



County of Santa Clara
Emergency Medical Services Agency
ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

Number: 080925-01

Title: Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) – Pilot Project

Effective: September 25, 2008 - January 26, 2009

The San Jose Fire Department and American Medical Response have been authorized to accept Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST), as an equivalent to the Do Not Resuscitate Order, identified in ***Santa Clara County Prehospital Care Policy 604 – Do Not Resuscitate (DNR)/Advanced Directives*** under the following conditions:

- When the components of the Pilot Study are met as identified in the attached memorandum from the EMS Medical Director, dated June 11, 2008 and entitled "The POLST Pilot Project".
- The pilot is limited only to EMS calls for service in the City of San Jose.

This approval has been granted as part of a Pilot Program. Based on the performance of the pilot, revisions will be made to Policy 604 and will be effective countywide on January 26, 2009. These changes have been integrated into the POLST training that is a current component of the mandatory training within the EMS Update 2009 program in preparation for countywide implementation in January 2009.

Attachment:

- Memorandum from Dr. Ghilarducci, dated June 11, 2008, entitled "The POLST Pilot Project".

Authorized by:

Handwritten signature of Bruce H. Lee in black ink.

Bruce H. Lee
Director

Handwritten signature of David Ghilarducci in black ink.

David Ghilarducci, MD
EMS Medical Director

Emergency Medical Services Agency

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Public Health Department

Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System



June 11, 2008

To: All prehospital provider agencies

From: David Ghilarducci, MD EMS Medical Director

D. Ghilarducci MD

Re: The POLST pilot project

As you are aware a project concerning end of life care will be ongoing soon in San Jose. The Physicians Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (or POLST) is a standardized form which includes specific orders from a physician regarding prescribed treatment for the patient. The POLST form is signed by the physician, and the patient or the patient's guardian or surrogate. The POLST form contains orders pertaining to withholding of CPR, medical interventions, antibiotics, and artificially administered nutrition. The POLST form contains orders pertaining to a range of treatments including CPR, medical interventions, antibiotics, and artificially administered nutrition.

Following are the facilities which are participating in this pilot program: Skyline Health Care Center, White Blossom Care Center, San Jose Sub Acute and Skilled Care, Hospice of the Valley and O'Connor Hospital.

The POLST program was begun in Oregon, has been expanded to several other states, and now is being studied in the State of California. The aim of the POLST organization (www.polst.org) is to "effectively communicate the wishes of seriously ill patients to have or to limit medical treatment as they move from one care setting to another."

As of March 1993, the state of California implemented regulations concerning withholding resuscitation for patients who did not wish to be resuscitated. The State Emergency Medical Services Authority and the State Medical Society collaborated on a prehospital DNR form which has been in use since those regulations were introduced.

The POLST form will eventually be formalized into law and be the equivalent to the Prehospital DNR form once AB 3000 is signed.

The POLST form will be in the patient chart and is to be presented to the paramedic on arrival to the facility. The form is printed on card stock and is a bright pink color. The original POLST form should be kept with the patient at all times, although faxed and photocopied forms are legal and valid as long as signed by the physician, and patient or patient's guardian or surrogate.

Dedicated to the health of the whole community

The Public Health Department is a division of Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System, owned and operated by the County of Santa Clara.

There are several questions that have come up through our meetings concerning the use of the POLST form. This letter will address the specific questions and provide answers to those questions.

1. The current Prehospital DNR form has to be signed by the patient or patient's designated decision maker. Does the POLST form have to be signed by the patient? Can a prehospital provider honor a POLST form that is not signed by the patient or patient's surrogate?

The POLST form has to have a patient or patient's surrogate signature to allow a prehospital provider to honor that form. On paramedic arrival, look at Section A of the form. If the box that indicates DO NOT ATTEMPT RESUSCITATION (DNR/No CPR) is checked, look in the signature area at the bottom of the form and look to see if there is a patient (or patient's surrogate) signature. If there is no signature, proceed with the resuscitation.

2. Section B of the form lists the comfort care measures for the patient. That section also states: **Do not transfer to hospital for life-sustaining treatment and Transfer if comfort needs cannot be met in current location.** Does this mean that the paramedic must make the decision to transfer the patient?

The POLST form takes the place of several forms that are in use currently. This section and the subsequent sections (C and D) represent the intensity of care issues addressed on the PIT form that exists currently in most skilled nursing facilities. Paramedics can only follow policies approved by the Medical Director of the Local EMS Agency. The Santa Clara County EMS Agency has a "Do Not Resuscitate" policy (Policy 604) which clearly delineates comfort care measures. The only part of the POLST form which is applicable to Prehospital providers is Section A.

If "Comfort Measures Only", in section B is checked for the patient, and the facility calls 9-1-1 the decision to "transfer" the patient has been made by that facility. As it is explained on the back of the form: "When comfort cannot be achieved in the current setting, the person, including someone with "Comfort Measures Only" should be transferred to a setting able to provide comfort." Transfer in this case is not a prehospital determination. It is a facility decision. The information in Sections C and D are pertinent to the skilled nursing facility only. They do not apply to Prehospital personnel.

3. If the POLST form is signed by a patient surrogate, and the person who signed is not the person who holds the medical durable power of attorney, and there is a difference of opinion between the two persons about the resuscitation, whose opinion should the paramedic accept, the surrogate or the holder of the medical durable power of attorney?

In any case where there is a conflict, the paramedic can always contact the Base Hospital. Certainly the paramedic should get out of the situation as soon as possible. Paramedics should not attempt to adjudicate a conflict situation, rather de-escalate the conflict and if the situation requires it transport the patient.

Please remember that the Base Hospital is always available to assist the paramedic whenever s/he finds an unusual occurrence. Please feel free to call the EMS Agency for any further questions, and certainly use the Unusual Occurrence Report forms to alert us to any issues that you may have.