

Define. Foster. Curate. Connect.

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

Pandemics have a way of helping you figure out what's really important. COVID-19 has created a crucible of performance and opportunity assessment like no other. It has turned all of our "what if" musings into harsh reality and shown us what we're made of, what we're great at, and where we fall short.

What we've learned at UCA has been uncomfortable, and maybe you've felt the same as your centers have struggled to adapt. As we go through this journey together, I want to be transparent about UCA's learnings in the hope that it will inspire you to be part of where they are taking us—because we want to be part of where you're going.

Learning #1 – All Things to All People

Our industry has evolved to be incredibly diverse. We have hospital-owned, privately owned, investor-backed, single-site, and 300+site organizations and everything in between. We have physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, managers, billers, owners, medical assistants, rad techs, marketers, business developers, investors and vendors. We have U.S.-based, international, rural, suburban, urban, pediatrics-only, after hours-only, occupational medicine, and hybrid primary care/urgent care centers, not counting our external stakeholders.

In trying to serve all of the industry and everyone who's interested in us well, we've struggled to be fantastic at anything. In trying to be something for everyone, we've struggled to have a clear identity. Good has been the enemy of great. And though it's been very difficult to discover this about ourselves, we see it now and are already making some changes to do better.

Learning #2 – Flying Under the Radar

Urgent care's original DNA included strains of existence on the fringes and in the in-betweens. We started as an "alternative." Primary care was too hard to get into with services that were too limited, and the ED was no place for nonemergencies. There

was nothing in-between for "urgencies"—so we were born.

Patients loved us, but as it turned out, not *everyone* was thrilled about what we were doing. To avoid being pounded by the proverbial 800-pound gorillas of family and emergency medicine and the regulatory bodies who saw us as an opportunity, we chose to fly under the radar and make friends where we could but not make too much noise so we didn't become a target.

UCA's approach to programs and even advocacy has, somewhat unconsciously, been a reflection of that. We've not been too noisy about who should and shouldn't be calling themselves an urgent care; about what good urgent care looks like; and about defining our identity and what we stand for.

That worked well for a long time for urgent care and UCA—until we discovered that we wanted to be heard. Until we discovered that we wanted to attract attention. Until we discovered that we needed to be clear about and proud of our identity and why we're here in order to be heard. And though it's been very difficult to discover this too, we see it now and can ignore it no longer.

These two realizations have reached deep and wide into what we at UCA do, how we do it, and even how we think about it. It's made us realize we needed more urgent care experience on our staff, so we made changes. It's made us realize we have some products and programs that are no longer relevant enough, so we are unwinding them. It's made us realize our role in serving you is going to be different going forward, so we are doing a lot of listening to understand what that means.

COVID-19 hit UCA hard. Cancelling the 2020 Convention took almost 50% of our typical annual revenue with it, without much chance of recouping it this year given the challenging situations you are in and the uncertainty everyone feels. EXCEPT...via growing our membership. And that benefits us all.

If you are reading this and aren't a member, please come and join us officially. By the time you read this we will have announced some new benefits and we are working on more. We are going to be a better partner for you than ever before—and we need you. We hope you find you need us, as well.

If you are a member, thank you deeply from me, the staff, the board, and all of our affiliates plus your fellow members. Together we are stronger. More to come. Tell your friends. ■



Lou Ellen Horwitz, MA is the chief executive officer of the Urgent Care Association.