

**U.S. Department of Labor**

Pension and Welfare Benefits Administration  
Washington, D.C. 20210



MAY 3 1990

ERISA OPINION 90-10A  
Sec. 3(40), 514(b)(6)

Ms. Mary Nance  
Texas State Board of Insurance  
1110 San Jacinto  
Austin, Texas 78701-1998

Dear Ms. Nance:

This is in reply to your request for an advisory opinion regarding the applicability of title I of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA). Specifically, you ask whether the MDPhysicians & Associates, Inc. Employee Benefit Plan (MDPEBP) is an employee welfare benefit plan within the meaning of section 3(1) of title I of ERISA and whether MDPEBP is a multiple employer welfare arrangement (MEWA) within the meaning of section 3(40) of that title.

You advise that MDPEBP is funded through a trust created on October 1, 1989, under a trust agreement between three doctors as trustees and MDPhysicians & Associates, Inc. (MDPA). The trust agreement states that the trust was created to carry out the MDPEBP for the payment of group health care, sickness, accident, life and other benefits for eligible employees of members of MDPA. You further state that as of August 7, 1989 at least 69 unrelated employers primarily in the panhandle area of Texas have adopted MDPEBP to provide benefits to their employees. These employers include Westminster Presbyterian Church, Balfour Optical, Amarillo Rubber Stamp Co., Wagner Farms, Panhandle Truck Parts, Inc., Valu-Line of Amarillo, and various medical professional corporations. In a telephone conversation with a representative of this Office, you also stated that the employers utilizing MDPEBP to provide benefits to their employees do not constitute a controlled group and that MDPEBP is not maintained pursuant to any collectively bargained agreement.

Section 3(40)(A) of title I of ERISA defines the term "MEWA" to include:

...an employee welfare benefit plan, or any other arrangement (other than an employee welfare benefit plan), which is established or maintained for the purpose of offering or providing any benefit described in paragraph (1) to the employees of two or more employers (including one or more self-employed individuals), or to their beneficiaries, except that such term does not include any such plan or other arrangement which is established or maintained--

- (i) under or pursuant to one or more agreements which the Secretary finds to be collective bargaining agreements, or
- (ii) by a rural electric cooperative.

Based upon the information you submitted, it is the position of the Department of Labor (the Department) that MDPEBP is a MEWA within the meaning of section 3(40). MDPEBP covers the employees of more than two separate, independent employers; is not maintained by a rural electric cooperative; and is not maintained under or pursuant to any collective bargaining agreement.

Although section 514(a) of ERISA provides that any state law or regulation which relates to an employee benefit plan covered by ERISA is preempted, section 514(b) of title I of ERISA provides:

(6)(A) Notwithstanding any other provision of this section-- (i) in the case of an employee welfare benefit plan which is a multiple employer welfare arrangement and is fully insured (or which is a multiple employer welfare arrangement subject to an exemption under subparagraph (B)), any law of any State which regulates insurance may apply to such arrangement to the extent that such law provides--

(I) standards, requiring the maintenance of specified levels of reserves and specified levels of contributions, which any such plan, or any trust established under such a plan, must meet in order to be considered under such law able to pay benefits in full when due, and

(II) provisions to enforce such standards, and

(ii) in the case of any other employee welfare benefit plan which is a multiple employer welfare arrangement, in addition to this title, any law of any State which regulates insurance may apply to the extent not inconsistent with the preceding sections of this title.

(B) The Secretary may, under regulations which may be prescribed by the Secretary, exempt from subparagraph (A)(ii), individually or by class, multiple employer welfare arrangements which are not fully insured. Any such exemption may be granted with respect to any arrangement or class of arrangements only if such arrangement or each arrangement which is a member of such class meets the requirements of section 3(1) and section 4 necessary to be considered an employee welfare benefit plan to which this title applies.

Although section 514(b)(6)(B) provides that the Secretary of Labor may prescribe regulations under which the Department may exempt MEWAs from state regulation under section 514(b)(6)(A)(ii), the Department has previously stated that it did not see the need to prescribe regulations under section 514(b)(6)(B) to exempt MEWAs from state regulation. The Department, at this time, has not changed its position. Accordingly, the Department is not providing MEWAs exemptions under section 514(b)(6)(B) from state regulation.

It is, therefore, the Department's position that MDPEBP is subject to state regulation at least to the extent provided in section 514(b)(6)(A), regardless of whether it is an employee benefit plan covered by title I of ERISA, because it is a MEWA within the meaning of section 3(40) of that title.

Because your request for an advisory opinion was concerned primarily with the issue of whether or not MDPEBP is subject to the applicable regulatory authority of the State of Texas's insurance laws or is saved from such authority under the general preemption provision of section 514(a) of title I of ERISA, and because of the opinion above, we have determined it is not necessary at this time to render an opinion as to whether MDPEBP is an employee welfare benefit plan within the meaning of section 3(1) of that title.

The preceding constitutes an advisory opinion under ERISA Procedure 76-1. Accordingly, it is issued subject to the provisions of that procedure, including section 10 thereof relating to the effect of advisory opinions.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Doyle  
Director of Regulations and Interpretations