

A Provider's Guide to POLST
(Physician's Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment)
Kokua Mau

What is POLST?

POLST (Physician's Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) is a physician's order that gives patients more control over their end-of-life care. It specifies the types of treatments that a patient wishes to receive towards the end of life. Completing a POLST form encourages communication between healthcare providers and patients, enabling patients to make more informed decisions. The POLST form documents those decisions in a clear manner and can be quickly understood by all providers, including first responders and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel. As a result, the patient's wishes can be honored across all settings of care.

Is the POLST simply a DNR order?

No, POLST is a document that empowers a patient or their surrogate to make decisions along the whole continuum of care, from very aggressive, life sustaining care, to comfort care only, including choices about full resuscitation or do not attempt resuscitation.

Is POLST the same as an Advance Health Care Directive?

No, POLST does not replace an Advance Health Care Directive (AD). The AD can provide a significant amount of more detail about an individual's wishes and preferences for treatment. In addition, the AD is the most common mechanism for designating a surrogate decision maker for the patient. The POLST does not provide for the designation of a surrogate decision maker.

Will the CCO-DNR Bracelet still be honored by EMS?

Yes, the CCO-DNR Bracelet is still a valid method to communicate a person's intent about attempts to resuscitate. There are still thousands of these bracelets in use, and EMS personnel will continue to honor this directive.

Why is the POLST form lime green?

The POLST form is usually completed on a distinctive bright lime-green form, but is also freely available from the internet and is acceptable in black and white. The bright color is to make the form quickly visible to families and emergency medical services personnel. The lime-green color is also easily copied. A copy is a valid document.

Does the POLST form travel with the patient between settings of care?

Yes, the POLST form is designed to be a standard form that may be accepted by all providers across the state. As a legal physician's order, it will be honored by EMS. Hospitals, long-term care facilities, home care and hospice providers may also voluntarily adopt the form in their institution and include it into their medical records. However, providers with electronic medical records may choose to adapt the essence of the orders into their specific system. Hospital discharge planners are encouraged to support the completion of the POLST form (when clinically appropriate) as a part of their daily practice.

Is implementing the orders from the POLST form protected under Hawaii Law?

Yes. The law states that no provider will be subject to criminal prosecution and civil liability for carrying out the treatment orders in good faith or for performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation if the person performing CPR was unaware of the POLST order to not attempt resuscitation or they believed that the treatment orders (including the DNR order) had been revoked or canceled.

How do providers get more copies of the POLST form?

The form is freely available on the Kokua Mau web site. (www.kokuamau.org) in PDF format for easy replication. It is the standard that the form be on an 8½” X 11” sheet of lime colored paper. The form must have both sides copied on the front and back of the paper.

Where is the family encouraged to keep the form?

For the patient at home, the POLST form should be kept in a place readily accessible by family members. Examples include on the refrigerator, in the medicine cabinet, on the back of a bedroom door or on a bedside table.

Which patients should complete a POLST form?

It is recommended that a patient with a chronic debilitating disease, a seriously ill patient, or a terminally ill patient have both an Advance Health Care Directive *and* a signed POLST form.

Who can explain the POLST form and fill it out?

The patient’s physician or another health care provider must explain to the patient or their surrogate the nature and content of the form, including any medical interventions or procedures. Additionally, the provider must also explain the difference between the POLST form and an Advance Directive. The physician or the healthcare provider may prepare (or fill in) the form, but it **MUST** be signed by the patient’s physician and the patient or their surrogate in order to be valid.

Which physician should be signing the POLST form?

The law stipulates that the physician who is co-signing the POLST form with the patient or their surrogate must be a licensed physician and *must have examined the patient*. The intent of this definition is to assure that there has been a professional relationship between the patient and physician.

Are there limits to what a surrogate decision maker can choose?

There are two types of surrogate decision makers under Hawaii State Law (HRS 327E-5). The appointment of a surrogate decision maker is accomplished in the Advance Healthcare Directive.

- Designated Surrogate: This individual has been appointed by the patient to make any and all health care decisions on behalf of the patient, unless specifically limited by the patient.
- Non-Designated Surrogate: This individual is appointed in accordance with HRS 327E, and has limitations placed upon him or her with respect to decisions about withholding or withdrawing artificial hydration and nutrition.

When should the POLST form be reviewed?

The physician should review the POLST form with the patient or their surrogate whenever there are substantial changes in the health status, when there is a transfer from one setting to another or when the goals for treatment change.

How is the form modified or voided?

A patient or their surrogate may revoke or void the POLST form in any manner that communicates that intent. The form may also be voided by drawing a line through the front of the page (sections A – D) writing “VOID” in large letters on the original and copies, and signing and dating that action.

For more information, contact Kokua Mau at 585-9977.