



SMFM Statement Opposing Final Conscience Rule
Final Rule is Unnecessary and Harms Access to Women's Health Services

May 6, 2019, Washington, DC - The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM) is extremely concerned about the most recent final rule related to the enforcement of federal laws that allow health care providers to refuse to provide care based on religious objections. The SMFM believes this new regulation is unnecessary, as current law already provides protections for clinicians who refuse to participate in certain health care procedures based on their religious beliefs. Further, the final rule prohibits health care providers from providing appropriate health care referrals and treatment information which is detrimental to optimizing health outcomes for women and interferes with the physician-patient relationship.

The SMFM has long advocated for access to women's health services, particularly due to the nature of high-risk pregnancies. We continue to oppose policies that compromise women's health by allowing providers the option of not providing medically-appropriate treatment or withholding information regarding the range of care options available. This new regulation very clearly violates this sentiment as well as the ethical responsibilities of physicians. It is essential that women whose health care providers express religious exemptions can continue to be provided the full range of available options and the information necessary to access those options elsewhere.

Rights of Individual Clinicians

The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine asserts that maternal-fetal (MFM) physicians have the professional responsibility to respect women's autonomy in decisions about pregnancy and to provide nonjudgmental care to women, either directly or through appropriate referrals. However, the Society recognizes that some physicians may have religious or moral objections to participating in certain health care services, including pregnancy termination. The Society supports protections afforded under federal law for an individual physician who refuses to participate in an abortion or other health care procedures to which the physician has a moral or religious objection so long as the physician has given appropriate notice to his or her employer. Further, should such an event arise that an MFM physician has a religious or moral reason for not providing abortion or other legal reproductive health services, the physician has a professional responsibility to provide women with information about the range of care options available and timely referrals for women who desire care that the physician will not provide.