

questions before us. The Committee also visited the Department's Wellington district office and was shown the office procedures involved in dealing with claims under the General Medical Services Scheme and in the pricing of prescriptions in connection with pharmaceutical benefits. Except as just indicated, the proceedings took the form of discussions.

GENERAL OUTLINE OF COMMITTEE'S APPROACH

7. The Committee considered that its principal function was to explore the measure of agreement to be reached on various problems relating to medical services between the representatives of the two bodies immediately concerned with the difficulties occasioned by those problems—namely, the medical profession and the Department. As was to be expected, the representatives met each other with fairly well-established but divergent views on some issues, but each group of representatives was actuated by a sincere desire to appreciate and weigh the objections and difficulties on any point felt by the other group. Much of the discussion that took place was exploratory of these differing views in an endeavour to reach agreement.

The result was that on a number of matters, some of great importance, the Committee's recommendations were arrived at by concessions being made by one body or the other in order to reach a basis that afforded some reasonable hope of general acceptance and satisfactory operation. On many points, therefore, the recommendations made do not necessarily conform to the opinions of individual members of the Committee.

8. From the commencement of its deliberations the Committee recognized that any recommendations made by it must be governed by the wording of the order of reference which required it to "advise as to what alterations are necessary to give effect to the Government's policy of making available adequate and proper medical services (general and specialist) free or substantially free of cost."

9. The requirement, as a matter of Government policy, that medical services should be free or substantially free of cost to the patient relieved the Committee from the necessity of considering any suggestions that did not satisfy this requirement. In effect this meant that the Committee was to commence its investigations with the consideration of the best means of remunerating medical practitioners from the Social Security Fund for services that should be free or substantially free to the public. This brought the Committee at an early stage to a consideration of the method of dealing with the most important aspect of medical services—the General Medical Services Scheme.

10. The information supplied to the Committee as to the payments made from the Fund under the General Medical Services Scheme disclosed cases where general practitioners were receiving annual sums much in excess of what could be regarded as reasonable and proper remuneration. The Committee was unanimous in its desire to devise a system and methods to guard against excessive payments and to eliminate abuses. To achieve this end under such new system the Committee recommends that steps be taken to place upon the profession itself as a body a large degree of responsibility for the ethical behaviour of its members and for the general quality of all medical services afforded in relation to benefits. This report, therefore, includes recommendations for giving responsibility of this nature to the New Zealand Branch of the British Medical Association through advisory and disciplinary committees to be set up as hereinafter suggested.

11. The next major question with which the Committee was faced was that under the present arrangements many specialist services afforded under conditions of private practice are not as yet the subject of adequate benefits, and, therefore, to a large number of patients constitute a considerable financial burden. The making of recommendations whereby specialist services as well as general medical services should be available free or substantially free of cost to the patient involved the examination of many aspects of specialism, and the Committee's recommendations in this respect are set out in detail in later portions of the report.