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## Be Sure to have a Living Will in Place

Pennsylvania—Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) is a *medical* order also known as Out-of-Hospital Do-Not-Resuscitate (DNR) orders. POLST forms are intended to supplement Healthcare Powers of Attorney with Living Will (executed since 2007) or older Advance Directives (the term prior to the Out-of-Hospital Nonresuscitation Act of 2006). Living Wills or Advance Directives indicate the wishes of the person signing the document. A POLST document completed by the person's attending physician, physician assistant, or certified nurse practitioner notifies EMS personnel (ambulance crews) that the person affected does not want CPR or other life sustaining treatment if that treatment is attempted outside of the hospital environment.

POLST forms are intended to be part of an overall program for end of life decisions that includes educational support and other planning for providers and patients. The POLST form was designed by the PA Department of Health to be consistent with Pennsylvania law and to standardize the language and format to make it easier for healthcare personnel to be consistent in their application of these orders. There are also bracelets and necklaces available to physicians to distribute to patients who have a DNR order in place.

Anyone eighteen years of age or older (and in some circumstances those younger than 18 years) can and should have a Healthcare Power of Attorney with Living Will, or at least, a Living Will. Such documents outline the person's wishes should an end-stage medical condition or permanent unconsciousness occur. These documents also indicate who is to make decisions for that person should the signer of the documents be unable to speak for himself or herself. On the other hand, Out-of-Hospital DNR forms are only issued by the patient's attending physician when the physician determines that the patient has an end-stage medical condition or is permanently unconscious, and the patient, or his appointed representative, requests such a document. This is to insure that a person with an advanced state of illness, which with a reasonable degree of medical uncertainty will result in death from the disease process despite the introduction or continuation from treatment, does not receive treatment that will worsen the person's medical condition, and prolong the dying process. CPR or Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation is intended to save persons who are not in a terminal disease process, and are able to return to their former lifestyles after successful CPR. There are special rules to follow if the person requesting the DNR is pregnant.

There is significant confusion even among healthcare providers and nursing facility personnel (including Assisted Living Facilities) about DNR forms. A Living Will is all that is necessary unless the resident suffers from a terminal condition. The DNR form is not applicable, nor is it possible to obtain, until and unless the medical condition of the resident is clearly in an end-stage medical condition as determined by his or her attending physician.

The PA Department of Health has detailed information on POLST forms and questions concerning them on their website at [http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/emergency\\_medical\\_services](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/emergency_medical_services). It is important that a Healthcare Power of Attorney with Living Will or the older Advance Directives be in place to name an appropriate representative to speak for you if you are not able to do so.