



Looking Forward, Looking Back

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

ately, it seems like time flies whether you're having fun or not. Can it possibly already be December? 2010 was more like a bullet train than a roller coaster; most of the time we were all going too fast to know if we were really climbing up a hill or careening down.

For many in our country, however, it feels like they got kicked off the train and are standing in a lonely field watching it fly by without them. It's hard to say who's got it worse.

Practically every call we take these days from the media or from investors looking into urgent care includes the same question: "What effect do you think healthcare reform is going to have on the urgent care industry?"

To speculate would be futile. What we do know is this: regardless of the changes that take place between now and the day we start truly feeling the effects of whatever healthcare reform turns out to be, it's probably going to mean more patients seeking care. More patients without primary care physicians. More patients unused to "the healthcare system."

A significant unknown is, of course, what the payment structure for all of those patients is going to look like.

Have you started a dialogue within your centers about how you could manage more patients? Are you looking at ways to more efficiently manage your patient flow? Do you have a good recruiting system in place now for adding more providers as you need them? Do you have a good relationship with your local banker, in case you need cash quickly to expand your operations? Do you have a good records management system with room to grow and absorb a significant increase? Would now be a good time to look at all of your contracts with payors as you consider your strategies? Does it look like the bullet train has no likelihood of slowing down in 2011?

Actually, there will probably be a bit of a lull here for a few months. Washington has to "re-sort" itself from a staffing standpoint as different offices (both physical and nominal) change

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hands and colors and everyone has to get back up to speed. Take advantage of that time between panic waves (!) to do some examination of where you are and where you want to be—and what you will need to do in the next year to get there.

As tumultuous as it has been out there, I hope that some of the things we've been doing at UCAOA have positively impacted you (or will in the future). As we have matured as an organization, we are seeing that our projects are getting bigger and having longer time horizons, so I use a lot of the space in these columns to talk about what is coming vs. what is past.

Here's a brief look back at a few highlights from 2010:

- UConnect launches. Our new "members only" area, full of easy-access resources and new ways to connect with your urgent care colleagues.
- Convention and conferences stay strong. The industry (and industry supporters) continues to come together for in-person meetings, defying trends across the association industry.
- Online education expands. We've done a complete overhaul of our online education, making it easier to access and a more robust educational experience.
- Corporate Support Partners stay supportive. Bucking trends across the country, our vendor partners continue to support UCAOA—and by extension, the urgent care industry.
- Fellowship programs grow. We added another Fellowship program this year, and there are more on the way.

In January, we'll pull back the curtain on the new programs we've been alluding to for months. (Some hints: a Foundation, a new "sister" organization, a new website for patients, benchmarking results, and more.)

See you in 2011—and remember, although it's moving fast, it's a great train to be on! ■



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