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Muhammad Kausar: GP and faith leader who had to appeal to government to win the right to run a general practice in Glasgow

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Glasgow GP Muhammad Kausar wrote poetry as a way of coming to terms with his life as a migrant. On the one hand, he considered himself fortunate to have been able to build a life and a career far from home, but on the other, the racism he was exposed to left scars.

In his poem *Britain—Land of Flowers*, Kausar wrote about how he loved the flowers that bloomed in Lanarkshire in the spring. Some people, much like some flowers, give you pleasure through their kindness, he wrote. Others have thorns: “racist colleagues who kept on throwing remarks” as immigrants “sifted pearls from the mud” of their new lives.

Kausar came to the UK from Pakistan in 1968 and initially worked in Essex and Kent before settling in Glasgow, where there was an emergent Pakistan diaspora and high demand for GPs. Kausar chose general practice as he wanted to be part of, and to help to create, a community. In an interview in 2011 he recalled his struggle to secure a full time post in primary care: “Outsiders were not allowed to become GPs and the local GPs only gave us very minor, underpaid, and overworked duty jobs.”

Many Asian migrant doctors in the city found themselves relegated to out-of-hours work. But in 1972, after a long struggle to be awarded the patient list by the local medical committee—with Kausar taking his appeal to the secretary of state for

health—he took over a single handed practice in the West End of Glasgow, a working class area that was facing rapid deindustrialisation. He became the city’s first practice owning Asian GP.

Quickly, Kausar became a well known figure in the community, always there with kind words, a house call, or to extend advice.

His son Imran, an anaesthetist and pharmaceutical physician, remembers patients coming to the family home, with Kausar becoming “something between a counsellor and a father of the community.” Kausar helped his migrant patients to navigate health and translation challenges, and routinely stepped in when a family lost a breadwinner, mentoring children and offering advice. Imran recalls him helping to find refuge for a woman and her children who were fleeing domestic violence.

When Imran was in Glasgow’s West End, locals would routinely stop him to tell him that his father was an “angel.” Kausar’s daughter Chand, a pharmacist, recalls that her father had no appointment system: he would drop Chand and her five siblings at school, start surgery at 10 am, and give his patients “all the time they needed.”

“He told his patients they could come see him twice a day if they wanted, and he would break in the middle of his surgery day to go to the mosque to pray and do some community work,” she said.

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It was no coincidence, Chand thought, that her father's name "Shafi" translates from Arabic as "the one who heals."

Kausar was born in 1938 in a village near Delhi, India, and moved to Multan in the Punjab which became part of the new nation of Pakistan after Partition in 1947. As a young man he was an academic high flyer, earning the National Talent of Pakistan award for his exam grades and going on to study medicine at Nishtar Medical College.

Aged 27, when he was working as an orthopaedic trainee, war broke out between Pakistan and India. Kausar heeded a call for military doctors and within weeks became an army officer, volunteering to work in the Kashmir borderlands.

He recalled treating army officers in the trenches in Kashmir. One wounded man would see the flashing of artillery bombardment and shout "Allahu akbar," his screams alerting India's enemy gunners to their position. "I was asked to send him away from the front by the commanders, which I was unsure about, as I was also unsure of his diagnosis. But it opened up a lifelong interest in the human mind," Kausar recalled in 2011.

He loved the collegiate nature of army life, but too much time, in his view, was spent sitting around and drinking coffee. He was posted to Saudi Arabia in 1967, where he treated soldiers stationed at Dammam, a small fishing village that was rapidly transforming into a port city. Here he met his first wife Amina, a fellow Pakistani working as a midwife. Transporting an unwell army general to Beirut in 1968, Kausar used his flight permission documents to fly on to the UK, where he had heard good things about the opportunities for work and postgraduate education—although these opportunities were not quite so accessible to overseas doctors.

Kausar was a devout Muslim and played a key role in establishing Glasgow's Central Mosque, the first purpose built mosque and Islamic centre in Scotland. This opened in 1984, and he served as general secretary and later president.

By the 1980s Kausar's doctoring had merged with his work at the mosque. He set up NHS blood donation drives around Friday prayers and flu vaccinations for vulnerable patients. Humza Yousaf, former first minister of Scotland, remembers him organising 40 coaches of mosque goers to attend the 2003 Iraq war protests in London after delivering a rousing sermon about the Muslim community's duty to global peace. "Kausar was a respected doctor and could have had a really comfortable life. But he also had moral clarity about what he felt was right and wrong, and he stood up and was counted," said Yousaf.

Kausar won an award from Police Scotland in 2007 for his work with interfaith groups after the failed extremist attacks on Glasgow Airport in the same year, and a lifetime achievement award in the Scottish Muslim awards in 2024.

Kausar thought Scotland was beautiful, when it wasn't raining, as it reminded him of the spare, mountainous beauty of Kashmir. In retirement he became a gardening enthusiast, spending hours tending the roses he had loved since first seeing them in the grounds of his medical college. He was grateful for his life, that his children were flourishing, and for his role as a GP. He wrote, "We kept on smiling, and distributed love and flowers to everyone."

Kausar leaves daughters Saba, Sana, Farah, Chand, and Sitara, and son Imran. His second wife Batul predeceased him in 2017. Kausar and Amina divorced in 1982.

Muhammad Shafi Kausar (b 1938; q 1965, Nishtar, Pakistan), died from heart failure on 9 May 2025