

They Won on
MEDICAL
JEOPARDY!
Internal medicine residents
take home national championship

It all came down to the final question. Using knowledge, deft strategy and — to hear the team say it, luck — three internal medicine residents from SIU School of Medicine triumphed as national champions of Doctors Dilemma™, also known as Medical Jeopardy. The annual competition is sponsored by the American College of Physicians (ACP) and was held during the national meeting of the ACP in Washington, D.C.

Residents Nishith Singh, M.D., Aparna Suryadevara, M.D., and Armine Tumyan, M.D., first won the state competition held in Urbana, earning the right to represent the Illinois Downstate Region of the ACP. Seven months later, Dr. Singh had a new team with Jacob Mathew, M.D., and Sudhir Hansalia, M.D., and the three battled against 34 other teams from institutions around the country during the three-day national competition in D.C.

The residents were a bit unsure of their chances in the intense contest. “We weren’t expecting to win,” says Dr. Singh. “We were going to have fun and get information to use next year.”

Their cat-like strategy was to lay low and observe the teams. “The key was to go for the buzzer at the right time,” says Dr. Mathew. Teams lose points for wrong answers, so the SIU trio carefully answered questions among topics as varied as the field of internal medicine: orthopaedics, pulmonology, neurology, cardiology, dermatology, otolaryngology, geriatrics, and more. Many of the questions dealt with complex and obscure diagnoses found deep in internal medicine texts.

“We were overconfident going in, and we thought we lost the first round because we weren’t looking at the scores,” Dr. Mathew says.

The turning point came on the third and final day when an overeager team from another institution pressed the buzzer before the moderator finished asking the question about diagnoses of rash and joint pain. “We had time to figure out the right answer: cryoglobulinemia,” recalls Dr. Singh.

“When we got that right, we realized we were in control of the situation and decided to go for it.” With renewed confidence and a crowd cheering them on, the team took more chances.

“It was all about teamwork,” Dr. Mathew says. “Each one of us pitched in at the right time. When one of us pressed the buzzer, the others were there to help.”

After two days of elimination rounds, the SIU team advanced to the “Final Jeopardy” question with 140 points, second only to Drexel College’s 210 points. The final question: What disease is associated with loss of vision in old age? “This was easy,” says Dr. Singh. The team confidently gave the correct answer: macular degeneration. SIU had courageously wagered all its points (“What did we have to lose?” says Dr. Singh). Drexel College guessed “atherosclerosis.” The SIU team became the national champion, complete with a trophy. “We were surprised that we won,” says Dr. Mathew with a laugh. “We couldn’t believe that we had defeated the big colleges.”

“SIU’s national championship showed that we are the best of the best,” says Susan Hingle, M.D., governor elect, ACP Illinois Southern Chapter. Dr. Hingle is an associate professor of internal medicine and serves as clerkship director and associate residency program director. “We couldn’t be more proud of our residents for this incredible achievement.”

Two members of the SIU team are on new journeys. Dr. Mathew transferred to the internal medicine residency program at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School to be near his family. “I consider having been part of SIU as one of my great achievements,” he says. Dr. Hansalia completed his residency in July.

Dr. Singh, now a second-year resident, led a new team at the local competition in October. Although they did not win this year, Dr. Singh is getting ready for next year’s competition, saying, “We will strike back.” Stay tuned. ●●●

Written by Karen Carlson