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(54) **FLEX CIRCUIT SNAP TRACK FOR A BIOMETRIC SENSOR**

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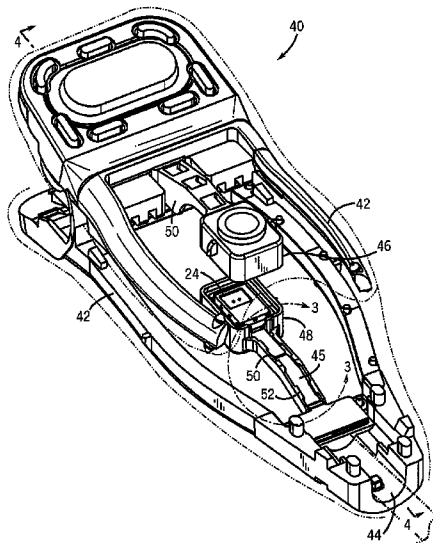
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present disclosure relates to a sensor assembly, comprising a frame comprising structural supports, and housings configured to house an optical component; and a strut disposed between one of the structural supports and housings; wherein the struts are adapted to house conductors connecting the optical component to a circuit.

5 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets



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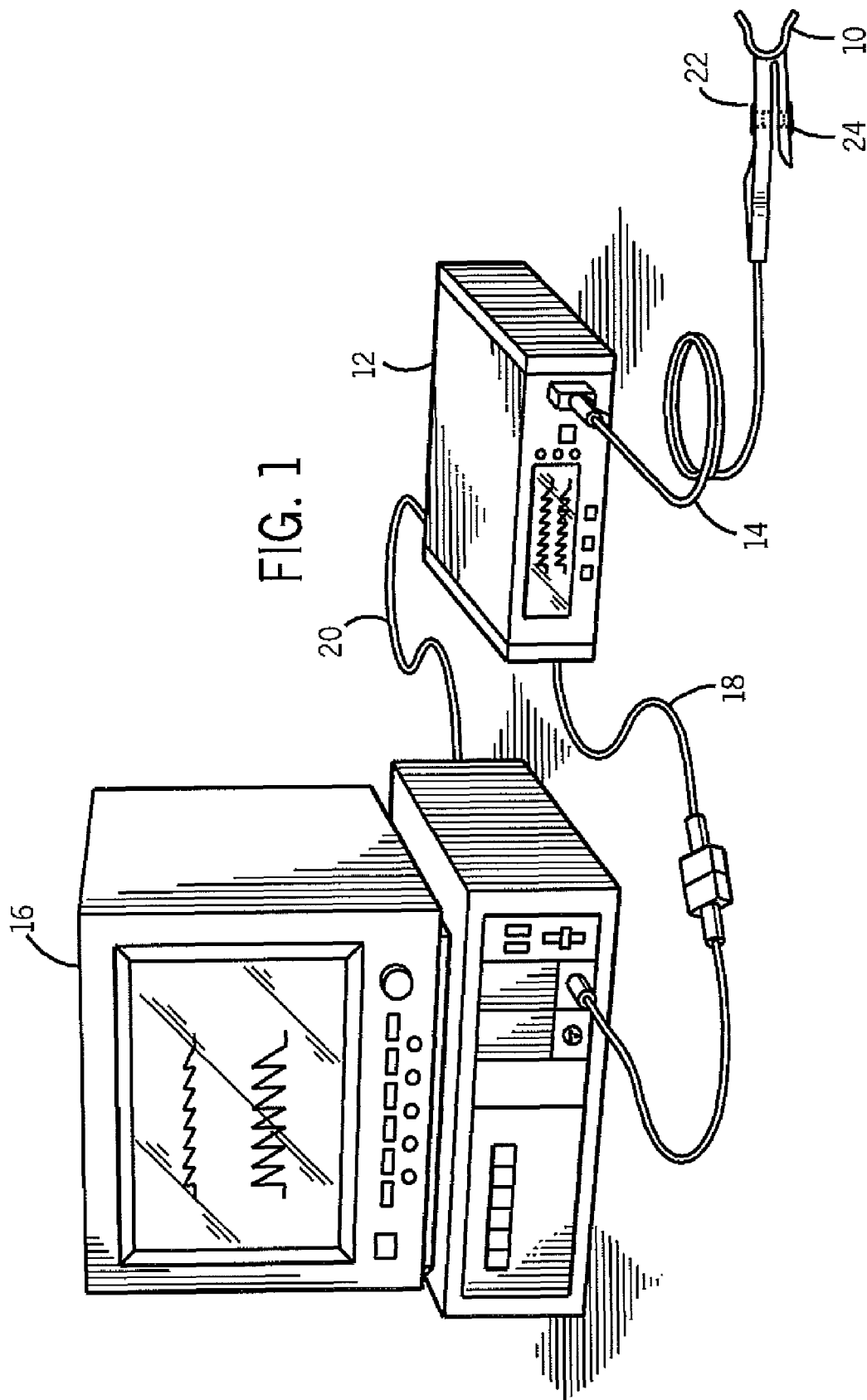
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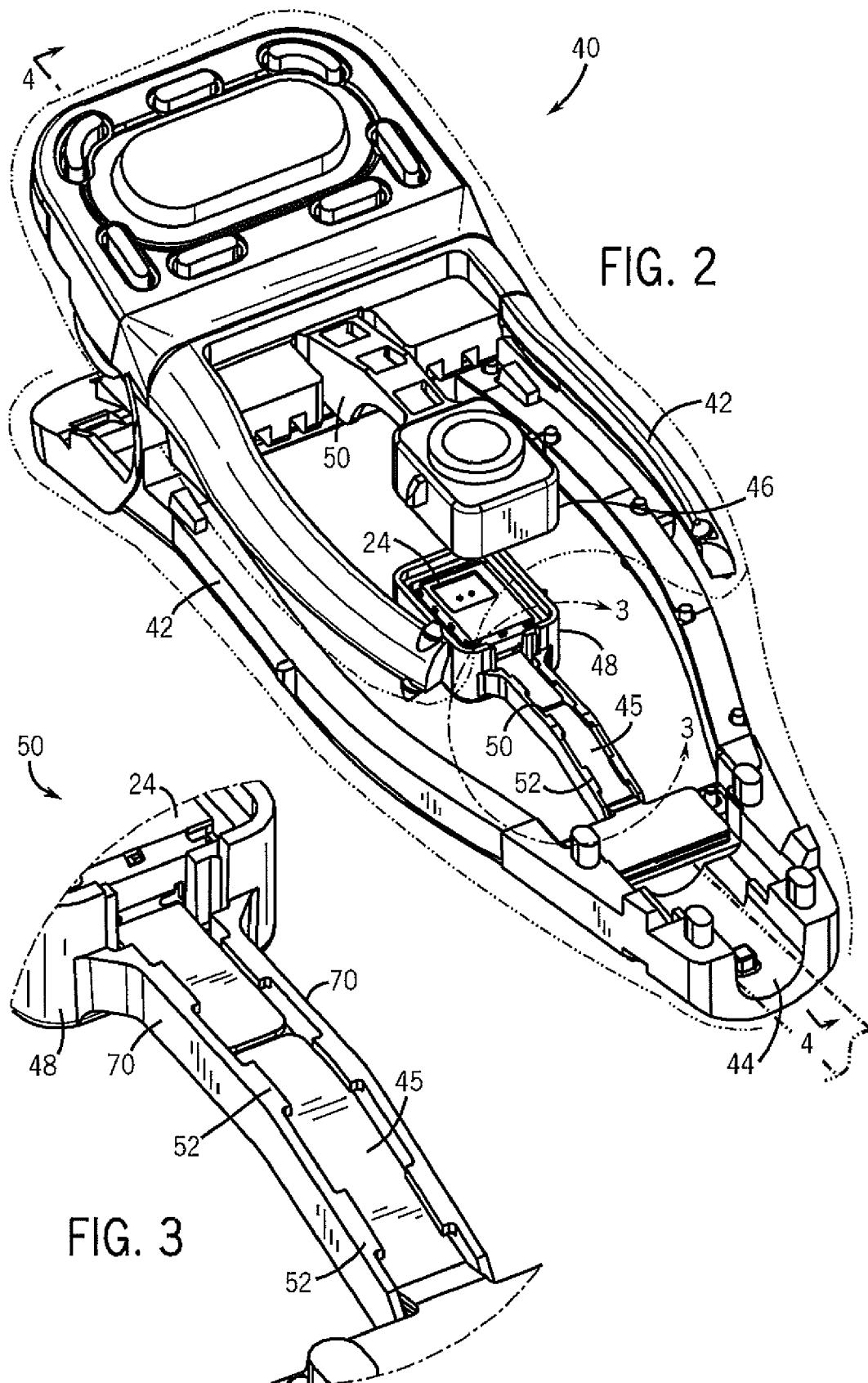
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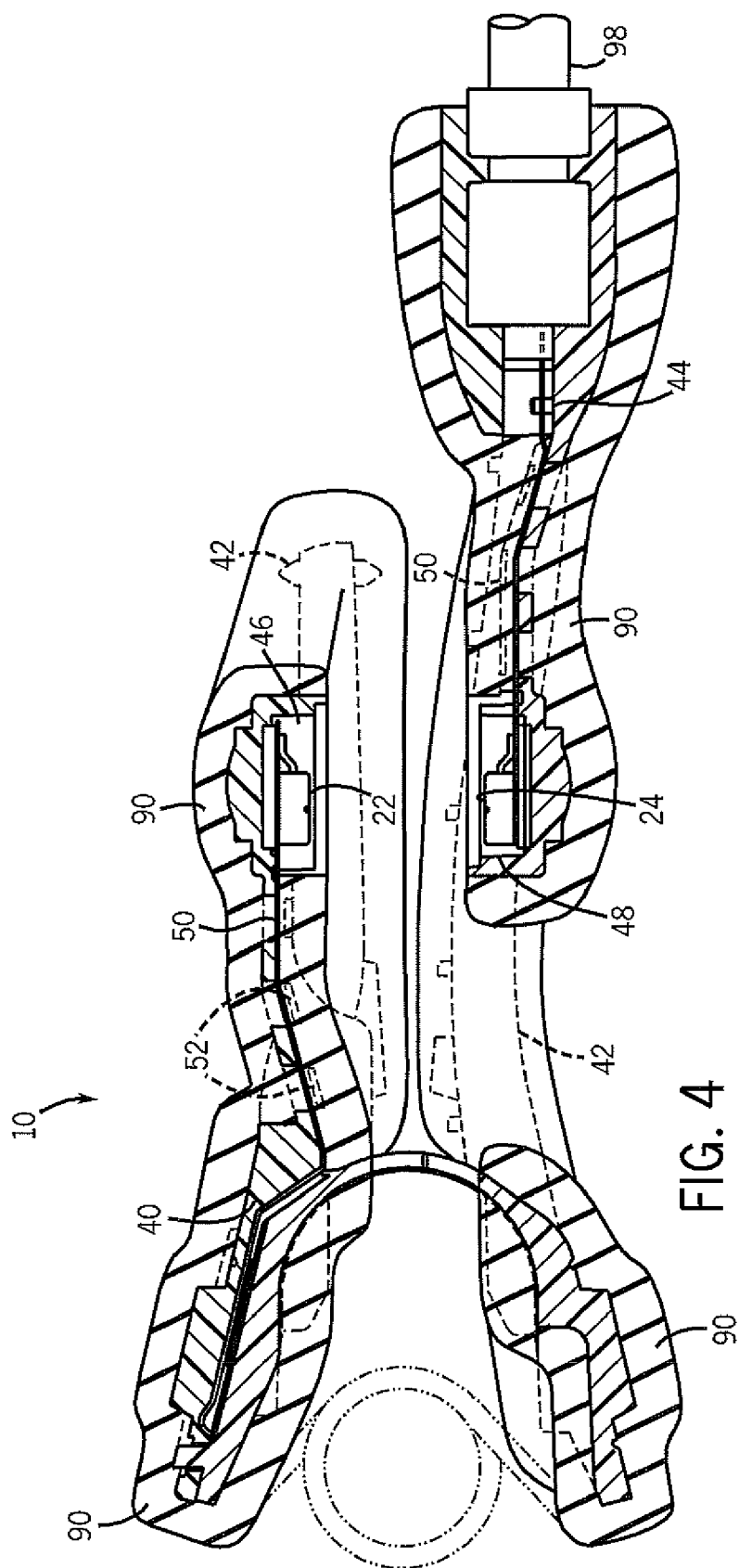
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FLEX CIRCUIT SNAP TRACK FOR A BIOMETRIC SENSOR

RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims priority from U.S. Patent Application No. 61/009,676 which was filed on Dec. 31, 2007 and is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

The present disclosure relates generally to medical devices and, more particularly, to sensors used for sensing physiological parameters of a patient.

This section is intended to introduce the reader to various aspects of art that may be related to various aspects of the present disclosure, which are described and/or claimed below. This discussion is believed to be helpful in providing the reader with background information to facilitate a better understanding of the various aspects of the present disclosure. Accordingly, it should be understood that these statements are to be read in this light, and not as admissions of prior art.

In the field of medicine, doctors often desire to monitor certain physiological characteristics of their patients. Accordingly, a wide variety of devices have been developed for monitoring physiological characteristics. Such devices provide doctors and other healthcare personnel with the information they need to provide the best possible healthcare for their patients. As a result, such monitoring devices have become an indispensable part of modern medicine.

One technique for monitoring certain physiological characteristics of a patient is commonly referred to as pulse oximetry, and the devices built based upon pulse oximetry techniques are commonly referred to as pulse oximeters. Pulse oximetry may be used to measure various blood flow characteristics, such as the blood-oxygen saturation of hemoglobin in arterial blood, the volume of individual blood pulsations supplying the tissue, and/or the rate of blood pulsations corresponding to each heartbeat of a patient.

Pulse oximeters typically utilize a non-invasive sensor that is placed on or against a patient's tissue that is well perfused with blood, such as a patient's finger, toe, forehead or earlobe. The pulse oximeter sensor emits light and photoelectrically senses the absorption and/or scattering of the light after passage through the perfused tissue. The data collected by the sensor may then be used to calculate one or more of the above physiological characteristics based upon the absorption or scattering of the light. More specifically, the emitted light is typically selected to be of one or more wavelengths that are absorbed or scattered in an amount related to the presence of oxygenated versus de-oxygenated hemoglobin in the blood. The amount of light absorbed and/or scattered may then be used to estimate the amount of the oxygen in the tissue using various algorithms.

Pulse oximetry sensors may include a flex circuit that electrically connects various electrical components of the sensor. For example, components of the flex circuit may include an optical emitter, such as an LED, a photodetector and wires forming conductors which electrically connect the sensor components and/or allow connection of the sensor components to a pulse oximeter monitor. During fabrication of such a sensor, various aspects of the manufacturing process may place mechanical stresses upon the flex circuit or the attached components such that the circuit and/or components are moved from their desired positions, resulting in a sensor being fabricated in which the flex circuit and/or electrical

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components are displaced and/or misaligned with respect to the remainder of the sensor body, potentially rendering the sensor unusable.

SUMMARY

Certain aspects commensurate in scope with the disclosure are set forth below. It should be understood that these aspects are presented merely to provide the reader with a brief summary of embodiments and that these aspects are not intended to limit the scope of the disclosure. Indeed, the disclosure may encompass a variety of aspects that may not be set forth below.

In an embodiment, there is provided a sensor frame. The sensor frame includes a frame body configured to house one or more optical components. The sensor body further includes one or more retaining features provided on the frame body, such that the one or more retaining features are configured to limit the movement of a flex circuit electrically connected to the one or more optical components.

In an embodiment, there is provided a sensor assembly. The sensor assembly includes a light emitting component and a photodetecting component. The sensor assembly further comprise a flex circuit connecting at least the light emitting component and the light detecting component, and a frame comprising one or more retaining features configured to restrict movement of at least part of the flex circuit.

In an embodiment there is provided a method for manufacturing a sensor. The method includes positioning a flex circuit on a frame such that retaining features on at least part of the frame restrict the motion of the flex circuit. The method further includes the act of coating the frame.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Advantages of the disclosure may become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and upon reference to the drawings in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates a patient monitoring system coupled to a multi-parameter patient monitor and a sensor; in accordance with an embodiment;

FIG. 2 illustrates a perspective view of an internal frame for use in a patient sensor, in accordance with an embodiment;

FIG. 3 illustrates a blow-up view of the internal frame of FIG. 2, in accordance with an embodiment; and

FIG. 4 illustrates a cross section view of an overmolded patient sensor, in accordance with an embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

Various embodiments of the present disclosure will be described below. In an effort to provide a concise description of these embodiments, not all features of an actual implementation are described in the specification. It should be appreciated that in the development of any such actual implementation, as in any engineering or design project, numerous implementation-specific decisions must be made to achieve the developers' specific goals, such as compliance with system-related and business-related constraints, which may vary from one implementation to another. Moreover, it should be appreciated that such a development effort might be complex and time consuming, but would nevertheless be a routine undertaking of design, fabrication, and manufacture for those of ordinary skill having the benefit of this disclosure.

In various embodiments, methods and systems for securing a flex circuit during a sensor fabrication process may be

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described. In one embodiment, the flex circuit is secured within a corresponding flex circuit track of a sensor frame. In such an embodiment, the sensor frame may be overmolded or otherwise used in the further construction of a sensor, such as a pulse oximetry sensor, without the flex circuit or attached electrical components becoming displaced or misaligned.

Prior to discussing embodiments of sensors in detail, it should be appreciated that such sensors are typically designed for use with a patient monitoring system. In various embodiments, referring now to FIG. 1, a sensor 10 according to the present disclosure may be used in conjunction with a patient monitor 12. In the depicted embodiment a cable 14 connects the sensor 10 to the patient monitor 12. As will be appreciated, the sensor 10 and/or the cable 14 may include or incorporate one or more integrated circuit devices or electrical devices, such as a memory, processor chip, or resistor, that may facilitate or enhance communication between the sensor 10 and the patient monitor 12. Likewise the cable 14 may be an adaptor cable, with or without an integrated circuit or electrical device, for facilitating communication between the sensor 10 and various types of monitors, including older or newer versions of the patient monitor 12 or other physiological monitors.

In other embodiments, the sensor 10 and the patient monitor 12 may communicate via wireless means, such as using radio, infrared, or optical signals. In such embodiments, a transmission device (not shown) may be connected to the sensor 10 to facilitate wireless transmission between the sensor 10 and the patient monitor 12. As will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art, the cable 14 (or corresponding wireless transmissions) are typically used to transmit control or timing signals from the monitor 12 to the sensor 10 and/or to transmit acquired data from the sensor 10 to the monitor 12. In some embodiments, however, the cable 14 may be an optical fiber that allows optical signals to be conducted between the monitor 12 and the sensor 10.

In an embodiment, the patient monitor 12 may be a suitable pulse oximeter, such as those available from Nellcor Puritan Bennett LLC. In other embodiments, the patient monitor 12 may be a monitor suitable for measuring tissue water fractions, or other body fluid related metrics, using spectrophotometric or other techniques. Furthermore, the monitor 12 may be a multi-purpose monitor suitable for performing pulse oximetry and measurement of tissue water fraction, or other combinations of physiological and/or biochemical monitoring processes, using data acquired via the sensor 10. Furthermore, to upgrade conventional monitoring functions provided by the monitor 12 to provide additional functions, the patient monitor 12 may be coupled to a multi-parameter patient monitor 16 via a cable 18 connected to a sensor input port and/or via a cable 20 connected to a digital communication port.

The sensor 10, in the example depicted in FIG. 1, is a clip-style sensor that is overmolded to provide a generally unitary or enclosed assembly. In various embodiments, the sensor 10 may include an emitter 22 and a detector 24 which may be of any suitable type. For example, the emitter 22 may be one or more light emitting diodes adapted to transmit one or more wavelengths of light, such as in the red to infrared range, and the detector 24 may be a photodetector, such as a silicon photodiode package, selected to receive light in the range emitted from the emitter 22. In the depicted embodiment, the sensor 10 is coupled to a cable 14 that is responsible for transmitting electrical and/or optical signals to and from the emitter 22 and detector 24 of the sensor 10. The cable 14 may be permanently coupled to the sensor 10, or it may be

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removably coupled to the sensor 10—the latter alternative being more useful and cost efficient in situations where the sensor 10 is disposable.

For pulse oximetry embodiments, the oxygen saturation of the patient's arterial blood may be determined using two or more wavelengths of light, most commonly red and near infrared wavelengths. Similarly, in other embodiments a tissue water fraction (or other body fluid related metric) or a concentration of one or more biochemical components in an aqueous environment may be measured using two or more wavelengths of light, most commonly near infrared wavelengths between about 1,000 nm to about 2,500 nm. It should be understood that, as used herein, the term "light" may refer to one or more of infrared, visible, ultraviolet, or even X-ray electromagnetic radiation, and may also include any wavelength within the infrared, visible, ultraviolet, or X-ray spectra.

In various embodiments, the overmolded sensor 10 discussed herein may be configured for either transmission or reflectance type sensing. Furthermore, the sensor 10 may include various structural and functional features designed to facilitate its use. An example of such a sensor and its use and construction may be found in U.S. application Ser. No. 11/199,524 titled "Medical Sensor and Technique for Using the Same" and filed on Aug. 8, 2005, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety for all purposes. As will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art, however, such discussion is merely an example and is not intended to limit the scope of the present disclosure.

Referring now to FIG. 2, an internal frame 40 of the sensor 10 is depicted in accordance with an embodiment. In the depicted example, the internal frame 40 is a skeletal frame for the sensor 10. In certain embodiments, the internal frame 40 may be constructed, in whole or in part, from polymeric materials, such as thermoplastics, capable of providing a suitable rigidity or semi-rigidity for the different portions of the internal frame 40. Examples of such suitable materials may include polypropylene and nylon, though other polymeric materials may also be suitable. For example, in one embodiment, the internal frame 40 is constructed from polyurethane having a durometer of 65 Shore D. In other embodiments, the internal frame 40 may be constructed, in whole or in part, from other suitably rigid or semi-rigid materials, such as stainless steel, aluminum, magnesium, graphite, fiberglass, or other metals, alloys, or compositions that are sufficiently ductile and/or strong. For example, metals, alloys, or compositions that are suitable for diecasting, sintering, lost wax casting, stamping and forming, and other metal or composition fabrication processes may be used to construct the internal frame 40.

In various embodiments, the internal frame 40 may be constructed as an integral structure or as a composite structure. For example, in one embodiment, the internal frame 40 may be constructed as a single piece from a single material or from different materials. Alternatively, the internal frame 40 may be constructed or assembled from two or more parts that are separately formed. In such embodiments, the different parts may be formed from the same or different materials. For example, in implementations where different parts are formed from different materials, each part may be constructed from a material having suitable mechanical and/or chemical properties for that part. The different parts may then be joined or fitted together to form the internal frame 40.

In various embodiments, the internal frame 40 may include different structures or regions that may or may not have similar rigidities. For example, the depicted skeletal frame includes top and bottom structural supports 42 that define the

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general shape of the sensor 10 when coated with an overmolding. In view of their structure providing function, the structural supports 42 may be constructed to be substantially rigid or semi-rigid. In addition, the skeletal frame may include a cable guide 44 through which a cable, such as an electrical or optical cable, may pass to connect to electrical or optical conductors formed on a flex circuit 45 attached to the emitter 22 and/or detector 24 upon assembly. For example, in one embodiment the emitter 22 and/or detector 24 and associated conductors may form components of the flex circuit 45 disposed on the frame 40.

In addition, in the depicted embodiment, the internal frame 40 may include component housings, such as the emitter housing 46 and detector housing 48, as well as one or more retaining features, such as struts 50 configured to couple such housings to the remainder of the frame 40. In one embodiment, such housings 46, 48 and struts 50, along with other components as discussed herein, may form a flex circuit track configured to secure and support the flex circuit on the frame 40.

For example, FIG. 3 (taken along circular region 3 in FIG. 2) is a blow-up view of one of the retaining features, i.e., struts 50, capable of securing a flex circuit 45. In this embodiment, the depicted strut 50 is adapted to secure the flex circuit 45 that electrically connects the detector 24, housed in detector housing 48, to additional elements of the flex circuit 45. In the depicted embodiment of FIG. 3, side panels 70 are depicted that extend along the outer edges of the strut 50, defining its outer boundaries. Disposed on the upper edge of the side panels 70 are tabs 52, extending inward from the side panels 70.

As will be appreciated, the flex circuit 45 may be placed in the track formed by the sidewalls 70 and the tabs 52 by snap fitting, i.e., applying pressure to the flex circuit 45 such that the flex circuit 45 bends or gives sufficiently along its edges to allow the flex circuit 45 to move past the tabs 52. Therefore, the tabs 52 may be sized such that the flexibility of the flex circuit 45 is sufficient to allow the flex circuit 45 to be pressed or snap fit past the tabs 52. Alternatively, the flex circuit 45 may be tilted or angled to facilitate moving the flex circuit 45 past the tabs 52 initially.

In the illustrated embodiment, the tabs 52 are flush with the upper surface of the side panel 70 and have a thickness that is equal to or less than the thickness of the side panels 70 and/or the one or more retaining features, i.e., the strut 50. As will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art, in other embodiments the thickness and placement of the tabs 52 may vary. For example, in the illustrated embodiment the tabs 52 are disposed periodically along the side panels 70 and the tabs 52 are of similar or equal length. However, in other embodiments the lengths of the tabs 52 may vary depending on their placement along the side panels 70. Likewise, the tabs need not be spaced regularly or periodically, but may instead be placed to at locations on the strut 50 where they will be suitably effective at retaining the flex circuit 45 on the strut 50.

In various embodiments, the inward extension of the tabs 52 from the side panels 70 facilitates maintaining the flex circuit 45 on the retaining feature, i.e., strut 50, particularly during fabrication steps which might otherwise move or displace the flex circuit 45 from the frame 40. For example, in one embodiment, the tabs 52 and/or sidewalls 70 act to prevent the pressures arising during an overmolding process from dislodging the flex circuit 45 from the struts 50. In such an implementation, the depicted tabs 52 and sidewalls 70 of the internal frame 40 may help prevent the flex circuit 45 from

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being displaced by the high pressures when overmolding material is injected or cast onto the frame 40.

During such overmolding processes, the internal frame 40 may be positioned within a die or mold of the desired shape for the sensor 10. In one embodiment, a molten or otherwise unset overmold material may then be injected into the die or mold. Such injection may be done such that the overmolding material enters the die or mold at high speed subjecting the frame 40 to high pressures and strains. Accordingly, the retaining features (i.e., the sidewalls 70 and/or the tabs 52) of the struts 50 ensure that the flex circuit 45 remains properly oriented on the frame 40 during the overmolding process. Likewise, in some embodiments, the overmold material may be injected in to the mold at high temperatures, such as between about 400° F. to about 450° F. In such embodiments, the overmold material may then be set, such as by cooling for one or more minutes or by chemical treatment, to form the sensor body about the internal frame 40. Such an overmolding process may result in thermal expansions and contractions of the frame 40 and surrounding overmolding material. Accordingly, any potential movement and/or misalignment of the flex circuit 45 relative to the frame 40 can be mitigated or prevented by the retaining features of the struts 50 which secure the flex circuit 45 to the frame 40.

As will be appreciated, the injection molding process described herein is merely one technique by which the frame 40 may be coated to form a sensor body, with or without associated sensing components. Other techniques which may be employed include, but are not limited to, dipping the frame 40 into a molten or otherwise unset coating material to coat the frame 40 or spraying the frame 40 with a molten or otherwise unset coating material to coat the frame 40. In such implementations, the coating material may be subsequently set, such as by cooling or chemical means, to form the coating. Such alternative techniques, to the extent that they may result in the movement of the flex circuit 45 away from the frame 40, may also benefit from the use of the tabs 52 and/or sidewalls 70 on the frame 40, as described herein.

Turning now to FIG. 4, a cross-sectional view of the sensor 10 taken along line 4 of FIG. 2 is depicted in accordance with an embodiment. The figure depicts the sensor 10 coated with overmolding 90 covering the skeletal frame 40. In one embodiment, the overmolding 90 of the sensor 10 may be formed by an injection molding process, as described herein. Likewise, in certain embodiments, the frame 40 is coated to form a unitary or integral sensor assembly, as depicted in FIG. 4. Such an overmolded embodiment may result in a sensor assembly in which the internal frame 40 is completely or substantially coated.

In various embodiments, various overmolding processes of the sensor 10 may subject the flex circuit 45 to stresses and pressures such that the flex circuit 45 may dislodge from its designated position within the frame 40 and/or become damaged as a result of the overmolding process. Accordingly, the retaining features, such as the struts 50, may retain the flex circuit 45 on the frame 40 so that the overmolded sensor 10, such as the one shown in FIG. 4, may securely house the flex circuit 45 and components connected thereto.

Furthering the embodiment depicted in FIG. 4, a cable 98 may be disposed along cable guide 44 of the sensor 10 to connect the flex circuit 45 of the sensor 10 to an external device, such as the monitor 12 of FIG. 1, for use of the sensor 10. The cable 98 may join the flex circuit 45 at contact points disposed within the sensor 10. In the illustrated embodiment, the cable 98 is partially coated with the overmolding 90 so that it is securely affixed to the sensor 10.

While the medical sensors 10 discussed herein are some examples of overmolded or coated medical devices, other such devices are also contemplated and fall within the scope of the present disclosure. For example, other medical sensors and/or contacts applied externally to a patient may be advantageously applied using an overmolded sensor body having flex circuitry retaining features as discussed herein. For example, devices for measuring tissue water fraction or other body fluid related metrics may utilize a sensor as described herein. Likewise, other spectrophotometric applications where a probe is attached to a patient may utilize a sensor as described herein.

While the disclosure may be susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments have been shown by way of example in the drawings and have been described in detail herein. However, it should be understood that the disclosure is not intended to be limited to the particular forms disclosed. Rather, the disclosure is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the disclosure as defined by the following appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A sensor frame, comprising:

a rigid or semi-rigid frame body capable of housing one or more optical components; and

one or more retaining features provided on the frame body, wherein the one or more retaining features are disposed along a substantially continuous length of the frame body corresponding to substantially the entire length of a flex circuit and wherein the one or more retaining features generally limit movement along the length of the flex circuit relative to the frame body.

2. The sensor frame of claim 1, wherein the one or more retaining features comprise a pair of sidewalls disposed along at least a portion of the frame body.

3. The sensor frame of claim 2, wherein the one or more retaining features comprise the pair of sidewalls with two or more tabs disposed thereon.

4. The sensor frame of claim 1, wherein the frame body has a durometer of at least 65 Shore D.

5. The sensor frame of claim 1, wherein the frame body comprises polypropylene, nylon, polyurethane, stainless steel, aluminum, magnesium, graphite, fiberglass, or other metal alloy.

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