

# Silence of Francophone family physicians

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Like many of you, I attended Family Medicine Forum (FMF), held by the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) from November 10 to 13, 2021. It is one of the most important gatherings of family physicians in the country, if not the largest. Every year, the conference is held in one of Canada's major cities. As Associate Scientific Editor of *Canadian Family Physician*, I have been attending for the past 20 years.

*Attended* is perhaps too strong a word, as FMF was actually held virtually both this past year and in 2020 owing to the pandemic. That means that the entire conference—taking place over 4 days—was conducted over video. Like many, I am not a big fan of Zoom and other virtual meetings, but it allowed us to watch and rewatch all sessions included in the program. It was a good way to keep us up to date.

But as the conference went on, a question kept nagging at me: How many sessions were held in French? I am obviously not referring to simultaneous interpretation, but to sessions originally presented in French.

Note that, according to the latest available data, approximately 10 000 of Canada's 45 532 family physicians are Francophones,<sup>1-3</sup> which is almost 25%. In Quebec alone, there are 11 668 family physicians, 85.8% of these physicians being Francophone.<sup>4</sup> There is also a good number of Francophone physicians in other provinces as well. Yet, according to the estimations available from the CFPC, only 4458 are Francophone. Why is that? There are also 3 Francophone medical schools and a few bilingual universities. One would, therefore, expect the conference to include a few sessions conducted in French of the 50 sessions on the program.

In reality, except for a few posters, there were none. Not a single session in French!

I know many will say, "If we include sessions in French, no one will participate in the chat." I know. I have personally given presentations to only 2 or 3 participants. Essentially friends and supporters! And practically no Anglophone colleagues. It is not very encouraging. But that is not an excuse. Is simultaneous interpretation not already provided?

However, we certainly cannot blame the FMF Committee, nor the CFPC. If no Francophone physicians offer to present, what can FMF do? Presenters cannot be produced out of thin air!

The real question is why are those Francophone family physicians remaining silent? Where are the Francophone clinicians, teachers, scholars, and residents? Do none of them have any experiences, discoveries, or inquiries to share with their peers? That seems improbable to me.

Therefore, could we not ask the Quebec chapter of the CFPC, the Collège québécois des médecins de famille, to encourage its members to present at FMF? Could we ask the same of the 3 Francophone medical schools in Quebec (Laval University, the University of Montreal, and the University of Sherbrooke) and the bilingual universities? Could we encourage departments of family medicine and emergency medicine and Francophone family medicine interests groups to post more call-outs for presenters?

Because, even if everyone agrees that English is the lingua franca, all Canadian family physicians lose when Francophones remain silent. Let us encourage those Francophone voices who have been silent to share their work with a national audience.

The opinions expressed in editorials are those of the authors. Publication does not imply endorsement by the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

## References

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