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(54) **RADIALLY-FIRING ELECTROHYDRAULIC LITHOTRIPSY PROBE**

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(71) Applicant: **Northgate Technologies Inc.**, Elgin, IL (US)

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(72) Inventors: **Stan J. Lipowski**, Loves Park, IL (US); **Robert Mantell**, Arlington Heights, IL (US); **Chuck Zander**, McHenry, IL (US)

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(73) Assignee: **Northgate Technologies Inc.**, Elgin, IL (US)

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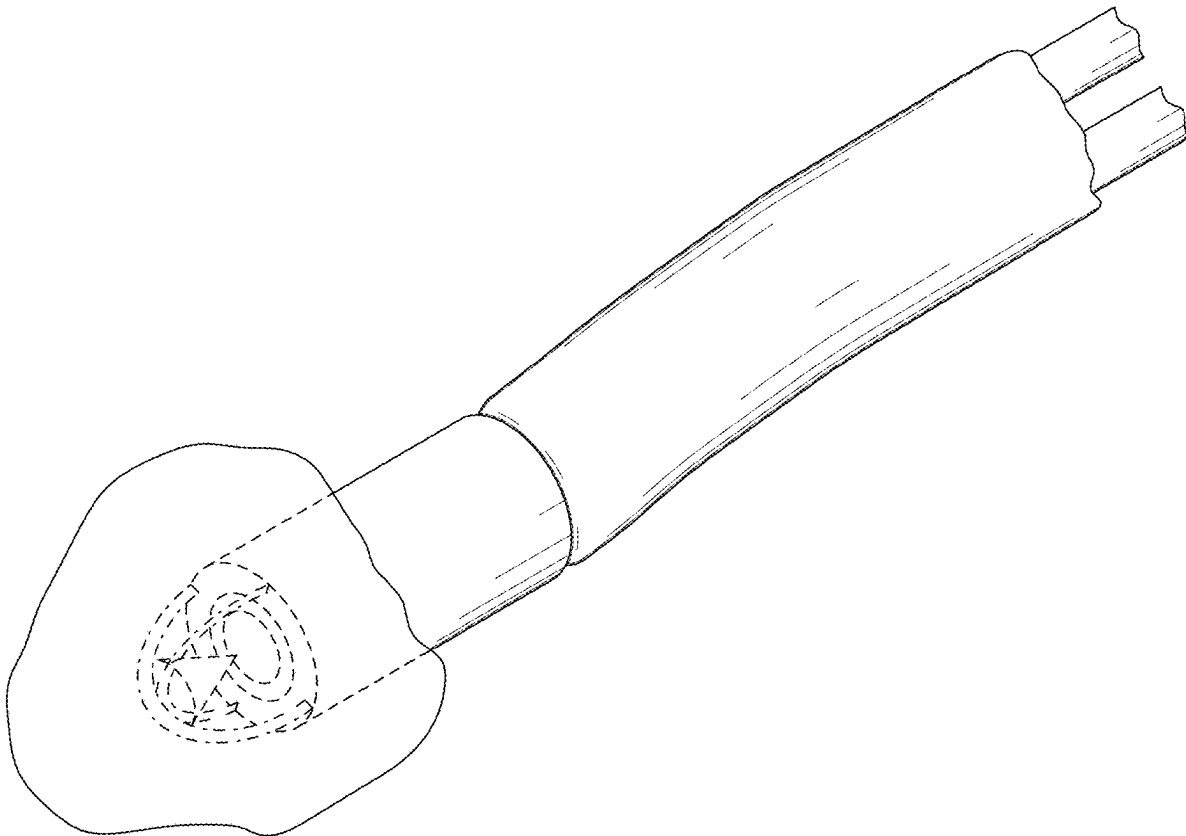
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(63) Continuation of application No. 18/084,689, filed on Dec. 20, 2022, now abandoned, which is a continuation of application No. 16/541,475, filed on Aug. 15, 2019, now Pat. No. 11,559,318, which is a continuation of application No. 14/966,899, filed on Dec. 11, 2015, now Pat. No. 10,426,500, which is a continuation of application No. 13/302,706, filed on Nov. 22, 2011, now Pat. No. 9,579,114, which is a continuation of application No. 12/436,547, filed on May 6, 2009, now abandoned.

(57)

ABSTRACT

An invasive electrohydraulic lithotripter probe may comprise a lithotripter tip that comprises a first electrode and a second electrode. The lithotripter tip has a length in excess of 250 cm and is dimensioned to be inserted into a long channel having a length in excess of 250 cm. The lithotripter probe may include a material that reinforces a linear strength of at least a portion of the lithotripter probe.



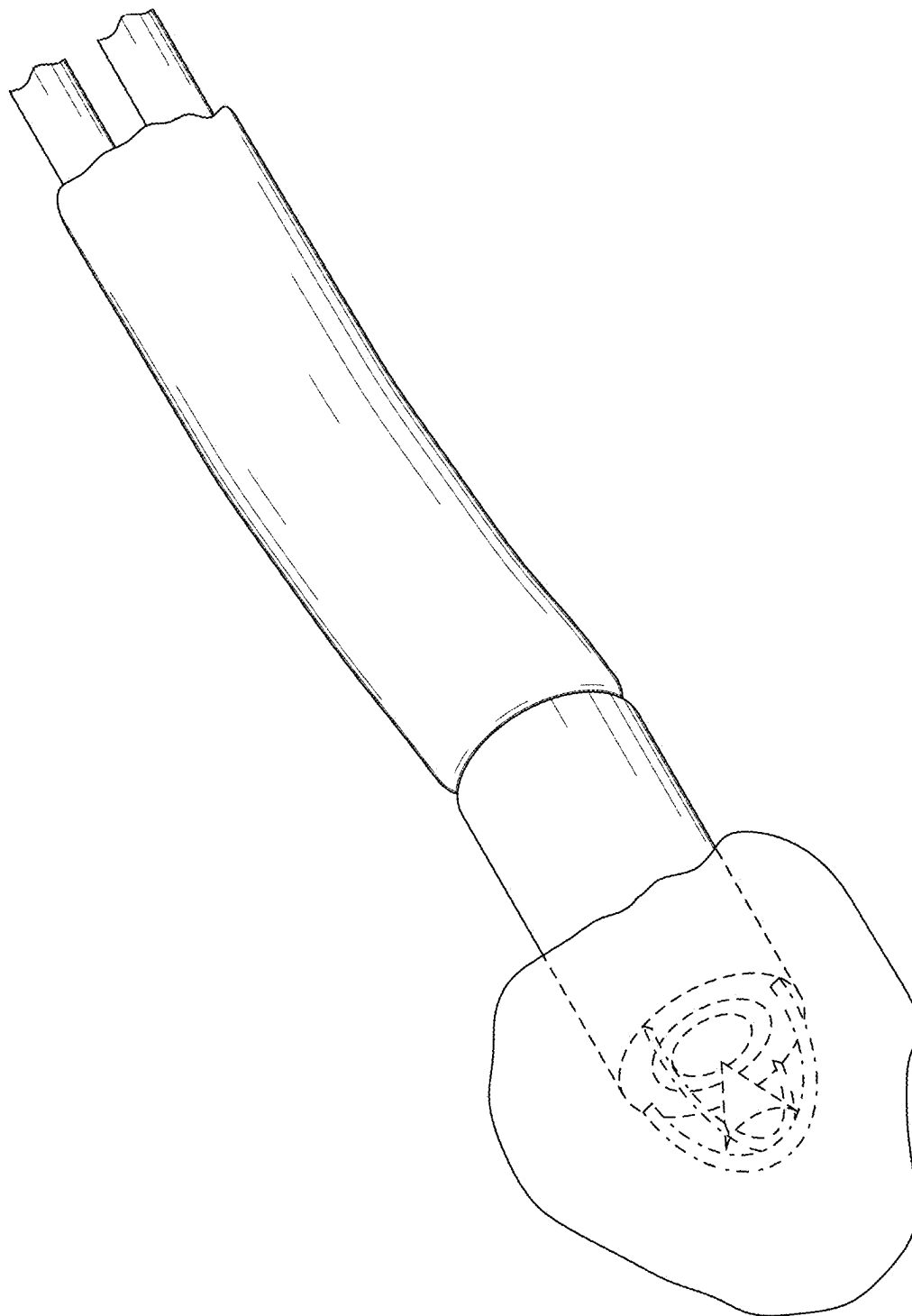


FIG. 1

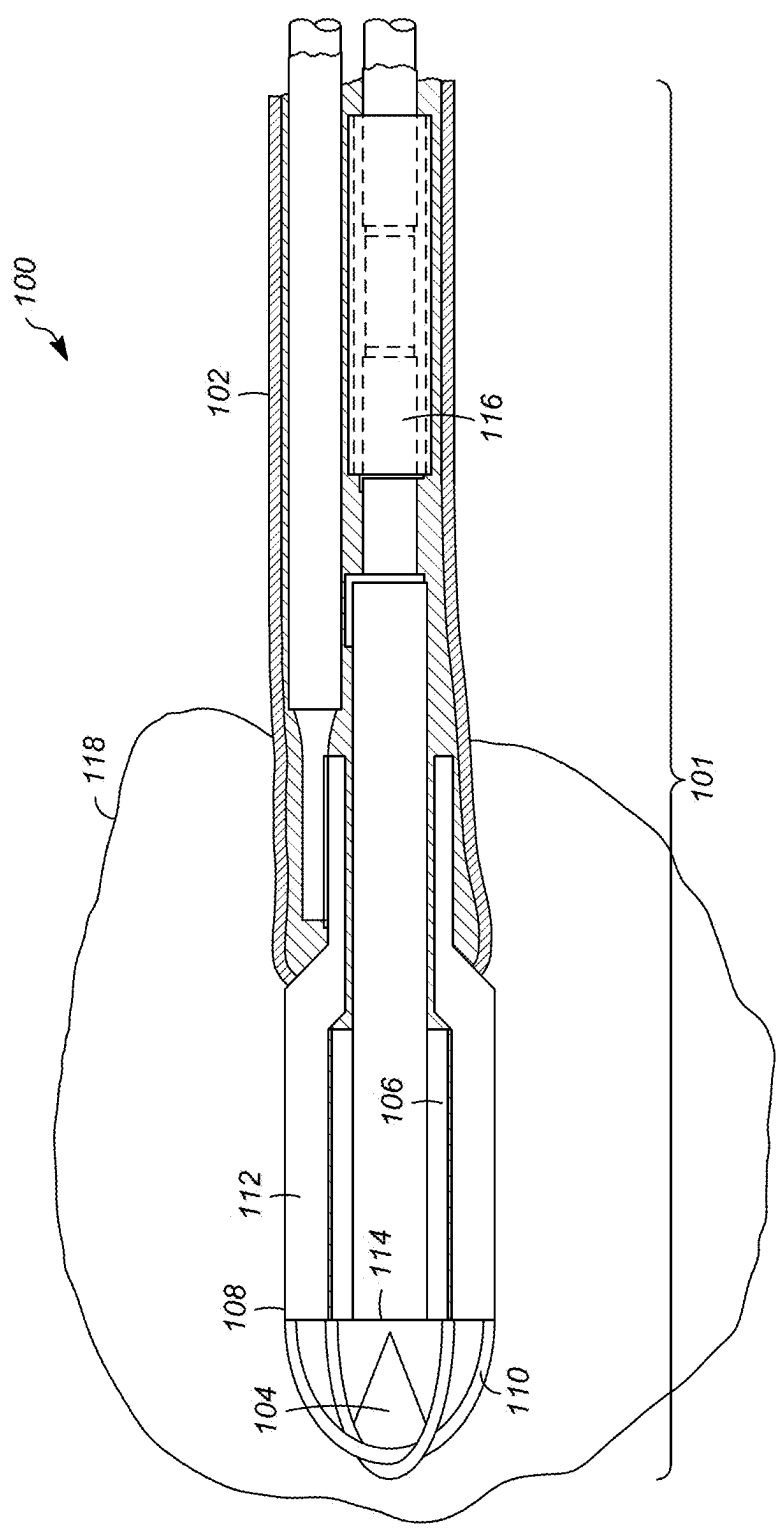


FIG. 2

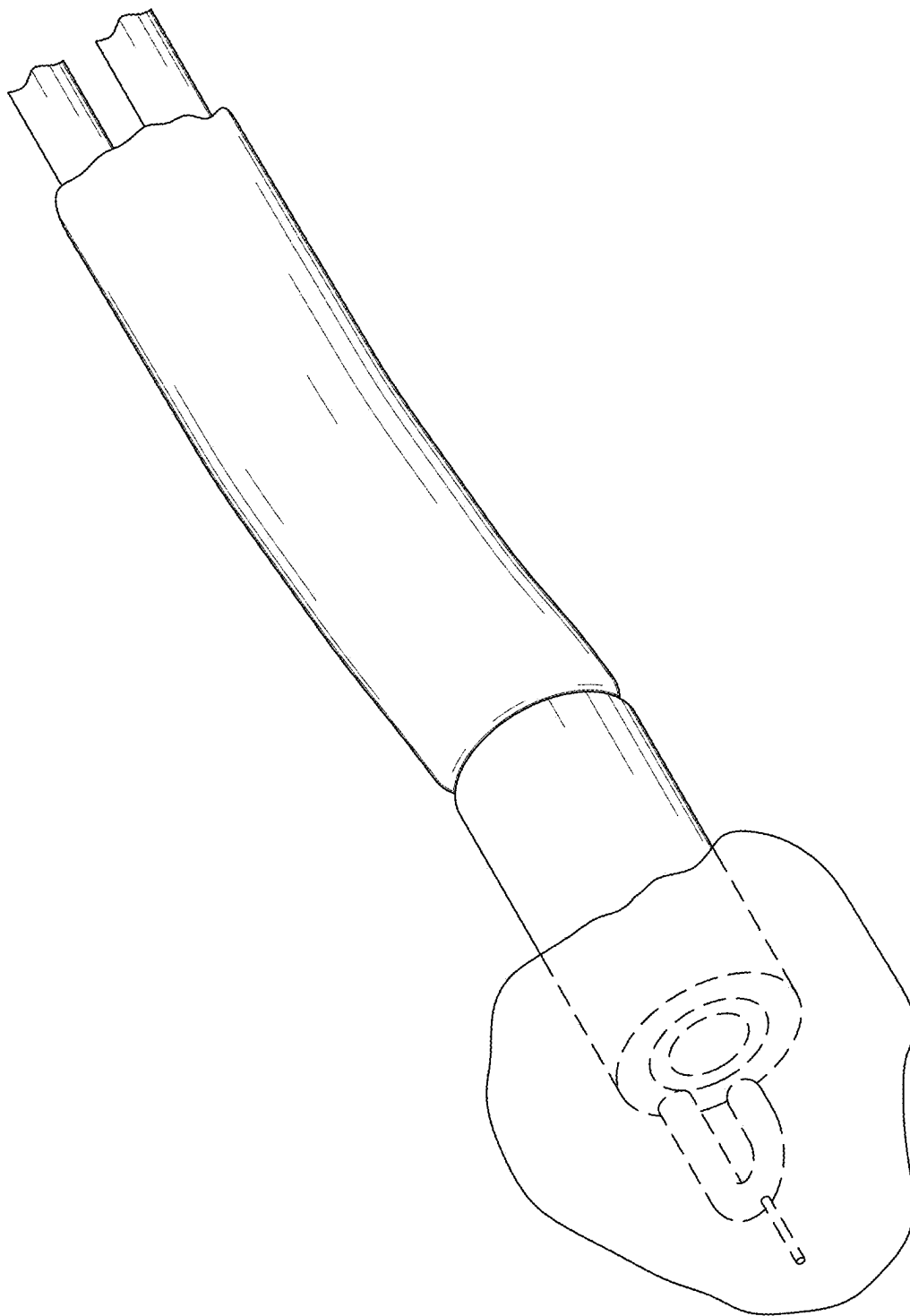


FIG. 3

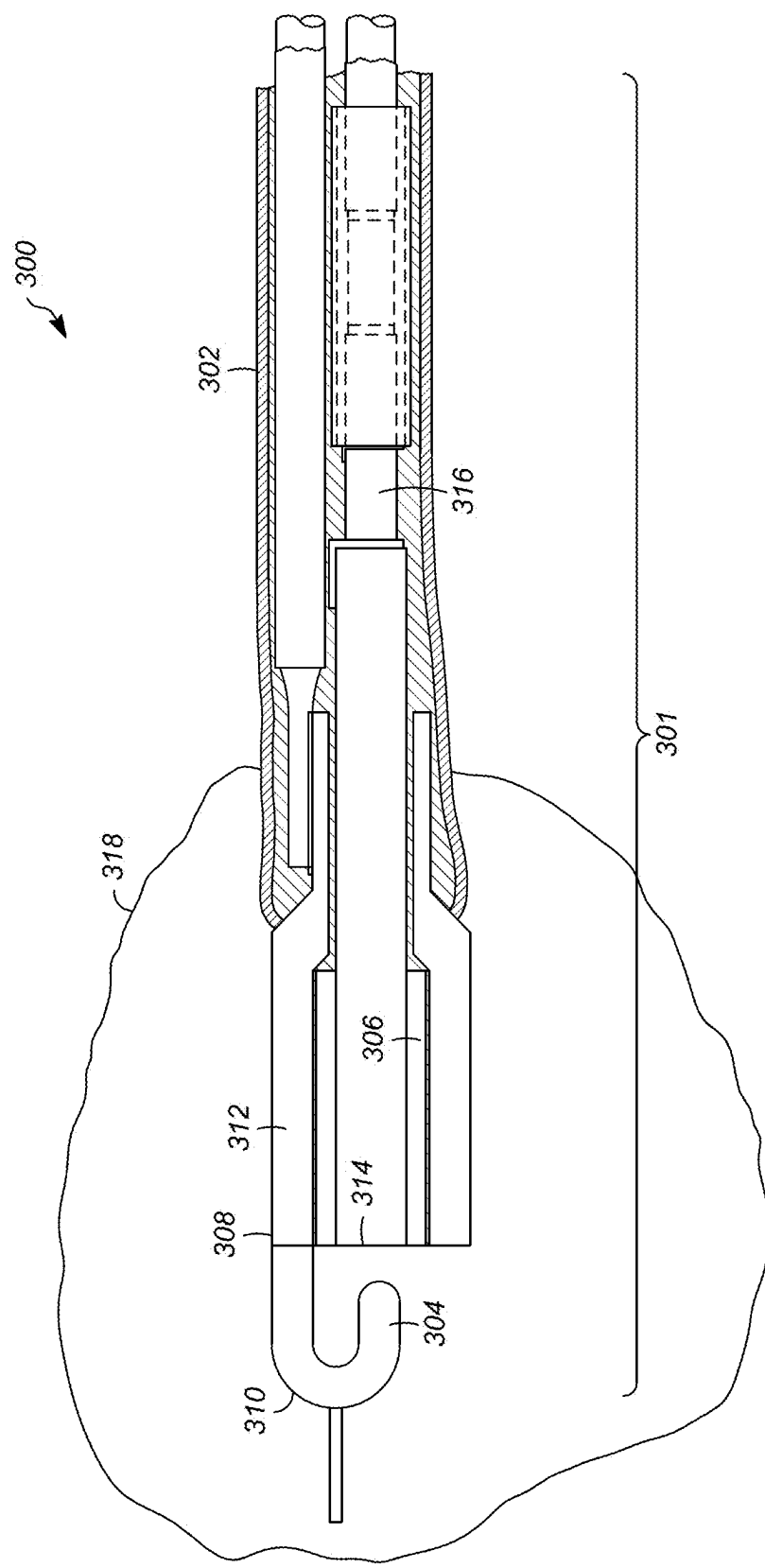


FIG. 4

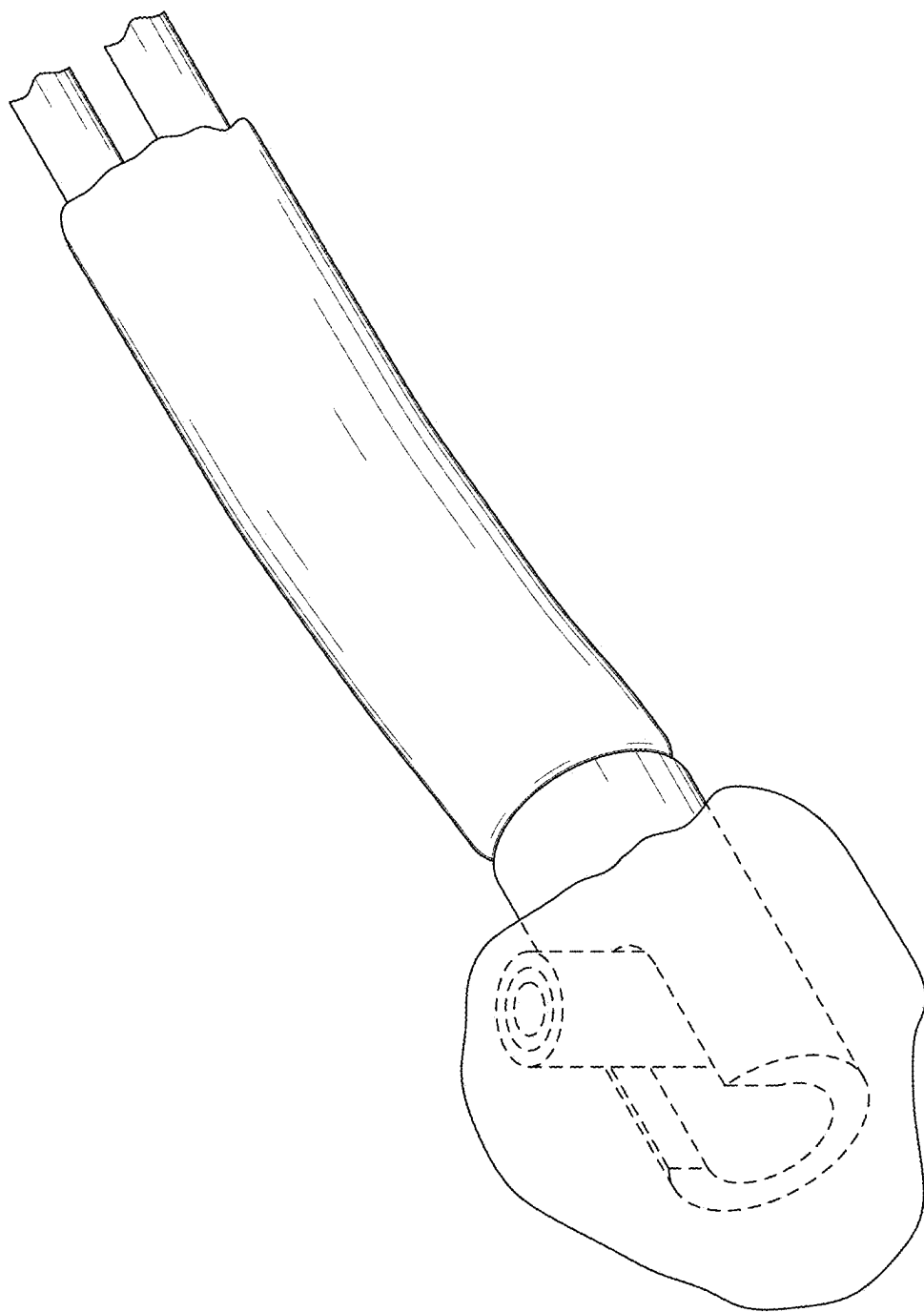


FIG. 5

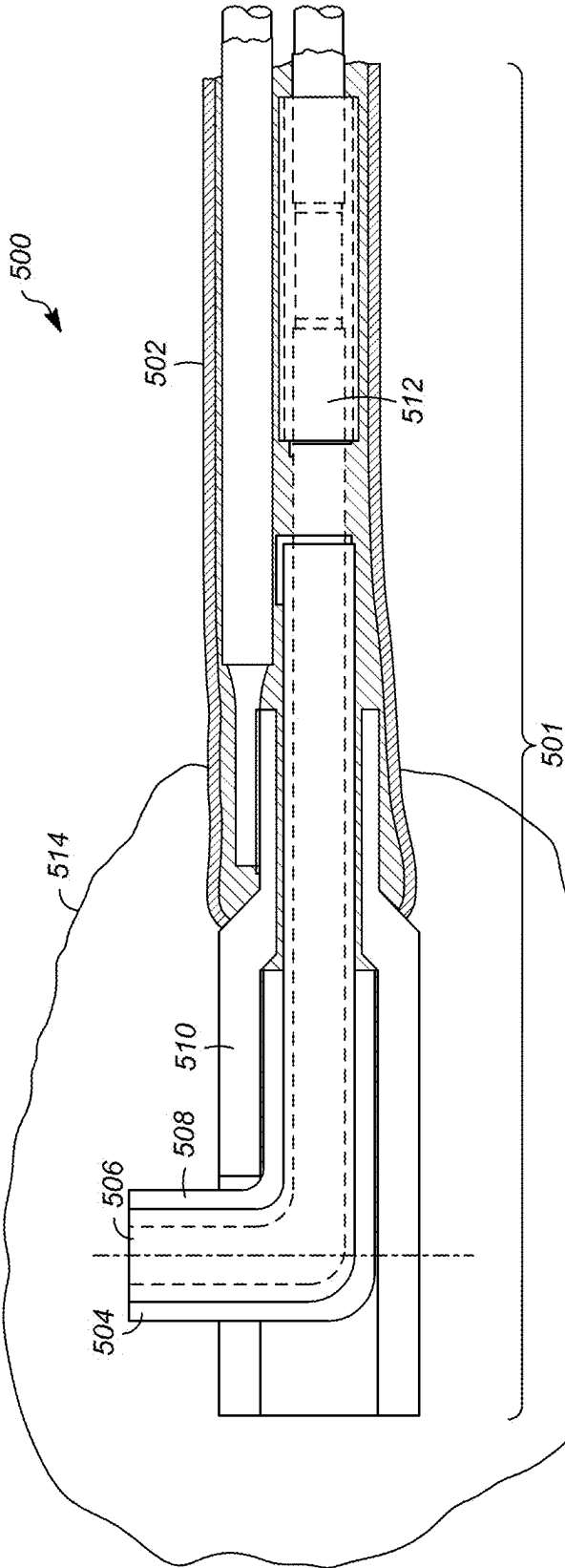


FIG. 6

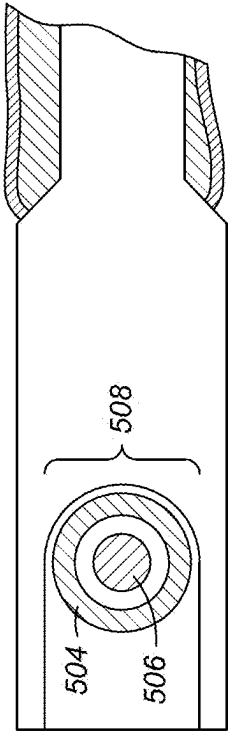


FIG. 7

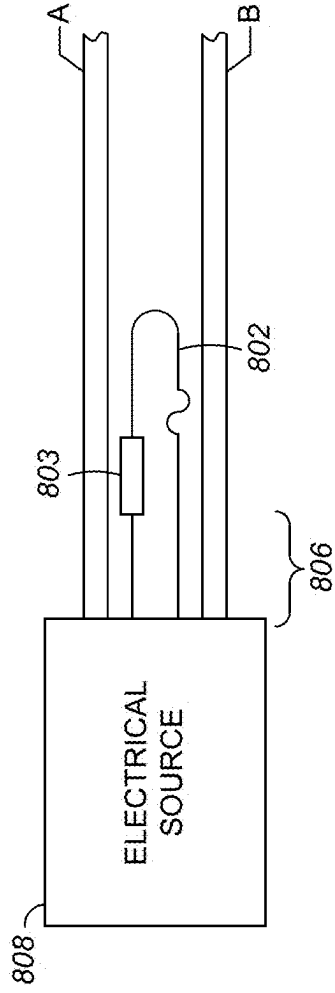
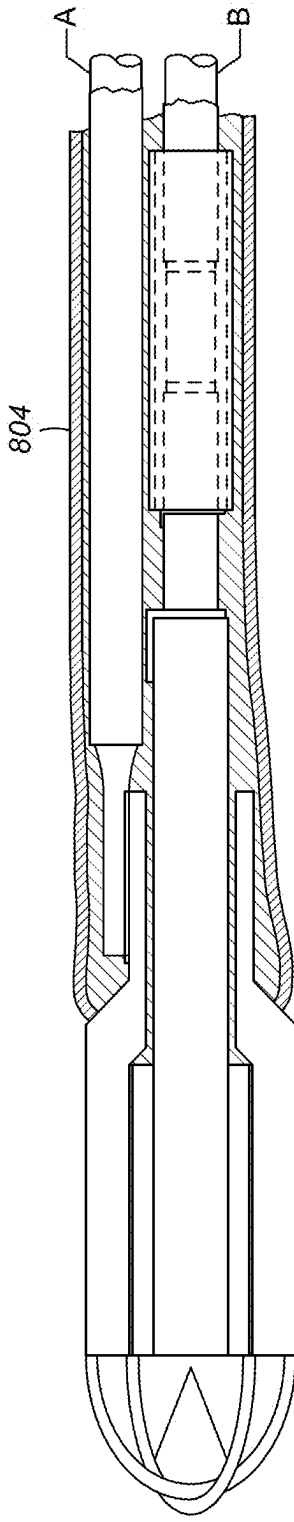
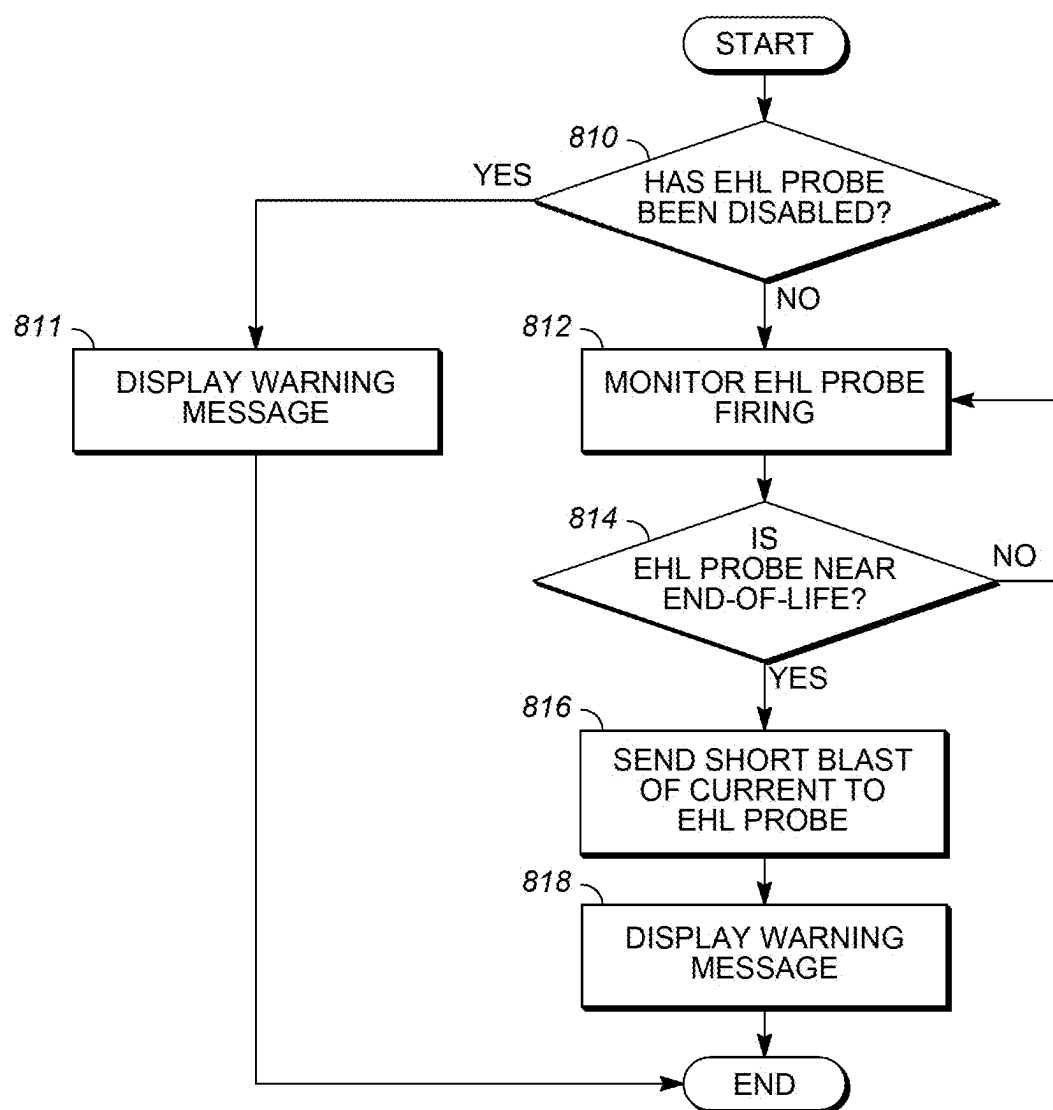
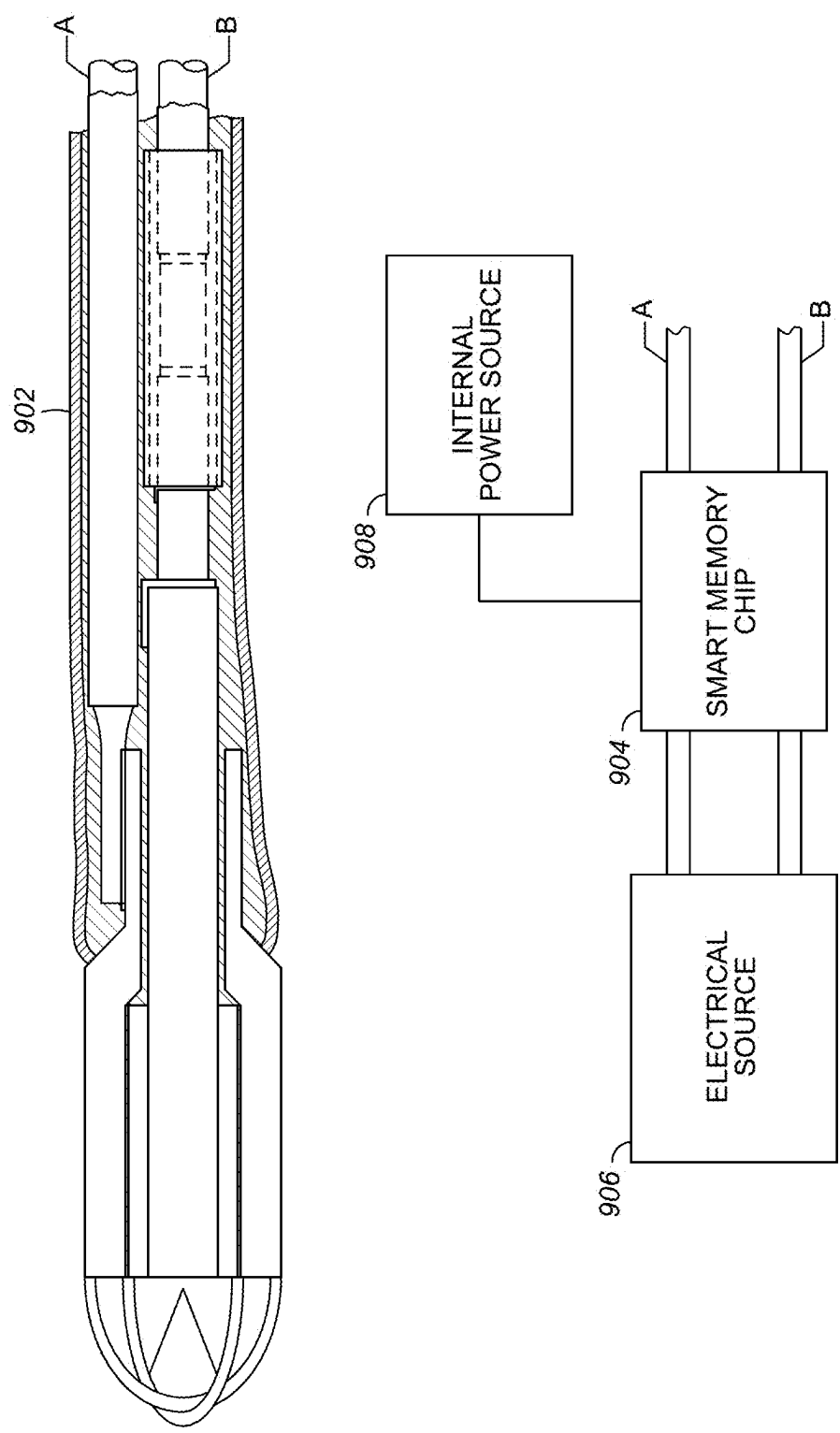
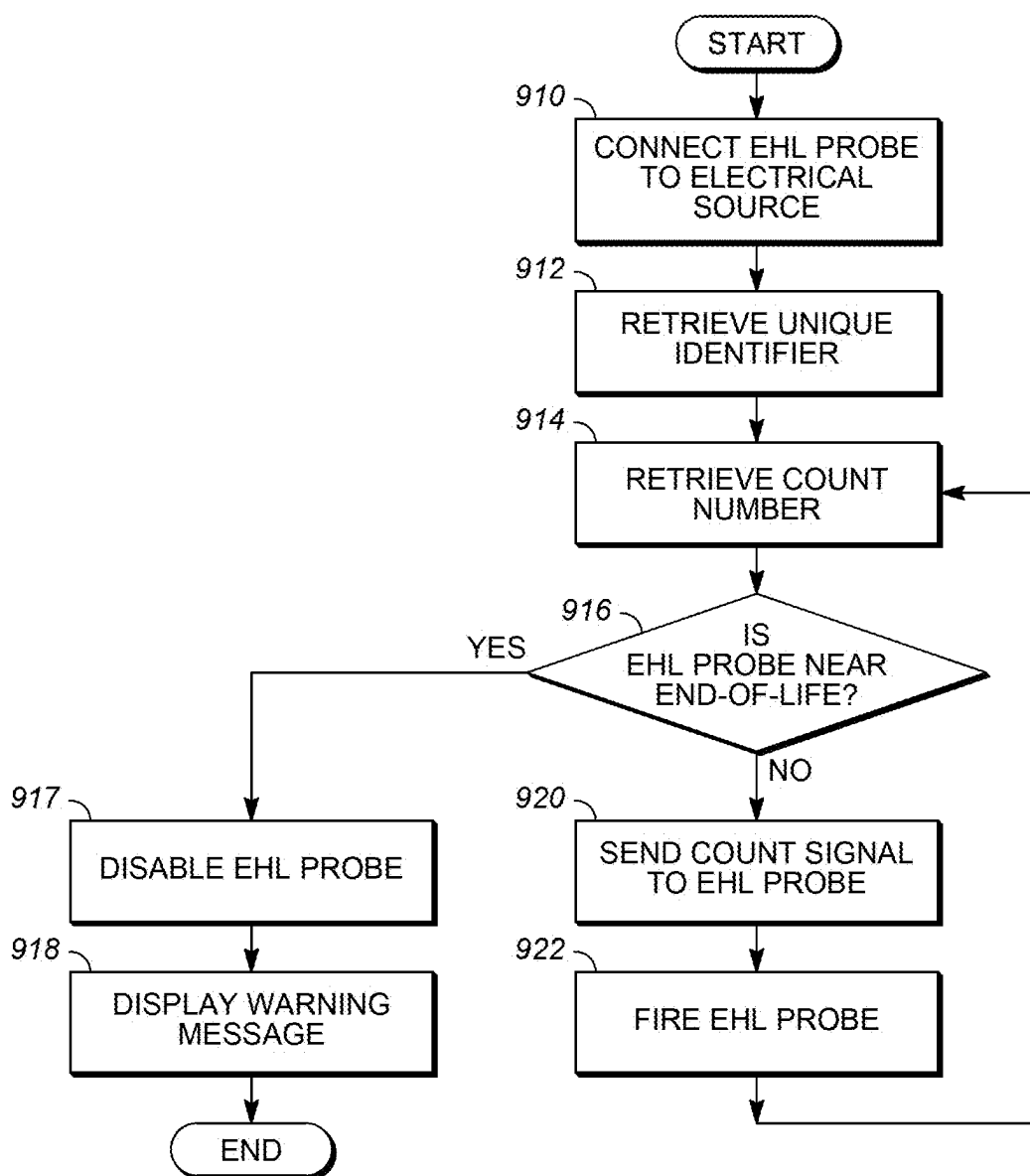


FIG. 8A

*FIG. 8B*



*FIG. 9B*

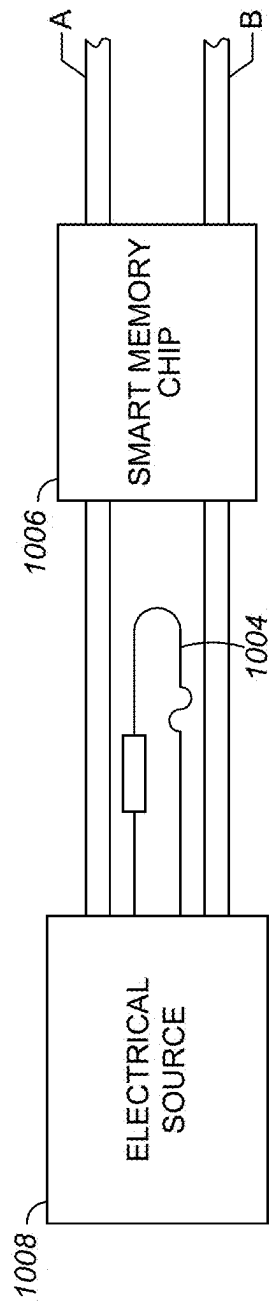
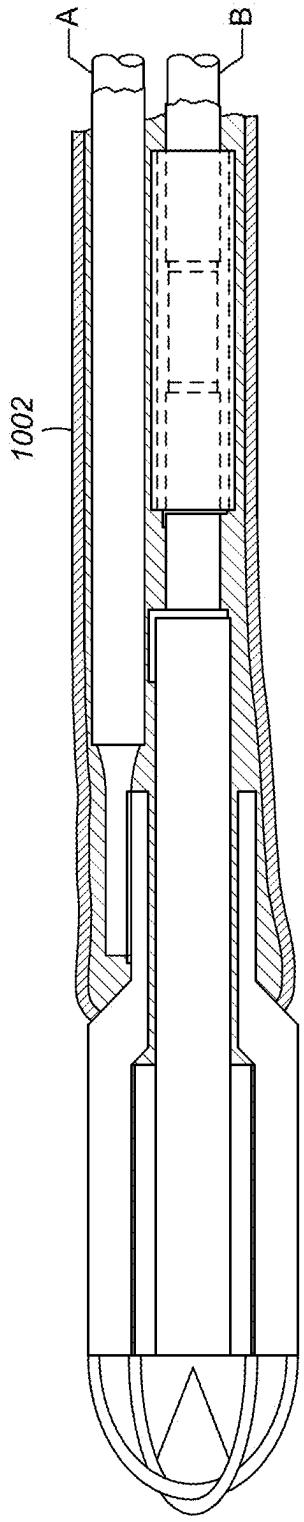
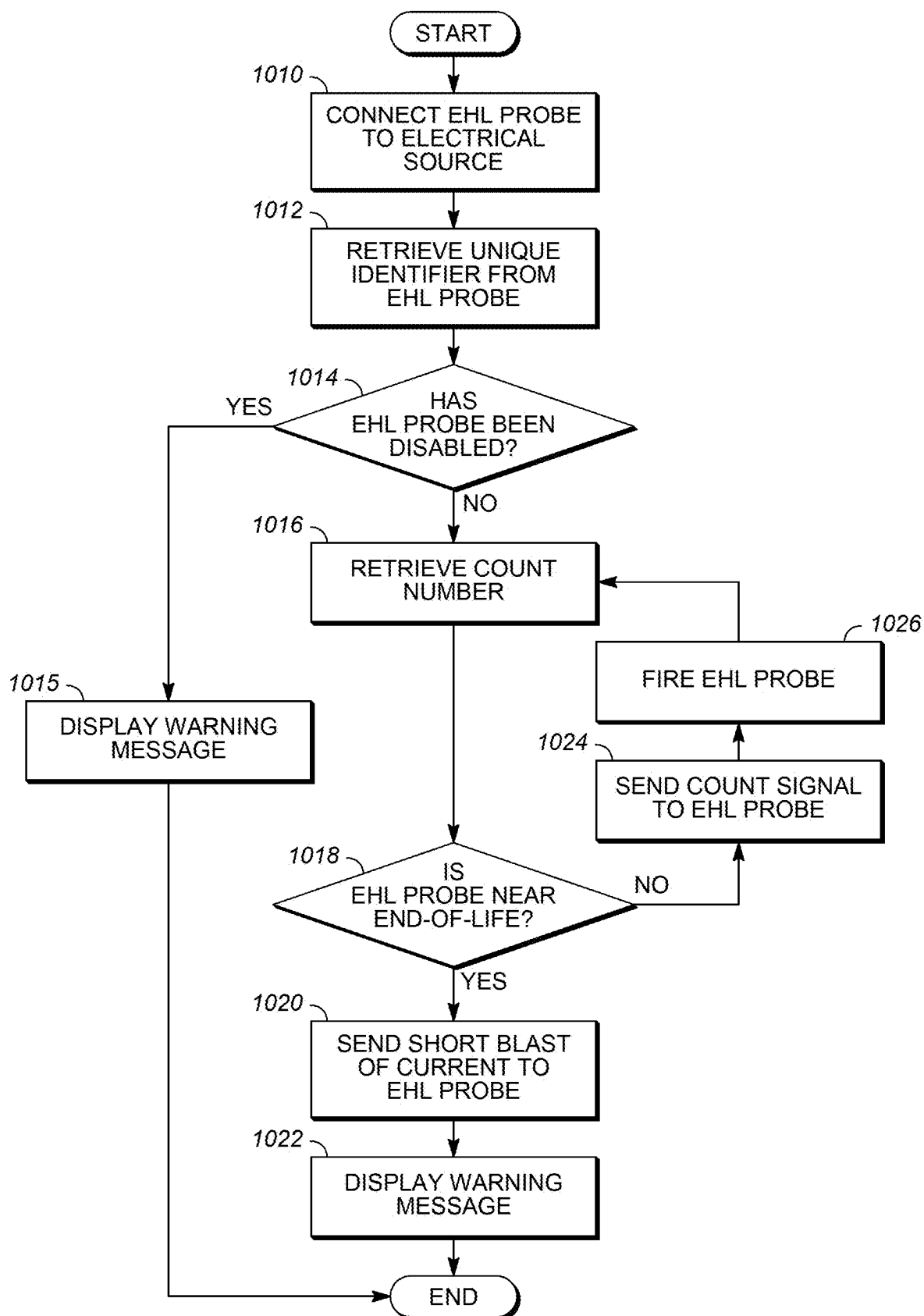


FIG. 10A

*FIG. 10B*

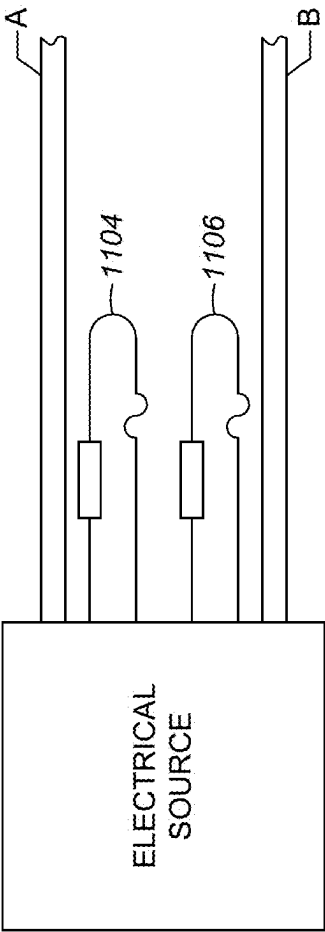
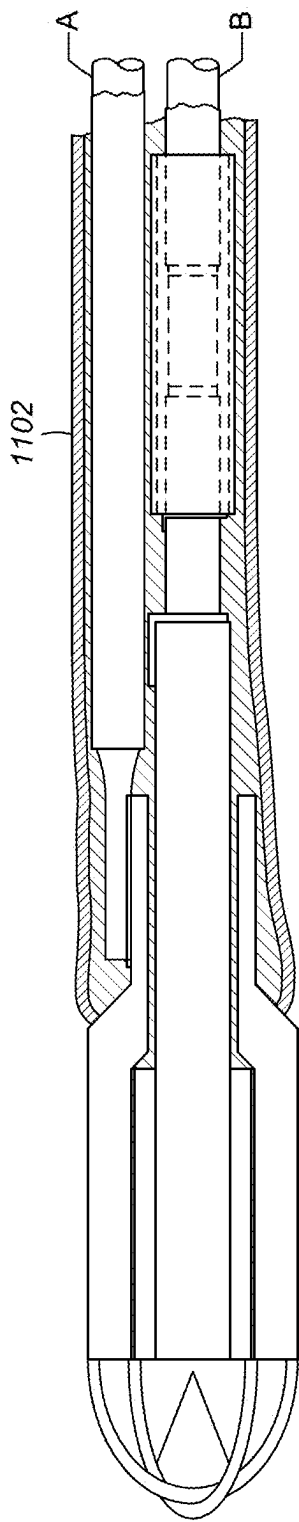


FIG. 11A

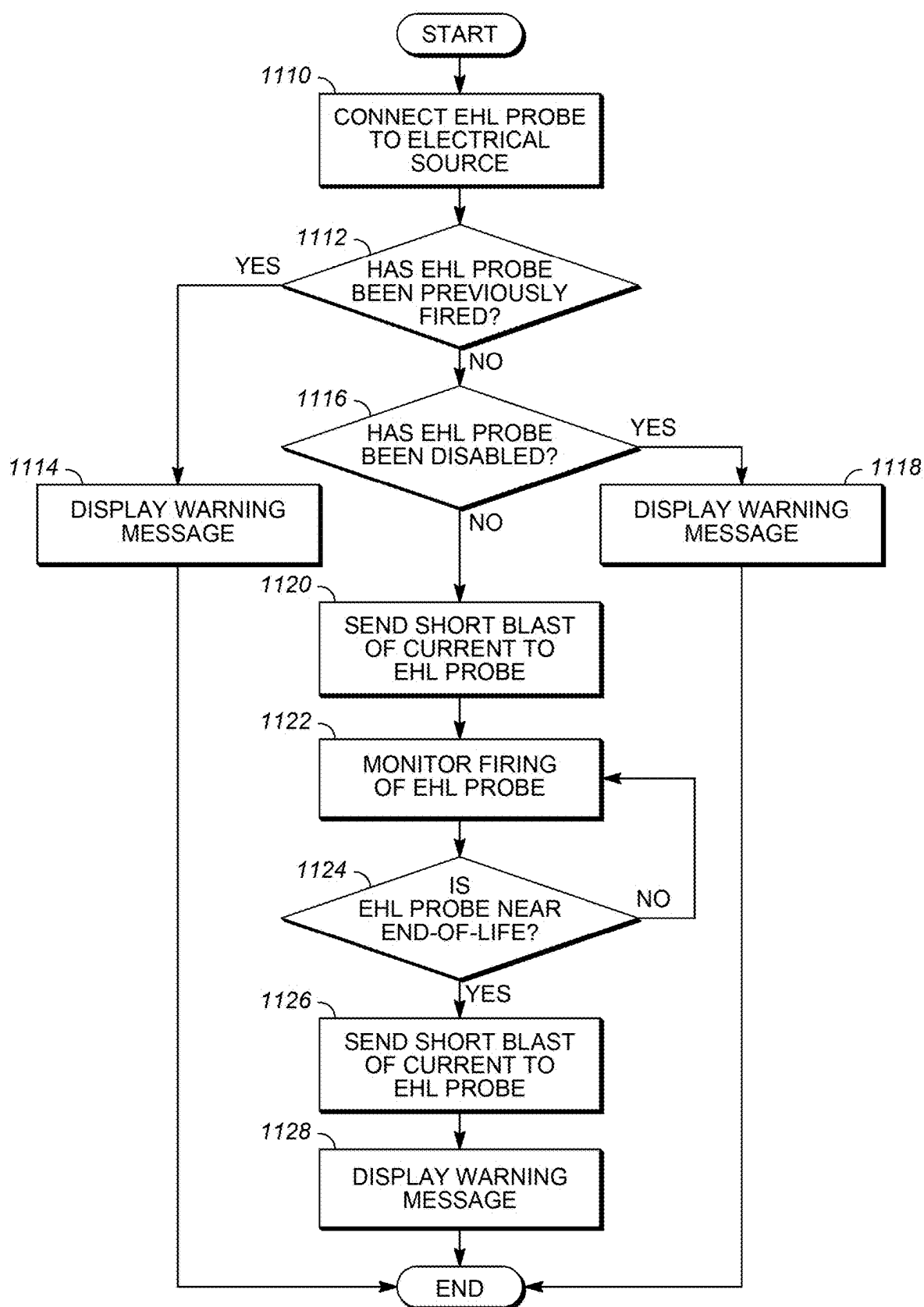


FIG. 11B

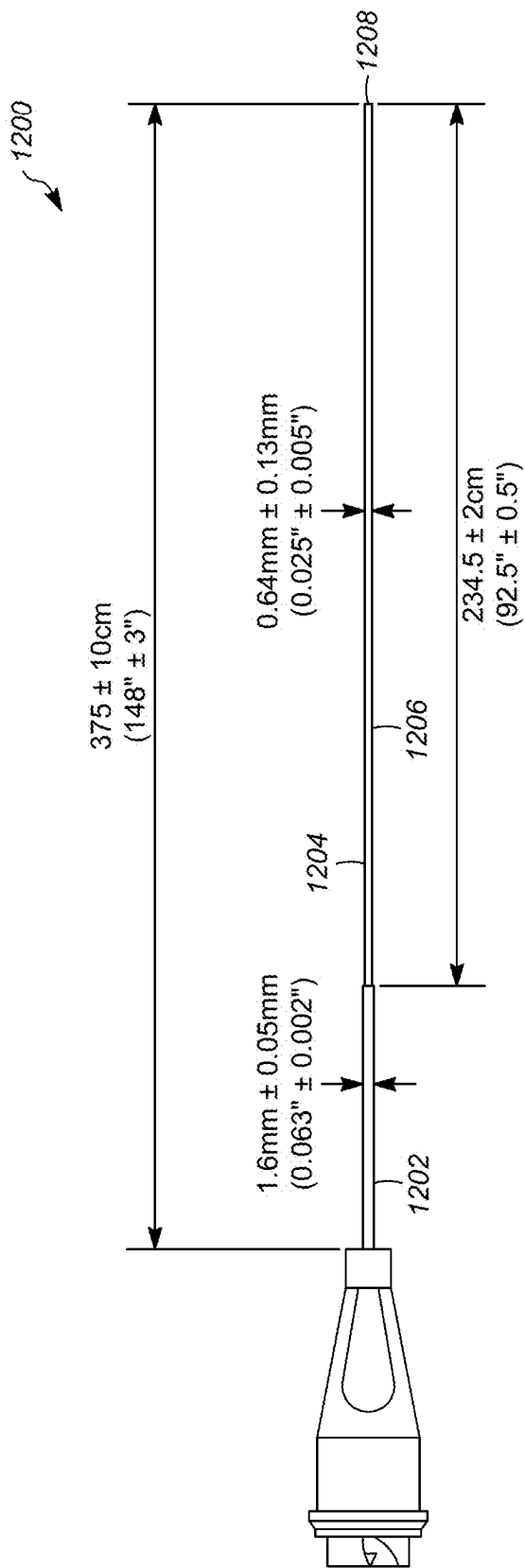


FIG. 12

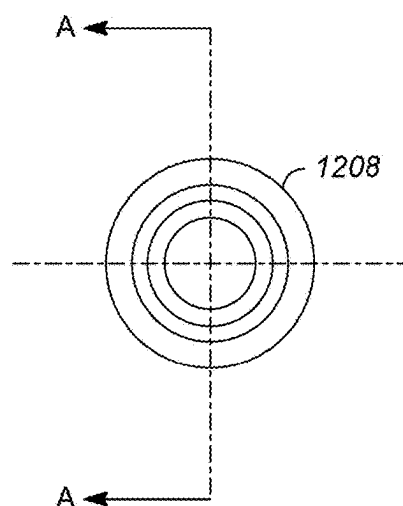


FIG. 13A

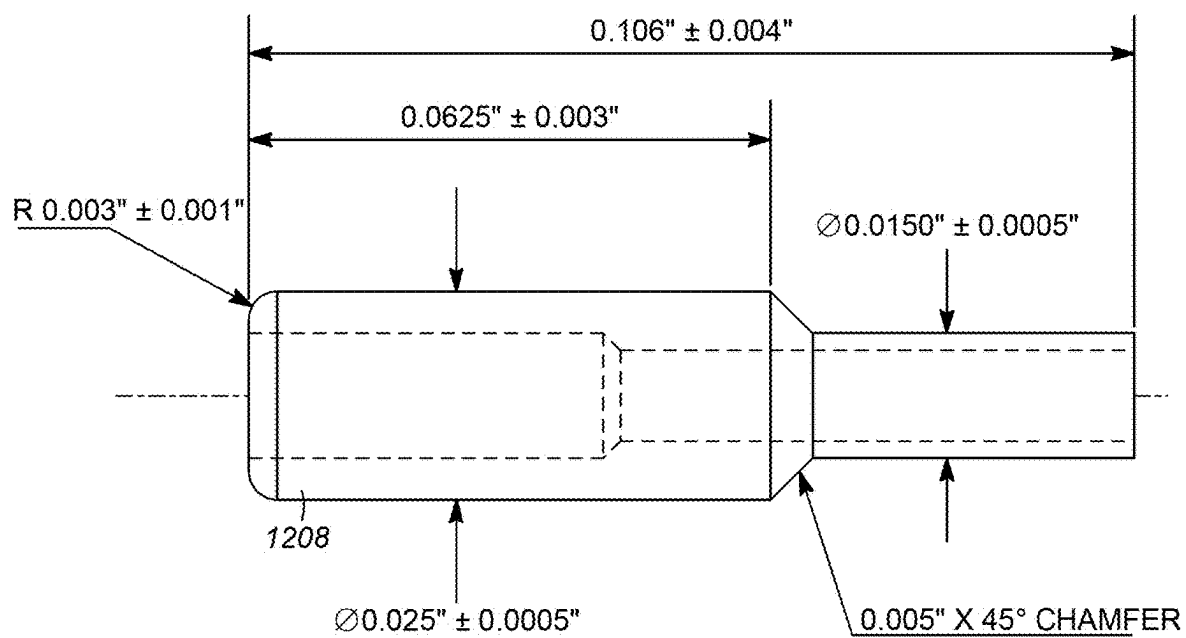


FIG. 13B

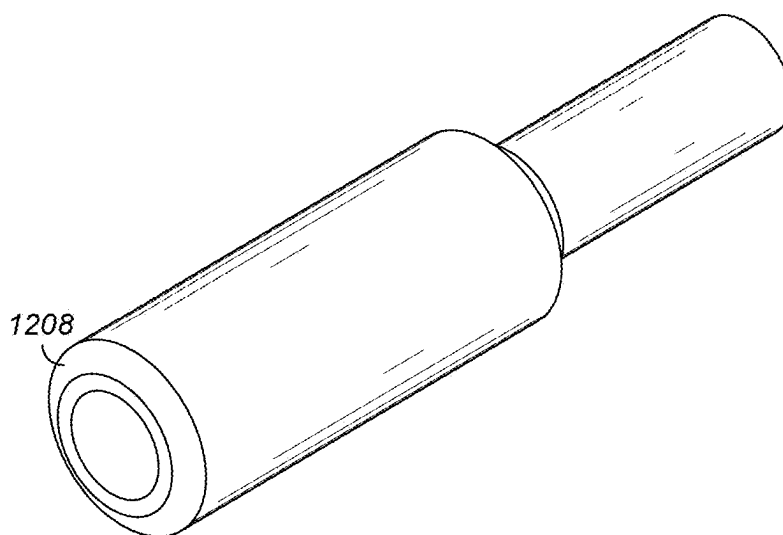


FIG. 13C

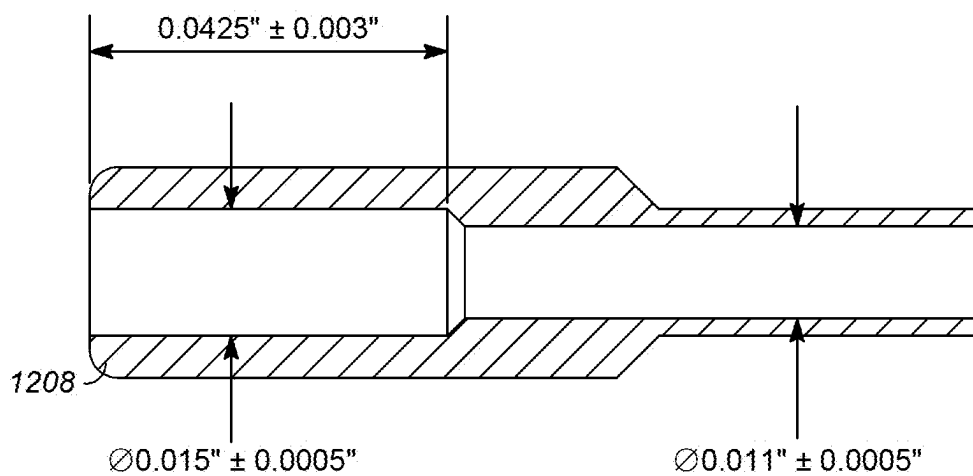


FIG. 13D

RADIALLY-FIRING ELECTROHYDRAULIC LITHOTRIPSY PROBE

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 18/084,689 (still pending), filed Dec. 20, 2022, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/541,475 (now U.S. Pat. No. 11,559,318), filed Aug. 15, 2019, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/966,899 (now U.S. Pat. No. 10,426,500), filed on Dec. 11, 2015, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/302,706, filed Nov. 22, 2011 (now U.S. Pat. No. 9,579,114), which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/436,547 (abandoned), filed May 6, 2009, which claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent AppIn No. 61/051,262, filed May 7, 2008, the entirety of each of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Electrohydraulic lithotripsy has been used in the medical field, primarily for breaking concretions in the urinary or biliary track. Conventional lithotripsy probes produce a shockwave that radiates axially from a distal end of the lithotripsy probe. While a shockwave radiating axially from a distal end of a lithotripsy probe is useful in breaking up concretions such as a kidney stone, it is often difficult to use these types of probes to break up annular concretions, such as concretions around a heart valve. Accordingly, improved lithotripsy probes are desirable for breaking up concretions that are not located axially from a distal end of a lithotripsy probe.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0003] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a radially-firing electrohydraulic lithotripsy probe;
 [0004] FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional side view of the radially-firing electrohydraulic lithotripsy probe of FIG. 1;
 [0005] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of another embodiment of a radially-firing electrohydraulic lithotripsy probe;
 [0006] FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional side view of the radially-firing electrohydraulic lithotripsy probe of FIG. 3;
 [0007] FIG. 5 is a perspective view of another embodiment of a radially-firing electrohydraulic lithotripsy probe;
 [0008] FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional side view of the radially-firing electrohydraulic lithotripsy probe of FIG. 5;
 [0009] FIG. 7 is a side view of the radially-firing electrohydraulic lithotripsy probe of FIG. 5;
 [0010] FIG. 8a is a cross-section of an EHL probe including a fusible link;
 [0011] FIG. 8b is a flow chart for a method of using the EHL probe of FIG. 8a;
 [0012] FIG. 9a is a cross-section of an EHL probe including a smart memory chip;
 [0013] FIG. 9b is a flow chart of a method for using the EHL probe of FIG. 9a;
 [0014] FIG. 10a is a cross-section of an EHL probe including a fusible link and a smart memory chip;
 [0015] FIG. 10b is a flow chart of a method for using the EHL probe of FIG. 10a;
 [0016] FIG. 11a is a cross-section of an EHL probe including a first fusible link and a second fusible link;

[0017] FIG. 11b is a flow chart of a method for using the EHL probe of FIG. 11a;

[0018] FIG. 12 is a side view of a reinforced EHL probe; and

[0019] FIGS. 13a, 13b, 13c, and 13d illustrate enlarged views of a rounded tip of an EHL probe.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0020] The present disclosure is directed to an invasive radially-firing electrohydraulic lithotripsy probe that creates a substantially annular shockwave for uses such as breaking up concretions that are at least semi-annular or disrupting tissue of a body organ. Generally, embodiments of the disclosed radially-firing electrohydraulic lithotripsy (“EHL”) probes include a first electrode at a distal end of the probe, and a second electrode coaxially aligned with the first electrode. A difference in voltage polarities between the first and second electrodes causes an electric arc, resulting in a shockwave that is at least semi-annular that radiates radially from the lithotripsy probe.

[0021] In one implementation, the EHL probes described below may be delivered to a proper channel of a heart by threading (or pre-loading) an EHL probe through a center lumen of a catheter or balloon device. The catheter may be threaded through appropriate veins or arteries to address concretions either forming in vessels or even in the valves of the heart or other organs.

[0022] In other implementations, the EHL probes described below may be delivered to a small lumen of a body organ for the purpose of disturbing or disrupting (distressing) tissue of the body organ in such a way as to cause a stricture or a “scarring” of the tissue for the purpose of creating a permanent stricture or blockage of the lumen. For example, the EHL probes described below may be used to purposely create a blockage in a fallopian tube for the purpose of preventing pregnancies (sterilization). A fallopian tube, which is approximately 1 mm in diameter, would have one of the EHL probes described below threaded into it. The EHL probe may be threaded through the fallopian tube(s) to address the inner surface of the fallopian tube. Upon generating the EHL spark and subsequent pressure wave in a radial manner, a rupturing or disrupting of the walls of the inner surface of the fallopian tube can be accomplished. The subsequent healing or scarring of the walls cause the walls of the inner surface of the fallopian tube to knit together and create a blockage that renders the fallopian tube non-functional, thereby sterilizing a patient and preventing pregnancies.

[0023] Referring to FIGS. 1 and 2, one embodiment of a radially-firing EHL probe 100 (the “probe 100”) includes a lithotripsy probe tip 101 including an insulating body 102, a first electrode 104, and a second electrode 106. Typically, the first electrode 104 is positioned at a first distal end 108 of the lithotripsy probe tip 101. In one implementation, the first electrode 106 is conic in shape and includes an electrically conductive material such as copper, silver, or stainless steels. However, the first electrode 106 may be other shapes such as a curved surface and/or made of other electrically conductive material.

[0024] The first electrode 104 is supported by a plurality of wires 110 extending from the first distal end 108 of the lithotripsy probe tip 101. The plurality of wires 110 are made of an electrically conductive material, such as copper, silver, stainless steel, or other conductive materials, and electrically

coupled with a first electrically conductive structure **112** in the EHL probe **100**. Typically, the plurality of wires **110** are insulated other than where the plurality of wires **110** are electrically coupled with the first electrode **104** and the first electrically conductive structure **112**. As known in the art, the first conductive structure **112** may be coupled with an electrical source, such as an electrohydraulic generator (Autolith, Supplied by Norhgate Technologies Inc.), used to charge the first electrode **104** to a first polarity.

[0025] The second electrode **106** is positioned in the body of the lithotripsy probe tip **101**. In one implementation, at least an end **114** of the second electrode **106** is cylindrical and includes an electrically conductive material such as copper, silver, stainless steel, or other conductive materials. However, the second electrode **106** may be other shapes. The second electrode **106** is positioned in the lithotripsy probe tip **101** such that the second electrode **106** is coaxially, and in some implementations symmetrically, aligned with the first electrode **104**. For example, when the first electrode **104** is conic in shape and an end **114** of the second electrode **106** is cylindrical, the first and second electrodes **104**, **106** are positioned such that an axis extending from the conic first electrode **104** is substantially aligned with an axis extending from the cylindrical portion of the second electrode **106**.

[0026] In some implementations, a distance between a tip of the first electrode **104** and a point on the second electrode **106** closest to the first electrode is 0.021 inch. However, various distances between 0.006 and 0.100 inch could be used depending on the application and the amount of energy to be transmitted.

[0027] The second electrode **106** is electrically coupled with a second electrically conductive structure **116** in the EHL probe **100**. As known in the art, the second electrically conductive structure **116** may be coupled with an electrical source and used to charge the second electrode to a second polarity, which is opposite to the first polarity of the first electrode **104**.

[0028] In one implementation, the first electrode **104** is an anode and the second electrode **106** is a cathode, where in other implementations, the first electrode **104** is a cathode and the second electrode **106** is an anode. When the first electrode **104** is charged to a first polarity via the first conductive structure **112** and the second electrode **106** is charged to a second, opposite polarity via the second conductive structure **114**, a discharge of electricity occurs between the first and second electrodes **104**, **106** (an electrical arc) when the potential between the first and second electrodes **104**, **106** reaches the breakdown voltage for the media separating the electrodes.

[0029] In some implementations, such as the heart application described above, at least a portion of the lithotripsy probe tip **101** including the first and second electrodes **104**, **106** is surrounded by a flexible encapsulating member **118**, such as a balloon, comprising a water-tight flexible material such as Mylar. The flexible encapsulating member **118** encapsulates a liquid such as saline. However, other liquids can be used. When an electrical arc occurs between the first and second electrodes **104**, **106** as described above, the electrical arc causes a steam bubble in the liquid of the flexible encapsulating member **118**. The steam bubble rapidly expands and contracts back on itself. As the steam bubble contracts, a pressure wave (a shockwave) is created in the liquid of the flexible encapsulating member **118** that

radiates away from the lithotripsy tip **101** in a substantially radial manner such that the shockwave is at least semi-annular. However, in other implementations, a flexible encapsulating member **118** does not surround the lithotripsy probe tip **101**.

[0030] Another embodiment of a radially-firing EHL probe is described below with respect to FIGS. **3** and **4**. The radially-firing EHL probe **300** (the “probe **300**”) includes a lithotripsy probe tip **301** including an insulating body **302**, a first electrode **304**, and a second electrode **306**. Similar to the embodiment described above with respect to FIGS. **1** and **2**, the first electrode **304** is positioned at a first distal end **308** of the lithotripsy probe tip **301**. The first electrode **304** is positioned on an end of a hook structure **310** extending from the first distal end **308** of the lithotripsy probe tip **301**. The hook structure **310** may be other shapes that extend from the first distal end **308** of the lithotripsy probe tip **301** and curve back towards the lithotripsy probe tip **301** so that the first electrode **304** may be positioned at an end of the structure **310** and coaxially aligned with the second electrode **306** as explained in more detail below.

[0031] The hook structure **310** includes an electrically conductive material such as copper, silver, stainless steel, or other conductive materials, and is electrically coupled with a first electrically conductive structure **312** in the EHL probe **300**. In some implementations, the hook structure **310** is insulated other than where the hook structure **310** is electrically coupled with the first electrode **304** and at the first electrode **304**. As known in the art, the first electrically conductive structure **312** may be electrically coupled with an electrical source and used to charge the first electrode **304** to a first polarity.

[0032] The second electrode **306** is positioned in body of the lithotripsy probe tip **301**. In one implementation, at least an end **314** of the second electrode **306** is cylindrical and includes an electrically conductive material such as copper, silver, stainless steel, or other conductive materials. However, the second electrode **306** may be other shapes. The second electrode **306** is positioned in the lithotripsy probe tip **301** such that the second electrode **306** is coaxially, and in some implementations symmetrically, aligned with the first electrode **304**. For example, when an end **314** of the second electrode **306** is cylindrical, an axis extending from the cylindrical portion of the second electrode **306** is substantially aligned with the first electrode **304** positioned on the hook structure **310**.

[0033] In some implementations, a distance between the first electrode **304** and a point on the second electrode **306** closest to the first electrode is 0.021 inch. However, various distances between 0.006 and 0.100 inch could be used depending on the application and the amount of energy to be transmitted.

[0034] The second electrode **306** is electrically coupled with a second electrically conductive structure **316** in the EHL probe **300**. As known in the art, the second electrically conductive structure **316** may be electrically coupled with an electrical source and used to charge the second electrode to a second polarity, which is opposite to the first polarity of the first electrode **304**.

[0035] In one implementation, the first electrode **304** is an anode and the second electrode **306** is a cathode, where in other implementations, the first electrode **304** is a cathode and the second electrode **306** is an anode. When the first electrode **304** is charged to a first polarity via the first

electrically conductive structure **312** and the second electrode **306** is charged to a second, opposite polarity via the second electrically conductive structure **314**, a discharge of electricity occurs between the first and second electrodes **304**, **306** (an electrical arc) when the potential between the first and second electrodes **304**, **306** reaches the breakdown voltage for the media separating the electrodes.

[0036] In some implementations, at least a portion of the lithotripsy probe tip **301** including the first and second electrodes **304**, **306** is surrounded by a flexible encapsulating member **318**, such as a balloon, comprising a water-tight flexible material such as Mylar. The flexible encapsulating member **318** encapsulates a liquid such as saline. However, other liquids can be used. When an electrical arc occurs between the first and second electrodes **304**, **306** as described above, the electrical arc causes a steam bubble in the liquid of the flexible encapsulating member **318**. The steam bubble rapidly expands and contracts back on itself. As the steam bubble contracts, a pressure wave (a shock-wave) is created in the liquid of the flexible encapsulating member **118** that radiates away from the lithotripsy tip **301** in a radial manner such that the shockwave is at least semi-annular. However, in other implementations, a flexible encapsulating member **318** does not surround the lithotripsy probe tip **301**.

[0037] Yet another embodiment of a radially-firing EHL probe is described below with respect to FIGS. **5**, **6**, and **7**. The radially-firing EHL probe **500** (the “probe **500**”) includes a lithotripsy probe tip **501** including an insulating body **502**, a first electrode **504**, and a second electrode **506**. The first and second electrodes **504**, **506** are positioned on a side-firing structure **508** of the lithotripsy probe tip **501**. An axis of the side-firing structure **508** is typically angled approximately 90 degrees from the longitudinal axis of the lithotripsy probe **501** so that, as explained below, the lithotripsy probe tip **501** may create a directed shockwave that radiates away from the lithotripsy probe tip **501** at approximately a 90 degree angle from the longitudinal axis of the lithotripsy probe **501**.

[0038] In one implementation, the first electrode **504** may be a cylindrical sleeve positioned on an exterior of the side-firing structure **508**. However, the first electrode **504** may be other shapes. The first electrode **504** is electrically coupled with a first electrically conductive structure **510** in the EHL probe **500**. As known in the art, the first electrically conductive structure **510** may be electrically coupled with an electrical source and used to charge the first electrode **504** to a first polarity.

[0039] The second electrode **506** is coaxially aligned with the first electrode **504**. In one implementation, the first electrode **504** is a cylindrical sleeve and the second electrode **506** is a cylindrical core that is positioned within the interior of the first electrode **504** such that the axis of the cylindrical sleeve of the first electrode **504** substantially aligns with the cylindrical core of the second electrode **506**.

[0040] The second electrode **506** is electrically coupled with a second electrically conductive structure **512** in the EHL probe **500**. As known in the art, the second electrically conductive structure **512** may be electrically coupled with an electrical source and used to charge the second electrode **506** to a second polarity, which is opposite to the first polarity of the first electrode **504**.

[0041] In one implementation, the first electrode **504** is an anode and the second electrode **506** is a cathode, where in

other implementations, the first electrode **504** is a cathode and the second electrode **506** is an anode. When the first electrode **504** is charged to a first polarity via the first conductive structure **510** and the second electrode **506** is charged to a second, opposite polarity via the second conductive structure **512**, a discharge of electricity occurs between the first and second electrodes **504**, **506** (an electrical arc) when the potential between the first and second electrodes **504**, **506** reaches the breakdown voltage for the media separating the electrodes.

[0042] In some implementations, at least a portion of the lithotripsy probe tip **501** including the first and second electrodes **504**, **506** is surrounded by a flexible encapsulating member **514**, such as a balloon, comprising a water-tight flexible material such as Mylar. The flexible encapsulating member **514** encapsulates a liquid such as saline. However, other liquids can be used. When an electrical arc occurs between the first and second electrodes **504**, **506** as described above, the electrical arc causes a steam bubble in the liquid of the flexible encapsulating member **514**. The steam bubble rapidly expands and contracts back on itself. As the steam bubble contracts, a pressure wave (a shock-wave) is created in the liquid of the flexible encapsulating member **514** that radiates away from the side-firing structure **508** in an axial manner, so that the shockwave radiates away from the lithotripsy probe tip **501** in a radial manner. However, in other implementations, a flexible encapsulating member **514** does not surround the lithotripsy probe tip **501**.

[0043] One concern with EHL probes is a breakdown of the EHL probe, also known as the End of Life of an EHL probe. In some implementations, an electrical source such as an electrohydraulic generator connected to an EHL probe may track a number of times it fires an EHL probe. Based on the number of times the EHL probe fires, power levels used during the firing of the EHL probe, and historical End of Life data for EHL probes, the electrical source may then determine when the EHL probe is nearing End of Life.

[0044] When an EHL probe nears End of Life, an electrical source may display messages such as “End of Life” or “Change Probe” to warn a doctor to dispose of an EHL probe. In some implementations, an EHL probe may be designed to disable the EHL probe after reaching or nearing End of Life.

[0045] FIG. **8a** is a cross-section of an EHL probe **804** including a fusible link **802**. Generally, the fusible link **802** is used to disable the EHL probe **804** when the EHL probe nears End of Life. In one implementation, the fusible link **802** may be placed in a connector **806** of the EHL probe **804**. However, in other implementations, the fusible link **802** may be placed in other portions of the EHL probe **804**.

[0046] Generally, an electrical source **808** monitors a number of times the EHL probe **804** fires and power levels used during firing of the EHL probe **804**. The electrical source **808** compares the number of times the EHL probe **804** fires and power levels used during firing of the EHL probe **804** to historical End of Life data for EHL probes. When the electrical source **808** determines the EHL probe **804** is near End of Life, the electrical source **808** send a short blast of high current to the EHL probe **804**. In one implementation, the short blast of high current is 150 milliamps. When the short blast of high current reaches the fusible link **802** in the EHL probe **804**, the high current causes a fuse within the fusible link **802** to “open” (vaporizing some of the wire to open a circuit), thereby disabling the EHL probe **804**.

In some implementations, the fusible link **802** includes a sense resistor **803** placed between two pins, however other implementations do not include the sense resistor **803**.

[0047] In some implementations, the electrical source **808** may measure an interior resistance of an EHL probe **804** so that the electrical source **808** can determine when the EHL probe **804** has been disabled.

[0048] FIG. **8b** is a flow chart of a method for using the EHL probe described above with respect to FIG. **8a**. At step **810** an electrical source measures an interior resistance of an EHL probe to determine whether the EHL probe has been disabled. The electrical source may perform step **810** when the EHL probe is first connected to the electrical source, periodically, before each firing of the EHL probe, and/or after each firing of the EHL probe.

[0049] If the electrical source determines at step **810** that the EHL probe has been disabled, the method proceeds to step **811** where the electrical source displays a message such as “End of Life” or “Change Probe” to warn a doctor to dispose of the EHL probe. However, if the electrical source determines at step **810** that the EHL probe has not been disabled, the method proceeds to step **812** where the electrical source monitors a number of times an EHL probe fires and power levels used during firing of the EHL probe.

[0050] At step **814**, the electrical source compares the number of times the EHL probe has fired and the power levels used during firing of the EHL probe to historical End of Life data for EHL probes to determine whether the EHL probe is near End of Life. The electrical source may perform step **814** periodically, before each firing of the EHL probe, and/or after each firing of the EHL probe.

[0051] If the electrical source determines at step **814** that the EHL probe is not near End of Life, the method loops to step **812** and the electrical source continues to monitor the number of times an EHL probe fires and power levels used during firing of the EHL probe. However, if the electrical source determines at step **812** that the EHL probe is near End of Life, the method proceeds to step **816**.

[0052] At step **816**, the electrical source sends a short blast of high current to the EHL probe to cause a fuse within the fusible link of the EHL probe to open, thereby disabling the EHL probe. At step **818**, the electrical source may display a message such as “End of Life” or “Change Probe” to warn a doctor to dispose of the EHL probe.

[0053] It will be appreciated that the order of the one or more steps of the method described with respect to FIG. **8b** may be changed. Further, in some implementations, the method of FIG. **8b** may be implemented in conjunction with a computer-readable storage medium comprising a set of instructions to direct a processor of the electrical source to perform one or more of the above-described acts.

[0054] FIG. **9a** is a cross-section of an EHL probe **902** including a smart memory chip **904**. The smart memory chip **904** may be any flash memory device small enough to be positioned in a connector of the EHL probe **902**. One example of such a flash memory device is a 128 kx8 monolithic flash chip by White Electronics Designs Corp. (part number WMF-128 k8-xclx5). Generally, each time an electrical source **906** fires the EHL probe **902**, the electrical source **906** also sends a count signal to the smart memory chip **904**. The smart memory chip **904** monitors a number of times the EHL probe **902** has been fired. When the EHL

probe **902** is near End of Life, the smart memory chip **904** may disable the EHL probe **902** and prevent the EHL probe **902** from firing.

[0055] In some implementations, the EHL probe **902** may include an internal power source **908** such as a battery so that the smart memory chip **904** may maintain a count of the number of times the EHL probe **902** has fired even when the EHL probe **902** is disconnected from the electrical source **906**. In some implementations the smart memory chip **904** may additionally include a unique identifier, such as a serial number, so that the EHL probe **902** is uniquely identified to the electrical source **906** when the EHL probe **902** is first connected to the electrical source **906**. The electrical source **906** may use the unique identifier for purposes such as record keeping, performance analysis, or trouble shooting of faulty EHL probes **902**.

[0056] FIG. **9b** is a flow chart of a method for using the EHL probe described above with respect to FIG. **9a**. At step **910**, an EHL probe is connected to the electrical source. At step **912**, the electrical source retrieves a unique identifier from a memory of the EHL probe to identify the EHL probe to the electrical source.

[0057] At step **914**, the electrical source retrieves a count of a number of times the EHL probe has been fired from the memory of the EHL probe. At step **916**, the electrical source determines whether the EHL probe is near End of Life by comparing the number of times the EHL probe has been fired to a threshold.

[0058] If the electrical source determines at step **916** that the EHL probe is near End of Life, the electrical source disables the EHL probe at step **917**. Additionally, the electrical source may display a message such as “End of Life” or “Change Probe” to warn a doctor to dispose of the EHL probe at step **918**.

[0059] However, if the electrical source determines at step **916** that the EHL probe is not near End of Life, the method proceeds to step **920** where the electrical source sends a count signal to the memory of the EHL probe to increment the number of times the EHL probe has been fired. At step **922**, the electrical source fires the EHL probe. The method then loops to step **914**.

[0060] It will be appreciated that the order of one or more steps of the method described above with respect to FIG. **9b** may be changed. For example, the electrical source may fire the EHL probe (step **922**) before incrementing the number of times the EHL probe has been fired (step **920**). Further, in some implementations, the method of FIG. **9b** may be implemented in conjunction with a computer-readable storage medium comprising a set of instructions to direct a processor of the electrical source to perform one or more of the above-described acts.

[0061] FIG. **10a** is a cross-section of an EHL probe **1002** including a fusible link **1004** and a smart memory chip **1006**. It will be appreciated that in implementations including both the fusible link **1004** and the smart memory chip **1006**, the fusible link **1004** may function as described above in conjunction with FIG. **8** to disable the EHL probe **1002** in response to a short blast of high current from an electrical source **1008**. Additionally, the smart memory chip **1006** may function as described above in conjunction with FIG. **9** to disable the EHL probe **1002** when the smart memory chip **1006** determines based on a number of times the EHL probe **1002** has fired that the EHL probe **1002** is near End of Life.

[0062] FIG. 10*b* is a flow chart of a method for using the EHL probe of FIG. 10*a*. At step 1010, an EHL probe is connected to the electrical source. At step 1012, the electrical source retrieves a unique identifier from a memory of the EHL probe to identify the EHL probe to the electrical source. At step 1014, the electrical source measures an interior resistance of the EHL probe to determine whether the EHL probe has been disabled.

[0063] If the electrical source determines at step 1014 that the EHL probe has been disabled, the method proceeds to step 1015 where the electrical source displays a message such as “End of Life” or “Change Probe” to warn a doctor to dispose of the EHL probe. However, if the electrical source determines at step 1014 that the EHL probe has not been disabled, the method proceeds to step 1016.

[0064] At step 1016, the electrical source retrieves a count of a number of times the EHL probe has been fired from the memory of the EHL probe. At step 1018, the electrical source determines whether the EHL probe is near End of Life by comparing the number of times the EHL probe has been fired to a threshold.

[0065] If the electrical source determines at step 1018 that the EHL probe is near End of Life, the method proceeds to step 1020 where the electrical source sends a short blast of high current to the EHL probe to cause a fuse within the fusible link of the EHL probe to open, thereby disabling the EHL probe. At step 1022, the electrical source may display a message such as “End of Life” or “Change Probe” to warn a doctor to dispose of the EHL probe.

[0066] If the electrical source determines at step 1018 that the EHL probe is not near End of Life, the method proceeds to step 1024 where the electrical source sends a count signal to the memory of the EHL probe to increment the number of times the EHL probe has been fired. At step 1026, the electrical source fires the EHL probe. The method then loops to step 1016.

[0067] It will be appreciated that the order of one or more steps of the method described above with respect to FIG. 10*b* may be changed. Further, in some implementations, the method of FIG. 10*b* may be implemented in conjunction with a computer-readable storage medium comprising a set of instructions to direct a processor of the electrical source to perform one or more of the above-described acts.

[0068] FIG. 11*a* is a cross-section of an EHL probe 1102 including a first fusible link 1104 and a second fusible link 1106. Generally, when the EHL probe 1102 is first fired, the first fusible link 1104 is blown so that the EHL probe cannot be reused (protecting its single use designation). Additionally, when an electrical source determines the EHL probe 1102 is near End of Life, the electrical source may send a short blast of high current to the EHL probe 1102 to blow the second fusible link 1106 as described above in conjunction with FIG. 8, thereby disabling the EHL probe 1102.

[0069] FIG. 11*b* is a flow chart of a method for using the EHL probe described above with respect to FIG. 11*a*. At step 1110 an EHL probe is connected to an electrical source. At step 1112, the electrical source measures an interior resistance of the EHL probe with respect to a first fuse to determine if the EHL probe has been previously fired. If the electrical source determines at step 1112 that the EHL probe has been fired, the method proceeds to step 1114 where the electrical source displays a message such as “End of Life” or “Change Probe” to warn a doctor to dispose of the EHL probe.

[0070] If the electrical source determines at step 1112 that the EHL probe has not been previously fired, the method proceeds to step 1116 where the electrical source measures an interior resistance of the EHL probe with respect to a second fuse to determine whether the EHL has been disabled because it is near End of Life. If the electrical source determines at step 1116 that the EHL probe has been disabled, the method proceeds to step 1118 where the electrical source displays a message such as “End of Life” or “Change Probe” to warn a doctor to dispose of the EHL probe.

[0071] If the electrical source determines at step 1118 that the EHL probe has not been disabled, the method proceeds to step 1120 where the electrical source sends a short blast of high current to the EHL probe to cause the first fuse within the fuseable link of the EHL probe to open before the EHL probe is fired for the first time. At step 1122 the electrical source monitors a number of times an EHL probe fires and power levels used during firing of the EHL probe.

[0072] At step 1124, the electrical source compares the number of times the EHL probe has fired and the power levels used during firing of the EHL probe to historical End of Life data for EHL probes to determine whether the EHL probe is near End of Life. If the electrical source determines at step 1124 that the EHL probe is not near End of Life, the method loops to step 1122 and the electrical source continues to monitor the number of times an EHL probe fires and power levels used during firing of the EHL probe.

[0073] If the electrical source determines at step 1124 that the EHL probe is near End of Life, the method proceeds to step 1126 where the electrical source sends a short blast of high current to the EHL probe to cause the second fuse within the fusible link of the EHL probe to open, thereby disabling the EHL probe. At step 1128, the electrical source may display a message such as “End of Life” or “Change Probe” to warn a doctor to dispose of the EHL probe.

[0074] It will be appreciated that the order one or more steps of the method described with respect to FIG. 11*b* may be changed. Further, in some implementations, the method of FIG. 11*b* may be implemented in conjunction with a computer-readable storage medium comprising a set of instructions to direct a processor of the electrical source to perform one or more of the above-described acts.

[0075] Because of the delicate nature of small EHL probes and the long paths that may be required to insert an EHL probe through body channels or through sheaths or endoscopes, EHL probes in excess of 250 cm are desirable. The EHL probes described above with respect to FIGS. 1-11 may be constructed to allow for insertion of the EHL probe into channel in excess of 250 cm by improving a linear strength of the EHL probe without significantly reducing the performance or flexibility of the EHL probe.

[0076] FIG. 12 is a side view of a reinforced EHL probe 1200. In one implementation, the linear strength of an EHL probe 1200 is improved by placing a stiffening over-sheath 1202 partially over the EHL probe 1200. The stiffening over-sheath 1202 may be constructed of materials such as Kynar®, Pebax®, or other similar materials.

[0077] In another implementation, the linear strength of an EHL probe 1200 is improved by using non-kinking formulations of a polyimide sheath material, such as those with thicker insulation, or ribbed or ringed areas along a length of a sheath or insulating material 1204. Examples of these types of materials are provided by Micro Lumen.

[0078] In yet other implementations, the linear strength of an EHL probe 1200 is improved by using an outer sheath 1204 of a polyimide sheath/insulation either coated or impregnated with lubricious materials such as Teflon or hydrophilic coatings. The more lubricious surface of the EHL probe would reduce a linear friction of the EHL probe as it is inserted through long channels.

[0079] In another implementation, the linear strength of an EHL probe 1200 is improved by using conductor wire 1206 of special manufacture, such as stainless steel wire with copper coating. The stainless steel center would provide greater stiffness for push strength, and the copper coating would provide for a less resistive current path. Because EHL probes 1200 are often used in a radio frequency (RF) range, and RF currents tend to flow at the surface of a wire rather than at the core of the wire, the added resistance of the stainless steel wire would not significantly affect the EHL probe 1200 performance.

[0080] In some embodiments, one or more of the implementations described above for improving the linear strength of the EHL probe 1200 may increase the linear strength of the EHL probe 1200 by approximately 50%.

[0081] In yet another implementation, an EHL probe 1200 is constructed to allow for insertion into long channels by rounding a tip 1208 of the EHL probe 1200 as shown in FIGS. 13a, 13b, 13c, and 13d. By rounding the tip 1208 of the EHL probe 1200, the tip 1208 of the EHL probe 1202 would be more likely to slide and prevent the tip 1208 of the EHL probe 1202 from “digging” into tissue, or a sheath or a scope.

[0082] Electrical sources such as those described above with respect to FIGS. 1-13 may use spark gap technology. The gaps used in spark gap technology may be sealed, noble gas spark discharge tubes that have an approximate life of approximately 400,000 to 500,000 discharges. After approximately 400,000 to 500,000 discharges, the gaps can no longer “break over” at a proper voltage.

[0083] An electrical source used with an EHL probe may record information such as a number of times a gap fires an EHL probe, a power of a gap when the gap fires an EHL probe, a frequency of a gap firing an EHL probe, a unique identifier provided by an EHL probe, or any other information that may be useful to the electrical source in determining a remaining number of times a gap may fire an EHL probe. When the electrical source determines that a gap may no longer be able to fire an EHL probe, the electrical source may display a warning message indicating that maintenance or replacement of the gap is necessary.

[0084] In some implementations, the electrical source may include an internal power source such as a battery so that when external power is not provided to the electrical source, the electrical source is able to maintain the recorded information regarding the gap. Additionally, in some implementations, the electrical source may communicate with a computer so that the computer may retrieve the recorded information stored at the electrical source for purposes of record keeping, performance analysis, or trouble shooting of the electrical source and/or an EHL probe.

[0085] It is intended that the foregoing detailed description be regarded as illustrative rather than limiting, and that it be understood that it is the following claims, including all equivalents, that are intended to define the spirit and scope of this invention.

1. (canceled)

2. An invasive lithotripter probe system comprising:

an invasive lithotripter probe comprising:

a water-tight flexible encapsulating member encapsulating a liquid; and

a first electrode and a second electrode positioned on the lithotripter probe and within the water-tight flexible encapsulating member such that an electric spark between the first and second electrodes causes an annular shockwave within the liquid to radiate radially in a direction that is transverse from a longitudinal axis of the invasive lithotripter probe; and

an electrical source configured to charge the first electrode to a first polarity, wherein the electrical source comprises a fusible link configured to disable the lithotripter tip.

3. The invasive lithotripter probe system of claim 2, wherein the electrical source comprises an electrohydraulic generator.

4. The invasive lithotripter probe system of claim 2, wherein the electrical source is configured to:

monitor a number of times the lithotripter probe has fired and power levels used during firing of the lithotripter probe; and

determine when the lithotripter probe is near End of Life based on the monitoring.

5. The invasive lithotripter probe system of claim 4, wherein the electrical source is further configured to cause the fusible link to open in response to determining the lithotripter probe is near End of Life.

6. The invasive lithotripter probe system of claim 2, wherein the lithotripter probe is configured to be threaded through a human vein or artery.

7. The invasive lithotripter probe system of claim 2, wherein the lithotripter probe is dimensioned to be delivered to a small lumen of a body organ.

8. A method comprising:

monitoring, with a processor of an electric source, a number of times an invasive lithotripter probe fires and power levels used during firing of the lithotripter probe; determining, with the processor, that the lithotripter probe is near End of Life based on the monitoring; and

causing, with the processor, a fusible link configured to disable the lithotripter probe to open in response to determining that the lithotripter probe is near End of Life;

wherein the invasive lithotripter probe comprises:

a water-tight flexible encapsulating member encapsulating a liquid; and

a first electrode and a second electrode positioned on the lithotripter probe and within the water-tight flexible encapsulating member such that an electric spark between the first and second electrodes causes an annular shockwave within the liquid to radiate radially in a direction that is transverse from a longitudinal axis of the invasive lithotripter probe.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the lithotripter probe is configured to be threaded through a human vein or artery.

10. The method of claim 8, wherein the lithotripter probe is dimensioned to be delivered to a small lumen of a body organ.

11. The method of claim 8, wherein determining that the lithotripter probe is near End of Life based on the monitoring comprises:

comparing, with the processor, the monitored number of times the invasive lithotripter probe fires and the power levels used during firing of the lithotripter probe with historical End of Life data for lithotripter probes.

12. The method of claim **8**, wherein causing the fusible link to open comprises:

sending a high current to the lithotripter probe to cause the fusible link to open.

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