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December 12, 2008

TO: EMS System Participants

FROM:  Bruce E. Haynes, M.D.
Medical Director

RE: POLST Advisory

A new instrument that provides information on patients' health care preferences, including resuscitation status, is effective January 1, 2009. The POLST, or Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment, can be used as a do-not-resuscitate (DNR) order, and to indicate preferences for different levels of medical care, including nutrition. Please see the attached copy for details.

The POLST was first developed in Oregon and is used in several other states. In California its use was authorized by AB 3000, signed into law by the governor in August. Health care providers are required to honor the preferences stated in the POLST, if it is signed by the patient and their physician, and the preferences do not require ineffective medical care. There is strong liability protection for healthcare personnel honoring patient requests.

The POLST form addresses a range of treatment options and enables a patient to clearly express their treatment preferences regarding life-sustaining treatments such as resuscitation, nutrition and pain management. This form does not replace other Advance Directive forms, such as the state DNR, or facsimiles, but simply complements them by taking the individual's wishes regarding life-sustaining treatment and converting them into medical orders signed by the patient's physician.

POLST forms are standardized orders and will be printed on bright pink paper to make them easily identifiable. Prehospital personnel should be on the alert for these forms, should honor the patient's specific wishes and should contact the appropriate Base Hospital for any questions they might have. If the patient is to be transported to the hospital, the POLST form should be brought with the patient.

Bruce E. Haynes, M.D., Medical Director

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The law's provisions give the California Emergency Medical Services Authority (EMSA) the ability to approve the document. State EMSA has developed an approved form that differs slightly from the

version on the POLST website (www.polst.org). The official version will be the state version without the preferences for antibiotics in a separate box. The original POLST form, however, can be recognized as well. Our current County of San Diego EMS policy regarding Prehospital Determination of Death, S-402, as well as the policy on Resuscitation, S-414, will be revised in January 2009 to reflect the POLST form as an option for a patient's preferences.

Attached you will find frequently asked questions regarding POLST. More information regarding the POLST program and forms is available at www.polst.org. For EMS questions and additional information, contact Rebecca Pate, RN or myself at County of San Diego Emergency Medical Services.

BH:kc

Attachment