

US Patent & Trademark Office

Patent Public Search | Text View

United States Patent Application Publication

20250261916

Kind Code

A1

Publication Date

August 21, 2025

Inventor(s)

WELLS; Timothy N. et al.

LIGHT ASSEMBLIES AND METHODS FOR MAMMOGRAPHY AND TOMOSYNTHESIS IMAGING SYSTEMS

Abstract

An imaging system includes an x-ray tube head, a support arm, and a compression system coupled to the support arm. The compression system is independently rotatable relative to the x-ray tube head and includes a compression paddle, a support platform, and an x-ray receptor. The imaging system also includes a light assembly coupled to the support arm and disposed above the compression paddle. The light assembly is configured to direct one or more beams of light towards the support platform.

Inventors: WELLS; Timothy N. (Manchester, CT), BUCCILLI; Juliette (Wallingford, CT), REGO; Alan (Woodbury, CT), VARTOLONE; Joseph (Danbury, CT)

Applicant: Hologic, Inc. (Marlborough, MA)

Family ID: 1000008577987

Assignee: Hologic, Inc. (Marlborough, MA)

Appl. No.: 19/068178

Filed: March 03, 2025

Related U.S. Application Data

parent US continuation 17279364 20210324 parent-grant-document US 12268535 US continuation PCT/US2019/053020 20190925 child US 19068178
us-provisional-application US 62736089 20180925

Publication Classification

Int. Cl.: A61B6/04 (20060101); A61B6/02 (20060101); A61B6/10 (20060101); A61B6/50 (20240101)

Background/Summary

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS [0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/279,364, filed Mar. 24, 2021, which is a National Stage Application of PCT/US2019/053020, filed Sep. 25, 2019 which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 62/736,089, filed Sep. 25, 2018, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference in their entireties. To the extent appropriate, a claim of priority is made to each of the above disclosed applications.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Compression during mammography and tomosynthesis imaging serves a number of purposes. For example, it: (1) makes the breast thinner in the direction of x-ray flux and thereby reduces patient radiation exposure from the level required to image the thicker parts of a breast that are not compressed; (2) makes the breast more uniform in thickness in the direction of x-ray flux and thereby facilitates more uniform exposure at the image plane over the entire breast image; (3) immobilizes the breast during the x-ray exposure and thereby reduces image blurring; and (4) brings breast tissues out from the chest wall into the imaging exposure field and thus allows for more tissue imaging. As the breast is being compressed, typically a technologist manipulates the breast to position it appropriately and counter the tendency that compression has of pushing breast tissue toward the chest wall and out of the image field.

[0003] Standard compression methods for mammography and tomosynthesis use a movable, rigid, radiolucent compression paddle. The breast is placed in an imaging area on a breast support platform that typically is flat, and the paddle then compresses the breast, usually while a technologist or other health professional is holding the breast in place. The technologist may also manipulate the breast to ensure proper tissue coverage in the image receptor's field of view.

[0004] One known challenge in mammography and breast tomosynthesis is the positioning of the patient's breast by the technologist in the image receptor's field of view before compressing the breast. For example, the imaging room typically has dim lighting to increase patient comfort and reduce patient anxiety. Low light, however, makes the technologist's work around the imaging system much more difficult and can increase the time required for imaging procedures. For example, identifying the active imaging area, which at times generally corresponds to the size, shape, and location of a compression paddle. Additionally, identifying the field of view of the image receptor is often difficult when the x-ray source is moved out of position so that the technologist has access to the patient's breast and the compression system.

SUMMARY

[0005] In one aspect, the technology relates to an imaging system including: an x-ray tube head; a support arm; a compression system coupled to the support arm and independently rotatable relative to the x-ray tube head, wherein the compression system includes a compression paddle, a support platform, and an x-ray receptor; and a light assembly coupled to the support arm and disposed above the compression paddle, wherein the light assembly is configured to direct one or more beams of light towards the support platform.

[0006] In an example, the light assembly includes a cantilever support coupled to the support arm and a light structure coupled to the cantilever support. In another example, the light structure includes a ring with an opening defined therein, and when an x-ray beam is emitted from the x-ray

tube head, the x-ray beam travels through the opening such that the ring is not in a field of view of a resulting x-ray image. In yet another example, the light structure is fixed to the cantilever support. In still another example, the light structure includes one or more light sources. In an example, at least one of the one or more light sources is articulated. In another example, at least one of the one or more light sources is collimated. In yet another example, the light assembly includes a face shield. In still another example, the face shield is slidably coupled to the cantilever support and configured to move along the cantilever support and with respect to the light structure.

[0007] In another aspect, the technology relates to an imaging system including: a gantry; a compression system rotatably supported on the gantry, wherein the compression system includes a compression paddle, a support platform, and an x-ray receptor disposed below the support platform; an x-ray tube head rotatably supported on the gantry and independently rotatable relative to the compression system; and an emitter configured to emit a visible position marker onto the support platform, wherein the emitter is disposed on the compression system.

[0008] In an example, the emitter includes a face shield. In another example, the emitter includes a ring extending from the compression system. In yet another example, the emitter includes at least one of an articulator and a collimator. In still another example, the emitter includes a laser light. In an example, the position marker includes a substantially linear line. In another example, the line corresponds to a front edge of the x-ray receptor.

[0009] In another aspect, the technology relates to a method of compressing a breast for an imaging procedure, the method including: illuminating a support platform of an imaging system by one or more light sources disposed on a light assembly, wherein the light assembly is coupled to a compression system; positioning the breast on the support platform; advancing a compression paddle towards the breast positioned on the support platform; and contacting at least a portion of the breast with the compression paddle.

[0010] In an example, the method further includes moving a face shield of the light assembly towards a retracted position, the face shield being moveable relative to the one or more light sources. In another example, illuminating the support platform includes emitting a position marker from the one or more light sources, the emitted position marker substantially visibly identifying a position of an imaging area on the support platform. In yet another example, the emitted position marker corresponds to a position of an x-ray receptor relative to the support platform during the imaging procedure. In still another example, the emitted position marker includes a substantially linear line that corresponds to a front edge of an x-ray receptor. In an example, the emitted position marker includes at least one target marker identifying a target breast placement location on the support platform for positioning the breast. In another example, positioning the breast includes aligning at least a portion of the breast with the position marker.

[0011] In another aspect, the technology relates to a method of identifying an imaging area for an imaging system including: (a) a gantry, (b) a compression system including a compression paddle, a support platform, and an x-ray receptor disposed below the support platform, wherein the compression system is rotatable relative to the gantry, and (c) an x-ray tube head independently rotatable to the gantry and the compression system, the method including: rotating the compression system to a compression position; rotating the x-ray tube head to an access position, wherein when in the access position, the x-ray tube head is disposed at a non-orthogonal angle to the breast platform; emitting a position marker from an emitter disposed on the x-ray tube head towards the breast platform, wherein the emitted position marker substantially visibly delineates a position of the imaging area during an imaging procedure; rotating the x-ray source tube head to an imaging position; and performing an imaging procedure.

[0012] In an example, the emitted position marker corresponds to a position of the x-ray receptor relative to the breast platform. In another example, the emitted position marker includes at least one target marker identifying a target breast placement location on the breast platform for a patient's breast. In yet another example, the at least one target marker corresponds to the target breast

placement location for one or more of a nipple line, a skin line, and an axilla tissue line for the patent's breast. In still another example, the method further includes articulating the emitter relative to the x-ray tube head prior to emitting the position marker. In an example, the method further includes collimating the emitted position marker. In another example, rotating the x-ray tube head to the access position includes rotating the x-ray tube head relative to the compression paddle such that the compression paddle is not in a field of view of the emitter.

[0013] In another aspect, the technology relates to a method of illuminating an active imaging area for an imaging system including: (a) a gantry, (b) a compression system including a compression paddle, a support platform, and an x-ray receptor disposed below the support platform, wherein the compression system is rotatable relative to the gantry, and (c) an x-ray tube head independently rotatable to the gantry and the compression system, the method including: rotating the compression system to a first rotation position; rotating the x-ray tube head to a second rotation position, wherein when in the second rotation position, the x-ray tube head is disposed at a non-imaging position relative to the breast platform; emitting a position marker from a light source disposed on the compression system towards the breast platform, wherein the emitted position marker substantially visibly delineates a position of the active imaging area; rotating the x-ray source tube head to an imaging position; and performing an imaging procedure.

[0014] In an example, the first rotation position is a MLO imaging position. In another example, the second rotation position is at a non-orthogonal angle to the breast platform. In yet another example, the active imaging area is based at least in part on a size, a shape, and/or a position of the compression paddle.

[0015] In another aspect, the technology relates to an imaging system including: an x-ray tube head; a support arm; a compression system coupled to the support arm and independently rotatable relative to the x-ray tube head, wherein the compression system includes a compression paddle, a support platform, and an x-ray receptor; and a projector coupled to the support arm and disposed above the compression paddle, wherein the projector is configured to project an image towards the support platform.

[0016] In an example, the imaging system further includes a face shield, and the projector is coupled to the face shield. In another example, the imaging system further includes a cantilever support, and the projector is coupled to the cantilever support. In yet another example, the projector is coupled in communication to a system control and work station unit of the imaging system. In still another example, the image projected by the projector at least partially aligns with an x-ray field of the x-ray tube head. In an example, the image projected by the projector includes one or more of a white box, a cross hair pattern, and one or more targets.

[0017] In another aspect, the technology relates to a method of compressing a breast for an imaging procedure, the method including: illuminating a support platform of an imaging system by a projector coupled to a compression system, wherein the illumination is provided by one or more images projected towards the support platform by the projector; positioning the breast on the support platform; advancing a compression paddle towards the breast positioned on the support platform; and contacting at least a portion of the breast with the compression paddle.

[0018] In an example, the one or more images projected towards the support platform by the projector substantially aligns with an x-ray field of an x-ray tube head, and the method further includes verifying that a patient is not within the x-ray field after the breast is positioned on the support platform. In another example, illuminating the support platform includes projecting one or more of a white box, a cross hair pattern, and one or more targets.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0019] FIG. 1A is a schematic view of an exemplary imaging system.

[0020] FIG. 1B is a perspective view of the imaging system of FIG. 1A.

[0021] FIGS. 2A and 2B are perspective views of an exemplary light assembly in an extended and a retracted position, respectively.

[0022] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of another light assembly.

[0023] FIGS. 4A and 4B are front views of an imaging system having a tube head in a plurality of positions.

[0024] FIG. 5 depicts a flowchart illustrating a method of compressing a breast for an imaging procedure.

[0025] FIG. 6 depicts a flowchart illustrating a method of identifying an imaging area for an imaging system.

[0026] FIG. 7 depicts a flowchart illustrating a method of illuminating an active imaging area for an imaging system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0027] FIG. 1A is a schematic view of an exemplary imaging system **100**. FIG. 1B is a perspective view of the imaging system **100**. Referring concurrently to FIGS. 1A and 1B, the imaging system **100** is configured to immobilize a patient's breast **102** for x-ray imaging (either or both of mammography and tomosynthesis) via a breast compression immobilizer unit or compression system **104**. In the example, the compression system **104** includes a static breast support platform **106** and a moveable compression paddle **108**. The breast support platform **106** and the compression paddle **108** each have a compression surface **110** and **112**, respectively, with the compression surface **112** configured to move towards the support platform **106** to compress and immobilize the breast **102**. In known systems, the compression surfaces **110**, **112** are exposed so as to directly contact the breast **102**. The support platform **106** also houses an image receptor **114** and, optionally, a tilting mechanism **116**. The immobilizer unit **104** is in a path of an imaging x-ray beam **118** emanating from an x-ray source **120**, such that the beam **118** impinges on the image receptor **114**. [0028] The compression system **104** is supported on a first support arm **122** and the x-ray source **120** is supported on a second support arm, also referred to as a tube arm **124**. For mammography, support arms **122** and **124** can rotate as a unit about an axis **126** between different imaging orientations such as cranial-caudal (CC) and mediolateral oblique (MLO) views, so that the imaging system **100** can take a mammogram projection image at each orientation. In operation, the image receptor **114** remains in place relative to the support platform **106** while an image is taken. The immobilizer unit **104** releases the breast **102** for movement of support arms **122**, **124** to a different imaging orientation. For tomosynthesis, the support arm **122** stays in place, with the breast **102** immobilized and remaining in place, while at least the tube arm **124** rotates the x-ray source **120** relative to the immobilizer unit **104** and the compressed breast **102** about the axis **126**. The imaging system **100** takes plural tomosynthesis projection images of the breast **102** at respective angles of the x-ray beam **118** relative to the breast **102**. As such, the compression system **104** and tube arm **124** may be rotated discrete from each other, unless matched rotation is required or desired for an imaging procedure.

[0029] Concurrently and optionally, the image receptor **114** may be tilted relative to the breast support platform **106** and coordinated with the rotation of the second support arm **124**. The tilting can be through the same angle as the rotation of the x-ray source **120**, but may also be through a different angle selected such that the x-ray beam **118** remains substantially in the same position on the image receptor **114** for each of the plural images. The tilting can be about an axis **128**, which can but need not be in the image plane of the image receptor **114**. The tilting mechanism **116** that is coupled to the image receptor **114** can drive the image receptor **114** in a tilting motion. For tomosynthesis imaging and/or CT imaging, the breast support platform **106** can be horizontal or

can be at an angle to the horizontal, e.g., at an orientation similar to that for conventional MLO imaging in mammography. The imaging system **100** can be solely a mammography system, a CT system, or solely a tomosynthesis system, or a “combo” system that can perform multiple forms of imaging. One example of such a combo system has been offered by the assignee hereof under the trade name Selenia Dimensions.

[0030] When the system is operated, the image receptor **114** produces imaging information in response to illumination by the imaging x-ray beam **118**, and supplies it to an image processor **130** for processing and generating breast x-ray images. A system control and work station unit **132** including software controls the operation of the system and interacts with the operator to receive commands and deliver information including processed-ray images.

[0031] One challenge with the imaging system **100** is how to efficiently position the breast **102** on the support platform **106** such that the patient's breast **102** can be compressed and immobilized for the desired or required imaging. For example, a health professional, typically an x-ray technologist, generally places the breast **102** on the support platform **106**. The technologist will adjust the position of the breast **102** within the immobilizer unit **104** while pulling tissue towards imaging area and moving the compression paddle **108** toward the breast support platform **106** to immobilize the breast **102** and keep it in place, with as much of the breast tissue as practicable being between the compression surfaces **110**, **112**. However, if the patient's breast is not properly positioned within the imaging area of the imaging system **100**, then the breast compression procedures may be required to be redone, thus increasing patient discomfort and anxiety. Additionally, an improperly positioned breast may require an x-ray image to be retaken, which then may deliver an unnecessary x-ray dose. Furthermore, once the patient's breast is immobilized on the imaging system **100**, the patient (e.g., hair, arms, etc.) also needs to be positioned by the technologist out of the path (e.g., the x-ray field) of the x-ray source **120**.

[0032] The technologies described herein relate to a breast compression and imaging system that utilizes a light assembly to aid the technologist in positioning the patient's breast for compression and imaging. Some of these technologies provide general illumination to the compression system, which aids the technologist when working with the patient and the imaging system. By illuminating the working area, the technologist can more efficiently position the patient. This can increase the overall efficiency of the imaging procedure, which also increases overall patient comfort. Other light assembly technologies described herein provide visible position markers that enable proper placement and/or compression of the breast such that the immobilization and imaging procedures are more efficient to perform. This can also help reduce patient discomfort associated with compression and the imaging process. These technologies generally improve the accuracy of breast placement and/or compression, enabling the technologist to more efficiently ensure proper immobilization and subsequent imaging.

[0033] As described herein, the technologies mainly utilize one or more light sources, preferably, visible light sources, coupled to the compression system **104**. These light sources are configured to illuminate the breast support platform **106** to aid the technologist when working around the compression system **104**. Additionally or alternatively, the light source can provide one or more position markers on the breast support platform **106** to more specifically aid the technologist in positioning and/or compressing the patient's breast in a proper position for the imaging process. For example, the position markers may correspond to a position of the image receptor **114**, which is not visible to the technologist as it is below the support platform **106**. In other examples, the position markers may correspond to an active imaging area that is a subset of the image receptor **114** to provide a more focused position aid for the technologist. Examples of the light sources can include, but are not limited to, light emitting diodes, laser lights, incandescent lamps, and even optical devices such as image projector systems.

[0034] Imaging systems **100** including any one of the light sources that perform the functions described herein are contemplated, although certain systems may include all of the described light

sources, or additional light sources that are positioned differently but that perform the various functions described herein. In certain examples, the light sources described herein may perform a single described function or a plurality of functions.

[0035] Returning to FIG. 1A, the imaging system **100** is typically disposed within a patient room that is dimly lit to increase patient comfort and reduce patient apprehension. As such, a light assembly **134** may be coupled to the support arm **122** so that a light source can be provided in the system **100** and aid the technologist with positioning the patient within the compression system **104**. The light assembly **134** generally points in a downward direction towards the compression paddle **108**, breast **102**, and the support platform **106**. Functions performed in conjunction with the light assembly **134** are described herein and may include providing a light source on the compression system **104** for assisting the technologist with breast **102** positioning and compression. In some examples, the light assembly **134** is configured to not interfere with the x-ray beams **118** during the imaging procedures. In other examples, at least a portion of the light assembly **134** may be extended and/or retracted relative to the support arm **122**, such that full access to the compression system **104** is provided to the technologist, and/or interference with the x-ray beam **118** during imaging procedures is reduced. In another example, the light assembly **134** may be storable at least partially within the support arm **122**. Additionally or alternatively, the light assembly **134** may be configured to emit one or more position markers on the support platform **106** so as to identify an image area, an active image area, and/or specific breast placement location and further aid the technologist with positioning and compression of the breast. By increasing proper breast position and compression, patient comfort during the imaging procedure is increased and anxiety is reduced. Additional illumination systems are also depicted and described herein.

[0036] FIGS. 2A and 2B are perspective views of an imaging system **202** incorporating an exemplary light assembly **200** in an extended and a retracted position, respectively. Referring concurrently to FIGS. 2A and 2B and as described above, the imaging system **202** includes a gantry **204** that rotatably supports a compression system **206** having a support platform **208** and a compression paddle support **210** (a compression paddle is not shown for clarity). Additionally, the gantry **204** rotatably supports an x-ray tube head **212**. In this example, the light assembly **200** is coupled to the compression system **206** such that the light assembly **200** can rotate therewith, relative to the gantry **204** and/or the x-ray tube head **212**, and is positioned above the compression paddle support **210**. The light assembly **200** includes one or more light sources **214** that are oriented so as to direct light beams towards an upper surface **216** of the support platform **208**. By illuminating the upper surface **216**, the technologist may more easily position the patient's breast within the compression system **206**, even when the components of the imaging system **202** generate shadows over the support platform **208** and/or the compression paddle support **210**.

[0037] In the example, the light source **214** may emit a general white light for illumination of area surrounding the support platform **208**. For example, the light source **214** can be a light emitting diode (LED) lamp, an incandescent lamp, or the like. In other examples, the light source **214** may emit a colored light (e.g., red or blue) as required or desired. In another example, the light source **214** may be a laser that can provide a visible light. In some examples, the light source **214** may emit ultraviolet light and/or infrared light that can be used with additional imaging devices that are configured to make these light forms visible to the technologist. In yet further examples, the light source **214** may emit light that changes colors. For example, the light source **214** may change light colors based at least partially on the position of the patient's breast so as to indicate to the technologist that the breast is properly positioned on the support platform **208**. Additionally or alternatively, the light source **214** may emit different light colors based on the area of the support platform **208** being illuminated.

[0038] In still further examples, the light source **214** may include an image projector configured to project an image towards the support platform **208**. The image projector can include one or more of the following components: a light (e.g., LED, laser, etc.), an optical engine (e.g., Liquid Crystal

Display (LCD), Digital Light Processing (DLP), etc.), an image input, a power input, a cooling system, a processor, and a focusing optic. The image projector can project still or video images as required or desired.

[0039] The light assembly **200** includes a cantilever support **218** that is coupled to a support arm **220** of the compression system **206**. The cantilever support **218** can be removably coupled to the support arm **220** so that the light assembly **200** can be removed as required or desired. Additionally or alternatively, the cantilever support **218** can be slidingly coupled to the support arm **220** so that the light assembly **200** can move linearly L along the support arm **220** and be adjustable in height relative to the support platform **208** as required or desired. The cantilever support **218** extends from the patient facing end of the support arm **220** such that operation of the compression paddle support **210** is uninhibited. Furthermore, access is maintained to the compression system **206** from either the left or right side of the imaging system **202** for the patient and/or the technologist. The cantilever support **218** can be coupled in communication (e.g., power and/or data) to the imaging system **202** so that the system control and work station unit **132** (shown in FIG. 1A) can control the light source **214** as required or desired. The light assembly **200** can be a wired or wireless communication.

[0040] Attached to the free end of the cantilever support **218**, the light assembly **200** may include a face shield **222**. The face shield **222** is slidingly coupled to the cantilever support **218** so that it can move transversely T between an extended position (shown in FIG. 2A) and a retracted position (shown in FIG. 2B). In the extended position, the face shield **222** can be used to prevent the patient from moving into the x-ray beam emitted from the x-ray tube head **212** during imaging. The face shield **222** is substantially U-shaped such that the face shield **222** is not within a field of view of the x-ray image when it is in the extended position. In other examples, the face shield **222** may be lined with lead so as to provide radiation protection for the patient during the imaging procedures. Additionally, the face shield **222** remains stationary during tomosynthesis imaging since it is coupled to the support arm **220**. The face shield **222** can also be retractable toward the retracted position so as to move the face shield **222** away from being positioned over the support platform **208** so that the technologist can more easily work while positioning and compressing the patient's breast.

[0041] In the example, the light source **214** is coupled to an inside surface of the face shield **222** so that patient contact with the light source **214** during use of the face shield **222** is prevented. Additionally, the light source **214** is substantially centered on the face shield **222** and aligned with the cantilever support **218**. This position enables for a substantially uniform light distribution to be provided on the support platform **208** by the light assembly **200**. In another example, the light source **214** may be disposed on the free end of the cantilever support **218**. In some examples, more than one light source **214** may be spaced along the inside perimeter of the face shield **222**. By using more than one light source **214**, the light assembly **200** can independently operate each light source **214** such that the light distribution on the support platform **208** can be adjustable as required or desired. For example, light from each light source **214** may be directed towards one or more of the left side portion, the right side portion, the front portion, the back portion, and the center portion of the support platform **208**.

[0042] Since the face shield **222** is moveable between two positions (e.g., extended and retracted), the light source **214** also moves between two positions. As such, one or more of the light sources **214** may be mounted on an articulator so that the light source **214** can be articulated. For example, articulating the light source **214** may include pivoting the light source **214** about one or more axes. In another example, articulating the light source **214** may include moving the light source **214** (e.g., in a linear and/or curvilinear range of motion) between two or more positions. This enables the light source **214** to be directed to the same location on the support platform **208** in both the extended and retracted positions, as well as at any positions between these extremes. Additionally or alternatively, one or more of the light sources **214** may be collimated so as to be directed to a

specific location on the support platform **208**. This enables undesirable light distribution away from the support platform **208** to be reduced and/or eliminated. For example, collimation of the light source **214** may include one or more optical lens that reflect and/or refract the light beam in a required or desired distribution pattern. Collimation of the light source **214** may also be induced by one or more angled mirrors in the light assembly **200**. In another example, the collimated light may include a grid pattern illuminated over the upper surface **216** of the support surface **208** so as to aid the technologist in patient breast placement.

[0043] Furthermore, by collimating the light source **214** one or more position markers can be formed and directed on the support platform **208**. The position marker is configured to aid the technologist in more specifically positioning the patient's breast on the support platform **208** for compression. In one example, the light source **214** can emit a position marker that corresponds to a position of the x-ray receptor relative to the support platform **208**. This enables the technologist to have a visual aid to ensure that the patient's breast is positioned over the x-ray receptor. In another example, the emitted position marker can include a target marker that corresponds to a target breast placement location for one or more of a nipple line, a skin line, and an axilla tissue line. For example, the target marker may be a linear nipple line that the technologist can use to align the patient's nipple along on the support platform **208**. The target marker can also be one or more lines, crosshatches, and/or shapes (e.g., square, circle, triangle, etc.) that define a general breast placement area on the support platform **208**. The target marker may be a perimeter, or a partial perimeter, outline of a breast shape to define a breast placement area on the support platform **208**. In still another example, the emitted position marker may correspond to an active imaging area, which can be based at least partially on the size, shape, and/or position of the compression paddle of the compression system **206**. Regardless, any light source **214** may be used in the light assembly **200** that provides aid to the technologist and enables the patient's breast to be positioned more accurately and quickly while reducing the need for re-compression of the patient's breast.

[0044] In an aspect, the light source **214** can include a laser light that emits a light beam towards the support platform **208** and that forms a substantially linear line **224** (shown in FIG. 2B). In one example, the line **224** corresponds to a front edge of the x-ray receptor disposed within the platform **208**, and thus, is positioned towards the front of the upper surface **216** of the support platform **208**. By identifying the front edge of the receptor, the technologist can more easily position the patient's breast on the support platform **208** for compression. Additionally, the line **224** can project on the chest wall of the patient when the patient is positioned on the platform **208** so that the technologist can visualize the portion of the breast that is within the x-ray image area. In this example, the light source **214** emits a position marker, the line **224**, and the position marker can also provide general illumination of the support platform **208** to assist the technologist in low light areas. In some examples, the laser light can be colored (e.g., red, green, etc.). In other examples, the laser light can be a white light as required or desired.

[0045] In the example, the light source **214** is disposed above the compression paddle on the support arm **220** so that it illuminates the support platform **208** from an above position. In this position, the light source **214** enables light to be directed in an orientation that at least partially aligns with an x-ray field of the x-ray tube head **212**. As such, patient placement within the x-ray field and between the tube head **212** and the support platform **208** can easily be determined even when the tube head **212** is rotated out of an imaging position. In examples where the light source **214** includes a projector, the projector can project any image (still or motion) that enables the light assembly **200** to function as described herein. For example, a projection image may be a white box on a black background that corresponds to the x-ray receptor location within the platform **208**. The position and size of the box can be completely flexible within the image space and there is no need for a mechanical shutter or other moving parts. A projector can project any desired shape, any size shape, any color, and is easily positionable (e.g., left or right side of the imaging area). This allows the light source **214** to provide any type of visual aid for the technologist. Further, the projector can

project different patterns (e.g., a cross hair pattern for needle locations) or targets (e.g., an arrow for biopsy procedures) as required or desired. Additionally or alternatively, the light source **214** can have its intensity (e.g., brightness) be adjustable.

[0046] FIG. **3** is a perspective view of an imaging system **302** including a different light assembly **300**. As described above, the imaging system **302** includes a gantry **304** that rotatably supports a compression system **306** having a support platform **308** and a compression paddle **310**.

Additionally, the gantry **304** also rotatably supports an x-ray tube head (not shown for clarity but located at the top of a rotatable support arm **311**). As illustrated in FIG. **3**, the compression system **306** can be rotated to a MLO imaging procedure angle. The light assembly **300** is coupled to a support arm **312** of the compression system **306** such that the light assembly **300** can rotate therewith in relation to the gantry **304**, and is positioned above the compression paddle **310**. The light assembly **300** includes one or more light sources (not shown but disposed on a light structure **318**) that are oriented so as to direct light beams towards an upper surface **314** of the support platform **308** as described above. The light sources can be LEDs, laser lights, a projector system, or any other light device as required or desired. In this example, however, the light assembly **300** includes a face shield **316** and the separate light structure **318**, each independently coupled to the cantilever support **320**.

[0047] The cantilever support **320** can linearly move L along the support arm **312** so that the light assembly **300** is adjustable in height as measured from the support platform **308**. Additionally, the face shield **316** can transversely move T along the cantilever support **320** between an extended position and a retracted position as described above. The light structure **318** in this example, however, is disposed above the face shield **316** and fixed to the free end of the cantilever support **320** such that the light structure **318** remains fixed during movement of the face shield **316**. This configuration of the light assembly **300** enables for one or more light sources disposed on the light structure **318** to maintain position above the support platform **308** regardless of the face shield **316** position. As such, the upper surface **314** of the support platform **308** is consistently illuminated so the technologist may more easily work around the compression system **306**.

[0048] In the example, the light structure **318** may be substantially ring-shaped with an opening **322** defined therein. The ring may be substantially D-shaped (as shown in FIG. **3**) with the long straight edge coupled to the cantilever support **320**. In other examples, the ring may have any other shape as required or desired, for example, oval-shaped, circular-shaped, etc. The opening **322** is sized and shaped such that when the x-ray beam is emitted from the x-ray tube head, the x-ray beam travels through the opening **322** such that the light structure **318** is not in a field of view of the x-ray image that is formed. The ring is also large in size such that no matter its position L along the support arm **312**, the light structure **318** is not in the field of view of the x-ray image. This enables for the light structure **318** to maintain its position above the support platform **308** during any imaging mode as required or desired, without forming undesirable artifacts in the x-ray image.

[0049] The light structure **318** may at least partially correspond to the perimeter shape of the top end of the face shield **316**. That is, as shown in FIG. **3**, when the face shield **316** is in its extended position, the light structure **318** aligns with the face shield **316** as if the light structure **318** is integral with the face shield **316**. This enables for the ring and the opening **322** to be configured to not interfere with the x-ray beam during imaging procedures as is already for the face shield **316**. Additionally, by aligning the light structure **318** and the face shield **316**, patient contact with the light structure **318** is reduced or eliminated.

[0050] The one or more light sources on the light structure **318** may be disposed on the bottom surface of the ring such that they face the upper surface **314** of the support platform **308**. In other examples, the one or more light sources may be disposed on the inside surface of the ring and angled towards the upper surface **314**. As described above, the light sources can be LED lamps, incandescent lamps, lasers, projector, or the like, that emit white light, colored light, or any other light as required or desired. The light sources can also be articulated and/or collimated to direct the

light to predetermined areas on the support platform **308**. In the example, the upper surface of the ring may be configured as a heat sink so as to remove heat from the light sources. The light sources can provide a general working light for the technologist and aid in positioning and/or compressing the patient's breast. Additionally or alternatively, the light sources can provide a position marker (e.g., line(s), hash(s), point(s), outline(s), grid(s), etc.) for the technologist and aid in more specific alignment of the patient's breast for compression. This additional illumination generated by the light assembly **300** increases patient comfort during imaging procedures as the technologist is able to work more quickly and efficiently.

[0051] In some examples, the light structure may be configured to direct light towards the support platform **308** that corresponds to the image receptor area that corresponds to the imaging area. In other examples, the light structure **318** may be configured to direct light towards the support platform **308** that correspond to the active imaging area. For example, the active imaging area may be at least partially based on the size, shape, and/or position of the compression **310** on the compression system **306** and is generally a subset area of the larger imaging area. As such, the light sources may illuminate at least two portions, preferably two sides, of the active imaging area. The light structure **318** enables this illumination even when the x-ray tube head is moved to facilitate patient positioning, for example, during MLO positioning as described further below.

[0052] FIGS. **4A** and **4B** are front views of an imaging system **400** having a tube head **402** in a plurality of positions. FIGS. **4A-4B** are generally described concurrently. The tube head **402** is rotatably coupled to a gantry **404** via a support arm **406**. The imaging system **400** also includes a compression system **408** rotatably coupled to the gantry **404**. The compression system **408** includes a breast support platform **410** and a compression paddle **412** that may be moved relative to (e.g., towards or away from) the support platform **410**. Both the compression system **408** and tube head **402** are configured to rotate independently of each other. FIGS. **4A** and **4B** depict the compression system **408** in an angled position typically used for an MLO mammogram, but the imaging system **400** may also be used in conjunction with a tomosynthesis scan as required or desired.

[0053] One of the challenges associated with positioning the patient's breast, especially in advance of an MLO imaging procedure, is that the tube head **402** acts as an impediment to the technologist in positioning the breast. For example and referencing FIG. **4B**, in some known prior art imaging systems, a positioning light can be emitted from the tube head **402** so as to mark an imaging area on the support platform **410**. However, since the technologist generally stands to one side S of the gantry **404** to position the breast for compression, the position of the tube head **402** often requires the technologist to duck or crouch below the tube head **402** so as to position the breast between the support platform **410** and the compression paddle **412**. This makes positioning of the breast in relation to the imaging area difficult because when the tube head **402** is rotated away from the compression system **408** the positioning light no longer aligns with the imaging area.

[0054] With reference now to FIG. **4A**, the imaging system **400** includes a tube head emitter **414** disposed on or in the tube head **402**. In some examples, the emitter **414** may be aligned with the x-ray beam source, while in other examples the emitter **414** may be offset from the x-ray beam source. The tube head emitter **414** is coupled to a mechanism **416** that is configured to articulate the direction of the tube head emitter **414**. As such, the technologies described herein allow the imaging area (marked as I in FIG. **4A**) to be properly marked, even when the tube head **402** is not directly aligned with the support platform **410**. In order to determine the position of the imaging area I, a position encoder associated with the x-ray receptor disposed below the support platform **410** can communicate the location thereof to a remote or local controller of the tube head emitter **414**.

[0055] In the example, the tube head emitter **414** emits visible or invisible light **418** that appears visible when impacting a support surface **420** of the support platform **410** for marking the image area I. Thus, the tube head emitter **414** more clearly visually identifies the imaging area I for the technologist to more efficiently position and compress the patient's breast, while still enabling

access to the compression system **408** by the technologist. The light **418** may form a position marker upon the support platform **410** so as to delineate a position of the imaging area I during the imaging procedure. The position marker may correspond to a position of the x-ray receptor relative to the support platform **410**. In another example, the position marker may include a target marker (e.g., a line(s), hash(s), point(s), outline(s), grid(s), etc.) used for aligning at least a portion of the patient's breast therewith. For example, the target marker may correspond to a nipple line, a skin line, or an axilla tissue line and aid in positioning the patient's breast. In some examples, the emitter **414** may emit a laser or a projection towards the support surface **420** to form the position marker. In other examples, collimated light may be emitted instead of a laser in order to form the position marker. In still another example, the emitted position marker may correspond to an active imaging area, which can be based at least partially on the size, shape, and/or position of the compression paddle **412**.

[0056] In another example, an emitter **422** that is configured to emit a visual position marker as described above may be coupled to the compression system **408**. This emitter **422** may include the light assemblies **200**, **300** described above in reference to FIGS. 2A-3, or may be the emitter **414** just disposed at a different location on the imaging system **400**. In either example, the emitter **422** may more clearly identify the imaging area I for the technologist to more efficiently position and compress the patient's breast. By locating the emitter **422** on the compression system **408**, then the orientation of the position marker is more easily determined since the emitter **422** rotates with the compression system **408** and is aligned with the support platform **410**. In another example, the emitter **422** may be coupled to the compression arm to which the compression paddle **412** is fixed. The emitter **422** may illuminate a general imaging area, such as an area defined by the x-ray receptor, illuminate a more specific active imaging area, such as an area defined by the compression paddle **412**, or illuminate a target marker for more exact breast placement as required or desired.

[0057] FIG. 5 depicts a flowchart illustrating a method **500** of compressing a breast for an imaging procedure. In the example, the method **500** begins with operation **502**, illuminating a support platform of an imaging system by one or more light sources disposed on a light assembly. The light assembly may be coupled to a compression system of the imaging system. By illuminating the support platform, the technologist can be more efficient in working with the patient and manipulating the patient's breast. As described herein, the support platform can also be illuminated by a laser light or a projector that projects one or more images towards the support platform. In operation **502**, the patient's breast is positioned on the support platform. Based on the position of the patient's breast, a compression paddle is advanced towards the support platform, operation **506**. The patient's breast may then be contacted with the compression paddle, operation **508**, so as to immobilize the breast for the imaging procedure. In some examples, the method **500** may further include moving a face shield of the light assembly towards a retracted position in operation **510**. The face shield being moveable relative to the one or more light sources.

[0058] In general, the method **500** contemplates using a light source to illuminate the support platform to aid in the efficiency of the work of the technologist and improve patient experience. In some examples, the illumination may be a general working light that illuminates the working area (e.g., the support platform and compression paddle) of the technologist. In other examples, the illumination may be more targeted so that specific areas of the support platform are identified (e.g., an imaging area or active imaging area) to efficiently aid the technologist in positioning the patient's breast on the support platform and performing the compression of the breast for the subsequent imaging procedure. For example, in operation **512** illuminating the support platform (operation **502**) may further include emitting a position marker from the one or more light sources such that the emitted position marker substantially visibly identifies a position of an imaging area on the support platform. In an aspect, the emitted position marker can include a substantially linear line that corresponds to a front edge of an x-ray receptor. In another example, illuminating the

support platform may include aligning the illumination with an x-ray field of an x-ray tube head so that the technologist can verify that the patient is not within the x-ray field. For example, verify that the patient's hair is not within the x-ray field.

[0059] In order to determine the imaging area on the imaging system, data obtained from various sensors on the imaging system can be compared to known data from prior compressions, similar breasts, or similar procedures to identify an appropriate position marker. As such, the method **500** aids in increasing efficiencies for the technologist during the breast immobilization procedures so that patient comfort is increased. In one example, the emitted position marker may correspond to a position of an x-ray receptor relative to the support platform so that the patient's breast may be positioned appropriately over the x-ray receptor. In another example, the emitted position marker may include a target marker identifying a target breast placement location for the patient's breast. The target marker can be associated with a required or desired breast placement position on the support platform. This can include, for example, a nipple placement, a skin outline, an axilla tissue line, a scar placement, a mole placement, and the like. As such, positioning the patient's breast (operation **504**) may include aligning at least a portion of the breast with the position marker, operation **514**. In still another example, the emitted position marker may correspond to an active imaging area, which can be based at least partially on the size, shape, and/or position of the compression paddle of the compression system.

[0060] Additionally or alternatively, the position marker may indicate not only an initial breast position area to aid the technologist in breast placement on the support platform, but may also be used to indicate a required or desired compressed breast position. For example, the position marker may include a first marker indicating the position of the uncompressed patient's breast on the support platform and a corresponding second marker that indicates a position of the compressed patient's breast on the support platform. Once the second marker is reached (e.g., aligns) with at least a portion of the breast, this indicator may prompt the technologist to stop the breast compression. This will also increase patient comfort because it enhances the technologist's ability to not only position the breast, but to compress the breast to a comfortably, and clinically relevant, level of compression. The precise image area details provided by the light source generally allow for greater accuracy in both positioning and compression, enabling the technologist to provide reassurance and comfort to the patient during an often anxiety-inducing medical procedure. Thereafter, imaging may be performed of the compressed breast.

[0061] FIG. **6** depicts a flowchart illustrating a method **600** of identifying an imaging area for an imaging system. In general, the method **600** contemplates identifying an area for imaging on an imaging receptor, which may be useful for properly positioning a breast in an imaging system. This method **600** may be particularly useful when a tube head of an imaging system is disposed outside of a typical imaging position, such that proper positioning of the breast is more challenging for a technologist. The imaging system may be a breast imaging system such as those described herein that include a gantry and a compression system including a compression paddle, a support platform, and an x-ray receptor disposed below the support platform. The imaging system also includes an x-ray tube head independently rotatable to the gantry and the compression system, which is also rotatable relative to the gantry. The method **600** begins by rotating the compression system to a compression position, operation **602**. This may be the position depicted, for example in FIG. **4A**. In operation **604**, the x-ray tube head is rotated to an access position, again as depicted in FIG. **4A**. When in the access position, the x-ray tube head is disposed at a non-orthogonal angle to the breast platform. A position marker is emitted from an emitter disposed on the x-ray tube head towards the breast platform, operation **606**. The emitted position marker substantially visibly delineates a position of the x-ray receptor during an imaging procedure. This allows for proper positioning of the breast by a technologist, without the need to duck or crouch under the x-ray tube head. Once the breast is properly positioned, the x-ray source tube head is rotated to an imaging position, operation **608**. The imaging position of the tube head is depicted in FIG. **4B**. Thereafter,

an imaging procedure may be performed, operation **610**.

[0062] As described above, in one example, the emitted position marker may correspond to a position of an x-ray receptor relative to the support platform so that the patient's breast may be positioned appropriately over the x-ray receptor. In another example, the emitted position marker may include a target marker identifying a target breast placement location for the patient's breast. The target marker can be associated with a required or desired breast placement position on the support platform. This can include, for example, a nipple placement, a skin outline, an axilla tissue line, a scar placement, a mole placement, and the like. These markers allow for greater accuracy in positioning of the patient's breast, enabling the technologist to be more efficient during the compression procedure.

[0063] The method **600** may also further include articulating the emitter relative to the x-ray tube head prior to emitting the position marker, operation **612**, such that the rotational offset between the compression system and the x-ray tube head is accounted for. In another example, the method **600** may include collimating the emitted position marker, operation **614**, so as to reduce light dispersion away from the support platform. Furthermore, when rotating the x-ray tube head to the access position, the method **600** may include rotating the x-ray tube head relative to the compression paddle such that the compression paddle is not in a field of view of the emitter, operation **616**. This ensures that the light emission is able to reach the support platform without being blocked by the compression paddle.

[0064] FIG. 7 depicts a flowchart illustrating a method **700** of illuminating an active imaging area for an imaging system. In general, the method **700** contemplates illuminating an active area, for example, based at least in part on a size, a shape, and/or a position of a compression paddle, which may be useful for properly positioning a breast in an imaging system. This method **700** may be particularly useful when a tube head of an imaging system is disposed outside of a typical imaging position, such that proper positioning of the breast is more challenging for a technologist. The imaging system may be a breast imaging system such as those described herein that include a gantry and a compression system including a compression paddle, a support platform, and an x-ray receptor disposed below the support platform. The imaging system also includes an x-ray tube head independently rotatable to the gantry and the compression system, which is also rotatable relative to the gantry. The method **700** begins by rotating the compression system to a first rotation position, operation **702**. This may be the position depicted, for example, in FIG. 4A and corresponds to an MLO imaging procedure. In operation **704**, the x-ray tube head is rotated to a second rotation position, again as depicted in FIG. 4A. When in the second rotation position, the x-ray tube head is disposed at a non-imaging position that is also at a non-orthogonal angle to the breast platform. A position marker is emitted from a light source disposed on the compression system towards the breast platform, operation **706**. The emitted position marker substantially visibly delineates a position of the active image area. This allows for proper positioning of the breast by a technologist, without the need to duck or crouch under the x-ray tube head. Once the breast is properly positioned, the x-ray source tube head is rotated to an imaging position, operation **708**. The imaging position of the tube head is depicted in FIG. 4B. Thereafter, an imaging procedure may be performed, operation **710**.

[0065] This disclosure describes some examples of the present technology with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which only some of the possible examples were shown. Other aspects can, however, be embodied in many different forms and should not be construed as limited to the examples set forth herein. Rather, these examples were provided so that this disclosure was thorough and complete and fully conveyed the scope of the possible examples to those skilled in the art. Any number of the features of the different examples described herein may be combined into one single example and alternate examples having fewer than or more than all of the features herein described are possible. It is to be understood that terminology employed herein is used for the purpose of describing particular examples only and is not intended to be limiting. It must be

noted that, as used in this specification, the singular forms “a,” “an,” and “the” include plural referents unless the context clearly dictates otherwise.

[0066] Although specific examples were described herein, the scope of the technology is not limited to those specific examples. One skilled in the art will recognize other examples or improvements that are within the scope of the present technology. Therefore, the specific structure, acts, or media are disclosed only as illustrative examples. Examples according to the technology may also combine elements or components of those that are disclosed in general but not expressly exemplified in combination, unless otherwise stated herein. The scope of the technology is defined by the following claims and any equivalents therein.

Claims

1. (canceled)
2. A method of identifying an imaging area for an imaging system comprising: (a) a gantry, (b) a compression system comprising a compression paddle, a support platform, and an x-ray receptor disposed below the support platform, wherein the compression system is rotatable relative to the gantry, and (c) an x-ray tube head independently rotatable to the gantry and the compression system, the method comprising: rotating the compression system to a compression position; rotating the x-ray tube head to an access position, wherein when in the access position, the x-ray tube head is disposed at a non-orthogonal angle relative to the support platform; emitting a position marker from an emitter disposed on the x-ray tube head towards the support platform, wherein the emitted position marker substantially visibly delineates a position of the imaging area during an imaging procedure; rotating the x-ray source tube head to an imaging position different than the access position; and performing the imaging procedure.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the emitted position marker corresponds to a position of the x-ray receptor relative to the support platform.
4. The method of claim 2, wherein the emitted position marker comprises at least one target marker identifying a target breast placement location on the support platform for a patient's breast.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein the at least one target marker corresponds to the target breast placement location for one or more of a nipple line, a skin line, and an axilla tissue line for the patient's breast.
6. The method of claim 2, further comprising articulating the emitter relative to the x-ray tube head prior to emitting the position marker.
7. The method of claim 2, further comprising collimating the emitted position marker.
8. The method of claim 2, wherein rotating the x-ray tube head to the access position comprises rotating the x-ray tube head relative to the compression paddle such that the compression paddle is not in a field of view of the emitter.
9. The method of claim 2, wherein the compression position is a mediolateral oblique (MLO) position of the compression system.
10. An imaging system comprising: a gantry; a compression system rotatably coupled to the gantry, the compression system including a compression paddle, a support platform having a support surface, and an x-ray receptor disposed below the support platform opposite of the support surface; an x-ray tube head rotatably coupled to the gantry, wherein the x-ray tube head is independently rotatable relative to the gantry and the compression system; and an emitter disposed on the x-ray tube head, the emitter configured to emit a position marker on the support surface that visibly delineates a position of an imaging area for a breast of a patient for imaging, and wherein the position marker is emitted while the x-ray tube head is in an access position relative to the support platform and at a non-orthogonal angle relative to the support platform.
11. The imaging system of claim 10, wherein the imaging area corresponds to a position of the x-ray receptor below the support platform.

- 12.** The imaging system of claim 11, further comprising a position encoder associated with the x-ray receptor and configured to determine the position of the x-ray receptor.
- 13.** The imaging system of claim 10, wherein the emitted position marker comprises at least one target marker identifying a target breast placement location on the support platform for the patient's breast.
- 14.** The imaging system of claim 13, wherein the at least one target marker corresponds to the target breast placement location for one or more of a nipple line, a skin line, and an axilla tissue line for the patient's breast.
- 15.** The imaging system of claim 10, wherein the emitter is offset from an x-ray beam source of the x-ray tube head, the emitter further comprising an articulation drive configured to drive orientation of the emitter relative to the support platform.
- 16.** The imaging system of claim 10, wherein the emitter is aligned with an x-ray beam source of the x-ray tube head, the x-ray tube head further comprising a collimator configured to collimate the emitted position marker from the emitter.
- 17.** The imaging system of claim 10, wherein the emitter is a light source including at least one of a light emitting diode (LED), a laser light, and a projector.
- 18.** A method of illuminating an active imaging area for an imaging system comprising: (a) a gantry, (b) a compression system comprising a compression paddle, a support platform, and an x-ray receptor disposed below the support platform, wherein the compression system is rotatable relative to the gantry, and (c) an x-ray tube head independently rotatable to the gantry and the compression system, the method comprising: rotating the compression system to a first rotation position; rotating the x-ray tube head to a second rotation position, wherein when in the second rotation position, the x-ray tube head is disposed at a non-imaging position relative to the support platform; emitting a position marker from a light source disposed on the compression system towards the support platform, wherein the emitted position marker substantially visibly delineates a position of the active imaging area; rotating the x-ray source tube head to an imaging position; and performing an imaging procedure.
- 19.** The method of claim 18, wherein the first rotation position is a MLO imaging position.
- 20.** The method of claim 18, wherein the second rotation position is at a non-orthogonal angle to the support platform.
- 21.** The method of claim 18, wherein the active imaging area is based at least in part on a size, a shape, and/or a position of the compression paddle.
-