What We Know About POLST in California

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CHCF Sacramento Briefing
December 3, 2014
### Site of Care | Data Source(s)
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Nursing homes | Survey and MDS
Hospitals | Survey of 286 hospitals
EMS providers | Survey of 20 LEMSA administrators
POLST community coalitions | Annual reports to CHCF and survey

EMS: Emergency Medical Services
LEMSA: Local Emergency Medical Services Agencies
CHCF: California HealthCare Foundation
Introduction

- POLST is widely used in California
- Challenges with completing form and making sure it travels with the patient
- One solution to these challenges: A POLST registry
POLST Use in California Nursing Homes, 2011

California nursing home residents = 296,276

POLST completed = 181,410 residents (63%)

- Valid POLST with all signatures: 142,672 residents (49%)
- POLST with at least one signature missing: 38,738 residents (13%)

Source: 2011 Nursing Home Minimum Data Set
Variation in POLST Use and Handling in California Nursing Homes

POLST Completion Among Long Stay Residents by Nursing Home Facility

Source: 2011 Nursing Home Minimum Data Set

N=1,122 facilities
Excludes 98 facilities with <20 long-stay residents
Issues with POLST reported by California Nursing Homes, 2012

Nearly all of 290 nursing home respondents reported a problem with POLST implementation

Top two problems that could be addressed by a POLST registry:

- Not receiving the POLST form back from other facilities
- Receiving incomplete or incorrect POLST form from another facility

Issues with POLST reported by California Hospitals, 2011

Of 286 hospital respondents, 47% reported a problem with POLST implementation

Top three problems that could be addressed by a POLST registry:
- POLST does not contain required signatures
- POLST incomplete
- POLST incorrectly completed

### Issues with POLST reported by Local Emergency Management Service Areas, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occ.</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting the POLST to make treatment decisions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
<td>12 (60%)</td>
<td>44 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the orders contained in the POLST</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
<td>9 (45%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient or family say that patient has a POLST form but it is not available</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLST form is incomplete or unsigned</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>44 (20%)</td>
<td>8 (40%)</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 of the 33 LEMSAs provided responses to these items

**LEMSA: Local Emergency Medical Services Agencies**
What Do Nursing Home Residents Want?

- Do Not Attempt Resuscitation & Comfort Care
- Do Not Attempt Resuscitation & Limited treatment
- Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)
- Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) & Comfort/Limited

57% chose to limit care. If POLST information is not known these patients could receive care they don’t want.

Source: 2011 Nursing Home Minimum Data Set
Case Study: What Can Happen When POLST Form Doesn’t Travel with Patient

An 86-year-old woman with advanced dementia was transferred from a nursing home to a hospital because of a fever and weight loss.

The physician met with her daughter, and they decided that an extensive work-up and burdensome treatment would not be pursued.

The physician completed a POLST form electing comfort measures only – which was later signed by the daughter.
Case Study: What Can Happen When POLST Form Doesn’t Travel with Patient

The hospital discharge information did not include the POLST form.

Two months later, the patient developed another fever and her blood pressure drops. Nursing home staff notify the on-call doctor who advises them to call 911.

Paramedics transport her to the nearest hospital and she goes to the ICU, is placed on a ventilator, and dies there.
Summary

- POLST is widely used in California nursing homes and hospitals
- Nursing homes and hospitals report problems with the flow of POLST forms between settings
- Emergency Medical Services report problems with the availability of documents
- A POLST registry would alleviate these issues and improve continuity of care