



Oifig um Cheannasaí Seirbhíse do Chúram Príomhúil
Cúram Sláinte Phobail FSS an Mheán Iarthair
Ascaill Bhaile Choimín,
Páirc Gnó an Ráithín, Ráithín
Luimneach
Teil: 061 483722

Office of the Head of Service for Primary Care
HSE Mid West Community Healthcare
Ballycummin Ave, Raheen Business Park, Raheen,
Limerick
Tel: 061 483722

11th May 2023

Deputy Róisín Shortall
Dail Eireann
Leinster House
Kildare St.,
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 18222/23 - "To ask the Minister for Health the number of consultations provided by ShannonDoc Out of Hours service on 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th December 2022, by centre and day, in tabular form; and the number of doctors on duty at each centre for each of the aforementioned dates."

Dear Deputy Shortall,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in regard to your parliamentary question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Firstly, I must apologise for the delay in forwarding you my response. By way of information/background, I am attaching a statement issued by ShannonDoc in response to queries received regarding the GP Out of Hours service provided over the Christmas period.

I can advise that ShannonDoc provided the HSE with detailed information regarding the GP Out of Hours service over the Christmas period across the HSE Mid-West (CHO3) area. In the table below, I am outlining the total number of contacts received by ShannonDoc and the number of GP consultations facilitated on the dates requested in your query:

Date:	Total number of contacts received by ShannonDoc:	No. of GP appointments/consultations arranged by ShannonDoc:
24/12/2022	765	614
25/12/2022	501	399
26/12/2022	768	610
27/12/2022	825	675

ShannonDoc also provided the HSE with a breakdown of the GP consultations facilitated by each of the ShannonDoc Treatment Centres across the CHO3 area over the Christmas period 24/12/2022 – 02/01/2023 incl. These details are outlined in the table below:

No. of GP Consultations facilitated by ShannonDoc Treatment Centres across HSE Mid-West area (CHO3) between <u>24/12/2022 to 02/01/2023</u> incl.	
ShannonDoc Treatment Centre location:	Total no. of GP Consultations facilitated:
Limerick City & County	
Limerick City & Hospital	1307
Newcastle West	532
Clare	
Ennis & Shannon	1027
West Clare	244
Nth. Tipperary	
Nenagh	832
Thurles & Roscrea	351
Central Remote Hub	
Total no. of GP Consultations facilitated during the period outlined above	4,499

ShannonDoc have confirmed that it is not possible to give a definitive number in relation to the number of GPs who provided cover at each of the Treatment Centres over the Christmas period. This is due to the fact that a different doctors would have provided cover over the period covered by the Out of Hours service.

ShannonDoc have quantified that the number of ‘shifts’ provided across all of the Treatment Centres in CHO3 over the Christmas period was 61 shifts in total. The total number of hours covered by the doctors during the dates 24th December – 27th December 2022 incl. was 675 hours.

I trust this information addresses the issues raised in your representation.

Yours sincerely,



Margaret Costello
Head of Service
Primary Care

ShannonDoc response 29.12.22

ShannonDoc experienced a huge surge in patients contacting the service over the Christmas period. During the peak times ShannonDoc dealt with approximately 1 patient every minute. The out of hours service managed to provide 40% more GP appointments when compared to last year; with a significant portion of patients presenting with respiratory illnesses.

The Christmas period is always ShannonDoc's busiest period where additional doctors and nurses are rostered to deal with the increase in patient volumes. This year, the out of hours service has rostered on more doctors than previous years with a 30% increase in medical manpower on duty. However this year's patient surge is unprecedented with patient volumes contacting the service amounting to almost 3 times more than last year's levels. On one day alone over 12,500 inbound calls were made to our switch board. These are incredible numbers which amount to almost 1 month of calls in just 1 day.

Over the four days during Christmas (24th to 27th) ShannonDoc provided 2,280 doctor consultations up from 1,641 in 2021, representing a 41% increase across the Midwest. Broken down by region; county Clare saw a 49% increase, North Tipperary was up 41% and Limerick city and county was up 35%.

Of the total patients dealt with by ShannonDoc, 81% were categorised as being routine with the remainder of patients prioritised as urgent. We have observed an increase in routine patients over the Christmas period when compared to normal trends over the year.

Patients requiring specific Covid-19 advice and test referrals reduced considerably when compared to last year. This year patients are seeking direct consultations with a doctor for a range of illnesses such as stomach bugs, flu's, colds and other respiratory illnesses. Our services are also busier across essential areas including mental health calls, nursing home calls, palliative care visits, dental calls, Garda calls and verification of deaths.

As a result of the patient surge; during some periods at peak times on Monday 26th and Tuesday 27th, the service was operating above its maximum capacity. In some instances this resulted in patients having difficulty accessing the phone lines. Due to the unprecedented call volumes; it is inevitable there will be longer than usual wait times and there may be difficulties in accessing the phone lines during peak times.

Unfortunately we remain very concerned about the winter period ahead. GP surgeries in recent weeks have experienced an exponential surge, which has carried through to the out of hours service. ShannonDoc is an urgent out of hours GP service. We are urging our patients to only contact the service if you really need to. Please only contact the service if you require urgent medical attention and if you cannot safely wait to see your own GP during normal surgery hours.

Additionally we advise the public to visit www2.hse.ie/under-the-weather, a helpful online guidance for patients. Many common, routine illnesses can be treated safely at home without having to see a doctor and we would encourage patients to use this online guidance.

Ends