

12th February, 2024

Mr. Pa Daly, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 54118/23

"To ask the Minister for Health his views on the provision of South Doc services in Listowel; and his plans to change the service."

Dear Deputy Daly,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

South West Doctors on Call Limited is an appointment based Out of Hours Family Doctor service for urgent medical care in Counties Cork and Kerry with its administrative headquarters and call centre in Killarney, Co Kerry. It has a membership of over 500 GPs and a network of Treatment Centres of which eight are overnight and supported by a fleet of vehicles, which are fully equipped for home visit situations. The peninsulas are also supported with a specific model of service provision.

SouthDoc provides a medical service to a population of approximately 736,000 in addition to the 3.3M visitors to the area, and dealt with over 231,000 patient contacts in 2022. As of December 13, 2023 we have already looked after 198,000 patients with our busiest period of the year to come.

As a dynamic community based service delivered across the two counties of Cork and Kerry SouthDoc constantly reviews the service provision to ensure its continued viability. There are many factors involved in the delivery of the service not least the capacity / availability of Doctors, Locum Doctors, staff and infrastructure. All these elements are supported by a bespoke Patient Management System as well as a Call Centre where the patient calls are acknowledged, documented and triaged.

The North Kerry GPs, including those in Castleisland and Tralee, have strongly advocated to combine GP rotas to sustain and enhance the North Kerry out of hours' service. This enhancement will include the provision of a dedicated home visit division for those patients unable to attend a Treatment Centre for their care. An enlarged GP rota in North Kerry, supported by Locum Doctors underpins a more secure and sustainable number of Doctors in the area. Critically also, an enlarged rota will prevent GP burnout, which is currently a real concern due to the day and night time demands on them and enhance the out of hours service provision.

This will futureproof the delivery of the out of hours' service in North Kerry. Failure to do so will ultimately result in a reduction in the number of Doctors and lead to potential interruptions to the service provision. In short, without this enhancement, we cannot guarantee the continuation of the service.

SouthDoc continually evaluates the service provision, formally with the HSE and on an ongoing basis internally. As there are numerous stakeholders concerned, any service reviews, which would potentially vary the delivery model, would involve appropriate advance engagement. Such advance engagement, which has happened in this instance, also ensures the outcome guarantees that patients receive the same standard of care whilst at the same time maximising the utilisation of the clinical personnel available.

SouthDoc is committed to the long-term continuation of the provision of the Out of Hours service in the North Kerry Region. All Treatment Centres in the area will remain available to the out of hours' service. Listowel GPs are valued members of SouthDoc and their patients will continue to have access to the out of hours' service. Consultations at a Treatment Centre continue to be available by appointment.

The Listowel Treatment Centre will continue to be available to patients by appointment and as deemed clinically appropriate by the consulting Doctor.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Priscilla Lynch', written in a cursive style.

Priscilla Lynch
Head of Service - Primary Care,
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare