

# A MISSION worth accepting

Running into the conference room like the hero from *Mission Impossible*, Gregory Poland, M.D., '80, made a dramatic entrance to begin his lecture on the importance of health-care workers receiving the flu vaccine.

Dr. Poland, director of the Mayo Vaccine Research Group at Mayo Medical School in Rochester, Minnesota, was the Sergio Rabinovich Distinguished Lecturer at the Department of Internal Medicine's Grand Rounds in November. "Dr. Rabinovich was my mentor," Dr. Poland said. "His passion intrigued me."

That passion infected Dr. Poland, and the result has been a career in vaccine administration and development. During a video parodying *Mission Impossible* Dr. Poland chose to accept his mission of spreading the word of prevention through vaccine faster than the flu can spread itself.

"This mission is possible," he said.

The topic was timely, considering the scare of a flu vaccine shortage last fall that plagued America like the virus itself.

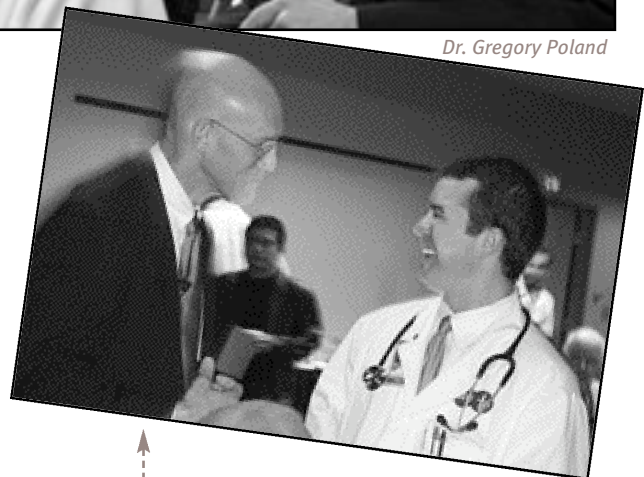
Dr. Poland covered the distressing, 80-year history of the topic, citing thousands of deaths during each pandemic since 1918.

"The flu is so common we discount its importance," Dr. Poland said. He cited 36,000 deaths per year in the United States — the sixth leading cause of death. "We can prevent more deaths than AIDS or breast cancer with the flu vaccine," he says. He reported that 82 million are affected annually in the U.S.; of these, 65 million become ill and 30 million receive medical care.

"At most institutions, the vaccine is not required," Dr. Poland noted, calling it a "patient safety issue." Citing the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, Dr. Poland



*Dr. Gregory Poland*



*Dr. Poland talks with medical student Brad Bernard ('06)*



*Dr. David Steward, Dr. Poland and Dr. Rabinovich*

says about 64 percent of health-care workers opt not to get the vaccine. "Volunteer programs don't work," he said.

That's disturbing news, considering that infected health-care workers can transmit the infection to their already weakened patients.

The fact, he said, is that the vaccine is safe and effective. And yet, "volunteer immunization programs never result in high immunization rates."

He stressed that it was a patient safety issue. "We have a duty to protect our VIPs — very important patients — from things we can prevent." ■