

This article has been contributed by GPCAPT Geoffrey Robinson, highlighting the amazing career of Professor Norton Duckmanton whose experiences gained in service of the RAAF, have changed the practice of dentistry for thousands of graduates of the Sydney Dental Hospital.

A Life of Service to Veterans

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As an 18-year-old, when Norton Duckmanton watched his friend fatally crash a Mosquito dive bomber during Pacific War training he couldn't have known that the moment would define his 66-year career in dentistry.

Though he was unable to cry at the military funeral, years later Professor Duckmanton suffered an episode that he would later understand to be a symptom of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

"When I began treating Vietnam Veterans I saw how different they were to our other patients so I decided I should finally learn something about the condition," he said.

"Looking back, I think the treatment of patients with PTSD was the area that I was able to make the greatest contribution, at a time no one else saw fit to do so."

"No one understood that these people were completely different and had special needs, including their dental health needs."

Having presented multiple research papers on caring for patients with special considerations such as PTSD, and treating hundreds of Diggers throughout his career, the Professor has reluctantly decided to retire from his post at Sydney Dental Hospital at the age of 88.

Arriving at Sydney Dental Hospital for the first time in 1948 as a first year student, Professor Duckmanton graduated in 1951 and began work as a registrar.

Since then the Professor has trained countless students at Sydney Dental Hospital and the North Western University Dental School in Chicago during two visits as a visiting professor in prosthodontics .

In 2007 he was awarded the medal in the in the general division of the Order of Australia for services to veterans and their families, and to dentistry as a practitioner and educator in the area of prosthodontics.

He has been fortunate enough to witness revolutionary changes in the field of dentistry throughout his career including the introduction of water fluoridation and the modernisation of dental implants.

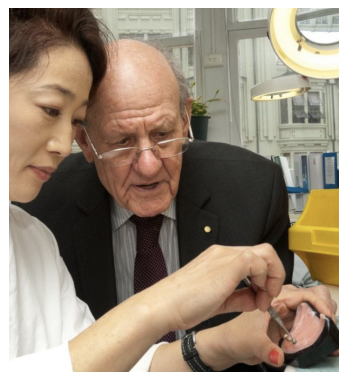
"Before fluoridation there was an enormous demand to repair the ravages of dental caries, so we've almost worked ourselves out of a job."

"Today we're training people for jobs that haven't even been invented yet involving the milling of metals by computer control and 3D printing. It's all very exciting."

Professor Duckmanton said the Sydney Dental Hospital had been a fascinating second home over the years, and that he had many friends there, including his son, Peter, a professor of endodontics.

While he said he wouldn't miss the responsibility of patient in retirement, Professor Duckmanton has vowed to stay on in an honorary teaching role for as long as he could.

"If you like what you're doing, it's not work," he said. "I see myself as being singularly fortunate and privileged having been in the right place at the right time all my life."



(Top) Professor Norton Duckmanton with technician Won Kim, and (below) Norton in his army years (second from the right).