

Worse than war: Paris doctor recalls night of horror

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La Garenne-Colombes, France: In 2008, Philippe Juvin worked for several months as an anesthesiologist with French troops in Afghanistan. Nothing he handled there was as difficult as his night in Paris when terror attacks killed at least 129 people.

Juvin, the head of the emergency department at Georges Pompidou hospital, said he was called back to work about two hours after the attacks started Friday. The first thing he did was send patients who did not need emergency care home.

"I went to the waiting room and told them they should leave and see their general practitioner the day after," Juvin told The Associated Press. "I also made sure that those who needed to be seen quickly were transferred to smaller hospitals for appropriate treatment."

The victims arrived in waves between 2 and 3 a.m. They were mostly young people shot when gunmen attacked the Bataclan concert hall during a rock show.

"They were all silent. They couldn't say a word," Juvin said. "They were paralyzed by what they saw."

The hospital ended up receiving about 50 of the 352 people wounded when the gunmen opened fire on cafes, detonated suicide bombs near the national stadium and attacked the concert hall.

In Afghanistan, Juvin saw "many gun battles, explosions, buildings on fire, accidents with casualties." But he had never seen so many victims at the same time.

"The majority were gunshot wounds inflicted with weapons of war, of high caliber, in the thorax, the abdomen, their legs and arms. Also, the psychological trauma, the people that witness these kinds of events are deeply affected, even if some may not be physically injured, it hurts their soul, that is why we had a psychiatrist with us." But none died.

Juvin said the spontaneous help he received from doctors leaving near his hospital was decisive in saving lives. Physicians who were on vacation in Paris also showed up, offering assistance.

"We managed somehow," he said.

The youth and good health of most of the victims helped them survive, Juvin said.

"Waiting one hour or two when you're wounded but young is less uncomfortable than when you're old and sick," he said.

- AP