

POLST Linked to Lower Rates of Unwanted Hospitalization

Since the Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment or POLST program was implemented in California in 2009, health care professionals across the state have reported that POLST is a helpful tool for recording patients' wishes for end-of-life treatment. This is now being confirmed by a recent multi-state study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. The study found that nursing home residents who complete a POLST form are far less likely to receive unwanted hospitalizations and medical interventions than other patients.

The study found that patients with POLST forms stating they wished to receive care primarily focused on relieving their pain and suffering were 59 percent less likely to receive unwanted treatments such as hospitalization than those who had only a Do Not Resuscitate order. At the same time, the study showed that patients with POLST forms requesting fewer medical interventions continued to receive pain management; when compared to other patients, they were found to receive identical levels of treatment for pain and other symptoms.

POLST was designed to help ensure that patients have more control over their end-of-life treatment, and to help health care providers across settings honor their patients' wishes. But POLST isn't just a form.

"The main point of POLST is to encourage communication between providers, patients, and their loved ones, so patients can make more informed decisions and clearly communicate these decisions to their health care providers," said Kate O'Malley, senior program officer at the California HealthCare Foundation (CHCF), which is funding training and outreach for POLST in California.

Today some of the state's largest integrated health systems and many long-term care facilities have already adopted the POLST process to help patients document their preferences for end-of-life treatment.

To learn more about POLST, log on to www.caPOLST.org.

To learn more about the study showing the impact of POLST, go to <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/123572530/PDFSTART?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>.