Standardized Patient #1: Chinese

Yihan is a 26-year old Chinese female who has been in the U.S. for three years as a student. She’s performing very well academically at U.C. Irvine but lately has been experiencing auditory and visual hallucinations. She struggles to ignore the voices which are devaluing -- saying she’s worthless and will never graduate and earn her degree because she’s incompetent and stupid. Yihan also sees a ghost in her room before falling asleep. You suspect she may meet criteria for Schizophrenia. Yihan lives at home with her parents and last week, she disclosed to her family that she’s hearing voices and suspects classmates are spreading rumors about her failing grades and that the campus police are doing surveillance on her. Her parents believe that spiritual and mystical forces invaded her mind and that Yihan did things that upset her social harmony or she transgressed and violated some social norms of her culture. They plan to send her to a shamanistic healer, Buddhist monk or someone that practices traditional Chinese medicine. The parents are not considering sending her to a mental health practitioner.

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 her trust and confidence in you; respond empathetically and begin to explain to Yihan that her condition is a mental illness and not a weakness or her violating social harmony or norms.

Factors to consider in your response to this case:

Due to cultural bias and stigma, Asians tend to view mental illness as a personal weakness or moral failing.

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

Also – Asians tend to view the mind and body as one rather than a dualistic view where mind and body are two distinct entities.