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## Handout: Everyone Needs an Advance Directive! Not Everyone Needs a POLST!

Northwest Life Passages Coalition

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# Everyone needs an Advance Directive! Not everyone needs a POLST!

The **Advance Directive** and **Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatments (POLST)** are both important tools for documenting your wishes for care.

They are each designed to accomplish specific goals - it is important to understand who they are intended for and what they do!

## **The Advance Health Care Directive – aka – Advance Directive:**

An Advance Directive always has two parts\*:

- A) Durable Power of Attorney for HealthCare and
- B) Healthcare Directive, also known as Directive to Physicians.

*\*Many have a third part, a “Values Section”, where you can outline your priorities for guiding decisions.*

## **Essential Facts about Advance Directives:**

- 1) Names your Health Care Power of Attorney - the person who can speak for you anytime you cannot speak for yourself in a medical situation - **POLST does NOT allow for this.**
- 2) Outlines your wishes for care at the end-of-life when you are seriously ill- It can describe your “line in the sand”.
- 3) The healthcare directive takes effect when you are deemed terminally or irreversibly ill by two physicians.
  - As a legal document, it guides medical decisions made by your doctors and health care team.
  - As a legal document, **it cannot be “followed” as a medical order by emergency medical personnel.**
  - There are many versions of the Advance Directive.
  - **Everyone 18 years and older needs an Advance Directive.**

## **Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatments – aka – POLST:**

POLST is a portable medical order that *takes effect as soon as it is signed!*

## **Essential Facts about POLST:**

- 1) POLST is intended for people with serious illness and/or the medically frail at any age.
- 2) POLST must be signed by a physician, PA-C or ARNP to be valid. As a medical order, it can be quickly understood by all healthcare professionals, including first responders and emergency medical personnel.
- 3) POLST is a portable medical order; it is transferable to all healthcare settings. It remains valid as you transition from home into a medical setting, and back... to your home or other care setting, such as skilled nursing facility or long-term care home.
  - This form contains medical orders that specify the type of care you would like in the event of a medical emergency
  - **As medical orders, POLST can be followed by emergency medical personnel.**
  - Versions of POLST exist in many states; they vary slightly but may be honored across state lines in some instances.

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# Advance Directive vs. POLST

DETAILS	Advance Directive:	POLST:
Purpose	Express wishes for future end of life care and appoints a health care power of attorney(s)	Portable Medical Order which turns a patient's wishes to action in a medical emergency
Who Needs It?	All Adults 18+ of sound mind	Seriously Ill or medically frail at any age
Treatment Focus	In the future, if you cannot speak for yourself, if you are deemed ill enough	Right now – based on your current medical condition
Completed by?	Individual (you)	Doctor or Advance Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) AND individual (you) OR legally authorized representative
Appoints Healthcare Agent?	YES	NO
Guides Emergency Room Decisions?	YES, with discretion of physician	YES
Followed “in the field” by EMS?	NO	YES

More information on both documents is available on the following websites:

<https://www.peacehealth.org/advance-care-planning>

<http://www.honoringchoicespnw.org/get-started/start-the-conversation/>

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