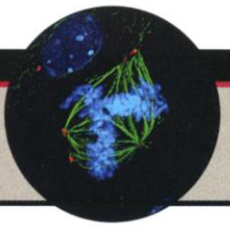
417 Grandmother knows best

LEAD STORY 420 Fifteen years after Chornobyl

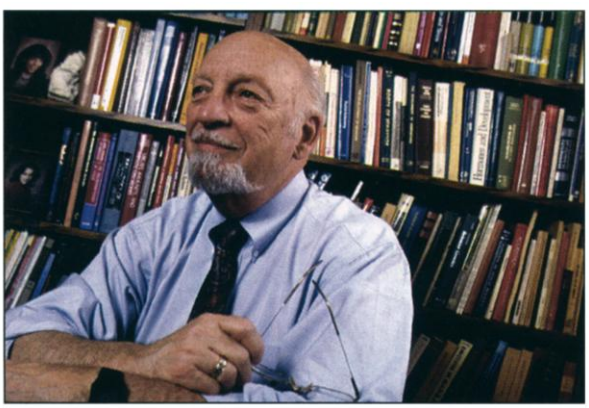


426 Cancer and the centrosome

UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

Researcher Sues After School Spent His Grant

Robert Ader, a prominent neuropsychologist at the University of Rochester in New York, won a $200,000 research grant from Philip Morris Companies Inc. in 1989. He didn't need the money at the time, so he left it in an endowment fund for future use. But he later discovered that his department chair, without his knowledge, had spent the funds to renovate his lab. In January, after a long battle to get the money back, he sued. A judge rejected the suit last month on grounds that the statute of limitations on such complaints had run out, but Ader says he plans to appeal.



Missing money. Robert Ader hopes to get back research money used to renovate his University of Rochester lab.

The case is drawing national attention. Martin Snyder, an official at the American Association of University Professors, which is weighing whether to support Ader's legal campaign, calls it "a very, very curious situation. ... I haven't encountered anything quite like this, and no one else has, either."

Ader, the George L. Engel professor of psychosocial medicine, has been at Rochester since 1957. He is known for his pioneering rodent experiments on the interaction between the nervous and immune systems that spawned the field of psychoneuroimmunology.

His work was already well funded by public and private agencies when the money from Philip Morris—a general grant to support his research, with no strings attached and no reporting requirements—came in. So he left it untouched in his department's endowment account. For several years, he received regular interest statements indicating a growing balance, according to his lawyer, Alexander Geiger.

But the money in fact wasn't there. When a new department chair arrived in 1996 and began going through the books, Ader was told that the money had been spent to renovate his lab. He says university administrators had promised to refurbish his lab when he was named head of the Division of Behavioral and Psychosocial Medicine in 1982, but he was never told his own research funds would pay for the work.

After 4 years of memos and meetings with the then-dean of the School of Medicine and Dentistry, Ader says he was finally told his complaints were groundless because the $200,000 had been used for his research program, as Philip Morris intended. Ader won the backing of the University Committee on Tenure and Privileges, but the university president decided that the committee had no jurisdiction over the matter. After further futile appeals, Ader went to court asking the university to turn over $600,000—the grant award plus accrued interest—for his research.

University spokesperson Teri d'Agostino says that using the grant money to pay for Ader's lab was appropriate because "the funding source had placed no restriction on the use of these funds," and they "were used exclusively for Dr. Ader's program." She says that the school has no explanation for the financial statements, and that only the former chair, now deceased, knew what they were. However, she agrees that Ader should have been kept better informed about what was going on.

In court, the university did not argue the merits of the case but convinced the judge that Ader's complaint was invalidated by a 4-month statute of limitations on review of disputed grievances with government bodies. Geiger says the court has misinterpreted the law, because the last letter from university officials was sent in October, only 3 months before the suit was filed.

Ader is keeping up the attack. "It's disheartening to find, after 40 years in academia, that there are university officials who will resort to patently deceptive practices," he says. Nicholas Cohen, a longtime collaborator and a member of the Committee on Tenure and Privileges, says the group "argued [in vain] that it was indeed faculty privilege not to have money taken from them." The committee plans to recommend the establishment of some channel to handle grievances against the administration, he adds, such as the appointment of a mediator.

—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

X-RAY CRYSTALLOGRAPHY

Transcription Enzyme Structure Solved

If any enzyme does the cell's heavy lifting, it's RNA polymerase II. Its job: getting the synthesis of all the proteins in higher cells under way by copying their genes into RNAs, and doing it at just the right time and in just the right amounts. As such, pol II, as the enzyme is called, is the heart of the machinery that controls everything that cells do—from differentiating into all the tissues of a developing embryo to responding to everyday stresses. Now, cell biologists can get their best look yet at just how the pol II enzyme of yeast and, by implication, of other higher organisms performs its critical role.

In two papers published online today by *Science* (www.sciencexpress.org), Roger Kornberg's group at Stanford University School of Medicine describes the atomic structure of the yeast enzyme; a slightly lower resolution structure captures yeast pol II in the act of transcribing a piece of DNA into RNA. Cell biologist E. Peter Gei-

Jaws of life. This ribbon image of pol II shows the opening to the enzyme's active site. The colors mark the different protein subunits of pol II.

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