

The healing touch

JOHN McNAMEE is earning a reputation for being a lifesaver for hundreds of people in Derry and throughout the North West who are crippled with back pain or sports injuries.

His healing hands and skills as a Chartered Physiotherapist have people flocking to his Hawkin Street clinic, now renamed Foyle Back Pain Clinic. But according to John, throughout the treatment many patients fail to realise that he is in fact blind and relies on his hands to diagnose patients.

John explains: "I have an genetic eye disorder and I knew from the early eighties that I was losing my sight, so I gave up working as an accountant and

retrained to be a physiotherapist.

By Claire Davidson

"The nature of my disorder is such that I can still maintain eye contact with people, so sometimes people who come to my clinic don't realise that I can't see.

"My office is set up in such a way that I can operate very independently here. The first clue people may have to my blind-

ness is when they hear my voice synthesised computer, but often people don't think anything of it."

John trained to become a Chartered Physiotherapist at the North London School of Physiotherapy and after qualifying in 1986 he spent 12 years working his way up to senior positions in London hospitals and training in acupuncture and the treatment of sports injuries.

Last year he moved back to Derry with his three children and wife Bernadette, who operates her own successful counselling service from the Hawkin Street practice.

Although, due to a road accident, John has only been fully running the Foyleside Back Pain Clinic

since April, word of John's ability to sort out all kinds of aches and pains is getting around and he finds himself increasingly busy. Despite his disability John, along with many satisfied of his patients, has full confidence in his ability to get the job done.

"The most common complaints I hear are those of lower back pain, neck and arm pain. I'd would say the main cause for this is our increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Often people will sit down in front of a computer and remain there all day. This does cause pressure on the back and neck and can lead to pain and injury," he said.

"The aim of physiotherapy is to restore normal movement. Back or neck

pain is always accompanied by a restriction in movement and I specialise in soft tissue and spinal manipulation.

Investigative

"When I assess people the first thing I do is place my hand on their shoulder, that usually tells me most of what I need to know. Of course sight would be a big advantage to anyone, but I use my hand to read the muscles of the back. They are my investigative tools," he said.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, John says people are often fascinated at how he can work as a physiotherapist without his sight. "There does seem to be a great deal of interest in my story, but it isn't the pri-

mary reason people come to see me. When the back is injured, people are in a lot of pain and want treatment. I can help them and that is the most important factor."

John gets referrals from GPs, but most of his work is private and he treats common conditions such as Sciatica, whiplash, arthritic knee pain, repetitive strain injury and all types of sports injuries.

John is also a qualified acupuncturist, which he believes is particularly effective when combined with physiotherapy as a method of pain relief.

Appointments can be made with John at the clinic, formerly Foyle Physiotherapy, on 028 7128 0380.

An award to be proud of

A DERRY schoolboy who has been a lifeline for his father and a model