barbershops and nearly 500 of their customers as part of the TRIM and CUTS studies. The TRIM study is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Preliminary results demonstrate that barbers can be trained to encourage clients to make informed decisions about getting colorectal and prostate cancer screenings, and that clients are enthusiastic in their support of receiving health information in the barbershops. Preliminary results from CUTS showed that African-American men were more aware of (and had increased calls to acquire) the free, lifesaving information available through the National Cancer Institute’s Cancer Information Service.

Linnan says these studies have continued to build the evidence base for promoting health in beauty salons and barbershops and that they are willing partners in working toward eliminating the health disparities that exist. Perhaps most importantly, “we have clearly demonstrated that barbershops are a great place to reach men, as long as we don’t overwhelm them with too much information,” she says. “The average age of our CUTS participants was 35 years, and there are very few settings where we can reach young African-American men with information about health. The barbershop is a unique place in that regard.” Hooker agrees with that assessment. “Men will listen to their barber,” he says.

Cancer Understanding Today (CUTS) is a two-year National Cancer Institute project designed to increase calls from African-American men to its cancer hotline, 1-800-4CANCER. Linnan is encouraged by early indications from the study, which relies on barbershops to promote the health education information.

“The good news is that we definitely are seeing trends toward increased calls” after a recent education campaign about cancer and the hotline, Linnan says.

Colon cancer screening kits
FIT for duty in High Point project

One test that screens for colon cancer is pretty simple, but it requires taking three stool samples. That can be a daunting prospect, even for people who have the privacy of their own home and bathroom. When the patient is homeless and living out of his car, the challenges ratchet up quickly.

Yet health care professionals in High Point, N.C., were able to help a man in this situation – and even provide some follow-up care based on his test results – through a UNC-led study that centers on a strong community health care partnership. The study’s goal is to reduce colon cancer deaths by increasing the number of people who are screened early for the disease.

“Being able to talk with (the homeless man) and really educate him about the importance of screening, and also following up by helping him see a gastroenterologist, made a huge difference,” says Carin Hiott, director of chronic care for High Point Regional Health System. The system is one of the project’s partners, which also include the UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Can-
As many as 60 percent of deaths from colorectal cancer could be prevented if everyone age 50 and older were screened regularly. — Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

In all, 301 eligible adults have been enrolled in the study, with an overall FIT return rate of 67 percent. Of the 201 FIT that were returned, four were positive. All four patients have been referred for free diagnostic colonoscopy.

“We are excited about the high return rate,” Moore says. “We have learned that the stool test is affordable and can be distributed in clinics, and it’s terrific to know firsthand how many positives from this first sample will need follow-up.”

Lessons learned in the study have laid a good foundation, but questions remain as to whether the clinics can continue the outreach on their own and whether follow-up care will be available. Providing screening kits for people who need them is only the first step. It is also crucial that a “safety net” of gastroenterologists and other specialty care providers are available to provide prompt follow-up care to people who need it.

High Point Regional’s Hiott notes that the next steps would be tougher for all agencies, given limited resources and tight budgets. During the study, having a research assistant dedicated solely to promoting the FIT tests and talking with patients about colorectal cancer made a tremendous difference, she says.

Moore agrees that the challenges become greater without the study resources. Many clinics treating people who are uninsured or underinsured are acute care clinics, which must focus on more immediate problems, including hypertension and diabetes, rather than encourage preventive screenings for cancer.

Moore says that researchers are looking for additional partners to share expenses and successes. They hope to expand the project to additional communities.

— By Kim Gazella