

# Christian doctors claim jobs at risk if they refuse to do gender reassignment operations

Posted: Wed, 25th Apr 2012 by [Tessa Kendall](#)

Dr Peter Saunders of the Christian Medical Fellowship is claiming that doctors risk disciplinary action if they refuse to carry out gender reassignment surgery.

Dr Saunders is being rather economical with the truth. The Royal College of Surgeons has confirmed that gender reassignment operations are not something a general surgeon would be expected to do. There are [many different kinds of surgery involved](#) and like other areas of specialist surgery, they require training so a doctor who had objections wouldn't elect to be trained in this area in the first place.

The *Mail* has picked up on this in the story as [Doctors 'forced to carry out sex-change ops' under rules meant to 'marginalise Christian medics'](#)

The *Mail* got the story from Dr Saunders' blog [Christian Medical Comment](#). He claims that 'Legislation and regulations are being used to marginalise Christian health professionals in Britain. British medicine in the 21st Century now involves practices which many doctors regard as unethical. A significant number of doctors do not wish to be involved in sex-change operations or prescribing contraceptives to unmarried couples.'

He gives no evidence for what this 'significant number' might be.

Gender reassignment surgery has been available on the NHS since 1999 and the Equality Act 2010 prohibits doctors from discriminating against people who are undergoing gender reassignment treatment.

The [CMF website](#) says things like *God created each of us in his image, male and female, and he doesn't make mistakes... This issue has tremendous implications for society at large and the institution of marriage in particular... the doctor's duty in treating his/her patients is to restore people to what God originally intended ... giving sex change treatment goes beyond this remit.*

Saunders refers to the General Medical Council's current [consultation on personal belief and medical practice](#), including conscientious objections. Draft guidance says 'You may choose to opt out of providing a particular procedure because of your personal beliefs and values' and adds 'The exception to this is gender reassignment since this procedure is only sought by a particular group of patients (and cannot therefore be subject to a conscientious objection)'.

Although his blog mostly relates to surgery, Saunders also mentions GPs with religious objections who would not currently be allowed to opt out of referring a patient to a specialist or providing related treatments for [gender dysphoria](#).

It appears that he has not read his own web site. For example, [one doctor writes](#):

*I would emphasise that I am no expert in this type of problem and would be happy to refer him to a psychologist to explore his request further.*

This may be a fudge to avoid being accused of discrimination but it would ensure that the doctor's beliefs would not affect the patient. It also means that Saunders does not even represent all CMF members of Christian doctors.

The NSS believes that, while doctors should not be forced to do anything against their conscience, their beliefs should not be put before patient welfare. They must refer patients to another doctor immediately and without judgment. They should also make clear during job interviews if there is anything they are not prepared to do. They should not put the onus on the patient to check out what a doctor believes before making an appointment. Doctors must also abide by the law and not seek special exemptions because of their beliefs.

The GMC consultation closes on 13 June. The NSS and the Secular Medical Forum will be submitting a joint response. We also jointly [responded to](#) the GMC consultation on this subject in 2007. Also, read [the CMF's response to the consultation](#).

## **Tessa Kendall**

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