G46 Immigration-Related, Dental Age-Estimation Cases for the Del Rio and Laredo Sectors of the United States-Mexico Border in Texas

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of the complexity of the illegal immigration problem as well as the nature and scope of immigration-related, dental age-estimation procedures performed by a forensic odontologist for a portion of the United States-Mexico border in Texas.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by raising awareness of one aspect of the complex and continuing problems confronted by multiple entities including, but not limited to, immigration and law enforcement personnel as they attempt to manage various problems associated with illegal border crossings.

Persons who are apprehended by federal, state, or local agencies following illegal border crossings constitute a serious problem. This problem has existed for many years but has changed in recent history because of (or despite) increased efforts by federal and state governments. The United States government has dedicated vast resources into increasing border security over the past decades including adding more than 650 miles of border fences and adding 21,000+ border patrol personnel according to one study. That same study reports that more than $18 billion was spent on border enforcement in 2012.

A report from the Council of Foreign Relations includes information indicating that the best outside estimate is that the United States government's apprehension rate has increased in recent years because of increased border security. Others report that the problems with the United States economy have more to do with the decrease in illegal border crossings. Most studies estimate that the government now intercedes in about half of all illegal border crossings from Mexico. Most also agree that the incentive for illegal immigration is not going to disappear in the foreseeable future.

The Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S.744), if signed into law, will establish a 90% "effectiveness rate" as a goal for each of nine separate sectors of the southern United States border.

The effectiveness rate is the percentage calculated by dividing the number of apprehensions and "turn backs" in a given sector during a fiscal year by the total number of illegal entries in that sector. The nine sectors from west to east are San Diego, El Centro, Yuma, Tucson, El Paso, Big Bend, Del Rio, Laredo, and Rio Grande Valley. This presentation includes discussion of dental age estimation cases for the Del Rio and Laredo Sectors only.

The management of illegal immigrants in all sectors includes the necessity of discriminating between adult and juvenile detainees. Juveniles and adults are detained separately and the juvenile facilities are perceived to be preferable to the adult. Consequently, detainees of all ages often claim to be "under 18." Eighteen is the current age of majority in all four states bordering Mexico. Absent definitive proof of actual chronological age, immigration agencies sometimes request age estimation services from forensic odontologists to help them differentiate likely adults from likely juveniles. The recent increase in illegal immigration levels of younger juveniles both accompanied and unaccompanied has generated some activity in the dental estimation of age for younger juveniles.

This presentation will describe the history, nature, and scope of the immigration-related age estimation activities of one forensic odontologist from 1998 through 2014 for two sectors of the United States-Mexico border in Texas.

Age Estimation, Odontology, Immigration