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(54) **Apparatus and method for securing a curtain to a curtain rail**

(57) Disclosed is a curtain having a plurality of glider retaining formations at or near an edge of the curtain, and a plurality of gliders for securing the curtain to a curtain rail, and an aligning tool, each said glider releasably secured to a glider retaining formation and comprising a cooperating formation in cooperative engagement with the aligning tool, the cooperatively engaged gliders positioned in line along the aligning tool, the aligning tool disengageable from the said gliders. The invention extends to a glider and an aligning tool, and a method of installing a curtain of the present invention. When the gliders are each in cooperative engagement with, and aligned by the aligning tool, they are positioned so as to facilitate rapid engagement of a plurality of gliders with a curtain rail, thereby rapidly hanging the curtain.

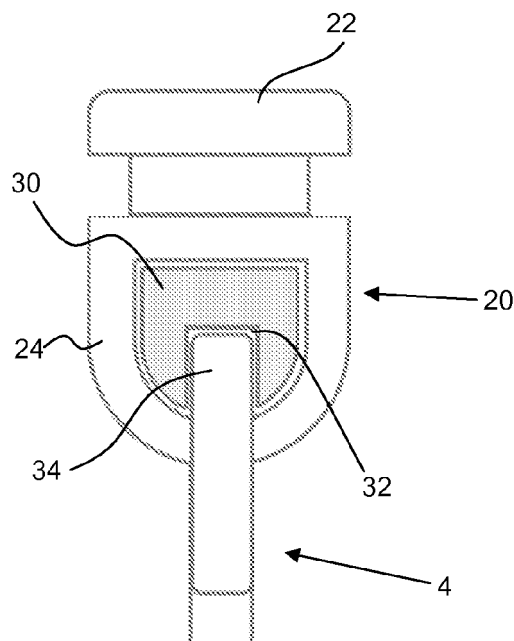


Fig. 5

Description

Field of the invention

[0001] The invention relates to apparatus for attaching a curtain to a curtain rail and in particular to the field of apparatus for hanging disposable curtains for use in healthcare.

Background to the invention

[0002] Curtains are typically suspended from curtain rails (or tracks) by apparatus comprising a glider adapted to slide or roll along the curtain rail, and some means of hanging the curtain from the glider, which may be a glider in the form of loop or eyelet suspended from (or integral to) the glider, through which hooks attached to the curtain are passed, or eyelets attached to or through the curtain through which hooks attached to the glider are passed.

[0003] The position of the gliders in relation to the curtains of conventional apparatus for securing a curtain to a curtain rail is not fixed or limited, for example, the gliders may be loosely secured to the eyelets and able to move in relation to, and rotate about, the eyelets. Therefore, the gliders of conventional apparatus must be individually secured to curtain rails, by a manual process that is typically time consuming.

[0004] In environments where curtains are repeatedly attached and removed from a curtain rail for cleaning or replacement, such as in the healthcare environment, a number of adaptations have been proposed in order to decrease the time taken to attach and remove a curtain, such as a hospital cubicle curtain (which, in order to maintain hygiene, are typically disposable and thus replaced frequently), from a curtain rail.

[0005] For example, as shown in Figure 1a, curtains 1 are in common use which are provided with a plurality of eyelets 2 through the curtain, spaced at regular intervals along an upper edge of the curtain. Double ended hooks 4 pass through the curtain eyelets at one end, and eyelets 6 at the underside of gliders 8 (having, in the example shown, which can be seen more clearly the expanded view of Figure 1b, a head 10 sized to be retained within a channel 11 of a curtain rail 12) at the other end, thereby connecting the curtain to the gliders.

[0006] Attachment and removal of the curtain from the hooks may be achieved more rapidly than, for example, curtains typically found in domestic environments, however such systems are still time consuming to use. In order to initially attach a curtain to a curtain rail, the gliders must be individually introduced to the curtain rail. Since the eyelet/hook/glider assembly is not mechanically rigid or restrained and the gliders are free to move (typically in all directions or orientations) with respect to the eyelets, connecting the parts together and to the curtain prior to attaching to a curtain rail is also fiddly and time consuming.

[0007] In order to facilitate rapid attachment of a curtain

to a curtain rail, and subsequent rapid removal, a number of integrated solutions have been proposed wherein the gliders are permanently and rigidly fixed to a curtain, for example the Marlux system, (Marlux is a registered trade mark of Summit Medical Limited, Cheltenham, UK) and the EasyFit system (EasyFit is a trade mark of Disposable Cubicle Curtains Limited). The fixed position of the gliders in relation to the curtain of such system enables the gliders of pleated curtains to be easily aligned for rapid installation to a curtain rail, by holding the upper part of the curtain towards the curtain rail so as to secure the gliders to the curtain rail in one, or a small number, of steps (as compared to individually securing each of the gliders to a curtain rail).

[0008] However, a number of types of curtain rail are in common use, each requiring a different configuration of glider to be inserted into, onto, or around a curtain rail in order to install curtains. Thus, such one-piece systems are necessarily restricted to use with a single type of curtain rail and therefore lack the adaptability and serviceability of conventional hook and eyelet systems.

[0009] For example, a given hospital may be equipped with several types of curtain rail and may be required to stock several types of such curtains having integrated gliders, which typically adds to costs. Furthermore, in order to remove such curtains from a curtain rail, the gliders must be demounted from the rail entirely, as it is not possible (as with conventional hook and eyelet systems) to simply unhook the curtain leaving the gliders in place. In some applications, several curtains are installed in series on a curtain rail and thus replacement of one curtain may necessitate removal and reinstallation of others. Additionally, in the event that a glider breaks, such integrated designs require that the entire curtain either be replaced or use continued (if possible) with a portion of the curtain not suspended.

[0010] Accordingly, there remains a need for a means of securing a curtain to a curtain rail having the adaptability and serviceability of conventional hook and eyelet systems, but enabling a curtain to be rapidly secured to a curtain rail.

Summary of the invention

[0011] According to a first aspect of the invention there is provided a curtain having a plurality of glider retaining formations at or near an edge of the curtain, a plurality of gliders for securing the curtain to a curtain rail, and an aligning tool, each said glider releasably secured to a glider retaining formation and comprising a cooperating formation in cooperative engagement with the aligning tool, the cooperatively engaged gliders positioned in line along the aligning tool, the aligning tool disengageable from the said gliders.

[0012] When the gliders are each in cooperative engagement with the aligning tool, movement of the position or orientation of the gliders with respect to the aligning tool is restricted or prevented. Accordingly, the gliders

held in line along the aligning tool so as to facilitate rapid engagement of a plurality of gliders with a curtain rail, thereby hanging the curtain. In use, the gliders may be engaged with the aligning tool (for example by sliding one by one onto the aligning tool), or the curtain may be provided with the gliders pre-engaged with the aligning tool. The aligning tool, and thus the gliders may be positioned to be secured to the curtain rail in a single step, by sliding or rolling the gliders onto, into or around the curtain rail, (as compared to individually securing each of the gliders to a curtain rail, comprising a considerably larger number of steps) and the aligning tool slideably disengaged from the gliders, preferably in a single step.

[0013] In some embodiments, the gliders may be slideably disengaged from the aligning tool onto (or into, or around) the curtain rail.

[0014] Each said glider retaining formation may be releasably secured to the curtain.

[0015] Subsequently, the curtain may be removed from the curtain rail (for cleaning or replacement) without the requirement to demount the gliders from the curtain rail, by releasing the gliders from the glider retaining formations.

[0016] It may be that each said glider retaining formation is releasably secured to a said glider. It may be that each said glider is releasably secured to a said glider retaining formation.

[0017] Preferably, the aligning tool is slideably disengageable from the said gliders.

[0018] Preferably the aligning tool is slideably engageable with a plurality of, and most preferably all, of the said gliders.

[0019] The aligning tool may comprise a single, elongate glider engaging formation sized to slideably and cooperatively engage and disengage with a plurality, and preferably all, of the said gliders. In some embodiments, the aligning tool is a rod, a portion of which is provided with a cross section sized to cooperatively engage and disengage with each said receiving formation and thereby function as a glider engaging formation.

[0020] In some embodiments, the aligning tool is provided with a plurality of glider engaging formations, each sized to cooperatively engage with a said glider.

[0021] Preferably, the or each glider engaging formation is sized to slide through each said cooperating formation, such that a part of each said glider extends partially or, in some embodiments, fully, around the or each glider engaging formation.

[0022] Each said cooperating formation may comprise an eyelet. Each said glider may comprise an eyelet, and each said glider eyelet may comprise a cooperating formation. For example, each said glider eyelet may comprise a flat inner surface, or may have a non-circular, or keyed inner surface sized to cooperatively engage with a glider engaging formation of the aligning tool slideably received through the glider eyelet, and thereby function as a cooperating formation. Thus, in some embodiments, the gliders are demountably threaded on a rod.

[0023] Each said glider may comprise a groove or a channel, sized to cooperatively engage with a channel or a groove of the aligning tool.

[0024] In some embodiments, said glider comprises an eyelet, each said glider eyelet having an inner surface with a non-circular cross section (which may comprise one or more flat or flattened surfaces), functioning as a cooperating formation, and the aligning tool is a rod, at least a portion of which has a cross section sized to be cooperatively received by each of the said eyelets and thereby function as a glider engaging formation. Thus each of the said eyelets may be slidably received by the aligning tool.

[0025] Therefore, the apparatus of the present invention, wherein the cooperating formation of each said glider is an eyelet or other formation to which a hook may be attached, is compatible for use with conventional eyeleted curtains and conventional curtain hooks, the curtain hooks functioning as a glider retaining formation. The gliders (and in some embodiments the glider eyelets in particular) are advantageously also adapted for cooperative engagement with an aligning tool so as to facilitate rapid engagement with a curtain rail, and rapid disengagement of the aligning tool.

[0026] In some embodiments, the or each glider engaging formation further comprises a recess sized to accommodate a said, or each said glider retaining formation (such as, in some embodiments a conventional curtain hook), when each said glider is in cooperative engagement with the aligning tool.

[0027] Thus, the aligning tool may be cooperatively engaged, and disengaged, with the said gliders when each said glider is secured to a glider retaining formation.

[0028] The recess may be elongate, having a cross section sized to accommodate a glider retaining formation.

[0029] Preferably the aligning rod further comprises a releasable retainer for releasably retaining the said gliders to the or each said glider retaining formation. The or each retainer may be a spring pin, split pin, or locking pin, operable to clip around, or through, the aligning tool, or the or each glider engaging formation thereof and prevent the gliders from being disengaged from the aligning tool. The retainer may be a peg, or a removable or adjustable collar. Typically, in embodiments wherein the aligning tool is a rod, the or each retainer is releasably securable to the aligning tool at or near an end of the rod.

[0030] Thus, in use, the or each retainer may be releasably attached to the aligning tool so as to prevent the gliders from being disengaged therefrom, while the gliders are secured to a curtain rail, and then removed so as to permit the aligning tool to be released from the said gliders. For example, the retainer may be removed so as to allow the gliders to be slideably disengaged from the aligning rod.

[0031] Preferably, the retainer is also securable to, around, or through, a curtain rail so as to retain the gliders to the curtain rail, in use.

[0032] Curtain rails in common use are provided with a spring pin which is installed through an aperture in the curtain rail (typically perpendicularly across the curtain rail) near an end (or both ends) of the curtain rail. The pin is conventionally removed to permit gliders to be secured or removed from the curtain rail, and inserted to prevent the gliders from falling out (or off) the curtain rail in normal use. Advantageously, the aligning tool is provided with a similar arrangement, such that the retainer may be removed when the gliders have been secured to the curtain rail, and immediately secured to the curtain rail to retain the gliders thereto.

[0033] The or each glider engaging formation may comprise an abutment, to abut a glider retained thereon. Accordingly, in use, one or more gliders may be cooperatively engaged with the or each glider engaging formation between the abutment and the retainer.

[0034] In some embodiments, the aligning tool further comprises a manual disengagement formation, for example a hook or a handle to enable the aligning tool to be manually disengaged from the said gliders. In a preferred embodiment, the manual disengagement formation comprises a loop at or near a first end of the aligning tool (in the form of a rod), the loop adjacent to and optionally formed integrally to the abutment, operable to cause the slideable disengagement of the aligning tool from the said gliders.

[0035] Each said glider retaining formation may be integral to the curtain, immovably secured to a curtain. Each said glider retaining formation may be secured to a curtain by any suitable means. In some embodiments, each said immovably secured glider retaining formation is glued to the curtain. The glider retaining formation may be mechanically secured to the curtain, or may be ultrasonically welded to the curtain.

[0036] The curtain may comprise a plurality of curtain supporting formations, each said glider retaining formation removably secured to a curtain supporting formation (each said curtain supporting formation being integral to or immovably secured to the curtain). Each said glider retaining formation may be adapted to be secured at a first end to a curtain supporting formation and at a second end to a glider. For example, each said curtain supporting formation may be an eyelet each said glider retaining formation may be a double hook, secureable to a glider eyelet at a first end and a curtain eyelet at a second end.

[0037] The curtain may be a conventional eyeleted curtain and the glider retaining formations may be conventional curtain hooks. Other fixings, suitable to removably secure each said a glider retaining formation to a glider and/or to secure each said glider retaining formation to a curtain supporting formation, fall within the scope of the invention herein disclosed.

[0038] In some embodiments, each said curtain supporting formation (or each said glider retaining formation immovably secured to the curtain) comprises a first part a second part fastened to the first part, the curtain extending between at least a portion of the first and second

parts. The first and/or second parts may comprise curtain engaging formations, such as an array of hooks or spikes. The first and/or second parts may extend through the curtain. For example, an array of hooks or spikes may extend between the first and second parts through the curtain. The first and second parts may cooperatively engage, and trap the curtain therebetween. The first and second parts may be fixed, with glue, or ultrasonic welding, to together and/or to the curtain.

[0039] The glider may be adapted to be secured to any known type of curtain rail. Preferably, the glider is adapted to be slideably secured within a channel of a curtain rail. The glider may be adapted to be slideably secured around, or over, a curtain rail. In some embodiments the glider comprises a neck (which may be elongate) extending to a curtain rail engaging formation.

[0040] In some embodiments, the glider comprises a head, at least one dimension of the head being larger than the neck, and sized to be slideably retained within a channel of a curtain rail, the head thus functioning as a curtain rail engaging formation. In some embodiments, the glider comprises one or more wheels sized to roll within a channel of, or on, a curtain rail. In some embodiments the glider comprises an open clasp sized to fit around a curtain rail (for example a curtain rail comprising a T-shaped cross section).

[0041] The curtain may be made of any suitable sheet or sheets of material, arranged in one or more layers. The curtain is typically a fabric curtain and, for example may be a hospital cubicle curtain. In some embodiments, the curtain is treated with a biocidal composition (which may be any or all of; antibacterial, antimicrobial, antifungal, sporicidal or endosporicidal). The curtain may be composed of a plastics material, which may be in the form of a sheet of plastics material, or may be in the form of woven or non-woven fibres of plastics material. The curtain may be disposable. The curtain may be a hospital cubicle curtain. Alternatively, or in addition, the curtain may comprise woven or non-woven natural fibres, such as cotton fibres.

[0042] Preferably the said glider retaining formations are positioned at regular intervals at or near the upper edge of the curtain.

[0043] Typically, the curtain is substantially rectangular or square, having a substantially straight upper edge and a lower edge substantially parallel to the upper edge.

[0044] The terms upper and lower are used herein to describe the relative positions or orientations of various features of the invention in relation to the orientation of the curtain when hung from a curtain rail in use and it will be understood that the relative positions and orientations of the features will be maintained regardless of the orientation of the curtain, or the constituent parts thereof.

[0045] The curtain may be pleated. The said curtain supporting formations are typically each positioned at a predetermined distance from a respective pleat.

[0046] A pleated curtain may be folded and thus more easily packaged and, more easily drawn back along a

curtain rail, in use.

[0047] By a pleated curtain we mean a curtain having a plurality of folds in alternating directions, regularly positioned along at least the upper edge. In some embodiments, the folds extend parallel to one another and may extend some or all of the distance from the upper edge towards, or to, the lower edge.

[0048] According to a second aspect of the invention there is provided a method of securing a curtain to a curtain rail, comprising the steps of providing a curtain having a plurality of glider retaining formations at or near an edge of the curtain, a plurality of gliders for securing the curtain to a curtain rail, and an aligning tool, each said glider releasably secured to a glider retaining formation comprising a cooperating formation in cooperative engagement with the aligning tool, the cooperatively engaged gliders positioned in line along the aligning tool; securing the said gliders to a curtain rail; and disengaging the aligning tool from the gliders.

[0049] The aligning tool may be slideably disengaged from the gliders. Preferably the aligning tool is disengaged (an in some embodiments slideably disengaged) from the gliders in a single motion, for example by pulling (or pushing) the aligning tool off, or out of, the said cooperating formations of the said gliders.

[0050] The method may comprise the step of cooperatively engaging (and in some embodiments slideably engaging) the gliders with the aligning tool, to thereby cooperatively engage the said cooperating formations with the aligning tool.

[0051] In some embodiments, the said gliders may be slideably disengaged from the aligning tool onto (or into, or around) the curtain rail. Gliders may be disengaged from the aligning tool and secured to the curtain rail in the same motion, for example by slid from the aligning tool onto (or into, or around) the curtain rail.

[0052] The aligning tool may comprise a glider engaging formation in cooperative engagement, or cooperatively engageable with the said gliders (or, in some embodiments, a plurality of glider engaging formations, each in cooperative engagement, or cooperatively engageable, with a said glider). The aligning tool may further comprise a retainer for releasably retaining the said gliders to the or each said glider retaining formation.

[0053] Thus, the method may comprise the steps of bringing the gliders into cooperative engagement with the or each said glider engaging formation and/or the steps of removing the retainer from the aligning tool and disengaging the aligning tool from the gliders.

[0054] The gliders may be engaged by sliding onto, or around the or each said glider engaging formation.

[0055] In some embodiments, the aligning tool comprises a releasable retainer, for retaining the gliders to the aligning tool. The method may comprise the step of securing the gliders to a curtain rail, removing the retainer and demounting the aligning tool from the gliders. The method may comprise the step of securing the retainer to the curtain rail to retain the gliders thereto.

[0056] The method may comprise the steps of slideably engaging the gliders with the aligning tool and releasably securing the retainer to the aligning tool to retain the gliders thereto.

[0057] Preferred and optional features of the curtain of the first aspect correspond to preferred and optional features of the first aspect.

[0058] According to a third aspect of the invention, there is provided a glider releasably secureable to a glider retaining formation, and comprising a cooperating formation sized to cooperatively engage with an aligning tool.

[0059] The invention extends in a fourth aspect to a kit of parts comprising a plurality of gliders of the fourth aspect, and an aligning tool, comprising a glider engaging formation, cooperatively engageable and disengageable with a plurality of gliders. The aligning tool may comprise a plurality of glider engaging formations, each operable to cooperatively engageable with and disengageable from a glider. The aligning tool may be in cooperative engagement with the said gliders.

[0060] In some embodiments, the kit comprises a curtain comprising a plurality of glider retaining formations releasably secured, or releasably securable, to the said gliders. In some embodiments, the kit comprises a plurality of glider retaining formations, each releasably secureable to, or each releasably secured to, a curtain and/or a said glider. The kit may further comprise a curtain, the curtain having a plurality of curtain supporting formations each releasably secureable to, or releasably secured to, a said glider retaining formation. Preferably the curtain is an eyeleted curtain, wherein each said eyelet functions as a curtain supporting formation.

[0061] Preferred and optional features of the curtain, the or each glider, glider retaining formation, curtain supporting formation and aligning tool of the third and fourth aspects correspond to preferred and optional features of the corresponding features of the first and second aspects.

Description of the Drawings

[0062] An example embodiment of the present invention will now be illustrated with reference to the following Figures in which:

Figure 1a shows a known arrangement for hanging curtains;

Figure 1b shows an expanded view of a known arrangement for hanging curtains;

Figure 2a shows a perspective view and Figure 2b shows a side view of a conventional glider, with a conventional curtain hook secured thereto;

Figure 3 shows a side view of a glider of the present invention, with a conventional curtain hook there-through.

Figure 4 shows across sectional perspective view of an aligning rod;

Figure 5 shows a cross sectional view of an aligning rod cooperatively engaged with a glider;

Figure 6 shows a side view of the aligning rod of Figure 4; and

Figure 7 shows an end view of the aligning rod of Figure 4, with a retaining clip releasably secured thereto.

Detailed Description of an Example Embodiment

[0063] Figure 2a shows a conventional glider and curtain hook in detail. Figure 2b shows the circular cross section 7 of the internal surface of the glider eyelet 6 more clearly.

[0064] In use of such conventional apparatus, the glider is substantially free to move around the hook 8 and the hook is substantially free to move about the eyelet of a curtain to which it is secured. Thus, in order to secure the glider to a curtain rail, the gliders must be individually brought into alignment with the curtain rail and inserted therein.

[0065] Figure 3 shows a glider 20 of the present invention, secured to a curtain hook 4. The glider has a head 22 (similar to the head 10 of the glider of Figures 1 a through 2b) and an eyelet 24. The eyelet has an inner surface with a non-circular cross section, and is provided with a flat surface 26.

[0066] Figure 4 shows a cross sectional view through B of an aligning rod 30, having a cross sectional shape sized to received by the eyelet 24. The rod further comprises an elongate recess 32, sized to accommodate the upper part 34 of the hook 4, as shown in Figure 5. The aligning rod further comprises an aperture 36, perpendicular to the recess, the aperture extending through the rod.

[0067] Figure 6 shows a side view of the aligning rod 30. At the end of the rod is a finger pull 38, the outer surface 40 functioning as an abutment to abut gliders slideably engaged on the rod in use.

[0068] Figure 7 shows an end view of the rod 30 (from the opposite end of the rod to the finger pull) with a resilient retaining clip 42 releasably secured to the rod through the aperture.

[0069] In use, the gliders of a curtain having plurality of gliders secured (by a plurality of curtain hooks 4) thereto, are slidably engaged with the aligning rod, such that the heads of the gliders are aligned along the top surface 33 of the rod, and retained on the rod by inserting the retaining clip through the aperture, the gliders prevented from sliding off the other end of the rod by the outer surface 40 of the finger pull 38. The curtain may be provided for use in this configuration.

[0070] The heads of the aligned gliders may then be

rapidly introduced into the open end of a curtain rail in a single motion, or small number of motions. The retaining clip is then removed from the aperture and inserted into an aperture 44 near the open end of the curtain rail (as shown in Figure 1b) and the aligning rod slideably disengaged from the gliders (which may abut the retaining clip, but which are prevented from falling out of the curtain rail by the retaining clip) by pulling the rod by the finger pull.

[0071] Further variations and modifications may be made within the scope of the invention herein disclosed.

Claims

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1. A curtain having a plurality of glider retaining formations (2) at or near an edge of the curtain, a plurality of gliders (20) for securing the curtain to a curtain rail (12), and an aligning tool (30), each said glider releasably secured to a glider retaining formation and comprising a cooperating formation in cooperative engagement with the aligning tool, the cooperatively engaged gliders positioned in line along the aligning tool, the aligning tool disengageable from the said gliders.

2. A curtain according to claim 1, wherein each said glider is releasably secured to a said glider retaining formation.

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3. A curtain according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the aligning tool is slideably disengageable from the said gliders.

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4. A curtain according to any one preceding claim, wherein the aligning tool comprises an elongate glider engaging formation sized to slideably and cooperatively engage with the said gliders.

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5. A curtain according to claim 4, wherein the aligning tool further comprises an elongate recess sized to accommodate each said glider retaining formation.

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6. A curtain according to any one preceding claim, wherein each said glider comprises an eyelet, each said glider eyelet comprising a cooperating formation.

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7. A curtain according to claim 6, wherein each said glider eyelet comprises a flat inner surface sized to cooperatively engage with the aligning tool slideably received therethrough.

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8. An eyeleted curtain according to any one preceding claim, wherein each said glider retaining formation is a curtain hook.

9. A curtain according to claims 4 to 8, wherein the

aligning tool further comprises a releasable retainer for releasably retaining the said gliders to the glider retaining formation.

10. A biocidal and/or disposable hospital cubicle curtain according to any one preceding claim. 5

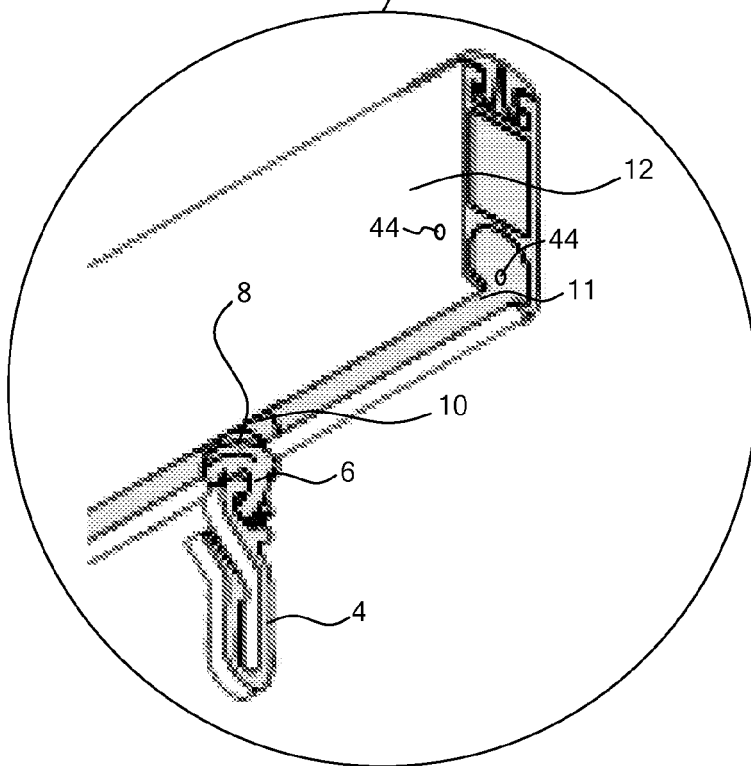
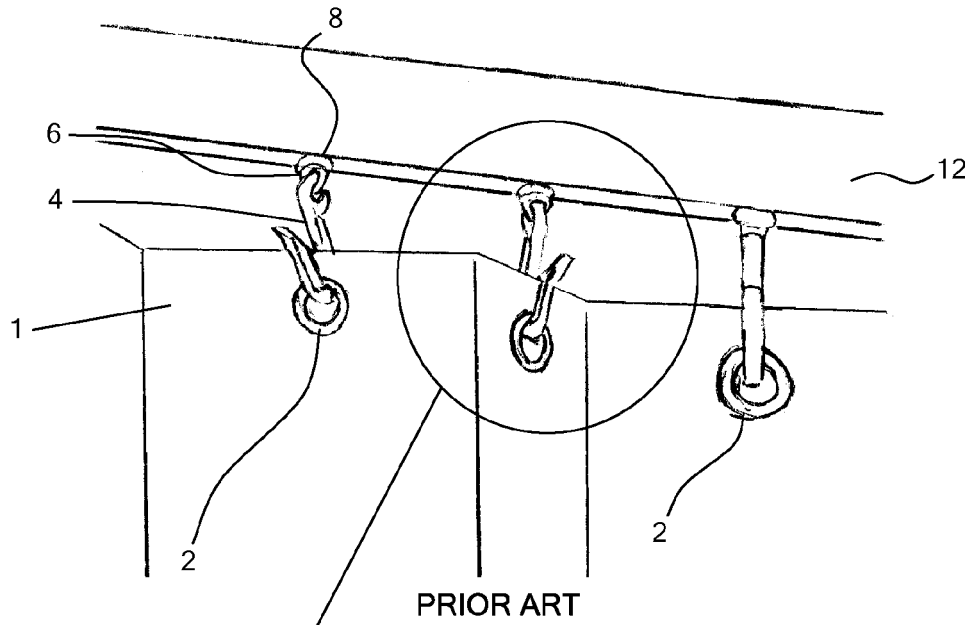
11. A method of securing a curtain to a curtain rail (12), comprising the steps of providing a curtain having a plurality of glider retaining formations (2) at or near an edge of the curtain, a plurality of gliders (20) for securing the curtain to a curtain rail, and an aligning tool (30), each said glider releasably secured to a glider retaining formation and comprising a cooperating formation in cooperative engagement with the aligning tool, the cooperatively engaged gliders positioned in line along the aligning tool; securing the said gliders to a curtain rail; and disengaging the aligning tool from the gliders. 10
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12. A method according to claim 11, wherein the gliders are slideably disengaged from the gliders in a single motion.

13. A glider releasably secureable to a glider retaining formation, and comprising a cooperating formation sized to cooperatively engage with an aligning tool. 25

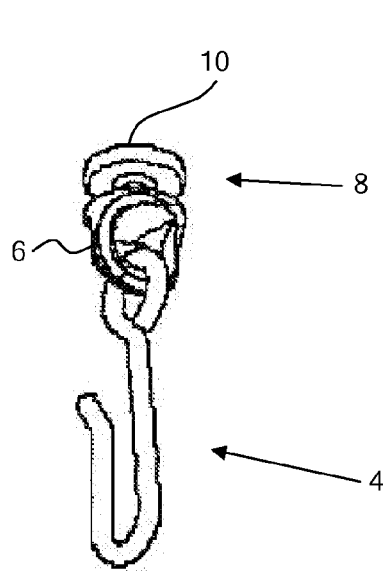
14. A kit of parts comprising a plurality of gliders according to claim 13, and an aligning tool having a glider engaging formation, cooperatively engageable and disengageable with a plurality of gliders. 30

15. A kit according to claim 14 further comprising a plurality of glider retaining formations, each releasably securable to a curtain and a said glider, and a curtain having a plurality of curtain supporting formations releasably securable to a glider retaining formation.. 35
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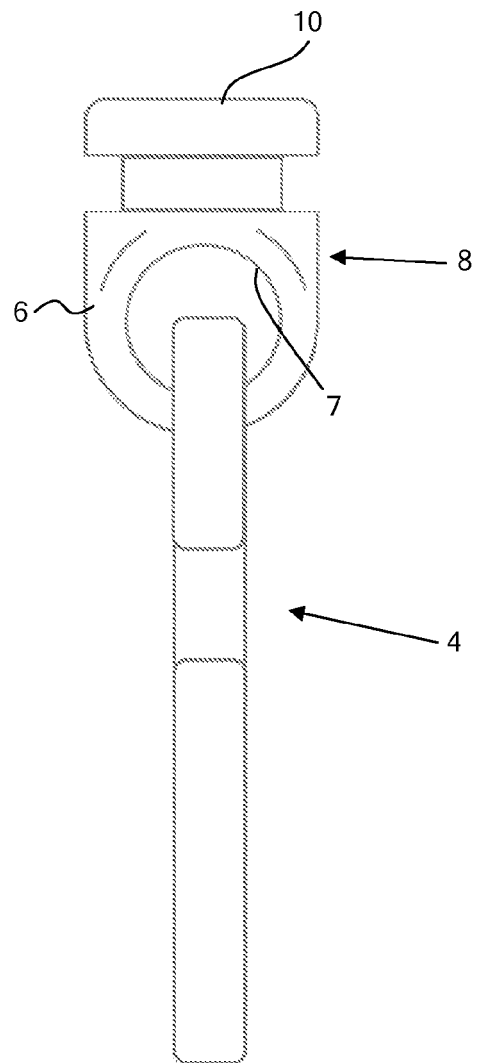
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Fig. 1b



PRIOR ART

Fig. 2a



PRIOR ART

Fig. 2b

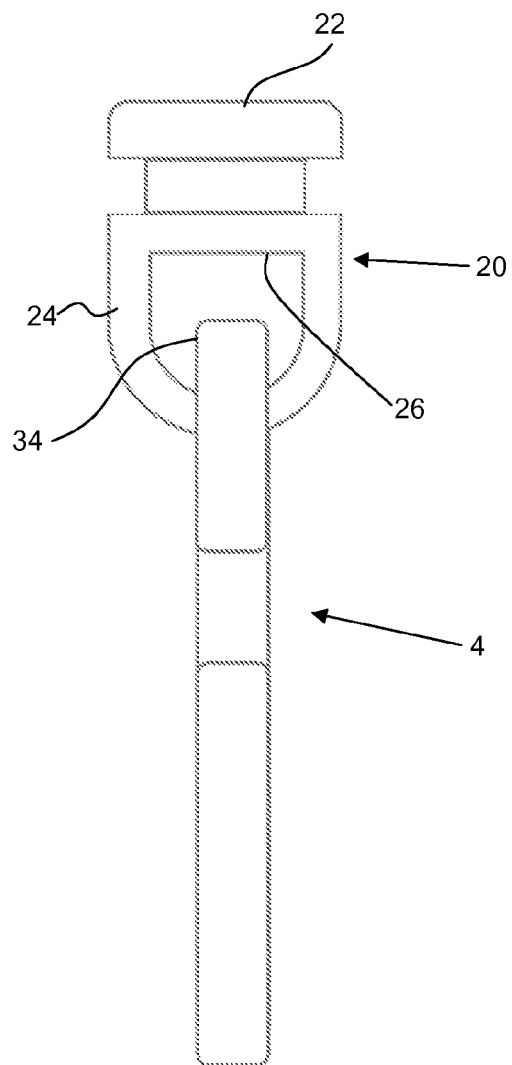
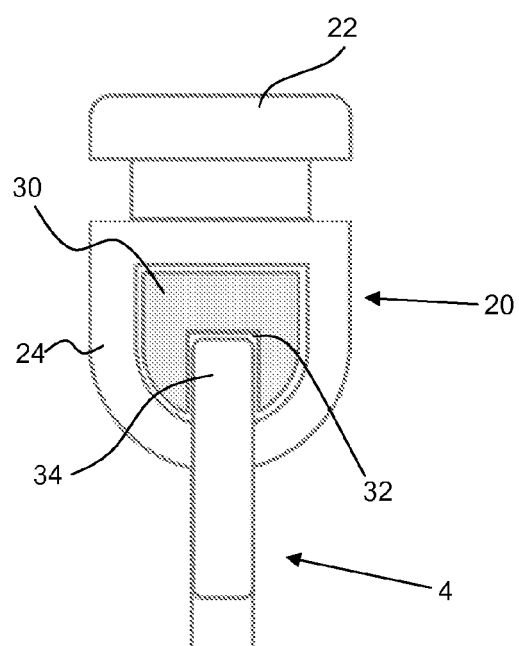
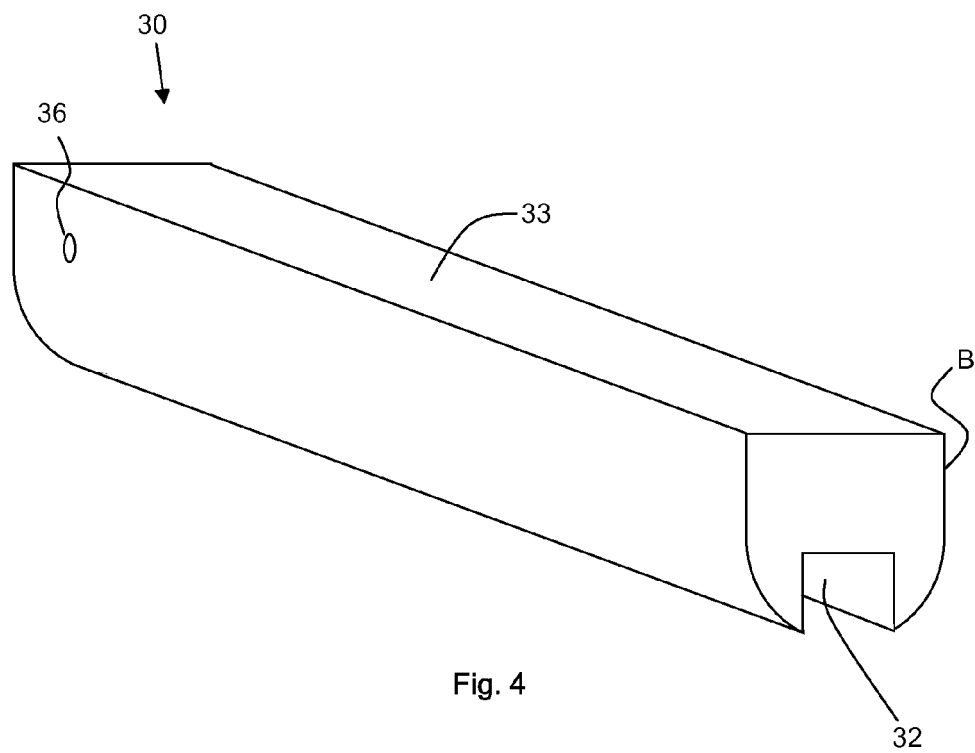


Fig. 3



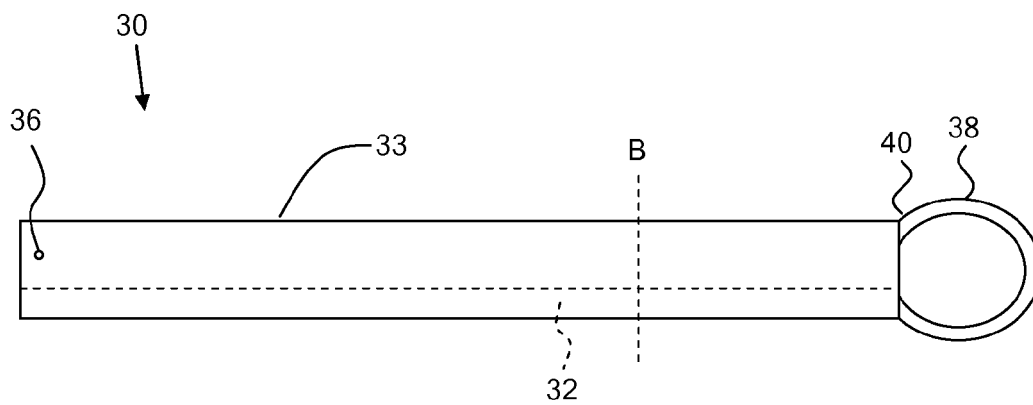


Fig. 6

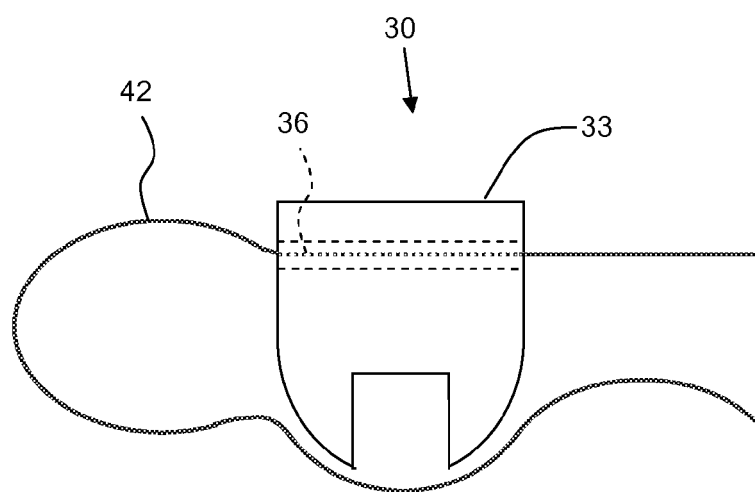


Fig. 7