



Occupational Medicine Boosts Sustainability and Growth

■ LAUREL STOIMENOFF, PT, CHC

Ongoing growth in the urgent care marketplace, coupled with uncertainty about future payment models, has inspired many operators to expand their product offerings to include occupational medicine.

According to the National Academy of Social Insurance, injured workers' medical benefits exceed \$31 billion per year. Yet, according to UCAOA's annual Benchmarking Report, it represents a small percentage of revenue for many centers. Astute employers seek cost-effective alternatives to the emergency department for their workforce. Onsite radiology, lab, and medical services augmented by a 7-day schedule render the urgent care center an attractive option for workers and employers.

While the synergies of acute primary care and occ med abound, there are nuances associated with caring for injured workers and the new customer in the room: *the employer*. Urgent care operators must ensure that their administrative, communication, and clinical processes address the triggers that ensure not only a positive patient outcome, but also a favorable employer experience. As one employer once said to me, despite a long history of providing care for their injured workers, "You're only as good as the last one treated." This is a service line where relationships determine results, and urgent care centers need to adjust their delivery model or, if multisite, consider selecting several geographically appropriate occupational medicine centers of excellence.

Diversify Your Patient and Payer Base

Adding occ med services opens the door to new patient populations in the community. While traditional urgent care patients often seek care close to their home, injured workers seek services close to work. Adding occ med services taps into

a new, nonresident population. While urgent care centers are prepared for illness and injury, illness tends to dominate unless an injured worker strategy is pursued. Additionally, increasing overall reimbursement per visit can be accomplished through a more favorable payer distribution. The National Council on Compensation Insurance reported that of the 42 states with industrial fee schedules, only two reimbursed *some* services less than Medicare, while most compensated providers an average of 130% of the Medicare fee schedule. Imagine favorable fee schedules with *no* patient responsibility toward payment.

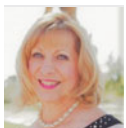
Viability

The ever-changing healthcare landscape continues to put pressure on providers to secure strong reimbursement contracts with payers and to strengthen the bottom line. When urgent care expands to include occ med services, new channels of revenue become available. While employer satisfaction is essential, management of a work-related injury becomes a team sport, and a favorable patient experience is more likely to result in a positive clinical (and financial) outcome. A positive work-related injury experience in the urgent care center should translate to future traffic if it's done right. Additionally, injured workers often require follow-up care, so while the cost of patient acquisition may be higher, it is more than offset by the revenue associated with the injury care.

Sustainability

Integrating occ med services allows urgent care to remain resilient to industry changes. Offering a variety of on-demand services empowers urgent care centers to keep pace with the demand for convenient, patient-focused healthcare options. Patients and employers share a common need: ready access to affordable, quality, one-stop healthcare.

Join us at the UCAOA Fall Conference October 26-28 in Anaheim, CA. Experts will offer insights on occupational medicine and much more. Visit ucaoa.org/2017Fall for details. ■



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