

Rutgers WPF and its history

Rutgers Nisso Groep, Expert Centre on Sexuality, and World Population Foundation, have merged at the end of 2010. By joining forces Rutgers WPF emerged, a strong organisation that operates nationally as well as internationally in the field of sexual health and rights. Below you will get acquainted with Rutgers WPF and its history that goes way back to 1881.

Contraceptives against overpopulation

In 1881 the New Malthusian Union (Nieuwe Malthusiaanse Bond) was established to promote birth control. The name refers to Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), economist and demographer. He introduced the term 'Malthusian ceiling' to determine the maximum population growth in relation to the amount of land available. The New Malthusian Union wanted free distribution of contraceptives to the working classes to promote reduction of large families (and poverty). The NMB later merged into the NVSH (see below).

Jan Rutgers and his wife's influence

Secretary of the NMU was Jan Rutgers (1850 - 1924), a family doctor who used to hold birth control surgeries in Rotterdam as early as 1892. Together with Aletta Jacobs, Johannes Rutgers was a pioneer in the field of sexuality and contraceptives. Johannes Rutgers joined the NMU in 1901 following the example of his second wife, Maria ("Mientje") Wilhelmina, Hendrika Hoitsema. She was a member of the Union and was Chairwoman for many years. Mientje played an important role in Rutgers' life. Her concern for social issues kindled her husband's enthusiasm. Johannes Rutgers stopped working as GP from 1904 onwards. He continued birth control surgeries and organised practical contraceptive help through professional nurses. On top of that he was governor of the NMU till 1920. After he died, someone of Rutgers' standing who was fighting for sexual reform was hard to find for a long time.

All over the Netherlands clinics for married life and sexuality were established in the nineteen thirties. The first clinic in Amsterdam received the name Aletta Jacobs (the first woman ever to become a medical doctor). The second clinic in Rotterdam was called after the local pioneer, Dr. J. Rutgers.

New Malthusian Union to NVSH

The New Malthusian Union was dissolved under German occupation during World War II. The Germans did not favour birth control for the Arian race (as Arian should multiply endlessly). After World War II the Dutch Society for Sexual Reform (NVSH) was established in 1946. They continued the work of the NMB and also held clinics for married life and sexuality under the name of NVSH.

Too much success

NVSH grew enormously during the sixties of the 20th century. There was a huge demand for sexual counselling, so much so that the organisation was no longer able to sufficiently attend to its core business, promoting sexual reform. Apart from ideology there were also financial considerations. Deficits of the clinics weighed heavily on the budget. The NVSH expected that by dividing counselling and reform activities government grants would be easier obtainable.

The start of the Rutgers Foundation

In order to provide counselling services Rutgers Foundation was set up in 1969. On the one hand, this resulted in obtaining government grants more easily, on the other hand in NVSH losing a lot of members as from 1970. NVSH started on a more radical path, while counselling services became more commonly accepted by the establishment of the Rutgers Foundation. People had somewhere to go to for their contraceptive surgeries.

Free access to contraceptives

The Rutgers Foundation was greatly successful with its clinics for birth control, also known as Rutgers Houses. Anyone could visit the clinic's surgeries for information about and access to contraceptives, even if you were not married. This was exceptional, since generally doctors only prescribed contraceptive pills to women who were married. Moreover, other contraceptives, such as IUDs and diaphragms, were especially hard to come by. At the Rutgers Houses unmarried women

were as easily able to get contraceptives as their married peers. And to improve access further many clinics had an outside condom machine.

More than counselling alone

Over the years sexuality counselling changed. Apart from medical doctors, also social workers and psychologists were employed in the Rutgers clinics. Gradually, the clinics for contraceptives developed into centres for sexuality. People could go for a consultation about their sexual problems. The Rutgers Foundation was increasingly active in providing relational and sexual education. Members of staff started giving sex education carrying toolkits full of contraceptives, thus aiming at prevention of sexual problems.

The social boundaries of what was done and not done regarding sexuality gradually shifted. Consequently, Rutgers Foundation also was confronted with sexual harassment and sexual abuse. Thus, they began offering sexological counselling to victims of sexual violence. Furthermore, the educational message had to be adjusted, since up to then exploration of sexuality and positive sexual experiences had been main points. In the '80s and '90s of the 20th century, however, Rutgers Foundation started the disciplinary training 'Sexuality Education for juvenile sex offenders' (rape or sexual harassment). Besides victims now perpetrators of sexual violence were also going to be treated.

Academic and scholarly research

Shortly before Rutgers Foundation came to be established in 1967 the Netherlands Institute for Social Sexological Research (NISSO) had started. The institute was jointly founded by national health organisations and the sexual reform movement. NISSO carried out scholarly research into psychological and social aspects of sexuality. At the same time the institute maintained contacts with other organisations studying sexuality and relationships education. NISSO provided information about sexuality to organisations, local authorities and companies.

NISSO closely followed social developments, such as birth control being the main point of research during the nineteen sixties. Studies into sexual relations were flourishing in the nineteen seventies and eighties as well as problems within sexual relationships. In the course of time we learned more about all kinds of sexual abuse. Due to the AIDS epidemic in the nineteen nineties the number of studies into STI education increased.

Rutgers Nisso Groep

In 1999 Rutgers Foundation and NISSO decided to merge and became Rutgers Nisso Groep. The organisation that came into being uniquely combined research, counselling and prevention. However, the (former) Rutgers Foundation was no longer able to carry out the counselling services cost-effectively and was taken over by other health care organisations in 2002. The clinics for contraceptives subsequently developed into centres for sexuality independent of Rutgers Nisso Groep. They were joined in cooperative organisations such as CASA and StiSAN. In addition to this young people up to 25 years can now consult so-called Sense-surgeries at Municipal Health centres all over the country.

Rutgers Nisso Groep is the Dutch Expert Centre on Sexual and Reproductive Health. Research, innovation, education and information are cornerstones of the organisation. Rutgers Nisso Groep aims at prevention and education of various target groups in order to improve people's (sexual) health. Intermediaries are indispensable in this process.

Rutgers Nisso Groep has become internationally active as well since 2002 with her programme Youth Incentives. This programme aims at young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights in developing countries. Youth Incentives works in Bangladesh, Tanzania, Rwanda, Malawi, Mali, Somaliland, China and Russia.

World Population Foundation

World Population Foundation (WPF) was founded in 1987 by the British couple Roy and Diana Brown, who lived in the Netherlands at that time. They were surprised about the lack of interest in population issues from Dutch non-governmental organisations (NGOs). After vain attempts to find room for these issues within existing organisations, they decided to found WPF on 10 July 1987, which incidentally was the first VN World Population Day ever.

WPF aimed at forcing back high birth rates, as well as death rates of mothers and children in developing countries. The foundation expanded throughout the years and played an important role

during the 'International Conference on Population and Development' in Cairo in 1994. The then Minister for Development Cooperation, Jan Pronk, asked WPF to join the Dutch delegation's debates. WPF grew into a financially independent organisation and therefore Roy Brown was able to stop his financial support. However, he Brown has been closely involved in all WPF's activities ever since.

WPF has field offices in Pakistan, Vietnam and Indonesia and programmes running in Kenia, Uganda, Tanzania, South-Africa and Thailand. WPF fights for sexual and reproductive health and rights for instance by providing (sexuality) education and promoting the female condom. In the Netherlands WPF campaigns under the label 'My Body' to raise funds for and make people aware of the situation in developing countries.

Rutgers WPF

In December 2010 World Population Foundation and Rutgers Nisso Groep have merged and became Rutgers WPF. By joining forces a strong organisation emerged, that works both nationally and internationally in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

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