

# Bowenwork for Nurses and Healthcare Practitioners: Healing with Your Hands

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Healing professionals, in their desire to help people, often aspire to make hands-on contact with patients yet still must maintain a healthy, therapeutic relationship. My career began as an Intensive Care-trained RN in a hospital setting in Australia. I loved to use my nursing skills to support my patient's return to health after life-threatening events, but was limited in what else I could offer within my scope of practice.

I became a Naturopathic practitioner, hoping to be able to work in a field that would combine my nursing and naturopathic skills. Fortunately, the positive trend towards Complimentary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), offering integrated, holistic care, has enabled me to fulfill my goals. I currently work in Santa Rosa, CA, in an Integrative Medical practice, alongside an MD Neurologist. Patients are offered highly skilled medical care as well as nutritional supplementation, herbal and homeopathic medicine, acupuncture and Bowenwork to support their recovery from illness or injury.

Of all the modalities I use, Bowenwork is the one I use most often with my patients, giving me the satisfaction of connecting with them through my hands and intuition without any undue strain on my own body.

The late Mr. Tom Bowen, from Geelong, Australia, developed the work from the 1950s through the 1980s and helped thousands of people with many different conditions, acute and chronic — infants, children, adults, disabled and elderly folk.

Bowenwork is a very gentle, soft-tissue technique that resets dysfunctional tissue tension patterns, and supports the body in healing itself (Gustafson, 2010). It facilitates a state of relaxation by resetting the autonomic nervous system from being in sympathetic (fight/flight) dominance to parasympathetic (relax/restore) mode. In this phase, the internal organs function more optimally; with improved digestion and assimilation of nutrients, capillary circulation, tissue healing, and elimination of waste products from the body (Rentsch, 2007).



It is an unusual, minimalistic technique that involves applying a series of light, rolling moves over specific areas of muscles, fascia, tendons and ligaments, interspersed with short mandatory delays to allow the body to integrate the effects of the work. Bowenwork is often performed through loose, light clothing, so people do not need to undress, and no massage oils or lotions are used. Patients usually lie on a bed or massage table, or are seated comfortably to receive the work, which may be performed in a clinic, home or even workplace or sports setting.

Bowenwork is effective in helping patients suffering from stress and pain. Over the past 19 years, I have used it for patients on heavy medication regimes



for conditions like migraines, fibromyalgia and neuropathic pain. Many patients have been able to experience significant reduction in both pain and medication levels, as well as regain function and mobility. It is very effective for muscular-skeletal and postural alignment issues. By relaxing the muscles and soft-tissues, joint range of motion can improve, and patients are better able to mobilize.

As a holistic-minded nurse, I also offer Bowenwork to support wellness for my patients; the practice encourages optimal postural alignment and function, relaxation, and self-reflection, creating capacity to prevent illness.

I have used Bowenwork to support women with gynecological issues, maintain healthy pregnancies and optimize fetal positioning before labor and delivery (Gustafson, 2010). In the post-partum period, Bowenwork can support lactation, as well as healing after birthing and caesarian sections. Babies respond well to Bowenwork and specific procedures exist to address colic, breathing, teething and sleeping issues (Wilks, 2007). Bowenwork can help children with growing pains, bedwetting, learning disorders and injury recovery. Teenagers benefit from good postural support and minimizing the potential for developing scoliosis. It can also help to enhance sporting abilities (Wilks, 2007).

Adults face many different stressors that can impact their health, mentally and physically. Bowenwork can be helpful for relieving headaches, temporomandibular jaw tension, backache, sciatica, and neck and shoulder problems. As people age and postural changes occur, joints can become prone to osteoarthritis, internal organ functions can become sluggish, and patients often complain of digestive and elimination disorders. Bowenwork can be helpful in supporting many of these conditions. Bowenwork is well suited to palliative care settings, helping people cope with the stress of terminal illness, chronic pain and debility. It can also be very supportive for caregivers and family members, too.

Even animals benefit from Bowenwork! There's a saying: "Every body is better with Bowenwork." It's a wonderful way to offer care and healing from the heart, through the hands, for all stages of life.

## References

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## Biography:

*Sandra Gustafson BSN, RN holds a Bachelor of Nursing Science degree from James Cook University, Australia. She attended Cairns College of Natural Therapies (Australia) to become a Naturopathic Practitioner. She learned Bowenwork in 1991 and became an instructor in 1994. She is a licensed RN in the state of California, and currently practices in an Integrative Neurology office in Santa Rosa, CA. Sandra has presented Bowenwork to healthcare practitioners in many different settings and at conferences around the world.*

