**Non-accidental injury**

**Non accidental injury (NAI)** is common, and potentially life-threatening and often presents with musculoskeletal problems, such as pain, swelling, limping, or non-weight bearing and all healthcare professionals who have contact with children should be alert to the possibility of abuse. Early intervention is crucial, and any concerns about neglect or abuse should be discussed with senior clinical staff or the designated child protection lead, to protect vulnerable children. You need to ensure that you are familiar with your local procedures and protocols for child protection.

***Points to consider in detecting non-accidental injury:***

* Is the history variable or inconsistent with the injuries seen?
* Was there a delay in seeking attention following an injury?
* In a limping child – could this be due to a fracture or soft tissue injury? Is there a history of trauma, and is it consistent with the injury?
* Are there multiple injuries?
* Are there multiple attendances to the Emergency department, primary care or other healthcare services?
* Are there signs of neglect, such as an unkempt, persistently dirty or smelly child - and especially in a child with learning difficulties or chronic illness?
* Are the findings consistent with the developmental age of the child?

***Certain patterns of injury are suggestive of non-accidental injury:***

* Bruising in a non-mobile child.
* Bruising over soft tissues, multiple bruises, clusters of bruises, bruises in the shape of a hand or implement or instrument.
* Burns in particular shapes eg cigarette burns, burns suggestive of forced immersion.
* Certain types of fractures are more suggestive of abuse than others (although none are pathognomonic) eg classic metaphyseal lesions, usually caused by twisting/shearing forces.
* Exclude bruising or soft tissue swelling due to medical causes – eg vasculitis, coagulation disorders.
* Exclude metabolic bone disease with recurrent fractures (e.g osteogenesis imperfecta or osteoporosis secondary to chronic corticosteroids).
* Remember a child with an organic diagnosis and especially chronic illness or disability may still be at risk of abuse or neglect.