

*** NEWS RELEASE ***
WOMAN SENTENCED
IN FELONY PRESCRIPTION FRAUD

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Monterey County District Attorney Dean D. Flippo announced today that on August 24, 2016, Kristen Elizabeth Harris, age 29, was sentenced by Judge Pamela Butler for obtaining a controlled substance by fraud based on a plea of no contest that she entered into on July 20, 2016. The defendant was placed on three years of felony probation and ordered to serve 120 days in custody.

On July 7, 2016, the defendant went to Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula (CHOMP), Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital (SVMH), and Natividad Medical Center (NMC). She used several false names and demanded highly addictive pain medications from medical personnel. A quick acting emergency physician at CHOMP notified physicians at the other hospitals of this drug seeking patient. Despite using a different false name, she was identified based on the information provided by the physician at CHOMP when she went to SVMH demanding the same pain medications. The medical personnel at SVMH contacted law enforcement and the defendant's true identity was revealed. The officers determined that she was providing a false name in order to fraudulently obtain a controlled substance and arrested the defendant.

The charges in this case reflect a growing concern about the abuse of highly addictive pain medications and the opioid crisis. Studies have shown there are more overdose deaths from prescription pain killers and sedatives than from heroin and cocaine combined. Drug overdose was the leading cause of injury death in 2013 among those 25 to 64 years old, causing more deaths than motor vehicle traffic accidents. In 2011, an estimated 22.5 million Americans aged 12 or older used an illicit drug or abused a prescription drug in the past month. In 2011, 1.4 million emergency department visits were related to the misuse or abuse of prescription drugs; of the 22,767 deaths relating to prescription drug overdose in 2013, 16,235 involved opioid analgesics and 6,973 involved benzodiazepines. Non-medical use of prescription painkillers cost health insurers up to \$72.5 billion annually in direct health-care costs.

The Healthcare Fraud Unit, of the Monterey County District Attorney's Office, aggressively prosecutes prescription drug fraud in Monterey County. The unit also investigates and prosecutes other cases to include, but not limited to: use of another's identity to secure healthcare benefits; embezzlement; unlawful solicitations/referrals; fraudulent billing; inflated or falsified pharmacy billings; prescription fraud and abuse; out-patient surgery center fraud; and fraudulent disability claims.

This case was investigated by the Monterey County District Attorney Investigator Ben Draeger and Salinas Police Department.