

There are literally millions of veterans among us who are really lacking care, and these are just generally good people who we can help.”

— Dr. Frederic Norkin

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This page is a tribute to community citizens who have demonstrated exemplary service and leadership to the city of Boca Raton and is in memory of John E. Shuff.

# Dr. Frederic Norkin

An award-winning periodontist pays it forward to America’s servicemembers

Written by **CHRISTIANA LILLY**

In Dr. Frederic Norkin’s office, it’s not uncommon for a patient to sit there shaking their head in disbelief—that the major dental procedure he’s about to offer is completely free. A periodontist with the South Florida Center for Periodontics & Implant Dentistry, he has donated his services to more than two dozen veterans with failing or missing teeth.

“They try to figure out what the hidden cost is or what the catch is going to be when I explain to them, ‘We’re not charging you anything; you’re with the Wounded Veterans Relief Fund,’” he says. “I’ve had a couple of spouses, wives in particular, shaking their heads saying, ‘It’s not real, it’s not real. They’re just surprised that somebody would actually do this.’”

Norkin has been volunteering with the organization since 2022, donating his time and talents so that donations can go toward lab fees. All told, he’s completed about \$300,000 of pro bono work for veterans with some of the most challenging dental cases.

The son of an Army dentist, Norkin attended dental school at Tufts University in Boston, then did his hospital residency at the VA Medical Center in Miami and periodontal training at Nova Southeastern University. It was during his residency that he saw the impactful work he could make on veterans as a dentist. He joined South Florida Center for Periodontics & Implant Dentistry in 2001.

As a member of Evolution Fitness, it was during a special Memorial Day boot camp in 2022 that Norkin had a chance to hear from Mike Durkee, the executive director of the Wounded Veterans Relief Fund. Norkin immediately volunteered his talents, insisting he would help patients pro bono.

Norkin sees one to two veterans a month, some flying from as far as the Florida panhandle to be treated for their missing or failing teeth. Some have a history of addiction, others have not been able to afford dental treatment, and others have a fear of the dentist (something up to 20% of us can relate to!).

“Just because they’re veterans, they served, doesn’t mean they’re not frightened of the dentist,” he says. “The VA doesn’t offer great benefits to a lot of our veterans, and there’s a huge population of people out there who just need some help; they just need a hand up.”

Norkin recounted how a woman who actually works for the Wounded Veterans Relief Fund was able to benefit from dental implants—a veteran and a single mom

who helped her daughters earn their PhDs. Even with a “booming personality,” it

was her failing teeth that kept her working in the back.

“The change in her personality was instantaneous and palpable. It gave her the confidence that she needed,” Norkin says. “She deserves it, and when you meet her, you can’t imagine her being any other way.”

The dentist sits on the Wounded Veterans Relief Fund’s Dental Advisory Board, and the nonprofit honored him with the Dental Valor Award in 2023. As a periodontist, he specializes in conscious sedation to help alleviate patients’ fears, and he also pioneered Yomi Robotic-Guided Dental Surgery, a robot-assisted surgical technique.

**HONORING VETERANS:** This is a group of people who have given so much more than most of us will ever give to our society. Not that everybody served in an active combat situation, but the fact that they even raised their hand and said they were willing to go if they were called upon is far more than most of us will ever do.

**ON OFFERING YOUR TALENTS:** Each of us also has a unique ability, and if we could share our unique abilities, we could make a difference. ... Florida is a big state, and there is a complete lack of support. If we could get more doctors involved, that would be incredible.

**HELPING OVERCOME DENTAL FEARS:** The first thing is just treat them with dignity and reassure them that they’re not the only one that has this problem. And it’s not just my wounded veteran patients—it’s all my patients. Most of them come in and think they’re the only ones with this issue.

**HIS WHY:** I’m really fortunate the way I grew up, really fortunate in the community I live in, the community I’m able to practice in and raise my children in, and I want my children to see that we’re very fortunate for what we have, and it’s really important that we always give back to other people.

