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# Vigil aims to raise stem cell awareness

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The Student Society for Stem Cell Research will hold a candlelight vigil today at 7 p.m. in the W.M. Keck Center for Collaborative Neuroscience on Busch campus to honor the legacy of Christopher Reeve, who died in 2004.

Reeve, renowned for his film portrayal as Superman/Clark Kent, was paralyzed during an equestrian competition in 1995. After his accident, he became a spokesman for the Spinal Cord Injured community and a vocal supporter of stem cell research.

Rutgers College senior Ajar Kochar, who founded the SSSCR at Rutgers last year, said the group will hold the event to remind the community of Reeve's mission.

"Christopher Reeve started a movement and passed the baton of responsibility to all of us: patients, advocates, students and researchers," Kochar said. "It is thus our duty to continue forward until we clear all political and scientific obstacles to find a cure."

The event will feature a performance by the rap artist ProfessirX, who suffers from a spinal cord injury, and a speech recitation written by Dr. Wise Young.

Young, a professor at the University, earned numerous accolades including TIME magazine's Neuroscientist of 2001 and was named one of the "Best and Brightest" by Esquire Magazine in 2005. He was also on the team that discovered Methylprednisolone as the first effective treatment for spinal cord injuries.

Patients treated with Methylprednisolone gain about 20 percent motor recovery compared to patients who do not receive the drug.

The speaking portion will be held at the W.M. Keck Center for Collaborative Neuroscience. Then, the event will move outside to the Nelson courtyard to light candles in honor of Reeve and others with spinal cord injuries.

Joe Riggs in August 2003 founded SSSCR on the National level, which has since become an international organization.

"The purpose of the organization is to foster relationships between students interested in stem cell research so they can become the next generation of scientists to drive forward the field," Kochar said. "In order for the field to progress, however, political obstacles must be overcome."

SSSCR takes a very comprehensive approach to stem cell research, Kochar said.

"It is not just about the science - there are profound political, ethical, and legal implications," Kochar said.

The SSSCR of Rutgers hosted a Stem Cell Conference last year at the University. Members of the society presented Gov. Richard J. Codey with an award for his contributions to advancing stem cell research in New Jersey. Among the panel featured at the event were Congressman Rush Holt, New York Times writer Gina Kolata, Young, and John Hopkins University professor Dr. John Gearhart.

"The purpose of our organization at Rutgers is to foster networks between highly-interested students, to encourage discussion and catalyze political change," Kochar said.

SSSCR members from Rutgers and other chapters, as well as members of SCI community in New Jersey, will be in attendance. The event is open to everyone in the New Jersey area who would like to pay tribute to Reeve and his cause.

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