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Walker vet using stem-cell therapy to treat dogs and cats with arthritis, joint problems

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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)



GRAND RAPIDS -- An 11-year-old dog named Boris with severe arthritis in his hips and knees is making local medical history today by being the first to undergo a new form of stem-cell therapy by a Walker veterinarian.

Dr. James Kelley said he hopes it provides relief for the 80-pound Chow-mix dog, which has suffered with hip dysplasia and painful joints for about five years and has been treated with an array of medications.

"It's probably the best thing I've done in my 40-year career," Kelley said. "It's actually regenerative. It's not just a pain reliever."

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-America. "It helps the body heal itself."

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

The treatment is a multi-step process that began about 9 a.m. at Kelley's Animal Clinic when veterinary technicians withdrew blood from the dog's jugular vein. Then, he was put under anesthesia, a patch of fur was shaved from his shoulder, and Kelley removed about a half-cup of fat from under the skin.

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

Kelley, who invested \$12,000-\$14,000 into the equipment and materials to process the stem cells, said he charges \$1,500 per treatment.

"I think that's reasonable," he said. "The studies go out three years now, and the animals, after three years, are OK."

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.

E-mail Sue Thoms: sthoms@grpress.com

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Good job by Dr. Kelley.

One of the primary goals of medicine is to relieve pain and suffering.

This therapy appears to do just that.

Hopefully we will all live to see the day when similar therapies are commonplace for humans.

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Dr. Kelley and the members of his practice are our vet staff. We have been through a lot with them, including when we had to put our 15 year old Shepherd mix down a few years ago. They knew how hard it was for us to make the choice for our boy, and they truly felt our pain. They are totally professional and get the fact that pets are a true part of many families. It would take an awful lot to convince us to even think about going to another vet office. Our chow/lab mix gets lots of attention when we show up for shots and regular care, the vet techs are second to none! Thank you Dr. Kelley and to all your staff for taking such good care of our pets!

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