

## CONFERENCE REPORT

European Conference on Deafblindness.

Aalborg, Denmark. From 4 to 8 September 2017.

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The 9<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Deafblindness took place in Aalborg, Denmark, from 4 till 8 September 2017. Pre-conferences were held on 3<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of September.

More than 400 persons from 32 countries came together to talk and share knowledge about Touch of Closeness : Maintaining Social Connectedness. Knowledge about acquired deafblindness and congenital deafblindness was related and shared in order to learn from each other.

One of the keynote speakers was dr. Alberto Gallace, a cognitive neuroscientist and a researcher at the Department of Psychology at the University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy. In his presentation, *Touch and the Body: Tactile awareness and the science of interpersonal touch*, dr. Gallace shared scientific findings on touch and its impact on the emotional, relational, cognitive and neural functioning of humans. Touch is highly efficient but it is also a complex system with a multisensory nature, integrating the processes of thermal and proprioceptive information. The sense of touch is extremely relevant for our survival; for example when there is danger you need a fast reaction. It has been claimed that interpersonal touch is one of humankind's earliest forms of communication.

Dr. Gallace showed that interpersonal tactile stimulation provides an effective means of influencing people's social behaviors, such as modulating the tendency to comply with requests, creating bonds between persons and strengthening romantic and sexual relationships. Just touching someone else can provide behavioral change. What is more, interpersonal touch can be used to communicate emotion in a manner similar to that observed in vision and hearing. Although little is currently known about the integration of touch and other sensory inputs, such as auditory and visual input, touch might possibly be one of the most effective modalities in activating emotional neural circuits.

Regarding persons with deafblindness, the presentation of dr. Gallace strengthened our assumptions that we all should be more aware of the sense of touch and what touch really means for the individual with deafblindness. The presentation was very interesting and this theme is worth discussing further with professionals and persons with deafblindness.

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