

# Two National Polls<sup>1</sup> Reveal Broad Support for Conscience Rights in Health Care

## Highlights of The Polling Company, Inc. Phone Survey of the American Public

Results released April 8, 2009 • 39% Democrat • 33% Republican • 22% Independent

1. **88%** of American adults surveyed said it is either “very” or “somewhat” **important to them that they share a similar set of morals as their doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers.**
2. **87%** of American adults surveyed believed it is important to “make sure that healthcare professionals in America are **not forced to participate** in procedures and practices to which they have moral objections.”
3. Support for the conscience protection regulation (rule finalized Dec. 2008):
  - **63% support conscience protection regulation**
  - 28% oppose conscience protection regulation
4. Support for Obama administration proposal to eliminate the new conscience protection regulation:
  - 30% support Obama administration proposal
  - **62% oppose Obama administration proposal**
5. Likelihood of voting for current Member of Congress who supported eliminating the conscience rule:
  - 25% more likely to vote for Member who supported eliminating rule
  - **54% less likely to vote for Member who supported eliminating rule**
6. "In 2004 the Hyde-Weldon Amendment was passed. It ruled that taxpayer funds must not be used by governments and government-funded programs to discriminate against hospitals, health insurance plans, and healthcare professionals who decline to participate in abortions. Do you support or oppose this law?"
  - **58% support Hyde-Weldon Amendment**
  - 31% oppose Hyde-Weldon Amendment

## Highlights of Online Survey of Faith-Based Professionals

Results released April 8, 2009 • 2,865 faith-based healthcare professionals

1. **95%** of faith-based physicians agreed, "I would **rather stop practicing medicine** altogether than be forced to violate my conscience."
2. **32%** of faith-based healthcare professionals report having "been **pressured to refer a patient** for a procedure to which [they] had moral, ethical, or religious objections."
3. **39%** of faith-based healthcare professionals have “experienced pressure from or **discrimination by faculty** or administrators based on [their] moral, ethical, or religious beliefs”
4. **20%** of faith-based medical students say they are "**not pursuing a career in Obstetrics or Gynecology**" because of perceived discrimination and coercion in that field.

<sup>1</sup> Results of both surveys released April 8, 2009. On behalf of the Christian Medical Association, the polling companyTM, inc./ WomanTrend conducted a nationwide survey of 800 American adults. Field Dates: March 23 -25, 2009. The overall margin of error for the survey is ± 3.5% at a 95% confidence interval. The polling companyTM, inc./ WomanTrend also conducted an online survey of members of faith-based organizations, fielded March 31, 2009 to April 3, 2009. It was completed by 2,298 members of the Christian Medical Association, 400 members of the Catholic Medical Association, 69 members of the Fellowship of Christian Physicians Assistants, 206 members of the Christian Pharmacists Fellowship International, and 8 members of Nurses Christian Fellowship.

## Phone Survey of the American Public

### 1. Americans of all characteristics and politics seek shared values with healthcare professionals.

Fully 88% of American adults surveyed said it is either “very” or “somewhat” important to them that they enjoy a similar set of morals as their doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers. Intensity was strong, as 63% described this as “very” important while at the other end of the spectrum, just 6% said it is “not at all important,” a ratio of more than 10-to-1.

### 2. Voters will punish politicians who fail to defend healthcare providers’ conscience rights.

Finally, when asked how they would view their Member of Congress if he or she voted against conscience protection rights, 54% indicated they would be less likely to back their United States Representative. In fact, 36% said they would be much less likely, a figure three times greater than the 11 % who said they would be much more likely. Furthermore, 43% of respondents who said they voted for President Obama indicated that they would be less inclined to back a Member of Congress if he or she opposed conscience protection rights.

### 3. Healthcare providers’ conscience protections are viewed as an inalienable right.

A sizable 87% of American adults surveyed believed it is important to “make sure that healthcare professionals in America are not forced to participate in procedures and practices to which they have moral objections.” 65% of respondents considered it very essential. Also joining with these majorities were 95% of respondents who self-identified as “pro-life,” 78% who considered themselves “pro-choice,” 94% who voted for Senator McCain in November 2008 and 80% who cast a ballot for (now) President Obama.

### 4. Americans oppose forcing healthcare providers to act against their consciences...

A majority (57%) of American adults opposed regulations “that require medical professionals to perform or provide procedures to which they have moral or ethical objections.” In contrast, 38% favored such rules. A full 40% strongly objected to the rules while just 19% strongly backed them. A majority of conservative Republicans (69%), moderate Republicans (69%), and conservative Democrats (59%), as well as the plurality of liberal/moderate Democrats (49%), joining together to reject policies to that require doctors and nurses to act against their personal moral code or value set.

### 5. ...Support laws that protect them from doing so...

Without any names or political parties being mentioned, support for the new conscience protection rule outpaced opposition by a margin of more than 2-to-1 (63% vs. 28%). Intensity favored the rule, with 42% strongly backing it and 19% strongly rejecting it. Endorsements for the rule spanned demographic and political spectra, with majorities in all cohorts offering their support. In fact, even 56% of adults who said they voted for President Obama last fall and 60% of respondents who self-identified as “pro-choice” said they favor this two-month old conscience protection rule.

### 6. ... And oppose any efforts to remove such rules.

Opposition to revocation of the conscience protection rule outpaced support by a margin of more than 2- to-1 (62% vs. 30%). Intensity favored retention of the rule (44% strongly opposing rescission versus 17% strongly supporting it). There was consistent demographic alignment and cohesiveness across political lines, as 52% of self-identified Democrats, 67% of self-identified Independents, and 73% of self- identified Republicans, as well as 50% of liberals, 65% of moderates, and 69% of conservatives also opposed nullification. A narrow majority (53%) of people who considered themselves to be “pro-choice” opposed rescission. Notably, a small number (7%) were ambivalent or undecided, saying they did not know or lacked the information to render an opinion one way or the other.

# Online Survey of Faith-Based Medical Professionals

## 1. Medical access will suffer if doctors are forced to act against their moral and ethical codes.

In the survey of 2,865 members of faith-based organizations, doctors and other medical professionals voiced their concerns that serious consequences could occur if doctors are forced to participate in or perform practices to which they have moral or ethical objections. Nearly three-quarters (74%) believed that elimination of the conscience protection could result in “fewer doctors practicing medicine,” 66% predicted “decreased access to healthcare providers, services, and/or facilities for patients in low-income areas,” 64% surmised “decreased access to healthcare providers, services, and/or facilities for patients in rural areas,” and 58% hypothesized “fewer hospitals providing services.”

Asked how rescission of the rule would affect them personally, 82% said it was either “very” or “somewhat” likely that they personally would limit the scope of their practice of medicine. This was true of 81% of medical professionals who practice in rural areas and 86% who work full-time serving poor and medically-underserved populations.

## 2. The conscience protection rule is fundamental and necessary in the medical profession.

Fully 97% of members who participated in the survey supported the two-month-old conscience protection clause and 96% objected to rescission of the rule. 95% of physicians agreed, "I would rather stop practicing medicine altogether than be forced to violate my conscience." The Department of Health and Human Services has asked whether the objectives of the conscience protection rule can be achieved “through non-regulatory means, such as outreach and education.” Nearly nine-in-ten (87%) members surveyed – those who are on the ground, in hospitals and clinics across the country – felt “outreach and education” alone were insufficient to accomplish the goal. Ninety-two percent declared the codification of conscience protection to be necessary (83% “very” and 9% “somewhat”) based on their knowledge of “discrimination in healthcare on the basis of conscience, religious, and moral values.”

## 3. Discrimination is widespread in education and professional practice.

Asked to assess their educational experiences:

- 39% have “experienced pressure from or discrimination by faculty or administrators based on [their] moral, ethical, or religious beliefs”
- 33% have “considered not pursuing a career in a particular medical specialty because of attitudes prevalent in that specialty that is not considered tolerant of [their] moral, ethical or religious beliefs.”
- 23% have “experienced discrimination during the medical school or residency application and interview process because of [their] moral, ethical or religious beliefs.”

Asked to assess their professional experiences:

- 32% have "been pressured to refer a patient for a procedure to which [they] had moral, ethical, or religious objections."
- 26% have "been pressured to write a prescription for a medication to which [they] had moral, ethical, or religious objections."
- 17% have "been pressured to participate in training for a procedure to which [they] had moral, ethical, or religious objections."
- 12% have "been pressured to perform a procedure to which [they] had moral, ethical, or religious objections."

## 4. Discrimination is forcing faith-based medical students to shun careers in Obstetrics and Gynecology.

- 20% of students surveyed agreed with the statement, "I am **not pursuing a career in Obstetrics or Gynecology** mainly because I do not want to be forced to compromise my moral, ethical, or religious beliefs by being required to perform or participate in certain procedures or provide certain medications."
- **96%** of medical students support (90% "Strongly Support") the conscience protection regulation.
- 32% of medical students say they "have experienced pressure from or **discrimination by faculty** or administrators based on your moral, ethical, or religious beliefs."