



Karl Rickels MD

August 17, 1924 - July 16, 2025

Karl Rickels, MD, one of the first psychiatrists to study antianxiety and antidepressant medications in outpatients, died peacefully and surrounded by family on July 16, 2025 at his home in Gladwyne. He was 100 years old. Karl is survived by his 3 sons, Laurence, Stephen, and Michael; his 2 daughters-in-law, Alyssa and Heidi; his 6 grandchildren, Karl “Andrew”, Peter, Caroline, Claudia, Aiden, and Ashley, and his faithful caregiver Marta Kubisiak. He was predeceased by his wife Crista (née Loessin) in 1963, his wife Rosalind “Linda” (née Wilson) in 2008, and his siblings Dr. Gisela Agah and Dr. Lothar Rickels. Karl was born in Wilhelmshaven, Germany on August 17, 1924, and grew up in Berlin, the child of Dr. Karl Eduard, CEO of a chocolate company, and Stephanie Roehrhoff, an elementary school teacher. He served briefly in the German Africa Corps during WWII, was captured, and became a prisoner of war in the US for over 2 years. In 1946, he was shipped back to Germany, and enrolled in the University of Muenster, where he completed his medical degree in 1951. A believer in the American Dream, Karl enthusiastically accepted an opportunity to return to the US to serve as a psychiatric resident at the Mental Health Institute in Cherokee, Iowa, moving there with his pregnant wife in 1954. During that year, he observed the remarkable effects of new drug treatments for individuals hospitalized with mental illness. Intrigued by this nascent field, Karl moved to the University of Pennsylvania in 1955 to complete his psychiatry residency. In 1957, he joined the faculty to study and develop outpatient drug therapy for individuals affected by anxiety, panic, and

depressive disorders. Over time, his work expanded to include the treatment of premenstrual dysphoric disorder, and in 1977 he was named the Stuart and Emily Mudd Professor of Human Behavior and Reproduction. Karl's research, funded by the NIH's National Institute of Mental Health continuously from 1959 to 2009, contributed to the FDA approvals of the first and subsequent benzodiazepines (e.g. Librium, Valium, Ativan, Xanax), the anxiolytic Buspar, and several antidepressant SSRIs (e.g. Prozac) and SNRIs (e.g. Effexor). Importantly, Karl was the first physician scientist to demonstrate the efficacy of certain antidepressants in the treatment of anxiety disorders. Karl's contributions to medicine, which continue to help countless individuals affected by mental illness, were recognized by an NIH Merit Award (1988), the Philadelphia Psychiatric Society Lifetime Achievement Award (2003), the University of Pennsylvania William Osler Patient-Oriented Research Award (2008), the International College of Neuro-Psychopharmacology Pioneer in Psychopharmacology Award (2012), and Penn Medicine's Distinguished Graduate Award (2018), the highest honor bestowed upon its alumni. During his 65-year career at Penn, Karl endowed 3 professorships in the Department of Psychiatry: the Karl Eduard Rickels Chair (1993), the Karl and Linda Rickels Chair (1999), and the Roehrhoff Rickels Chair (2015). Karl was the author of more than 600 scientific publications, books, chapters, and reviews and in 2011, he published an autobiography of his remarkable life and career titled *A Serendipitous Life: From German POW to American Psychiatrist*. Aside from working, there was nothing Karl loved more than spending time with family. A devotee of opera and symphony, connoisseur of spy novels and movies, Karl delighted in the pursuits of the mind. He was equally comfortable on the athletic field and traipsing through the woods, happily engaging in any activity that interested his family. He adored traveling with his grandchildren, cheering them on at competitions, and playing games of all sorts with them. Karl remained active for much of his life, skiing and playing tennis through his 80s, and relishing golf, bridge, and bowling through his 90s. He especially enjoyed his longtime membership at the Philadelphia Country Club, where he

faithfully ate brunch with family every Sunday. "Opa," as Karl was affectionately known to his grandchildren and their friends, will long be remembered as an intrepid adventurer, partner in crime, dependable doughnut supplier, trusted confidant, and all-time favorite pal. Opa provided his loved ones and colleagues with the most priceless gifts: undivided attention, dedicated mentorship, and perpetual encouragement. Larger than life, Karl loved and was loved unreservedly. He will be greatly missed. Funeral services will be held Friday, July 25, 2025, at 10 A.M. at St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, 226 Righter's Mill Road, Gladwyne PA 19035. Luncheon to follow at the Philadelphia Country Club, Gladwyne PA. Burial will be private. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Gladwyne Library League.

Previous Events

Funeral Service

JUL **25**. 10:00 AM (ET)

St. Christopher's Episcopal Church
226 Righters Mill Road
Gladwyne, PA 19035

Tribute Wall

LK

“ I worked with Dr Rickels for 2 years in the early 1990's, writing up his and Dr Ellen Freeman's project, "Teen Pregnancy in the Black Urban Community", doing this after I wrote and published in the Penn Med Alumni Journal, in 1988, "Drugs' Toughest Tester", detailing Dr Rickels' achievements up until that point, including the crucial role of the placebo effects of how a doctor present to the patient, a medication...this area of psychopharmacology is practically never shared with patients, btw....I knew Dr Rickels very well, and know that he is with loved ones in Heaven...my name is Leslie Kelly

Leslie Kelly - August 23, 2025 at 10:32 AM

TC

“ Thinking of you all! He led an exceptional and inspirational life. Best, Trish Curran

Trish Curran - July 28, 2025 at 10:00 AM

AB

“ I was blessed to have known Dr. Rickels over the past 25 years during my time living in Gladwyne. He has been an inspiring example for how to live a full, robust life. He and Linda, were the most generous and thoughtful people I have ever known. My thoughts and prayers are with their wonderful sons and families.

Amy Bartosiak - July 24, 2025 at 03:26 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Karl Rickels MD.



July 24, 2025 at 02:32 PM



“ Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Karl Rickels MD.



July 24, 2025 at 09:43 AM



“ The Evans Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Karl Rickels MD.

The Evans Family - July 24, 2025 at 07:25 AM



“ The Evans Family purchased the Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum for the family of Karl Rickels MD.



The Evans Family - July 24, 2025 at 07:25 AM

FD

“ From the EDM division purchased the Serene Re treat for the family of Karl Rickels MD.



From the EDM division - July 22, 2025 at 12:08 PM

CS

“ David, Emina, Christiane and Ute Schreiter would like to express their condolences. Karl Rickels was a generous, lovely and cheerful uncle and grand uncle to us. We miss him very much.

Christiane Schreiter - July 22, 2025 at 10:07 AM

CS

“ Christiane S. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Karl Rickels MD.

Christiane S. - July 22, 2025 at 09:58 AM

DS

“ David, Emina and Ute Schreiter planted a grove of 3 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Karl Rickels MD.

David, Emina and Ute Schreiter - July 22, 2025 at 09:54 AM

JG

“ Jim and Kay Gately planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Karl Rickels MD.

Jim and Kay Gately - July 21, 2025 at 02:23 PM

JG

“ Jim and Kay Gately purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of Karl Rickels MD.



Jim and Kay Gately - July 21, 2025 at 02:23 PM

MF

“ Minou, Jasmin, Suzan, Leila and families planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Karl Rickels MD.

Minou, Jasmin, Suzan, Leila and families - July 20, 2025 at 02:57 PM

MF

“ Minou, Jasmin, Suzan, Leila and families purchased the Pink Tribute Spray for the family of Karl Rickels MD.



Minou, Jasmin, Suzan, Leila and families - July 20, 2025 at 02:57 PM



“ Pink Tribute Spray was purchased for the family of Karl Rickels MD.



July 20, 2025 at 02:47 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Karl Rickels MD.

July 20, 2025 at 02:47 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Karl Rickels MD.

July 19, 2025 at 04:43 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Karl Rickels MD.



July 19, 2025 at 04:43 PM



“ Amazing life & legacy. May his memory be a blessing. Thinking of you all and sending hugs. Your father's contribution to psychiatry has helped so many lives and continues to do so. His devotion to his family definitely shows in all that the Rickels family continues to do in life. With ❤️ the Berrys

Yuet Berry - July 18, 2025 at 02:44 PM



“ Karl was the first person I interviewed with at Penn. He was engaging and kind and his advocacy for my recruitment was, and continues to be, greatly appreciated.

Michael Perlis - July 18, 2025 at 11:33 AM