Q: I occasionally see a new patient whose dental work I can immediately identify with one area dentist. In other words, it’s terrible! Should I tell the patient the truth about the gross malpractice in their mouths, or protect a local colleague?

A: If what you mean by ‘telling the truth’ is reporting that existing work needs to be replaced or that it doesn’t meet what you believe the standard of care requires, tell the truth. But you can do so in a manner that does not indict someone else. After all, you weren’t present when the work was done, you do not know under what conditions the work was rendered, and you do not know what the dentist advised the patient about the work. In short, be brutally honest in your OPINION as to the existing dental work and what should be done, but don’t make unsupported conclusions as to ‘malpractice,’ ‘incompetence’ or other derogatory comments.