WE CLAIM:

1. A safety scalpel comprising:

a disposable blade cartridge comprising:

a blade;

a blade holder in communication with the blade; and

a blade guard adapted to receive the blade and blade holder; and

a non-disposable scalpel handle having a distal end,

wherein the disposable blade cartridge is slideable onto the distal end of the non-disposable scalpel handle, the disposable blade cartridge for lockable to the non-disposable scalpel handle.

2. The safety scalpel of claim 1, wherein the non-disposable scalpel handle includes an extending member, wherein the disposable blade cartridge includes a catch for engaging the extending member, and wherein the catch engaging the extending member locks the disposable blade cartridge to the scalpel handle.

3. The safety scalpel of claim 1, wherein the blade holder further comprises a holder knob, the blade moveable from a closed position, wherein the blade is not exposed beyond the disposable blade cartridge, to an open position, and wherein the blade is exposed beyond the disposable blade cartridge.

4. The safety scalpel of claim 1, wherein the non-disposable scalpel handle includes an extending member, wherein the disposable blade cartridge includes a catch for engaging the extending member,

wherein the catch engaging the extending member locks the disposable blade cartridge to the scalpel handle, and

wherein the blade holder further comprises a holder knob, the holder knob enabling the blade to move from a closed position, wherein the blade is not exposed beyond the disposable blade cartridge, to an open position, wherein the blade is exposed beyond the disposable blade cartridge.

5. The safety scalpel of claim 1, wherein the disposable blade cartridge further comprises a latching assembly comprising a locking mechanism that is adapted to engage an aperture of the scalpel handle, such that the latching assembly locks the blade cartridge to the scalpel handle.

6. The safety scalpel of claim 1, wherein the blade cartridge includes a mechanical brake to supply frictional force to prevent movement of the blade

7. The safety scalpel of claim 6 wherein said brake includes at least one element which supplies frictional force to prevent movement of the blade only when the handle is removed.

8. The scalpel of claim 7 wherein the cartridge includes a space for receiving said handle and wherein said brake element includes a finger which flexibly protrudes into said space allowed for the handle, whereby the brake is prevented from interfering with the movement of the blade.

9. The scalpel of claim 8 wherein said finger is configured to flexibly engage at least a portion of the blade holder when said handle is not in place, thereby preventing movement of the blade without the handle.

10. The scalpel of claim 8 wherein said finger includes a contact land, said land having a chamfered surface proximate the point where said land contacts said blade holder when so engaged.

11. The scalpel of claim 6 further including a safety catch for preventing accidental retraction of the blade when in use, comprising:

a. a slider knob at least partly external to the blade guard and in mechanical communication with the blade, so that movement of the slider causes movement of the blade,

b. said slider including a base portion and releaseable engagement portion

c. a catch portion sized to receive said engagement portion, said catch located on said guard such that said catch and engagement portion are engaged when the blade is in a fully extended position.

12. The scalpel of claim 11 wherein said engagement portion includes a resilient portion extending from said base, having a free end and being spaced apart from said base.

13. The scalpel of claim 12 wherein said resilient portion is arcuate and depressible and includes a catch at its free end and wherein said catch portion includes a receiver sized to receive said catch, so that when said resilient portion is undepressed, said catch may be engaged within said receiver thereby preventing movement of the blade.

14. A safety scalpel comprising:

a scalpel handle having a longitudinal axis;

a blade cartridge attachable to the scalpel handle,

wherein the blade cartridge is only slideably, releasably attached to the scalpel handle in a direction generally along the longitudinal axis.

15. A method of attaching a blade cartridge to a scalpel handle, the method comprising:

positioning an aperture located at a proximal end of a blade cartridge into a distal end of a scalpel handle; and

sliding the blade cartridge in a direction along the longitudinal axis of the scalpel handle.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein a catch of the blade cartridge engages an extending member of the scalpel handle.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein a latching assembly engages an aperture of the scalpel handle.

18. The method of claim 16 further including the steps of preventing movement of the blade within the cartridge except when said handle is in place partially received within said cartridge.

19. The method of claim 15 further including the steps of applying a frictional force to prevent movement of the blade, and removing said force when said handle is inserted within said cartridge

CLAIMS:

1. A safety scalpel comprising:

a) a disposable blade cartridge comprising:

a blade;

a blade holder in communication with the blade; and

a blade guard adapted to receive the blade and blade holder; and

b) a reusable scalpel handle having a distal end,

wherein the blade holder comprises a track in a rear face of the blade holder opposite a surface of the blade holder for holding the blade, the track including the rear face and a plurality of ridges arranged to slidably receive and house a blade receiving portion of the scalpel handle;

wherein the disposable blade cartridge is lockable to the reusable scalpel handle; and wherein the disposable blade cartridge includes a mechanical brake arranged to apply a frictional force on the track of the blade holder to prevent movement of the blade, and configured to deform upon engagement with the distal end of the scalpel handle to remove the frictional force from the track to allow movement of the blade.

2. The safety scalpel of claim 1, wherein the non-disposable scalpel handle includes an extending member, wherein the disposable blade cartridge includes a catch for engaging the extending member, and wherein the catch engaging the extending member locks the disposable blade cartridge to the scalpel handle.

3. The safety scalpel of claim 1, wherein the blade holder further comprises a holder knob, the blade moveable from a closed position, wherein the blade is not exposed beyond the disposable blade cartridge, to an open position, and wherein the blade is exposed beyond the disposable blade cartridge.

4. The safety scalpel of claim 1, wherein the non-disposable scalpel handle includes an extending member, wherein the disposable blade cartridge includes a catch for engaging the extending member, wherein the catch engaging the extending member locks the disposable blade cartridge to the scalpel handle, and wherein the blade holder further comprises a holder knob, the holder knob enabling the blade to move from a closed position, wherein the blade is not exposed beyond the disposable blade cartridge, to an open position, wherein the blade is exposed beyond the disposable blade cartridge.

5. The safety scalpel of claim 1, wherein the disposable blade cartridge further comprises a latching assembly comprising a locking mechanism that is adapted to engage an aperture of the scalpel handle, such that the latching assembly locks the blade cartridge to the scalpel handle.

6. The safety scalpel of claim 1 wherein said brake includes at least one element which supplies frictional force to prevent movement of the blade only when the handle is removed.

7. The scalpel of claim 6 wherein the cartridge includes a space for receiving said handle and wherein said brake element includes a finger which flexibly protrudes into said space allowed for the handle, whereby the brake is prevented from interfering with the movement of the blade.

8. The scalpel of claim 7 wherein said finger is configured to flexibly engage at least a portion of the blade holder when said handle is not in place, thereby preventing movement of the blade without the handle.

9. The scalpel of claim 7 wherein said finger includes a contact land, said land having a chamfered surface proximate the point where said land contacts said blade holder when so engaged.

10. The scalpel of claim 1 further including a safety catch for preventing accidental retraction of the blade when in use, comprising:

a) a slider knob at least partly external to the blade guard and in mechanical communication with the blade, so that movement of the slider causes movement of the blade'

b) said slider including a base portion and releaseable engagement portion; and

c) a catch portion sized to receive said engagement portion, said catch located on said guard such that said catch and engagement portion are engaged when the blade is in a fully extended position.

11. The scalpel of claim 10 wherein said engagement portion includes a resilient portion extending from said base, having a free end and being spaced apart from said base.

12. The scalpel of claim 11 wherein said resilient portion is arcuate and depressible and includes a catch at its free end and wherein said catch portion includes a receiver sized to

receive said catch, so that when said resilient portion is undepressed, said catch may be engaged within said receiver thereby preventing movement of the blade.

13. A safety scalpel comprising:
a scalpel handle having a longitudinal axis and a distal end;
a blade cartridge attachable to the scalpel handle, the blade cartridge having:
a blade holder for holding a blade and a track in a rear face of the blade holder opposite a surface of the blade holder for holding the blade, the track including the rear face and a plurality of ridges arranged to slidably receive and house a blade receiving portion of the scalpel handle, wherein the blade cartridge includes a mechanical brake arranged to apply a frictional force on the track of the blade holder to prevent movement of the blade, and configured to deform upon engagement with the distal end of the scalpel handle to remove the frictional force from the track to allow movement of the blade.

14. A method of attaching a blade cartridge to a scalpel handle, the method comprising:
positioning an aperture located at a proximal end of a blade cartridge into a distal end of a scalpel handle;
sliding the blade cartridge in a direction along the longitudinal axis of the scalpel handle;
applying a frictional force to prevent movement of the blade; and removing said force when said handle is inserted within said cartridge.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein a catch of the blade cartridge engages an extending member of the scalpel handle.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein a latching assembly engages an aperture of the scalpel handle.

17. The method of claim 15 further including the steps of preventing movement of the blade within the cartridge except when said handle is in place partially received within said cartridge.

18. A disposable blade cartridge for connecting to a scalpel handle having a distal end, the disposable blade cartridge comprising:
a blade; and
a blade holder for holding the blade, and a track in a rear face of the blade holder opposite a surface of the blade holder for holding the blade, the track including the rear face

and a plurality of ridges arranged to slidably receive and house a blade receiving portion of the scalpel handle; and

a mechanical brake arranged to apply a frictional force on the track of the blade holder to prevent movement of the blade, and configured to deform upon engagement with a distal end of the scalpel handle to remove the frictional force from the track to allow movement of the blade.