July 26, 2014

To: The Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario
Re: Feedback for the CPSO policy review for “Physicians and the Ontario Human Rights Code”

This letter is written in response to the CPSO’s request for feedback concerning their policy “Physicians and the Ontario Human Rights Code” which is under review.

I urge the Council to uphold and respect the freedom of physicians to practice their profession without violating their conscience or moral and ethical beliefs. The practice of medicine is often fraught with moral and ethical dilemmas that require careful deliberation to discern a right course of action. Expecting physicians to practice medicine in a way that violates their conscience and deeply held moral convictions is equivalent to expecting physicians to do what they believe to be wrong or harmful under threat of professional sanction. This is a form of tyranny that puts at risk the moral integrity of the practice of medicine.

There is an increasing trend toward legalizing physician-assisted suicide as part of “medical treatment.” The province of Quebec recently passed Bill 52, “An Act Respecting End-of-Life Care” and it is foreseeable that physician-assisted suicide will eventually be legalized in other parts of Canada, including Ontario. Shall physicians be forced against their consciences into providing this “service” should it become legalized in Ontario?

Mutual respect and trust form the foundation of a healthy patient-doctor relationship. Where there is disagreement, patients and doctors must each have the liberty to express their views in respectful dialogue, in a setting free of coercion. When physicians, after deep reflection, decline to provide a service that they understand to be harmful, the freedom of their patients to seek care from alternative providers is preserved. Can we not find acceptable solutions to conflicting views between physicians and patients without taking away the fundamental freedoms of medical professionals? I believe we can and that it is essential that we do so.

I hope that the CPSO will deliberate carefully upon the serious implications that restricting a physician’s freedom of conscience will have upon the practice of medicine, and urge the Council to uphold policy guidelines that will respect these fundamental freedoms in the best interest of all.