

Medicare

Would it cost more to include the services provided by optometrists? One of the minister's colleagues has suggested that this inclusion would cost an extra \$18 million. I am not prepared to admit that it would cost that much because many patients who need visual correction will go to their doctor's office for an examination of their eyes rather than to an optometrist who would prescribe glasses and rectify the difficulty. I suggest that this practice will result in a great deal of additional expense, far outweighing the expense of including optometrists in this scheme.

Let us turn our attention to what will happen in the case of dental surgery. I suggest if oral surgeons are not covered by the plan patients will go to their doctors to have a tooth removed. How many doctors is the minister aware of who take their patients to a hospital to remove a tooth? Surely this practice will create an additional workload on physicians and a tremendous additional expense so far as the government is concerned.

Let us consider the situation in respect of chiropractors who are, after all, accepted as therapists in some provinces which have medical care plans. I am sure that in certain circumstances individuals who could properly be treated by a physiotherapist will turn to an orthopedic surgeon for treatment because his services will be covered under the bill.

The minister is not being practical in his arguments. Whether this amendment is accepted or rejected is of no particular consequence to me. What is of consequence is that the minister is not being sensible in his approach to this whole problem. It seems that he is not being politically astute in forcing this bill down his colleagues' throats, perhaps for the sake of his own ego. We know that health services fall within the responsibility of the provinces, so in the light of the minister's argument perhaps he should drop the entire plan. It may be that if the money is available the government should say to the provinces, you take this money and use it because this is your responsibility.

We have listened to arguments in respect of the inclusion of paramedical services. I hope what I have said to the minister in regard to the four categories I have mentioned will strike him as sufficiently important that serious consideration will be given. In the small rural area from which I come there is a 48-bed hospital which is now looking after 62 patients as a result of the hospitalization plan adopted by the province of Ontario. There is

no doubt that this difficult situation is aggravated by the adoption of a medical plan. Yet the minister refuses to increase hospital grants.

Everybody who has approached this situation from a sensible point of view has suggested that we are putting the cart before the horse. If the minister will not listen to us and accept some of our reasonable suggestions we intend to carry on the argument until he does change his mind. We are now approaching the conclusion of the second day of debate and the minister still continues to take an extremely adamant position, even more so than last June. Individuals on that side of the house seem to be able to get away with that type of attitude. Unfortunately we on this side cannot always depend on the individuals who sit here. If we were able to depend on them we could defeat the government on this measure.

Let me hasten to add that there are other considerations which must be taken into account. Notwithstanding that fact, if everybody on this side of the house took a sensible and responsible attitude toward Bill C-227 and the arguments that have been advanced the government would not last another 48 hours. It is also my belief that if the minister wanted to do the right thing he would stop this debate now and let us discuss old age pensions for one day.

There is a member of the press gallery, whose name I do not know, who feels that what I have said in the past about old age pensioners is wrong. In spite of that I believe the responsible thing to do would be to end this debate and discuss old age pension amendments. This is particularly true in view of the refusal on the part of the minister to accept any amendment to Bill C-227. We would then have something to work on and an opportunity to do something in the interests of Canadians.

I have referred to our point of view in respect of the inclusion of paramedical people and the expense which might be involved. Let me repeat, if a doctor has to examine a greater number of patients in his office because they cannot visit an optometrist under the provisions of this bill, then the bill is working against the interests of the people of Canada.

I conclude my argument at this point. The minister should accept some of the sensible and responsible amendments placed before the committee by the opposition.