

A Love Letter

■ Lou Ellen Horwitz, MA

Dear Urgent Care,

I remember the day we first met. It was a long-ago Christmas Eve early in the morning, and I had awakened with a terribly sore throat. I was despondent, knowing no one would be willing to take care of me on the holiday, which meant it wouldn't be a very merry one for me. Then, there you were.

In a brick building on a well-traveled highway, your lights were on and your sign was bright. I turned into the warm welcome of your parking lot, and you took care of me. It was love at first sight. It was many years later before we met again. A friend of a friend reintroduced us, and I fell in love again, this time much more deeply. The more I got to know you, the more I loved everything about you.

Your feisty spirit that wouldn't take no for an answer and rose to meet every challenge that came your way. Your maverick side that said, "the way we've always done it" wasn't in your playbook. Your tender side that wanted to stay focused on each and every individual that came through your doors and to treat them as the remarkable people that they are. Your brainy side that wanted to dive into numbers and science, looking for proof and evidence and returns on investment. Your protective side that reared up when your staff was in danger or being mistreated. Your funny side that could still laugh with friends amidst desperate uncertainty, and your beautiful side that wanted to create a more healing environment for patients and families. How could I not fall in love with you?

As we have grown older together, we've learned together too. We've learned not to be afraid of new market entrants. We've stopped circling the wagons and instead opened the circle to embrace the new—or at least give others the opportunity to be part of what we are doing!



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

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We've lost our fear of raising our heads up out of the herd and are learning how to leverage the power of visibility. We've learned that we are resilient and creative and that we are even more so together. We've learned that we still have room to grow and that new expertise is a wonderful thing.

We've learned that scaling is hard, staying small is hard, consistent quality is hard, and that inconsistent quality is harder. We've learned that standards and standardization matter, even though they go against our entrepreneurial grain. We've learned that diversity of thought and diversity among our approaches, our teams, and our patients matters much, and that inclusion is the path to growth. We've learned that partnerships can be critical, having the right team members is crucial, and that there's actually no such thing as the secret sauce in Urgent Care; many different approaches can be successful if the right standards are underneath.

As our relationship has matured and we both have matured, we've made it okay to challenge each other. I call you out on your ways of thinking, and you call me out on mine. I believe it has made me a better person, and I hope it has contributed to the amazing “you” that you have become and continue to become. Every day, I love watching how you reinvent yourself over and over again to adapt to the needs of the world around you and the changes it throws your way. Chameleons may not be thought of as standards of beauty, but every time I look at you, I see all the colors that you can show. And you are beautiful to me.

In the past few months I've shared your story with new people, and it has made me fall in love with you all over again. As you face another challenge or change or opportunity in the coming months, I hope that you will open this up again and remember that you are loved, cherished, appreciated, and one of a kind. ■