

# Focus

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

It seems like urgent care is no longer in the shadows of the “healthcare continuum.” This shift is the culmination of over a decade of work by many, many people, to whom all of us owe much. It’s also the outgrowth of how everyone reading this sentence responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Coming out of the shadows means coming into the light, but sometimes that light is glaring. Sometimes that light is searing through a magnifying glass. Sometimes those shadows start to look pretty attractive again. It’s so much cooler back under cover—but we never were a group to run away from a challenge, were we?

The challenge all of this light brings us is one of focus: for all of you to clarify who you are going to be, and for UCA and CUCM and UCF to clarify who we are going to be for you.

The question on most lips in our industry and profession is, *What is next for urgent care?* Though the pandemic, in many ways, gave us a chance to do what we do best, the issues we had before last March are here waiting for us as we emerge. Primarily they stem from definition and recognition of the specialty of urgent care medicine and payer policies—and all that trickles down from those two.

As I just stated, none of this is new but our understanding of the road we’ve traveled to get here and our ideas of where to go next are ever-more-sophisticated. There are many creative conversations happening right now about the future of urgent care, and we’ll continue those in October at the Convention. Our relationships with new stakeholders like major diagnostic and pharmaceutical companies, and top governmental agencies are giving us new inroads.

Being in the searing spotlight, and performing well in that spotlight, is starting to pay off.

Stepping into the light also invites criticism. It makes us a target, and is part of the price of fame (which we knew would come). Knowing that and managing that is where UCA, CUCM,



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and UCF have been working on our focus. While it is tempting to go chasing after every statement or article or mention of urgent care, we have to ensure that the catch is worth the chase. Put another way, we are very thoughtful about whether our actions are ego-based “feel good” behaviors (and let us say to you “Look, we responded!”) vs results-based *effective* behaviors that leads to an improved environment for urgent care.

We take our responsibility as stewards of your resources very carefully, so if you ever wonder “why didn’t UCA say anything about this,” it’s likely because we want to use our/your political and reputational capital in strategic ways and to do that we have to stay focused. We can’t respond to everything that happens—otherwise we’d get stuck forever being reactive instead of proactive. But I also want you to know that it is very, very hard, because we deeply want to respond every single time. I hope that you will agree that to accomplish the big things you are asking from us, to land the very big roles, sometimes we have to let the bit parts pass us by.

What’s exciting to me at this moment is that even the critics and bit parts are informing the strategy discussions—we are using them to learn and make our arguments stronger. We are using them to better connect efforts across partners like JUCM and Hippo Education. We are using them to challenge the assumptions and blind spots that have likely been holding us back. We are all standing bravely in the light, and now we have been brave enough to take a hard look at ourselves in that light.

Why is this so exciting? Because there is no stronger weapon than true self-knowledge. This deep level of understanding of who we are and what we are capable of is the key to taking control of our own growth and development—vs having our fate determined by others. It’s the key to what’s next, and it’s going to be quite a show.

Thanks, as always, for letting me and all of us at UCA be part of it. ■