

OBITUARY

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Dr Anita B Roberts 1942–2006

On the morning of May 26 of this year, Anita Roberts died at her home in Bethesda, Maryland, following a heroic and stoic 2-year struggle against gastric cancer. September 2005, barely 8 months ago, saw the publication of one of her last visions – as co-editor of an issue of *Oncogene Reviews* devoted to transforming growth factor- β (TGF- β) signaling in stem cells and cancer. On behalf of her many friends and colleagues, we offer a tribute to the life and work of this remarkable scientist.

Anita was 64 to all those who knew her; however, it was clear that she lived and worked well beyond these years, with her extraordinary energy, infectious enthusiasm and pioneering work. Her career began with retinoic acid metabolism studies with Hector DeLuca at the University of Wisconsin where she received a doctoral degree in biochemistry, followed by a post-doctoral fellowship at Harvard University Medical School. After becoming a staff chemist at the Aerospace Research Applications Center in Bloomington, Ind., Anita taught chemistry at Indiana University. In 1976,

Anita went on to study derepressed developmentally regulated genes with transforming oncogenic abilities with Michael Sporn at the National Cancer Institute. Together with Michael Sporn, Anita discovered and characterized TGF- β , co-ordinating a strikingly productive research effort over deciphering the Jekyll and Hyde functions of TGF- β in autoimmune disease, fibrogenesis, carcinogenesis and wound healing. Broad and successful collaborations with Biotech investigators such as Rik Derynck at Genentech facilitated complete sequence identification, with subsequent breakthroughs in its linear signaling cascade through serine threonine type I and II kinase receptors, and intracellular Smad proteins. By 1990, Anita had risen to deputy chief of the Laboratory of Cell Regulation and Carcinogenesis, then to acting chief and, in 1995, to Branch chief, a position she held until 2 years ago. Over this period, Anita authored over 330 papers, being the second most-cited female scientist and the 49th most cited scientist, worldwide.

Anita was the recipient of the FASEB award for Excellence in Science, the Leopold Griffuel Prize, awarded by the French Association for Cancer, and has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She was among the first group of National Institutes of Health (NIH) scientists elected to the Senior Biomedical Research Service and was a past president of the Wound Healing Society. She was a co-awardee of the 2005 Komen Brinker Award for Scientific Distinction for basic research, sharing the award with Dr Sporn. Most of all, it was Anita's incredible personal integrity, cohesive team approach which helped establish the strong and large field of TGF- β signaling with over 30 000 citations and a diverse scientific community that she 'glued' together.

The void left by Anita in science is small in comparison to the grief felt by her family – she was married to her husband for nearly 42 years, Robert E Roberts of Bethesda; two children, Greg and Karl Roberts; a sister, Dorrie Derge and five grandchildren. Plans to honor Anita include a remembrance celebration which will be held on the NIH campus at a later date. To honor Anita, the following memorials are being established by government and academic agencies: (1) Construction of a Contemplation Garden on the NIH campus and (2) The Anita Roberts Scholarship Award that will be given to a deserving postdoctoral fellow to attend special conferences on TGF- β .

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