



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From [REDACTED]
Minister of State for Care

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Our ref: [REDACTED]

Richard Travers
HM Coroner's Court
Station Approach
Woking
GU22 7AP

By email: [REDACTED]

24th September 2024

Dear Mr Travers,

Thank you for the Regulation 28 report of 8th August 2024 sent to the Secretary of State / the Department of Health and Social Care about the death of Emma Pattison, Ellette Pattison, and George Pattison. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for NHS Primary Care.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Emma Pattison, Ellette Pattison, and George Pattison's deaths and I offer my sincere condolences to their family and loved ones. The circumstances your report describes are very concerning and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

The report raises concerns over:

1. An applicant for a shotgun certificate is able to obtain medication from an on-line doctor without the knowledge of their GP, giving rise to a risk that a licensing authority might grant a shotgun certificate to an applicant who has a relevant previous medical history about which the authority is not aware.
2. In consulting an on-line doctor, it is possible for an applicant for a shotgun certificate to avoid the current safeguards relating to full disclosure of their previous and current medical history.
3. Consideration should be given as to how a licensing authority can obtain full and accurate disclosure of an applicant's history of coercive controlling behaviour towards another / others.

In preparing this response, my officials have made enquiries with NHS England to ensure we adequately address your concerns.

I am responding to your first two concerns regarding medical checks as part of the firearms application process as requested of my Department in your report.

We have worked closely with the Home Office and the British Medical Association to ensure there are strong controls in place in relation to an applicant's medical suitability which is one

element of the application process that the police consider when deciding if an applicant can hold a firearms or shotgun certificate. An applicant is required to declare all relevant medical conditions upon applying and they must provide details of their GP. A proforma is then completed by their GP or an independent General Medical Council registered doctor. The doctor completing the proforma checks the GP medical record and must provide details of all relevant medical conditions to the police. This process has been further strengthened within GP IT systems, where a GP adds a digital marker to the patient record, to note that the patient has a firearms certificate. This was fully rolled out to all GP IT systems in England by May 2023. If the patient begins to experience a relevant medical condition while the certificate is valid, upon discussion with the GP, the GP will see an alert and can flag this to the police allowing them to review the person's suitability, and if necessary, revoke the certificate.

In response to the issue you raise that an applicant for a shotgun certificate is able to obtain medication from an on-line doctor without the knowledge of their GP, there is no legal requirement for a GP to be informed about medication from a private online prescriber. This is an issue which the Government is considering. Third party (non-NHS) doctors or prescribers cannot share confidential patient information with a person's NHS GP if that person objects unless they believe there is an overriding public interest justification for doing so (e.g. to protect a third party from serious harm). Third party prescribers are also reliant on the patient fully disclosing all medical conditions and existing medication to be able to prescribe safely. Under data protection law each healthcare provider is the 'data controller' of their patient records and the common law duty of confidentiality further protects personal data.

In order to practice medicine in the UK, all doctors must meet the expected standards set out in the GMC's Good medical practice and for prescribing, the GMC's Good practice in prescribing and managing medicines and devices.

In your report you raise the issue of whether an applicant can avoid full disclosure of their previous and current medical history. If an applicant seeks treatment from a range of healthcare providers, this is possible. The Home Office is considering the concerns you have raised in relation to the firearms licensing process and will be responding to your report in due course.

Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature and name of the sender. Below it is a smaller black rectangular redaction box covering the contact information.