February 16, 2015

The Registrar

The College of Physicians & Surgeons

80 College Street

Toronto, ON M5G 2E2

RE: PHYSICIANS' CHARTER RIGHT OF FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION

We believe that an “effective referral” is a violation of a physician’s rights, as it compels the physician to violate his or her own conscience by being a participant in the very procedure to which he or she objects in the first place, and we strongly object to, and reject the proposed new draft document that would put this into effect.

The prospect of physician assisted suicide would impact on health care for everyone, and the conscience rights of health care workers. It would lead to abuse of the aged in our society especially from those who stand to inherit; as well as abuse of the disabled. In time it will expand to non-terminal illness patients and allow other than doctors to assist.

The physician’s Charter Right of Freedom of Conscience and Religion must be respected.
Statement from Cardinal Thomas Collins re: Supreme Court of Canada decision on assisted suicide

February 10, 2015

“For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.” Psalm 31

In our days, as in the days of the psalmist, so many years ago, people can suffer grievously during their journey through this “valley of tears,” and may even be tempted to request assisted suicide. The Supreme Court has now allowed that, and at first glance, it may seem to be the compassionate thing to do.

There is certainly no need to take extreme measures to extend the length of life. When people are dying, we should surround them with love as they enter into their final experience on this earth, and relieve as best we can any suffering they endure. We need as a society to make effective palliative care more available. But there is a profound difference between compassionately journeying with someone who is dying, or who is suffering when not in danger of death, and killing that person, or helping that person to commit suicide. No one has a right to do that, and it is simply wrong for the state to allow or to encourage that.

Suicide is already a sadly common tragedy in our society, as persons facing what at the moment they feel to be intolerable suffering of some kind, decide to end their life. We all need to reach out compassionately to anyone contemplating suicide, and to offer whatever help we can to alleviate their pain, be it physical or psychological, so they can appreciate the value of their life, and know they are loved. But for anyone actually to assist them not to escape but to commit suicide is wrong. It is a perversion of the vocation of physicians to have them engaged in helping people to kill themselves. Physicians are called to be servants of healing, not agents of death.

Assisted suicide is the deceptively attractive face of euthanasia. The most compelling cases grip our attention and sway the debate, and so the Court opens the door to assisted suicide, all the while seeming to do less than it actually has done by surrounding its action with a set of limiting conditions, seeking to guarantee informed consent, as if that were the key issue. But the state is authorizing the killing of an innocent person, whatever controls are in place, and even those limitations can over time be swept away, leading to the more widespread practice of euthanasia. We have only to look at some European countries to see what lies ahead. We Canadians patriotically believe our country is special, but it is not so special as to be immune to the dynamics of increasing access to medical killing, as individualist rationales make persuasive the argument for that in more and more cases.

The court, recognizing that many physicians, faithful to their healing vocation, will not assist people to kill themselves, makes some very slight room for freedom of conscience. It trusts local Colleges of Physicians and other such groups to deal appropriately with the conscience issue.