

*Supply—Veterans Affairs*

he is eligible for treatment as a pensioner. In any event many of the recipients of war veterans allowances are billed for these provincial insurance premiums. It is not a great deal of money, but for them every dollar counts.

There has been a good deal of concern about this situation. Has the minister's department taken any steps to make some arrangement with the provincial government hospital insurance authorities so that veterans either will not be billed for provincial insurance premiums or will be covered by the federal hospitalization scheme?

**Mr. Gregg:** I take it that the hon. member refers to the wives of veterans. I understand recipients of veterans allowances are exempted. The veterans themselves are exempt from payment to the provincial hospital plan.

**Mr. Green:** No, not unless it has been done this year.

**Mr. Gregg:** I know to my certain knowledge that there has been discussion between my department and the provincial government towards that end. With regard to widows generally, I do not need to repeat of course, because my hon. friend knows it better than I do, that these benefits accruing to the veterans provide subsidiary benefits to wives and widows, but only through the veteran. They were not to apply to the widows he mentioned, or in fact to the widows of those who were killed in action or the widows of pensioners.

On the point made by the hon. member about our hospitals being less busy than they were, and the 12-D patients being accepted, the hospitals are equipped to accept men veterans in the main, but also women veterans to a limited number. Physically speaking therefore, apart from other considerations, it would be difficult to adapt our hospitals at this time for that purpose.

**Mr. Lennard:** Several years ago the Department of Veterans Affairs issued orders which enabled optometrists to be employed on hospital staffs. The intimation went out at that time that one or more would be allotted to these staffs permanently. About a year ago I put a question on the order paper asking how many optometrists had been employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs since January, 1948. The answer said that there were 277 on a fee for services basis. I am quite aware of the reason why no optometrists were permanently appointed to the hospital staff. I feel it is due to professional jealousy. The ophthalmologists have full control of the situation and are jealous of their position. They have prevented the department, if the department ever did wish to make an appointment, from fulfilling its promise to the Canadian

Society of Optometrists. Several years ago a promise was made that the optometrists would receive consideration, but that was never done.

From my own experience there is no better man to care for the eyes than a man who specializes in that work. From my own experience, and my experience with service clubs in that connection, I can say that better results have been obtained by having children treated by optometrists than through other branches of the professional service. I feel rather strongly about that because I know the reason, and I believe the minister has some idea about it. I believe it is something that should be corrected.

**Mr. Gregg:** Mr. Chairman, before my estimates are through I shall be glad to bring in a statement on this subject, and I hope it will not be tinged by professional jealousy. With regard to the answer to the question last year, I would point out that we have adopted a policy relating to professional men generally, doctors and so on, that there are not many full-time doctors employed in our hospitals. The main principle behind it is the desire that these well-trained professional men should be kept in touch with what is going on in the outside world, and in the profession generally, and thus bring to the hospital the best that can be obtained. It may be that, owing to that policy with regard to men in medicine, these professional men have only been employed part-time. I shall bring in a proper statement later.

**Mr. Lennard:** It may be well for the minister, when he makes that statement, to ascertain whether there are any full-time ophthalmologists employed by the department.

**Mr. Fulton:** May I ask the minister where we find that position of director of treatment services? I notice it is not in the detail here, and I cannot find it under departmental administration.

**Mr. Gregg:** I am told the reason is that the director is a term appointment, and consequently is blanketed in the non-permanent list.

**Mr. Fulton:** What was spent last year for materials and supplies, for which the minister is asking about \$6,500,000 this year?

**Mr. Gregg:** Last year we spent \$6,384,000.

**Mr. Harkness:** Mr. Chairman, this is a branch of the department in which the number of temporary employees compared with the permanents is particularly high. There are 9,328 temporary employees, and 985 permanent employees. In other words, there is a proportion of about 10 to one. Can the minister tell us in general terms what sort of job those 9,000 people do that they are all