

HAND-HELD PUMP APPARATUS

BACKGROUND

5 a. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a hand-held pump apparatus, notably to a peristaltic pump for use in sterile or clean-room environments, and to a pump head for use in the pump apparatus.

10 b. Related Art

A peristaltic pump is a positive displacement pump used to dispense a fluid from a container through a flexible dispensing tube. Hand-held peristaltic pumps are typically used to pump various fluids, such as a clean or sterile fluid, where there is
15 a need for the pump not to contaminate the fluid, or to pump aggressive fluids such as adhesives, so that the fluid cannot contaminate the pump. A peristaltic pump allows delivery of a specified volume of fluid for a given actuation movement independently of the viscosity of the fluid.

20 US 2010/0313996 describes a hand-held peristaltic pump apparatus for dispensing fluid from a rigid container. The apparatus includes a hand-operated peristaltic pump. The pump supports a rigid container which includes a fluid to be dispensed. A separate dispensing tube as well as a vent tube extends from the container through the pump.

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The peristaltic pump is actuated by a user grasping the pump head in one hand, and using one or more fingers to depress a trigger which operates a rotary member that bears against the dispensing tube and the vent tube. Operation of the pump causes fluid to be pumped out from the container through the dispensing
30 tube and air is pumped into the container through the vent tube so as to equalise pressure in the container.

A problem with the use of hand-held peristaltic pumps in sterile or clean-room

environments is that not all of a user's fingers typically rest on the trigger. A user's finger which is not on the trigger is liable to be trapped between the trigger and an adjacent surface of the pump head. This can cause damage to a glove worn by the user and contamination of the sterile or clean environment. Prolonged use may
5 also promote repetitive strain injury (RSI).

Where it is necessary for the liquid in the container to be sterilised by irradiation by gamma or other rays, this causes heating of the liquid up to about 55°C and creates an internal pressure. Such pressure is not released by a vent tube which
10 passes through the pump head because, like the dispensing tube, the vent tube is sealed by pressure of the peristaltic rotary member. In this case, the vent tube may instead be open to atmosphere via a one-way valve such as a duck-bill valve, although such a vent/valve arrangement does not allow air to be pumped into the container to replace liquid which is pumped out. Use of a collapsible container
15 instead of a rigid container allows the internal pressure to be adjusted by reduction in the internal volume of the container as liquid is pumped out. However, it is desirable to reduce the complexity of the pump.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

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Aspects of the invention are specified in the independent claims. Preferred features are specified in the dependent claims.

The invention provides a pump apparatus and pump head which may be operated
25 with no or reduced risk of glove tear or finger damage, and which is ergonomically advantageous.

The invention will be described with reference to a peristaltic pump apparatus; however, it will be understood that it is applicable to other types of hand-held
30 pump apparatus, the general arrangement and operation of which will be known *per se* to those skilled in the art of hand-held pump manufacture.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will now be further described, by way of example only, with reference to the following drawings, in which:

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Figure 1 shows a pump head for use in a hand-held peristaltic pump apparatus in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

Figure 2 illustrates the pump head of Figure 1 in use;

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Figure 3 shows an embodiment of a hand-held peristaltic pump apparatus in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

Figure 4 is an exploded view of the pump head of Figure 1;

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Figure 5 shows another embodiment of a pump apparatus in accordance with the invention, in a storage configuration;

Figure 6 shows the pump apparatus of Figure 5 in use, and alternative embodiments of container for use in the pump apparatus;

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Figure 7 illustrates the pump apparatus of Figure 5 in a sterile, packaged condition;

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Figure 8 shows the valve location in an embodiment of the pump apparatus;

Figures 9-11 illustrate the non-return valve arrangement of pump apparatus in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

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Figures 12-14 illustrate further embodiments of a pump apparatus in accordance with the invention;

Figure 15 shows hooks for use with the embodiments of Figures 12-14;

Figures 16-18 show pump apparatus in accordance with a further embodiment of the invention; and

Figure 19 illustrates manipulation of the pump head of Figure 1 by a user.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring to Figure 1, a pump head 2 houses a rotatable peristaltic pump member 6 and a flexible dispensing tube 4 disposed through the pump head 2. The pump head 2 includes a finger-actuated trigger 12 which is provided with at least one pawl member 52. Actuation of the trigger 12 causes turning of the pump member 6 in one direction only, by interaction between the pawl member 52 and ratchet features 50 on the pump member 6. At least one impeller 36 (best shown in Figure 4) acts on the dispensing tube 4 to squeeze the tube 4 against an inner surface of the pump head . As the pump member 6 turns, the impeller 36 drives fluid ahead of it through the dispensing tube and out through a nozzle 10.

The volume squeezed out by the impeller 36 is independent of the viscosity of the fluid within the dispensing tube 4 The dispensing tube 4 is elastomeric, at least in the region where the impeller 36 acts upon it, to ensure that the tube returns to its original cross-sectional shape when not acted upon by an impeller. In a preferred embodiment, the dispensing tube 4 is elastomeric along its entire length. In this embodiment, the dispensing tube 4 is of a unitary construction and formed from a silicone rubber.

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The pump head 2 is provided with a thumb hole 8 disposed within an area around which the peristaltic pump member 6 turns when actuated. This arrangement permits a user's hand 14 to grip the pump head 2 by locating the thumb 16 in the thumb hole 8 and all the user's fingers 18 on the trigger 12. This has the benefit that no part of a user's finger will be trapped between the trigger 12 and the housing (22,24) of the pump head 2 (Figure 4). Such trapping can cause tearing of a user's glove and contamination of a sterile or clean-room environment in which the pump head is being used, as well as potential finger damage. The

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arrangement allows the pump head to be of sufficient size to accommodate a rotary peristaltic pump member of a large enough diameter not to cause kinking or flattening of the dispensing tube as a result of its conforming to the curvature of the pump member. Location of all fingers on the trigger 12 is also ergonomic and helps reduce RSI from repeated trigger actuation compared to a conventional trigger sprayer in which not all fingers act on the trigger. In this example, the thumb hole has a central axis which is substantially coincident with an axis of rotation of the peristaltic pump member 6.

10 An embodiment of a hand-held peristaltic pump apparatus, or trigger-sprayer, 1 shown in Figure 3 includes a rigid container 20 attached to the pump head 2 and containing a liquid to be dispensed. The dispensing tube 4 is in fluid connection with the liquid and will be dispensed through the nozzle 10 when the user squeezes the trigger.

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Referring now to Figure 4, the exemplified pump head 2 is assembled from opposed parts 22,24 which co-operate to define a pump housing to which the trigger 12 is pivotally mounted and biased by a return spring 26. The peristaltic pump member is formed from opposed drive wheels 32,34 connected together by impellers 36 and rotatably mounted within the pump housing. The dispensing tube 4 is disposed around the pump member and connected at one end to the nozzle 10 via a connector 30 and at the other end to a supply tube 28 as will be further described in more detail presently. In this example the final seal is ultrasonically welded once the supply tube 28 has been connected. It will be appreciated that other methods may be used to achieve the final seal; suitable methods will be known to those skilled in the art.

The container 20 need not be rigidly connected to the pump head 2. Indeed, it is preferred that the container 20 is connected to the pump head 2 only by the dispensing tube 4 and optionally via the supply tube 28. This allows the container to be supported by means other than the user holding it and relieves the user from carrying the weight of the container. Referring to Figure 5, the container 20 is a collapsible bag and is provided with a feature 42 to enable it to be hung from a bar

or other support structure 40. The exemplified feature 42 is a hole through which a hook 44 passes. The pump head 2 may also be hung up when not in use, for example by means of a hook 38 through the thumb hole 8.

- 5 When the pump apparatus is in use the tubing 28 connecting the container 20 to the pump head 2 allows the user to carry out fluid pumping operations some distance from the container, which may be supported in various ways. Referring to Figure 6, the tubing 28 is shown fully extended and may have any desired length, for example a length in the range 1-3 metres, preferably about
10 1.5 m. Containers 20 of different capacity may be used, as illustrated in the left hand and centre representations of Figure 6 which have, respectively, 1 litre and 3 litre capacities. The proximal end of the supply tube 28 is located inside the container 20 and in fluid contact with liquid therein. Adjacent to the distal end 48 of the supply tube 28, the wall of the supply tube has a hole 46 extending all the way
15 through the wall.

- When the pump apparatus 1 is to be used in a sterile environment, it is triple-bagged 54 and gamma-irradiated to kill any pathogens. The process of gamma-irradiation causes liquid in the container 20 to heat up substantially, for example to
20 about 55°C, which creates an internal pressure. To release this pressure, a non-return valve is required, and in this example is provided in the overlap of the supply tube 28 and the dispensing tube 4 inside the pump head 2 by an interference detail 56 indicated in Figure 8.

- 25 Referring now to Figures 9-11, the non-return valve arrangement formed by connection of the dispensing tube 4 and supply tube 28 is shown. In this example the supply tube is made of PVC and the dispensing tube is made of a silicone rubber. The distal end 48 of the supply tube 28 is disposed within and is a close fit for the dispensing tube 4. The hole 46 is also within the dispensing tube 4. The
30 interference detail 56 clamps the dispensing tube 4 to the supply tube 28 within the pump head 2, but the hole 46 is not clamped so is free to release. When pressure is applied from the supply tube 28 (Figure 10) from the liquid container 20 the dispensing tube stretches away from the hole 46 allowing gas to flow out

and relieve the pressure. When the liquid in the container cools down and the pressure is reversed (Figure 11) the rubber wall of the dispensing tube is sucked over the hole 46 and creates a seal.

- 5 This arrangement avoids the need for a separate vent tube and provides a pump apparatus of simplified construction.

The container 20 may be placed on the ground (Figure 12) while in use, or hung from a hook 44 (Figure 13) from which the pump head 2 may also be hung when not in use (Figure 14). The hook 44 may be provided with a suction cup 56 for
10 attachment to any suitable smooth surface; the hook 44 may be pivotable between an attaching position and an attached position, shown in the left and right representations respectively of Figure 15.

- 15 In the embodiment shown in Figures 16-18 the container 20 is collapsible and is housed in a substantially rigid container housing 64, in this example a flagon. The container 20 is placed in the flagon through an opening 62 and the supply tube 28 in this example is disposed through a hole at the base of the flagon. The flagon 64 has a moulded feature 58 which provides a seat for the pump head 2 when not in
20 use. In this example the feature 58 is provided in a cap 60 which covers the opening 62.

The provision of a thumb hole 6 in the pump head 2 allows the pump head to be securely hung from a user's thumb 16 without limiting other movements of the
25 user's fingers, as illustrated in Figure 19, in a similar manner to hanging it on a hook. When doing this, the user's fingers are free to perform other activities including co-operation with the other hand, and the pump head can be readily manipulated and manoeuvred using only the thumb. With the small amount of room, and the position and shape of rubber glove arms, movement inside an
30 isolator unit is very restricted. If a user has to put a trigger sprayer down it is often knocked over; not having to put the pump head down at frequent intervals aids production efficiency and user comfort.

It is envisaged that the pump head 2 and container housing 64 will be reused, and the container 20 is a refill component which will be replaced as needed.

5 It will be understood that the pump head 2 may be manufactured and sold independently of the container. Accordingly, another aspect of the invention provides a pump head as specified.

10 It is appreciated that certain features of the invention, which are, for clarity, described in the context of separate embodiments, may also be provided in combination in a single embodiment. Conversely, various features of the invention which are, for brevity, described in the context of a single embodiment, may also be provided separately, or in any suitable combination.

CLAIMS

1. A hand-held pump apparatus comprising a peristaltic pump head and a container for a liquid to be dispensed;
5 the pump head having:
 - a rotatable peristaltic pump member and
 - a flexible dispensing tube in fluid connection with the inside of the container,
 - and a finger-actuated trigger arranged to drive the peristaltic pump member when actuated so as to cause the peristaltic pump member to turn and pump fluid
 - 10 through the dispensing tube; and wherein
 - the pump head has a thumb hole disposed through it, the thumb hole being disposed within an area around which the peristaltic pump member turns when actuated.
- 15 2. Pump apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the fluid connection between the dispensing tube and the inside of the container is provided by a supply tube which co-operates with the dispensing tube to provide a non-return valve function.
3. Pump apparatus according to claim 2, wherein an end of the supply tube is
20 disposed within an end of the dispensing tube and wherein the non-return valve function is provided by a hole through a side wall of the supply tube in a region where the dispensing tube overlaps the supply tube.
4. Pump apparatus according to any preceding claim, wherein the dispensing
25 tube is formed of silicone rubber.
5. Pump apparatus according to any preceding claim, wherein the thumb hole has a central axis which is substantially coincident with an axis of rotation of the peristaltic pump member.
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6. Pump apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the container is connected to the pump head only by the dispensing tube.

7. Pump apparatus according to claim 2, wherein the container is connected to the pump head only by the dispensing tube and/or the supply tube.

8. Pump apparatus according to claim 6 or claim 7, wherein the length of the tubing which connects the pump head to the container is in the range 1-3 metres.

9. Pump apparatus according to any of claims 6-8, wherein the container is provided with a feature to enable it to be hung from a support structure.

10. Pump apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said feature is a hole or a hook.

11. Pump apparatus according to any preceding claim, wherein the container is collapsible and is housed in a substantially rigid container housing.

12. Pump apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the container housing is provided with a seat for receiving the pump head when not in use.

13. A pump head for pumping fluid from a container, the pump head having a thumb hole disposed through it and comprising a rotatable peristaltic pump member, a flexible dispensing tube for fluid connection with the inside of a container, a finger-actuated trigger arranged to drive the pump member when actuated so as to cause the peristaltic pump member to turn and pump fluid through the dispensing tube; and wherein

the thumb hole is disposed within an area around which the peristaltic pump member turns when actuated.

14. A method of sterilizing a pump apparatus according to claim 2, when the container contains a liquid to be dispensed, the method comprising irradiating the apparatus with gamma radiation and permitting gas pressure generated by heating of the liquid to be reduced by escape of gas through the non-return valve function.