



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Quantifying Urgent Care, Defining Our Industry



Have you ever wondered how many urgent care centers there are in the U.S.? So did UCAOA.

Partnering with researchers at Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital, UCAOA has completed the first-ever sampling frame of urgent care centers across the country.

Our goal was to produce an objective, scientifically valid assessment of the size of the urgent care industry. Estimates have flown around the industry for years, but until now no one has committed the resources to ensure an accurate count, making this truly an historic project.

Robin Weinick, PhD, along with her colleagues Catherine Desroches, DrPH, Steffanie Bristol, and Jessica Marder used comprehensive search strategies and extensive data cleaning to produce the most scientifically valid accounting of the urgent care industry ever.

They identified 9,135 unique urgent care centers around the country. Of these, 8,113 are freestanding, and 1,022 are hospital-affiliated.

While there is no way to be certain they found every urgent care center in the country, we're confident that we've identified the large majority of them.

One limitation of the sampling frame is represented in the number of "health system" urgent care centers. The data source identified all hospitals that had at least one urgent care center as part of their network. However, no source is available to identify exactly how many centers each hospital has.

Future surveys will identify the average number of urgent care centers per hospital, allowing us to better estimate the total. This is important, given that we identified over 1,000 hospital-based urgent cares. Survey data may reveal that a multiple of this number is more accurate.

So what does all this mean?

A scientifically valid sampling frame like this clearly identifies urgent care as a major player in the healthcare delivery system.

By comparison, in 2004 the American Hospital Association said there were less than 4,500 emergency departments in the U.S.—less than half the number of urgent care centers.

We suspect that future surveys will reveal at least as many urgent care visits annually as emergency department visits.

All of this puts urgent care solidly on the map as a critical provider of acute care services.

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So where do we go from here? Along with this research team, UCAOA is about to launch the first scientifically rigorous national survey of urgent care centers. This will help us understand how centers like yours work and what their needs are—so we can serve you better.

The survey will also provide some much needed industry benchmarks. Many of you who are reading this letter will be selected to participate in the survey. If you receive a survey, please help us out by answering the questions and returning it to us quickly.

Welcome to a new era. UCAOA is committed to being the leader by defining the industry, establishing educational competencies and programs, and representing the discipline as an essential part of the healthcare delivery system. ■

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