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Asymmetrically expandable cage

Abstract

The present disclosure describes an intervertebral implant having a laterovertically-expanding shell operable for a reversible expansion from a collapsed state into an expanded state, the laterovertically-expanding shell having one or more connectors, and a pair of lateral extension elements that function to laterally expand the footprint of the implant within an intervertebral disc space.

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Background/Summary

CROSS-REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS (1) This application is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 17/546,816 filed Dec. 9, 2021, which was a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 16/633,523, filed Jan. 23, 2020, which is a national stage entry of international application no. PCT/US2018/043517, filed Jul. 24, 2018, which claims the benefit of U.S. provisional application No. 62/536,335, filed Jul. 24, 2017, each application of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD

(1) The present disclosure relates generally to the field of medical devices, and more specifically to expandable intervertebral implants.

BACKGROUND

(2) The disc space or intervertebral space needs to be stabilized after the core of the disc is removed in a spinal fusion procedure. The emptied disc space is often larger than the size of the access corridor, and thus the fusion implants that are typically used are too small to fill the entire disc space. This may result in long-term instability. Ideally, the fusion implant is large enough in width to fill the disc space and as wide as possible to distribute the high compressive in vivo load over a larger area to avoid subsidence which leads to instability. Furthermore, spinal fusion implants sometimes back out of the disc over time after surgery and this can cause harm to the patient. Therefore it is desired that there is an implant that can collapse to a small size to be inserted through a small access opening in the patient, and then expand both vertically and horizontally to fill up the disc space as much as possible and in effect render a more stable fusion implant long-term as well as one that does not back out because it is expanded larger than the access corridor. Oftentimes, the opening in the disc (called an annulotomy) has the height of the space between the vertebra but has a width that is much smaller than the width of the space inside the disc. The ability to expand horizontally helps to make it more difficult for the implant to back out of the disc. During the horizontal expansion step, the inserter that holds the implant can be pushed towards sensitive anatomical structures such as nerves. There are no implants on the market that can expand horizontally and vertically while maintaining good strength and stability long-term while avoiding instrument shifting during expansion that may impinge on sensitive anatomy like nerves.

(3) Furthermore, because so many different widths and heights are needed for a conventional implant, it is not cost effective to mold because of need develop so many expensive molds. Machining is there for used but is less consistent, reliable and expensive.

(4) Existing spinal fusion implants are either made of a polymer such as Polyether Ether Ketone (PEEK), metal such as titanium, or ceramic such as silicon nitride. Some are made by a combination thereof. Some implants are made of PEEK coated with metal particles such as titanium or silver based due to the belief that the metal coatings are more osteogenic. However, the coatings can slough off from shear during implantation or in vivo and can cause adverse reactions. Also the implant is mostly radiolucent so it is hard to visualize on x-ray the full extent of the

implant profile. Some implants are made of all metal or ceramics. These implants have shown improvement in surface fusion but they are both more stiff than bony endplate and can cause stress shielding. The all-metal implants are radiopaque for the most part and makes it hard to visualize bony fusion through the center of cage on post-operative follow up scans. There are implants made of PEEK in the middle with endplates that are slabs of porous metal. These are machined and assembled. Due to the aforementioned problems presented, there is a need for an implant that is expandable in 2 or more directions and with bone like stiffness and highly osteogenic surface interfacing with the endplate. It should also be designed to enable highly repeatable and cost effective fabrication methods.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

(1) Many advantages of the present disclosure will be apparent to those skilled in the art with a reading of this specification in conjunction with the attached drawings, wherein like reference numerals are applied to like elements and wherein:

(2) FIG. 1 is a plan view, a transverse section, of one example of a surgical implant showing a collapsed shell assembly inserted within a prepared intervertebral disc space, prior to insertion of the shim, according to an embodiment;

(3) FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the surgical implant of FIG. 1;

(4) FIG. 3 is a plan view, a transverse section, of the surgical implant of FIG. 1 with the shim fully inserted into the shell;

(5) FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the surgical implant of FIG. 3;

(6) FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a guide element forming part of the surgical implant of FIG. 1;

(7) FIG. 6 is a plan view of the guide element of FIG. 5;

(8) FIG. 7 is a side plan view of the guide element of FIG. 5;

(9) FIGS. 8-9 are perspective views of a shim forming part of the surgical implant of FIG. 1;

(10) FIGS. 10-12 are various plan views of the surgical implant of FIG. 1;

(11) FIG. 13 is a perspective view of the shim of FIG. 8 coupled with a guide element of FIG. 5;

(12) FIGS. 14A and 14B provide a perspective view of another example of a surgical implant delivered using an anterolateral approach, according to an embodiment, FIG. 14A showing a collapsed shell assembly inserted within a prepared intervertebral disc space, prior to insertion of the shim and FIG. 14B showing the shim fully expanded in the shell;

(13) FIG. 15 shows how the device provides a clinical safety advantage by avoiding a need to maneuver around tissue in the region of the annulotomy to position the implant, according to an embodiment of the invention;

(14) FIGS. 16-17 are perspective views of a shell assembly forming part of another example of a surgical implant, according to an embodiment;

(15) FIG. 18 is an exploded perspective view of the shell assembly of FIG. 16, according to an embodiment; and,

(16) FIG. 19 is a perspective view of the shell assembly of FIG. 16 prior to coupling with a shim element, according to an embodiment.

SUMMARY

(17) The teachings provided herein include expandable intervertebral implants. In some embodiments, a surgical implant configured for placement within an intervertebral space of a subject is provided.

(18) The surgical implant can include, for example, a laterovertically-expanding shell configured to create an intervertebral scaffolding system in vivo, the shell having a first body portion configured to engage a first vertebral endplate and a second body portion configured to engage a second

vertebral endplate, the shell further including a collapsed state and an expanded state; a guide element that slideably engages with the distal region of the shell, and is configured for retaining the shell from lateral movement that exceeds the expanded state; and a shim configured for in vivo introduction into the shell when the shell is in a collapsed state and thereafter causing expansion of the shell to an expanded state, the expansion occurring in a lateral direction and a vertical direction; wherein the shell is configured to extend asymmetrically in the lateral direction.

(19) In some embodiments, the first body portion includes a first elongated support beam extending parallel to a first longitudinal axis of the shell, a second elongated support beam laterally displaced from the first elongated support beam and extending parallel to the longitudinal axis, and a plurality of connectors extending between and the first and second elongated support beams. In some embodiments, the second body portion includes a third elongated support beam extending parallel to a second longitudinal axis of the shell, a fourth elongated support beam laterally displaced from the third elongated support beam and extending parallel to the longitudinal axis, and a plurality of connectors extending between and the third and fourth elongated support beams.

(20) In some embodiments, one of the first and second support beams includes a first lateral extension element extending in a direction away from the other of the first and second support beams, the first lateral extension element having a length dimension extending at least substantially the length of the respective support beam and a width dimension extending laterally away from the edge of the respective support beam. In some embodiments, one of the third and fourth support beams includes a second lateral extension element extending in a direction away from the other of the third and fourth support beams, the second lateral extension element having a length dimension extending substantially the length of the respective support beam and a width dimension extending laterally away from the edge of the respective support beam. In some embodiments, the first and second lateral extension elements extend in the same direction.

(21) In some embodiments, the respective support beams having the first and second lateral extension elements each have a width dimension that is between 1.2 and 10 times greater than the width dimensions of the other respective support beams.

(22) The shell can comprise structural elements that are interconnected, for example, using connectors. The connectors can be bowed, for example, in a proximal direction. In some embodiments, the bowed connectors maintain a curved orientation at the apex of the bowed shape to prevent, or at least inhibit, any stress cracking that may otherwise occur.

(23) The shell can be made of a combination of materials that are combined in layers to impart desired physical characteristics to the implant. In some embodiments, the shell can be made from at least one of a polymer, metal alloy, and titanium alloy. In some embodiments, the shell includes a central layer and a plurality of surface layers, the central layer and surface layers comprising different materials. In some embodiments, the central layer is made from a medical grade polymer. In some embodiments, the medical grade polymer is one of PEEK, polyetherimide, polyimide, and polyamide. In some embodiments, the surface layers are made from at least one of titanium alloy, cobalt chromium, stainless steel, ceramic, silicon nitride, and hydroxyapatite.

(24) As such, in some embodiments, the laterover vertically expanding shell can be configured to create an intervertebral scaffolding system in vivo, the shell having a first body portion configured to engage a first vertebral endplate and a second body portion configured to engage a second vertebral endplate, the shell further including a collapsed state and an expanded state; a guide element that slideably engages with the distal region of the shell, and is configured for retaining the shell from lateral movement that exceeds the expanded state; and a shim configured for in vivo introduction into the shell when the shell is in a collapsed state and thereafter causing expansion of the shell to an expanded state, the expansion occurring in a lateral direction and a vertical direction; wherein the shell includes a central layer and a plurality of surface layers, the central layer and surface layers comprising different materials. The central layer can be made from a medical grade polymer, for example. In some embodiments, the medical grade polymer can include one of PEEK,

polyetherimide, polyimide, and polyamide. The surface layers can be made from at least one of titanium alloy, cobalt chromium, stainless steel, ceramic, silicon nitride, and hydroxyapatite. The surface layers can have at least one of a roughened and porous texture. And, in some embodiments, the surface layers are associated with the central layer using at least one of pressure, heat melting, snap fit engagement, and adhesive.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

(25) Illustrative embodiments of the invention are described below. In the interest of clarity, not all features of an actual implementation are described in this specification. It will of course be appreciated that in the development of any such actual embodiment, numerous implementation-specific decisions must be made to achieve the developers' specific goals, such as compliance with system-related and business-related constraints, which will vary from one implementation to another. Moreover, it will be appreciated that such a development effort might be complex and time-consuming, but would nevertheless be a routine undertaking for those of ordinary skill in the art having the benefit of this disclosure. The surgical implant and related methods disclosed herein boasts a variety of inventive features and components that warrant patent protection, both individually and in combination.

(26) The surgical implants can be specifically configured to have a shape upon expansion that is asymmetric within the intervertebral space. For example, the surgical implant can be biased in shape, extending further in a first lateral direction than in a second lateral direction to bias the profile, or footprint, of the surgical implant in the first lateral direction in the intervertebral space. This asymmetry can, for example, provide additional scaffolding support to vertical forces in the intervertebral space and/or prevent, or at least inhibit, a migration of the surgical implant in the intervertebral space after implanting it in the subject. The asymmetric shape can be biased in any direction desired including, but not limited to, a direction that is on a side of the implant positioned medial in an intervertebral space, a direction that is on a side of the implant positioned posterior in an intervertebral space, a direction that is on a side of the implant positioned anterior in an intervertebral space, or a direction that is on a side of the implant positioned lateral in an intervertebral space, or a direction representing an orientation that is a combination thereof.

(27) In some embodiments, the surgical implant can include, for example, a laterovertically-expanding shell configured to create an intervertebral scaffolding system in vivo, the shell having a first body portion configured to engage a first vertebral endplate and a second body portion configured to engage a second vertebral endplate, the shell further including a collapsed state and an expanded state; a guide element that slideably engages with the distal region of the shell, and is configured for retaining the shell from lateral movement that exceeds the expanded state; and, a shim configured for in vivo introduction into the shell when the shell is in a collapsed state and thereafter causing expansion of the shell to an expanded state, the expansion occurring in a lateral direction and a vertical direction; wherein the shell is configured to extend asymmetrically in the lateral direction.

(28) One of skill will appreciate that the terms “lateral”, “vertical”, and “laterovertical” can be used as terms of relative orientation, meaning that the surgical implant can expand in at two directions that are normal to each other. In some embodiments, the term “vertical” can be used herein synonymously with “cephalocaudal”, “craniocaudal”, and the like, meaning that the implant expands at least substantially in the vertical direction of the spine, at least substantially in the directions of the coronal and sagittal planes of the subject, expanding the intervertebral space by applying a force to the two vertebral endplates that define the upper and lower borders of the intervertebral space. In some embodiments, the term “lateral” can be used herein synonymously with the term “transverse”, which encompasses the terms “mediolateral”, “anteromedial”, “posteromedial”, and the like, meaning that the implant expands in any direction that is at least substantially in the direction of a transverse plane of the subject. This can include, for example, expanding the implant toward the annular walls of the disc space, in some embodiments, and away

from the annular walls in some embodiments. Likewise, the term “lateroververtical” can be used, for example, to refer to an expansion that is at least substantially in the “cephalocaudal” or “craniocaudal” direction combined with an expansion that is at least substantially in the direction of a transverse plane, noting that the transverse plane can be used relative to the subject as a whole, or relative to an anatomical position within the subject, which transverse plane relative to the anatomical position can vary a bit in direction due to normal anatomical variation, or perhaps a disease or disorder.

(29) The term “at least substantially” will be understood by those of skill in the art as a term that provides for some variance from a strict and narrowly construed direction, essentially meaning “generally in that direction” or “generally in that orientation”. This is because, although the orientation of the implant or its movement is intended to be in a particular direction, a pure orientation or direction is often not reasonable to expect in practical application within a subject, and a reasonable amount of deviation in that direction is understood and acceptable by those of skill for the purposes of understanding the scope of, and practicing, the teachings provided herein. In some embodiments, for example, an orientation is at least substantially on a plane or a direction when it's orientation deviates from the plane or direction by no more than 40%, no more than 30%, no more than 20%, no more than 10%, no more than 5%, no more than 1%, or no more than any amount or range therein in increments of 0.1%. In some embodiments, the vertical expansion of the vertebral implant in an intervertebral space can occur, for example, in a direction that is still “craniocaudal” and is understood to be at least substantially parallel to the vertical axis of the intervertebral disc space, for example, such that the vertical axis of the intervertebral disc space is defined by a line connecting the center of the top vertebral endplate and the center of the bottom vertebral endplate defining that intervertebral space when combined with the annulus surrounding the space. Likewise, in some embodiments, the lateral expansion of the vertebral implant in an intervertebral space can occur, for example, in a direction that is at least substantially parallel to any direction of a transverse plane through the intervertebral disc space. In some embodiments, the transverse plane of the intervertebral disc space can be defined by a transverse section of the annulus of the disc rather than a transverse section of the subject, the transverse plane being placed equidistant between the top vertebral endplate and the bottom vertebral endplate, the transverse section of the disc space varying from a transverse section of the subject as a whole, as it is tilted to account for any lordosis, kyphosis, scoliosis, or bone degeneration or disease which can alter the relative position of the intervertebral space within the subject from an otherwise pure interpretation of the orientation intended.

(30) In some embodiments, the first body portion includes a first elongated support beam extending at least substantially parallel to a first longitudinal axis of the shell, a second elongated support beam laterally displaced from the first elongated support beam and extending at least substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis, and a plurality of connectors extending between and the first and second elongated support beams. In some embodiments, the second body portion includes a third elongated support beam extending at least substantially parallel to a second longitudinal axis of the shell, a fourth elongated support beam laterally displaced from the third elongated support beam and extending at least substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis, and a plurality of connectors extending between and the third and fourth elongated support beams. In some embodiments, the first longitudinal axis of the shell can be at least substantially parallel to the second longitudinal axis. And, in some embodiments, the first longitudinal axis can be at least substantially coincident with the second longitudinal axis. In embodiments where the first longitudinal axis is at least substantially coincident with the second longitudinal axis, this can be referred to as a central, longitudinal axis. In some embodiments, the central longitudinal axis can be identified as being at least substantially central to the positions of the first, second, third, and fourth support beams. In some embodiments, the central longitudinal axis can be identified as being at least substantially central to a lumen defined by the positions of the first, second, third, and fourth support beams.

(31) In some embodiments, one of the first and second support beams includes a first lateral extension element extending in a direction away from the other of the first and second support beams, the first lateral extension element having a length dimension extending at least substantially the length of the respective support beam and a width dimension extending laterally away from the edge of the respective support beam. In such embodiments, the first and second support beams can be oriented to a first plane, and the lateral extension element extends away from either the first or second support beam in a direction that is at least substantially parallel to the first plane and away from the other of the first and second support beams. Likewise, in some embodiments, one of the third and fourth support beams includes a second lateral extension element extending in a direction away from the other of the third and fourth support beams, the second lateral extension element having a length dimension extending substantially the length of the respective support beam and a width dimension extending laterally away from the edge of the respective support beam. Likewise, the third and fourth support beams can be oriented to a second plane, and the lateral extension element extends away from either the third or fourth support beam in a direction that is at least substantially parallel to the second plane and away from the other of the third and fourth support beams. In some embodiments, the first and second lateral extension elements extend at least substantially in the same direction.

(32) In some embodiments, the respective support beams having the first and second lateral extension elements each have a width dimension that is at least 20% greater than the other to provide an asymmetrical extension of the shell in the desired direction in an intervertebral space. In some embodiments, the width of a support can range from about 1.2 to about 10 times greater than the width dimension of the other respective support beam, or any range therein. In some embodiments, the lateral extension element of one beam can be about 1.2, about 2×, about 3×, about 4×, about 5×, about 6×, about 7×, about 8×, about 9×, or about 10×, or any amount or range therein in increments of 0.1×, greater than the other support beam in order to create the desired asymmetry or bias of the surgical implant. In some embodiments, the extension is at least substantially as long as the support beam from which it extends. In some embodiments, a plurality of extensions are provided from the support beam, rather than a single extension.

(33) The shell can comprise structural elements that are interconnected, for example, using connectors. In some embodiments, the connectors are flexible and configured for expansion and collapse of the shell. The connectors can be referred to as struts, in some embodiments. The connectors can be bowed, for example, in a proximal direction or a distal direction. In some embodiments, the bowed connectors maintain a curved orientation at the apex of the bowed shape to prevent, or at least inhibit, any stress cracking that may otherwise occur. In some embodiments, the connectors flex in, on, or at least substantially parallel to, a plane that intersects the longitudinal axes of the support beams that are interconnected by the connectors.

(34) The shell can be made of a combination of materials that are combined in layers to impart desired physical characteristics to the implant, such as a particular configuration that imparts a desired strength, rigidity, flexibility, friction, biocompatibility, and/or osteogenicity, ease of manufacture, and the like, or any combination thereof, to any one or any combination of elements that compose the shell. In some embodiments, the shell is made from at least one of a polymer, metal alloy, and titanium alloy. In some embodiments, a first layer of the shell can comprise a polymer, a second layer can comprise a metal, and the first and second layers can be adjacent to one another. In some embodiments, a first layer of the shell can comprise a first polymer, a second layer can comprise a second polymer, and the first and second layers can be adjacent to one another. In some embodiments, a first layer of the shell can comprise a first metal, a second layer can comprise a second metal, and the first and second layers can be adjacent to one another. In some embodiments, the shell includes a central layer and a plurality of surface layers, the central layer and surface layers comprising different materials. In some embodiments, the central layer is made from a medical grade polymer. In some embodiments, the medical grade polymer is one of

PEEK, polyetherimide, polyimide, and polyamide. In some embodiments, the surface layers are made from at least one of titanium alloy, cobalt chromium, stainless steel, ceramic, silicon nitride, and hydroxyapatite.

(35) As such, in some embodiments, the laterovertically expanding shell is configured to create an intervertebral scaffolding system in vivo, the shell having a first body portion configured to engage a first vertebral endplate and a second body portion configured to engage a second vertebral endplate, the shell further including a collapsed state and an expanded state; a guide element that slidably engages with the distal region of the shell, and is configured for retaining the shell from lateral movement that exceeds the expanded state; and a shim configured for in vivo introduction into the shell when the shell is in a collapsed state and thereafter causing expansion of the shell to an expanded state, the expansion occurring in a lateral direction and a vertical direction; wherein the shell includes a central layer and a plurality of surface layers, the central layer and surface layers comprising different materials. The central layer can be made from a medical grade polymer, for example. In some embodiments, the medical grade polymer can include one of PEEK, polyetherimide, polyimide, and polyamide. The surface layers can be made from at least one of titanium alloy, cobalt chromium, stainless steel, ceramic, silicon nitride, and hydroxyapatite.

(36) In any of the embodiments taught herein, the implant can have surface layers with at least one of a roughened and porous texture, for example, which can impart a morphology having a desired characteristic including, but not limited to, osteogenesis, osteoinduction, osteointegration, and an increase in implant surface area which can be used to facilitate the same. And, in some embodiments, the surface layers are associated with the central layer using at least one of pressure, heat melting, snap fit engagement, and adhesive.

(37) FIGS. 1-13 illustrate an example of a surgical implant **10**, according to an embodiment. By way of example, the surgical implant **10** of the present disclosure is a spinal fusion implant that may be inserted into an intervertebral disc space during a minimally invasive or open spinal fusion surgery, from any suitable approach (e.g. anterior, posterior, lateral, postero-lateral, etc). After insertion into the disc space, the surgical implant **10** of the present disclosure is expandable in multiple directions (e.g. vertically and laterally) to create an improved footprint within the disc space, which in turn enhances the stability of the fusion surgery. Multiple graft windows allow for the use of bone graft material (e.g. biologic bone, artificial bone matrix, collagen, protein, etc.). By way of example, the surgical implant **10** of the present disclosure includes a multi-axially expandable, unibody structure having a generally rectangular cross-sectional shape and a central longitudinal axis L.sub.1 parallel to a long edge of the implant **10**. The surgical implant **10** of the present example includes a shell assembly **12** that is inserted into a surgically prepared target disc space and a shim **14** that is thereafter inserted into the shell assembly **12** to facilitate expansion of the shell assembly **12** within the target disc space. When fully inserted into the shell assembly **12**, the shim **14** securely couples with the shell assembly **12** to provide stability to the expanded construct.

(38) FIGS. 1-2 illustrate a collapsed shell assembly **12** inserted within a transverse section of a prepared intervertebral disc space **5**, prior to insertion of the shim **14**, while FIGS. 3-4 illustrate an expanded shell assembly **12** within the disc space **5** with the shim **14** fully inserted. FIG. 1 shows the relative orientation of the view within the subject receiving the implant, illustrating the cephalocaudal (or craniocaudal) directions, as well as the anterior, posterior, medial, and lateral directions within the subject. FIG. 2 shows the posterolateral approach that is used to insert the implant, relative to the orientation of the subject, as well as the proximal-to-distal insertion of the implant, relative to the orientation of the implant itself. FIGS. 3 and 4 show the lateromedial bias to the asymmetric profile of the implant, relative to the orientation of the subject. By way of example, the shell assembly **12** includes a shell **16** and a guide element **18**. The shell **16** includes a first body portion **20**, second body portion **22**, leading (or “distal”) end **24**, and a trailing (or “proximal”) end **26**. When the surgical implant **10** has been implanted within an intervertebral disc space, the first

body portion **20** will contact an endplate of a first vertebral body and the second body portion **22** will contact an endplate of a second vertebral body. To clarify the orientation of the implantation relative to the subject and the implant description, FIG. **1** shows a posterolateral approach relative to the subject but a proximal-to-distal insertion of the device, the implant extended with a medial, or posteromedial, bias, as used herein.

(39) The first body portion **20** includes a first elongated support beam **28** extending parallel to the longitudinal axis L.sub.1, a second elongated support beam **30** extending parallel to the longitudinal axis L.sub.1, and a plurality of flexion struts extending between and connecting the first and second elongated support beams **28**, **30**. The example shown by way of illustration includes first and second flexion struts **32**, **34** positioned directly between the first and second support beams **28**, **30**, and a third flexion strut **36** positioned at the trailing end **26**, however any number of flexion struts may be used. Each of the first and second elongated support beams **28**, **30** includes an outer surface **38** adapted to interface with the body tissue (e.g. vertebral endplate). The outer surface **38** may include any number of anti-migration features **40** to ensure the implant **10** remains in place after insertion into the patient's intervertebral disc space. By way of example, the anti-migration features **40** may include a plurality of teeth (see e.g. FIG. **1**), spikes, surface roughening, friction elements, and the like.

(40) The second elongated support beam **30** includes a lateral extension **42** that extends away from the longitudinal axis L.sub.1 of the implant **10**. The lateral extension **42** expands the width dimension of the second elongated support beam **30**, enabling it to protrude into the disc space **5** (after insertion) to expand the footprint of the implant **10** within the disc space, giving further stability to the implanted construct. For example, for a posterior or posterolateral approach (such as the one shown by way of example in FIG. **1**), the increased wall thickness/lateral extension **42** is on the medial side. When the shim **14** is inserted to expand the shell **16** (FIGS. **3-4**), the shell **16** (or footprint thereof) can extend asymmetrically such the medial side expands more than the lateral side due to the thicker wall/lateral extension. Since the shell **16** extends more medially than laterally within the disc space, the shim **14** and insertion instrument (not shown) do not require repositioning in the body during placement, and are thus less likely to impinge upon adjacent nerve structure (for example the dura sac). Furthermore, by extending more medially, the implant **10** is positioned more centrally within the disc space, which is preferable for support of the disc for fusion purposes. By way of example, the thicker side (e.g. the second elongated support beam **30** with lateral extension **42**/increased thickness) may have a width dimension that is 1.2-10 times greater than the width dimension of the first elongated support beam **28**.

(41) In the current example embodiment, the shell **16** is made from polyetheretherketone (PEEK), however any suitable medical grade material may be used to manufacture the shell **16**, including but not limited to polymers (e.g. PEEK, polyetherimide (Ultem), polyimide, polyamide), metal alloys (e.g. cobalt chromium), and/or titanium alloys (e.g. Ti6Al4V, nickel titanium). In instances in which a radiolucent polymer (e.g. PEEK) is used, the implant may not be visible during fluoroscopic imaging (during surgery or post-op). Thus, a plurality of radiographic markers **44** may be embedded within the first body portion to aid with intraoperative (and post-operative) visibility of the implant, to ensure proper positioning and locking of the final construct before completion of the surgery. By way of example, the radiographic markers **44** are positioned near the proximal and distal ends of the first and second elongated support beams **28**, **30**, as shown in FIG. **1**. The radiographic markers **44** may be made from any suitable radiopaque material (e.g. titanium, tantalum, etc).

(42) The first and second flexion struts **32**, **34**, extend between the first and second support beams **28**, **30**, however each of the flexion struts **32**, **34** has a length that is greater than the distance between the first and second support beams **28**, **30**. As such, the flexion struts **32**, **34** are bowed in a proximal direction to fit between the support beams **28**, **30** without breaking the plane of the support beams **28**, **30**. The bowed flexion struts **32**, **34** maintain a curved orientation at the apex of

the bowed shape (as opposed to a sharp angle), which is located at the midpoint of the distance between the first and second support beams **28, 30**, to prevent stress cracking. By way of example, the bowed shape may be generally “U”-shaped, “C”-shaped, “S”-shaped, “W”-shaped, or sinusoidal. The flexion struts **32, 34** are generally uniform in thickness in the proximal-distal direction however the strut thickness may be increased at either end of the struts near the junctions with the first and second support beams **28, 30**. By way of example, the strut thickness in the proximal-distal direction of the shell may be between 0.1-2 mm and preferably 0.2-1 mm. This amount of thickness allows for bending of the struts during collapsing or expansion of the shell **16** without excessive strain on the struts. The struts **32, 34** may have a thickness in the range of 2-12 mm in the transverse direction (perpendicular to the proximal-distal axis). This increased thickness in the transverse direction is desired to maintain a high structural stiffness and strength in the transverse direction so that the transverse cross section shape is maintained during and after insertion into the disc space, during implant expansion when the shim **14** is inserted into the shell **16**, and after the surgery when the patient resumes normal activity.

(43) The third flexion strut **36** is attached at either end to the proximal ends of the first and second support beams **28, 30**. As with the first and second flexion struts **32, 34**, the third flexion strut **36** has a length that is greater than the distance between the first and second support beams **28, 30**. As such, the third flexion strut **36** is bowed in a proximal direction. By way of example, a “bowed” shape may be generally “U”-shaped, “C”-shaped, “S”-shaped, “W”-shaped, or sinusoidal. The flexion strut **36** can be uniform in thickness in the proximal-distal direction however the strut thickness may be increased at either end of the strut near the junctions with the first and second support beams **28, 30**. By way of example, the third strut **36** may have similar thickness in the proximal-distal direction and transverse direction as described above in reference to the first and second flexion struts **32, 34**. In some embodiments, the flexion strut **36** can be configured to maintain a curved orientation at the apex of the bowed shape to prevent stress cracking, and in some embodiments, the third flexion strut **36** can be designed to be drawn to a tension upon expansion, and it can be configured to be elastic or inelastic.

(44) In some embodiments, the second body portion **22** can be essentially a mirror image copy of the first body portion **20**. It should be understood, for example, that all of the features described above in relation to the first body portion **20** can be included in mirror image fashion on the second body portion **22**. The second body portion **22** can include a third elongated support beam **46** extending parallel to the longitudinal axis L.sub.1, a fourth elongated support beam **48** extending parallel to the longitudinal axis L.sub.1, and a plurality of flexion struts extending between and connecting the third and fourth elongated support beams **46, 48**. The example shown by way of illustration includes first and second flexion struts **50, 52** positioned directly between the third and fourth support beams **59, 52**, and a third flexion strut **54** positioned at the trailing end **26**, however any number of flexion struts may be used. Each of the third and fourth elongated support beams **46, 48** includes an outer surface **56** adapted to interface with the body tissue (e.g. vertebral endplate). The outer surface **56** may include a any number of anti-migration features **58** to ensure the implant **10** remains in place after insertion into the patient's intervertebral disc space. By way of example, the anti-migration features **58** may include a plurality of teeth (see e.g. FIG. 1), spikes, surface roughening, friction elements, and the like.

(45) The fourth elongated support beam **48** in the current example includes a lateral extension **60** that extends away from the longitudinal axis L.sub.1 of the implant **10**. The lateral extension **60** expands the width dimension of the fourth elongated support beam **48**, enabling it to protrude into the disc space **5** (after insertion) to expand the footprint of the implant **10** within the disc space, giving further stability to the implanted construct. For example, for a posterior or postero-lateral approach (such as the one shown by way of example in FIG. 1), the increased wall thickness/lateral extension **60** is on the medial side. When the shim **14** is inserted to expand the shell **16** (FIGS. 3-4), the shell **16** (or footprint thereof) can expand asymmetrically such the medial side expands more

than the lateral side due to the thicker wall/lateral extension. Since the shell **16** extends more medially than laterally within the disc space in this embodiment, the shim **14** and insertion instrument (not shown) do not require repositioning with instruments in the body during placement, and are thus less likely to impinge upon adjacent nerve structure (for example the dura sac). Furthermore, by expanding more medially, the implant **10** is positioned more centrally within the disc space, which is preferable for support of the disc for fusion purposes. By way of example, the thicker side (e.g. the fourth elongated support beam **48** with lateral extension **60**/increased thickness) may have a width dimension that is 1.2-10 times greater than the width dimension of the third elongated support beam **46**.

(46) A plurality of radiographic markers **62** may be embedded within the second body portion **22** to aid with intraoperative (and post-operative) visibility of the implant, to ensure proper positioning and locking of the final construct before completion of the surgery. By way of example, the radiographic markers **62** are positioned near the proximal and distal ends of the third and fourth elongated support beams **46, 48**. The radiographic markers **62** may be made from any suitable radiopaque material (e.g. titanium, tantalum, etc).

(47) The first and second flexion struts **50, 52** extend between the third and fourth support beams **46, 48**, however each of the flexion struts **50, 52** has a length that is greater than the distance between the third and fourth support beams **46, 48**. As such, the flexion struts **50, 52** are bowed in a proximal direction to fit between the support beams **46, 48** without breaking the plane of the support beams **46, 48**. The bowed flexion struts **50, 52** maintain a curved orientation at the apex of the bowed shape (as opposed to a sharp angle), which is located at the midpoint of the distance between the third and fourth support beams **46, 48**, to prevent stress cracking. By way of example, the bowed shape may be generally “U”-shaped, “C”-shaped, “S”-shaped, “W”-shaped, or sinusoidal. The flexion struts **50, 52** are generally uniform in thickness in the proximal-distal direction however the strut thickness may be increased at either end of the struts near the junctions with the third and fourth support beams **46, 48**. By way of example, the first and second flexion struts **50, 52** of the second body portion **22** may have similar thickness in the proximal-distal direction and transverse direction as described above in reference to the first and second flexion struts **32, 34** of the first body portion **20**.

(48) The third flexion strut **54** of the second body portion **22** is attached at either end to the proximal ends of the third and fourth support beams **46, 48**. As with the first and second flexion struts **50, 52**, the third flexion strut **54** has a length that is greater than the distance between the third and fourth support beams **46, 48**. As such, the third flexion strut **54** is bowed in a proximal direction. The bowed flexion strut **54** maintains a curved orientation at the apex of the bowed shape to prevent stress cracking. By way of example, the bowed shape may be generally “U”-shaped, “C”-shaped, “S”-shaped, “W”-shaped, or sinusoidal. The third flexion strut **54** is generally uniform in thickness in the proximal-distal direction however the strut thickness may be increased at either end of the strut near the junctions with the third and fourth support beams **46, 48**. By way of example, the third flexion strut **54** of the second body portion **22** may have similar thickness in the proximal-distal direction and transverse direction as described above in reference to the first and second flexion struts **32, 34** of the first body portion **20**.

(49) The first and second body portions **20, 22** are connected to one another via a plurality of lateral flexion struts **63**, as best viewed in FIG. **4**. By way of example only, each side has a group of three lateral flexion struts **63**, however more or less may be included without departing from the scope of this disclosure. One group of lateral flexion struts **63** extends between the first support beam **28** and the third support beam **46**, and the other group of lateral flexion struts **63** extends between the second support beam **30** and the fourth support beam **48**. Each of the flexion struts **63** has a length that is greater than the distance between the respective support beams. As such, the flexion struts **63** are bowed in either a proximal or distal direction to fit between the support beams without breaking the plane of the support beams. The bowed flexion struts **63** maintain a curved

orientation at the apex of the bowed shape (as opposed to a sharp angle), which is located at the midpoint of the distance between the first and second body portions **20**, **22**, to prevent stress cracking. By way of example, the bowed shape may be generally “U”-shaped, “C”-shaped, “S”-shaped, “W”-shaped, or sinusoidal. The flexion struts **63** are generally uniform in thickness in the proximal-distal direction. By way of example, the strut thickness in the proximal-distal direction, or longitudinal thickness, may be between 0.1-2 mm and preferably 0.2-1 mm. This amount of thickness allows for bending of the struts during collapsing or expansion of the shell **16** without excessive strain on the struts. The struts **63** may have a thickness in the range of 2-12 mm in the transverse direction (perpendicular to the proximal-distal axis). This increased thickness in the transverse direction is desired to maintain a high structural stiffness and strength in the transverse direction so that the transverse cross section shape is maintained during and after insertion into the disc space, during implant expansion when the shim **14** is inserted into the shell **16**, and after the surgery when the patient resumes normal activity. As taught herein, the ratio of longitudinal thickness to transverse thickness of the struts can be configured, in some embodiments, to add a particular strength to the connectors in order to maintain the shape of the shell.

(50) In the current example, the leading end **24** comprises four distal panels **64**, **66**, **68**, **70** that, while the implant **10** is in an initial, collapsed state (e.g. as it would be during the insertion process), are arranged in such close proximity to one another so as to create a solid wall at the leading end. Each of the four distal panels **64**, **66**, **68**, **70** has a generally rectangular perimeter and is arranged perpendicular to the longitudinal axis L.sub.1. Each of the four panels is integrally formed with an extension arm that extends distally from one of the aforementioned elongated support beams. For example, a first distal panel **64** is connected to the first elongated support beam **28** by way of a first extension arm **72**. A second distal panel **66** is connected to the second elongated support beam **30** by way of a second extension arm **74**. A third distal panel **68** is connected to the third elongated support beam **46** by way of a third extension arm **76**. A fourth distal panel **70** is connected to the fourth elongated support beam **48** by way of a fourth extension arm **78**. The distal panels **64**, **66**, **68**, **70** each include a smooth outer leading surface that is at least partially tapered to provide for easier insertion into the disc space. When the implant is in the initial, collapsed state, the distal panels **64**, **66**, **68**, **70** align with the central flange **106** of the guide element **18** to form a closed surface to prevent seepage of body fluids and/or tissue into the implant during insertion into the target disc space.

(51) The trailing end **26** includes an aperture **80** that provides access to the central lumen **82** of the shell **16** when the implant is in a collapsed orientation, such as during insertion into the disc space. The aperture **80** is sized and configured to allow passage of any instrument used during insertion, including but not limited to an inserter, various cannula and the like, as well as graft material (e.g. biologic bone, synthetic bone matrix, collagen, protein, etc.) and the shim **14**. As such, unlike the “closed” configuration of the leading **24** discussed above, the trailing end **26** has an “open” configuration. The trailing end **26** further comprises four medial flanges **82**, **84**, **86**, **88** that, while the implant **10** is in an initial, collapsed state (e.g. as it would be during the insertion process), are arranged in such close proximity to one another so as to create a rigid crossbar at the trailing end **26** to increase implant stability. Each of the medial flanges **82**, **84**, **86**, **88** is generally perpendicular to the longitudinal axis L.sub.1 and extends inward relative to the implant. Each of the medial flanges **82**, **84**, **86**, **88** is integrally formed with one of the aforementioned elongated support beams. For example, a first medial flange **82** extends from the first elongated support beam. The second medial flange **84** extends from the second elongated support beam **30**. A third medial flange **86** extends from the third elongated support beam **46**. A fourth medial flange **88** extends from the fourth elongated support beam **48**. The medial flanges **82**, **84**, **86**, **88** each include a smooth tapered surface **90** on the edge of the aperture **80** to provide for easier insertion of the shim **14** into the shell **16**.

(52) The shell **16** further includes a central lumen **92** and a plurality of graft windows **94**. The

central lumen **92** extends through the shell **16** and is sized and configured to allow passage of any instrument used during insertion, including but not limited to an inserter, various cannula and the like, as well as graft material (e.g. biologic bone, synthetic bone matrix, collagen, protein, etc.) and the shim **14**. For example, the inserter passes through the aperture **80** and central lumen **92** and couples with the threaded post **102** of the guide element **18**, which is positioned near the leading end **24** of the implant. The graft windows **94** are relatively large and enable fusion of the graft material with tissue.

(53) FIGS. 5-7 illustrate the guide element **18** in further detail. By way of example, the guide element **18** according to the present example may be made from any suitable medical grade material, including but not limited to metal alloys (e.g. cobalt chromium), titanium alloys (e.g. Ti6Al4V, nickel titanium), or polymers (e.g. PEEK, polyetherimide (Ultem), polyimide, polyamide). The guide element **18** of the instant example includes a base **96**, a leading side **98**, and a trailing side **100**. The base includes a post **102** extending perpendicularly from the trailing side, the post **102** being configured to engage an instrument such as an inserter. By way of example, the post **102** includes threads **104** for threaded engagement, however other engagement mechanisms are possible, for example snap-fit, ratchet, and the like. The central flange **106** extends perpendicularly from the leading side **98** of the base **106**, has a height dimension that is substantially identical to the height dimension of the shell **16**, and at least a partial perimeter shape that coincides with the shape of the leading end **24** of the shell **16**. More specifically, the central flange **106** has a leading edge **108** including first and second tapered portions **110**, **112** that align with the tapered portions of the smooth outer leading surfaces of the distal panels **64**, **66**, **68**, **70**, so that when the implant is in the initial, collapsed state, the central flange **106** and distal panels **64**, **66**, **68**, **70** present a smooth, closed leading surface to facilitate advancement of the implant **10** into the target disc space.

(54) The guide element **18** further includes first and second lateral flanges **114**, **116** connected to the base **96** by way of first and second transverse connectors **118**, **120**. Each of the first and second lateral flanges **114**, **116** has a generally rectangular perimeter shape (for example, however other shapes are possible) and a height dimension identical to the height dimension of the central flange **106**. The distance between the central flange **106** and either of the first and second lateral flanges **114**, **116** determines the maximum distance that the shell **16** is able to expand laterally during shim insertion, as they provide a physical barrier for the first, second, third, and fourth extension arms **72**, **74**, **76**, **78**, respectively.

(55) In some embodiments, the guide element **18** is not attached to the shell **16** but is held in place by different elements during different stages of the insertion process. For example, prior to insertion, the guide element **18** can be held in place by the distal panels **64**, **66**, **68**, **70** of the collapsed implant (e.g. FIG. 1). During insertion (and more specifically during shim **14** insertion) the guide element **18** can be held in place due to its connection to the inserter (not shown). Finally, after insertion the guide element **18** can be held in place by the leading end **122** of the shim **14** (e.g. FIG. 13).

(56) FIGS. 8-13 illustrate one example of a shim **14** in further detail. The shim **14** drives the expansion of the shell **16** upon insertion of the shim **14** through the aperture **80** and into the central lumen **92**. The degree of shell **16** expansion in any direction is directly correlated to the size and shape of the shim **14**. Therefore, the shim may be provided in various sizes and shapes without departing from the scope of the disclosure. By way of example, the shim **14** includes a leading end **122**, trailing end **124**, top **126**, bottom **128**, a first side **130**, a second side **132**, and a central lumen **134**.

(57) The leading end **122** can be configured to be introduced into the aperture **80** at the trailing end **26** of the shell **16** and thereafter cause expansion of the shell **16** as the shim **14** continues advancement into the central lumen **92**. To facilitate this, each of the top **126**, bottom **128**, first side **130**, and second side **132** can include a tapered surface **136**, **138**, **140**, **142**, respectively, that tapers

distally toward the central longitudinal axis L.sub.1 of the implant **10**. The slope of the individual tapered surfaces determines how quickly the shell **16** expands to maximum height/width, and may be different for the different surfaces. Each tapered surface **136, 138, 140, 142** has a slot **144, 146, 148, 150** formed therein that is configured to receive a portion of the guide element **18** during coupling of the shim **14** and shell **16** (see e.g. FIG. **13**). More specifically, the tapered surface **136** can have a slot **144** configured to receive a first portion of the central flange **106**, the tapered surface **138** can have a slot **146** configured to receive a second portion of the central flange **106**, the tapered surface **140** can have a slot **148** configured to receive at least a portion of the first transverse connector **118**, and the tapered surface **142** can have a slot **150** configured to receive at least a portion of the second transverse connector **120**. The leading end **122** can further include an aperture **152** sized and configured to enable passage of the post **102** of the guide element **18** through the leading end **122** and into the central lumen **92** so that the post **102** is accessible for coupling with an insertion instrument (not shown) by way of aperture **80** and central lumen **92**.

(58) In some embodiments, the trailing end **124** includes an axial aperture **154** sized and configured to allow passage of one or more instruments (e.g. inserter, graft applicator, etc) through the trailing end **124** and into the central lumen **134**. The top surface **126** at the trailing end **124** includes one or more locking barbs **156**, a transverse recess **158** positioned posterior of the one or more locking barbs **156**, a posterior ramp **160** positioned posterior of the transverse recess **158**, and an engagement aperture **162** formed within the recess **158** for engaging with a surgical instrument such as a shim removal tool. Each locking barb **156** includes a ramped surface **164** ascending posteriorly to the edge of the recess **158**. The one or more locking barbs **156** and transverse recess **158** interact with the first and second medial flanges **82, 84** of the shell **16** to securely hold the shim **14** within the shell **16** after the shim **14** has been fully inserted. More specifically, as the trailing end **124** of the shim **14** passes into the central lumen **134**, the first and second medial flanges **82, 84** will slideably engage the ramped surface(s) **164** of the locking barb(s) **156** and be displaced slightly as the locking barb(s) **156** pass by, at which point the medial flanges **82, 84** will snap back into place within the transverse recess **158**. This action not only produces an audible and tactile “click”, but also places the medial flanges **82, 84** in position to prevent unwanted posterior migration of the shim **14** after the surgery has been completed. The surgeon may confirm that the shim **14** has been fully inserted by viewing the construct under fluoroscopy and ensuring that the locking barb(s) **156** are anterior of the two radiographic markers **44** positioned at the trailing end **26** of the shell **16** (see, e.g. FIGS. **12-13**).

(59) In some embodiments, the bottom surface **128** at the trailing end **124** can be essentially a mirror image of the top surface **126** at the trailing end **124**, and includes one or more locking barbs **166**, a transverse recess **168** positioned posterior of the one or more locking barbs **166**, a posterior ramp **170** positioned posterior of the transverse recess **168**, and an engagement aperture **172** formed within the recess **170** for engaging with a surgical instrument such as a shim removal tool. Each locking barb **166** includes a ramped surface **168** ascending posteriorly to the edge of the recess **168**. The one or more locking barbs **166** and transverse recess **168** interact with the third and fourth medial flanges **86, 88** of the shell **16** to securely hold the shim **14** within the shell **16** after the shim **14** has been fully inserted. More specifically, as the trailing end **124** of the shim **14** passes into the central lumen **134**, the third and fourth medial flanges **86, 88** will slideably engage the ramped surface(s) **174** of the locking barb(s) **166** and be displaced slightly as the locking barb(s) **166** pass by, at which point the medial flanges **86, 88** will snap back into place within the transverse recess **168**. This action not only produces an audible and tactile “click”, but also places the medial flanges **86, 88** in position to prevent unwanted posterior migration of the shim **14** after the surgery has been completed. The surgeon may confirm that the shim **14** has been fully inserted by viewing the construct under fluoroscopy and ensuring that the locking barb(s) **166** are anterior of the two radiographic markers **44** positioned at the trailing end **26** of the shell **16**.

(60) The first and second sides **130, 132** are smooth at the trailing end **124**. The shim **14** further

includes large top and bottom graft windows **176**, **178** formed in the top and bottom surfaces **126**, **128**, respectively, and side graft windows **180** formed in the first and second sides **130**, **132**. The graft windows allow for the use of bone graft material (e.g. biologic bone, artificial bone matrix, collagen, protein, etc.)

(61) It should be appreciated that, although the shim illustrated in FIGS. **8-13** is not “asymmetrical”, it can be in some embodiments. As can be appreciated, in some embodiments, the system can be designed such that the asymmetry of the shell is configured to extend out in the intervertebral space in a direction that is away from, or perhaps opposite, the location of the shell due to the entry profile. In some embodiments, an anterolateral approach results in an anterior location, or anchor point, of the shell upon entry, so the asymmetry can be configured to extend away from the anterior location, reaching to the medial region of the intervertebral space. In some embodiments, a posterolateral approach results in a lateral location of the shell upon entry, or anchor point, such that the asymmetry can be configured to extend away from the lateral location, reaching to the medial region of the intervertebral space. In some embodiments, if the anchor point of the shell is central, or medial, in the intervertebral space, and the asymmetry can be configured to extend away from the medial location in any direction, either anterior, posterior or lateral in the intervertebral space. In some embodiments, the shim can be configured to include a biased extension or asymmetry, for example, to take further advantage of providing support to the asymmetric extension of the shell from the entry location, or anchor point.

(62) FIGS. **14A** and **14B** illustrate an anterolateral approach to implanting the device, oriented relative to the subject, according to an embodiment. A transverse section of an intervertebral space having a surgical implant **210** is shown. It should be appreciated that the surgical implant **210**, however, is configured for use in either a posterolateral or anterolateral approach. FIG. **14A** illustrates a collapsed shell assembly **212** inserted within a prepared intervertebral disc space **5**, prior to insertion of the shim **214**, while FIG. **14B** illustrates an expanded shell assembly **212** within the disc space **5** with the shim **214** fully inserted. Interestingly, FIG. **14A** shows the process starting with a posteromedial bias in the collapsed state, already showing large coverage, and FIG. **14B** shows a more posterior bias with expansive coverage in the expanded state. The shell assembly **212** includes a shell **216** and a guide element **218**. It should be understood that the surgical implant **210** of the present example can be compared to the surgical implant **10** disclosed above with a few notable exceptions that will be described in detail below. For example, the shim **214** of the instant example can be compared to the shim **14** described above and the guide element **218** of the present example can be compared to the guide element **18** described above. As such, repeated disclosure of identical elements is avoided with the understanding that, generally speaking, an element or feature described in conjunction with a particular example embodiment may be applied to other example embodiments without departing from the scope of the disclosure.

(63) FIG. **15** shows how the device provides a clinical safety advantage by avoiding a need to maneuver around nerves in the region of the annulotomy to position the implant, according to an embodiment of the invention. FIG. **14A** illustrates how the shim **214**, and instrument that inserts the shim into the shell (not shown), are initially positioned asymmetrical to the disc during the implantation procedure, and are also inserted into the disc in an asymmetrical position at the onset of expansion. The problem with other fusion devices is that the positioning of such a device as desired in the intervertebral space can require substantial maneuvering to reposition the implant through the location of the annulotomy, and this can make it difficult-to-impossible to avoid an undesirable contact with surrounding tissue, such as nerve tissue, in the region of the annulotomy. As shown in FIGS. **14A** and **14B**, however, the expanding asymmetrical implants taught herein address the problem. FIG. **14A** shows an initial positioning of the collapsed shell before insertion of the shim, the collapsed shell already reaching in the direction of the desired medial location, and FIG. **14B** shows how the positioning of the shell has not changed and the expansion extended the implant further to the medial region of the intervertebral space. As such, the implant remained in its

initial location without further maneuvering, and a desired positioning of the implant was reached through expansion alone, without having to otherwise reposition instruments during implantation which can disturb and damage surrounding tissue. As can be seen, the asymmetric shims and methods taught herein allow the shim to be inserted to expand the shell, and the shell expanded, while the transverse width and position of elements outside the disc (shim and expansion instrument) remain fixed while the shell is expanding. FIG. 15 illustrates how there is an improved nerve safety in a posterolateral approach, where shim 277 has been inserted to asymmetric shell 210 using expansion instrument 266 through a region 299 that includes an annulotomy and nerve tissue in the region 299 which is undesirably close to the annulotomy and subject to risk of damage. Using the asymmetric implants and methods taught herein, however, the transverse width and position of elements outside the disc (shim and expansion instrument) remain fixed while the shell is expanding, allowing the implant to expand into the desired location in the intervertebral space without repositioning the expansion instrument and risking undue contact with the nerve tissue in the region of the annulotomy. One of skill will appreciate that the asymmetric implants and methods taught herein provide a great clinical safety advantage, as there are currently no implants on the market that can expand horizontally and vertically while maintaining good strength and stability long-term while avoiding instrument shifting during expansion that may impinge on sensitive anatomy like nerve tissue.

(64) The primary difference in surgical implant 210 as compared with the previously described surgical implant 10 lies in its size. Because the surgical implant 210 is configured for use with a lateral or anterolateral approach, a wider shell 216 may be used. Typically, the access is more anterior to avoid impinging on the psoas plexus nerves. This access direction also allows for greater access to the disc space 5. As a result, the implant 210 includes second and fourth elongated support beams 230, 248 having extra-wide lateral extensions 242, 260 so that, when the shim 214 is inserted to expand the shell 216, the shell expands asymmetrically with the greater expansion in the posterior direction. During shell expansion, the shim and insertion instrument will not migrate, or position themselves themselves in the process, posteriorly, greatly reducing the risk of impinging upon surrounding nerve tissue such as the psoas plexus. In the instant example, the second and fourth distal panels 266, 270 also have an increased width dimension.

(65) FIGS. 16-19 illustrate an example of a surgical implant 310 according to another embodiment. By way of example, the surgical implant 310 of the present disclosure is a spinal fusion implant that may be inserted into an intervertebral disc space during a minimally invasive or open spinal fusion surgery. After insertion into the disc space, the surgical implant 310 of the present disclosure is expandable in multiple directions to create an improved footprint within the disc space, which in turn enhances the stability of the fusion surgery. Multiple graft windows allow for the use of bone graft material (e.g. biologic bone, artificial bone matrix, collagen, protein, etc.). By way of example, the surgical implant 310 of the present disclosure includes a multi-axially expandable, unibody structure having a generally rectangular cross-sectional shape and a central longitudinal axis L.sub.1 parallel to a long edge of the implant 310, and has surface layers made of stronger material than the central layer, which has flexion elements. The surgical implant 310 of the present example includes a shell assembly 312 that is inserted into a surgically prepared target disc space and a shim 314 that is thereafter inserted into the shell assembly 312 to facilitate expansion of the shell assembly 312 within the target disc space. When fully inserted into the shell assembly 312, the shim 314 securely couples with the shell assembly 312 to provide stability to the expanded construct.

(66) By way of example, the shell assembly 312 includes a shell 316 and a guide element 318 (not shown). The shell 316 includes a central layer 320, a plurality of surface layers 322a-322d, leading (or “distal”) end 324, a trailing (or “proximal”) end 326, and a central lumen 327 extending therethrough. When the surgical implant 310 has been implanted within an intervertebral disc space, the top pair of surface layers 322a, 322b will contact an endplate of a first vertebral body

and the bottom pair of surface layers **322c**, **322d** will contact an endplate of a second vertebral body. The central lumen **327** extends through the shell **316** and is sized and configured to allow passage of any instrument used during insertion, including but not limited to an inserter, various cannula and the like, as well as graft material (e.g. biologic bone, synthetic bone matrix, collagen, protein, etc.) and the shim **314**.

(67) The central layer **320** includes first, second, third, and fourth elongated support beams **328**, **330**, **332**, **334**, each comprising a long edge of the generally rectangular box-like shape of the implant, and each support beam extending parallel to the longitudinal axis L.sub.1. The central layer **320** further comprises a plurality of transverse flexion struts **336**, proximal flexion struts **338**, and vertical flexion struts **340** extending between and connecting the various support beams to one another. The example shown by way of illustration includes a first pair of transverse flexion struts **336** positioned directly between the first and second support beams **328**, **330**, defining a top face **342** of the central layer **320**. A second pair of transverse flexion struts **336** positioned directly between the third and fourth support beams **332**, **334** defines a bottom face **344** of the central layer **320**. A first proximal flexion strut **338** connecting the first and second support beams **328**, **330** is positioned at the trailing end **326**, and a second proximal flexion strut **338** connecting the third and fourth support beams **332**, **334** is also positioned at the trailing end **326**. A first plurality of vertical flexion struts **340** (for example, three) is positioned between the first and third support beams **328**, **332**, defining a first lateral face **346** of the shell **316**. A second plurality of vertical flexion struts **340** is positioned between the second and fourth beams **330**, defining a second lateral face **348** of the shell **316**. The number and configuration of the various flexion struts is shown and described by way of example only, however any number of flexion struts may be used without departing from the scope of this disclosure.

(68) When the implant **310** is in a compressed position, each of the various flexion struts (transverse, proximal, and vertical) has a length dimension that is greater than the distance between the relevant support beams. As such, the transverse flexion struts **336** and vertical flexion struts **340** are bowed to fit between the corresponding support beams without breaking the plane of the support beams. The bowed flexion struts maintain a curved orientation at the apex of the bowed shape (as opposed to a sharp angle), which is located at the midpoint of the distance between the support beams, and preferably having a radius within the range of 0.005-0.5" (and more preferably 0.020-0.128") to prevent stress cracking. By way of example, the bowed shape may be generally "U"-shaped, "C"-shaped, "S"-shaped, "W"-shaped, or sinusoidal. The transverse flexion struts **336** are bowed in a proximal direction and are generally uniform in thickness in the proximal-distal direction however the strut thickness may be increased at either end of the struts near the junctions with support beams. The vertical flexion struts **340** may be bowed in a proximal or distal direction and have a uniform thickness in the proximal-distal direction. By way of example, the two proximal-most vertical flexion struts **340** in the first lateral face **346** and second lateral face **348** are bowed in a distal direction to facilitate insertion of the shim **314**, since as the shim **314** is advanced into the central lumen **327**, the lateral faces **346**, **348** and thus the vertical struts **340** contained therein are pushed outward laterally ahead of the shim **314**. By way of example, the strut thickness in the proximal-distal direction may be between 0.1-2 mm and preferably 0.2-1 mm. This amount of thickness allows for bending of the struts during collapsing or expansion of the shell **16** without excessive strain on the struts. The flexion struts may have a thickness in the range of 2-12 mm in the transverse direction (perpendicular to the proximal-distal axis). This increased thickness in the transverse direction is desired to maintain a high structural stiffness and strength in the transverse direction so that the transverse cross section shape is maintained during and after insertion into the disc space, during implant expansion when the shim **314** is inserted into the shell **316**, and after the surgery when the patient resumes normal activity.

(69) The aspect ratio of the longitudinal:transverse thickness of the struts can be configured to provide the desired amount of strength, stiffness, and ability of the implants to retain their shape

under the forces they experience in the intervertebral space. It should also be appreciated that, in some embodiments, the maintaining of the structural integrity of the surgical implants is highly desired. In some embodiments, for example, the connectors, or struts, are designed to have an aspect ratio of longitudinal thickness to transverse thickness ranging from about 1:2 to about 1:16, from about 1:2 to about 1:12, from about 1:2 to about 1:10, from about 1:2 to about 1:8, or any range therein in some embodiments. Structural integrity can include, but is not limited to, at least inhibiting torsional movement of the first, second, third, or fourth support beam around its own central axis after expansion; deformation of the first, second, third, or fourth support beam around the shim; and, the like.

(70) The central layer **320** further includes a plurality of “V” shaped slots **350** formed therethrough near the junction of each end of each strut and the corresponding support beams, starting at a distance of 1-4 mm (0.5-8) from each support beam corner to effectively render “V” shaped struts. The slots **350** may be formed perpendicular to the longitudinal axis L.sub.1 or angled distally from the outside in. The distally angled formation renders struts that have distally angled surfaces on the side facing the central lumen **327** to facilitate insertion of the shim **314**. The V-shaped slots **350** that form gaps between the vertical struts **340** narrow as the shell **316** is collapsed to keep the outer surfaces of the lateral faces **346**, **348** smooth for insertion into the disc space. Additionally, the inner surfaces (e.g. facing the central lumen **327**) of the lateral faces **346**, **348** are smooth to facilitate insertion of the shim **314** into the central lumen **327**. Once the shell **316** is expanded, the size of the gaps increase rendering surfaces that are rougher to help embed the implant **10** within the tissues in the disc (vertebra and annulus) and to hold the shim **314** in place to maximize implant stability. Furthermore the angle of contraction lies in a plane parallel to the longitudinal axis L.sub.1 of the shell **316** so that it flexes in that plane and thus does not alter the sidewall thickness of the implant **10**. This is desired to minimize the outer profile for insertion while maximizing the size of the central lumen **327** to allow the shim **314** to be inserted for expansion after the shell **316** has been inserted into the disc space. This geometry, combined with the solid beams on the corners ensure that the implant has minimal change in length (e.g. less than 15%) during significant lateral and/or vertical expansion (e.g. more than 20%). In fact, the surface layers **322a-322d** that engage the vertebra are constant in length regardless of shell **316** expansion. This is desired to allow the surgeon to be precise about getting an implant **310** into the disc space that is the correct length unlike other technologies that expand by shortening the implant by the same amount. Furthermore this set of angled strut patterns on each side of the implant **310** allow for independent horizontal and vertical expansion. In other words the amount of horizontal expansion is independent of the amount of vertical expansion, and depends entirely upon the shim **314** used for expansion. This allows for a more controlled variety of aspect ratios so that the implant **310** can best fit the target disc space.

(71) The proximal flexion struts **338** are attached at either end to the proximal ends of the support beams. As with the transverse and vertical flexion struts **336**, **340**, the proximal flexion struts **338** have a length that is greater than the distance between the various support beams. As such, the proximal flexion struts **338** are bowed in a proximal direction. The bowed flexion struts **338** maintain a curved orientation at the apex of the bowed shape to prevent stress cracking. By way of example, the bowed shape may be generally “U”-shaped, “C”-shaped, “S”-shaped, “W”-shaped, or sinusoidal. The proximal flexion strut **338** is generally uniform in thickness in the proximal-distal direction.

(72) Each of the elongated support beams **328**, **330**, **332**, **334** includes a corner post **352** located at the proximal ends of the support beams and extending perpendicularly toward the midline of the implant in the same direction as the vertical struts **340**. The corner posts **352** provide additional stability and rigidity to the implant. The proximal faces of the corner posts **352** have inward, distally angled chamfers **354** to allow for initial insertion of the shim **314** that itself is tapered distally. Each of the elongated support beams **328**, **330**, **332**, **334** further includes an elongated

cutout region/shelf **355** extending the entire length of the corresponding support beam. Each shelf **355** provides an interface with the surface layers **322a-d**.

(73) The central layer **320** is preferably made from strong but ductile material such as polymers with tensile modulus of around 200-600,000 psi and tensile strength of around >9000 psi, and ability to strain more than 4% to break and preferably more than 20% to break. The ability to achieve high strain to break is essential for the various flexion struts to flex enough to allow the shell **316** to expand in a least 2-3 directions (vertical, horizontal and angles). In the current example embodiment, the shell **16** is made from polyetheretherketone (PEEK), however any suitable medical grade material may be used to manufacture the shell **316**, including but not limited to polymers (e.g. PEEK, polyetherimide (Ultem), polyimide, polyamide), metal alloys (e.g. cobalt chromium), or titanium alloys (e.g. Ti6Al4V, nickel titanium). If metal is used to make the central layer **320**, then strut thickness may be reduced by 3-5 times in the long axis direction.

(74) By way of example, the surface layers **322a-d** are either identical or mirror images of each other and all have the same features. Thus, any feature described in relation to one of the surface layers may be applicable all surface layers. Each of the surface layers **322a-d** includes a leading end **356**, trailing end **358**, and an elongated beam **360** extending between the leading and trailing ends **356**, **358**.

(75) In the current example, the leading end **356** of each of the surface layers **322a-322d** comprises a distal panel **362** that, while the implant **310** is in an initial, collapsed state (e.g. as it would be during the insertion process), is arranged with the distal panels **362** of the other surface layers in such close proximity to one another so as to create a solid wall at the leading end **356**. Each of the four distal panels **362** has a generally rectangular perimeter and is arranged perpendicular to the longitudinal axis L.sub.1. Each of the four panels **362** is integrally formed with an extension arm **364** that extends distally from a distal end of one of the aforementioned elongated beams **360**. Each distal panel **362** includes a smooth outer leading surface **366** that is at least partially tapered to provide for easier insertion into the disc space. As with the implant **10** described above, when the implant **310** is in the initial, collapsed state, the distal panels **362** align with the central flange of the guide element (not shown) to form a "closed" surface at the leading end **324** of the implant **310** to prevent seepage of body fluids and/or tissue into the implant during insertion into the target disc space.

(76) The trailing end **358** of each of the surface layers **322a-322d** includes a longitudinal flange **368** and a medial flange **370**. The longitudinal flanges **368** extend proximally from the proximal end of the elongated beam **360** in a direction parallel to the longitudinal axis L.sub.1 and provide support and stability to the assembled (or machined) construct. The medial flanges **370** each extend perpendicularly inward from the proximal end of the respective elongated beam **360** such that, while the implant **310** is in an initial, collapsed state (e.g. as it would be during the insertion process), the medial flanges **370** are arranged in such close proximity to one another so as to create a rigid crossbar at the trailing end **326** of the shell **316** to increase implant stability. Each of the medial flanges **370** is integrally formed with one of the aforementioned elongated support beams **360**. The medial flanges **370** each include a proximal-facing smooth tapered surface **372** to provide for easier insertion of the shim **314** into the shell **316**.

(77) The elongated beam **360** includes an outer surface **374** adapted to interface with the body tissue (e.g. vertebral endplate). The outer surface **374** may include any number of anti-migration features **376** to ensure the implant **310** remains in place after insertion into the patient's intervertebral disc space. By way of example, the anti-migration features **376** may include a plurality of teeth (as shown in FIGS. **16-19**), spikes, surface roughening, friction elements, and the like. Additionally, there are ledges **378** protruding inwards from the corners that provide a strong track for the shim **314** to ride inside to push up to expand the shell **316** outward and maintain the expansion. The ledges **378** are part of the strong and stiff surface layer to achieve stability during and after expansion of the shell **316**.

(78) The trailing end **326** of the shell **316** includes an aperture **380** that provides access to the central lumen **327** of the shell **316** when the implant **310** is in a collapsed orientation, such as during insertion into the disc space. The aperture **380** is sized and configured to allow passage of any instrument used during insertion, including but not limited to an inserter, various cannula and the like, as well as graft material (e.g. biologic bone, synthetic bone matrix, collagen, protein, etc.) and the shim **314**. As such, unlike the “closed” configuration of the leading end **324** discussed above, the trailing end **326** has an “open” configuration.

(79) The shell **16** further includes a plurality of graft windows **382**. For example, the inserter passes through the aperture **380** and central lumen **327** and couples with the threaded post of the guide element (not shown) in the manner described above with respect to the implant **10**. The graft windows **382** are relatively large and enable fusion of the graft material with tissue. There are graft windows **382** in the top and bottom faces **342**, **344** of the implant **310** that are especially designed to accommodate flexion of the struts into when the shell **316** is collapsed but opens up larger as the shell **316** is expanded horizontally.

(80) The surface layers **322a-322d** are preferably highly osteogenic due to having a rough texture or being made of osteoconductive material such as roughened or porous metal (e.g. Titanium alloys, cobalt chromium or stainless steel). The surface layers **322a-322d** may also be made of a ceramic (e.g. silicon nitride), hydroxyapatite, and/or any combination composite thereof. The layer may be porous throughout like bone or it may be dense in the base and roughened on the surface. The surface layers **322a-322d** may have holes **384** for the polymer from the central lumen **327** to flow into to lock the surface layers **322a-322d** into position.

(81) In one embodiment of manufacturing the surgical implant **310**, the central layer **320** and surface layers **322a-322d** may be overmolded together. In such embodiment, the surface layers **322a-322d** may be sintered/3D printed, molded or machined separately and then placed into a mold for the assembly where the polymer will flow into the mold to fill the central layer **320** and bind to surface layers **322a-322d**. The surface layers **322a-322d** may have holes **384**, porous surfaces and/or undercuts to allow for mechanical locking due to polymer flowing into such features during the molding process. Alternatively, the central layer **320** may be molded or machined. The surface layers **322a-322d** may be machined, molded or sintered. Then the layers are assembled by pressure, heat melting, snap fits, use of adhesive or a combination thereof.

(82) The shim **314** is substantially the same as the shim **14** described above. The shim **314** functions to expand the surgical implant **310** after the shell **316** is inserted in the disc space, and to help to stabilize the shell **316** in the expanded state against in vivo forces. Once fully inserted, the width of the shim **314** is combined with the thicknesses of the side walls of the shell **316** to increase the width and height of the surgical implant **310** to be larger than the width and height of either the shell **316** or the shim **314** alone.

(83) The multiaxially expandable, unibody structure of the surgical implant **310** of the present example enables highly repeatable and cost effective fabrication methods such as molding or other high speed automated fabrication methods. Only a small number of molds (1-2) are required to achieve implant with 4-20 times aspect ratios. The surface layer is optimized for strength, radioopacity and osteogenicity/osteoconductivity without compromising the structural stiffness, expandability and central radiolucency by combining these layers of different materials. For example, the surface layers can be roughened metal (highly osteogenic/osteoconductive, radioopaque, very high strength) while the central layer is a polymer with bone-like modulus. The polymer is substantially less stiff than the metal. The layers stacked in series represents a “springs in series” model in which case the least-stiff element dominates the stiffness of the structure and renders it more like bone in stiffness which is favorable for stable bone healing (no stress shielding). The high strength of the surface layer allows the surgeon to mallet the cage into a tight disc without risking damage. The surface layers can help the cage maintain its shape better due to higher modulus strength than polymer for example. The radioopacity helps the surgeon to visualize

the extent of the expansion and shape of the implant on X-Ray without compromising the ability to visualize bony fusion through the central portion of the cage long term.

(84) In some embodiments, a shim can also be configured with a lateral bias to asymmetrically expand the shell to a biased footprint, or profile, in an intervertebral space. In some embodiments, the first body portion of the shell can have a first track beam that serves as a track by which the position of the shim is fixed relative to the shell, with regard to lateral movement in the shell, as the shim is inserted into the shell in a proximal-to-distal direction in vivo, such that a lateral bias of the shim becomes a lateral bias in the shell upon expansion. In some embodiments, the second body portion of the shell can, likewise, have a second track beam to fix the position of the shim relative to the shell, again with regard to the lateral movement in the shell. The track, in some embodiments, can be a tongue-and-groove configuration that allows proximal-to-distal translation of the shim in the shell, or it can be a track-and-key configuration, or the like, wherein any translatable indicator configuration known to one of skill can be used to facilitate the bias of the shim creating an asymmetry or bias in the profile or footprint of the surgical implant in the intervertebral space.

Claims

1. A surgical implant having a combination of materials combined in layers, comprising: an expandable shell having a distal region and configured for placement within an intervertebral space, the shell having a layered assembly that includes a central body and a plurality of surface layers; wherein the central body comprises a first pair of support beams configured to move laterally away from a second pair of support beams, each support beam of said first pair of support beams having an outer edge and a lateral extension element extending from said outer edge in a direction away from said second pair of support beams such that each support beam of said first pair of support beams has a width dimension that is greater than a width dimension of each support beam of said second pair of support beams; the central body has a top face and a bottom face, and is configured to associate with the plurality of surface layers; the plurality of surface layers has a top surface layer and a bottom surface layer, the top surface layer configured to associate with the top face of the central body and form a first body portion configured to engage a first vertebral endplate; and the bottom surface layer configured to associate with the bottom face of the central body and form a second body portion configured to engage a second vertebral endplate; wherein the central body and the plurality of surface layers comprise different materials.
2. The surgical implant of claim 1, wherein the central body is made from a medical grade polymer.
3. The surgical implant of claim 2, wherein the medical grade polymer is one of PEEK, polyetherimide, polyimide, and polyamide.
4. The surgical implant of claim 1, wherein the plurality of surface layers are made from at least one of titanium alloy, cobalt chromium, stainless steel, ceramic, silicon nitride, and hydroxyapatite.
5. The surgical implant of claim 1, wherein the plurality of surface layers have at least one of a roughened and porous texture.
6. The surgical implant of claim 1, wherein the plurality of surface layers are associated with the central body using at least one of pressure, heat melting, snap fit engagement, and adhesive.
7. The surgical implant of claim 1, wherein the central body comprises a laterovertically-expanding cage configured to create an intervertebral scaffolding system in vivo, the laterovertically-expanding cage having a collapsed state and an expanded state.
8. The surgical implant of claim 1, wherein the central body has a plurality of flexion struts attaching the top face to the bottom face.
9. The surgical implant of claim 8, wherein the plurality of flexion struts have a bowed shape.
10. The surgical implant of claim 9, wherein the bowed shape is selected from the group consisting of u-shaped, c-shaped, s-shaped, w-shaped, sinusoidal, and combinations thereof.

11. The surgical implant of claim 9, wherein the plurality of flexion struts maintain a curved orientation at an apex of the bowed shape.
 12. The surgical implant of claim 8, wherein the plurality of flexion struts have a uniform thickness in a proximal-distal direction.
 13. The surgical implant of claim 1, wherein the width dimension of each support beam of said first pair of support beams is between 1.2 and 10 times greater than the width dimension of each support beam of said second pair of support beams.
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