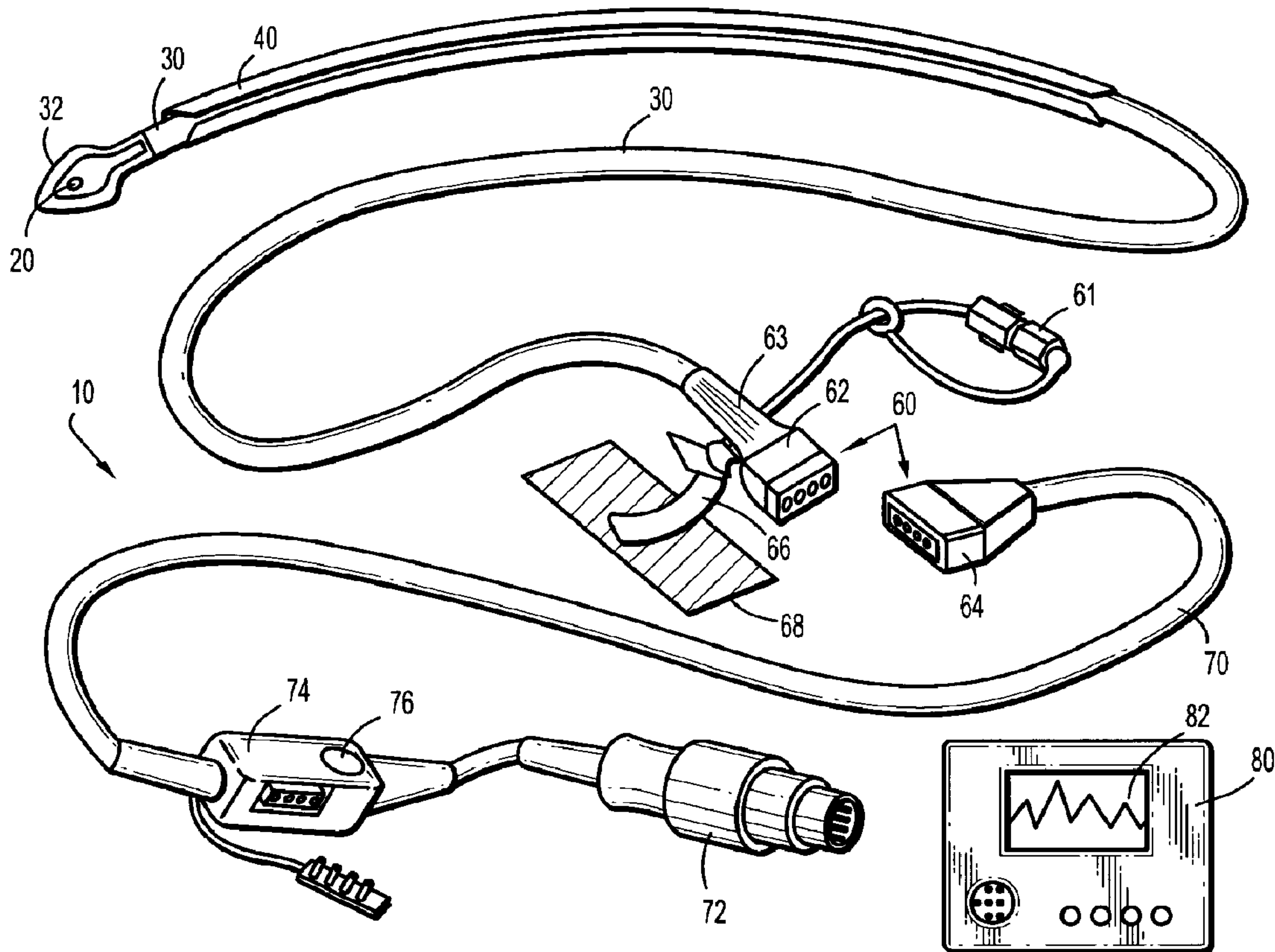




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(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

An introducer adapted to facilitate positioning of a catheter, such as an intrauterine catheter, is provided. The introducer includes an elongate member having an outer wall defining a longitudinal axis and a longitudinal lumen for reception of a catheter, e.g., an

(57) Abrégé(suite)/Abstract(continued):

intrauterine catheter. The outer wall includes first and second longitudinal edges defining a longitudinal slot in communication with the longitudinal lumen. The outer wall has a cross-section orthogonal to the longitudinal axis and defining a thickness at an opposed location generally opposing the longitudinal slot greater than a thickness at edge locations adjacent the first and second longitudinal edges, to thereby permit the first and second longitudinal edges to be displaced relative to each other to increase a dimension of the longitudinal slot to facilitate one of removal or insertion of the catheter via the longitudinal slot and relative to the longitudinal lumen. The thickness of the outer wall may be dimensioned to gradually decrease from the opposed location to the edge locations. The ratio of the thickness of the outer wall at the opposed location to the thickness of the outer wall at the edge locations is about 2:1. The outer wall may define a generally c-shaped cross-section.

ABSTRACT

An introducer adapted to facilitate positioning of a catheter, such as an intrauterine catheter, is provided. The introducer includes an elongate member having an outer wall defining a longitudinal axis and a longitudinal lumen for reception of a catheter, e.g., an intrauterine catheter. The outer wall includes first and second longitudinal edges defining a longitudinal slot in communication with the longitudinal lumen. The outer wall has a cross-section orthogonal to the longitudinal axis and defining a thickness at an opposed location generally opposing the longitudinal slot greater than a thickness at edge locations adjacent the first and second longitudinal edges, to thereby permit the first and second longitudinal edges to be displaced relative to each other to increase a dimension of the longitudinal slot to facilitate one of removal or insertion of the catheter via the longitudinal slot and relative to the longitudinal lumen. The thickness of the outer wall may be dimensioned to gradually decrease from the opposed location to the edge locations. The ratio of the thickness of the outer wall at the opposed location to the thickness of the outer wall at the edge locations is about 2:1. The outer wall may define a generally c-shaped cross-section.

IUPC INTRODUCER

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present disclosure relates to an intrauterine pressure catheter (IUPC) system. The present disclosure also relates to an introducer for positioning a catheter within the uterus and for permitting the efficient removal of the introducer after application of the catheter.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

Systems for monitoring and/or analyzing fetal contractions include externally applied devices (e.g., tocodynamometers) and intrauterine devices. External devices, such as a tocodynamometer or tocotransducer, sense uterine activity superficially and non-invasively. Tocodynamometers are held adjacent the patient's abdomen in the vicinity of the fundus and measure the hardness of the abdominal wall which is an indication of uterine activity. Such devices, however, may suffer from large measurement errors.

Intrauterine pressure monitoring systems provide more reliable and accurate information regarding uterine contractions including frequency, duration, intensity, and resting tone of the uterine contractions. Intrauterine devices also reduce measurement errors relative to external devices because the uterine pressure is measured directly with a catheter appropriately positioned within the uterus.

SUMMARY

Accordingly, an introducer adapted to facilitate positioning of a catheter into a cavity of a patient is provided. The introducer includes an elongate member having an outer wall defining a longitudinal axis and having a longitudinal lumen for reception of a catheter, e.g., an intrauterine catheter. The outer wall includes first and second longitudinal edges defining a longitudinal slot in communication with the longitudinal lumen. The outer wall has a cross-section orthogonal to the longitudinal axis and defining a thickness at an opposed location generally opposing the longitudinal slot greater than a thickness at edge locations adjacent the first and second longitudinal edges, to thereby permit the first and second longitudinal edges to be displaced relative to each other to increase a dimension of the longitudinal slot to facilitate one of removal or insertion of the catheter via the longitudinal slot and relative to the longitudinal lumen, the outer wall being dimensioned to gradually and continuously decrease in thickness from the opposed location to the edge locations. The thickness of the outer wall may be dimensioned to gradually decrease from the opposed location to the edge locations. The ratio of the thickness of the outer wall at the opposed location to the thickness of the outer wall at the edge locations is about **2:1**. The outer wall may define a generally c-shaped cross-section.

The elongate member may define an atraumatic leading tip segment. The leading tip segment includes first and second oblique edges leading to an arcuate leading surface to define a generally open profile. The open profile may accommodate a pressure sensor associated with the catheter. The elongate member may include a grip to facilitate manipulating of the outer wall and separation of the introducer from the catheter.

In an alternative embodiment, an intrauterine pressure catheter monitoring system is provided. The system includes a catheter having a pressure sensor for detecting biomedical signals indicative of uterine activity, an introducer comprising an elongate member including an outer wall defining a longitudinal axis and having a longitudinal lumen for reception of the catheter, and an external monitor adapted to receive the biomedical signals and having logic and associated output for display of information retrieved by the biomedical signals. The outer wall of the introducer may include first and second longitudinal edges defining a longitudinal slot in communication with the longitudinal lumen. The outer wall has a cross-section orthogonal to the longitudinal axis defining a thickness at an opposed location generally opposing the longitudinal slot greater than a thickness at edge locations adjacent the first and second longitudinal edges, to thereby permit the first and second longitudinal edges to be displaced relative to each other to increase a dimension of the longitudinal slot to facilitate one of removal or insertion of the catheter via the longitudinal slot and relative to the longitudinal lumen, the outer wall being dimensioned to gradually and continuously decrease in thickness from the opposed location to the edge locations.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Embodiments of the present disclosure will be better appreciated by reference to the drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an intrauterine pressure catheter system in accordance with the present disclosure;

FIG. 2 is a top view of the introducer of the system of **FIG. 1**;

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of an alternate embodiment of the introducer;

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of the introducer of the system of **FIG. 1**;

FIG. 5 is a top view of the distal or leading end of the introducer illustrating the atraumatic tip; and

FIG. 6 is a perspective view illustrating the grip of the introducer.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to the drawings, in which like reference numerals identify identical or substantially similar parts throughout the several views, **FIG. 1** illustrates, in perspective view, an intrauterine pressure catheter system **10** in accordance with the principles of the present disclosure. Intrauterine pressure catheter system **10** may include pressure sensor **20**, catheter **30**, introducer **40**, connector assembly **60**, monitor cable **70**, and external monitor **80**. Pressure sensor **20** may be embedded in tip **32** of catheter **30**. In the alternative, pressure sensor **20** may be a separate component and positionable within a lumen of catheter **30**. Introducer **40** facilitates insertion of catheter **30** and proper positioning of tip **32** and therefore, pressure sensor **20**, at a defined therapeutic position within the uterus. Introducer **40** will be discussed in greater detail hereinbelow.

Catheter **30** may be any suitable intrauterine catheter such as, e.g., the catheter disclosed in commonly assigned U.S. Patent No. **5,566,680** to Urion et al. Catheter **30** may be relatively flexible to permit the catheter **30** to follow the contours of the cervix.

Connector assembly **60** includes female connector socket **62** and male connector plug **64** which electrically connects pressure sensor **20** with monitor cable **70**. Monitor cable **70** electrically connects pressure sensor **20** to external monitor **80** via monitor pin connector **72**. Test member **74** may be provided to assure that male connector plug **64**, monitor cable **70**, and monitor pin connector **72** are operational and properly connected. Push button **76** can be depressed to clear data or zero system **10** at any time during use. Connector assembly **60** is secured to the thigh or abdomen of the patient using adhesive attachment pad **66** and an attachment strap **68** subsequent to placement of catheter **30**. To permit infusion of fluid into the amniotic sac, a luer fitting **61** is connected to catheter **30** in the body **63** enclosing female connector socket **62**.

With reference to **FIG. 2** and **FIG. 4**, in conjunction with **FIG. 1**, introducer **40** will be discussed. Introducer **40** is adapted for receiving catheter **30** to facilitate insertion of the catheter **30** within the uterus. Introducer **40** is of sufficient stiffness and/or rigidity to facilitate advancement within the uterus and to ease insertion of catheter **30**. Introducer **40** includes outer wall **45** defining a longitudinal axis “x” along the length of introducer **40** from proximal or trailing end **42** to distal or leading end **44**. Introducer **40** has longitudinal slot **46** within outer wall **45** disposed along at least a portion of the length of introducer **40**. Outer wall **45** defines longitudinal lumen **48** which receives catheter **30**. Catheter **30** may be installed into, and removed from, longitudinal lumen **48** via longitudinal slot **46**. Longitudinal slot **46** defines a width “w”,

which, in combination with other features of outer wall 45 to be discussed hereinbelow, permits insertion or removal of catheter 30 from introducer 40. Width “w” of longitudinal slot 46 may be about 0.105 inches to about 0.165 inches, or from about 0.125 inches to about 0.145 inches. As will be appreciated, width “w” may be increased by deflection of longitudinal edges 50, 52 defining slot 46. Introducer 40 may be shaped as shown or may have a gentle curve, as illustrated in FIG. 3, to conform to the shape of the vagina and cervix. Longitudinal lumen 48 defines an internal dimension or diameter to receive catheter 30. In one embodiment, the internal diameter of longitudinal lumen 48 generally approximates the outer diameter of catheter 30 as shown in phantom in FIG. 4.

Referring now to FIG. 4, introducer 40 has a cross-section transverse to longitudinal axis “x”. The cross-section may define a generally arcuate configuration, such as a c-shape, a u-shape, or a horseshoe-shape. Other shapes are also envisioned to those skilled in the art, such as circular, ovoid, and the like. As mentioned hereinabove, introducer 40 includes longitudinal edges 50, 52 within outer wall 45, which define longitudinal slot 46. The thickness “t1” of introducer 40 is broadest at location 49 opposite slot 46 and along the arc section towards longitudinal edges 50 and 52. In embodiments, thickness “t1” is about 0.030 inches. The thickness tapers towards longitudinal edges 50, 52 to a thickness “t2”. In embodiments, thickness “t2” is about 0.015 inches. In embodiments, the ratio between “t1” and “t2” is about 4:1, or alternatively, about 3:1, about 2:1 or about 1.5:1. The thickness may taper in linear or gradual manner from location 49 toward longitudinal edges 50, 52, or may be non-linear. The arrangement permits longitudinal edges 50, 52 to be displaced relative to each other

in opposed direction “b” to facilitate reception or removal of catheter 30 relative to longitudinal lumen 48 via longitudinal slot 46. For example, due to the more narrow thickness of the segment of outer wall 45 adjacent longitudinal edges 50, 52, the edges 50, 52 may deflect outwardly or inwardly in at least the direction of arrow “b” to permit the passage of catheter 30.

Introducer 40 may include an atraumatic tip 54 as shown in FIGS. 3 and 5 adjacent distal or leading end 44. Atraumatic tip 54 is adapted to reduce discomfort or tissue damage when advancing introducer 40 through tissue. Atraumatic tip 54 defines an opening 55 having curved leading edge 56 and oblique edges 57 extending contiguously from the leading edge 56. The curve of leading edge 56 minimizes the risk of tissue trauma. Leading edge 56 may also be formed from a soft, flexible material capable of deforming as it contacts tissue. Oblique edges 57 may be arranged at an angle “k” ranging from about 10° to about 60° relative to the longitudinal axis “x”. Atraumatic tip 54 may be integrally formed with introducer 40 or may be formed separate therefrom. When formed as a separate component, atraumatic tip 54 may be coupled to introducer 40 by any suitable means, such as, for example, with the use of adhesives or heat welding. Opening 55 of atraumatic tip 54 may accommodate pressure sensor 20. Oblique edges 57 may assist in removal of introducer 40 from catheter 30 and pressure sensor 20.

Introducer 40 includes a grip as shown in FIG. 6 to ease removal of introducer 40 from catheter 30. Grip 58 may be a tab, flap, strip, or other arm adjacent proximal end 42. In embodiments, grip 58 may be a bend in proximal end 42. Grip 58 is

angled from longitudinal axis "x". In embodiments, grip 58 is at about a 45 degree angle from longitudinal axis "x". Grip 58 permits the clinician to grasp and pull introducer 40 away from catheter 30 in a direction opposite longitudinal slot 46 of introducer 40. In embodiments, grip 58 may have finger catching surfaces or be textured to facilitate engagement by the clinician. Grip 58 may be integrally formed with introducer 40 or may be formed separate therefrom. When formed as a separate component, grip 58 may be coupled to introducer 40 by any suitable means, such as, for example, use of adhesives or heat welding. Introducer 40 may further include depth markings "m" on the external surface of outer wall 45 (FIG. 3). Depth markings "m" may correspond to various predefined distances measured from atraumatic tip 54 to assist the surgeon in ascertaining the degree of insertion of introducer 40 within the cervix.

Introducer 40 may be fabricated from material sufficiently rigid to endure placement and manipulation without loss of structural integrity. Introducer 40 may be fabricated of lubricious materials to reduce the coefficient of friction upon exposure to tissue. Introducer 40 may be a plastic resin, polyethylene, polyvinylchloride, silicone, Teflon TM, or combinations thereof. In embodiments, introducer 40 may be made from a medical grade metal or polymer and have a lubricious coating made from one or more of the materials described above.

An anti-bacterial coating may be applied on the entire disposable portion of intrauterine pressure catheter system 10. Such a coating provides an antiseptic surface active against major nosocomial pathogens. For example, a chlorhexidine and silver

sulfadiazine coating can be molecularly bonded to the surface of catheter **30** and introducer **40**.

Referring again to **FIG. 1**, monitor **80** includes circuitry or logic adapted to receive biomedical signals collected by pressure sensor **20** and provide an output either text or visual on display **82**.

The use of intrauterine pressure catheter system **10** of the present disclosure will be discussed. The components of the system are connected and prepared for use. Monitor pin connector **72** is plugged into external monitor **80**. If desired, test member **74** may be used to assure that monitor cable **70**, male connector plug **64**, and monitor pin connector **72** are operational. Previously obtained data within monitor **80** is then cleared or zeroed by pressing push button **76** on test member **74**. Monitor cable **70** is connected, via male connector plug **64**, to female connector socket **62** and connector assembly **60** is completed. External monitor **80** is activated.

In one methodology, catheter **30** is assembled within introducer **40** with catheter tip **32** being positioned adjacent the distal end **44** of introducer **40**. In this regard, pressure sensor **20** may be disposed adjacent opening **55** of introducer **40**. Catheter **30** may be assembled within introducer **40** by sliding catheter along longitudinal lumen **48**, or, alternatively, by introducing catheter **30** through longitudinal slot **46**. First and second edges **50**, **52** may deflect to accommodate catheter **30** as discussed hereinabove. Introducer **40** and catheter **30** are then inserted by gently sliding the components through the cervical os and into the amniotic space. Depth markings "m" on outer wall of introducer **40** may assist the clinician in appropriately positioning atraumatic

tip **54** at the proper location. Alternatively, first and second position indicators on catheter **30** indicate insertion depths of **12** and **18** inches, respectively, relative to the introitus. Catheter **30** is advanced until the second position indicator, the **18** inch mark, is at the introitus. The second position indicator indicates that catheter tip **32** has progressed about **12-14** inches into the uterus and should be positioned at the fundus of the uterus. In another method, introducer **40** may be first introduced within the cervix. Once appropriately positioned as confirmed by, e.g., depth markings "m", catheter **30** may be advanced through longitudinal lumen **48** of introducer **40** whereby pressure sensor **20** is disposed adjacent atraumatic tip **54**.

Once catheter **20** is properly positioned, introducer **40** may be removed. Holding introducer **40** in one hand and catheter **30** in the other, introducer **40** is retracted and separated from catheter **30**. In embodiments, introducer **40** may be separated from catheter **30** via grip **58**. Introducer **40** may be separated from catheter **30** by sliding introducer **40** longitudinally along a portion of catheter **30** thereby separating introducer **40** from catheter **30** via the opening in distal end **44** and slot **46**, by pulling or otherwise separating the introducer from catheter **30** via longitudinal slot **46** where longitudinal edges **50**, **52** deflect to permit passage of catheter **30**, and/or by combinations of these methods. In addition, the angled arrangement of longitudinal edges **50**, **52** may enable atraumatic tip **54** to slide along pressure sensor **20** to permit passage of the pressure sensor **20**. With catheter **30** now positioned within the cervix, adhesive attachment pad **66** is applied to the patient's thigh or abdomen and attachment strap **68** is secured to adhesive attachment pad **66**. Attachment strap **68** is adjusted as desired for patient

comfort. Monitoring of uterine activity with pressure sensor **20** and monitor **80** is commenced.

It will be understood that various modifications may be made to the embodiments disclosed herein. Therefore, the above description should not be construed as limiting, but merely as an exemplification of preferred embodiments. Those skilled in the art will envision other modifications. The invention, rather, is defined by the claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An introducer adapted to facilitate positioning of a catheter into a cavity of a patient, which comprises:

an elongate member including an outer wall defining a longitudinal axis and having a longitudinal lumen for reception of a catheter, the outer wall including first and second longitudinal edges defining a longitudinal slot in communication with the longitudinal lumen, the outer wall having a cross-section orthogonal to the longitudinal axis and defining a thickness at an opposed location generally opposing the longitudinal slot greater than a thickness at edge locations adjacent the first and second longitudinal edges, to thereby permit the first and second longitudinal edges to be displaced relative to each other to increase a dimension of the longitudinal slot to facilitate one of removal or insertion of the catheter via the longitudinal slot and relative to the longitudinal lumen, the outer wall being dimensioned to gradually and continuously decrease in thickness from the opposed location to the edge locations.

2. The introducer according to claim 1 wherein the ratio of the thickness of the outer wall at the opposed location to the thickness of the outer wall at the edge locations is about 2:1.

3. The introducer according to claim 1 wherein the outer wall defines a generally c-shaped cross-section.

4. The introducer according to claim 1 wherein the elongate member defines an atraumatic leading tip segment.

5. The introducer according to claim 4 wherein the leading tip segment includes first and second oblique edges leading to an arcuate leading surface to define a generally open profile.

6. The introducer according to claim 1 wherein the elongate member includes a grip.

7. The introducer according to claim 1 wherein the catheter is an intrauterine catheter.

8. An intrauterine pressure catheter monitoring system, which comprises:
a catheter including a pressure sensor for detecting biomedical signals indicative of uterine activity;
an introducer comprising an elongate member including an outer wall defining a longitudinal axis and having a longitudinal lumen for reception of the catheter, the outer wall including first and second longitudinal edges defining a longitudinal slot in communication with the longitudinal lumen, the outer wall having a cross-section orthogonal to the longitudinal axis and defining a thickness at an opposed location generally opposing the longitudinal slot greater than a thickness at edge locations adjacent the first and second longitudinal edges, to thereby permit the first and second longitudinal edges to be displaced relative to each other to increase a dimension of the longitudinal slot to facilitate one of removal or insertion of the catheter via the longitudinal slot and relative to the longitudinal lumen, the outer wall being dimensioned to gradually and continuously decrease in thickness from the opposed location to the edge locations; and

an external monitor adapted to receive the biomedical signals and having logic and associated output for display of information retrieved by the biomedical signals.

9. The introducer according to claim 5, wherein the first and second oblique edges are arranged at an angle ranging from 10 degrees to 60 degrees relative to the longitudinal axis.

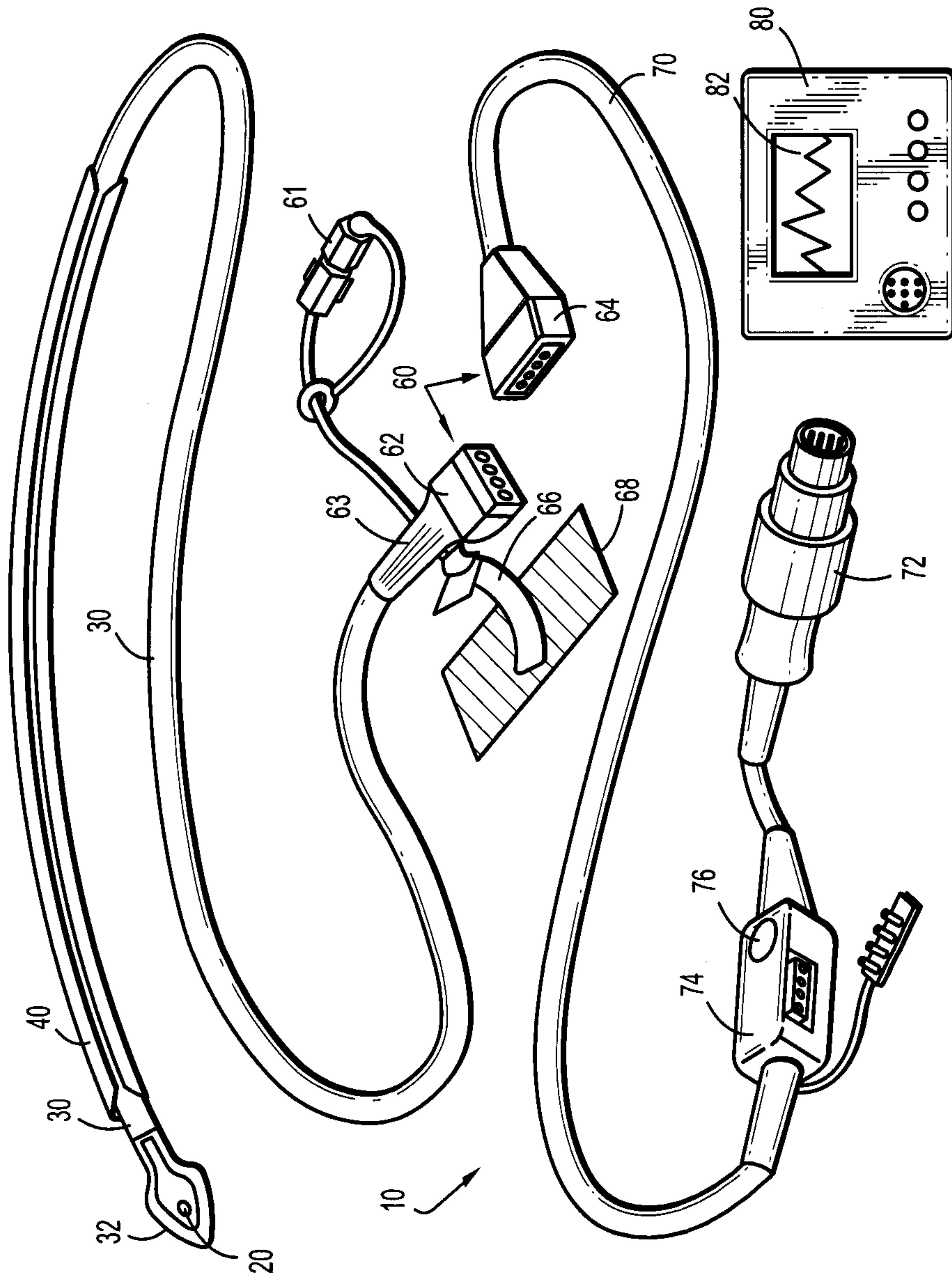


FIG. 1

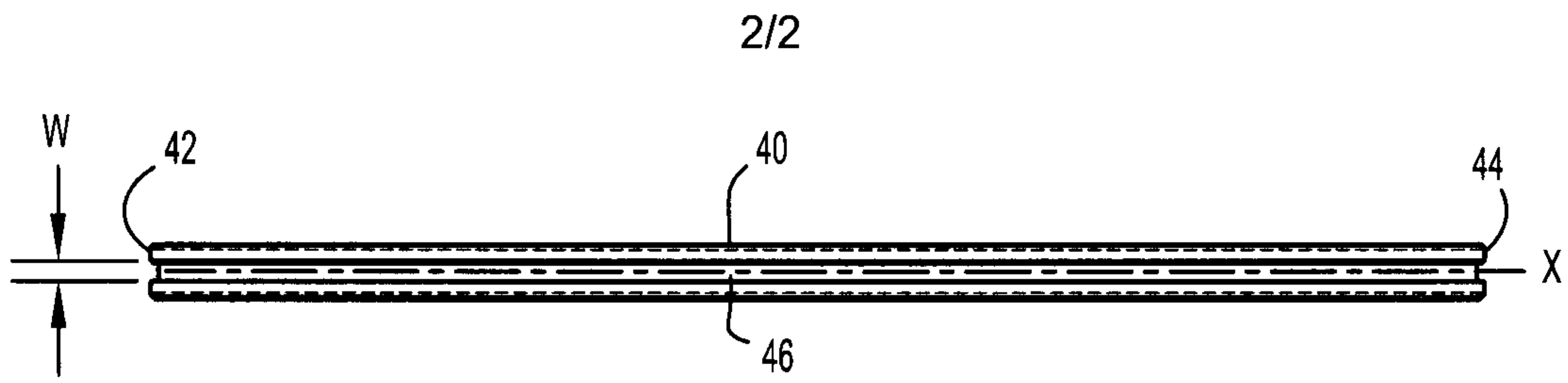


FIG. 2

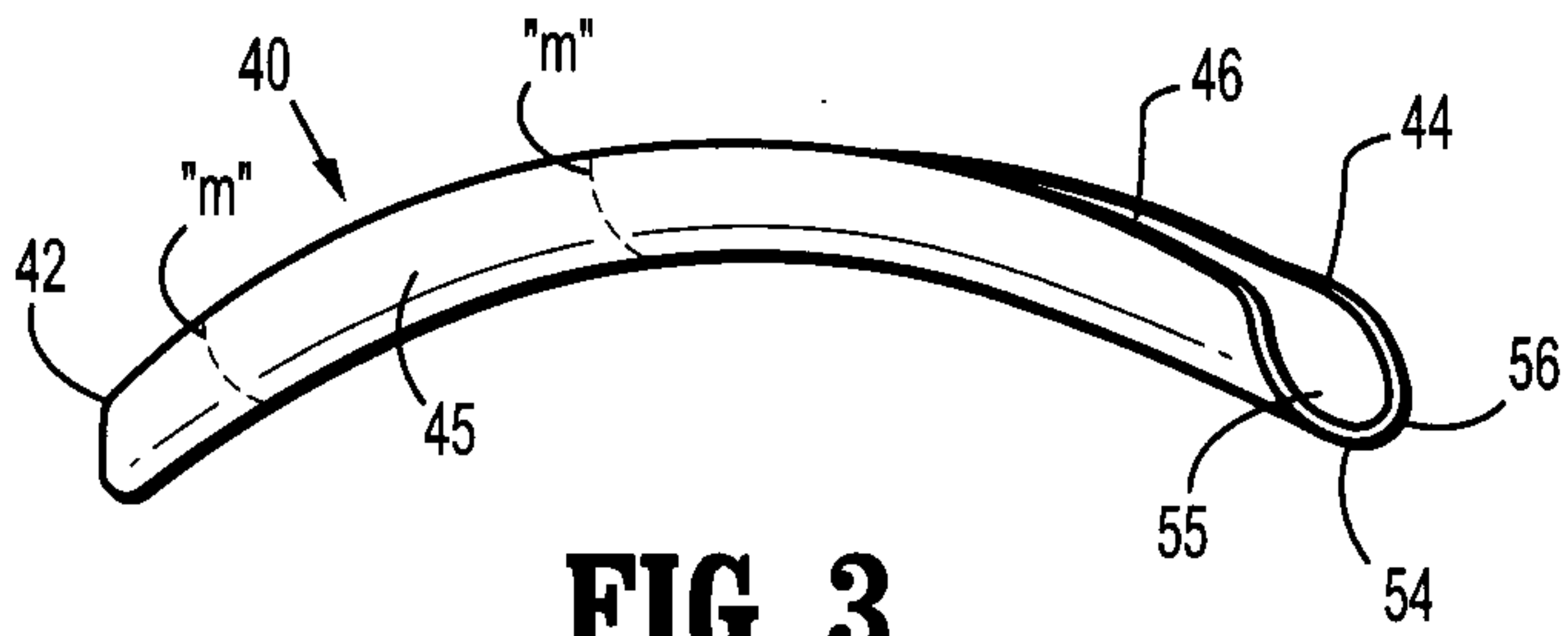


FIG. 3

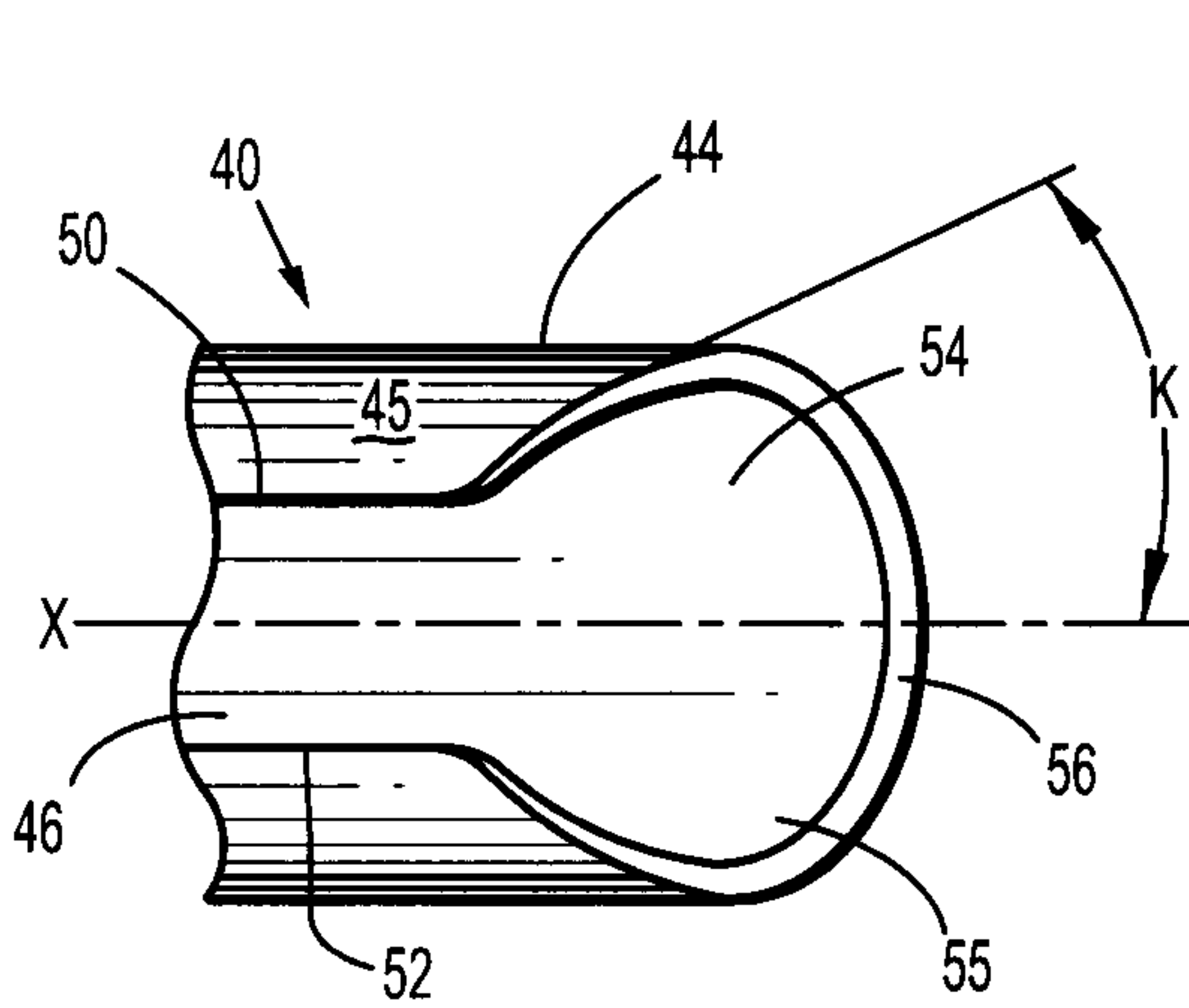


FIG. 5

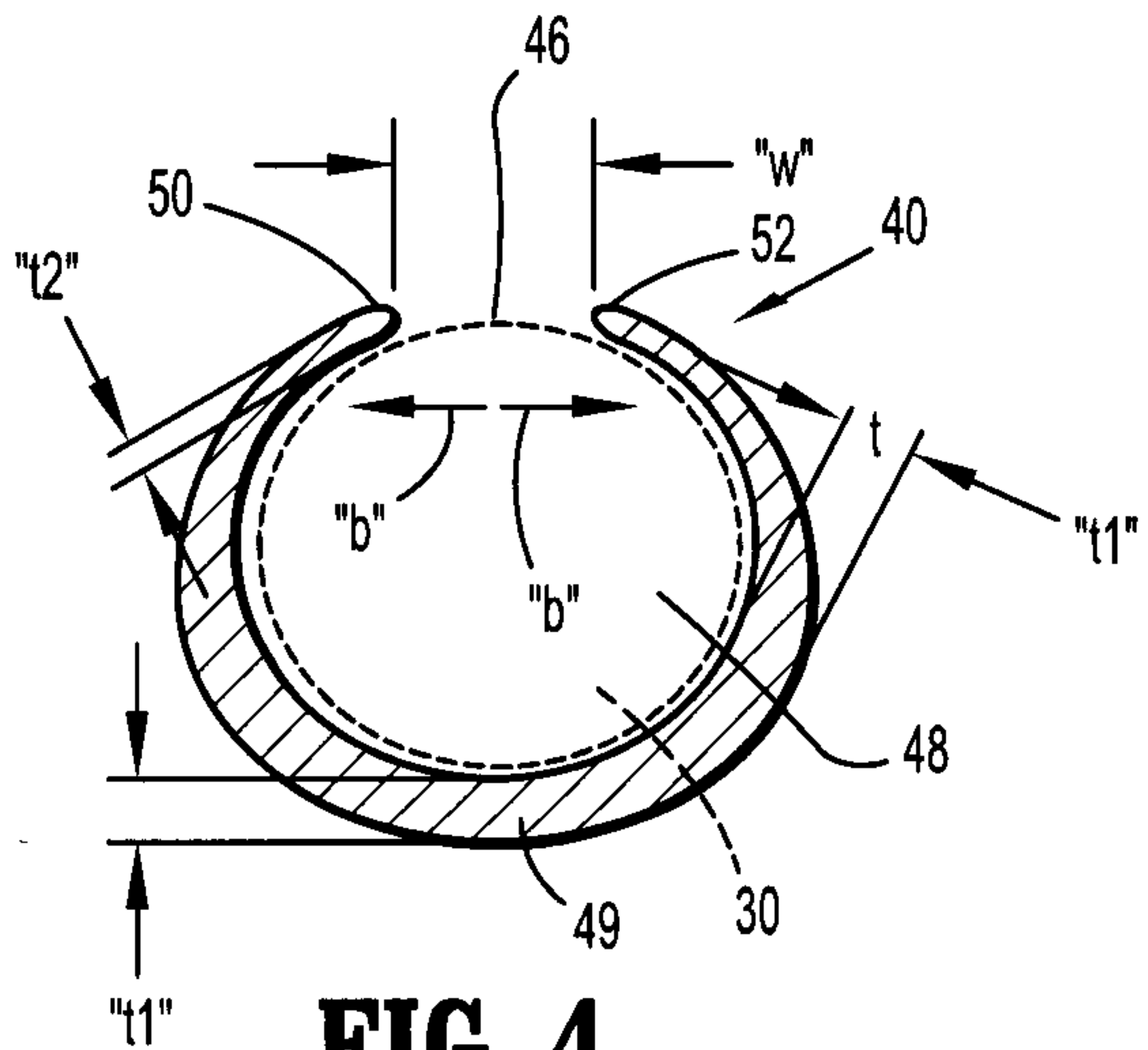


FIG. 4

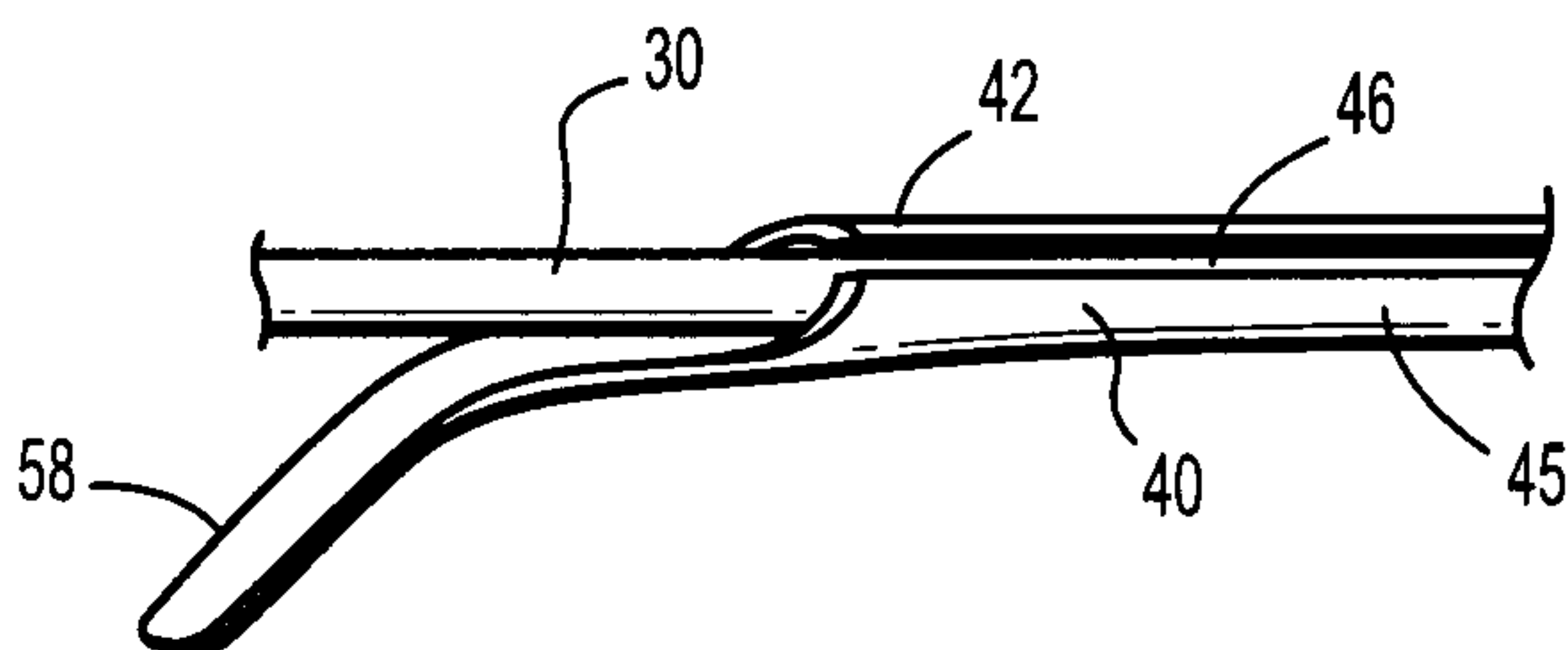


FIG. 6

