

Attention: ■

22 October 2010

## **ALERT: Ballerinas en pointe to raise \$1 million for spinal injury research**

Ballerinas from the Queensland Ballet will mark the start of a campaign to raise \$1 million for spinal injury research by Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and the Princess Alexandra Hospital - home to the state's only Spinal Injuries Unit.

The inaugural Spinal Injuries Research Ballet Gala will be held on November 4 at the Queensland Ballet, Thomas Dixon Centre in West End - and will also mark 50 years of operation for the Queensland Ballet and the Spinal Injuries Association.

The dancers will present excerpts from their repertoire, some works-in-progress and exciting new creations from emerging choreographers.

Funds raised will boost \$1 million already granted by the Queensland Government to the Queensland-Canada Spinal Cord Injury Alliance - a joint initiative of QUT and Canadian researchers.

Chief Alliance researcher, QUT's Dr Ben Goss, said researchers would compare Canadian and Queensland health systems to identify options to speed up retrieval and treatment of patients with spinal injury, which could mean the difference between complete and partial paralysis.

"The research will highlight key differences in care delivery to spinal cord injury patients, identify 'bottlenecks' to timely and effective treatment, and promote learning of excellent clinical care practices in Queensland and beyond," Dr Goss said.

"We will track patients with injured spinal cords, their treatment and clinical outcomes with a view to improving the delivery of quality care.

"An additional \$1 million would allow up to three new researchers to join our team testing new therapies, fine-tuning system responses and preparing for future clinical trials.

"We are half-way funded and must match this support to sustain momentum over the next three years."

Dr Goss said the research which could benefit from the funding boost aimed to regenerate or repair spinal cord nerves by preventing secondary injury - which is known to enlarge the damaged area.

"This is an alternative to stem cell research. Inflammation needs to be managed before further treatment is applied. I believe this is the first step to achieving a cure and we are progressing well in our research," Dr Goss said.

Event organiser and Director of Trauma at the Princess Alexandra Hospital QUT Professor Michael Schuetz said research conducted by the Alliance was vital for reducing the long-term effects of a spinal cord injury.

"We know that the first few minutes/hours after an injury are the crucial window for treatment that can improve the person's chance of regaining function," Professor Schuetz said.

Professor Schuetz said he hoped the Spinal Injuries Research Ballet Gala would become an annual event and applauded the partnership with Queensland Ballet.

Former ballerina Katie Franz sustained a spinal cord injury in a car accident when she was 16 and says she is optimistic Queensland researchers can achieve a world breakthrough.

"About 300 Australians a year sustain spinal cord injury and may benefit from research being done now to improve medical processes," Ms Franz, now a 30-year-old mother-of-two, said.

"A century ago the chance of surviving this injury was as low as one in five. Thanks to research and medical advances, nine out of 10 people who are injured now have a future."

Queensland Governor Penelope Wensley and patron of the Spinal Injuries Association and the Queensland Ballet will attend the Spinal Injuries Research Ballet Gala. Representatives of the Canadian Rick Hansen Institute will also attend with local and national spinal injury physicians, surgeons, clinical and social support workers.

To make a donation to the research or enquire about gala tickets, please contact the Spinal Injuries Association on [enquiries@spinal.com.au](mailto:enquiries@spinal.com.au) or visit the event website at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/pahospital/ballet/>

Interview and photo opportunities

**What:**

- **Ballerina en pointe in medical research laboratory**
- **QUT spinal injuries researcher Dr Ben Goss**
- **Spinal injuries research advocate Katie Franz**

**When: 9am, Monday 25 October**

**Where: Meet at reception, Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation, corner of Musk Ave and Blamey St, QUT Kelvin Grove campus**

**Interview: Dr Ben Goss, +61 7 3138 6239 (QUT)**

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