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- (54) **THERMAL BLANKET**
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(List continued on next page.)

Related U.S. Patent Documents

- Reissue of:
- (64) Patent No.: **5,405,371**
 - Issued: **Apr. 11, 1995**
 - Appl. No.: **08/638,748**
 - Filed: **Jan. 8, 1991**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A thermal blanket includes an inflatable covering with a head end, a foot end, two edges and an undersurface. The covering includes a plurality of inflatable chambers that are inflated when a thermally-controlled inflating medium is introduced into the thermal blanket through an inlet at the foot end. When inflated, the thermal blanket self-erects into a structure and provides a bath of thermally-controlled inflating medium to the interior of the erected structure through an aperture array on the undersurface of the inflatable covering. The thermal blanket includes a first aspect in which the inflatable chambers in the covering are oriented for substantially longitudinal disposition over a portion of a patient's body extending from the pelvic area to the feet of the patient's body. This aspect may include a provision for securing the inflatable covering to the patient's body at the head end and an uninflatable foot drape at the foot end. In another aspect of the thermal blanket, the inflatable chambers are oriented for substantially transverse disposition over a portion of the patient's body extending across the arms and chest of the patient's body. This aspect may include an uninflatable portion at the foot end of the thermal blanket with provision for attaching to a patient's body and a head drape at the head end to drape over the patient's head.

U.S. Applications:

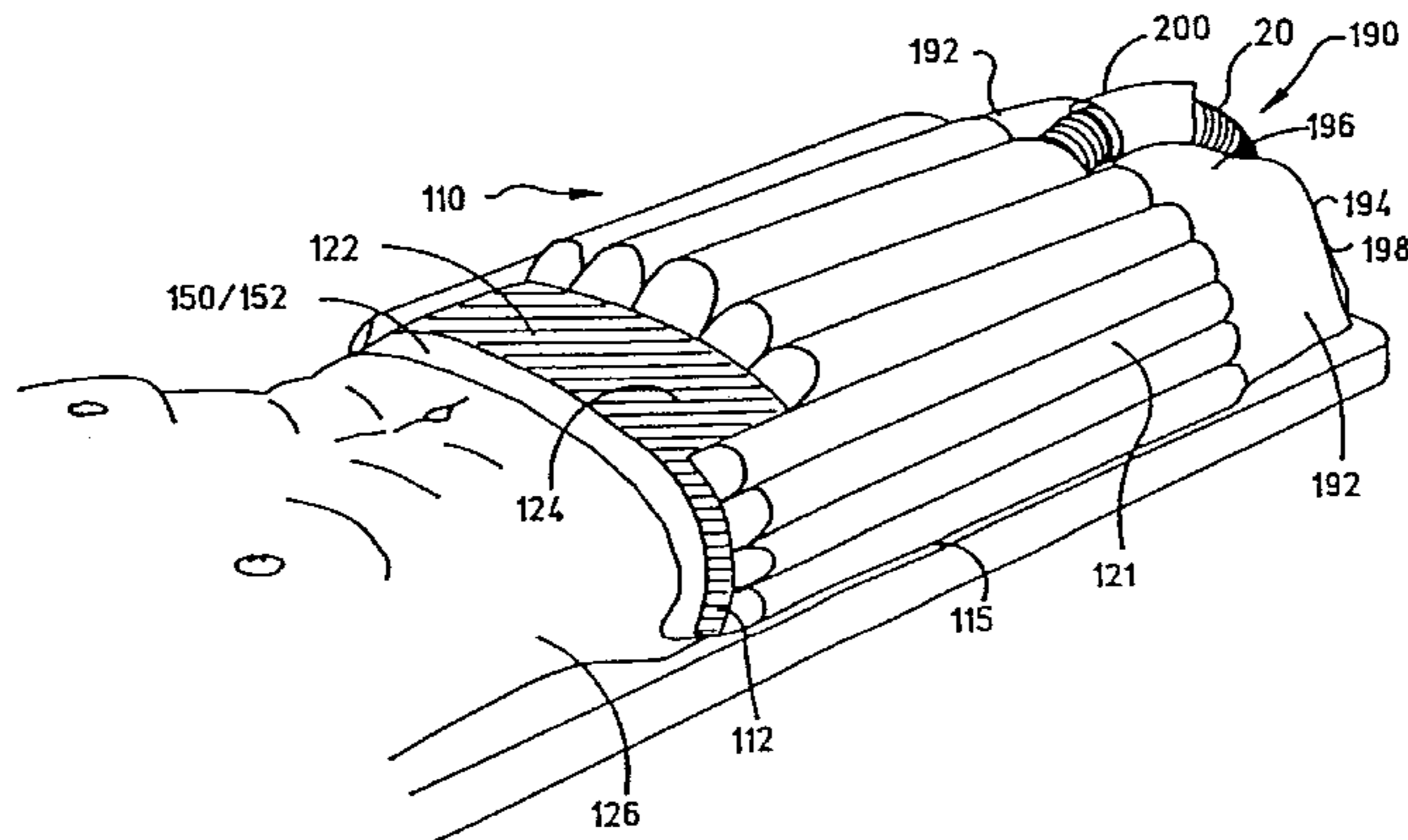
- (63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 07/550,757, filed on Jul. 10, 1990, now abandoned, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 07/227,189, filed on Aug. 2, 1988, now abandoned, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 07/104,682, filed on Oct. 5, 1987, now abandoned.
- (51) **Int. Cl.⁷** **A61F 7/00**
- (52) **U.S. Cl.** **607/107; 607/108**
- (58) **Field of Search** **607/104-107; 165/46; 5/482**

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5 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



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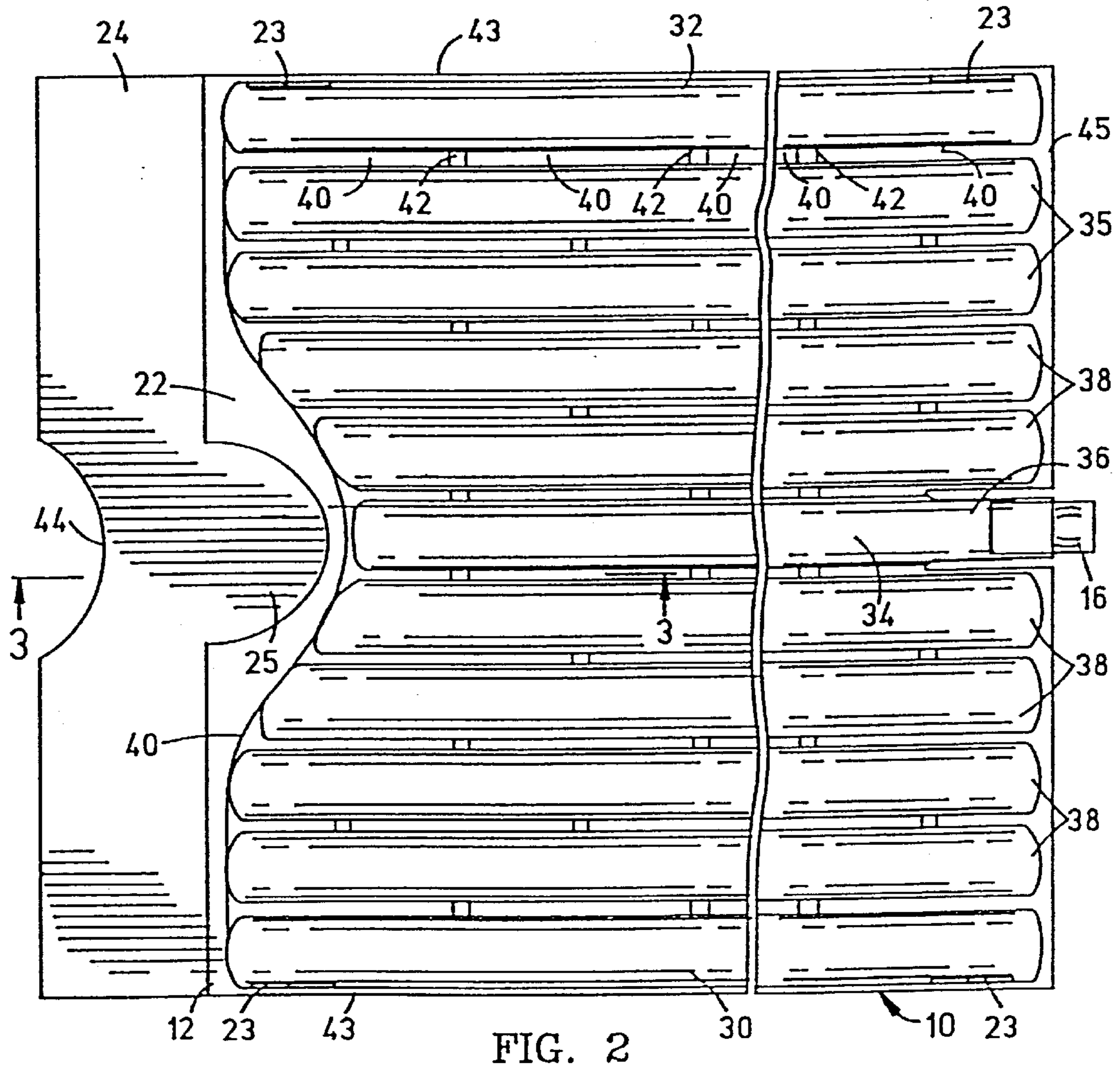
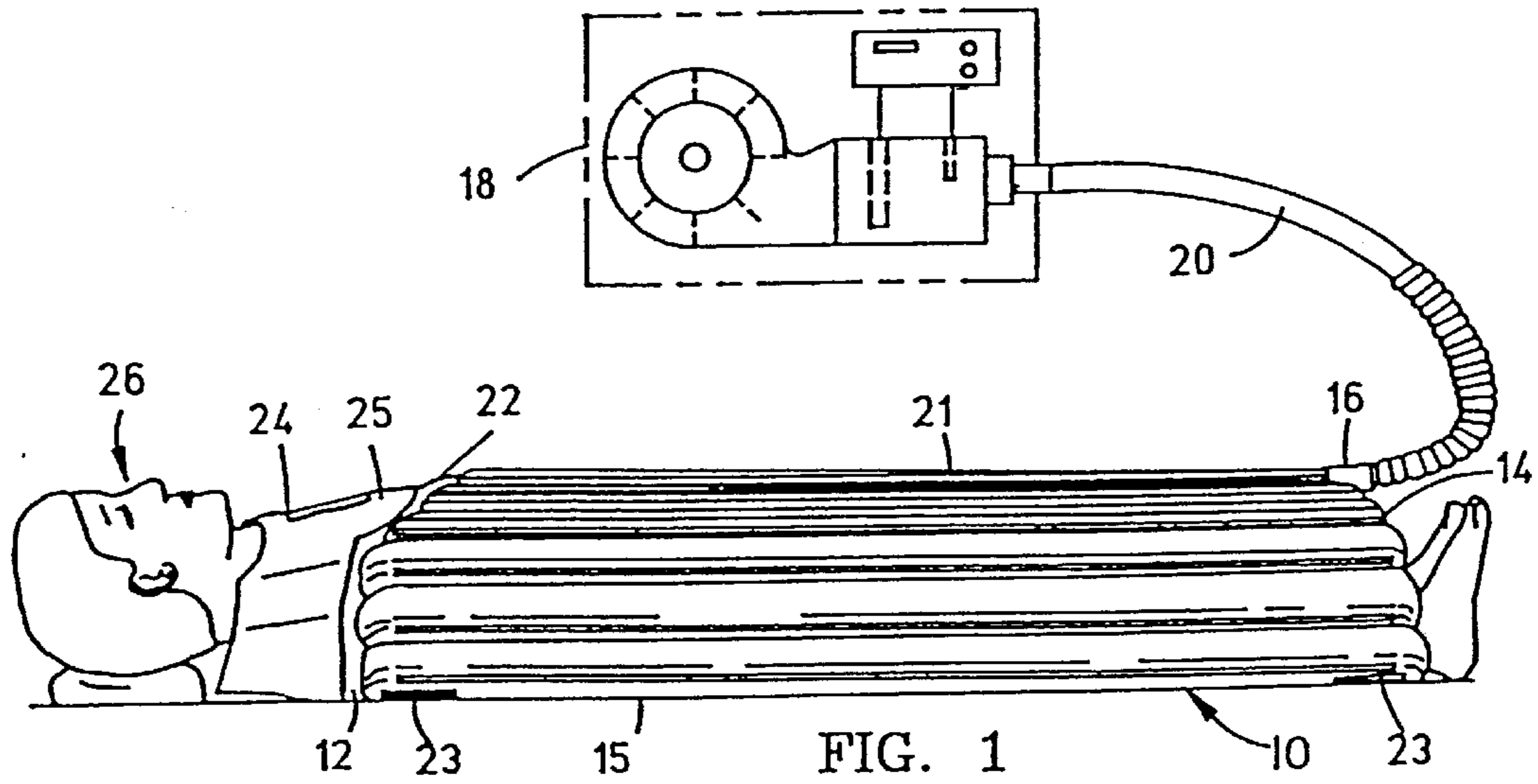
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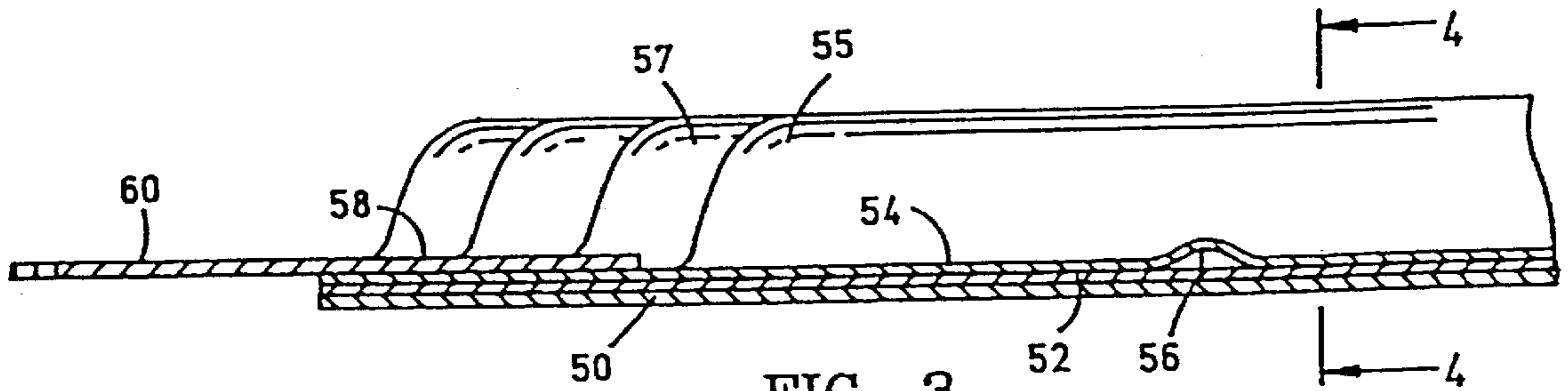


FIG. 3

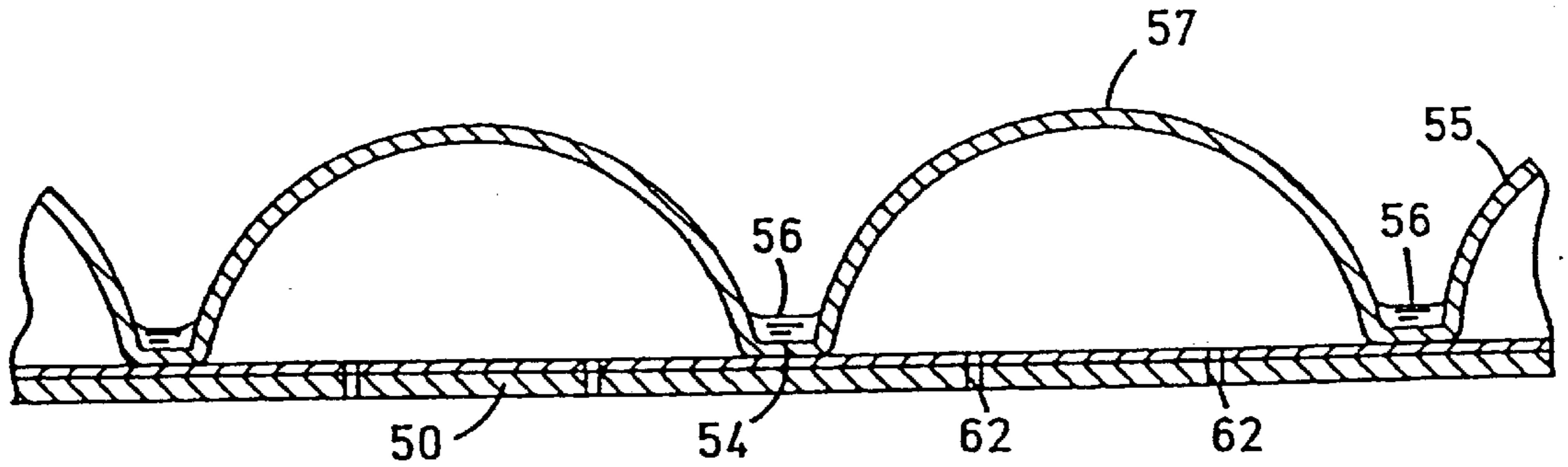


FIG. 4

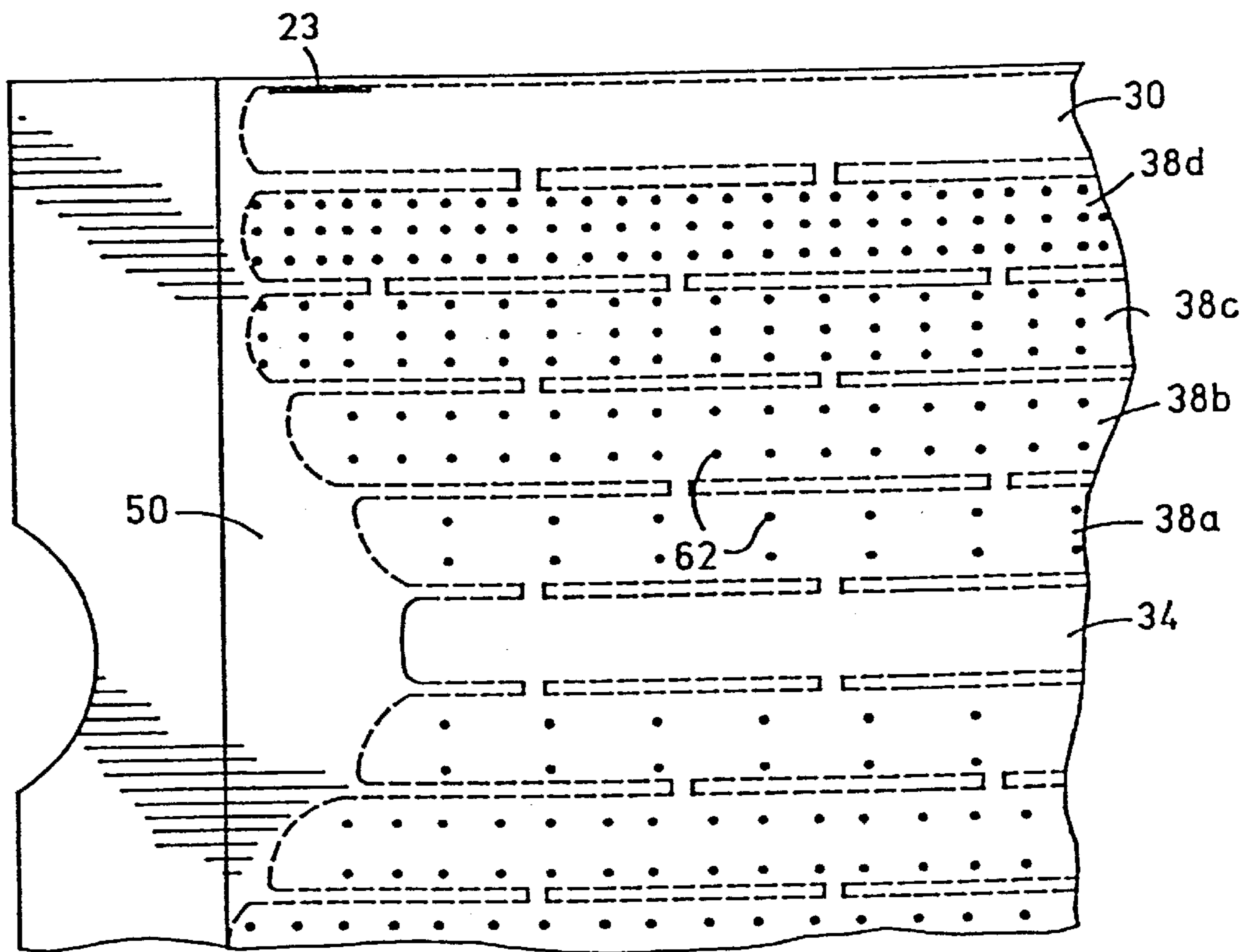
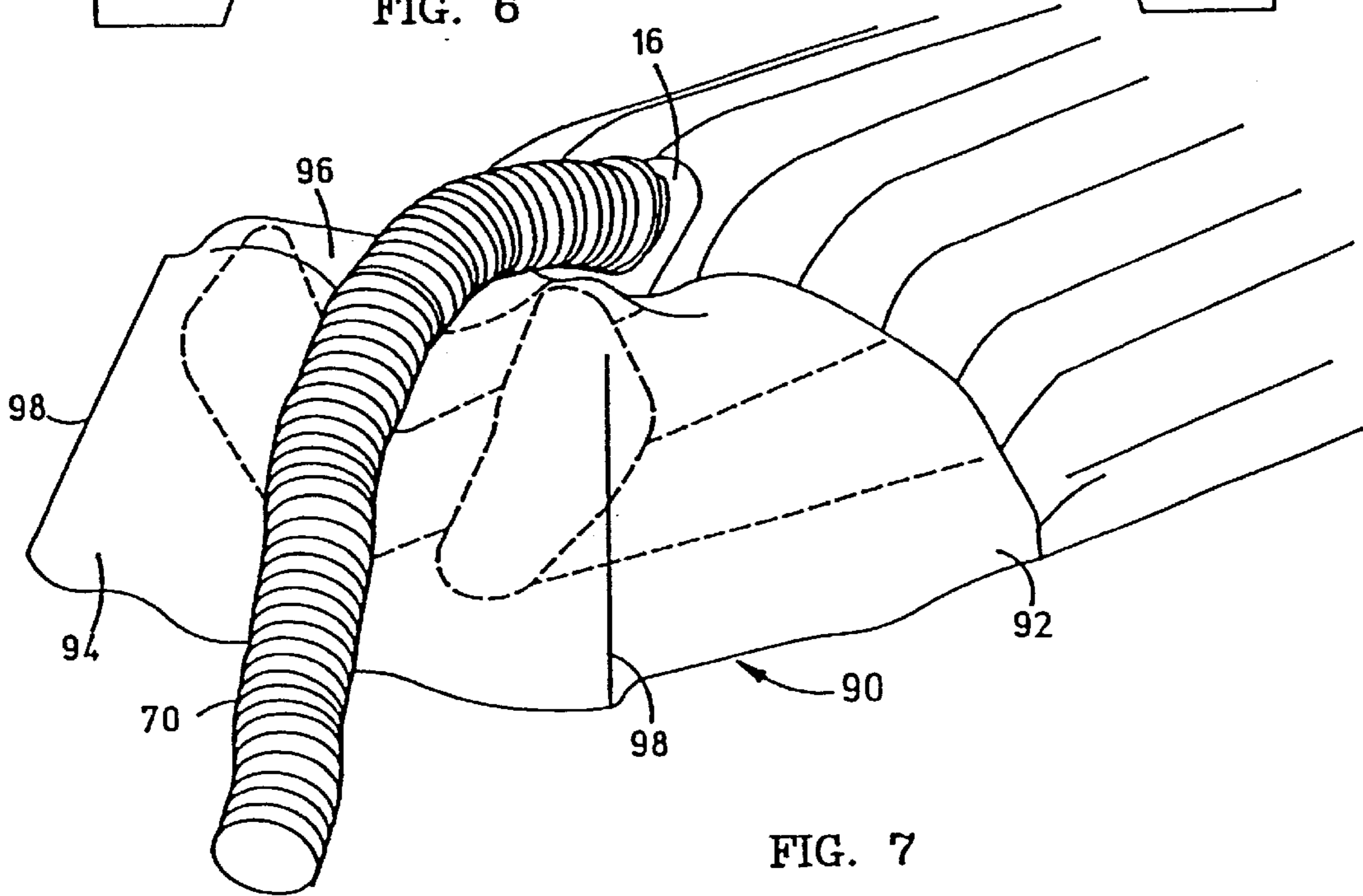
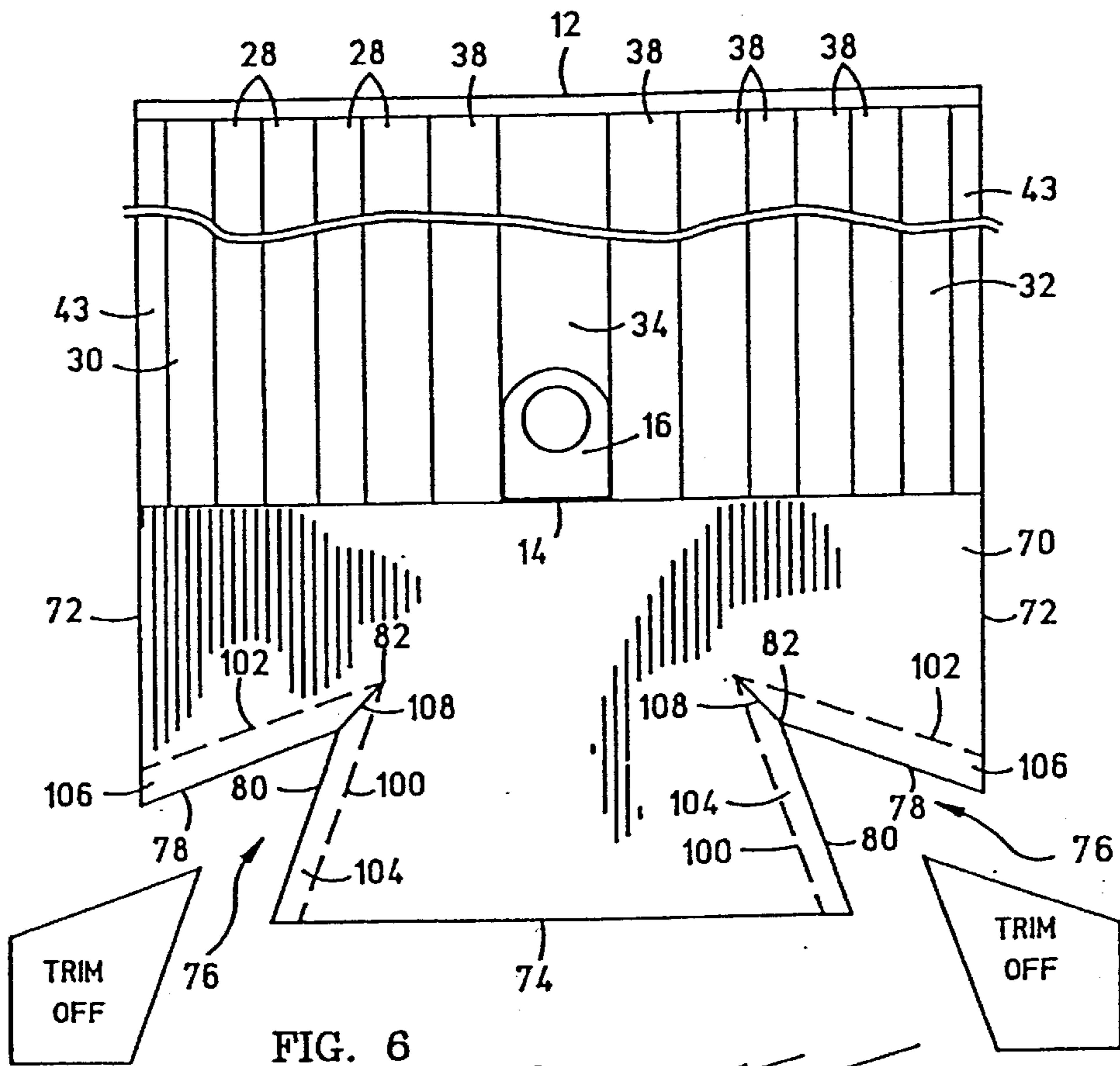


FIG. 5



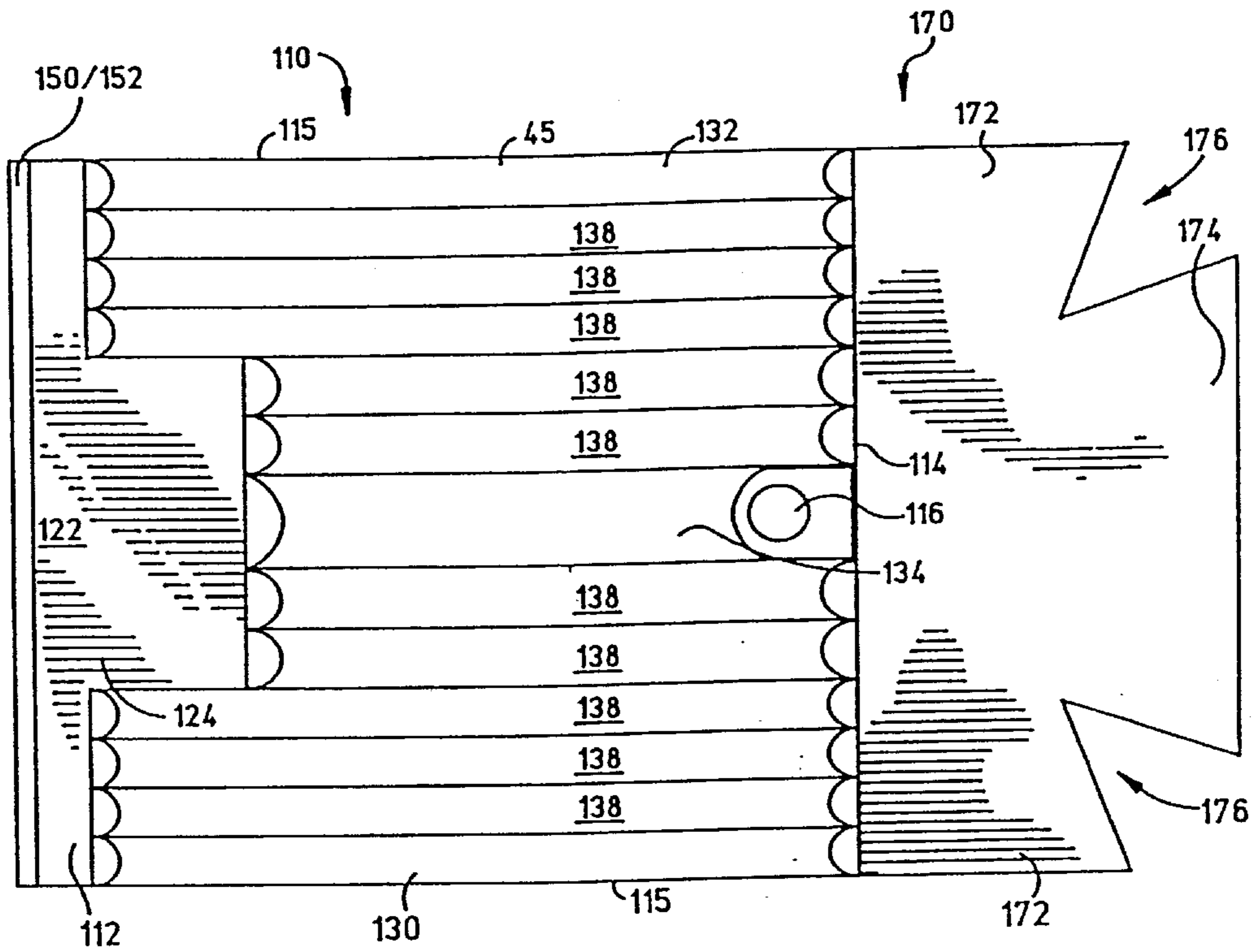


FIG. 8

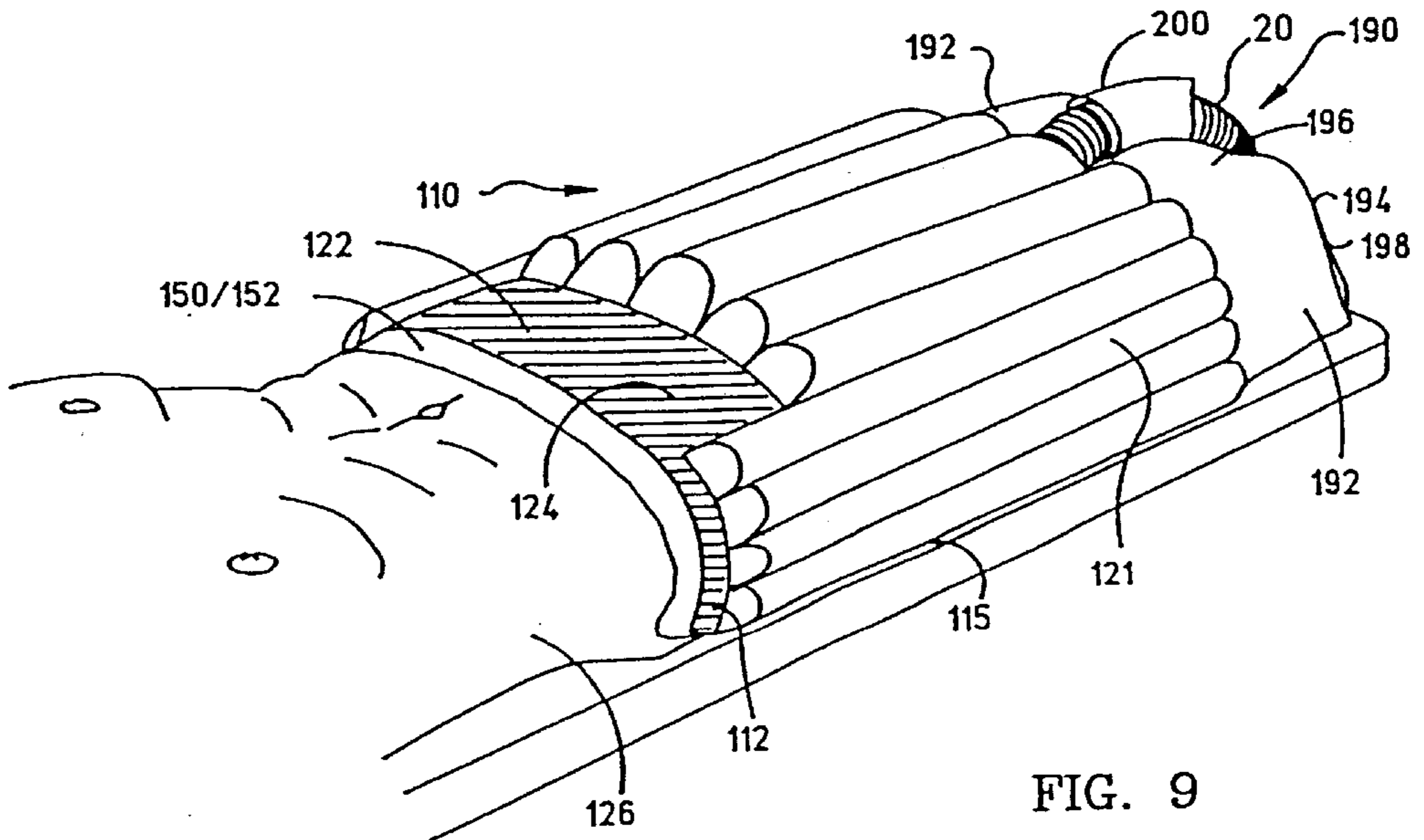


FIG. 9

FIG. 10

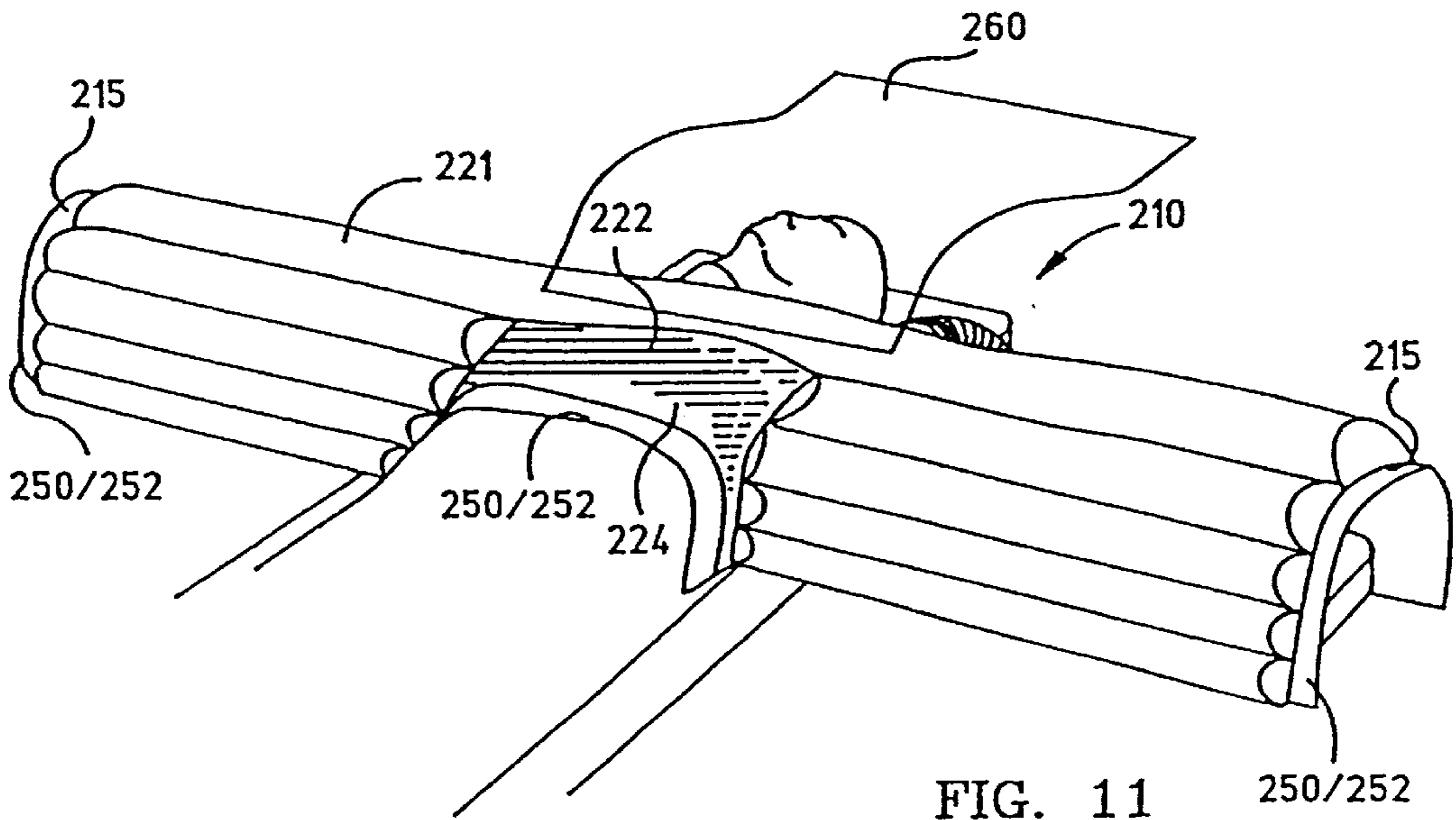
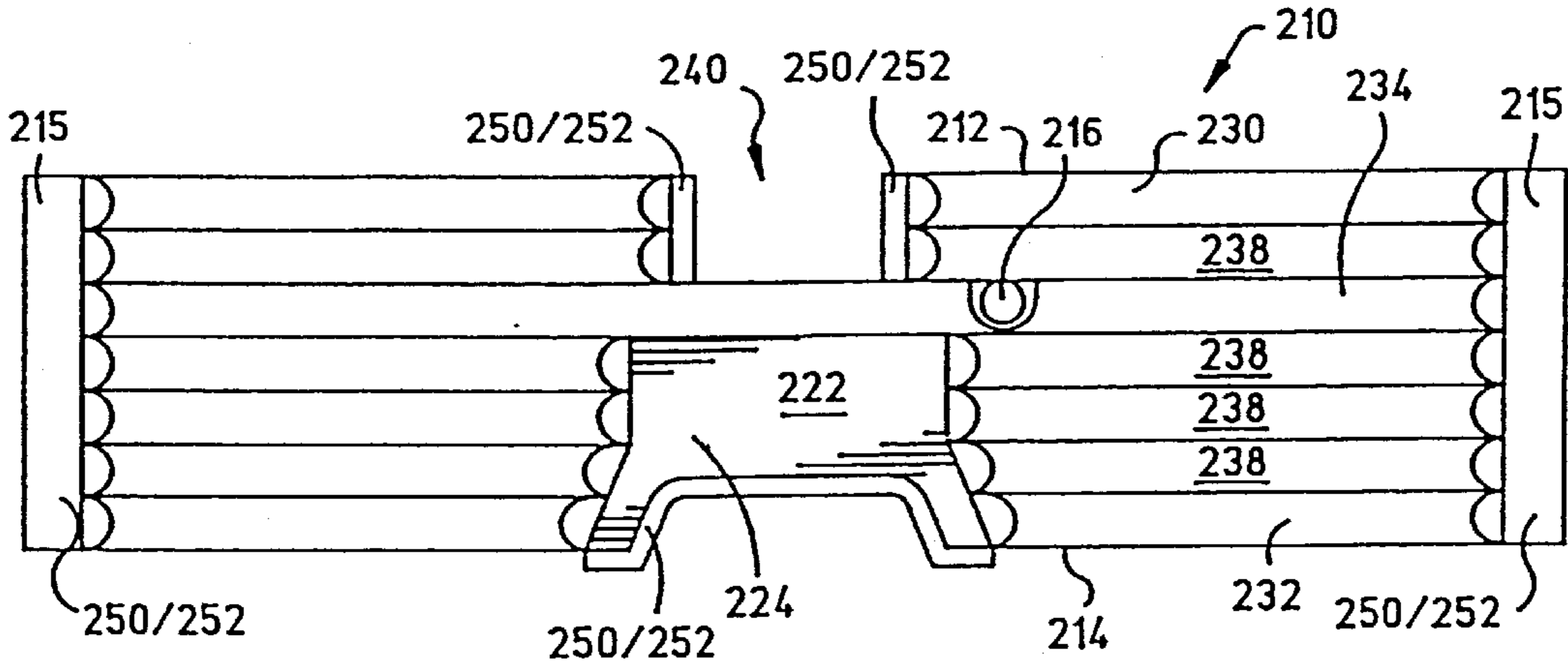


FIG. 11

THERMAL BLANKET

Matter enclosed in heavy brackets [] appears in the original patent but forms no part of this reissue specification; matter printed in italics indicates the additions made by reissue.

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 07,550,757, filed Jul. 10, 1990, abandoned, which is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 07,227,189, filed Aug. 2, 1988, abandoned, which is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 07,104,682, filed Oct. 5, 1987, abandoned.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to thermal blankets used in a medical setting to deliver a bath of a thermally-controlled medium to a patient.

The thermal blanket prior art is best expressed in our prior U.S. Pat. No. 4,572,188 entitled "AIRFLOW COVER FOR CONTROLLING BODY TEMPERATURE." In our patent, a self-erecting, inflatable airflow cover is inflated by the introduction into the cover of a thermally-controlled inflating medium, such as warmed air. When inflated, the cover self-erects about a patient, thereby creating an ambient environment about the patient, the thermal characteristics of which are determined by the temperature of the inflating medium. Holes on the underside of our prior art airflow cover exhaust the thermally-controlled, inflating medium from inside the cover to the interior of the erected structure. Our airflow cover is intended for the treatment of hypothermia, as might occur postoperatively.

Evaluation of our airflow cover by skilled practitioners has resulted in general approbation: the opinion is that the airflow cover efficiently and effectively accomplishes its purpose of giving a thermally-controlled bath. We have realized, however, that, while our prior art airflow cover achieves its objective, certain improvements to it are necessary in order to realize additional clinical objectives and to enjoy further advantages in its use.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

We have improved the clinical usefulness of our self-erecting airflow cover by observing that controlling the contour of its inflatable portion at its head end to define a generally concave non-inflatable portion will permit a care giver to more easily observe a patient's head, face, neck and chest. Finally, we have observed that limited venting of the thermally controlled inflating medium from the edges of the cover results in more efficient, more uniform heating within the cover. We have also observed that it is good clinical practice to keep the area of the care site in the vicinity of the patient's head and face as clean as possible. Still further, we have observed that modification of the foot end of the self-erecting airflow cover to define a non-inflatable but erectable drape section retains heat from the inflating medium to warm the patient's feet and insulate the bare skin of the feet from excessive heat from the inlet hose. Finally, we have observed that our self-erecting airflow cover may be advantageously adapted to thermally control specific partial portions of the patient such as the legs and lower body or the arms and upper body, leaving other areas of the patient available for care and treatment. Moreover, an end portion of the cover may be adhesively attached to the

patient to prevent the migration of air toward a care area. Finally, a protective sleeve may be slideably mounted on a connected heater tube adjacent the patient to prevent the heater tube from contacting the patient.

These observations have resulted in an improved thermal blanket and method therefor in which a self-erecting inflatable covering has a head end, a foot end, two edges, and an undersurface. An inflating inlet adjacent the foot (or head) end admits a thermally-controlled inflating medium into the covering. An aperture array on the undersurface of the covering exhausts the thermally controlled inflating medium from the covering into the structure created when the covering self-erects upon inflation. The improvements to this basic structural complement include an uninflatable section at the head (or foot) end of the covering, exhaust port openings at the edges of the cover, an absorbent bib or adhesive strip attached to the covering at the head (or foot) end adjacent the uninflatable section, in uninflatable erectable drape section at the foot end of the covering, a heater tube protective cover and structural features that make the covering simple and economical to produce. In the case of an upper body covering, the positions of the inflating inlet and the uninflatable section are reversed from that of other coverings. In the case of an upper body covering, the inflating inlet is positioned at the head end of the covering while the uninflatable section is arranged at the foot end of the covering.

With these improvements, the thermal blankets, when inflated and erected over a patient, delivers the thermally-controlled inflating medium into the interior of the structure covering the patient, thereby thermally bathing the patient. The first improvement permits full viewing of the head and face of the patient from almost any aspect around the thermal blanket. The exhaust port openings increase the rate of circulation of the inflating medium within the blanket, thereby increasing the temperature within the structure and making the temperature distribution more uniform. The absorbent bib soaks up and retains liquid which might otherwise spread over the care site in the area of the patient's head or other body area. Such liquids can include the patient's own perspiration, blood, vomit, saliva, or liquids which are administered to the patient. The adhesive strip acts to seal the head (or foot) end of the inflated structure. The non-inflatable erectable drape section at the foot end of a covering encompassing the lower extremities retains heat around the patient's feet and insulates the bare skin of the legs and/or feet. The protective cover for the heater tube prevents an attached heater tube from contacting the patient.

From another aspect, the invention is a thermal blanket for covering and bathing a person in a thermally-controlled medium. The thermal blanket includes a flexible base sheet having a head end, a foot end, two edges, and a plurality of apertures opening between the first and second surface of the base sheet. An overlying material sheet is attached to the first surface of the base sheet by a plurality of discontinuous seams which form the material sheet into a plurality of substantially parallel, inflatable chambers. A continuous seam is provided between the material sheet and the base sheet at the head (or foot) end to form a non-inflatable viewing recess at the head (or foot) end. Exhaust port openings are provided through the material sheet to vent the medium from the chambers away from the base sheet. An absorbent bib is attached to the head (or foot) end in the vicinity of the viewing recess. In coverings encompassing the lower extremities, a continuous seam is provided between the material sheet and the base sheet at the foot end to form a non-inflatable, erectable drape section to cover the patient's legs and/or feet.

Therefore the invention accomplishes the important objective of providing a self-erecting, inflatable thermal blanket that permits a relatively unobstructed view of a care site when in use.

Another object is the efficient and uniform heating of the interior of the structure created when the blanket is inflated with a heat inflating medium.

A further objective is providing a covering for a patient's legs and/or feet that helps retain the heat inflating medium around the patient.

A still further objective is the provision of such a blanket with a means for maintaining the cleanliness of the care site.

A still further objective is to provide the ability to select coverings adapted for specific partial areas of the patient leaving other areas exposed for care and treatment.

The advantageous simplified structure of the thermal blanket make its production straight forward and economical.

These and other important objectives and advantages will become evident when the detailed description of the invention is read with reference to the below-summarized drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a side elevation view of a thermal blanket constructed in accordance with a first aspect of the invention, with the blanket in use, with associated thermal apparatus indicated schematically;

FIG. 2 is an enlarged top plan view of the thermal blanket opened flat;

FIG. 3 is an enlarged sectional view taken along 3—3 of FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 is a further enlarged sectional view taken along line 4—4 of FIG. 3;

FIG. 5 is a partial underside view of the thermal blanket;

FIG. 6 is a partial diagrammatic top plan view of a thermal blanket constructed in accordance with a second aspect of the invention, with a partially constructed foot drape;

FIG. 7 is a partial projected view of a fully constructed thermal blanket of FIG. 6 in use, with the patient's feet illustrated by hidden lines underlying the foot drape.

FIG. 8 is a top plan view of a partially constructed thermal blanket in accordance with a third aspect of the invention, for thermally covering the pelvic area and lower extremities of a patient;

FIG. 9 is a partial projected view of a fully constructed thermal blanket of FIG. 8 in use;

FIG. 10 is a top plan view of a thermal blanket constructed in accordance with a fourth aspect of the present invention, for thermally covering the chest and upper extremities of a patient; and

FIG. 11 is a partial projected view of a fully constructed thermal blanket of FIG. 10 in use.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

When used herein, the term "thermal blanket" is intended to be interchangeable with, but not necessarily limited by, the term "airflow cover" used in our U.S. Pat. No. 4,572,188, which is incorporated herein in its entirety by reference. In this description, the term "thermal blanket" is meant to invoke a self-erecting, inflatable structure for delivering a thermally-controlled inflating medium to the interior of the structure created when the thermal blanket is inflated. The purpose of the thermal blanket is to efficiently administer a uniformly thermally-controlled bath of the inflating medium to a patient within the erected structure.

Our invention is illustrated as we intend for it to be used in a first aspect without a foot drape in FIG. 1. In FIG. 1, a self-erecting, inflatable thermal blanket 10 has a head end 12, a foot end 14 and two lateral edges, one indicated by 15. An inflation inlet cuff 16 is connected to a heater/blower assembly 18 which provides a stream of heated air through a connecting hose 20. When the heater/blower 18 is operated, the stream of heated air flows through the inflating hose 20 into the thermal blanket 10 through the inflation cuff 16. When the blanket is inflated, it erects itself into a Quonset hut-like structure with a quilted upper surface 21. As described below, a pattern of apertures on the undersurface of the blanket (not shown in FIG. 1) convectively delivers the inflating heated air into the interior space enclosed by the erected thermal blanket.

The contour of the inflatable portion of the thermal blanket 10 is varied at the head end 12 of the blanket to provide a non-inflated blanket recess 22 in the quilted upper surface 21, which remains smooth and flat when the blanket is inflated and erected. Circulation of the heating air is accelerated through the thermal blanket by exhaust port openings in the upper surface, adjacent the lateral edges of the blanket. Two exhaust ports openings are indicated by reference numeral 23. Further, a bib 24 made of an absorbent material is attached to the head end 12 of the thermal blanket in the vicinity of the non-inflated recess 22. In fact, as shown in FIG. 1, the bib 24 includes a semi-circular tab 25 that extends into the recess 22.

As illustrated in FIG. 1, the thermal blanket of the invention is inflated, erects itself into a bathing structure, and bathes a patient 26 with the thermally-controlled air used to inflate the structure. While the patient is being thermally bathed, the uninflated recess 22 permits observation of the patient's head, face, neck, and chest from almost any location with respect to the thermal blanket 10. Thus, if the patient is placed on a gurney or a bed, the head of which is against a wall, a care giver such as a nurse, intern, resident, or doctor, can keep the patient's face under observation from the foot end 14 of the thermal blanket 10. Respiration can be detected by the rise and fall of the bib and uninflated area, which rest directly on the patient's chest. Moreover, the bib 24 will provide an absorbent sink for stray, unconfined liquids in the area of the patient's head or at the head end 12 of the thermal blanket 10.

FIG. 2 is a plan view of thermal blanket 10 opened flat to show details of its structure. FIG. 2 illustrates the upper surface of the thermal blanket, that is the side that is visible in FIG. 1. As seen, the upper surface consists of a parallel array of elongated tubes of which 30 and 32 are the lateralmost tubes, 34 is the center tube, and the tubes 38 are arrayed between one of the lateralmost tubes and the center tube. Each tube is separated from an adjacent tube by a discontinuous seam, one of which is indicated by 40. The seam 40 separates the tube 32 and its nearest adjacent neighbor 38. The discontinuous seam 40 is interrupted by passageways 42 communicating between the tubes. An interrupted seam separates every tube from one adjacent neighboring tube. The seams permit the thermal blanket, when inflated, to assume a tubular structure on the upper surface, while the ports 42 permit full circulation of the inflating medium throughout the array of tubes. The foot-end seam 45 is continuous. The tubes are inflated through the center tube 34 which transitions to a port 36, through which the inflation cuff 16 is inserted. The edge seams 43 are discontinuous only at the exhaust port opening locations 23. A seal can be made between the inflation port 36 and the inflation cuff 16 by any conventional means, for example, an

o-ring, or even tape. When the inflating medium is introduced into the center tube **34**, it flows laterally from the center tube into all of other tubes through the ports **42**. Near the head end **12**, a continuous seam **40** defines the forward end of all of the tubes, with the seam assuming a bell-curve shape. On the head end side of the seam **40**, the thermal blanket **10** is uninflatable. The bell-shaped seam **40** thus defines the uninflatable area **22** at the head end of the thermal blanket **10**, which is essentially coplanar with, or substantially parallel to, the underside of the blanket. As shown in FIG. 1, by virtue of its structural integration with the rest of the thermal blanket **10**, the non-inflated recess extends over the upper chest of the patient **26** when the blanket is inflated. However, since the recess **22** is uninflated, it provides a wide-angled viewing gap in the inflated contour of the upper surface **21**. The gap is filled by continuation of the underside of the blanket. It is also noted that the pattern of inflatable tubes can be replaced by other suitable patterns of communicating, inflatable chambers. The tubes are preferred since they impart strength and shape to the erected bathing structure; other inflatable structures are contemplated, however.

The absorbent bib has an indent **44** cut into its outside edge, which permits the blanket to be drawn up to the chin of patient and which provides absorbency laterally up the neck of the patient. The absorbent bib can consist of any absorbent material such as a single- or multi-ply tissue paper which is used to make paper towels.

Construction details of the thermal blanket **10** are illustrated in FIGS. 3 and 4. The thermal blanket **10** is assembled from a base sheet consisting of an underside layer **50** formed from flexible material capable of bonding to a layer **52** of heat-sealable plastic. For the layers **50** and **52**, we have used a stratum of absorbent tissue paper prelaminate with a layer of heat-sealable plastic. Materials of such construction is commercially available in production rolls and is used to make painters' drop cloths. The upper side of the thermal blanket consists of a sheet of plastic bonded to the plastic layer **52** by an interruptible heat-sealing process to form the interrupted seams, one of which is indicated by **54**, and the inflatable tubes, one indicated by **55**. As can be seen in FIG. 3, the interruption of the seam **54** forms a passageway **56** between adjacent tubes **55** and **57**.

The absorbent bib and tab are shown in FIG. 3 as a single material layer **60/58**. Alternatively, they may be formed from separate material sheets cut to the outlines illustrated in FIG. 2. The absorbent material forming the bib and tab can be bonded to the upper plastic layer by heat process or by gluing.

The inventors also contemplate deletion of the bib and tab. In this instance, the thermal blanket would still have the viewing recess, which would be defined by the continuous seam at the head end, and which would be filled with the forward portion of the base sheet.

Circulation of heated air through the blanket is enhanced by the exhaust port openings **23**, which open through the upper plastic sheet, which is heat sealed to the base of the blanket. The openings **23** vent the heated inflating air out of the outermost tubes **30** and **32**, away from the underside of the blanket. Because air can circulate to, and through, the blanket edges, the inflating air in the outermost tubes is hotter than if the openings were absent. This results in hotter air being delivered through the underside apertures toward the edge of the blanket. We have measured the temperature distribution within the thermal blanket for inflating air which is heated to a medium temperature range and for inflating air

which is heated to a high temperature range. The results are provided in Table I for a blanket consisting of **13** tubes. Measurements of the temperature of air exhausted through underside apertures were made on the underside of each tube on one side of the blanket. The tubes are numbered **1-6**, with **1** being the tube adjacent to the center tube, and tube **6** being the outermost tube adjacent on lateral edge of the blanket. Test apertures were made in the bottom of the tube **6** only for the purposes of this test. As is evident, the distribution of temperature within the erected thermal blanket is more uniform when the exhaust port openings are provided. Further, provision of the exhaust ports also increases the average temperature within the erected structure of the blanket. Clearly, the provision of exhaust port openings at the lateral edges of the blanket delivers results which one would not expect when considering the operation of our thermal blanket with no exhaust port openings.

In our first preferred embodiment, the exhaust port openings are slits in the edge seams of our blanket. These slits vary in length from 1¾ to 2 inches. Each edge seam is discontinuous approximately at each corner of the blanket so that inflating air is vented away from the underside of the erected blanket. This keeps the relatively "colder" air at the blanket edges from mixing with the relatively "hotter" air exhausted into the structure through the underside apertures. The result is a "flatter" temperature profile of air within the blanket than without the vents, which raises the average temperature within the erected structure and makes the temperature distribution in the structure more uniform. Resultantly, the clinical effect of the blanket is enhanced. Heating is better controlled, and more uniform, with greater comfort to the patient.

TABLE I

TUBE NO.	MEDIUM TEMPERATURE RANGE		HIGH TEMPERATURE RANGE	
	WITHOUT EXHAUST PORTS	WITH 2" EXHAUST PORTS	WITHOUT EXHAUST PORTS	WITH 2" EXHAUST PORTS
center (inlet) tube	113.3°F.	114.1°F.	121.3°F.	121.3°F.
Tube #1	109.9°	112.3°	117.3°	117.7°
Tube #2	105.3°	109.8°	113.4°	115.0°
Tube #3	103.2°	107.1°	111.0°	113.3°
Tube #4	99.9°	104.3°	101.4°	108.6°
Tube #5	97.2°	100.0°	95.7°	104.4°
Tube #6 (outermost)	85.2°	95.8°	89.6°	99.4°
Average temp. under cover	103.8°	106.7°	108.4°	112.5°

The thermal blanket of the invention is enabled to bathe a patient in the thermally-controlled inflating medium introduced into the upper side tubes by means of a plurality of apertures **62** shown in FIGS. 4 and 5. The apertures extend through the underside of the blanket, which includes the layers **50** and **52**. The apertures **62** are made in the footprints of the tubes of the blanket upper side according to a pattern which has been determined to deliver a very uniform thermal bath. In this regard, no apertures are provided through the underside into the lateral most tubes **30** and **32**, or into the center tube **34**. In addition, the apertures **62** are provided through the underside to the apertured tubes in a density which varies inversely with the proximity of the tube to the center tube **34**. Thus, the hole density increases from the tube **38a** through the tube **38d**. Even with the exhaust port openings, the temperature of the inflating medium exhibits

a drop from the center to the lateral most tubes. The varying density of the apertures **62** tends to reduce this gradient further by forcing hotter air to the edges of the blanket. Thus, the thermal bath delivered to the patient is of a generally uniform temperature. The aperture density variation also equalizes the flow of inflating medium out of the apertures. As will be evident, the inflating pressure will be greatest at the center tube **34** and will tend to diminish toward the lateral edges of the thermal blanket. Therefore, fewer apertures are required for the tubes near the center tube **34** to deliver the same amount of air as the relatively greater number of apertures in the tubes at a greater distance from the center tube **34**.

The apertures comprise openings which can be of any appropriate shape. For example, we have produced blankets with elongated apertures, approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in length.

Our invention is illustrated as we intend for it to be used in a second aspect including a foot drape in FIG. 7. The foot end **14** of the thermal blanket **10** is modified to provide an uninflated drape forming section **70** formed by a rearward extension of the base sheet **50/52** and a noninflatable portion of the heat-sealable plastic bonded to the base sheet. The drape forming sheet **70** has sides **72** extending parallel to and rearwardly from the outside edge of the edge seams **43**, and a rear edge **74**. Optionally, the drape-forming sheet **70** further includes a pair of V-shaped cuts **76** in the rear corners thereof. The V-shaped cuts **76** are formed by converging cuts **78** and **80**, extending inwardly from one of the sides **72** and the rear edge **74**, respectively, to a point of intersection **82**. As shown in FIG. 7, the drape-forming section **70** may be formed into a foot drape **90** that includes a pair of side portions **92**, a rear portion **94** and an upper portion **96**. The drape **90** is so formed by joining the edges **78** and **80** of the V-shaped cuts **76** to form a pair of seams **98**. To form the seams **98**, the V-shaped cut edges **78** and **80** may be folded about respective lines **100** and **102** that parallel the edges **78** and **80**, as shown in FIG. 6. The resulting respective folded surfaces **104** and **106** may then be fastened together by appropriate means such as heat sealing. Joining the surfaces **104** and **106** forms a cease **108** and transforms the two dimensional drape forming section **70** into the three dimensional drape **90**.

The resultant drape **90** is non-inflatable but erectable under the force of the heated medium circulating around the patient. The drape **90** thus traps and retains heat around the patient's feet to warm the feet. As shown in FIG. 7, the drape **90** also insulates the bare skin of the feet from excessive conductive heat from the inflating hose **70** in the event the hose is oriented in a position wherein it might otherwise come in contact with the feet. Patient warming and comfort is this further enhanced.

Our invention is illustrated as we intend for it to be used in a third aspect as an inflatable lower body covering in FIGS. 8 and 9. This covering warms convectively by exhausting warm air onto a patient. The thermal covering in this case is similar in all respects to the covering shown in FIGS. 6 and 7, except that the covering may be shortened to cover only the pelvic area and lower extremities of the patient. Moreover, the head end of the covering may be modified to provide an open flat working area **122** for the placement of instrumentation and to improve visualization of the care site, as shown in FIG. 9. As in the case of the thermal coverings discussed above, the covering **110** of FIGS. 8 and 9 includes a head end **112**, a foot end **114**, a pair of lateral edges **115**, and an inflation inlet cuff **116** to which may be connected through a heater tube **20** to a heater/blower assembly such as the assembly **18** shown in FIG. 1.

As shown in FIG. 9, the covering **110** may be inflated to form a Quonset hut-like structure with a quilted upper surface **121**. Like the thermal covering **10**, a pattern of apertures on the undersurface of the blanket **110** convectively delivers the inflating heated air into the interior space enclosed by the erected thermal blanket.

Alternatively, the head end of the quilted upper surface **121** could extend directly from one edge **115** to the other edge **115** without the provision of a non-inflated blanket recess **122**, as shown in FIG. 8. Further, an adhesive strip **124** made of an adhesive material may be attached to the head end **112** of the covering **110** and extend between the edges **115**. Preferably, the adhesive strip **124** is mounted with its adhesive side oriented toward the base sheet, which includes an underside layer **150** formed from a flexible material capable of bonding the layer **152** of heat sealable plastic. The layers **150/152** are formed in the same manner as the layers **50/52** shown in FIG. 3 and described above. Mounted to the underside of the adhesive strip **124** is a backing strip **125**, which may be positioned partially between the adhesive strip **124** and the layer **152** to prevent inadvertent peel-off.

As shown in FIG. 9, the adhesive strip **124** may be adhered above the patient's pelvic and groin area to prevent the migration of air from inside the covering **110** to the care site. Moreover, the optional non-inflated recess **122** may be large and well-defined in order to improve visualization of the operating field and provide sufficient working area for resting instruments or other items during the rendering of care to a patient **126**.

Like its counterpart covering **10**, the covering **110** includes a parallel array of elongated tubes of which **130** and **132** are the lateralmost tubes, **134** is the center tube, and the tubes **138** are arrayed between one of the lateralmost tubes and the center tube. The thermal covering **110** further includes a non-inflated yet erectable foot drape for retaining a thermal medium around a patient's feet. As in the covering shown in FIG. 6, the covering **110** is provided with a non-inflated drape forming section **170** extending rearwardly from the foot end **114**. The covering **170** includes a pair of sides **172** and a rear edge **174**. Moreover, the drape forming sheet **170** includes a pair of V-shaped cuts **176** in the rear corner thereof. As shown in FIG. 9, the drape forming section **170** may be formed into an erectable foot drape **190** that includes a pair of side portion **192**, a rear portion **194**, and an upper portion **196**. As in the covering **10**, the drape **190** of the covering **110** is formed by joining the edges of the V-shaped cuts **176** to form a pair of seams **198**.

As with the longer full-body thermal blanket of FIGS. 1 and 2, the covering **110** may be provided without a foot drape as appropriate. In that case, it may be desirable to slideably mount a protective sleeve **200** over the connecting hose **20** to prevent the hose from contacting the patient.

Advantageously, it will be observed that the lower body warming cover **110** maintains a thermal medium around the pelvic and groin area and lower extremities of the patient, while at the same time exposing the patient's torso and head as may be necessary for the provision of medical care and treatment to those areas.

Alternatively, or in combination with the lower body thermal covering **110**, an upper body thermal covering **210** could be provided as shown in FIGS. 10 and 11. The upper body thermal covering **210** is structurally and functionally similar in most respects to the thermal coverings **10** and **110** discussed above. Thus, the thermal covering **210** includes a head end **212**, a foot end **214**, a pair of lateral edges **215**, and

an inflation inlet cuff 216 which may be connected through a connecting hose 20 to an external heater/blower assembly such as the assembly 18 shown in FIG. 1. The thermal covering 210 further includes a quilted upper surface 221, which may have a non-inflated recess 222 located at the foot end of the covering, as shown in FIG. 11. Thus, with the upper torso and arms of the patient being thermally bathed, the uninflated recess 222 permits observation of the patient's middle torso from almost any location with respect to the thermal covering 210.

Alternatively, as shown in FIG. 10, the quilted upper surface 221 could extend across the entire expanse of the covering between the edges 215 such that no uninflated recess 222 is formed. It is preferable in most cases, however, to provide a recess 223 in the quilted upper surface 221 and the foot end 214 of the covering 210 to accommodate the curvature of the patient's torso, as shown in FIG. 11.

There may be additionally provided an adhesive strip 224 mounted to the foot end 214 of the covering 210. Preferably, the adhesive strip 224 is mounted with the adhesive side facing the base sheet, which includes an underside layer 250 formed from a flexible material capable of bonding to a layer 252 of heat sealable plastic. The layers 250/252 are formed in the same manner as the layers 50/52 shown in FIG. 3 and described above. Mounted to the underside of the adhesive strip 224 is a backing strip 225, which may be positioned partially between the adhesive strip 224 and the layer 252 to prevent inadvertent peel-off. As shown in FIG. 11, the adhesive strip 224 may be adhered to the patient's torso to prevent the migration of air toward the care site.

The covering 210 further includes an array of elongated tubes of which 230 and 232 are the lateral most tubes, 234 is the center tube and the tubes 238 are arrayed between one of the lateral most tubes and center tube. In addition, the thermal covering 210 includes a cutout area 240 centrally positioned at the head end 212 of the covering. The cutout 240 is formed by truncating the lateralmost tube 230 and an adjacent tube 238. The recess 240 permits observation of the patient's head and neck from almost any location with respect to the thermal blanket 210. It also assists in the thermally covering the patient's shoulders and arms without covering the patient's face. As shown in FIGS. 10 and 11, the bottom layer 250/252 of the covering 210 may extend slightly beyond lateral edges 215 or the head end 212, or it may be coextensive therewith.

As shown in FIG. 11, the thermal covering 210 is positioned over the patient's upper torso and arms so as to thermally control those areas while leaving the patient's lower torso exposed for the provision of care. As indicated, the thermal covering 210 may be used alone or in combination with the thermal covering 110 depending on the location of the care site. Thus, various selected portions of the patient may be selectively warmed with the illustrated thermal coverings while care and treatment may be rendered to other areas. In addition, a plastic head drape 260 may be adhesively mounted to the covering 210 over the patient's chest, and adjacent the head end 230. The plastic head drape 260 is placed over the patient's head and one or more vents 270 may be provided to direct warmed air to the head area.

In a preferred method of operation, one or both of the coverings 110 and 210 may be selectively employed on a patient to warm selected portions of the patient while permitting other portions to remain exposed for treatment. In utilizing the coverings 110 and 210, either alone or in combination, the covering 110 or 210 is first placed over the patient. The adhesive backing 125 or 225 is removed from

the adhesive strip 124 or 224 and the adhesive strip is adhered to the patient to prevent the migration of air toward the care site. The hose 20 is then attached to the covering, an appropriate temperature is selected on the heater unit 18 and the unit 18 is activated. For the covering 110, the protective heater tube 200 cover may also be used when the cover does not include a foot drape. For the covering 210, the head drape 260 may be adhered to the quilted portion 221 over the patient's chest and draped over the patient's head. As a final measure, a conventional blanket may be placed over the covering 110 or 210. During operation, the patient's temperature should be monitored regularly and the air temperature setting of the heater unit 18 adjusted accordingly.

Many modifications and variations of our invention will be evident to those skilled in the art. For example, thermal coverings for additional selected patient areas could be implemented depending on the location of the care site and the need for thermally maintaining other areas. It is understood that such variations may deviate from specific teachings of this description without departing from the essence of the invention, which is expressed in the following claims.

We claim:

[1. In a self-erecting inflatable thermal blanket for covering and bathing a portion of a patient's body in a thermally-controlled inflating medium, the improvement comprising:

a flexible base sheet having a head end, a foot end, two edges, and a plurality of apertures;

an overlaying flexible material sheet attached to a first surface of said base sheet by a plurality of discontinuous seams which form said overlaying material sheet into a plurality of communicating inflatable chambers, said apertures opening through said base sheet into said chambers;

said inflatable chambers in said covering for substantially longitudinal disposition over a portion of a patient's body extending substantially from the pelvic area of said patient's body to the feet of said patient's body;

a continuous seam between said overlaying material sheet and said base sheet near said head end which closes ends of said inflatable chamber; and

a non-inflatable section of said thermal blanket extending substantially between said continuous seam and said head end and including an end portion of said flexible base sheet.]

[2. The improvement of claim 1 further including a non-inflatable extension of said thermal blanket for covering said feet.]

[3. The improvement of claim 1 further including an attachment means at said head end for adhering said head end to said pelvic area and preventing migration of air from under said thermal blanket toward a care site.]

4. In a self-erecting, inflatable thermal blanket for covering and bathing a portion of a patient's body in a thermally-controlled inflating medium, the improvement comprising:

a flexible base sheet having a head end, a foot end, two edges, and a plurality of apertures;

an overlaying flexible material sheet attached to a first surface of said base sheet by a plurality of discontinuous seams which form said overlaying material sheet into a plurality of communicating, inflatable chambers, said apertures opening through said base sheet into said chambers;

said inflatable chambers for substantially transverse disposition over a portion of said patient's body and

extending substantially across the arms and chest of said patient's body;

a continuous seam between said overlaying material sheet and said base sheet near said head end which closes ends of said inflatable chambers; [and]

a non-inflatable section of said thermal blanket extending substantially between said continuous seam and said head end and including an end portion of said flexible base sheet;

and

a head drape at said head end to drape over a patient's head.

5. The improvement of claim 4 further including a flat uninflatable section of said thermal blanket at said foot end extending over said chest.

6. The improvement of claim 4 further including an attachment means at said foot end for adhering said foot end to said chest and preventing migration of air from under said thermal blanket toward a care site.

[7. The improvement of claim 4 further including a head drape at said head end to drape over a patient's head.]

8. [An] A *self-erecting* inflatable thermal blanket for convectively controlling the temperature of a portion of a patient's body, comprising:

[a self-erecting]an inflatable cover with an undersurface and a plurality of substantially elongate, inflatable chambers for substantially transverse disposition over a portion of a patient's body and extending substantially across the arms and chest of said patient's body;

an inflating inlet for admitting a thermally-controlled inflating medium into said chambers for erection of said inflatable covering;

an array of apertures in said undersurface for exhausting a thermally-controlled inflating medium from said chambers through said undersurface to a space between said undersurface and said patient's body;

a first recess in said inflatable chambers extending across and closing off first inflatable chambers adjacent a first peripheral margin of said inflatable covering;

a second recess in said inflatable chambers extending across and closing off second inflatable chambers adjacent a second peripheral margin of said inflatable covering opposite said first peripheral margin;

5 the second recess for accommodating the curvature of said patient's torso; and

attachment means at said second recess for adhering said inflatable covering to said chest and preventing migration of air from underneath said thermal blanket toward a care site;

10 and

a head drape at said first peripheral margin.

9. [An] A *self-erecting* inflatable thermal blanket for convectively controlling the temperature of a portion of a patient's body, comprising:

[a self-erecting]an inflatable cover with an undersurface and a plurality of substantially elongate, inflatable chambers for substantially transverse disposition over a portion of a patient's body and extending substantially across the arms and chest of said patient's body;

an inflating inlet for admitting a thermally-controlled inflating medium into said chambers for erection of said inflatable covering;

25 an array of apertures in said undersurface for exhausting a thermally-controlled inflating medium from said chambers through said undersurface to a space between said undersurface and said patient's body;

a first recess in said inflatable chambers extending across and closing off first inflatable chambers adjacent a first peripheral margin of said inflatable covering;

a second recess in said inflatable chambers extending across and closing off second inflatable chambers adjacent a second peripheral margin of said inflatable covering opposite said first peripheral margin;

35 the second recess for accommodating the curvature of said patient's torso; and

a head drape at said first recess to drape over a patient's head.

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