

## **MANUAL THERAPY, WHAT IS IT REALLY?**

Manual therapy is a specialised field in physiotherapy. It consists of an individualised therapeutic approach where a detailed evaluation of the joints, muscles, soft tissues around joints and nerve tissues are carried out. Following this examination, a rehabilitation program is established based on the patient's specific needs, taking into account his age, life style and physical activities.

Manual therapy, as its name indicates, implies the use of the hands to evaluate and treat. Many years of post-graduate training are required to develop expertise in this field. A variety of techniques are used in manual therapy: soft tissue techniques, massage, mobilisations and manipulations. The goal of these techniques is to regain movement and function as well as to decrease pain. Soft tissue techniques (specific massage techniques) are used to relax tight muscles, break down scar tissue and increase circulation. Articular mobilisations vary in speed and amplitude and can be applied to all joints (for example - knees, shoulders, spine). Some mobilisations are of very small amplitude and are done very lightly. These are best used when the condition is more irritable and the intensity of the pain is a major issue. Manipulations are rapid short amplitude movements and they are mainly used when stiffness is a major issue or when there is a joint fixation.

In physiotherapy, the philosophy of treatment is based on an *active approach* which encourages patient independence. Physiotherapists are known as *movement specialists* and they are best trained to prescribe therapeutic exercises to improve posture, muscle strength, mobility, endurance or motor control. Specific exercises, based on the patient's condition, are always taught so that the patient can learn what to do when he has symptoms. Education is a key element for full recovery and prevention of recurrences. It is very important that the patient understands the pathology involved and what to do if symptoms recur. The patient is given the tools to become his own therapist.