Mark Smith, director of ambulatory care services for Union Hospital in Elkton, Maryland says their UCA Accreditation helps them send a powerful message.

“We wanted to set ourselves apart, and let our patients and the community know our urgent care centers had reached the gold standard,” says Smith. “Our UCA Accreditation now demonstrates that for us.”

Serving Their Region for More Than 100 Years

Nationally recognized Union Hospital is an 84-bed licensed, nonprofit community hospital located in Cecil County, Maryland. They have served the county, as well as neighboring communities in Delaware and southern Pennsylvania, for more than 100 years.

In 2015, Union Hospital opened two urgent care centers, to help meet the needs of their community: one in Elkton, where the hospital is located, another in Perryville, a town about 20 minutes southwest of the hospital, where there were no existing urgent care services. In addition to treating non-emergency illnesses and injuries, both centers offer on-site X-rays and laboratory testing.

Only the Best, or Not at All

Many meetings and much thought, debate and discussion occurred prior to finalizing the decision to build the urgent care centers.

Union Hospital knew it would not simply be a matter of following the steps needed to build and equip them, but that the quality of the centers would reflect directly on the hospital itself. The excellent reputation that had taken them a century—literally—to build needed to be upheld and they needed to ensure their urgent cares would be the very best.

“Union Hospital was founded in 1908—the same year Henry Ford built the Model T and Theodore Roosevelt was in the Oval Office. We not only serve our community, we are an integral part of it,” says Laurie Beyer, chief financial officer and senior vice president for Union Hospital. “When we felt absolutely confident that we could build urgent care centers that would be excellent on all levels, we decided to move forward.”

Joint Commission Process Helped Prepare Them

In December 2015, Union Hospital went through an accreditation with Joint Commission. While many lessons were learned during this process, they recognized a different accreditation was needed for their urgent care centers.

“We were concerned that the Joint Commission accreditation wasn’t detailed enough for our urgent cares, and it also had a different focus,” says Smith. “The consultants working on our urgent care initiative agreed and strongly recommended we pursue UCA Accreditation, and we followed that recommendation.”

Another motivating factor to seek accreditation sooner rather than later was the fact that a large health insurer specifically required UCA Accreditation from them and would not participate with Union Hospital’s urgent care centers without it.

Including Representatives from Throughout the Organization

Union Hospital began the UCA Accreditation process in February 2016. To help drive the initiative, Smith partnered with Kristy Gunns-Goodwin, director of regulatory and patient safety for Union Hospital.

“Once we had all the standards that would be surveyed in hand, we worked through it chapter by chapter,” explains Smith. “Over the first six weeks, I set up meetings individually with everyone..."
One of the first steps they took after receiving notice that their accreditation was approved was to post the UCA seal and logo on the Union Hospital website.

The week prior to the site survey, the accreditation team conducted on-site visits at both centers, met with staff, interviewed patients and conducted a mock survey, and asked staff questions.

“It went really well, and we somewhat mimicked what we did when preparing for the Joint Commission survey,” explains Smith. “I just tapped into those same teams and asked them to mobilize again and do a mock survey.”

For others considering or going through UCA Accreditation, Smith says being highly organized is key. Specifically, their team found it valuable to have hard copy documents readily on hand, and kept everything related to their accreditation in a single file box—a suggestion by Gunns-Goodwin, which proved to be very beneficial. It also allowed them to quickly respond to any surveyor requests on the date of the site visit and Smith says he feels it also helped demonstrate to the surveyor that they had made good use of their time.

Now that they have achieved UCA Accreditation, they expect to leverage the recognition and in a variety of ways. First and foremost, they will continue to publicize the fact that they have earned the distinction and also will begin to pursue other possibilities, such as obtaining discounted fees from professional medical liability providers.

One of the first steps they took after receiving notice that their accreditation was approved was to post the UCA seal and logo on the Union Hospital website, along with this description of their urgent care services:

Union Hospital’s Urgent Care Center at Principio and the Urgent Care Center at Elkton, have received the Accredited Urgent Care designation, the highest level of distinction for urgent care centers. Union Hospital’s centers provide patients with walk-in, extended-hour medical attention with licensed providers for a large scope of medical conditions and have met all of the Urgent Care Association of America’s established standards and criteria for quality of patient care, safety, and scope of services.

“Although the process did take time, and we needed to dedicate resources towards it, it was well worth the effort,” says Cydney Teal, MD, chief medical officer and senior vice president for Union Hospital. “We know our patients are taking notice of it and we are pleased that it reassures them that Union Hospital is carrying over the same high level of excellence to our urgent cares.”

To learn more, visit the accreditation section on ucaoa.org.