

MEDAL OF HONOR

BY: JARED HANSEN

DO HEROES HAVE THEIR OWN HEROES? IF YOU ASK ANY OF THE PATIENTS WHO HAVE VISITED THE NEW ENGLAND SHELTER FOR HOMELESS VETERANS IN BOSTON, THERE IS NO DOUBT THEY DO.



Dr. Steven Spitz with a war veteran.

On many Monday nights, since 1997, Dr. Steven Spitz—a practicing prosthodontist and dental implant specialist in Boston, Massachusetts—can be found at the shelter providing his services to a very special group in need: homeless war veterans. Since its inception in 1997, Dr. Spitz has been an asset to the clinic due to his training in prosthodontics. Dr. Spitz, along with an oral surgeon, an endodontist, a periodontist and several general dentists, dedicate their Monday evenings providing a range of dental services to the genuinely appreciative war veterans.

The dental clinic within the shelter, supplied with all donated equipment, houses two dental chairs and a front desk reception area, and will typically see about six to nine patients each evening. The dental facility is an extension of the medical clinic where patients, after being screened, are referred to the dental clinic if necessary. “If we had more volunteers at the shelter, we could open it more [days],” says Dr. Spitz. “The need is certainly there.” The majority of the patients that are seen in the clinic are there for removable and restorative work.

Dr. Spitz has spent the majority of his professional life providing for war veterans in Miami and in Boston. After attending Tufts Dental School in Boston, Massachusetts, he was accepted to a general practice residency at the Miami VA and Jackson Memorial Hospital. Following this one-year program, he was accepted to a two-year prosthodontic residency at the Boston VA and the Harvard School of Dental Medicine. Of his time in the VA programs, Dr. Spitz comments, “Working with the members at the VA has been an amazing experience. I am honored to care for them.”

The patients that are seen at the Boston shelter have served the United States on many fronts, including WWII veterans to soldiers who have returned from the current conflicts in Iraq. They range in age from 30 years old to more than 80, but Dr. Spitz finds each patient amazing. “I enjoy interacting with a lot of patients that have had different life experiences than I have had,” says Dr. Spitz. “My father was a school teacher and education is important to me. These patients come from all walks of life, and have a wealth of knowledge and experience to contribute.”

The time spent working with veterans at the shelter and in other areas has provided Dr. Spitz with countless memories and lasting friendships. Dr. Spitz recalls a particularly special case, “I provided dental work for a homeless veteran who had fought in Vietnam, was captured and spent considerable time as a POW. As a POW his front teeth had been broken. When he returned home, the VA hospital fixed his teeth, but he continued to suffer a lot of psychological problems from the war. Over the years he had several jobs but was homeless when I met him. He was living out of his car when two thieves, not noticing he was sleeping in the car, broke into the vehicle to steal it. A brawl ensued and the thieves knocked out his front teeth. This sent him into a downward spiral that included flashbacks from his imprisonment.”

“He eventually came to the shelter to receive treatment. I had the opportunity to work with him, and when I put in the final crown, he broke down crying. He explained what a difference it made to have teeth again and the confidence it gave him. Soon after, he landed a job and, for the next two years, he searched for me to become a patient in my private practice.”

Dr. Spitz believes that anyone involved in charitable causes benefits more than those they serve. “There are so many causes and people in need, that there is an urgency for dental professionals to help in any way possible,” says Dr. Spitz. He says, “Dentistry has been good to me and it’s important to give back.” Just as Dr. Spitz has shown by real example, there are countless ways to be somebody’s hero.

If you would like to contribute time or resources to the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans in Boston, please contact Dr. Spitz at 617 437-1060 or steve.spitz@verizon.net.

Dentrix Dental Systems is proud to be in the offices of the industry’s finest dentists and applauds their volunteer efforts. Dentrix does not specifically endorse any specific volunteer organization but recognizes the great and meaningful service provided by our customers.