UPMC PALLIATIVE AND SUPPORTIVE INSTITUTE

WHAT IS POLST?

Pennsylvania Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST)

If you're exploring the many options that palliative and supportive care can offer to you, your family member, or your loved one, you need to know about one of the most important documents out there: the POLST form.

POLST stands for Pennsylvania Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment. The actual form is a portable document that contains a physician's orders. POLST ensures that a patient's wishes to implement, or to limit medical treatments will be carried out by his or her health care providers. The POLST form is a bright pink document that is yours to keep. A copy of the POLST form becomes a part of your medical record.

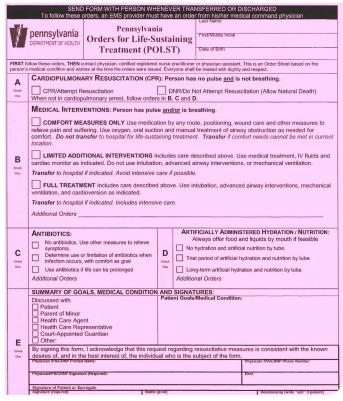
POLST vs. Advance Directives: What is the difference?

You may already have completed a living will that spells out your wishes for health care in case you become sick and can no longer make decisions for yourself. The living will is a good idea, but it is not a medical order—it is not a signed order from a physician directing your care. A living will is a legal document in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania but it only goes into effect when enacted by a physician through a separate order within your medical record. A POLST form is an order so it is already enacted through the signature of the Physician or Certified Registered Nurse Practitioner (CRNP). The POLST form is endorsed in Pennsylvania and is different because it is a signed order from a physician specifying your instructions to be followed by any provider—in the emergency department, in the ICU, in hospice, or anywhere you are receiving care. It is a permanent part of your medical record once it is completed by you and your physician.

It's all about your values.

Some people do not wish to use any artificial means to extend their life when there is no cure. Others believe that every possible effort should be made to extend life until those efforts are no longer successful and death occurs. Most people fall somewhere in between. Feelings about "quantity of life" and "quality of life" often overlap, but **most people know what they want.** Our individual values are just that—individual. What is right for one person may not be right for another.

POLST ensures that your health care providers will honor your values. You can specify treatments that you do—or do not—want, and you can appoint a family member or another person you trust to make decisions for you in case you are not able to do so. You can change your mind (and your instructions on your POLST form) at any time. POLST is a voluntary opportunity to express your wishes very clearly, in a way that ensures your values will be honored.



*Photo of POLST form for illustration purposes only.

Who needs POLST?

People who are living with life-limiting illnesses or who have received a poor prognosis should complete a POLST form. Other candidates for completing a POLST form include the frail elderly or anyone with chronic or acute illnesses that have less than a year of life expectancy.

If you believe POLST is a good idea, ask your doctor. Together, you can discuss your prognosis, your goals and wishes for treatment, and other important topics related to your present and future health. If someone you care about needs to know about POLST, share this article with him or her.

Learn more about POLST:

For more details, visit **www.POLST.org** or speak with your doctor or other health care provider, or send us an email at acppolst@UPMC.edu.

To learn more about palliative and supportive care services at UPMC call the UPMC Palliative and Supportive Institute at **1-855-565-7146**, or send an email to **psicare@upmc.edu**. Visit our website at **UPMC.com/PSI**.

