Imagine the abrupt onslaught of an acute condition that required immediate surgery. Now, imagine that surgery having left you with a scar from a long incision, a prolonged recovery period and an aftermath of corresponding pain. Believe it or not, that’s the only option many people in rural environments face because the technology for less invasive surgery is not available.

Although surgeons’ ultimate goal is to use the smallest incision necessary to perform a surgery, smaller incisions can limit their vision and range of mobility. Dr. Mirna Bowden, MD, at Alpine Women’s Center, has evolved her practice with the implementation of minimally invasive surgery (MIS) at North Valley Hospital. “The trend over time has been to perform surgery through small incisions (MIS), but major surgeries historically required large abdominal surgeries. We couldn’t use laparoscopic key-hole incisions because we couldn’t see as well and didn’t have the range of motion we needed,” she explained. “Now, using the da Vinci robot, we can see in real time 3-D and use the instruments of the robot to articulate at the wrist making it possible to perform major surgeries through smaller incisions.”

The da Vinci robot was created to enable surgery in war settings, whereby the surgeon would manipulate the robot to perform surgical procedures on a patient who could be in another country. Implications for widespread medical use transformed the role of surgeons, nurses and surgical technicians. At North Valley Hospital, for example, an entire crew of medical professionals is trained specifically for use and operation of the da Vinci. “We have a specialized team of surgeons, surgery technicians, surgical nurses and anesthesiologists for the ad Vinci,” said Dr. Bowden. “We’re doing all the same surgeries we were doing before, but we’re doing it with a lot better technology. The result is that we can offer it to a lot more people.”

The MIS technology’s evolution also changes the way patients experience surgery and recovery.

“Before, women who just had a hysterectomy experienced lots of pain, and so they had a morphine pump, and a catheter, and they couldn’t go back to work for 6-8 weeks. With the da Vinci, recovery is now only 2-4 weeks,” Dr. Bowden said. “They experience considerably less pain and have shorter hospital stays.”

The benefits spread across surgical fields. Dr. Bailey, MD, practices orthopedic surgery at North Valley Hospital and Kalispell Regional Medical Center. “With minimally invasive techniques, we can do a lot more in terms of surgery to treat ACL injuries and rotator cuff injuries,” he explained. “It’s helped us become more accurate and improved people’s recovery.” Dr. Bailey has been practicing medicine in the Flathead Valley for more than nine years, and the addition of MIS expands his capabilities and the patient’s benefits. “The technology really helps us get closer to perfect,” he said.

Dr. Bowden, like Dr. Bailey, has practiced medicine in the Flathead Valley for more than nine years. Both doctors have witnessed the
benefits their patient’s reap from less invasive styles of surgery. “From endometriosis, infertility, to problems in ovaries, it’s really changed how we practice medicine. I’ve been doing robotic surgery for two years now and our rate of doing open abdominal surgeries is less than five percent now,” said Dr. Bowden.

A leading-edge technology introduced to the Flathead Valley in 2010 brought a new option to help people struggling with chronic acid reflux, or Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD). Between 10-15% of the adult population suffers from daily symptoms of GERD. Dr. Ryan Gunlikson was the first specialist in Montana to be trained on the Transoral Incisionless Fundoplication (TIF) procedure, the most advanced incisionless procedure for safely and effectively treating GERD. TIF is performed endoscopically using the innovative Esophyx™ surgical device from EndoGastric Solutions. This type of procedure has revolutionized the treatment of this disease leading to improved quality of life and reduced dependency on medications. In clinical studies, 93% of patients remained free of their heartburn two years after treatment.

Typically, patients have to travel to receive such high quality treatment. As Dr. Bowden explains, however, North Valley Hospital strives to serve the Flathead Valley and surrounding areas with the same medical excellence found in more urban environments. “(The da Vinci) has become a standard in big cities and academic environments but not in smaller hospitals. We were really fortunate to get this technology. Our board has a vision that gives people the same treatment here that you would get at a big hospital allowing our patients to stay closer to home.”

Imagine the abrupt onslaught of an acute condition that required immediate surgery. Now, imagine that surgery having left you with a scar from a long incision, a prolonged recovery period and an aftermath of corresponding pain. Believe it or not, that’s the only option many people in rural environments face because the technology for less invasive surgery is not available.

Although surgeons’ ultimate goal is to use the smallest incision necessary to perform a surgery, smaller incisions can limit their vision and range of mobility. Dr. Mirna Bowden, MD, at Alpine Women’s Center, has evolved her practice with the implementation of minimally invasive surgery (MIS) at North Valley Hospital. “The trend over time has been to perform surgery through small incisions (MIS), but major surgeries historically required large abdominal surgeries. We couldn’t use laparoscopic key-hole incisions because we couldn’t see as well and didn’t have the range of motion we needed,” she explained. “Now, using the da Vinci robot, we can see in real time 3-D and use the instruments of the robot to articulate at the wrist making it possible to perform major surgeries through smaller incisions.”

The da Vinci robot was created to enable surgery in war settings, whereby the surgeon would manipulate the robot to perform surgical procedures on a patient who could be in another country. Implications for widespread medical use transformed the role of surgeons, nurses and surgical technicians. At North Valley Hospital, for example, an entire crew of medical professionals is trained specifically for use and operation of the da Vinci. “We have a specialized team of surgeons, surgery technicians, surgical nurses and anesthesiologists for the ad Vinci,” said Dr. Bowden. “We’re doing all the same surgeries we were doing before, but we’re doing it with a lot better technology. The result is that we can offer it to a lot more people.”

The MIS technology’s evolution also changes the way patients experience surgery and recovery. “Before, women who just had a hysterectomy experienced lots of pain, and so they had a morphine pump, and a catheter, and they couldn’t go back to work for 6-8 weeks. With the da Vinci, recovery is now only 2-4 weeks,” Dr. Bowden said. They experience considerably less pain and have shorter hospital stays, his capabilities and the patient’s benefits. “The technology really helps us get closer to perfect,” he said.

Dr. Bowden, like Dr. Bailey, has practiced medicine in the Flathead Valley for more than nine years. Both doctors have witnessed the benefits their patient’s reap from less invasive styles of surgery. “From endometriosis, infertility, to problems in ovaries, it’s really changed how we practice medicine. I’ve been doing robotic surgery for two years now and our rate of doing open abdominal surgeries is less than five percent now,” said Dr. Bowden.

A leading-edge technology introduced to the Flathead Valley in 2010 brought a new option to help people struggling with chronic acid reflux, or Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD). Between 10-15% of the adult population suffers from daily symptoms of GERD. Dr. Ryan Gunlikson was the first specialist in Montana to be trained on the Transoral Incisionless Fundoplication (TIF) procedure, the most advanced incisionless procedure for safely and effectively treating GERD. TIF is performed endoscopically using the innovative Esophyx™ surgical device from EndoGastric Solutions. This type of procedure has revolutionized the treatment of this disease leading to improved quality of life and reduced dependency on medications. In clinical studies, 93% of patients remained free of their heartburn two years after treatment.

Typically, patients have to travel to receive such high quality treatment. As Dr. Bowden explains, however, North Valley Hospital strives to serve the Flathead Valley and surrounding areas with the same medical excellence found in more urban environments. “(The da Vinci) has become a standard in big cities and academic environments but not in smaller hospitals. We were really fortunate to get this technology. Our board has a vision that gives people the same treatment here that you would get at a big hospital allowing our patients to stay closer to home.”