



# Solving Our Identity Crisis as an Industry

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

At the risk of sounding existential, what *is* urgent care? Patients, payors, and the larger healthcare community are looking for an easy answer to that question, but there isn't one. UCAOA took three paragraphs to explain it on our website (and not definitively, at that) and provided a grant to a team of researchers to help identify "real" urgent care centers.

We have been struggling with this question for a long time, effectively unwilling or unable to come to a consensus and draw the line between what is an urgent care center and what is not.

Well, that stops today.

UCAOA is launching a new program to certify urgent care centers—to define the delivery of urgent care medicine.

A Certified Urgent Care (CUC) must meet certain criteria that establish *who* provides care and to whom, *what* services must be available, and *when* the facility must be open.

These criteria create a definition of urgent care that will be accessible to all stakeholders.

But why does our industry need this?

- Because of the countless phone calls we get from centers who have received "urgent care" criteria from payors, cobbled together from a variety of sources—some of them as unqualified as an anonymous posting on our own Forums (I am not making that up).
- Because patients cannot be asked to figure out whether "their" urgent care center offers this service or that one when they are ill or injured
- Because some facilities are using "urgent care" in their name when they are not remotely providing urgent care services.



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Wait a minute though; what about UCAOA's partnership with the Joint Commission? Doesn't that do the same thing? Actually, no—which was another impetus for this program.

*"We have established a set of criteria that reflects our industry and will give all urgent care centers a distinction that is clear."*

The Joint Commission does not define what kind of facility does or does not qualify to be accredited using the urgent care set of standards. The Joint Commission's programs set standards for *how* care should be provided, not specifically *what* care should be provided, nor when nor by whom. Accreditation serves an important purpose, but it is not to define urgent care. That is the job of the urgent care industry itself.

We are very appreciative of the work of our committees and board members, as well as UCAOA staff who have made this possible. As you might imagine, it was not a simple nor conflict-free process, but we have established a set of criteria that we believe reflects our industry and will give all urgent care centers a distinction that is clear (and desperately needed).

How can you see the criteria?

The certification program is 100% public and all criteria will be shared with everyone; this transparency is critical to our efforts to create a global understanding. You can see the criteria on the UCAOA website now ([www.ucaoa.org/certification](http://www.ucaoa.org/certification)), and download the application package as soon as you are ready to apply.

We hope this program will give you an edge in marketing, a tool for negotiation, and a mark of distinction among facilities in your community. You certainly deserve it, and we are proud to provide it for you. ■