

## Nothing fishy about COHO's help with end-of-life choices

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In July 2009, only 18 percent of patients in Medford hospitals with a life-threatening diagnosis had prepared their important documents. By September 2010, at what was then called Rogue Valley Medical Center, the prevalence has increased 10 times! What happened? Choosing Options, Honoring Options, or COHO, came onto the scene.

COHO is a collaboration of caregivers, patients and educators in the Rogue Valley, centered on facilitating respectful conversations about end-of-life care. Begun by local retired cardiologist, Dr. John Forsyth, along with a small group of dedicated individuals, support for end-of-life information had come to the Rogue Valley.

Here's what they discovered: There is a huge disconnect between the end-of-life care most people wish for and the care they actually receive. Why is that? The number-one reason: lack of communication prior to a crisis.

This is really tough for families. Without these conversations, it's more likely that there will be disagreements between what family members think their loved one would have wanted. In the midst of a difficult situation, now we have the added challenge of family dissension. Alleviating this potential hot spot depends on what has been prepared ahead of time.

Basically, there are two components: the Oregon Advance Directive (AD) and the Physician's Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (known as the POLST form). Preceded by some honest communication with yourself and your family, these documents will assure that what you really want to happen will be the treatments you receive.

The Oregon AD has been used here since 1996. You are able to make your wishes known clearly and succinctly, under a variety of circumstance that might befall you. You fill this out yourself, and there is no fee for these forms. They are available at most doctor's offices and hospitals. In the AD, you also appoint what is known as your health care representative.

This person will advocate for your wishes, should you not be able to speak for yourself. That's why the conversations are so important in the first place. The representative needs to know what you will want in various scenarios. The AD booklet has a workbook attached to it which allows you to consider all your options.

The Oregon POLST form really speaks to what you would want should the emergency providers be called to your home. This form must be filled out by a physician and is consider doctor's orders, just as the name states. This used to be called the do-not-resuscitate order or DNR. Although anyone over age 18 might consider having an AD, the POLST form is really for those who are quite elderly, nearer to the end of life, or have a time-limiting illness.

I recommend that you check out COHO online ([cohoroguevalley.org](http://cohoroguevalley.org); 541-292-6466). They are currently having a series of free public forums in Grants Pass on these important topics. If you get on their mailing list, you will find out when forums will be held in Medford as well. Their resource section online is full of other great organizations that can assist you. There is also help with the AD through the Ashland Senior Center ([ashlandseniorcenter.org](http://ashlandseniorcenter.org); 541-488-5342).

What's the best thing you can do right now?

First of all, be an Oregonian. We have a great advance care planning system in place and it actually works quite well;

Begin having conversations now, while you're up and running. Learn as much as you can about advance planning through organizations such as COHO; and

Create the documents to support your wishes — the AD and, later, the POLST.

If these topics are not the norm for you and your family, try viewing "Consider the Conversation," a wonderful award-winning documentary video about this topic. You can check out their website at [considertheconversation.org](http://considertheconversation.org). There is a copy of this film at the Ashland Library.

You can also remember that the COHO is a noble fish which swims upstream at the end of life to fulfill it's biologic destiny. The hope is that this information makes that swim a whole lot easier.