

Secular doctors call on the GMC to revise personal belief and medical practice guidance

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Secular doctors have called on the GMC to urgently revise [guidance on personal belief and medical practice](#), effective from 22 April 2013, that allows religious doctors "to opt out of providing a particular procedure because of (the doctor's) beliefs and values..."

Dr Lempert, a GP and chair of the [Secular Medical Forum](#) (SMF), warned that the new guidance gives a green light to religious doctors to obstruct patient care. He said: "The new guidance gives unrestrained freedom to religious doctors to refuse to provide the most appropriate treatment options".

"The guidance also contradicts existing BMA policy that the right of doctors to refuse to treat patients for reasons of conscientious objection should be restricted "to those protected in law and to withdrawing life-sustaining treatment..."

"Patients should be able to rely on their doctor's professional expertise not being compromised by his/her religious beliefs. It is not in patients' best interests to allow wholesale religious exemptions to the provision of standard medical care"

"The new guidance fails to limit conscientious objection to the areas, such as [abortion](#), that are narrowly defined by legislation, making way for a potentially open-ended refusal to provide medical care on religious grounds. As a result, patients will be left vulnerable to the personal whims of their doctor."

The Secular Medical Forum criticised the new guidance which also recommends that doctors "must do (their) best to make sure that patients are aware of (their) objection in advance." The SMF is concerned that this places an unreasonable onus of responsibility on patients to investigate in advance their doctor's personal views.

Dr Lempert commented: "The GMC should remind doctors of the professional responsibilities which accompany the privilege of their chosen profession. Patients cannot always choose to see a doctor of their choice; so the guidelines should make clear that patients' best interests and reasonable treatment options should never be restricted because of conflict with the doctor's own personal beliefs, except where prescribed by law."

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