

Maybe Baby

The Law-Medical Debate 2004

By Dr Somasundram Subramaniam



The stars of the show. (L-R) Mr Chelva Rajah, Ms Deborah Barker, Mr Adrian Tan, Mr Jason Chan, Dr Lucy Ooi, Mr Viswa Sadasivan, Prof Robert Beckman, Dr S Sreedharan, Dr Anne Tan-Kendrick, Dr T Umaphathi, and Dr Toh Han Chong.

On 15 October 2004, the Medical team squared off against the Law team at the Asian Civilisations Museum in the Rematch of last year's inaugural Law-Medical Debate, where the medical debaters were taken by surprise when their well-prepared factual arguments were trumped by the lawyers' resort to humour and irreverence, which was widely covered in the local media.

Schooled from their earlier loss, the doctors were back to beat the lawyers at their own game of comedy and under-the-table barbs loosely wound into a debate. This year, the Medical team was proposing the motion: "It is in the interests of the nation that doctors should produce more babies than lawyers."

During the pre-debate dinner and drinks, the audience was buzzing in anticipation, wondering if the lawyers were indeed better, or if they had, as the Proposition's Dr Thirugnanam Umaphathi, Chief of Neurology at the National Neuroscience Institute, claimed, "libelled, slandered and disparaged us to victory last year."

The debate was chaired by political commentator Mr Viswa Sadasivan. In his opening remarks, he declared that being from the media, he was "fair and biased" and expected the lawyers to win. That set the tone for the whole debate. The formidable Law team this year comprised two members from last year, as was stipulated in this year's rules, including litigator "Teenage Textbook" Mr Adrian Tan, and Senior Counsel Mr Chelva Rajah, former President of the Law Society. They were joined by Deputy Public Prosecutor Mr Jason Chan, the Best Orallist at the International Jessups Moots, and veteran university debater Senior Counsel Ms Deborah Barker.

The doctors came dressed for the occasion. Dr Umaphathi

AKA Uma Thurman the Bride, wore a bridal veil; paediatric radiologist Dr Anne Tan-Kendrick sizzled in an orange toga top; and oddest of all, one male debater came in a maternity dress to cover his bulging gravid abdomen. Dr Toh Han Chong, senior consultant at the National Cancer Centre, later explained the Medical team needed a skirt to avoid being caught again with their pants down, as they had been last year. The lawyers also came with props – each had a white "good morning" towel slung over their shoulders, presumably to show their child-rearing credentials, although they never clearly explained the metaphor once they found out that they were "out-propped" by the other team.

First speaker Dr Umaphathi wasted no time in asserting that the Medical team was back for revenge and planned to kill any bill the lawyers proposed. To "Kill Bill", he renamed himself Uma Thurman, donned a bridal dress and the Hattori sword before laying out the Proposition's case that doctors could afford the time to have a family, while lawyers were too busy upholding the law and contributing to the well-being of the nation.

Neither team, however, spent a lot of time discussing the motion and focused more on the anatomy and physiology of making babies, to the delight of the audience which chuckled roundly at the double-entendres-a-minute presentations. Dr Umaphathi argued that doctors were more familiar with reproduction and could even make test-tube babies. Lawyers, on the other hand, were famed for their oral abilities, but unfortunately, they "cannot produce babies by swallowing it!" This led to several almost serious mini-lectures from the lawyers justifying Singapore's legal stand on fellatio, with the



About the author:

Soma Subramaniam graduated recently and is a House Officer at the Department of Medicine in National University Hospital. His interests include reading, travelling and nowadays, sleeping, occasionally during ward rounds. He can be contacted at somatime@singnet.com.sg.

◀ Page 22 – *The Law-Medical Debate 2004*

Law team's final speaker summing up: "If you suck, you must!"

The next speaker for the Proposition, Dr Sreedharan, a medical officer at Singapore General Hospital, and the team's resident funnyman, abandoned the topic of the debate and decided on a more blatant means to winning – by trying to charm the well-endowed and neutral judge for the evening, the sassy Ms Aileen Wee. After paying tribute to her achievements, like her appearance in FHM magazine's Singapore's Sexiest Women, he proceeded to serenade her with a Mandarin song. The flirtation between the two was electric. Indeed, Dr Sreedharan brought the house down with his performance, which even the Opposition commended as world-class "sucking up".

The second speaker for the lawyers, Adrian Tan put forward their "three prong" approach, referring to himself and team members DPP Jason Chan and SC Chelva Rajah. He was brought up short by Dr Anne Tan-Kendrick: "Adrian, you can show me your prong if you want to, but it doesn't mean it will work!"

Clad in a striking belly-button-revealing outfit, Dr Anne Tan-Kendrick from Raffles Hospital was dubbed by SC Rajah as the "orange popsicle". Instead of melting under the heat of the debate, she coolly questioned if lawyers were really keen to have children, taking into account their long hours, physical and mental stresses. She went on to illustrate the effects of this burn-out and how doctors' eggs and sperm were superior to those of lawyers, using elegantly designed props.

*Lawyers, on the other hand,
were famed for their oral abilities,
but unfortunately, they "cannot
produce babies by swallowing it!"*

The Law team's third debater, and winner of the Best Speaker for the evening, DPP Jason Chan explained that doctors were too clinical in their approach to reproduction compared to lawyers' far more creative approach to life: "If its legal, keep doing it." That seemed to have tipped the judges over in his favour, although the audience's response was much more muted than their response to Dr Sreedharan.

During the audience round, despite being greatly outnumbered, the few doctors in the crowd were very vocal in countering the arguments of the Law team.

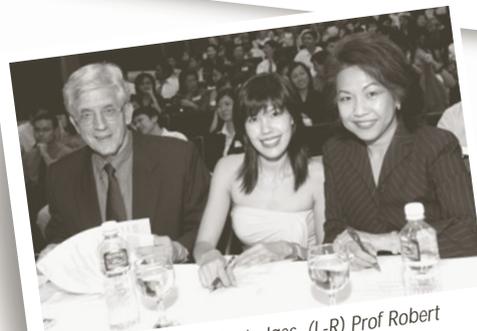
SC Chelva Rajah, the much awaited anchor speaker for the Opposition, delivered an entertaining rebuttal speech, firing humorous salvos at each of the doctors in turn. Most of his time, however, was spent making advances on Dr Anne Tan-Kendrick and Aileen Wee.

The final speaker for the Medical team, Dr Toh Han Chong, was outlandishly outfitted in a maternity dress and skirt, and clearly "pregnant". He carried on the consistent tone of the Medical team's argument by flattering the lawyers for working very hard and being very good at what they did, contributing invaluable to society, but suggested that they leave the procreation to doctors, who had more family-friendly work practices. He ended by dedicating the Abba song, *Thank You for the Music*, to the lawyers for all their good work to the nation, and the whole Medical team danced along in probably the closest the Asian Civilisations Museum was ever going to get to the hit musical *Mamma Mia*.

In the end, however, the judges, Aileen Wee, Professor Robert Beckman, Associate Dean of the NUS Law Faculty, and Dr Lucy Ooi from the Association of Women Doctors, ruled in favour of the lawyers. Nonetheless, they admitted it was a tough decision. From the chatter amongst the audience, many felt it could have gone either way. A member of the Law team was overhead saying to his wife that the Medical team had "kicked their asses" this time, unlike last year. In any case, both teams put up tremendously entertaining performances. Sadly, there were very few doctors in the audience to join in the fun while lawyers turned up in droves to support their team. Now that the hilarious Law-Medical debate may be an annual affair, we should book our seats early for the next stress-relieving and knee-slappingly funny installment of this wonderful tradition. ■



Bringing down the house - the audience never stopped laughing!



A tough decision for the judges. (L-R) Prof Robert Beckman, Ms Aileen Wee and Dr Lucy Ooi.