

*Narcotic Drugs Act*

will agree with me, and I am sure anyone in this House who has been watching the unfortunate progress of this evil, will also agree that everything possible must be done to suppress this traffic. I have noted in some articles and speeches and, I think, in statements by police authorities that there has been considerable difficulty with irresponsible practitioners, not necessarily physicians, but particularly veterinaries. I have heard on several occasions the opinion expressed, or, indeed, the assertion made positively that they were circumventing the law.

Mr. BELAND: My hon. friend refers to practitioners regularly practising.

Mr. STEVENS: What are referred to in this bill as physicians, veterinaries, dentists, druggists, and so forth. My suggestion is that we should enlarge this clause to provide that they shall give the information when requested to do so, not only by the minister, but by recognized police authorities—I am not particular as to the wording—administering the law in any municipality. I submit that to the consideration of the minister.

Mr. MacLAREN: Would the minister explain a little more definitely what is meant by the words "giving information"? Before taking a step such as has been suggested by the hon. member for Vancouver (Mr. Stevens), we should consider very carefully the question of giving up professional secrecy unless the matter is properly safeguarded.

Mr. MANION: I might mention that in Ontario, we are fully covered as regards ordinary medical practitioners, just as the minister explained in connection with Quebec. I cannot answer for the veterinary surgeons or the dentists, but I believe they are covered also in this way. Supposing some medical practitioner or veterinary surgeon or dentist prescribes a large quantity of the drugs in the schedule. Immediately the Department of Public Health writes to him because the druggist makes a report to the department regularly. If a report went in that a large quantity of a drug was prescribed by a certain physician, dentist or veterinary, and from the quantity of the drug prescribed the department were of the opinion that it was not being used for medicinal purposes, then they would write the doctor, veterinary or dentist concerned and ask for an explanation. I believe, therefore, that the act covers the situation so far as Ontario is concerned, and I have no doubt the same thing applies to the other provinces. But suppose a medical practitioner were pulled up by the department and

[Mr. Stevens.]

condemned to pay a fine or be otherwise punished for some offence under the act; it would be the duty of the provincial authority mentioned by my hon. friend, the Medical Council, to deal with that practitioner. But so far as reports are concerned, I think the point made by the member for St. John (Mr. MacLaren) is a good one. No doctor would care to hand in to any policeman or police magistrate any information regarding his patients; he would not consent to do anything of the kind unless he were subpoenaed. The department can look into the matter and deal with any practitioner who is prescribing drugs improperly, and can deal with him as they see fit if a satisfactory explanation is not given.

Mr. BELAND: My hon. friend has perfectly explained the situation as it exists in practice. Subsection (a) covers the manufacturers as well as the druggists, wholesale and retail. As regards the duly authorized practising physician, it is not deemed advisable that he should be subjected to investigation on the part of a peace officer or a policeman. As my hon. friend has pointed out, it is rather an easy matter for the department to ascertain the quantities of drugs a doctor has been able to procure through the wholesale or the retail druggist, and it is always open to the department to institute an inquiry if they have reason to believe that a doctor is dispensing a large quantity of any forbidden drug. If there is some reason to think that he is using it for other than purely medical purposes we can follow him up, and that has been done in many instances. The hon. member for St. John has brought to the attention of the committee another feature of the subject that should be given consideration and that is that medical men be allowed to exercise professional discretion without being interfered with unduly by the powers that be, and I think that the law has been framed to meet such cases. As my hon. friend for Vancouver Centre has said, the law is important as it is severe, the only difficulty being as to where to draw the line. We have attempted, as our predecessors did, to devise legislation that would suppress the illicit traffic in drugs, but our object is difficult of realization. The law as presented to the House to-day contains very severe and drastic provisions and I do not think it could be made more stringent than it is without indeed unduly interfering with individual liberty. At all events, I believe the section covers the points brought up pretty well.

Section agreed to.