

Jonathan Roger Beckwith Biography

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Biography

Jonathan Roger Beckwith is the American Cancer Society Research Professor of Microbiology and **Molecular Genetics** at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts. He is world renowned for his studies of bacterial **gene** expression, protein secretion, the structure and function of membrane proteins, and bacterial division. He has authored over 230 scientific publications. As well, Beckwith is a commentator of the societal aspects of science, with over 70 publications to date.

Beckwith was born and educated in the Boston area. He graduated from Newton High School in 1953 and went onto Harvard College, where he graduated in 1957 with an A.B. in Chemistry. From there, he attended Harvard University, graduating with a Ph.D. in Biochemical Sciences in 1961. From 1961 until 1965, he was a National Institutes of Health post-doctoral fellow in the laboratories of Arthur Pardee (Berkeley and Princeton), William Hayes (London), Sidney Brenner (Cambridge), and Francois Jacob (Paris). In 1965, he returned to Harvard as an Associate in the Department of Bacteriology and **Immunology**, the faculty he has remained with to this day (the name of the department was changed to Microbiology and Molecular Genetics in 1969). He became an Assistant Professor in 1966, an Associate Professor in 1968, and a Professor in 1969.

Beckwith's studies of protein expression, secretion, membrane dynamics and division in the bacterium ***Escherichia coli*** have been of fundamental importance in both basic bacteriology and in the development of clinical strategies to deal with *Escherichia coli* infections. As part of these studies, in 1969 Beckwith was the first person to isolate a gene.

In addition to his fundamental scientific research, Beckwith has also been an active commentator on the social impact of genetics, the need to present scientific issues and topics in language that is accessible to all, and on the political influences on scientific research.

The scope and importance of Beckwith's achievements in fundamental bacterial genetics and societal aspects of genetics have been recognized by his receipt of many awards and honors. These include a Merit Award from the National Institutes of Health (1986), the Eli Lilly Award for outstanding achievement in microbiology (1970), and the Genetics Society of America Medal (1993).

Beckwith continues to research and teach at Harvard. His laboratory remains one of the most productive and innovative **microbial genetics** labs in the world.