



Opinion

Buying health care, retail style

Editorial

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It's early Sunday morning. Your throat hurts, you feel like you might be coming down with something and you want to talk with someone who can tell you if it's a strep infection or simply a lack of rest and strain from talking loudly over the music at a club the night before. Where do you go?

If you're like most people, you have two choices. You can go to a hospital emergency room or urgent care clinic and wait. Or you can try to make an appointment with your doctor for another day — with a good chance you won't be able to secure a convenient time.

Neither option presents a fully satisfactory solution. And those without insurance have even worse options, relying solely on public emergency rooms or government health clinics.

Enter Bay Area businessman David Mandelkern, with an idea nearly unheard of in the United States.

Mandelkern, a Stanford graduate with a background in startup technology companies, is starting up a "retail health care store" in San Mateo. It's the first of its kind in the nation.

But it should provide a convenient means of reducing the strain on emergency rooms caused by uninsured patients who have few other choices for care.

In Canada, similar clinics are common in both downtown areas and suburban residential communities. The government, of course, pays for health care in Canada, but why couldn't the idea of retail medical shops become a part of the American health care system? At first it might seem odd to treat a visit to a doctor like a trip to the dry cleaner's, but seeing a doctor for a few minutes in a shop on the way to work or at a mall on the weekend would undoubtedly make it easier than waiting to schedule an appointment at a hospital.

It remains to be seen how successful Mandelkern's idea will be. But it is undeniably intriguing, and we'll be watching to see whether it takes hold.