

In memoriam: Chawki Benkelfat (1953–2020)

Marco Leyton, PhD

Chawki Benkelfat, a creative clinician-scientist and James McGill Professor in McGill University's Department of Psychiatry, died on January 7 at age 66 following a long struggle that somehow did not stop him from writing or supporting his many patients and protégé(e)s. His research interests were broad, sufficiently so that he described himself as studying "human models of psychiatric disorders." Our thoughts and sympathies are with his wife Naima, daughters Lamia and Rislaine, grandson Othmane, father Otmane, and brother Fethi.

Chawki was born in Paris, the son of an Algerian diplomat. He went on to complete medical training in Morocco, a psychiatry residency with Pierre Deniker in Paris, and post-doctoral training at the National Institute of Mental Health with Dennis Murphy as part of an exceptional cohort that included Tom Insel, Josi Zohar, Tom Nordahl, and Peter Lesch. As a McGill faculty member, Chawki played a distinctive role, bringing creative people together, challenging them with penetrating questions, and taking pleasure in the fruit that grew.

His first claims to scientific fame included a pair of papers in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* published in 1989 and 1990. One provided evidence that serotonin was causally involved in the clinical efficacy of clomipramine for obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). The second provided early neuroimaging mapping of the functional neurocircuitry of OCD.

Upon arriving in Montreal, Chawki played a major role in the early adoption of brain imaging by McGill's psychiatry research community and was an active member of the

Neuro's Brain Imaging Centre, working with Albert Gjedde, Mirko Diksic, Alain Dagher and Alan Evans. With them and others, he was an early proponent of blood flow "activation" studies to explore neural correlates of anxiety, identified serotonergic alterations in people at risk for mood and impulse-control disorders, and described dopamine alterations in people with psychoses. With Simon Young and Bob Pihl, he studied the effects of transiently decreasing serotonin synthesis. With Guy Rouleau and Gustavo Turecki, he mapped both genetic and epigenetic features associated with neuroimaging findings.

As one of his first postdoctoral fellows, I had the good fortune to overlap with many exceptional fellow trainees, including Ridha Joobar, Pedro Rosa-Neto, Flavio Kapczinski, Alexandre Berney, and Mark Ellenbogen. Throughout his career, Chawki continued to mentor outstanding young scientists, including Isabelle Boileau, Linda Booij, Mariya Cherkasova, Atsuko Nagano-Saito, and Paul Gravel. His concluding cohort consisted of Kelly Smart, Jennifer Lissemore, Hussein Bdair, and Marie Fitoussi, all of whom I suspect we will hear from much more. We will miss him: the fine scientist and mentor, the wild ocean yachting enthusiast, and the passionate volleyball player who, on hearing about a successfully completed study, could leap into the air, brushing the ceiling with his hand, an unabashed expression of joy and athleticism.

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