

## **Statement by Darilyn Falck, MD FACEP**

My name is Darilyn Falck. I am an emergency medicine physician in Sacramento. I am representing the Christian Medical Association, a faith-based professional organization with over 15,000 members nationwide.

If 900,000 children are cut from California's Healthy Families program as proposed, right now many of those families will likely turn to California's faith-based physicians, clinics and hospitals that provide compassionate and charitable care regardless of the patients' ability to pay. These are the very healthcare professionals and institutions that will be forced out of medicine if their conscience protections are removed.

Until the federal conscience protection regulation was recently implemented, present laws regarding conscience had no enforcement provision. The conscience clause has been desperately needed to protect doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals from discrimination who practice medicine adhering to life-affirming ethical standards such as the Hippocratic Oath.

How would a lack of conscience protection affect access to care? Current projections indicate a 200,000 physician shortage by 2025. According to the Department of Labor there are 800,000 practicing physicians in the US and 250,000 are over the age of 55. The supply of new physicians is not keeping pace with the growing population and aging baby boomer generation. A lack of conscience protections would only worsen this physician shortage and decrease access to care.

A recent national survey conducted by The Polling Company revealed that 95% of faith-based physicians agreed with the statement, "I would rather stop practicing medicine altogether than be forced to violate my conscience." The loss of these faith-based physicians would have a devastating impact on health care access and would disproportionately hurt the poor and medically underserved populations, where often faith-based healthcare is their only option. Many faith-based clinics and hospitals would likely close their doors rather than be forced to violate their ethical foundations.

Coupled with the increasing debt of going into medicine, increasing occurrence of medical malpractice claims, increasing number of uninsured and under-insured patients, loss of control over practice decisions, why would anyone want to sacrifice approximately ten years of their youth to go into medicine? It's no surprise that the national survey of faith-based medical professionals revealed that 20% of faith-based medical students report that they are "not pursuing a career in Obstetrics or Gynecology" because of perceived discrimination and coercion in that field.

I practice emergency medicine. The emergency departments around the country have already begun to feel the impact of our current economy and level of unemployment. Where do all the patients go for care when they don't have insurance and/or they don't have a physician? Thousands of doctors leaving their practices and additional hospital closures means increased overburdening of our current emergency departments.

The Health and Human Services conscience protection regulation simply does three things: 1) educate the country on this issue; 2) provide a place to report discrimination; 3) require employers and educators to certify that they will follow the law.

This regulation is sensible and reasonable. In these times of budgetary crisis here in California, it helps insure that our patients will have access to the doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals they depend on.