

Frequently Asked Questions about the Physician Orders for Scope of Treatment (POST) Form

1. What is the POST form?

Under the West Virginia Health Care Decisions Act, the POST form is a standardized “hot pink” form containing orders by a physician who has personally examined a patient regarding that patient’s preferences for end-of-life care. The form provides physician orders regarding CPR-code or no code status; level of intervention (comfort care, intermediate, or full treatment); and use or withholding of antibiotics and feeding tubes. The comfort care level stipulates, “The patient is not to be hospitalized unless comfort interventions [in the present setting] fail.” Use of this form should lead to better identification and respect of patient’s preferences for treatment at life’s end.

2. For whom should a POST form be completed?

The form should be completed for any individual with a chronic illness who may need a life-sustaining treatment in the future to attempt to survive. Completion of POST forms is highly recommended for hospitalized patients being discharged to nursing homes or home with hospice or home health care. Completion of POST forms is also highly recommended for nursing home residents either at the time of admission to nursing homes or during quarterly care planning.

3. Is a POST form required on all patients?

No. Completion of the POST form is voluntary, but it is encouraged so that all participating in a patient’s care can readily know the medical treatment the patient does and does not want at the end of life.

4. What if a patient has an advance directive?

The POST form reinforces the wishes that a patient expresses in a living will and/or medical power of attorney. The POST form remains with the patient and is a physician’s order that should be immediately used to direct the care of the patient. Often the advance directive is not readily available or questions exist about the decision-making capacity of a patient and whether the advance directive is in effect. It is recommended that individuals who are seriously ill have both advance directives and a POST form.

5. Does the patient need a POST form if he/she has a West Virginia Do Not Resuscitate Card?

If the patient prefers comfort level interventions and/or withholding of antibiotics and medically administered nutrition and hydration at the end of life, completion of a POST form is recommended.

6. Does the patient need a DNR order if he/she has a POST form?

In Section A, the POST form includes either a full resuscitation or Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order. The West Virginia Health Care Decisions Act establishes the POST form as a legally recognized means of West Virginia Do Not Resuscitate identification. Because the POST form remains with the patient, a POST form will suffice as a DNR order for patients who are confined and who always have the POST form readily available.

However, if a patient is mobile enough to leave his/her home for reasons such as shopping or other activity, it is recommended that the more portable orange WV DNR card (wallet size) also be completed because the patient may not always have the POST form in his/her possession.

7. Does a physician need to sign the POST form?

Yes. The POST form is a physician's order and must be reviewed and signed in Section E by a physician who has examined the patient. The physician must also sign the form in Section F after review of the form upon change in care setting of the patient or substantial change in the patient's condition.

8. Can a social worker, nurse or other health care professional fill out the POST form?

Yes. Social workers, nurses, and other health care professionals can fill out the form with patients or their representatives/surrogates. The person preparing the form should sign his/her name in section F in the space provided for the preparer. To activate the form, a physician must review it and sign it.

9. Should the POST form be completed or voided without a conversation with the patient or his/her representative/surrogate?

No. The POST form should not be completed, changed, or voided unless there is a conversation with either the patient or, if the patient lacks capacity, his/her representative/surrogate. The purpose of the form is to ensure that the patient's wishes for care at the end of life are followed so a conversation must take place.

10. When does the POST form have to be reviewed?

According to the West Virginia Health Care Decisions Act in §16-30-13(d), the POST form is to be reviewed when the patient is transferred from one health care facility to

another. Section F of the POST form stipulates conditions under which the form is to be reviewed. **As long as the patient remains in the same health care facility, there is not a need to review the form when the patient is transferred from one floor to another.**

11. What if a patient or representative/surrogate changes his/her mind about the wishes documented on the POST form?

The form should be voided and a new form completed. The voided form should be placed in the permanent medical record in the “Correspondence” or equivalent appropriate section.

12. Should the POST form be used to guide daily care decisions?

Yes. For example, the completed POST form should be used to guide decisions regarding the placement of feeding tubes, the use of antibiotics to treat pneumonia, and the provision of other treatments for the patient. The POST form is not just for patients in cardiac arrest.

13. Are health care professionals required to comply with the orders on the POST form?

Yes. The POST form is based on the patient’s directives as expressed orally or in a living will or medical power of attorney or on the decisions of the patient’s Medical Power of Attorney representative/surrogate acting in the patient’s best interest. The West Virginia Health Care Decisions Act stipulates that health care providers are subject to disciplinary action by their licensing board for failure to honor a patient’s advance directives or the decisions of the representative/surrogate, provided the health care provider had actual knowledge of the directives or decisions. The West Virginia Health Care Decisions Act provides legal protection for health care providers who comply with the orders on the POST forms. In the law, health care providers are not subject to civil or criminal liability for good faith compliance with or reliance upon POST forms.

14. What are the requirements when a patient with a POST form is transferred from one health care facility to another?

The West Virginia Health Care Decisions Act at §16-30-21(d) requires that the facility initiating the transfer communicate the existence of the POST form to the receiving facility prior to the transfer. The POST form orders shall remain in effect in the receiving facility. After admission, the attending physician is required to review the POST form and take one of three actions: 1) continue the form without change; 2) void the form and issue a new one; or 3) void the form without issuing a new one.

15. Where should the original POST form be kept?

The original POST form should be kept with the patient at all times. If the patient resides at home, the POST form should be kept on the refrigerator. Family members and caregivers should know where the form is located. Health care facilities are required to keep the POST form as the first page in a person's medical record unless otherwise specified in the health care facility's policies and procedures.

16. Where can I get more information about POST forms?

Forms can be obtained free of charge by calling the West Virginia Center for End-of-Life Care at 1-877-209-8086. The West Virginia Center for End-of-Life Care's web site at www.wvinitiative.org has PowerPoint slides, a readable only copy of the form, as well as a sample policy for use in a health care facility, and other information about the POST form.