Let's spare a thought this month for patients, groups of embarrassed strangers putting condoms onto broomsticks or bananas or, when they're really caught short, onto each other's fingers.

As fear in the community grows about the cost of caring for the sick and dying, the pressure is on the trainers to stop the spread of the virus. The government wants them to 'educate, co-ordinate and evaluate' - but of course what the government really wants them to do is to come in under budget.

And so, with a growing public health problem and limited resources, the pressure is on the AIDS Educators to kick goals! - without a ball! It's not surprising that they're suffering from psycho-sexual stress at the moment. They are the people who have to answer all the questions in the wake of each new terrifying media campaign about AIDS. As all those couples start falling onto beds of needles, the phones start ringing with the questions.

The questions in country areas can be particularly difficult, for example, this frequently asked question which puts the beef industry in a whole new light: "If a man with AIDS has sex with a cow, and then I milk the cow and drink the milk, will I get it?" And "What if a mosquito bites a man with AIDS and then bites the cow, will I get it then?"

Country AIDS Educators must also grapple with what I refer to clinically as 'The Easter Show Factor' - that time of the year when country folk come down to the Big Smoke to have a little Greek (the Ottoman Ride) with a city prostitute and to share a needle with the stock and station agent from Elders.

But perhaps the most difficult situation to deal with is the earnest Australian male who looks the AIDS Educator in the eye and says, "Yes, I do occasionally visit the men's toilets behind the footy club for a f.ck and s.ck" (as they so bluntly put it, I hope I don't have to spell this out). "But I'm definitely not a pooper because I'm married, I've got fourteen children, I'm a Catholic, and if that doesn't convince you, I'm a Rotarian!"

It's at about this point in the conversation that many AIDS Educators start to think about changing to a sensible job like the Quit campaign, or the baby health immunisation program.

But even the problem of the Aussie father of fourteen pales into insignificance when the Educator is faced with the apparently sane and intelligent Australian woman who still falls for the following two lines -

"If you loved me you wouldn't want me to wear a condom" and "I have been faithful to you for the entire 32 years of our married life."

Patients, there'll be more on AIDS in this column next month. Goodbye until then.

Send your problems to Dr Hartman's secretary, Julie McCrossin, care of ALR.