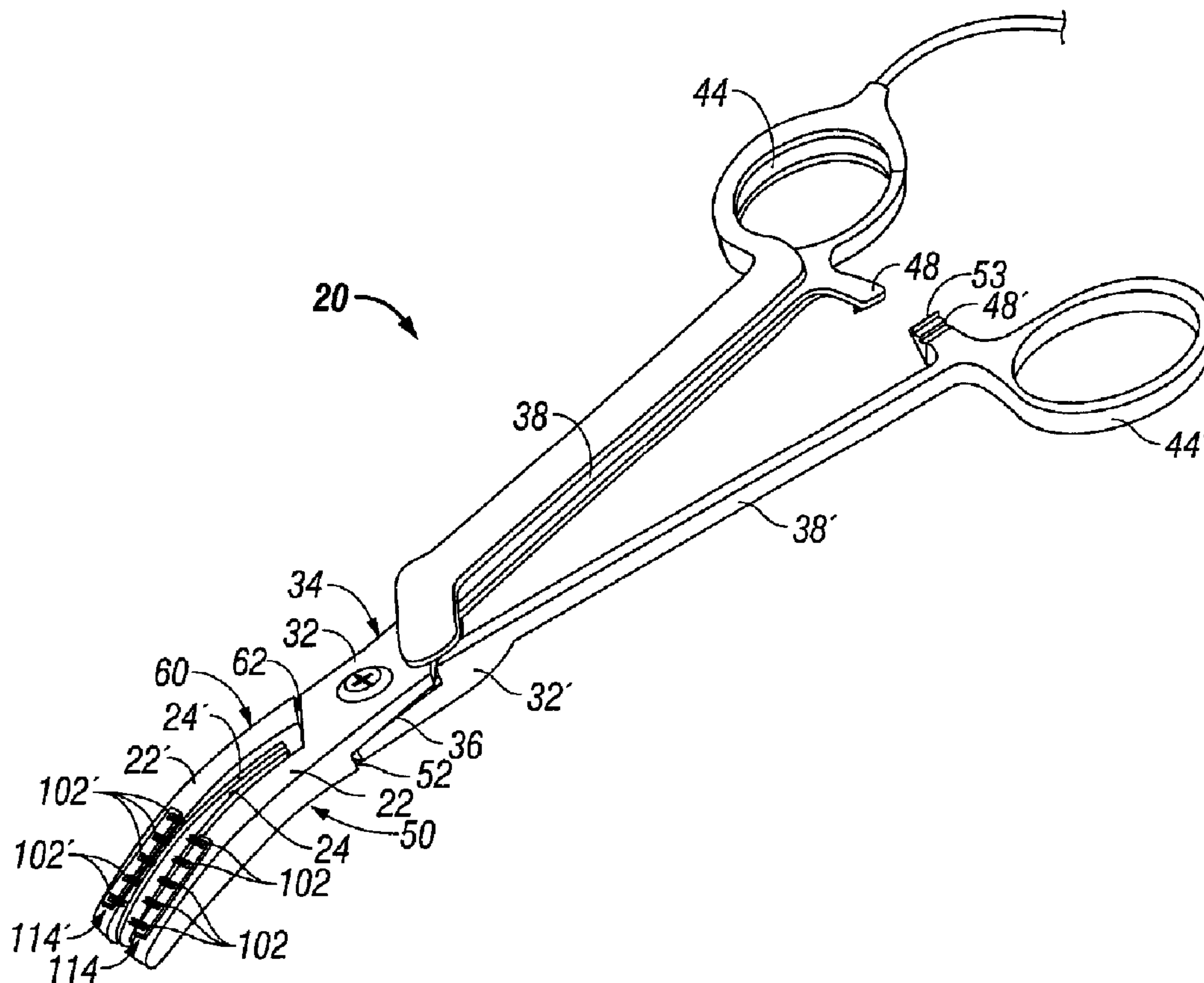




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(54) Titre : OBTURATEUR ELECTROCHIRURGICAL BIPOLAIRE EQUIPE D'UNE PINCE A TISSUS AMELIOREE
(54) Title: A BIPOLAR ELECTROSURGICAL SEALING INSTRUMENT HAVING AN IMPROVED TISSUE GRIPPING
DEVICE



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

A bipolar electrocautery instrument has inner and outer members each having a respective jaw member disposed at a distal end thereof. Each jaw members has right and left side surfaces and seal surface. The seal surfaces are adapted to connect to an



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

electrical energy source such that the seal surfaces are capable of conducting bipolar energy therebetween. The inner and outer members are movable from a first position where the jaw members are disposed in spaced relation relative to one another to a second position where the jaw members are closer to one another for grasping tissue. The instrument further has a first gripping device disposed on at least one of the right and left side surfaces of one of the jaw members. The first gripping device includes tines extending therefrom dimensioned to engage and hold tissue when the jaw members are moved from the first position to the second position.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A bipolar electrosurgical instrument has inner and outer members each having a respective jaw member disposed at a distal end thereof. Each jaw
5 members has right and left side surfaces and seal surface. The seal surfaces are adapted to connect to an electrical energy source such that the seal surfaces are capable of conducting bipolar energy therebetween. The inner and outer members are movable from a first position where the jaw members are disposed in spaced relation relative to one another to a second position where the jaw
10 members are closer to one another for grasping tissue. The instrument further has a first gripping device disposed on at least one of the right and left side surfaces of one of the jaw members. The first gripping device includes tines extending therefrom dimensioned to engage and hold tissue when the jaw members are moved from the first position to the second position.

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A BIPOLAR ELECTROSURGICAL SEALING INSTRUMENT HAVING AN IMPROVED TISSUE GRIPPING DEVICE

BACKGROUND

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1. Technical Field

[001] The present disclosure relates to an electrosurgical instrument for permanently closing epidermis and/or body tissue sections in a human or animal, and more particularly to a bipolar electrosurgical instrument having an improved gripping device. The gripping device grips, pulls together and seals epidermis and dermis tissue sections by applying a combination of pressure and electrosurgical current, while not disturbing any subcutaneous adipose tissue sections. The gripping device could also be used to oppose and fuse other types of tissue.

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2. Background of the Related Art

[002] Coagulation instruments are known in the art. Coagulation is defined as a process of desiccating tissue wherein the tissue cells are ruptured and dried. Vessel sealing is also known in the art. Vessel sealing is the process of liquefying the collagen in the tissue so that it crosslinks and reforms into a fused mass. Coagulation of vessels is thus sufficient to permanently close them. Small and large vessels may be sealed to assure a permanent closure.

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[003] Typically, to seal vessels and/or tissue the selected tissue or vessel is placed between a first seal surface and a second seal surface of an instrument. A handle with a first looped member and a second looped member is gripped. The handle controls the seal surfaces to grip and hold the selected tissue or vessel between the first seal surface and the second seal surface. Thereafter, an electrical current is introduced through the instrument. The current is introduced by actuating an actuator to direct the current through the

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first seal surface through the tissue or vessel and through the second seal surface. This electrical current and the pressure imparted to the selected vessel (or tissue) causes coagulation or a liquefying of the collagen in the tissue so that that the liquefied tissue is cross-linked and the tissue reforms into a fused mass.

5 Thereafter, the seal is completed and the instrument is withdrawn by the surgeon.

[004] Full depth skin incisions usually involve a laceration or injury where a tissue section having an epidermis section, a dermis section and a
10 subcutaneous adipose section are all cut. Some so called "full depth" cuts or so called "full depth incisions" extend into the skin a predetermined depth. The depth is through the top epidermis section through the intermediate dermis section and also sometimes through the bottom subcutaneous adipose section.

15 [005] The outermost epidermis is made from a stratified squamous epithelium. These stratified squamous epithelium cells typically can withstand an amount of stress and are easier to manipulate relative to other layers. The subcutaneous adipose section, however, is made from a loose connective tissue. This loose connective tissue is more difficult to manipulate relative to the
20 previously described stratified squamous epithelium. The cells of this type of loose connective tissue are generally separated by quite some distance relative to the previously described stratified squamous epithelium and are separated by a gel-like or gelatinous substance. The gel-like or gelatinous substance is primarily made up of collagenous and elastic fibers.

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[006] This gelatinous substance is difficult to manipulate and will move and slip around if placed between, for example, the jaws of a bipolar instrument. This does not contribute to treatment of the epidermis of the full depth skin incisions using electrical current and pressure to cause coagulation or a
30 liquefying of the epidermis so that that the liquefied tissue is cross-linked and the tissue reforms into a fused mass. A known problem is that in these applications

(if it is even attempted) the subcutaneous adipose section will slide from the jaws and thus drag other tissue sections with it. This gelatinous substance of the subcutaneous adipose section impedes alignment of any lacerated edges of the epidermis and skin sections that are desired to be sealed. Thus, a known
5 problem in the art is that the surgeon has difficulty applying the electrical current successfully to the epidermis section of such a full depth skin incision, and the lacerated edges are difficult to align and maintain in alignment once aligned between the jaws for treatment.

10 [007] Accordingly, there is a need for an improved gripping device for a bipolar sealing device for aligning a first lacerated edge of a first tissue component with a second lacerated edge of another tissue component. There is also a need for such a gripping device that holds and prevents the lacerated tissue component from traversing out from any alignment between the first and
15 second tissue components. There is also a further need for such a gripping device for a bipolar sealing device that only grips a preselected optimal amount of the tissue and does not disturb other tissue in order to align the first and the second lacerated edges for coagulation.

20 **SUMMARY**

[008] According to a first aspect of the present disclosure, there is provided a bipolar electrosurgical instrument. The bipolar electrosurgical instrument has inner and outer members each having a respective jaw member
25 disposed at a distal end thereof. Each jaw member has right and left side surfaces and seal surface. The seal surfaces are adapted to connect to an electrical energy source such that the seal surfaces are capable of conducting bipolar energy therebetween. The inner and outer members are movable from a first position where the jaw members are disposed in spaced relation relative to
30 one another to a second position where the jaw members are closer to one another for grasping tissue. The instrument further has a first gripping device

disposed on at least one of the right and left side surfaces of one of the jaw members. The first gripping device includes tines extending therefrom dimensioned to engage and hold tissue when the jaw members are moved from the first position to the second position.

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[009] According to another aspect of the present disclosure, there is provided a bipolar electrosurgical instrument having inner and outer members. Each has a respective jaw member disposed at a distal end thereof. Each jaw member includes right and left side surfaces and seal surface. The seal surfaces
10 are adapted to connect to an electrical energy source such that the seal surfaces are capable of conducting bipolar energy therebetween. The inner and outer members are movable from a first position wherein the jaw members are disposed in spaced relation relative to one another to a second position where the jaw members are closer to one another for grasping tissue. The instrument
15 has a first gripping device disposed on at least one of the right and left side surfaces of one of the jaw members. The first gripping device includes a plurality of tines extending therefrom dimensioned to engage and hold tissue when the jaw members are moved from the first position to the second position. The instrument also has each of the tines with a free gripping end. The free gripping
20 end is suitable to manipulate an epidermis section of tissue but not disturb a subcutaneous adipose tissue layer when the outer and inner members move from the first position to the second position.

[010] According to a further aspect of the present disclosure, there is
25 provided a bipolar electrosurgical instrument. The bipolar electrosurgical instrument has inner and outer members. Each has a respective jaw member disposed at a distal end thereof. Each jaw members includes right and left side surfaces and seal surface. The seal surfaces are adapted to connect to an electrical energy source such that the seal surfaces are capable of conducting
30 bipolar energy therebetween. The instrument has the inner and outer members movable from a first position where the jaw members are disposed in spaced

relation relative to one another to a second position where the jaw members are closer to one another for grasping tissue. The instrument also has a plurality of tines disposed on at least one of the right and left side surfaces of one of the jaw members. The tines are dimensioned to engage and hold tissue when the jaw members are moved from the first position to the second position. The tines form an epidermis gripping zone. The epidermis gripping zone is suitable to grasp and retain an epidermis section of tissue and a dermis section of tissue between the seal surfaces but not contact any subcutaneous adipose tissue layer.

[011] According to another aspect of the present disclosure, there is provided a method of sealing tissue. The method has the steps of providing a bipolar instrument including inner and outer members each having a respective jaw member disposed at a distal end thereof. Each jaw members include right and left side surfaces and a seal surface. The seal surfaces are adapted to connect to an electrical energy source such that the seal surfaces are capable of conducting bipolar energy therebetween. The instrument has a first gripping device disposed on at least one of the right and left side surfaces of one of the jaw members. The first gripping device includes a plurality of tines extending therefrom dimensioned to engage and hold tissue when the jaw members are moved from the first position to the second position. The method has the steps of moving the inner and outer members from the first to second positions and engaging tissue with the gripping device. The method further has the steps of closing the first and second jaw members about tissue and activating an electrical energy source to seal tissue between the seal surfaces.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[012] FIG. 1 is a view of a first tissue component with a first epidermis section, a first dermis, and a first subcutaneous adipose section adjacent to a second tissue component with a second epidermis section, a second dermis, and a second subcutaneous adipose section;

[013] FIG. 1A is a view of a bipolar sealing instrument for tissue fusion of the present disclosure grasping and sealing the first epidermis section with the second epidermis section and not grasping any first and second subcutaneous
5 adipose sections that disturb alignment;

[014] FIG. 2 is a close up view of the jaws of the bipolar instrument for tissue fusion having a number of tines;

10 [015] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of a bipolar instrument for tissue fusion;

[016] FIG. 3A is a close up view of a first tine;

[017] FIG. 3B is a close up of an alternative embodiment of the first tine of
15 Fig. 3A;

[018] FIG. 3C is a close up of an alternative embodiment of the first tine of Fig. 3A;

20 [019] FIG. 3D is a close up of an alternative embodiment of the first tine of Fig. 3A;

[020] FIG. 3E is a close up of an alternative embodiment of the first tine of Fig. 3A;

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[021] FIG. 3F is a close up of an alternative embodiment of the first tine of Fig. 3A;

[022] FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the bipolar sealing instrument shown
30 partially exploded;

[023] FIG. 5 is a front view of the bipolar sealing instrument of Fig. 3;

[024] FIG. 6 is a first lateral side view of the bipolar sealing instrument of Fig. 6.

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[025] FIGS. 7 and 8 are top views of the bipolar sealing instrument of Fig. 6; and

[026] FIG. 9 shows an alternative embodiment of the bipolar sealing instrument of Fig. 6 having gripping tines extending from a distal most location of the outer and the inner jaws.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[027] In the drawings and in the description which follows, the term "proximal", as is traditional, will refer to the end of the apparatus which is closest to the operator, while the term "distal" will refer to the end of the apparatus which is furthest from the operator. It should be appreciated that these designation form no limitations on the present disclosure whatsoever.

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[028] Fig. 1 shows a cross sectional view of a full depth incision with a first tissue component 10 and a second tissue component 10'. The first tissue component 10 has a first epidermis section 12, a first dermis section 14, and a first subcutaneous adipose section 16. Such a full depth incision is defined as a separation of the skin, into two portions, by a sharp object through the application of an acutely directed force that extends at least through the epidermis section 12 and the dermis section 14 of the first tissue component 10.

[029] The apparatus of the present disclosure has an improved skin grasping feature. The feature is advantageous over known surgical instruments because the apparatus and method of the present disclosure can grasp and seal

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or fuse the first tissue component 10 and the second tissue component 10' in an improved manner over the art because the apparatus only grasps at a preselected portion of the skin.

5 [030] The second tissue component 10' also shown in cross section in Fig. 1 has a second epidermis section 12', a second dermis section 14', and a second subcutaneous adipose section 16'. As can be understood from the figures, the tissue components 10 and 10' are shown as separated from one another by a distance marked by reference letter "d" for illustration purposes.
10 However, in actuality some tissue components may be separated by a slight difference or gap and other tissue sections may be separated by another or different distance. Further, in another embodiment some of the tissue components (such as the first and second subcutaneous adipose sections 16 and 16') may be still connected to one another while some other tissue
15 components may be fully separated from one another by the distance "d". Various configurations are possible and are all within the scope of the present disclosure.

[031] Fig. 1A shows a cross sectional view of a first tissue component 10
20 and a second tissue component 10' and bipolar sealing instrument of the present disclosure generally represented by reference number 20. The bipolar sealing instrument 20 has a jaw member 50 with a first seal surface 24 and a jaw member 60 with a second seal surface 24'. The jaw members 50, 60 move from an opened position where the jaw members 50, 60 are separated relative to one
25 another to a closed position wherein the first seal surface 24 is closer to the second seal surface 24'.

[032] The first and the second jaw members 50, 60 are selectively
positionable to grasp the tissue (i.e., the first tissue component 10 and the
30 second tissue component 10') along the lateral edges between the jaw members 50, 60. One significant advantage of the present disclosure over other known

devices is that bipolar sealing instrument 20 aligns only the desired tissue components between the seal surfaces 24, 24' as shown in Fig. 1A.

[033] Once aligned, the user selectively activates the bipolar sealing instrument 20 to energize the seal surfaces 24, 24' to apply bipolar energy across the seal surfaces 24 and 24'. One example of a sealing instrument is disclosed in commonly-owned United States Patent Nos. 6,187,003, 6,726,686 B2, and 6,352,536 to Buysse, et al. which are all herein incorporated by reference in their entirety. Other instruments are disclosed in commonly owned PCT Patent Application Serial No. PCT/US01/11420, U.S. application Ser. No. 09/425,696 and U.S. application Ser. No. 09/178,027, which are all herein incorporated by reference in their entirety.

[034] It has been observed with a skin sealing application that it is desirable to only grip the first epidermis section 12 with the first dermis section 14 and the second epidermis section 12' with the second dermis section 14'. As mentioned above, it has also been observed that it is not desirable to grip any portions of the first subcutaneous adipose section 16 or second subcutaneous adipose section 16' for coagulating since this may affect the success of the tissue seal. More particularly, it has been observed that the first and second subcutaneous adipose sections 16, 16' have cells which are typically not disposed close to one another relative to the other dermis sections 12, 12', 14, 14'. Often these cells are separated by a loose gel-like connective tissue which makes the first and/or second subcutaneous adipose sections 16, 16' difficult to handle and/or manipulate between the jaw members 50, 60.

[035] Further, grasping the first and/or second subcutaneous adipose sections 16, 16' with the first and/or second epidermis sections 12, 12' often disturbs or misaligns the instrument's orientation which in turn may cause misalignment of the tissue structures.

[036] Figs. 1A and 2 show the bipolar sealing instrument 20 of the present disclosure with a gripping device 100. The gripping device 100 assists gripping the first epidermis section 12 and the first dermis section 14 with the second epidermis section 12' and the second dermis section 14'. The gripping device 5 100 specifically does not grip or otherwise engage the first and second subcutaneous adipose sections 16 and 16'.

[037] Fig. 2 shows the bipolar sealing instrument 20 with the gripping device 100. The gripping device 100 includes an array of tines 102 or prongs 10 disposed on at least one side 22 of the bipolar sealing instrument 20. The tines 102 are typically thin, pointed or needle-like projections which extend inwardly (i.e., toward tissue engaging surfaces 24, and 24') from the bipolar sealing instrument 20 and are configured to grasp epidermis section 12, 12' of a deep skin incision. Alternatively, the gripping device 100 may have a series of 15 protrusions, knobs, teeth, branches, connected branches, or members each collectively forming an aligned pattern on one or both sides of the bipolar sealing instrument 20 for gripping.

[038] The gripping device 100 includes a pair of opposing comb-like 20 gripping members 114 and 114' disposed on jaw members 50 and 60, respectively. More particularly, each gripping member 114 and 114' is disposed on the respective outer surface or outer side 22 and 22' of each jaw member 50 and 60 such that a series of comb-like or tine elements 102 and 102' common to each of the gripping members 114 and 114', respectively, oppose one another 25 for gripping and holding tissue. As best shown in Fig. 2, the plurality of tines 102 disposed on surface 22 is generally offset relative to the corresponding plurality of tines 102' disposed on surface 22' along the length of the jaw members 50 and 60. It is envisioned that this promotes better grasping of tissue structures. Alternatively, the tines 102 and 102' may register with one another along the 30 length of the jaw members 50 and 60 depending upon a particular purpose or to achieve a particular surgical result.

[039] The gripping members 114, and 114' may be dimensioned to extend partially along the entire length of each jaw member, e.g. 50, or may be dimensioned to extend along the entire length of the same. Alternatively, a series of gripping elements 114 may be staggered across the length of the jaw member 50 with an opposing series of gripping elements 114' staggered along the opposite jaw member 60.

[040] The gripping device 100 will contact the relevant epidermis 12, 12' and/or dermis 14, 14' sections and firmly grasp only the relevant epidermis/dermis 12, 12', 14, and 14' sections while specifically not contacting other tissue sections or components that may disturb the orientation of the relevant epidermis and dermis tissue sections 12, 12', 14, and 14'. This is particularly advantageous to assist with the tissue sealing using RF electrosurgical energy. The gripping device 100 thus allows for a more precise operation of the bipolar sealing instrument 20.

[041] In one embodiment, each of the tines 102, 102' may be substantially "U" shaped and arranged in rows of five; however any number of tines 102 may be used for the bipolar sealing instrument 20 of the present disclosure.

[042] Fig. 3A shows an enlarged view of an alternative configuration for the tine 102 (and/or 102'). The tine 102 of this particular embodiment is configured in a "U" shape with a base portion 116. The base portion 116 connects to gripping member 114 and includes two arms 118, 120 which extend from the base 116. Each arm 118 and 120 is spaced relative to one another and includes a point 122 at a distal end thereof for engaging the tissue. However, the end 122 is not limited to this configuration. In other embodiments, the ends 122 may be rectangular (end 126), cylindrical (end 128) or include a plurality of points (end 130) as seen in Figs. 3B and 3C. As shown in Figs. 3B and 3C, each end 122 is disposed on a single base may have differently-shaped ends 126, 128 and

130 respectively. Various configurations of the tines 102 are possible and within the scope of the present disclosure and have been shown in the various figures 3A through 3F as 102a through 102f.

5 [043] Referring to Fig. 3A, in one embodiment, the arms 118 and 120 are straight planar members. Alternatively, the arms 118 and 120 may not be straight and instead have a curvature as shown in Fig. 3D.

10 [044] Referring to Fig. 3E, in one embodiment, the tines 102e may extend simply from the side 22 without any gripping member 114. Moreover, the tines 102a may be configured in a longitudinal or "I" shaped configuration. In this embodiment, each of the tines 102 may simply be spaced from one another by a predetermined distance along the side 22 as shown in Fig. 3E. Again, 15 alternatively as shown the tines 102 in Fig. 3F, may have a curvature to assist with grasping the relevant tissue sections and to facilitate treatment.

[045] Turning back to Fig. 3 which shows a perspective view of one particularly simple bipolar sealing instrument 20 in an assembled state, the bipolar sealing instrument 20 has an inner member 32' and an outer member 32. 20 The members 32 and 32' are connected through an open lockbox 34 which has a gap 36 between flanges. The terms "inner" and "outer" are used to distinguish the members 32 and 32', and their component parts, according to the members' respective positions with respect to the open lockbox 34, however the bipolar sealing instrument 20 is not limited to any such orientation and the inner member 25 32' and the outer member 32 may have other configurations. The inner member 32' is fitted generally within the inner surfaces of the open lockbox 34 and is captured between the flanges. The outer member 32 generally forms the outside surfaces of the open lockbox 34. Details relating to one envisioned lockbox 34 are disclosed in commonly owned United States Patent No.: 6,187,003, the 30 entire contents incorporated by references herein.

[046] The inner member 32' has an inner shank 38' which is operatively associated with the inner jaw 60 at a distal end thereof and has an inner ring handle 44' at a proximal end thereof. Similarly, the outer member 32 has an outer shank 38 at a distal end thereof which operatively connects to the jaw member 50, and an outer ring handle 44 at a proximal end thereof. The inner and the outer jaw members 60, and 50 are designed to grasp tissue between the opposing seal surfaces 24, 24'.

[047] Each shank, 38 and 38', has a respective ratchet stub or interlocking member 48 and 48'. Ratchet teeth 53 are designed to interlock in a manner that holds the inner and outer shank, 38 and 38', in position. The shanks 38 and 38' are deflected in the manner of a cantilever spring when the jaw members 50, 60 are forced together by the surgeon. The deflection of the shanks 38 and 38' may produce a spring restoring force that can be opposed by interlocking the ratchet stubs or interlocking members 48, 48'.

[048] The proximal end of the jaw member 50 also includes a rectangular step 52 disposed on an inner facing surface of jaw member 50 proximal sealing surface 24. The rectangular step 52 may be made from a thermally non-conductive material, or alternatively has a thermally non-conductive material connected thereto. The rectangular step 52 with the thermally non-conductive material does not conduct or interfere with the application of any RF electro-surgical energy to the first seal surface 24.

[049] The proximal end of the jaw member 50 also includes rectangular step 62 disposed on an inwardly facing surface of jaw 60 proximal sealing surface 24' and complementary to step 52. The rectangular step 62 also is likewise made from a thermally non-conductive material, or alternatively has a thermally non-conductive material connected thereto. Rectangular step 62 does not conduct or interfere with the application of any RF electro-surgical energy to the seal surface 24.

[050] In operation, the gripping members 114, 114' contact the first and the second epidermis section 12, 12' and the first and the second dermis sections 14, 14' before the sections are grasped by the inner and the outer jaw members 50, 60. The gripping members 114, 114' will then contact and move the desired tissue into an alignment so the first epidermis section 12 and the second epidermis section 12' align. Thereafter, the first dermis portion 14 and the second dermis portion 14' align. The first dermis portion 14 and the second dermis portion 14' are forced in a complementary direction between the jaw members 50, 60. The desired tissue sections are introduced between the first sealing surface 24 and the second sealing surface 24' for sealing by the RF electrosurgical energy.

[051] Fig. 4 shows the inner and outer member 32', and 32. Each is connected to a pole of a bipolar electrosurgical generator (not shown). Electrical connectors 51, 51' and are located on the ring handles 44 and 44' to provide a convenient point of connection with a suitable coupling. The inner and the outer members 32' and 32 are formed of an electrically conductive material, such as a stainless steel. The exposed surfaces of the members 32', 32, except for the connectors 51, and 51' and the seal surfaces 24 and 24', are spray coated with an insulating material. The characteristics of the bipolar electrosurgical current are determined by the design of the electrosurgical generator. Moreover, it is envisioned that other open forceps designs are also contemplated wherein the electrical connections are disposed through a single shank member and the different bipolar portions are electrically communicated through the pivot assembly. For example, commonly owned United States Patent No. 6,277,117 and United States Patent Application Serial Nos. 10/996,971 and 10/284,562 disclose different configurations or forceps which may be designed for use with the present disclosure. All of these patents and applications are herein incorporated by reference in their entirety.

[052] The generator (not shown) has an output wherein the peak-to-peak voltage will not exceed 130 Volts. This is because higher voltages can cause sparking. This sparking results in localized burning of tissue which may result in a failure of the tissue weld. The generator capable of producing high frequency output current of at least two amps (RMS). High electrical current is one aspect of the present disclosure because it heats the tissue sufficiently to melt the collagen and thus fuse the first and second epidermis sections 12, 12'. Notably, lower electrical currents will often produce weak tissue welds with low bursting strength. During operation, the bipolar sealing instrument 20 is used to grasp tissue between the seal surfaces 24 and 24' using the array of tines 102, 102'. The surgeon squeezes the ring handles 44 and 44' together, causing pressure to be applied to the tissue. The shanks 38 and 38' are designed to maintain closure force of about 3 kg/cm² to about 16 kg/cm² between jaw members 50 and 60.

[053] The magnitude of pressure exerted on the tissue by the seal surfaces 24, 24' is one aspect in assuring a proper surgical outcome. Tissue pressures within a working range of about of 3 kg/cm² to about of 16 kg/cm² and, within a working range of 7 to 13 kg/cm² have been shown to be effective for sealing the desired first epidermis section 12 and the second epidermis section 12'. Tissue pressures within the range of about 4 kg/cm² to about 6.5 kg/cm² have proven to be particularly effective in sealing tissue bundles.

[054] The ratchet teeth 53 are interlocked at the appropriate ratchet setting, depending on the skin type and skin thickness. Bipolar electrosurgical current is applied through the instrument and the first and the second epidermis sections 12, 12' are sealed. Preferably, the jaw members 50, 60 include one or more stop members (not shown) which provide a tissue gap of about 0.001 inches to about 0.006 inches between the vessel sealing surfaces 24, 24' when the jaw members 50, 60 are closed about tissue. This is an important mechanical factor to promote tissue sealing.

[055] The jaw members 50, 60 have a structure and cross-section that resist bending under load. Thus the inner and the outer shanks 38', 38 act as a cantilever supported beam once the seal surfaces 24, 24' are closed. The length of this idealized cantilever beam extends from a lockbox screw 31 to the location of the respective interlocking members 48, 48'. It is possible to model each shank 38', 38 as a cantilever spring having a spring constant such that each ratchet position on the teeth 53 is designed to transmit a particular closure force to the jaw members 50 and 60 against the action of the restoring force of the cantilever spring. Preferably, the closure force is produced and maintained within the above working range of 3 kg/cm² to 16 kg/cm².

[056] The open lockbox 34 has the function of providing a pivoting joint for the inner and the outer shanks 38' and 38. In addition, the flanges provide lateral support to help maintain alignment of the jaw members 50 and 60. Closed lockbox designs are typically used and the outer member 32 is completely captured through a slot in the inner member 32'.

[057] The electrically insulated pivot in the present disclosure has a shoulder washer 29 supporting the lockbox screw 31. The shoulder washer 29 is composed of an electrically insulating material that prevents a short circuit between the members 32 and 32'.

[058] Referring now to a distal portion of the bipolar sealing instrument 20, each sealing surface 24, 24' has a radiused edge. In addition, a taper on the seal surface 24, 24' permits a relatively constant pressure on the tissue along the length of the seal surfaces 24, 24'. The width of the seal surfaces 24 and 24' is adjusted, in certain embodiments, wherein the closure force divided by the width is approximately constant along the length.

[059] In one embodiment, the seal surfaces may have a stop member 55, made from insulating material with the stop maintaining a minimum separation of

at least about 0.001 inches between the seal surfaces 24 and 24', as shown in FIG. 4. The stop member 55 reduces the possibility of short circuits between the seal surfaces 24 and 24' as well as promotes tissue sealing.

5 [060] In use the surgeon positions the forceps to engage the first epidermis section 12 with the first dermis section 14 and the second epidermis section 12' with the second dermis section 14' and they are compressed between the opposable seal surfaces 24 and 24'. The opposable seal surfaces 24, 24' come together in aligned opposition due to the alignment action of the open
10 lockbox 34. The surgeon further deflects the shanks 38, 38' of the members 32, 32' to engage the ratchet stubs 48 and 48'. The engagement of the ratchet stubs 48, 48' hold the shanks 38, 38' in their deflected positions to provide a constant spring force that is transmitted as a closure force to the jaw members 50 and 60.

15 [061] An electrosurgical generator (not shown) is connected to the bipolar sealing instrument 20 through connectors 51, 51' (Fig. 4) on the ring handles 44, 44'. An electrical switch is used to close a circuit between the generator and the bipolar sealing instrument 20. Alternatively, both connectors 51, 51' may be operatively connected to extend through ring handle 44 as shown.

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[062] The switch may be a footswitch such as Valleylab's catalog number E6009, available from Valleylab Inc., Boulder Colo. The electrosurgical current flows through an electrically conductive path on each of the inner and outer members 32, 32' between its respective electrical connector, 51' or 51, and the
25 respective seal surfaces, 24, 24'. An electrically insulating coating substantially covers each member 32, 32' to protect the surgeon against electrical arcs. An insulating sheath 58 may also be used to cover the members or the component parts thereof, i.e., the handles, the shanks and the outer surfaces (non-opposing surfaces) of the jaw members 50, 60.

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[063] It is envisioned that the outer surface of the jaw members 50, 60

may include a nickel-based material, a coating, a stamping, or a metal injection molding which is designed to reduce adhesion between the jaw members 50, 60 (or components thereof) with the surrounding tissue during activation and sealing. Other components such as the shanks 38, 38' and the ring handles 44, 44' are coated with the same or a different "non-stick" material. The materials are of a class of materials that provide a smooth surface to prevent mechanical tooth adhesions.

[064] It is also contemplated that the sealing surfaces 24, 24' of the jaw members 50, 60, respectively, may be manufactured from such "non-stick" materials as a nickel-chrome, a chromium nitride, a Med Coat 2000 manufactured by Electrolizing Corporation of Ohio, Inconel 600, tin-nickel, or any alloys thereof. High nickel chrome alloys and Ni200, Ni201 (about 100% Ni) may be made into electrodes or sealing surfaces by metal injection molding, stamping, machining or any like process.

[065] These materials have an optimal surface energy for eliminating sticking due in part to surface texture and susceptibility to surface breakdown due electrical effects and corrosion in the presence of biologic tissues. These materials exhibit superior non-stick qualities over stainless steel and should be used on the sealing instrument 20 in areas where the exposure to pressure and RF energy can create localized "hot spots" more susceptible to epidermis adhesion. Reducing the amount of skin that "sticks" during sealing improves the overall efficacy of the instrument. The sealing surfaces 24, 24' may also be "coated" with one or more of the above materials to achieve the same result, i.e., a "non-stick surface". For example, Nitride coatings (or one or more of the other above-identified materials) may be deposited as a coating on another base material (metal or nonmetal) using a vapor deposition manufacturing technique.

[066] One particular class of materials disclosed herein has demonstrated superior non-stick properties and, in some instances, superior seal quality. For

example, nitride coatings which include, but not are not limited to: TiN, ZrN, TiAlN, and CrN are some materials used for non-stick purposes. One is disclosed in commonly owned United States Patent Application Serial No.: 10/284,562 which is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety.

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[067] CrN has been found to be useful for non-stick purposes due to its overall surface properties and performance. Other classes of materials have also been found to reduce overall sticking. High nickel/chrome alloys with a Ni/Cr ratio of approximately 5:1 significantly reduce sticking in bipolar instrumentation. A non-stick material in this class is Inconel 600. Bipolar instrumentation having electrodes made from or coated with Ni200, Ni201 (about 100% Ni) also showed improved non-stick performance over other bipolar stainless steel electrodes.

[068] Referring now to Fig. 9, there is shown an alternative embodiment of the bipolar sealing instrument 20. In this embodiment, the bipolar sealing instrument 20 has the gripping tines 102, 102' extending longitudinally from the distal most portion of the inner and the outer jaws 50, 60. The gripping tines 102, 102' extend from this distal most location of the inner and the outer jaws 50, 60 to assist with dissection of tissue. Alternatively, the gripping tines 102, 102' may also assist with the manipulation and gripping of thin tissue for sealing by the bipolar sealing instrument 20. The gripping tines 102, 102' at this longitudinal distal most location of the bipolar sealing instrument 20 may have any length conducive to gripping, manipulating and/or dissecting tissue.

[069] It is to be understood that the above described embodiments are only illustrative of the application of the principles of the present disclosure. Numerous modifications and alternative arrangements may be devised by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the present disclosure. The appended claims are intended to cover such modifications and arrangements.

30

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

Claim 1: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument comprising:

5 inner and outer members each having a respective jaw member disposed at a distal end thereof, each of said jaw members including right and left side surfaces and seal surface, said seal surfaces adapted to connect to an electrical energy source such that said seal surfaces are capable of conducting bipolar energy therebetween;

10

said inner and outer members movable from a first position wherein said jaw members are disposed in spaced relation relative to one another to a second position wherein the jaw members are closer to one another for grasping tissue; and

15

a first gripping device disposed on at least one of said right and left side surfaces of one of said jaw members, said first gripping device including a plurality of tines extending therefrom dimensioned to engage and hold tissue when said jaw members are moved from said first position to said second position.

20

Claim 2: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 1 further comprising:

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a second gripping device disposed on the other of said at least one of said right and left side surfaces of the other of said jaw members, said second gripping device including said plurality of tines extending therefrom which cooperate with said first gripping device to engage and hold tissue when said jaw members are moved from said first position to said second position.

30

Claim 3: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 1, wherein each tine is a resilient member.

Claim 4: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 1,
5 wherein at least one of said plurality of tines extends from said jaw member at an angle.

Claim 5: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 1, wherein each tine has a complementary size relative to a remainder of said plurality of
10 tines, and wherein said plurality of tines are configured to form a gripping zone.

Claim 6: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 3, wherein each tine is straight.

15 Claim 7: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 3, wherein each tine is curved.

Claim 8: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 1, wherein said plurality of tines contact the epidermis section of the tissue before tissue is
20 grasped by said seal surface.

Claim 9: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 1, wherein each tine is a resilient member configured to move a predetermined amount of tissue from a separated position to another position between said seal surfaces.
25

Claim 10: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 1, wherein each of said plurality of tines is a rectangular member configured in a substantially "U" shape, with each tine being a complementary size relative to one another, said plurality of tines configured to form a gripping zone.
30

Claim 11: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument comprising:

inner and outer members each having a respective jaw member disposed at a distal end thereof, each of said jaw members including right and left side surfaces and seal surface, said seal surfaces adapted to connect to an electrical energy source such that said seal surfaces are capable of conducting bipolar energy therebetween;

said inner and outer members movable from a first position wherein said jaw members are disposed in spaced relation relative to one another to a second position wherein the jaw members are closer to one another for grasping tissue;

a first gripping device disposed on at least one of said right and left side surfaces of one of said jaw members, said first gripping device including a plurality of tines extending therefrom dimensioned to engage and hold tissue when said jaw members are moved from said first position to said second position;

wherein each of said plurality of tines has a free gripping end, said free gripping end being suitable to manipulate the epidermis section of tissue but not disturb the subcutaneous adipose tissue layer when said outer member and said inner member move from said first position to said second position.

Claim 12: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 11, wherein said plurality of tines extend from said respective jaw member at an angle, said angle being measured relative to a horizontal axis of said jaw member, said horizontal axis being about perpendicular to said seal surface, said angle being in a range that includes about forty five degrees.

Claim 13: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 11, wherein each tine is a U shaped member including a base portion connected to said first gripping device.

Claim 14: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 11, wherein at least one of said plurality of tines has said free gripping end being pointed.

5

Claim 15: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 11, wherein at least one of said plurality of tines is curved.

Claim 16: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 11, wherein at least one of said plurality of tines has a pointed end.

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Claim 17: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 11, wherein at least one of said plurality of tines has a cylindrical end.

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Claim 18: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 11, wherein at least one of said plurality of tines has an end with a plurality of points.

Claim 19: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument according to claim 11, wherein at least one of said plurality of tines has a different end relative to another one of said plurality of tines.

20

Claim 20: A bipolar electrosurgical instrument comprising:

inner and outer members each having a respective jaw member disposed at a distal end thereof, each of said jaw members including seal surfaces adapted to connect to an electrical energy source such that said seal surfaces are capable of conducting bipolar energy therebetween;

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said inner and outer members movable from a first position wherein said jaw members are disposed in spaced relation relative to one another to a second

30

position wherein the jaw members are closer to one another for grasping tissue;
and

at least one tine disposed at a distal-most end of each of said jaw
5 members in opposing relation thereto, said tines being dimensioned to engage
and hold tissue when said jaw members are moved from said first position to said
second position; and

wherein said tines form an epidermis gripping zone, said epidermis
10 gripping zone being suitable to grasp and retain the epidermis section of tissue
and the dermis section of tissue between said seal surfaces but not contact any
subcutaneous adipose tissue layer.

Claim 21: A method of sealing tissue comprising the step of:

15 providing a bipolar instrument including:

inner and outer members each having a respective jaw member disposed
at a distal end thereof, each of said jaw members including right and left side
20 surfaces and seal surface, said seal surfaces adapted to connect to an electrical
energy source such that said seal surfaces are capable of conducting bipolar
energy therebetween;

a first gripping device disposed on at least one of said right and left side
25 surfaces of one of said jaw members, said first gripping device including a
plurality of tines extending therefrom dimensioned to engage and hold tissue
when said jaw members are moved from said first position to said second
position;

30 moving said inner and outer members from the first to second positions
and engaging tissue with said gripping device;

closing said first and second jaw members about tissue; and

activating an electrical energy source to seal tissue between said seal
5 surfaces.

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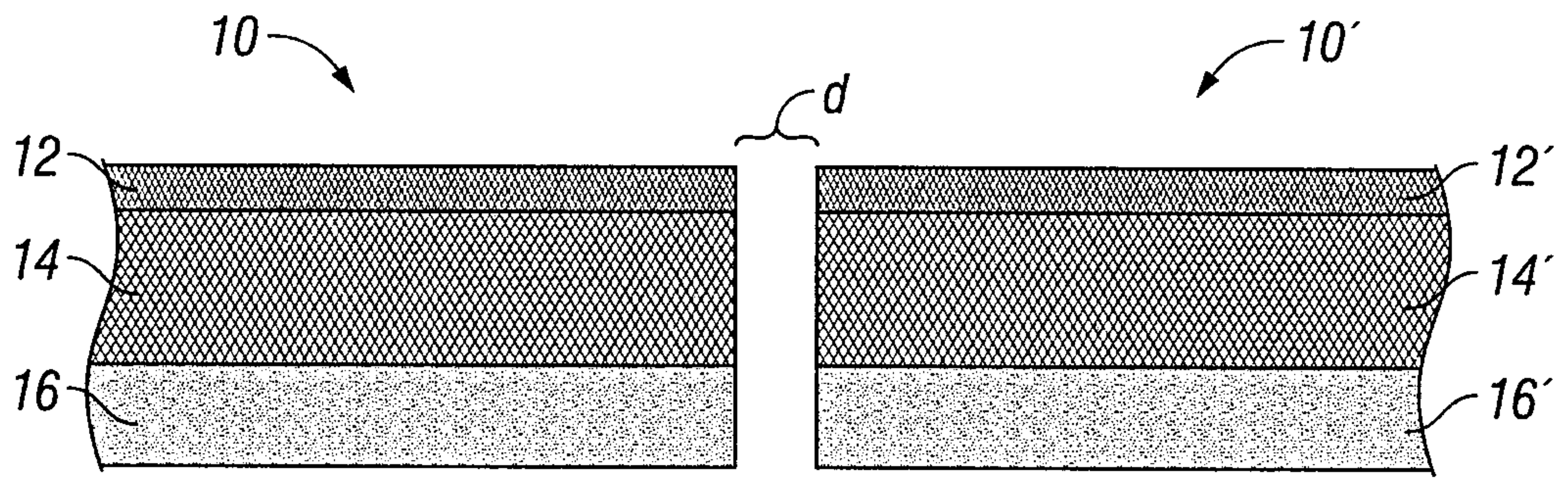


FIG. 1

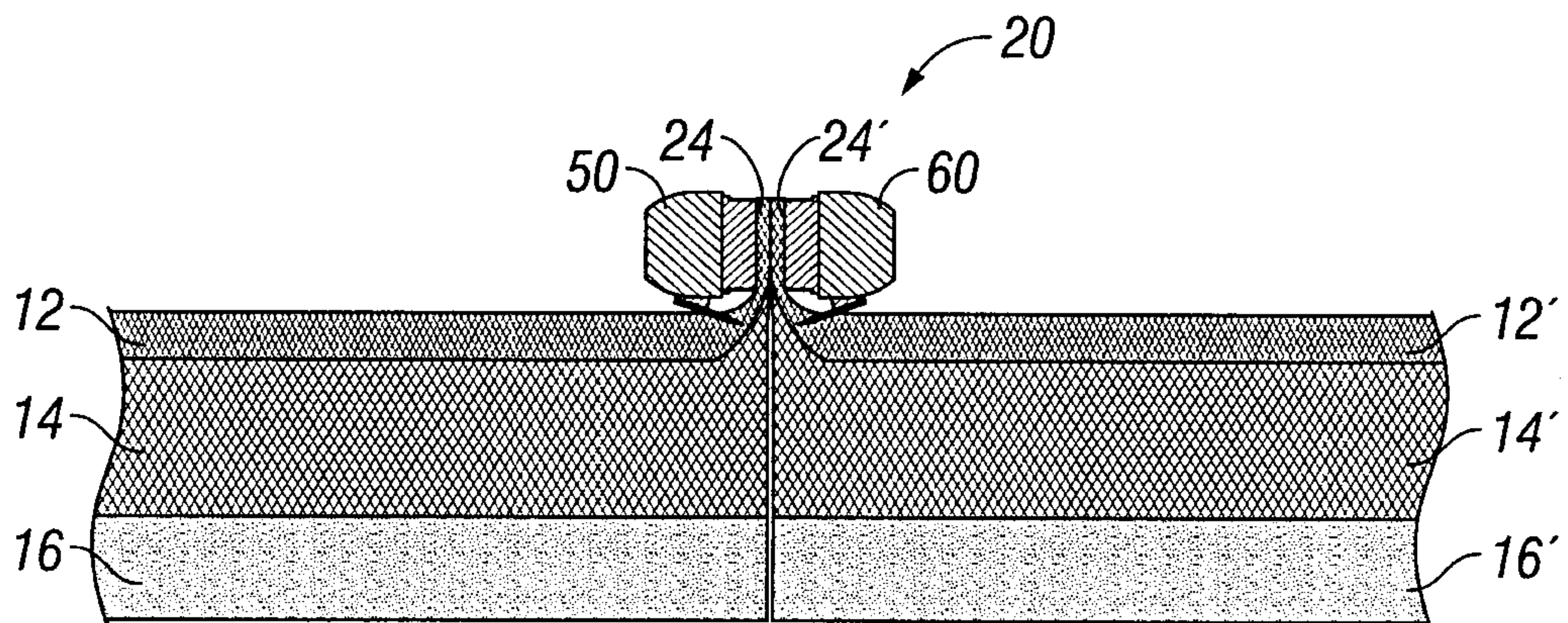


FIG. 1A

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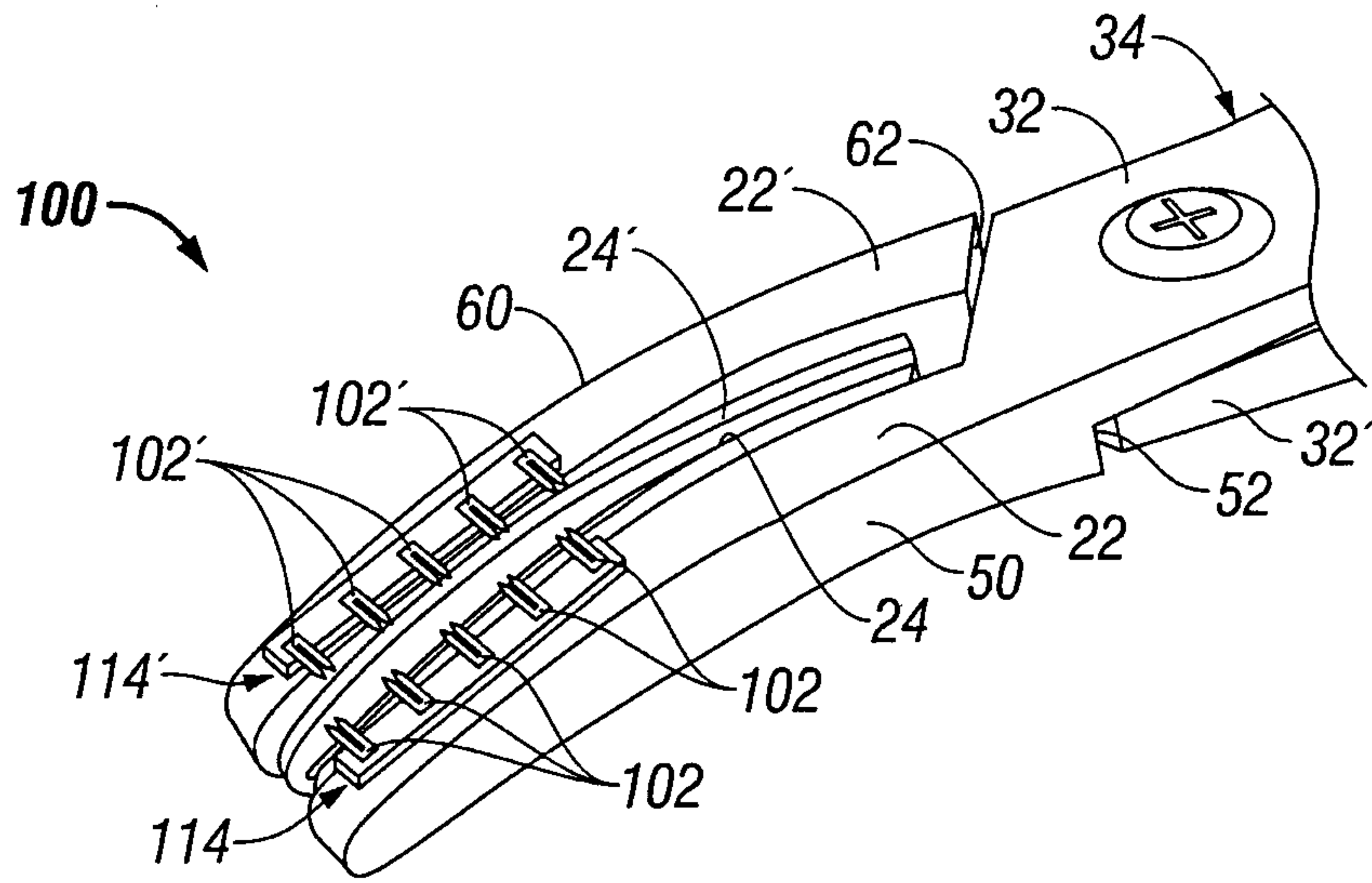


FIG. 2

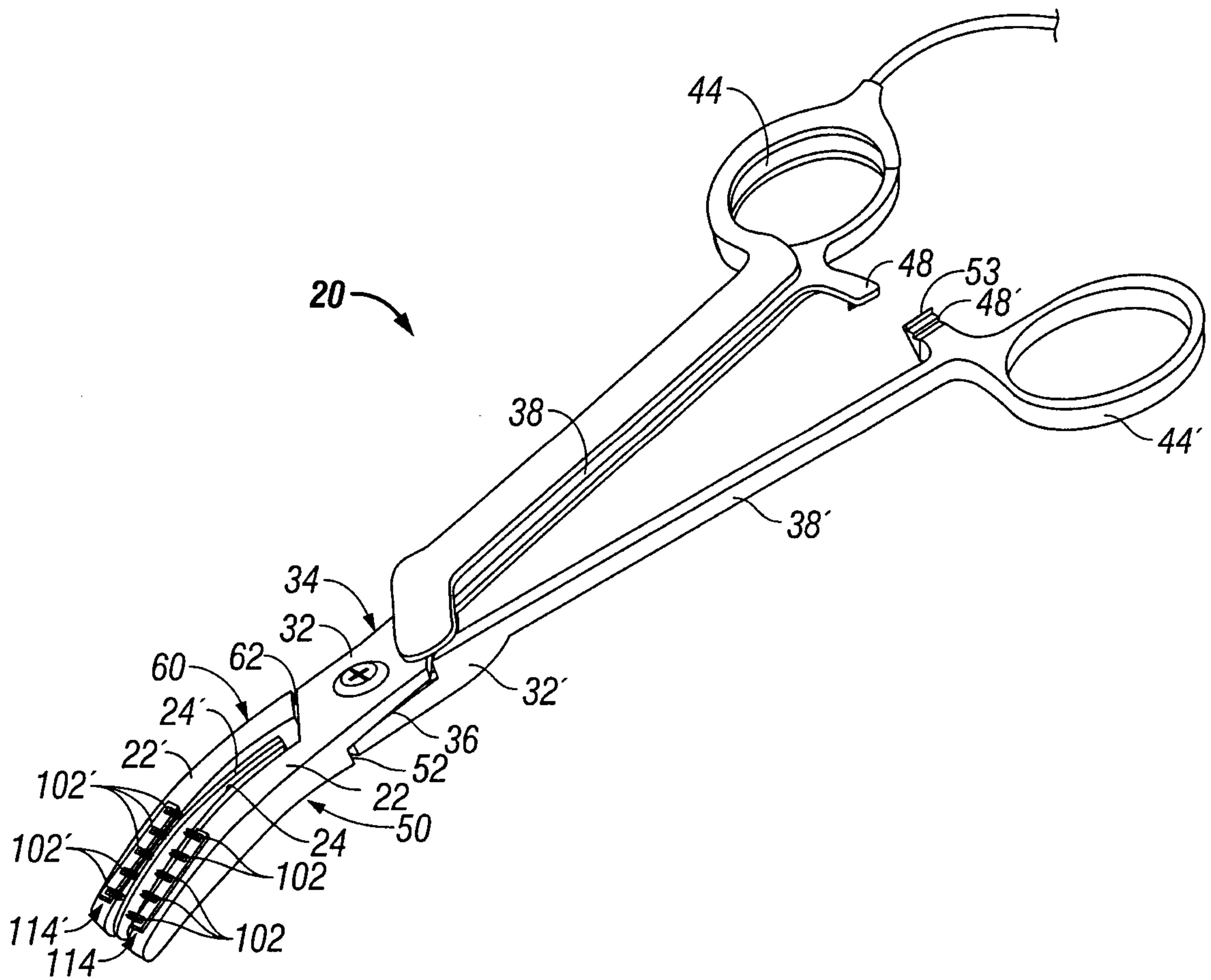


FIG. 3

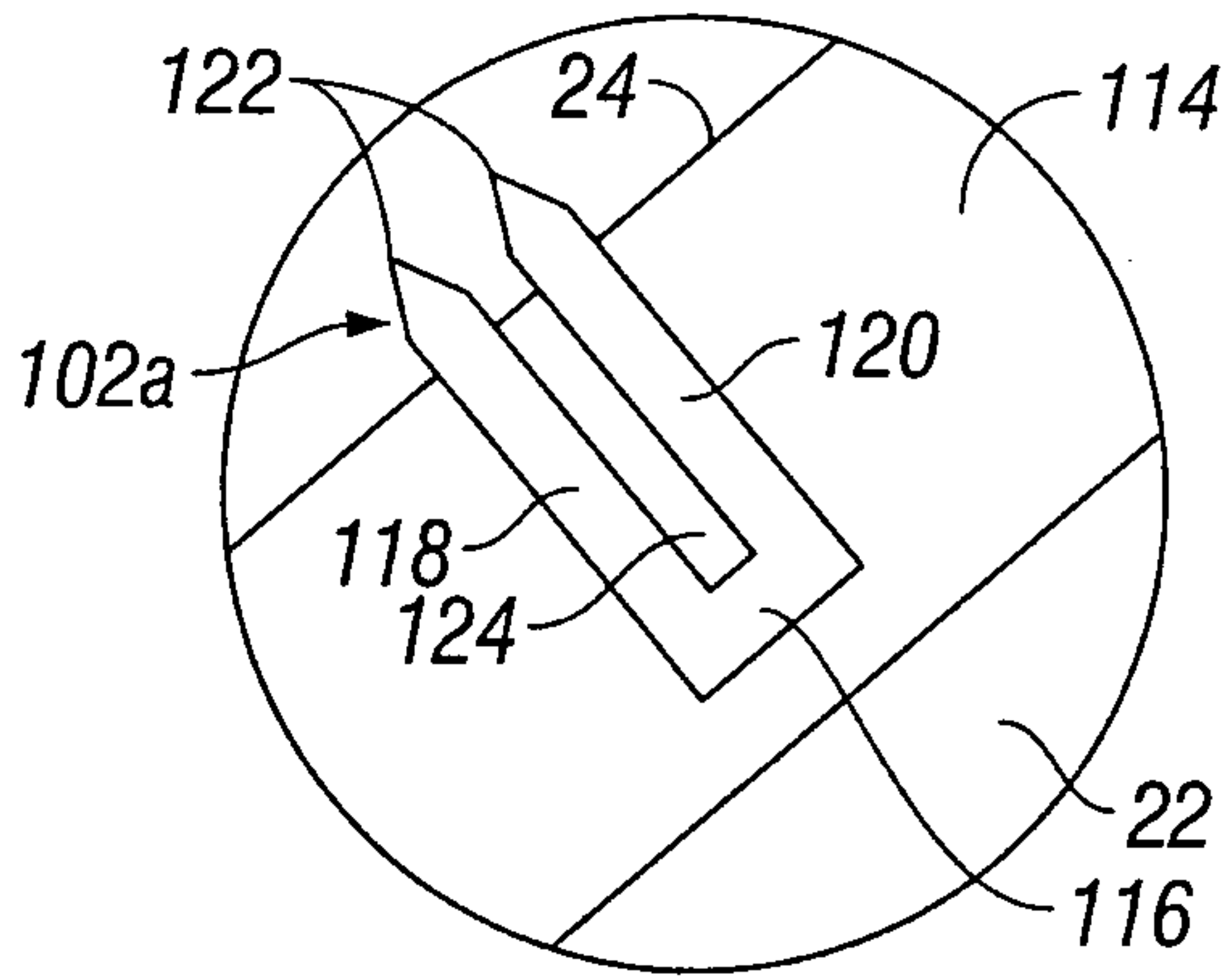


FIG. 3A

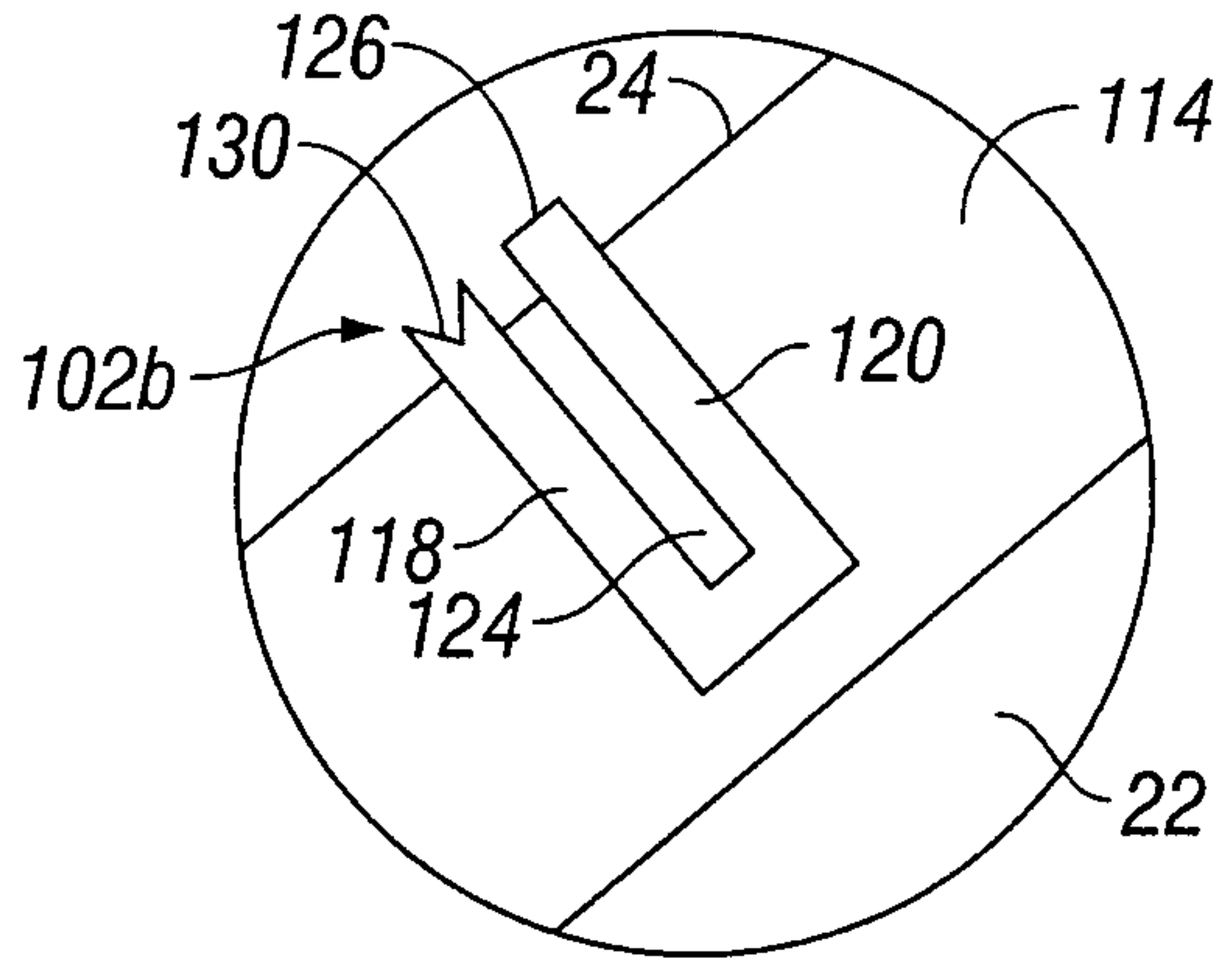


FIG. 3B

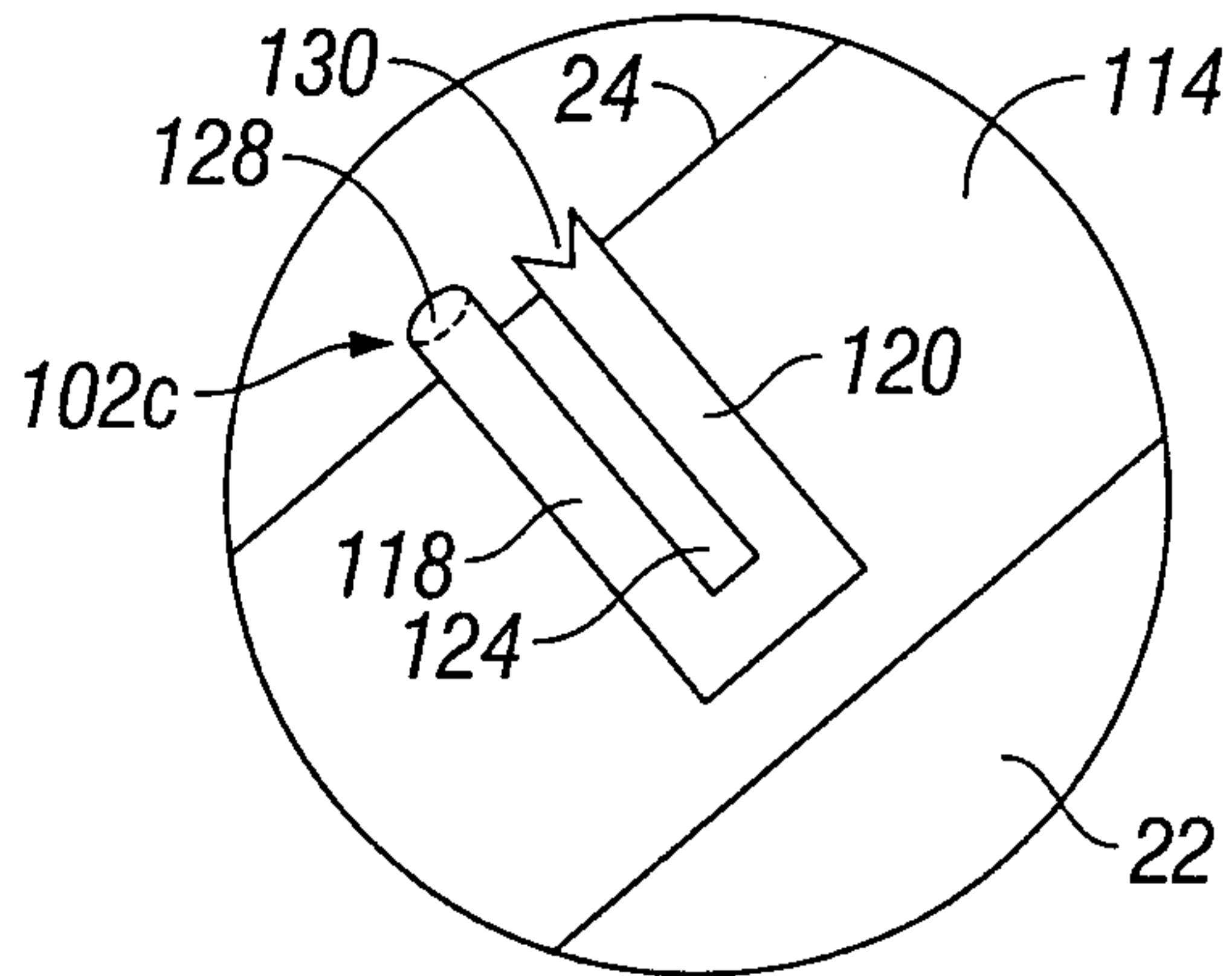


FIG. 3C

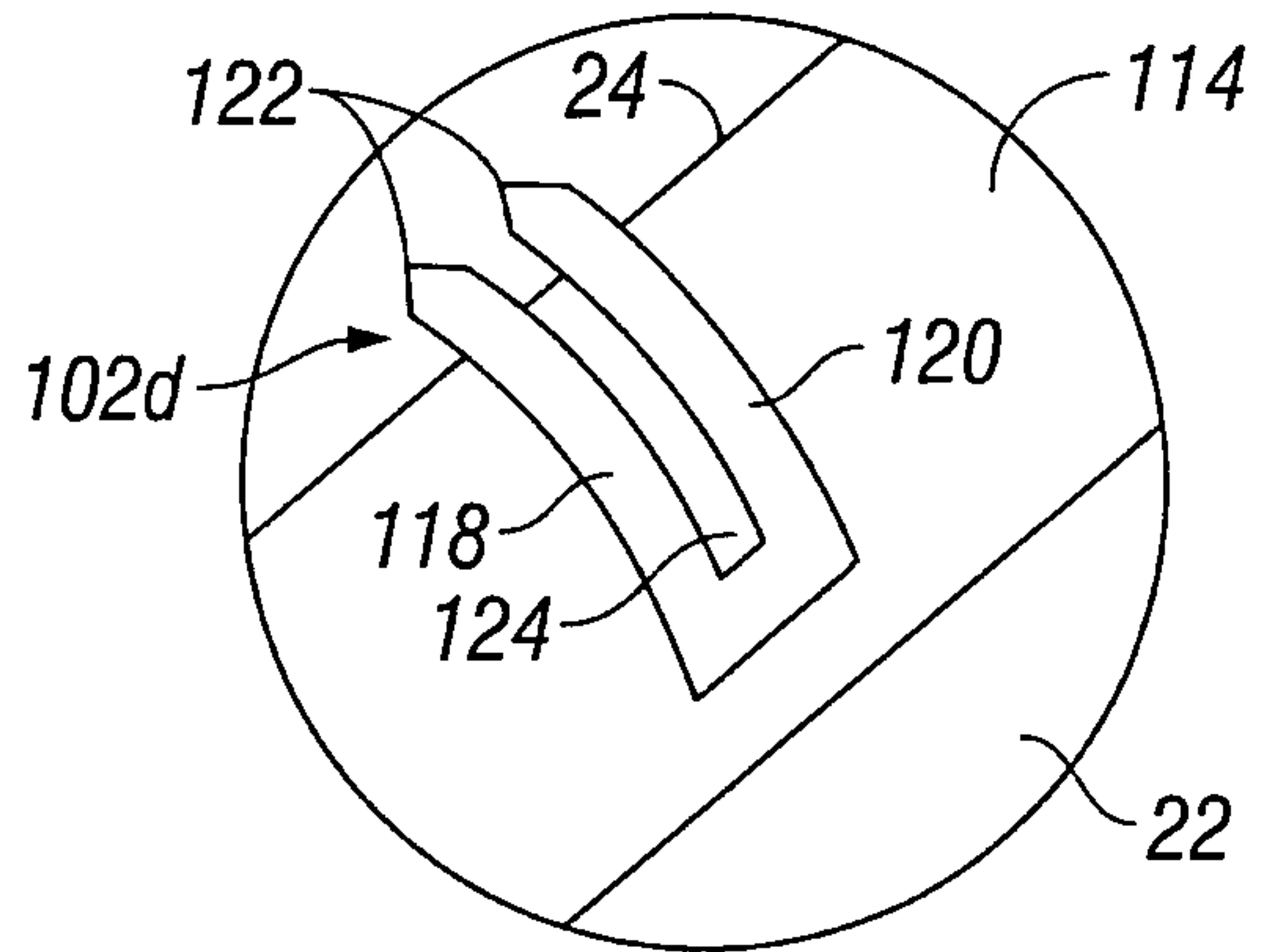


FIG. 3D

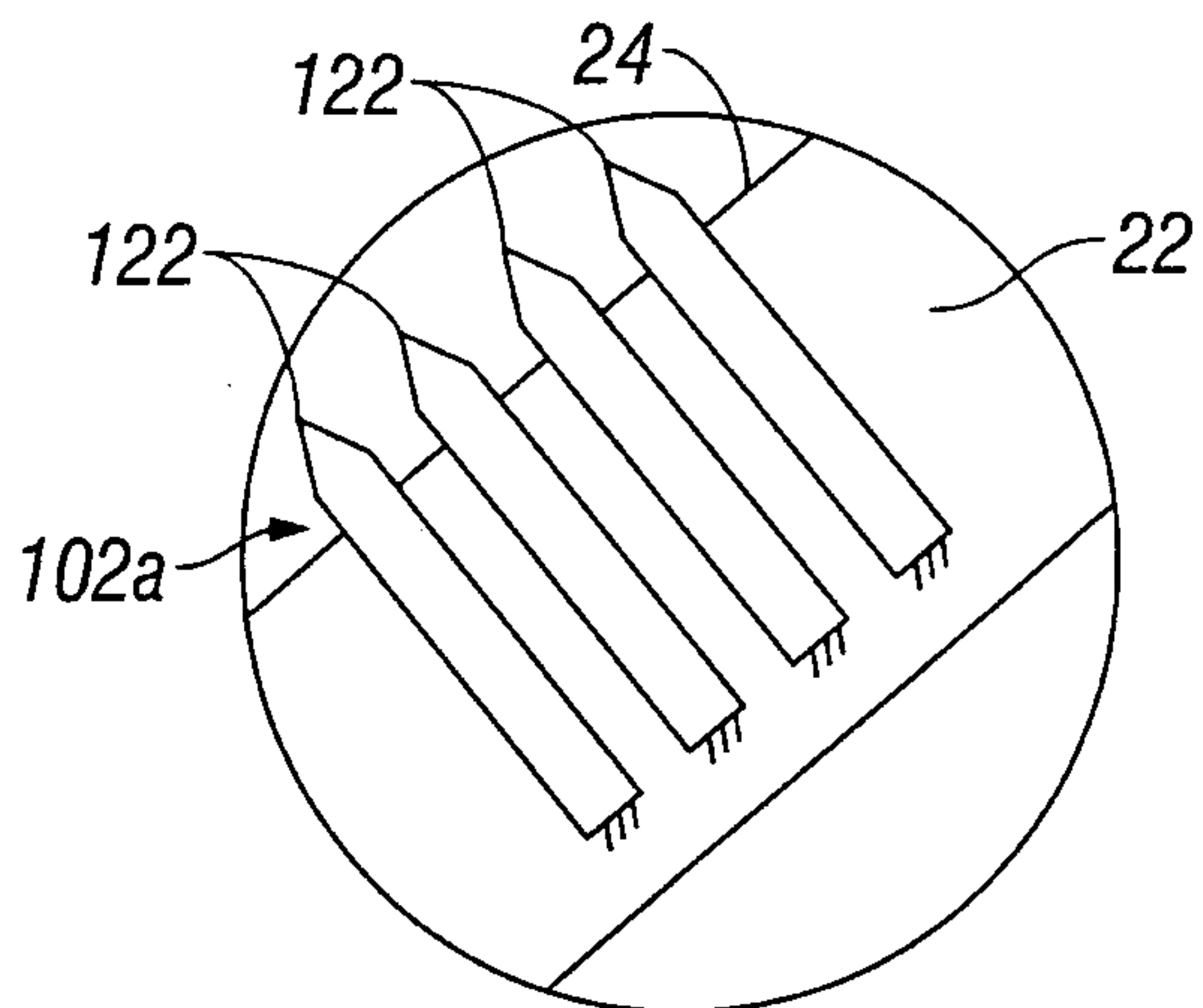


FIG. 3E

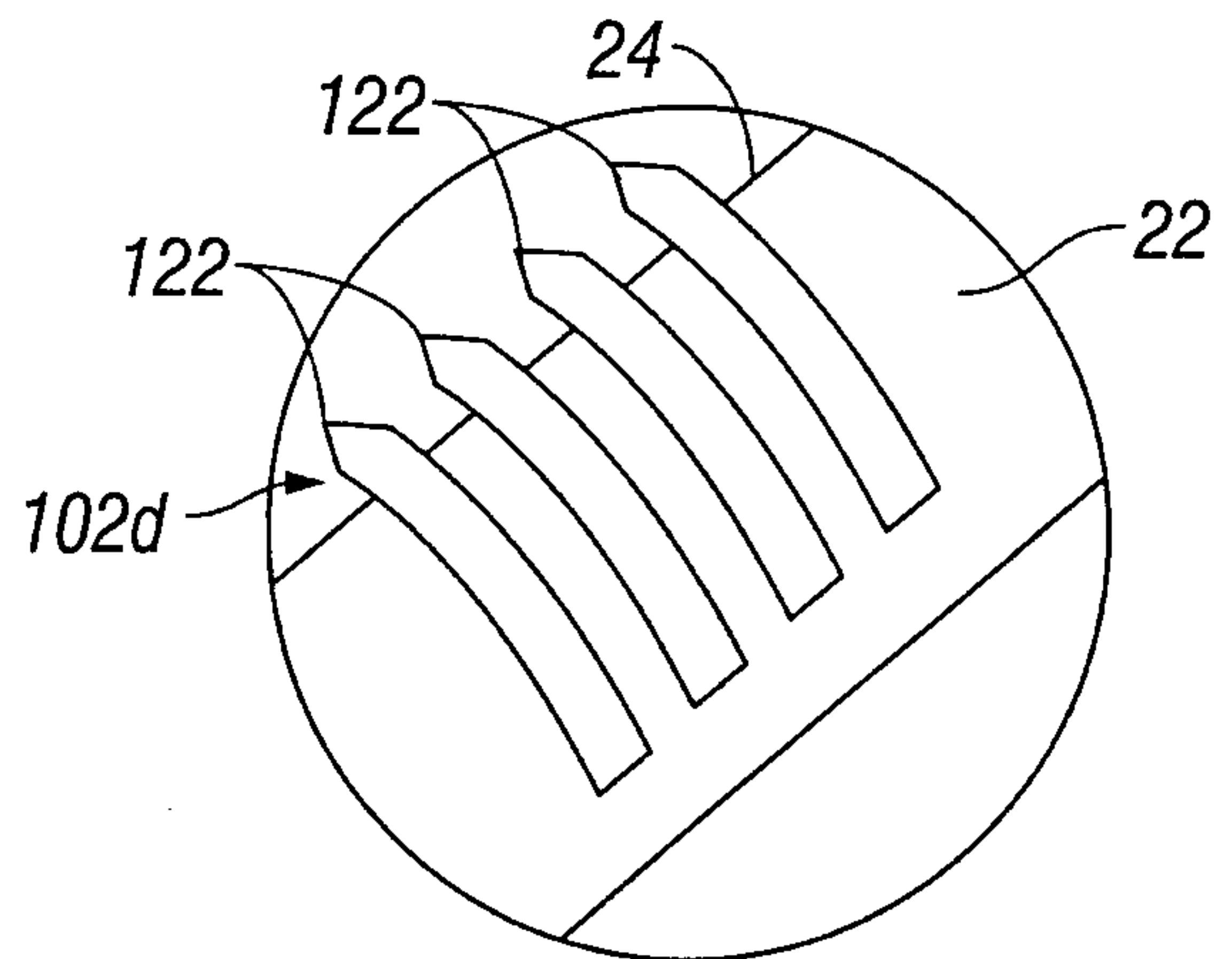


FIG. 3F

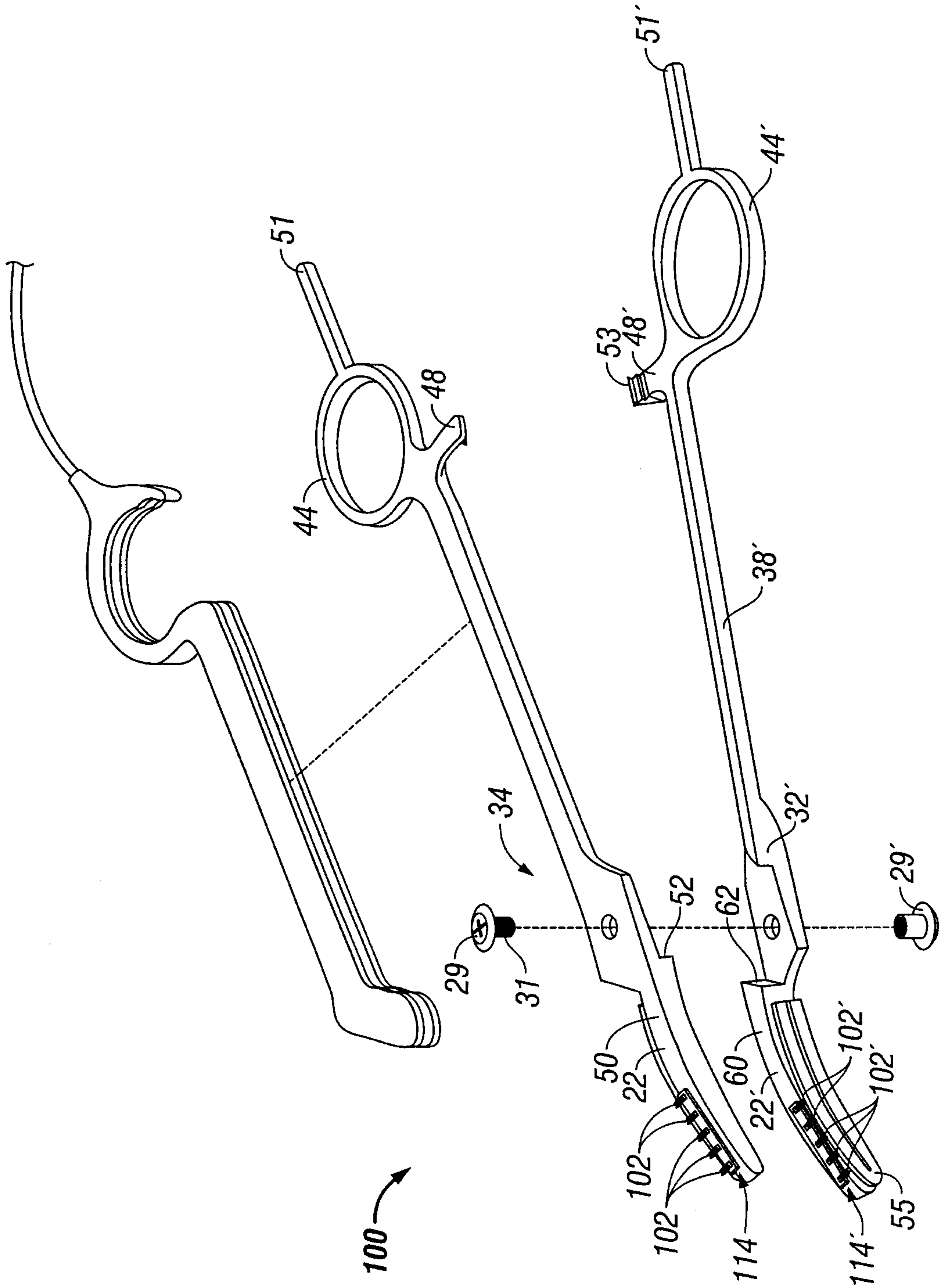


FIG. 4

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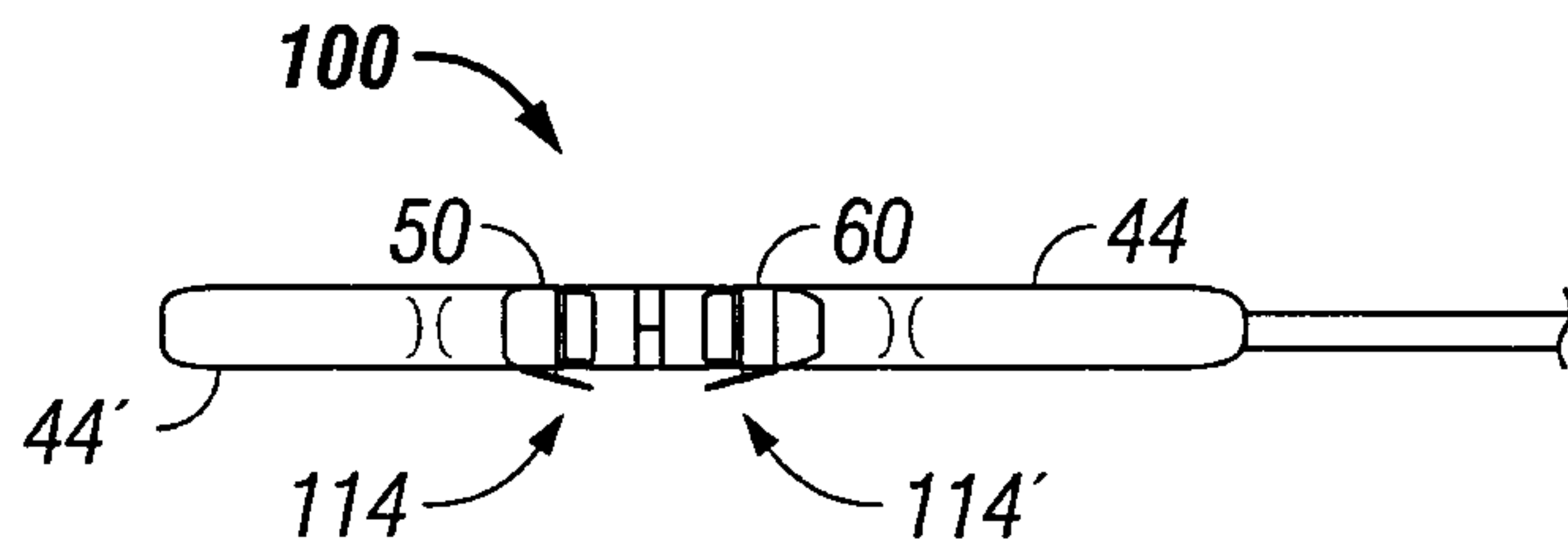


FIG. 5

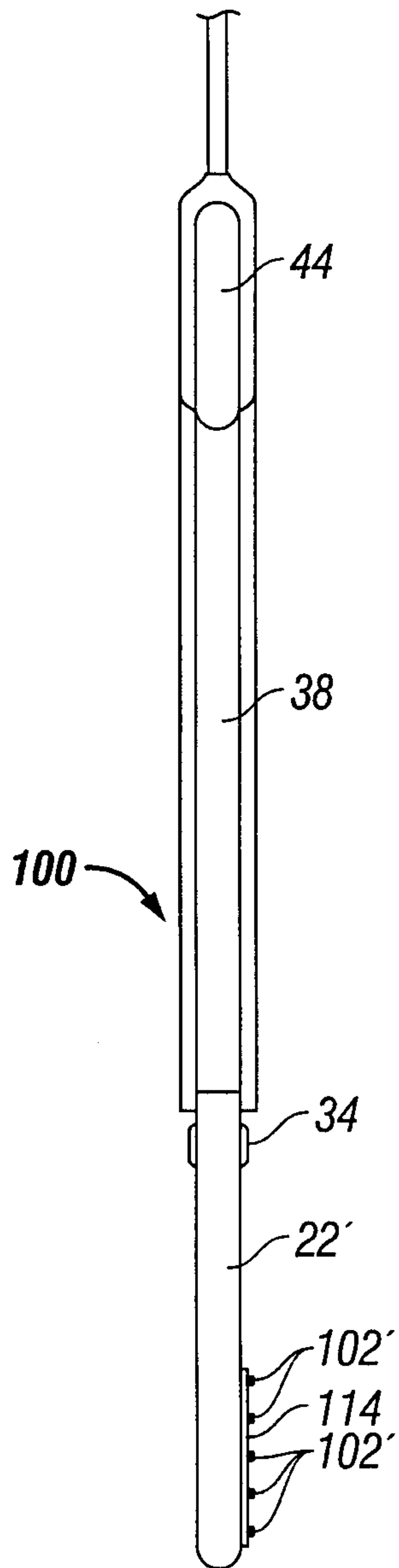


FIG. 6

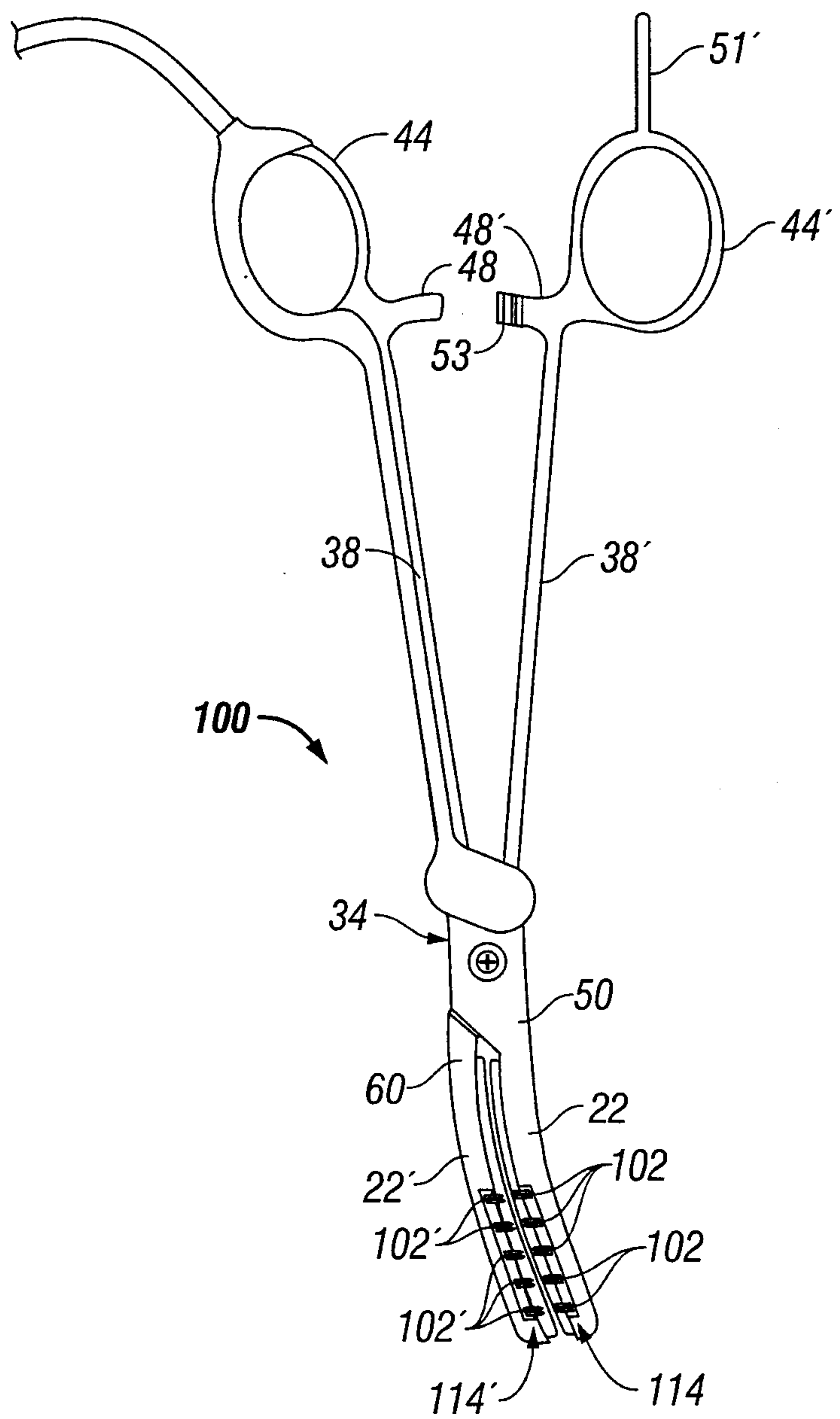


FIG. 7

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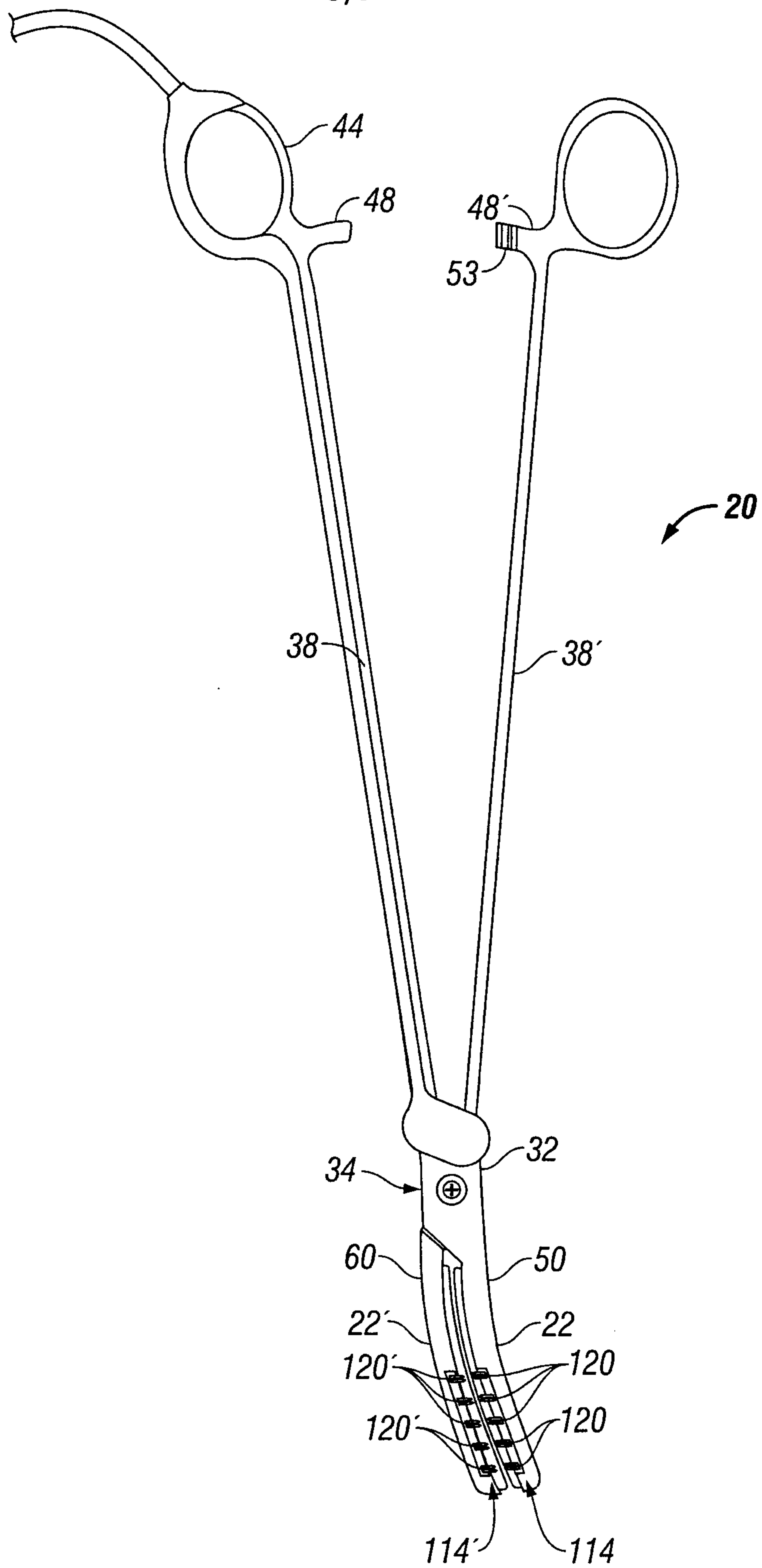


FIG. 8

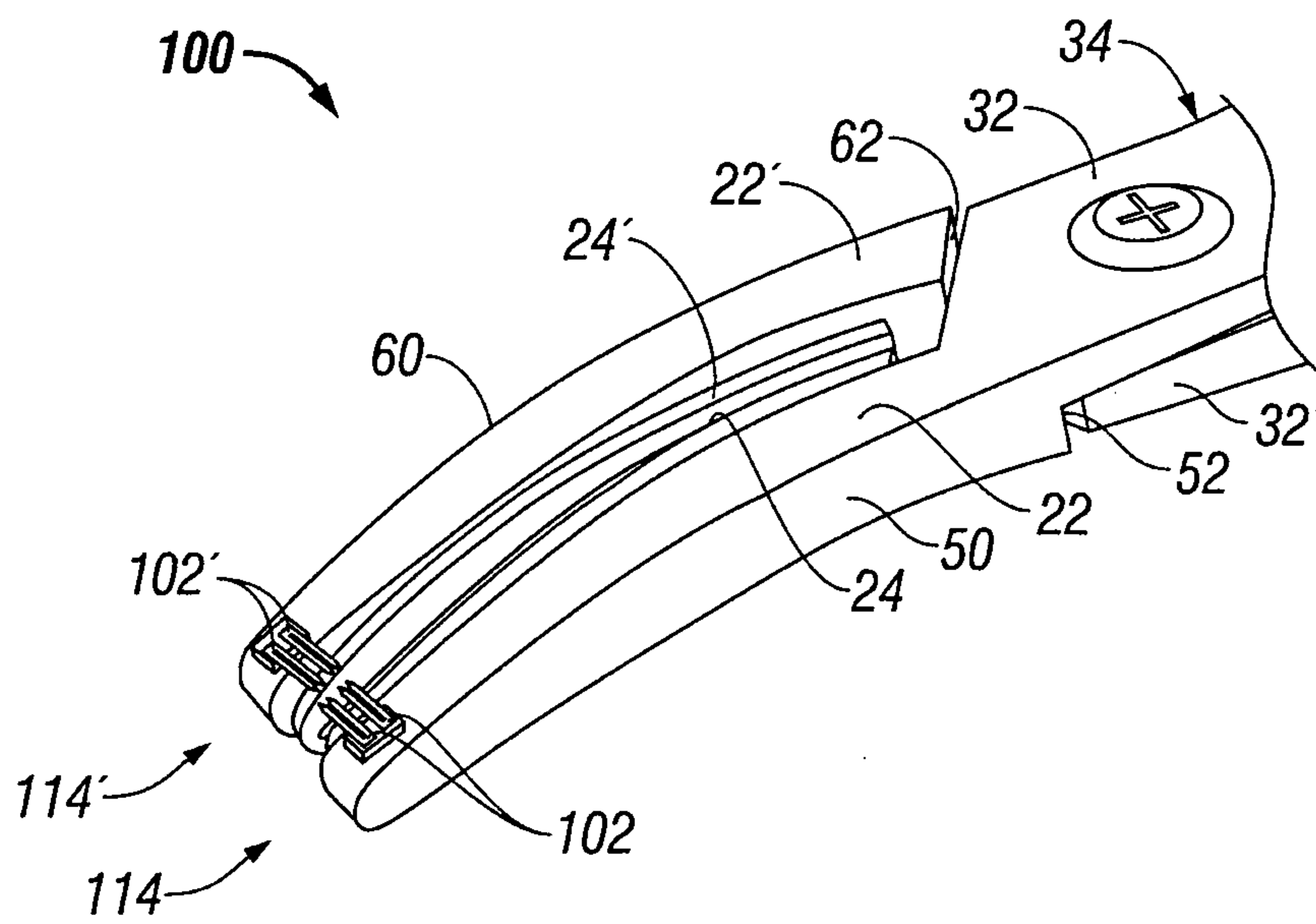


FIG. 9

