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# Stem cell therapy aims to ease pain for veteran's best pal

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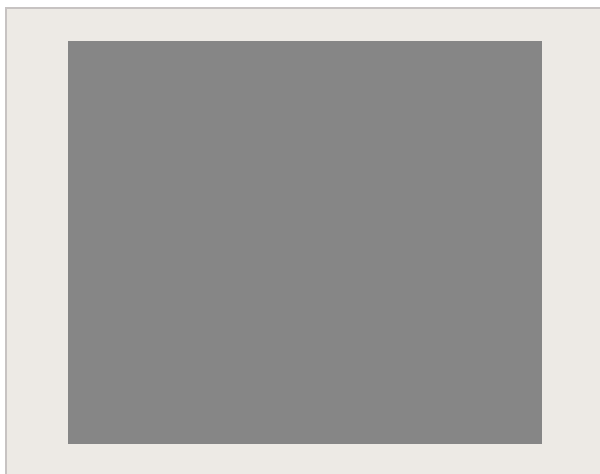
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BY LANA DOUGLAS - LDOUGLAS@NEWSOBSERVER.COM

DURHAM -- A Durham veterinary clinic on Friday performed the first in-house, same-day animal stem cell therapy in the Triangle.

For Sam Wilson, 35, his German shepherd Tobo is more than just a pet. She's family.

After Wilson, a captain in the Army, returned from a seven-month tour in Iraq on Aug. 15, 2003, he was a mess.



"I was just kind of mad a lot," Wilson said. "After a couple of months out there, I started getting very disillusioned."

Wilson was angry about friends killed in the war. He had nightmares about the people he saw suffering, including Iraqi children.

About four months after he returned, his wife, Kris, handed him a newspaper with advertisements for dogs circled.

"I guess my wife just knew what I

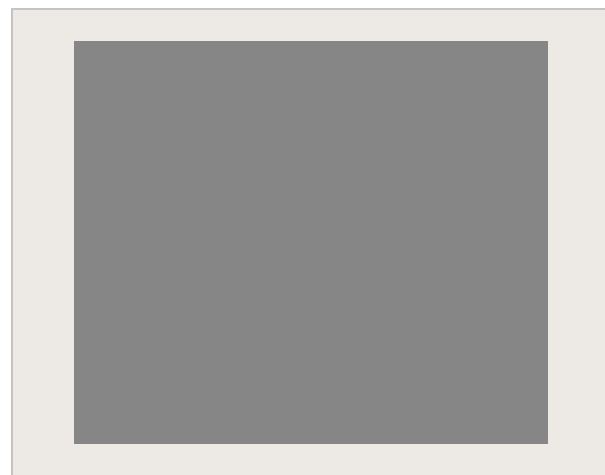
needed," Wilson said.

No matter what Wilson did or how much he yelled, Tobo would always love him back.

"I began to realize what type of person I was being, and I didn't want to be that type of person," Wilson said. "I think only a dog can teach you something like that because they are the only ones that can take that kind of treatment and still love you."

"Tobo and my wife were the ones that got me through all that (anger). They kind of put me back together again."

Wilson works in Research Triangle Park as a clinical trial contractor and has another German shepherd and two other dogs.



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Sam Wilson says Tobo helped him resolve his postwar anger.  
LANA DOUGLAS -

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When Tobo was just 3 years old, it became harder for her to go on runs with Wilson. Now 8, she has hip dysplasia and degenerative joint disease.

"I want her to not be in pain all the time," Wilson said.

Tobo has undergone several surgeries, taken medication and therapy to help manage her pain.

Wilson hopes the adipose-derived stem cell therapy will help Tobo regain some of her mobility. "Any margin of improvement would be worth it to me," he said.

The procedure includes removing a few tablespoons of fat from the animal, mixing it with enzymes to break it down, spinning it in a centrifuge to separate the stem cells from fat, mixing the stem cells with plasma-rich platelets derived from the animal's blood and activating the cells in the LED machine.

The cells are then injected into the sites causing problems.

"The stem cells take on the properties of any cells they are injected next to," said Bob De Witt, spokesman for MediVet-America.

The procedure takes about three hours from the first incision to the injection of stem cells.

Within a month to six weeks of the treatment, Tobo should have increased mobility with little to no pain, De Witt said.

Tobo was one of two dogs treated Friday. The other, a 7-year-old Labrador retriever from Virginia named Tucker, has arthritis in his legs.

The treatment has a 94 percent success rate with improvement in animals' gait, strength, range of motion and pain, De Witt said.

The treatment costs about \$1,800 for dogs and cats and about \$2,400 for horses.

MediVet-America, based in Nicholasville, Ky., launched this procedure commercially in April 2010.

"These animals are just like our kids," said Dr. Chuck Miller, the veterinarian who performed Tobo's procedure Friday at the Triangle Veterinary Hospital.

"It's great to be able to help them," he said.

Tobo was sore and resting at home Friday evening.

Wilson looks forward to seeing her relax and back to her usual self.

"I just want to see her enjoying herself," he said.

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