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**THE ACTIVITY OF THE AVIATION-MEDICAL AND  
OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE CERTIFICATION  
EXAMINATION CENTRE AT THE MILITARY  
INSTITUTE OF AVIATION MEDICINE IN THE  
FIELD OF ASSESSING THE ABILITY TO POSSESS  
FIREARMS**

DZIAŁALNOŚĆ OŚRODKA BADAŃ ORZECZNICZYCH  
LOTNICZO-LEKARSKICH I MEDYCYNY PRACY  
WOJSKOWEGO INSTYTUTU MEDYCYNY LOTNICZEJ  
W ZAKRESIE ORZEKANIA O ZDOLNOŚCI OSÓB DO  
POSIADANIA BRONI

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**ABSTRACT:** *The authors of this article have tackled the problem of the availability of firearms, especially in the aspect of medical and psychological activity, while assessing the ability to possess and use firearms. Special attention has been paid to the responsibility that is placed upon such examinations. The article also covers the asks of the Aviation-medical and Occupational Medicine Certification Examination Center at the Military Institute of Aviation Medicine in the field of appeal examinations of persons whose firearms certificates are withdrawn*

**KEY WORDS:** *firearms, reasons for withdrawal of firearms certificate, medical and psychological examinations*

**STRESZCZENIE:** *Autorzy poruszają problem dostępu do broni palnej w aspekcie działalności lekarskiej i psychologicznej przy orzekaniu o możliwości posiadania i użytkowania broni palnej. Zwracają uwagę na odpowiedzialność, jaka ciąży przy tego typu badaniach. W artykule przedstawiono zadania Ośrodka Badań*

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*Orzecznicych Lotniczo-Lekarskich i Medycyny Pracy WIML w zakresie badań odwoławczych w stosunku do osób, którzy utracili uprawnienia do posiadania broni*

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** broń palna, przyczyny utraty uprawnień do posiadania broni, badania lekarskie i psychologiczne

One of the important and, at the same time, responsible tasks carried out at the Aviation-Medical and Occupational Medicine Certification Examination Center at the Military Institute of Aviation Medicine is conducting medical and psychological examinations of applicants for a firearms certificate. Pursuant to the order of the Minister of Health dated 7th September, 2000 (Journal of Laws No. 79, item 898, as amended), OBOLLiMP is one of five institutions in Poland entitled to carry out the final appeal examinations in the above mentioned area.

It is important to emphasize that making a decision about granting permission to possess firearms is a complex process and it requires broad knowledge of the subject-matter and many years of experience. This in turn results in broadly defined safety measures. Medical personnel working in OBOLLiMP, who possess both clinical and certifying experience, guarantees reliable and responsible decisions on issuing firearms certificates. In addition, the newest medical equipment allows for an in-depth diagnoses and assessment of illnesses disqualifying a person from obtaining a firearms certificate.

Correspondence to: It should be stressed that access to the possession of firearms in Poland is a very emotional issue, while the definition of firearms itself arouses a lot of controversy. A part of society, including a number of politicians, believes that the Polish regulations in this field are far too strict. However, the media report on more and more cases of often irresponsible firearms use in the countries, which possess a more liberal attitude towards this matter. The drama, which took place on Utoya Island in Norway, clearly shows how important it is to eliminate mentally unstable people and what a heavy responsibility lies on the certifying doctors. Bearing that in mind, it is necessary to have an appropriate distance to the problem of liberalizing firearms regulations in Poland. In accordance with the Guns and Ammunition Act it should be explained that whenever weapon is mentioned, it refers to firearms, hunting weapons, sports weapons, gas weapons, alarm and signal weapons. Other types, such as electroshock weapons or melee weapons and archery weapons, such as bows and cross-bows, are not classified as firearms.

Firearms permit can be issued only for a particular purpose, such as:

- personal protection or protection of others or property,
- hunting,
- sports,
- collectibles,
- commemorative,
- education.

In accordance with Article 15, section 1 of the Firearms and Ammunition Act, firearms permissions are not issued to those who:

- are under the age of 21 (however, upon the request of a school, sports organization, the Polish Hunting Association or a defense association, such a permit

can be issued to a person over 18 years of age, but only for sports and hunting purposes),

- have mental disturbances, referred to in the Mental Health Act of August 19th, 1994, or are of limited psycho-physical fitness,
- show serious psychological disturbances,
- are addicted to alcohol or psychoactive substances,
- have no permanent residence in the Republic of Poland,
- towards whom exists a justified fear that they would use a gun against public order and safety, especially those convicted by the final and legally binding decision of a court for a crime against life, health or property and those against whom proceedings are pending.

It is beyond doubt that firearms permit should only be granted to people fully healthy, both in physical and mental terms. That is why certifying access to guns is a process of utmost responsibility, both for doctors and psychologists, and it requires in-depth knowledge of the subject-matter. Examinations verifying one's ability to possess firearms are a crucial element of diagnostics for many illnesses which disqualify from the ability to possess and use firearms both in a work environment and for private purposes. The ordinance of the Minister of Health dated September 7th, 2000, establishing medical and psychological examinations of firearms permit applicants precisely determines the health conditions and ability to possess firearms. Generally, good physical condition, comprised of the proper functioning of a number of organs and systems, stable mental state and both physical and intellectual fitness are the main elements of examination and certification.

According to relevant judiciary regulations, people applying for a firearms permit, or those who have to undergo appeal examinations, are subject to medical and psychological examinations. The final ruling is made by doctors and psychologists who, pursuant to the abovementioned ordinance of the Minister of Health, meet specific conditions. A doctor authorized to carry out examinations and issue certificates must hold a license to practice their profession, have at least five years of experience, and additionally, confirmed by a special document, the right to carry out medical examinations and have an entry in the register of the Head of Voivodeship Police. Appropriate trainings, completion of which allows a doctor to examine and certify applicants for a firearms permit, are conducted by such institutions as the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine in Lodz, the Institute of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health in Sosnowiec, the Institute of Marine and Tropical Medicine in Gdynia and the Military Institute of Aviation Medicine in Warsaw. At the same time, these institutes may carry out appeal examinations in accordance with the quoted ordinance.

Medical examinations encompass:

- conducting a detailed anamnesis, also in terms of a patient's emotional states and his possible use of various substances (alcohol, psychotropics and drugs). A long-term abuse of alcohol or other stimulants leads to a lowered self-criticism and affects self-control, and in some cases may produce emotional and mental disorders. Often during such examinations mental disorders of various clinical forms and lowered intellectual efficiency are discovered. Therefore, it is important to channel the questions about professional and private life, family or work con-

- flicts, accidents of losing consciousness or limited motor skills. Another relevant element is a community interview, which often reveals crucial episodes of private life that may affect the final assessment of certifying a firearms permit,
- overall state of health, especially the nervous system, mental state, movement system, organs of sight, hearing and balance,
  - both specialist and supplementary examinations:
    - psychiatric examination,
    - further consultations and additional examinations (laboratory, EKG, EEG, RTG and others, deemed necessary by the doctor).

A psychological examination of a firearms permit applicant encompasses an assessment of intellectual development and a description of personality features. It should also take into account the ability to function in stressful situations, as well as the patient's social maturity.

An in-depth analysis of the results obtained through the above methods allows to eliminate people with certain illnesses, as well as those who are at risk of irresponsible use of firearms.

As mentioned in the opening paragraph, apart from the routine examinations of firearms certificate applicants carried out at the OBOLLiMP, there are also examinations of persons referred by Police Stations. These are the people whose firearms certificates have been withdrawn. Such a situation may take place for the following reasons:

- disobeying the terms of a firearms certificate, which rule out or limit carrying of guns,
- when a gun owner shows signs of mental disorders, is addicted to alcohol, drugs or psychoactive substances,
- failing to report the loss of a firearm to the police,
- carrying a gun while intoxicated or under the influence of other psychoactive substances,
- failing to undergo medical and psychological examinations and to provide an appropriate medical or psychological certificate.

Police Headquarters also refer for examinations those, towards whom a community interview has collected information indicating the possible necessity of withdrawing firearms permit. In such cases a detailed interview and physical examination should be carried out, since imputations of alcohol abuse or other pathological behaviors may be rejected during the examination.

In the 2009-2011, a total number of 664 examinations were carried out for firearms permit applicants at the Aviation-Medical and Occupational Medicine Certification Examination Center at the Military Institute of Aviation Medicine. Within these years appeal examinations, referred by Police Stations, were only a small percentage (37 cases) of the total number. It results from the fact that similar procedures are carried in the other centers mentioned earlier. Therefore, data presented here do not reflect the full scope of the situation of losses the ability to possess firearms in our country. It seems, however, that similar tendencies are observed in other centers.

It is worth mentioning that, for example, in 2009 out of eleven people referred for examinations due to various objections by the Police Stations, only two cases were stated incapable of possessing firearms. In the remaining seven cases no impediments were found.

In 2010, 11 appeal examinations were conducted, with 8 of them referred by the Police Stations, whereas the remaining 3 cases were individual appeals. The main reasons behind them were alcohol abuse (4 cases), diagnosed post stroke encephalopathy, impairment of the central nervous system (4 cases) and 3 cases of eyesight diseases in the form of binocular vision impairment. Out of these eleven cases, five people were judged fit to hold firearms permit, while the remaining six exhibited aberrations large enough to make them unable to receive a positive ruling.

In 2011, 15 appeal examinations were carried out, with 14 of them referred by the Voivodeship Police Stations. Like in the preceding years the majority of referrals regarded alcohol abuse (7 people) and broadly defined mental disorders (3 people). It should be noted that some of the reservations expressed by the Police Stations were not confirmed by specialist examinations. And thus, 12 out of 15 people examined in 2011 turned out to have no impediments in their state of health and they were found capable of possessing firearms.

The total number of firearm holders in Poland is around 300,000 people, with 45,000 of them living in the Mazowiecki Voivodeship. It should be noted that the small percentage of firearm accidents indicates an effective selection process of candidates for holding firearms.

Organizing medical and psychological examinations, together with appropriate processes of selection and training, good cooperation of the Police Stations with healthcare institutions and, finally, a thorough community interview eliminates the individuals who may be a threat to their own health and life, and towards that of others.

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