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### Wound-healing therapy promising, not proven

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#### Document Text

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Cape Coral's Ed Herlund didn't want his lower right leg amputated. After four years of bandaging a bloody gash on his shin, doctors told him he had no choice.

Just as he was preparing for life with one leg, Herlund agreed to use his own blood for a new wound-healing treatment.

Platelet-rich plasma therapy, which channels the healing power in a patient's blood to speed recovery, healed Herlund's wound in three weeks.

"When they pulled the dressing off, I stood there and cried. I couldn't believe the results," said Arlene Herlund, Ed's wife.

PRP, which has been used by a growing list of professional athletes, is making its way to Southwest Florida clinics. Fort Myers' Institute for Orthopaedic Surgery & Sports Medicine has been practicing PRP for eight months and a new Fort Myers laboratory is conducting research.

Doctors say the method can revolutionize sports medicine and orthopedics by eliminating the need for more aggressive and expensive treatments such as surgery. But doctors also caution that more rigorous studies are necessary before the therapy can emerge as scientifically proven.

"PRP has become a very interesting new treatment in sports medicine and all of orthopedics," said Dr. Allan Mishra, an assistant professor of orthopedics at Stanford University Medical Center. "Data is now emerging that it's useful for certain things but maybe not for everything."

Dr. Brian Halpern, a sports-medicine specialist at The Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, said PRP has helped his patients restart the healing process in tendons, ligaments and joints.

#### Quick procedure

The procedure, which takes less than an hour, is designed to kick-start the body's ability to heal itself with few side effects.

PRP involves taking a small syringe of blood from a patient's body, spinning it in a centrifuge to isolate the platelets - which act as healing agents - and injecting the richer plasma into the injured area.

PRP isn't covered by most insurance companies, but it's considerably cheaper than surgery. PRP costs about \$2,000 - compared to \$10,000 to \$15,000 for surgery.

Professional athletes such as golfer Tiger Woods have undergone PRP. Woods did it to

accelerate his recovery from reconstructive knee surgery.

"But it's not just for professional athletes," Mishra said. "More importantly, this can be used for the weekend warriors and the aging athletes who want to stay in the game."

Mishra has published results showing that 90 percent of patients who are facing surgery for chronic tennis elbow improved with PRP. Another group conducted a randomized trial comparing PRP and cortisone shots, and found that those treated with the former had less pain.

"But not all PRP is the same," Mishra said. "The type of PRP used in the (study) had five times the level of platelets in it. So when somebody goes into their doctor's office, they need to ask their doctor if the PRP he's using is backed up with data."

John Kiwczak, 50, of Sarasota had PRP done on his right shoulder to heal a nagging rotator cuff injury.

"I got one injection and within 48 hours the pain in my shoulder was gone," Kiwczak said.

Too much hype?

Some skeptics say that PRP is overhyped. Others doubt its effectiveness.

Bill Snyder, 66, of Fort Myers disagreed. He had PRP done on a pressure induced ulcer on his big toe. Snyder said the ulcer was 1-inch deep and had been bothering him for a year.

Three weeks after one PRP injection, Snyder said his wound was "completely filled up" and healed.

"Anybody who says this stuff doesn't work is kidding themselves," Snyder said. "It heals like nothing I ever saw."

Ryan Brandt, the president of Fort Myers-based Orogen Biosciences, said Growth Factors are a better solution than cortisone for nagging tendon injuries.

"Cortisone shrinks inflammation, but after a while the pain comes back because cortisone doesn't repair the injury," Brandt said. "We're finding that growth factors do."

Brandt's company, which opened its laboratory on Metro Parkway a year ago, has treated racehorses from around the nation. He is developing a patented protein matrix he hopes can perform regenerative medicine.

Brandt's matrix entraps the blood's growth factors and creates a synergistic spot for the platelets to build upon and heal.

Dr. Gary Nelson at Cape Coral's Viscaya-Prado Veterinary Hospital, used Brandt's protein matrix PRP on 12 injured dogs. The PRP came from a blood bank of healthy dogs, Nelson said.

"I've had several orthopedic cases where dogs healed, without exaggeration, in three-quarters of the normal time down to half the normal time," Nelson said. "Dogs that were not healed after two months were healed in three to four weeks after the application of this product."

Nelson stressed that Brandt's Canine product is in its early trial studies.

Brandt, who started researching the field 9 years ago, is excited about the future.

"The possibilities are endless," he said. "From orthopedic surgeries to treating diabetic wounds to healing sports injuries to hair restoration, PRP can help in a lot of ways."

Mishra, the Stanford professor, agreed.

"We're just beginning to understand how to use the body to heal itself," he said.

Pros and cons of PRP

#### PROS

- \* Cheaper than surgery in most cases.
- \* No chance for allergic reaction because substance comes from one's own blood.
- \* Doesn't leave a scar.
- \* Shorter recovery time than surgery.

#### CONS

- \* Platelet-rich therapy is a new process with few published studies showing its effectiveness.
- \* Insurance doesn't cover the procedure. An injection costs about \$2,000.
- \* A 2009 Netherlands study of 54 randomized patients showed that PRP didn't decrease the pain in people with chronic Achilles' tendon injuries.

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#### **Abstract** (Document Summary)

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