A Tennessee doctor pleaded guilty Friday to distributing opioids to people who were not his patients, marking the first conviction for the Appalachian Regional Prescription Opioid Strike Force.

Richard Farmer, an 83-year-old psychiatrist from Memphis, was found guilty of three counts of distribution of controlled substances outside the scope of professional practice and without a legitimate medical purpose, a press release from the Department of Justice (DOJ) said.

A psychiatrist from West Tennessee has been convicted of giving opioids to people who were not his patients. (drugabuse.com)

According to the evidence presented during his trial, Farmer prescribed opioids to three sisters with whom he was having sexual contact.

Between July 2016 and January 2019, Farmer prescribed more 1,200 pills, despite the sisters showing signs of addiction, the evidence showed. The evidence also showed that he kept almost no patient files on these women and that he wrote opioid prescriptions for their friends and neighbors.

“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.”

Farmer’s sentencing is scheduled for May 22 by U.S. District Judge Thomas L. Parker of the Western District of Tennessee.

His indictment marked the first trial guilty verdict for the ARPO Strike Force, a joint law enforcement effort aimed at identifying and investigating health care fraud schemes in the Appalachian region and surrounding areas.

Since its formation 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, according to the DOJ.