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## Stratton medical chief to quit post

*Doctors had urged Dr. Eina Fishman's removal after deadly cancer study*

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ALBANY -- The beleaguered Stratton VA Medical Center, having weathered a cancer researcher's indictment and the opening of an FBI probe in the last year, will now see its top medical officer demoted.

Stratton officials said that Dr. Eina Fishman voluntarily stepped down to take a new [job](#), but staffers said the move came after 22 physicians urged hospital director Mary-Ellen Piche to remove her.

Fishman will leave her post at the end of October, at which point Stratton will begin a search for a new chief of staff.

The chief of staff's job change comes in the aftermath of a deadly cancer study, allegations that doctors have been unfairly demoted and accusations of deficiencies in patient care.

"It was probably something in the best interest of everybody," said Assemblyman Ron Tocci, a Westchester County Democrat who chairs the Veterans Committee. Tocci has been meeting with Stratton officials in recent months.

"I've heard a lot of stories that things aren't quite right there, in terms of the way they deliver services to veterans," he said.

Hospital employees who asked not to be named said that many doctors felt they couldn't trust Fishman after the high-profile controversies at Stratton. During a Sept. 9 staff meeting, 22 physicians voted for a resolution asking Piche to remove Fishman. Three staff doctors abstained.

Stratton was rocked last year by the indictment of a former cancer researcher on federal charges, including homicide and manslaughter, for allegedly falsifying medical records to enroll veterans in experimental drug studies. The charges stem from the death of a 71-year-old patient after he was fraudulently enrolled in a human research drug program.

Fishman fired a pharmacist, Jeffrey Fudin, who spoke out about alleged misuse of research funds, patient abuse, patient deaths and falsification of patient records. The Federal Bureau of Investigation opened an investigation early this year. Its status was unavailable Friday. Fudin was reinstated by a federal whistleblower court.

More recently, some employees protested when Dr. Roberta Miller, the award-winning director of Stratton's home care patient program, was reassigned after she went public about what she believed was a lack of resources and staff.

Stratton officials said Friday that Fishman's reassignment had nothing to do with those incidents or with the votes that medical staff took to urge her departure.

"She voluntarily stepped down for personal reasons," spokeswoman Linda Blumenstock said.

In November, Fishman will begin work as a "hospitalist," a new position that many institutions are embracing. The sole responsibility of such a doctor is to care for hospitalized patients, from admission through discharge. Unlike most physicians in hospitals, hospitalists don't have their own practices or supervise medical students.

Tocci, who praised Stratton's leadership, said he may soon conduct hearings to air concerns that patients, physicians and others have shared with him.