

What Are Some of the Terms Used When Talking About Serious Illness?



Advance Directives

Advance directives are written instructions stating how you wish your medical decisions be made if you are unable to make decisions for yourself. Some advance directives are called living wills. Most states allow patients to leave written instructions and appoint a person who can make health care decisions on their behalf when patients cannot speak for themselves.

Artificial Nutrition

When a patient can no longer eat or drink by mouth, liquid food can be given to them by tube.

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)

Attempts to restart breathing and the heartbeat of a person who has no heartbeat or has stopped breathing. Typically involves “mouth-to-mouth” and forceful pressure on the chest to restart the heart.

Continued on reverse side.

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CPR (Continued)

CPR may also involve electric shock (defibrillation) or a plastic tube down the throat into the windpipe to assist breathing (intubation).

Comfort Measures

Care undertaken with the primary goal of keeping a person comfortable (rather than prolonging life). On the POLST, a person who requests “comfort measures only” would be transferred to the hospital only if needed for his or her comfort.

Mechanical Ventilation/Respiration

A plastic tube is put down the throat to help breathing. A machine pumps air in and out of the lungs through the tube when a person is no longer able to breathe on his/her own.

Tube Feeding

On a short-term basis, fluids and liquid food can be given through a tube in the nose that goes into the stomach (nasogastric or “NG” tube). For long-term feeding, a tube can be inserted through a surgical procedure directly into the stomach (gastric or “G” tube) or the intestines (jejunal or “J” tube).



Do you have a serious health condition?

*Physician Orders for
Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST)
Information for
Patients & Families*

Developed by
The Oregon POLST Task Force

