CARD 3

Your safeguarding responsibilities – a stepped approach
Safeguarding adults is straightforwardly part of good medical care, linked to both patient safety and overall wellbeing. Doctors work with adults with a range of needs, many of whom will not require support beyond the direct provision of medical care. As mentioned, the purpose of safeguarding is to give people as much control as possible and to help them make informed choices.

**Step 1: Identifying adults who may have safeguarding needs**
As a first step it is important that doctors can identify factors that may put adults at risk, as set out in more detail in cards 2 and 4. Identifying and recording factors that contribute to risk can be a vital first step in ensuring patients receive necessary support.

**Step 2: responding to immediate risks**
Where you identify that an adult may have safeguarding needs, you must establish whether they are at immediate risk of harm, if a crime has been committed and whether emergency services, including the police, need to be involved – the priority is to ensure their safety and wellbeing. You should also consider whether a referral to the appropriate local authority safeguarding adult services is required as a matter of urgency.

**Step 3: assessing the individual’s needs**
Having addressed immediate safety issues, it is important to make a thorough and holistic assessment of your patient. This will ordinarily extend beyond the presenting clinical issue to look at their broader emotional, psychological and safeguarding needs. In addition to presenting physical and clinical factors, it is important to consider:
– are there any existing safeguarding alerts or any current agency involvement?
– might there be others at risk, such as children or other adults?
– what are the patient’s home circumstances? Do they contribute to risk?
– what kinds of support does the patient have?

**Step 4: assessing capacity**

Does the patient have the capacity to make relevant decisions, or do best-interests decisions need to be made on their behalf? Remember that adults with capacity have the right to make decisions on their own behalf, even where it may expose them to risk. In these circumstances it is important to ensure that the patient understands the nature of the risks and is offered support as appropriate. More information on mental capacity is included in cards 6, 7 and 8.

**Step 5: responding to harm or abuse – identifying relevant services**

The aim of safeguarding is to help people develop resilience and maintain independence, and attention must be given to all aspects of the individual’s wellbeing, not just their safety. It is important to explore with your patient what their goals are and how they want to live. Following discussion, relevant supporting services should be identified and offered.

Local authorities have overall responsibility for adult safeguarding and it may be appropriate to refer the individual to social care, particularly where they cannot keep themselves safe.

Where adults are at risk because of poor care, it may be appropriate to contact the CQC (Care Quality
Commission) and/or the body responsible for commissioning the care.

Alternative support services should also be considered. These may include citizens’ advisors or charitable organisations offering support and advice for individuals with specific conditions or with social needs.

It is vital that all health professionals familiarise themselves with their local adult safeguarding procedures.

**Step 6: a consensual approach**
Most adults with capacity accept the offer of support services. Where adults with capacity decline services, the reasons should be sensitively explored and alternatives offered where appropriate. As far as possible you should ensure they are aware of risks and the possible impact on their wellbeing, and encourage them to develop strategies to protect themselves. Ultimately, the decision to accept care and treatment rests with the competent adult.

In some cases information may need to be shared without consent, where others are at risk of significant harm.

**Step 7: review**
Where significant incidents have taken place, doctors – particularly GPs – will often have an important role. Local authority safeguarding adult boards have a statutory obligation to undertake safeguarding adult reviews in especially serious cases where an adult has been seriously injured or has died and abuse or neglect are suspected.