



*Acting United States Attorney
Sandra J. Hairston
Middle District of North Carolina*

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Contact:

Lynne Klauer

Public Information Officer

lynne.klauer@usdoj.gov

(336) 333-5351

**WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO FRAUDULENTLY OBTAINING
MORE THAN 8,000 HYDROCODONE PILLS**

Forged Prescriptions Using Identity of Duke Neurosurgeon

GREENSBORO, N.C. – A Burlington resident pleaded guilty on October 4, 2017, in United States District Court before the Honorable N. Carlton Tilley, Jr., to controlled substance offenses and other crimes, announced Sandra J. Hairston, Acting United States Attorney for the Middle District of North Carolina.

HEATHER SMITH ELLIOTT, 41, of Burlington, North Carolina, pleaded guilty to charges in relation to a scheme to fraudulently obtain over 8,000 10-325 mg hydrocodone pills from CVS pharmacies in Alamance and Guilford Counties through use of forged and fraudulent prescriptions appearing to be issued by a Duke University Medical Center neurosurgeon. ELLIOTT pleaded guilty to two counts of obtaining hydrocodone pills, a Schedule II controlled substance, by use of forged and fraudulent prescriptions, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 843, one count of wire fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343, and one count of aggravated identity theft, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1028A.

Documents filed with the Court show that ELLIOTT forged and counterfeited approximately 132 prescriptions for hydrocodone. Each of these forged and counterfeit prescriptions bore the name and DEA number of a neurosurgeon at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina. ELLIOTT made use of altered actual Duke University Medical Center prescription forms to create fraudulent prescriptions for hydrocodone appearing to be issued by the Duke neurosurgeon for herself, as well as for friends and family members of ELLIOTT including an ex-boyfriend, a former employee, her former husband, her son, and a neighbor. Neither ELLIOTT nor any of these persons were patients of the Duke neurosurgeon, nor had he prescribed any medications to them. ELLIOTT retained and converted the hydrocodone pills to her own use and purpose. ELLIOTT also made use of a fraudulently obtained Bank of America credit card in the name of her former boyfriend to pay for at least one of the false prescriptions.

Obtaining a controlled substance through use of a fraudulent prescription is punishable by up to four years in federal prison. Wire fraud is punishable by up to twenty years in federal prison. Aggravated identity theft is punishable by two years in federal prison consecutive to any other prison sentences imposed by the court. ELLIOTT also faces a fine of up to \$250,000 and a term of supervised release of not less than three years. Sentencing is scheduled for January 18, 2018, at 9:30 a.m. in Greensboro, Courtroom #2.

The United States Postal Inspection Service, United States Treasury Office of Inspector General Task Force, and the City of Burlington Police Department participated in the investigation. Special Assistant United States Attorney Kennedy Gates and Assistant United States Attorney Frank Joseph Chut, Jr. prosecuted the case.

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