

THE DUTCH

APPROACH

ALEX BAKKER



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FIFTY YEARS OF TRANSGENDER HEALTH CARE
AT THE VU AMSTERDAM GENDER CLINIC

Boom

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FOREWORD

Nowadays, transgender health care is an established part of the medical institution in the Netherlands. Although not many hospitals provide this care, the medical treatment of people who wish to transition receives extensive attention at medical conferences and in medical journals, as well as internationally. This situation differs as night and day from the situation of half a century ago. Only a handful of people dared to express their desire. And only a handful of doctors were willing to treat these people medically, with hormones and sex reassignment surgery.

How has this situation changed in fifty years? This book focuses on the history of the Amsterdam Gender Team, nowadays officially called the Center of Expertise on Gender Dysphoria, at the vumc. Starting out with just one psychologist, one endocrinologist and one plastic surgeon in the 1970s, it has now grown into a team of about 100 care providers. This team has been playing a leading role in scientific research and the introduction of new treatment procedures, such as puberty suppression.

The title of this book, ‘The Dutch Approach’, alludes to that: it refers to the protocol around the use of puberty blockers, as this had been developed in the Netherlands in the nineties. As many gender clinics in other countries adopted this approach in the 21st century, it became known by that name. However, ‘the Dutch approach’ has a wider meaning. An important characteristic of the Amsterdam Gender Team is its location; it was formed

within an academic hospital, where there is ample attention for research and education. Furthermore, it is remarkable that the Gender Team found a home in a hospital with an outspoken Protestant Christian identity. This book demonstrates the influence of both these aspects on the development of transgender health care in the Netherlands over the past decades, and how this reflects changes in society.

Inspired care and research, those words characterize this history. In nearly half a century, the Gender Clinic has developed into a large, dynamic department. Its inspired drive to provide care clearly shows in this book. At the same time, there is an academic need to understand, to gather and share knowledge. The engagement with society and attention for diversity perfectly suit the identity of the vU and vumc, an identity that lives on now that the Gender Team has become part of Amsterdam UMC. The care providers act from various motivations. Motivations of compassion; of being touched by the problems of transgender people; of social criticism and objection to paternalism and patronization. These are just as present as scientific curiosity about gender identity development and the effects of hormonal and surgical treatment.

But history doesn't stop here. Where old dilemmas have been overcome, new dilemmas and trends are rising. In the Netherlands and also globally, many changes are currently happening in populations and definitions around transgender. This leads to new questions and challenges, for which new answers and solutions are needed. This book offers a foothold in understanding the history. It allows us to situate developments and to be better prepared to move in to the future better.

Alex Bakker is an historian and a trans man. He has written the book *Transgender in Nederland. Een buitengewone geschiedenis* (Amsterdam, 2018) (Transgender in the Netherlands. An extraordinary history). With his wide knowledge and experience, he has researched the above questions using minutes and other written material from the past fifty years that was available within vU University medical center. He also held interviews with a number of people in the field. This is an important book, not only as 'corporate history' of vumc and the gender center in particular, but also for an international audience of health care providers and other interested parties involved in transgender health care worldwide.

The execution of this research and the writing of this book have been made possible with contributions from the vU-Vereniging and the Pieter van Forest Stichting, for which we are deeply grateful. We thank the members of the reading committee: Dr. Ab Flipse (University Historian of the vU), Prof. Paul Lips (Professor Emeritus of Endocrinology, vumc)