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# Area Islamic community moved by faith to help uninsured patients

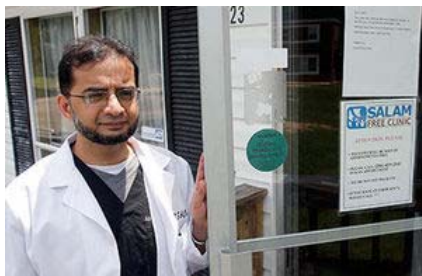
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Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Dr. Abdul Kazi, one of the founders of the Salam Free Clinic. Photo by Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Posted: Friday, July 17, 2015 4:30 pm

By Seth Boster, Star Staff Writer, sboster@annistonstar.com

Johnny Barksdale carries pain and no health insurance.

The 54-year-old Anniston man last Saturday afternoon sat with his eyes closed on a sofa in a trailer home, waiting for the only option he felt he had.

He was at the Salam Free Clinic at the Anniston Islamic Center's campus off McCall Drive, where a certified physician saw him and suspected

arthritis in his joints. The clinic's next step was to find a rheumatologist who would care for Barksdale in the fashion it did: completely free of charge.

Such has been the Salam Clinic's service ever since one of the Islamic Center's community members, Dr. Abdul Ahad Kazi, bought the trailer home in 2012 for nearly \$40,000. Kazi, whose ophthalmology office operates at Regional Medical Center, established the clinic along with Dr. Ebba K. Ebba, a fellow



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member at the Islamic Center who at the time was a pediatrician working out of Jacksonville.

Their vision was to do what the pillars of their Islamic faith commanded them to do: serve their fellow people. They called it “salam,” meaning peace.

“We wanted to provide free care to our community at large, because we realized there were many patients who were not getting care,” Kazi said. “Insurance was a problem, and it still is a problem.”

At the time of the clinic’s opening in 2012, census data from 2011 showed that 15.6 percent of Calhoun County’s population was uninsured. Most recent data now shows that figure has fallen to 13.8 percent.

The decreasing trend has been common across the country since 2012, when the Supreme Court upheld the Affordable Care Act.

Roughly 171,000 Alabamians have received health coverage through the federal marketplace since the last enrollment period. And according to Jim Carnes, policy director at Alabama Arise, the nonprofit and self-described non-partisan organization that advocates for the low-income population, many more could gain from the state deciding to expand Medicaid under the ACA.

Alabama remains one of 21 states to not expand. A 2012 study by economists at the University of Alabama at Birmingham described the decision to expand as a win-win for Alabama; \$1 billion in tax revenue could be collected, according to the study, and about 300,000 citizens could be covered.

Democrats have urged Gov. Robert Bentley to expand Medicaid under the ACA, but Bentley has expressed reservations over the state’s spending toward the expansion.

“Medicaid expansion is a great uncapped resource, and we’re working hard to persuade politicians it’s a wise move,” said Carnes of Alabama Arise.

“We have a segment of the population who are already working, trying to make it, and they simply can’t afford health coverage,” Carnes added. “... And we’re just letting it pass by every day.”

The Salam Clinic intends to do the opposite.

Khurram Fareed, a doctor in internal medicine at Gadsden Regional Medical Center, became director at the clinic six months ago and brought with him a vision to expand operations.

“We’ve been in the same third gear for a while now,” Kazi said. “I’m excited to say with Dr. Fareed, we’ll take this clinic to the next level.”

Inside the trailer home last Saturday, Fareed was with his wife, Shehla Aziz, who said she is in the process of applying for grants that could bolster the clinic’s fund. That fund has totally been supported by the Islamic Center’s members who worship in the mosque across the lawn from the clinic.

“We dreamed of something like this,” Aziz said of the Islamic Center, reflecting on when she and her husband and three children moved to Alabama two years ago.

She and Fareed grew up in Pakistan and lived in Saudi Arabia before moving to the states.



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“We were always thinking, We don't know where we will be, whether the community will accept us or not,” Aziz said. “We thank God that he (brought) us here. Everything was set up for us.”

Here, she and Fareed are able to attain what they described as “energy” by serving at the clinic.

Fareed said he envisions a staff beyond the one volunteer physician and nurse who serve at the clinic every Saturday. He said patients could gain from a social worker increasing preventative services already in place, and a registered full-time nurse available throughout the week could be an option for uninsured patients who can't afford visits to the emergency room.

“Hopefully we will get these, because that's the need of the community,” Fareed said. “That's what we are feeling.”

Sara Sadiq, a doctor in internal medicine at Citizens Baptist Medical Center in Talladega, sees that need.

“I don't know exactly why it is, why people are so poor here,” she said, in between appointments with the 10 patients she had at the Salam Clinic last Saturday. “In Talladega, literally the patient population is like what you would see in a third-world country.”

Her Islamic faith led her to volunteering at the clinic. That faith is what Kazi said guided him in establishing it, and it guides Fareed and his wife in growing it.

“To serve them and make them comfortable, that gives you the happiness which I cannot explain,” Fareed said. “I see my patient, and he just says thanks to me as he walks away, and that's fulfillment.”



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## CHINESE NATIONAL PLEADS GUILTY IN '96 DEATH

**Chen Shi gets 15-plus years of probation in death of JSU student Zhihui "Linda" Liu**  
A Chinese national plead guilty to the death of a JSU student in 1996. Chen Shi, 38, of Alabama, pleaded guilty to the death of Zhihui "Linda" Liu, 21, of Alabama, in 1996. Chen was sentenced to 15 years of probation. The judge said Chen was "a good person" and "a hard worker."

## Plea for patience, unity

**Obama urges speed in intervention to explain administration's steps**  
President Barack Obama urged Congress to move quickly to pass legislation to explain the administration's steps. He said the administration is committed to transparency and accountability.

## PLAYOFF PICTURE

**Alabama, JSU have big matchups remaining**  
Alabama and Jacksonville State have big matchups remaining in the playoffs. Alabama is set to play against Michigan State, while Jacksonville State is set to play against Charlotte Southern.

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## Alabama bill would request U.S. constitutional convention

**Article V amendment 'real threat,' critic says**  
A bill introduced in the Alabama legislature would request a constitutional convention to amend the U.S. Constitution. Critics say the amendment is a "real threat" to the current Constitution.



**Fragment from USS Arizona unveiled at Berman ceremony**  
A fragment from the USS Arizona was unveiled at a ceremony in Berman. The fragment is a piece of the ship's hull that was recovered from the wreckage of the ship.

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