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Racz

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(54) **FLOW ELEMENTS FOR USE WITH FLEXIBLE SPINAL NEEDLES, NEEDLE ASSEMBLIES FOR MANUFACTURE AND METHODS THEREFOR**

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(58) **Field of Classification Search** 264/279;
604/164.01, 164.02, 164.04

See application file for complete search history.

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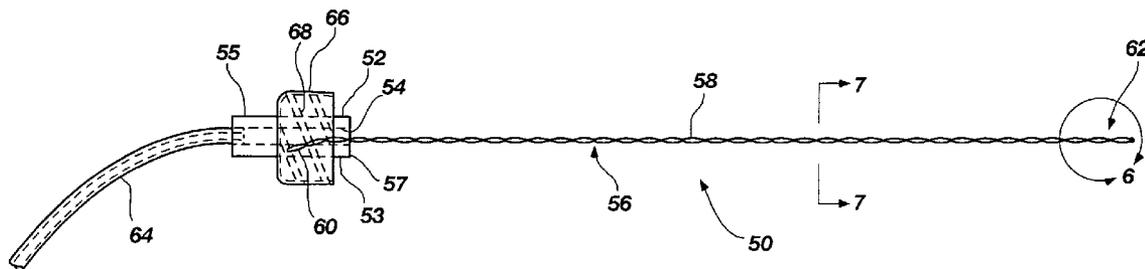
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A flow element (50) for use with flexible needles and flexible needle assemblies (10) to minimize flow occlusion within a flexible needle (15) is provided. The flow element (50) is particularly suited for uses with a flexible needle (15) for minimizing incidence of post-dural puncture headache. The flow element (50) includes a body having an internal flow path for conducting a fluid through a flexible needle, and an anti-restriction member (56). The anti-restriction member (56) includes an elongated body (58), a proximal end (70) coupled to the body within the internal flow path, and a distal end (60) for positioning at least a portion of the elongated body within a flexible needle. A flexible spinal needle assembly (10) for minimizing flow occlusion through an internal flow path of a flexible needle (15) by unintended kinking that is potentially caused by ligament or muscle layer movements is also provided, hi other embodiments, a flexible spinal needle assembly (10), a flexible spinal needle assembly kit, a method for installing a flexible spinal needle assembly, and a process for producing a flow element are provided.

19 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



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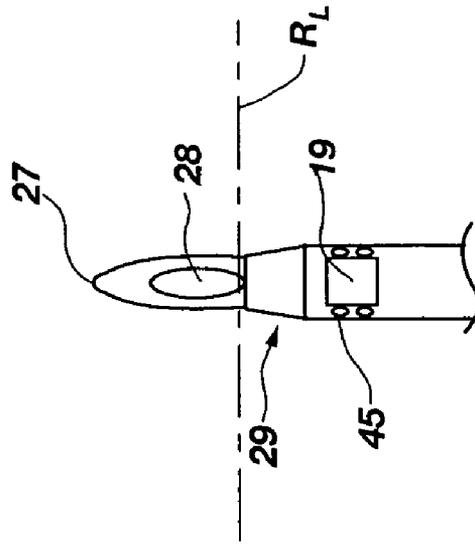


FIG. 4

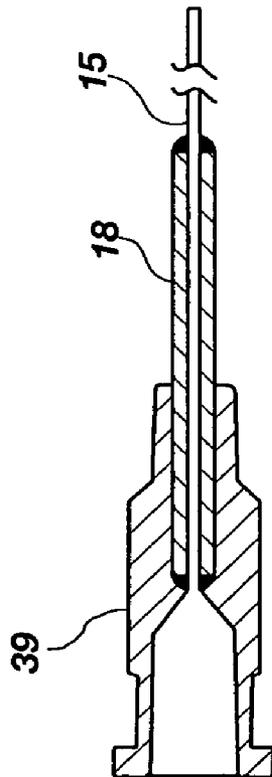


FIG. 3

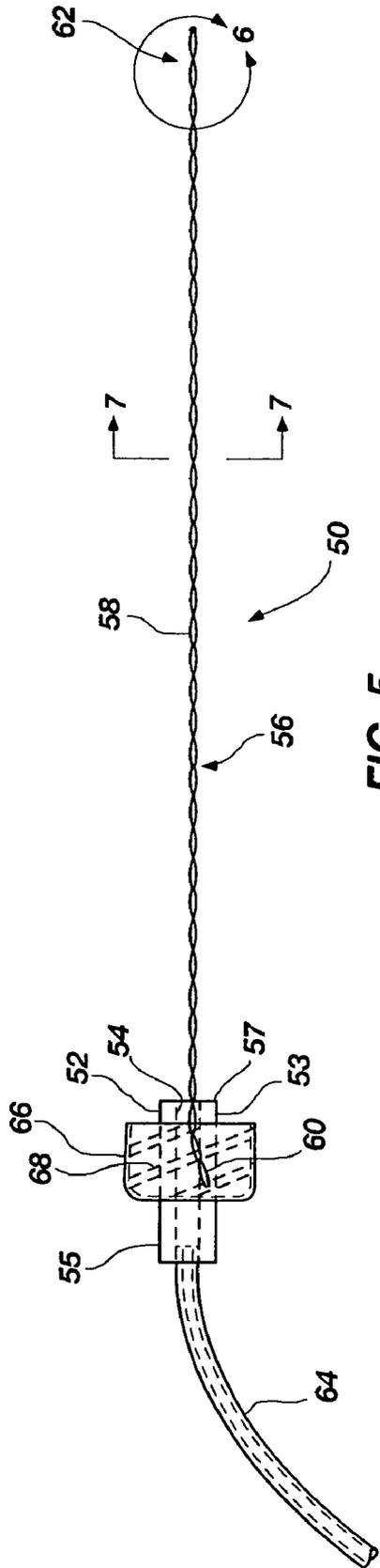


FIG. 5

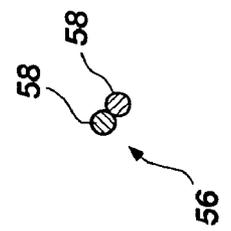


FIG. 7

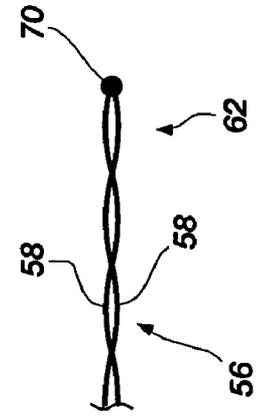


FIG. 6

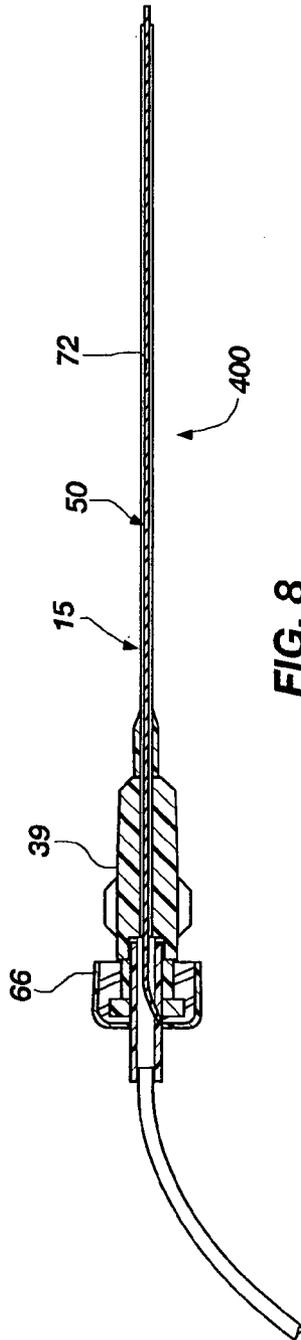


FIG. 8

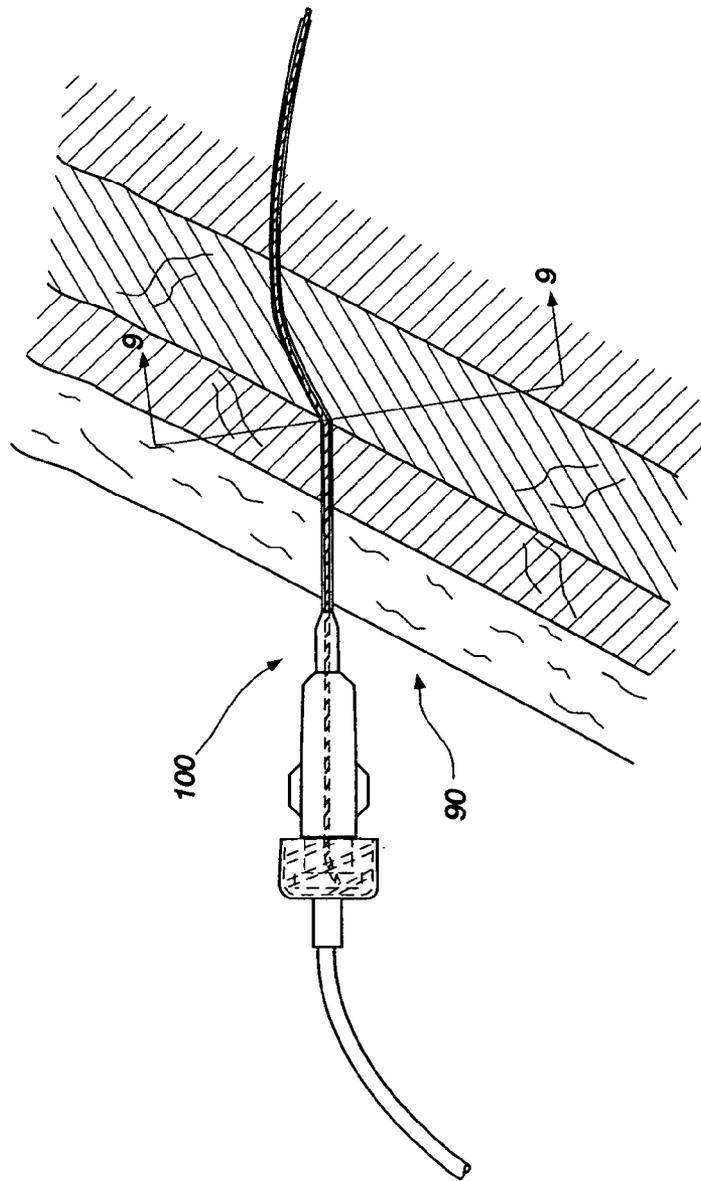


FIG. 9

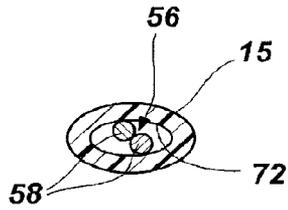


FIG. 10

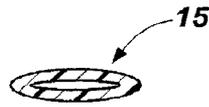


FIG. 11
Conventional

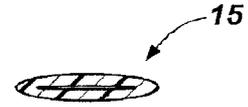


FIG. 12
Conventional

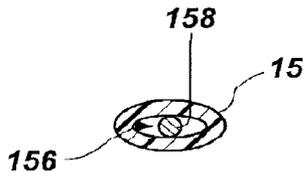


FIG. 13

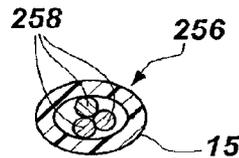


FIG. 14

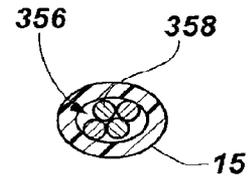


FIG. 15



FIG. 16



FIG. 17



FIG. 18

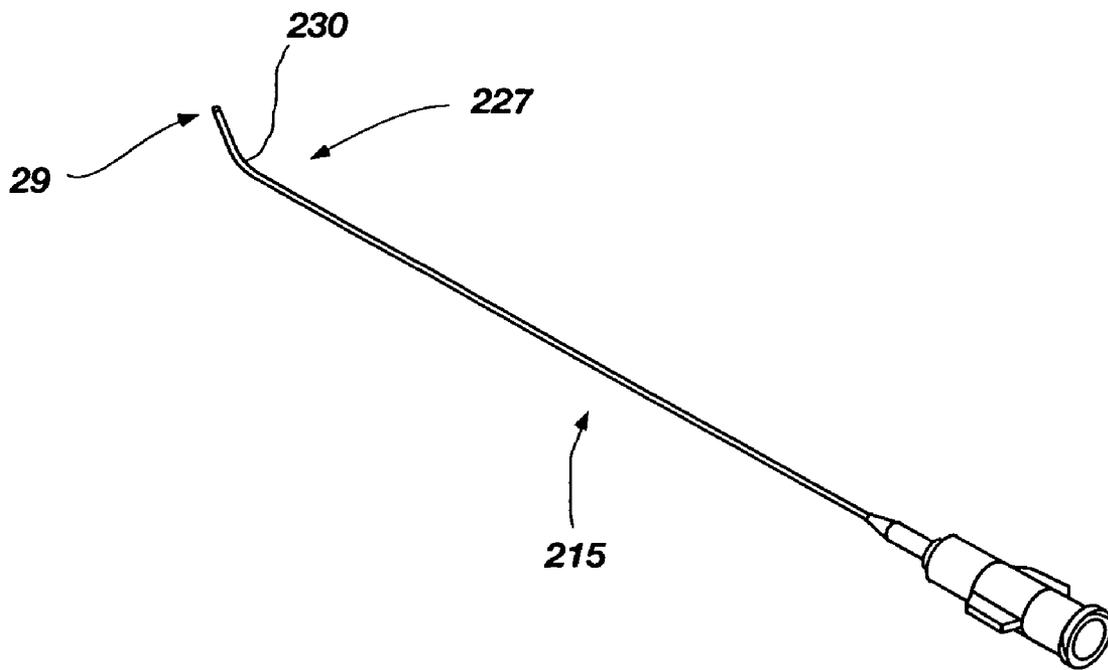


FIG. 19

**FLOW ELEMENTS FOR USE WITH
FLEXIBLE SPINAL NEEDLES, NEEDLE
ASSEMBLIES FOR MANUFACTURE AND
METHODS THEREFOR**

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED
APPLICATIONS

This is a national phase entry under 35 U.S.C. §371 of International Patent Application PCT/US2009/000250, filed Jan. 14, 2009, published in English as International Patent Publication WO 2009/091567 A2 on Jul. 23, 2009, which claims the benefit under 35 U.S.C. §119(e) to U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 61/020,791, filed Jan. 14, 2008.

TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates generally to medical devices, and particularly to structures for preventing fluid occlusion in medical needles. It is particularly directed to a flow element for use with flexible needles and flexible spinal needle assemblies, including methods for manufacture and use thereof.

BACKGROUND

The advantages of continuous administration of spinal anesthesia have long been appreciated by anesthesiologists. Unlike conventional single-shot techniques, continuous spinal anesthesia (“CSA”) with an indwelling catheter facilitates the administration of anesthesia over an unlimited period of time and furthermore provides the ability to carefully control the level of the block by administering repeated small, incremental doses of anesthetic. As compared to continuous epidural anesthesia, which has become widely used as a substitute for spinal anesthesia, CSA generally requires far smaller quantities of a drug to achieve the desired effect, has a definite endpoint of correct catheter placement, requires no “test dose,” and produces a much more reliable and less spotty block.

Unfortunately, technical problems have severely limited the usefulness of continuous spinal techniques. Until recently, the standard technique of inserting the spinal catheter through the spinal needle, coupled with the difficulty of manufacturing truly small needles and catheters, has meant large needles and catheters were required. This in turn has resulted in an unacceptably high incidence of post-dural puncture headaches (“PDPH”).

In the mid 1980’s, various technical advances fueled renewed interest in spinal anesthesia in general, and in CSA in particular. Improvements in manufacturing ever-smaller conventional (QUINCKE™) spinal needles of 25 gauge, 26 gauge, and even 30 gauge have significantly reduced PDPH incidence. These results have allowed for the use of spinal anesthesia in age groups and in procedures which were not previously considered suitable.

At the same time, advances in catheter manufacture have made possible spinal catheters of 28 gauge and 32 gauge which would fit through relatively small spinal needles. Unfortunately, these catheters proved difficult to handle and to make. Moreover, such catheters were expensive, and, more ominously, they were associated with several reports of neurologic damage (i.e., cauda equina syndrome). Many clinicians experimented with these catheters and subsequently abandoned them. These types of catheters were ultimately removed from the market by the Food and Drug Administration (“FDA”).

The FDA’s decision to recall and ban the marketing of microspinal catheters for CSA in the U.S., and its requirement that any new device for CSA be subjected to an extremely stringent pre-market approval process, have resulted in a freeze on the development of these products, at least in the United States. Nevertheless, the use of such catheters for injecting local anesthetics for the establishing surgical anesthesia is not the only use to which such devices might beneficially be put. In fact, the injection of narcotics, such as FENTANYL™, for analgesia during labor would be a very desirable use of such catheters.

Installing a conventional catheter generally requires several cumbersome steps involving threading long, very thin catheters through a spinal needle. Simply threading a catheter into the end of a spinal needle can be so difficult that some manufacturers include a “threading aid” as part of their kit. In short, the conventional spinal catheter threading operation requires considerable time and effort on the part of a clinician. Once threaded, a degree of uncertainty exists for the clinician as to how far to insert the catheter. Also, a risk exists that a piece of the catheter might be sheared off by the needle, if the catheter were to be pulled back during the threading operation. In such cases, bits of catheter could potentially be left behind in the intrathecal space. Furthermore, removing the spinal needle, while holding the catheter in position, can be a challenge. Additionally, attaching a hub/injection adapter to the naked end of the 28 gauge or 32 gauge catheter can be even more of a challenge. Finally, once the adapter is successfully attached, the small lumen of the catheter permits only a slow flow of either CSF or anesthetic.

A parallel technical development has been the introduction of non-cutting spinal needles, such as the “Pencil Point” type needles, which have been shown to drastically reduce PDPH incidence. Examples of Pencil Point type needles include the Sprotte and Whitacre non-cutting spinal needles. In terms of PDPH incidence, a 22 gauge Sprotte needle seems to be roughly equivalent to a 25 gauge or 26 gauge Quincke needle, while a 24 gauge Sprotte needle or 25 gauge Whitacre needle essentially eliminates the risk of PDPH.

One problem of Sprotte and Whitacre non-cutting spinal needles is that the injection orifice is on the side of the needle. Failures in spinal anesthesia administration have been known to occur when the needle was “half-in, half-out” of the intrathecal space, i.e. the needle was only partially inserted into the intrathecal space. Another problem with Sprotte and Whitacre spinal needles is that the smooth curved tip profile provides no definitive feedback signal or “click” to the clinician when the dura is punctured. This lack of feedback contributes to uncertainty in catheter tip placement for the clinician.

One proposed solution for overcoming the limitations of the conventional catheters mentioned above and a solution which has been approved by the FDA is a flexible spinal needle, described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/694, 235, filed Oct. 27, 2003, (U.S. 2005-0090801 A1, published Apr. 28, 2005) the disclosure of which is incorporated by this reference in its entirety herein. Specifically, this particulate flexible spinal needle may be used for CSA while essentially eliminating the risk of PDPH.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

In order to improve the performance of a flexible needle, a flow element is provided for use in conjunction with the flexible needle. A flow element may be used with flexible needles, including flexible spinal needles, and flexible needle assemblies to prevent, or at least minimize, the extent to

which flow occlusion may occur within a flexible needle, particularly when used with a flexible needle for minimizing incidence of post-dural puncture headache. The flow element includes a body having an internal flow path for conducting a fluid through a flexible needle and an anti-restriction member. The anti-restriction member includes an elongated body, a proximal end element coupled to the body within the internal flow path, and a distal end element for positioning at least a portion of the elongated body within a flexible needle.

In certain embodiments, a parallel flexible spinal needle assembly for minimizing flow occlusion through an internal flow path of a flexible needle, caused by unintended kinking potentially resultant from ligament or muscle layer movements, is also provided.

In certain embodiments, a flexible spinal needle assembly, a flexible spinal needle assembly kit, a method for installing a flexible spinal needle assembly, and a process for manufacturing a flow element are provided.

Other advantages of the flexible needle and flexible needle assembly, in which a flow element may be used to advantage, are now described. In contrast to a conventional spinal catheter, the instant flexible needle flow element is advantageously used with a flexible needle. The association of the catheter with the flow element provides for simple and straightforward needle insertion without either threading a catheter through a needle or installing an adapter. The installation procedure is similar to intravenous catheter or "single-shot" spinal procedures which are already familiar to clinicians. Placement of the flexible needle over the inserting needle allows for a larger diameter flexible needle to be inserted. The resulting improved diameter flexible needle allows easier and faster flow of either cerebrospinal fluid ("CSF") or medicating agents.

Insertion of the flexible needle tip in the intrathecal space with the instant device is more secure than prior devices. The Pencil Point style non-cutting tip of the support needle promotes a low incidence of PDPH. Furthermore, the assembly tip may be shaped to provide a feedback signal when the dura is punctured during the insertion operation. An observation of CSF which is rendered possible with the instant design further assures a clinician that the entire orifice located at the flexible needle tip is positioned in the intrathecal space.

The likelihood of neurologic damage is lessened with the shorter flexible needle of the invention. The shorter length makes it less likely that the needle will be wedged against a nerve root. More importantly, the larger bore of the improved flexible needle promotes turbulent flow and improved mixing of the fluid to be injected and the CSF. The improved short flexible needle, in association with its hub, removes ambiguity for the clinician as to how far to insert needle in that the needle is inserted to the hub. The flexible needle hub greatly aids fixation of the needle assembly to the patient's skin. Contamination to the entry site during insertion is less likely with the instant invention. Also, kinking of the needle proximate the patient's skin is largely eliminated when a flexible kink sleeve is included in the needle assembly.

The relative ease, simplicity, and safety of the improved inventive device have the potential of beneficially expanding the use of continuous spinal anesthesia/analgesia. Lumbar epidurals could be replaced by using this device. Similarly, most conventional single-shot spinal procedures could be replaced by use of this device, "just-in-case" the procedure goes longer than expected, or the level of the block needs adjustment. A number of situations outside the operating room environment could also benefit from this device, non-exclusively including: acute and chronic pain control with spinal narcotics, labor analgesia, diagnostic taps, and indwelling catheters for

continuous peripheral nerve blocks, as well as research efforts. In effect, this device may be used in medical procedures involving needle insertion at the lumbar level of the spine. Versions of the instant device are contemplated to offer improved techniques for the insertion of a wide variety of medical catheters, including arterial lines, major nerve blocks, intraperitoneal catheters, intraventricular (brain) catheters, and intravenous catheters.

The instant device provides an apparatus and method for inserting a flexible spinal needle in a quick, easy, and straightforward manner. The instant flexible spinal needle assembly has an outside diameter which is sized, such that upon withdrawal of the assembly from the subarachnoid space, the dura mater, may substantially reseal the space formerly occupied by the assembly. An assembly typically includes a support needle, a flexible needle, slidably mounted on the support needle, and a central stylet slidably inserted within the support needle. The inserted tip end of the flexible needle assembly is advantageously configured to produce a feedback signal during the insertion process to indicate dural puncture.

A support needle may have a piercing point on a first end and a central hub at a second end. The piercing point protrudes from a front, distal, inserted, or tip, end of the flexible spinal needle assembly. The piercing point is adapted to penetrate, substantially without cutting, and helps to form a puncture hole through the dura mater which substantially reseals itself automatically subsequent to a retraction of the flexible needle. A second end of the central stylet generally may have a locking hub. The locking hub may carry a first attachment structure for connecting with corresponding structure carried by the central stylet.

The front end of the support needle may be configured cooperatively to form a structural interference with a distal end of a flexible needle. This structural interference resists a relative motion between the piercing point of the support needle and the distal end of the flexible needle during the insertion of the flexible needle into a patient. A rear end of the support needle may carry a support hub having second attachment structure for removably connecting the support needle to the central hub of the central stylet. The first and second attachment structures may be structured to form a removable connection, such as a LUER-LOCK™ type connection. The support hub may be advantageously made from a transparent material to permit the clinician to observe fluid flow through the support hub.

A flexible needle may be viewed as a flexible conduit having distal and proximal ends. Preferred flexible needles have sufficient transverse flexibility to accommodate a patient's torso bending movement. This flexibility operates to reduce a patient's awareness of the presence of the inserted device. Flexible needles typically are made from medical grade plastic materials. For example, polyester shrink tube or similar materials may be used. The distal end of a flexible needle may be reinforced, in some instances, in order to resist a displacement or peel-back of the distal end from the front end of a support needle.

The portion of the assembly which transitions from the proximal flexible needle hub to the flexible needle body may be reinforced by a kink sleeve segment. The kink sleeve segment may be constructed of a firm, yet flexible material, such as nylon or other polymers. The kink sleeve is intended to cushion the effects of forces applied to the assembly over the area of transition from the hub to the flexible needle body during instances of bending that may occur after the flexible needle is inserted and the support needle is removed. For

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example, once the flexible needle is inserted, the hub may be bent over and taped to the patient's skin, often at an angle of approximately 90 degrees.

Needle hubs are typically configured for fluid flow attachment to medical fluid transfer equipment. For example, needle hubs may be configured to form LUER-LOCK™ type connections with such equipment. It may be preferred to form the needle hub for substantially unobtrusive attachment to a patient's skin by way of an intermediary adhesive element. Alternatively, the hub may be designed to lay flush against the patient's skin with a connection positioned parallel thereto thereby avoiding a need for bending the flexible needle.

A flexible needle assembly may be installed using a method as follows:

- providing a flexible needle assembly as disclosed herein;
- using a conventional spinal needle technique to prepare the skin of a patient at an injection site, applying local anesthetic, piercing the patient's skin and subcutaneous fascia, and inserting a piercing point tip of the flexible spinal needle assembly;
- removing the central stylet subsequent to receiving a feedback signal that a puncture of the dura mater has occurred;
- checking for the presence of CSF at the support hub; if no CSF is observed, further inserting the assembly until the tip is within the intrathecal space; or if CSF is observed, unlocking the support hub and the flexible needle hub, and while holding the support needle stationary, advancing the flexible needle until the flexible needle hub contacts the patient's skin;
- removing the support needle and checking for the presence of CSF at the flexible needle hub;
- positioning and connecting a flow element into an internal flow path of the flexible needle to substantially reduce flow occlusion through the internal flow path caused by kinking;
- connecting a medical fluid transfer apparatus to an attachment hub of the flow element; and finally,
- securing the flexible needle hub to the skin.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is an exploded plan assembly view of a flexible needle assembly.

FIG. 2 is an exploded plan assembly view of a second embodiment of a flexible needle assembly.

FIG. 3 shows a partial cross-sectional view of the flexible needle shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 4 shows a detail view of a distal end portion of the flexible needle assembly tip shown in FIG. 1 when assembled.

FIG. 5 is a plan view of a flow element of the flexible needle assembly shown in FIG. 2.

FIG. 6 shows an exploded view the flow element as indicated by reference in FIG. 5.

FIG. 7 shows a cross-sectional view taken along section line 7-7 in FIG. 5.

FIG. 8 is a side assembled view of the flexible needle assembly shown in FIG. 2.

FIG. 9 representatively shows a portion of the flexible needle assembly shown in FIG. 8 being kinked in ligament layers.

FIG. 10 shows a cross-sectional view of the flexible needle assembly taken along section line 10-10 in FIG. 9.

FIG. 11 illustrates a cross-sectional view of a conventional flexible needle being partially occluded when bent in ligament layers.

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FIG. 12 illustrates a cross-sectional view of a conventional flexible needle being fully occluded when kinked in ligament layers.

FIG. 13 shows a cross-sectional view of another flexible needle assembly.

FIG. 14 shows a cross-sectional view of a further flexible needle assembly.

FIG. 15 shows a cross-sectional view of yet another flexible needle assembly.

FIG. 16 shows a cross-sectional view of a flow element.

FIG. 17 shows a cross-sectional view of a flow element.

FIG. 18 shows a cross-sectional view of a flow element.

FIG. 19 is a side view of a flexible spinal needle assembly.

MODE(S) FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

The illustrations presented herein are, in some instances, not actual views of any particular flow element, flexible needle assembly or other feature of a flexible spinal needle assembly, but are merely idealized representation that are employed to describe the invention. Additionally, elements common between figures may retain the same numerical designation.

Generally, the flow element may be advantageously used with an integrated spinal needle or flexible needle assembly 10 (much like an intravenous needle and catheter mounted therein) as shown in FIG. 1, with the flexible needle 15 being releasably mounted on the outside of a support needle 19. The flexible needle 15 is configured for uses with embodiments of the invention as will be further described below. Flexible needle 15, being configured for placement on the outside of the support needle 19, provides a number of advantages which are first described hereafter, prior to turning to the embodiments of the invention. First, this design makes insertion significantly easier by eliminating the separate steps of catheter threading, insertion and hub/adaptor attachment. A single "stick" or insertion is all that is required; once the needle is inserted into position, the flexible conduit is likewise in position for purposes of infusing fluid. Since the flexible needle 15 is larger for a given needle size, its flow and handling characteristics will be much improved, and it is easier and cheaper to manufacture. Advantageously, embodiments of the invention may provide for a flow element 50 that may be introduced into the flexible needle 15 to minimize the effects of kinking by substantially preventing total flow occlusion of fluid through the flexible needle, thereby ensuring a minimal amount of fluid flow through the needle as shown in FIG. 2.

Shown in FIG. 1 is an exploded plan assembly view of a flexible needle assembly 10 which is usable in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. The flexible needle assembly 10 consists of three components: a central stylet 17, a hollow support needle 19, and a flexible needle 15. The overall dimensions of the flexible needle 15 and representatively the flexible needle assembly are generally represented in length, and may be similar to a conventional spinal needle in gauge size ranging from about 22 gauge to about 25 gauge in size, but as illustrated the flexible needle 15 is shown as being about 23 gauge cannula in size.

The innermost component of the assembly is configured as a solid central stylet 17. When inserted in the support needle 19 (discussed in detail further herein), the central stylet 17 prevents the entry of extraneous tissue or other material into the support needle opening 28 during insertion of the assembly into the patient. The central stylet may also serve as a "stiffening" portion of the assembly providing extra support

and stiffness to the entire assembly. The hub **25** of the central stylet **17** is configured to be positioned outermost, or located at an extreme proximal end **26** of assembly **10**. This positioning facilitates the removal or disengagement of the central stylet **17** from the assembly **10**. In most instances the stylet is the first component which is disengaged from the assembly **10** subsequent to the insertion of the assembly into the patient. An attachment structure, such as resilient tab **32**, may be located on the hub **25** for retaining the central stylet **17** in the support needle **19**. The tab **32** may interact with a corresponding attachment structure on the hub **35** of the support needle **19**.

The next layer of the assembly is a removable hollow support needle **19** to support and allow insertion of the flexible needle **15** into a subject. This support needle **19** closely resembles a conventional spinal needle. The tip **27** of support needle **19** may have a pencil-point formation to allow penetration of tissue substantially without cutting. As discussed previously herein, this aids in forming a puncture hole through the dura mater which automatically may substantially reseal subsequent to retraction. An opening **28** is located near the tip **27** to allow cerebral spinal fluid "CSF" or other fluids to flow through the support needle **19** from the opening **28** to the hub **35**. It will be appreciated that where desired, suitable treatment solutions may be injected through the support needle **19**, to enter a patient's tissue through the opening **28**.

The hub **35** of the support needle **19** may beneficially be made of clear plastic to permit the clinician to view CSF return when the central stylet **17** has been removed. Of course, any CSF present will visibly flow from the distal end **33** of support needle **19** subsequent to removal of the central stylet **17**. Optional use of clear plastic or a transparent fluid observation window in the support hub **35** can provide an additional convenience, and minimize loss of CSF.

The central stylet **17** may be attachable to the support needle **19**, as illustrated in FIG. 1. The central hub **25** typically carries an attachment structure, such as tab **32**, to interface in a structural interference with an attachment structure **34** carried by support hub **35**. As illustrated, tab **32** and attachment structure **34** cooperatively form a slidably engageable joint. Alternative releasable retaining joint configurations, including rotatable attachments such as LUER-LOCK™ type joints, may also be used.

The outermost layer or portion of the assembly **10** is the flexible needle **15** itself. As previously described the flexible needle **15** is approximately 23 gauge in size and about the length of a conventional spinal needle, although the adoption of different diameters and lengths for use with different procedures is within the scope of the invention. Conventional plastic catheter material may be used in the construction of needle **15**. The flexible needle material may be reinforced with a flat ribbon internal spring **45** (shown in FIG. 4), an internal or external wire wrap, or other reinforcing structure. Alternative materials, and various materials in combination, also may be used to construct a flexible needle **15**. Suitable flexible needle material produces a flexible needle **15** which is fairly stiff and has a sufficiently high tensile strength to maintain structural integrity during insertion, during residency in the body, and during retraction from the patient. A flexible needle **15** desirably possesses sufficient transverse flexibility to deform and accommodate patient motion in order to reduce irritation to the patient resulting from the presence of a foreign body.

A slippery nonstick surface is generally provided to ease insertion and removal of the flexible needle **15**. The tip **29** of flexible needle **15** may be tapered into a curve to blend

smoothly into the edge of support needle **19** (see, FIGS. 4 & 19). The degree of this curved taper may be governed by a tradeoff between the decreased resistance to insertion of an extreme taper versus the fragility and tendency to peelback of a very thin leading edge. A preferred taper provides ease of insertion, a feedback signal to indicate entry of flexible needle **15** through the dura, and sufficient tensile strength to prevent peelback. The feedback signal may be described as a distinct "click" or a discernible change in the required insertion force. The "click" may be a sonic event, or may be tactilely perceptible through the clinician's fingers in contact with the assembly.

Flexible needle tips **29**, having shapes in addition to those illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 4, are within contemplation. For example, manufacturing or material requirements may influence the shape of a tip **29**. An alternative flexible needle may include a reinforcing wire of fine gauge. Such a wire may be embedded into the material forming the sealing wall of flexible needle **15** to reinforce against peelback. The wire may also be spiraled along the length of the flexible needle to provide additional strength to resist collapse, kinking, or breakage of a flexible needle **15**. Alternatively, a flat spring ribbon **45** may be used to provide reinforcement.

The flexible needle hub **39** typically includes a LUER-LOCK™ type connector, or other attachment structure, for easy and secure connection with common infusion tubing, injection ports, or syringes, and other medical fluid transfer apparatus. Since the flexible needle **15** may be inserted all the way to the hub **39**, a flat, circular flange, or other ergonomically shaped structure, may be provided on the surface of the hub which rests against the patient's skin to facilitate easy tape fixation. Fixation to the patient's skin may be accomplished with a slotted circular foam tape. Of course, other tapes or adhesive systems may also be used. A quantity of suitable adhesive or tape could be included in a prepackaged flexible spinal needle assembly kit.

It is desirable to prevent inadvertent premature removal of the support needle **19** from the flexible needle **15**. In the embodiment depicted in FIG. 1, support hub **35** is configured to threadedly receive the threaded structure **37**, which is located on the flexible needle hub **39**, and form a releasable locked connection with the structure **37** upon a rotation of the structure **37** relative to the support hub **35** or vice-versa. Such a positive connection may be desirable and may form a LUER-LOCK™ or other rotatable-type joint. Other such interlocking or even alternative retaining structure may also be used. For example, a secure friction fit attachment between support needle **19** and flexible needle **15** is within contemplation in the practice of this invention, as is a structural interference fit of attachment structures similar to that shown in connection with tab **32** on the central stylet **17**.

FIG. 3 illustrates a partial cross-sectional view of the flexible needle shown in FIG. 1. The flexible needle **15** may include a flexible kink sleeve **18**. Kink sleeve **18** covers a portion of the proximal surface of the flexible needle **15** to protect the area covered against kinking and damage during bending. Desirably, the kink sleeve **18** will begin at the base of the flexible needle **15** inside the hub **39** (as depicted in FIG. 3) to provide maximum protection. Alternate embodiments, where kink sleeve begins at a location spacedly removed from the end of the flexible needle inside the hub **39**, or at the end of the hub **39** are within the scope of the invention. Kink sleeve **18** may extend along the length of the flexible needle **15** to a length or distance appropriate for the planned use of the flexible needle. Typically, kink sleeve **18** will extend to a length sufficient to prevent kinking of the flexible needle at the skin of the patient or within the skin and fascia of the

patient. Kink sleeve **18** may be constructed of any suitable flexible material that is medically acceptable, including polymers such as nylon.

When flexible needle **15** is fully inserted, a portion of the kink sleeve **18** may reside within the skin and fascia of the patient. The hub **39** may then be bent over and taped to the skin, if desired. The kink sleeve **18** acts to protect the flexible needle **15** during this bending process, which may bend the flexible needle **15** at an angle of about 90 degrees or more. The kink sleeve **18** absorbs the force of the bend and maintains the flexible needle **15** in a position allowing fluid flow there-through. Kinking of the flexible needle **15** is thus minimized, and may be largely prevented. The kink sleeve **18** may be impregnated, coated, or otherwise treated with a biocompatible infection resistant substance to prevent adverse tissue reaction or infection at the flexible spinal needle entry site.

Flexible needles **15** may be made from suitable medical grade, plastic type materials. For example, polyester shrink tubing may be employed in one embodiment of the device, although it will be appreciated that any suitable material, including other polymers, may be used. Flexible needles **15** may be composed of a single material, or may be a composite of two or more materials to provide the desired flexible needle handling characteristics. Fine gauge wire, such as stainless steel wire, or a flat internal ribbon spring **45** (shown in FIG. **4**), may be incorporated into a flexible needle sealable wall to improve resistance to peelback and to further support the structural integrity of the flexible needle. The distal ends may alternatively be reinforced with metal bands. Hubs **25**, **35** and **39** are typically also made from medical grade plastic type materials. The central stylet **17** and support needle **19** are typically made from a medically acceptable metal, such as stainless steel or titanium.

The design of this device makes the placement of a spinal flexible needle **15** quick, easy, and straightforward. It should be so easy, in fact, that most clinicians may choose to use this device for every spinal procedure they perform. The initial steps of skin preparation, local anesthetic infiltration, and needle insertion are identical to those now used with conventional spinal needles. As the flexible needle assembly **10** is being inserted and the clinician feels the slight "click" upon dural puncture, he or she removes the central stylet **17**. If the insertion has been successful, CSF will promptly appear at the hub **35** of the support needle **19**. If the dura has not been penetrated, the entire assembly **10** may continue to be advanced until dural puncture is achieved. If desired, the central stylet **17** may be reinserted prior to continued advancement in order to prevent tissue from entering the opening **28**.

Once CSF is observed at the hub **35** of the support needle **19**, the clinician can have confidence that the tip **29** of the flexible needle **15** is within the intrathecal space. If desirable for the procedure, the clinician may continue to advance the hollow support needle/flexible needle **19/15** of the assembly **10** another centimeter or so. At this point, the hub **35** of the hollow needle **19** is typically rotated or twisted to unlock it from engagement with the flexible needle hub **39**. While holding the hollow needle **19** stationary, the clinician further advances the flexible needle **15** into the patient until the hub **39** contacts the patient's skin. For embodiments including a kink sleeve **18**, this advancement may insert, or further insert, the kink sleeve **18** within the patient's skin.

At this point, the hollow support needle **19** may be removed, and the appearance of CSF at the flexible needle hub **39** will confirm the correct placement of the flexible needle **15**. The desired injection port, tubing, or other medical fluid transfer apparatus, may then be attached to the flexible

needle hub **39** such as by way of attachment structure **37**. Where necessary, the flexible needle **15** may be bent and taped to the patient's skin before or after the attachment of the corresponding apparatus, if required. Where included, kink sleeve **18** protects the flexible needle **15** from kinking and incurring damage at the bend. A piece of slotted, circular foam tape (which might also be treated with an antimicrobial substance) may also be applied to secure the hub **39** to the skin, thereby preventing a dislodgement of the flexible needle **15**, and furthermore providing a cushion to the patient to reduce potential irritation from the hub **39**.

The flexible needle **15** may then be left in place for as long as clinically necessary and, assuming adequate tensile strength, may be easily and safely removed when appropriate. At the time of removal, since the non-cutting point **22** of the support needle **19** substantially eliminates laceration of any of the fibers in the dural membrane, the mesh-like fibers may relax to their original position, thus automatically closing or resealing the dural puncture. As a result the incidence of PDPH is expected to be in agreement with that experienced with Sprotte and Whitacre needles, despite the luxury or provision of a reasonably large flexible needle **15** in a device usable to advantage with the instant invention.

FIG. **2** is an exploded plan assembly view of a flexible needle assembly **100** in accordance with a further embodiment of the invention. The flexible needle assembly **100** comprises a flexible needle **15** as previously described and a flow element **50**, and may further comprise a central stylet **17**, and a hollow support needle **19**. FIG. **8** shows a side assembled view of the flexible needle assembly **100** shown in FIG. **2**. The overall dimensions of the flexible needle **15** and the flow element **50** are generally represented in length as indicated by reference line R_L , and may be similar to a conventional spinal needle in gauge size ranging from about 22 gauge to about 25 gauge in size. As illustrated the flexible needle **15** is shown as being approximately 23 gauge cannula in size. The flow element **50** is dimensioned to be sufficiently small so as to be positioned within an inner flow path **72** (shown in FIG. **8**) defined within the flexible needle **15**.

FIG. **5** is a plan view of the flow element **50** of the flexible needle assembly **100** shown in FIG. **2**. The flow element **50** is advantageously used with the flexible needle **15** to further prevent kinking of the flexible needle **15** or from substantially occluding fluid flow through the needle when the needle is inserted through muscle or ligament layers **90** of a patient as illustrated in FIG. **9**. FIG. **10** illustrates a cross-sectional view of the flexible needle assembly taken along section line **10-10** of FIG. **9** wherein the flexible needle **15** is kinked and an anti-restriction member **56** of the flow element **50** prevents fluid occlusion within the inner flow path **72**.

FIG. **11** illustrates a cross-sectional view of a conventional flexible needle **15** being partially occluded when bent in ligament layers and FIG. **12** illustrates a cross-sectional view of a conventional flexible needle **15** being fully occluded when kinked in ligament layers.

Returning to FIG. **5**, The flow element **50** includes a body **52** having an internal flow path **54** for conducting a fluid through the flexible needle **15** and an anti-restriction member **56**. The anti-restriction member **56** includes elongated bodies **58**, a proximal end **60** coupled to the body **52** within the internal flow path **54**, and a distal end **62** for disposing at least a portion of the elongated body **58** within the flexible needle **15**. Advantageously, the elongated body **58** will help to maintain a minimal amount of fluid flow through the flexible needle **15** should kinking thereof occur. FIG. **9** representa-

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tively shows a portion of the flexible needle assembly **100** show in FIG. **8** being kinked in ligament layer **90** as mentioned above.

The body **52** may be made from any suitable material, and in this embodiment is made from a medical grade plastic. The anti-restriction member **56** is made from a medical grade stainless steel and may be made from any other suitable material. The flow element **50** may be manufactured by known methods, such as injection molding, by locating the anti-restriction member **56** into a mold and then forming the body **52** about member **56**. Other methods may be utilized to manufacture the flow element **50**, such as by forming the body **52** using conventional techniques and then securing the anti-restriction member **56** to the body **52**, for example, with glue.

The body **52** may include a cylindrical outer surface **53** extending substantially between a first end **55** and a second end **57**, wherein a portion of the cylindrical outer surface **53** is configured for sealing attachment to the attach structure **39** of the flexible needle **15**. A flexible conduit **64** may be coupled to the first end **55** of the body **52** to supply fluid thereto or for connection to a machine configured for delivering fluids thereto. A support hub **66** may be coupled to the body **52**, the support hub **66** having a first attach structure **68** configured to removably attach to the attach structure **37** of the flexible needle to allow at least a portion of the elongated body **58** to be disposed therein. Optionally, the first attach structure **68** may comprise a LUER-LOCK™ type of connector or any other suitable connector type for attaching to the flexible needle **15**.

FIG. **7** shows a cross-sectional view of the anti-restriction member **56** taken along section line 7-7 in FIG. **5**. As shown, the anti-restriction member **56** may include two elongated bodies **58** in this embodiment. As shown in FIG. **6**, the two elongated bodies **58** may include a twisted pair of wires. Optionally, the twisted wire pair may be secured on one end with a weld bead **70**. Manufacturing the anti-restriction member **56** may include receiving two wires and positioning them one on the other relative to their axial lengths, optionally twisting them and further securing them together with a weld bead, so as to leave one end prepped for securing to, or forming with, the body **52** and the other end for positioning in a flexible needle as herein described. It is to be recognized that the anti-restriction member **56** may include one or three or more elongated bodies other than the two elongated bodies **58** as illustrated by the twisted wire pair. For example: FIG. **13** shows a flexible needle **15** having a single elongated body **158** of an anti-restriction member **156** positioned therein; FIG. **14** shows a flexible needle **15** having three elongated bodies **258** of an anti-restriction member **256** disposed therein; and FIG. **15** shows a flexible needle **15** having four elongated bodies **358** of an anti-restriction member **356** disposed therein. Each of the illustrated embodiments provides a different amount of minimal fluid occlusion should the flexible needle **15** be kinked when used.

It is to be recognized that each elongated body **58** of the anti-restriction member **56** while shown as a single uniform structure, may comprises two or more wires or elements banded, twisted or coupled together to form the unitary elongated body **58**. However, in this embodiment the anti-restriction member **56** comprises six wires (not shown) for each of the two elongated bodies **58** shown in FIG. **10**.

Optionally, each elongated body **58** of the anti-restriction member **56** may be configured with a cross-sectional shape of a circle as shown in FIG. **10**, an ellipse (not shown), a diamond as shown in FIG. **17**, a jack as shown in FIG. **16**, a square (not shown), a triangle (not shown), a sigmoid as shown in FIG. **18** or any other suitable cross-sectional shape

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for advantageously preventing and minimizing flow occlusion through a flexible spinal needle assembly **100**.

Advantageously, the anti-restriction member **56** effectively maintains an open channel within the inner flow path **72** of the flexible needle **15** upon a bending or kinking of the needle **15**.

The flow element **50** may be configured such that the distal end **62** of the elongated body **58** protrudes partially from a flexible distal end of the flexible needle **15** to allow the fluid to be dispersed more effectively from the cannula of the flexible needle **15**, or may be configured to have a length which is either greater or smaller than that illustrated.

FIG. **19** is a perspective view of a flexible spinal needle **215**. The flexible spinal needle **215** may be used with a flow element **50** for minimizing flow occlusion through an internal flow path thereof by unintended kinking that is potentially caused by ligament or muscle layer movements when inserted into dura mater and into the intrathecal space of a subject. The flexible spinal needle **215** includes an internal flow path (not shown) advantageously for receiving a flow element **50** for coupling with the flexible needle **215** and disposed through a substantial portion of the internal flow path. The flexible needle includes an exterior diameter such that withdrawal of the flexible needle from the dura mater, permits the dura mater to substantially reseal a space formerly occupied by the flexible needle. A tip and a flexible needle body of the flexible needle are of a substantial elongated extent such that they can be further extended into the dura mater upon extraction of a support needle coupled therewithin before exposing the flow element **50** therewithin. Optionally, the distal end or tip **227** of the flexible spinal needle **215** may include a curved portion **230** to facilitate further insertion into an intrathecal space of a patient upon removal of a support needle **19** that naturally strengthens while supporting the flexible material characteristics of the flexible spinal needle **215**. The curved portion **230** may be manufactured by forming the material in the desired shape or otherwise providing material strain or strain relief strategically located in a portion of the material forming the cannula of the flexible spinal needle **215**. The curved portion **230** may be formed using manufacturing methods understood by a person of skill in the art.

In still other embodiments of the invention, a flexible spinal needle assembly kit is provided. The flexible spinal needle assembly kit includes a flow element, configured for minimizing flow occlusion through a flow path upon its insertion into a flexible needle and a flexible needle, having a flow path and configured for receiving a flow element or a support needle within the flow path. The flexible spinal needle assembly kit may further include a support needle configured for insertion into the flexible needle to minimize the transverse flexibility of the flexible needle to enable insertion of the support needle and coaxially supported flexible needle through dura mater and into the spine of a patient. The flexible spinal needle assembly kit may also include a central stylet configured for removable insertion into the support needle to prevent entry of matter through an opening proximate a distal end of the support needle when inserted into a patient.

Optionally, the flexible spinal needle assembly kit may include the support needle and the flexible needle in a pre-assembled form allowing insertion of the pre-assembly into a patient and facilitating a removal of the support needle and subsequent insertion of the flow element into the flexible needle. Likewise, the central stylet, the support needle and the flexible needle may be pre-assembled for facilitating insertion of the pre-assembly into a patient and further to facilitate removal of the support needle and central stylet and subsequent insertion of the flow element into the flexible needle.

A method for installing a flexible spinal needle assembly in accordance with embodiments of the invention may include: inserting a distal end of a flexible spinal needle assembly provided through dura mater and into an intrathecal space of a patient, the spinal needle assembly including: a support needle with a non-cutting piercing point at the distal end and a hollow bore; a flexible needle with a tip at the distal end and slidably mounted on and supported by the support needle to expose the piercing point slightly extending beyond the tip in the distal end thereof, the flexible needle having an outside diameter sufficiently small so that upon insertion of the flexible spinal needle assembly and withdrawal of the support needle from the flexible needle permits the dura mater substantially to seal against the outside diameter of the flexible needle; removing the support needle from within the flexible needle while maintaining the tip of the flexible needle within the intrathecal space to expose an inner flow path; and thereafter, connecting a flow element to the flexible needle positioning an anti-restriction member of the flow element into the inner flow path of the flexible needle to substantially prevent fluid occlusion caused by bending or kinking of the flexible needle.

The method for installing a flexible spinal needle assembly may further include, prior to removing the support needle from within the flexible needle, verifying a presence of cerebrospinal fluid in a proximal end of the flexible spinal needle assembly; if no cerebrospinal fluid is observed, further inserting the distal end of the flexible spinal needle assembly through the dura mater until the tip is at least positioned in the intrathecal space; and thereafter removing the support needle from within the flexible needle upon observing the presence of cerebrospinal fluid within the flexible spinal needle assembly.

Optionally, inserting the distal end of the flexible spinal needle assembly through dura mater and into the intrathecal space of the patient wherein the outside diameter of the flexible needle is sufficiently small so that upon withdrawal of the flexible needle from the dura mater, subsequent to insertion of the flexible spinal needle assembly therethrough, the dura mater may substantially to reseal a space formerly occupied by the flexible needle.

The method for installing a flexible spinal needle assembly may include utilizing a central stylet slidably mounted in the support needle to prevent the entry of matter through an opening in the distal end of the support needle during an insertion procedure, and further including prior to removing the support needle from within the flexible needle, checking for cerebrospinal fluid at a proximate end of the spinal needle assembly; if no cerebrospinal fluid is observed, replacing the central stylet and further inserting the spinal needle assembly until the tip is in the intrathecal space; and once cerebrospinal fluid is observed, then removing the central stylet.

The method for installing a flexible spinal needle assembly may also include utilizing a central stylet slidably mounted in the support needle to prevent the entry of matter through an opening in the distal end of the support needle during an insertion procedure, and further including prior to removing the support needle from within the flexible needle, checking for cerebrospinal fluid at a proximate end of the spinal needle assembly; if no cerebrospinal fluid is observed, replacing the central stylet and further inserting the spinal needle assembly until the tip is in the intrathecal space; and once cerebrospinal fluid is observed, then removing the support needle and the central stylet.

Optionally, removing the support needle from within the flexible needle includes advancing the flexible needle into the intrathecal space until a proximate end hub of the flexible needle contacts the patient.

The method for installing a flexible spinal needle assembly may further include subsequent to removing the support needle from within the flexible needle, checking for the presence of cerebrospinal fluid at a flexible needle hub on a proximate end of the flexible needle prior to positioning the anti-restriction member of the flow element into the inner flow path of the flexible needle.

The method for installing a flexible spinal needle assembly may optionally include subsequent to removing the support needle from within the flexible needle and after positioning the anti-restriction member of the flow element into the inner flow path of the flexible needle and connecting the flow element to the flexible needle, connecting medical fluid transfer apparatus to the flow element for supplying fluid into the inner flow path; and securing the flexible needle hub to the patient.

The method for installing a flexible spinal needle assembly may still further include, prior to inserting the distal end of the flexible spinal needle assembly through dura mater and into the intrathecal space of the patient, preparing the skin of a patient at an injection site; applying local anesthetic at the injection site; and inserting the distal end of the flexible spinal needle assembly into the prepared injection site.

The method for installing a flexible spinal needle assembly may include checking for cerebrospinal fluid and removing the central stylet subsequent to receiving a feedback signal that puncture of the dura mater has occurred.

Lastly, the method for installing a flexible spinal needle assembly may include utilizing a flow element including: a body having an internal flow path for conducting a fluid through the flexible needle; and an anti-restriction member having an elongated body, a proximal end coupled to the body within the internal flow path, and a distal end to facilitate positioning at least a portion of the elongated body within the inner flow path of the flexible needle.

After having been apprised of the disclosure hereof, one of ordinary skill in the art would be able to make and use the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A process for producing a flow element, the process comprising:
 - forming an anti-restriction member having an elongated body, a proximal end and a distal end;
 - forming the elongated body of the anti-restriction member from at least two wires;
 - sizing and adapting the anti-restriction member to enable at least a portion thereof to be disposed by way of the distal end of the anti-restriction member into a proximal end of a flexible spinal needle previously inserted within a subject to permit fluid flow through the flexible spinal needle and to resist occlusion of the fluid flow through the flexible spinal needle;
 - securing the proximal end of the anti-restriction member to a flow element body having an internal flow path for conducting a fluid through the flexible spinal needle;
 - sizing and adapting the elongated body of the anti-restriction member such that a terminal end of the at least two wires forms the distal end of the anti-restriction member; and
 - sizing and adapting the terminal end of the at least two wires to extend freely to a location proximate to a distal end of the flexible spinal needle.

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2. The process for producing a flow element of claim 1, wherein securing the proximal end of the anti-restriction member to the flow element body comprises injection molding the flow element body about the proximal end of the anti-restriction member, and forming the anti-restriction member having the elongated body comprises forming the anti-restriction member having plurality of elongated bodies, each elongated body comprising a plurality of wires.

3. The process of claim 1, further comprising:
forming the flow element body to include a cylindrical outer surface extending substantially between a first end and a second end; and
adapting the cylindrical outer surface for sealing attachment to an attachment structure of the flexible spinal needle.

4. The process of claim 1, further comprising:
forming a support hub adapted to removably attach to the flexible spinal needle; and
coupling the support hub to the flow element body such that the support hub positions the internal flow path of the flow element body in fluid communication with a lumen of the flexible spinal needle when the support hub is removably attached to the flexible spinal needle.

5. The process of claim 4, further comprising forming the support hub to comprise a luer lock type connector.

6. The process of claim 1, further comprising sizing and adapting the elongated body of the anti-restriction member such that a terminal end of each of the at least two wires forms the distal end of the anti-restriction member that is configured to extend freely to the location proximate to the distal end of the flexible spinal needle.

7. The process of claim 6, further comprising forming the elongated body of the anti-restriction member from six wires.

8. The process of claim 6, further comprising forming the anti-restriction member from a plurality of elongated bodies.

9. The process of claim 1, further comprising forming the at least two wires to comprise a twisted wire pair.

10. The process of claim 6, further comprising forming a weld bead on a distal end of the elongated body sized to exhibit an outer diameter less than an inner diameter of the flexible spinal needle.

11. The process of claim 1, further comprising forming the at least two wires such that a terminal end of each of the at least two wires extends at least to the distal end of the flexible spinal needle.

12. The process of claim 11, further comprising forming the at least two wires such that the terminal end of each of the at least two wire extends past the distal end of the flexible spinal needle.

13. The process of claim 1, further comprising:
forming the flow element body from a medical grade plastic; and

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forming the anti-restriction member from a medical grade stainless steel.

14. A process for producing a flexible spinal needle assembly, the process comprising:
providing a flexible spinal needle;
forming a flow element for insertion in the flexible spinal needle comprising:
forming an anti-restriction member having an elongated body formed from at least two wires, a proximal end, and a distal end formed by a terminal end of each of the at least two wires;
sizing and adapting the anti-restriction member to enable at least a portion thereof to be disposed within the flexible spinal needle after the flexible spinal needle has been inserted within a subject to permit fluid flow through the flexible spinal needle and to resist occlusion of the fluid flow through the flexible spinal needle;
sizing and adapting the terminal end of each of the at least two wires to extend freely to a location proximate to a distal end of the flexible spinal needle; and
securing the proximal end of the anti-restriction member to a flow element body having an internal flow path for conducting a fluid through the flexible spinal needle.

15. The process of claim 14, wherein providing the flexible spinal needle comprises disposing at least one radially reinforcing element to maintain structural integrity of the flexible spinal needle during insertion into the subject within the flexible spinal needle.

16. The process of claim 15, wherein providing the flexible spinal needle further comprises forming the at least one radially reinforcing element from at least one of an internal wire wrap and an internal spring.

17. The process of claim 15, wherein providing the flexible spinal needle further comprises forming the at least one radially reinforcing element from an external wire wrap.

18. The process of claim 14, wherein providing the flexible spinal needle comprises disposing a kink sleeve disposed on a portion of the flexible spinal needle.

19. The process of claim 14, further comprising:
providing a support needle configured for insertion into the flexible spinal needle to minimize transverse flexibility of the flexible spinal needle and to enable insertion of the support needle and the coaxially supported flexible spinal needle through dura mater and into a spine of the subject; and
providing a central stylet configured for removable insertion into the support needle to prevent entry of matter through an opening proximate a distal end of the support needle when inserted into the subject.

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