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19th July, 2023

Mr. Pádraig O'Sullivan, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 33403/23

"To ask the Minister for Health if SouthDoc management is committed to providing a proper out-of-hours service in Fermoy; and if he will make a statement on the matter."

Dear Deputy O'Sullivan,

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 throughout the region which include overnight and non-overnight. SouthDoc has a fleet of 19 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. There are many factors involved in the delivery of the service including local doctors, locum doctors, local staff, and infrastructure. All these elements are supported by a bespoke IT system, Patient Management System, as well as a Call Centre where patient calls are acknowledged, documented, and triaged.

SouthDoc continually evaluates the service provision, formally with the HSE and on an ongoing basis internally, to ensure its continued effectiveness. The HSE has in place a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with SouthDoc for a quantum of service with an associated funding stream for the Cork Kerry Community Healthcare region. SouthDoc continues to provide this quantum of service from 6pm to 8am each weekday and 24-hour cover at weekends and public holidays. SouthDoc does not have any plans to alter this quantum of service commitment in Fermoy or indeed the North Cork area.

As with any service, SouthDoc continuously reviews its operations and the allocation of doctors, both member GPs and locum doctors, to enable the most effective allocation of their clinical expertise and to ensure the safest service.

The ever increasing demand, against the back drop of a chronic shortage of doctors, has necessitated a review of the allocation of doctors. This will be done through reforming doctor rosters. These adjustments relate to the doctors' rosters only and will not impact the service provision overnight. All patients are currently dealt with by appointment only and this will remain unchanged. Any patients that may require a home visit, due to their clinical condition, will also be treated accordingly.



North Cork GPs are valued members of the SouthDoc co-operative who remain committed to ensuring appropriate clinical care is available out of hours for their areas. It is important to emphasise that if an individual in Fermoy requires care, that care can be provided by appointment in the Fermoy Treatment Centre, or via home visit, depending on clinical condition of the patient as assessed by the consulting doctor. There is no reduction in service to North Cork.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Priscilla Lynch', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Priscilla Lynch
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