You can’t always get what you want (unless you clearly ask!)

By Laura Kelly, AAACD

Let’s be honest: There are times when your laboratory technician simply doesn’t deliver what you envisioned so clearly in your mind. A bit more convergence or a specific gingival color; a minor mesial rotation on that bicuspid or an occlusal table that’s just a little too wide.

Twenty years ago, when I began my career as a laboratory technician, we had only a few tools at our disposal. Hastily made sketches on the back of prescription pads, a few colored pencils to indicate body shade, incisal level or some other specific instruction; and sometimes pre-op models were sent.

Looking back, I’m amazed at what we pieced together given such limited communication tools. Yet that was the best the dentists could provide to the technician, and we had to work from what we had. It was challenging to create the specific results for, say, a single unit anterior crown.

Often there were trips between the laboratory and the practice or extra meetings — not to mention costly remakes for everyone. As we got better, we pulled it off, but it wasn’t easy.

Fast forward two decades to the era of digital camera, e-mail and Skype and the way we work together is instantly and forever transformed. No longer must we guess, imagine or try to convey with facsimiles or mere words. These tools have totally changed the way the dentist and laboratory technician collaborate on their work, and everyone — the patient included — has been the beneficiary of this technology.

Imagine if you had to work without a digital camera today: Film. Developing. Printing. Waiting. Time. Out of focus. Do it again. Wait some more.

With today’s digital technology, the clinician can instantly determine whether the information in the photograph will adequately convey everything necessary to the technician.

Many cases require more than a shade tab number written in the shade box on the prescription, and taking full face, retracted and lateral views make all the difference to the technician working on your cases.

Once the image is captured, e-mail can transfer the information virtually instantaneously, permitting the dentist to choose a technician anywhere in the country. This allows the dentist to work with a technician with whom he or she can work best, regardless of geography. The technician, in return, can send preliminary images of his or her wax up and bisque bake along with the final stage images for the den-

‘Would you like a massage while you wait?’

Florida cosmetic dentist wants to rub the stress away for his patients

By Fred Michmershuizen, Online Editor

Let’s face it: For many patients, going to the dentist can be — shall we say — a bit stressful. Even if they are coming in for a cosmetic procedure, such as veneers or teeth whitening, many are apprehensive about looming pain, real or imagined.

With that in mind, Dr. Hamid Nassery, a cosmetic dentist with a thriving practice in Miami called the Miami Beach Dental Institute, offers massages to his patients. He says the massages are a great way to relax his patients, improve dental procedures and even treat temporomandibular disorders.

“Going to the dentist should be a relaxing experience that makes people feel good about their teeth, their body and their overall health,” says Nassery, who is able to offer the massages to his patients through an arrangement with Love Life Massage, a local spa. “Not only can massage improve the dental experience as a whole, but it also treats conditions such as TMD, which causes pain in the jaw and face.”

Nassery says the idea behind the added benefit to patients is to make people comfortable. The benefits of dental massage include stress relief, reduced pain, quicker recovery and an improved sense of well-being and body awareness, he says.

“With these new massage services, we’re moving toward stress-free dentistry that works to put patients at ease in the dentist’s chair as well as improve their dental health,” he says.

Patients can receive a massage at the Miami Beach Dental Institute before and after their dental procedure. A therapist tailors each massage based on the patient’s specific needs and concerns.

The massage therapists at Nassery’s office also specialize in temporomandibular joint (TMD) massage, which focuses on eliminating pain to the jaw by treating the chewing muscles and releasing tension in the jaw, neck and face. Patients who suffer from temporomandibular joint disorder (TMD) benefit from therapeutic massage, especially when scheduled with regular den-

Shade tab placed in the same plane as teeth, ensuring the tab and corresponding shade number is in the photo. (Photo/Provided by Laura Kelly and Dr. Jeff Morley)
When looking for a new lab...

- Call and introduce yourself, communicate what it is you are looking for and what is missing from your current lab relationship. (We need to know what you don’t like so it’s not repeated!)
- Ask to see photos of their work, and find out who receives the e-mail photos that you will be attaching to your cases.
- Ask how the lab assigns your cases to a technician(s) and request to speak directly with the technician you will be working with.
- Visit the lab if possible, or use Skype for instant communications online.
- Ask for a bisque bake photo to be e-mailed to you for approval before sending the case out. This saves time and the dentist can give useful feedback at a time when modifications are easily made.
- Schedule quarterly phone or in-person meetings to discuss how everything is progressing; so engage in regular meetings.
- Ask other dentists what their experience has been with the laboratory you are considering.
- Outsourcing cases overseas has increased in the laboratory profession. If this is important to you, you may want to inquire as to where your restorations are being made.

What to include

- Clear, full arch impressions
- Bite
- Photos
- Face bow or stick bite
- Pre-op models
- Model of temps or diagnostic wax-up to follow
- Concise instructions

Labs evaluate you too

We all know that dentists are constant-ly evaluating their laboratory techni-cians and relationships, but the same is true for the technicians.

When we receive a case from a cli-ent who communicates well, makes expectations clear, works in a collabor-ative partnership and gives candid and timely feedback, we know we have to be on our toes and it chal-lenges us to do our very best.

When we work with a dentist who sends clear impressions, focused pho-to graphs and would prefer this level of information than not, thus, these tools have become the new standard of care. It must be said that in addition to increasing the predictable results, using these communication tools increases profitability for both the lab oratory technician and the dentist.

When you consider the cost of remakes and adjustments as well as sending cases back and forth mul-tiple times — not to mention patient dissatisfaction with these frustration— the savings are real and the profits are equally real. When professionals spend more time at the beginning and avoid these mistakes, the benefits are tangible.

Even with these improved technol-oogies, the most important tool we have is the time the dentist and laboratory technician invest in one another.

By taking the time meet and discuss cases, being clear about mutual expec-tations and giving immediate feed-back to one another, the dentist and technician can build a strong working relationship that can last for years and even decades.

In modern dentistry, it is easy to do so much and expect too much. Nowhere is this more evident than in the relationship between the dentist and laboratory technician. It must be clear from the beginning that this relationship is of utmost importance. It is not enough to have a good lab, the relationship must be equally good.

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Magnuson is accredited by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD), and he has served as an accreditation examiner for that organization. He is also a member of the American Board of Cosmetic Dentistry. The Consumer’s Research Council has named him one of America’s Top Dentists. In addition to offering porcelain dental veneers in Kalamazoo and other methods of improving smiles and general oral health, Magnuson says he makes it a point to reach out to his own community as well as those around the world.

He is a contributor to the Give Back a Smile Foundation — an organization dedicated to helping victims of domestic violence — and the AACD Foundation Disaster Relief Fund. The latter organization has helped many people in the United States and around the globe who have been affected by the 2007 California wildfires, the 2004 tsunami that hit countries along the Indian Ocean and the 2005 hurricanes that impacted the U.S. Gulf Coast.
Labs evaluate you by …

- Quality of impression, free of pulls, distortions or voids on the margins.
- Photographs sent with shade tab desired, as well as prep or “stump” shade for all ceramic restorations.
- Detailed prescriptions and “call to discuss” written on cases that require more communication.
- Your willingness to be open to feedback. Ask your technician what you can do to make his/her job easier and he/she will be happily surprised.
- Your direct and honest feedback. Technicians need to know what you like and what you don’t in order to improve and meet your expectations.

About the author

Laura Kelly is a dental ceramist and began her dental laboratory career in 1985. An accredited member of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD), she is also the first dental technician to have been elected to serve as president of the AACD (2007–2008).

Recently, Kelly was elected to serve as secretary for the International Federation of Esthetic Dentistry (IFED), currently serves on the editorial board of Spectrum, and is also the editor in chief for Lab Tribune. She lectures nationally and internationally on dentist/technician communications, new laboratory materials and how to incorporate effective marketing concepts into dental practices and laboratories.

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