

Very Vocal Nurses



RN singing group from Minneapolis-St. Paul changes song lyrics into medical parodies

By Debra Anscombe Wood, RN

Four Minneapolis-St. Paul-area nurse anesthetists spend their days administering anesthesia. By night they incite laughter with their clever medical, musical parodies.

"Most of the people think the stuff is pretty funny, and it's a fun thing to do," says Gary Cozine, CRNA, chief anesthesiologist at WestHealth Surgery Center in Plymouth, Minn., and one of the founding members of The Laryngospasms, a singing group.

The all-nurse group crafts new lyrics to familiar songs, such as "Little HMO," sung to the tune of "Little GTO," and "The Little Old Lady With Her Fractured Femur," harmonized to "The Little Old Lady From Pasadena."

It all began in 1991 as a party gag while he was in nurse anesthetist school, says Cozine. He and a few classmates came up with new lyrics for "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do," and changed the lyrics to "Waking Up Is Hard to Do." The song remains one of the band's most popular hits today.

One of the older students at the party saw the act and invited The Laryngospasms to sing at graduation. From that point on, word spread to state and national anesthesiologist organizations and beyond. As the original members graduated, the group recruited new members. The current members of The Laryngospasms have performed together for 10 years.

"It has changed for us over the years," says Rich Leyh, CRNA, staff anesthesiologist at Lakeview Hospital in Stillwater, Minn., explaining that in the early days the band accepted more local gigs. Nursing and medical conferences now dominate the schedule and give the guys an opportunity to travel.

"People like it and can relate," says Keith Larson, CRNA, of KAPA anesthesia services, a company that provides anesthesia services in the Twin Cities metro area. "I think healthcare people understand it."

The CRNAs practice at different facilities in the Twin Cities region and get together in the evening a couple of times a month to write new material and rehearse songs and dance steps. Most of The Laryngospasms also sing part time solo, with bands, with barbershop quartets, or in musical theater.

"We're pretty good singers, but it's the comedy act that makes it," says Doug Meuwissen, CRNA, chief anesthesiologist at Woodwinds Hospital in Woodbury, Minn., and a veteran of the Persian Gulf War, Operation Desert Storm. "It has taken us all over the country."

The Laryngospasms entertained at the American College of Surgeons outgoing president's dinner in October in San Francisco. They tweaked some of the lyrics before performing before 10,000 nurses at the American Perioperative Registered Nurses Congress in Anaheim, Calif. In the spring, the group will sing for orthopedic surgeons at the Arthroscopy Association of North America's annual meeting.

"The best success is with nurses' groups," says Meuwissen. "Maybe it's because we are nurses, too."

The men collaborate to develop new material. Leyh says he tends to select readily recognized tunes and tweaks the chorus, sometimes using a rhyming dictionary to find the right word. Sometimes he finds inspiration while working as a nurse.

"We all think of songs and write words," Larson says. "It's a compilation, working together to make it funnier."

With good songs and ideas, the medical lyrics start to flow, adds Meuwissen.

The group has produced music videos, available at YouTube.com and www.Laryngospasms.com, and two CDs. In 1994, the first CD, "The Laryngospasms," had 15 mostly anesthesia-related songs. In 2002, a second album, "Paradise," featured 13 numbers with a broader medical focus such as "Your Bill Isn't Right" sung to the tune of "In the Still of the Night." The men hope to record another CD this winter.

"Nurses are unique in that we are willing to poke fun at ourselves," Cozine says. "I never thought my contribution to the anesthesia art would be The Laryngospasms, but I guess there are worse things."

To contact the group, visit www.Laryngospasms.com and e-mail them through the Contact Us button.

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