The National Network for Oral Health Access (NNOHA) has been leading an effort to shift the quality of care in dentistry across the country. With efforts such as the Sealants Improvement Collaborative, NNOHA is actively engaging health centers in quality improvement efforts to benefit their dental programs. Through the leadership of the NNOHA Collaborative and by working side-by-side with participating dental colleagues, health centers are able to expand, strengthen and enhance their patient-centered and evidence-based oral health care practices.

The Breakthrough Series, a Collaborative Model of learning created by The Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) is designed to help health care organizations make “breakthrough” improvements in quality while reducing costs.* By creating a short-term learning system (6-15 months), organizations learn from each other and from recognized experts in their field. Collaboratives consist of bringing together many teams from multiple organizations in a focused subject area who are seeking improvement. Through using the Breakthrough Series methodology, teams alternate between three in-person Learning Sessions and Action Periods. During Learning Sessions, teams come together to learn about the chosen content area and plan changes to test at their organization. The Action Periods are used for teams to return to their organizations and test the changes in a clinical setting with the rest of their staff. The beneficial results of using this Collaborative Model can be seen in organizations making system-level changes to increase their quality of care. During NNOHA’s most recent Sealants Improvement Collaborative, the 35 participating health centers made improvements in their rates of caries risk assessment and sealants. By June 2019, 15 of the health centers reported caries risk assessment rates of 95% and above, and 14 health centers showed strong signals of improvement in their sealant rates.

sitting with colleagues who may be facing similar problems, you get to learn and test something a little different, it can have a big impact,” said Dr. Donigan of Gaston Family Health Services.

Katie Eyes, Senior Program Officer of The Blue Cross NC Foundation believes that “The benefits extend well past the sealant collaborative and into other work that [health centers] are doing”. This rang true when talking with Advance CHC where, since their participation in the Collaborative, the partnerships that were forged have allowed them to continue to discuss ideas, “it’s great having other clinics [in NC] who understand our state and are eager to develop strategies to continue the work we learned during the Collaborative,” said Dr. Rebecca Reeves. Additionally, Advance CHC talked about the freedom of being able to discuss and brainstorm ideas outside of clinic time and how this provided space to learn and think about making small, incremental changes in workflow which ultimately made a major positive impact on their delivery of care – not just in dentistry, but throughout their clinic. Gaston Family Health Services found that by “having an opportunity to be able to start small, develop a workflow, test changes through PDSA cycles at one clinic location...provided us the space to get it right,” said Dr. William Donigan.

So, if you are a health center who is interested in learning improvement processes, expanding your network and challenging ‘how it’s always been done’, we are currently accepting team applications through August 1, 2019 to participate in the next NNOHA Sealants Improvement Collaborative. And if you are a foundation looking to cultivate and support learning in your safety net, consider funding a team (or a few teams) in your state. As Dr. Rebecca Reeves of Advance CHC said, “I encourage anyone who has an opportunity to participate in a Collaborative like this to definitely jump at the chance!”

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