

Saying Goodbye

■ Lou Ellen Horwitz, MA

My friends, we have come a long way together in the last 5 years! Let me remind you of how far. My first *JUCM* column in my second term as CEO at the Urgent Care Association (UCA) in July 2020 was an admonishment to us all: We had to come together if we were ever going to create change on a national level.

Over the next 5 years, you did precisely that. Through tremendous adversity, you built confidence in yourselves and in each other. You leaned on and into our Urgent Care community for resources, advice, camaraderie, inspiration, tough love, and courage. You drove change over and over, and you are still doing it. You lived the values that UCA eventually codified and adopted as our own in 2024. You inspired us to figure out who we are as a professional field (5 distinct associations as of this January), and you are still doing it. You made us rethink everything that UCA and our affiliates had to offer, upgrade our experiences, transform our convention, and re-imagine our relationships, and you are still doing that.

We'll never stop trying to be better for you. Together we have raised standards, challenged thinking, held hands through tough times, and shouted each other's praises, and we are going to keep doing it.

The Distinct Identity of Urgent Care

For the first 20 years of our field, Urgent Care tried to blend in with the healthcare establishment. However, the COVID-19 pandemic taught us that it was time to stand up, so we did. We even decided to capitalize "Urgent Care" in all settings to emphasize its importance. Now when we visit Congress or the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, they know who we are. I think that phrase should just sit there by itself for a second and be appreciated: They know who we are.

This is all thanks to you. I could have shouted at the top of my lungs alone for 5 years, but without you, I

would have just been really hoarse. You answered the call. You donated your time, opinions, and energy, while also showing up to make things happen. I am so grateful for that. Being your leader through this particular time has been the privilege of my life. The first time was fun, but this time was really quite something.

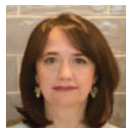
In addition to all of you—the professionals of our field—I must give top honors to the UCA staff members, both past and present, who have been on the inside of our organizations giving their blood, sweat, and tears to bring all of us through the challenges of 2020 to today. Our team thinks about you all day long and have become experts at change management and resourcefulness. They respect each other, hold each other accountable, act with integrity, and "throw out the baby with bath-water" when we need to reinvent. They link arms, dig in, and figure out the next move that will be best for the field. They love Urgent Care and each other, and I hope that all leaders someday get to work with a team like ours.

Welcome Steve Sellars

Which leads me to my successor. It would be harder to leave if I didn't know that all of this was going to be in the hands of Steve Sellars, UCA's new CEO. When I agreed to come back as CEO, one of my criteria was having a key vote in selecting my successor, and I am so happy that it was such an easy vote. I have known Steve for more than 20 years, and I know that his character, love for our field, and unique experience make him absolutely perfect as our next CEO. He's just what we need for the next phase of Urgent Care.

Which leads me to goodbye at last. It is going to be hard for me to leave this role.

We still have our challenges, but our momentum is fantastic. The next 5 years are going to be even greater than the past 5. I'm so excited to watch you continue to collaborate and advance the field, get the payment and recognition that you deserve, and raise the bar for everyone else in healthcare. I love you all. Thank you for everything. *Onward!* ■



Lou Ellen Horwitz, MA is the former Chief Executive Officer of the Urgent Care Association.