



Winter 2-1-2007

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Recommended Citation

Kuzniar, Taylor, "Avian Flu Expert to Speak About the Threat of a Pandemic Flu" (2007).
News and Events. 3197.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/3197>

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Avian Flu Expert to Speak About the Threat of a Pandemic Flu

February 1, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Gregory Poland, international expert in the field of vaccine development and Illinois Wesleyan alumnus, class of 1977, will give a speech titled, "Avian/Pandemic Influenza: What's All The Flap?" as part of the Natural Science Colloquium program at Illinois Wesleyan. The presentation will take place on Friday, Feb. 9 at 3 p.m. in room C101 in the Center for Natural Science (201 Beecher St., Bloomington).

The event is free and open to the public.

Returning to the University after delivering the 2005 commencement address, Poland, a member of the Infectious Diseases Society of America Taskforce on Pandemic Influenza since 2004, will address the audience about the imminent threat of a worldwide avian flu epidemic.

Also called "fowl plague," "avian flu" and most commonly known as "bird flu," avian influenza is a highly contagious viral disease spread primarily by the poultry industry that has approximately a 100 percent mortality rate among fowl and a 55 percent mortality rate among humans, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Although humans are rarely infected by the virus thus far, characteristics of the disease include flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough and muscle aches, as well as eye infections, pneumonia and acute respiratory diseases.

According to Poland in his article, "Vaccines Against Avian Influenza-A Race Against Time" in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, because of its constant mutation, the virus is close to meeting the criteria of becoming a pandemic virus. The virus' only weakness is human-to-human transmission, which keeps this strain from becoming an international epidemic. If faced with an avian flu outbreak, Poland, president of the International Society for Vaccines, predicts that 200 million people in the United States would be infected with the virus, 90 million people left clinically ill and 2 million dead. In addition, the economic costs that would face our country could total \$675 billion, according to the Congressional Budget Office, and could therefore cause a collapse of our world economy.

Due to the threat to our country's public and economic health, Poland warns that this possible pandemic could "arguably be the most horrific disaster in modern history" and is therefore an advocate for mandatory flu immunizations for health-care professionals as well as increased development and testing for more effective avian flu vaccines.

Considered by the Global Health council to be an avian flu expert, Poland is the founder and director of the Mayo Clinic's Vaccine Research Group, a state-of-the-art research group and laboratory that investigates issues surrounding vaccine response, effectiveness and development. At the Mayo Clinic, he also serves as a Professor of Medicine and Infectious Diseases and Molecular Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics, the Associate Chair for Research for the Department of Medicine, the Director of the Immunization Clinic and the Director of the Program in Translational Immunovirology and Biodefense.

For his work in vaccine studies, Poland was awarded the Charles Merieux Lifetime Achievement Award in Vaccinology from the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases in May 2006. In 1998, the Surgeon General of the United States rewarded Poland a joint award from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Health Care Financing Administration for his contribution to increasing adult immunization rates in the United States.

Outside of his studies in vaccinology, Poland has received several other significant distinctions. For his service as a professor at the Mayo Clinic, in February 2004 he received the highest academic distinction for a faculty member when he was appointed as the Mary Lowell Leary Professor in Medicine by the Mayo Clinic's Board of Trustees. In May 2003, Poland was awarded the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service for his work on the Armed Forces Epidemiological Board, and in March 2005, he became the board's president.

Poland is the American editor for the journal *Vaccine*. He peer-reviews journal articles for more than 26 publications including *The Lancet*, *Annals of Internal Medicine* and *New England Journal of Medicine*, and has published more than 200 peer-reviewed scientific articles and chapters. He has been highly visible in the national media on topics of vaccine research and biodefense, giving interviews to major news networks and print media including NBC and ABC "Nightly News," "The Jim Lehrer Report," *The Wall Street Journal* and *Newsweek*.

Poland received a bachelor's degree in biology from IWU. He earned his medical degree from the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in Springfield, Ill., and completed his residency and advanced post-doctorate work at the University of Minnesota/Abbott-Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis.



Gregory Poland