

## Veterinarian clinic offers alternative

Dog's cells used to regenerate tissue

By Heidi McKinley, correspondent

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Until recently, the only treatment options for animals with degenerative tissue disease were pain relievers and anti-inflammatories. Eastern Iowa Veterinary Specialty Center, however, soon will offer a promising new alternative.

“The typical drug therapy doesn’t solve the problem,” said veterinarian Bob Harman, CEO of the company Vet Stem. “It just reduces the inflammation.”

Harman’s company has partnered with EIVSC, which is in Cedar Rapids, to use an

animal’s own cells for healing. This therapy is presented to owners as a way to regenerate tissue more naturally.

“We’re not using foreign (cells). We’re not killing babies. We’re not using embryos. We’re not doing any of the stuff you see on ‘60 Minutes’ and CNN,” Harman said. “We’re going to use the dog’s own natural cells.”

The process involves harvesting a sample from a pet's fatty tissue, concentrating the cells in a lab and then injecting them back into the joint. The average dog will go 18 months to two years between therapies.

Stem cell therapy is most commonly used to treat arthritis; however, future applications could be used for possibly fatal diseases such as kidney failure, immune system malfunction (for example, dry eye) and traumatic injury.

The clinic's motivation to offer the service came from the case of a 12-year-old sheltie/collie mix named Yurtie.

Yurtie is the first and only patient to receive stem cell therapy at the clinic. Jan Erceg adopted her after her previous owner, Kevin McClain, died from lung cancer in 2011. McClain had been living out of his car when Erceg, a paramedic, was dispatched to take him to the hospital. One of the dying man's last requests was for his dog to be taken care of, and Erceg has honored that request.

Last April, Erceg said she noticed something was wrong, after Yurtie stopped eating. The dog's loss of appetite turned out to be a symptom of chronic kidney failure, for which there are few options other than transplantation.

"I knew that if I was going to do anything at all I needed to go on a search to find an option for her. And my first thought was stem cell therapy," Erceg said.

She learned of Harman's company, Vet-Stem. It arranged for Yurtie to receive her first treatment at the Animal Medical Center in New York. For Yurtie's second round, Erceg found a clinic closer to home that was looking to add stem cell therapy to its services. Erceg's prompting got results.

The clinic hopes to offer stem cell therapy as a normal service for different kinds of arthritis, tendon and ligament issues, muscle tears and cartilage damage.

Erceg said the progression of Yurtie's kidney disease seems to be slowing and may have stopped.

"Five days after her infusion I started seeing changes," said Erceg. "Her appetite returned, her energy level has increased dramatically, I'd say back to normal. Her hair coat has filled out. She looks like a different dog."

So far there is no set pricing for the new therapy because they are still in the process of setting up to offer the service. People interested in finding out more for their pets or setting up possible future appointments can contact Heather Peck at the clinic, 755 Capital Drive SW, or call (319) 841-5161.