

The medical cannabis landscape in the UK is a complex and evolving field where legality often outpaces real-world access. Since medical cannabis was legalised for prescription in November 2018, many patients and clinicians alike have navigated uncharted territory involving regulation, treatment pathways, and paying for care privately due to limited NHS funding. Within this environment, **patient registries** have emerged as a crucial tool for improving the quality, safety, and availability of medical cannabis treatment. This post explores why patient registries matter for medical cannabis care in the UK, with a close look at how they support evidence generation and help address key system challenges.

Understanding the Gap Between Legality and Real-World Access

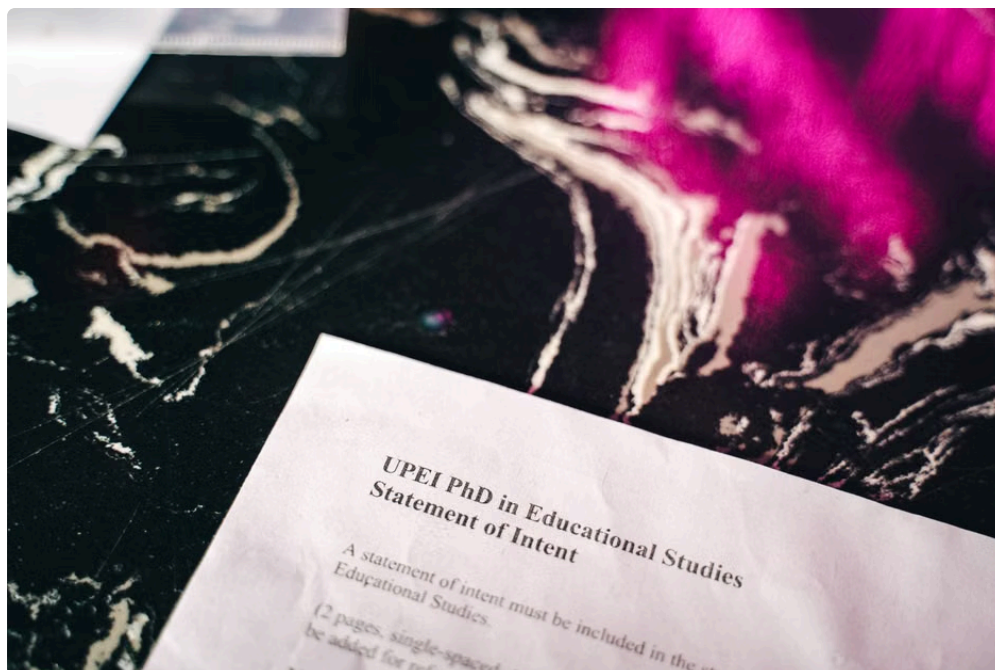
Medical cannabis became legally prescribable in the UK in late 2018, following amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001. However, legality alone did not translate into widespread accessibility. A number of factors contribute to this access gap:

- **Limited NHS funding:** NICE guidelines and NHS commissioning remain cautious, restricting routine NHS prescriptions for most patients.
- **Specialist prescriber requirements:** Only doctors on the GMC Specialist Register or those working in specific specialist settings can prescribe medical cannabis.
- **High private costs:** Most patients seeking medical cannabis turn to private clinics, where treatment costs can be substantial and follow-up pricing is often unclear.
- **Regulatory and safety oversight:** Medical cannabis requires compliance with robust regulations including Care Quality Commission (CQC) declarations when using remote prescribing or video consultations, particularly in England.

Given these conditions, patients and health professionals navigate a challenging care environment where legally permitted treatment may seem inaccessible or prohibitively expensive. This is where **patient registries** play an important role.

What Are Patient Registries and Why Are They Key?

Patient registries are organised systems that collect uniform data on patients undergoing a particular treatment—in this case, medical cannabis. Registries gather real-world data about outcomes, safety, dosage, and usage patterns over time. They are different from traditional clinical trials because they reflect everyday clinical practice, including diverse patient populations and settings.



Benefits of Patient Registries in Medical Cannabis Care

- **Real-world evidence generation:** Registries create evidence from actual clinical use rather than controlled trial conditions, vital for treatments like medical cannabis where large-scale RCTs are limited.
- **Improved safety monitoring:** Tracking patient outcomes systematically detects adverse effects or unexpected issues earlier, enhancing patient safety.
- **Informing clinical guidelines:** Data from registries can support NICE and other bodies in updating guidance and commissioning decisions.
- **Supporting prescribers:** Clinicians benefit from shared data that help refine dosing and patient selection.
- **Transparency and trust:** Demonstrating structured data collection and ongoing monitoring boosts patient confidence and contributes to regulatory acceptance.

Who Can Prescribe Medical Cannabis in the UK—and Why Patient Registries Matter to Them

By law, only doctors listed on the General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register, or those working in hospital specialist settings with experience in the relevant clinical area, can prescribe medical cannabis. This restriction exists because medical cannabis products have complex profiles and require nuanced clinical judgement. General practitioners cannot prescribe them routinely.

Given the relative novelty of medical cannabis in clinical use and the limited robust trial evidence supporting specific indications, prescribers rely heavily on real-world data to make informed decisions. Patient registries therefore help specialists to:

1. Share anonymised outcome data across clinics and regions.
2. Adjust prescribing practices based on aggregated evidence.
3. Provide regulators and commissioners with safety and efficacy information.

Role of Video Consultations and Remote Prescribing Under CQC Regulation in England

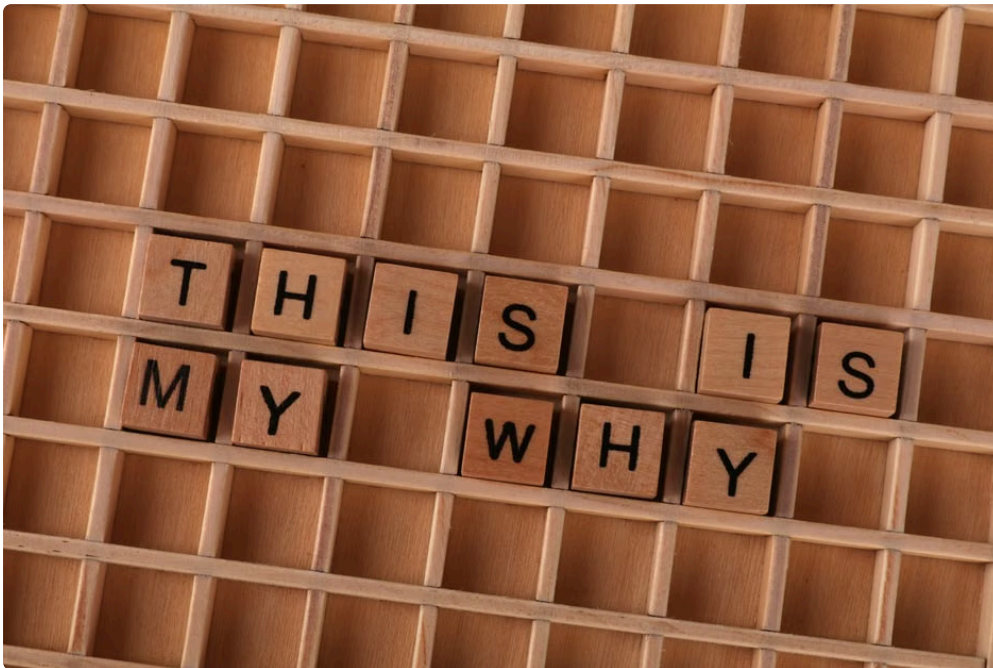
Many medical cannabis clinics offer **video consultations** as part of their service model, making access easier for patients across the UK. In England, clinics that prescribe remotely must register with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and comply with their standards on remote prescribing and patient safety.

This regulatory oversight helps ensure quality and safety for patients receiving prescriptions via remote routes. However, the CQC requires transparency around service models and pricing, which is often lacking in the private market.

The Pricing Transparency Problem in Private Medical Cannabis Clinics

A common pitfall in private medical cannabis care is the failure to clearly state consultation fees and prescription costs upfront. Many clinics market video <https://todaynews.co.uk/2026/08/10/inside-the-uks-private-medical-cannabis-clinics-how-the-sector-actually-works/> consultations or remote prescribing with little pricing clarity, leaving patients unsure about the total cost of treatment, including follow-up appointments and medications. This lack of transparency is a barrier to informed decision-making and can undermine patient trust.

Patient registries, while primarily focused on clinical data, can also support pricing transparency by encouraging clinics to share structured information about care pathways and costs, thereby nudging the market towards clearer communication and fairer patient experiences.



Addressing the NHS Funding Gap Through Real-World Data

The absence of routine NHS funding for most medical cannabis treatments means patients often pay out of pocket. Commissioners cite insufficient evidence on clinical and cost-effectiveness as a key reason for this gap. Patient registries aim to fill that evidence void by collecting robust real-world data that can inform policy changes and NHS commissioning in future.

Without these data streams, health authorities remain hesitant to support broad NHS access, leaving many patients reliant on the private sector and its associated costs and regulatory complexities.

Summary Checklist: Why Patient Registries Matter in UK Medical Cannabis Care

Aspect Importance Real-world evidence Supports safe, effective prescribing where RCTs are insufficient Regulatory oversight Assists CQC in monitoring remote prescribing and clinic quality Prescriber confidence Enables specialists to refine dosing and patient selection NHS funding influence Generates evidence needed to close funding and access gaps Pricing transparency Encourages clear pricing disclosure and fair patient access Patient safety Facilitates early identification of adverse events

Closing Thoughts

In summary, patient registries are a cornerstone of responsible and progressive medical cannabis care in the UK. They bridge the gap between legality and meaningful access by generating the real-world data necessary for evidence-based prescribing, improving patient safety, and supporting regulatory oversight such as that provided by the CQC for video consultations and remote prescribing. For patients, clinicians, policymakers, and payers alike, these registries hold the key to unlocking wider, safer, and more affordable access.

If you are a patient considering medical cannabis or a clinician treating patients with these therapies, always ask about the clinic's involvement in patient registries and insist on transparent pricing. This ensures you are part of a system working to build trustworthy, evidence-driven care for all.