



OUR ANGELS OF LIFE

"You're some organizer, Phyl. I'm glad you're on my team."

There is a tension that many terminally ill people embrace: whether to struggle for the possibility of more time through aggressive treatments, or be comforted and call it a day—and a life.

At our February 2002 ALS support group meeting, two speakers came from the local hospice organization to share their program with us. They passed out literature that explained all aspects of the program, reviewed the services they provided, how hospice is paid for as a Medicare program, who is entitled to participate, and how to get an evaluation at home.

Several in our group already had hospice services at home and were still able to attend the support group meetings. They shared how comforting it was for them and their family to have the support of a nurse they could call twenty-four hours a day. In addition, they didn't have to visit a doctor for prescriptions because a physician visited as needed. Several of the men mentioned that hospice

services improved their quality of life and that of their wives because of the help that the nursing aides provided with toileting, showering and dressing their husbands.

These features pleased George because he wasn't interested in visiting a doctor's office anymore, except for routine exams with his eye doctor and dentist. Furthermore, what he heard from his ALS friends involved in hospice care convinced him that comfort care would improve his chances to live his life with dignity, while remaining close to those he loved instead of in an institution.

On the way home I asked George about his responses to the meeting and if he was interested in having an evaluation.

"I have no idea how close I am to dying," he said without a pause, "and she said they accept you if you are expected to live six months." He added, "I've already lived more than a year and a half since Dr. Noble told me I had six months to live. What the hell's the magic of six months?"

"There's no magic that I know of, George. Perhaps you didn't hear her say that they re-evaluate you every six months. If you're cured at six months, then you may be released from the program, but you can always re-apply. Their focus is caring, not curing. But there isn't any cure with ALS."

"Well, you decide. Can we afford it? They may help you, but I'm not dead yet," he said. He struggled to reach over and pat me.

"No. It's your decision, not mine, George. Medicare and your military benefit will pay for most of