

In the UK, healthcare decisions require trust, especially when paying for private consultations. Many patients wonder: **can I verify a clinic's claims before paying a consultation fee?** The short answer is yes. But it takes some homework.

This blog post explains the key steps and tools you can use to check a clinic's claims. We'll focus on important themes such as regulation and clinic oversight, unlicensed medicines and risk disclosure, who can legally prescribe, and verifying specialist competence. We'll also highlight key resources like the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register.

Why Verify Clinic Claims Before Paying?

Private healthcare in the UK is largely unregulated compared to the NHS, increasing the risk of misleading advertising or hidden fees. Before you hand over your money, it's important to:

- Confirm the clinic is a legitimate healthcare provider under UK regulations
- Know who will be treating you and their qualifications
- Understand what medicines they will prescribe, including if they use unlicensed products like medical cannabis
- Ensure pricing is clear and upfront, avoiding unexpected charges

Failing to check can lead to wasted money, ineffective or unsafe treatments, and difficulty seeking redress if things go wrong.

1. Regulation and Clinic Oversight: What You Should Know

In England, clinics providing medical services must register with the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The CQC inspects and regulates healthcare providers to ensure they meet fundamental standards of quality and safety.

How to check a clinic's CQC status:

1. Visit the CQC Location Search page
2. Enter the clinic's name or address to see if it is registered
3. Review the inspection reports to check for any concerns about safety, staffing, or patient experience

If a clinic is not registered with the CQC, this raises a red flag. It may mean it is operating outside legal oversight or providing services not subject to safety inspection. Proceed cautiously.

Key red flags related to regulation

- No CQC registration number or refusal to provide it when asked
- No clear registered address or operating under multiple unregistered aliases
- No published inspection reports or very poor ratings

2. Unlicensed Medicines and Risk Disclosure

Many private clinics now offer treatments involving *unlicensed medicines*, such as medical cannabis. These are medicines not approved by the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). Using

unlicensed medicines is legal but carries specific responsibilities.

Important points about unlicensed medicines:

- The prescriber must inform you that the medicine is unlicensed and explain associated risks.
- Clinics must obtain your informed consent in writing before prescribing such medicines.
- Prices should clearly state if unlicensed medicines incur additional fees above consultation costs.

Beware of clinics that use marketing language suggesting unlicensed medicines are a “magic bullet” for everything. Evidence is limited, and those guarantees should be treated with skepticism.

3. Who Is Legally Allowed to Prescribe?

Only authorised healthcare professionals can legally prescribe medicines, including doctors, dentists, nurse prescribers, and some pharmacists. Among these, the consultant or clinician who prescribes your treatment must have a valid UK licence.

In private clinics, most prescriptions for complex medicines like cannabis should come from medical doctors who are on the UK’s medical register maintained by the General Medical Council (GMC).

How to verify a prescriber

1. Request the full name and GMC registration number of the doctor who will assess and prescribe for you
2. Use the GMC’s online Medical Register search tool to confirm:
 - The doctor is registered and licensed to practise in the UK
 - Their specialty status if claimed (e.g., a neurologist or psychiatrist)
 - Any fitness to practice warnings or sanctions
3. If the clinic refuses or stalls when asked for this information, consider it a warning sign

Note: Some clinics may refer to “specialist doctors” but refuse to name them or confirm their registration. This is unfortunately common and should not be accepted.

4. Specialist Competence and Scope

Claiming to be a “specialist” or “consultant” is meaningless without proof. The GMC Specialist Register exists to verify legitimate medical specialties recognised in the UK.

How to check specialist status:

1. Ask the clinic for the prescriber’s GMC registration number and specialty
2. Using the GMC Specialist Register search tool, verify if the doctor holds that specialist registration
3. Confirm whether that specialty matches the condition they are treating
4. Remember: doctors can prescribe outside their specialty legally but expertise matters for safe, effective care

Why specialist competence matters

Specialist knowledge means better diagnosis, treatment planning, and patient safety. Clinics that hide their prescriber’s identity or provide vague answers about qualifications may not have the right expertise.

5. Pricing Upfront: Transparency Is Key

Many clinics advertise attractive low consultation fees but add hidden costs for medicines and dispensing. This can significantly increase your final bill.

Recommendations for pricing transparency:

- Check if the clinic's website openly lists fees for consultation, medicines, and any follow-up appointments
- Ask for a detailed price quote before booking a consultation
- Avoid clinics that bundle subscriptions or treatment packages without breaking down costs

Remember: knowing prices upfront helps avoid unpleasant surprises and enables you to compare options fairly.

Summary: Your Pre-Consultation Checklist

Check Point How? What to Watch Out For CQC Registration Search clinic on CQC website No registration number or poor inspection ratings Prescriber Identity & Credentials Request name and GMC number; verify on GMC Register Refusal to provide info; unregistered doctors; no specialist registration when claimed Use of Unlicensed Medicines Ask consent and risk disclosure; verify medicine licensing status Vague claims; no informed consent; hidden fees Pricing Transparency Request full fee breakdown before booking Hidden medicine or dispensing fees; unclear package costs

Final Thoughts

Verifying a clinic's claims before paying a consultation fee is always possible with the right questions and resources. Always ask for the clinic's CQC registration number and the doctor's GMC registration before making any payments.

Never rely solely on marketing claims of "specialists" or "miracle cures." Check official regulator listings and insist on upfront pricing and clear risk disclosures, especially when unlicensed medicines are involved.





Taking these steps protects your health, your money, and peace of mind.

If you are ever in doubt, ask a trusted healthcare professional for a second opinion.