

NGO takes legal advice on medical evidence

AS MORE POLICE FORCES ARE NOW INSISTING on having written clearance from an applicant's GP before granting or renewing firearms and shot gun certificates, the NGO is taking formal legal advice as to whether their insistence is lawful.

Greater Manchester Police is the latest of half a dozen forces to require a letter from a GP saying they know of no medical reason why an applicant should not possess guns. The practice is controversial because most GPs charge a random fee for producing such a letter (the amount often exceeding the

cost of the application itself), whereas a few refuse to take part. Home Office guidance on the Firearms Act merely says that the police should ask the GP if there is a reason not to grant a certificate and assume that all is well if they do not hear back within 21 days.

At least one force, Thames Valley Police, is asking for information which goes beyond that required by the application form, such as a diagnosis within the past two years of any terminal illness.

By introducing this system, police forces are effectively coercing applicants to pay an unregulated and uncapped fee

to GPs, who can then charge what they like knowing the applicant has no option but to pay.

To be clear, the NGO is all in favour of the police taking medical evidence into account when assessing certificate applications, but the system must be clearly set out and fair for all. GPs should be required by their contracts to take part and the fee charged must be reasonable and consistent across the country so as to remove the current postcode lottery.

The matter is to be reviewed by the Home Office (indeed, a public consultation may have started by the time you read this) and the shooting organisations will all be lobbying for improvements. But the NGO is going a step further, preparing for that consultation by seeking legal advice from Counsel as to whether the current *ad hoc* approach by some police forces is lawful. Section 26 of the Firearms Act goes into great detail as to what information applicants for firearms and shot gun certificates must supply and it makes no mention of a GP's letter.

"Showing that the current hotch potch is unlawful would be a very strong starting point from which to make an argument for replacing it," says Liam Bell, the NGO Chairman. Knights Solicitors, who have long provided assistance to NGO members on firearms and other legal matters, are instructing Counsel on behalf of the NGO.

We will keep readers updated in future issues of *Keeping the Balance*.



ISTOCK.COM/WAVE BREAK MEDIA



Shooting & Reloading Supplies

1000's of products in stock!!!



1967SPUD
PRODUCTIONS

www.1967spud.com Tel 01263 732740 Mob 07879 468878 Email spud@1967spud.com

MACGAITERS - THE OBVIOUS CHOICE

The MacGaiter Co is pleased to introduce MacGaiter neoprene gaiters, a revolutionary addition to outdoor clothing in the UK. These neoprene gaiters are strong, lightweight, comfortable, waterproof and washable.

7 calf sizes available for the perfect fit.
Junior Small - Large
Adult Small - XXL £32.95 per pair + p&p



Order online at www.macgaiters.co.uk | Also available in selected countrywear shops
Contact mail@macgaiters.co.uk or 07970 473659