



(22) Date de dépôt/Filing Date: 2009/04/20

(41) Mise à la disp. pub./Open to Public Insp.: 2009/10/22

(30) Priorités/Priorities: 2008/04/22 (US61/046,882);
2009/04/07 (US12/419,735)

(51) Cl.Int./Int.Cl. *A61B 18/14* (2006.01),
G01B 21/22 (2006.01)

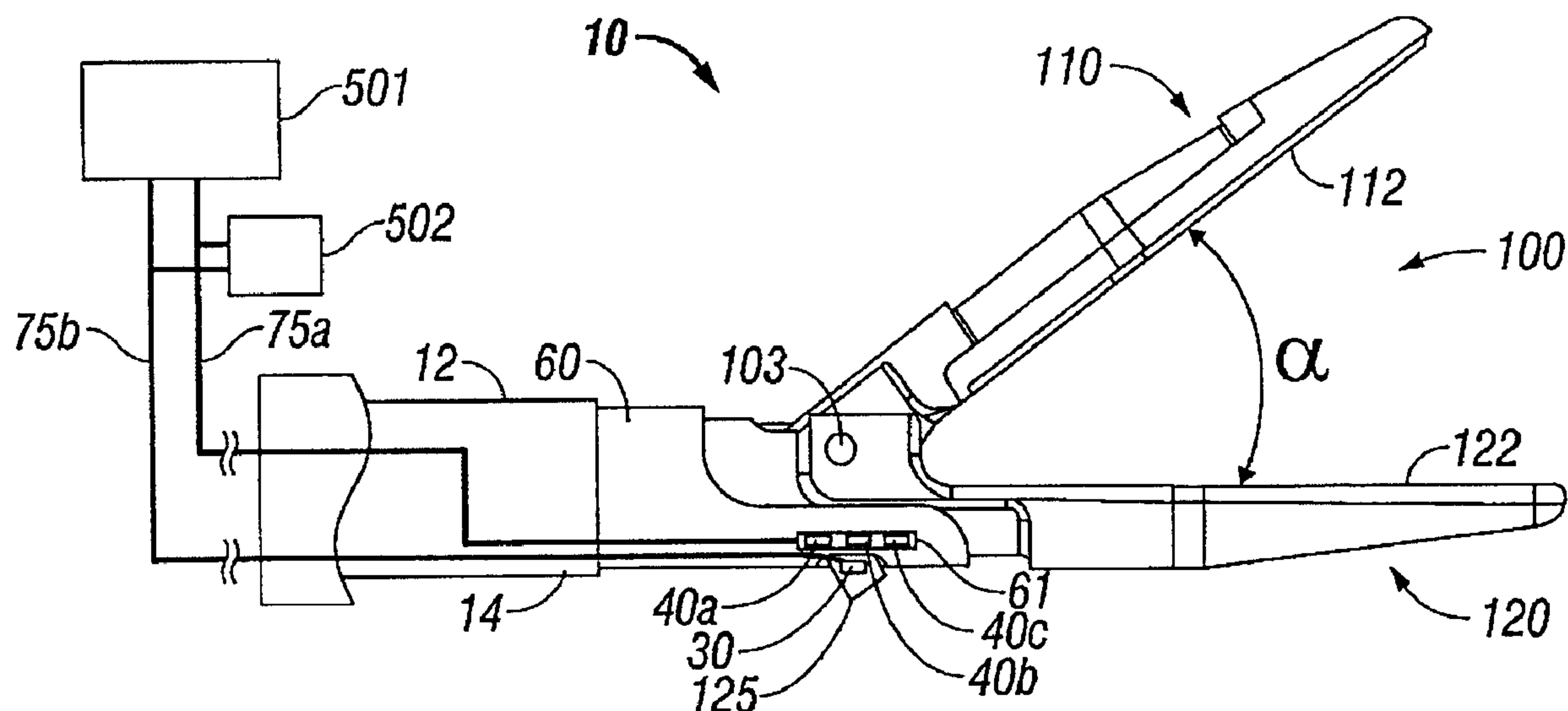
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(54) Titre : MONTAGE DE DETECTION DE FERMETURE DE MACHOIRES

(54) Title: JAW CLOSURE DETECTION SYSTEM



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

A jaw angle detection system for an end effector assembly includes a first electrical contact that connects to a first jaw member and connects to a generator. A sensor connects to a second jaw member (or an actuator) and connects to the generator, and configured to move relative to the first electrical contact upon movement of the second jaw member (or the actuator) when the first and second jaw members are moved to close about tissue disposed therebetween. Information relating to the position of the sensor relative to the first electrical contact is relayed back to the generator to determine an angle between the first and second jaw members.

ABSTRACT

A jaw angle detection system for an end effector assembly includes a first electrical contact that connects to a first jaw member and connects to a generator. A sensor connects to a second jaw member (or an actuator) and connects to the generator, and configured to move relative to the first electrical contact upon movement of the second jaw member (or the actuator) when the first and second jaw members are moved to close about tissue disposed therebetween. Information relating to the position of the sensor relative to the first electrical contact is relayed back to the generator to determine an angle between the first and second jaw members.

JAW CLOSURE DETECTION SYSTEM

BACKGROUND

The present disclosure relates to a jaw closure detection system for performing electrosurgical procedures. More particularly, the present disclosure relates to a jaw sensing system that detects and/or confirms jaw closure about tissue and/or detects the relative angle of two opposing jaw members relative to one another when tissue is engaged therebetween.

Technical Field

Forceps utilize mechanical action to constrict, grasp, dissect and/or clamp tissue. Electrosurgical forceps utilize both mechanical clamping action and electrical energy to effect hemostasis by heating the tissue and blood vessels. By controlling the intensity, frequency and duration of the electrosurgical energy applied through the jaw members to the tissue, the surgeon can coagulate, cauterize and/or seal tissue.

In order to effect a proper seal with larger vessels or thick tissue, two predominant mechanical parameters should be accurately controlled: the pressure applied to the tissue; and the gap distance between the electrodes. As can be

appreciated, both of these parameters are affected by the thickness of vessels or tissue. More particularly, accurate application of pressure is important for several reasons: to reduce the tissue impedance to a low enough value that allows enough electrosurgical energy through the tissue; to overcome the forces of expansion during tissue heating; and to contribute to the end tissue thickness, which is an indication of a good seal.

In some instances, in order to properly and effectively seal larger vessels or tissue, a greater closure force between opposing jaw members is required and accurate detection of jaw closure, and in some cases the jaw closure angle, is important to assure a consistent and reliable seal. This presents a design challenge for manufacturers because the jaw members are typically affixed with pins that are positioned to have small moment arms with respect to the pivot of each jaw member and it is often difficult to assess accurate jaw closure. Further, many of these known instruments generally rely on clamping pressure alone to procure proper sealing thickness and are often not designed to take into account jaw closure variables relating to gap tolerances and/or parallelism and flatness requirements, which are parameters that, if properly controlled, can assure a consistent and effective tissue seal.

SUMMARY

The present disclosure relates to a jaw closure mechanism or jaw angle detector for an end effector assembly of a forceps and includes a first electrical contact that connects to a first jaw member and connects to a generator (or a controller). A sensor is included that connects to a second jaw member (or an actuator) and connects to the generator/controller. The sensor is configured to

move relative to the first electrical contact upon movement of the second jaw member (or the actuator) when the first and second jaw members are moved to close about tissue disposed therebetween. Information relating to the position of the sensor relative to the first electrical contact is relayed back to the generator/controller to determine an angle between the first and second jaw members. This information is conveyed to the user by a monitor or other type of visual or audible indicator. The relative position of the first electrical contact relative to the sensor may be represented in binary code.

In some embodiments, the sensor includes a variable resistor, a series of resistors or a voltage divider network (potentiometer) that relays information back to the generator (or controller). In yet another embodiment, the sensor includes a variable capacitor that may include first and second conductive rings, the first conductive ring being fixed relative to the second conductive ring.

In another embodiment, the sensor includes a second electrical contact that is positioned to conduct a signal back to the generator/controller when the second electrical contact electrically connects to the first electrical contact upon the jaw members closing about tissue past a particular angle, e.g., a threshold angle. The threshold angle being an angle wherein the jaw members are closed about tissue to assure a consistent and reliable seal.

The present disclosure also relates to a jaw angle detector having first and second jaw members and first and second conductors (e.g., conductive rings) adapted to connect to a capacitive sensing circuit of an electrical generator. The first conductor is fixed relative to the second conductor and the second conductor is moveable relative to the first conductor upon movement of the jaw members from a first spaced position relative to one another to a second position closer to one

another. Information relating to the position of the second conductor relative to the first conductor is relayed back to the capacitive sensing circuit to determine an angle between the first and second jaw members. In embodiments, the second conductor is attached to a drive rod of an endoscopic electrosurgical forceps or a movable jaw member of a unilateral endoscopic electrosurgical forceps.

The present disclosure also relates to a jaw angle detector that includes first and second jaw members each having proximally extending flanges adapted to connect to an electrosurgical energy source for conducting energy through tissue held between jaw members. A conductor is disposed on the proximal flange of the first jaw member and a variable resistor (e.g., series of resistors, voltage divider network, etc.) is disposed on the proximal flange of the second jaw member in opposing relation to the conductor. The first conductor and the variable resistor are adapted to relay a signal to a sensing circuit of the electrosurgical generator. The movement of the jaw members from an open spaced apart position to a closed position causes the conductor to move across the variable resistor and vary the signal relayed back to the sensing circuit, which, in turn, determines an angle between the first and second jaw members. In embodiments, the variable resistor is disposed in a port defined in the second jaw member, the port being configured to mechanically receive the conductor therein.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Various embodiments of the present disclosure are described herein with reference to the drawings wherein:

Fig. 1A is a side view of unilateral laparoscopic bipolar forceps

configured to support one embodiment of a jaw closure detection system according to the present disclosure;

Fig. 1B is an enlarged, side view of an end effector assembly of an open bipolar forceps configured to support another embodiment of a jaw closure detection system according to the present disclosure;

Fig. 2 is an enlarged, side view of an end effector assembly of an open bipolar forceps configured to support one embodiment of a jaw closure detection system according to the present disclosure;

Fig. 3 is a side view of a bilateral endoscopic bipolar forceps configured to support another embodiment of a jaw closure detection system according to the present disclosure including a variable resistor;

Fig. 4A is a front, perspective view of an end effector assembly of an open forceps showing a jaw closure detection system in a first orientation prior to grasping tissue;

Fig. 4B is a front, perspective view of the end effector assembly of Fig 4A showing the jaw closure detection system in a second orientation with the jaw members closed;

Fig. 5 is a schematic view of a drive actuator of an endoscopic forceps configured to support another embodiment of a jaw closure detection system according to the present disclosure including a variable capacitor; and

Fig. 6 is a schematic circuit diagram of a capacitive sensing circuit for use with the variable capacitor of Fig. 5.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring to Figs 1A-6, various embodiments of a jaw closure detector or sensing mechanism are disclosed in accordance with the present disclosure. A laparoscopic, an endoscopic, or an open instrument may be utilized for supporting the jaw closure detector assembly; however, different electrical and mechanical connections and considerations apply to each particular type of instrument. In addition, although the following description is directed towards a jaw closure detection system in conjunction with an electrosurgical device, the principles of the present invention may also be used in conjunction with any suitable type of instrument having jaws that open and close, such as ultrasonic instruments. In the drawings and in the description that follows, the term "proximal", as is traditional, will refer to the end of the forceps that is closer to the user, while the term "distal" will refer to the end of the forceps that is further from the user.

Fig. 1A shows a unilateral laparoscopic vessel sealing forceps 10 that is configured to support an electrode sealing assembly 100. Forceps 10 typically includes various conventional features (e.g., housing, a handle assembly, a rotating assembly, a trigger assembly (all not shown)) that enable the forceps 10 and the end effector assembly 100 to mutually cooperate to grasp, seal and, if warranted, divide tissue. The forceps 10 includes a shaft 12 that has a distal end 14 dimensioned to mechanically engage the end effector assembly 100 and a proximal end (not shown) that mechanically engages the housing (not shown). Details relating to the inter-cooperative relationships of the various components of forceps 10 are disclosed in commonly-owned U.S. Patent Application No. 11/348,072.

Forceps 10 also includes a plug (not shown) that connects the forceps 10 to a source of energy, e.g., an electrosurgical generator 501, via one or more electrical cables (not shown). Other electrical connections (not shown) are positioned through the shaft 12 and end effector assembly 100 to supply bipolar electrical energy to opposing sealing surfaces 112 and 122 of jaw members 110 and 120, respectively. The jaw members 110 and 120 move in response to movement of an actuator or handle (not shown) from an open position wherein the electrically conductive sealing surfaces 112 and 122 are disposed in spaced relation relative to one another, to a clamping or closed position wherein the electrically conductive sealing surfaces 112 and 122 cooperate to grasp tissue 401 (See Fig. 2) therebetween. Again, details relating to the inter-cooperative relationships of the inner-working components of the actuator or handle of the forceps 10 are disclosed in commonly-owned U.S. Patent Application No. 11/348,072. When the electrically conductive sealing surfaces 112 and 122 of the jaw members 110 and 120 are fully compressed about the tissue, the forceps 10 is now ready for selective application of electrosurgical energy.

As mentioned above, Fig. 1A shows a bipolar forceps 10 that includes a unilateral end effector assembly 100 having one stationary or fixed jaw member 120 mounted in fixed relation to the shaft 12 and pivoting jaw member 110 mounted about a pivot pin 103 attached to the stationary jaw member 120. A reciprocating sleeve 60 is slidably disposed within the shaft 12 and is remotely operable by the drive actuator (not shown). The pivoting jaw member 110 includes a detent or protrusion 125 that extends from jaw member 110 through an aperture defined within the reciprocating sleeve 60. The pivoting jaw member 110 is actuated by sliding the sleeve 60 axially within the shaft 12 such that a distal end of the aperture

abuts against the detent 125 on the pivoting jaw member 110. Pulling the sleeve 60 proximally closes the jaw members 110 and 120 about tissue grasped therebetween and pushing the sleeve 60 distally opens the jaw members 110 and 120 for grasping purposes.

In one embodiment, one of the jaw members, e.g. jaw member 110, includes a sensor 30 disposed on detent 125. Reciprocating sleeve 60 includes one or more corresponding sensors 40a-40c disposed on a distal end 61 thereof. The sensors 30 and 40a-40c are electrically coupled to a feedback circuit associated with the generator 501 or an independent controller 502 via leads 75b and 75a, respectively, which determines the position of sensor 30 relative to sensors 40a-40c, respectively, and associates the relative position with a jaw angle " α " between jaw members 110 and 120. The sensors 30 and 40a-40c may be magnetic, resistive, capacitive, optical or any other suitable type of sensor. In use, as the user actuates the drive sleeve 60 proximally to close the jaw members 110 and 120 relative to one another, sensor 30, in turn, moves relative to sensors 40c-40a. The feedback loop calculates the angle " α " of the jaw members 110 and 120 and provides the information back to the user.

The sensors 30 and 40a-40c may also be configured to provide additional feedback to the user relating to tissue thickness (based on relative resistance to closure), speed of jaw closure and if the jaw members 110 and 120 are closed appropriately about tissue for application of electrosurgical energy. Moreover, jaw closure angle " α " may be used to determine a "re-grasp" condition during sealing due to insufficient jaw closure or may be used to determine the overall adequacy of the seal either prior to, during, or after activation. In another

embodiment, the jaw closure angle " α " may be used modify the energy delivery from the generator 501 to enhance the sealing process.

As shown in Fig. 2, in another embodiment, a single electrical contact 240 may act as a sensor to determine jaw closure and provide information to the generator 501 regarding the jaw angle " α ". For example, Fig. 2 shows another forceps design 200 that includes two opposing jaw members 210 and 220 movable relative to one another about a pivot 265 to engage tissue. Jaw members 210 and 220 each include an electrically conductive surface 212 and 222, respectively, disposed thereon that connects to generator 501 for selectively conducting bipolar energy through tissue.

Jaw member 220 also includes a proximal portion or base 245 having guide slot 224 defined therein that allows a terminal connector 250 or so-called "POGO" pin to ride therein upon movement of the jaw members 210 and 220 from the open to closed positions. A corresponding base 235 of jaw member 210 includes a sensor or contact 240 disposed proximate slot 224 that electrically connects to the generator 501 or independent controller 502. As explained above, the sensor 240 may be configured to provide information back to the generator via one or more feedback loops relating to the angle " α " of the jaw members 210 and 220 relative to one another.

Sensor 240 may also be configured to provide additional information back to the generator 501 as explained above. In one embodiment, the sensor 240 may act as a safety mechanism wherein the electrical contact 240 simply determines if the two opposing jaw members 210 and 220 are moved close enough together (e.g., have moved past a threshold angle) for application of electrical energy. In this manner, when the jaw members 210 and 220 are closed to an angle less than

desired or less than appropriate to commence sealing, the sensor 240 does not electrically connect to terminal connector 250 to send a signal back to the generator 501 to allow activation. For example, when the jaw members 210 and 220 are opened at an angle not appropriate to seal vessels or tissue, the sensor 240 may be positioned opposite (or relative to) a non-conductive material and, as a result, does not conduct a signal back to the generator 501. Conversely, when the jaw members 210 and 220 are closed past a threshold angle, the sensor 240 is positioned opposite (or relative to) terminal connector 250 and conducts a signal back to generator 501 to allow activation.

Referring to Fig. 1B, in some embodiments, a series of sensors e.g., sensors 140a and 140b, may be employed along or on a distal end of drive sleeve 160 such that the relative angle " α " between the jaw members 110 and 120 may be divided into discreet units for finer resolution. For example, in the instance where two sensors 140a and 140b are utilized to determine the relative angle between jaw members 110 and 120, information relating to the state of conductivity of each electrical connection between the respective sensors 140a and 140b and connector 130 can be communicated back to the generator 501 via leads 133, 143a and 143b, respectively, in binary format, e.g., "00" (no contact with either sensor 143a or 143b); "01" (contact with first sensor 143a); "11" (contact with both sensors 143a and 143b); and "10" (contact with second sensor 143b).

Fig. 3 shows yet another forceps 300 that utilizes a variable resistor 340, e.g., a voltage divider network ("VDN"), to determine jaw angle " α ". VDN 340 may be a film-type potentiometer that forms a switch closure. For the purposes herein, the term "voltage divider network" relates to any suitable form of resistive, capacitive or inductive switch closure (or the like) that determines the output voltage

across a voltage source (e.g., one of two impedances) connected in series. A “voltage divider” as used herein relates to a number of resistors connected in series that are provided with taps at certain points to make available a fixed or variable fraction of the applied voltage.

In the illustrated embodiment, actuating pin 330 would act as a contact across the VDN 340 such that, as the actuating pin 330 is translated within a slot 345 within shaft 312 and respective cam slots 374 and 372 in jaw members 310 and 320, the actuating pin 330 would move relative to the VDN 340, thereby varying the intensity of the signal relayed back to the generator 501 which, in turn, may be utilized to determine jaw angle “ α ”. Additional wiring (not shown) may be required to accomplish this purpose, but a finer resolution of jaw angle “ α ” may be determined.

Figs. 4A and 4B show another embodiment of an open forceps 400 having a similar style sensor arrangement for determining jaw angle “ α ”. More particularly, forceps 400 includes two opposing jaw members 410 and 420 that are movable relative to one another about a pivot 450. Each jaw member 410 and 420 includes a flange 442 and 432 that extends proximally therefrom. Flange 432 includes a contact 440 that is mechanically received within a complementary interface 431 disposed on flange 442 that houses VDN 430. During movement of the jaw members 410 and 420 from the open position to the closed position, contact 440 moves from a spaced position relative to interface 431 (as shown in Fig. 4A) to a series of subsequent positions within interface 431 as the contact 440 moves across the VDN (or series of resistors), thereby varying the intensity of the signal relayed back to the generator 501 for determining jaw angle “ α ”.

Fig. 5 shows another embodiment of a forceps 500 wherein a drive actuator 560 has been modified to include a variable capacitor 520 to determine the jaw angle " α " between two opposing jaw members, e.g., jaw members 110 and 120. More particularly, variable capacitor 520 includes a fixed conductor, e.g., a conductive ring 540 disposed on a forceps housing (not shown) or jaw member 110 and 120 that encapsulates a second conductor, e.g., a conductive ring 530, disposed on the drive actuator 560. Movement of the drive actuator 560 moves the conductive ring 530 relative to the conductive ring 540. A dielectric insulator (not shown) may be placed between the two rings 530 and 540 (e.g., air or insulating lubricant).

As the drive actuator 560 moves to close the jaw members 110 and 120, the conductive rings 530 move relative to the fixed conductive ring 540 thereby changing the capacitance between the two conductive rings 530 and 540 based on a capacitive sensing circuit 600 described below with respect to Fig. 6. The change in capacitance can be detected and transmitted to the generator 501 or controller 502 to determine the jaw closure angle " α " between the two jaw members 110 and 120. In one embodiment, the conductive rings 530 and 540 may both be movable relative to one another to accomplish a similar purpose.

Fig. 6 shows one example of a variable capacitance circuit 600 for use with the embodiment described with respect to Fig. 5. As mentioned above, the conductive rings 540 and 530 form a variable capacitor 520 that transmits a signal back to the generator 501 and circuit 600. The connection of the variable capacitor 520 to the voltage source (labeled +5v) causes the variable capacitor 520 to charge when S2 is open, S3 is open and S1 is shut. After a predetermined amount of time, S1 opens and S2 shuts. This causes the charge stored on the variable capacitor

520 to be transferred to the charge capacitor 620. S2 then opens and the process is repeated for a predetermined number of cycles. The resulting voltage on the charge capacitor 620 can then be read (in this case by an analog to digital converter 630). S3 is then closed and re-opened to discharge the charge capacitor 620. The entire cycle is then repeated at a desired read rate. The read voltage is proportional to the capacitance of the variable capacitor 520 which, in turn, relates to the jaw angle " α " between jaw members, e.g., jaw members 110 and 120.

From the foregoing and with reference to the various figure drawings, those skilled in the art will appreciate that certain modifications can also be made to the present disclosure without departing from the scope of the same. For example, one or more stop members may be disposed adjacent to or disposed on one or both electrically conductive sealing surfaces of the jaw members to regulate the gap distance between conductive surfaces. The distance the stop members extend from the electrically conductive surfaces may effect the jaw angle " α " between jaw members. The generator may have to be programmed (automatically or manually) to account for this feature when determining the overall jaw angle " α " and any type of threshold angle as mentioned above. Moreover, the tissue thickness may also effect the jaw angle " α ". Again the generator may have to be programmed (automatically or manually) to compensate for these various tissue types.

One or more of the jaw closure detectors described herein may be configured to detect the change in the jaw closure angle " α " over a period of time during the sealing process. This information may also be relayed back to the generator for determining seal quality and overall success of the resulting seal.

In some embodiments, any of jaw closure detectors described herein may be coupled to a controller 502 (Fig. 1A) that is electrically coupled to the

generator 501 or, in some instances, independent from the generator 501. The controller 501 (if independent) may be configured to provide any or all of the features described herein with respect generator 501.

While several embodiments of the disclosure have been shown in the drawings and/or discussed herein, it is not intended that the disclosure be limited thereto, as it is intended that the disclosure be as broad in scope as the art will allow and that the specification be read likewise. Therefore, the above description should not be construed as limiting, but merely as exemplifications of particular embodiments. Those skilled in the art will envision other modifications within the scope and spirit of the claims appended hereto.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A jaw angle detection system for an end effector assembly, comprising:
 - a first electrical contact associated with a first jaw member and adapted to connect to one of a controller and a generator; and
 - a sensor associated with one of a second jaw member and an actuator and adapted to connect to one of the controller and the generator, the sensor configured to move relative to the first electrical contact upon movement of one of the respective second jaw member and the actuator when the first and second jaw members are moved to close about tissue disposed therebetween, wherein information relating to the position of the sensor relative to the first electrical contact is relayed back to one of the controller and the generator to determine an angle between the first and second jaw members.
2. A jaw angle detection system according to claim 1, wherein the sensor includes a series of resistors.
3. A jaw angle detection system according to claim 2, wherein the sensor includes a voltage divider network.
4. A jaw angle detection system according to claim 1, wherein the sensor includes a second electrical contact that is positioned to conduct a signal back to one of the controller and the generator when the second electrical contact electrically connects to the first electrical contact upon the jaw members closing about tissue past a threshold angle.

5. A jaw angle detection system according to claim 2, wherein the relative position of the first electrical contact relative to the sensor is represented in binary code.
6. A jaw angle detection system according to claim 1, wherein the sensor includes a variable capacitor.
7. A jaw angle detection system according to claim 6, wherein the variable capacitor includes first and second conductive rings, the first conductive ring fixed relative to the second conductive ring.
8. A jaw angle detection method, comprising:
 - sensing a position of a first jaw member relative to a second jaw member of an end effector assembly;
 - conducting a signal representative of the sensed position back to one of a controller and a generator;
 - determining an angle between the first and second jaw members based on the signal; and
 - modifying energy delivery to the jaw members based on the determined angle.
9. A jaw angle detection method according to claim 8, further comprising providing information to a user based on the determined angle, the information selected from the group consisting of a tissue thickness, a rate of closure of the jaw members, a seal quality, and a re-grasp condition.

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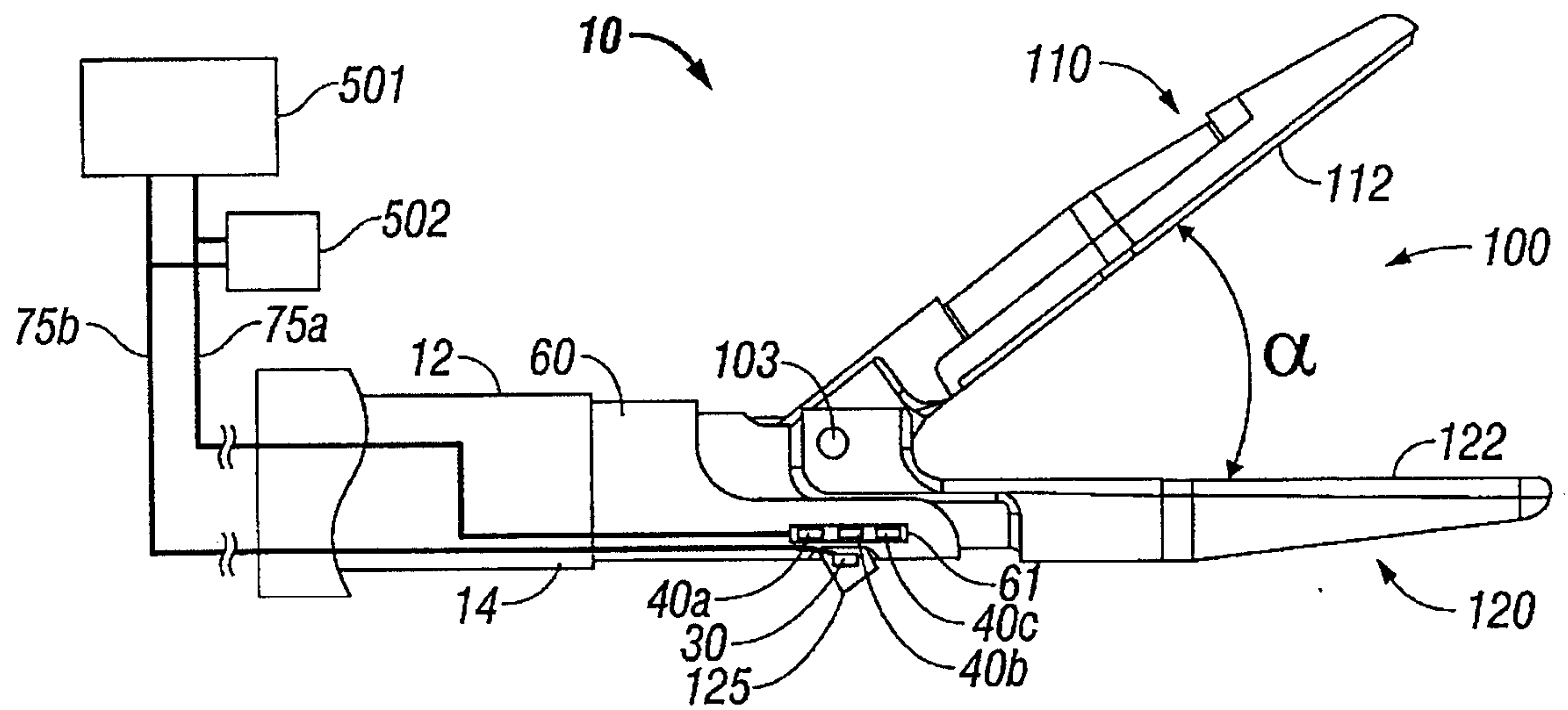


FIG. 1A

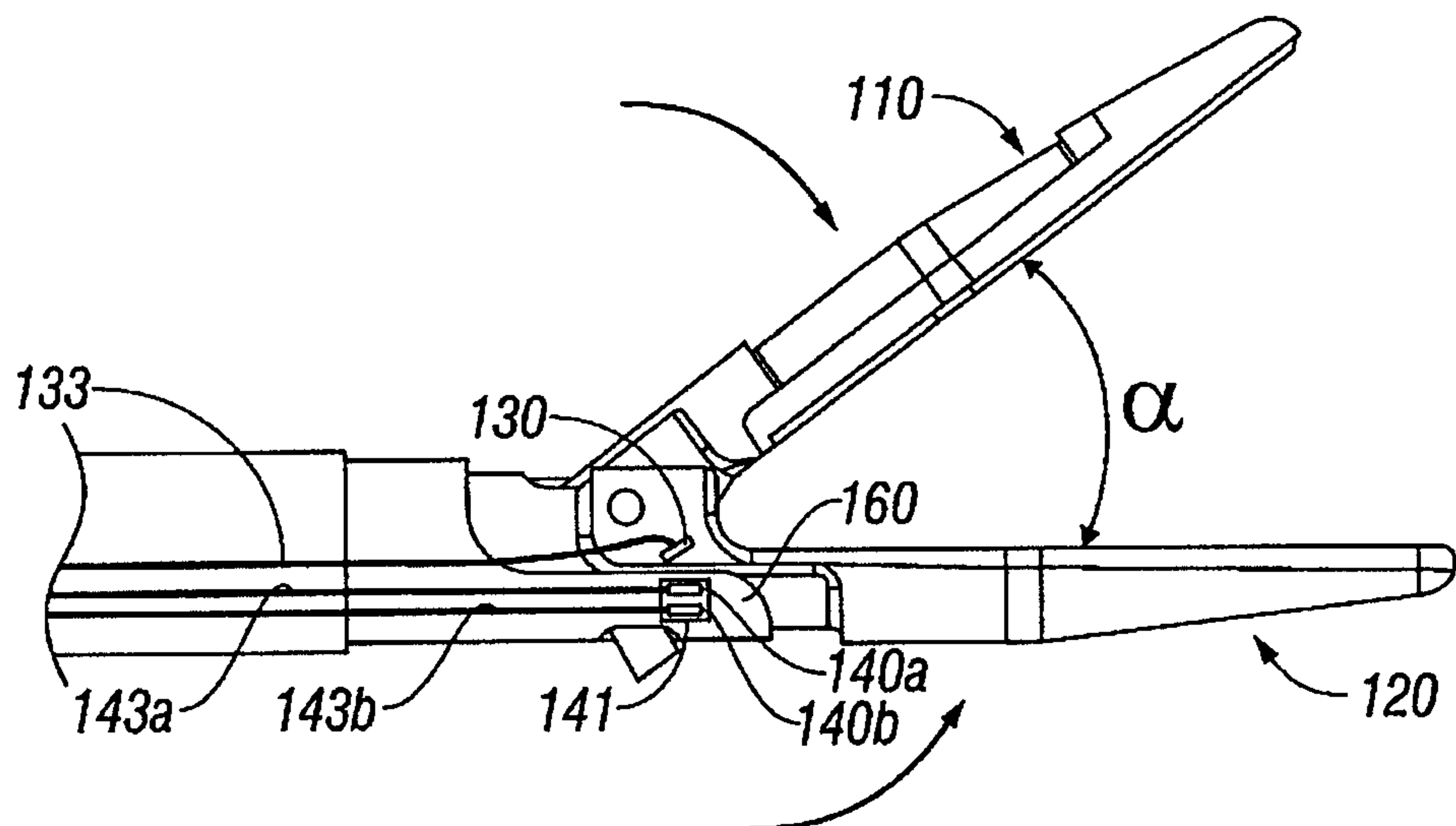


FIG. 1B

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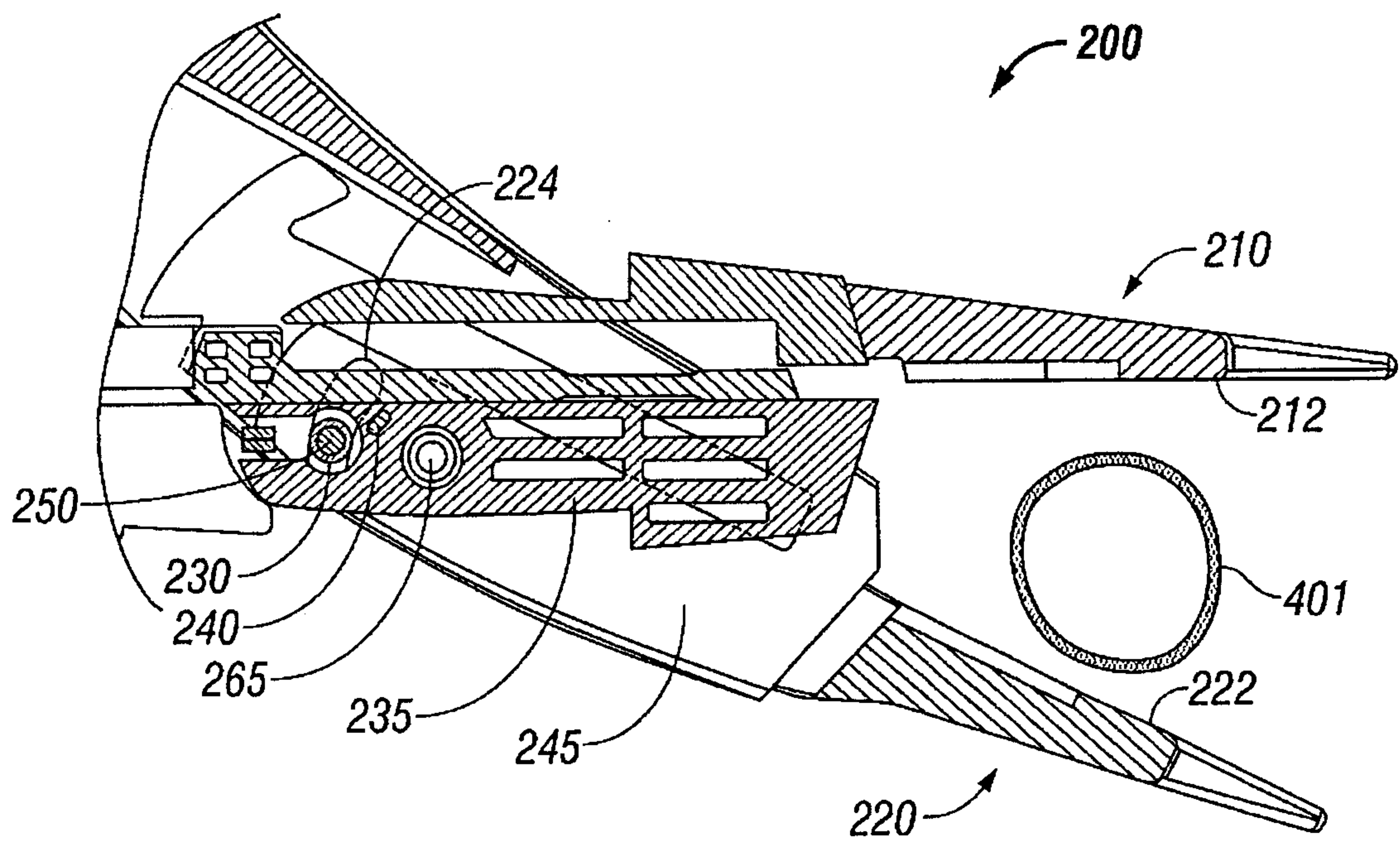


FIG. 2

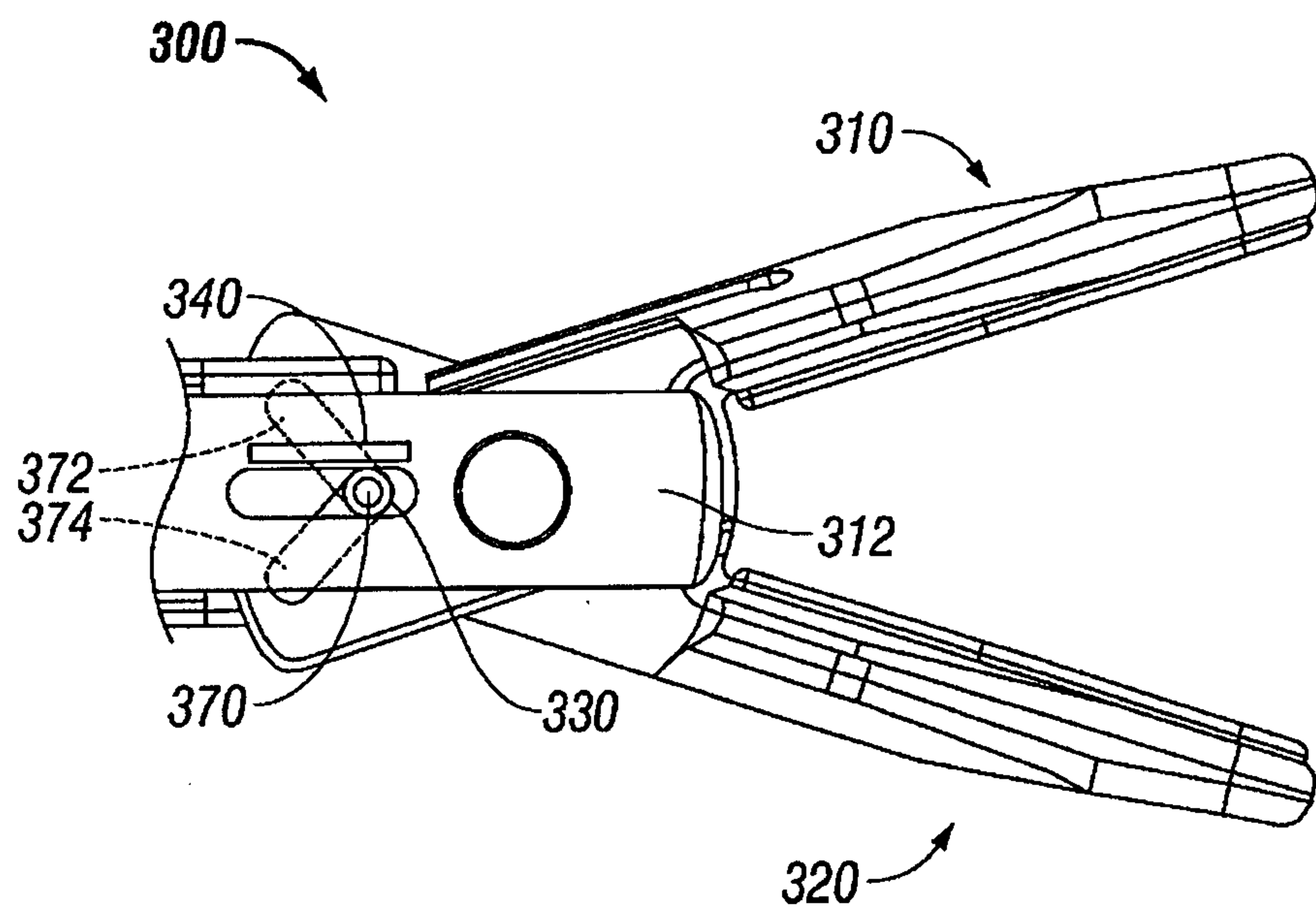
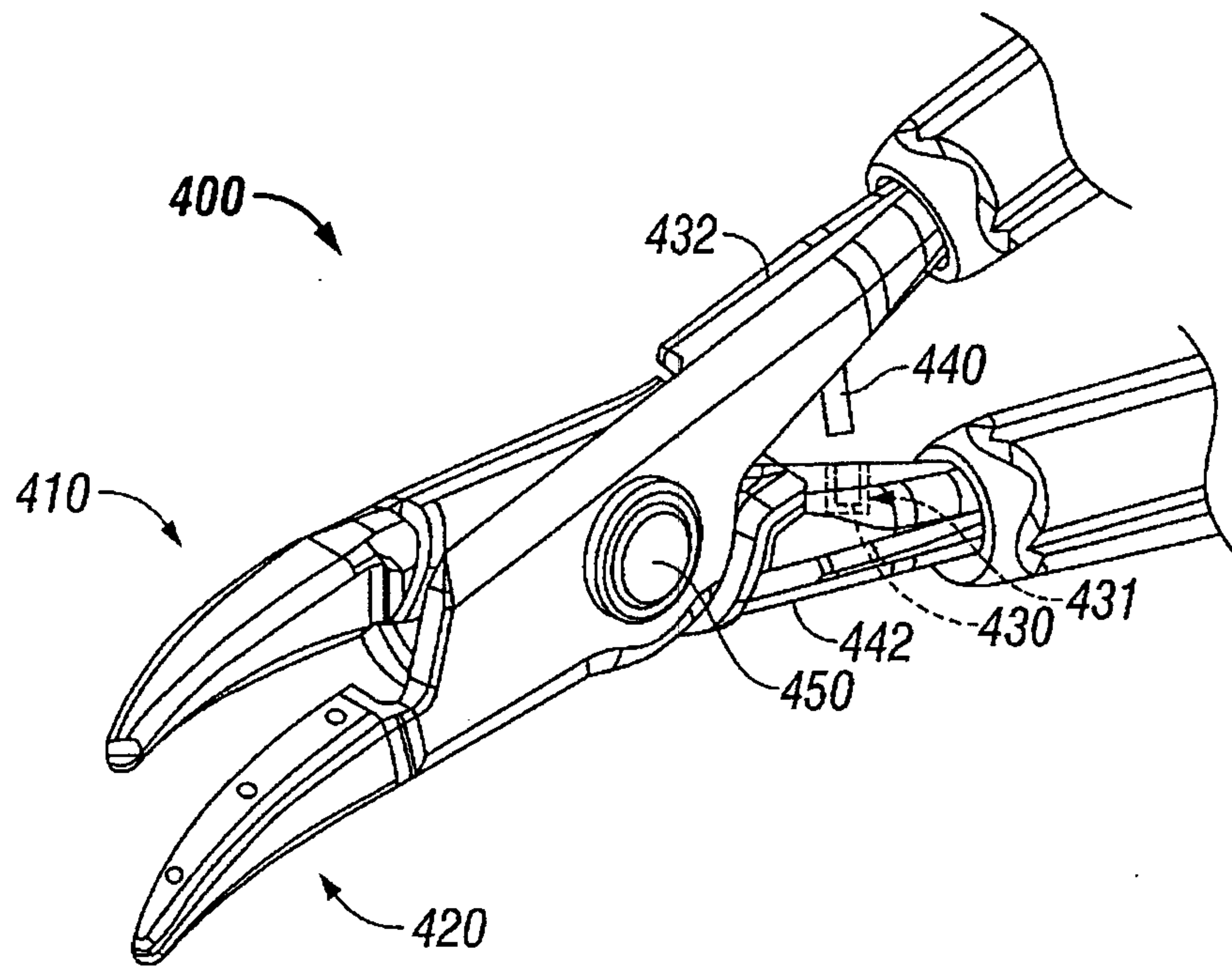
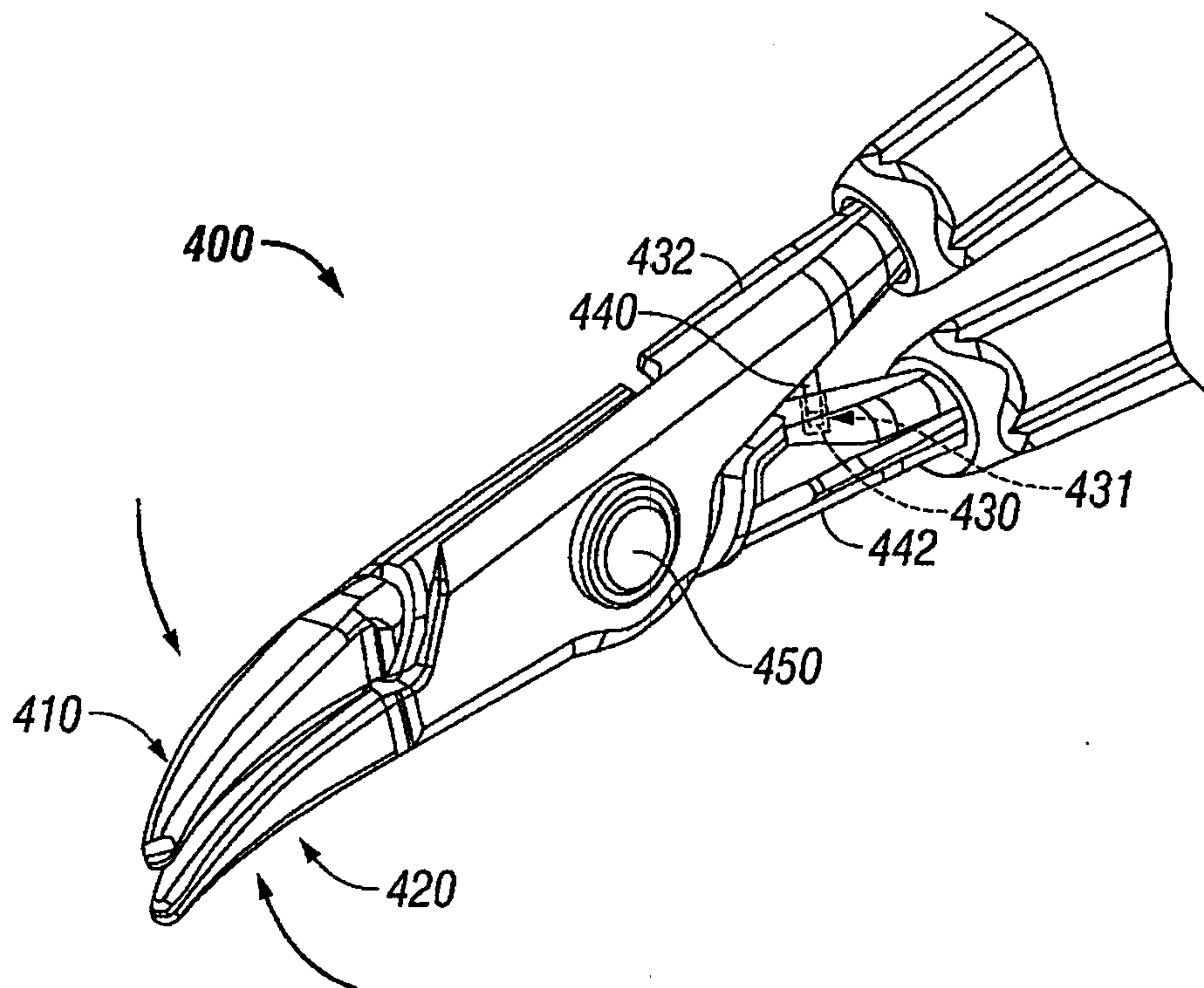


FIG. 3

3/4**FIG. 4A****FIG. 4B**

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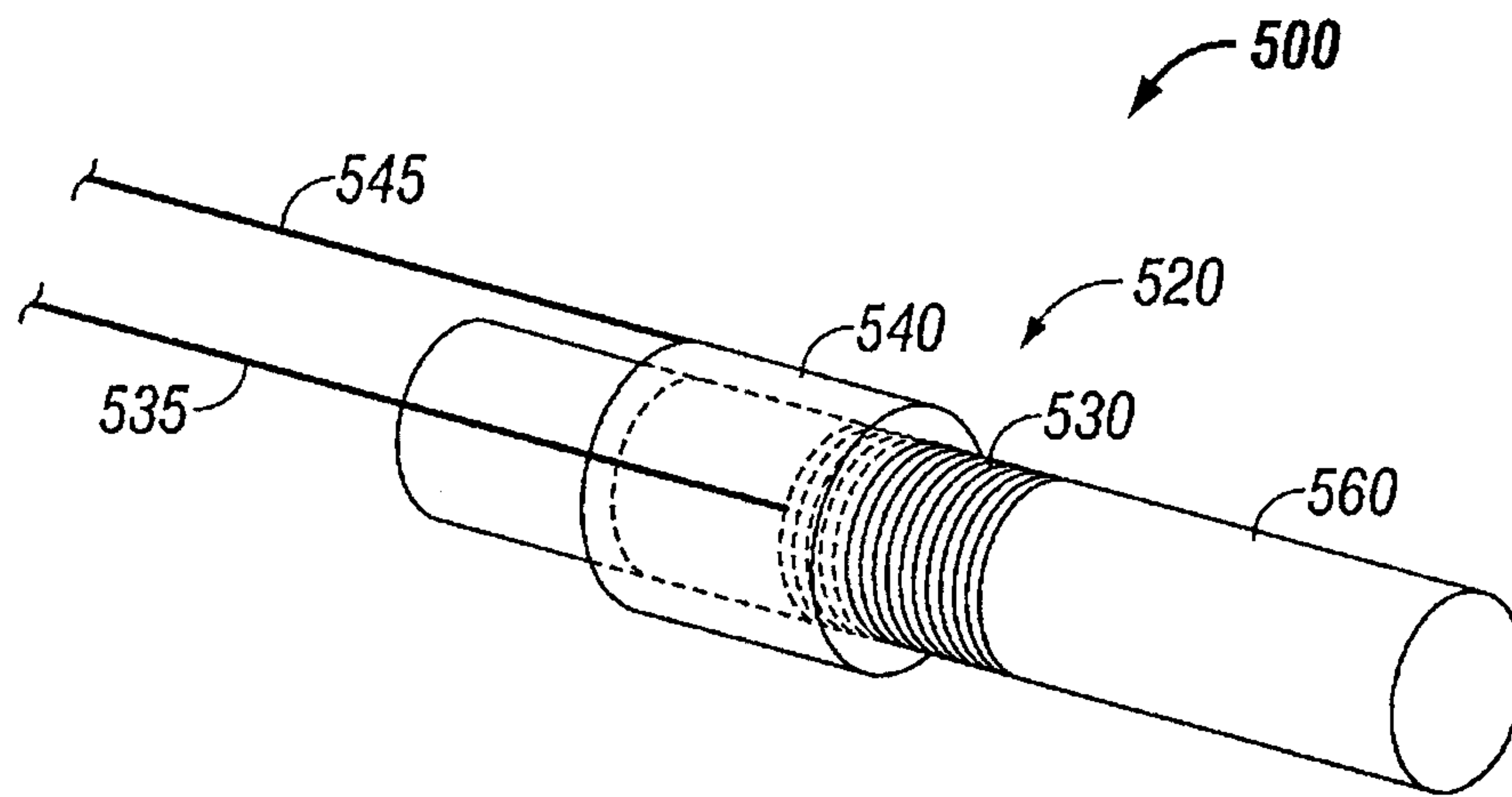


FIG. 5

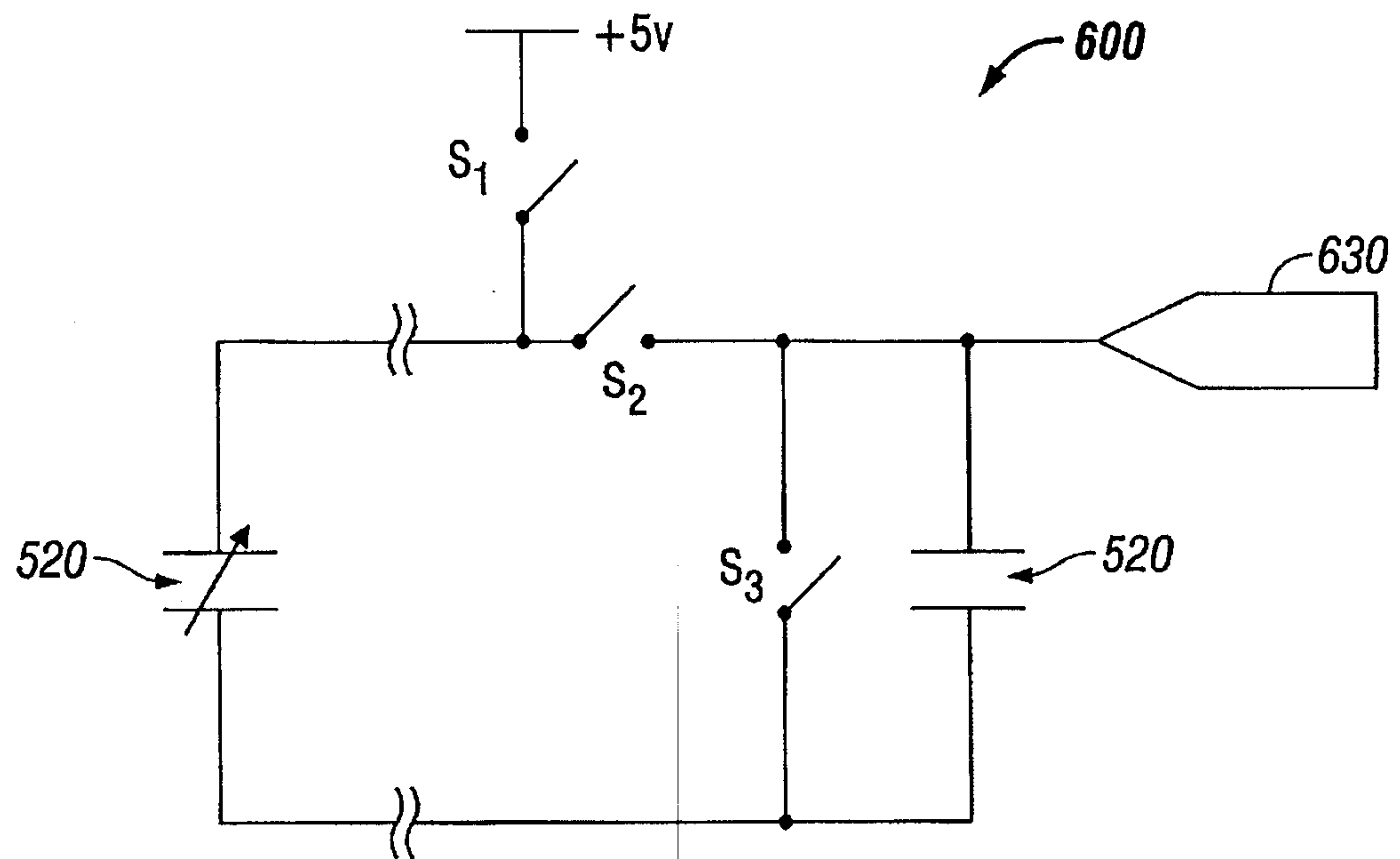


FIG. 6

