

29th May, 2023

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

PQ ref 24797/23

“To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ensure that an out-of-hours GP service is open after 9pm (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.”
Detail Supplied: SouthDoc Clonakilty.

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 an out of hours' 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 interdependent factors involved in the delivery of the service in Clonakilty to include 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 the patient calls are acknowledged, documented and triaged. The hours of the service provision in Clonakilty are Monday through Friday 18.00-21.00 and weekends and public holidays 09.00-21.00. The overnight service is provided by a Locum Doctor based in Bandon or Bantry. This model of service is working extremely well.

The out of hour's service in Clonakilty is provided by the local Doctors. Currently there are 14 Doctors equivalent to 11 FTE (full time equivalent) working in daytime practice in the area. The SouthDoc service hours provided in Clonakilty are 2,148 hours per annum. This means that each local Doctor is undertaking 195 hours of SouthDoc duties in addition to their daytime practice. This is the equivalent of an additional six weeks work each year. Therefore, to extend the hours of service beyond 21.00 is neither feasible nor practicable given the limited resource of the local GPs. The ongoing reliance on the limited pool of Locum Doctors to support the provision of the out of hour's service has already put significant pressure on their availability. Therefore, it cannot be guaranteed that a Locum Doctor can be secured to provide additional overnight service in Clonakilty. In any event, the location of the two overnight centres, Bandon and Bantry, ensure that all patients in the Clonakilty area are within close proximity to SouthDoc out of hour's services after 21.00.

Therefore, SouthDoc has no plans to extend the hours of service in Clonakilty.

SouthDoc continues to deliver the service in response to the patient needs in a manner, which ensures 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 black ink, appearing to read 'Priscilla Lynch', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Priscilla Lynch
Head of Service - Primary Care,
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare