:customer care

WHO CARES?

Tony Griffin looks at the importance of customer care for both the laboratory and clinic.

The attractiveness to consumers of good quality customer care should never be underestimated. We react and decide daily regarding services we want to purchase, often by the way in which we expect that service to be provided. Dentistry is no different.

Our own expectations of the customer care we want to experience is being raised by other service providers and care providers all the time, as customer demand for better service increases. What all the major players know is that a service that goes beyond the expected level giving that extra something we were not expecting is worth its weight in gold. The employee who can produce repeatedly personalised care and meet the workload demands is the employee that will bring in the customers.

In the relationship between the dental laboratory and clinic, the customer care can run both ways. Team work in dentistry will enhance the care of patients if 'customer care' is applied from both the dental laboratory and clinic. The standards of proficiency developed and maintained by dental technicians to meet clinical requirements is a combination of experience, skill, knowledge and continuing development. The quality of 'one off' custom-made dental devices that are manufactured from gold and platinum alloys, from composites, porcelain etc by the skilled hands of the dental technician is as if creating jewellery. The patient's satisfaction is the result of the dental team's applied customer care and their individual skills.

It takes four or more years for a dental technician to be able to competently construct a range of dental appliances from the raw materials that will then look and function

correctly. The dental nurse who is competent in all manner of surgery provision and patient care is not born overnight, neither is the receptionist and practice manager. All have developed their skills and knowledge over time to a standard acceptable to their own particular work area. The customer care provision is as essential as these skills.

If providing a good standard of patient care is required, consider the following list of core requirements from your own career role. Good quality care comes from:

- 1) Competently delivered service that meets the customer's needs. We are all customers to each other.**
- 2) Know your limitations in regard to training and experience. Focus your own personal continual professional development activity on aspects that enhance your work role.**
- 3) Clarify and agree the rights and responsibilities of both the clinical team and dental laboratory team.**
- 4) Do not let personality issues affect individual patient care.**
- 5) Records should be kept in a logical manner including agreements made over the telephone, all dated and signed in chronological order. Records should be accurate, respectful of your customers, clients and colleagues and protected from unauthorised disclosure. The data protection act and other legislation make disclosure to others of patient information an offence.**

In a world of competing goods and services where there is little to compare items

apart from the supply and client interaction, what is it that both parties are looking for in the supply of custom-made dental devices? What can we do at point of sale and in the follow up in dentistry to enhance customer service and patient satisfaction?

When looking for excellent customer service in dentistry, the dental laboratory and clinic both need to consider what both mean by good customer service. Pretend that you are one of your customers - what rating would they give you in the 'seven customer needs'? (See self-assessment checklist).

Now consider the questions from your own position of the customer service you receive from another party. How does the supplier of the service rate? If you are receiving less than a score of 40 then this should give you some concern unless the price is more important than the service, or the work is essential to your livelihood, or there is an unseen benefit which means you will always use this service no matter how poor the service is.

The opportunity to develop liaison and to formally discuss the laboratory and clinic needs can only enhance patient care but will also help to define where both parties intend to be in their long term plans. Dental care is changing - it's about choice and informing patients, sharing the opportunities and providing new ranges and individual responses to patients needs. The patient needs to see the team working together for their benefit. Professional relationships must be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect. It is therefore essential to develop good working relationships and systems of communication that enhance the services to patients at all times. Then all can benefit and we can develop together our excellent customer service.

Self assessment checklist:

SEVEN CUSTOMER NEEDS

Questions:

	10 Excellent	7 Good	4 Fair	1 Poor
1. How do you feel about being known to be dealing with this organisation?	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. How am I communicated with by telephone?	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. How am I regarded by the person I am dealing with?	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. How promptly does the other side respond to my request?	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. How do you generally rate the service provided?	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Do you regularly get what you want from the transaction?	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Are they continually developing services or products?	☐	☐	☐	☐