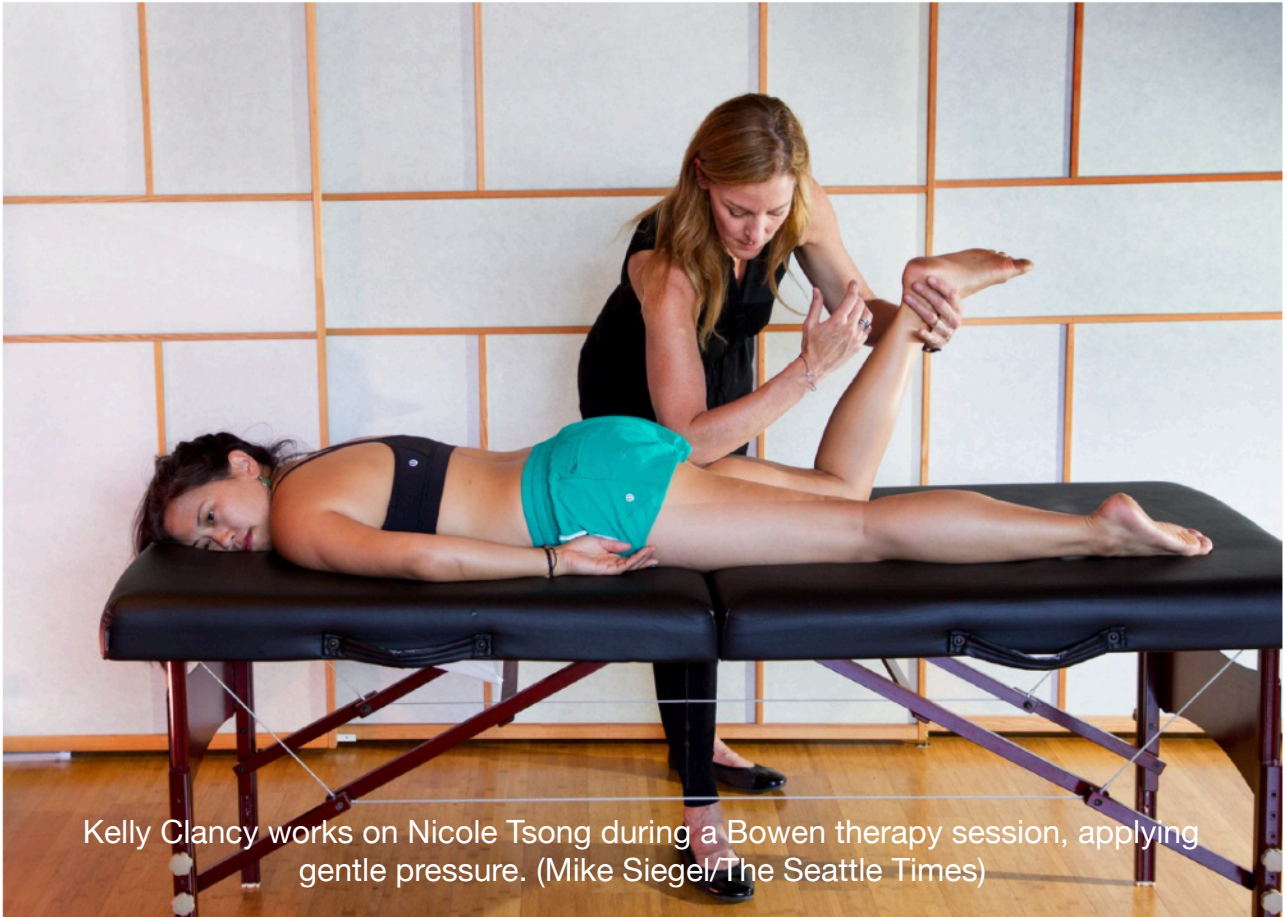


The Seattle Times

Fitness - Life - Lifestyle - Pacific NW Magazine

July 3, 2017

Bowen therapy's light touch can improve alignment, ease pain and increase range of motion



The practice relies on the body's nervous system to do the work after applying light pressure to connective tissue.

BY NICOLE TSONG

KELLY CLANCY'S TOUCH was gentle, much lighter than the firm intensity I was accustomed to from previous body work. Normally, I have to take deep breaths to tolerate the intensity of pressure on tight connective tissue.

I was at Clancy's clinic, the Seattle Center for Structural Medicine in Ballard, to experience Bowen therapy, a type of body work with a light touch, designed to coax your body to heal on its own through the nervous system.

Clancy is a Bowen instructor and practitioner. While she trained in heavier myofascial work, she's found that the lighter touch can be more effective.

“You can unwind the whole connective tissue system by just a couple different moves on a couple of places,” she says.

I arrived at her clinic without any specific injury or pain, and I was curious to know what she would find. Clancy assessed me first using her own approach, Tensegrity, looking for the body’s main points of tension. Your connective tissues hold your bones in place, and if there is too much tension in any area, it can lead to lack of mobility, pain or injury.

Clancy saw right away that my pelvis was tilted forward, and my weight was shifted toward the balls of my feet, likely because of tight hamstrings. My right arm also didn’t fall straight. Tight hamstrings had led to asymmetry in my pelvis, she said, and as a result, my rib cage twisted to one side, preventing me from fully rotating.

She showed me a more aligned posture, with my pelvis at a neutral position, more lift in my back ribs, a drop in my front ribs and a slight slouch in my shoulders. I had been working on my posture while walking, but apparently had not made full progress.

While I was on the massage table, Clancy said the source of alignment issues was tight tissue on my left leg, inside and outside, and in my hamstring, combined with an overly mobile hip flexor. I had always noticed I was more limber on my right side, but the contrast was stark as I watched Clancy move my left leg in different directions.

Clancy had me lie face-down and said she would be in and out of the room to give my body’s nervous system time to absorb the work.

First, she pressed on my lower back. While I could feel the pressure, it was gentle. After a few moves, she left the room. I rested, and noticed my hip flexors felt warmer than before. Curious.

Clancy came and went, doing various movements on my back, moving upward. I noticed warmth in my hands, like a tingling. She traversed to my upper back, but the tingling moved down to my feet. What was happening?

After she worked on my pecs and upper back, I flipped over. She did a few light touches on my head, then some deeper work on my left hamstring. I updated her, letting her know where I felt sensation. The work is so subtle, some people don’t feel it right away, she said. I also was relaxed, key to getting my body to heal.

Afterward, she did post-tests on my legs. I saw a significant difference in movement from previously tight areas of my left leg. She had me walk backward in the hall to prevent me from falling back into old walking patterns, then had me walk while swinging my rib cage more. Everything felt easier.

The biggest shift came after the session, when I was out for a walk. I didn’t have to think about my alignment; I was naturally walking with my weight shifted toward my heels, my front ribs pulling down toward my hips and my shoulders relaxed. I hope this new alignment stays.

Clancy has seen pain go away and range of motion return in as few as two sessions. After one session, I believe it.

Nicole Tsong teaches yoga at studios around Seattle. Learn more or reach her at nicoletsong.com. Mike Siegel is a Seattle Times staff photographer.

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