



# Bowenwork® - An Effective Therapeutic Intervention?

## A Systematic Review

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### Introduction

Holistic nurse leaders are advocates for inclusion of non-medical therapies within the healthcare spectrum, and transforming healthcare models by educating nurse colleagues, allied health practitioners and patients of evidence-based complementary therapies that offer holistic and patient-centered care. An essential component of promoting wellness-focused care is developing health awareness among our patients (and ourselves) and engaging in positive self-care and lifestyle activities. Holistic nurses gazing 'Through the Looking Glass' at Bowenwork (a gentle, soft-tissue relaxation technique), can enrich their knowledge of this complementary modality and develop a greater understanding of its potential for supporting patients of all ages with various health conditions. Clinical research points towards Bowenwork's potential as a therapeutic intervention to optimize wellbeing, support coping with stressful experiences, recovery from surgery, injuries and illnesses, and facilitate healing.



### Objectives of the Review

The aims of this study were to systematically review the literature available on a complementary healing technique known as Bowenwork, clinical trials using Bowenwork as a therapeutic intervention, and to explore the research methods used.

### Search and Review Methodology

Databases searched included Google Scholar, Medline Ovid, PubMed, PsychINFO, and CINAHL, and professional journals on complementary therapies and bodywork, and Bowenwork journals. The literature search included studies published in English from 1985-2013 using the search-terms: Bowen Technique, Bowen Therapy, Bowtech, and Bowenwork. The studies' abstracts were reviewed, and those that referenced the above search-terms, provided health-related outcomes and data reported as quantitative and/or qualitative information, were included.

### Findings

316 citations were found, and 22 articles met the inclusion criteria:

- randomized clinical trial,  $n=4$
- quasi-experimental,  $n=3$
- mixed methods,  $n=3$
- cross-sectional studies,  $n=2$
- case studies,  $n=10$

62% of the studies reported that Bowenwork was effective for pain reduction, 39% reported improved mobility and 43% reported increased quality of life and/or function.

Additionally, several studies reported Bowenwork's efficacy for the relief of symptoms experienced by people living with chronic illnesses, such as multiple sclerosis, back pain, stroke<sup>1</sup>, and lymphedema in women from post breast-cancer treatment<sup>2</sup>.



One hospital-based, randomized, blinded study of 91 patients evaluated the effectiveness of Bowenwork on patients' post-knee surgery recovery and pain levels versus standard post-surgical care<sup>3</sup>.

A mixed qualitative and quantitative study on 20 participants with frozen shoulder, showed that Bowenwork demonstrated significant improvement in shoulder mobility, function and daily activities<sup>4</sup>.

In a study of 67 babies, <1 year old, presenting with symptoms of colic, 81% had complete recovery within 1 - 2 Bowenwork treatments<sup>5</sup>. A similar study on the efficacy of Bowenwork in relieving colic in babies, showed that in infants with colic symptoms: 62% resolved completely, 23% had significant improvement with mild, incidental recurrences, and 14% showed no improvement in symptoms<sup>6</sup>.



### Conclusions

Bowenwork has the potential to offer noninvasive, affordable, complementary approaches to improving healthcare outcomes, particularly for conditions that have reached the limits of conventional medical care. Bowenwork is a relatively new modality in the USA, even though it is recognized internationally and covered by other national health insurances such as in Australia, Europe and the UK. Scientific research and evidence are sparse and not well documented. Further research is needed to explore Bowenwork's potential applications before it can be widely recommended in general healthcare settings.



### References

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