

## Obituary

### **Prof. Dr. med. Helmut Beckmann, 22.05.1940–03.09.2006**

With consternation we must accept that Helmut Beckmann has died, only a short time after he had entered retirement. We have shared more than two decades of scientific and clinical work and solidarity.

Helmut Beckmann was born in 1940 in Stettin and grew up in Upper-Silesia. After the end of world war II, he attended a Polish school there. His family settled in Düsseldorf where he finished school with the maturity examination. He studied medicine in Cologne, Düsseldorf, Heidelberg and Munich. After he achieved the doctor's degree in 1967 and his two-year internship, he became assistant physician in the psychiatric district hospital Haar in Munich 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 groups of Hanns Hippikus and Norbert Matussek, inspired by the idea that the clarification of the putative mechanisms of action of antidepressants, neuroleptics and other psychotropic drugs, e.g. Lysergic acid Diethylamide (LSD) would soon allow to unravel the pathogenesis of mental disorders.

Inspired by this enthusiasm Helmut Beckmann in 1973 moved 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 qualified as a lecturer of psychiatry with his investigations in the metabolism of biogenic amines.

From 1978 to 1984, Helmut Beckmann was vice director of the department of psychiatry of the Central Institute for Mental Health in Mannheim and Professor of psychiatry at the University of Heidelberg.

From the very beginning of his career as a researcher, the use of psychopharmaceuticals as experimental tools



(“challenge”) to clarify pathogenetic relationships of mental disorders played a significant role in his research. 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 implicitly acknowledged that a monocausal perspective is too simplistic to explain mental disorders but that this rather depends on the interaction of multiple biochemical parameters. Accordingly, Helmut Beckmann together with W. F. Gattaz and others examined multiple parameters in cerebrospinal fluid for concentration patterns potentially specific for one or the other mental disorder. Together with W. F. Gattaz he also performed his first human genetic studies on the HLA-System on chromosome 6p.

In 1984, Helmut Beckmann received the nominations to the chairs for psychiatry of the universities of Würzburg and Innsbruck. He accepted the chair of Würzburg, where his predecessor Prof. O. Schrappe, who unfortunately had died much too early after a severe illness, had set up a new department of psychiatry with excellent research

facilities. Starting from 1985, Helmut Beckmann filled these facilities with new scientific spirit. Systematically and consistently, he established research groups and laboratories for psychopharmacology, neurobiochemistry, neuropsychopharmacology, 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 internationally.

Together with H. Jakob (Wiesloch) in 1986 Helmut Beckmann 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 research of Helmut Beckmann was the classification of mental disorders developed by Karl Leonhard, especially concerning the so-called endogenous psychoses. Karl Leonhard and his postgraduate Edda Neele had introduced the – by now – internationally acknowledged differentiation of the affective psychoses into unipolar and bipolar forms. Helmut Beckmann arranged the opportunity for his co-workers at the Würzburg department of psychiatry to experience Karl Leonhard's psychopathological expertise on several visits to Würzburg until his death in 1988. This induced multiple research activities, among others the identification of the coupling of periodic catatonia to a gene locus on chromosome 15q15.

Helmut Beckmann was a member of numerous international scientific societies. In 1978, he was one of the founders of the German society for biological psychiatry on the occasion of the world congress for biological psychiatry in Barcelona. In 1989, he founded the international Wernicke-Kleist-Leonhard-Society, the president of which he has been since then. 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 biggest international scientific society in the field of the psychiatry.

The university of Asunción awarded a honorary doctorate to Helmut Beckmann. Helmut Beckmann was honorary member of the "American Society of Biological Psychiatry" and the "Brazilian Society of Biological Psychiatry". The universities of Buenos Aires (Argentina) as well as Asunción (Paraguay) nominated him as an "invited distinguished professor".

The publication list of Helmut Beckmann includes approximately 400 papers in national and international journals. He was a favourite speaker on national and international scientific meetings giving about 350 lectures in approximately 40 countries worldwide. He was a member of the editorial as well as the advisory boards of numerous international journals.

As such Helmut Beckmann has been one of the longest acting editors and section editors of JNT. He has been engaged with this scientific journal since 1983, when he was invited to be editor in the field of biological psychiatry, a responsibility which he filled with enthusiasm until he decided to step back from this position. He supported the nomination of Jürgen Deckert as his successor with empathy in 2006.

The Managing Editors and Springer Vienna are very thankful for Helmut Beckmann's cooperation and for his advice to improve the scientific quality of JNT. They offered him to publish both, his scientific life work in the field of the developmental disorders schizophrenia and depression and his Experiences with the Leonhard-Kleist-Wernicke differentiated psychopathology. It is a loss for the scientific community that Helmut Beckmann was not able to communicate his scientific concepts in these enriched books due to his untimely dead.

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.

*Peter Riederer (Würzburg),  
Jürgen Fritze (Pulheim),  
Konrad Maurer (Frankfurt am Main),  
Jürgen Deckert (Würzburg)*