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Kinnelon vet spreads word about stem cell therapy

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SUBURBAN TRENDS

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Vaia McGinnity doesn't expect her rescue dog Smith to regain the pep of a puppy, but she is hoping that this past week's stem cell therapy will end the pain of arthritis and spring him into daily walks again.

"I'm definitely curious to see how it will all turn out," said McGinnity, who described roughly 10-year-old Smith as "on the mend" after the stem cell regenerative procedure on Wednesday.

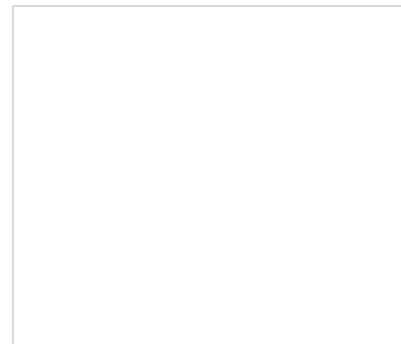
McGinnity lives in Orange County, N.Y., but traveled all the way to Park View Animal Hospital in Boonton for Kinnelon resident Dr. Malathy Rao to give her 90-pound mixed breed a burst of his youthful vigor.

She had been tracking progress of stem cell therapy over the Internet for the past year but only recently did the procedure fall into her price range.

"He's my number-one little buddy," said McGinnity of why she was willing to invest \$1,800 for the procedure that Dr. Rao says means a better quality of life for animals suffering from arthritis, degenerative joint disease, and tendon and ligament injuries.

Adult animal stem cell technology uses the body's own regenerative healing power to help cure dogs, cats, horses and other animals suffering from these ailments and more. According to the Mayo Clinic, stem cells are the body's raw materials – cells from which all other cells with specialized functions are generated.

In an interview Thursday, Dr. Rao said she is trying to



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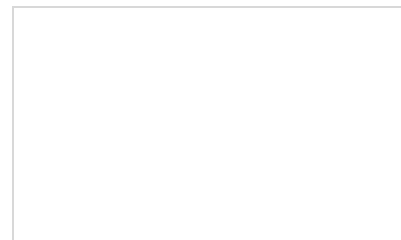
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get the word out to pet owners that this procedure is getting good results especially in the treatment of arthritis-type ailments.

"People do not know it is out there," she said.

Since March, Dr. Rao has performed five procedures and said she just had to get involved after seeing how animals were making tremendous recoveries.

"Oh my God, the results were just so brilliant. Stem cell therapy has really taken off in the last year," said Dr. Rao.

While not extending the length of an animal's life, a successful procedure can lift away most of the pain.

"You can see it in their eyes," Dr. Rao said of how animals are responding to this particular drug-free technology being pioneered by MediVet-America, based in Kentucky.



Dr. Malathy Rao, a Kinnelon resident, offers stem cell therapy for animals at Park View Animal Hospital in Boonton.

Within about two months of the procedure, Smith should be moving well, with little or no pain.

For Smith the procedure on Wednesday started at about 9:30 a.m., and one of the first steps was drawing fat tissue from behind his shoulder blade and then separating stem cells from the fat tissue. All this occurred while Smith was under general anesthesia at the Park View Animal Hospital.

"We also draw some blood to mix the plasma with the stem cells," said Dr. Rao. Over several hours, the fat is processed and enriched with platelet-rich plasma and other life-extending factors designed to "potentiate the effect of the stem cells." The mix is also subjected to photo-bio-stimulation, which "excites the stem cells and makes them more active and ready to replicate themselves," she said.

The final mix is then injected into the affected joints, where hopes are that it will create new bone and cartilage. In Smith's case, he had significant arthritis in his hips, knees, and elbows, which meant six needles in all.

Dr. Rao and other veterinarians embracing this stem cell procedure like that the injections can be prepared right on scene and that days no longer have to be lost by sending the stem cells to California for preparation.

For pets and their owners, this means that the whole procedure can be done in a single day at the vet's office, whereas in the past the animal had to return for the injections.

Smith was scheduled for the procedure from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Wednesday. The next day he was "sore" but "on the mend" McGinnity said.

Jacqueline Bednarski of Boonton took Ella, her Labrador/shepherd mix, to Dr. Rao for the stem cell procedure back in May and "she's doing great."

Originally a shelter dog who had broken a leg, Ella was only 7 years old when she started showing early signs of arthritis accompanied by a lot of limping and an uneven gait, Bednarski said.

In deciding on stem cell therapy, she said, "We thought we'd rather give her a better quality of life. We decided to give her the best chance."



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Now Ella can freely climb the stairs and has more energy. She no longer has to take medication for pain.

The biggest challenge was limiting Ella's mobility once she started feeling better. She noted that Ella was restricted to slow walking for four to six weeks so the stem cells had the optimum chance to work.

Dr. Brian Voynick, a spokesman for the New Jersey Veterinary Medical Association, agreed that stem cell therapy has come a long way since he was the first in the nation to begin offering this procedure in 2005 at American Animal Hospital in Randolph. With costs coming down and the convenience of a same-day procedure, he expects that more doctors and patients will be turning to it as a treatment for ailing animals.

In fact, he said that the applications for this technology have gone from horses, cats and dogs to include even camels and birds. In addition, while it is a "home run" with arthritis-type ailments, it could also benefit cats with kidney disease, dogs with chronic active hepatitis, and other animals with inflammatory bowel disease, and these applications are now under study, he said.

"I think it's great. It's very natural. It's the body healing itself," he said of stem cell therapy.

Dr. Rao also commented on how since the fat and blood comes from the animal itself, there is no chance of the body rejecting these substances as it could with a separate donor.

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