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CMA Calls for American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists to Rescind Ethics Opinion

DATELINE February 29, 2008 – The Catholic Medical Association (CMA) has called upon the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) to rescind an “ethics opinion” released last November by its Committee on Ethics. ACOG’s opinion demands that ob-gyns opposed to abortion provide referrals for, and even perform, abortions in certain situations, despite their conscientious belief that abortion involves the killing of an unborn child. In a letter to ACOG president Kenneth Noller, M.D., CMA’s president, Kathleen M. Raviele, M.D., F.A.C.O.G., said that the ethics opinion suffered from substantial flaws in ethical analysis; created guidelines that were too vague and contentious to be effective; and proposed solutions that were unjust, unworkable, and harmful to the profession of medicine.

ACOG’s ethics opinion, titled “The Limits of Conscientious Refusal in Reproductive Medicine,” came as a surprise to many ob-gyn doctors, since there was no consultation among or vote taken of ACOG members prior to its release on November 7, 2007. “I was stunned when it came out,” said Lester Ruppertsberger, D.O., a Fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. “This is an important and complex topic. To spring this flawed mandate on the membership of ACOG and the public is unfair and outrageous.”

According to Dr. Raviele, there are several fatal flaws in the opinion. “But what is new and what is worst,” she explained, “is the opinion’s demand that all physicians refer for and perform abortions.” “The committee that wrote this opinion shows no respect for the beliefs of others. They have moved from believing that abortion should be legal to defining it as ‘standard care’ under reproductive services. If physicians refuse to go along with these demands they risk having an ethics complaint filed against them, and this could cause them to lose their certification through the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Because hospitals use board certification to grant hospital privileges, pro-life physicians could lose their ability to admit patients to hospitals.”

CMA’s Executive Director, John F. Brehany, Ph.D., pointed out that ACOG’s ethics committee is trying to exert a high level of control over physicians. “The opinion actually discourages physicians from exercising ethical judgment in daily practice; it tells them that this is a job for professional organizations,” Brehany noted. “Moreover, the opinion suggests that physicians need ‘scripting’ to explain issues to patients. It says that doctors must employ ‘professionally accepted characterizations of reproductive services’.”

The CMA urged ACOG’s Committee on Ethics to rescind its opinion when the committee meets March 17-18. The CMA urges physicians, their patients, and members

of the public to contact ACOG at their headquarters, to protest this denial of conscience rights and religious freedom.

CMA's letter to ACOG can be read in its entirety at www.cathmed.org.

The Catholic Medical Association is the nation's largest professional organization of Catholic physicians. More information on the CMA can be found at www.cathmed.org.