

# NADL

## National Association of Dental Laboratories



### **Dental Laboratories, Your Partner in Dentistry May 2009**

Recently, Dentaltown subscribers received an e-promotion about how you, the dentist, can save significantly on your dental laboratory operating expenses.

The National Association of Dental Laboratories (NADL) would like to share some factual information regarding the current state of the U.S. dental laboratory segment and the dental technician workforce.

Here are the myths that you might have read and our organization's perspective.

#### **Dental Technician Education and Training**

The NADL advocates for formally educated dental technicians. Many U.S. dentists do not realize that there is no minimum educational requirement for dental technicians. Recently there has been support and an understanding from organized dentistry that dental technology education is important to the delivery of quality dentistry.

There are twenty accredited dental laboratory technology schools in the U.S. and nearly another thirty that follow similar curriculum but are not accredited. Formal educational programs, most of which are two years in duration result in an associates in science (AS) degree, and provide a comprehensive background in dental technology for graduating students.

The dental laboratory industry is largely unregulated and as a result formal education in dental technology is not required to enter the field. Four states, Texas, Kentucky, South Carolina and Florida do require a dental laboratory to employ at least one Certified Dental Technician or employ a dental technician that maintains continuing education on an annual basis.

There are approximately twelve additional states that are currently working on state legislation to replicate similar requirement. Such legislation would be encompassed in state dental practice acts.

Since education is not mandatory to practice as a dental technician, it is true that many dental laboratories train their employees. However, it must be noted that nearly 7,000 dental technicians are certified in the United States. This certification is administered by the National Board for Certification (NBC) in Dental Laboratory Technology. Additionally, a great many dental laboratories have internal formal education programs that help prepare the dental technician for certification.

This program in place since 1957 has achieved third party accreditation by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). ANSI is the same organization that provides the ISO certification. Over 84,000 hours of continuing education credits per year are earned by Certified Dental Technicians (CDT's) as a collective body, in order to meet the minimum requirement.

Certified Dental Technicians provide dentists with a technician that has both the skill and applied knowledge to provide a quality product. According to a 2007 NBC survey, 84% of Certified Dental Technicians have earned at least a two year associate's degree program.

### **Quality Restorations from the Dental Laboratory Industry**

U.S. dental Laboratories and dental technicians manufacture dental restorations based on the prescription from a licensed dentist. In the U.S. most dental schools have stopped teaching their students on even the most basic dental laboratory procedures.

On a daily basis dentists are relying upon their dental technician(s) to select the appropriate material and guide them on treatment planning. Further, dental material manufacturers routinely rely on dental technicians and laboratories to serve as beta test site researchers before products are launched into the marketplace because of their advanced knowledge in this area.

It is unfortunate to make a generalization that dental technicians are producing inferior products either based on lack of knowledge or material quality. The success of quality dentistry is achieved through consistent and open communication between the dentist and the dental laboratory.

## **Pricing in the Laboratory Marketplace**

The National Association of Dental Laboratories consistently surveys its membership on profitability. During calendar years, 2006 and 2007, the average net profit for a dental laboratory, regardless of size averaged 14%, hardly a windfall.

Further, a statistical analysis of survey data available from the NADL and the American Dental Association indicates that during the last thirty years the cost of a pfm single unit crown from dental laboratories to dentists has decreased compared to the inflation rate while, the fee charged by a dentist to a patient for the same restoration during this same time period has increased with inflation. Dental laboratories, by and large are hardly, charging excessive fees to their valued clients.

There is a vast range of market demand in dentistry for both "economy" priced restorations and "high end" priced restorations. This price range is based on patient demographics, dental insurance reimbursement schedules, selection of materials and complexity of case development.

NADL and its members advocate a strong partnership with the dentist community. This is achieved on a daily basis by the nearly 13,000 dental laboratories in the U.S. that work hand in hand with their dental clients to deliver the highest quality restorations available in the market.

The National Association of Dental Laboratories, as the national organization representing commercial dental laboratories welcomes the opportunity to provide additional information for dental clinicians to make informed choices on selecting a dental laboratory or dental technician. Please visit us at [www.nadl.org](http://www.nadl.org) or [www.nbccert.org](http://www.nbccert.org) to find one of our member laboratories or a Certified Dental Technician or Certified Dental Laboratory in your area.