

In memory of Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Helmut Beckmann (1940 – 2006)



We regret having to inform you that Helmut Beckmann passed away on September 3, 2006. His sudden passing was a great shock to his many friends and colleagues throughout the world.

Helmut Beckmann was born in 1940 in Stettin (today Poland). He grew up in Upper-Silesia and after the end of World War II, he attended a Polish school there, until the German population was expelled. His family then settled in Düsseldorf, where he finished school. He studied medicine in Cologne, Düsseldorf, Heidelberg and Munich. After he achieved his doctor's degree in 1967 and a two-year internship, he became an assistant physician at the Psychiatric State Hospital Munich-Haar in 1969.

In 1972, Helmut Beckmann joined the Department of Psychiatry of the Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich as a scientific assistant. There, he was welcomed by an unbelievably enthusiastic atmosphere in the research group of Hanns Hippus and Norbert Matussek. He was inspired by the idea that clarifica-

tion of the putative mechanisms of action of antidepressants, antipsychotics and other psychotropic drugs, e.g. LSD, would soon allow the pathogenesis of mental disorders to be unravelled.

Inspired by this enthusiasm Helmut Beckmann moved in 1973 to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in Bethesda/USA as a research fellow where he joined the group of F.K. Goodwin. In 1974, he returned to the University Department of Psychiatry in Munich where in 1978 he received his postdoctoral lecture qualification with a thesis on the metabolisms of biogenic amines.

From 1978 to 1984, Helmut Beckmann was leading senior registrar and acting director of the Department of Psychiatry at the Central Institute for Mental Health in Mannheim and Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Heidelberg. From the very beginning of his research career, the use of psychotropic drugs as experimental tools ("challenge") to clarify the pathogenesis of mental disorders played a significant role. He applied this research strategy systematically in order to test the adrenergic-cholinergic imbalance hypothesis of affective disorders proposed by D. Janowsky in 1974. This hypothesis acknowledged that a monocausal perspective is too simplistic to explain mental disorders but that these rather depend on the interaction of multiple biochemical parameters. Accordingly, Helmut Beckmann together with W.F. Gattaz and others examined multiple parameters of the cerebrospinal fluid. He also performed one of the first genetic studies on the HLA system, i.e. on chromosome 6p, in psychiatric disorders.

In 1984, Helmut Beckmann had the choice between a nomination to the Chair for Psychiatry at the

University of Würzburg or at the University of Innsbruck. He decided in favor of Würzburg, where his predecessor had set up a new department of psychiatry with excellent research facilities. Starting in 1985, Helmut Beckmann filled these facilities with new scientific spirit and curiosity. Systematically and consistently, he established research groups and laboratories for psychopharmacology, neurobiochemistry, neuropsychendocrinology, genetics, neuropathology, psychophysiology, neuroimaging and psychopathology. With great skill and success he attracted excellent researchers. Thus, within only a few years the Department of Psychiatry gained considerable reputation in Germany as well as in the international scientific community.

Together with H. Jakob in 1986, Helmut Beckman was the first to publish findings of disturbed cell migration in the entorhinal cortex of patients who had suffered from schizophrenia. Thus, he inaugurated the concept of the schizophrenias as neurodevelopmental brain disorders. This concept has gained broad international interest since then and is subject to intensive research.

A particular focus of Helmut Beckmann's research was the classification of mental disorders developed by Karl Leonhard. Helmut Beckmann arranged the opportunity for Karl Leonhard to share his psychopathological expertise during several visits to the Department of Psychiatry in Würzburg.

The publication list of Helmut Beckmann includes approximately 400 papers in national and international journals. He was a member of the editorial as well as the advisory boards of numerous international journals. He was a favorite

speaker at national and international scientific meetings giving about 350 lectures worldwide.

Helmut Beckmann was a member of numerous international scientific societies. In 1989, he founded the international Wernicke-Kleist-Leonhard Society, of which he was the president since its founding. From 1991 to 1997, he was "Secretary-Treasurer" of the World Society for Biological Psychiatry. He was vice-president from 1992-1998 and from 1998 through 2002 president of the "Collegium Internationale Neuro-Psychopharmacologicum" (CINP), the largest international scientific society in the field of the

psychiatry. In 1978, he was one of the founders of the German Society for Biological Psychiatry (DGBP) on the occasion of the world congress for biological psychiatry in Barcelona. He was president of the DGBP from 1987 - 1990 and was later distinguished as an honorary member of the society.

The University of Asunción awarded an honorary doctorate to Helmut Beckmann. He was honorary member of the "American Society of Biological Psychiatry" and the "Brazilian Society of Biological Psychiatry". The University of Buenos Aires (Argentina) as well as the University of Asunción

(Paraguay) nominated him as an "invited distinguished professor".

Helmut Beckmann deserves much credit for the investigation of mental disorders by giving innovative directions, some of which have been delineated here. He leaves not only a well prepared field of scientific research but also numerous researchers who owe a great deal of their fertile research activities to him. We would have wished to see him accompany the harvest of his seed.

Prof. Dr. Norbert Müller
President of the Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Biologische Psychiatrie