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Leaving a mark in the hearts of patients

Lise Bissonnette, former editor-in-chief of *Le Devoir* and founder of the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec, and **Dr. Marie-Michelle Robert**, emergency medicine physician ▶

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Leaving a mark in the hearts of patients

Interview with Dr. Marie-Michelle Robert and Ms. Lise Bissonnette

By Marie Grenon, Director of Communications and Public Relations for the Foundation

I recently had the privilege of bringing together two remarkable women for this article: Dr. Marie-Michelle Robert, an emergency physician, and Ms. Lise Bissonnette, former editor-in-chief of *Le Devoir* and ex-director of the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec. We arranged to meet in the same place where they first met, in the emergency room of Hôpital du Sacré-Cœur-de-Montréal, more precisely at the door of consultation room number 10. The context this time was very different. We arranged to meet at the same place they first met, the emergency department of the Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital, specifically at the door of consultation room number 10. However, the context this time was very different.

A meaningful encounter

It was 2018. After waiting for hours in a crowded emergency room, Ms. Bissonnette's husband, Godefroy-Maurice Cardinal, wanted to go home despite sharp abdominal pain and nausea. Ms. Bissonnette politely approached a nurse to ask how much longer they would have to wait to see a doctor. The overwhelmed nurse, having repeated herself many times that evening, explained she didn't know the exact waiting time and asked if they wanted to leave. Dr. Robert was just finishing her shift but felt uneasy with the situation and what they had observed during triage, so she asked to see Mr. Cardinal immediately.

Dr. Robert recognized Ms. Bissonnette's voice before she saw her, as she accompanied her husband into the consultation room. As a regular listener of *Midi Info*, *Grand Angle sur l'Actualité*, Dr. Robert was familiar with Ms. Bissonnette's career. Dr. Robert was a lover of books and current affairs and was well aware of the magnitude of the career of the esteemed woman standing before her. After diagnosing a kidney stone, she strongly recommended that Mr. Cardinal stay overnight, which he did, despite his initial reluctance. According to Ms. Bissonnette, her husband avoided hospitals and almost needed to be forced to go.

Dr. Robert admits she quickly felt a special connection with the retired professor of education, who reminded her of her own father, who had also dedicated his life to teaching. After this first visit to Sacré-Cœur Hospital, Mr. Cardinal sent Dr. Robert the novels that Ms. Bissonnette had written, along with a letter. "When I found the envelope, I was like a little kid," recalls Dr. Robert. The two women continued writing to each other, exchanging news occasionally, even after Mr. Cardinal passed away in December 2022.

Treating, but above all, reassuring

It is precisely for the connections she can create in just a few minutes, whether with patients or their loved ones in



an emergency, and her desire to help and reassure, that Dr. Marie-Michelle Robert chose to practice emergency medicine. She began her residency in family medicine and later completed an additional year of training in emergency medicine. She notes that emergency medicine

was not a popular or appealing choice at the time for most students. Fortunately, this field is now recognized for its true value, and more and more students are showing interest in it. A new specialized residency program in emergency medicine was also established in Quebec universities in the early 2000s.

Dr. Robert has been practicing medicine for nearly 25 years. After spending three years at the Hôpital de Chicoutimi, the young physician from Quebec City moved to Montreal, where she continued her practice in the emergency department of the Sacré-Cœur Hospital.

Dr. Robert loves the energy and atmosphere of the emergency room, the constant flow of people, and the teamwork. "We're there for one another," she adds. Her experience on the show *De garde 24/7* reminded her of what she appreciates most about her role as an emergency physician.

"I enjoyed opening the hospital doors and showing that we're not machines; we're sensitive human beings who are truly there for the patients. We are moved by their stories, and we're all dedicated to their well-being."

Listening to her words, Ms. Bissonnette recalled an episode of *De garde 24/7* where Dr. Robert tried to find a solution for a patient who, despite her concerning health condition, was anxious about her dog being left alone at home. This deeply impressed Ms. Bissonnette, who also has a special bond with her canine companion. At that moment, it was easy to feel the mutual admiration between the two women. "What I wanted to show on *De garde 24/7* is that you don't need to be flashy. I'm a kind person, and that's what matters," said Dr. Robert.

Interestingly, it was because of a dog that Mr. Cardinal ended up at Sacré-Cœur Hospital in 2007. His dog had bolted at the end of its leash, causing him to fall on the pavement. The hospital, only two kilometres from his home, was where Dr. Michel Malo performed a hip replacement surgery. Ms. Bissonnette recalls the kindness of the staff during that stay, despite Mr. Cardinal being a model patient for the staff, but not easy to treat.

Passing away at the hospital

She never imagined that it would be in that same hospital, on December 16, 2022, at the age of 86, that her life partner would take his last breath. She remembers how difficult it was to convince him to go to the emergency room for his respiratory problems. The emotion is still palpable when she recounts walking into the emergency room shortly before their final meeting.

She recalls that it was early in the morning on November 23, 2022. Upon Mr. Cardinal's arrival, the entire staff mobilized to help him. A week later, he woke up in the intensive care unit. In the final days of his life, he was confused, in a state of delirium, with only brief moments of lucidity. It was a difficult time for his loved ones. "Among the most challenging experiences we face in life, many of them happen here, at the hospital," Ms. Bissonnette explained, emphasizing the crucial role of the staff's support during such times and the bonds that are formed.

As for Dr. Marie-Michelle Robert, she cherishes the memory of this cultured man and the couple who admired each other deeply. She eagerly awaits the next note from Ms. Bissonnette, to which she will try to respond promptly, or the chance to read her next book. For Ms. Bissonnette, Dr. Robert helped ease a difficult time and brought much needed comfort. This gratitude is what Ms. Bissonnette wanted to express by becoming a donor and ambassador for our foundation.



Our experts in the public eye!



Return of the show *De garde 24/7* filmed primarily at Sacré-Cœur

For a second year, doctors and nurses at the Sacré-Cœur Hospital are the 14 protagonists of the series *De garde 24/7*, with most episodes filmed within the hospital's walls. Several of them have been featured in publications and interviews since the start of the 10th season on September 5. From the initial shock to hopes of recovery, this season highlights the work of the teams who respond to urgent needs with compassion and humanity.

◀ Dr. Soazig Le Guillan, Dr. Véronique Castonguay, Dr. Patrick Bellemare, and Dr. Étienne Bourassa-Moreau.

**Episodes air on Thursdays
at 8 p.m. on Télé-Québec.**

In French only

Toward better opioid management



Dr. Raoul
Daoust



Dr. Alexis
Cournoyer

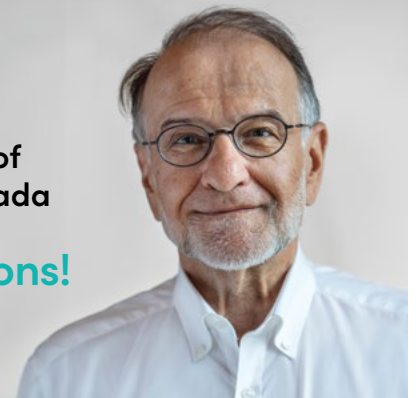
A recent study published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* was led by Dr. Raoul Daoust of the Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital, along with a team of emergency physicians and clinical researchers, including Dr. Alexis Cournoyer. They analyzed the cases of 2,240 adults from Ontario and Quebec, with an average age of 51, who had visited the emergency department due to acute pain lasting less than two weeks.

All these patients were given opioid prescriptions, which they filled at a pharmacy. However, the researchers found that two-thirds of these medications went unused, leading them to conclude that opioids should be prescribed in smaller quantities and in a more targeted manner. "We also need to find a way to convince patients to return their unused pills to the pharmacy," said Dr. Cournoyer in an interview with *The Canadian Press*.

This study has been featured in several media reports, including on ICI Radio-Canada and *Le Devoir*.

**Researcher
Daniel G. Bichet
Named Member of
the Order of Canada**

Congratulations!



Dr. Daniel Bichet, a nephrologist at the Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital, was named a Member of the Order of Canada this past June, a prestigious recognition for his extraordinary contributions to the nation.

As a full professor at the Université de Montréal, Dr. Bichet has led groundbreaking global studies and was the first to identify the AVPR2 gene, responsible for nephrogenic diabetes insipidus. His discovery has enabled the prevention of severe dehydration episodes in affected individuals. A prolific author and speaker, Dr. Bichet has also been actively involved in several organizations, including the Canadian Kidney Foundation and the Gairdner Foundation.

Source: recherche.iciusssnm.ca



Louis De Beaumont on RDS

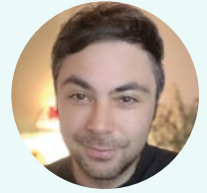
On March 26, Louis De Beaumont appeared on RDS's 5 à 7 program to discuss the Université de Montréal's LIFESPAN project on concussions. Funded by the Canadian and Quebec governments, the program, co-led by Louis De Beaumont, uses artificial intelligence to predict and prevent concussions in sports. With a \$7 million investment, the study will follow 350 athletes over the long term, focusing on various sports such as hockey, football and rugby.

The project is particularly interested in the effects of concussions on young athletes, a field less explored due to limited access to professional equipment. Louis De Beaumont's lab now brings equipment to youth athletes, providing vests that monitor concussion risks in real time during games. This equipment is available at the CHU Sainte-Justine and Sacré-Cœur Hospital.

Athletes voluntarily participate, with their safety as the top priority. Approximately 85% of university football players in Canada will experience at least one concussion in their lifetime. By reducing avoidable impacts and improving protective gear, the goal is to lower the risk of concussions.

RESEARCH

Shady Rahayel, a researcher at Sacré-Cœur, focuses on Parkinson's disease

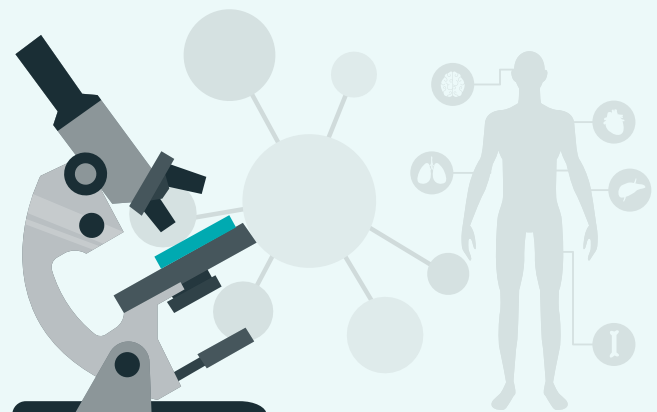


Dr. Shady Rahayel, a sleep psychologist and researcher at the Centre for Advanced Research in Sleep Medicine (CARSM) at the Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital, is also a professor in the Department of Medicine at the Université de Montréal. His research aims to understand the brain changes that lead to the development of Parkinson's disease and Lewy body dementia. To achieve this, his team studies REM sleep behaviour disorder (RBD), a sleep condition associated with abnormal and often violent movements during dreams. His lab is currently managing an international initiative to understand the brain changes involved in this sleep disorder.

Parkinson's disease and Lewy body dementia are the most common neurodegenerative diseases after Alzheimer's. They don't develop overnight and are often preceded by REM sleep behaviour disorder, where individuals experience abnormal and often violent movements during dreams. In a conference presented last April, Dr. Rahayel shared the results of a recent study showing a specific pattern of brain blood flow that predicts the development of dementia in people with this sleep disorder.

Lewy body dementia is marked by cognitive impairments that lead to a loss of functional autonomy (the ability to care for oneself). These cognitive issues can fluctuate from day to day and are often accompanied by visual hallucinations and symptoms similar to those of Parkinson's disease, known as parkinsonism. Parkinson's disease is characterized by rigidity, tremors (less present in Lewy body dementia compared to idiopathic Parkinson's disease), slowness of movement, balance problems and clumsiness.

Dr. Shady Rahayel's dedication to research in sleep and neurodegeneration is demonstrated by his efforts to better understand the biological mechanisms underlying these disorders, paving the way for new therapeutic and preventive approaches.



Launch of Dr. Pierre Tessier's first novel

On Thursday, September 12, at the Raffin bookstore on St-Hubert Street in Montreal, Dr. Pierre Tessier, a cardiologist at the Sacré-Cœur Hospital and a friend of the Foundation, celebrated the launch of his novel *Notre possible*. Surrounded by colleagues, acquaintances, and family members, Dr. Tessier proudly presented his book, which was released in early September and is now available in bookstores.

Over the course of two years, while continuing his medical practice, Dr. Tessier dedicated his time to writing this novel. *Notre Possible* tells the story of a couple, Nathalie and Paul, who, caught by the twists of fate, find themselves far less in control than they once believed. With his extensive experience as a cardiologist, Dr. Tessier is intimately familiar with the heart—both as an organ and as a vessel for the emotions we often bury deep inside. This novel brings those emotions to the surface.



**Congratulations
on this impressive
achievement!**



THE IMPACT OF YOUR DONATIONS

New equipment for improved diagnostics

New gastroenterology equipment

The purchase of endoscopic ultrasound equipment and a Fibroscan probe, totaling \$597,400, was made possible thanks to your generous donations. It is for this kind of need that the Foundation calls on your support.

Digestive endoscopic ultrasound is a rapidly evolving field. According to Dr. Marcel Tomaszewski, an advanced endoscopy gastroenterologist, this investment will certainly enhance the reputation of the Sacré-Cœur Hospital and, more importantly, will help patients facing various digestive health issues, including those who are not candidates for surgery or who are dealing with advanced cancers.

The two linear echo-endoscopes acquired will advance the hospital's digestive endoscopy program, **allowing for cutting-edge techniques such as endoscopic ultrasound-guided gallbladder drainage.**

The Fibroscan is a liver examination performed using an ultrasound probe (similar to an ultrasound). This non-invasive test is used to assess whether a patient has liver fibrosis or cirrhosis (liver scarring), helping to avoid liver biopsies.



Dr. Chadi Aboudan and Dr. Marcel Tomaszewski stand beside the new echo-endoscopy processor, one of the latest equipment acquisitions.

Albert-Prévost Early Psychosis Clinic celebrates 30 years of service

The healthcare teams at the Albert-Prévost Mental Health Hospital (formerly known as the Pavillon Albert-Prévost or “PAP”) have long been pioneers in mental health care, particularly in their approach to treating young people with early psychosis. Over 25 years ago, Dr. Jean-Pierre Mottard, a psychiatrist at PAP, became a trailblazer in the treatment of young individuals experiencing their first psychotic episode.

Alongside his colleagues Dr. Jean-Pierre Rodriguez, another psychiatrist, and Pierre Fortier, an occupational therapist, Dr. Mottard developed an intervention program grounded in best practices. This included cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), a therapeutic technique that helps individuals change their behaviour by modifying their thought patterns.

The Early Psychosis Clinic was created in 1994 as part of the Early Psychosis Program, known as PPEP (Programme pour les premiers épisodes psychotiques), after having gone through various names over the years. It is one of the oldest such clinics in Canada. For 30 years, the clinic has continuously provided care to hundreds of young patients, helping them regain functionality and improve their quality of life.

In the 2015–2020 Mental Health Action Plan, Quebec’s Ministry of Health and Social Services mandated that every healthcare institution offer services for early psychosis. In 2021, the CIUSSS du Nord-de-l’Île-de-Montréal received funding to enhance care services at two of its locations. This allowed the Early Psychosis Clinic to expand its team to 14 professionals, including occupational therapists, social workers, nurses and peer support workers. The clinic now serves clients aged 12 to 35, with the pediatric psychiatric unit located at the Rivière des Prairies Mental Health Hospital and the adult unit at Albert-Prévost Mental Health Hospital.



◀ Dr. Jean-Pierre Mottard was psychiatrist and true pioneer in mental health. He practiced for over 25 years at Albert-Prévost.

Clinic’s clientele

Psychotic disorders are serious mental health conditions that significantly impair daily functioning and cause considerable distress to the affected individual and their loved ones. These disorders typically appear between the ages of 16 and 35 and can take various forms. Due to a loss of contact with reality, some patients may not recognize their symptoms, which can delay seek help.

Recovery from psychosis is closely linked to how long the condition goes untreated. Early intervention programs, like those offered at the Early Psychosis Clinic, are designed to quickly detect and treat young adults at the onset of psychosis, during the critical first two to five years. The clinic provides intensive, interdisciplinary care that combines medical treatment for psychosis with psychosocial support. Their approach is flexible to accommodate the developmental stage and maturity level of each individual. These services are free and covered by Quebec’s health insurance.

Currently, over 300 young people experiencing early psychosis receive care through PPEP, with new cases being treated weekly. The team at the clinic continues to develop innovative projects to raise awareness among young people and their families, helping them quickly return to their normal lives.

OUR COMMUNITY IS ON THE MOVE!

Artist Paola Lanfranchi showcases her work in our neighbourhood

Artist Paola Lanfranchi held an art show entitled "Les percées de ma nostalgie" at Le Locart gallery on Gouin Boulevard, a few steps from the Sacré-Cœur Hospital. Paola Lanfranchi is a native of Italy who has lived in Quebec since 2002.

As a cardiologist and researcher, she worked at the hospital for ten years. She has had some memorable experiences here, and is deeply grateful to the Hospital, the Research Centre, the Cardiology Department and the Foundation, and to all those who have supported her along the way and made her achievements possible.

As a token of her appreciation, Paola has donated part of the proceeds from the sale of her artwork to the Foundation, as well as all the proceeds from an auctioned piece, to support the mental health program.

Thank you for this precious gift!





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Founded in 1976 by the Sisters of Providence, the Montréal Sacré-Cœur Hospital Foundation has as its raison d'être to help the extended Sacré-Cœur and Albert-Prévost team constantly improve the care, treatment and environment of patients, while supporting the research and teaching activity of this major university hospital.

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Pénélope McQuade
Volunteer
spokesperson