MONTRÉAL SACRÉ-CŒUR HOSPITAL FOUNDATION

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The PET-CT Project is a Collective Success

Dr. Valérie Levert, Nuclear Medicine Specialist

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A landmark project comes together through vision, perseverance and collaboration

Interview with Dr. Valérie Levert, Nuclear Medicine Specialist

This interview takes a look at the journey that led to the acquisition of a PET-CT scanner for the Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital, from the first efforts to demonstrate its importance to its commissioning in June 2025. Achieving this goal required fifteen years of determination and the unwavering support of the Nuclear Medicine Department and the Foundation, which raised nearly $3.4 million. Dr. Valérie Levert, a nuclear medicine specialist, discusses the challenges and technological decisions along the way, the collaborations that brought the project to fruition, and the clinical and scientific impact of this technology for a leading university hospital like Sacré-Cœur.

THE START OF THE PROJECT AND ITS CHALLENGES

Q: How did your efforts to get a PET-CT scanner begin?

We put together several reports to justify the project from a clinical standpoint and to assess its cost effectiveness. We needed to show that the investment really made sense both medically and economically. There were many meetings with government representatives, including two different health ministers, since the project stretched over several years. At each step, we had to present, explain and justify everything. It was a long and demanding process.

Q: The fundraising campaign also played a key role, right?

Yes. It was launched in 2010, and many donors got involved. I particularly want to acknowledge Robert Bouchard, who chaired the campaign and is still on the Foundation's board of directors today. He gave me so much incredible support, almost like a mentor. His experience in fundraising was invaluable.

Q: And when was the project officially approved?

In 2016, I had just become head of the department, and that's when the project was approved for the installation of the PET scanner at Sacré-Cœur. It was an unbelievably meaningful moment. After that, I attended international conferences to evaluate the most suitable technologies. The equipment purchase went through in 2018.

Q: Once the project was approved and the equipment was purchased, what happened next?

After we bought the scanner in 2018, we moved into planning and development in 2019. We had to draw up plans, coordinate all the teams, figure out the layout, logistics, training—it was a really intense period.

Q: Then the pandemic hit. Did that slow things down?

Yes, COVID definitely slowed things down, especially the installation phase, since most resources were redirected to fight the pandemic. But we still kept moving ahead on other fronts. It was basically a temporary pause; the vision remained the same, and we stayed motivated.

Q: Looking back on the whole journey, what stands out for you?

A lot of emotion. This project took years of effort, persistence and teamwork. There were ups and downs, but we never gave up. And now, seeing patients actually benefit from the technology—that's the best reward there is.

A CRUCIAL TOOL FOR MEDICAL INNOVATION

Q: What does having access to this equipment mean in practical terms?

It's huge. Having a PET scanner means we can make faster, more accurate diagnoses, and most importantly, better guide treatment decisions. It's really the cornerstone for determining the best treatment plan for many different types of cancer.

Q: And it has an impact on multiple specialties, right?

Absolutely. We work closely with teams in hematology, oncology, pulmonology, gastroenterology, cardiology, dermatology, infectious diseases and now urology, especially for metastatic prostate cancers that are resistant to castration. It also has a role in neurology for diagnosing dementias like Alzheimer's. The scope is really vast.

The new PET-CT scanner for the Sacré-Cœur Hospital.

Q: What impact does this technology have on your daily practice in 2025?

The impact is massive. Working with the best technology available means we can help even more patients with faster, more precise diagnoses. We can finally put all our nuclear medicine knowledge to work to provide the best care possible.

Q: So this technology also expands the possibilities?

Yes, exponentially. Having a state-of-the-art scanner allows us to harness the full potential of the most advanced tracers. Exams can be tailored to each patient depending on their condition. It's a major breakthrough.

Q: Does it also have an impact on treatment?

We're now entering the era of theranostics. We use agents that serve both diagnostic and therapeutic purposes. By switching the attached isotope, we can move from diagnosis to targeted treatment, particularly in internal radiotherapy. It's a game-changer for the management of certain cancers.

Q: What difference does it make in research?

It's fundamental. With the PET-CT scanner, we can initiate clinical trials right here at our hospital. This is essential for developing new tracers and improving diagnostics and treatments. We're already collaborating across different specialties like oncology, urology, pulmonology, rheumatology and neurology.

Q: Do you already have a team in place for this research?

We do, and it includes Dr. Guillaume Chaussé, who has completed fellowships in Vancouver and Germany. He specializes in theranostics and he's already leading several research projects. He's a major asset to our department.

Q: And what role did the Foundation play in all of this?

Without the Foundation, this project simply couldn't have happened. The donors and the Foundation's dedicated teams were the driving force behind the PET project. They sustained the project's momentum and visibility despite the obstacles we faced along the way. Their support made it possible to persevere, especially when the project's approval was delayed.

Q: What's the bigger-picture impact for Hôpital du Sacré-Cœur?

Thanks to the Foundation, Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital has regained its status as a tertiary-level care centre in oncology and pulmonology. Without the PET scanner, we wouldn't have been able to reach that level, with the dedicated budgets, resources and recognition involved. The fundraising campaign gave us essential momentum, and the Foundation—led by capable, committed individuals who fully believed in our vision—remained proactive and collaborative.

This PET project is a shared success, the result of a combination of clinical expertise, technological innovation and the dedication of an entire community. Thanks to the efforts of the Foundation, our medical teams and our partners, Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital is now equipped with a state-of-the-art tool that helps patients, enables research and advances specialized care.

A state-of-the-art Nuclear Medicine Department at Sacré-Cœur

The acquisition of the PET-CT scanner and the upgrading of the Nuclear Medicine Department were made possible by the dedication of its staff, including Dr. Mathieu Charest, Medical Chief of Nuclear Medicine at Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital. With its close-knit, highly skilled team and some of the most advanced equipment available, the department provides nuclear medicine services that support multiple specialties in diagnosing a wide range of medical conditions.

The Nuclear Medicine Department at Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital includes four nuclear medicine physicians who work closely with medical imaging technologists trained in nuclear medicine and qualified to handle radioactive materials. The technologists receive patients, answer their questions, perform the scans and reconstruct the images for physicians to analyze on imaging consoles.

In a recent interview, Dr. Charest explained that nuclear medicine is used to diagnose a range of conditions, including cancer. The procedure involves injecting tracers (substances with low levels of radioactivity) that accumulate in the organ being examined. The radiation emitted by these substances is captured by a medical imaging camera, such as a PET scanner. Nuclear medicine specialists then interpret the images to understand what is happening inside the body and find answers to the clinicians' questions.

Dr. Mathieu Charest, Medical Chief of Nuclear Medicine at Sacré-Cœur Hospital.

> *"We don't treat patients directly with the PET-CT, but it allows us to visualize cancer, determine whether it has spread or whether it has been cured, detect recurrence and assess the effectiveness of ongoing therapy. Clinicians use the information from the PET scan to develop the best possible treatment plan for patients."*
>
> – Dr. Mathieu Charest

Radiology or nuclear medicine?

Nuclear medicine and radiology are complementary medical imaging specialties. Nuclear medicine uses radioactive tracers to visualize organs so that clinicians can understand how the body functions and diseases develop. For example, these images can reveal the aggressiveness of a cancer and track its progression over time. Radiology, on the other hand, uses forms of energy such as X-rays or magnetic fields to image anatomy: for example, radiologists are able to assess the size or position of a lesion in the body.

Nuclear cardiology: advancing heart health

The Nuclear Medicine Department has acquired other equipment in addition to the PET-CT to meet the growing demand for exams. Two new cameras dedicated to nuclear cardiology provide a non-invasive way to image how the heart muscle functions and to detect blockages in the coronary arteries.

According to Dr. Charest, access to PET-CT on-site, along with the acquisition of new nuclear cardiology technology, has had a major impact on the Nuclear Medicine team's work, enabling them to care for far more patients. The new cameras lower the radiation dose administered to patients and deliver clearer, faster images, providing clinicians with more relevant information.

A recognition cocktail to inaugurate the major PET-Scan Project

On October 1, a reception was held to mark the inauguration of the new Nuclear Medicine Department and its flagship component, the PET-CT scanner. Organized by the Foundation, the event celebrated this remarkable collective achievement alongside donors, nuclear medicine specialists, technologists and many others who helped make the project a reality.

The evening highlighted the effort, determination and perseverance that turned the nuclear medicine team's vision into reality—a vision conceived twenty years ago and made possible through the support of many partners, including the Foundation.

"The **$3.4 million in funding** provided by the Foundation through the generosity of its donors was a catalyst for the construction of these new facilities, which represent a total investment of $42 million. Our role is to support the hospital's teams in carrying out transformative projects like the upgrading of the Nuclear Medicine Department and the construction of the Integrated Trauma Centre. We look forward to supporting the growth of Sacré-Cœur through other major projects to come, said Bernard Pitre, Chair of the Foundation's Board of Directors.

The teams from the Foundation and the Nuclear Medicine Department were delighted to have the opportunity to thank the generous donors for their support, as well as everyone who contributed to making this major project a reality, which will benefit thousands of patients.

Left to right: Dr. Raymond Lemieux, Dr. Martin Veilleux, Dr. Guillaume Chaussé, Dr. Valérie Levert, Dr. Mathieu Charest, Sophie Venne, Jean-François Deslauriers, Me Pierre Venne, Me Christian Leblanc, Gilles Levert and Bernard Pitre.

The Sleep Hub: an innovative initiative from CÉAMS

The Foundation will contribute **$675,000** over three years to support the Sleep Hub, an innovative project developed by the teams at the Centre for Advanced Research in Sleep Medicine (CÉAMS).

The Foundation's investment will be used to develop the infrastructure and software to integrate the Canadian Biobank for Sleep Research, the CÉAMS Banque de nuit (nights bank), and the Snooz Toolbox app onto a single platform. Bringing these three complementary research resources together within an open science framework will foster collaboration and innovation by providing researchers with easy access to data, biological samples and analysis tools for sleep disorder studies. This shared platform will allow scientists from Quebec, across Canada and around the world to carry out large-scale research to better understand sleep disorders.

The Foundation partnered with Brain Canada and the research centre of the CIUSSS du Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal to provide $2,137,500 for funding of the Sleep Hub project. This visionary ecosystem will play a major role in advancing research and improving treatments for sleep disorders.

40 years of care for the Canadian Grand Prix

Last June, Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital's trackside hospital celebrated 40 years of presence at the Canadian Formula 1 Grand Prix on Île Sainte-Hélène. Thanks to its recognized expertise in trauma care, Sacré-Cœur has been designated since 1985 to provide medical services at this major event.

Sacré-Coeur Hospital is a tertiary trauma centre that treats the most complex cases in western Quebec. Its multidisciplinary team has developed specialized expertise in caring for trauma patients, including those affected by severe car accidents, falls or assaults.

Each year, nurses, doctors, pharmacists and respiratory therapists from Sacré-Cœur Hospital set up operations in the former Pirelli tower at Circuit Gilles-Villeneuve. There, they run a fully equipped trackside hospital modeled on the trauma centre at Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital. The team's highly skilled medical professionals provide care to both drivers and spectators, with seriously injured patients able to reach Sacré-Cœur by helicopter within minutes. For the trackside medical team, caring for participants and spectators at the Grand Prix has been both a significant responsibility and a source of pride for the past four decades.

A medical team in action at 2025 Canadian Grand Prix.

Dr. Ronald Denis and Dr. Jacques Bouchard, Chief Medical Officers of the Canadian Grand Prix, share their experience in this article published in *La Presse*

Read the article

In French only

Albert-Prévost medical teams: providing essential care in cases of psychosis

Last September, *Le Devoir* published an article about the way professionals at Albert-Prévost Mental Health Hospital assisted a young man in regaining stability following a psychotic episode.

His story began when he voluntarily went to Albert-Prévost Hospital, sure that he had been both stung by a scorpion and shot. At the hospital, he met with several care providers, including occupational therapist Élisa Froc and psychiatrist Dr. Jean-Gabriel Daneault. Though initially diagnosed with psychosis, the young man learned a year later that he had schizophrenia. With expertise and compassion, the care team gently helped him feel better.

The teams at Albert-Prévost have been pioneers in their approach to youth experiencing psychosis, notably with the Early Psychosis Clinic established over 30 years ago.

You can read the young man's complete story on the website of *Le Devoir*

Read the article

In French only

A major breakthrough in diagnosing vasculitis

Dr. Jean-Paul Makhzoum, researcher and internal medicine specialist at Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital, has developed a new method for diagnosing vasculitis. **It's the first method of its kind in Canada** for detecting this rare disease, caused by the immune system attacking the blood vessels.

The method employs a cranial ultrasound to visualize blood vessels and detect vasculitis. Painless, faster and more reliable than the standard diagnostic process, this breakthrough has halved emergency visits for the disease and reduced hospitalizations by 60%.

The research behind this medical breakthrough was conducted at the Vasculitis Clinic at the Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital, a leading Quebec referral centre for this specialty. The Foundation is proud to support the Vasculitis Clinic's ongoing research.

You can read the full article on the website of *Le Journal de Montréal*

Read the article

In French only

Celebrating 75 years of commitment to mental health!

On Wednesday, September 10, staff and management at Rivière-des-Prairies Mental Health Hospital were invited to celebrate the hospital's 75th anniversary. Our deepest thanks to the teams who, day in and day out, carry forward the pioneering work begun by the Sisters of Providence 75 years ago.

Advanced expertise

Rivière-des-Prairies Mental Health Hospital has greatly expanded its mental health services over the years. It delivers specialized, cutting-edge care across a full continuum of services, addressing the needs of patients at every stage of life, from early childhood to adulthood. The hospital is internationally recognized for its expertise and leading research, particularly in supporting children and adults with autism, as well as young people with sleep disorders or neurodevelopmental conditions.

In partnership with Université de Montréal, Rivière-des-Prairies continues to advance its teaching and research mission. Researchers and clinicians work closely to translate scientific discoveries into practical patient care and to strengthen mental health services.

Transforming child and adolescent psychiatry: a project within our reach

In 2025, our Foundation launched the *les petits trésors* Child Psychiatry Fund to support innovative projects at Rivière-des-Prairies' Mental Health Hospital, an institution dedicated to the mental health of children and adolescents. Following the closure of Fondation les petits trésors, a total of $800,000 was tranferred to our Foundation to continue supporting Rivière-des-Prairies' Hospital intiatives.

The Foundation has already committed nearly $600,000 of this funding to:

> Support the next generation through excellence scholarships

> Promote research on neurodevelopmental disorders

> Advance education in autism and youth mental health

> Build essential databases to improve understanding of children and adolescents

> Back hands-on projects such as the *Sur le spectre* magazine and Dr. Mottron's autism research

These initiatives, led by dedicated medical professionals at the top of their field, are aimed at improving care, expanding knowledge and offering a brighter future to the young people treated at the hospital.

FONDS DE PÉDOPSYCHIATRIE
petits trésors

TOGETHER, we can make a difference

Every donation to the *les petits trésors* fund has a direct impact. By supporting these projects and supporting the teams who provide exceptional care, you help transform the lives of thousands of children.

Support the cause

NEW APPOINTMENT

The Foundation has a new CEO!

Julie Pouliot, Chief Executive Officer

Julie Pouliot, a leader of remarkable passion, vision and dedication, became the Foundation's president and chief executive officer in June. An experienced manager deeply committed to the Foundation's mission, Julie brings the expertise needed to guide the organization's growth.

Julie brings extensive experience in leading change and transformation across a range of Quebec companies. Guided by her values of solidarity and sustainable development, she combines a rich multidisciplinary background with a genuine commitment to enhancing community well-being and a strong dedication to both physical and mental health.

Sacré-Cœur has been Julie's local hospital for 20 years. Through her experiences supporting loved ones at Sacré-Cœur, as well as at Albert-Prévost and Rivière-des-Prairies, she has witnessed firsthand the excellent care these hospitals provide and the challenges they continue to face.

Julie looks forward to taking on her role just in time for several key milestones: the 75th anniversary of Rivière-des-Prairies Mental Health Hospital in 2025, the Foundation's 50th anniversary, and the 100th anniversary of Montreal Sacré-Cœur Hospital in 2026. Julie sees her role as an opportunity to bring together medical teams, donors, Foundation staff and board members in order to strengthen collaboration and deepen understanding of the organization's vital mission.

Her visionary leadership, innovative ideas and wide-reaching business network will be key in advancing the Foundation's mission and enhancing the lives of patients and staff at the three hospitals it supports.

"These are firmly established institutions that are rooted in the community and have rich histories to share. Sacré-Cœur is still a hidden gem in north Montreal that deserves broader recognition across Quebec. The coming months of celebration will kick off a new era of impactful initiatives and projects that will meet the needs of the public and have an impact on all of us."

Watch this short video in which Julie Pouliot introduces herself on our **youtube** channel

In French only

Pénélope McQuade
Volunteer spokesperson

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