

Oral Questions

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, there are many issues concerning women's health that I am sure are of concern to the parliamentary secretary responding and to all of us.

Recently this week there was a report released entitled *Breast Cancer, Unanswered Questions*, a report that made 49 recommendations about the kind of leadership role the federal government could take basically in research, in education, and indeed in consultation with the provinces and territories.

I would like to ask the spokesperson for the minister whether the minister, at the meetings this week with the provincial and territorial ministers of health, is raising this urgent issue of health concerns for women. It is clear that when we have something like breast cancer from which one woman every two hours dies in Canada, this is urgent.

Has the minister of health raised it with provincial and territorial ministers, and what plan of action is contemplated?

Mrs. Barbara Sparrow (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the hon. leader brought forward the health cancer research document that was tabled in the House the other day. It does stipulate 49 recommendations in this area, specifically education, research and working together, the federal department along with the provincial departments of health and welfare, and I would say with the public and with the medical fraternity.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare is at the Canada health meetings today. He was there yesterday and last night. He will be reviewing the total act. I can assure my colleague that the issue of breast cancer will be brought forward. I hope that he will be able to report directly to her in the next few days.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House would like to say that we appreciate the unequivocal apology of the parliamentary secretary for the statements made. We would also like to tell her that an apology is not going to set the record straight. The parliamentary secretary herself cited Dr. Cornelia Baines as one of the key players in the panel which finally determined that in fact the Meme implant was not a risk factor for women.

In the same article that same doctor who participated on the panel said that the conclusions of the panel might have been different had they known about the internal minutes. We are talking about internal minutes that have been hidden by someone from the eyes of the panel and the public about this very serious issue.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary to go one step beyond an apology and to order a review of all the material, throw out the panel findings because they were based on inaccurate information, and bring forward legitimate information including the information from her own department that the Meme implant was putting women at risk.

Mrs. Barbara Sparrow (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, there have been no hidden minutes from the panel or indeed anyone. Dr. Baines did go on to be appointed to an independent review of the breast implants.

As my colleague does know, the Meme implant was withdrawn well over a year ago by the manufacturers, and the silicone gel breast implants have been put into a moratorium for some months now. There will be no breast implants taking place within Canada until further review.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): With all due respect for the parliamentary secretary, she was not telling the truth, Mr. Speaker, since it was revealed today that the department of health has been withholding information on this for three years. I think that Canadian women are entitled to know why a memo from a professor in her department who spoke of possible risks was hidden both from the public and from physicians interested in this matter. What are they doing in her department?

[*English*]

Mrs. Barbara Sparrow (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Yes, Mr. Speaker, Canadian women do have the right to all the information. Their health is foremost for each and every one of us. There is no hidden information.

The department did an intensive scientific review, the research and the development with regard to implants, both Meme and silicone gel breast implants. I can say right here in the House there is no specific scientific evidence proving that they are unsafe for women.