

Aaron T. Beck, Perelman School of Medicine

NOVEMBER 16, 2021 | VOL 68 ISSUE 14 ([HTTPS://ALMANAC.UPENN.EDU/VOLUME-68-NUMBER-14](https://almanac.upenn.edu/volume-68-number-14)) | DEATHS |

PRINT



Aaron Beck

Aaron T. Beck, emeritus professor in the department of psychiatry at the Perelman School of Medicine and the director of the Aaron T. Beck Psychopathology Research Center, died on November 1. He was 100.

Dr. Beck was born in Providence, Rhode Island. After high school, he entered Brown University, graduating summa cum laude in 1942. He embarked on a career in medicine at Yale Medical School, graduating in 1946. Although initially interested in psychiatry, he found the approaches at medical school to be unrewarding and decided on a career in neurology, attracted by the high degree of precision that characterized the discipline. During his residency in neurology at the Cushing Veterans' Administration Hospital in Framingham, Massachusetts, a required rotation in psychiatry intrigued him with some of the more recent developments in the field. He decided to explore further developments in psychotherapy. He spent two years as a fellow at Austen Riggs Center in Stockbridge, where he acquired substantial experience in conducting long-term psychotherapy. During the Korean War, Dr. Beck moved to the Valley Forge Army Hospital, where he served as an assistant chief of neuropsychiatry.

Dr. Beck joined the department of psychiatry at Penn's School of Medicine in 1954, becoming an assistant professor in 1958 and an associate professor in 1967. He became a full professor of psychiatry in 1971 and took emeritus status in 1992.

Dr. Beck is known as "the father of cognitive therapy." He initially conducted research into the psychoanalytic theories of depression, but when these hypotheses were disconfirmed, he developed a different theoretical-clinical approach that he labeled cognitive therapy. Beginning in 1959, he 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.

Dr. Beck was a member of or consultant for several review panels of the NIMH, 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 was a visiting fellow of Wolfson College. He was also a visiting professor at Harvard, Yale, and Columbia, and was a member of the Institute of Medicine. Dr. Beck had published more than 500 articles and authored or co-authored 17 books.

Dr. Beck received awards from numerous professional organizations and was the only psychiatrist to have received research awards from both the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association. He has also received the Heinz Human Condition Award, the Lasker-DeBakey Clinical Medical Research Award, an honor often called "America's Nobels," and the Adolf Meyer Award, the American Psychiatric Association's most prestigious award. Dr. Beck was awarded two honorary degrees, a doctor of medical science from Brown University and a doctor of humane letters from Assumption College. Dr. Beck has appeared on numerous lists of the world's most influential psychiatrists. He received an honorary degree from Penn in 2007.

In 1994, Dr. Beck established the Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy in Philadelphia with his daughter, Judith Beck, to train and mentor therapists and advance the technique. She serves as its president.

Dr. Beck is survived by his wife, Phyllis; daughters, Judith Beck and Alice Beck Dubow; sons, Roy and Daniel; 10 grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.