

Adjournment Debate

Let me suggest possible areas of responsibility for government action relative to drugs. I recognize there has been a meagre beginning. First, they should ensure all drugs in general use are reasonably effective and safe. Second, they should be concerned with drug research, not only those prescribed by doctors but self-medication and abuse of drugs by society. In addition, research in clinical pharmacology should be expanded. Third, government should take responsibility for research in important areas such as cancer research and cardiovascular disease, which frequently are commercially unrewarding. Finally, government should see that patients get value for their money.

Mr. Norman A. Cafik (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the series of questions originally raised by the hon. member for Lambton-Kent (Mr. Holmes), I believe have been responded to in the letter from the minister to the member dated March 30 to which he referred. It deals with the difficulty involved in the processing of analytical data which form the bases of the QUAD program itself. It is an extremely complex subject and one which involves volumes and volumes of material. It is extremely difficult to be able to examine these in the way they should be examined by doctors and others who are concerned about the question.

The next point I would like to make is that the hon. member, not only in his original questions but again tonight, indicated that there is some conflict between the minister and his officials in respect of equivalents of the

drugs that are covered in the QUAD program. This simply is not true. There is no disagreement whatever between the officials and the minister in respect of this. The member talked about the importance of reducing the cost of drugs to consumers, and at the same time ensuring that they are effective and safe. That is precisely the reason for the QUAD program.

It seems rather difficult to understand the hon. member, when you marry that particular idea with another one which came forward in his remarks when he indicated that this kind of thing should be free of any kind of political interference or political overtones. He quoted from a release which I do not have in front of me, but I challenge what he said basically. He talked about the minister stating that he would make sure that the goals of the QUAD program would not be thwarted.

Surely that is a kind of political interference which is very good and which shows the determination that the government has, not only that the drugs taken by Canadians be safe, but also that information is available so that they can have those drugs at the lowest possible cost. Surely there is a role for government in this respect. I would be surprised if the hon. member for Lambton-Kent would not agree with me that we must make sure that drugs are analysed and that the information is presented to the Canadian public so that they will know that the drugs they can choose are clinically equivalent and can be bought for the cheapest possible price. That is the purpose of the program, and I think all hon. members would subscribe to it.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.32 p.m.