WHAT WILL WE DO?
An effort to investigate and answer questions about patient medical care in clinical settings began in the 1970s with the creation of practice-based research networks (PBRNs). Today, close to 200 PBRNs – representing medical practices in all 50 states and more than 25 countries – are registered with the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

It wasn’t until the early 2000s that the focus turned to dental practices. In 2002, the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, part of the National Institutes of Health, spearheaded development of a PBRN centered on the dental profession.

The National Dental Practice-Based Research Network is the result of that effort. Its two-pronged mission: Improve oral health through dental practice-based research, and support education and collegiality among dental professionals. Through this network, practitioners partner with clinical researchers to conduct research in their dental offices and evaluate ways to improve patients’ oral health.

The National Dental PBRN is the outgrowth of three regional PBRNs that were funded by the NIDCR from 2005-2012. The second round of funding ran from 2012-2019, and the network received another seven years of funding in 2019. The National Dental PBRN has six regional administrative nodes, a specialty node, and more than 7,000 members. The network’s Western Region, which comprises 11 states and three U.S. territories, is staffed through CHR. Its director is CHR Senior Investigator Jeffrey Fellows.

The role of the National Dental PBRN Coordinating Center is to centralize and standardize study operations and data management, provide statistical and scientific support, and facilitate rapid development and implementation of oral health studies conducted in the National Dental PBRN. CHR Senior Investigator Mary Ann McBurnie is the director.

WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL THIS STUDY MAKE?
Through the National Dental PBRN, dental practitioners work with clinical researchers to design, implement, and evaluate clinically relevant and pragmatic strategies for improving patients’ oral health. The goal is to engage practitioners so that clinical research is translated into everyday practice.

So far more than 40 studies involving more than 15,000 dental practitioners and 63,000 patient participants have been conducted through the National Dental PBRN. The range of topics is broad, including predicting the outcomes of root canal treatment, management of painful temporomandibular joint disorders, tobacco cessation, use of antibiotics in dental offices, and oral cancer/human papillomavirus (HPV) screening and referral.