

Westminster Hospital

have utilized the splendid facilities at that hospital. A number of veterans from that area have expressed to me a number of concerns and it is only fair that I should share some of those concerns with the House because to me they form the crux of the problem. That is why I believe the production of these papers might allay some of those apprehensions and fears.

The major concern of the veterans in the area is the quality of medical care. They recognize that in years gone by they received excellent medical care at Westminster Hospital. They feel very comfortable in the surroundings there. They know the personnel; many individuals and veterans have been patients on a recurring basis for a number of years. The crux of the problem for them is the need to be reassured about the quality of the medical care they will have in the future.

There is some concern because of the government's initiative in introducing Bill C-68. They are well aware that the federal government has indicated it is prepared to reduce its fiscal responsibility with respect to health services in the provinces. They are concerned about whether that quality of care will be maintained in subsequent years. Very clearly there is uncertainty about the quality of medical care and whether it will be provided in some other area in the future.

Another concern expressed to me on numerous occasions is the question of where these veterans will be transferred to. Some of them honestly believe that they might be transferred to such distant areas as Toronto. It is quite obvious that these individuals want to be as close to their home as they can, whether that be Wallaceburg, Bothwell, Oil Springs, Blenheim, Ridgeway or many of the small communities which are at a distance close enough for their families to visit them.

The parliamentary secretary referred to a misconception, and this has not been defined, but there has been the suggestion that some of these veterans might be returned to local hospitals. No one is objecting to that concept in principle, but there is concern that some of these local hospitals might not have the facilities required for the special type of treatment veterans need, whether it be in the area of rehabilitation or whatever. It is important to have these papers so that we know the background and can allay the fears and apprehensions of veterans, especially veterans in that area.

● (1730)

I must also compliment the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe for raising the specific issue of chronic care and domiciliary-type cases, an issue which, without doubt, is of great concern to veterans in my area as well as to veterans all across Canada. We have seen no documented evidence to show that the government has a plan for meeting this particular need, which will grow in years to come. I again say to the parliamentary secretary that we urgently need to have this information tabled in the House of Commons so that we may know precisely what the government has in mind for chronic care and domiciliary-type cases.

Around the middle of September at a meeting held near Sarnia the possible closing down of Westminster Hospital or the transfer of patients, and the full implication of such closing

[Mr. Holmes.]

or transfer, were discussed. Unfortunately I must report to the House that the proceedings at that meeting did not allay the apprehension and fears of veterans in my area. After that meeting I received representations from veterans and it was evident that their fears had not been allayed, but were greater than ever.

May I refer again to the special services provided at Westminster Hospital? There is no indication—and this is why the pertinent documents ought to be tabled in the House—that special services for veterans, for example such as occupational therapy and rehabilitation, will be provided elsewhere. Therefore we need far greater assurance that veterans will continue to receive the particular kind of care to which they have been accustomed in the past.

Allow me to cite some more examples of special needs, Mr. Speaker. I received a letter from a legionnaire in my home town, Wallaceburg, who is most concerned because he, suffering from a dermatological ailment, had been told by his dermatologist that not enough beds were allocated in the one major hospital in London for the treatment of that particular ailment. He implied that at the moment there are only four beds available for such treatment in London, whereas between 15 and 25 beds were required at Westminster Hospital for treating that chronic ailment. That is a matter of concern—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I interrupt the hon. member to draw to his attention that he is not speaking to the motion. I suggest that he bring his remarks back to the terms of the motion.

Mr. Holmes: Mr. Speaker, may I summarize quickly. I have tried to point out that fear has been expressed, and that the documents in question ought to be tabled so that we can act on the basis of adequate information. I have mentioned our concern with respect to Westminster Hospital in London and the necessity for the veterans of the area to be assured in the future of care of high quality.

I wish to make one final point which has been overlooked by many. I know from experience that veterans under treatment have enjoyed feelings of comradeship, in that veterans and legions of the area have provided them with personal service, gifts, and entertainment. We want to make sure that the personal touch is not omitted; some of us are concerned that this will be the result if there is to be a transfer at some later date.

I conclude by saying that it is relevant and important that these documents should be tabled at this time so that we may have a better understanding of the situation in order to allay the fears and apprehensions of veterans of the area concerned.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Question.

Mr. Gus MacFarlane (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to talk on the motion proposed by the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) and I take this opportunity to congratulate him on