

CIVIL SERVICE RETIREMENT

If Dr. Blewett is unable to prevent even the salaried medical officers in the departments from prescribing unwarranted treatment (over-servicing), then he has an impossible task ahead controlling Medicare. It would indeed be surprising if a commodity supplied at no cost to the recipient were not used in greater amount than justified by its cost to the community. To prevent over-servicing the medical department relies on computer profiles of medical practices. If a doctor is found to be treating "too many" colds, tonsils, gall stones or whatever, he is asked to please explain and if he can't he might get a call from the Commonwealth Police. Not a very satisfactory procedure but in the absence of patient fees how else can the government limit the cost of Medicare.

A group of doctors within the Civil Service provides medical certificates to persons who retire from the Service on medical grounds. The certificate entitles the retiree to superannuation payment.

A computer could be run over these salaried doctors to see how the very expensive treatment- superannuated retirement - which they prescribe lines up with national averages.

Of every seven privately insured superannuants, one will retire because of ill-health; six because they have reached pensionable age. But in 1977-78, 72% of Commonwealth superannuants retired because of ill-health. By 1981-82 this had dropped to a still high 38%.

I have been told about the tough life in the Civil Service but I had not realised how bad it was. I am moved to remorse by my past disregard for their welfare, by the discovery that the biggest single cause of early retirement (32% in 1980-81) is not heart disease but disorders of the nervous system, mainly neurosis.

The Commonwealth statistician tells us that only 3% of the public suffer psychotic illness. We are driving our civil servants neurotic. Even though the Commonwealth retiree can take another job without loss of pension, we must believe that the illnesses are genuine; they are certified by Commonwealth Medical Officers.

These doctors would surely be disciplined if they were "over-servicing". Surely the AMA would be quick to point to salaried doctors over-servicing even if they are AMA members. No, the Civil Service must be going mad.

If the Civil Service is not going mad, then Medicare is mad. If the supply of sickness retirements from within the government's own departments can't be controlled by resort to standards or, I add ethics, then neither can the delivery of other medical services.

To control cost, the government will be forced to resort to full waiting rooms and other forms of queuing. The best treatment will be provided free to those who can pull strings; these will be the wealthy, as they are in Britain.