



Beyond Access: Redefining Your Value Proposition

■ LAUREL STOIMENOFF, PT, CHC

Urgent care centers were the originators of convenient access to care for non-life- and limb-threatening illnesses and injuries. Consumers embraced the convenience, and the rest of the world noticed. New delivery models catalyzed by growing expectations for on-demand services have provided those seeking health-care services more options than ever before. If you are feeling the impact, it may be a manifestation of the successful model you developed—and now others are electing to modify or mirror it.

To ensure that urgent care continues to thrive in the new on-demand marketplace, we must ask ourselves what we can do to renew our value proposition. To do this, we must know what *today's* patient is seeking and anticipate what tomorrow's consumer will expect.

Convenience is Still Key

More than ever, convenience is a driver for healthcare decision making. Customers seek prompt, quality service that is most easily integrated into their busy lives. Urgent care continues to lead on this main value proposition; the 2016 UCAOA Benchmarking Survey found 92% of urgent care patients waited 30 minutes or less to be seen by a practitioner last year, and 90% of visits took 60 minutes or less to complete.

While telemedicine, retail, and other on-demand services are also finding niche roles in the continuum of care, urgent care remains a necessity due to our combination of broad scope of services, fast delivery of care, and great value. Studies indicate this trifecta of convenience will remain extremely important to the customer of the future—the millennials.

A 2016 UCAOA survey of patients from different age groups revealed millennials prioritize cost-savings and accessibility when making healthcare purchasing decisions. It is no surprise then that a study from the Health Industry Distribution Asso-

ciation (HIDA) showed 43% of millennials reported using an urgent care center in the last year.

Embrace Technology

Technology is no longer a supplement to our business—it is driving our business, as connectivity and accessibility are the new normal.

It can impact the customer experience at every stage of the patient visit. Time-saving check-in processes conducted online are becoming commonplace, as are providing patient alerts when a practitioner is ready to see them. Likewise, urgent care centers are integrating telemedicine to make better use of the medical providers when there are lulls in patient traffic.

Finding ways to improve our customer-centric service will continue to be an educational focus at the Urgent Care Convention & Expo in National Harbor, MD, April 29–May 3. We will discuss how best to cultivate healthy interactions with patients using current technologies, and why this engagement is vital to urgent care's future growth and success.

Prioritize Patients Over Process

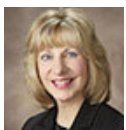
Urgent care centers often adjust their service model to accommodate payers, technology providers, or other third parties. Allowing these roadblocks to get in the way of delivering the optimum, on-demand care that patients are actively seeking would betray the foundation urgent care was built on: convenience and accessibility. If the *tail is wagging the dog*, it's time to step back and re-evaluate.

Look Back to Move Forward

As the market for on-demand healthcare continues to grow, urgent care must lead the way in efficiency, convenience, and a consumer-focused experience.

The upcoming UCAOA Convention & Expo will highlight market insights on the state of urgent care now and in the future.

However, we may find we need to take a step back to identify and eliminate barriers before pressing forward with a renewed focus on consumer needs and operational efficiency. ■



Laurel Stoimenoff, PT, CHC, is Chief Executive Officer of the Urgent Care Association of America.