

Dr. ALISSA Shulman

**Medical Artistry
at Sovereign
Plastic Surgery**



She came to Sarasota from South Bend, Indiana, nine years ago and opened Sovereign Plastic Surgery in 2009. Dr. Shulman is a board-certified plastic surgeon who performs cosmetic and reconstructive procedures from the neck down. She knew when she was a child she'd be a doctor and by age 12 she liked surgery. With a talent for three-dimensional sculpture, Dr. Shulman associates plastic surgery with the creative process.

Dr. Shulman and her husband William Edwards are Honorary Chairs of this year's annual Key to the Cure event on October 12 at Saks Fifth Avenue at University Town Center. "This year the event is more meaningful because ten cancer survivors who were treated by Sarasota Memorial Health Care System will be featured. This is a good community for breast cancer care," she notes.

After nine years as a plastic surgeon in South Bend, Indiana, Dr. Alissa Shulman took a professional risk and moved to Sarasota with no job, a small loan, and some funds from the sale of her house to open her solo practice, Sovereign Plastic Surgery, in 2009. Dr. Shulman is a board-certified plastic surgeon who performs cosmetic and reconstructive procedures from the neck down. She knew when she was a child she'd be a doctor and by age 12 she liked surgery. With a talent for three-dimensional sculpture, Dr. Shulman associates plastic surgery with the creative process.

"I picture a potential result when consulting with patients. I tell patients what I can and cannot do. With breast cancer patients, I see them right after diagnosis. I tell patients that the cancer will be treated and that I can help them look beautiful," says Dr. Shulman. "Unfortunately some do not survive cancer; we cannot cure everyone. But the time a patient spent with us was good and we made them whole again. We are a caring office of all females with my mother as the office manager. We talk to and nurture our patients."

Dr. Shulman sees 25 to 30 patients a day at the office and performs surgery all day on two to three days a week. Her practice includes elective cosmetic surgery such as liposuction; tummy tuck; arm and thigh lift; and breast reduction, asymmetry correction, augmentation, and lift. Most exciting to her is fat grafting instead of liposuction where she removes fat from another part of the body such as the belly, hip, or breasts and uses it to "sculpt" another part of the body.

Dr. Shulman prefers fat sculpting instead of breast implants as she can form the breasts into smaller, rounded, athletic breasts. Dr. Shulman's practice also includes reconstructive procedures for post-breast cancer and post-mastectomy reconstruction which is usually covered by insurance. She also performs preventive mastectomy when the patient shows a genetic tendency to cancer. Nonsurgical noninvasive options include CoolSculpting for fat reduction.

What is the key to her success? "I think about what I would want—especially when working on breasts. Being an artist and appreciating different sizes, shapes, and forms, I think about the normal body. I want people to be happier than they were before surgery. I have seen models in my art classes that were all shapes and sizes and I always point out a person's good features. Being a plastic surgeon is not as glamorous as it appears. It is not about the rich and famous. I treat a wide range of everyday people."

Russell W. Novak, M.D., general and oncologic surgeon, says, "Dr. Shulman has been an outstanding addition to our medical community. Along with an active cosmetic practice, she has dedicated herself and expertise to reconstruction of women with breast disease and breast cancer. Her artistic touch only adds to her excellent cosmetic results, helping countless women deal with the stress of cancer and body image changes. Women connect with her as she helps guide them through treatment and reconstruction. We have shared many patients and can—with

her experience—offer many options of reconstruction to our patients. She strives for excellence and delivers."

Dr. Shulman and her husband William Edwards are Honorary Chairs of this year's annual Key to the Cure event on October 12 at Saks Fifth Avenue at University Town Center. "This year the event is more meaningful because ten cancer survivors who were treated by Sarasota Memorial Health Care System will be featured. This is a good community for breast cancer care. All the funds raised remain in the community helping women with breast cancer and other types of cancer and mammograms," she notes.

Unlike most nondescript medical offices with uncomfortable institutional seating, Dr. Shulman's office reflects her artistic bent with sea themed décor and chairs suitable for a dining room table. The office features her fused glass artwork in the reception area and examination rooms, three stained glass doors to examination rooms, and a large stained glass piece that provides privacy to her office space. A vacant second floor area in the building housing her office served as her studio as she constructed the large pieces. Dr. Shulman "painted" a mixture of sand and silicone caulking on the walls with artificial plants symmetrically placed on the walls. A sculpture she created stands in the hallway.

Dr. Shulman performs surgery at the Cape Surgery Center and Sarasota Memorial Hospital. Her "firsts" include the first woman to be Section Chief of Plastic Surgery at Sarasota Memorial Hospital from 2011 to present, the first woman to be named Chief of Surgery from 2015 to 2016, President of the Sarasota County Medical Society from 2015 to 2016, and the only woman on the Board of Directors of the Florida State Society of Plastic Surgeons.

Mingling her love of art and medicine, she received Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees and graduated from SUNY-Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. Her general surgery internship and residency and a research/teaching fellowship in microsurgery and clinical fellowship in burn surgery were completed at the University of Texas School of Medicine at Houston. Her plastic surgery residency was completed at the Medical College of Ohio.

Raised in Buffalo and Rochester, Dr. Shulman's mother Charlene is her office manager and her late father Elliott was an engineer. She met her husband William Edwards in a nightclub in Houston. She sewed her own turn-of-the-century wedding dress. William is a stay-at-home father to nine-year old Mallory and eleven-year old Ayla.

As her office décor suggests, the family loves everything about the water—swimming, paddle boarding, and scuba diving off Siesta Key. Before medical school Dr. Shulman swam across Lake Erie. She still creates—beading, designing and sewing her daughters' Halloween costumes every year and designing and sewing their First Communion dresses. Some day she'd like to swim around Key West and, as a Project Runway fan, she'd like to put on a fashion show with her own designs—maybe from black plastic. 🍷

STORY: Carol Darling

IMAGES: Evelyn England