

Let's Get this Party Started

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

This time last year all we could talk about was the “twindemic” and whether it was coming or not. The ache for normalcy was pervasive, and though a twindemic did not materialize in 2020, the Delta variant was headed our way and we didn't even know it. We were so focused on driving volume for so long, and it seems so laughable today. Normalcy has a new definition.

What people tell me they are worrying about today is staffing shortages and burnout, patient anger to the point of violence, and the big glowing eye of the payer community swiveling towards urgent care. When we said we wanted to stand up and be recognized for our extraordinary contributions to healthcare, *more* downward pressure is not what we hoped for.

Trends we are hearing about include a move away from global rates (which were great for the payers when we did high acuity for moderate payment but lately we've done a lot of low acuity for moderate payment...so much for letting things “balance out over time”), and tiered payment structures that cut lower acuity by huge percentages (visit the North East Regional Urgent Care Association chapter's website at www.ne-ruca.org to learn more). Though we certainly don't and can't support collusion, we hope you are individually finding the strength in your negotiations to own the tremendous role you have played, are playing, and should play in your communities—and standing up for the critical importance of the scope of care that you provide.

And where will the patients go if not to us? We (and they) know the answer, and it doesn't seem to be telemedicine. Nothing against telemedicine—it's fantastic for the right things and urgent care has done a wonderful job integrating digital front doors, but there's a reason people talk about “healing hands”—it's the same reason patients want face-to-face when they are really sick or injured.

We are also not high cost. One study paid for by an emer-

gency medicine foundation using highly selective data does not prove that we are—no matter where the researchers went to school or how esteemed the publication is. Payers know this because they have their own data! We are also not sites of tremendous inefficiencies and waste. We are rightfully known for our efficiencies and ingenuity (hello...pandemic response), so they may as well stop squeezing us and look elsewhere. Let's all be sure we remind them of that at every opportunity.

Now About that Party

I know from the title of this column that there's a party in here somewhere, and I'll tell you where it is—it's in Las Vegas. Take a moment and close your eyes and remember what it feels like to be in a huge ballroom room filled with hundreds and hundreds of people who understand you. People who have been you. People who truly want to help you. People willing to share without agenda. People who have the answers you need—or at the very least can sympathize with your struggle or commiserate with your frustration.

Remember what it feels like to sit in a classroom and hear from people more knowledgeable than you. Remember what it feels like to share your own successes and receive the heartfelt thankfulness of a colleague who needed to know their dream was possible. Remember what likemindedness and affirmation feels like. Remember how it feels to have validation that your ideas are correct, your hunches are dead on, your suspicions are not crazy, your hopes are possible.

Remember what it's like to walk into an exhibit hall with hundreds of vendors who understand urgent care and might have the perfect solution for you. Remember that out of those hundreds of vendors, some have become friends and can't wait to show you their new thing. Remember how fun it is to round a corner in the middle of that huge hall and run into that very person you were hoping to meet. Remember the serendipity of getting some true face time with the right group. There's absolutely nothing like the UCA Annual Convention.

Let's do it again, shall we? (We'll have some supremely cool new things to share with you, too!) Registration opened December 1. I truly, truly cannot wait to see you all. ■



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