

POLST Conversations in ALs and SNFs

The conversation below between the health care professional and the patient/family should take place after viewing the POLST 12 minute video



Introduction

"We recommend that all of our residents complete a POLST form so we can follow their wishes regarding the types of treatment they do and don't want if they require emergency treatment. You may have a very clear idea about your wishes after watching the video or you may want to have further discussions with your doctor. Either is absolutely fine.

If You Don't Have a POLST

"But it is very important that you understand that are policy is always to provide all life sustaining treatments for any resident that has not told us that there are treatments that they do not want.

Section A: CPR

"As you saw in the video, the first choice on the POLST concerns cardiac arrest. This means your heart has stopped beating and you have died a natural death. About one time out of twenty or 5% of the time we can reverse cardiac arrest with CPR. This would require emergency transfer to the hospital and use of a mechanical ventilator in the intensive care unit.

"Unfortunately, receiving CPR can cause fractured ribs and the lack of blood supply to the brain because of the cardiac arrest may cause brain damage. However, the one out of twenty patients that do survive and are able to leave the hospital can usually care for themselves. But about half of them will have memory or mental health problems.

"Do you think you would want CPR attempted if your heart stopped or would you prefer to select the option to allow a natural death and not attempt CPR?"

Section B: Three Overall Treatment Options

"The second section of the POLST form deals with medical treatments. There are three levels of treatment: the first is Full Treatment. This choice means that you would like all medical treatments used to prolong your life. This would include treatments such as CPR, mechanical ventilation, kidney dialysis, intensive care, and major surgery. If you select CPR then you must select full treatment, because these treatments are often necessary after CPR.

"Also, you can select DNR – allow a natural death – and still choose Full Treatment in Section B. Some people might choose this because though they don't want CPR attempted because of the poor chance of survival, but they would want to try full treatment for pneumonia or heart failure where a ventilator treatment may be necessary in the Intensive Care Unit. People that get this sick are critically ill. But they still have about a 50% chance, or one chance out of two, of making a recovery.

"The second option is Selective Treatment. This means that if you had a serious problem like pneumonia, you would like to go to the hospital and receive such treatments as intravenous fluids and antibiotics to cure the pneumonia. But you would prefer to avoid CPR or Intensive Care.

"The third option is Comfort Care. This option is for people that really want their treatment focused on comfort and prefer to avoid the hospital. They would prefer to be treated at home and don't want their life prolonged with medical treatment.

Section E: Nutrition/Hydration and Antibiotics

"On the next section of the POLST there are two sections. The first deals with artificially administered nutrition. This means nutrition – food and liquids – delivered by a tube into your stomach because you've lost the ability to swallow. This could be from a stroke and be temporary or it could be from diseases like dementia or Parkinson's disease and be permanent. If you had a stroke you may choose to have a trial of a feeding tube to see if after a period of days or weeks your swallowing ability returned. We usually don't recommend feeding tubes with dementia or Parkinson's Disease because we don't have evidence that it prolongs people's lives or helps improve the quality of their lives. Would you be comfortable making a decision on tube feeding today?"

"The next section of POLST deals with treatment of infection with antibiotics. We would always recommend treating an infection for comfort. The video gave a good example – the treatment of a bladder infection with antibiotics. Antibiotics also can be used to prolong life such as in the case of treating pneumonia. If someone had pneumonia and did not want antibiotics, we would use other treatments to keep them comfortable such as oxygen and medication to relieve shortness of breath. If someone wants antibiotics they may receive them by mouth or through an IV. IV antibiotics are usually given in the hospital. If you wanted to avoid going to the hospital you may want to receive antibiotics only by mouth. Would you like to make a decision about antibiotic treatment today?"

Questions: Your Doctor or Nurse Practitioner

"I want to repeat that you do not have to make any choices today or ever for that matter. But it is our obligation to provide CPR and Full Treatment if we do not know what your wishes are. You also can change your mind about your decisions and we will complete a new POLST form.

"AND we absolutely want you to discuss any questions you have about your particular situation and health conditions with your doctor. Do you have any questions about the video or the POLST form?"