Thousands of UK Patients Left Suffering as Fewer Than 1% of Doctors Trained to Prescribe Legal Medical Cannabis

Thursday 23 October, 2025

London, UK – Thursday 23 October, 2025 — Almost seven years since medical cannabis was legalised in the UK on 1st November 2018, less than 1% of the UK's approximate 100,000 doctors on the General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register have the training required to prescribe medical cannabis.

While the UK's medical cannabis market has evolved rapidly, with patient demand and private-sector supply accelerating year on year, the UK's public institutions have failed to keep pace. Universities have yet to integrate cannabis-based products for medicinal use (CBPMs) into medical curricula.

The NHS offers no centralised guidance or training programmes, and major health bodies remain largely silent on its clinical use.

In the absence of institutional support, it has fallen to individual clinicians to fill the gap — seeking out independent education, joining peer networks, and driving change from within the system to better serve their patients.

Patient Demand Is Rising – But Access Remains a Barrier

According to global cannabis data specialists Prohibition Partners, nearly 80,000 patients in the UK will receive medical cannabis treatment in 2025. This makes the UK the second-largest medical cannabis market in Europe. That number is expected to rise to almost 190,000 by 2029, generating an estimated market value of €619 million (£539 million).

However, most patients currently access treatment through private clinics, with no support from the NHS. The number of medical cannabis prescriptions issued by the NHS remains extremely low, with estimates suggesting fewer than five prescriptions to date.

Expanding access could also deliver wider economic benefits. A report from the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) highlights the potential for effective treatment to reduce long-term illness and help more people return to work.

Potential Prescribers Without Tools

Of the approximate 100,000 doctors on the GMC Specialist Register who are legally permitted to initiate a medical cannabis prescription, only 180 clinicians are currently doing so – less than 1%.

Professor Mike Barnes, Chair of the Medical Cannabis Clinicians Society (MCCS) and a leading authority on medical cannabis, points to the lack of education as the key barrier.

"We urgently need to train more clinicians in the science of cannabis medicine," Professor Barnes said.

"We are barely touching the surface of those who would benefit from medicinal cannabis. Many tens of thousands of people living with chronic anxiety, pain, sleep problems, epilepsy and other conditions are being deprived of access, due to both the intransigence of the NHS – and especially the lack of knowledge and education about the plant."

Clinical Change is Coming – and Education is Key

In an attempt to fill this education gap, hundreds of healthcare professionals (HCPs) will converge on London next month (25th November 2025) for Cannabis Health Symposium, to drive clinical change for UK-based patients.

Presented in partnership with Curaleaf Laboratories and the UK's Medical Cannabis Clinicians Society (MCCS), the CPD-accredited educational event is designed to provide UK healthcare professionals with expert-led, clinically grounded education on cannabis-based products for medicinal use (CBPMs), to meet the growing patient demand for medical cannabis to treat a range of conditions.

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Jonathan Hodgson, CEO at Curaleaf Laboratories, said: “While the adoption of medical cannabis is still only in its infancy here in the UK, we want to help widen access to this as a viable option for patients. Through our experience, we’re in the privileged position to be ready to help the hundreds of thousands of patients in the UK who will access these medicines over the coming years.”

“In order for us as a medical community to adequately support patients, it’s vitally important that healthcare professionals (HCPs) are able to access much-needed education on cannabis-based medicines, so they can help their patients through guiding access or prescribing directly,” Hodgson added.

About Cannabis Health Symposium

Cannabis Health Symposium is designed to provide UK healthcare professionals with expert-led, clinically grounded education on (CBPMs). Tailored for those seeking evidence-led guidance, this forum offers practical insights and the confidence needed to safely and effectively integrate CBPMs into patient treatment protocols.

About Curaleaf Laboratories

Curaleaf Laboratories are the UK-leading experts in the manufacture and distribution of EU-GMP medical cannabis as part of Curaleaf International, a subsidiary of Curaleaf Holdings, Inc. the largest cannabis company in the world. With over a decade of experience in unlicensed medicines (Specials), Curaleaf has invested heavily in its state-of-the-art UK manufacturing facility, perfectly positioning the company with its international vertically integrated supply chain to deliver cannabis-based medicinal products (CBPM’s) of the highest quality for specialists to prescribe to their patients.

About the Medical Cannabis Clinicians Society (MCCS)

The Medical Cannabis Clinicians Society is the UK’s independent, clinician-led organisation dedicated to supporting and educating healthcare professionals in the safe and ethical prescribing of cannabis-based medicines.

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