



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

March 2018

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about the General Medical Council's standards for healthcare professionals and Early Day Motion 861 on conscientious objection.

Ministers do not, by convention, sign any Early Day Motions, as doing so is likely to breach the Ministerial Code's rules on collective responsibility. However, I hope I can assure you that while the General Medical Council (GMC) wishes to accommodate and respect the diversity of its members' beliefs, it is committed to providing 'patient-centred' care and will never allow anyone to be denied medical care and assistance on the grounds of belief.

The GMC has a range of guidelines for their members to ensure 'Good Medical practice' and they state that doctors must explain to patients if they have a conscientious objection to a particular procedure. The 'conscientious objection' clause in the GMC's 2013 guidance allows doctors to opt-out from performing a procedure to which they object, but they must make every effort to notify their patient in advance and they must not obstruct patients from gaining access to the services they require. Arrangements for patients to see another doctor must be made without delay, and patients must not be left with nowhere to turn. Furthermore, in emergencies, doctors must not withhold treatment from any patient if it may run into conflict with their personal beliefs.

I believe this strikes an appropriate balance between respecting the range of deeply-held personal, moral and religious beliefs of our many healthcare professionals, and the rights of all patients to receive the medical treatment the need and deserve.

These guidelines will continue to maintain the NHS's commitment to providing patient care, within their rights as enshrined in the NHS Constitution, while also ensuring that doctors are able to practise in accordance with their moral and religious beliefs.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

**CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY**