

Working in adult primary care or cardiology clinics, encountering patients who use dietary supplements is commonplace. These patients often bring their supplement bottles during visits, expecting either affirmations or dismissive comments from healthcare providers. However, a **nonjudgmental approach** combined with informed **bedside conversations** can transform these encounters into opportunities that improve patient engagement and medication safety.

In this post, I'll walk you through my practical strategies for handling patients who expect dismissal of their supplements. We'll explore the essentials of Certificate of Analysis (COA) basics and why they matter, how to verify batch and date matching, understand potency units relative to serving size, and distinguish between acid vs neutral cannabinoids, especially when calculating totals. Along the way, I'll naturally mention trusted companies like Joy Organics, highlight good practices such as looking for the **USDA Organic** seal, and explain how tools like QR code batch lookup and batch numbers printed on cartons help us ensure product reliability.

Why Patients Use Supplements—and Why You Should Listen

I'll be honest with you: supplements like cbd oils, herbal blends, vitamins, and minerals fill gaps patients believe exist in their diets or symptom management. Patients often rely on them for chronic pain, anxiety, sleep problems, or cardiovascular health, sometimes as a last resort or complementary therapy. Their willingness to disclose supplement use can be hindered by previous negative experiences or assumptions that providers will dismiss these as "just supplements."

Instead of dismissing, approach conversations with curiosity and respect. This improves disclosure, ensures better medication reconciliation, and protects patients from potential risks such as interactions or incorrect dosing.

Certificate of Analysis (COA): The cornerstone for safe supplement assessment

One of the first tools I reach for when reviewing supplements is the Certificate of Analysis or COA. This lab-derived document verifies what's inside the product — including cannabinoid content, pesticide residue, heavy metals, and microbial contaminants. Here's what every nurse should know:

- **Why COAs Matter:** They confirm the product is safe, without harmful contaminants, correct in asserted potency, and matches label claims.
- **Red Flags to Watch For:** COAs without a *batch number*, *date of testing*, or clarity on units (mg per serving) should be treated with caution. Also, beware when reports only say "pass/fail" without numeric values or detailed breakdowns.
- **Reliable Companies and COAs:** Brands like Joy Organics routinely publish updated COAs for every batch on their websites. This transparency is a model to encourage patients to seek out when choosing supplements.

How to Verify COAs During Intake

1. Always ask the patient to **show you the actual bottle**; don't rely on verbal descriptions alone.
2. Locate the **batch number** printed on the carton or label. This is crucial for matching the product to the correct COA.
3. Use tools like **QR code batch lookup** when available. Many reputable companies print a QR code on packaging that links directly to test reports or product details.

4. Compare the batch number and expiration date on the bottle with the COA information. If they don't match, raise concerns and educate the patient on the inconsistencies.
5. Look for certifications like **USDA Organic** or seals from **NSF International** that add credibility to manufacturing practices.

Batch and Date Matching: Why It's Essential

Batch-specific COAs matter because supplements can vary significantly between production runs. Potency or contaminants might fluctuate due to raw material sourcing or manufacturing changes. A COA for a different batch doesn't guarantee the current bottle's contents or safety.

In practice, I always:

- Verify that the batch number on the bottle or packaging exactly matches the COA used for assessment.
- Check expiration or manufacture dates to ensure the supplement is still within its potency window.
- Advise patients to discard products past their labeled expiration to avoid reduced effectiveness or increased risks.

Potency Units and Serving Sizes: The Language of Supplements

When documenting supplements, I always write doses in mg per serving first, then note how the patient actually takes it. For example, a tincture might have 10 mg CBD per 1 ml dropper serving, but the patient takes a half-dropper irregularly. This nuanced documentation helps providers understand actual exposure and risk.

Supplement	Label Potency	Patient Usage	Notes
Joy Organics CBD Oil	15 mg CBD per 1 ml dropper	0.5 ml twice daily	Patient consumes 7.5 mg daily
Herbal Sleep Blend	250 mg valerian root per capsule	1 capsule nightly	Matches label exactly
Magnesium Citrate	150 mg elemental magnesium per tablet	1 tablet every other day	Lower frequency than recommended

Being precise avoids assumptions and supports clinical decision-making <https://nursekey.com/reading-a-certificate-of-analysis-a-clinicians-guide-to-supplement-quality/> about potential toxicity, interactions, or benefits.

Acid vs Neutral Cannabinoids: Understanding Total Potency Calculations

For cannabis-derived products like CBD oils, a technical but important concept to grasp is the distinction between acid and neutral cannabinoids:

- **Acid Cannabinoids (e.g., CBDA, THCA)** – precursors found in raw plants, usually converted to neutral forms by heating (decarboxylation).
- **Neutral Cannabinoids (e.g., CBD, THC)** – the active chemical forms that interact with the body's receptor systems.

Most COAs will list cannabinoid content broken down into acid and neutral forms. To report total cannabinoid content accurately, use this formula:



Total neutral cannabinoid $\approx$ Neutral cannabinoid + (Acid cannabinoid $\times$ 0.877)

The factor 0.877 accounts for the loss of a carboxyl group during heating. Without this adjustment, reported totals may overestimate potency—potentially misleading patients or providers.



CT Cannabinoid education and brands like Joy Organics often provide simplified guidance or total calculations on labels, but knowing the chemistry empowers informed conversations and documentation.

Practical Tips for a Nonjudgmental, Engaging Bedside Conversation

Here is my mental checklist when a patient expects me to dismiss their supplements:

1. **Ask to See the Actual Bottle:** This helps avoid mistakes from verbal descriptions and supports objective assessment.
2. **Check Certifications and Seals:** Look for trusted labels like **USDA Organic** or **NSF** as initial quality indicators.
3. **Request or Help Lookup COAs:** Use printed **batch numbers** or **QR code batch lookup** to find the most recent, accurate lab results.

4. **Discuss Dosage Details:** Write doses in mg per serving first, clarify what the patient actually takes, and document frequency.
5. **Educate Respectfully:** If concerns arise, explain them calmly, highlighting safety rather than judgment.
6. **Encourage Open Dialogue:** Emphasize your role as a partner in their overall health strategy, including supplements.

Conclusion

Handling patients who expect dismissal of their supplements requires a blend of knowledge, empathy, and communication skills.

Using objective tools like COAs, batch number verification, and potency understanding builds trust and ensures safety. The goal is not to judge, but to engage, educate, and document thoughtfully.

Next time a patient presents with a Joy Organics CBD oil or any other supplement, remember to:

- Ask for the **actual bottle**
- Verify **batch number** and use available **QR code batch lookup** tools
- Review the COA carefully for valid potency units and contaminant tests
- Clarify dosing in mg per serving alongside patient's actual intake
- Explain the science behind acid vs neutral cannabinoids if relevant
- Maintain a **nonjudgmental, engaging bedside conversation**

These steps will enhance your medication reconciliation process, deepen patient relationships, and contribute to safer, more informed care.