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Stem-cell therapy for dogs in pain? Money well spent, owner says

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By Sue Thoms | The Grand Rapids Press

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Veterinarian James Kelley inspects where Boris has been shaved and where he will inject the stem cells into his joints Tuesday, Dec. 13, at Kelley's Animal Clinic in Walker. The clinic is the first in the area to use stem cell therapy on animals. (Katie Greene | The Grand Rapids Press). (Katie Greene | The Grand Rapids Press)

[Boris Receives Stem Cell Therapy](#) gallery (19 photos)

After an 11-year-old dog named Boris **underwent stem-cell therapy treatment**, his owner said the \$1,500 procedure will be "money well spent" if it brings the animal relief from painful arthritis in its hips and knees.

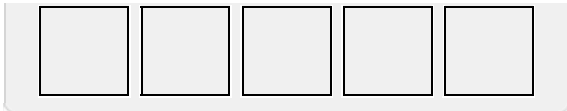
"It's a lot of money, no doubt about it," said Paul Bultinck, "But the dogs become one of your family. If you can swing it, you do. A loved one in your family certainly takes a very high priority."

He plans to have the same procedure performed next week on Boris' sister, Natasha.

Boris, an 80-pound Chow mix, made

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local history Tuesday when he became the first dog to receive a new form of stem-cell therapy from a Walker veterinarian, **Dr. James Kelley**.

Kelley is the first in the area to perform the treatment in-clinic using technology developed by **MediVet-America**, a Kentucky-based company that uses the treatment on horses, cats and dogs. It involves injecting the joints with adult stem cells that have been removed from the animal's fat.

"They take the properties of whatever they are injected next to," said Bob DeWitt, a spokesman for MediVet. "It helps the body heal itself."

If all goes as planned, Boris should be able to move with little or no pain in about two months, Kelley said.

"I'm very optimistic about it," said Bultinck, the owner of Grand Rapids Metaltek. "I hope this will help his hip dysplasia."

Boris was an active dog in his younger years, but has been moving much slower in recent years, Bultinck said. He no longer runs or jumps much, and climbing stairs is a challenge.

The dog takes anti-inflammatory medications and undergoes soft-tissue laser therapy every three weeks. Natasha, who has suffered from arthritis even longer, had surgery on her hip about five years ago.

Kelley said he invested \$12,000-\$14,000 into the equipment and materials to process the stem cells. He said the \$1,500 charge per treatment is "reasonable."

"The studies go out three years now, and the animals, after three years, are OK."

Bultinck said if the treatment succeeds and he can discontinue the laser therapy and medications, he could save money in the long run, he said.

The stem-cell therapy is a multi-step process that began about 9 a.m. when veterinary technicians withdrew blood from the dog's jugular vein. Then, it was put under anesthesia, a patch of fur was shaved from its shoulder, and Kelley removed about a half-cup of fat from under the skin.

The fat was processed with an enzyme to remove the stem cells, which were activated with light treatments. In the afternoon, the stem cells -- less than 2 millimeters -- were mixed with plasma from the blood sample and injected into the dog's hip and knee joints.

In case repeat treatments are needed, Kelley said MediVet-America will cryogenically freeze samples of stem cells that can be injected at a later date.

He said he was excited about the new procedure because osteoarthritis is a common problem for dogs, especially large, active ones. Some cats also suffer from arthritis, although it is less common, he said.

The therapy is being tested for other medical conditions, including diabetes, bowel disease and allergic skin reactions, he added.

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
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
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karinmaxim

December 14, 2011 at 1:04PM

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