



San Gelissen wears the vest fitted with an external defibrillator. Picture: Steve Ferrier

Life-saving jolt for heart patients

■ **Cathy O'Leary** Medical Editor

It is a life-saving vest but has nothing to do with water.

The external defibrillator LifeVest monitors the heart and can automatically give an electrical jolt, protecting people from a sudden cardiac arrest.

Sam Gelissen, 29, is using the device while doctors see if medication can treat the severe heart failure he was diagnosed with six weeks ago.

He was referred to Fiona Stanley Hospital's Advanced Heart Failure and Cardiac Transplant Service, where doctors

suggested wearing the vest, Cardiologist Jay Baumwol said external defibrillators were useful in patients at risk of cardiac arrest and waiting on treatment.

Heart medication could sometimes treat the problem but had to be introduced slowly.

This meant patients might have to stay in hospital or be fitted with an internal defibrillator which could turn out to be unnecessary and was often difficult to remove.

The Heart Foundation's Big Heart Appeal is raising funds to tackle heart disease. **Donate at big.heartappeal.org.au until October 31.**