



July 18, 2016

Anthony Komaroff, MD
c/o Harvard Health Publications
via email: AskDoctorK@hms.harvard.edu

Dear Dr. Komaroff,

Thank you for covering the topic of POLST in your “Ask Dr. K” column on July 12. We agree: it’s important that your readers know that they have that option for themselves or a seriously ill loved one in 42 states.

There are a few key points your readers will also want to know:

1) A POLST Paradigm Form (called different things in different states) can be changed or voided at any time. Since it is a set of medical orders, as a clinical matter, the National POLST Paradigm Task Force recommends POLST Paradigm Form orders be reviewed periodically and specifically when:

- The patient’s goals of care and/or treatment preferences change, or
- A patient is transferred from one care setting or care level to another, or
- There is a substantial change in the patient’s health status.

This information is captured in the directions on the backside of most POLST Paradigm Forms. A new POLST Paradigm Form is also completed if the patient requests a new one with different medical orders.

- 2) A POLST Paradigm Form helps individuals with serious illness or frailty for whom their health care professional wouldn’t be surprised if they died within a year communicate their treatment decisions. The current standard of care during an emergency is for emergency medical services (EMS) to attempt everything possible to save a life. Not all patients who are seriously ill or frail want this treatment, and a POLST Paradigm Form provides the option for these patients to: (1) confirm this is the treatment they want or (2) to state what level of treatment they do want instead.
- 3) A POLST Paradigm Form always remains with the patient, regardless of the care setting. The form should be placed in a visible location recognized by EMS (standard locations include the

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www.polst.org

Mail code: UHN-86
3181 SW Sam Jackson Park Road
Portland, OR 97239-3098
(503) 494-4463

refrigerator and medicine cabinet). These are places that EMS teams will look for Do Not Resuscitate forms.

- 4) While a living will can spell out similar preferences, a living will **cannot** be followed in an emergency as it is not a set of medical orders. EMS can **only** follow medical orders- and a POLST Paradigm Form **is** a set of medical orders EMS can follow.

For specific differences between a POLST Paradigm Form and an advance directive, refer to our FAQs (see question 6):

www.polst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2016.04.03-POLST-FAQs.pdf

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact me at amy@polst.org or (503) 494-9550.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amy Vandembroucke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amy Vandembroucke, JD
Executive Director, National POLST Paradigm Office