

Thoughtfully Flourishing into New Frontiers

■ LAUREL STOIMENOFF, PT, CHC

UCA frequently receives calls from the media questioning the impact of current or looming influences on the industry. Typically, they are seeking opinions on how urgent care will fare in the uncertain future and if its meteoric growth trajectory can continue. The good news is we are on their radar, though I sometimes sense they are seeking a more savory story, even hoping our fate is like that of the Ford Edsel. I attribute it to envy, particularly in those who believe the road was an easy one devoid of the ingenuity and grit it took to get you where you are.

Urgent care centers have transformed on-demand medicine. The industry collectively chose to put the patient first and the consumer gravitated to it. Its focus has always been on elevating the **patient experience** and gaining their **loyalty**. Yet in recent months I have spoken with both clinical and operational leaders in a number of organizations regarding issues of **clinical quality** and **patient safety**. Suffice it to say that I have been extremely impressed and humbled by the profound commitment that fundamentally begins with these core tenets. A parallel can be found in Disney, which is known for its courtesy and the guest experience but defines its highest priority as **safety**. While quality and safety are “given” expectations of consumers and they may lack the “wow” factor, they require relentless attention by those who provide the care and service.

High-Reliability Organizations

A high-reliability organization (HRO) is defined as an organization that operates in complex, high-hazard domains for extended periods without serious accidents or catastrophic failures. HROs consistently achieve their goals and deliver safe, high-quality service based on six foundational elements, including a *preoccupation with failure*. They focus on predicting failures

instead of reacting to them. While on the surface the urgent care environment may not seem to be highly complex or looming with hazards, reliability is a core tenet of value-based care (VBC). And VBC will inspire integration with other providers and systems, resulting in an increasingly complex web where failure probabilities increase.

What Could Go Wrong?

We are *not* pessimists when reflecting on what could go wrong. As a mentor used to tell me, *a pessimist is just an optimist with experience*. Whether considering quality and safety issues, the fate of your business, or the future of our industry, we must do what oftentimes feels impossible: **take time to think**. The Urgent Care Foundation recently convened a representation of industry thought leaders for this purpose. We learned that many of these innovators are implementing and improving their organizations with what some perceive as necessary defensive moves, while others see it as playing offense. Either way, we saw ways these organizations continue to evolve while maintaining a keen focus on quality and safety. One of HRO’s foundational elements is **resiliency**, and these thought leaders define it.

In support of this, UCA’s revised mission reads: “*We are an organization of leaders, providers and suppliers in the field of on-demand, consumer-focused healthcare. We advance our industry and support success through advocacy, education, research, collaboration and high standards of excellence.*”

The upcoming urgent care conference is themed New Frontiers, representing the innovation of the industry and our collective commitment to reinventing ourselves in anticipation of changes in technology, the regulatory climate, consumer demands, and our healthcare communities, while always building on the fundamental successes that launched on-demand ambulatory healthcare. When the media calls, I make sure they understand the strength of the fabric that makes up this organism we call urgent care. *That* should be their story.

I hope to see you at the UCA Fall Conference in Houston, October 12-14. It’s where failure is not an option! ■



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