

Medical cannabis remains one of the most talked-about treatments in UK healthcare today. Yet for many patients and clinicians, navigating the journey from legalisation to actual access can still feel confusing and uncertain. In this post, we separate the often-muddled claims around evidence, licensing, prescribing and regulation—focusing on what a cautious provider truly says about the developing evidence base, legal framework and patient realities.

## Legality Versus Real-World Access: What Patients Face

Since November 2018, medical cannabis products have been legal for prescription in the UK under very limited circumstances. The law permits specialist doctors to prescribe cannabis-based products for medicinal use (CBPMs) if they deem it clinically appropriate. However, legal availability does not automatically mean easy access:



- **NHS Funding Gap:** Despite legal status, the NHS rarely funds these prescriptions. This means most patients seeking medical cannabis must rely on private prescriptions.
- **Strict Prescribing Criteria:** Access is usually limited to patients with specific conditions like certain types of epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, or chemotherapy-induced nausea.
- **Private Market Reality:** Many clinics have stepped in offering video consultations and remote prescribing services, but these come with out-of-pocket costs.

This gap between legality and actual availability is crucial to understand. A cautious provider will be upfront about this—acknowledging that while prescriptions are lawful, NHS prescriptions remain uncommon, and private prescribing comes with its own considerations.

## Why Does the NHS Rarely Fund Medical Cannabis?

The NHS's reluctance largely stems from the need for robust, high-quality clinical evidence and formal national guidance. Until comprehensive research demonstrates clear risk-benefit profiles, NHS bodies hesitate to routinely fund cannabis-based treatments, especially as these products often have varied formulations and no standardised dosing.

## Evidence Developing: Why Caution Prevails in National Guidance

When considering evidence for medical cannabis, a cautious provider follows the principle of avoiding certainty where the data is still emerging. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and other UK

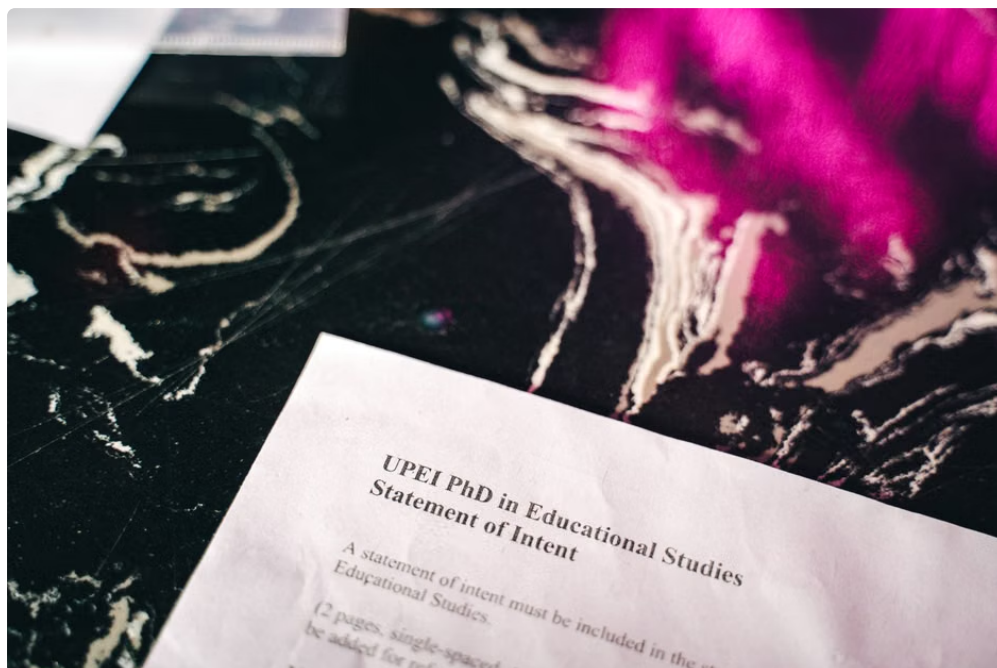
advisory bodies describe the evidence as *developing but not definitive*. Key points include:

- Many clinical trials are small or lack robust controls.
- Most studies focus on symptom relief (e.g., spasticity in MS, chronic pain), with varying outcomes.
- Long-term safety data are sparse.

National guidance advises caution, suggesting medical cannabis for patients only when standard treatments have exhausted or proved ineffective. This careful, incremental approach reflects an effort to protect patients while better data accumulate.

## The Need to Avoid Overconfidence

Cautious providers explicitly avoid overconfident claims or sweeping promises. They recognise that media and marketing hype often oversell benefits without adequate discussion of potential harms, side effects or the limitations of current knowledge. Such providers will say:



"While promising in some contexts, the evidence for medical cannabis is still evolving, and we must carefully weigh benefits against risks case-by-case."

## Who Can Prescribe Medical Cannabis and Why It Matters

Medical cannabis prescribing in the UK is strictly regulated. Key regulatory rules are:

- Only doctors on the **General Medical Council's (GMC) Specialist Register** may initiate prescriptions for cannabis-based medicinal products.
- Doctors prescribing must ensure a thorough clinical assessment and document rationale for treatment.
- Specialist status ensures prescribers have the relevant expertise to weigh complex risks and benefits.

This regulation aims to safeguard patients from inappropriate prescribing, given the complexities and uncertainties surrounding medical cannabis.

## Remote Prescribing and Video Consultations: Modern Tools Under Regulation

The rise of private clinics offering **video consultations** has expanded access to specialist opinions without geographic barriers. These providers also often offer **remote prescribing**, electronically issuing prescriptions after online assessment.

In England, providers must declare these [eligibility screening medical cannabis](#) services to the **Care Quality Commission (CQC)**. The CQC monitors safety and quality, including how clinics manage remote consultations and ensure patient consent and follow-up. This oversight is vital for maintaining standards in a fast-evolving market.

## Addressing Common Mistakes Around Pricing Transparency

A frequently observed issue in private medical cannabis services is a lack of clear pricing upfront. Clinics may advertise consultations or treatments without explicitly stating:

- How much the initial consultation costs—especially for video assessments.
- Prices for the cannabis prescription or product itself, which can vary widely.
- Whether follow-up appointments or ongoing prescription renewals incur additional fees.

This ambiguity can mislead patients about the true financial commitment involved. A cautious, patient-focused provider always provides clear, detailed pricing before appointments to enable informed decisions and avoid unexpected charges.

## Summary Checklist: What a Cautious Provider Will Communicate About Medical Cannabis

Aspect Cautious Provider Approach Legality Medical cannabis is legal but access depends on specialist prescribing; NHS rarely funds. Evidence Evidence base is developing; national guidance urges careful case-by-case use; avoid certainty. Prescribers Only GMC Specialist Register doctors may prescribe; ensures clinical expertise. Consultations Video consultations and remote prescribing possible; must be declared to CQC in England. Regulation Private clinics regulated by CQC for safety and quality standards. Pricing Transparent disclosure of consultation, prescription and follow-up costs upfront.

## Final Thoughts

Medical cannabis is a promising yet complex therapeutic area. Responsible providers distinguish themselves by embracing the nuance and uncertainty inherent in the current evidence landscape. They clearly separate the question of legality from practical access, explain why NHS prescribing is limited, and emphasise their specialist credentials. They also leverage modern tools like video consultations responsibly, with full regulatory oversight.

Most importantly, they give patients transparent, upfront information about costs and clinical risks, avoiding the trap of overpromising benefits. In an arena where hype can cloud judgement, this careful, transparent approach offers patients the best foundation for informed decisions.