

Researcher Retracts Cancer Biomarker Paper Cited by Lawsuit

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A paper on a new cancer biomarker that led a company to sue two major universities for scientific fraud has been retracted by the authors because they could not verify the data.

Published in *Urology* in April 2007 by Johns Hopkins University researcher Robert Getzenberg and his team, the paper reported that a novel protein in blood could be used as a sensitive test for detecting early prostate cancer. Two years later a company called Onconome that helped fund the study and related research [sued](#) Hopkins, Getzenberg, and his former institution, the University of Pittsburgh, alleging that the biomarker test was "essentially as reliable as flipping a coin." The parties reached a [settlement](#) for an undisclosed amount in 2010.

Now it has come to light (thanks to [Retraction Watch](#)) that Getzenberg and his co-authors retracted the *Urology* paper on 3 October. (The date does not appear on the [retraction notice](#) on *Urology's* web site, but Hopkins confirmed it.) The notice states that the paper's findings "may be unreliable." The authors rereviewed the data and found "differences" between some values and those reported in the paper. Because of this and other problems, "the inconsistencies in validating the data collection and recordation warrant retraction of the article," the notice says.

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When asked if Hopkins has investigated the matter, spokesperson Gary Stephenson e-mailed a statement saying the university "takes the circumstances that led to the retraction extremely seriously. Although internal investigations of the kind that might be triggered by the issues that have been raised are confidential, we want to emphasize that matters of integrity in research are at the core of our mission." In general, the university does not comment on research misconduct investigations, the statement says.

Getzenberg remains on the Hopkins faculty, the statement says. And he is still writing papers -- he co-authored nine last year, according to Pubmed. Getzenberg did not respond to an e-mail from *ScienceInsider*.

The full statement from Hopkins reads:

We are aware that at Dr. Robert Getzenberg's request, the journal *Urology* on Oct. 3, 2011, retracted his manuscript entitled, "EPCA-2: a highly specific serum marker for prostate cancer." Johns Hopkins University takes the circumstances that led to the retraction extremely seriously. Although internal investigations of the kind that might be triggered by the issues that have been

raised are confidential, we want to emphasize that matters of integrity in research are at the core of our mission and we are committed to ensuring that all research conducted under the auspices of Johns Hopkins University are conducted to the highest ethical and scientific standards.

As a general matter, the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine neither confirms nor denies the existence of research misconduct investigations to the public nor does it release details to the public. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis if warranted. Beyond this, we have no additional information at this time and it would be inappropriate for us to comment further. Dr. Getzenberg remains on the faculty.

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