

Brief Summary of the Irish Medical System

Ireland has a comprehensive, government funded public healthcare system (Health Service Executive, HSE). Separate to the Irish public health system, 45.8% of the Irish population (end Dec 2015), have health insurance and many people opt to be treated privately.

Public Healthcare:

A person living in Ireland for at least one year is considered by the HSE to be 'ordinarily resident' and is entitled to either full eligibility or limited eligibility for health services depending on their financial situation.

- Full eligibility is given to individuals with **medical cards**. Medical Cards allow people to get a wide range of health services and medicines free of charge. Over 30% of people in Ireland have medical cards, they are known as General Medical Services (**GMS**) patients.
- Limited eligibility is given to individuals without medical cards. People without medical cards can still access a wide range of community and hospital health services, either free of charge or at reduced cost. This group are known as **non-GMS** patients.

GPs in the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme enter a contract with the Health Service Executive (**HSE**) to provide services. GPs in the GMS scheme are expected to provide or arrange for the provision of appropriate out of hours' services for their own medical card patients, *see GP Co-Op section*.

General Practitioner Co-operative (GP Co-Op)

General medical practitioners in Ireland are contracted by the public health service to provide out of hours' services for eligible patients under the Agreement for Provision of Services under Section 58 of the Health Act 1970 and as substituted by the Health (Amendment) Act, 2005.

A **GP Co-Op** is a group of GPs that provide out of hours' coverage for patients who need to see a GP outside of surgery hours. The co-operative may be based in a health centre, public hospital or in another location. The out of hours' care provided by the GP Co-Ops is funded publicly by the HSE and by the GP members that belong to the surgery providing the coverage.

Publicly funded GP Co-operatives came into operation in Ireland in 1999 with the aim of providing an easily accessible out of hours' service for patients and to minimise the out of hours' commitment of individual GPs. Both GMS and non-GMS patients can use the out of hours' service as well as private patients registered with participating GPs although the cost to the patient will vary.

Participating GPs provide this service on a rota basis in the evenings, at weekends and on bank and public holidays. Typical shift hours are between 6pm and 8am on Monday to Friday and for the 24 hour period on Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holidays.

The Out of Hours Process for Patients

The patient telephones a contact number to access the nurse telephone triage. This means that patients who call the service will speak with or receive a call back from a nurse to discuss their

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condition, get advice and decide if they need to be seen by the GP. If a GP visit is required, patients will either attend a treatment centre or receive a visit to your home by the doctor on duty.

If the nurse triage decides the patient is in an emergency condition, they will alert the ambulance service. The doctor on duty will not respond to emergency calls.

Further Information

Further information can be found at the following links that sourced the information above.

- Health Service Executive: <http://www.hse.ie/>
- Out of Hours Services:
http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/PrimaryCare/GP_Out_of_Hours/
- Citizen Information: <http://www.citizensinformation.ie/>
- Irish Medical Council: <https://www.medicalcouncil.ie/>
- <http://www.lenus.ie/>