

Friends of Medicare fight extra billing

by Sandra Corbett

The Alberta Committee on Assessments of Physicians Bills, established in January 1981 to assess the fairness of extra billing practices has proven that the majority of the 130 extra bills reviewed were unjustified.

"The committee has decided that only 17 of the 130 extra bills assessed, or 13 percent were justified, in fact, 43 of the doctors, or 33 percent backed down on the extra bill and 48, or 36.9 percent were found to be unjustified and

were therefore cancelled or the money was refunded to the patient," said Don Aitken, Friends of Medicare coordinator.

The Friends of Medicare is an organization which opposes the practice of extra billing; according to Aitken, "Our position has been that extra billing should not be allowed in the first place and that the Committee was simply set up to take the heat off the doctors and the government."

The Friends of Medicare is calling on Hospitals and Medical

Care Minister, Dave Russell, to save taxpayers money by disbanding the assessment committee. They also want legislation introduced this fall to put an end to extra billing.

According to Aitken, the Friends of Medicare have been "generally putting pressure on, but Mr. Russell is not about to do anything because his idea is that if he had his way, he would return to the private insurance and he's made that statement publicly." Aitken strongly feels that "Mr. Russell should be the last person in the government who should be Health Minister because he doesn't believe in the system."

The Friends of Medicare are being constantly made aware of patients in extra billing predicaments through their hotline. The hotline operators attempt to suggest to patients how to effectively deal with unfair extra billing or in some cases, how not to deal with extra billing by not paying. The hotline has been a success, hundreds of calls from patients with problems have been received. According to Aitken, "patients were referred to the committee as the last resort because we don't agree with the committee."

Many complaints arise because doctors do not inform patients that they will be extra billed. Aitken said "doctors are supposed to tell the patient directly that they are going to extra bill in the first place, but appeal it later" because they, at the time they were told, were not in a position to argue with the doctor or state their opposition because they were ill or going on the operating table.

Don Aitken stated that "everybody has the right to appeal and everybody is supposed to

know about this committee, but, in fact, they don't and the people who are supposed to be telling them are not telling them."

For example, one woman received a letter from her doctor stating that he was going to take her to a collection agency. The woman wrote to the College of Physicians and Surgeons to complain about the doctor, their reply stated that they were sorry but there was nothing they could do about it. However, the College is supposed to be working with the assessment committee and it is their job to pass complaints over to the committee. In this case, neither the doctor, nor the College, informed the woman about the review appeal process.

The Friends of Medicare feel that all extra billing is unjust and that government has a responsibility to pay the bills. They claim the government is allowing doctors to "weasel" out of the Medicare insurance plan by letting them extra bill their patients.

The Friends of Medicare maintain that the assessment

committee should not be necessary, because if extra billing did not exist, taxpayer's dollars would not be helping fund a committee that only protects the doctors.

The organization is planning to step up their campaign against extra billing this fall.

They have plans to institute individual memberships to the Friends of Medicare and are producing an informative brochure on extra billing and how to fight it. They will also hold public forums and are planning, in the event of a fall election, to make extra billing an important campaign issue.

"Mr. Russell is trying to sweep this issue under the rug but Albertans won't stand for it, particularly with the upcoming election," said Aitken. The Friends of Medicare plans to launch a province wide awareness campaign, raising the issue and education the public in ways to fight the crisis that Medicare is facing.

Meet your favorite MLA

by Michael Leitch

On October 13, the SU is presenting the 3rd annual University Night at 8:00 p.m. in the Lister Hall Banquet Room.

All students are welcome to attend the "wine and cheese" event, as it provides a good opportunity for students to talk with faculty members, MLA's, aldermen, and MP's alike.

The event is being organized by Tony Brouwer, SU external commissioner, and v.p. external, Teresa Gonzales. Gonzales states that "University Night is basically

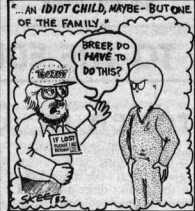
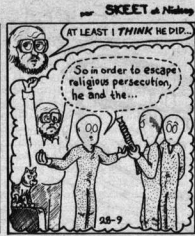
a lobby night for students to try to make MLA's more aware of why students are concerned with what they are."

"The provincial government will soon be drawing up next year's budget. That budget will determine how much money the University will receive in grants."

"Basically," states Gonzales, "University Night is an information session."

The evening is costing the SU approximately \$1,600.

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Students' Union Employment Opportunities

Returning Officer

Responsibilities:

- Performance of duties normally required by a Returning Officer (staff recruitment and hiring, poll organization)
- Conduct elections under the "Nominations and Elections Bylaw" (Bylaw 300, or such other elections or referenda as the Students' Council designates)

Qualifications:

- Organizational and administrative skills a necessity
- Familiarity with previous Students' Union elections and background of computing knowledge an asset

Remuneration:

- \$5.00 per hour

Term of Office:

- Immediately to 31 March 1983

Housing and Transport Commissioner

Responsibilities:

- Assist Vice-President (External) with external programmes of the Students' Union
- Investigate Government and University programmes of housing and transportation of concern to students
- Serve as Chairperson of the Housing and Transport Commission of the Students' Union

Remuneration:

- \$200 per month, September 1982 to March 1983

Term of Office:

- Immediately to 31 March 1983

Deadline for Applications: Thursday, 30 September 1982

For information and/or Applications, please contact the Students' Union Executive Offices, 259 Students' Union Building, phone 432-4236.

Students' Union Involvement Opportunities

Discipline, Interpretation and Enforcement Board (D.I.E.) Board

Requires:

- 2 Alternate Members

Duties:

- Acts as administrative tribunal for S.U. Constitution and Bylaws

Bylaws

- has "court-like" powers
- investigates and tries alleged breaches of discipline
- enforces discipline among Students' Union members
- interprets S.U. Constitution and Bylaws

Term of Office:

- Immediately to 31 May 1983

Eugene L. Brody Funding Board

Requires:

- 2 Members-at-Large

Duties:

- Determine Students' Union financial donations to various charitable, developmental, or relief projects from the Eugene Brody Fund.

Term of Office:

- Immediately to 31 March 1983

Housing and Transport Commission

Requires:

- 1 Student-at-Large Member

Duties:

- Make recommendations to Students' Council respecting housing and transport concerns
- Investigate development and zoning plans for the University area

Term of Office:

- Immediately to 31 March 1983

Nominating Committee

Requires:

- 1 Student-at-Large Member

Duties:

- Selection Commissioners of the S.U.; members of S.U. boards; Directors of S.U. services; Speaker for Students' Council

Term of Office:

- Immediately to 31 March 1983.