



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ACOs, Hospitals, and You

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

The folks at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services are busy reviewing all the comments on their proposed accountable care organization (ACO) regulations that were submitted by over 1,200 organizations, including UCAOA. All that reviewing and the subsequent adjustments and rewrites will take some time. In the meantime, what's an organization to do?

There was a great article in the journal *HealthLeaders* in July on "The Hospital of the Future" (available free at www.healthleadersmedia.com). It had a great thought that neatly addresses the issue:

The key is for leaders to strive toward achieving the goals behind the regulations because they are the right thing to do for their organization's future, rather than what may or may not come of government initiatives.

What's also interesting about the article is what it's recommending that hospitals do: start paying attention to "downstream providers" whom they have been virtually ignoring. For some hospitals and health systems, that has meant opening their own urgent care centers, but for most, it means finding partners and building relationships. This is where you come in!

What's tricky for hospitals is finding a way to work with you (and with other providers) that does not run into a variety of regulations against paying for referrals and the like. The naturally creative, entrepreneurial spirit of the typical urgent care owner can be a strong asset at a time like this.

ACOs will make these relationships both easier and harder to establish, it seems, depending on how events unfold. But, unlike in the past when payers were in charge of coordinating care (managed care), this time physicians will be in charge of coordination, if all goes as designed. In a way, this

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is a very good thing: instead of hinging hopes on a stranger in a corporate office thousands of miles away, providers can hinge their hopes on one another.

More Support Is on the Way

As I mentioned in my last editorial, UCAOA is working on a subtle but important transformation that will help us support you more effectively as we all muddle through these times together. We have been working on some aspects of the transformation for a long time; other efforts have just started and a few have yet to begin. We are adding staff. We are expanding our focus, our reach, and our expertise. We are expanding our membership. We are collaborating with other entities to assist in developing new studies of the industry.

At the same time, we are improving our existing programs so they will continue to be the best you can find. We recently received accreditation from the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education, so we will be able to provide even more CME programs than in the past and make them more accessible. We are partnering with the Urgent Care College of Physicians to cosponsor our conferences to further improve the clinical content of our meetings. We are also working on our practice management courses to keep them at the advanced levels you are demanding.

In short, we are taking the resources you have entrusted to us and putting them back to work for you. We hope you like what we are up to, and we invite you to share your comments and suggestions with us. ■



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