

## The POLST Paradigm Population: Who Should Have a POLST Form?

The POLST Paradigm is not for everyone. POLST is appropriate for patients with serious illness or frailty for whom their health care professional would not be surprised if they died within a year. For patients where a POLST form is appropriate, their current health status indicates the need for standing medical orders for emergent or future medical treatment.

For healthy patients, and even for many patients who have recently been diagnosed with a serious illness, an advance directive is an appropriate tool for making future end-of-life treatment wishes known to family, friends and health care professionals.

However, just because a person's prognosis indicates he or she is POLST appropriate, does not mean that person must have a POLST form. POLST forms are completely voluntary and should never be used as a criterion for admission to a long-term care, nursing home, assisted living or hospice facility. The choice to have a POLST is always up to the resident (or the surrogate decision maker).

*POLST Paradigm screening questions* identify patients appropriate for thoughtful POLST conversations:

1. Does this person have one or more advanced chronic conditions or a serious illness with a poor prognosis or advanced frailty?
2. Would you be surprised if the person dies in the next year?
3. Does the person express a desire to receive or avoid any or all life-sustaining treatment?
4. Does the person live in a nursing home or receive long term care services at home or in an assisted living facility?
5. Does this patient have decreased function, frailty, progressive weight loss,  $\geq 2$  unplanned admissions in last 12 months, have inadequate social supports, or need more help at home?

Both [Virginia](#) and [New York](#) have created useful guides for helping health care professionals determine which of their patients may be appropriate for the POLST Paradigm.

A facility should never mandate the completion of a POLST form for all patients in a facility—in fact, it should raise a red flag if a facility has 100% POLST form completion rates and trigger a review of how staff discusses the POLST Paradigm with patients or residents. Instead, a facility can—and should!—have a policy to offer a POLST form to all appropriate patients, provided that the facility appropriately implement the POLST Paradigm, which includes appropriate staff training and education on the POLST Paradigm.

For more information, please visit: [www.polst.org](http://www.polst.org).