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Medical cannabis has become a topic of keen interest in the UK over recent years. Since legalisation for medicinal use in 2018, many patients are curious about how to access cannabis-based products for medicinal use (CBPMs) within the current healthcare framework. However, the pathway from initial enquiry to actually receiving prescribed medical cannabis is often less straightforward than headlines suggest. This post unpacks what a typical patient journey looks like at a UK <https://todaynews.co.uk/2026/08/10/inside-the-uks-private-medical-cannabis-clinics-how-the-sector-actually-works/> medical cannabis clinic, balancing the legal framework against real-world access, and shedding light on how private clinics operate within regulated boundaries.

## Legality vs. Real-World Access: What's the Situation?

It is legal in the UK to be prescribed medical cannabis products, but crucially, this does **not** mean widespread availability or easy access. The National Health Service (NHS) provides access only in very limited cases, primarily when other treatment options have failed or are inappropriate. This statutory limitation has created a funding gap, driving demand towards private medical cannabis clinics that operate alongside NHS services.

The key legal facts to remember:

- Medical cannabis prescriptions require a specialist on the *General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register*.
- NHS prescriptions are extremely rare and carefully considered.
- Private clinics can offer consultations with suitable specialists and arrange prescriptions, but these come at a cost — which is not covered by the NHS.
- In England, private clinics must be registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) — a fact not always clearly communicated.

## The Private Patient Pathway: Step-by-Step

Below is an outline of a typical patient journey at a private UK medical cannabis clinic, highlighting the crucial stages and considerations.

### 1. Eligibility Screening – Is Medical Cannabis Suitable for You?

The pathway begins with an eligibility screening process. This step often includes filling out medical history questionnaires and may involve a preliminary call or online assessment. The purpose is to establish whether medical cannabis could be a treatment option worth pursuing, considering the patient's condition and history.

**Important:** Patients should expect clear, upfront information about any screening fees and what's included. Avoid clinics that provide vague pricing or bundle this crucial first step into opaque fees.

### 2. Video Consultation(s) with a Specialist

Next, a crucial stage is a detailed consultation conducted remotely via video call with a doctor on the GMC Specialist Register. This ensures that the prescriber has the appropriate expertise to consider, recommend, and oversee the management of medical cannabis treatment.

Video consultations are a convenient and effective means of patient assessment, especially given geographic and mobility constraints for many patients. However, in England, clinics providing remote prescribing must be registered with the CQC and declare these activities—something patients should verify.

**Tip:** Good clinics transparently list consultation fees per appointment, including any necessary follow-up consultations. Be cautious of clinics that do not clearly specify these prices upfront.

### 3. **Prescription and Pharmacy Delivery**

If the specialist agrees medical cannabis is appropriate, a prescription can be issued. This prescription is usually for authorised cannabis-based medicinal products available in the UK. The patient's prescription will be filled and delivered by a pharmacy licensed to dispense cannabis medicines, often offering discreet delivery services directly to the patient's home.

Pharmacy delivery is not only convenient but vital for ensuring product quality, safety, and traceability — something patients should confirm before proceeding. Patients should also ask about ongoing costs, including prescription prices and delivery fees, to avoid surprises later on.

### 4. **Follow-Up and Ongoing Care**

Medical cannabis treatment requires close monitoring due to varied patient responses and potential adjustments in dosing or product type. Clinics typically offer follow-up video consultations to assess efficacy, side effects, and overall wellbeing.

Regular follow-ups are essential, and patients should understand whether these are included in their initial package or billed separately.

## **Who Can Prescribe Medical Cannabis in the UK?**

Unlike GPs, only doctors listed on the GMC Specialist Register can prescribe cannabis-based medicinal products for human use. This rule ensures clinicians have the specialist expertise to safely navigate an area of medicine still developing robust evidence.



This restriction is enforced by regulatory bodies and remains consistent across the four UK nations, though the nature of further regulation may differ:

Nation Regulatory Authority Notes on Private Clinic Oversight England Care Quality Commission (CQC) Private clinics offering remote consultations and prescribing must be registered and declare remote prescribing activity.

Scotland Healthcare Improvement Scotland & NHS Boards Private clinics are regulated but processes differ; remote prescribing guidance is developing. Wales Healthcare Inspectorate Wales Similar regulation to England; formal declarations required for remote practices. Northern Ireland Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) Private healthcare regulation in progress; remote prescribing details less widely publicised.

## Important Consumer Warnings: Prices and Transparency

A common pitfall in this market is poor transparency around pricing, especially concerning initial consultations, prescriptions, and follow-ups. Patients often report surprise at discovery of extra fees or ongoing costs that clinics did not clearly disclose beforehand.

### Checklist before booking with a medical cannabis clinic:

- Are consultation fees (screening and specialist) stated upfront on the website or in initial communications?
- Are prescription and medication costs clarified, including pharmacy dispensing and delivery charges?
- Is follow-up care priced separately, and if so, what is the frequency of recommended follow-ups?
- Is the clinic registered with the CQC or relevant regulatory body, and is remote prescribing declared where applicable?
- Does the clinic explain clearly the eligibility screening process and its cost implications?

## Bridging the NHS Funding Gap: The Reality for Patients

The NHS provides medical cannabis to a very limited subset of patients, often those with rare or complex conditions where other treatments have failed, such as certain epilepsy syndromes or chemotherapy-induced nausea unresponsive to standard therapies. Most other patients interested in exploring CBPMs currently rely on private clinics.

This creates a two-tier system:

- **NHS Access:** Limited, highly regulated, no direct cost to patient but very restricted availability.
- **Private Market:** Broader access opportunities, speedy appointments, but comes at a financial cost and with variable clinic quality.

While some view private clinics as filling an access gap, it is essential patients understand both the strengths and limitations inherent to this pathway. Transparent communication about the trade-off between NHS-funded care and private access is crucial to informed decision-making.

## Summary: Navigating Your Medical Cannabis Journey

Considering a medical cannabis clinic in the UK? Here's a concise summary of what to expect in the typical patient pathway:

1. **Eligibility Screening:** Initial assessment of suitability, with clear indication of any fees.
2. **Video Consultation with Specialist:** Conducted remotely by a GMC Specialist Register doctor, ensuring expert oversight.
3. **Prescription and Delivery:** Medication dispensed by licensed pharmacies, delivered discreetly, with pricing transparency.
4. **Follow-Up Care:** Ongoing remote monitoring essential for safe and effective treatment.

Keep these key concerns front of mind: ask questions about pricing before booking, verify clinic registration and regulatory compliance, and seek a prescriber with specialist credentials. This approach will help you navigate the complex landscape of UK medical cannabis with clarity and confidence.



Remember: legality does not guarantee availability, and private clinics fill a niche where NHS provision has yet to expand substantially. Your best advocacy is informed, cautious, and engaged healthcare decisions.

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