FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

North Valley Hospital Is First in NW Montana to Perform Single-Incision Robotic Surgery to Remove Gall Bladder

WHITEFISH, MT – July 27, 2012: Today, a surgical robot on the forefront of technology was used to remove a diseased gall bladder from a Columbia Falls resident through an incision in her navel. Dr. John Means, fellowship-trained, board certified laparoscopic general surgeon with Kalispell Regional Medical Center’s Northwest Montana Surgical Associates and the Surgery Clinic of North Valley Hospital, was at the robot's controls in North Valley Hospital to remove the patient’s gall bladder through one, small incision that will be virtually invisible.

This is the first surgery of its kind in Northwestern Montana with only 123 hospitals and 143 surgeons nationwide trained in performing a cholecystectomy (surgical removal of the gall bladder) using a single incision technique with the da Vinci® Robot. The Food and Drug Administration approved the new procedure in Dec. 2011 for the Intuitive da Vinci Robotic Surgical System.

More than one million patients undergo gall bladder surgeries each year in the US with over 3800 taking place in Montana. Forty percent of these surgeries are performed on women age eighteen to forty-two.

In the past thirty years, there has been a revolution in surgical techniques, beginning with the introduction of laparoscopy. For certain procedures, large incisions are no longer required. Using small cameras and extended tools, surgeons work through very small cuts to remove gall bladders or appendixes, fix hernias and more. For patients, laparoscopy was an amazing advance. The weeks or months of recovery time from large incisions was reduced to only days. The disadvantages of this procedure includes limited instrumentation and difficulty in accessing certain internal areas.
The introduction of robot-assisted surgery in recent years changed surgery again. Robotic surgery combines the benefits of laparoscopy with greater precision, dexterity and control by the surgeon. The latest addition is single site robotic surgery that decreases the number of incisions from four or five to only one, usually at the belly button, where surgeons enter the abdomen. With the prevalence of these surgeries in young women, it provides an aesthetic benefit of hiding the small scar.

“This type of technology is the future of health care,” said Jason Spring, CEO at North Valley Hospital. “To be the first hospital in Northwest Montana to offer this technically advanced surgery demonstrates North Valley’s leadership in providing patients with the latest, minimally invasive surgical options. Since adding the da Vinci robot in 2010, gynecological, urologic and general surgeons have used this state-of-the-art technology in our operating room. Over the past year, Dr. Means was trained in robot-assisted general surgery and single incision laparoscopic surgery. Now, he has combined the two to provide patients with the benefits of both.”

"While robotic surgery and single incisions are not new, combining the two to remove the gall bladder requires special training and equipment," said Dr. Means. “I’m excited to be a part of bringing this new technology to the Flathead Valley where patients can experience the healthcare benefits without having to travel out of state.”

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 only hospital in Montana 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. The hospital and its affiliate clinics serve Flathead and Lincoln counties.

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