

Pre-Reading Discussion: What questions do health professionals ask you when you call or visit them? Do you give them complete answers?

This passage is about a student named Deb, who winds up at her college urgent care clinic with horrible pain in her back. You'll see how important it is that she communicates all of her symptoms to the nurse practitioner.

Deb is a college student. She is studying to be a teacher. Deb woke up on Saturday with a dull ache in her back. She thought, "I wonder what I did to hurt my back? Maybe I overdid it in yoga class yesterday."

The pain was on the right side. All day long it hurt. Even when she lay down, it did not go away. She took Advil. That helped a little, but not for long.

That night the pain got worse. The dull ache became a throb. Deb could not sleep at all. By Sunday morning, her back hurt so much she could hardly walk. She felt weak and very tired. She was sweating a lot.

Deb asked her roommate to drive her to the college Urgent Care Clinic. At the clinic, she saw a nurse practitioner named Tom.

"What brings you here today?" asked Tom.

"I hurt my back," said Deb.

"How did you do that?" asked Tom.

“I’m not sure. Maybe it was in yoga class on Thursday.”

“When did the pain start?” asked Tom.

“Yesterday morning. I had it when I woke up,” said Deb.

Tom said, “Show me where it hurts.”

Deb cupped her hand on her lower right back. “Here, and it comes up and around to my side, too.”

“Tell me more about the pain,” said Tom.

“Well, it started out just a dull ache yesterday. But last night it started to throb. It never goes away, even when I lie down. It’s so bad I couldn’t sleep at all last night.”

“Did you take anything for it?” asked Tom.

“Yes, some Advil. But it hardly helped at all.”

“Have you had this before?” asked Tom.

“No,” said Deb, “never like this.”

“Do you have any other symptoms?” asked Tom.

“Well, today I feel weak. I can hardly walk.”

“How about a fever?” asked Tom.

“I don’t know,” said Deb. “I was sweating a lot last night.” Tom took her temperature. Deb did have a fever.

Tom asked, “Do you have any pain when you go to the bathroom? And have you noticed any change in your urine?”

Deb felt embarrassed. For the past few days she had felt a little burning when she went to the bathroom. Her urine looked cloudy. It had a bad smell. She told Tom all of this.

Then Tom examined Deb. He pressed his fingers gently in different places on her back and tummy. One spot was very, very sore when he touched it.

“O.K. Deb. I need you to give a urine sample now,” said Tom.

“You mean I have to pee in a jar?” asked Deb. “How come?”

“Good question. You see, I don’t think you hurt your back in yoga, Deb. It’s a good thing you told me about

ALL of your symptoms. I think you might have a kidney infection.”

“A kidney infection?” cried Deb.

“Yes. And it can be a serious thing if not treated right away,” said Tom.

The urine test confirmed it. Deb did have a kidney infection.

“It’s a good thing you didn’t wait any longer to come in,” said Tom. “We’ll start you on antibiotics right away.”

Questions for Discussion:

Can you relate to Deb's experience?

Can you remember all of Deb's symptoms? What would you have told Tom if you were Deb?

Are you comfortable talking to doctors and nurses? Why is it important to be honest when you describe your symptoms?