

Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST)

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As attorneys, we are often asked about the difference between Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) and Advance Health Care Directives (AHCD). These documents complement each other and one does not replace the other. All adults should consider executing an AHCD concerning their “future” health care and appoint an agent to make health care decisions for them. A POLST is not signed “in advance” and is not a future directive.

A POLST is a physician (the definition of which has now been expanded to include a nurse practitioner and physician assistant) order about current care based on a shared decision making process between doctor and patient (or his or her health care agent under an AHCD who may act for the patient). An AHCD can be completed by an adult at any time in their lives without consultation with a physician.

A POLST must be signed by a physician and is generally only completed for seriously ill patients by their doctors who believe their patients need them to act on it in the near future. We do like to point out that neither replaces the need for conversations with your loved ones.

To read more about Joan LeBlanc, click [here](#).