What is your role at Johns Hopkins?
My job is to improve clinical operations for all outpatient areas at The Johns Hopkins Hospital, so that patients have the best experience getting the care they need, and providers love seeing and treating patients at Johns Hopkins.

How long have you been with Johns Hopkins?
28 years! I got all my gray hair here.

What do you think are the most pressing issues that members of the LGBTQ community face today?
I think the LGBTQ community has seen great advances in acceptance in society over the past 20 years. It has been truly remarkable and empowering. That said, our rights in society are constantly being challenged, and in many parts of the country same-sex marriage is not recognized at a state or local level, and you even have laws restricting which bathroom to use. In addition, health care disparities still exist for those of us in the LGBTQ community, and there is room to improve our education of future physicians who will deliver that care.

How does being a member of the LGBTQ community shape your work and experiences?
Speaking personally, I spent the early part of my professional career in the closet, concerned about how people would react. I think many people could sense I was holding something back, and I think that inhibited my professional relationships. Coming out has allowed me to be more honest with myself and with others, and that has only strengthened my professional relationships and, I think, helped my career. I have never looked back.

What LGBTQ historical figures and/or contemporary heroes do you find interesting or inspiring?
Janelle Monáe is someone who I have been following for several years. I appreciated that her initial self-description as an “android” was a coy way of evading the question of her sexuality. She has now come out to the press and delivered the best album of her career. I think she, like me, has benefitted from coming to terms with who we are.

What would you like readers to know about you and your experiences?
The journey has not been easy, and it’s not over. But I am better for it.

What mark do you hope to leave on Johns Hopkins, your community, the nation or the world?
I was the first “out” chief resident in the Department of Medicine. But I’m most proud of the day-to-day care I provide my patients—helping them to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

What advice can you give other LGBTQ individuals pursuing medicine?
We need you! There are real health care challenges for the LGBTQ community, and we need the voice of our community integrated into health care in order to improve the clinical care of LGBTQ patients.

What message do you have for the Johns Hopkins community about serving and supporting members of the LGBTQ community?
Johns Hopkins has a great reputation and a long history and tradition, but that can sometimes make it feel staid and conservative. At times, that can feel overwhelming. But I’ve found a true warmth and acceptance from just about everyone here.

Anything you would like to add?
We all know the saying “to thine own self be true.” Once I realized that and lived my life honestly with myself and others, things became amazing.

Stephen D. Sisson, M.D.
Executive Director, Ambulatory Services
The Johns Hopkins Hospital