

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CERTIFICATE OF FITNESS

SIR—May I have the use of your columns in a plea for sanity?

On the day that the news was released about our Forces landing on the Falkland Islands, I was requested to sign a certificate of fitness to attend a golf course. Earlier that week I had refused to sign such a certificate, but the soldier in question was told that without a certificate he would not be allowed to proceed on the course.

It would appear that a PES of FE permits a soldier to go into action against an enemy without further medical screening, but does not permit him to partake in an officially run course to learn the secrets of golf. I find that attitude hard to justify and would be grateful if readers of your columns could inform me of any medical conditions compatible with Active Service duty but incompatible with golf!

Surely the idea of the PULHEEMS system is to review the health of our Forces at regular intervals to ensure that they are fit for their role, and that, if the system is working properly, there should be no need for any pre-course medical certificates. I would of course be prepared to accept the need for such a medical certificate in the event of personnel proceeding on arduous courses such as Parachute, SAS selection and the like, but surely they are irrelevant for personnel proceeding on golf, typewriting and other such courses.

I am, etc.

J P G BOLTON

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14 June 1982

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR MEDICAL ATTENDANCE

SIR — I started to ponder on this question recently when a WRAC Sgt asked if she could register her husband with my Army Practice as he was her dependant. Regulations AMS are quite clear on which persons are eligible for Medical Attendance by a Military Medical Officer and go so far as define a family as “the wife of an officer, soldier or MOD civilian and children under 18 years of age who are normally resident in the household of an officer, soldier or MOD civilian.”

From this definition my WRAC Sgt does not qualify for medical attendance for her husband. “But he is my dependant” she said and on checking, this proves to be true. Her husband is out of work and totally dependent upon his wife who even provides his shelter in the form of the married quarter which is in her name. It is now 1982, we have the act for the equality of women and things have changed, perhaps the definition of a family needs to change also.

Would a dependant of a serviceman be a more suitable word to use, but how are we to decide who is dependent upon whom? If a servicewoman is married to an unemployed civilian then he is a dependant of hers? Presumably yes but

then if he becomes employed but earns less than his wife — is he still a dependant? and if he should earn more than his wife then presumably he is no longer a dependant, but if the house is in her name and he earns more than she does, then is he still a non-dependant?

What is a dependant? — The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines a dependant as one who depends upon another for support and support is defined as, 'to supply with necessaries, provide for,' but what are necessaries? Shelter, Food, Clothing, Warmth? so if the house is in the servicewoman's name then she is providing a necessary — Shelter: so is her husband a dependant?

Perhaps a service person's spouse and children should replace a soldier's wife and children in Regulations AMS? The present wording could lead to problems with the equality for women lobby and perhaps needs reconsidering.

I have registered the WRAC Sgt's husband as a patient, all well and good except that his first visit was for a medical for a job!!

I am, etc.

I M M BAGSHAW

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10 August 1982

TATTOOING

SIR — I am a Dermatologist interested in the history of tattooing. A patient of mine recently mentioned to me that when he was in the army he heard a story of a member of the RAMC during the First World War who, following his capture by the Germans, was tattooed with a eagle on the chin. This procedure he told me was performed in order to make him instantly recognisable and therefore discourage any attempt he might make to escape.

I wondered whether you have any knowledge of such an occurrence, or whether in fact this story does not have any basis of truth?

I should be most grateful if you could let me know if there is any record of such an individual.

I am, etc.

D A BURNS

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2 June 1982

(Information from anyone who may have knowledge of this incident would be appreciated).