

Editorial

Physical anthropology and medicine

Physical anthropology in general and auxology in particular have deep roots in Lithuania: it has been initiated by Andrzej Sniadecki, a professor of medicine of Vilnius University, 200 years ago. During its long history, Lithuanian anthropology was closely related to medicine: medical doctors, not biologists or professional anthropologists, made a major contribution to the studies. Due to their endeavour, biological history of the Lithuanian people was elucidated, research into odontological characteristics of modern and ancient populations was carried out, new methods of stature reconstruction of local inhabitants on the basis of osteological examination were created, standard norms of physical growth and development were estimated, and some general theoretical problems of human biology were solved.

Human skeletal remains of different époques are of great interest to medicine, for they present information on the epidemiology of various diseases that leave the signs on the bones, and this helps to better understand pathogenetical processes. Moreover, palaeopathological investigations benefit identification of persons in the practice of forensic medicine.

Auxological data on the growth and development of children at various ages are of great use in obstetrics, neonatology,

paediatrics, general practice, as well as in social medicine for the evaluation of physical status of newborns, infants, children and adolescents in order to prevent growth deviations and to help their early correction. The data on body composition in childhood are important in endocrinological and dietary practice. The solution of some purely theoretical problems (epochal trend in growth and development, obesity etc.) may be important for school psychologists and children's psychiatrists.

It is no wonder that an international conference on the indicated links between anthropology and medical practice was organized by the Department of Anatomy, Histology and Anthropology, the Faculty of Medicine, Vilnius University, and the Commission of Human Morphology, the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. These two institutions are the main centres of physical anthropology in Lithuania. Representatives from 10 countries took part at the Conference. The following sessions were held: 1. Palaeopathology; 2. Functional anthropology; 3. Genetics, reproduction, obesity; 4. Head and face; 5. Auxology.

Thanks to the endeavours of the Scientific Committee of the Conference, some of the presentations are published in the present special issue of Acta medica Lituanica.

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