



(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**

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(10) **Pub. No.: US 2002/0010495 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Jan. 24, 2002**

(54) **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR TREATING OROPHARYNGEAL, RESPIRATORY AND ORAL MOTOR NEUROMUSCULAR DISORDERS WITH ELECTRICAL STIMULATION**

is a continuation of application No. 08/549,046, filed on Oct. 27, 1995, now Pat. No. 5,725,564.

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.⁷** **A61N 1/36**
(52) **U.S. Cl.** **607/42**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A simple, non-invasive device and method for treating oropharyngeal, respiratory, and oral motor neuromuscular disorders provides electrical stimulation to various regions of a patient. The method and device offer an effective and non-invasive treatment for these disorders. The device is an electrical neuromuscular stimulator that includes a pulse generator for generating a series of electrical pulses and a processor coupled to the pulse generator for controlling its operation. An electrode array of uni-directional or bi-directional electrodes is coupled to the pulse generator and provides electrical stimulation to the appropriate neck, chest, or facial region of the patient. Using bi-directional snap electrodes, for example, the electrode array may also generate electrical feedback signals in response to the neuromuscular stimulation of the patient. The electrical feedback signals are provided to the processor, which generates and stores test data and may modify the operation of the device in response to the electrical feedback signals.

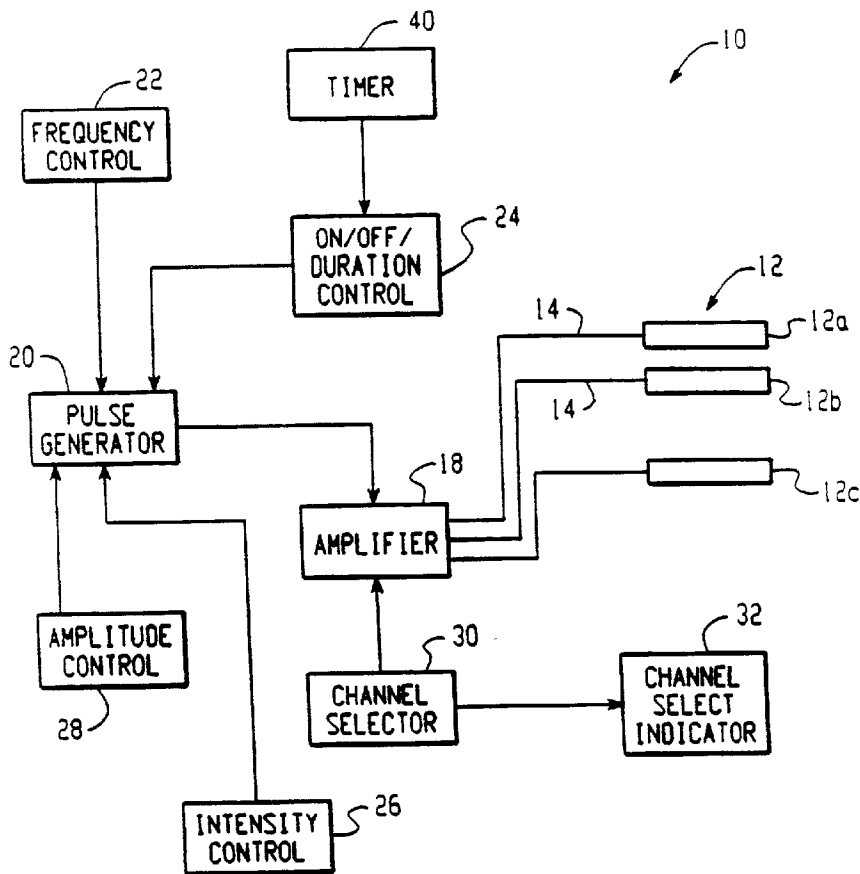
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(21) Appl. No.: **09/757,804**

(22) Filed: **Jan. 11, 2001**

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 09/236,829, filed on Jan. 25, 1999, now Pat. No. 6,198,970, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 08/956,448, filed on Oct. 23, 1997, now Pat. No. 5,987,359, which



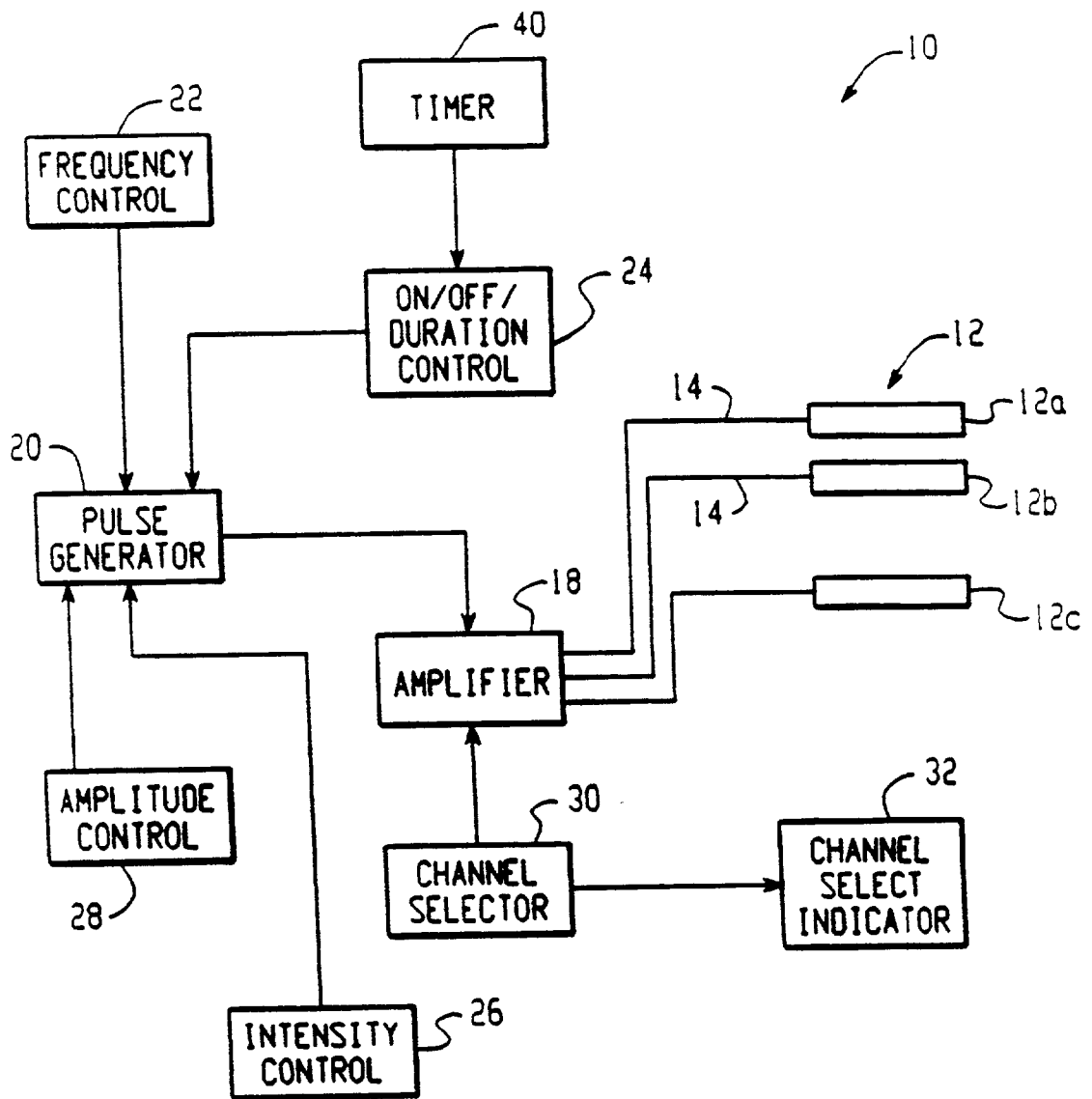


Fig. 1

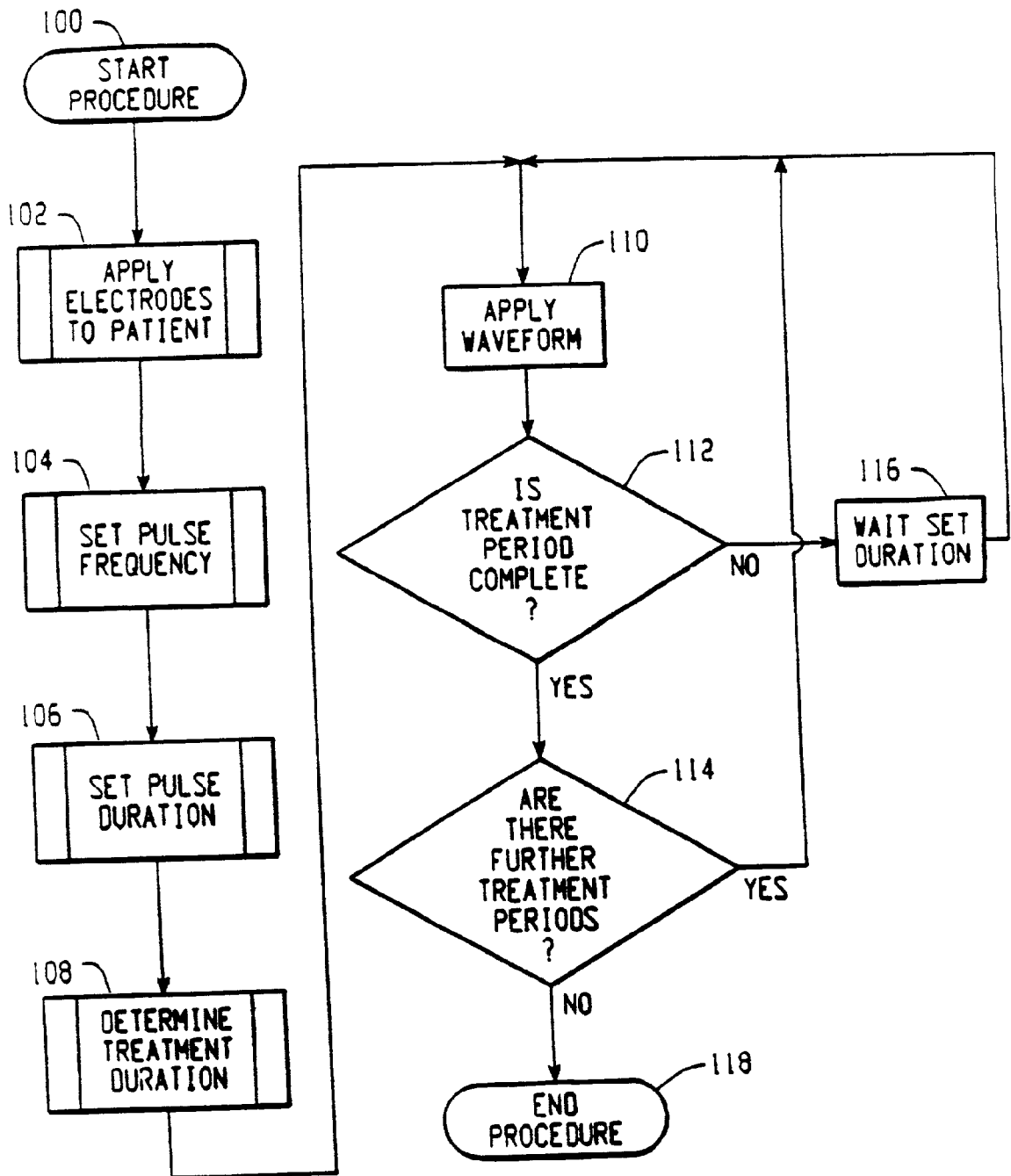


Fig. 2

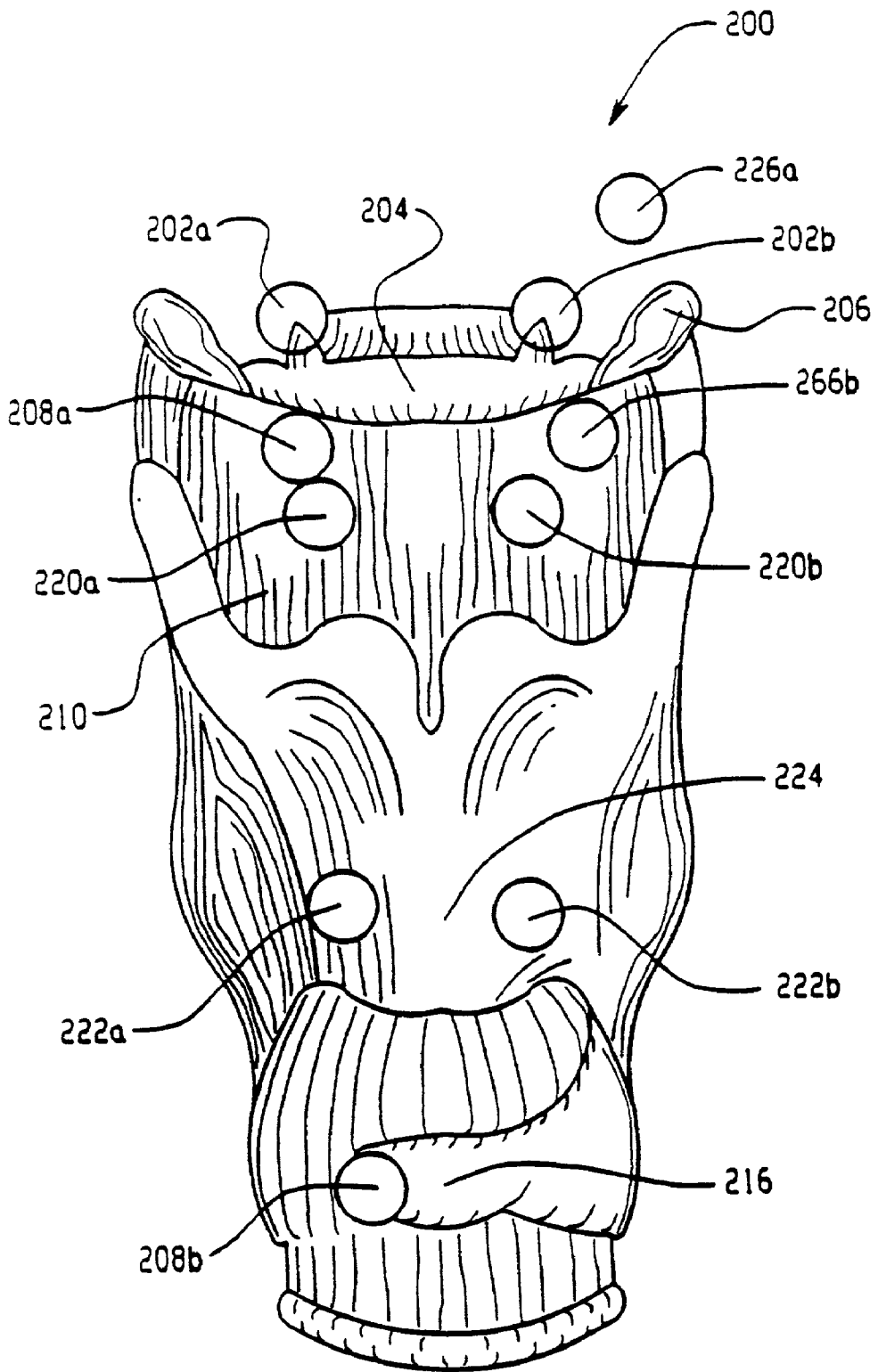


Fig. 3

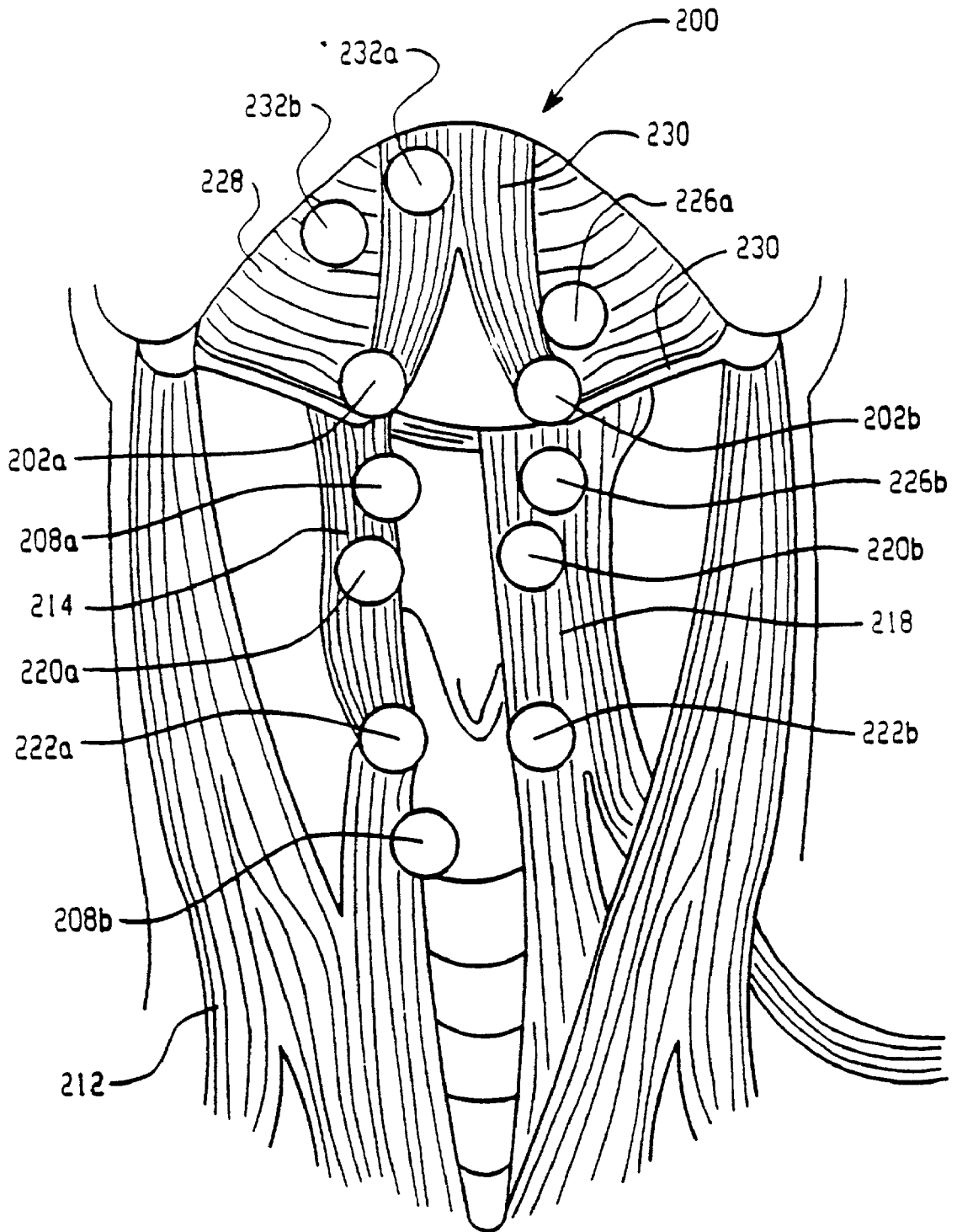


Fig. 4

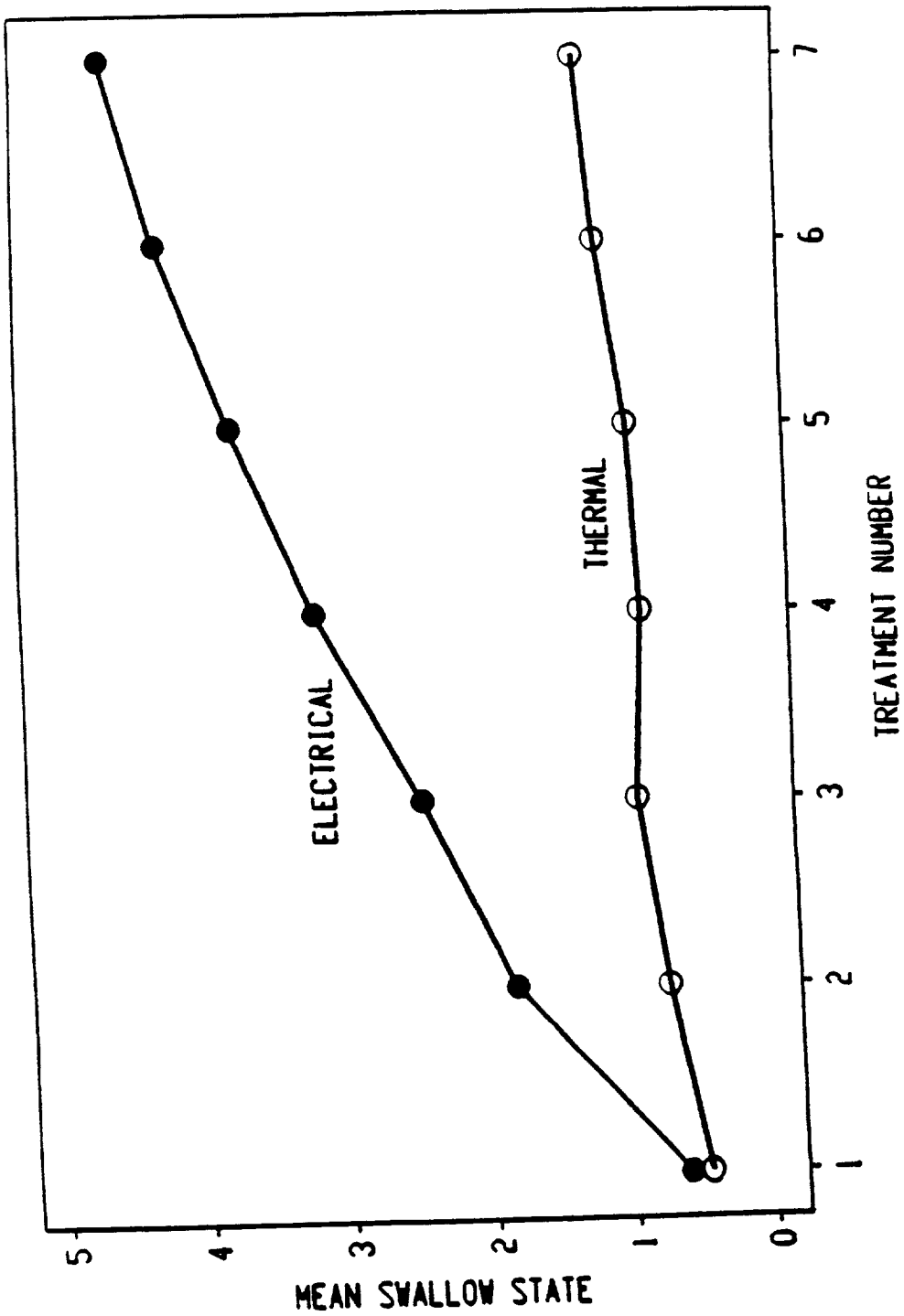


Fig. 5

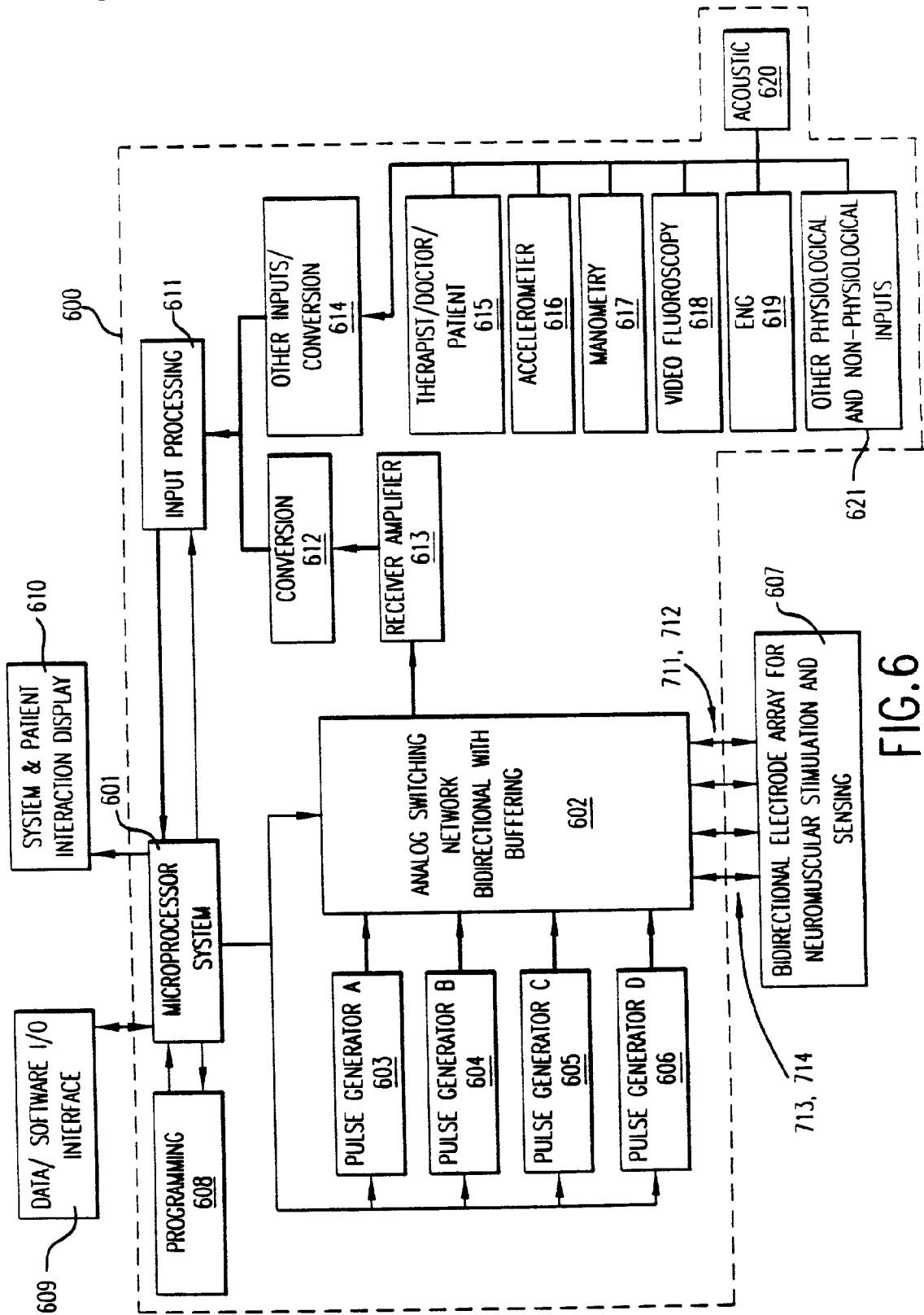


FIG. 6

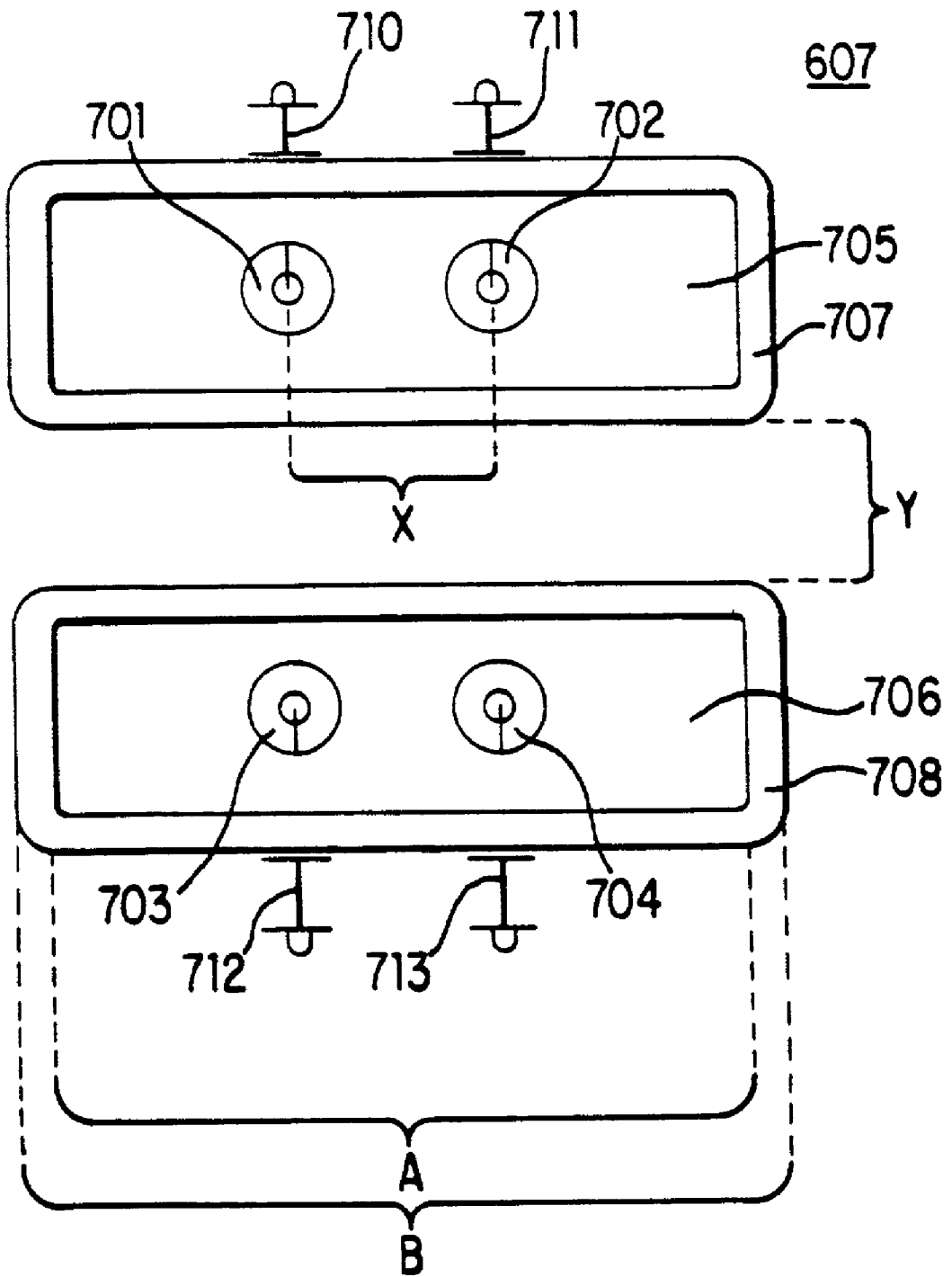


FIG. 7

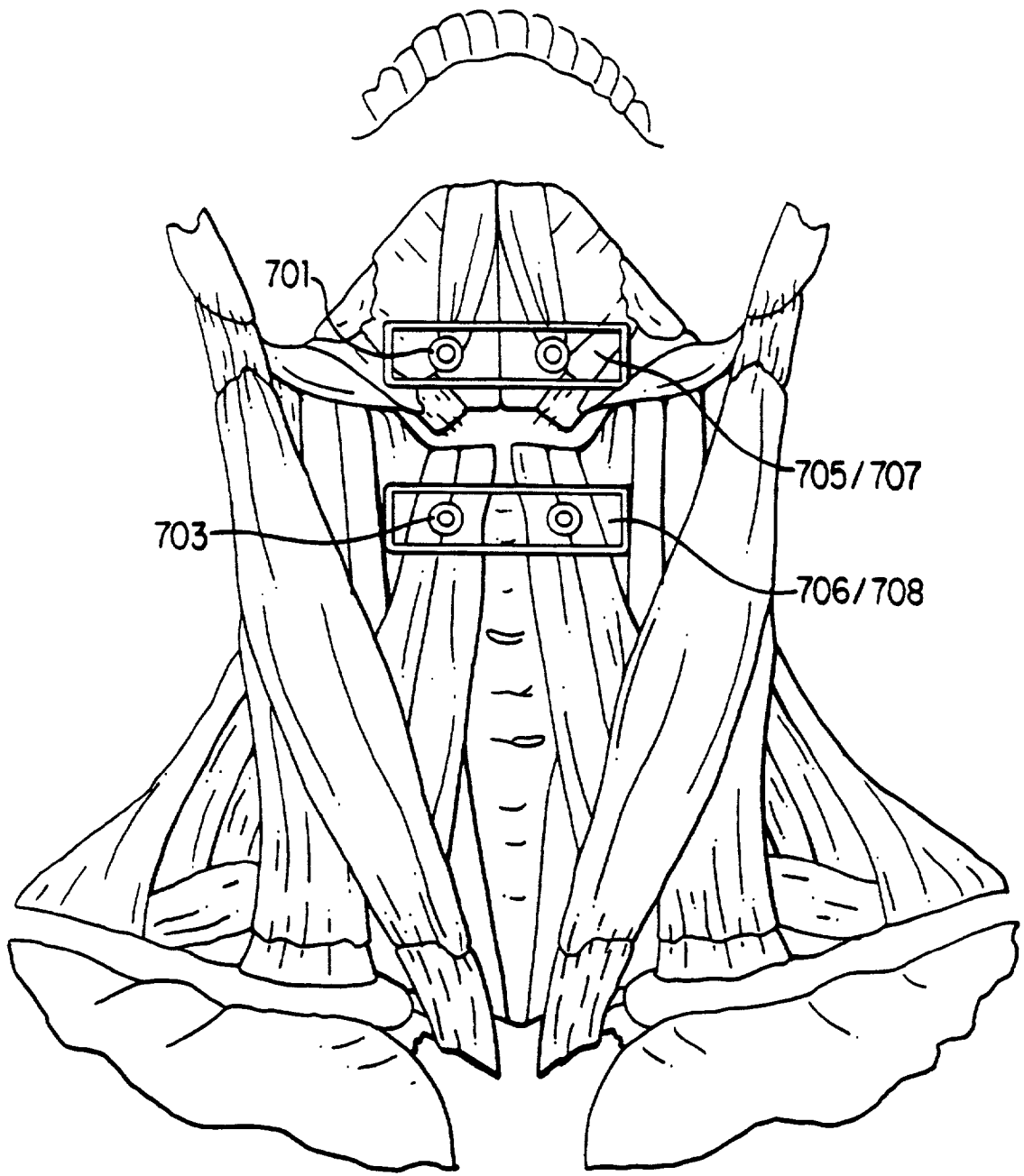
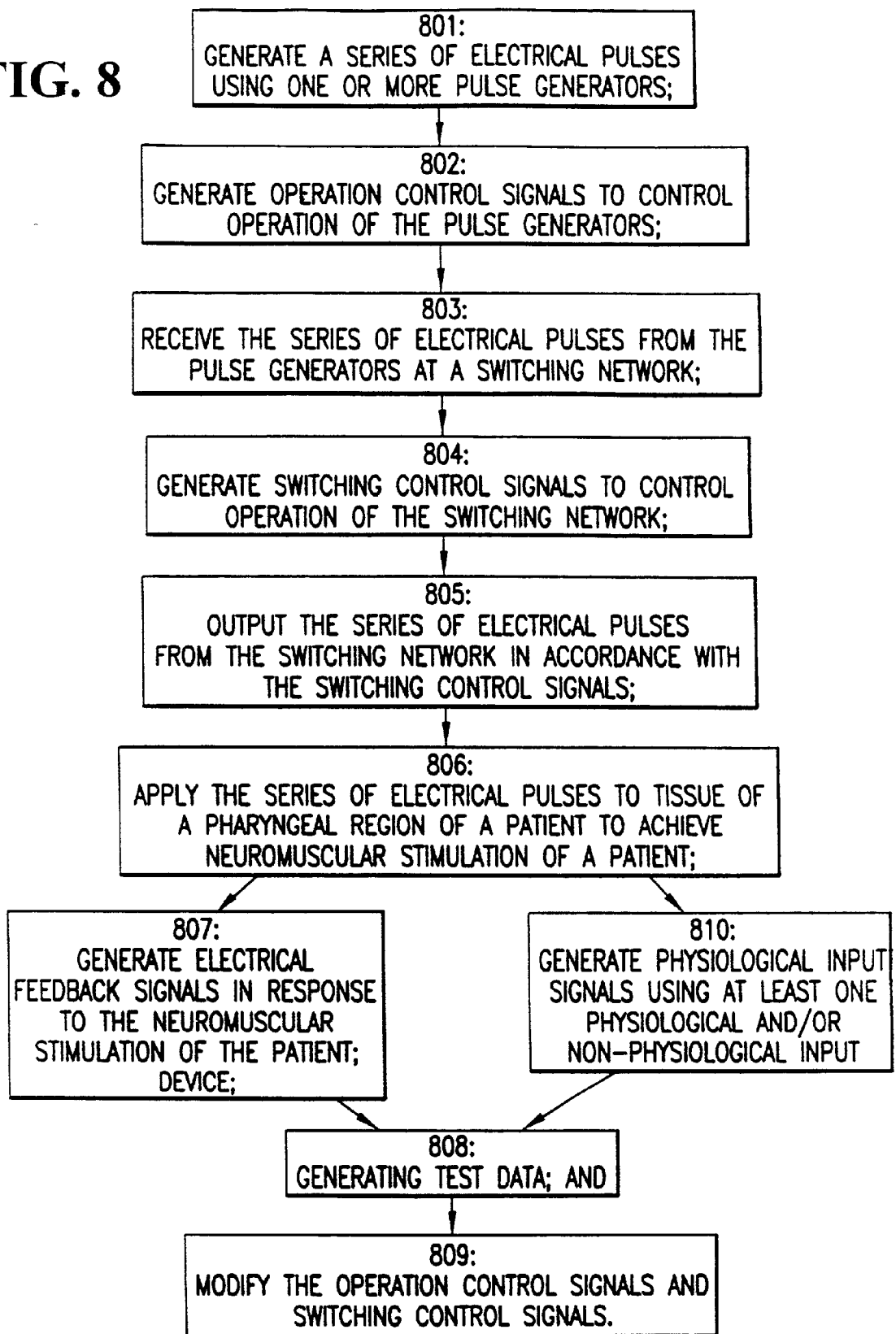


FIG. 7A

FIG. 8



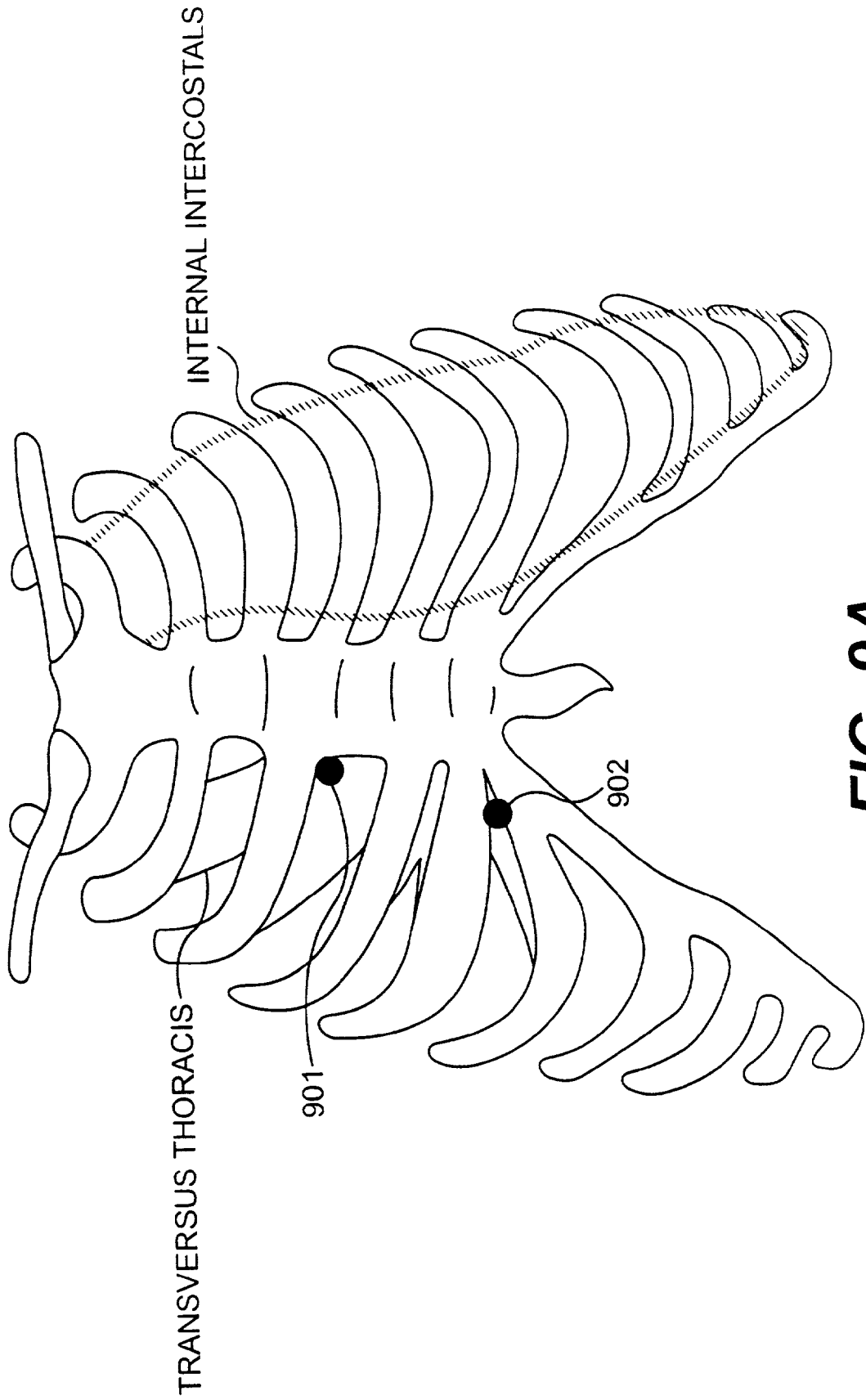


FIG. 9A

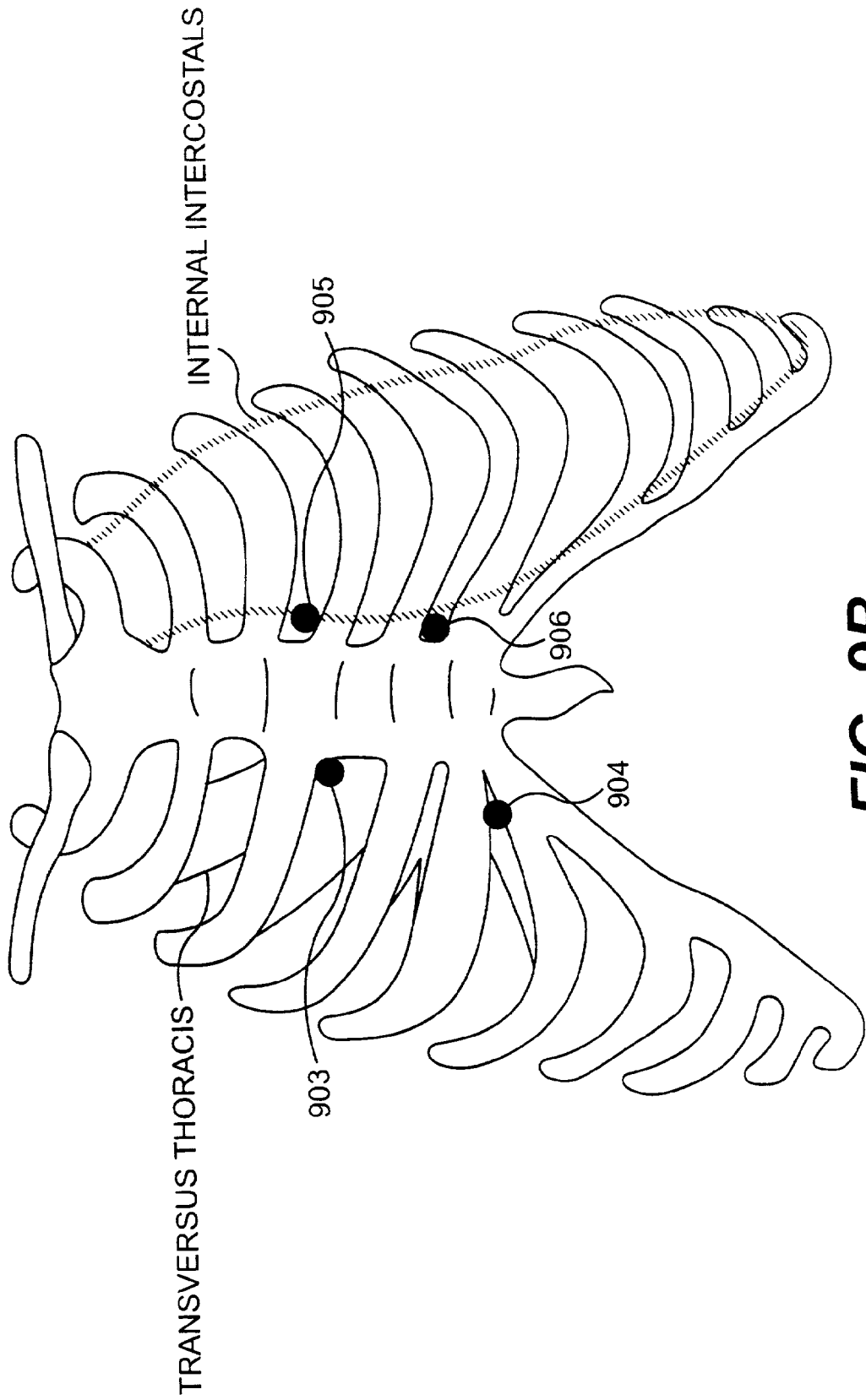


FIG. 9B

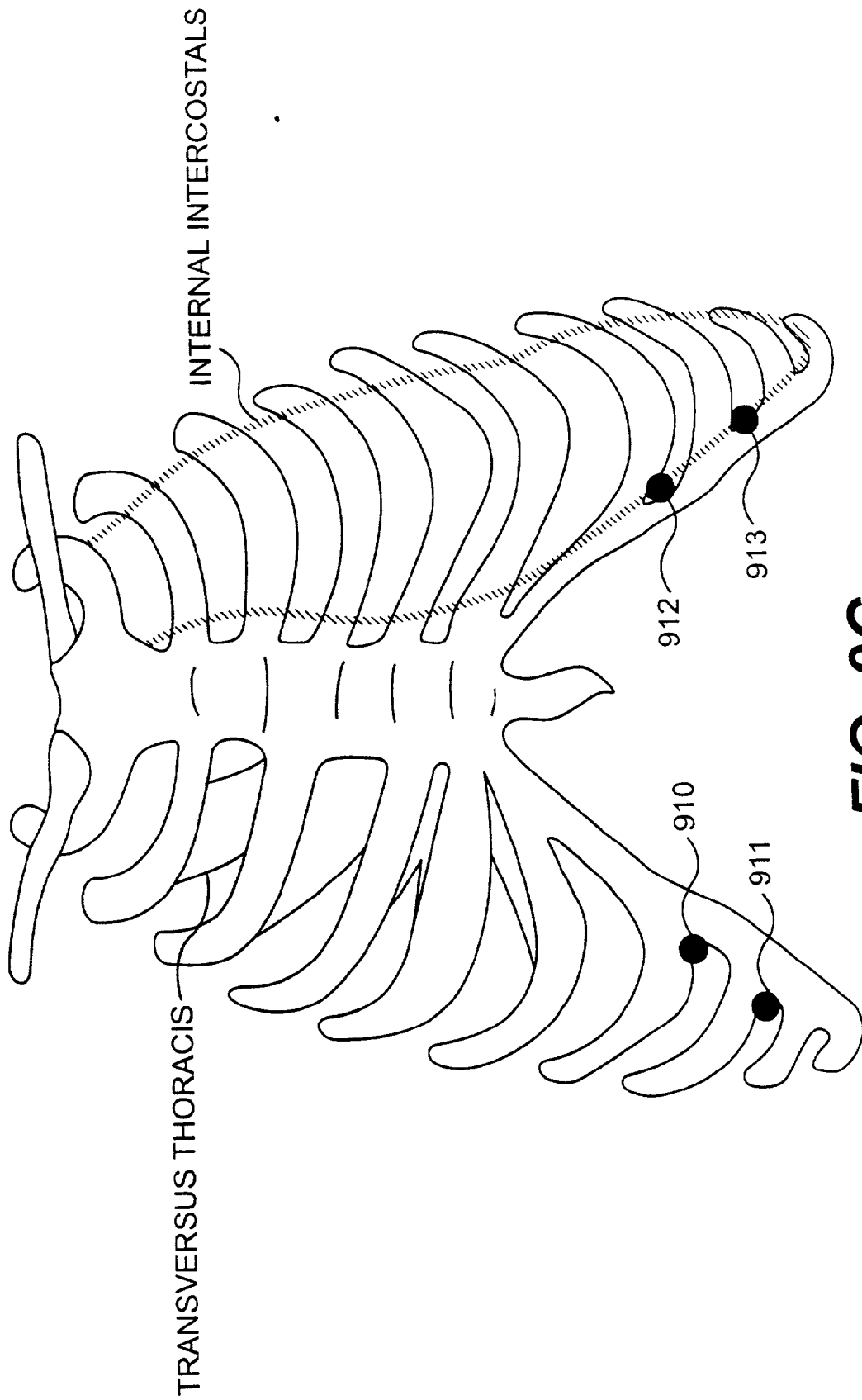


FIG. 9C

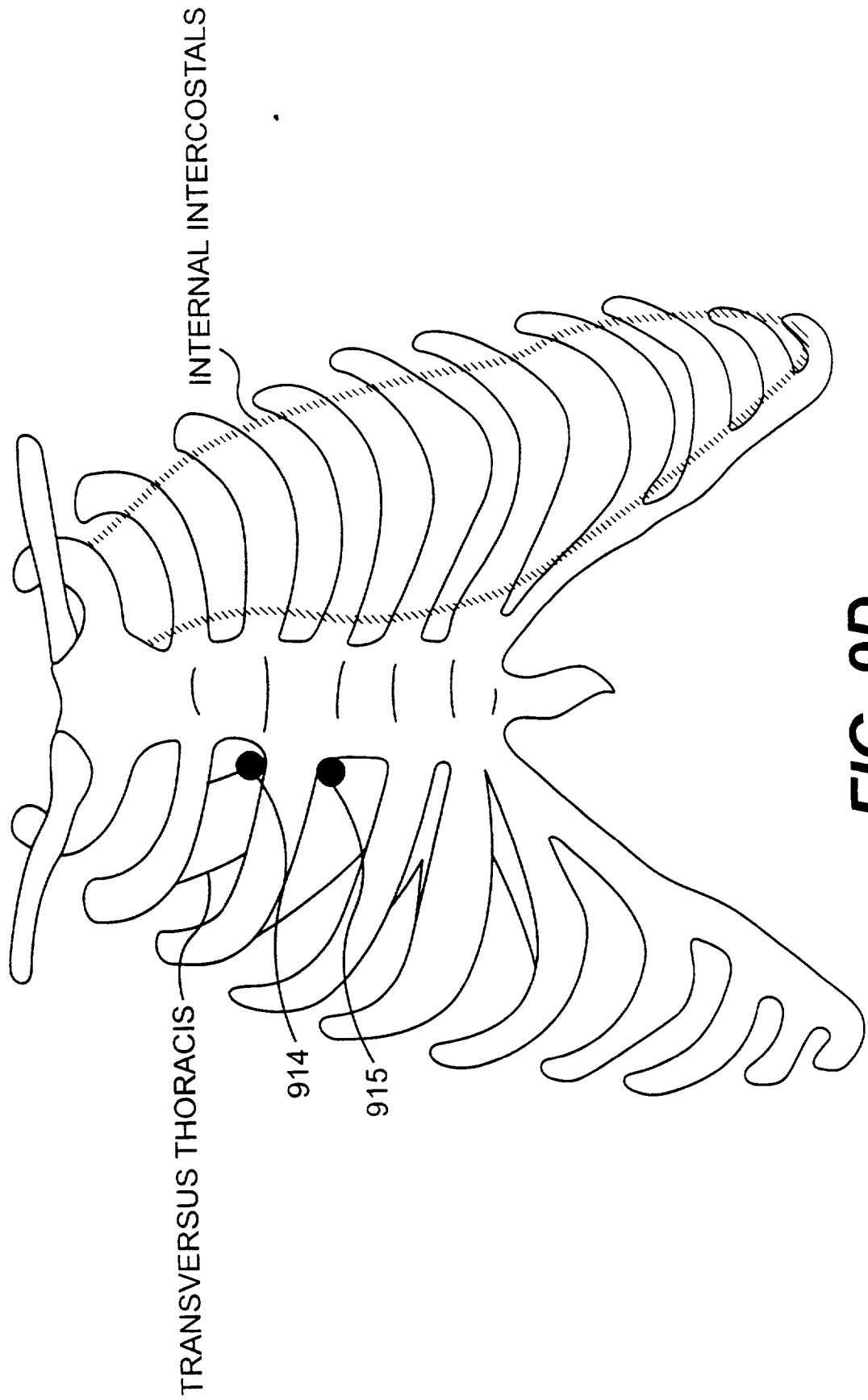


FIG. 9D

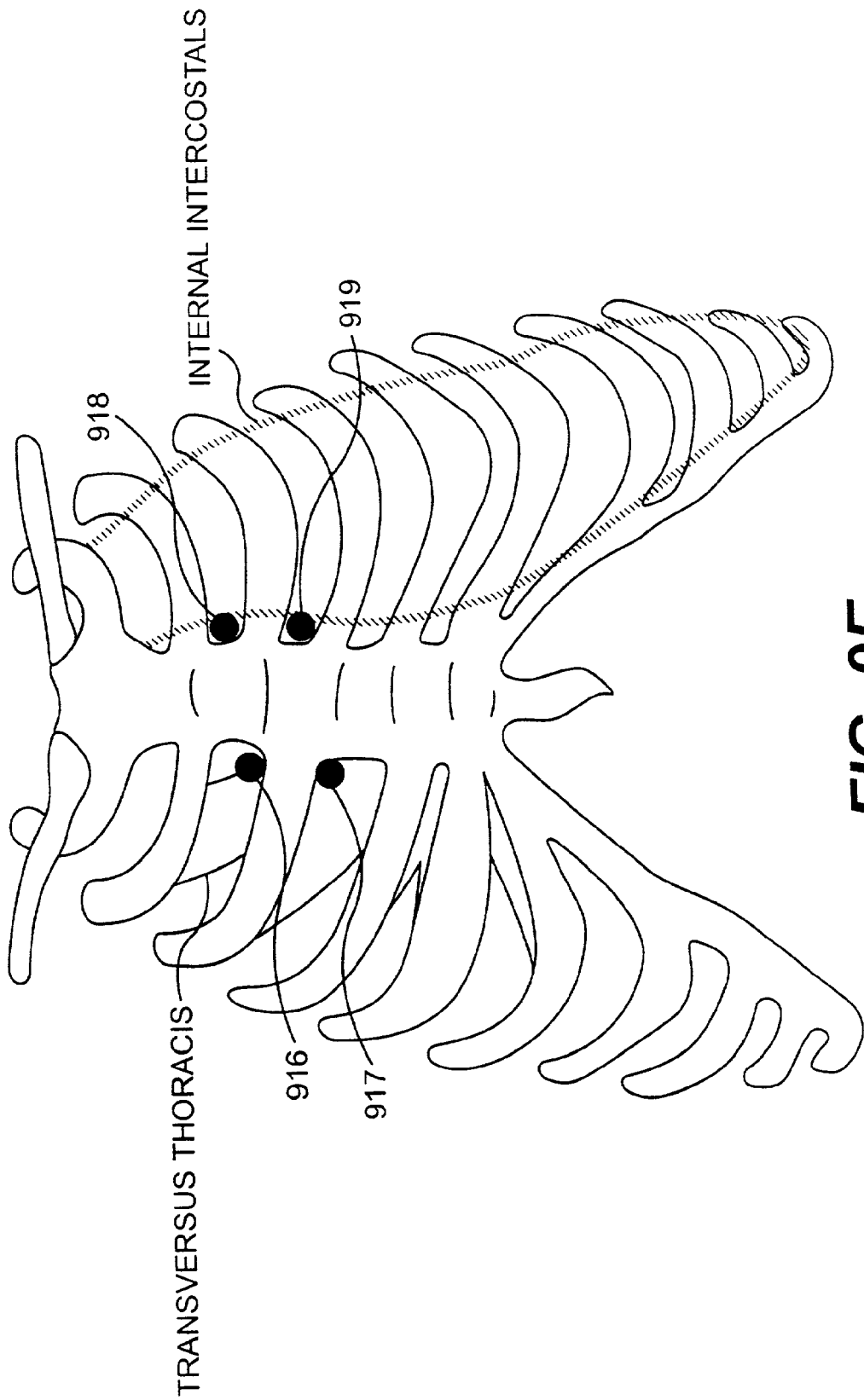


FIG. 9E

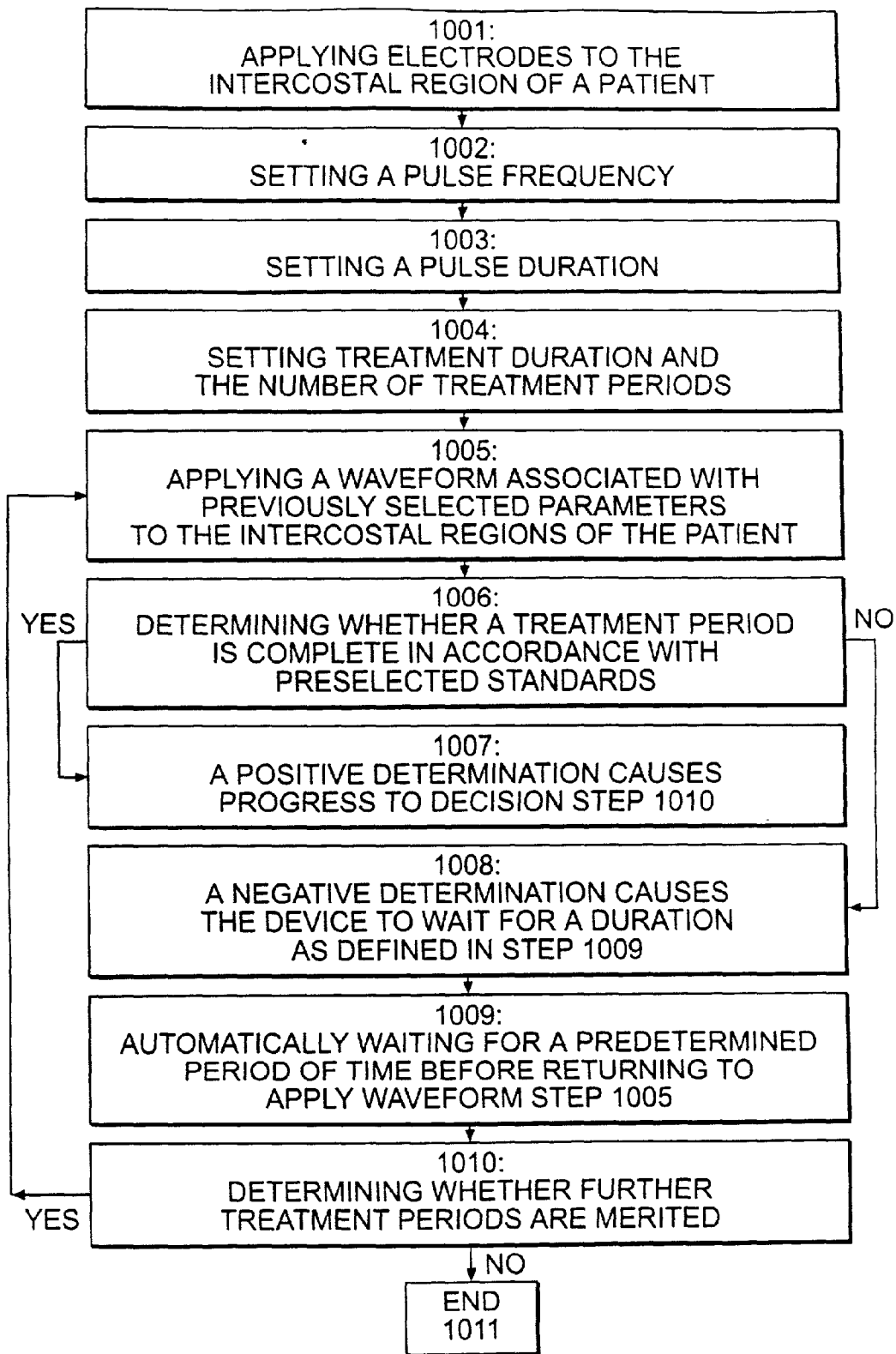


FIG. 10

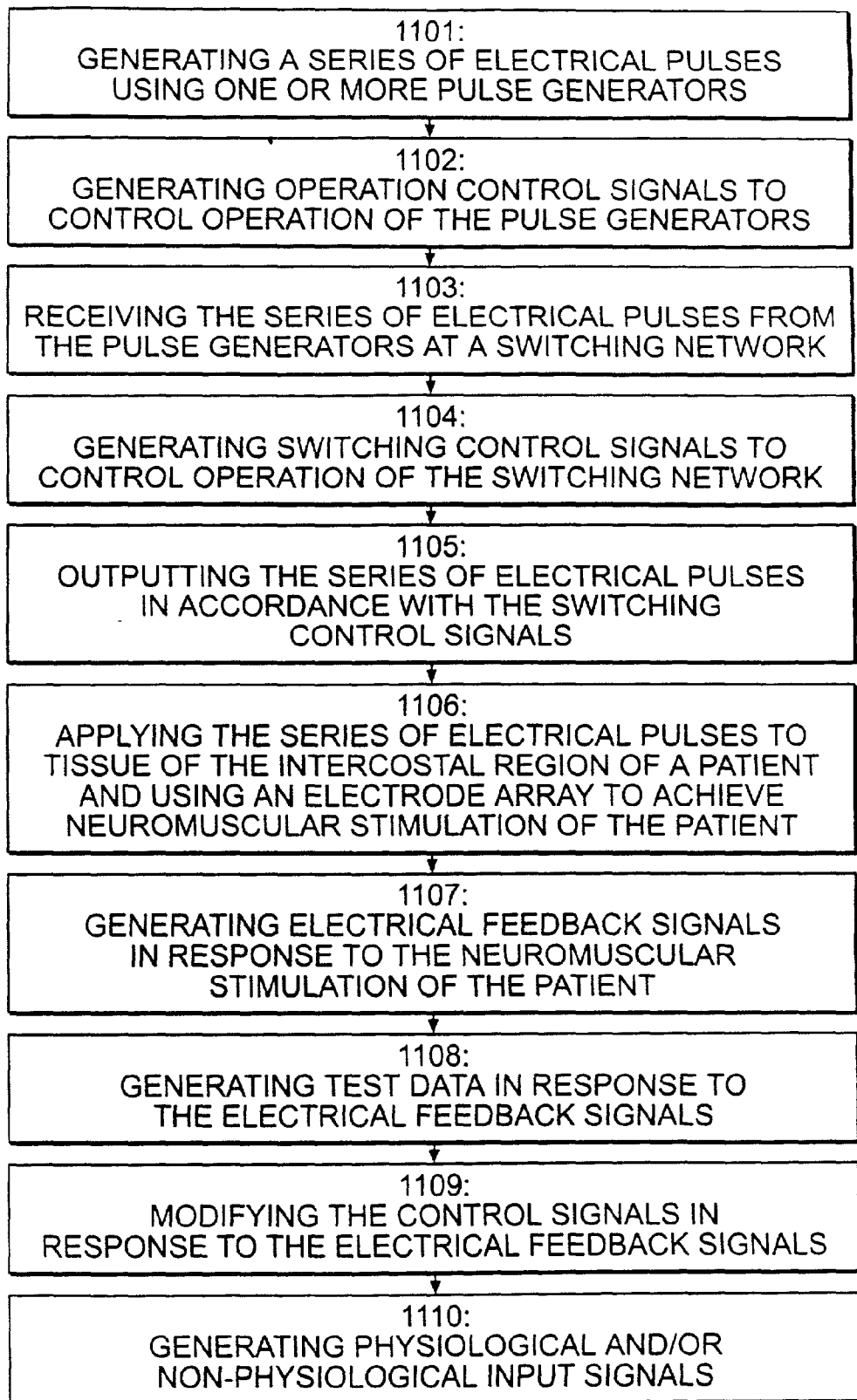


FIG. 11

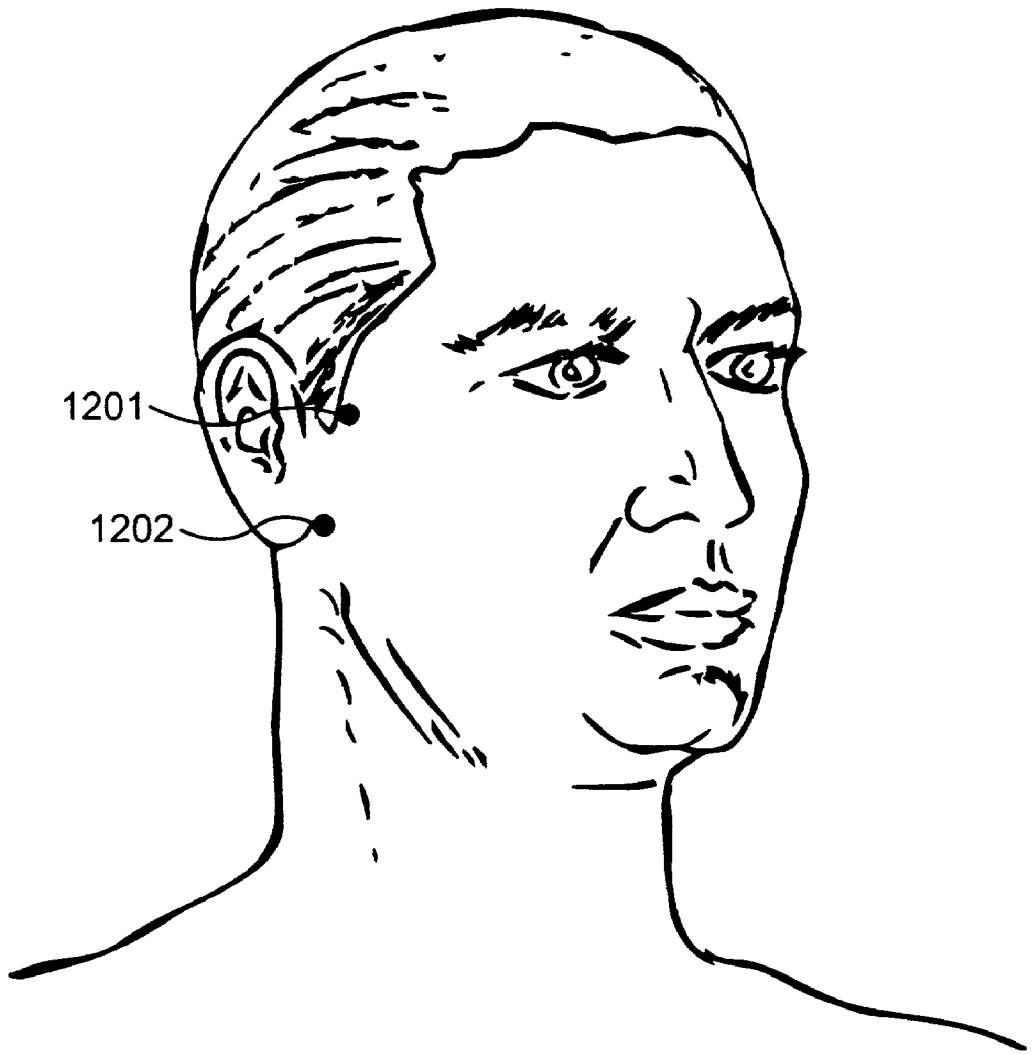


FIG. 12

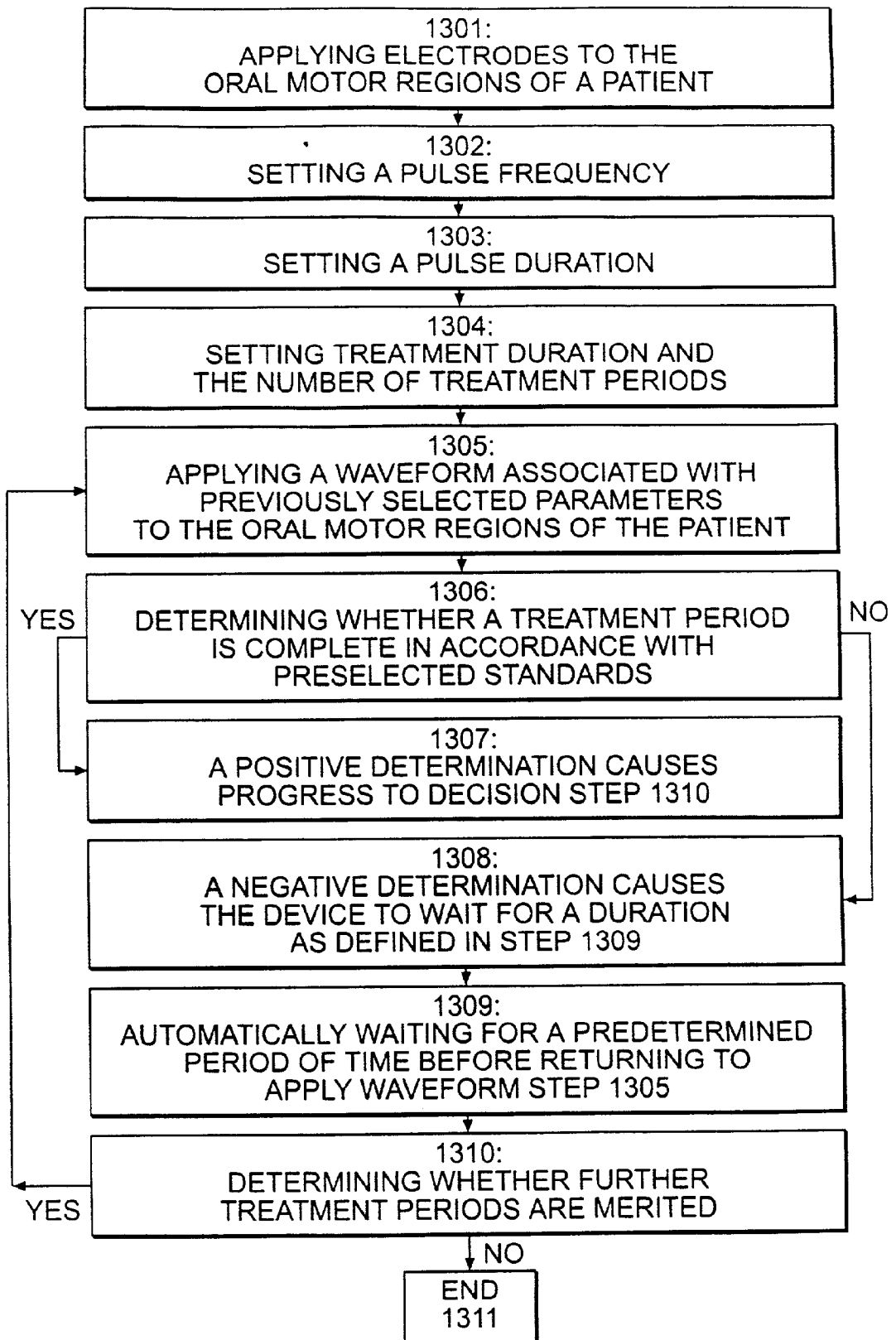


FIG. 13

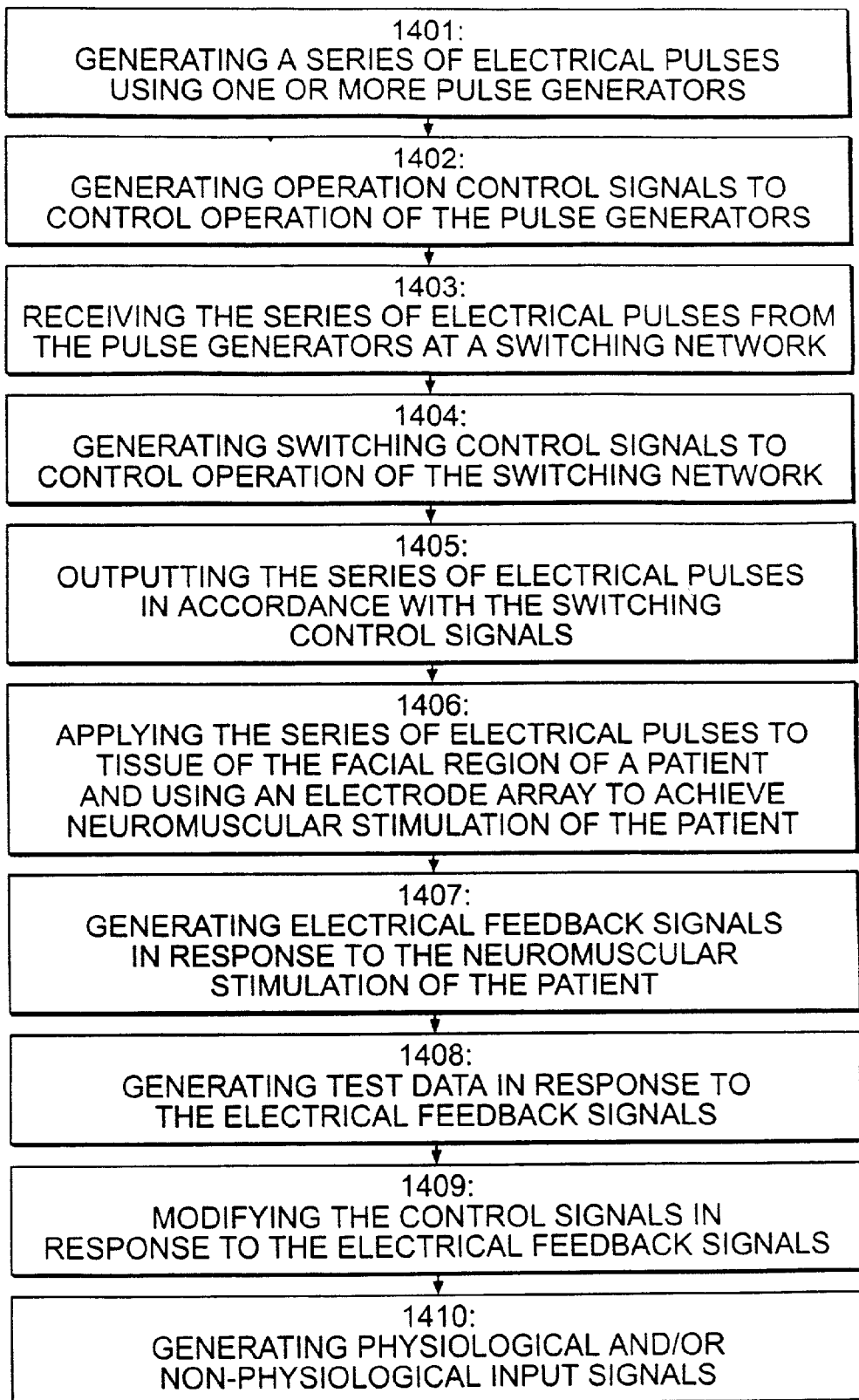


FIG. 14

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR TREATING OROPHARYNGEAL, RESPIRATORY AND ORAL MOTOR NEUROMUSCULAR DISORDERS WITH ELECTRICAL STIMULATION

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation-in part of U.S. application Ser. No. 08/956,448, filed Oct. 23, 1997, entitled "Method for Treating Dysphagia with Electrical Stimulation," which is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 08/549,046, filed Oct. 27, 1995, and entitled "Method for Treating Dysphagia With Electrical Stimulation," issued as U.S. Pat. No. 5,725,564.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates to a method and apparatus for effectively treating oropharyngeal, respiratory, and oral motor neuromuscular disorders. In particular, the present invention relates to a method and apparatus for treating oropharyngeal, respiratory and oral motor neuromuscular disorders by providing electrical stimulation to specific muscle regions of a patient using one or more snap electrodes.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Asymptomatic and symptomatic oropharyngeal disorders can lead to an inability to swallow or difficulty in swallowing. These disorders may be caused, for example, by stroke, neurodegenerative diseases, brain tumors, or respiratory disorders.

[0004] Swallowing is a complicated action whereby food is moved from the mouth through the pharynx and esophagus to the stomach. The act of swallowing may be initiated voluntarily or reflexively but is always completed reflexively.

[0005] The act of swallowing occurs in three stages and requires the integrated action of the respiratory center and motor functions of multiple cranial nerves, and the coordination of the autonomic system within the esophagus. In the first stage, food or some other substance is placed on the surface of the tongue. The tip of the tongue is placed against the hard palate. Elevation of the larynx and backward movement of the tongue forces the food through the isthmus of the fauces in the pharynx. In the second stage, the food passes through the pharynx. This involves constriction of the walls of the pharynx, backward bending of the epiglottis, and an upward and forward movement of the larynx and trachea. Food is kept from entering the nasal cavity by elevation of the soft palate and from entering the larynx by closure of the glottis and backward inclination of the epiglottis. During this stage, respiratory movements are inhibited by reflex. In the third stage, food moves down the esophagus and into the stomach. This movement is accomplished by momentum from the second stage, peristaltic contractions, and gravity.

[0006] Although the main function of swallowing is the propulsion of food from the mouth into the stomach, swallowing also serves as a protective reflex for the upper respiratory tract by removing particles trapped in the nasopharynx and oropharynx, returning materials refluxed from the stomach into the pharynx, or removing particles

propelled from the upper respiratory tract into the pharynx. Therefore, the absence of adequate swallowing reflex greatly increases the chance of pulmonary aspiration.

[0007] In the past, patients suffering from oropharyngeal disorders have undergone dietary changes or thermal stimulation treatment to regain adequate swallowing reflexes. Thermal stimulation involves immersing a mirror or probe in ice or another cold substance. The tonsillar fossa is stimulated with the mirror or probe, and the patient closes his mouth and attempts to swallow. While these traditional methods are usually effective for treating oropharyngeal disorders, in some patients these methods require that the patient endure weeks or months of therapy. It is also difficult to distinguish these patients who require more extensive treatments from patients who recover spontaneously. Thus, it is desirable to have a simple, non-invasive method and device for treating oropharyngeal disorders and artificially promoting swallowing which is effective within a relatively short treatment period.

[0008] Electrical stimulation has been used as a method for alleviating pain and stimulating nerves, as well as a means for treating disorders of the spinal cord or peripheral nervous system. Electrical stimulation has further been used to facilitate muscle reeducation and with other physical therapy treatments. In the past, electrical stimulation was not recommended for use in the neck because of the theoretical concerns that the patient would develop spasms of the laryngeal muscles, resulting in closure of the airway or difficulty in breathing. Further, the introduction of electrical current into the neck near the carotid body may cause cardiac arrhythmia.

[0009] More recently, electrical stimulation has been used to stimulate the recurrent laryngeal nerve to stimulate the laryngeal muscles to control the opening of the vocal cords to overcome vocal cord paralysis, to assist with the assessment of vocal cord function, to aid with intubation, and other related uses. There have been no adverse reactions to such treatment techniques. However, electrical stimulation has not been used in the treatment of oropharyngeal disorders to promote the swallowing reflex, which involves the integrated action of the respiratory center and motor functions of multiple cranial nerves.

[0010] The oral motor skills needed to effectively speak, chew and swallow include the ability to open and close the mouth, the ability to elevate the tongue, the ability to lateralize the tongue, and the ability to purse the lips. Deficiencies in one or more of these oral motor skills as sometimes occurs in children and stroke victims, for example, can delay or cause a complete inability of a patient to achieve safe oral intake.

[0011] Known treatment techniques for oral motor skills deficiencies typically require lengthy treatment periods to achieve the skills necessary to speak and swallow. Thus, there is a need for a method of treatment that enables development of these skills with relatively fewer treatments performed within a shorter period of time.

[0012] Chronic respiratory disorders, including asthma, bronchitis, asthma-like symptoms, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and atelectasis are common and often debilitating disorders. Individuals suffering from one or more of these disorders may incur the expense of high-cost

medications and may be severely limited in terms of the physical activities they are able to undertake. These individuals may also be placed on ventilators because they are unable to breathe deeply enough without the aid of a ventilator. Such ventilator dependence substantially increases the cost to the patient and severely restricts the patient's mobility. Thus, there is a need for a simple, inexpensive treatment for chronic respiratory disorders that reduces the coughing and inflammation associated with such disorders, for example, to allow the patient to be extubated from a ventilator and/or to reduce or eliminate the medications needed by the patient, thereby substantially reducing the costs of the treatment and improving the quality of life of the patient.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0013] The present invention provides a simple, non-invasive method and device for treating oropharyngeal disorders and artificially promoting swallowing. The present invention further provides a simple, non-invasive method and device for treating respiratory disorders such as asthma, bronchitis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease to provide improved respiratory capacity of a patient. The present invention also provides a simple, non-invasive method and device for treating oral motor neuromuscular damage and disorders to provide improved control and usage of oral motor muscles.

[0014] According to one embodiment of the present invention, a method and device provide electrical stimulus to the pharyngeal region of a patient (a human or other animal) to stimulate muscles and nerves located in the pharyngeal region in order to promote swallowing.

[0015] The method and device for electrical pharyngeal neuromuscular stimulation according to the present invention are more effective for treating oropharyngeal disorders than traditional treatment methods, such as thermal stimulation. Further, the method and device of the present invention are effective for treating worst-case dysphagia resulting from neurodegeneration and strokes.

[0016] According to another embodiment of the present invention, a method and device provide electrical stimulus to the intercostal muscle regions between the ribs of a patient to enable improved respiratory functions of the patient, treating respiratory disorders such as asthma, bronchitis or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and further treating ventilator dependence (also known as life support) conditions of patients with no ability to breathe independently. By providing electrical stimulation to these muscles, deeper self-motivated inhalations and exhalations may be achieved by the patient. The method and device according to the present invention may substantially reduce coughing and inflammation suffered by the patient, substantially increase the air intake and outflow of the patient, and may allow a patient on a ventilator to achieve sufficiently deep aspirations to enable extubation of the patient from the ventilator.

[0017] None of the known treatments for respiratory disorders is capable of safely achieving the results achieved by the method and device according to the present invention. The method and device according to the present invention may also eliminate the long-term costs and potential side effects from inhalers and other medications, as well as avoid the need for high-cost, long-term ventilator care.

[0018] According to another embodiment of the present invention, the method and device provide electrical stimulation to various oral motor muscles and nerves to enable treatment of muscle and nerve damage and disorders of these muscles. Use of the method and device according to the present invention may result in substantial improvement of the physical skills needed to speak, chew, and swallow effectively after only a few treatments, for example two to three treatments, thereby allowing expedited recovery of the patient. The present invention facilitates the retraining and use of the oral motor muscles to enable the patient to speak, chew and swallow, thereby allowing safe intake of food and liquids and regular self-motivated breathing. Moreover, the method and device according to the present invention may be used to apply electrical stimulation to oral motor muscles to create a more normal facial appearance of a patient and enable use and control of the oral motor muscles within only a few treatments, for example, five to eight treatments. In contrast, known techniques often involve lengthy treatment periods, for example, of a year or more, and often do not enable the patient to successfully regain oral motor skills.

[0019] An apparatus for treating oropharyngeal, respiratory, and oral motor neuromuscular disorders according to the present invention includes a plurality of electrodes adapted to provide selective electrical stimulation to the tissue of a patient and a pulse generator preferably coupled to each of the plurality of electrodes, for generating a series of electrical pulses. The pulse generator preferably includes a frequency controller, which modulates an electrical signal generated by the pulse generator at a predetermined frequency to produce the series of electrical pulses output by the pulse generator. The pulse generator also includes a duration control circuit for controlling the duration of time for which the pulse generator outputs the series of electrical pulses. An intensity control circuit regulates the series electrical pulses such that the electrical current does not exceed a predetermined current or voltage value. The predetermined current and voltage values may vary in accordance with the patient's physical condition and tolerances and the treatments performed.

[0020] A method for treating oropharyngeal, respiratory, and oral motor neuromuscular disorders according to the present invention includes the steps of generating a series of electrical pulses using the pulse generator described above; generating operation control signals to control operation of the pulse generator; and applying the series of electrical pulses to the tissue of a patient to achieve neuromuscular stimulation of a patient.

[0021] Another apparatus for treating oropharyngeal, respiratory, and oral motor neuromuscular disorders according to the present invention includes one or more pulse generators for generating a series of electrical pulses and a processor coupled to the pulse generators for outputting operation control signals to the pulse generators. A switching network is coupled to the pulse generators and the processor. The switching network receives the series of electrical pulses from the pulse generators and outputs the series of electrical pulses in accordance with switching control signals received from the processor. An electrode array is also coupled to the switching network. The electrode array applies the series of electrical pulses output by the switching network to tissue of a patient to achieve neuromuscular stimulation of the patient, and also generates electrical

feedback signals in response to the neuromuscular stimulation of the patient. The electrical feedback signals are provided to the processor via the switching network. The processor generates and stores test data and modifies the operation control signals and switching control signals in response to the electrical feedback signals.

[0022] Another method for treating oropharyngeal, respiratory, and oral motor neuromuscular disorders according to the present invention includes the steps of generating a series of electrical pulses using one or more pulse generators; generating operation control signals to control operation of the pulse generators; receiving the series of electrical pulses from the pulse generators at a switching network; generating switching control signals to control operation of the switching network; outputting the series of electrical pulses from the switching network in accordance with the switching control signals; applying the series of electrical pulses to the tissue of a patient to achieve neuromuscular stimulation of a patient; generating electrical feedback signals in response to the neuromuscular stimulation of the patient; generating test data in response to the electrical feedback signals; and modifying the operation control signals and switching control signals in response to the electrical feedback signals.

[0023] A novel size and arrangement of snap electrodes may be utilized to enable effective stimulation of the muscles and nerves in the respective regions of the patient. In this novel size and arrangement of snap electrodes, each snap electrode provides a halo or circle of electrical output, such that the electrical field is concentrated at the outer circumference of the electrode and not evenly dispersed over the surface of the electrode. This is in contrast to pin-type electrodes, commonly used in electrical stimulation applications, which provide an even, dispersed field of electrical output over the entire surface of the electrode. As a result of the concentration of the electrical output of snap electrodes around their circumferences, less electrical intensity is required to treat the patient when using snap electrodes than when using pin electrodes. Thus, the electrical output produced by the novel size and arrangement of snap electrodes according to the present invention enables the stimulated muscles to achieve stronger squeeze and contractility without exceeding the tolerance or comfort level of the patient. In contrast, achieving the same degree of squeeze and contractility with larger, standard electrodes requires the use of a substantially higher intensity of electrical stimulation, which frequently exceeds the tolerance or comfort level of the patient. Moreover, the size of a snap electrode may be reduced without decreasing the electrical output of the electrode, providing for additional treatment flexibility, such as treatment of small children.

[0024] These and other aspects of the invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art upon reading and understanding the specification that follows.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0025] FIG. 1 is a diagram of an electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to the present invention for use in treating dysphagia and respiratory disorders, and for stimulating the oral motor muscles of a patient.

[0026] FIG. 2 is a flow chart of a method for electrical pharyngeal neuromuscular stimulation according to the present invention for promoting swallowing.

[0027] FIG. 3 is a view of a portion a pharyngeal region of a patient illustrating an exemplary placement of two electrodes according to the present invention.

[0028] FIG. 4 is a view of a portion a pharyngeal region of a patient illustrating an exemplary placement of electrodes according to the present invention.

[0029] FIG. 5 is a graph illustrating the effectiveness of electric pharyngeal neuromuscular stimulation method and device according to the present invention.

[0030] FIG. 6 is a block diagram of an alternative embodiment of an electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to the present invention, including a microprocessor system, a plurality of pulse generators, and a bi-directional analog switching network.

[0031] FIG. 7 is a diagram of an electrode array that may be used in conjunction with the embodiment of FIG. 6 to provide neuromuscular stimulation to a patient and to provide feedback signals to the bi-directional analog switching network of FIG. 6.

[0032] FIG. 7A illustrates the placement of an electrode array including four bi-directional electrodes on the pharyngeal region of a human patient.

[0033] FIG. 8 is a diagram of an alternative method for electrical pharyngeal neuromuscular stimulation according to the present invention for promoting swallowing.

[0034] FIGS. 9A, 9B, 9C, 9D and 9E are diagrams of preferred placements of electrodes used to perform the method for electrical intercostal neuromuscular stimulation of FIGS. 10 and 11.

[0035] FIG. 10 is a flow chart of a method for electrical intercostal neuromuscular stimulation according to the present invention for treating respiratory disorders and ventilator dependence conditions.

[0036] FIG. 11 is a flow chart of an alternative method for electrical intercostal neuromuscular stimulation according to the present invention for treating respiratory disorders and ventilator dependence conditions.

[0037] FIG. 12 is a diagram of a preferred placement of electrodes used to perform the method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation of oral motor muscles of FIGS. 13 and 14.

[0038] FIG. 13 is a flow chart of a method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation of oral motor muscles according to the present invention for treating damage and disorders of oral motor muscles and nerves.

[0039] FIG. 14 is a flow chart of an alternative method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation of oral motor muscles according to the present invention for treating damage and disorders of oral motor muscles and nerves.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0040] The present invention will now be described in detail with reference to the accompanying drawings, which are provided as illustrative examples of embodiments of the invention only and not for purposes of limiting the same. In the drawings, like reference numerals indicate like elements throughout the several views.

[0041] FIG. 1 illustrates a preferred embodiment of an electrical neuromuscular stimulation device 10 for providing electrical neuromuscular stimulus to specific regions of a patient in order to artificially promote swallowing, to treat respiratory disorders, or to provide neuromuscular stimulation to oral motor regions of the patient. The electrical neuromuscular stimulation device 10 as shown in FIG. 1 is comprised of a plurality of electrodes 12 (including individual electrodes 12a, 12b, and 12c) adapted to be selectively placed in electrical contact with tissue of a patient, and a pulse generator 20 for generating a series of electrical pulses, which is coupled to each of the plurality of electrodes 12.

[0042] The device 10 preferably includes at least two electrodes 12a and 12b, although three electrodes (12a, 12b, and 12c) are shown in FIG. 1. For human applications, the electrodes 12a, 12b and 12c may preferably be snap electrodes having approximate measurements as follows: an eleven-millimeter diameter circular metal snap electrode affixed to the patient using strips of adhesive tape or using a circular adhesive pad for each electrode having an approximate radius of two millimeters greater than that of the electrode for adult applications. A three-eighths inch diameter circular metal snap electrode affixed with strips of adhesive tape or with a circular adhesive pad for each electrode having an approximate radius two-millimeters greater than that of the electrode may be used for child applications. The electrodes may alternatively be made of piezoelectric material. The adhesive portion of each electrode (e.g., 12a, 12b, and 12c) is preferably a conventional conductive skin adhesive manufactured from a polyethylene-glycol polymer. Because the conductivity of the adhesive is dependent on the water content in the polymer, the addition of a small amount of salt will further aid conduction by the adhesive. For child applications, hi-tack versions of the adhesive are preferred because of the small contact area. A hi-tack adhesive called RG-72 is available from the Promeon Company. The electrodes 12a, 12b and 12c may also be any suitably conventional and convenient shapes that are suited for physiological applications.

[0043] In a preferred embodiment, lead wires 14 are attached to each electrode and are suitable for attachment to the pulse generator 20. Lead wires 14 may be made from any physiologically acceptable conductive metal, preferably insulated aluminum or copper wire. Multistrand wire is preferable to "wire wrap" wire because multistrand wire is softer and less likely to break with repeated flexing.

[0044] The series of electrical pulses is generated by selective control of pulse generator 20, which provides the series of electrical pulses to the plurality of electrodes 12 via an amplifier 18. Pulse generator 20 preferably includes a frequency controller 22 (shown as separate component in FIG. 1) which modulates an electrical signal generated by the pulse generator at a predetermined frequency to produce the series of electrical pulses output by the pulse generator 20. The frequency controller 22 may modulate the electrical signal at a fixed frequency, for example, 80 hertz, or may vary the frequency of the electrical pulses within a predetermined range of frequencies, for example, a range of frequencies from 4 to 80 hertz. Other frequency ranges as known in the art may also be used. Generally, the frequency of the electrical pulses is selected in order to provide the

greatest comfort to the patient and to minimize as much as possible the amount of pin-prick sensation felt by the patient.

[0045] The pulse generator 20 also preferably includes a duration control 24 for controlling the duration of time for which pulse generator 20 outputs the series of electrical pulses. The duration control 24 may control pulse generator 20 to output the electrical pulses for a fixed duration, for example, generally fixed at 300 microseconds. Alternatively, the duration control 24 may control pulse generator 20 to output the electrical pulses for varying durations within a predetermined range, for example a range of 50 to 300 microseconds, and may further create one or more pauses of varying duration during the application of the electrical pulses to the patient's tissue. Other durations as known in the art may also be used. The duration control 24 may be adjusted manually or automatically using conventional circuits, such as a timer 40.

[0046] In the embodiment depicted in FIG. 1, the generator is further comprised of an intensity control circuit 26 (shown as a separate component in FIG. 1) for regulating the series electrical pulses such that the electrical current does not exceed a predetermined current value, for example, 25 milliamps RMS, and the power does not exceed a predetermined voltage value, for example, 9.6 MW RMS, or both. In a preferred embodiment, the intensity control circuit 26 limits the current and voltage values of the electrical pulses output by pulse generator 20 using conventional limiter circuits. The predetermined current and voltage values may vary in accordance with the patient's physical condition and tolerances and the treatments performed. Generally, the intensity of the current and voltage outputs is determined in order to provide the greatest comfort to the patient and to minimize as much as possible the amount of pin-prick sensation felt by the patient.

[0047] For example, in treatment of oropharyngeal disorders, the current applied should be sufficient to produce the desired response and promote the swallowing reflex. The intensity of the current is increased by small increments until the swallow response or muscle fasciculation occurs. However, the current that is applied should not be too intense in order to avoid laryngeal spasms or cardiac arrhythmia in the patient.

[0048] Similarly, in treatment of respiratory disorders, the amount of current applied should be selected so as not to adversely affect the function of the patient's heart or lungs. In the treatment of oral motor neuromuscular disorders, the intensity of the current applied and the placement of the electrodes are selected so as to avoid any damage to the patient's tissue or skin. Accordingly, in a preferred embodiment of the present invention, a current of up to approximately 100 milliamps may be applied in respiratory and oral motor neuromuscular treatments.

[0049] In the preferred embodiment depicted in FIG. 1, pulse generator 20 also includes an amplitude control circuit 28 (shown as a separate component in FIG. 1). Amplitude control circuit 28 allows for selective control of the amplitude of the electrical pulses generated by pulse generator 20 by manually or automatically operated conventional circuits as are known in the art.

[0050] In a preferred embodiment, a channel selector 30 suitably forms another input to amplifier to allow for con-

current activation of additional sets of electrodes (not shown) using conventional switching circuits. The status of channel selector **30** is indicated by a channel selector indicator **32**.

[0051] In one embodiment of the present invention, the pulse generator **20** continuously generates electrical pulses for a predetermined period of time. For example, electric pulses may be continuously generated and delivered to the electrodes until a complete swallow is achieved or the sensory tolerance level is reached in the patient. Additional treatments wherein the generator continuously generates electric pulses are suitably performed on the patient as necessary.

[0052] In an alternative embodiment of the present invention, the pulse generator **20** selectively generates cycles of electrical pulses. In this embodiment, pulse generator **20** includes a treatment time control function, which is accomplished with intensity control **26** in response to real time information provided by timer **40**. The timer **40**, intensity control **26**, and pulse generator **16** also serve to provide functions of treatment time control, on-ramp control, and off-ramp control.

[0053] In a preferred embodiment, the treatment time control function selectively controls the duration of time wherein the pulse generator **20** selectively generates cycles of electric pulses. The treatment time is any suitable period, such as fifteen, thirty, or sixty minutes or continuous treatment. As with all settings, the particular values are highly specific to the application and patient. Thus, a suitable duration of the electric pulses in each cycle is manually or automatically set. In one embodiment according to the present invention, the duration of electric pulses in each cycle is within the range of 0.5 seconds to 30 seconds. Other durations as known in the art may also be used.

[0054] In a preferred embodiment, the treatment time control function also selectively controls the amount of time between each treatment cycle. For example, the treatment time control may be set to provide a delay between treatment cycles ranging from 0.1 seconds, for example, for facial and respiratory treatments, to 60 seconds, for other oropharyngeal applications. Other ranges as known in the art may also be used.

[0055] In a preferred embodiment, the on-ramp control function controls the amount of time required to reach the maximum intensity in each cycle. In one embodiment of the present invention, the amount of time required to reach the maximum intensity is between approximately 0.1 and 6.0 seconds. According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the maximum intensity in facial and respiratory treatments may be reached in 0.1 second or less to reach the maximum intensity as rapidly as possible. Other times as known in the art may also be used.

[0056] In a preferred embodiment, the off-ramp control function controls the amount of time required to decrease from the maximum intensity to zero intensity at the end of each cycle. In one embodiment of the present invention, the amount of time required to decrease from the maximum intensity to zero intensity is between approximately 0.1 and 6.0 seconds. Other times as known in the art may also be used.

[0057] A suitable commercially available device that provides the functions described above is a Staodyn⁷ EMS+2 System manufactured by Staodyn, Inc. of Longmont, Colo.

[0058] An alternative embodiment of a device for electrical neuromuscular stimulation according to the present invention will now be described with reference to **FIG. 6**.

[0059] **FIG. 6** illustrates a microprocessor-based stimulation device **600** according to the present invention including a microprocessor **601**, a bi-directional analog switching network **602**, and a plurality of pulse generators **603**, **604**, **605** and **606**. Microprocessor **601** controls the operation of pulse generators **603** through **606** by generating control signals indicating the parameters for generation of electrical pulses for each pulse generator **603** through **606** respectively. For example, control signals provided by microprocessor **601** to each pulse generator **603** through **606** may include waveform, intensity, pulse width, ramp-on, and ramp-off control signals. Upon receipt of the respective control signals from microprocessor **601**, pulse generators **603** through **606** generate electrical pulses and output the pulses to bi-directional analog switching network **602**.

[0060] In the preferred embodiment depicted in **FIG. 6**, microprocessor **601** is also coupled to bi-directional analog switching network **602** and provides control signal to switching network **602** to control the operation of switching network **602** in processing and selectively outputting the electrical pulses to a bi-directional electrode array **607** coupled to switching network **602**.

[0061] In the preferred embodiment depicted in **FIG. 6**, switching network **602** receives electrical pulses generated by each of pulse generators **603** through **606**. Based upon the control signals from microprocessor **601** to switching network **602** control, switching network **602** outputs the electrical pulses from one or more of pulse generators **603** through **606** to electrodes **710**, **702**, **703** and **704** (various exemplary arrangements of electrodes are shown in **FIGS. 7, 9A-E, and 12**) in electrode array **607** via lead wires **710**, **711**, **712**, and **713** respectively. The control signals from microprocessor **601** to switching network **602** determine, for example, the sequence in which the electrical pulses from each of pulse generators **603** through **606** are provided to each electrode in electrode array **607** and the duration for which electrical pulses from each pulse generator will be provided to each electrode. Notably, switching network **602** may include one or more conventional buffer memories (not shown) to prevent overloading of the network.

[0062] According to one embodiment of the present invention, microprocessor **601**, switching network **602** and pulse generators **603** through **606** may be designed to provide maximum flexibility of operation. Thus, each of the pulse generators may be capable of providing electrical pulses having either fixed or variable current and voltage values, modulation rates and frequencies. The waveform, intensity, and ramp-on and ramp-off functions provided by each pulse generator **603** through **606** may also be variably selected. Stimulation device **600** allows each of pulse generators **603** through **606** to independently produce simultaneous and/or sequential stimulation by each of the electrodes in electrode array **607**. Generally, the waveform and intensity of the electrical pulses is selected and/or pre-programmed in order to provide the greatest comfort to the patient and to minimize as much as possible the amount of pin-prick sensation felt by the patient.

[0063] In the preferred embodiment depicted in FIG. 6, microprocessor 601 is coupled to a programming device 608, which enables the microprocessor to be programmed to perform the processing functions in accordance with the present invention. Data may also be provided to microprocessor 601 by programming device 608. Programming of microprocessor 601 and downloading of data to the microprocessor may be accomplished through a conventional interface, such as standard RS232 serial and parallel ports or infrared links, as is known in the art.

[0064] Stimulation device 600 depicted in FIG. 6 also includes a feedback network for receiving and processing feedback received from electrode array 607. For example, electrode array 607 may use electromyographic (EMG) sensing capabilities to generate electrical feedback signals. The EMG sensing capabilities are utilized, for example, to determine whether muscles are contracting and, if so, the sequence of muscle contractions. This information may be used to adjust the electrical pulses supplied to stimulate these muscles. In treatments of oropharyngeal disorders, muscle contraction information may also be used to identify the patient's attempts to swallow, enabling the stimulator to facilitate the remainder of the swallowing sequence.

[0065] The feedback signals generated by electrode array 607 are provided to switching network 602 that outputs the feedback signals to a receiver amplifier 613. Receiver amplifier 613 amplifies the feedback signals and outputs the amplified feedback signals to a conversion circuit 612. Conversion circuit 612 formats the amplified feedback signals into a selected signal format and outputs the formatted feedback signals to an input processor 611. The selected signal format into which conversion circuit 612 converts the feedback signals is selected to enable input processor 611 to download and process the feedback signals.

[0066] In the preferred embodiment depicted in FIG. 6, input processor 611 also optionally receives one or more physiological and/or non-physiological inputs from input devices 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620 and 621. The physiological input devices such as devices 616, 617, 618, 619 and 620 provide inputs representing various physiological characteristics of the patient. For example, physiological inputs may be received from such devices as an accelerometer 616 (indicating motion due to a contraction of the muscle during swallowing), a manometry device 617 (indicating pressure increase due to the attempt at swallowing), a video fluoroscopy device 618 (for providing an input from visual examination of the patient's swallowing mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the swallow), an EMG device 619 (indicating muscle movements in the oral motor muscles and/or swallowing mechanism which may not be detected by the electrode stimulation patch), and/or an acoustic signaling device 620, e.g., a microphone placed on the neck of the patient, to detect speech and/or swallowing sounds.

[0067] Non-physiological devices such as device 615 may provide inputs representing various non-physiological characteristics of the patient. Non-physiological inputs may be received from such sources as therapist/patient/doctor input device 615 which enables a therapist, patient and/or doctor to enter information such as the patient's threshold for the stimulation device parameters, including a minimum threshold needed and the maximum intensity usable for the patient,

as well as parameters for altering the sequence and intensity of electrode stimulation for the patient based upon asymmetries which the patient may have during the swallowing process, respiratory process or oral motor stimulation process.

[0068] Additional factors such as height, weight, neck thickness/size, torso measurements, facial dimensions, pain tolerance, and the current status of the patient's ability to swallow, breathe, or control oral motor muscles may be entered for use in determining the appropriate stimulation frequency patterns and intensities (depending on the type of treatment). Additional physiological and/or non-physiological inputs may be received from other devices as indicated by representative input device 621.

[0069] In a preferred embodiment, the physiological and non-physiological inputs respectively generated by physiological and non-physiological input devices 615 through 620 are formatted by a conversion circuit 614 (similar to conversion circuit 612) and then stored and processed by input processor 611. Input processor 611 processes and stores as test data both the feedback signals originated by electrode array 607 and physiological and non-physiological inputs from devices 615 through 620. Input processor also receives control signals and data inputs from microprocessor 601.

[0070] In the preferred embodiment depicted in FIG. 6, a system and patient interaction display 610 is optionally provided. Display 610 is coupled to microprocessor 601 and receives processed data from input processor 611 via microprocessor 601. In this manner, display 610 enables monitoring of the feedback signals from electrode array 607 in addition to the status of inputs from the various physiological and non-physiological inputs 615 through 620 as described above. Display 610 may also enable monitoring of the operating status of stimulation device 600.

[0071] The display 610 may display a variety of parameters, inputs, and outputs as may be desired. For example, display 610 may show current patient parameters, current inputs from the physiological and non-physiological devices and the electrode stimulation array, an overall rating of swallowing capability and current swallowing effectiveness, respiratory capacity and capability, or degree of oral motor muscle control (depending on the type of treatment), and the current setting(s) of the stimulation pattern frequency and/or intensity. Additionally, the display 610 may be adapted for monitoring by the patient to provide feedback to the patient as to how well swallowing has been completed. This feedback to the patient may assist with the patient's inherent bio-feedback mechanisms.

[0072] In the preferred embodiment depicted in FIG. 6, a data/software I/O interface 609 is optionally provided to enable downloading of testing data collected and processed by stimulation device 600, for example, during patient treatments. Patient-specific data may be downloaded to external devices, including portable devices, through any conventional interface (e.g., a hardwired interface, coaxial interface, infrared interface, etc.).

[0073] Treatment of Oropharyngeal Disorders

[0074] A preferred embodiment of a bi-directional electrode array 607 for use in conjunction with stimulation device 600 for treatment of oropharyngeal disorders is

illustrated in FIG. 7. Each bi-directional electrode in array 607 stimulates one or more pharyngeal muscles with electrical stimulation provided by the switching network 602, detects the electromyographic (EMG) response from the stimulated muscle(s), and provides the EMG response as an electrical feedback signal to the switching network 602.

[0075] Notably, the arrangement of electrodes and connecting wires shown in FIG. 7 is provided as an example and is not intended to limit the scope of the present invention. Uni-directional electrodes (stimulating muscles but not sensing EMG signals from the stimulated muscles) may also be used in accordance with the present invention. Also, multiple electrodes, including squares of four, sixteen, twenty-five, or thirty-six electrodes or more, may be used. As the number of electrodes increases, the surface area treated by the array may be increased and/or the electrodes may be more closely positioned.

[0076] As shown in FIG. 7, array 607 preferably comprises bi-directional four electrodes 701, 702, 703 and 704, which are positioned on the tissue of the pharyngeal region of a patient using adhesive bands 705 and 706 as illustrated in FIG. 7A or with circular adhesive regions surrounding each metal electrode. The electrodes may preferably be arranged in two pairs or in a vertical row of four electrodes. In yet other preferred embodiments (not shown), alternative electrode arrangements may be used to achieve elevation of the patient's larynx.

[0077] In the two-pair electrode arrangement, each pair of electrodes (701, 703) is positioned on one lateral side (e.g., the right hand or left hand side) of the pharyngeal region of the patient, with one electrode positioned above the patient's Adams Apple and the other below the Adams Apple of the patient. The second pair of electrodes (702, 704) is positioned in the same arrangement on the opposite side of the patient's pharyngeal region. Each pair of electrodes may preferably be positioned such that the distance between the centers of the electrodes, shown as distance "X" in FIG. 7, may be approximately three to four centimeters or other spacing as required to position the electrodes on the pharyngeal region of the patient as described above. The pairs of electrodes may preferably be spaced at a distance, shown as distance "Y" in FIG. 7, of approximately two and a half centimeters or other spacing as required to position the electrodes on the pharyngeal region of the patient as described above. In the two-pair electrode arrangement described above, the two electrodes (701, 703) positioned on one lateral side (e.g., right or left side) of the patient's pharyngeal region are coupled to a first output channel of the switching network 602, and the two electrodes (702, 704) positioned on the other lateral side of the patient's pharyngeal region are coupled to a second output channel of the switching network 602.

[0078] In the vertical row electrode arrangement (not shown), the four electrodes are positioned in a vertical row directly adjacent to one another, but not overlapping, starting with a first uppermost electrode being positioned on the patient's digastric muscles, covering the hyoid and the strap muscles of the patient's larynx, and ending with a fourth lowermost electrode being positioned at the base of the patient's thyroid cartilage. In the vertical row electrode arrangement described above, the two upper electrodes in the row are coupled to a First output channel of the switch-

ing network 602, and the two lower electrodes in the row are coupled to a second output channel of the switching network 602.

[0079] The electrodes 701, 702, 703 and 704 may preferably be snap electrodes having the following approximate dimensions: an eleven-millimeter diameter circular metal snap electrode positioned on an adhesive band as shown in FIG. 7A or using a circular adhesive pad for each electrode having an approximate radius of two millimeters greater than that of the electrode for adult applications. A three-eighths inch diameter circular metal snap electrode affixed with an adhesive band, strips of adhesive tape, or a circular adhesive pad for each electrode having an approximate radius two-millimeters greater than that of the electrode may be used for child applications. The electrodes 701-704 may also be any suitably conventional and convenient shape that is suited for physiological applications.

[0080] The adhesive bands used to attach each pair of electrodes in array 607 to the patient may have a width of approximately eight centimeters, shown as distance "A" in FIG. 7. Contact pads 707 and 708 having a width of approximately eight and a half centimeters (shown as distance "B" in FIG. 7) are also provided.

[0081] The adhesive portions may be preferably made of a conventional conductive skin adhesive such as a polyethylene-glycol polymer. Because the conductivity of such adhesives may be dependent on the water content in the polymer, the addition of a small amount of salt may further aid conduction by the adhesive. For child applications, hi-tack versions of the adhesive are preferred because of the small contact area. Other suitable adhesive materials may also be used as would be apparent to those of skill in the art.

[0082] In a preferred embodiment, each electrode of electrode array 607 is independently coupled to an output of switching network 602 (shown in FIG. 6) by lead wires 710, 711, 712, and 713 respectively. As a result, each electrode independently receives one or more series of electrical pulses generated by one or more of pulse generators 603-606 via switching network 602 as determined by microprocessor 601. Microprocessor 601 controls the switching operation of switching network 602 to control which output or outputs from pulse generators 603-606 are provided to each electrode in electrode array 607.

[0083] Several alternative two-electrode arrangements for the placement of electrodes on the tissue of the pharyngeal region of a patient will now be described in detail with reference to FIGS. 3, 4 and 7. These arrangements are provided as examples of electrode placement and are not intended to limit the number and arrangement of electrodes for use in practicing the present invention.

[0084] The electrodes are selectively placed in any suitable site within the pharyngeal region 200 of the patient as shown in FIGS. 3, 4 and 7. The placement of the electrodes in the pharyngeal region of the patient is based on several factors, such as the extent and type of oropharyngeal disorder exhibited by the patient and, given the extent and type of oropharyngeal disorder exhibited, those locations within the pharyngeal region, when subjected to electrical stimulus, have the possibility of eliciting the strongest and most complete swallow. An evaluation for swallowing ability is done on the patient to determine the extent and type of

oropharyngeal disorder. The critical elements in the evaluation are analysis by video fluoroscopy and clinical evaluation to determine the presence of a gag reflex, a dry swallow, and ability to tolerate one's own secretions. The placement of the electrodes may be changed several times in an effort to obtain the strongest and most effective treatment.

[0085] In a two-electrode embodiment of the present invention, a pair of electrodes **202** is positioned on the skin of the pharyngeal region **200** at approximately the position of the lesser horn **204** of the hyoid bone **206** on either side of the pharyngeal region **200** and just above the body of the hyoid bone **206**. The electrodes overlie the muscles of the floor of the mouth (not shown).

[0086] In an alternative two-electrode embodiment of the present invention, a pair of electrodes **208** is positioned on the side of the pharyngeal region **200** on one side of the midline of the pharyngeal region **200**. One electrode **208a** is placed on the thyrohyoid membrane **210** at approximately the level of the lesser horn **204** close to the hyoid bone **206**. This electrode **208a** overlies the sternothyroid muscle **212** and the thyrohyoid muscle **214**. The other electrode **208b** is placed on the cricoid cartilage **216** to the side of the midline of the pharyngeal region **200**. This electrode overlies the sternothyroid muscle **218** and the sternothyroid muscle **212** on one side of the midline of the pharyngeal region.

[0087] In another embodiment of the present invention, a pair of electrodes **220** is positioned on the skin of the pharyngeal region **200** on the thyrohyoid membrane **210** on either side of the midline of the pharyngeal region **200**. These electrodes overlie the thyrohyoid muscle **214** and the sternothyroid muscle **218**.

[0088] In yet another embodiment of the present invention, a pair of electrodes **222** is positioned on the skin of the pharyngeal region **200** on either side of the midline of the pharyngeal region **200** proximately midway between the thyroid notch **224** and the cricoid cartilage **216**. These electrodes overlie the sternothyroid muscle **218** and the transition zone between the sternothyroid muscle **212** and the thyrohyoid muscle **214** on either side of the midline of the pharyngeal region **200**.

[0089] In an additional embodiment of the present invention, a pair of electrodes **226** is positioned on the skin of the pharyngeal region **200** on one side of the midline of the pharyngeal region **200**. One electrode **226a** is placed just lateral to the lesser horn **204** of the hyoid bone **206** proximately midway between the hyoid bone **206** and the lower border of the mandible (not shown). This electrode overlies the mylohyoid muscle **228** and the digastric muscle **230**. The other electrode **226b** is placed proximate to the upper end of the thyrohyoid membrane **210** and proximate to the hyoid bone **206** or on the hyoid bone **206** proximately at the level of the lesser horn **204** of the hyoid bone **206**. This electrode overlies the sternothyroid muscle **212** and the thyrohyoid muscle **214**.

[0090] In a further embodiment of the present invention, a pair of electrodes **232** is positioned on the skin of the pharyngeal region **200** to the side of the midline of the pharyngeal region **200**. One electrode **232a** is placed on the midline of the pharyngeal region near the chin (not shown). The other electrode **232b** is placed laterally to the other electrode. These electrodes overlie the mylohyoid muscle

228 and the digastric muscle **230** in the midline and to one side of the midline of the pharyngeal region **200**.

[0091] In general, the placement and dimensions of the electrodes in accordance with the present invention is performed so as to avoid the carotid body and to insure the safety of the patient.

[0092] A preferred method for electrical pharyngeal neuromuscular stimulation using the apparatus shown in **FIG. 1** will now be described with reference to **FIG. 2**. Turning to start procedure step **100**, the procedure for treating oropharyngeal disorders with electrical stimulation is initiated. Next, at apply electrodes to patient step **102**, actual electrodes are applied to the pharyngeal area of a patient. The particulars for electrode placement and selection are described in detail below with reference to **FIGS. 3, 4** and **7**.

[0093] Turning next to set pulse frequency step **104**, a pulse frequency is set in accordance with the parameters disclosed above. Similarly, at set pulse duration step **106**, pulse duration is set. Finally, at determine treatment time step **108**, a determination of a treatment duration is made, as well as to the number of treatment periods that are to be applied.

[0094] Turning next to apply waveform step **110**, an actual waveform associated with the previously selected parameters is applied to the pharyngeal area of a patient. Next, at decision step **112**, a determination is made as to whether a treatment period is complete in accordance with the preselected standards. A positive determination causes progress to decision step **114** and a negative determination causes progress to wait for duration step **116**. At wait for duration step **116**, the device automatically waits for a predetermined period of time before returning to apply waveform step **110**.

[0095] At decision step **114**, a determination is made as to whether further treatment periods are merited. A positive determination causes a return to wait set duration step **110**. A negative determination results in completion of the treatment procedure as indicated by end procedure step **118**.

[0096] With reference to **FIG. 8**, an alternative embodiment of a preferred method for electrical pharyngeal neuromuscular stimulation according to the present invention includes the steps of:

- [0097] **801**: generating a series of electrical pulses using one or more pulse generators;
- [0098] **802**: generating operation control signals to control operation of the pulse generators;
- [0099] **803**: receiving the series of electrical pulses from the pulse generators at a switching network;
- [0100] **804**: generating switching control signals to control operation of the switching network;
- [0101] **805**: outputting the series of electrical pulses from the switching network in accordance with the switching control signals;
- [0102] **806**: applying the series of electrical pulses to tissue of a pharyngeal region of a patient using an electrode array to achieve neuromuscular stimulation of a patient;

[0103] **807:** generating electrical feedback signals in response to the neuromuscular stimulation of the patient;

[0104] **808:** generating test data in response to the electrical feedback signals; and

[0105] **809:** modifying the operation control signals and switching control signals in response to the electrical feedback signals.

[0106] This method may further include the step of:

[0107] **810:** generating physiological and/or non-physiological input signals using at least one physiological and/or non-physiological input device.

[0108] When step **810** is included, the test data generated in step **808** above is also based upon the physiological and/or non-physiological input signals. Similarly, step **809** above includes the modification of the operation control signals and switching of control signals in response to both the electrical feedback signals and the physiological and/or non-physiological input signals.

[0109] The preferred method depicted in **FIG. 8** may optionally include the steps of monitoring the electrical feedback signals, the physiological input signals, the non-physiological input signals, or any combination thereof and downloading the test data to a test data receiver, for example, an external receiving device.

[0110] The practice of various embodiments of the method according to the present invention will now be described in further detail. In the following examples, the inventive method was used to treat dysphagia. These examples are not intended to limit the scope of the present invention.

EXAMPLE 1

[0111] One hundred and ninety-five patients suffering from dysphagia as a result of a stroke or neurodegeneration were studied. The swallowing ability of each patient was evaluated to determine the extent and type of dysphagia exhibited by the patient. The swallowing ability of each patient was assigned a number which corresponds to a defined swallow state wherein the swallow states are listed below: swallow state zero is the inability to have a pharyngeal contraction; swallow state one is the ability to swallow one's own secretions; swallow state two is the ability to swallow paste, pudding, or similar substances; swallow state three is the ability to swallow honey or similar substances; swallow state four is the ability to swallow nectar or similar substances; swallow state five is the ability to swallow liquids; and swallow state six is the ability to swallow water. All of the patients were determined to have swallowing states of either zero or one, indicating the patient did not have a complete pharyngeal contraction and had no gag reflex or the ability to handle secretions. The patients were then objected to a series of treatment sessions. The patients were divided into two treatment groups: electrical stimulation and thermal stimulation.

[0112] Sixty three patients underwent a series of electrical stimulation treatment sessions. Preferably, the patients underwent a least seven electrical stimulation treatment sessions. In each treatment session, electrodes were selectively placed on the skin of the pharyngeal region of the patient. The placement of the electrodes was determined by

the extent and type of dysphagia exhibited by the patient and, given the extent and type of dysphagia exhibited, those locations within the pharyngeal region, when subjected to electrical stimulus, have the possibility of eliciting the strongest and most complete swallow. Electrode placement was adjusted until the patient achieved the most complete swallowing contraction for which he was capable. Once the correct electrode placement was determined, the intensity of the current was increased by small increments until the tolerance and comfort level limits are reached in the patient. The optimal intensity was realized when the patient felt a tugging or pinch in the area of stimulation. The patient was then subjected to continuous electrical stimulation wherein electric pulses were continuously generated and delivered to the electrodes until a complete swallow was achieved or the tolerance level was reached in the patient. This step was repeated five to twenty times in each treatment session wherein the patient was subjected to continuous electrical stimulation. If the electrical stimulation was successful in promoting a complete contraction, swabbing of the oral cavity was done and the patient attempted a dry swallow. In those patients who did not exhibit any pharyngeal contraction, one or more treatment sessions were required before an adequate dry swallow occurred.

[0113] Once an adequate dry swallow was achieved, oral intake was provided to assist in the treatment. The consistency of the oral intake was determined by the strength of the contraction elicited by the patient. If the patient was able to swallow his own saliva, swabbing the oral cavity with a sponge moistened by water or juice was performed. The patient attempted to swallow the water or juice while subjected to continuous electrical stimulation. Once the patient had achieved audible, strong contractions, the patient was challenged with pudding, thick liquid, or ice slush. The patient attempted to swallow these substances while subjected to continuous electrical stimulation. Once three to five strong swallows were achieved with the assistance of electrical stimulation, the patient attempted to swallow these substances without the assistance of electrical stimulation. Treatment sessions continued with each patient until the patient's improvement reached a plateau.

[0114] Thirty-one patients were subjected to a series of thermal stimulation treatment sessions. Preferably, the patients were subjected to a least seven thermal stimulation treatment sessions. In each treatment session, a mirror or probe was immersed in ice or cold substance. The tonsillar fossa was stimulated with the mirror or probe. The patient then closed his mouth and attempted a dry swallow. If the stimulation was successful in promoting a complete contraction, oral intake was provided to assist in the treatment. The consistency of the oral intake was determined by the strength of the contraction elicited by the patient. Once an adequate dry swallow was achieved, oral intake was provided to assist in the treatment. The consistency of the oral intake was determined by the strength of the contraction elicited by the patient. If the patient was able to swallow his own saliva, swabbing the oral cavity with a sponge moistened by water or juice was performed. The patient attempted to swallow the water or juice while subjected to thermal stimulation. Once the patient had achieved audible, strong contractions, the patient was challenged with pudding, thick liquid, or ice slush. The patient attempted to swallow these substances while subjected to thermal stimulation. Once three to five strong swallows were achieved with the assis-

tance of thermal stimulation, the patient attempted to swallow these substances without the assistance of thermal stimulation. Treatment sessions continued with each patient until the patient's improvement plateaus. Once the patient had achieved audible, strong contractions, the patient was challenged with pudding, thick liquid, or ice slush. The patient attempted to swallow these substances while subjected to continuous electrical stimulation. Once three to five strong swallows were achieved with the assistance of electrical stimulation, the patient attempted to swallow these substances without the assistance of thermal stimulation. Treatment sessions continued with each patient until the patient's improvement plateaus.

[0115] The effectiveness of the electrical stimulation treatments and the thermal stimulation treatments is shown in FIG. 5. FIG. 5 is a graph illustrating the mean swallowing state achieved after electrical stimulation treatment sessions and thermal stimulation treatments. After seven treatment sessions, the mean swallowing state of the patients treated with electrical stimulation was swallow state five, or the ability to swallow thin liquids. After seven treatment sessions, the mean swallowing state of the patients treated with thermal stimulation was only swallow state one, or the ability to handle one's own secretions.

[0116] The method and device for electrical pharyngeal neuromuscular stimulation of the present invention provides an effective and non-invasive treatment for dysphagia. The method and device for electrical pharyngeal neuromuscular stimulation is more effective for treating dysphagia than traditional treatment methods, such as thermal stimulation. Further, the method and device of the present invention is effective for treating worst-case dysphagia resulting from neurodegeneration and strokes.

[0117] Treatment of Respiratory Disorders

[0118] The device described above with reference FIGS. 1 and 6 above may further be used to treat respiratory disorders, such as asthma, bronchitis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and to treat ventilator dependence conditions by providing electrical neuromuscular stimulation to the intercostal muscles between the ribs of a patient.

[0119] The electrodes used in treatment of respiratory disorders are preferably unidirectional or bi-directional snap electrodes having an eleven-millimeter diameter circular metal snap electrode surrounded by an annular adhesive portion approximately two millimeters wide may be used for adult applications. A three-eighths inch diameter circular metal snap electrode affixed to the patient using strips of adhesive tape or using a circular adhesive pad for each electrode having an approximate radius of two millimeters greater than that of the electrode may be used for adult applications. A three-eighths inch diameter circular metal snap electrode affixed with strips of adhesive tape or with a circular adhesive pad for each electrode having an approximate radius two-millimeters greater than that of the electrode may be used for child applications. The adhesive portions are preferably made of a conventional conductive skin adhesive such as a polyethylene-glycol polymer. Because the conductivity of the adhesive is dependent on the water content in the polymer, the addition of a small amount of salt will further aid conduction by the adhesive. For child applications, hi-tack versions of the adhesive are preferred because of the small contact area. However, the electrodes

may also be any suitably conventional and convenient shape that is suited for physiological applications.

[0120] Various exemplary electrode configurations will now be described with reference to FIGS. 9A-E. These arrangements are provided as examples of electrode placement and are not intended to limit the number and arrangement of electrodes for use in practicing the present invention.

[0121] According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention, treatment of respiratory disorders such as asthma and asthma-type symptoms may be performed by placing one uni-directional circular snap electrode on the intercostal muscle between the patient's third and fourth anterior ribs and one uni-directional circular snap electrode on the intercostal muscle between either the patient's fourth and fifth or fifth and sixth anterior ribs. Both electrodes are positioned on the same side (left or right side, depending on the patient's condition) of the patient, applying a total of two circular uni-directional snap electrodes (901 and 902) in this embodiment, as shown in FIG. 9A (showing left side placement only). Each electrode is placed in proximity to, but not touching, the patient's sternum.

[0122] According to another preferred embodiment of the present invention, treatment of respiratory disorders may be performed by placing one bi-directional circular snap electrode on the intercostal muscle between the patient's third and fourth anterior ribs on each side of the patient and one bi-directional circular snap electrode on the intercostal muscle between either the patient's fourth and fifth or fifth and sixth anterior ribs on each side of the patient. Thus, a total of four circular bi-directional snap electrodes (903, 904, 905 and 906) are applied in this embodiment, as shown in FIG. 9B. Each electrode is placed in proximity to, but not touching, the patient's sternum.

[0123] According to yet another preferred embodiment of the present invention, treatment of ventilator dependence conditions may be performed by placing one bi-directional rectangular two-inch snap electrode in the intercostal space between the patient's seventh and eighth anterior ribs on each side of the patient and one bi-directional rectangular two-inch snap electrode in the intercostal space between the patient's eighth and ninth anterior ribs on each side of the patient. Thus, a total of four rectangular bi-directional snap electrodes (910, 911, 912, and 913) are applied in this embodiment, as shown in FIG. 9C.

[0124] According to another preferred embodiment of the present invention, treatment of respiratory disorders such as bronchitis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD) may be performed by placing one uni-directional circular snap electrode on the intercostal muscle between the patient's second and third anterior ribs and one uni-directional circular snap electrode on the intercostal muscle between the patient's third and fourth anterior ribs. Both electrodes are placed on the same side (either the right or left side, depending on the patient's condition) of the patient. Thus, a total of two circular uni-directional snap electrodes (914 and 915) are applied in this embodiment, as shown in FIG. 9D (showing left side placement only). Each electrode is placed in proximity to, but not touching, the patient's sternum.

[0125] According to another preferred embodiment of the present invention, treatment of respiratory disorders such as

bronchitis and COPD may be performed by placing one bi-directional circular snap electrode on the intercostal muscle between the patient's second and third anterior ribs on each side of the patient and one bi-directional circular snap electrode on the intercostal muscle between the patient's third and fourth anterior ribs on each side of the patient. Thus, a total of four circular bi-directional snap electrodes (**916**, **917**, **918** and **919**) are applied in this embodiment, as shown in **FIG. 9E**. Each electrode is placed in proximity to, but not touching, the patient's sternum.

[**0126**] Other arrangements and placements of electrodes may also be used in accordance with the present invention as would be apparent to those of skill in the art. As illustrated in **FIG. 10**, a method for treating respiratory disorders according to the present invention using the electrical neuromuscular stimulator shown in **FIG. 1** includes the following steps:

- [**0127**] **1001**: applying electrodes to the intercostal regions of a patient as described above with reference to **FIGS. 9A-E**.
- [**0128**] **1002**: setting a pulse frequency in accordance with the parameters disclosed above with reference to **FIG. 1**.
- [**0129**] **1003**: setting a pulse duration.
- [**0130**] **1004**: setting a treatment duration, as well as to the number of treatment periods that are to be applied.
- [**0131**] **1005**: applying a waveform associated with the previously selected parameters to the intercostal regions of the patient as described above with reference to **FIGS. 9A-E**.
- [**0132**] **1006**: determining whether a treatment period is complete in accordance with preselected standards.
- [**0133**] **1007**: a positive determination causes progress to decision step **1010**.
- [**0134**] **1008**: a negative determination causes the device to wait for a duration as defined in step **1009**.
- [**0135**] **1009**: pausing for a predetermined period of time before returning to apply waveform step **1005**.
- [**0136**] **1010**: determining whether further treatment periods are merited. A positive determination causes a return to wait for duration step **1009**. A negative determination results in completion of the treatment procedure as indicated by end procedure step **1011**.

[**0137**] As shown in **FIG. 11**, an alternative method for treating respiratory disorders according to the present invention using the electrical neuromuscular stimulator shown in **FIG. 6** includes the following steps:

- [**0138**] **1101**: generating a series of electrical pulses using one or more pulse generators;
- [**0139**] **1102**: generating operation control signals to control operation of the pulse generators;
- [**0140**] **1103**: receiving the series of electrical pulses from the pulse generators at a switching network;

[**0141**] **1104**: generating switching control signals to control operation of the switching network;

[**0142**] **1105**: outputting the series of electrical pulses from the switching network in accordance with the switching control signals;

[**0143**] **1106**: applying the series of electrical pulses to tissue of at least one intercostal region of a patient and using an electrode array as described above with reference to **FIGS. 9A-E** to achieve neuromuscular stimulation of the patient;

[**0144**] **1107**: generating electrical feedback signals in response to the neuromuscular stimulation of the patient;

[**0145**] **1108**: generating test data in response to the electrical feedback signals; and

[**0146**] **1109**: modifying the operation control signals and switching control signals in response to the electrical feedback signals.

[**0147**] This method may further include the step of:

[**0148**] **1110**: generating physiological and/or non-physiological input signals using at least one physiological and/or non-physiological input device.

[**0149**] When step **1110** is included, the test data generated in step **1108** above is also based upon the physiological and/or non-physiological input signals. Similarly, step **1109** above includes the modification of the operation control signals and switching of control signals in response to both the electrical feedback signals and the physiological and/or non-physiological input signals.

[**0150**] The preferred method depicted in **FIG. 11** may optionally include the steps of monitoring the electrical feedback signals, the physiological input signals, the non-physiological input signals, or any combination thereof and downloading the test data to a test data receiver, for example, an external receiving device.

[**0151**] Treatment of Oral Motor Neuromuscular Damage and Disorders

[**0152**] The device described above with reference **FIGS. 1 and 6** above may further be used to treat oral motor neuromuscular damage and disorders by providing electrical neuromuscular stimulation at specific oral motor points on the face of a patient.

[**0153**] The electrodes used in treatment of oral motor neuromuscular disorders are preferably uni-directional or bi-directional snap electrodes having an eleven-millimeter diameter circular metal snap electrode surrounded by an annular adhesive portion approximately two millimeters wide may be used for adult applications. A three-eighths inch diameter circular metal snap electrode affixed to the patient using strips of adhesive tape or using a circular adhesive pad for each electrode having an approximate radius of two millimeters greater than that of the electrode may be used for adult applications. A three-eighths inch diameter circular metal snap electrode affixed with strips of adhesive tape or with a circular adhesive pad for each electrode having an approximate radius two-millimeters greater than that of the electrode may be used for child applications. The adhesive portions are preferably made of

a conventional conductive skin adhesive such as a polyethylene-glycol polymer: Because the conductivity of the adhesive is dependent on the water content in the polymer, the addition of a small amount of salt will further aid conduction by the adhesive. For child applications, hi-tack versions of the adhesive are preferred because of the small contact area. However, the electrodes may also be any suitably conventional and convenient shape that is suited for physiological applications.

[0154] Various exemplary electrode configurations will now be described with reference to FIG. 12. These arrangements are provided as examples of electrode placement and are not intended to limit the number and arrangement of electrodes for use in practicing the present invention.

[0155] With reference to FIG. 12, treatment of oral motor neuromuscular damage and/or disorders may be performed by placing one uni-directional circular snap electrode in front of the Targus and the Tempro Mandibular Joint. A second uni-directional circular snap electrode is placed overlying the neck of the mandible at the N. Facial (Trunk). Thus, a total of two circular uni-directional snap electrodes (1201 and 1202) are applied to the oral motor region on one side of the patient's face (either the left or right side, depending on the patient's condition).

[0156] An alternative treatment (not shown) of oral motor neuromuscular damage and/or disorders may be performed by placing one bi-directional circular snap electrode in front of the Targus and the Tempro Mandibular Joint on each side of the patient's face and one bi-directional circular snap electrode overlying the neck of the mandible at the N. Facial (Trunk) on each side of the patient's face. Thus, a total of four circular bi-directional snap electrodes are applied to the patient's oral motor region in this embodiment.

[0157] As shown in FIG. 13, a method for treating oral motor neuromuscular damage and/or disorders according to the present invention using the electrical neuromuscular stimulator shown in FIG. 1 includes the following steps:

[0158] 1300: initiating the procedure for treating respiratory disorders with electrical stimulation.

[0159] 1301: applying electrodes to the tissue of the oral motor region of a patient as described above with reference to FIG. 12.

[0160] 1302: setting a pulse frequency in accordance with the parameters disclosed above with reference to FIG. 1.

[0161] 1303: setting a pulse duration.

[0162] 1304: setting a treatment duration is made, as well as to the number of treatment periods that are to be applied.

[0163] 1305: applying a waveform associated with the previously selected parameters to the face of the patient as described above with reference to FIG. 12.

[0164] 1306: determining whether a treatment period is complete in accordance with preselected standards.

[0165] 1307: a positive determination causes progress to decision step 1310.

[0166] 1308: a negative determination causes the device to wait for a duration determined in step 1309.

[0167] 1309: pausing for a predetermined period of time before returning to apply waveform step 1305.

[0168] 1310: determining whether further treatment periods are merited. A positive determination causes a return to wait for duration step 1309. A negative determination results in completion of the treatment procedure as indicated by end procedure step 1312.

[0169] As shown in FIG. 14, an alternative method for treating oral motor neuromuscular damage and/or disorders according to the present invention using the electrical neuromuscular stimulator shown in FIG. 6 includes the following steps:

[0170] 1401: generating a series of electrical pulses using one or more pulse generators;

[0171] 1402: generating operation control signals to control operation of the pulse generators;

[0172] 1403: receiving the series of electrical pulses from the pulse generators at a switching network;

[0173] 1404: generating switching control signals to control operation of the switching network;

[0174] 1405: outputting the series of electrical pulses from the switching network in accordance with the switching control signals;

[0175] 1406: applying the series of electrical pulses to the face of a patient using an electrode array as described above with reference to FIG. 12 to achieve neuromuscular stimulation of a patient;

[0176] 1407: generating electrical feedback signals in response to the neuromuscular stimulation of the patient;

[0177] 1408: generating test data in response to the electrical feedback signals; and

[0178] 1409: modifying the operation control signals and switching control signals in response to the electrical feedback signals.

[0179] This method may further include the step of:

[0180] 1410: generating physiological and/or non-physiological input signals using at least one physiological and/or non-physiological input device.

[0181] When step 1410 is included, the test data generated in step 1408 above is also based upon the physiological and/or non-physiological input signals. Similarly, step 1409 above includes the modification of the operation control signals and switching of control signals in response to both the electrical feedback signals and the physiological and/or non-physiological input signals.

[0182] The preferred method depicted in FIG. 14 may optionally include the steps of monitoring the electrical feedback signals, the physiological input signals, the non-physiological input signals, or any combination thereof and downloading the test data to a test data receiver, for example, an external receiving device.

[0183] While various embodiments of a method and device for treating oropharyngeal, respiratory, and oral

motor neuromuscular disorders with electrical stimulation have been disclosed, it should be understood that modifications and adaptations thereof will occur to persons skilled in the art. Other features and aspects of this invention will be appreciated by those skilled in the art upon reading and comprehending this disclosure. Such features, aspects, and expected variations and modifications of the reported results and examples, as well as their equivalents, are clearly within the scope of the invention as described by the following claims.

We claim:

1. An electrical neuromuscular stimulator for treating respiratory disorders comprising:

at least one electrode adapted for selective placement in electrical contact with tissue of at least one intercostal region of a patient; and

a pulse generator coupled to said at least one electrode for generating a series of electrical pulses, wherein said pulse generator comprises

a frequency controller for modulating an electrical signal generated by the pulse generator at a predetermined frequency to produce the series of electrical pulses output by said pulse generator,

a duration control circuit for controlling the duration of time for which said pulse generator outputs the series of electrical pulses, and

an intensity control circuit for regulating the series electrical pulses such that the electrical current does not exceed a predetermined current or voltage value.

2. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 1, wherein said intensity control circuit regulates the series electrical pulses such that the electrical current does not exceed a predetermined current or voltage value.

3. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 1, wherein said predetermined current and voltage values vary in accordance with the patient's physical condition or tolerances.

4. An electrical neuromuscular stimulator for treating respiratory disorders, comprising:

at least one pulse generator for generating a series of electrical pulses;

a processor coupled to said at least one pulse generator for outputting operation control signals to said at least one pulse generator;

a switching network coupled to said at least one pulse generator and said processor, said switching network receiving the series of electrical pulses from said at least one pulse generator and outputting, responsive to switching control signals from said processor, the series of electrical pulses; and

an electrode array coupled to said switching network for applying the series of electrical pulses to tissue of at least one intercostal region of a patient.

5. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 4, wherein said electrode array generates electrical feedback signals in response to neuromuscular stimulation of the patient, the electrical feedback signals being provided to said processor via said switching network.

6. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 5, wherein, in response to the electrical feedback signals, said processor generates and stores test data.

7. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 4, wherein said switching network includes a buffer memory.

8. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 5, further comprising at least one physiological input device for providing physiological input signals to said processor, wherein said processor is responsive to the physiological inputs signals.

9. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 5, further comprising at least one non-physiological input device for providing non-physiological input signals to said processor, wherein said processor is responsive to the non-physiological inputs signals.

10. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 5, further comprising a programming device coupled to said processor.

11. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 8, further comprising a display device coupled to said processor.

12. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 4, further comprising a data/software interface device coupled to said processor.

13. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 4, wherein said electrode array comprises at least one bi-directional electrode.

14. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 4, wherein said electrode array comprises at least one unidirectional electrode.

15. A method of electrical neuromuscular stimulation for treating respiratory disorders, comprising the steps of:

generating a series of electrical pulses using a pulse generator comprising:

a frequency controller for modulating an electrical signal generated by the pulse generator at a predetermined frequency to produce the series of electrical pulses output by said pulse generator,

a duration control circuit for controlling the duration of time for which said pulse generator outputs the series of electrical pulses, and

an intensity control circuit for regulating the series electrical pulses such that the electrical current does not exceed a predetermined current or voltage value; and

applying the series of electrical pulses to tissue of at least one intercostal region of a patient using an electrode array.

16. A method of electrical neuromuscular stimulation for treating respiratory disorders, comprising the steps of:

generating a series of electrical pulses using at least one pulse generator;

generating operation control signals to control operation of said at least one pulse generator;

receiving the series of electrical pulses from said at least one pulse generator at a switching network;

generating switching control signals to control operation of said switching network;

outputting the series of electrical pulses from said switching network in accordance with said switching control signals;

applying the series of electrical pulses to tissue of a least one intercostal region of a patient using an electrode array;

generating electrical feedback signals in response to the application of the series of electrical pulses;

generating test data in response to the electrical feedback signals; and

modifying the operation control signals and switching control signals in response to the electrical feedback signals.

17. The method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation according to claim 16, further comprising the step of generating physiological input signals using at least one physiological input device; wherein the test data is generated in response to the electrical feedback signals and the physiological input signals; and wherein the operation control signals and switching control signals are responsive to the electrical feedback signals and the physiological inputs signals.

18. The method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation according to claim 16, further comprising the step of generating non-physiological input signals using at least one non-physiological input device; wherein the test data is generated in response to the electrical feedback signals and the non-physiological input signals; and wherein the operation control signals and switching control signals are responsive to the electrical feedback signals and the non-physiological inputs signals.

19. The method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation according to claim 17, further comprising the step of monitoring of the electrical feedback signals and the physiological input signals.

20. The method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation according to claim 18, further comprising the step of monitoring of the electrical feedback signals and the non-physiological input signals.

21. The method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation according to claim 16, further comprising the step of downloading the test data to a test data receiving device.

22. An electrical neuromuscular stimulator for treating oral motor neuromuscular disorders, comprising:

at least one electrode adapted to be selectively placed in electrical contact with tissue of an oral motor region of a patient; and

a pulse generator for generating a series of electrical pulses in electrical contact with said at least one electrode, wherein said pulse generator comprises

a frequency controller for modulating an electrical signal generated by the pulse generator at a predetermined frequency to produce the series of electrical pulses output by said pulse generator,

a duration control circuit for controlling the duration of time for which said pulse generator outputs the series of electrical pulses, and

an intensity control circuit for regulating the series electrical pulses such that the electrical current does not exceed a predetermined current or voltage value.

23. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 22, wherein said predetermined current and voltage values vary in accordance with the patient's physical condition or tolerances.

24. An electrical neuromuscular stimulator for treating oral motor neuromuscular disorders, comprising:

at least one pulse generator for generating a series of electrical pulses;

a processor coupled to said at least one pulse generator for outputting operation control signals to said at least one pulse generator;

a switching network coupled to said at least one pulse generator and said processor, said switching network receiving the series of electrical pulses from said at least one pulse generator and outputting, responsive to switching control signals from said processor, the series of electrical pulses; and

an electrode array coupled to said switching network for applying the series of electrical pulses to tissue of an oral motor region of a patient.

25. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 24, wherein said electrode array generates electrical feedback signals in response to the neuromuscular stimulation of the patient, the electrical feedback signals being provided to said processor via said switching network.

26. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 25, wherein, in response to the electrical feedback signals, said processor generates and stores test data.

27. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 24, wherein said switching network includes a buffer memory.

28. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 25, further comprising at least one physiological input device for providing physiological input signals to said processor, wherein said processor is responsive to the physiological inputs signals.

29. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 25, further comprising at least one non-physiological input device for providing non-physiological input signals to said processor, wherein said processor is responsive to the non-physiological inputs signals.

30. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 25, further comprising a programming device coupled to said processor for transmitting programming information and data to said processor.

31. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 28, further comprising a display device coupled to said processor for monitoring at least one of the electrical feedback signals, physiological input signals, test data, and operating status of said neuromuscular stimulator.

32. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 28, further comprising a display device coupled to said processor for monitoring at least one of the electrical feedback signals, non-physiological input signals, test data, and operating status of said neuromuscular stimulator.

33. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 24, further comprising a data/software interface device coupled to said processor for transmitting the test data.

34. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 24, wherein said electrode array comprises at least one bi-directional electrode.

35. The electrical neuromuscular stimulator according to claim 24, wherein said electrode array comprises at least one unidirectional electrode.

36. A method of electrical neuromuscular stimulation for treating oral motor neuromuscular disorders, comprising the steps of:

generating a series of electrical pulses using a pulse generator comprising:

a frequency controller for modulating an electrical signal generated by the pulse generator at a predetermined frequency to produce the series of electrical pulses output by said pulse generator,

a duration control circuit for controlling the duration of time for which said pulse generator outputs the series of electrical pulses, and

an intensity control circuit for regulating the series electrical pulses such that the electrical current does not exceed a predetermined current or voltage value; and

applying the series of electrical pulses to tissue of an oral motor region of a patient using an electrode array.

37. A method of electrical neuromuscular stimulation for treating oral motor neuromuscular disorders, comprising the steps of:

generating a series of electrical pulses using at least one pulse generator;

generating operation control signals to control operation of said at least one pulse generator;

receiving the series of electrical pulses from said at least one pulse generator at a switching network;

generating switching control signals to control operation of said switching network;

outputting the series of electrical pulses from said switching network in accordance with said switching control signals;

applying the series of electrical pulses to tissue of an oral motor region of a patient using an electrode array;

generating electrical feedback signals in response to the application of the series of electrical pulses;

generating test data in response to the electrical feedback signals; and

modifying the operation control signals and switching control signals in response to the electrical feedback signals.

38. The method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation according to claim 37, further comprising the step of generating physiological input signals using at least one physiological input device; wherein the test data is generated in response to the electrical feedback signals and the physiological input signals; and wherein the operation control signals and switching control signals are responsive to the electrical feedback signals and the physiological inputs signals.

39. The method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation according to claim 37, further comprising the step of generating non-physiological input signals using at least one non-physiological input device; wherein the test data is generated in response to the electrical feedback signals and the non-physiological input signals; and wherein the operation control signals and switching control signals are responsive to the electrical feedback signals and the non-physiological inputs signals.

40. The method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation according to claim 38, further comprising the step of monitoring of the electrical feedback signals and the physiological input signals.

41. The method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation according to claim 39, further comprising the step of monitoring of the electrical feedback signals and the non-physiological input signals.

42. The method for electrical neuromuscular stimulation according to claim 37, further comprising the step of downloading the test data to a test data receiving device.

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