**Draft 3 Policy on raising a conscientious objection**

1. **The law**

The law provides that clinicians have a right of conscientious objection; see the Abortion Act 1967, as amended and the Human Fertilisation of Embryology Act.

However there is no direct precedent to confirm that the legal provisions relating to conscientious objection also include students.

Nevertheless the General Medical Council (GMC), the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCP) have all advised that this is a matter for the discretion of each institution.

1. **Conscientious objection**

From the outset St Georges, emphasises that its students must behave professionally and in accordance with the standards of their chosen professional group. As such, even from the earliest days of their course, a student will be reminded of their obligations and privileges as healthcare students. As students progress through their education and training, they will spend increasing amounts of time in the clinical setting where they will be treated as part of the healthcare team.

1. **Educational obligations placed upon all St Georges students**

All students need to be aware they are expected to attain the professional standards of their chosen professional group and that therefore:

* all students are still required to participate in educational activities while on clinical services
* any student’s personal beliefs must not compromise or otherwise detract from patient care
* no student is exempt from educational activities and therefore all students will still be assessed in line with the learning objectives of their course of study whatever their personal view of any issue.

While any clinician has the absolute right to decline to take an active part in some procedures, they must also be knowledgeable and skilled enough to recognise and manage complications arising from them.

It is therefore vital that all students have at least a theoretical understanding of such issues so that they may be assessed in line with their Learning Objectives. Students therefore may be tested to ensure they reach the professional standards for their speciality. As an example, students may be required to participate in educational activities related to termination of pregnancy. Such activities are designed to:

* encourage students to reflect on their own beliefs
* consider how such beliefs might inform their practice
* explore their chosen profession’s requirements for protecting patient care and the special status of emergencies.

Therefore, all students need to be aware that they will be assessed in line with their Learning Objectives, whatever their personal views.

1. **Making the university aware of a conscientious objection**

However, St Georges has collectively decided that its students may be afforded the same protections, within the same boundaries, that apply to practising clinicians, nurses and other health professionals.

Thus the university has introduced a process to enable students to express a conscientious objection in relation to ‘participation’ in such activities as are protected by law for health professionals, such as activities involving termination of pregnancy and aspects of reproductive medicine involving human embryos.

Students should formally notify Registry of their conscientious objection to participation in such a procedure by completing the attached ‘registering a conscientious objection’form – see Appendix A. Alternatively this form may be downloaded from the student centre page on the portal or picked up directly from the student centre.

Registry will then keep a record of this request on the student’s files as proof that the student understands that s/he still needs tomeet all learning outcomes.

**Appendix A**

**‘Registering a conscientious objection’ form**

Students should complete the following details and return this form directly to the course coordinator for their programme of study.

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| 1. **Student’s name:** |  |

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| 1. **Name of student’s programme of study:** |  |

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| 1. **Name of student’s course director:** |  |

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| 1. **Please indicate the specific educational experiences in which you would anticipate non-participation** |
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| 1. **Please sign here to confirm that you understand that:**  * **you will be expected to meet all the learning outcomes; including any that might relate to the procedure/activities to which you object** * **those learning outcomes may be assessed in examinations** |
| **Signature: Date request made:** |

KH July 2013