



March 26, 2008

Dear Fellows:

Thank you for your comments on Committee Opinion #385, “The Limits of Conscientious Refusal in Reproductive Medicine.” The Committee on Ethics is grateful for the thoughtful and considered input of Fellows regarding this document. We received many letters reflecting the importance of this issue to Fellows, as well as a breadth of opinion regarding the role of conscience in professional life.

The Committee on Ethics met on March 17-18, 2008, and discussed the correspondence received since the Opinion’s publication. The letters and a summary of the concerns raised were carefully reviewed. Also the Executive Committee of ACOG’s Executive Board met and discussed the Opinion and the response to the Opinion on March 24, 2008.

We want to be clear the Opinion does not compel any Fellow to perform any procedure which he or she finds to be in conflict with his or her conscience and affirms the importance of conscience in shaping ethical professional conduct. For example, while this is not a document focused on abortion, ACOG recognizes that support for or opposition to abortion is a matter of profound moral conviction, and ACOG respects the need and responsibility of its members to determine their individual positions on this issue based on their personal values and beliefs. We want to assure members with a diversity of views on this issue that they have a place in our organization.

Ethics Committee Opinions provide guidance regarding ethical issues. This Committee Opinion is not part of the “Code of Professional Ethics of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.” This Committee Opinion was not intended to be used as a rule of ethical conduct which could be used to affect an individual’s initial or continuing Fellowship in ACOG. Similarly, it is not cited in the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology’s “Bulletin for 2008” and “Bulletin for 2008 Maintenance of Certification,” and an obstetrician-gynecologist’s board certification is not determined or jeopardized by his or her adherence to this Opinion.

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Conscience has an important role in the ethical practice of medicine. While this Opinion attempted to provide guidance for balancing the critical role of conscience with a woman's right to access reproductive medicine, the Executive Committee has noted the uncertain and mixed interpretation of this Opinion. Thus, the Executive Committee has instructed the Committee on Ethics to hold a special meeting as soon as possible to reevaluate ACOG Committee Opinion #385.

Thank you again for your thoughtful comments.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth L. Noller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kenneth" and last name "Noller" clearly distinguishable.

Kenneth L. Noller, MD, MS, FACOG
President