Salud Family Health Centers (Salud) is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) with 12 locations and a mobile unit in northern Colorado providing medical, dental, pharmacy and behavioral health care services. Salud focuses on low-income, medically underserved populations as well as the agricultural worker population.

Since 1970, Salud has been firmly committed to providing care to all community members regardless of finances, insurance coverage, or ability to pay. Salud’s Mission is to provide a quality, integrated health care home to the communities we serve. Fort Morgan is located about 80 miles northeast of Denver and has a population of just over 11,000. Salud opened the Fort Morgan clinic in 2011 and expanded the dental clinic with assistance from a HRSA Oral Health Service Expansion grant in 2016.

When community health centers lack the infrastructure to meet the demand for dental services, many choose to expand in order to meet this demand. Many have expanded their dental services with the assistance of expansion grants from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).
Salud Family Health Services applied for a HRSA grant to help expand its Fort Morgan dental clinic due to the lack of dental services in the rural county and surrounding area. Salud also wanted to expand dental services at this site as Salud is currently implementing the Virtual Dental Home Model in this community. California has been testing this model for seven years, and they have found that roughly 30% of the children seen in schools through the Virtual Dental Home Model need to be seen in the dental clinic at some point. By expanding Salud’s Fort Morgan clinic from seven operatories to ten, and adding another full-time dentist and hygienist, Salud now has the capacity to provide dental services to the increased number of children coming to the dental clinic.

When expanding an existing dental clinic or building a new clinic, Salud examines the following program criteria during the planning process.

**Staffing**

Most FQHC dental clinics will have two full-time dental assistants per full-time dentist. In states where dental assistants have expanded privileges, there may be more assistants per full-time dentist. According to the 2016 UDS report, the ratio for dental hygienists in FQHCs was 0.49 registered dental hygienists per full-time dentist. This is in contrast to most private practice clinics where the ratio is 1.8 full-time hygienists per full-time dentist according to the ADA’s Health Policy Institute.

Salud’s Fort Morgan clinic is adding two additional full-time dental assistants as part of the expansion grant, and two additional full-time dental assistants for the Virtual Dental Home Model in schools.

When you have a job opening for a dentist or dental hygienist, it is important to post your job opening in multiple places. Some examples of where to post your job opening include: state Primary Care Associations, state dental association, local dental society, Dental Schools/alumni networks, National Health Service Corps (NHSC), State Loan Repayment Programs, and the National Network for Oral Health Access (NNOHA) Job Bank [NNOHA Job Bank](#). Your job posting should highlight some of the many benefits of working at a FQHC. Example benefits might include: scholarship and loan repayment, continuing education (CE) allowance, flexible work hours, paid sick leave, vacation, and malpractice coverage (FTCA).

Salud posted the hygienist and dentist job positions on the following websites: NNOHA, National Health Service Corps, Indeed, Colorado Dental Association, and Salud’s website.

Many FQHCs have dental students/residents that rotate through their clinics. Salud has found this to be a great source of dental applicants when we are recruiting a dentist.
Lessons Learned

- When Salud Family Health Centers has job postings for dentists, there has typically been a lot of interest from applicants that have rotated through Salud clinics as students.

- When a prior student applies for a dentist job posting, it has been beneficial to know the applicant in order to evaluate whether he/she was the right fit for Salud.

- Salud’s dentists all enjoy working with students, so it benefits job satisfaction.

- If you plan to have hygienists see patients in medical exam rooms as a part of integration, then you may need more hygienists than other Community Health Centers.

Capital Buildout

When you are ready to design your clinic, you want to make sure that you understand room staffing ratio concepts. In general, most dental clinics want three dental operatories per dentist. This can vary depending on what your state allows dental assistants to do and whether you have dental students. When designing your clinic, it is always wise to consider how your clinic could be expanded in the future if an expansion grant was received. It is important to keep in mind that construction for dental operatories is typically much more complex and expensive than it is for medical exam rooms.

Since Salud Family Health Centers is expecting to see more children in the Fort Morgan clinic due to the Virtual Dental Home Model, Salud made some modifications to make the environment more child friendly. Salud rolled out a new dinosaur mascot and upgraded two dental operatories to appeal to children. Salud also built a child play area in the waiting room that incorporates the new mascot.
Lessons Learned

Salud wanted seating for parents in the operatories, but the existing operatories already had cabinets along the entire wall. Salud had to tear out cabinets to make seating available for parents. In the future, seating will be incorporated into all new dental operatories.

- Since there was a lot of noise during construction, Salud found it best to inform all patients about the remodel when confirming their appointments.

- When designing a new clinic, it is imperative that the design meet regulations such as Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), American Dental Association (ADA) and local codes.

Scope of Service

- As a reminder, Federally Qualified Community Health Center Dental clinics must offer preventive dental services, and may offer optional dental restorative, emergency, and specialty services. These must be listed on HRSA Form 5A: Services Provided.

If you plan to offer services outside your clinic on a regular basis, then you may need to add these sites to your HRSA scope of project. Example locations would include schools, nursing homes, and homeless shelters.

For Salud’s Fort Morgan Virtual Dental Home Model, Salud is adding five elementary schools to its scope of project. Salud Family Health Centers has completed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Fort Morgan school district.

Lessons Learned

- Creating an MOU with a school can take several months to complete, so be sure to allow enough time.

- If you are planning to offer services in multiple schools in the same school district, then it may be easier to get a district-wide MOU rather than one with each school.

- In the scenario where a child has a dental emergency in the school setting, there should be workflows in place to confirm that the child receives the necessary treatment even if the child needs to come to the main clinic.
Patient Outreach

Marketing can be important in bringing new patients into your new/expanded clinic. You will need to determine the target population and how to best connect with that population. This can be done through both in-house and outreach methods.

In-house communication with employees should include the call center, other clinic sites, system-wide communication, current patients (digital signage in waiting rooms, flyers), and your enrollment staff. This communication raises awareness about your new/expanded clinic.

Outreach strategies to the community should include information regarding the new/expanded clinic, services offered, and background about new staff. Outreach should also be conducted to entities such as health and human service agencies, schools, health departments and other health providers for referral purposes. The vehicles for this outreach can include social media, local publications, radio, and billboards. It is always a great idea to host an open house with an invitation sent to the community and legislators. Agencies who provided letters of support for an expansion application should also be invited to an open house.

After Salud completed its dental clinic expansion, including the two pediatric operatories and waiting area with the new dinosaur mascot, Salud decided to host an open house at the Fort Morgan clinic. This allowed the community to see Salud’s expansion and be reminded of Salud’s mission to serve the community.

Lessons Learned

- When you build a new clinic or expand an existing clinic, consider hosting a community event to engage the community.
- When Salud hires a new dentist or hygienist, Salud posts a biography with a picture in the local newspaper and on Facebook so that the community can be introduced to the provider and recognize that Salud has increased capacity to accept patients.

In Summary

Salud learned many lessons throughout the process of expanding our dental services and clinic. It is important during the planning to determine the population to be served and how to best serve that population through clinic design, staffing, and publicity. During planning it is also critical to consider the whole clinic, not just the additional operatories as there will be impacts on the waiting area, parking, and future expansion areas for other departments. There are many local, state, and federal codes to remember during the design process.

Also, early planning is necessary if fundraising or grant submissions will be made. The clinic should build into the timeline enough time for recruiting, hiring, and orienting new staff. Salud recommends hiring your own residents or former students when possible.
It’s important to notify the health centers’ existing patients about temporary changes in the building, including potential noise and room closures during the construction. It is important to keep the community informed about changes at the health center and to publicize the new health professionals who have joined the staff. Salud recommends a community event to showcase the new space and let the community meet the new dental department staff.

Above all, stay in contact with your HRSA project officer to ensure that all changes in the project are correctly submitted. There are many resources available during your dental clinic expansion. Some are listed below. Take advantage of them.

Resources

Here are some NNOHA resources that can help you prepare for expanding/building a community health dental clinic:

- Website: www.nnoha.org
- Annual Conference
- National Oral Health Learning Institute
- Webinars
- Listserv
- Promising Practices
- Individual consultation/referral
- Dashboard Quality Measures

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