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(54) **EXPANDABLE INTRALUMINAL GRAFT**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A plurality of expandable and deformable intraluminal vascular grafts are expanded within a blood vessel by an angioplasty balloon associated with a catheter to dilate and expand the lumen of a blood vessel. The grafts may be thin-walled tubular members having a plurality of slots disposed substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the tubular members, and adjacent grafts are flexibly connected by a single connector member disposed substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the tubular members.

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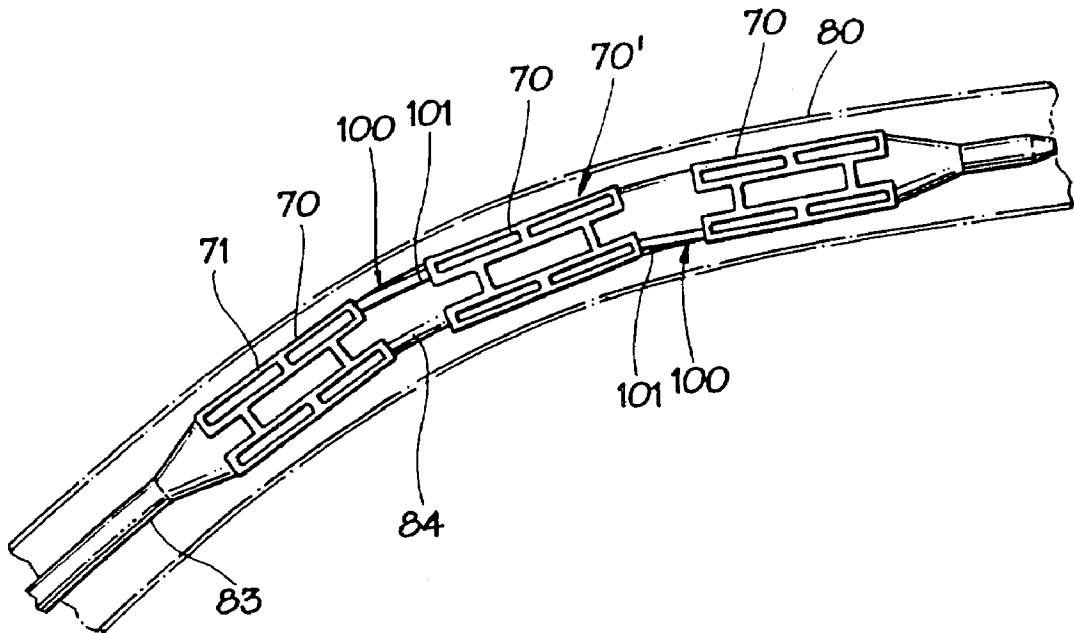


FIG. 1A
(PRIOR ART)

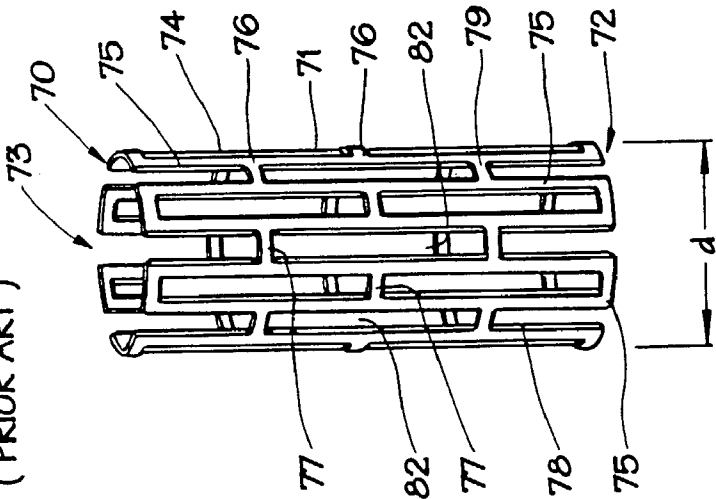


FIG. 1B
(PRIOR ART)

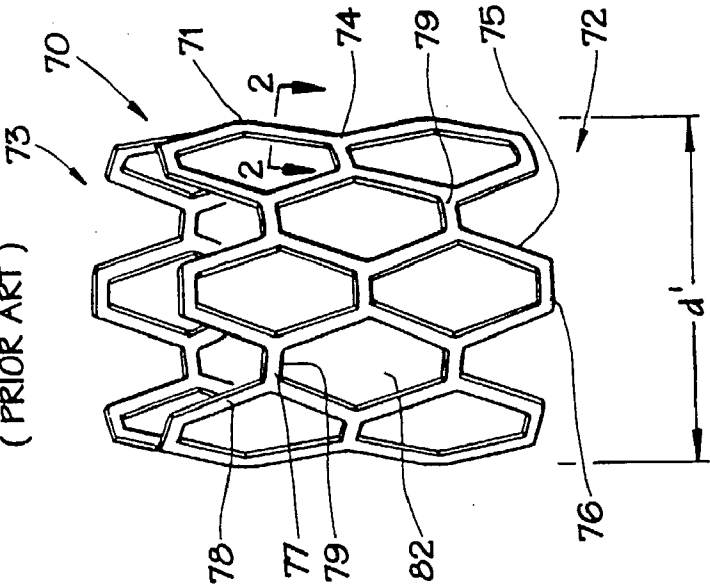


FIG. 2

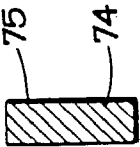


FIG. 3
(PRIOR ART)

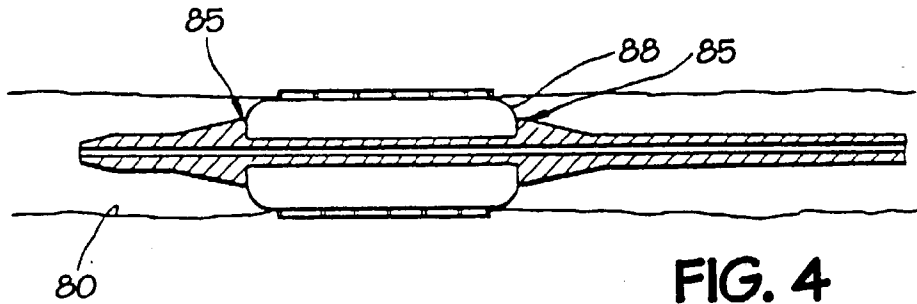
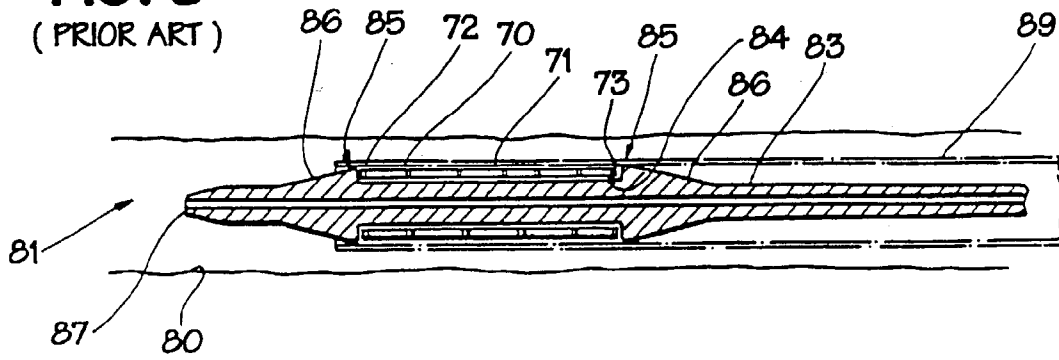


FIG. 4
(PRIOR ART)

FIG. 5
(PRIOR ART)

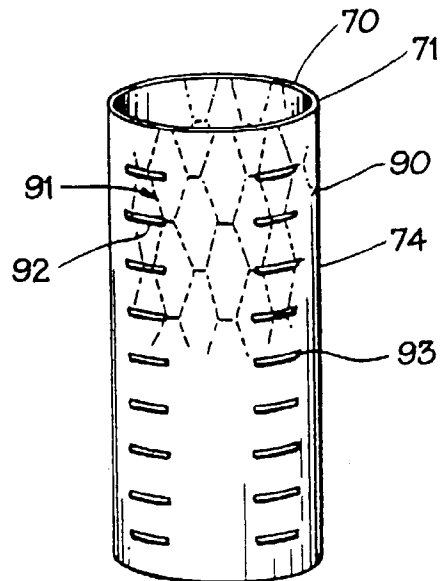
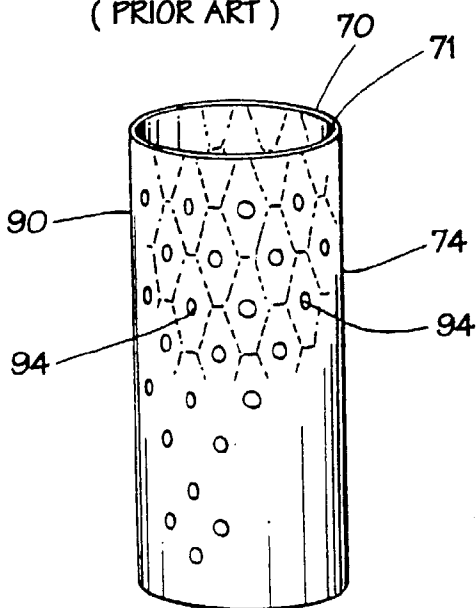
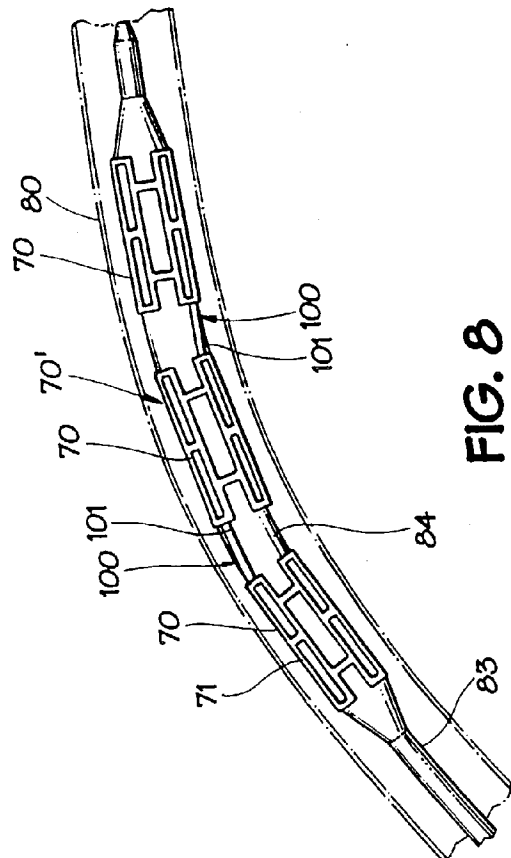
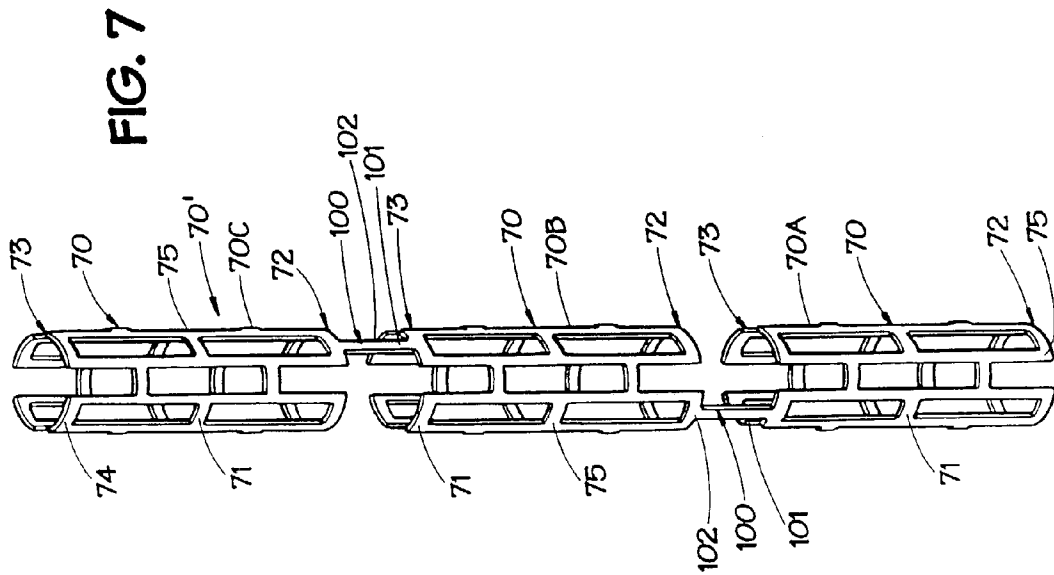


FIG. 6
(PRIOR ART)



EXPANDABLE INTRALUMINAL GRAFT

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The invention relates to an expandable intraluminal graft for use within a body passageway or duct and, more particularly, expandable intraluminal vascular grafts which are particularly useful for repairing blood vessels narrowed or occluded by disease; and a method and apparatus for implanting expandable intraluminal grafts.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIOR ART

[0002] Intraluminal endovascular grafting has been demonstrated by experimentation to present a possible alternative to conventional vascular surgery. Intraluminal endovascular grafting involves the percutaneous insertion into a blood vessel of a tubular prosthetic graft and its delivery via a catheter to the desired location within the vascular system. Advantages of this method over conventional vascular surgery include obviating the need for: surgically exposing, incising, removing, replacing, or bypassing the defective blood vessel.

[0003] Structures which have previously been used as intraluminal vascular grafts have included coiled stainless steel springs; helically wound coil springs manufactured from an expandable heat-sensitive material; and expanding stainless steel stents formed of stainless steel wire in a zig-zag pattern. In general, the foregoing structures have one major disadvantage in common. Insofar as these structures must be delivered to the desired location within a given body passageway in a collapsed state, in order to pass through the body passageway, there is no effective control over the final, expanded configuration of each structure. For example, the expansion of a particular coiled spring-type graft is predetermined by the spring constant and modulus of elasticity of the particular material utilized to manufacture the coiled spring structure. These same factors predetermine the amount of expansion of collapsed stents formed of stainless steel wire in a zig-zag pattern. In the case of intraluminal grafts, or prostheses, formed of a heat sensitive material which expands upon heating, the amount of expansion is likewise predetermined by the heat expansion characteristics of the particular alloy utilized in the manufacture of the intraluminal graft.

[0004] Thus, once the foregoing types of intraluminal grafts are expanded at the desired location within a body passageway, such as within an artery or vein, the expanded size of the graft cannot be changed. If the diameter of the desired body passageway has been miscalculated, an undersized graft might not expand enough to contact the interior surface of the body passageway, so as to be secured thereto. It may then migrate away from the desired location within the body passageway. Likewise, an oversized graft might expand to such an extent that the spring force, or expansion force, exerted by the graft upon the body passageway could cause rupturing of the body passageway. Further, the constant outwardly radiating force exerted upon the interior surface of the body passageway can cause erosion of the internal surface, or intima, of the artery or body passageway.

[0005] Another alternative to conventional vascular surgery has been percutaneous balloon dilation of elastic vascular stenoses, or blockages, through use of a catheter mounted angioplasty balloon. In this procedure, the angio-

plasty balloon is inflated within the stenosed vessel, or body passageway, in order to shear and disrupt the wall components of the vessel to obtain an enlarged lumen. With respect to arterial atherosclerotic lesions, the relatively incompressible plaque remains unaltered, while the more elastic medial and adventitial layers of the body passageway stretch around the plaque. This process produces dissection, or a splitting and tearing, of the body passageway wall layers, wherein the intima, or internal surface of the artery or body passageway, suffers fissuring. This dissection forms a "flap" of underlying tissue which may reduce the blood flow through the lumen, or block the lumen. Typically, the distending intraluminal pressure within the body passageway can hold the disrupted layer or flap, in place. If the intimal flap created by the balloon dilation procedure is not maintained in place against the expanded intima, the intimal flap can fold down into the lumen and close off the lumen, or may even become detached and enter the body passageway. When the intimal flap closes off the body passageway, immediate surgery is necessary to correct this problem.

[0006] Although the balloon dilation procedure is typically conducted in the catheterization lab of a hospital, because of the foregoing problem, it is always necessary to have a surgeon on call should the intimal flap block the blood vessel or body passageway. Further, because of the possibility of the intimal flap tearing away from the blood vessel and blocking the lumen, balloon dilations cannot be performed upon certain critical body passageways, such as the left main coronary artery, which leads into the heart. If an intimal flap formed by a balloon dilation procedure abruptly comes down and closes off a critical body passageway, such as the left main coronary artery, the patient could die before any surgical procedures could be performed.

[0007] Additional disadvantages associated with balloon dilation of elastic vascular stenoses is that many fail because of elastic recoil of the stenotic lesion. This usually occurs due to a high fibrocollagenous content in the lesion and is sometimes due to certain mechanical characteristics of the area to be dilated. Thus, although the body passageway may initially be successfully expanded by a balloon dilation procedure, subsequent, early restenosis can occur due to the recoil of the body passageway wall which decreases the size of the previously expanded lumen of the body passageway. For example, stenoses of the renal artery at the ostium are known to be refractory to balloon dilation because the dilating forces are applied to the aortic wall rather than to the renal artery itself. Vascular stenoses caused by neointimal fibrosis, such as those seen in dialysis-access fistulas, have proved to be difficult to dilate, requiring high dilating pressures and larger balloon diameters. Similar difficulties have been observed in angioplasties of graft-artery anastomotic strictures and postendarterectomy recurrent stenoses. Percutaneous angioplasty of Takayasu arteritis and neurofibromatosis arterial stenoses may show poor initial response and recurrence which is believed due to the fibrotic nature of these lesions.

[0008] For repairing blood vessels narrowed or occluded by disease, or repairing other body passageways, the length of the body passageway which requires repair, as by the insertion of a tubular prosthetic graft, may present problems if the length of the required graft cannot negotiate the curves or bends of the body passageway through which the graft is passed by the catheter. In other words, in many instances, it

is necessary to support a length of tissue within a body passageway by a graft, wherein the length of the required graft exceeds the length of a graft which can be readily delivered via a catheter to the desired location within the vascular system. Some grafts do not have the requisite ability to bend so as to negotiate the curves and bends present within the vascular system, particularly prostheses or grafts which are relatively rigid and resist bending with respect to their longitudinal axes.

[0009] Accordingly, prior to the development of the present invention, there has been no expandable intraluminal vascular graft for expanding the lumen of a body passageway, which: prevents recurrence of stenoses in the body passageway; can be utilized for critical body passageways, such as the left main coronary artery of a patient's heart; prevents recoil of the body passageway wall; allows the intraluminal graft to be expanded to a variable size to prevent migration of the graft away from the desired location and prevents rupturing and/or erosion of the body passageway by the expanded graft; permits tissue of an elongated section of a body passageway to be supported by an elongated graft; and provides the necessary flexibility to negotiate the bends and curves in the vascular system. Therefore, the art has sought an expandable intraluminal vascular graft which: prevents recurrence of stenoses in the body passageway; is believed to be able to be utilized in critical body passageways, such as the left main coronary artery of the heart; prevents recoil of the body passageway; can be expanded to a variable size within the body passageway to prevent migration of the graft away from the desired location and to prevent rupturing and/or erosion of the body passageway by the expanded graft; permits tissue of an elongated section of a body passageway to be supported by an elongated graft; and provides the necessary flexibility to negotiate the bends and curves in the vascular system.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] In accordance with the invention, the foregoing advantages have been achieved by the present expandable intraluminal vascular graft. The present invention includes a plurality of thin-walled tubular members, each having first and second ends and a wall surface disposed between the first and second ends, the wall surface having a substantially uniform thickness and a plurality of slots formed therein, the slots being disposed substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of each tubular member; a single connector member being disposed between adjacent tubular members to flexibly connect adjacent tubular members, the single connector member being disposed in a substantially parallel relationship with respect to the longitudinal axis of the tubular members and coplanar with each tubular member; each tubular member having a first diameter which permits intraluminal delivery of the tubular members into a body passageway having a lumen; and the tubular members having a second, expanded and deformed diameter, upon the application from the interior of the tubular members of a radially, outwardly extending force, which second diameter is variable and dependent upon the amount of force applied to the tubular members, whereby the tubular members may be expanded and deformed to expand the lumen of the body passageway.

[0011] A further feature of the present invention is that the single connector member may be a thin-walled, elongate bar

member, coplanar with adjacent tubular members. An additional feature of the present invention is that a first connector member may be disposed between the second end of a first tubular member and the first end of a second tubular member; a second connector member may be disposed between the second end of the second tubular member and the first end of a third tubular member; the first and second connector members being angularly offset from one another with respect to the longitudinal axis of the tubular members.

[0012] The expandable intraluminal vascular graft of the present invention, when compared with previously proposed prior art intraluminal grafts, has the advantages of: preventing recurrence of stenoses; is believed to permit implantation of grafts in critical body passageways, such as in the left main coronary artery of the heart; prevents recoil of the body passageway; prevents erosion of the body passageway by the expanded graft; permits expansion of the graft to a variable size dependent upon conditions within the body passageway; permits tissue of an elongated section of a body passageway to be supported by an elongated graft; and provides the necessary flexibility to negotiate the bends and curves in tortuous body passageways, such as the vascular system.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] In the drawings:

[0014] **FIG. 1A** is a perspective view of an expandable intraluminal vascular graft, or prosthesis for a body passageway, having a first diameter which permits delivery of the graft, or prosthesis, into a body passageway;

[0015] **FIG. 1B** is a perspective view of the graft, or prosthesis, of **FIG. 1A**, in its expanded configuration when disposed within a body passageway;

[0016] **FIG. 2** is a cross-sectional view of the prosthesis taken along line 2-2 of **FIG. 1B**;

[0017] **FIG. 3** is a cross-sectional view of an apparatus for intraluminally reinforcing a body passageway, or for expanding the lumen of a body passageway, illustrating a prosthesis, or intraluminal vascular graft, in the configuration shown in **FIG. 1A**;

[0018] **FIG. 4** is a cross-sectional view of the apparatus for intraluminally reinforcing a body passageway, or for expanding the lumen of a body passageway, with the graft, or prosthesis, in the configurations shown in **FIG. 1B**;

[0019] **FIGS. 5 and 6** are perspective views of prostheses for a body passageway, with the grafts, or prostheses, having a coating thereon;

[0020] **FIG. 7** is a perspective view of another embodiment of a graft or prosthesis in accordance with the present invention; and

[0021] **FIG. 8** is a perspective view of the graft of **FIG. 7**, wherein the graft has been bent or articulated.

[0022] While the invention will be described in connection with the preferred embodiment, it will be understood that it is not intended to limit the invention to that embodiment. On the contrary, it is intended to cover all alternatives, modifications, and equivalents, as may be included within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0023] In FIGS. 1A and 1B, an expandable intraluminal vascular graft, or expandable prosthesis for a body passageway, 70 is illustrated. It should be understood that the terms “expandable intraluminal vascular graft” and “expandable prosthesis” are interchangeably used to some extent in describing the present invention, insofar as the methods, apparatus, and structures of the present invention may be utilized not only in connection with an expandable intraluminal vascular graft for expanding partially occluded segments of a blood vessel, or body passageway, but may also be utilized for many other purposes as an expandable prosthesis for many other types of body passageways. For example, expandable prostheses 70 may also be used for such purposes as: (1) supportive graft placement within blocked arteries opened by transluminal recanalization, but which are likely to collapse in the absence of an internal support; (2) similar use following catheter passage through mediastinal and other veins occluded by inoperable cancers; (3) reinforcement of catheter created intrahepatic communications between portal and hepatic veins in patients suffering from portal hypertension; (4) supportive graft placement of narrowing of the esophagus, the intestine, the ureters, the urethra; and (5) supportive graft reinforcement of reopened and previously obstructed bile ducts. Accordingly, use of the term “prosthesis” encompasses the foregoing usages within various types of body passageways, and the use of the term “intraluminal vascular graft” encompasses use for expanding the lumen of a body passageway. Further, in this regard, the term “body passageway” encompasses any duct within the human body, such as those previously described, as well as any vein, artery, or blood vessel within the human vascular system.

[0024] Still with reference to FIGS. 1A and 1B, the expandable intraluminal vascular graft, or prosthesis, 70 is shown to generally comprise a tubular member 71 having first and second ends 72, 73 and a wall surface 74 disposed between the first and second ends 72, 73. Tubular member 71 has a first diameter, d , which, to be hereinafter described in greater detail, permits intraluminal delivery of the tubular member 71 into a body passageway 80 having a lumen 81 (FIG. 3). With reference to FIG. 1B, upon the application from the interior of the tubular member 71 of a radially, outwardly extending force, to be hereinafter described in greater detail tubular member 71 has a second, expanded diameter, d' , which second diameter d' is variable in size and dependent upon the amount of force applied to deform the tubular member 71.

[0025] Tubular member 71, may be any suitable material which is compatible with the human body and the bodily fluids (not shown) with which the vascular graft, or prosthesis, 70 may come into contact. Tubular member 71 must also be made of a material which has the requisite strength and elasticity characteristics to permit the tubular member 71 to be expanded and deformed from the configuration shown in FIG. 1A to the configuration shown illustrated in FIG. 1B and further to permit the tubular member 71 to retain its expanded and deformed configuration with the enlarged diameter d' shown in FIG. 1B and resist radial collapse. Suitable materials for the fabrication of tubular member 71 would include silver, tantalum, stainless steel,

gold, titanium or any suitable plastic material having the requisite characteristics previously described.

[0026] Preferably, tubular member 71 is initially a thin-walled stainless steel tube having a uniform wall thickness, and a plurality of slots 82 are formed in the wall surface 74 of tubular member 71. As seen in FIG. 1A when tubular member 71 has the first diameter d , the slots 82 are disposed substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the tubular member 71. As seen in FIG. 1A, the slots 82 are preferably uniformly and circumferentially spaced from adjacent slots 82, as by connecting members 77, which connecting members 77 preferably have a length equal to the width of slots 82, as seen in FIG. 1A. Slots 82 are further uniformly spaced from adjacent slots 82 along the longitudinal axis of the tubular member 71, which spacing is preferably equal to the width of connecting members 77. Thus, the formation of slots 82 results in at least one elongate member 75 being formed between adjacent slots 82, elongate member 75 extending between the first and second Ends, 72, 73 of tubular member 71, as seen in FIG. 1A.

[0027] Still with reference to FIG. 1A, each slot will leave first and second ends with a connecting member 77 disposed at the first and second ends of slots 82. Preferably, the first and second ends of each slot 82 are disposed intermediate the first and second ends of adjacent slots 82 along the longitudinal axis of the tubular member 71. Thus, connecting members 77, which are disposed at the first and second ends of each slot 82, and between elongate members 75, will in turn be disposed intermediate the first and second ends of adjacent slots 82 along the longitudinal axis of the tubular member 71. Accordingly, slots 82 are preferably uniformly and circumferentially spaced from adjacent slots, and slots 82 adjacent to one another along the longitudinal axis of tubular member 71 are in a staggered relationship with one another. Alternating slots disposed about the circumference of tubular member 71 at both the first and second ends 72, 73 of tubular member 71 will only have a length equal to approximately one-half of the length of a complete slot 82, such half-slot 82 being bounded by members 78, 79, at both the first and second ends 72, 73 of tubular member 71. Although the graft, or prosthesis, 70 of FIGS. 1A and 1B is illustrated to have a length approximately equal to the length of two slots 82, it should be apparent that the length of the graft 70 could be made longer or shorter as desired.

[0028] The foregoing described construction of graft, or prosthesis, 70 permits graft, or prosthesis, 70 to be expanded uniformly, and outwardly, in a controlled manner into the configuration shown in FIG. 1B, upon the application of a suitable force from the interior of tubular member 71, as will be hereinafter described in greater detail. The expansion of tubular member 71 into the configuration shown in FIG. 1B is further uniform along the length of tubular member 71, not only because of the uniform spacing between slots 82, as previously described, but also because the thickness of the wall surface 74, or the thickness of connecting members 77, elongate members 75, and members 78, 79, is the same uniform thickness. As illustrated in FIG. 2, the uniform thickness of elongate member 75 is shown, and the preferred cross-sectional configuration of elongate member 75, connecting member 77, and members 78, 79, is illustrated, which configuration is rectangular. It should of course be understood by those skilled in the art, that the cross-sectional configuration of the foregoing components of graft, or

prosthesis, **70** could also be square, rectangular, or other cross-sectional configurations. As will be hereinafter described in greater detail, it is preferable that the outer surface **74** of graft, or prosthesis, **70**, which would be in contact with the body passageway **80** FIG. 4, should be relatively smooth.

[0029] With reference to FIG. 1B, it is seen that after the graft, or prosthesis **70**, has been expanded and deformed into the configuration of FIG. 1B, the slots **82** will assume a substantially hexagonal configuration when the tubular member **71** has the second, expanded diameter, d' , as shown in FIG. 1B. Such a hexagonal configuration will result when the slots **82** initially have a substantially rectangular configuration when the tubular member **71** has the first diameter, d , illustrated in FIG. 1A. It should be noted that were the width of slots **82** to be substantially reduced, whereby the length of connecting member **77** would approximate a single point intersection, the expansion of such a tubular member **71** would result in slots **82** assuming a configuration which would be substantially a parallelogram (not shown).

[0030] It should be noted that not only is tubular member **71** expanded from the configuration shown in FIG. 1A to achieve the configuration shown in FIG. 1B, but tubular member **71** is further "deformed" to achieve that configuration. By use of the term "deformed" is meant that the material from which graft, or prosthesis, **70** is manufactured is subjected to a force which is greater than the elastic limit of the material utilized to make tubular member **71**. Accordingly, the force is sufficient to permanently bend elongate members **75** whereby segments of the elongate members **75** pivot about connecting members **77** and move in a circumferential direction as they pivot, whereby the diameter of the tubular member **71** increases from the first diameter, d , to the expanded diameter, d' , of FIG. 1B. The force to be applied to expand tubular member **71**, which is applied in the manner which will be hereinafter described in greater detail, must thus be sufficient to not only expand tubular member **71**, but also to deform elongate member **75**, in the manner previously described, whereby the portions of the elongate members **75** which pivot about the ends of connecting members **77** do not "spring back" and assume their configuration shown in FIG. 1A, but rather retain the configuration thereof in FIG. 1B. Once graft, or prosthesis, **70** has been expanded and deformed into the configuration shown in FIG. 1B, graft, or prosthesis **70**, will serve to prevent a body passageway from collapsing as will be hereinafter described in greater detail. It should be noted that when tubular member **71** has the first diameter, d , shown in FIG. 1A, or after tubular member **71** has been expanded and deformed into the second, expanded diameter, d' , of FIG. 1B, tubular member **71** does not exert any outward, radial force, in that tubular member **71** is not a "spring-like" or "self-expanding member", which would tend to exert an outwardly radial force.

[0031] With reference now to FIGS. 3 and 4, apparatus of the present invention will be described in greater detail. Once again, it should be understood that the apparatus of the present invention is useful not only for expanding the lumen of a body passageway, such as an artery, vein, or blood vessel of the human vascular system, but are also useful to perform the previously described procedures to intraluminally reinforce other body passageways or ducts, as previously described. Still with reference to FIGS. 3 and 4, an

expandable intraluminal vascular graft, or prosthesis, **70**, of the type described in connection with FIGS. 1A and 1B, is disposed or mounted upon a catheter **83**. Catheter **83** has an expandable, inflatable portion **84** associated therewith. Catheter **83** may include means for mounting and retaining **85** the expandable intraluminal vascular graft, or prosthesis, **70** on the expandable, inflatable portion **84** of catheter **83**. The mounting and retaining means **85** could comprise retainer ring members **86** disposed on the catheter **83** adjacent the expandable inflatable portion **84** of catheter **83**; and a retainer ring member **86** is disposed adjacent each end **72, 73** of the expandable intraluminal vascular graft, or prosthesis, **70**. As seen in FIG. 3, retainer ring members could be formed integral with catheter **83**, and the retainer ring member **86** adjacent the leading tip **87** of catheter **83** slopes upwardly and away from catheter tip **87** in order to protect and retain graft or prosthesis, **70** as it is inserted into the lumen **81** of body passageway **80**, as to be hereinafter described in greater detail. The remaining retainer ring member **86** as shown in FIG. 3, slopes downwardly away from tip **87** of catheter **83**, to insure easy removal of catheter **83** from body passageway **80**. After expandable intraluminal graft, or prosthesis, **70** has been disposed upon catheter **83**, in the manner previously described, the graft, or prosthesis, **70** and catheter **83** are inserted within a body passageway **80** by catheterization of the body passageway **80** in a conventional manner.

[0032] In a conventional manner, the catheter **83** and graft, or prosthesis, **70** are delivered to the desired location within the body passageway **80**, whereat it is desired to expand the lumen **81** of body passageway **80** via intraluminal graft **70**, or where it is desired to implant prosthesis **70**. Fluoroscopy, and/or other conventional techniques may be utilized to insure that the catheter **83** and graft, or prosthesis, **70** are delivered to the desired location within the body passageway. Prosthesis, or graft, **70** is then controllably expanded and deformed by controllably expanding the expandable, inflatable portion **84** of catheter **83**, whereby the prosthesis, or graft, **70** is expanded and deformed radially, outwardly into contact with the body passageway **80**, as shown in FIG. 4. In this regard, the expandable, inflatable portion of catheter **83** may be a conventional angioplasty balloon **88**. After the desired expansion and deformation of prosthesis, or graft, **70** has been accomplished, angioplasty balloon **88** may be collapsed, or deflated, and the catheter **83** may be removed in a conventional manner from body passageway **80**. If desired, as seen in FIG. 3, catheter **83**, having graft or prosthesis, **70** disposed thereon, may be initially encased in a conventional Teflon sheath **89**, or a sheath **89** made of another suitable material, which is pulled away from prosthesis, or graft, **70**, prior to expansion of the prosthesis, or graft, **70**.

[0033] Still with reference to FIGS. 3 and 4, it should be noted that tubular member **71** of prosthesis, or graft, **70** initially has the first predetermined, collapsed diameter, d , as described in connection with FIG. 1A, in order to permit the insertion of the tubular member, **71** into the body passageway **80** as previously described. When it is desired to implant prosthesis **70** within a body passageway **80** for the purposes previously described, the prosthesis **70** is, controllably expanded and deformed to the second diameter, d' , and the second, expanded diameter, d' , is variable and determined by the internal diameter of the body passageway **80**, as shown in FIG. 4, and by the amount of expansion of the

inflatable portion **84** of catheter **83**. Accordingly, the expanded and deformed prosthesis **70**, upon deflation of angioplasty balloon **88** will not be able to migrate from the desired location within the body passageway **80**, nor will the expansion of the prosthesis **70** be likely to cause a rupture of the body passageway **80**. Furthermore, insofar as prosthesis, or graft, **70** is not a "spring-like" or "self-expanding member", the prosthesis is not consistently applying an outward, radial force against the interior surface of body passageway **80**, in excess of that required to resist radial collapse of the body passageway **80**. Thus, erosion of the interior surface, or intima, of the artery or body passageway is prevented.

[0034] When it is desired to use expandable intraluminal graft **70** to expand the lumen **81** of a body passageway **80** having an area of stenosis, the expansion of intra-luminal vascular graft **70** by angioplasty balloon **88**, allows controlled dilation of the stenotic area and, at the same time controlled expansion and deformation of the vascular graft **70**, whereby vascular graft **70** prevents the body passageway **80** from collapsing and decreasing the size of the previously expanded lumen **81**. Once again, the second, expanded diameter d' of intraluminal vascular graft **70**, as shown in FIG. 4, is variable and determined by the desired expanded internal diameter of body passageway **80**. Thus, the expandable intraluminal graft **70** will not migrate away from the desired location within the body passageway **80** upon deflation of angioplasty balloon **88**, nor will the expansion of intraluminal graft **70** likely cause a rupture of body passageway **80**, nor any erosion as previously described. Further, should an intimal flap, or fissure, be formed in body passageway **80** at the location of graft **70**, graft **70** will insure that such an intimal flap will not be able to fold inwardly into body passageway **80**, nor tear loose and flow through body passageway **80**. In the situation of utilizing graft **70** in the manner previously described to expand the lumen of a portion of a critical body passageway, such as the left main coronary artery, it is believed that the intimal flap will be unable to occlude the left main coronary artery of the heart and cause the death of the patient.

[0035] Because it is only necessary to inflate angioplasty balloon **88** one time in order to expand and deform graft **70**, it is believed that a greater amount of endothelium, or inner layer of the intima, or inner surface of the body passageway, will be preserved, insofar as the extent of endothelial denudation during transluminal angioplasty is proportional to the balloon inflation time. Further, in theory, the amount of preserved endothelium should be large because in the expanded configuration of graft **70**, potentially 80% of the endothelium is exposed through the openings or expanded slots **82** of graft **70**. It is further believed that intact patches of endothelium within expanded slots **82** of graft **70** may result in a rapid, multicentric endothelialization pattern as shown by experimental studies.

[0036] With reference now to FIGS. 5 and 6, prostheses, or grafts, **70** of the type previously described in connection with FIGS. 1A and 1B are shown, and the tubular members **71** of grafts, or prostheses, **70** have a biologically inert or biologically compatible coating **90** placed upon wall surfaces **74** of tubular shaped members **71**. Examples of a suitable biologically inert coating would be porous polyurethane, Teflon, or other conventional biologically inert plastic materials. The coating **90** should be thin and highly elastic so as not to interfere with the desired expansion and defor-

mation of prosthesis, or graft, **70**. Coating **90** may be further provided with a means for anchoring **91** (FIG. 6) the tubular member **71** to the body passageway **80**. Anchoring means **91** may be comprised of a plurality of radially, outwardly extending projections **92** formed on the coating **90**. As seen in FIG. 6, the radially outwardly extending projections **92** could comprise a plurality of ridges **93**, or other types of radially, outwardly extending projections. Further, it may be desirable to have a plurality of openings **94** formed in coating **90**, as shown in FIG. 5, whereby the fluid contained in body passageway **80** can be in direct contact with the dilated, or expanded, body passageway area. Examples of biologically compatible coatings **90** would include coatings made of absorbable polymers such as those used to manufacture absorbable sutures. Such absorbable polymers include polyglycoides, polylactides, and copolymers thereof. Such absorbable polymers could also contain various types of drugs, whereby as the coating **90** is absorbed, or dissolves, the drug would be slowly released into the body passageway **80**.

[0037] Turning now to FIGS. 7 and 8, an expandable intraluminal vascular graft, or prosthesis, **70'** is shown for implantation in curved body passageways **80**, or for use in the elongated sections of body passageway **80**, when a prosthesis or a graft, **70'** is required which is longer than the graft, or prosthesis, **70** of FIG. 1A. Identical reference numerals are used throughout FIGS. 7 and 8 for elements which are the same in design, construction, and operation, as those previously described in connection with FIGS. 1A-6, and primed reference numerals are used for elements which are similar in construction, design, and operation, as those previously described in connection with 1A-6. As seen in FIG. 7, graft, or prosthesis, **70'** generally includes a plurality of prostheses, or grafts, **70** as described previously in connection with FIGS. 1A, 1D, and 2. Disposed between adjacent tubular members, **71**, or adjacent grafts, or prostheses, **70**, is a single connector member **100** to flexibly connect adjacent tubular members **71** or grafts, or prostheses, **70**. Connector members **100** are preferably formed of the same material as grafts **70**, as previously described, and connector members **100** may be formed integrally between adjacent grafts **70**, or tubular members **71**, as shown in FIG. 7. The cross-sectional configuration of connector members **100**, along the longitudinal axis of graft, or prosthesis, **70'**, is the same, in that connector members **100** have the same uniform wall thickness of elongate members **75** and thus form a thin-walled, elongate bar member **101** which is coplanar with adjacent tubular members **71**. Of course, it should be readily apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art, that the thickness of connector members **100** could alternatively be smaller than elongate member **75**; however, it is preferable that the outer circumferential surface **102** of connector members **100** lies in the same plane formed by the wall surfaces **74** of grafts, or prostheses, **70**, as seen in FIG. 7.

[0038] Still with reference to FIGS. 7-8, it should be noted that although graft, or prosthesis, **70'** is illustrated as including three grafts, or prostheses, **70** flexibly connected to one another by connector members **100**, as few as two grafts **70** could be connected to form graft, or prosthesis, **70'**. Furthermore, many grafts **70** could be flexibly connected by connector members **100** as are desired to form graft, or prosthesis, **70'**. Preferably, the length of each graft, or prosthesis, **70** is approximately the length of two slots **82**;

however, the length of each graft **70** could be approximately equal to the length of two or more slots **82**. When three or more grafts **70** are flexibly connected by connector members **100**, as shown in **FIGS. 7 and 8**, preferably a first connector member **100** is disposed between the second end **73** of a first tubular member **70A** and the first end **72** of a second tubular member **70B**. A second connector member **100** is then disposed between the second end **73** of the second tubular member **70B** and the first end **72** of a third tubular member **70C**. The first and second connector members **100**, as shown in **FIGS. 7 and 8**, may be angularly offset from one another with respect to the longitudinal axis of the tubular members **70** to permit the requisite flexibility between the interconnected grafts, or prostheses, **70**.

[0039] The delivery and expansion of graft, or prosthesis, **70'** is the same as that previously described in connection with **FIGS. 1A, 1B, and 3-4**. The length of the expandable, inflatable portion **84** of catheter **83** would be sized to conform with the length of the graft, or prosthesis, **70'**, as should be readily apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art. Except for the length of the expandable, inflatable portion **84**, catheter **83**, the method of delivery of graft, or prosthesis, **70'** and its subsequent, controllable expansion and deformation are the same as previously described. As seen in **FIG. 8**, the prosthesis **70'** is illustrated in the configuration it would assume when being delivered to the desired location within the body passageway **80**, and the graft, or prosthesis, **70'** is disposed upon catheter **83** and is passing through a curved portion of body passageway **80**, such as an arterial bend. Because of the disposition of flexible connector members **100** between adjacent tubular members **71**, or grafts, or prostheses, **70**, graft, or prosthesis, **70'** is able to flexibly bend, or articulate, with respect to the longitudinal axis of graft, or prosthesis, **70'**, so as to be able to negotiate the curves or bends found in body passageways **80**. It should be noted that connector members **100** permit the bending, or articulation of adjacent tubular members in any direction about the longitudinal axis of graft, or prosthesis, **70'**. When graft, or prosthesis, **70'** is in its expanded, and deformed configuration, tubular members **71** of graft, or prosthesis, **70'**, will assume the configuration shown in **FIG. 1B**.

[0040] It is to be understood that the invention is not to be limited to the exact details of construction, operation, exact materials, or embodiments shown and described, as obvious modifications and equivalents will be apparent to one skilled in the art. Accordingly, the invention is therefore to be limited only by the scope of the appended claims.

1. An expandable intraluminal vascular graft, comprising:

- a plurality of thin-walled tubular members, each having first and second ends and a wall surface disposed between the first and second ends, the wall surface having a substantially uniform thickness and a plurality of slots formed therein, the slots being disposed substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of each tubular member;
- a single connector member being disposed between adjacent tubular members to flexibly connect adjacent tubular members, the single connector member being disposed in a substantially parallel relationship with respect to the longitudinal axis of the tubular members and coplanar with each tubular member.

each tubular member having a first diameter which permits intraluminal delivery of the tubular members into a body passageway having a lumen; and

the tubular members having a second, expanded and deformed diameter, upon the application from the interior of the tubular members of a radially, outwardly extending force, which second diameter is variable and dependent upon the amount of force applied to the tubular members, whereby the tubular members may be expanded and deformed to expand the lumen of the body passageway.

2. The expandable intraluminal graft of claim 1, wherein the single connector member is a thin-walled, elongate bar member, coplanar with adjacent tubular members.

3. The expandable intraluminal graft of claim 1, wherein a first connector member is disposed between the second end of a first tubular member and the first end of a second tubular member; a second connector member is disposed between the second end of the second tubular member and the first end of a third tubular member, the first and second connector members being angularly offset from one another with respect to the longitudinal axis of the tubular members.

4. An expandable prosthesis for a body passageway, comprising:

a plurality of thin-walled tubular members, each having first and second ends and a wall surface disposed between the first and second ends, the wall surface having a substantially uniform thickness and a plurality of slots formed therein, the slots being disposed substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of each tubular member;

a single connector member being disposed between adjacent tubular members to flexibly connect adjacent tubular members, the single connector member being disposed in a substantially parallel relationship with respect to the longitudinal axis of the tubular members and coplanar with each tubular member;

each tubular member having a first diameter which permits intraluminal delivery of the tubular members into a body passageway having a lumen; and

the tubular members having a second, expanded and deformed diameter, upon the application from the interior of the tubular members, of a radially, outwardly extending force, which second diameter is variable and dependent upon the amount of force applied to the tubular member, whereby the tubular member may be expanded and deformed to expand the lumen of the body passageway.

5. The expandable prosthesis of claim 4, wherein the single connector member is a thin-walled, elongate bar member, coplanar with adjacent tubular members.

6. The expandable prosthesis of claim 4, wherein a first connector member is disposed between the second end of a first tubular member and the first end of a second tubular member; a second connector member is disposed between the second end of the second tubular member and the first end of a third tubular member, the first and second connector members being angularly offset from one another with respect to the longitudinal axis of the tubular members.

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