

Dr. Atul Gawande is a surgeon who also writes about medicine and health care, and the article “Letting Go” is not a philosophy article. (It’s a magazine article.) The first time that you read it, should try to read it all in one go—that will make it easier to keep track of the different characters and Gawande’s themes.

Sarah Monopoli had a metastatic cancer. *Metastatic* is a feature of the cancer, not the type of cancer. It means that the cancer has spread from the location of the original tumor to other parts of the body.

Diagram: <https://nci-media.cancer.gov/pdq/media/images/764135.jpg>

Definition on the National Cancer Institute website:

<https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/metastasis>

In section 5, Gawande quotes Stephen Jay Gould who writes,

The literature couldn’t have been more brutally clear: mesothelioma is incurable, with a median survival of only eight months after discovery. (p. 16)

Median survival is not *average* (or *mean*) *survival*. To find the median, we must, first, list the length of time that everyone who has this disease lives after they are diagnosed with it. Then, the *median* is the middle value in that list. This could also be the average value, but it’s often not, and in some cases, it is relatively far from the average—although the average isn’t particularly important in Gould’s case because he ended up being one of the patients who survived longer than most (much longer than the median patient and presumably longer than the average patient also).

Once you’ve read the article one time, go back and determine who these people are and where they are discussed in the article: Sara Monopoli, Sarah Creed, Lee Cox, Dave Galloway, Stephen Jay Gould, and Dr. Susan Block.

Also notate the article with this outline. (You can change the section and sub-section titles and fill in more sub-sections.)

1. Sara Monopoli
2. Section 2
 - 2a. costs for end of life care
 - 2b. “a warehouse for the dying”

3. The history of dying and dying today
4. Hospice & Sarah Creed
 - 4a. Lee Cox
 - 4b. Some data and description of hospice care
 - 4c. Dave Galloway
5. Sara Monopoli
 - 5a. "the options she had left"
 - 5b. how physicians confront patients (or don't)
 - 5c. Sara Monopoli's final treatment, Stephen Jay Gould, and not accepting death
6. Sara Monopoli
7. Progress on end-of-life care
8. Talking about terminal illnesses with patients
 - 8a. How to have discussions with patients and Dr. Susan Block
 - 8b. Jack Block
9. A 29 year old patient
10. Sara Monopoli