

# Royal College of Physicians adopts neutral policy on assisted suicide

MANCHESTER, England (CNS) – The professional body for doctors in the U.K. dropped its traditional opposition to assisted suicide, despite a poll that found a majority of its members remain opposed to the practice.

The Royal College of Physicians declared it has adopted a policy of neutrality, although a majority of doctors said they were against assisted suicide.

In a March 21 statement published on the college's website, Andrew Goddard, college president, said: "Adopting a neutral position will mean that we can reflect the differing opinions among our membership. Neutral means the RCP neither supports nor opposes a change in the law."

A poll of members conducted between Feb. 5 and March 1 found that 31.6 percent were in favor of the college adopting a pro-assisted suicide policy, while 43.4 percent were opposed and 25 percent were neutral.

A question asking doctors if they would also like to see British law changed to allow assisted suicide was answered affirmatively by 40.5 percent, while 49.1 percent opposed a law change and 10.4 percent were undecided.

The college decided in advance that it would adopt a neutral policy unless a supra-majority of more than 60 percent of doctors voted for or against assisted suicide.

Four doctors, including two Catholics, had applied to Britain's High Court for a judicial review of the way the poll was conducted but were told March 21 that their legal

challenge would not be accepted.

In a March 21 statement sent by email to Catholic News Service, the four said: "We were disappointed not to receive permission today to challenge the decision of the college in the High Court on technical grounds."

"Sick and vulnerable people are at risk as a result of college neutrality on assisted suicide," they added. "The profession has not moved on this issue, so neither should the college."