

Muslim Community Center in Richland Hills still growing after 20 years



Dr. Basheer Ahmed, Founder and Chairman Emeritus of Muslim Community Center for Human Services

Dr. Basheer Ahmed founded the Muslim Community Center for Human Services 20 years ago. **Khampha Bouaphanh** Star-Telegram

BY SARAH BAHARI

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RICHLAND HILLS

In the Al-Shifa Medical Clinic, Abade Irizarry sat forward in his chair and waited for the doctor to call his name.

Like most of the patients treated here, Irizarry does not have health insurance, yet in recent months the clinic has helped him manage his diabetes and treat sleep apnea.

“I am blessed to have found this place,” said Irizarry, of Hurst. “The doctors take their time to explain things to you. They treat the whole patient, not just one issue.”

Al-Shifa, the “Healing Place” in Arabic, is the centerpiece of the nonprofit [Muslim Community Center for Human Services](#), which turns 20 this year. The charity offers low-income people a long list of services, including medical and dental care and mental health services.

1,600 to 1,800 patients a year receive care.

Dr. Basheer Ahmed, a psychiatrist, founded the organization in 1995 when Catholic Charities sought his help with Bosnian and Somali refugees settling in the area. At the time, Dallas-Fort Worth had no social service agency to assist Muslim refugees and immigrants. Ahmed met with about 35 Muslim leaders in the area and soon established a help line in his garage, fielding questions about local mosques, schools and more.

“We found many refugees were having difficulty accessing available services because of religious, cultural and language barriers,” said Ahmed, a native of India. “We knew we needed to find a way to help.”

Soon, the garage phone line blossomed into the Muslim Community Center for Human Services. Three years later, Al-Shifa Clinic opened, providing free and low-cost medical services to patients with no health insurance or exorbitant deductibles.

In 2003, the center organized the first Interfaith Health Fair at Richland Hills United Methodist Church, and almost 90 percent of the patients were non-Muslims. An idea struck Ahmed.

“We should be helping humanity. Our religion says to help all people, regardless of their background or religion,” Ahmed said. “This was a big turning point for us.”

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Dr. Basheer Ahmed, who founded the organization in 1995

‘The doctors listen’



Dr. Patricia Brock seeing a patient at Al-Shifa Clinic at 7600, Glenn View Dr, Richland Hills

Today, the Community Center is open to everyone and clients come from Fort Worth, Arlington, Dallas and beyond. It offers psychiatric counseling, domestic violence intervention, a dental clinic, free mammograms and the most recent addition, free legal aid.

The medical clinic treats 1,600 to 1,800 patients a year, and new patients are asked to make a \$10 donation. Low-cost lab work and prescription drugs are available.

More than 200 people each year receive dental care. On retirement, Dr. Sam Roach, a dentist, donated his practice's dental equipment and volunteered at the clinic. Roach recently died, and the center is looking for a dentist.

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Irizarry, the patient from Hurst, said the clinic has helped him find low-cost generic alternatives to his medications, saving him money each month.

"I have received better care here than just about anywhere," he said. "The doctors listen. They don't just pop in for a minute, talk, then leave."

Dr. Mehreen Khan, the center's program director, first began working at the clinic at age 14 as a volunteer and was inspired to study medicine. After finishing medical school, Khan returned to the center while she is completing a master's degree in healthcare administration.

Khan said she is drawn to the simplicity of the center and Al-Shifa Clinic.

"Patients do not fill out stacks of paperwork with endless questions. Insurance does not dictate what services we can or cannot provide," Khan said. "A patient comes in, and the doctor treats the patient. In a way, it's like old-fashioned medicine."

‘Providing care to everyone’



Patients waiting outside the clinic for the medical checkup.

In coming months, the Community Center hopes to expand its work on domestic violence, which Ahmed calls a serious and seldom discussed problem in the Muslim community. It is also trying to increase the number of registered foster parents in the Muslim community through education and outreach.

To do so, the center is working to recruit more volunteers, including physicians, dentists and office workers, said Dr. Wasiq Zaidi, who serves on the board of directors and oversees clinical operations.

“This center is very important to the community it serves,” Zaidi said. “Everything we do requires manpower, and like any nonprofit we have limited resources.”

Ahmed sees the center’s continued success as crucial to the community. He studied medicine in England and Scotland, and never billed a patient until moving to the United States.

“In my heart, I felt the people who could not pay must still be served,” he said.
“And we are committed to providing care for everyone.”

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IF YOU GO

The Muslim Community Center for Human Services, 7600 Glenview Drive,
Richland Hills

Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday; 9 a.m.-noon Saturday

Appointments are required — call 817-589-9165

Domestic violence hotline: 817-589-0200

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