



# BIRTH OF THE *Medical Women's Soccer Team*

Text and photo by Dr Priyanka Rajendram

*Two physicians boarded a flight out of Seattle. One sat in the window seat, the other sat in the middle seat. Just before take-off, an attorney got on and took the aisle seat next to the two physicians. The attorney kicked off his shoes, wiggled his toes and was settling in when the physician in the window seat said, "I think I'll get up and get a coke."*

*"No problem," said the attorney, "I'll get it for you." While he was gone, one of the physicians picked up the attorney's shoe and spat in it. When he returned with the coke, the other physician said, "That looks good, I think I'll have one too." Again, the attorney obligingly went to fetch it and while he was gone, the other physician picked up the other shoe*

*and spat in it. The attorney returned and they all sat back and enjoyed the flight. As the plane was landing, the attorney slipped his feet into his shoes and knew immediately what had happened.*

*"How long must this go on for?" he asked, "This fighting between our professions? This hatred? This animosity? This spitting in shoes and pissing in cokes?"*

## **History of the law-medicine relationship**

The Law-Medicine Challenge, which continues till today, is a medical school tradition I hold near and dear to my heart. Under the guidance of A/Prof Paul Tambyah, we, the

then student body, reintroduced the Law-Med Debates back into our annual calendar in 2007. The February 1982 issue of *Vagus*, the then Medical Society newsletter, depicted a young Dr Vivian Balakrishnan (now Minister for Foreign Affairs) participating in the Law-Med Debates held in December 1981. Almost 30 years later in 2008, it all came a full circle as Dr Balakrishnan donated the trophy for the Law-Med Challenge, humbly requesting for it to be named after his late mentor, Prof Arthur Lim. The Challenge today features a variety of events aside from the debates, which include floorball, touch rugby, soccer, handball and even computer

gaming. It is an event that law and medical student representatives look back on only with fondness... *usually*.

But why was it law and medicine specifically? Back in the 1980s and 1990s, the debates were meant to build a sense of camaraderie among the medicine and law faculty students, given their small student population in comparison to the other faculties. This intention continues to hold ground and was the basis for the institution of the Challenge in 2008. Inter-faculty collaboration and regular competition can be a positive step, given that students are likely to run into each other in school and friendships that extend into the working world can thus be developed. *Or not?*

While inter-faculty sports and games are an excellent way to promote a sense of *esprit de corps*, the lingering fear is that it could also be rife with identity politics, descending into a "war" by proxy through non-violent means. Even between the two professions, there has been this unspoken notion that one profession is better than the other and this is evident in the intensity of the competition on the sporting field. Let's be clear: no one can explicitly and definitively say that being a doctor is better than being a lawyer or vice versa because it is so ridiculous to compare any two given professions that serve different purposes in the world.

The way I see it, this Challenge, whatever emotions it evokes, is simply an opportunity for a group of people to get together to have some *joie de vivre*. After all, in this day and age, the professions need each other whether or not society needs us. It's always better to work together than against each other and the world would be a justifiably healthier place that way.

Throughout my three years of medical school, I played soccer for the medicine girls' team during

the Law-Med Challenge. Needless to say, the competition with the law girls' team was always stiff. I no longer remember if we won or lost; I just know that we had a lot of fun and I still reminisce with my teammates whenever we bump into one another along the halls of Singapore's public healthcare institutions. Our days as soccer teammates were over once school ended. After all, with other commitments and time constraints after entering the working world, soccer was not really on the priority list as compared to, for example, sleep.

*Or so I thought...*

### **The Bench and Bar Games**

In 2016, I decided to follow my husband, a lawyer and footballer himself, as he travelled with his teammates from the Law Society of Singapore (LSS) to Kuantan for the "Bench and Bar" games. These games are an annual tradition, forging competition and camaraderie between the representatives from LSS and The Malaysian Bar. The two countries take turns hosting one another for three days of non-stop games including golf, hockey and pool.

Firms block their calendars in anticipation of this annual event and lawyers are usually granted the leave they need in order to do what they need to do for their country. Without meaning to make this sound like some war, this competition is definitely intense in the competitive spirit it evokes. However, the fun and camaraderie are the bigger takeaways as evidenced by the most intense game of all – the boat race, a competition to see which team can gulp down their beers the fastest. I went there intending to relax by the pool, but I was soon sucked in by the electrifying atmosphere and went on to cheer the Singaporean lawyers at the various games.

The event also gave me a chance to reconnect with some of the

women lawyers whom I used to play against on the soccer field back in school. I learnt that their team has a full squad of players and trains regularly in preparation for the game against the Malaysians, as well as the annual Inter-Professional Games (IPG) held in Singapore. In addition, I also found out that Medicine had never fielded a women's soccer team to play in the IPG or any other postgraduate games before. Watching them play was really frustrating for me; all I wanted to do was to get on the pitch myself. That then got me wondering: Why doesn't the medical fraternity have a women's soccer team? With the advent and increasing popularity of women's soccer in schools, I was sure that there would be enough players to join us.

### **The medical women's soccer team**

However, rallying the alumni troop turned out to be more difficult than I had anticipated. Our profession is such that everyone is just so busy and spread out all over the island. Between juggling calls, weekend rounds and personal commitments, carving out time to kick a ball around was really challenging. Eventually, some doctors did come forward, but there were not enough to form a full team. Then it occurred to me: Why am I only concentrating on forming an alumni team when there is also a school team? We are one medical fraternity after all. Before we knew it, we too had a sizeable team filled with an eclectic mix of students from various years and doctors from various postgraduate years. The first ever medical women's soccer team has been formed!

After discussing with the women lawyers, the inaugural alumni women's soccer match between the lawyers and doctors was set and was to be held every year in conjunction with National Day. The result of the inaugural match is unimportant at this point (you can guess what



that means), but trust me, we did our medical fraternity proud. Our dwindling fitness level was evidenced by our bursting lungs, and the aches and pains that came after the match were clear indications that running around the hospital did not provide enough exercise – a good wake up call. Luckily, we had the youth of our students to make up for that.

What is important, however, is the fact that we now have an avenue where both medical students and doctors have a chance to interact regularly. This team is bigger than just the games; it is a family and a fraternity that crosses personal, academic and working lines. It is well documented in academic medical literature that mentoring is a critical component of medical education as both the mentor and mentee benefit from the relationship. This team allows for a more informal and less-threatening way of forming mentoring relationships between the students and doctors. Since we

are all going to be working together at some point, it seems only fitting that we form trusting, long-lasting relationships through the team. Besides intra-fraternity relationships being born, this annual game has also allowed us to get to know our lawyer counterparts better. Hopefully, we would never need one another's services, but this has allowed us to widen our social circles amid our constant battle with time.

While the competition can be intense, the wisdom from entering the working world has definitely reminded all of us about what is truly important – a lesson the doctors continuously share with the students. We are a group of women who work and play hard together, and we are there for one another. When a team works this way, it should never be taken for granted. I am proud of us and the diversity of the group. As we continue to grow in numbers and strength, you'll definitely be hearing more from us. ♦

#### Author's Note

*To appease your piqued curiosity, the medical women drew with the lawyers 1-1 and then lost 5-3 on penalties – not a bad result after only one informal practice session as compared to a team that had had a year of practice.*

#### Legend

1. The lawyers (red) and doctors (white) after the inaugural alumni women's soccer match in August 2016

Priyanka is an R3 preventive medicine resident and the captain of the medical women's soccer team. If you're interested in being a part of the team or to support in any way, please do not hesitate to contact her at [rajendram.priyanka@mohh.com.sg](mailto:rajendram.priyanka@mohh.com.sg).

