Chemically-induced arachnoiditis tends to be more diffuse and cause more florid, systemic problems than mechanically-induced arachnoiditis, which is usually more localised and causes the expected neurological problems associated with pathology at the affected spinal level.

However, most patients will have some degree of both subtypes. There are a few who have purely MIA and a somewhat greater number who have arachnoiditis after chemical insult, without a history of trauma or surgery (or indeed a significant mechanical factor).

Chemically induced arachnoiditis (CIA) is essentially a toxic condition, which seems to involve a chronically-hypersensitised CNS, with substantial autonomic effects and centrally-originating pain.

This chronic "red-alert" situation then seems to trigger autoimmune problems, presumably via neuroimmunomodulation. There are similarities between CIA and MCS (Multiple chemical sensitivity); also, Human Adjuvant disease, Gulf War Syndrome.