

22nd February, 2023

Ms. Holly Cairns., T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 7749/23

"To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ensure that SouthDoc out-of-hours GP service is operating in Castletownbere, County Cork."

Dear Deputy Cairns,

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 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 in addition to the 3.3M visitors to the area, and dealt with over 231,000 patient contacts in 2022. The geographical area serviced by SouthDoc is spread over circa 13,500 sq. Km is uniquely diverse, and includes five peninsulas incorporating Castletownbere.

The overall availability of GPs and engaging Locum Doctors to provide support to the out of hours service is extremely difficult. Specifically, and in relation to Castletownbere, the number of local GPs has decreased, and therefore relies heavily on the support of Locum Doctors as well as other treatment centres in the Co-op to sustain the out of hours service particularly at the weekends.

SouthDoc continues to provide the out of hours service in the Castletownbere area, however, due to the reliance on Locum Doctors, and the significant shortfall in their availability there may be occasions when this additional support is not available. SouthDoc endeavours at all times to minimise these occasions. In these circumstances, patients are treated by the Doctors in adjacent areas. All patients are dealt with in line with their clinical needs and are provided with the appropriate medical care in line with those needs.

SouthDoc continues to deliver the service in response to the patient needs in a manner, which 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,



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