

Getting the Band Back Together

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

Last December when we decided to move our 2021 Annual Convention from April to October it brought both heartbreak and hope. COVID-19 visits were peaking in urgent care and the first vaccine was still in Phase 3 trials, so we knew we couldn't host you in April—but we weren't sure we'd be able to host you by October, either, so rescheduling a face-to-face was a leap of faith for all of us here.

As we deliberated whether to reschedule or do a virtual event, we talked with a lot of you—members and vendors and others who believe in the value of urgent care. You told us what's most important about that gathering. You talked about the special things that happen when like-minded people come together for an extended period of time. You shared past experiences and people you'd met that made all the difference in your success, and talked about others that have become lifelong friends.

These are not things that happen in a virtual event, no matter how great the platform. In the end, it was an easy decision.

Togetherness is important all of the time, but especially in times of change—and urgent care is definitely facing a time of change. External forces wrote our story for us throughout 2020, but now that we've reached the midway point of 2021 it's time for us to start writing our own again. To find a way to truly take control of our future in ways we have not been able to do so far.

The threats facing urgent care are becoming more universal rather than occurring in isolated pockets across the country. If we are going to fulfill our potential in the healthcare continuum, we are going to have to face them together. As you read this, the payer community is downgrading our medical and business models while simultaneously bemoaning our failure to pull visits from the ED; this all has the potential to lead to an unwinnable scenario. The irony is that payers need us, primary care needs us, health systems need us, and emergency departments need us. And yet they continue to make it hard to *be us*.

The time for us to rise up together and fix this is now. Trust



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

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with payers (and vice versa) must be rebuilt into an actual pro-patient partnership, and advanced medical capability must be rebuilt. This won't happen overnight, of course, so we also need more immediate strategies while this rebuilding takes place.

Urgent care has always been at its best when we share with and learn from each other, so in October we are going to do that. We are going to look at different models and experiments and successes and failures to share what's working and what to avoid.

One of my favorite words that came from the “Should we have the Convention in person?” conversations was *serendipity* (thanks, Heather). I am one of those people who still has a print dictionary on my desk and it defines this as: “the faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident.”

This is what happens when smart people like you come together and meet each other in a ballroom lobby at a break, introduce someone to someone else at an exhibit hall reception, or deliberately sit down to solve a problem from a new perspective in a workshop or discuss a potential deal over dinner. It's almost impossible to do that without coming together—so I am so excited we are going to be able to provide you with that opportunity again.

I'm also so tempted to share in depth what our general sessions are going to be, but I'll just hint that we'll probably make some music, reset the performance bar, and play some offense. Those are going to be awesome.

Urgent care people are some of the most creative, determined, and passionate people around, and we can't wait to gather you again and see what happens. Only a few more months to wait! ■