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25th June, 2025

Mr. Colm Burke., T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 33241/25

"To ask the Minister for Health the number of appointments taken in SouthDoc in Blackpool, Cork, in each of the past 12 months; the number of patients that were unable to be seen in Blackpool and were referred to SouthDoc in Kinsale Road, Cork from Blackpool in the same time period; and if she will make a statement on the matter."

Dear Deputy Burke,

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 (known as SouthDoc) provides an Out-of-Hours non-urgent GP service to a population of approximately 736,000 in Cork and Kerry, in addition to the 3.3M visitors to the area. The HSE has a Service Level Agreement with SouthDoc for the provision of out-of-hours cover for medical card holders. The Head of Service for Primary Care chairs these meetings on a quarterly basis with SouthDoc. SouthDoc continually evaluates their service provision, formally with the HSE and on an ongoing basis internally.

It is important to emphasise that if an individual in Cork city requires care, that care will be provided by appointment in either the Blackpool or Kinsale Road Treatment Centre, or via a home visit; depending on clinical condition of the patient, as assessed by the consulting doctor. There is no reduction in service to city patients and existing resources can meet the demand comfortably.

The Blackpool Treatment Centre remains operational for appointments where there is a clearly established clinical need. Since September 2023, however, routine appointments have been scheduled at the primary treatment centre on Kinsale Road.

This operational adjustment was implemented as part of an organisation-wide service review aimed at optimising resources and service delivery while maintaining patient care standards within the available budget.

That said, there are instances where the attending doctor may determine—based on clinical need—that a patient should be seen at the Blackpool Centre. In 2025 to date, 22 patients have been seen at the Blackpool Centre under such circumstances. In addition, approx. 410 home visits were carried out in the Blackpool area, supporting patients who met the clinical criteria and were unable to travel to the Tramore Road centre.

We trust this information will help to demonstrate that the Blackpool Centre remains in use for appropriate clinical cases, even though it is no longer a site for routine appointments.

HSE South West appreciates the ongoing commitment of SouthDoc to improving service delivery and patient care. Ninety per cent of patients are seen within four hours, and we acknowledge the continued efforts by SouthDoc and its staff to maintain this high level of service. The current average call waiting time at peak hours is 7.18 minutes.

Seirbhís sláinte a thógáil a bhfuil ár bpobal bródúil aisti
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The activity data for each SouthDoc treatment centre for the first four months of 2025 is below. Please note that the figures for each treatment centre include all consultations carried out by doctors at the centre, including:

- Tele consults
- In-person appointments at the centre
- Home visits
- Engagement with the emergency services (in rare cases)

May 2025	April 2025	Mar 2025	Feb 2025	Jan 2025	Dec 2024	Nov 2024	Oct 2024	Sept 2024	Aug 2024	July 2024	Jun 2024	May 2024
484	466	567	384	481	700	442	449	358	329	377	490	523

Please be advised that patients are not transferred between treatment locations within the SouthDoc service. Instead, patients contact SouthDoc directly, where they are triaged and offered an appointment at a Treatment Centre where a doctor is based. If clinically indicated, a home visit may be arranged. Accordingly, we are unable to provide information regarding patient transfers between sites, as this is not how the SouthDoc system operates in practice.

By way of context, it's worth setting out the process for patient engagement with SouthDoc:

- Patients contact the SouthDoc call centre.
- Relevant data is collected, and an electronic patient record is created. This record follows the patient through the service.
- The clinical condition of the patient determines the type and nature of their treatment, which may include:
 - a phone consultation with a nurse. Some patients can have their treatment closed off at this point
 - a consultation with a duty doctor at a treatment centre
 - referral to emergency services (in rare cases)
- If a doctor consultation is required, the patient's record is sent electronically to a doctor at a treatment centre.
- The doctor determines the most appropriate treatment and its location, and options may include a tele-consultation, a home visit, or an in-person consultation at a SouthDoc treatment centre.
- After the consultation, the patient's GP receives a copy of the visit and treatment record.

HSE South West appreciates the ongoing commitment of SouthDoc to improving service delivery and patient care and continue to monitor performance to ensure the highest standards of care is provided to service users in the region.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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