

Fast Facts: TPOPP/POLST for EMS

What is TPOPP/POLST?

Transportable Physician Orders for Patient Preferences (TPOPP/POLST) is a program designed to improve the quality of care people receive at the end of life by translating patient/resident goals and preferences into medical orders for treatment and building the community infrastructure to ensure that those goals and preferences are reviewed and honored as appropriate as patient illness changes over time.

What is the TPOPP/POLST form?

The TPOPP/POLST form is a distinct paper that can communicate patient preferences regarding life-sustaining medical treatment. When signed by a patient (or a recognized decision maker) and a physician licensed in Kansas or Missouri, it becomes a medical order. Providers at all sites of care should follow the medical orders.

What types of medical orders are on the form?

The form includes medical orders and patient preferences regarding:

- CPR
- Implementing comfort care
- Defibrillation and cardioversion
- Intubation and mechanical ventilation
- Transport decisions

Who might have a TPOPP/POLST form?

TPOPP/POLST is designed for persons who are living with serious or advanced illness. EMS may see TPOPP/POLST forms for persons who:

- Live independently;
- Reside in a long-term care or assisted living facility;
- Receive hospice care.

Does every person with advanced chronic or terminal illness have a form?

No. TPOPP/POLST is voluntary and based on the belief that an individual has the right to make his or her own health care decisions. TPOPP/POLST forms can be used by persons of any age with an advanced progressive or serious illness.

How is a TPOPP/POLST form completed?

The TPOPP/POLST form is completed by an authorized clinician (e.g., physician, PA) after completing a conversation with the patient (or recognized decision maker) along with other appropriate members of the healthcare team (e.g., consulting physician, nurse, social worker or chaplain). The patient or recognized decision maker concurs with the physician (authorized clinician) executing the order by signing the form as well to validate it. Both signatures are necessary. The signatures verify that the preferences on the form are consistent with the patient's values and treatment goals.

What do you do with a completed form?

The TPOPP/POLST form travels with the patient between care settings. The original or copy of the form should accompany the patient and be presented to each provider (first responder, hospital or other care setting).

Where is the form kept?

The form may be housed and retrieved in electronic records or may be transferred in hard copy with the patient across settings. EMS personnel should look for or ask for the form. It should be conspicuously located. Hard copies should be readily available:

- In the front of the patient's medical chart at care facilities;
- On the refrigerator, by a phone, or bedside when the patient resides at home;

The TPOPP/POLST form should go with the patient when the person is transferred from any setting to another.

How is the form used by EMS?

EMS should administer the level of treatment as ordered in Section A, B, and C unless medical evidence to contrary is presented. EMS should rely on the treatment guidance as outlined on the form, and if necessary reviewed by medical control for additional instructions and guidance.

What sections apply to EMS providers?

Section A applies only when the person is in full cardiopulmonary arrest. If the "Attempt Resuscitation/ CPR" box is checked full CPR should be administered. If the "Do Not Attempt Resuscitation (DNAR/no CPR/Allow Natural Death)" box is checked and the patient is in full cardiopulmonary arrest, CPR should not be performed. Comfort measures should always apply until the patient is pronounced deceased.

Section B orders apply to emergency medical circumstances for a person who has a pulse and/or is breathing. These range from full treatment to comfort measures. If all life-sustaining treatments are desired the "Full Treatment" box is checked. However, if the person desires "selective treatments" or "comfort focused treatments" then one or the other of two remaining boxes in this section is checked. Transfer instructions are included in these descriptions. EMS administers the level of emergency medical services reflected in the order set and may verify or contact medical control as needed. Comfort focused treatments are always provided regardless of the patient's condition.

If Attempt Resuscitation in Section A is checked, then Full Treatment in Section B is checked. Full resuscitation implies full treatment.

Section C addresses medically administered nutrition and may not apply during emergency response. Section D provides **additional orders** or instructions as necessary. Section E. provides for validation of the orders with the dated signatures of the physician and the patient or recognized decision maker's acknowledgment.

When can EMS honor the TPOPP/POLST form?

EMS personnel can honor the TPOPP/POLST form in any situation in which a valid TPOPP/POLST form is presented for the patient requiring emergency medical care.

Is a copy or faxed copy of the form acceptable?

Yes – A copy, faxed copy, or electronic representation of the TPOPP/POLST form is acceptable provided it has the person's name and signatures of the physician and patient (or recognized decision maker).

Where can I get more information?

A complete Clinical Guide is available for clinicians and first responders in guiding them in responding to a seriously ill patient with a validly executed TPOPP/POLST form. Visit the website of Center for Practical Bioethics at www.practicalbioethics.org to learn more or send an e-mail to TPOPP@practicalbioethics.org or call the TPOPP Managing Director at 816-979-1366.