

Odessa hospital passes trauma test in face of massacre

Monique Batson | September 6, 2019



Trauma surgeon Sudip Bose said “the system” is the hero in the aftermath of the shootings on Aug. 31.

Perhaps that’s part modesty from the decorated war hero who founded a nonprofit to help injured veterans; perhaps it is really the case. Because the system put in place at Medical

Center Hospital in Odessa might have saved 13 of the 14 victims brought into the emergency room.

It was something for which they had been preparing for years.

“We treated this as ‘when it happens,’ not ‘if it happens,’” Bose, 45, said. “Training kicked in and it ran like clockwork.”

For Russell Tippin, CEO and president of Medical Center Health System, it was impressive to watch.

“All the training and preparing, rehearsals, everything the medical center has done paid off,” Tippin said. “It’s a machine and it worked well. People knew where to go, nobody panicked. They knew their job and what to do.”

It was the first time Tippin had seen the hospital’s mass shooting protocol.

It was his fourth day on the job.

* * *

Bose was not scheduled to work the day Seth Aaron Ator went on a rampage through Odessa, using an AR-style weapon to shoot — seemingly at random — while driving a 10-mile span, killing seven people and injuring 25.

Of those victims, 14 were taken to Medical Center Hospital’s trauma center. One person was in critical condition, one was in serious condition, seven were in fair condition, one was treated and released, and one was flown to a pediatric unit in Lubbock and later released. One person did not survive.

Bose was called into the hospital to assist, but if you ask him what he did, he’ll say he didn’t do anything.

“When this happened, their training kicked in,” he said of the paramedics and hospital staff. “And honestly, I didn’t have to do anything. They were awesome.”

Training has been as much a part of Bose’s life as trauma, although the latter overlapped more times than he realized.

His grandfather’s death in Kolkata, India, in 1982 brought him to medicine.

“The doctors came to the house and put a towel on his chest. He died that night. That’s not how you treat a heart attack.”

It was the kindness bestowed on his parents when they immigrated from India to the U.S. that led him to enlist in the U.S. Army between his first two semesters of medical school. Sept. 11, 2001, brought him to Fallujah, Iraq, where he was the physician chosen to examine Saddam Hussein shortly after his capture in 2003. He also would treat the wounded on the street under the protection of Odessa native and rooftop sniper Chis Kyle.

Kyle was fatally shot on a gun range in 2013 by a veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Bose spoke at his memorial.

He specialized in emergency medicine at Fort Hood, which would become the location of a mass shooting in 2009. He worked in an emergency room on the south side of Chicago, treating gunshot victims.

And the same year of the Fort Hood shooting, Bose came to Odessa.

“It’s interesting how you go from one desert — big sky, open sand of Middle East Iraq — to an open desert here of big sky and sand. Maybe I’m drawn to that,” Bose said.

Or maybe a man rooted in trauma was brought to the right place at the right time.

* * *

Tippin said his prayer has always been “that the Lord lead me somewhere I can be used and give back.”

Speaking with him, one can quickly tell he’s filled with strong faith and Texas pride.

“I always say if you split me in half, it’s all Texas inside,” Tippin said.

Health care runs in the Denton native’s blood. His father was one of the first male nurse practitioners in the state of Texas. His mother was a director of medical records. He grew up in a hospital as if it were a playground.

The 45-year-old, who has spent 20 years in West Texas health care, previously was CEO of Permian Regional Medical Center in Andrews. He already was familiar with Medical Center Hospital before he was hired to lead it.

He had been a patient there before.

“They’ve always taken extremely good care of me,” Tippin said. “They saved my life. I feel like I owe the people of Odessa and West Texas.”

So, when the position became available, he was quick to apply. It was announced on Aug. 6 that he would begin work in September.

He was traveling back from Lubbock on Aug. 31 with his wife and two children when he got the call.

“My first thought was, ‘Dear Lord, just let the shootings be over. Let this end. Protect the victims and first responders.’”

He stayed up-to-date, and then set the phone aside so they could pray as a family. One of his children is the same age as Leilah Hernandez, the 15-year-old Odessa High student who did not survive the shooting. Realizing that, he said while his voice shook with emotion, was indescribable.

“It kicked me right square in the teeth. I can’t imagine the grief and pain these families are going through. It just turned to prayers for those families. It was very emotional for me.”

He went straight to the hospital, where he had yet to complete a full week of work.

“I could hardly remember where to park, but I just knew I needed to be there.”

* * *

In separate interviews, the two men stressed the same message.

“It’s not about us, it’s about these victims and their families,” Tippin said. “You have to have the right people in the right place.”

And that, Bose said, was always the plan. Because he also serves as the medical director of Odessa Fire Rescue, the system put in place years before went from the ambulance to the hospital walls, but also included a committee with representatives from the Ector County Sheriff’s Department, SWAT team, and Ector County ISD.

“In the event of a school shooting, you don’t want your superintendent and emergency officials meeting each other for the first time,” he said. “Preparation goes a long way. It starts locally.”

That preparation on Aug. 31, Tippin said, included making sure blood and supplies were stocked, locations were secure, knowing what patients were coming in, and how to comfort the hundreds of family members and relatives who filled the hospital cafeteria to wait on victim updates.

Mass shootings aren't the only thing Medical Center Hospital has prepared for in advance. Similar protocols are in place for everything from an Ebola outbreak to natural disasters.

"It's about identifying the bottlenecks, divorcing emotion and filling the vacuum to stop the wrong information from getting out," Bose said. "You can't work in silos."

Bose, who is certified in mass casualty incidents by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, travels around the country to speak on high-pressure situations. But the most important part, he said, is that emergency officials and first responders have a checklist long before they need it.

"The lesson here is leadership under pressure," he said. "What we did as a community in West Texas we can do nationwide."

Tippin, who left the hospital around 3 a.m. on Sept 1, also opts for an approach that can be used across the country.

"As I drove home from the hospital in the still of the night, I just prayed for the victims."

Read more at: <https://m.beaumontenterprise.com/news/article/HOSPITAL-HEROES-14420426.php>