

By Erica Goldfine | Published by [DC Intersections](#) on January 1, 2010



Neatly organized stacks of 10 different magazines sit on a table. A few children's toys lay on the floor near an empty water cooler. A large TV is mounted to the wall displays health-promotion advertisements for products like fiber cereals.

The office nurses and multiple receptionists talk to patients about their insurance and appointment scheduling. About half a dozen patients sit in the waiting room, reading the magazines, browsing their phones or talking with family members.

At first glance, there is nothing different between this doctor's office and most others across the United States.

But a closer look reveals that the mothers in the waiting room of the Dar-us-Salaam (DUS) Family Medical Practice are speaking Arabic to their children. And all the women that work at DUS Family Practice wear beautifully designed, colorful hijabs, or Muslim head coverings, for women.

In the corner of the waiting room, there is an "Islamic etiquette" poster about visiting the sick. Above the seating area of the doctor's office, a black, white, and yellow Arabic painting hangs on the wall. The TV alternates health promotion ads with a quote of the prophet Mohammed every so often.

The DUS Family Medical Practice, located in Greenbelt, Md., began in January 2005. The medical practice is one component of the Dar-us-Salaam community. The community is "a model Islamic community based upon and adhering to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah," according to its Web site. The DUS Family Practice is an integral part of the Islamic community that has been created in the southern part of Maryland, close to Washington, D.C.

Dr. Naseem Sharieff, director of the DUS Medical Center underscored the idea that Dar-us-Salaam is creating and follows their strong ideals.

We "are trying to create a community through a model community to show people that things can be done in a humanitarian grounds," Sharieff said in a phone interview. "Together we can make it a very good, strong community,"

Sharieff said the foundations for the the medical practice are based on Islamic principles that focus on helping others and taking care of one's neighbors. This is based on the principle that every Muslim must give 2.5 percent of their income to the community to help build and sustain the entire community, Sharieff said.

Muslims donate a portion of their income, she said, to help those truly in need, those who do not have "insurance or a home," or those who may have any type of crisis whether it is physical, emotional, or material.

"DUS has let us build a community where each one is worried about others and not just being selfish. When you live your life as an individual, you must do for the community, you do not have an option," Sharieff said.

The DUS practice prides itself on being a doctor's office that is willing and able to help any patient.

"It is care of a person in totality, not just their physical health," Sharieff said in a phone interview.



On a recent weekday, Amistin Perrera and her 13-year-old daughter, Solara Jaafar, sat in the waiting room of DUS. Perrera spoke to Jaafar in Arabic while Jaafar looked down at her shoes, responding in English. Perrera was dressed in head-to-toe Muslim garb in neutral browns while

her daughter donned jeans, Ugg boots and a fitted sweater. The two very different women awaited Dr. Sharieff's arrival.

Perrera and Jafaar are long time patients of Dr. Sharieff and the DUS Family Medical Practice. Perrera and Jaafar have come to DUS for almost five years and have always enjoyed the atmosphere created by the doctors and employees of the office.

"All of the doctors are nice, Perrera said. "They understand how to talk to the people. Some of the doctors I talk to, they don't know how to talk to people. That's why I like it here."

After Dr. Sharieff arrived, Jaafar and Perrera walked to the back of the office with her and sat in Sharieff's office, covered in papers and lined with bookshelves. Jaafar, who had the appointment with Sharieff, shifted in her seat but seemed comfortable interacting with her mother and her longtime doctor.

"It has been a good experience (coming to DUS) and they always help," Jaafar said.

As a part of the Islamic principle of charity, the DUS Family Medical Practice, never turns away a patient if they cannot afford the services or if they do not have insurance to cover the costs. Sharieff said that the clinic is not free. It is a business clinic that takes insurance but will accommodate a patient who does not have insurance.

"They see people not money," Perrera said.

Over the past five years, the clinic has evolved from one doctor to a multi-specialty office with six physicians. The office offers pediatrics, geriatrics, cardiology, and a social services department.

The office, although small in square footage, sees 7,000 patients, according to Sharieff. The patient population has grown through word of mouth and without any type of marketing, she said.

"People come and they feel the warmth, they transfer from one doctor to us," Sharieff said.

DUS medical practice focuses on a more holistic type of medicine. They prescribe medications when needed but also turn to more natural types of medicines. According to their Web site, the clinic tries to go beyond physical and psychological needs. Sharieff said every doctor in the DUS practice stops to talk to patients and understand their health problems and concerns before writing a prescription.

"A lot of stress of life is too much, this is deeper than a normal doctor would talk about," Sharieff said. "We really want to help all the people in totality, rewind them, put they're thoughts together...it's more naturalistic medicine."

Jenny Adams, the outreach coordinator of DUS, appreciates the time and effort the doctors of DUS take with their patients.

The DUS medical center was originally created to help employees of the community, but it has also become a clinic that Muslim women in particular feel comfortable visiting. Sharieff explained that while in a medical setting Muslim men and women are comfortable touching, Muslim women are typically more comfortable with female doctors.

Adams said she feels comfortable in the DUS office because they understand her religious practices as a Muslim woman.

“The staff understands and respects my needs. I know that my doctor will be female, no need to ask,” Adams said. “I know that I won’t have any embarrassing surprises with a male nurse unexpectedly walking in, or passing by, when my hijab isn’t arranged.”

Adams, like many other patients of the Dar-us-Salaam Family Medical Practice, believes the practice is an asset to the community as a whole.

“Practical, natural healthcare advice is given along with medicines for acute needs,” she said in an e-mail. “In addition, my doctor takes the time to talk with me, adopting a holistic approach to one’s well being.”