

In 1995, there was an influx of refugees into the United States from Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq (mostly Kurds), and Somalia. Many agencies like Catholic Charities and World Vision, which were helping to settle these refugees in different locations, faced difficulties in dealing with their physical and emotional problems due to language and cultural barriers.

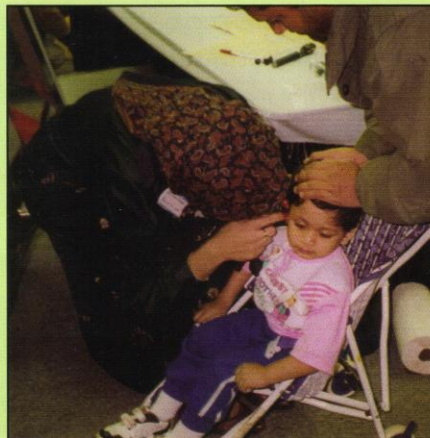


A health fair held by the Muslim Community Center for Human Services.

As a psychiatrist, I had worked with Catholic Charities prior to this, and therefore they contacted me seeking some help. It became very obvious that these refugees definitely need the help, which the public health system is not able to provide.

With the help of a few concerned community leaders, we organized Muslim Community Center for Human Services to offer a variety of services including health and social services to these distressed individuals. As we organized, it became evident that many individuals from Southeast Asia, Africa, and Middle East—especially the recent immigrants—were extremely hesitant to seek help at the public hospitals and clinics due to cultural and language barriers. In 1998, MCC for Human Services started a free health clinic to offer services for medical problems such as hypertension, diabetes, minor infections, arthritis, etc. The major goal was to deal with these issues at an early stage of development, so that these people do not neglect their health and wait until the last minute to rush to the emergency room. By that time, a patient may develop some complications requiring more intensive treatment.

The MCC clinic is located in Richland Hills, which is easily accessible to Fort Worth, Mid-Cities, Arlington, and the western part of Dallas. The clinic has now been in operation for about seven years, and we are seeing many indigent patients irrespective of their race, color, creed, nationality of origin or religion. Fifteen area physicians give their free time to the clinic, which opens every Saturday between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. We see approximately 20 to 25 patients per week. Medical students from the area as well as many volunteers, including pre-medical students, also help in the clinic. We have negotiated a



A young patient's ear is examined during a health fair.

contract with a local laboratory, which offers an almost 60-percent discount for routine lab work. Many indigent patients cannot afford to purchase medication due to the high cost. We have sent out an appeal to our volunteer physicians, and they bring free samples of medication to the clinic from their office. When no samples are available, physicians prescribe generic medication. Our patients can enroll in an Rx Outreach program, which dispenses a three-month supply of generic medication for \$18. We also refer patients to local public and private hospitals if they are in an emergency, or if we cannot handle their medical problem due to lack of resources.

To promote health education and the importance of preventive services among the immigrant population, MCC for Human Services also arranges Annual Health Fairs. The last two Health Fairs were held at United Methodist Church in Richland Hills, and Al Hedayah School in east Fort Worth. Four to five hundred individuals participated in the Health Fair. Health Fairs offer free blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol screen-

Al-Shifa Clinic

Free medical clinic whose name means "healing" is seeking physicians to help fulfill its mission

by M. Basheer Ahmed, MD

ing, BMI assessment, free dental screening, eye screening for sight and glaucoma, and hearing tests. Most of the participants have access to physicians, including OB/GYNs and pediatricians who counsel them during the fair. The American Cancer Society, Heart Association, Diabetic Association, the Public Health Department, and many other agencies participate, offering educational material on health related issues. The results of the blood test are provided immediately, and individuals with abnormal results are advised to seek help through their private physicians—if they cannot afford it, they are referred to either the MCC clinic or public clinics. The major goal of the Health Fair is to screen patients with abnormal results, and give appropriate consultation. About 24 area physicians participate in Health Fair.

During the past few years, we have seen an increase in the number of patients due to high unemployment rates and lack of medical insurance. People used to having a stable income and insurance, experience extreme difficulty in obtaining medical care when they lose health insurance from work. For many individuals without health insurance, our clinic is a major resource for health care. Individuals who were once hesitant to go to public hospitals and clinics are eager

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to seek help here not only due to the free services, but also due to feeling at ease with language familiarity and cultural understanding with the staff.

Our physicians represent a diverse ethnic and cultural background.

MCC also offers educational programs for breast cancer awareness at the local libraries and Islamic centers. Free mammograms are arranged for indigent patients, courtesy of the Harris Methodist Program for Breast Cancer.



During the last year, *Blood pressure screening at a health fair.* the clinic has served approximately 1,000 patients. Due to limited time, we have had to turn some patients away as we cannot see them in the allotted time. We want to increase the clinic timings from one day to two days a week, and we are seriously looking for more physicians to help us in the clinic operation.

Al-Shifa Clinic

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Sponsoring organization: Muslim Community Center for Human Services

Medical Director: M. Basheer Ahmed, MD

Clinic hours: Each Saturday - 9:30 am to 1:00 pm
Family physician/internist and psychiatrist available

Lab work: At discounted price

Medication: At discounted price through Rx Medic services (\$18 for a three-month supply of generic medicine). Samples provided as available.

Screening services: Saturdays between 9 and 11 a.m.
Free blood pressure and blood sugar screening
Mammograms 3 to 4 times a year - pre-registration required

Educational programs: Periodic educational programs on common medical and emotional problems such as: diabetes, hypertension, depression, and stress disorders

Needs: Internists, Family Physicians, Psychiatrists, Pediatricians, OB/GYNs, Ophthalmologists, Dentists and other specialists

Future Plans: To open a dental and eye clinic once a month for 6 hours