

# Timing is Everything

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

ately it's been hard to keep up around here, so I wanted to begin with confirming what we announced by email in October: We are calling off the search for a new CEO for another year. We'd announced my planned retirement in June, and launched the search in August, and had an overwhelming response. However, as the search committee reviewed candidates, we began to have concerns about timing of a change in leadership on that projected timetable. There's a potential lull in momentum that happens while a new leader is getting up to speed and we concluded that a lull in momentum right now was highly undesirable.

I want to express my appreciation to the search committee for their partnership on determining our best course, to the UCA Board of Directors for their support of my continuing as CEO for a while longer, and especially to the staff for involuntarily riding this roller coaster. We have so many wonderful things under development and I'm happy to postpone my retirement to fully leverage the progress we've made so far.

## Web Presence

You will see the most immediate evidence of this progress in our new website, which launches this month. It comes with a new URL—[urgentcareassociation.org](http://urgentcareassociation.org)—and our affiliates will have new sites, as well ([urgentcarecollege.org](http://urgentcarecollege.org) for CUCM and [urgentcarefoundation.org](http://urgentcarefoundation.org) for UCF). We are beyond excited to have you visit us there and see how much it's improved.

Behind the scenes, we're also replacing our AMS (Association Management System), which is where all of your UCA/CUCM/UCF membership and activity information lives. And even though it's behind the scenes, you should see a tremendous improvement in the experience of how you connect with us online.

Both of these technological efforts have enabled us to create our new Learning Center, which we piloted this summer. If you were one of the thousands of visitors we've had so far, we hope you liked what you found! We will constantly be curating, de-



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veloping, and adding new resources to the Learning Center to ensure you have best practices across all Urgent Care operations and clinical practice available at your fingertips.

## Membership Improvements

We are also making significant improvements to how membership works and growing the benefits you get as a member. If you are an organizational member, our new structure scales with the number of centers in your company instead of having "tiers," which means your membership dues are tailored specifically to your organization and membership benefits are available to everyone who works for you (and we've made it super-easy to access those benefits). There are new benefits, as well; you can discover them all for yourself on the new website, or we'll walk you through it when it's time to renew.

## Product and Service Provider Engagement

We have a new digital membership option for individuals. This is great for people who are just dipping their toe into Urgent Care but don't yet want to take advantage of everything that full membership has to offer. If you are one of the many who have asked for access to our digital activities but don't actually work in Urgent Care, this one is for you.

We've also revamped engagement opportunities for all of you who provide products and services to Urgent Care centers. There are new ways to interact with members and support ev-

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everything that UCA, CUCM, and UCF are doing on behalf of our members. We all appreciate your support and hope you will like what we've created for you, too!

**Moving Forward**

If it sounds like a lot has been under wraps around here, that's entirely accurate. Most of these transformations have been underway for 2 years or more, and we hope that with their release you will see how hard we have been working to earn your trust as *The Urgent Care Association* that will be your partner in advancement and long-term success for many years to come. We promise to continue to evolve and grow our ability to lead national efforts on your behalf.

It's been a while since I've talked about those national efforts in this column, so let's catch up a bit. As we all know, the pandemic finally woke everyone up to the role that Urgent Care plays in our national healthcare system, and to how poorly integrated into that system we actually were.

Part of this is our own fault. Until that point, we'd done work on relationship-building with the federal government and public health, but not in a way that was making a national-level impact. Isolated groups of volunteers or Urgent Care companies were working on this, but we were not banding together as an industry, so our progress was also isolated and very limited. The cold reality of what that meant for the industry has smacked us time and again throughout the pandemic.

Because we hadn't had one voice, the concept of working with Urgent Care on a national level wasn't even considered. This made it hard (and expensive) for you to get PPE, hard for you to get tests once they were available, hard for you to participate in vaccinations, hard for you to get treatments once they came out, and—worst of all—hard for you to serve your communities in the way that you were absolutely prepared to do. We are all complicit in the limited access to care that persists to this day because of our lack of a unified, national voice.

There's a quote that applies here that I both love and hate: *The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago; the second-best time is today.* Nothing brought that home to Urgent Care like our shared experiences through the pandemic. We had not done the work for the past 20 years to be ready to go when the time came; to share another quote: *The time to be ready is not the time to get ready.*

I think you can figure out what that means. We *must* invest in advocacy today, and we must invest *aggressively*, or we will

be left out again and we will deserve it—because we weren't willing to do the work on our own behalf.

Surely, surely we are not going to let that happen.

Part of our work has been done. We have identified our advocacy priorities and the paths to get there.

1. Educate – There are people with direct power to influence our future who still don't fully understand what we are capable of. We have a plan to fix that.
2. Nationalize UC Scope – This is necessary to have a foundation for all of the changes we want in how Urgent Care are treated. Together we can stand up for who we are in a way that's clear to all stakeholders.
3. Improve Industry Sustainability – We must shift the way Urgent Care is paid to align with (and expand) the contributions we make to society. This is a key issue for equitable access to healthcare and your basic ability to serve your communities.

As we've solidified these priorities and mapped out the strategies, our path is clear but still very uncertain. *We will not succeed*, or even be able to pursue our agenda, *without participation from the majority of the industry.* To date, we've not achieved that, and I want to be transparent with you: If we don't unify our voice, these efforts are going to continue to fail.



What does unifying our voice look like? It looks like donating to the cause. We have experts and strategies figured out and ready to go, but we cannot afford it by ourselves. We know that most of you don't have the capacity to donate time, so we are asking you to donate dollars. We are

asking *every Urgent Care center* to donate \$100 (just scan the QR code). That's covered by about one patient for a center, but collectively it adds up to over a million dollars—and we can do a lot with a million dollars.

I can't say it more clearly: The future is up to you and the time to step up is now.

It's exciting just to think about, isn't it—that our industry is big enough that we could actually, finally, get something done on a national level? Look out, world.

As we close out another year of working together, I want to say again how thankful I am that you are part of Urgent Care and part of transforming healthcare in your communities. You are the leaders in redefining what quality of care and patient experience can look like, and I know that this is your time. I know that we can leverage all of the work that you are doing every day into something even better. I know that though there are struggles, our future is bright.

If you haven't already done so, save March 31–April 4 in your calendar. Those are the dates of the Urgent Care Convention, and it's going to be the best yet.

Look out, 2023, we're coming for you. ■