



Supporting family medicine globally



Francine Lemire MD CM CCFP FCFP CAE ICD.D, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
David Ponka MD CM CCFP(EM) FCFP MSc, DIRECTOR, THE BESROUR CENTRE FOR GLOBAL FAMILY MEDICINE

Dear Colleagues,

On the 11th anniversary of the creation of the Besroul Centre for Global Family Medicine within our College, and on the eve of the 23rd WONCA World Conference, we want to share ways in which we advance family medicine globally. Most of our work focuses on Canadians, including those who are more vulnerable. But why exert energy outside our jurisdictions, especially in times of crisis? Two reasons come to mind: to share innovations and advance together as a discipline; and because the global crisis will continue to threaten us if we fail to do so.

Family medicine in Canada enjoys a strong global reputation; this inspired the creation of the Besroul Centre and attracts interest in its activities. At the same time, we in Canada have a lot to learn from other health systems, especially when it comes to system integration.

Despite our connected world, global discrepancies remain staggering: 50% of the world's population does not have access to adequate primary health care¹; 80% of Canadians will soon be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, but only 2.8% of people in low-income countries have received one dose.² This presents us with a moral issue but also a public health issue: until herd immunity is achieved more globally, variants will threaten our national efforts.

We deliberately aligned the Besroul Centre's priorities with those of the CFPC—education, research, and advocacy and community engagement. Our bilingualism is an asset to collaboration with Francophone academic institutions and WHO. We are prepared to work with low- and mid-resource countries and with better-resourced regions that wish to enhance capacity in family medicine. We value our collaboration with the Réseau international francophone pour la responsabilité sociale en santé, Canadian departments of family medicine, and the Royal College's Office of International Collaboration.

In the area of education, we highlight FM Pivot, a series of modules relevant to the pandemic and to front-line family doctors. Each module is co-led by a Canadian faculty and an overseas faculty to show the potential for collaborative learning. Our module topics respond to pressing needs: managing health emergencies in partnership with public health, chronic disease management, mental health integration, virtual education, and studying emerging lessons using an implementation research lens.

In the research field, we are pleased to lead the FM Vax study in collaboration with The George Institute and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation-funded Primary Health Care Research Consortium. We hope to understand barriers to and enablers of the integration of primary care and public health in delivering COVID-19 vaccinations globally. Our survey instrument will be available in all United Nations official languages and in Portuguese.

In the area of partnerships, we were invited to present several keynotes at the Emirates Family Medicine Society annual conference. There is interest from the UAE (United Arab Emirates) in collaborating on activities such as accreditation of their postgraduate residency programs and assessment of residents to enhance capacity in family medicine education and practice. This is a new strategic direction for us: we see the UAE as an emerging leader in medical education in the region and beyond, and we think this diversified approach will help us sustain our core activities in low- and middle-income contexts. With support from the Foundation for Advancing Family Medicine, we created 2 global grants as part of the COVID-19 Pandemic Response and Impact Grant initiative. This program seeks to share ideas between countries to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations worldwide. The first 2 global recipients, from South Africa and Indonesia, are studying ways to reduce the impact of chronic phases of the pandemic through interdisciplinary approaches and family engagement strategies—topics relevant to the Canadian context. We were humbled that the modest grant has inspired the creation of a new family medicine residency program close to Banda Aceh, Indonesia, the area devastated by a tsunami in 2004.

Making an impact in this work takes time. A meaningful contribution abroad depends on investing in capacity building and strengthening family medicine in Canada.

Above all, the Besroul Centre unites family physicians around the world who believe deeply in the principles and potential of our discipline. We are all challenged by the times but inspired by our community of practice that reminds us that everything, and everyone, is connected.

For more details about the Besroul Centre projects, visit <https://www.cfpc.ca/en/about-us/the-besroul-centre/news-current-projects>.

References

1. *Half the world lacks access to essential health services, 100 million still pushed into extreme poverty because of health expenses* [news release]. Geneva, Switz: WHO; 2017.
2. *Coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccinations*. Our World in Data; 2021. Available from: <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>. Accessed 2021 Oct 21.

Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 871.

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