

Supply—Health and Welfare

parliamentary committee of this kind would be a noticeable advantage that could not be derived in any other way.

I am going to conclude by urging the minister to make a note of this, if she has not already done so, as well as of the statement which will be made available in due course by the world health organization committee which deals with this very serious problem. It is one which will inevitably come upon us. It is my honest opinion that the establishment of an all-party joint committee to look into the problems with which we will be dealing in the near future is something which would be of major benefit to this country, and which would lend distinction to her administration of this department.

Mr. Cowan: Mr. Chairman, I wish to take this opportunity to comment on the nursing situation in the hospitals of this country, in view of the fact that we are dealing with item No. 1 of the Department of National Health and Welfare. I make particular reference to the item on page 286 of the estimates, contribution to the provinces under agreements entered into pursuant to the Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Act, \$420 million. I have no criticism whatever to make of the amount of money involved in this item; in fact I am happy to see that the increase over a year ago is \$35 million.

Last night the hon. member for Kamloops very definitely and explicitly put his finger on a great problem in this country of ours; that is, the continuing shortage of doctors. He emphasized that steps must be taken to meet this situation, which is becoming dangerous for the country as a whole. He also, out of his vast knowledge of the subject, dealt with the lack of money for medical research. The hon. member for Springfield was kind enough to speak on some of the problems connected with dentistry. I should like to refer to the nursing situation, which I believe is of more serious import to this nation than the shortage of doctors or the shortage of funds for medical research. However, I wish to congratulate the government upon the fact that this government has implemented the system of shift differential rates of pay for nurses in hospitals under the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This action by the Department of Veterans Affairs means that in every such hospital in the country the federal government is now paying a shift differential to the staff, including nurses. The nurses who work the evening shift are paid more money than those who work the day shift, and those

who work the night shift are paid more money than those who work the evening shift. This government, and particularly the Minister of National Health and Welfare, are to be congratulated upon the fact that they have willingly paid, as did the previous administration under the hon. member for Perth, their share of the shift differentials to all hospital employees in the provinces of Quebec and Saskatchewan, and to all hospital employees except nurses in the province of British Columbia.

Now, I should like the hospital staffs of the dominion to realize that the federal government, under both the previous administration and this administration, has shown by its actions that it is not averse to paying shift differentials in all hospitals of the dominion. The federal government is paying approximately one third of the cost of the operation of all hospitals in the nation, and that is a very healthy contribution. I admire the present Secretary of State for External Affairs for many, many things. I first met him in 1922, and I have had a close and intimate contact with him over the intervening 42 years. I sincerely believe that the most outstanding act in his life was the introduction of this hospitalization act on a national basis. I am not suggesting that the Liberal government of 1956 initiated this type of welfare service. I know that two provinces in western Canada had experimented with it and had shown it could be done. However, the present Secretary of State for External Affairs is the man who made it possible to extend this type of hospital care from one end of the country to the other with the first act in 1956.

When the hospital staffs of the nation realize that the federal government, both the previous administration and this administration, is willingly paying one third of the cost of shift differentials, I feel that the staffs of those hospitals in the seven provinces not now paying shift differentials will demand that the provincial authorities institute shift differentials for these employees. I spoke on this subject two years ago when I was in opposition and we were considering the estimates of this department. I spoke on the subject a year ago, and I would go into it in detail once more except that I should like to see the estimates of the government passed as speedily as possible.

I did emphasize on both occasions when I spoke on this matter that I was advocating not only the payment of shift differentials for hospital staffs, but the payment of