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July 15, 2008

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The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt
Secretary of Health & Human Services
U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services
Hubert Humphrey Building
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt,

The *New York Times* has indicated that you intend to soon publish regulations in accord with federal laws protecting patients and healthcare professionals in decisions relating to controversial procedures and prescriptions. These regulations reportedly will help "to ensure that federal money does not 'support morally coercive or discriminatory practices or policies in violation of federal law.'" On behalf of our 13,000 members, we applaud your leadership in taking this long-overdue action.

It is entirely appropriate, given the past 35 years of laws passed by Congress, that these principles finally be translated into practical healthcare regulations. From the 1973 Church Amendment to the more recent Hyde-Weldon Amendment, Congress has recognized the importance of protecting patients and their healthcare professionals from political pressures on these vital issues.

Americans on all sides of controversial issues such as abortion, reproductive technologies and assisted suicide can appreciate the need to protect everyone's First Amendment rights of free speech and religious exercise. That means that healthcare professionals must be free to follow their individual conscientious convictions on these life-and-death matters.

An informal survey of Christian Medical Association members found that over 41 percent of respondents had been "pressured to compromise Biblical or ethical convictions." Anecdotal accounts suggest that few persecuted healthcare professionals actually know their conscience rights and that they typically simply submit to pressure by resigning. Students who experience discrimination and pressure to violate conscience simply give in and attempt to find a more tolerant institution or a less controversial field of medicine than obstetrics and gynecology. Unless pro-life professionals are equipped to know and apply their conscience rights, they actually stand at risk of being weeded out from the profession altogether.

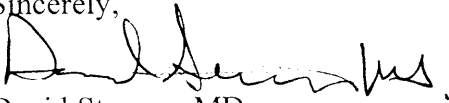
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Patients are protected when physicians follow objective ethical codes, such as those expressed in the Hippocratic Oath and the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. These life-honoring principles have protected patients for millennia. We recognize that some individuals choose to refuse to follow these principles, and under current law, that is their choice.

The regulations reportedly under consideration at Health and Human Services apparently would simply protect the right for all healthcare professionals to make professional judgments based on moral convictions and ethical standards. Protecting this right also protects patients who choose their physicians based on life-affirming values.

We applaud your leadership in this area and look forward to commenting on the proposed regulations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Stevens, MD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

David Stevens, MD
Chief Executive Officer