

Health Blog

By Amy Dockser Marcus

Judy A. Mikovits, the embattled scientist who led the research team that found a possible link between the retrovirus XMRV and patients with chronic fatigue syndrome, has been terminated from her job as director of research at the Whittemore Peterson Institute for Neuro-Immune Disease in Reno, Nev.

The controversial finding, published in a 2009 Science paper, excited patients and researchers who have long been searching for a cause for chronic fatigue syndrome, which has an array of debilitating symptoms that include cognitive difficulties, severe pain, and overwhelming fatigue. On Sept. 22, the authors of the paper, including Mikovits, [published a partial retraction](#) of the findings in Science, after two of the 13 study authors found contamination in blood samples from patients.

A week later, Mikovits was fired, she told Health Blog.

In a letter from Whittemore Peterson President Annette Whittemore to Mikovits, which was reviewed by Health Blog, Mikovits was terminated after refusing Whittemore's direct request that cell lines be turned over to another scientist at the institute who wanted to do research on them.

In a letter of response, Mikovits said that the cells were for use in a specific NIH-funded project and that it would be inappropriate to use them for another purpose without her knowledge and consent.

Whittemore told the Health Blog that she and Mikovits were "not seeing eye-to-eye" on who controlled the cells. Research on retroviruses and their possible connection to CFS as well as other diseases continues, she said. "We will keep going down that path as long as it continues to show promise," Whittemore says.

Mikovits is a principal investigator on an ongoing NIH-funded study that will test CFS patients and healthy controls for XMRV or related viruses, and she said that she plans to take her grant with her to a new institution where she wants to continue her work on CFS.

But like many things in the [long-running XMRV saga](#), this may not be simple. Whittemore says that the institute wants to continue to participate in the NIH study and has "the research capacity, the lab and the researchers" to follow through on the work. In terms of the fate of that grant, "it is an NIH call," Whittemore says.

UPDATED to add response from the Institute above.