

Medicare

My view is that the proper place to do so is in paragraph (f) by definition of those who are regarded as medical practitioners for the purpose of the act. That would be neater. But the object of the amendment is simple. It is in line with the amendment we have in mind, and we shall support it. On the same basis, I believe the hon. member for Hamilton South will support our amendment when we come to paragraph (f).

Mr. Rynard: The minister, not being a medical man, may have failed to grasp this point. But there are not enough ophthalmologists to look after the need for eye care in Canada. Optometrists do 70 per cent of the work. The ophthalmologists are concentrated in the big cities. In effect, this means that those who live in the cities go to the ophthalmologist and have their bills paid while those who live in smaller cities will go to the optometrist and have to pay their bills themselves. Consideration must be given to this point if proper health care is to be given.

Mr. Orlikow: A great deal has been said on this side of the house to the effect that we should not proceed with the legislation before us because the necessary personnel are not available in sufficient numbers. I do not agree with that contention, but I certainly believe we ought to make full use of the skill and experience which are available. These qualities are not necessarily to be found only among graduate medical doctors.

I wish to turn to the field of mental health. There is at present a disturbing shortage of psychiatrists to look after patients suffering from mental or emotional illnesses. Indeed, there is little possibility that patients who are mentally or emotionally ill will be able to secure the services of a qualified person within a reasonable period. Yet this bill, in its present form, is saying to people who are mentally ill: you must see a psychiatrist.

My hon. friend from Hamilton South was concerned some time ago with the case of a patient who had been recommended to visit a psychologist. Under the terms of the medical plan in question, the Civil Service Medical Insurance Plan, fees paid to a psychologist can not be recovered, though fees paid to a psychiatrist are recoverable.

What happens is this: if a doctor recommends that a person covered by this plan—one of the better insurance plans—should see a psychologist, the patient will, obviously, say: Your advice is probably very good but my bill will only be paid by the Civil Service Medical

[Mr. Fulton.]

Insurance Plan if I go to a psychiatrist. So, I will go to a psychiatrist.

When the minister says that only fees charged by medical doctors can be covered, he is saying that if people wish to have their bills paid they must go, in a case such as I have mentioned, to a psychiatrist rather than to a psychologist. I can assure members of this committee that getting to see a psychiatrist in any city in Canada is a very difficult thing; their time is already completely filled.

If the bill is passed in its present form, a patient who does manage to see a psychiatrist will be able to recover the cost of treatment to the extent of the time actually spent with the psychiatrist. But should the psychiatrist recommend that the patient see a clinical psychologist, for example, for tests to be carried out—there are I.Q. tests, and so on; a whole battery of tests; I am not an expert in this field—the psychologist's fees, the cost of carrying out these tests, would have to be paid for by the patient himself. If we were to follow the minister's interpretation of this bill we should be heading into a disastrous situation.

● (5:40 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Chairman, I am rising on behalf of our group to say that we are one hundred per cent behind the amendment now before us.

I was somewhat astounded a moment ago by the argument put forward by the minister and I detected once again the supremacy of the medical profession.

I think that the first flaw in this bill is the faulty interpretation of the words "medical practitioner". In my opinion, the expression "medical practitioner" should have a wider meaning and not be confined to the high spheres of medicine and used only in the case of physicians or those who have always wanted to stay well anchored in that field. I believe that the medical profession has a much wider scope than the general public think today.

If my eyes are sore, if I have a toothache, I do not go and see a surgeon whose specialty is the removal of appendices or anything else; I go and see an oculist, a dentist. I consider them medical practitioners in those fields as much as the other, for instance, general practice. I have always felt that it was possible to compare an optician, a dentist or a psychiatrist to a general practitioner. It seems to me that if someone suffers from an eye deficiency, a toothache or a mental disorder, he should be