

PROPOSED INCREASE IN DOCTORS' FEES

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. JOHN GORTON

Dr. Forbes announced last night that he was concerned at the size of the fee increases recommended by the State Branches of the Australian Medical Association.

He also stated that he could not accept their recommended increases as reasonable.

Speaking for the Government I now say that we are more than concerned at the size of the increases. We are appalled that in the circumstances in which Australia finds itself such great increases in fees should be even considered by the A. M. A.

The result of these increases would be to present a Bill of \$32 million to the Australian people and this cost would have to be borne either by the patients of doctors or by the taxpayer.

I hope and believe that individual doctors in the profession, as good Australians would be more responsible than to endorse the stand taken by their representatives.

The Government believes there is no justification whatever for increases of this size. We do not believe that any profession should be able to fix their fees at any level which appeals to them when they are supported by public money.

If agreement cannot be reached between the Government and the A. M. A. on reasonable increases we believe the matter should go to Arbitration and not be decided by unilateral action on the part of the A. M. A.

If the A. M. A. refuses to accept this course then the Government is duty bound in the interests of the Australian people and of the fight against inflation to take all measures open to it to combat the proposed rise.

I have asked representatives of the A. M. A. to come to Canberra to discuss this whole matter with me on Friday.