

Supply—Health and Welfare

Perhaps at the same time the minister could answer my other question regarding the earmarking of specific dental health grants. This matter has been under consideration in the department for some time and I should like to know if a decision has been reached.

Miss LaMarsh: Mr. Chairman, I am not able to give a specific amount as being allocated to dental research this year because it depends on what projects come in from the provinces and are approved. There is some \$15,017,000 this year allocated to health grants, which include dental grants. I am sorry my hon. friend was not here when I began my remarks because his question about the provision of a special dental grant I did answer.

Mr. Slogan: In the negative?

Miss LaMarsh: Yes.

I think I have dealt, Mr. Chairman, with all outstanding questions. I have attempted to make notes of them and to refer to them as they came up. There was also a question asked by the hon. member for York-Humber about nurses' wages. I know he appreciates that wages are a matter which lies between the hospital boards and the nurses they hire. We pay about 50 per cent of the cost of administration of hospitals. If higher wages are involved we still pay that amount. Our only direct responsibility of course for wages is with regard to nurses we employ ourselves. I am not wholly persuaded that the spirit of Florence Nightingale is so distant that \$20 will bring a nurse in to work on Sundays whereas \$12 will not, but I will look into that matter.

I might also mention that this year, because of the increase in the amount of hospital insurance, we have set up a group to deal directly with the provinces in an attempt to keep the cost under control in all provinces. That was done at their request following the last meeting of provincial ministers of health and the advisory council of health. This group will, among other things, be looking into the cost on a provincial basis of nursing services as well as other services.

If there is something I have forgotten to refer to I would be very happy to attempt to answer it. I hope all hon. members of the committee will feel that no attempt is being made to throttle them or to keep them from speaking either at length or cursorily. Such matters as the survey of the aged to which the hon. member for St. Lawrence-St. George referred last night are most interesting ideas

[Mr. Slogan.]

and will give food for much thought within the department. However, the main estimates and supplementary estimates of the department were subjected to two or three days scrutiny previously, and the whole of yesterday as well, and it is hoped that by now I will have satisfied all hon. members of the committee and that we should be able to proceed through the estimates.

Mr. Scott: Could I ask a question? The minister knows that over the last six or nine months we have been discussing in this house the policy of the government on hospital grants. I do not want to go through all the material which is on record but I would ask whether the government is reviewing this policy. The problem, as the minister probably knows, is that the gap between federal and provincial grants and the actual cost of hospital operation is very substantial, one which many municipalities feel they are unable to shoulder. I am wondering what the minister is doing or is thinking in this regard. Is there a reappraisal of the size of the grant structure, and can we look for any upward revision during the next year?

Miss LaMarsh: I think I answered that question previously, Mr. Chairman. This matter was discussed before the meeting of the ministers of health and also before the premiers meeting, and there was far from unanimity on any question of increasing the grants. I must say to my hon. friend that I do not intend to hold out any particular hope to him that there will be any increase in any of the grants. This is not in line with the thinking of the department or of the government at this time because it does tend to create an imbalance. Since the construction of health facilities is one of the first things which will have to be done before any contemplation of a national health scheme, the protection of the department is given to the over-all construction of such projects as medical schools and other facilities to see what if any additional help is required from the federal government.

No consideration is being given to increasing the grant per bed of the ordinary hospital. I think I have told my hon. friend before, but if not I should like to now, that there are really three provinces particularly short of hospital beds—the province of Nova Scotia, and the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. That is rather astonishing when you consider that the two richest provinces are Ontario and Quebec. The amounts which were allocated by the previous government to hospital construction run until 1968. How-