

LASER FOCUSED



BY SARAH MCNEAL, PATTERSON VETERINARY

Meeting Dr. Billy Kowalski is to meet a driven veterinarian, committed not only to patient health but also helping fellow veterinarians. If you've attended one of Patterson Veterinary's Guiding Practice Success events, you've likely seen Kowalski, AKA Dr. Billy, during the panel discussion, where doctors share their stories of building a new practice and answer questions from attendees. Hosted by Patterson Veterinary for new practice clinics, the events are three days and take place on both coasts. It was while attending one of these events that Kowalski set the goal to be on the panel one day.



And he is.

This kind of laser focus is the kind of energy he put into his Harbor Springs Vet, opened in 2019. Harbor Springs Vet is near Tampa, Florida, and is a state-of-the-art practice, equipped with cutting-edge technology and techniques, with the goal of ensuring his patients are happy and healthy throughout all stages of their lives.

Laser therapy helps make that goal a reality.

"We opened the practice in 2019 as a new practice, from scratch. And at that time, I was already very familiar with Class 4 laser therapy. I had been using it in the two other practices I'd

worked at before opening my own practice," Kowalski said.

"It was a no-brainer to put a Class 4 therapy laser into our budget for new practice equipment. I did demo the three major or top players and I'm really happy with the choice of going with Cutting Edge laser." With intuitive features like preprogrammed protocols, an ergonomic handpiece that incorporates two overlying laser sources and covers a two-centimeter target area, and a large optical system that focuses them and transmits maximum synergy, the Cutting Edge laser means optimal delivery to irradiate the muscular trigger points simultaneously and evenly.

USED DAILY

When asked what types of issues the Cutting Edge laser treats, Kowalski didn't hesitate. "Everything that's not cancer. We'll use it on surgeries. There are non-oncology surgeries, meaning non-mass-removal. We're going to use it on all our spays and neuters, cystotomy, our implants. For orthopedic surgeries, the Cutting Edge lasers are one of the only ones that I'm personally aware of that can be used over orthopedic hardware – plates, screws and pins. Others will cause extreme heat and damage to those bones and surrounding tissues. We use it on any infected ear cleaning that we're doing here because it's going to decrease pain and inflammation at the time of the appointment. We also use it on all of our hotspots or lick granulomas. Same thing – instant pain and inflammation turnaround."

Clients see immediate results. "It's really cool to be able to show an owner, 'Wow, look how less red this is compared to when you got here 20 minutes ago.'"

Even cats can benefit.

"We use it on cats – they sometimes have urinary blockages. We use it on anal gland repairs, anal gland



abscesses, edema cases. We had an edema case yesterday where a dog had some edema in one of its legs just from the way it was laying. And we're able to see a significant reduction in edema – about 90% reduction after the first laser treatment yesterday. Came back in today for another one and definitely going in the right direction."

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Kowalski says the unit paid for itself within the first year or so.

"I've worked in clinics where certain things are prohibitively expensive to clients. I would say we skip that gap; we just built laser into our treatments. We built it into every surgery that we do, every dental that we do. It's not a line-item charge, it's just included in those packages, which is just a different way to look at it," Kowalski said about return on investment.

"It's like you can't opt out of it because it's not going to save you any money. And that's mostly the reason people opt out of procedures at the clinic," he continued. "So same thing, if we're going to do a wound care in a hotspot, it comes with laser, so we charge accordingly, but we don't have a different price for not using it. So that I think allows us to use it more without having to upsell or upcharge for what we're doing. We're just providing a better product for the cost that it would've been otherwise."

"One of the big concerns I think a lot of veterinarians have when choosing equipment would be, what's my return on investment? What's that ROI as our CPAs and financial advisors call it? We all know dentals are a really big revenue stream for veterinary practices. But a lot of people ask

me when I'm at these Patterson conventions – why? Why do I like laser so much? And obviously we've talked greatly about healing abilities and reducing pain and inflammation."

Getting the equipment to pay for itself quickly is something else Kowalski talked about. "I don't remember the exact number that we paid for our Cutting Edge laser in 2019, but I can tell you that we've run the numbers in the past and it was paid off within about a year, a little maybe just over a year of opening the practice. And mind you, we opened the practice in 2019; we opened in November of 2019. COVID was in early 2020, so things were off to a p-r-e-t-y slow start for us when we opened."

EASY TO LEARN, EASY TO USE

One of the other things the team at Harbor Springs likes is that the CE laser is easy to learn and quick to use, so no one minds taking a few minutes to use it.

"It's really quick, very tech light when it comes to how long it takes to use a Cutting Edge compared to the some of the other ones I've compared it to in the past. I can tell you in my practice nobody complains about using the laser because it's so fast. They're just like, 'Yeah, I've got three minutes, let's go laser that dog's ear real quickly' or 'I've got five minutes, let's go do that knee.' And something that truly sets apart Cutting Edge is the time and involvement from technicians. I've never had any pushback versus other lasers in the past because it's like 30 minutes wrestling a big Labrador – nobody wants to do that. But if you can do it in under five, that's huge."

Continued

EXPANDING LASER THERAPY

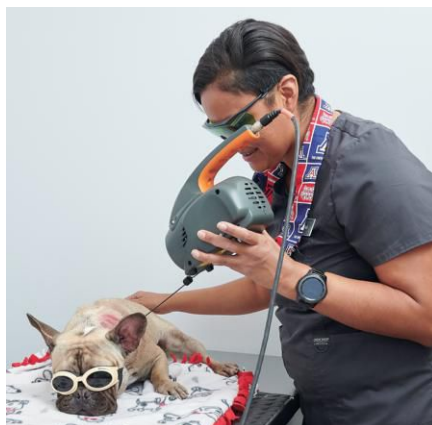
Harbor Springs Vet recently brought in Cutting Edge Class 3B lasers for clients to use at home. They can either purchase them or rent them. It's ideal for patients who can't come in twice a week for treatment.

"We're doing Class 3B lasers right now, which are Cutting Edge. The clients that have them love them. We also do a rental program; we have one out for rental right now with a Labrador that's too difficult to bring in after surgery. So he is renting it for two weeks to use at home on his incision and on his hardware in his knee. We've got a couple more on order, which I'm excited to see when they come in and we can continue to have people be able to laser at home."

"It's definitely not a replacement for the Class 4 laser, but it's a really good in-between if that makes sense. I think it's really cool the technology's available to decrease pain and inflammation now at home. There's a lot of other lasers on the market that are not Cutting Edge, that don't have that proven wavelength for pain."

The Class 3B lasers have a proven wavelength for home treatment without having to meet the government regulations the Class 4 demands.

"Now that we actually have real ones available with proven wavelength technology, I think that's going to be a big change in 2025 to just up our level of care even higher."



USING IT FOR OLDER DOGS

Kowalski cites two dogs, Tiger and Sam, when asked if any particular cases stand out.

"Tiger, a 10-year-old dachshund, was just not doing well. We ended up diagnosing him with some severe disc disease in his back that was leading to his inappetence and grumpiness and things like that. The owners knew that the dog had a pretty severe heart disease at that time and said they didn't really want to put him through an anesthetic event. So we opted for medical management with laser therapy using Class 4 laser and despite the dog getting older, the difference was significant in how much better Tiger felt when we started using the Cutting Edge laser. We have an IVDD setting on that laser. That dog never got back surgery, but he lived for over four years with severe disc disease in a lot more comfort. And I don't think that he would've been around for even a month or two if it weren't for laser."

The side benefit to repeat laser therapy? Kowalski became good friends with the owners! The sessions are 10 minutes, but frequent, so vets really get to know their clients.

"Just visiting with them, even though the laser appointments were only, you know, five, 10 minutes long when he would come in. It was just seeing them so regularly that we were able to really bond with these people. And to me I think that that bond that we have with our clients and in getting their pets better is strengthened with laser, which is pretty cool."

The other standout case hits a little hard for Kowalski. It's his own dog. "The most near and dear to my heart and I'm going to try and stay composed during this, but my own black Lab, that I got in undergrad at the University of Missouri. Sam Dog Kowalski, my dog was number one. She was my dog through undergrad, vet school, getting married, having kids, like many big portions of my life. And she would come to work with me at Harbor Springs when we opened and we had the laser. She was in her teenage years at that point, and she was a retired hunting dog of mine and definitely had some arthritis and back pain – just moving slower than she used to back in her prime."

"I promised Sam, 'I'll at least get you to the clinic once a week for laser.' And it was like having a new dog when we started lasering her, how much more comfortable she was, easier for her to get up and down on the colder days and get outside. Wanting to be a little bit more playful with our other dog at home and easier on and off the furniture. And I will say hands down that our Cutting Edge laser gave me more years, not just weeks or months or anything, like more years of comfort with my dog. So I can say that case shines very bright in my mind when we talk about success cases." ■