

January 2013

Dear Clients and Friends:

As Pedro Medina was being wheeled out of a nursing home in Davis, he suddenly realized something was missing. “Where is my pink paper?” A nurse quickly produced the bright pink medical form, signed by Pedro’s doctor, which assured him a peaceful death. The orders from the doctor meant there would be no more trips to the hospital and no medical interventions, simply care to keep him comfortable during a final illness.

Pedro had bone cancer and was only expected to live a few weeks. As it turns out, he surprised everyone by rebounding and living at least another three years, as AARP reported online in January of 2012. He continued to keep his pink form with him, and for all I know he is still enjoying life in Yolo County.

So what is this pink form? It’s called a POLST, which stands for Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment. Unlike an Advance Health Care Directive, this form is only for patients with a serious or progressive illness, and must be signed by a doctor. In 2009 a California law took effect which requires all health care providers to follow the patient’s wishes as stated in the form. The law also gives immunity to providers who honor the POLST, and because it is signed by a doctor this form is given more weight in the medical community than other directives.

Patients request the document from their health care provider, then specify a number of options concerning resuscitation, medical interventions and nutrition. California has been on the cutting edge when it comes to patients controlling their own medical care, as we now have the advance directive, Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) and POLST forms.

Regards,



Charles M. Shackelford