

Title: Are We Following Recommendations For Completing POLST Forms In Hospitalized Patients with Serious Illnesses?

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Introduction: The Physician's Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) are a set of medical orders that aim to prevent unwanted or unnecessarily invasive treatment in seriously ill or frail patients, reduce patient and loved ones' suffering, and ensure that one's final wishes are honored at the end of life. The State of New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) recommends completing a POLST for patients with serious, life-limiting illnesses. We conducted our study to determine the number of hospitalized patients with do-not-resuscitate (DNR) orders that also had POLST forms filled out and assess this relationship in regard to the COVID pandemic.

Methods: A retrospective case-control study consisting of 207 patients older than 18 years of age with DNR orders in the EMR who were hospitalized at University Hospital (October 2019 to December 2020). We included all Covid patients (n=69) and a computer-generated random sample of 1:2 ratio of non-Covid patients (n=138). We calculated the frequency of patients with POLST or advanced directive (AD) forms before and during the COVID pandemic and compared them between the groups.

Results: The POLST/AD form was present on admission in 30% of non-COVID patients and 9% of COVID patients ($p < 0.001$). A total of 102 patients died during hospitalization and amongst those who survived, a POLST form was completed on discharge by 39% of non-COVID patients and 9% of COVID patients ($p = 0.006$).

Conclusion: On average, 1 out of every 4 patients with a DNR order had a completed POLST/AD form prior to admission. This number was significantly lower in COVID patients both prior to admission and on discharge.