

As someone who has followed football careers for over a decade, I've seen how retirement from elite sport can hit hard—physically, mentally, and emotionally. The abrupt end to the daily training grind, the shift in identity, and the challenge of finding a new career path all add up. And when you throw medical issues into the mix—like being prescribed medical cannabis—questions about workplace policies, drug testing, and disclosure arise.

This blog post will tackle the tough question: **Do you have to tell your employer if you're a medical cannabis patient?** I'll also weave in themes of retirement shock, identity shifts post-retirement, and career pathways to keep the story in the real world, especially for elite athletes thinking ahead. Plus, I'll mention some handy resources like the PFA and Releaf.co.uk. And yes, I'm mindful of calling out what the rules say, versus how things tend to play out in practice.



What The Rule Says About Medical Cannabis and Work Disclosure

Let's start with the basics:



- Medical cannabis is legal in the UK for prescribed medicinal use, but it remains a controlled substance with restrictions.
- Employers usually have drug testing policies aligned with safety, performance, and legal compliance.
- There's no explicit legal duty for employees to disclose medical cannabis use unless it impacts the job or safety.
- The Equality Act 2010 covers disabilities—including some chronic health conditions—but being a medical cannabis patient is not, in itself, a protected characteristic or condition.

Essentially, if you're prescribed medical cannabis and it does not interfere with your ability to work or your safety or that of others, there is no strict legal obligation to inform your employer. But it isn't quite that simple in practice.

What Happens in Practice: Drug Testing Policies and Workplace Realities

Employers often do drug tests for staff—especially in safety-critical roles or industries prone to strict regulatory oversight. This could include elite sports clubs, factories, transport, or healthcare. Policies vary widely from company to company.

Aspect What the Rule Says What Happens in Practice Disclosure of medical cannabis use No explicit legal duty unless it affects job performance or safety Many employers expect disclosure if drug testing is routine or likely; nondisclosure can lead to disciplinary action Drug testing policies Employers can test for drugs if reasonable, with clear policies in place Some employers test randomly or post-incident; others test on reasonable suspicion; positive medical cannabis tests may still be treated as positives Reasonable adjustments under Equality Act 2010 Applies if employee has qualifying disability or health condition Unlikely to cover cannabis use unless part of a disability treatment regimen acknowledged by employer and supported by medical evidence

In other words, despite being prescribed medical cannabis, you may still test positive in a workplace drug test. This can lead to misunderstandings or disciplinary hearings, even if your medicine is legal. That's why disclosure is a tricky decision and needs to be handled thoughtfully.

Retirement Shock and Identity Shift After Elite Sport: Why This Matters

From my experience reporting on football players and their futures, the loss of daily structure is massive. Footballers coming to the end of their elite careers face:

- **Retirement shock:** Suddenly no more regimented training, team meetings, or match days.
- **Loss of identity:** "I'm no longer a footballer" can sting more than expected.
- **Health challenges:** Lingering injuries or chronic pain that may require ongoing treatment, including medical cannabis.

Imagine adding the pressure of navigating drug testing and employer disclosure on top of that. It's easy to see why some don't want to disclose medical cannabis use, fearing stigma or job loss. But hiding it isn't risk-free either.

Career Pathways and Entry Costs: Planning Beyond the Pitch

Organizations like the PFA do great work supporting players with career pathways, education, and retraining. They understand financial planning, qualifications, and mental wellness all go hand in hand.

The transition usually means investing time and sometimes money in new skills or qualifications. Here are some typical considerations:

- Entry costs—tuition fees, materials, or losing income during retraining.
- Adjusting physical or cognitive abilities after injury or treatment.
- Setting realistic expectations—not every ex-player can become a pundit or coach.

And let's be clear: medical cannabis use might be part of managing pain or other health conditions, but it's no "miracle cure." Planning ahead with proper medical advice and career guidance beats hoping resilience carries you through.

Retraining Before Retirement: The Best Defense

To soften retirement shock and reduce identity crisis, early retraining or dual careers make sense. Some players start courses or mentorship programs years before retiring. The PFA and even club networks like Arsenal alumni network provide mentoring and support.

Retraining early means you can:

- Test out new careers while still earning football wages.
- Build a network beyond sport.
- Manage medical treatments openly with prospective employers who appreciate transparency.

As for medical cannabis, starting open conversations with potential future employers or HR teams—ideally with support from medical professionals—can ease fears and avoid surprises.

Using Releaf.co.uk and Other Resources for Guidance

Releaf.co.uk is a useful platform focused on patient education and [private healthcare vs NHS](#) rights around medical cannabis. They offer guidance about:

- Your legal position regarding medical cannabis at work.

- Understanding employer drug testing policies.
- Accessing support networks and counseling.

Combining resources from Releaf, the PFA, and club alumni groups like Arsenal's creates a strong foundation for handling health and career transitions holistically.

Summary Checklist: What You Should Consider

1. **Understand your employer's drug testing policy**—ask for it in writing if unclear.
2. **Know the legal background**—medical cannabis is legal when prescribed but is still a controlled substance.
3. **Consider the risks and benefits of disclosure**—think about your role, safety concerns, and company culture.
4. **Seek advice**—use PFA education services, [Releaf.co.uk](https://www.releaf.co.uk), and medical professionals.
5. **Plan your retirement career early**—retrain, network, and build new skills.
6. **Be honest and proactive**—open communication with employers often leads to better outcomes.

Final Thoughts

Being a medical cannabis patient at work isn't a simple yes/no question when it comes to telling your employer. Legally, you aren't required to disclose unless it influences your job or safety, but in practice, honesty combined with an understanding of your workplace's policies usually serves you best.

Elite footballers planning retirement must prepare not just for career shifts but also for the health realities they face. Organizations like the PFA and networks such as Arsenal's alumni group are vital lifelines to support identity shifts and open doors to new opportunities.

And remember: careful planning, properly informed decisions, and trusted advice are the keys—not miracle cures.