

26th February, 2024

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

PQ ref 44300/23

"To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the lack of weekend healthcare services in (details supplied); the measures his Department will take to ensure weekend medical cover in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter."

Detail Supplied: "South Doc and GP clinics are closed on weekends in Skibbereen, Co Cork. There is also no Sunday pharmacy."

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 throughout the region which include overnight and non-overnight. SouthDoc has a fleet of 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.

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.

SouthDoc provides and continues to be committed to the continuation of the provision of the Out of Hours service in the West Cork Region. SouthDoc continues to provide care and access to care to the out of hours services in Skibbereen and for patients in the West Cork area generally. Skibbereen based GPs are valued members of the SouthDoc co-operative and there are no plans to withdraw access to SouthDoc's services from their patients. Skibbereen treatment centre continues to be available to patients by appointment at weekends, and there are no plans to alter the availability of this centre from service and/or for when in-person consultations in this base are deemed clinically necessary by a doctor.

It is important to emphasise that if an individual in Skibbereen requires care, that care will be provided by appointment in the Skibbereen Treatment Centre or via Home Visit depending on clinical condition of the patient as assessed by the consulting Doctor.

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 Centre facilities in West 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.

The HSE has no role in lack of a Sunday pharmacy service and it is a matter for the pharmacies themselves as to what their opening hours are.

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