



Twenty-one Down, 8,000-plus to Go

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

In the pages of this month's *JUCM*, you will see a full-page congratulations to the first 21 urgent care centers receiving designation as a Certified Urgent Care Center.

My question to you is, why isn't yours on this list?

Your question to me may be, "Why should it be?"

The "brochure answer" looks like this:

- Gives your clinic a mark of distinction to eliminate confusion with other types of providers
- Provides a tool for negotiation as a national benchmark for discussing higher fee schedules
- Give you an edge in marketing to clearly and effectively describe your level of service

All good reasons, but let me share a possible scenario that may hit home even more.

You know (from last month's column) that UCAOA is working on ways to be more involved in the legislative and regulatory environment. Imagine this conversation as the UCAOA committee members (or even you) try to reach out to the government and payor community:

You: Hi, Representative so and so, I'm calling you to make sure you know about urgent care and the important role it is playing in our community and even across the nation. Urgent care helps keep patients out of the emergency room and...

Representative: Wait, urgent care...those are those things in the drugstore, right? Yeah, those are great!

Y: Ah, no, urgent care is much more than that. They are usually freestanding, and provide a much broader scope of services than a drugstore clinic.

R: Oh, so more like a freestanding emergency room. Don't the hospital ERs have some problems with you guys stealing their patients?

Y: No, not like a freestanding emergency room either. We don't treat life-threatening conditions. Think of us as somewhere you go when you can't get into your primary care physician, or your injury is more serious than what your regular doctor can treat, but you don't belong in the emergency room.

R: You know, my primary care doc has started having evening and Saturday hours for more "urgent" care, so now I know exactly what you are talking about. Thanks for calling!

Are you seeing a pattern? While many, many, many patients are aware of you and what you do, many of the "key people" in the government and payor communities still are not—and we, as an industry, have not done much to help them.

That is what the Certified Urgent Care Center designation is all about. It's about defining ourselves for the very powerful stakeholders that will exert tremendous influence on our industry in the coming years, either through regulatory or legislative efforts, or simply through criteria for getting on an insurance panel. The ability to say "this is what a full-fledged urgent care is" in simple, identifiable terms (one term, really) will help all of us—in ways we can't even see yet.

There's a great story that's quoted toward the end of the movie "Under the Tuscan Sun" about how the Italians built railroad tracks through the mountains before there was even a train that could make the trip. They knew that someday the train would come. The Certified Urgent Care center designation is our set of railroad tracks.

All we need, from each of you, is a tiny piece of the track. We—UCAOA—cannot build it without you. We can't staff it out, or delegate it to a committee; we don't own a single center. What we have done is to provide the roadbed (criteria). You just need to pick up a piece of track, put your name on it, and lay it down. We have 21 pieces so far—a great start, but not nearly enough to get us where we all want to be able to go.

So, if you do nothing else this month, and don't have a Certification brochure sitting buried on your desk somewhere, go to the website www.ucaoa.org/certification and get started on your application. The train is coming. ■



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