



PO Box 19525, 55 Bloor St. West,
Toronto ON M5S 1M2
October 24, 2022

Dr. Catherine Zahn,
Deputy Minister of Health, Ontario

Dear Dr. Zahn,

I am writing to ask that you and the Minister of Health prioritize legislation to protect the freedom of conscience and religion of Ontario health professionals. The context for this request is the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario's (CPSO's) draft policy, "Human Rights in the Provision of Health Services" (HRPHS, 2022). I am not confident that CPSO's public consultation on the precursor to HRPHS genuinely considered the perspective that I present in this letter.

The HRPHS draft policy "will be used by the College and its Committees when considering physician practice or conduct." It is extremely prescriptive and coercive, leaving little space for clinical judgment. Physicians with conscientious or religious objections to controversial practices are specifically targeted in HRPHS. For example, "physicians who choose not to assess patients for or provide MAiD for reasons of conscience or religion" are required to document the date of all oral and written requests. They "**must** provide...enough information about all available or appropriate clinical options". They "**must not**: express personal moral judgments about...the health services that patients are considering." They "**must** provide" [unsolicited] information on all available clinical options [including MAiD] and timely effective referrals. They "**must** ...confirm that a patient was connected...and **must** take further action to provide an effective referral" if the first referral failed (HRPHS, 2022). These requirements facilitate an expedited MAiD process.

Respect for Inclusion, Diversity and Equity involves not only respect for patients. Health professionals with religious beliefs ought to be represented in all the professions so that the needs of a diverse population are better served. Current legislation and college policies would exclude many sincere practitioners of various faith groups from clinical practice, since CPSO's policies also influence the College of Nurses of Ontario and other professional colleges.

When health care professionals are expected and coerced to act against their conscience, we create a system that removes the final safeguard to protecting patients. We need provincial legislation to enforce the true exercise of freedom of conscience because it protects patients and fosters a health care system that encourages sound ethical life and death decisions.

Professional colleges in Ontario would be obliged to adhere to provincial legislation that protects the freedom of conscience and religion of their registrants. Please make this a priority.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Helen McGee'.

Helen McGee, MN, CPMHNC
President, National Association of Catholic Nurses - Canada