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Honoring Your Wishes: Meaningful POLST Conversations

Background: Effective goals of care and end-of-life discussions are not uniformly done or done well in most traditional healthcare settings. We know that there are systemic barriers, cultural disincentives, and lack of sufficient expertise in efforts to have impactful discussions on goals of care and advance care planning.

Our geriatrics and palliative medicine teams at Palo Alto Medical Foundation (PAMF) care for the most vulnerable, seriously ill patients in our medical system. Recognizing that advance care planning is critical to ensuring patient-centered, quality care, our institution aims to have Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) addressed by all patients with serious illness and to document treatment preferences properly in the electronic medical record.

Aim: As the old adage states, “a picture is worth a thousand words”. Our new program, “Honoring Your Wishes”, seeks to improve the quality of POLST conversations by using a professionally based, research-based video library to help guide decision-making. Through our program, trained healthcare providers explore the patient’s understanding of their illness and values through using the video decision support tool to review treatment options. The Nous Foundation’s Advance Care Planning (ACP) Decisions video decision support tool is a series of narrative videos filmed and produced by Dr. Angelo Volandes, from Harvard Medical School, designed to educate patients about advance care planning and end-of-life care options. Clinical research has shown that these videos help surmount communication barriers and ensure more patient-centered care. Our goal is to educate and support persons with serious illness so the medical treatment they receive has meaning and makes sense to them.

Methods: The geriatrics and palliative care department will partner closely with primary care, oncology, and pulmonary to promote more informed discussions in the outpatient setting. We will target 150 patients for this pilot over one year to participate in the program. The primary outcome will be % completion of POLST forms in our target population. We will also measure patient satisfaction with the clinical encounter and collect qualitative data regarding the patient experience.

Long-Term Goals: This project aligns with our organization’s continuing goal to transform health care to achieve the highest levels of quality care. A successful pilot of the program in the outpatient setting at PAMF could lead to wider support from Sutter Health leadership, and ultimately, a more systematic implementation across Sutter clinical sites. This program is about matching patient treatment preferences based on their values and goals to ensure that their wishes are followed across our healthcare system. If our program increases the quality and completion rates of POLST forms for patients with serious illness, this will help meet our targets of improving the advance care planning process.