

SIX MONTHS

After George was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), his doctor told him he probably had six months to live and to go out and do all the things he had postponed doing. In addition, he prescribed an experimental drug, Rilutek, that had the potential to increase his life a month or two. George refused to take the drug because of the potential serious side effects that might reduce his current quality of life.

1. Try to imagine what it would be like to be told by your doctor that you probably have six months to live. How would you process that message? Do you think doctors should tell patients that information if they don't ask for it? If you only had a limited time to live, how would you live it?
2. Would you share the news with your family and friends? Why or why not? When and how would you do this while still protecting your own privacy and personal rights?
3. Would you consider taking an experimental drug if it might increase your life another month or two, but had the potential to reduce the quality of your life? Would your decision be different if you were younger—or had dependants? Do you think patients in these circumstances should feel an obligation to participate in experimental protocols that may have long-term benefits for others? Explain.

4. Describe your reaction to George's statement after he heard the bad news, "I know what's going to be on my death certificate. That's more than you can say?" Were you surprised?