

If you're considering treatment at a private medical clinic, particularly those offering complex therapies such as medical cannabis, it is vital to understand how thoroughly your care will be managed. Clinics differ widely in how they conduct patient assessments, prescribing, and follow-up. A concerning model, sometimes called a "lighter process," may seem convenient but could carry serious risks.

In this guide, we explain what "lighter process" means in this context, how to spot it, and what tools like the [patient safety private clinic](#) Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register can tell you about a clinic's oversight and expertise. We also clarify the legal and ethical requirements around prescribing unlicensed medicines and highlight warning signs around monitoring and multidisciplinary teamwork.

What Is a 'Lighter Process' in Clinical Practice?

The term "lighter process" is often used informally to describe clinics that apply less rigorous assessment, prescribing, and monitoring protocols than expected in good medical practice. This can include:

- Consultation through a single visit or short initial assessment only ("mdt only at initiation")
- No scheduled or periodic clinical review after treatment starts ("no periodic review")
- Minimal or no active monitoring of treatment outcomes or complications ("minimal monitoring")

While some clinics may promote their streamlined approach as efficient or patient-friendly, these shortcuts can risk patient safety and treatment effectiveness, especially when dealing with unlicensed medicines or complex conditions.

Why Is Regulation and Clinic Oversight Important?

In the UK, healthcare providers are regulated and inspected to ensure they meet minimum safety and quality standards. Two key regulators and oversight bodies help maintain these standards:

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

The **Care Quality Commission (CQC)** regulates health and social care services in England. Clinics must register with the CQC and meet requirements in areas such as safety, staffing, governance, and patient involvement.

The CQC reports include inspection results and highlight serious risks. Clinics operating a lighter process often receive critical comments about:

- Inadequate clinical review or monitoring of patients
- Lack of proper governance arrangements
- Failure to apply multidisciplinary team oversight

Before attending a clinic, always check their CQC registration status and reviews. Beware clinics with limited or no inspection records.

General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register

The **General Medical Council (GMC)** maintains the Specialist Register, listing doctors qualified in particular specialties. Knowing if your doctor is on this register matters because:

- Specialists have in-depth training relevant to your condition
- They're vetted for ongoing competence and ethical practice
- They are better equipped to lead complex decisions, especially with unlicensed medicines

Some clinics claim they have “specialist doctors,” but refuse to name them or provide registration numbers (a red flag). Always ask for your prescriber’s name and GMC number before proceeding.

Who Is Legally Allowed to Prescribe Medicines?

Only licensed medical professionals such as doctors, dentists, and some nurse practitioners can legally prescribe medicines in the UK.

- Doctors must be registered with the GMC and licensed to practice
- Prescribing unlicensed medicines (e.g., certain medical cannabis products) requires additional responsibility
- Prescribers must assess risks, benefits, and have valid clinical reasons

Clinics offering a lighter process may subcontract or delegate prescribing to non-registrants or may not have appropriately qualified prescribers leading the pathway. This practice is illegal and unsafe.

Unlicensed Medicines and Risk Disclosure

Medical cannabis and other treatments often involve *unlicensed medicines*. This means they have not passed full regulatory approval, and their safety or efficacy for conditions may be uncertain.

Best practice and legal requirements dictate that clinics must:

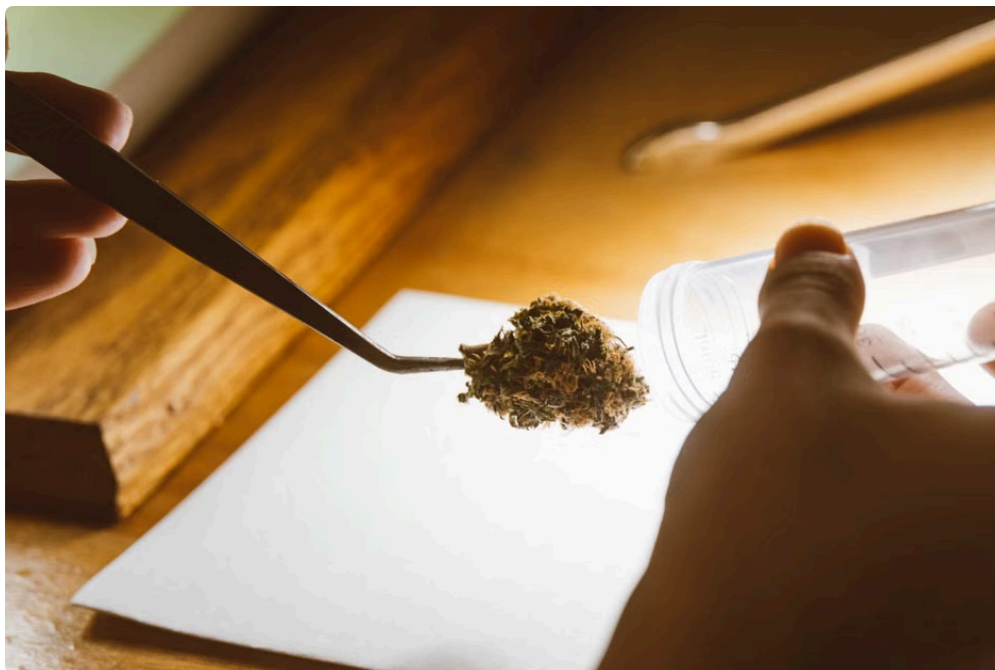
- Explain clearly that the medicine is unlicensed
- Discuss potential benefits and risks honestly
- Document informed consent with patient understanding
- Provide ongoing monitoring and review

If a clinic downplays these risks, minimises information, or rushes patients through consent, it may be running a lighter process that prioritises sales over safety.

Specialist Competence and Scope

Not every doctor is a specialist in the condition you are seeking treatment for. For example, medical cannabis prescribing for chronic pain requires understanding pain management, drug interactions, and patient psychology.

A multidisciplinary team (“MDT”) is often the gold standard—combining specialists such as:



- Consultant physicians in relevant fields (e.g., neurology, pain management, psychiatry)
- Pharmacists experienced with unlicensed medicines
- Specialist nurses or allied health professionals

A clinic claiming to rely on "mdt only at initiation" but then dropping follow-up shows minimal ongoing oversight. Good care involves periodic review, dose adjustment, side effect monitoring, and psychological support.



Spotting the Signs of a 'Lighter Process' Clinic

Here are practical tips to identify if a clinic may be using a lighter process:

1. **Check the clinic's CQC registration and reports.** Is it fully registered? Are there any negative comments on monitoring or governance?
2. **Ask for the prescriber's full name and GMC registration number.** Look up their specialist status online.

3. **Request details on how often you will be reviewed after the initial prescription.** Clinics that only offer an initial MDT review with no scheduled follow-up may not provide adequate ongoing care.
4. **Find out how the clinic monitors treatment progress and side effects.** Beware if they dismiss monitoring as your responsibility or provide no clear plan.
5. **Confirm that informed consent includes risks of unlicensed medicines and is documented.** Vague or rushed consent is a concern.
6. **Avoid clinics offering subscription “packages” that bundle medicine and dispensing fees without clear billing details.**
7. **Check if the clinic can name the specialists on its team and describe their roles.** Clinics refusing to disclose this or claiming “specialist doctors” without proof are suspect.

Why Does It Matter?

When clinics run a lighter process, the risks to patients include:

- Inadequate diagnosis or treatment plans
- Undetected adverse effects or medication interactions
- Poor symptom control and unnecessary suffering
- Legal and ethical breaches harming patient rights

Healthcare is about safety first. Cutting corners to make treatment faster or cheaper undermines standard care and potentially endangers your health.

Summary Table: Comparing Clinic Practices

Aspect	Lighter Process Clinic	Best Practice Clinic
Initial Assessment	Single MDT evaluation only	Comprehensive assessment with team input
Ongoing Review	No scheduled follow-ups or ad hoc only	Regularly scheduled periodic reviews
Monitoring	Minimal or no documented monitoring	Active monitoring of outcomes and side effects
Prescriber Credentials	Unclear or non-specialist prescribers	Named GMC-registered specialists with relevant expertise
Informed Consent	Brief or vague disclosure on risks, unlicensed status	Detailed, documented explanation and patient consent
Regulatory Oversight	Limited or no CQC registration/reports	Fully registered, inspected and rated by CQC

Final Advice

When you seek treatment at a specialised private clinic, protect yourself by doing your homework:

- **Always ask for and verify registration numbers.**
- **Check the clinic’s CQC status.**
- **Request details on the prescribing doctor’s credentials.**
- **Insist on clear care pathways with periodic review and monitoring.**
- **Be cautious of subscription models or “lite” processes pushed as convenience.**

Your health depends on proper medical oversight, especially when unlicensed medicines or complex conditions are involved. A “lighter process” might sound appealing but often risks your safety and treatment success. Use the tools and tips here to spot clinics that prioritize quality and patient-centred care.