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Raising The Bar On Community Healthcare With The East End's Top Doctor

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When Dr. Alison Madden came to Greenport for the interview that would make her Chief Medical Officer at Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital, she stepped into a hospital that was in the middle of crisis — a power outage caused by a downed electrical pole that blacked-out the entire town.

“But everyone was really friendly and really happy to see the leadership team,” she said. “And that’s not usually what happens in hospitals when stuff goes wrong. There’s usually stress, but I felt a palpable community where people cared about each other. They were laughing and helping patients. It was genuine, and it’s still there.”



Chief Medical Officer at Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital Dr. Alison Madden (Credit: courtesy photo)

Dr. Madden was born in a New Jersey farm town, the fourth out of five kids. Her twin sister is just three minutes younger, and they have three older brothers. Around the time she and her sister turned 10, the family moved to New York City, where Dr. Madden could see into the windows of Weill Cornell Medical School, where she later took pre-med courses after studying history and art at Barnard, without taking a single science class.

“I wanted to be an artist. I love sculpture,” she said. “I liked dance when I was younger. I used to sneak into the New York City Ballet.”

She also enjoyed working with medical professionals at a clinic in New York City, where the midwives urged her to go back to school to study medicine. She worked in the lab of Dr. Kendall Smith, at Weill Cornell, who was conducting research on HIV in competition with the Fauci lab working on HIV at the same time. It was the height of the AIDS epidemic, and she began to feel the draw of doing important, life-saving work.

In medical school, she was surprised to find she loved surgery, especially transplant surgery, which she saw transforming lives. “You took a patient who was on dialysis and sick,” she said. “You did this amazing surgery, with a gift from a donor or a donor’s family, and the patient’s life changed. It was just life altering and beautiful.”

There was the same thrill seeing newborns take their first breaths and she decided to go into OB/GYN, a choice she said she has never regretted.

Completing her obstetrics-and-gynecology residency at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, Dr. Madden went in for an induction to give birth to her son. “It went incredibly quickly,” she remembered. “I went from closed to completely dilated in less than three hours. You could hear me in Pasadena. That was kind of embarrassing. My nurses, the people I trained with, everybody was in the room, there were 30 people and they were all fighting over who got to help me.”

Now 58, and “very happily divorced” after a 35-year marriage, Dr. Madden has two children, a son who is 22 and doing maternal/child health for the Peace Corps in Africa, and a 20-year-old daughter who is finishing college.

She became Chief Medical Officer at SBELIH in July of 2025, and in that time has already seen improvement in services, most notably, the hospital’s designation as a Primary Stroke Center. That designation means that life-saving treatment for people with strokes on the North Fork and Shelter Island is much closer than ever before. “Speed of treatment is especially vital with stroke, which can be very time critical,” she said. “If you can get to a hospital and get a clot busting medicine, it can work very well.”

Another recent innovation to help patients is the electronic ICU, or eICU, which connects a patient’s bedside ICU team with a remote team of critical-care specialists through video, audio, and monitoring data. “This allows us to have 24/7 intensivists [critical care specialists], who can be called in by an emergency button on the wall or by the phone for a consult, and they will round every few hours on an ICU patient,” Dr. Madden said. “As a physician in the closest hospital to Shelter Island, I worry about the residents there and the access to health care, she said. “There’s been a lot of loss — the pharmacy moving on, Dr. Potter cutting back, and Dr. Kelt looking at a change in his practice. Stony Brook is working to address some of those needs.”

Dr. Madden will be a panelist at the Reporter Community Forum “Seniors on Shelter Island,” coming Oct. 1 at the Presbyterian Church’s Fellowship Hall from 5:30 to 7 p.m. It’s free and all are welcome.

Stony Brook ELIH is building an office in Greenport, where NYU Langone was located before they moved their physicians west to NYU Suffolk. “It’s a great building because it’s close to Greenport and it’s got room to have multiple specialties,” Dr. Madden said. “We have a primary care doctor joining us, at the end of October who lives in Southold, and then we have a very experienced cardiologist from California, who moved to the East to be closer to his kids.” She said those doctors will be joined by a hand surgeon, a general surgeon, a spine physician, and other specialties as needed.

“I feel I’m part of this community,” she said. “I see my role as trying to help people, however I can, and advocate for our hospital to try to get more services. I love it out here, but it’s not for everybody. So that’s a challenge.”

Her mother, she said, spent the last 10 years of her life in Nantucket. “My parents bought a house there back in the early ‘60s, before it was a popular, fancy place to be, and they lived in a rural part of Nantucket. The community there, especially offseason, was like here, they really took care of each other. The general surgeon would come to her house since she had cancer at the end of her life, and the firemen came and helped her move her bed. You know, people just took care of each other. I feel like that’s kind of the way it is out here. We’ve got to look out for each other.”

Lightning Round with Dr. Alison Madden

What do you always have with you? My reading glasses

Favorite place on Shelter Island? Taylor's Island.

Favorite place not on Shelter Island? Deer Isle, Maine. Remote on the ocean, beautiful, surrounded by lobstermen. Nothing fancy. I love it.

When was the last time you were afraid, and when were you last elated?

I was so worried about my son. He had some medical stuff going on, he was in Guinea, and it would have taken three days to get to him. He's O.K. My kids are my heart and soul, so knowing that they're O.K, that made me unbelievably happy.

What exasperates you? I want everything to happen a little bit quicker than it can.

Favorite movie or book? *Cutting for Stone*, by Abraham Verghese

Favorite food? Spicy Thai green curry,

Favorite person, living or dead, who is not a member of the family? I have two: Kendall Smith, who ran the lab that I worked at in Cornell, and Ilana Cass, the Chair and Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Dartmouth's Geisel School of Medicine.