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“We can treat the body, but we also need to treat the mind and spirit.”

– Dr. Kevin Jao, hematologist-oncologist



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We also need to treat the mind and spirit

Interview with Dr. Kevin Jao, hematologist-oncologist at the Montréal Sacré-Cœur Hospital

Dr. Kevin Jao, a hematologist-oncologist, began his career in health care with a clear goal: to serve a vulnerable population. Initially drawn to working in refugee camps, he considered emergency medicine and intensive care before finally choosing hematology-oncology during his residency. After all, few experiences leave a person more vulnerable than a cancer diagnosis—especially when the prognosis is uncertain.

Dr. Jao's appearance in an episode of *De garde 24/7* highlights the qualities essential for caring for patients made vulnerable by illness—attentiveness, support, gentleness, and compassion. He makes a real difference in their lives, not only through the treatments he provides but also through the human connections he builds.

Q: What attracted you to medicine, and then to hematology-oncology?

When I started my training, cancer patients often had less favourable prognoses. There was that emotional aspect and the need for support that attracted me.

Q: How did you come to specialize in lung cancer?

When I started my oncology residency, patients diagnosed with lung cancer were often told they had less than a year to live. And they ended up dying. Then, around 2012 to 2013, we started hearing about the EGFR mutation (a genetic change found in people with lung cancer). That was just the tip of the iceberg, in terms of the potential treatments for patients. Now patients can often be treated with pills or immunotherapy to strengthen the immune system. When I started exploring the scientific potential of these developments, that plus the patient support aspect that I was really drawn to, I realized that this specialty was perfect for me.

Q: Why did you decide to practice at Sacré-Cœur?

I held a senior residency clinic at Sacré-Cœur. I really liked the team there; they were such a friendly group.

Sacré-Cœur has a large pulmonology team. There are 16 of us in hematology-oncology; that's a big group compared to other hospitals. There was a real need for follow-up care for lung cancer patients. And over time, we've developed expertise in a number of areas, such as malignant hematology, colon cancer and breast cancer. We've become a centre of expertise for autologous stem cell transplants for multiple myeloma. What's great about having a large team is that we can offer specialized care to our patients. Lung cancer alone is now understood as a very complex disease. Specializing in this field allows me to provide patients with the most optimal care using the latest tools.

Q: What drives you from day to day?

It's not an easy profession. I'll be completely honest, it's a challenge every day. Lung cancer remains a disease with a poor prognosis and symptoms that need to be managed.

The further along I am in my career, the more I appreciate what it means to encounter someone in a context where there's fear, anxiety and the unknown, and to be able to help them. I can only imagine being in the other person's shoes, needing someone to explain things and reassure me, even when it's hard. I don't always have good news to give, but connecting on a human level reminds me why I chose to go into medicine.

Q: What's the most rewarding part of your job?

We've made progress in oncology. Seeing patients who had a serious diagnosis respond well to treatments, feel good, return to their normal lives, leave the hospital, and have no one suspect that they had cancer—that's all I aim for in my work. I want to bring a bit of normalcy back into their lives. If I can do that, it's the greatest gift I can receive in my day.

Q: What still surprises you in your practice?

Every patient is unique, in terms of their illness, their social situation, and simply their personality. I might see a young adult in their thirties or forties who doesn't smoke and has cancer, or I might see grandparents in their seventies or eighties with a lifetime behind them. Each person has a story. As we get to know each other, the stories they share always strike me. There's always an element of the unknown when I step into my clinic, even during follow-ups.

Q: How do you see the evolution of hematology-oncology?

What's consistent across all cancers is patients' perceptions. When they think about the experiences of loved ones years

ago or what they see in the media, in movies, it's pretty intense: someone losing their hair, becoming very thin, constantly sick and vomiting due to chemotherapy. There wasn't much to counter that image 30 years ago. But I'd say in the last 15 years, or really in the last 5 to 10 years, our understanding of cancer has changed dramatically. Instead of seeing cancer as a disease where chemotherapy is the only treatment, we now understand that the biology of the disease matters a lot.

When we talk about lung cancer, people immediately think of someone who smoked three packs a day for 50 years. If I told them the percentage of lung cancer patients who have never smoked, people would say, "That's impossible—they must have been exposed to secondhand smoke." But that's far from the truth. There are people who have never smoked and have no reason to have this type of cancer. It's about 20% of lung cancer cases, and the number is rising. And this increase is actually due to biological differences in these cancers. Research in recent years has shown that specific genes at the molecular level drive the development of cancer.

Q: Does Sacré-Cœur conduct cancer research?

I'm the director of clinical research for our team. We focus mainly in clinical studies—treatments for patients. We target several areas in our portfolio, so to speak, and lung cancer is one of them. We're able to offer our patients a range of therapies that they wouldn't otherwise have access to. We take a broad approach and continue to strengthen our research team so we can ultimately provide patients with treatments that will help them.

Q: What would you like people to take away from this interview?

I believe education is essential to help people understand that a cancer patient has the potential to live well for many years. We need to change the mindset that cancer means you're doomed to die. That's no longer entirely correct. It's especially the case for lung cancer.

Also, many people think of lung cancer as a disease the patient brought upon themselves. We know that's not entirely true. And it creates a lot of guilt and a feeling of isolation, on top of the illness itself. That's something I hope changes—not just for lung cancer, but for other diseases as well.

I hope people come to realize that with the tools we have now—and the new ones we develop almost every year—we're able to help patients in a real way. I want people to know that oncology has become increasingly complex, and it's quite fascinating, both scientifically and emotionally. I hope we can focus on the emotional side and not just on the physical aspects. We're starting to integrate yoga and kinesiology here at Sacré-Cœur, aspects that are often

overlooked. We tend to focus so much on treatment that we forget the importance of well-being. We can treat the body, but we also need to treat the mind and spirit.

“We can treat the body, but we also need to treat the mind and spirit.”

We need to continue supporting research for all types of cancer. Clinical research is particularly important because it offers the chance to bring potentially groundbreaking treatments to patients who wouldn't have access to them otherwise. This can benefit a large number of people, and we need to remember that cancer is the leading cause of death in Canada, across all causes. It affects a huge number of people, and eventually, it will affect our loved ones—our brothers, sisters, partners, parents. Ultimately, everyone is affected by this disease. **Lung cancer remains the most common cancer in Canada. It is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths.**



Dr. Kevin Jao is one of the featured doctors in the documentary series *De garde 24/7*, whose 9th and 10th seasons were filmed at Sacré-Cœur Hospital. This photo, showing the Dr. Jao speaking with a patient, is from episode 6, "Se dépasser" of season 10. The series shines a light on the daily work of our dedicated experts and showcases remarkable individuals who practise medicine with passion and commitment.

DE GARDE
24/7

video.telequebec.tv

In French only

Cardiac surgery: a vital complement to cardiology



Dr. Hugues Jeanmart,
Cardiac Surgery

Dr. Hugues Jeanmart led the Cardiac Surgery Department for 12 years, until January 2025. Over that time, the team of four cardiac surgeons who practise at both Montréal Sacré-Cœur Hospital and the Montreal Heart Institute (MHI) accomplished remarkable work. According to Dr. Jeanmart, collaboration between surgeons and intensivists at both hospitals ensures patients have access to a broad range of cutting-edge care.

After completing his residency in 2006, Dr. Jeanmart quickly developed an interest in robotic surgery. Of the 2,500 surgeries performed annually by the Sacré-Cœur/MHI group, 130 involved a robot. Due to operating room constraints, the team has had to conduct these procedures at MHI, but Dr. Jeanmart hopes to eventually bring them back to Sacré-Cœur.

Cardiology has already advanced significantly with percutaneous intervention techniques (non-surgical procedures performed using a catheter). Cardiac surgery continues to evolve rapidly, however, driven by advancements such as minimally invasive and robotic procedures. These are among the advanced techniques used by cardiac surgeons at Sacré-Cœur to treat serious health issues and prolong lives.

Advancing medicine through research

Driven by a constant commitment to optimizing patient care, Dr. Jeanmart has also led the cardiac surgery clinical research department for more than 15 years.

The doctor has also lent his expertise to over a dozen pharmaceutical studies, and devotes his time and energy to clinical studies developed by his colleagues, focusing on issues that directly impact patients at Sacré-Cœur. One of these studies has led to the identification of a new surgical technique that reduces the risk of stroke in at-risk patients by ligating the left atrial appendage of the heart.

“With every progress, we don’t just impact a single life—we touch the lives of dozens of future patients. We like to call this the medical snowball effect!”



Angélica Ostiguy,
Cardiac Surgery Research Coordinator

Clinical research introduces a personalized element into the patient’s care path, tailored to their unique needs. Based on our experience, clinical research participants feel actively engaged in their treatment journey, as they are given options that enhance the standard course of care. Regardless of whether they choose to participate in a clinical study, the well-being of patients always remains the central focus of all medical decisions.

“Dr Jeanmart is like a big teddy bear who wears his heart on his sleeve. His dedication to people goes beyond the operating room: his listening and kindness to his colleagues and the entire cardiac surgery department are constant. In the operating room, he’s the captain of the ship. Sometimes we sail on calm seas, sometimes on rough water—but no matter what, we know his calm and composure will bring us safely to port. The patient is in very experienced hands,” said Ms. Ostiguy.

Note: The head of the Cardiac Surgery Department who succeeded Dr. Jeanmart is Dr. Nicolas Dürrleman.

Listening to patients: more ways than one

Dr. Michelle Goulet is a powerful example of how determination can turn obstacles into strengths. Despite being deaf, the internist at the Montréal Sacré-Cœur Hospital has developed a unique approach to patient care, using lip-reading to communicate effectively with her patients. Her story, the subject of a *Journal de Montréal* article this February, shows that when it comes to patient care, listening and empathy matter far more than any disability.



Thank you
Dr. Goulet, for the inspiring example you've set through your creativity and resilience.

Photo source: Agence QMI, Joel Lemay

Dr. Goulet cofounded a clinic at Sacré-Cœur that specializes in autoimmune hearing loss, a rare condition especially in adults, for which treatment options are hard to come by. Her journey is a reminder of the crucial role of inclusion in healthcare.

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

In french only

Canada's short-track speed skating team uses cutting-edge research to better adapt to jet lag



Giorgio Varesco,
Postdoctoral Researcher at the Center for Advanced Research in Sleep Medicine (CARSM)

Like many elite athletes, members of Canada's team travel the world for international competitions, battling jet lag along the way. According to a news article on l'Université de Montréal's website, however, the short-track speed skaters have discovered a quicker way to overcome jet lag—taking just five days to adjust when competing in Asia, 13 time zones away. The standard theory says that air travellers need 12 to 24 hours to recover for each time zone crossed; that means Canada's skaters are adapting twice as quickly.

The study, led by postdoctoral researcher Giorgio Varesco at the Center for Advanced Research in Sleep Medicine (CARSM) under the supervision of researcher Guido Simonelli and François Bieuzen of the Institut national du sport du Québec, looked for ways to enhance athletes' ability to adapt to intercontinental travel. Building on the study's promising results, scientists now plan to extend their research to other sports to improve athletes' preparation strategies for international competition.

You can read the full article on the website of l'*Université de Montréal*.



Dr. Caroline Samson participates in a virtual panel on breast cancer

Since 2022, the Fédération des médecins spécialistes du Québec (FMSQ) has been hosting an annual virtual event for International Women's Day, called "Les femmes au cœur de la santé" ("Women at the Heart of Health"). The goal is to celebrate the invaluable contributions of women to health care and to society, and also to highlight an issue that directly impacts women.

The 2025 edition of *Les femmes au cœur de la santé* focused on the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in the management of breast cancer. Dr. Caroline Samson, a radiologist at the Montréal Sacré-Cœur Hospital and a board member of our Foundation, Dr. Alexandra Desnoyers,

an oncologist at Hôpital Charles Lemoyne, and Dr. Nancy Roy, a surgeon at Hôpital de Gatineau, took part in a panel discussion on the topic.

Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers among women in Canada and the second leading cause of cancer-related death among Canadian women. The statistics are alarming: one in eight women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime, and one in 36 will die from it.

"We have doctors from three different disciplines on the panel to show that breast cancer requires a multidisciplinary approach. The main message we want to send to women is that they are not alone," said Dr. Caroline Samson.

Visit the Website of *Fédération des médecins spécialistes du Québec*

In french only

A wider selection of recreational activities, thanks to the L'Écuyer family

Tarek-Alexandre Jbeili has served as the recreation technician at the Albert-Prévost Mental Health Hospital since February 2024. His responsibilities include organizing, leading and coordinating activities for approximately 100 patients across the hospital's five care units. Thanks to support from the Joanne Martens Fund established by the L'Écuyer family, Tarek-Alexandre has been able to offer recreational activities that otherwise would have been impossible due to limited financial resources.



"This is all possible thanks to Claudie's wonderful approach and professionalism. She's gentle and attentive with patients, always warm and engaging. She immediately adapts her manner to each new person, making sure they have an experience that matches their needs. Her approach is safe and also respectful of the hospital environment," said Tarek-Alexandre.



The recreation technician Tarek-Alexandre Jbeili observes many benefits of animal-assisted therapy with patients.

The benefits of animal-assisted therapy

For nearly two years, Claudie Gauthier has been making a few visits each year to the Albert-Prévost Mental Health Hospital, accompanied by various animals—dogs, guinea pigs, parrots, bearded dragons and more. Since last September, she has been visiting the hospital every two weeks with her animals, to the delight of the patients.

As Tarek-Alexandre explains, animal-assisted therapy has many benefits. It reduces stress and anxiety, helps patients focus on the present moment and gives them the opportunity to both give and receive affection. It's a way for them to forget that they're in a hospital for a while and to feel more like themselves. Caring for animals boosts their self-esteem and improves their well-being. These multiple benefits can speed up recovery and even reduce the length of hospital stays.

Interactive percussion workshops

In October 2024, another exciting activity was introduced: percussion workshops. Led by the Saya Percussion company, these workshops cover various musical genres, from pop to South American and Latin music, holiday music, world music and, of course, French and Quebec music.

"This activity has many benefits for our patients. It provides a space for release and self-expression in a friendly atmosphere, helps them develop musical skills—especially in percussion—improves their coordination and motor skills through the playing of instruments, and builds social bonds and a sense of community through a rewarding group experience," said Tarek-Alexandre.



Child psychiatry will be fully supported by our foundation



FONDS DE PÉDOPSYCHIATRIE
petits trésors

Musical entertainment every Wednesday

Since 2018, donations from the Joanne Martens Fund have also funded popular musical performances on two care units, held every Wednesday evening.

Grants are provided to music students from Collège Saint-Laurent who perform in the 50-minute concerts, featuring a variety of musical genres. The concert series aims to improve the well-being of patients at the Albert-Prévost Mental Health Hospital, while also supporting young musicians and building connections between art, health and social engagement.

“This year, we worked with the program coordinators at Collège Saint-Laurent to make these concerts more interactive. Instead of just presenting a 50-minute performance, the music students now invite patients to get involved: for instance, by improvising lyrics to the music. That way, the patients get to participate and share the spotlight,” said Tarek-Alexandre, who is thrilled to be able to offer this experience.



Our foundation recently announced that it will be taking over part of the activities of the Fondation les petits trésors, which ceased activities after more than 40 years of supporting children and adolescents with mental health and autism diagnoses.

We will continue to raise funds for research, education and the development of mental health care for children and adolescents at the Rivière-des-Prairies Mental Health Hospital. To do this, we have created a dedicated fund: Les Petits Trésors Child Psychiatry Fund.

We encourage everyone who cares about this cause to contribute and help strengthen the fund so we can meet the growing needs of children and adolescents.

For more information about this fund, please contact:

Nadine Leroux at 514-338-2303

or by email at nadine.leroux.cnmtl@ssss.gouv.qc.ca.

To continue supporting this cause, please visit our website.



Every fundraiser helps!

Want to show your appreciation for the care you or a loved one received at Sacré-Cœur? There are many ways to support our teams:



Plan a fundraising event that matches your interests, whether it's a dinner, a race, a sports tournament, an auction or something else you enjoy.

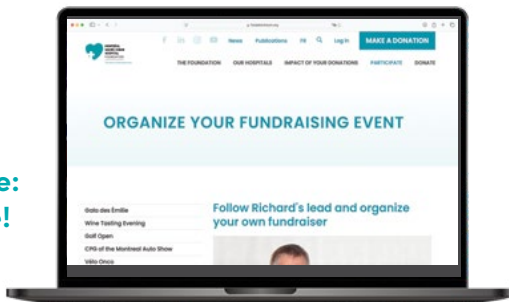
Take part in our benefit events. Stay tuned for our 2025 calendar!

Explore other ways to give, such as a planned gift or a life insurance donation. You can also choose to give monthly—set an amount and have it automatically donated each month. It's a simple yet lasting and meaningful way to support the Foundation's mission.

Organize a fundraising drive—encourage friends and family to contribute to the cause. You could tie it to your birthday or create a fundraiser in memory of a loved one. To make it easy, we can set up a fundraising page on our website where donations can be made online.



Donations can be made online: it's very simple!



Have an idea of your own or a question? Get in touch—we'd be happy to help!

Call us at 514-338-2303.

YOU CAN MAKE A DONATION:

♥ **Online** at fondationhscm.org ♥ **By Cheque** ♥ **By Phone**

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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.



Pénélope McQuade
Volunteer spokesperson