

14th May, 2024.

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

PQ ref 21154/24

“To ask the Minister for Health if he will comment on a situation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Details supplied: Minister there is no full cover for South Doc in Caherciveen and with some nights or weekends having cover.

Dear Deputy Healy-Rea,

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 and supported by a fleet of vehicles, which are fully equipped for home visit situations. The peninsulas are also supported with a specific model of service provision requiring significant financial support from the member Doctors as well as the HSE.

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 212,000 patient contacts in 2023.

The overall availability of GPs and engaging Locum Doctors to provide support to the out of hours service is extremely difficult. Specifically, and in relation to Caherciveen the number of local GPs has decreased significantly over the years, from six to three with a retirement imminent. 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 in that area particularly on the overnight and at the weekends.

Evaluation of the service provision over the past three months shows that SouthDoc was very successful in covering the out of hours' commitment in Caherciveen. Our records show that in the three months since February 2024 there was only one night, March 28th that was inadvertently left uncovered.

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 additional support is not available. SouthDoc endeavours at all times to minimise these occasions which it has successfully achieved over the past three months of evaluation. In these circumstances, patients are treated by the Doctors in adjacent areas.

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.

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 initial 'P'.

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