

RECOGNITION *for* ROWLEY

by Robert Mitchum

You could say that Janet Rowley is having a pretty good year.

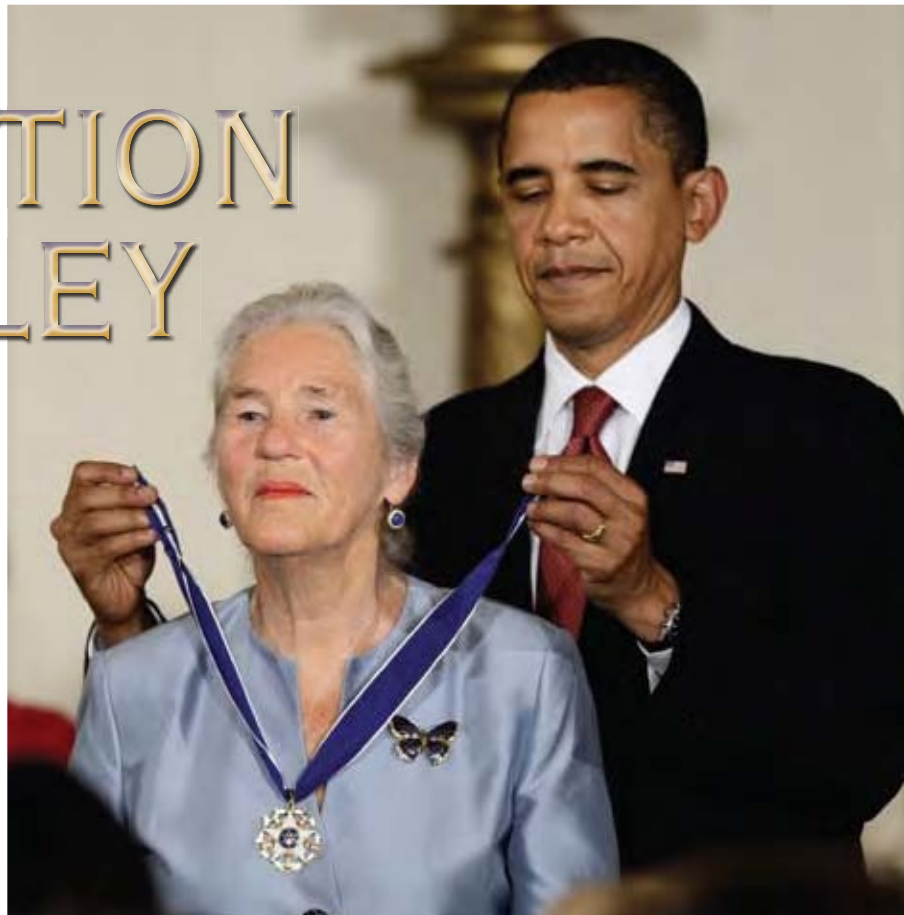
In March, the Medical Center molecular geneticist stood at President Barack Obama's right arm as he signed an executive order clearing the way for federal funding of embryonic stem-cell research. Early in July, she was declared the recipient of the 2009 Peter and Patricia Gruber Genetics Prize, which comes with a \$500,000 cash award and a gold medal. Then on July 30, another tremendous honor was announced for the still-active 84-year-old: the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest award an American civilian can receive from the White House.

The Medal recognizes "an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors." Among the other 15 recipients are Stephen Hawking, the late Sen. Edward Kennedy and Desmond Tutu; very prestigious company indeed. In addition, among ten previous recipients affiliated with the University of Chicago are scientist James Watson, economists Gary Becker and Milton Friedman, and historians Hanna Gray and John Hope Franklin.

In typical fashion, Rowley—the Blum-Riese Distinguished Service Professor of Hematology and Oncology—downplayed being recognized for her important research in the early days of cancer genetics. In her University of Chicago laboratory, Rowley discovered recurring chromosomal abnormalities in leukemias and lymphomas—findings that revolutionized how cancer is understood and treated.

"Janet Rowley's work established that cancer is a genetic disease," said Mary-Claire King, PhD, a geneticist at the University of Washington. "She demonstrated that mutations in critical genes lead to specific forms of leukemia and lymphoma, and that one can determine the form of cancer present in a patient directly from the cancer's genes. This changed the way cancer was understood, opened the door to development of drugs directed at the cancer-specific genetic abnormalities and created the paradigm that still drives cancer research."

Rowley's colleagues applauded her accomplishments and the attention they have garnered her and the university. "By showing that unique genetic abnormalities are the root cause of



Janet Rowley, MD, a pioneer in demonstrating that cancer is a genetic disease, receives the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama at a White House ceremony on August 12.

cancer, Rowley laid the foundation for personalized cancer care and targeted therapy," said Richard L. Schilsky, MD, professor of medicine at the University of Chicago and past president of the American Society for Clinical Oncology.

"Janet was a pioneer in what is now called 'translational research,' the direct application of laboratory studies to understanding and treating human disease," added leukemia specialist Richard Larson, MD, professor of medicine at the University of Chicago. "She opened a window that allowed us to see the genetic basis of the leukemias and other cancers. She also has been a champion of international collaboration for the advancement of science."

"I felt very humbled, but also as though I didn't deserve it," Rowley said of her initial reaction to the honor. James L. Madara, MD, chief executive officer at the University of Chicago Medical Center and dean of the Division of Biological Sciences and Pritzker School of Medicine, praised Rowley: "Dr. Rowley has brought and will continue to bring much distinction and honor to our institution, and we are grateful and very proud to call her one of our own."

For much of the past decade, Rowley served on President George W. Bush's Council on Bioethics, advising the White House on controversial scientific topics such as embryonic stem-cell research. Rowley continues her research at the Medical Center, and is an avid swimmer, sailor, cyclist and gardener. "It's a great honor," said Rowley, "to have one's colleagues still recognize one's accomplishments."

To learn more about Janet Rowley's accomplishments, watch the video interview and read the press release on the Medical Center Web site at www.uchospitals.edu/news/2009/20090730-rowley.html.