

PHYSICIAN ORDERS FOR LIFE SUSTAINING TREATMENT (POLST) FORM

What is the POLST form?

The POLST form is a document which your doctor fills out and signs after learning your wishes about what end-of-life health care you want and don't want. It goes a step beyond the Advance Directive by turning your wishes concerning life-sustaining treatment into specific, written medical orders which can be understood and which will be followed by other doctors, nurses, emergency personnel ("EMT's"), and health facilities. The physician orders in the POLST form cover resuscitation, use of antibiotics, and getting fluids through an IV or food through a feeding tube. For example, your POLST form could order that you not be resuscitated if your heart were to stop beating – a do-not-resuscitate or "DNR" order. No matter what your POLST form says about your wishes concerning life-sustaining treatment, you will always be given treatment to make you as comfortable as possible. The form can be reviewed and changed over time as your medical condition or your wishes change.

Where should I keep my POLST form?

The POLST form is a one page, two sided, bright pink form which is meant to be easy to recognize. If you live at home, you should keep it somewhere it can be found in an emergency, such as on your refrigerator with a magnet. If you live in a long term care facility, your POLST form will be kept in your medical chart.

Who should have a POLST form?

If you have a serious, perhaps life-threatening illness, and are faced with end-of-life decisions, you should ask your doctor about completing a POLST form. The POLST is often used for residents of long term care facilities and hospice facilities. If you are named in an Advance Directive as the health care representative for someone who is now unable to communicate her wishes to her doctor, her doctor can complete a POLST form by having you make the necessary end-of-life decisions.

If I have an Advance Directive do I need a POLST too?

The POLST is not meant to replace an Advance Directive, but to complement one. An Advance Directive applies to end-of-life-decisions like the POLST form does, and to other health care questions too, but it is not a doctor's order like the POLST form is. If you have an Advance Directive and have a serious illness, you should talk with your doctor about completing a POLST form to go along with your Advance Directive.

Where can I get the POLST form?

Your doctor can get the POLST form for you from the Center for Ethics in Health Care of the Oregon Health Sciences University. Ask your doctor to get the form by contacting the Center at 503-494-4466, or at www.ohsu.edu/ethics. The Center also has a brochure about the POLST form, wallet cards, and other helpful information.

If you have access to the internet, you can go to the Center's website above for information and links which you may find useful.

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