

*Dr. Gerard Frans Gaarenstroom, Amsterdam 26 December 1886 – Amsterdam 19 April 1955, is a Dutch physician who, from 1912, is trained as a surgeon at the University of Amsterdam. On the initiative of Professor Jacob Rotgans, Gaarenstroom specialises in the treatment of cancer with X-ray and radium irradiation. He becomes one of the first radiologists to specialise in the irradiation of cancer and is regarded as a pioneer in radiotherapy in The Netherlands. He is the first head of the Department of Radiotherapy in the Netherlands Cancer Institute (NKI) from 1915 until 1921.*

*Gaarenstroom was the son of Johannes Hendrik Gaarenstroom, headmaster and Maria Schaap. He was married with 2 children: Frans Gaarenstroom, born 19 September 1924, adopted, and Helena Johanna Gaarenstroom, born 3 February 1934.*

*From an interview with his daughter, Mrs H.J. Wagenaar-Gaarenstroom: the family Gaarenstroom has Swedish origins and the name is a corruption of a Swedish name.*

*Training:*

- *Medical school, University of Amsterdam (Diploma 1911)*
- *Initial interest in anatomy, resident with Professor Bolk*
- *Specialisation in surgery under Professor Jacob Rotgans (1912)*
- *From 1913, specialisation in X-ray treatment in the surgical department of the Binnen Gasthuis (teaching hospital of Amsterdam 1582-1981) under Professor Jacob Rotgans. Very probably in close contact with radiologist Professor J.K.A. Wertheim Salomonson.*

*In 1913, in the surgical clinic of Professor Rotgans in the Binnen Gasthuis in Amsterdam, Dr. Gaarenstroom is given the responsibility for the application of the newly introduced X-ray treatments. At the founding meeting of the Netherlands Cancer Institute (NKI) on 10 October 1913, it is decided to enable Gaarenstroom to make a study trip to the principal cancer centres of Europe. At the opening of the NKI in January 1915, he takes up the position of head of the Department of Radiotherapy. He keeps this position until 1922, when he leaves the NKI.*

*After his NKI period, Gaarenstroom opens an X-ray and radium practice at his home at Keizersgracht 669 in Amsterdam. He was also connected to several Amsterdam hospitals, in particular the Burger Hospital and the Spinoza Clinic. Besides these, he was also connected to the NIZ, the Nieuw Israelitisch Ziekenhuis ( New Israelite Hospital). In the Spinoza Clinic he treated children with radium.*

*Initially, he had many contacts with Jewish physicians through his work in east Amsterdam (first the NKI, later at the Burgerziekenhuis). Many Jewish physicians lived in that neighbourhood around the Ooster city park – a possible explanation for his involvement in radiology in Jewish hospitals. In 2008, Henk van der Gugten, member of the Historad working group, spoke with the daughter of G.F. Gaarenstroom, Mrs. H.J. Wagenaar-Gaarenstroom. She remembers his work in Jewish hospitals as a side-line. She remembers few details. With regard to contacts with radiologist Betty Levie (NKI), she remembers nothing, and about the events of World War II she heard nothing from her parents. She was then between 6 and 11 years old and was kept out of such matters. Also later on, she was not given any information.*

*She does remember that during the war her father refused to sign the loyalty declaration that had been demanded by the German authority in the occupied territory. For this reason, from around 1943, he had to hide during Nazi raids. Note by Henk van der Gugten : Gaarenstroom's name is on the 1940 wartime list of physicians working in the NIZ, the Nieuw Israelitisch Ziekenhuis (New Israelite Hospital), Nieuwe Keizersgracht 110, Amsterdam. Source JHM (Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam).*

*From the In Memoriam printed in the Netherlands Journal of Medicine (NTVG 99, II, 19 of 7 May, 1955) by A. Kropveld :*

*"... he was a modest person who never pushed himself to the foreground. Gaarenstroom was one of the first in The Netherlands who worked in Radiotherapy and, as with so many pioneers in the area of X-ray therapy, he lost a body part – in this case a finger – to the X-rays..... For many years, until his death, Gaarensroom was board member of the Amsterdams Geneeskundig Genootschap (Amsterdam Medical Society).*

**\*Sources:**

- Mrs. H.J. Wagenaar-Gaarenstroom, daughter of radiologist G.F. Gaarenstroom

- The biographical description in the book "Persoonlijkheden uit het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden" (Personalities from the Kingdom of The Netherlands), published in 1938 by Holkema and Warendorf, foreword Prof. Brugmans