

A Word About Dental Laboratory Technology

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I'm not sure what most dental patients know about dental laboratory technology, but as it is with all other fields, there are levels of quality that range from mediocre to the highest level of excellence. These are the folks who fabricate crowns, bridges, dentures, etc. that go into a person's mouth. A good dental laboratory technician, besides having a knowledge of the latest in manufacturing technologies, materials and their applications, must have an ability to create natural teeth forms both esthetically and functionally. The result of even the best dental lab technician's efforts are only as good as what they receive from the dentist. If the impressions, bite registration and other recording data from the dentist are sub-par, the best efforts of the technician will render the project mediocre, and that also goes the other way, i.e., if the dentist's efforts are tops and the lab's is poor, the result will also be poor. The truth is that water seems to seek its own level in this area. A poor dentist will select cheap labs, and an excellent dentist will only seek the best in dental laboratories, as they would want to dignify their efforts with the best. There are several tiers of quality in between, and this is one of the reasons why dental fees can vary from dentist to dentist. In a typical general dental practice, the highest category of overhead expense after staff, is laboratory expenses. One thing that has come to light recently is that many dentists are using overseas labs because they are vastly less expensive than even those of the lowest quality in the U.S. Besides the low quality, what is scary is that it is becoming apparent that there is lead in the materials that come from overseas, namely China. The truth is that any lead in a dental prostheses is too much lead. Word has it that over 25% of general dentists are using overseas labs. I used to be my own lab technician, and still do some of it myself. This experience has given me an acute eye for what is out there in that field. This is why my gold restorations are performed by a lab technician in Lake Chelan, Washington even though his fees are many times higher than those around the local area. He has a passion for this technology and I have not seen better anywhere. This also holds true for my denture laboratory technician, as a lack in quality control in the fabrication of removable prostheses can subvert my best efforts. My porcelain crowns and veneers and implant restorations are performed by another lab, and they are tops in their field in quality, as well as their fees. Their technicians are certified by the Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, which is not come by easily, as there is rigorous testing involved. My passion and experience necessitates that I use only the finest in dental laboratories. I have never based my decision on what lab to use based on cost, as anything less than the best would diminish my best efforts.