

Henry T. Wycis

Born in Bayonne, N.J., in 1911, Wycis first attended Grace City College in Pennsylvania. He reportedly worked his way through medical school playing semiprofessional baseball and gambling, and graduated as valedictorian from Temple Medical School in 1938, after which he entered the neurosurgery residency program at Temple and eventually became a faculty member there.

During his time in medical school, he worked in the lab of [Ernest A. Spiegel](#).

The field of human [stereotactic neurosurgery](#) was introduced by [Ernest A. Spiegel](#) and [Henry T. Wycis](#) by a historical paper in Science in 1947. Spiegel was a conservative [Vienna](#) trained experimental neurologist who fled the Nazis to Temple Medical School in [Philadelphia](#). Wycis was a huge flamboyant but brilliant neurosurgeon who started as Spiegel's student and then became his collaborator. They described a [Horsley-Clarke apparatus](#) that could be used in human [stereotactic](#) surgery. It relied on internal cerebral landmarks, which made it accurate enough to be used in humans. The fields of human neurophysiology, pneumoencephalography, radiology, and electrophysiology had advanced enough to provide for the first time the required technology. At the time of their initial publication, they had probably already performed surgery for psychiatric illness, pain, movement disorders, and aspiration of tumor cysts. The first decade after their publication was a remarkably productive time for them and the other pioneers who entered the field ¹⁾.

Tracking and scrutinising original publications by Spiegel and Wycis, the pioneers of human stereotactic neurosurgery, it was found that its origin and the very incentive for its development and first clinical use were to avoid the side effects of frontal leucotomy. The first applications of functional stereotactic neurosurgery were in performing dorsomedial thalamotomies in psychiatric patients; it was only later that the stereotactic technique was applied in patients with chronic pain, movement disorders and epilepsy. Spiegel and Wycis' first functional stereotactic operations were for obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, and other psychiatric conditions ²⁾.

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Gildenberg PL. Spiegel and Wycis - the early years. Stereotact Funct Neurosurg. 2001;77(1-4):11-6. PubMed PMID: 12378049.

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Rzesnitzek L, Hariz M, Krauss JK. The Origins of Human Functional Stereotaxis: A Reappraisal. Stereotact Funct Neurosurg. 2019 Feb 13:1-6. doi: 10.1159/000496157. [Epub ahead of print] PubMed PMID: 30759450.

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