

Champions of the cause



HILARY BUTLER, immunisation awareness campaigner, does not worry that the medical establishment probably regards her as a pain in the neck. She is sure such is the fate of all who challenge the expertise of the "experts" in any field.

With no trace of immodesty, she recalls Barnes Wallis, the "dam buster" whose bouncing bomb concept was rubbished by the top brass, and Marconi, who was told that radio waves beamed up into space would never come back.

"They were probably regarded as pains in the neck."

Butler is the energy behind — although deliberately not an office holder in — the Immunisation Awareness Society, which aims to challenge official pronouncements about the advisability of mass immunisation of children.

She first began to question the wisdom of doctors' advice — which she had always unquestioningly accepted — during and after the troublesome birth of her first child which, she alleges, was complicated by needless interference.

"For the first time in my life," she says. "I decided to trust my instincts."

Those instincts urged her not to have her baby — whom she thought had suffered enough from treatment as a new-born — immunised. That resolve led her to research

the side-effects of immunisation and, as she puts it, the idea snowballed.

These days, Butler's telephone runs hot with invitations to address workshops and conferences and her mailbox is crammed with requests for information from consumers.

She concedes that her work has emotional and psychological costs. The last year, she says, has been "far too busy." Public concern about the hepatitis B vaccination campaign, coming hard on the heels of the debacle surrounding the meningococcal meningitis immunisations, has kept her working at least three hours a day and every second night till 2 am.

"It affects the family. I get tired and when I get tired I get bitchy and the children don't get the attention they deserve."

But Butler balances against that the distress of the parents who are told by doctors they are neurotic idiots and her Christian conviction that "we are put on this earth to help people."

She says there are real frustrations in taking on the machinery of the medical establishment and the pharmaceutical companies, which she compares to a "Sherman tank on auto pilot."

But the rewards come in the letters of thanks she gets from people.

Butler estimates that she has spent about \$10,000 in the past three years on toll calls — national and international.

There have been many times she has considered throwing in the towel. "I have no doubt about the wisdom of the issue," she says. "But there are a lot of people out there and only one of me."