

Assessment of the Age of Refugee Children

Paediatricians are sometimes asked to give their opinion on whether a refugee child is under or over 18. The request may come from the child's legal representative or from a government agency. In either case the College would urge caution when making such an assessment:

- The determination of age is a complex and often inexact set of skills, where various types of physical, social and cultural factors all play their part, although none provide a wholly exact or reliable indication of age, especially for older children.
- Assessments of age should only be made in the context of the overall assessment of the child.
- As there can be a wide margin of error in assessing age it may be best to word a clinical judgment in terms of whether a child is probably, likely, possibly or unlikely to be under the age of 18
- It is inappropriate for x-rays to be used merely to assist in age determination for immigration purposes.

The issues are covered in greater detail in "The Health of Refugee Children – Guidelines for Paediatricians", which is available on the College web-site at http://www.rcpch.ac.uk/publications/past_publications.html

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