

Medicare

Mr. Knowles: Read the rest of the amendment.

Mr. MacEachen: "—when rendered by a medical practitioner, would be considered as insured services". But the effect of the hon. member's amendment is to bring in every single health profession. If it is accepted, any other profession can be substituted for optometrists, such as psychologists, chiropractors, podiatrists and so on. This may be a highly desirable objective and I would like to say more about it later when we deal with the substance of the matter, but surely if that is possible then it is absolutely clear that the amendment exceeds the power conferred by the royal recommendation. This is the nub of the matter, and this amendment is deficient for precisely the same reason as were the other two.

[Translation]

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Chairman, could the minister tell us frankly—I wait until the minister puts on his earphone—for instance can the minister deny that the population needs care given by optometrists, podiatrists, oculists, dentists? In short, they need care as everyone is entitled to have. And these people are considered as medical practitioners.

When the minister reads Beauchesne or May to clear the government or to lessen its responsibility with regard to the amendment moved by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), I find that the reasons he gives are childish, that they do not make sense, because the Canadian people need optometrists, podiatrists, dentists. In taking its stand upon May's work written 125 year ago, the government does not allow us to move an increase of expenditures.

According to Beauchesne's work, that does not concern us; but according to the population we govern, and I think that concerns us.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is perfectly right when he insists to have accepted the amendment he moved, both by the Chair and by the members as a whole.

I see that some liberal members, for example, my good friend, the hon. member for Mercier (Mr. Boulanger) is convinced that dentists, podiatrists, optometrists, and all similar professions have necessarily the same rights as any medical practitioner in Canada and that this amendment does not interfere with physicians' rights. We recognize the

[Mr. MacEachen.]

physicians' rights, but at the same time we would like all other specialists to be respected just like the medical profession, and like any other specialty or profession that deserves to be recognized by law.

Mr. Chairman, I sincerely believe the amendment moved by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre deserves to be supported not only by one group but by the hon. members as a whole, so that podiatrists and optometrists may be on equal footing with general practitioners, medical specialists and all specialties, whatever they may be.

• (9:20 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. Kindt: Mr. Chairman, I should like to take issue with one point made by the minister, namely, that if this amendment is implemented costs will increase.

Let me take the case of the optician. If I go to an optician for an eye examination and I buy a pair of glasses, I pay a certain amount of money. If I go to an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist who does the same job, I will also pay a like amount. In one case I am insured but if I go to the optician I am not.

For many years I have had the services of a good optician in my area. Under the present circumstances I will have to cease using his services and seek out an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist in order to be covered under medical insurance. But in both cases the cost to the government is the same whether the service is rendered by a medical practitioner or an optician. So no argument can be made about additional cost.

However, there is a tremendous argument to be made against the government trying to put legislation into effect which will put opticians out of practice. I believe in freedom of enterprise and in these people being given the right to practise. I do not believe that the government should have the right to pass legislation to force opticians out of business, which is what this amounts to. We will all have medical insurance when this legislation passes and in any particular province will have to seek the services of a medical practitioner, not of an optician, and the opticians will be put out of business. It will take months and months to get an appointment and years and years to increase the number of eye, ear, nose and throat specialists to carry the extra load placed upon them.

Why not start this legislation off properly? Why distort the usual practice which has been in effect? People are used to opticians and to