



Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST)

Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) is a form that clearly states what level of medical treatment a patient wants toward the end of life. Printed on bright pink paper, and signed by both the patient AND a physician, nurse practitioner or physician assistant, POLST helps give seriously-ill patients more control over their treatment. POLST also helps patients talk with their healthcare team and loved ones about their choices. In this way, POLST can help reduce patient and family suffering and make sure that patient wishes are known and honored.

Hallmarks of POLST are (1) immediately actionable signed medical orders on a standardized form; (2) orders that address a range of life-sustaining interventions as well as the patient's preferred intensity of treatment for each intervention; (3) a brightly colored, clearly identifiable form (4) that is recognized, adopted, and honored across treatment settings.

Completing a POLST form is always voluntary for the patient. California law (AB 3000, Chapter 266) requires that a POLST form be followed by healthcare providers and provides immunity to those who comply in good faith. In the hospital setting, a patient will be assessed by a physician who will issue appropriate orders that are consistent with the patient's POLST preferences.

POLST is important because it gives seriously ill patients a voice in their care, and spares families the confusion and uncertainty regarding what treatments their loved-one wants – or doesn't want. POLST also spares physicians and other clinicians from providing medical procedures which are unwanted by the patient, and helps reduce unnecessary hospitalizations.

California's POLST program is administered by the Coalition for Compassionate Care of California. To find out more about POLST, visit www.caPOLST.org or contact the Coalition at (916) 489-2222.