

BMA accuses Lawson of 'fiddling the books'

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By Pat Healy, Social Services Correspondent

The British Medical Association yesterday accused the ~~Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr Nigel Lawson, of "fiddling the books"~~ in alleging that family practitioner services would overspend by £100m this year, and then imposing that figure as a cut on health authorities.

Dr John Ball, chairman of the BMA general medical services committee, said: "If the Chancellor had moved in and looked at the books and found the economy in a dreadful state and then said everyone has to make a 1 per cent saving, that might have been understandable. But that is not what he has done.

"I do not see the basis for his action, or the basis for his calculation, which has led to him making an external and arbitrary decision with no idea of the damage he was doing to the health service."

Dr Ball's calculations indicate that any overspending by the family practitioner service is likely to be of the same order as in the past three years: about 3 to 6 per cent on budgets drawn up by the Department of Health and Social Security, using Treasury assumptions on inflation and earnings.

Those calculations, he said, have been consistently underestimated because they were drawn up in advance of pay rounds.

"When it happens once, that is chance. When it happens twice, it is coincidence. When it happens three times, that is enemy action", he said.

When under-budgeting went on year after year, there was no way that either the Treasury or the health department could be surprised if they were exceeded.