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(54) Title: WEARABLE CUSTOMIZED EAR CANAL APPARATUS

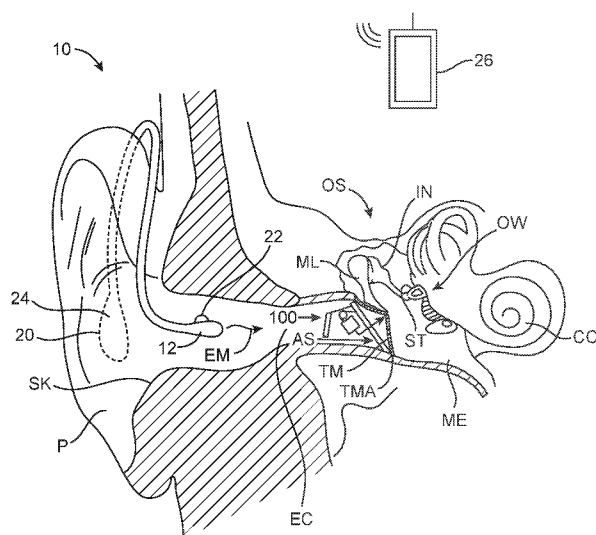


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: The present invention is directed to a wearable system wherein elements of the system, including various sensors adapted to detect biometric and other data and/or to deliver drugs, are positioned proximal to, on the ear or in the ear canal of a person. In embodiments of the invention, elements of the system are positioned on the ear or in the ear canal for extended periods of time. For example, an element of the system may be positioned on the tympanic membrane of a user and left there overnight, for multiple days, months, or years. Because of the position and longevity of the system elements in the ear canal, the present invention has many advantages over prior wearable biometric and drug delivery devices.



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WEARABLE CUSTOMIZED EAR CANAL APPARATUS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application Nos. 62/236,295, filed October 2, 2015, and 62/395,667, filed September 16, 2016, which applications are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention is related to wearable devices and methods for their use. The present invention is further related to hearing devices. The present invention is further related to methods for the use of wearable devices and hearing devices.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present invention is directed to a wearable system wherein elements of the system, including various sensors, are adapted to detect biometric and other data and/or to deliver drugs. In this invention, the elements of the system are positioned proximal to, on, or in the ear canal of a person. In embodiments of the invention, elements of the system are positioned external to, on or in the ear canal and may reside there for extended periods of time. For example, an element of the system may be positioned on the tympanic membrane of a user and left there overnight, for multiple days, months or years. Because of the position and longevity of the system elements in the ear canal, the present invention has many advantages over prior wearable biometric devices.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0004] The foregoing and other objects, features and advantages of embodiments of the present inventive concepts will be apparent from the more particular description of preferred embodiments, as illustrated in the accompanying drawings in which like reference characters refer to the same or like elements. The drawings are not necessarily to scale; emphasis instead being placed upon illustrating the principles of the preferred embodiments.

[0005] Figure 1 shows a hearing system configured in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0006] Figure 2 shows an isometric view of the medial ear canal assembly of the hearing system of Figure 1 in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0007] Figure 3 shows a top view of the medial ear canal assembly of the hearing system of Figure 1 in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0008] Figure 4 shows an exploded view of a medial ear canal assembly and its method of assembly, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0009] Figure 5A is an isometric Top view of a medial ear canal assembly in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0010] Figure 5B is an isometric bottom view of a medial ear canal assembly in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0011] Figure 6 shows a medial ear canal assembly in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0012] Figure 7 shows an isometric view of a medial ear canal assembly including a drug delivery reservoir in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0013] Figure 8 shows an isometric view of a lateral ear canal assembly in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0014] Figure 9 is an isometric top view of a medial ear canal assembly in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0015] Figure 10 is an isometric bottom view of a medial ear canal assembly in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0016] In embodiments of the present invention, biometric sensors and other devices may be placed in proximity to, on or in the ear canal resulting in a system with the ability to collect information on the user's environment, including information on the user's location, the time of day, and the activity the user is engaged in. In embodiments of the present invention, drug delivery devices may be placed in proximity to, on or in the ear canal resulting in a system with the ability to deliver drugs to a user through the ear and/or components of the ear. In embodiments of the present invention, the combination of a superior hearing system with biometric sensors and other devices, such as drug delivery devices, in a single system which may be placed in proximity to, on or in the ear canal may result in a system with the ability to collect information on the user's environment, including information on the user's location, the time of day, and the activity the user is engaged in. The system may further provide access to highly vascular sections of ear canal, including the pars tensa and manubrium vessels and the information that may be gathered from such locations. The system may further provide the ability to gather data, monitor health, send alerts and deliver drugs through a device that is in place 24 hours a day for years on end,

without interfering with or changing the wearer's day to day activities. The system may further provide the ability to ensure user compliance without the need for user interaction, other than, in some cases, normal upkeep. In some embodiments, the current invention may be used to replace halter monitors, event recorders and/or Sub-Cutaneous (Sub-Q) monitors (e.g. injectable monitors). The system may further provide the ability to mount sensors directly against the skin and ensure that they stay in place over long periods of time, by, for example, using system components that are custom fit to the ear canal wall and/or to the tympanic membrane. The system may further provide the user with feedback, instructions or warnings which go directly to the wearer's tympanic membrane in a manner which is imperceptible to any third party.

[0017] A system according to the present invention may further enable a user to take advantage of characteristics of the ear canal of the user to make measurements of the user's biometric data, including: positioning of sensors in a place, which is undetectable to both the user and third parties; positioning of sensors in a place where they are well protected from the environment, and from external forces (not subject to false alarms, such as, for example, the type of false alarms that result from the dropping or shaking of externally worn devices); positioning of sensors in a very vascular environment; positioning sensors in an environment which may be highly conducive to the measurement of biometric data (an environment where a better signal to noise ratio is achievable - enclosed and dark to facilitate optical measurements; and positioning sensors in an environment where an extensive range of biometric data is available and can be measured, including blood pressure, heart rate, glucose levels, respiration rate, temperature, blood flow and other biometric data.

[0018] A system according to the present invention may further provide: the ability to deliver drugs to a user, including sustained, timed and/or algorithm controlled drug delivery; the ability to ensure compliance with drug regimens by automating drug delivery in an easily accessible region such as the ear canal; the ability to limit the amount of drug delivered without compromising efficacy by delivering to highly vascular tissue in or around the ear canal, such as, for example, the pars tensa and manubrium vessels; the ability to deliver drugs to regions of the body where the vasculature is easily accessible, for example, where the tissue covering the vasculature is very thin, such as, for example, over the manubrium vessels; the ability to locally deliver drugs which are normally delivered systemically, thereby reducing the amount of drugs delivered and the related side effects; and the ability to deliver drugs and treat diseases using a novel platform in the ear canal. Drugs which may be delivered using the present invention include antibiotics (neomycin / quinolones),

dexamethasone, steroids (prednisolone), acetic acid, aluminum acetate, boric acid, betnesol, prednisolone sodium phosphate, clotrimazole, Ceruminolytic agents (sodium chloride / chlorbutanol / paradichlorobenzene), amoxicillin, flucloxacillin; ciprofloxacin, penicillin, betahistine dopamine antagonists (prochlorperazine), antihistamines (cinnarizine and cyclizine), antiviral drugs (acyclovir), sodium fluoride, nicotine and insulin. Diseases which may be treated using the present invention include acute otitis media, furunculosis of external auditory canal, perichondritis of pinna, acute mastoiditis, and malignant otitis externa, vertigo, herpes zoster oticus and cancer. Embodiments of the invention may be used to deliver drugs in which systemic or local drug delivery would be beneficial.

[0019] Figure 1 shows a hearing system 10 configured to transmit electromagnetic energy EM to a medial ear canal assembly 100 positioned in the ear canal EC of the user. The ear comprises an external ear, a middle ear ME and an inner ear. The external ear comprises a Pinna P and an ear canal EC and is bounded medially by a tympanic membrane (also referred to as an eardrum) TM. Ear canal EC extends medially from pinna P to tympanic membrane TM. Ear canal EC is at least partially defined by a skin SK disposed along the surface of the ear canal. The tympanic membrane TM comprises a tympanic membrane annulus TMA that extends circumferentially around a majority of the eardrum to hold the eardrum in place. The middle ear ME is disposed between tympanic membrane TM of the ear and a cochlea CO of the ear. The middle ear ME comprises the ossicles OS to couple the tympanic membrane TM to cochlea CO. The ossicles OS comprise an incus IN, a malleus ML and a stapes ST. The malleus ML is connected to the tympanic membrane TM and the stapes ST is connected to an oval window OW, with the incus IN disposed between the malleus ML and stapes ST. Stapes ST is coupled to the oval window OW so as to conduct sound from the middle ear to the cochlea.

[0020] The hearing system 10 may include an input transducer assembly 20 and a medial ear canal assembly 100 to transmit sound to the user. Hearing system 10 may comprise a sound processor 24, which may be, for example, a behind the ear unit (BTE). Sound processor 24 may comprise many components of hearing system 10 such as a speech processor, battery, wireless transmission circuitry, and input transducer assembly 20. The input transducer assembly 20 can be located at least partially behind the pinna P or substantially or entirely within the ear canal EC. Input transducer assembly 20 may further comprise a Bluetooth™ connection to couple to a cell phone or other external communication device 26. The medial ear canal assembly 100 of hearing system 10 may comprise

components to receive the light energy or other energy, such as RF energy and vibrate the eardrum in response to such energy.

[0021] The input transducer assembly 20 can receive a sound input, for example an audio sound or an input from external communication device 26. With hearing aids for hearing impaired individuals, the input can be ambient sound. The input transducer assembly may comprise at least one input transducer, for example a microphone 22. The at least one input transducer may comprise a second microphone located away from the first microphone, in the ear canal or the ear canal opening, for example positioned on sound processor 24. Input transducer assembly 20 may also include can include a suitable amplifier or other electronic interface. In some embodiments, the input may comprise an electronic sound signal from a sound producing or receiving device, such as a telephone, a cellular telephone, a Bluetooth connection, a radio, a digital audio unit, and the like.

[0022] Input transducer assembly 20 may include a lateral ear canal assembly 12 which may comprise a light source such as an LED or a laser diode for transmitting data (including audio data) and energy to medial ear canal assembly 100. In other embodiments, lateral ear canal assembly 12 may comprise an electromagnetic coil, an RF source, or the like for transmitting data (including audio data) and energy to medial ear canal assembly 100. In embodiments of the invention, lateral ear canal assembly 12 may further comprise a receiver adapted to receive data transmitted from medial ear canal assembly 100, such as, for example, biometric data from sensors positioned on or near medial ear canal assembly 100.

[0023] In embodiments of the invention, medial ear canal assembly 100 is adapted to receive the output from input transducer assembly 20 and produce mechanical vibrations in response to the received information, which may be, for example, in the form of a light signal generated by lateral ear canal assembly 12. In embodiments of the invention, medial ear canal assembly 100 comprises a sound transducer, wherein the sound transducer may comprise at least one of a microactuator, a coil, a magnet, a magnetostrictive element, a photostrictive element, or a piezoelectric element. In embodiments of the invention, input transducer assembly 20 may comprise a light source coupled to sound processor 24 by a fiber optic cable and positioned on lateral ear canal assembly 12. In embodiments of the invention, input transducer assembly 20 may comprise a laser diode coupled to sound processor 24 and positioned on lateral ear canal assembly 12. In embodiments of the invention, the light source of the input transducer assembly 20 may be positioned in the ear canal along with sound processor 24 and microphone 22. When properly coupled to the subject's hearing transduction pathway, the mechanical vibrations caused by medial ear canal assembly 100

can stimulate the cochlea CO, which induces neural impulses in the subject which can be interpreted by the subject as a sound input.

[0024] Figure 2 and Figure 3 show isometric and top views, respectively, of an embodiment of medial ear canal assembly 100 according to the present invention. In the illustrated embodiments, medial ear canal assembly 100 may comprise a retention structure 110, a support structure 120, a transducer 130, at least one spring 140, and a photodetector 150. Medial ear canal assembly 100 may include data processor 200 and transmitter 210 which may be positioned on transducer 130. Retention structure 110, which may be a resilient retention structure, may be sized to couple to the tympanic membrane annulus TMA and at least a portion of the anterior sulcus AS of the ear canal EC. Retention structure 110 may comprise an aperture 110A. Aperture 110A is sized to receive transducer 130 and to allow for normal transduction of sound through the subjects hearing transduction pathway.

[0025] The retention structure 110 can be sized to the user and may comprise one or more of an O-ring, a C-ring, a molded structure, or a structure having a shape profile so as to correspond to the user's ear canal anatomy, or to a mold of the ear canal of the user. Retention structure 110 may comprise a resilient retention structure such that the retention structure can be compressed radially inward as indicated by arrows 102 from an expanded wide profile configuration to a narrow profile configuration when passing through the ear canal and subsequently expand to the wide profile configuration when placed on one or more of the eardrum, the eardrum annulus, or the skin of the ear canal. The retention structure 110 may comprise a shape profile corresponding to anatomical structures that define the ear canal. For example, the retention structure 110 may comprise a first end 112 corresponding to a shape profile of the anterior sulcus AS of the ear canal and the anterior portion of the tympanic membrane annulus TMA. The first end 112 may comprise an end portion having a convex shape profile, for example a nose, so as to fit the anterior sulcus and so as to facilitate advancement of the first end 112 into the anterior sulcus. The retention structure 110 may comprise a second end 114 having a shape profile corresponding to the posterior portion of tympanic membrane annulus TMA.

[0026] The support structure 120 may be positioned in aperture 110A and may comprise a frame, or chassis, so as to support the components connected to support structure 120. Support structure 120 may comprise a rigid material and can be coupled to the retention structure 110, the transducer 130, the at least one spring 140, which may support transducer 130, and the photodetector 150. The support structure 120 may comprise an elastomeric bumpers 122 extending between the support and the retention structure, so as to couple the

support to the retention structure 110 with the elastomeric bumpers 122. The support structure 120 may define an aperture 120A formed thereon. The aperture 120A can be sized so as to receive transducer 130, which may be, for example, a balanced armature transducer. When positioned in aperture 120A, housing 139 of the balanced armature transducer 130 may extend at least partially through the aperture 120A when transducer 130 is coupled to the tympanic membrane TM. Aperture 120A may be further sized to allow normal sound conduction through medial ear canal assembly 100.

[0027] Transducer 130 may, in embodiments of the invention, comprise structures to couple to the eardrum when the retention structure 110 contacts one or more of the eardrum, the eardrum annulus, or the skin of the ear canal. The transducer 130 may, in embodiments of the invention, comprise a balanced armature transducer having a housing 139 and a vibratory reed 132 extending out one end of housing 139. Housing 139 may also, in embodiments of the invention, be a part of a flux return path for transducer 130. In embodiments of the invention, the housing may be a fully integrated part of the transducer, including, for example, the magnetic flux path. The vibratory reed 132 may be affixed to a post 134 and an umbo pad 136. The umbo pad 136 may have a convex surface that contacts the tympanic membrane TM and may move the TM in response to signals received by medial ear canal assembly 100, causing the TM to vibrate. The umbo pad 136 can be anatomically customized to the anatomy of the ear of the user.

[0028] At least one spring 140 may be connected to the support structure 120 and the transducer 130, so as to support the transducer 130 in aperture 120A. The at least one spring 140 may comprise a first spring 142 and a second spring 144, in which each spring is connected to opposing sides of a first end of transducer 130. The springs may comprise coil springs having a first end attached to support structure 120 and a second end attached to transducer 130 or a mount affixed to transducer 130, such that the coil springs pivot the transducer about axes 140A of the coils of the coil springs and resiliently urge the transducer toward the eardrum when retention structure 110 contacts one or more of the eardrum, the eardrum annulus, or the skin of the ear canal. The support structure 120 may comprise a tube sized to receiving an end of the at least one spring 140, so as to couple the at least one spring to support structure 120.

[0029] In embodiments of the invention, a photodetector 150 may be coupled to support structure 120 of medial ear canal assembly 100. A bracket mount 152 can extend substantially around photodetector 150. An arm 154 may extend between support structure 120 and bracket mount 152 so as to support photodetector 150 with an orientation relative to

support structure 120 when placed in the ear canal EC. The arm 154 may comprise a ball portion so as to couple to support structure 120 with a ball-joint 128. The photodetector 150 may be electrically coupled to transducer 130 so as to drive transducer 130 with electrical energy in response to the light energy signal radiated to medial ear canal assembly 100 by input transducer assembly 20. In embodiments of the invention, medial ear canal assembly 100 may include an electronics package 215 mounted on a back surface of photodetector 150. Electronics in electronics package 215 may be used to, for example, condition or modulate the light energy signal between photodetector 150 and transducer 130. Electronics package 215 may comprise, for example, an amplifier to amplify the signal from photodetector 150.

[0030] Resilient retention structure 110 can be resiliently deformed when inserted into the ear canal EC. The retention structure 110 can be compressed radially inward along the pivot axes 140A of the coil springs such that the retention structure 110 is compressed as indicated by arrows 102 from a wide profile configuration having a first width 110W1 as illustrated in Figure 3 to an elongate narrow profile configuration having a second width 110W2.

Compression of retention structure 110 may facilitate advancement of medial ear canal assembly 12 through ear canal EC in the direction illustrate by arrow 104 in Figure 2 and when removed from the ear canal in the direction illustrated by arrow 106 in Figure 2. The elongate narrow profile configuration may comprise an elongate dimension extending along an elongate axis corresponding to an elongate dimension of support structure 120 (120W) and aperture 120A. The elongate narrow profile configuration may comprise a shorter dimension corresponding to a width of the support structure 120 and aperture 120A. The retention structure 110 and support structure 120 may be passed through the ear canal EC for placement on, for example, the tympanic membrane TM of a user. To facilitate placement, vibratory reed 132 of the transducer 130 can be aligned substantially with the ear canal EC while medial ear canal assembly 100 is advanced along the ear canal EC in the elongate narrow profile configuration having second width 110W2.

[0031] When properly positioned, retention structure 110 may return to a shape conforming to the ear canal adjacent to tympanic membrane TM, wherein the medial ear canal assembly is held in place, at least in part, by the interaction of retention structure 110 with the walls of ear canal EC. The medial ear canal assembly 100, including support structure 120, may apply a predetermined amount of force to the tympanic membrane TM when the umbo pad 136 is in contact with the eardrum. When medial ear canal assembly 100 is positioned the support structure 120 can maintain a substantially fixed shape and contact with the tympanic membrane TM is maintained, at least in part, by the force exerted by at least one spring 140.

[0032] Figure 4 is an exploded view of a medial ear canal assembly 100 according to embodiments of the present invention which shows an assembly drawing and a method of assembling medial ear canal assembly 100. The retention structure 110 as described herein can be coupled to the support structure 120, for example, with elastomeric bumpers 122 extending between the retention structure 110 and the support structure 120. The retention structure 110 may define an aperture 110A having a width 110AW corresponding to the wide profile configuration. The support structure 120 may define an aperture 120A having a width 120AW that remains substantially fixed when the resilient retention structure is compressed. The aperture 110A of the resilient retention structure can be aligned with the aperture 120A of the support. Support structure 120 may comprise ball joint 128, and ball joint 128 can be coupled to arm 154 and bracket mount 152, such that the support is coupled to the photodetector 150.

[0033] The transducer 130 may comprise a housing 139 and a mount 138 attached to housing 139, in which the mount 138 is shaped to receive the at least one spring 140. The transducer 130 may comprise a vibratory reed 132 extending from housing 139, in which the vibratory reed 132 is attached to a post 134. The post 134 can be connected to the umbo pad 136.

[0034] The support structure 120 can be coupled to the transducer 130 with the at least one spring 140 extending between the coil and the transducer such that the umbo pad 136 is urged against the tympanic membrane TM when the medial ear canal assembly 100 is placed to transmit sound to the user. The support structure 120 may comprise mounts 126, for example tubes, and the mounts 126 can be coupled to a first end of at least one spring 140, and a second end of the at least one spring 140 can be coupled to the transducer 130 such that the at least one spring 140 extends between the support and the transducer. Umbo sensor 220 may be attached to umbo pad 136 such that umbo sensor 220 is positioned against tympanic membrane TM when medial ear canal assembly 100 is positioned in the ear canal. Umbo sensor may be positioned against any portion of the tympanic membrane and may be referred to as a tympanic membrane sensor.

[0035] Figure 5A is an isometric top view of a medial ear canal assembly 100 according to embodiments of the invention. Figure 5B is an isometric bottom view of a medial ear canal assembly 100 according to embodiments of the invention. In figures 5A and 5B, medial ear canal assembly 100 has a retention structure 110 comprising a stiff support 121 extending along a portion of retention structure 110. The stiff support 121 may be connected to resilient member 141 and coupled to intermediate portion 149. In many embodiments, resilient

member 141 and stiff support structure 120 comprise an integrated component such as an injection molded (or 3-D Printed) unitary component comprising a modulus of elasticity and dimensions so as to provide the resilient member 141 and the stiff support 121.

[0036] In the embodiments of Figure 5A and 5B, stiff support 121 and resilient member 141 can be configured to support output transducer 130 such that output transducer 130 is coupled to the tympanic membrane TM when the medial ear canal assembly 100, including retention structure 110 is placed in the ear canal EC. The resilient member 141 can be attached to the stiff support 121, such that the resilient member 141 directly engages the stiff support 121. The stiff support 121 can be affixed to the resilient member 141 so as to position the umbo pad 136 below the retention structure 110, such that the umbo pad 136 engages the tympanic membrane TM when the retention structure 110 is placed, for example on the tympanic membrane annulus TMA. The resilient member 141 can be configured to provide a predetermined force to the eardrum when the medial ear canal assembly 100 is placed in the Ear Canal.

[0037] In the embodiments of Figures 5A and 5B, resilient member 141 may comprise a resilient cantilever beam. In these embodiments, photodetector 150 may be attached to the output transducer 130 with a mount 153. Photodetector 150 and output transducer 130 can deflect together when the biasing structure 149, for example a spacer, is adjusted to couple the output transducer 130 and the umbo pad 136 to the tympanic membrane TM.

[0038] Sulcus sensors 230 may be positioned on layer 115 of retention structure 110 such that sulcus sensors 230 are in contact with the tympanic membrane TM and/or other portions of the ear canal EC when medial ear canal assembly 100 is positioned in the ear canal. Sulcus sensors 230 may also be positioned on sulcus flanges 235 to optimize their position in ear canal EC, such as, for example, to optimize their position against the tissue of tympanic membrane TM and / or against the tissue of the tympanic membrane annulus TMA. Sulcus flanges 235 may be used to, for example, position sulcus sensors 230 over regions of highly vascular tissue in the ear canal EC, such as on the tympanic membrane TM. Sulcus flanges 235 may be used to, for example, position sulcus sensors 230 over the pars tensa.

[0039] Figure 6 shows an isometric view of the medial ear canal assembly 100. Medial ear canal assembly 100 comprises a retention structure 110, a support structure 120, a transducer 130, at least one spring 140 and a photodetector 150. Medial ear canal assembly 100 may include data processor 200 and transmitter 210 which may be positioned on transducer 130. Medial ear canal assembly 100 may further include non-contact sensors 260 and tethered sensors 250. Non-contact sensors 260 and tethered sensors 250 may be connected to data

processor 200 to provide data to data processor 200. Alternatively, or in combination, one or more of data processor 200, transmitter 210, non-contact sensor(s) 260 and tethered sensors 250 may be part of, located on, or connected to electronics package 215 on photodetector 150. Tethered sensors 250 may be positioned against the skin SK in the ear canal EC where umbo sensors 220 (not shown in Figure 6) and sulcus sensors 230 (not shown in Figure 6) cannot contact. Alternatively or in combination, one or more of non-contact sensors 260 may be positioned loosely in ear canal EC to gather data. Retention structure 110 is sized to couple to the tympanic membrane annulus TMA and at least a portion of the anterior sulcus AS of the ear canal EC. With respect to the remaining elements of the retention structure and their function, see the discussion of Figures 2 and 3.

[0040] Figure 7 shows an isometric view of the medial ear canal assembly 100 including retention structure 110, support structure 120, springs 140, a photodetector 150, and at least one drug delivery device. In embodiments of the invention, medial ear canal assembly 100 may include reservoir 400 and delivery tube 410 which are adapted to deliver drugs to the wearer. In embodiments of the invention, reservoir 400 may be used to store drugs for delivery to, for example, the tympanic membrane. In embodiments of the invention, delivery tube 410 may be used to transport drugs from reservoir 400 to umbo pad 136 which may be constructed to transmit the drugs to or through at least a portion of the tympanic membrane TM. In embodiments of the invention, umbo pad 136 may be constructed to include, for example, needles or microneedles through which drugs may be transported into the tissue of, for example, the tympanic membrane.

[0041] In embodiments of the invention, the medial ear canal assembly 100 may include sensors, such as, for example, umbo sensors 220, sulcus sensors 230 and tethered sensors 250, such as those shown in Figures 4, 5, and 6. In embodiments of the invention, sensors located on medial ear canal assembly 100 may be used to collect data on the user, which user data may be used to regulate the flow of drugs from the at least one drug delivery device which is incorporated into medial ear canal assembly 100.

[0042] Figure 8 shows a lateral ear canal assembly 12, including a retention structure 310 (which may also be referred to as an eartip retention structure) configured for placement in the ear canal. Retention structure 310 may comprise a molded tubular structure having the shape of the ear canal. Retention structure 310 may be configured to retain lateral ear canal assembly 12 in the ear canal. Lateral ear canal assembly 12 may include a signal source 320 such as a laser diode. An outer surface 340 of retention structure 310 may include ear tip sensors 240, which may be positioned against the skin SK of the ear canal EC and,

alternatively or in combination, sensors (not shown) which are positioned on the medial or lateral ends of lateral ear canal assembly 12, such as, for example, a body temperature sensor.

[0043] Figure 9 is an isometric Top view of a medial ear canal assembly in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. In Figure 9, medial ear canal assembly 100 comprises transducer 130, photodetector 150, spring 140, support structure 120 and retention structure 110. In the embodiment of Figure 9, sulcus sensors 230 may be positioned on retention structure 110, which may be, for example a flexible material adapted to conform to the anatomy of the user's ear canal. Retention structure 110 may comprise a material such as Parylene or Silicone.

[0044] Figure 10 is an isometric bottom view of a medial ear canal assembly in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. In Figure 10, medial ear canal assembly 100 may comprise transducer 130, photodetector 150, spring 140, support structure 120, retention structure 110 and umbo pad 136. In the embodiment of Figure 10, sulcus sensors 230 may be positioned on retention structure 110, which may be, for example a flexible material adapted to conform to the anatomy of the user's ear canal. In the embodiment of Figure 10, umbo sensors 220 may be positioned on umbo pad 136. Retention structure 110 may comprise a material such as Parylene or Silicone.

[0045] In embodiments of the invention, umbo sensors 220, sulcus sensors 230, eartip sensors 240, and tethered sensors 250 may comprise sensors that contact the skin to detect biometric data. Alternatively or in combination, umbo sensors 220, sulcus sensors 230, eartip sensors 240, and tethered sensors 250 may comprise sensors that do not require skin contact to detect biometric data. Non-contact sensors may also be sensors which do not require skin contact to detect biometric data.

[0046] Skin contacting sensors adaptable for use in embodiments of the present invention may include: micro-sensors, electrochemical sensors; thin film sensors; pressure sensors; micro-needle sensors, capacitive sensors thermometers, thermocouples, trigeminal nerve monitors; piezoelectric sensors; electrodes, pulse oximetry sensors, glucose meters, oxygen sensors and iontophoresis electrodes.

[0047] Non-skin contacting sensors adaptable for use in embodiments of the present invention may include: light sensors (e.g. optical sensors or infrared sensors); sound sensors (e.g. a microphone to pick up sounds in the ear canal); vibration sensors; heat sensors, micro-sensors; electrochemical sensors; thin film sensors; liquid (e.g. oil) sensors; accelerometers, microphones; gyroscopes, including 3-axis accelerometers, 3 axis gyroscopes; MEMS

sensors, including 3 axis MEMS sensors; GPS circuitry; pedometers; reservoir monitors; walking gait sensors; battery state monitors; energy level monitors; and strain gauges.

[0048] In embodiments of the present invention, a suitable microphone might be transducer 130 wired to measure back electromagnetic fields (back EMF) which is generated when post 134 is moved independent of any drive signal provided to transducer 130, such as by vibrations in the tympanic membrane TM resulting from, for example the user speaking or snoring. The back EMF could then be provided to data processor 200 where it could be analyzed and transmitted to a receiver in lateral ear canal assembly 12 or in a remote receiver (e.g. a smart phone) by transmitter 210. In one embodiment of the invention, data processor 200 could include circuitry used to separate sounds coming from sources other than the user from sounds generated by the user to provide filtered data, which filtered feedback data may represent, for example, the user's voice.

[0049] In embodiments of the invention, a suitable optical sensor may comprise an infrared transmitter and infrared receiver. In embodiments of the invention, a suitable optical sensor may include an optical receiver tuned to the same frequency as signal source 320.

[0050] In embodiments of the invention, sensors may be 3D printed on or as an integral part of structures in the components of hearing system 10. In embodiments of the invention, non-skin contacting sensors may be mounted on, for example, the back side of photodetector 150.

[0051] In embodiments of the invention, a light may be mounted on medial ear canal assembly 100 and positioned to shine through tympanic membrane TM to illuminate the middle ear and the contents thereof. In embodiments of the invention, a sensor may be further included on medial ear canal assembly 100 to measure light reflected from the middle ear.

[0052] In embodiments of the invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 may be used to sense the position of transducer assembly with respect to structural features of the ear canal EC, such as the tympanic membrane TM. The data from such sensors may be used to position the medial ear canal assembly 100 to ensure it is properly placed and aligned in the user's ear.

[0053] In embodiments of the invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure environmental factors which are related to the proper functioning of the medial ear canal assembly 100, such as, degradation in photodetector output, earwax buildup, whether the user is compliant with the required oiling regimen. In embodiments of the invention, sensors may be used to ensure that the

user is properly oiling by, for example, measuring the amount and regularity of oiling. In embodiments of the invention, sensors on the eartip may be used to guide and/or detect proper medial ear canal assembly insertion. In embodiments of the invention, pressure sensors and/or fluid sensors may be positioned on a medial ear canal assembly, including on the umbo pad 136 or sulcus platform to assist in the preceding tasks.

[0054] In embodiments of the invention, strain gauges may be included in the medial ear canal assembly 100 to provide feedback on the proper placement of medial ear canal assembly 100. For example, post 134 may include strain gauges which indicate when displacement starts and/or the degree of displacement by registering the lateral force on umbo pad 136. Further, the placement of one or more strain gages on retention structure 110 may provide an indication that the medial ear canal assembly 100 has lifted off of the tympanic membrane TM. In embodiments of the invention, medial ear canal assembly 100 may include features which interact with physical features of the wearer to maintain medial ear canal assembly 100 in a predetermined position in the ear canal EC, such as, for example against the tympanic membrane TM. In embodiments of the invention, such physical features may create strain on the medial ear canal assembly 100, which strain may be measured by strain gauges positioned on medial ear canal assembly 100 to ensure proper placement of medial ear canal assembly 100.

[0055] In embodiments of the invention, a feedback signal representative of the average power received by photodetector 150 may be provided, which signal may be used to quantify the coupling efficiency between photodetector 150 and signal source 320. In embodiments of the invention, the power level of signal source 320 may be adjusted to reflect the degree of coupling and the coupling efficiency indicated by the feedback signal. In embodiments of the invention, the position of lateral ear canal assembly 12 and/or medial ear canal assembly 100 may be modified to increase or decrease the level of the feedback signal, thus improving the coupling efficiency between the lateral ear canal assembly 12 and the medial ear canal assembly 100.

[0056] In embodiments of the invention, noise cancelation may be implemented by, for example, incorporating a microphone onto the back of photodetector 150. Sound signals received by the microphone could be converted into drive signals which move the tympanic membrane in opposition to the received signals such that the received signals are not perceived by the user. Such noise cancelation may be implemented such that the microphone is turned on only when the output from the photodetector exceeds a predetermined voltage, such as, for example, approximately 300 millivolts. Alternatively or in combination, the

microphone may be turned on when the photodetector output voltage exceeds approximately 1 volt. In one embodiment of the invention, the sound signals may be measured by measuring the back EMF of transducer 130 and generating a signal to the transducer which causes the transducer to vibrate the tympanic membrane in a way which cancels the movement which generated the measured back EMF.

[0057] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure bodily fluids, such as sweat, interstitial fluid, blood and/or cerumen (ear wax). Sensors suitable for making these measurements include electrochemical sensors, micro-needles and capacitive sensors.

[0058] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure sweat for the purpose of, for example, measuring hydration levels, electrolyte balance, lactate threshold, glucose levels, calories burned, respiration rate, drug levels, metabolites, small molecules (e.g. amino acids, DHEA, cortisol, pH levels and various proteins. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include electrochemical sensors, micro-needles and capacitive sensors.

[0059] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure the temperature, including the core body temperature of a user. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include thermometers, thermocouples, and optical temperature sensors.

[0060] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor blood pressure, blood flow, heart rate, pulse, and arrhythmia. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include electrodes, PPG (Photoplethysmography) sensors and pulse oximetry sensors.

[0061] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor the oxygen level in a user's blood. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include optical sensors PPG (Photoplethysmography) sensors, and/or pulse oximetry sensors.

[0062] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor drug delivery and/or medication use by monitoring the drug content in blood or interstitial fluid of a user. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include micro-needles and/or iontophoresis electrodes.

[0063] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor body fat. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include electrodes.

[0064] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to monitor and/or measure sleep, including the duration and/or quality of such sleep. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include accelerometers, microphones and gyroscopes.

[0065] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor snoring and/or sleep apnea. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include accelerometers, microphones; gyroscopes; head position monitors (3 axis gyroscope); vibration sensor (microphone, TMT microactuator); oxygen sensors and trigeminal nerve monitors.

[0066] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC and/or on the tympanic membrane may be used to measure and/or monitor the location of a user. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include GPS circuitry.

[0067] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor the movement of a user. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include an accelerometer and/or a pedometer.

[0068] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor calorie intake. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include microphones and piezoelectric sensors.

[0069] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor posture, head position and/or body position. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include gyroscopes, accelerometers (including 3-axis accelerometers) and MEMS sensors (including 3 axis MEMS sensors).

[0070] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor seizure disorders, including epilepsy, by making electroencephalogram (EEG) measurements. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include electrodes and/or electroencephalograph.

[0071] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor electrical activities of the heart by making an electrocardiogram (ECG/EKG). Sensors suitable for making these measurements may include electrodes and/or electrocardiographs.

[0072] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor the electrical activity produced by skeletal muscles by making an electromyogram using Electromyography (EMG). Sensors suitable for making these measurements may include electrodes and/or electromyographs.

[0073] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor the glucose in a user's blood and/or interstitial fluid. Sensors suitable for making these measurements include glucose meters, electrochemical sensors, microneedles, and/or iontophoresis electrodes.

[0074] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor neurological function. Sensors suitable for making these measurements may include sensors for measuring the walking gait of a user.

[0075] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to measure and/or monitor the position and/or orientation of a user's eye.

[0076] Many other physical characteristics may be measured by sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC, including: multi-axis acceleration; multi-axis angle; skin capacitance; infrared absorption, (e.g. pulse ox), chemical reactions; and strains.

[0077] In embodiments of the present invention, devices on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used in combination with sensors to deliver medication to a user. Devices suitable for making these delivers may include drug reservoirs, patches, microneedles, polymers designed to elute over time and/or drug eluting materials.

[0078] In embodiments of the invention, drugs may be delivered through, for example, iontophoresis, direct skin contact, needles, drugs in the platform, drug infused silicon or other structural materials or holes or pores in the tympanic membrane structure to hold drugs prior to dispensing or weep over time.

[0079] In embodiments of the present invention, devices on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to stimulate serotonin production in a user by, for example, shining light in the ear canal EC for predetermined periods of time.

Alternatively, such devices may be adapted to increase the production of vitamin D.

[0080] In embodiments of the present invention, devices, including sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to recognize the speech of a user. Devices suitable for making these deliveries may include microphones and speech recognition / signal processing chips and software.

[0081] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 or positioned in the ear canal EC may be used to control the function of hearing system 10. The function of hearing system 10 may be controlled by, for example, sensing control instructions from the user, including, verbal instructions and/or instructions conveyed by finger snapping, bone conduction and/or bringing a hand or finger into proximity with the sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100. Sensors suitable for such control functions may include touch sensors, bone conduction sensors and proximity sensors.

[0082] In embodiments of the present invention, the power required to operate sensors, drug delivery, and/or other devices located on medial ear canal assembly 100 may be supplied by one or more of the following: AC or DC current from photodetector 150; AC or DC current from an RF antenna located on or connected to medial ear canal assembly 100; Energy from a battery, micro-battery and/or super capacitor on or connected to medial ear canal assembly 100. In further embodiments of the present invention, circuitry on medial ear canal assembly 100 may be obtained by, for example: harvesting power from the motion of the user, including the dynamic motion of the wall of an outer ear, using, for example, a spring located on or connected to medial ear canal assembly 100; harvesting power from the motion of the tympanic membrane, including harvesting sound energy which vibrates the tympanic membrane; harvesting power from the motion of the tympanic membrane, including harvesting sound energy below approximately 100 Hz; harvesting power from the action of muscles in or near the ear canal, such as, for example muscles used in chewing food; harvesting power from the temporomandibular joint; using the movement of the eardrum (such as, for example, driven by music) to act as a pump. In embodiments of the invention circuitry on medial ear canal assembly 100 may be powered by, for example, the use of light based earplugs which transmits energy to medial ear canal assembly 100 to power the assembly when lateral ear canal assembly 12 is not being used. In embodiments of the invention, such light based earplugs may be used to recharge batteries or super capacitors

located on or connected to medial ear canal assembly 100. In embodiments of the invention circuitry on medial ear canal assembly 100 may be powered by, for example, a wand which radiates, for example, RF energy to an antenna located on or connected to medial ear canal assembly 100 to power sensors on medial ear canal assembly 100 and/or in the ear canal EC for the purpose of making measurements.

[0083] In embodiments of the present invention, sensors located on medial ear canal assembly 100 may communicate data to any one of a number of devices, including lateral ear canal assembly 12, a smartphone, a smart watch, a cellular network, a ZigBee network, a Wi-Fi network, a WiGi-G network, and/or a Bluetooth enabled device. In embodiments of the present invention, such information may be transmitted from medial ear canal assembly 100 to lateral ear canal assembly 12 and from lateral ear canal assembly 12 to a smartphone, a smart watch, a cellular network, a ZigBee network, and/or a Bluetooth enabled device. In embodiments of the invention, such sensors a part of a closed loop communication network. In embodiments of the invention, communication to medial ear canal assembly 100 may be facilitated by the positioning of an antenna on or connected to medial ear canal assembly 100. In embodiments of the invention, such antennas may be printed on or formed as part of a chassis of medial ear canal assembly 100. In embodiments of the present invention, communication of data may be facilitated by the inclusion of transmitter 210 on medial ear canal assembly 100.

[0084] In embodiments of the invention, removable portions of hearing system 10 may sense emergency situations, such as fire alarms, and communicate with the user wearing medial ear canal assembly 100 using an antenna located on or connected to medial ear canal assembly 100 to warn the user of danger.

[0085] In embodiments of the invention, data collected from sensors located on medial ear canal assembly 100 or in the ear canal EC of a user may be communicated to the user's physician and/or family. In embodiments of the invention, data collected from sensors located on medial ear canal assembly 100 or in the ear canal EC of a user may be used to generate data or reports which may be communicated to the user's physician and/or family. In embodiments of the present invention, information, data or reports which may be communicated to the user, the user's physician and/or family may include information on the user's environment, including time of day, activity, surrounding sounds. In embodiments of the present invention, information, data or reports which may be communicated to the user, the user's family physician, and/or family may include information on biometric data related to the user, including blood pressure, heart rate, glucose levels, and other biometric data. In

embodiments of the present invention, information, data or reports which may be communicated to the user, the user's family physician and/or family may include information on specific events related to the user or the user's physical condition, including, falls, blood pressure spikes, heart attacks, temperature spikes, impending or actual seizures, changes in specific biomarkers, or other metrics. In embodiments of the present invention, information, data or reports which may be communicated to the user, the user's family physician and/or family may include algorithm results transmitted when trends or parameters in the user's biometric data become concerning. In embodiments of the present invention, information, including warnings may be communicated to the user may include, sleep apnea warnings, drowsiness warnings (e.g. when driving), warnings of impending seizures, migraine headaches warnings, and/or cluster headache warnings.

[0086] In embodiments of the invention, medial ear canal assembly 100 may be used to communicate with the user to, for example, remind the user when to drink or when the user's sugar levels are spiking or dropping.

[0087] In embodiments of the present invention, data or other information may be transmitted by a user to the hearing system 10 of a second user. In embodiments of the invention, a user may transmit data or other information to a network of hearing systems 10.

[0088] In embodiments of the present invention, data collected by sensors positioned on medial ear canal assembly 100 or in the ear canal of a user may be collected and analyzed, by, for example, an Application on the user's smart phone. Such data may be used for many purposes, including predicating changes in the user's health and generating event alarms. Event alarms generated from the collected data might include alarms related to epilepsy seizures, migraines, cluster headaches, or predetermined changes in key biometric data or trends. Such data may be further processed to allow the user to, for example, view the data which is most important to the user, perform trend analysis on the data, correlate specific data with activities or environment, provide a dashboard of data or chart specific data. Data may also be stored for review at future doctor's appointments. Data trends may also be stored and analyzed over time.

[0089] Embodiments of the present invention are directed to a hearing system comprising a medial ear canal assembly including a transducer configured to be positioned on the tympanic membrane of a user; a lateral ear canal assembly including a signal source configured to be positioned in the ear canal of a user; and sensors connected to the medial ear canal assembly, the sensors being connected to a transmitter. In embodiments of the invention, the sensors may include sensors adapted to detect biometric data. In embodiments of the invention, the

sensors may include sensors adapted to detect one or more physical characteristics of the user. In embodiments of the invention, at least one of the sensors may comprise a microphone. In embodiments of the invention, the microphone may comprise a micro-actuator. In embodiments of the invention, sound received by the micro-actuator is configured to be converted to a back EMF signal. In embodiments of the invention, the hearing system may include a data processor which is configured to convert the back EMF to a signal representative of the sound received by the micro-actuator. In embodiments of the invention the hearing system may be configured to transmit the signal representative of the sound received by the microactuator to a receiver external to the hearing system. In embodiments of the invention, the receiver comprises a smart phone, a wireless network, or a peripheral device. In embodiments of the invention, at least one of the sensors comprises a skin contacting sensor or a non-skin contacting sensor. In embodiments of the invention, at least one of the sensors comprises an umbo sensor, an eartip sensor, or a tethered sensor.

[0090] Embodiments of the present invention are directed to a method of sensing physical characteristics of a hearing system user, the hearing system comprising a medial ear canal assembly positioned on or near the tympanic membrane, the medial ear canal assembly comprising transducer sensors and a transmitter, the method comprising the steps of: using the sensors to measure biometric data of the user; and transmitting the measured biometric data using the transmitter. In embodiments of the invention the method further comprising using the sensors to measure one or more physical characteristics of the user. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises a microphone the method further comprising the steps of measuring sound in the user's ear canal. In embodiments of the invention the microphone comprises a micro-actuator, the method further comprising measuring the back EMF signal. In embodiments of the invention the hearing system includes a data processor, the method further including the step of converting the back EMF signal to an electrical signal and transmitting the electrical signal to the data signal processor. In embodiments of the invention the back EMF signal includes a first signal portion representative of the signal received from the hearing system and a second signal representative of at least one physical characteristic of the user, the method further including the step of separating the first signal from the second signal. In embodiments of the invention the method further includes the step of transmitting the signal to a receiver external to the hearing system. In embodiments of the invention the receiver comprises a smart phone. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises a skin contacting sensor or a non-skin contacting sensor. In embodiments of the invention at least

one of the sensors comprises an umbo sensor, an eartip sensor, or a tethered sensor. In embodiments of the invention the output transducer is used as a sensor. In embodiments of the invention the sensor is used as a microphone to measure received sound at the tympanic membrane. In embodiments of the invention the signal from the microphone is coupled to the transmitter.

[0091] Embodiments of the present invention are directed to an ear canal platform comprising: a medial ear canal assembly positioned on or over the tympanic membrane of a user; and sensors connected to the signal output transducer, the sensors being connected to a transmitter. In embodiments of the invention the sensors include sensors adapted to detect biometric data. In embodiments of the invention the sensors include sensors adapted to detect one or more physical characteristics of the user. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises a microphone. In embodiments of the invention the microphone comprises a micro-actuator. In embodiments of the invention sound received by the micro-actuator is configured to be converted to a voltage representative of the back EMF generated in the microactuator by the sound received by the microactuator. In embodiments of the invention the hearing system includes a data processor which is configured to convert the voltage to a signal representative of the sound received by the micro-actuator. In embodiments of the invention the signal is configured to be transmitted by the hearing system to a receiver external to the hearing system. In embodiments of the invention the receiver comprises a smart phone, a wireless network, or a peripheral device. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises a skin contacting sensor or a non-skin contacting sensor. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises an umbo sensor, an eartip sensor, or a tethered sensor.

[0092] Embodiments of the present invention are directed to a method of sensing physical characteristics of a user having a medial ear canal assembly positioned on or near the tympanic membrane, the medial ear canal assembly comprising sensors and a transmitter, the method comprising the steps of: using the sensors to measure biometric data of the user; and transmitting the measured biometric data using the transmitter. In embodiments of the invention the method further comprising using the sensors to measure one or more physical characteristics of the user. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises a microphone the method further comprising the steps of measuring sound in the user's ear canal. In embodiments of the invention the microphone comprises a micro-actuator, the method further comprising measuring and transmitting the output of the microphone. In embodiments of the invention the hearing system includes a data processor,

the method further including the step of sending the transmitted signal to the data processor. the transmitted signal includes a first signal portion representative of the signal received from the hearing system and a second signal representative of a physical characteristic of the user, the method further including the step of separating the first signal from the second signal. In embodiments of the invention the method further includes the step of transmitting the signal to a receiver external to the hearing system. In embodiments of the invention the receiver comprises a smart phone. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises a skin contacting sensor or a non-skin contacting sensor. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises an umbo sensor, an eartip sensor, or a tethered sensor. In embodiments of the invention the output transducer is used as a sensor. In embodiments of the invention the sensor is used as a microphone to measure received sound at the tympanic membrane. In embodiments of the invention the signal from the microphone is coupled to the transmitter.

[0093] Embodiments of the present invention are directed to an ear canal platform comprising: a medial ear canal assembly positioned on the tympanic membrane of a user; a drug delivery device mounted on the ear canal assembly. In embodiments of the invention an ear canal assembly further includes sensors connected to the ear canal assembly, the sensors being connected to a transmitter. In embodiments of the invention the sensors include sensors adapted to detect biometric data. In embodiments of the invention the sensors include sensors adapted to detect one or more physical characteristics of the user. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors is a microphone. In embodiments of the invention the microphone is a micro-actuator. In embodiments of the invention sound received by the micro-actuator is converted to a transmitted signal. In embodiments of the invention the hearing system includes a data processor which converts the transmitted signal to a signal representative of the sound received by the micro-actuator. In embodiments of the invention the signal is transmitted by the hearing system to a receiver external to the hearing system. In embodiments of the invention the receiver is a smart phone, a wireless network, or a peripheral device. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises a skin contacting sensor, or a non-skin contacting sensor. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises an umbo sensor, an eartip sensor, or a tethered sensor.

[0094] Embodiments of the present invention are directed to a method of delivering drugs to a user having a medial ear canal assembly positioned on or near the user's tympanic membrane, the medial ear canal assembly comprising a drug delivery device, the method comprising the steps of: delivering drugs to the user through the drug delivery device. In

embodiments of the invention the medial ear canal assembly further includes sensors and a transmitter, the method comprising the steps of: using the sensors to measure biometric data of the user; and transmitting the measured biometric data using the transmitter. In embodiments of the invention the method further includes the step of activating the drug delivery device using the biometric data measured by the sensors. In embodiments of the invention the method further comprises using the sensors to measure one or more physical characteristics of the user. In embodiments of the invention the method further comprises the step of activating the drug delivery device using the measured physical characteristics of the user. In embodiments of the invention, the step of activating drug delivery includes activating drug delivery when needed and/or at predetermined times or over predetermined time periods. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises a skin contacting sensor or a non-skin contacting sensor. In embodiments of the invention at least one of the sensors comprises an umbo sensor, an eartip sensor, or a tethered sensor. In embodiments of the invention, the system may comprise a reservoir and mechanisms for drug delivery.

[0095] While the preferred embodiments of the devices and methods have been described in reference to the environment in which they were developed, they are merely illustrative of the principles of the present inventive concepts. Modification or combinations of the above-described assemblies, other embodiments, configurations, and methods for carrying out the invention, and variations of aspects of the invention that are obvious to those of skill in the art are intended to be within the scope of the claims. In addition, where this application has listed the steps of a method or procedure in a specific order, it may be possible, or even expedient in certain circumstances, to change the order in which some steps are performed, and it is intended that the particular steps of the method or procedure claim set forth herein below not be construed as being order-specific unless such order specificity is expressly stated in the claim.

Claims

1. A system comprising:

a medial ear canal assembly including a transducer configured to be positioned on the tympanic membrane of a user;

a lateral ear canal assembly including a signal source configured to be positioned in the ear canal of a user; and

sensors connected to the medial ear canal assembly, the sensors being connected to a transmitter.
2. A system according to Claim 1, wherein the sensors include sensors adapted to detect biometric data.
3. A system according to Claim 2, wherein the sensors include sensors adapted to detect one or more physical characteristics of the user.
4. A system according to Claim 1, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises a microphone.
5. A system according to Claim 4, wherein the microphone comprises a micro-actuator.
6. A system according to Claim 5, wherein sound received by the micro-actuator is configured to be converted to a back EMF signal.
7. A system according to Claim 6, wherein the system includes a data processor which is configured to convert the back EMF to a signal representative of the sound received by the micro-actuator.
8. A system according to Claim 7, wherein the system is configured to transmit the signal to a receiver external to the system.
9. A system according to Claim 8, wherein the receiver comprises a smart phone, a wireless network, or a peripheral device.
10. A system according to Claim 1, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises a skin contacting sensor or a non-skin contacting sensor.

11. A system according to Claim 1, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises an umbo sensor, an eartip sensor, or a tethered sensor.
12. A method of sensing physical characteristics of a system user, the system comprising a medial ear canal assembly positioned on or near the tympanic membrane, the medial ear canal assembly comprising transducer sensors and a transmitter, the method comprising the steps of:

using the sensors to measure biometric data of the user; and

transmitting the measured biometric data using the transmitter.
13. A method according to Claim 12, the method further comprising using the sensors to measure one or more physical characteristics of the user.
14. A method according to Claim 13, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises a microphone the method further comprising the steps of measuring sound in the user's ear canal.
15. A method according to Claim 14, wherein the microphone comprises a micro-actuator, the method further comprising measuring the back EMF signal.
16. A method according to Claim 15, wherein the system includes a data processor, the method further including the step of converting the back EMF signal to an electrical signal and transmitting the electrical signal to the data signal processor.
17. A method according to Claim 16, wherein the back EMF signal includes a first signal portion representative of the signal received from the system and a second signal representative of at least one physical characteristic of the user, the method further including the step of separating the first signal from the second signal.
18. A method according to Claim 16, wherein the method further includes the step of transmitting the signal to a receiver external to the system.
19. A method according to Claim 17, wherein the receiver comprises a smart phone.
20. A method according to Claim 12, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises a skin contacting sensor or a non-skin contacting sensor.
21. A method according to Claim 12, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises an umbo sensor, an eartip sensor, or a tethered sensor.

22. A method according to Claim 12, wherein the output transducer is used as a sensor.
23. A method according to Claim 22, wherein the sensor is used as a microphone to measure received sound at the tympanic membrane.
24. A method according to Claim 23, wherein the signal from the microphone is coupled to the transmitter.
25. An ear canal platform comprising:
 - a medial ear canal assembly positioned on or over the tympanic membrane of a user;
 - and
 - sensors connected to the signal output transducer, the sensors being connected to a transmitter.
26. An ear canal platform according to Claim 25, wherein the sensors include sensors adapted to detect biometric data.
27. An ear canal platform according to Claim 26, wherein the sensors include sensors adapted to detect one or more physical characteristics of the user.
28. An ear canal platform according to Claim 25, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises a microphone.
29. An ear canal platform according to Claim 28, wherein the microphone comprises a micro-actuator.
30. An ear canal platform according to Claim 29, wherein sound received by the micro-actuator is configured to be converted to a voltage representative of the back EMF generated in the microactuator by the sound received by the microactuator.
31. An ear canal platform according to Claim 30, wherein the system includes a data processor which is configured to convert the voltage to a signal representative of the sound received by the micro-actuator.
32. An ear canal platform according to Claim 31, wherein the signal is configured to be transmitted by the system to a receiver external to the system.
33. An ear canal platform according to Claim 32, wherein the receiver comprises a smart phone, a wireless network, or a peripheral device.

34. An ear canal platform according to Claim 25, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises a skin contacting sensor or a non-skin contacting sensor.
35. An ear canal platform according to Claim 25, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises an umbo sensor, an eartip sensor, or a tethered sensor.
36. A method of sensing physical characteristics of a user having a medial ear canal assembly positioned on or near the tympanic membrane, the medial ear canal assembly comprising sensors and a transmitter, the method comprising the steps of:
using the sensors to measure biometric data of the user; and
transmitting the measured biometric data using the transmitter.
37. A method according to Claim 36, the method further comprising using the sensors to measure one or more physical characteristics of the user.
38. A method according to Claim 37, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises a microphone the method further comprising the steps of measuring sound in the user's ear canal.
39. A method according to Claim 38, wherein the microphone comprises a micro-actuator, the method further comprising measuring and transmitting the output of the microphone.
40. A method according to Claim 39, wherein the system includes a data processor, the method further including the step of sending the transmitted signal to the data processor.
41. A method according to Claim 40, wherein the transmitted signal includes a first signal portion representative of the signal received from the system and a second signal representative of a physical characteristic of the user, the method further including the step of separating the first signal from the second signal.
42. A method according to Claim 40, wherein the method further includes the step of transmitting the signal to a receiver external to the system.
43. A method according to Claim 41, wherein the receiver comprises a smart phone.
44. A method according to Claim 36, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises a skin contacting sensor or a non-skin contacting sensor.

45. A method according to Claim 36, wherein at least one of the sensors comprises an umbo sensor, an eartip sensor, or a tethered sensor.
46. A method according to Claim 36, wherein the output transducer is used as a sensor.
47. A method according to Claim 46, wherein the sensor is used as a microphone to measure received sound at the tympanic membrane
48. A method according to Claim 47, wherein the signal from the microphone is coupled to the transmitter.
49. A method according to Claim 40 wherein the data processor is a cloud based system.
50. A method according to Claim 40 wherein the data processor is a communication device including an application.
51. A method according to Claim 40 wherein the data processor is located at the facility of a medical professional.

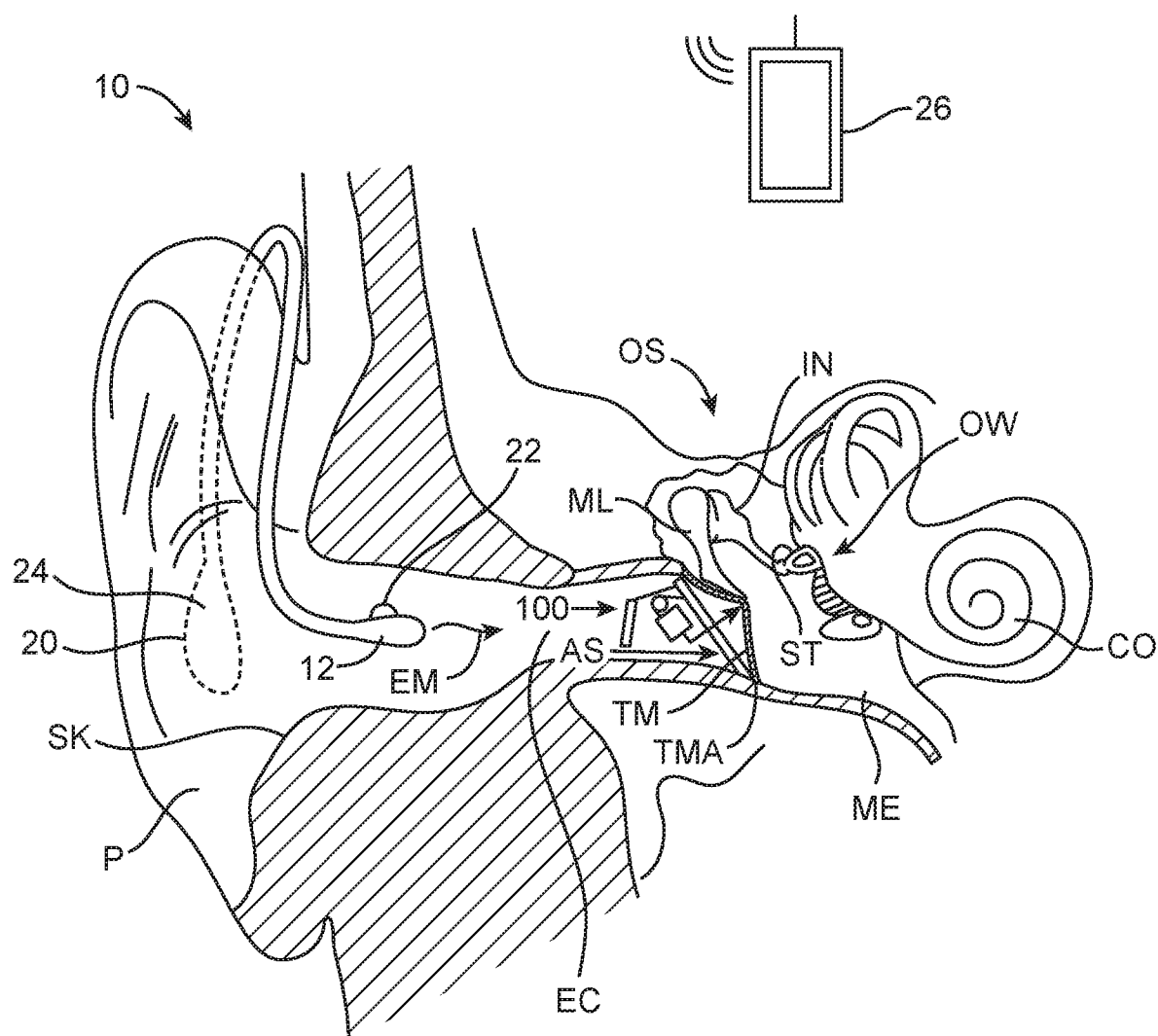
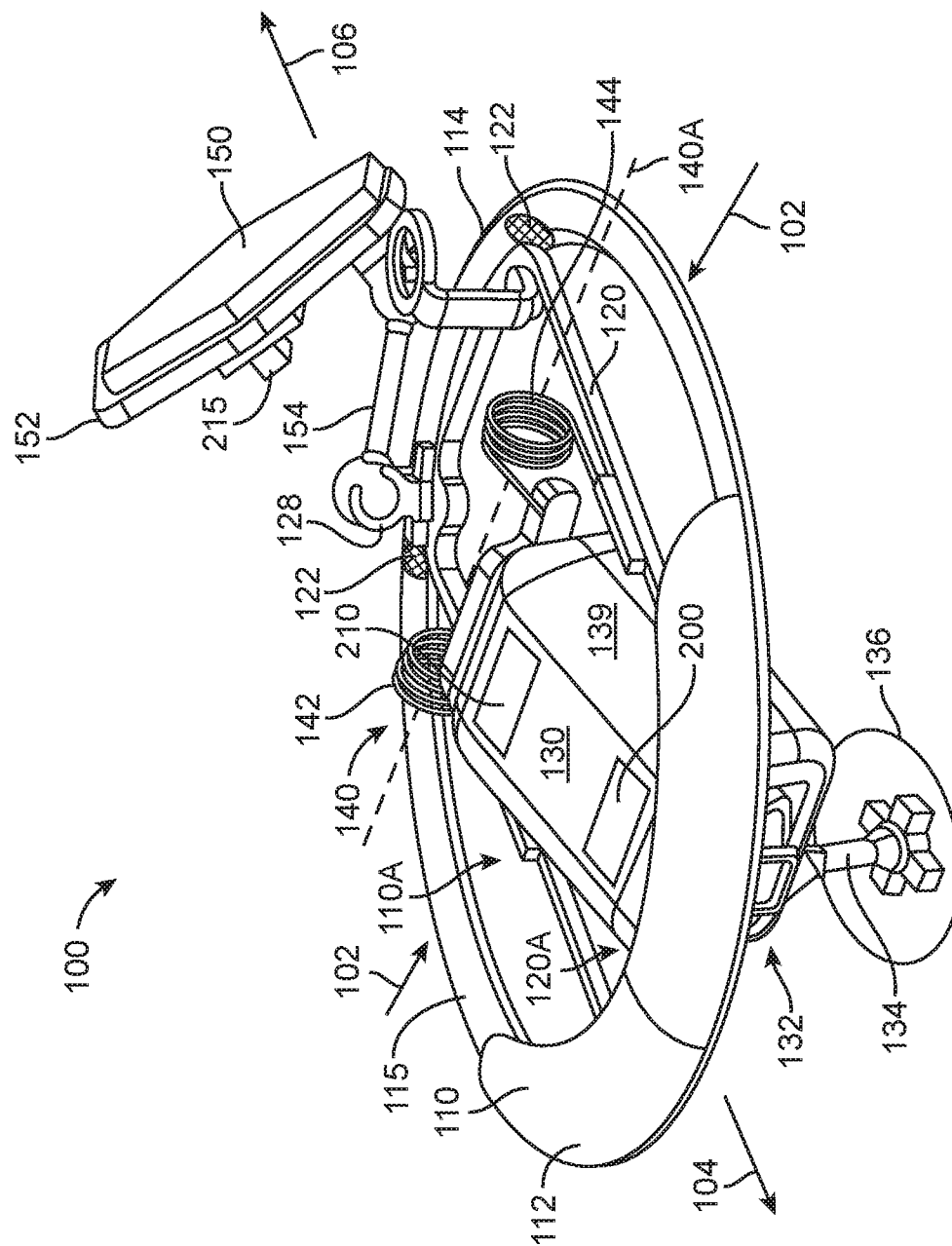


FIG. 1

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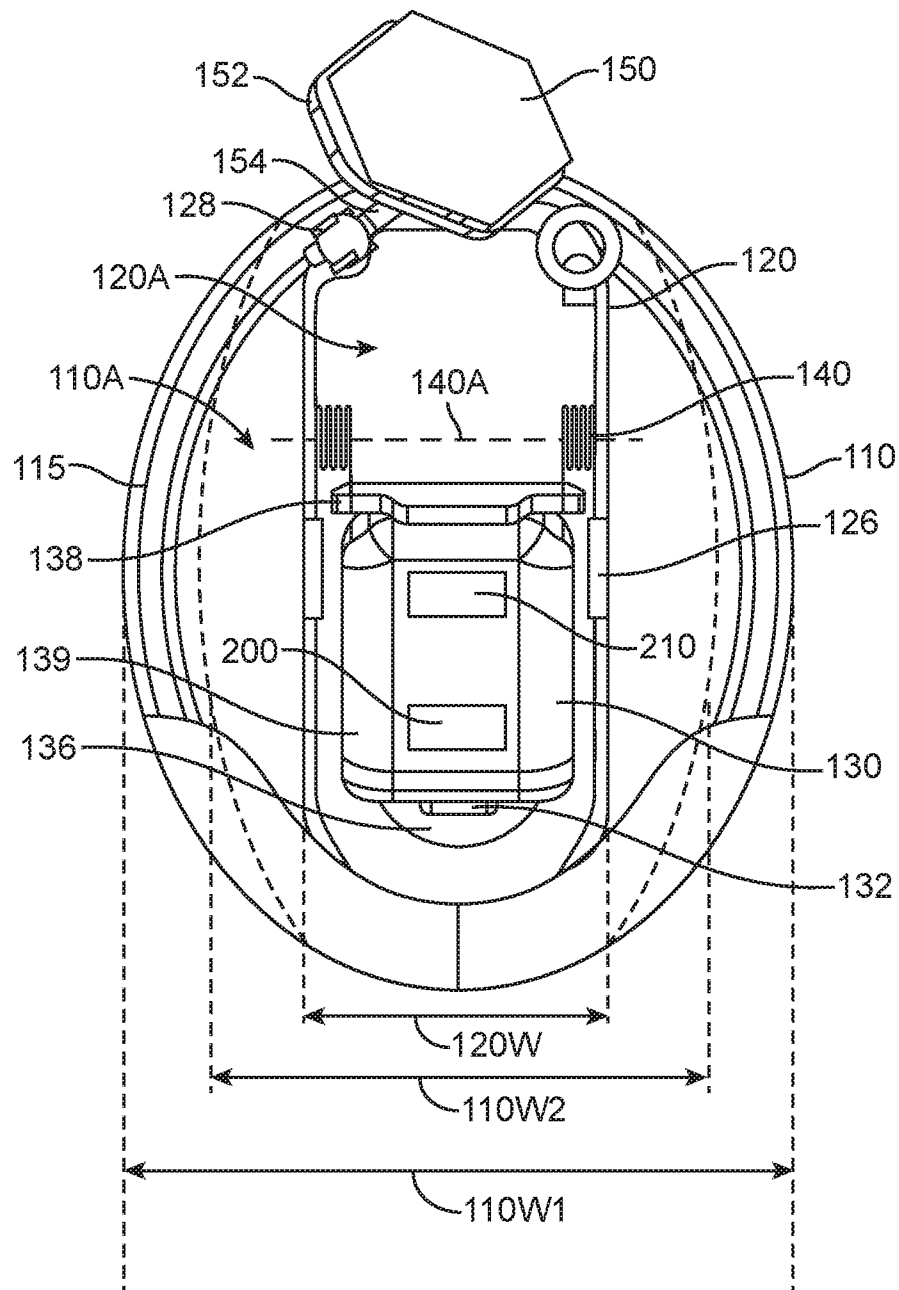


FIG. 3

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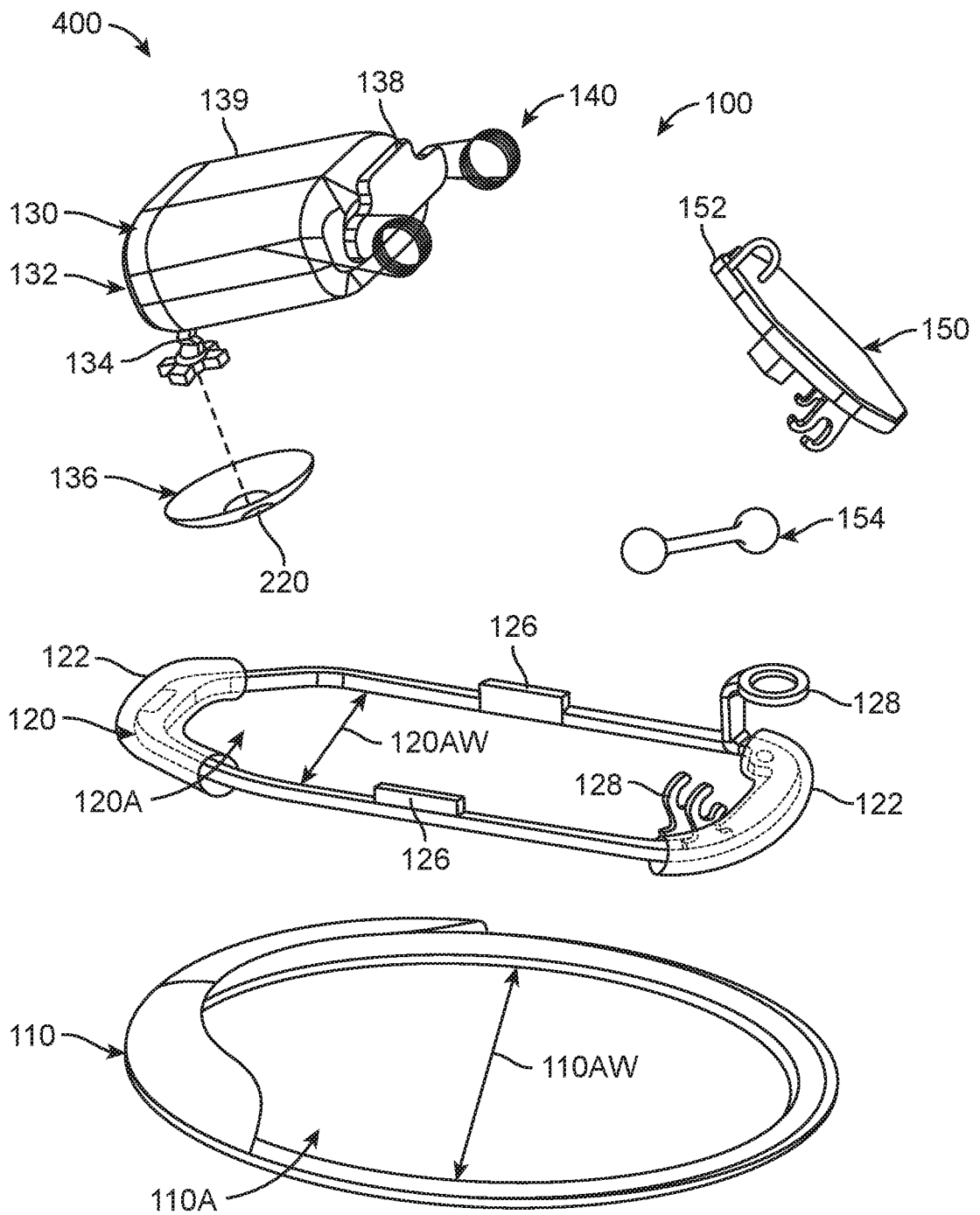


FIG. 4

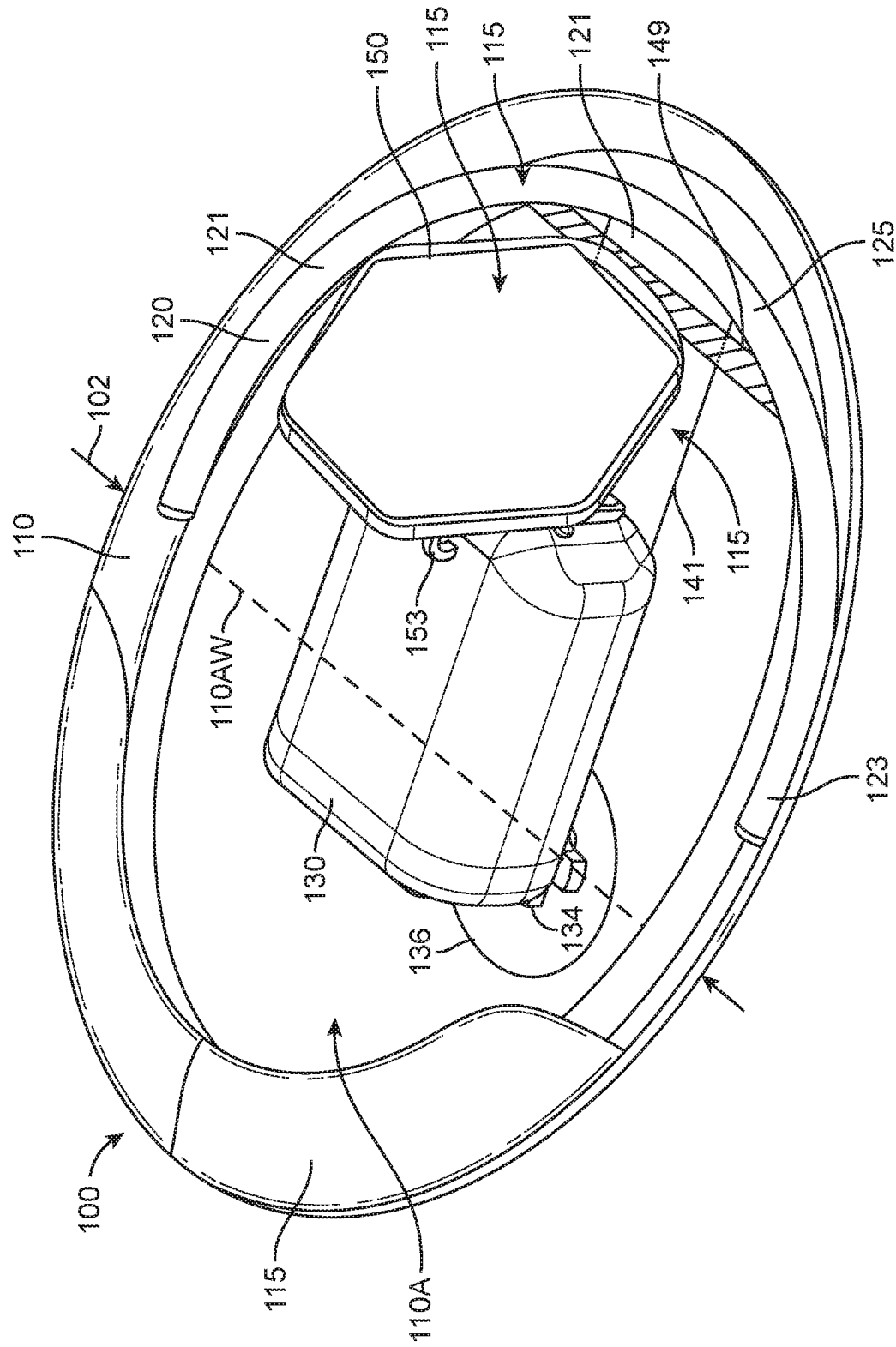
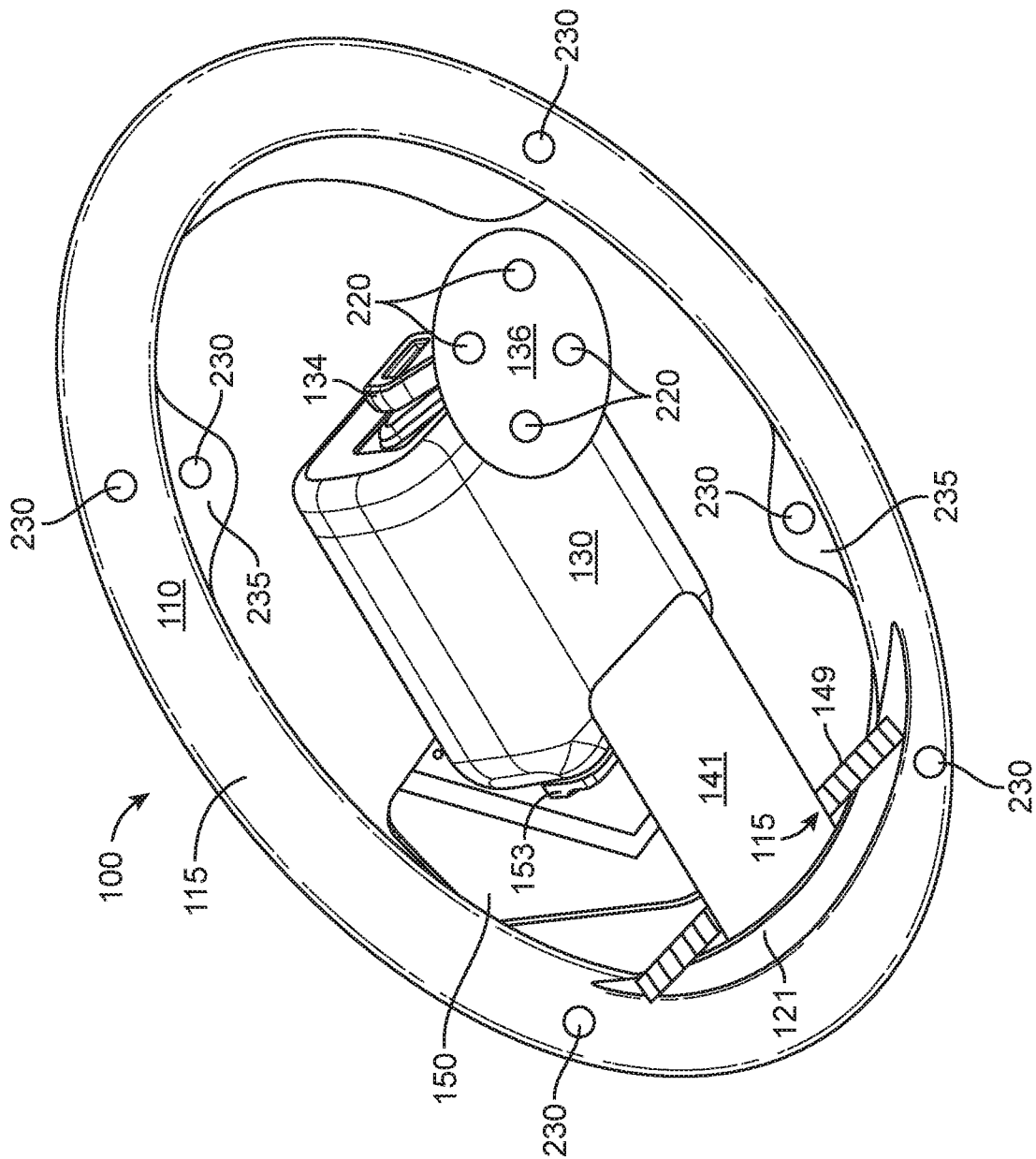

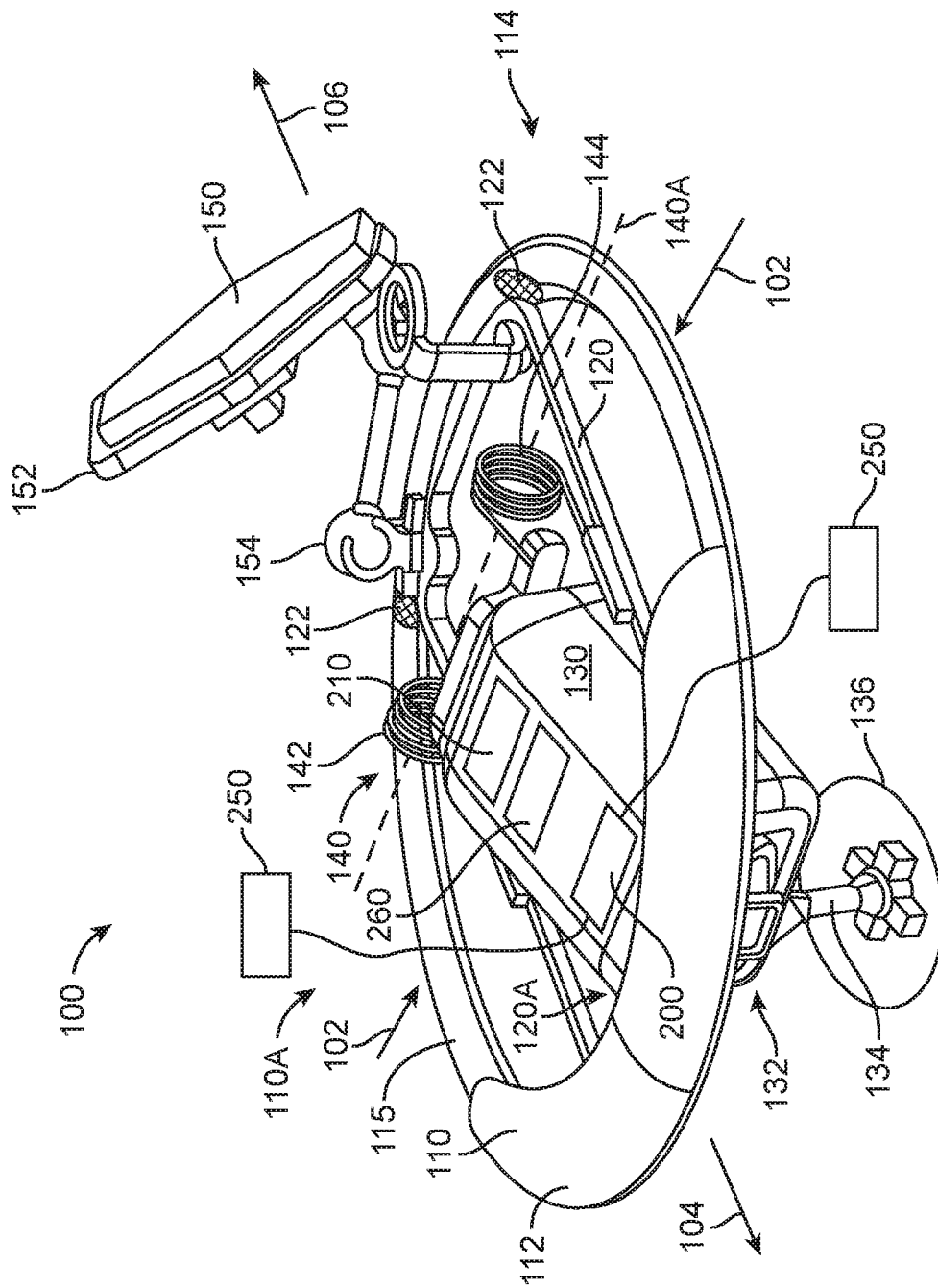


FIG. 5A




 ҚАЗАҚСТАН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫНЫҢ
 БІЛІМ ЖӘНЕ ҒЫЛЫМ МИНИСТРЛІГІ



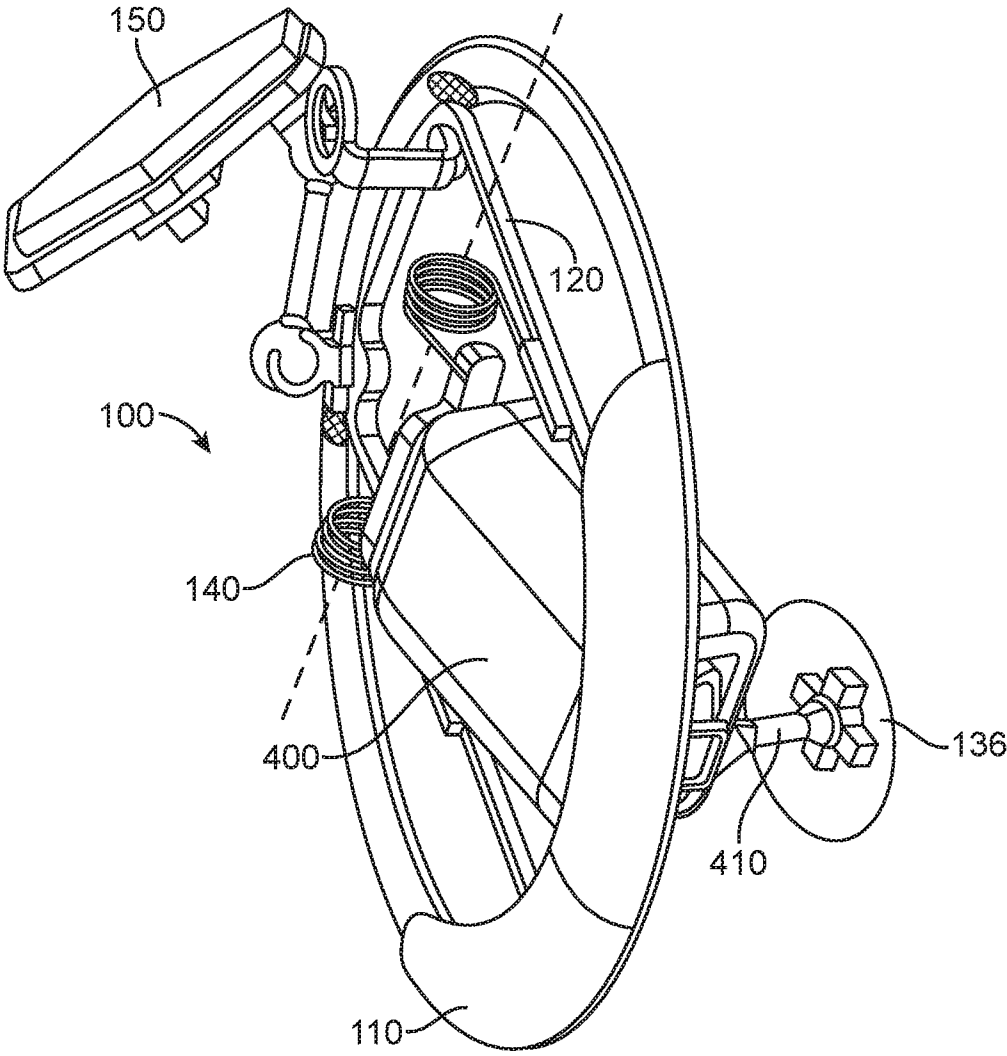


FIG. 7

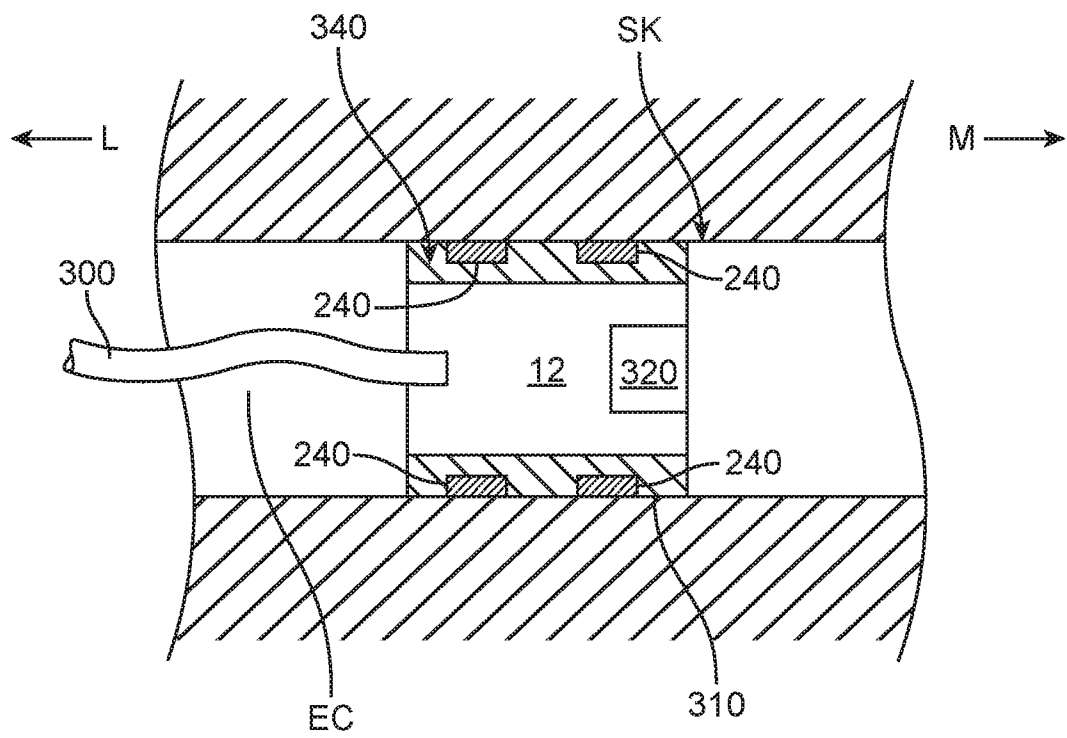


FIG. 8

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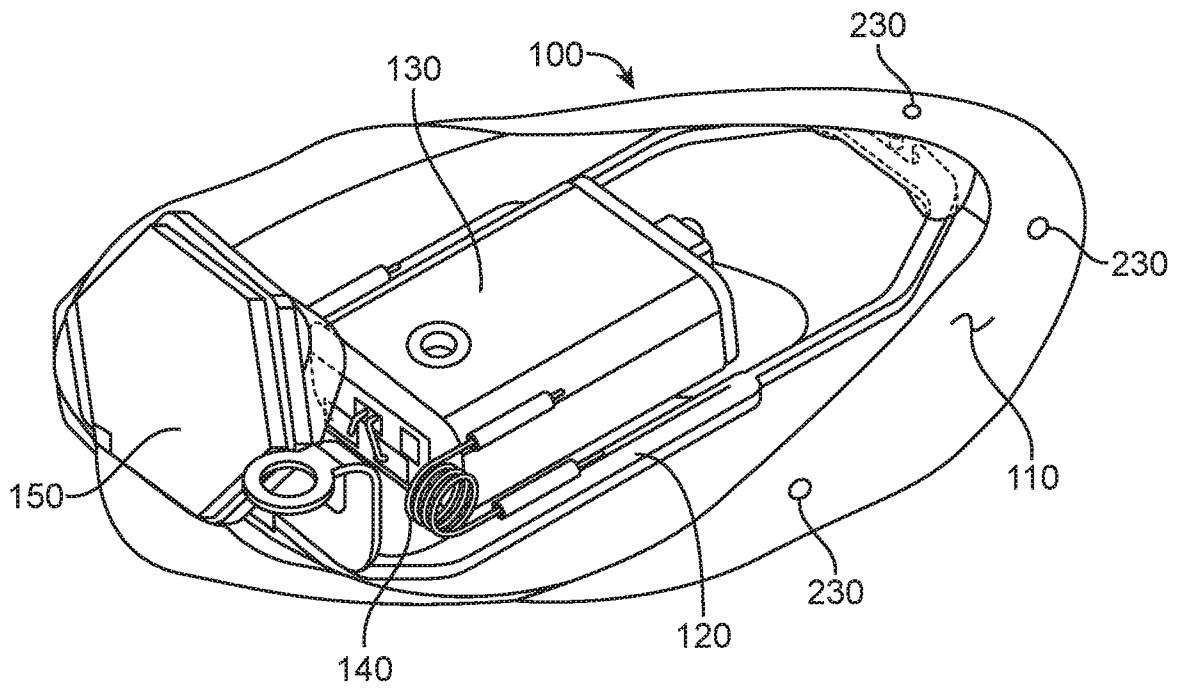


FIG. 9

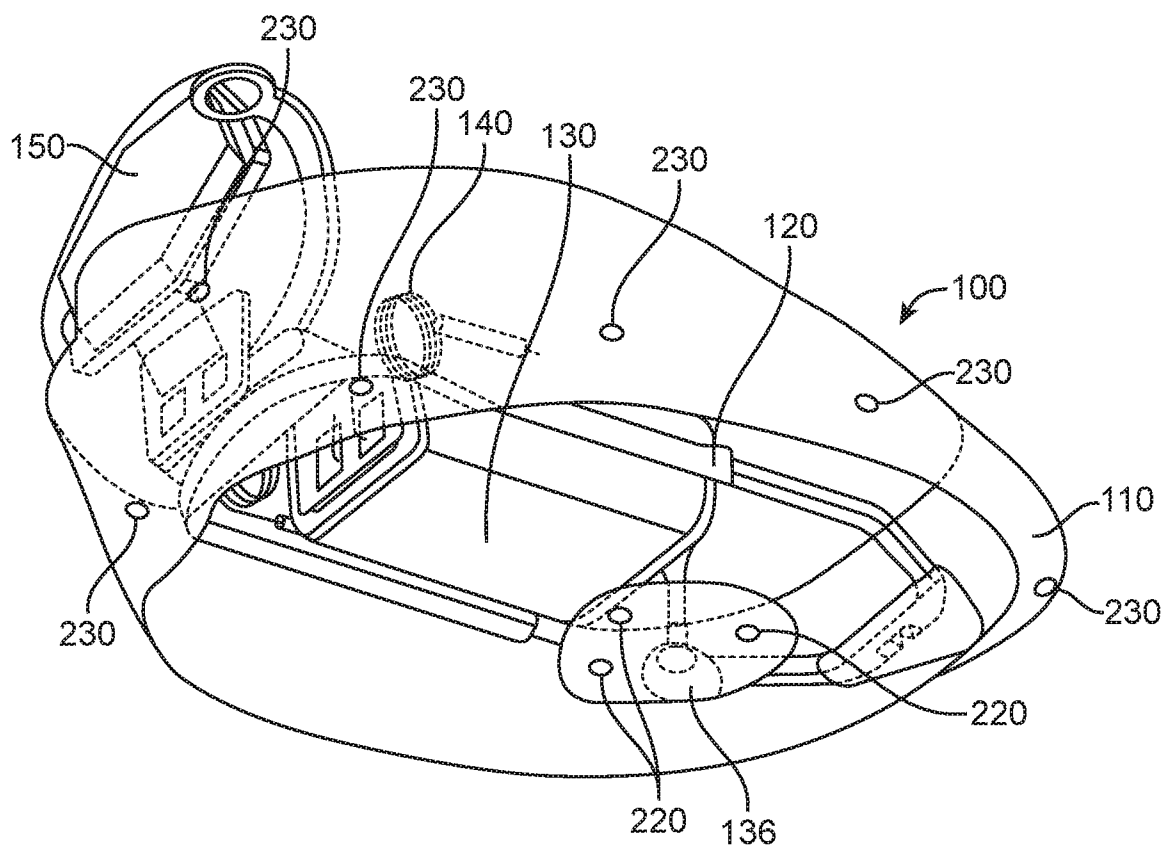


FIG. 10

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US16/54714

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(8) - A61B 5/02, 1/227; H04R 1/10 (2016.01)

CPC - A61B 5/6817; H04R 1/1016; G06F 1/163

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC(8) Classifications: A61B 5/02, 1/227; H04R 1/10 (2016.01)

CPC Classifications: A61B 5/6817; H04R 1/1016; G06F 1/163, 21/32

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

PatSeer (US, EP, WO, JP, DE, GB, CN, FR, KR, ES, AU, IN, CA, INPADOC Data); Google Scholar; IEEE; EBSCO

Keywords used: biometric sensor; wearable; ear canal; micro actuator; back EMF

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X Y	US 2014/0254856 A1 (WISCONSIN ALUMNI RESEARCH FOUNDATION) September 11, 2014; abstract; figures 1-4; paragraphs [0033-0034]; [0045])	12-14, 18, 20, 22-29, 34, 36-40, 42, 44, 46-48 1-11, 15-17, 19, 21, 30-33, 35, 41, 43, 45, 49-51
Y	US 2015/0031941 A1 (EARLENS CORPORATION) January 29, 2015; abstract; figures 1A, 1A1; paragraphs [0047]; [0049]; [0051]	1-11, 21, 35, 45
Y	US 2014/0288356 A1 (VAN VLEM, J) September 25, 2014; abstract; figure 2b; paragraphs [0029]; [0044]; [0050-0051]; [0056]	6-9, 15-17, 19, 30-33, 41, 43, 51
Y	US 2015/0201269 A1 (DAHL, L) July 16, 2015; abstract; figures 8-9; paragraphs [0022]; [0056-0057]	49-50

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.☐ See patent family annex.

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"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

20 November 2016 (20.11.2016)

Date of mailing of the international search report

13 DEC 2016

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