

Opportunities in Urgent Care Education

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Urgent care centers represent a vital component of the American health care system, as evidenced by their rapid growth over the last decade and urgent care's role during the COVID-19 pandemic; but demand for urgent care services has highlighted a need for focused education for the clinicians practicing in this nuanced environment.

By equipping clinicians with specialized urgent care education, urgent care centers can better support their teams and improve patient outcomes.

A unique environment



Urgent care makes health care accessible, convenient, and affordable by aligning with the needs of modern consumers. Shifting consumer preferences for the convenience and time-saving nature of urgent care, coupled with rising emergency care costs, have contributed to increased demand for urgent care services.¹ **In response, the number of urgent care centers in the U.S. has grown 10 percent year over year for the past decade.**



For patients, urgent care centers are not only a convenient option—they can also save thousands of dollars compared to a visit to an emergency room.² But while the convenience and affordability of urgent care's position in the healthcare industry benefits consumers, its position between primary and emergency care presents a unique and challenging environment for clinicians.

The urgent care setting requires clinicians to treat urgent cases while also identifying emergency situations that are best redirected to the ER. A high level of knowledge and readiness is needed for the broad scope of illnesses and injuries seen in urgent care. Unlike other specialties, urgent care is not yet recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), so specialized education and training of new clinicians is primarily the responsibility of urgent care centers, presenting unique challenges.

The need for focused education

Urgent care clinicians leverage their skills and knowledge to deliver meaningful patient outcomes in a highly demanding environment, and the broad scope of urgent care can make training new clinicians challenging for urgent care centers, especially on their own. If new clinicians aren't prepared for the nuances of the urgent care environment, it can lead to burnout, clinician turnover, a lack of clinical confidence around this expansive scope of patients, and confusion about which patients belong in an ER.

Shouldering the responsibility for clinician education can be a burden on urgent care centers, but that is the reality of the current environment. Fortunately, new education resources developed by seasoned urgent care practitioners can offer support for urgent care centers. By adopting an educational program focused on the unique scope and depth of the urgent care setting, urgent care centers can better support their clinicians and patients while positioning their practices for sustainable success.

Education solutions for urgent care

Urgent care centers that adopt educational programs targeting their unique challenges see substantial benefits. On average, clinician retention rates rise and patient outcomes improve. In some cases, this creates a positive reinforcing feedback loop within urgent care organizations where better educated clinicians lead to enhanced patient outcomes, improving the reputation of the urgent care center and attracting more talented clinicians.

Carbon Health is an example of this.

The modern primary and urgent care organization is adding 60 new centers in 2021 alone and is projected to grow 5,900 percent in the next five years, all while maintaining exceptional patient care. A key to their success has been the organization's commitment to focused education and training for their clinicians.



“Our [clinician] retention rate is over 95 percent, and one of the biggest factors is the attention we put into education and career development,” says Dr. Roger Wu, Medical Director at Carbon. “When clinicians are happy and fulfilled, patients experience better outcomes. It becomes a positive reinforcing feedback loop that supports growth.”

For urgent care centers ready to invest in specialized education and training for their new clinicians, several programs are available online. Leaders should research their options to ensure the onboarding program they select provides comprehensive, quality education focused on the broad scope and unique environment of urgent care. Programs built by seasoned urgent care practitioners, as opposed to those created by practitioners from other specialties, should be prioritized.

With a wide variety of illnesses and injuries in an evolving practice, it's equally essential for experienced clinicians to be equipped with resources for ongoing education. Staying up to date on important topics and improving knowledge gaps is a key part of continuous quality improvement and clinician satisfaction. Easily accessible modalities such as podcasts are a convenient and affordable way for experienced clinicians to stay current despite busy schedules. Adding a regular knowledge assessment program—as simple as five evidenced-based questions—can spark ongoing learning and engagement around the latest urgent care best practices. Combining these on-demand modalities with live activities fully rounds out an ongoing professional development program for clinicians.

Education in urgent care can be as complex and nuanced as the practice itself, but it doesn't need to be. By prioritizing educational programs focused on the unique scope and challenges of the urgent care environment, urgent care centers can better support their teams and patients in this essential and thriving practice.

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