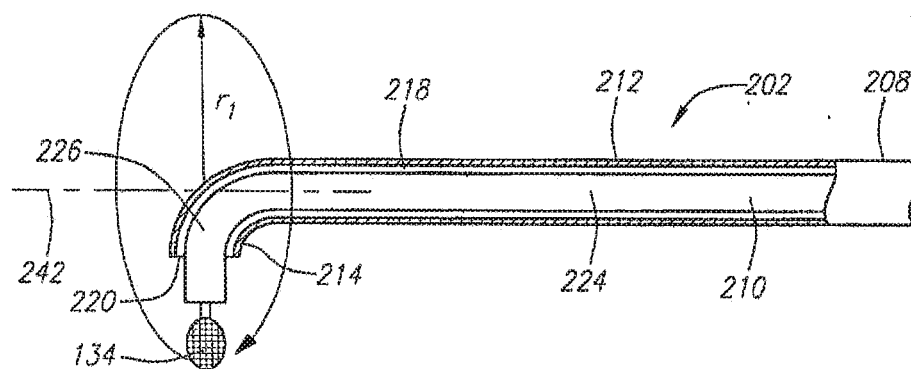


FIG. 16

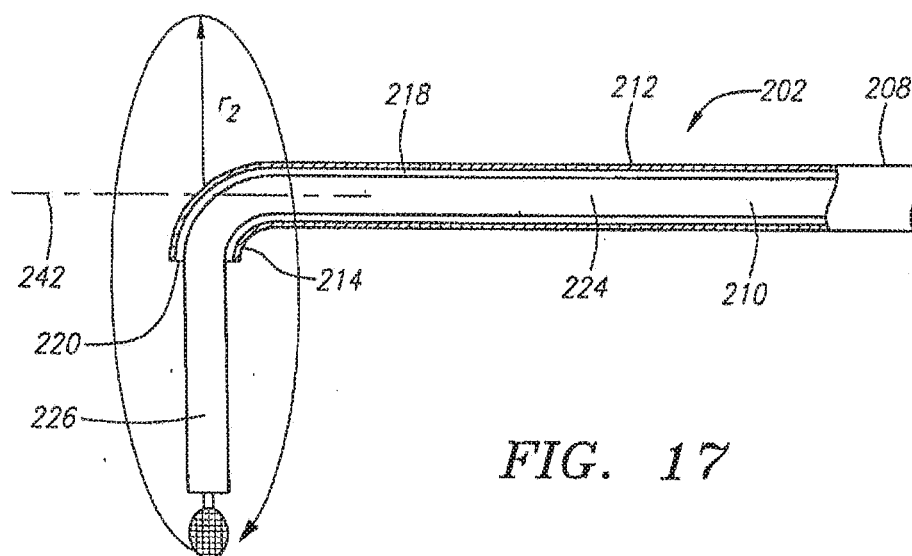


FIG. 17

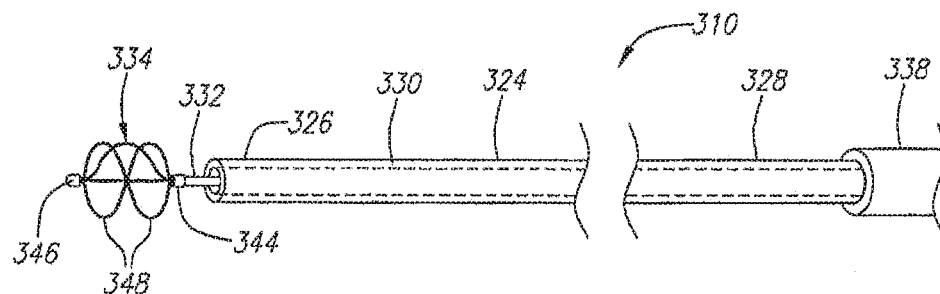


FIG. 18

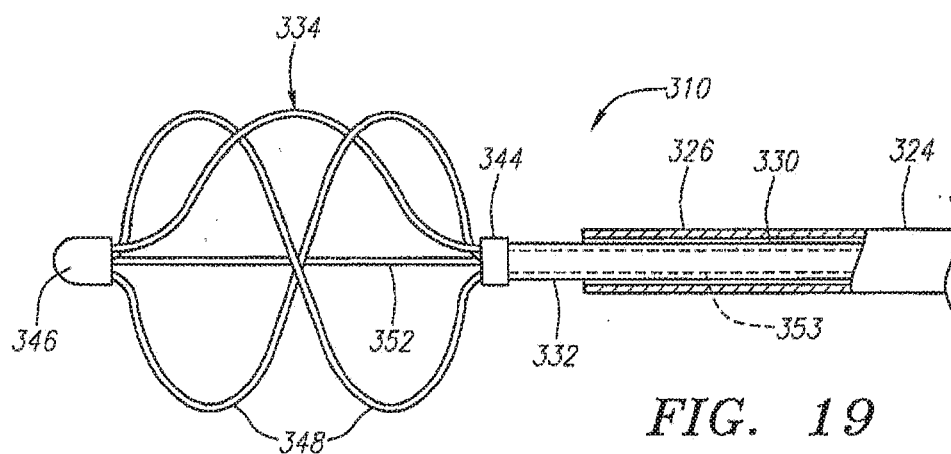


FIG. 19

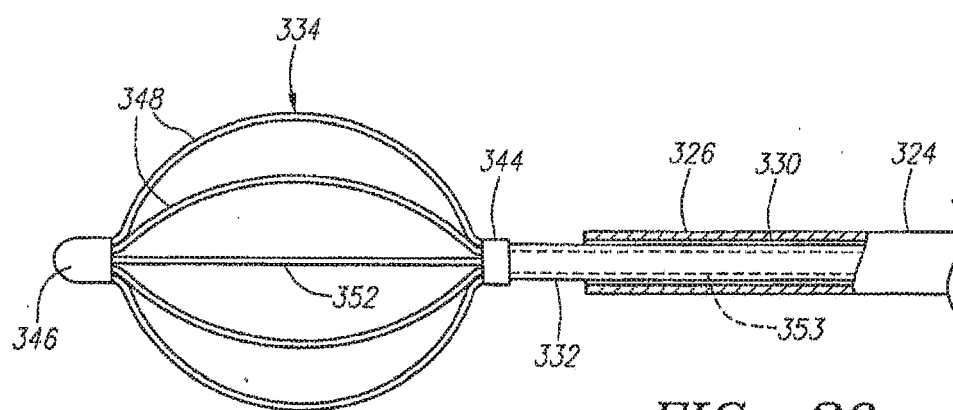


FIG. 20

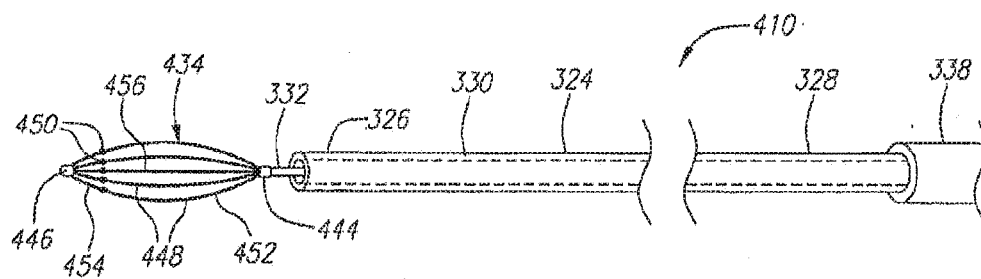


FIG. 21

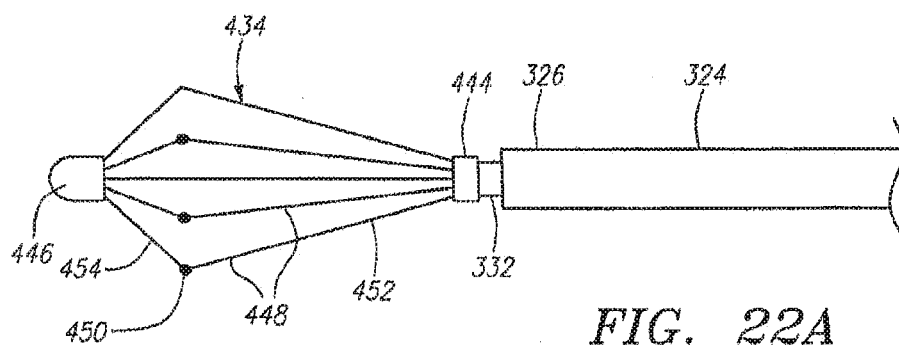


FIG. 22A

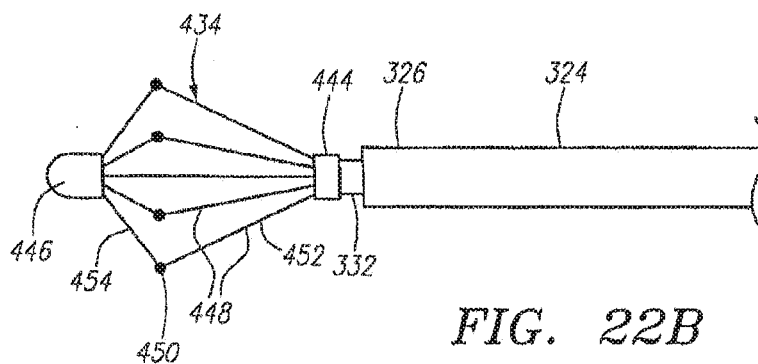


FIG. 22B

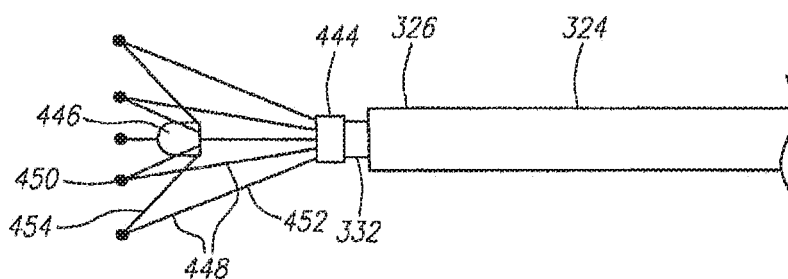


FIG. 22C

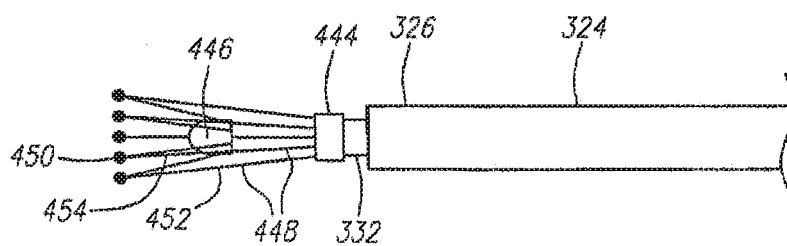


FIG. 22D

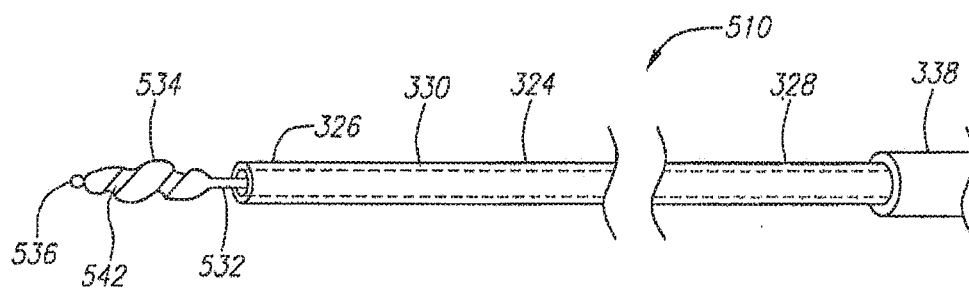


FIG. 23

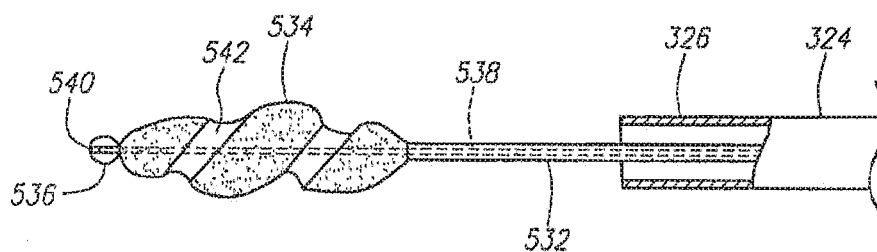


FIG. 24

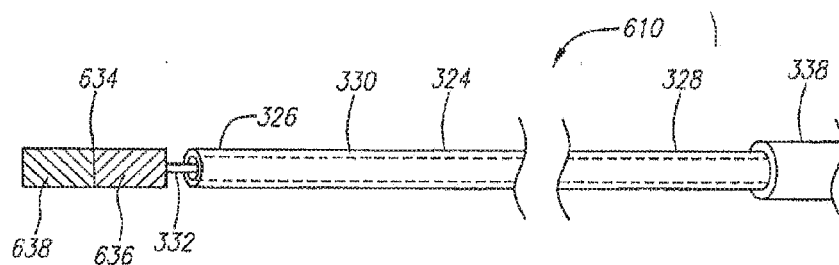


FIG. 25

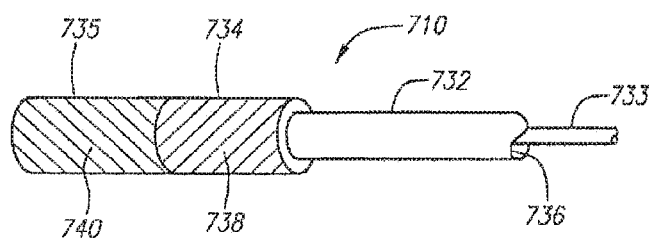


FIG. 26

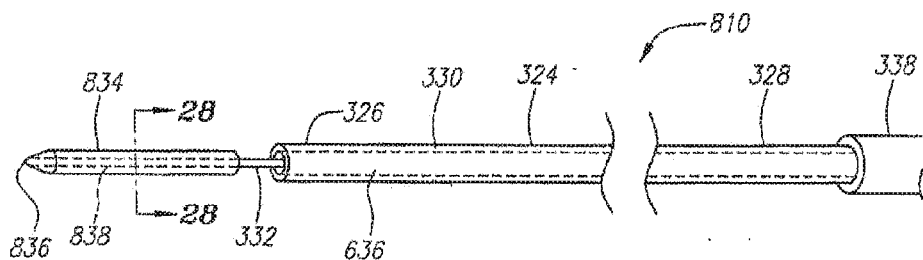


FIG. 27

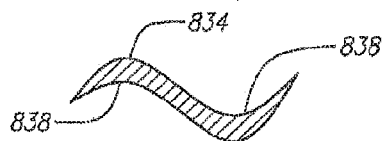


FIG. 28

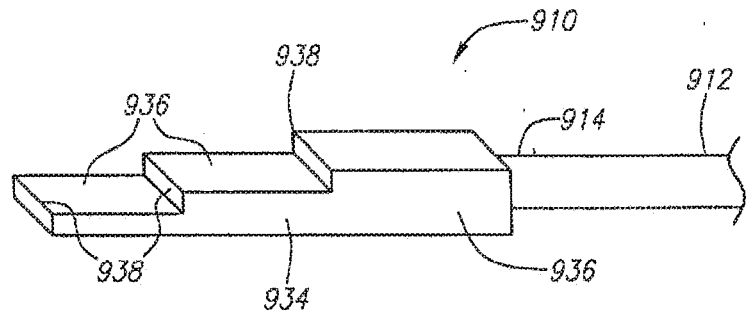


FIG. 29

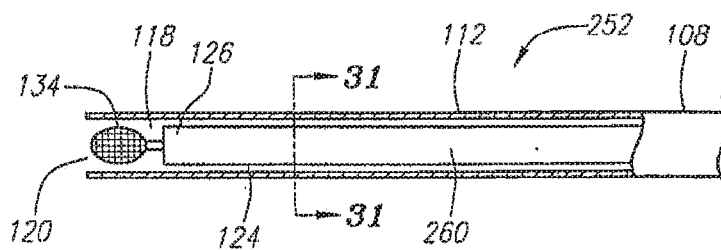


FIG. 30

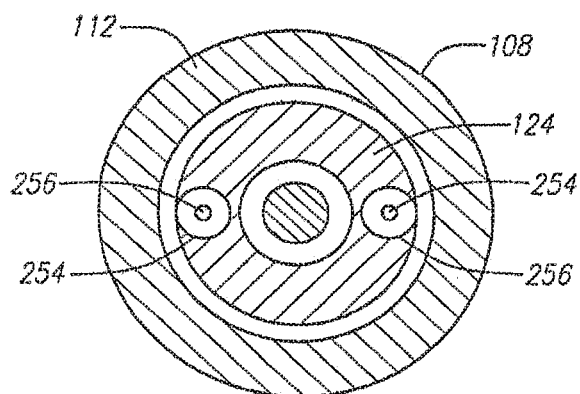


FIG. 31

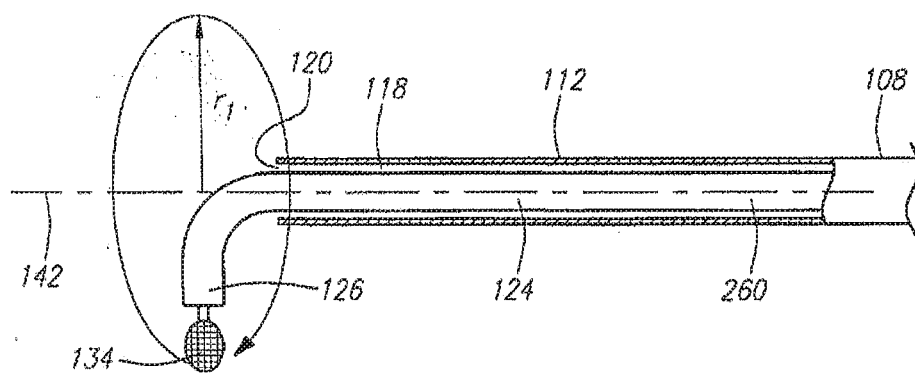


FIG. 32

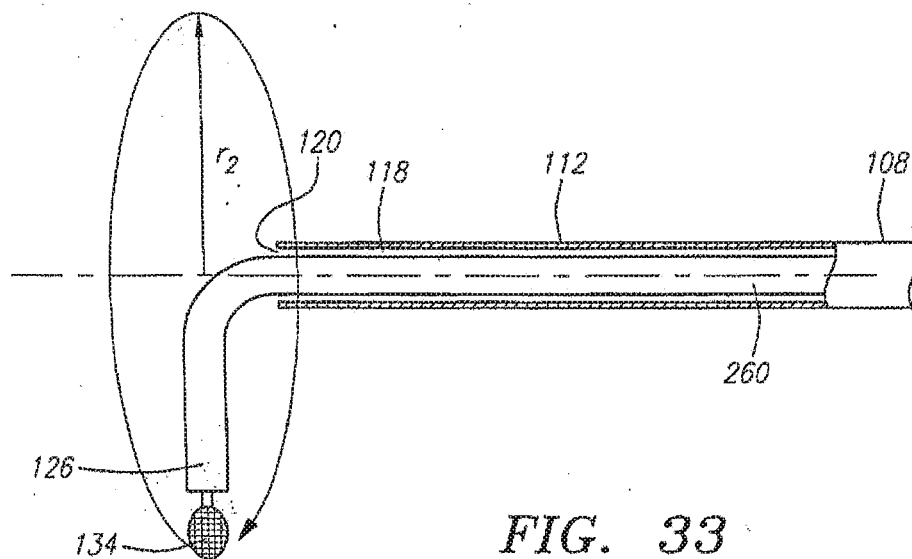


FIG. 33

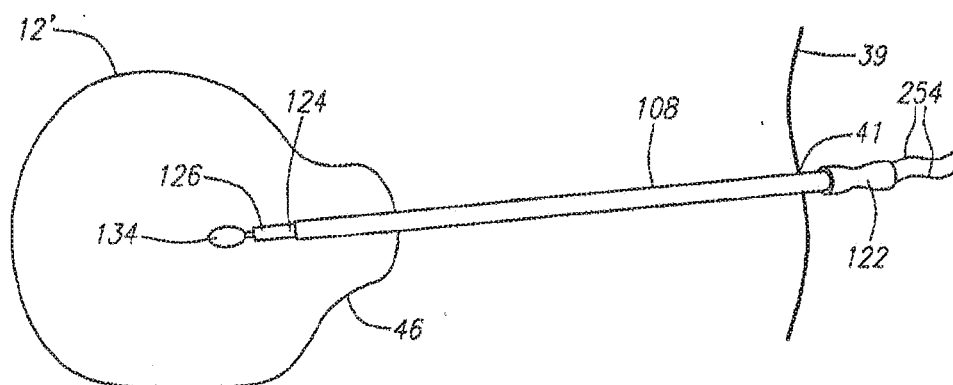


FIG. 34A

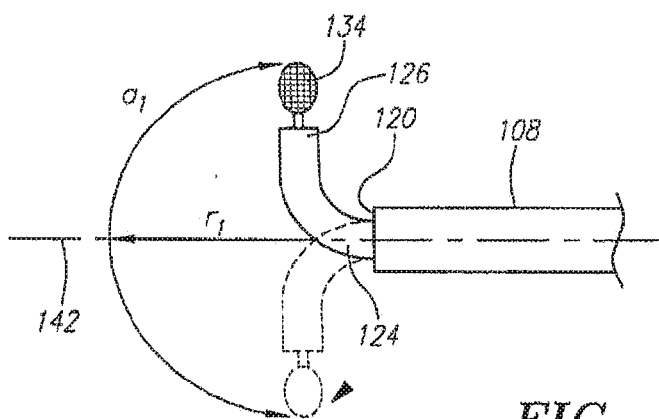


FIG. 34B

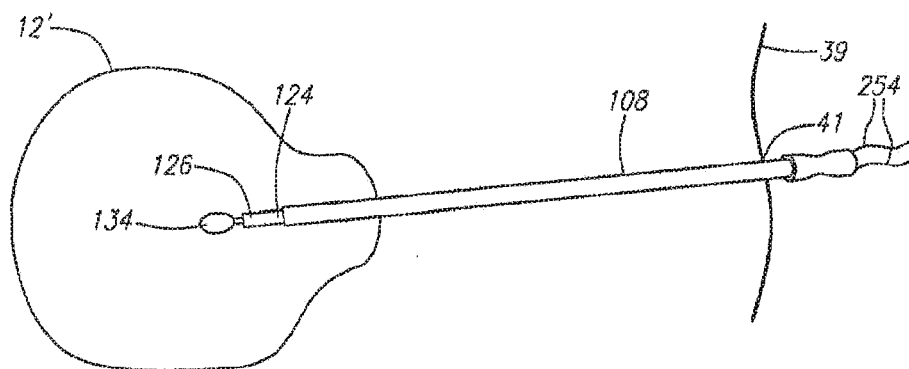


FIG. 34C

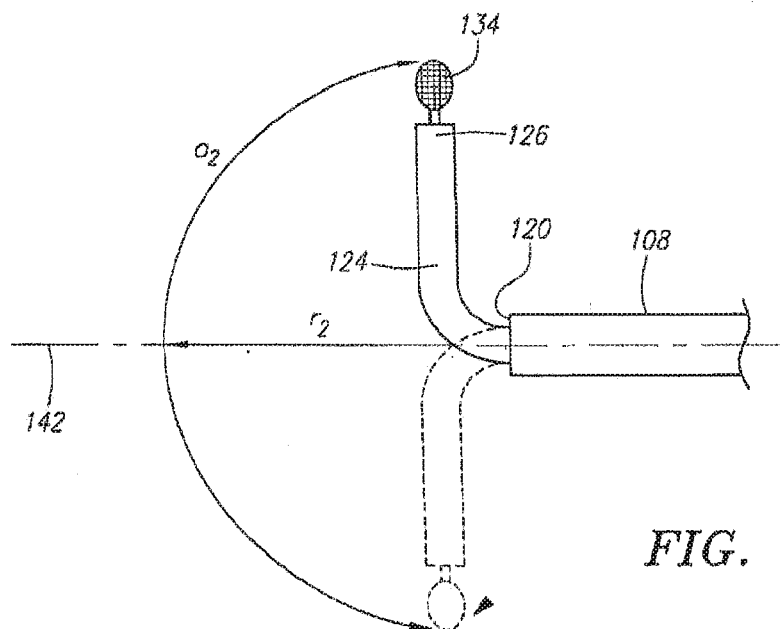


FIG. 34D

APPARATUS AND METHODS FOR REMOVING VERTEBRAL BONE AND DISC TISSUE

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of co-pending U.S. application Ser. No. 14/266,075, filed Apr. 30, 2014, which is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 10/793,185, filed Mar. 3, 2004, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,784,421, which are expressly incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The field of the invention pertains to medical devices and methods for removing tissue, and in particular, vertebral bone and intervertebral disc tissue.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The spinal column consists of thirty-three bones called vertebra, the first twenty-four vertebrae of which make up the cervical, thoracic, and lumbar regions of the spine and are separated from each other by “pads” of tough cartilage called “intervertebral discs,” which act as shock absorbers that provide flexibility, stability, and pain-free movement of the spine.

[0004] FIGS. 1 and 2 illustrate a portion of a healthy and normal spine, and specifically, two vertebra 10 and two intervertebral discs 12 (only one shown). The posterior of the vertebra 10 includes right and left transverse processes 14R, 14L, right and left superior articular processes 16R, 16L, and a spinous process 18. Muscles and ligaments that move and stabilize the vertebra 10 are connected to these structures. The vertebra 10 further includes a centrally located lamina 20 with right and left lamina 20R, 20L, that lie inbetween the spinous process 18 and the superior articular processes 16R, 16L. Right and left pedicles 22R, 22L are positioned anterior to the right and left transverse processes 14R, 14L, respectively. A vertebral arch 24 extends between the pedicles 22 and through the lamina 20. The anterior of the vertebra 10 includes a vertebral body 26, which joins the vertebral arch 24 at the pedicles 22. The vertebral body 26 includes an interior volume of reticulated, cancellous bone (not shown) enclosed by a compact cortical bone 30 around the exterior. The vertebral arch 24 and vertebral body 26 make up the spinal canal (i.e., the vertebral foramen 32), which is the opening through which the spinal cord 34 and epidural veins (not shown) pass. Nerve roots 36 laterally pass from the spinal cord 34 out through the neural foramen 38 at the side of the spinal canal formed between the pedicles 22. Structurally, the intervertebral disc 12 consists of two parts: an inner gel-like nucleus (nucleus pulposus) 40 located centrally within the disc 12, and tough fibrous outer annulus (annulus fibrosis) 42 surrounding the nucleus 40.

[0005] A person may develop any one of a variety of debilitating spinal conditions and diseases. For example, as illustrated in FIG. 3, when the outer wall of the disc 12' (i.e., the annulus fibrosis 42) becomes weakened through age or injury, it may tear allowing the soft inner part of the disc 12 (i.e., the nucleus pulposus 40) to bulge out, forming a herniation 46. The herniated disc 12' often pinches or compresses the adjacent dorsal root 36 against a portion of the vertebra 10, resulting in weakness, tingling, numbness, or pain in the back, legs or arm areas.

[0006] Often, inflammation from disc herniation can be treated successfully by nonsurgical means, such as bedrest, therapeutic exercise, oral anti-inflammatory medications or epidural injection of corticosteroids, and anesthetics. In some cases, however, the disc tissue is irreparably damaged, in which case, surgery is the best option.

[0007] Discectomy, which involves removing all, or a portion, of the affected disc, is the most common surgical treatment for ruptured or herniated discs of the lumbar spine. In most cases, a laminotomy or laminectomy is performed to visualize and access the affected disc. Once the vertebrae, disc, and other surrounding structures can be visualized, the surgeon will remove the section of the disc that is protruding from the disc wall and any other offending disc fragments that may have been expelled from the disc. In some cases, the entire disc may be removed, with or without a bony fusion or arthroplasty (disc nucleus replacement or total disc replacement).

[0008] Open discectomy is usually performed under general anesthesia and typically requires at least a one-day hospital stay. During this procedure, a two to three-inch incision in the skin over the affected area of the spine is made. Muscle tissue may be separated from the bone above and below the affected disc, while retractors hold the wound open so that the surgeon has a clear view of the vertebrae and disc and related structures. The disc or a portion thereof, can then be removed using standard medical equipment, such as rongeurs and curettes.

[0009] Because open discectomy requires larger incisions, muscle stripping or splitting, more anesthesia, and more operating, hospitalization, and a longer patient recovery time, the trend in spine surgery is moving towards minimally invasive surgical techniques, such as microdiscectomy and percutaneous discectomy.

[0010] Microdiscectomy uses a microscope or magnifying instrument to view the disc. The magnified view may make it possible for the surgeon to remove herniated disc material through a smaller incision (about twice as small as that required by open discectomy) with smaller instruments, potentially reducing damage to tissue that is intended to be preserved.

[0011] Percutaneous discectomy is often an outpatient procedure that may be carried out by utilizing hollow needles or cannulae through which special instruments can be deployed into the vertebra and disc in order to cut, remove, irrigate, and aspirate tissue. X-ray pictures and a video screen and computer-aided workstation may be used to guide by the surgeon into the treatment region. Improved imaging and video or computer guidance systems have the potential to reduce the amount of tissue removal required to access and treat the injured tissue or structures. Sometimes an endoscope is inserted to view the intradiscal and perivertebral area.

[0012] Besides disc hernias, other debilitating spinal conditions or diseases may occur. For example, spinal stenosis, which results from hypertrophic bone and soft tissue growth on a vertebra, reduces the space within the spinal canal. When the nerve roots are pinched, a painful, burning, tingling, and/or numbing sensation is felt down the lower back, down legs, and sometimes in the feet. As illustrated in FIG. 2, the spinal canal 32 has a rounded triangular shape that holds the spinal cord 34 without pinching. The nerve roots 36 leave the spinal canal 32 through the nerve root canals 38, which should be free of obstruction. As shown in

FIG. 4, hypertrophic bone growth 48 (e.g., bone spurs, osteophytes, spondylophytes) within the spinal canal 32, and specifically from the diseased lamina 20 and proximate facet joints may cause compression of the nerve roots, which may contribute or lead to the pain of spinal stenosis. Spinal stenosis may be treated by performing a laminectomy or laminectomy in order to decompress the nerve root 36 impinged by the bone growth 48. Along with the laminectomy, a foraminotomy, (i.e., enlarging of the channel from which the nerve roots 36 exit is performed). Depending on the extent of the bone growth, the entire lamina and spinal process may be removed.

[0013] Another debilitating bone condition is a vertebral body compression fracture (VCF), which may be caused by spinal injuries, bone diseases such as osteoporosis, vertebral hemangiomas, multiple myeloma, necrotic lesions (Kummel's Disease, Avascular Necrosis), and metastatic disease, or other conditions that can cause painful collapse of vertebral bodies. VCFs are common in patients who suffer from these medical conditions, often resulting in pain, compromises to activities of daily living, and even prolonged disability.

[0014] On some occasions, VCFs may be repaired by cutting, shaping, and removing damaged bone tissue inside a vertebra to create a void, and then injecting a bone cement percutaneously or packing bone graft into the void. This is typically accomplished percutaneously through a cannula to minimize tissue trauma. The hardening (polymerization) of a bone cement media or bone grafting or other suitable biomaterial serves to buttress the bony vault of the vertebral body, providing both increased structural integrity and decreased pain that may be associated with micromotion and progressive collapse of the vertebrae.

[0015] Thus, it can be appreciated that in many spinal treatment procedures, bone and/or disc tissue must be removed in order to decompress neural tissue or rebuild the bony vertebra or intervertebral disc. In the case of target bone tissue that is adjacent spinal tissue, a physician is required to exercise extreme care when cutting away the target bone tissue (e.g., during a laminectomy and foraminotomy), such that injury to spinal tissue can be prevented. A physician may have difficulty controlling existing bone removal devices, however, and may unintentionally remove healthy bone tissue or injure spinal tissue during use. This problem is exacerbated with percutaneous treatments, which, although less invasive than other procedures, limit the range of motion of the cutting instrument, thereby further limiting the control that the physician may have during the bone cutting procedure.

[0016] Burr-type tissue removal probes may also be used to remove soft tissue, such as the gel-like nuclear tissue within the intervertebral disc or the cancellous bone tissue within the vertebral body. For example, FIG. 5 illustrates one prior art burr-type tissue removal probe 50 that can be introduced through a delivery cannula (not shown) into contact with the target tissue region to be removed. The tissue removal probe 50 comprises a rigid shaft 52 and a rotatable burr 54 associated with the distal end of the rigid shaft 52. Rotation of a drive shaft 56 extending through the rigid shaft 52, in turn, causes rotation of the burr 54 (either manually or via a motor), thereby removing tissue that comes in contact with the burr 54. Notably, the tissue removal probe 50 is laterally constrained within the cannula (or if a cannula is not shown, constrained by the many layers

of tissue that the device 50 must traverse to reach the target tissue), and thus, can only be effectively moved along its longitudinal axis, thereby limiting the amount of tissue that can be removed to the tissue that is on-axis. As such, the tissue removal probe 50 may have to be introduced through several access points within the anatomical body (e.g., the disc or vertebral body) that contains the target tissue in order to remove the desired amount of the tissue.

[0017] As illustrated in FIG. 6, the distal end 58 of the rigid shaft 52 may be curved in an alternative prior art removal device 60, so that the burr 54 is off-axis from the shaft 52. As such, off-axis target regions can be reached by rotating and axially displacing the rigid shaft 52 about its axis. Because the length of the curved distal end is fixed, however, only the tissue regions that are off-axis by a distance equal to the off-axis distance of the burr 54 will be removed, as illustrated in FIG. 7. In effect, the removal device 60 can only remove a cylindrical outline 62 of the tissue, leaving a cylindrical tissue body 64 behind. Thus, the tissue removal probe 60 must still be introduced into the tissue via several access holes in order to remove any remaining tissue.

[0018] In addition, because the distal end of the rigid shaft 52 is curved and has a length of the distal tip that is now at an angle to the main shaft, the delivery cannula must be made larger to accommodate the entire profile of the distal end. Thus, the incision through which the cannula is introduced must likewise be made larger. Lastly, if the anatomical body in which the removal device 60 is introduced is relatively thin (e.g., an intervertebral disc is a few millimeters thick), the top or bottom of the anatomical body may hinder movement of the burr 54 as the shaft 52 is rotated around its axis. In such cases, the removal device 60 may have to be introduced along the bottom of the anatomical body to allow tissue to be removed at the top of the anatomical body (i.e., by sweeping the burr 54 along an upper arc until the burr 54 hits the top, or if clearance at the top is available, by sweeping the burr 54 along the upper arc, below the top, until the burr 54 hits the bottom), and then reintroduced along the top of the anatomical body to allow tissue to be removed at the bottom of the anatomical body (i.e., by sweeping the burr 54 along a lower arc until the burr 54 hits the bottom, or if clearance at the bottom is available, by sweeping the burr 54 along the lower arc, above the bottom, until the burr 54 hits the top). As can be appreciated, this excessive movement of the removal device 60 increases the time of the spinal procedure as well as surgical risk due to manipulation of the device.

[0019] Another problem with current burr-type removal devices is that soft material, such as the nuclear material in an intervertebral disc or cancellous bone within the vertebral body, tends to stick to the burrs, thereby limiting the abrasive effect that the burrs are intended to have in order to efficiently remove tissue. As a result, burr-type removal device may have to be continuously removed from the patient's body in order to clean the soft tissue from the burr.

[0020] Furthermore, during the tissue removal or cutting process, a media, such as saline, is generally delivered via a tube to a target site for clearing debris. The delivered media together with the debris are then removed from the target site via a separate tube (i.e., the media and the debris are aspirated into a vacuum port of the tube). When the spine is treated percutaneously, however, the delivery cannula must be made large enough to accommodate the tissue removal

probe and tubes. As a result, the incision through which the cannula is to be introduced must be made relatively large, thereby unnecessarily causing more tissue trauma.

[0021] There, thus, remains a need to provide for improved tissue removal probes and methods for use during spinal treatment and other surgeries.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0022] The present inventions are directed to tissue removal probes that are capable of removing tissue, such as vertebral bone tissue, although such tissue removal probes may be used to remove tissue from other bone structure, such as the skull, humerus, radius, ulna, femur, fibula, tibia, hip bone, and bones within the hands and feet. In addition, some of the tissue removal probes lend themselves well to the removal of soft tissue, such as cancellous bone or intervertebral disc tissue. Some of the tissue removal probes also lends themselves to laterally cutting bone tissue, e.g., in a laminectomy procedure. The tissue removal probes of the present inventions comprise an elongated member (such as a sleeve) having a lumen, a drive shaft rotatably disposed within the member lumen, and a rotatably tissue removal element mounted to the distal end of the drive shaft. They may be combined into a tissue removal assembly that includes a cannula in which the tissue removal probe can be slidably disposed.

[0023] In accordance with a first aspect of the present invention, the tissue removal element comprises a plurality of tissue-cutting filaments affixed at proximal and distal ends of the tissue removal element. In one embodiment, the tissue removal element comprises a base member mounted to the distal end of the drive shaft and a distal hub. The filaments are connected between the base member and the distal hub. The filaments can be variously configured. In one embodiment, the filaments are interlaced, e.g., to provide the tissue removal element with increased structural integrity. In another embodiment, the filaments are looped. The tissue removal element may further include abrasive particles disposed on the filaments. The tissue removal probe optionally comprises a proximal adapter mounted to the member for mating with a drive unit. The tissue removal probe may optionally comprise a guide wire extending through the tissue removal element in order to provide lateral support. By way of non-limiting example, the large spaces formed between the tissue-cutting filaments prevents or minimizes the build up of tissue on the tissue removal element.

[0024] In accordance with a second aspect of the present inventions, the tissue-cutting filaments have hinge points that divide the filaments into proximal filament segments and distal filament segments. The tissue removal probe further comprises a pull element mounted to the distal end of the tissue removal element. Pulling the pull element causes the distal filament segments to hinge towards the proximal filament segments to form folded filaments configured to be used as tissue-grasping arms. In this manner, the tissue removal element can be either used as a tissue-cutting device or a tissue-grasping device. In one embodiment, the hinge points can be located distal of the filament midpoints, so as to make the tissue-grasping arms shorter, thus increasing their lateral strength. In one embodiment, the pulling of the pull element causes the distal end of the tissue removal element to invert. The pull element may be slidably disposed in a lumen within the drive shaft.

[0025] In accordance with a third aspect of the present inventions, the drive shaft is rigid and has a distal end with a blunt tip, e.g., a spherical tip. In this manner, inadvertent tissue trauma distal to the tissue removal element is prevented or minimized. The tissue removal probe further comprises a lumen extending through the drive shaft and terminating in a flush port at the blunt tip. In this manner, a convenient means of providing irrigation fluid to the tissue and/or tissue removal element is provided. The tissue removal element can take the form of any element, but in one embodiment, it is an abrasive burr. A spiral cutting groove can be provided on the tissue removal element, so as to facilitate movement of the removed tissue in the proximal direction. The optional proximal adapter may be configured for mating with both a drive unit and an irrigation source.

[0026] In accordance with a fourth aspect of the present inventions, the tissue removal element has a proximal spiral groove and a distal spiral groove. The proximal and distal spiral grooves are oppositely pitched. By way of non-limiting example, the oppositely pitched spiral grooves provides a convenient means for collecting the removed tissue. In particular, the removed tissue will be forced to move along the grooves to the center of the tissue removal element when rotated in a particular direction.

[0027] In accordance with a fifth aspect of the present inventions, the drive shaft can be an outer drive shaft with a lumen. The tissue removal device also has an inner drive shaft rotatably disposed within the outer drive shaft lumen. In this manner, the outer and inner drive shaft may rotate independently relative to each other, e.g., in opposite directions or in the same direction. The tissue removal probe comprises two tissue removal elements—one mounted to the outer drive shaft, and the other mounted to the inner drive shaft. The tissue removal elements may be in a proximal and distal relationship and may be coextensive with each other, so that the tissue removal elements effectively act as one tissue removal element. By way of non-limiting example, the independent rotation of the drive shafts provides a convenient means for rotating the two tissue removal elements in opposite directions or in the same direction.

[0028] The tissue removal elements may take the form of any element, but in one embodiment, they take the form of two separate burrs. The tissue removal elements may advantageously have oppositely pitched spiral cutting grooves. In this manner, when rotated in opposite directions, the cutting action of the tissue removal elements is steadier, and minimizes stray from the cutting line. When rotated in the same direction, the removed tissue is forced to travel along the cutting grooves to the interface between the tissue removal elements, where it can be collected and aspirated.

[0029] In accordance with a sixth aspect of the present inventions, the tissue removal probe may comprise a rigid shaft and a drill bit formed on the distal end of the rigid shaft. The rigid shaft may be slidably disposed within a cannula lumen, in which case, the sheath may be optional. The drill bit has two fluted cutting grooves longitudinally extending along opposite sides of the drill bit. In this manner, the drill bit can be used to drill through bone tissue.

[0030] In accordance with a seventh aspect of the present inventions, the tissue removal element takes the form of a block on which a series of longitudinally disposed cascading tissue-cutting notches are disposed. By way of non-limiting example, the tissue removal element can be used to enlarge holes, grooves, channels or shaped defined by the tissue-

cutting notches within bones by placing the tissue removal element within the hole and applying a reciprocating motion to the drive shaft to in order to remove tissue with the cutting notches.

[0031] Other and further aspects and features of the invention will be evident from reading the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments, which are intended to illustrate, not limit, the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0032] The drawings illustrate the design and utility of preferred embodiments of the present invention. It should be noted that the figures are not drawn to scale and that elements of similar structures or functions are represented by like reference numerals throughout the figures. In order to better appreciate how the above-recited and other advantages and objects of the present inventions are obtained, a more particular description of the present inventions briefly described above will be rendered by reference to specific embodiments thereof, which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Understanding that these drawings depict only typical embodiments of the invention and are not therefore to be considered limiting of its scope, the invention will be described and explained with additional specificity and detail through the use of the accompanying drawings in which:

[0033] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a portion of a spine;

[0034] FIG. 2 is a top view of a vertebra with a healthy intervertebral disc;

[0035] FIG. 3 is a top view of a vertebra with a herniated intervertebral disc;

[0036] FIG. 4 is a top view of a vertebra with spinal stenosis;

[0037] FIG. 5 is a prior art tissue removal probe;

[0038] FIG. 6 is another prior art tissue removal probe;

[0039] FIG. 7 is a plan view showing tissue removal using the tissue removal probe of FIG. 6;

[0040] FIG. 8 is a perspective view of a tissue removal system arranged in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

[0041] FIG. 9 is perspective view of a tissue removal probe that can be used in the system of FIG. 8;

[0042] FIG. 10 is a partially cutaway side view of the distal end of the probe of FIG. 9, particularly showing the tissue removal element retracted within the probe shaft;

[0043] FIG. 11 is a partially cutaway side view of the distal end of the probe of FIG. 9, particularly showing the tissue removal element partially deployed from the probe shaft;

[0044] FIG. 12 is a partially cutaway side view of the distal end of the probe of FIG. 9, particularly showing the tissue removal element fully deployed from the probe shaft;

[0045] FIG. 13 is a perspective view of a variation of the probe of FIG. 9, particularly showing irrigation and aspiration lumens;

[0046] FIGS. 14A-14G are perspective views showing a method of using the tissue removal system of FIG. 8 to remove tissue within a herniated intervertebral disc;

[0047] FIG. 15 is a partially cutaway side view of the distal end of another tissue removal probe that can be used in the tissue removal system of FIG. 8, particularly showing the tissue removal element retracted within the probe shaft;

[0048] FIG. 16 is a partially cutaway side view of the distal end of the probe of FIG. 15, particularly showing the tissue removal element partially deployed from the probe shaft;

[0049] FIG. 17 is a partially cutaway side view of the distal end of the probe of FIG. 15, particularly showing the tissue removal element fully deployed from the probe shaft;

[0050] FIG. 18 is perspective view of still another tissue removal probe that can be used in the system of FIG. 8;

[0051] FIG. 19 is a partially cut-away side view of the distal end of the probe of FIG. 18, particularly showing a tissue removal element;

[0052] FIG. 20 is a partially cut-away side view of a variation of the distal end of the probe of FIG. 18, particularly showing a variation of the tissue removal element;

[0053] FIG. 21 is perspective view of yet another tissue removal probe that can be used in the system of FIG. 8;

[0054] FIGS. 22A-22D are side views of the distal end of the probe of FIG. 21, particularly showing a transformation of the probe from a tissue-cutting device to a tissue-grasping device;

[0055] FIG. 23 is perspective view of yet another tissue removal probe that can be used in the system of FIG. 8;

[0056] FIG. 24 is a partially cut-away side view of the distal end of the probe of FIG. 23;

[0057] FIG. 25 is perspective view of yet another tissue removal probe that can be used in the system of FIG. 8;

[0058] FIG. 26 is a partially cut-away side view of the distal end of yet another tissue removal probe that can be used in the system of FIG. 8;

[0059] FIG. 27 is perspective view of yet another tissue removal probe that can be used in the system of FIG. 8;

[0060] FIG. 28 is a cross-sectional view of the probe of FIG. 27, taken along the line 28-28;

[0061] FIG. 29 is perspective view of yet another tissue removal probe that can be used in the system of FIG. 8;

[0062] FIG. 30 is a partially cutaway side view of the distal end of still another tissue removal probe that can be used in the tissue removal system of FIG. 8, particularly showing the tissue removal element retracted within the probe shaft;

[0063] FIG. 31 is a cross-sectional view of the distal end of the tissue removal probe of FIG. 30, taken along the line 31-31;

[0064] FIG. 32 is a partially cutaway side view of the distal end of the probe of FIG. 30, particularly showing the tissue removal element partially deployed from the probe shaft;

[0065] FIG. 33 is a partially cutaway side view of the distal end of the probe of FIG. 30, particularly showing the tissue removal element fully deployed from the probe shaft; and

[0066] FIGS. 34A-34D are perspective views showing a method of using the tissue removal system of FIG. 8, with the tissue removal probe of FIG. 30, to remove tissue within a herniated intervertebral disc.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

[0067] FIG. 8 illustrates a tissue removal system 100 constructed in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present inventions. The system 100 generally comprises a tissue removal probe assembly 102 and a rotary drive unit 104 connected to the probe assembly 102 via a drive cable

106. The drive unit **104** may take the form of a standard rotary drive used for powering medical cutting instruments. The tissue removal probe assembly **102** comprises a cannula **108** and a tissue removal probe **110** disposed therein.

[0068] The cannula **108** comprises a shaft **112** having a distal end **114** and proximal end **116**, a lumen **118** (shown in phantom) terminating in an exit port **120** at the distal end **114** of the cannula shaft **112**, and a handle **122** mounted on the proximal end **116** of the cannula shaft **112**. To facilitate introduction through tissue, the cannula shaft **112** is preferably stiff (e.g., it can be composed of a stiff material, or reinforced with a coating or a coil to control the amount of flexing), so that the cannula shaft **112** can penetrate the tissue without being damaged. The materials used in constructing the cannula shaft **112** may comprise any of a wide variety of biocompatible materials. In a preferred embodiment, a radiopaque material, such as metal (e.g., stainless steel, titanium alloys, or cobalt alloys) or a polymer (e.g., ultra high molecular weight polyethylene) may be used, as is well known in the art. Alternatively, if supported by a rigid member during introduction into the tissue, the cannula shaft **112** may be flexible. The handle **122** is preferably composed of a durable and rigid material, such as medical grade plastic, and is ergonomically molded to allow a physician to more easily manipulate the cannula **108**.

[0069] The outer diameter of the cannula shaft **112** is preferably less than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, but other dimensions for the outer diameter of the cannula shaft **112** may also be appropriate, depending on the particular application or clinical procedure. The cannula lumen **118** should have an inner diameter so as to allow the tissue removal probe **110** to be slidably housed therein, as will be described in further detail below. In the illustrated embodiment, the profile of the cannula lumen **118** is circular, but can be other shapes as well. In the illustrated embodiment, the distal tip of the cannula shaft **112** is blunt. In this case, the thickness and cross-sectional profile of the cannula shaft **112** is small enough, so that the distal tip can be used as a cutting or deforming tool for boring or coring through tissue. Alternatively, the distal tip of the cannula shaft **112** may be advantageously sharpened or wedged to facilitate its introduction into bone structure. Even more alternatively, a stilette (not shown) can be introduced through the cannula lumen **118** to provide an independent means for boring through bone structure. In this manner, bone cores will not block the cannula lumen **118**, which may otherwise prevent, or at least make difficult, deployment of the tissue removal probe **110** and other therapeutic materials.

[0070] Referring now to FIG. 9, the tissue removal probe **110** will be described in further detail. The tissue removal probe **110** comprises a sleeve **124** having a distal end **126** and a proximal end **128**, and a lumen **130** (shown in phantom) extending through the sleeve **124**. The tissue removal probe **110** further comprises a drive shaft **132** rotatably disposed within the sleeve lumen **130** and a rotatable tissue removal element, and in particular, an abrasive burr **134**, mounted to the distal end of the drive shaft **132**. The burr **134** has a pattern of cutting edges **136** that facilitate removal of tissue that comes in contact with the rotating burr **134**. In the illustrated embodiment, the burr **134** is fully exposed in that it entirely resides outside of the sleeve **124**. In alternative embodiments, the burr **134** may be seated within the distal end of a sheath, and exposed through a window cutout from the distal end of the sheath. Other types of tissue-cutting

element can also be used in place of the burr **134**. Examples of other tissue-cutting elements will subsequently be described.

[0071] The tissue removal probe **110** further comprises a proximal adapter **138** mounted to the proximal end **128** of the sleeve **124**. The proximal adapter **138** is configured to be mated with the drive cable **106**, thereby providing a means for rotatably coupling the drive unit **104** to the proximal end of the drive shaft **132**. Thus, operation of the drive unit **104** will rotate the drive shaft **132**, which in turn, will rotate the burr **134** about its rotational axis **140**. Details of the structure of standard tissue removal probes, including the aforementioned window-exposed burr and proximal adapter, are disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,913,867, which is expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0072] The tissue removal probe **110** is rotatably disposed within the cannula lumen **118**, such that the sleeve **124** (and in particular, the straight portion of the sleeve) has an axis of rotation **142** (i.e., the sleeve **124** can be rotated about the rotational axis **142**, e.g., when the proximal end **128** of sleeve distal end **126** is manually rotated). As illustrated in FIG. 9, the rotational axes **140** and **142** of the respective burr **132** and sleeve **124** are coincident with each other when the entirety of the sleeve **124** is straight. As will be described in below, the rotational axes **140** and **142** will diverge from each other when the distal end **126** of the sleeve **124** is curved or bent.

[0073] As illustrated in FIGS. 10-12, the tissue removal probe **110** is slidably disposed in the cannula lumen **118** in the longitudinal direction, so that the burr **134** can be incrementally deployed from the exit port **120** of the cannula shaft **112** and retracted within the distal end **114** of the cannula shaft **112**.

[0074] As can be seen from FIG. 10, when confined within the cannula lumen **118**, the sleeve **124** assumes a substantially straight configuration and conforms to the shape of the cannula shaft **112**. As can be seen from FIGS. 11 and 12, the distal end **126** of the sleeve **124**, when in its relaxed state, has a pre-shaped curved portion **144** and a pre-shaped straight portion **146** distal to the curved portion **144**. In the illustrated embodiment, the curved portion **144** defines an arc of ninety-degrees. It should be noted, however, the curved portion **144** may define other arcs. So that the distal end **126** of the sleeve **124** readily assumes and maintains its defined shape, the sleeve **124** is composed of a laterally flexible, yet resilient, material, such as nitinol. Significantly, the drive shaft **132** is also laterally flexible, and thus easily conforms to the curved geometry of the deployed sleeve distal end **126**. In this manner, the burr **134** will rotate about its rotational axis **140** even if the drive shaft **132** is bent.

[0075] As can be appreciated from FIGS. 11 and 12, the distal end **126** of the sleeve **124** can be deployed from the cannula exit port **120** in stages. For example, the sleeve distal end **126** can be deployed a first distance from the distal end **114** of the cannula shaft **112**, so that the burr **134** defines a particular radius of revolution r_1 (shown in FIG. 11) around the rotational axis **142** of the sleeve **124**. The sleeve distal end **126** can be deployed a second greater distance from the distal end **126** of the cannula shaft **112**, so that the burr **134** defines a second greater radius of revolution r_2 (shown in FIG. 12) around the rotational axis **142** of the sleeve **124**. Thus, it can be appreciated that radius of revolution r of the burr **134** can be adjusted simply by displacing the sleeve **124** within the cannula lumen **118**.

[0076] As illustrated in FIG. 13, the tissue removal probe 110 can optionally have irrigation and aspiration capability. In particular, the sleeve 124, in addition to having the lumen 130 through which the drive shaft 132 extends, includes irrigation and aspiration lumens 148 and 150 (shown in phantom). The irrigation lumen 148 terminates at an irrigation outlet port 152 in the sleeve distal end 126 and proximally terminates at an irrigation inlet port (not shown) in the proximal adapter 138. Likewise, the aspiration lumen 150 terminates at an aspiration entry port 154 in the sleeve distal end 126 and proximally terminates at an aspiration outlet port (not shown) in the proximal adapter 138. Alternatively, irrigation and/or aspiration ports can be placed in the burr 134.

[0077] As can be appreciated, a pump (not shown) can be connected to the irrigation inlet port on the proximal adapter 138 in order to flush irrigation fluid, such as saline, through the irrigation lumen 148 and out the irrigation outlet port 152. The irrigation fluid helps cool the drive shaft 132 and/or the burr 134, while the burr 134 is rotating at high speed and grinding against tissue. The media also washes away debris at the target site. A vacuum (not shown) can be connected to the aspiration outlet port on the proximal adapter 138 in order to aspirate the removed tissue into the aspiration inlet port 154, through the aspiration lumen 150, and out of the aspiration outlet port. Because there are separate irrigation and aspiration lumens 148 and 150, both the pump and aspirator can be activated simultaneously or separately.

[0078] Having described the structure of the tissue removal system 100, its operation will now be described with reference to FIGS. 14A-14G, in removing soft tissue from an anatomical body, and in particular, in performing a discectomy on a herniated intervertebral disc. It should be noted, however, that other tissue, such as the cancellous tissue within a vertebral body, could also be removed by the tissue removal system 100.

[0079] First, the cannula 108 is introduced through a small incision 41 in the back 39 and into the herniated disc 12' (FIG. 14A). In some circumstances, a laminectomy may have to be performed to access the disc 12'. In such cases, the cannula 108 may be used to bore through the lamina (not shown). Torsional and/or axial motion may be applied to the cannula 108 to facilitate boring of the lamina. The torsional and/or axial motion may be applied manually or mechanically (i.e., by a machine). An object, such as a hammer or a plunger, may also be used to tap against the handle 122 of the cannula 108 in order to facilitate boring through the lamina. Alternatively, a stilette (not shown) can be introduced through the cannula lumen (not shown in FIG. 14A) to create a passage through the lamina. Or, a separate drill or bone cutting device, such as those described below, can be used to bore or cut a passage through the lamina prior to placement of the cannula 108.

[0080] In the illustrated method, the cannula 108 is introduced into the disc 12', such that its distal tip is placed adjacent the distal-most region of the target tissue. In this case, distal to the herniation 46. Next, the tissue removal probe 110 is introduced through the cannula lumen 118 until the distal end 126 of the sleeve 124 deploys out from exit port 120 of the cannula shaft 112 a first distance (FIG. 14B), which as described above, associates the burr 134 with a first radius of revolution r_1 around the rotational axis 142 of the sleeve 124. The tissue removal probe 110 can either be introduced into the cannula lumen 118 prior to introduction

of the cannula 108 into the patient's back (in which case, the tissue removal probe 110 will be fully retracted within the cannula lumen 118 during introduction of the cannula 108) or can be introduced into the cannula lumen 118 after the cannula 108 has been introduced into, and properly positioned, within the disc 12'.

[0081] Next, the proximal adapter 138 of the tissue removal probe 110 is mated to the drive unit (shown in FIG. 8), which is then operated to rotate the burr 134 about its own rotational axis 140. At the same time, the sleeve 124 is manually rotated (e.g., by rotating the proximal adapter 138), which causes the burr 134 to scribe an arc a_1 around the rotational axis 142 of the sleeve 124 (FIG. 14C). As a result, tissue is removed by the rotating burr 134 along the arc a_1 . In the illustrated method, the sleeve 124 is rotated until the burr 134 scribes an entire circle around the rotational axis 142 of the sleeve 124. In this manner, a full circle of tissue is removed by the burr 134. In the illustrated method, the radius of revolution of the burr 134 is so short that both on-axis and off-axis tissue is essentially removed. In effect, the burr 134 removes a small disc of tissue at this point. It should be noted that, during the tissue removal procedure, the removed tissue could be aspirated from the herniated disc 12' using an aspirator. Aspiration of the tissue can be accomplished via the cannula or through another cannula. Alternatively, as previously described, aspiration can be accomplished via the tissue removal probe 110, itself.

[0082] Next, the tissue removal probe 110 is further introduced through the cannula lumen 118 until the distal end 126 of the sleeve 124 deploys out from the exit port 120 of the cannula shaft 112 a second greater distance (FIG. 14D), which as described above, associates the burr 134 with a second greater radius of revolution r_2 around the rotational axis 142 of the sleeve 124. Again, the drive unit 104 is operated to rotate the burr 134 about its own rotational axis 140, while manually rotating the sleeve 124, which causes the burr 134 to scribe another larger arc a_2 around the rotational axis 142 of the sleeve 124 (FIG. 14E). As a result, a ring of tissue is removed by the rotating burr 134 along the larger arc a_2 . Again, the sleeve 124 is rotated until the burr 134 scribes an entire circle around the rotational axis 142 of the sleeve 124. In this manner, a full circle of tissue is removed by the burr 134. The difference between the first and second radii and of revolution r_1 and r_2 is such that the disc of tissue removed by the burr 134 along the first arc a_1 is coextensive with the ring of tissue removed by the burr 134 along the second arc a_2 . The steps illustrated in FIGS. 14D and 14E can be repeated to remove even larger discs of tissue.

[0083] Next, the cannula 108 is displaced in the proximal direction, and the tissue removal probe 110 is retracted, so that the sleeve distal end 126 deploys out from the exit port 120 of the cannula shaft 112 the first distance (FIG. 14F). The steps illustrated in FIGS. 14B-14E are then repeated to remove another disc of tissue (FIG. 14G). In the illustrated method, the proximal displacement of the cannula 108 is such that the first and second discs of removed tissue are contiguous. As such, a cylinder of tissue is removed. A longer cylinder of tissue can be removed by repeating the steps illustrated in FIGS. 14F and 14G. After the discectomy has been completed (i.e., the herniated disc material has been removed, or in some cases, the entire herniated disc has been removed), the cannula 108, along with the tissue removal probe 110, is removed from the patient's body.

Alternatively, prior to total removal of the cannula 108, the tissue removal probe 110 can be removed, and a therapeutic media, such as a drug or disc replacement material can be delivered through the cannula lumen 118 into the disc 12'.

[0084] Although curved portion 144 of the sleeve distal end 126 is pre-shaped in order to create a radius of revolution r for the deployed burr 134, there are other means for bending the distal end of a sleeve as it deploys from a cannula. For example, FIGS. 15-17 illustrate a tissue removal assembly 202 that bends a deploying sleeve using the cannula, itself. In particular, the tissue removal assembly 202 comprises a cannula 208, which is similar to the previously described cannula 108, with the exception that it comprises a cannula shaft 212 with a curved distal end 214. In the illustrated embodiment, the distal end 214 of the cannula 208 assumes a ninety-degree curve. The tissue removal assembly 202 comprises a tissue removal probe 210 that is similar to the previously described tissue removal probe 110, with the exception that it comprises a sleeve 224 that does not have a pre-curved distal end. Instead, the entire sleeve 224 is configured to assume a straight configuration in its relaxed state.

[0085] As can be seen from FIG. 15, when confined within the cannula lumen 218, the sleeve 224 assumes a substantially straight configuration and conforms to the shape of the cannula shaft 212. As can be seen from FIGS. 16 and 17, the distal end 226 of the sleeve 224 bends when deployed from the distal end of the cannula shaft 112. That is, as it is deployed, the sleeve distal end 226 contacts the inner surface of the curved cannula distal end 214, thereby deflecting the sleeve distal end 226 as it exits the cannula lumen 218. Like the previously described sleeve 124, the sleeve is laterally resilient, such that it maintains its shape as it deploys from the exit port 220 at the distal end 214 of the cannula shaft 212.

[0086] As with the previously described sleeve distal end 126, the sleeve distal end 226 can be deployed from the exit port 220 of the cannula shaft 212 in stages. For example, the sleeve distal end 226 can be deployed a particular distance from exit port 220, so that the burr 134 defines a particular radius of revolution r_1 (shown in FIG. 16) around the rotational axis 242 of the sleeve 224. The sleeve distal end 226 can be deployed a second greater distance from the exit port 220, so that the burr 134 defines a second greater particular radius of revolution r_2 (shown in FIG. 17) around the rotational axis 242 of the sleeve 224. Thus, it can be appreciated that radius of revolution r of the burr 134 can be adjusted simply by displacing the sleeve 224 within the cannula lumen 218.

[0087] Operation of the tissue removal assembly 202 in removing soft tissue is similar to the operation of the previously described tissue removal assembly 102, and will thus, not be further described.

[0088] As another example, FIGS. 30-33 illustrate a tissue removal assembly 252 that has a sleeve with steering functionality. In particular, the tissue removal assembly 252 comprises the previously described cannula 108, and a tissue removal probe 260 that is similar to the previously described tissue removal probe 110, with the exception that it does not have a pre-curved distal end, but instead, comprises a pair of pull wires 254 (shown in FIG. 31) extending through a respective pair of pull wire lumens 256 contained within the sleeve 124. The distal ends of the pull wires 254 are mounted to the distal tip of the sleeve 124 in a suitable

manner. As can be seen from FIG. 30, when confined within the cannula lumen 218, the sleeve 124 assumes a substantially straight configuration and conforms to the shape of the cannula shaft 112. As can be seen from FIGS. 32 and 33, the distal end 126 of the sleeve 124, when deployed from the exit port 120 of the cannula shaft 112, bends in one direction when one of the pull wires 254 is pulled.

[0089] As with the previously described tissue removal probe 110, the sleeve distal end 126 can be deployed from the exit port 120 of the cannula shaft 112 in stages. For example, the sleeve distal end 126 can be deployed a first distance from exit port 120 and one of the pull wires 254 pulled to bend the sleeve distal end 126, so that the burr 134 defines a particular radius of revolution r_1 (shown in FIG. 32) around the rotational axis 142 of the sleeve 124. The sleeve distal end 126 can be deployed a second greater distance from the exit port 120 and the pull wire 254 pulled to bend the sleeve distal end 126 again, so that the burr 134 defines a second greater particular radius of revolution r_2 (shown in FIG. 33) around the rotational axis 142 of the sleeve 124. Thus, it can be appreciated that radius of revolution r of the burr 134 can be adjusted simply by displacing the sleeve 124 within the cannula lumen 118 and pulling one of the pull wires 254 to bend the sleeve distal end 126.

[0090] Operation of the tissue removal assembly 252 in removing soft tissue is similar to the operation of the previously described tissue removal assembly 102, with the exception that the pull wires 254 are used to actively bend the distal end 126 of the sheath 124.

[0091] Alternatively, as illustrated in FIGS. 34A-34F, the tissue removal assembly 252 may be used in a different manner to remove soft tissue from an anatomical body, and in particular, in performing a discectomy on a herniated intervertebral disc. This alternative method is accomplished by bending the distal end 126 of the sleeve 124 in opposite directions using the pull wires 254, while rotating the burr 134, thereby removing tissue in an arc that is coplanar with the plane of the axis 142. In this case, a layer of tissue is removed in a plane that is parallel with the flat sides of the herniated disc.

[0092] In particular, after the cannula 108 is introduced into the herniated disc 12' in the same manner previously illustrated in FIG. 14A, the tissue removal probe 260 is introduced through the cannula lumen 118 until the distal end 126 of the sleeve 124 deploys out from exit port 120 of the cannula shaft 112 a first distance (FIG. 34A), which associates the burr 134 with a first radius of curvature r_1 (shown in FIG. 34B). Next, the proximal adapter 138 of the tissue removal probe 210 is mated to the drive unit (shown in FIG. 8), which is then operated to rotate the burr 134 about its own rotational axis 140. At the same time, the distal end 126 of the sleeve 124 is bent in one direction by pulling one of the pull wires 254 (shown in FIG. 34A), which causes the rotating burr 134 to scribe a ninety degree arc a_1 (as measured from the longitudinal axis 142) around the distal tip of the sleeve 124 (FIG. 34B). Next, the distal end 126 of the sleeve 124 is bent in the opposite direction by pulling the other pull wire 254, which causes the rotating burr 134 to scribe a one hundred eighty degree arc a_1 (ninety degrees above the longitudinal axis 142 and ninety degrees below the longitudinal axis 142) around the distal tip of the sleeve 124 (shown in phantom in FIG. 34B). In this manner, a semi-circle of tissue is removed by the burr 134. In the

illustrated method, the radius of curvature of the burr **134** is so short that a solid radial sector of tissue is removed. As with the previous methods, the remove tissue can optionally be aspirated.

[0093] Next, the tissue removal probe **210** is further introduced through the cannula lumen **118** until the distal end **126** of the sleeve **124** deploys out from the exit port **120** of the cannula shaft **112** a second greater distance (FIG. **34C**), which associates the burr **134** with a second greater radius of curvature r_2 (shown in FIG. **34D**). Again, the drive unit **104** is operated to rotate the burr **134** about its own rotational axis **140**, while bending the distal end **126** of the sleeve **124** in one direction using the first pull wire **254** (shown in FIG. **34C**), which causes the burr **134** to scribe another larger ninety degree arc a_2 around the distal tip of the sleeve **124** (FIG. **34D**). Next, the distal end **126** of the sleeve **124** is bent in the opposite direction by pulling the other pull wire **254**, which causes the rotating burr **134** to scribe a one hundred eighty degree arc a_2 around the distal tip of the sleeve **124** (shown in phantom in FIG. **34D**). In this manner, a semi-circular ring of tissue is removed by the burr **134**.

[0094] The difference between the first and second radii and of curvature r_1 and r_2 is such that the radial sector of tissue removed by the burr **134** along the first arc a_1 is coextensive with the semi-circular ring of tissue removed by the burr **134** along the second arc c_2 . The steps illustrated in FIGS. **34C** and **34D** can be repeated to remove even larger discs of tissue.

[0095] After the discectomy has been completed (i.e., the herniated disc material has been removed, or in some cases, the entire herniated disc has been removed), the cannula **108**, along with the tissue removal probe **110**, is removed from the patient's body. Alternatively, prior to total removal of the cannula **108**, the tissue removal probe **260** can be removed, and a therapeutic media, such as a drug or disc replacement material can be delivered through the cannula lumen **118** into the disc **12'**.

[0096] Referring now to FIGS. **18** and **19**, another tissue removal probe **310** that can alternatively be used in the tissue removal system **100** will be described. The tissue removal probe **310** comprises a sleeve **324** having a distal end **326** and a proximal end **328**, and a lumen **330** (shown in phantom in FIG. **18**) extending through the sleeve **324**. The tissue removal probe **310** further comprises a drive shaft **332** rotatably disposed within the sleeve lumen **330** and a rotatable tissue removal element, and in particular, a rotatable cutting basket **334**, mounted to the distal end of the drive shaft **332**. The tissue removal probe **310** further comprises a proximal adapter **338** mounted to the proximal end **328** of the sleeve **324**. The proximal adapter **338** is configured to be mated with the drive cable **106**, thereby providing a means for rotatably coupling the drive unit **104** to the proximal end of the drive shaft **332**. Thus, operation of the drive unit **104** will rotate the drive shaft **332**, which, in turn, will rotate the cutting basket **334** about its rotational axis **340**. Like the tissue removal probe **110**, the tissue removal probe **310** can be rotatably disposed within the lumen **118** of the cannula **108**, so that the cutting basket **334** can be alternately deployed from and retracted into the distal end **114** of the cannula shaft **112**.

[0097] The cutting basket **334** comprises a base member **344**, a distal hub **346**, and a plurality of filaments **348** proximally affixed to the base member **344** and distally affixed to the distal hub **346**. The base member **344** is

mounted to the distal end of the drive shaft **332** using suitable means, such as soldering or welding. The distal hub **346** is preferably rounded, such that only lateral tissue removal is achieved, and inadvertent tissue trauma distal to the cutting basket **334** is prevented. As shown in FIGS. **18** and **19**, the shape of the filaments **348** is sinusoidal, although other shapes can be provided. Although three filaments **348** are shown, the cutting basket **334** may include a different number of filaments **348**. The filaments **348** are also interlaced or braided to provide the cutting basket **334** with a more integral structure.

[0098] In alternative embodiments, however, the filaments **348** can be configured differently. For example, FIG. **20** illustrates an alternative cutting basket **354**, wherein the filaments **348**, the proximal and distal ends of which are mounted to the base member **344**, thereby affixing the filaments **348** at the proximal end of the cutting basket **334**. The filaments **348** are affixed at the distal end of the cutting basket **334** by looping the filaments **348** through the distal hub **346**.

[0099] Whichever filament configuration is used, the cross-sectional shape of each filament **348** can be circular, rectangular, elliptical, or other customized shapes. As can be appreciated, the large spaces between the filaments **348** prevent, or at the least minimize, the build-up of tissue on the cutting basket **334**. If bone tissue is to be removed, the filaments **348** are preferably made from a tough material, such as steel or other alloys, so that it could penetrate or cut into a bone structure without being damaged. The stiffness of the filaments **348** are preferably selected so that the cutting basket **334** is stiff enough to cut, deform, and/or compact target bone tissue. In the case where soft tissue is to be removed, the filaments **348** may likewise be composed of a soft material. In any event, the material from which the filaments **348** are made are resilient, such that cutting basket **334** assumes a low profile while residing within the cannula lumen **330**, and is free to assume an expanded profile when deployed outside of the cannula lumen **330**. In the illustrated embodiment, the cutting basket **334** is 1 cm in length and $\frac{1}{2}$ cm in diameter.

[0100] In some embodiments, the filaments **348** have sharp edges, thereby providing bone, disc or soft tissue cutting/drilling capability. In other embodiments, the cutting basket **334** includes abrasive particles, such as diamond dusts, disposed on surfaces of the filaments **348**, for cutting, digging, and/or sanding against target bone, disc or soft tissue. The filaments **348** are connected between the base member **344** and distal hub **346** and drive shaft **332** using means, such as a welding, brazing, or glue, depending on the materials from which the distal hub, filaments, and drive shaft **332** are made. Alternatively, the filaments **348** are connected between the distal hub **346** and drive shaft **332** by a snap-fit connection, a screw connection, or otherwise an interference-fit connection.

[0101] The tissue ablation probe **310** optionally comprises a guidewire **352** that extends through a lumen **353** (shown in phantom) within the drive shaft **332**, and is mounted to the distal hub **346** of the cutting basket **334**. In this manner, the lateral movement of the cutting basket **334** during operation is limited.

[0102] Referring now to FIG. **21**, still another tissue removal probe **410** that can alternatively be used in the tissue removal system **100** will be described. The tissue removal probe **410** is similar to the previously described tissue

removal probe **310** in that it comprises the sleeve **324**, drive shaft **332**, and proximal adapter **338**. The tissue removal probe **410** differs from the tissue removal probe **310** in that it comprises a tissue removal device, and in particular, a cutting basket, that can be transformed between a tissue-cutting device and a tissue grasper.

[0103] In particular, the cutting basket **434** comprises a base member **444**, a distal hub **446**, and a plurality of filaments **448** proximally affixed to the base member **444** and distally affixed to the distal hub **446**. The base member **444** is mounted to the distal end of the drive shaft **332** using suitable means, such as soldering or welding. The distal hub **446** is preferably rounded, such that only lateral tissue removal is achieved, and inadvertent tissue trauma distal to the cutting basket **434** is prevented. The filaments **448** may have the same composition as the previously described filaments **448**.

[0104] Each filament **448**, however, has a hinge point **450** that divides the filament **448** into a proximal filament segment **452** and a distal filament segment **454**. As shown in the progression illustrated in FIGS. 22A-22D, pulling the distal hub **446** in the proximal direction causes the distal end of the cutting basket **434** to invert into the proximal end of the cutting basket **434**. That is, the distal filament segments **454** fold around the hinge points **450** towards the proximal filament segments **452**, transforming the folded filaments **448** into tissue-grasping arms, with the hinge points **450** forming the most distal points of the arms. Notably, the hinge points **450** are located distal to the midpoints of the filaments **448** (i.e., the distal filament segments **454** are shorter than the proximal filament segments **452**). In this manner, the resulting tissue-grasping arms are relatively short, and therefore have a greater resistance to lateral bending when grasping tissue.

[0105] The actuating device takes the form of a pull wire **456** that extends through the lumen **353** in the drive shaft **332**, attaching to the distal hub **446**. Thus, when the pull wire **456** is pulled, the cutting basket **434** is transformed from a tissue-cutting device to a tissue-grasping device. When the pull wire **456** is relaxed, the tissue-grasping device (due to its resiliency) reverts back to a tissue-cutting device. That is, the distal filament segments **454** will fold back around the hinge points **450** away from the proximal filament segments **452**, transforming the filaments **448** into tissue-cutting filaments.

[0106] Referring now to FIGS. 23 and 24, yet another tissue removal probe **510** that can alternatively be used in the tissue removal system **100** will be described. The tissue removal probe **510** is similar to the previously described tissue removal probe **310** in that it comprises the sleeve **324** and proximal adapter **338**. The tissue removal probe **510** differs from the tissue removal probe **310** in that it has tissue irrigating functionality and minimizes inadvertent trauma to distal tissue, otherwise caused by a tissue removal element **534**.

[0107] In particular, the tissue removal probe **510** comprises a drive shaft **532**, which is composed of a rigid material, such as stainless steel, and has a distal end with a non-traumatic blunt tip **536**. The blunt tip **536** prevents the tissue removal element **534** from abrading or harming distal tissue during use. In the illustrated embodiment, the blunt tip **536** has a spherical shape. In alternative embodiments, however, the blunt tip **536** can have other shapes as well. The drive shaft **332** further comprises an irrigation lumen

538 (shown in phantom) that terminates in an irrigation port **540** at the blunt tip **536**. As previously described, irrigation fluid can be delivered through the irrigation lumen **538** and out of the irrigation port **540** in order to cool the drive shaft **332** and/or tissue removal element **534**, as well as to wash debris at the target site. The irrigation lumen **538** can alternatively be used as a guidewire lumen.

[0108] The tissue removal element **534** is formed on the distal end of the drive shaft **332** just proximal to the blunt tip **536**. In the illustrated embodiment, the tissue removal device **534** comprises an ellipsoidal burr, although other geometrically shaped burrs can be used. Unlike a cutting basket, the cross-section of the burr **534** is relatively more solid, thereby providing more stiffness. Such configuration is advantageous in that it allows cutting and/or abrading of stiff materials without deforming. In the illustrated embodiment, the burr **534** includes abrasive particles, such as diamond dusts, that are disposed on the surface of the burr **534**. In other embodiments, instead of having diamond dusts, parts of the surface of the burr **534** can be removed to create an abrasive surface. The burr **534** further comprises a spiral cutting groove **542**. During use, the groove **542** allows bone particles that have been removed to travel proximally and away from a target site.

[0109] Referring now to FIG. 25, yet another tissue removal probe **610** that can alternatively be used in the tissue removal system **100** will be described. The tissue removal probe **610** is similar to the previously described tissue removal probe **310** in that it comprises the sleeve **324**, drive shaft **332**, and proximal adapter **338**. The tissue removal probe **610** differs from the tissue removal probe **310** in that it comprises a tissue removal element **634** with counter-pitched grooves.

[0110] In particular, the tissue removal element **634** is mounted to the distal end of the drive shaft **332**, and takes the form of a cylindrically-shaped burr with proximal spiral cutting grooves **636** and distal spiral cutting grooves **638**. The respective proximal and distal grooves **636** and **638** are oppositely pitched, such the removed tissue is forced to travel along the grooves **636/638** towards the center of the burr **634** when rotated in a particular direction (in this case, clockwise if looking down the distal end of the burr **634**). In this manner, the removed tissue will tend to be collected in one place, thereby making aspiration of the tissue easier.

[0111] Referring now to FIG. 26, yet another tissue removal probe **710** that can alternatively be used in the tissue removal system **100** will be described. The tissue removal probe **710** is similar to the previously described tissue removal probe **610** with the exception that two counter-rotating burrs are used.

[0112] In particular, the tissue removal probe **710** comprises an outer drive shaft **732** with a lumen **736**, and an inner drive shaft **733** disposed within the outer drive shaft lumen **736**. As such, the drive shafts **732** and **733** are independent, and can thus be rotated in opposite directions or the same direction. The tissue removal probe **710** further comprises proximal and distal removal elements **734** and **735** in the form of cylindrical burrs mounted to the distal ends of the respective drive shafts **732** and **733**. The cylindrical burrs **734** and **735** are collinear and coextensive with each other, so that they can operate as a contiguous tissue removal device. Spiral cutting grooves **738** and **740** are formed in the surfaces of the respective burrs **734** and **735**. In the illustrated embodiment, the absolute pitch of the spiral

grooves **738** on the proximal burr **734** is the same as the absolute pitch on the distal burr **735**. The grooves **738/740**, however, are pitched in the opposite direction. Thus, rotation of the proximal burr **734** in one direction (by rotating the outer drive shaft **732** in that direction), and rotation of the distal burr **735** in the opposite direction (by rotating the inner drive shaft **733** in that direction) will stabilize the tissue removal probe **710** as it is laterally cutting through tissue, e.g., bone tissue. That is, the counter-rotating burrs **734/735** prevents, or at least minimizes, the tendency of the tissue removal probe **710** to stray from its intended cut path.

[0113] Alternatively, the burrs **734/735** can be rotated in the same direction, preferably in a direction that forces the removed tissue to travel along the grooves **738/740** of the respective burrs **734/735** towards the interface between the burrs **734/735**. In this manner, the removed tissue will tend to be collected in one place, thereby making it more easily aspirated. Thus, it can be appreciated that the independence of the outer and inner drive shafts **732/733**, allows the respective burrs **734/735** to be selectively rotated in opposite directions or rotated in the same direction.

[0114] Referring now to FIG. 27, yet another tissue removal probe **810** that can alternatively be used in the tissue removal system **100** will be described. The tissue removal probe **810** is similar to the previously described tissue removal probe **310** in that it comprises the sleeve **324**, drive shaft **332**, and proximal adapter **338**. The tissue removal probe **810** differs from the tissue removal probe **310** in that it comprises a tissue removal element **834** configured to drill holes through bone, whereas the tissue removal element of the tissue removal probe **310**, as well as those subsequently described in tissue removal probes **410**, **510**, **610**, and **710**, lend itself well to the lateral removal of hard bone tissue, e.g., during laminectomy and laminotomy procedures.

[0115] In particular, the tissue removal element **834** takes the form of a drill bit mounted at the distal end of the drive shaft **332**. The drill bit **834** has a sharp distal tip **836** that allows the rotating drill bit **834** to penetrate or shape bone tissue. In the illustrated embodiment, the drill bit **834** has a length that is between $\frac{1}{100}$ and 1 inch, and a diameter that is between $\frac{1}{100}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. The drill bit **834** includes two fluted cutting grooves **838** that extend down opposite sides of the drill bit **834**, as shown in FIG. 28.

[0116] Referring now to FIG. 29, yet another tissue removal probe **910** that can alternatively be used in the tissue removal system **100** will be described. Unlike in the previously described embodiments, which have rotatable tissue removal elements, the tissue removal probe **910** comprises a reciprocating tissue removal element. In particular, the tissue removal probe **910** comprises a rigid drive shaft **912** having a distal end **914**, and a tissue removal element **934** formed on the distal end **914** of the drive shaft **912**. The tissue removal element **934** comprise a block **936** with a series of cascading tissue-cutting notches **938** longitudinally formed along the block **934**. As a result, a series of sharp leading edges **940** are formed along the block **934**. In the illustrated embodiment, the block **936** has a rectangular cross-section.

[0117] Thus, it can be appreciated that the tissue removal element **934** can be placed within a hole or groove in a bone, and reciprocatably moved to remove bone tissue from the bone, thereby enlarging the hole. A motor can be configured to apply a hammering motion (i.e., a forward and rearward motion) to drive the shaft **912**.

[0118] Although particular embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described, it should be understood that the above discussion is not intended to limit the present invention to these embodiments. It will be obvious to those skilled in the art that various changes and modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. In addition, an illustrated embodiment needs not have all the aspects or advantages of the invention shown. An aspect or an advantage described in conjunction with a particular embodiment of the present invention is not necessarily limited to that embodiment and can be practiced in any other embodiments of the present invention even if not so illustrated. Thus, the present invention is intended to cover alternatives, modifications, and equivalents that may fall within the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined by the claims.

1. A tissue removing medical device, comprising:
 - a tubular member having a working channel and an auxiliary channel;
 - a shaft extending through the working channel of the tubular member, the shaft having a distal end region; and
 - a rotatable cutting burr coupled to the distal end region of the shaft.
2. The tissue removing medical device of claim 1, wherein auxiliary channel is an aspiration channel.
3. The tissue removing medical device of claim 1, wherein auxiliary channel is an irrigation channel.
4. The tissue removing medical device of claim 3, wherein the tubular member further comprises an aspiration channel.
5. The tissue removing medical device of claim 1, wherein the tubular member further comprises a steering mechanism.
6. The tissue removing medical device of claim 1, wherein the shaft is axially movable relative to the tubular member.
7. The tissue removing medical device of claim 1, wherein the shaft is rotatable relative to the tubular member.
8. The tissue removing medical device of claim 1, wherein the shaft is axially movable and rotatable relative to the tubular member.
9. The tissue removing medical device of claim 1, further comprising a drive motor coupled to the shaft.
10. The tissue removing medical device of claim 1, wherein the tubular member includes a window cutout positioned proximally of a distal end of tubular member.
11. The tissue removing medical device of claim 1, wherein the rotatable cutting burr includes a plurality of tissue-cutting structures designed to resect tissue.
12. A tissue removing medical device, comprising:
 - a tubular sleeve having a plurality of lumen extending therethrough, the plurality of lumens including a first lumen;
 - a drive shaft extending through the first lumen, the drive shaft having a distal end region; and
 - a cutting member coupled to the distal end region of the drive shaft.
13. The tissue removing medical device of claim 12, wherein the cutting member includes a reciprocating cutting member.
14. The tissue removing medical device of claim 12, wherein the cutting member includes a burr.
15. The tissue removing medical device of claim 14, wherein the burr includes a helical groove.
16. The tissue removing medical device of claim 12, wherein the cutting member includes an expandable basket.

17. The tissue removing medical device of claim **12**, wherein the cutting member includes a drill bit.

18. The tissue removing medical device of claim **12**, wherein the tubular sleeve includes a window cutout positioned proximally of a distal end of tubular sleeve.

19. A tissue removing medical device assembly, comprising:

a tubular sleeve having a plurality of lumen extending therethrough, the plurality of lumens including a first lumen;

a drive shaft extending through the first lumen, the drive shaft having a distal end region;

a drive motor coupled to the drive shaft, the drive motor being designed to rotate the drive shaft; and

a burr coupled to the distal end region of the drive shaft.

20. The tissue removing medical device assembly of claim **19**, wherein the tubular sleeve includes a window cutout positioned proximally of a distal end of tubular sleeve.

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