

The Best Time for Romance

By Denise Yuen

The second annual Medical Debate, jointly organised by the Duke-NUS Student Council, the National University of Singapore (NUS) Medical Society and SMA was held at NUSS Kent Ridge Guild House on 25 August 2012.

The debate was meant as a platform for students from the students from Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School and NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM) to interact and form lasting friendships. To encourage this interaction, the debate teams were made up of students from both schools. The Proposition was R R Pravin (YLLSoM), Martyn Gostelow (Duke-NUS) and Marvin Loh (YLLSoM), while the Opposition was David Tainter (Duke-NUS), Clarissa Tio (Duke-NUS) and Ryan Leow (YLLSoM). More than 100 students from both schools attended the event.

In his welcome address, the Guest of Honour, Prof Arthur Lim, Founding Director of the Singapore National Eye Centre, recounted the difficult times the local medical fraternity had been through in the past. Prof Lim noted that the quality of medical education that medical students currently receive is excellent, and as long as they can maintain their standards, they do not need to worry about survival as their predecessors had to. As Singapore is wealthy and has one of the best health services in the world, he felt that it can help poorer countries improve their healthcare standards. "We have to take over the role, which a hundred years ago, was done by the European countries and done by America. So you have a great responsibility, not only in your own little practices, but to see what you can do for Asia and (...) the whole of Africa," he concluded.

The motion for this year's debate was "This house believes that medical school is a time for romance", particularly apt at a time of falling marriage and birth rates. In the tradition of similar debates, this debate was also filled with wit, irreverence, sharp repartee, tongue-in-cheek humour, and hand-and-foot-in-the-mouth disease.

The chairperson of the debate, Mr Adrian Tan, a lawyer at Drew & Napier, explained its format. All six speakers would each get eight minutes to speak, after which one person from each team would be given four minutes to deliver a reply speech.

The first Proposition speaker was Pravin, who punctuated his speech with catchy melodic outbursts. He reiterated his team's stand that medical school is an "ideal" and "healthy" time for romance, and one does not want to end up as a "lecherous house officer trying to get the attention of female colleagues all because you missed the love boat". As medical school is very stressful, a partner could provide one with much needed support, and allow one to practise listening skills and history taking.

The first Opposition speaker, David, declared that medical students dating will be "disastrous for Singapore's healthcare system", as it will make them unhappy and affect their work. It will be difficult for students to juggle both medical school and relationships, as they will not be able to devote much time and energy to their partners, and this will be unfair for both parties. Also, since breakups are inevitable, it will be challenging for medical students to work with their exes.

Martyn, the second Proposition speaker, startled and amused the audience by stripping down to his... singlet. He disagreed with David that dating in medical school makes students unhappy because they are unable to find the time, indicating that it is a question of priorities, and also disagreed there are "not many romantic moments", asking the audience to consider physical examinations where people take their shirts off, and so on. He opined that "girls like older, mature men". As such, "it is easy for us Duke students, as the average age of guys in the class is around 26 years old", so they and older YLLSoM male students could date younger female students, or even "hit on nurses, (...) dieticians (...) and physiotherapists".

The next Opposition speaker, Clarissa, felt that "it is better for your clinical skills if you can do physical examinations with more than one person", not just one's partner, since every human is different, so one's educational opportunities will not be compromised. She opined that someone having a physical examination might be wondering if their 50-year-old GP is hitting on them, which is "definitely a breakdown in doctor-patient relationships". Meanwhile, medical students who break up will be full of emotional baggage, and this "will put a lot of strain on the Social Development Unit (SDU), and in the future, funds for education have to be channelled to SDU to accommodate this growing number of singles who can never move on".



Back row, L to R: Dr Toh Han Chong, Dr Chia Ghim Song, A/Prof Yeoh Khay Guan, A/Prof Chin Jing Jih, Mr Adrian Tan, Ms Stefanie Yuen Thio, Dr Sim Sze Keen and Dr Sia Ching Hui
Front row, L to R: Martyn Gostelow, Marvin Loh, R R Pravin, Clarissa Tio, David Tainter and Ryan Leow

The last Proposition speaker, Marvin, noted that it will be better for medical students to date each other as they already understand the challenges of a medical career and what their partners are undergoing. He also felt that dating will make him a better doctor, because when his girlfriend conducts a physical examination on him, he will be able to understand the patient's perspective better. He concluded that relationships in medical school will give students a source of emotional support, and allow them to become better people and hence, better doctors.

Ryan, the final Opposition speaker, felt that if they encourage medical students to date, it will become part and parcel of medical school ("as important as biochemistry"). This will cause medical school admission criteria to change, and it will no longer be about what type of student makes a good doctor, but a good spouse. Once word gets around that medical school was a dating paradise, students, like gold diggers who want to be rich and have an easy life, will apply for medical school. There will be a cost to one's medical education if one ends up as someone who wants an easy life over excellence, and "at that moment, we stop being doctors (...) and become lawyers".

After all six debaters had spoken, the teams made their reply speeches. Clarissa from the Opposition spoke first, followed by Martyn from the Proposition. Both summarised their team's stance and why it was the superior one.

Chairperson Mr Tan added to the general hilarity by giving short witty comments after each debater had spoken their piece. After the debate ended, the judges, Dr Sia Ching Hui, a first year Internal Medicine resident, Dr Sim Sze Keen, a paediatrician in private practice, and Ms Stefanie Yuen Thio, Joint Managing Director of TSMP Law Corporation, adjourned to another room to confer on the results. During this interval, musical group A Capella (Duke-NUS) took to the stage and entertained the audience with a few songs, backed with live music.

After a ten-minute conference, the judges returned. Ms Yuen Thio, who had been appointed adjudicator, said that the judges felt that both sides had made interesting points and "deliberated about (the winner) long and hard, about 25 seconds". The Proposition was announced the winner to thunderous applause. David from the Opposition was named Best Speaker, and the judges also made special mention of the Proposition's Marvin.

A second musical interlude followed, in which two other musical groups, Mashed Potatoes (YLLSoM) and Band (Duke-NUS) each performed a couple of songs onstage. This was followed by a lucky draw, with five winners walking away with different fabulous prizes. After the event, the audience mingled over a delicious dinner reception.

The organisers thank all who contributed to make this event a success, and look forward to students from the third local medical school joining them at next year's debate. **SMA**



Guest of Honour Prof Arthur Lim delivering his welcome address



Emcees Aditya Sangam (YLLSoM) and Kenneth Goh (Duke-NUS) entertaining the audience with witty banter



Pravin from the Proposition giving an amusing speech punctuated with singing



The debate was well attended by medical students