

Medicare

this device would be the optometric profession.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, by means of what I must say is an ingenious twist in the previous argumentation, is now proposing that the clause be amended to include a new profession, the optometric profession. It seems to me that to include the optometric profession would be to extend the meaning of "medical services" and to impose a charge on the treasury in excess of that contemplated in the original resolution. The estimate of the cost of including optometric services not foreseen in the resolution is in the neighbourhood of \$18 million.

Though the hon. member has argued ingeniously, nevertheless, the effect of his amendment would be to enlarge the meaning given to "medical services" and impose an additional charge on the treasury. The hon. member is attempting to achieve what two other hon. members failed to achieve, but the procedural obstacle which they encountered stands in his way also.

Mr. Baldwin: I rise merely to say that I support the amendment and to express the view that there would be no additional charge on the crown, since the reference in the amendment is to optometrists performing medical services which would otherwise be performed by the medical profession. That is my primary point but I should like to say, parenthetically, that this attitude on the part of the government illustrates the wisdom of the opposition in refusing to be seduced by the government into agreeing to the second reading of a number of other bills.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Baldwin: The attitude of the government toward suggestions forthcoming from this side of the house shows that we were wise to refuse, and we shall continue to do so.

Mr. Patterson: The question which occurs to me is this, and I think it is one of vital importance. Are we discussing the practitioners per se under this scheme or the service they are rendering? The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has pointed out that what concerns us in this amendment is service rendered by optometrists which, when rendered by medical practitioners, would be counted as insured service. I suggest we should be interested in the availability of the service and whether it is provided by a medical practitioner or someone else should not make any difference.

23033-663½

In my view the same principle should apply to other categories engaged in providing a health service, chiropractors, for instance. We are told that medical practitioners are taking a short course, anything from an hour to five days, so as to carry out work in the manipulative therapy field. We are taking a completely unrealistic position by saying in effect that the services of skilled chiropractors cannot be used.

Mr. Kindt: This particular paragraph of clause 2 deserves far more consideration than has so far been given to it. Anyone who is familiar with the situation throughout the country, anyone who knows that opticians are performing a service which is just as essential in many respects as the service performed by ear, eye, nose and throat specialists, would have serious doubts about the course the minister is following.

I happen to be a member of M.S.I. in Alberta. I received a letter stating that as of a certain date, the cost of treatment for sight deficiencies, or the cost of eyeglasses, would be taken care of provided I went to an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist. As it happens, up to now I have not needed the services of such a specialist. That is perhaps, fortunate, because I might have to wait a month before I could get an appointment to see one.

I do not believe that parliament has the right on ethical grounds to discriminate against opticians and put them out of business. If it is not beyond the scope of our authority, on ethical grounds we should certainly refrain from doing so. These opticians have had to study hard and make themselves skilled in their professions. They are doing good work. As the minister has no doubt experienced on one or two occasions, they put medicinal drops into the eyes of their patients. So they are giving a medical service. Surely the minister will realize upon reflection that he is not acting fairly when he leaves out opticians and drives the public to the medical practitioners because the services of the latter are covered by insurance.

• (8:30 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Chairman, clause 2(b) states very clearly:

"Insurable resident", in relation to any province means an individual who is a resident of the province and is not excluded from the calculation—

Clause 2, paragraph (d):

"Insured services" means all services rendered by medical practitioners that are medically required, except any services that a person is eligible