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(54) **SURGICAL ACCESS SYSTEM AND RELATED METHODS**

(75) Inventors: **Luiz Pimenta**, Sao Paulo (BR); **Patrick Miles**, San Diego, CA (US); **Scot Martinelli**, San Diego, CA (US); **Eric Finley**, San Diego, CA (US)

(73) Assignee: **NuVasive, Inc.**, San Diego, CA (US)

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See application file for complete search history.

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Primary Examiner — Brian Szmal

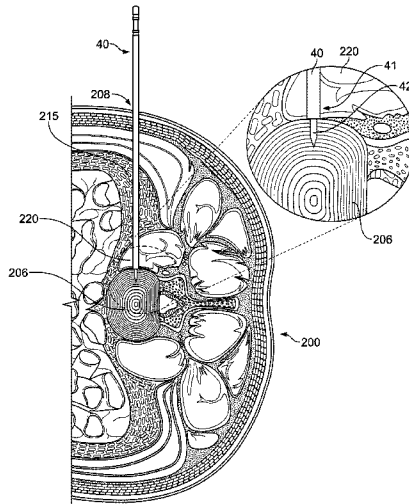
Assistant Examiner — Fangemonique Smith

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Fish & Richardson P.C.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A surgical access system including a tissue distraction assembly and a tissue retraction assembly, both of which may be equipped with one or more electrodes for use in detecting the existence of (and optionally the distance and/or direction to) neural structures before, during, and after the establishment of an operative corridor to a surgical target site. Some embodiments of the surgical access system may be particularly suited for establishing an operative corridor to a surgical target site in the spine. Such an operative corridor may be established through the retroperitoneal space and the psoas muscle during a direct lateral, retroperitoneal approach to the spine.

19 Claims, 50 Drawing Sheets



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