

By Ms Priyanka Rajendram

## Med-Law Challenge Shield Debate 2008: **THE CLASH OF THE TITANS**

**I**ts return has been a long time coming – too long, in fact. So long, that the current generation of NUS students have become ignorant of the rich history and tradition behind this event. However, thanks to its revival on 22 January 2008 at MD11's Clinical Research Centre Auditorium, things have finally been brought back to light. Yes, after a long enough hiatus, the annual Medicine-Law Challenge Shield Debate has finally returned!

Like how Sting and the Police reunited with a bang by embarking on a whirlwind world tour, the Med-Law debates had to return with as much hoopla as in the previous years in order to retain its original appeal. Thus, what better way to do

Medicine and Law faculties, as they swarmed into the auditorium like bees to honey. At 7 pm sharp, students and faculty members were already in their seats, eagerly awaiting the start of the much-anticipated debate.

Speaking for the proposition was our team from the Medical faculty, Ms Samantha Yeo, Mr David Pflug and Ms Tan Li Feng. Armed with immaculate blazers and impressive records of oratorical triumphs, the team members were ready to prove their mettle and stand their ground against the lawyers-to-be. The testosterone-filled opposition team from the Law faculty comprised Mr Choo Zheng Xi, Mr Nabil Mustafiz and Mr Vishal Harnal, all just as eager to tear Team Medicine's case apart.



Professor Paul Tambyah entertains the crowd with his witty remarks during the audience round.  
Photo credit: Jonathan Kwong

this than by having a sensationally juicy motion to stir things up again?

The motion was: This House believes that it is dangerous for society if it pays its lawyers more than its doctors.

The initial reaction of most people to this motion can be easily guessed. A laugh followed by a look of nervousness mixed with excitement at the idea of such an audacious topic. The prospect of witnessing their debater friends trying to squirm their way out of this politically incorrect motion, however, proved to be a very attractive factor for the students from both the

The debate was a lively affair with each side fervently proving their points with eloquent speeches. While Team Law felt that it was reasonable for lawyers to “take as much as their clients were willing to pay”, Team Medicine felt that what matters most is altruism. Samantha Yeo, first speaker for Team Medicine, pointed out that since doctors and lawyers share the same desire to do good, doctors should not be the only ones lowering their fees in order for their services to become more accessible. Rather, lawyers should also lower their fees as “justice is not just for the rich, justice is for everybody.” Team Law rejected



Priyanka Rajendram is in her second year of study at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, NUS. Inspired by the rich history of the event, she decided to organise the revival of the Med-Law debates.

◀ Page 23 – *The Clash of the Titans*

this proposition and attributed the doctors' low costs to their subsidised medical education and their subsequent bond to SingHealth. Choo Zheng Xi, first speaker for Team Law, also proved that poor people could gain legal representation via various *pro bono* schemes such as the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme, where the accused can get free legal representation. David Pflug, second speaker for Team Medicine, *pooh-pooed* Mr Choo's point by pointing out that the scheme was insufficient as only 20% of the criminal cases submitted are dealt with. He also reiterated the importance of altruism to be the driving force behind the work of doctors and lawyers, rather than financial incentives.

Nabil Mustafiz, second speaker for Team Law, then countered this point by saying that the nature of their work decides their salaries and the relatively high pay from corporate clients enables them to channel the pay back to the expenses incurred by the free *pro bono* work they do. Vishal Harnal, final speaker for Team Law, furthered the case by adding that a litigious society brought about by easily accessible legal service would be undesirable for society. Tan Li Feng, final speaker for Team Medicine, decisively took apart Team Law's case, point for point, and reiterated Team Medicine's

stand on the important responsibilities doctors and lawyers have in society. Thus, they must handle these responsibilities with care and a dutiful conscience. She also drew the longest applause of the evening after her speech. The audience round, thereafter, allowed the doctors and lawyers in the crowd to further support the teams of their own profession.

Of course, what would a Med-Law debate be without the usual wicked, black humour and witty banter between the speakers? One of the more memorable examples of the evening was when Team Law's Vishal Harnal jokingly attacked David Pflug for having failed anatomy in Year One. He said that patients should not have to pay incompetent doctors who fail their exams. However, Associate Professor Paul Tambyah, ever the avid debater and a Cicero in his own right, drew peals of laughter from the crowd when he pointed out during the audience round that he, too, was a borderline anatomy viva student. In another instance, Nabil Mustafiz claimed that fresh medical graduates get a starting salary of \$3,000. David Pflug was quick to point out that fresh doctors actually only get \$2,420.

All in all, the parley turned out to be most enjoyable and entertaining for everybody who was there, including the three judges:



Clockwise from left:

Tan Li Feng, wins Best Speaker for her clear, concise and forceful speech.

Nabil Mustafiz (right, standing) interrupts David Pflug (left, standing) during his speech

Samantha Yeo gets the ball rolling as Team Law listens in.

Vishal Harnal (right, standing) makes a point during David's speech.

All photos credit: Jonathan Kwong

◀ Page 24 – *The Clash of the Titans*

Dr Andre Wan (Medicine), Professor Eleanor Wong (Law) and Ms Usha Jeyarajah (neutral party). We also had the honour of having Professor Arthur Lim, after whom the challenge shield trophy was named after, to grace the occasion as the guest-of-honour. Unfortunately, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, who generously donated the challenge shield, was unable to attend the occasion.

Although Team Law won the debate, Tan Li Feng from Medicine deservedly won the Best Speaker Award. However, since the debate was actually a finale to the inaugural Medicine-Law Challenge Shield that also included four other sporting events such as soccer, rugby and floorball, Team Medicine emerged as the overall

winners of the 'Professor Arthur Lim Challenge Shield Trophy'.

Other than the proud win, what was most inspiring about the evening was perhaps the team spirit and solidarity that could be felt among the medical fraternity. The old generation of doctors possessed a fierce pride for the medical fraternity, which began in medical school. Unfortunately, the generation after them did not have as strong a sense of community and pride. May the revival of the Med-Law challenge be symbolic of the change that is to come – a new generation of medical students with a revived pride in our Medical School! ■

Congratulations Team Medicine!

It was a pleasure and delight for me to be invited as a judge for the Med-Law Debate 2008. Debating has certainly changed a lot since my own university days! In my time, speakers did not have more than four minutes to make their points and you could not interrupt your opponents in mid-speech as is the case with the new format. I was very impressed with the poise and polish of the speakers from both teams, and I think it reflects well for the quality of doctors and lawyers who are being trained at NUS. I am glad to see that the spirit of friendly competition and good sportsmanship was evident throughout the debate and I welcome the return of the Med-Law debate as a regular highlight of the NUS calendar. It would be wonderful too if future topics for these debates could address real-life practice issues that are of mutual interest to doctors and lawyers.

– Dr Andre Wan

*Dr Andre Wan is currently Deputy Executive Director of Biomedical Research Council (BMRC) at the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*Star). Dr Wan graduated in 1988 with an MBBS degree from the National University of Singapore. He received his Masters of Medicine in Public Health from NUS in 1994. Ever the avid debater, Dr Wan took part in a few such Medicine-Law debates when he was a student as well. This year, he was one of the judges for the debate.*



Medicine and Law representatives posing with the guest-of-honour, Professor Arthur Lim.  
Photo credit: Jonathan Kwong