



Minnesota POLST and COVID 19

Our country and our state are in a health emergency created by the highly contagious and dangerous COVID 19 virus. This virus appears to be approximately 20 times as deadly as Influenza A. The patients most at risk are those over 70 with chronic health problems. The patients who succumb to this virus die of respiratory failure. In an attempt to save the lives of these patients, physicians will intubate and employ mechanical ventilation unless the patients/families have previously decided that they would not want this treatment.

Value of POLST. The POLST allows patients, through discussions with health professionals, to make informed decisions to say whether they want aggressive medical interventions such as mechanical ventilation, ICU treatment, or CPR. Patients who complete a POLST will have their wishes followed because the POLST is a signed provider order. The POLST is voluntary. However, if one does not have a POLST or a doctor's order to forgo aggressive medical treatment (DNR/DNI), then the patient will routinely receive full aggressive treatment. If they are infected with COVID 19 and develop respiratory failure the doctors will routinely intubate them and employ mechanical ventilation.

Who Should Have a POLST? We encourage all patients who are appropriate for the POLST to have a discussion with their health care provider. These patients include patients with serious chronic health problems and frail elderly including nursing home residents. If the patient has cognitive decline/dementia and can no longer communicate their wishes, then the discussion should take place with their health care agent or surrogate decision maker.

How to Complete POLST. Given current social distancing that has been mandated by our Governor we recommend that patients and families view the POLST video remotely. The POLST conversations can likewise be held remotely (health professionals, please see the “POLST how-to guide”). If a patient completes a POLST or changes their POLST during the pandemic this factor should be noted on the POLST form – both front and back. Because factors related to this health crisis may have influenced their decisions (e.g., ventilator shortages, reluctance to go to ER because of risk of exposure to the virus), the POLST should be reviewed after the pandemic to corroborate that the decisions indicated on the POLST have not changed.

For additional information on POLST and COVID 19 please go to our national POLST website: www.polst.org