

Emergence

Stories from the frontlines - family physicians around the world responding to COVID-19 - episode 10 - Tunisia

A Narrative Collaboration between the Besroul Centre of CFPC and CFP

by Christine Gibson MD FCFP MMedED DTM&H

Interview with Professor Mohamed Jouini (Tunisia)

Joined by Professor Ahmed Maherzi and Dr. Sadok Besroul from Canada on June 22, 2020

"Co-creating the Future of Family Medicine"

Our final episode of the podcast about the COVID-19 pandemic is an exciting one. Dr. Sadok Besroul from the University of Montreal tells the history of the Besroul Centre, a branch of the College of Family Physicians of Canada that supports the development of Family Medicine worldwide. Since Dr. Besroul is from Tunisia, it was a natural fit to interview one of the Deans that has strong connections to Canada. We were so lucky to be joined by Professor Maherzi, who held this position before moving to Canada himself, as well as Professor Jouini who is the current Dean. It was insightful to be speaking to people who were part of national commissions and government response, about the pandemic and the role of Family Medicine.

Tunisia successfully closed down on March 18, 2020 with a curfew and confinement, isolation of positive cases, and selective screening. The health system in Tunisia has a strong primary care system, which was primed to assist in prevention and screening response once the pandemic hit. They provided a triage system in the community for referral of suspected cases.

"Training was focused on protecting themselves and their patients." Professor Jouini

Professor Jouini described how Family Medicine residents were given special training in preparation for pandemic. Professor Maherzi was able to relate how the program was developed over the years, as he was involved in health-system planning that placed the program at the centre of public health. It was rather incredible to hear Dr. Besroul tell the story of how a small team of people were able to instigate such a huge shift in the health system of another country, with his passionate support and insights from Canada.

"At that time, even in Canada, nobody knew what to expect from Family Medicine." Dr. Besroul

The pandemic demonstrated the commitment of their frontline workers and medical students. Students joining in contact tracing. Civil society contributing donations. There were many stories of solidarity and compassion in Tunisia.

Curriculum of the Family Medicine training program was designed to meet the population health needs of the country. It evolved from a two-year to a three-year program, which Professor Maherzi felt was an important milestone to match other specialties.

Dr. Besroul dreamed of the Canadian experience being exported to a contextual response, a linkage to benefit both countries. It took key partnerships, influential support, and "working hand in hand" to make the discipline begin and grow. It is with certainty that we can say this has definitely transpired.

Passion. Collaboration. Commitment.

Thank you, Professor Jouini, for sharing the story of Family Medicine from a high level of leadership. Thank you

to our Canadian Tunisian colleagues, for adding your influential voices and vision to this story. Indeed, this partnership is a role model to the world.

Listen to the podcast here: <https://cfppodcast.libsyn.com/covid-19-global-pandemic-and-family-medicine-ep-10-tunisia>



Pr Mohamed Jouini (MD) is the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of Tunis, a graduate of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Tunis El Manar. Professor Jouini is a visceral surgeon, former President of the Tunisian Society of Laparoscopic Surgery Former General Secretary and former Vice-President of the National Council of the Medical Association. He is former vice-dean and director of internships at the Faculty of Medicine of Tunis.



A graduate of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Tunis El Manar, Dr. Ahmed Maherzi is a pediatrician. He was the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of Tunis (2011 to 2017). Dr. Maherzi is a member of the permanent Board of Directors of the CIDMEF (Conférence internationale des Doyens et des Facultés de Médecine d'expression Française) and of the AUF (Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie) Scientific Committee. He is currently a professor in the Faculté de médecine de l'Université de Montréal, where he is also Director of the Social Accountability Office. Dr. Maherzi has been honoured with Honorary membership award of the College of Family Physicians of Canada in 2017.



Dr Sadok Besrour, born in Tunisia, trained in medicine in France and completed his family medicine residency in Montreal. He has practiced family medicine for more than twenty years at the CHUM and was one of the first Montrealers to graduate from the American Board of Family Practice in 1979. He is also one of the founding members of the Clinique de CHUM family medicine, Notre-Dame Hospital. Member of several professional associations, Dr. Besrour obtained in 1972 an MBA from what has become the very prestigious International Management Development Institute of Lausanne. He is also Governor of the Fondation du CHUM. In recognition of his adopted country and to contribute to the discipline he has practiced for so long, Dr. Sadok Besrour has decided to devote time, expertise and resources to the development of this specialty. Thus was born the commitment of Dr Besrour for the creation of a chair in family medicine at the University of Montreal.

Dr. Christine Gibson (www.christinegibson.net) is a family physician in Calgary, Canada with a background in justice work, medical education, and global health. A skilled facilitator and speaker, she is engaged in building individual and community resilience. Her writing creates the woven narrative between her interests - wellbeing, trauma recovery, and the power of story.