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## Oregon launches statewide registry for end-of-life care wishes

**By Don Colburn, The Oregonian**

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Oregon's POLST program, a national model for ensuring that doctors and paramedics follow people's medical wishes near the end of life, launched its computerized statewide registry Thursday.

The bright pink POLST (Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) form, usually posted on the refrigerator door, instructs workers what kind of treatment to use in an emergency when a patient is incapacitated.

But what if paramedics can't find the POLST form?

When a POLST form doesn't exist or can't be found immediately, emergency medical technicians are trained to use whatever medical treatments are needed to prolong life — even those that a frail patient may have asked not to receive.

Now paramedics can find out instantly whether a patient has a POLST form on file — and check its instructions — by calling an around-the-clock hotline at Oregon Health & Science University.

The voluntary electronic registry includes more than 4,000 POLST forms and expects to add about 50,000 a year. Newly signed POLST forms are automatically added to the computerized registry, unless the patient opts out, which is rare.

"Most people say, 'Well, if I filled out a form wouldn't I want them to find it?'" said Dr. Susan Tolle, director of the Center for Ethics in Health Care at OHSU.

POLST is a medical order designed for patients with advanced illness or frailty. They specify what kind of life-prolonging treatment they want — or don't want — near the end of life. For example, the form can spell out whether the patient wants to be resuscitated in the event of cardiac arrest and whether tube feeding should be used.

The statewide registry is based on a pilot project tested in Clackamas County.

The computerized registry had to work flawlessly —within two minutes in every emergency case — before it went statewide, Tolle said.

"Otherwise, the EMT's got other things to be doing," she said. "You can't be fooling around, and you've got to get it right every time."

For more information, go to [www.polst.org](http://www.polst.org) or call 503-418-4083. And use this number to send a completed POLST form to the registry by fax: 503-418-2161.

-- **Don Colburn**

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