

A Biography of Aaron T. Beck, MD:

A native of Providence, Rhode Island, Aaron T. Beck had an interest in psychiatry as far back as he can remember. At Brown University, he was associate editor of the Brown Daily Herald and received a number of honors and awards, including Phi Beta Kappa, the Francis Wayland Scholarship, the Bennet Essay Award, and the Gaston Prize for Oratory. After graduating magna cum laude in 1942, he embarked on a career in medicine at Yale Medical School. He served a rotating internship, followed by a residency in pathology at the Rhode Island Hospital. Although initially interested in psychiatry, he found the then current approaches to be nihilistic and unrewarding and decided on a career in neurology, attracted by the high degree of precision that characterized this discipline. During his residency in neurology at the Cushing Veterans Administration Hospital in Framingham, MA, a required rotation in psychiatry intrigued him with some of the more recent developments in the field. He spent two years as a fellow at Austin Riggs Center at Stockbridge where he had a substantial experience in conducting long-term psychotherapy. The Korean War shifted Beck's area of work to the Valley Forge Army Hospital where he was Assistant Chief of Neuropsychiatry.

Beck joined the Department of Psychiatry of the University of Pennsylvania in 1954 and is currently University Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry. He initially conducted research into the psychoanalytic theories of depression, but when these were disconfirmed, he developed a different theoretical-clinical approach that he labeled cognitive therapy. His work is currently supported by a 10-year M.E.R.I.T. Award from the National Institute of Mental Health and a grant from the Centers for Disease Control for a study to determine the efficacy and effectiveness of a short-term cognitive therapy intervention for suicide attempters. Since 1959 he has directed funded research investigations of the psychopathology of depression, suicide, anxiety disorders, panic disorders, alcoholism, drug abuse, and personality disorders and of cognitive therapy of these disorders. He has published over 375 articles and fourteen books.

Beck has been a member or consultant for several review panels of the National Institute of Mental Health, served on the editorial boards of many journals, and lectured throughout the world. He was a visiting scientist of the Medical Research Council at Oxford and is a visiting fellow of Wolfson College. In recent years, in his capacity as consultant for psychiatric hospitals, HMO's, and managed care organizations, he has set up inpatient, partial hospitalization, and outpatient programs organized according to the cognitive therapy model. He has also introduced cognitive therapy into the treatment of medical patients at several HMO's.

Beck has been married for 49 years and has four children and eight grandchildren.