Competition is a relatively new phenomenon in dentistry. Twenty or thirty years ago, most patients who needed a dentist approached the local surgery with no thought of seeking a second opinion, took what was on offer and went contentedly on their way.

Not anymore. Today’s patients compare prices and treatments, are prepared to travel for the best deal, and thanks to the media’s new-found interest in dentistry, have a far greater knowledge of different procedures and awareness of what is possible in terms of improving their appearance. And the tentacles of competition reach beyond the high street; technicians too have a responsibility to constantly hone their skills to ensure the practices they serve maintain a competitive edge and keep up to date with the latest developments in materials and methods.

Extending your reach
All dentists seek to offer a wide range of treatment options, each reflecting the highest standards of professional care. Technicians have the same ambition, to create prostheses and appliances of the highest quality, which satisfy patient expectations and complement the talents of their clinician partners. However, compatible ambitions need to be reinforced by common knowledge. To ensure the midfield and the striker are playing the same tactical game, both must pay attention to the team talk. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) keeps the different elements of the dental team not only up to date, but communicating in the same language.

Learning new skills is personally challenging and commercially productive. For practices engaging with and exploiting the latest developments as they occur, unlimited progress becomes possible. Staff are highly motivated, the patients benefit, and profitability soars. In many respects, technicians man the engine room driving the practice forward; advanced clinical protocols within the surgery cannot succeed without the support and certified, proven expertise of the technician behind the scenes.

Widen your skills
Undertaking CPD, with its emphasis on promoting understanding of key aspects such as new materials and handling facilities, broadens the technician’s knowledge and practical abilities. Another area rapidly increasing in importance for all technicians is public relations. While technicians themselves rarely have face-to-face contact with the patients, their specialist knowledge, which is not shared by the ‘front line’ members of the dental team, has led to a recommendation that they pursue the same CPD syllabus in legal and ethical issues and complaints handling as other members of the team. In the 21st century, communication skills have a more prominent role than ever before in every professional activity, and certainly not least in the delivery of healthcare in all its forms.

The General Dental Council is asking all unregistered technicians to register immediately. The new requirement, due to come into effect shortly, for all dental care professionals to complete 150 hours of recorded CPD every five years, is indicative of the importance now being attached to ongoing training and education. Dentists need to ensure that every member of their team is prepared to meet these new professional standards.

For further information please call Richard Daniels on 0870 991 4525, or visit www.dla.org.uk.