Standardized Patient #3: African (Nigerian)

Abeo is a 21 year old Nigerian male attending UCLA working on his undergraduate degree in Biology. He intends to apply to medical school in two years and is excited about graduating in a year. Abeo lives at home and plans to find part time work transporting patients in a hospital to gain some experience after he graduates. However, he’s recently been experiencing anxiety symptoms including not wanting to be around his friends, worrying about his parent’s health, his own health and lots of doubt about his ability to get admitted to medical school. Abeo is also not sleeping well and has recently been having headaches, poor concentration and fatigue. He’s noticed his grades are slipping and he’s been worrying excessively about this issue. Abeo thinks he caused these symptoms because he’s misbehaved and he feels shameful and guilty. He knows that if he discloses this condition to his parents, they will insist on him seeing a spiritual or religious healer (priest) to remove the supernatural forces that caused him this condition. In the past his parents have indicated that when anyone gets sick, they believe it represents a sickness of the soul and a burdened heart. Abeo would like to be screened and evaluated at the school’s health center before he discloses his condition to his parents. He would like to discuss this situation with you and get your advice.

The findings of a physical examination and all laboratory results; complete blood cell count, serum electrolytes, thyroid function tests, liver function tests are unremarkable.

As a primary care professional how could you gain Abeo’s trust and confidence in you; respond empathetically and begin to explain to him that his anxiety symptoms were not caused by a supernatural force and that he shouldn’t feel shameful and guilty about it.

Factors to consider in your response to this case:

Remember -- Africans may under-report their symptoms for fear of feeling ashamed and humiliating their family.

His friends and family may shun and exclude him from activities once they learn of his mental illness.

Friends and family will say forces put a spiritual curse on Abeo or he was bewitched