



## **Krishnarao V. Tangella, MD, MBA, FCAP**

Taking the Bull by the Horns

*Just because you're being nice doesn't mean you cannot be firm.*

Krishnarao V. Tangella, MD, MBA, FCAP

“Pathologists have to integrate with the rest of the medical staff,” says Krishnarao V. Tangella, MD, MBA, FCAP. In that context, a specimen that prompts more questions than answers is an opportunity.

“There are emails, there are doctors’ lounges, there are telephones, there are information systems,” Dr. Tangella says. “Talking to the doctor, looking at the clinical history, the past medical history, and past specimens,” he says, are all part of a complete diagnosis. The bonus is that a collaborative posture fosters collegiality. Each time a pathologist reaches out to a fellow physician, he says, that physician becomes more comfortable about calling for a consult on his or her next test selection.

“It’s very important to educate our doctors as to what we do,” says Dr. Tangella, who chairs the Department of Pathology and acts as laboratory medical director for both the Provena Covenant Medical Center and the Christie Clinic in Urbana Illinois. “These are the people who will be talking for or against us when it comes to contract negotiations,” he says. “If the hospital gives you a tough time in negotiating a contract and you can call upon 10 colleagues you have helped in the last year to put in a good word, the administration will know that you are bringing value to the table.”

As someone whose favorite business school course concerned cross-cultural negotiating skills, Dr. Tangella appreciates the importance of good relationships between pathologists and hospital administrators. By stepping outside the laboratory to serve on hospital committees, he ensures that his commitment to their shared goals is evident. At Provena, for example, he chairs the hospital medical quality committee and the institutional review committee while serving on the medical center board and medical executive, cancer, and credentials committees, as well as groups responsible for transfusion and blood utilization, quality control, and infectious disease. At the Christie Clinic, he serves on the board of directors and the quality and health outcome committee. “I put in a lot of effort and time, not only learning the processes but also serving,” he says. “One needs to be involved.”

Dr. Tangella is a clinical assistant professor in the departments of pathology and internal medicine at the University of Illinois College of Medicine-Urbana, where he also serves on the medical executive committee. He mentors internal medicine residents and medical students who rotate through his laboratories for community practice experience. Mentorship “takes a lot of effort and energy, but it is worth it,” he says.

Dr. Tangella also serves as medical director for the McKinley Health Sciences Center Laboratory at the University of Illinois-Urbana, and medical director for the Provena United Samaritan Medical Center laboratory in neighboring Danville. He and his partners are always on the go; so it comes as no surprise that they make a point of reaching out to newcomers.

“When a new doctor comes to town, I introduce myself and say, ‘You will be using the lab, so let me know how we can look at your practice patterns and empower you to be successful.’ I tell them my door is always open, my phone is always open, any time they want to look at any slides, come in.” At the same time, he adds, “Just because you’re being nice doesn’t mean you cannot be firm.” Should that physician later object when the lab questions his order for an outdated test, Dr. Tangella tells him, “Sure, no problem, just give me the literature showing that the test you want to order is better than what we have in the system.” They will concur with his approach, he says, but the order never comes; the disagreement is amicably resolved.

Dr. Tangella is one of three pathologists in a multispecialty group of about 100 doctors that covers four hospitals. His colleagues in the laboratory, he says, recognize the value of his work with the hospital medical staffs, and he, in turn, knows that none of it would be possible if they were not covering for him. “When I go to the meetings, I’m not looking at slides,” he says. “On a weekly basis, we sit down during lunch or whatever and talk about what I have done and what has come up. A lot of the big practices have a hierarchical system but we work together. I encourage the other pathologists to take the bull by the horns, get to know other doctors on the medical staff, and spend energy and time for the sake of patients and the quality of care.”