

10th February, 2023

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

**PQ ref 5687/23**

**"To ask the Minister for Health if he will instruct Southdoc to operate a text service for people hard of hearing."**

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.

South West Doctors on Call CLG is an 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 26 treatment centres of which eight are overnight and supported by a fleet of 19 vehicles, which are fully equipped for home visit situations.

SouthDoc provides a medical service to a population of approximately 736,000 (2022 Census) plus the 3.3M visitors to the area, and dealt with over 231,000 patient contacts in 2022. Already this year the number of patients who have availed of the service already exceeds 25,000. Although a number of these patient contacts were deemed to be emergency related, it is important to point out that while SouthDoc works closely with the Emergency Services it is not the primary emergency service provider.

In relation to the Deaf / Hard Of Hearing and Speech Impaired Community, SouthDoc undertook significant engagement with a representative body for this community in an effort to put in place a system which would be specific, appropriate and reflecting the needs of the Deaf / Hard Of Hearing and Speech Impaired Community thus ensuring clinically safe processing of those calls through the SouthDoc system. IT development work was required and undertaken in order to reflect a call process specific to the needs of the patients, ensuring a safe and effective system was implemented. While on the face of it, it may appear to be a very simple function, each step of the call flow process had to be developed and risk assessed to ensure the process is continuous and aligned with the overall system. It is vital that any patient contact which may fall outside of the standard call process flow is safeguarded and dealt with appropriately.

Working collaboratively with a representative body of the Deaf / Hard of Hearing and Speech Impaired Community, SouthDoc has already put in place a dedicated system to support those patients. A texting service is already in place for the exclusive use of only those patients requiring a texting service. It is vitally important that access to this service is limited to the Deaf / Hard of Hearing and Speech Impaired Community with initial contact and Registration of patients being completed through their representative body. Such a system, which has been jointly agreed with a representative body, ensures a safe processing of the patients' out of hours calls to SouthDoc. Significant work has been undertaken on this service and SouthDoc is committed to the continuation of this facility. SouthDoc is pleased to note that a number of patients have already registered their details in the event that they may require to use the out of hours service in the future.

SouthDoc continues to deliver the service in response to the patient needs in a manner that assures safety, ease and equity of access and does not have any plans to alter the service in any way that would diminish this ethos. All patients are dealt with in accordance with their clinical needs.

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael Noone".

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**Acting Head of Service - Primary Care,  
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare**