Feburary 15, 2015

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario
80 College Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5G 2E2

Dear Members of the Consultations Committee:

Subject: Draft Policy “Professional Obligations and Human Rights”.

Since the initiation of your Draft Policy and the Supreme Court’s decision a few days ago striking down the current Law preventing Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide, I have spoken to elderly people who are absolutely terrified of the consequences of these changes.

We are very concerned about Section 8, 10, and 11 that suggest physicians who decline to participate in certain acts for reasons of conscience should be compelled to refer their patients to other physicians who will perform these acts. It does not address the fact that many of these same physicians will find the act of referral itself objectionable, as they consider it material cooperation with the act. In compelling physicians to refer, you are limiting their right to conscientious objection.

There is significant disagreement in our society as to what constitutes a moral act, and we do not expect the College to define or limit morality. We do expect that physicians, as professionals, be allowed to respect their own consciences. Freedom of conscience for everyone is foundational to our free society and cannot be limited, even for the best of intentions. If we coerce physicians into violating their consciences we will inevitably erode the personal integrity which is the basis of the physicians’ relationship with their patients.

Many doctors are guided in decision making by their desire to help patients and by the principle of doing no harm. No doctor should ever be forced to act against his conscience, either by being compelled to take a specific action or by having to refer to another doctor who will be forced to carry out the request. If the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario or other provinces should make that a requirement of being a physician, how does that make our country any better than Germany was in 1929 when doctors killed so many victims because of their view that “some lives are not worthy to be lived?”

I encourage you to revise the sections above, and include a clear defence of the right to freedom of conscience for all physicians.