



Global health

# The Boy from Fez: A tale of five charities, and the global community, joining hands

Layla Zniber<sup>1</sup>, Maria Rogers<sup>2,3,\*</sup>, Akhlaque Nabi Bhat<sup>4</sup>, Ahmad Sallehuddin<sup>4</sup>, Lisa Yacoub<sup>5</sup>

## ABSTRACT

A case study in global cooperation between multiple charities and cardiac centers helped to save a 8-year-old Moroccan boy suffering a case of Laubry-Pezzi syndrome with severe aortic regurgitation and ventricular septal defect. His recuperation was aided by the support of communities in both Morocco and Qatar.

<sup>1</sup>Centre de Cardiologie à Rabat, Rabat, Morocco

<sup>2</sup>Magdi Yacoub Research Network, Doha, Qatar

<sup>3</sup>Qatar Cardiovascular Research Center, Doha, Qatar

<sup>4</sup>Hamad Medical Corporation, Doha, Qatar

<sup>5</sup>Chain of Hope, London, UK

\*Email: maria.rogers@myrn.co.uk

[http://dx.doi.org/  
10.5339/gcsp.2013.19](http://dx.doi.org/10.5339/gcsp.2013.19)

Submitted: 12 April 2013

Accepted: 22 May 2013

© 2013 Zniber, Rogers, Bhat, Sallehuddin, Yacoub, licensee Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Journals. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license CC BY 3.0, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## THE BOY FROM FEZ

The massive global burden of heart disease in children, and the fact that it affects predominantly children from developing countries, requires a concerted collaborative effort. A spark of light in this effort was kindled recently by the cooperation of five organisations to provide life-saving intervention for an 8-year-old Moroccan boy with congenital heart disease.

Mustapha was born to a young couple living in Fez (Figures 1–3). His father works as a sandwich maker and his mother is a full-time homemaker.



**Figure 1.** Map of Morocco, showing Fez and disputed Western Sahara region (original adapted from 'TUBS' [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Morocco\\_on\\_the\\_globe\\_\(claimed\\_%2B\\_de-facto\\_hatched\)\\_ \(Africa\\_centered\).svg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Morocco_on_the_globe_(claimed_%2B_de-facto_hatched)_ (Africa_centered).svg)).

Mustapha was a cheerful, intelligent boy growing up with his peers and acting as a source of great joy to his parents and family. This continued until the age of seven, when suddenly he started to complain of shortness of breath and tiredness. These symptoms were most unusual for the carefree boy, and worried his parents, who took him to the Cardiology Clinic in Rabat to see the consultant Paediatric Cardiologist, Dr Layla Zniber. Dr Layla volunteers for the Chain of Hope as the medical representative in Morocco and has facilitated the treatment of dozens of critically ill cardiac patients through this link with La Chaine de l'Espoir in France, the Chain of Hope in the UK and now with Chain of Hope in Qatar.

Mustapha was diagnosed as having a relatively rare complex heart disease, Laubry-Pezzi syndrome, consisting of a severe aortic regurgitation and VSD.

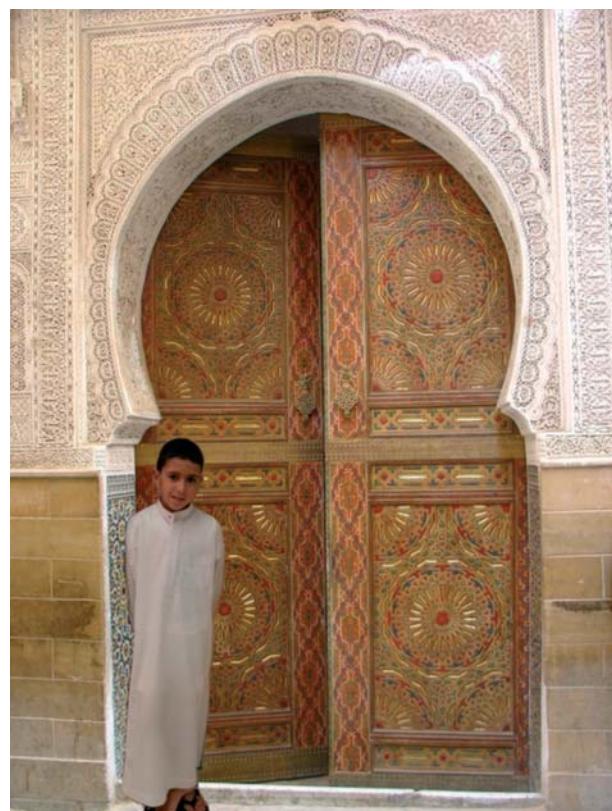
With the leak in the valve worsening, the heart started to enlarge and fail which caused deterioration of his general condition and his parents were told that unless he underwent a complex heart operation, he would not live beyond his teens, which caused considerable anguish within the family. The cost of the required surgery was beyond their means.



**Figure 2.** City of Fez, Morocco (courtesy of 'High Contrast' – [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:City\\_of\\_Fez,\\_Morocco.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:City_of_Fez,_Morocco.jpg)).

A multilateral agreement between Qatar Foundation, Chain of Hope, Magdi Yacoub Research Network, Hamad Medical Corporation and the Centre in Morocco, provided unexpected hope for Mustapha and his family with the prospect of rapid, corrective surgery. Effective communication among the five organisations, culminated in Mustapha and his family being flown to Doha, Qatar.

During the journey, a Moroccan flight attendant befriended the boy and his mother and her support and compassion ensured that the boy had constant round-the-clock support from the Moroccan community in Doha. This support was facilitated by a caring paramedic from HMC and his wife. In addition the Family Consulting Centre in Doha and the Moroccan Ambassador also rallied to support the family.



**Figure 3.** Mustapha – before surgery.

Mustapha was admitted to Hamad General Hospital on Friday 13 July 2012 and on 15 July he underwent a Ross procedure and VSD repair. This procedure is ideally suited for a pre-adolescent child and is designed to last for life.

The team included surgeons from Chain of Hope and HMC. The operation was successful and within a few days he was a typical energetic youngster. In addition to the remarkable improvement in his health from the operation, the procedure presented a unique opportunity for training for the staff at the hospital.

Life since his operation has changed immeasurably for Mustapha – not only did he turn 9-years old on the day of the surgery, but the young boy is now attending school full time and is able, once again, to play with friends. He is particularly keen on football and hopes one day to emulate the stars of his favourite team. This is not only a happy ending for Mustapha, but he has opened the door for many more children.