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A Special Project of the Genetics Policy Institute

Student Society for Stem Cell Research

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- [Home](#)
- [About SSSCR](#)
- [Chapters](#)
- [Membership](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Media](#)
- [Library](#)
- [Opportunities](#)
- [Take Action](#)

SSSCR is an international network dedicated to the advancement of scientific research for cures.

Media

- [SSSCR in the News](#)
- [TV & Radio](#)
- [Press Releases](#)
- [Editorials](#)
- [Inquiries](#)

"It is very tempting to give up, yet we have to find the will to keep going. But even when we discover what motivates us, we realize that we can't go the distance alone." - Christopher Reeve

SSSCR in the News

Student supports stem cell amendment

By Derek Simons
UNews
September 18, 2006

UMKC students Jeff McCaffrey, founder of the Student Society for Stem Cell Research (SSSCR), and Simon Khagi, SSSCR president, want you to vote yes to Constitutional Amendment No. 2 on the state ballot Nov. 7.

The amendment would protect embryonic stem cell research that is permitted under federal law against state legislative initiatives by its opponents.

McCaffrey's reasons for supporting the amendment are clear. Due to a spinal cord injury, he is confined to a

wheelchair and he wants to walk again. He also believes that possible cures from the research could benefit millions of other people.

To mobilize the UMKC student body to vote, the SSSCR will promote initiatives in the coming weeks aimed at better informing students about this complicated issue.

Adult stem cells are defined as multipotent, meaning that they can give rise to a small number of different cell types. Embryonic stem cells are pluripotent, meaning that they can give rise to any type of cell in the body except those needed to develop a fetus, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The capacity of stem cells to divide and replenish other cells is considered crucial to curing many medical conditions. Adult stem cells, being limited in the types of other cells they can replicate, are not nearly as useful as embryonic stem cells.

Yet some opponents still characterize embryonic stem cell research as human cloning or even killing fetuses.

"Those are sound-bites aimed at uninformed voters. The amendment actually bans any form of human cloning as well as imposing the highest ethical standards of control on the research," said Khagi. "It is a completely non-partisan issue. It is about giving life - not taking it away."

But the opposition has been enough to make Kansas City's Stowers Institute for Medical Research, a leader in stem cell studies, reluctant to move forward with a planned \$250 million expansion plan until the legal situation is clearer.

"Without guarantees, Stowers could just simply move to California," said McCaffrey. "Last year, in Jefferson City, when it reached the point of having to put a 7-year-old diabetes patient on the witness stand to fight legislation, we said, 'Enough. Missourians should decide if they want lifesaving cures.'"

There are many associations pushing for the passage of this amendment, but the SSSCR is the first student organization in the Midwest to have formed. It is offering support to the Missouri Coalition for Lifesaving Cures.

Besides helping spinal cord injury victims, stem cell research is aimed at helping those with Parkinson's disease, heart disease and a host of other problems.

"If you chose 25 UMKC students at random, probably 24 of them would have someone close to them who could benefit from this research," said McCaffrey.

Embryonic stem cells would function as a sort of repair system for the human body. They are taken from the blastocyst, the mass of about 30 cells formed in the first few days of an embryo from in vitro fertilization, according to the NIH. They are not derived from eggs fertilized in a woman's body and are only donated for research after the informed consent of the donor.

McCaffrey and Khagi are confident that the amendment will pass as long as students, who statistically have a low voter turnout, can be mobilized.

For more information, the NIH Web site at <http://stemcells.nih.gov/index.asp> offers complete answers regarding medical and legal matters.

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