

# First guilty verdict for opioid strike force

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WBBJ 7 Eyewitness News Staff

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — A federal jury found a West Tennessee doctor guilty Friday for unlawfully distributing opioids to purported patients and to others who were never his patients.

According to a press release, 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 legitimate medical purpose.

“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 Louisville Division Office.

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.

“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.

“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.

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