

Prosthodontic Forum

January 18, 2008

Dr. Mark Feldman
President
American Dental Association
211 East Chicago Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611-2678

Dear Doctor Feldman:

As Chair of the Prosthodontic Forum I am writing this letter on behalf of our 16 organizations, and over 23,000 members, to reinforce our collective concerns about the crisis in the Dental Laboratory Technology industry. There are a myriad of challenges that domestic dental laboratories and technologists are facing, most of which stem from the following changes:

There has been a shift in curriculum in dental schools, drastically reducing the number of clock hours required for dental students in the area of dental laboratory studies and prosthodontics.

Result: Students may have never performed laboratory procedures
Students may not be competent to evaluate a prosthesis received from a dental laboratory for the purpose of quality control
Students may have never met a Laboratory Technologist
Students have no sense of the value of a Laboratory Technologist
Technologists are forced to make decisions on design and product that were typically a dentist's responsibility

"Most dentists rely on the dental technician to choose the materials needed for the fabrication of the prosthesis. With lack of adequate information, all too often the design, fabrication, and completion of the case is left up to the technician. Therefore, our results indicate an apparent trend to which technicians are left to make crucial decisions for dentists."

(Afsharzand Z, Rashedi B, Petropoulos VC. Communication between the dental laboratory technician and dentist: Work authorization for fixed partial dentures. J Prosthodont 2006;15:123-128.)

There has been a drastic reduction in CODA accredited dental laboratory technology schools to only 20, from a previous high of 58 in the mid 1980s. There are many reasons for this: the cost of CODA certification, CODA requirement that all 5 laboratory specialties (Crown and Bridge, Ceramics, Partial Dentures, Complete Dentures and Orthodontics) need to be taught, finances, lack of faculty (faculty must have at least one degree level higher than the one that they are educating and there are not adequate BS degrees available to DLT educators). It is estimated that 11,000 technologists are leaving the industry in the next 7 years and that the current technical schools can only train 1,400 technologists in that time period.

Result: A lack of qualified individuals to make treatment decisions relegated from the dentist to the technologist

Academy of Osseointegration

Academy of Prosthodontics

American Academy of Esthetic Dentistry

American Academy of Fixed Prosthodontics

American Academy of Implant Dentistry

American Academy of Maxillofacial Prosthetics

American College of Prosthodontists

American Equilibration Society

American Prosthodontic Society

Greater New York Academy of Prosthodontics

The International Academy of Gnathology-American Section

National Association of Dental Laboratories

National Board for Certification in Dental Laboratory Technology

Northeastern Gnathological Society

Pacific Coast Society for Prosthodontists

Southeastern Academy of Prosthodontics

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It would appear that we are on a dangerous downward spiral that will result in an inadequate number of trained technologists to serve the oral health care needs of the U.S. population. The Minutes of the July 26, 2007 CODA Report of the Review Committee on Dental Laboratory Technology reveals an inertia that is no longer acceptable.

“An analysis of citations indicates that one hundred and eleven (111) areas of non-compliance have been cited during the reporting period. Of that total, eleven (11) citations occurred in Standard 1- Institutional Effectiveness; seventy-two (72) citations in Standard 2-Educational Program; twenty-five (25) citations in Standard 3-Administration, Faculty and Staff; and three (3) citations in Standard 5-Health and Safety Provisions.

Based on existing data, there is an increase in the number of programs that are being cited for non-compliance related to documentation of the curriculum and faculty qualifications.

Commission Action: *This report was informational in nature and no action was taken.”*

The Prosthodontic Forum unanimously voted to ask the ADA and CODA to take an immediate proactive position to help halt this trend.

Some potential ideas that may assist in this endeavor:

1. Work with the communities of interests, such as the Prosthodontic Forum organizations, to create expedited accreditation models - while maintaining the quality of the programs - so that the system is not adding an additional burden on these schools.
2. Work with the communities of interest and the existing laboratory programs to create alternative educational models. One recommendation is to construct a progressive, tiered educational system. For example, instead of just having 2 year programs, perhaps there is a need to create some one-year programs, focusing on fewer than 5 modules, that would potentially attract more applicants and prepare them to be good entry level employees. There could then be a second year (or multi year part-time) for those wanting additional education to expand their knowledge and skills and then additional years, as needed, to complete the BS degree and create the elite leadership. Of course, transferable credit is a backbone of this incentive.

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3. Support from the ADA, CODA and Industry to help programs embrace and have access to modern and emerging science and technologies.

Computer generated technology would appeal to the modern student and help attract people to the career.

4. Reach out to technical and community colleges to consider starting laboratory technology programs. Have CODA and a panel of experts create a Program Manual "How to start an accredited Dental Science and Technology Program" as done recently for AGD and GPR programs. Reach out to technical and community colleges to introduce and market these programs in their communities.

5. Promote dental laboratory technology as a career to High School Counselors.

6. Work with communities of interest and dental educators to increase the exposure of pre-doctoral students to laboratory technologists and prosthodontic experiences.

Our organizations are open to these and any other constructive approaches to help solve these critical problems.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,



Gary Goldstein D.D.S.
Chair, Prosthodontic Forum

Other references:

Christensen GJ. Yancey W. Dental laboratory technology in crisis: the challenges facing the industry. JADA 2005;136:653-55

Christensen GJ. Dental laboratory technology in crisis, part II: Potential solutions to the challenges facing the industry. JADA 2005;136:783-86

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