

# Arie Haspels

Champion of women's right to control their fertility and inventor of the "morning after" pill

Professor in obstetrics and gynaecology  
Utrecht University (b 1925; q Amsterdam  
1954), died on 30 December 2012.

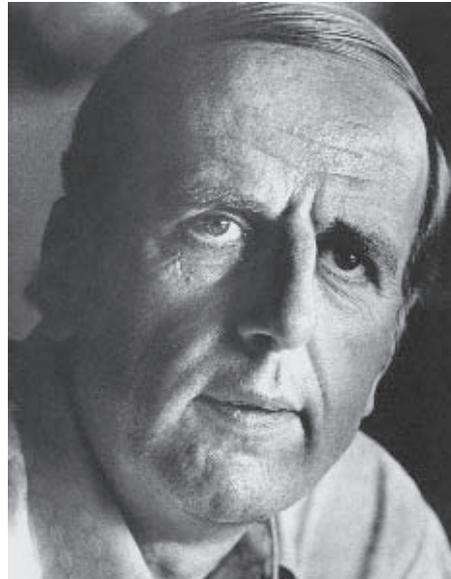
Many agree that Arie Haspels, who died at the age of 87, was "the right man, at the right time, in the right place." This was certainly true for a woman who attended his surgery in 1964 after having been gang raped. It would be two decades before abortion was officially legal in the Netherlands, but, by treating the woman with oestrogen, Haspels prevented any pregnancy. Almost by accident the "morning after" (emergency contraceptive) pill was born. Haspels would go on to champion women's right to control their fertility, chiming with a sexual revolution that transformed a conservative Netherlands in the 1960s.

Born into a strict Protestant family near Rotterdam, Arie Haspels declared, at the age of 8, that he would become a medical missionary. After qualifying, he left for Indonesia and later Nigeria, where his views on contraception were forged as he experienced how multiple births simply led to children starving. He also became an expert in repairing obstetric fistulas caused by pregnancy trauma, a problem largely affecting developing countries that can leave women incontinent. In 1961 he returned to the Netherlands, gaining his doctoral thesis with research into uterine rupture among women in central Java.

By 1964 Haspels, with a growing reputation for open mindedness, was perhaps ready to embrace an unorthodox treatment of his raped woman patient. According to his colleague Peter Heintz, a professor of gynaecologic oncology: "Haspels always chose the side of women with problems who wanted contraception, while others didn't." Although research was being carried out simultaneously in the US, it was Haspels who prescribed the first emergency contraceptive pill.

Controversy ensued, but Haspels proceeded, undeterred, to research dose and develop a pill that could end pregnancy up to 72 hours after conception. Heintz recalled: "Once the effect was clear, Haspels started to promote the pill to prevent unwanted pregnancies. In those days that was quite revolutionary. It has helped many women in protecting themselves from an unwanted pregnancy and illegal abortions."

By now his advocacy of contraception and abortion rights placed him in the zeitgeist of sexual revolution and women's liberation. The



ANP PHOTO

## Haspels contributed to the Netherlands enjoying the lowest levels of abortion and unwanted pregnancy in Europe today

contraceptive pill, manufactured by the Dutch firm Organon, was marketed in 1964, followed by Pope Paul VI's rejection of all artificial birth control in 1968. Women proclaiming "Baas in Eigen Buik [boss in (my) own belly]," across their bared abdomens, demonstrated outside meetings of the Dutch Society for Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

Haspels argued that neither pastor nor doctor should decide family planning, but that that decision lay with couples themselves. When in 1968 he was set to become professor at Utrecht University he was publicly, but unsuccessfully, opposed for his controversial views by his conservative predecessor and 130 other gynaecologists. The university hospital in Utrecht, where Haspels worked, and its progressive twin at Leiden opened some of the first contraception clinics. Professor Heintz believes that, together with colleagues in Amsterdam and Leiden, Haspels represented a new wave of gynaecological thinking among university medical faculties: "His teaching and ongoing research stimulated the thinking of many young doctors. It was all part of a big wave of change in society. Women knew that this generation of gynaecologists was on their side."

One of the new wave, gynaecologist Ineke van Seumeren first met Haspels by simply booking herself into his surgery to seek his

career advice. She later worked in his clinic and recalls a decade of enormous change, where the sudden freedom to talk about sexuality was combined with a method of controlling one's fertility: "Haspels was perfectly suited to this. He gave enormous support for women's emancipation."

Haspels was equally at home among the Dutch elite. He became obstetrician to the Dutch Royal family, attending the birth of Queen Beatrix's third son, Constantijn, and helped establish the AMREF Flying Doctors, an African medical aid organisation with Beatrix's father, Prince Bernhard. He was comfortable too with the popular media, reaching a wider audience through women's magazines, thus creating a demand among women for a contraceptive pill that used a lower dose of oestrogen.

His fame did not keep him from treating non-famous women. He collaborated for decades with Eileen Engels, a nurse specialising in the treatment of postnatal depression. They appeared on television together, and he coauthored her research paper on accepting referrals in emergency cases when local GPs refused. He helped her, she believes, because he was always one to challenge "sacred cows," and even today taboos remain around such issues as postnatal depression.

Nor did he neglect the developing world. Jacqueline Lampe, director of the AMREF Flying Doctors, first met Haspels in 2004 when, almost 80 years old and affected by Parkinson's disease, he was still visiting projects in east Africa to offer follow-up care to women who had undergone fistula repair. He remained "driven by a passionate desire to address injustice among vulnerable African women," she says, and to promote contraception.

Professor Heintz believes that Haspels contributed to the Netherlands enjoying the lowest levels of abortion and unwanted pregnancy in Europe today by normalising contraception and then motivating young people to use it. He was "one of the most important opinion makers in the area of contraception and abortion."

Haspels died after having Parkinson's disease for many years. Predeceased by his second wife and a daughter, he leaves his wife, Cécile Haspels-Kenter; a former wife; and four children.

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**Milan Kumar Bose**



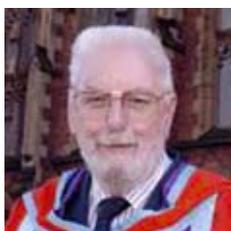
**General practitioner Newport, South Wales (b 1946; q Utkal, India, 1968; MD), died from a cerebral haemorrhage on 25 December 2012.**

Milan Kumar Bose worked as a specialist registrar in radiotherapy in India until 1974. He moved to the UK for further training and experience and worked as a radiotherapy registrar at Leicester Royal Infirmary and Ninewells Hospital in Dundee until 1982. After a spell back in India, as assistant professor in radiotherapy in Bombay, he returned to the UK in 1987 and started a career in general practice, becoming a partner in Central Surgery in Newport in 1990. His special interest was in palliative care, and he obtained a diploma in the subject. He leaves his wife, Kamlesh; two sons; and four grandchildren.

**Eman Mahmoud**

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**Robin Harland**



**Senior medical officer Queens University Belfast and sport and exercise medicine pioneer (b 1926; q Queens University Belfast 1948; FRCGP, PhD, OBE), died after a prolonged illness on 17 November 2012.**

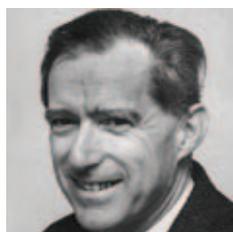
Robert Wallace ("Robin") Harland worked as a GP in Durham when he first developed an interest in student health and sports medicine. When presented with the opportunity to return to Queens University Belfast in 1970, a time of increasing civil unrest in Northern Ireland, Robin reassured

his wife and young family that "it would all be over by Christmas." How wrong this prediction proved to be: his entire career at Queens until retirement in 1991 was played out against the backdrop of the Troubles. In his later years Robin developed idiopathic axonal atrophy, which caused muscular weakness and resulted in walking difficulties and eventually problems with speech and swallowing. Predeceased by his wife, May, and a son, Robin leaves four sons.

**Michael Cullen**

*Cite this as: BMJ 2013;346:f885*

**Francis Leslie Jackson**



**Former professor and chairman Department of Medical Microbiology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada (b 1922; q Guy's Hospital Medical School, London 1946; Dip Bact, FRCPath), died from colon and prostate cancer on 24 July 2012.**

Francis Leslie Jackson worked at the Lister Institute and the National Institute for Medical Research in Mill Hill before moving to King's College Hospital Medical School as a research fellow and later senior lecturer in bacteriology. From 1966 to 1990 he was professor and chairman of the department of medical microbiology at the University of Alberta in Canada and worked for two separate sabbatical years at the Pasteur Institute in Paris. His research at the time included work on facultative anaerobes, including the classification of *Eikenella corrodens*, and on infective endocarditis. In retirement, Francis returned to Europe. Married twice and predeceased by both wives, he leaves six children, 12 grandchildren, and seven great grandchildren.

**William Jackson**

**Lisa Jackson**

*Cite this as: BMJ 2013;346:f891*

**James C Leask**



**Former general practitioner and chief medical officer (b Wick 1915; q Aberdeen 1941), d 21 December 2012.**

After the second world war, James C Leask took over his father's town and country practice in Wick, Caithness, where he worked until 1970. He spent the following 10 years in southern and east Africa as senior physician at Batoka General Hospital in Livingstone, Zambia, and as chief medical officer for staff of AngloAmerican Corporation and Standard Chartered Bank in Lusaka, before moving to Kenya as chief medical officer to the Masinga Dam project on the Tana River. Returning to UK, he took up locums in Skye, Scourie, and Arran before retiring at 72 to pursue his many interests. He leaves his wife of 70 years, Margaret; three sons; and three grandchildren.

**Roy Leask**

*Cite this as: BMJ 2013;346:f892*

**John Longstaff**



**Former general practitioner (b 1928; q Sheffield University 1954), d 8 January 2013.**

Born in Belfast, John Longstaff spent part of his early years in India, where his father was posted in the army. He studied medicine at Sheffield University, where he met Peggy, his future wife. They married after graduating and started their medical careers in Beverley, Yorkshire. In 1960 John was appointed as a GP in Toddington, Bedfordshire, serving the village and surrounding area. John was a dedicated doctor and a great believer in the NHS; he had a holistic approach

to care and a wicked sense of humour. After retiring from general practice he continued to do hypnotherapy and medical assessments. He leaves three daughters, seven grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.

**Fiona Richardson**

*Cite this as: BMJ 2013;346:f893*

**Philip E S Palmer**



**Emeritus professor of radiology University of California, Davis (b 1921; q London 1944; FRCP, FRCP Edin, MD), d 3 January 2013.**

Philip E S Palmer initially worked in England and Africa, where he introduced new techniques in diagnostic radiology and radiotherapy. In 1968 he became professor of radiology at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and a regular lecturer at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington, DC. In 1970 he moved to California as the first professor of diagnostic radiology at the new medical school at University of California, Davis and director of diagnostic radiology at the University Medical Center in Sacramento, where he remained until his retirement. For 30 years he was a consultant and adviser to the World Health Organization (WHO) and published widely. Predeceased by his first wife, he leaves Miep, his second wife of 44 years; a daughter; a son; three grandchildren; and two great grandchildren.

**Alison Leake**

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