



CÚRAM SLÁINTE POBAIL  
**CORCAIGH CIARRAÍ**  
**CORK KERRY**  
COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

**Priscilla Lynch**  
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25<sup>th</sup> April, 2022.

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

**PQ ref 19158/22**

**“To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ensure that the SouthDoc out-of-hours general practitioner service is operating in Castletownbere, County Cork.”**

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.

It provides a medical service to a population of approximately 694,000 plus the 3.3M visitors to the area, and dealt with over 203,000 patient contacts in 2021. Although a number of these patient contacts were deemed to be emergency related, it is important to point out that while SouthDoc works closely with the Emergency Services is not the primary emergency service provider.

When a patient initiates contact with SouthDoc, an electronic medical record is created which documents the patient's details, clinical category and ensures the safe progression through the service.

As you are aware, 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 Castletownbere, the number of local GPs has remained static, and 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 at the weekends.

In late 2021 an additional GP relocated to the Castletownbere area and continues in both day time practice and SouthDoc out of hours at this time. This has had a hugely beneficial impact on the availability of GPs in the area and contributed positively to the longer term stability of the out of hours service.

SouthDoc continues to provide the out of hours service in the Castletownbere 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. 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. 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 be 'Priscilla Lynch', written over a light blue rectangular background.

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