

She explained that scoliosis kept her in pain and that surgery a few months before made her need more and more relief. She described how she visited several doctors for extra painkiller prescriptions, but said that she did not know that was illegal. Asked if she was addicted to the medications, she said, "Not really."

"I would like to get off of them," she said, "because this is not worth it."

While Detective Caid sorted through more empty bottles and pharmacy receipts, Sheriff Rick Walter watched Ms. Hammon on two monitors and became convinced that she was not selling her pills, but taking them herself.

Sheriff Walter said that his small force, even with an armed pharmacist like Mr. Logan, was simply outmanned to deter the drug abuse already occurring in Scott County, and that cases like Ms. Hammon's would increase if Missouri did not get a database.

"I understand what they're saying about privacy, I really do," Sheriff Walter said. "But look at this — this is just one woman, one family. Those kids, they're wondering where Mama is tonight. She's hooked on painkillers, because the system allowed her to be."

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