

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

BREAST IMPLANTS

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, my question once again is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

Last year 15,000 Canadian women got breast cancer and 5,000 women died of breast cancer. The issue of breast implant safety was first raised in the House of Commons in April 1990.

I would like to ask the minister on how many occasions did the manufacturers of the Meme implant violate part V of the medical devices regulations? When did he become aware of these violations, and what action did he take?

[Translation]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should point out, first of all, that the Department of National Health and Welfare acts in the best interests of the health of Canadian women in every area that concerns the department, and especially breast implants. As I said yesterday, and as I have said many times, the department makes decisions regarding the drugs or food or medical devices it is asked to evaluate, on the basis of the information it is given and also on the basis of scientific evidence.

Mr. Speaker, the information received by the Department of National Health and Welfare on breast implants, and especially silicone implants, did not, as far as I know, contain any erroneous data that might have led the department to decide otherwise than it did.

[English]

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister stood in this House and said that if he had any evidence whatsoever he would act.

I have in my hand a copy of a letter that he received last October from his own deputy minister in which he cites proof that the company on at least two occasions violated part V of the medical devices regulations. On at

least two occasions, according to his deputy minister, this company failed to follow Canadian law.

I want to ask the minister this: In light of this information which was passed to him last October, why did he do nothing and why does he continue to stand in his place and do nothing?

[Translation]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Hamilton East is in the habit of producing all kinds of documents. I do not question the letter that may have been sent, but I confess I am not familiar with the context in which it was sent. In any case, we will have to look at the letter to which the hon. member referred. I will see exactly what the reference is, and in due time I will have the appropriate response to the hon. member's question.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, for shame! This letter reveals that the company on two occasions violated the regulations for this implant product. My question for the minister still is: When will he do something about the 150,000 women who today are wondering whether the government will protect them? Why did he not act immediately after receiving the letter sent to him on October 30 last year. Why did he do nothing, and why does he continue to do nothing?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, once again, I have no comments on this document at the present time. I will comment in due time.

• (1420)

Perhaps the hon. member will recall that in the case of the Mème, which is a manufacturer's trademark, the product was voluntarily withdrawn from the market last April, before I was appointed to this department.

As for other silicone implants, since January companies have been asked and in fact have agreed, on a voluntary basis, to stop providing surgeons with silicone implants. We have been informed by the *Association des chirurgiens de la province de Québec*—in fact there was a public announcement—that it will no longer use this type of breast implant.

I believe that as usual, our response was based on our knowledge of what had happened. As far as women's health is concerned, Mr. Speaker, I am aware that many