

BOOK REVIEW

It's in a chart!

Handbook of Physical Measurements – Second Edition

Judith G Hall, Judith E Allanson, Karen W Gripp and Anne M Slavotinek
Oxford University Press, 2007. 507 pp. £35.99 (Hardback).
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Are you a clinical geneticist, pediatrician, or any other care provider involved in dysmorphology, someone who has to struggle with the documentation of physical traits and with translating what's in a face into accurate measurements? Do not worry – it will certainly be found in one of the charts of the 'Handbook of Physical Measurements,' which has just been published as the second edition.

This Handbook is an updated and retitled version of the 'Handbook of Normal Physical Measurements,' which is itself widely used and much appreciated by dysmorphologists for many years.

The material is structured into 18 chapters containing more than 400 figures, two-thirds of which are charts or tables. The majority of the chapters concentrate on the different body regions, and each follows the same clear structure: an introduction with a discussion of the embryology of that area, a description of the method of measurement, growth charts, and references. The section on measurement defines the landmarks to be used, lists instruments and positions, adds useful remarks, and draws the user's attention to common pitfalls. All this is easy to take in at a glance and is written

comprehensibly. The chapters on craniofacial measurements and on limbs are particularly rich in information. The embryology part gives useful clues to variants and physical anomalies, and the multitude of charts provide the standards for frequent, as also less frequent, measurements.

Two chapters cover general aspects (measurement and the approach to the child with dysmorphic features), and five other address specific issues: the use of radiographs, developmental data, prenatal and postmortem measurements, and measurements for specific syndromes. A detailed glossary and index round off the Handbook.

Compared to the first edition, there are two major changes. The charts on the basic measurements of length/height, weight, and head circumference have been updated for Europeans and North Americans. Height and weight charts now cover the age up to 20 years, web sites are quoted as references, and a chart for body mass indices has been added. Charts on head circumference as a parameter of major importance are more diverse for Europeans. They also include figures for infants with birth weights between 500 and 1000 g and a better spread notification

between birth and 36 months of age. Surprisingly, figures for ages 2–16 years are unchanged.

As a second major change, the chapter on specific syndromes has been considerably revised and expanded. It now includes 16 more frequent and well-delineated syndromes, from achondroplasia to Williams syndrome. These charts will be of value in the follow-up of children with these syndromes.

Minor changes concern a correction of the old OCD (outer canthal distance) chart, which gave abnormally low values; the inclusion of charts on racial differences in pubertal development; and the shortening of the developmental data screening section.

The format of the book has much improved. It is slightly bigger but still a real handbook. The layout of texts and charts is clearer, and the charts are easier to use. The user will much appreciate the inclusion of several charts, specifically for ages between birth and 2 years when growth velocity is particularly high.

This is a wonderful book, obviously written by experienced and practising clinical geneticists. It is a handbook for routine clinical use, but nonetheless, it is a valuable source of explanations of physical variants and abnormalities. It is a great pleasure to read and will become an indispensable aid for anyone who has to obtain accurate physical measurements in the evaluation of children and adults. What I missed? A thumb register – to find back more easily my favorites: head circumference, ICD and OCD, ear and hand length, and upper-to-lower segment ratio. But whatever you want to find, it will be in one of these charts ■

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