

26th March, 2023

Mr. Thomas Gould, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 54828/23

"To ask the Minister for Health the number of GMS GPs in Cork by LHO in 2017 and as of the latest date available in 2023."

Dear Deputy Gould,

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.

There were 338 GMS panels in Cork in 2017 and 322 in 2023. While this is a reduction in the number of contracts approx less than 5%, I strongly caution against simply comparing the number of panels in place now and the number in the past. In some cases, a panel or lists with a small number of patients may have been merged with another panel so that it is attractive for prospective candidates. This does now mean there has been a reduction in the cover offered to these patients. In other cases, the GP giving up the contract has been part of a GP partnership which means that their partner has the right to take up the GMS panel. Again, this could mean that the panels are merged but the cover offered is not reduced.

Of the 322 GMS panels in Cork, just one (Youghal) is currently vacant. A successful candidate has been contracted and will be in place in early April. While we were recruiting for a GP to take up the panel, at no time was any patient on a GMS list left without GP cover. The GP service for GMS patients in Youghal has continued without interruption under a Doctor-In-Charge contract under the governance of the HSE.

Despite the well-documented challenges in GP recruitment, at no time has anyone or any area been left without GP cover for a GMS list. Any vacancy is dealt with quickly and appropriately, usually by advertising the contract and filling the position.

I am very aware of the importance of GP services to all communities including rural areas, and we do not underestimate the challenges in recruiting GPs to take up GMS panels in some rural areas. My team and I are making strenuous efforts to advertise and raise the profile of any vacancies, so that we attract a field of qualified candidates. In any case where there has been a temporary vacancy while we recruit GP cover, we have ensured that interim arrangements are in place, and these remain in place until we recruit a GP to take on the vacant panel.

I wish to reassure you that we are constantly reviewing our efforts to ensure that we are availing of any opportunity to highlight the vacant panel, and the delivery of a safe, quality and accessible GP service under the GMS contract remains a key priority.

Table hereunder breaks down the GMS panel for the region for the periods requested:

LHO	No. of GMS GPs 2017	No. of GMS GPs 2023
South Lee	134	133
North Lee	115	98
West Cork	37	40
North Cork	52	51
TOTAL	338	322

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

Yours sincerely,



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