

# News Release

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## **Penn Professor Receives Lasker Award for Developing Cognitive Therapy**

(Philadelphia, PA) - Aaron T. Beck, MD, University Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, is the recipient of the 2006 Albert Lasker Award for Clinical Medical Research. Often called "America's Nobels," the Laskers are the nation's most distinguished honor for outstanding contributions to basic and clinical medical research.

Beck will receive the Lasker Award for developing cognitive therapy - a form of psychotherapy - which transformed the understanding and treatment of many psychiatric conditions, including depression, suicidal behavior, generalized anxiety, panic attacks, and eating disorders. In cognitive therapy, a therapist and client work together as a team to identify and solve problems. Therapists help clients to overcome their difficulties by changing their thinking, behavior, and emotional responses.

"It is a true thrill and honor to receive the prestigious Lasker Award," said Beck, who is also President of the non-profit Beck Institute for Cognitive Therapy and Research.

Beck will be awarded the Lasker Award at a luncheon ceremony on Friday, September 29th in New York City. Additionally, the Lasker Award for Basic Medical Research will be awarded to Elizabeth H. Blackburn, University of California, San Francisco; Carol W. Greider, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine; and Jack W. Szostak, Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital. Joseph G. Gall, Canegie Institution will receive the Lasker Award for Special Achievement in Medical Science.

A native of Providence, Rhode Island, Beck had an interest in human nature as far back as he can remember. However, he did not pursue this interest until later in his professional career. 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 graduating in 1946. He served a rotating internship, followed by a residency in pathology at the Rhode Island Hospital. Although initially interested in psychiatry, he found the approaches at Medical School 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 decided to explore further developments in psychotherapy. He spent two years as a fellow at Austin Riggs Center

at Stockbridge where he acquired 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 at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in 1954 and is currently University Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry. 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. 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. His work was supported by a 10-year M.E.R.I.T. Award from the National Institute of Mental Health and grants 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. His most recent work has focused on reducing suicide attempts among chronic suicide attempters and borderline personality disorder patients. NIH AND NIDA have co-funded Dr. Beck's five-year Developing Center Grant, "Cognitive Therapy for the Prevention of Suicide." He has also directed an international working group testing cognitive therapy of schizophrenia. He has published over 500 articles and authored or co-authored seventeen 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. He has also been a visiting Professor at Harvard, Yale, and Columbia, and is a member of The Institute of Medicine. He has received awards from numerous professional organizations and is the only psychiatrist to have received research awards from both The American Psychiatric Association and The American Psychological Association. He is also the recipient of the Heinz Award for "The Human Condition" and The Sarnat Award from The Institute of Medicine. Beck has been awarded two honorary degrees, a Doctor of Medical Science from Brown University and a Doctor of Humane Letters from Assumption College. He has been listed as one of the "10 individuals in history who shaped the face of American Psychiatry."

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*The University of Pennsylvania Health System includes three hospitals, all of which have received numerous national patient-care honors [Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania; Pennsylvania Hospital, the nation's first hospital; and Penn Presbyterian Medical Suite]; a faculty practice plan; a primary-care provider network; two multispecialty satellite facilities; and home care and hospice.*

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