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Posted: Aug 09, 2011 5:25 PM PDT



Gunther

By Michael Peppers

ROCKFORD-WREX

Doctors in Rockford perform an experimental procedure on a four-legged patient to improve its mobility.

Hillcrest Animal Hospital in Rockford is one of four locations that offer animal stem cell therapy. On Tuesday, their main patient was a search dog named Gunther.



Doctors cuts the scar tissue from Gunther's leg

"It's hard to have a big dog that's used to doing things and can't," Dr. Kari Kobus of the Hillcrest Animal Hospital.

"You want to jump in the truck and the legs don't work. You want to climb back on the couch and the legs don't work."

Dr. Kobus is also Gunther's owner. The 8-year old German Shepard is part of a search and rescue team that operates out of Illinois and Wisconsin. He's had trouble doing his job because of a condition in his back-right leg.

"He's got what's called a Fibrotic Myopathy where you actually got scar tissue in the tendon in the muscle," said Dr. Charles Wimmer.

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Dr. Kobus, Gunther's owner

Wimmer and other Hillcrest surgeons cut a one-inch piece of scar tissue and injected the area with stem cells from Gunther's own fat. Other stem cells were injected intravenously. Doctors hope the cells will stimulate new muscle and tendon growth. While it's still experimental, they say they've seen progress before.



Dr. Charles Wimmer

"We've seen tremendous results with stem cells," said Dr. Wimmer. "Almost every dog, in fact every dog that we've done has improved."

Hillcrest Animal Hospital has done twelve such procedures since May. While Kobus is optimistic Gunther will get better, she's hoping the procedure will improve the lives of other police dogs whose careers get cut short.

"They're very expensive, very valuable and very important animals," said Kobus. "If we can get them back into service, it's going to be an amazing addition to therapy for these conditions."

The pet organization Medivet is helping Dr. Kobus with the expenses for the therapy.

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