



This Team Is Medical Jeopardy State Champions: Who Is Drexel University College of Medicine?

"The condition where you see hemorrhage between myosites."

"What is cyclophosphamide-induced myocarditis?"

"Food poisoning within six hours of food consumption."

"What is Staph aureus?"

"Mortality from postpartum myocarditis."

"What is 10%?"

By correctly answering these rapid-fire questions, the Drexel University College of Medicine's Medical Jeopardy Team became Pennsylvania State Champions. The team advanced to the national competition, held in Toronto this past April, at the American College of Physicians' (ACP) annual Internal Medicine meeting.



The real story, however, may be that the College of Medicine is creating something of a legacy in this competition.

The 2009-2010 team consisted of internal medicine residents Petros Grivas, M.D., Ashwani Gupta, M.D., Krishna Rao, M.D., and alternate Gaurav Mathur, M.D. They were coached by chief medical resident Joseph Vadakara, M.D., himself a former team member, Mohammed Islam, M.D., and faculty members David Sass, M.D. and Allison Ferris, M.D.

Since 2007, the Drexel Medical Jeopardy team has won the highly competitive Southeastern Pennsylvania region. According to Dr. Grivas, this three-peat is a first in school history. Dr. Rao observed, "The most competition [comes] from Philadelphia." As Dr. Vadakara explains, "depending on the competition, we practice differently...the kind of questions they ask are different, mostly because Southeastern Pennsylvania is the hardest to win in the state.... Albert Einstein dominates the whole thing because they've won it twice. We have to prepare differently."

Although team membership changes every year as residents graduate, they have managed to create continuity and success by staggering the year-groups of members. The Drexel team has also greatly benefited from the experience of its coaches and faculty mentors. Dr. Rao, for example, is quick to credit Drs. Vadakara, Sass, Islam, and Ferris for the team's continuing success. He also explains, "One of the biggest advantages is that other team members have

already gone through the competition." Dr. Grivas, who will be graduating this year, states, "I tried to collect all this material, and I'm going to pass it on to my colleagues who have one more year, two more years. I'm going to be there for them if they need advice, counseling."

The Medical Jeopardy competition, formally known as "Doctor's Dilemma," is administered by the ACP. Local chapters of the ACP sponsor the tournament, and any institution with a residency program is eligible to participate, provided the team members belong to the ACP.

The format of the game is similar to that of the *Jeopardy* television show. Three teams compete against one another to quickly – and correctly – answer questions related to a variety of medical fields. Faculty sponsor Allison Ferris, M.D. says that the questions cover a wide range of knowledge, including medical history. The team members "all have different perspectives" and strengths.

To prepare for competition, the residents focus on different areas of knowledge and continually read and quiz each other. Dr. Rao, a team member for the past two years, agrees that the dynamic works. "Everyone on the team has their own credentials," he explains, "we complement each other." Every team member also mentioned "the folder from Dr. Sass" as a vital aspect of team preparation. The folder, guarded much like the "president's football", contains years' worth of common questions and jeopardy insight.

Besides the mastery of medical knowledge, Dr. Gupta also stresses the importance of strategy. "We concentrate on our buzzing speed," he says. "Most of the time the questions are not that difficult.... We try to concentrate on how to improve hearing and improve hand-eye coordination so you can buzz in fast." He explains that the question is read aloud, but once you buzz in, the question stops. "You have to be really, really careful with that, because sometimes there are so many options so you just have to wait for the exact [time]...."

The Drexel team is well aware of the importance of strategy in addition to knowledge.

In 2007, the team won regionals and states to advance to the national competition, held that year in Washington, D.C. Dr. Grivas, a member of that team, explains that they never expected to make it that far. "It was incredible, but we lost the last question. That's how we lost the national championship." Adding insult to injury, the Drexel team did have the correct answer. "If there happens to be a second correct answer, they'll only take what's written on the slide," explains Dr. Ferris, citing the example of a scientific name versus an eponym.

This past April marked the team's second appearance in the national championship in three years. They entered as three-time winners of the highly competitive Southeastern Pennsylvania region. The stage was set.

The team entered nationals with a huge amount of pride and competitive spirit. Dr. Vadakara, a member of the 2007 team, said that going to nationals again, even as coach, was "a great opportunity. The last time we went to nationals we didn't expect to be there. We thought we'd be eliminated in the first round, but this time I think we [were] a bit more confident about how we're doing. We [were] very excited about it. We should have won the last time, at least according to us."

Dr. Gupta attested that he was "really looking forward to [nationals]. When we started I never thought that I would be representing [us] in a national competition." He said that representing the state is particularly noteworthy since Pennsylvania is known for "a lot of good programs [and] very good residents." Dr. Grivas described the journey to nationals as "amazing," saying, "You compete at a very high level against teams that have the brightest people in the whole country." Dr. Ferris commented, "We're just very excited they [could] represent us and show their knowledge, because not only are these four guys great doctors, but they're great people. We're very, very excited that they [could] go and show off their skills."

Every team member echoed this sentiment of being proud to represent the College of Medicine and bring Drexel national recognition. They also stressed that while the competitions are intense and the preparation rigorous, it is also enjoyable. "It takes a lot of time," says Dr. Rao, "but it's been fun." In the same breath, Dr. Vadakara insists, "it's so competitive, and you don't want to lose any edge at all. It's fun."

The Drexel team, however, "lost the championship in the last question by one point," lamented Dr. Grivas. He continued, "Sometimes you hear one thing and you jump to answer it...for example, there was a question about multiple endocrine neoplasia syndrome, MEN, and we jumped in and answered about MEN Type I, but the question was about MEN Type II. So, despite being fast, we ended up losing the points. If we'd answered this question right...we could easily have won the game. It was that close." Despite the loss, he confidently asserts, "at that level I think it's nice just to get Drexel out there."

As a graduating three-year member of the team, Dr. Grivas insists, "From the beginning, I was honored to be selected to represent the team...it's an amazing process. The process was rewarding." Although the team did not win nationals, there have been other benefits to taking part, including, "knowledge, a good relationship with teammates, meeting people, and of course, getting some recognition at the end of it."

And, perhaps, the start of a legacy.