

Book Review.

Age Estimation in the Living. A Practitioner's Guide. By Sue Black, Anil Aggrawal and Jason Payne-James. Wiley-Blackwell. Chichester. UK. 978-0-470-51967-7

This book is the first to bring together the differing threads of Age Estimation in living subjects. It comprises 14 chapters covering History of Age Estimation, Immigration, Legal Requirements, Consent, Psychological Assessment, Physical Age Estimation, Growth, Maturation and Age, Imaging Techniques, Soft Tissue Evaluation, Odontology, Skeletal Age Estimation, Evaluation after Growth Cessation, Presentation of Statistics and Practical Elements for Age Estimation.

Throughout the book there is a vibrant sense of the writer imparting her/his knowledge in an enthusiastic and erudite manner. I enjoyed reading every word. As one who has struggled, in isolation, with many of the issues raised, it is refreshing and helpful to see legal aspects, statistical guidance and issues of consent so skilfully presented.

On re-reading the book, it is timely to look at some of the areas that may concern clinicians attempting to put into practice some of the advice given. The most significant shortcoming is the lack of validation of Reference Data. This means that throughout the whole book there is no reference to Validation of Age Estimation in subjects using any of the techniques described by comparing the age estimations with the gold standard of a known date of birth. This is very much an inherent shortcoming of the techniques available as it is not ethical to take x-rays for clinical research purposes so it is no longer possible in many of the areas to validate findings using the Gold Standard of Chronological Age. This is not the case with Dental Age Assessment where many thousands of x-rays of healthy children taken for diagnosis of dental disease are available in dental centres throughout the world. This has not been highlighted by the authors of the Dental Chapter, nor has this been alluded to appropriately by the editors who drafted the final chapter on 'Key Practical Elements for Age Estimation in the Living'. The authors/editors have drawn attention to shortcomings in age estimation techniques but not highlighted the major advantages of Dental Age Assessment data. Hopefully, there will be an opportunity to amend these aspects of the book in a second edition. Despite these shortcomings, it is important to give considerable credit to the chapter authors and editors who have brought together large amounts of material from many diverse sources. The book is truly holistic in that the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

Any Age Assessment Practitioner or Forensic Scientist must have this book available for reference.

As the first comprehensive text in this field, it sets a very high standard. Further work on Validation of Age Assessment Techniques will be available by the time a second edition follows. This subject area of Age Assessment in the Living needed this book; it fills a void in the field to a very high standard.

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