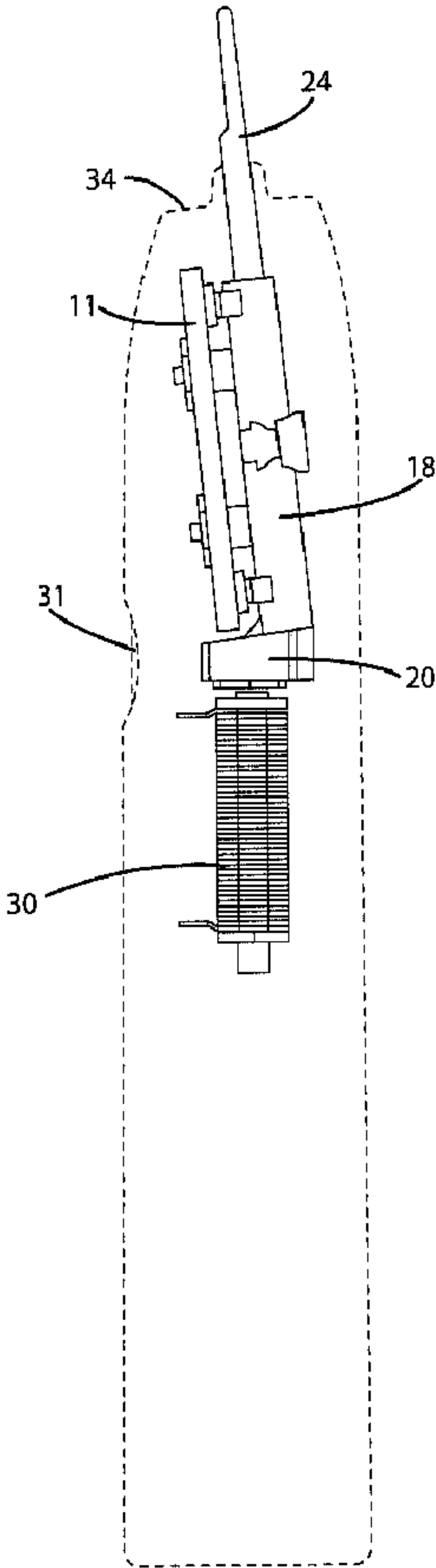




(22) Date de dépôt/Filing Date: 2016/02/08 (41) Mise à la disp. pub./Open to Public Insp.: 2016/09/18 (45) Date de délivrance/Issue Date: 2018/06/12 (30) Priorités/Priorities: 2015/03/18 (US14/661,680); 2015/07/17 (US14/801,968)	(51) Cl.Int./Int.Cl. A61C 17/16 (2006.01), F16H 25/18 (2006.01), H02K 33/00 (2006.01) (72) Inventeurs/Inventors: DISHON, BRYAN J., US; KOLLAR, KEVIN J., US (73) Propriétaire/Owner: RANIR, LLC, US (74) Agent: MCMILLAN LLP
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(54) **Titre : MECANISME A RESSORT POUR DISPOSITIF DE PUISSANCE**
(54) **Title: SPRING MECHANISM FOR POWER DEVICE**



(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**
A spring mechanism for an electromagnetic drive unit converts or translates the movement and/or actuation of the electromagnet into a desired movement of the workpiece and enables simple and efficient tuning of the workpiece movement. The spring

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

mechanism includes a housing, a spring connected to the housing, wherein at least two sections of the spring are movable with respect to the housing, a drive shaft that includes a first end having a magnet and a second end for attachment to a workpiece, and at least two tuning elements connecting the drive shaft to the movable portion of the spring. At least one of the tuning elements is adjustable. In one embodiment, the spring may be a flat spring, and the movable sections may each be positioned between a pair of cutouts defined in the spring.

ABSTRACT

A spring mechanism for an electromagnetic drive unit converts or translates the movement and/or actuation of the electromagnet into a desired movement of the workpiece and enables simple and efficient tuning of the workpiece movement. The spring mechanism includes a housing, a spring connected to the housing, wherein at least two sections of the spring are movable with respect to the housing, a drive shaft that includes a first end having a magnet and a second end for attachment to a workpiece, and at least two tuning elements connecting the drive shaft to the movable portion of the spring. At least one of the tuning elements is adjustable. In one embodiment, the spring may be a flat spring, and the movable sections may each be positioned between a pair of cutouts defined in the spring.

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SPRING MECHANISM FOR POWER DEVICE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention is directed to electromagnetically powered devices, and, more particularly, to powered devices such as electric toothbrushes having an electromagnetic drive unit.

[0002] One method for actuating the bristles, or other cleaning elements, of an electric toothbrush or another device having a powered handle is an electromagnetic drive positioned within the handle portion of the toothbrush or other device. The electromagnet can be actuated by a switch to alternate polarity at a desired frequency. A movable permanent magnet (or a pair of permanent magnets) is positioned proximate to the electromagnet, such that the permanent magnet is driven to oscillate at an oscillating frequency by the electromagnet when the electromagnet is actuated. A neck, which may or may not be elongated, including a workpiece such as a brush head is typically attached to the permanent magnet, such that the workpiece is driven to oscillate by the movement of the permanent magnet.

[0003] Recognizing the need to replace certain aspects of these workpieces, such as toothbrush bristles, after they are worn out or in order to provide more options, e.g., to attach a different head with a different function, manufacturers have designed replacement heads that fit onto separate electromagnetic drive units. The drive units may include the power source, switch, fixed electromagnet, movable permanent magnet and drive shaft, with the replacement heads including a neck and a workpiece such as a toothbrush head. In some instances, the replacement heads may further include the permanent magnet, drive shaft and workpiece. The replacement

heads can be removably attached to the drive units, for instance, by threading or otherwise connecting a portion of the replacement head onto a portion of the drive unit.

[0004] More recently, manufacturers have attempted to control the movement of these workpieces, in order to provide a more efficient and desirable workpiece motion. For example, in the case of electric toothbrushes, manufacturers have attempted to control the movement of the cleaning elements in a rotational motion about the central longitudinal axis of the toothbrush. Difficulties arise in doing so, especially in the case of toothbrushes with electromagnetic drives, because the generally linear oscillation caused by the electromagnet must be converted into the desired rotational motion. Some replacement heads include parts that may contribute to vibrations and/or noise in the electric toothbrush that may be undesirable or annoying. In each situation, the motion of the workpiece can vary dramatically as the frequency of the electromagnet approaches the resonant frequency of the drive shaft and workpiece.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] The present invention provides a spring mechanism for an electromagnetically powered device that converts or translates the movement and/or actuation of the electromagnet into a desired movement of the workpiece and enables simple and efficient tuning of the workpiece movement.

[0006] In one embodiment, the spring mechanism includes a housing, a spring connected to the housing, wherein at least a portion of the spring is movable with respect to the housing, a drive shaft that includes a first end having a magnet and a second end for attachment to a

workpiece, and an adjustable tuning element connecting the drive shaft to the movable portion of the spring.

[0007] In one embodiment, the spring may be a flat spring, and the movable portion of the spring may be a spring section positioned between a pair of cutouts defined in the spring. The size and shape of the cutouts may also be varied in order to control the workpiece movement.

[0008] In one embodiment, the adjustable tuning element extends from the drive shaft to the movable portion of the spring, and is connected to the spring such that the adjustable tuning element places the movable portion of the spring under a degree of tension. The adjustable tuning element may be threadedly connected between the drive shaft and the movable portion of the spring, such that the threaded connection enables adjustment of the amount of the tension on the movable portion of the spring. More particularly, the tuning element may be a bolt extending through the movable portion of the spring, through the drive shaft, and into a nut on an opposite surface of the drive shaft.

[0009] The drive shaft may be rotatable about a pair of bearing surfaces defining an axis of rotation extending along the bearing surfaces, and the adjustable tuning element may be positioned between the bearing surfaces. The bearing surfaces may be formed by a pair of rockers extending from the drive shaft.

[0010] In another embodiment, the spring mechanism may include two or more of the movable spring portions, and two or more adjustable tuning elements. For example, two of the movable spring portions may be aligned with one another along the longitudinal axis of the toothbrush. An adjustable tuning element may extend through each of the movable spring

portions to the drive shaft. In such an embodiment, the spring mechanism may not include bearing surfaces separate from the adjustable tuning elements, as the motion of the drive shaft may be controlled by the tuning of the two or more movable spring portions and adjustable tuning elements. Each set of movable spring portions and adjustable tuning elements may be individually tuned by adjusting the tension of the tuning element and/or adjusting the size and shape of the movable spring portion, in order to achieve the desired workpiece motion.

[0011] The spring mechanism may be implemented into a toothbrush drive unit or some other personal care device drive unit, wherein the bristle head and neck are capable of being removed from the drive unit and replaced. In another embodiment, however, the spring mechanism may be incorporated into a replacement head for a toothbrush or for some other personal care device, wherein the bristle head and neck, drive shaft, and spring are replaceable.

[0012] The present invention also provides a method for manufacturing a spring mechanism for an electric toothbrush or other personal care device, including the steps of: providing a fixed housing defining a generally hollow interior; providing a drive shaft extending at least in part into the hollow interior of the fixed housing, the drive shaft having a first end and a second end, the first end including a magnet and the second end adapted to receive a workpiece; connecting a spring member to the fixed housing, the spring member having a movable section; connecting the spring member to the drive shaft with an adjustable tuning member; and adjusting the tuning member to provide a desired degree of tension on the movable section of the spring.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] FIG. 1 is a side view according to one embodiment of the present invention showing a spring mechanism as disposed within a handle housing shown in broken lines, and including an electromagnet within the handle housing.

[0014] FIG. 2 is a front view thereof.

[0015] FIG. 3 is a front view of a spring mechanism for a power device according to one embodiment.

[0016] FIG. 4 is a rear perspective view thereof;

[0017] FIG. 5 is a front perspective view thereof;

[0018] FIG. 6 is a side cross sectional view taken along line A—A in Fig. 3, showing the spring in a neutral position.

[0019] FIG. 6A is a perspective cross sectional view thereof.

[0020] FIG. 7 is a side cross sectional view taken along line A—A in Fig. 3, showing the spring in a more tensioned positioned.

[0021] FIG. 7A is a perspective cross sectional view thereof.

[0022] FIG. 8 is a perspective view of a spring mechanism with a workpiece connected thereto, with the drive shaft and spring in a central position.

[0023] FIG. 9 is a rear view thereof.

[0024] FIG. 10 is a perspective view of a spring mechanism with a workpiece connected thereto, with the drive shaft and spring in a left-rotated position.

[0025] FIG. 11 is a rear view thereof.

[0026] FIG. 12 is a perspective view of a spring mechanism with a workpiece connected thereto, with the drive shaft and spring in a right-rotated position.

[0027] FIG. 13 is a rear view thereof.

[0028] FIG. 14 is a front view of a spring mechanism with a workpiece connected thereto, with the drive shaft and spring in a central position.

[0029] FIG. 15 is a cross sectional view thereof taken along line C—C in Fig. 14.

[0030] FIG. 16 is a front view of a spring mechanism with a workpiece connected thereto, with the drive shaft and spring in a left-rotated position.

[0031] FIG. 17 is a cross sectional view thereof taken along line B—B in Fig. 16.

[0032] FIG. 18 is a front view of a spring mechanism with a workpiece connected thereto, with the drive shaft and spring in a right-rotated position.

[0033] Fig. 19 is a cross sectional view thereof taken along line D—D in Fig. 18.

[0034] Fig. 20 is a side view of an electric toothbrush with a replacement head attached wherein the electromagnet and spring mechanism are visible through the drive unit housing.

[0035] FIG. 21 is a front view according to a second embodiment of the present invention showing a spring mechanism as disposed within a handle housing shown in broken lines, and including an electromagnet within the handle housing.

[0036] FIG. 22 is a side view thereof.

[0037] FIG. 23 is a perspective view of a spring mechanism for a power device according to the second embodiment.

[0038] FIG. 24 is a rear perspective view thereof.

[0039] FIG. 25 is another perspective view thereof.

[0040] FIG. 26 is a front view thereof.

[0041] FIG. 27 is a side cross sectional view along line E—E in FIG. 26.

[0042] FIG. 28 is a front view of a spring mechanism according to the second embodiment with the drive shaft and spring in a central position.

[0043] FIG. 29 is a front view of a spring mechanism according to the second embodiment with the drive shaft and spring in a right-rotated position.

[0044] FIG. 30 is a front view of a spring mechanism according to the second embodiment with the drive shaft in a left-rotated position.

[0045] FIG. 31 is a bottom view of the spring mechanism of FIG. 28.

[0046] FIG. 32 is a bottom view of the spring mechanism of FIG. 29.

[0047] FIG. 33 is a bottom view of the spring mechanism of FIG. 30.

[0048] FIG. 34 is a cross sectional view taken along line A—A in FIG. 28.

[0049] FIG. 35 is a cross sectional view taken along line B—B in FIG. 29.

[0050] FIG. 36 is a cross sectional view taken along line C—C in FIG. 30.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE CURRENT EMBODIMENTS

I. Overview

[0051] A spring mechanism for use in powered devices such as an electric toothbrush is shown in Figs. 1-19 and generally designated 10. The spring mechanism 10 includes: a fixed element 11 connected to a drive unit housing 12, a spring 14 connected to the fixed element 11, wherein at least a portion 16 of the spring 14 is movable with respect to the fixed element 11 and the housing 12, a drive shaft 18 that includes a first end 20 having a magnet and a second end 24 for attachment to a workpiece 26, and an adjustable tuning element 28 connecting the drive shaft 18 to the movable section 16 of the spring 14.

[0052] In operation, the spring mechanism 10 operates to convert or translate movement of the magnet into a desired movement of the workpiece 26 at a desired frequency. The magnet is driven by a drive, such as an electromagnet 30, positioned adjacent to the magnet. The adjustable tuning element 28 enables simple adjustment of the workpiece movement and frequency. In the illustrated embodiment, the workpiece 26 is a replacement head for an electric toothbrush and the spring mechanism 10 provides the toothbrush head with a desired motion. In an alternative embodiment, the spring mechanism 10 may form part of the replacement head, rather than part of the drive unit housing.

II. Structure

[0053] As noted above, electromagnetic drive units are well known; therefore, the drive unit housing 12 and electromagnet 30 will not be described in great detail herein. Suffice it to say that the drive unit housing 12 generally forms a handle for the drive unit and includes a power source (not shown) within the housing, such as a battery or AC power supply, and a switch 31 that is operable by the user. The drive unit housing 12 includes a drive mechanism that may be a DC drive or an AC drive. In one embodiment, the drive unit housing 12 includes an electromagnet 30 positioned within the drive unit housing 12 that is actuated when the user presses the switch 31. The electromagnet 30, or a pair of electromagnets, may be actuated to oscillate between positive and negative polarities within the drive unit housing 12. The oscillation may be over a range of resonant frequencies of the electromagnet. As depicted in Figs. 1, 2 and 20, the electromagnet 30 is centrally positioned within the drive unit housing 12 proximate the first end 20 of the spring mechanism 10 drive shaft 18, and the spring mechanism 10 is positioned within the housing 12. A portion of the drive shaft 18 including the second end

24 of the drive shaft 18 extends outwardly from an end 34 of the housing 12 for receiving the workpiece 26.

[0054] The spring mechanism 10 may be designed for removably attaching to the workpiece 26, such as a replacement toothbrush head or another type of device intended for rotational oscillation. Referring to Figs. 10-20, in one embodiment, the workpiece 26 is a toothbrush head that generally includes elongated neck 38 with a head 40 at one end, and a receptacle (not shown) at the opposite end. The receptacle is sized to receive the second end 24 of the drive shaft 18. As illustrated, the head 40 includes a plurality of bristles 44 that may be of various lengths extending outwardly from the head 40. In another embodiment, the head 40 may include one or more alternative cleaning elements, such as elastomeric elements, extending from the head 40. In yet another embodiment, referenced above, the workpiece 26 may form a part of a larger replacement head that also includes the spring mechanism 10. In such an embodiment, the drive unit housing 12 may include structure, such as threads, for connecting to the replacement head and a portion of the spring mechanism 10 may extend into an opening in the drive unit housing 12 to enable the spring mechanism 10 to be driven by the electromagnet 30.

[0055] Referring to Figs. 1-20, the spring mechanism 10 includes the fixed element 11, spring 14, drive shaft 18, and adjustable tuning element 28. In the illustrated embodiment, the fixed element 11 is connected to the larger drive unit housing 12 by conventional means. The fixed element 11 is connected to the drive unit housing 12 in such a way that the fixed element 11 is fixed in place with respect to the drive unit housing 12. In one embodiment, the fixed element 11 is a generally flat, molded plastic plate having an upper surface 46 and a lower surface 48. The fixed element 11 may otherwise be formed from a variety of different materials,

and in one embodiment may be formed integrally with the drive unit housing 12. In the illustrated embodiment of Figs. 1-7, the lower surface 48 includes a pair of spaced-apart protrusions or bosses 50 extending outwardly from the lower surface 48. The outer surfaces 52 of these bosses 50 may be concave in shape to form a portion of an engagement surface when engaged with a bearing member 80 on the drive shaft 18 described below. A second embodiment of the fixed element 11' is shown in Figs. 10-19. In this variation (see Fig. 17), the fixed element 11' does not include outwardly extending bosses 50. Instead, a pair of concave depressions 50' in the lower surface 48' of fixed element 11' form engagement surfaces 52' that function similarly to the outer surfaces 52 on the bosses 50.

[0056] The spring member 14 is attached to the fixed element 11. In the illustrated embodiment, the spring member 14 is a generally flat plate formed of a resilient material such as spring steel. As illustrated, the spring 14 is attached to the fixed element 11 with four fasteners 56 that extend through the fixed element 11 and the spring 14. The fasteners 56 hold at least a portion of the spring 14 fixed with respect to the fixed element 11 and the drive unit housing 12. Of course, the spring 14 could be fixedly secured to the fixed housing 11 or the drive unit housing 12 in a variety of other conventional methods.

[0057] In one embodiment, the spring 14 further includes a movable section 16. As illustrated, the movable section 16 is a strip of the spring member 14 that is formed between a pair of symmetric cutouts 60 in the spring 14. In the illustrated embodiment, the movable section 16 is positioned centrally within the spring 14, however, the movable section 16 may otherwise be positioned at alternative locations on the spring as desired depending on the application. By virtue of the cutouts 60, the movable section 16 is formed to include a first end

62 and a second end 64 opposite the first end, such that the movable section 16 forms a torsion bar between the first 62 and second 64 ends that may twist back and forth along a spring axis defined along the longitudinal extent of the movable section 16 while the ends 62, 64 remain fixed. The size and shape of the cutouts 60 will control the degree of flexibility and torsional rotation of the movable section 16 about the spring axis. In the illustrated embodiment, each cutout 60 is generally semi-circular, with the convex surfaces facing away from the movable section 16; however, the shape of the cutouts 60 may be changed in order to alter the characteristics of the movable portion 16. In order to increase flexibility in the movable section 16, and thus increase the movement of the drive shaft 18 and workpiece 26, the cutouts may be made larger, and the movable section thinner. In one embodiment, the size and shape of the cutouts 60 and the movable section 16 are preselected by the manufacturer in accordance with the size and shape of the drive shaft 18 and workpiece 26 in order to produce a desired workpiece motion, for example, wherein the frequency of the electromagnetic drive mechanism 30 approximates the resonant frequency of the workpiece 26. In one embodiment, the movable section 16 defines a central opening 66 for receiving the adjustable tuning element 28 as described in more detail below. Other characteristics of the spring may also be altered to change the motion of the workpiece 26, for example, a thicker spring material will increase the force required to twist the spring and reduce the amount that the spring will twist during operation. Additional elements such as slots and holes may further be incorporated into the spring, or multiple springs, to provide the spring(s) with desired characteristics. In one embodiment, the spring 14 may include holes that enable the bosses 50 on the fixed element to extend through the spring 14 and into engagement with the drive shaft 18. Alternatively, the spring may be

configured without these openings such that the spring forms engagement surfaces for the drive shaft 18.

[0058] Although the movable section 16 of the spring 14 is illustrated as a portion of the larger spring member that is defined between a pair of cutouts, it should be understood that in an alternative embodiment, the spring 14 may be comprised solely of a movable portion, such as a generally flat strip of spring material that is fixed on opposite ends to form a torsion bar with characteristics similar to that of the movable section 16.

[0059] The drive shaft 18 is a generally elongated member defining a longitudinal axis 68, and having a first end 20 and a second end 24 opposite the first end. The drive shaft 18 may be formed integrally as a single unitary piece of material, but in the illustrated embodiment is formed from two materials and two pieces including a molded plastic member 70 that includes the first end 20 of the drive shaft 18 and a metal member 71 that extends into a recess in the plastic member 70 along the longitudinal axis and includes the second end 24 of the drive shaft 18. As illustrated, the first end 20 of the drive shaft 18 includes a base 72, which is a generally flat plate extending outwardly from the first end 20 of the drive shaft 18 in a direction generally perpendicular to the longitudinal axis 68 of the drive shaft 18. The base 72 has a lower surface 74 that supports a pair of permanent magnets 76, 78 of opposite polarities for instance, by molding the magnets into the base 72, or with an adhesive or by other known means. Alternatively, the magnets 76, 78 may be indirectly connected to the base 72 by an intermediate plate, for example. As shown in Figs. 1 and 2, when assembled, the magnets 76, 78 are positioned adjacent to the electromagnet 30. As a result of the magnets 76, 78 being positioned on the base 72 such that they are offset from the longitudinal axis of the drive shaft 18, the

electromagnet will cause the magnets 76, 78 to move the base 72 in an arcuate path. As illustrated, the base 72 includes an outer periphery that is smaller than the size of the interior of the drive unit housing 12, so that the base 72 is capable of moving back and forth and/or up and down within the drive unit 12 housing. In one embodiment, the magnets 76, 78 may be replaced by a ferromagnetic material, such as steel, that can be attracted to and repelled by the electromagnet 30 within the drive unit housing 12.

[0060] The remainder of the plastic member 70 of the drive shaft 18 facilitates engagement between the outer surfaces 52, 52' on the fixed element 11 as well as the connection between the drive shaft 18 and the movable section 16 of the spring 14. Referring now to Fig. 15, the drive shaft 18 includes a pair of rounded protrusions 80 forming rounded bearing surfaces that engage the engagement surfaces 52, 52' on the fixed element 11 to determine a rocking-style relationship between the drive shaft 18 and the fixed element 11, wherein the rounded protrusions 80 can rock back and forth on the concaved engagement surfaces 52. In between the rounded protrusions 80, the drive shaft 18 includes structure for connecting the drive shaft 18 to the movable section of the spring 16. In one embodiment, the drive shaft 18 defines a fastener hole 82 extending therethrough for receiving the adjustable tuning element 28 as described in more detail below. In another embodiment, an alternative structure may be used to facilitate a rocking-style movement of the drive shaft 18 with respect to the fixed housing 11. For example, rounded protrusions may be included on the fixed housing 11 or spring member 14 to engage concave surfaces on the drive shaft 18, or the drive shaft 18 may be connected to the fixed housing with hinges. In each case, the connection of the drive shaft 18 to the fixed element 11 causes the drive shaft 18 to move in an arcuate motion upon actuation of the electromagnet, the

electromagnet 30 causing the permanent magnets 76, 78 to move in an oscillating motion, and the connection of the drive shaft 18 to the fixed element 11 causing the drive shaft to move in an arcuate path about an axis that is parallel with the spring axis and the longitudinal axis 68 of the drive shaft 18 along an axis generally extending through the bearing surfaces.

[0061] Finally, the second end 24 of the drive shaft 18 is shaped to attach to the workpiece 26. In the illustrated embodiment, the second end 24 includes a shape that is formed to extend into the receptacle in the workpiece 26 and prevent rotation or axial displacement of the workpiece 26 with respect to the drive shaft 18. Referring now to Figs. 1 and 2, the second end 24 extends outwardly beyond an end of the drive unit housing 12 for attachment to the workpiece 26.

[0062] The adjustable tuning element 28 connects the drive shaft 18 to the spring 14. More particularly, the adjustable tuning element 28 connects the drive shaft 18 to the movable portion 16 of the spring 14. In the illustrated embodiment, the adjustable tuning element 28 is a threaded bolt that extends through the central opening 66 in the movable section 16 of the spring 14, through the fastener hole 82 in the drive shaft 18, and into a tuning nut 84 on the rear surface of the drive shaft 18. When the bolt 28 is inserted into the nut 84, the drive shaft 18 is connected to the spring 14 and to the fixed element 11 with the engagement surfaces 52 and 80 in engagement with one another to form bearings for the rocking movement of the drive shaft 18. As a result of the threads on the bolt 28, the bolt 28 and nut 84 can be tightened or loosened to adjust the amount of tension placed on the movable section 16 of the spring 14. For example, Fig. 6 shows the tuning element 28 connected to the nut 84 with the movable section 16 of the spring in a generally neutral position aligned with the remainder of the flat spring 14. In this

state, there may be a gap between the movable section 16 of the spring 14 and the drive shaft 18. Fig. 7 shows the tuning element 28 connected more tightly onto the nut 84 with the movable section 16 of the spring 14 in a tensioned position wherein the movable section is flexed slightly toward the drive shaft 18, which may partially or completely close the gap between the drive shaft 18 and the spring 14. Variations in the amount of tension on the movable section 16 of the spring 14 will alter the amplitude and frequency of the movement of the drive shaft 18 and the workpiece 26. As such, the manufacturer can efficiently tune the movement of the workpiece 26 by rotating the bolt 28 with respect to the nut 84, therefore drawing the movable section 16 toward the drive shaft 18 and adjusting the tension on the movable section 16 of the spring 14. Alternate fasteners or devices that provide a degree of adjustment may be substituted for the bolt style fastener in variations on the current design.

[0063] Notably, although the above disclosed embodiments are shown in connection with toothbrush heads, they may also be used in connection with other types of workpieces that utilize the same or similar ranges of motion, such a cleaning brush and/or an exfoliating brush with bristles arranged generally parallel to the longitudinal length of the drive shaft 18.

III. Operation

[0064] During operation, the electromagnet 30 within the drive unit housing 12 is operated by the user manipulating switch 31. When actuated, the electromagnet 30 may oscillate and/or be controlled to change polarities over a range of drive frequencies. The replacement head or other workpiece 26 is connected to the end 24 of the drive shaft 18 by inserting the second end 24 of the drive shaft 18 into the receptacle on the workpiece 26 – or by another attachment method. The electromagnet 30, and its attraction to the permanent magnets 76, 78 (or

ferromagnetic material) on the base 72 causes the base 72 to oscillate back and forth in an arcuate path.

[0065] The spring mechanism 10 controls the path of movement of the drive shaft 18, as well as the amplitude and frequency of movement of the workpiece 26. Referring to spring mechanism 10, the movement of the base 72 causes the drive shaft 18 to rotate back and forth about a rotation axis extending through the bearing surface 80 – specifically the engagement surface between the bearing surface 80 and the surfaces 52, 52' of the fixed housing 11 because of the connection between the drive shaft 18 and the movable portion 16 of the spring 14. The rotation axis is general parallel to the spring axis and the longitudinal axis 68 of the drive shaft 18. The movable section 16 of the spring 14 rotates about the spring axis as the drive shaft 18 oscillates, and acts to control the movement of the drive shaft 18 and bias the drive shaft 18 in a central position. As the spring 74 twists, the workpiece 26 moves in an arcuate path.

[0066] The motion of the spring mechanism 10 and workpiece 26 is depicted in detail in Figs. 8—19. Figs. 8-9 and 14-15 show the spring mechanism 10 in a central position, which may be a neutral resting position when the electromagnet is off, and may be a central position of rotation when the electromagnet is actuated. In this position, the movable portion 16 of the spring 14 lies generally in the same plane as the remainder of the spring 14 in a non-twisted state. As shown in Fig. 15, the bearing surface 80 on the drive shaft engages the surface 52' of the fixed housing 11 (extending through an opening defined in the spring 14) and the bristles 44 on the workpiece 26 are generally perpendicular to the upper surface 46 of the fixed element 11. Figs. 10-11 and 16-17 show the spring mechanism 10 in a left-rotated position, occurring when the electromagnet is actuated. In this position, the movable portion 16 of the spring 14 lies

generally in a plane that is angled with respect to the remainder of the spring 14 in a twisted state. As shown in Fig. 17, the bearing surface 80 on the drive shaft engages the surface 52' of the fixed housing 11 (extending through an opening defined in the spring 14) and the bristles 44 on the workpiece 26 are generally rotated to the left with respect to the upper surface 46 of the fixed element 11. Finally, Figs. 12-13 and 18-19 show the spring mechanism 10 in a right-rotated position, occurring when the electromagnet is actuated. In this position, the movable portion 16 of the spring 14 lies generally in a plane that is angled to the right with respect to the remainder of the spring 14 in a twisted state. As shown in Fig. 19, the bearing surface 80 on the drive shaft engages the surface 52' of the fixed housing 11 (extending through an opening defined in the spring 14) and the bristles 44 on the workpiece 26 are generally rotated to the right with respect to the upper surface 46 of the fixed element 11. For the duration that the electromagnet 30 is actuated, the spring mechanism 10 oscillates back and forth between the left-rotated and right-rotated positions.

[0067] As noted above, the motion and frequency of the workpiece, such as the bristle head 40 or the workpiece of another type of device, may be controlled by a variety of variables. In the present invention, this may include adjustment of the adjustable tuning element 28. Other variables include, but are not limited to, the size, thickness and shape of the spring, the positioning of the magnets on the bottom member, the size and length of the bristles, and the drive frequency of the motor. Each of these variables can be adjusted from application to application to provide a desirable user experience in terms of brushing function, handle vibration and operating noise. In one embodiment, the drive frequency of the motor is between about 60 Hz and 1000 Hz. In a more particular embodiment for use with an electric toothbrush, the drive

frequency is between about 150 Hz and 400 Hz. In a more particular embodiment for an electric toothbrush, the drive frequency of the motor is between about 230 Hz and 280 Hz, and in an even more particular embodiment for an electric toothbrush the drive frequency of the motor is set to about 260 Hz. In an embodiment wherein the workpiece is the head of an exfoliator, the drive frequency may be between about 150 and 200 Hz. The drive frequency for alternative workpiece applications, such as those listed above, may be increased or decreased depending on the desired power and workpiece motion for the particular application.

[0068] After a particular drive frequency is determined, the above noted variables are adjusted to achieve the desired motion and frequency of the bristle head 40 while maintaining a relatively low sound level and a relatively low current draw on the motor. In one embodiment for use with an electric toothbrush, the desired frequency of the bristle head is between about 245 Hz and 255 Hz. In another embodiment, the desired range of motion of the tips of the bristles is between about .370 mm and .575 mm. In yet another embodiment, the desired sound level of the operating toothbrush containing one of the above noted embodiments is below about 73 dB, and more particularly, below about 60 dB. If, after assembly and after an initial testing operation, the workpiece movement is found to be incorrect, a manufacturer may simply adjust the tuning element 28 to achieve the desired motion.

IV. Second Embodiment

[0069] A second embodiment of a spring mechanism for use in powered devices such as an electric toothbrush is shown in Figs. 21-36 and generally designated 100. The spring mechanism 100 is similar to the spring mechanism 10 in that it includes: a spring 114 connected to a drive unit housing 112. In this embodiment, at least two portions 116, 117 of the spring 114

are movable with respect to the housing 112. The drive shaft 118 includes a first end 120 having a magnet and a second end 124 for attachment to a workpiece (such as the workpiece 26 shown in connection with the spring mechanism 10), and at least two adjustable tuning elements 128, 129 connect the drive shaft 118 to the movable sections 116, 117 of the spring 114.

[0070] In operation, the spring mechanism 100 operates similar to the spring mechanism 10 to convert or translate movement of the magnet into a desired movement of the workpiece at a desired frequency. The magnet is driven by a drive, such as an electromagnet 130, positioned adjacent to the magnet on the drive shaft 118. In this embodiment, the multiple adjustable tuning elements 128, 129 enable a high degree of adjustment of the workpiece movement and frequency.

[0071] The electromagnetic drive unit of the second embodiment 100 is substantially the same as that of the first embodiment 10. The housing 112 includes an electromagnet or a pair of electromagnets 130 and a switch 131 that is operable by the user. A portion of the drive shaft 118 including the second end 124 of the drive shaft 118 extends outwardly from an end 134 of the housing 112 for receiving the workpiece. The workpiece of the second embodiment may be a variety of workpieces including any of the variety of workpieces 26 described above.

[0072] Referring to Figs. 21-36, the spring mechanism 100 includes a spring 114, drive shaft 118, and adjustable tuning elements 128, 129. In this embodiment, the spring 114 is connected to the larger drive unit housing 112 by conventional means. In one embodiment, the spring may be connected to a fixed element such as the fixed element 11 described above. The spring may alternatively be attached to the housing 112 by another method such as fasteners that extend through the spring 114. In the illustrated embodiment, the spring member 114 is a

generally flat plate formed of a resilient material such as spring steel. At least a portion of the spring 114 is fixed with respect to the drive unit housing 112.

[0073] The spring 114 includes multiple movable sections, and in the embodiment illustrated in Figs. 21-36, the spring 114 includes a pair of movable sections 116, 117. Each movable section 116, 117 may be a strip of the spring member 114 that is formed between a pair of symmetric cutouts 160 in the spring 114. As shown, each movable section 116, 117 is positioned centrally within the spring 114 such that they are aligned with each other along a longitudinal axis of the movable sections 116, 117 of the spring 114, however, the movable sections 116, 117 may otherwise be positioned at alternative locations on the spring as desired depending on the application. For example, staggering the movable sections 116, 117 on opposite sides of the longitudinal centerline of the spring 114 may provide an alternative but desirable workpiece motion.

[0074] By virtue of the cutouts 160, each movable section 116, 117 is formed to include a first end 162 and a second end 164 opposite the first end, such that the movable sections 116, 117 each form a torsion bar between the first 162 and second 164 ends that may twist back and forth along a spring axis defined along the longitudinal extent of the movable section 116, 117 while the ends 162, 164 remain fixed. The size and shape of the cutouts 160 will control the degree of flexibility and torsional rotation of the movable sections 116, 117 about the spring axis. In the illustrated embodiment, each cutout 160 for each of the movable sections 116, 117 is generally semi-circular, with the convex surfaces facing away from the movable sections 116, 117; however, the shape of the cutouts 160 may be changed in order to alter the characteristics of the movable portion 116. In order to increase flexibility in the movable section 116, and thus

increase the movement of the drive shaft 118 and workpiece, one or more of the cutouts may be made larger, and the movable sections thinner. In one embodiment, the size and shape of the cutouts 160 and the movable sections 116, 117 are preselected by the manufacturer in accordance with the size and shape of the drive shaft 118 and workpiece in order to produce a desired workpiece motion, for example, wherein the frequency of the electromagnetic drive mechanism 130 approximates the resonant frequency of the workpiece. The size and shapes of the cutouts 160 of one of the movable sections 116 may also be varied with respect to the size and shape of the cutouts 160 of the other movable section 117 to further refine the characteristics of the driveshaft 118 and workpiece movements. For example, if the movable section 116 is constructed to provide a greater degree of flexibility than the movable section 117, then the workpiece may have greater amplitude of movement.

[0075] In one embodiment, each movable section 116, 117 defines a central opening 166 for receiving the respective adjustable tuning element 128, 129 in a manner similar to that described above. As noted above, other characteristics of the spring may also be altered to change the motion of the workpiece, for example, a thicker spring material will increase the force required to twist the spring and reduce the amount that the spring will twist during operation. Additional elements such as slots and holes may further be incorporated into the spring, or multiple springs, to provide the spring(s) with desired characteristics.

[0076] Although the movable sections 116, 117 of the spring 114 are illustrated as a portion of the larger spring member 114 that is defined between a pair of cutouts, it should be understood that in an alternative embodiment, the spring 114 may be comprised solely of a

movable portion, such as a generally flat strip of spring material that is fixed on opposite ends to form a torsion bar with characteristics similar to that of the movable sections 116, 117.

[0077] The drive shaft 118 is a generally elongated member defining a longitudinal axis 168, and having a first end 120 and a second end 124 opposite the first end. The drive shaft 118 of the illustrated embodiment is constructed similar to the drive shaft 18 in that it is formed from two materials and two pieces including a molded plastic member 170 that includes the first end 120 of the drive shaft 118 and a metal member 171 that extends into a recess in the plastic member 170 along the longitudinal axis and includes the second end 124 of the drive shaft 118. As illustrated, the first end 120 of the drive shaft 118 includes a base 172, which is a generally flat plate extending outwardly from the first end 120 of the drive shaft 18 in a direction generally perpendicular to the longitudinal axis 168 of the drive shaft 118. The base 172 has a lower surface 174 that supports a pair of permanent magnets 176, 178 of opposite polarities for instance, by molding the magnets into the base 172, or with an adhesive or by other known means. Alternatively, the magnets 176, 178 may be indirectly connected to the base 172 by an intermediate plate, for example. As shown in Figs. 21 and 22, when assembled, the magnets 176, 178 are positioned adjacent to the electromagnet 130. As a result of the magnets 176, 178 being positioned on the base 172 such that they are offset from the longitudinal axis of the drive shaft 118, the electromagnet will cause the magnets 176, 178 to move the base 172 in an arcuate path. As illustrated, the base 172 includes an outer periphery that is smaller than the size of the interior of the drive unit housing 112, so that the base 172 is capable of moving back and forth and/or up and down within the drive unit 12 housing. In one embodiment, the magnets 176, 178

may be replaced by a ferromagnetic material, such as steel, that can be attracted to and repelled by the electromagnet 130 within the drive unit housing 112.

[0078] The remainder of the plastic member 170 of the drive shaft 118 facilitates engagement with the movable sections 116, 117 of the spring 114 (or in another embodiment, with a portion of a fixed element attached to the spring 118). Referring now to Fig. 27, the drive shaft 118 includes structure for connecting the drive shaft 118 to the movable sections 116, 117 of the spring 114. In one embodiment, the drive shaft 118 defines a pair of fastener holes 182, 183 extending therethrough for receiving the adjustable tuning elements 128, 129 as described in more detail below. As shown, each fastener hole 182, 183 may be defined within an upstanding boss 190, 191 that protrudes from the drive shaft 118. These bosses 190, 191 contact the spring 114 within the movable portions and adjacent to the adjustable tuning elements 128, 129 providing a pivot point about which the movable sections 116, 117 can rotate. In another embodiment, an alternative structure may be used to facilitate a rocking-style movement of the drive shaft 118 with respect to the housing 112, such as the rounded protrusions described in connection with the spring element 10 above. In each case, the connection of the drive shaft 118 to the movable sections of the spring 114 causes the drive shaft 118 to move in an arcuate motion upon actuation of the electromagnet, the electromagnet 130 causing the permanent magnets 176, 178 to move in an oscillating motion about the longitudinal axes of the movable sections 116, 117. Finally, the second end 124 of the drive shaft 118 is shaped to attach to a workpiece in the same manner as described above in connection with workpiece 26.

[0079] The adjustable tuning elements 128, 129 connect the drive shaft 118 to the spring 114. More particularly, the adjustable tuning elements 128, 129 connect the drive shaft 118 to

the movable portions 116, 117 of the spring 114. In the illustrated embodiment, the adjustable tuning elements 128, 129 are threaded bolts that extend through the central openings 166 in the movable sections 116, 117 of the spring 114, through the fastener holes 182, 183 in the drive shaft 118, and into respective tuning nuts 84 on the rear surface of the drive shaft 118. When the bolts 128, 129 are inserted into the nuts 84, the drive shaft 118 is connected to the spring 114 with the engagement of the bosses 190, 191 with the spring 114 within the movable sections 116, 117. As a result of the threads on the bolts 128, 129, they can be tightened or loosened to adjust the amount of tension placed on each of the movable sections 116, 117 of the spring 114 in a manner similar to that described above and illustrated in Figs. 6 and 7. Variations in the amount of tension on one or both of the movable sections 116, 117 of the spring 114 will alter the amplitude and frequency of the movement of the drive shaft 118 and the workpiece. As such, the manufacturer can efficiently tune the movement of the workpiece by rotating one or both of the bolts 128, 129 with respect to the nuts 84, therefore drawing the movable sections 116, 117 toward the drive shaft 118 and adjusting the tension on the movable sections 116, 117 of the spring 114. Alternate fasteners or devices that provide a degree of adjustment may be substituted for the bolt style fastener in variations on the current design.

[0080] Although the above disclosed embodiments are shown in connection with toothbrush heads, they may also be used in connection with other types of workpieces that utilize the same or similar ranges of motion, such a cleaning brush and/or an exfoliating brush with bristles arranged generally parallel to the longitudinal length of the drive shaft 18, 118.

[0081] During operation, the electromagnet 130 within the drive unit housing 112 is operated by the user manipulating switch 131 in a manner similar to that described above in

connection with spring mechanism 10. The spring mechanism 100 controls the path of movement of the drive shaft 118, as well as the amplitude and frequency of movement of the workpiece. Referring to spring mechanism 100, the movement of the base 172 causes the drive shaft 118 to rotate back and forth about a rotation axis extending generally along the spring axis defined by the movable portions 116, 117 of the spring 114 to the extent that the movable portions 116, 117 are aligned as they are in the illustrated embodiment. The rotation axis is general parallel to the spring axis and the longitudinal axis 168 of the drive shaft 118. The movable sections 116, 117 of the spring 114 rotate about the spring axis as the drive shaft 118 oscillates, and act to control the movement of the drive shaft 118 and bias the drive shaft 118 in a central position. As the movable sections 116, 117 twist, the workpiece moves in an arcuate path.

[0082] The motion of the spring mechanism 100 is depicted in detail in Figs. 28-36. Figs. 28, 31 and 34 show the spring mechanism 100 in a central position, which may be a neutral resting position when the electromagnet is off, and may be a central position of rotation when the electromagnet is actuated. In this position, the movable portions 116, 117 of the spring 114 lie generally in the same plane as the remainder of the spring 114 in a non-twisted state. As shown in Fig. 34, the boss 190 on the drive shaft 118 engages the spring 114 within the movable portion 116. Figs. 30, 33 and 36 show the spring mechanism 100 in a left-rotated position, occurring when the electromagnet is actuated. In this position, the movable portions 116, 117 of the spring 114 lie generally in a plane that is angled with respect to the remainder of the spring 114 in a twisted state. Finally, Figs. 29, 32 and 35 show the spring mechanism 100 in a right-rotated position, occurring when the electromagnet is actuated. In this position, the movable portion 116

of the spring 114 lies generally in a plane that is angled to the right with respect to the remainder of the spring 114 in a twisted state. For the duration that the electromagnet 130 is actuated, the spring mechanism 100 oscillates back and forth between the left-rotated and right-rotated positions.

[0083] As noted above and in connection with the spring mechanism 100, the motion and frequency of the workpiece may be controlled by a variety of variables. In the present invention, this may include adjustment of one or both of the adjustable tuning elements 128, 129. Other variables include, but are not limited to, the size, thickness and shape of the spring, the positioning of the magnets on the bottom member, the size and length of the bristles or other elements extending from the workpiece, and the drive frequency of the motor. Each of these variables can be adjusted from application to application to provide a desirable user experience in terms of brushing function, handle vibration and operating noise. The drive frequency of the motor, and the relative frequencies of the motor and the workpiece, may be determined as noted above in connection with spring mechanism 10. The spring mechanism 100 provides a broad range of adjustability due to the ability to adjust the characteristics of one or both of the tuning elements 128, 129 and movable spring sections 116, 117. As noted above, manufacturers may vary the characteristics of both tuning elements 128, 129 and both movable spring sections 116, 117 uniformly, or they may adjust the characteristics of one tuning element and/or one spring section with respect to the other.

[0084] The above description is that of the current embodiment of the invention. Various alterations and changes can be made without departing from the spirit and broader aspects of the invention as defined in the appended claims, which are to be interpreted in accordance with the

principles of patent law including the doctrine of equivalents. Any reference to claim elements in the singular, for example, using the articles “a,” “an,” “the” or “said,” is not to be construed as limiting the element to the singular.

CLAIMS

1. A spring mechanism for a power device, the device including an electromagnet, the spring mechanism comprising:

a housing;

a spring connected to the housing, wherein at least two portions of said spring are movable with respect to said housing;

a drive shaft that includes a first end having a magnet and a second end for attachment to a workpiece; and

adjustable tuning elements connecting said drive shaft to each of said movable portions of said spring.

2. The spring mechanism of claim 1 wherein said movable portions of said spring each have a longitudinal extent, said longitudinal extents being in alignment with one another.

3. The spring mechanism of claim 2 wherein said spring is a flat spring, and said movable portions of said spring are spring sections that are each positioned between a pair of cutouts defined in said spring.

4. The spring mechanism of claim 3 wherein said adjustable tuning elements extend from said drive shaft to said movable portions of said spring, said adjustable tuning elements connected to said spring such that each said adjustable tuning element places said movable portion of said spring under a degree of tension, said adjustable tuning elements being independently tunable such that the degree of tension on one said movable portion of said spring may be different from another said movable portion of said spring.

5. The spring mechanism of claim 4 wherein said adjustable tuning elements are each threadedly connected between said drive shaft and said movable portions of said spring, said threaded connection enabling said independent adjustment of the amount of said tension on each said movable portion of said spring.

6. The spring mechanism of claim 5 wherein said adjustable tuning elements extend generally perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of said spring, and wherein said adjustable tuning elements are generally in alignment along said longitudinal axis.

7. The spring mechanism of claim 6 wherein said adjustable tuning elements are spaced apart along said longitudinal axis of said spring mechanism.

8. The spring mechanism of claim 7 wherein a pair of bosses extend outwardly from said drive shaft, each said boss aligned with one of said movable portions of said spring.

9. The spring mechanism of claim 8 wherein each said boss extends into engagement with one of said movable portions of said spring, each said boss defining an opening, wherein one of said adjustable tuning elements extends into each said opening.

10. A spring mechanism for a power device, the device including an electromagnet, the spring mechanism comprising:

an elongated drive shaft having a first end and a second end opposite said first end for attaching to a workpiece, said drive shaft defining a longitudinal axis, said first end including a base extending outwardly from said longitudinal axis, said base including a magnet proximate the electromagnet;

a fixed housing including a spring member, said spring member having at least two movable sections capable of torsional rotation about a spring axis, said spring axis generally

parallel to said longitudinal axis of said drive shaft, said movable sections aligned along said longitudinal axis;

at least two tuning members, each said tuning member extending between said drive shaft and an associated one of said movable sections of said spring member.

11. The spring mechanism of claim 10 wherein said spring member is a flat spring and said movable sections are spaced apart from one another and said movable sections are each defined between a pair of cutouts in said spring member.

12. The spring mechanism of claim 10 wherein said tuning members are independently adjustable to adjust a degree of tension on said movable sections of said spring in a direction generally perpendicular to said spring axis.

13. The spring mechanism of claim 12 wherein said each of said tuning members is a threaded member extending through said movable section of said spring and through said drive shaft.

14. The spring mechanism of claim 10 wherein said drive shaft includes at least one upwardly extending boss aligned with one of said movable sections of said spring member.

15. The spring mechanism of claim 14 wherein said at least one boss extends from said drive shaft into engagement with said one of said movable sections of said spring member.

16. The spring mechanism of claim 15 wherein said drive shaft includes at least two of said bosses, each said boss defining an opening, said tuning elements each extending into one of said openings.

17. The spring mechanism of claim 10 wherein said base at said first end of said drive shaft extends towards said spring member.

18. A method of manufacturing a spring mechanism for an electric toothbrush, comprising:
- providing a fixed housing defining a generally hollow interior;
 - providing a drive shaft extending at least in part into the hollow interior of the fixed housing, the drive shaft having a first end and a second end, the first end including a magnet and the second end adapted to receive a workpiece;
 - connecting a spring member to the fixed housing, the spring member having at least two movable sections spaced apart from one another;
 - connecting the spring member to the drive shaft with at least two tuning members; and
 - adjusting at least one of the tuning members to provide a desired degree of tension on one of the movable sections of the spring.
19. The method of claim 18 wherein the adjusting of the tuning member includes drawing the one of the movable sections of the spring member towards the drive shaft.
20. The method of claim 19 wherein the spring is a flat spring and the tuning members each extend through an associated one of the movable sections of the spring and into the drive shaft.

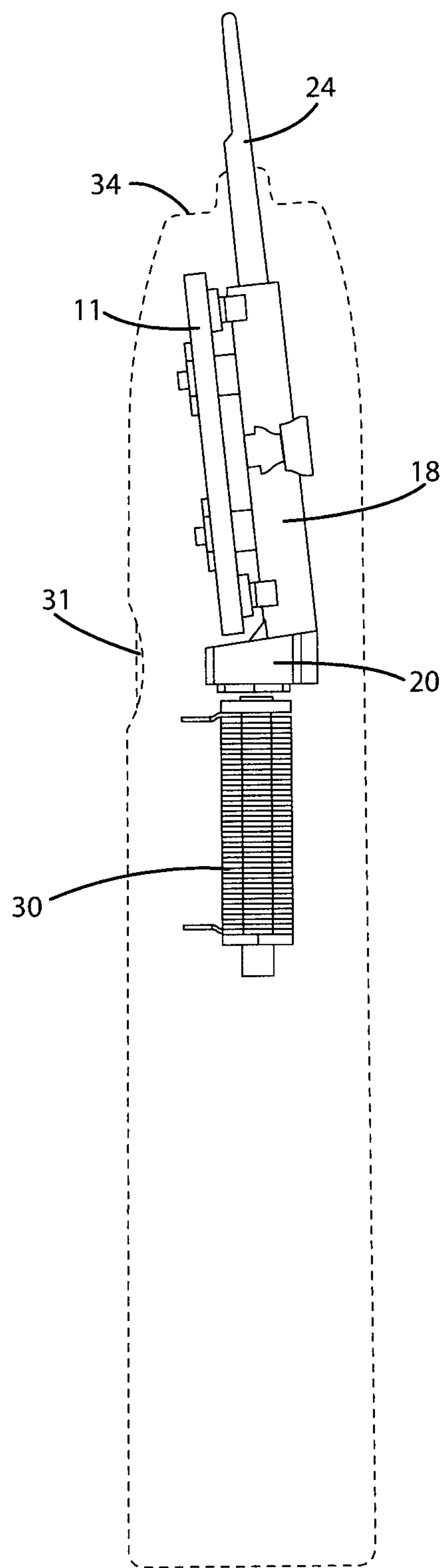


Fig. 1

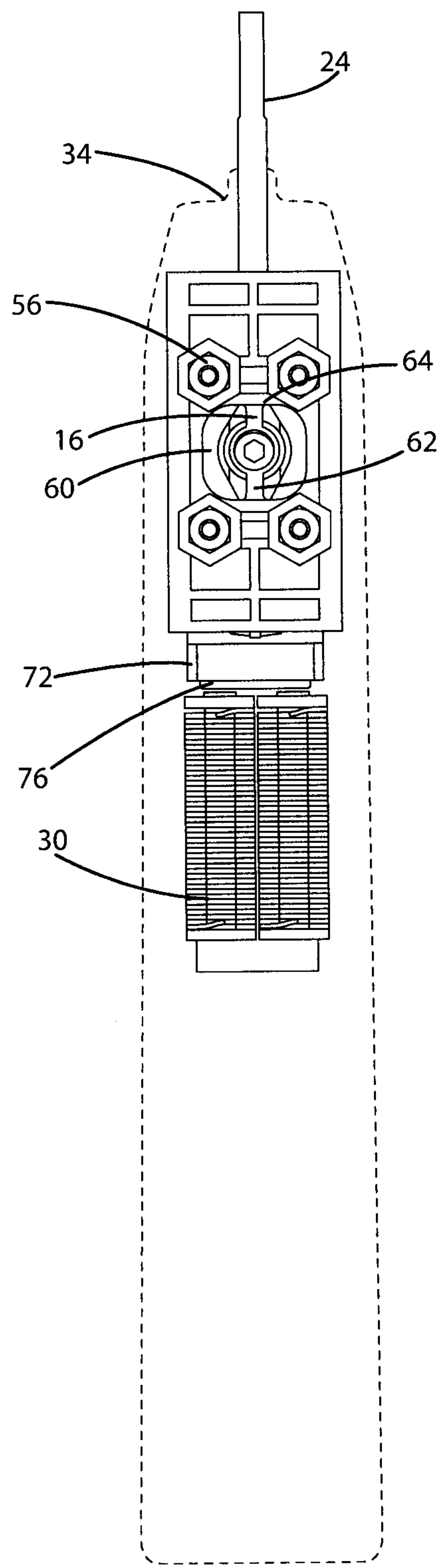


Fig. 2

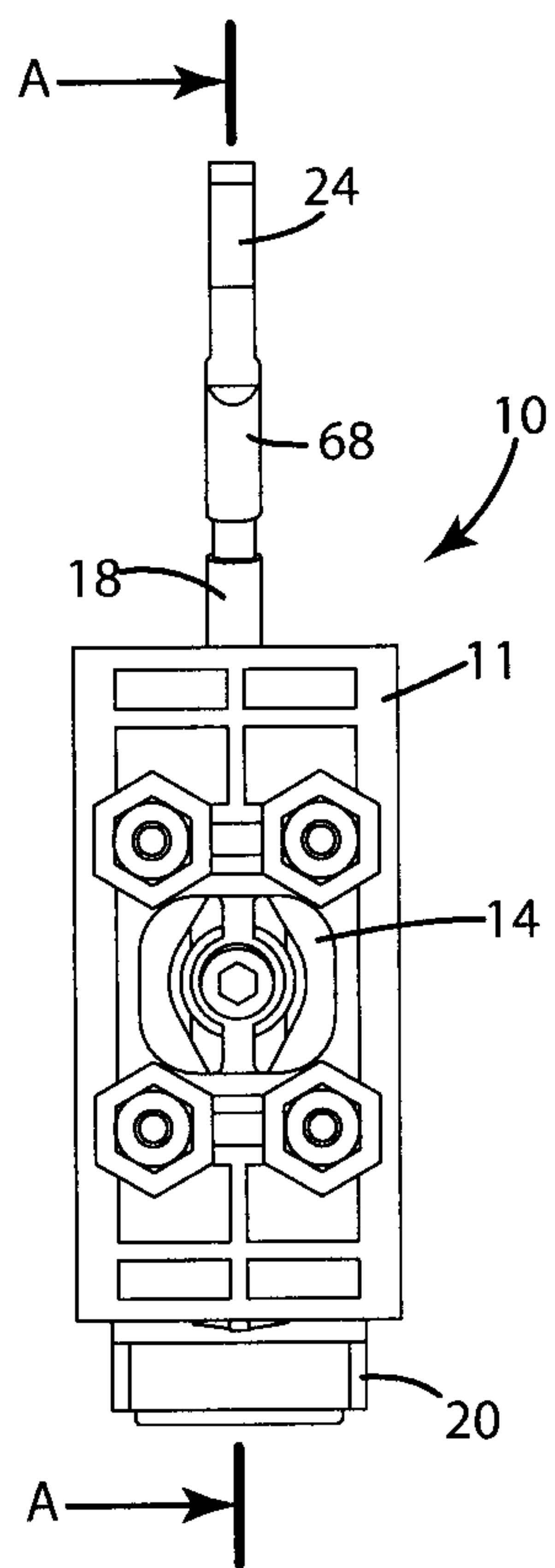


Fig. 3

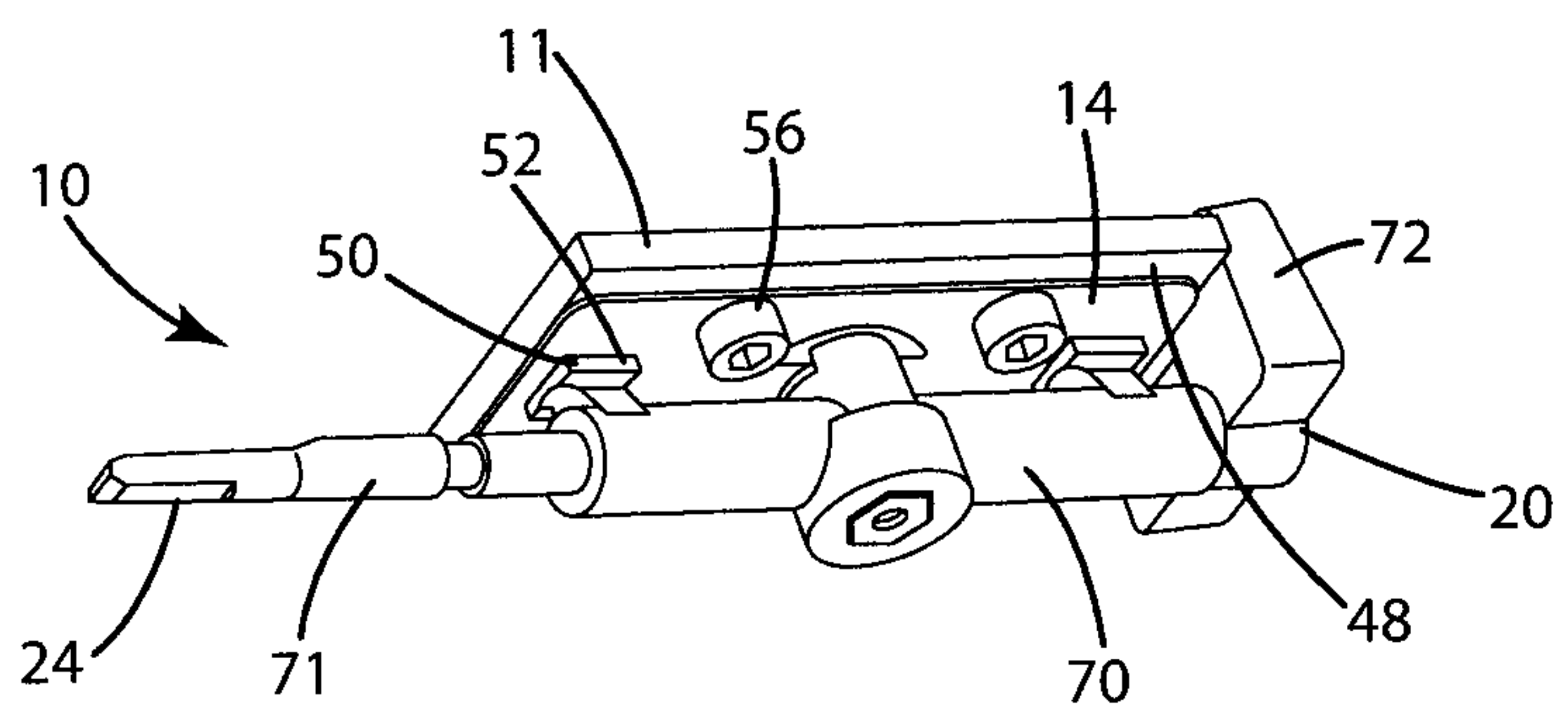


Fig. 4

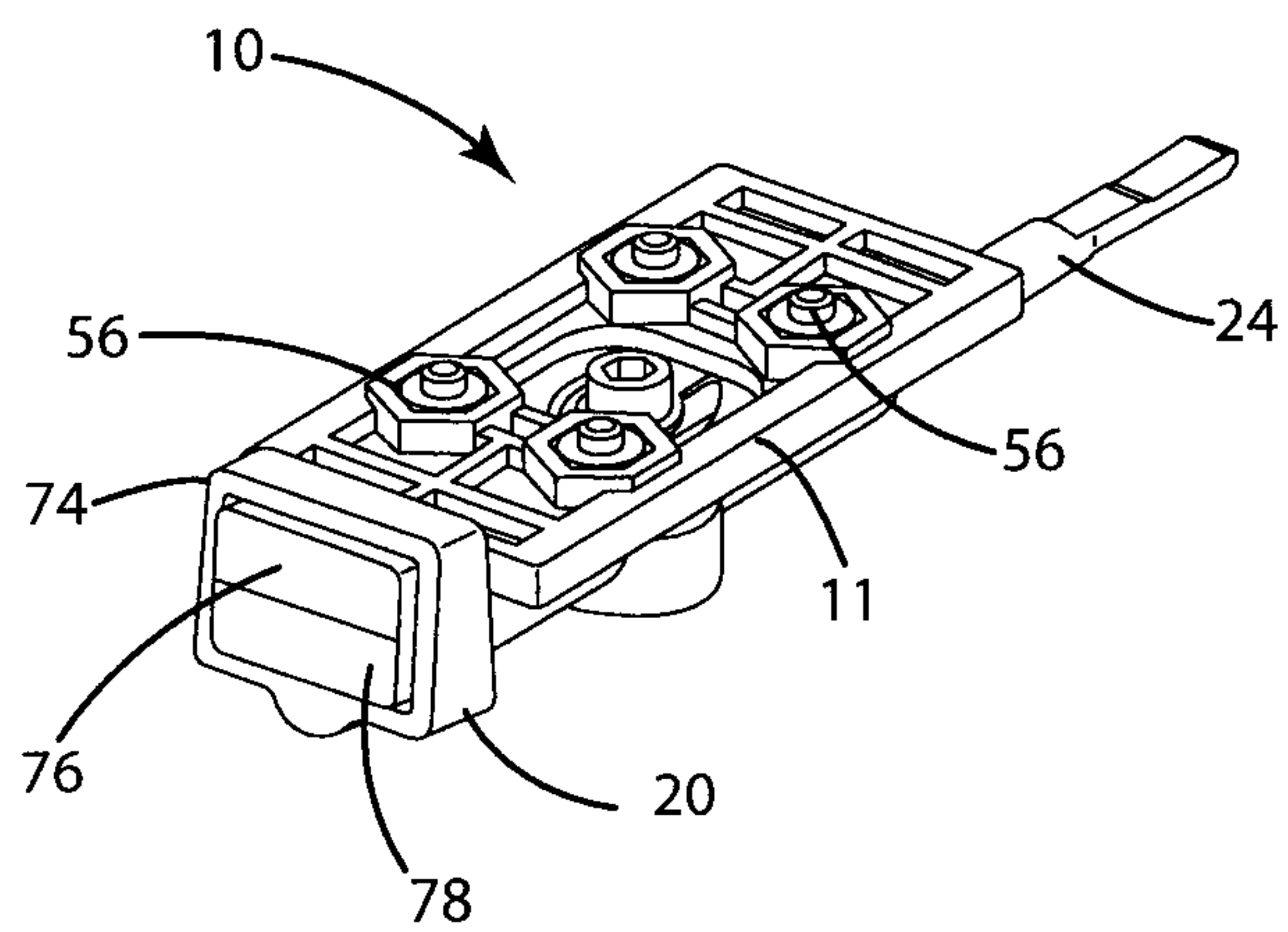


Fig. 5

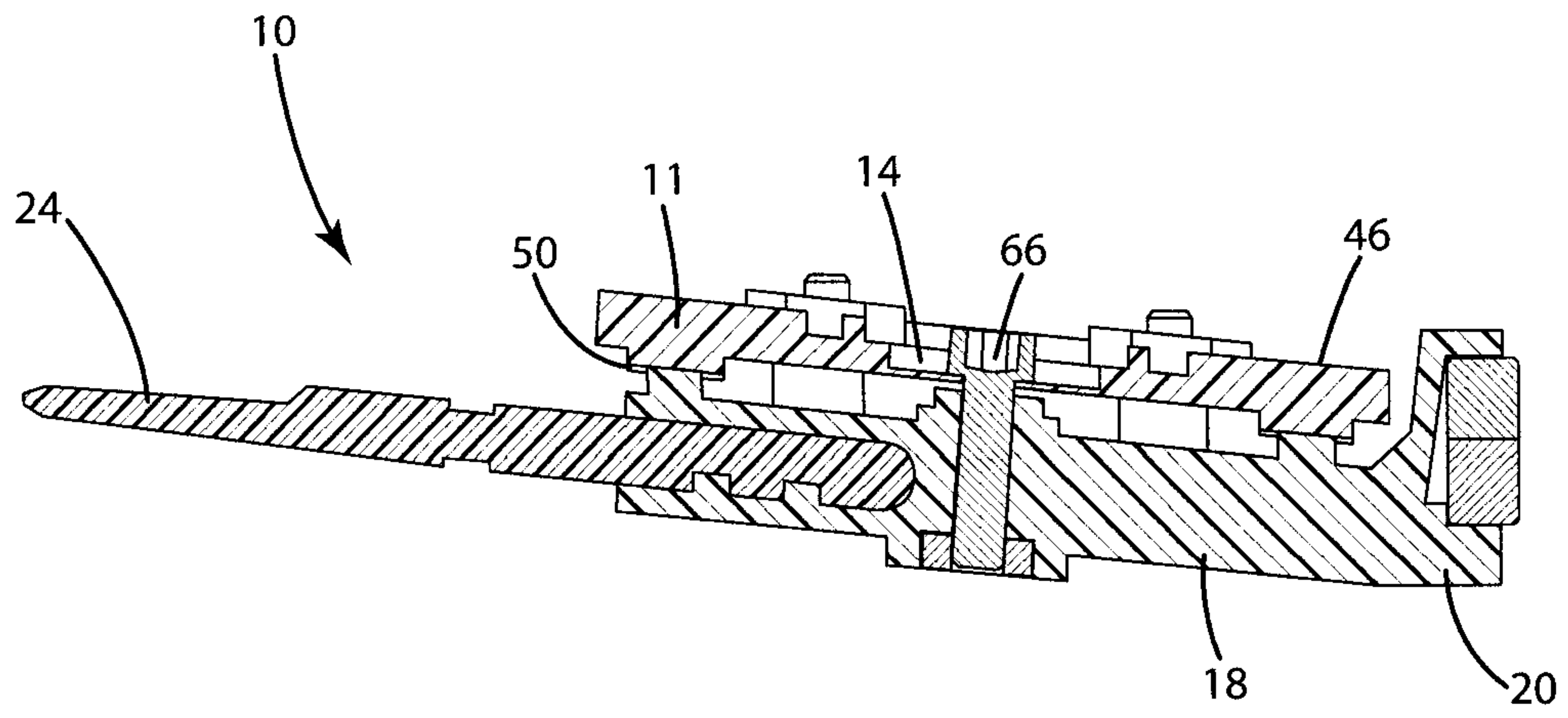


Fig. 6

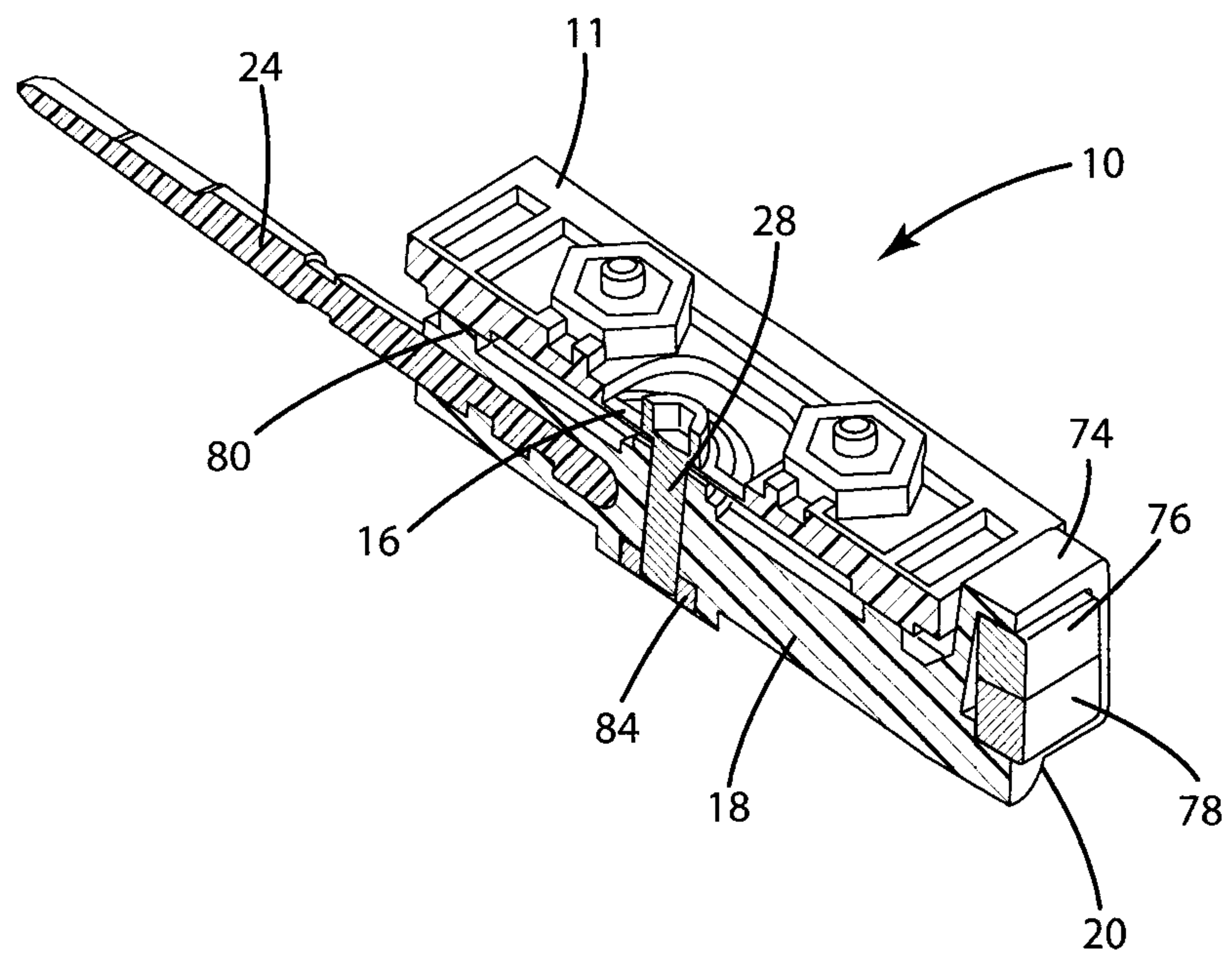


Fig. 6A

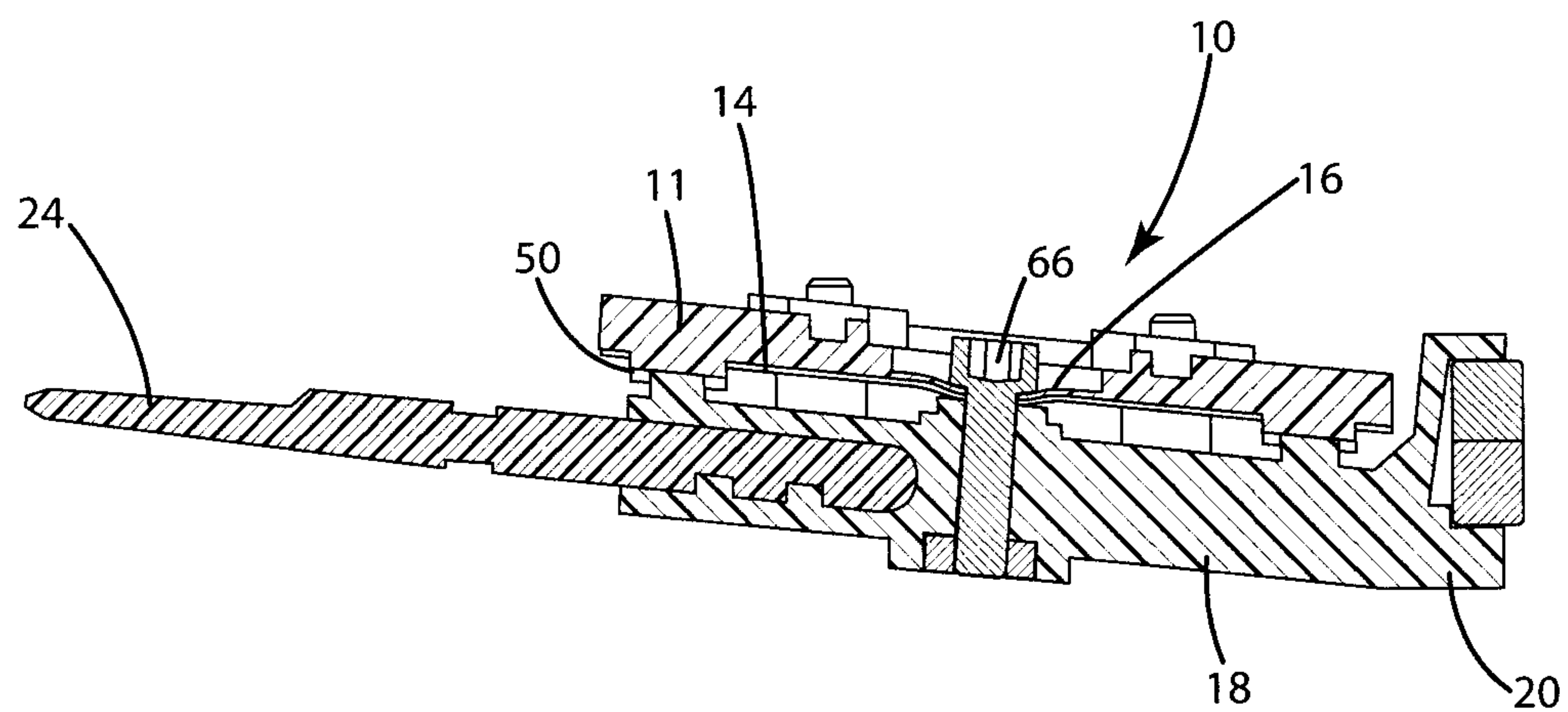


Fig. 7

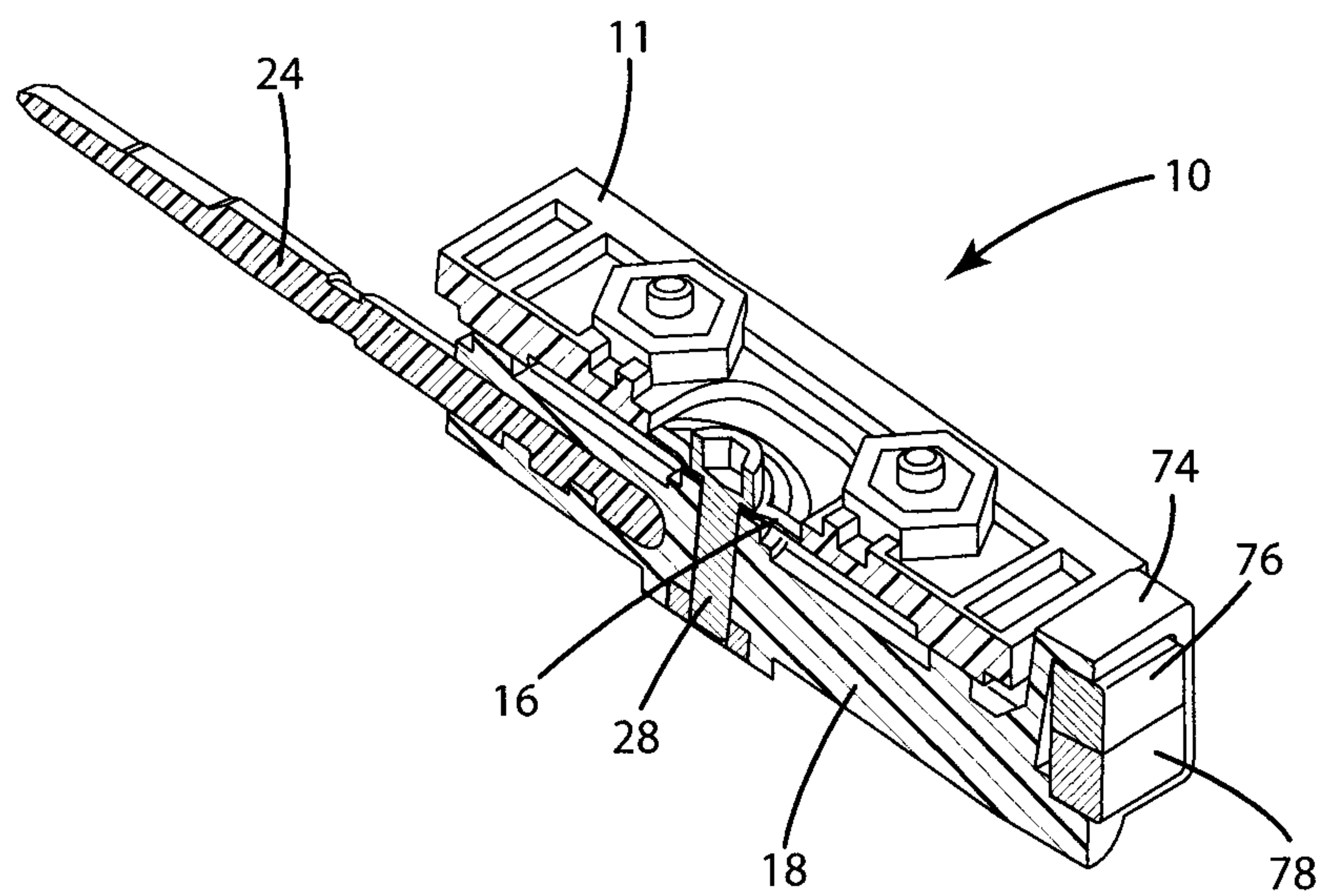


Fig. 7A

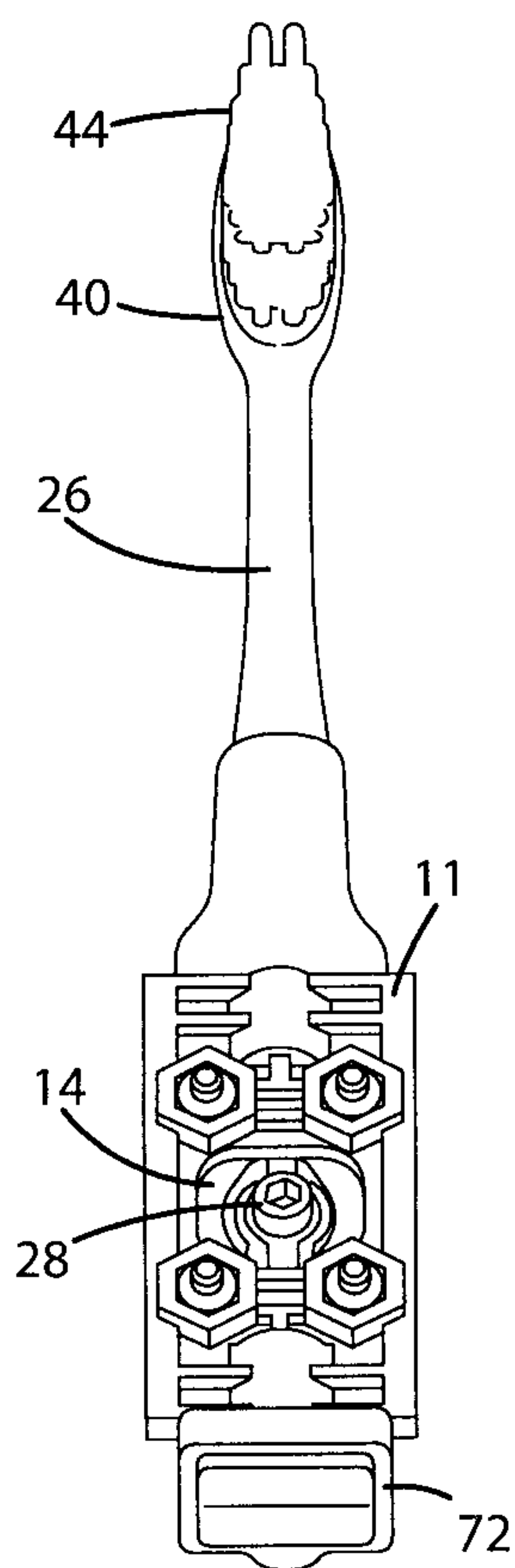


Fig. 8

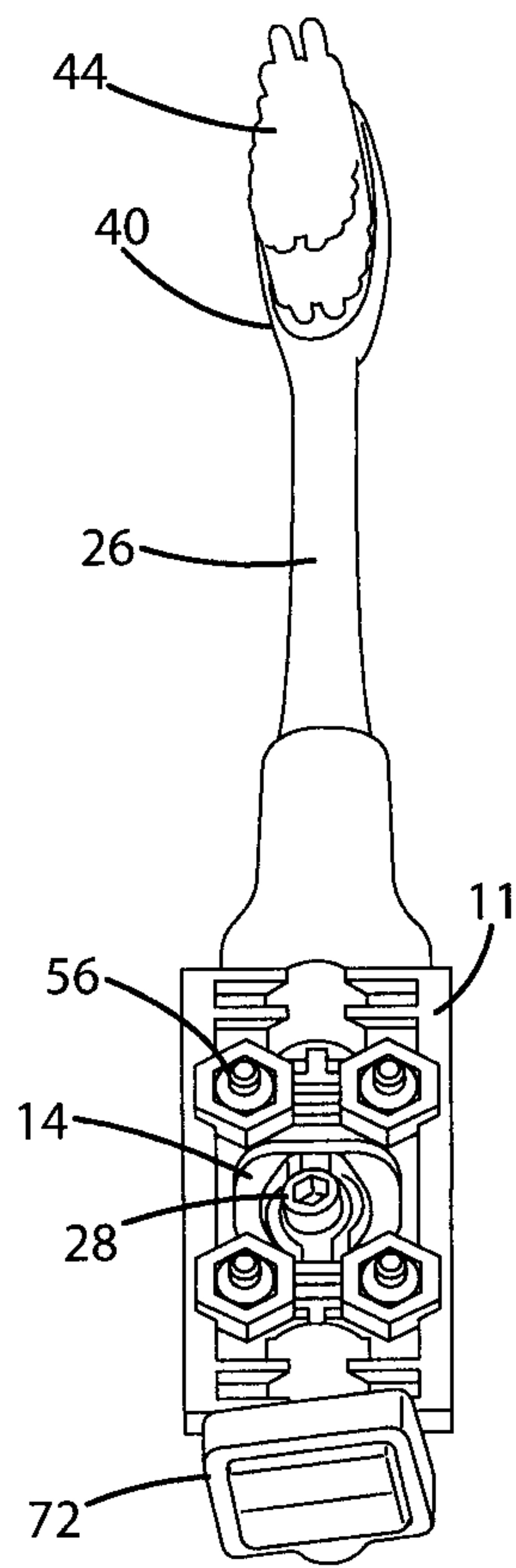


Fig. 10

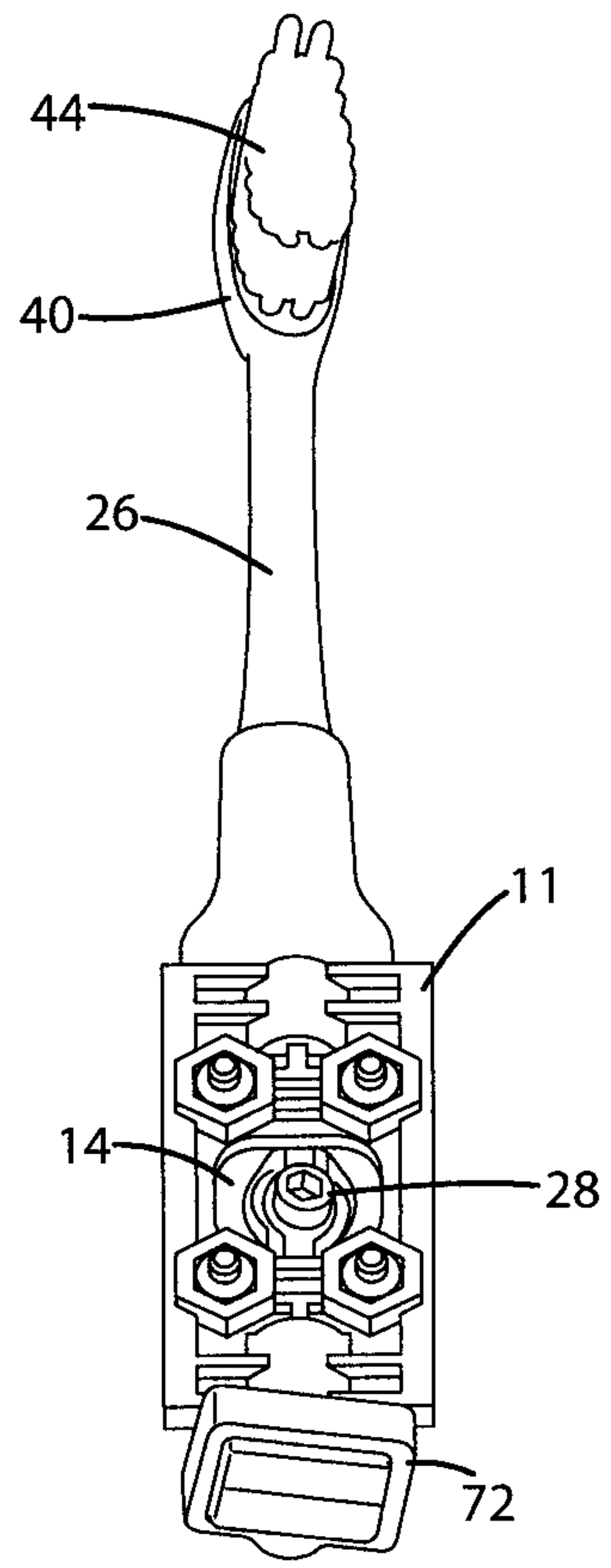


Fig. 12

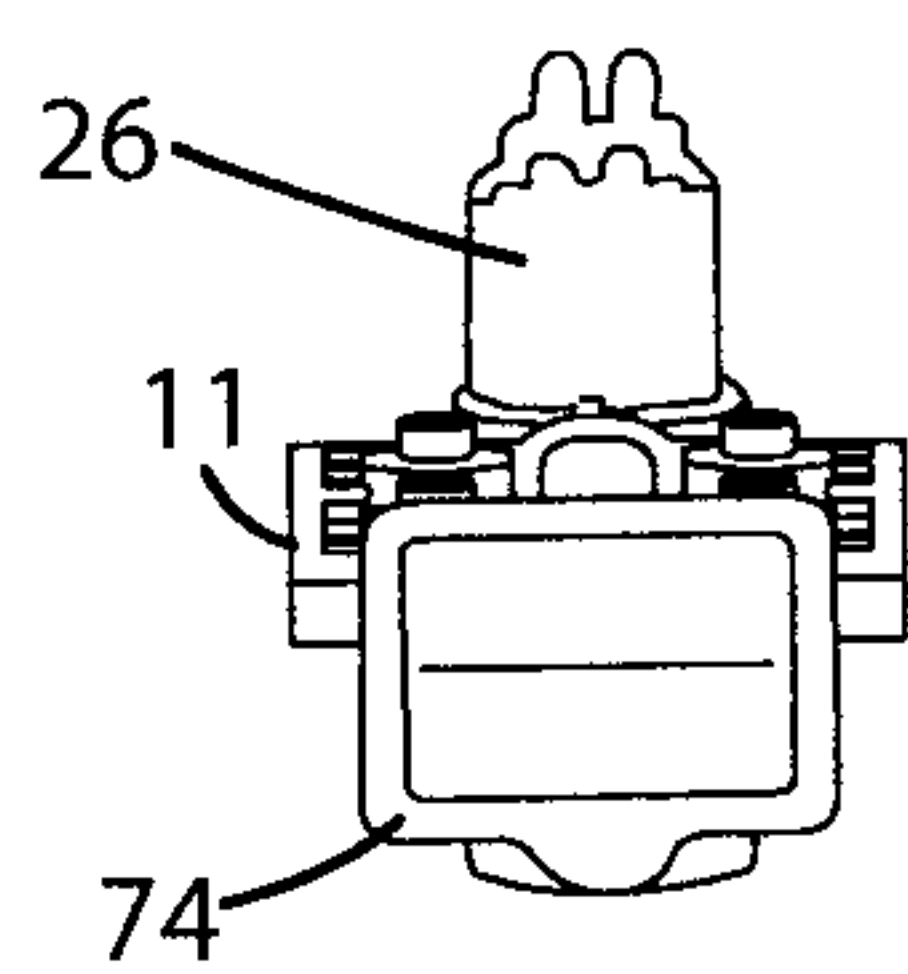


Fig. 9

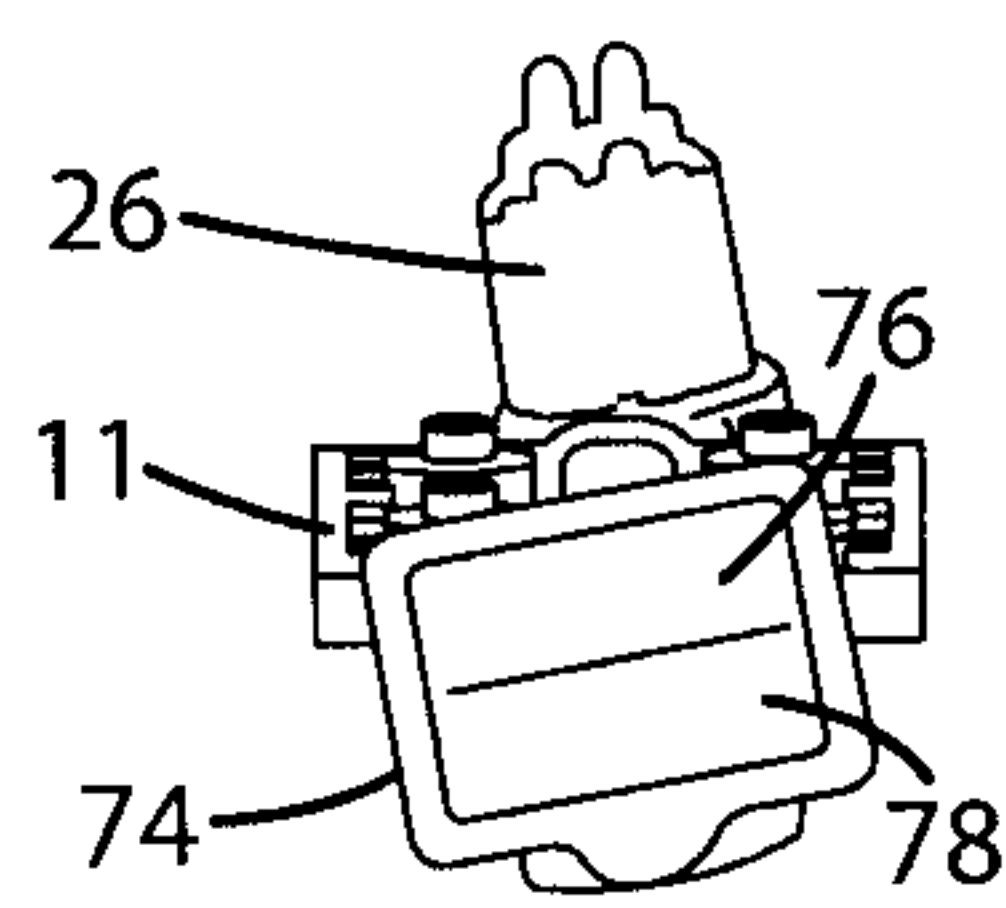


Fig. 11

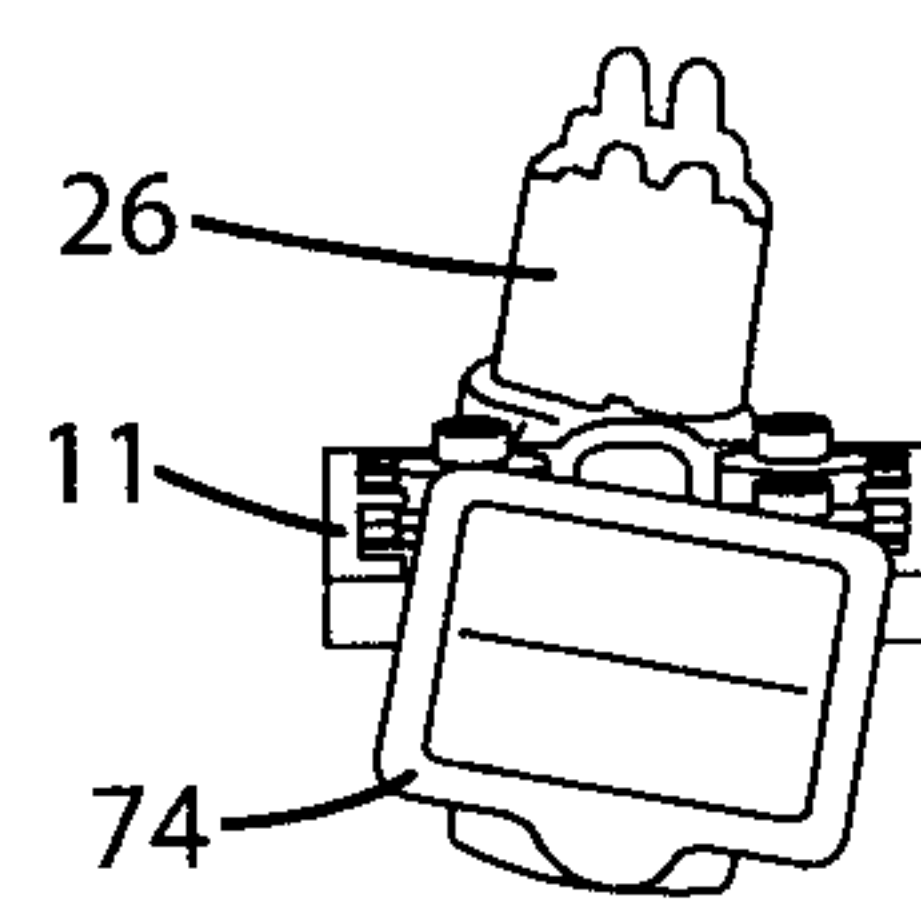


Fig. 13

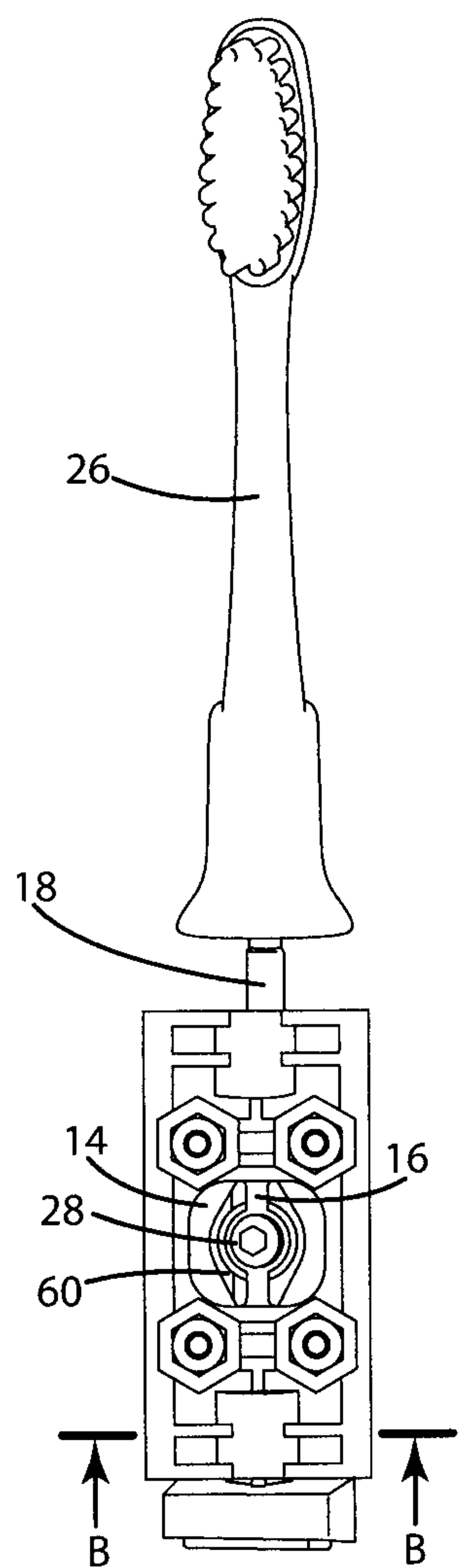


Fig. 16

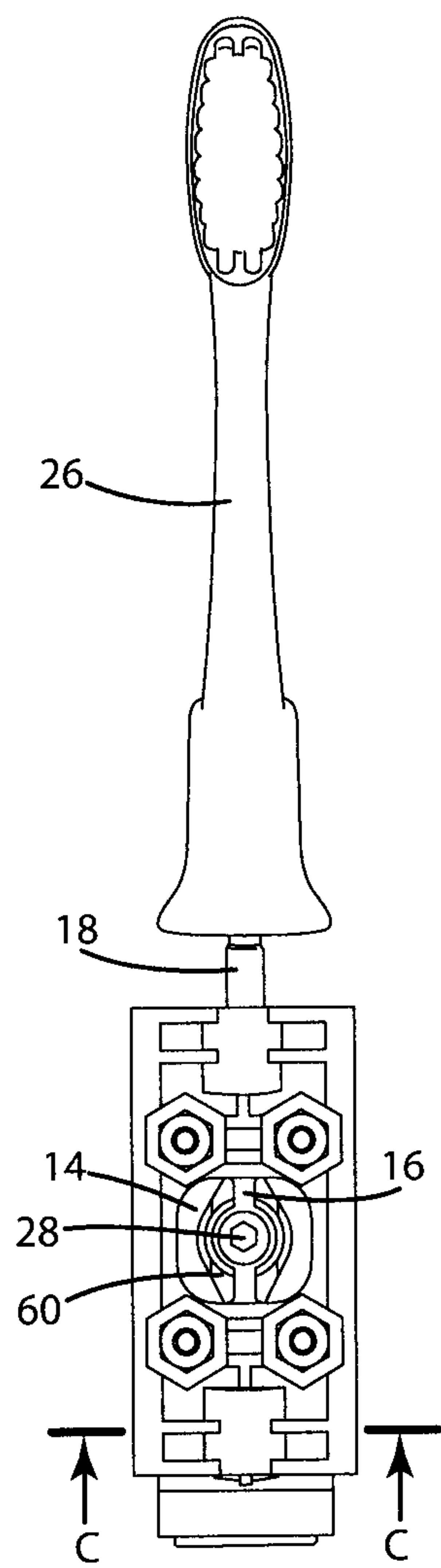


Fig. 14

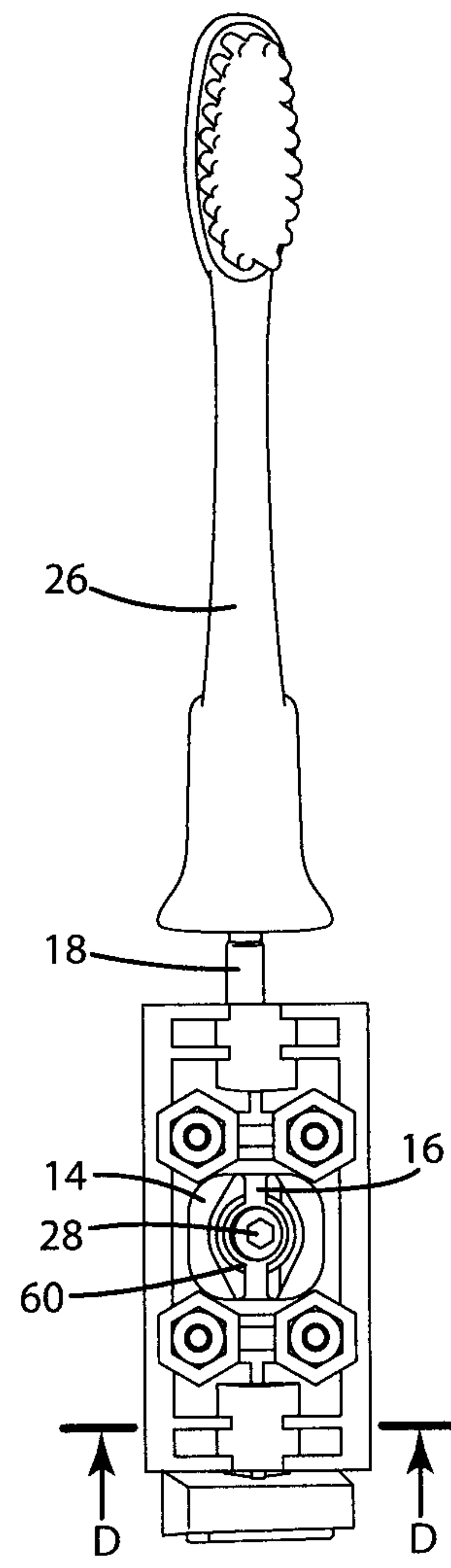


Fig. 18

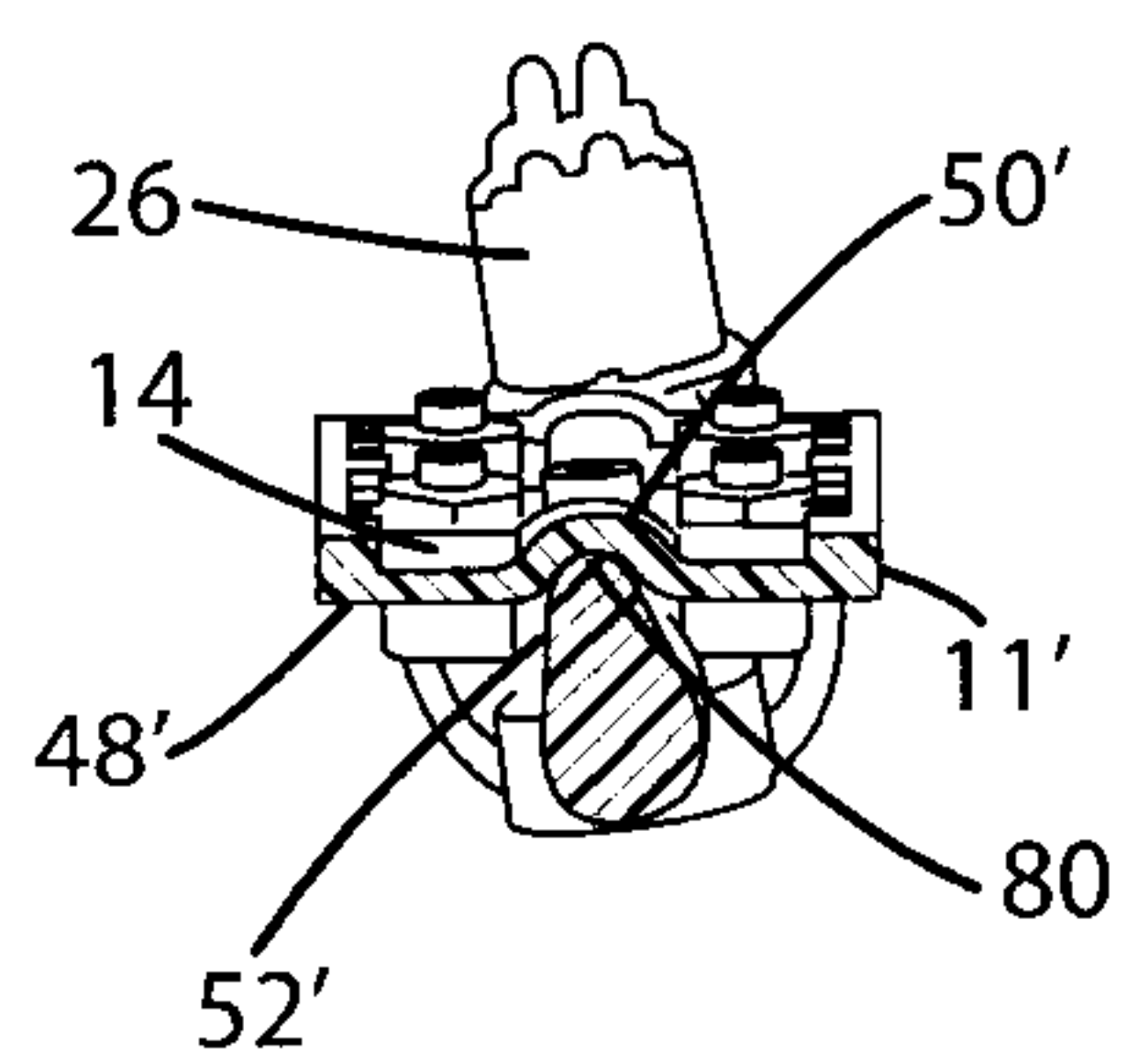


Fig. 17

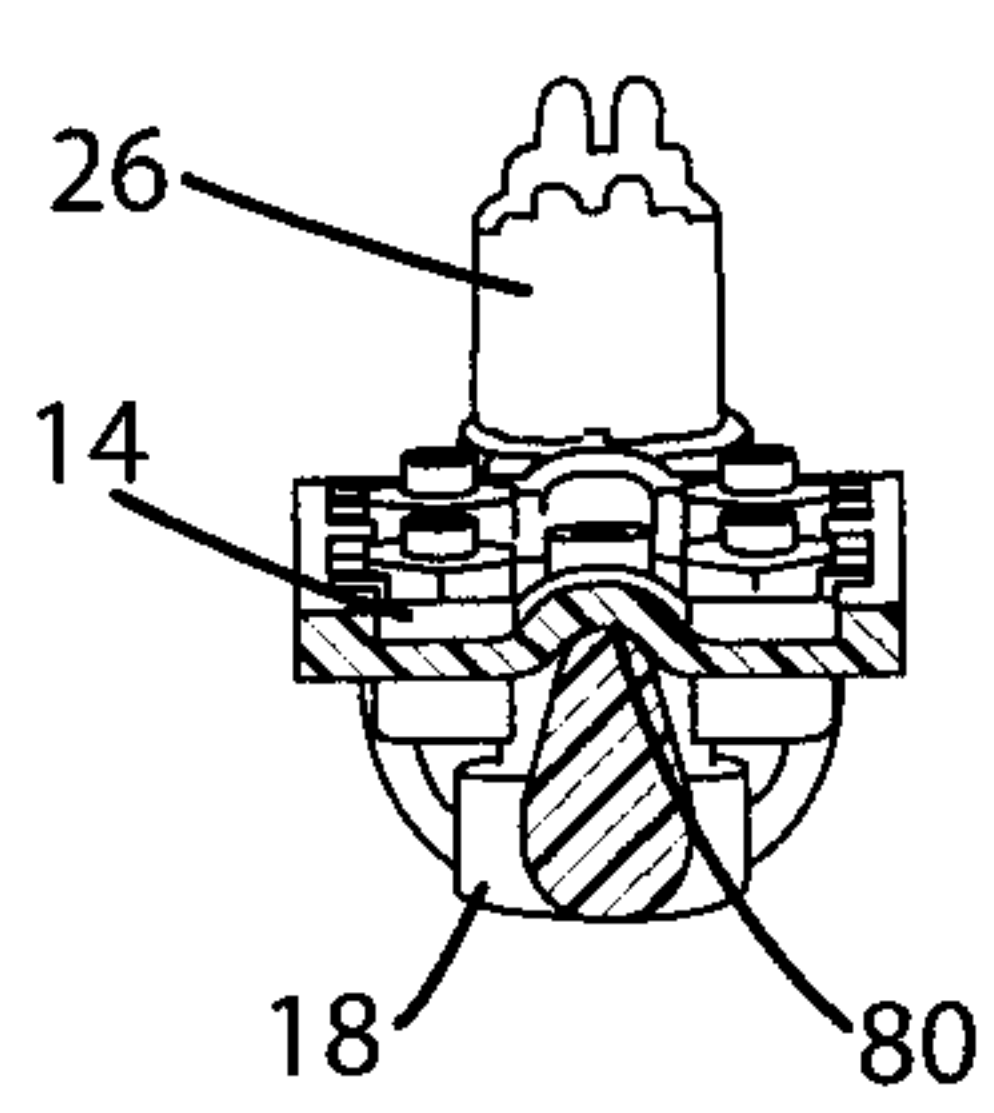


Fig. 15

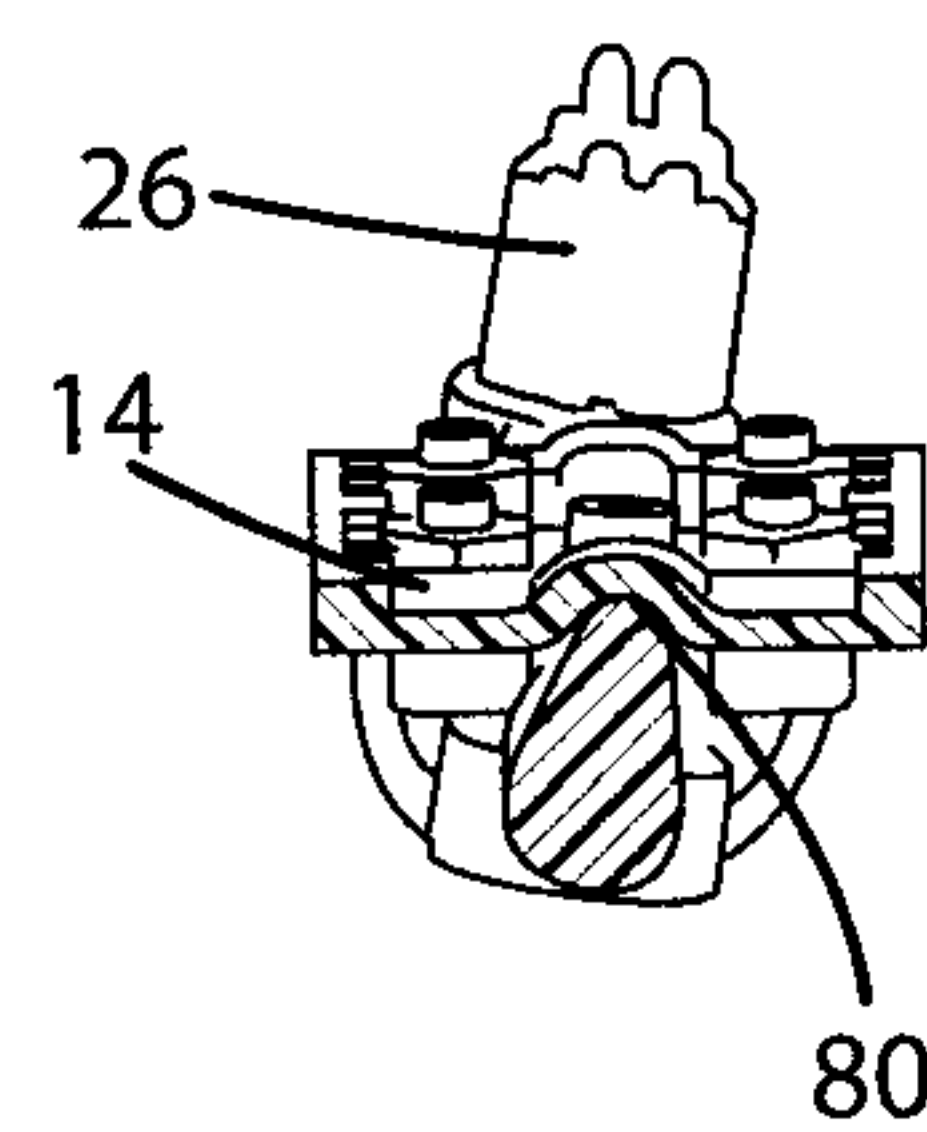


Fig. 19

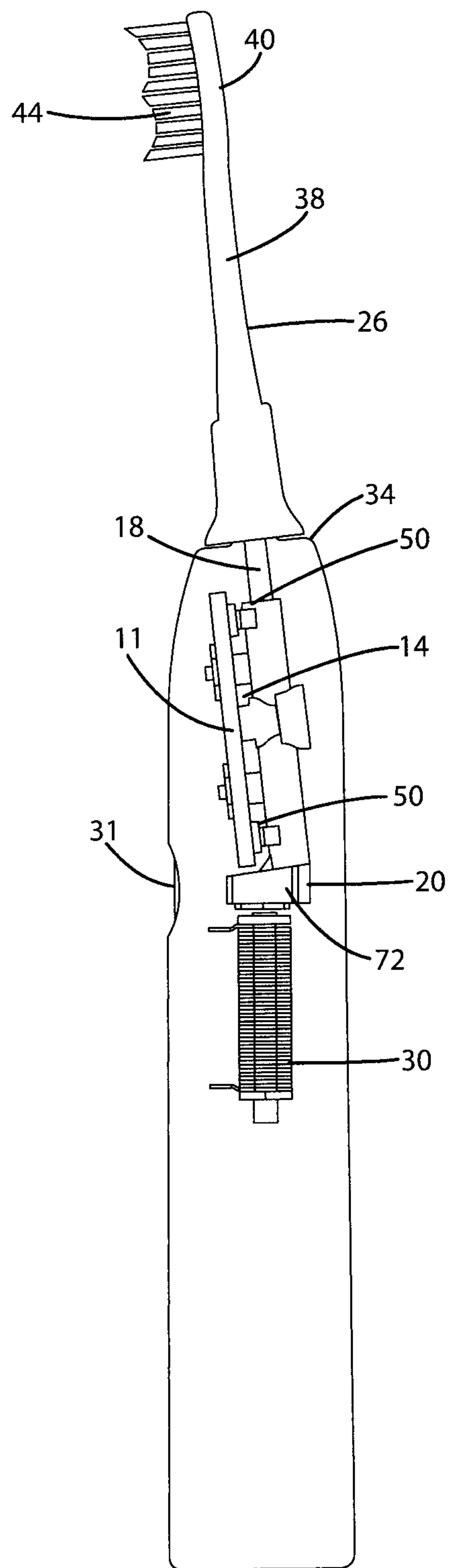


Fig. 20

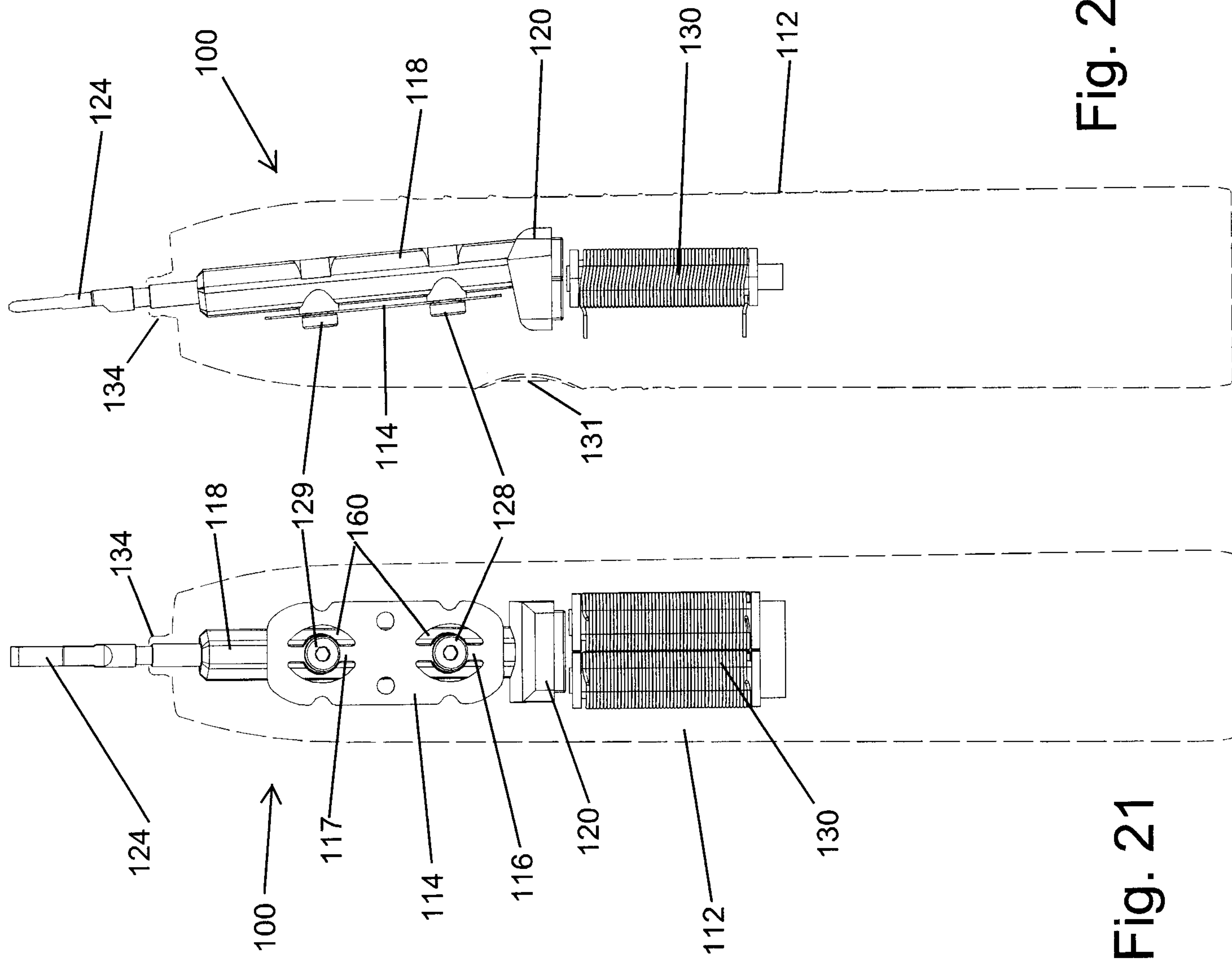


Fig. 21

Fig. 22

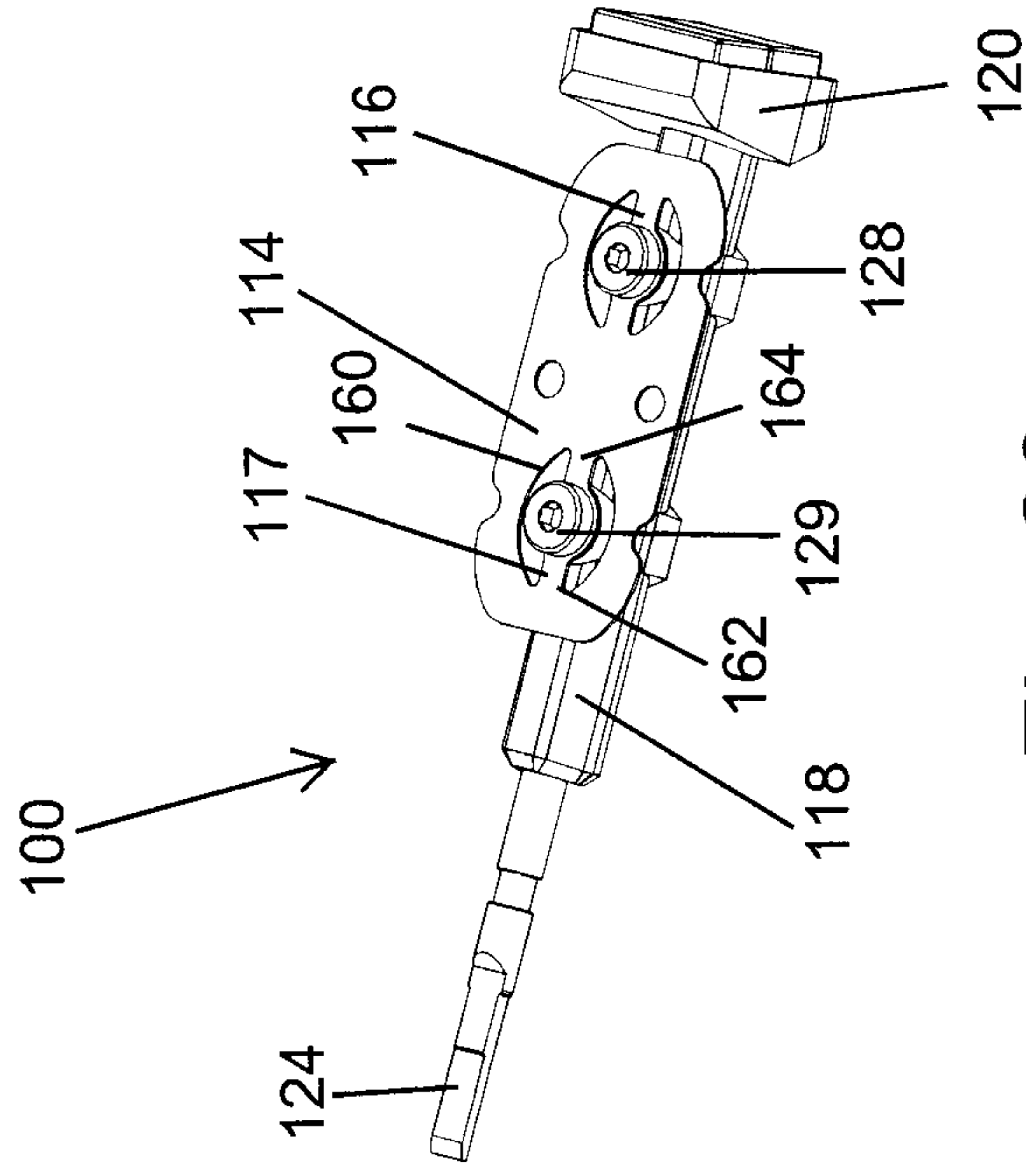


Fig. 23

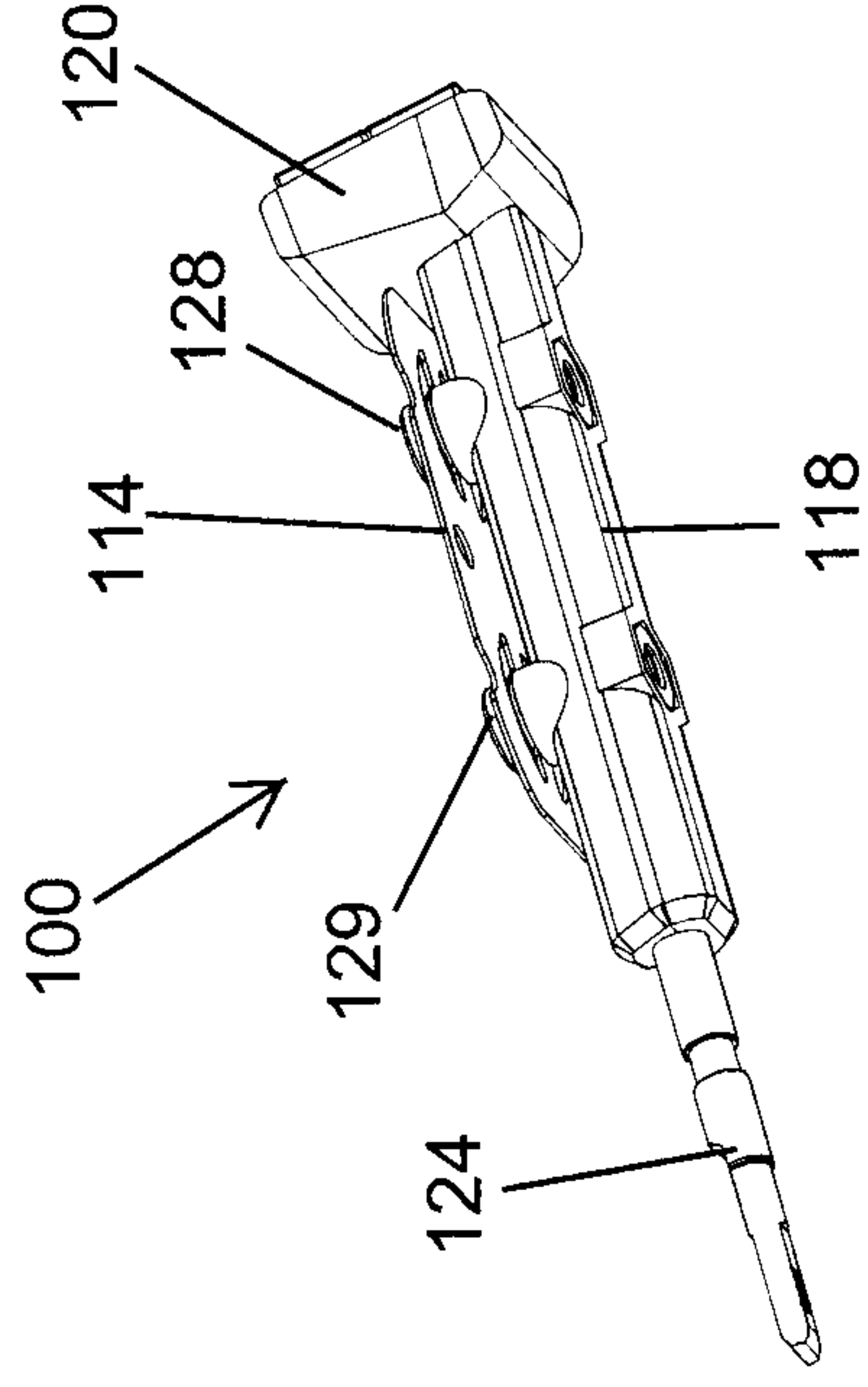


Fig. 24

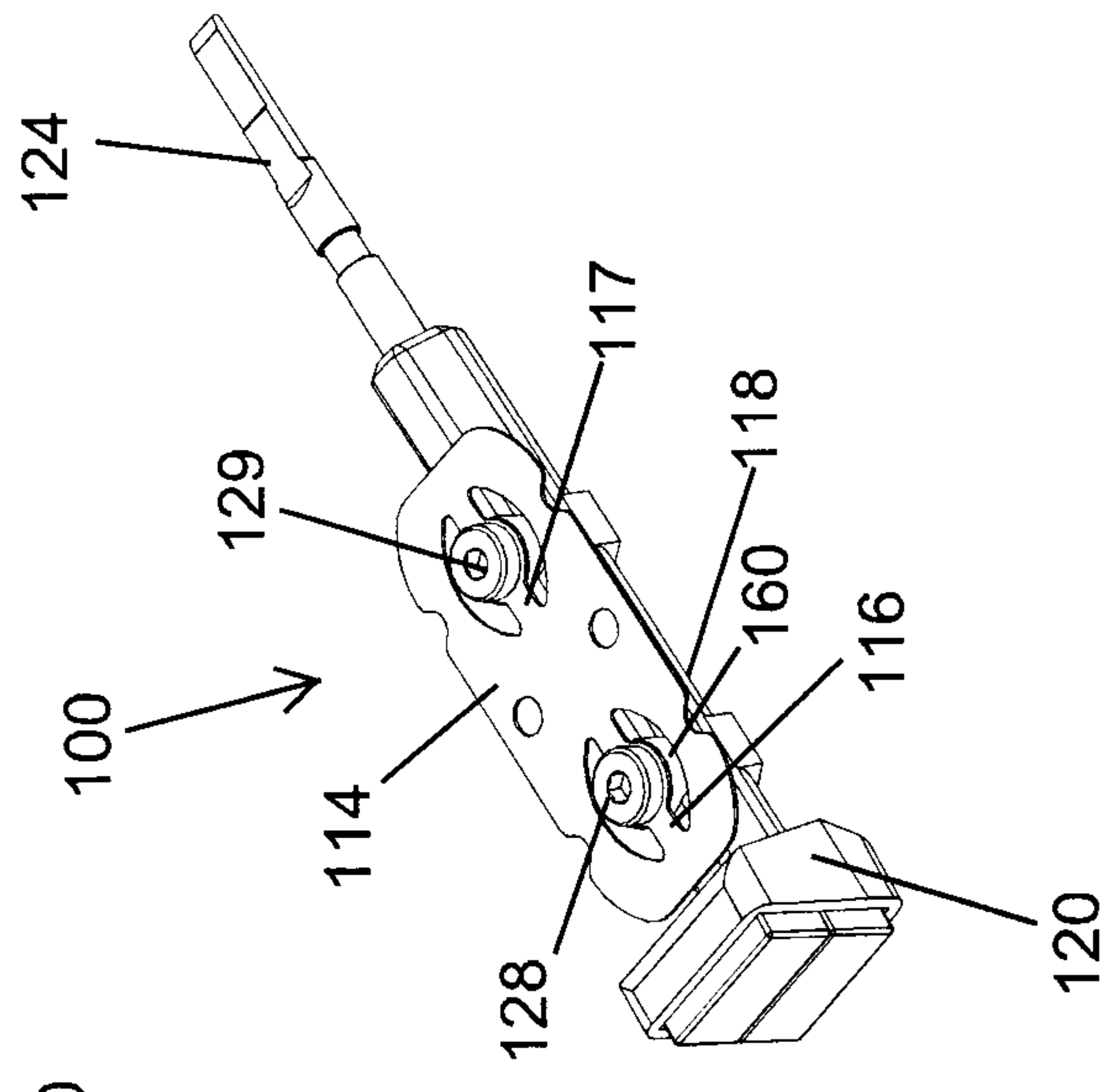


Fig. 25

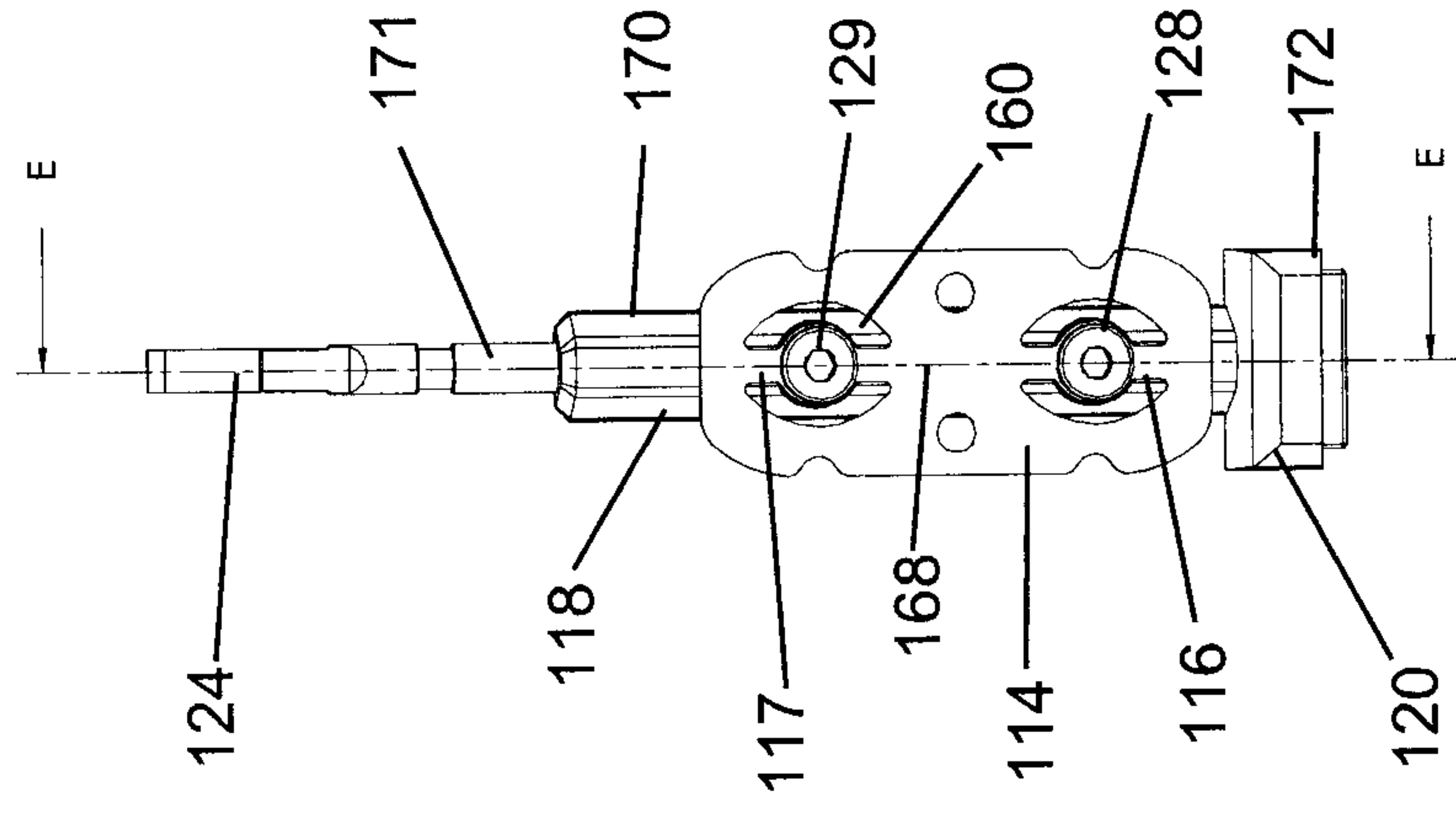


Fig. 26

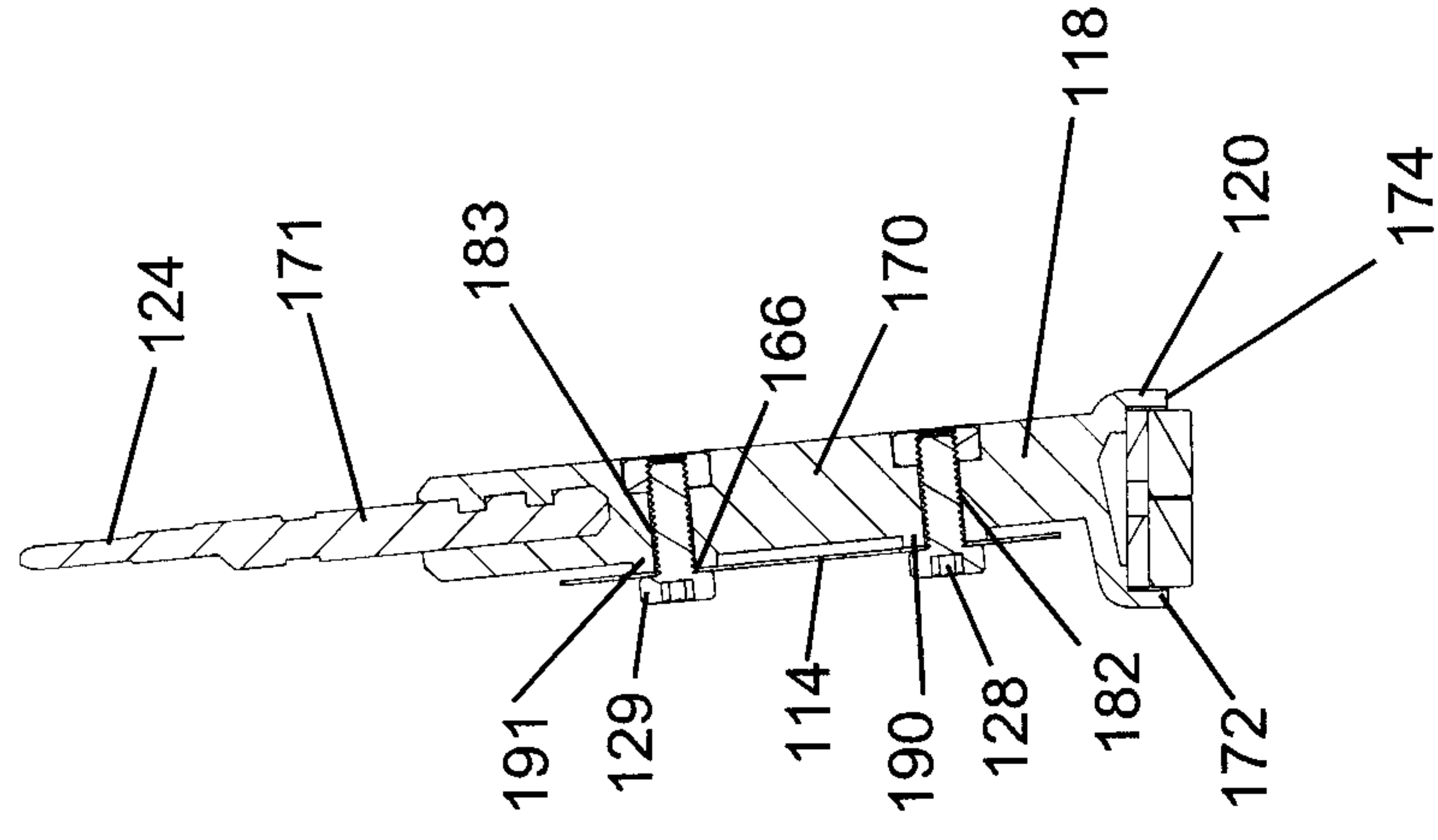


Fig. 27

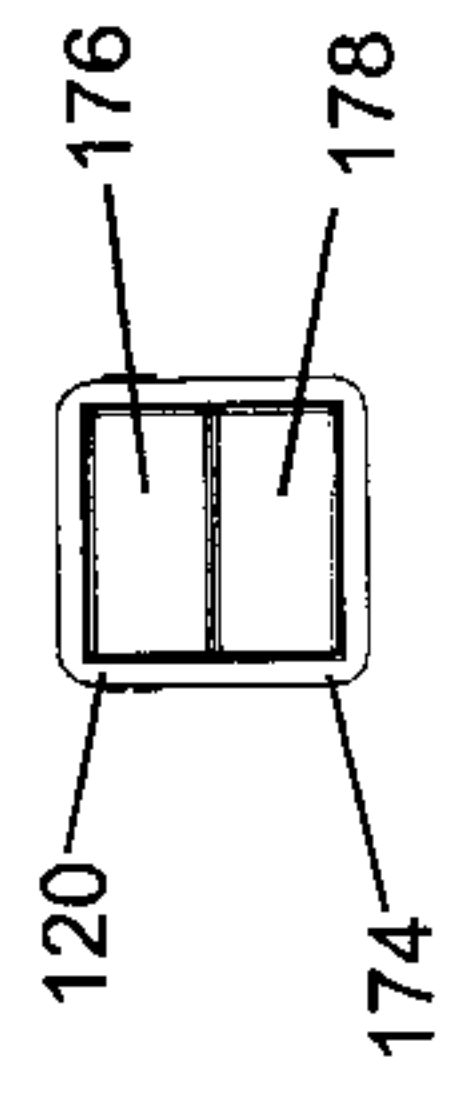
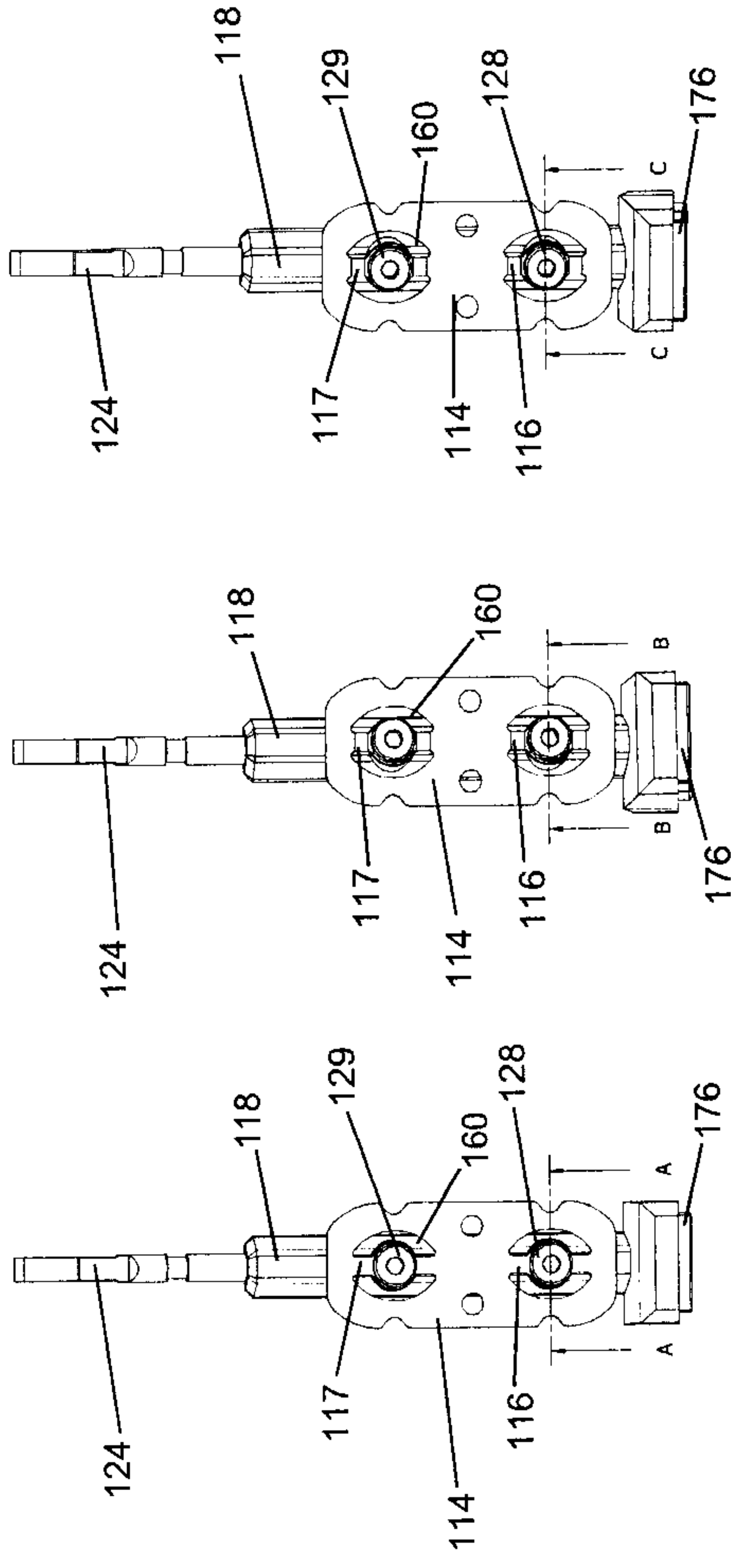


Fig. 31

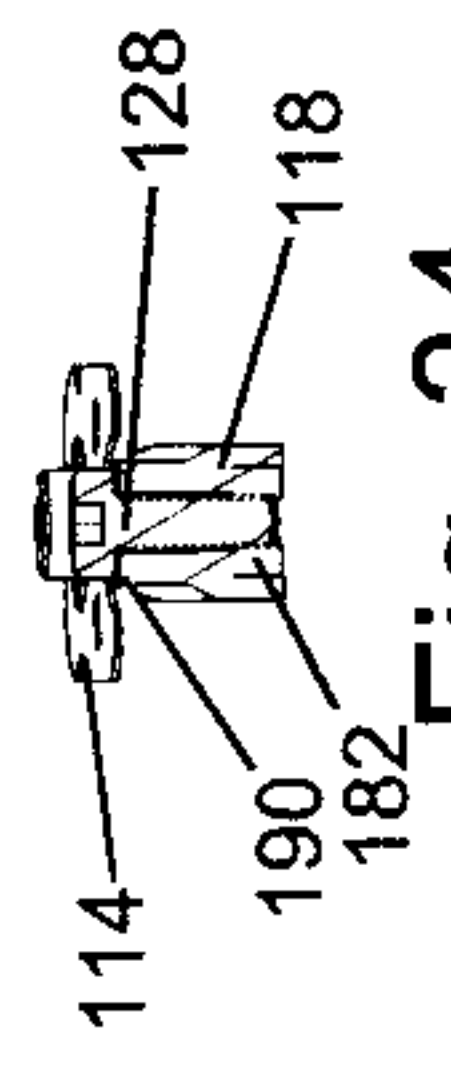


Fig. 32

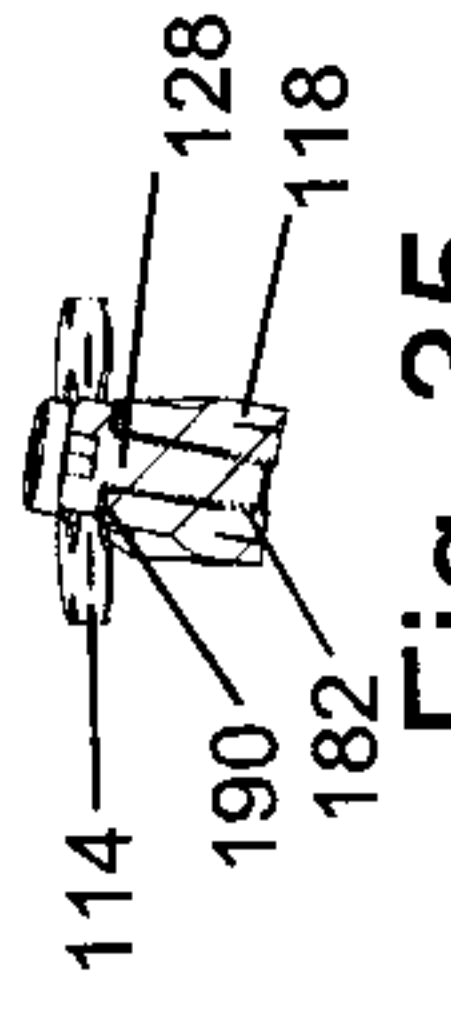
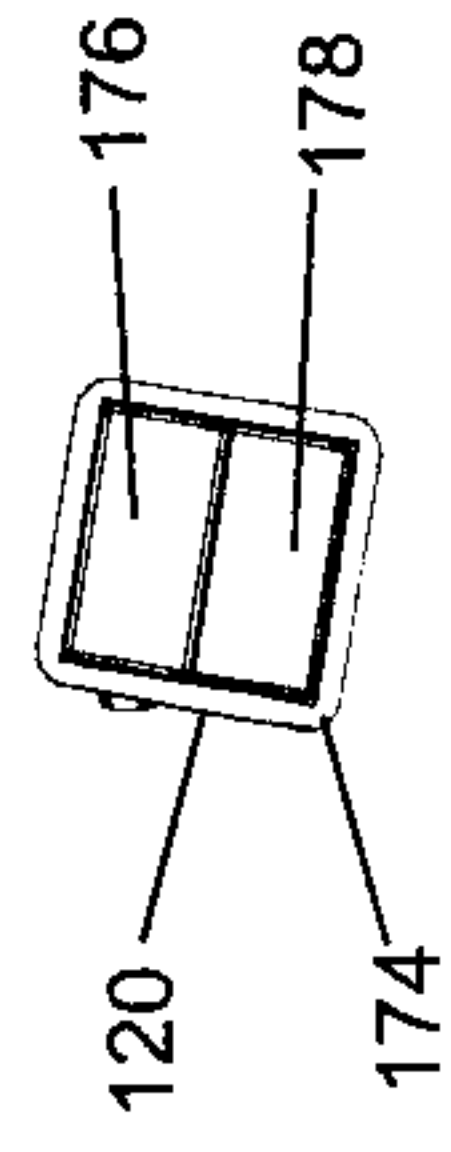


Fig. 33

