

West Tennessee Psychiatrist Found Guilty of Unlawfully Distributing Opioids

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A federal jury found a west Tennessee doctor guilty today for unlawfully distributing opioids to purported patients and to others who were never his patients. The defendant was charged in an April 2019 indictment as part of the first Appalachian Regional Prescription Opioid (ARPO) Strike Force Takedown, and this was the first trial guilty verdict for the ARPO Strike Force.

Following an eight-day trial, Richard Farmer, M.D., 83, of Memphis, Tennessee, a licensed psychiatrist, was found guilty of three counts of distribution of controlled substances outside the scope of professional practice and without a legitimate medical purpose. Sentencing is scheduled for May 22 by U.S. District Judge Thomas L. Parker of the Western District of Tennessee, who presided over the trial.

“The Department of Justice will not relent in its pursuit of those responsible for fueling the opioid epidemic in the Appalachian region,” said Assistant Attorney General Brian A. Benczkowski of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. “Today’s verdict, which shows that our efforts are yielding tangible results, is a credit to the hard work of the Criminal Division’s ARPO Strike Force and our U.S. Attorney’s Office and law enforcement partners.”

“Opioid misuse and abuse is an insidious epidemic, created in large part by the over-prescribing and diversion of potent opioids,” said U.S. Attorney D. Michael Dunavant of the Western District of Tennessee. “This guilty verdict demonstrates our resolve to aggressively prosecute medical personnel who misuse their positions of trust to exploit the very people coming to them for help.”

“Doctors who take advantage of patients suffering from addiction are no different than street corner drug dealers,” said Special Agent in Charge J. Todd Scott of the Drug Enforcement Administration’s (DEA) Louisville Division Office. “I am proud of the dedicated men and women of DEA who worked tirelessly to bring Dr. Farmer to justice.”

According to the evidence presented at trial, Farmer prescribed opioids to three sisters with whom he had ongoing sexual contact during the time he was prescribing. The evidence showed that between July 2016 and January 2019, Farmer prescribed over 1,200 pills, even

though the three sisters showed clear signs of addiction. The evidence further showed that he kept almost no patient files on these women, and that he also wrote opioid prescriptions for the women's friends and neighbors without any office visits.

The DEA, along with the Shelby County Sheriff's Office and the Jackson Police Department, investigated the case.

Trial Attorney Jillian Willis of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Damon Griffin of the Western District of Tennessee are prosecuting the case.

The Fraud Section leads the ARPO Strike Force. Since its inception in October 2018, the ARPO Strike Force, which operates in 10 districts, has charged more than 70 defendants who are collectively responsible for distributing more than 40 million pills. There have thus far been 24 guilty pleas as a result of the ARPO Strike Force's efforts.

The year 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of the Department of Justice. Learn more about the history of our agency at www.Justice.gov/Celebrating150Years.