

# Affective Immortality, Circumventing Grief: Ethical Concerns Related to Technological Resurrections in Cancer Care

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## Introduction / Background

In an age of rapid technological advancement, cancer patients and their loved ones are met with an ever-increasing menu of technological products and services to engage with. Virtual reality and **artificial intelligence (AI) generated videos have convincingly blurred the lines between reality and fiction.**

The development of AI technologies creates opportunities for connection and innovation where they had not previously existed. Namely, **technological resurrection** which serves to create a virtual avatar of a deceased person, **presents new ethical issues** that can deeply affect cancer patients, their loved ones, and their healthcare teams.

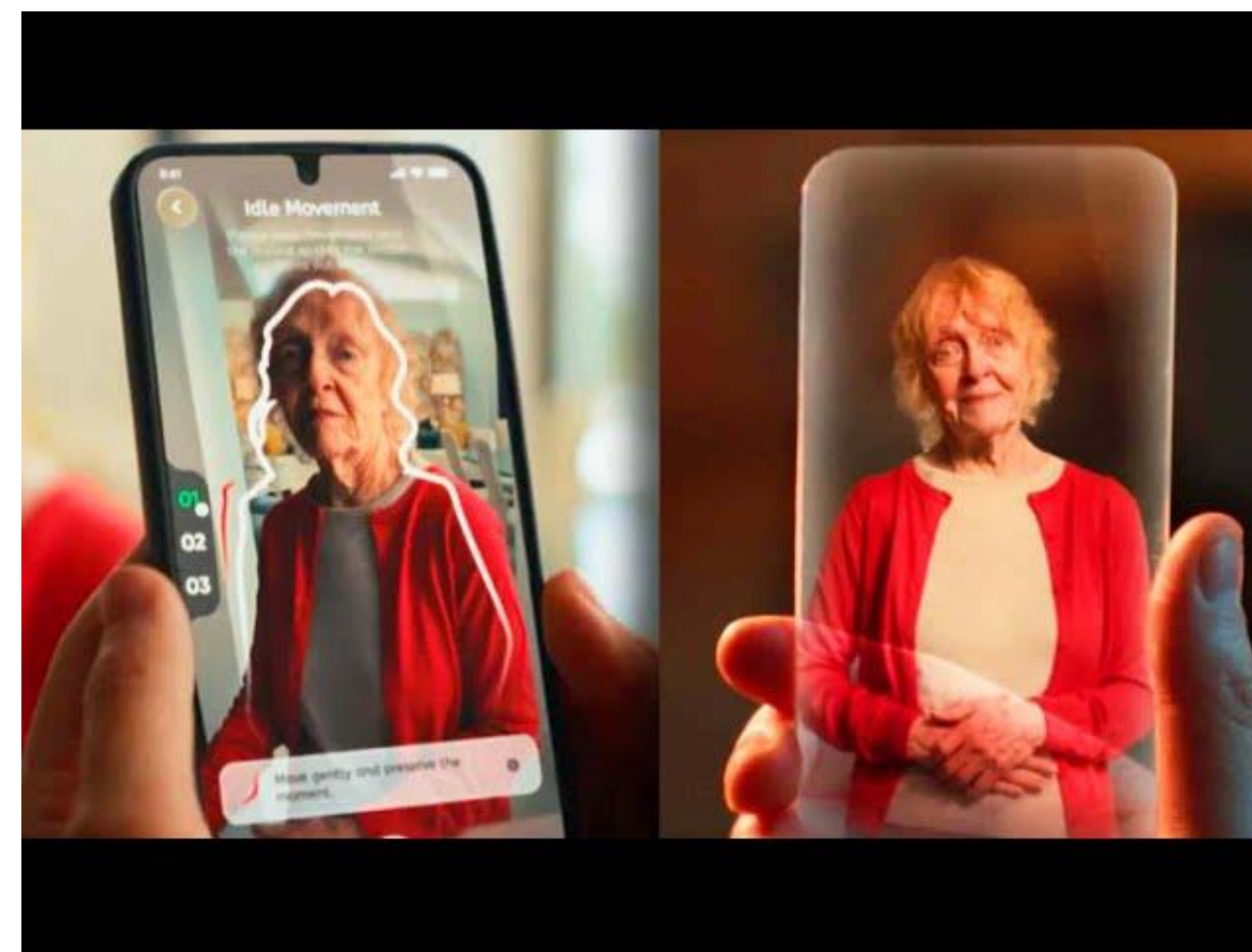
## Objectives

- Describe ethical concerns related to technological resurrections in cancer care.
- Analyze the oncology social worker role as its interfaces in their affective and emotional understandings of being human, and how this can interface with the cancer-related grief process.
- Discuss ethical concerns related to the virtual reanimation of those with cancer, and how social workers can help clients navigate these spaces with grieving patients and loved ones while upholding our disciplinary and ethical commitments to clients.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Zwai, an AI platform that creates a virtual avatar or "twin" from captured video, has created opportunity for the technological resurrection of deceased persons. Following the expiration of the physical body, loved ones can continue to engage with the deceased by reanimating, interacting with, asking questions of, and maintaining the memory of an individual over time through AI platforms. These technologies perform a type of technological resurrection or exhumation of a person beyond their death.

With high relevance to the psychosocial oncology sphere, loved ones may turn to these digital avatars as a source of comfort while grieving the loss of a loved one from cancer. Additionally, cancer patients may actively become involved in the construction of a digital twin with hopes of persisting in the memory of generations they will never meet.



Question for Social Work	Ethical Concerns
What is social work's role in helping patients and their loved ones navigate an increasingly complex AI landscape, both in preparation for treatment and/or one's death?	Misinformation risks with AI, privacy concerns, achieving informed choice without coercion (sycophantic nature of AI), protecting posthumous dignity and "right to their history"
How might AI technologies interface with the cancer-related grief process for patients and families?	Retrospective programming of affective and emotional traits of posthumous person, circumvention of grief process that honors terminality of human life, potential suspension of important death rituals, commercialization of grief, generational implications
Do AI technologies/ products narrow a deceased person's rights? Does a deceased person have a right to their prehumous autonomy being respected?	Moral and legal duties (socially supported ideals) for what ought to be honored posthumously vs lack of legal personhood posthumously; potential for violence and exploitation toward deceased person

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**Virtual reanimation of cancer patients following their death, even if only in a virtual reality, introduces ethical concerns that oncology social workers must be prepared to engage with as essential support systems in the cancer care environment.** The virtual enlivening of individuals in preparation for, or following their death, can shape decisions related to legacy planning, dignity preservation, and rituals around commemoration.