

This Is Us

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

If the 2020 word of the year wasn't *unprecedented*, it should be. Most of the time that word was used to describe the next difficulty that 2020 brought, but in urgent care we saw something very different—we saw unprecedented connection with our communities. We also saw an unprecedented collaboration across UCA via not only staff and formal volunteers, but all members, and many vendor partners.

We realized early on with COVID testing that, once again, urgent care had been left out of the important conversations. We all know what happened next—you went and did testing anyway, and rocked it, and continue to be an example for your healthcare community on improvisation, creativity, service, and determination to this day. Hospitals and EDs have to be open, but urgent care *chose* to be open, and that garnered attention like never before. We all sensed it as a storytelling moment we could not miss and redoubled our efforts to get a voice in the rest of COVID planning.

Hundreds of us spent 2020 telling the urgent care COVID story to lawmakers, regulators, public health officials, suppliers, the media, strategic partners, and so on. It took some time for us to fully mobilize and break through longstanding barriers, but by the Fall we were not only sitting at the table, but being *asked* to speak.

Here are some highlights of what we did together:

- Worked with the CDC to help them *correctly* understand your capabilities and edit their final Vaccine Playbook to include urgent care. This is the first time federal guidance has formally included us. **Because of this, urgent care centers were included in many state vaccine playbooks from day 1.**
- Connected with state planners to get UCA members a seat on their vaccine task forces. **Because of this, urgent care centers have a seat at the table for ongoing planning in many states.**



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- Ensured that state vaccination planners had comprehensive lists of their state's urgent care centers. **Because of this, urgent care centers are positioned to play key roles in vaccinating pivotal or underserved geographic areas.**
- Lobbied members of Congress and CMS to increase COVID-19 testing reimbursement alongside diagnostic industry partners and advocated for key public health issues related to testing. **Because of this, these members and UCA staff have gained new access to high-level decision makers** (though the reimbursement battle continues).
- Leveraged these and other connections with the Healthcare Resilience Working Group (a committee of Operation Warp Speed) to further our reach into federal agencies. The HRWG is made up of governmental agencies such as the CDC, FEMA, the FDA, CMS and others, and are tasked with understanding the challenges we've had with provider utilization through the pandemic, toward better utilization in future emergencies or pandemics. **Because of this, there is greater understanding at the federal level of the role we are playing and can play in healthcare.**
- Begun talks with Operation Warp Speed: Therapeutics and therapeutics manufacturers about urgent care's potential role in COVID-19 therapies for non-critical patients. **Because of this, urgent care will be included in rollout planning as these therapies evolve.**

It is easy to watch the news and get discouraged by all the talk about drugstores and their very visible testing or vaccine mobilizations—and feel that in spite of all of our efforts you're still not the healthcare celebrities you should be. I'll confess I've found myself yelling at the television on your behalf more than once!

It's then I have to remind myself how far we *have* come since March. All of these government agencies know who you are. They may not be able to turn on a dime like we'd like, *but they are turning*. Big pharma is calling us. The CDC is giving direct briefings to us and recommending utilization of urgent care. All because we came together, stood up and said, "This is us."

2021 brings a new administration and a new Congress, which means we will have to keep coming together and keep standing up. We all have to keep telling our story. Some of these people will be hearing it for the first time. Let's make it a good one. ■