

# A Partner In Health

An Interview with William Wertheim, MD, MBA, Executive Vice President, Stony Brook Medicine

**EDITORS' NOTE** William Wertheim, who came to Stony Brook in 1996, currently serves as executive vice president for Stony Brook Medicine. He also holds the Endowed Chair in Graduate Medical Education at RSOM and is a past president of the Stony Brook Medicine Community Medical Group. A graduate of Harvard University and New York University School of Medicine, Wertheim completed his internal medicine residency at University of Michigan Hospitals, where he also served as chief resident. He worked as a clinical faculty member at the University of Michigan's Veterans Administration Hospital, then moved to New York, where he worked at The Brooklyn Hospital Center. Wertheim began his Stony Brook career by leading the Medical Consult Service. He later served as associate program director and director of the primary care track of the Internal Medicine residency, then Internal Medicine residency program director, followed by executive vice chair of the Department of Medicine and associate dean for clinical outreach. He has also served as president of the medical staff of Stony Brook University Hospital.



William Wertheim

and now as Executive Vice President for Stony Brook Medicine. A constant throughout my journey has been a passion for mentoring future health-care leaders and strengthening the pipeline of health sciences students prepared for the evolving needs of patients and communities.

Early in my career, I saw health-care through a narrow lens, focusing primarily on the individual patient in front of me. When one sees patients for a length of time, one encounters problems which are harder to fix with a prescription pad or a CT scan. I came to understand that excelling in healthcare also means understanding the complex worlds people live in, and the social, economic and emotional factors that influence health outcomes. Compassion at the bedside is like good leadership – both require us to hear what is being said and, just as importantly, what is left unsaid. Patients, families, and colleagues each bring valuable insights if we take the time to listen and understand their perspectives. That realization continues to shape how I lead. People working in healthcare

say important things and also leave important things unspoken, but it's the leader's role to tease those unspoken concerns out in conversation. Collaboration and trust are essential, and I believe that teamwork and communication are the true foundations of progress.

## How do you describe Stony Brook Medicine's culture and values?

Our iCARE values – integrity, compassion, accountability, respect and excellence – shape how we treat our patients, students, and one another. By embracing these principles, Stony Brook Medicine can foster a culture where innovation is encouraged, collaboration is expected, and people feel supported to do their best work. There is a shared sense of mission across the organization that unites our hospitals, faculty, students, and staff to deliver the best care possible while advancing knowledge and training the next generation of healthcare professionals.

## Will you highlight your role and areas of focus?

As Executive Vice President, I oversee the clinical, academic and operational functions of the health system, which includes our hospitals,

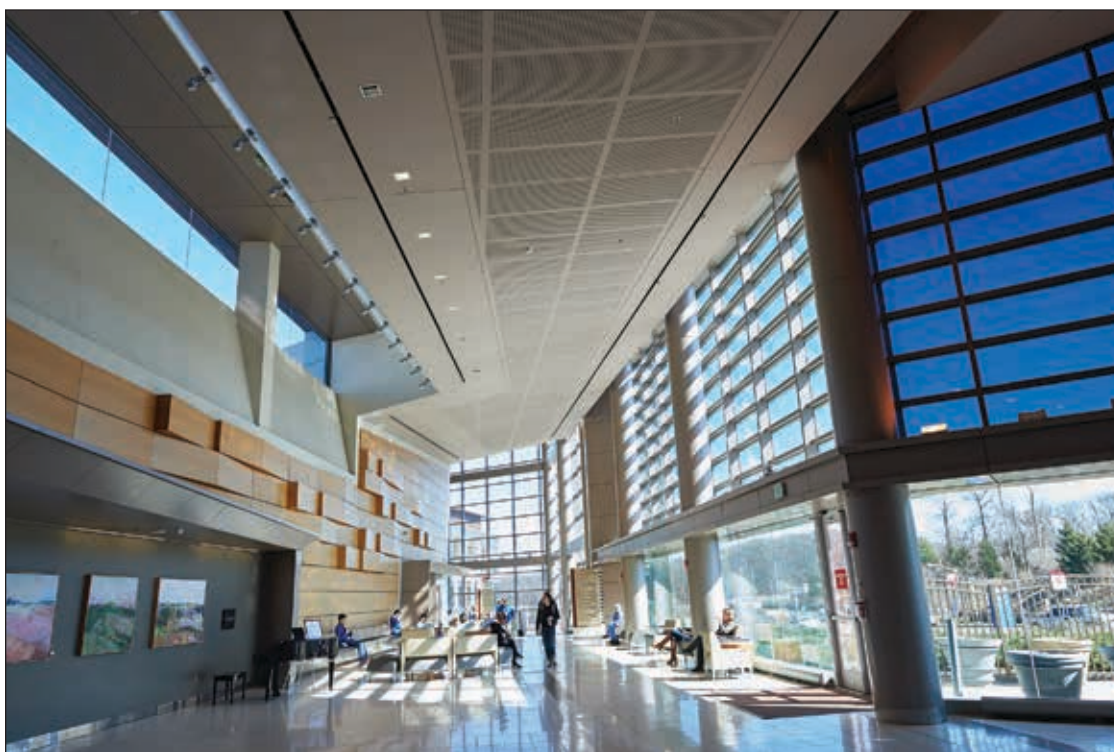
**INSTITUTION BRIEF** Stony Brook Medicine ([stonybrookmedicine.edu](http://stonybrookmedicine.edu)) oversees all of Stony Brook University's health-related initiatives – education, research and patient care. It includes the five Health Sciences schools – Renaissance School of Medicine, School of Dental Medicine, School of Health Professions, School of Nursing and School of Social Welfare – as well as the Program in Public Health. It also includes Stony Brook University Hospital, Stony Brook Children's Hospital, Stony Brook Southampton Hospital, Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital, Long Island State Veterans Home, and more than 200 community-based healthcare settings throughout Suffolk County.

## Will you discuss your career journey?

I've spent nearly three decades at Stony Brook Medicine, beginning as a practicing internist and growing into leadership roles that allowed me to shape education, training, and clinical operations. I've served as Internal Medicine Residency Program Director, Vice Dean for Graduate Medical Education, Interim Dean of the Renaissance School of Medicine,



Stony Brook University Hospital (above and opposite page)



physician practices, and five health sciences schools. My focus is on aligning our system's strengths to advance access, quality, research and education, while ensuring that we function as one integrated enterprise. I'm also committed to supporting the people behind our mission by promoting transparency, engagement, and a culture where every voice is valued. Every decision we make must account not just for the immediate needs, but also for how we grow sustainably, innovate, and coordinate care and education opportunities across multiple sites.

A significant area of focus is expanding our "front door" to care – through telehealth, digital platforms, and innovative in-person models. We're committed to meeting patients where they are, whether virtually or in their communities, and removing barriers that prevent people from getting the right care at the right time.

We're also building sustained partnerships with community organizations to address health disparities and improve public health outcomes across Long Island. These collaborations help us deliver more targeted, accessible care, especially to communities which traditionally haven't felt welcome in healthcare settings, and strengthen our role as a trusted community partner.

#### **Will you provide an overview of Stony Brook Medicine?**

Our mission is grounded in three pillars – patient care, education and research – and the strength of our system lies in how seamlessly we integrate all three. Stony Brook Medicine is Suffolk County's only academic medical center and the only Level I Trauma Center for both adults and children. We offer medical and wellness care to 2.9 million diverse residents across Long Island and beyond through a four-hospital network that spans all of Suffolk County. This includes Stony Brook University Hospital, Stony Brook Children's Hospital, Stony Brook Southampton Hospital, and Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital, as well as the Long Island

State Veterans Home – a 350-bed skilled nursing facility dedicated to serving those who served in our military.

Our system includes more than 1,400 physicians across nearly 150 specialties, a Cancer Center, Heart Institute, and Neurosciences Institute, and a growing ambulatory footprint with over 240 community-based care locations. We are also deeply committed to research and innovation, with more than 100 active research labs and over 400 clinical trials that give patients access to leading-edge diagnostics and treatments before they are widely available.

What sets us apart is the integration of this clinical strength with our five health sciences schools, where we educate and train future leaders in medicine, nursing, social welfare, dental medicine, and health technology and management. Together, our mission is to deliver world-class care, advance scientific discovery, and prepare the next generation of healthcare professionals to meet the needs of our region and beyond.

#### **What do you see as Stony Brook Medicine's responsibility to be engaged in the communities it serves?**

As a public academic health system, we view community engagement as central to our mission. We are not just a provider of care; we are a partner in health. Through initiatives like our mobile health units which bring preventive services, screenings and health education directly to neighborhoods across Suffolk County, we reduce barriers to care by meeting people where they are.

Our Food Farmacy program addresses food insecurity by providing patients with access to nutritious foods, along with counseling from dietitians and social workers, helping patients manage chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension through better nutrition and support.

Our library-based health programs, in partnership with public libraries and our health

sciences schools, place interprofessional student teams in local libraries to offer health screenings, resource navigation and wellness education to the public. These efforts help us address social determinants of health while giving students valuable experience in community-based care.

Preparing students to understand and address these broader factors is part of our responsibility to teach them that healthcare doesn't begin and end in the clinic, but is shaped by where and how people live.

#### **You joined Stony Brook Medicine almost three decades ago. What has made the experience so special for you?**

It's the people and the purpose. I've had the privilege of working alongside faculty, staff and students who are deeply committed to improving lives. What makes Stony Brook Medicine so special is the alignment between our mission and our day-to-day work. We're not only delivering excellent care; we're pushing the envelope in biomedical research and leading innovation in educating future healthcare professionals who will go on to make an even greater impact.

Over the years, I've watched students grow into confident, compassionate leaders. I've seen scientific breakthroughs move from the lab into our clinics, improving outcomes for our patients. And I've witnessed firsthand how our community programs extend care well beyond hospital walls. That sense of shared responsibility and constant forward motion has made this an incredibly meaningful place to spend my career.

#### **What advice do you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in medicine?**

Stay curious and stay grounded. Medicine is a field of lifelong learning – not just about science and technology, but about people. Listen deeply, ask thoughtful questions, and try to understand what your patients aren't saying just as much as what they are. Compassion, communication and cultural understanding are as essential as clinical skills.

I also encourage students to keep an open mind about what a healthcare career might look like. Embrace new experiences. Challenge the limits of what you believe is achievable and don't be afraid to pursue ambitious goals. Sometimes the path may take unexpected turns, and those turns can lead you somewhere even better. Early in my career, I was offered a fellowship I had worked very hard to earn. It was something I deeply wanted, but ultimately, I passed on it because it didn't align with the family balance I needed at the time. It was a difficult decision, but one that opened doors I hadn't imagined. That moment led me toward academic leadership and a broader role in shaping healthcare delivery, education, and strategy. It wasn't the path I expected, but it became the one I was meant to walk. So don't be discouraged if things don't go exactly as planned. Challenges often present new opportunities. What matters most is staying open, leading with empathy, and remembering why you chose this calling in the first place. If you hold onto that purpose, you'll not only succeed, you'll make a real and lasting impact. ●