

20th September, 2023

Mr. Michael Healy-Rae, T.D.,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Dublin 2

**PQ ref 38916/23**

**"To ask the Minister for Health for an explanation regarding the lack of GP services (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter."**

**Detail Supplied: "Minister can I please have an explanation as to why on Friday 25/8/23, Saturday 26/8/23, Sunday 27/8/23 there was no GP cover whatsoever in the greater Waterville area in South Kerry. This is a dangerous situation and it is leaving people in this area very vulnerable, adding to this there are major road works being undertaken whereby the road will be closed overnight going from Caherciveen-Killarney/Tralee via Mountainstage in Glenbeigh. What are these people to do if they need out of hours healthcare service.**

Dear Deputy Healy Rae,

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 treatment centres throughout the region which include overnight and non-overnight. 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.

The overall availability of GPs and engaging Locum Doctors to provide support to the out of hours' service is extremely difficult and particularly so in the Peninsulas. Specifically, and in relation to Caherciveen the number of local GPs has decreased significantly over the years, from six to three of which one is a Locum Doctor, with a further retirement planned for next year, 2024. This poses significant issues for daytime services with the obvious knock on effect on the out of hours' services. Due to a variety of circumstances, not all Doctors are in a position to participate in the out of hours' service hence the considerable reliance on Locum Doctor support. Caherciveen therefore relies heavily on the support of Locum Doctors as well as other treatment centres in the Co-op to sustain the out of hours' service particularly on the overnight and at the weekends.

SouthDoc continues to provide the out of hours service in the Caherciveen area, however, due to the reliance on Locum Doctors, and the significant shortfall in their availability there may be occasions when this support is not available such as August 25-27, 2023, when the Locum Doctor was cancelled without adequate notice. SouthDoc endeavours at all times to minimise these occasions. In these circumstances, patients are treated by the Doctors in adjacent areas. The Locum Doctor currently engaged for Caherciveen is confirmed to work with SouthDoc until December, 2023.

All patients are dealt with in line with their clinical needs and are provided with the appropriate medical care in line with those needs. SouthDoc continues to deliver the service in response to the patient needs in a manner, which assures 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.

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