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**POLST Empowers Patients in Healthcare Decisions**

Talking about your wishes in a chronic illness or at the end of life is a conversation that can be awkward, difficult and for some of us, one we would rather avoid. But it’s a conversation you must have as an important and necessary part of good medical care. You have the right to participate fully in all your healthcare decisions, and this becomes especially important near the end of life.

New Jersey now has a new resource to make your preferences known called Practitioner Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment, or POLST. POLST is a medical order form that details your wishes regarding life-sustaining treatment. POLST forms currently are used in 42 states, and Gov. Chris Christie signed New Jersey's POLST law in December 2011.

The form is intended to be completed jointly by you and a physician, physician’s assistant or an advanced practice nurse (APN). You can modify your POLST at any time. To access New Jersey’s POLST form, go to [www.njha.com/POLST](http://www.njha.com/POLST).

Your healthcare team wants to understand your wishes and goals of care, and filling out the POLST form is one of the easiest and simplest ways to do this. POLST can help you make meaningful personal choices regarding your care, and your instructions will be honored across all care settings including emergency medical services, hospitals and nursing homes.

You should have a POLST form if you are:

* Seriously ill with a life-limiting advanced illness
* Frail and weak and have trouble performing routine daily activities
* Afraid of losing the capacity to make your own healthcare decisions in the near future
* Living in a nursing home or hospice.

Educate yourself by talking with your doctor, physician’s assistant or APN about your options, and then discuss your choices with your family. How do you want to live your life in the time you have left? How much do you want to know about your illness and how much does your family know about your priorities and wishes? What are your goals in the next year or so? These are all issues you need to consider as you determine your treatment options. Having a completed POLST form also will allow you to make known any personal, cultural or spiritual practices related to your care. Your quality of life during this time should be totally under your control.

POLST complements an Advance Directive and does not totally replace that document. You may still need an advance directive to appoint a legal healthcare administrator. It is recommended that all adults have an advance directive regardless of their health status. If there is a conflict between the documents, the most current document will be followed. (more)

POLST can help you enhance your personal liberty at the end of life, and it empowers you to make a clear statement about the type of medical services you will receive among your end-of-life care. It's up to you to take the initiative and express your wishes, and POLST will help you do just that. Talk with your doctor, physician’s assistant or advance practice nurse about POLST.