11 February 2015

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

Attention: Policy Department

As a concerned citizen of Canada, and a resident of Ontario, I first want to thank the CPSO for being open to public consultation regarding the proposed revisions to the Document on *Professional Obligations and Human Rights*. I also wish to underscore how appreciative I am that the College accepts the existing Charter rights of freedom of religion and conscience; I am writing this letter to urge the CPSO to continue defending these two fundamental rights for patients and health-care providers, alike.

After reading the proposed new draft of the Document, I am deeply concerned that the physician’s “duty to accommodate” means, at various points throughout the draft, his/her “duty” to dispense with his/her conscience. Repeatedly, throughout the draft, the patient’s rights are seen as superseding any reasonable reservations, on moral and rational grounds, that a physician may have for refusing to provide or refer certain medical procedures. As such, this draft seems to equate conscientious objection with discrimination and this is a philosophically, morally, and socially problematic association: the draft fails to recognize that, in certain circumstances, the physician may have to take a moral stance, based on rational and evidence-based facts, that goes against the wishes or intents of the patient. A physician refusing to provide or refer certain procedures is not discriminating against a patient. Rather, he/she is making a moral judgement about an action. Conscientious objection means discerning that certain actions are wrong and cannot be supported either directly or indirectly.

If the draft is approved in its current state, most physicians who wish to offer their skills and services in Ontario will face undue and unethical coercion from the very institutional body that is supposed to support and protect both them and their patients. Compelling individuals to act against their rational conscience decisions violates the Charter and the United Nation’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, as outlined in Article 1, which states that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Moral convictions based on careful reasoning and scientific evidence, supported by religious belief, need to be protected in Canada—a nation that prides itself on upholding and promoting the principles of democracy. I strongly urge the CPSO to carefully reconsider the wording and ethics of its current draft of the *Professional Obligations and Human Rights* document.