

Medicare

has not been done in any publicly administered plan in Canada and that is why I am giving consideration to following that procedure. I am suggesting that this as a way to overcome this difficulty. I believe this will be accepted as a genuine effort to meet the problems of the optometric profession.

Mr. Rynard: Mr. Chairman, I should like to thank the minister for his explanations, but I am wondering whether anything was said about this at the federal-provincial conferences. Were optometrists not spoken about? Has the minister no indication of what the provinces intend to do about this question? If he has, why does he not take us into his confidence and tell us what is going to be done? Surely something must be done. At the present moment in the field of physiotherapy in Ontario there is discrimination. If patients are sent to a hospital they are covered under the plan. If they are sent to a physiotherapist who does not work in a hospital, his services are not paid for under the plan. This is discrimination.

The points we would like cleared up are: What are the prospects? What is being proposed? Where are we going from here? As I say, I thank the minister for his explanations. I think some of them were overdue but he did give us some good explanations. But the key points are the attitude of the federal and provincial governments and what the situation is regarding optometrists and the other paramedical services in view of the statement in the Hall commission report that optometrists could be included very easily.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, the feelings of the provinces have been expressed, of course, in their own plans. They have not included eye refractions as an insured service. This has been reflected in the discussions we have held. I believe the proposal I now suggest is the kind of proposal that the provinces would feel is the correct one at this time.

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Chairman, I should like to ask the minister a question. The minister seems to miss the whole point of the argument which has been put forward by this particular part of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Our position is that the federal government should supplement provincial schemes. If the provincial schemes allow the services to be rendered and to be compensated for, the federal government should agree to pay one half of the cost. When the minister tries to reproach us for increasing the cost of the scheme, he is

completely misinterpreting and distorting our position.

Our primary position is and has always been that the role that the federal government should be playing is to supplement provincial schemes, and the minister cannot deny that. Not being able to deny it, when he says that by our insistence, if the provinces include these related services, we will be running counter to what we criticized him for on the resolution stage, he must admit he is guilty of a distortion of our position.

Why, therefore, does he not now say to the provinces and to this house that what we will do is supplement medical insurance plans which the provinces introduce. The provincial governments are not unintelligent. They are responsible for the licensing of medical and paramedical people. Does the minister want to arrogate that power unto himself? I would think not. Why then does he not say to the provinces: If you institute a prepaid medical insurance plan and decide to cover under it the cost of the services of qualified practitioners in the field of medical care generally speaking, we will pay half the cost? That is what we are asking him to do.

Why does the minister go through these long and obfuscated arguments about whether certain provinces do or do not now include these services? The province of British Columbia has one scheme, the province of Alberta has another. The province of Ontario has a different one and the province of Saskatchewan a different one still. Presumably they are satisfactory to the voters in those provinces. If they are not it is not the business of the minister to say that they should be changed.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, why does the minister not simply and straightforwardly say that he will now accept amendments in this committee to this bill to provide that services in the field we are discussing here, services which the provinces are prepared to include in a prepaid medical insurance scheme, will be compensated for the extent of 50 per cent by the federal treasury? That is all we are asking the minister to do. If he will do that we could get on with the bill and really bring about a medical insurance scheme to cover all the people of Canada and do so very quickly. This is our common aim and objective.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, I will tell the hon. gentleman very quickly why it is not possible to accede to his request. We had this out fully on second reading. The proposal the