

The Mexican Stem Cell Adventure

Part 1: Searching for a Cure

By: Robert Genetski

At an early age, I was fortunate enough to learn one of life's most important lessons—experts don't always know what they're talking about. While I have not found any area where this isn't true, I find it particularly prevalent in healthcare.

I've always loved sports and enjoyed exercising. I've played almost every sport there is. While I was never much of an athlete, I could spend an entire day trying to pitch a curve ball, sink baskets, kick a soccer ball or swing a golf club. For thirty years I've regularly practiced Tai Chi.

My first experience with a health issue came in my late 20s during a routine checkup. I told the doctor my elbows felt sore. He told me it was the beginning of arthritis and if it became too painful he could prescribe medication for the pain.

This didn't appeal to me. I assumed any soreness or pain was a signal from my body that something was wrong. Taking pain medication would be akin to killing the messenger. I would be telling my body I didn't want to hear about the problem. Giving my condition a name didn't tell me what was causing the problem. It appeared my doctor either didn't know why I had the problem or what to do about it.

A year later someone recommended a chiropractor who specialized in applied kinesiology—the use of muscle feedback techniques to diagnose health problems. He used this technique to find the location of various knots in my arm muscles. After several weeks of painful massaging to break up the knots, the muscles were back to working as they should. This apparently took the pressure off the elbows. He told me if the soreness in my elbows returned, I could feel for any soreness in my muscles and massage the knots to get them working again. I asked what would have happened if the knots had not be broken up. He said it would eventually have resulted in severe, painful arthritis which I would have to live with.

I now have severe arthritis. Instead of in my elbows, it's in my knees. Several years ago I had to stop playing basketball, soccer and even jogging because my knees felt weak and weren't able to stand the impact. Until this past summer I was able to play golf. However, the knees became progressively worse. I began experiencing occasional sharp pain. Three months ago, my left knee became swollen and I had difficulty walking.

An orthopedic doctor took x-rays confirming his diagnosis—severe arthritis, bone on bone and loose cartilage. He said both knees would get progressively worse and I would soon need a total knee replacement for each knee.

I had read a great deal about stem cell therapy and asked if he thought it might be an alternative to replacing the knees. He said absolutely not. There is no evidence we can regrow bone or cartilage.

I had done enough research on stem cells to know doctors had been reporting encouraging results in restoring bone and cartilage. However, I also found many were attempting stem cell therapy without proper training, without proper stem cells and without the strict processing of stem cells that is necessary for a successful treatment. In other words, there were a lot of charlatans in the stem cell field.

I was determined to find out as much as I could about the therapy. My hope was to raise the odds of successfully restoring my knees without surgery and knee replacements.

I found there were doctors in the US who were reporting significant success with their approach to stem cell therapies. There were also reports of stem cell success outside the US.

One of the stem cell leaders in the US is a company called Regenexx. What impressed me was how this company sent all their data on every patient to an independent organization to compile data on the extent of success for different types of stem cell therapy. Up until 2015 their success rate for knees is about 60%, which was the most successful of all their stem cell therapies.

There are other US stem cell doctors in the US and Mexico, who have websites with video testimonials from very satisfied stem cell patients. Unfortunately, none of these appear to report their success rates. Also, in almost all cases I have encountered, the stem cell therapy involves the use of the patient's own stem cells. These cells are usually taken from the patient's hip bone or other areas. They are processed in various ways and then implanted into the knee by an injection. Reported improvement ranges anywhere from little or no improvement to a complete recovery.

Last November I was in San Jose del Cabo, Mexico and met with Barry Russell, a businessman associated with a company called PRMedica, which gets stem cells from a laboratory in Guadalajara, Mexico. Barry introduced me to Dr. Victor Ocegueda, who has been involved with stem cell therapy for many years. Dr. Victor (as we call him) examined my x-rays and my knees. When I asked about his success rate for repairing knees he told me it was around 90%. However, he also told me success depends on how much damage has been done. If the knee is too damaged, it cannot be repaired. He also looked for those in good physical shape. If the person was 82 years old, overweight and a heavy smoker, he was not likely to be a candidate.

Following an initial diagnosis, he told me my left knee not only had bone and cartilage damage, it was close to being bone on bone. In addition, the ligaments were badly frayed. His analysis of both knees appeared far more thorough than any other doctor I had seen. In spite of the damage, Dr. Victor said he believed stem cell therapy would work. He believed I would need an injection of 50 million stem cells in my left knee and 25 million in my right knee. He was confident the right knee would be as good as new. The left knee would improve, but he was uncertain as to the extent of the improvement.

He said the first step would involve a series of blood tests to make sure I did not have any serious diseases or other medical conditions. He said as good as the stem cells were at repairing damage to the body, if there is a serious disease, they can act to accelerate the disease and the person would not be a candidate for treatment.

Assuming I passed the blood tests, Dr. Victor would begin by injecting an implant of stem cells into my belly to prepare my body to make better use of the stem cells designed for healing.

The final therapy would involve taking a lot of my blood (I didn't ask how much "a lot" would be). My blood would then be mixed with the stem cells. He intended to use an ultrasound to guide him in injecting the stem cell-blood mixture to the precise places in the knees. He expected to be able to get by with one injection into each knee by shifting the needle from the cartilage area to the ligaments. The procedure itself will take only a few seconds for each knee.

I told him I would consider the treatment and returned to the US. As my knees became progressively worse, I was inclined to look further into Dr. Victor's success. I asked for references and was given the email addresses of three patients, two of whom responded. Both were accomplished businessmen. Each had been treated about a year ago. Extensive talks with each of them confirmed seemingly miraculous recoveries.

The first patient was a Canadian with a severe knee problem. He was in a great deal of pain and a year ago had come to Cabo using a cane to walk. He told me how two weeks after his therapy his x-ray showed an eighth of an inch gap in his knee. It had previously shown bone on bone. The cartilage was regrown, all pain was gone and his knee continued to feel great almost a year later.

The second patient, a US owner of a State Farm business, had severe back problems. He was becoming addicted to pain medication and his doctor said there was no other alternative. His therapy was so successful he has taken a number of others to Dr. Victor for treatment. All of them had similarly miraculous recoveries.

These testimonials, along with a success rate of 90%, led me to arrange treatment with PRMedica and Dr. Victor. This is in spite of them not having a website or other means of publicity. My wife and I flew to Cabo on January 14th. We meet with Barry and Victor at their clinic the following morning to begin my Mexican stem cell adventure.