MedCanHub: a platform developed by Cellen aimed at reducing barriers of access to unlicensed cannabis-based medicinal products during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction

Unlicensed cannabis-based medicinal products (UCBPMs) were reclassified from Schedule 1 to Schedule 2 in 2018 in the UK, allowing doctors on the Specialist Register of the General Medical Council to legally issue prescriptions for UCBPMs. However, there has been evidence showing that patients face difficulties in accessing UCBPMs, with the NHS only prescribing 18 out of a total of 259 UCBPMs prescriptions in the UK in 2019 despite a 2019 YouGov poll reporting about 1.4 million patients self-medicating with cannabis. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this problem, with border crossing and import supply chains facing disruptions. Reports investigating the barriers to accessing UCBPMs on the NHS list the lack of knowledge and education of cannabis use and its benefits as one of the main problems. As such, despite 92.8% of specialists surveyed reported having asked by patients to prescribe medical cannabis, most did not have the confidence to prescribe it.

Cellen Therapeutics, an independent, UK-based UCBPMs research organisation aiming to make UK UCBPMs prescriptions more transparent and accessible, decided to develop the MedCanHub platform, to increase the proficiency and confidence of doctors to prescribe.

Methods

Qualitative data were collected from interviews conducted with 14 prescribers. They shared problems encountered with current UCBPMs, with the NHS only prescribing 18 out of a total of 259 UCBPMs prescriptions in the UK in 2019 despite a 2019 YouGov poll reporting about 1.4 million patients self-medicating with cannabis. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this problem, with border crossing and import supply chains facing disruptions. Reports investigating the barriers to accessing UCBPMs on the NHS list the lack of knowledge and education of cannabis use and its benefits as one of the main problems. As such, despite 92.8% of specialists surveyed reported having asked by patients to prescribe medical cannabis, most did not have the confidence to prescribe it.

Table 1. Quantified interest of prescribers in the different aspect of support and education regarding unlicensed cannabis-based medical products

| Topic/segment | New prescribers | Experienced prescribers |
|---------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Setup: registration to CDAO, guidelines creation, interaction with CQC, compliance audit. | 5 | 2 |
| Education: training on endocannabinoid system, CBMPs legal status in the UK, existing products. | 5 | 2 |
| Product: labelling, absorption method, terpenes profile, content, price, delivery and personalisation. | 4 | 4 |
| Prescribing support: MDT, titration, dosage limit, patient eligibility, reminders. | 5 | 3 |
| Admin: researching patient information, writing and mailing prescriptions, shared care management. | 3 | 4 |
| Treatment tracking: patient scoring and scientifically validated questionnaires. | 3 | 5 |

Results

The results of the interviews are shown in Table 1. Prior to consultation, the MedCanHub supports prescribers by describing the process to acquire a controlled drug private prescriber number and with a checklist of contraindications. For consultation support, we developed a literature review of validated dosage of THC and CBD, a checklist of information to
deliver to patients, a list of UCBPMs oils available in the UK, a
treatment planner creation tool, and a sample prescription.
Post-consultation support includes tools to generate CQC
compliant letters, sending a prescription and how to report
drug incidents to the MHRA.
Lastly, links to online training, regulations and guidelines are
included.

Discussion
The MedCanHub software was developed to support
consultants during COVID-19 in the process of UCBPMs
prescriptions, from pre-consultation to post-consultation.
100% of the surveyed specialists would recommend the
platform to colleagues who are looking to support their patients
with UCBPMs prescriptions. As a result, we believe that by
providing consultants with sufficient information, they can
better support patients during the pandemic. ❖

Conflicts of interest
This paper was authored by medical undergraduate students
and consultant specialists with information regarding software
provided by the team at Cellen Life Sciences.

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