

The landscape of cannabis-based medicinal products (CBMPs) in the UK is evolving — legally, clinically, and commercially. Yet, despite the legalisation of CBMPs for medical use in November 2018, real-world access remains patchy. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) in England plays a key part in regulating providers offering consultations and prescriptions for CBMPs. However, in this still-nascent sector, confusion often arises around what the CQC regulates, who can prescribe these products, and the costs involved. This blog post will clarify the CQC's role, address common misconceptions, and explore the reality of patient access to cannabis medicines through private and NHS routes.

Understanding Legality vs Real-World Access

Legally, cannabis-based medicinal products have been available for prescription in the UK since November 1, 2018. The UK government allows specialist doctors on the GMC Specialist Register to prescribe Schedule 2 and 3 cannabis medicines for appropriate clinical reasons.

However, legality doesn't guarantee access. The NHS has been slow to routinely fund CBMPs except in very limited circumstances, resulting in a significant funding gap. Consequently, many patients turn to the private market to access these treatments. This juxtaposition between legality and day-to-day availability leads to a complex environment full of questions about who can legally prescribe, how these services must be regulated, and where patients can safely obtain cannabis medicines.

The NHS Funding Gap and Private Market Reality

Despite growing patient demand and supportive clinical guidelines in some cases, the NHS has largely maintained a cautious stance on funding CBMPs. Access via NHS prescriptions is often limited to specialist clinics or trial contexts, and general practitioners do not usually prescribe cannabis medicines.

This funding gap has fueled a burgeoning private market. Private clinics increasingly offer consultations, often remotely via video calls, followed by prescriptions for CBMPs. Yet, this market is unevenly regulated, especially compared to traditional medicines, causing both patient safety and transparency concerns.

Key issues in the private market include:

- **Variable consultation costs:** Many providers do not clearly state prices upfront, leaving patients uncertain about the full financial commitment.
- **Unclear prescription pricing:** Patients often pay separately for prescriptions and the products, but this is not always transparent before consultation.
- **Questionable prescribing practices:** Some providers skirt best practice by offering prescriptions without full adherence to specialist prescriber requirements.
- **Regulation awareness:** Patients frequently mistake wellness or lifestyle clinics for medical providers properly regulated by the CQC.

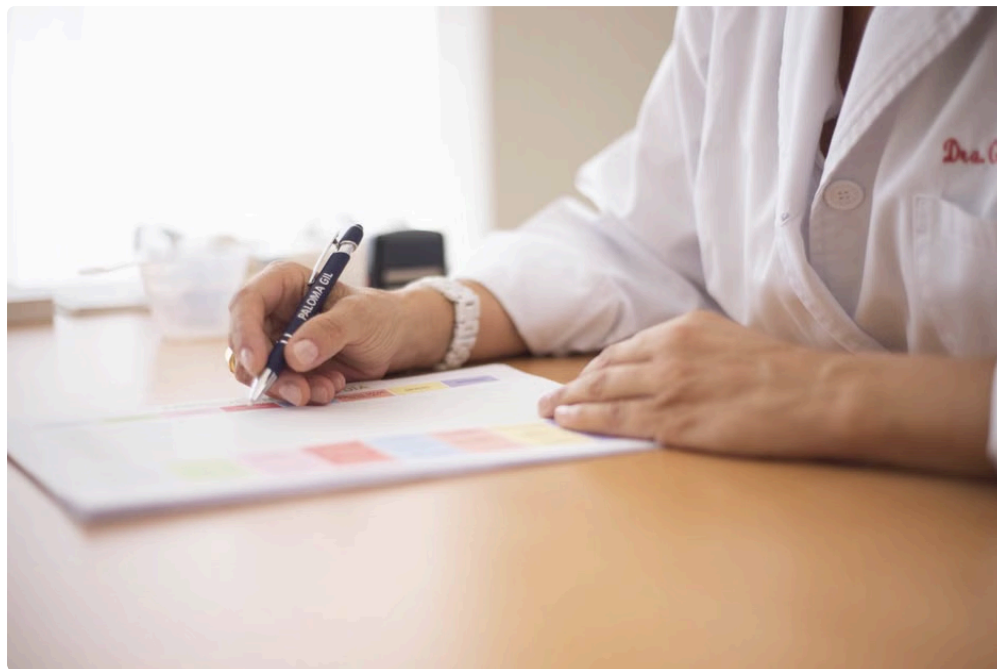
Who Can Prescribe Cannabis-Based Medicinal Products?

Under UK law, only a doctor listed on the **General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register** can prescribe CBMPs. This requirement is strict and non-negotiable, ensuring that only clinicians with appropriate expertise and responsibility prescribe these medicines.

Here is a checklist of prescribing qualifications:

1. Must be a medically qualified doctor registered with the GMC.
2. Must appear on the GMC Specialist Register in the relevant specialty.
3. Must undertake a full patient assessment before prescribing.
4. Must adhere to guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and other pertinent bodies.

Practitioners outside these parameters cannot legally prescribe cannabis medicines, a line the CQC is attentive to when registering and inspecting providers.



Regulation and the Care Quality Commission's Oversight

What is the CQC?

The **Care Quality Commission** is the independent regulator of health and social care services in England. It monitors, inspects, and regulates services to ensure they meet fundamental standards of safety, quality, and governance. Providers of medical consultations, including those involving CBMP prescriptions, must register with the CQC if they deliver regulated activities.

The CQC's Role with CBMP Providers

For CBMP-related services offered in England, the CQC specifically monitors:

- The suitability and safety of the provider's premises and staff.
- The qualifications and registration of clinicians prescribing CBMPs.
- Compliance with national healthcare standards and patient safety standards.
- Transparency about costs, including consultation fees and follow-up appointment pricing.
- Governance around remote consultations and remote prescribing — both increasingly common in this sector.

Importantly, providers offering **remote consultations** and **remote prescribing** must declare this activity to the CQC at registration. The CQC's 2021 guide clarifies that digitally enabled prescribing is regarded as a regulated

activity and cannot be performed unchecked or outside regulation.

Registration Requirements for Providers

When registering with the CQC, providers offering cannabis-based medicinal products must:

- Detail the types of regulated activities they provide (e.g., treatment of disease, disorder, or injury).
- Name the clinicians responsible for prescribing, confirming they are GMC-registered specialists.
- Declare if services include video or telephone consultations, including remote prescribing.
- Show clear pricing structures, covering consultation and prescription fees, including follow-ups.
- Demonstrate robust governance and record-keeping systems around patient care and medicine supply.

How the CQC Inspects CBMP Providers

Inspections focus on:

1. Checking that only appropriately licensed specialists prescribe cannabis medicines.
2. Reviewing medical records to ensure correct clinical assessments precede prescriptions.
3. Verifying patient consent and understanding of treatment risks and benefits.
4. Inspecting digital systems used for video consultations and prescriptions for security and confidentiality.
5. Assessing transparency on costs and treatment pathways.

Common Mistakes and Misconceptions

Omitting Consultation and Prescription Prices

A widespread issue with CBMP providers in the private sector is unclear pricing. Many clinics promote consultations or prescribing services without upfront, clear pricing information. This lack of transparency can mislead patients about the total cost of ongoing treatment, especially since cannabis-based [private medical cannabis uk](#) products often require repeat prescriptions and monitoring.

Best practice demands providers state clearly:



- Initial consultation fees.
- Follow-up appointment costs.
- Prescription fees, including product cost estimates.
- Any additional charges (e.g., shipping or dispensary fees).

The CQC expects providers to be explicit about all fees to help patients make informed choices and avoid hidden costs.

Confusing Wellness Services with Medical Prescribing

Some clinics mix wellness language (such as "natural healing" or "lifestyle enhancement") with medical prescribing, which confuses patients about the legitimacy and regulation of services. The CQC only regulates medical treatment, not wellness or lifestyle advice. Patients should verify that any CBMP provider is registered with the CQC and employs GMC-registered specialist prescribers.

Summary Checklist: CQC and Cannabis-Based Medicinal Products

Aspect	Requirement/Reality	CQC Role	Legal prescriber	Doctor on GMC Specialist Register only	Checks clinician qualifications and registrations
	Remote consultations/prescribing	Allowed if declared and compliant	Requires declaration at registration; inspects systems	Pricing transparency	Must state consultation and prescription costs upfront
	Monitors patient information and complaints	Provider registration	Must register with CQC to offer CBMP prescribing	Registers, inspects, and can enforce closures	NHS vs Private Access
	Regulates private providers; NHS regulated separately	Patient safety	Requires proper assessment, consent, and follow-up	Checks compliance and investigates concerns	

Conclusion

The Care Quality Commission is an essential gatekeeper in England ensuring that cannabis-based medicinal product providers meet core healthcare standards. Patients seeking CBMP treatment must be aware that legality does not equate to easy access, and the NHS currently offers limited funding for these medicines. Hence, the private market fills an important gap but is not without pitfalls.

Patients should look for providers properly registered with the CQC who employ GMC Specialist Register doctors. Transparency about all costs, including consultations and prescriptions, is critical to avoid unpleasant surprises. Regulations around video consultations and remote prescribing are in place and must be adhered to, with CQC oversight playing an increasing role as digital health expands.

Ultimately, understanding the CQC's role helps patients distinguish reputable, regulated providers from less scrupulous operators blending medical and wellness services or obscuring charges. This knowledge empowers safer, more informed choices when considering cannabis-based medicinal products in England.