

【 図 1 】

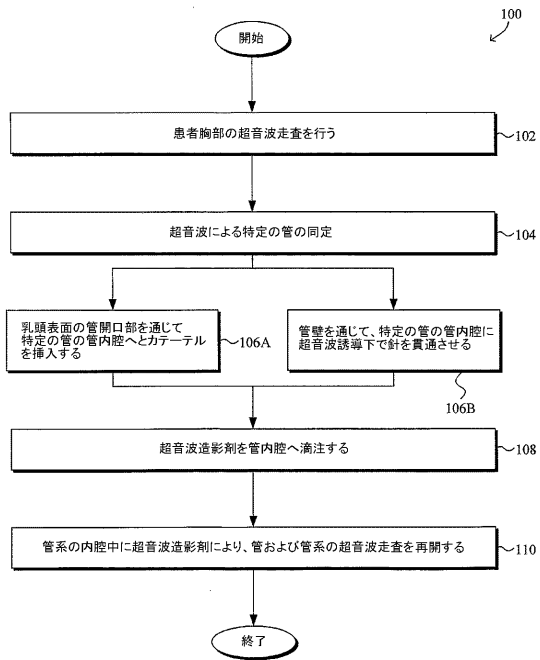


FIG. 1

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TR), OAPI patent (BI, BJ, CI, CG, CL, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NI, SN, TD, TG). *For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.*

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An ultrasound examination of the internal breast anatomy as described in U.S. Patent No. 5,709,206 to Teboul, incorporated by reference herein, can be utilized to study the lesion and its relation to the lobe in which it is contained. By using axial ductal ultrasound scanning, identification of the affected lobe, lesion size, position within the lobe, and the possibility of other lesions within the affected lobe (e.g. multifocal cancer), and/or spread within the ducts can be delineated prior to surgical treatment.

Duct systems and small lesions within the duct system may be difficult to identify due to limitations of resolution of the ultrasound machine. Thus, there is a need for an improved method for ultrasound imaging of breast tissue to better image one or more ducts within a specified lobe of the breast to improve characterization of lesion or lesions within the duct system of the specified lobe. The improved method for ultrasound imaging would ideally facilitate more accurate diagnosis and surgical excision of lesion or lesions within the duct system of the specified lobe.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A system and method for ultrasound imaging of breast tissue by injecting an ultrasound contrast agent into a duct lumen of a patient's breast to enhance the imaging of one or more ducts within a specified lobe of the breast to improve characterization of a lesion or lesions within the duct system of the specified lobe are disclosed. It should be appreciated that the present invention can be implemented in numerous ways, including as a process, an apparatus, a system, a device, or a method. Several inventive embodiments of the present invention are described below.

In one preferred embodiment, an improved method for ultrasound imaging of breast tissue using an ultrasound contrast agent to enhance the imaging of one or more ducts within a specified lobe of the breast to improve characterization of a lesion or lesions within the duct system of the specified lobe is disclosed. The method may help determine whether removal of the lesion requires excision of part of the lobe, the entire lobe, or the entire lobe plus surrounding adjacent tissue. The ultrasound contrast agent is injected into a duct lumen by injecting through a duct orifice on a nipple and/or through a duct wall into a duct lumen. In addition, the ultrasound contrast agent is injected into the duct lumen before and/or during ultrasound imaging.

These and other features and advantages of the present invention will be presented in more detail in the following detailed description and the accompanying figures which illustrate by way of example the principles of the invention.

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is particularly effective in providing precise control during the excision of a lesion or abnormality in breast tissue with minimal invasiveness.

It is to be understood that various other features may be provided in the tissue severing device. For example, locking mechanisms may be provided to ensure a greater degree of control
5 over the spatial relationship between the cutting tool and the guide. In addition, the device may be manually, automatically, and/or remotely controlled.

All patents, patent applications, and publications referenced herein are hereby incorporated by reference in their entireties.

While the preferred embodiments of the present invention are described and illustrated
10 herein, it will be appreciated that they are merely illustrative and that modifications can be made to these embodiments without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Thus, the invention is intended to be defined only in terms of the following claims.

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CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. In a method for ultrasound imaging of breast tissue, the improvement which comprises injecting an ultrasound contrast agent into a duct lumen of a human patient's breast.
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2. The method of claim 1, wherein the ultrasound contrast agent is injected into the duct lumen through at least one of an orifice on the nipple and a duct wall into the duct lumen.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the ultrasound contrast agent is injected at least
10 one of prior to and during ultrasound imaging.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the ultrasound contrast agent is an acoustically detectable gas.
- 15 5. The method of claim 4, wherein the acoustically detectable gas is a halogenated hydrocarbon.
6. The method of claim 4, wherein the acoustically detectable gas is selected from the group consisting of halogenated alkane gases, nitrogen, helium, argon and xenon.
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7. The method of claim 6, wherein the halogenated alkane gas is a perfluorinated hydrocarbon selected from the group consisting of saturated perfluorocarbon, an unsaturated perfluorocarbon, and a cyclic perfluorocarbon.
- 25 8. The method of claim 4, wherein the acoustically detectable gas is mixed in a liquid solution.

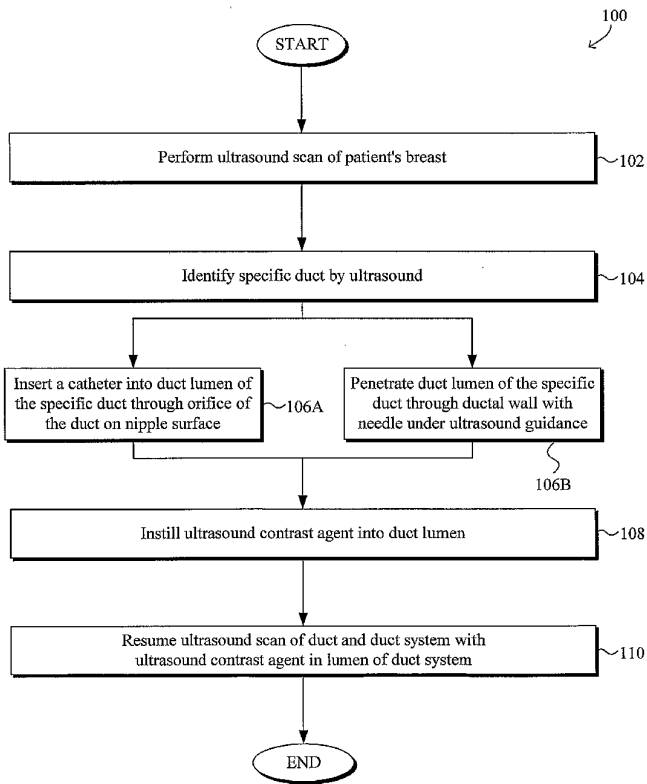


FIG. 1

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