

All of this relates specifically to the principle involved here, as the minister defines the strict limitation of the term "medical practitioners" and "medical services."

May I also say in this regard that I hope the minister will give very serious consideration to reversing the stand he has taken on this question. One hon. member used to word "retrograde". I think that this particular decision of the minister is an extremely narrow and unfortunate one. Certainly, his definition of this term which requires the bill to be limited in this way will result not only in hardship being worked on the sick people in Canada but it is also unfair and unjust.

If we are to have a medicare program to take care of the cost of services rendered by doctors, it is imperative that it cover the very widest scope of services available, instead of being limited to one particular service. Not only is this unfair but, in my opinion, it just does not make sense.

Mr. Webb: Mr. Chairman, I posed two questions to the minister and I am wondering whether he could answer them before this clause carries.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, the hon. gentleman asked some questions which I did attempt to answer earlier in the committee. We have taken the view that contributions will be made to the provinces for medical services performed by medical practitioners. It will, of course, be the responsibility of the provinces, within their own boundaries, to designate the medical practitioners concerned. For that reason and because of that approach it is quite true, as my hon. friend has stated, that we do not propose to insure services of other health professions, including podiatrists.

We have taken the view that the provinces may wish to add additional professions on their own account, and as a consensus develops the federal government will consider sharing with the provinces the cost of these additional professions at some future time.

A great point has been made in this committee that the omission of certain health professions from the provisions of this bill may be very damaging to them. May I remind the members of the committee that in the four public plans established in the provinces none of these professions is presently included. For example, optometry is not included in any public plan, including the OMSIP plan of Ontario and the Saskatchewan plan. It is true that in Alberta limited services provided by optometrists are included. To my knowledge,

in none of these plans is the profession of podiatry included. So, in this regard we are following practices established by the provinces.

Mr. Thompson: Why do you not lead them in this field?

Mr. MacEachen: Indeed, Mr. Chairman, we are leading in establishing or laying the foundations of a system of medical care insurance in Canada. We have always stated that our program will be limited to services provided by physicians at the initial stage, and this is what this bill provides.

If my hon. friend has any further questions I would be happy to answer them if I can.

Mr. Webb: May I just ask the minister whether he would agree that podiatrists, as I pointed out, are licensed in the same way as are doctors.

● (3:50 p.m.)

They perform the same operations. A podiatrist performs operations that a doctor performs on certain parts of the body. I cannot for the life of me see how the minister can discriminate between optometrists and ophthalmologists. They are both licenced to carry out the same procedures. I should like to know how the minister can discriminate in this way.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the minister to comment on my request for the tabling of certain correspondence? I do not wish to prejudice the position of the hon. member for Red Deer in asking for something of wider range, but because the minister has said that he might bring in an amendment having to do with optometric services would he consider tabling the documents that bear on the very point he has raised, the possibility of introducing exclusions?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, I will consider whether this letter can be tabled. I want to see whether one letter from an optometrist is written in a personal or confidential way, before tabling it.

Mr. Knowles: Do I gather that the minister has had only one letter in support of the exclusion?

Mr. MacEachen: I made it perfectly clear, not trying to misrepresent the attitude of the profession, that the profession wanted inclusion of the services. In a letter from the