

BY TONNY ABET

# Irish donors give Uganda 11 ambulances for palliative care

**KAMPALA.** An Irish humanitarian initiative, Hope on Wheels (HOW), has given Uganda 11 ambulances to improve emergency care for patients with cancer, HIV/Aids and other palliative care needs.

While handing over the ambulances to the Ministry of Health recently, Mr Tom Doyle, HOW Board Chairperson, said their initiative was inspired by the late Dr Anne Merriman, the “mother of palliative care” in Africa and the founder of Kampala-based Hospice Africa Uganda.

Mr Doyle, who founded one of Ire-

land’s biggest baker businesses, said the plan to donate the ambulances was born in January 2025, at dinner with Dr Merriman.

“She (Dr Merriman) suggested, could we get one ambulance for Hospice Africa Uganda? So we went back to Ireland, we thought about this, and we thought, let’s try to get maybe more than one ambulance and let’s look at more than one hospice,” he narrated.

The businessman explained that when their team adopted this bigger plan, they teamed up with the Palliative Care Association of Uganda (PCAU),

and looked at the broader hospice community.

“We decided to try something bigger. We approached the Irish National Ambulance Service, and we approached our fire service back in Ireland, and we found that once they heard of the need in Uganda, they also wanted to help,” he said.

“So they gave us these vehicles. Some of them are six or seven years old, some of them a little bit more than that, but they’ve been taken care of really well,” he said.

Dr Diana Atwine, the Permanent Sec-

retary at the Ministry of Health, in her speech read by Dr Charles Oloro, the director general of Health Services, appreciated HOW and said the ambulances would be put to good use.

Dr Oloro said the Ebola outbreak is under control and that international travellers can fly in and go back without contacting Ebola.

While receiving the ambulances, Dr Oloro also launched the Dr Anne Merriman Fund for Palliative Care in Uganda (DAMFU), an initiative which aims to bridge gaps in access to palliative care in the country.

According to information from PCAU, the majority of Ugandans who need palliative care are unable to access it because of the low number of palliative care professionals and limited facilities.

## Palliative care professionals

Dr Nixon Niyonzima, the PCAU Board Chairperson, said the country requires at least 3,000 palliative care professionals, but there are only 350.

Information from the ministry indicates that the ambulances will be given to different hospices, many run by charity organisations, across the country.