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Clinics and other facilities would get ratings like those at restaurants, under a plan to be explored by L.A. County.

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Los Angeles County officials voted Tuesday to explore a system that would assign health clinics and nursing homes letter grades similar to those currently posted on restaurants.

While the move signaled that the county may eventually adopt a grading system for health facilities, the Board of Supervisors stopped short of endorsing Supervisor Mike Antonovich's motion to begin the process of establishing such a

system. Instead, after hearing mixed opinions on how well a grading system would work from health industry officials and health advocates, the board instructed county attorneys and the Department of Health Services to examine the legal and logistical hurdles to establishing one.

James Lott, executive vice president for the Hospital Assn. of Southern California, told the board that some private health plans grade hospitals, but said that any grading system adopted by the county should also apply to public hospitals.

He also cautioned that a grading system could expose the county to lawsuits if, for instance, a procedure went awry at a hospital that received high marks from the county.

"Hospitals are targets of

Grades for Health Centers Studied

lawsuits all the time," Lott said. "I believe the umbrella would probably be extended to loop you in, too, if you rated in such a fashion."

Genevieve Clavreul, a former member of the county's Commission on HIV Health Services and a frequent critic of the county health system, said she supported the idea of grading health facilities.

"It's a very complex project and it will take a lot of work to make it happen, but I think it's a worthwhile project," Clavreul said. "Hospitals in the U.S. have a lousy rating system. [It's] not a true reflection of the care patients receive."

Although health facilities are required by law to post their licenses to operate, they are not required to make public more detailed evaluations by state and federal regulatory agencies.