

## News

### **Student group supports stem cell research**

by Wendy Withers  
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Stem cell research may be a nationwide issue, but on Monday, it found its way on campus.

Outside the MLK Plaza, about 15 students gathered to raise awareness and emphasize the importance of stem cell research and the possibility such research may lead to a cure for paralysis and other debilitating conditions.

The Student Society for Stem Cell Research (SSSCR), an organization founded at USF in August 2003, sponsored the event.

Marion Riggs, who founded SSSCR and is now the director, said the event was held in honor of actor Christopher Reeve, who passed away last year. Many believe that stem cell research could have helped save his life.

“Reeve gave a lot of people inspiration and hope,” Riggs said. “He was also a strong supporter of stem cell research. It’s something that we will do every year on Oct. 10 to remember Christopher Reeve.”

SSSCR President Shirley Dejarano is using the vigil and other events as a way of educating the public about stem cell research.

“I feel that people oppose stem cell research because they’re not fully aware of what the methods can do and how they use the stem cells in research,” Dejarano said.

On Monday, the SSSCR will host speaker Juan Sanchez-Ramos, a professor in the Department of Neurology, who admits that while a great deal of controversy surrounds the issue, he isn’t going to dwell on that aspect of the research.

“Most of the stuff I talk about is not controversial at all,” said Sanchez-Ramos, whose research deals with adult stem cells found in such areas as bone marrow and the brain.

Federal research grants are available for using adult stem cells, he said.

Sanchez-Ramos believes that embryonic stem cell research is a hot-button political issue that is not as important as stem cell research as a whole.

He said people can be so closed-minded to the issue that they won't pay attention to the facts he presented in articles and papers. Sanchez-Ramos said he has even received hate mail.

“I wrote an article about taking stem cells from bone marrow and forcing them into neurological cells,” Sanchez-Ramos said. “Most of the time I'm talking about stem cells found in bone marrow, the brain or hair follicles in adults. Using stem cells is equivalent to killing babies for some people.”

Sanchez-Ramos said he understands that members of the general public will be closed-minded, but he hopes that college students will come to his lectures with an open mind.

He said embryonic stem cells by themselves couldn't make a human being. However, he believes that the ethical questions should be asked by the donors themselves, whether it be the donor of an embryo or an organ donor.

Dejarno, meanwhile, questions a medical practice in use today.

“There are about 40,000 test-tube babies that are thrown away every year,” Dejarano said. “They all have potential to be babies, but instead of throwing them away, you can use them to cure people. I don't understand why they waste these stem cells when you could use them to save lives.”

Sanchez-Ramos said that stem cell research is a long way from producing cures to medical conditions.

The members of SSSCR don't let that deter them from their mission. They believe the future will bring advances in the medical field through stem cell research.

“Paralysis is a condition that a few years ago a cure or treatment wasn't possible,” Riggs said. “Looking at the technology available, we have the potential to cure it in the future. One of those technologies is stem cell research.”

Riggs said his goal was to see someone in a wheelchair walk because of his

activism. He said he hopes his activism will continue research and further advances in the medical field.

Many of the attendees cited that they wanted to help make the world a better place. Riggs said that would happen when people open their minds to new sciences and advances that weren't thought of as possible in the past.

Riggs said stem cell research should be supported because of its potential to cure paralysis and medical problems. He recommended that students contact their representatives if they care about the issue.

“We believe that if American ingenuity and science can get a person to the moon, we can get a person out of a wheelchair,” Riggs said. ■