

With medical cannabis increasingly sought after across the UK, many patients find themselves navigating a complex private healthcare landscape. One client recently told me made a mistake that cost them thousands.. Providers such as Releaf Cannabis offer structured patient pathways that might seem appealing, but how do you effectively compare patient pathways across clinics? What should you look for beyond marketing claims? In this post, we'll unpack the key issues and help you make an informed choice, focusing on real-world access versus legality, the role of NHS funding gaps, who can legally prescribe medical cannabis, and the pivotal regulatory oversight by authorities like the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in England.

Understanding Legality Versus Real-World Access

Since November 2018, medical cannabis has been legal to prescribe in the UK, but legal availability and real-world access are two very different things. Prescribing medical cannabis is tightly regulated, with clinicians often reluctant to issue prescriptions under the NHS, citing limited clinical evidence and specialist expertise requirements.

Because of this reluctance and the lack of widespread NHS funding, a thriving private market has emerged. Here, clinics like Releaf Cannabis play a significant role by creating clear patient pathways from consultation to prescription. However, just because something is legal doesn't guarantee that any given clinic can or will provide the treatment you want.

- **Legality:** Medical cannabis is legal for prescription under UK law, but only by specialist doctors registered on the General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register, or via specialists acting under their direction.
- **Real-world access:** Patients often face barriers including cost, clinician reluctance, and limited expertise, which pushes many to the private sector.

The NHS Funding Gap and the Reality of the Private Market

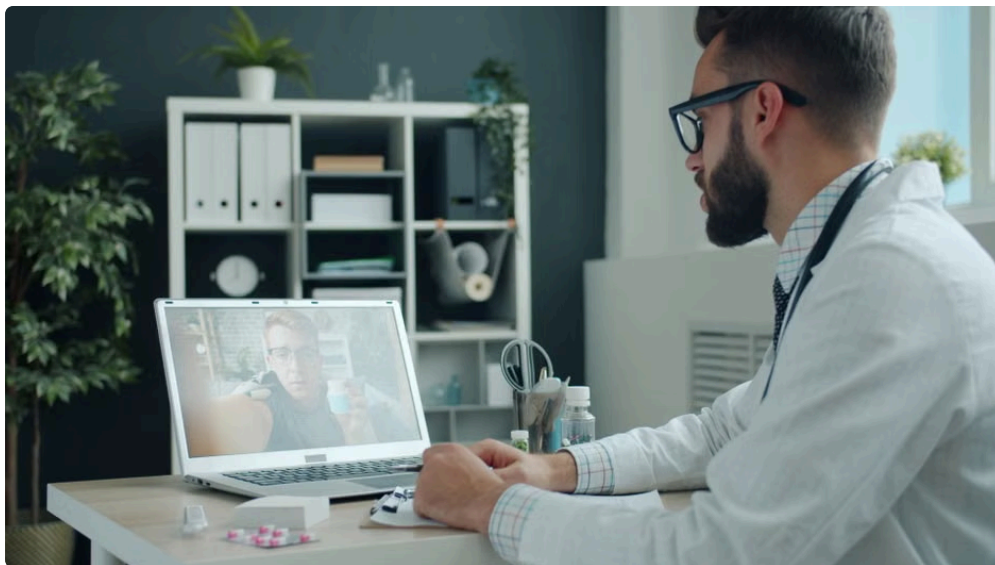
The NHS currently does not routinely fund most medical cannabis prescriptions due to limited clinical trial evidence, regulatory caution, and cost-effectiveness concerns. This leaves patients seeking medical cannabis to turn to private clinics. These providers bridge the gap but introduce new variables for patients to consider:

1. **Consultation fees:** Private clinics usually charge consultation fees upfront, which contrasts with NHS consults that are free at point of care.
2. **Prescription costs:** Not only consultation fees but ongoing prescription costs must be factored in; these can be substantial and ongoing.
3. **Follow-up care:** Private pathways vary widely in their approach to review appointments and patient monitoring.

Understanding these distinctions is crucial when comparing clinics — transparent pricing and follow-up care commitments are key indicators of patient-centred practice.

Who Can Prescribe Medical Cannabis and Why It Matters

In the UK, medical cannabis prescriptions are restricted to specialist doctors listed on the GMC Specialist Register. GPs cannot prescribe medical cannabis. This restriction means clinics offering these prescriptions must ensure their doctors meet strict criteria.



Specialist registration ensures the prescribing doctor has adequate expertise to manage complex cases safely. Clinics that obscure who is prescribing or rely on generalists may be less compliant with UK medical regulations. When evaluating providers such as Releaf Cannabis, confirm their clinicians' GMC Specialist Register status.

Key Regulatory Oversight: The Care Quality Commission (CQC) Role in England

Regulation provides safety and quality assurance. In England, private clinics offering medical cannabis must be registered with the **Care Quality Commission (CQC)**. This registration covers critical aspects such as:

- Compliance with healthcare standards
- Accountability for clinical governance
- Transparency of services offered
- Declaration of services such as *remote prescribing* and *video consultations*

A clinic's CQC registration status is a concrete, checkable fact — unlike tenuous marketing claims. If a clinic states it offers remote prescribing or virtual consultations but is not registered or does not declare these to the CQC, this is a red flag.



Comparing the Patient Pathway: What to Look For in Clinics Like Releaf Cannabis

When comparing clinics, focus on their entire patient pathway from initial contact through follow-up care. Here is a checklist to guide you:

1. Transparent Consultation Pricing

Ensure the clinic explicitly states the cost of consultations. Beware clinics that omit this, try to upsell add-ons, or only reveal prices after extensive engagement. Transparent pricing upfront helps you compare value and plan financially.

2. Clear Prescription Pricing

Understand how much prescriptions cost, including any recurrent payment obligations. Some clinics charge extra for prescription fulfilment or require subscription models. Ask whether prescription costs include medication price or if you pay separately to pharmacies or suppliers.

3. Video Consultations Offered and Declared

Many providers now offer remote video consultations — a growing standard amid COVID-19 and for patient convenience. In England, this must be declared to the CQC. Confirm if the clinic's pathway includes remote appointments and how they manage clinical safety and patient identity verification during these.

4. Remote Prescribing Capability and Declaration

Remote prescribing is permitted but <https://todaynews.co.uk/2026/08/10/inside-the-uks-private-medical-cannabis-clinics-how-the-sector-actually-works/> must be declared to the CQC as part of compliance. Clinics offering this can provide flexibility but make sure they have clear safeguards and disclosures in place.

5. Specialist Prescriber Credentials

Ask which specialists will conduct the assessment and prescribe medication. Confirm they are on the GMC Specialist Register, and understand their specialism. Clinics like Releaf Cannabis often provide this information openly.

6. Follow-Up Appointment Policies

Medical cannabis treatment requires ongoing monitoring to adjust dosage and manage side effects. Check how often follow-ups are scheduled, whether these are included in fees or extra, and whether they are in-person or remote.

Common Mistake: Not Disclosing Consultation and Prescription Prices

One mistake many prospective patients make is assuming that consultation is a one-off cost or that prescription fees are modest or included. Clinics often omit transparent pricing in early marketing. This leads to sticker shock when patients learn about follow-up costs or medication charges.

A reputable provider will display or disclose all pricing components upfront. This includes:

- Initial consultation fees

- Any additional assessment or documentation fees
- The typical cost range of a prescription, clarifying patient responsibilities
- Follow-up consultation charges

Never hesitate to ask providers directly. If they avoid or delay giving clear answers, consider this a significant warning sign.

Sample Comparison Table: Releaf Cannabis versus Other Clinics

Feature	Releaf Cannabis	Other Private Clinics
Consultation Price	Clearly stated upfront on website	Often unclear or disclosed late
Prescription Pricing	Transparent estimate provided	Varies widely, sometimes opaque
Video Consultations	Offered and declared to CQC	May be offered but not always declared
Remote Prescribing	Declared to and regulated by CQC	Inconsistent declaration
Prescriber Credentials	Specialists on GMC Specialist Register	Varies, sometimes unclear
Follow-Up Appointments	Included in pathway, frequency stated	Often ad hoc, may incur extra fees

Summary: Making the Right Choice for Your Medical Cannabis Journey

Choosing a medical cannabis provider requires balancing legality, practical access, clinical safety, and cost transparency. Providers like Releaf Cannabis offer clearly articulated patient pathways that prioritise transparency and regulatory compliance, helping you understand what to expect at each stage.

To compare providers effectively:

- Check they are registered with the CQC (in England) and declare all services including remote prescribing
- Confirm prescribing doctors are GMC Specialist Register members
- Demand upfront transparency on consultation and prescription pricing
- Understand how follow-up care is structured and billed
- Evaluate whether video consultations or remote prescribing suit your situation and are properly regulated

Navigating the private medical cannabis market is challenging, but armed with the right knowledge, you can find a provider that offers safety, transparency, and clinically appropriate care.