



(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**  
**O'Brien et al.**

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2023/0371876 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Nov. 23, 2023**

(54) **SYSTEMS, METHODS, AND DEVICES FOR DETECTING THE THRESHOLD OF NERVE-MUSCLE RESPONSE USING VARIABLE FREQUENCY OF STIMULATION**

*A61B 5/389* (2021.01)  
*A61B 5/00* (2006.01)  
*G16H 20/30* (2018.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ..... *A61B 5/316* (2021.01); *A61B 5/24* (2021.01); *A61N 1/36017* (2013.01); *A61B 5/389* (2021.01); *A61B 5/7214* (2013.01); *G16H 20/30* (2018.01); *A61B 5/7264* (2013.01); *A61B 5/746* (2013.01)

(71) Applicant: **Alphatec Spine, Inc.**, Carlsbad, CA (US)

(72) Inventors: **Richard A. O'Brien**, Cockeysville, MD (US); **Gregg Johns**, Oceanside, CA (US); **Robert SNOW**, Phoenix, MD (US); **James E. Gharib**, San Diego, CA (US)

(57)

**ABSTRACT**

A method for determining a lowest stimulation threshold current level in a group of channels of a neuromonitoring device. The method includes stimulating tissue at a current level from a predetermined range of current levels as a sequence of pulses delivered at a frequency. The stimulating includes increasing the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from an immediately preceding pulse by a first current increment. The method includes determining that a first evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes a first muscular response. The method includes stimulating the tissue with a second evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses to evoke a second muscular response. The stimulating includes decreasing the frequency of the delivery of each pulse in the sequence of pulses and increasing the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from the immediately preceding pulse by a second current increment. The method includes determining that the second evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes the second muscular response.

(21) Appl. No.: **18/352,975**

(22) Filed: **Jul. 14, 2023**

**Related U.S. Application Data**

(63) Continuation of application No. 16/010,157, filed on Jun. 15, 2018, now Pat. No. 11,701,047.

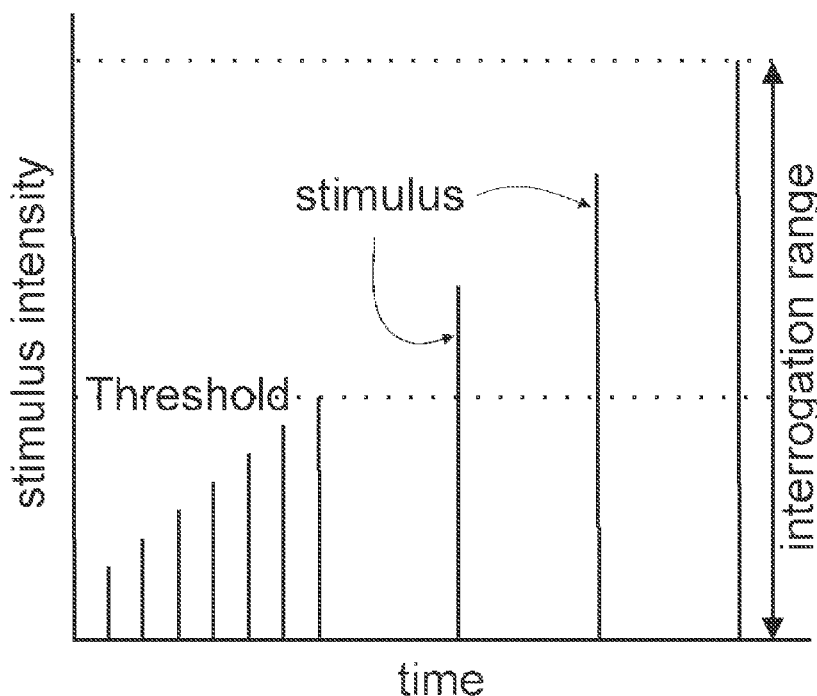
(60) Provisional application No. 62/592,275, filed on Nov. 29, 2017, provisional application No. 62/521,268, filed on Jun. 16, 2017.

**Publication Classification**

(51) **Int. Cl.**

*A61B 5/316* (2021.01)  
*A61B 5/24* (2021.01)  
*A61N 1/36* (2006.01)

200



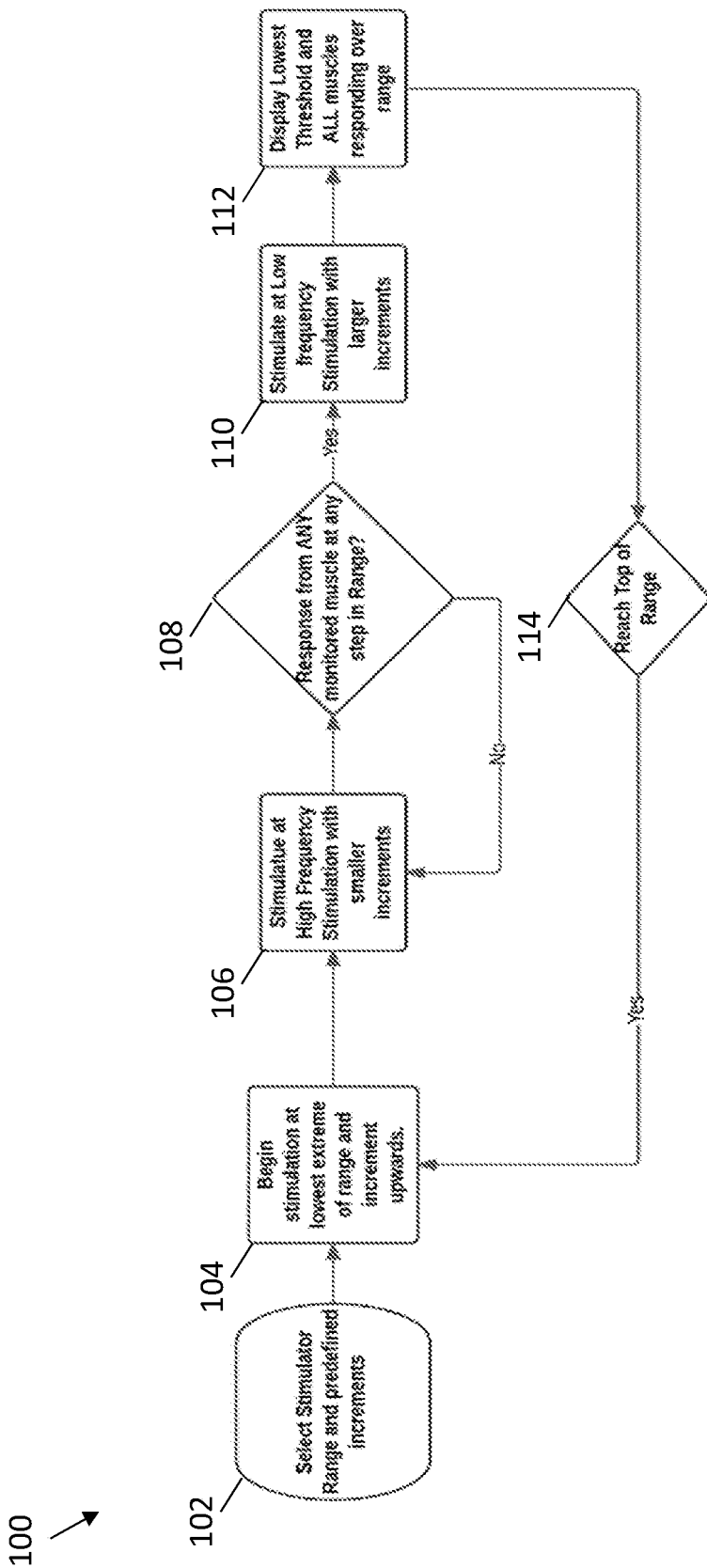


FIG. 1

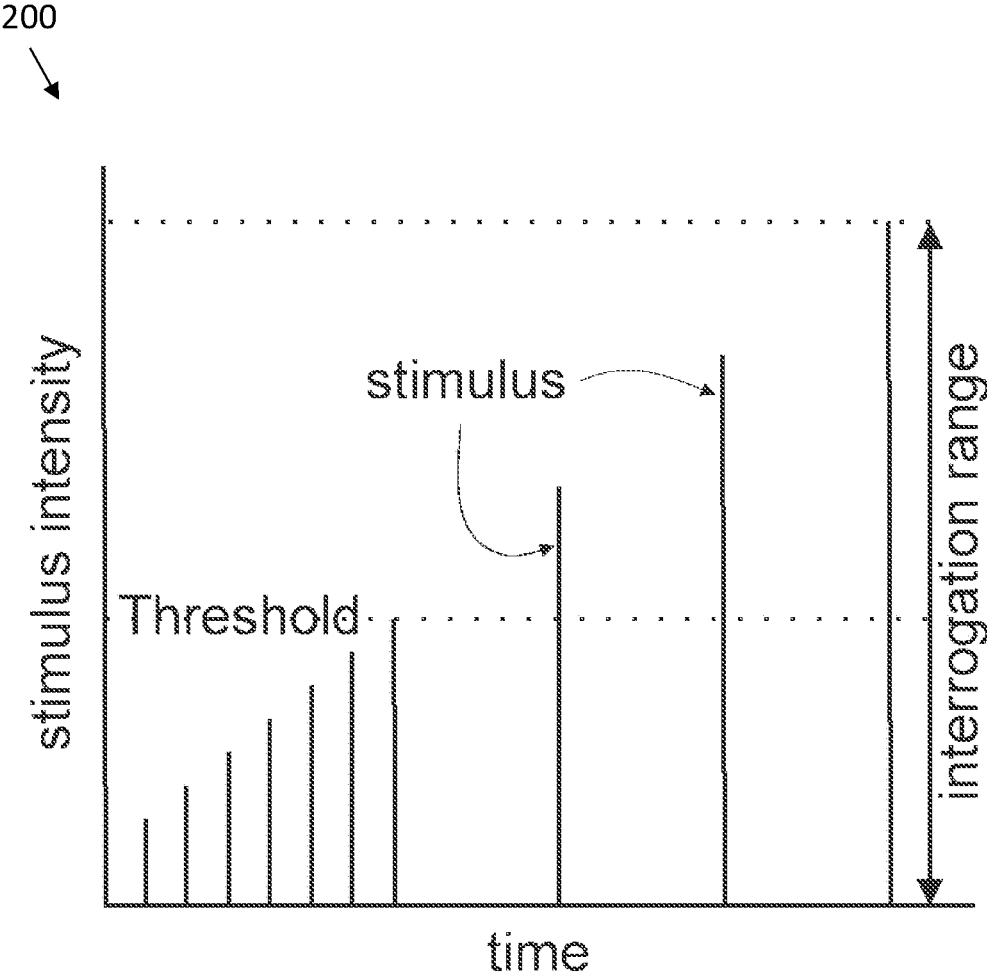
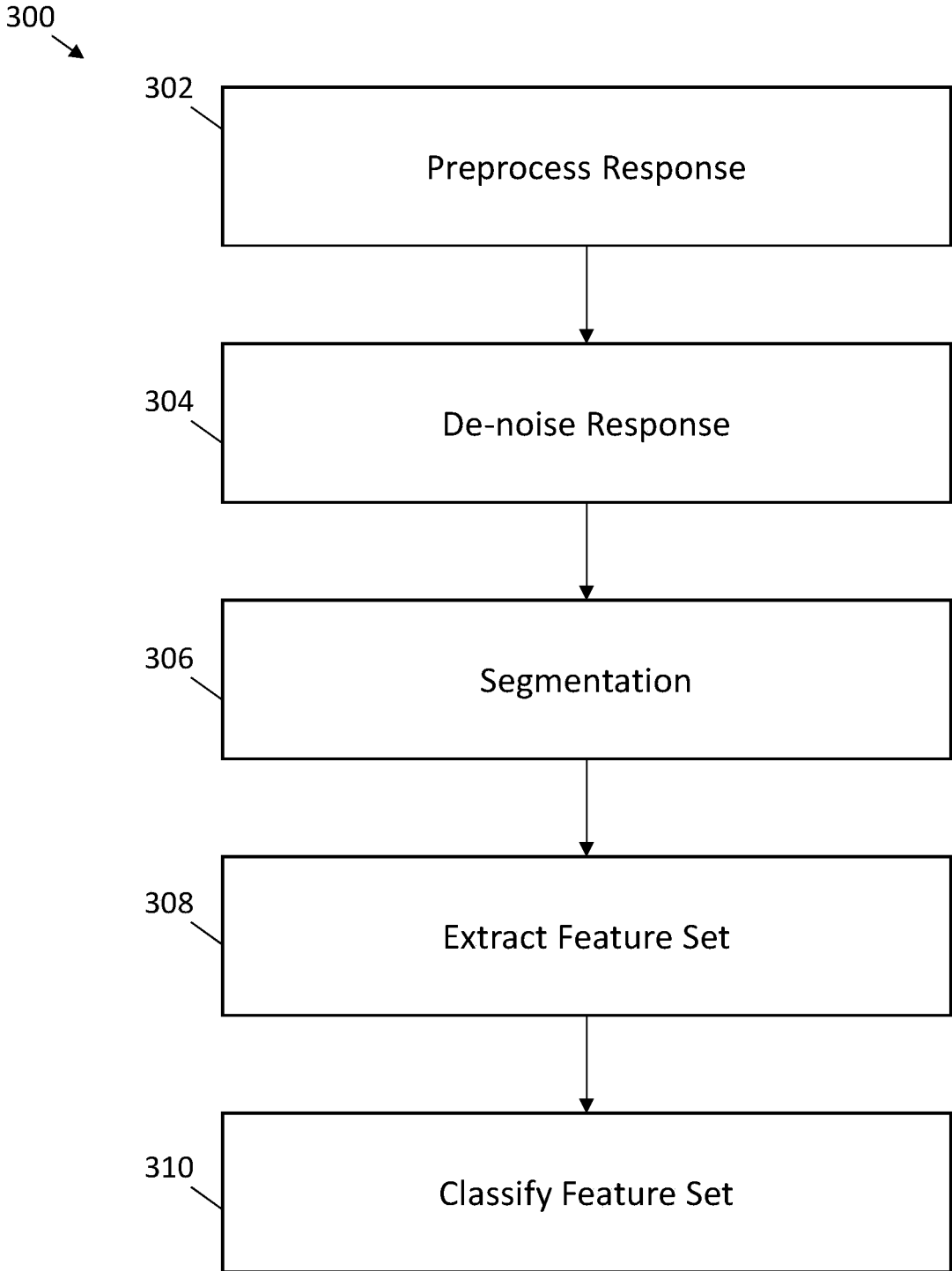
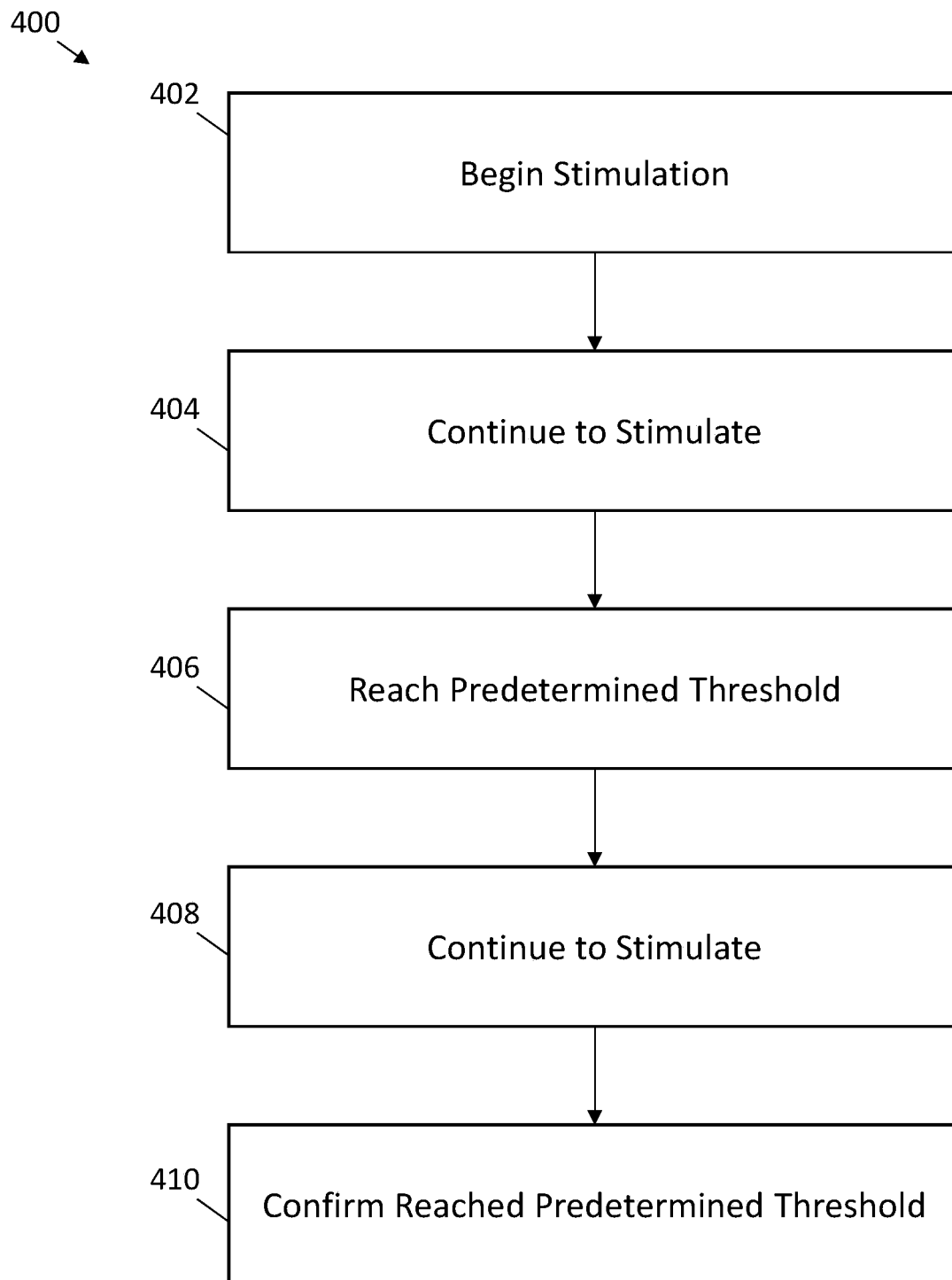


FIG. 2



**FIG. 3**



**FIG. 4**

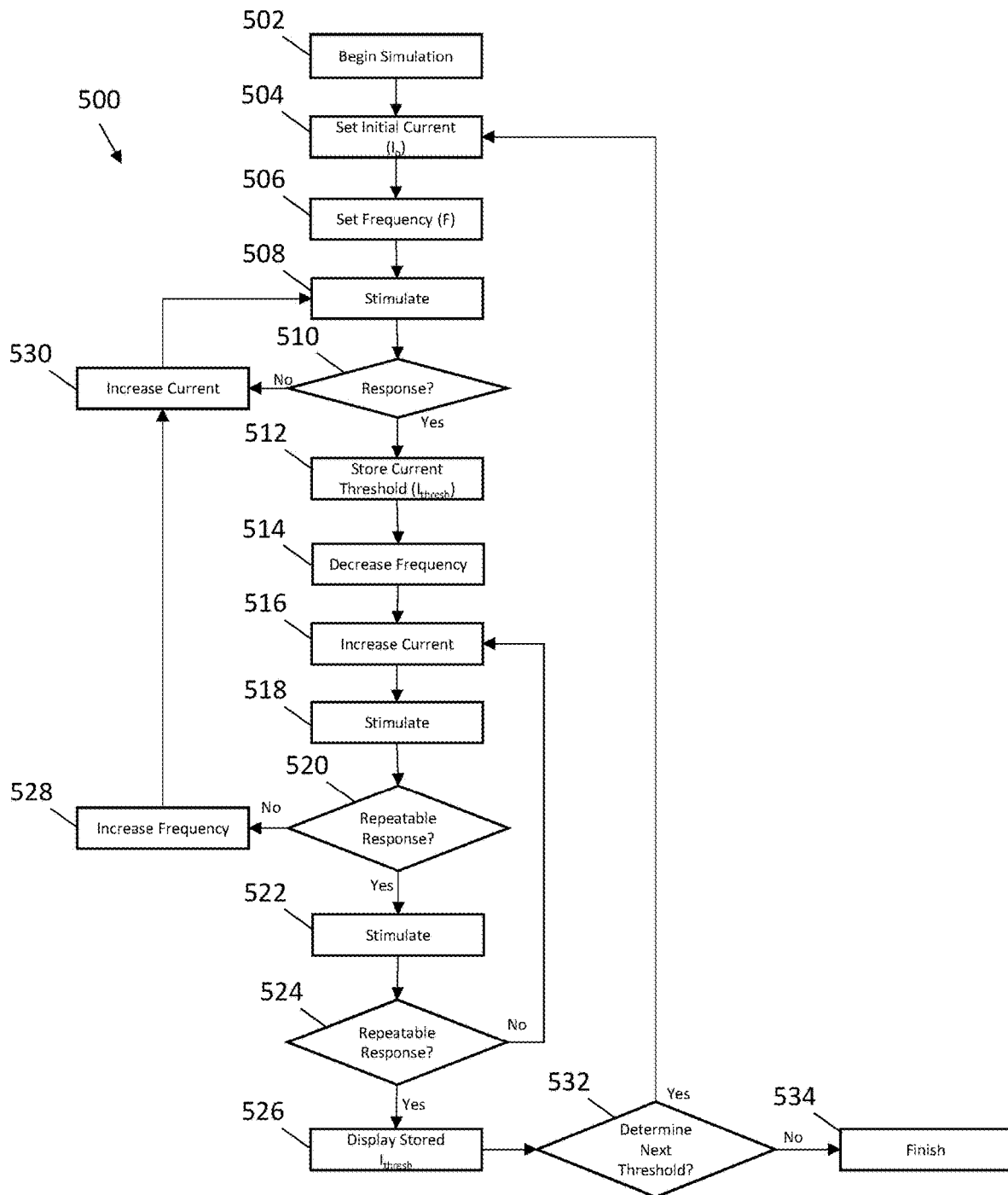


FIG. 5

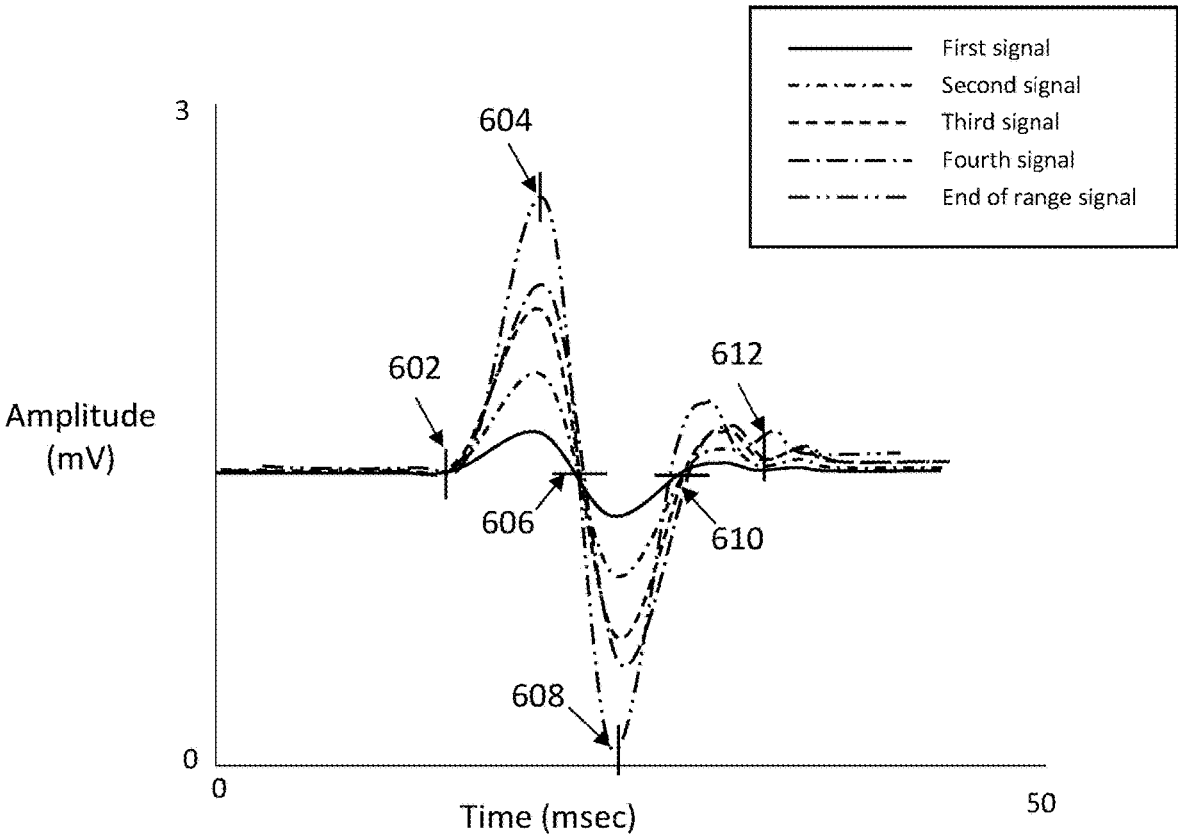


FIG. 6

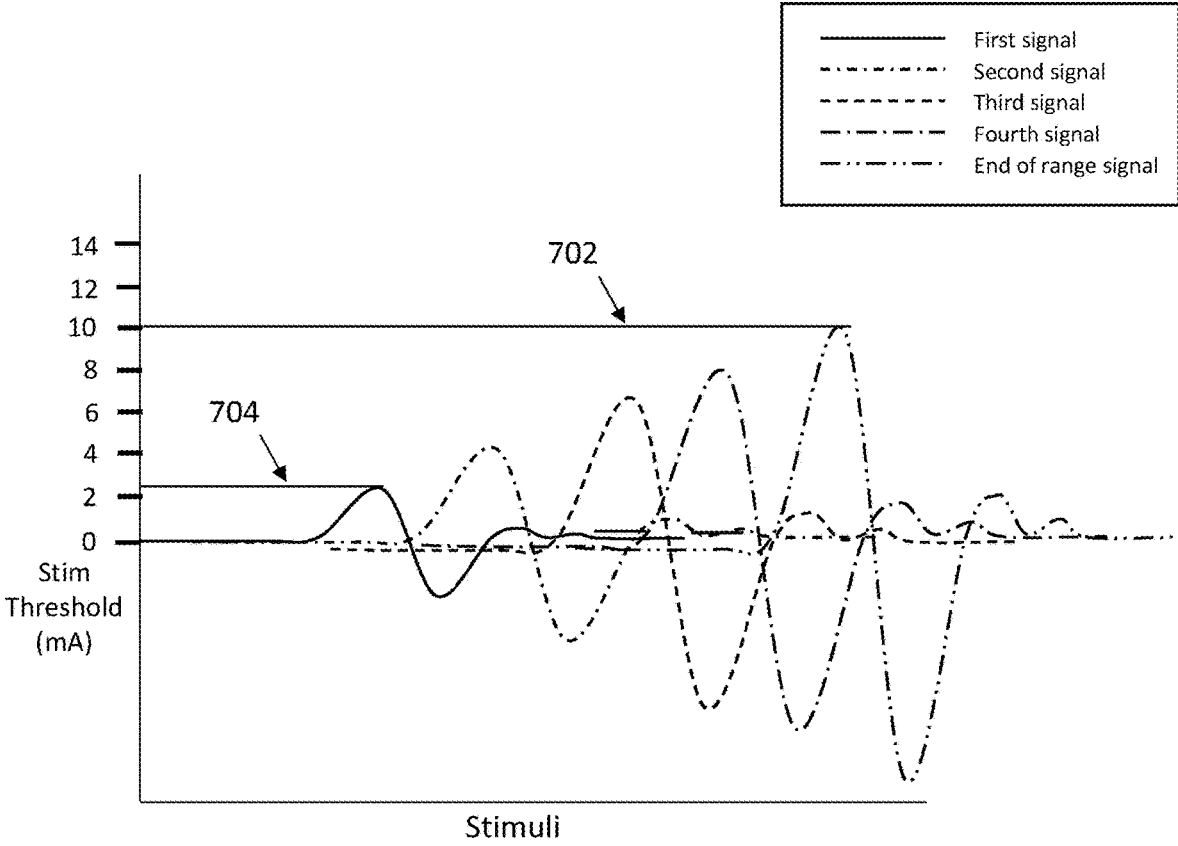


FIG. 7



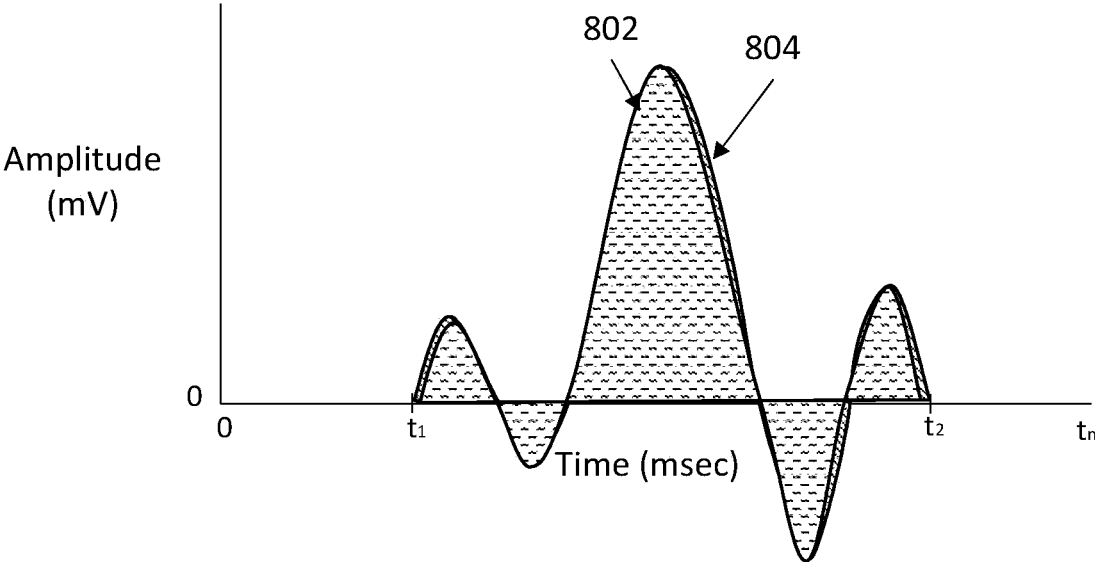


FIG. 8A

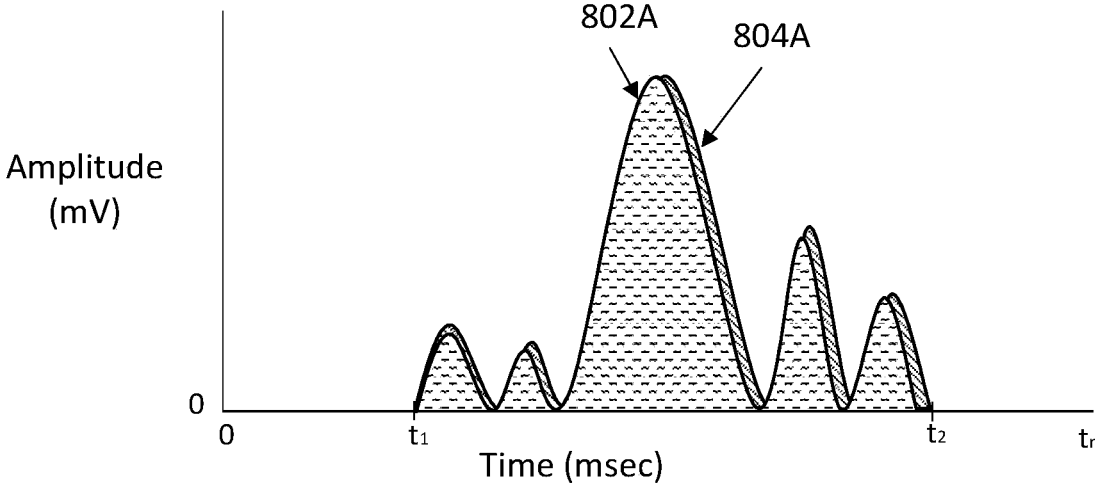


FIG. 8B

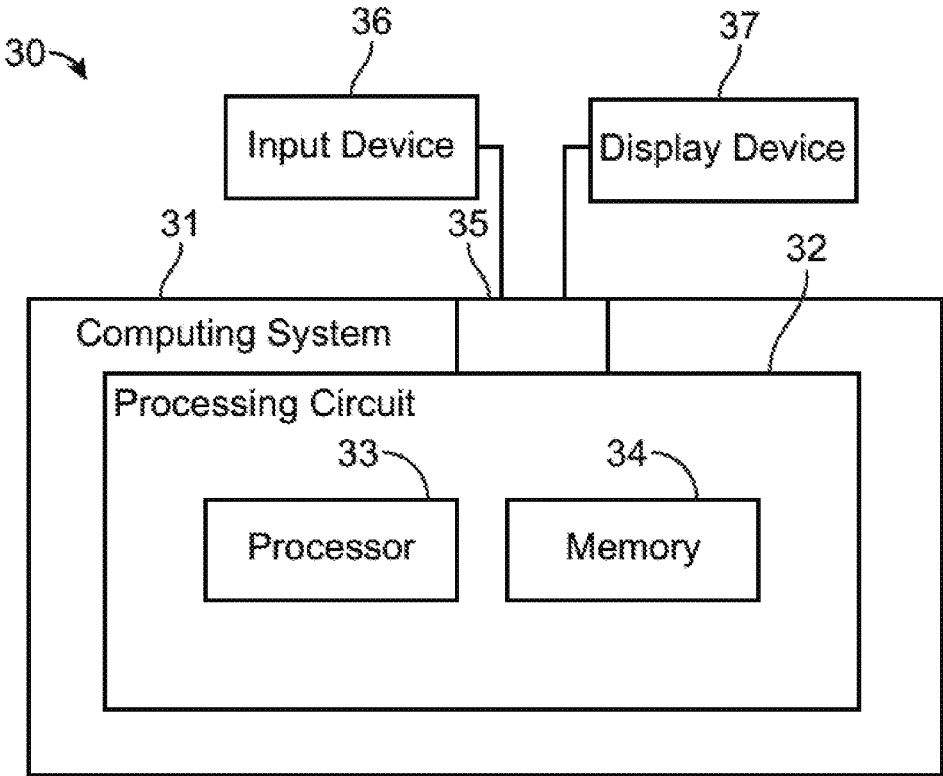


FIG. 9

**SYSTEMS, METHODS, AND DEVICES FOR  
DETECTING THE THRESHOLD OF  
NERVE-MUSCLE RESPONSE USING  
VARIABLE FREQUENCY OF STIMULATION**

**RELATED APPLICATIONS**

**[0001]** This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/010,157, filed on Jun. 15, 2018, which claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 62/521,268, filed on Jun. 16, 2017, and U.S. Provisional Application No. 62/592,275, filed on Nov. 29, 2017, the entirety of each is incorporated by reference herein.

**FIELD**

**[0002]** The present technology generally relates to the field of clinical neurophysiology. More specifically it relates generally to systems, devices, methodology, rules, operations, calculations and/or steps used for stimulator control capable of more accurately finding stimulation thresholds to estimate nerve health, integrity of adjacent structures, or nerve proximity, for instance while developing a surgical corridor.

**BACKGROUND**

**[0003]** Various types of intraoperative monitoring (TOM) are utilized during medical surgeries. Such TOM includes monitoring to evaluate the integrity of aspects of the nervous system or structures adjacent components of the nervous system. One type of TOM involves determining stimulation threshold levels, which typically involve identifying the minimum stimulation required to elicit muscle activation. Embodiments described herein generally relate to improved systems, devices and methods for detecting the stimulation threshold of a nerve-muscle response.

**SUMMARY**

**[0004]** By using graded electrical stimulation the threshold stimulation intensity of a motor nerve can be measured during surgery. For example, in an automated triggered electromyography system, it may be desired to determine a stimulation current threshold associated with a compound muscle action potential (CMAP) or partial compound motor action potential (PCMAP) that meets certain predetermined criteria. The CMAP or PCMAP is composed of multiple motor units (MU) that have different stimulation thresholds. By gradually increasing the stimulus intensity from sub-threshold to maximal values some or all MUs in the muscle or myotome are activated. The stimulation median threshold range from the first MU being evoked to 95% of MUs being evoked may be 7.6 mA (5.4-11.5). Thresholds are used to estimate proximity of the nerve to the simulator and the health of the nerve in responding to stimuli or the integrity of anatomical features adjacent to nerves. Multiple types of methods, including computer implemented methods, are used to find stimulation thresholds primarily aimed at accuracy of threshold finding, speed of threshold finding or finding thresholds over multiple muscles or myotomes to triangulate where the stimulator is in relation to the nerve or nerves in question.

**[0005]** While many approaches utilize algorithms that are useful, they suffer from several issues. Many times, the surgical team is not interested in determining the threshold of multiple myotomes or triangulating the stimulator place-

ment. They are much more interested in locating the closest nerve or the nerve with the lowest threshold which is therefor most at risk. In addition, these methods do not always take into account the variability in likelihood of any particular MU responding to a single stimulation intensity which can produce variability in the threshold level when activating PCMAPs.

**[0006]** In addition, during surgery, muscular blockade is often given. While strategies are available for determining the degree of blockade present such as the most popular method of measuring the degree of muscular blockade is the train of four (TOF), this technique has limited accuracy and is often neglected. Consequently, threshold testing may be inaccurate since the muscular blockade blunts the muscular response to stimulation.

**[0007]** While high frequency stimulation (10-20 Hz) of a nerve and attached muscle will condition the neuro-muscular junction to produce a response even in the presence of partial muscular blockade, persistent stimulation at those frequencies may lead to muscular tetany and confound results. Stimulation at lower frequencies (e.g. 1-5 Hz) may not provide adequate conditioning and therefore fail to provide an accurate response from the muscle. Similarly, stimulation intensities that vary dramatically while trying to 'zero in' on the threshold such as used in a bisecting algorithm may not provide adequate conditioning for an accurate response, as fewer stimuli occur close to the threshold intensity. These systems also do not account for variability in PCMAP response that can occur when the threshold is approached from higher or lower stimulation intensities.

**[0008]** Certain methods may also require low frequencies, such that they are below levels which would induce tetany. In addition, since lower thresholds often suggest nerve proximity, which is of primary interest to the user, stimulation patterns that update more quickly for lower stimulation thresholds is preferred but not always available. Failure to interrogate the muscular response over the entire expected range of responses to stimulation may fail to confirm an accurate threshold when spurious responses are present or fail to adequately show an absence of response throughout the expected range when none is present.

**[0009]** In some automated Electromyography (EMG) systems, a transient noise disturbance, spontaneous EMG spike or burst, or other anomaly may be mistaken for an electrically elicited CMAP and lead to an erroneously identified threshold (e.g., a false positive).

**[0010]** Also, some automated EMG systems may, under some conditions, approach a stimulation threshold from above and, under other conditions, approach a stim threshold from below. This method may lead to variability in a determined threshold because of the range of stimulation required to elicit the first MU response and the maximal CMAP can differ by more than 7 mA. By approaching the stimulation threshold from below the stimulation threshold for the first MUs that comprise the CMAP, the threshold could be 7 mA less than approaching the stimulation threshold from above.

**[0011]** Non-limiting example embodiments disclosed herein address at least some of the previously described drawbacks. The example embodiments provide a simple and rapid way to obtain thresholds that update quickly when at critical threshold levels.

**[0012]** According to some embodiments, a method for determining a lowest stimulation threshold current level in a group of channels of a neuromonitoring device, wherein each channel is associated with one or more muscles, includes stimulating, by delivering stimulation signals, tissue at a current level from within a predetermined range of current levels as a sequence of pulses delivered at a frequency. The stimulating includes increasing the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from an immediately preceding pulse by a first current increment. The method includes determining that a first evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes a first muscular response. The method includes stimulating the tissue with a second evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses to evoke a second muscular response. The stimulating includes decreasing the frequency of the delivery of each pulse in the sequence of pulses and increasing the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from the immediately preceding pulse by a second current increment. The method also includes determining that the second evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes the second muscular response.

**[0013]** In some embodiments, the second current increment is the same as the first current increment. In some embodiments, the determining that the first evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes the first muscular response further includes storing a first current level of the first evocation pulse. In some embodiments, the determining that the first evocation pulse evokes the first muscular response includes receiving a first signal representing the first muscular response and the determining that the second evocation pulse evokes the second muscular response includes receiving a second signal representing the second muscular response.

**[0014]** In some embodiments, the method includes comparing the first signal to the second signal, determining that the first signal matches the second signal, and displaying a first current level of the first evocation pulse.

**[0015]** In some embodiments, the method includes comparing the first signal to the second signal, determining that the first signal does not match the second signal, and stimulating the tissue with a third evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses to evoke a third muscular response. The stimulating includes increasing the frequency of the delivery of each pulse in the sequence of pulses and increasing the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from the immediately preceding pulse.

**[0016]** In some embodiments, the method includes continuing to deliver an evocation pulse until a maximum stimulus current level within the predetermined range of current levels is reached. In some embodiments, the presence or absence of muscular responses from each of the channels in the group of channels is determined.

**[0017]** According to some embodiments, a method for determining a stimulation threshold includes determining a threshold by delivering a plurality of stimulation pulses to determine a first current level that generates a predetermined response. The method can include continuing to delivery at least one stimulation pulse at at least the same current level to generate another predetermined response.

**[0018]** According to some embodiments, a method of medical treatment includes performing a medical procedure using any apparatus and method described herein.

**[0019]** According to some embodiments, a method for determining a stimulation threshold current level includes

stimulating, by delivering stimulation pulses via at least one electrode, tissue at a current level as a sequence of pulses. The stimulating includes increasing the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from an immediately preceding pulse. The method includes determining that a first evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes a first muscular response. The method includes stimulating the tissue with a second evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses to evoke a second muscular response. The stimulating may include decreasing the frequency of the delivery of each pulse in the sequence of pulses. The stimulating may include delivering the second evocation pulse at the same or higher current level relative to the immediately preceding pulse. The method also includes determining that the second evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes the second muscular response.

**[0020]** According to some embodiments, a method for determining a lowest stimulation threshold current level in a group of channels of a neuromonitoring device, wherein each channel is associated with one or more muscles, includes stimulating tissue within a predetermined range of current levels as a sequence of pulses delivered at a frequency by delivering stimulation signals. The sequence of pulses includes a first pulse delivered at a first current level within the predetermined range of current levels, and a second pulse delivered at a second current level within the predetermined range of current levels. The first pulse may be delivered immediately preceding the second pulse. The second current level may be higher than the first current level. The method may include determining that the second pulse evokes a muscular response that is similar to the first response. The method may also include stimulating the tissue with a third pulse from the sequence of pulses to evoke a third muscular response. The third pulse may be delivered at a third current level that is higher than the second current level. The method may include determining that the third pulse evokes the third muscular response that is similar to the first and second response.

**[0021]** In some embodiments, the stimulating further comprises decreasing the frequency of the delivery of each pulse in the sequence of pulses, and increasing the current level of the third pulse by an amount that is greater than a difference between the first current level and the second current level. In some embodiments, the determining that the second pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes the first muscular response further includes storing the second current level. In some embodiments, the determining that the second pulse evokes a muscular response that is similar to the first muscular response includes receiving a first signal representing the first muscular response and the determining that the third pulse evokes a muscular response that matches the second muscle response includes receiving a second signal representing the second muscular response.

**[0022]** In some embodiments, the method includes comparing the first signal with the second signal, determining that the first signal matches the second signal, and displaying the second current level of the second pulse. In some embodiments, the method includes comparing the first signal with the second signal, determining that the first signal does not match the second signal, and stimulating the tissue with a fourth pulse from the sequence of pulses to evoke a third muscular response. The stimulating may include increasing the frequency of the delivery of each pulse in the sequence of pulses. The stimulating may also include

increasing the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from the immediately preceding pulse.

**[0023]** In some embodiments, the method includes continuing to deliver a pulse until a maximum stimulus current level within the predetermined range of current levels is reached. In some embodiments, the presence or absence of muscular responses from each of the channels in the group of channels is determined.

**[0024]** According to some embodiments, a method for performing neurophysiologic assessments includes determining the lowest stimulation threshold current level in a group of channels of a neuromonitoring device, where each channel is associated with one or more muscles. Determining the lowest stimulation threshold current level (ST) includes delivering stimulation signals within tissue and monitoring muscular responses on the group of channels to determine when the stimulation signals evoke a significant muscular response from any of the channels. The stimulation signals may be delivered within a specific range of possible current levels as a sequence of pulses delivered at a frequency. The current level of each pulse may be increased from an immediately preceding pulse by an increment until the current level required to evoke a significant muscular response is determined. Upon determining the stimulus threshold current level, the frequency of the stimulation may be reduced and the increment between stimulus current levels may be increased. The method further includes continuing to deliver stimulation pulses until a maximal stimulus current level within the specific range of possible current levels is reached. The presence or absence of responses from any other channels are determined and the entire process is then repeated to determine any change in stimulus threshold current level (ST) over time.

**[0025]** In some embodiments, the muscular response is detected by an EMG sensor and the stimulation threshold current level is determined when the muscular response reaches a pre-determined peak-to-peak voltage. The muscular response may be detected by an MMG (Mechanomyography) sensor and the stimulation threshold current level may be determined. In some embodiments, the predetermined peak-to-peak voltage from within the range of 20 uV to 100 uV. In some embodiments, the stimulus current levels are displayed to the user on a user interface. In some embodiments, the stimulation threshold current level is displayed to the user on a user interface.

**[0026]** In some embodiments, the muscle responses to the stimuli are displayed to the user on a user interface. In some embodiments, the increment is 0.25 mA or 0.5 mA and the frequency is 20 Hz. In some embodiments, the increased increment is 2.0 mA and the reduced frequency is 5 Hz. In some embodiments, a specific range of possible current levels has a maximum of 20 mA.

**[0027]** In some embodiments, a method can assess the presence of a nerve relative to at least one probe or surgical tool being introduced towards at least one region of a patient's spine or peripheral nerve site

**[0028]** In some embodiments, a device, apparatus or system for intraoperative monitoring can include a surgical tool and one or more components that deliver stimulation signals within tissue and monitor muscular responses on a group of channels to determine when the stimulation signals evoke a significant muscular response from any of the channels.

**[0029]** According to some embodiments, a method for assessing the presence of a nerve relative to at least one

probe or surgical tool being introduced towards at least one region of a patient's spine or peripheral nerve site includes emitting a stimulus signal from an electrode disposed on a probe or surgical tool as said probe or tool is introduced towards any aspect of a vertebral body, an intervertebral disc of a patient's spine or placed near any peripheral motor nerve. The method includes electromyographically monitoring muscles coupled to said spinal nerve to determine if any predetermined neuro-muscular response is elicited by the stimulus signal. The method also includes increasing the intensity level of said stimulus signal through a predetermined range of values utilizing a variable stimulus frequency and calculating which neuro-muscular response is elicited by the lowest stimulus pulse, and if any other neuro-muscular response is elicited throughout the range. The method also includes communicating to an operator said lowest intensity level of said stimulus signal required to elicit said predetermined neuro-muscular response. The intensity level required to elicit the predetermined neuro-muscular response represents the presence of said spinal nerve within the sweep range.

**[0030]** In some embodiments, upon identifying said lowest intensity level of said stimulus signal required to elicit said predetermined response, the method includes continuing to emit stimulus signal for the predetermined range. The method can include continuing to emit stimulus signal for the predetermined range comprises emitting successively stronger signals within the predetermined range.

**[0031]** In some embodiments, the emitting of successively stronger signals within the predetermined range includes decreasing the frequency of the signal emission compared to the frequency prior to identifying the lowest intensity level required to emit the predetermined response, and/or increasing the increase in stimulus intensity compared to the frequency prior to identifying the lowest intensity level required to emit the predetermined response. In some embodiments, the stimulus signal is emitted from an electrode disposed anywhere along the length of at least one probe or surgical tool.

**[0032]** In some embodiments, detecting neuro-muscular responses involves detecting the neuro-muscular responses at a plurality of distally spaced apart myotome locations corresponding to each of a plurality of spinal nerves. In some embodiments, the method includes repeating the method while the intensity level of the electrical stimulus signal is restarted at its lowest level and swept through the same range. In some embodiments, the intensity and frequency of stimulation level of the stimulus signal is varied incrementally. In some embodiments, the intensity level of the stimulus signal is increased over time until it reaches the extremes of the stimulating range.

**[0033]** In some embodiments, the method is performed in a repeating sequence. In some embodiments, the method is repeated automatically. In some embodiments, the method is repeated under operator control. In some embodiments, communicating to said operator involves at least one of visually and audibly indicating to said operator the lowest intensity level of the stimulus signal required to elicit any said predetermined neuro-muscular response as well as all said predetermined neuro-muscular responses. In some embodiments, the method includes repeating the method thereby detecting and measuring sequential sets of neuro-muscular responses for said nerves. In some embodiments,

the method includes visually indicating to said operator that said nerve is within the sweep range of at least one probe or surgical tool.

**[0034]** In some embodiments, the method includes audibly indicating to said operator that said spinal nerve is positioned near the distal end of the at least one probe or surgical tool. Audibly indicating to said operator involves sounding an alarm when the lowest intensity level of the stimulus signal required to elicit any said predetermined neuro-muscular response is at or below a specific predetermined stimulus intensity. The volume of the alarm is varied according to the lowest intensity level of the stimulus signal required to elicit any said predetermined neuro-muscular response. The frequency of the alarm is varied according to the lowest intensity level of the stimulus signal required to elicit any said predetermined neuro-muscular response.

**[0035]** In some embodiments, the method is performed on multiple myotomes. In some embodiments, a medical instrument is selected from the group consisting of implants, rods, fixation devices, disc replacements, probes, dilators, retractors, pedicle screws, pedicle screw awls, nerve stimulators, curettes, forceps, needles, micro-dissectors, rongeurs, elevators, rasps, gouges, surgical site lights and suction tubes.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

**[0036]** FIG. 1 shows an embodiment of a process for determining a stimulation threshold according to implementations of the current subject matter.

**[0037]** FIG. 2 shows an embodiment of a stimulation pattern according to implementations of the current subject matter.

**[0038]** FIG. 3 shows an embodiment of a process for processing a response to stimulation and determining a stimulation threshold according to implementations of the current subject matter.

**[0039]** FIG. 4 shows an embodiment of a process for determining a stimulation threshold according to implementations of the current subject matter.

**[0040]** FIG. 5 shows an embodiment of a process for determining a stimulation threshold according to implementations of the current subject matter.

**[0041]** FIG. 6 shows an embodiment of an example epoch of waveform responses according to implementations of the current subject matter.

**[0042]** FIG. 7 shows an embodiment of an example epoch of waveform responses according to implementations of the current subject matter.

**[0043]** FIG. 8A shows an embodiment of example waveform responses according to implementations of the current subject matter.

**[0044]** FIG. 8B shows an embodiment of example waveform responses according to implementations of the current subject matter.

**[0045]** FIG. 9 is a block diagram of a model neuromonitoring device according to implementations of the current subject matter.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

**[0046]** According to implementations of the current subject matter, a system, method, device and/or computer implemented algorithm for automatically detecting the stimulation threshold of a nerve or nerves resulting in the recordable response in one or more muscles innervated by

that nerve(s) is disclosed. The system, method, device and/or computer algorithm relate to determining the lowest stimulation threshold current level in a group of channels of a neuromonitoring device. Each channel may be associated with one or more muscles.

**[0047]** As described herein, a Stimulation Intensity (SI) refers to an electrical stimulus current level in amperage of a defined duration, typically one of 50, 100 or 200 microseconds. Stimulation threshold (ST) is defined as the lowest SI that causes a nearby or adjacent nerve to depolarize. The ST may result in recordable depolarization of one or more attached muscles. Depolarization of the muscles may be recorded via an electromyogram (EMG) or mechanomyography (MMG) using electrodes positioned on the muscle(s). The resulting EMG or MMG will show depolarization. The Interrogation Range (IR) is the range of SIs that are of interest to the user for their particular application, typically determined to include STs that disclose the relative health, proximity or structural integrity of the tissue being stimulated. The IR is pre-determined based on the particular application and/or may be customized or selected by a healthcare provider. In an exemplary embodiment, the IR may be tailored to the patient's particular situation so that several versions of IR exist with differing or the same stimulation frequency and increments. Stimulation frequency (Frequency) is the frequency at which stimuli are delivered to the tissue. Stimulation increments (Increments) are the incremental changes in stimulation intensity between subsequent stimuli.

**[0048]** In implementations of the current subject matter, a stimulation probe may be used to provide a stimulation pulse, which acts on one or more nearby nerves. The probe may include electrodes that provide the stimulation pulse. In some embodiments, the electrodes are placed on the patient separately from the probe. The probe may be stationary and/or may be moved along a trajectory.

**[0049]** Systems, devices, and methods for determining a threshold stimulation pulse according to the current subject matter may be implemented using a bottom-up approach. For example, as described in more detail herein, the stimulation pulses are applied to the patient by approaching the current threshold from below, for example, by incrementally increasing stimulation current starting from a low value. Configurations according to the current subject matter improve the accuracy and/or repeatability of the current threshold.

**[0050]** FIG. 1 illustrates a flowchart showing an example method 100 for determining a current threshold according to implementations of the current subject matter. At step 102, the IR, the frequency, and/or the initial current may be defined. The IR, the frequency, and/or the initial current may be defined automatically by the system and/or through inputs received by the system from the user via a user interface.

**[0051]** At 104, the device begins stimulation of the patient's tissue by delivering pulses at a high frequency and with a low current (e.g., SI). For example, in some embodiments, the SI may be initially set to 0.25 mA and the initial frequency may be set to 20 Hz.

**[0052]** At 106, the SI may be incrementally increased after each delivered pulse. FIG. 2 illustrates an example of a sequence of pulses in which the SI is incrementally increased after each delivered pulse. In some example embodiments, the stimulation begins at a SI of 0.25 mA at

a frequency of 20 Hz. Thus, the SI may be incrementally increased, such as by 0.25 mA, after each pulse is delivered to the patient's tissue.

**[0053]** The system may continue to deliver stimulation pulses to the patient at the same frequency until an initial response is received by the system in response to the SI (see FIG. 2), at step **108**. If no responses are received by the system in response to the SI, the system may continue to deliver stimulation pulses to the patient at step **106**.

**[0054]** In some embodiments, ST may be detected by using the resulting EMG or MMG. ST may be determined when the resulting muscle activity reaches a pre-determined magnitude, such as a measured as a peak-to-peak voltage. In some embodiments, the predetermined magnitude is a peak-to-peak voltage from within the range of 20  $\mu$ V to 100  $\mu$ V. The system then shows the user the threshold, for example, on a user interface, such as at **112**.

**[0055]** The ST may be determined from a plurality of channels, where the ST is the lowest threshold (i.e., resulting muscle activity) observed from any of the channels. Accordingly, rather than assessing each channel in a multi-channel system individually, the system may assess the muscular response on all channels, and determine the ST from lowest stimulation threshold response.

**[0056]** After the potential threshold is determined, the system may continue to deliver stimulation pulses to the patient. At **110**, stimulation frequency is decreased and current of one or more pulses is increased. In some embodiments, the stimulation frequency is decreased to 5 Hz. In some embodiments, the increment size is increased to 2 mA. Using the decreased frequency and increased current and/or current increment, the system may continue to deliver stimulation pulses to the patient until the current levels reaches the top of the IR at **114**. In some embodiments, the maximum of the IR is 20 mA. If additional muscle responses are recruited from other muscles being recorded, the user display shows the user that those muscles are within the IR. The system may then repeat the process at **102** and update the ST with each sweep until the user stops the process or the system automatically stops the process.

**[0057]** Changes in the ST may be descriptive of nerve health, integrity of adjacent structures, or nerve proximity, for instance while developing a surgical corridor. In some embodiments, the changes may describe at least one of pedicle integrity, nerve pathology, and spinal cord health. In certain embodiments, the disclosed system and method is useful for determining nerve proximity. For this purpose, a decrease in ST would indicate an approach of a nerve, and may indicate to a user to discontinue that particular approach trajectory. A certain ST may indicate that the probe is too near to a nerve and that nerve damage may be imminent. Accordingly, a continuous detection and update of the ST guides a user, for example, in determining a surgical corridor that is safe for the surrounding nerves.

**[0058]** In some embodiments, the time between updating ST may decline if the ST is low, typically indicating proximity to the nerve or lack of integrity of intervening tissue. In some embodiments, the algorithm may use uniform sized increments which vary with the stimulation frequency. In some embodiments, the algorithm may vary the increments logarithmically. In some embodiments, the algorithm may vary the increments according the ST.

**[0059]** FIG. 3 illustrates an example embodiment of a method **300** for processing a response to stimulation and

determining a stimulation threshold according to implementations of the current subject matter. The system can (e.g., automatically) cause stimulation of a nerve pathway of the patient with electrical pulses via electrodes placed over the nerve pathway coupled with or separate from a probe. The stimulation can generate a plurality of resultant electrical signals in the form of waveforms that can be recorded by the system, such as by a neuromonitoring device. The stimulation is applied to the patient at a set initial frequency, with increasing current levels (e.g., intensity) at a fixed current increment). In this approach, the stimulation is applied to the patient at a high frequency, and rising intensity level (e.g., see FIG. 2).

**[0060]** At **302**, the response signal(s) can be preprocessed using one or more filtering techniques, mathematical transforms, or other preprocessing techniques. At **304**, the response signal(s) can be denoised. Examples of the denoising process is described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 15/927,921, filed Mar. 21, 2018, entitled "MEDICAL SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR DETECTING CHANGES IN ELECTROPHYSIOLOGICAL EVOKED POTENTIALS," which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety. For example, the system can include a processing circuit that can generate a plurality of evoked potential waveforms (EPs) based on the electrical potential data; calculate an ensemble average waveform (EA) of a subset of the plurality of EPs; apply a mathematical wavelet transform to the resultant EA; attenuate noise components from the transformed EA; and/or apply an inverse transform to the transformed EA to generate a denoised EA, among other things. In some implementations, the EA can be automatically denoised. In some implementations, the denoising method can include applying (e.g., automatically applying) at least one wavelet transform, such as a mathematical wavelet transform, to the EA. In some implementations, noise components can be attenuated from the transformed EA and/or an inverse transform can be applied to the transformed EA to generate a denoised EA.

**[0061]** At **306**, the denoised response signals can be segmented. For example, one or more response signals can be grouped and/or otherwise collected.

**[0062]** At **308**, one or more feature sets of the one or more groups of denoised response signals can be extracted. Each feature set may include one or more features of the collected signals and/or data. For example, a feature may include time complexity features, such as zero crossings, waveform length, minima and/or maxima counts, and/or the like. In some implementations, a feature may include a latency of the onset peak or a negative peak, the negative peak or peak to peak amplitude, a negative peak or rectified area (e.g., absolute value area) of the response, a duration and/or a rising or falling slope of the negative peak, and/or the like. In some implementations, the feature may include inter trough time (e.g. duration) of a CMAP, a CMAP amplitude, a spectral coherence, a linear prediction coefficient, an auto-regressive coefficient, and/or the like. The feature sets may be predetermined and/or automatically selected.

**[0063]** In some implementations, the feature can be included in a single feature set to classify a single epoch, or the feature can be included in a number N of feature sets, where N is the number of epochs being analyzed by the system. For example, in some implementations, if four epochs are analyzed, and only amplitude is considered, the system would extract four total features.

[0064] At 310, once the one or more feature sets are extracted, the system may classify the one or more feature sets, and/or one or more features of the feature sets using a classifier. Classification of the feature sets can help to determine a similarity between at least two response signals or groups of response signals. The classifier may include a statistical probability model (e.g., multi-variate Gaussian), a decision tree, support vector analysis, neural network, thresholding, a nearest neighbor, classifier, and/or the like. In some implementations, the classifier may include an auto-correlation between CMAPS and a time-series similarity metric between CMAPS (e.g., dynamic time warping). Thus, two or more response signals may be compared to confirm that a threshold has been reached.

[0065] FIG. 4 illustrates an example embodiment of a method 400 for determining a lowest stimulation threshold current level using a neuromonitoring device according to implementations of the current subject matter. At 402, the system can (e.g., automatically) cause stimulation of a nerve pathway of the patient with electrical pulses via electrodes placed over the nerve pathway coupled with or separate from a probe. The stimulation pulses can be provided to the patient at an initial frequency and an initial current level. The stimulation can generate a plurality of resultant electrical signals in the form of waveforms that can be recorded by the system, such as by the neuromonitoring device.

[0066] At 404, the system can continue to cause stimulation of the nerve pathway of the patient by continuing to deliver stimulation pulses to the patient. The continued stimulation pulses can be delivered at the same or lower frequency. The continued stimulation pulses can be delivered with current levels (e.g., intensity) of one or more pulses at the same current level and/or that increase by a current increment or a variety of current increments. In this approach, the stimulation is applied to the patient at a high frequency, and rising intensity level (e.g., see FIG. 2).

[0067] At 406 the system can determine that a predetermined threshold is reached according to methods described herein based one or more response signal received by the system. Once the predetermined threshold is reached, the system continues to deliver stimulation pulses to the patient to evoke one or more additional muscular responses, at 408. After the predetermined threshold is reached, the system may continue to deliver stimulation pulses to the patient at a higher frequency, and increasing current levels. Continuing to deliver stimulation pulses after the threshold is reached can increase the quality of the response signals received by the system in response to the delivered stimulation pulses. The increased quality of the response signals can lead to more stable and/or repeatable responses, and threshold determinations.

[0068] At 410, the system can confirm or otherwise verify that the threshold is reached according to methods described herein. For example, the system can compare one or more response signals received by the system after the threshold is reached to each other, and/or to the initial response signal received when the threshold was reached, to determine whether the initial response signal is repeatable, as described herein. In some implementations, the system can extract one or more features from the collected response signals and classify the one or more features to determine whether the initial response signal is repeatable.

[0069] FIG. 5 illustrates an example embodiment of a method 500 for determining a lowest stimulation threshold

current level using a neuromonitoring device according to implementations of the current subject matter. According to some embodiments, the method may automatically and/or quickly determine a stimulation current threshold after the device delivers one or more stimulation pulses to the patient. In an automated triggered electromyography or mechanomyography systems, it may be beneficial to determine the stimulation current threshold associated with a CMAP (e.g., a muscular response) that meets predetermined criteria. As mentioned above, in some EMG systems, a transient noise disturbance, spontaneous EMG spike or burst, and/or another anomaly may be improperly mistaken for an electrically elicited CMAP and lead to an erroneously identified threshold. For example, noise recorded by the device during a pulse sequence can result in false current threshold determinations. The systems described herein can help to reduce false-positives, and reduce or elimination noise disturbances.

[0070] Implementations of the device may confirm a current threshold, at least in part, by obtaining a repeatable muscle response resulting from continuing to stimulate the patient with one or more stimulation pulses after reaching the current threshold. As discussed below, the current threshold may be displayed via a display device.

[0071] At 502, stimulation of tissue associated with one or more muscles of a patient may begin. To stimulate the tissue of the patient, a stimulation probe may be used to provide one or more stimulation pulses, which act on one or more nearby nerves. In some embodiments, one or more electrodes attached to and/or separated from the stimulation probe may be used to provide the one or more stimulation pulses.

[0072] The patient's tissue may be stimulated, such as by the probe and/or electrodes, as a sequence of pulses. Generally, the stimulation pulses may be delivered by the device to the patient to approach the current threshold from below, by for example, incrementally increasing the stimulation current beginning at a lowest current level of a predetermined range of current levels. Methods described herein can improve the accuracy and/or repeatability of the displayed current threshold.

[0073] For example, the stimulation pulses can include a current level from within a predetermined range of current levels. At 504, the initial current level ( $I_0$ ) may be set. The initial current level may be set to 0.5 mA or another low value. For example, the initial current level may be set to 0.25 mA, 0.75 mA, 1.0 mA, 1.25 mA, or more.

[0074] The initial current level may be predetermined as a low end point in the predetermined range of current values, and/or may be automatically selected based on certain conditions of the patient. The current level of one or more stimulation pulses in the sequence of pulses may be the same and/or increased from an immediately preceding pulse by a fixed current increment, such as by a first current increment. The first current increment can be set to 0.5 mA. In some embodiments, the first current increment is set to 0.25 mA, 0.75 mA, 1.0 mA, 1.25 mA, or more. The first current increment may be equal to the initial current level.

[0075] The stimulation pulses may be delivered at a predetermined frequency (e.g., a rate of stimulation). For example, at 506, the initial frequency may be set. The initial current level may be predetermined as a low end point in the predetermined range of current values, and/or may be automatically selected based on certain conditions of the patient.



The initial frequency may be received by a user input device. The frequency may be initially set to 20 Hz, for example. In some embodiments, the frequency may be set to 5 Hz, 10 Hz, 15 Hz, 25 Hz, 30 Hz, or more.

**[0076]** At **508**, the device may deliver one or more stimulation pulses to the patient. The current level of each stimulation pulse in the sequence of pulses may be automatically incremented by the current increment until a response that meets certain criteria is identified by the device. FIG. 2 illustrates an example of the sequence of pulses.

**[0077]** In some embodiments, the criteria may be predetermined. The criteria can include whether the muscular response reaches a predefined threshold. Other criteria, such as certain features, that may be included to determine whether incremental responses are repeatable and thus a predetermined threshold is reached could include the latency of the onset peak or a negative peak, the negative peak or peak to peak amplitude, a negative peak or rectified area (e.g., absolute value area) of the response, a duration and/or a rising or falling slope of the negative peak, and/or the like. In some implementations, the criteria, such as the feature, may include inter trough time (e.g. duration) of a CMAP, a CMAP amplitude, a spectral coherence, a linear prediction coefficient, an auto-regressive coefficient, and/or the like. The feature sets may be predetermined and/or automatically selected. In some implementations, the criteria includes time complexity features, such as zero crossings, waveform length, minima and/or maxima counts, and/or the like. In some implementations, a feature may include a latency of the onset.

**[0078]** For example, FIG. 6 illustrates example response signals shown as waveforms received by the system in response to stimulation pulses being delivered to the patient. As shown in FIG. 6, the criteria for reaching a threshold can include the latency of the onset (e.g., a time at point **0** to the time at point **602**) or a negative peak (e.g., the time at point **0** to the time at point **604**), the negative peak (e.g., an amplitude at point **602** to point **604**) or peak to peak (e.g., an amplitude at point **604** to point **608**) amplitude, the negative peak (e.g., an area under the curve from point **602** to point **606**) or rectified area of the response (e.g., a rectified area between point **602** to point **606** plus point **606** to point **610**), a duration (e.g., the time from point **602** to point **612**) and a rising (e.g., an amplitude and/or time from point **602** to point **604**) or falling (e.g., an amplitude and/or time from point **604** to point **606**) slope of the negative peak.

**[0079]** FIG. 7 illustrates other example response signals shown as waveforms received by the system in response to stimulation pulses being delivered to the patient. As shown in FIG. 7, the threshold current level may be predetermined, such as at current level **702** or current level **704**.

**[0080]** Once the device receives and identifies a response that meets the criteria, the device may continue to deliver stimulation pulses, such as at a lower frequency and/or higher current level, which in some cases, have a current level that is high enough to evoke a muscular response.

**[0081]** For example, the sequence of stimulation pulses can include a first pulse and a second pulse delivered immediately after the first pulse. The first pulse can be delivered at a first current level from within the predetermined range of current levels and the second pulse can be delivered at a second current level from within the predetermined range of current levels. The second current level

may be higher than the first current level. For example, the second current level can be higher than the first current level by an amount equal to the first current increment.

**[0082]** A first muscular or nerve response that meets the criteria (e.g., predetermined criteria) may be received in response to the tissue stimulation. For example, at **510** the system can determine whether a first response was received in response to a stimulation pulse that meets the criteria. In some implementations, the system may remove artifacts (e.g., noise) from the received signals, and/or may denoise the received signals according to implementations described herein. The system can receive a first response signal representing the muscular response. FIG. 4 illustrates example waveforms representing muscular responses received in response to one or more stimulation pulses delivered to the patient. If the system receives the response signal that meets the criteria, the system can, at **512**, store the current level of the most recent pulse, and continue to deliver stimulation pulses to the patient. The stored current level can indicate a threshold current level ( $I_{thresh}$ ).

**[0083]** If the system determines that the most recent pulse (e.g., a first evocation pulse) evoked a first muscular response that meets the criteria, the system may stimulate the tissue with at least one more stimulation pulse (e.g., a second evocation pulse) to evoke another muscular response (e.g., a second muscular response). When stimulating the patient's tissue with the second evocation pulse, the system can deliver one or more stimulation pulses in the sequence of pulses with the same or decreasing frequency of the delivery of each stimulation pulse (e.g., at **514**) and/or at the same or increasing current level of one or more pulses in the sequence of pulses from the immediately preceding pulse by a second current increment (e.g., at **516**). For example, the frequency can be decreased to 5 Hz (e.g., from 20 Hz). In some embodiments, the frequency is decreased to 2.5 Hz, 5 Hz, 7.5 Hz, 10 Hz, or more. The frequency of the delivery of stimulation pulses may be reduced to avoid muscular tetany. In some implementations, variable current increments may be implemented.

**[0084]** In some embodiments, the second current increment is equal to the first current increment (for example, the second current increment can be equal to 0.5 mA), or the current increments can be varied. In some embodiments, the second current increment is larger than the first current increment.

**[0085]** In some embodiments, at **518**, the system can deliver a number N additional stimulation pulses to the patient's tissue, where N=2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or more. The system may analyze the responses received in response to the N stimulation pulses sequentially and/or iteratively.

**[0086]** For example, the system may receive at least a second signal (and/or third signal, fourth signal, fifth signal, etc.) representing the second or more muscular response in response to the second or more evocation pulse delivered to the tissue. Thus, the system may determine that the second evocation pulse evokes the second muscular response.

**[0087]** At **520**, the system can compare the first signal (see FIG. 4) received in response to the first evocation pulse and at least the second signal (see FIG. 4) received in response to the second evocation pulse. In some examples, the system can compare the signals sequentially. For example, the system can compare the first signal to the second signal, a third signal to the second signal, a fourth signal to the third signal, and/or a fifth signal to the fourth signal, etc. In some

examples, the system can compare epochs of signals (e.g., pools of signals) simultaneously. For example, the system can compare the first signal, second signal, third signal, fourth signal, and/or fifth signal, among other signals at the same time.

**[0088]** At **520**, if the system determines that at least two signals, such as the first and second signals, are repeatable, the system can display the stored threshold current level, at **526**, on the user display. The signals may be determined as repeatable by comparing by one or more methods including onset or peak latency range, amplitude range, area, morphology, power, rectified area, power, upswing slope, downswing slope or segmented waveform characteristics. In some implementations, the system may classify one or more features extracted from the collected response signals to determine repeatability of the threshold response. The classifier may include a statistical probability model (e.g., multivariate Gaussian), a decision tree, support vector analysis, neural network, thresholding, a nearest neighbor, classifier, and/or the like. In some implementations, the classifier may include an auto-correlation between CMAPS and a time-series similarity metric between CMAPS (e.g., dynamic time warping). Thus, two or more response signals may be compared to confirm that a threshold has been reached. Additionally, at **520**, the second, third, fourth and end of range response may vary significantly and may be differentiated from artifact by one or more of amplitude, morphology, area, slope, power or latency.

**[0089]** FIGS. **8A** and **8B** illustrate example response signals received in response to the delivery of stimulation pulses to the patient. As shown in FIGS. **8A** and **8B**, a threshold response signal **802** and another subsequent response signal **804** can be compared for repeatability and confirmation that the threshold has been reached, such as using an area comparison method. Upon capturing one or more waveforms, the system can determine similarity between the waveforms over a time region of interest (e.g., from  $t_1$  to  $t_2$ ). A scaling factor  $k$  may be determined by dividing a peak to peak amplitude of the first waveform (e.g., waveform **802**) shown in FIG. **8A** by the peak to peak amplitude of the second waveform (e.g., waveform **804**) shown in FIG. **8A**. The waveforms may be converted to a rectified (absolute value) representation (see FIG. **8B**). The area of the rectified first waveform **802A** is calculated as  $A_1$ . The second rectified waveform **804A** is multiplied by the scaling factor  $k$  to normalize the two amplitudes, and then subtracted from the first rectified waveform **802A** in a point by point manner. The difference can then be integrated over the time region of interest to calculate a difference area,  $A_{diff}$ . Similarity, and thus repeatability, may be found when the difference area,  $A_{diff}$  is less than a predetermined fraction (e.g. 20%) of the first waveform area,  $A_1$ .

**[0090]** At **522**, in some embodiments, if the system determines that at least two signals are repeatable, such as the first and second signals, the system can again stimulate the patient's tissue with another evocation pulse having the same or higher current than a preceding evocation pulse. Here, the current level may or may not be incremented by the current increment. For example, the current level of the additional evocation pulse may be the same as the current level of the previous evocation pulse(s). At **524**, the system can compare the additional signal(s), received in response to the additional evocation pulse(s), to at least the first two repeatable signals, such as the first and second signals, using

methods described above. If the additional signal satisfies the criteria of similarity to the previously determined repeatable signals, the system may display the stored threshold current level on the user display, at **526**.

**[0091]** In some embodiments, if at **520**, the system determines that the analyzed signals, such as the first and second signals, are not repeatable, the system can increase the frequency of the pulses in the pulse sequence (e.g., to 20 Hz) at **528**, and increase the current level at **530** by the current increment (e.g., by 0.5 mA). In some implementations, the frequency of the pulses may not change and/or may be lowered, and/or the current level may not change. The process may be repeated at **508** by delivering a sequence of stimulation pulses to the patient to determine whether additional evocation pulses are repeatable.

**[0092]** In some embodiments, if at **524** the system determines that the analyzed signals, such as the first, second signals, and/or additional signals are not repeatable or are caused by artifact, the system can increase the current level of the pulses in the pulse sequence by the current increment (e.g., by 0.5 mA), at **516**. The process may be repeated at **518** by continuing to deliver a sequence of stimulation pulses to the patient to determine whether additional evocation pulses are repeatable.

**[0093]** At **532**, the system can determine whether delivery of stimulation pulses to the patient's tissue should continue, or determine whether to continue locating another current threshold by using the above noted criteria.

**[0094]** At **532**, if the system determines that additional stimulation pulses should be delivered to the patient, the process may restart at **504**. At **532**, if the system determines that additional stimulation pulses should not be delivered to the patient, the process may finish at **534**. In some embodiments, the process can be run in a single pass to yield a single current threshold result and finish, complete a stimulation sweep over an entire stimulation range, and/or be repeated to continuously display the value of a changing current threshold.

**[0095]** The systems, devices, apparatus, methods, algorithms, and other embodiments described herein can be utilized in connection with medical procedures, such as surgical procedures, and with medical and surgical instruments. For example, the various systems, devices, apparatus, methods, algorithms, and other embodiments can be utilized in medical procedures involving the spine or nervous system, or other types of procedures where it is desirable to monitor the health and/or integrity of nerves during the procedure. For example, the spinal surgery or other surgery can be performed by lateral approach or traditional anterior and/or posterior surgical approaches. Thus, the systems, devices, apparatus, methods, algorithms, and other embodiments can be integrated or used in connection with medical apparatus and instruments including, but not limited to, implants, rods, fixation devices, disc replacements, probes, dilators, retractors, pedicle screws, pedicle screw awls, nerve stimulators, curettes, forceps, needles, micro-dissectors, rongeurs, elevators, Jamshidi needles, rasps, gouges, surgical site lights or suction tubes.

**[0096]** The various examples illustrated and described are provided merely as examples to illustrate various features of the claims. However, features shown and described with respect to any given example are not necessarily limited to the associated example and may be used or combined with

other examples that are shown and described. Further, the claims are not intended to be limited by any one example.

**[0097]** The foregoing system, method and device descriptions and the diagrams are provided merely as illustrative examples and are not intended to require or imply that the steps of various examples must be performed in the order presented. As will be appreciated by one of skill in the art the order of steps in the foregoing examples may be performed in any order. Words such as “thereafter,” “then,” “next,” etc. are not intended to limit the order of the steps; these words are simply used to guide the reader through the description of the methods. Further, any reference to claim elements in the singular, for example, using the articles “a,” “an” or “the” is not to be construed as limiting the element to the singular.

**[0098]** The various illustrative logical blocks, modules, and algorithm steps described in connection with the examples disclosed herein may be implemented wholly or in part as electronic hardware, computer software, or combinations of both. To clearly illustrate this interchangeability of hardware and software, various illustrative components, blocks, modules, circuits, and steps have been described above generally in terms of their functionality. Whether such functionality is implemented as hardware or software depends upon the particular application and design constraints imposed on the overall system. Skilled artisans may implement the described functionality in varying ways for each particular application, but such implementation decisions should not be interpreted as causing a departure from the scope of the present disclosure.

**[0099]** Referring to FIG. 9, according to some implementations of the current subject matter, the methods described above are implemented with neuromonitoring device 30. The device 30 includes hardware and software for operation and control of the system. According to some implementations, the device 30 includes a computing system 31, an input device 36, and a graphical alerting system, such as display device 37, among other components. The computing system comprises a processing circuit 32 having a processor 33 and memory 34. Processor 33 can be implemented as a general purpose processor, a digital signal processor (DSP), an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC), one or more field programmable gate arrays (FPGAs), a group of processing components, or other suitable electronic processing components or programmable logic device, discrete gate or transistor logic, discrete hardware components, or any combination thereof designed to perform the functions described herein. Memory 34 (e.g., memory, memory unit, storage device, etc.) is one or more devices (e.g., RAM, ROM, Flash-memory, hard disk storage, etc.) for storing data and/or computer code for completing or facilitating the various processes described in the present application. Memory 34 may be or include volatile memory or non-volatile memory. Memory 34 may include database components, object code components, script components, or any other type of information structure for supporting the various activities described in the present application. According to some implementations, memory 34 is communicably connected to processor 33 and includes computer code for executing one or more processes described herein. The memory 34 may contain a variety of modules, each capable of storing data and/or computer code related to specific types of functions.

**[0100]** Referring still to FIG. 9, the computing system 31 further includes a communication interface 35. The communication interface 35 can be or include wired or wireless interfaces (e.g., jacks, antennas, transmitters, receivers, transceivers, wire terminals, etc.) for conducting data communications with external sources via a direct connection or a network connection (e.g., an Internet connection, a LAN, WAN, or WLAN connection, etc.).

**[0101]** Unless specifically stated otherwise, as apparent from the following discussions, it may be appreciated that throughout the specification discussions utilizing terms such as “processing,” “computing,” “calculating,” “determining,” or the like, refer to the action and/or processes of a computer or computing system, or similar electronic computing device, that manipulate and/or transform data represented as physical, such as electronic, quantities within the computing system’s registers and/or memories into other data similarly represented as physical quantities within the computing system’s memories, registers or other such information storage, transmission or display devices.

**[0102]** The previous description is provided to enable any person skilled in the art to practice the various aspects described herein. Various modifications to these aspects will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art, and the generic principles defined herein may be applied to other aspects. Thus, the claims are not intended to be limited to the aspects shown herein, but is to be accorded the full scope consistent with the language claims, wherein reference to an element in the singular is not intended to mean “one and only one” unless specifically so stated, but rather “one or more.” Unless specifically stated otherwise, the term “some” refers to one or more. All structural and functional equivalents to the elements of the various aspects described throughout the previous description that are known or later come to be known to those of ordinary skill in the art are expressly incorporated herein by reference and are intended to be encompassed by the claims. Moreover, nothing disclosed herein is intended to be dedicated to the public regardless of whether such disclosure is explicitly recited in the claims. No claim element is to be construed as a means plus function unless the element is expressly recited using the phrase “means for.”

**1-20.** (canceled)

**21.** A method for determining a stimulation threshold current level to avoid tetany associated with one or more muscles, the method comprising:

causing, by a stimulation system comprising one or more data processors, stimulation, via one or more electrodes, of tissue of a patient as a sequence of pulses delivered at a current level and a frequency, the causing including increasing the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from an immediately preceding pulse by a first current increment;

determining, by the stimulation system, that a first evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes a first muscular response, the first evocation pulse reaching predetermined criteria, the first evocation pulse having a first evocation current level, the first muscular response comprising a first evoked response that is processed by the stimulation system to classify the first evoked response;

causing, by the stimulation system, stimulation, via the one or more electrodes, of the tissue with a second

- evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses to evoke a second muscular response, the causing comprising:
- maintaining or decreasing the frequency of the delivery of each pulse in the sequence of pulses; and
  - maintaining the current level of one or more pulses in the sequence of pulses at the current level of the first evocation pulse or increasing the current level of one or more pulses in the sequence of pulses from the immediately preceding pulse by a second current increment;
- determining, by the stimulation system, that the second evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes the second muscular response, the second muscular response comprising a second evoked response that is processed by the stimulation system to compare the first evoked response to the second evoked response; and
- storing, by the stimulation system, based at least in part on the determination that the first evocation pulse evokes the first muscular response and the determination that the second evocation pulse evokes the second muscular response, the first evocation current level as the stimulation threshold current level.
- 22.** The method of claim **21**, further comprising determining, by the stimulation system, that the first evocation pulse and the second evocation pulse are not due to artifact noise present within a first signal representing the first muscular response and artifact noise present within a second signal representing the second muscular response.
- 23.** The method of claim **21**, wherein the second current increment is the same as the first current increment.
- 24.** The method of claim **21**, wherein the determining that the first evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes the first muscular response further comprises: storing the first evocation current level of the first evocation pulse.
- 25.** The method of claim **21**, wherein the determining that the first evocation pulse evokes the first muscular response includes receiving, by the stimulation system, a first signal representing the first muscular response and the determining that the second evocation pulse evokes the second muscular response includes receiving, by the stimulation system, a second signal representing the second muscular response.
- 26.** The method of claim **25**, further comprising:
- comparing, by the stimulation system, the first signal to the second signal;
  - determining, by the stimulation system, that the first signal can be repeatably obtained based on the comparison between the first signal and the second signal; and
  - displaying, by the stimulation system, the first evocation current level of the first evocation pulse.
- 27.** The method of claim **26**, wherein the first signal and the second signal are compared as a group of signals that includes a third signal representing a third muscular response evoked in response to a third evocation pulse.
- 28.** The method of claim **25**, further comprising:
- comparing, by the stimulation system, the first signal to the second signal;
  - determining, by the stimulation system, that the first signal is not repeatably obtained based on the comparison between the first signal and the second signal;
- causing, by the stimulation system, stimulation of the tissue with a third evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses to evoke a third muscular response, the causing comprising:
- increasing or maintaining, by the stimulation system, the frequency of the delivery of each pulse in the sequence of pulses; and
  - increasing, by the stimulation system, the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from the immediately preceding pulse or maintaining the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from the immediately preceding pulse.
- 29.** The method of claim **21**, wherein the processing of the first evoked response comprises preprocessing the first evoked response using one or more filtering techniques or mathematical transforms.
- 30.** The method of claim **21**, wherein the processing of the second evoked response comprises preprocessing the first evoked response using one or more filtering techniques or mathematical transforms.
- 31.** A method for determining a stimulation threshold current level in a group of channels of a neuromonitoring device, wherein each channel is associated with one or more muscles, the method comprising:
- causing, by a stimulation system comprising one or more data processors, stimulation, via one or more electrodes, of tissue within a predetermined range of current levels as a sequence of pulses delivered at a frequency by delivering stimulation signals, the sequence of pulses including:
    - a first pulse delivered at a first current level within the predetermined range of current levels; and
    - a second pulse delivered at a second current level within the predetermined range of current levels, the first pulse being delivered immediately preceding the second pulse, and the second current level being higher than the first current level;
  - determining that the second pulse evokes a first muscular response, the first muscular response comprising a first evoked response that is processed by the stimulation system to classify the first evoked response;
  - causing, by the stimulation system, stimulation, via the one or more electrodes, the tissue with a third pulse from the sequence of pulses to evoke a second muscular response, the third pulse being delivered at a third current level that is the same as or higher than the second current level;
  - determining that the third pulse evokes the second muscular response; and
  - storing, by the stimulation system, based at least in part on the determination that the second pulse evokes the first muscular response and the determination that the third pulse evokes the second muscular response, the second current level as the stimulation threshold current level.
- 32.** The method of claim **31**, further comprising determining, by the stimulation system, that the first pulse and the second pulse are not due to artifact noise present within a first signal representing the first muscular response and artifact noise present within a second signal representing the second muscular response.
- 33.** The method of claim **31**, wherein the stimulating further comprises:

decreasing or maintaining, by the stimulation system, the frequency of the delivery of each pulse in the sequence of pulses; and

increasing, by the stimulation system, the current level of the third pulse by an amount that is greater than a difference between the first current level and the second current level.

**34.** The method of claim **31**, wherein the determining that the second pulse evokes the first muscular response includes receiving, by the stimulation system, a first signal representing the first muscular response and the determining that the third pulse evokes the second muscular response includes receiving by the stimulation system, a second signal representing the second muscular response.

**35.** The method of claim **34**, further comprising:

comparing, by the stimulation system, the first signal with the second signal;

determining, by the stimulation system, that the first signal can be repeatably obtained-based on the comparison between the first signal and the second signal; and

displaying, by the stimulation system, the second current level of the second pulse.

**36.** The method of claim **35**, wherein the first signal and the second signal are compared as a group of signals that includes a third signal representing a third muscular response evoked in response to a third evocation pulse.

**37.** The method of claim **35**, further comprising:

comparing, by the stimulation system, the first signal with the second signal;

determining, by the stimulation system, that the first signal is not repeatably obtained based on the comparison between the first signal and the second signal;

causing, by the stimulation system, stimulation of the tissue with a fourth pulse from the sequence of pulses to evoke a third muscular response, the causing comprising:

increasing or maintaining, by the stimulation system, the frequency of the delivery of each pulse in the sequence of pulses; and

increasing, by the stimulation system, the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from the immediately preceding pulse or maintaining the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from the immediately preceding pulse.

**38.** A stimulation system for detecting and identifying a stimulation threshold to avoid tetany of a patient's muscles, wherein the system comprises:

an input device for obtaining electrical potential data from the patient's physiological system after application of stimulation to the patient's tissue;

at least one processor; and

at least one memory storing instructions which, when executed by the at least one data processor, result in operations comprising:

causing, by the stimulation system, stimulation, via one or more electrodes, of tissue with a sequence of pulses delivered at a current level and a frequency, the causing including increasing the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from an immediately preceding pulse;

determining, by the stimulation system, that a first evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes a first muscular response, the first evocation pulse having a first evocation current level;

continuing to cause, by the stimulation system, stimulation of the tissue with a second evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses to evoke a second muscular response, the causing comprising:

maintaining or decreasing the frequency of the delivery of each pulse in the sequence of pulses; and maintaining or increasing the current level of each pulse in the sequence of pulses from the immediately preceding pulse by a second current increment;

determining, by the stimulation system, that the second evocation pulse from the sequence of pulses evokes the second muscular response; and

storing, by the stimulation system, based at least in part on the determination that the first evocation pulse evokes the first muscular response and the determination that the second evocation pulse evokes the second muscular response, the first evocation current level as the stimulation threshold current level.

**39.** The system of claim **38**, wherein the operations further comprise determining, by the stimulation system, that the first evocation pulse and the second evocation pulse are not due to artifact noise present within a first signal representing the first muscular response and artifact noise present within a second signal representing the second muscular response.

\* \* \* \* \*