

Threats to Academic Freedom Should Worry Public

Medical Reform Group

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The Medical Reform Group of Ontario today noted the serious implications of a Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) task force report highlighting threats to academic freedom among clinical faculty in health sciences centres, and proposing solutions.

“When doctors exposing the dangers of drugs face intimidation and legal action, the public should be concerned,” said MRG spokesperson Ahmed Bayoumi. “When doctors who highlight limitations in clinical care face loss of hospital privileges, the public must realize that patient care is threatened.”

The CAUT report highlights the increasing threats to the academic freedom of doctors working in university settings. The case of Nancy Olivieri, who faced persecution not only from the drug industry but from the University of Toronto after she identified the dangers of a drug she was studying, is the most prominent. The report notes that the CAUT has received an increasing number of complaints from clinical faculty who face loss of jobs, income, or opportunities as a result of behaviour that institutions see as threatening to their interests.

“The report proposes much needed solutions to these growing problems,” said another MRG spokesperson, Dr. PJ Devereaux. “Doctors who are threatened need arbitration procedures that protect them. They need backing and support when attacked by powerful institutions.”

“The five academic physicians and scientists who authored this report are issuing a wake-up call,” Dr. Bayoumi concluded. “When clinical faculty can’t speak out on behalf of their patients, the public should be worried.”