

Robert Gorter Discovering the Values of the Medical Use of Cannabis (*Cannabis sativa*)



Robert Gorter, MD, PhD. (Berlin 2012)

Robert Gorter grew up in a suburb between Haarlem and the North Sea in the Netherlands. After finishing college (Coornhert Lyceum & Gymnasium) in Haarlem, he moved 20 km away to Amsterdam to study simultaneously medicine and philosophy at the University of Amsterdam. He likes to say:

“I grew up in Haarlem and that I woke up in Amsterdam!”

It was the time of the Flower Power and the “Provo’s” and social unrests that hit the Netherlands as much as other countries in Western Europe and USA. During the 1960’s and the 1970’s, San Francisco, California, and Amsterdam, the Netherlands, were probably the two cities *par excellence* that were the centers of these powerful social and cultural developments that would rock all developed Western Societies at large.

In Amsterdam, it was the time of the months-long occupation of the “Maagdenhuis” (The “House of the Virgins” referring to the Greek “Seven Graces”, the main administrative building that harbored the University for over 500 years).

The University Library, where Robert used to study, turned into the delivery site of food and other necessities for the occupants of the Maagdenhuis. Among other things, a bridge through the air was constructed, connecting both buildings like a ski lift sending foods and other articles to the Maagdenhuis.



Robert Gorter as volunteering doctor in the Vondelpark

(“The Clean Doctor” in Amsterdam 1969-1973)

In 1968, Robert Gorter started a commune at the Overtoom 253 with the garden neighboring the Vondelpark, that had been turned into one huge Hippy Camping and where the City of Amsterdam provided toilets, showers, free health care and coffee with “belegde broodjes” and croissants.

In 1969 in a tent in the Vondelpark, Robert Gorter set up a free clinic of his own in his free evening hours for providing first aid, prescriptions for lost medications, and condoms and other necessities. Also, as an experienced acupuncturist, he provided acupuncture treatments to those in needed of this intervention.

As Robert Gorter never touched a drop of alcohol nor smoked anything (including Cannabis), and as a strict vegetarian, he quickly got the nickname “The Clean Doctor.”

The mood changed among the Hippies and by 1971, hard drugs made their first noticeable appearance in Amsterdam and with this the associated crime and people suffering from withdrawal symptoms. Here, Robert Gorter started the very first methadone program in the European continent. In addition, with the help of the City of Amsterdam Public Health Department (GGD), Robert Gorter and a few volunteering nurses and social workers, free syringes were handed out to halt the spread of the “Australian Antigen” (Hepatitis B Virus).

Robert Gorter lived in a commune he set up himself and he lived there a few years with 9 other students (among them Gerard Smits, Evert-Jan van der Heuvel & Margret van Gelder, Coentje Nijssen & Maaïke Dahler, Johannes (Hans) van Turnhout).

Robert Gorter was the only one to have to wake up at 5.00 am to be in the teaching hospital by 6.00 am and ready for early rounds with the professor at the various departments of the University hospital: the “Wilhelmina Gasthuis”

All other students studied various subjects where no lecture would start before noon and if one would not show up for lectures anyway, it was considered to be a “cavalier’s delict.”

Except Robert, all would smoke regularly Cannabis and go to bed around sunrise. It happened a few times per week, that his friends would fry eggs and get French fries from around the corner to still their hunger. The smell would ascend towards the floor where Robert lived and wake him up. He would then rush downstairs to the community kitchen to ask them to close the kitchen door and let him sleep. Robert Gorter was always greeted with the sentence: “when one smokes weet (pot) it makes one terribly hungry!” So, that Cannabis stimulates the appetite became a traumatic experience for him, being so often sleep deprived thanks to this quality of *Cannabis sativa*.

Robert Gorter started his own practice as a Family and Community Doctor in the center of Amsterdam and very close to the Rijksmuseum.

Very quickly, he was overwhelmed by cancer patients frequenting his doctor's office and ambulatory clinic. Quite a few suffered from severe loss of appetite (anorexia) and wasting (cachexia). As a clinician, Robert strongly believed that anorexia and cachexia are independent risk factors for morbidity and mortality. One day, he suddenly remembered his terrible sleep deprivation during his clinical rotations at Wilhelmina Gasthuis, due to the appetite stimulation of Cannabis among his friends sharing the commune.

He then quickly started to advise the ingestion of Cannabis by means of Hot Chocolate Milk or Bownies ("Space Cake"). Robert Gorter and his two secretaries Ria and Elly Bos (both sisters) even wrote a little Cannabis cook book for patients.....

(There was even a period that Robert Gorter grew Cannabis legally on a small island inside the Vondelpark. One day, it got discovered and others harvested the Cannabis plants).

From one indication the next was discovered and developed by Robert Gorter and his team in his doctor's office and day care clinic at the Weteringschans 72-76 in 1017 XR Amsterdam.