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In-house stem cell therapy plays emerging role in animal care

By: Ed Scannell

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GREENSBORO - It's used to treat a broad range of ailments in humans and stem cell therapy also is showing growing promise in the treatment of animals. Doctors at University Animal Hospital have performed stem cell therapy in-house for less than a year but say the cutting edge treatment is producing remarkable results and restoring quality of life.

Eight-year-old Haley was in a lot of pain last February, suffering from severe degenerative arthritis in her knees and dysplasia in her left hip. These days the senior shepherd mix is a different dog.

"And now she's just about back to normal," said Margo Freibott, Haley's owner. "She goes up and down stairs. She runs in the yard with the other dogs. She plays Frisbee just in three months time."

Haley is one of nine dogs who've received stem cell therapy at University Animal Hospital, the first

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veterinary hospital in the Triad to perform the treatment. Dr. Christine Hunt begins the procedure by extracting fat cells from a ligament below the belly button.

"It takes 3 1/2 hours to harvest the stem cells from the fat and then we re-anesthetize and inject those concentrated stem cells intravenously and in any affected joint," said Hunt.

The practice's Dr. Catherine Markijohn looked to stem cell therapy as an alternative to medications for her 8-year old Pembroke Corgi "Riot." She believes that over time stem cell therapy will play a larger role in the treatment of animals.

"We're able to do more than just mask pain," said Markijohn. "We're able to treat the source of it where we couldn't always before."

While stem cell therapy most often has been used to treat painful conditions, it produced an unexpected benefit in Teresa Craig's Pomeranian, Indiana Jones. "Indie" developed Alopecia X and lost its coat on the rear half of his body.

"His hair started growing back in, so, that was a real visual that the stem cells were actually working," said Craig. "He wasn't just having a feel-good day."

Freibott said stem cell therapy had been life-changing for Haley.

"It's been a miracle for her," she said. "Absolute miracle."



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