MAP – Guidance for Criterion 13: Ethical principles

First, READ THE CRITERION! More people fail by not reading and understanding it than any other way.

Second, think of a clinical situation you have been involved in during the last few months (within the annual deadline for this criterion). The assessors believe that there is an ethical dimension to most clinical situations, e.g. someone under 16 wanting contraception, a relative wanting information about a patient, a married man wanting Viagra (does his wife agree?), a patient wanting a prescription for an unproven treatment.

Third, write a brief account describing:

a) What happened
b) What ethical guidance you used
c) How you applied the four ethical principles to your case, namely:
   Autonomy – whose? The patient’s, a relative’s, an unborn baby’s, yours?
   Beneficence – your actions should be aimed at doing good to the patient. What are the possible courses of action here? Which is the most likely to do good?
   Non maleficence – (Do no harm.) This is not quite the opposite of beneficence. What actions are possible here, what harm might they do? Would doing nothing cause harm?
   Justice – This is more relevant in some cases than others. It involves justice for all parties, including you, the doctor. It may involve justice for all your other patients, staff and the wider society. It includes the rule of law and the use of resources.
d) The outcome of your case as far as you know it. As is often the case in general practice, you may not know the final outcome.
e) Reflect on what you decided, and how you came to the decision. Reflection is a really important part of MAP. It shows that you look critically at your work and how you can learn from it. Don’t be afraid to say that perhaps you might have done things differently. As long as you acted as any reasonable doctor would that is fine. You don’t have to be perfect.

In addition to this brief guidance, the four principles as outlined in the Handbook and Good Medical Practice for GPs are essential reading. The RCGP on-line bookshop has a list of excellent books on the topic as well.

You should have no shortage of material but it is an idea to keep a notebook on your desk. Then you can jot down any suitable case as they happen. This process could be useful for several sections of MAP.