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Dog recovering after stem cell treatment

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By: Donna Swicegood | Statesville Record & Landmark Published: February 04, 2012

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Many years ago, Susie and Tom Wiberg nursed one of their dogs through hip surgery.

The dog went through a long and extensive recovery period and the surgery cost more than \$7,000.



Credit: Photo by Donna Swicegood

When the newest addition to their canine family, Douglas, began limping a few weeks ago, the Wibergs knew something would have to be done, and they knew surgery might be the only way to heal Douglas' problem.

Susie Wiberg's dog Douglas underwent stem cell therapy. The cells were harvested from the dogs own fat tissue and injected back in to treat his hip dysplasia. Hip dysplasia is when the hip socket is abnormally developed and cause severe crippling and painful arthritis of the joints.

Wiberg said she didn't want to put Douglas through the surgery if it could be avoided, and when she learned that a local vet, Dr. Robert McCurry, was performing stem cell procedures on animals with osteoarthritis, she and her husband opted for that procedure.

With stem cell therapy, the recovery time is much less and much less costly - about \$1,800.

McCurry, who owns Iredell Companion Hospital in Statesville, said the procedure involves removing fat from Douglas' abdomen and, after converting it to a liquid form, injecting it into the affected joints. In Douglas' case, that meant both of his hips and both of his knees.

The Wibergs are self-described animal lovers. They have dogs and horses, and when they lost their beloved Australian shepherd last year they knew they wanted another dog for themselves and their dog, Bruce.

In August, they spend a couple of weekends looking at dogs at several adoption fairs. When they walked into the Humane Society of Iredell's building in Mooresville one Saturday, they found Douglas.

"Our eyes met across a crowded shelter," she said.

Douglas was approximately five months old and soon he headed home with the Wibergs.

Then, just a few weeks ago, Wiberg said, she noticed Douglas was limping. After a lifetime of owning big dogs, she knew what that meant.

"I was not surprised," she said, when her vet said it was osteoarthritis.



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She spoke to someone at the Humane Society, and they told her about McCurry and the stem cell treatment he began performing late in 2011.

Last Tuesday, Douglas became McCurry's 12th patient to receive the stem cell treatment.

The procedure began with sedation being administered to Douglas.

Once he was unconscious, Douglas was put on an oxygen mask and monitor, and then McCurry made an incision in the center of Douglas' abdomen – about the same spot used when a female dog is spayed.

McCurry extracted a small container full of fat from his abdomen and turned it over to vet tech Elaine Kelly.

Kelly then took the fat, mixed it with a solution and then put it into a machine which converts the fat into a liquid.

Meanwhile, Douglas was awakened from the sedation and placed back into a kennel to rest.

By that afternoon, McCurry and Kelly brought Douglas back into the procedure room and administered another dose of medicine to make Douglas comfortable for the remainder of the procedure.

With an oxygen mask covering Douglas' muzzle, McCurry injected the now liquid fat cells into both of the dog's hips and knees.

Kelly explained that the stem cells would attach to and repair the affected joints.

By 4:30 that afternoon, Douglas headed home with a relieved Susie Wiberg to begin his recovery.

Some of the 11 other dogs he has performed the procedure on are doing well. Since it's been only three months since performed the first procedure, long term results are not known, but McCurry said, the 11 dogs are doing much better.

"Ninety percent of the dogs showed definite signs of improvement," he said.

One dog, he said, had been in so much pain that the muscles in his leg had atrophied.

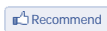
Now, he said, that dog is doing better, and is undergoing rehabilitation to deal with the muscle atrophy.

Because of Douglas' youth, the Wibergs opted to have McCurry extract extra fat calls to be stored in the event Douglas needs the procedure again in the future. If he does, McCurry said, the toughest part of the therapy – sedating the dog and performing the extraction – will not be necessary.

The cells will be stored by MediVet America for a one-time storage fee.

For Wiberg, there was never a question about providing Douglas with whatever he needs to recover.

"For Tom and me, our dogs are our babies and we'll do whatever it takes," she said.



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