

EDITORIAL

LEARNING PHYSIOLOGY BY COMPETITION

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Every year for the last one decade Physiology students of many medical colleges around the globe and their teachers anxiously wait and laboriously prepare for annual Inter-Medical School Physiology Quiz (IMSPQ) in Malaysia. We have closely watched progress of this marvellous activity over the last few years. Our conclusion is that this quiz is a great learning experience for the Physiology students in participating universities.

The idea of this quiz was perceived at Department of Physiology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2003. The initial event attracted seven Malaysian teams. The trophy was named after a late Physiology professor of university of Malaya (Prof A. Raman). The number of teams and the number of countries represented at the quiz went on increasing with each passing year. By 2008 (6th Quiz) the number of teams exceeded 30, most of whom were from outside the Malaysia.¹ Likewise 53 teams from over 25 countries participated in 9th IMSPQ in 2011 and around 70 teams from over 25 countries are expected to participate in the 10th IMSPQ on 29–30 August this year.

University of Malaya in general and the staff as well as students of Department of Physiology at the Faculty of Medicine in particular put in a lot of effort into this activity. The hard work starts from announcement of dates for this two day event. It involves meticulous logistics and arrangements that includes but is not limited to worldwide advertisement, continuous updates on programmes, boarding and lodging, transport, arranging for prizes, giving protocol to teams and accompanying teachers, encouraging volunteers to help and so on. It is a job superbly done by University of Malaya from its own resources.

The quiz initially started as a one day event where teams were asked questions from all parts of Physiology before a live audience. However as the size of the competition grew the competition was expanded to two days. The first day being a written (MCQ) test from where the average scores of teams are obtained to rank the universities to various levels (rounds) of quiz scheduled for the day-2. The best scorers directly land in round-2 while the rest of the teams compete in the first round for empty slots in round-3.¹ However we are sure, that as the number of teams increases the management will have to screen teams on the basis of score in written test.

The most challenging part in preparation is developing hundreds of standard questions for the written test and different rounds of the quiz.¹ University of Malaya, Department of Physiology tries their best to make questions that test concepts or understanding of physiology rather than mere recall. They also ensure preparation of questions with equal difficulty for various rounds of competition. In order to be sure they appoint a panel of judges from teachers accompanying the participating teams to decide there and then if there is any objection on any question.

Physiology department of the College of medicine at University of Dammam, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been sending its team for the event for the last 3 years. Our brief experience is worth sharing.

In 2010 when we were introduced to this event, we announced the event and asked the students to come forward. Most of them were reluctant or not confident enough to volunteer initially. Then we made selection on the basis of our continuous (internal) assessment and final exam grades. We selected the top students and made a team of four students. This team was the pioneer from the Arab countries and the team members and accompanying teacher brought rich experience with them.

In 2011 the scenario started changing and many students volunteered. We had to arrange a special written test followed by interviews to select a team of four. This team did marvellously well and finished 4th amongst the 53 competitors. The result was this that in 2012 almost 25% of students and almost all of A and A+ students applied for selection. They started asking for 'selection for Malaysia team' from the beginning of academic year. The students were visiting the faculty throughout the year to seek guidance for preparation. We had difficulty in finalising just four names for our team due to many good students fairing very well in all our selection criteria, i.e., grades in continuous assessment, scores in written test and interview.

We report that the thrill of this competition has electrified our students and the proportion of students working for getting better grades in Physiology has definitely increased. They work hard to assure their place in the team and it is a healthy sign for our department. Another very important aspect is this that our teachers accompanying the team in their reports highlighted weaknesses of our

team compared to other universities. This has led to important adjustments in curriculum and teaching to compensate. We are sure that an on-going cycle of improvement has started in our department by virtue of this competition.

We are writing this editorial with two points in our mind. Firstly, we want to thank University of Malaya for providing the world of Physiology with this great platform. Secondly, with our example we want to encourage all the universities who have so far

not sent their teams in this competition to gear up. We assure you that participation in this event will encourage your students to work hard in Physiology. We believe that this very healthy competition has raised the bar for our students at University of Dammam and it will surely do the same for you.

REFERENCE

1. Cheng HM. Stimulating student interest in physiology: the intermedical school physiology quiz. *Adv Physiol Educ* 2010;34:20-1.

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