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(54) **APPARATUS FOR A MOLECULAR IMPRINTED PROTECTIVE FACE MASK**

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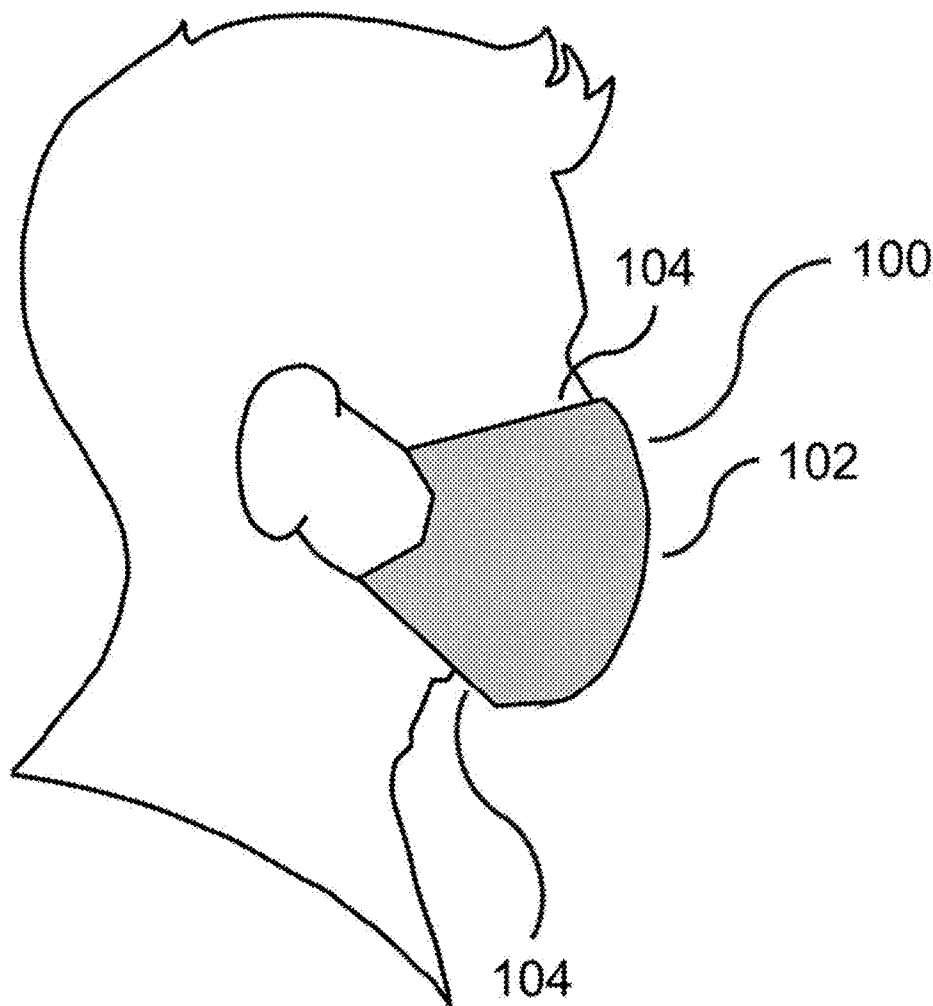
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(57) **ABSTRACT**
Disclosed herein is a molecular imprinted protective face mask comprising a supportive structure, a surface material that receives and retains a molecular imprint and that is positioned to contact airborne molecules during use, a molecular imprint of a bioactive molecule wherein an imprinted cavity is at least one of a bioactive molecule with a molecular configuration that captures a specific airborne and/or microdroplet-borne molecule and a protein with a binding site that captures a specific molecule.

100



100

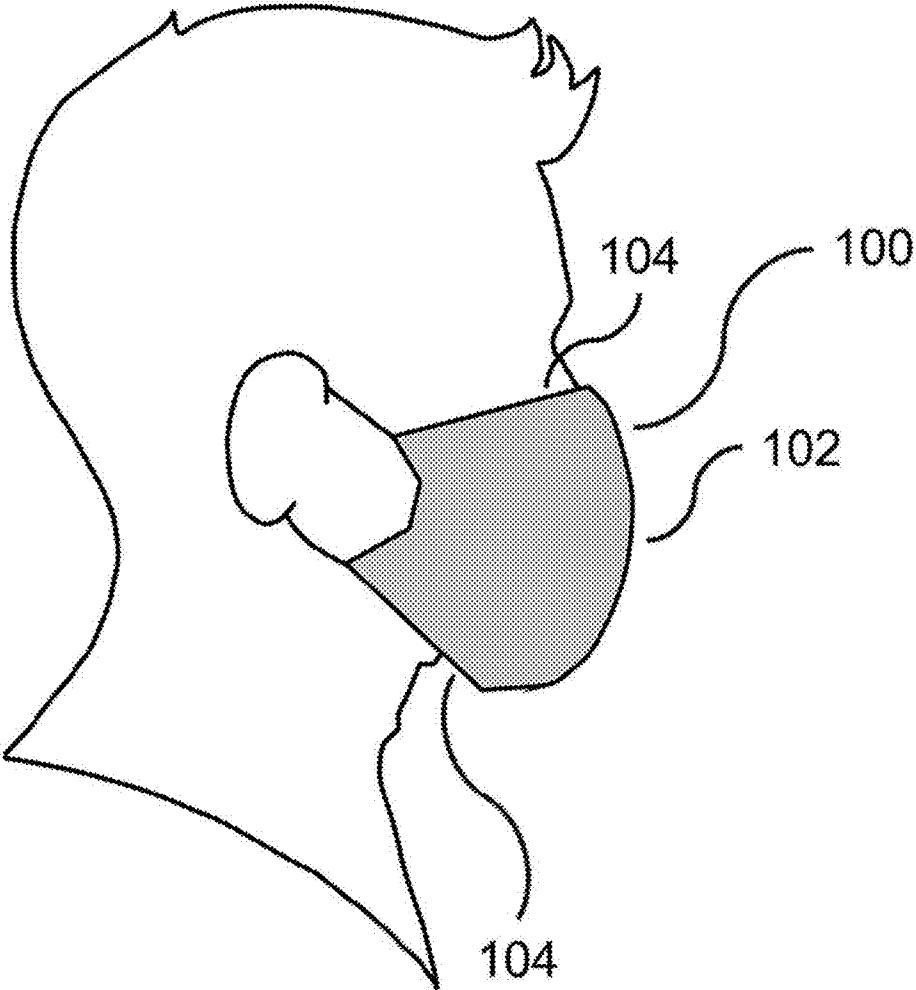


FIG. 1

200

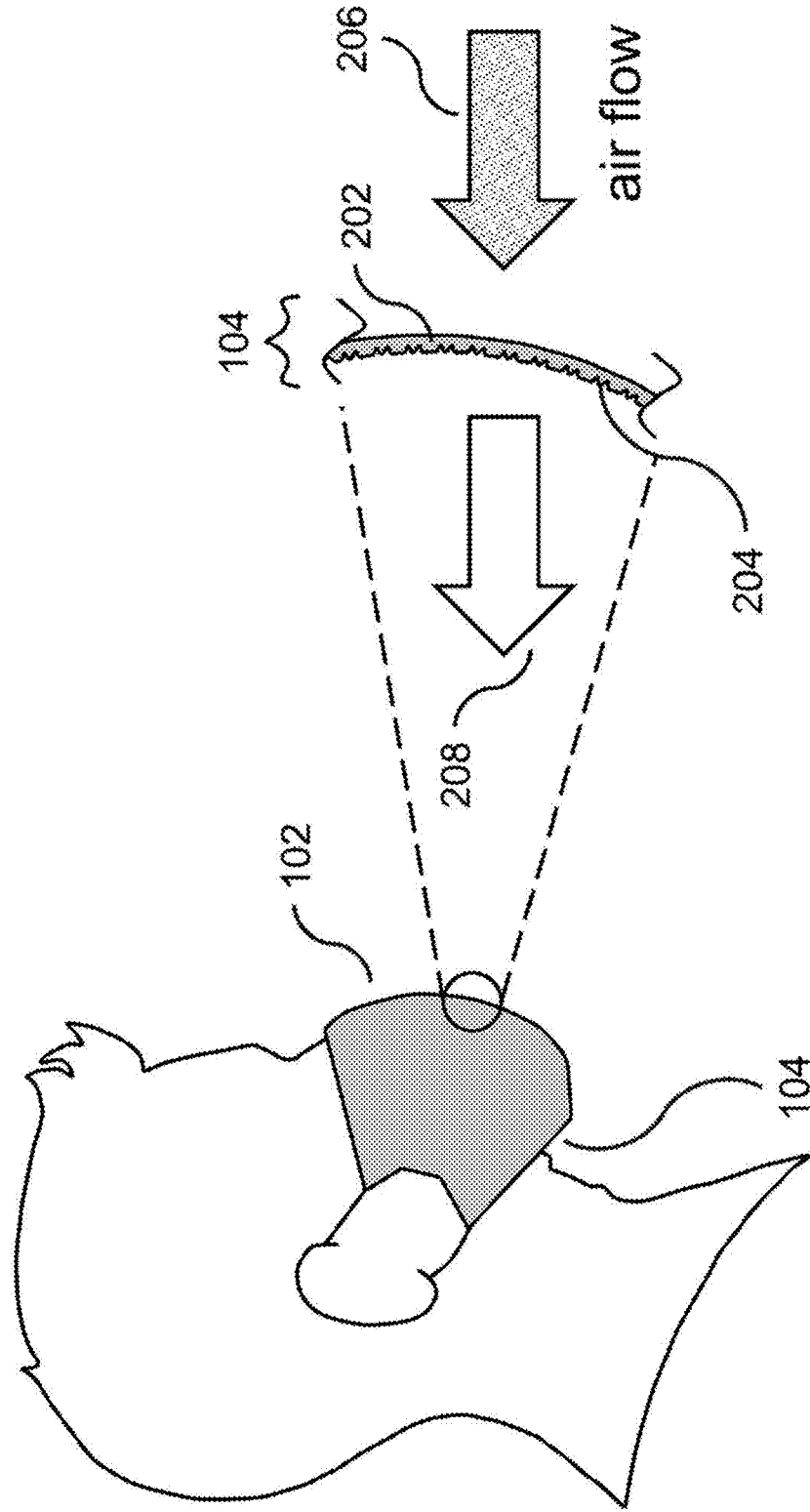


FIG. 2

300

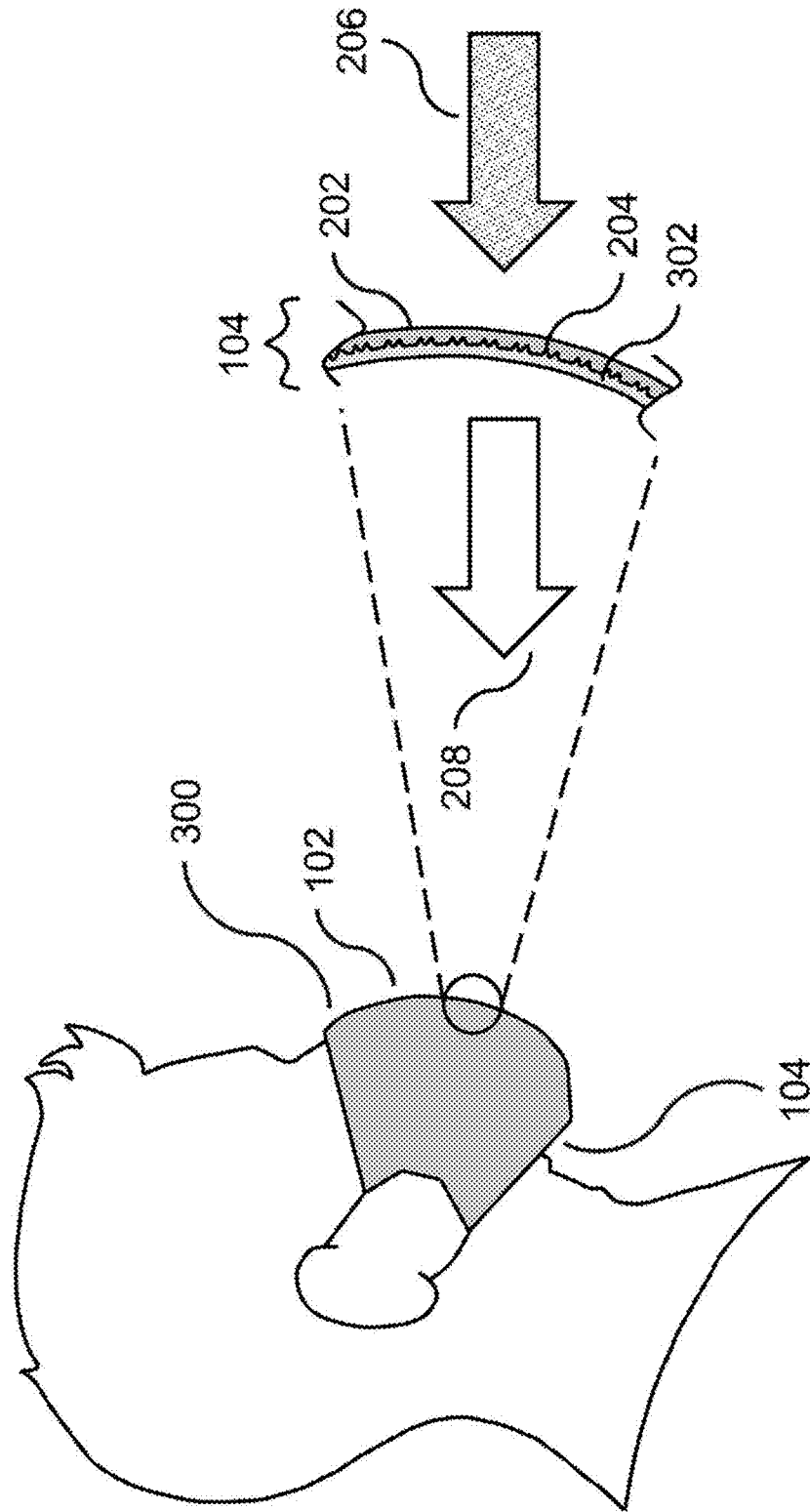


FIG. 3

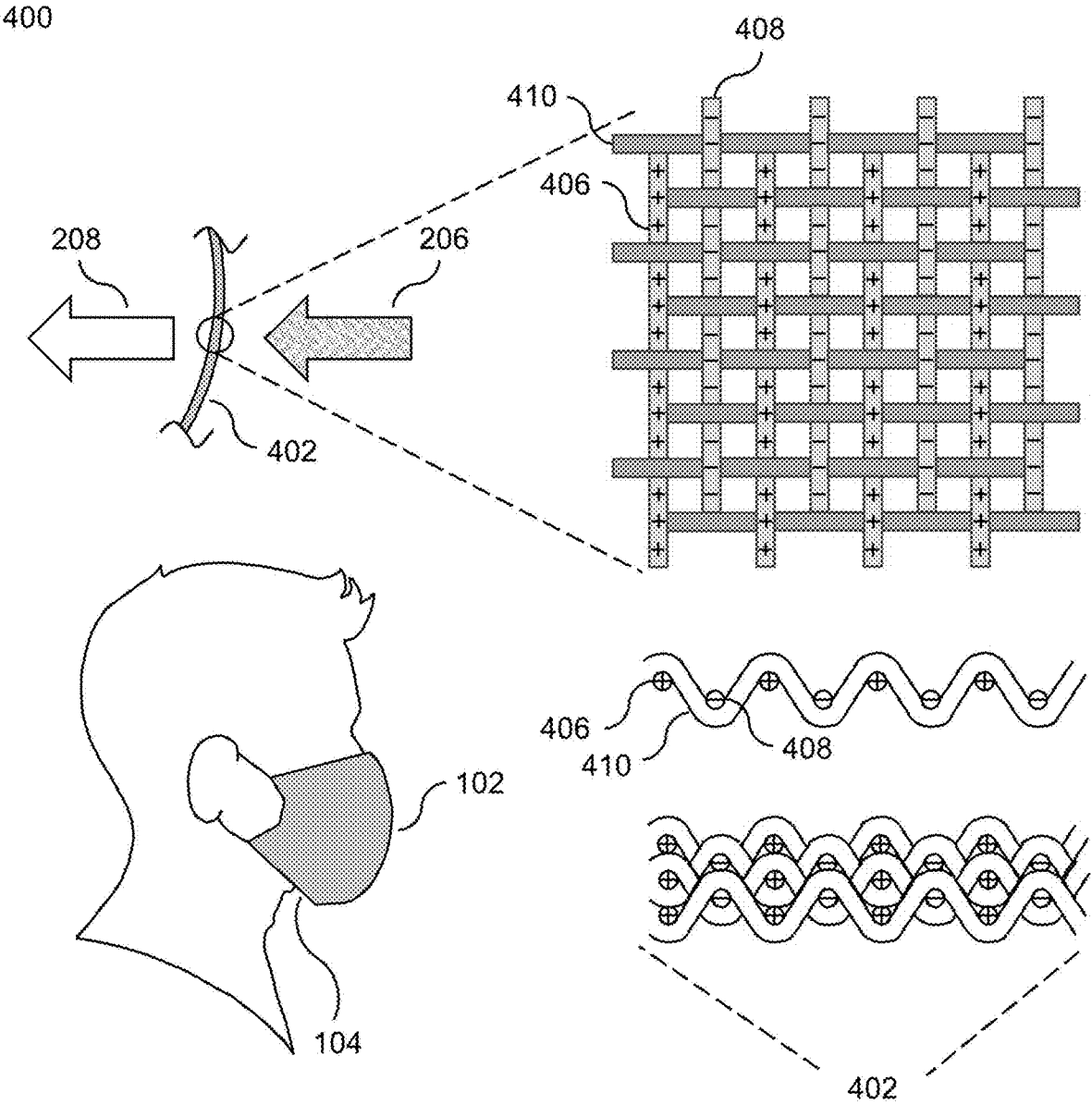
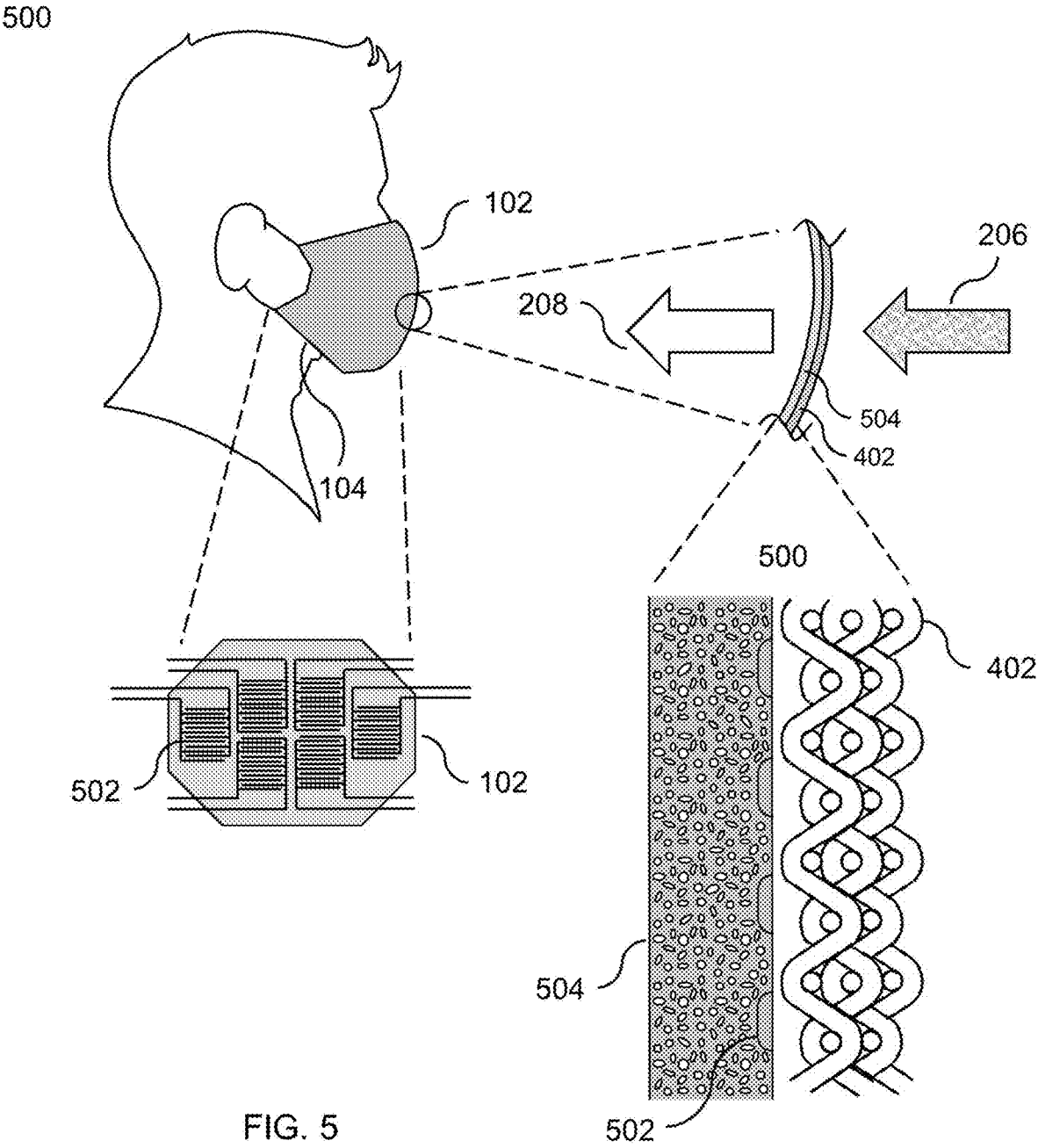


FIG. 4



600

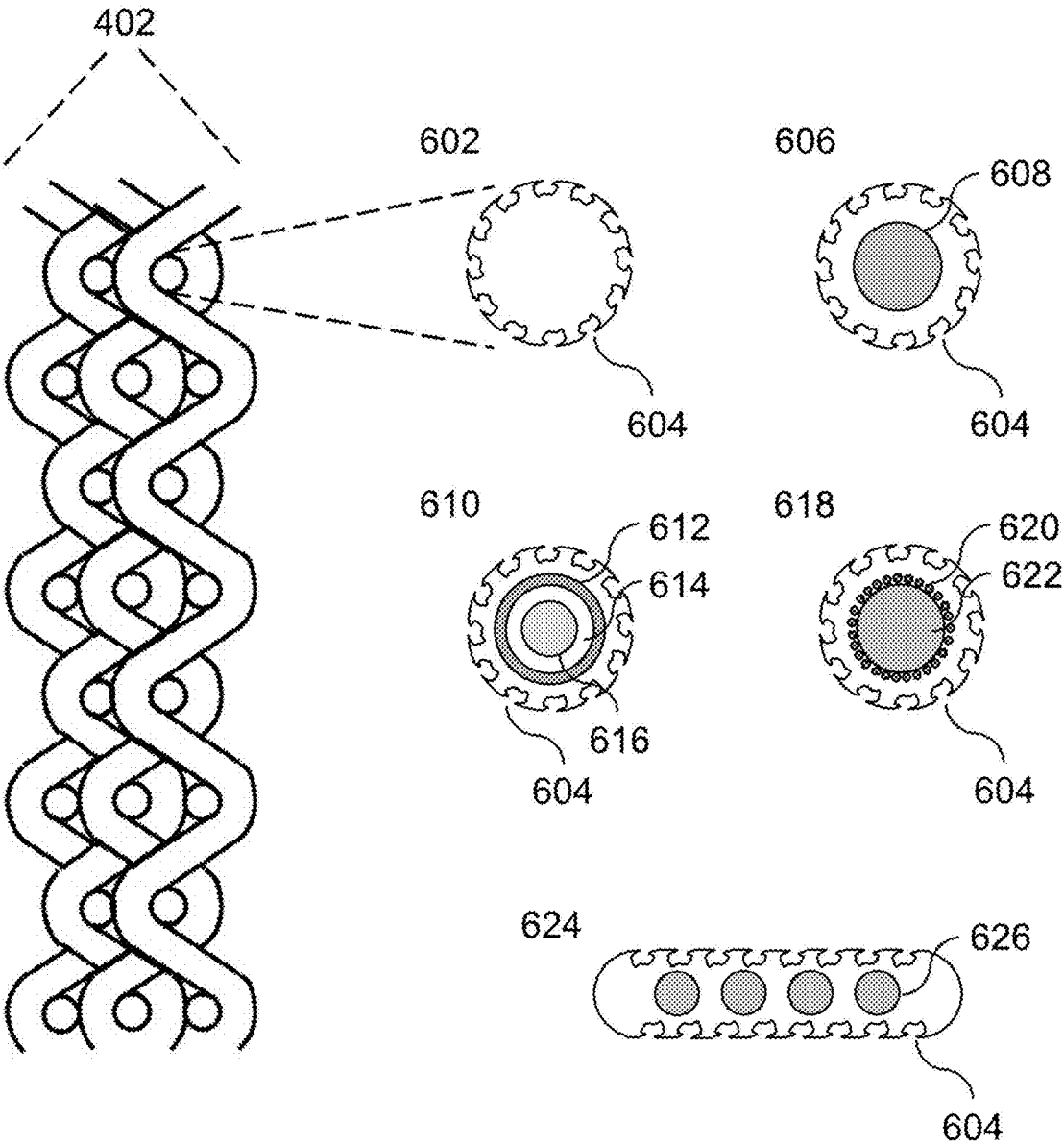


FIG. 6

700

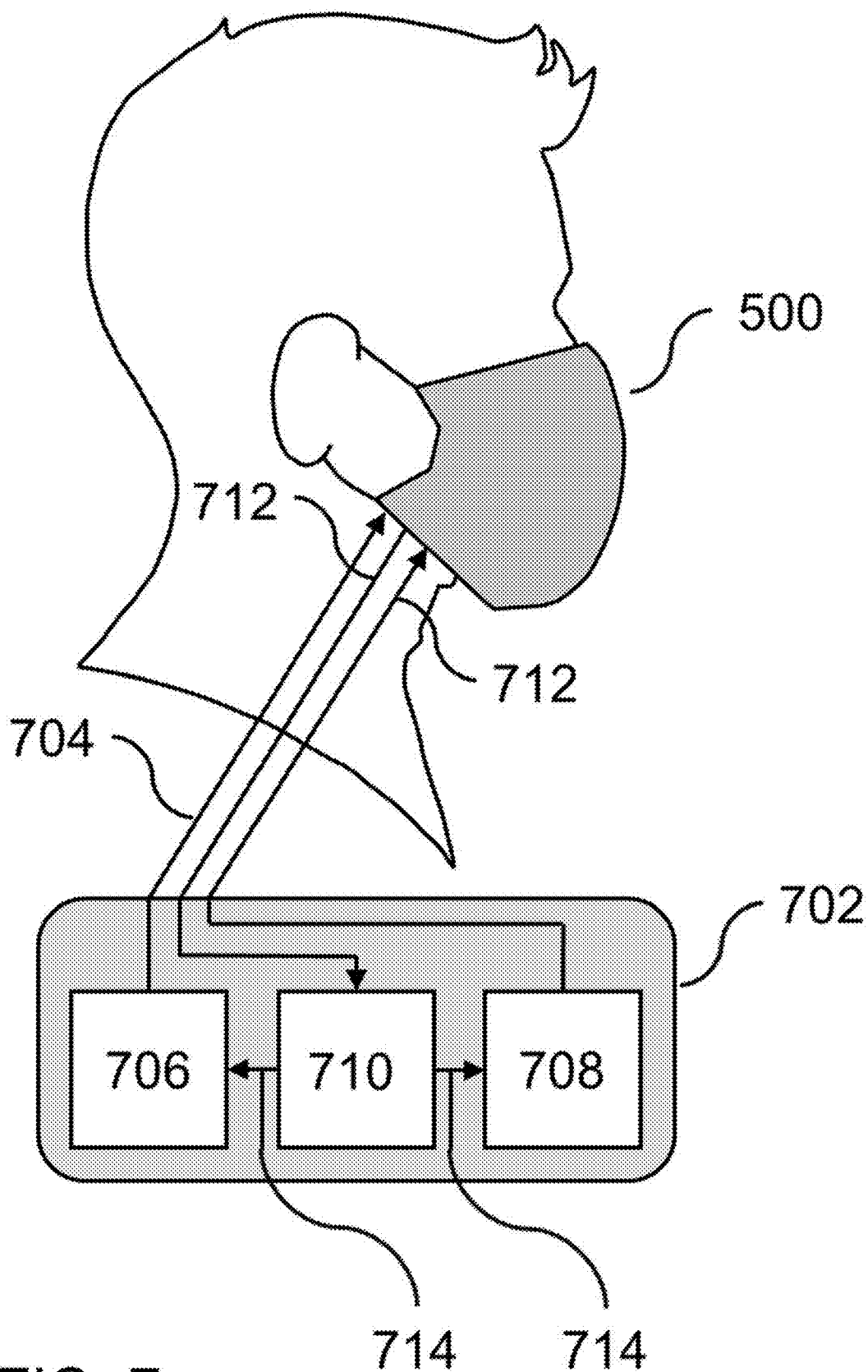


FIG. 7

APPARATUS FOR A MOLECULAR IMPRINTED PROTECTIVE FACE MASK

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates to a protective face mask and more particularly relates to a molecular imprinted anti-microbial protective face mask.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Protective face masks of various designs have traditionally been used in medical and industrial settings to shield the face and respiratory system of the wearer from infectious agents, particulate matter, and noxious gasses. Various protective face masks have been designed to exclude various materials or particle sizes. For example masks with a designation ending in “95”, have a 95 percent efficiency while masks ending in a 99 have a 99 percent efficiency. Masks ending in 100 are 99.97 percent efficient which is the same as a HEPA quality filter. An “N” labeling designates “non-oil;” signifying that the mask is effective in a work environment with no oil particles present. Other masks ratings are R (resistant to oil for 8 hours) and P (oil proof).

[0003] Similarly the “0.3” designation indicates that the masks filters out contaminants like dusts, mists and fumes with minimum particulate size of 0.3 microns. The filtration material on a mask is typically an electrostatic non-woven polypropylene fiber. Additional technologies may infuse mask surfaces with various metal ions such as copper to provide some degree of antimicrobial function. However, current mask surface coating technologies do not incorporate all desirable aspects, such as agent specific anti-microbial action. Thus, a need exists for a device incorporating the action of a specific molecules and/or a mixture of molecules targeted to specific agents including specific pathogens.

SUMMARY

[0004] From the foregoing discussion, it should be apparent that a need exists for protective face mask that would protect against specific infectious agents. It should further be apparent that a need exists for a protective face mask with anti-microbial properties. Beneficially, such an apparatus would be re-usable, and self-cleaning.

[0005] The present invention has been developed in response to the present state of the art, and in particular, in response to the problems and needs in the art that have not yet been fully solved by currently available protective face masks. Accordingly, the present invention has been developed to provide a molecular imprinted protective face mask that overcomes many or all of the above-discussed shortcomings in the art.

[0006] Provided herein is a molecular imprint apparatus comprising a face mask or similar personal protective equipment for cleansing air, and/or detecting hazardous substances and infectious pathogens in the air. In various embodiments the apparatus comprises an air filtering component comprising one or more air-permeable layers of molecular imprinted fabric, woven material, non-woven material and/or a porous material positioned to contact airborne and/or microdroplet-borne molecules during use and comprises a bioactive molecular imprint wherein an imprinted cavity is of a bioactive molecule that captures a specific airborne and/or microdroplet-borne molecule and/or

of a protein with a binding site that captures a specific airborne and/or microdroplet-borne molecule. The molecular imprints on the surface of the threads of the fabric and/or the interior pores of the porous material may attenuate, neutralize, and/or detect toxic gases, toxic fumes, hazardous aerosols, or infectious pathogens.

[0007] In certain embodiments the air filtering component comprises an air-permeable material comprising paper, polymer foam, woven fabric, knitted fabric, non-woven fabric, melt-blown fabric, ion-infused fabric, a non-fabric material and/or a hydrophilic material to capture microscopic airborne droplets to enable the interaction of the molecular imprints with airborne hazardous substances and/or infectious pathogens in an aqueous environment. The one or more layers of the filtering component may catalyze a biochemical reaction with an airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agent to attenuate, neutralize, and/or detect the agent.

[0008] The apparatus sometimes comprises an electronic enhancement comprising at least one of an interdigital electrode, a semiconductor, a nanoparticle quantum dot, a nano-island, a quantum wire, other nanostructured component, a piezoelectric element, a semiconductor, an acoustic waveguide, an optical fiber, an ultrasonic transducer, and a laser. In various embodiments the electronic enhancement at least one of generates a static and/or time-varying electrical field, produces an electron wave function configuration that dynamically reconfigures the electron charge distribution within the molecular imprint, enables tuning of the imprinted cavity, generates at least one of ultrasonic and electromagnetic waves, and mechanically agitates a biomolecule to induce its interaction with or release from the molecular imprint cavity.

[0009] Layer (n) of the apparatus sometimes catalyzes a particular biochemical reaction (p) in a multistep reaction with an airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agent. Layer (n+1) may catalyze a successive biochemical reaction (p+1) in a multistep reaction with an airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agent. In some embodiments each layer of the filtering component catalyzes a particular step of a biochemical reaction with an airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agent to attenuate, neutralize, and/or detect the agent. The filtering component may comprise one or more layers of porous material comprising fibers of at least one of a plurality of molecular imprint types, conductive electrodes, sensor wires, optical waveguides, and acoustic waveguides.

[0010] In various embodiments the plurality of molecular imprint types catalyze a multistep biochemical reaction to attenuate, neutralize, or detect an airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agent. The plurality of molecular imprint types may simultaneously catalyze one or more biochemical reactions to at least one of attenuate neutralize, and detect one or more hazardous airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agents.

[0011] The sensor wires may read the binding state of molecular imprint cavities to detect hazardous airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agents. The air filtering component sometimes comprises a transducer comprising an interdigital electrode and/or other device for at least one of fine-tuning the molecular imprint to enhance its response to a range of molecules, provide electrical energy to free molecules from the imprinted binding site, re-activate the specific molecule capture function of the imprint site, and interact with the molecular imprint to function as a biosensor.

[0012] The apparatus biosensor may comprise a molecular imprinted polymer surface comprising at least one of surface plasmon resonance (SPR), surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS), fluorescence quenching of semiconductor quantum dots, photoluminescence, UV-visible spectroscopy, electrochemical sensors (conductivity, capacitance, impedance, potentiometry, and voltametry measurements), piezoelectric (quartz crystal microbalance, surface acoustic wave (SAW), pulse-echo ultrasound, through-transmission ultrasound, and phased-array ultrasound) sensors, and biomimetic microchips with micropatterned imprinted polymers. In some embodiments the conductive electrode functions as an interdigital electrode for enhancing, modulating and/or reading the binding state of the imprinted cavity.

[0013] The interdigital electrode sometimes comprises at least one of comb-shaped interlocking arrays of straight parallel electrodes, a fan-shaped array of radially-oriented electrodes, an array of concentrically-oriented circular electrodes, and arrays consisting of electrodes arranged in more complex geometries such as elliptical, parabolic, hyperbolic, and straight-line angles.

[0014] In various embodiments the apparatus biosensor triggers re-tuning the imprinted cavity in response to at least one of a completed reaction and a changing molecular environment. At least one of the air filtration component and the molecular imprint cavity may comprise a biosensor for at least one of a specific health condition, a specific type of pathogen, a specific type of pollutant, a specific type of allergen, and a specific environment or condition and/or may be customized to a specific user or set of users.

[0015] The apparatus may comprise an alarm and/or a triggerable reservoir of inhalable or other appropriate medication. In some embodiments the triggerable reservoir of medication comprises at least one of a loaded molecular imprint cavity and other storage medium. The specific user or set of users may comprise persons with compromised lung function and the biosensor may sense restricted air flow through a porous material and trigger an alarm and/or release of a bronchodilator and/or other lung treatment. In various embodiments the biosensor is tuned to sense specific volatile organic molecules in the exhaled breath of the user and to trigger an alarm and/or the release of an appropriate medication.

[0016] Reference throughout this specification to features, advantages, or similar language does not imply that all of the features and advantages that may be realized with the present invention should be or are in any single embodiment of the invention. Rather, language referring to the features and advantages is understood to mean that a specific feature, advantage, or characteristic described in connection with an embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the present invention. Thus, discussions of the features and advantages, and similar language, throughout this specification may, but do not necessarily, refer to the same embodiment.

[0017] Furthermore, the described features, advantages, and characteristics of the invention may be combined in any suitable manner in one or more embodiments. One skilled in the relevant art will recognize that the invention may be practiced without one or more of the specific features or advantages of a particular embodiment. In other instances, additional features and advantages may be recognized in certain embodiments that may not be present in all embodiments of the invention.

[0018] These features and advantages of the present invention will become more fully apparent from the following description and appended claims or may be learned by the practice of the invention as set forth hereinafter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0019] In order that the advantages of the invention will be readily understood, a more particular description of the invention briefly described above will be rendered by reference to specific embodiments that are illustrated in the appended drawings. Understanding that these drawings depict only typical embodiments of the invention and are not therefore to be considered to be limiting of its scope, the invention will be described and explained with additional specificity and detail through the use of the accompanying drawings, in which:

[0020] FIG. 1 is a schematic line drawing depicting an embodiment of a molecular imprinted face mask as worn by an individual, comprising a filtering component and a component that holds the filtering component securely against the front of the face over the nose and mouth;

[0021] FIG. 2 is a schematic line drawing and expanded section view depicting an embodiment of a molecular imprinted face mask consisting of a single-layered filtering component, composed of a molecular imprinted fabric or other porous material;

[0022] FIG. 3 is a schematic line drawing and expanded section view depicting an embodiment of a molecular imprinted face mask consisting of a double-layered filtering component, composed of fabric or other porous material layers with molecular imprints, different types of molecular imprints, conductive electrodes, microsensors, sensor wires, optical waveguides, and/or acoustic waveguides;

[0023] FIG. 4 is a schematic line drawing and expanded section view depicting an embodiment of a molecular imprinted face mask consisting of a woven filtering component, composed of fibers with molecular imprints, different types of molecular imprints, conductive electrodes, sensor wires, optical waveguides, and/or acoustic waveguides.

[0024] FIG. 5 is a schematic line and surface drawing depicting an expanded view of an embodiment of an electronically enhanced molecular imprinted face mask in accordance with the present invention;

[0025] FIG. 6 is a schematic line and surface drawing depicting an expanded section view of an embodiment of an electronically embedded molecular imprint protective face mask in accordance with the present invention, showing semiconductor and nanoparticle quantum dots embedded within a mask element in accordance with the present invention;

[0026] FIG. 7 is a schematic line and surface drawing depicting an embodiment of a system for an electronically enhanced molecular imprint protective face mask in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Introduction

[0027] Molecular imprinting is an advancing technique in the medical device field because of its ability to mimic biologically active binding sites. Molecular imprinting uses artificial binding sites of proteins, sugars, and other biologi-

cal compounds in order to capture molecules. Numerous two-dimensional and three-dimensional techniques are known in the art for imprinting of surface proteins. Techniques using silica have shown successful specificity for imprinting complex shapes such as hemoglobin. Biomedical applications have utilized molecular imprinting for ex vivo diagnostic methods such as immunoassays (antibody detection), analytical separations, and biosensors for detecting changes in blood sugar. Molecular imprinting is also used in the development of other biosensors and for diagnostic detection of viruses by interacting with antibodies.

[0028] Reference throughout this specification to “one embodiment,” “an embodiment,” or similar language means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the present invention. Thus, appearances of the phrases “in one embodiment,” “in an embodiment,” and similar language throughout this specification may, but do not necessarily, all refer to the same embodiment.

[0029] Furthermore, the described features, structures, or characteristics of the invention may be combined in any suitable manner in one or more embodiments. In the following description, numerous specific details are provided to convey a thorough understanding of embodiments of the invention. One skilled in the relevant art will recognize, however, that the invention may be practiced without one or more of the specific details, or with other methods, components, materials, and so forth. In other instances, well-known structures, materials, or operations are not shown or described in detail to avoid obscuring aspects of the invention.

[0030] FIG. 1 depicts an embodiment of a molecular imprinted face mask **100** as worn by an individual, comprising an outer surface **102** that holds a filtering component **104** securely against the front of the face over the nose and mouth and a user. The outer surface may comprise an air-permeable material including without limitation paper, woven fabric, knitted fabric, non-woven fabric, melt-blown fabric, ion-infused fabric, polymer foam, or other appropriate material as known in the art.

[0031] In various embodiments the filtering component **104** comprises a fabric and/or porous material for air to pass through. The surface of the threads of the fabric and/or the interior pores of the porous material may be coated with molecular imprints that capture, attenuate, neutralize, and/or detect toxic gases, toxic fumes, hazardous aerosols, or infectious pathogens. In certain embodiments a single layer of a molecular imprinted fabric, woven, or non-woven material is used as the filtering component. The fabric or other woven or non-woven material sometimes comprises more than one type of fiber or other material and/or more than one type of molecular imprint. Different types of molecular imprints sometimes attenuate and/or neutralize more than one airborne agent. Different types of molecular imprints sometimes generate a multi-step process in the woven matrix to attenuate and/or neutralize an airborne agent.

[0032] FIG. 2 depicts an expanded view of an embodiment of a molecular imprinted face mask **100** comprising a single-layered filtering component **104**, an outer surface **102**, a thin polymer film **202**, and molecular imprints **204** on surface of the polymer film **202**. Environmental air **206** passes through the filtering component **104** and filtered air **208** emerges.

[0033] In some embodiments the outer surface **102** is coated with the thin polymer film **202**. The filtering component **104** may comprise a molecular imprinted fabric or other porous material. The polymer film **202** may be a molecular imprinted polymer with imprinted sites **204** that in various embodiments may capture, sense, destroy, and/or release bacteria, viruses, medications, and various airborne particles.

[0034] A molecular imprinted polymer **202** may be created by mixing monomers of the polymer with the molecule (known as the template) to be imprinted. First, the monomers cluster and conform around the template. Second, the monomers polymerize with the template in place. Third, the template is removed from the polymer, thus leaving a mold or imprint **204** of the molecule in a polymer matrix. The monomers can be polymerized into nanoparticles or thin films. To create the molecular imprinted face mask **100** described herein, the monomers may be polymerized as a thin film **202** on the porous surface **102** of the face mask **100** or on the surfaces of fibers comprising a fabric or woven filtering component. Alternative, the monomers may be polymerized directly as fibers and incorporated into a fabric or woven filtering component.

[0035] Various methods for the fabrication of molecular imprinted polymers as thin films on a solid substrate are known in the art, and include spin coating, polymer brushes, dip coating using a silicon substrate, self-assembling monolayers, drop coating, spray coating, grafting, electropolymerization, and sol-gel processes. Micropatterned thin films of molecular imprinted polymers can also be manufactured using various lithography methods such as UV-mask lithography, soft lithography, micro-stereo lithography, and nano-imprint lithography.

[0036] The molecular imprinted face mask **100** may be fabricated in a variety of different models comprising different sets of molecular imprints **204**. A model could then be available for capturing various types of pathogens including bacteria and viruses such as the COVID-19 virus. In certain embodiments pathogens trapped by the molecular imprints **204** may also be inactivated or killed. Mechanisms may include, without limitation, chemical, biological, electrical, sonic, and UV light, applications as described above.

[0037] FIG. 3 depicts an embodiment of a multi-layer molecular imprinted face mask **300** in accordance with the present invention. As depicted, the multi-layer molecular face mask **300** comprises an outer surface **102**, a filtering component **104**, a thin polymer film **202**, molecular imprints **204** on surface of polymer film **202**, and an additional filtering layer **302**. In various embodiments of the invention, two or more layers of a molecular imprinted fabric or other material are used to generate a multi-step process to attenuate, neutralize, and/or detect toxic, hazardous, or infectious agents in the air. Two or more layers of a molecular imprinted fabric may be used to detect toxic, hazardous, or infectious airborne agents in one layer, and to attenuate and/or neutralize these agents in the other layer.

[0038] The strategically placed imprints **204** as shown on the molecular imprinted face mask **300** may be those of an antigen or binding site for a bacteria or virus such as COVID-19. Imprinting of an antigen or binding site may be accomplished through template imprinting techniques. Antigen or binding site molecules are obtained as a template by absorption onto a silicate mineral along with a buffer. The sample is heated and left to cool. Afterwards the sample is

rinsed with deionized water to remove the buffer. The remaining sample may be coated with a disaccharide. A plasma deposition (hexafluoropropylene) may be deposited onto the sample where it will be placed in a plasma reactor to remove the template protein. Finally, a solvent may wash away any remains of the template protein.

[0039] In certain embodiments the thin polymer film 202 covers majority of mask 300 area for biochemically interacting with airborne particles. A pattern of molecular imprints 204 of different molecular species on a polymer film 202 may be used as described above. Molecular imprints may function as “phantom” or “virtual” molecules or binding sites to capture and immobilize pathogen molecules, to sense and report them, to kill or inactivate them, and to release them during cleaning.

[0040] FIG. 4 depicts an embodiment of a woven filtering component 400, composed of fibers with molecular imprints 402, different types of molecular imprints 404, positively charged conductive electrodes 406, negatively charged conductive electrodes 408, sensor wires, optical waveguides, and/or acoustic waveguides 410. In some embodiments an electronically generated physical mechanism may release proteins from trapped on the surface of the polymer film 202. Ultrasonic waves may be generated in the mask 100, 300 or an external device 702 and transmitted to the mask surface 102 and polymer film 202 via waveguide principles. An acoustic waveguide 410 may comprise metal incorporated into the filtering component 104. Such waveguide principles are identical to those used to propagate light along an optical fiber. In this manner the protective face mask 100 may be safely cleaned between uses and pre-loaded molecular imprints may be emptied of medication and/or other cargo.

[0041] In certain embodiments conductive wires function as interdigital electrodes 406 and 408 that enhance, modulate and/or read the binding state of the imprints 204. Optical and/or acoustic waveguides 410 may function as sensor components in conjunction with the molecular imprints 204. Optical and/or acoustic waveguides 410 in a fabric, woven, or non-woven material may function to attenuate or neutralize a hazardous airborne agent. For example, ultraviolet (UV) light transmitted by optical waveguides 410 may attenuate or neutralize a virus captured by molecular imprints 202 on the optical waveguides 410, and/or other fiber components in the fabric, woven or non-woven matrix.

[0042] FIG. 5 depicts an expanded view of embodiment of an enhanced molecular imprinted filtering component 500 in accordance with the present invention. As depicted the electronically enhanced molecular imprinted filtering component 500 comprises a polymer coating 202, molecular imprints 204, and interdigital electrodes 502 embedded within the filtering component 104, embedded within an air-permeable polymer support substrate such as polyurethane foam 504, and/or positioned on the surface of the mask 102 as biosensors. Molecular imprints 204 may be loaded with material 506 comprising medications or other substances.

[0043] Biosensing molecular imprinted polymer surface technologies include surface plasmon resonance (SPR) techniques, surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS), fluorescence quenching of semiconductor quantum dots, photoluminescence, UV-visible spectroscopy, electrochemical sensors (conductivity, capacitance, impedance, potentiometry, and voltammetry measurements), piezoelectric

(quartz crystal microbalance) sensors, and biomimetic microchips with micropatterned imprinted polymers. The molecular imprint biofunctional devices provided herein may combine biosensors with bioactive molecular imprints and apply them to a protective face mask.

[0044] In certain embodiments the electronically enhanced molecular imprinted filtering component 500 detects molecules in contact with the molecular imprints 204. The electronically enhanced molecular imprinted filtering component 500 sometimes detects specific pathogen molecules, providing information on probable exposure and the relevant venue. In various embodiments the electronically enhanced molecular imprinted filtering component 500 detects particles, pollutants, and gasses, and may alert the wearer to the status of the breathing environment in real time.

[0045] In some embodiments the molecular imprinted protective face mask is configured for a specific type of pathogen, a specific type of pollutant, a specific type of allergen, a specific environment or condition and/or is customized to a specific user or set of users. The electronically enhanced molecular imprinted filtering component sometimes comprises a triggerable reservoir of airborne medication 504 which may comprise a loaded molecular imprints 202 and/or other storage medium. The specific user or set of users sometimes comprises persons with compromised lung function. The biosensor may sense restricted air flow through the mask and trigger release of a bronchodilator and/or other lung treatment. In certain embodiments the biosensor is tuned to sense specific volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the exhaled breath of the user and to trigger an alert and/or release of an appropriate medication. Non-limiting examples of using the molecular imprinted face mask to sense VOCs in exhaled breath to diagnose, monitor, and/or treat medical conditions include asthma, hyperglycemia in diabetic patients, disease progression in patients with renal failure, and cancer.

[0046] FIG. 6 depicts an expanded section view of an embodiment of an electronically enhanced molecular imprinted face mask 500 in accordance with the present invention. As depicted, the electronically enhanced molecular imprinted face mask is comprised of a fabric or woven filtering component 402 with simply structured molecular imprinted fibers 602, with molecular imprints on the surface of the fiber 604 and electronically enhanced with interdigital electrodes 502. Alternatively, complexly structured molecular imprinted fibers may be used with surface molecular imprints 604 combined with internal electrical components 602, 606, 610, 618, and 624. These complexly structured fibers include those with a conductive electrode core 608, a coaxial conductive core 612 and conductive shield 616, a conductive electrode core 622 surrounded by quantum dots 620, and/or multiple conductive cores 626. As depicted, fibers with multiple conductive cores may be configured as a ribbon 624, increasing the surface area of the fiber and thereby the density of molecular imprints 604.

[0047] In one embodiment the electronically enhanced molecular imprinted face mask 500 comprises a polymer film 202, molecular imprints 604, an embedded semiconductor or piezoelectric polymer 614, embedded quantum wires 626, or nanoparticle quantum dots 620. In some embodiments, quantum dots 620 underneath the molecular imprints 604 are used to configure the imprints 604. In certain embodiments the quantum dots 620 or wires 626 are

custom-engineered to produce unique electron wave function configurations that modulate the response of the molecular imprints **604**. The quantum dots **620**, or wires **626** may be used to dynamically reconfigure the electron charge distribution within the molecular imprints **604**, thereby creating a tunable molecular imprint **604** at the quantum level. Such charge distribution may influence processes such as the capture, sensing, reporting, deactivation, or destruction of pathogens or other molecules.

[0048] For non-limiting example, static electric fields (also known as direct-current or DC fields) have been shown to repel, attract, or capture airborne molecules, particles, or gases. Such static electric fields are sometimes generated on the surface of the electronically enhanced molecular imprinted face mask **500**, with the use of interdigital electrodes **502** deposited onto or into the surface of an insulating material (e.g. polyurethane foam), but lying beneath the polymer film **202** or molecular imprinted fabric **402**, and corresponding molecular imprints **604**.

[0049] In various embodiments electric fields, ultrasonic waves, electromagnetic waves, or quantum dots provide additional energy to free molecules from the imprint binding sites. This may function in the fabrication of the molecular imprints and in re-activation of the binding function of imprint sites that have been de-activated by the bonding of free molecules to the imprints.

[0050] In certain embodiments high frequency ultrasonic waves (10 MHz-10 GHz) or light (infrared to ultraviolet) may impact pathogens or other materials bound to the molecular imprints **204**. The ultrasonic or light waves may be generated in the electronically enhanced molecular imprinted face mask **500** or in an attachment and conducted to the face mask **500** via waveguide principles, including without limitation an acoustic waveguide or optical fibers embedded into the face mask **500**. The electronically enhanced molecular imprinted face mask **500** sometimes comprises a semiconductor. In certain embodiments the semiconductor comprises silicon into which ultrasonic transducers or lasers are fabricated on microchips and embedded into the filtering component **104** to locally excite the molecular imprints.

[0051] In certain embodiments high-frequency ultrasonic waves (10 MHz-10 GHz) are generated locally in the electronically enhanced molecular imprinted face mask **500** by embedded piezoelectric elements and conductive electrodes **612**, **614**, and **616**. In some embodiments an ultrasonic wave is generated on the electronically enhanced molecular face mask component **500** that mechanically agitates bound protein molecules or other materials and induces their separation from the imprints **204**. Piezoelectric elements may include but are not limited to fibers and thin films.

[0052] FIG. 7 depicts an embodiment of a system for an electronically enhanced molecular imprinted protective face mask in accordance with the present invention, the system comprising an electronically enhanced molecular imprinted protective face mask **500**, an attachment **702**, a supply tube **704**, a medication repository **706**, a power supply component **708**, and a detection component **710**. The attachment **702** may be connected to the face mask **500** either physically or remotely. In certain embodiments electric current, light waves, sound waves or other energy is generated in the attachment **702** by a power supply component and conducted to the face mask **500** via wires, tape, channels, optical

waveguides, or other conduit **712**. In some embodiments the attachment **702** is a triggering device that communicates with the mask **500** to generate an energetic response within the mask **500**. In various embodiments the attachment **702** comprises a triggerable repository for inhalable or other appropriate medication **706**. Medication may be supplied to the mask **500** via a tube **704** or other channel. The medication repository **706** may be located on the attachment **702** or in any convenient location on the face mask **500**.

[0053] In some embodiments, the attachment **702** contains a detection component **710** to electronically process sensor signals received from the mask **500** via wires, tape, channels, optical waveguides, wireless radio-frequency communication, or other conduit **712**. In some embodiments, the detection component **710** also provides a readable output to the mask wearer on the level and/or type of hazardous substance or infectious pathogen detected by the face mask **500**. In certain embodiments, the detection component **710** generates a triggering signal based on sensor input from the mask **500**. The triggering signal is communicated via electrical wires **714** to the medication repository **706**, where it triggers the release of medication. In certain embodiments, the triggering signal from the detection component **710** is communicated via electrical wires **714** to the power supply component **708**, where it triggers at least one of fine-tuning the molecular imprint to enhance its response to a range of molecules, providing electrical energy to free molecules from the imprinted binding site, re-activating the specific molecule capture function of the imprint site, and interacting with the molecular imprint to function as a biosensor.

EXAMPLES

Example 1: The Manufacture of a Molecular Imprinted Face Mask

[0054] A procedure for creating molecular imprints on face mask comprises the following steps. (1) Molecules of a specific airborne molecule (for example, COVID-19 virus) or a specific protein that functions as an antigen, antibody, or binding site for the airborne molecule are absorbed onto the surface of a thin mica sheet. (2) A buffer is added to neutralize the pH of the mica-protein surface. (3) The mica sheet-buffer solution is heated and subsequently cooled. (4) The mica sheet is rinsed with deionized water and spin cast with a disaccharide to allow coating.

[0055] The hydroxyl groups on the disaccharide molecules, combined with the surface polar residues of the protein molecules, facilitate the formation of hydrogen bonds during dehydration. Hydrogen bonds are vital for molecular recognition in biological signaling. The disaccharide coating also protects the protein molecules from dehydration and damage during the following plasma deposition process, thus preserving the fidelity of the imprinted cavities.

[0056] (5) A thin fluoropolymer film is deposited onto the mica surface using radio-frequency glow-discharge plasma deposition and hexafluoropropylene. (6) The fluoropolymer film is removably attached to a temporary support surface. The surface provides mechanical support for the fluoropolymer film. (7) The mica sheet is peeled from the supported fluoropolymer film. (8) The protein molecules are removed from the fluoropolymer film using a solvent wash, leaving

behind molecular imprints of the protein. (9) The fluoropolymer film is incorporated into a woven or non-woven air-permeable surface.

[0057] For the synthesis of molecular imprinted fibers, silica capillaries are used as molds to replace the mica sheet. As in the procedure above, the target molecules are absorbed onto the interior surface of the capillary. The support polymer is then introduced into the capillary and polymerized. The capillaries are then etched away to free the imprinted polymer fibers. Another approach for the synthesis of molecular imprinted fibers is to use silica fibers as a permanent substrate for the molecularly imprinted polymer. The silica fibers are coated with a thin layer of the molecularly imprinted polymer and the polymer is then polymerized.

[0058] The above procedures may be utilized to molecularly imprint a set of diverse proteins onto a face mask in a specific spatial pattern. Non-limiting examples of proteins and other macromolecules that could be used for each molecular-imprinted polymer region on the face mask include the following: (1) angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE-2), which functions as the entry point into cells for the COVID-19 virus and other coronaviruses; (2) complex sugar chains (glycans) such as sialic acids of various chemical forms, which function as the entry point into cells for influenza viruses; and (3) receptor molecules in the immunoglobulin superfamily (IgSF), which function as entry points into cells for the measles virus and rhinovirus (common cold).

[0059] In the event that certain molecular imprints do not function similarly to their protein molecule counterparts, molecular “outprints” can be created by a stamping method that first creates the molecular imprints on nanoparticles. A polymer film is then stamped with these molecularly imprinted nanoparticles, creating a negative image of the molecular imprint, or an outprint. These molecular outprints will have the same positive shape as the original molecule, and may, therefore, have a functionality more similar to the original molecule.

Example 2: Detection of Virus Proteins

[0060] Protein-based molecular imprints have additionally been explored for the detection of virus proteins and even whole viruses. In some cases, a polymer is cross-linked and co-polymerized in the presence of a target molecule or protein. This target acts as a template for creating a cast. Once the cast is removed, it creates space for an active binding site. Molecular imprinting is supported by extensive research in the last decade, yet the application of imprinting protein-binding sites on dry surfaces for capture, sensing, activation and deactivation of airborne molecules remains to be investigated.

[0061] Previous studies have demonstrated the binding of influenza viruses to molecular imprints using aqueous solutions of viruses in contact with an imprinted polymer. In the event that an aqueous environment may be necessary for the binding of viruses to molecular imprints, evidence supports a mechanism for the capture, sensing, activation and deactivation of airborne viruses by a molecular imprinted face mask. This evidence includes the fact that many pathogenic viruses such as influenza and COVID-19 are primarily spread by microscopic airborne droplets (microdroplets) that are dispersed from an infected person by coughing, sneezing, singing, and/or speaking. Upon passing through a

molecular imprinted face mask, the microdroplets are trapped by the fibers **402** and/or pores **504** in the mask's filtering component **104**, and simultaneously come into contact with molecular imprints **604** on the fiber and/or pore surfaces. Consequently, the viruses are brought into contact with the molecular imprints in the aqueous environment of the microdroplets.

[0062] The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its spirit or essential characteristics. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the invention is, therefore, indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description. All changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are to be embraced within their scope.

What is claimed is:

1. A biofunctional molecular imprint apparatus, the apparatus comprising a face mask or similar personal protective equipment for cleansing air, and/or detecting hazardous substances and infectious pathogens in the air, the apparatus comprising:

- a. an air filtering component comprising one or more air-permeable layers of molecular imprinted fabric, woven material, non-woven material and/or a porous material positioned to contact airborne and/or microdroplet-borne molecules during use; and
- b. a bioactive molecular imprint wherein an imprinted cavity is of at least one of a bioactive molecule that captures a specific airborne and/or microdroplet-borne molecule and a protein with a binding site that captures a specific airborne and/or microdroplet-borne molecule.

2. The apparatus of claim **1** wherein the air filtering component comprises an air-permeable material comprising at least one of paper, polymer foam, woven fabric, knitted fabric, non-woven fabric, melt-blown fabric, ion-infused fabric, a non-fabric material and a hydrophilic material to capture microscopic airborne droplets to enable the interaction of the molecular imprints with airborne hazardous substances and/or infectious pathogens in an aqueous environment and wherein a captured molecule may be removed by an appropriate solvent wash.

3. The apparatus of claim **2**, wherein the one or more layers of the filtering component catalyze a biochemical reaction with an airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agent to attenuate, neutralize, and/or detect the agent.

4. The apparatus of claim **3** further comprising an electronic enhancement comprising at least one of an interdigital electrode, a semiconductor, a nanoparticle quantum dot, a nano-island, a quantum wire, other nanostructured component, a piezoelectric element, a semiconductor, an acoustic waveguide, an optical fiber, an ultrasonic transducer, and a laser.

5. The apparatus of claim **4**, wherein the electronic enhancement at least one of generates a static and time-varying electrical field, produces an electron wave function configuration that dynamically reconfigures the electron charge distribution within the molecular imprint, enables tuning of the imprinted cavity, generates at least one of ultrasonic and electromagnetic waves, and mechanically agitates a biomolecule to induce its interaction with or release from the molecular imprint cavity.

6. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein layer (n) catalyzes a particular biochemical reaction (p) in a multistep reaction with an airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agent.

7. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein layer (n+1) catalyzes a successive biochemical reaction (p+1) in a multistep reaction with an airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agent.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein each layer of the filtering component catalyzes a particular step of a biochemical reaction with an airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agent to attenuate, neutralize, and/or detect the agent.

9. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the filtering component comprises one or more layers of porous material comprising fibers comprising at least one of a plurality of molecular imprint types, conductive electrodes, sensor wires, optical waveguides, and acoustic waveguides.

10. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the plurality molecular imprint types catalyze a multistep biochemical reaction to attenuate, neutralize, or detect an airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agent.

11. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the plurality of molecular imprint types simultaneously catalyze one or more biochemical reactions to at least one of attenuate, neutralize, and detect one or more hazardous airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agents.

12. The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the sensor wires read the binding state of molecular imprint cavities to detect hazardous airborne and/or microdroplet-borne agents.

13. The apparatus of claim 5 wherein the air filtering component comprises a transducer comprising an interdigital electrode and other device for at least one of fine-tuning the molecular imprint to enhance its response to a range of molecules, providing electrical energy to free molecules from the imprinted binding site, re-activating the specific molecule capture function of the imprint site, and interacting with the molecular imprint to function as a biosensor.

14. The apparatus of claim 13 wherein the biosensor comprises a molecular imprinted polymer surface comprising at least one of surface plasmon resonance (SPR), surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS), fluorescence quenching of semiconductor quantum dots, photoluminescence, UV-visible spectroscopy, electrochemical sensors (conductivity, capacitance, impedance, potentiometry, and voltametry measurements), piezoelectric (quartz crystal

microbalance, surface acoustic wave (SAW), pulse-echo ultrasound, through-transmission ultrasound, and phased-array ultrasound) sensors, and biomimetic microchips with micropatterned imprinted polymers.

15. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein a conductive electrode functions as an interdigital electrode for at least one of enhancing, modulating and reading the binding state of the imprinted cavity.

16. The apparatus of claim 15 wherein the interdigital electrode comprises at least one of comb-shaped interlocking arrays of straight parallel electrodes, a fan-shaped array of radially-oriented electrodes, an array of concentrically-oriented circular electrodes, and arrays consisting of electrodes arranged in more complex geometries such as elliptical, parabolic, hyperbolic, and straight-line angles.

17. The apparatus of claim 16 wherein the biosensor triggers re-tuning the imprinted cavity in response to at least one of a completed reaction and a changing molecular environment.

18. The apparatus of claim 17 wherein at least one of the air filtration component and the molecular imprint cavity comprises a biosensor for at least one of a specific health condition, a specific type of pathogen, a specific type of pollutant, a specific type of allergen, and a specific environment or condition and/or is customized to a specific user or set of users.

19. The apparatus of claim 18 further comprising at least one of an alarm and a triggerable reservoir of inhalable or other appropriate medication.

20. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the triggerable reservoir of medication comprises at least one of a loaded molecular imprint cavity and other storage medium.

21. The apparatus of claim 20 wherein the specific user or set of users comprises persons with compromised lung function and wherein a biosensor senses restricted air flow through a porous material and triggers an alarm and/or release of a bronchodilator and/or other lung treatment.

22. The apparatus of claim 21 wherein the biosensor is tuned to sense specific volatile organic molecules in the exhaled breath of the user and to trigger an alarm and/or the release of an appropriate medication.

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