

‘All three main parties are trying to get to grips with the challenges facing the UK economy’

CUTS SEEM inevitable — but not to the detriment of frontline public services such as the NHS. That was the buzz at the three party conferences this autumn.

No doubt there will be some impact on the health service, and the BMA has been putting pressure on the political parties to make sure frontline services to patients and the terms and conditions of the doctors delivering them are not adversely affected.

Conference season was enlightening, as it provided some much needed clarity on the parties’ opinions on public sector finances, and there were numerous discussions in the conference halls and fringe meetings about how to deal with the massive hole in public finances and the possible implications for public services.

All three main parties are trying to get to grips with the challenges facing the UK economy and how public services should respond. The BMA will be putting forward its own views, but has already called for

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an end to wasteful private sector contracts, through its Look After Our NHS campaign.

MPs returned to Westminster earlier this month to start to tie up loose ends in legislation, before the Queen’s speech on November 18. On the day of their return, they supported measures in the Health Bill to prohibit cigarette vending machines and the display of tobacco at the point of sale — measures welcomed by the BMA.

The health bill and a large number of other bills will have to complete their parliamentary stages in the next few weeks, as the Queen’s speech marks the start of the new parliamentary session. The next session will be a short one, because the general

election must take place before June 3, 2010.

As we approach the election, there will be questions from doctors on how best to lobby prospective parliamentary candidates. In anticipation of this, the BMA’s in-house parliamentary team has launched its first newsletter for members, *Inside Parliament*.

The newsletter summarises the BMA’s activities at Westminster. There is also an update on the party conference season, as well as an introduction to the BMA parliamentary team.

A good number of doctors are in touch with their local politicians, and it is hoped that this resource from the BMA — which will be produced bi-monthly — will be useful to them.

Future editions will offer specific tips on engaging with prospective parliamentary candidates as the election draws nearer.

Read *Inside Parliament* by logging in at www.bma.org.uk/lobbying

Robert Okunnu is BMA head of parliamentary relations