



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This Field is *Your* Field

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

Until recently, I'd never written a letter to my Congressman. The legislative system is not only complex, it seems impenetrable to an outsider, and one letter seems like a waste of time. I was not born a political activist.

And yet, in July, UCAOA's president, Dr. Don Dillahunty, and I authored several *hundred* letters to Senators, Representatives, heads of the house of medicine, CEOs and directors of organizations who are key players in the healthcare reform discussions currently underway across the nation.

Several things changed my mind about letter-writing—and I hope the lessons I have learned will have resonance with you in the way you run your clinics.

This land is your land, this land is my land...

As complex as governmental operations are, to remain silent on what they are doing is to abdicate our role as citizens—both individually and corporately. As the Urgent Care Association of America, the least we can do is to speak up on your behalf, whether it is in our traditional “comfort zone” or not.

From California, to the New York island...

Urgent care is a critical component in healthcare delivery—and while we have some awareness issues (or our letter wouldn't be necessary), it is extremely important that those who make our policy understand that.

One by one, in every state in America, urgent care centers are open and seeing hundreds of thousands of patients every week. Old, young, insured, self-pay, locals, travelers—you are taking care of them.

From the redwood forest, to the Gulf stream waters,



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“It's hard to educate people about when they should come to see us. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.”

My third reason doesn't fit as nicely into Woody Guthrie's lyrics (and it's a really long song, so that's probably for the best). The third reason is I believe that often what you put out into the universe is what comes back to you. So if we are negligent in speaking up in our professional environment, how could we wonder if we don't hear from our own members on issues in *their* professional environment? You constantly hear me saying “we want to hear from you,” so it's time I practiced what I preach.

This land was made for you and me.

Here's where it comes back to your clinic. It's all connected. I want Congress to listen to us, you want me to listen to you, and your patients want you to listen to them.

Just as government appears impenetrable to me, patients feel the same way about healthcare. They don't understand with any certainty when they should go to the ED vs. urgent care. They don't know how their bill is determined, and why you can't tell them what something will cost. They don't really know how their insurance works. And yet they are being asked to play an increasingly active role in their own care.

The more we can do to simplify access to urgent care, the better. It's not enough just being there with the doors open—though that's important. Access is more than availability. It's easy to get your Congressman's mailing address, phone number, or e-mail; it's much harder to make that contact make a difference.

It's easy (okay, maybe not easy!) to open an urgent care center in 8,000 locations across the U.S.; it's much harder to educate approximately 307,000,000 people in the U.S. about when then should come see us. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. ■