To the College of Physicians and Surgeons,

Thank you for requesting public input on the question of whether or not physicians should be granted freedom to act with impunity according to their consciences. Quite simply, I believe they must be guaranteed this right, not only for their own sake but also for the good of their patients and of society in general.

Conscience is more than opinion or preference. It is the intimate realm deepest within oneself in which one discerns the truth and which, when well-formed and informed, helps to safeguard the individual from the variety of influences and pressures which can otherwise lead one to make decisions contrary to what one believes is right and true. Freedom of conscience is not sought solely by those with religious convictions; (consider conscientious objectors during war).

While history is replete with individuals and nations who violated their consciences under the tyranny of those wielding power, there have been countless examples of others who, true to their consciences in the face of such tyranny, were willing to suffer the consequences.
rather than deny or suppress that inner voice of truth.

As we make today tomorrow's history, we should seriously consider that our efforts should go towards helping people to form their consciences and encouraging people to live according to them, rather than putting pressure on them to suppress their consciences. This effort involves everyone, but is especially important in medicine. Patients need to trust their doctors; they need to know that their doctors will give them the care they believe to be best. Forcing doctors to suppress their consciences will call this trust into question and discriminate against doctors who have the integrity to refuse to violate their consciences.

In the wake of the recent SCC decision to de-criminalize doctor assisted suicide, freedom of conscience in the medical profession is more important than ever. But I believe the even bigger questions are, What was wrong with the Hippocratic Oath? and, Is medicine/science for the human being or is the human being for medicine/science?