

Medical Malls - A Health System Makeover

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The lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many mall retailers going out of business. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of indoor space footage remains vacant while shopping trends continue to shift online. Despite this movement, many malls are of desirable location as they are conveniently situated to the interstate, provide public transportation, and remain surrounded by acres of parking and a dense population. In a decision that may reinvent the concept and perception of a mall comes the delivery of healthcare services: The Medical Mall.

A Medical Mall falls within an indoor shopping facility. While some are strictly medical, others exist within retail space and are a combination of a shopping area and a medical facility. As of 2022, 32 enclosed malls within the United States provide health care services. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Medical Mall design emerged at a much greater pace. Acknowledging the details of what defines a Medical Mall allows the discussion of its potential sustainability for the future of healthcare.

As drifting from large hospital infrastructures further progresses, Medical Malls offer greater flexibility and efficiency. Growth relative to telehealth, ambulatory surgery centers, urgent care facilities, new and ever-evolving technology, and home visits is just a few reasons that explain this trend. While a hospital infrastructure remains essential for the more expensive services requiring specialized skills, equipment, and monitoring, efforts can still transpire to deliver lower-cost, mall-based services relative to outpatient care. Nashville is home to the One Hundred Oaks Mall, where Vanderbilt Health has outpatient services in half of an 880,000-square-foot facility. This all-under-one-roof care experience reduces dependency on lowering a hospital's variable and fixed costs while enabling physicians to increase their quantity of services. While hospital-based systems reevaluate their business design and overall approach, Medical Malls can highlight continuous rather than episode-based care across various specialties.

Medical Malls can help to improve the inequities existing across communities. Easily accessible locations and sufficient parking spaces are just a glimpse into why Medical Malls provide convenient and affordable outlets for underserved populations. A perfect example is the Jackson Medical Mall Thad Cochran Center, once the Jackson Mall, which provides health care services for Mississippi residents. In a state striving to address the medically underserved, the Jackson Medical Mall Foundation, since 1996, aspires to reduce healthcare disparities through innovation and continues to do so through strategic partnerships and substantial grants.

Relative to receiving quality, consistent care, there remain inequities regarding transportation. Missed appointments, delays, and re-scheduled appointments directly impact quality, reliable, and stable care. In turn, transportation barriers can result in inadequate management of long-term illness, poor quality of life, and unhealthy prognosis. Medical Malls are accessible by public transportation, rather than costly Uber rides or relying on friends and family. In addition, multispecialty practices within Medical Malls allow patients to have multiple appointments on the same day. Thus, this eliminates several visits and stressful transportation concerns. With the knowledge of new opportunities arising from a Medical Mall comes the opening for new employment for both the healthcare facility and the retail areas.

While an ambiguous proposal, malls may seamlessly find a new purpose in the medical industry. Many consumers remain unsatisfied with their healthcare experience, long wait times in medical offices, and overall traveling demands. Subsequently, the innovation of a Medical Mall can confront some of healthcare's most pressing issues. Both communities and health systems can better understand what works, what does not, and what are equitable and efficient considerations so that all patients can receive quality care.

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