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CMA Responds to American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and American Board of Obstetricians and Gynecologists on Ethics Opinion #385

May 19, 2008 – The Catholic Medical Association (CMA) has reiterated its call to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) to rescind its Ethics Opinion #385. In addition, CMA has formally requested the American Board of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ABOG) to clarify that board certification decisions will not rely upon Opinion #385. While both ACOG and ABOG issued letters of clarification in March in response to the storm of protest about Opinion #385, CMA believes that additional clarification and action are necessary.

In a letter to ACOG president Kenneth Noller, M.D., CMA president, Kathleen M. Raviele, M.D., F.A.C.O.G., noted with appreciation Noller’s statement that ACOG had not intended to force physicians to perform any procedures that conflict with their conscience and that ACOG’s Board had instructed the Committee on Ethics to reevaluate Opinion #385 as soon as possible. At the same time, Dr. Raviele stated, “there are significant issues that require further clarification, including the demand that physicians provide referrals for abortion.” Moreover, Dr. Raviele pointed out the need for ACOG to follow due process in issuing ethics standards, as this controversial opinion was issued without input from, or a vote by, ACOG membership. Finally, Dr. Raviele stated, “CMA is still urging ACOG to rescind, and not merely revise, Opinion #385 because of its many substantial flaws and its evident lack of respect for the conscience of physicians.”

In a separate letter to the American Board of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ABOG), Dr. Raviele noted that statements made by ABOG in March 2008 have not resolved physicians’ legitimate concerns changes to the 2008 board certification process related to Opinion #385. ABOG claimed there was no evidence that it has ever asked physicians “to violate their own ethical or moral standards” and that ABOG has “taken no stand . . . against individual physicians who choose to or choose not to perform abortions or to refer patients to abortion providers.” Dr. Raviele explained, “What is required to resolve this matter – and what CMA is formally requesting – is a clear, public statement that ABOG will not base decisions to certify or re-certify a physician, in the practice of obstetrics and gynecology, on ACOG Opinion #385.”

CMA continues to urge physicians, their patients, and members of the public to contact ACOG and ABOG to protest this attack on conscience and religious freedom.

The Catholic Medical Association is the nation’s largest professional organization of Catholic physicians. CMA’s letters to ACOG and ABOG can be read in their entirety at www.cathmed.org.