



UCAOA Takes to Capitol Hill to Meet with Congressional Offices

■ CAMILLE S. BONTA, MHS

Members of the Urgent Care Association of America (UCAOA) advocated on Capitol Hill in May to educate lawmakers about the role urgent care plays in the healthcare continuum. The “day on the Hill” coincided with UCAOA’s Urgent Care Convention & Expo and brought together 15 UCAOA representatives with 90 congressional offices, including staff serving on committees with jurisdiction over Medicaid and veterans’ healthcare.

Beyond providing a basic education on urgent care centers, the group solicited support for legislation that would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to cover urgent care visits for veterans. Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) has since introduced that legislation in the Senate, with bipartisan companion legislation expected in the House. Legislation to improve veterans’ access to urgent care centers is important to UCAOA’s broader efforts to educate payers about urgent care’s value proposition.

Just one day after that May visit, the House of Representatives passed the GOP American Health Care Act. While the extent to which Republicans will ultimately be successful at dismantling Obamacare this year is unclear, there is no doubt that states will seek greater flexibility with their Medicaid programs. The thirty-one states (and the District of Columbia) that have expanded Medicaid are likely nervous because enrollment projections are higher than expected, putting a squeeze on state budgets. Urgent care centers have the capacity to meet the nonemergency medical needs of the Medicaid population at a fraction of the cost to care for these patients in hospital EDs, but they cannot do so at a financial loss, and Medicaid rates for urgent care services are simply insufficient. That leaves states without a healthcare delivery infrastructure that encourages and supports lower cost sites of service.

Improving Medicaid rates so they are on par with Medicare



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would be one step toward a solution. While the failure of the Office of Management and Budget to conduct dynamic scoring that would quantify the savings realized by shifting care out of the ED into urgent care centers (and other budgetary factors) makes achieving Medicaid payment parity difficult, key congressional staff seemed genuinely interested in policy barriers urgent care centers face in caring for these patients.

UCAOA’s “day on the Hill” is just one component of the organization’s overall advocacy efforts, but an important one the association hopes to replicate and grow in the future. A 2015 survey, *Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement*, revealed that 94% of participating congressional staffers believe “in-person visits from constituents” have some or a lot of influence on an undecided lawmaker—a finding that has been consistent for more than a decade, according to the Congressional Management Foundation. The survey also found that in-person meetings that allow legislators and staff to interact and develop relationships with constituents are very important for understanding constituents’ views, and that getting to know legislative assistants and district and state directors is a good way to build those relationships.

UCAOA members truly can use their voices to make a difference on policy issues important to this industry. UCAOA hopes its members will engage in advocacy efforts when called upon and, in the meantime, use UCAOA resources to communicate and build relationships with state and federal lawmakers.

To learn more about UCAOA’s advocacy activities, visit www.ucaoa.org and look for “advocacy” in the menu bar. ■