

## *Conscientious Objection to Provision of Service*

*This policy has been developed to provide instruction to physicians on how to meet their obligations to patients when limiting services to patients for reasons of conscience or religion.*

### **Introduction:**

Physicians have the right to limit the health services they provide for legitimate reasons of conscience or religion. Physicians' freedom of conscience and religion must also be balanced against the right of existing and potential patients to access care. Where an irreconcilable conflict arises between a physician's interest and a patient's interest, the interest of the patient prevails.

The expectations outlined in this policy accommodate the rights of the objecting physicians to the greatest extent possible, while ensuring that patients' access to healthcare is not impeded.

### **Policy:**

When choosing to limit the health services they provide for reasons of conscience or religion, physicians **must**:

- (a) do so in a manner that respects patient dignity, ensures access to care, and protects patient safety;
- (b) communicate their objection directly, promptly, and with sensitivity to patients, and inform them that the objection is due to personal and not clinical reasons;
- (c) **not** promote their own moral or religious beliefs when interacting with patients;
- (d) provide patients with accurate, complete, and unbiased information about all available and appropriate options to meet their clinical needs or concerns;
- (e) **not** withhold information about the existence of any relevant service, treatment or procedure because it conflicts with their conscience or religious beliefs;
- (f) **not** impede access to information and/or care;
- (g) provide the patient with a timely effective referral, which means taking positive action to ensure the patient is connected to a non-objecting, available, and accessible physician, other health-care professional, or agency;

- (h) proactively maintain an effective referral plan for the frequently requested services that they are unwilling to provide; and,
- (i) provide care in an emergency, where it is necessary to prevent imminent harm, even where that care conflicts with their conscience or religious beliefs.

**Applicable Legislation:**

*Canadian Medical Association Code of Ethics and Professionalism*

**Document History:**

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