

A Strategy to Increase Singapore's Fertility Rate?

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L to R: Debate judges Sanjiv Nair, A/Prof Chin Jing Jih and Dr Andre Wan; LKCMedicine faculty member Prof Lionel Lee; Guest of Honour Prof Tan Ser Kiat; and YLLSoM faculty members A/Prof K Rajendran and A/Prof Marie Clement

"Singles should not be allowed to graduate from medical school" was the motion of the third Medicine Debates, held at the Shaw Foundation Alumni House in the National University of Singapore (NUS) Kent Ridge Campus on 7 September 2013. Over 50 students braved the pouring rain to attend the event.

The debate proposition was particularly apt in the light of Singapore's falling fertility rate. In his welcome address, Prof Tan Ser Kiat, President of the Singapore Medical Council and the debate's Guest of Honour, called the topic humorous and controversial, but meaningful. He also said that preparing for this event would sharpen the debaters' minds and analytical skills, and looked forward to listening to their arguments and humour.

Jointly organised by SMA, Duke-NUS Student Council and NUS Medical Society, the annual debate was meant as a platform for students from both the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM) and Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School to interact and form lasting friendships. To encourage this interaction, the debate teams were composed of students from both schools. Meanwhile, students from the third local medical school, Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMedicine) at

Nanyang Technological University (which welcomed its first batch of undergrads in August this year), were among the audience.

Emcees Priya Vohra (Duke-NUS) and Aishwarya Narayanan (LKCMedicine) explained the format of the debate, which was somewhat different from previous editions: the Proposition would speak first, followed by the Opposition, proceeded by the Proposition, and so on. The twist was that the teams would then field questions from the audience, before each side delivered their concluding statements.

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. Proposing the motion were Chng Wei Qiang (YLLSoM), Aaron Ng (YLLSoM) and Nick Shannon (Duke-NUS), who were dressed in red for "love", while opposing it were Alfred Wong (Duke-NUS), Benjamin Tan (YLLSoM) and Hasan Abbas (Duke-NUS), who were dressed in blue for "cold hard bitterness".

The Proposition started by defining the key terms: *singles* as "people who do not have a boyfriend or girlfriend" and *relationships* as "passionate and romantic



A member of the audience speaks



Wei Qiang



Hasan

“Singles in medical school, we argue, will be like cancer cells escaping from the primary site, meandering around like lost souls, until they have found another organ to latch on. The malignancy of neoplasm is as insidious as the malignancy of singlehood. Singles are unpredictable, unstable and ultimately ravaging creatures.

– First Proposition speaker, Wei Qiang



Prof Tan Ser Kiat with the winning Opposition team (L to R): Benjamin, Hasan and Alfred

“I shall be the Morpheus to these young Neos [the Proposition]. You know they talked a lot about red versus blue, but today you have to choose between the red pill and the blue pill. The red pill is fantasy; the blue pill, reality. But whatever you take, whatever you choose, there is no turning back.

– Final Opposition speaker, Hasan

connections between two people”. They discussed the benefits of getting into relationships while in medical school, and why getting into such relationships were “opportunities not to be missed”. The Opposition rebutted by saying that medical students should be committed to their studies instead of relationships, relationships had emotional and financial costs, juggling both relationships and medical school would burden students, and “what the global community would think if they saw the headline ‘Singapore doctor shortage exacerbated by new policy’”.

After all the debaters had spoken their piece, the emcees invited members of the floor to speak. A lively discussion ensued, with questions coming mainly from the female students in the audience. A female student from Duke-NUS jokingly asked if it would be all right to fake a marriage to graduate from medical school, and the Proposition replied that this was a flaw of character than of the system, and they could not dismiss the system just because someone chose to cheat. Finally, Wei Qiang and Benjamin closed the debate with summaries of their respective teams’ arguments.

The judges, A/Prof Chin Jing Jih, SMA President;

Dr Andre Wan, Research Director, NUS Office of the Deputy President (Research & Technology); and student Sanjiv Nair (YLLSoM) then adjourned to another room to confer on the results. Pop-Up Band (Duke-NUS) and Rajesh Ravi (YLLSoM) provided a musical interlude by entertaining the audience with short but spirited performances of live vocals and music.

After a conference of 15 minutes, the judges returned. Dr Wan, who had been appointed adjudicator, commented that while the judges considered the debate “truly entertaining”, they felt that it would have been “nice to have female debaters”. They also noted that while many “interesting and witty things were said”, neither team had taken the opportunity to play around with the topic, like suggest ways to prove that someone was not single. He then announced that the Opposition was the winner of the debate “by a small margin”. Wei Qiang, the Proposition’s first speaker, was named Best Speaker.

After the debate, the audience got the opportunity to mingle over a tea reception. The organisers wish to thank all those who contributed to make this event a success, and look forward to greater participation from all three local medical schools in future debates. **SMA**