

View from the bench

Look at my handwriti



A clear, concise and correctly filled in docket is the key to a successful working relationship with your laboratory of choice, writes Peter Wagon

Last month I wrote about what you should be looking for when choosing a laboratory. This month I will look at how to get the best from them once you have found the right one for you.

As always, I will bang on about communication between technician and dentist with a plea for you to listen to the laboratory's advice. Your technician is a free yet valuable information resource with vast experience of different techniques and the problems that occur. A quick 'back of the envelope' calculation shows that I have made over 100,000 crowns during my career, for thousands of different dentists. My colleagues have similar experience, although it is true that there are occasions when our clients surprise us. This has given us a pretty good

nose for what will and will not work so, although the dentists always have the last word in how we proceed with a case, I do expect my clients to listen to my suggestions and I charge for remakes if my qualms are ignored.


In most cases the primary communication aid is the laboratory docket, which should be a fairly simple document to complete given the intelligence and expensive years of education of the group filling them in... sadly this is not always the case.

The number of dockets we receive every week without vital information on them are legion: missing shades, no finish date, patient's names left off – even a lack of the surgeon's name is not uncommon. All require a phone call and wasted time in the surgery and the laboratory.

Once the docket is filled in with all the relevant information, look at the docket, then look into your heart and ask yourself, is this written in a legible style or does it look more like left-handed ancient Assyrian cuneiform? I have clients with whom I have been working for over a decade – fine, talented dentists, very personable chaps. I have got to know them really well because every time we attempt anything more complex than a simple bonded crown I have to phone them so they can decipher what they have written on the docket. If you have idiosyncratic hand-writing, please print your instructions or get your nurse to fill in the docket.

Finish dates can be a bugbear for laboratories. We all know that there must be a

little known part of the patient's charter that requires them to keep long holidays and impending weddings a secret from their dentist until the preps are cut. When possible, please give the laboratory enough time to do a decent job without rushing. When an express job is required, call the laboratory in advance to book it in, so they can plan ahead.

Technicians are sensitive, artistic creatures, so a quick call to say that a job has gone well is always appreciated. Dentists are quick enough to let us know when we muck up. Hearing that we have done something right does leave a warm glow, as does paying you bill promptly – one always feels better disposed towards someone who hasn't owed you thousands of Euros for months! 

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