

## USING STRAW NOTES TO STANDARDIZE AND IMPROVE ZOO NUTRITION OUTCOMES

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### **Abstract**

Nutritional inquiries are widely diverse in topic, background detail, and background of our intended audience and inquirers. Providing the required information in an organized and standardized framework can expedite the progression and/or resolution of the inquiry. Developed by nutritionists at San Diego Zoo Global, the STRAW note – an mnemonic acronym for **S**ituation, **T**arget, **R**equired **A**ction(s) by **W**ho/**W**hen – is an easy-to-remember framework for documenting zoo nutrition questions, particularly those involving multiple stakeholders across departments

*Situation:* San Diego Zoo Global (SDZG) is a not-for-profit organization that operates the San Diego Zoo, the San Diego Zoo Safari Park, and the Institute for Conservation Research. Combined, the Zoo and Safari Park are home to more than 8,000 animals representing more than 800 species. Nutritionists serve both collections and field questions on a daily basis concerning feeding, diet, and nutrition from animal care staff, veterinarians, vet technicians, pathologists, and the browse team (a subset of the Horticulture Department). Because the stakeholders come from a range of backgrounds and experience, questions raised differ substantially in background detail provided, typically resulting in follow-up correspondence to clarify the request before progressing the inquiry. Example zoo nutrition questions include: “Do you know if watermelon is ok for aye-aye?” “Is crepe myrtle a potential browse species?” “Can we get a diet increase for ... (insert species/specimen)”

*Target:* Develop a standardized method for recording and responding to questions in note form. The note format must be sufficiently detailed to ensure someone with no previous interaction can obtain all the necessary information from the record and/or subsequent consultation to appropriately provide care/follow-up. Efficiency and time management are also important (particularly in clinical nutrition cases), so the note must also avoid overly wordy phrasing and unnecessary detail. Headings for the note must be easy to follow, sufficiently broad to fit the variety of questions received, and outcome driven.

*Required Actions:* Review alternative documentation note formats. SMART is a mnemonic acronym giving criteria that guides in the setting of objectives, for example, in project management, employee-performance, and personal development. Each letter in SMART refers to a different criterion for judging objectives, which are easy to understand. The SOAP note – a mnemonic acronym for **S**ubjective, **O**bjective, **A**ssessment, and **P**lan – is a documentation format used among the veterinary profession (including SDZG Veterinary Services) to record patient interactions. Neither SMART nor SOAP readily apply to questions about feeding, diet, and nutrition, nonetheless their definition informed STRAW.

*When:* Using a standardized recording format to respond to nutrition inquiries, all staff can approach any diet or nutrition-related question and work towards a positive outcome in a logical manner. The STRAW note can stand on its own, providing a comprehensive review of the case, and the thought processes at each step should be evident to anyone reviewing the record. Use of the STRAW note format enhances communication between all staff across departments, optimizing the quality of care and minimizing the potential for redundancy and mistakes. It serves as a record of the question, agreed targets, communications with stakeholders, and reasoning for any action (or lack of action). STRAW notes can be shared in various formats suitable for archiving and future retrieval (*e.g.* email and Zoo Information Management Systems)

<b>Situation</b>	Details of inquiry and why it was prompted Brief summary of key points from stakeholder discussions, including subjective information Available objective information Appropriate historical information
<b>Target</b>	Target as determined by discussions with stakeholders Target may be a set goal or an evaluation of inquiry itself ( <i>i.e.</i> , feasibility, need for revision, etc.)
<b>Required Action(s)</b>	Key steps to achieve desired outcome a.k.a. what will happen?
<b>Who/When</b>	Who is responsible for the actions (including follow-up), by when?