FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

North Valley Hospital First Hospital in Region to Offer Nitrous Oxide for Labor

WHITEFISH, MT – April 15, 2015: Women in Montana have a new option for pain management during labor and delivery. North Valley Hospital is now offering nitrous oxide by inhalation as an alternative method for pain relief for women in labor at its Birth Center in Whitefish. Nitrous oxide, sometimes called “laughing gas,” is widely known to rapidly ease pain and has been proven safe for both mothers and their babies.

Nitrous oxide has a variety of benefits including reducing anxiety and the perception of pain. Most women experience its effects in less than one minute, and then it dissipates fully within five minutes after stopping use. It can be started and stopped at any point during labor, depending on the mother’s preference. This gives women a sense of control over the dosage and over the pain.

Some women describe its effects of nitrous oxide as a type of euphoria. Breathing the gas mixture gives patients additional oxygen and also releases endorphins, helping to reduce the sensation of pain. The gas does not affect the woman’s ability to push during labor, nor does it cause drowsiness. Extensive research shows that the nitrous oxide mixture is safe for both the mother and baby because it is eliminated from the body through the lungs, rather than through the liver.

The nitrous oxide gas is an odorless, tasteless blend of nitrous and oxygen that is self-administered by the mother through a mask that she controls. Unlike the continuous stream at a dental office, women can breathe the gas for a short time to help them through a contraction, and then remove the mask until it is needed again. “We’re very excited to be the only hospital in Montana, and one of the few places in the nation, to offer the option of nitrous oxide pain relief for our patients,” said Cindy Walp, Manager of the Birth Center. “Women now have many options for their birth plan. For instance, we can offer water births, un-medicated births, epidurals and now nitrous oxide. Ultimately, we want our patients to decide what’s best for them.”

Nitrous oxide has been used for many years during labor and childbirth in Europe and Canada. It was used in the United States in the 1950s, but was later replaced by other options including epidurals. Fewer than a dozen hospitals in the United States have taken the steps to add nitrous to its list of pain relief options. Many of those offering nitrous oxide are highly respected, university medical centers including Vanderbilt University Medical
"I am thrilled that North Valley Hospital is offering this option for managing pain during labor." said Honey Newton, Certified Nurse Midwife with Heart and Hands Midwifery and Women’s Health in Kalispell. "Many women want to experience their labor and birth without medication or epidural anesthesia, but may find that they still need some sort of pain management to get them through the rough spots."

For more information on the use of nitrous oxide in labor, visit the Birth Center page on the North Valley Hospital website at http://www.nv hosp.org/our-services/the-birth-center.

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About North Valley Hospital:

North Valley Hospital is a private 501©(3), non-profit community Critical Access hospital governed by a Volunteer Board of Directors from the North Valley area. North Valley Hospital is the first hospital in Montana to be affiliated with Planetree. Planetree is a non-profit organization that provides education and information in a collaborative community of healthcare organizations, facilitating efforts to create patient centered care in healing environments. North Valley Hospital receives no tax support for its services. It recently announced that it will expand their Birth Center with funding the Building For Generations Capital Campaign.