



Effective laboratory = dentist communication

Author: Ashley Byrne

CPD: 1 hour

Educational aims and objectives

The aim is to highlight to the technician the importance of communicating effectively with the dentist. Give a number of different options for communicating effectively with the dentist.

Anticipated outcomes

Technicians will be revitalised to find better ways to communicate with dentist clients.

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Effective laboratory = dentist communication

Relationships between dentists and technicians have traditionally been distant. **Ashley Byrne** gives some pointers on communicating with each other to achieve the best possible results

If your dentist fills in the laboratory ticket like this: 'Please make single central crown, high aesthetics needed, shade A1', there's a risk that you may misunderstand what the dentist actually wants. Unless the dentist clearly refers to Vita shade tabs for teeth, the crown isn't going to look very good, so it's important that they clearly communicate what they want, which will in turn benefit the technician, dentist and patient.

Communicating well with the laboratory is far more than filling in a lab ticket or making a quick call. I think it falls into two main areas: the relationship you have with the clinical team, and what they provide for the technical team with reference to the case. Running a dental practice is time consuming and when they run late, the last thing the dentist wants to do is to fill in a huge essay for the lab, so here are some great easy ways to help with communication. Once these procedures are in place, the extra time taken will seem insignificant in comparison with the time saved on adjustments, retries and remakes.

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP

Recent market research looking at the relationship between clinicians and their labs, has found that less than half of the



Ashley Byrne is managing director of Byrnes Dental Laboratory. He trained and qualified at Manchester Metropolitan University with a BSc Hons in dental technology. He specialises in implantology and CAD/CAM, as well as lecturing in the UK and Europe.



Figure 1

100 private clinicians approached knew the name of the technician they worked with! It also found that while 88% of clinicians knew the name of their laboratory, they didn't know the people working on their restorations.

This left me shocked. If the dentist does not know the technical team, introduce yourself, visit the dentist and make yourself known. When the dentist knows who you are and the type of person you are, it is easier to discuss cases in depth, learn the way you like to work and understand what you want to deliver to the patient.

At our laboratory, we run a 'no blame' culture. If restorations don't fit or the colour is wrong, we encourage both clinician and technician to avoid pointing fingers and instead work out a solution to ensure the issue doesn't happen again. Splitting any additional costs ensures the

relationships between both parties remain strong and the communication still flows easily. By verbally communicating the problem and discussing solutions, it can only benefit the patient at the end of the treatment.

The finest work we have made as a laboratory has been with the clinicians I have a strong relationship with. Our clinicians invite us on social days and we as a lab do the same with varied events, such as beer festivals and fancy-dress ski trips (Figure 1). By breaking down the traditional clinical-to-technical poor relationship, we can all achieve excellence by working with each other rather than for each other.

LAB TICKETS AND ENCLOSURES

Writing out laboratory prescriptions can be a tedious task, but it is essential to communication. More commonly than



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

ever, lab tickets in our laboratory now say 'see email' or 'call me'. This may seem like a poor way to communicate, but it is quite the contrary. It is sometimes far easier to communicate verbally about the case with the technician when both parties have a set of study models in hand (Figure 2).

It's also important that your handwriting is clear. Checklists are also a fantastic tool and can really help ensure everything is included to help both parties. Study casts, bites, shades and even impressions have all been left out or not taken, so a good clear checklist will help avoid this happening (Figure 3).

PHOTOGRAPHY

Using your iPhone to take a picture of a tooth shade isn't ideal, but sometimes it's better than nothing. If you want perfection, an SLR camera is critical with a ring flash or side units, a good macro lens and then a lesson in using it. Setting your camera to auto will not give you the results the camera is capable of (Figure 4).

The next stage in good communication is to ask the dentist for a series of photographs. A single image of a smile and shade tab is not much use. Ideally, we need to see the full face, lips at rest, smiling, close up, side profiles etc. If the clinician is unsure provide them with a

checklist of ideal photographs. One of the most important photographs a lab can have is of the preparations and yet rarely is one provided. With the shift to more translucent materials, such as Emax, the colour of the stump or tooth can have dramatic effects on this and the restoration can be useless.

Ask the dentist to send images over by email. If there are lots of images, then Dropbox, YouSendIt and various other large-file transfers make it easy to send these files at the click of a button, so there really are no excuses when it comes to sending images.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

They say a picture tells a thousand words; a video must reveal 10 times as many. Skype or Apple's Facetime are both fantastic free ways to talk to your laboratory (Figure 5).

From any webcam, iPhone or iPad, you can talk using a wifi connection and discuss the cases. This way, you can show complications, problems and it's even been known for some our clients to get the patient on the video so the patient can put feedback directly our way. Communication doesn't get much better than that!

BUILDING ON COMMUNICATION

Encourage the clinician to send back finished work images. Far too often, the laboratory only hears about work that hasn't gone well. Sending images of finished work allows your lab to reflect on the work and hopefully aim to improve it; even if it's a fantastic result, it can always be better (Figure 6). One of our own clients even takes the time to photograph all his work, which we then view as a team on a large projector (Figure 7). This level of communication in understanding each other's profession really helps to achieve perfection for the patient.

VISITING CLINICIANS AND LABORATORIES

Face-to-face communication between the technician and clinician is another great way to enhance the relationship and build on communication. Involving the patient at either the lab or the surgery is the absolute ideal in case communication. On large complex cases, many clinicians bring the patient to the lab or we will visit the surgery to discuss all aspects from shade to restoration options. If we are all looking to use communication to improve the patient's treatment then this type of communication is by far the best approach. **CPD**