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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR POSITIONING
A LAPAROSCOPIC DEVICE**

ation No. 60/773,638, filed on Feb. 16, 2006. Pro-
visional application No. 60/821,692, filed on Aug. 7,
2006.

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Publication Classification

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(51) **Int. Cl.**
A61B 1/00 (2006.01)
(52) **U.S. Cl.** **600/102**

(21) Appl. No.: **11/464,804**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

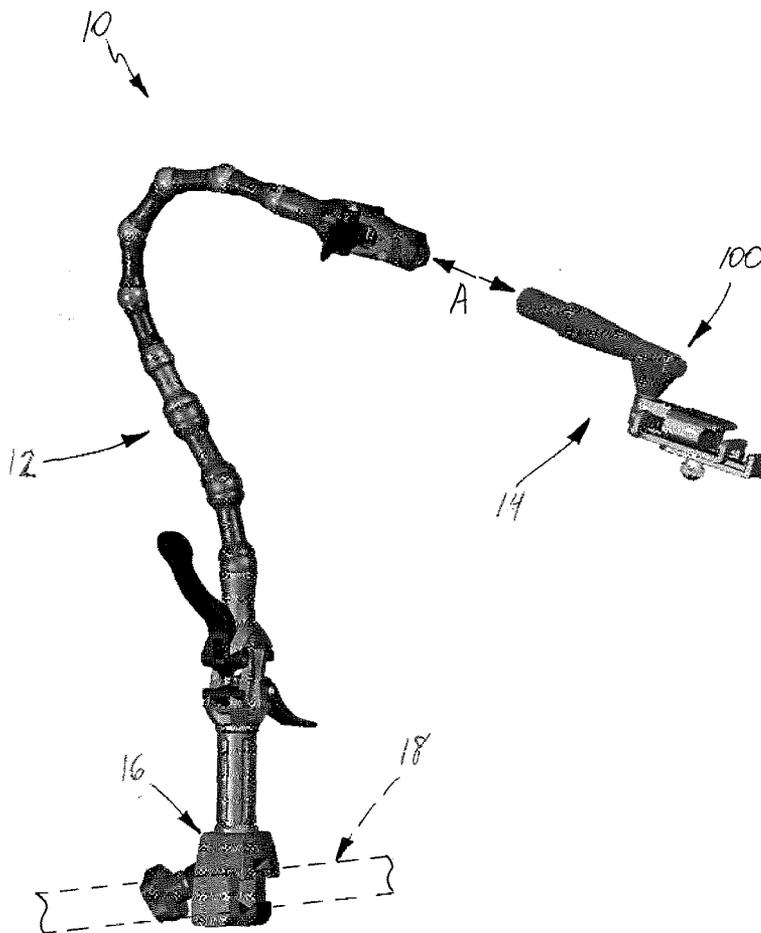
(22) Filed: **Aug. 15, 2006**

A system for positioning a laparoscopic device includes a curvilinear articulating arm and a holder. The holder has at least two rotational regions and a clamping portion for receiving the laparoscopic device, and the holder is coupled to the curvilinear articulating arm. The at least two rotational regions are permitted to articulate. In addition, a method of positioning a laparoscopic device in a skin port of a mammal includes: securing the laparoscopic device to a holder having at least two rotational joints; coupling the holder to a curvilinear articulating arm; disposing the laparoscopic device partially within the skin port; positioning the laparoscopic device by selectively articulating the curvilinear articulating arm and selectively rotating portions of the holder with respect to one another.

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 10/095,586,
filed on Mar. 11, 2002, now Pat. No. R,E38,492.

(60) Provisional application No. 60/709,098, filed on Aug.
18, 2005. Provisional application No. 60/730,853,
filed on Oct. 28, 2005. Provisional application No.
60/772,863, filed on Feb. 14, 2006. Provisional appli-



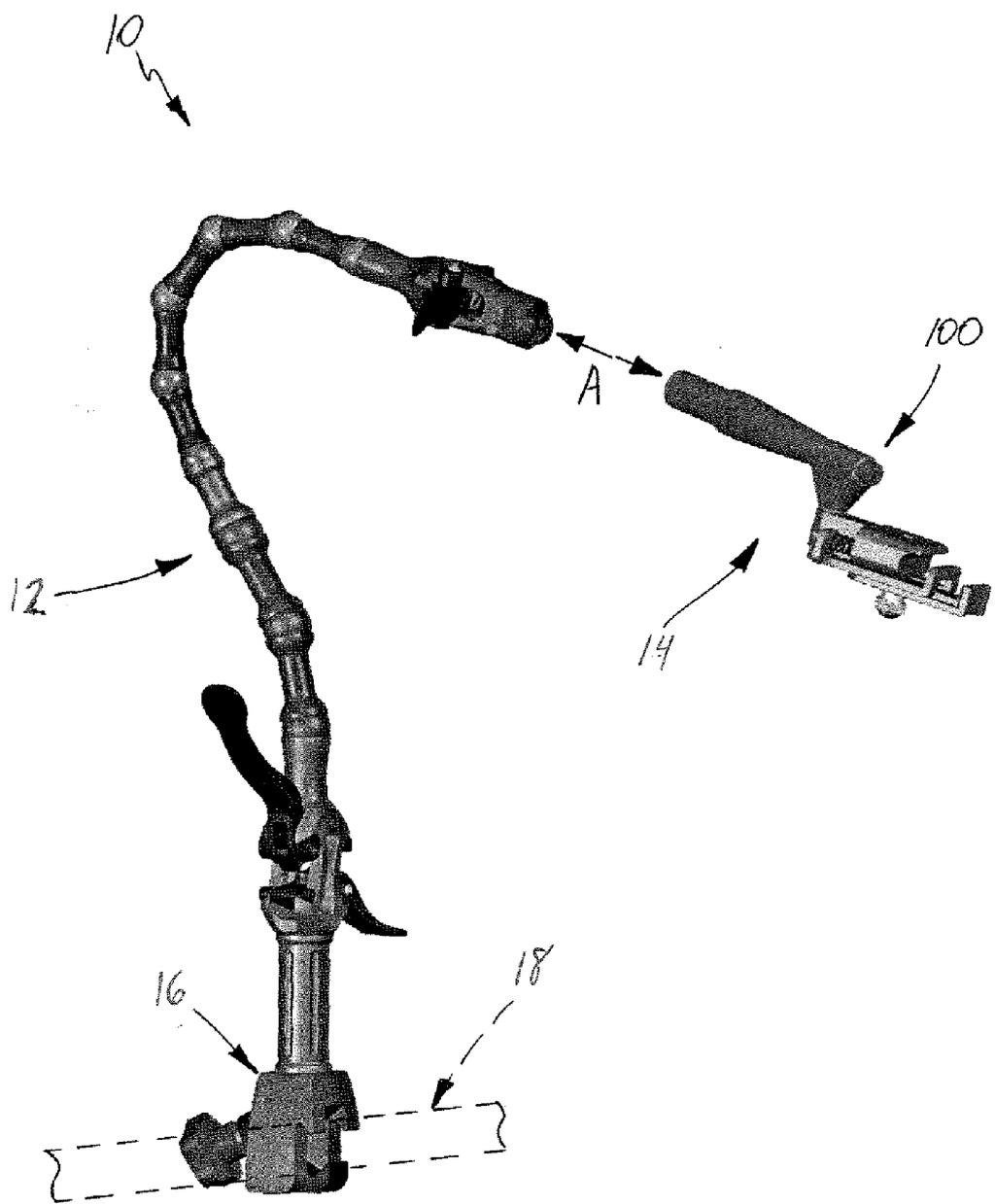


FIG. 1

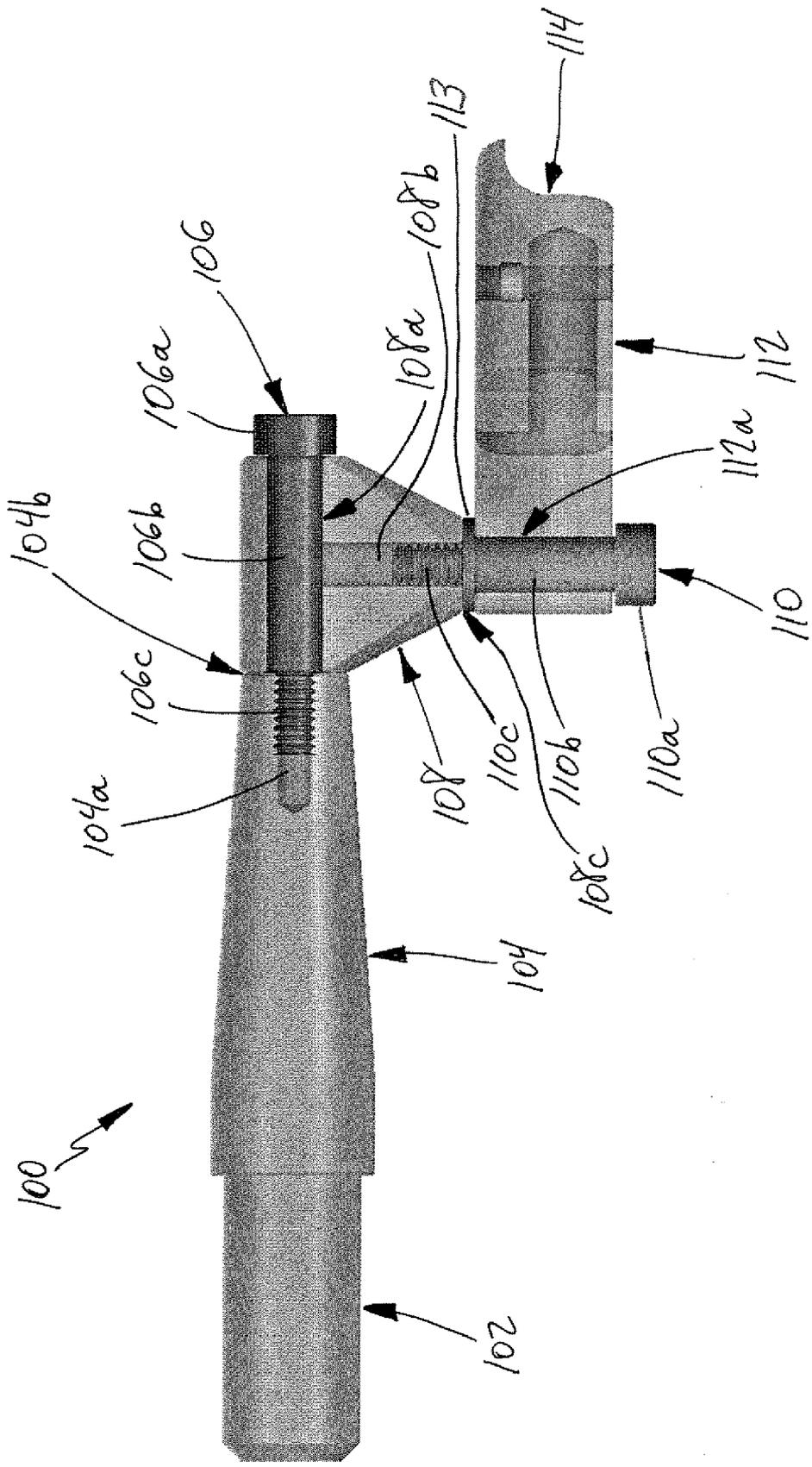


FIG. 2B

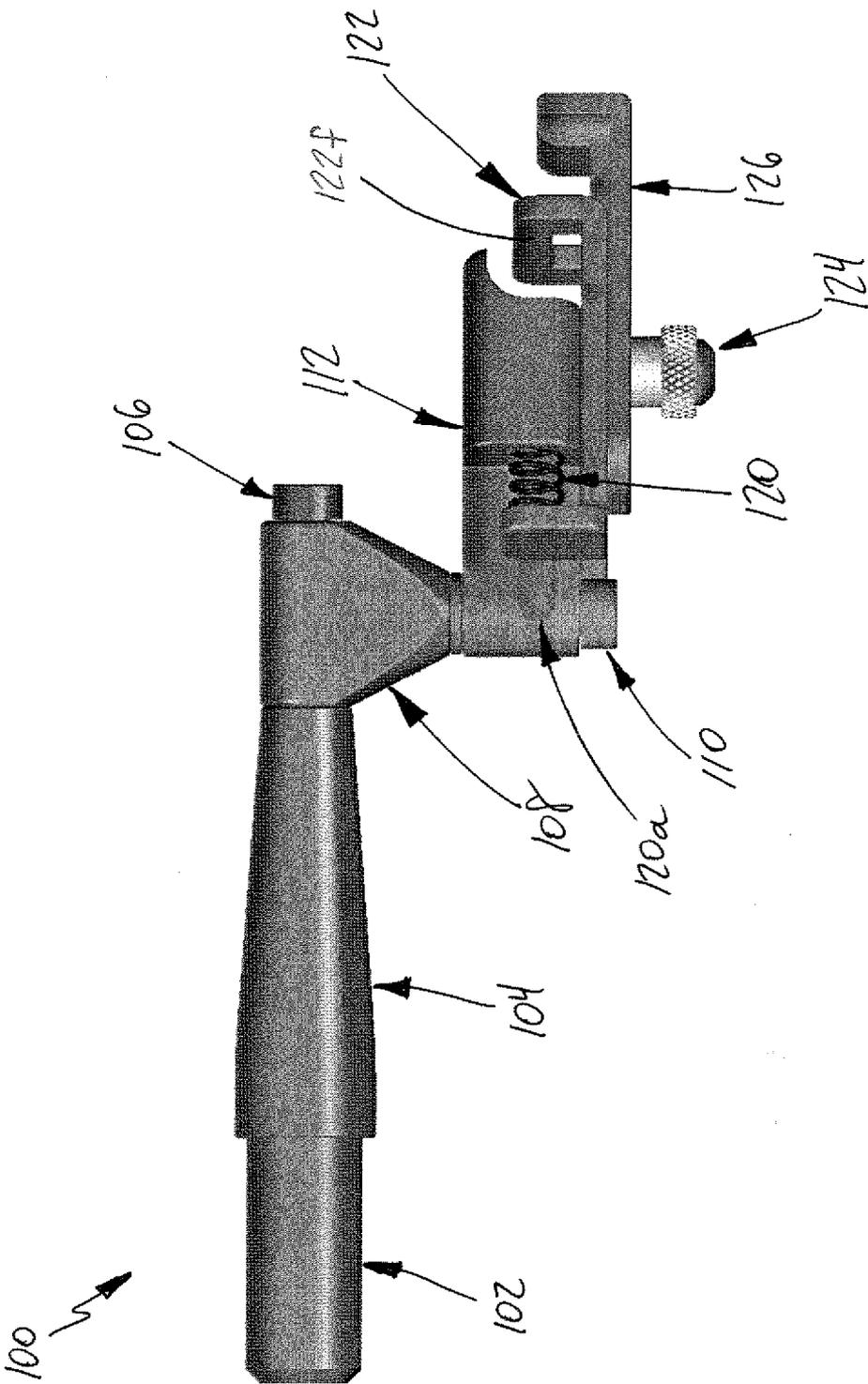


FIG. 2C

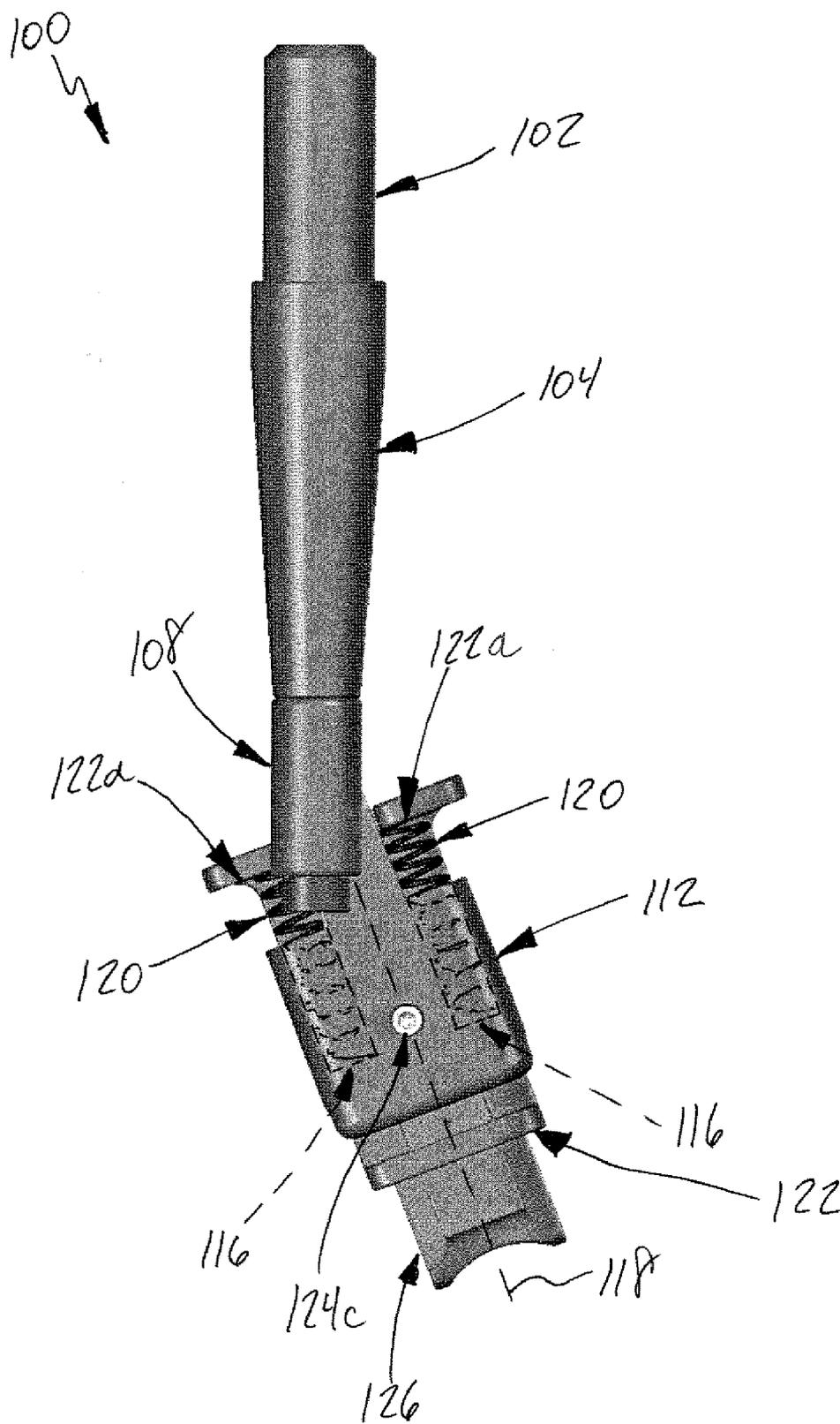


FIG. 2E

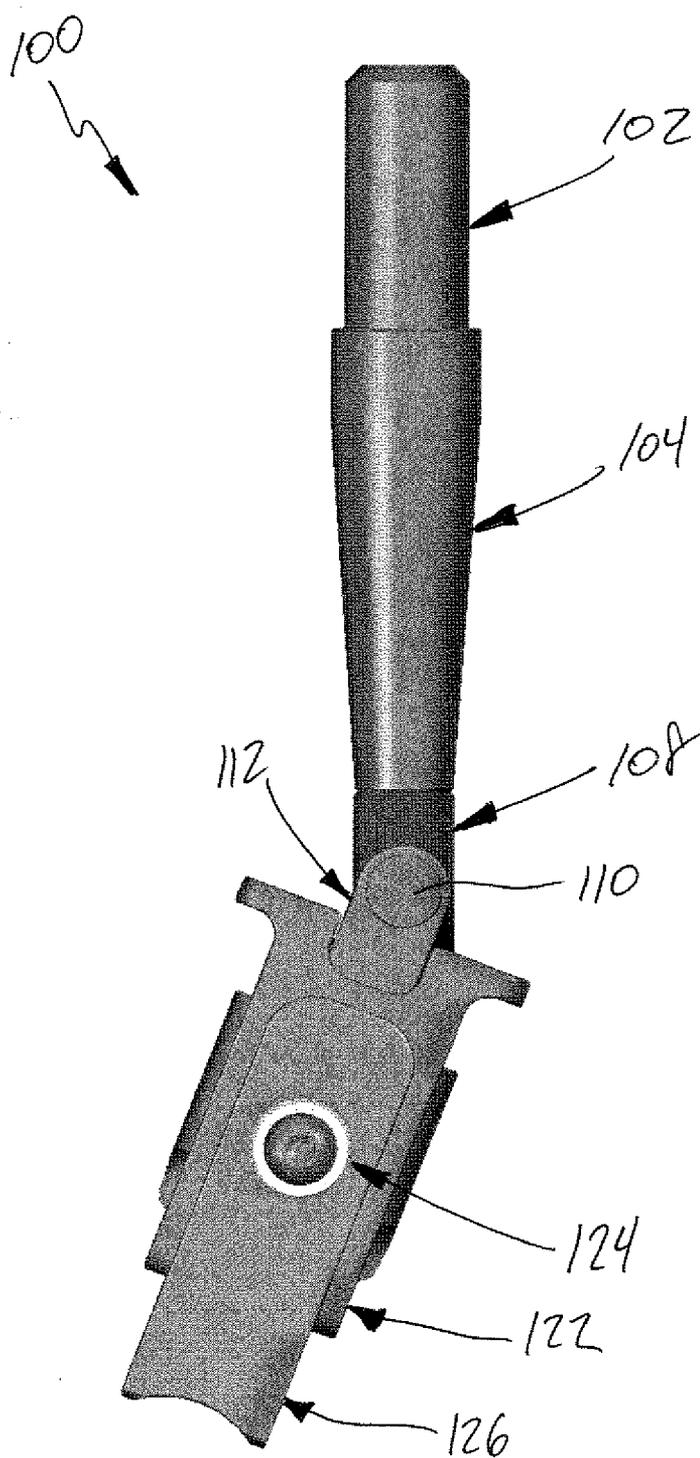


FIG. 2F

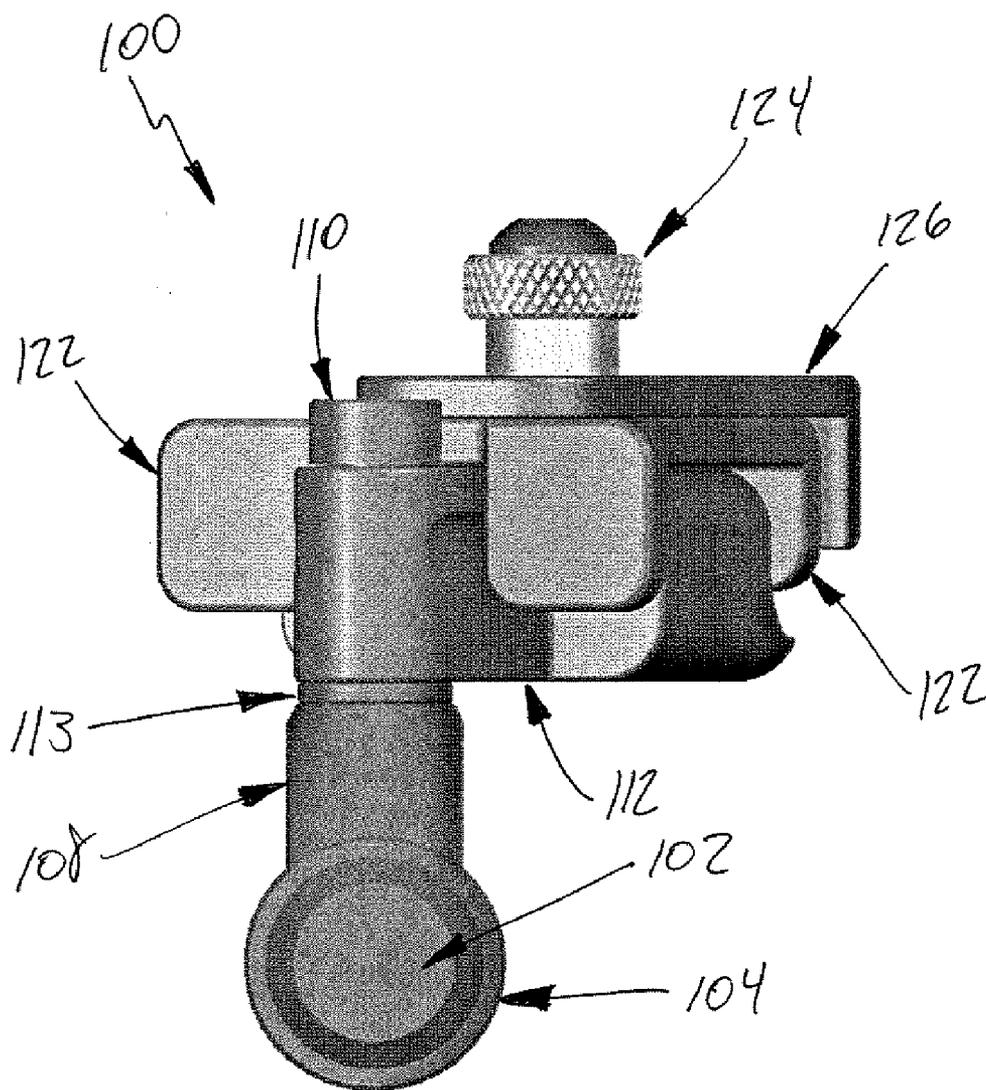


FIG. 2G

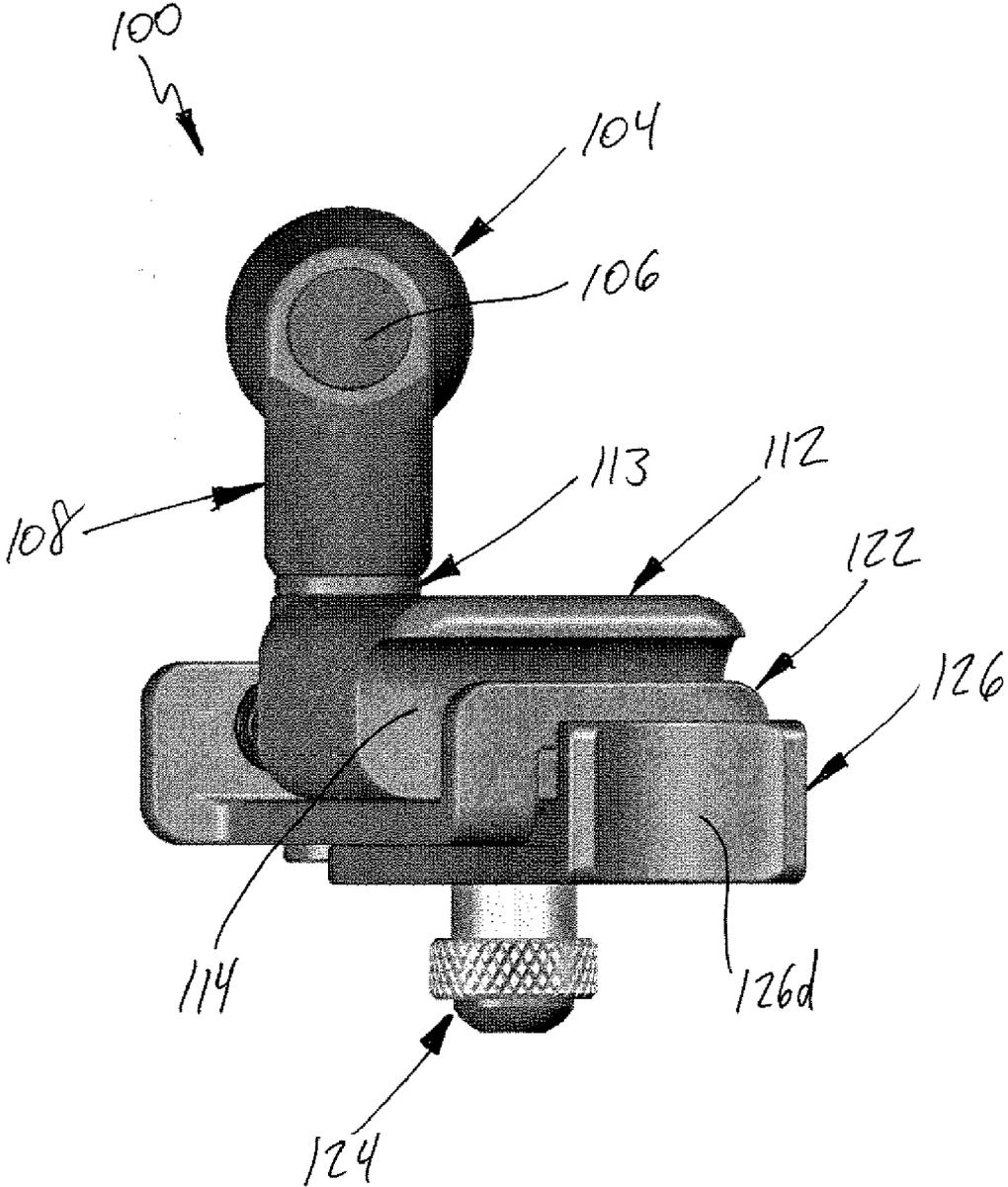


FIG. 2H

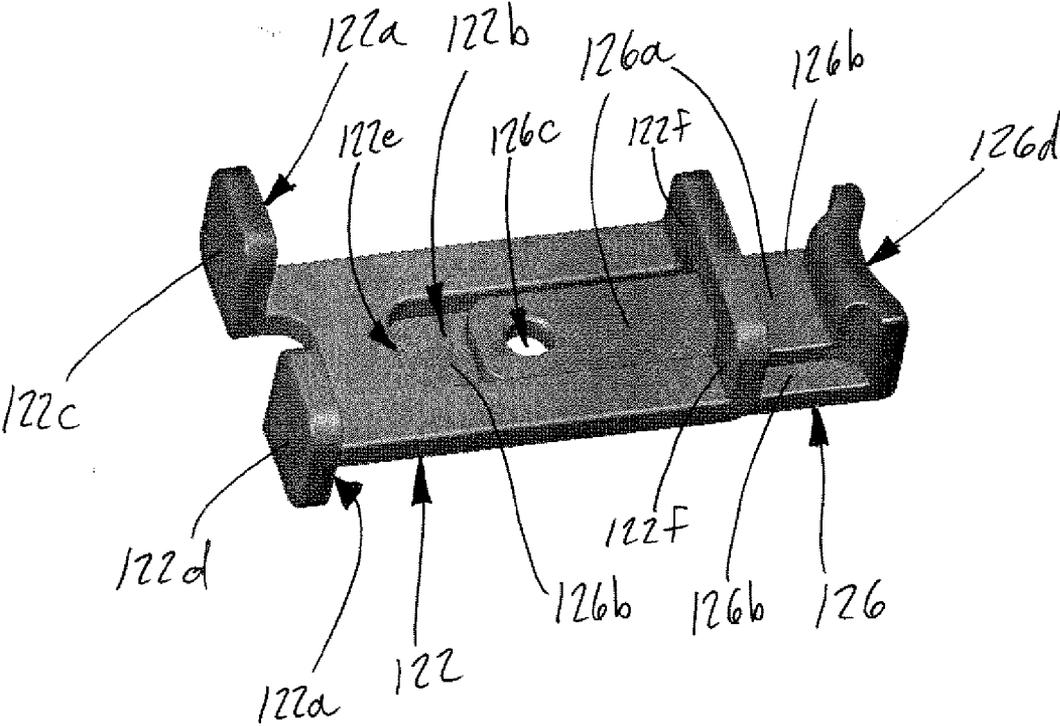


FIG. 21

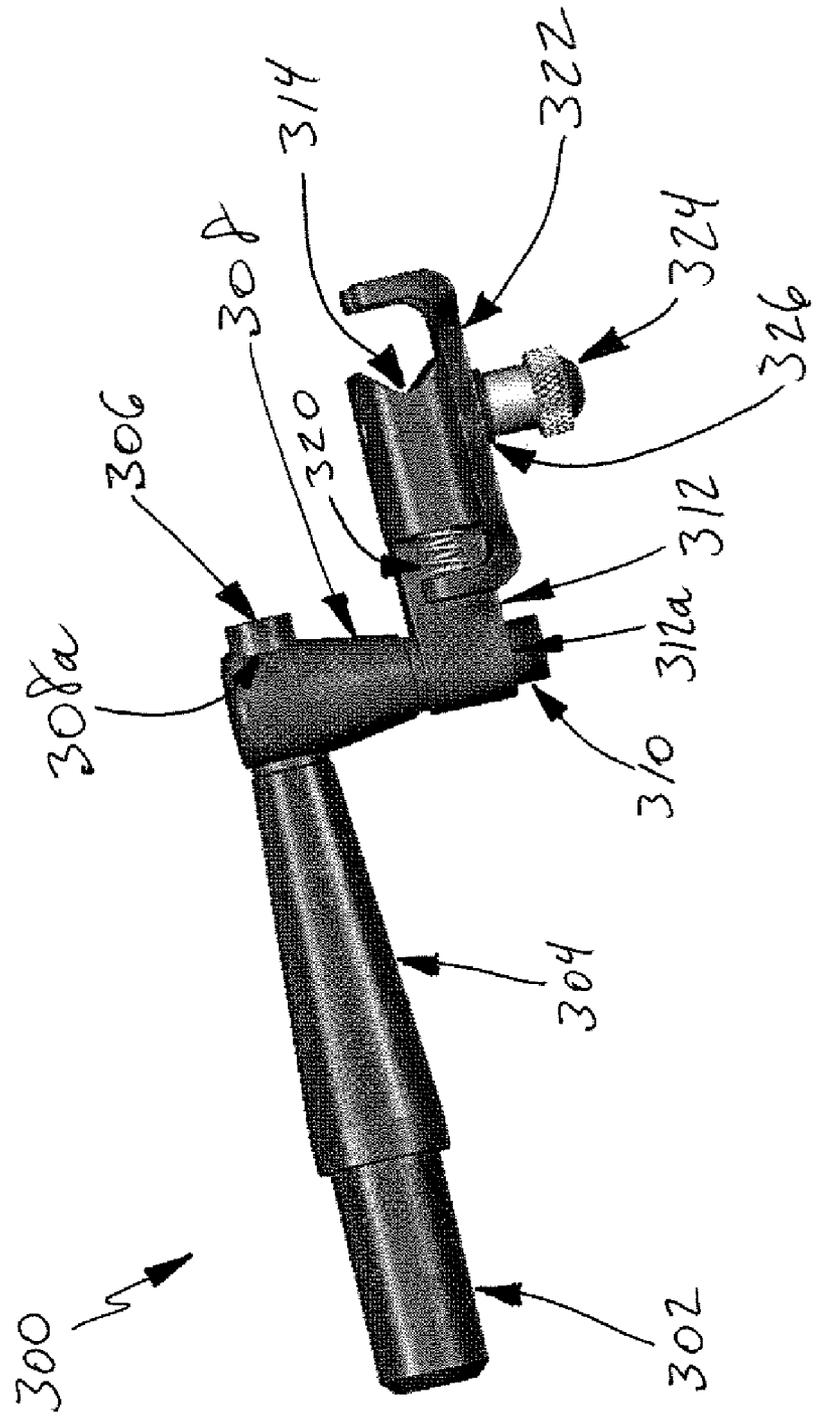


FIG. 3A

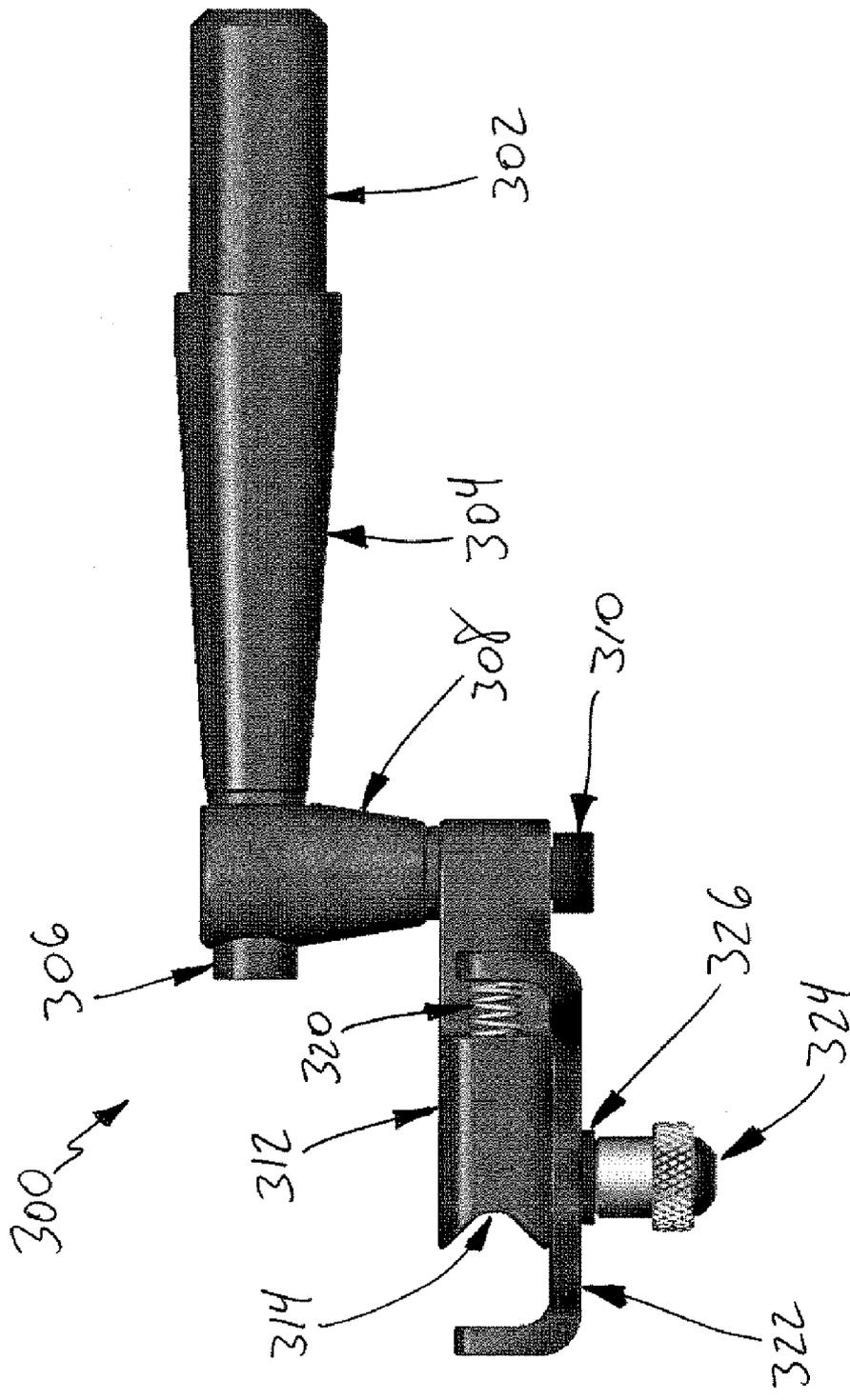


FIG. 3B

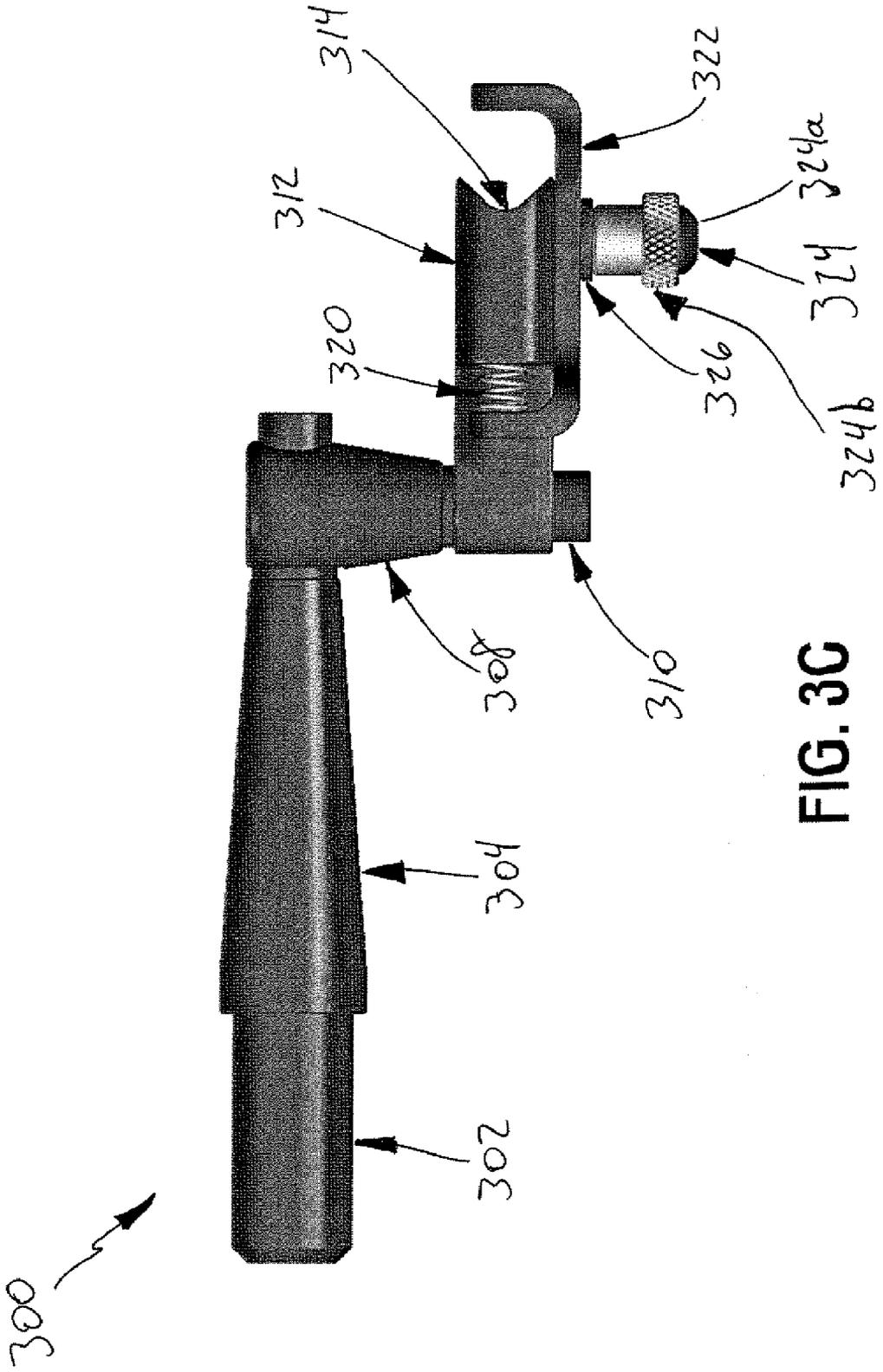


FIG. 30

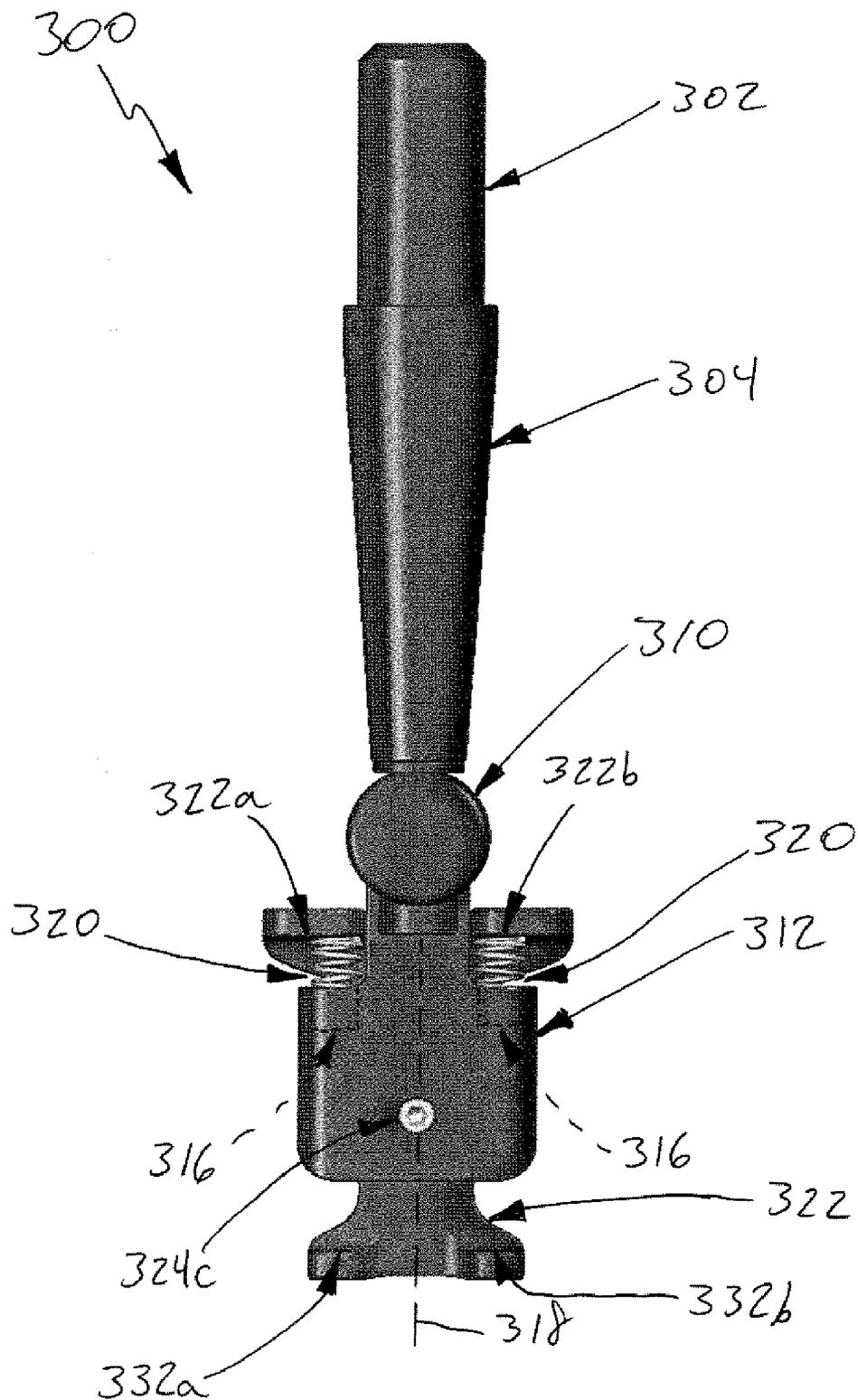


FIG. 3D

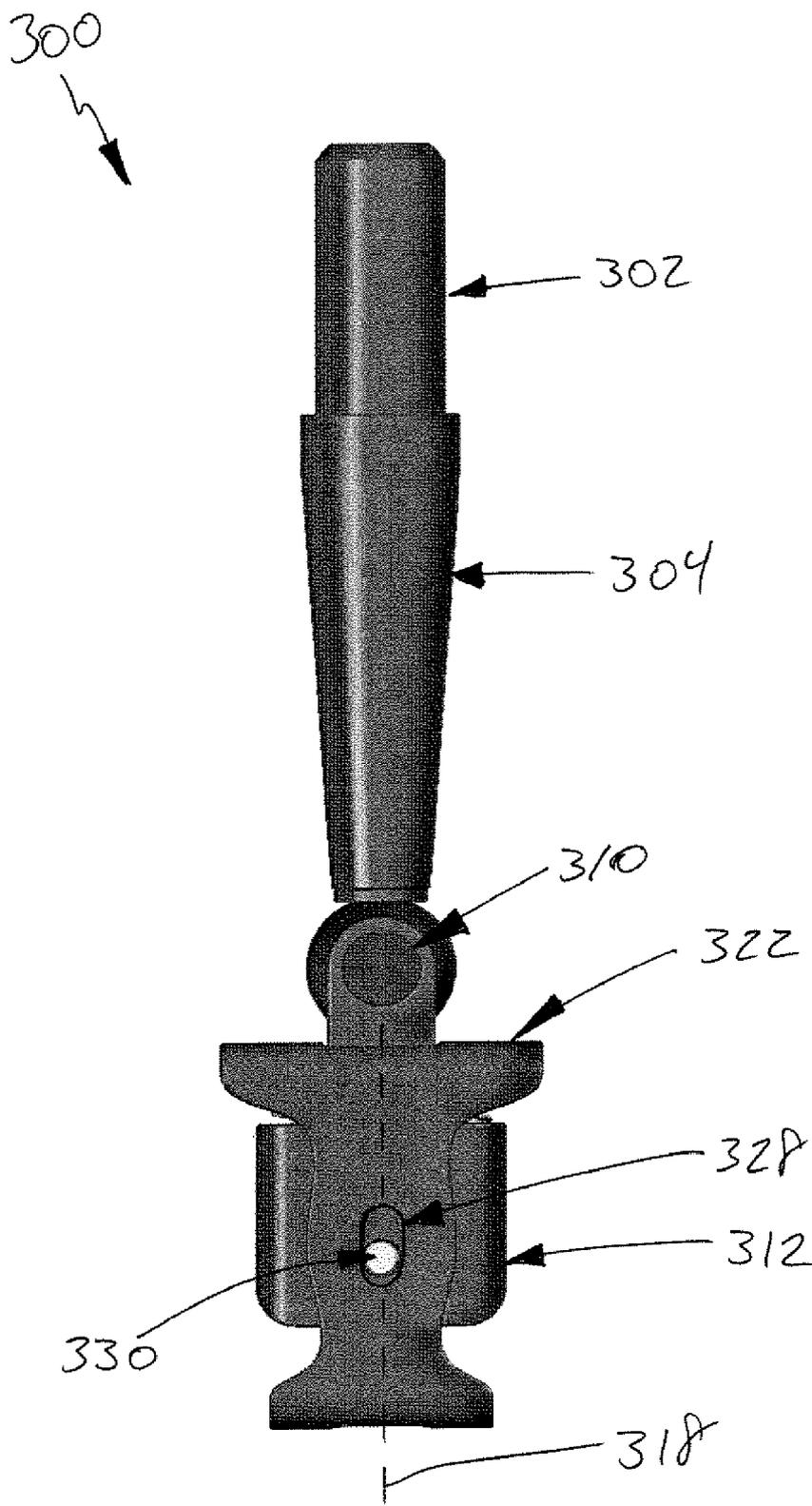


FIG. 3E

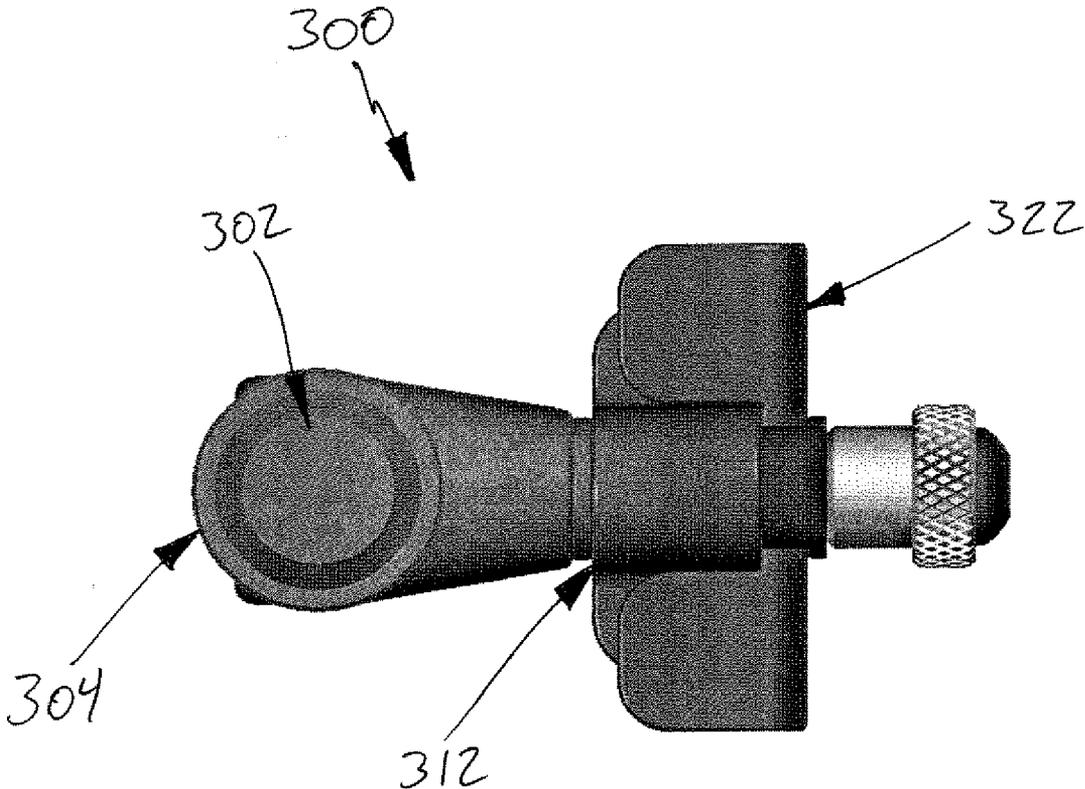


FIG. 3F

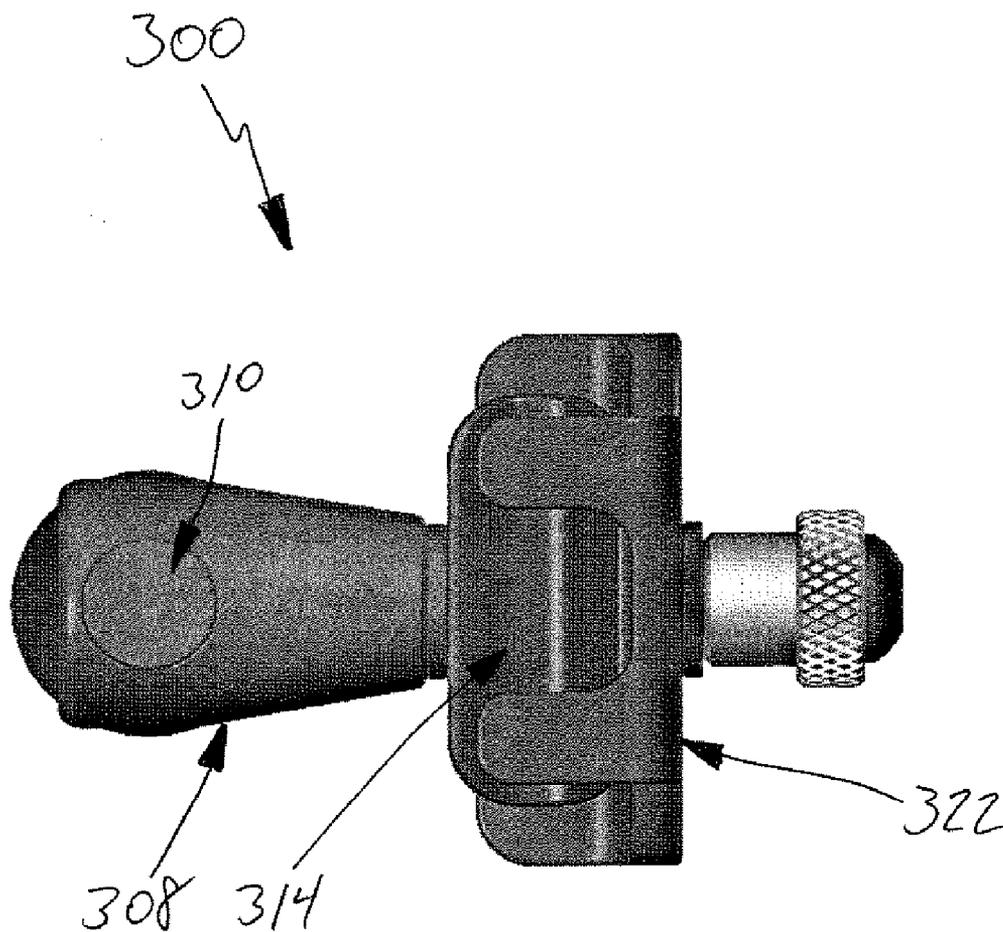


FIG. 3G

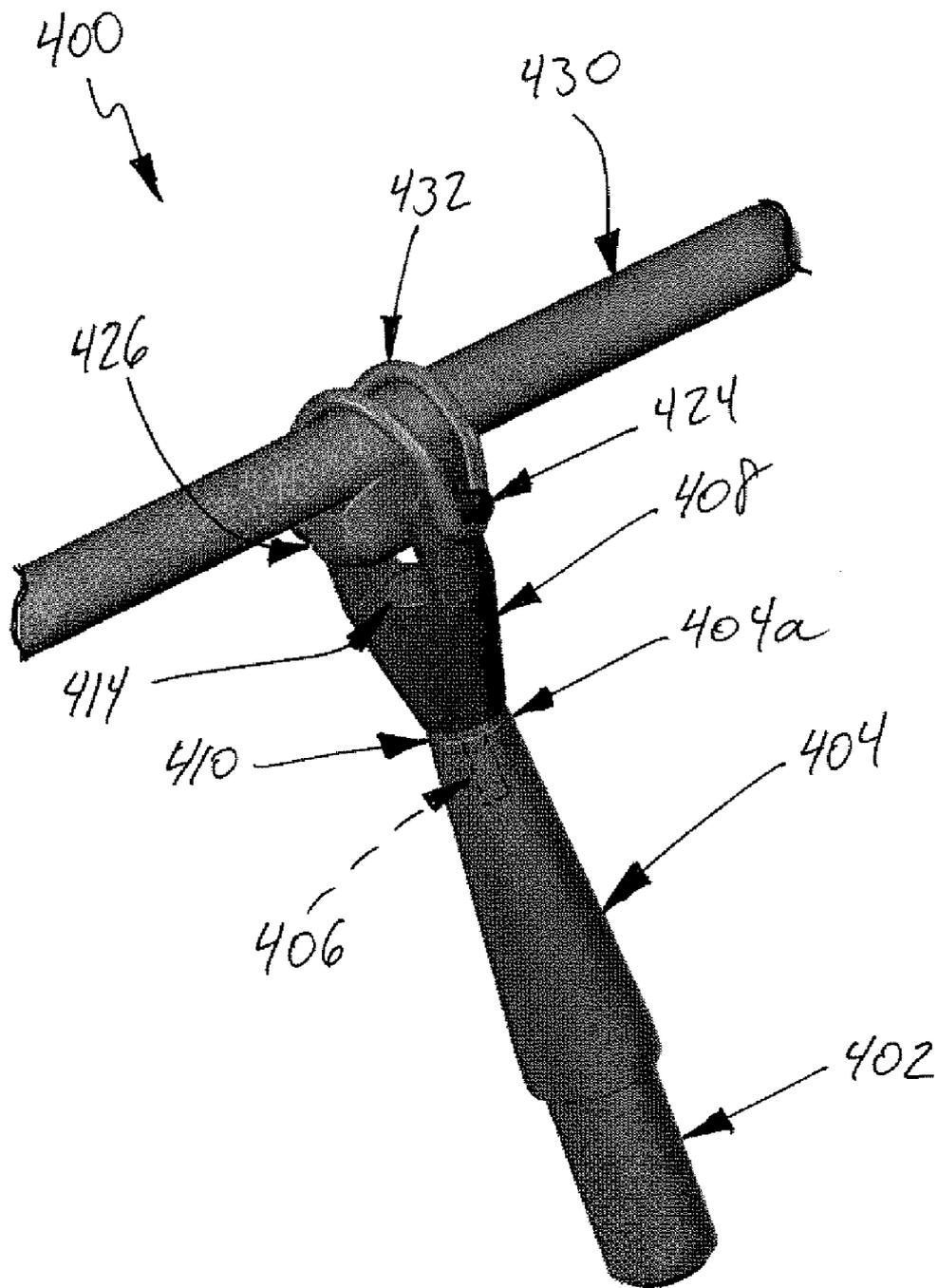


FIG. 3H

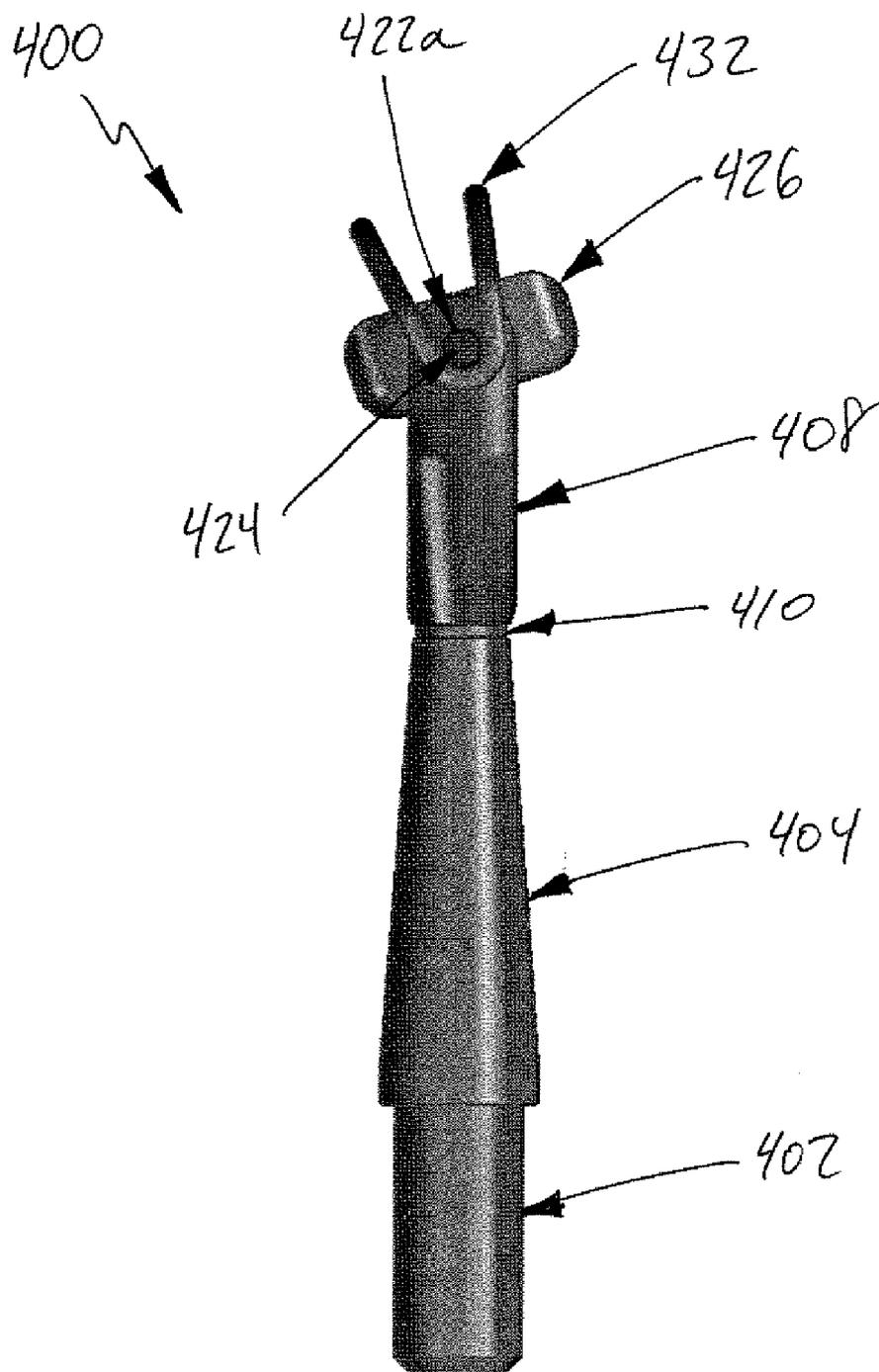


FIG. 3I

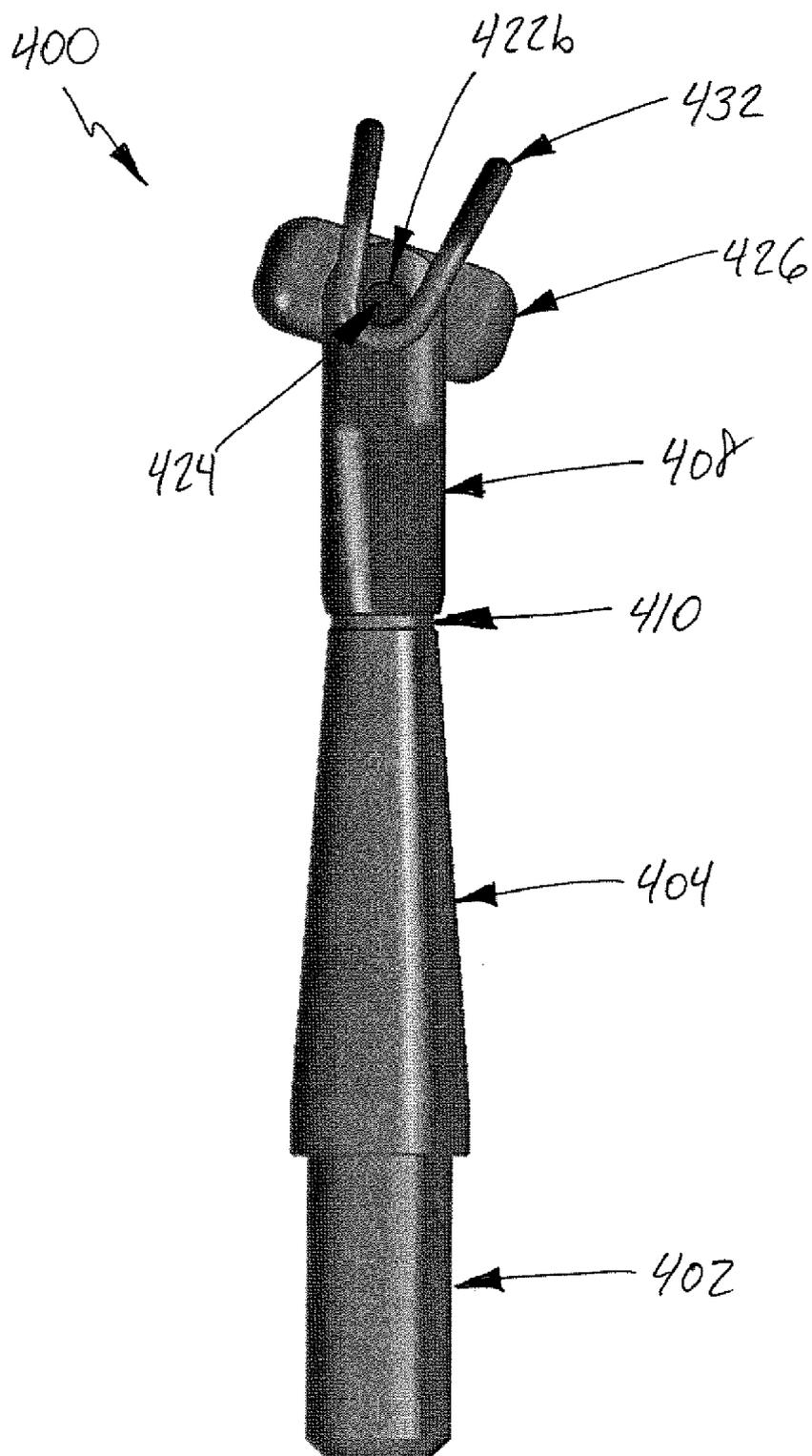


FIG. 3J

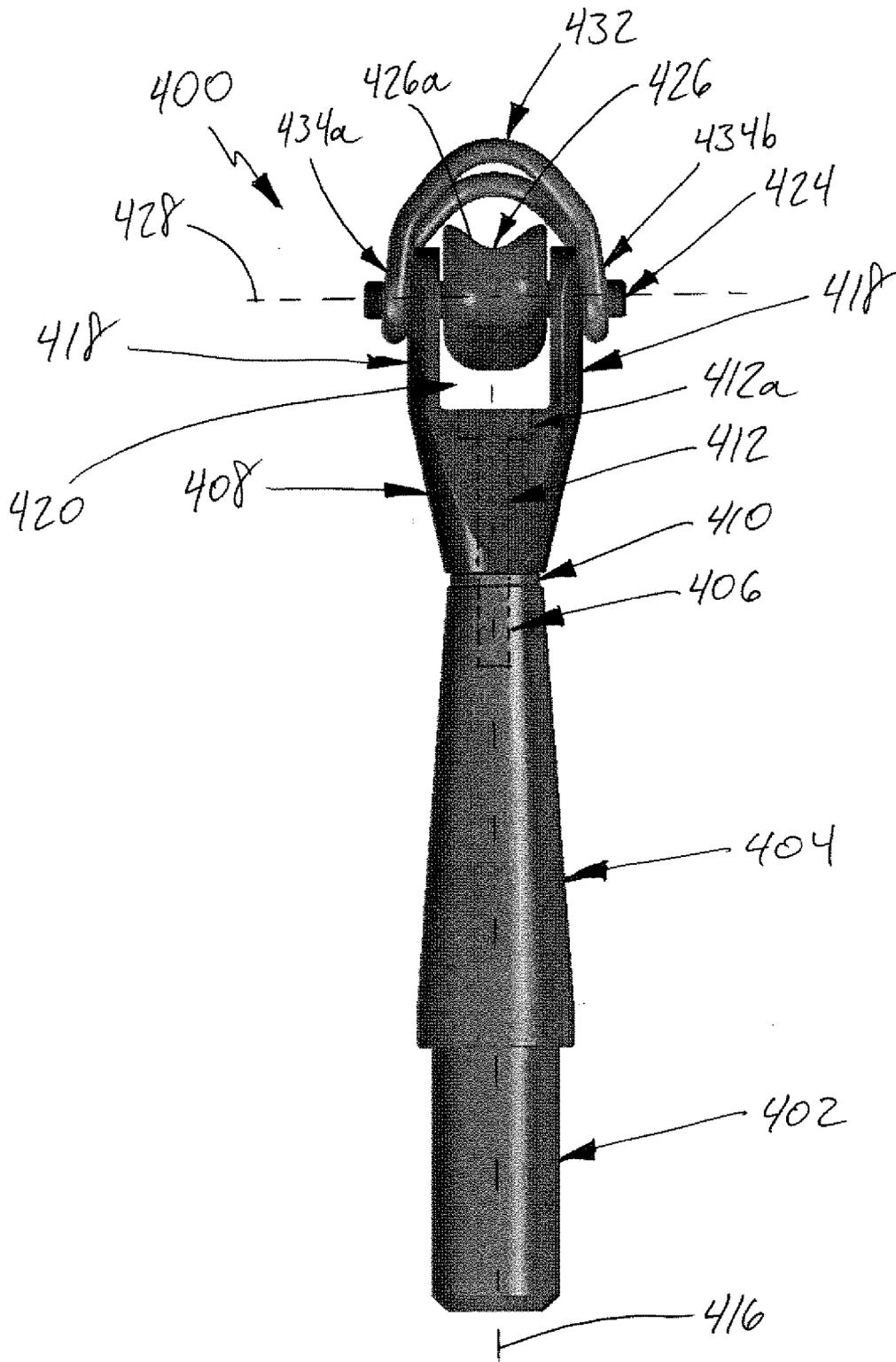


FIG. 3K

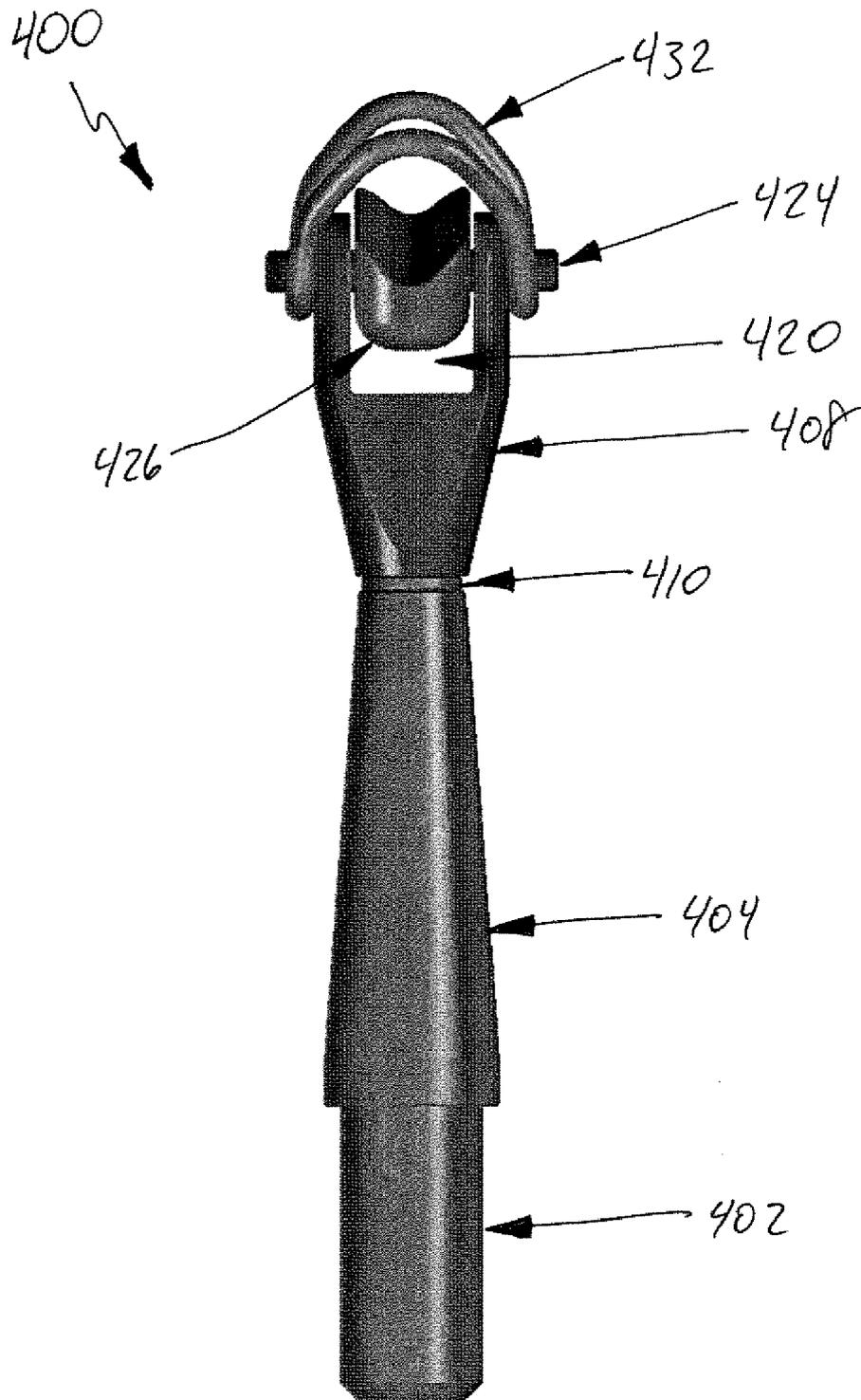


FIG. 3L

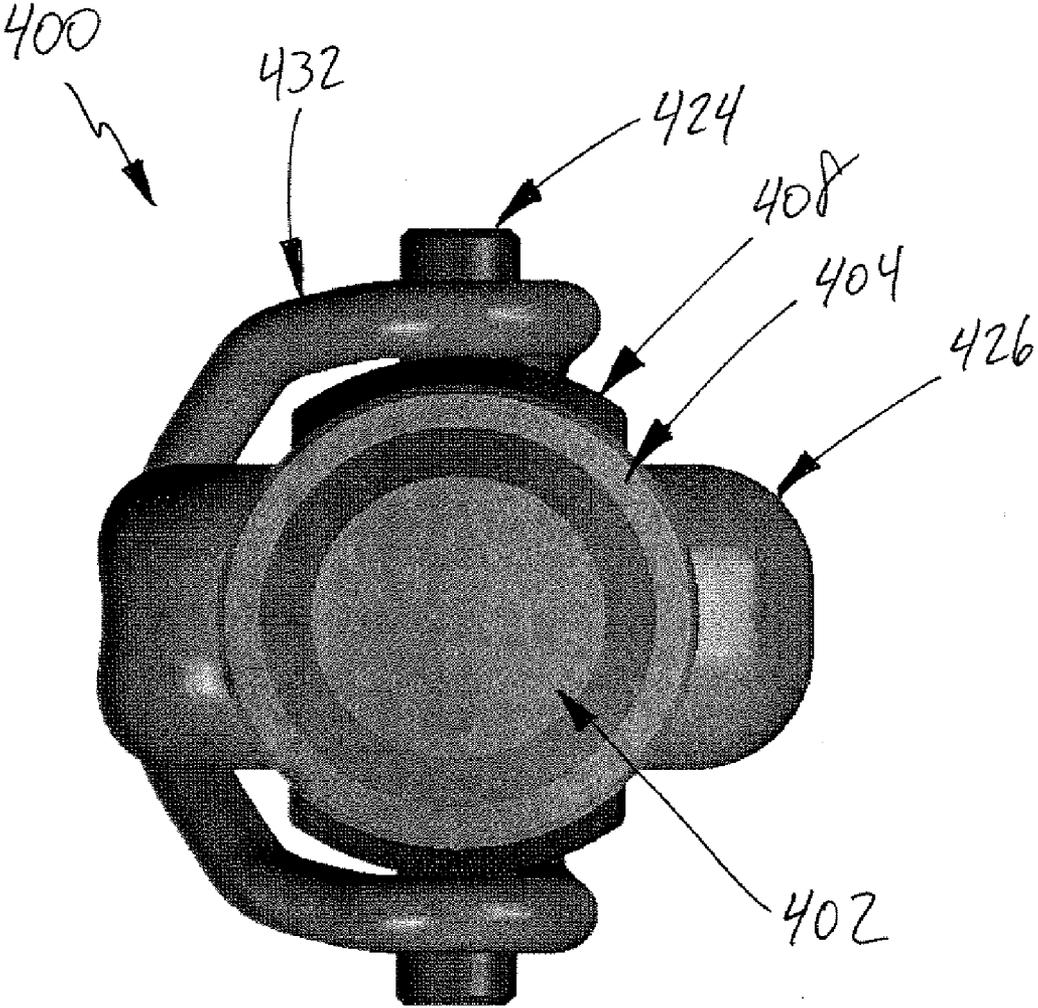


FIG. 3M

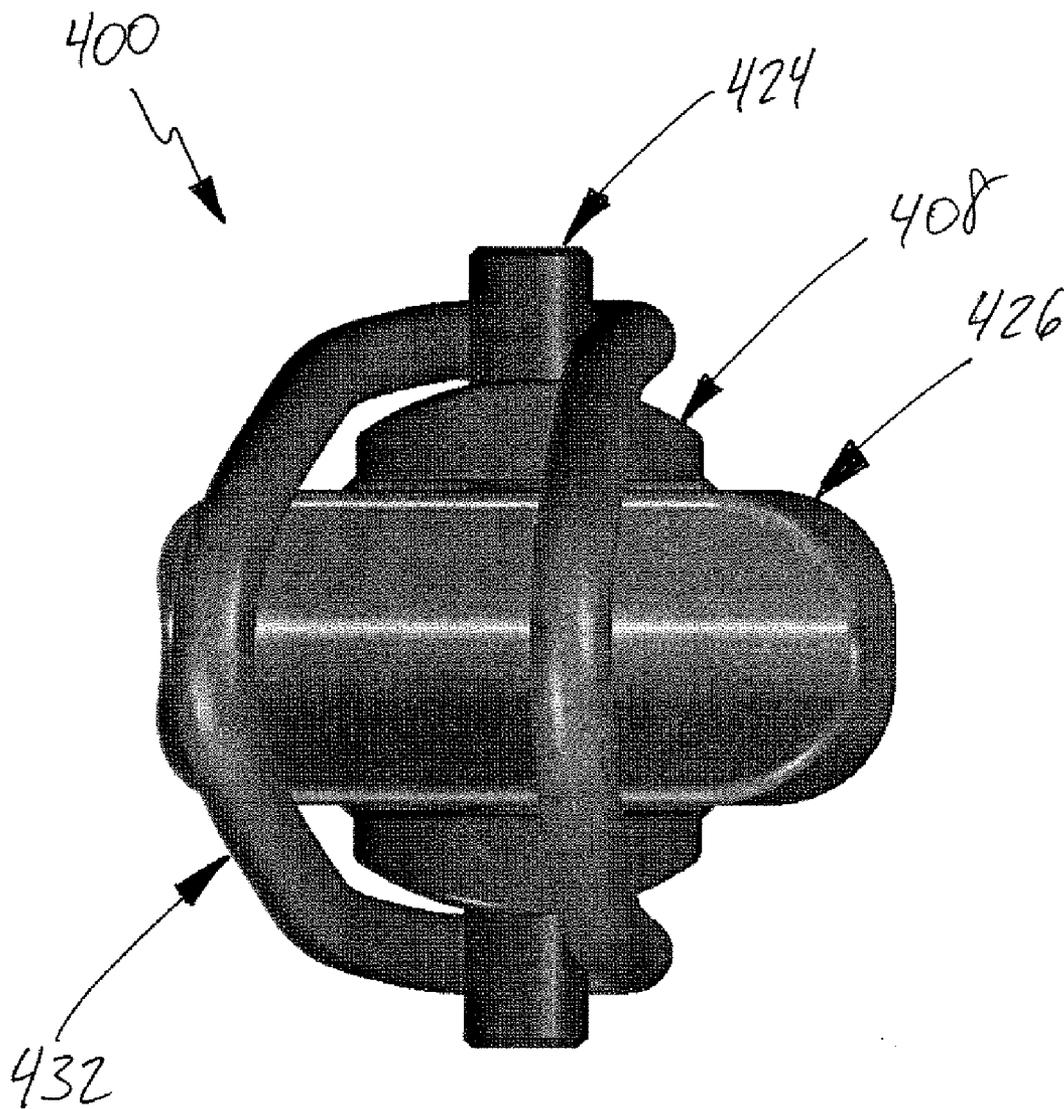


FIG. 3N

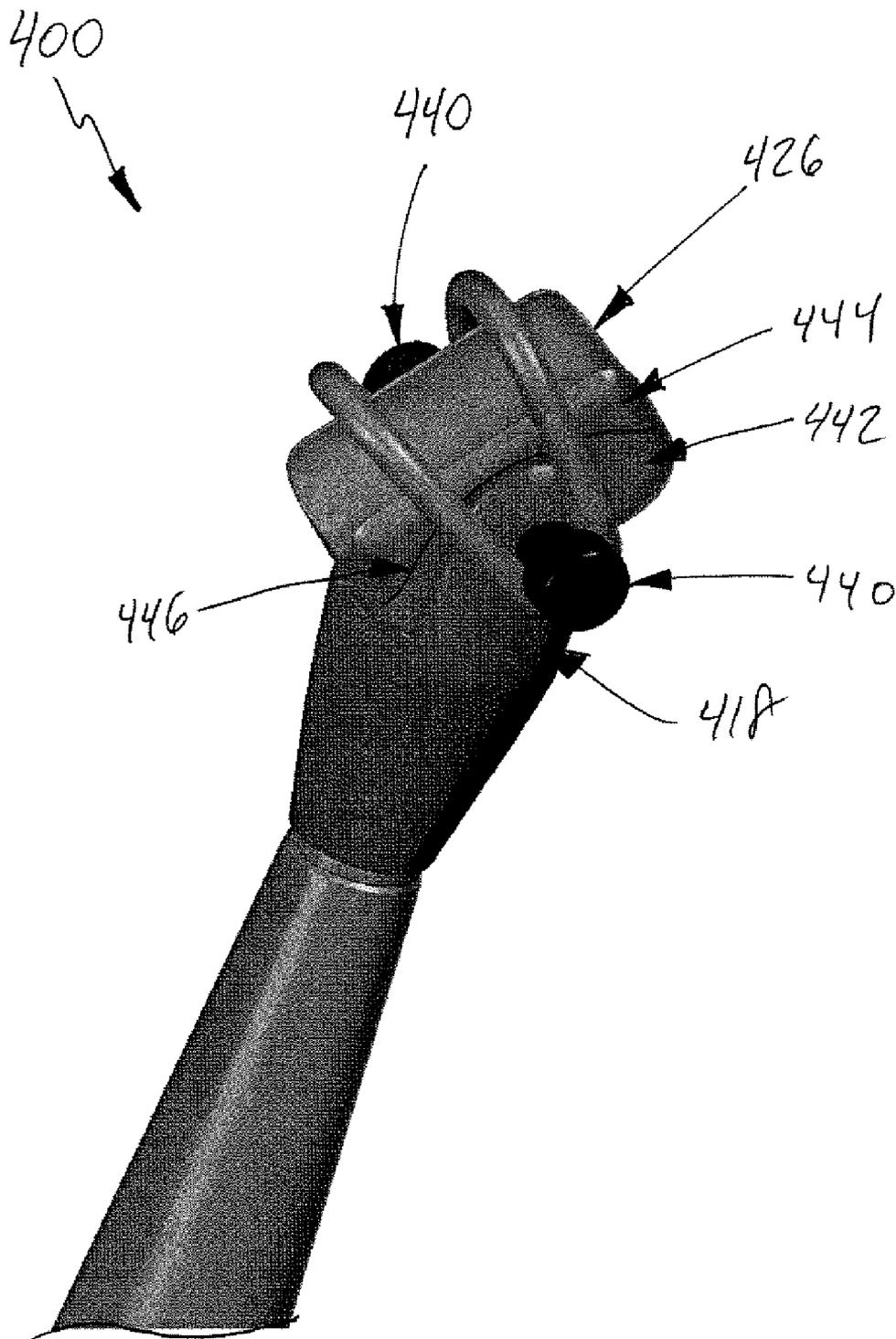


FIG. 3-O

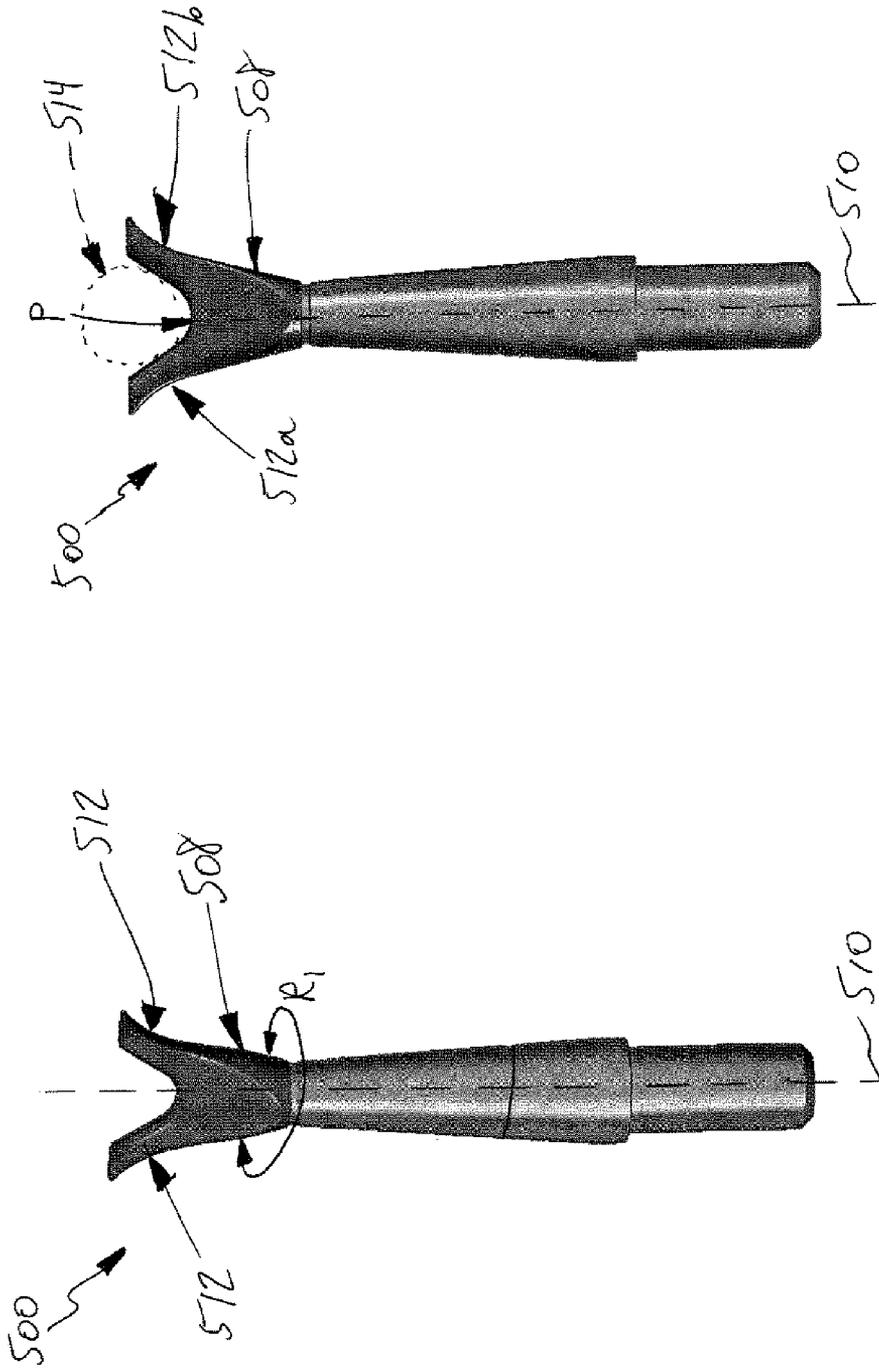


FIG. 3Q

FIG. 3P

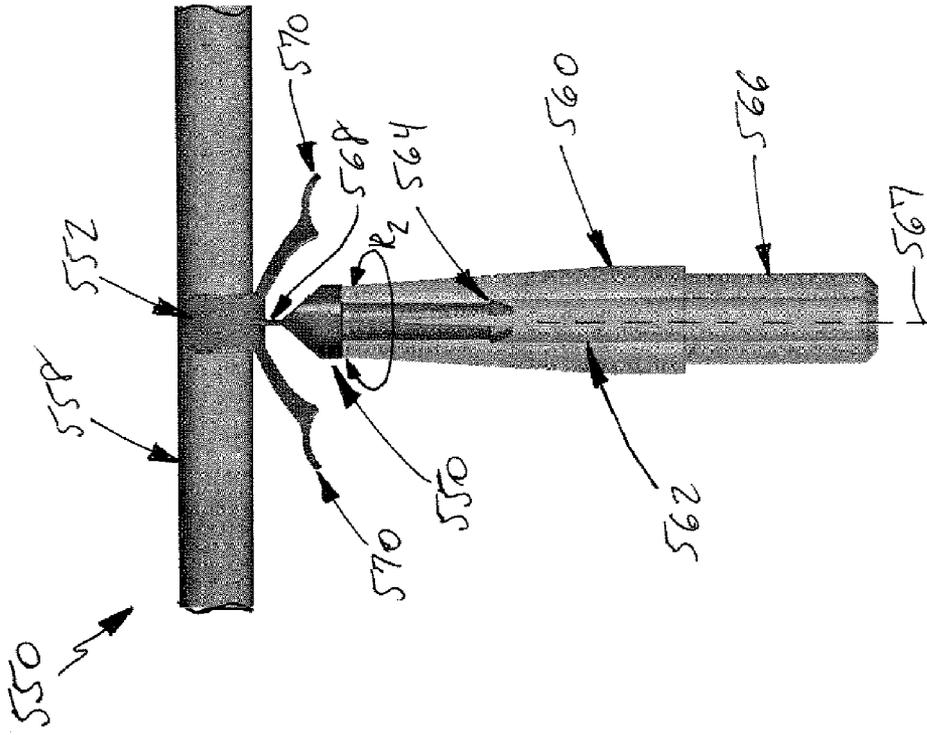


FIG. 3S

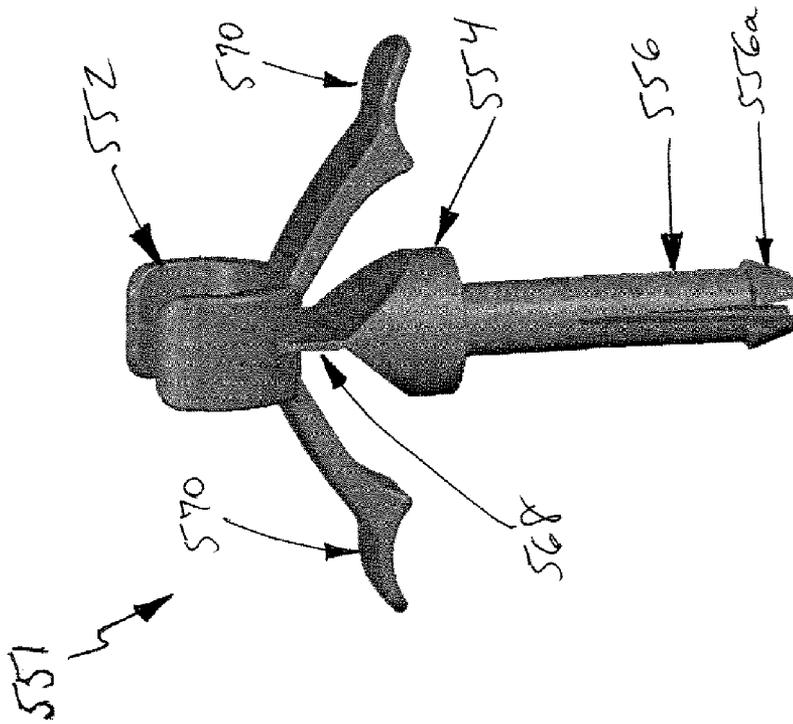


FIG. 3R

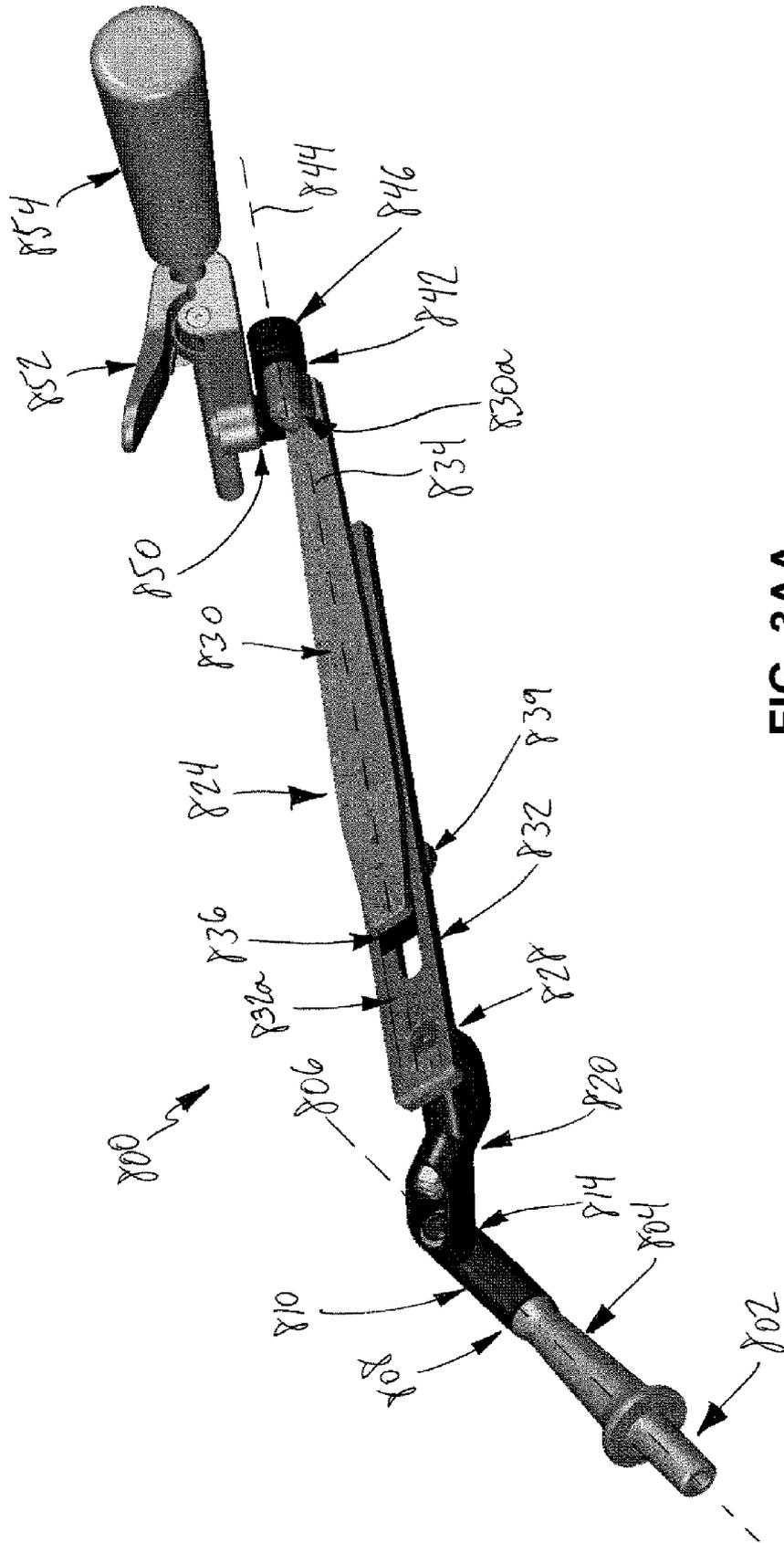


FIG. 3AA

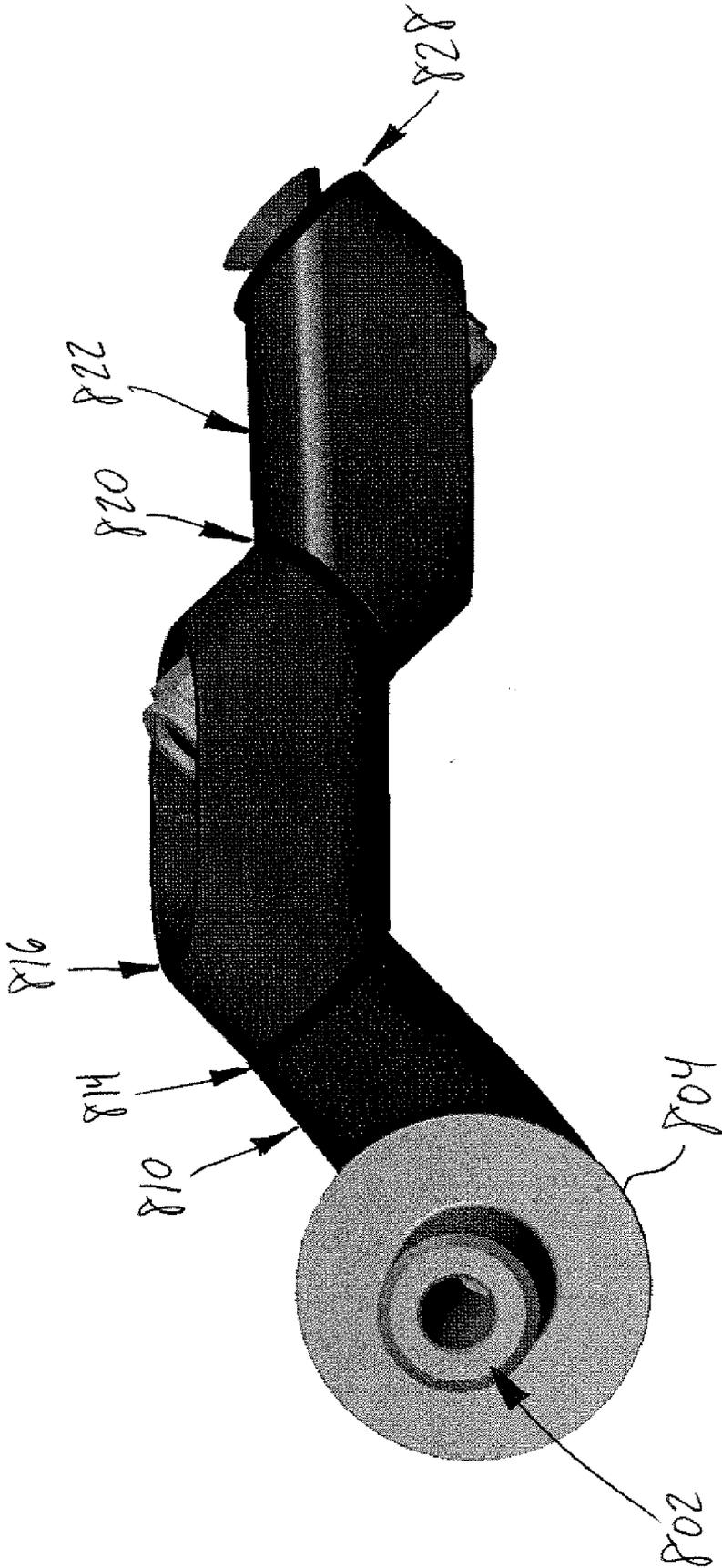


FIG. 3BB

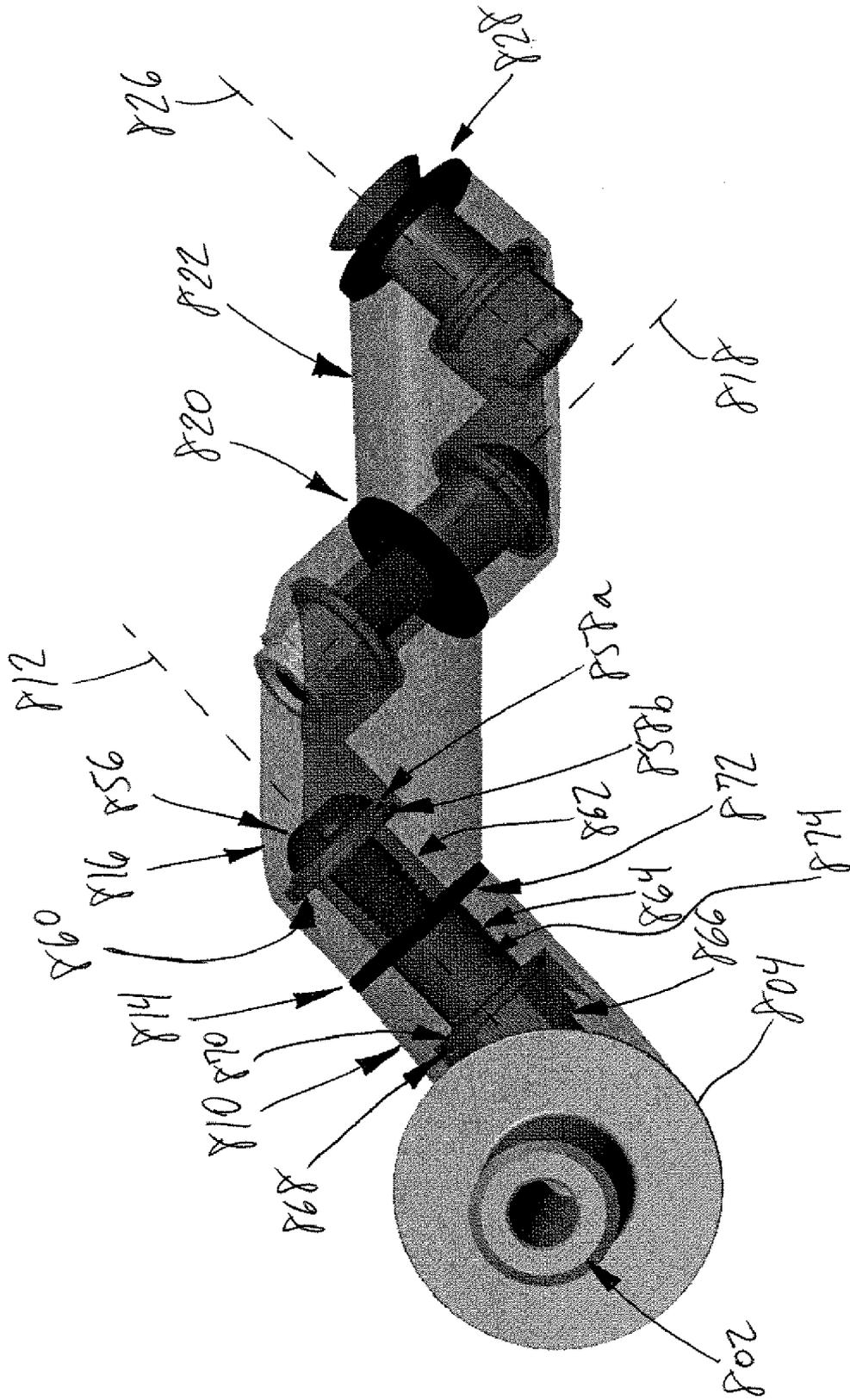


FIG. 3CC

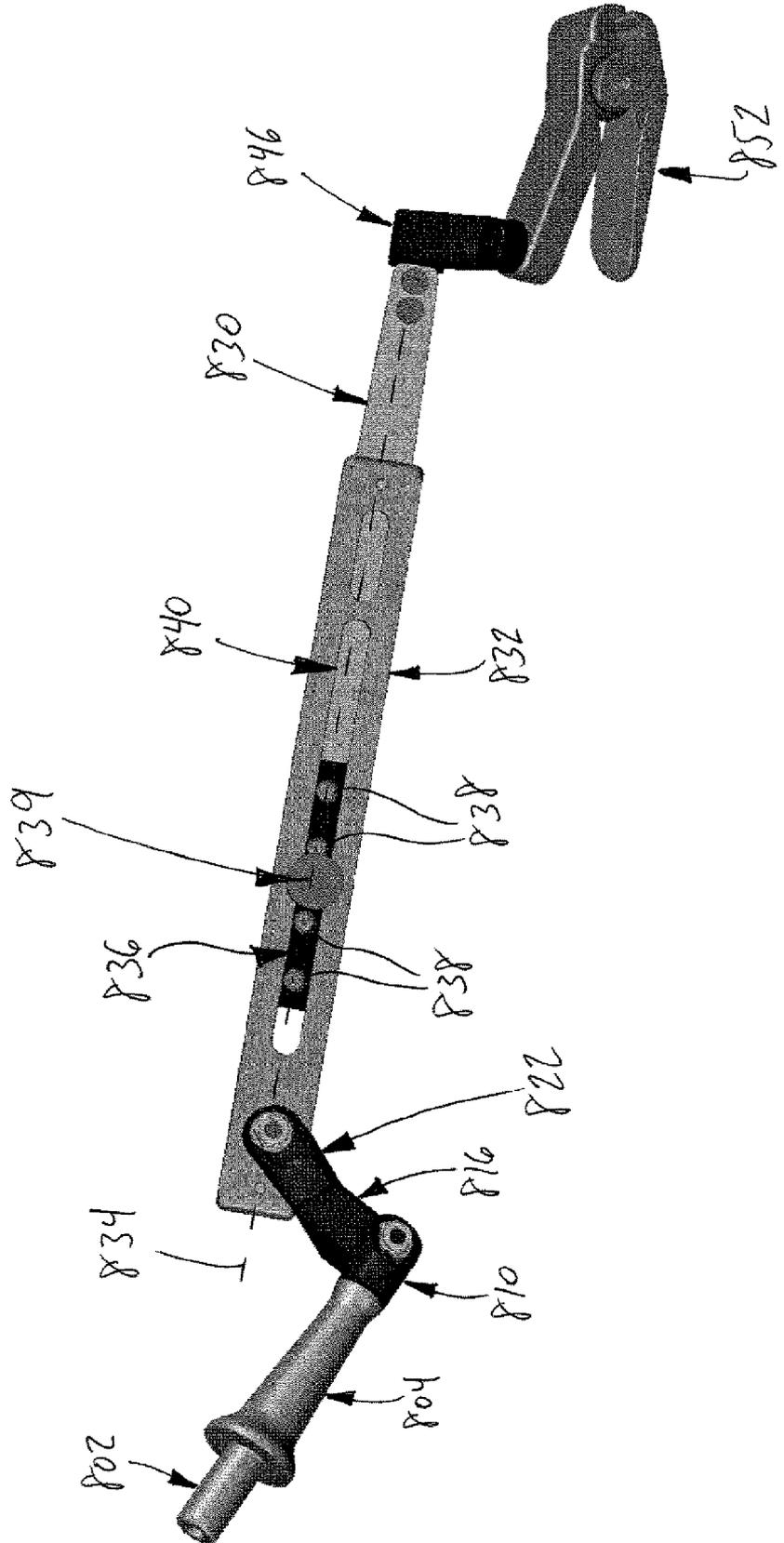


FIG. 3DD

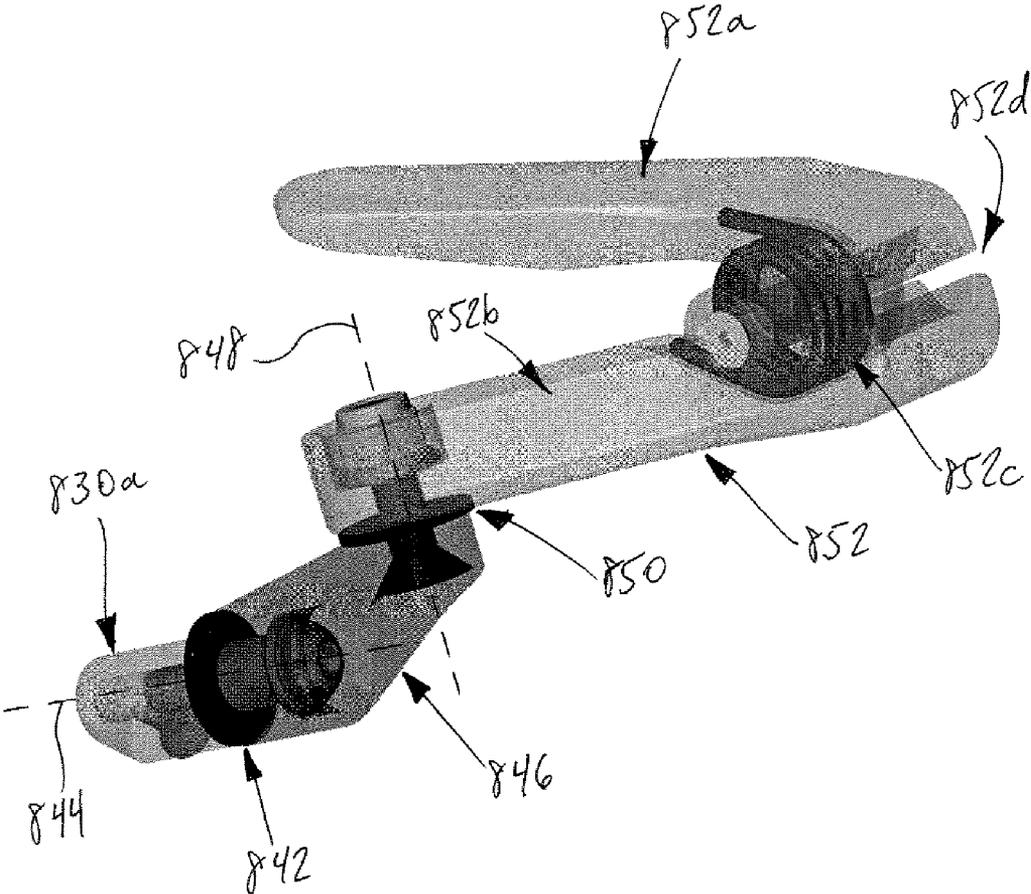


FIG. 3EE

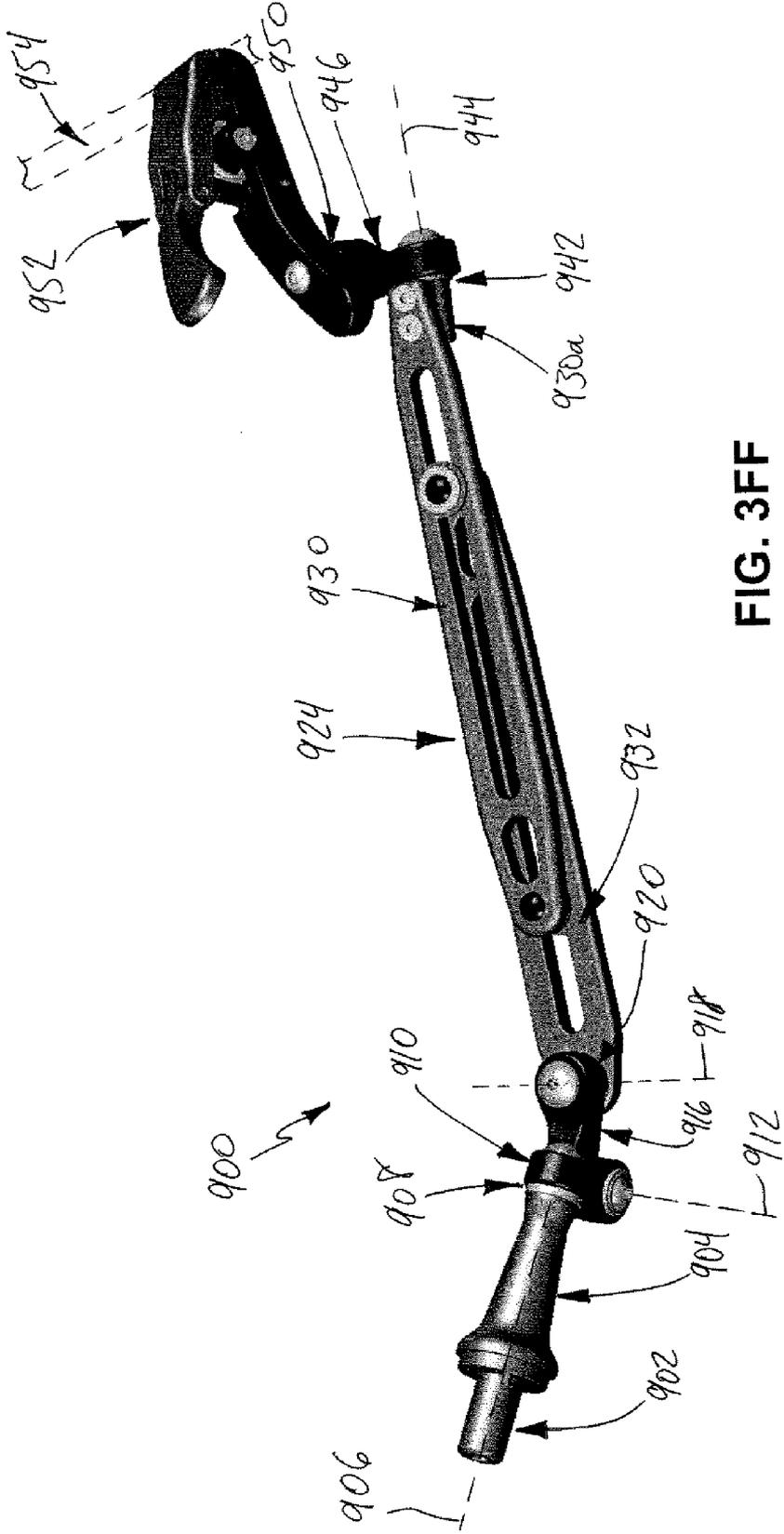


FIG. 3FF

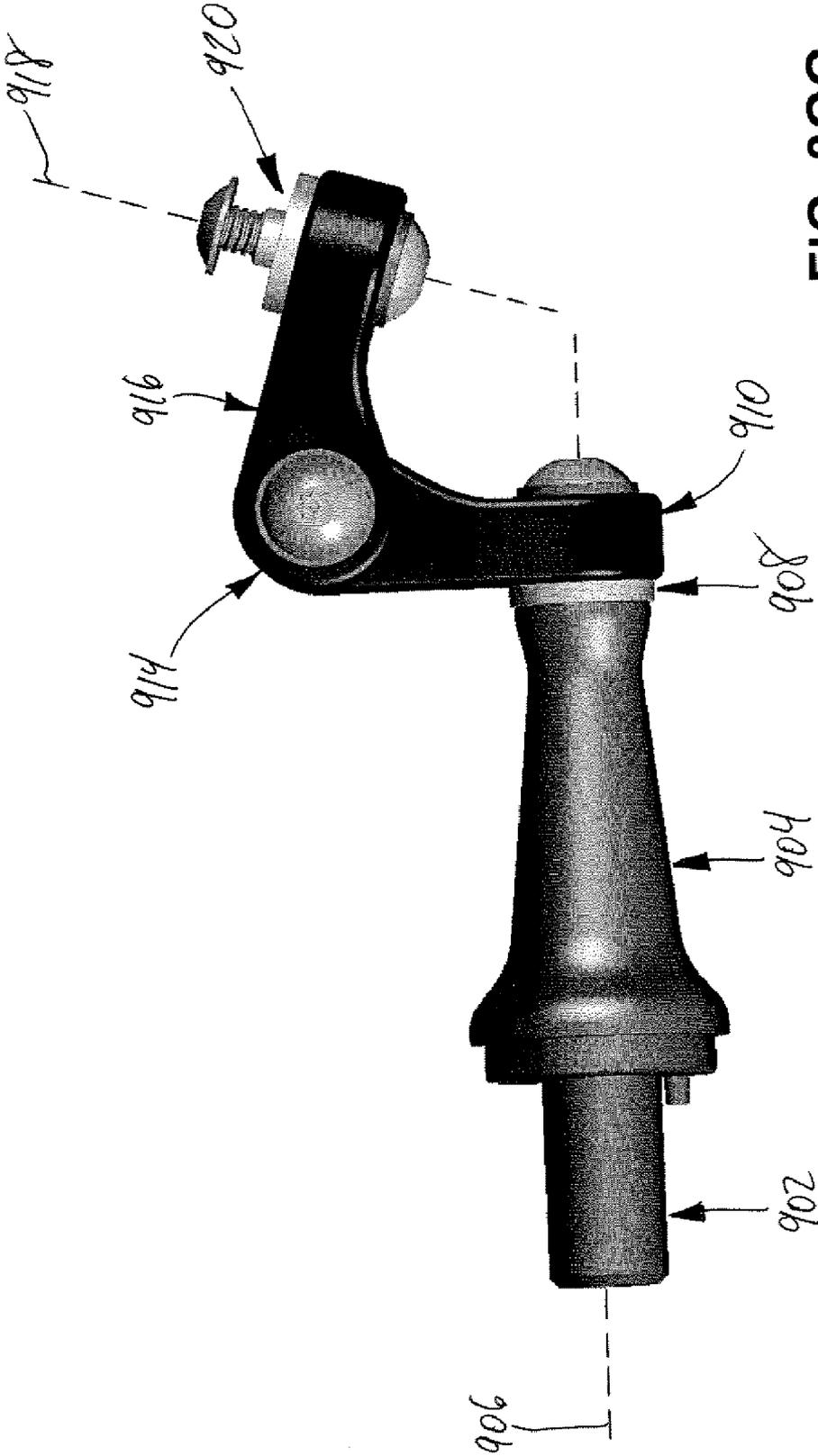


FIG. 3GG

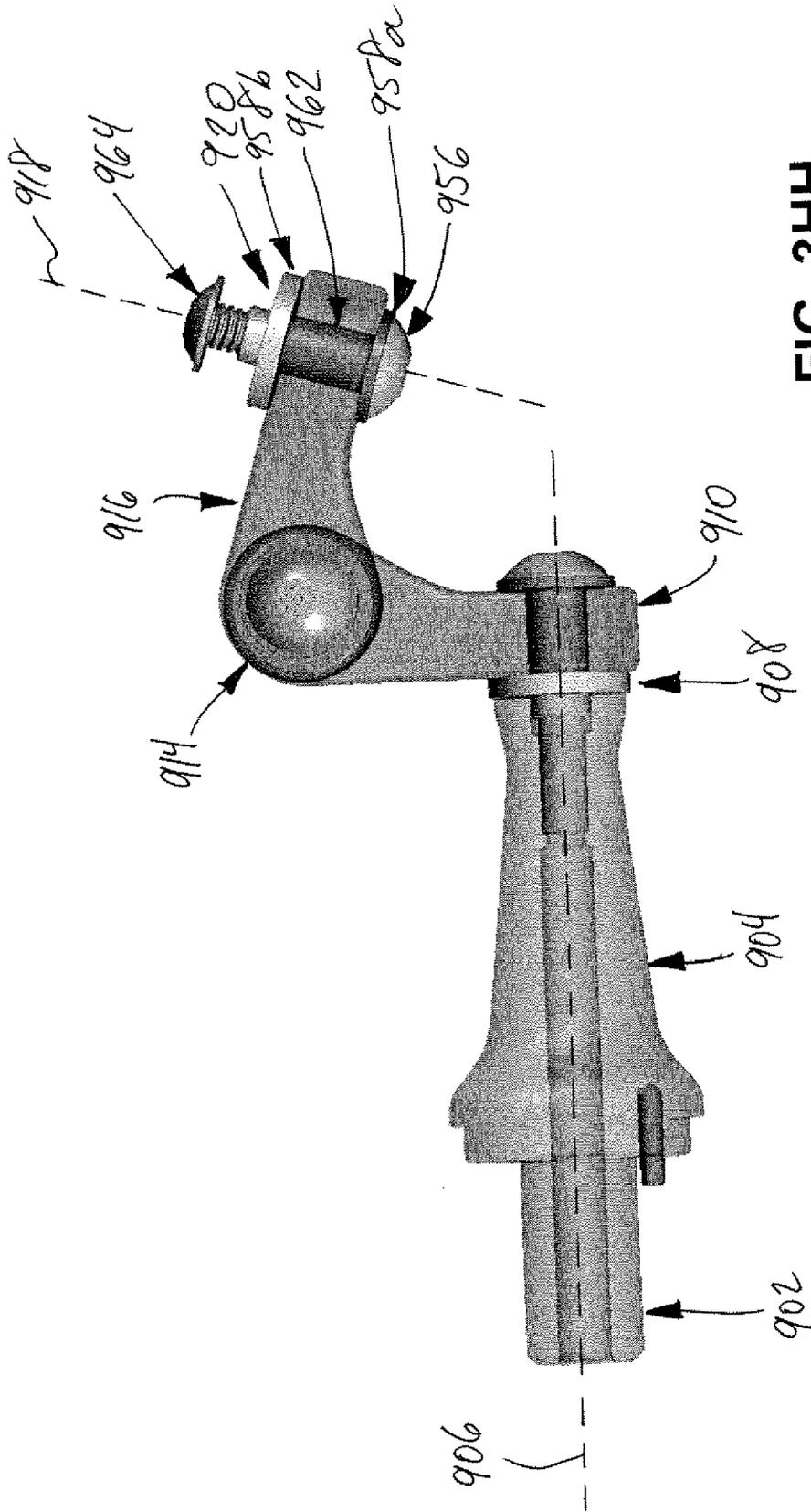


FIG. 3HH

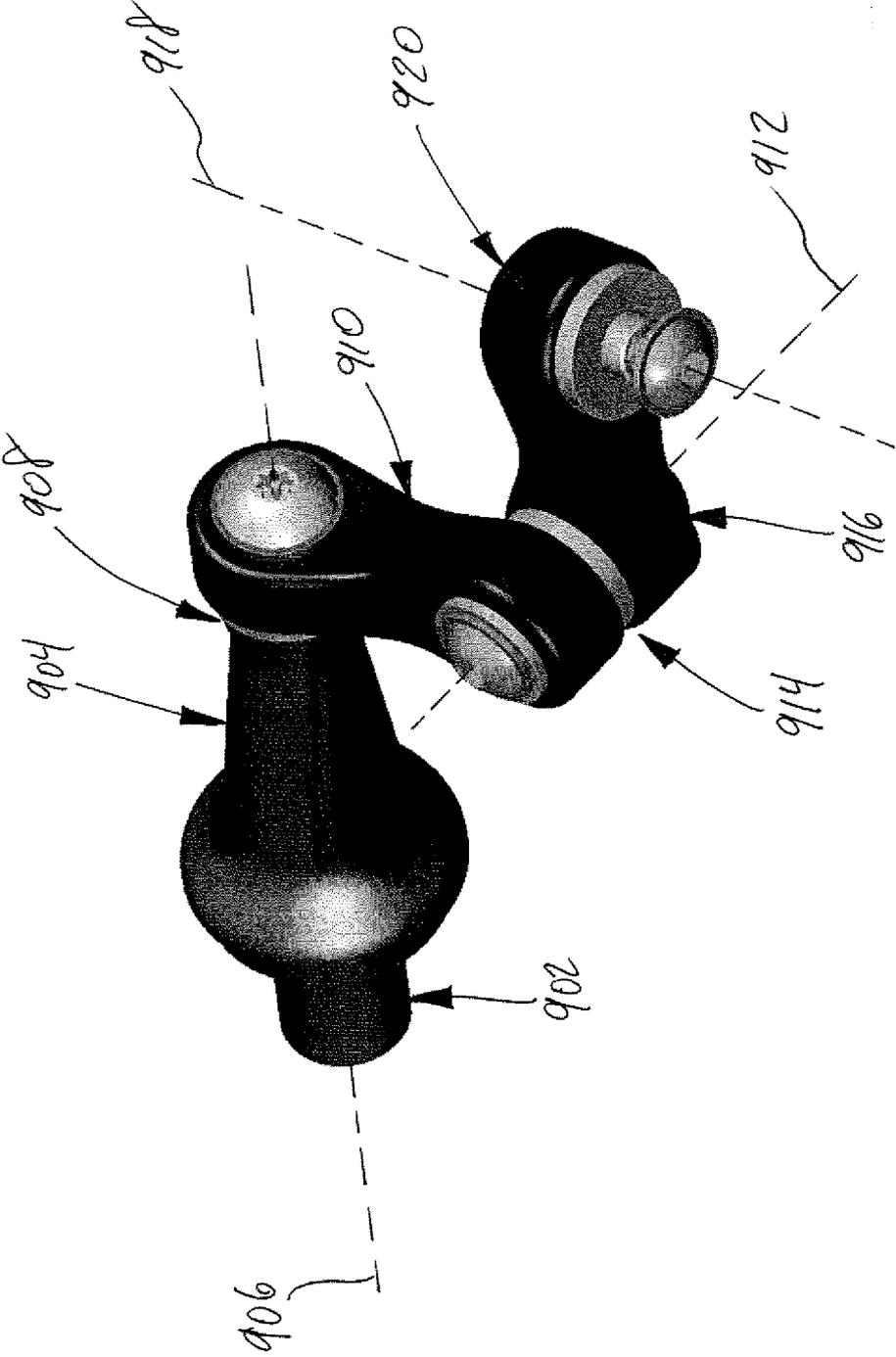
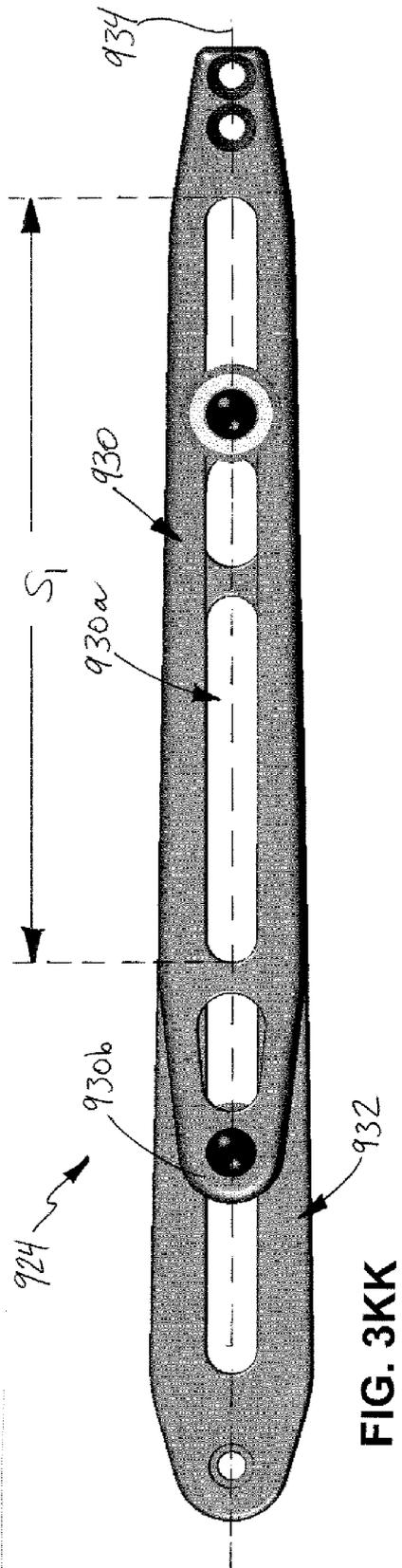
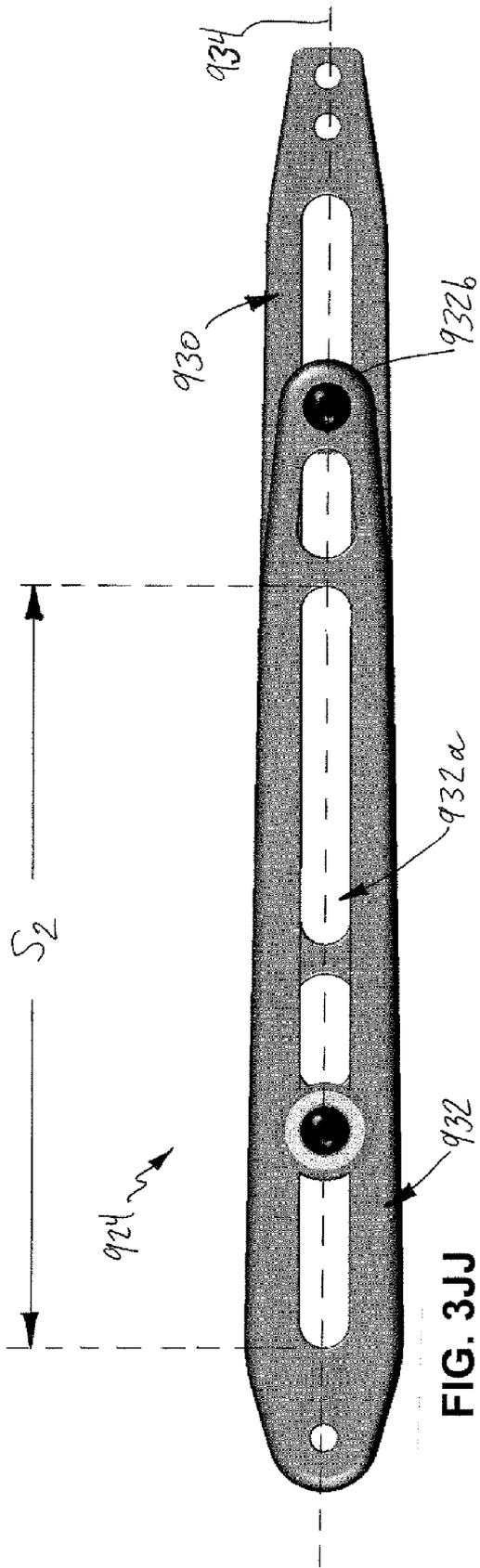


FIG. 3II



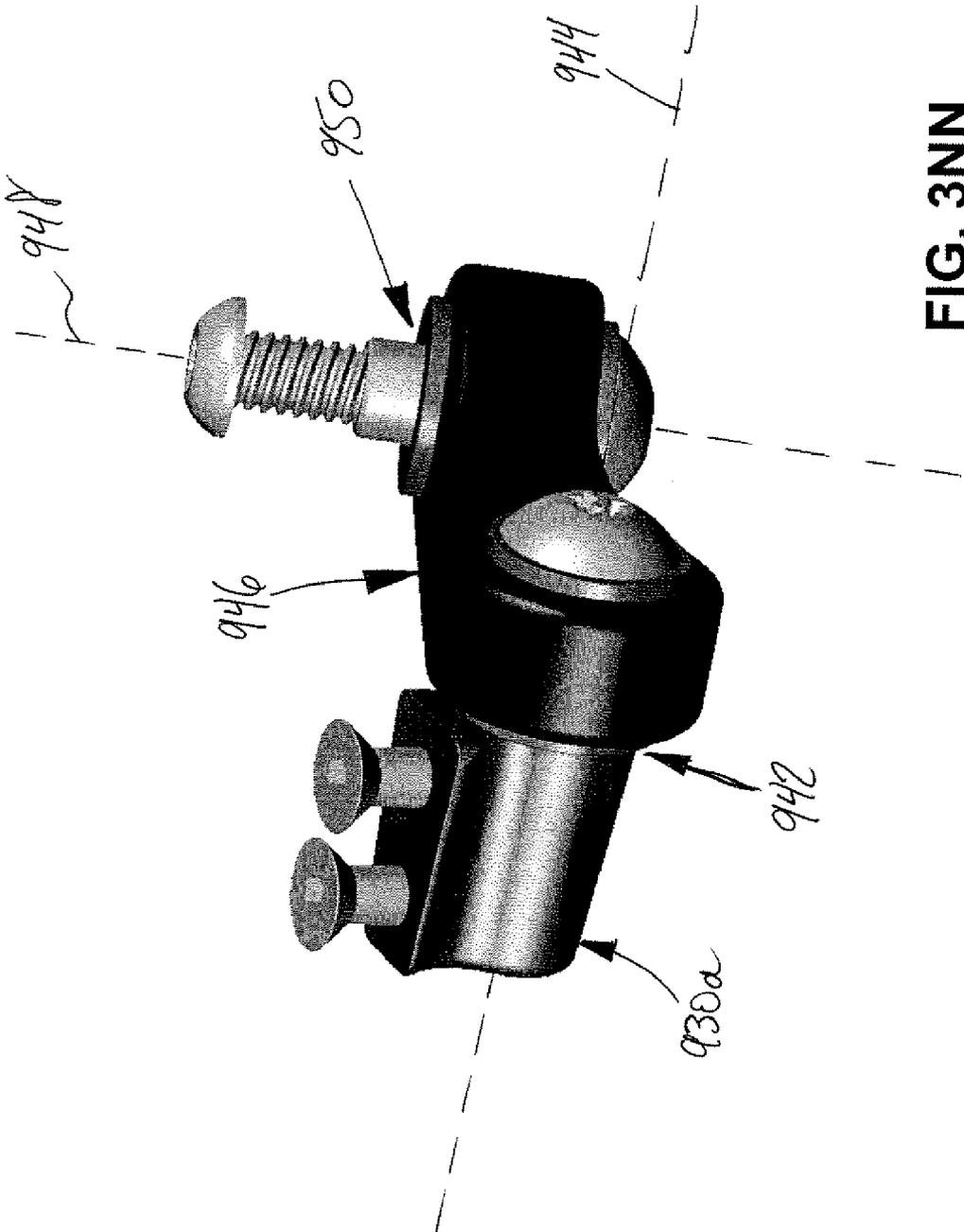


FIG. 3NN

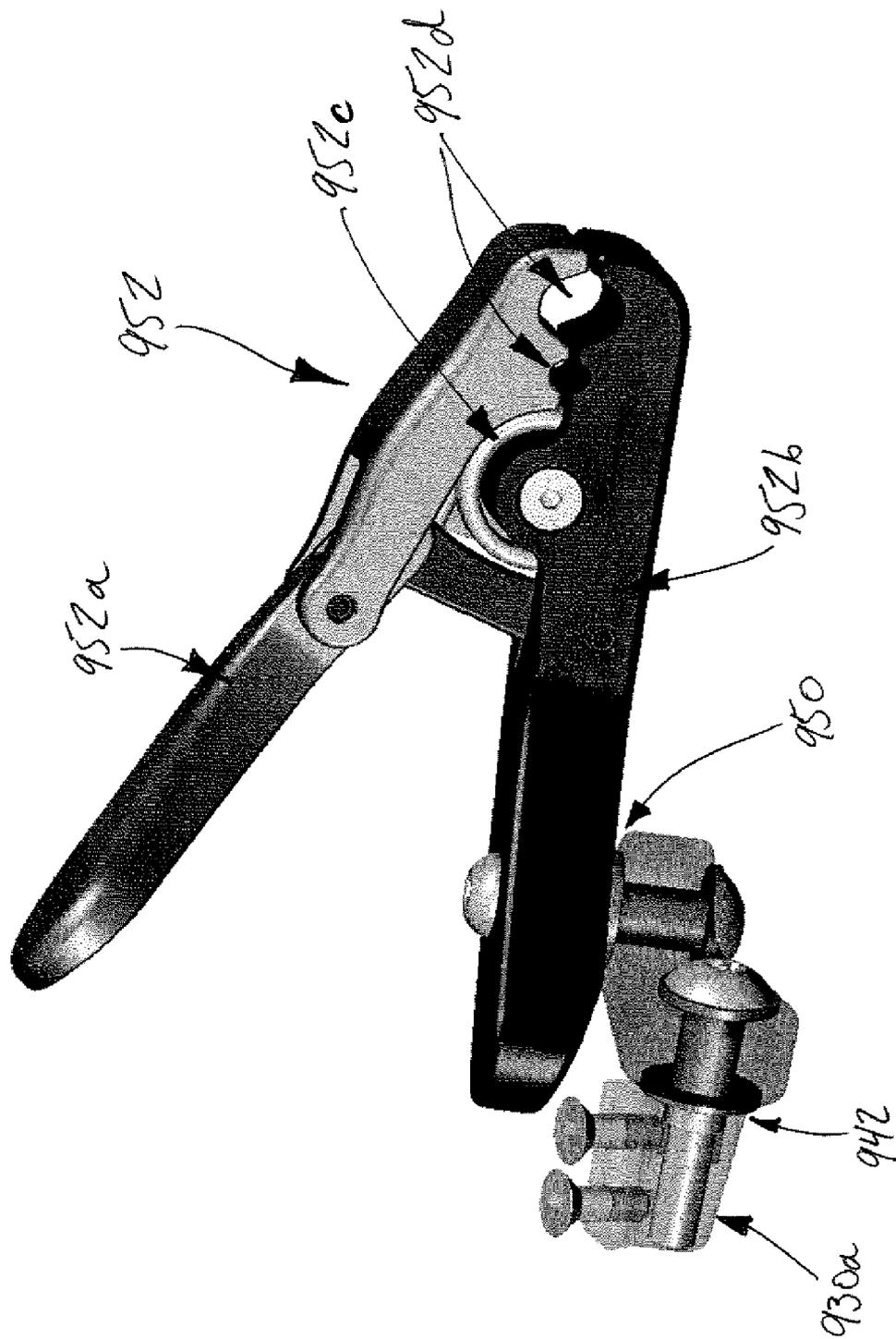


FIG. 3-00

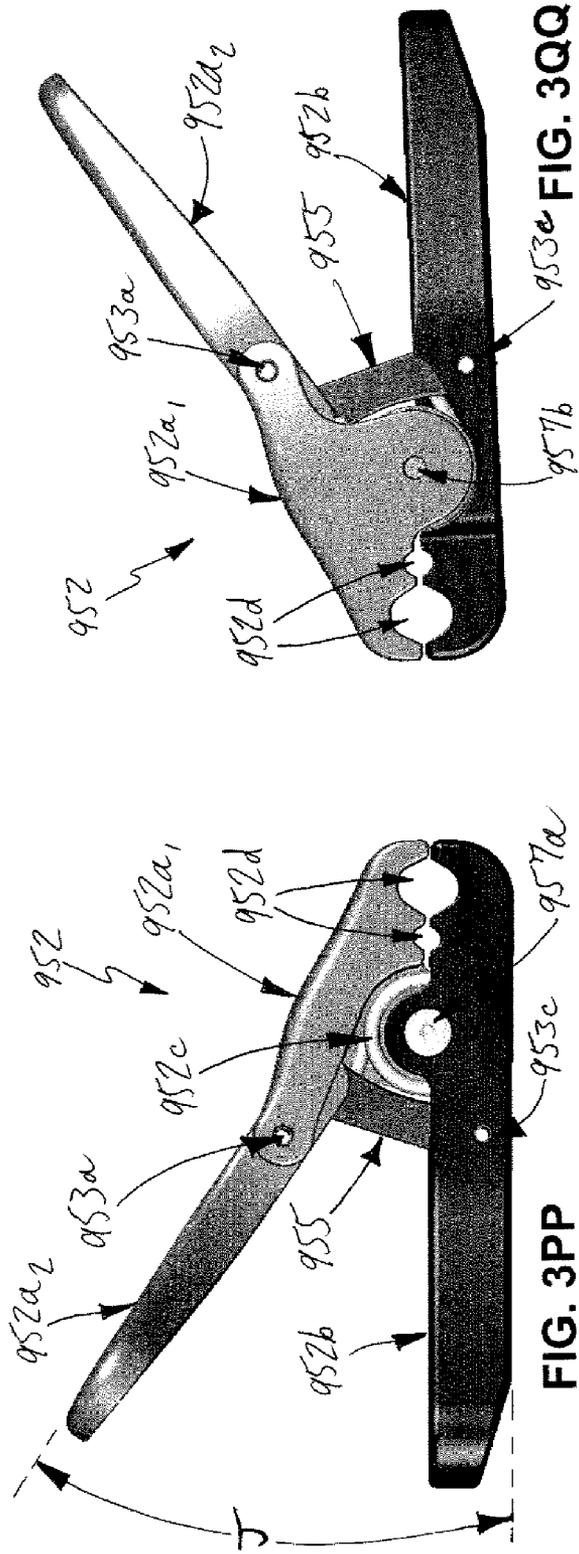


FIG. 3PP

FIG. 3QQ

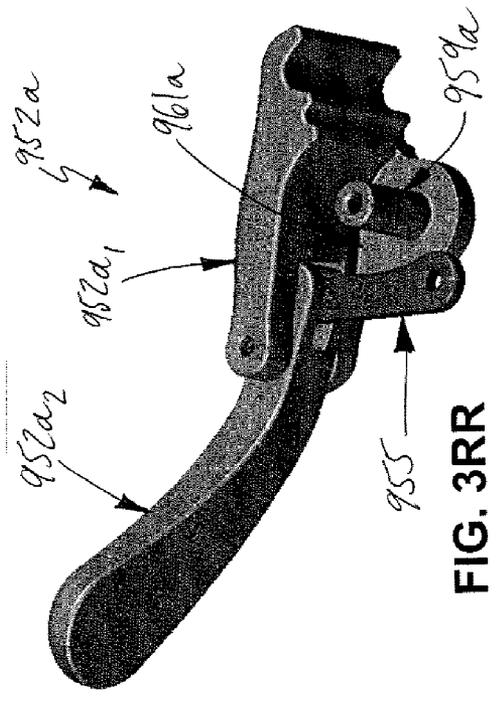


FIG. 3RR

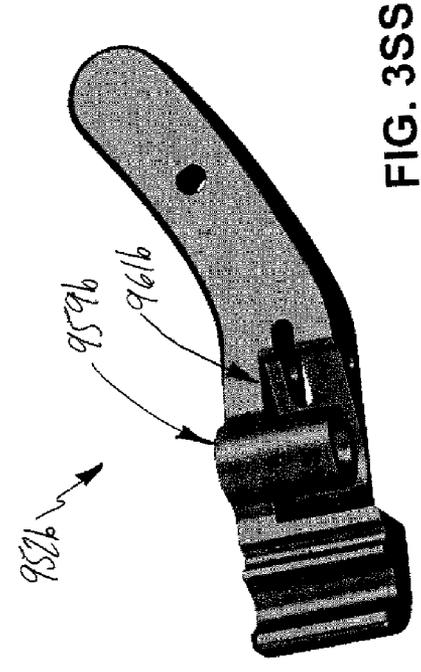


FIG. 3SS

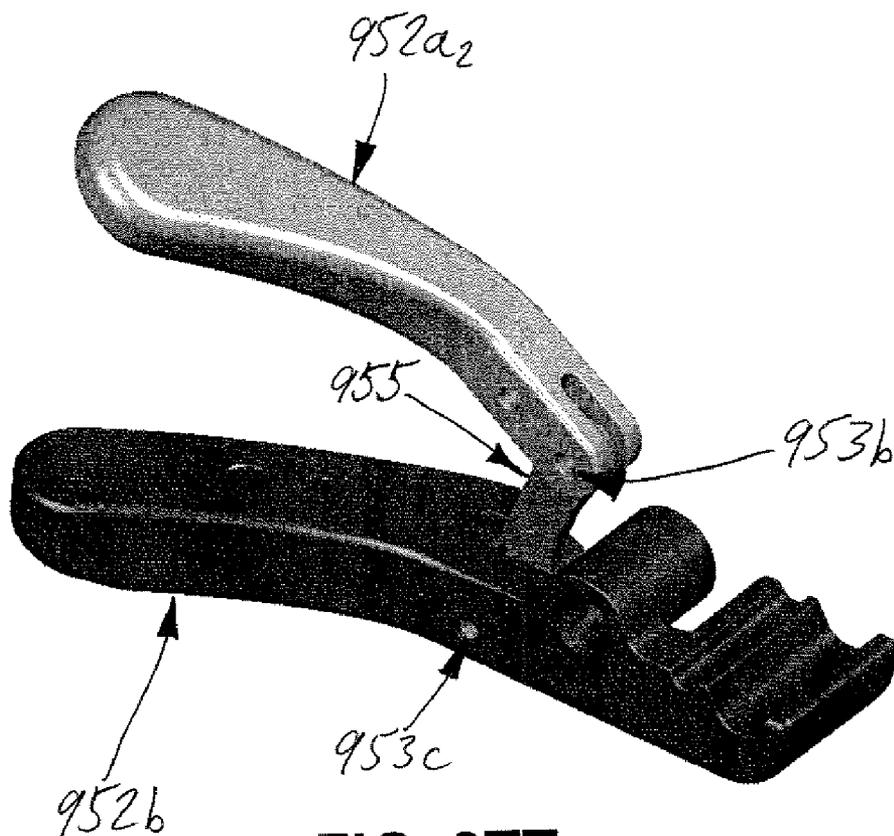


FIG. 3TT

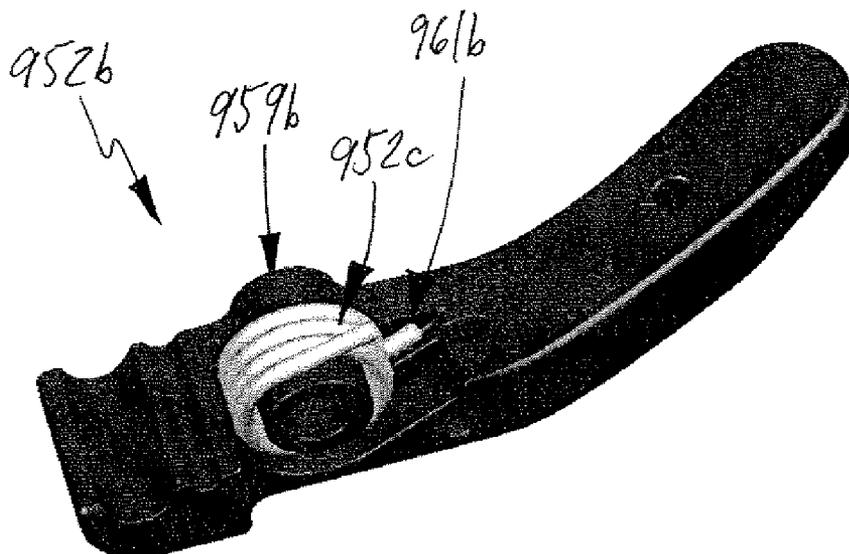
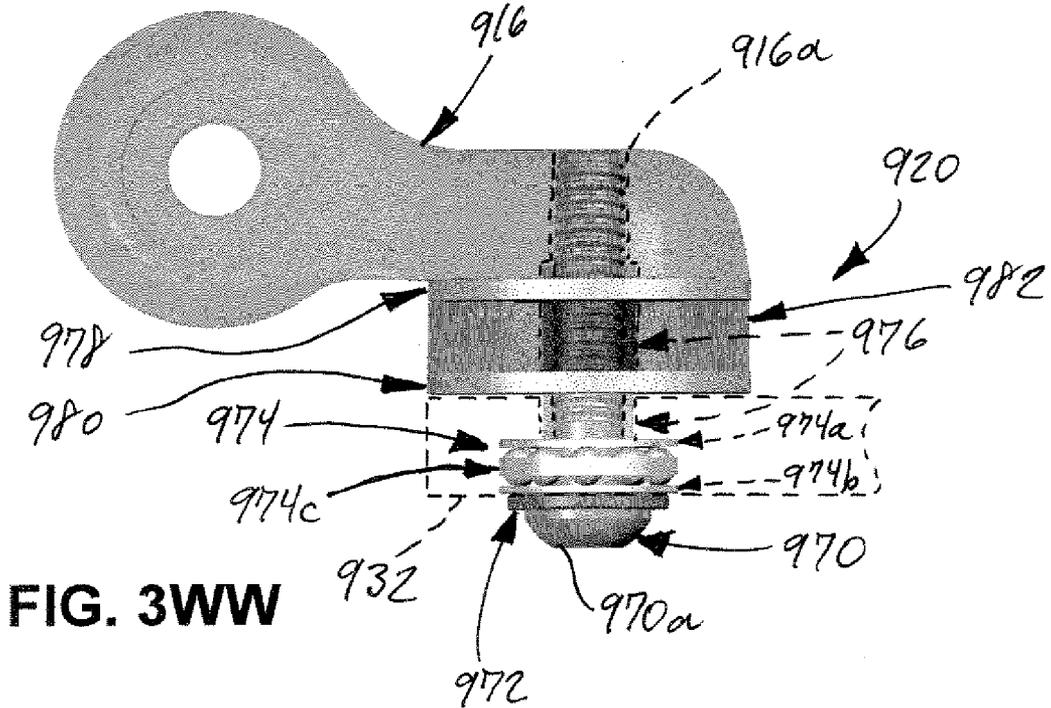
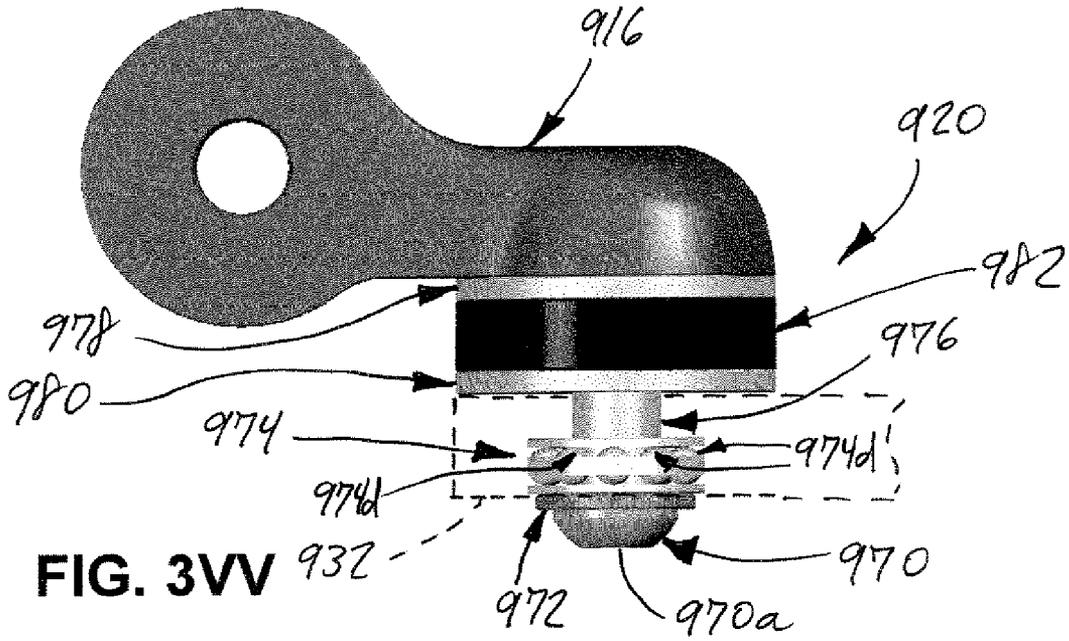


FIG. 3UU



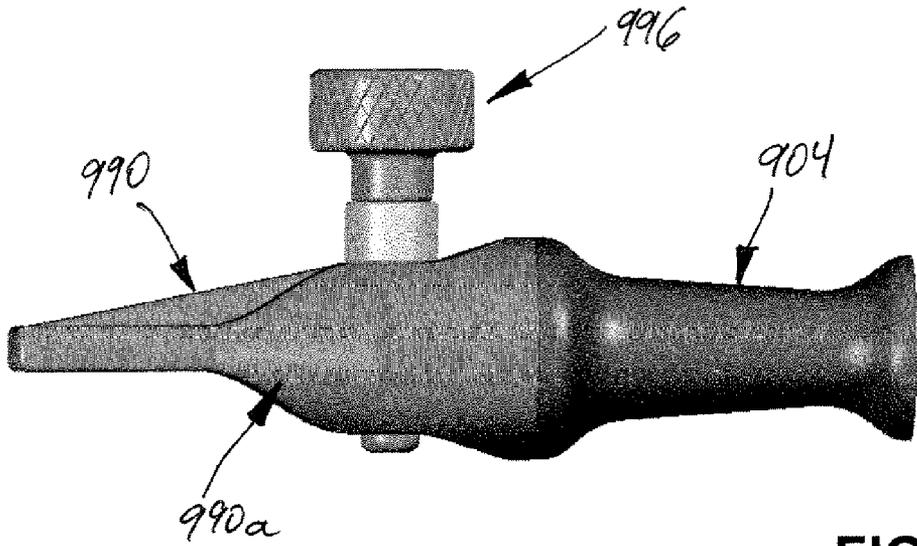


FIG. 3XX

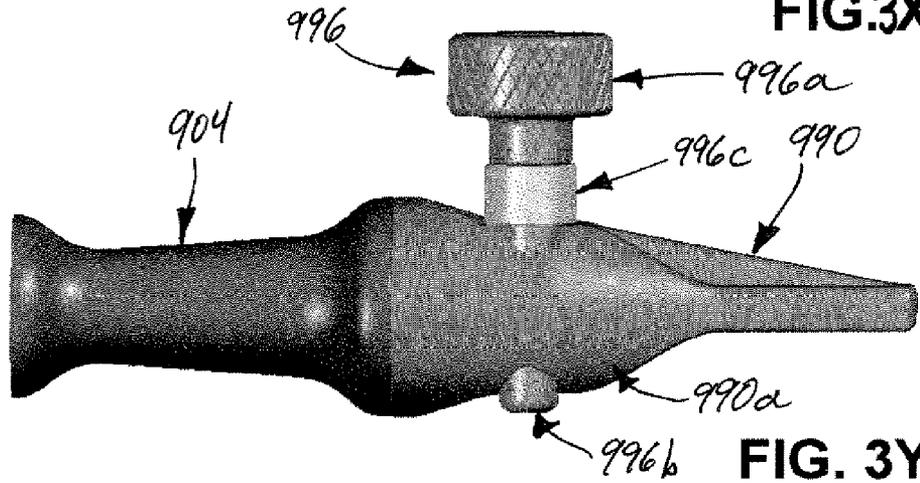


FIG. 3YY

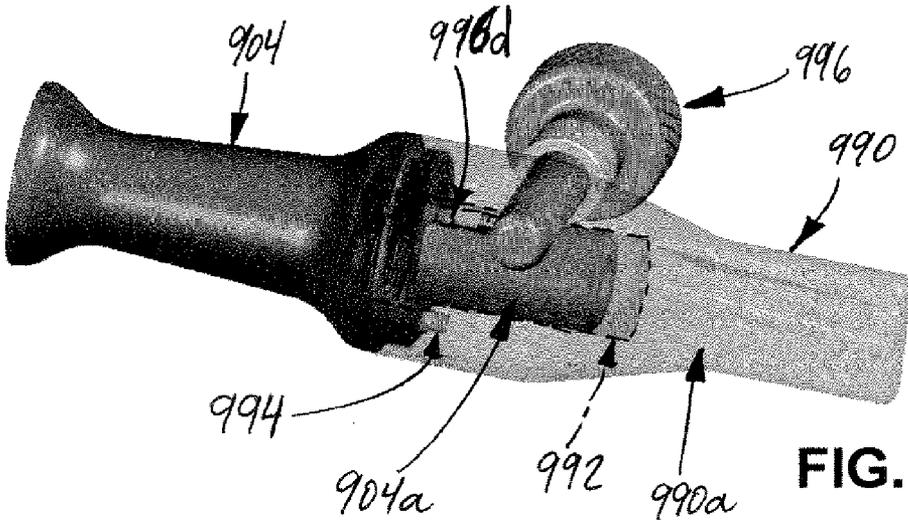


FIG. 3ZZ

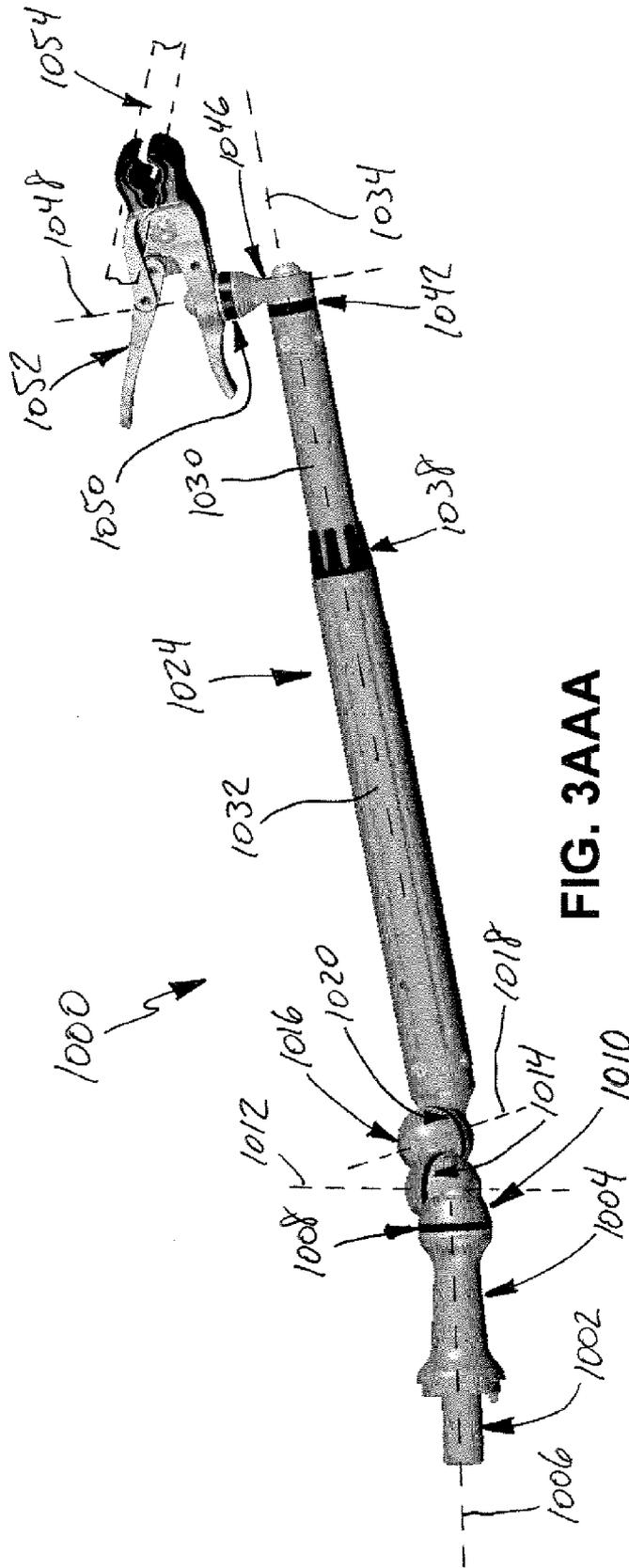


FIG. 3AAA

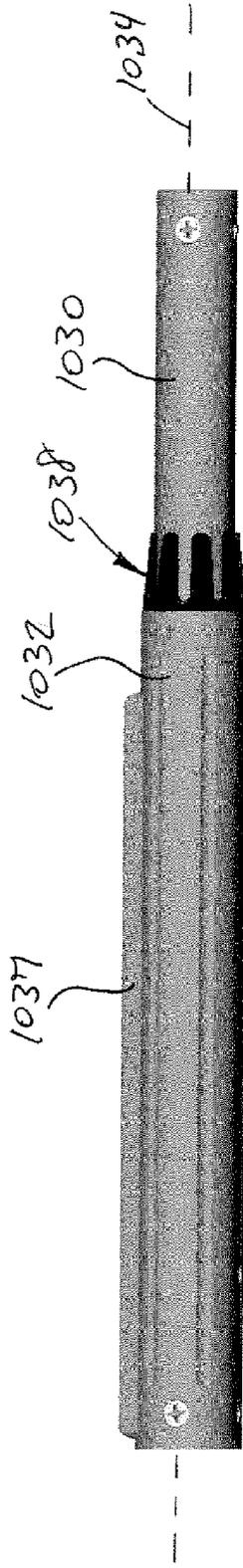


FIG. 3BBB

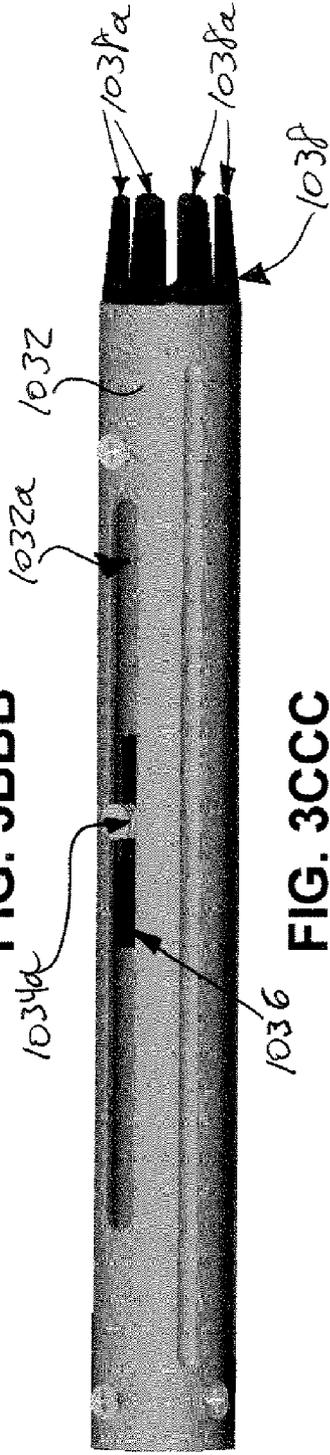


FIG. 3CCC

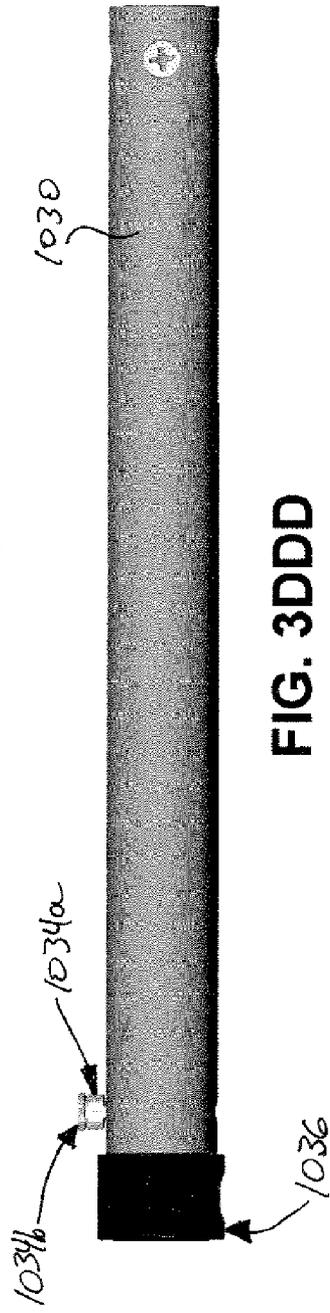
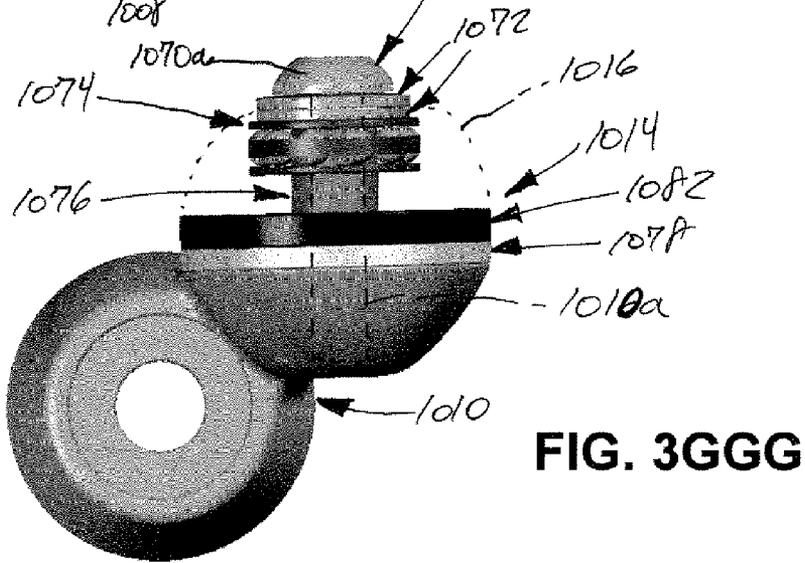
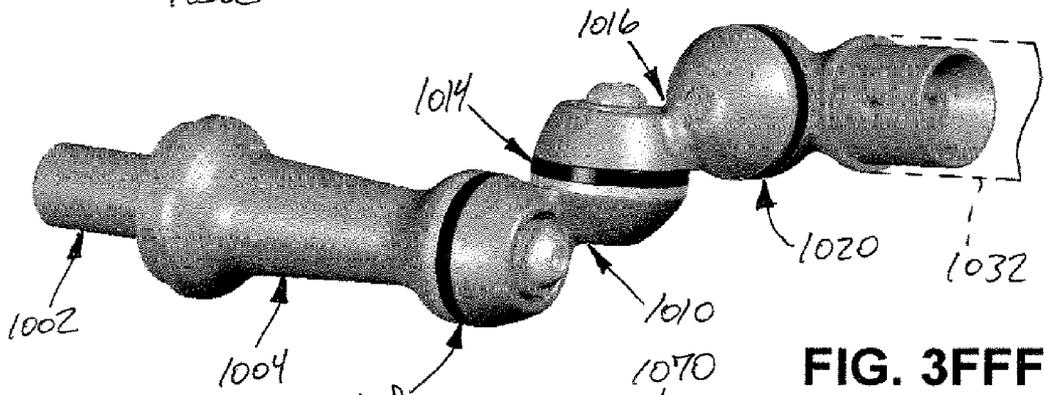
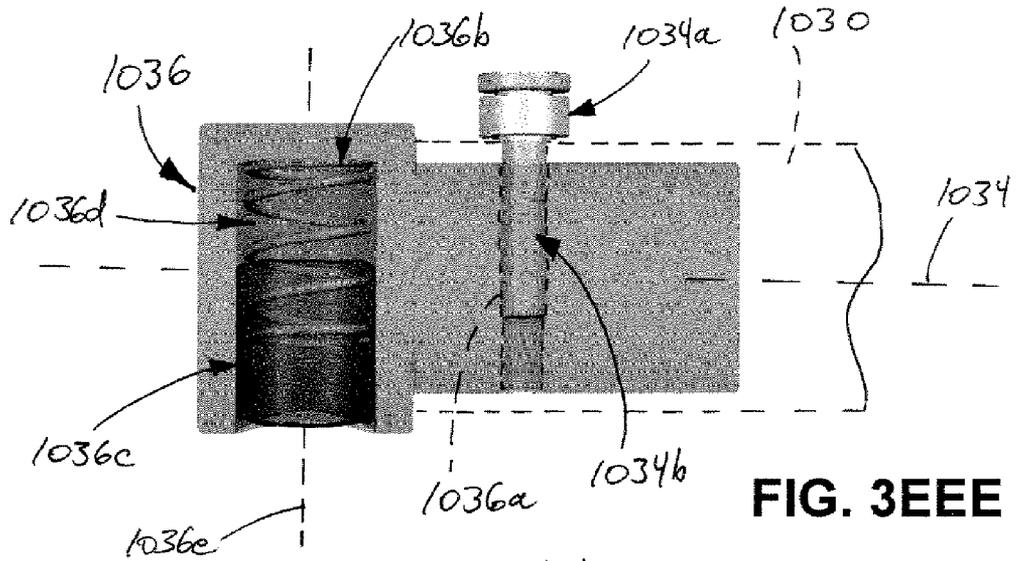


FIG. 3DDD



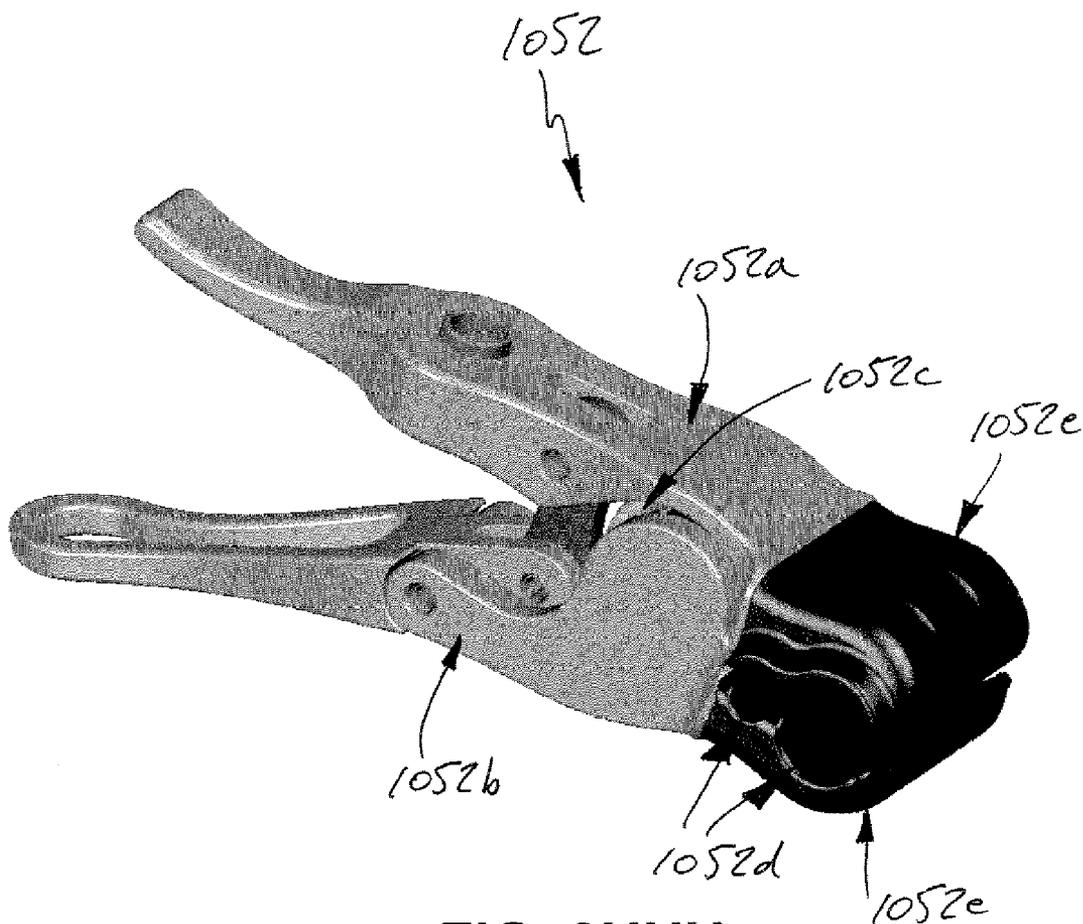


FIG. 3HHH

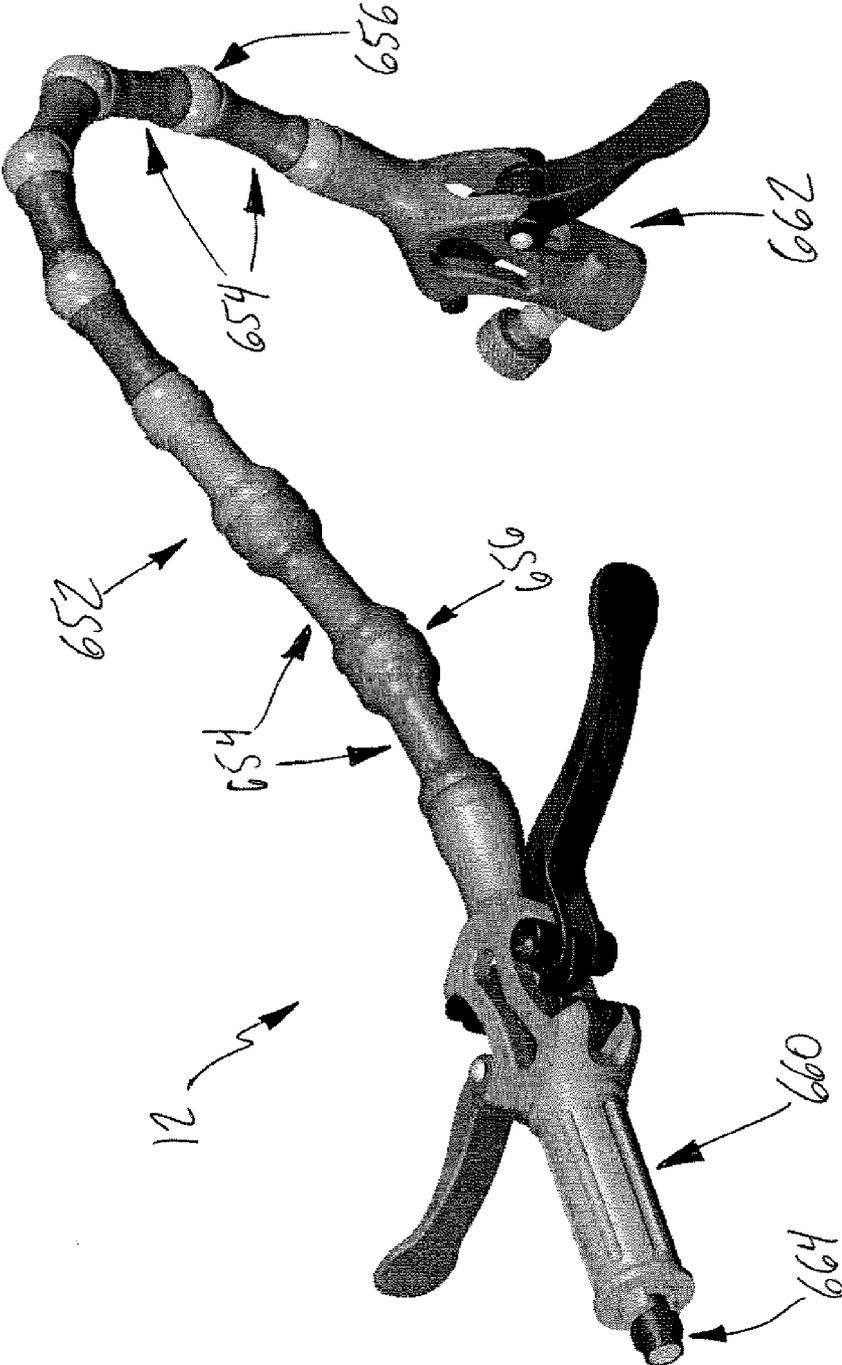


FIG. 4A

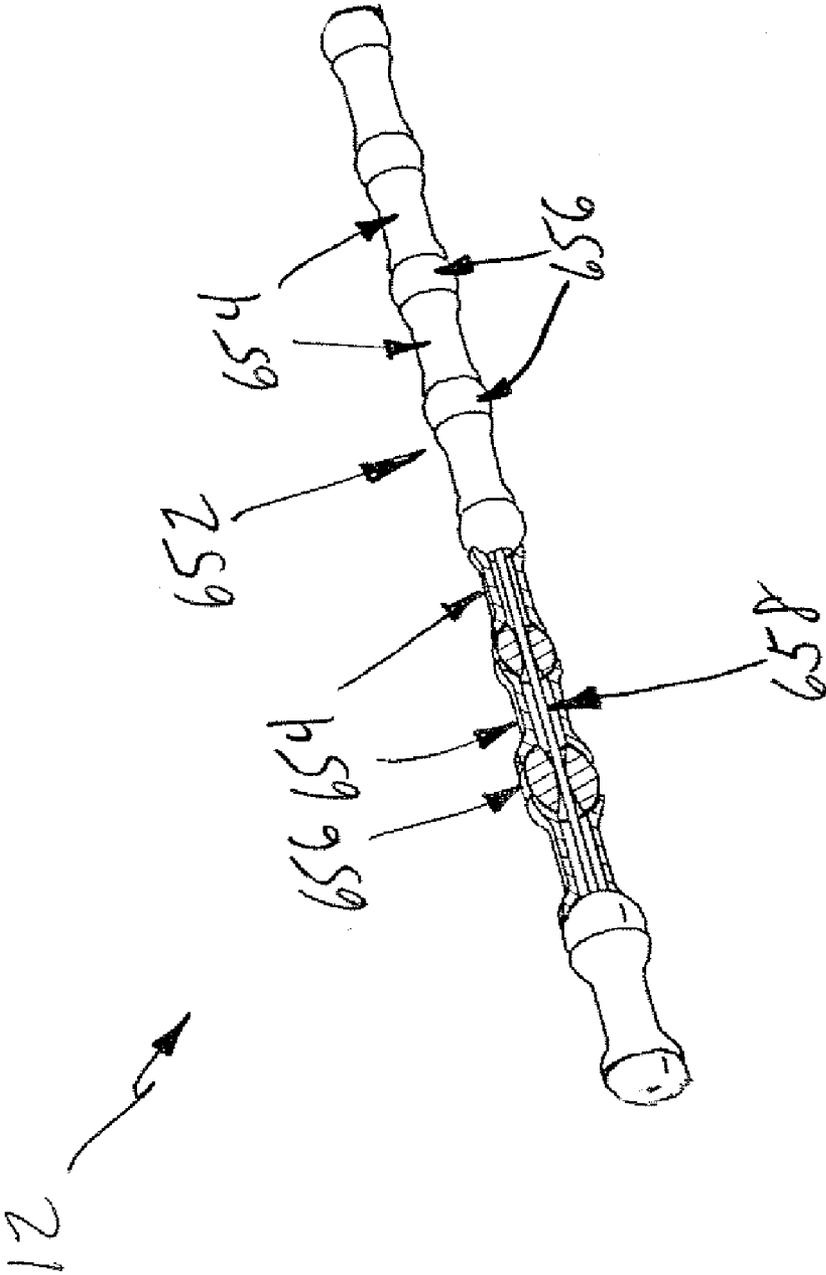


FIG. 4B

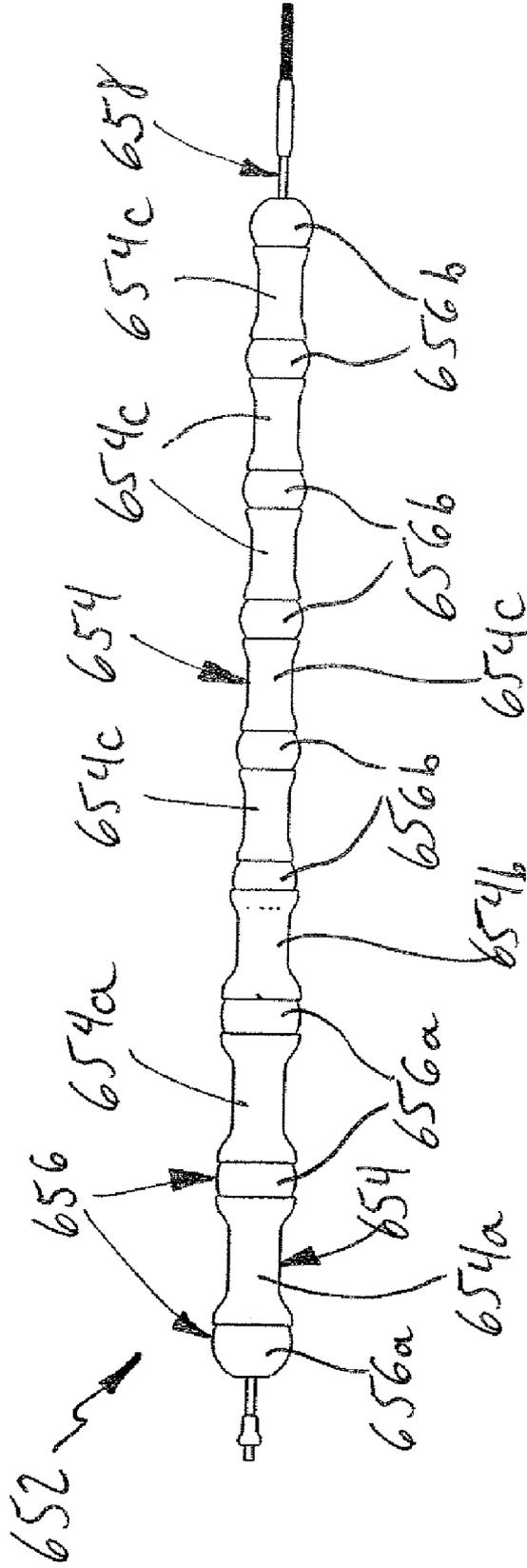


FIG. 4C

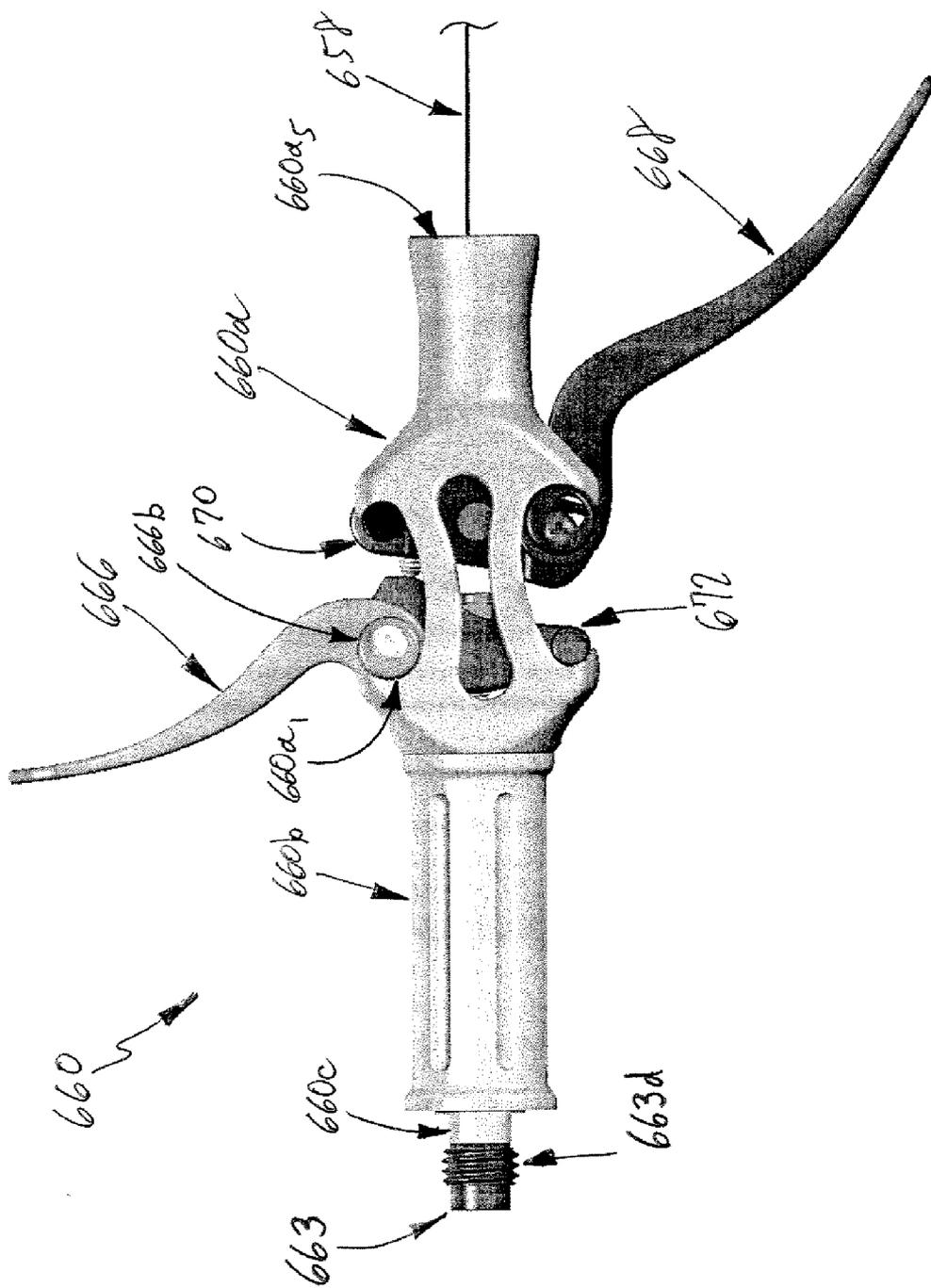


FIG. 4D

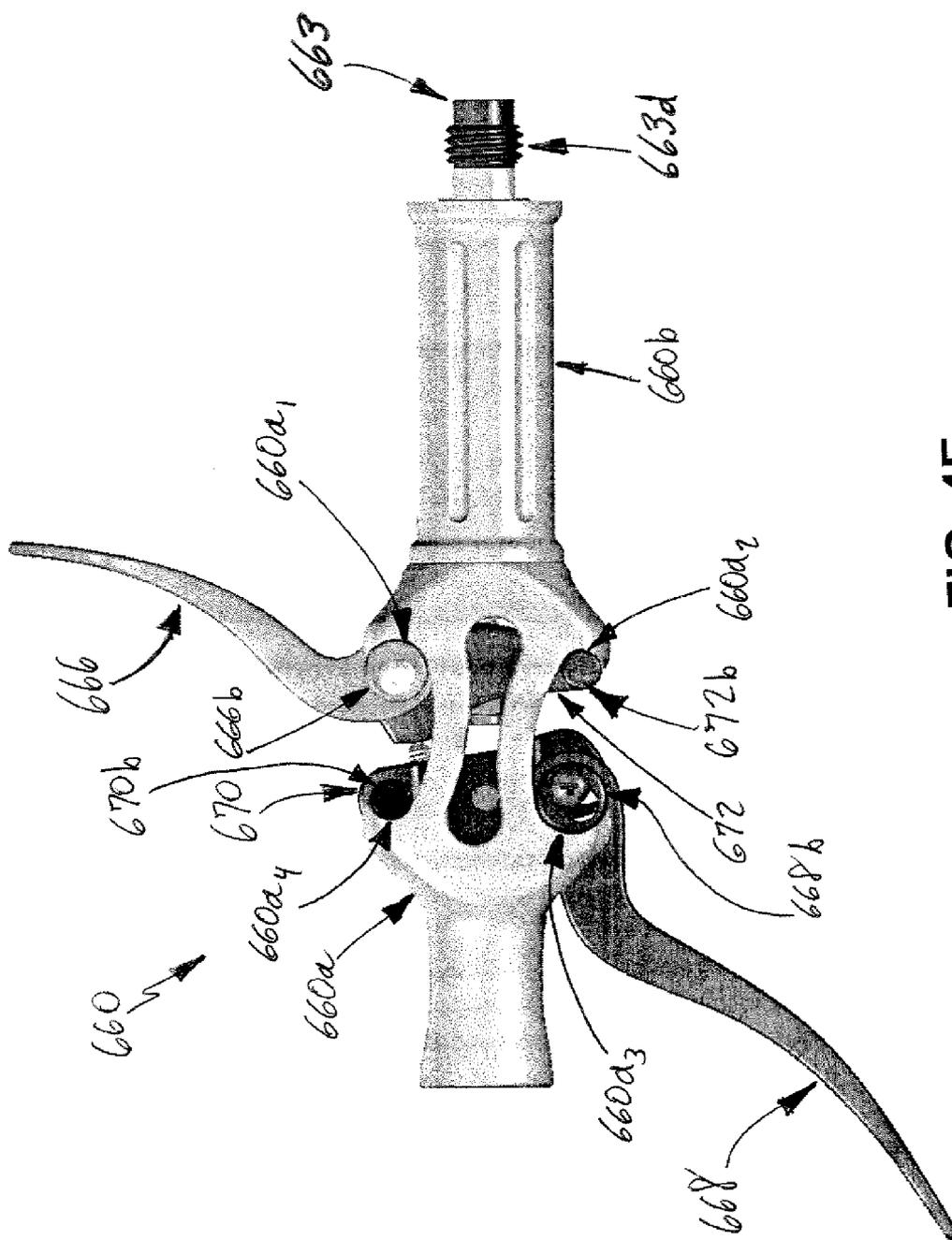


FIG. 4E

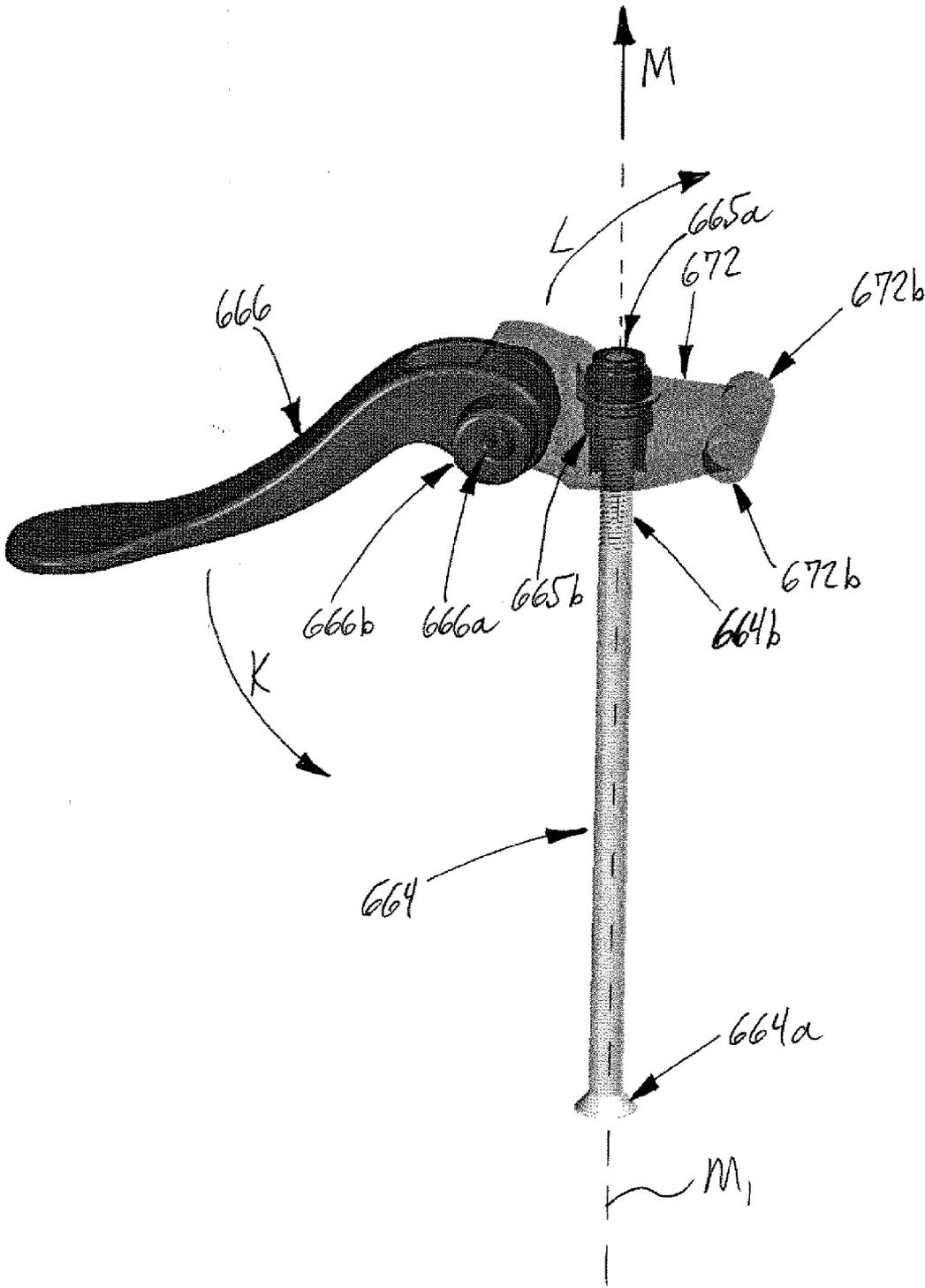


FIG. 4F

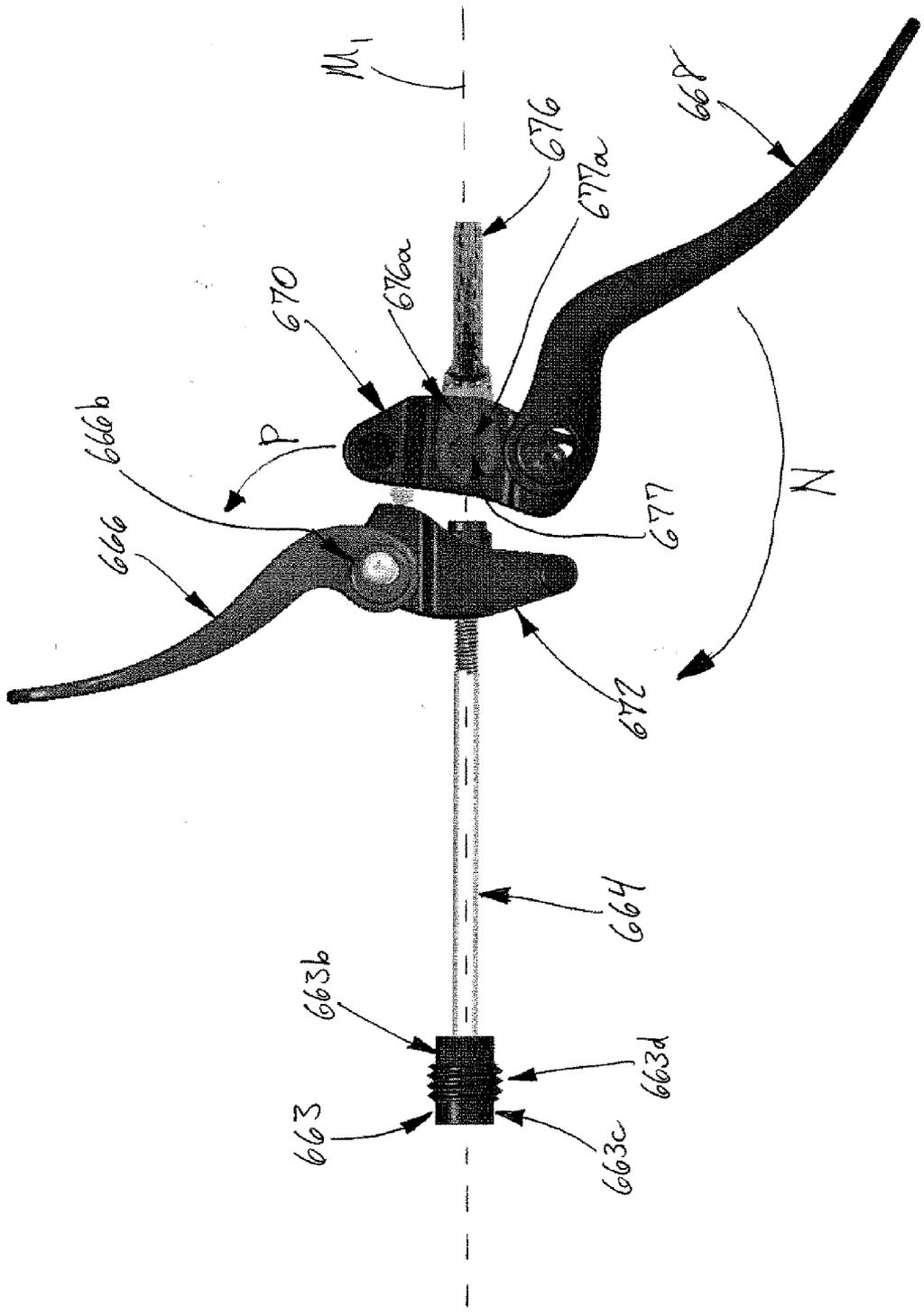


FIG. 4G

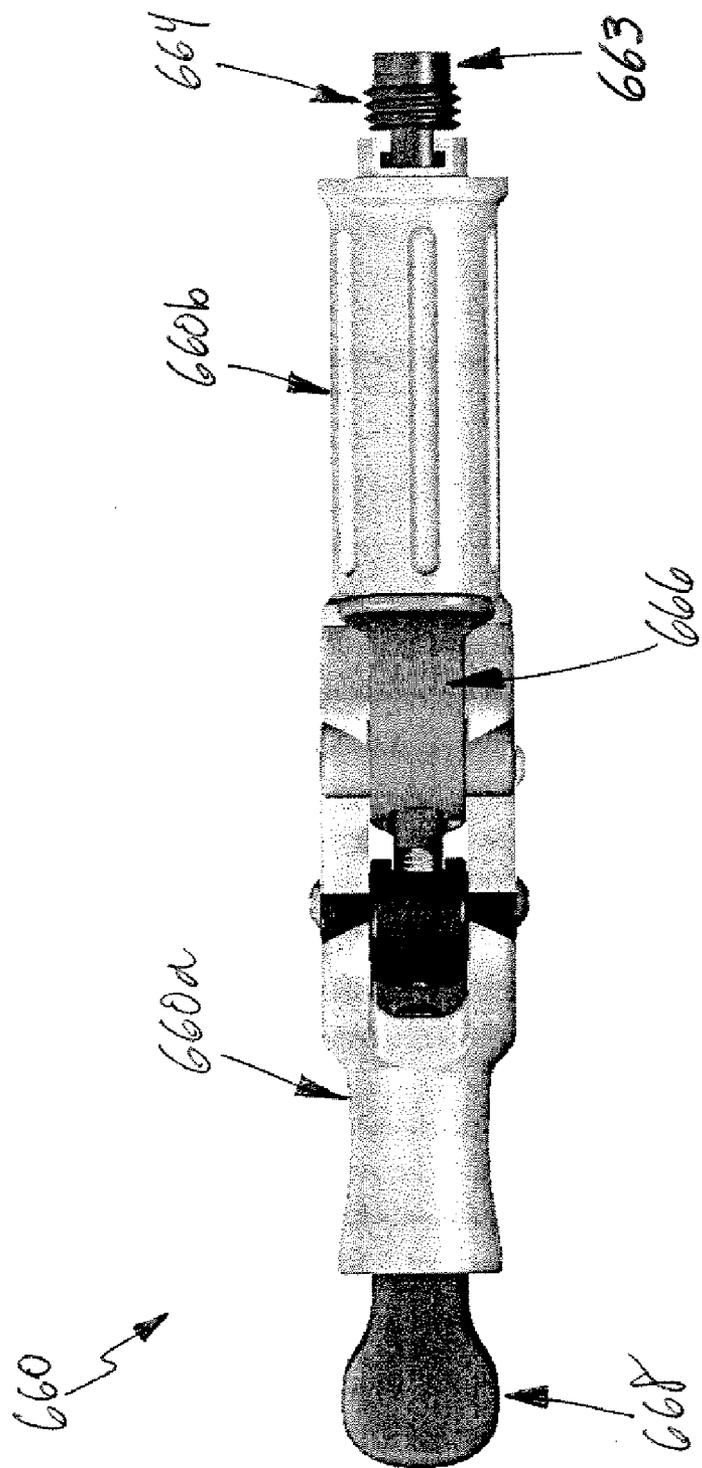


FIG. 4I

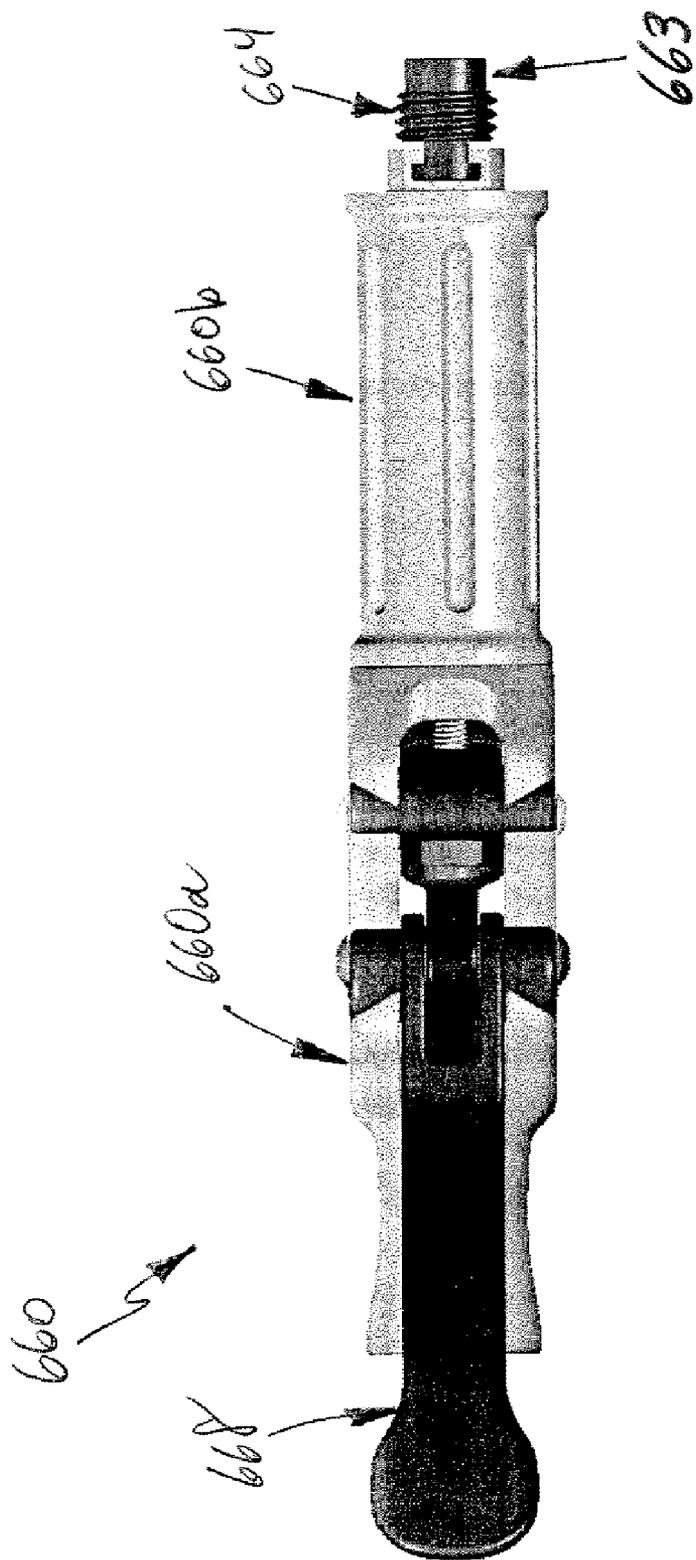


FIG. 4J

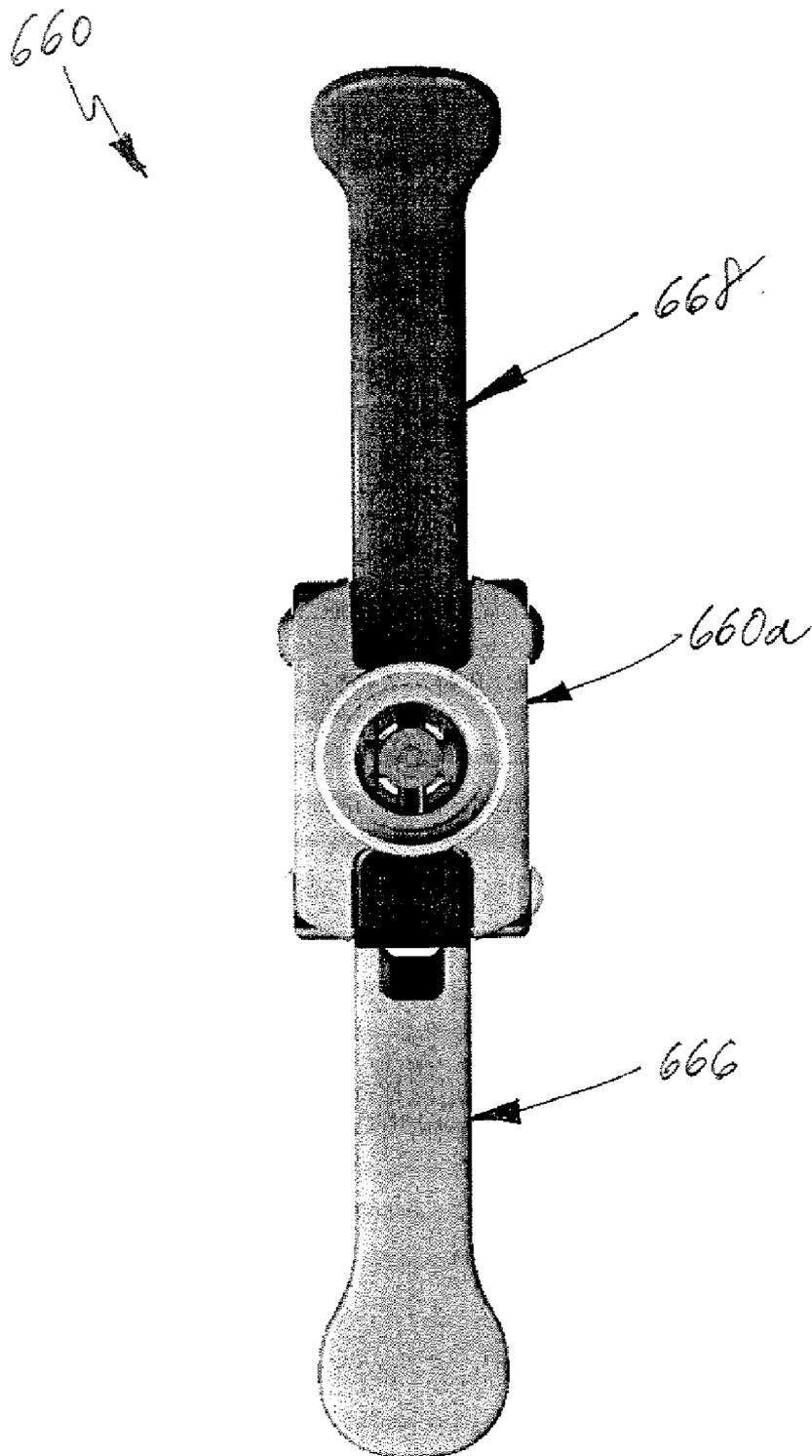


FIG. 4K

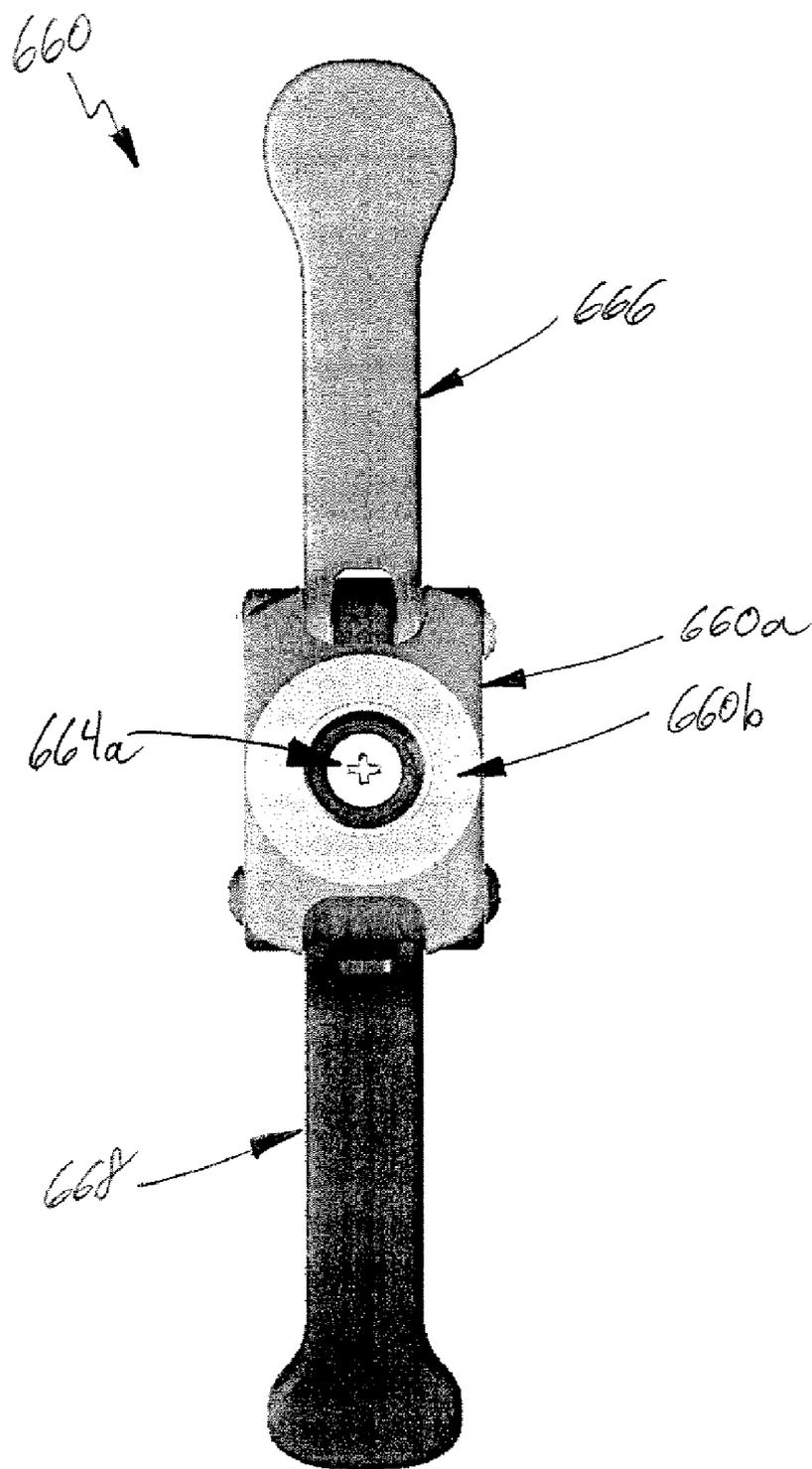


FIG. 4L

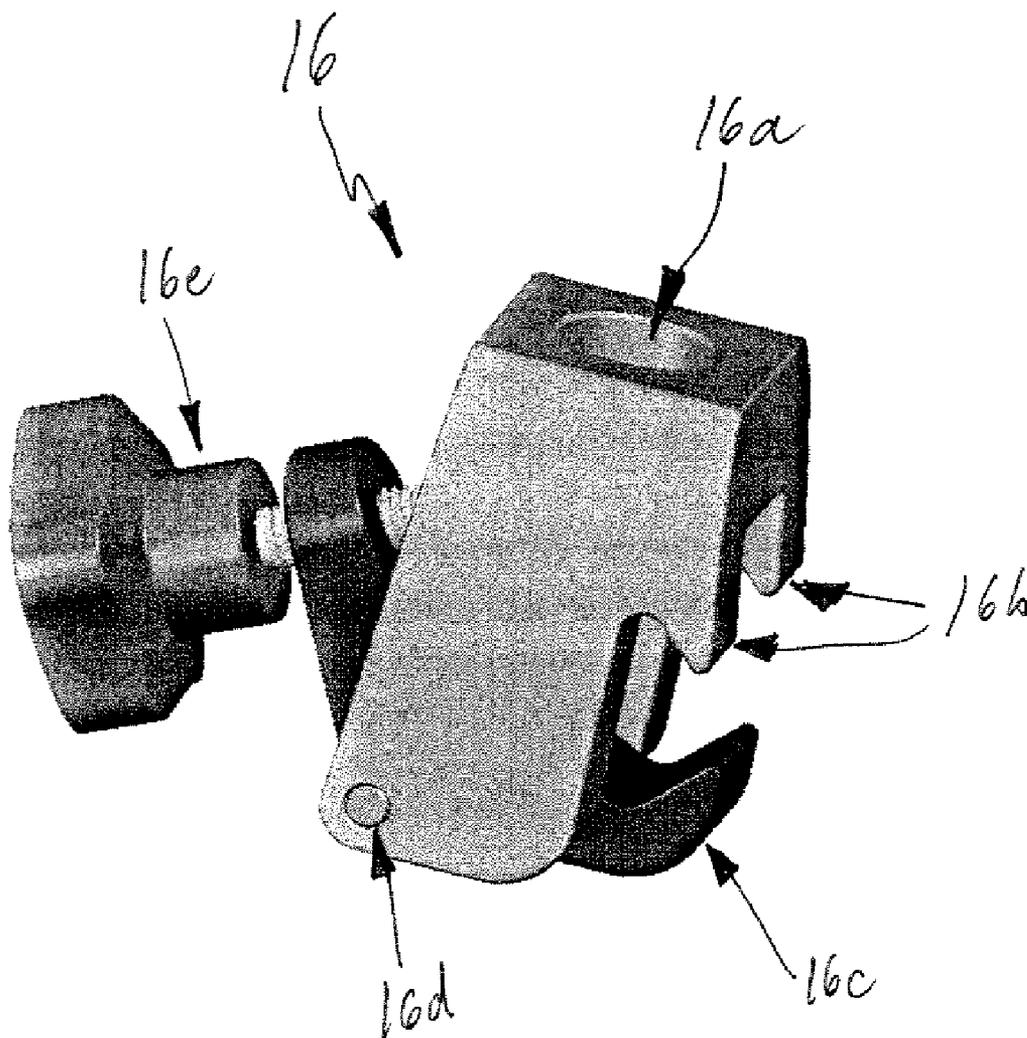


FIG. 4M

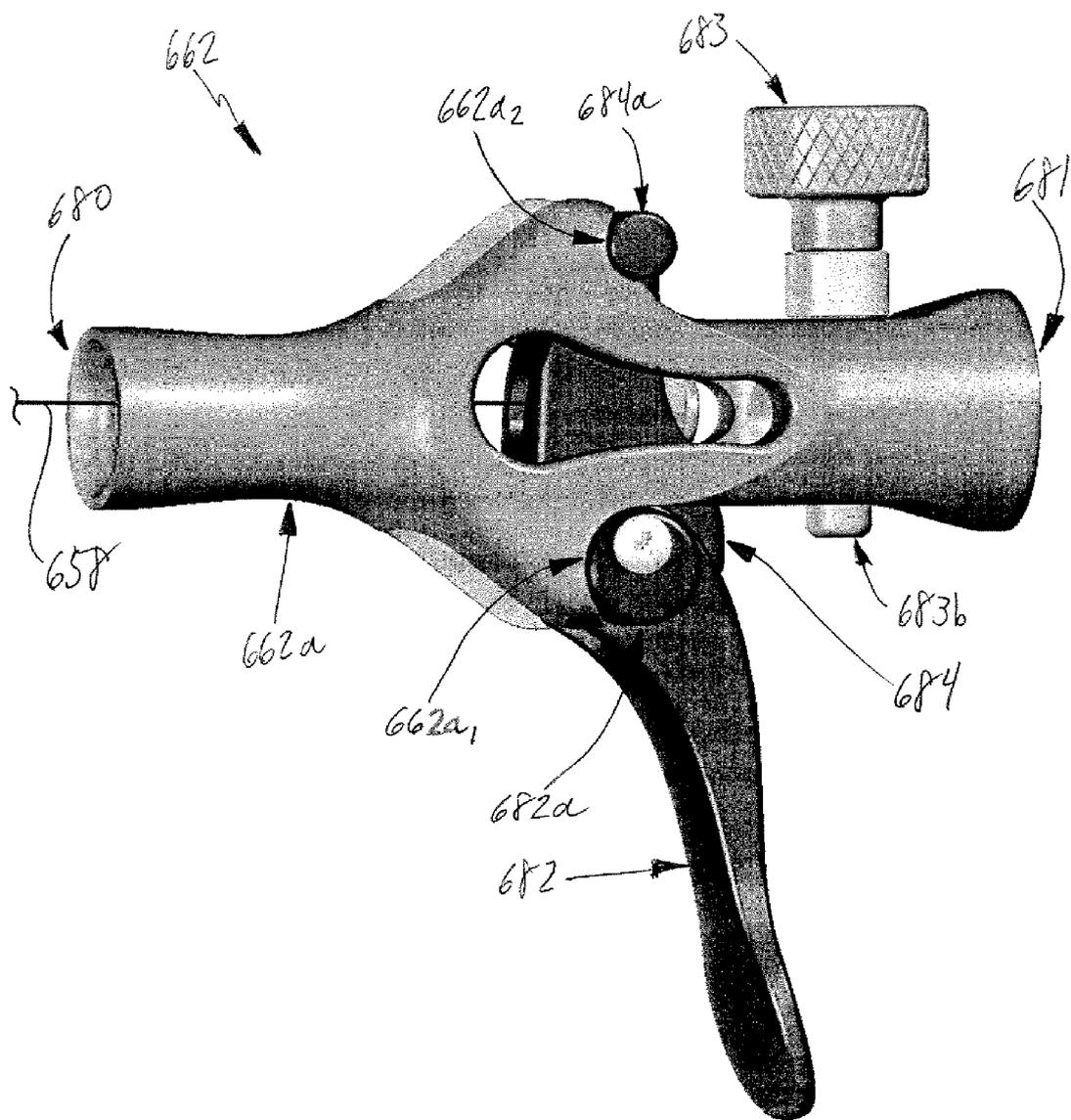


FIG. 4N

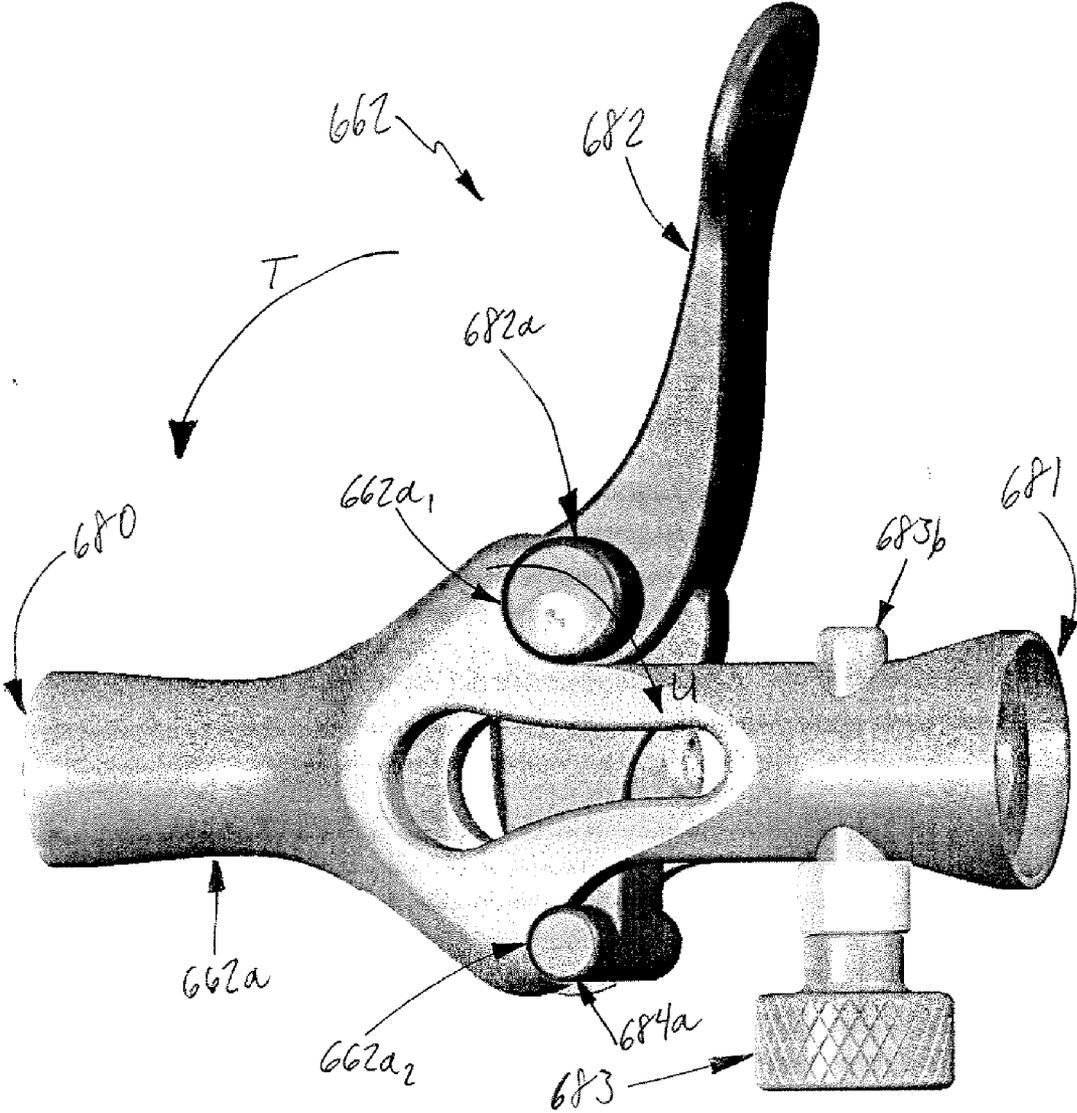


FIG. 4-O

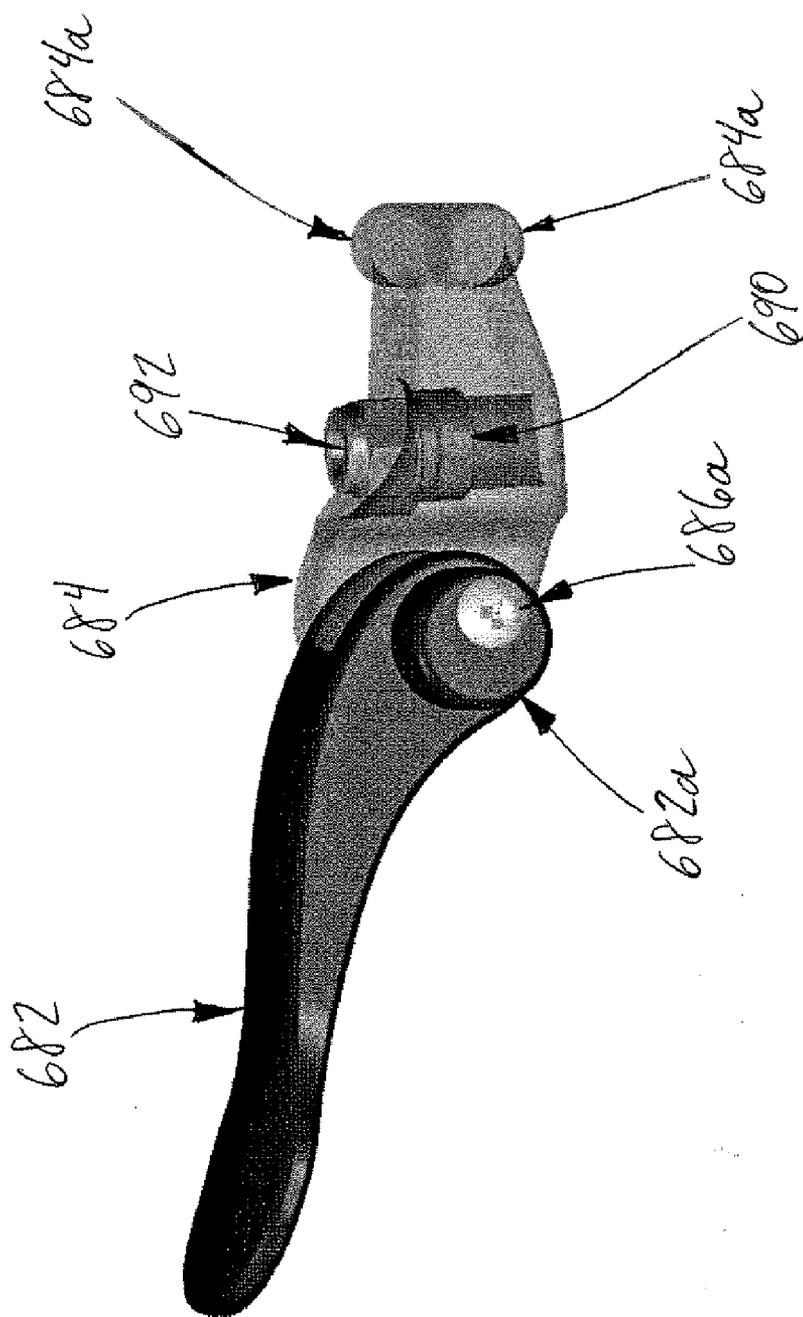


FIG. 4P

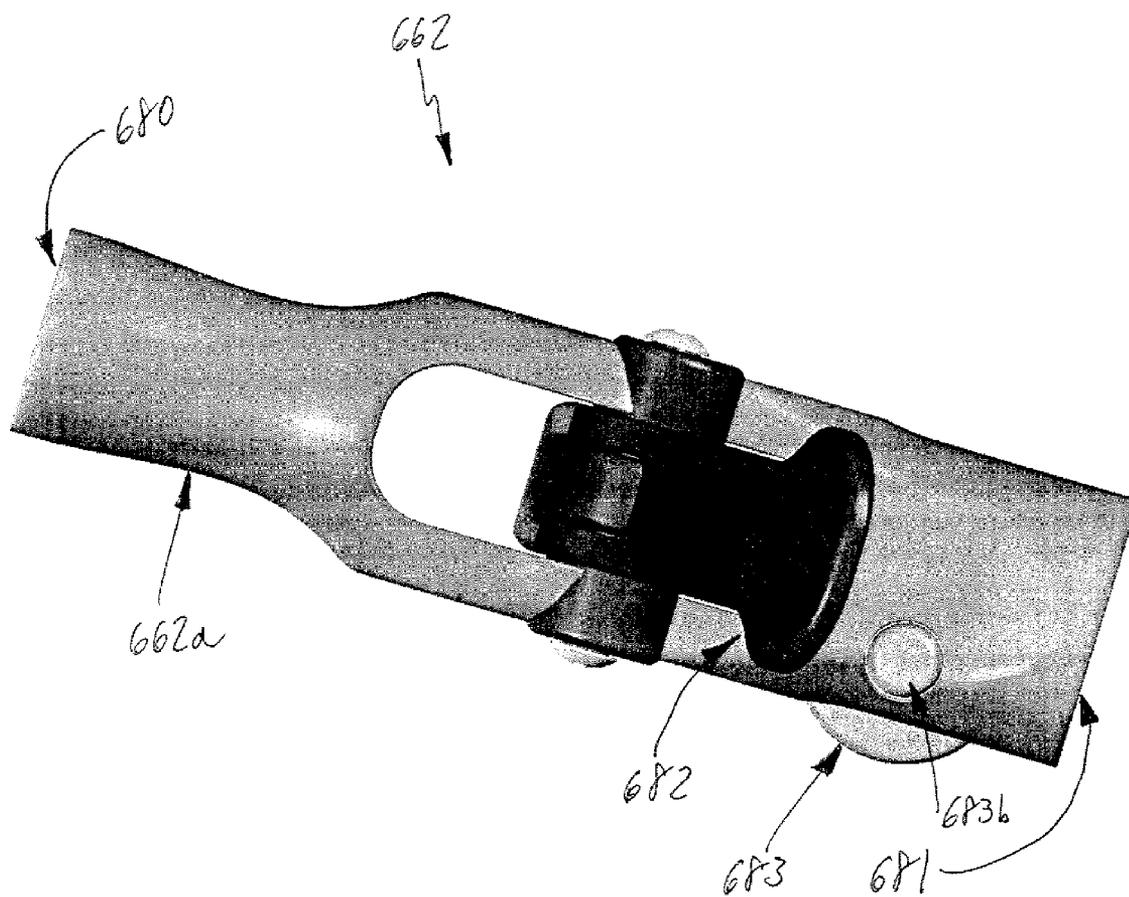


FIG. 4Q

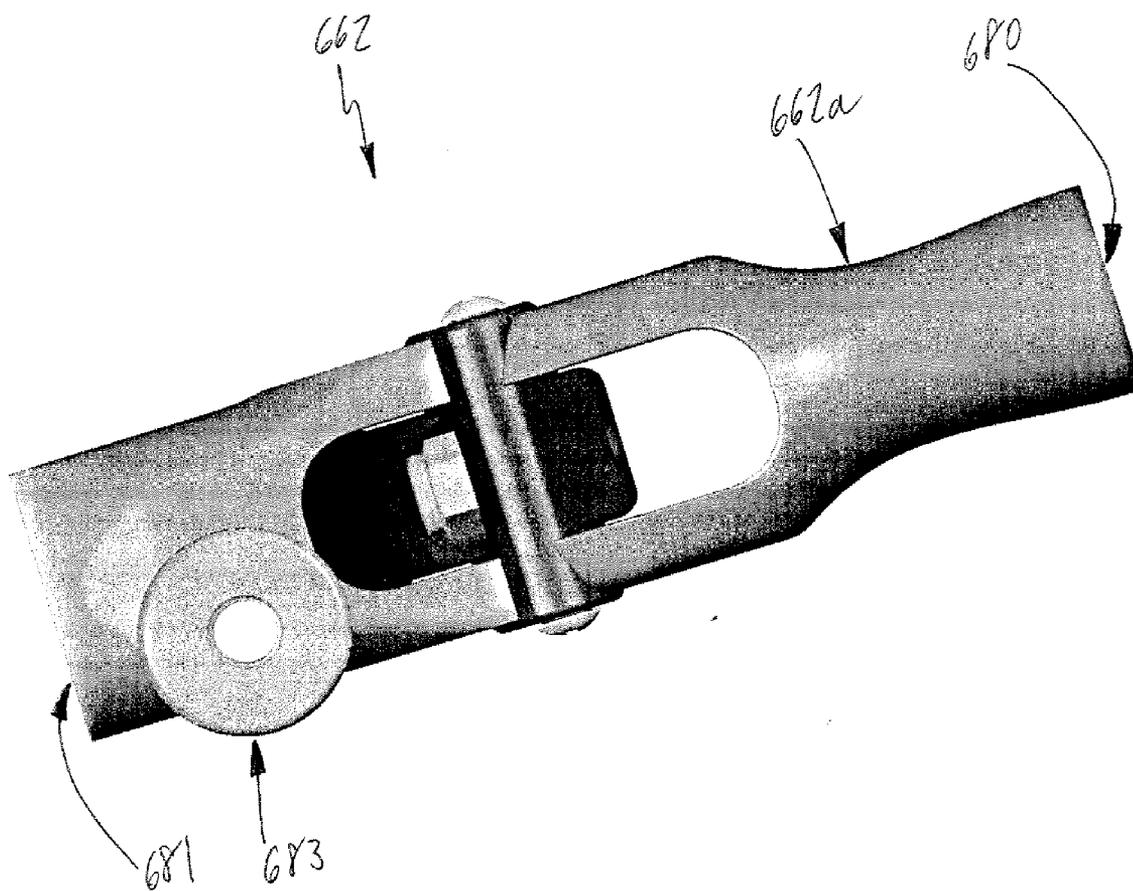


FIG. 4R

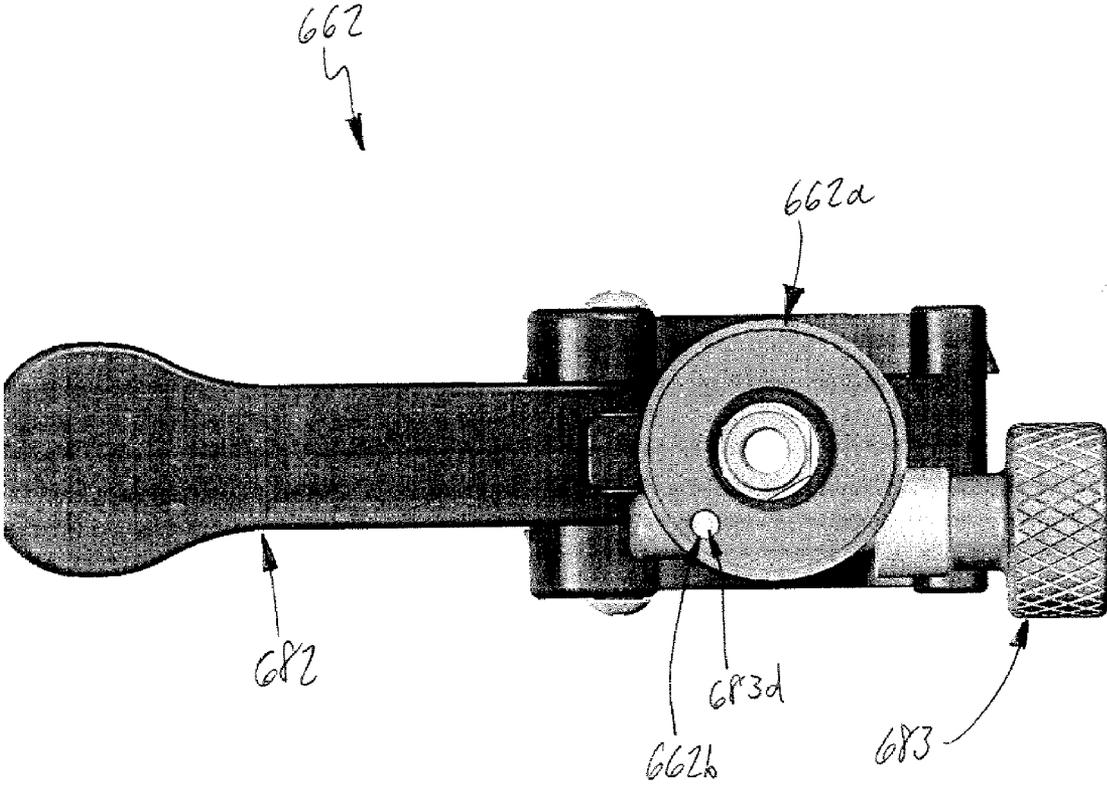


FIG. 4S

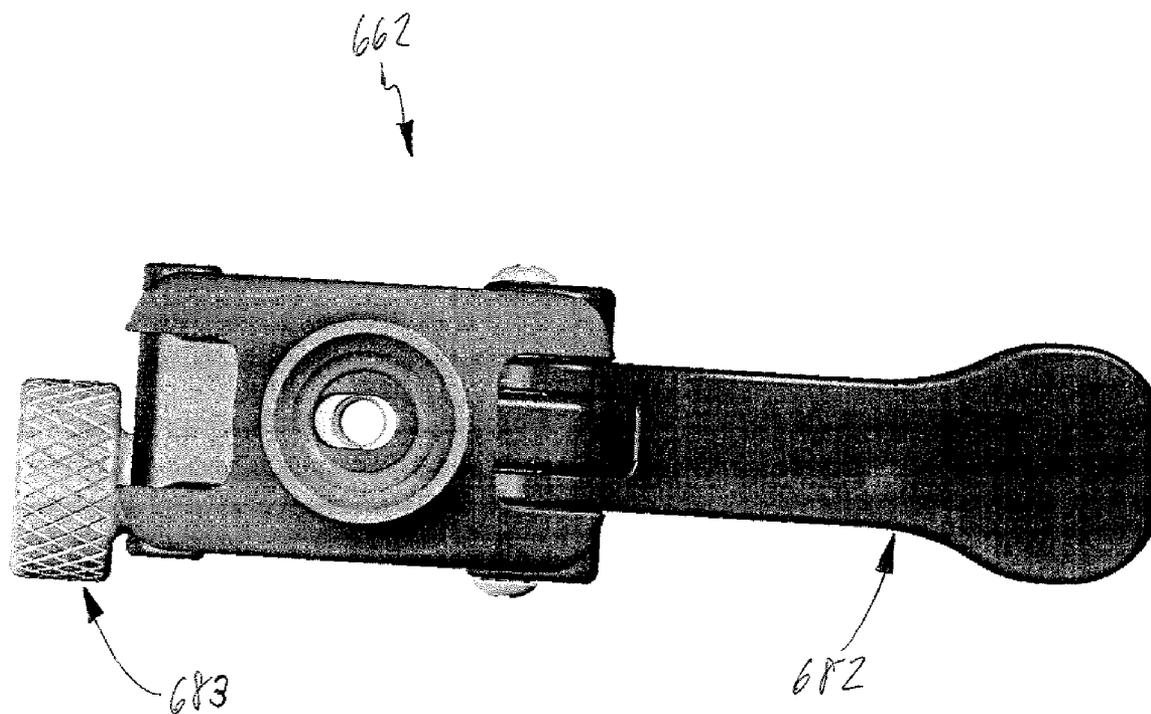


FIG. 4T

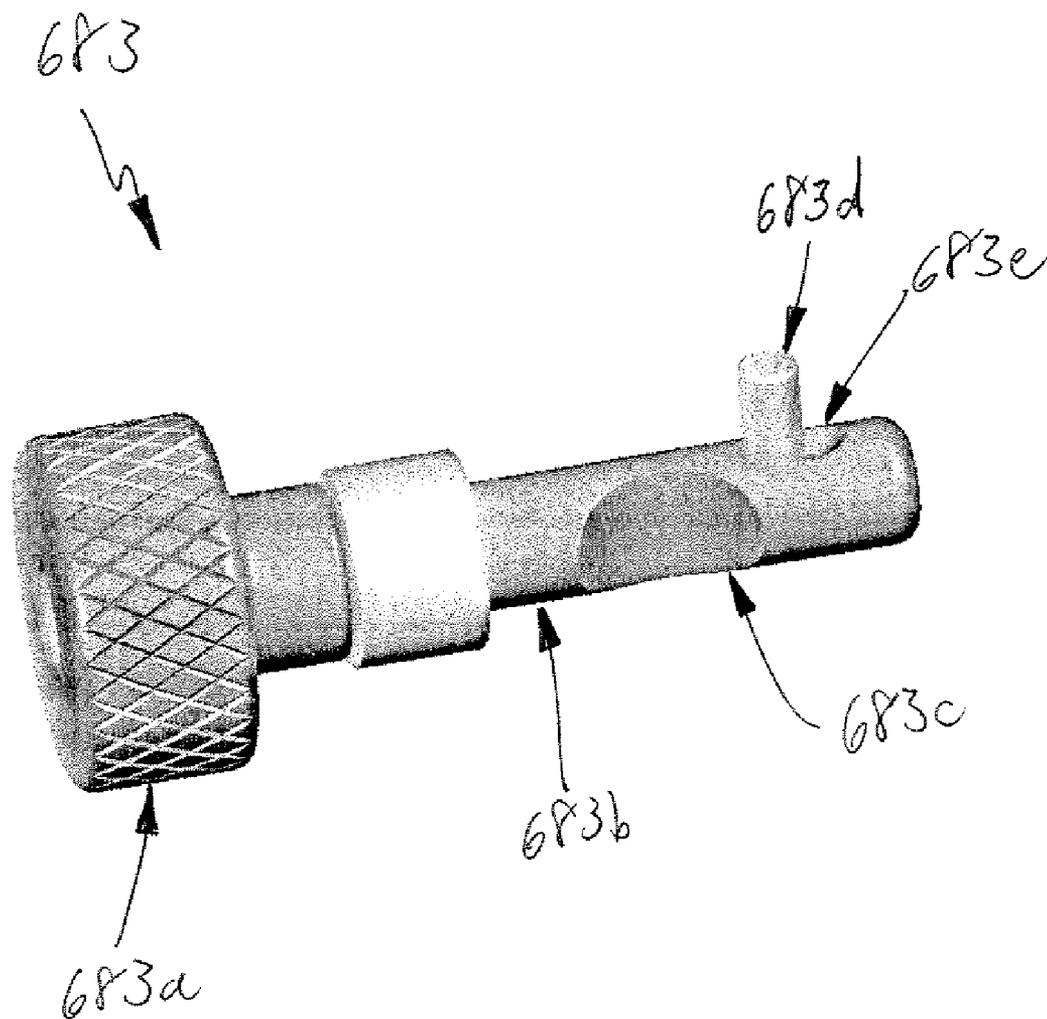


FIG. 4U

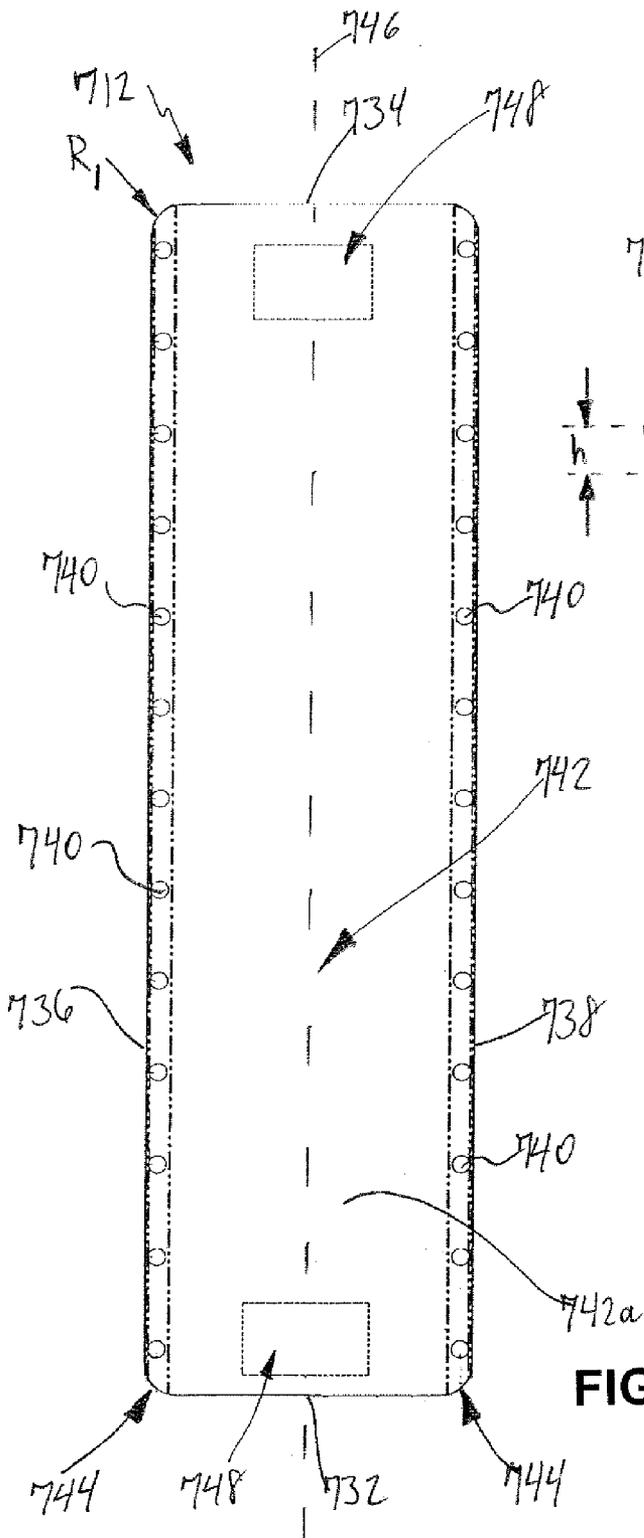


FIG. 6A

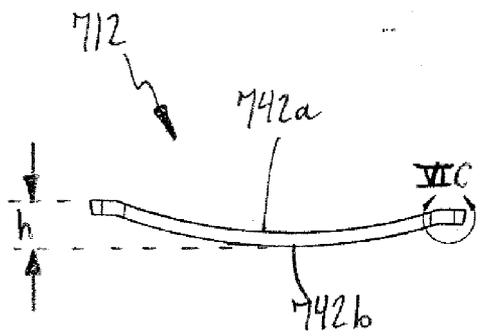


FIG. 6B

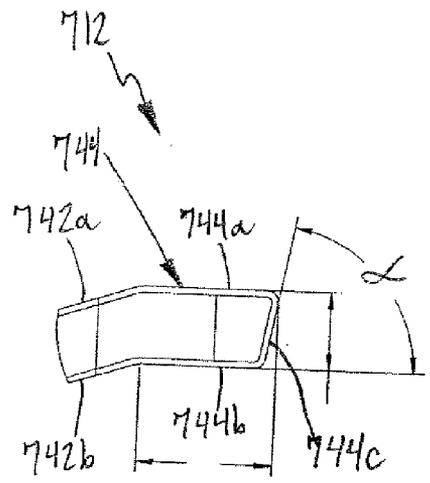


FIG. 6C

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR POSITIONING A LAPAROSCOPIC DEVICE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 11/095,586 filed Apr. 1, 2005 and entitled "Support System for Use When Performing Medical Imaging of a Patient" which claims the benefits of Provisional Application No. 60/559,414 filed Apr. 2, 2004, Provisional Application No. 60/575,792 filed May 28, 2004, and Provisional Application No. 60/614,593 filed Oct. 1, 2004 under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e), and the entire contents of each of these applications are expressly incorporated herein by reference thereto.

[0002] In addition, the benefits of Provisional Application No. 60/709,098 filed Aug. 18, 2005, Provisional Application No. 60/730,853 filed Oct. 28, 2005, Provisional Application No. 60/772,863 filed Feb. 14, 2006, and Provisional Application No. 60/773,638 filed Feb. 16, 2006, each entitled "System for Positioning a Laparoscopic Device," as well as Provisional Application No. 60/821,692 filed Aug. 7, 2006 and entitled "System and Method for Positioning a Laparoscopic Device" are claimed under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e), and the entire contents of these provisional applications are expressly incorporated herein by reference thereto.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The invention relates to a system for positioning a laparoscopic device. In particular, the invention relates to a holder and curvilinear articulating arm for positioning a laparoscopic device such as an endoscopic camera.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0004] During laparoscopy, a minimally invasive surgical procedure in which tissue for example may be removed from the abdomen or chest through a small puncture wound, the laparoscopic surgery is performed with the aid of an endoscopic camera. The camera is placed through a port in the skin into a working cavity and may be used for example to visually examine the interior of the cavity such as the peritoneum or surgical planes or spaces created for purposes of dissection. Typically, the camera includes a light source. Correct positioning and aim of the laparoscopic camera and light throughout a procedure are fundamental to laparoscopy.

[0005] Most commonly, the endoscopic camera is held by an assistant who must continually watch the video monitor and hold a steady position until the surgeon requests a change in the field of view. Alternatively, a variety of robotic arms have been designed to hold the camera and move for example on voice command by the surgeon. Such systems include the AESOP® (Automated Endoscopic System for Optimal Positioning) voice controlled robot system and the Zeus® minimal invasive surgical robot system from Computer Motion Inc./Intuitive Surgical Inc. Mechanical/electrical servomotor controlled systems that move by foot controls, palm and fingertip controls include the LAP-MAN® by MedSys s.a. of Belgium, while a remote, manual control system da Vinci® is available from Intuitive Surgical Inc.

[0006] In addition, a variety of known mechanical frameworks that have multiple adjustment and locking points can be used to hold an endoscopic camera including a laparoscopic retractor from Thompson Surgical Instruments, the Martin Arm System from Gebrüder Martin GmbH & Co. KG, and the Omni-Tract® surgical retractors from Minnesota Scientific Inc. These devices have the capability of holding other laparoscopic instruments as well, although different connections at the instrument interface may be required depending on the instrument and the application.

[0007] The first choice for any surgeon is to have a good human assistant, who can continuously and accurately aim and focus the camera and light on the moving surgical field. Unfortunately, good assistance, or any assistance for that matter, is frequently unavailable, and the surgeon must work solo. Also, occasions frequently arise where an assistant's hands may be occupied by other tasks, such as retraction and suction, and in these circumstances other means for holding the camera also are required. The alternatives for holding and positioning the camera cited above then come into play. However, these alternatives each have one or more troublesome drawbacks. The high end robotic arms (such as da Vinci) are expensive, have high maintenance requirements, are time consuming and cumbersome to set up and may have high cost disposable components. They also require an experienced assistant or technician to be present. The simpler, voice controlled (AESOP) or palm radio controlled (LAPMAN) robotic arms also require significant maintenance and set up time, move too slowly for many surgeons, and are hard to precisely control. The mechanical arms and frameworks that are available typically have too many movable parts that require adjustment, require two hands for re-positioning, may have a large footprint near the surgical field, and are very slow to re-position because of the several joints that must be loosened and retightened.

[0008] Thompson Surgical Instruments also offers a Flex-bar Scope Holder (product #42133C). This device has a clamp to the bedside railing and a set of stainless steel rods that may be clamped at a desired length with right angle clamps to position the base attachment of a curvilinear flexible arm. The arm uses a combination of a screw and cam locking mechanism to achieve an adjustable friction lock of the arm. In this device, the clamp that holds the laparoscopic camera at the free end of the flexible arm has limited capabilities; the clamp becomes locked dimensionally with the arm and is not a universal joint. The design of the scope holder generally requires a user to loosen and then retighten the locking mechanism for the arm whenever it is necessary to reposition the laparoscope.

[0009] Thus, there remains a need for better holding and positioning devices for laparoscopic instruments in general and for the laparoscopic camera (laparoscope) in particular. In particular there is a need for a device that will hold a laparoscope steady when it is not in hand, may be quickly re-positioned using one hand, allows quick engagement and disengagement to a laparoscopic instrument, and has a minimal and movable footprint on the surgical field.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] The invention relates to a system for positioning a laparoscopic device, the system having a holder. The holder includes a central portion having a first member operatively

associated with a second member, the members selectively movable with respect to one another along a central axis, the central portion having a proximal end defined by the first member and a distal end defined by the second member. The holder also has at least three proximal rotational joints coupled to the first member proximate the proximal end, at least two distal rotational joints coupled to the second member proximate the distal end, a clamp configured and dimensioned for retaining a laparoscopic device, and a coupling portion proximate a first of the proximal rotational joints. A first of the distal rotational joints is coupled to the distal end of the central portion and a second of the distal rotational joints is coupled to the clamp.

[0011] In some embodiments, the members may telescope with respect to one another. The second member may be slidably received in the first member. The first member may have a slot and the second member may have a protrusion, the protrusion movable within the slot. For example, the protrusion may include a roller key. Also, in some embodiments, the second member may include a piston member proximate an end thereof the piston member disposed within the first member. The piston member may be spring-loaded with a spring oriented transverse to the central axis.

[0012] The first member may include a receiving end for receiving the second member and a bushing coupled to the receiving end, with the bushing having a plurality of fingers disposed radially with respect to the central axis.

[0013] Each of the proximal and distal rotational joints may include a thrust bearing which may be a steel ball thrust bearing. In addition, each of the proximal rotational joints may include a washer abutting a spacer and rotatable with respect to each other. In some embodiments, the spacer may be formed of a material that is polytetrafluoroethylene-based. Each of the distal rotational joints may include a washer abutting a spacer and rotatable with respect to each other. In some embodiments, the spacer may be formed of a material comprising acetal homopolymer. Each of the proximal and distal rotational joints may include a spacer, each of the spacers of the proximal rotational joints having a first thickness and each of the spacers of the distal rotational joints having a second thickness, the first thickness being smaller than the second thickness.

[0014] The at least three proximal rotational joints may be three proximal rotational joints that each permit movement in a separate plane, and at least two of the planes may be parallel to one another.

[0015] The first of the distal rotational joints may permit rotation about an axis coinciding with the main axis and the second of the distal rotational joints may permit rotation about an axis transverse to the main axis. Also, the second of the distal rotational joints may permit rotation about an axis generally perpendicular to the main axis.

[0016] The clamp may include a pair of spring-biased jaw members each having a cover formed of a material softer than aluminum, the clamp being configured and dimensioned to retain the laparoscopic device while contacting the covers. For example, each cover may be formed of polyurethane.

[0017] The laparoscopic device may have a cylindrical portion. The first member may be tubular. Each of the proximal and distal rotational joints may have a first portion

rotatable with respect to a second portion about a fixed axis. The first and second members may be movable with respect to each other along the central axis but may not be rotatable with respect to each other.

[0018] The system may further include a curvilinear articulating arm, the holder being coupled to the curvilinear articulating arm. In addition, the system may further include a tray configured and dimensioned for supporting a mammal, the curvilinear articulating arm being coupled to the tray.

[0019] The coupling portion may include a clamp for coupling to a support, wherein the support is selected from the group consisting of a rail of a table and a rail of a bed.

[0020] Each proximal rotational joint and each distal rotational joint may permit 360° of rotation about an axis thereof.

[0021] The invention also relates to a system for positioning a laparoscopic device including a curvilinear articulating arm and a holder having at least two rotational regions and a clamping portion for receiving the laparoscopic device, the holder being coupled to the curvilinear articulating arm. The at least two rotational regions are permitted to articulate. The holder may further include a central portion with a selectively adjustable length along a central axis, wherein the at least two rotational regions are disposed between the central portion and the clamping portion. In some embodiments, the holder further includes a central portion with a selectively adjustable length along a central axis, the central portion having a proximal end and a distal end, wherein the at least two rotational regions includes at least three proximal rotational joints disposed proximate the proximal end and at least two distal rotational joints disposed between the distal end and the clamping portion. The at least two rotational regions may include a thrust bearing.

[0022] In addition, the invention relates to a method of positioning a laparoscopic device in a skin port of a mammal, the method including: coupling the laparoscopic device to a holder comprising a clamping portion and five rotational joints, the laparoscopic device being partially retained in the clamping portion; disposing the laparoscopic device partially within the skin port; positioning the laparoscopic device by selectively rotating portions of the holder with respect to one another. The method may further include positioning the laparoscopic device by selectively adjusting a length of the holder along a central axis. The holder may further include first and second members selectively movable with respect to one another. The length may be selectively adjustable by moving the first and second members with respect to each other. The length may be selectively adjustable by telescoping the first member with respect to the second member. Movement of the first and second members may be restricted to linear movement along the central axis, and the holder may be manually operated.

[0023] In some embodiments, the method may further include: coupling the holder to a curvilinear articulating arm; and articulating the curvilinear articulating arm. Also, the method may further include: coupling the curvilinear articulating arm to a tray configured and dimensioned for supporting the mammal. Moreover, the method may further include: coupling the curvilinear articulating arm to a support, wherein the support may be selected from the group

consisting of a rail of a table and a rail of a bed. The laparoscopic device may be held in a selected position while disposed partially within the skin port without locking movement of the rotational joints of the holder.

[0024] The invention also relates to a method of positioning a laparoscopic device in a skin port of a mammal, the method including: securing the laparoscopic device to a holder comprising at least two rotational joints; coupling the holder to a curvilinear articulating arm; disposing the laparoscopic device partially within the skin port; positioning the laparoscopic device by selectively articulating the curvilinear articulating arm and selectively rotating portions of the holder with respect to one another.

[0025] The method may further include: positioning the laparoscopic device by selectively adjusting a length of the holder along a central axis, wherein the holder further comprises first and second members selectively movable with respect to one another, and wherein the length is selectively adjustable by moving the first and second members with respect to each other. Also, the laparoscopic device may be held in a selected position while disposed partially within the skin port without locking movement of the rotational joints of the holder.

[0026] The invention further relates to a system for positioning a laparoscopic device such as a camera, the system including a curvilinear articulating arm and a holder that has at least two rotational regions as well as a clamping portion for receiving the laparoscopic device. The holder is coupled to the curvilinear articulating arm, and wherein the at least two rotational regions are permitted to articulate. The at least two rotational regions may be provided by one or more types of structures selected from the group consisting of a rotational joint, a rocking joint, and a living hinge. The at least two rotational regions may be permitted to freely articulate.

[0027] The invention also relates to a method of positioning a laparoscopic device in a skin port of a patient, the method including: securing the device in a holder permitted to articulate about at least two rotational regions; coupling the holder to a curvilinear articulating arm; disposing the device partially within the skin port; positioning the device by articulating the curvilinear articulating arm with the device moving in response to the articulation. The orientation of the device, such as a laparoscopic camera, thus may be set. The holder may be permitted to freely articulate about at least two rotational regions.

[0028] The present invention further relates to a new set of devices and a method that is particularly suited for holding, positioning and repositioning a laparoscopic camera throughout a laparoscopic surgical procedure. The device includes a holder with joints for permitting rotational movement and positioning of a clamping end for securing a laparoscopic instrument. Fixed positioning and manual repositioning may be quickly accomplished by simply overcoming the modest frictional resistance to movement within the devices without any mechanical adjustments after the initial set up. The joints of the holder may remain free to move at all times. When the holder is static it preferably will not move, and thus, in effect, becomes self locking because of the physical/mechanical relationship of the various system components including the laparoscopic instrument such as an endoscopic camera which is secured in the holder and extending through the skin of the patient. In addition, the

multi-modality holder has alternative functionality for holding and positioning other laparoscopic instruments.

[0029] In one exemplary embodiment, the present invention comprises an articulating arm that may be attached at one end to a surgical table, and that has the capability of movement in three dimensions (i.e., at least three degrees (x, y and z) of freedom) at a free end. This arm has a receiving mechanism at the free end that can accept a variety of instrument holding devices one of the main ones of which is a laparoscopic instrument holder for coupling to the free end of the articulating arm and for positioning a laparoscopic device such as an endoscopic camera.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0030] Preferred features of the present invention are disclosed in the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0031] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a laparoscopic instrument holder system according to the present invention, showing an exemplary arrangement with a holder 100 although the other exemplary holders disclosed herein may instead be used in such a system in place of holder 100;

[0032] FIGS. 2A-2I show a first embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder according to the present invention, including (2A) a perspective view, (2B) a partial cross-sectional front view of a portion of the holder, (2C) a front view, (2D) a back view, (2E) a first side view, (2F) a second side view, (2G) a bottom view, (2H) a top view, and (2I) a perspective view of the mating of movable clamping jaws 122 and finger rest portion 126;

[0033] FIGS. 3A-3G show another embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder according to the present invention, including (3A) a perspective view, (3B) a front view, (3C) a back view, (3D) a first side view, (3E) a second side view, (3F) a bottom view, and (3G) a top view;

[0034] FIGS. 3H-3N show yet another embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder according to the present invention, including (3H) a perspective view, (3I) a front view, (3J) a back view, (3K) a first side view, (3L) a second side view, (3M) a bottom view, and (3N) a top view;

[0035] FIG. 3-O shows a perspective view of the holder of FIGS. 3H-3N with a modified member and clamping portion mounted thereon;

[0036] FIG. 3P-3Q show another embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder according to the present invention, including (3P) a perspective view and (3Q) a front view;

[0037] FIG. 3R shows a perspective view of a portion of another clamping system for use with the present invention;

[0038] FIG. 3S shows a partial cross-sectional side view of the clamping system of FIG. 3Q;

[0039] FIGS. 3AA-3EE show another embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder according to the present invention, including (3AA) a perspective view with a laparoscopic instrument retained by said holder, (3BB) a partial perspective view, (3CC) a partial cross-sectional perspective view, (3DD) another perspective view, and (3EE) another partial cross-sectional perspective view;

[0040] FIGS. 3FF-3-UU show another embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder according to the present invention, including (3FF) a perspective view with a laparoscopic instrument retained by said holder, (3GG) a partial perspective view including several rotational joints, (3HH) a partial cross-sectional perspective view including the rotational joints of the previous figure, (3II) another partial perspective view including the rotational joints of the previous figure, (3JJ) a partial bottom view of the linear length adjustment portion of the holder, (3KK) a partial top view thereof and (3LL) a partial cross-sectional side view thereof, (3MM) a partial cross-sectional side view of a coupling assembly, (3NN) a partial perspective view of several rotational joints, (3-OO) another partial cross-sectional perspective view of several rotational joints and clamp, (3PP) a side view of a clamp, (3QQ) another side view of the clamp, and (3RR to 3UU) partial perspective views of the clamp;

[0041] FIGS. 3VV-3WW show an embodiment of a rotational joint for use with laparoscopic instrument holders of the present invention, including (3VV) a partial side view and (3WW) a partial cross-sectional side view;

[0042] FIGS. 3XX-3ZZ show another exemplary embodiment of a coupling portion for use with laparoscopic instrument holders of the present invention, including (3XX) a first side view, (3YY) a second side view, and (3ZZ) a partial cross-sectional perspective view;

[0043] FIGS. 3AAA-3HHH show another embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder according to the present invention, including (3AAA) a perspective view with a laparoscopic instrument retained by said holder, (3BBB) a first partial side view, (3CCC) a second partial side view, (3DDD) a third partial side view, (3EEE) a partial cross-sectional side view of a piston member couple to a sliding member, (3FFF) a partial perspective view of several rotational joints, (3GGG) a partial perspective view of a rotational joint with joint members, and (3HHH) a partial perspective view of a clamp;

[0044] FIGS. 4A-4C show the curvilinear articulating arm assembly of FIG. 1, including (4A) a perspective view, (4B) a partial cross-sectional perspective view, and (4C) a partial side view;

[0045] FIGS. 4D-4L show the base handle of FIG. 1, including (4D) a first side view, (4E) a second side view, (4F) a partial perspective view of a first set of components thereof, (4G) a partial side view of a second set of components thereof, (4H) another partial side view of the second set of components thereof, (4I) a front view, (4J) a back view, (4K) a top view, and (4L) a bottom view;

[0046] FIG. 4M shows a perspective view of a rail clamp for use with the present invention;

[0047] FIGS. 4N-4T show the free handle of FIG. 1, including (4N) a first side perspective view showing a portion of a tensioning wire therewith, (4-O) a second side perspective view, (4P) a partial perspective view showing a first set of components thereof, (4Q) a front perspective view, (4R) a back perspective view, (4S) a top perspective view, and (4T) a bottom perspective view;

[0048] FIG. 4U shows a side perspective view of the interface lock of the free handle of FIGS. 4N-4T;

[0049] FIG. 5 shows a perspective view of a support system according to the present invention; and

[0050] FIGS. 6A-6C show the tray of FIG. 5, including (6A) a top view, (6B) a cross-section taken perpendicular to the central axis of the tray, and (6C) a partial cross-section showing detail taken at VIC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0051] The instrument holders described herein are particularly useful in minimally invasive surgical procedures using a laparoscope (laparoscopic camera), which is a type of endoscope (endoscopic camera). It should be understood that each of the terms laparoscope, laparoscopic camera, endoscope, and endoscopic camera as individually used with respect to any particular embodiment are not meant to limit that embodiment to a laparoscopic or endoscopic context.

[0052] Referring initially to FIG. 1, an exemplary embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder system 10 according to the present invention is shown. Holder system 10 includes a curvilinear articulating arm assembly 12 and a laparoscopic instrument holder 14 coupled to assembly 12 as indicated by arrow A. As will be further described, arm assembly 12 includes a clamp 16 at a first free end thereof for coupling system 10 to a structure such as the rail 18 (shown schematically in phantom) of an operating room table.

[0053] Turning next to FIGS. 2A-2G, a first exemplary embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder 100 according to the present invention is shown. Holder 100 includes a coupling portion 102 in the form of a post. Coupling portion 102 preferably is configured to be received in portion 681 of free handle 662 of articulating arm assembly 12, as will be described later. Holder 100 includes a body portion 104 with a shaft portion 106 extending from an end thereof and forming a first rotational joint. As shown in the partial cross-sectional side view of FIG. 2B, shaft portion 106 may be formed as a screw with a head 106a, a cylindrical shaft 106b, and a threaded end 106c that may be received in threaded hole 104a in body portion 104. A first member 108 is mounted on shaft portion 106 and particularly cylindrical shaft 106b so that shaft portion 106 extends within a bore 108a in first member 108. In the preferred exemplary embodiment, there is minimal frictional resistance to rotational movement of portion 106 and first member 108 with respect to one another so that these components are freely rotatable with respect to one another. However, the tolerance between the components preferably is selected to minimize other play therebetween, and the coupling between the components preferably is such that minimal translation of one component with respect to the other component is permitted along their central axis of rotation.

[0054] In alternate embodiments, portion 106 and first member 108 are mechanically associated with each other such that frictional engagement of these components provides limited resistance to rotational movement of portion 106 and first member 108 with respect to each other. However, the frictional engagement preferably permits relative rotation of portion 106 and first member 108 when sufficient manual, external force is applied as by a surgeon using holder 100 during a medical procedure.

[0055] Shaft portion 106 and first member 108 are disposed preferably at right angles with respect to each other. First member 108 preferably includes a shaft portion 110 that may be formed as a screw with a head 110a, a cylindrical shaft 110b, and a threaded end 110c that may be received in threaded hole 108b in first member 108. Shaft portion 110 forms a second rotational joint.

[0056] Holder 100 further includes a second member 112 that is mounted on shaft portion 110 and particularly cylindrical shaft 110b so that shaft portion 110 extends within a bore 112a in second member 112. In the preferred exemplary embodiment, there is minimal frictional resistance to rotational movement of second member 112 and portion 110 with respect to one another so that these components are freely rotatable with respect to one another. However, the tolerance between the components preferably is selected to minimize other play therebetween, and the coupling between the components preferably is such that minimal translation of one component with respect to the other component is permitted along their central axis of rotation.

[0057] In alternate embodiments, portion 110 and second member 112 are mechanically associated with each other such that frictional engagement of these components provides limited resistance to rotational movement of portion 110 and second member 112 with respect to each other. However, the frictional engagement preferably permits relative rotation of portion 110 and second member 112 when sufficient manual, external force is applied as by a surgeon using holder 100 during a medical procedure. Shaft portion 110 and second member 112 are disposed preferably at right angles with respect to each other.

[0058] In one preferred exemplary embodiment, the joints formed by rotational movement of portion 106 and first member 108 with respect to each other, and by rotational movement of portion 110 and second member 112 with respect to each other, do not lock and are disposed at about 90° to each other. Preferably, the joints provide loose coupling between the components so that they may freely rock back and forth and be angulated.

[0059] In a preferred exemplary embodiment, a stop 104b is created at the transition from a first circumference of body portion 104 to a smaller circumference of cylindrical shaft 106b. Preferably, the length of cylindrical shaft 106b is chosen to be approximately the length of bore 108a in first member 108 so that a portion of first member 108 may be retained between head 106a and body portion 104.

[0060] In some alternate embodiments, portion 106 optionally may be tightened to provide substantial resistance to rotational movement of body portion 104 and first member 108 with respect to one another.

[0061] Similarly, a stop 108c is created at the transition from a first circumference of first member 108 to a smaller circumference of cylindrical shaft 110b. Stop 108c may include washer 113 disposed between first member 108 and second member 112. Preferably, the length of cylindrical shaft 110b is chosen to be approximately the length of bore 112a in second member 112 so that a portion of second member 112 may be retained between head 110a and first member 108. In the preferred embodiment, portion 110 provides minimal frictional resistance to rotational movement. However, in an alternate embodiment, portion 110

optionally may be tightened to provide substantial resistance to rotational movement of first member 108 and second member 112 with respect to one another.

[0062] Second member 112 includes a preferably arcuate clamping portion 114. In addition, a pair of holes 116 extend into second member 112 and are disposed on either side of central longitudinal axis 118 thereof. Holes 116 are configured and dimensioned to receive end portions of springs 120, which extend out of holes 116 and each may partially be disposed in a groove 120a in second member 112. Movable clamping jaws 122 are “spring loaded,” with end faces 122a abutting ends of respective springs 120. Thus, springs 120 bias clamping jaws 122 so that face 122f is biased toward clamping portion 114. The slot formed between face 122f and clamping portion 114 is designed so that the spring loading alone is sufficient to hold a laparoscope securely in place therein, but also to let the laparoscope rotate with sufficient frictional resistance to prevent undesired movement.

[0063] A set screw assembly 124 releasably and adjustably couples movable clamping jaws 122 to second member 112. Preferably, only slight rotation of assembly 124 is permitted, e.g., one-quarter turn clockwise or counterclockwise. Such turning may loosen or tighten the engagement of movable clamping jaws 122 and finger rest portion 126 with respect to one another thus respectively permitting or hindering movement of spring-loaded clamping jaws 122.

[0064] In alternate embodiments, set screw assembly 124 may be any component(s) or manner of fixedly coupling finger rest portion 126 to second member 112.

[0065] As shown for example in FIG. 2I, a finger rest portion 126 includes a central raised portion 126a and a lower face 126b. Central raised portion 126a is slidably received in a slot 122b in movable clamping jaws 122. Travel of clamping jaws 122 is limited and governed by slot 122b which includes a stop portion 122e. Slot 122b is symmetrically disposed with respect to axis 118. Finger rests 122c, 122d are disposed at a free end of movable clamping jaws 122. Finger rest portion 126 is positionally fixed with respect to second member 112, with a threaded screw 124a of screw assembly 124 extending through hole 126c. A knurled knob 124b may be provided as well as a set screw 124c (shown in FIG. 2E) extending into the shaft of screw 124a.

[0066] Finger rest portion 126 includes a finger rest surface 126d which provides sufficient surface area for accommodating a portion of a user's finger such as the fleshy tip of a user's thumb. Similarly, finger rests 122c, 122d of movable clamping jaws 122 each provide sufficient surface area for accommodating a portion of another of a user's fingers. Thus, in use, in order to adjust the spacing between arcuate clamping portion 114 and clamping face 122f of movable clamping jaws 122, a user may grasp finger rest portion 126 with his or her thumb disposed on surface 126d and two other fingers disposed on rests 122c, 122d, and squeeze so that the spacing d between arcuate clamping portion 114 and clamping face 122f is increased. Movement of clamping jaws 122 also is limited by the combined lateral distance defined by spacings d, e, particularly because of the fixed position of finger rest portion 126 with respect to second member 112 as well as the maximum travel of surfaces 122a of movable clamping jaws 122 with respect to surfaces 112b of second member 112.

[0067] Thus, an object such as an endoscopic camera may be releasably retained in the space between portion 114 and clamping face 122*f*. Finger rest portion 126 thus serves as a quick-release for such an object. Because clamping end face 122*f* is movable with respect to arcuate clamping portion 114 of second member 112, a variety of sizes and geometries of laparoscopic devices such as an endoscopic camera may be releasably retained within the region between clamping portion 114 and clamping end face 132*a*, 132*b*. Although a single end face 132*a* is shown, other configurations may be used including a bifurcated arrangement of clamping faces, or more than two distinct end faces or extensions such as a three “tine” fork configuration.

[0068] In use, when an object such as an endoscopic camera is secured by holder 100, the rotational joints thereof are freely movable. However, once the camera is passed through a hole in a patient’s skin, the camera may be aligned to provide the desired view through the use of curvilinear articulating arm assembly 12. Because the size of the entry hole in the patient’s skin is limited, such an object disposed therein is unable to move substantially laterally, but may be angulated as by using arm assembly 12.

[0069] Arm assembly 12 and holder 100 may be disposed in a sterile sleeve cover so that a sterile environment may be maintained for example when an endoscopic camera is coupled thereto and in use. Sterile covers for holder systems such as system 10 preferably are designed to cover the entire apparatus and slide on easily when articulating arm assembly 12 is in the semi-rigid “gooseneck lamp” mode (i.e. with only lever 682 locked, as will be explained). Such covers, preferably formed of transparent or semi-transparent flexible polymer as known in the art, obviate the need for much cleaning and enable full function and use of system 10 in a sterile field. The scope retained by holder 100 is engaged by opening the spring-loaded slot between face 122*f* and clamping portion 114 and working the mechanism of holder 100 through the cover, invaginating the cover into this slot with the scope then retained. The cover preferably withstands repeated engage/disengage cycles and scope rotations.

[0070] A variety of materials may be used to form the holder systems of the present invention. For example, components may be formed of polymer such as injection molded polymer, or metallic materials such as aluminum. Wherein springs are used, the springs for example may be formed of steel.

[0071] Although the center of second member 112 of holder 100 may be offset a distance d_1 from the central longitudinal axis of coupling portion 102 and body portion 104, in some embodiments first member 108 may be configured so that the center of second member 112 may be aligned to be coaxial with the central longitudinal axis of coupling portion 102 and body portion 104.

[0072] Turning to FIGS. 3A-3G, a second exemplary embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder 300 according to the present invention is shown. Holder 300 includes a coupling portion 302 in the form of a post that optionally may include a circumferential groove therein (not shown). Coupling portion 302 preferably is configured to be received in portion 82 of free handle 62 of articulating arm assembly 14, as will be described later. Holder 300 includes a body portion 304 with a preferably cylindrical free end portion 306 forming a first rotational joint. In particular, a

first member 308 is mounted on end portion 306 so that end portion 306 extends within a bore 308*a* in first member 308. In the preferred exemplary embodiment, there is minimal frictional resistance to rotational movement of portion 306 and first member 308 with respect to one another so that these components are freely rotatable with respect to one another. However, the tolerance between the components preferably is selected to minimize other play therebetween, and the coupling between the components preferably is such that minimal translation of one component with respect to the other component is permitted along their central axis of rotation.

[0073] In alternate embodiments, portion 306 and first member 308 are mechanically associated with each other such that frictional engagement of these components resists rotational movement of portion 306 and first member 308 with respect to each other. However, the frictional engagement preferably permits relative rotation of portion 306 and first member 308 when sufficient manual, external force is applied as by a using holder 300 surgeon during a medical procedure.

[0074] End portion 306 and first member 308 are disposed preferably at right angles with respect to each other. First member 308 preferably includes a cylindrical free end portion 310 forming a second rotational joint.

[0075] Holder 300 further includes a second member 312 that is mounted on end portion 310 so that end portion 310 extends within a bore 312*a* in second member 312. Again, in the preferred exemplary embodiment, there is minimal frictional resistance to rotational movement of portion 310 and second member 312 with respect to one another so that these components are freely rotatable with respect to one another. However, the tolerance between the components preferably is selected to minimize other play therebetween, and the coupling between the components preferably is such that minimal translation of one component with respect to the other component is permitted along their central axis of rotation.

[0076] In alternate embodiments, portion 310 and second member 312 are mechanically associated with each other such that frictional engagement of these components resists rotational movement of portion 310 and second member 312 with respect to each other. However, the frictional engagement preferably permits relative rotation of portion 310 and second member 312 when sufficient manual, external force is applied as by a surgeon using holder 300 during a medical procedure.

[0077] End portion 310 and second member 312 are disposed preferably at right angles with respect to each other.

[0078] Second member 312 includes a clamping portion 314 that may be arcuate such as U-shaped or may be another retaining shape such as V-shaped. In addition, a pair of holes 316 extend into second member 312 and are disposed on either side of central longitudinal axis 318 thereof. Holes 316 are configured and dimensioned to receive end portions of springs 320, which extend out of holes 316. Movable clamping jaws 322 are “spring loaded,” with end faces 322*a*, 322*b* abutting ends of respective springs 320. A set screw assembly 324 and respective washer 326 releasably and adjustably couples movable clamping jaws 322 to second

member **312**. As shown for example in FIG. 3E, which shows a view with screw assembly **324** and washer **326** removed, a slot **328** guides movement of movable clamping jaws **322** along axis **318**, with the shaft portion of screw assembly **324** being threadably received in central threaded hole **330** in second member **312**. Oval shaped slot **328** permits limited movement, with the shaft of screw assembly **324** being stopped from further movement at either end of slot **328**.

[0079] Clamping end faces **332a**, **332b** that are movable with respect to arcuate clamping portion **314** of second member **312**, and thus a variety of sizes and geometries of laparoscopic devices such as an endoscopic camera may be releasably retained within the region between clamping portion **314** and clamping end faces **332a**, **332b**. Although end faces **332a**, **332b** are shown in a bifurcated arrangement, other configurations may be used including a single clamping face such as a larger end face **332a** or **332b**, or more than two distinct end faces or extensions such as a three "tine" fork configuration.

[0080] In some embodiments, screw assembly **324** may include a threaded screw **324a**, a knurled thumb portion **324b**, and a set screw **324c** (shown in FIG. 3D) extending into the shaft of screw **324a**.

[0081] Holders **100**, **300** thus each incorporate a system of freely articulating joints and that supports a clamp for a laparoscope which may be aligned and attached along the long axis of the laparoscope. The instrument shaft may be held in alignment within the clamp opening by the spring-loaded clamp or in an alternate embodiment by using elastic band(s). The clamping mechanism of holders **100**, **300** preferably is of sufficient tension to hold the laparoscope in fixed alignment with the clamp body and yet allow rotation of the laparoscope about its long axis within the clamp. Proper functioning of this mechanism will allow for simple fixation of holder **100**, **300** to secure the laparoscope in a steady position without actually locking the individual joints in the universal system. Such a retention is permitted because the laparoscope shaft is firmly attached in three dimensions to the joint at the end of holder **100**, **300** and also passes through a second joint (the laparoscopic port) that is fixed in two dimensions at the skin. By positioning holder **100**, **300**, the camera may be positionally fixed unless the various frictional resistances previously set and controlled are overcome.

[0082] This design and method allows instantaneous and free movement and instant "re-locking" of the laparoscope position merely by relying on frictional resistance of the arm and clamp that is easily overcome for example by articulation by a surgeon, when desired, preferably by one handed positioning and re-positioning. Advantageously, this laparoscope holder system **100**, **300** is very simple mechanically, yet quick, reliable and easy to use. Also, it is a very quick and simple process to engage or disengage the laparoscope when desired.

[0083] The rotational joint provided, for example, by the coupling of end portion **310** and second member **312** preferably allows a 360° range of rotation, because the range of motion required for the laparoscope is extreme. Offsetting the points of rotation of the joints is one preferred design solution.

[0084] In use, a straight, rod-like laparoscope extends both above and below the point of attachment of any clamp that

is used to grasp it. Typically the laparoscope has power/light cords attached at the outer end that increase bulk in that region. Offsetting the rotational joints advantageously may permit better clearance between the outer end of holder **100**, **300** proximate second member **112**, **312** and the bulkier external end of the laparoscope.

[0085] Referring next to FIGS. 3H to 3-O, a third exemplary embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder **400** according to the present invention is shown.

[0086] Holder **400** includes a coupling portion **402** in the form of a post that optionally may include a circumferential groove therein (not shown). Coupling portion **402** preferably is configured to be received in portion **82** of free handle **62** of articulating arm assembly **14**, as will be described later. Holder **400** includes a body portion **404** with a preferably threaded hole **406** formed therein. A rotatable cradle **408** is mounted on a free end **404a** of body portion **404**, with a washer **410** disposed therebetween. A hole **412** with an upper broadened portion **412a** is disposed in cradle **408** and is configured and dimensioned to receive the shaft and head of a threaded screw **414**. Rotation of cradle **408** about longitudinal axis **416** is permitted.

[0087] In one exemplary embodiment, body portion **404**, washer **410**, and cradle **408** are mechanically associated with each other such that there is minimal frictional resistance to rotational movement between components so that cradle **408** and screw **414** are freely rotatable with respect to one another (screw **414** includes an unthreaded portion for this purpose). However, the tolerance between the components preferably is selected to minimize other play therebetween, and the coupling between the components preferably is such that minimal translation of one component with respect to the other component is permitted along their central axis of rotation. In alternate embodiments, frictional engagement of these components resists rotational movement of these components with respect to each other. However, the frictional engagement preferably permits relative rotation of portion **404** and first member **408** when sufficient manual, external force is applied as by a surgeon using holder **400** during a medical procedure.

[0088] Cradle **408** includes spaced, preferably parallel extensions **418** defining a space **420**. Aligned holes **422a**, **422b** in respective extensions **418** receive a rod-shaped member **424** that extends therethrough. Member **424**, for example, may be press-fit in holes **422a**, **422b** so as to be fixed therein. A first clamping portion **426** with a preferably generally C-shaped or arcuate face **426a** is mounted on member **424**, such as by member **424** extending through a hole in portion **426**. First clamping portion **426** is disposed between extensions **418** and is permitted to swivel on member **424** about swivel or rotational axis **428**.

[0089] In one exemplary, preferred embodiment, there is minimal frictional resistance to rotational movement of member **424** and first clamping portion **426** with respect to one another so that these components are freely rotatable with respect to one another. However, the tolerance between the components preferably is selected to minimize other play therebetween, and the coupling between the components preferably is such that minimal translation of one component with respect to the other component is permitted along their central axis of rotation.

[0090] In alternate embodiments, member **424** and first clamping portion **426** may be mechanically associated with

each other such that frictional engagement of these components resists rotational movement of these components with respect to each other. However, the frictional engagement preferably permits relative rotation of member 424 and first clamping portion 426 when sufficient manual, external force is applied as by a surgeon using holder 400 during a medical procedure.

[0091] In a preferred embodiment, axes 416, 428 are oriented perpendicular to one another.

[0092] Angulation of first clamping portion 426 on member 424 permits a laparoscopic device such as an endoscopic camera, schematically shown in FIG. 3H as component 430, to be selectively positioned by a surgeon in a desired orientation.

[0093] Finally, a second clamping portion 432 is provided. Portion 432 preferably is elastic, and in one preferred exemplary embodiment is a resilient rubber o-ring. Advantageously, member 424 extends outward from extensions 418 such that a clamping portion 432 in the form of an o-ring may be demountably coupled proximate ends thereof. Member 424 may include a head or lip at each free end thereof to further assist in captivating clamping portion 432. Thus, a component 430 may be releasably secured to holder 400 by: resting component 430 against first clamping portion 426 on surface 426a, coupling a first loop section 434a of second clamping portion 432 to member 424, extending second clamping portion 432 over component 430, and coupling a second loop section 434b of second clamping portion 432 to member 424.

[0094] Although a resilient o-ring is shown, other alternate embodiments include for example a flexible clip.

[0095] An alternate embodiment of holder 400 is shown in FIG. 3-O. In this embodiment, member 424 comprises a pair of opposing, aligned set screws 440. Thus, clamping portion 426 swivels on an axis defined by screws 440, with the screws extending in holes in clamping portion 426. In addition, clamping portion 426 further includes a recessed portion 442 and a raised portion 444 separated by arcuate transition 446 on the outer sides of each extension 418. Movement of clamping portion 426, in some embodiments, may in part be guided by transition 446, which also may provide a stop to prevent over-rotation of clamping portion 426 on member 440 but otherwise permits free and loose movement.

[0096] Another embodiment of a holder 500 is shown in FIG. 3P. Holder 500 is similar to holder 400 with the rotatable body, however a one-piece Y-shaped cradle or yoke 508 is provided for use with an elastic clamping band as described above. Rotation is permitted about axis 510 as indicated by R_1 , and additional rotation is permitted about pivot region P disposed proximate axis 510 at and proximate the center of yoke 512. In particular, an object such as an endoscopic camera 514 may rock transverse to axis 510, for example in a plane through axis 510 and extending into and out of the page. As shown for example in FIG. 3K, an elastic band may be retained proximate regions 512a, 512b, extending over object 514. In the preferred exemplary embodiment, tines 512 are rigid. However, in some alternate embodiments, tines 512 may have limited flexibility in positioning. In particular, a laparoscopic device such as an endoscopic camera could be held in the Y-axis using the elastic band.

[0097] In yet another embodiment, shown in FIGS. 3R-3S, a holder system 550 includes a holder 551 with a clamping portion 552 for receiving a laparoscopic device such as an endoscopic camera (shown schematically as object 558). Clamping portion 552 is mounted at one end of a body 554 with a split shaft 556. Holder 551 is formed of unitary construction, and for example could be mounted on body portion 560 having a preferably unthreaded hole 562. In particular, split shaft 556 may be releasably disposed in hole 562 so that body 554 and clamping portion 552 may rotate with respect to body portion 560. Portion 556a may be used to engage a suitably configured region in hole 562 (such as a ledge 564) to releasably lock clamping system 550 in hole 562. A coupling portion 566 in the form of a post may be provided as previously described with respect to other embodiments. Body 554 may rotate about central axis 567 in direction R2 as shown. In addition, further rotation may be provided by preferably rigid member 568 extending from body 554 to clamping portion 552. Member 568 forms a living hinge and permits rotation in the form of rocking transverse to axis 567 and preferably in the plane of the page for the orientation shown in FIG. 3S. In a preferred exemplary embodiment, member 568 is rigid such that torsion about axis 567 is substantially resisted. Arms 570 serve as levers upon which a user may grasp with his or her fingers to assist in stabilizing the assembly during insertion or withdrawal of an object 558 such as an endoscopic camera from clamping portion 552.

[0098] Portions of the holders described above, such as holder 551, for example, could be made injection molded parts that could be made to function as described. Holder 551, for example, may be a single-use, sterile, disposable component and thus in some embodiments a sterile drape for use with system 550 need only cover body portion 560 thereof and not holder 551.

[0099] Referring next to FIGS. 3AA-3EE, another exemplary embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder 800 according to the present invention is shown. Holder 800 includes a coupling portion 802 in the form of a post that optionally may include a circumferential groove therein (not shown). Coupling portion 802 preferably is configured to be received in portion 82 of free handle 62 of articulating arm assembly 14, as will be described later. Holder 800 includes a body portion 804 coupled along axis 806 at a first rotational joint 808 to a first joint member 810. In the exemplary embodiment, first rotational joint 808 may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis 806.

[0100] In some embodiments, a series of rotational joints may be provided. In the exemplary embodiment, first member 810 is coupled along an axis 812 at a second rotational joint 814 to a second joint member 816. Second rotational joint 814 may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis 812. Second joint member 816 is coupled along an axis 818 at a third rotational joint 820 to a third joint member 822. Third rotational joint 820 may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis 818.

[0101] Holder 800 further includes a linear length adjustment portion 824, which will be described shortly. In the exemplary embodiment, portion 824 is coupled along an axis 826 at a fourth rotational joint 828 to third joint member 822. Preferably, fourth rotational joint 828 is disposed proximate a free end of portion 824.

[0102] In one preferred exemplary embodiment, axes **806**, **812** are disposed at about 90° with respect to each other, axes **812**, **818** are disposed at about 90° with respect to each other, and axes **818**, **826** are disposed at about 90° with respect to each other. In addition, the combination of rotational joints **808**, **814**, **820**, **828** permit movement in four separate planes, it being possible for at least one pair of said planes (e.g., as defined by joints **808**, **820** or as defined by joints **814**, **828**) to be parallel to one another and it also being possible for there to be two pairs of parallel planes provided by the joints (e.g., as defined by joints **808**, **820** and as defined by joints **814**, **828**). The combination of rotational joints **808**, **814**, **820**, **828** also preferably permits movement in four separate planes which may be nonparallel to one another.

[0103] In the exemplary embodiment, linear length adjustment portion **824** forms a sliding mechanism in which a first sliding member **830** is coupled to a second sliding member **832** and slidably associated with one another. Preferably, constant friction sliding is provided by members **830**, **832**. Also in the exemplary embodiment, members **830**, **832** are restricted to move with respect to one another along central sliding axis **834**.

[0104] Member **830** for example may be coupled to a coupling portion **836** such as with a plurality of screws **838**. Preferably, coupling portion **836** is configured and dimensioned to be received and slide in a grooved portion or track **832a** formed in member **832**. Members **830**, **832** may be coupled to one another with a set screw **839** which extends through and is permitted to translate along the length of slot **840** in member **832**. The shaft of set screw **839** extends into member **834**. In some embodiments, set screw **839** may be tightened so that the head thereof bears against member **832** to adjust the friction between the members **830**, **832** with respect to each other.

[0105] In alternate embodiments, the shaft of set screw **839** and the width of slot **840** may be sized so that if no coupling portion **836** is provided, movement of members **830**, **832** is guided along axis **834**.

[0106] Another rotational joint **842** is disposed proximate the free end of portion **824** opposite the free end at which rotational joint **828** is disposed. Joint **842** is disposed along an axis **844**. In particular, an extension **830a** of member **830** is coupled along axis **844** at rotational joint **842** to a joint member **846**. Rotational joint **842** may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis **844**. Preferably, axes **834**, **844** are parallel and disposed in different planes.

[0107] Joint member **846** is coupled along an axis **848** at yet another rotational joint **850** to a laparoscopic device retaining portion **852**. Rotational joint **850** may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis **848**. Laparoscopic device retaining portion **852** for example may be a clamp formed by a pair of jaw members **852a**, **852b** that are spring biased toward one another with a spring **852c** at a laparoscopic device grasping region **852d**. Preferably, laparoscopic device grasping region **852d** is sized to receive a laparoscopic device such as an endoscopic camera, shown schematically as device **854**. Thus, grasping region **852d** may be sized, for example, to grasp a 5 mm and/or 10 mm laparoscope. In the exemplary embodiment, axes **844**, **848** are disposed at about 90° with respect to each other.

[0108] Retaining portion **852** preferably may be used to secure the shaft portion of a laparoscopic device such as an

endoscopic camera. A sterile sleeve drape may be used to cover the entire apparatus and to be imbricated into grasping region **852d**. Preferably, while spring-biased jaw members are configured to hold the laparoscopic device securely, they also permit the device to be manually rotated about its linear axis with enough frictional resistance to prevent undesired rotational movement.

[0109] The rotational joints of holder **800** such as rotational joints **814**, **816** for example may be formed as follows. A threaded screw **856** is disposed with the head thereof abutting a first washer **858a** which optionally rests on a second washer **858b**. Washers **858a**, **858b** rest on a ledge such as ledge **860** in member **816**. The shaft of screw **856** extends through coaxial holes **862**, **864** in adjacent components such as members **810**, **816**, and is threadably received in a nut **866** that rests against a washer **868** abutting ledge **870** in member **810**. Members **810**, **816** may be separated from one another with a washer **872**. A sleeve **874** optionally may be provided with a hole therein through which the shaft of screw **856** extends and is guided. Sleeve **874** may be disposed proximate the head of screw **856** or remote from the head.

[0110] Thus, laparoscopic device **854** may be positioned as desired using the combined freedom of movement provided by rotational joints **808**, **814**, **820**, **828**, **842**, **850**, linear length adjustment portion **824**, as well as the rotation provided by coupling portion **802** when received in portion **82** of free handle **62** of articulating arm assembly **14**.

[0111] In one preferred exemplary embodiment, holder **800** moves with five degrees of freedom, with the sixth degree being accommodated by rotation of laparoscopic device **854** within laparoscopic device retaining portion **852**. Preferably, frictional movement is provided by rotational joints **808**, **814**, **820**, **828**, **842**, **850**, linear length adjustment portion **824**, as well as coupling portion **802** when received in portion **82** of free handle **62** of articulating arm assembly **14**. Preferably, the friction is sufficient to hold the laparoscopic device regardless of orientation but selected so that the device is easily movable for reorientation through manual manipulation by a user. Higher frictional resistance to allow for movement of the working envelope may be provided by curvilinear articulating arm assembly **12**, as described herein. It should be noted, however, that the ease of movement between relatively moving components may be selected as desired as a function of the friction between said components. Thus, different embodiments of holder **800** may be provided with different amounts of friction for rotational joints **808**, **814**, **820**, **828**, **842**, **850**, linear length adjustment portion **824**, as well as coupling portion **802**.

[0112] Turning next to FIGS. 3FF to 3-UU, yet another exemplary embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder **900** according to the present invention is shown. Holder **900** includes a coupling portion **902** in the form of a post that optionally may include a circumferential groove therein (not shown). Coupling portion **902** preferably is configured to be received in portion **82** of free handle **62** of articulating arm assembly **14**, as will be described later. Holder **900** includes a body portion **904** coupled along axis **906** at a first rotational joint **908** to a first joint member **910**. In the exemplary embodiment, first rotational joint **908** may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis **906**.

[0113] In some embodiments, a series of rotational joints may be provided. In the exemplary embodiment, first mem-

ber 910 is coupled along an axis 912 at a second rotational joint 914 to a second joint member 916. Second rotational joint 914 may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis 912. Second joint member 916 is coupled along an axis 918 at a third rotational joint 920 to a linear length adjustment portion 924, which will be described shortly. Third rotational joint 920 may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis 918. Preferably, third rotational joint 914 is disposed proximate a free end of portion 924.

[0114] In one preferred exemplary embodiment, axes 906, 912 are disposed at about 90° with respect to each other, and axes 912, 918 are disposed at about 90° with respect to each other. In addition, the combination of rotational joints 908, 914, 920 permits movement in three separate planes, it being possible for at least one pair of said planes (e.g., as defined by joints 908, 920) to be parallel to one another. The combination of rotational joints 908, 914, 920 also preferably permits movement in three separate planes which may be nonparallel to one another.

[0115] In the exemplary embodiment, linear length adjustment portion 924 forms a sliding mechanism in which a first sliding member 930 is coupled to a second sliding member 932 and slidably associated with one another. Preferably, constant friction sliding is provided by members 930, 932. Also in the exemplary embodiment, members 930, 932 are restricted to move with respect to one another along central sliding axis 934. Advantageously, linear length adjustment portion 924 permits a user to reposition a laparoscopic device 954, for example into and out of an opening in a patient, with gross movement in a linear direction, as compared to angulation. For example, linear length adjustment portion 924 may permit about 6 inches of linear movement of a device 954 held by holder 900.

[0116] Member 930 may be provided with a first slot 930a and member 932 may be provided with a second slot 932a, with each of slots 930a, 932a being disposed centrally along axis 934. First and second slots 930a, 932a each may have a length S_1 , S_2 , respectively, along axis 934, and lengths S_1 , S_2 may be about the same as one another. In an exemplary preferred embodiment, lengths S_1 , S_2 each may be about 5.5 inches. In the preferred exemplary embodiment, members 930, 932 are coupled to each other by coupling assemblies 936 extending from fixed positions with respect to and proximate free ends 930b, 932b thereof.

[0117] Each coupling assembly 936 includes a female threaded round standoff 936a that threadably receives truss head Phillips machine screws 936b, 936c at opposing ends thereof. Standoff 936a extends through a plain bearing 936d which is sized to slide and be guided in a respective slot 930a, 930b generally constrained for movement along axis 934. Bearing 936d extends through a plastic thrust bearing 936c positioned between members 930, 932. A member 930, 932 is captivated between plastic thrust bearing 936e and a second plastic thrust bearing 936f. A stainless steel round flat washer 936g and a curved disc spring 936h are provided between bearing 936f and the head of screw 936c as shown, with bearing 936d abutting washer 936g. Spring 936h maintains tension between thrust bearings 936e, 936g. Finally, another curved disc spring 936i is provided and seats in a recess 930c or 932c of a member 930, 932, respectively. Curved disc spring 936i allows for greater machining tolerances for recesses 930c, 932c and preferably keeps bearing

936d in contact with washer 936g. Coupling assemblies 936 thus allow some adjustment of tensioning so that a desired level of force permits movement of members 930, 932 with respect to one another. By loosening or tightening each of assemblies 936, frictional resistance to sliding or telescoping of members 930, 932 with respect to each other may be selected.

[0118] Another rotational joint 942 is disposed proximate the free end of portion 924 opposite the free end at which rotational joint 920 is disposed. Joint 942 is disposed along an axis 944. In particular, an extension 930a of member 930 is coupled along axis 944 at rotational joint 942 to a joint member 946. Rotational joint 942 may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis 944. Preferably, axes 934, 944 are parallel and disposed in different planes.

[0119] Joint member 946 is coupled along an axis 948 at yet another rotational joint 950 to a laparoscopic device retaining portion 952. Rotational joint 950 may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis 948. Laparoscopic device retaining portion 952, for example, may be a clamp formed by a pair of jaw members 952a, 952b with a laparoscopic device grasping region 952d formed by jaw portions that are spring biased toward one another and handle regions that are spring biased away from one another, the biasing accomplished using a spring 952c. Preferably, laparoscopic device grasping region 952d is sized to receive a laparoscopic device such as an endoscopic camera, shown schematically as device 954. Thus, grasping region 952d may be sized, for example, to grasp a 5 mm and/or 10 mm laparoscope (as shown in FIG. 3-OO, two cylindrical regions are sized for this purpose). In the exemplary embodiment, axes 944, 948 are disposed at about 90° with respect to each other.

[0120] In order to provide sufficient clamping strength so that a laparoscopic device 954 may be securely and releasably retained within grasping region 952d of retaining portion 952, without undesired slippage or rotation, a strong spring mechanism is provided. In particular, as shown in FIGS. 3PP-3UU, spring 952c in part elastically biases jaw members 952a, 952b toward one another so that grasping region 952d is in a closed position. In the preferred exemplary embodiment, spring 952c is a Type 302 stainless steel torsion spring providing a torque of about 21 in.-lbs. (McMaster-Carr part number 9287K103 with the following characteristics: 90° deflection angle clockwise wound, spring outer diameter about 0.9 inch, wire diameter about 0.1 inch, length about 3.5 inches, maximum rod outer diameter about 0.5 inch, body length/spring length at torque about 0.6 inch, and about 3.25 active coils). However, in alternate embodiments, other elastic members instead of a torsion spring may be used and other spring characteristics may be specified as long as proper retention is provided in region 952d. Thus, even forces due to power cords, etc., that may be associated with a laparoscopic device 954 may be sufficiently countered while device 954 is disposed in grasping region 952d.

[0121] Because of the substantial torque provided by spring 952c to securely retain a laparoscopic device 954 in grasping region 952d, a user may need very significant hand strength to be able to compress the handle portions of jaw members 952a, 952b toward one another. To enhance usability in view of the torque of spring 952c, jaw member 952a has a forked, bifurcated design with a first portion 952a₁

having a U-shaped region that receives a second portion 952a₂. A first pin 953a pivotally associates portions 952a₁ and 952a₂ to one another, while a second pin 953b pivotally associates second portion 952a₂ to lever link 955. Lever link 955 is further pivotally associated with jaw member 952b with a third pin 953c. A boss 959a of first portion 952a₁ with a through hole therein is received in the through hole of a boss 959b of jaw member 952b and these jaw members 952a, 952b are coupled to one another with a screw 957a that extends in the through hole of boss 959a and tightly abuts a coaxial set screw 957b. Spring 952c is disposed about boss 959b with one leg resting against ledge 961a and the other leg resting against ledge 961b of jaw members 952a, 952b, respectively. During operation, in order to open grasping region 952d, a user may grasp in one hand and squeeze (1) portion 952a₁ of jaw 952a which forms a first handle region and (2) jaw member 952b which forms a second handle region. The use of a jaw member 952a having portions 952a₁ and 952a₂ as well as lever link 955 provides a mechanical advantage to the user when changing the size of the openings in grasping region 952d, e.g. to allow insertion or release of a laparoscopic device 954 therein. Preferably, the mechanical advantage is such that the turning force applied by a user to move jaw members 952a, 952b with respect to one another is less than half the turning force otherwise required for the spring 952c.

[0122] In an exemplary preferred embodiment, when jaw members 952a, 952b are closed as shown in FIGS. 3PP and 3QQ, portion 952a₂ is separated from portion 952b by an angle J of about 35°.

[0123] Retaining portion 952 preferably may be used to secure the shaft portion of a laparoscopic device such as an endoscopic camera. A sterile sleeve drape may be used to cover the entire apparatus and to be imbricated into grasping region 952d. Preferably, while spring-biased jaw members are configured to hold the laparoscopic device securely, they also permit the device to be manually rotated about its linear axis with enough frictional resistance to prevent undesired rotational movement.

[0124] The rotational joints of holder 900 such as rotational joints 914, 920 for example may be formed as follows. An internally threaded bolt 956 is disposed with the head thereof abutting a first washer 958a. The washer 958a abuts a first side of a joint member such as member 916 while a second washer 958b abuts an opposite side of member 916 with bolt 956 extending therethrough. The shaft of bolt 956 extends through hole 962 and a coaxial hole in an adjacent component such as member 932. An externally threaded bolt 964 is threadably received in internally threaded bolt 956.

[0125] In another exemplary embodiment, the rotational joints of holder 900 such as rotational joints 908, 914, 920, 942, 950 for example may be formed with thrust bearings as follows. Although in FIGS. 3VV and 3WW an exemplary rotational joint 920 is shown, the construction of this joint also may reflect the construction of exemplary rotational joints 908, 914, 942, 950 according to this embodiment. Rotational joint 920 couples joint member 916 and sliding member 932 (shown in phantom). Joint 920 includes a central screw 970 which is threadably received in a threaded hole 916a in joint member 916. A Belleville or conical washer 972 abuts head 970a of screw 970 as well as a steel ball thrust bearing 974 (which for example may be carbon

steel or stainless steel). Washer 972 creates a spring tension to broaden the window of adjustability of holder 900 during assembly and accommodates slight wear that may occur in operation of holder 900. In turn, thrust bearing 974 is mounted on a sleeve 976 which extends from within a central opening in thrust bearing 974 to within a recessed region in joint member 916. Rotational joint 920 further includes a pair of washers 978, 980, preferably formed of stainless steel, and a spacer 982 disposed therebetween, together mounted on sleeve 976. Washer 978 abuts and preferably is bonded to joint member 916 while washer 980 abuts and preferably is bonded to sliding member 932. Washers 978, 980 may rotate freely with respect to spacer 982. Spacer 982 for example may be formed of Delrin® AF Blend (Acetal homopolymer, PTFE-filled). As is known in the art, a high performance miniature steel ball thrust bearing 974 for example may be formed of a pair of precision chrome-steel washers 974a, 974b and a ball cage 974c that is bronze or stainless steel with steel balls 974d disposed therein (e.g., McMaster-Carr part number 7806K63). In use, rotational joint 920 advantageously accommodates thrust loads—it can accommodate axial thrust along the axis of the “shaft” it supports—while also providing desired rotational movement between joint member 916 and sliding member 932. Although a steel ball thrust bearing 972 is shown, other types of thrust bearing constructions instead may be used, and also other types of bearings instead may be used. Moreover, although rotational joint 920 with thrust bearing 972 has been shown in the exemplary context of joint member 916 and sliding member 932, in the present embodiment such joint constructions with thrust bearings may be used in one or more, and preferably each of rotational joints 908, 914, 920, 942, 950.

[0126] While holder 900 for example is shown in FIGS. 3FF and 3GG with a coupling portion 902 in the form of a post that couples to body portion 904, another exemplary embodiment of a coupling portion 990 coupled to body portion 904 is shown in FIGS. 3XX-3ZZ. Coupling portion 990 is configured, for example, as an adaptor for coupling holder 900 to other types of arrangements as known in the art. Thus, holder 900 may be attached to a variety of positioning arms not limited for example to the curvilinear articulating arm assembly 12 in FIG. 1. Portion 990 includes a central hole 992 that receives a projection 904a extending from an end of body portion 904. Body portion 904 and coupling portion 990 are further aligned with a pin 994 extending in holes in portions 904, 990 that are coaxial when in alignment with one another. An interface lock 996 extends into member 990a of coupling portion 990 and is rotatably associated with projection 904a of body portion 904. Interface lock 996 for example may include a knurled knob portion 996a, a cylindrical post 996b, a sleeve 996c, and a set screw 996d. Exemplary operation of such an interface lock 996 is described elsewhere herein with respect to an interface lock 683 shown in FIG. 4U.

[0127] Thus, laparoscopic device 954 may be positioned as desired using the combined freedom of movement provided by rotational joints 908, 914, 920, 942, 950, linear length adjustment portion 924, as well as the rotation provided by coupling portion 902 when received in portion 82 of free handle 62 of articulating arm assembly 14.

[0128] Preferably, frictional movement is provided by rotational joints 908, 914, 920, 942, 950, linear length

adjustment portion **924**, as well as coupling portion **902** when received in portion **82** of free handle **62** of articulating arm assembly **14**, as described with respect to holder **800** above. Preferably the friction is sufficient to hold the laparoscopic device regardless of orientation but selected so that the device is easily movable for reorientation through manual manipulation by a user. Preferably, when a user positions a laparoscopic device **954** using holder **900**, the rotational and linear movements provided by the components of holder **900** provide a generally uniform feel to the user. In other words, during manual manipulation of a device **954** coupled to holder **900**, it feels to the user as though the user encounters the same degree of resistance to movement of the laparoscopic device **954** regardless of the direction in which device **954** is moved/oriented. In one exemplary preferred embodiment, rotational joints **908**, **914**, **920** proximate coupling portion **902** for interfacing with articulating arm assembly **14** may have about two times the frictional resistance to movement as rotational joints **942**, **950** proximate laparoscopic device retaining portion **952**.

[0129] Next, with reference to FIGS. 3AAA-3HHH, yet another exemplary embodiment of a laparoscopic instrument holder **1000** according to the present invention is shown. As with previous embodiments, in an exemplary embodiment holder **1000** includes three rotational axes at a proximal end and two rotational axes at a distal end. Holder **1000** includes a coupling portion **1002** in the form of a post. Coupling portion **1002** preferably is configured to be received in portion **82** of free handle **62** of articulating arm assembly **14**, as will be described later. Holder **1000** includes a body portion **1004** coupled along axis **1006** at a first rotational joint **1008** to a first joint member **1010**. In the exemplary embodiment, first rotational joint **1008** may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis **1006**.

[0130] In some embodiments, a series of rotational joints may be provided. In the exemplary embodiment, first member **1010** is coupled along an axis **1012** at a second rotational joint **1014** to a second joint member **1016**. Second rotational joint **1014** may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis **1012**. Second joint member **1016** is coupled along an axis **1018** at a third rotational joint **1020** to a linear length adjustment portion **1024**, which will be described shortly. Third rotational joint **1020** may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis **1018**. Preferably, third rotational joint **1014** is disposed proximate a free end of portion **1024**.

[0131] In one preferred exemplary embodiment, axes **1006**, **1012** are disposed at about 90° with respect to each other, and axes **1012**, **1018** are disposed at about 90° with respect to each other. In addition, the combination of rotational joints **1008**, **1014**, **1020** permits movement in three separate planes, it being possible for at least one pair of said planes (e.g., as defined by joints **1008**, **1020**) to be parallel to one another. The combination of rotational joints **1008**, **1014**, **1020** may permit movement in three separate planes which may be nonparallel to one another.

[0132] In the exemplary embodiment, linear length adjustment portion **1024** forms a sliding mechanism in which a generally tubular first sliding member **1030** is coupled to a generally tubular second sliding member **1032** and are slidably associated with one another. Portion **1024** forms an extendable section of holder **1000** that for example provides adjustability to the length of holder **1000**. In the exemplary

embodiment, members **1030**, **1032** are restricted to move with respect to one another along central sliding axis **1034**. Advantageously, linear length adjustment portion **1024** permits a user to reposition a laparoscopic device **1054**, for example into and out of an opening in a patient, with gross movement in a linear direction, as compared to angulation. For example, linear length adjustment portion **1024** may permit about 5 or about 6 inches of linear movement of a device **1054** held by holder **1000**.

[0133] Member **1030** preferably is received within, and telescopes with respect to member **1032**. As shown in FIG. 3CCC, member **1032** is hollow and is provided with a slot **1032a**. A roller key **1034a** is secured to member **1030** with a rivet **1034b**; a piston member **1036** is coupled to a free end of member **1030** (see FIG. 3EEE) and rivet **1034b** extends in a coaxially disposed holes **1036a**, **1030a** in members **1036**, **1030** respectively. Roller key **1034a** coupled to member **1030** is movable within slot **1032a** of member **1032** and preferably is a miniature high precision stainless steel ball bearing. A cover **1037** may be secured to member **1032** over slot **1032a**, for example, for safety and aesthetic reasons. Member **1032** also may be provided with a bushing **1038** to provide support for member **1030** and to assist in preventing a sterile sleeve drape covering holder **1000** from being caught during movement of member **1030** with respect to member **1032**. Bushing **1038** includes a plurality of fingers **1038a** disposed radially with respect to axis **1034**. Advantageously, the use of fingers **1038a** allows an adequate interference fit to be provided with minimal drag between fingers **1038a** and the outer surface of member **1030** to prevent the sterile sleeve drape covering holder **1000** from being inadvertently caught during movement. Bushing **1038** may be formed, for example, of Delrin® AF Blend (Acetal homopolymer, PTFE-filled).

[0134] As shown in FIG. 3EEE, piston member **1036** is spring-loaded. In particular, a spring **1036b** and a plunger **1036c** are disposed within a hollow cylindrical region **1036d** in piston member **1036** for movement along axis **1036e**. Preferably axis **1036e** is disposed perpendicular to axis **1034**. By providing the spring/plunger arrangement, a consistent drag force may be provided for movement of members **1030**, **1032** with respect to each other as plunger **1036c** bears against the inner wall of member **1032**. In an exemplary embodiment, the following components and materials may be used: spring **1036b** may be stainless, ½" long×0.36" OD×0.032" wire; the plunger may be 0.43" long with an OD of 0.375 and may be made of Delrin® AF Blend; the depth of the hole in the piston may be ¾" and the diameter of the piston may be 0.86", sized for clearance to the ID of member **1032**.

[0135] Turning back to FIG. 3AAA, another rotational joint **1042** is disposed proximate the free end of member **1030** opposite the free end of member **1032** at which rotational joint **1020** is disposed. Joint **1042** is disposed along axis **1034**. Rotational joint **1042** may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis **1034**. Joint member **1046** is coupled along an axis **1048** at yet another rotational joint **1050** to a laparoscopic device retaining portion **1052**. Rotational joint **1050** may permit a 360° range of rotation about axis **1048**. Laparoscopic device retaining portion **1052**, for example as shown in FIG. 3HHH, may be a clamp formed by a pair of jaw members **1052a**, **1052b** with a laparoscopic device grasping region **1052d** formed by jaw portions that

are spring biased toward one another and handle regions that are spring biased away from one another, the biasing accomplished using a spring **1052c**. Preferably, laparoscopic device grasping region **1052d** is sized to receive a laparoscopic device such as an endoscopic camera, shown schematically as device **1054**. Preferably, grasping region **1052d** is formed by material softer than aluminum to prevent marring or denting of surfaces of delicate laparoscopic device **1054** which typically is thin-walled. In the exemplary preferred embodiment, polyurethane covers **1052e** are provided. Covers **1052e** for example may be formed of 85 or 95 durometer polyurethane, permitting devices **1054** to even be twisted out of grasping region **1052d** without damage occurring. In the exemplary embodiment, axes **1034**, **1048** are disposed at about 90° with respect to each other.

[0136] Further details concerning retaining portion **1052** were previously provided in the context of retaining portion **952** of a previous embodiment.

[0137] Thus, retaining portion **1052** preferably may be used to secure the shaft portion of a laparoscopic device such as an endoscopic camera. A sterile sleeve drape may be used to cover the entire apparatus and to be imbricated into grasping region **1052d**. Preferably, while spring-biased jaw members are configured to hold the laparoscopic device securely, they also permit the device to be manually rotated about its linear axis with enough frictional resistance to prevent undesired rotational movement.

[0138] An exemplary rotational joint **1014** is shown in FIG. 3GGG. Each of joints **1008**, **1014**, **1020** for example may have the same construction, and joint **1014** is described in particular. Although similar to these joints, the joints **1042**, **1050** proximate retaining portion **1052** have similar constructions to joint **920** shown in FIGS. 3VV-3WW a previously described (e.g., with two stainless steel washers and a Delrin® AF Blend spacer therebetween that is not bonded to its surroundings). However, as will be described, components in these various joints may be formed of different materials depending on whether the joint is located near the proximal or distal end of holder **1000**.

[0139] In a preferred exemplary embodiment, joint **1014** may include a thrust bearing. Rotational joint **1014** couples joint member **1010** to joint member **1016** (shown in phantom). Joint **1014** includes a central screw **1070** which is threadably received in a threaded hole **1010a** in joint member **1010**. A pair of Belleville or conical washers **1072** are disposed proximate head **1070a** of screw **1070** as well as a high performance miniature steel ball thrust bearing **1074** that for example may be formed of a pair of precision chrome-steel washers **974a**, **974b** and a ball cage **974c** that is bronze or stainless steel with steel balls **974d** disposed therein (e.g., McMaster-Carr part number 7806K63). In turn, thrust bearing **1074** is mounted on a sleeve **1076** which extends from within a central opening in thrust bearing **1074** to within a recessed region in joint member **1016**. Rotational joint **1014** further includes a washer **1078** preferably formed of stainless steel and a spacer **1082** adjacent sleeve **1076**. Washer **1078** abuts joint member **1010**. Washer **1078** preferably is bonded to joint member **1010** while spacer **1082** preferably is bonded to joint member **1016**, it being possible for washer **1078** and spacer **1082** to rotate with respect to each other. The use of such a joint with a thrust bearing was

described previously with respect to joint **920** of another embodiment, and the previous description also applies to this embodiment.

[0140] In a preferred exemplary embodiment, members **1030**, **1032** are formed of 6061-T6 aluminum due to the strength to weight ratio of this material. However, other materials could be used for example thin wall steel. Washers such as washers **1072** may be formed of stainless steel.

[0141] The spacers such as spacer **1082** in rotational joints **1008**, **1014**, **1020** at the proximal end may be formed of Multifil™ sliding bearing material which is polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE)-based and available from GGB North America LLC. Advantageously, the Multifil material has low stiction for the present application—it shows almost no signs of “sticking” in the operating conditions of holder **1000**. On the other hand, the spacers in the rotational joints at the distal end such as joints **1042**, **1050** may be formed of Delrin® AF Blend (Acetal homopolymer, PTFE-filled). Different materials were used for the spacers at the proximal and distal ends for several reasons. First, Multifil was only available in a limited range of thicknesses. Because the spacers at the proximal end were of relatively large diameters (1 1/8 inch), forces against the spacers could be spread over this relatively large area thus allowing a “smaller” thickness of spacer to be used without risking plastic deformation. The spacers at the distal end proximate retaining portion **1052** have comparatively small diameters (3/4 inch), and thus “larger” spacer thickness was needed to accommodate forces on these spacers without risking plastic deformation. Multifil was not available in the thickness needed for the spacers at the distal end and thus another material (Delrin® AF Blend) was chosen. Second, stiction appeared to be more of an issue in joints at the proximal end near body portion **1004** (than in joints proximate retaining portion **1052**); Multifil thus was the preferred material for addressing stiction concerns.

[0142] In an exemplary embodiment, holder **1000** may have a fully telescoped length of about 19.5 inches as measured from the first rotational joint **1008** at the proximal end proximate body portion **1004** to the center of the clamp jaw cover **1052e**; the unextended length of holder **1000** may be about 14.25 inches. Thus, telescoping action may provide about 5 to about 5.5 inches of adjustment in length of holder **1000**.

[0143] Joints **1008**, **1014**, and **1020** each are set to about 2 ft-lbs of torque, while joint **1042** is set to about 0.8 ft-lbs of torque and joint **1050** is set to about 1.2 ft-lbs of torque. The telescoping action of members **1030**, **1032** may be set to have about an axial force of about 1 lb.

[0144] In use, the port in a patient into which a device **1054** is introduced may serve as a fulcrum. The clamp of holder **1000** preferably is capable of holding about 1/4 lb. of weight from device **1054** when holder **1000** is fully extended. Although a typical endoscopic scope may weigh about 1/4 lb., various cables associated with the scope increase the weight that must be supported. However, support is further provided by the port formed in the body into which the scope is inserted, helping to assist in accommodating the additional weight.

[0145] The rotational joints described herein, for example, may permit limited rotation such as rotation through an

angle of about 180° or an angle of about 270°, or may permit about 360° of rotation about an axis of the rotational joint.

[0146] Next, an exemplary method of using holder **900** is described although this method applies to other holders described herein such as holder **1000**. In use, the position of holder **900** should be checked for suitable working range near the planned camera port site. The optimum attachment point for the articulating arm assembly **14** for example on a surgical bed railing should be determined after the patient is positioned and asleep and before the prep. Initially, linear length adjustment portion **924** need not be telescoped, although portion **924** should be fully extended for draping. Assembly **14** should be oriented to near vertical for prepping and draping the patient and the arm. The drape for assembly **14** preferably should be placed after the skin prep but before the final large procedure drape is placed. A separate skirt half-sheet drape may be clipped around the base of the system after the large patient drape is placed. Assembly **14** then should be contoured closely to the patient to minimize its footprint and brought adjacent to the camera port. In use, the assembly **14** should be closely contoured to the patient and holder **900** disposed approximately parallel to the skin (perpendicular to the port) to minimize interference and clutter. Also, although it is possible that in one combination joints **910**, **914**, **920** may be aligned generally in the same plane, it is desirable to have at least one of these joint out of plane relative to the others to start. If the laparoscopic device **954** is an endoscopic camera, preferably the shaft of the device is grasped in clamp **952** as close as possible to the camera body. A laparoscopic device **954** coupled to holder **900** may be moved, for example, in six degrees of freedom with the combination of rotational joints **942**, **950** and grasping region **952d** of clamp **952** which permits rotation of device **954** therein.

[0147] Holders **100**, **300**, **400**, **500**, **800**, **900**, **1000** and clamping system **550** preferably may be provided with a full cover sleeve drape. Devices **100**, **300**, **400**, **500**, **550**, **800**, **900**, **1000** may be formed as a single use, pre-sterilized device, or as a sterilizable, re-usable device, or as a non-sterile re-usable device that is covered by a sterile drape/cover when required. Portions of devices **100**, **300**, **400**, **500**, **550**, **800**, **900**, **1000** may be disposable.

[0148] In one exemplary, preferred embodiment, the holders of the present invention may be designed to create a minimum footprint or minimum interference within the surgical field and be easily sterilized or protected by a sterile cover. The holders preferably are long enough to reach from an attachment point on or proximate the location of a bedside railing to well past the skin entry port of a patient to allow for a full range of movement of the laparoscope, and to have enough pathway variability to clear other objects in the surgical field.

[0149] Some embodiments of holders may have several modes of operation. One mode may be free movement with little resistance at the free end. A second mode may be moderate resistance at the free end. This may be most useful when holding an endoscopic camera. In this instance, the resistance in this second mode preferably should be sufficient to maintain camera position in the absence of additional external force while at the same time being weak enough to allow a complete range of three-dimensional manipulation by the surgeon or assistant using only one hand

without the need to adjust any locking or unlocking mechanism. A third mode may be fully locked with high resistance to movement at the free end. This mode may be particularly useful in the case where greater force may be required, such as retraction of an internal structure or organ. In this circumstance, an instrument connection other than, or in addition to the rotational joints disclosed herein, may be used.

[0150] As described above, coupling portion **302** of holder **300** and coupling portion **402** of holder **400** preferably are configured to be received in portion **82** of free handle **62** of articulating arm assembly **14**. This articulating arm assembly now will be described.

[0151] Turning to FIGS. 4A-4C, an exemplary preferred curvilinear articulating arm assembly **12** is shown for use with a laparoscopic instrument holder **14**. Arm assembly includes a central arm **652** with a ball-sleeve arrangement that forms joints. In particular, central arm **652** includes a plurality of sleeves **654** with spherical balls **656** disposed therebetween thus forming ball and socket connections. In the exemplary embodiment shown in the figures, three balls **656a** of a first size are disposed adjacent one another proximate one end of arm **652**, while the remaining balls **656b** are of a second size smaller than the first size. Sleeves **654a** of a first size and sleeves **654c** of a second size smaller than the first size are provided for accommodating balls **656a**, **656b**, respectively, while a transition sleeve **654b** is provided intermediate sleeves **654a**, **654c** as shown for accommodating a ball **656a** on one side and a ball **656b** on the other side thereof. Sleeves **654** are configured and dimensioned to receive balls **656a**, **656b** at ends thereof and thus permit articulating of sleeves with respect to each other. A tensioning wire **658** runs generally centrally through sleeves **654** and balls **656**, as will be further described shortly. Preferably, wire **658** is formed of metal. In an exemplary preferred embodiment, wire **658** is Type 302 stainless steel wire rope, 1×19 strand, 5/32 inch diameter, with a breaking strength of 3300 lb. (McMaster-Carr part number 3458T27). One exemplary operation of a wire tensioning mechanism is shown and described in U.S. Pat. No. 3,858,578 to Milo, which is expressly incorporated herein by reference thereto. Preferably, curvilinear articulating arm assembly **12** may move with six degrees of freedom.

[0152] In the exemplary preferred embodiment, three additional balls **656a** and three additional sleeves **654a** are provided to the arm assembly **12** shown in FIGS. 4A-4C, with arm assembly **12** having a fully extended (straightened) length of about 40 inches. End effector **14**, for example, may add about 4 inches to the length of the arm assembly **12**. In other embodiments, other desired lengths of arm assembly **12** may be accomplished by changing the number of balls and sleeves. For example, without the three additional balls **656a** and three additional sleeves **654a**, arm assembly **12** may have a length of about 32 inches.

[0153] A base handle **660** is coupled to central arm **652** on a first end thereof, preferably adjacent a ball **656a**. In addition, a free handle **662** is coupled to central arm **652** on a second end thereof, preferably adjacent a ball **656b**.

[0154] In one preferred exemplary embodiment, a series of larger balls **656a** is provided proximate base handle **660** to provide stability to curvilinear articulating arm assembly **12**. If for example a user such as a surgeon orients assembly **12** by grasping it proximate free handle **662**, substantial

bending forces may be exerted on central arm 652 proximate base handle 660. Thus, the use of larger balls 656a proximate base handle 660 as compared to smaller balls 656b proximate free handle 662 provides a system with larger surface area balls near base handle 660 for additional resistance to rotational movement in that portion of central arm 652 and thus more stability. In alternate embodiments, more than two different sizes of balls 656 or more than two sets of sizes of balls 656 may be used, preferably increasing in size toward base handle 660. In one alternate embodiment, each of the balls 656 in central arm 652 is of increasingly larger size from free handle 662 to base handle 660. The use of only two sizes of balls 656 advantageously facilitates manufacture and construction of arm assembly 12 because of the need to only stock two sizes as compared to a larger number of sizes and concomitantly greater ease of construction because only two sizes need be assembled to form central arm 652. In yet another alternate embodiment, central arm 652 may be formed of balls 656 that all are the same size.

[0155] Turning to FIG. 4D-4L, base handle 660 will be described. Base handle 660 includes a body portion 660a with levers 666, 668 pivotably associated therewith, as well as an extension 660b that turns screw coupling 663 and rotates in relation to and independent of body portion 660a. Base handle 660 further includes cam mechanisms 670, 672 as will be described. Portion 663b of coupling 663 preferably is noncircular and mechanically engages and is fixed to a like-shaped and sized non-circular opening in portion 660c of extension 660b so that rotation of extensions 660b as by gripping and turning by a user imparts like-rotation of coupling 663 for example for demountable coupling to clamp 16 and further coupling to a surgical table rail 18, as shown for example in FIG. 1. In the preferred exemplary embodiment, coupling 663 comprises a threaded portion 663d which may be threadably received in a threaded hole 16a disposed in clamp 16.

[0156] Coupling 663 is disposed proximate a first free end 664a of a stainless steel shaft 664 which extends through and is provided with a head that abuts a shoulder disposed in end 663c of coupling 663. Preferably, rotation of coupling 663 is independent of rotation of shaft 664. Shaft 664 preferably extends through a hole in extension 660b.

[0157] Lever 666 is pivotably coupled to rocker arm 672 with a pin 666a that is disposed such that rotation of lever 666 results in eccentric movement of rocker arm 672. As shown for example in FIGS. 4D-4E, cylindrical projections 666b of lever 666 are received and rotate in arcuate cradle portions 660a₁ of body portion 660a, while cylindrical projections 672b of rocker arm 672 are received and rotate in arcuate cradle portions 660a₂ of body portion 660a. Rotation of lever 666 toward screw coupling 663 in direction K lifts pin 666a, and because rocker arm 672 rests on pin 666a, rocker arm 672 is rotated in direction L in an eccentric fashion.

[0158] As seen particularly in FIG. 4F, shaft 664 includes a threaded portion 664b the free end of which is threadably associated with a nut 665a. Shaft 664 extends through a hole in rocker arm 672 and an unthreaded insert 665b with a hole therein which assists in guiding travel of rod 664 along the longitudinal axis thereof. Pivoting of lever 666 in direction K causes rotation of rocker arm 672, and with shaft 664

coupled to nut 665a and nut 665a abutting insert 665b, rod 664 is translated in direction M.

[0159] When coupling 663 is threaded into a like threaded hole by rotation of extension 660b, arm assembly 12 is relatively loosely coupled by the connection of coupling 663 to the hole. To firmly couple arm assembly 12, lever 666 may be pivoted in direction K so that threaded portion 663d of coupling 663 also moves in direction M and bears against the threads of the hole in which it is received. The leverage created by even slight movement of the threads against the threaded holes, on the order of tens of thousandths of an inch, creates a wedging effect that strongly locks arm assembly 12 to the hole.

[0160] Lever 668 of base handle 660 also is pivotably coupled to a rocker arm 670 with a pin 668a that is disposed such that rotation of lever 668 results in eccentric movement of rocker arm 670. As shown for example in FIGS. 4D-4H, cylindrical projections 668b of lever 668 are received and rotate in arcuate cradle portions 660a₃ of body portion 660a, while cylindrical projections 670b of rocker arm 670 are received and rotate in arcuate cradle portions 660a₄ of body portion 660a. Rotation of lever 668 toward screw coupling 663 in direction N lifts pin 668a, and because rocker arm 670 rests on pin 668a, rocker arm 670 is rotated in direction P in an eccentric fashion.

[0161] A forked member 676, which for example may be formed of stainless steel, is coupled to rocker 670 and includes substantially parallel prongs 676a, 676b which mate with side walls of rocker 670 as shown. Rocker 670 is pivotably associated with forked member 676, with a shaft 677 extending through aligned holes in prongs 676a, 676b and rocker 670. Shaft 677 may be provided with a head 677a and an external retaining ring 677b secured in a shaft groove proximate an end opposite head 677a to retain forked member 676 in association therewith and thus with rocker 670. An axial through hole 676c is provided in tubular portion 676d of forked member 676. Tensioning wire 658 is coupled to forked member 676 by inserting an end portion of wire 658 in hole 676c and swaging tubular portion 676d so that wire 658, which extends out of open end 660a₅ of body portion 660a, is retained by compression within tubular portion 676d.

[0162] When lever 668 is rotated in direction N, shaft 676 translates along the longitudinal axis M₁ toward coupling 663 creating substantial tension in tensioning wire 658 such that movement of curvilinear articulating arm assembly 12 may be substantially resisted. In particular, actuation of second lever 668 may increase or decrease the tension in wire 658 as desired by acting on rocker arm 670. By increasing tension in wire 658, central arm 652 preferably becomes increasingly resistant to movement although central arm 652 preferably still may be moved through its full range of motion. Thus, a user may orient curvilinear articulating arm assembly 12 as desired, and then increase the tension of wire 658 so that the orientation of arm 652 is releasably fixed. Lever 668 preferably has an angular range of movement about pin 668a of up to about 180° to permit substantial tension to be generated in tensioning wire 658.

[0163] Rockers 670, 672 preferably are associated with each other as with a spring plunger 679 extending from within one rocker 670 into a hole in the other rocker 672. Spring plunger for example may be a stainless steel spring

plunger with a round Delrin nose, without a lock element, with ¼"-20 threading, and 3-13 lb. end force (McMaster-Carr part number 84765A33). Spring plunger 679 is used as shown because under the force of gravity, first lever 666 may otherwise tend to move toward a closed position with in the direction of arrow K. Instead, spring plunger 679 applies pressure to rocker arm 672 to set lever 666 to tend to a default open position in which shaft 664 has not otherwise been raised toward open end 660_a of body portion 660.

[0164] In a preferred exemplary embodiment, rocker 670 moves with substantially greater eccentricity than rocker 672.

[0165] Clamp 16 for use with base handle 660 may be demountably attached to surgical table rail 18. As previously discussed, actuation of first lever 666 permits a user to apply a force on coupling 663 so that movement is resisted (e.g., in response to an 8 or 10 pound force applied to arm 652). In an alternate embodiment which will be further described later, screw coupling 664 as shown in FIG. 4A proximate base handle 660 of arm assembly 12 may be threadably associated with a threaded hole in another support surface.

[0166] A preferred exemplary embodiment of clamp 16 is shown in FIG. 4M. Clamp 16 includes a threaded hole 16a for threadably receiving threaded portion 664 of base handle 660. In addition, clamp 16 includes fixed jaw portion 16b and movable jaw portion 16c which is pivotable about axle 16d and lockable in place using screw mechanism 16e to firmly couple clamp 16 to a rail 18 secured between jaw portions 16b, 16c.

[0167] Next turning to FIGS. 4N-4U, free handle 662 will be described. Free handle 662 includes a wire receiving portion 680 and an end effector receiving portion 681. In particular, wire receiving portion 680 preferably is configured to receive a ball 656b therein, along with an end portion of wire 658. As described previously with respect to base handle 660, a pivotable lever 682 is associated with free handle 662 and preferably is coupled to tensioning wire 658 so that actuation of lever 682 may increase or decrease the tension in wire 658 as desired by acting on rocker arm 684. By increasing tension in wire 658, central arm 652 preferably becomes less flexible. Thus, a user may orient curvilinear articulating arm assembly 12 as desired, and then increase the tension of wire 658 so that the orientation of arm 652 is releasably fixed. Free handle 662 has a body portion 662a, and lever 682 is rotatable with respect thereto. An interface lock 683 also is rotatably associated with body portion 662a proximate end effector receiving portion 681, as will be described shortly.

[0168] Lever 682 is pivotably coupled to rocker arm 684 with a pin 686a that is disposed such that rotation of lever 682 results in eccentric movement of rocker arm 684. Cylindrical projections 682a of lever 682 are received and rotate in arcuate cradle portions 662a₁ of body portion 662a, while cylindrical projections 684a of rocker arm 684 are received and rotate in arcuate cradle portions 662a₂ of body portion 662a. Rotation of lever 682 toward wire receiving portion 680 in direction T lifts pin 686a, and because rocker arm 684 rests on pin 686a, rocker arm 684 is rotated in direction U in an eccentric fashion.

[0169] Rocker arm 684 includes a hole in which a self-aligning setup washer 690 (a two-piece washer with one

portion that rocks in another portion) is disposed. Setup washer 690 for example may be an 18-8 stainless steel self-aligning setup washer, ¼ inch in size, 1/64 inch inner diameter, ½ inch outer diameter, and 0.250 inch to 0.281 inch thick (McMaster-Carr part number 91944A028). A nut 692 also may abut setup washer 690 on the flat upper surface thereof and rock thereon. A threaded stud (not shown) may be swaged to the end of tensioning wire 658 opposite the end attached to forked member 676, thus coupling wire 658 to the threaded stud by compression. The threaded stud may in turn be threadably associated with nut 692. Wire 658 is provided with suitable length to span from forked member 676 to nut 692.

[0170] Pivoting of lever 682 in direction T causes rotation of rocker arm 684, and with tensioning wire 658 coupled to nut 692 and nut 692 abutting insert 690, tension in wire 658 may be increased. In particular, actuation of lever 682 may increase or decrease the tension in wire 658 as desired. By increasing tension in wire 658, central arm 652 preferably becomes increasingly resistant to movement although central arm 652 preferably still may be moved through its full range of motion. Thus, a user may orient curvilinear articulating arm assembly 12 as desired, and then increase the tension of wire 658 so that the orientation of arm 652 is releasably fixed. Lever 668 preferably has an angular range of movement about pin 686a of up to about 90° to permit tension to be generated in tensioning wire 658.

[0171] In the preferred exemplary embodiment, actuation of lever 682 free handle 662 permits initial tensioning of central arm 652 while still permitting restricted movement. And, actuation of lever 668 of base handle 660 permits substantially greater tensioning of central arm 652 while also still permitting restricted movement thereof. Advantageously, with tension created in wire 658 of central arm 652 to restrict movement thereof, the orientation of lever 668 such as with respect to a patient still may readily be reset or adjusted before lever 666 in base handle 660 is actuated to create sufficient force to prevent rotation of threaded portion 663d of coupling 663 in the hole in which it is received.

[0172] As shown in FIG. 4U, interface lock 683 includes a knurled knob portion 683a and a cylindrical post 683b that is provided with an arcuate cutout 683c. Interface lock 683 is coupled to body portion 662a with set screw 683d which is threadably received in a threaded hole 662b in body portion 662a. Set screw 683d is further received in a slot 683e in post 683b to lock post 683b in a position with arcuate cutout 683c oriented to be movable along the longitudinal axis of cylindrical post 683b. Cylindrical post 683b may be disposed in a disengaged position in which the axial position of post 683b is such that arcuate cutout 683c generally follows the inner cylindrical contour of end effector receiving portion 681. Also, cylindrical post 683b may be disposed in an engaged position in which the axial position of post 683b is such that a portion of cylindrical post 683b other than arcuate cutout 683c extends past the inner cylindrical contour of end effector receiving portion 681 toward the central longitudinal axis of end effector receiving portion 681.

[0173] In use, in order for example to couple articulating arm assembly 12 to an end effector such as a holder 100, by capturing post 102 of holder 100 in end effector receiving portion 681 of free handle 662, post 102 is inserted therein

while interface lock **683** is disposed in the aforementioned disengaged position. While lock **683** is in the disengaged position, post **102** may freely rotate about the central axis of receiving portion **681**. Once a desired orientation is set, lock **683** may be translated along the major axis defined by slot **683a** so that a portion of cylindrical post **683b** of lock **683** is disposed in an engaged position and bears against post **102**. Such interference between post **102** of holder **100** and post **683b** of lock **683** provides sufficient pressure so that post **102** will remain fixed in rotational position and translation along the longitudinal axis thereof against the inner cylindrical contour of end effector receiving portion **681**.

[0174] In one method of conducting a laparoscopic procedure according to the present invention, a curvilinear articulating arm assembly **12** with base attachment **16** is releasably secured to a surgical table rail **18**. Holder system **100** is demountably coupled to the free end of arm assembly **12** at free handle **662**, and a laparoscope is releasably retained in holder system **100** by locking it in the slot defined between face **122f** and clamping portion **114**, with the laparoscope being frictionally held in the slot in the desired rotational orientation. By articulating the lever **682** at the free end to a locked position, arm assembly **12** will hold position when left alone but can be easily repositioned with one hand without having to loosen or unclamp any other mechanisms. In this mode, arm assembly **12** should have sufficient resistance to hold the laparoscope in position absent other external forces, much like a gooseneck lamp. If locking lever **668** near the base of arm assembly **12** is also locked then arm assembly **12** will hold position against a much greater force, but this lever **668** will then have to be released when ready movement of the arm/scope combination is required.

[0175] Preferably, the two rotating joints of holder **100** have complete freedom of motion and cannot be locked, and the scope is engaged by the slot defined between face **122f** and clamping portion **114** that opens via a syringe-like spring mechanism as previously described. Free movement of the scope is allowed by the freely rotating joints of holder **100** that respond to user-selected positioning of articulating arm assembly **12** while the scope is in the skin port of the patient.

[0176] In normal use, knob **124** preferably is backed off so that the spring loading of movable clamping jaws **122** operates freely and the scope may be engaged and disengaged quickly at will.

[0177] Once curvilinear articulating arm assembly **12** is fixed in position, the geometry of the swivel joints of holder **100** in combination with the curvilinear articulating arm assembly **12** and the laparoscope passing through a skin port is designed to result in reliable position holding for the scope, yet allow complete freedom of movement by manual repositioning. There is no need to adjust any locking or tensioning mechanisms because of the geometry of the setup and the resistance provided by the arm in its "gooseneck lamp" mode.

[0178] In some methods, gross movements of the scope may be accomplished by grabbing the articulating arm assembly **12** proximate the swivel joints and reorient the device from that gripping point. For smaller movements, it is possible to simply grab and torque the scope itself.

[0179] In one method of use, curvilinear articulating arm assembly **12** is closely contoured to the patient (approxi-

mately parallel to the skin) to minimize interference and clutter, and with the holder such as holder **800** extended nearby the endoscopic camera port. The position of arm assembly **12** is checked for suitable working range near the planned port site. The optimum attachment point for the base of the arm assembly **12** for example on a surgical bed railing is determined after the patient is positioned and asleep and before the next preparation phase. Arm assembly **12** may be oriented out of the way for prepping and draping. An arm drape may be placed after the skin prep but before the final large procedure drape is placed. A separate skirt/sheet drape may be clipped around the base after the large drape is placed. Arm assembly **12** may be contoured to the patient and brought adjacent to the camera port. The scope may be engaged working through the drape for example by pinching open the spring loaded clamp of holder **800** and simply invaginating the cover with the scope into the slot. The cover preferably is tough and stretchy and withstands repeated engage/disengage cycles and scope rotation.

[0180] Each of the holder systems described herein may be used in accordance with the aforementioned methods, regardless of spring-loading of the clamping arrangements.

[0181] Also, although an exemplary curvilinear articulating arm assembly is described herein, it should be understood that other preferably, curvilinear articulating arm assemblies instead may be used which preferably provide six degrees of freedom of movement and permit relatively rigid positioning such as described herein.

[0182] In some embodiments of the present invention, an instrument holder system such as system **10** may be coupled to a patient support other than a rail of a table. For example, referring next to FIG. 5, an exemplary support system **710** according to the present invention is shown with a variety of components coupled thereto. Support system **710** includes a tray **712**, curvilinear articulating arm assemblies **12**, **716** having respective end effectors **100**, **720**, an IV pole **722**, an arm board **724**, and rail assemblies **726**, **728**. A variety of end effectors may be demountably attached for example to articulating arm assembly **716** to assist a technician or practitioner with a medical/imaging procedure or provide other features useful with respect to a patient. End effector **720**, for example, is configured as a self-centering abdominal probe bracket.

[0183] In one preferred exemplary embodiment, tray **712** may include two pairs of hold regions **730**, each pair being disposed proximate a free cranial end **732** or free caudal end **734** of tray **712**. In alternate embodiments, other numbers of hold regions **730** may be provided such as two or more, and hold regions **730** may be provided in other regions of tray **712** such as intermediate ends **732**, **734** proximate sides **736**, **738**. Hold regions **730** may be configured as hand holds, or alternatively may be configured to receive strapping so that tray **712** may be releasably coupled to another object such as an ambulance stretcher, hospital bed, operating room table, or imaging scanner table. In some embodiments, handles may be coupled to tray **712**. As also shown in FIG. 5, attachment regions **740** are provided proximate sides **736**, **738** for demountably coupling components as previously described to tray **712**, as will be further described below. In the exemplary preferred embodiment, tray **712** is provided with thirteen attachment regions **740**, although in alternate embodiments another number of regions **740** may be pro-

vided such as at least one or tray 712 may be provided with a surgical rail or track permitting substantial freedom of coupling of components along the length thereof.

[0184] Turning to FIGS. 6A-6C, additional features of tray 712 are shown. Although hand hold regions 730 are not included in the figure, such regions may be provided as shown in FIG. 5. Attachment regions 740 are provided in spaced arrangement along the perimeter of tray 712. Preferably, tray 712 includes a central arcuate portion 742 disposed between outer ledge portions 744. Preferably, regions 740 are provided on outer ledge portions 744. Central arcuate portion 742 preferably has an upper concave surface 742a for receiving a patient and optionally a cushion (not shown) for the patient to rest against, and optionally includes a lower convex surface 742b. Preferably, outer ledge portions 744 include upper and lower surfaces 744a, 744b connected by a sidewall 744c at an angle α with respect to surface 744b. In a preferred exemplary embodiment, sidewall 744c is disposed at an angle α between about 60° and about 100°, more preferably between about 70° and about 90°, and most preferably at about 80°.

[0185] In a preferred exemplary embodiment, tray 712 is formed of natural finish carbon fiber, R-51 foam core, and phenolic. Attenuation preferably is less than 1 mm Al equivalency. Thus, tray 712 is radiolucent and suitable for use with computed axial tomography (CT) scanners. In other embodiments, tray 712 is formed of a material suitable for use with magnetic resonance imaging (MR) scanners. In addition, tray 712 preferably supports a load of 900 lbs. evenly distributed along centerline 746, about which tray 712 may be substantially symmetric as shown. Indicia 748 optionally may be provided, as shown for example proximate ends 732, 734. The indicia may for example indicate preferred orientation of tray 712 with respect to a patient lying thereon.

[0186] In the preferred exemplary embodiment, attachment regions 740 on each side of tray 712 are evenly spaced from each other by about 6 inches between centers thereof. To accommodate patients and equipment attached to tray 12, in one preferred embodiment tray 712 has a length of about 78 inches, a width of about 21 inches, a generally uniform thickness of about 0.9 inch, and a height h of about 2.5 inches. Corners may be provided with a radius R_1 of about 2 inches. In the preferred exemplary embodiment, attachment regions 740 preferably accommodate threaded inserts, which may be formed of aluminum.

[0187] In some embodiments, tray 712 is sized to hold an adult patient, and may be between about 180 cm and about 200 cm long. However, it will be appreciated that longer and shorter trays may be provided. In order to accommodate an adult patient, tray 712 may support an overall weight capacity of at least about 200 pounds, and preferably at least about 300 pounds. However, if a tray 712 is sized for use with a pediatric patient, tray 712 may only accommodate weights that do not exceed 200 pounds, and more preferably do not exceed 100 pounds.

[0188] Although the surface of portion 742 of tray 712 is substantially smooth in the preferred exemplary embodiment, in alternate embodiments the surface may be textured to provide additional resistance to motion of objects and/or a patient placed thereon.

[0189] Tray 712 thus is suitable for use in multiple environments, and thus may “move” with the patient from one

environment (e.g., ambulance) to the next (e.g., CT scanner) without removing a patient supported thereon.

[0190] While various descriptions of the present invention are described above, it should be understood that the various features can be used singly or in any combination thereof. Therefore, this invention is not to be limited to only the specifically preferred embodiments depicted herein. For example, although the holders described herein are described in the context of laparoscopic instrument holder systems that may place a camera through a port in the skin into a working cavity, the holders also may be used for example in the context of procedures that examine the interior of a bodily canal or hollow organ such as the colon, bladder, or stomach. The present invention may be applied in a variety of fields including but not limited to general surgery, orthopedics, gynecology, urology, and cardiology. In the context of laparoscopy, the systems of the present invention for example may be used to assist in surgical procedures involving the intestines, stomach, or gallbladder which may benefit from the visual inspection made possible by a laparoscope.

[0191] Further, it should be understood that variations and modifications within the spirit and scope of the invention may occur to those skilled in the art to which the invention pertains. Accordingly, all expedient modifications readily attainable by one versed in the art from the disclosure set forth herein that are within the scope and spirit of the present invention are to be included as further embodiments of the present invention. The scope of the present invention is accordingly defined as set forth in the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A system for positioning a laparoscopic device, the system having a holder comprising:

a central portion comprising a first member operatively associated with a second member, the members selectively movable with respect to one another along a central axis, the central portion having a proximal end defined by the first member and a distal end defined by the second member;

at least three proximal rotational joints coupled to the first member proximate the proximal end;

at least two distal rotational joints coupled to the second member proximate the distal end;

a clamp configured and dimensioned for retaining a laparoscopic device; and

a coupling portion proximate a first of the proximal rotational joints;

wherein a first of the distal rotational joints is coupled to the distal end of the central portion and a second of the distal rotational joints is coupled to the clamp.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the members telescope with respect to one another.

3. The system of claim 2, wherein the second member is slidably received in the first member.

4. The system of claim 3, wherein the first member comprises a slot and the second member comprises a protrusion, the protrusion movable within the slot.

5. The system of claim 4, wherein the protrusion comprises a roller key.

6. The system of claim 4, wherein the second member comprises a piston member proximate an end thereof, the piston member disposed within the first member.

7. The system of claim 6, wherein the piston member is spring-loaded with a spring oriented transverse to the central axis.

8. The system of claim 2, wherein the first member comprises a receiving end for receiving the second member and a bushing coupled to the receiving end.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein the bushing comprises a plurality of fingers disposed radially with respect to the central axis.

10. The system of claim 1, wherein each of the proximal and distal rotational joints comprises a thrust bearing.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the thrust bearing is a steel ball thrust bearing.

12. The system of claim 10, wherein each of the proximal rotational joints comprises a washer abutting a spacer and rotatable with respect to each other.

13. The system of claim 12, wherein the spacer is formed of a material that is polytetrafluoroethylene-based.

14. The system of claim 10, wherein each of the distal rotational joints comprises a washer abutting a spacer and rotatable with respect to each other.

15. The system of claim 15, wherein the spacer is formed of a material comprising acetal homopolymer.

16. The system of claim 10, wherein each of the proximal and distal rotational joints comprises a spacer, each of the spacers of the proximal rotational joints having a first thickness and each of the spacers of the distal rotational joints having a second thickness, the first thickness being smaller than the second thickness.

17. The system of claim 1, wherein the at least three proximal rotational joints comprises three proximal rotational joints that each permit movement in a separate plane.

18. The system of claim 17, wherein at least two of the planes are parallel to one another.

19. The system of claim 1, wherein:

the first of the distal rotational joints permits rotation about an axis coinciding with the main axis; and

the second of the distal rotational joints permits rotation about an axis transverse to the main axis.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the second of the distal rotational joints permits rotation about an axis generally perpendicular to the main axis.

21. The system of claim 1, wherein the clamp comprises a pair of spring-biased jaw members each having a cover formed of a material softer than aluminum, the clamp being configured and dimensioned to retain the laparoscopic device while contacting the covers.

22. The system of claim 21, wherein each cover is formed of polyurethane.

23. The system of claim 22, wherein the laparoscopic device comprises a cylindrical portion.

24. The system of claim 1, wherein the first member is tubular.

25. The system of claim 1, wherein each of the proximal and distal rotational joints comprises a first portion rotatable with respect to a second portion about a fixed axis.

26. The system of claim 1, wherein the first and second members are movable with respect to each other along the central axis but are not rotatable with respect to each other.

27. The system of claim 1, further comprising a curvilinear articulating arm, the holder being coupled to the curvilinear articulating arm.

28. The system of claim 27, further comprising a tray configured and dimensioned for supporting a mammal, the curvilinear articulating arm being coupled to the tray.

29. The system of claim 1, wherein the coupling portion comprises a clamp for coupling to a support.

30. The system of claim 29, wherein the support is selected from the group consisting of a rail of a table and a rail of a bed.

31. The system of claim 1, wherein each proximal rotational joint and each distal rotational joint permits 360° of rotation about an axis thereof.

32. A system for positioning a laparoscopic device comprising:

a curvilinear articulating arm; and

a holder comprising at least two rotational regions and a clamping portion for receiving the laparoscopic device, the holder being coupled to the curvilinear articulating arm;

wherein the at least two rotational regions are permitted to articulate.

33. The system of claim 32, wherein the holder further comprises a central portion with a selectively adjustable length along a central axis, wherein the at least two rotational regions are disposed between the central portion and the clamping portion.

34. The system of claim 32, wherein the holder further comprises a central portion with a selectively adjustable length along a central axis, the central portion having a proximal end and a distal end, wherein the at least two rotational regions comprises at least three proximal rotational joints disposed proximate the proximal end and at least two distal rotational joints disposed between the distal end and the clamping portion.

35. The system of claim 32, wherein the at least two rotational regions comprises a thrust bearing.

36. A method of positioning a laparoscopic device in a skin port of a mammal, the method comprising:

coupling the laparoscopic device to a holder comprising a clamping portion and five rotational joints, the laparoscopic device being partially retained in the clamping portion;

disposing the laparoscopic device partially within the skin port;

positioning the laparoscopic device by selectively rotating portions of the holder with respect to one another.

37. The method of claim 36, further comprising:

positioning the laparoscopic device by selectively adjusting a length of the holder along a central axis.

38. The method of claim 37, wherein the holder further comprises first and second members selectively movable with respect to one another.

39. The method of claim 38, wherein the length is selectively adjustable by moving the first and second members with respect to each other.

40. The method of claim 38, wherein the length is selectively adjustable by telescoping the first member with respect to the second member.

41. The method of claim 38, wherein movement of the first and second members is restricted to linear movement along the central axis.

42. The method of claim 38, wherein the holder is manually operated.

43. The method of claim 38, further comprising:

coupling the holder to a curvilinear articulating arm; and articulating the curvilinear articulating arm.

44. The method of claim 43, further comprising:

coupling the curvilinear articulating arm to a tray configured and dimensioned for supporting the mammal.

45. The method of claim 43, further comprising:

coupling the curvilinear articulating arm to a support.

46. The method of claim 45, wherein the support is selected from the group consisting of a rail of a table and a rail of a bed.

47. The method of claim 36, wherein the laparoscopic device is held in a selected position while disposed partially within the skin port without locking movement of the rotational joints of the holder.

48. A method of positioning a laparoscopic device in a skin port of a mammal, the method comprising:

securing the laparoscopic device to a holder comprising at least two rotational joints;

coupling the holder to a curvilinear articulating arm;

disposing the laparoscopic device partially within the skin port;

positioning the laparoscopic device by selectively articulating the curvilinear articulating arm and selectively rotating portions of the holder with respect to one another.

49. The method of claim 48, further comprising:

positioning the laparoscopic device by selectively adjusting a length of the holder along a central axis, wherein the holder further comprises first and second members selectively movable with respect to one another, and wherein the length is selectively adjustable by moving the first and second members with respect to each other.

50. The method of claim 48, wherein the laparoscopic device is held in a selected position while disposed partially within the skin port without locking movement of the rotational joints of the holder.

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