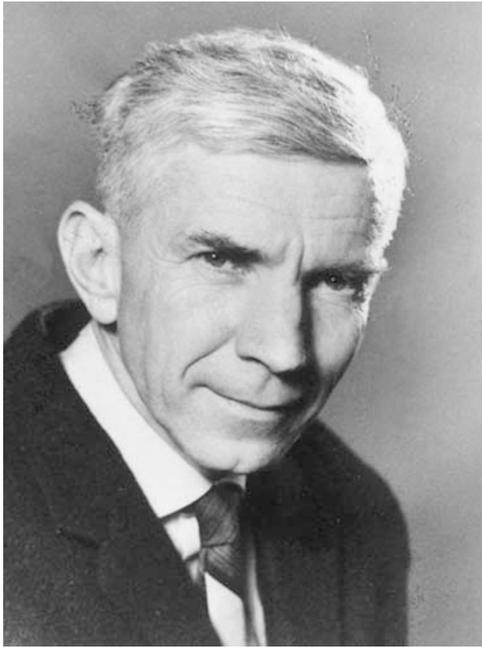


## Obituary

### Roland Kuhn, 1912–2005

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Roland Kuhn, the discoverer in 1956 of the antidepressant effect of imipramine, died on October 10, 2005, at the age of 93 years, in Scherzingen, Switzerland. He was born on March 4, 1912, in Biel, Switzerland. He was married to Verena Gebhart; they had three daughters, Regula, Beatrix, and Ursula, and were grandparents of Ursula's three children.

Roland Kuhn studied medicine in Bern and Paris, graduating MD in 1937. In 1939, he was appointed to the medical staff of the psychiatric hospital at Muensterlingen in the canton of Thurgau, situated picturesquely on the southern border of Lake Constance. He was director of this hospital from 1960 to 1980. In the 1950s, the hospital budget for the purchase of medications was very tight, so Dr Kuhn asked the firm Geigy, manufacturer of drugs at Basle, if they had some new antipsychotic drugs to try out on patients at the hospital with the diagnosis of schizophrenia. The reply was in the affirmative, and the hospital received a supply of G22355, later named imipramine; the chemical formula of imipramine was similar to that of chlorpromazine, which had become recognized worldwide as very effective in the treatment of psychotic symptoms.

Dr Kuhn was a very careful observer of the effect of medications, and it did not take long for him to notice that the psychotic symptoms did not improve, and in several

patients even got worse, but in those patients who were depressed as well, the depressive symptoms improved, and in some disappeared altogether. Therefore, he switched the prescriptions of G22355 from patients with schizophrenia to those with depression. Within a period of 3 weeks, the depressive symptoms cleared up in most of these patients, especially in those with what Kuhn described as 'vital depression' (similar to or coinciding with 'endogenous' or 'major depression').

In 1957, Kuhn published the results of his observations in the *Schweizerische Medizinische Wochenschrift* (Swiss Weekly Medical Journal). Heinz Lehmann, Clinical Director at Douglas Hospital, Montreal, Canada, read this article, was duly impressed, and obtained enough samples of imipramine from Basle by airmail to treat depressed patients at that hospital with equally good results. Lehmann and two co-workers published their results in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* in 1958.

A personal note: Charles Cahn, the writer of this obituary, and Roland Kuhn became very good friends starting when Roland, Verena, and Beatrix were guests in my house in Montreal. On several occasions when my wife and I spent our summer holidays in Switzerland, we visited the Kuhns in their house and greatly enjoyed their hospitality. On other occasions we met them in the Engadine, a beautiful valley in the canton of Graubunden. We went for long walks during which it was always a great pleasure for me to listen to Roland Kuhn's accounts of his work. I was much impressed by the fact that he stressed the importance of practicing a combination of psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy. He knew how to do this very well. Much of the type of Kuhn's psychotherapy was the existential analysis (*Daseinsanalyse*) practiced by Ludwig Binswanger, a fellow Swiss philosopher and close associate of Kuhn. From 1957 to 1983, Kuhn was Docent of Psychiatry at the University of Zurich.

In 1992, on the occasion of Roland Kuhn's 80th birthday, which I was privileged to attend, a Colloquium was held in Muensterlingen. The main themes of this meeting were ethics and aesthetics in philosophy and psychiatry.

In 2002, on the occasion of Kuhn's 90th birthday, a Symposium was held in Muensterlingen, at which presentations were made by 12 scientists and philosophers, including one by Kuhn on questions of style in scientific research and medical treatment.

Roland Kuhn was much in demand as a visiting lecturer in many different countries. He received doctor honoris causa in medicine by the Universities of Louvain (Belgium) and Basle, and doctor honoris causa in philosophy by the Sorbonne in Paris.

For more than 60 years of his life, Roland Kuhn was truly a man for all seasons!

Charles Cahn  
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