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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR AN INJECTION USING A SYRINGE NEEDLE**

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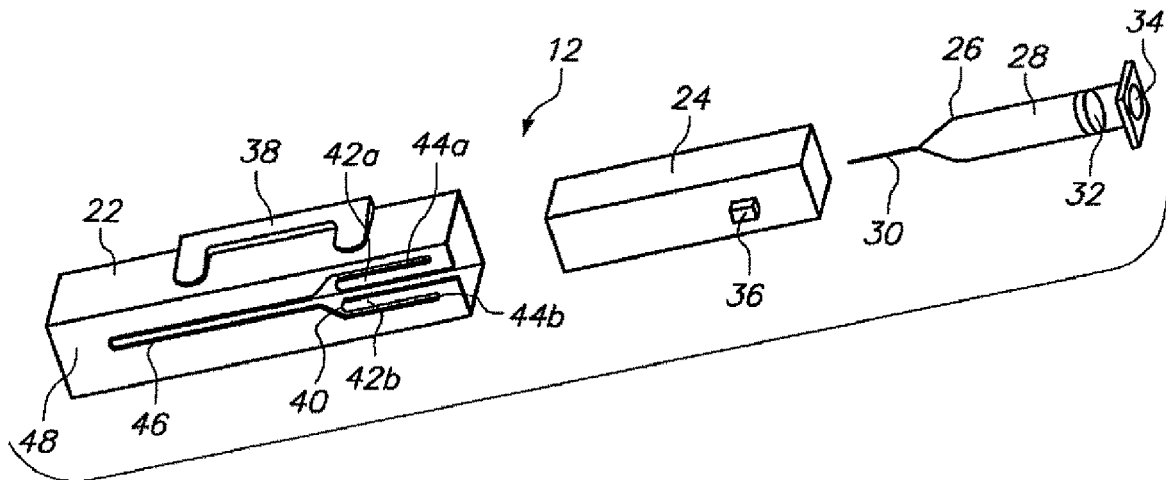
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An auto-injector for injecting a fluid medicament into a patient from a pre-filled syringe requires a disposable cassette that is selectively engageable with the reusable injector. The syringe is latched onto the cassette, and the cassette is then engaged with the injector. Activation of the injector causes a first motor to move the syringe so its needle is extended from a concealed position inside the cassette for injection of the medicament. A second motor on the injector is then activated to expel fluid medicament from the syringe. Then, the first motor is again activated to withdraw the syringe into the cassette for disposal of the cassette/syringe after an injection.

8 Claims, 2 Drawing Sheets



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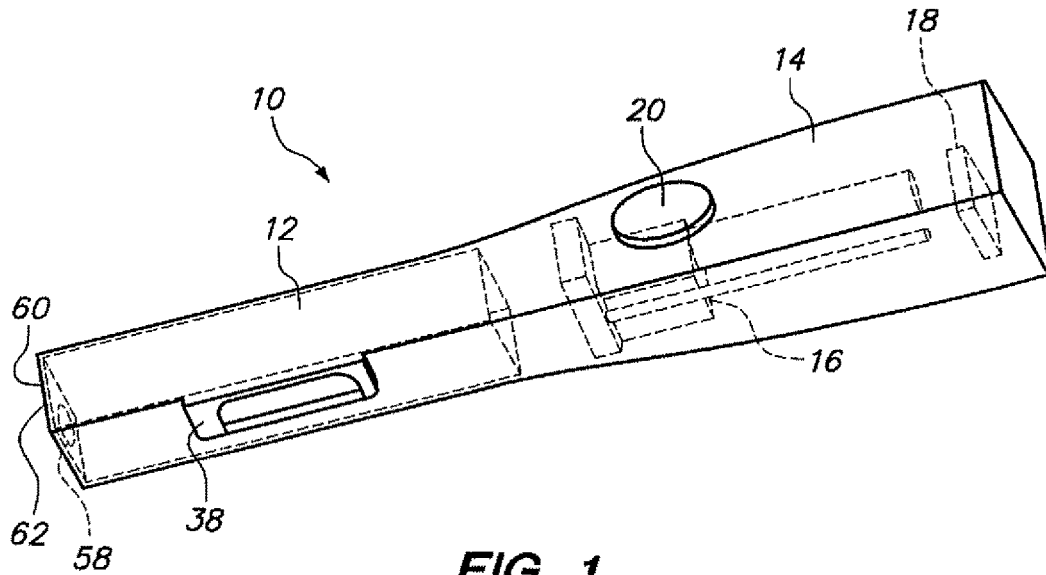


FIG. 1

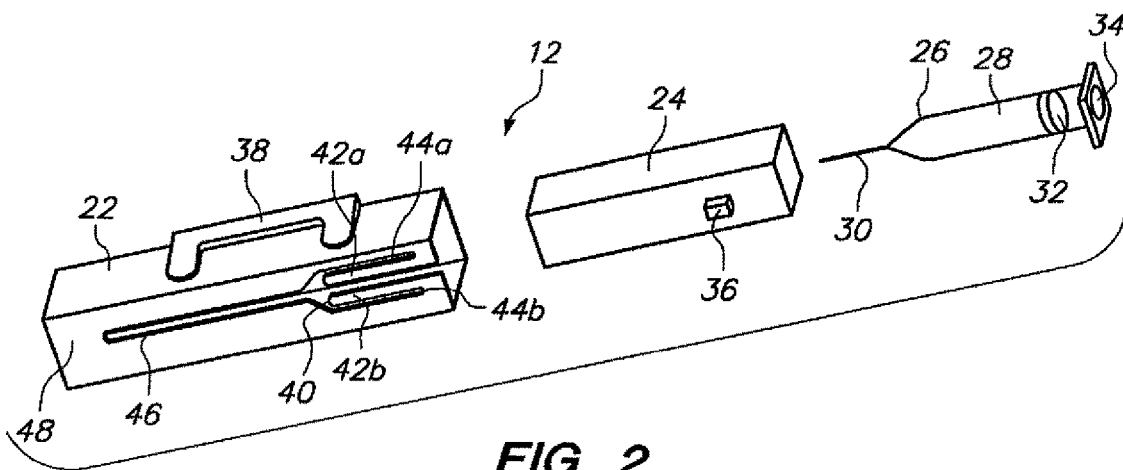


FIG. 2

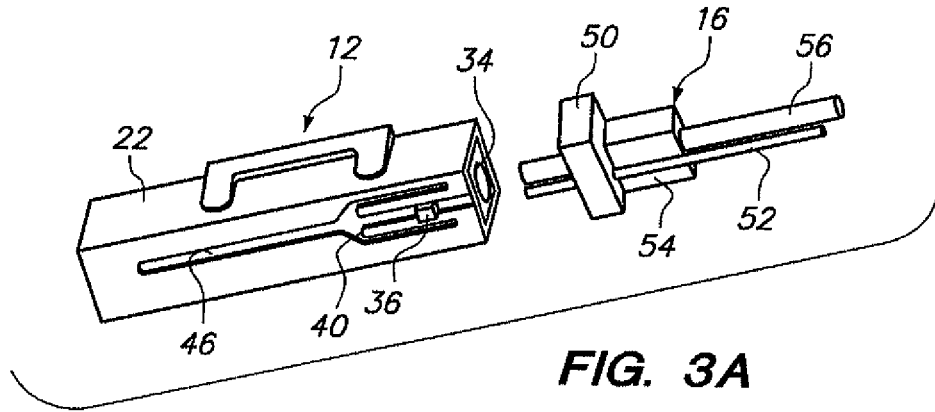


FIG. 3A

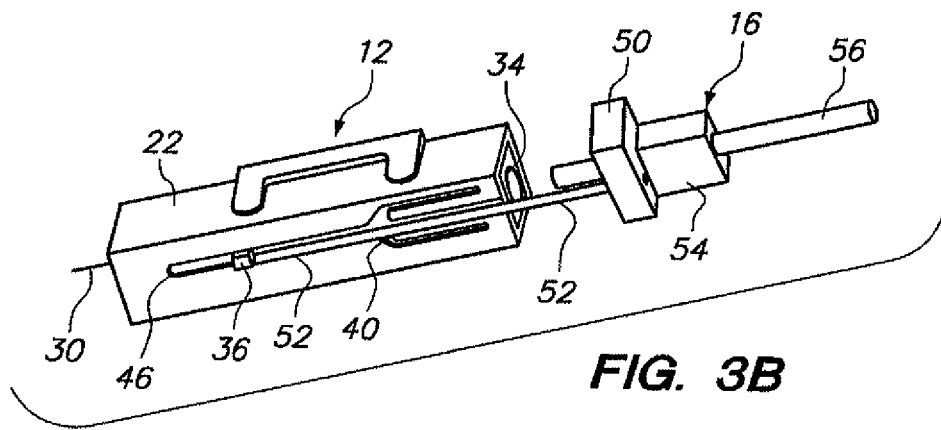


FIG. 3B

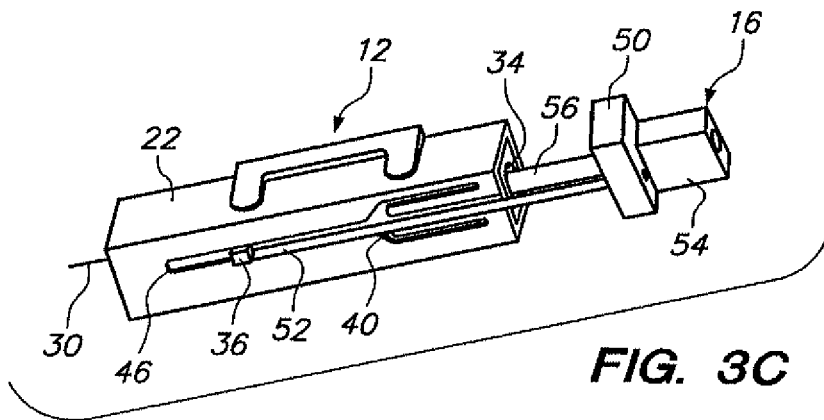


FIG. 3C

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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR AN INJECTION USING A SYRINGE NEEDLE

RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation of co-pending U.S. application Ser. No. 12/178,447, filed on Jul. 23, 2008. The entire disclosure of the application is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention pertains generally to systems and methods for injecting fluid medicaments into a patient from a syringe. More particularly, the present invention pertains to auto-injectors that conceal the injection needle of a hypodermic syringe before, and after an injection. The present invention is particularly, but not exclusively, useful as a system and method that employs a bifurcated drive mechanism wherein one motor moves the entire syringe for an injection, and another motor moves the syringe plunger for expelling a fluid medicament from the syringe.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In order to inject a fluid medicament into a patient when using a hypodermic syringe, three separate and distinct tasks must be performed. These are: 1) insertion of the needle into the patient; 2) injection of the fluid medicament from the syringe into the patient; and 3) withdrawal of the needle after the injection has been completed. For each task, the magnitude and direction of forces on the syringe, as well as the location of their application, are different from the other tasks. For instance, compare the task of inserting the needle, with the task of injecting the fluid medicament. Insertion of the needle requires that only minimal forces be applied on the syringe, and that they be applied for only a very short period of time. On the other hand, injection of the medicament requires a much greater force be applied. Further, this force must be applied on the plunger of the syringe for what will typically be a relatively longer period of time. In comparison with both of these tasks, needle withdrawal requires the application of a force in the opposite direction. These, and other similar considerations, become important when the injection process is to be automated.

Springs for generating forces on a syringe in an automated process have been used heretofore for various purposes. A characteristic of springs, however, is that the magnitude and direction of a spring force are not variable. Consequently, springs do not lend themselves for so-called "multi-tasking" operations. This is particularly so where precise control over a syringe injection operation is required, and different magnitude forces are sequentially required in the same direction (e.g. needle insertion and medicament injection).

In addition to the mechanical considerations mentioned above, the design of an auto-injector also requires "user-friendly" considerations. In particular, it is desirable that the injection needle of a syringe be operationally concealed from the view of a user. Preferably, this concealment can be maintained before, during and after an injection procedure. Further, it is desirable that operation of the syringe be limited to only those times when the syringe is properly positioned for an injection.

In light of the above, it is an object of the present invention to provide a two-motor device for performing the injection of a fluid medicament into a patient wherein each motor generates different forces on a hypodermic syringe for

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different purposes. Another object of the present invention is to provide a reusable injector that can be operationally engaged with a disposable, pre-filled syringe. Still another object of the present invention is to provide an auto-injector system wherein the needle of a pre-filled syringe is operationally concealed and the system is operable only when the injector is properly positioned against the skin of a patient for an injection. Another object of the present invention is to provide a system and a method for automatically injecting a fluid medicament from a pre-filled syringe that is relatively simple to manufacture, is easy to use and is comparatively cost effective.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with the present invention an autoinjector system includes a disposable cassette that operates in combination with a reusable injector. Prior to an engagement of the cassette with the injector, however, a pre-filled syringe is mounted and latched onto the cassette. When latched, the syringe is held on the cassette in a so-called "home position". For the present invention, this pre-filled syringe may be of any type syringe wellknown in the pertinent art that has a fluid chamber with an injection needle at its distal end, and a plunger that can be advanced into the fluid chamber. When the cassette, with syringe, is engaged with the injector, the system is ready for use.

Operation of the system of the present invention requires two separate motors that are individually mounted on the injector. Though they are mechanically independent of each other, the respective operations of these two motors must be coordinated. Specifically, a first motor is used to effect movements of the entire syringe assembly (i.e. syringe chamber, injection needle and plunger are all moved together). On the other hand, a second motor is employed to advance the plunger into the fluid chamber for performing an injection of a fluid medicament.

In a duty cycle of the system, the first motor moves a drive rod into engagement with the syringe. With this engagement, the drive rod also releases the latch that otherwise holds the syringe in its "home position." After the syringe has been released, the first motor then advances the syringe in a distal direction on the cassette. This movement inserts the injection needle into a patient. Further, the first motor can be used to abruptly stop the needle when a specified needle depth has been achieved. The first motor can then be used to help stabilize the needle during an injection of the medical medicament from the syringe.

As mentioned above, the injection of medical medicament from the syringe is accomplished using the second motor. In detail, once the needle has been properly inserted into the patient, the second motor moves a pusher to urge against the plunger of the syringe to advance the plunger into the fluid chamber of the syringe. Importantly, the second motor can be programmed to advance the plunger into the fluid chamber at a predetermined rate(s) for compliance with an injection protocol.

After the injection has been completed, the second motor withdraws the pusher. The first motor is then used again. Specifically, the first motor is now used to withdraw the injection needle from the patient, and to return the syringe to its "home position" on the cassette, where it is re-latched onto the cassette. The cassette can then be removed from the injector and discarded.

In order to control the concerted operations of the first and second motors, the system includes a microcomputer that is mounted on the injector. Importantly, the microcomputer

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operates the motors with different forces, and at different speeds for different purposes. More specifically, the first motor must operate quickly to insert the needle (e.g. 0.1 to 1 m/s), but it does not require much force to do so. Similarly, needle withdrawal by the first motor requires a minimal force. Unlike the first motor, however, the second motor will typically be required to generate greater forces for the injection of fluid medicament. And, accordingly, it will also typically operate at slower speeds. Further, and most importantly, different injections (i.e. advancements of the syringe plunger by the second motor) may require different injection rates. Thus, the second motor requires speed control provided by the microcomputer.

Together with the components mentioned above, the system of the present invention may, optionally, employ a capacitance skin sensor of a type well known in the pertinent art. If used, such a sensor will allow the user to ascertain whether the system has been properly positioned for an injection. In detail, a metal foil is positioned at the extreme distal end of the injector to establish a capacitance signal whenever the foil is in contact with a skin surface of the patient. The function of this signal is actually two-fold. First, it can be used to prevent initial operation, if the system is not properly positioned. And, second, it can be used to interrupt operation of the system, if it becomes improperly positioned during an injection.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The novel features of this invention, as well as the invention itself, both as to its structure and its operation, will be best understood from the accompanying drawings, taken in conjunction with the accompanying description, in which similar reference characters refer to similar parts, and in which:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an autoinjector system showing a cassette engaged with an injector in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an exploded perspective view of the cassette and its component elements for use with the present invention;

FIG. 3A is a perspective view of a cassette and a drive assembly of the system in position at the beginning and at the end of a duty cycle;

FIG. 3B is a view of the components shown in FIG. 3A with the syringe in the cassette being advanced by a first motor of the drive assembly for insertion of the syringe needle into a patient; and

FIG. 3C is a view of the components shown in FIG. 3B with the plunger in the syringe being advanced by a second motor of the drive assembly for injection of a fluid medicament from the syringe into the patient.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring initially to FIG. 1, an autoinjector system in accordance with the present invention is shown and is generally designated 10. As shown, the system 10 essentially includes a disposable cassette 12 and a re-useable injector 14. Further, as shown in phantom in FIG. 1, a drive assembly 16 and a microcomputer 18 are mounted inside the injector 14. As intended for the present invention, the microcomputer 18 is activated by depression of the button 20 on the injector 14. And, when activated, the microcomputer 18 controls the operation of the drive assembly 16 for its interaction with the cassette 12.

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In FIG. 2 it will be seen that the cassette 12 includes a housing 22, a sleeve member 24 and a syringe assembly 26. More specifically, the syringe assembly 26 is of a type well-known in the pertinent art that has a syringe chamber 28 for holding a fluid medicament. The syringe assembly 26 will also have an injection needle 30, and a plunger 32 that is moveable within the syringe chamber 28 to expel fluid medicament from the syringe chamber 28 through the injection needle 30. FIG. 2 also shows that the syringe assembly 26 is formed with an orifice 34 that allows for contact with the plunger 32 for the stated purpose. As intended for the present invention, the syringe assembly 26 is fixedly joined with the sleeve member 24 and this combination (i.e. syringe assembly 26 and sleeve member 24) is incorporated with the housing 22 to establish the cassette 12.

Still referring to FIG. 2, it will be seen that the sleeve member 24 includes a protrusion 36. Further, it will be seen that the housing 22 is formed with a fixation member 38 that is dimensioned for engagement with the injector 14 (see FIG. 1). As is to be appreciated by the skilled artisan, the fixation member 38 engages with the injector 14 to position the cassette 12 in an operational alignment with the drive assembly 16. Importantly, the cassette 12 can be fixedly held on the injector 14 during an operation duty cycle of the system 10, and selectively removed from the injector 14 after its use.

FIG. 2 also shows that the housing 22 is formed with a latch mechanism 40. In detail, the latch mechanism 40 includes a pair of opposed, resilient arms 42a and 42b that are respectively formed with a detent 44a and 44b. As shown, the resilient arms 42a and 42b straddle a slot 46 that extends along the side 48 of the housing 22.

An important aspect of the present invention involves the assembly of the cassette 12 into an integral unit. When assembled, it is to be appreciated that the cassette 12 is intended for use only so long as there is fluid medicament in the syringe chamber 28 and, it is thereafter disposable. Prior to assembly, the syringe assembly 26 will have a pre-filled syringe chamber 28 holding a defined dose. The pre-filled syringe assembly 26 is then inserted into the sleeve member 24 where it is fixedly held. Movements of the sleeve member 24 will thus result in a corresponding movement of the syringe assembly 26. The combination (i.e. syringe assembly 26 and sleeve member 24) is then joined with the housing 22. When so joined, the protrusion 36 on sleeve member 24 fits in the detents 44a and 44b between the resilient arms 42a and 42b. Accordingly, the syringe assembly 26 is held on the cassette 12 in a so-called "home position". Importantly, with the syringe assembly 26 in the "home position", the injection needle 30 of the syringe assembly 26 is held, and concealed within the housing 22. In this configuration, the cassette 12 can be engaged with the injector 14 substantially as shown in FIG. 1.

For an operation of the system 10, reference is directed collectively to FIGS. 3A, 3B and 3C. Although the injector 14 is not shown in these Figs., it is to be appreciated that the cassette 12 and the drive assembly 16 are to be considered as being operationally mounted on the injector 14 (i.e. cross-reference FIGS. 3A, 3B and 3C with FIG. 1). Further, in greater detail, the drive assembly 16 is shown in FIG. 3A to include a first motor 50 that is used to move a drive rod 52. Also, a second motor 54 is shown that is used to move a pusher 56. For purposes of the present invention, the motors 50 and 54 can be of any type well known in the pertinent art. Furthermore, the respective movements of drive rod 52 and pusher 56 can be provided by any well known mechanical device such as a lead screw or a rack-

and-pinion. As noted above, the operations of the first motor 50 and the second motor 54 are both controlled by the microcomputer 18.

In overview, a duty cycle for the system 10 can be envisioned as a series of sequential changes in the configuration of cassette 12. For system 10, these configuration changes are caused by separate operations of the first motor 50 and the second motor 54. In compliance with these operations, a complete duty cycle for the system 10 will constitute, in order, configurations shown from FIG. 3A, to FIG. 3B, to FIG. 3C, and then in reverse order from FIG. 3C, back to FIG. 3B and FIG. 3A.

FIG. 3A, shows the cassette 12 with the syringe assembly 26 in its "home position." Importantly, in this "home position" the protrusion 36 on sleeve member 24 is held by the latch mechanism 40 on housing 22. And, consequently, the injection needle 30 of the syringe assembly 26 is held and concealed within the cassette 12. FIG. 3B shows the cassette 12 with the syringe assembly 26 moved into an advanced position wherein the injection needle 30 has been extended from the cassette 12 through a hole 58 at the distal end 60 of the system 10 (see FIG. 1). It is to be appreciated that during the movement from FIG. 3A to FIG. 3B, the first motor 50 advances the drive rod 52. Specifically, with this advancement, the drive rod 52 interacts with latch mechanism 40 to release protrusion 36, and to thereby allow a distal movement of the now "unlatched" syringe assembly 26 and sleeve member 24 on the housing 22. Specifically, this movement is controlled by the microcomputer 18 and is performed with sufficient force to allow the injection needle 30 to penetrate into the tissue of a patient. Preferably, this movement of the syringe assembly 26 from the "home position" (FIG. 3A) to the advanced position (FIG. 3B) is accomplished at a speed of approximately 0.1 to 1 m/s. Further, the first motor 50 can be pre-programmed to stabilize the syringe assembly 26 in its advanced position.

With the syringe assembly 26 in its advanced position (FIG. 3B), microcomputer 18 then activates second motor 54 to move pusher 56 against the plunger 32 in syringe chamber 28 (see FIG. 2). Again, microcomputer 18 is in control and, in this case, can be pre-programmed to advance the plunger 32 at an appropriate speed for injection of the fluid medicament from the syringe chamber 28. At the completion of the injection, the respective configurations of the cassette 12 and the drive assembly 16 are as shown in FIG. 3C. As mentioned above, completion of the injection duty cycle requires the pusher 56 be withdrawn. This withdrawal of the pusher 56 is accomplished by the second motor 54. Once the pusher 56 has been withdrawn (see FIG. 3B), the first motor 50 is again activated to withdraw the drive rod 52. The drive rod 52 then pulls the protrusion 36 back for engagement with the latch mechanism 40, and the syringe assembly 26 is thus returned to its "home position." The cassette 12 can then be removed from the injector 14 and discarded.

As an additional feature of the system 10, a sensor 62 can be provided at the distal end of the injector 14. In particular, the sensor 62 should be positioned adjacent the hole 58 of cassette 12. For purposes of the present invention, the sensor 62 is preferably of a type that will react to capacitance that can be measured between the sensor 62 and the skin of the patient. The purpose of this sensor 62 is to establish that the system 10 is in physical contact with the patient. Specifically, the microcomputer 18 will operate a duty cycle for the system 10 only when such contact is indicated. Otherwise, there can be no operation of the system 10.

While the particular System and Method for an Injection Using a Syringe Needle as herein shown and disclosed in detail is fully capable of obtaining the objects and providing the advantages herein before stated, it is to be understood that it is merely illustrative of the presently preferred embodiments of the invention and that no limitations are intended to the details of construction or design herein shown other than as described in the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A disposable cassette for use with a reusable injector, the cassette comprising:

a housing;

a sleeve movable in the housing;

a hypodermic syringe fixedly held within the sleeve for movement therewith in the housing, the syringe comprising an injection needle and a fluid medicament; and a latch mechanism for latching the sleeve within the housing of the disposable cassette, the latch mechanism comprising first and second parts;

wherein the housing includes one of the first and second parts of the latch mechanism and the sleeve includes the other one of the first and second parts of the latch mechanism;

wherein the latch mechanism is configured to be unlatched by the reusable injector, thereby allowing the sleeve and the syringe fixedly held within the sleeve, to be moved within the housing by the reusable injector from a first position where the injection needle is concealed within the housing of the disposable cassette, to a second position where the injection needle extends from the housing of the disposable cassette; and wherein the latch mechanism is configured to be relatched by the reusable injector when the injector moves the sleeve and the syringe fixedly held within the sleeve, back to the first position where the injection needle is concealed within the housing of the disposable cassette from the second position where the injection needle extends from the disposable cassette.

2. A disposable cassette as recited in claim 1 wherein the housing comprises an orifice for allowing the injection needle to extend from the housing of the disposable cassette in the second position.

3. A disposable cassette as recited in claim 1 wherein the hypodermic syringe further comprises:

a chamber for holding the fluid medicament, the injection needle extending from the syringe chamber; and

a plunger slidably disposed within the syringe chamber for expelling the fluid medicament therefrom through the injection needle.

4. A disposable cassette as recited in claim 1 wherein the hypodermic syringe is nonremovably disposed within the housing of the cassette.

5. A disposable cassette as recited in claim 1 wherein the housing includes a detent comprising the one of the first and second parts of the latch mechanism and the sleeve includes a protrusion comprising the other one of the first and second parts of the latch mechanism, and wherein the protrusion is held by the detent when the latch mechanism is latched.

6. A disposable cassette as recited in claim 1 wherein a side of the housing includes opposing resilient arms, each of the arms having a detent, the resilient arms and the detents comprising the one of the first and second parts of the latch mechanism and the sleeve includes a protrusion comprising the other one of the first and second parts of the latch mechanism, and wherein the protrusion is held by the detents when the latch mechanism is latched.

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7. A disposable cassette as recited in claim 6 wherein the resilient arms straddle a slot that extends along the side of the housing.

8. A disposable cassette as recited in claim 1 wherein the housing includes a fixation member for engaging the injector to position the cassette in operational alignment with a drive assembly of the injector. 5

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