

April 7, 2021

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

CPSO Policy Department:

We represent over 1000 doctors who endorsed our *Physicians Together with Vulnerable Patients* statement decrying Bill C-7 and the inherent risks it poses to the lives of many Canadians ⁽¹⁾.

Bill C-7, having received royal assent March 17, 2021, expands access to medical assistance in dying (MAiD) to those with chronic illness, disability and mental illness ⁽²⁾.

Canada's approach has always been to honour freedom of conscience. In fact, the legislative preamble of Bill C-14 had made clear that, in matters of conscience, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms should continue to set the precedent, and a clause inserted into the code stated that participation in MAiD should be voluntary ⁽³⁾.

In spite of this, the CPSO policy regarding conscience objection and MAiD requires practitioners to create a pathway for death via effective referral ⁽⁴⁾. Furthermore, there are concerns that the CPSO might set out new positive obligation of raising MAiD as a treatment option, despite the risks this suggestion might pose to patients' lives. We know most patients who qualify for MAiD will recover their will to live with good medical care ⁽⁵⁾.

We request your policies be reconciled to respect conscience and patient safety in all patient settings.

Other jurisdictions globally, and even other Canadian provinces, have systems that respect an individual's conscience while maintaining patient access to controversial services. Ontario actually has systems to facilitate patient access and therefore these policies place an undue burden on practitioners without increasing patient access ⁽⁶⁾.

We have started to hear from doctors at various institutions who feel threatened by their working environments. Physicians have said they no longer feel free to be open about their medical judgement and opinions for fear of reprimand. This does not foster a collaborative working environment, which is detrimental to patient care. One physician who stopped practicing in Ontario because of this shared that, "The anxiety, fear, and sadness surrounding my work bled into my family life, and I ultimately felt that I could not manage practicing palliative care at this stage of my life ⁽⁷⁾."

Given how our health care workers have risked their lives during the COVID pandemic, it is alarming that the CPSO has failed to ensure their members' conscience freedoms are protected.

As the Council of Canadian Academies pointed out, if conscientious objectors are not protected, individuals who value moral integrity will not enter medicine ⁽⁸⁾. We believe the majority of Ontarians would concur with the Council of Canadian Academies and want the beliefs and values of the population reflected in their health care workers.

Dr Ramona Coelho,
co-founder of Physicians Together with Vulnerable Canadians

References;

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<https://parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/bill/C-7/royal-assent>

3: Parliament of Canada. (June 17, 2016). *Bill C-14*. [Internet] Accessed April 7th 2021.

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