



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

20<sup>th</sup> March 2018

*Dear Constituent,*

**RE: MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS AND CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION.**

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of the General Medical Council's standards for healthcare professionals, and Early Day Motion 861, on conscientious objection.

As a Parliamentary Private Secretary, I am not able to sign Early Day Motions, as doing so would likely be in breach of the Ministerial Code's rules on collective responsibility. However, in any event, I have general concerns about the effectiveness and expense of the EDM system, and I have attached a copy of an excellent article written by my colleague, Chris Heaton-Harris MP, which I feel succinctly sets out those concerns. I hope that this will be of interest to you, and essentially, I think it is much more effective to raise concerns directly with Ministers, both verbally, and in writing, rather than signing EDMs.

However, I hope I can assure you that, while the General Medical Council (GMC) wishes to accommodate and respect the diversity of its members' beliefs, it is committed to providing 'patient-centred' care, and will never allow anyone to be denied medical care and assistance on the grounds of belief.

The GMC has a range of guidelines for their members to ensure 'Good Medical Practice', and they state that doctors must explain to patients if they have a conscientious objection to a particular procedure. The 'conscientious objection' clause in the GMC's 2013 guidance allows doctors to opt-out from performing a procedure to which they object, but they must make every effort to notify their patient in advance, and they must not obstruct patients from gaining access to the services they require. Arrangements for patients to see another doctor must be made without delay, and patients must not be left with nowhere to turn. Furthermore, in emergencies, doctors must not withhold treatment from any patient if it may run into conflict with their personal beliefs.

I believe this strikes an appropriate balance between respecting the range of deeply-held personal, moral, and religious beliefs of our many healthcare professionals, and the rights of all patients to receive the medical treatment they need and deserve.

I have every confidence that these guidelines will continue to maintain the NHS's commitment to providing patient care, within their rights as enshrined in the NHS Constitution, while also ensuring that doctors are able to practise in accordance with their moral and religious beliefs.



Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

*with best wishes,*

*Tom*

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP  
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT  
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

## Chris Heaton-Harris: Why Early Day Motions are politically impotent

Writing exclusively for PoliticsHome, Conservative MP Chris Heaton-Harris describes Early Day Motions as 'politically impotent', and warns he is 'not going to waste time and money on sponsoring or signing EDMs'.

Since being elected last year, a number of my constituents have asked me to sign Early Day Motions (EDMs). I'm afraid I haven't signed any yet and don't plan on changing that in the future as I think they are pretty much politically impotent and too costly in their current form.

I'm not alone either, quite a number of the 2010 intake all independently decided to do the same thing and I would imagine that if the rules around EDMs don't change at the next election, even more MPs will join the "just say no" bandwagon.

Supposedly EDMs cost around £500 a go and we have already had 2423 tabled in this Parliament. Looking through the titles of the EDMs you'll see many a worthy political cause being lauded, people recently passed away remembered and an abundant amount of motherhood and apple pie. Yet even the most benign EDM rarely gets more than 50 signatories; indeed, many barely scrape into double figures.

I really do think that we need to change how EDMs can be sponsored before too many MPs decide to call it a day on them. Surely a sensible solution would be to say that an individual Member should not be allowed to table an EDM? We should at least try to separate the more popular ones by asking that there be at least ten MPs proposing for it to be accepted as being tabled and thus, opened up for others to sign.

Considering there are MPs out there who tend to sign a large number of EDMs (Sir Peter Bottomley and Alan Meale, please take a bow) surely setting an entry point of ten signatures is not an oppressive barrier if you really do care about a subject?

One of the main reasons (if not the main reason) why so few people sign EDMs is that in the last few years they have turned into the tool of the crap lobbyist. Sitting in a meeting room trying to work out how to justify their Client's retainer, many believe that if they can get a few signatures on an EDM he has done his or her job. Even better if you can persuade your client to run a campaign to get more MPs to sign up; more money for you to set up pointless meetings to talk about a pointless campaign to try and get more than a dozen signatures for a pointless motion that will be ignored by Government and just about everyone else too.

If you are a business, charity or NGO and your Public Affairs outfit recommends an EDM - fire them immediately! Few people take any notice of them and so they are really no more than political graffiti.

So, to my Constituents I say if you are writing to me, please don't ask me to sign an EDM. I'll happily raise subjects with Ministers, ask questions in the House or try to have a Westminster Hall debate - in other words, do things that actually count - but I'm not going to waste time and money on sponsoring or signing EDMs.