

With growing interest in medicinal cannabis as a treatment option, a number of private clinics have emerged across the UK offering cannabis-based medicine prescriptions. Yet, these services operate differently than typical private healthcare providers, and understanding those differences is crucial for patients navigating their options.

Legality vs Real-World Access: Understanding the Gap

Medicinal cannabis was legally rescheduled in the UK in 2018, allowing specialist doctors to prescribe cannabis-based products for medicinal use in humans (CBPMs). However, **legal does not always mean readily accessible**.

- **Legality:** Prescribing cannabis-based products is legal under UK law when done by appropriately licensed and registered specialists.
- **Real-world Access:** Despite legal status, NHS prescriptions for cannabis remain rare due to limited clinical evidence and NHS guidelines. Most patients find NHS funding unavailable or denied, leading them to the private sector to seek treatment.

This leads to a fundamental tension between *sole access* (availability strictly via NHS specialists, which is extremely limited) and *speed and breadth of access* through private cannabis clinics.

The NHS Funding Gap and Private Market Realities

Because the NHS seldom funds CBPMs, patients wanting access often turn to private cannabis clinics for:

1. **Faster access:** Private clinics may offer quicker appointments, including same-day or next-day video consultations.
2. **More frequent availability:** Private providers may be open to prescribing cannabis for a wider range of conditions compared with the NHS.
3. **Remote prescribing:** Especially in England, many cannabis clinics offer remote prescription services, allowing patients to consult and receive prescriptions without in-person visits, subject to regulations.

Nonetheless, this private route carries a significant financial burden. Some clinics quote high consultation fees without transparent breakdowns of ongoing costs, prescriptions, or follow-ups — a common pitfall for patients to watch out for.

Common Mistake: No Consultation or Prescription Prices Stated Upfront

Unlike standard private healthcare where pricing is often clear and all-inclusive, many private cannabis clinics either omit prices or only reveal them on enquiry. This complicates patients' ability to make informed decisions about affordability.



<https://todaynews.co.uk/2026/08/10/inside-the-uks-private-medical-cannabis-clinics-how-the-sector-actually-works/>

- **Beware hidden costs:** Consultation fees, prescription charges, follow-up appointments, and potential product costs should all be transparently communicated.
- **Request a full cost breakdown** before committing to private cannabis treatment plans.

Who Can Prescribe Cannabis-Based Products? The Role of the GMC Specialist Register

Private cannabis clinics have unique regulatory and prescribing criteria that differ from typical healthcare providers:

- **Only doctors listed on the General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register** can legally prescribe CBPMs in the UK. This is a more restricted group than doctors who can prescribe other medications.
- General practitioners (GPs) are not permitted to prescribe cannabis-based medicines, even in the private sector.
- Specialist consultants from certain fields such as neurology, psychiatry, pain medicine, or palliative care are most commonly qualified to prescribe.

This specialist prescribing requirement creates a bottleneck limiting widespread access, which explains why many patients seek private specialists willing to offer quicker, more flexible consultations.

Regulation and CQC Oversight in England

Private cannabis clinics are part of a broader healthcare market regulated under different frameworks than wellness or alternative medicine providers:

Aspect Private Cannabis Clinics Typical Private Healthcare Providers Regulator Care Quality Commission (CQC) in England (must register, including for remote prescribing services) Also CQC in England, Care Inspectorate (Scotland), HIW (Wales), RQIA (NI), depending on location Prescribing Rules Strict—only GMC Specialist Register doctors, with controlled specialist indications Broader prescriber base including GPs and consultants Consultation Format Video consultations and remote prescribing increasingly common and declared to CQC Mix of in-person and, increasingly, video consultations Pricing Transparency Often variable, with some clinics not disclosing full costs upfront More established pricing frameworks for packages, treatments, follow-ups

In England, the **CQC must be notified if a clinic offers remote prescribing of cannabis-based products**. This is a key safeguard ensuring accountability and standards in an otherwise rapidly expanding and commercially competitive market.



Putting It All Together: What Patients Need to Know

Choosing between private cannabis clinics and more traditional private healthcare services involves weighing several factors:

- **Access Speed vs Sole NHS Access:** Private clinics provide faster access, but cost and specialist availability vary. NHS access remains the sole funded route but is limited and slow.
- **Regulation and Safety:** Confirm your clinic is CQC-registered (in England) and that prescribing doctors are on the GMC Specialist Register to ensure legal, professional standards.
- **Pricing Clarity:** Demand a full written breakdown of all fees upfront—including consultation, prescription, ongoing care—to avoid unexpected costs.
- **Consultation Mode:** Video consultations and remote prescribing are increasingly the norm for cannabis clinics, offering convenience but note the importance of maintaining clinical oversight.

Understanding these differences protects patients from misleading marketing and unrealistic expectations, helping them navigate the private cannabis market with clarity and confidence.

Summary Checklist: Navigating Private Cannabis Clinics in the UK

1. Is the clinic registered with the appropriate healthcare regulator (CQC in England)?
2. Are prescribing doctors on the GMC Specialist Register qualified to prescribe cannabis products?
3. Are video consultations and remote prescribing practices clearly described and regulated?
4. Are all consultation, prescription, and ongoing care fees provided clearly in writing before booking?
5. Do you understand that NHS funding for medicinal cannabis is rare, so private treatment will be out-of-pocket?
6. Have you compared the speed, costs, and access benefits realistically between NHS routes and private providers?

By transparently addressing these points, patients can make informed choices in a complex landscape where legality, access, and commercial realities intersect.

For more detailed guidance on private healthcare providers and regulation across all UK nations, please consult the relevant health service and regulatory bodies directly.