



President elect candidate: Advocate, former Navy pediatrician Dr. Beers forges wide-ranging career path

by Wynn St. Clair, Correspondent

When she was about 5 years old, Lee Savio Beers, M.D., FAAP, told her parents she intended to become a doctor.

While it may not have been obvious to a kindergartner, Dr. Beers later realized pediatrics was the ideal melding of her parents' careers. Her father was a nuclear engineer, and her mother was a teacher.

"I was drawn to medicine because of the marrying of science and thinking analytically with the ability to work with children and families," she said. "It's the perfect coming together of the scientific process with my desire to help people."

Wide-ranging career

With her decision made, she embarked on a fascinating career that has included joining the Navy, meeting her future husband and becoming a national voice on pediatric issues. In her career path's latest turn, she is running for AAP president-elect.

"The AAP is my professional home but in a lot of ways, it's my personal home, too," Dr. Beers said. "This is a way to give back to an organization that has lifted me up in so many ways."

After earning a chemistry degree from the College of William & Mary in 1992, Dr. Beers attended Emory University School of Medicine. She joined the Navy after graduation and completed her residency at the Naval Medical Center in Portsmouth, Va.

Toward the end of her intern year, she became involved in what was then known as the Academy's residents' section. She met her now-husband, Nathaniel Savio Beers, M.D., M.P.A., FAAP, at an AAP meeting in Chicago in 1998, sparking a long-distance relationship helped greatly by Academy meetings. The couple lived in separate cities until about two weeks before their wedding.

"There are a lot of people in the Academy who take credit for our marriage and kids," Dr. Beers said, laughing.

After completing her residency, Dr. Beers was assigned to the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station in 1999. She was the only pediatrician on the base, an isolating job where she was responsible for inpatient and outpatient care at all times. During her 18-month assignment in which she cared for every child on the base, she also ran the station's immunization clinic, served on the child abuse committee and worked on Joint Commission issues. There were no CT scanners or other equipment that her stateside colleagues relied on regularly.

"I did it all, and it was clinically very challenging," she said. "In retrospect, it was very formative. I was the only pediatrician, and I was thinking about public health."

Dr. Beers returned stateside in 2001, working as a staff pediatrician at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., for two years. She left the military in 2003 and joined Children's National Medical Center, where she continues to practice.

As a staff pediatrician, her responsibilities include graduate medical education and serving as medical provider at a clinic for teen parents and their children. She also has been the center's medical director of municipal and



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regional affairs since 2011, advocating tirelessly for programs that address child health needs.

Leadership style



Dr. Beers represented the AAP while advocating for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program at a 2017 MomsRising news conference.

"She reaches out across party lines and through the community and convenes groups together who haven't been in the same room before," said Lanre Falusi, M.D., FAAP, the center's assistant director of municipal and regional affairs. "That's what we need in D.C., someone who is able to collaborate with people as well as she does. People like Lee give hope to others. She's optimistic but also realistic about child health and what needs to improve."

Her advocacy efforts include several leadership positions within the AAP, including serving as president of the AAP District of Columbia Chapter and as a leader in the Uniformed Services East Chapter. During her tenure, the D.C. chapter was named the AAP Outstanding Small Chapter of the Year.

In 2014, Dr. Beers served as a member of the search committee for the Academy's CEO/executive vice president. She currently works on the AAP national steering committee for the Zero to Three "Think Babies" campaign.

"As a leader, she listens and empowers. Dr. Beers is always learning, connecting people and ideas and is not afraid to challenge the status quo to come up with innovative solutions," said Susan J. Kressly, M.D., FAAP, who has chaired or served on AAP national committees. "The current climate of health care delivery and support for children is difficult but ripe with opportunity. Lee's leadership style is to find the passion in others and empower them to do great things."

If elected, Dr. Beers wants to continue the Academy's strong work in advocacy and shaping policy. She also intends to accelerate AAP efforts to enhance diversity and inclusion among its members.

Her agenda includes addressing workplace wellness and physician burnout, with a focus on changing systems to make them less stressful. Like many of her colleagues, she spends at least two hours a night catching up on paperwork or charting.



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"It's just not time well-spent. It's taking away from the things that you love about medicine," she said. "We have to really start figuring out how to improve these systems so people can do things that are most meaningful for them in medicine."

Family, D.C. involvements

Dr. Beers and her family live in Washington, D.C. Her husband is president and CEO of the nonprofit HSC Health Care System and has been an unwavering support system throughout her career.

Dr. Nathaniel Savio Beers also is a rare D.C. native. The couple purchased his childhood home, and their two children go to the same public grade schools that their father attended.

Both children - Charlotte, 14, and Jonah, 10 - play competitive soccer, so the family spends a lot of time at the local fields. They're also avid fans of professional soccer and had planned to attend the Women's World Cup in Paris this year.

Neither Charlotte nor Jonah has expressed an interest in medicine, but they both care about social justice and helping others, so their mother won't be surprised if they follow in their parents' footsteps. After all, they've been attending AAP conferences since birth.

"We joke that our kids have been to more NCEs (National Conference & Exhibition) than some of our members," Dr. Beers said. "We love to spend time together, and we love to travel, so we incorporate both with AAP meetings."

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