

Adjournment Debate

Mr. Justice Hall in the Health Services Review of 1980 recommended that extra billing be outlawed by amending the Medical Care Act to provide that extra billing by physicians inhibits reasonable access to services and is contrary to the intent and purpose of the act. This is what I, as health critic for the federal New Democratic Party, implore the minister to do now and not to wait for the renegotiation of the Established Programs Financing.

March, 1982 is just too long to wait for a remedy to this extremely serious problem. We allow extra billing to increase in the meantime; that is between now and the renegotiation of the Established Programs Financing, at the peril of so seriously eroding the principles of medicare that people come to expect extra billing, particularly in provinces like Ontario. They take out insurance against it, then we have exactly the two-tiered health care system Mr. Justice Hall warns us against, one for the rich and one for the poor.

During the two recent election campaigns, the minister talked tough to the provinces; when she was the minister prior to May, 1979 and then when she was in opposition. Now she is backing off, citing improvements in New Brunswick while she turns a blind eye to events in Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba and Alberta, to mention a few.

In her answer to me in the House the other day she posed the problem of doctors leaving a province that banned extra billing. That is precisely why we cannot expect even governments like Saskatchewan, which would like to so act, to outlaw extra billing by themselves. We cannot expect Saskatchewan to go through the trauma of giving birth to medicare once again while neo-conservative provinces sit idly by and watch the struggle.

Federal action will be required, the kind I am requesting of the minister. Federal leadership is required. That is what I and my colleagues in the New Democratic Party will wring out of this government if it is the last thing we do. We will not allow this government through sloth, cowardice, indifference or restraint to dismantle the heritage which the pioneers of our movement fought to get for the Canadian people in universal health care or in other social programs.

Let me give notice to the government that as we enter a period in which federal-provincial fiscal relationships are to be studied by an all-party task force, on which I will sit as the representative of my party, we will not accept or work within any hidden agenda that presumes a lessening of federal financial or philosophical commitment to medicare.

● (2225)

Mr. Doug Frith (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, with respect to

extra billing, I must first remind those who have tried to confuse this issue that this government is opposed to any form of extra billing. Mr. Justice Hall was justifiably concerned about extra billing and its possible impact on access to health care by disadvantaged groups in our society. He stated that "the practice of extra billing is inequitable" and would lead to a two-tiered system. He also noted that extra billing is twinned with the issue of protecting the legitimate interests of physicians when one way of increasing their income, the extra billing, is eliminated.

Mr. Justice Hall's solution to the problems of extra billing and reasonable compensation for physicians was to recommend that the provinces "outlaw extra billing" but also agree to establish and accept binding arbitration on compensation issues for which negotiated agreements could not be reached.

Mr. Justice Hall described the federal role as "a responsibility to set objectives which will reaffirm the national character of Canada's medical care program." He suggested that to fulfil this role with regards to extra billing and physician compensation, the federal government support the provinces my making legislative changes so that extra billing was declared contrary to the intent and purposes of national health insurance and to encourage the provinces to "develop a mechanism to ensure reasonable compensation to physicians." The minister strongly supports Mr. Justice Hall's views and intends to recommend to her colleagues in cabinet that, when the government begins bargaining with the provinces on fiscal arrangements with EPF, a primary goal of these negotiations should be an end to extra billing in conjunction with a system to ensure reasonable compensation for physicians.

Ever since the completion of the Hall report, officials of the department and the minister have been working with provinces to resolve this dilemma, and to build the groundwork for such negotiations. It is federal-provincial co-operation which will ensure that national objectives in the health sector are attained, and it will not be done by precipitous action on the part of the federal government.

As for the figures that gave rise to the estimated \$56 million in the cost of extra billing for insured medical care services, this is, I repeat, an estimated figure. These data were developed in co-operation with the provinces on a tentative basis, and until, and only until they have been further reviewed by the provinces, the minister is not prepared to release any supporting documentation.

In conclusion, this government is not prepared to withhold payments from provinces simply because they do not immediately agree to ban extra billing. Such hasty action could result