Rylla Baker

Ryall Baker joined the Hurley Clinic as Practice Manager in January 1990, when it was a single-site practice based in the basement of a 22-storey tower block in Lambeth. Thirty-five years later, she remains at the helm, now as Chief Executive Officer of the Hurley Group, an NHS GP partnership. Under her leadership and vision, the Hurley Group now serves over 120,000 patients across more than ten sites in London, with a workforce of over 350 staff for whom she bears ultimate responsibility.

She began her professional life as a nurse, qualifying as a State Registered Nurse at King's College Hospital in 1983. As Primary Care Lead in Lewisham, Rylla commissioned and project-managed the Waldron Health Centre - the first large PFI build by a Community Health Partnership in London - a landmark achievement in the development of integrated community facilities.

She introduced one of London's earliest social prescribing schemes, ahead of national policy, and forged cross-boundary working between the local authority and health services, which would later become standard practice across the NHS. She also led the rollout of IAPT mental health services across Lewisham, expanding access to psychological therapies for thousands of patients.

At NHS England North London, Rylla took on complex system-level responsibilities, including commissioning the Olympic Park health building and securing its legacy for London communities. She led the disaggregation of Walk-in Centre contracts between primary and secondary care commissioning organisations - a technically demanding process requiring careful stakeholder management - and led a London-wide workstream to reduce poor performance and unwarranted variation among the bottom 10% of practices, directly improving outcomes for patients in the most underperforming areas.

Throughout her career, Rylla has invested in developing practice management as a profession. She established the Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Practice Managers Forum, creating a peer support and collaborative network across practices. She also completed the King's Fund Top Managers Programme, bringing that learning back into the system.

As Chief Executive of the Hurley Group, one of London's largest and most complex primary care organisations, Rylla has provided the institutional backbone through a period of profound challenge.

She has led the Group in taking on some of the most challenging and poorly performing practices in the capital - many of them in areas of profound deprivation, where the social and clinical pressures on general practice are immense. Alongside core primary care and urgent care centres, the Hurley Group delivers specialist provision in drug and alcohol misuse, the award-winning Primary Care Gambling Service (PCGS), and the world-leading, CQC Outstanding-rated NHS Practitioner Health Service.

Her detailed knowledge of NHS contracts has resolved long-standing disputes and protected patient services. Her relationships with commissioners and the local leaders across London have enabled creative contractual solutions - including the Nightingale Hospital initiative during the pandemic - that other organisations could not have achieved.

Rylla also played a pivotal role in developing eConsult, the digital triage tool that has since transformed access to primary care across the country - a contribution that extends her influence well beyond the Group and into the fabric of how general practice operates nationally.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, she led the rapid establishment of hot hubs and vaccination clinics, maintaining daily situation reports to keep services operational under maximum pressure. She has worked across nine Primary Care Networks to secure ARRS roles, strengthening the workforce in underserved areas. She was recognised for her contribution to the Covid response with the Hurley Group Atlas Award.

Practice managers are too often the unsung architects of what makes general practice work. She has embodied that role with quiet determination, professional excellence, and an unwavering focus on patients and communities throughout her career. Perhaps most valuable, Rylla represents an increasingly rare asset in a system that has lost much of its organisational memory: she holds the history, the relationships, and the institutional knowledge that enable complex problems to be solved and crises to be navigated. She generously shares that knowledge, offering support and advice to managers across the system.