Office de la Propriété Intellectuelle du Canada
Un organisme d'Industrie Canada

Canadian Intellectual Property Office
An agency of Industry Canada

CA 2665123 A1 2009/11/05

(21) 2 665 123

(12) DEMANDE DE BREVET CANADIEN
CANADIAN PATENT APPLICATION

(13) A1

(22) Date de dépôt/Filing Date: 2009/05/01

(41) Mise à la disp. pub./Open to Public Insp.: 2009/11/05

(30) Priorités/Priorities: 2008/05/05 (US61/050,371);
2009/04/08 (US12/420,223)

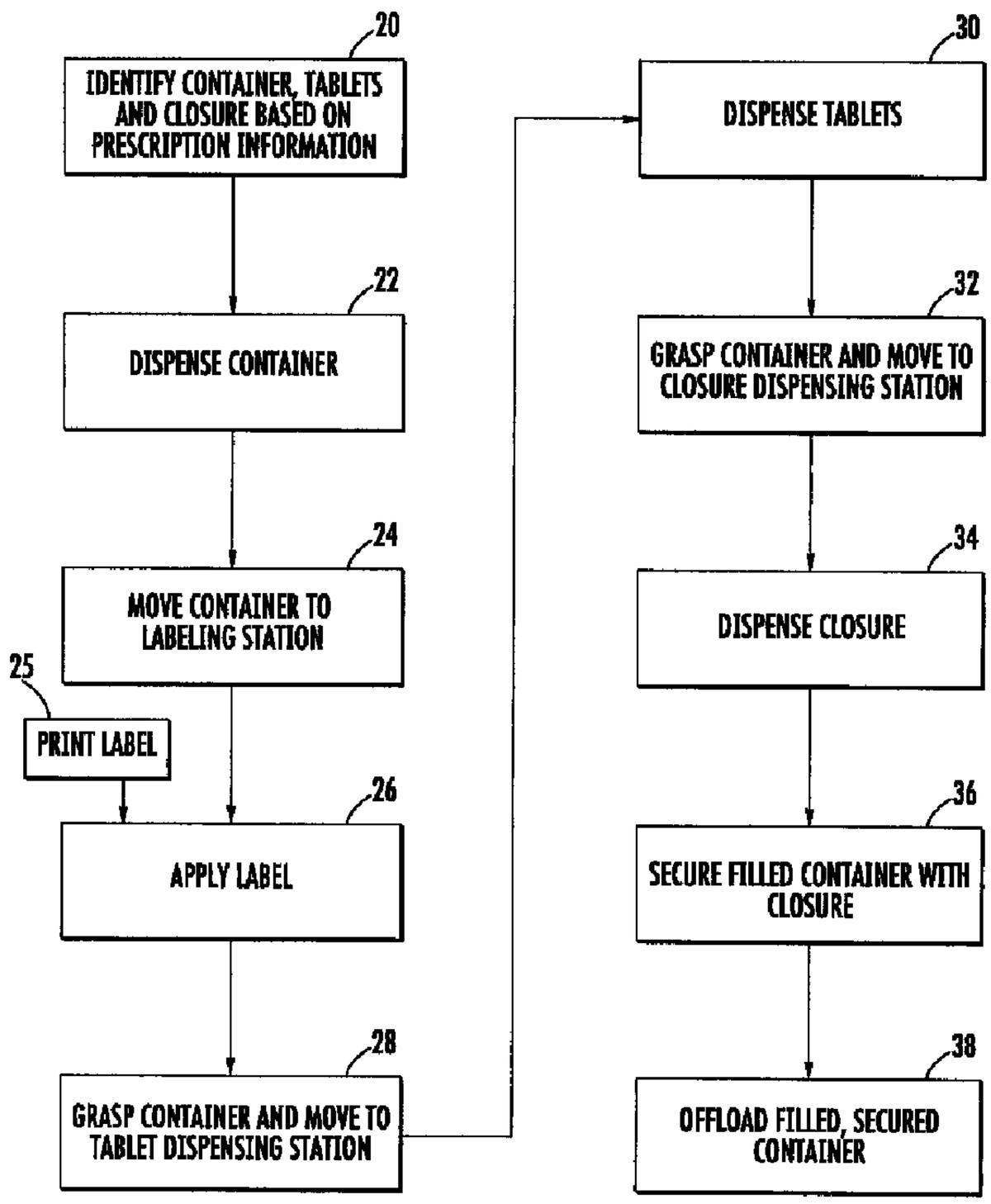
(51) Cl.Int./Int.Cl. *G01N 35/04* (2006.01),
G01N 35/00 (2006.01)

(71) Demandeur/Applicant:
PARATA SYSTEMS, L.L.C., US

(72) Inventeurs/Inventors:
RIVENBARK, JAMES, US;
CARPENTER, WILLIAM BRADFORD, US

(74) Agent: SMART & BIGGAR

(54) Titre : DISPOSITIF POUR LA PRESENTATION SELECTIVE D'OBJETS
(54) Title: DEVICE FOR SELECTIVELY PRESENTING OBJECTS



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:
An assembly for selectively presenting objects includes: a frame; a carousel rotatably mounted to the frame for rotation about a generally vertical axis of rotation, the carousel including a plurality of object compartments arranged about the axis of rotation; a

CA 2665123 A1 2009/11/05

(21) 2 665 123

(13) A1

(57) Abrégé(suite)/Abstract(continued):
servomotor operably connected with the carousel, the servomotor being configured to rotate the carousel about the axis of rotation; and a controller. The controller is configured to actuate the servomotor to rotate the carousel when torque applied to the servomotor exceeds a predetermined magnitude. Such an assembly can serve as a presentation device that enables an operator to remove objects therefrom at his/her convenience.

Attorney Docket No. 9335-60

DEVICE FOR SELECTIVELY PRESENTING OBJECTS

Abstract of the Disclosure

An assembly for selectively presenting objects includes: a frame; a carousel rotatably mounted to the frame for rotation about a generally vertical axis of rotation, the carousel including a plurality of object compartments arranged about the axis of rotation; a servomotor operably connected with the carousel, the servomotor being configured to rotate the carousel about the axis of rotation; and a controller. The controller is configured to actuate the servomotor to rotate the carousel when torque applied to the servomotor exceeds a predetermined magnitude. Such an assembly can serve as a presentation device that enables an operator to remove objects therefrom at his/her convenience.

Attorney Docket No. 9335-60

DEVICE FOR SELECTIVELY PRESENTING OBJECTS

Related Application

This application claims priority from U.S Provisional Application Serial No. 61/050,371, filed May 5, 2008, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference.

Field of the Invention

The present invention is directed generally to devices that present a number of objects for retrieval, and more specifically to devices that selectively present the objects for retrieval.

Background of the Invention

Pharmacy generally began with the compounding of medicines, which entailed the actual mixing and preparing of medications. Heretofore, pharmacy has been, to a great extent, a profession of dispensing, that is, the pouring, counting, and labeling of a prescription, and subsequently transferring the dispensed medication to the patient. Because of the repetitiveness of many of the pharmacist's tasks, automation of these tasks has been desirable.

Some attempts have been made to automate the pharmacy environment. Different exemplary approaches are shown in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,337,919 to Spaulding et al. and U.S Patent Nos. 6,006,946; 6,036,812 and 6,176,392 to Williams et al. The Williams system conveys a bin with tablets to a counter and a vial to the counter. The counter dispenses tablets to the vial. Once the tablets have been dispensed, the system returns the bin to its original location and conveys the vial to an output device. Tablets may be counted and dispensed with any number of

counting devices. Drawbacks to these systems typically include the relatively low speed at which prescriptions are filled and the absence in these systems of securing a closure (i.e., a lid) on the container after it is filled.

One additional automated system for dispensing pharmaceuticals is described in some detail in U.S. Patent No. 6,971,541 to Williams et al. This system has the capacity to select an appropriate vial, label the vial, fill the vial with a desired quantity of a selected pharmaceutical tablet, apply a cap to the filled vial, and convey the labeled, filled, capped vial to an offloading station for retrieval. The system discussed therein employs forced air that agitates tablets within a bin. The agitated tablets are conveyed via suction in singulated fashion through an outlet into the vial.

Typically a system like that discussed in U.S. Patent No. 6,971,541 to Williams et al. has a section of the offload station for "exceptions," which are vials that are unsuitable for distribution to customers. Potential reasons for exceptions include an incorrect number of tablets in the vial, incorrect or inadequate labeling, an uncapped or loosely capped vial, and the like. Because the system is highly automated, it is desirable to provide an area in which a robotic arm or other carrier that moves the vial within the system can drop off exceptions for subsequent handling by a pharmacist or technician. The exception area would desirably be easily accessible from the exterior of the system (*i.e.*, similar access to that for correctly filled vials), yet would also account for the possibility of vials being uncapped or loosely capped, such that tablets would not spill from the vial upon placement of the vial in the exception area or removal therefrom.

Summary of the Invention

As a first aspect, embodiments of the present invention are directed to an assembly for selectively presenting objects. The assembly comprises: a frame; a carousel rotatably mounted to the frame for rotation about a generally vertical axis of rotation, the carousel including a plurality of object compartments arranged about the axis of rotation; a servomotor operably connected with the carousel, the servomotor being configured to rotate the carousel about the axis of rotation, the servomotor associated with a detector; and a controller, the controller

configured to actuate the servomotor to rotate the carousel when the detector detects a user's attempt to rotate the carousel as the carousel is substantially stationary. Such an assembly can serve as a presentation device that enables an operator to remove objects therefrom at his/her convenience.

As a second aspect, embodiments of the present invention are directed to a system for automatically dispensing pharmaceuticals. The system includes a machine for automatically dispensing pharmaceuticals into vials and an exception vial assembly operably associated with the machine. The exception vial assembly is configured to receive exception vials produced by the machine and present the exception vials to an operator for removal from the system.

As a third aspect, embodiments of the present invention are directed to a method of controlling the presentation of objects with a rotary member. The method comprises the steps of: (a) detecting, with a controller, a level of angular displacement experienced by the rotary member, the rotary member housing at least one object; (b) if the magnitude of the detected angular displacement is below a predetermined level, maintaining an angular position of the rotary member; and (c) if the magnitude of the detected angular displacement exceeds the predetermined level, rotating the rotary over a predetermined angular distance to present the object at a new angular position.

As a fourth aspect, embodiments of the present invention are directed to a method of retrieving an object from a carousel, comprising the steps of: providing a carousel with a plurality of compartments, each of the compartments sized to contain one or more objects, the carousel being rotatable via a servomotor; with a controller, detecting an attempt by a user to rotate the carousel; and in response to the detecting step, rotating the carousel via the servomotor over a predetermined angle to present an object in a compartment to the user.

Brief Description of the Figures

Figure 1 is a flow chart depicting operations that can be carried out by an automated pharmacy machine according to embodiments of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a front perspective view of an automated pharmacy machine according to embodiments of the present invention.

Attorney Docket No. 9335-60

Figure 3 is an opposite side front perspective view of the automated pharmacy machine of **Figure 2** with the outer skin removed to permit visual access to components housed therein.

Figure 4 is a front perspective view of an exception assembly of the automated pharmacy machine shown in **Figures 2** and **3**.

Figure 5 is a rear perspective view of the exception assembly of **Figure 4**.

Figure 6 is a top partial perspective view of the exception assembly of **Figure 4**, with the ceiling of the frame, the top plate of the carousel, and the cover of the carousel removed.

Figure 7 is a section view of the exception assembly of **Figure 4** taken along lines **7—7** thereof.

Figure 8 is a flow chart illustrating exemplary operations of the exception assembly of **Figure 4**.

Figure 9 is a rear perspective view of the exception assembly of **Figure 4** showing the placement of an exception vial in a compartment.

Figure 10 is a front perspective view of the exception assembly of **Figure 4** showing the application of finger pressure by an operator to actuate the assembly.

Figure 11 is a front perspective view of the exception assembly of **Figure 4** showing the rotation of the carousel to allow access to an exception vial.

Detailed Description of Embodiments of the Invention

The present invention will now be described more fully hereinafter, in which preferred embodiments of the invention are shown. This invention may, however, be embodied in different forms and should not be construed as limited to the embodiments set forth herein. Rather, these embodiments are provided so that this disclosure will be thorough and complete, and will fully convey the scope of the invention to those skilled in the art. In the drawings, like numbers refer to like elements throughout. Thicknesses and dimensions of some components may be exaggerated for clarity.

Unless otherwise defined, all terms (including technical and scientific terms) used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood by one of ordinary skill in the art to which this invention belongs. It will be further understood that terms, such as those defined in commonly

used dictionaries, should be interpreted as having a meaning that is consistent with their meaning in the context of the relevant art and will not be interpreted in an idealized or overly formal sense unless expressly so defined herein.

The terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting of the invention. As used herein, the singular forms "a", "an" and "the" are intended to include the plural forms as well, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise. It will be further understood that the terms "comprises" and/or "comprising," when used in this specification, specify the presence of stated features, integers, steps, operations, elements, and/or components, but do not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, integers, steps, operations, elements, components, and/or groups thereof. As used herein the expression "and/or" includes any and all combinations of one or more of the associated listed items.

In addition, spatially relative terms, such as "under", "below", "lower", "over", "upper" and the like, may be used herein for ease of description to describe one element or feature's relationship to another element(s) or feature(s) as illustrated in the figures. It will be understood that the spatially relative terms are intended to encompass different orientations of the device in use or operation in addition to the orientation depicted in the figures. For example, if the device in the figures is turned over, elements described as "under" or "beneath" other elements or features would then be oriented "over" the other elements or features. Thus, the exemplary term "under" can encompass both an orientation of over and under. The device may be otherwise oriented (rotated 90 degrees or at other orientations) and the spatially relative descriptors used herein interpreted accordingly.

Also, as used herein, the terms "downstream" and "upstream," which are often used in manufacturing environments to indicate that certain material being acted upon is farther along in the manufacturing process than other material, are intended to indicate relative positions of components along a path following by a substantially continuous paper sheet that travels along and through the components. A component that is "downstream" from another component means that the first component is positioned farther along the paper path, and a component that is "upstream" from another component means that the first component is nearer the origin of the

paper path. It should be noted that, relative to an absolute x-y-z coordinate axis system, these directions shift as the paper is conveyed between different operations. When they occur, these shifts in absolute direction are noted hereinbelow, and the downstream direction is redefined with reference to structures illustrated in the drawings.

Well-known functions or constructions may not be described in detail for brevity and/or clarity.

As described above, the invention relates generally to a system and process for dispensing pharmaceuticals. An exemplary process is described generally with reference to **Figure 1**. The process begins with the identification of the proper container, tablets or capsules and closure to be dispensed based on a patient's prescription information (**Box 20**). A container of the proper size is dispensed at a container dispensing station (**Box 22**), then moved to a labeling station (**Box 24**). A printing station prints a label (**Box 25**) that is applied at the labeling station (**Box 26**), after which the container is transferred to a tablet dispensing station (**Box 28**), from which the designated tablets are dispensed in the designated amount into the container (**Box 30**). The filled container is then moved to a closure dispensing station (**Box 32**), where a closure of the proper size has been dispensed (**Box 34**). The filled container is secured with a closure (**Box 36**), then transported to an offload station and offloaded (**Box 38**).

A system that can carry out this process is illustrated in **Figures 2** and **3** and designated broadly therein at **40**. The system **40** includes a support frame **44** for the mounting of its various components. The system **40** generally includes as operative stations a controller (represented herein by a graphics user interface monitor **42**), a container dispensing station **58**, a labeling station **60**, a tablet dispensing station **62**, a closure station **64**, and an offloading station **66**. In the illustrated embodiment, containers, tablets and closures are moved between these stations with a single carrier **68**; however, in some embodiments additional carriers may be employed. The operation of the container dispensing station **58**, the labeling station **60**, the tablet dispensing station **62**, the closure station **64**, and the offloading station **66** are described in, for example, U.S. Patent Application Nos. 11/599,526; 11/599,576; 11/679,850; 11/693,929; 11/755,249; 11/927,865; and 11/111,270, the disclosure of each of which is hereby incorporated herein in its entirety.

Attorney Docket No. 9335-60

The system **40** also includes a vial exception assembly **100**, which is located on the same side of the system **40** as the offload station **66** (*see* **Figure 3**). The exception assembly **100**, which includes a frame **102** (*see* **Figures 4-6**), a carousel **120**, and a motor **140**, is described in detail below.

Turning now to **Figures 4** and **5**, the frame **102** is fixed to the frame **44** of the system **40**. The frame **102** includes a floor **104** and walls **106** that are, in this embodiment, integrally formed. Vertical flaps **107** are located in the rearward portions of the walls **106**. A ceiling **108** is mounted to and spans the upper ends of the walls **106**. A sensor support bracket **109** spans the floor **104** and the ceiling **108**.

A base **110** is mounted to the floor **104**. The base **110** includes a circular recess **112** (**Figures 6** and **7**) in its center portion. A guide rod **114** extends along one side of the recess **112** and overlies an outer portion thereof; on the opposite side, a guide rod **116**, extends along the edge of the recess and also overlies an outer portion thereof. In addition, two sensors **118a, 118b** are mounted to opposite ends of a cross-member **109a** that is mounted to the divider **109**; also, an emitter **118c** is mounted to a rear edge of one of the walls **106**.

Referring to **Figures 4-6**, the carousel **120** includes a base **122**, a cylindrical central cover **134**, and a top plate **136**. The base **122** and the top plate **136** are generally parallel with each other, with the base **122** nesting within the recess **112** of the base **110**, and the top plate **136** fitting just beneath the ceiling **108**. A plurality of recesses **124** (in this instance seven recesses **124**) are formed into the base **122**. The recesses **124** are generally semicircular or semi-oval in shape; a radius of between about 1 and 4 inches is typical. Two upstanding finger tabs **124a** project upwardly from the radially-outward edges of each of the recesses **124**. Partitions **126** are mounted between the recesses **124**, extend upwardly therefrom to meet the top plate **136**, and radiate outwardly from the cover **134**. Each of the partitions **126** includes a pair of cutaway areas such that an outwardly-radiating finger **128** is formed.

As can be seen in **Figures 4-6,** the base **122**, the top plate **136**, the cover **134**, and the partitions **126** form a plurality of compartments **127** (in this instance seven) around the cover **134**. Each of the compartments **127** is separated from adjacent compartments **127** by two partitions **126**.

As can be seen in **Figures 6** and **7**, the cover **134** covers a round, stepped hub **130** that projects upwardly from the center of the base **122**. An inwardly extending flange **152,** L-shaped in cross-section, projects from the hub **130**. Also, a ring gear **132** with radially-inwardly projecting teeth **132t** is mounted on top of the hub **130**. An axis **A1** extends perpendicular to the plane defined by the ring gear **132**.

Referring now to **Figures 6** and **7**, the motor **140** (in this embodiment a servomotor) is located inside the cover **134**. The motor **140** includes a downwardly-extending shaft on which is mounted a drive gear **144** with teeth **144t**. The shaft (not visible herein) defines an axis **A2**. The motor **140** is located such that the teeth **144t** of the drive gear **144** mate with the teeth **132t** of the ring gear **132**. The motor **140** is mounted to a motor mount arm **142**, which extends for mounting atop a centrally located pedestal **148** that is fixed to the floor **104**. Upper and lower bearings **154, 156** are attached to the pedestal below the motor mount arm **142** (with a lip **152a** being positioned between the upper and lower bearings **154, 156**); each of the bearings has an inner race that is fixed to the pedestal **148** and an outer race that is fixed to the vertical portion of the flange **152**, such that the carousel **120** can rotate relative to the pedestal **148** about the axis **A1**.

Referring back to **Figure 5**, a servocontroller **157** or other detector is mounted to the upper surface of the ceiling **108** and is connected to the motor **140**. The servocontroller **157** monitors the angular position of the motor **140** and signals the controller **42** in the event that the angular position changes more than a specified threshold. A wiring support **158** is attached to the upper end of the motor **140** to provide support for the wiring of the motor **140** and servocontroller **157**.

As can be understood from **Figures 4-7**, activation of the motor **140** by the controller **42** rotates the motor shaft **142** and, in turn, the drive gear **144** about the axis **A2**. Because the teeth **144t** of the drive gear **144** mesh with the teeth **132t** of the ring gear **132**, rotation of the drive gear **144** causes the ring gear **132** to rotate in the same rotative direction about the axis **A1**. Rotation of the ring gear drives the carousel **120** around the axis **A1**.

Turning now to **Figure 8**, within the controller **42**, programmable logic is configured to control the motor **140**, which in turn controls the movement of the carousel **120** relative to the

base **110** and frame **102**. More specifically, as a steady state condition, the controller **42** maintains the shaft **142** of the motor **140** in a particular angular position about the axis **A1** (**box 212**). If, as monitored by the servocontroller **157**, the magnitude of the angular displacement of the shaft **142** is lower than a predetermined threshold (**box 200**), the controller **42** signals the servocontroller **157** to maintain the angular position of the shaft **142**. If instead the angular displacement of the shaft **142** is exceeded (**box 200**), the controller **42**, via the servocontroller **157**, determines the direction of the angular displacement (**box 206**) and instructs the motor **140** to rotate the shaft **142** (and, in turn, the carousel **120**) in the rotational direction of the angular displacement for a preset angular distance (**box 208**).

Also, if there has been no angular displacement for a predetermined duration (**boxes 200** and **202**), the controller **42** detects whether the entry compartment **127** is full (**box 204**) (this detection typically involves one or more of the sensors **118a, 118b**). If the entry compartment **127** is full, the controller **42** will signal the motor **140** to rotate the carousel **120** to position an empty compartment **127** at the entry opening **127a (box 210)**.

In addition, the controller **42** can, absent an applied angular displacement, instruct the motor **140** to rotate the carousel **120** about the axis **A1** for a preset angular distance, typically based on a user's instructions. Such user input may be entered into the system in some manner other than direct interaction with the carousel **120**, such as through a user interface or one or more buttons included for this purpose (not shown).

Further, those skilled in this art will appreciate that angular displacement need not be the determining condition detected by the motor **140** in order to initiate rotation. For example, the magnitude of torque experienced by the motor shaft **142** may be used to determine whether an operator is attempting to rotate the carousel **120** rather than angular displacement. Other properties or relationships may also be used to detect an attempt to rotate the carousel, after which the carousel is rotated as described above.

Thus, in operation, most of the time the carousel **120** experiences little to no angular displacement, and thus remains in a stationary position. As shown in **Figure 9**, in this position, the carousel **120** presents a compartment **127** to the interior of the system **40**, such that the carrier **68** can deliver a vial (presumably an exception vial) to the compartment **127** through an entry

opening **127a**. Entry of the carrier **68** is facilitated by the absence of either of the guide rods **114, 116** across the mouth of the compartment **127**. The presence of the vial in the compartment **127** can be detected by the sensors **118a, 118b**, which provide this information to the controller **42**. In some embodiments, the controller **42** then rotates the carousel **120** such that the compartment **127** that houses the exception vial moves away from the entry opening **127a** and another compartment **127'** moves into position behind the entry opening **127a**. In this position, the compartment **127'** can receive a second exception vial. This process can (but need not) be repeated until each of the compartments **127** houses an exception vial.

If an operator (which could be a human or robotic operator) wishes to remove one of the exception vials that is located in one of the compartments that is still positioned within the interior of the frame **44**, the operator can simply push horizontally on one of the finger tabs **124a** located within one of the compartments **127** that is presented to the exterior of the frame **44** (*see* **Figure 10**). Once the angular displacement imposed by the operator exceeds the threshold limit for the motor **140** (typically about 2 degrees or more is to be applied by the operator to initiate rotation and 5 degrees to stop rotation, so the resulting threshold angular displacement is typically between about 0.3 and 10 degrees), the servocontroller **157** recognizes that the magnitude of the threshold angular displacement has been exceeded and responds by rotating the carousel **120** (via the motor **140**) in the direction of the angular displacement for a preset angular distance. Typically, the preset angular distance is selected such that most, if not all, of the compartments that were positioned on the interior of the frame **44** prior to the application of the force are now presented to the exterior of the frame **44**. For example, if seven compartments **127** are present in the carousel **120**, then the motor **140** may rotate the carousel **120** over approximately 154 degrees, which is the angular expanse covered by three compartments **127**. This rotation should allow the operator access to three of the compartments **127** that were previously positioned on the interior of the frame **44** and were, thus, inaccessible to the operator (*see* **Figure 11**). In other embodiments, the carousel **120** may rotate over a predetermined angular distance of between about 40 and 240 degrees.

It should be noted that the exception assembly **100** may be configured, as described above, such that the operator can impose angular displacement in either rotative direction and

cause the carousel **120** to rotate in that rotative direction. However, in some systems the exception assembly **100** may be configured to rotate only in one rotative direction.

Also, the exception assembly **100** can be configured such that, as the carousel **120** is rotating, its rotation can be halted by an angular displacement that exceeds a predetermined threshold that is opposite to the direction of rotation, or in some embodiments even by slowing the rotation. Halting the rotation may allow the operator easy access to a particular compartment **127** of interest. In this instance, when the servocontroller **157** detects the displacement in the opposite direction, it immediately begins to stop the initial rotation. It also signals controller **42** that there has been displacement in the opposite direction and controller **42** calculates the position of the most recently passed bin. Controller **42** then signals servocontroller **157** to move back to that last position. This capability can allow a user to manually halt rotation of the carousel **120** in a desired position.

It should also be noted that the guide rods **114, 116** are configured such that they overlie radially outer portions of the four compartments **127** that are located toward the rear of the exception assembly **100** (see **Figure 6**). This shape enables the guide rods **114, 116** to assist in maintaining the position of vials within the recesses **124** of the base **122**, particularly if the vials are picked up and replaced in a compartment by an operator. The guide rods **114, 116** may also help to keep the vials away from the sensors **118a** and **118b.**

It may also be desirable for the motor **140** to drive the carousel **120** at a rotational speed that allows an upright vial to remain upright and not topple over. This capability may be desirable as some vials may be regarded as exceptions because the cap is not secured properly, and a vial with an unsecured cap that topples over can spill tablets into the system. An exemplary speed for carousel rotation is between about 2 and 30 rpm.

Other embodiments of the invention may include additional functionality. For example, in some embodiments, the exception carousel **100** may be configured so that, unless the servocontroller **157** has very recently sensed an attempt to rotate the carousel **120**, a user may be "locked out" while a vial is delivered to the carousel **120**. Further, the exception assembly **100** may be configured to actively seek to maintain an open compartment for receipt from the carrier **68** anytime the exception assembly **100** is not already engaged. Thus, if interaction with a user

causes the entry opening **127a** to be occupied, the controller **42** can rotate the carousel to present an open compartment **127** in the entry opening **127a**. In certain embodiments, the exception assembly **100** may be configured so that neither this function nor the system's receipt of a vial can override a user's interaction or direction. Similarly, the exception assembly **100** may be configured so that a user cannot be "locked out" from interaction while the assembly **100** seeks an open compartment **127**. Other variations of such functionality may also be useful and/or desirable.

Those skilled in this art will also appreciate that the exception assembly **100** may be employed for other systems that include rotating carousels or other rotary members. For example, it may control an exception carousel or the like for a manufacturing line by receiving and presenting items that fail quality control inspections. The assembly might also be employed in a restaurant kitchen, wherein prepared dishes may be accessed by wait staff separated from the kitchen by a wall. Other applications may be apparent to those of skill in this art.

Those skilled in this art will recognize that other configurations of the exception assembly are encompassed within the present invention. For example, the numbers of compartments for containing vials may vary (seven are illustrated herein). The partitions may vary in size and shape. The motor may rotate the carousel in only one, rather than in either, rotative direction. The exception assembly may be positioned in a different location on the system **40**.

Those skilled in the art may also appreciate that the "push to control" technique described above may also be used for manually directed motorized wheeled conveyance, such as a wheel chair, pulled wagon, or pallet jack. In such a vehicle, the speed of the load can be controlled precisely through servo control, but the start, stop and direction of conveyance could be controlled through natural motion of the user. As a result, a wagon or pallet jack may begin to move when pulled, stop when pushed and turn when turned, while all the time keeping the load at controlled speed up and down hills.

The foregoing embodiments are illustrative of the present invention, and are not to be construed as limiting thereof. Although exemplary embodiments of this invention have been described, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that many modifications are possible in

the exemplary embodiments without materially departing from the novel teachings and advantages of this invention. Accordingly, all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of this invention as defined in the claims. The invention is defined by the following claims, with equivalents of the claims to be included therein.

Attorney Docket No. 9335-60

That Which is Claimed is:

1. An assembly for selectively presenting objects, comprising:

a frame;

a carousel rotatably mounted to the frame for rotation about a generally vertical axis of rotation, the carousel including a plurality of object compartments arranged about the axis of rotation;

a servomotor operably connected with the carousel, the servomotor being configured to rotate the carousel about the axis of rotation, the servomotor associated with a detector; and

a controller, the controller configured to actuate the servomotor to rotate the carousel when the detector detects an attempt to rotate the carousel as the carousel is substantially stationary.

2. The assembly defined in Claim 1, wherein the detector detects angular displacement of the motor and/or carousel as a result of the user's attempt.

3. The assembly defined in Claim 1, wherein the detector detects torque experienced by the motor as a result of the user's attempt.

4. The assembly defined in Claim 1, wherein the controller is configured to actuate the servomotor to rotate the carousel over a predetermined angular distance.

5. The assembly defined in Claim 3, wherein the controller is configured to maintain the carousel in a stationary position when no torque exceeding the predetermined magnitude is applied.

6. The assembly defined in Claim 2, wherein the controller is configured to maintain the carousel in a stationary position when no angular displacement exceeding the predetermined magnitude is imposed.

Attorney Docket No. 9335-60

7. The assembly defined in Claim 4, wherein the predetermined angular distance is between about 40 and 240 degrees.

8. The assembly defined in Claim 1, wherein the frame and carousel define an entry opening, and wherein the controller is configured to rotate the carousel when an object is detected in a compartment adjacent to the entry opening.

9. The assembly defined in Claim 1, wherein at least one of the carousel compartments includes a feature configured to receive an operator's finger as it imparts angular displacement to the carousel.

10. The assembly defined in Claim 1, wherein the compartments are divided from each other by generally upright partitions.

11. The assembly defined in Claim 1, further comprising guide rods mounted to the base and positioned to urge objects in compartments toward the axis of rotation.

12. The assembly defined in Claim 1, wherein the servomotor rotates the carousel at a speed of between about 2 and 30 rpm.

13. The assembly defined in Claim 1, wherein the controller is configured to cease rotation of the carousel when the detector detects an attempt to displace the rotating carousel in the opposite rotative direction.

14. A system for automatically dispensing pharmaceuticals, comprising:

a machine for automatically dispensing pharmaceuticals into vials; and

an exception vial assembly operably associated with the machine, the exception vial assembly configured to receive exception vials produced by the machine and present the exception vials to an operator.

Attorney Docket No. 9335-60

15. The system defined in Claim 14, wherein the machine includes a carrier that transports vials between locations in the machine, and wherein the exception vial assembly is positioned to receive exception vials from the carrier.

16. The system defined in Claim 15, wherein the machine has a frame that defines an interior cavity, in which the carrier is located, and wherein the exception vial assembly receives exception vials from the interior cavity and presents exception vials to an operator positioned exterior of the frame.

17. The system defined in Claim 14, wherein the exception vial assembly comprises:

a frame;

a carousel rotatably mounted to the frame for rotation about a generally vertical axis of rotation, the carousel including a plurality of vial compartments arranged about the axis of rotation;

a servomotor operably connected with the carousel, the servomotor being configured to rotate the carousel about the axis of rotation, the servomotor associated with a detector; and

a controller, the controller configured to actuate the servomotor to rotate the carousel when the detector detects a user's attempt to rotate the carousel as the carousel is substantially stationary.

18. A method of controlling the presentation of objects with a rotary member, comprising the steps of:

(a) detecting, with a controller, a level of angular displacement experienced by the rotary member, the rotary member housing at least one object;

(b) if the magnitude of the detected angular displacement is below a predetermined level, maintaining an angular position of the rotary member; and

(c) if the magnitude of the detected angular displacement exceeds the predetermined level, rotating the rotary member over a predetermined angular distance to present the object at a new angular position.

19. The method defined in Claim 18, wherein the objects are pharmaceutical vials.

20. The method defined in Claim 19, wherein the rotary member is associated with an automated pharmaceutical dispensing machine, and wherein the objects are exception pharmaceutical vials.

21. The method defined in Claim 20, wherein the rotating step rotates a compartment from a non-access position facing an interior portion of the automated dispensing machine to an access position facing away from the interior portion of the automated dispensing machine.

22. The method defined in Claim 18, wherein the predetermined angular distance is between about 40 and 240 degrees.

23. The method defined in Claim 18, wherein the predetermined level of angular displacement is between about 2 and 10 degrees.

24. The method defined in Claim 18, wherein the rotary member is a carousel with a plurality of compartments.

25. The method defined in Claim 24, wherein the carousel includes features for receiving an operator's finger as it imparts angular displacement to the carousel.

26. The method defined in Claim 18, wherein the controller is configured to move the rotary member over the predetermined angular distance upon a command from an operator.

Attorney Docket No. 9335-60

27. The method defined in Claim 18, wherein the controller is configured to cease rotation of the carousel when the detector detects an attempt to displace the rotating carousel in the opposite rotative direction.

28. A method of retrieving an object from a carousel, comprising the steps of:

providing a carousel with a plurality of compartments, each of the compartments sized to contain one or more objects, the carousel being rotatable via a servomotor;

with a controller, detecting an attempt by a user to rotate the carousel; and

in response to the detecting step, rotating the carousel via the servomotor over a predetermined angle to present an object in a compartment to the user.

Smart & Biggar
Ottawa, Canada
Patent Agents

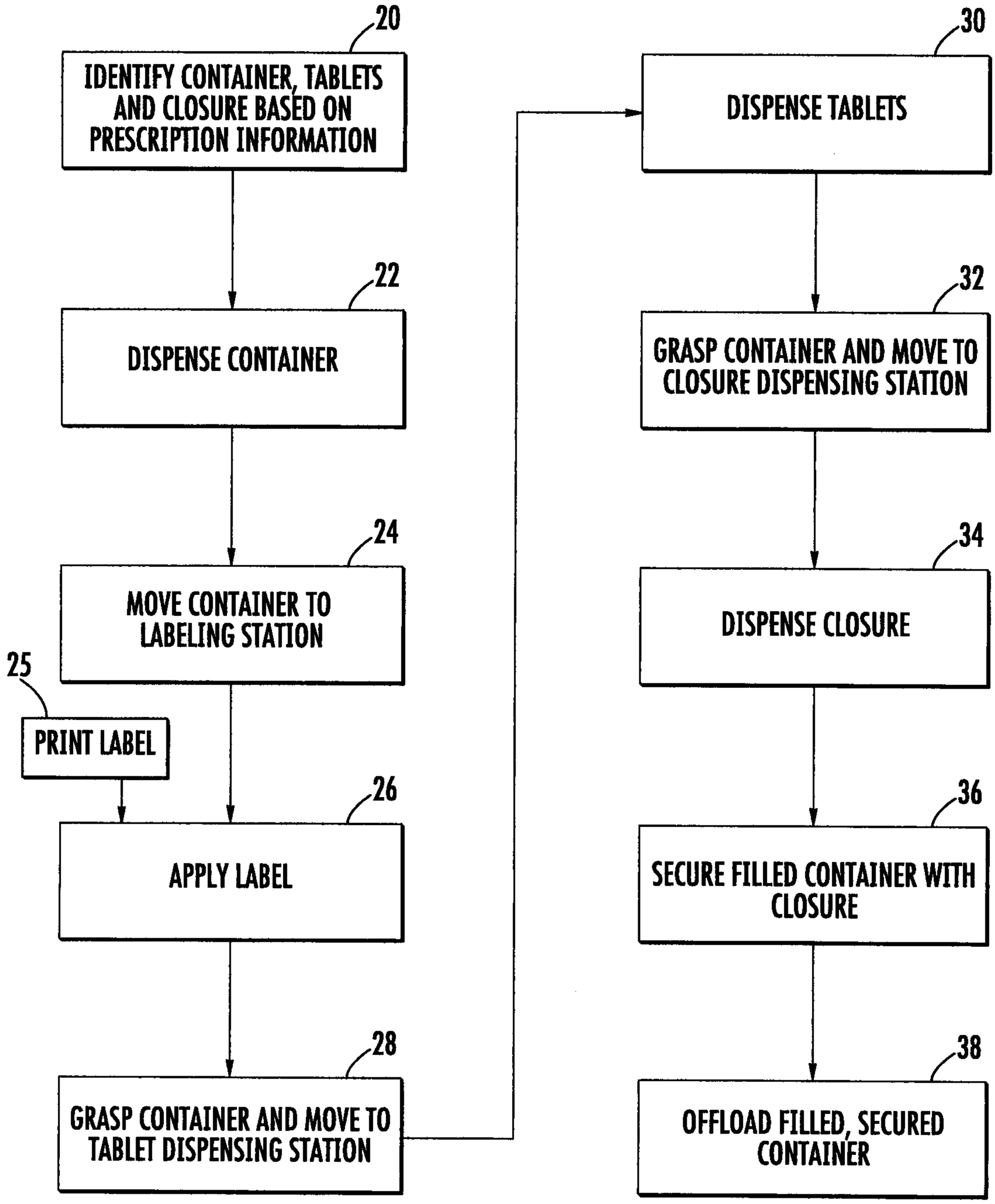

20
IDENTIFY CONTAINER, TABLETS AND CLOSURE BASED ON PRESCRIPTION INFORMATION
22
DISPENSE CONTAINER
24
MOVE CONTAINER TO LABELING STATION
25
PRINT LABEL
26
APPLY LABEL
28
GRASP CONTAINER AND MOVE TO TABLET DISPENSING STATION
30
DISPENSE TABLETS
32
GRASP CONTAINER AND MOVE TO CLOSURE DISPENSING STATION
34
DISPENSE CLOSURE
36
SECURE FILLED CONTAINER WITH CLOSURE
38
OFFLOAD FILLED, SECURED CONTAINER

FIG. 1

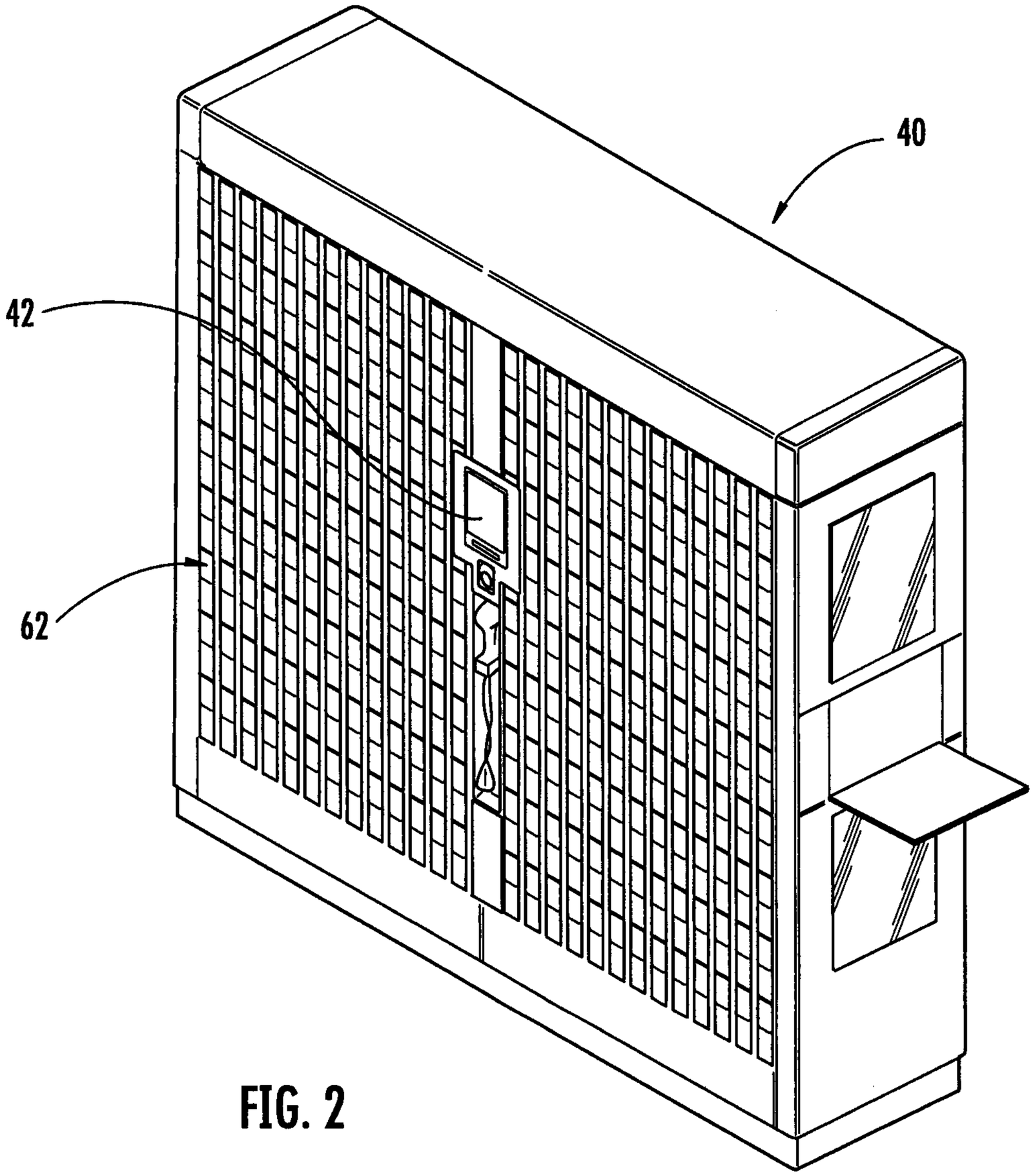


FIG. 2

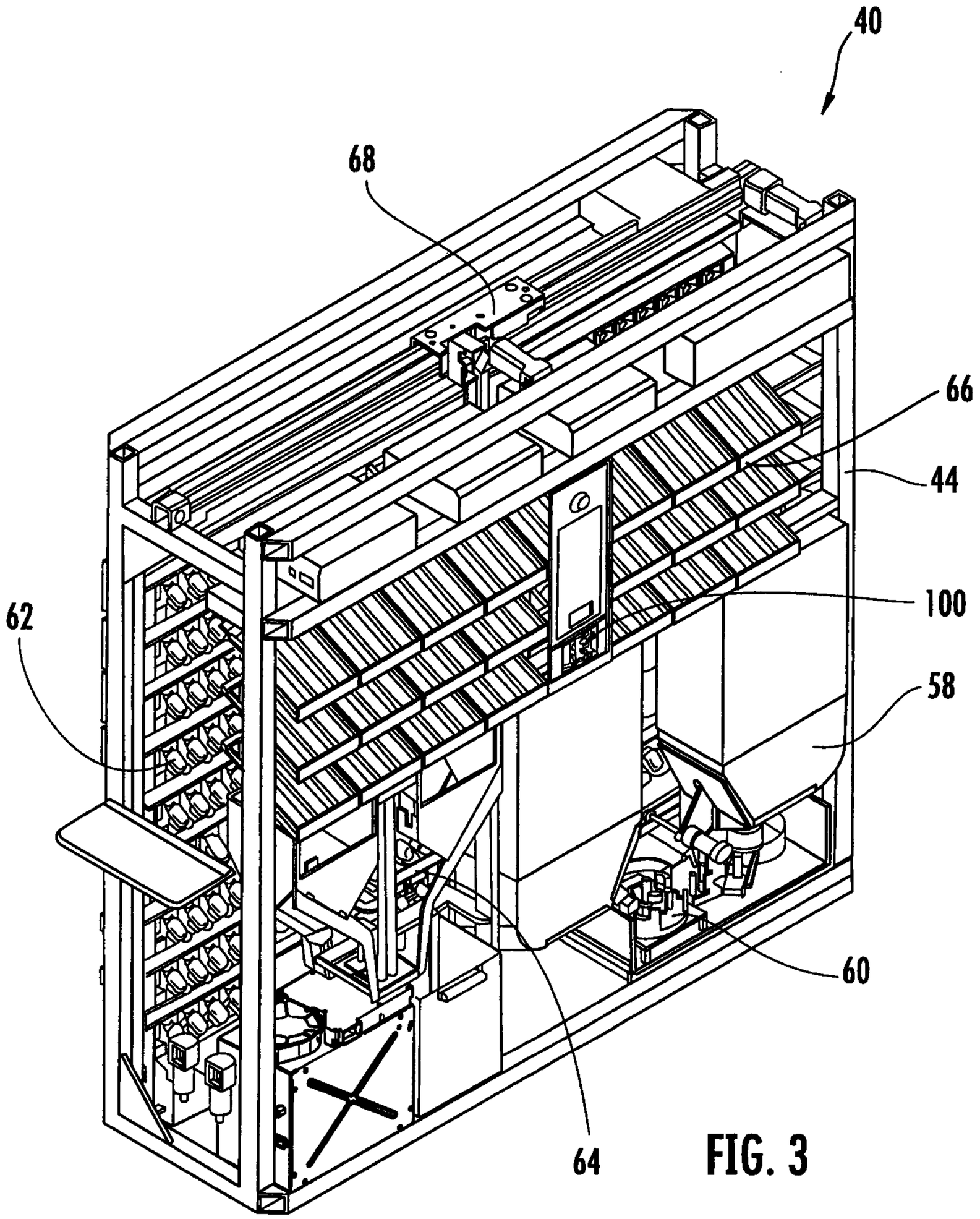


FIG. 3

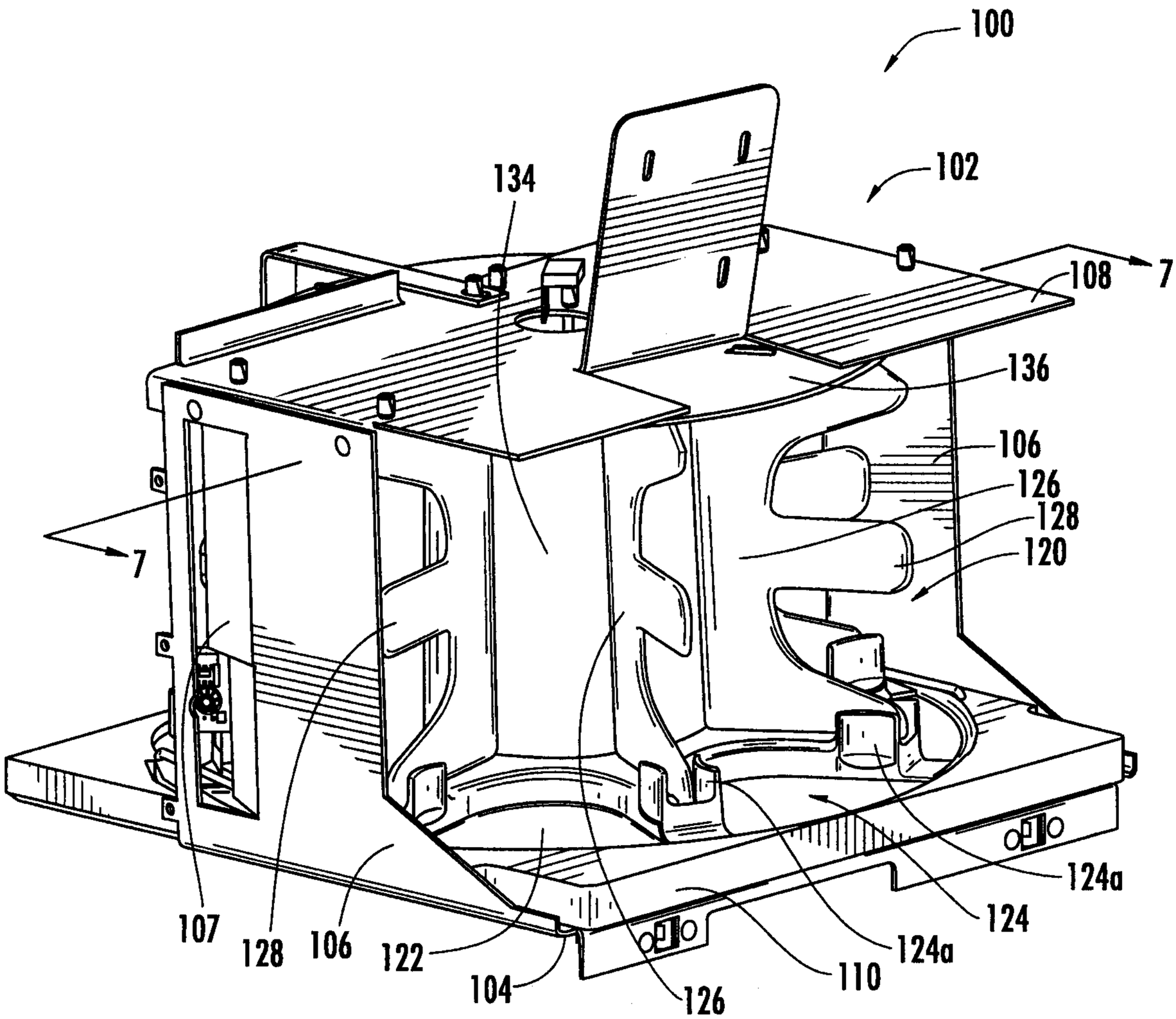

100
102
134
108
7
136
106
126
128
120
7
107
128
106
122
104
126
110
124a
124
124a

FIG. 4

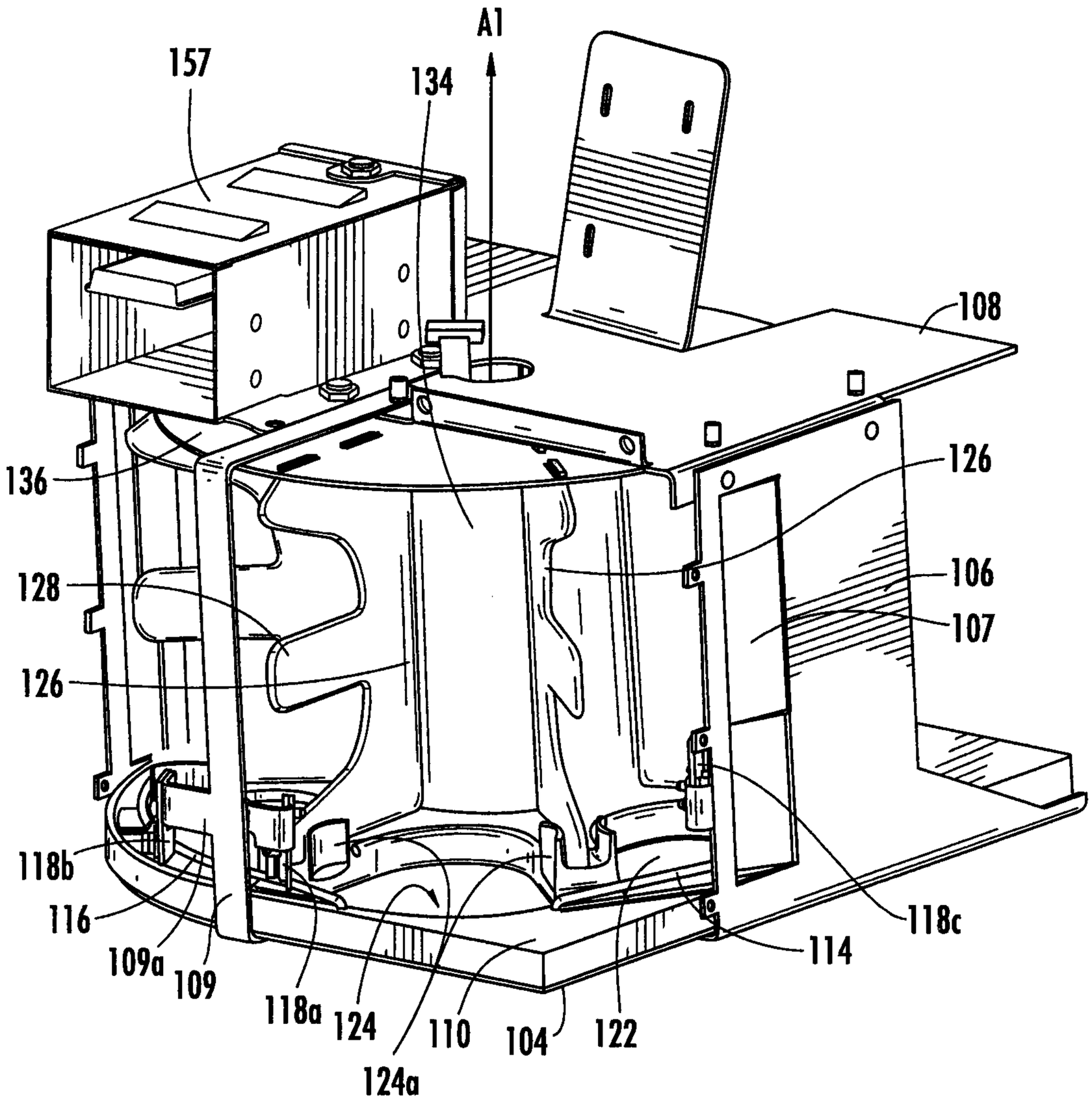

157
A1
134
108
136
126
128
106
107
126
118b
116
109a
109
118a
124
110
104
122
114
118c
124a

FIG. 5

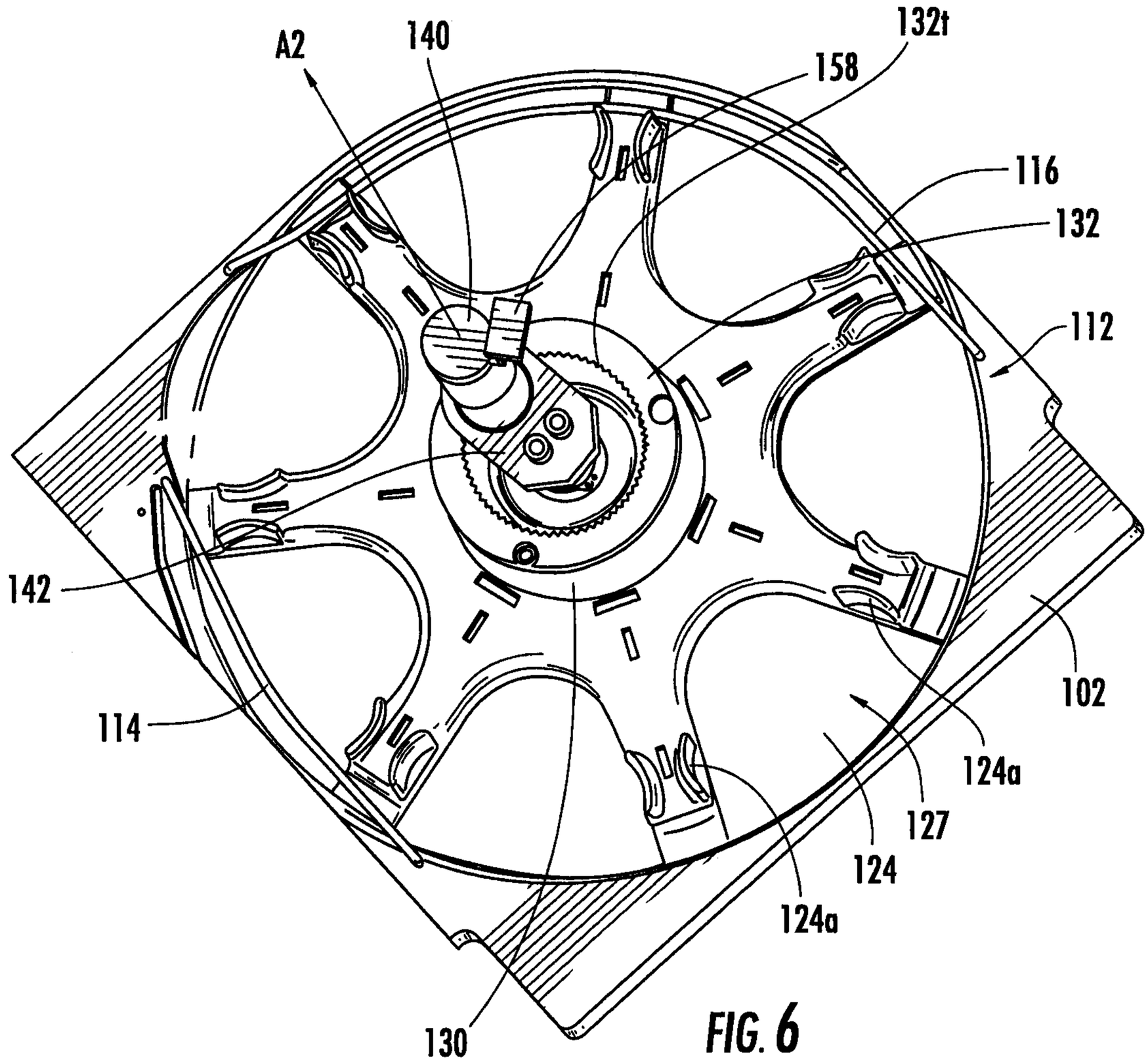


FIG. 6

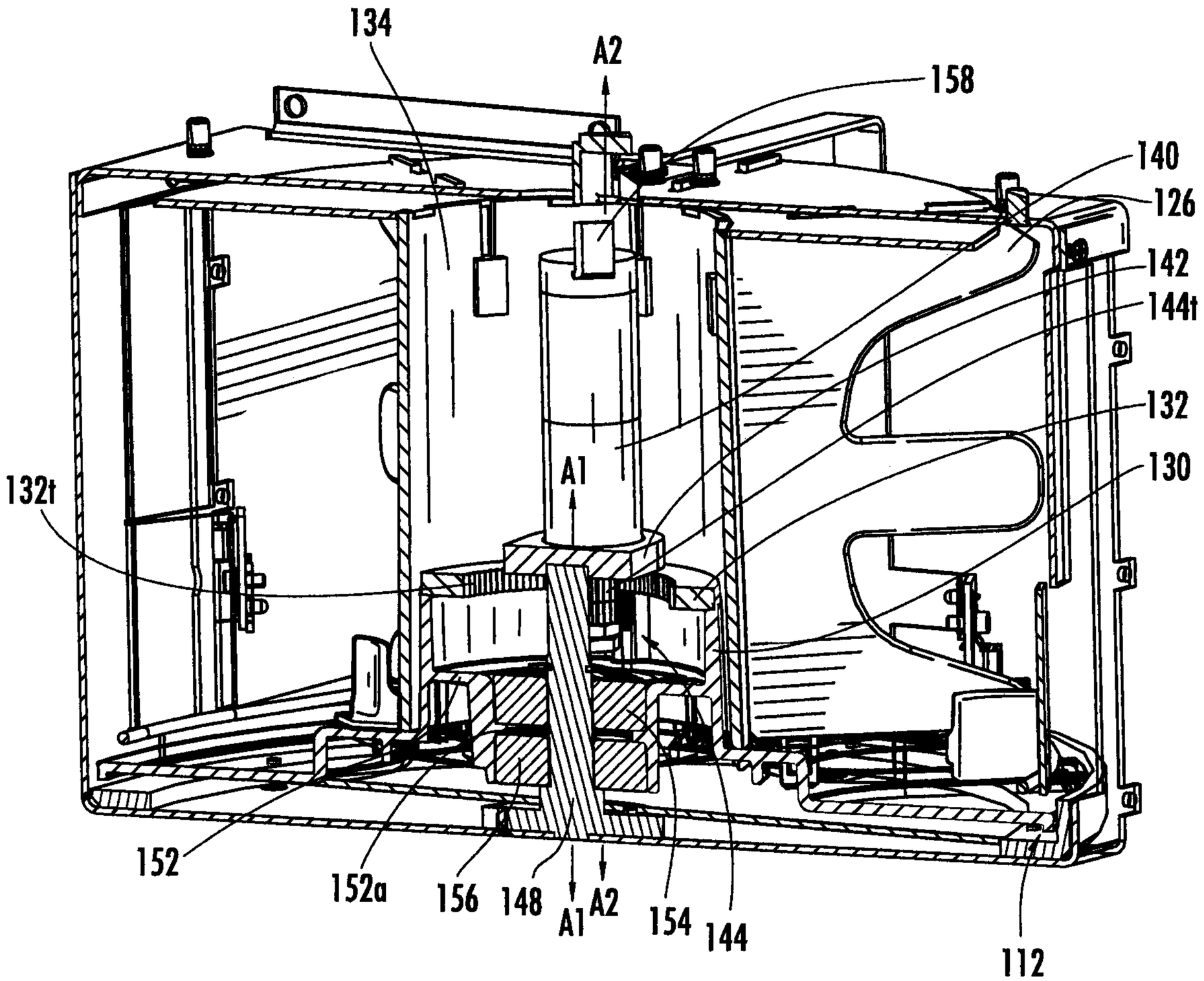

134
A2
158
140
126
142
144t
132
130
A1
132t
152
152a
156
148
A1
A2
154
144
112

FIG. 7

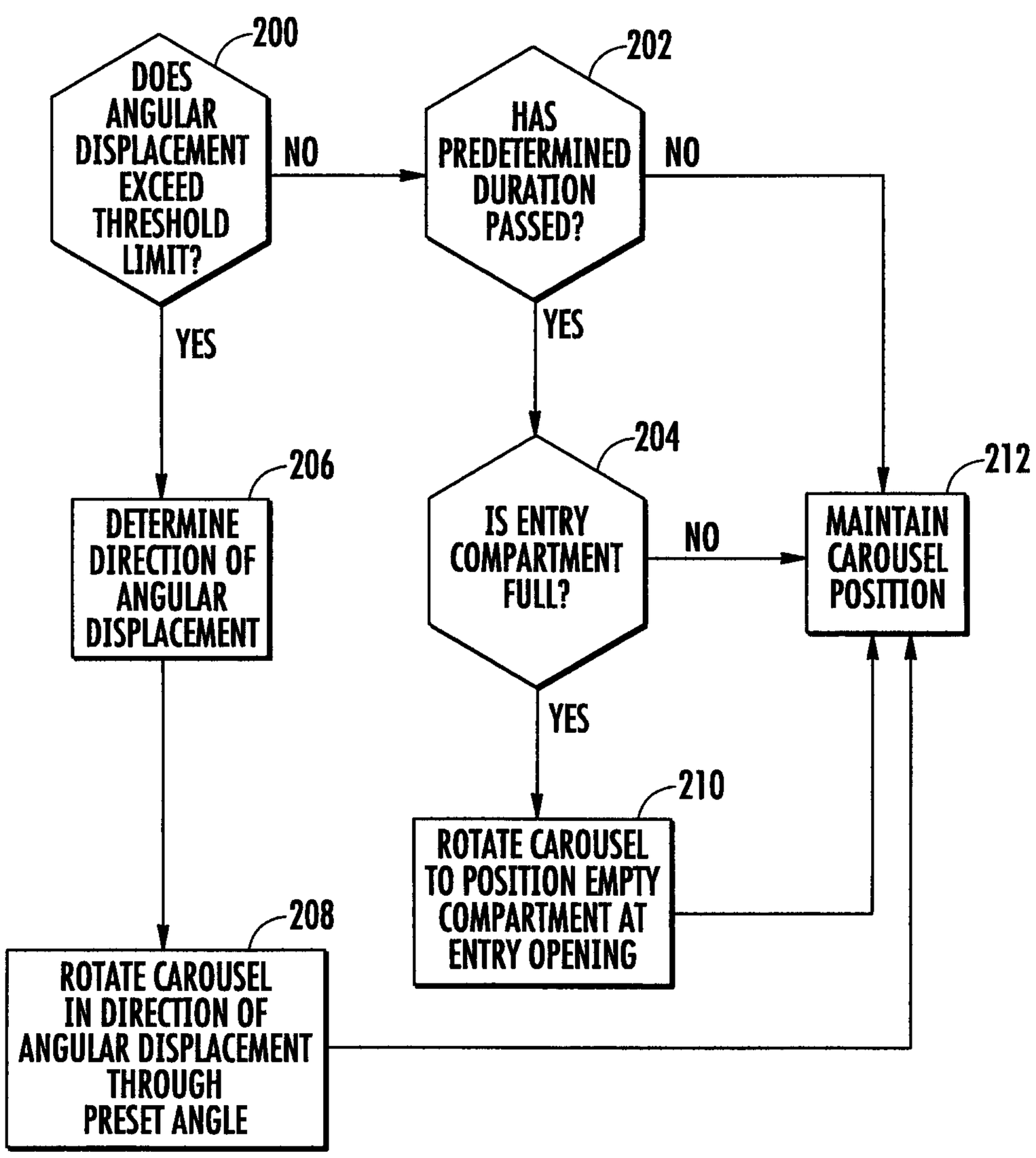

200
DOES ANGULAR DISPLACEMENT EXCEED THRESHOLD LIMIT?
NO
202
HAS PREDETERMINED DURATION PASSED?
NO
YES
YES
204
IS ENTRY COMPARTMENT FULL?
NO
212
MAINTAIN CAROUSEL POSITION
YES
206
DETERMINE DIRECTION OF ANGULAR DISPLACEMENT
210
ROTATE CAROUSEL TO POSITION EMPTY COMPARTMENT AT ENTRY OPENING
208
ROTATE CAROUSEL IN DIRECTION OF ANGULAR DISPLACEMENT THROUGH PRESET ANGLE

FIG. 8

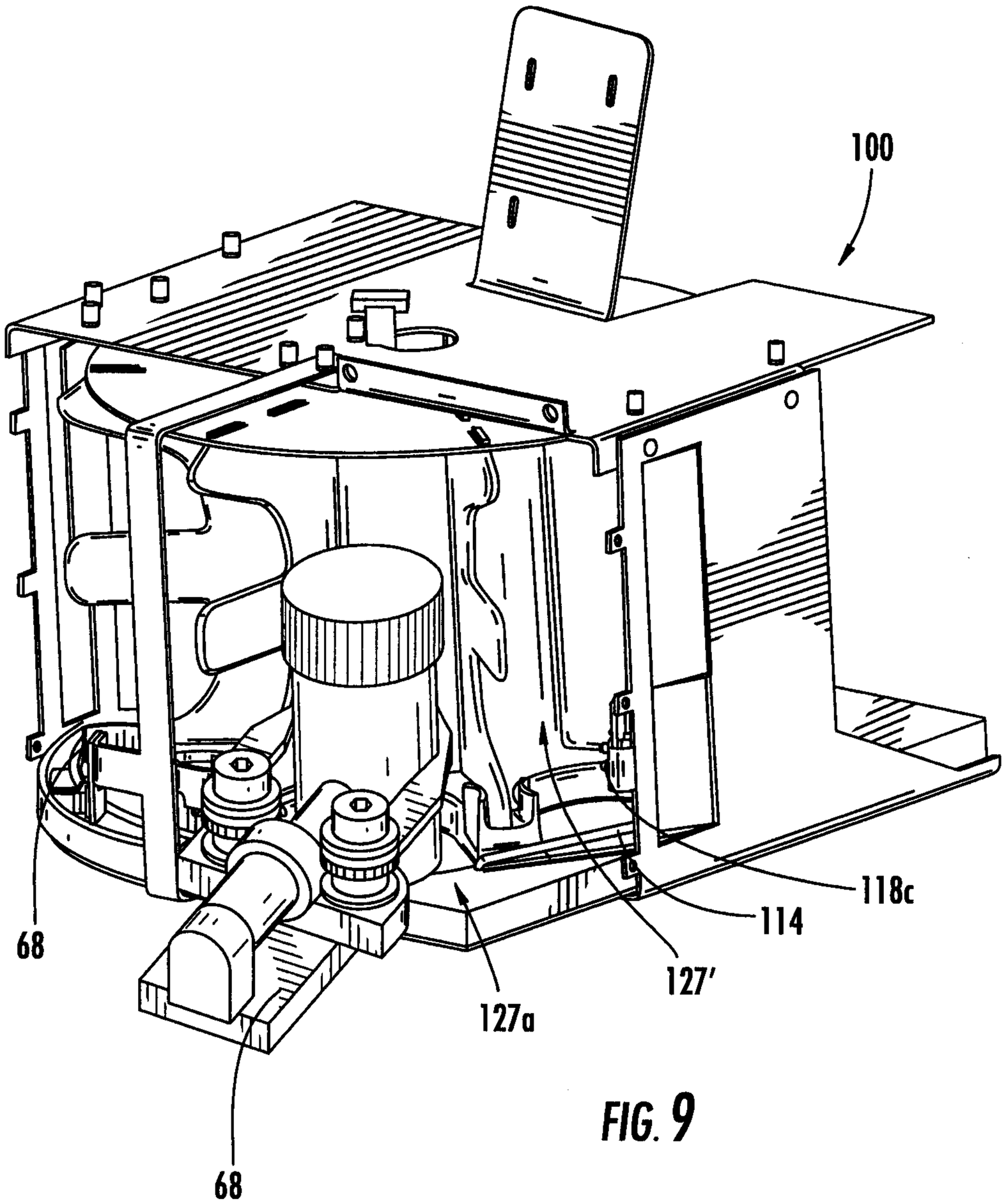


FIG. 9

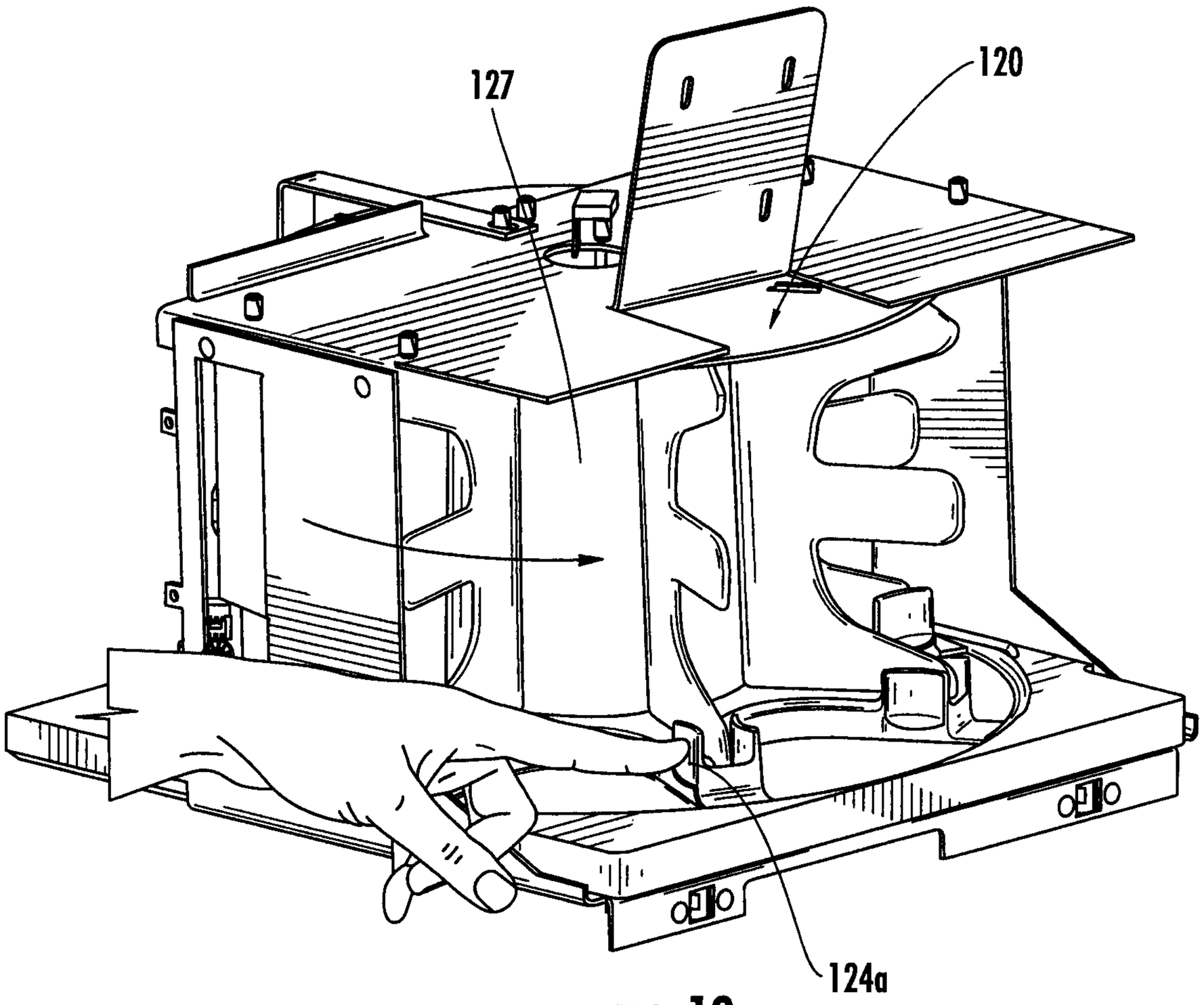


FIG. 10

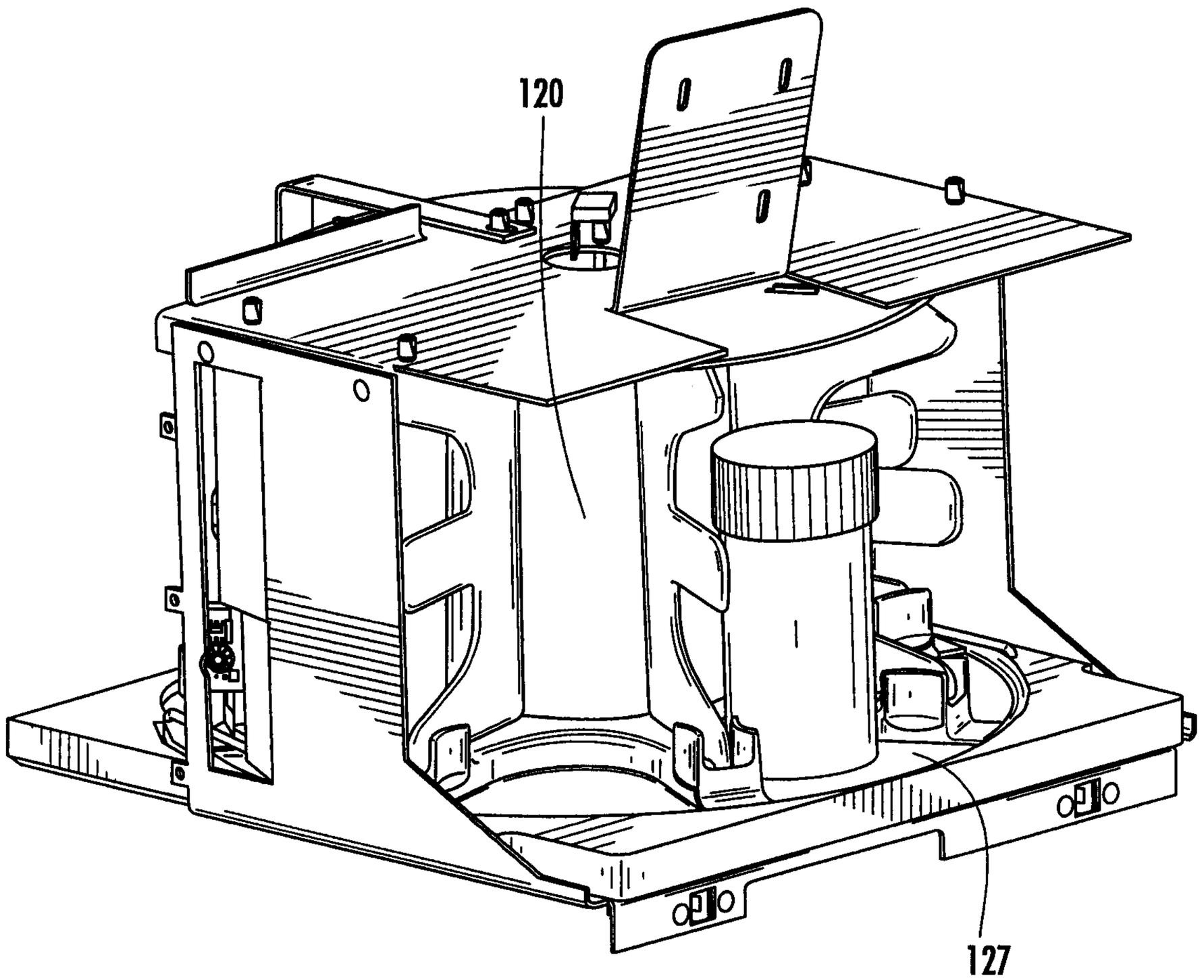
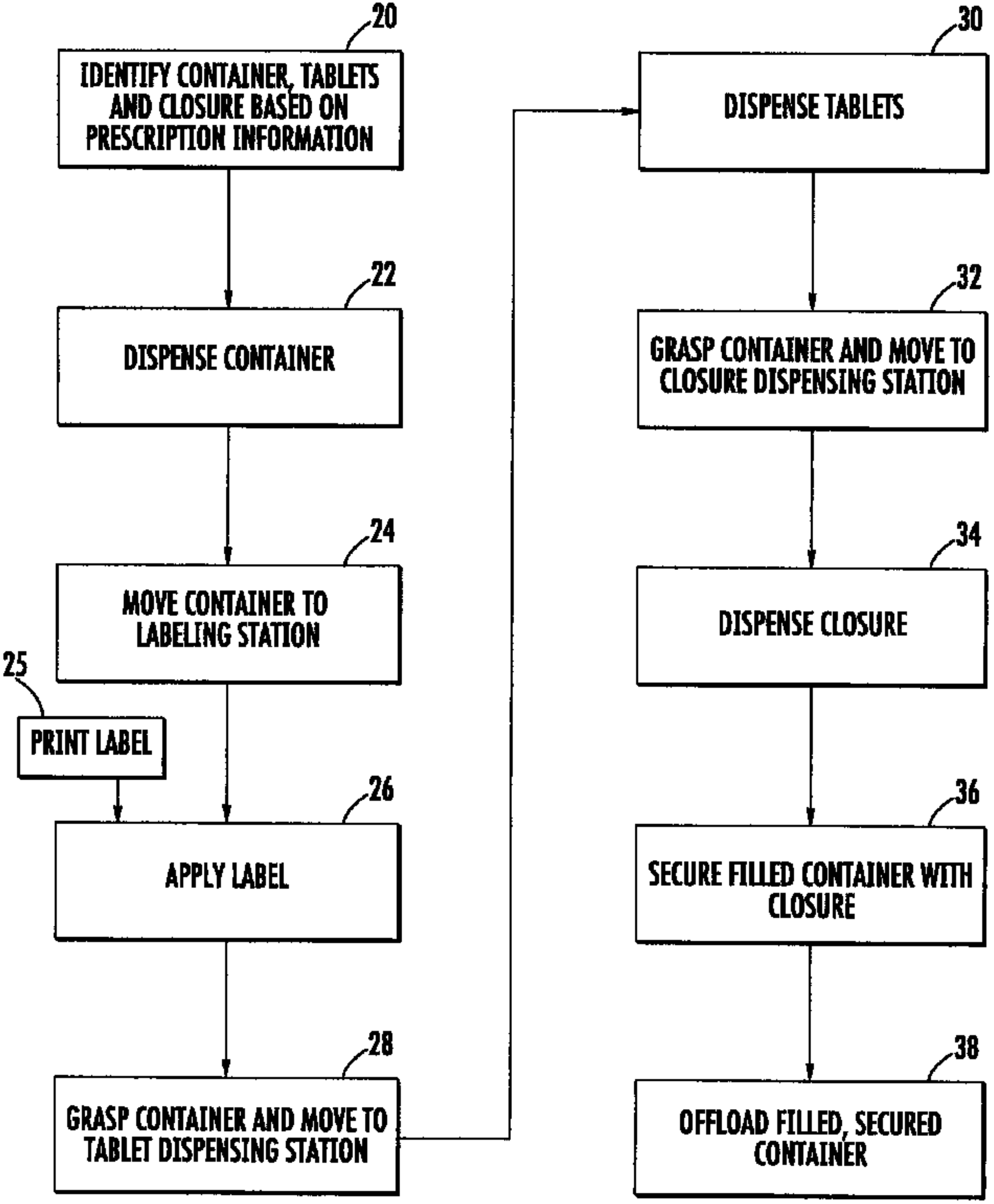


FIG. 11


20
IDENTIFY CONTAINER, TABLETS AND CLOSURE BASED ON PRESCRIPTION INFORMATION
22
DISPENSE CONTAINER
24
MOVE CONTAINER TO LABELING STATION
25
PRINT LABEL
26
APPLY LABEL
28
GRASP CONTAINER AND MOVE TO TABLET DISPENSING STATION
30
DISPENSE TABLETS
32
GRASP CONTAINER AND MOVE TO CLOSURE DISPENSING STATION
34
DISPENSE CLOSURE
36
SECURE FILLED CONTAINER WITH CLOSURE
38
OFFLOAD FILLED, SECURED CONTAINER