



Before You Get on the Bus, Consider Who's Driving

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

"All politics is local."

– Thomas O'Neill, Sr.

The more time goes by, the more it feels like we've been to this puppet show and already seen the strings. How can they keep selling tickets to us? I suppose it's because we keep buying them.

I first quoted Mr. O'Neill in my December 2009 column, entitled *Hands Across the Water*, about reaching out to your local primary care community to start talking about partnerships, connecting, serving their patients in their off-hours, etc.

That was over two years ago; three years before that, the term *Accountable Care Organization* was first used at a public meeting of the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC). Five years later, it's on everyone's lips and everyone's agenda, even if they aren't sure exactly what it is.

That would be a nice segue into one of my regular themes—healthcare moves slowly but urgent care life moves fast—but that's not where I'm headed. I'm headed back to Mr. O'Neill's revelation.

That quote about politics being local came about after young Thomas O'Neill, Jr. (later to be much more famously known by the nickname Tip) had run for—and lost—his first electoral seat. According to his father, he had not paid enough attention to his own neighborhood, not worked hard enough in his own backyard, so while he looked great in other locales, he lost his own. I think this is a critical lesson for urgent care owners.

Healthcare "fashions" come and go, but they are tremendously frightening most of the time. They threaten to impact your daily life and your livelihood. You cannot ignore them and must "chase" every single one to see if you should jump on the bus (or buy a ticket to the puppet show), or possibly be left behind at your pro-



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fessional peril.

What's important, though, is not the chase; it's what you do once you get on the bus to see if it's where you want to go. The bus may have a federal label such as Accountable Care Organization Route 12, but the people on that bus have a local label: Nearby Hospital Administrator, My Payor Representative, My Elected Official, or "My Physician Colleague."

"The most interesting urgent care success stories today are pretty out of the box."

Don't just hand the bus driver your money, take your seat, and face forward quietly until the bus stops somewhere; it may never stop!

First, take a good look at who is driving that bus in your neighborhood, and introduce yourself. Then, start meeting the other people on the bus. Ask if you can sit down with them. See if you have shared interests and may want to grab the pull cord and get off at the next stop together for a while.

You get the idea.

I doubt there is a "global" answer for any question in healthcare right now (and if there is, I certainly don't know what it is). What I do believe is that what is happening in healthcare and where the innovation is taking place is mostly happening right where you live. If you want to decide whether you should be jumping on any bandwagons, you need to be reaching out to the important players in your community to see what they are doing and whether you can (and want to) be a part of it.

Keep your options open, stay creative, don't talk to the same old people you always talk to, and see what you can make for yourself.

The most interesting success stories I'm hearing from urgent care centers today are pretty out of the box. They are basically building their own buses, or at least repainting them. You might consider looking at your own world and giving that some thought. ■