

OTTAWA (CP) — Former prime minister Lester Pearson hovered near death late Wednesday, his weakened body gradually yielding to cancer.

His physician, Dr. P. M. Burton, said earlier in the day it was impossible to say whether death would be a matter of hours or days. The condition of the 75-year-old former diplomat, Nobel Peace Prize winner and prime minister was grave and deteriorating.

At that time Mr. Pearson had lapsed into unconsciousness, and later an oxygen unit was carried into his Rockcliffe home where he is being treated.

Until Wednesday, the illness had not been publicly specified, but Dr. Burton said that "the cancer has now spread to the liver." Mr. Pearson had his right eye removed in 1970, as part of an operation to eliminate a tumor in that area.

About a month ago he re-entered hospital for further unspecified treatment, and then he and his wife, Maryon, flew to Florida for a scheduled three-week holiday. But they returned Christmas Eve, and since then Mr. Pearson's condition has deteriorated rapidly.

The two Pearson children, Patricia—Mrs. Walter Hannah of Toronto—and Geoffrey, an external affairs officer now lecturing at the University of British Columbia, were both at home.

Mr. Pearson, who resigned as prime minister in 1968 after five years in office and 10 years as Liberal party leader, was working on his memoirs—one volume has already been published—until this recent illness forced him to stop.

After his eye operation, he gave up all outside activities, including lecturing at Carleton University and any follow-up work connected with his World Bank study on aid to underdeveloped countries.

The gravity of Mr. Pearson's condition was not officially made public until Tuesday, pending the arrival of his son and daughter. Since Christmas Eve, said a family friend, the deterioration has been "very rapid."

Apart from doctors, only a few close relatives and friends entered the attractive Rockcliffe home Wednesday.

Another former prime minister, John Diefenbaker, who was Mr. Pearson's political adversary for 10 years, Wednesday asked Canadians to pray for Mr. Pearson.

"I think I speak for Canadians as a whole, that their prayers should go up to Almighty God that He in His grace will allow Mr. Pearson to continue his work internationally,

to which he now is giving his entire devotion."

Prime Minister Trudeau continued his skiing holiday with his family at Whistler Mountain, B.C., Wednesday, but the illness of Mr. Pearson could cut short his vacation.

"We understand that if Mr. Pearson's condition continues to worsen, the prime minister might fly back to Ottawa later today," an RCMP spokesman said Wednesday.



The personal physician of Lester B. Pearson said Wednesday that the former prime minister is hovering near death and that it was impossible to say whether it would be a matter of hours or days.

Pearson

near death

as

cancer spreads