

QUESTION: Does this mean that the Government is prepared to legislate to force the funds to provide/cover for chronically ill patients if need be? full

PRIME MINISTER: At the moment it doesn't mean any more than I have indicated there. I had quite a long talk with Ralph Hunt this morning and he has been very concerned about it. We were both concerned that chronically ill people should be fully protected. The way to go about it, is that he is preparing a report for Cabinet so that we can discuss it at the earliest opportunity. We will have to see where we go from there.

QUESTION: You have said, as you say, that you are determined that the chronically ill will be protected. Will this be by the private funds?

PRIME MINISTER: Let me just not go beyond, at the moment, that plain statement - that the chronically ill will be protected.

QUESTION: There have been suggestions, Prime Minister, that the Government might take over responsibility for the bills of the chronically ill. Would you see that then as an option at this stage?

PRIME MINISTER: I think that if funds are insuring somebody for a long while, and they become chronically ill, or have preexisting illnesses, that there is an obligation for the funds, at one sense, to take the good with the bad. I think the Government would be approaching it from that basis.

QUESTION: Does the whole situation show up quite a major mistake in the Government's new guidelines?

PRIME MINISTER: No, not at all, not at all. The whole purpose of health insurance is to protect people when they are sick - you don't need protection when you are well, when you are fit and young perhaps, but when you do become sick you need protection. If you become chronically sick you need that protection even more.

QUESTION: Yet, up to this point in time, the funds haven't imposed these sorts of restrictions.

PRIME MINISTER: That is exactly it. I really can't go beyond this at the moment. The Minister is reporting to the Government on the matter, Cabinet will be discussing it, and both the Minister and myself are determined that those who need protection, will be protected. Can we leave it at that, and we will see what comes out of our examination.

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