December 18, 2017

Update on POLST Legislation

Legislation that would create a legal framework for Pennsylvania Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) directives –Senate Bill (SB) 693, introduced by Sen. Gene Yaw – was unanimously approved by the Senate Health and Human Services Committee on Dec. 12, 2017.

"Use of a POLST form gives seriously ill patients more control over their treatment and also helps them talk with their doctors and family members about their end-of-life choices," said Sen. Yaw in this press release.

The latest action on SB 623 is another step forward in a multi-year, collaborative effort under the leadership of the Pennsylvania Medical Society that drew on the expertise of numerous health care and patient advocacy organizations from across the state.

Elements of POLST Legislation

While nothing in the legislation will require POLST use to be different than the "best practices" currently in use, the passage of legislation will remove barriers to greater recognition and acceptance. It addresses some of the most common concerns that have been expressed including:

1. Form signed by provider not on staff;
2. Potential for liability;
3. Reciprocity;
4. Signature requirements – Who can sign a form;
5. Requirement that EMS contact medical command prior to following orders on a POLST;
6. Out of Hospital Do Not Resuscitate Act;
7. Process to review and update the form.

What's Next for POLST Legislation?

SB 623 now advances to the full Pa. Senate for consideration. A similar POLST bill – House Bill 1196 – has been introduced by House Majority Whip Bryan Cutler and has been referred to the House Health Committee for consideration.

Thank you for your continuing support of POLST and we hope all of you have a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

Judith Black, MD, MHA
National POLST Paradigm Task Force Member
Jewish Health Foundation Medical Advisor,
blackjs352@gmail.com

Marian Kemp, RN
POLST Coordinator
Coalition for Quality at the End-of-life (CQEL)
PAPOLST@verizon.net