

To Whom It May Concern :

I am writing concerning the CPSO's Human Rights Code policy review, in particular as it pertains to a physician's right to decline non-emergency care that does not conform to his or her moral and/or religious beliefs. It is imperative that the CPSO retain this fundamental safeguard to a physician's right to act according to his or her conscience. Conscience-protection guidelines are vital to a physician's mental and emotional well-being and thereby contribute to a well-functioning and vibrant health care system. As Dr. Margaret Somerville, the founding director of the Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law at McGill University said recently, "Do you really want to be treated by a doctor who doesn't care if he thinks that he's doing something unconscionable or unethical or immoral?"

Again the point needs to be emphasised that we are speaking of non-emergency care and not health-care services where a patient's life is at risk. For example, except in very limited circumstances birth control is not health care, because it is acting against something that is actually functioning in a healthy manner - a person's reproduction and fertility. Therefore, in the vast majority of cases birth control is about peoples' lifestyle choices and not health care. Physicians should not be required by force of law to comply with someone else's lifestyle choices.

Certainly a physician's beliefs about what is, or is not, good medicine will sometimes inconvenience a patient. But what would be the consequences of forcing doctors to abandon their professional judgment and violate their conscience in order to cater to patients' wishes? If individual doctors don't have the right to reach their own conclusions as to what is good medicine in these non-emergency care situations we embark on a slippery slope where physicians will progressively be forced to cater to their patients' demands. This is not about good medical practices but about availability of non-emergency services that impose morality on all physicians, to the point where doctors need to violate their own conscience in order to serve their patients.

Our physicians' freedom of conscience may cause some inconveniences, but their freedom cannot be usurped by the purported "right" of patients to access all medical services from any physician of their choosing.

Sincerely,

Signed and Dated