

WHAT IS LaPOST?

LaPOST stands for Louisiana Physician Orders for Scope of Treatment. It refers to a physician's order that documents and directs a patient's medical treatment preferences when faced with life-limiting illnesses and irreversible conditions. LaPOST represents a model program for end-of-life care.

HOW DOES THE LAPOST DOCUMENT ENSURE THAT PATIENTS RECEIVE THE TYPE OF CARE THEY WANT?

The LaPOST document represents the wishes and goals of care of the patient, and is translated into a physician's order that is readily available to other health care providers involved in the patient's care. The information in the LaPOST document is obtained from a conversation between the patient or his/her health care representative and his/her physician. It transfers with the patient across health care settings, from home to hospital to long-term care facility or hospice care, as part of his/her medical record.

IS THE LAPOST FORM A LEGAL DOCUMENT?

Yes. The LaPOST program and document were approved by the Louisiana Legislature during the 2010 legislative session as Act 954 and revised during the 2016 legislative session.

IS THE LAPOST FORM VOLUNTARY?

Yes. The document is completely voluntary. The LaPOST form is not biased for or against treatment. It is nonjudgmental and allows patients to choose and clearly state their own preferences for medical treatment when faced with life-limiting and/or irreversible conditions.

DO ALL PHYSICIANS HAVE TO HONOR THE PATIENT'S LAPOST DOCUMENT?

Physicians should honor the orders stated in the patient's LaPOST document immediately, but the patient's physician is obliged to examine, assess and review the orders any time the patient transfers to a new health care setting as the patient's health status and goals of care may have changed. The physician may then issue new orders consistent with the most current information about the patient's health status, medical condition, treatment preferences and goals of care. Any deviations from the patient's original LaPOST document will be documented in the patient's medical record.

ARE THERE ANY REPERCUSSIONS FOR PHYSICIANS WHO FOLLOW THE ORDERS SET FORTH IN A PATIENT'S LAPOST DOCUMENT?

In some cases, physicians have been hesitant to follow LaPOST orders without first reassessing the patient's wishes in his/her current clinical situation. However, Louisiana law requires that LaPOST be followed until a review is completed by the accepting health care professional. The LaPOST document must be followed even if the physician who signed the document is not on the medical staff of the patient's treating facility. The law also states that health care providers who honor LaPOST documents are not subject to criminal prosecution, civil liability or any other sanction as a result of following the orders.

ARE PHYSICIANS COMPENSATED FOR DISCUSSING THE LaPOST DOCUMENT WITH THEIR PATIENTS?

Effective January 1, 2016, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will reimburse health care providers and other health care professionals if they choose to have advance care planning, or end-of-life care, discussions with their Medicare patients. This new rule will help to ensure that patients receive the type of care they want in the event that they are diagnosed with a life-limiting illness or are no longer able to speak for themselves.

IS THE LaPOST DOCUMENT THE SAME AS AN ADVANCE DIRECTIVE?

No. An advance directive, or living will, is a legal document that provides instructions specifying what types of treatment should be given to a person when that person becomes unable to make decisions or can no longer speak for him/herself. It is restrictive, as it only goes into effect if the patient loses the ability to make decisions and is terminally ill. An advance directive can be very specific or very vague, and is usually completed in advance of any known illness. The LaPOST document is complementary to advance directives. It may also be used in the absence of an advance directive. The LaPOST document is a physician's order that specifically outlines a patient's medical treatment wishes and goals of care. As a physician's order, it must be honored by all health care professionals, and it can be used to translate an advance directive into a physician's order.

WHO IS THE LaPOST DOCUMENT MOST APPROPRIATE FOR?

The LaPOST document is for patients who are seriously ill with life-limiting and irreversible illnesses and whose life expectancy is less than one year or who are frail and elderly. It can be completed for a qualified patient regardless of age. Act 954, which established LaPOST, defines a life-limiting and irreversible condition as "a continual profound comatose state with no reasonable chance of recovery or a condition caused by injury, disease or illness which within reasonable medical judgment would usually produce death within six months, for which the application of life-sustaining procedures would serve only to postpone the moment of death and for which the life-sustaining procedures would be a burden and not a benefit to the qualified patient."

WHO INITIATES THE CONVERSATION ABOUT A LaPOST DOCUMENT?

The diagnosis of a life-limiting or irreversible condition can leave patients and their families with many questions, and it is important for physicians and other health care providers to discuss with them the facts about the illness, the kinds of treatment available and what treatments will help, might help and won't help. The LaPOST document provides a context for guiding this important conversation. This discussion can be initiated by either the patient and his/her family or the patient's health care provider.



LaPOST
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WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LaPOST?

For more information about LaPOST, or to download a copy of the document, visit la-post.org.