Lycoming County POLST Project

Williamsport, PA
Alexander R Nesbitt MD
Medical Director
Susquehanna Hospice and Palliative Care

"Home of the Little League"
Williamsport 30,000
"Greater Williamsport area" 70,000
Lycoming County 120,000

Susquehanna Health
- Williamsport Hospital (WRMC) 175 beds
- Muncy Valley Hospital 25 bed CAH

Jersey Shore Hospital 25 bed CAH

Regional POLST/ACP Project

- Initiative of WRMC ethics committee:2005
- Three hospitals
- Eight skilled nursing facilities with total 1100 beds
- Clinical, administrative representation from each organization
- Worked to develop a commonly acceptable POLST form

Is the Document Enough?

The POLST form is an essential element of a system to document and transmit patient care preferences, but it is not the MAIN thing.

Careful discussions that elicit care preferences ARE the main thing.

Who will facilitate these discussions ?

Physicians/Providers-the only ones to lead these discussions?

- Need for non-physician facilitators to lead patient/family discussions, elicit preferences and complete POLST forms
- Facilitators need to be skilled, knowledgeable, and credible to physicians/providers as well as to patients and families

Facilitator training

- Respecting Choices curriculum (Gunderson/Lutheran Health system, Lacrosse Wisconsin)
- Fundraising from regional funding sources for training process.
- Four training sessions; 2006, 2008,2009,2011
- 144 facilitators trained, two thirds from hospitals and skilled nursing facilities

North Central Pennsylvania Advance Care Planning Task Force

- Community focus- "Pink Card"-encourage all to consider and name an agent, document their choice on portable card, and TALK to their agent about their preferences.
- Facility focus-POLST training, 4 hour session including information about ACP issues, important medical and ethical information, detailed review of Pennsylvania POLST form, and observed role playing facilitation

Lessons learned

Training facilitators is critical

- Not just cognitive, informational teaching
- Inclusion of experiential, interactive experience
- Observed role-playing of facilitation discussions
- Established published curriculum, or curriculum developed locally

Don't try to do too much initially

- Early focus on community based advance care planning, including ACP for all ages/stages.
- Start with most pressing patient types (elders in SNU, those "you wouldn't be surprised if they died within a year")
- Expand into community as secondary or separate initiative

Don't try to do too much initially

- Instead of including all SNU's/regional hospitals in one large cooperative project, select specific "partner" facilities and grow out. Idea of "fertile soil", "primed facilities"-build upon success incrementally.
- Change the acceptable "norm" gradually

Challenges to change in medical institutions

- SNU-buy in clinical/administrative/corporate
- Physician buy in, importance of credible facilitators and process, with physicians/providers ultimately responsible for the POLST order they sign.

Limits of the form

- Naming of agent (separate and essential document)
- Need to clarify and write in preferences regarding hospitalization for those who want more than comfort care but not full treatment
- Limit of its use outside of institution (home hospice, transport, ALF)- importance of EMS "work around", and of out of hospital DNR forms.

- Moving away from emphasis on completion of POLST as individualistic, rights-based, legal process....instead approaching this process as a means for the family, nurses, doctors to understand and honor what the patient wants, to understand and do 'the right thing' for the patient.
- Emphasis on relationship(with loved ones and those providing care for the patient) vs policy, legal responsibilities

Our patients/families are counting on us

- We and our loved ones are going to age, get sick and die in the medical system of care that we create
- A motivated group can make even major changes happen over time
- In your world, if you don't change things, who will?

anesbitt@susquehannahealth.org