

## Biography of Dr. Willem Frederik Wassink \*)

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*Willem Frederik Wassink, Amsterdam 31 December 1888 – Rabat (Marocco) 5 May 1963. Dr. W.F. Wassink was a Dutch surgeon who, from 1921 to 1953, was head of clinic in the Netherlands Cancer Institute. During the 2nd World War, he managed the Department of Radiotherapy and conducted radiation treatments with radium.*

*W.F. Wassink was the son of Dr. Louis Nicolas Serafin Wassink and Nelly Engelina Coomans de Ruiter. As physician, he continues a rich family tradition. His father and one of his grandfathers were general practitioners and an uncle was court physician to the Sultan of Turkey. A great uncle, who was major general in the colonial medical corps, was one of those responsible for the setting up of the medical services in the Dutch East Indies. In 1922 Wassink marries Catharina Philippina van Raamsdonk. They have 5 children. He met Catharina in the NKI where she was clinical resident and specializing in radiology. In 1921, she took her PhD with a dissertation entitled "Results of radiation treatment of uterine carcinoma". Over the course of the years, Wassink and his wife work together on scientific research and the organization of the clinic.*

*In Amsterdam Wassink graduates from high-school and he attends a practical training in building construction. In 1907 he enrolls at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) as a medical student. In 1911, after his bachelor's exams, he is awarded the gold medal for his answer to a contest set up by the Senate of the University of Amsterdam. This concerns research into the possibilities of culturing tissue outside the organism. He becomes assistant to Professor W.M. de Vries, who held the chair in Pathological Anatomy. In 1913, he takes the final exams for his medical degree.*

*In the first annual report of the "Association the Netherlands Cancer Institute" (NKI) for the year 1914, W.F. Wassink is named chief co-worker in the laboratory. Professor W.M. de Vries is temporary director of the laboratory. From January 1915, the young physician, Wassink, is asked by his tutor to carry out pathology research in the new NKI laboratory. In this way, the vacancy is filled which was created by the fact that, on the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the residents initially engaged by the NKI were called up for military service.*

*In 1916, Wassink chooses to specialize in surgery. He becomes resident in the teaching hospital Binnengasthuis under the leadership of Jacob Rotgans, professor in surgery at the University of Amsterdam and of Willem M. De Vries, professor in pathology. Besides, both Rotgans and de Vries were founder and first director (clinic resp. laboratory) of the NKI. In 1916, Wassink graduates with a dissertation "On tumours in pheasants caused by a worm". In 1919, Wassink completes his training as surgeon and establishes himself as such in*

*Amsterdam. His capabilities are well known and he is named as head of the City Orthopedic Clinic and Day-clinic. In 1920 he is decorated for this scientific work with the Tilanus Medal – a prize which was viewed as encouragement.*

*Beside his position in orthopedics, he is appointed head of clinic of the NKI in 1921. He fulfills this dual position until 1932. At that time, the work in the cancer institute has grown to such proportions that he decides to devote himself to this completely. He remains head of clinic until 1953. From 1953 to 1958 he leads the Social-Medical department which he founded at the Netherlands Cancer institute (NKI). In 1958, he ends his work at the NKI.*

*Wassink had a large influence on the development of the Netherlands Cancer Institute into a leading cancer centre. His annual reports give an impression of the growing numbers of patients and the adaptation of the treatments according to more modern practices. He strived for rigorous evaluation of treatment results in which the well-organised follow up of the patients was so important to him.*

*Wassink was also closely involved with the building, renovation and fitting out of the successive premises of the NKI. With his insight and knowledge of architecture and technical matters, he often made a major contribution to the design.*

*Dr. Wassink also greatly contributed to the development of information programmes and the setting up of medical research on cancer in the population, where the prevention of cancer and its early diagnosis were important themes. From the 30's he involves himself in positioning the general practitioner with a central role in healthcare. When, in the 40's, a start was being made with the layout of the new IJsselmeer polders, Wassink proposed an experiment in which integrated first-line healthcare was given in local centres. In an adapted form, this led to the current set up of healthcare in the province of Flevoland, ie the vast polders created in the former sea inlet called IJsselmeer.*

*In 1949, Dr. W.F. Wassink is awarded a royal honour. He becomes knight of the order of the Netherlands Lion.*

*\*With thanks to Professor J.A. van Dongen. Much information has been found in his publication "W.F. Wassink, een eigenzinnige pionier, eerste oncologische chirurg in Nederland", ("W.F. Wassink, a head-strong pioneer, first oncological surgeon in The Netherlands"), published in 2012.*