



US009138616B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Ferri

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,138,616 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Sep. 22, 2015**

(54) **FOOT-THERAPY AND TOE-ALIGNING
DEVICE**

USPC 482/47, 79–80, 148; 30/26; 15/167.3;
132/75.6; 601/27, 40; D21/685;
D28/56–61

(71) Applicant: **FenF, LLC**, Ann Arbor, MI (US)

See application file for complete search history.

(72) Inventor: **Frederic Ferri**, Dexter, MI (US)

(56) **References Cited**

(73) Assignee: **FenF, LLC**, Ann Arbor, MI (US)

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

276,558 A 5/1883 Brown, Jr.
365,572 A 6/1887 Boomer

(Continued)

(21) Appl. No.: **13/830,654**

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

(22) Filed: **Mar. 14, 2013**

DE 276558 7/1914
DE 2766558 7/1914

(Continued)

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2013/0203556 A1 Aug. 8, 2013

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Continuation of application No. 13/196,785, filed on
Aug. 2, 2011, which is a continuation of application
No. 11/982,390, filed on Oct. 31, 2007, now Pat. No.
8,002,675, which is a continuation-in-part of

(Continued)

(51) **Int. Cl.**
A63B 23/10 (2006.01)
A63B 24/00 (2006.01)

(Continued)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **A63B 23/10** (2013.01); **A61F 5/019**
(2013.01); **A61F 5/10** (2013.01); **A61H 1/0266**
(2013.01);

(Continued)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC A61F 5/019; A61F 5/10; A61H 2001/027;
A61H 1/0266; A63B 23/10; A63B 21/00163;
A63B 21/143

Invalidity Contentions by Taylor Gifts regarding Claim 1 of U.S. Pat.
No. 7,131,939 and Claim 33 of U.S. Pat. No. 7,322,915 in *FENF LLC*
v. *Taylor Gifts, Inc.*, dated Oct. 17, 2011.

(Continued)

Primary Examiner — Oren Ginsberg

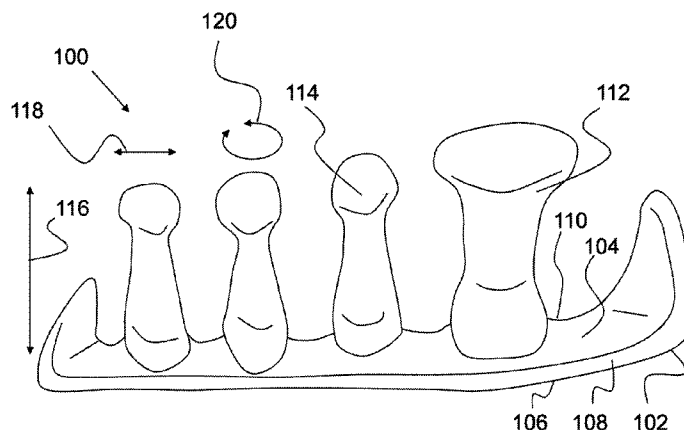
Assistant Examiner — Jennifer M Deichl

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Tope-McKay & Associates

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Described is an exercise tool. More particularly, it is a therapy
and exercise tool specifically devised as a foot-therapy and
toe-aligning device to align, separate, and stretch toes. The
foot-therapy and toe-aligning device comprises a frame with
a plurality of posts connected with the frame. The device is
formed of an elastic material such that a user may place at
least one of the plurality of posts between a user's toes and
pull the post to stretch and elongate the post between the toes.
Upon release, the elastic material of the post causes the post
to attempt to return to its original shape, thereby causing it to
expand out and conform its shape to fit snugly against the
user's toes. Additionally, the elastic material allows the toe
posts to be positioned and maintained at numerous locations
between the user's toes for customizable positioning between
the toes.

7 Claims, 21 Drawing Sheets



Related U.S. Application Data

application No. 11/541,067, filed on Sep. 28, 2006, now Pat. No. 7,322,915, which is a division of application No. 10/687,354, filed on Oct. 17, 2003, now Pat. No. 7,131,939.

(51) Int. Cl.

A63B 21/02 (2006.01)
A63B 23/00 (2006.01)
A61F 5/01 (2006.01)
A61F 5/10 (2006.01)
A61H 1/02 (2006.01)
G09F 21/02 (2006.01)
A61N 2/00 (2006.01)
A61N 5/06 (2006.01)

(52) U.S. Cl.

CPC *A63B 24/00* (2013.01); *G09F 21/02* (2013.01); *A61H 2001/027* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/0103* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/025* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/0207* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/0214* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/0228* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/0242* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/0257* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/10* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/105* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/5007* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/5082* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/5084* (2013.01); *A61H 2201/5097* (2013.01); *A61N 2/00* (2013.01); *A61N 2005/0651* (2013.01); *A63B 21/02* (2013.01); *A63B 2023/006* (2013.01); *A63B 2208/05* (2013.01); *A63B 2209/08* (2013.01); *A63B 2209/10* (2013.01); *A63B 2225/50* (2013.01); *A63B 2225/62* (2013.01); *A63B 2225/64* (2013.01); *A63B 2225/66* (2013.01); *A63B 2230/50* (2013.01)

(56)**References Cited****U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS**

445,921 A 2/1891 Burlingame
 525,059 A 8/1894 Ray et al.
 633,422 A 8/1899 Burns et al.
 1,095,213 A 5/1914 Johnson
 1,098,397 A 6/1914 Pacorella
 1,349,085 A 8/1920 Mouse
 1,402,375 A 1/1922 Parisi
 1,867,679 A 7/1932 Riehle et al.
 1,930,413 A 10/1933 Bruell
 2,095,664 A 10/1937 Grenfell
 2,153,493 A 4/1939 Yakimchick
 2,223,204 A 11/1940 Carmichael
 2,266,859 A 12/1941 Grampp
 2,286,089 A 6/1942 Harris
 2,335,665 A 11/1943 Goldmerstein
 2,471,997 A 5/1949 Baltor
 2,575,867 A 8/1949 Ferri
 2,506,308 A 5/1950 Maynier
 2,517,232 A 8/1950 Patulski
 2,531,851 A 11/1950 Kiwad
 2,546,118 A 3/1951 Wright
 2,575,868 A 11/1951 Ferri
 2,595,640 A 5/1952 Christopoulos
 2,640,482 A 6/1953 Kiwad
 2,740,207 A 4/1956 Starensier
 2,751,693 A 6/1956 Baker
 2,808,662 A 10/1957 Webb
 2,947,095 A 8/1960 Miyachi
 2,949,112 A 8/1960 Murray
 3,011,281 A 12/1961 King
 3,049,120 A 8/1962 Marcus
 3,088,458 A 5/1963 Stewart

3,099,884 A 8/1963 Kixmiller et al.
 3,128,763 A 4/1964 Langenfeld et al.
 3,275,002 A 9/1966 Scholl
 3,299,893 A 1/1967 Collina
 3,416,542 A 12/1968 Shook
 3,429,309 A * 2/1969 Kurth et al. 602/30
 3,581,740 A 6/1971 Sherbourne
 3,623,481 A 11/1971 Curran
 3,724,458 A 4/1973 Piper
 3,967,390 A 7/1976 Anfruns
 4,017,987 A 4/1977 Perez, Jr. et al.
 4,207,880 A 6/1980 Zinkovich
 4,211,246 A 7/1980 Hokama
 4,263,902 A 4/1981 Dieterich
 D260,047 S 8/1981 Heinz
 4,300,294 A 11/1981 Riecken
 D271,156 S 11/1983 Williamson
 4,419,839 A 12/1983 Wong
 4,821,431 A 4/1989 Rieffel
 D306,084 S 2/1990 Volz et al.
 4,914,837 A 4/1990 Rieffel
 4,936,300 A 6/1990 Funatogawa
 5,003,997 A 4/1991 Stewart et al.
 5,039,093 A 8/1991 Collier
 5,062,625 A 11/1991 Vonk
 5,076,263 A 12/1991 Funatogawa
 5,087,036 A 2/1992 Cooper
 D325,968 S 5/1992 Nofsinger
 5,136,911 A 8/1992 Wyss
 D335,299 S 5/1993 Guidry
 5,327,918 A 7/1994 Stewart et al.
 5,374,226 A 12/1994 Grahm
 5,466,202 A 11/1995 Stern
 5,523,734 A 6/1996 Beck et al.
 5,702,354 A 12/1997 DeSpain
 5,723,785 A 3/1998 Manning
 D393,931 S * 4/1998 Rue D28/57
 5,749,377 A 5/1998 Desario
 5,813,078 A 9/1998 Hogan, Sr.
 5,870,837 A 2/1999 Poulos
 5,893,221 A 4/1999 Weissman et al.
 5,946,823 A 9/1999 Yates
 D415,858 S * 10/1999 Funatogawa D28/56
 D420,785 S 2/2000 Perez
 D428,673 S 7/2000 Ikeda
 6,151,801 A 11/2000 Frederiksen et al.
 D439,704 S * 3/2001 Ikeda D28/57
 6,226,893 B1 5/2001 Schlamp et al.
 6,228,001 B1 5/2001 Johnson et al.
 6,238,357 B1 5/2001 Kawaguchi et al.
 6,298,580 B1 10/2001 Tadayon
 6,318,373 B1 11/2001 Kasahara
 6,352,096 B1 3/2002 Walsh
 D459,547 S 6/2002 Wada et al.
 6,481,443 B1 11/2002 Moore-Johnson et al.
 D476,147 S 6/2003 Campbell
 6,625,904 B1 9/2003 Frederiksen et al.
 6,629,943 B1 10/2003 Schroder
 D481,828 S 11/2003 Goldberg et al.
 6,678,971 B2 1/2004 Brooks
 6,719,714 B2 4/2004 Sossong
 6,748,604 B2 6/2004 Duboff et al.
 6,817,967 B1 11/2004 Ott et al.
 6,941,954 B1 9/2005 Belcher
 7,121,019 B2 10/2006 Frederiksen et al.
 7,131,939 B2 11/2006 Ferri
 D556,381 S 11/2007 Kennedy
 7,322,915 B2 1/2008 Ferri
 D600,818 S 9/2009 Yang
 2002/0121030 A1 * 9/2002 Coleman 36/11.5
 2003/0029056 A1 2/2003 Frederiksen et al.
 2004/0055179 A1 3/2004 Wang

(56)

References Cited

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

2006/0243291 A1 11/2006 Daley
 2007/0027011 A1 2/2007 Ferri
 2009/0093345 A1 4/2009 Findeisen

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

DE	1079504	4/1960
DE	1881215	10/1963
DE	3049528	7/1982
DE	3530511	3/1987
DE	29606182	9/1996
DE	10154185	5/2003
FR	1095213	5/1955
GB	155180	12/1920
GB	246375	1/1926
GB	365572	7/1930
GB	445921	4/1936
GB	525059	8/1940
GB	811791	4/1959
GB	2378891	2/2003
JP	1250257	10/1989
WO	WO 9504512	2/1995
WO	WO 0191674	12/2001

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Notice of Allowance for U.S. Appl. No. 11/541,067.
 Issue Notification for U.S. Appl. No. 11/541,067.
 "Yoga Toes," 1 page, <<http://www.yogapro.com>>, 2008.
 "Ms. Pedicure Toe Separator," 1 page, <<http://store.facevaluesonline.com>>, 2008.
 "Genki-kun One Step," 7 pages, <<http://www.dr-1.co.jp>>, 2008.
 "Genki-kun Toe Stretcher," 12 pages, <<http://www.dr-1.co.jp>>, 2008.
 "Toe Stretchers Strengthening Premium Toe Trainers," 7 pages, <<http://www.healionhealth.com>>, 2008.
 "Toe Flexers (C7315)," 1 page, <www.harrietcarter.com>, 2008.
 "Genki-kun One-Step," 5 pages, <<http://www.dr-1.co.jp/e/onestep.html>>.
 "Correct Toes," 3 pages, <<http://nwfootankle.com/home/toes>>, 2009.
 Interlocutory Order regarding U.S. Pat. No. 8,002,675 in *FENF LLC v. Smarthingz, Inc.*, dated Jul. 25, 2013.
 United States Court of Appeals for Federal Circuit, *FENF, LLC*, Plaintiff-Appellee, v. *Smarthingz, Inc.*, Defendant-Appellant, 2014-1490, Appeal from the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan in No. 2:12-cv-14770-PJDMKM, Judge Patrick J. Duggan, Decided: Feb. 6, 2015.

* cited by examiner

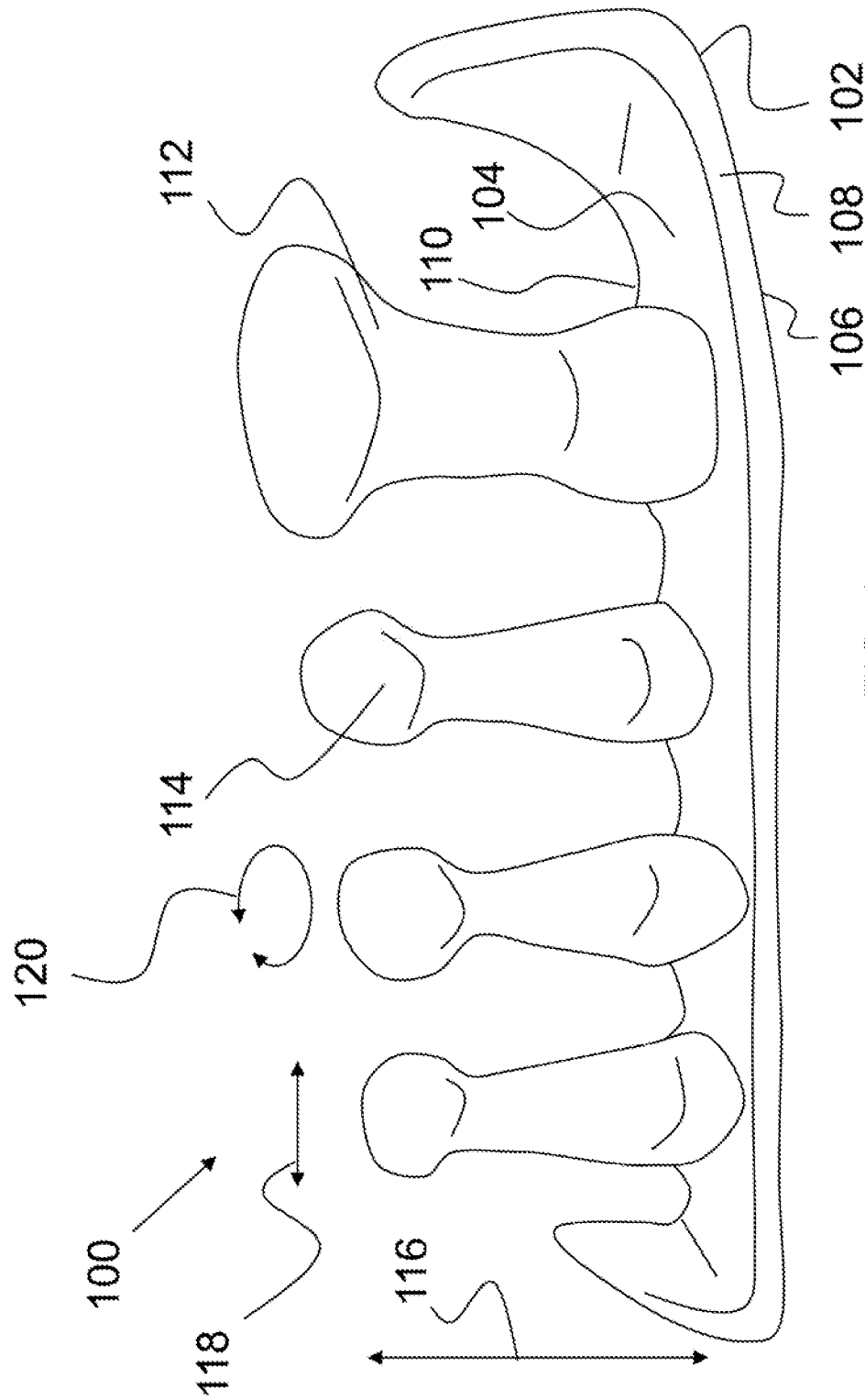
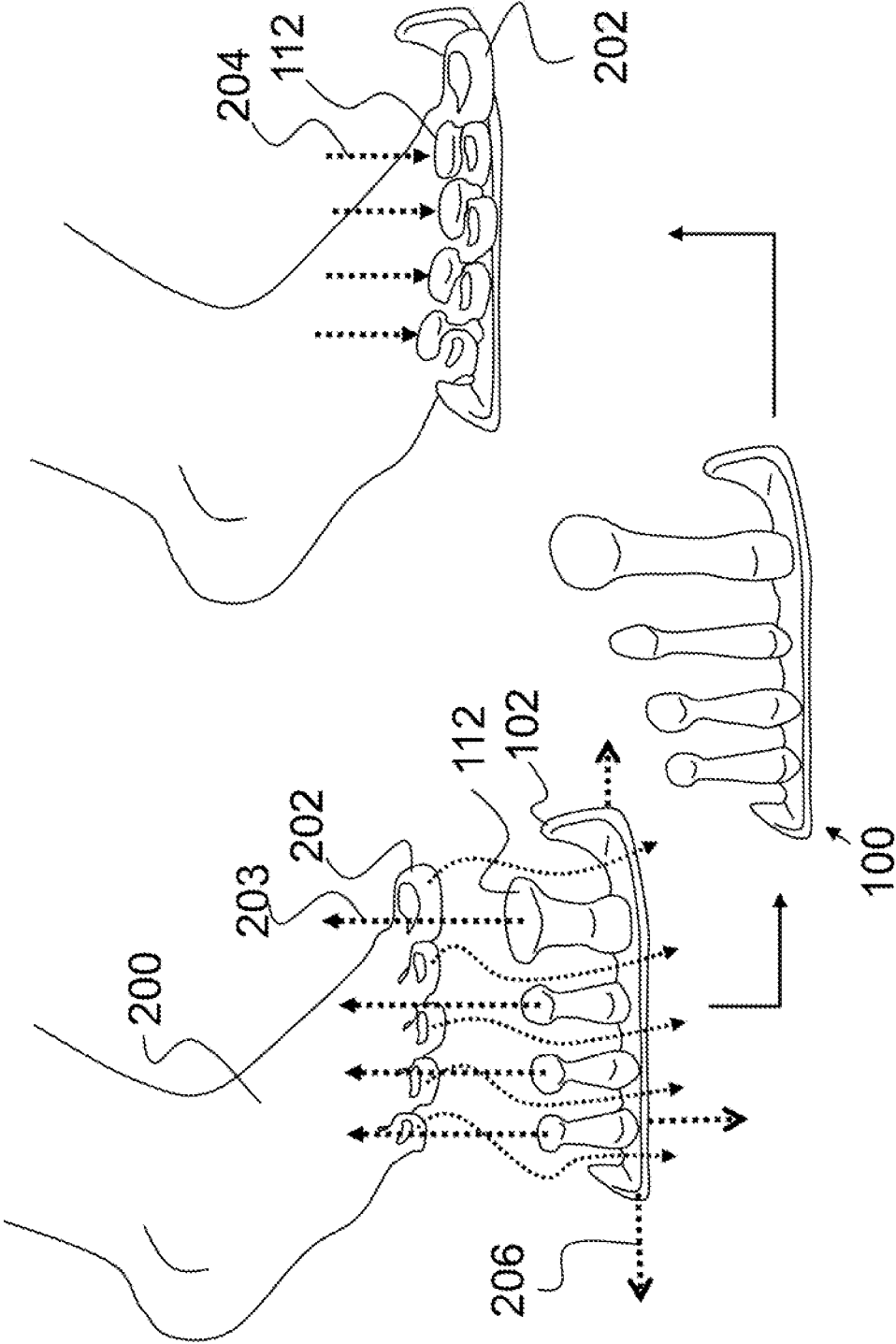
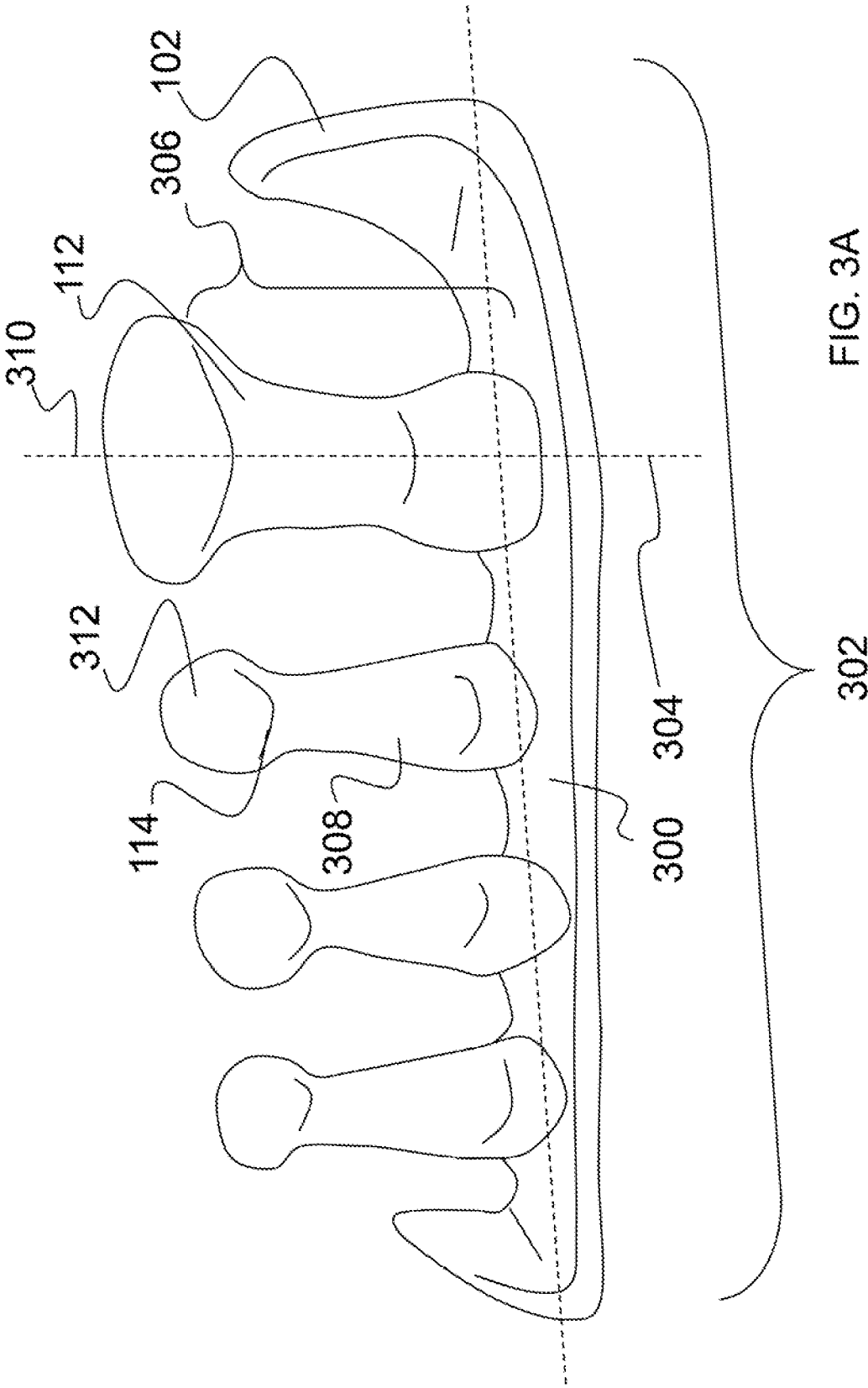


FIG. 1





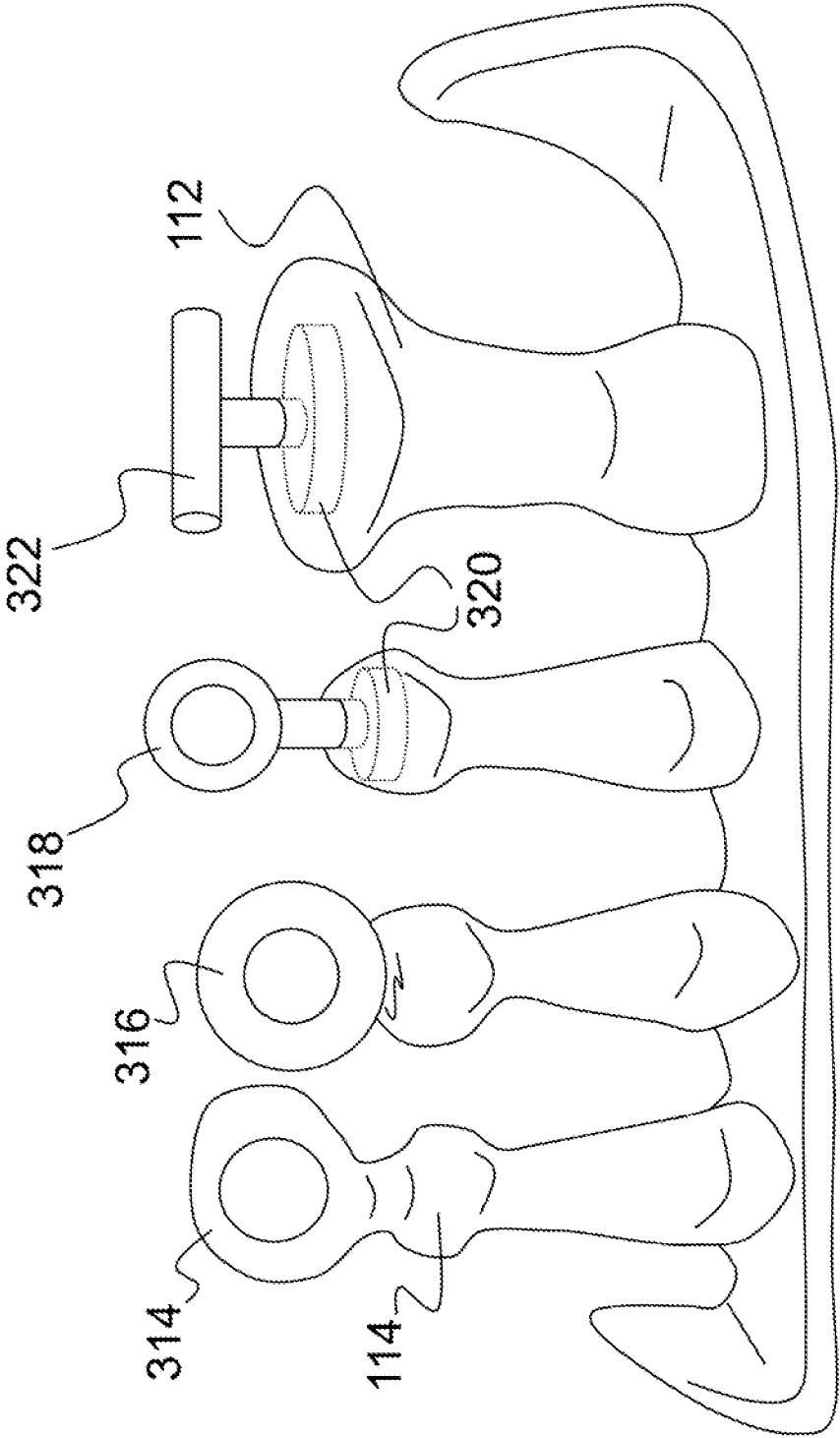


FIG. 3B

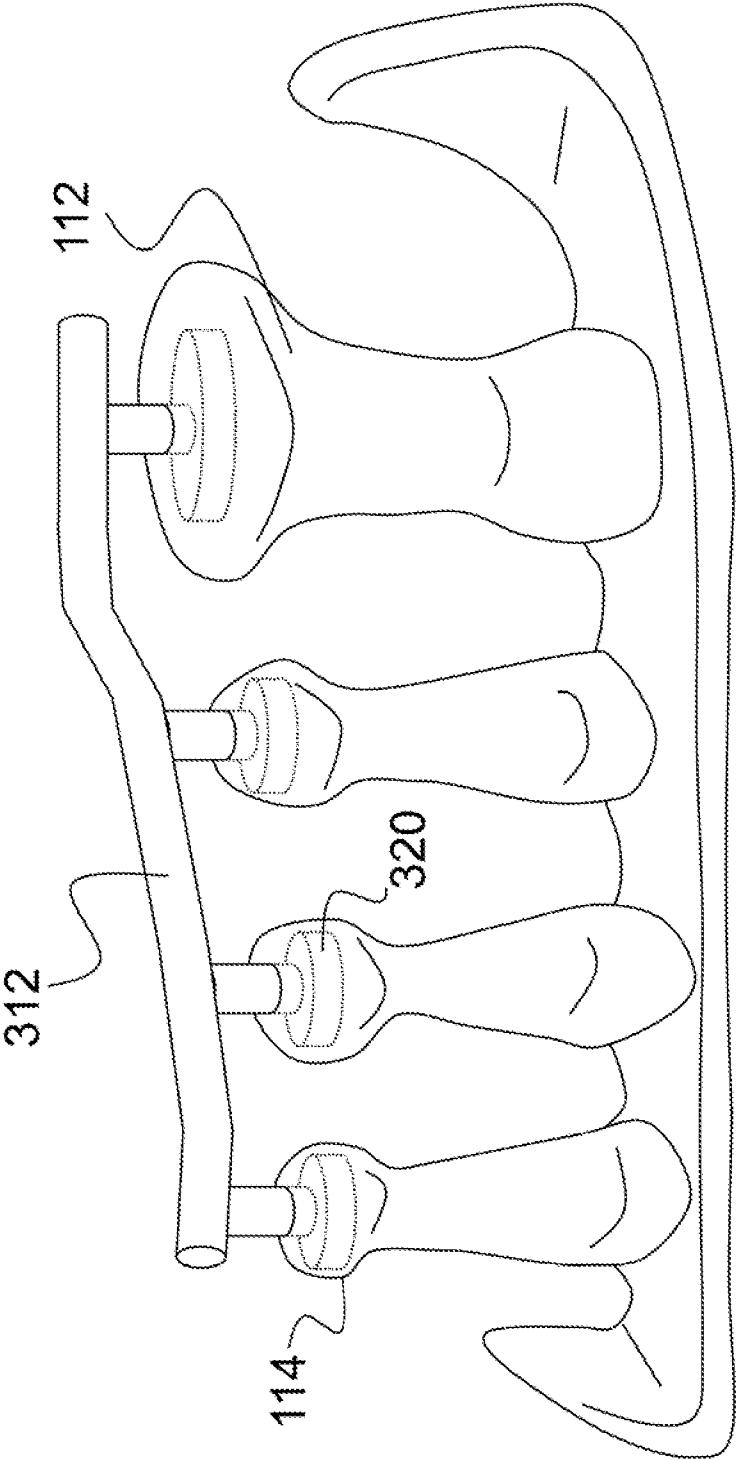


FIG. 3C

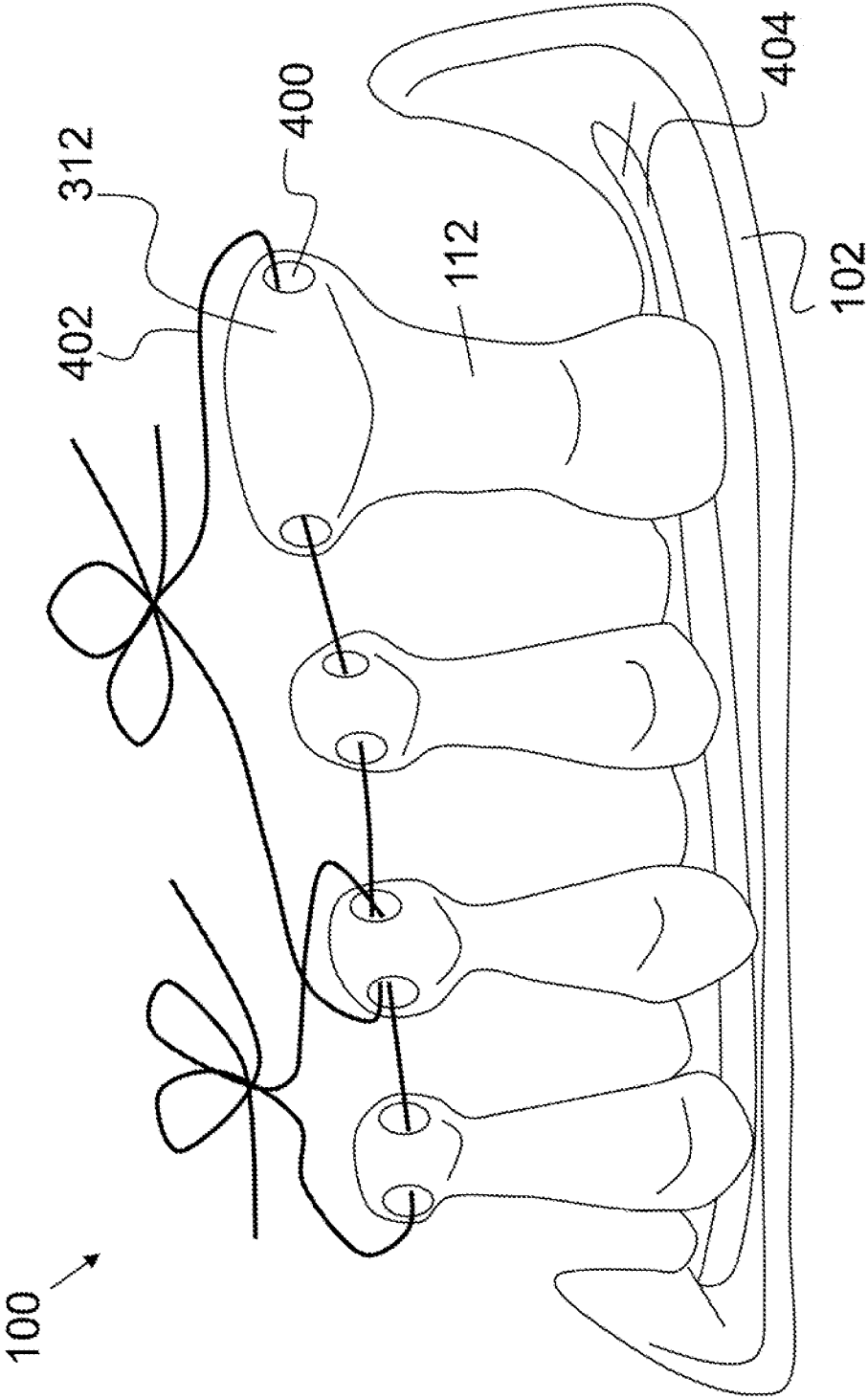


FIG. 4

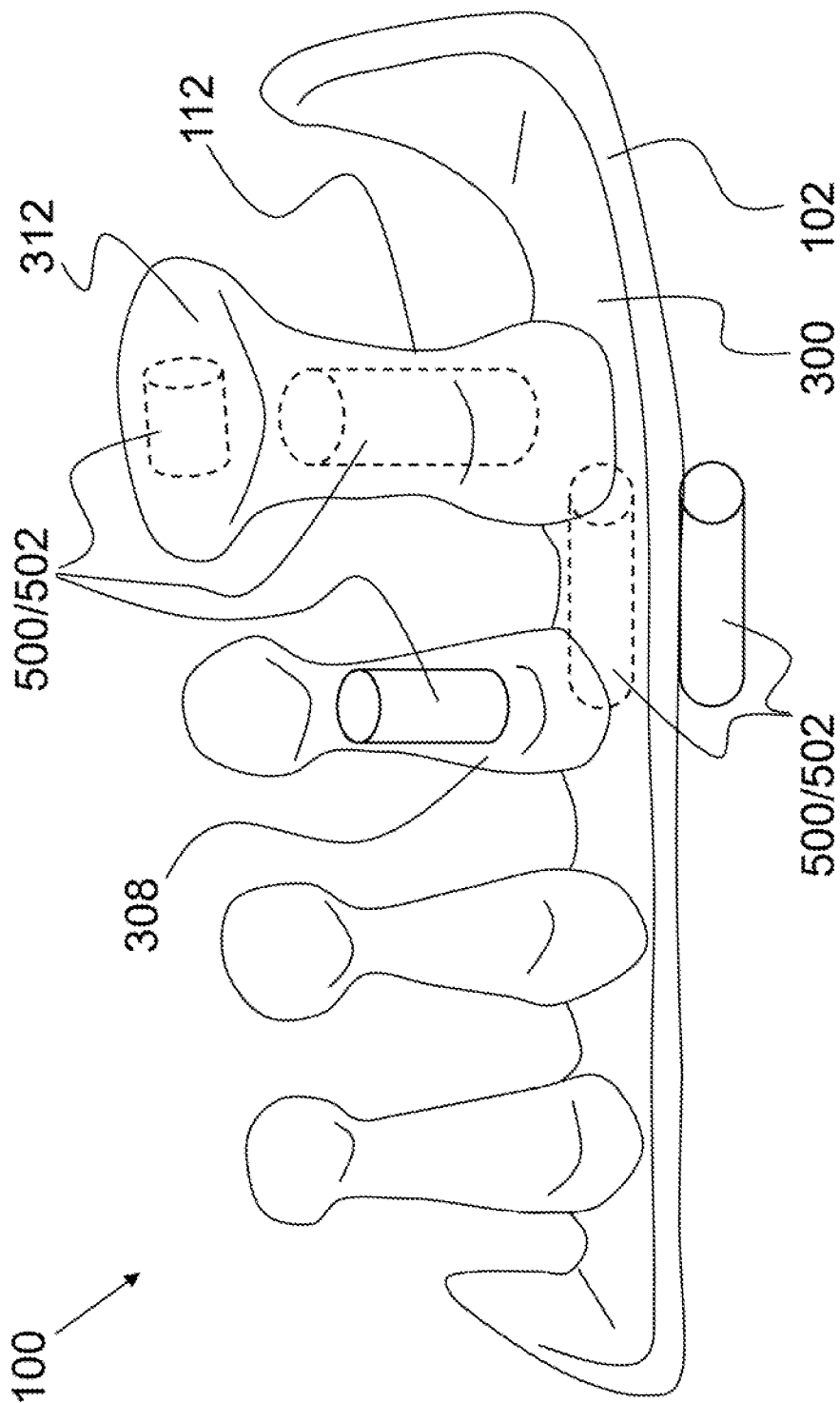
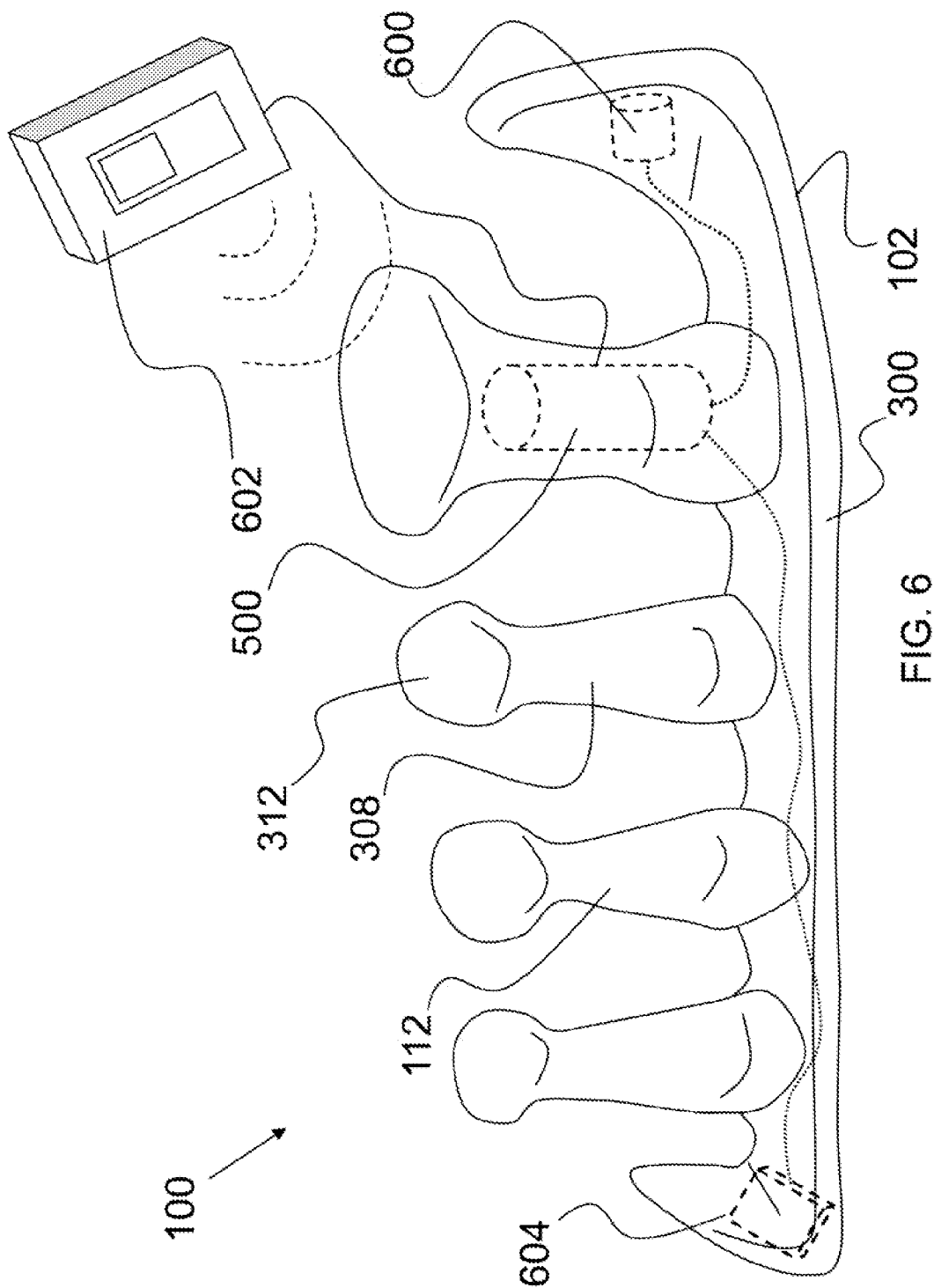
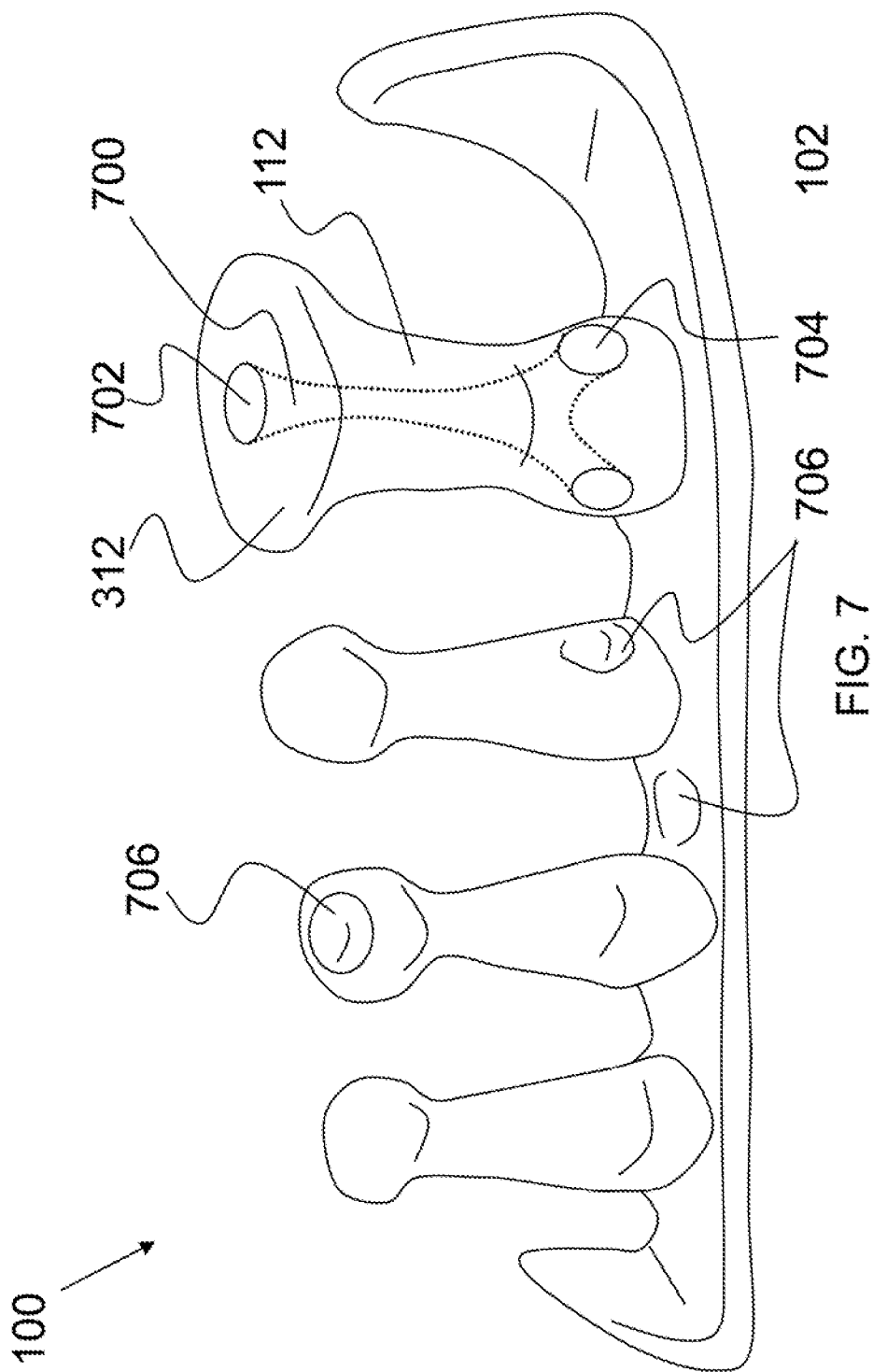


FIG. 5





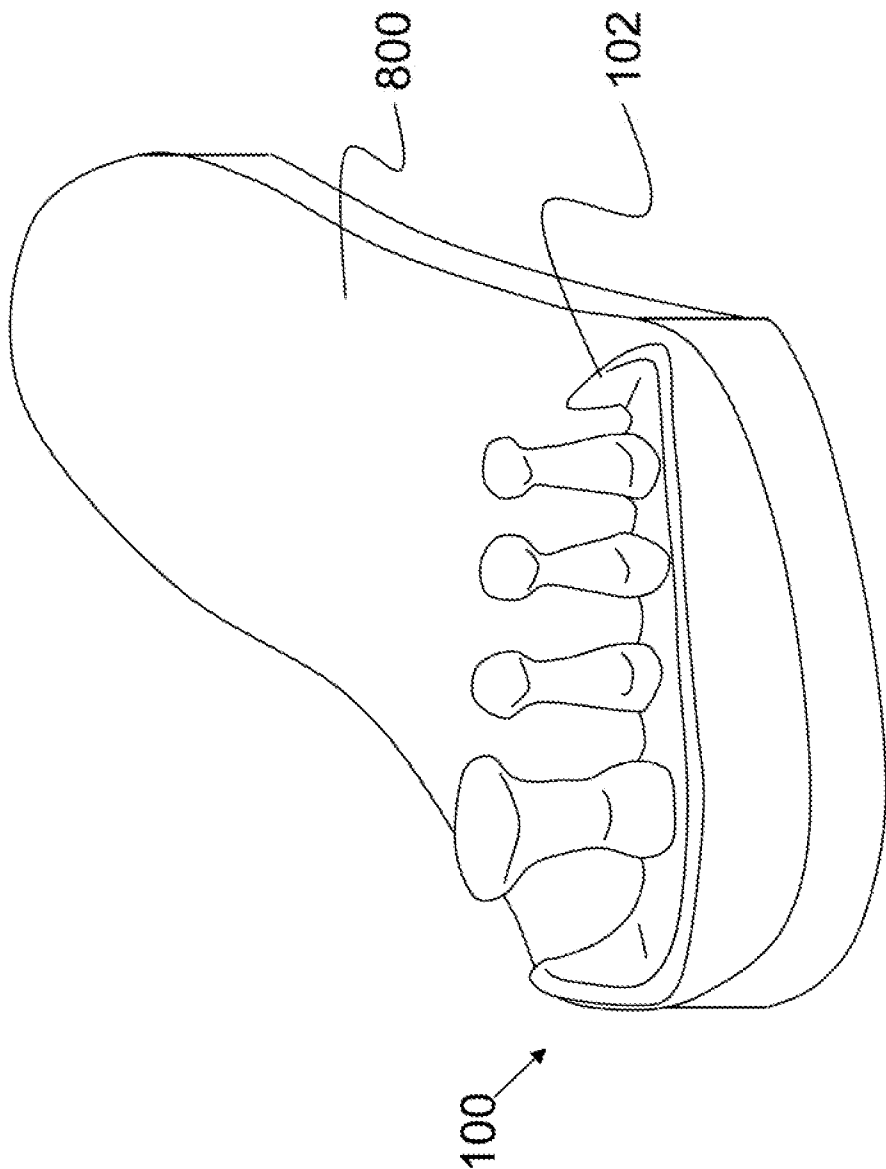


FIG. 8

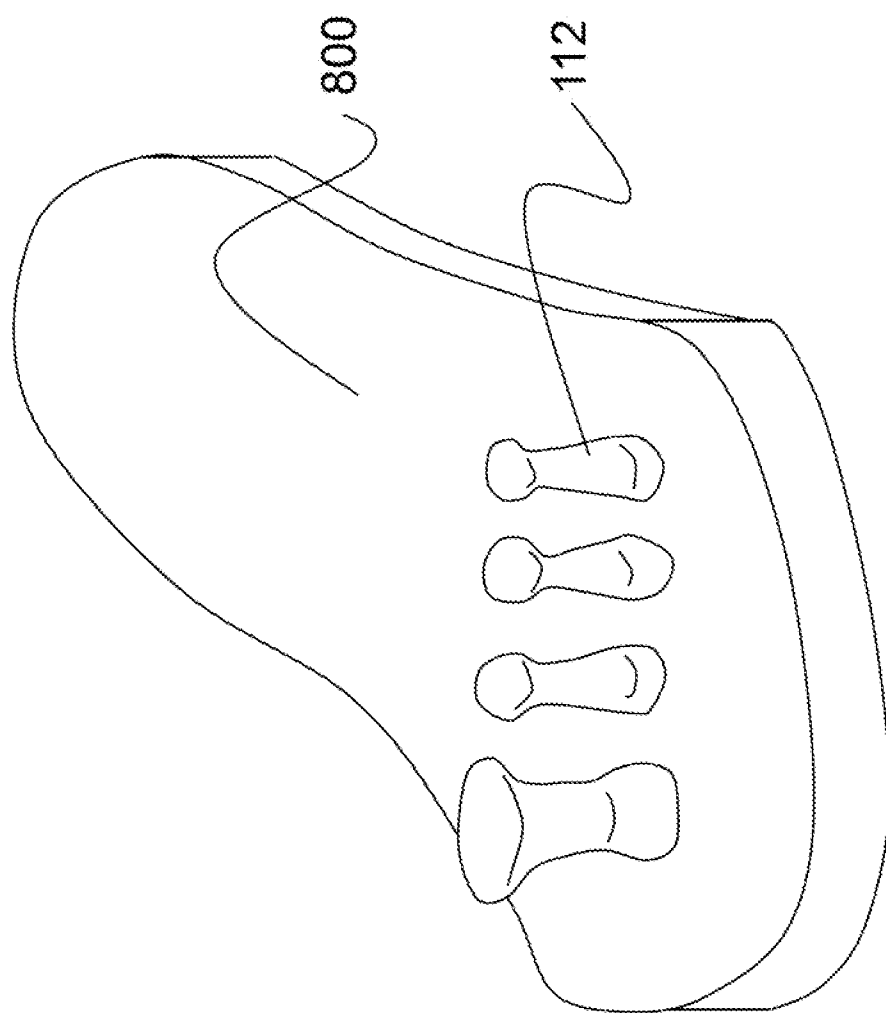


FIG. 9

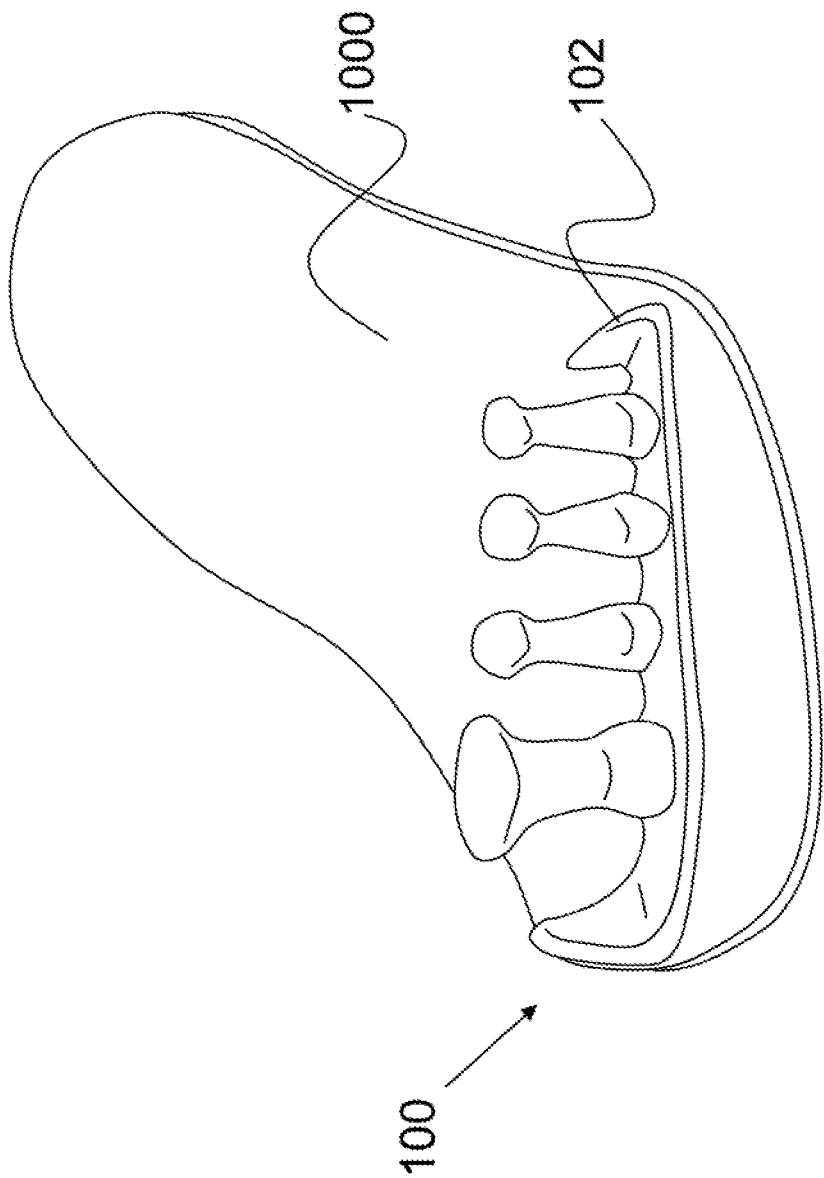


FIG. 10

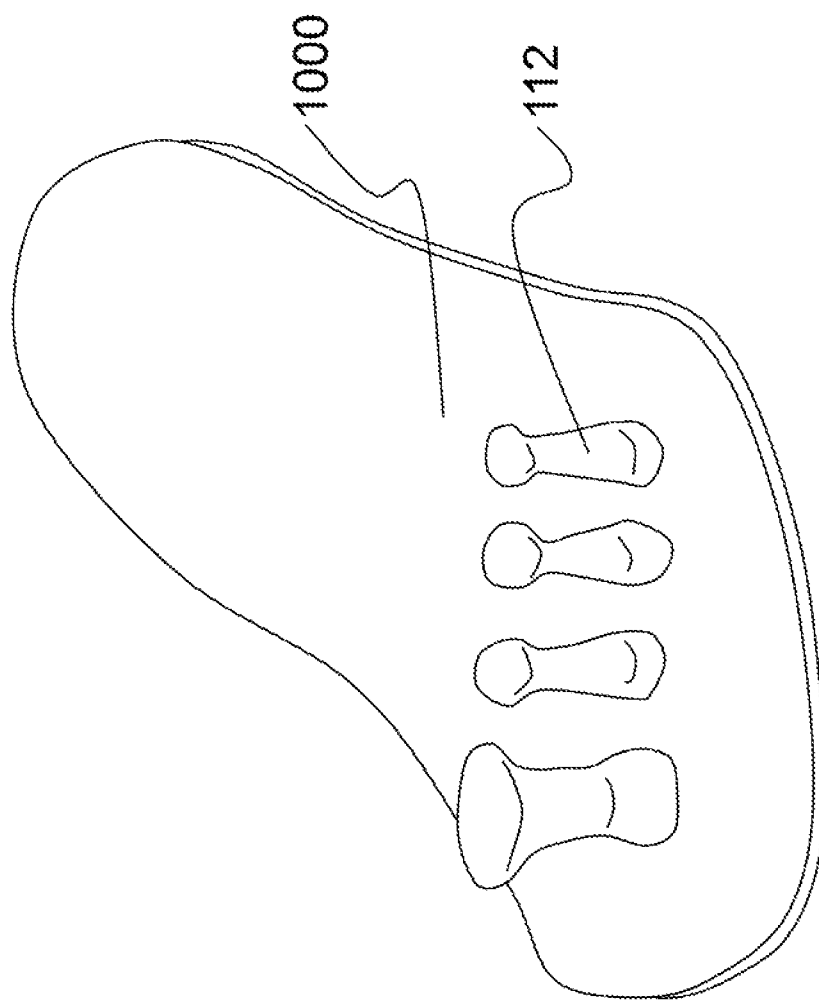
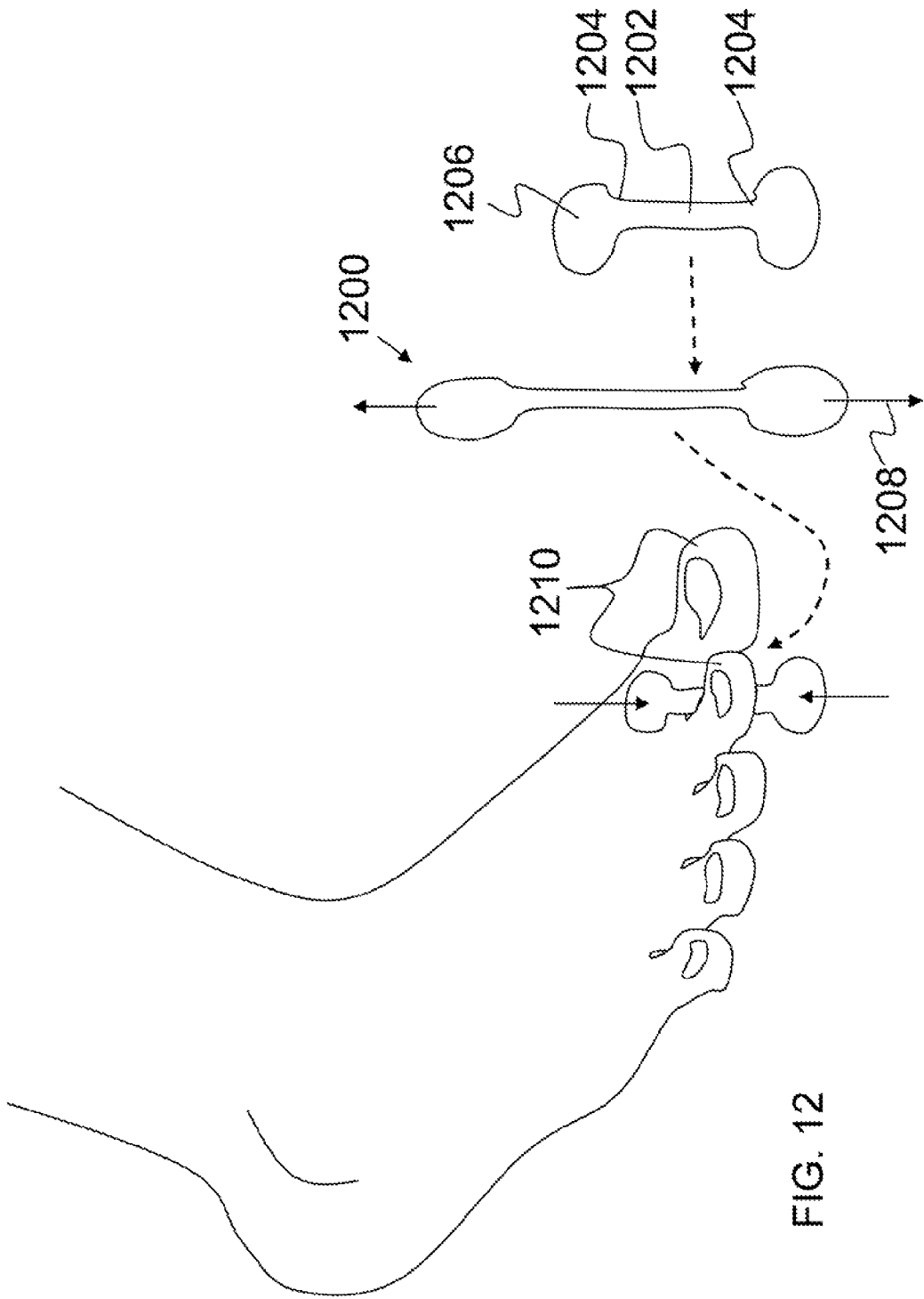


FIG. 11



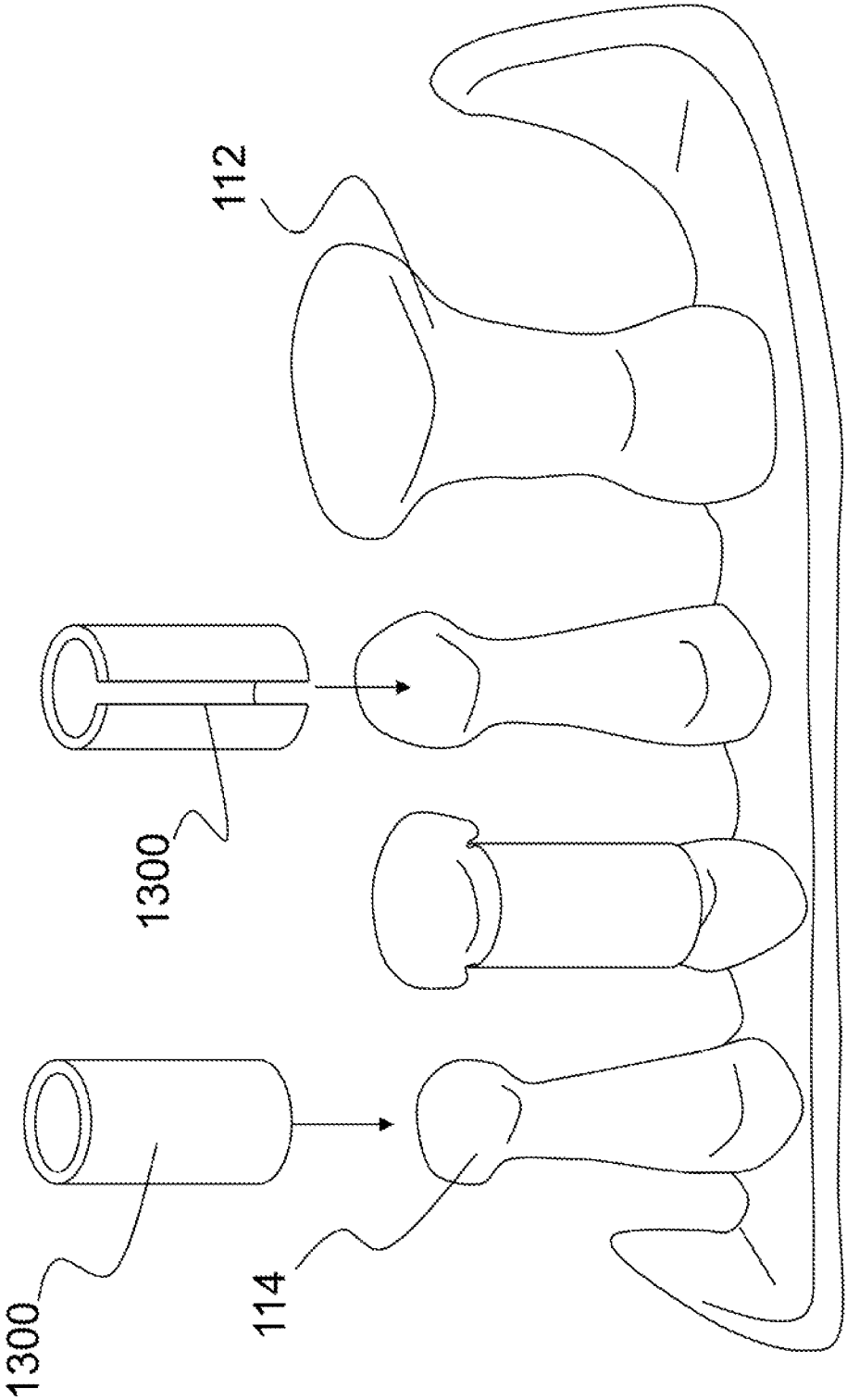


FIG. 13

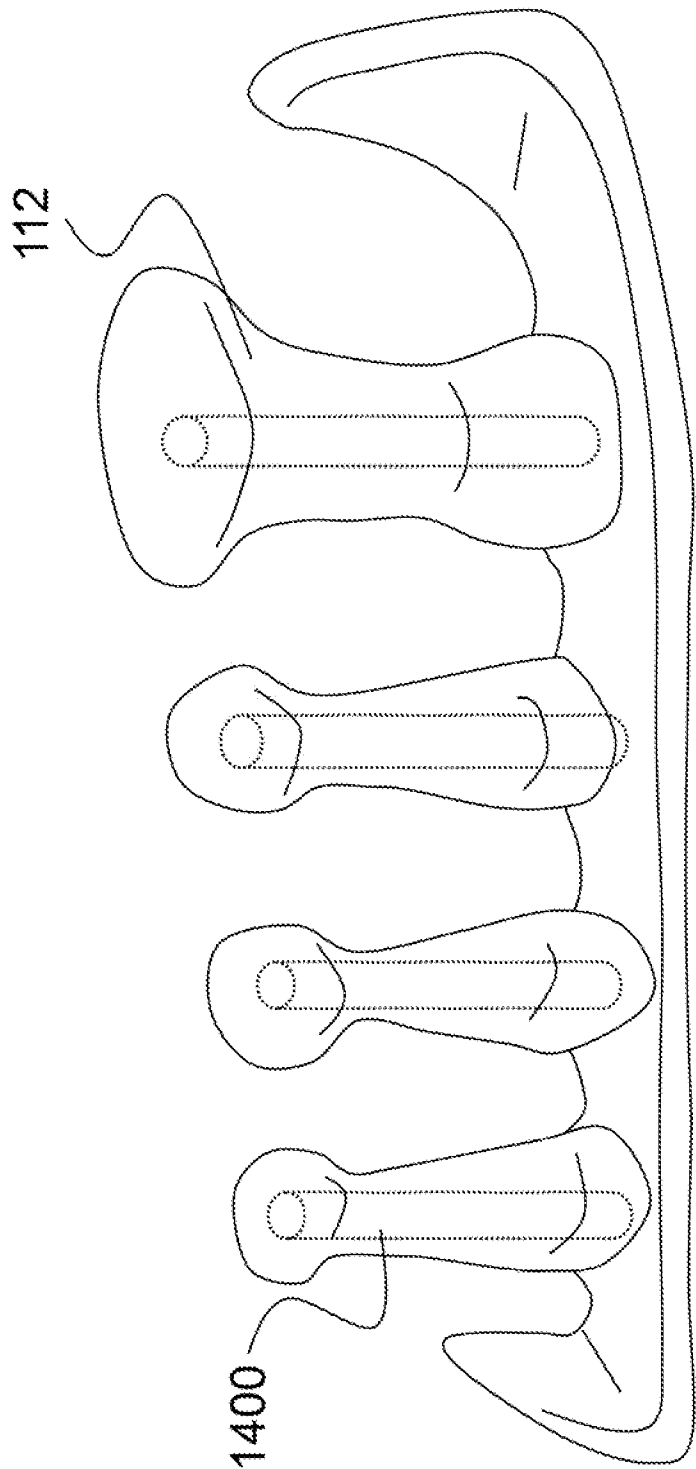


FIG. 14

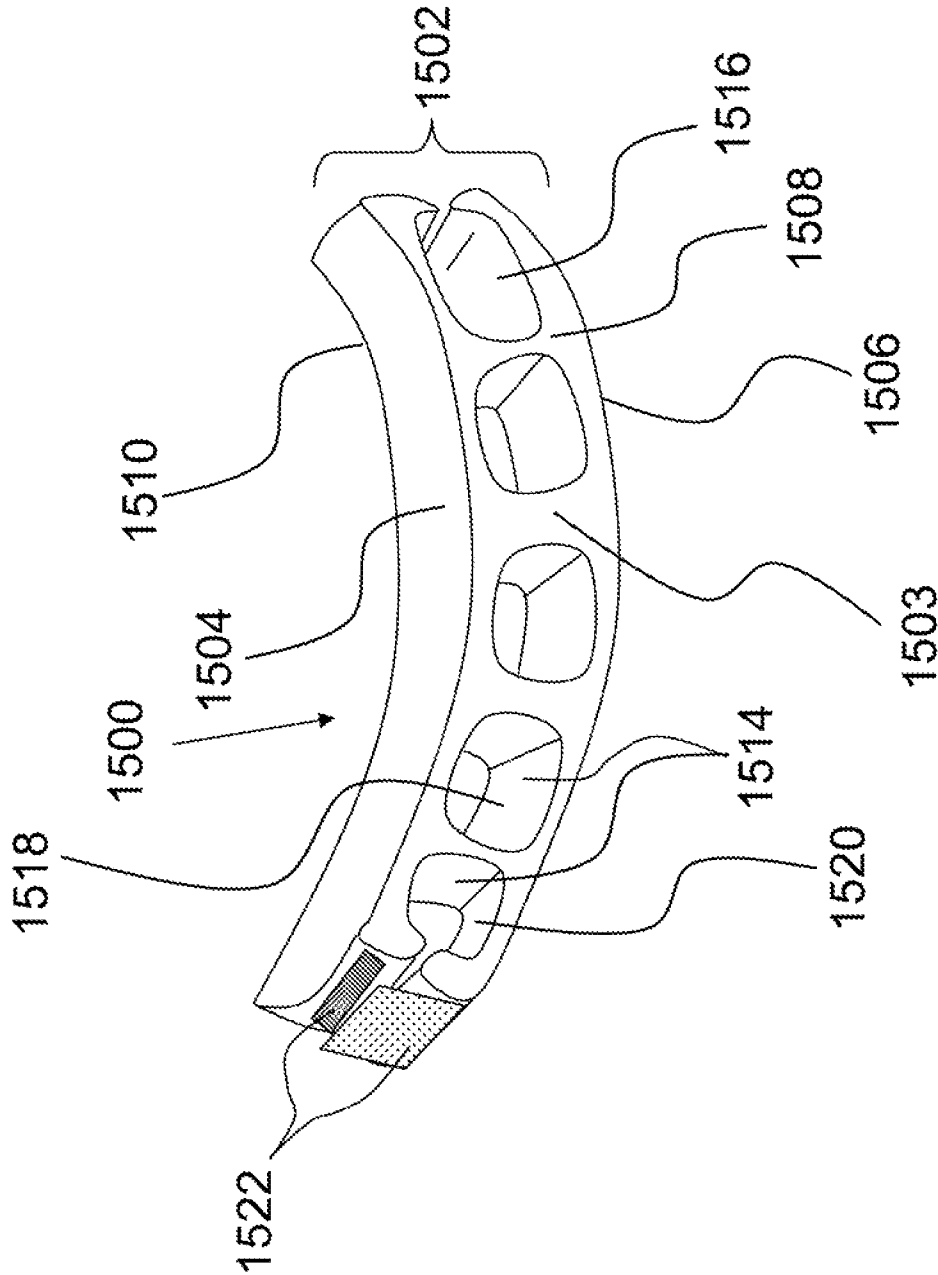
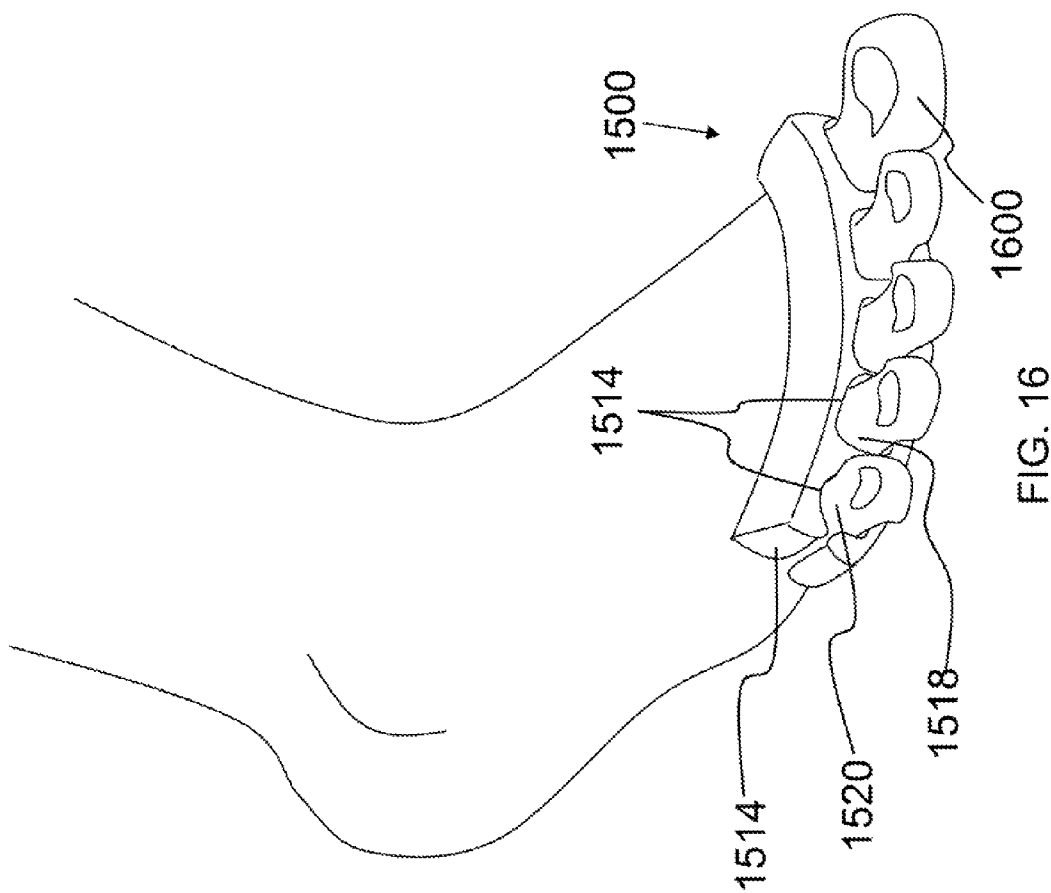


FIG. 15



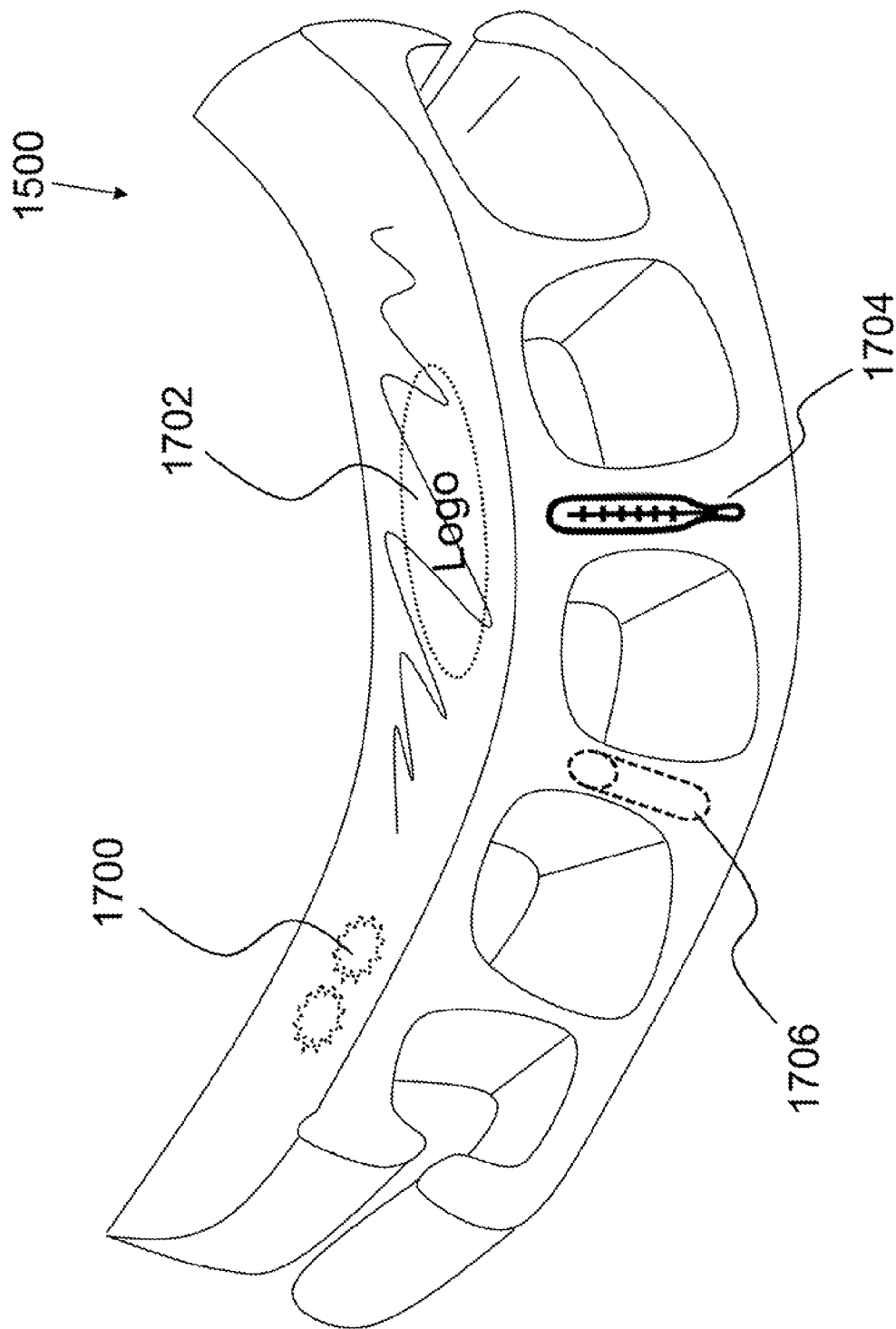


FIG. 17

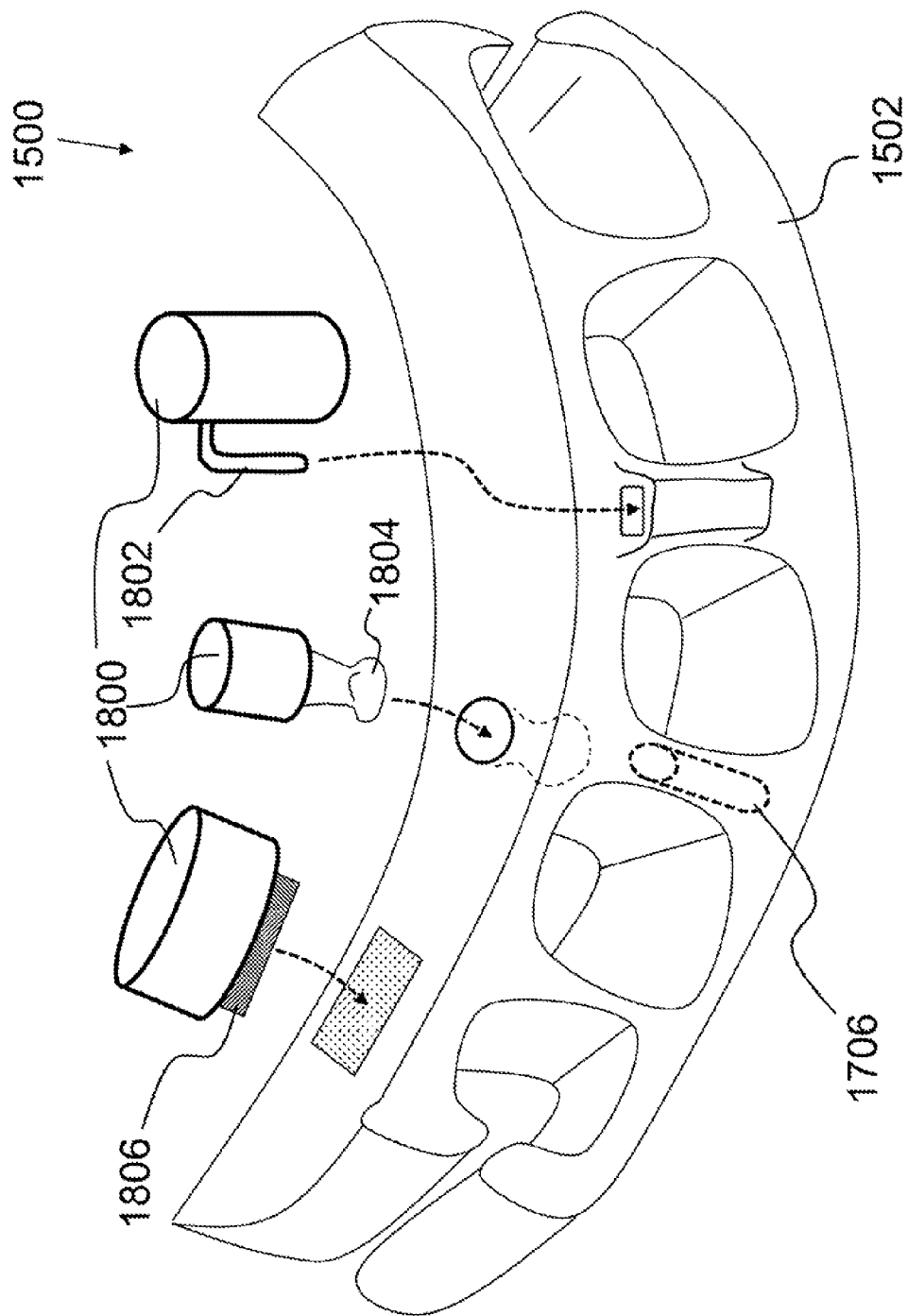


FIG. 18

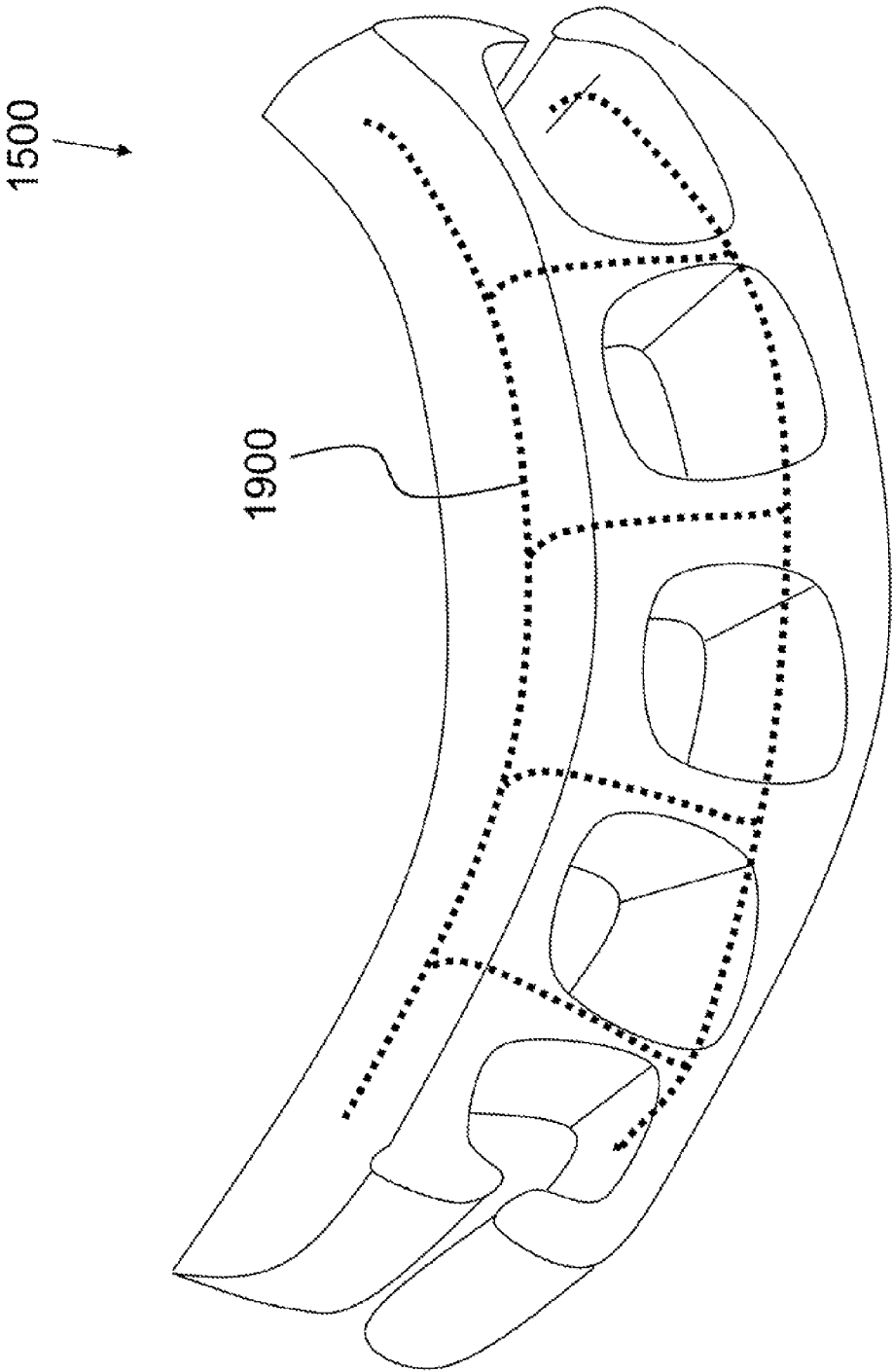


FIG. 19

1

FOOT-THERAPY AND TOE-ALIGNING DEVICE

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present application is a Continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/196,785, filed on Aug. 2, 2011, entitled, "Foot-Therapy and Toe-Aligning Device," which is a Continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/982,390, filed on Oct. 31, 2007, entitled, "Foot-Therapy and Toe-Aligning Device," now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 8,002,675, which is a Continuation-in-Part patent application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/541,067, filed on Sep. 28, 2006, entitled, "Toe Stretcher," now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 7,322,915, which is a divisional application of U.S. application Ser. No. 10/687,354, filed on Oct. 17, 2003, entitled, "Toe Stretcher," now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 7,131,939.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

(1) Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to an exercise tool, and more particularly, to a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device that is devised to align, separate, treat, and stretch toes.

(2) Description of Related Art

Therapy and exercise tools have long been known in prior art. Recently, such tools have been applied to not only stretch larger muscles, but also to those in the feet and toes. Several toe-stretching, exercising and a aligning devices have been invented where a user places a toe stretcher (aligner) between the user's toes. However, as scientific understanding advances, more effective and convenient devices are now possible.

A few advantages of existing toe stretcher devices are that they generally increase foot strength, increase toe and ankle flexibility, improve arches, stretch Achilles' tendons, and realign toes. Although toe stretchers devised to-date partially fulfill this need, they are difficult to use and remain tied to past technology and information, limiting their convenience and effectiveness. By way of example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,076,263, issued to Funatogawa (hereinafter "the Funatogawa invention"), discloses a toe holder consisting of a frame with five holes (each separated by a toe post) for toe insertion. The five holes are substantially circular, with each circle being sealed around its perimeter. Because each circle is sealed, inserting all five toes has been problematic, making it difficult to put the toe stretcher on and take it off. Additionally, this design does not allow for the wide variations seen in foot/toe shape or condition. Thus, in some cases, the devices are unwearable. Additionally, altering the relative positioning of the individual posts to easily fit a specific person's foot, or condition is again impossible with the Funatogawa invention because the surrounding frame is connected with each toe post. This also makes it impossible to separate the frame for toe insertion. Separating the frame (i.e., pulling top and bottom portions of the frame away from each other) in the Funatogawa invention would pull the toe posts together, thereby causing the toe holes to become increasingly narrow upon elongation. Because the holes are sealed around their perimeter, the Funatogawa invention does not allow for a more custom, individual post positioning. Further, the Funatogawa invention does not mention a means to keep the post in a custom position (i.e., through elongation and return).

Additionally, the Applicant of the present invention previously filed U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/687,354,

2

entitled, "Toe Stretcher" (hereinafter "application '354"), now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 7,131,939. Application '354 disclosed a toe stretcher having a frame with a separator for separating a plurality of toes. The frame included a top portion, a bottom portion, a front portion, and a back portion. The frame further included a plurality of holes through the frame for insertion of a plurality of toes, wherein each hole in the plurality of holes includes an entrance into the back portion, an exit from the front portion, and surrounding walls connecting the entrance with the exit. The surrounding wall in at least one hole in the plurality of holes is continuous and thereby sealed, and the surrounding wall in at least one other hole in the plurality of holes is non-continuous and thereby not sealed, serving as an openable toe hole allowing for easy insertion of a toe. While application '354 is particularly effective in stretching and aligning a user's toes, it requires a user to force at least one toe through a hole.

U.S. Pat. No. D415,858, issued to Funatogawa (hereinafter "the Funatogawa2 invention"), discloses a die-cut toe separator design, common in the cosmetic industry, having a bottom frame with at least four toe posts protruding up from the bottom frame. The toe separator in the Funatogawa2 invention appears to be formed of a die-cut foam and does not produce or teach a calculated balance of elastomeric properties and design shapes. Die-cut foam toe separators (for painting toe nails) are common and have been well known in the art for several years. Die-cut foam typically results in 90 degree angles, such as the 90 degree angles shown between the toe holes and the front and back portions (i.e., two-planes) of the frame in the Funatogawa2 invention. The two-plane, 90 degree cut and thickness represented in the Funatogawa2 invention would be extremely difficult if not impossible, to generate if the product disclosed in the Funatogawa2 invention was die-cut of an elastomeric gel material.

Additionally the two-plane die-cutting design in the Funatogawa2 invention does not disclose ergonomically shaped toe posts. For beneficial effects, a user would ideally wear the product for an extended period of time, unlike cosmetic toe separators. Because of the sharp edges and two-plane thick posts, the Funatogawa2 invention disclosed in the design patent cannot be worn for extended periods as it would be extremely uncomfortable. The 90 degree edges and planar surfaces of the funtagowa2 invention would focus and localize pressure on the skin, the underlying muscle, the nerves, and the bone. As such, the Funatogawa2 invention was clearly not intended to be a therapeutic tool.

Due to the die-cut foam and its two-plane design, the toe separator disclosed in the Funatogawa2 invention could not have the required properties of elongation, contraction and compression resistance, and still be comfortable to use and impart therapeutic benefits.

Further, as noted in the illustrations of the Funatogawa2 invention, the proportionality of the thickness-to-length-to-height dimensions of the toe separator are sufficient to allow a user to place toes within the toe separator. However, the dimensions do not provide a sufficient proportionality to allow a user to stretch the toes outward and away from the ball of the foot. Thus, based on the illustrations of the Funatogawa2 invention, it is clear that the toe separator was designed as a cosmetic tool rather than an exercise and therapeutic device.

Additionally, foam does not elongate sufficiently to allow a user to stretch the toe post or frame. Thus, a need exists for an intended stretchable toe post (and/or frame) because in stretching, the toe post becomes thinner in diameter and is thereby more easily placed between the user's toes. Upon release, a stretched toe post would contract in length and

expand circumferentially to conform tightly to and effectively hold the user's toes, thereby remaining in the desired position. When released, the post would expand outwardly to increase pressure against the toes and thereby hold the device in the desired position. Equally significant, the posts would contract along a lengthwise axis to impart a lengthwise axis compressive holding force on the surface of the toe as well, also holding the device in the desired position. The forces resulting from contraction and elongation, individually and in combination, would easily enable a user to place, affix and maintain a toe post position between a user's toes.

Therefore, it can be appreciated that a continuing need exists for a new and improved foot-therapy, exercise and aligning device that allows for axially, ergonomically-contoured post shapes, and a means of maintaining a post in a custom placed position through a calculated balance of elastomeric properties and design shape.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

The present invention relates to an exercise tool, and more particularly, to an exercise tool devised as a foot-therapy device to align, separate, and stretch toes. In one aspect, the devices comprise a frame that includes a top portion and a bottom portion. A plurality of posts (that are formed of an elastic (e.g., elastomeric) material) are connected with and extend from the top portion of the frame, whereby a user may place at least one of the plurality of posts between a user's toes. The posts have a length, a diameter, and a circumference, and further possess elastic (e.g., elastomeric) properties.

In another aspect, each of the plurality of posts has an outer edge and further comprises a handle attached with the outer edge.

In yet another aspect, the handles include an attachment mechanism, allowing user to connect the handles using a connector that connects with the attachment mechanism.

In yet another aspect, the attachment mechanism includes holes formed through the plurality of handles such that a user can connect the handles by using a connector that passes through the holes.

Additionally, the elastic material is an elastomer gel.

In another aspect, the device (e.g., frame and/or posts) is formed of an elastic material, such as an elastomer gel.

In yet another aspect, the handle is formed as a ring to allow a user to grasp the ring and stretch a post.

Additionally, each of the plurality of posts has a length, an outer post surface, and a center post axis running the post length. Further, the elastic material in the post has a density, with the density varying from the outer post surface to the center post axis.

Furthermore, the frame has an outer frame surface, a frame length, and a center frame-axis running the frame length. Additionally, the elastic material in the frame has a density, with the density varying from the outer frame surface to the center frame-axis.

In yet another aspect, a rigid material is positioned within the frame for providing a rigid support.

In another aspect, an electronic device is attached with the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device. The electronic device is a device selected from a group consisting of a vibrating system for massaging and stimulating a user's toes, a light system, a heating system, a sensor, a cooling system, and a pulsating pressure mechanism.

In another aspect, a motion sensor is connected with an electronic device for actuating the electronic device.

In yet another aspect, a remote control is connected with the electronic device for allowing a user to selectively control the electronic device.

Additionally, the electronic device is controlled by a processing unit.

In another aspect, a controller chip is connected with the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device.

Further, the sensor is configured to provide feedback to a user when a predetermined threshold is reached. The feedback is provided in a manner selected from a group consisting of at least one of light, sound, vibration, and a change in temperature.

In yet another aspect, each of the plurality of posts has an exposed outer edge and further comprises a plurality of handles connected with the outer edge of each of the plurality of posts, where a handle is connected with an outer edge. Additionally, an electronic device is attached with the handle.

In another aspect, the frame has an outer frame surface, a frame length, and a center frame-axis running the frame length. Each of the plurality of posts has a length, an outer post surface, and a center post axis running the post length. A magnet is attached with the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device in a manner selected from a group consisting of being positioned within a post, being attached with the outer post surface of the post, being positioned within an interior of the frame, and being attached with the outer frame surface of the frame.

In another aspect, each of the plurality of posts has an exposed outer edge and further comprises a plurality of handles connected with the outer edge of each of the plurality of posts, where a handle is connected with an outer edge. Further, a magnet is attached with the handle.

In yet another aspect, a port is formed through at least one of the plurality of posts and/or frame. The port is formed to allow a user to insert a material into the port for dispersal proximate to a user's toes.

In another aspect, the frame has an outer frame surface and each of the plurality of posts has an outer post surface. Additionally, a reservoir is formed in at least one of the following: the outer post surface and the outer frame surface, whereby a user may position a material into the reservoir.

In yet another aspect, each of the plurality of posts has an exposed outer edge and further comprises a plurality of handles connected with the outer edge of each of the plurality of posts, where a single handle is connected with a single outer edge. Further, a reservoir is formed in the handle.

In another aspect, a footwear is attached with the frame.

In yet another aspect, the frame is formed as a shoe sole insert, thereby allowing a user to place the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device within a shoe and wear the shoe while treating the user's toes.

In another aspect, the present invention further comprises a shoe sole insert attached with the frame, thereby allowing a user to place the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device within a shoe and wear the shoe while treating the user's toes.

In another aspect, each handle is integrally formed with its corresponding post as a single piece.

In yet another aspect, the present invention further comprises a sleeve for positioning over a toe post.

In another aspect, a support structure is disposed within the toe post.

Further, the frame is formed of a transparent material, allowing light to pass through the material.

In yet another aspect, an implantation element is inserted within the frame.

In another aspect, the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device comprises an elongated post formed of an elastic material.

5

The elongated post includes two opposing edges, whereby a user may use the two opposing edges to stretch the elongated post and place the now stretched elongated post between two adjacent toes, and where upon release, the elastic material of the post causes the post to conform its shape to fit snugly against the user's toes.

In yet another aspect, handles are attached at each of the two opposing edges, whereby a user may use the handles to stretch the elongated post. Additionally, the handles are integrally formed with the elongated post as a single piece.

In another aspect, the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device comprises a frame with a separator for separating a plurality of toes. The frame comprises a top portion, a bottom portion, a front portion, and a back portion. The frame further includes a plurality of holes through the frame for insertion of a plurality of toes. Each hole in the plurality of holes includes an entrance into the back portion, an exit from the front portion, and surrounding walls connecting the entrance with the exit. The surrounding walls in at least one hole in the plurality of holes is continuous and thereby sealed. Alternatively, the surrounding walls in at least one other hole in the plurality of holes is non-continuous and thereby not sealed, serving as an openable toe hole allowing for easy insertion of a toe, whereby a user may place the toe stretcher on the plurality of toes and effectively separate and stretch the toes.

In another aspect, the frame is formed of a transparent, elastic material and further includes an implantation element inserted within the frame.

In yet another aspect, a reservoir system is formed within the frame for receiving a material externally and applying the material to a user through use of the reservoir and the device.

In another aspect, an attachment mechanism is attached with the frame for allowing a user to attach an external object (such as an electronic device) with the device via the attachment mechanism. The electronic device can be attached internally or externally (using the attachment mechanism). Non-limiting examples of such an electronic device include a vibrator mechanism, a heating system, a cooling system, and a light system.

Finally, the present invention also includes a method for forming and using the device described herein. As can be appreciated by one skilled in the art, the method for forming the device comprises a plurality of acts of forming and attaching the device and related components. Further, the method for using the device comprises a plurality of acts applying and using the device as described below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The nature of the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device described herein will be readily apparent in the following drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating the device being attached with a user's toes;

FIG. 3A is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention;

FIG. 3B is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device, illustrating various handle configurations according to the present invention;

FIG. 3C is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device, illustrating a handle configuration according to the present invention;

6

FIG. 4 is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating holes formed through a plurality of posts;

FIG. 5 is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating an electronic device being connected with the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device;

FIG. 6 is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating a motion sensor and a remote control being connected with the electronic device;

FIG. 7 is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating a port being formed through a post, and a reservoir being formed on the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device;

FIG. 8 is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device being attached with a footwear;

FIG. 9 is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device being integrally formed with the footwear;

FIG. 10 is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device being attached with a shoe insole;

FIG. 11 is a front-view of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device being integrally formed with shoe insole;

FIG. 12 is an illustration of another aspect of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, where the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device is formed as a dumbbell shaped post;

FIG. 13 is an illustration of a sleeve for covering a toe post according to the present invention;

FIG. 14 is an illustration of the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, with a support structure disposed therein;

FIG. 15 is an illustration of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention;

FIG. 16 is an illustration of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, with toes inserted therein;

FIG. 17 is an illustration of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating implantation elements implanted within the device;

FIG. 18 is an illustration of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating external objects being attached with the device via an attachment mechanism; and

FIG. 19 is an illustration of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device according to the present invention, illustrating a support structure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present invention relates to an exercise tool, and more particularly, to a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device that is devised to align, separate, treat, and stretch toes. The following description is presented to enable one of ordinary skill in the art to make and use the invention and to incorporate it in the context of particular applications. Various modifications, as well as a variety of uses in different applications will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art, and the general principles defined herein may be applied to a wide range of

embodiments. Thus, the present invention is not intended to be limited to the embodiments presented, but is to be accorded the widest scope consistent with the principles and novel features disclosed herein.

In the following detailed description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a more thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without necessarily being limited to these specific details. In other instances, well-known structures and devices may be shown in block diagram form, rather than in detail, in order to avoid obscuring the present invention.

The reader's attention is directed to all papers and documents which are filed concurrently with this specification and which are open to public inspection with this specification, and the contents of all such papers and documents are incorporated herein by reference. All the features disclosed in this specification, (including any accompanying claims, abstract, and drawings) may be replaced by alternative features serving the same, equivalent or similar purpose, unless expressly stated otherwise. Thus, unless expressly stated otherwise, each feature disclosed is one example only of a generic series of equivalent or similar features.

Furthermore, any element in a claim that does not explicitly state "means for" performing a specified function, or "step for" performing a specific function, is not to be interpreted as a "means" or "step" clause as specified in 35 U.S.C. Section 112, Paragraph 6. In particular, the use of "step of" or "act of" in the claims herein is not intended to invoke the provisions of 35 U.S.C. 112, Paragraph 6.

(1) Description of Various Aspects

A foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** according to the present invention is shown in FIG. 1. The foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** comprises a frame **102** that allows for a post (described below) to become attached, embedded, or integrally formed thereto. The device **100** (including the frame **102**) is constructed of any suitable material, a non-limiting example of which includes an elastic material (e.g., an elastomeric gel such as a polymer or any other suitable elastic material). Although the frame **102** can be formed of other materials, it is desirable that it is formed of an elastomeric material. Additionally, the frame **102** may be optionally inflatable or filled with a fluid. When inflatable, the frame **102** may be inflatable to various pressures. Furthermore, the frame **102** may be formed through any suitable means for forming a frame **102**, non-limiting examples of which include injection molding, cast molding, compression molding, and extrusion molding. Further, the device (e.g., frame **102** and posts) are formed of a material (e.g., transparent material) that allows light to pass through the material. For example, the elastomeric gel is transparent such that a user can see into or through the frame **102** (and posts) and the device **100**. The device **100** can be formed such that its transparency ranges from 100 percent to a being opaque.

The frame **102** includes a top portion **104**, a bottom portion **106**, a front portion **108**, and a back portion **110**. A plurality of posts **112** formed of an elastic material are connected with the frame **102** such that they extend from the top portion **104**. A non-limiting example of the elastic/elastomeric material is a polymer elastic gel. Each of the plurality of posts **112** has an exposed outer edge **114**. The posts **112** can be separately formed and attached with the frame **102** or, in another aspect, the posts **112** are integrally formed with the frame **102** through a single, injection-molding process where the frame **102** and posts **112** are separate in name only.

FIG. 2 illustrates a user **200** using the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100**. As shown, a user **200** may place at

least one of the plurality of posts **112** between their toes **202** and pull **203** the post **112** to stretch and elongate the post **112** between the toes **202**. Upon release, the elastic/elastomeric material of the post **112** causes the post **112** to attempt to return **204** (contract) to its original shape. Because a toe **202** is placed between two adjacent posts **112**, the post cannot return to its exact original shape, thereby causing portions of the post to expand out and conform its shape to, and fit, snugly against, the user's toes **202**. For example, a top portion (and sometimes a bottom portion) of the post expands out to fit snugly against the toes **202**.

The ability of the posts **112** to conform their shape to a user's toes **202** is a beneficial feature of the present invention. For example, the toe posts in the prior art are formed of a die-cut or pressure molded semi-rigid foam. Due to the nature of foam, foam does not allow for the required elongation and subsequent conforming shape of the toe posts, as applicable to the present invention. In other prior art, such as Application '354, the outer edges of the toe posts are connected by a frame. Because the outer edges of the frame are connected, the toe posts in Application '354 cannot be easily elongated and returned to conform their shape to the user's toes.

For further clarification, referring to FIG. 1, the toe posts **112** have a length **116**, a diameter **118**, and a circumference **120**. Being formed of an elastomeric material causes the toe posts **112** to have properties such that stretching the toe posts **112** lengthwise **116** causes the toe posts **112** to become thinner in diameter **118** and thereby more easily placed between the user's toes. Upon release, a stretched toe post **112** would contract in length **116** and expand circumferentially **120** to conform tightly to and effectively hold the user's toes, thereby remaining in the desired position. In other words, when released, the post **112** expands its diameter **118** to increase pressure against the toes and thereby hold the device in the desired position. Equally significant, the posts **112** contract along a lengthwise **116** axis to impart a lengthwise **116** axis compressive holding force on the surface of the toe as well, also holding the device in the desired position. The forces resulting from contraction and elongation, individually and in combination, easily enable a user to place, affix and maintain a toe post **112** position between a user's toes.

Thus, the elastomeric material of the toe posts **112** of the present invention provides a benefit that allows the foot therapy and toe-aligning device **100** to be easily applied to a user's toes **202** by being elongated and then placed individually between adjacent toes **202**. The toe post **112** can be positioned fore and aft between the toes **202** to allow for user-specific placement and positioning. Thereafter, upon release, the elastomeric material of the toe post **112** causes the toe post **112** to conform its shape to the user's toes **202** and to be positioned and maintained at numerous locations between the user's toes **202** for customizable positioning. To provide this effect, the toe posts **112** are formed of an elastomeric polymer that has sufficient elastomeric properties. For example, if the toe posts **112** are too soft, then they will not provide a therapeutic benefit of separating adjacent toes **202**. Alternatively, if the toe posts **112** are too hard (e.g., hard plastic), then they will not allow the toe posts **112** to be stretched and released to be conformed to the user's toes **202**. As a non-limiting example, the toe posts **112** are desirably formed of an elastomeric material having the following properties: hardness between 20 and 90 on the Shore 00 scale for product comfort; elongation between 50% and 1000% for product functionality; and tensile strength between 100 and 2000 pounds per square inch (psi). More specifically, the toe posts **112** are formed of an elastomeric material having the following properties: hardness between 35 and 80 on the

Shore 00 scale; elongation between 50% and 800%; and tensile strength between 100 and 800 psi. As can be appreciated by one skilled in the art, the above ranges are for exemplary illustrative purposes only and are not intended to limit the present invention thereto.

As shown in the figures, the toe posts 112 are formed in any suitable ergonomic shape, non-limiting examples of which include being conically and/or cylindrically shaped. The toe post 112 is formed in a shape to provide a therapeutic benefit in combination with the properties of the elastomeric material. For example, in certain circumstances, a thicker toe post 112 would benefit from a softer elastomeric material. Alternatively, a thinner toe post 112 would benefit from harder elastomeric material.

It should be noted that the description above with respect to the elastomeric material of the toe posts 112 is also applicable to the frame 102. For example, the frame 102 can also be formed of an elastomeric material that includes all of the elastomeric properties listed above. Thus, the frame 102 is formed to also provide for extension and compression forces. In this aspect, the frame 102 can be stretched 206 along a lateral axis to allow a user to position the frame 102 against the user's 200 foot. Upon release of the stretched frame 102, the frame 102 contracts in an attempt to return to its original shape which causes the frame 102 to snugly hold the toes 202 in place along the lateral axis of the frame 102.

As shown in FIG. 3A, the frame 102 has an outer frame surface 300, a frame length 302, and a center frame-axis 304 running the frame length 302. Additionally, each of the plurality of posts 112 has a length 306, an outer post surface 308, and a center post axis 310 running the post length 306. The material forming the frame 102 and posts 112 is formed to have a consistent density throughout the frame 102 and posts 112 respectively. In another aspect, the elastomeric material forming the posts 112 has a compression resistance and a density that varies from the outer post surface 308 to the center post axis 310 (as a non-limiting example, the density is greater at the center post axis 310 and decreases toward the outer post surface 308). In yet another aspect, the elastomeric material forming the frame 102 has a compression resistance and density that varies from the outer frame surface 300 to the center frame axis 304 (as a non-limiting example, the density is greater at the center frame axis 304 than the outer frame surface 300). The compression resistance is softer on the outside and harder on the inside of each of the respective locations. Alternatively, the compression resistance can be harder on the outside and softer on the inside.

To assist a user in stretching each post 112, each post 112 includes a handle 312 connected with the outer edge 114. The handle 312 can be formed as the outer edge 114 itself, or formed separately and attached with the outer edge 114. As a non-limiting example, the outer edge 114 of the toe post 112 is formed in a bulbous shape to operate as a handle 312. The handle 312 allows a user to easily stretch and elongate the post 112.

FIG. 3B illustrates additional integral and attached handle configurations according to the present invention. For example, the handle can be an integrally formed ring 314 that is formed at the outer edge 114 of the post 112. As can be appreciated by one skilled in the art, an example of such a process for forming an integrally formed ring 314 is one-piece injection molding. Using a ring-shape, a user can insert a finger into or grasp the ring to stretch the post 112. In another aspect, the handle can be a fused ring 316 that is separately formed and fused to the outer edge 114 of the post 112 using standard material fusing techniques (e.g., melting and gluing). In yet another aspect, the handle can be a solid

ring 318 that is attached with an anchor 320 that is disposed within the post 112. For example, the solid ring 318 can be formed of a stiff material such as a hard plastic or metal that allows a user to grasp the handle and stretch the post 112, with the anchor 320 pulling up upon the outer edge 114. As can be appreciated by one skilled in the art, the handle is any suitable shape to allow a user to hold and stretch the post 112. For example, the handle can also be formed as a solid bar 322 that is attached with an anchor 320 disposed within the post 112.

FIG. 3C illustrates yet another handle configuration. In this aspect, the handle 312 is connected with the outer edge 114 of each of the plurality of posts 112. The handle 312 can be integrally formed with the posts 112, or formed as a separate item and attached with the posts 112 (either externally using an attachment mechanism (as described below) or internally). For example, the handle 312 can be connected with an anchor 320 that is disposed within each of the posts 112.

As shown in FIG. 4, the handles 312 optionally include an attachment mechanism 400, allowing a user to connect the handles 312 using a connector 402 that connects the attachment mechanism 400. The attachment mechanism 400 is any suitable mechanism or device that allows for connection with the connector 402, a non-limiting example of which includes holes formed through the handles 312. The connector 402 is any suitable mechanism or device that can be connected with the attachment mechanism 400 to allow a user to connect the handles 312, non-limiting examples of which include a thread and cord.

In some applications, it is desirable to have an integral flexible frame 102, such as that formed entirely of an elastomeric material. In other applications, it may be desirable to have a frame 102 that has an increased rigidity. As such, in another aspect, a rigid material 404 is positioned within the frame 102 to provide a rigid support for the frame 102. The rigid material 404 is any suitable mechanism or device for providing a rigid support for the frame 102, a non-limiting example of which includes a rigid rod, such as a plastic rod.

As shown in FIG. 5, to provide additional therapeutic benefits to a user, an electronic device 500 is attached with the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device 100. The electronic device 500 is attached with the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device 100 in any suitable manner to provide a desired therapeutic benefit non-limiting examples of which include being positioned within a post 112, being attached with the outer post surface 308 of the post 112, being positioned within an interior of the frame 102, being attached with the outer frame surface 300 of the frame 102, and being attached with a handle 312 (interior and/or exterior).

The electronic device 500 is any suitable mechanism or device for providing a therapeutic benefit, non-limiting examples of which include a vibrating mechanism for massaging and stimulating a user's toes, a light system (e.g., light-emitting diode, near infra-red), a heating system (e.g., heating element), a cooling system, a sensor, and a pulsating pressure mechanism. The sensor is any suitable mechanism or device capable of sensing something, non-limiting examples of which include a pressure sensor, a light sensor, and a temperature sensor.

When a sensor is included, the sensor is configured to provide feedback when a predetermined threshold is reached. For example, if the sensor is a pressure sensor, the sensor may create a sound when a certain amount of pressing pressure is reached. As another non-limiting example, if the electronic device 500 is a heating element, an alarm may be sounded when the temperature reaches a certain degree. The feedback is any suitable feedback for alerting a user, or third party, that the predetermined threshold has been met, non-limiting

11

examples of which include light, sound, vibration, and temperature (e.g., change in temperature). In other words, the feedback is any suitable feedback that can be received and interpreted by a user or a third party.

As can be appreciated by one skilled in the art, the electronic device **500** requires a power source. The power source may be included within the device, or maintained externally and electrically connected with the electronic device **500**.

In another aspect, a magnet **502** is attached with the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** to provide a therapeutic benefit. The magnet **502** is attached with the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** in any suitable manner, non-limiting examples of which include being positioned within a post **112**, being attached with the outer post surface **308** of the post **112**, being positioned within an interior of the frame **102**, being attached with the outer frame surface **300** of the frame **102**, and being attached with a handle **312**. For illustrative purposes with respect to FIG. 5, the magnet **502** is interchangeable with the electronic device **500**.

As shown in FIG. 6, the electronic device **500** can be controlled through a variety of techniques. For example, a motion sensor **600** may be connected with electronic device **500** to actuate the device **500**. In this aspect, the device **500** is turned on when the motion sensor **600** detects motion. As another example, a remote control **602** is connected with the electronic device **500** to allow a user to selectively control the electronic device **500**, such as by turning it on, off, up, down, and to a time-cycle. The up and down controls relate to functions as applicable to certain electronic devices **500**, such as when the electronic device is a heating element or a vibrating mechanism. Additionally, the remote control **602** can be either wired or wireless.

With the advent of new computer technologies, it may be desirable to control the electronic device **500** via a computer (i.e., processing unit). In this aspect, the remote control **602** is a processing unit that can operate the electronic device **500**. For example, certain computer-controlled therapeutic programs can be operated and controlled via the processing unit. As a specific non-limiting example, a massage therapy program can be used to control the vibrating mechanism, where it increases and decreases the vibrating strength of the vibrating mechanism according to a particular massage therapy program.

In addition to controlling the electronic device **500**, the processing unit can be used to monitor and control the biological functions of the user. For example, the processing unit can be connected to a temperature sensor (e.g., a thermometer, as illustrated in FIG. 17) to monitor the user's temperature. If the user's temperature falls outside a predetermined range of temperatures, the processing unit can turn on a heating or cooling system, as appropriate, to heat/cool the user. As can be appreciated by one skilled in the art, such a monitoring and control feature can also be used to monitor and control external conditions and devices, or other electronic devices, such as lights and a vibrator mechanism.

In yet another aspect, a computer controller chip **604** can be connected with the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** itself. As was the case above, the chip **604** is electronically connected with the electronic device **500** and is used to control the electronic device **500**. The chip **604** is connected with the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** at any suitable location, non-limiting examples of which include being positioned within, a post **112**, being attached with the outer post surface **308**, being positioned within an interior of the frame **102**, being attached with the outer frame surface **300** of the frame **102**, and being attached with a handle **312**.

12

In another aspect, it may be desirable to apply a material (such as a lotion or medicinal cream) to the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** for dispersal around a user's foot. As shown in FIG. 7, a port **700** is formed through at least one of the plurality of posts **112** and/or frame **102**. The port **700** is formed in any suitable manner to allow a user to insert a material into the port **700** for dispersal proximate a user's toes. For example, the port **700** may have an inlet **702** formed in the handle **312**, with an outlet **704** formed in the post **112** such that material inserted within the inlet **702** is dispersed to the user's toes at the outlet **704**.

The material may be applied to the user's foot through a variety of techniques. For example, a reservoir **706** is formed in the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** such that a user may position a material into the reservoir **706**. The reservoir **706** is formed at any suitable location on the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100**, non-limiting examples of which include being formed in the outer post surface **308**, being formed in the outer frame surface **300**, and being formed in the handle **312**. The reservoir **706** is formed in any suitable shape to hold the material. For example, the reservoir **706** may be a simple divot, or may include ribs. The reservoir **706** can be used to hold materials externally to be delivered on or through the device **100**, non-limiting examples of such materials include scented liquids, lotions, powders, and medicinal products (such as treatment products for athlete's foot).

In another aspect, any outer surface of the device **100** may include traction members (not shown) to increase the contact surface area of the area in which the traction members are formed. The traction members improve the traction characteristics between the device **100** and the user. For example, the traction members may be ribs bumps, notches, etc., to cause the device to better grip another surface. By way of example, the posts include traction members to assist the post in affixing with an adjacent toe.

In another aspect, the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** can be incorporated into footwear through a variety of techniques. As shown in FIG. 8, a piece of footwear **800** is attached with the frame **102**. Alternatively, as shown in FIG. 9, the piece of footwear **800** can operate as the frame, with the posts **112** protruding from the piece of footwear **800**.

In yet another aspect, the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** can be incorporated into a shoe sole insert. As shown in FIG. 10, a shoe sole insert **1000** is attached with the frame **102**, thereby allowing a user to place the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** within a shoe and wear the shoe while treating the user's toes. Alternatively, as shown in FIG. 11, the shoe sole insert **1000** can operate as the frame, with posts **112** attached with and protruding from the shoe sole insert **1000**. Another example of such a configuration would be an enlarged frame that includes a sufficient number of posts **112** for both feet (e.g., 8 posts) with the posts appropriately positioned to allow for placement of both feet upon the enlarged frame. In this aspect, the enlarged frame would act as a platform where both feet are held in place upon it using a combination of the platform and toe posts **112**. Such an aspect would be beneficial, for example, for holding both feet in place during a foot bath.

As described above, the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device includes a plurality of posts attached with some form of a frame. However, the invention is not intended to be limited thereto and can include additional aspects, such as that shown in FIG. 12. FIG. 12 illustrates another aspect of the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1200**. In this aspect, the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1200** comprises an elongated post **1202** formed of an elastomeric material. The elon-

13

gated post **1202** has two opposing edges **1204** with handles **1206** attached at each of the two opposing edges **1204**. The handles **1206** may be separately formed and attached with the elongated post **1202**, or integrally formed as a single piece. A user may use the handles **1206** to stretch **1208** the elongated post **1202** and place the now stretched elongated post **1202** between two adjacent toes **1210**. Upon release, the elastomeric material of the post **1202** causes the post **1202** to conform its shape to fit snugly against the user's toes **1210**.

FIG. **13** illustrates another aspect of the present invention where a sleeve **300** is formed to fit over at least one of the toe posts **112**. The sleeve **1300** is generally formed in any suitable shape to contain a toe post **112** therein. For example, the sleeve **1300** is generally cylindrical. Additionally, the sleeve can be formed of an elastomeric material so that it is expandable to conform to the shape of the post **112**. The sleeve **1300** can be a continuous or split sleeve **1302**. The split sleeve **1302** allows a user to open the sleeve for easy positioning over the post **112**. The sleeve allows a user to customize the therapeutic action of the present invention and to deliver medication, cream, magnets, scent, etc. to a user's toes. For example, a user can insert a cream within the sleeve such that the cream is dispersed around the edges of the sleeve to a user's toes. The sleeve can also be formed to hold other devices (non-limiting examples of which include a vibrator or orthopedic pad for the ball of user's foot, etc.) to further treat and accommodate each individual's unique biometric characteristics. In another aspect, the sleeve itself can operate as a medicinal delivery mechanism for delivering a medication to a user. As a non-limiting example of such a mechanism, the sleeve can include the medications typically used in a non-smoking transdermal patch. Alternatively, the sleeve can operate as a base for placement of other medicinal systems. As a non-limiting example, the sleeve is formed to operate as a base for placement of an adhesive non-smoking transdermal patch upon the sleeve, thereby allowing for medical benefits.

It should be noted that the various medicinal delivery systems (reservoir, port, sleeve, etc.) described herein are not limited to the posts and can be formed and applied at any desirable portion of the device, such as within the holes, along the base, or at any other portion of the device. Thus, using the present invention, a user can wear the device while simultaneously applying a myriad of creams, lotions, powders, medicines, etc.

When disposable, such a disposable post cover would allow multiple people to use the present invention without fear of cross-contamination from other users. Additionally, the sleeve **1300** can be used to hold and transport a product to the toes, non-limiting examples of such a product include an anti-fungal cream, an anti-bacterial agent, and/or a moisturizing material. In another aspect, the sleeve **1300** itself can be impregnated with the product.

FIG. **14** illustrates another aspect of the present invention. A support structure **1400** can be disposed within the toe posts **112** to provide the toe posts **112** with a rigid (or bendable/articulating) support. The support structure **1400** is any suitable rigid material, non-limiting examples of which include a metal rod and a plastic rod. The support structure **1400** can be disposed within the toe posts **112** individually such that they are not interconnected, or they can be connected through attachment with the rigid material shown in FIG. **4**.

Another aspect of a foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1500** according to the present invention is shown in FIG. **15**. The foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1500** comprises a frame **1502** with a separator **1503** for separating a plurality of toes. The frame **1502** may be constructed of any suitable material, non-limiting examples of which include plastic,

14

silicone, and cork. Additionally, the frame **1502** may be optionally inflatable or filled with a fluid. When inflatable, the frame **1502** may be inflatable to various pressures. Furthermore, the frame **1502** may be formed through any suitable means for forming a frame **1502**, non-limiting examples of which include injection molding, cast molding, compression molding, and extrusion molding. The frame **1502** has a top portion **1504**, a bottom portion **1506**, a front portion **1508**, and a back portion **1510**.

Included in the frame **1502** are a plurality of holes **1514**, each configured for insertion of a toe. Each hole has an entrance on the back portion **1510**, an exit on the front portion **1508**, and surrounding walls **1516**. The surrounding walls **1516** may be flat, curved or any other suitable shape to accommodate a toe. Additionally, the surrounding walls **1516** in at least one hole of the plurality of holes **1514** is continuous and thereby sealed, serving as a sealed toe hole **1518**. Additionally, the surrounding walls **1516** in at least one other hole in the plurality of holes **1514** is non-continuous and thereby not sealed, serving as an openable toe hole **1520** allowing for easy insertion of a corresponding toe or toes.

The openable toe hole **1520** may be sealed through use of an enclosure **1522**. Furthermore, the enclosure **1522** may be any suitable device or mechanism for attaching one medium with another, non-limiting examples of which include Velcro, snaps, an elastic band, hole and pin, and a male/female joint system.

A foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1500** with toes **1600** inserted therein, is illustrated in FIG. **16**. Although at least one hole in the plurality of holes **1514** serves as a sealed toe hole **1518**, at least one other hole in the plurality of holes **1514** is not sealed and serves as an openable toe hole **1520**. Because the openable toe hole **1520** is not sealed, the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1500** may be easily distorted and manipulated to allow easy insertion as well as articulation and accommodation of toes **1600** therein. The significance of the openable toe hole **1520** is that without the openable toe hole **1520**, the toe stretcher is not easily manipulated, thereby making it difficult to utilize existing toe stretchers.

The foot-therapy, exercise, and toe aligning device **1500** teaches specific combinations of one or more closed and openable toe holes that provides for a superior balance of convenience for placing and securing the device on the toes. These specific combinations also provide for superior therapeutic and exercise benefits for people with variations in foot and toe structure, foot conditioning, and pathology. The size, shape, and location of the toe hole openings provides unique and unanticipated benefits for people with varying foot and toe structures, conditions and pathology.

There are unique and novel advantages in the accommodation of toe movement/articulation, in passive and active use of the device **1500** that result from combinations of openable and closed toe openings. For example, a completely closed toe opening limits the amount of freedom (articulation) of movement that is available to the toes and feet. Under many circumstances, such as stiff toes and pathologic foot conditions (i.e., bunions, hammer toes, cross toes, etc.), a specific combination of closed and openable toe hole openings yields a more convenient and superior exercise and therapeutic result.

It should be noted that the configuration of the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1500** illustrated in FIGS. **15** through **19** can include each of the devices and elements that are attached to or within the frame (and posts) as described and illustrated in FIGS. **1** through **14**. For example and as can be appreciated by one skilled in the art, the reservoir, electronic devices, processing units, etc., can also be attached with (or

15

within, as applicable) the frame **1502** of FIG. **15** to provide an equivalent function to the user. It should also be noted that the mechanisms, elements, and devices described and illustrated with respect to FIGS. **17** through **19** can also be attached with and used with the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **100** that is illustrated in FIGS. **1** through **14**.

As shown in FIG. **17**, the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1500** can also include a variety of implantation elements. In addition to the electronic devices described above, the implantation element is any suitable element that can be implanted, either fully or partially, within the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1500**. Although illustrated as being fully implanted at various locations within the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1500**, the present invention is not intended to be limited thereto as the implantation elements, nor their implantation depths, can be affixed within the device **1500** at any desired location and at any desired implantation depth.

The implantation element can be used to provide a variety of cosmetic, ornamental, entertainment, therapeutic, and educational benefits. As a non-limiting example, the implantation element is a light or a series of lights **1700**. The lights **1700** can be used for a variety of purposes, non-limiting examples of which include light therapy and messaging. For example, the lights **1700** can be used for light therapy, where the light being emitted is within a range of the light spectrum (e.g., infrared) that provides a therapeutic benefit to the user.

As another example, the lights **1700** can be used as a messaging system. If the lights are used as a light messaging system (such as a light emitting diode (LED) system), the lights **1700** can be used to generate a variety of messages for entertainment, educational, ornamental, and advertisement purposes. In another aspect, the implantation element can be a display device **1702** that is used to display a variety of messages. As a non-limiting example, the display device **1702** can be a plastic disk (or any other suitable shape) that includes logos of recognizable sports teams, groups, companies, events, etc. (e.g., Coca-Cola™, Detroit Red Wings™, Beverly Hills Hotel™, etc.). As described above, the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1500** can be formed of a transparent material (e.g., a clear or colorless elastomeric gel or other transparent material). It should be noted that the device **1500** can also be formed of translucent tents with color that allow for light to pass therethrough. Thus, when the display device **1702** is inserted within, the foot-therapy and toe-aligning device **1500**, a user can easily see and read any messages imprinted upon or otherwise displayed by the display device **1702**.

Another non-limiting example of an implantation element is a thermometer **1704** or other suitable sensing device. As described above, the thermometer **1704** (or other sensing device) can be used to monitor and control the biological functions of the user to provide for therapeutic benefits.

As yet another non-limiting example, the implantation element can be a magnet **1706** or several magnets. As can be appreciated by one skilled in the art, the magnet **1706** can be used to provide a therapeutic benefit to the user. In another aspect, the magnet **1706** can be used to attach an external object with the device **1500** and thereby operate as an attachment mechanism.

As shown in FIG. **18** the present invention also includes an attachment mechanism that is attached with the frame **1502**. The attachment mechanism is any suitable mechanism or device that is operable for detachably attaching an external object **1800** with the device **1500**. Non-limiting examples of such attachment mechanisms include a magnet **1706** system, a clip mechanism **1802**, a male/female plug mechanism **1804**,

16

and a hook and loop fastener (e.g. Velcro) **1806**. The external object **1800** is any suitable object that is desirable for connecting with the device **1500**. For example, each of the electronic devices and implantation elements as described above can be attached with the device **1500** as an external object **1800**. As yet a further example, the display device (illustrated as element **1702** in FIG. **17**) can be affixed externally as an external object **1800** instead of being implanted within the device **1502**.

As described above with respect to FIG. **14**, the present invention also includes a support structure **1400**, either pre-formed or formable. Although FIG. **14** illustrates the support structure **1400** as being inserted within only the toe posts **112**, the present invention is not intended to be limited thereto. As shown in FIG. **19**, the support structure **1900** can be formed throughout (and within) the device **1500** to allow a user to customize the shape of the device **1500**. In this aspect, the support structure **1900** is malleable or bendable such that it operates as a formable armature. The support structure **1900** is formed of any suitably re-shapeable material that maintains a new shape once positioned in the new shape, a non-limiting example of which includes metallic wire. Thus, using the support structure **1900**, a user can alter the shape of the device **1500** to increase comfort, etc.

In summary, the present invention is an exercise foot-therapy and toe-aligning device that is formed to include a myriad of features. Examples of such features include educational benefits, therapeutic effects, advertisement opportunities, etc. Such features are provided using a variety of devices and implementations (e.g., implantation elements, electronic devices, external objects, reservoir, support structure, etc.) that can be used with each of the aspects illustrated in FIGS. **1** through **19**.

What is claimed is:

1. A foot-therapy and toe-aligning device comprising:

a frame being formed of an elastomeric material, the frame having a top portion, a bottom portion, a front portion, a back portion, and opposed first and second ends that define a frame length, the frame further including a first peripheral projection and a second peripheral projection, the first and second peripheral projections rising upwards from the first and second ends of the frame, respectively, and being spaced apart along the frame length;

a plurality of stretchable toe posts formed of an elastomeric material that are integrally formed with the top portion of the frame and are spaced apart along the frame length between the first and second peripheral projections, each of the toe posts extending upwards from the top portion of the frame along a toe post length and terminating in an outer edge having a bulbous shape, the bulbous shape at the outer edge of each toe post extending beyond a portion of the toe post immediately beneath the bulbous shape in all directions; and

wherein the plurality of toe posts consists of four toe posts that are positionable to separate all five toes of a human foot, with two of the four toe posts being inner toe posts and two of the four toe posts being outer toe posts, wherein the first peripheral projection is located outside of and adjacent to one of the two outer toe posts and the second peripheral projection is located outside of and adjacent to the other of the two outer toe posts, the first peripheral projection and the second peripheral projection being sized so that, when the plurality of toe posts are received between five toes of a human foot, the first peripheral projection rises above a toe located between the first peripheral projection and its adjacent outer toe

post, and the second peripheral projection rises above a toe located between the second peripheral projection and its adjacent outer toe post.

2. The foot-therapy and toe-aligning device set forth in claim 1 wherein the bottom portion of the frame is planar 5 underneath the two inner toe posts and the two outer toe posts.

3. The foot-therapy and toe-aligning device set forth in claim 1 wherein each of the first peripheral projection and the second peripheral projection rises upwards in a vertical plane.

4. The foot-therapy and toe-aligning device set forth in 10 claim 1, wherein the front and back portions of the frame define a frame width, and wherein the frame width at the first end of the frame is greater than the frame width at the second end of the frame.

5. The foot-therapy and toe-aligning device set forth in 15 claim 1, wherein the elastic frame and plurality of stretchable toe posts are formed of an elastomeric gel such that the elastomeric gel of the frame and toe posts has a consistent density throughout the frame and toe posts.

6. The foot-therapy and toe-aligning device set forth in 20 claim 1, wherein at least a portion of the frame is curved along the frame length.

7. The foot-therapy and toe-aligning device set forth in claim 1, wherein at least a portion of the frame is curved along 25 the frame length, and wherein the front and back portions of the frame define a frame width, the frame width at the first end of the frame being greater than the frame width at the second end of the frame.

* * * * *