

Medicare

examination performed by a medical practitioner to fit glasses or other devices so as to correct or improve an eye defect will be considered as an uninsured service if it is so stipulated in the provincial legislation."

● (4:50 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. Winkler: What a shame. What a shame.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, I want to express very strong opposition to this amendment and I say to the minister that he has no right to expect a decision on this matter today, as he put it. After all there are only six or seven minutes of government time left.

In particular I remind him that I have been asking for a couple of days for the tabling of the correspondence he has had with representatives of the optometric profession on this point. I know the minister will say that he has been considering the point, that we have kept him busy so that he has not had a chance to reach a decision, but I do think we should have before us the opinions which have been expressed on this point by the representatives of this profession.

Let me make it clear that I am not now asking for the opinions of the optometrists on the question of whether they as an entire profession should be included, because the minister has already said "no" for the time being at least. I am asking, rather, for their opinion on this move in the other direction.

When you first look at it you could think that the optometrists might say: Well, if we cannot be included we think that the ophthalmologists and others who do get covered should also be denied that coverage. My information is that the optometrists are not taking that dog-in-the-manger attitude. Their view is that as much as possible this bill should cover the services that our people need. I think the least we should have is evidence on the table of where these people stand. One of the reasons I am concerned about this is the impression gained from something the minister stated the other night. I know what he said and I understand what he said but the impression has gone out that, because the minister said he had letters from optometrists approving of this course, somehow or other this is the view of the optometrists and of their association. I think this ought to be corrected.

As I say, I am not asking for all the letters the minister has had from the optometrists. I am not asking for their views on their desire to be included. We know those views and we support them. But we are asking for the optometrists views on this subsequent proposal

[Mr. Cadieux (Terrebonne).]

the minister is making which, as my leader put it the other day, is progress backwards. I think it is quite out of keeping with the position taken by the Prime Minister in July, 1965, when he gave as one of the criteria coverage of all physicians' services. The minister has made much of what was made clear by the former minister of national health and welfare, the present Secretary of State, that there might be some modification. The only modification mentioned in early discussions dealt with cosmetic surgery, or whatever the phrase is. The minister seems to have a new idea. He thinks that since he cannot meet the wishes of the optometrists he will go in the other direction.

The other night when the minister announced he would take this course he said he would also look at the position of oral surgeons. He did not say he would treat oral surgeons as he would treat optometrists. In fact, he did not tell us in what way they are to be treated. We feel disappointed enough that the government is not willing to go farther in providing coverage, that the government has interpreted as narrowly as it has the Prime Minister's commitment of July, 1965, that there would be coverage of physician's services involved, but to go in the other direction and take out some of the services that until now have been included is going too far.

We have had the date put off for one year; we have had private carriers brought in; we have had universality defined as 90 per cent. If this bill is around much longer not much of it will be left. So I shall sit down to let somebody else who is against the measure speak. If there is nobody else from another part of the house, there are people in our group who will speak. I want the minister to think about this over the week end, and I want the correspondence tabled so that we know where the optometrists stand.

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Chairman, during the brief time before five o'clock I wish to say a few words. I am not too happy with the amendment in that it restricts rather than enlarges the bill. It obviously cuts down services which can be called insured services. I am rather happy, however, that the minister has included in the bill a clause which suggests that he recognizes certain rights of provincial governments. The minister also said during the course of introducing this amendment that at some later stage an additional amendment might be moved which might go some way to meeting the proposal put forward by the hon. member for Ontario. If that