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26th July, 2023

Deputy Pat Buckley, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 35422/23

“To ask the Minister for Health to provide details of any impact assessments or reports carried out in regard to SouthDoc services in Fermoy and the potential risks of the planned reduction in hours.”

Dear Deputy Buckley,

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.

The HSE has in place an SLA with SouthDoc for a quantum of service with an associated funding stream for the Cork Kerry community Healthcare (CKCH) 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 CKCH 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 CKCH 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 in Fermoy or for patients in the North Cork area generally. 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.

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.

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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Cork Kerry Community Healthcare