

## **THERAPEUTIC ACTION** by *Penny Schreiber, 2008*

This qualitative study explores how psychotherapists think about and hold a sense of their patients' futures, about what may be possible or desirable for an individual that may have been foreclosed. All of the participants knew something about the topic, although they approached it from different theoretical points of view and with different language. Their knowledge of these phenomena came from long experience as psychotherapists. From their responses it would seem that holding a sense of the patient's future, though not often addressed, is an essential psychotherapeutic function, forming a generally unspoken and often unconscious frame of reference for psychotherapy. Data was collected in one hour semi-structured interviews with ten experienced psychoanalytic psychotherapists from different professional fields and theoretical orientations. Each was recorded on audiotape and transcribed. Data analysis followed the Grounded Theory approach described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Findings of the study reveal that although the participants all hold and actively work with a sense of the patient's future, most of them described this in terms of holding hope and possibility. The findings include: holding hope and possibility, therapist hope as action, therapist influence, patient hope and hopelessness, affect regulation, anxiety about change, the relation of affects and symptoms to the patient's sense of future possibility, and the impact of the past on the future.