

*Answer: CU surgical residents Max Wohlauser and Akshay Chauhan won this in October*

# What is the International Surgical Jeopardy Finals?

*By Todd Neff*

*Strongly consider performing this procedure when ligating the right hepatic artery for trauma.*

Hmm.

What is cholecystectomy?

IBM's [Watson](#), much less Ken Jennings, would have had a heckuva time with that one. And heaven help Alex Trebek having to pronounce it. But so it goes in Jeopardy – in this case Surgical Jeopardy. That particular answer-question pair came from the University of Colorado School of Medicine preliminaries, under the topic “Stop the Bleeding!”



Unlike the syndicated version, which features solo humans (and the occasional supercomputer) facing off, Surgical Jeopardy contestants compete in teams of two. One CU School of Medicine pairing – chief surgical resident Max Wohlauser, MD, and third-year surgical resident Akshay Chauhan, MD – took their show all the way to Washington D.C. this year. On Oct. 9 they beat out 24 teams from as far away as Japan to win the international Surgical Jeopardy finals at the American College of Surgeons (ACS) Clinical Congress.

Richard Schulick, MD, who chairs the Department of Surgery, was among the 200 or so conference attendees looking on.

“Not only did we win, but we devastated the other teams,” Schulick said. “It was almost a little embarrassing to watch these guys do so well.”

Wohlauser, 34, had been to the big show before. He and then-partner Doug Benson, MD, had won the local CU Surgical Jeopardy competition (played during three different surgical grand rounds) and with their victory earned tickets to the 2011 ACS Clinical Congress in San Francisco, Calif. Twenty-four teams competed on the national stage, with the top four advancing to the finals, but CU wasn't among them that year.

Wohlauser could have been forgiven for returning home, working his 80-hour weeks, and calling it good.

No.

“We had something to strive for,” he said.

**Study up.** He needed a new partner, though. He got to know Chauhan, 37, whose experience includes a surgical residency in India, four years of performing surgeries in developing countries with the World Health Organization, and a transplant surgery fellowship at the University of Tennessee.

“We complemented each other's fund of knowledge,” Wohlauser said.

There are no Surgical Jeopardy primers. Wohlauser compiled a spreadsheet with a list of 76 topics he felt might appear on the

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Jeopardy grid. Next to each he entered an “a” or an “m,” depending on the assignment: Surgical History, m(ax); Surgical Instruments, a(kshay); Fluids and Electrolytes, a; Carcinoid Tumors, m; and so on.



*Akshay Chauhan, MD, left, and Max Wohlauer, MD, answer a question simultaneously during the Surgical Jeopardy international finals in Washington D.C. Oct. 9.*

“We never had a study group,” Chauhan said. Instead, they mostly studied on their own and peppered each other with questions when they happened to be in the same room, he said.

Many of the Surgical Jeopardy questions involve clinical issues a good surgeon should know anyway. “If you’re practicing for this, you’re practicing for surgery, right?” Schulick said. “These are all surgical topics that are relevant. Whether you learn them because you’re participating in this project or because you want to take better care of patients – the route may be a little bit different, but the endpoint is the same.”

But there was also an element of trivia involved. Wohlauer read through the American College of Surgeons website to glean a few names of past and present leaders and bounced around the Internet to bone up on the history of surgery.

**The main event.** The first of the six preliminary rounds kicked off at 8 a.m. in room 145 of the Washington Convention Center. Moderating was Surgical Jeopardy creator and CU School of Medicine graduate (’85) Mark Bowyer, MD, now with Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Md. The men representing his alma mater squeaked into the finals with a big bet on the last answer of final jeopardy. Chauhan framed the question: “What is multiple endocrine neoplasia 1?”

In the final round, Wohlauer and Chauhan then faced residents representing the top-four finishers: the University of West Virginia, the University of Washington, the University of Kentucky and the University of Toledo.

“Max’s fingertip was on the buzzer and my fingertip was on top of his finger,” Chauhan said. “We had a very clear understanding: if you hear the buzzer and you don’t know the answer, you lose the points. Either you know it or you don’t do it.”

**What is...** At Final Jeopardy, the CU team held a solid 1,300-point lead. They wagered enough that if they got the final answer right and the second-place team did the same, the CU team would come out on top. The question was, roughly: “This neurosurgeon and former American College of Surgeons president was also Nancy Reagan’s stepfather.”



*Wohlauer and Chauhan with their Surgical Jeopardy victory plaque.*

Bowyer asked the room for a show of hands among those who knew the answer. Just four arms rose, one being on the platform up front.

It was Wohlauer’s.

“Who is Loyal Davis?” Wohlauer said.

“The College of Surgeons has a book called ‘A Century of Surgeons and Surgery,’” he explained later. “I glanced across it somewhere and locked it away. He was ACS president from 1962 to 1963.”

"I never thought, 'I'm going to win the Jeopardy contest,'" Chauhan said later. "That morning we woke up, Max was like, 'Let's win the plaque.'"

They won the plaque. Demonstrating mastery on such a public stage was good for them, and not bad for the CU Department of Surgery, either.

"Does this increase the prestige of our program? Absolutely," Schulick said.

Wohlauer's Surgical Jeopardy days are behind him. He finishes up his residency in June.

Chauhan seems as determined as Wohlauer was two years ago.

"I want to get it back two more times," he said.

## Surgical Jeopardy: Good Luck

Here are a few of the questions from the CU rounds of Surgical Jeopardy, which Max Wohlauer and Akshay Chauhan won in January to qualify for the national competition (answers below).

- 1) A scaphoid fracture often presents with pain here, so-named from the use of this surface for placing and then sniffing tobacco.
- 2) Fracture of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, or 5th metacarpal neck.
- 3) Presenting symptoms of trauma to this region may include dyspnea, subcutaneous emphysema, hemothysis and/or stridor.
- 4) With a palpable carotid pulse, the blood pressure can be estimated to be at least this.
- 5) Cyclosporine and Tacrolimus inhibit synthesis of this cytokine.

Answers:

- 1) What is the anatomic snuffbox?
- 2) What is a Boxer's fracture?
- 3) What is the voice box (larynx)?
- 4) What is 60 mmHg?
- 5) What is IL-2?