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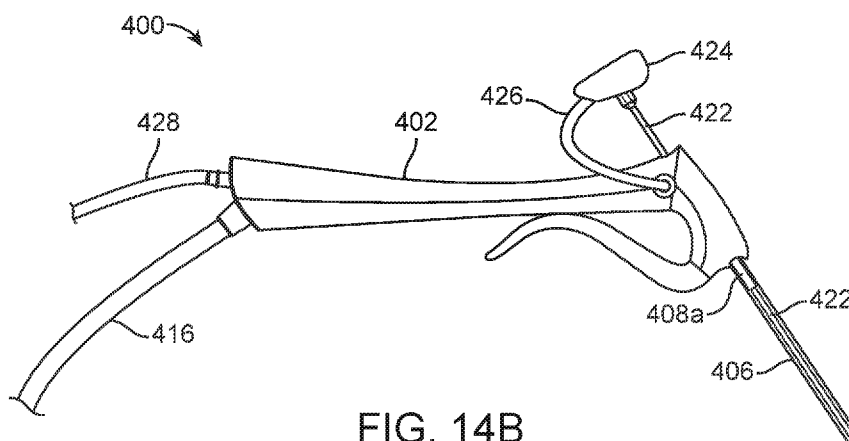


FIG. 14B

(57) Abstract: An ear endoscope device for use in a surgical procedure in an ear includes a handle, a visualization shaft extending from the handle, a tool guide extending from the handle parallel to the visualization shaft and configured to guide a tool into the ear with the visualization shaft, an imaging sensor at a distal end of the visualization shaft, and a light source. In some embodiments, the ear endoscope is combined with a suction device. In other embodiments, it may be combined with another tool.



EAR VISUALIZATION SYSTEM

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 [0001] This application is being filed on 6 July 2018, as a PCT International patent application, and claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 62/533,192, filed July 17, 2017, entitled, "EAR SURGERY VISUALIZATION DEVICE." The disclosure of this priority application is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety into the present application.

10

BACKGROUND

[0002] Middle ear surgery is performed on patients for a number of different reasons, most commonly for chronic recurring ear infections. When performing middle ear surgery, the ear, nose and throat (ENT) surgeon (or "otolaryngologist") typically visualizes the middle ear and the surgical procedure in one of two ways. In 15 some cases, the surgeon uses a microscope, positioned in front of the surgeon's eyes, and she typically uses her non-dominant hand to hold a suction device and her dominant hand to hold a surgical tool. In other cases, the surgeon uses a handheld endoscope to visualize the middle ear. The use of a handheld endoscope is problematic in several different ways.

20 [0003] First, standard endoscopes have long shafts and are not made for use in the ear. When the ENT surgeon uses an endoscope in the ear, he has to hold the handle of the scope up in the air, over the patient's head, with the surgeon's hand suspended in the air, unsupported. This factor alone is problematic, because if the surgeon accidentally moves his unsupported hand during surgery, he could very easily move 25 the distal end of the endoscope in a way that could damage the tympanic membrane or one or more of the delicate structures of the middle ear.

[0004] Second, compounding on the first issue, endoscopes are generally much heavier than the small, thin surgical tools used in middle ear procedures. The surgeon thus has an ergonomic imbalance between a relatively heavy endoscope in 30 her non-dominant hand and a relatively light surgical device in her dominant hand. This imbalance adds to the difficulty in stabilizing the endoscope. Additionally, holding a heavy endoscope suspended over the patient's head during a surgical procedure may quickly lead to arm and hand fatigue for the surgeon.

[0005] Third, since the surgeon is holding the endoscope in one hand, that hand is no longer free to hold a suction device or a surgical tool. Thus, when an endoscope is used for visualization, the surgeon cannot use a suction device and visualize the inside of the ear at the same time.

5 [0006] Fourth, standard endoscopes have straight shafts, so the surgeon must hold the endoscope in a direct line straight back from the patient's ear. This straight-line position makes it impossible, or at least incredibly challenging, to use an endoscope and a microscope in the same surgical procedure, since the position of the endoscope is directly in the path of vision of the microscope. This is a drawback, because in
10 some procedures an ENT surgeon would like to be able to switch back and forth quickly and easily between viewing with a microscope and viewing with an endoscope. It is also challenging for a surgeon to manipulate multiple tools with straight shafts held in two hands during an ear surgery procedure, because the hands must be held very close together (due to the small diameter of the ear canal), and the
15 tools tend to bump into one another as the surgeon manipulates them to perform the procedure.

[0007] For at least these reasons, it would be advantageous to have an improved system and method for ear visualization. Ideally such a system and method would be easy to use, allow for good visualization of the ear, and be compatible with use of
20 other ear surgery devices. At least some of these objectives will be addressed in this disclosure.

BRIEF SUMMARY

[0008] This disclosure describes various embodiments of a device and method for
25 visualizing an ear surgery procedure. In general, the device combines a visualization component (e.g., a camera) with a surgical tool component via a sheath that holds the two components together. In some embodiments, the surgical tool is a suction device, and thus the combined device in those embodiments is used for visualization and suction. The device is held in one hand and is short enough and thin enough to
30 be advanced easily into the ear and to allow the surgeon to rest her hand on the patient's head during the procedure while holding the device, which surgeons often do in ear surgery procedures for hand stability. In some embodiments, the camera is

free to roll (or “spin”) about its own axis within the sheath and/or the camera is free to rotate around the longitudinal axis of the suction device within the sheath.

[0009] In one aspect of the disclosure, a device for visualizing a surgical procedure on an ear may include a suction tube, a camera coupled with the suction tube in a side-by-side arrangement, and a sheath disposed around an outside of the suction tube and an outside of the camera to couple the suction tube and the camera together. In some embodiments, the sheath holds the camera and the suction tube in such a way that the camera is free to roll or spin about its own axis within the sheath, and the camera is also free to rotate about a longitudinal axis of the suction tube within the sheath. In some embodiments, the suction tube may have an outer diameter of no more than about 1.1 millimeters, and the camera may have an outer diameter of no more than about 2.5 millimeters. In some embodiments, for example, the sheath is disposed around the camera and the suction tube but is not fixedly attached to either one, so they are free to roll and rotate within the sheath. For example, the surgeon may want to roll the camera for image orientation and/or may want to rotate the camera around the suction tube for ergonomic reasons, such when moving the device from one hand to the other.

[0010] In some embodiments, the suction tube is rigid and includes a tubular portion with a distal suction end, a suction device attachment end opposite the distal suction end, and a bend in the tubular portion. In some embodiments, for example, the tubular portion is located about 40-100 millimeters from the distal suction end. In one embodiment, the bend in the tubular portion forms an angle of about 45 degrees, although other angles are possible in alternative embodiments. In some embodiments, the sheath is shorter than a distance from the distal suction end to the bend in the tubular portion, and the camera and the sheath are configured to slide along the tubular portion of the suction tube from a first position, in which a distal end of the camera is adjacent the distal suction end of the tubular portion, and a second position, in which the distal end of the camera is proximal to the distal suction end. In some embodiments the suction tube is made of metal. In some embodiments, at least a portion of the camera may be flexible. In some embodiments, the sheath is made of a heat-shrink polymer.

[0011] In another aspect of the disclosure, a method for performing a surgical procedure on an ear of a patient involves holding a combined visualization and

suction device in one hand and advancing a distal end of the combined visualization and suction device into the ear. The combined visualization and suction device may be the same as or similar to the one described immediately above, and it may have any or all of the features described above. The method also involves viewing using
5 the camera to view inside of the ear, activating the suction tube inside of the ear, and performing the surgical procedure on the ear, using a surgical tool held in the hand that is not holding the combined visualization and suction device. The method may also involve using the activated suction tube of the device to hold and move one or more structures within the ear. The activated suction tube may alternatively or
10 additionally be used to suction fluid from the ear.

[0012] In some embodiments, the method may further involve rolling the camera about its own longitudinal axis within the sheath. The method may also involve rotating the camera around a longitudinal axis of the suction tube within the sheath. In some embodiments, the method may involve additionally viewing the ear using a
15 microscope. Optionally, the suction tube may include a bend, and the method may further involve holding the combined visualization and suction device outside of a direct line of sight between a surgeon's eyes and the ear. The method may also involve supporting the hand that is holding the combined visualization and suction device on the patient's head during the surgical procedure. Optionally, the method
20 may involve supporting the hand that is holding the surgical tool on the patient's head during the surgical procedure.

[0013] In another aspect of the present disclosure, a device for visualizing a surgical procedure in an ear may include an ear endoscope and a coupler. The ear endoscope includes a handle, a shaft extending from the handle and having a bend
25 with an angle of 90-155 degrees, an outer diameter of no more than 2.5 millimeters, and a length of 30-80 millimeters, an imaging sensor at a distal end of the shaft, and a light source. The coupler is attached to a side of the ear endoscope shaft for attaching a tool to the endoscope. In various embodiments, the surgical tool and the overall device may include any of the features described above. The surgical tool
30 may be a suction device, as previously described, or alternatively it may be any other suitable tool, such as but not limited to a cutting device, a piercing device, an ear tube placement device, a seeker, tweezers or forceps.

[0014] In another aspect of the disclosure, a method for performing a surgical procedure in an ear of a patient may first involve attaching a tool to an ear endoscope in a side-by-side arrangement, using a coupler, where the ear endoscope includes a shaft with a bend and an outer diameter of no more than 2.5 millimeters.

5 The method may further involve holding a handle of the ear endoscope in one hand, advancing a distal end of the ear endoscope into the ear with the tool attached, viewing an inside of the ear, using the ear endoscope, and using the tool attached to the ear endoscope to facilitate or perform at least part of the surgical procedure. The combined visualization and surgical tool device may be the same as, or similar to,

10 the embodiment described above, and it may include any of the features described above.

[0015] In another aspect of the present disclosure, an ear endoscope device for use in a surgical procedure in an ear may include a handle, a visualization shaft extending from the handle, a tool guide extending from the handle parallel to the

15 visualization shaft and configured to guide a tool into the ear with the visualization shaft, an imaging sensor at a distal end of the visualization shaft, and a light source. In one embodiment, the ear endoscope device may include at least one tool coupler on a side of the shaft, at least one suction shaft insertion port at or near a distal end of the handle, two side suction tube connection ports at or near the distal end

20 of the handle, a rear suction tube connection port at or near a proximal end of the handle, and a suction lumen connecting the rear suction tube connection port to the two side suction tube connection ports. In various embodiments, the shaft and the handle may form an angle of between about 90 degrees and about 155 degrees. In some embodiments, the shaft may have an outer diameter of no more than about 2.5

25 millimeters and a length of between about 30 millimeters and about 80 millimeters.

[0016] In some embodiments, the ear endoscope further includes a suction device. The suction device may include a suction shaft for passing through the at least one suction shaft insertion port and the at least one tool coupler, a thumb depress member coupled with the suction shaft for allowing a user to advance the suction

30 shaft, a side suction tube for attaching the suction shaft, via the thumb depress portion, to one of the two side suction tube connection ports, and a rear suction tube for connecting the rear suction tube connection port to a suction source. The suction device may further include a spring disposed over a proximal portion of the suction

shaft, between the thumb depress member and the handle of the ear endoscope. The spring may be configured to automatically retract the suction shaft relative to the shaft when the thumb depress portion is released. In some embodiments, an open one of the two side suction tube connection ports that is not attached to the side suction tube is configured to act as a finger operated suction control for controlling the application of suction force with a user's finger.

[0017] In some embodiments, the handle includes two suction shaft insertion ports and two tool couplers disposed on opposite sides of the shaft, where each of the two suction shaft insertion ports feeds into a corresponding one of the two tool couplers. In some embodiments, the handle includes a finger loop for facilitating holding the device with a user's finger under the handle. Alternatively, the handle may include any other finger hold shape or other ergonomic shape to facilitate gripping the device with one hand.

[0018] In another aspect of the present disclosure, a method for performing a surgical procedure in an ear canal of a patient may involve holding in one hand an ear endoscope with an attached suction device, advancing a distal end of the ear endoscope with the attached suction device into the patient's ear canal, depressing a thumb depress member of the suction device with a thumb of the hand, to advance a suction shaft of the suction device relative to a visualization shaft of the ear endoscope, applying suction in the ear canal with the suction device, and viewing an inside of the ear canal, using the ear endoscope. In one embodiment, applying suction in the ear canal involves applying a finger of the hand to an open suction control opening on the handle.

[0019] In some embodiments, the method also involves releasing the thumb depress portion to allow a spring on the suction shaft to expand to cause the suction shaft to retract relative to the shaft of the ear endoscope. In some embodiments, depressing the thumb depress member causes the suction shaft to advance through a suction shaft insertion port on a handle of the ear endoscope and through a tool coupler attached to the shaft of the ear endoscope. The spring may be disposed over the suction shaft, between the thumb depress member and the handle. The method may optionally also involve supporting the hand that is holding the ear endoscope on the patient's head during the surgical procedure.

[0020] These and other aspects and embodiments are described in further detail below, in relation to the attached drawing figures.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- 5 [0021] Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a surgeon's hands and a surgical field, including a patient's ear, illustrating how a prior art endoscope and surgical tool are typically held;
- [0022] Fig. 2 is a side view of an ear visualization system, shown with a suction device, according to one embodiment;
- 10 [0023] Fig. 3 is a close-up illustration of a distal portion of the ear endoscope shown in Fig. 2;
- [0024] Fig. 4 is a perspective view of coupler for use with an ear visualization system, according to one embodiment;
- [0025] Figs. 5A–5C are side views of a combined visualization and suction device
15 for use in ear surgery procedures, according to one embodiment;
- [0026] Fig. 5D is a front end-on view of the combined visualization and suction device of Figs. 5A-5C;
- [0027] Fig. 6 is a perspective view of a surgeon's hands and a surgical field, including a patient's ear, illustrating how a combined visualization and suction
20 device, according to one embodiment, may be held and used during an ear surgery procedure; and
- [0028] Fig. 7 is a side view of a combined visualization and suction device for use in ear surgery procedures, where the camera has a bend near its distal end, according to one embodiment;
- 25 [0029] Fig. 8 is a side view of a combined visualization and suction device for use in ear surgery procedures, where the sheath couples the camera and suction tube together at an angle relative to one another, according to another embodiment;
- [0030] Figs. 9A-9C are side, front and exploded views, respectively, of a combination visualization and suction device, according to one embodiment;
- 30 [0031] Figs. 10A and 10B are side views of a portion of the combination device of Figs. 9A-9C, illustrating a method for advancing and retracting a suction shaft relative to a visualization shaft, according to one embodiment;

- [0032] Fig. 11 is a perspective view of a physician's hand holding the combination device of Figs. 9A-10B;
- [0033] Fig. 12 is a perspective view of a visualization component of the combination device of Figs. 9A-11, along with a viewing system, according to one
5 embodiment;
- [0034] Figs. 13A-13C are right perspective, left perspective and left side views, respectively, of an ear endoscope device, according to one embodiment;
- [0035] Fig. 14A is a side view of the ear endoscope device of Figs. 13A-13C, with a detached optional suction device for the endoscope, according to one
10 embodiment;
- [0036] Fig. 14B is a side view of the ear endoscope and suction device of Fig. 14A, with the suction device attached;
- [0037] Fig. 14C is a perspective view of the ear endoscope with attached suction device of Fig. 14B, shown in the left hand of a physician user;
- [0038] Fig. 15 is a distal-end view of a shaft of an ear endoscope, according to an
15 alternative embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0039] In general, the embodiments described herein are directed to a device,
20 system and method for visualizing an ear surgery procedure. The ear visualization device generally includes an ear endoscope (or "camera"), with an attachment mechanism for attaching an additional tool to the endoscope. Oftentimes, the additional tool is a suction device, but this is not a requirement, and in alternative embodiments, any of a number of different tools may be attached to the endoscope.
25 In some embodiments, the attachment mechanism is built into the endoscope. Alternatively, the attachment mechanism may be a separate coupler or sheath, which attaches to the shaft of the ear endoscope and allows any of a number of different types of surgical tools to be attached to the endoscope in a side-by-side arrangement. The ear visualization system may include the ear endoscope along with a separate
30 attachment mechanism, a light source for the endoscope, a video monitor for displaying images captured by the endoscope and/or any other suitable components. In some embodiments, the system may also include a suction device or other

surgical tool. In other embodiments, the ear endoscope device or system may be provided by itself, and may be used with one or more optional, stand-alone tools.

[0040] As mentioned immediately above, in some embodiments, the attachment mechanism is a separate piece, which may be removed from the endoscope shaft. In such embodiments, the endoscope and the coupler may be referred to as a “system,” due to the combination of two different devices. In alternative embodiments, the coupler may be integral with, or permanently attached to, the endoscope shaft, in which case the endoscope with coupler may be referred to as a “device.” In any case, use of the terms “system” and “device” herein should not be interpreted as limiting the scope of the invention.

[0041] The shaft of the ear endoscope and whatever surgical tool it is used with may have very small diameters, so the distal end of the combined device fits easily into an ear canal, for helping visualize and perform an ear surgery procedure. In some embodiments, the coupler surrounds part of the endoscope shaft and part of the surgical tool in such a way that the shaft can rotate about a longitudinal axis of the tool and can also roll (or “spin”) about its own longitudinal axis.

[0042] In one embodiment, described in detail below, the surgical tool is a suction tube device. In alternative embodiments, however, the tool may be any suitable, small-diameter tool, such as but not limited to a cutting device, a piercing device, an ear tube placement device, a seeker, tweezers, forceps, a speculum, a grasper, or a curette. In the description below of the suction embodiment, the fact that any other suitably sized surgical tool may be substituted for the suction device will not be repeated with the description of every embodiment. Similarly, the devices and methods described below for use in an ear surgery procedure may be used or adapted for use in any other suitable surgical procedure. This, too, will not be repeated with the description of every embodiment.

[0043] Although the following description is focused on use of the devices, systems and methods for visualizing and facilitating ear surgery procedures, the same embodiments may be used, or adapted for use, in any other suitable procedures and parts of a human or animal body. Therefore, the invention is not limited to use in the ear.

[0044] Referring now to Fig. 1, a prior art method for performing an ear surgery using a standard endoscope 10 is illustrated. The figure shows a surgical field, with

the patient's ear E exposed for the procedure. The surgeon is holding the endoscope 10 in his left hand L and a surgical tool 12 in his right hand. Due to the length of the endoscope 10, the surgeon has to hold his left hand L up in the air, suspended over the patient, in order to hold the handle of the endoscope 10. As mentioned
5 previously, this can be very awkward and potentially dangerous to the tympanic membrane and/or structures of the middle ear, especially in longer procedures where the surgeon's left arm and left hand L get fatigued. Additionally, the surgeon does not have a free hand to hold a suction device or other surgical tool, since both of the surgeon's hands are occupied. To have suction in this scenario, a nurse or other
10 assistant would have to hold the suction device in the patient's ear.

[0045] Referring to Fig. 2, an ear surgery visualization system 100, according to one embodiment, may include an ear endoscope 102 and a coupler 112. Also pictured in Fig. 2 is a suction device 128, which is not necessarily part of the system 100, but which is shown in the figure for illustrative purposes. In alternative
15 embodiments, the suction device 128 may be replaced by any other suitable surgical tool, such as the ones listed previously.

[0046] The ear endoscope 102 includes a handle 104, a shaft 106 and a processor 122, which may also act as a light source. The shaft 106 includes a proximal portion 107, a bend 108 and a distal portion 110, ending in a distal tip 111. The endoscope
20 102 also includes a light source 120 in the handle 104, and light fibers 118 that carry the light from the light source 120, through the shaft 106, to the distal tip 111. A camera on a chip (described more fully below) may be positioned at the distal tip 111, to acquire images of the ear. The system 100 may also include a video monitor 126, although optionally the video monitor 126 may be a separate component that is
25 not part of the system 100. In another embodiment, the processor 122 and video monitor 126 may be combined in one unit.

[0047] The shaft 106 of the endoscope 102 may have a total length of about 30 millimeters to about 80 millimeters and an outer diameter of less than about 2.5 millimeters. In some embodiments, the outer diameter of the shaft 106 may be
30 continuous along its length. Alternatively, the outer diameter of the distal portion 110 may be smaller than the outer diameter of the proximal portion 107. The bend 108 may form an angle between the proximal portion 107 and the distal portion 110 of between about 90 degrees and about 155 degrees. The handle 104 may be very

small and lightweight, compared to typical endoscope handles. In fact, the handle 104 may be shaped to have a comfortable pencil grip, so the surgeon may hold and manipulate the ear endoscope 102 like a pencil. Ear endoscope 102 may also include a cable 124, attaching the handle 104 to the processor 122.

5 **[0048]** The coupler 112 includes an endoscope attachment portion 114 and a tool attachment portion 116. In some embodiments, each of the two portions 114, 116 is shaped as a tube or a semicircular tube. In some embodiments, the endoscope attachment portion 114 and the tool attachment portion 116 may have the same diameter. Alternatively, they may have different diameters. For example, in some
10 embodiments the endoscope attachment portion 114 has a larger diameter than that of the tool attachment portion 116. The coupler 112 may be permanently attached to the shaft 106, or it may be removable, according to different alternative embodiments. The coupler 112 may be attached to the distal portion 110 of the shaft 106, as shown. Alternatively, the coupler 112 may be attached to the proximal
15 portion 107, for example if the shaft 106 is straight, or of the coupler 112 follows the bend 108 in the shaft 106.

[0049] The weight, size and feel of the ear endoscope 102 may be similar to that of other ear surgery tools. This makes it more comfortable for the surgeon to hold and prevents an imbalance between the ear endoscope 102 and other tools. The
20 surgeon may hold the handle 104 with a pencil grip and may rest her hand and/or the handle 104 on the patient's head during the procedure. In order to achieve this desired weight, size and feel, any suitable materials may be used for the various parts of the ear visualization system 100. For example, in one embodiment, the handle 104 may be made of any suitable lightweight plastic, and the shaft 106 may
25 be made of any suitable metal, such as stainless steel. Alternatively, the handle 104 may be made of a lightweight metal. The coupler 112 may be made of plastic or metal, for example. Any suitable, medically safe materials may be used.

[0050] As mentioned above, a suction device 128 is illustrated in Fig. 2, attached to the shaft 106 of the endoscope 102 via the coupler 112, in a side-by-side
30 arrangement. Any other tool may be substituted for the suction device 128, in alternative embodiments. The suction device 128 is also shown with a source of suction 130, which may be a separate component, wall suction, or any suitable suction source. The suction tube portion of the suction device 128 is flexible, at least

along part of its length, and has a distal portion with an outer diameter that fits within the tool attachment portion 116 of the coupler. Various embodiments and features of a suction device 128 are described in further detail below.

5 [0051] Referring now to Fig. 3, the distal portion 110 of the endoscope shaft 106 is illustrated in greater detail. At the distal end 111 of the shaft 106 are positioned an imaging sensor 140 and two light sources 142. The imaging sensor 140 may be any type of suitable sensor, such as a complementary metal-oxide semiconductor (CMOS) camera or any other “camera on a chip” type of device. The two light sources 142 (or alternatively any other number of light sources) may be light emitting diode (LED) lights, for example. These may be in addition to, or as an alternative to, the light source 120 shown in the handle 104 in Fig. 2. In other words, according to various embodiments, one or more light sources for the endoscope device 102 may be located in the handle 104, at the distal end 111 of the shaft 106, or both.

10 [0052] Fig. 4 is a magnified view of an alternative embodiment of a coupler 212 for use with the ear endoscope 102. The coupler 212 includes an endoscope attachment portion 214, a tool attachment portion 216, a longitudinal top opening 250 in the tool attachment portion 216, and a longitudinal middle opening 252 between the endoscope attachment portion 214 and the tool attachment portion 216. In this embodiment the endoscope attachment portion 214 has a larger diameter than that of the tool attachment portion 216. The tool (not shown) may be inserted into the tool attachment portion 216 by pushing it down through the top opening 250 or by sliding it into the proximal end of the tool attachment portion 216 and advancing it distally. In the case where the tool is pushed through the top opening 250, the coupler 212 may flex outward slightly, by expanding at the two openings 250, 252, to accommodate the tool. In alternative embodiments, the endoscope attachment portion 214 and/or the tool attachment portion 216 may be formed as complete tubes, with circular cross-sections rather than semi-circular cross-sections. As mentioned above, the coupler may be made of any suitable material.

15 [0053] Referring to Figs. 5A-5D, one embodiment of an ear surgery visualization device 20 is illustrated. In this embodiment, the visualization device 20, which may also be called “a combined visualization and suction device,” includes a suction tube 22, a camera 30 and a coupler 38 (or “sheath”) disposed around the suction tube 22

and the camera 30. The suction tube 22 has a distal end 24, a proximal end 26 for connecting with suction tubing connected to a suction source, and a bend 28 along its length. The camera 30 includes a distal portion 32, a proximal portion 36 and a distal end 34.

5 [0054] The suction tube 22 may be any standard or customized suction tube device. In various embodiments, the suction tube 22 may be rigid and may be made out of any suitable material, such as stainless steel or other biocompatible metal or plastic. The suction tube 22 will have an overall diameter and length to allow it to be advanced easily into the ear and to allow a surgeon to hold the visualization device
10 20 with one hand, resting on the patient's head, during the procedure. In some embodiments, for example, the suction tube 22 has an outer diameter, at least along the portion between the bend 28 and the distal end 24, of about 0.6 millimeter to about 1.1 millimeters. The bend 28 in the suction tube 22 is optional, and alternative embodiments may be straight. The bend 28 may be advantageous, however, because
15 it allows the visualization device 20 to be held at an angle from the ear, so the hand holding the device 20 is not in the direct line of sight of the surgeon. This is especially advantageous in cases where the surgeon wants to use a microscope and the visualization device 20 in the same procedure, but it is also advantageous in keeping the suction tube 22 and the camera 30 out of the way of any surgical tools
20 held in the surgeon's other hand. In various embodiments, for example, the bend 28 may be located about 40 millimeters to about 100 millimeters from the distal end 24 of the suction tube 22. In one embodiment, the bend may be about 60 millimeters from the distal end 24. In alternative embodiments of the device 20, where the camera 30 is combined with a different type of surgical tool rather than the suction
25 tube 22, that surgical tool may also include the same or a similar bend.

[0055] The camera 30 may be any suitable, small-diameter camera for viewing an ear during an ear surgery procedure. In some embodiments, for example, the camera 30 may be a fiber optic camera or a complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) camera. As small-diameter cameras are well known, they will not be
30 described in detail here. In some embodiments, at least the distal portion 32 of the camera 30 may be relatively rigid, so that the surgeon can easily roll it about its longitudinal axis and/or rotate it relative to the suction tube 22. In some embodiments, the camera 30 may include a bend, which may coincide with the bend

28 in the suction tube. The camera 30 may include CMOS sensors with a lens array. The sensors may be arrayed in a cube of between 0.6 mm by 0.6 mm and 1.0 mm by 1.0 mm, with overall length of up to 3 mm, in some examples. Alternative
5 CMOS. The light source for illumination may be LED at the distal tip 34 or fiber infused with light from a remote LED.

[0056] The cross-sectional shape of the camera 30 may vary in different embodiments (round, oval, square, rectangular, etc.), but in the embodiment shown the camera 30 has a round cross-sectional shape. This is advantageous for rolling
10 and rotating the camera 30 within the coupler 38 and relative to the suction tube 22. The body of the camera 30 is made from a relatively rigid or at least semi-rigid material, such as stainless steel or plastic (e.g., thermoplastic). The length of the distal portion 32 may be, for example, about 5 mm to about 100 mm. In some
15 embodiments, the distal portion 32 may be as long as the length of the suction tube 22 from its distal end 24 to the bend 28, which in one embodiment is about 60 mm. In various embodiments, the camera 30 and a light source may be integrated into a metal tube, over-molded with plastic, encapsulated in a polymer, or the like.

[0057] The coupler 38 may be any suitable material and have any suitable length, thickness and size, according to various embodiments. In one embodiment, the
20 coupler 38 is formed as a tube of heat-shrink polymer wrap that surrounds distal portions of the suction tube 22 and the camera 30. The heat-shrink polymer may be polyethylene terephthalate (PET) in some embodiments, or may alternatively be any other suitable polymer, such as but not limited to a polyolefin, a polyimide or nylon. As illustrated in Figs. 5A and 5B, in one embodiment, the coupler 38 is disposed
25 about the suction tube and the camera 30 such that the suction tube 22 can advance (Fig. 5B) and retract (Fig. 5A), relative to the coupler 38 and the camera 30. For example, in some embodiments, the suction tube 22 can advance from a position where its distal end 24 is at or near the distal end 34 of the camera 30 (Fig. 5A) to a position where its distal end 24 is ahead of that of the camera 30 (Fig. 5B). In this
30 embodiment, the camera 30 may also be able to slide forward and backward. In alternative embodiments, camera 30, suction tube 22 or both may be fixed to the inner surface of the coupler 38, such as by adhesive, thus reducing the amount of mobility of one or both components relative to the coupler 38.

[0058] Fig. 5C is an exploded view of the ear surgery visualization device 20, showing the suction tube 22, the camera 30 and the coupler 38 separate from one another. For assembly, the coupler 38 may be wrapped or slid over the suction tube 22 and the camera 30 in some embodiments.

5 [0059] Fig. 5D illustrates possible directions of movement of the camera 30, the suction tube 22 and the coupler 38, relative to one another. In some embodiments, the coupler 38 may be positioned around but not fixedly attached to the camera 30 and the suction tube 22, as described above. In addition to allowing the suction tube 22 and/or the camera 30 to advance longitudinally through the coupler 38, this
10 configuration also allows the suction tube 22 and the camera 30 to roll about their own axes within the coupler 38 (two small hollow arrows around perimeter of coupler 38). Additionally, the camera 30 may be rotated around a longitudinal axis of the suction tube 22 (larger hollow arrow). The suction tube 22 may also be rotated around a longitudinal axis of the camera 30. This freedom of movement—rotation
15 and rolling—allow the surgeon to adjust the orientation of the camera 30 and/or the suction tube 22 easily and quickly, without necessarily changing the orientation of both components. Again, however, in alternative embodiments the coupler 38 may be adhered or otherwise fixedly attached to either or both of the camera 30 and the suction tube 22.

20 [0060] Fig. 6 shows a surgical field, including a patient's ear E, and the left hand L and the right hand R of a surgeon, performing a procedure on the ear E. The surgeon's left hand L is holding the ear surgery visualization device 20, as described above, which includes the suction tube 22 and the camera 30. The suction tube 22 is attached proximally to a suction hose 40, which in turn is attached to a source of
25 suction (not shown). The surgeon's right hand R holds a surgical tool 12. As indicated by the large arrows on the figure, the surgeon's hands are approaching the ear E from two different angles, leaving a line of direct vision open from the surgeon's eyes to the patient's ear E (depicted by the middle/upper-right hollow arrow). This arrangement will allow a surgeon to visualize the surgical field using
30 both a microscope and the camera 30, if desired. As also illustrated in Fig. 6, the ear visualization device 20 is sized and shaped such that the surgeon can rest her hand on the patient's head during the procedure. In performing the procedure, the surgeon may advance the device 20 into the ear E, suction out the ear E using the suction

tube 22, visualize the ear E using the camera 30, and perform the procedure.

Alternatively or additionally, the suction tube 22 may be used to hold onto and move one or more small anatomical structures of the ear, such as but not limited to the bones of the middle ear. Suction may also be used to hold different devices, such as an ear tube or ossicular prostheses. The device 20 is generally small enough that the camera 30 can be used to visualize the middle ear through a natural hole or incision in the tympanic membrane. These actions may be performed in any sequence and in any combination. In some embodiments, it may be possible for the surgeon to separate the camera 30 from the suction tube 22 during the ear surgery procedure, so they can be used separately.

[0061] In some embodiments, the ear surgery visualization device 20 may be used with another, different ear surgery visualization device (not shown). For example, the combined camera/suction tube device 20 may be held in the surgeon's non-dominant hand, and a combined camera/surgical tool device may be held in the surgeon's dominant hand. These two devices 20 may be used at the same time, thus acquiring two images of the ear. The views from the two cameras may be displayed on a single, split video screen, for example, with the right half marked 'R' and the left half marked 'L'. In all embodiments, the video screen may be separate and located above the patient's head and within the field of view of a microscope, so that the surgeon can view the surgical field through the microscope and look at the endoscopic view through the microscope as well, or simply switch from looking through the microscope to looking at the video screen. In another embodiment, it may be possible to digitally feed the endoscopic image into the microscope, so that the surgeon can view both of them through the microscope, or toggle between them by pressing a button, for example.

[0062] Referring now to Fig. 7, an alternative embodiment of an ear surgery visualization/suction device 50 is illustrated. As mentioned above, in some embodiments, the suction tube 22 may be advanced, relative to the camera 30, as shown in Fig. 5B, such that the distal end 24 of the suction tube 22 is ahead of the distal end 34 of the camera 30. In embodiments where the distal portions of the suction tube 22 and the camera 30 are both straight and are connected in parallel with one another, the suction tube 22 may interfere with the field of view of the camera 30 in this configuration. The embodiment of the device 50 shown in Fig. 7 is

configured to address that issue. In this embodiment, the distal portion 32 of the camera 30 includes a bend 52. This bend 52 orients the field of view 54 of the camera 30 at an angle, relative to the longitudinal axes of the suction tube 22 and the camera 30, so the suction tube 22 does not interfere with or limit the field of view
5 54. In various embodiments, the bend 52 may be located anywhere along the length of the camera 30, although in many embodiments it will be located near the distal end 34, so that it is distal to the distal end of the coupler 38.

[0063] Referring now to Fig. 8, another alternative embodiment of an ear surgery visualization/suction device 60 is illustrated. This embodiment is alternative way of
10 addressing the issue of the suction tube 22 cutting off part of the field of view 54 of the camera. In this embodiment, the sheath 68 has a wider distal end 64 and a narrower proximal end 66. Thus, the sheath 68 couples the camera 30 and the suction tube 22 together such that they are oriented at an angle relative to one another. In other words, they are not parallel with one another. As with the previous
15 embodiment, this helps prevent the field of view 54 of the camera 30 from being limited by the suction tube 22.

[0064] Referring now to Figs. 9A-9C, one embodiment of an ear visualization system 300 is illustrated. The ear visualization system 300 includes an ear
20 endoscope 302 and an optional suction device 310. The ear endoscope 302 includes a handle 304, a shaft 306 extending from one end of the handle 304, two tool couplers 307a, 307b (see Fig. 9B) on either side of the shaft 306, and a cable 308 extending from the opposite end of the handle 304. Imaging components pass through the handle 304, the shaft 306 and the cable 308, which components may be any of those described above and which are not shown in these figures. The handle
25 304 includes two suction shaft apertures 305a, 305b (not visible in these drawings, because they are on the top surface of the handle 304), through which the shaft 316 of the suction component 310 is advanced. The shaft 316 of the suction component 310 advances through one of the two tool couplers 307a, 307b, after exiting the distal end of the corresponding aperture 305a, 305b. The handle 304 may have any
30 of a number of suitable sizes, shapes and weights, but in this embodiment it is configured to be held easily in a pencil grip by the physician. The handle 304 may be made of lightweight plastic, in some embodiments.

[0065] The suction component 310 includes a suction tube 312, a thumb depress portion 314, a suction control aperture 320, a suction shaft 316 with a distal end 317, and a spring 318 disposed over the suction shaft 316, between the thumb depress portion 314 and the handle 304. The suction shaft 316 extends through the suction shaft aperture 305a in the handle 304, through the tool coupler 307a, and alongside the visualization component shaft 306. As will be described further below, the user physician may depress the thumb depress portion 314 to advance the distal end 317 of the suction shaft 316 out of the distal end of the visualization shaft 306 and thus farther into the ear. When the user releases the thumb depress portion 314, the spring 318 automatically retracts the suction shaft 316 back along the visualization shaft 306, through the tool coupler 307a and the aperture 305a. The physician may use an index finger (or other finger) to cover the suction control aperture 320 to apply suction, and she may remove the finger from the hole to remove or reduce suction at the distal end 317 of the suction shaft 316.

[0066] Fig. 9B is a front view of the ear visualization system 300, which illustrates that this embodiment includes two suction tool couplers 307a, 307b, one on either side of the visualization component shaft 306. This embodiment thus also includes two suction shaft apertures 305a, 305b, each feeding into one of the two suction tool couplers 307a, 307b. The two tool couplers 307a, 307b facilitate holding and manipulation of the device 300 by either a right hand or a left hand, and placement of the suction tube/other tool either below or above the camera sensor. The visualization component shaft 306, the tool couplers 307a, 307b and the suction shaft 316, in some embodiments, may be made of metal, such as stainless steel or other biocompatible metal. In some embodiments, the visualization component shaft 306 has an outer diameter of about 2.5 millimeters or less. Similarly, each of the tool couplers 307a, 307b may have an outer diameter of about 2.5 millimeters or less. The suction shaft 316 has an outer diameter sized to fit through the inner diameter of the tool couplers 307a, 307b. In some embodiments, the suction shaft 316 may have an outer diameter of about 1.1 millimeters or less.

[0067] Fig. 9C is a side view of the ear visualization system 300, with ear endoscope 302 separated from the suction device 310. In this embodiment, the ergonomic design of the handle 304 may be important for facilitating handling of the system 300 by the physician. For example, the handle 304 includes a finger grip

feature 322, which may allow for easy gripping of the handle 304 with a middle finger (or other finger). The user's index finger may be used to control the suction control aperture 320, and the user's thumb may be used to control the thumb depress portion 314 of the suction component 310. In other embodiments, one of which is
5 described below, the finger grip feature 322 may include a loop, an elastic ring or any other suitable shape.

[0068] In various alternative embodiments, one or more variations may be made to the ear endoscope device 300. For example, in some embodiments, the couplers 307a, 307b may extend the entire length (or along a longer portion but not the entire
10 length) of the endoscope main shaft 306. In some embodiments, there may be only one coupler and one aperture, rather than two couplers 307a, 307b and two apertures 305a, 305b.

[0069] Referring to Fig. 15, in yet another alternative embodiment, an ear endoscope shaft 500 may include an outer shaft body 502, a tool guide 504 forming
15 a tool lumen 506, two light sources 508a, 508b and an imaging sensor. The tool guide 504 and tool lumen 506, in this embodiment, are located inside the outer shaft body 502, unlike the previously described embodiments that place the suction tube through a coupler on the outside of the main endoscope shaft. In some embodiments, the tool guide 504 may be used for applying suction or advancing a suction device
20 through the shaft 500. Alternatively, the tool guide 504 may be used for advancing any other suitable tool through the ear endoscope shaft 500, such as any tool listed in this application. This embodiment of Fig. 15 may be applied to any of endoscope embodiments described above or below to generate alternative embodiments.

[0070] Figs. 10A and 10B illustrate a method for advancing and retracting the
25 suction shaft 316 in the ear visualization system 300, according to one embodiment. In Fig. 10A, the physician is depressing the thumb depress portion 314 of the suction component 310 with her thumb T. This advances the suction shaft 316 through the handle 304 and the tool coupler 307a, thus advancing the suction shaft 316 along the side of the visualization shaft 306. Thus, the distal end 317 of the suction shaft 316
30 would be advanced farther down into the patient's ear. In this configuration, the spring 318 is compressed. In Fig. 10B, the physician has released her thumb T from the thumb depress portion 314, allowing the spring 318 to expand and causing the suction shaft 316 to retract proximally through the tool coupler 307a and the handle

304. Thus, the physician can easily adjust the position of the distal end 317 of the suction shaft 316 relative to the visualization shaft 306.

[0071] In various embodiments, the distal end 317 of the suction shaft 316 may be positioned in a number of different locations relative to the distal end of the visualization shaft 306. When the suction shaft 316 is fully advanced, its distal end 317 may be located at, proximal to or distal to the distal end of the visualization shaft 306. Similarly, when the suction shaft 316 is fully retracted, its distal end 317 may be located at, proximal to or distal to the distal end of the visualization shaft 306. For example, in one embodiment, the distal end 317 of the suction shaft 316 may be disposed even with the distal end of the visualization shaft 306 in the fully retracted position and then may be advanced to a position distally beyond the distal end of the visualization shaft 306. In another embodiment, the distal end 317 of the suction shaft 316 may be disposed more proximally than the distal end of the visualization shaft 306 in the fully retracted position and then may be advanced to a position even with the distal end of the visualization shaft 306. Any combination of locations is possible, according to various alternative embodiments.

[0072] Referring to Fig. 11, a physician's hand H is shown holding the combination device 300 over an anatomical model. As shown, the handle 304 fits comfortably in the hand H, with the middle finger on the bottom and the index finger on the top. The thumb is positioned on the thumb depress portion 314, and the visualization component shaft 306 and the suction shaft 316 are extended into the model. During an ear procedure, the physician might rest his or her hand on the patient's head, for support and stability and to prevent arm fatigue. The very light weight of the handle 304 and the device 300 in general make it easy to manipulate and hold.

[0073] Referring now to Fig. 12, in some embodiments, the ear visualization system 300 may include the ear endoscope 302 and a viewing system 330. The viewing system may include a video monitor 336, a console 332 and a cable 334 connecting the two. The console 332 may include a connector 338, into which a connector 337 on the visualization component 302 inserts. The various parts of the viewing system 330 may be any suitable off-the-shelf or custom components, according to various embodiments. In an alternative embodiment, the console 332 may include a built-in screen, rather than having a separate video monitor 336, and

the endoscope 300 would connect to the console 332. In various embodiments, the ear endoscope 302 may be provided with the viewing system 330, with the suction device 310 or as a stand-alone device.

[0074] Referring now to Figs. 13A-13C, another embodiment of an ear endoscope 5 400 is illustrated. In this embodiment the ear endoscope 400 includes a handle 402 with a finger loop 404, a shaft 406, two tool coupling shafts 408a, 408b, two side suction tube connection ports 410a, 410b, two suction tube insertion ports 412a, 412b, a rear suction tube connection port 414 and a sensor interface cable 416. In this embodiment, the ear endoscope 400 may be provided as a separate unit and may 10 be used with an add-on suction device, or it may be provided with the suction device. In either case, a suction supply may be connected to the rear suction tube connection port 414, which is in fluid communication with a suction lumen running through the handle 402 and exiting at the two side suction tube connection ports 410a, 410b. One of the two side suction tube connection ports 410a, 410b may in 15 turn be connected to a short suction tube, which is connected to a suction shaft that passes through one of the suction tube insertion ports 412a, 412b and one of the tool coupling shafts 408a, 408b, as will be described further below. Whichever of the two suction tube connection ports 410a, 410b that is left open may be used by the physician as a suction control, by placing a finger over, or releasing the finger from, 20 the port 410a, 410b. The finger loop 404 on the handle 402 may be flexible in some embodiments and rigid in others. In alternative embodiments, it may have any other suitable shape or size for facilitating gripping the endoscope 400. As is evident from Figs. 13A-13C, the shaft 406 is straight in this embodiment, but it is angled relative to the handle 402, so that the overall endoscope device 400 is angled, to allow the 25 physician to place the shaft 406 in the ear canal without obstructing a direct viewing path into the ear canal.

[0075] Referring now to Figs. 14A-14C, the ear endoscope of Figs. 13A-13C is now shown with an optional suction device 420. Fig. 14A shows the suction device 420 detached from the ear endoscope 400. The suction device 420 includes a suction 30 shaft 422, connected to a thumb depress member 424, connected to a side suction tube 426, and it also includes a rear suction tube 428. The suction shaft 422 is passed through either of the two suction tube insertion ports 412a, 412b and thus through the corresponding tool coupling shaft 408a, 408b. Side suction tube 426 may be

connected to either of the two side suction tube connection ports 410a, 410b, leaving the opposite side port 410a, 410b open for finger control of suction. Additionally, the rear suction tube 428 is attached to the rear suction tube connection port 414, to supply suction force from a suction supply (not shown) to the suction device 420. As
5 explained above, a suction lumen in the handle 402 of the endoscope 400 (not visible in the figures) connects the rear suction tube connection port 414 with the two side suction tube connection ports 410a, 410b.

[0076] Fig. 14B shows all the components of the suction device 420 attached to the ear endoscope. Fig. 14C shows a physician's left hand H holding the combined
10 ear endoscope 400 and suction device. As illustrated here, the physician's thumb is positioned on the thumb depress member 424 and is used to advance the suction shaft 422. The physician's middle or ring finger may be placed through the finger loop 404 of the handle 402. And the physician's index finger may be placed over or removed from the open side suction tube connection port 410b, to control the
15 application of suction through the suction shaft 422. If the physician prefers to hold the ear endoscope 400 in his right hand, the side suction tube 426 and suction shaft 422 may simply be shifted to the opposite side of the ear endoscope 400.

[0077] Fig. 15 illustrates the ear endoscope 400 combined with the suction device 420 in place in an ear canal, as they would be used during an ear surgery procedure.

20 **[0078]** The above description of embodiments and features of various devices and methods is believed to be complete. The embodiments are meant to exemplary in nature, however, and not exhaustive. Thus, their description should not be interpreted as limiting the scope of the invention.

CLAIMS

We claim:

- 5 1. A device for visualizing a surgical procedure in an ear, the device comprising:
- an ear endoscope, comprising:
- a handle;
- a shaft extending from the handle and having a bend with an angle of
- 10 90-155 degrees, an outer diameter of no more than 2.5 millimeters, and a length of 30-80 millimeters;
- an imaging sensor at a distal end of the shaft; and
- a light source; and
- a coupler attached to a side of the ear endoscope shaft for attaching a tool to
- 15 the endoscope.
2. The device of claim 1, further comprising:
- a monitor coupled with the ear endoscope; and
- a processing unit coupled with the ear endoscope.
- 20 3. The device of claim 2, wherein the monitor and the processing unit are housed in one device coupled with the handle of the ear endoscope via a cable.
4. The device of claim 1, wherein the coupler comprises:
- 25 an endoscope attachment portion for attaching to the shaft of the ear endoscope; and
- a tool attachment portion for attaching to the tool.
5. The device of claim 1, wherein the tool is selected from the group
- 30 consisting of a suction device, a cutting device, a piercing device, an ear tube placement device, a seeker, tweezers, forceps, a speculum, a grasper, and a curette.
6. The device of claim 5, wherein the device further comprises the tool.

7. The device of claim 1, wherein the tool comprises a suction tube having a bend configured to match the bend in the ear endoscope shaft, and wherein the suction tube has an outer diameter of no more than 1.1 millimeter.

5

8. The device of claim 1, wherein the coupler is permanently attached to the ear endoscope.

9. The device of claim 1, wherein the coupler is configured to slide
10 along the shaft of the ear endoscope.

10. A method for performing a surgical procedure in an ear of a patient, the method comprising:

15 attaching a tool to an ear endoscope in a side-by-side arrangement, using a coupler, wherein the ear endoscope comprises a shaft with a bend and an outer diameter of no more than 2.5 millimeters;

holding a handle of the ear endoscope in one hand;

advancing a distal end of the ear endoscope into the ear with the tool attached;

20 viewing an inside of the ear, using the ear endoscope; and

using the tool attached to the ear endoscope to facilitate or perform at least part of the surgical procedure.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the coupler is pre-attached to the
25 ear endoscope.

12. The method of claim 10, wherein the tool is selected from the group consisting of a suction device, a cutting device, a piercing device, an ear tube placement device, a seeker, tweezers, forceps, a speculum, a grasper, and a curette.

30

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the tool comprises a suction tube comprising a bend, the method further comprising holding the ear endoscope so that

the ear endoscope and the suction tube are outside of a direct line of sight between a surgeon's eyes and the ear.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising:
5 holding an anatomical structure of the ear with suction force applied by the suction tube; and
moving the anatomical structure, using the suction tube.

15. The method of claim 13, further comprising:
10 holding an ear device with suction force applied by the suction tube; and
placing the ear device in the ear, using the suction tube.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the ear device is selected from the group consisting of an ear tube and an ossicular prosthesis.

15
17. The method of claim 10, further comprising supporting the hand that is holding the ear endoscope handle on the patient's head during the surgical procedure.

20
18. An ear endoscope device for use in a surgical procedure in an ear, the device comprising:
a handle;
a visualization shaft extending from the handle;
a tool guide extending from the handle parallel to the visualization shaft and
25 configured to guide a tool into the ear with the visualization shaft;
an imaging sensor at a distal end of the visualization shaft; and
a light source.

19. The device of claim 18, wherein the tool comprises a suction device,
30 and wherein the device further comprises at least one suction shaft insertion port at or near a distal end of the handle.

20. The device of claim 19, further comprising:

at least one side suction tube connection port near the distal end of the handle;

a rear suction tube connection port at or near a proximal end of the handle;

and

5 a suction lumen connecting the rear suction tube connection port to the at least one side suction tube connection port.

21. The device of claim 20, wherein the at least one suction shaft insertion port comprises two suction shaft insertion ports, wherein the tool guide
10 comprises two tubular tool guides on either side of the visualization shaft, and wherein the at least one side suction tube connection port comprises two side suction tube connection ports on opposite sides of the handle.

22. The device of claim 18, wherein the tool guide comprises a lumen in
15 the visualization shaft.

23. The device of claim 18, wherein the visualization shaft and the handle form an angle of 90-155 degrees.

20 24. The device of claim 22, wherein the visualization shaft has an outer diameter of no more than 2.5 millimeters and a length of 30-80 millimeters.

25. The device of claim 18, further comprising a suction device, comprising:

25 a suction shaft for passing through the tool guide;

a thumb depress member coupled with the suction shaft for allowing a user to advance the suction shaft; and

a side suction tube for attaching the suction shaft, via the thumb depress portion, to a side suction tube connection port on the handle.

30

26. The device of claim 25, wherein the suction device further comprises a spring disposed over a proximal portion of the suction shaft, between the thumb depress member and the handle of the ear endoscope, wherein the spring is

configured to automatically retract the suction shaft relative to the visualization shaft when the thumb depress portion is released.

27. The device of claim 25, further comprising a suction control opening
5 on the handle configured to act as a finger operated suction control for controlling the application of suction force with a user's finger.

28. The device of claim 18, wherein the handle comprises a finger loop
for facilitating holding the device with a user's finger under the handle.

10

29. A method for performing a surgical procedure in an ear canal of a patient, the method comprising:

holding in one hand an ear endoscope with an attached suction device;

15 advancing a distal end of the ear endoscope with the attached suction device into the patient's ear canal;

depressing a thumb depress member of the suction device with a thumb of the hand, to advance a suction shaft of the suction device relative to a visualization shaft of the ear endoscope;

20 applying suction in the ear canal with the suction device; and viewing an inside of the ear canal, using the ear endoscope.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein applying suction in the ear canal comprises applying a finger of the hand to an open suction control opening on the handle.

25

31. The method of claim 29, further comprising releasing the thumb depress portion to allow the suction shaft to retract relative to the visualization shaft of the ear endoscope.

30 32. The method of claim 29, wherein depressing the thumb depress member causes the suction shaft to advance through a suction shaft insertion port on a handle of the ear endoscope and through a tool guide extending from the handle,

and wherein a spring is disposed over the suction shaft, between the thumb depress member and the handle.

33. The method of claim 29, further comprising supporting the hand that
5 is holding the ear endoscope on the patient's head during the surgical procedure.

10

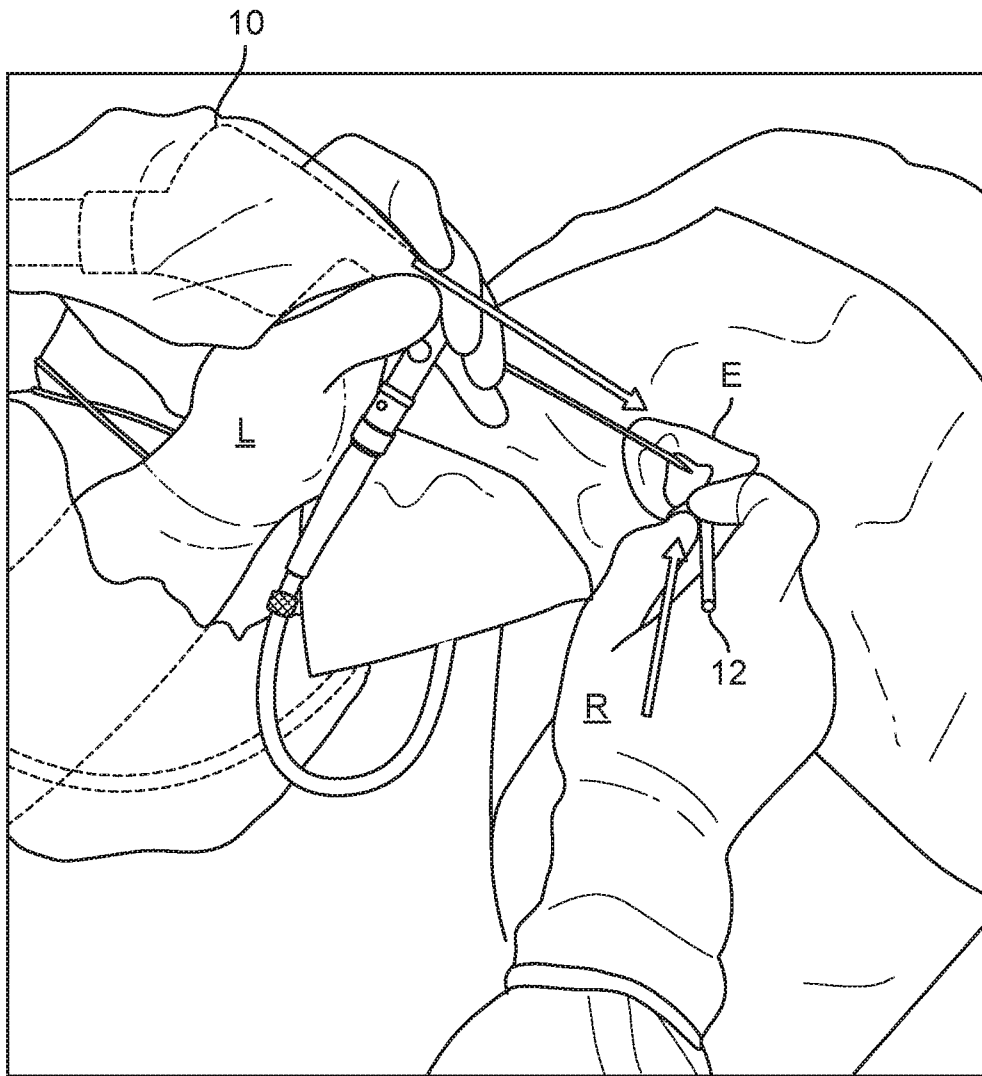


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

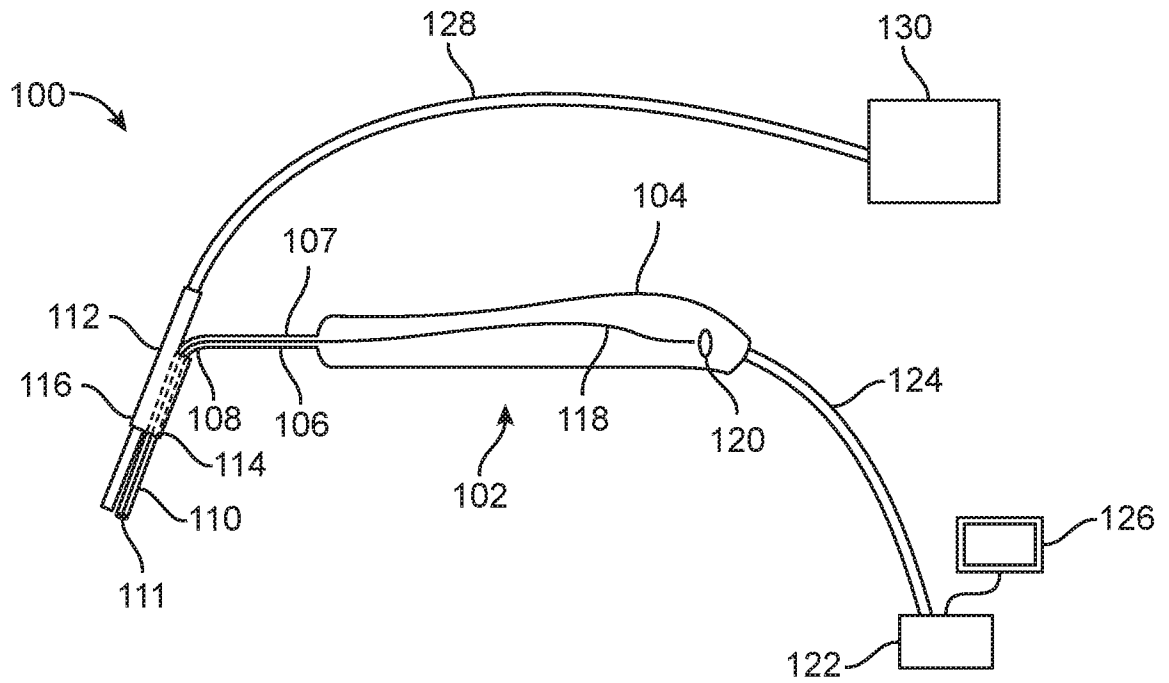


FIG. 2

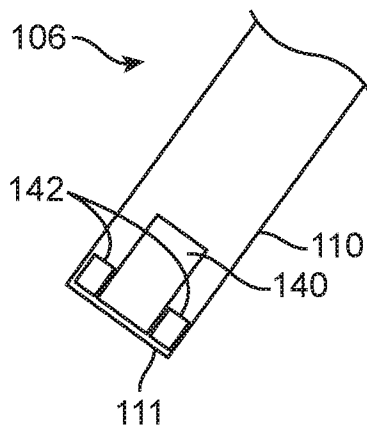


FIG. 3

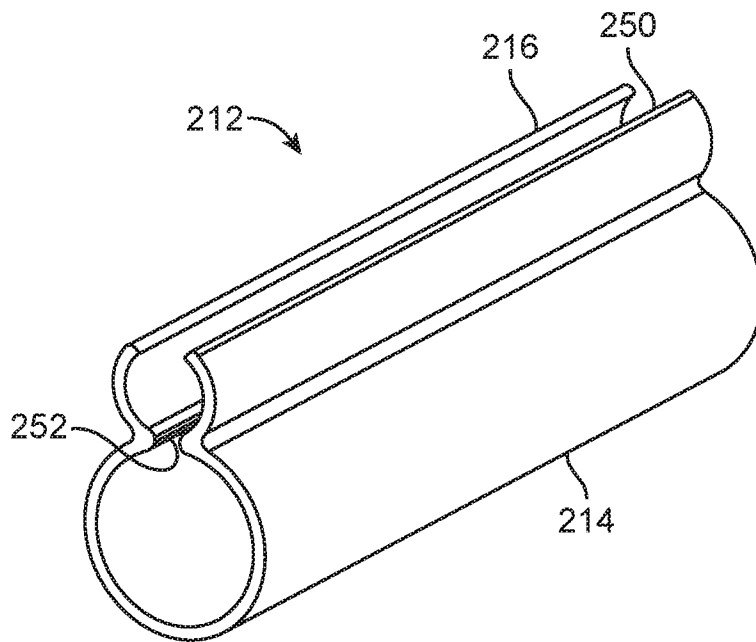
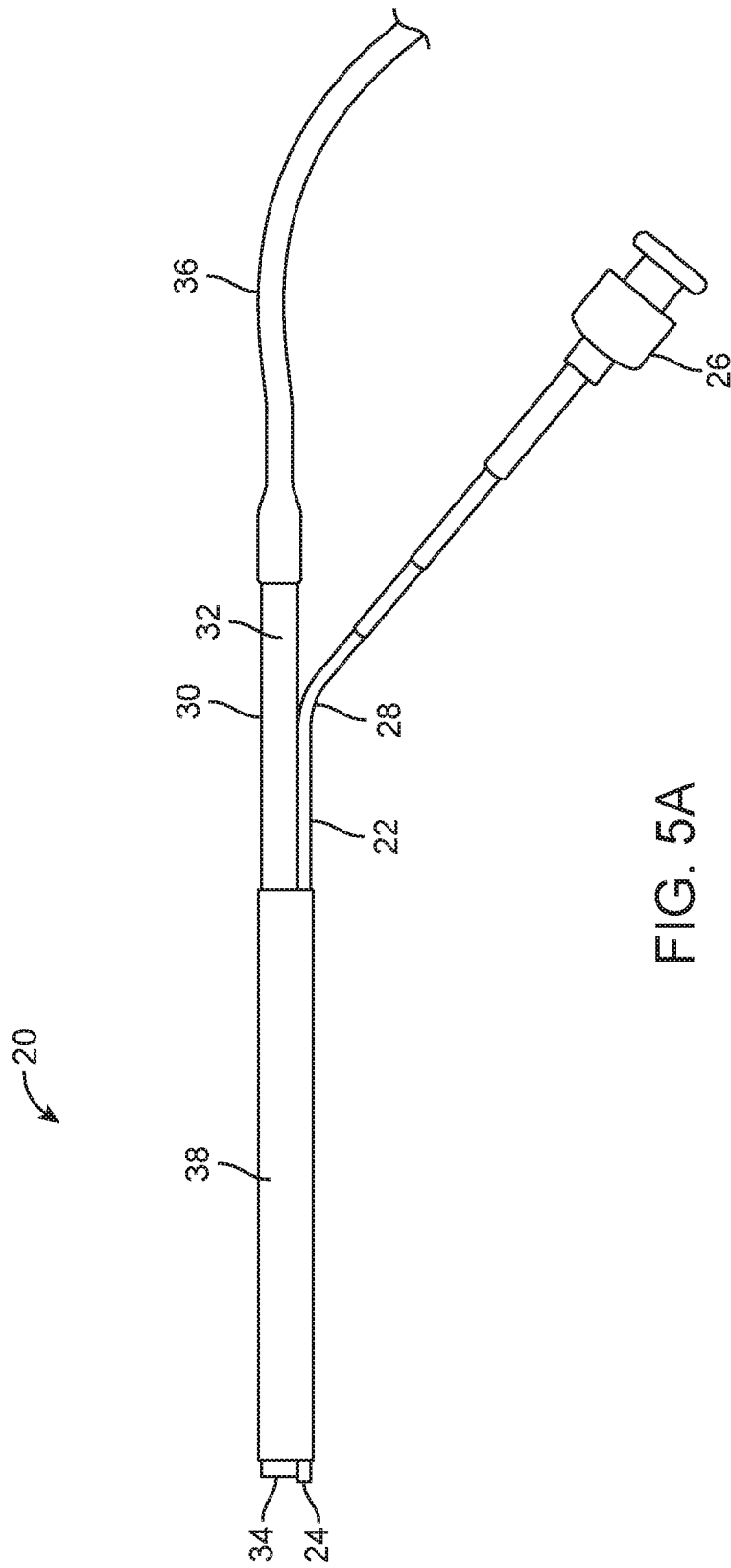


FIG. 4



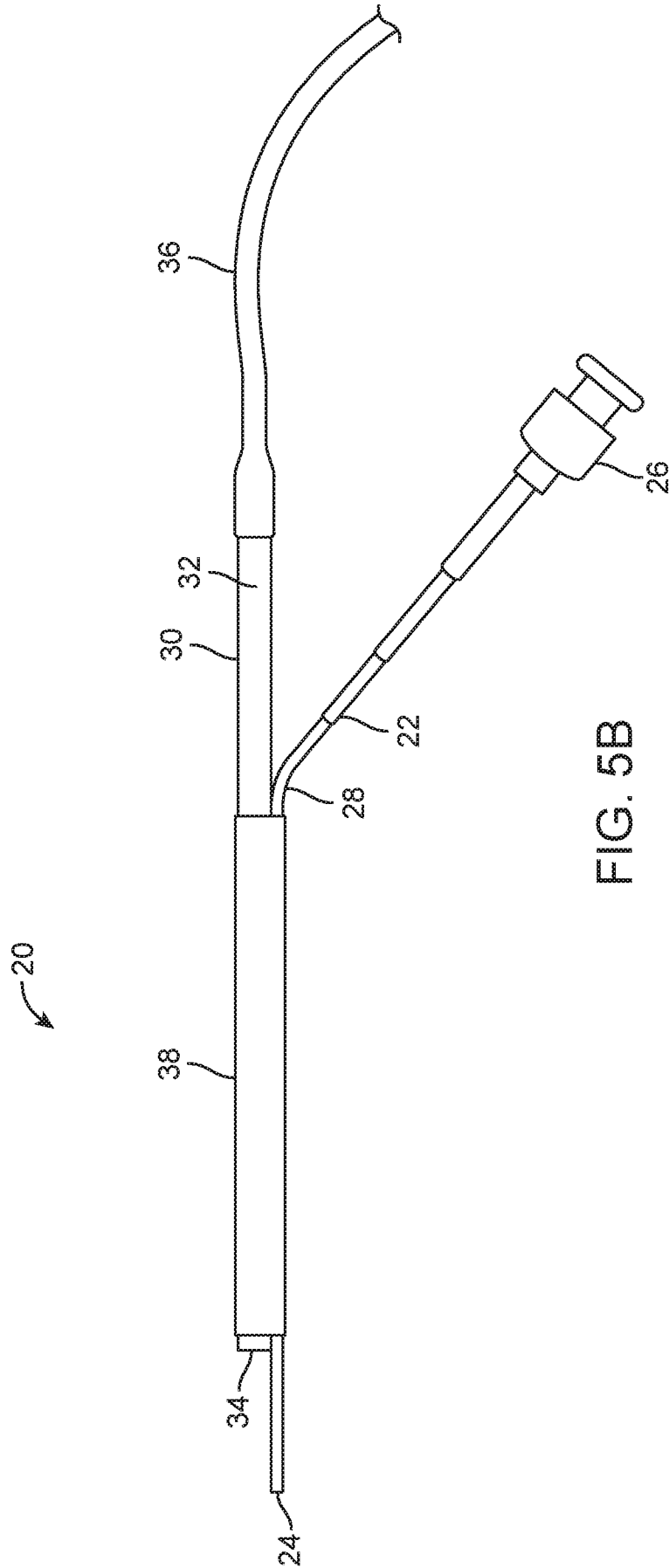


FIG. 5B

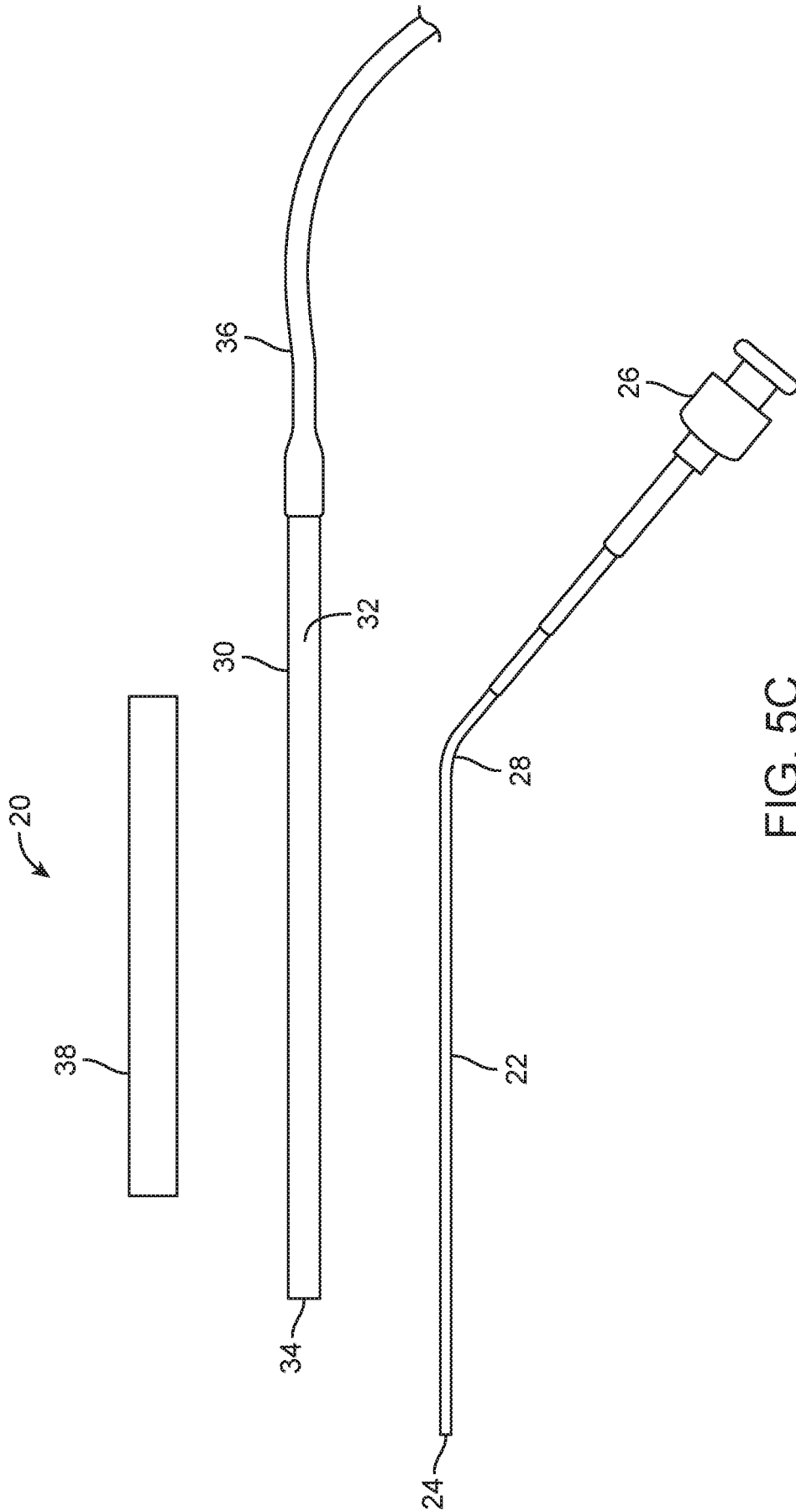


FIG. 5C

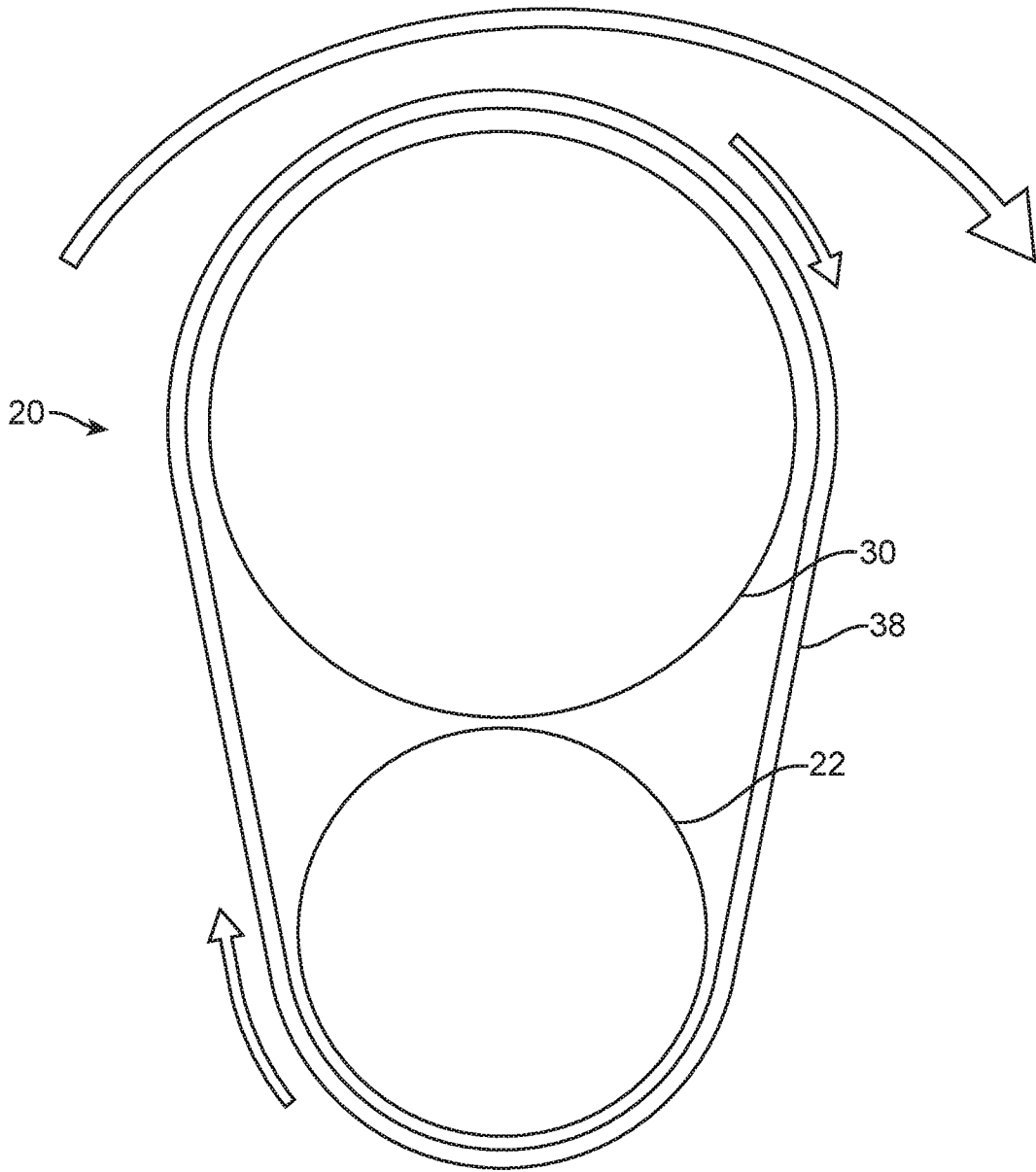


FIG. 5D

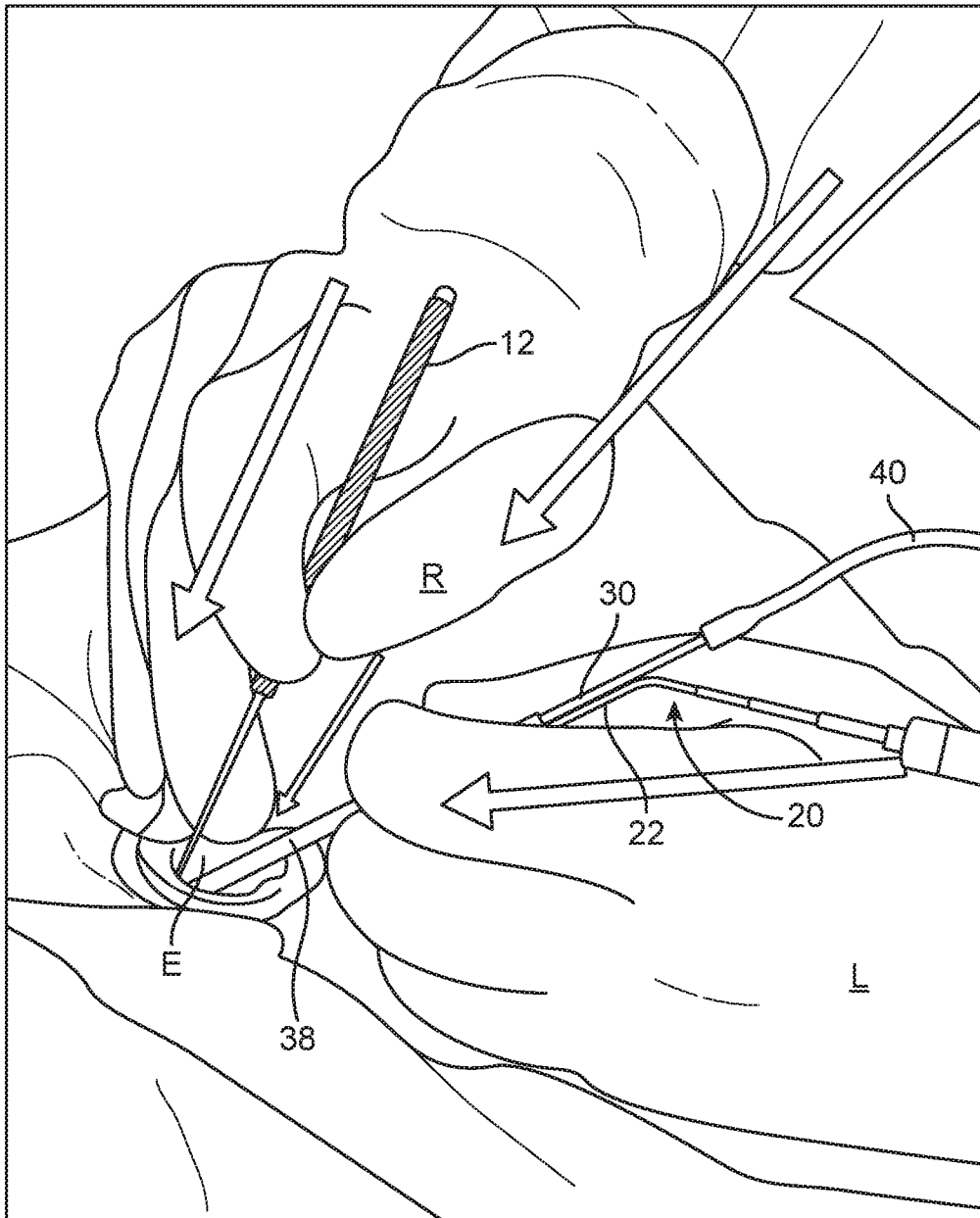


FIG. 6

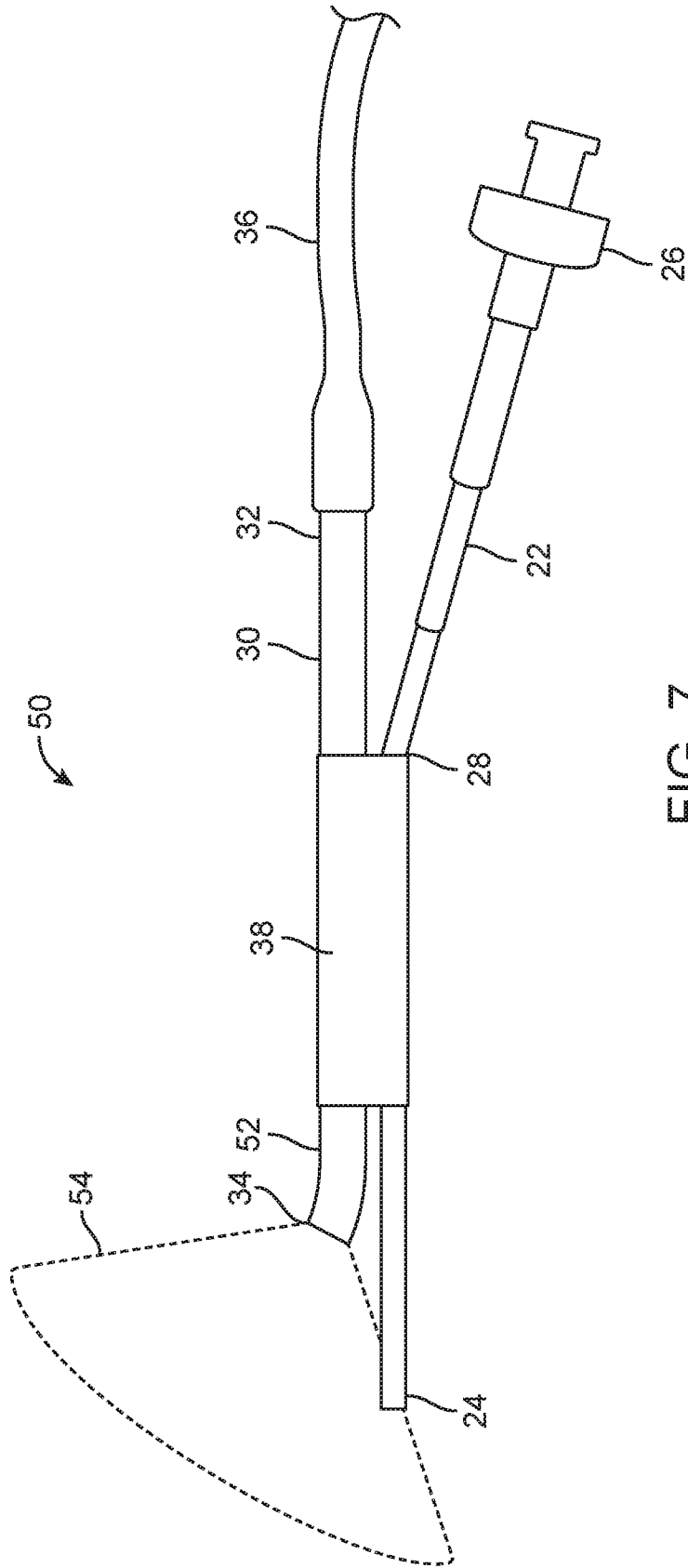
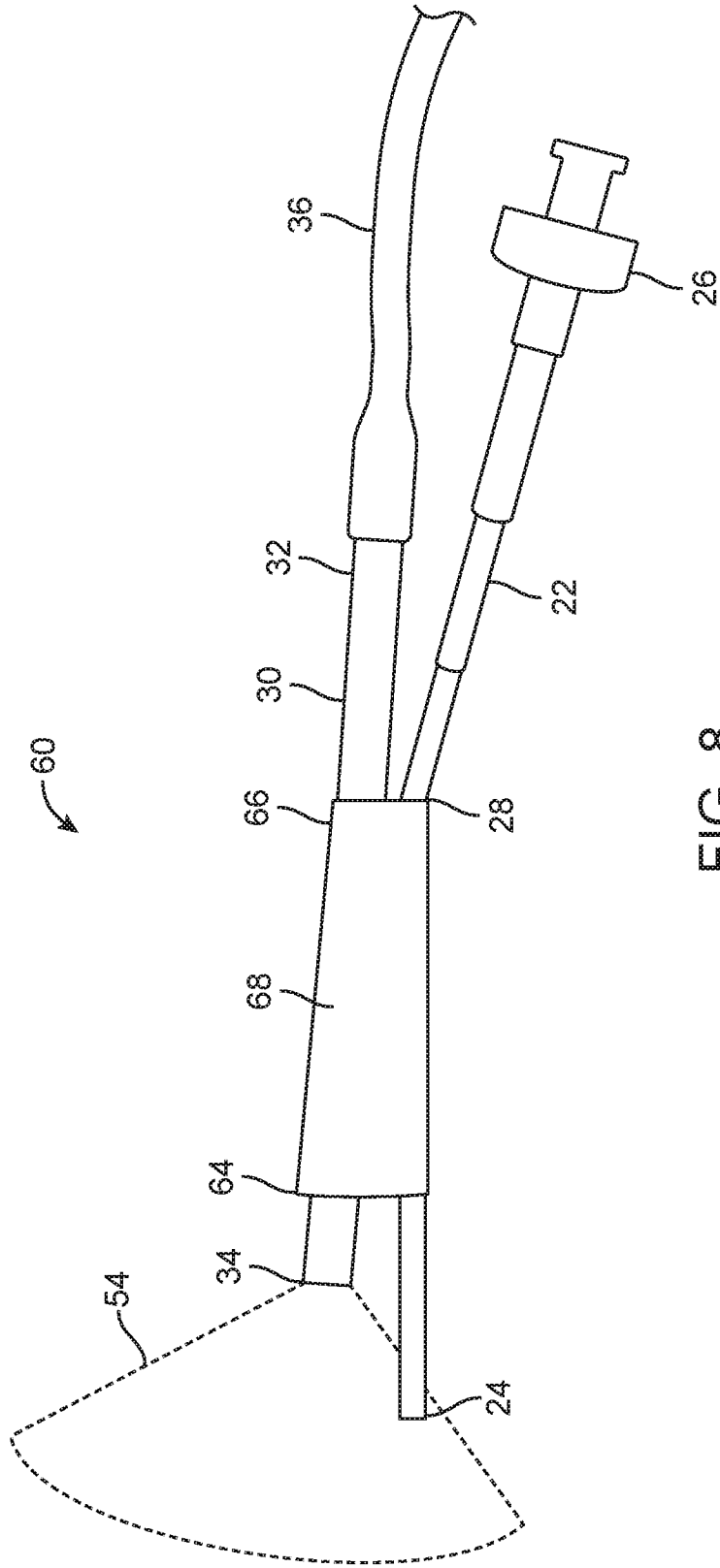


FIG. 7



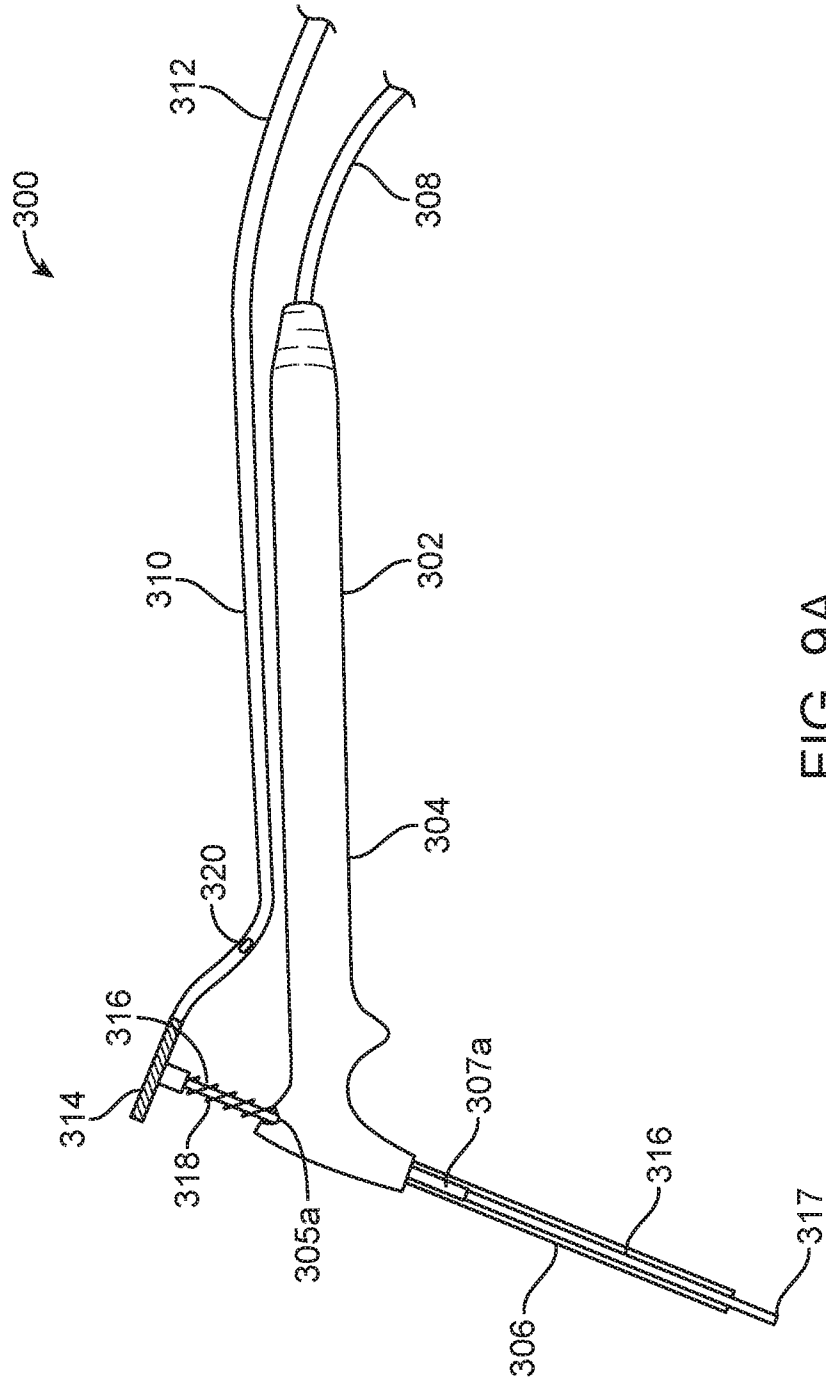


FIG. 9A

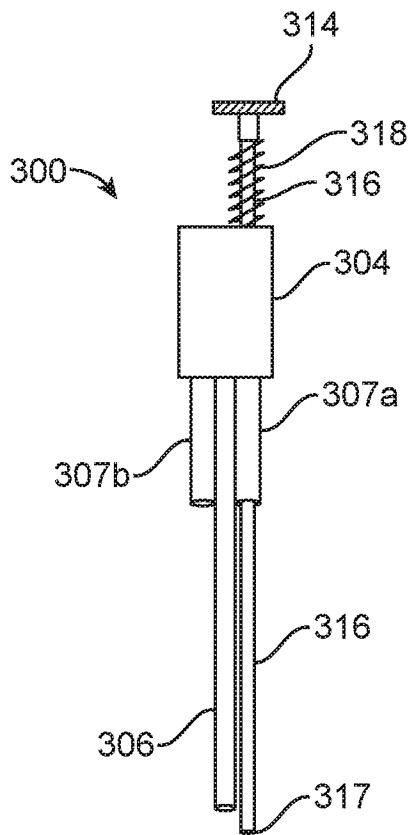


FIG. 9B

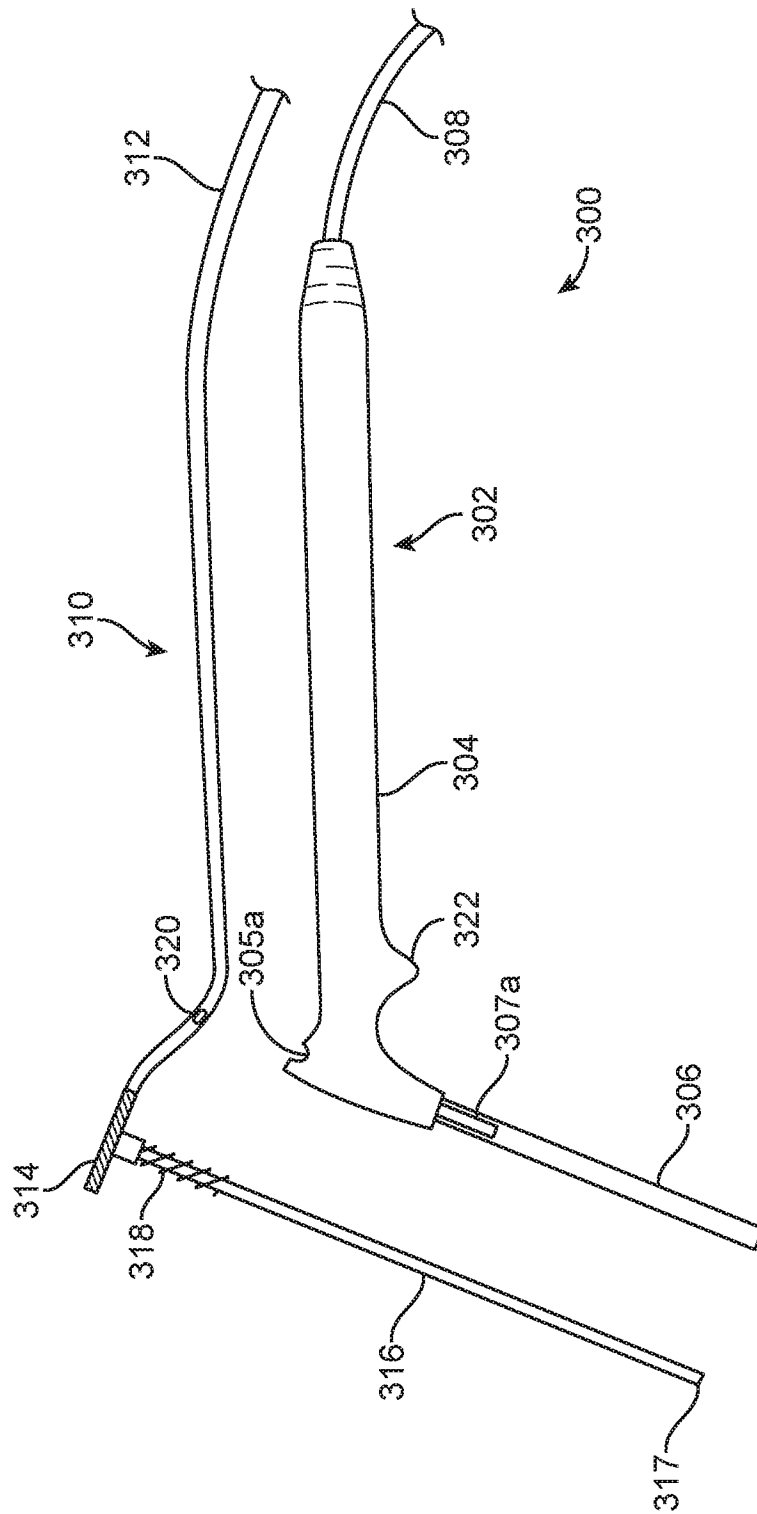


FIG. 9C

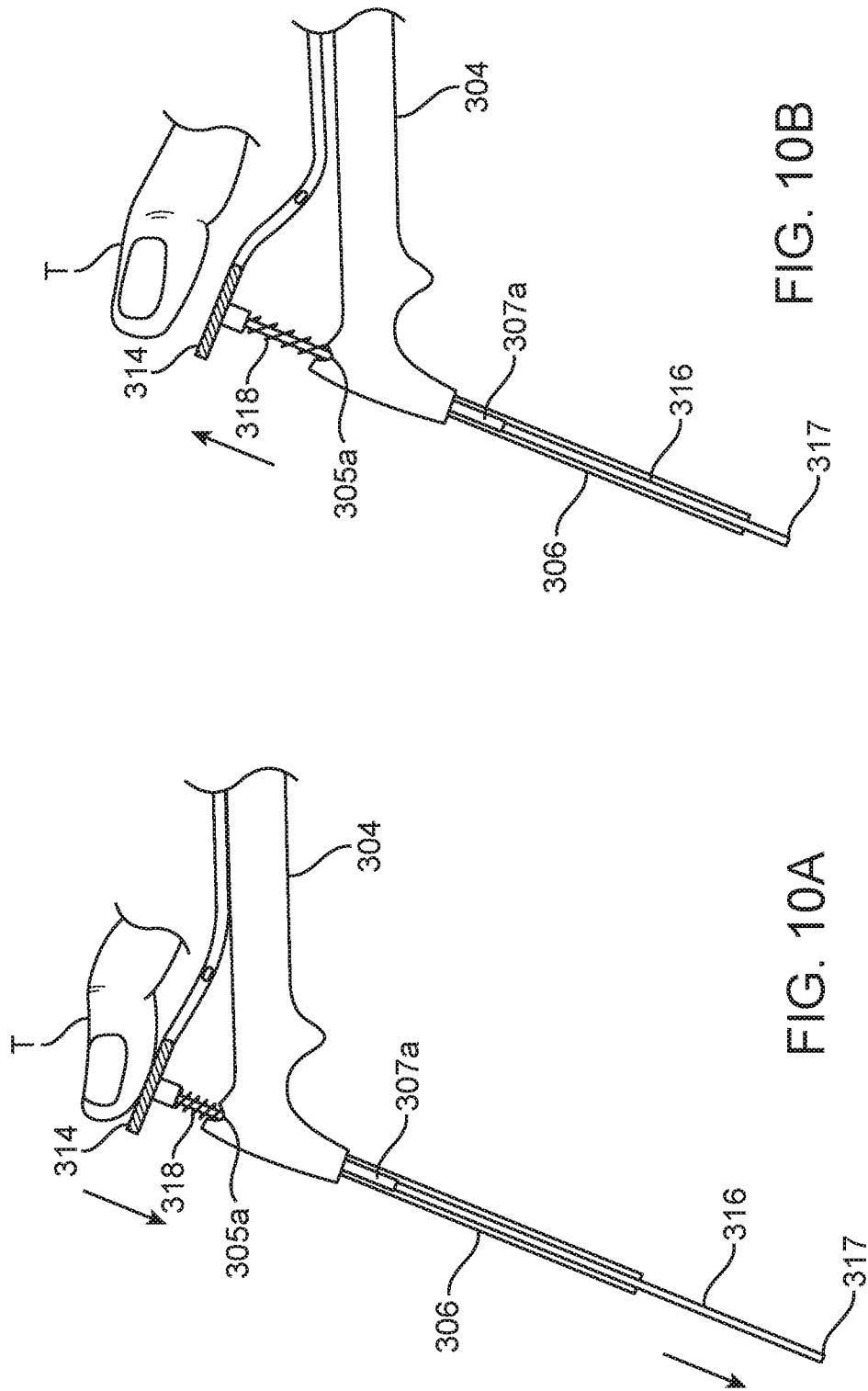


FIG. 10B

FIG. 10A

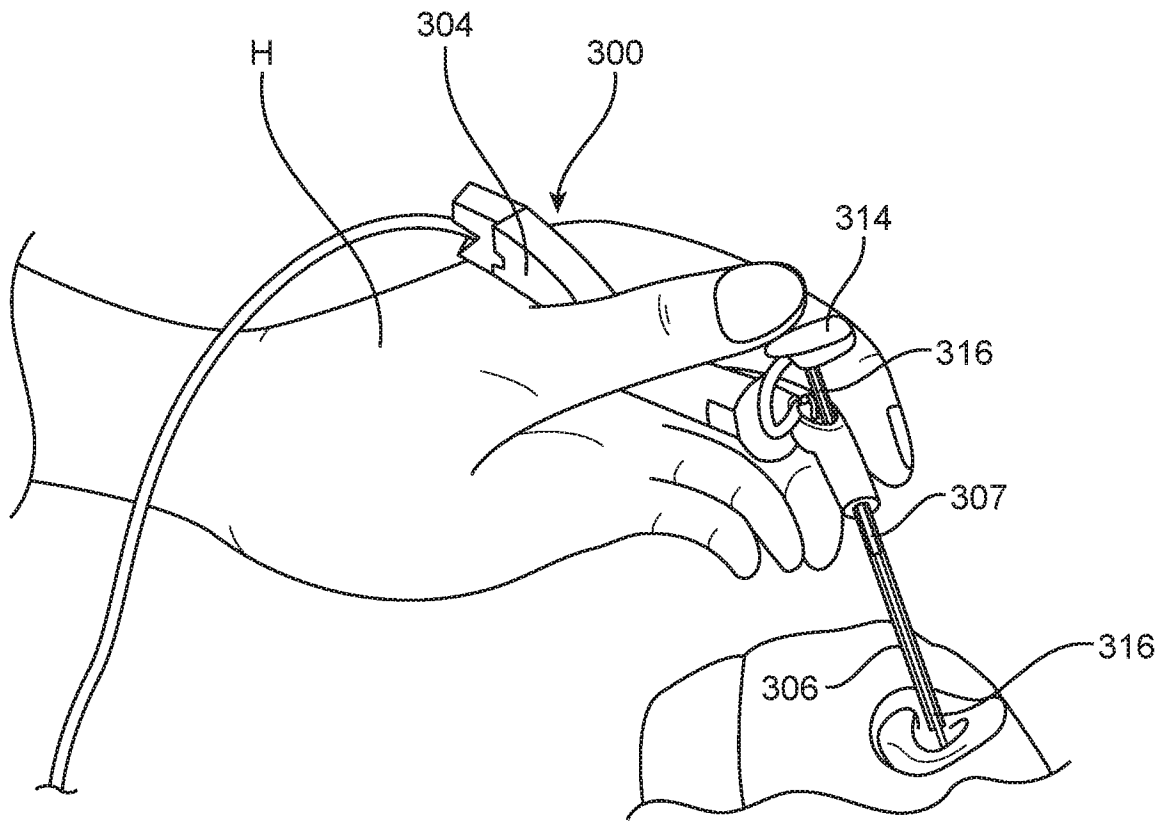


FIG. 11

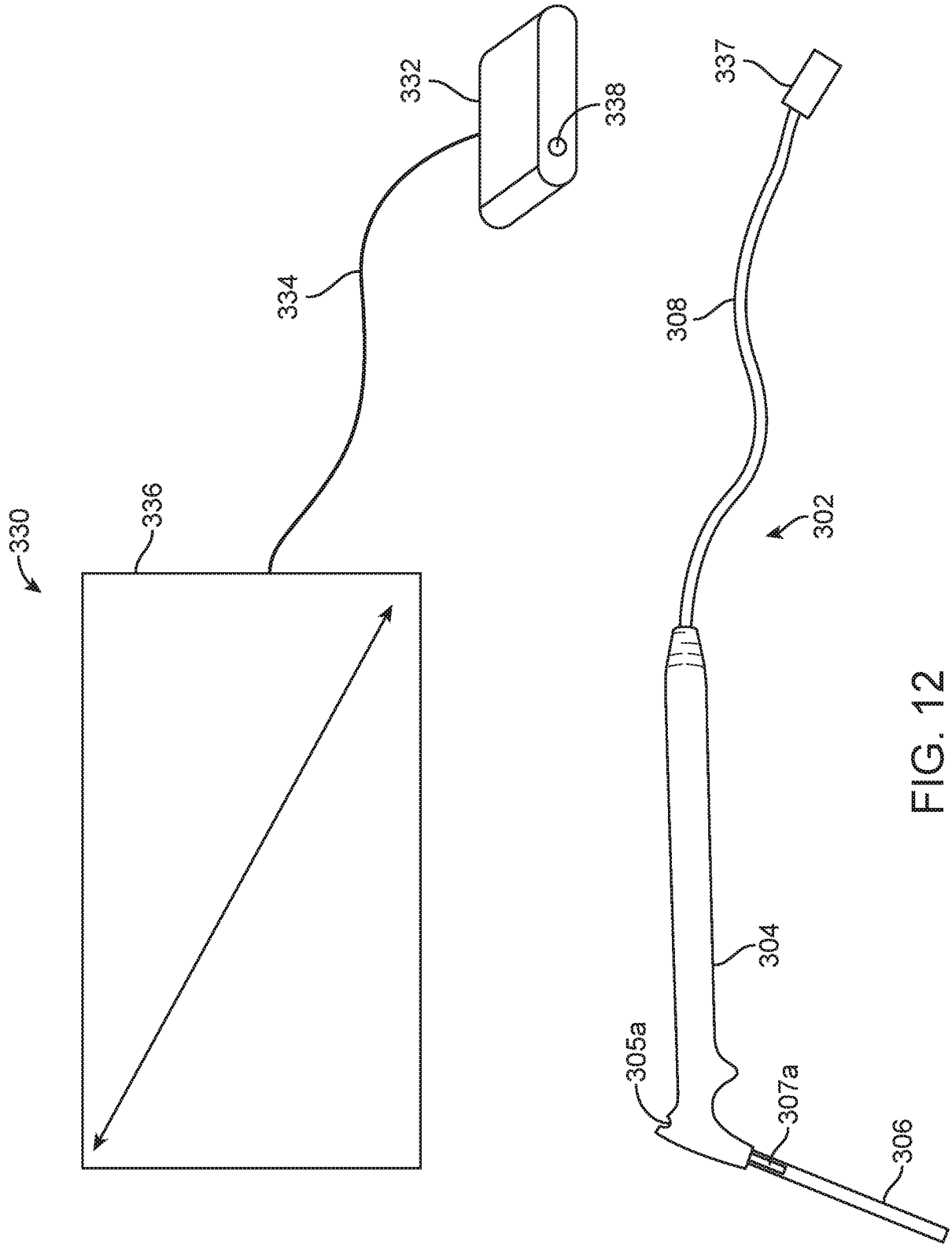


FIG. 12

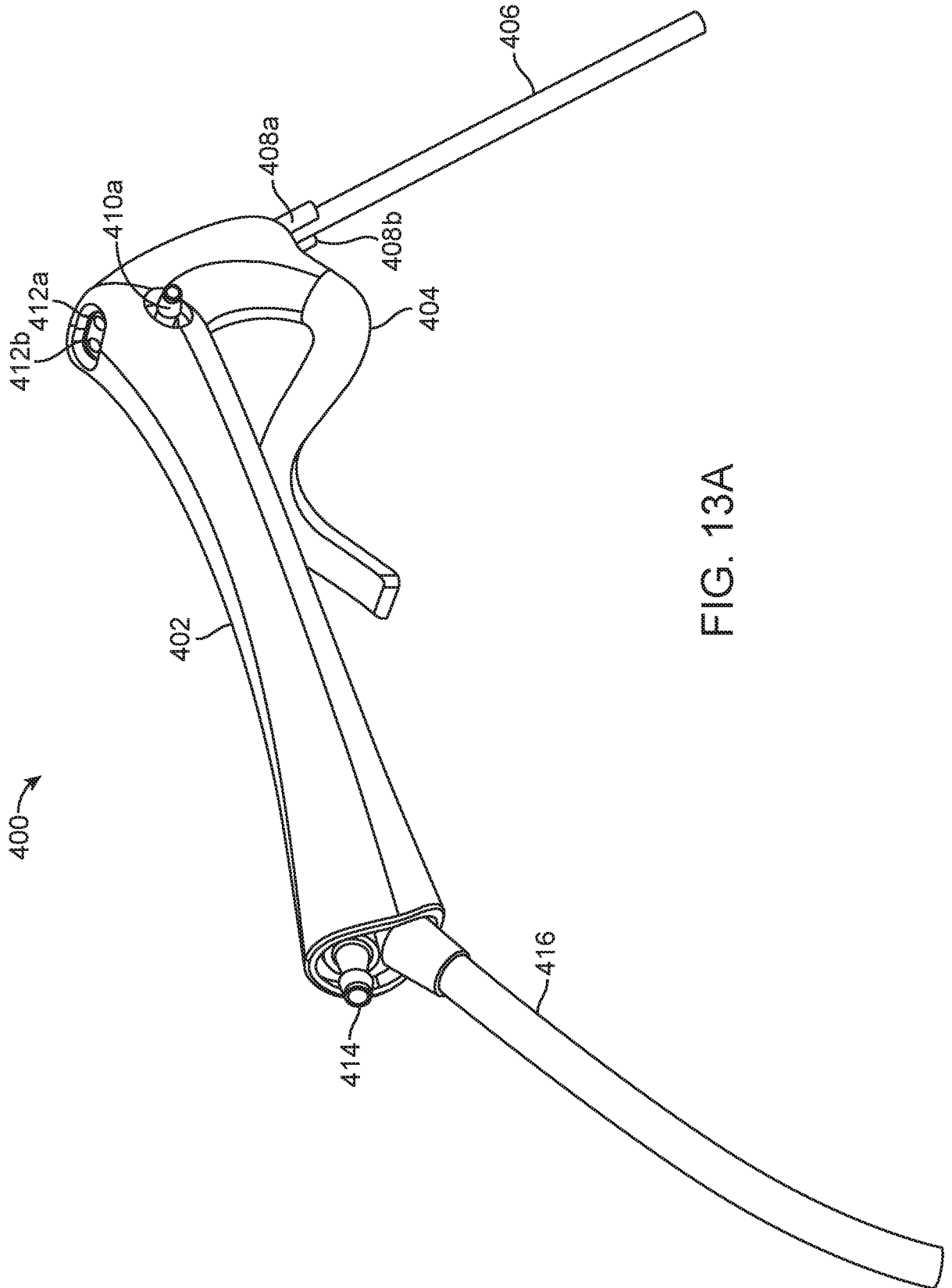


FIG. 13A

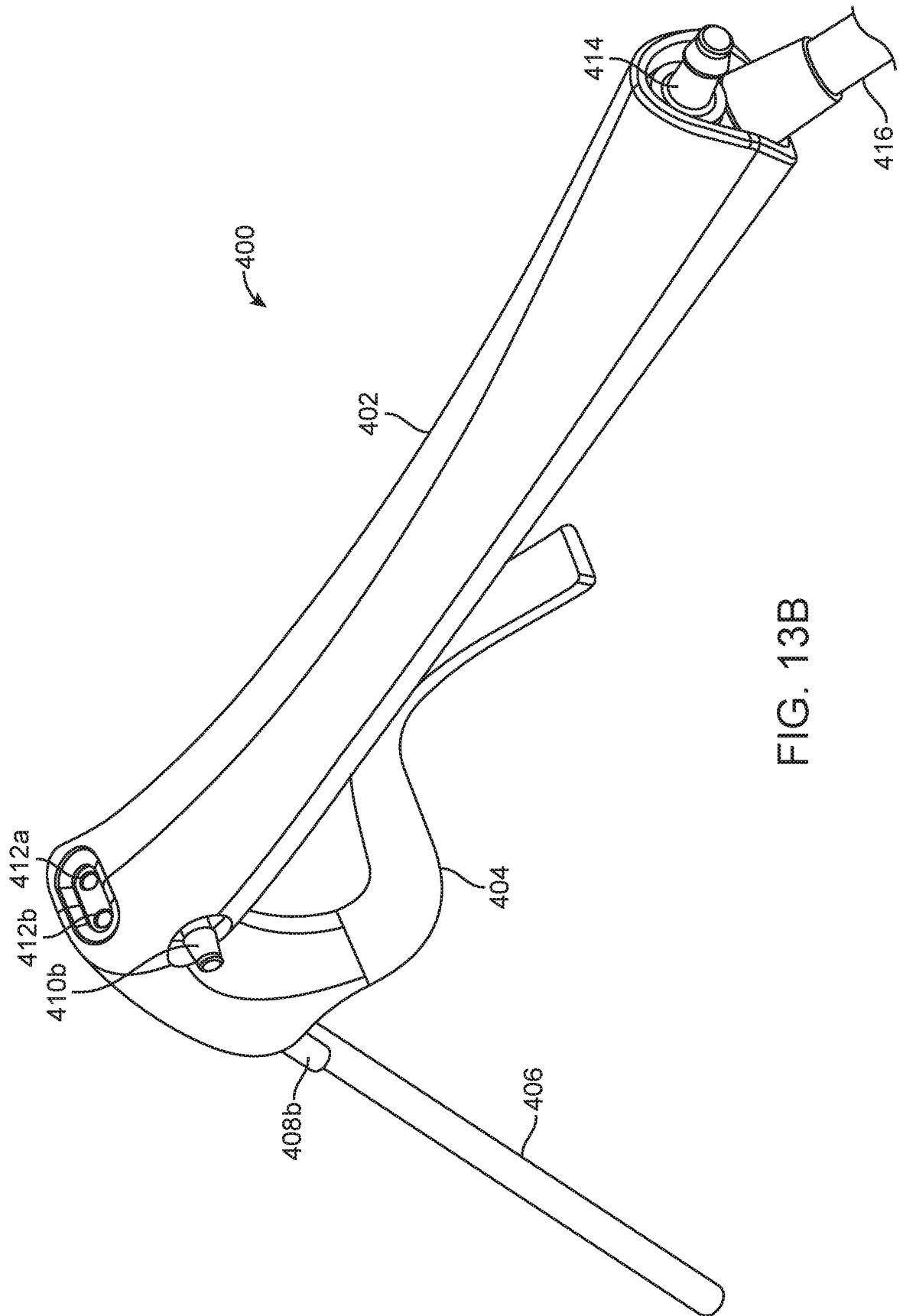


FIG. 13B

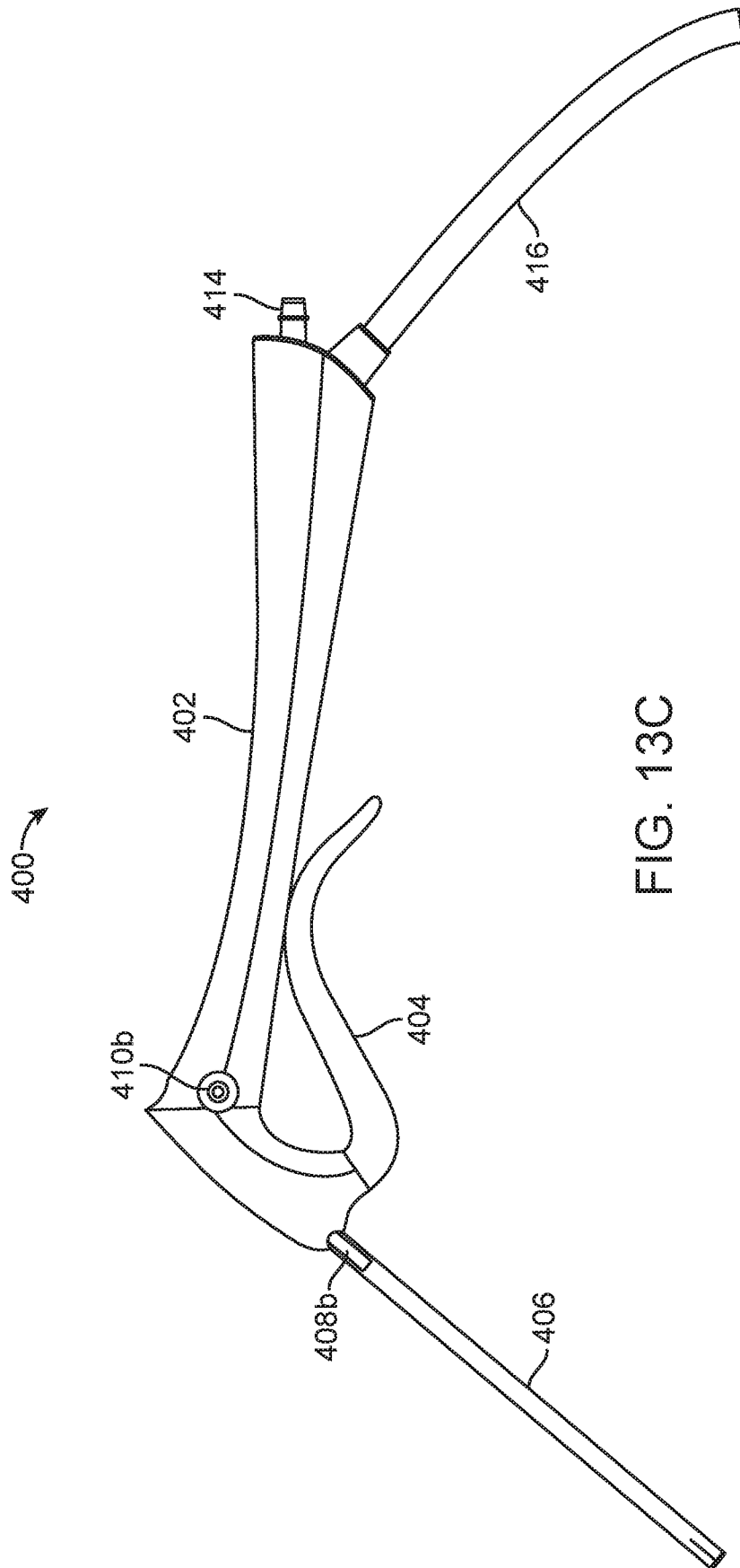
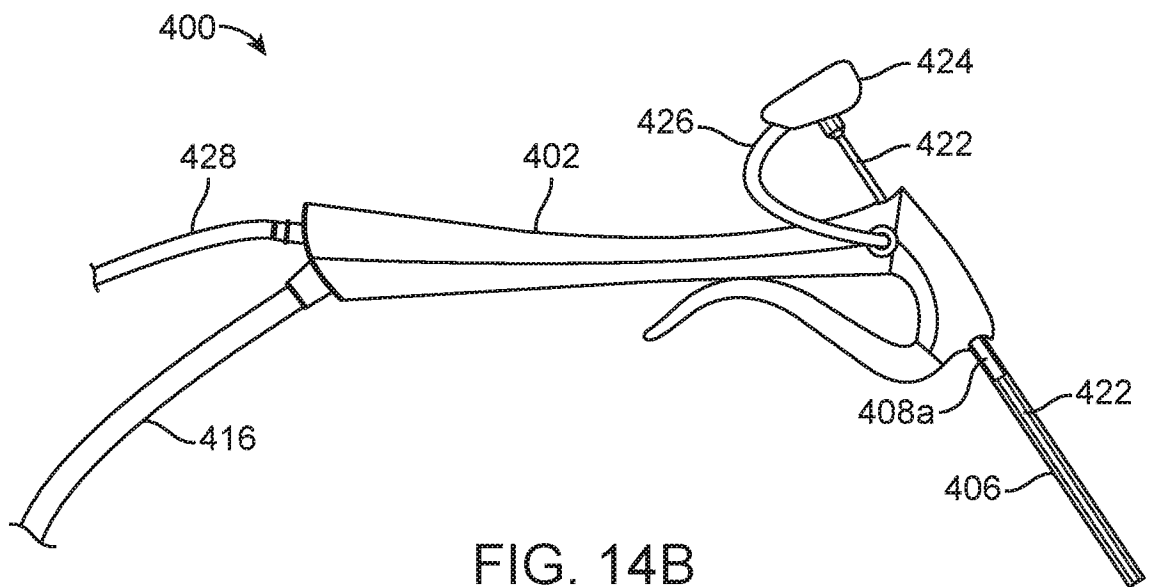
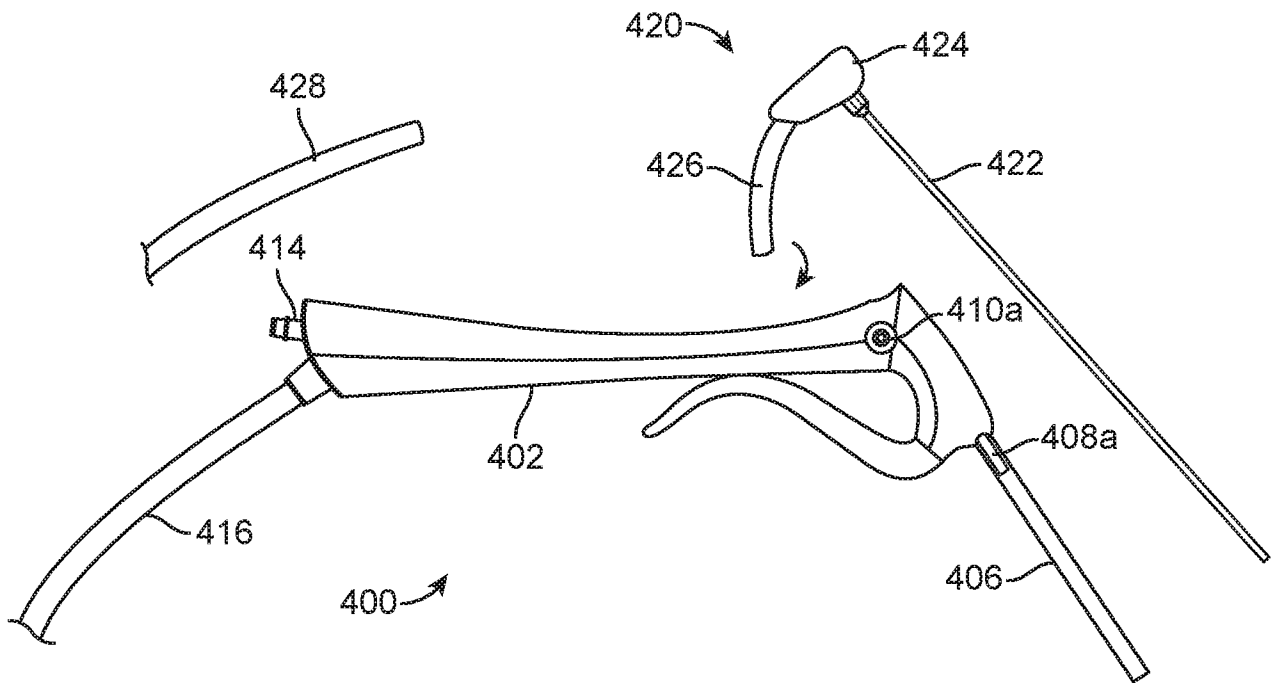


FIG. 13C



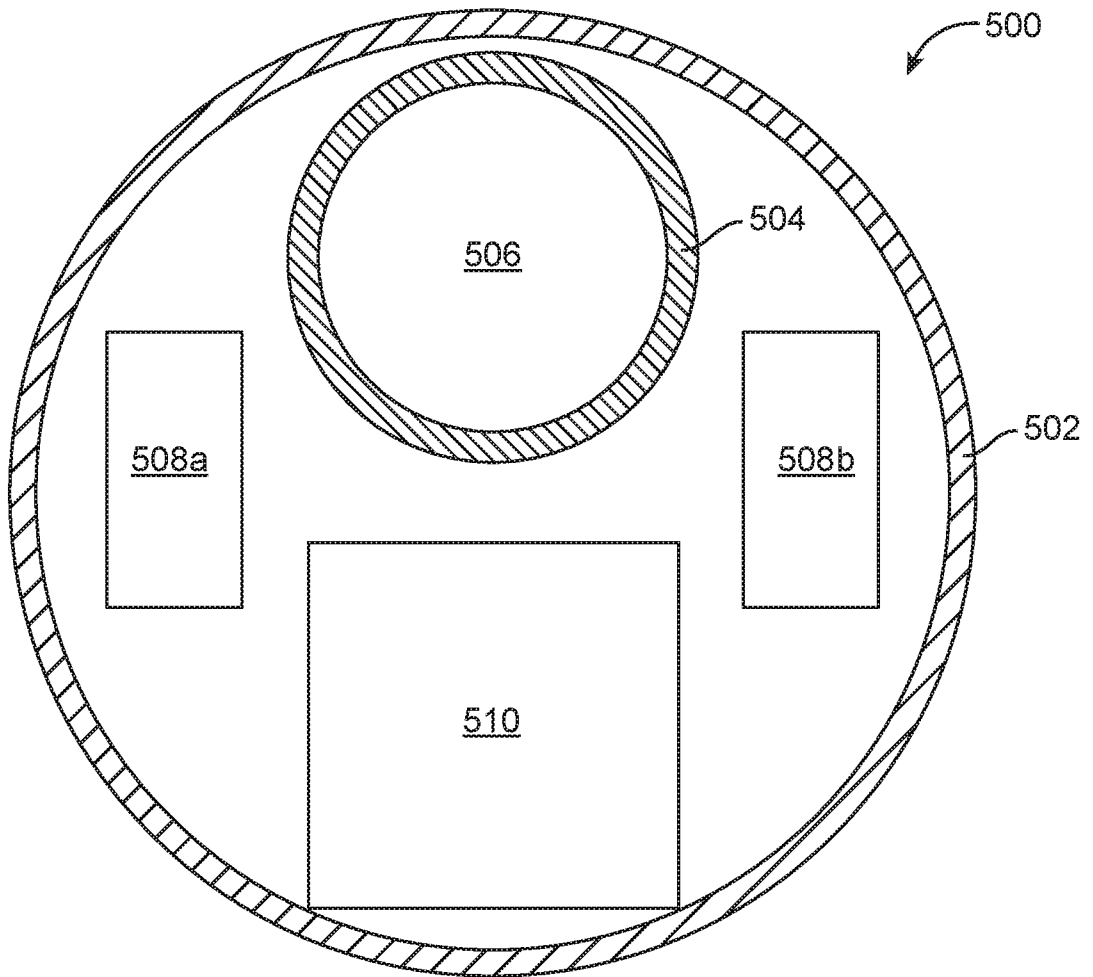


FIG. 15