

Future of age estimation

First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Balwant Rai for having so kindly invited me to be guest editor of the *Indian Journal of Forensic Odontology*. I have already had the pleasure of working with him, although we have still not met each other in person.

Over the last ten years, the *AgEstimation Project*, promoted by the Institute of Legal Medicine of the University of Macerata, Italy, has been studying techniques and methods for accurate age estimation in both juveniles and adult subjects. During this period, we have worked with several colleagues from various countries, developing topics, examining points of view, and assessing indications and reports. The samples we have examined were often very different from our early forensic samples. Techniques were often extended to archaeological samples or, in the case of children, used for auxological purposes. During this time, we have also been able, not only to develop, but also to improve and re-assess our methods. In the meantime, the scientific world has become much richer in studies on age estimation, and the number of increasingly safer and more precise techniques has grown.

The hope of finding methods less and less influenced by ethnic, environmental and dietary factors has always stimulated those who study this branch of science. However, even the most recent publications are not encouraging as regards the possibility of finding universally applicable techniques. This problem is of particular importance from the forensic point of view, for the practical application of formulas and methods to subjects from regions for which no studies exist. One of the most insurmountable problems is often precisely the difficulty of applying methods originally studied and tested on Western populations to subjects from other regions and continents. It is not good enough that a formula based on European samples should still have to be applied to illegal immigrants from Central Africa or Asia. All of us hope to find age indicators which can increasingly be used universally. Utopia, or reality? The future will show us whether our efforts have been repaid by the achievement of less invasive and more precise techniques. After all, only slightly more than one hundred and fifty years have passed since Saunders wrote the first work devoted to age estimation using teeth and assessing the subject's age from the moment of their eruption. Again, I would like to thank my Indian colleagues for their kind hospitality, and I hope to continue working with them in the future. And, why not? I also hope to be able to visit and know more of their enchanting country, as soon as possible.

Thank you,

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