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## Dogs receive first in-clinic stem cell therapy in Triangle

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By KEITH UPCHURCH

kupchurch@heraldsun.com; 419-6612



DURHAM – Tucker is a lucky dog – and a pioneer.

The 7-year-old Labrador retriever is lucky because he has owners who spent \$2,000 Friday for stem cell therapy at Triangle Veterinary Hospital to give him relief from painful arthritis.

Tucker was one of two dogs to get what is believed to be the first in-clinic stem cell therapy in the Triangle.

The procedure was performed by veterinarian Chuck Miller, who expects Tucker and his other stem cell patient – an 8-year-old German shepherd named Tobo with hip dysplasia and degenerative joint disease – to regain a much higher quality of life.

It was the first time Miller had done the procedure, and he's glad to be a pioneer.

"All great things have to start somewhere, and this is really exciting," Miller said. "It's great to have a new therapy that is relatively affordable, is minimally invasive and has very few complications. It's not going to be a cure for everybody. It's not the fountain of youth. But it gives us another therapy with minimal risk that can help a lot of arthritic animals."

As Tucker lay across the operating table, Miller expertly removed fat from his side. The stem cells were then separated from the fat during a three-hour procedure at the hospital on Old Chapel Hill Road. They're then activated with a laser-like technology, and platelet-rich plasma is added. The technology was pioneered by MediVet-America, based in Kentucky.

The final step was to inject the stem cells back into Tucker's arthritic joints – both elbows and knees and his left shoulder.

Stem cells then zero in on the body's inflamed areas.

"I like to think of them as healing cells," Miller said.

It's not certain yet if the stem cells regenerate tendons and cartilage "because this is so new."

Miller said there's a good chance that the inflamed joints will be improved dramatically.

"And who knows what the other applications are going to be?" he said.

One thing Miller likes about the procedure is that all cells that go into an animal's body were taken from it, so there's no moral controversy about stem cells taken from embryos.

Miller said it should be clear in about a month if the procedure worked.

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“Some people have said that there’s a 96 percent increase in these animals’ comfort,” he said. “It’s a huge potential for improvement.”

Tucker’s owner, Jarrod Lichty of Leesburg, Va., and formerly of Durham, watched every minute of his beloved dog’s operation Friday with his wife.

“After hearing about stem cell surgery, I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity,” Lichty said. “I’m hoping that in a couple of weeks, he’s better than he’s ever been.”

“He’s an amazing dog,” he said. “Nothing bothers him. He’s always wagging his tail.”

Tucker and Tobo were able to leave the hospital the same day as the procedure, and will be monitored daily by the hospital.

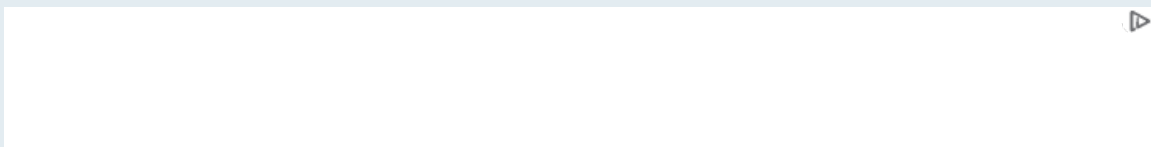
As for the future, Miller expects to treat more animals with stem cell therapy.

“This is just the tip of the iceberg,” he said. “That’s why this is so fascinating. Regenerative medicine is such a new science. It’s going to be really far-reaching.”

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