

17th July, 2023

Mr. Seán Sherlock, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 34481/23

"To ask the Minister for Health if he has been made aware of proposed changes to SouthDoc out-of-hours GP services; and if he will make a statement on the matter"

Dear Deputy Sherlock,

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. As a dynamic, community-based Out-of-Hours Family Doctor service, which is provided across the two counties of Cork and Kerry, SouthDoc constantly reviews the service provision to ensure its continued effectiveness. There are many factors involved in the delivery of the service including local General Practitioners, 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. Recognising the range of stakeholders, any review of service, which would impact on SouthDoc patients or public, would involve appropriate advance engagement.

The HSE has in place an SLA with SouthDoc for a quantum of service with an associated funding stream for the Cork and Kerry region. SouthDoc continues to provide this quantum of service from 18.00 to 08.00 each weekday and 24 hours cover at weekends and public holidays. SouthDoc does not have any plans to alter this quantum of service commitment. All patients in the Cork and Kerry region whose GPs are members of SouthDoc are entitled to access the service and there are no plans to change or withdraw access to the service from the population as a whole or any specific cohort. SouthDoc also provides care in the Out-of-Hours to patients who are not registered with any GP as well as visitors to the Cork and Kerry region and there are no plans to limit their access to the service.

SouthDoc is committed to the long-term continuation of the provision of the Out of Hours service in the North Cork Region. There are no plans to close any treatment centres in this area. There are no plans to withdraw the availability of or access to SouthDoc's services for patients in the North Cork area. North Cork GPs are valued members of the SouthDoc co-operative and there are no plans to withdraw

access to SouthDoc's services from their patients. There are also no plans to withdraw the availability of the centres in the region from service and/or for when in-person consultations in this base are deemed clinically necessary by a doctor.

SouthDoc as with any service continuously reviews the allocation of Doctors, both member GPs and Locum Doctors to ensure the most effective allocation of their clinical skills and expertise to ensure the safest and most effective service.

The ever increasing demand on the service, against the backdrop of a chronic shortage of Doctors has necessitated a review of the allocation of Doctors on the regional Red eye Service (22.00-08.00). This will be done through reforming their rosters.

These adjustments relate to the Doctors rosters only and will not impact the service provision on the Red Eye duty. The capacity of the Red Eye Service is more than sufficient to deal with any upsurge in patient demand.

SouthDoc will retain 11 GPs within the Red Eye service, which is capable of dealing with approximately 500 patients. This is far in excess of current demand which is on average 100 patients per night and is therefore well resourced to meet the demand during Red Eye times of 22.00 - 08.00 across Cork and Kerry.

It is important to emphasise that if an individual in North Cork requires care, that care will be provided by appointment in the 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 within the Red Eye Service and existing resources can meet the demand comfortably.

In summary, the SouthDoc Out of Hour's service remains available to the patients and full access to the services provided by them. The SouthDoc Treatment Centres facility in North Cork will continue to be by appointment.

Any patients that may require a Home Visit due to their clinical condition will be treated accordingly.

All patients continue to be dealt with by appointment only and this will remain unchanged.

SouthDoc continues to deliver the service in response to the patient needs in a manner, which assures safety, ease, and equity of access. All patients are dealt with in accordance with their clinical needs.

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

Yours sincerely



Mari O'Donovan
Acting Head of Service - Primary Care,
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare