



LTC Jaime L. Bellamy, DO (right), pictured with wife Kalah. They married in Kauai, Hawaii, in 2014 because it was not yet legal to marry in their home state of Missouri.

Courtesy of LTC Jaime L. Bellamy, DO

AAOS Now

Published 9/4/2020 | LTC Jaime L. Bellamy, DO

Diversity

Out of the Closet: Physician Endures Through DADT and DOMA

Growing up as a tomboy in the conservative, heavily Christian town of Springfield, Mo., I yearned to be “normal.” I dated men because that was what I was *supposed* to do. Admittedly, I was confused by the teachings of the church. It wasn’t until I was 16 years old that I realized I was attracted to women. I finally made the decision to stop dating

men, but it took 10 years for me to accept that I was a lesbian and to “come out of the closet.”

When I started medical school at the age of 26, I felt a call to serve my country in the U.S. Army and applied for the Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP). At that time, in 2004, the military had the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy in place. The policy allowed LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer [or questioning]) service members to serve with the caveat that they would not tell anyone and would not be asked about their sexual orientation. According to the Army, homosexual conduct was: (1) admitting being homosexual, (2) committing a homosexual act, or (3) marrying or attempting to marry a person of the same sex. When I signed the contract for HPSP, I agreed that I understood that homosexual conduct was “grounds for discharge from the military and agreed to reimburse the government for all costs it incurred, plus interest.” Although I was finally at peace with who I was as a lesbian, DADT forced me back into the closet.

The policy remained in place when I started orthopaedic residency in 2010. Being that orthopaedics is a conservative specialty, and with DADT, I could not be who I was among my peers. I had a life they knew nothing about because of my fear of being discharged. Residency is hard enough while living a “normal life,” let alone as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. I had difficulty bonding with my coresidents because of what I was hiding. In 2011, DADT was repealed, and I was officially able to be myself and not get kicked out of the Army. I still wondered, “Will I really be able to be myself and not be ridiculed by coresidents and attendings?” Even with the elimination of the DADT policy, I continued to fear openly sharing my sexual orientation, and I did not come out to any coresidents until my third year of residency. At that time, I brought my girlfriend to functions outside of work and felt such relief to have a supportive group of residents.



LTC Jaime L. Bellamy, DO (right), pictured with wife Kalah. They married in Kauai, Hawaii, in 2014 because it was not yet legal to marry in their home state of Missouri.

Courtesy of LTC Jaime L. Bellamy, DO



Kalah, wife of LTC Jaime L. Bellamy, DO, “pinned” on her newest rank, LTC, in an auditorium full of coworkers and friends on June 4. Dr. Bellamy never thought this would be possible after living through “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and the Defense of Marriage Act.

Courtesy of LTC Jaime L. Bellamy, DO

In 2013, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was repealed, and I married the love of my life in 2014. DOMA had been signed into law in 1996, preventing the recognition of marriages for gay and lesbian couples. This law denied families basic rights such as health insurance, social security benefits, and joint filing of income taxes. Specifically for the military, family, insurance, increased housing allowance, and separation pay were denied. My program director's wife talked to me about one of her friends who was gay. I shared with her concerns I had about bringing my life partner to graduation, and she reassured me it was a nonissue. It may not have seemed like much to her, but this sentiment meant the world to me and my wife. Not only did it signify their acceptance, but it meant even more to know that I could bring my wife to my residency graduation. She was the one who was behind the scenes, encouraging me when things got hard, sacrificing her time to be with me, and taking care of our house and dogs. My success in residency was just as much hers as it was mine, and she deserved to be recognized and celebrated, too.

I have been in practice in adult reconstruction for four years now. My wife "pinned" on my newest rank, LTC, in an auditorium full of coworkers and friends, which I never thought was a possibility for me. It is not hard for me to be out to my colleagues and other staff members. However, it remains difficult to answer elderly joint replacement patients when they ask, "What does your husband do for a living?" I know this art will come with time. As far as mentors, I know they are out there, but I do not personally know a single LGBTQ+ orthopaedic surgeon.

Certainly, the recent [three-part series](#) about LGBTQ+ orthopaedic surgeons published in *AAOS Now* was eye opening and encouraging. "Imposter syndrome" is strong in women, minorities, and those who are LGBTQ+. I would like to change this, which will require the specialty to be more inclusive and to encourage more surgeons to "come out." I consider myself lucky I graduated from a residency that recognized my wife, but I know not everyone feels as welcome as I did. I want others to feel like I do—unashamed and courageous to be themselves, out of the closet.

LTC Jaime L. Bellamy, DO, is an adult reconstruction surgeon and chief of the orthopaedic service at the Womack Army Medical Center in Fort Bragg, N.C.

© 1995-2021 by the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. "All Rights Reserved." This website and its contents may not be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission. "American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons" and its associated seal and "American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons" and its logo are all registered U.S. trademarks and may not be used without written permission.